

THE BLEARY EYES

- The Early Years



John Berry

introduction

Thirty seven years ago, Arthur Thomson (ATOM) and myself inaugurated a new publishing medium for the science fiction microcosm. We decided to form an unstable investigative organisation to enable us to write and draw humorously and satirically about the characters and situations pertaining to science fiction readers and writers who communicated via fanzines. Consequently, from 1956 to 1961, we published seventeen issues of RETRIBUTION, and using the two bumbling characters of Goon Bleary and Art as the focal points, we were able to include a considerable number of esoteric references regarding fans and fandom in the stories we wrote and illustrated.

When I wrote the stories I was a young man just over thirty years of age, thoroughly imbued with the incredibly fannish atmosphere pertaining in Belfast, thus enabling ATOM and myself to become uninhibited chroniclers of exaggerated circumstances via the typewriter and stylo.

A few months ago Ken Cheslin suggested reprinting the stories in three volumes under the collective title of THE BLEARY EYES. I am now an elderly man in my late sixties, variously sound in wind and limbs, and it was with some trepidation that I blew the accumulation of dust from the respective files and re-read the stories to select examples for the anthology. I really enjoyed reading them...noting just how many fans I was able to include in the stories, and unobtrusively incorporate their idiosyncrasies. The plots in the stories in volume one reveal that the two dimwits were always completely baffled by incidents and circumstances in their investigations, and yet they triumphed over adversity by sheer luck...their deductions were invariably wildly inaccurate but somehow they blundered to complicated denouements.

Since the last Bleary story was written many years ago, Sadie Shaw, ATOM, George Charters and other BNFs have unhappily passed away, but some of the fans parodied are still extant. Many presently active fans were not even thought of when the Bleary stories were published, and it will be most interesting to hear their response to this fannish mythology.

In 1982, negotiations were in hand to publish a thick volume of Bleary stories...unfortunately, the project died, but I have retained the Introduction I wrote for that concept. I concluded:

"For the last quarter of a century I have derived considerable pleasure from developing the character of Bleary from being an ignoramus to his present state of euphoric incertitude, and I hope that one day I shall be able to publish volumes of the adventures of The Bleary Eyes."

I am delighted that day has finally arrived.

JOHN BERRY. 1992.

contents

THE BLEARY EYES - Vol. 1 - THE EARLY DAYS

INTRODUCTION

THE GOON - MAN OR MONSTER	Oneshot - Berry & Thomson - 1958
THIS GOON FOR HIRE	Published for OMPA & FAPA by Chuck Harris - 1956
ESSEX FIEND	RETRIBUTION 2 - 1956
THE CEDRIC AFFAIR	RETRIBUTION 6 - 1957
CLOCHE BY NIGHT	Oneshot - Berry & Thomson - 1957
FISSION IN TROUBLED WATERS	Oneshot - Berry & Thomson - 1958
FOR WHOM THE GOON TOILS	Oneshot - Berry & Thomson - 1959

Artwork as originally published; all except that for FOR WHOM THE GOON TOILS by Arthur (ATom) Thomson; balance by John Berry and Jim Cawthorn.

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My especial thanks to Vinç Clarke;
his contribution to this publication
is very much greater than his modest,
"Re-typing by Vinç Clarke" suggests.
kench.

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EXEGESIS.....
or WHAT DOES HE MEAN BY THAT?
Ken & Vin

THE GOON, MAN OR MONSTER?

Page 1) *Bulmer-type plonker gun*. The 'preferred weapon' of '50s fandom was the zap-gun (water-pistol); but Ken Bulmer, fan and pro-author, introduced the 'plonker' gun, which had a sucker-tipped dart driven by a spring. Not as popular, as, unlike water, dart was not expendable.

Page 2) *Sylvia Dee*, Good looking US fan.

Page 2) *Bentcliffe, Eric*, Very active fan in '50s and early '60s, Helped found BSFA

Page 3) *RETRIBUTION*, Berry & Thomson's fanzine, '55-'61, but far from the only record of Goon Bleary and The Goon Detective Agency.

Page 3) *Dodd, Alan*, '50s/'60s fan known mostly by his LoCs and fanzine CAMBER. So seldom seen by other fans that he was suspected of being a hoax, and even ATon had to draw him as 'the invisible Alan Dodd'.

Page 3) *Wansborough, Norman George*. Something of a legend for his (few) illegible fanzines and his (many) poems, which were widely spread. NGW was a Wiltshire farm-hand.

Page 3) *Sanderson-Bentcliffe feud*. It rumbled on for many years. Both were Mancunians and cordially disliked each other.

Page 3) *Harris Chuch*, not Frank.

Page 3) *FOR BENS ONLY*, Projected fanzine, never appeared.

Page 3) *Sneary*, Rick Sneary, US fan notorious for original spelling.

THIS GOON FOR HIRE

Page 5) *Oblique House*, Otherwise, 170 Upper Newtownards Rd., Belfast, Home of Walter and wife Madeleine Willis, for a time also that of Bob and his (late) wife Sadie Shaw, and for years the meeting place of fabulous Irish fandom, aka The Wheels of IF.

Page 5) *BoSh*, Bob Shaw, fan & pro-author, Berry characterises him as having an enormous appetite.

Page 5) *Carol*, Walt & Madeleine's daughter.

Page 6) *STAR ROCKETS*, A fabulously awful US fanzine edited by Ralph Multog.

Page 6) *Peggy*, Wife of James White

Page 6) *George Charters* George was older than the other Irish fans and was therefore depicted here as senile. Edited THE SCARR

(anagram), '63-'70.

Page 6) *VARGO STATTEN MAGAZINE*, '54 - '56 prozine named for pseudonym of pro-author John Russell Fearn. Printed stories etc. by fans, but not well regarded. Connections with fandom led to short-lived 'scandal' in 1954.

Page 6) *Transfanfund* = TAFF

Page 6) *HYPHEN*, Edited by Walt Willis, Chuch Harris and others, begun '52 (37 issues so far), very influential and set the pattern for much of '50s and '60s fandom with its basically fannish and humorous approach.

Page 7) *Max Brand*, Well known writer of Westerns. George Charters was an avid collector of his works, amusing other Wheels of IF.

Page 9) *Ghoddminton*, Fannish version of Badminton, a favourite pastime of the Wheels of IF at Oblique House(qv).

Page 9) *FENIZINE*, Ostensibly all-feminine fanzine, '54-'60 (but subject of major hoax).

Page 9) *Beanie*, Originally headgear like peak-less cricket or school cap, surmounted with a propellor (hence 'helicopter beanie'), supposedly popular with callow youths (then) in the USA. US fan-artist Ray Nelson used it to indicate fans in his illos; later more than one propellor was humorously added to indicate 'status' of fan. Although not many fans actually wore them, even at Cons, they became 'traditional' fannish headgear in cartoons.

Page 13) *THE ENCHANTED DUPLICATOR*, Written by Walt Willis and Bob Shaw, stencilled by George Charters in 1954, a fannish epic which has had nearly a dozen editions.

ESSEX FIEND

Page 17) ...the *Varleys*, the *Reaneys*... Brian Varley was a prominent fan for many years, Reaney was a youngster who didn't really shine.

Page 17) *Doris*, Doris Harrison, minor London fan interested in psychic phenomena.

Page 17) *Art*, Arthur Thomson, Britain's most famous and prolific fannish cartoonist to date.

Page 18) *'The Globe'*, London pub in Hatton Garden, meeting place of fans from '53 to '74

Page 18) *Tubb*, E.C. (Ted) Tubb, fan and pro-author for many years. He used 45 pen names for his sf stories, was for many years a star turn when auctioneering at Conventions.



Page 18) *Brian Burgess*, A fan from 1950 to date, a 'travelling giant' noted for his hitch-hiking exploits, also for providing meat pies and milk to starving conventioners.

Page 18) *Campbell, H.J. ('Bert')* Campbell, a chemist who also wrote sf and was editor of *AUTHENTIC SF '52-'56*, when it was much improved. Noted for luxurious black beard.

Page 18) *Carnell, E.J. ('Ted')* Carnell, pre-war active fan, inc, editing fanzine *NEW WORLDS*. From '49 to '64 he edited prozine of same title, making it most prominent British sf zine during that time.

Page 18) *Clarke, Author Arthur.C.* Clarke, who visited 'Globe' fan gatherings when in this country.

Page 19) *Buckmasters*, Ron and Daphne, two active fans through the '50s. Daphne published fanzines.

Page 19) *W.F. (Bill) Temple*, Old time active fan and BIS member, authored sf and 'tec stories, books.

Page 20) *ORION*, Major '50s fanzine; first 20 issues edited by pre-war fan Paul Enever, last 9 by extremely active Ella Parker.

Page 21) *Newman*, Dave N. was active through most of '50s, helped found BSFA (first Chairman), gaffiated very soon after.

Page 21) *William Rotsler* Legendary US fan - writer, cartoonist, photographer of nude models.

Page 22) *Bob Tucker*, Arthur Wilson Tucker, outstanding US pro/fan author, fanzine editor etc. Known for his use of fan's names (and even 'ghoodwinton') in his fiction, Fandom dubbed them 'Tuckerisms'.

THE CEDRIC AFFAIR

Page 30 *NEBULA*, Popular British prozine, '52 - '59, with - towards the end - notorious irregularity of publication.

Page 34 *VARGO STATEN No.3*, Prozine notorious in Wheels of IF circles for containing autobiography of Walt Willis, also Chuck Harris's only professional sale, for which the Liquidators paid him seven shillings and tenpence.

CLOCHE BY NIGHT

Page 35) *Paul Enever*, (See p.20 'ORION' above). He was indeed a market gardener, and older than other fans of the time, Emigrated to Australia in '61 and vanished.

Page 38) *Chick Derry*, Active US fan.

Page 38) *Redd Grayson Case*, In the files of the GDA.

Page 39) *TRIODE*, Superior fanzine, '54 - '77 (with some interruption), edited initially by Eric Bentcliffe, Terry Jeeves and Eric Jones, hence *Triode*.

Page 39) *Eric Needham*, Pre-war fan, BIS member, wrote humorous pieces in '50s and co-edited zines with Harry Turner, Window cleaner by profession.

Page 42) *Bloch*, Bob Bloch, like Tucker (see above p.20) outstanding fan and author, known for gruesome stories, inc, 'Psycho'.

Page 44) *John Wyndham*, Aka John Beynon Harris and other permutations of his five given names, Wrote *Day of the Triffids*.

FISSION IN TROUBLED WATERS

Page 46) *Wetzel* George W. was minor US fan with poor reputation.

Page 49) *Shirley Marriot*, A minor but teenage female fan of the early fifties, which was unusual.

Page 52) *VERITAS*, A Berry/Thomson OMPazine '56-'59.

Page 54) *Archie Mercer*, Very active '50s/'60s/'70s fan, initially lived in caravan, produced numerous fanzines, including many for and about BSFA, drifted over into fantasy and mythology.

Page 57) *SPACE TIMES*, Early ('52-'54) fanzine edited by Eric Bentcliffe for North West SF Club.

Page 57) *Terry Jeeves*, Editor of record-breaking ERG, '59 to date, TAFF winner, etc.

Page 57) *Renee McKay*, Minor Liverpool fan.

FOR WHOM THE GOON TOILS

Page 61) *Steve Schultheis*, Notoriously well-dressed US fan, wrote some Goon Bleary stories.

Page 61) *Rory Faulkner*, Dorothea Faulkner, active US fan, poet, visited '57 London World Con at age of 69.

Page 61) *Boyd Raeburn*, Canadian active fan, whose notorious fanzine column 'Derogations' satirised fans of the era.

Sources: A WEALTH OF FABLE - Harry Warner Jr.; FANCYCLOPEDIA 2 - Richard Eney; BRITISH FANZINE BIBLIOGRAPHY - Peter Roberts; ILLUSTRATED BOOK OF SF LISTS - Mike Ashley; ENCYCLOPEDIA OF SF - Edited Peter Nicholls; THEN No's. 2 & 3 - Rob Hansen; ORION 20 - Ella Parker; SF & FANTASY MAGAZINE COLLECTORS CHECKLIST - Roger Robinson

THE GOON



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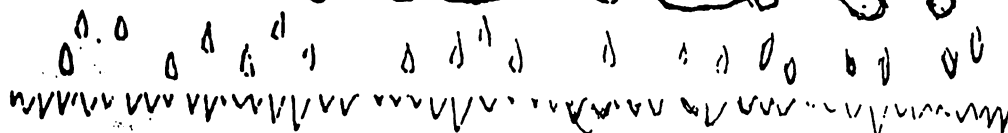
MAN

OR

JOHN

BERRY

MONSTER?



Here are a few biographical words about that fabulous character - the Goon himself.

Though always shunning the limelight (more because of his unfortunate physical appearance than any attribute of modesty) he has always been in the thick of things, in there pitching when the fannish forces of frustration have seemingly gained the upper hand. With a Bulmer-type plonker gun in his right hand and a privately printed sample of pornography in his left hand, he has blundered onwards, ever onwards, oblivious to all the jokes and jibes and cruel adjectives used to describe him (and not only because he doesn't understand them).

His bleary eyes, half shuttered by heavy lids, have seen and tabulated all the little events that the fannish perpetrators happily suspect have gone unnoticed. And in his office, carefully protected from flies and dust by a sheet of polythene, lies the dreaded Goon Casebook, containing secrets which will all be revealed in due course.

And in his office....?

Surely, to get a proper picture of this fabulous character we should go into Goon H.Q., sit down and look round us, seeing what he sees, and try to discover where he gets his boundless energy from, and his almost frightening powers of deduction, with which he continues to amaze sf fandom.

The office is small, about 10 feet square. Recently, the Goon opened the G.D.A. Benevolent Fund box, and emptied out the contents before him. Tabulating the amount with the aid of his daughter's bead-counter, he discovered it came to 4/3½d, excluding Sylvia Dee's fraternity pin, two buttons and a rusted yen. Taking the 4/3½d to a nearby furniture store, he put down the amount as a deposit, and obtained a door on the Hire Purchase system. The door, painted a gaudy puce, now swings happily where hessian sacking hung before it, giving the office a neat and tidy appearance from the outside.

This is an important phase of the Goon's astounding psychological block. The idea of this clean-looking door, to anyone preparing to enter, is indicative of normality inside. Picture the frightful shock a visitor gets when this door is opened, and instead of tidiness and neatness one discovers disorder and confusion. Even before the Goon mutters the magic word 'fee' the visitor is bewildered and befuddled, so bringing himself down to the Goon's permanent mental plane.

The door, to be brutally frank, is the only orthodox feature of this amazing locale. The wallpaper, depicting ripe rowan berries rampant on rhubarb leaves, is almost covered with portraits of females with whom the Goon has felt an affinity. Misses Monroe, Dors, Mansfield, Russell and Amelia Pemberton are predominant, although Mlle. Bardot, 'Desiree' and 'The Impatient Virgin' also have their respective places of honour.

The ceiling was whitened in 1897, and the Goon has always felt that the historic atmosphere would be spoilt if it were redone.

The floorboards, frankly, are rotted, with the ends of the individual planks rising slightly in warped frustration.

Manufactured with considerable skill from a tea-chest, two orange boxes and a kipper crate, the Goon's desk is strategically placed so that visitors find themselves confronted by the great man himself.

To the right of the desk is the Goon's bookcase, purchased at an auction sale for 1/4d, including carriage. The Goon would be the first to admit that his education left a great deal to be desired, and to compensate for this he has filled the bookcase (at the expense of the local library) with some of the world's greatest classical works and volumes of reference. A random glance at the middle shelf will serve to give an idea of how much the Goon has tried to rectify his former lack of academic instruction....'Orgies of Ancient Rome'...'Sex and Womanhood'...'The Canterbury Tales'...'Confessions of a Curate'...'The Philanderer'...'My Life in a Harem'...'The Decameron of Boccaccio'...'Bentcliffe's Life and Times...and four or five hundred of similar ilk.

One object in the left hand corner has created considerable interest amongst sightseers. It consists of an empty tea chest, and up from the depths is erected a perpendicular pole, from the top of which is attached a slack wire.

The Goon has never revealed much about this strange creation, but I happen to know its history and its use. For it is a fact that the Goon is an prolific reader of the Sherlock Holmes stories (The Kiddies Library version), and has stated once or twice that he has modelled his deductive powers from that famous fictional character. Reading that Sherlock Holmes attired himself in an ornate dressing gown and played the violin when a problem confronted him, the Goon sought to emulate this novel form of meditation.

Not having a dressing gown, the Goon manufactured one by cutting two armholes out of an army surplus blanket. He wrapped a length of stout cord

round his waist and strode over to the tea chest with the structure inside. He lifted up his left leg, placed it on the rim of the tea chest, grabbed the top of the pole with his left arm, and plucked the wire with his right hand. Strumming the wire, he told me, may have resembled the activities of a skiffle-group bass player, but his practical use of it was far removed from that. He couldn't afford a violin, and he couldn't play one anyway, and the skiffle-bass was so inexpensive to make. The vibrations the instrument set up, he revealed, proved a salve to his bemused mind, but more important, frightened the innumerable cockroaches from their lairs all over the room. "I have only to leap from the bass" observed the Goon wryly, "and plod round the room in my size 12 hobnails, and the dump is pest free for months - thus proving conclusively that Holmes suffered from the varmits too".

I am firmly convinced that Holmes's room in Baker Street was pest free, but it doesn't do to argue with the Goon. He has some strange notions, and gets irritable if fen cannot understand what he is driving about.

The minor furnishings of the room bear evidence of having originated from wildly different sources.

Two rugs are on the floor, one of them just inside the doorway, the other in front of the Goon's desk. One bears the legend 'GRAND CENTRAL HOTEL' and the other (the one in front of the desk) states bluntly in black letters on a white background 'TOILETTE', being in fact a prize collected when Goon was on a day trip to Calais in 1957.

An ashtray on the Goon's desk explains to the onlooker that 'BEER IS BEST'. A large mirror on the wall behind the door has the legend 'GREAT NORTHERN RAILWAY' painted in red along the top of it, and at the bottom leers the quaint instruction *Do not pull the chain whilst the train is in the station.*

As far as these and other similar items are concerned, it is a matter of conjecture as to whether or not they were obtained by the Goon with the owners permission. He grins slyly when the subject is broached, but knowing the Goon as I do, it does not require a very fertile imagination to see him locked in the lavatory of the Belfast-Ballybunnion Express, busily unscrewing the mirror with his right thumb nail, and whistling happily as he emerges with the mirror stuffed down the front of his trousers.

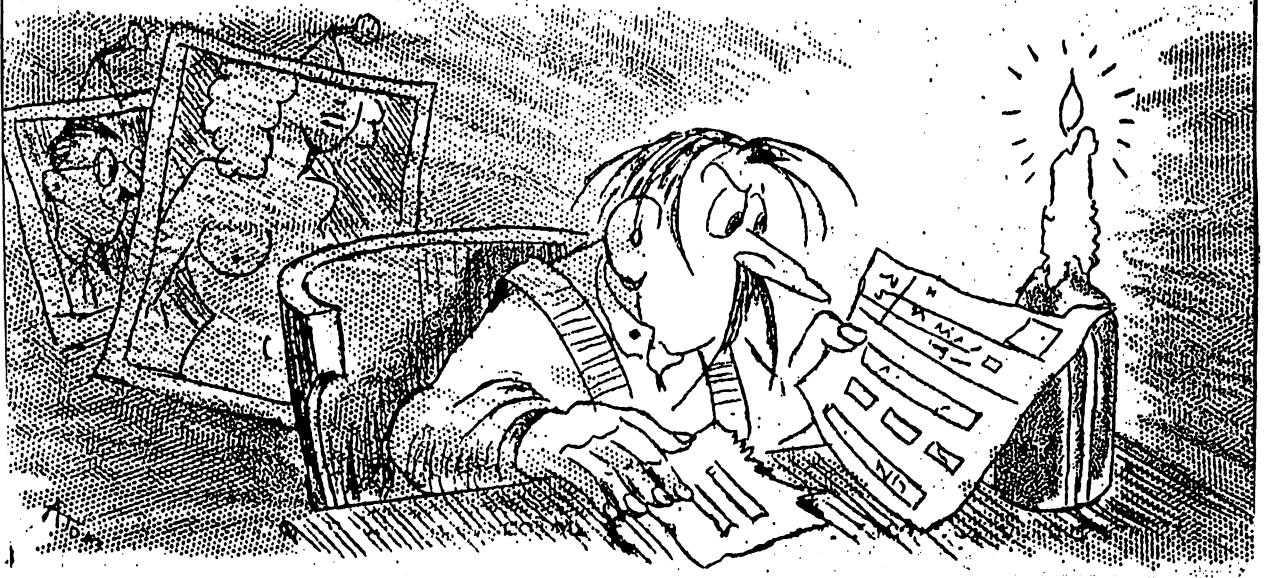
It is, however, rather difficult to decide what technique he employed to obtain the combined clock, compass, barometer and artificial horizon hanging on the wall behind him. There can be no doubt that it forms part of the dashboard of a secret English Electric P.1B Lightning supersonic jet fighter - it says so on the chrome nameplate - but the Goon refuses to comment on the matter, besides hinting that the Secretary of State for Air reads RETRIBUTION.

We leave this impossible character hunched over his desk, oblivious to everything mundane...to all the unfortunate things which are happening in the world today. The troubles in the Middle East, Cyprus, Little Rock, Formosa, Iceland, North Africa, etc., mean nothing to him. Names such as Nasser, Dulles, de Gaulle, and Makarios effect him not at all, except as potential RET subbers! Admittedly the Goon has shown interest in sputniks and projected flights to the moon, but the workings of his mind are strange, and who knows in what context he views them?

He is happy in his own little world. Final Rate Demands, coal bills and similar outstanding dues are merely slips of paper for him to make little gliders. His main worries concern much more important things....what happened to FOR BEMS ONLY?....Is Alan Dodd really NGW?....Is the Sanderson-Bentcliffe Feud really hoax?....Is Sneary co-editor of Webster's Dictionary?....Why hasn't anyone ever published the Goon's sole brilliant quip "Freas a jolly good fellow?"....Has Harris retired to a convent?....and much else.

Who knows? Maybe the Goon, for all his faults, is happier than most of us!





I ripped open the buff coloured envelope, and read the telegram. It said:
URGENT. QUICK. COME IMMEDIATELY. CAN'T
WAIT. HURRY. SERIOUS.

WALTER ALEXANDER WILLIS

I glanced at my watch. Mmm. 10.20pm. It was rather late, but the boss seemed to want to see me. Better go. I patted my hip-pocket, yeah, my notebook was there. Feeling under my armpit, I withdrew my automatic, aimed at a fly on the window, and pressed the trigger. It was loaded. Poor crittur. I guess drowning is a pretty horrible death.

Rushing to the garage, I pulled open the sliding doors. I looked at the heap, checked it for oil and tried the gears. O.K. I backed out my trusty conveyance, and cycled over to Oblique House.

It was dark, but light gleamed from the third floor windows. I walked up to the front door and pressed the bell. I waited, hands thrust deep into overcoat pockets.

Madeleine opened the door.

"What gives, sister?" I growled.

She looked at me. She was pale, apprehensive.

"Upstairs," she breathed.

I pushed past her, then halted. I thought I heard machine-gun fire. I tiptoed to a door on my left...listened. The staccato noise stopped.

"Page ninety-two of my new story just completed," I heard a tired voice gasp.

"Oh Bob, you are a darling...."

That guy BoSh has sure got himself a good woman.

"...and it's only three minutes to midnight," she said. "Try to type a dozen more pages before we retire."

Considerate, too.

I crept past the door, and tripped over the Willis cat. A red mist clouded my eyes. I felt...brutal...sadistic. Something came over me; I drew; I fired. The cat started to lap it up. Heck.

I climbed the stairs, and aimed a kick at Carol's bedroom door as I passed. The devil was in me.

I reached the fan room, kicked the door open and leapt inside. Walt lay back in a chair, a cigarette drooping from the corner of his mouth. A hip flask stood on the table near his elbow. He looked in a bad way.

"Hiya," he croaked. "Grab a chair, sit down, and have a swig."

"O.K.," I said. I grabbed a chair and sat down. What Walt says goes. I tilted the flask, took a deep gulp. It almost burned two layers of skin off my tongue. "Ghod," I thought, "how can Willis drink that stuff neat?" Personally, I like a little water with my orange cordial.

"I got your telegram," I said. "Sounded serious". I looked at the hollow rings under his eyes.

"I've got a job for you, son," he said, sweat beading his forehead. "Secret and confidential, see?"

"I get it," I said. "You know me."

"Yeah!" he repeated. "It's secret and confidential, see?"

I snarled. For two cents I would have extinguished the end of his cigarette - it was within range.

"Quiet," he shouted. "This thing is bigger than both of us."

"No!" I cried. "Not that...."

"Yeah," he said. "Someone has stolen my autographed copy of STAR ROCKETS."

This was terrible. Catastrophic. I pulled out my notebook. "I get it," I said, "You want me to discover who has stolen it."

"That's right," he said. "You're needle-sharp tonight."

"Yeah," I grinned. "I'm in the groove."

Walt raised a finger. "I hope that's off the record," he whispered.

We both stood up, shook hands. The great moment passed all too quickly. I flipped over a page and poised my pencil. "I want to ask a few questions," I said.

"O.K." he growled. "O.K."

"When did you last see STAR ROCKETS?"

"Last night," said Walt soberly. "I remember the incident distinctly. I couldn't stop laughing at one of my puns, and I picked up STAR ROCKETS to bring me back to sordid reality." He shuddered. "It worked."

I scribbled a few words. "We were all here last night," I pointed out, as I checked off the names....Walt, Madeleine, Bob, Sadie, James, Peggy, George and myself.

"I cannot believe there is a thief among us," said Walt, reaching again for the flask. "Make sure the investigation is secret and confidential."

"Yeah, like you said."

"Yeah, I want it secret and confidential."

I kicked back the chair, and crouched in front of Walt, trigger finger itching. Some guys can go too far. I leered.

"I know what you want," I growled, my voice oozing with menace.

Walt reached across, plucked the Marilyn Monroe calendar off the wall, and began to tear it in two. "What do I want?" said Walt, casually.

"You want the investigation secret and confidential," I panted. That was a near thing. No wonder Walt is the brains of this outfit.

He grinned and replaced Marilyn. I watched him carefully. For a few moments I was deep in contemplation as I gazed at the calendar. Only three more days before the Vargo Statten magazine was published.

I turned to Walt. His brow was furrowed. He was looking at a large book. I edged round behind him and saw a ledger, a book of logarithms, a pair of dice, and an ouija board.

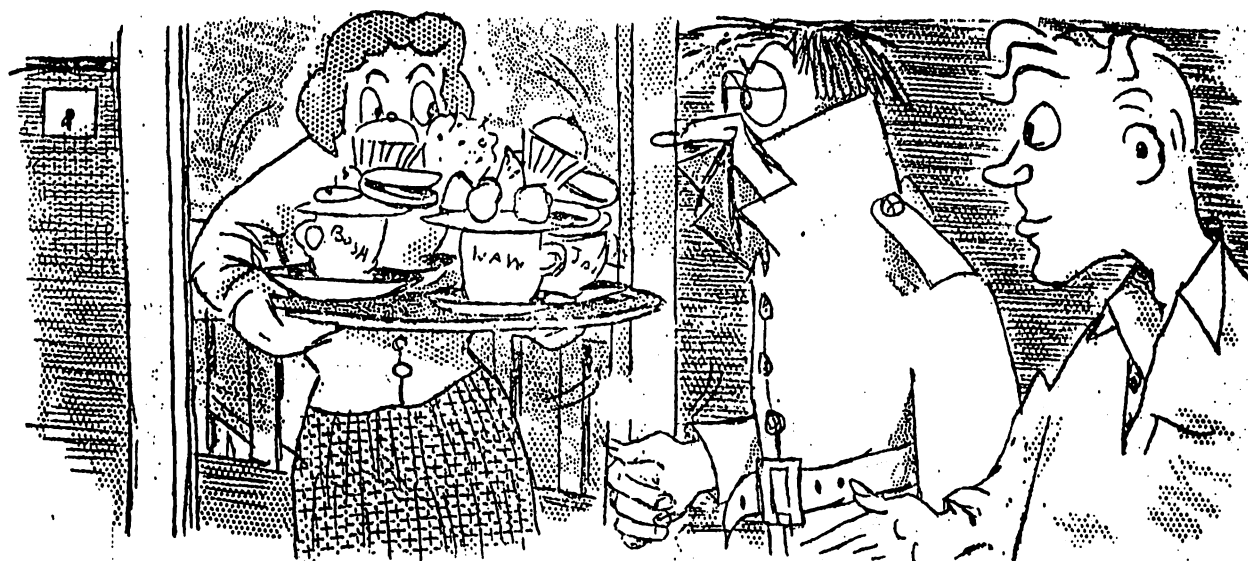
"What gives?" I asked, as he wiped the sweat from his forehead.

"I'm balancing the Transfund," he whispered hoarsely.

I kicked the table away, and pointed an accusing finger at Walt as he cringed in the chair. "I get it," I rasped. "You steal the fanzine, then claim the insurance in order to balance the Transfund." Don't let my looks fool you, folks. I'm smart.

Walt winced. "You silly twisted boy," he said. "You know I only insure my copies of HYPHEN."

"Sorry, boss," I said. That long shot didn't pay off. But there was a motive. I scribbled for a moment. Then my razor sharp ears (I never wear a hat) detected a faint noise. I tiptoed over to the door, suddenly yanked it open.



Madeleine was staggering on the threshold, heavily laden with a large tray, a vast teapot, knives, forks, spoons, plates, salt, mustard and pepper, cakes, tarts and biscuits.

"Eavesdropping, eh?" I gritted. I dragged her into the room.

"No, no!" she cried. She turned to Walt. "You'll have to get a lift. I can't keep carrying all this food up ninety-three steps every time we have fans here."

I had to resort to bluff. I picked up a buttered crumpet, and slapped her across the face with it. "So that's the game, sister," I snarled. "You steal the fanzine and then..."

"Drop the whole thing," ordered Walt.

I hopped to the armchair. What is there about Willis that makes people obey him so literally? I wrung hot tea out of my socks.

Walt surveyed the pile of refreshments. "There is only one man who has the capacity to clear up this mess," he said. "That man is Bob Shaw."

He turned to me. "You must go. I don't want Bob to see you here. It might embarrass your work. We will all meet here next Sunday. That gives you four days to clear the matter up. Goodbye."

I leered at Madeleine, slammed the door, and tripped down the stairs. I picked myself up, cycled home, and lay in bed wondering about the job I had landed.

Then I thought about George Charters. He had a certain motive. He wanted inspiration for his sixth column, and what better place to find it than browsing through STAR ROCKETS?

I decided to see him the following night.

* * * * *

George Charters lives in Bangor - a one-eyed seaside town a few miles away from Belfast. His address is #3, Lancaster Avenue. Some dump.

On the evening of my visit I kept the place under observation for some time, but there was no sign of movement. I had to get George out of the way, so I resorted to cunning. I went to a telephone kiosk and dialled his number.

"Hello," I heard. A sort of aristocratic voice.

I stretched my handkerchief over the mouthpiece. "This is a friend," I said. "I just wanted to tell you that a Max Brand hard cover has been washed up on the beach."

I dropped the receiver back into its cradle, and glanced across the road. Sure enough, a figure that I recognised as the venerable Charters came pounding

down the path, vaulted over the gate, and disappeared down the road. It had worked. I was pleased with my knowledge of human nature. I should have been a psychologist, then I could treat myself for nothing.

Silently, I opened the gate and walked up the gravelled approach to No.3. I walked round to the side of the building, and found the French windows slightly ajar. I nipped inside, closed the curtains, and switched on the light.

What a queer set-up. This guy Charters sure hates himself. The first things I noticed were large hand-coloured copies of his first five columns bracketed to the wall, and illuminated by a battery of arc-lamps. Over the door was a board stating:

449 TIMES UP TO 5.37pm TODAY.

Some guy. Modest too. You'd never believe it just by looking at him.

I could have stopped all night to admire George's furnishings, but I had to get down to work. "Where," I asked myself, "would George hide a copy of STAR ROCKETS?" I started to rummage through his desk. Was surprised to find that he has artistic leanings. He must have it said on the back of the photographs "For Art Students Only."

Suddenly I heard footsteps and the door handle started to turn. I drew my automatic, and slipped behind a curtain conveniently hung at the rear of George's desk.

Charters sauntered in, and took down the board over the door. He worked on it for a moment, then replaced it. It now read:

451 TIMES UP TO 7.14pm. TODAY.

Heck, I thought, this guy sure knows some hot numbers.

George smirked. He came over to the desk, and started to type. I peered out of the curtain, and looked over his shoulder.

Dear Mr. Willis,

I have read the last few issues of HYPHEN, and, although I wish to remain anonymous, I feel that I must bring to your notice my appreciation of the superb literary talents of one of your previous contributors. I am, naturally, referring to Mr. George Charters. No doubt you will make a point of allowing this undoubted genius to appear in your pages far more frequently,....etc.

Mmmmm. He started to type another letter:

Dear Messrs. Collins,

I note that you recently published a hard cover edition of Max Brand stories without mentioning my name. This is contrary to usual practice, and I trust that you will make the necessary arrangements in future editions....

Mmmm. It seems that George is suffering from an inferiority complex.

I pulled the curtains to one side, and as George turned his face towards me, I raised my gat and sprayed his glasses to show I wasn't fooling.

"I'm a special investigator for HYPHEN," I gritted. "I'm on the trail of the missing fanzine. Where is it?"

Bluff, see?

He looked indignant. "A fan of my reputation," he said loftily, "would not stoop so low as to swipe STAR ROCKETS."

My shrewd brain clicked into top gear. By a superb piece of reasoning, an unrivalled example of intellectual deduction, I discovered a significant fact. I pointed it out to George.

"How did you know it was STAR ROCKETS that was missing?" I barked. "I didn't say so."

He grinned weakly. I sprayed his glasses again, and during his temporary

blindness, I altered the name on his letter to HYPHEN to my own. Then I emptied the rest of my ammunition into the mechanism of his typer. I'm vicious when I'm aroused.

"Start talking," I said.

"I must get that leaky roof fixed," he said as he wiped his glasses on the corner of his handkerchief.

Listen, I'm even tempered. But I can only take so much. This guy was stalling, and I had Willis behind me. I decided to get rough. "If you don't co-operate," I scowled, "I'll get Willis to make a new rule banning your sneaky Ghoddminton service."

This was too much for George. He broke down. "O.K." he sobbed, "I'll tell you all I know."

"Get going," I said. I reloaded my automatic carefully in a vase of flowers.

"The other night we were playing Ghoddminton," he said in a strained sort of voice. "Remember when Sadie misjudged the flight of the shuttlecock, and smashed the electric light globe instead?"

I nodded.

"James was umpire," he continued, "and just before the light went out I saw him pick up the copy of STAR ROCKETS. When the light came on again, James was sitting on the floor with a bewildered expression on his face. That's all I can tell you."

"O.K." I grinned. "Thanks a lot, George." I crossed to the doorway, and then stopped and pointed at the board. "What's the idea of the scoreboard?" I asked. "You can tell me - I'm broadminded."

He beamed. "That indicates the number of times my name has appeared in fanzines," he explained proudly.

I felt disappointed. It spoiled my theory about where George got the feminine outlook for his articles in FEMIZINE. I slammed the door behind me.

* * * * *

I was on holiday the day following the Charters episode, and as I wanted to question James next, I decided to go to his place of employment. But - in disguise. I put on an old coat, baggy trousers, spectacles and a bowler hat. I looked like a refugee from a silent film. People wouldn't sit next to me on the trolley bus.

James works at a tailors shop. I pushed open the doors and hobbled over to the immaculate, freshly-pressed and shined, White.

He looked at me. "This is a Gentlemen's Outfitters, dad," he scowled.

"Don't speak to a faan in that manner," I whined in a senile voice.

He turned pale. "You.....a faan?" he whispered.

"Yes," I said. "I published my first fanzine in 1910. I called it BALLOON TIMES."

"What's your name?" he said, pulling the tape measure from around his neck and shaping it into a noose.

"Ebenezer Roundhill," I croaked. I was lulling him into a false sense of security, see?

"And what can I do for you?" he said. His friends and workmates were grinning. I presumed he had told them how exciting and futuristic Irish fandom was.

"I want to buy a beanie," I shouted loudly.

James turned red. He held his nose and waved me away. "Let's go to the fitting room," he said. "I'm sure I can fix you up there." I didn't like the way he seemed to be estimating my collar size.

Once in the fitting room, I drew my gat and watered James' carnation with a long steady blast.

"What have you done with STAR ROCKETS?" I shouted. I'm dead cunning, see?

"I knew you all the time, George," he said.

"I'm not George," I growled.

"Sorry Walt," he whispered.

"I'm not Walt," I said.

"You've lost weight, Bob," he tried.

"I'm not Shaw," I shouted.

"Make up your mind, then," he grinned.

I felt baffled. I decided to try the technique that had worked so well on George. I sprayed James' glasses.

"That's not fair, Madeleine," he said. "You know that there is a law about going around wearing clothing of the opposite sex."

"How did you know it was me?" I asked in a squeaky falsetto.

"I noticed your crooked ghoomdinton finger," he said.

"Well, I'm not Madeleine," I replied. To be honest with you, I was getting mixed up. I felt I had lost the initiative. Things were getting too confused.

Then James shuffled forward, grinning endearingly. "It's...it's not you, is it, Peggy?" he breathed heavily.

I gulped, and sprayed James once more. Clouds of steam rose from him.

"I'm not Peggy," I shouted. For one horrible moment I couldn't remember who I really was. "Let's start all over again," I said, waving my rod menacingly. "What do you know about Walt's STAR ROCKETS? I'm investigating its disappearance for him."

"Oh, that's different, Bleary," he said. "We were playing ghoomdinton the other night, and I saw the corner of a fanzine sticking out from a pile of others. I pulled it out - just out of curiosity - and was going to open it when that typical ghoomdinton accident occurred. Just after the light went out, I felt the fanzine pulled from my hand, and I was pushed to the floor."

"Who do you think it was?" I asked, as I scribbled notes into my book.

"Dunno, somebody strong, anyway," he replied.

I frowned. That added another suspect. I had already discounted Madeleine, but that last remark put her high on the list. She is not known as Muscular Madeleine for nothing. Walter should never have allowed her to start that correspondence with Charles Atlas.

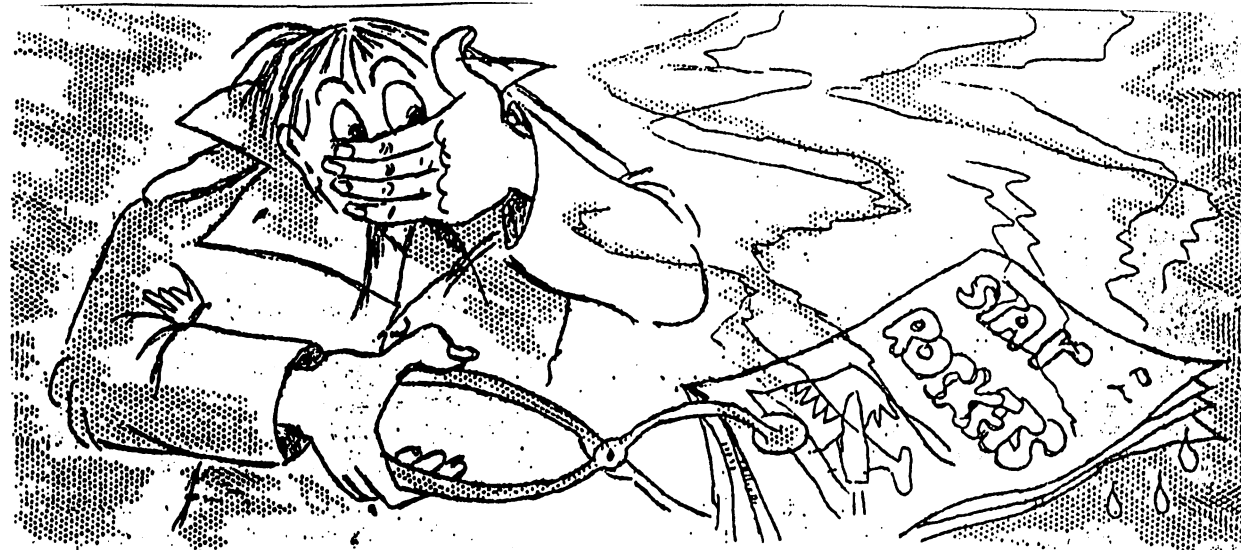
"O.K. Thanks, James. 'Bye." I said.

"Bye, Sadie," he shouted as I passed through the doorway.

Heck.

Later that same afternoon, I was sprawled across an armchair, trying to formulate a theory without any clues, when I heard a noise in the hallway. I rushed to the window and saw the postman just closing the gate. In the hallway, I found a thick manilla envelope. Inside it was a copy of STAR ROCKETS.

I examined the fanzine carefully. Previously, I couldn't understand why Walt had been so shaken to discover that STAR ROCKETS had been stolen. Now I could appreciate his feelings. It was incredible.



I rested for a few moments, took two aspirins, and felt slightly better. On the bacover, I noticed something strange. There was a series of faint black hand-prints, seemingly made by a deformed person. They didn't convey anything, but they seemed to have been made quite recently.

The next person I had to interview was Bob Shaw. As you probably realise, this guy Shaw is nobody's fool. He is clever, shrewd, capable, and strong. Very strong. For this reason, I decided to curb my itchy trigger finger and resort to psychology. Only be receiving a severe mental jolt could Bob be shaken out of his rigid composure.

However, time was short. I had only two days left to get an answer to the problem, and I still had at least five suspects.

Suddenly, the answer came to me...the one way, the only way to get the truth out of Bob. I rushed into Town and bought the following: one square yard of black fabric, a spool of fuse wire, a packet of benzedrine tablets, half a pound of ground nuts, and a bottle of lemonade. I also looked up the telephone number of the nearest mental institution - I was taking a great risk, and, the way I planned it, one of us might easily need that number. It could be me. The brain is a funny thing....mine is.

Only one more thing remained to be done. I telephoned Bob at his office. "Robert Shaw speaking," he said.

"Bleary here," I answered. "How would you like a strawberry flan, two dozen vanilla trifles, a raspberry tart, three apple dumplings, and a gingerbread cake?" I'm subtle, see.

All I could hear over the phone was a sort of prolonged whistle, followed by a tortured gulp. "I'll be there in ten seconds," he gasped.

"No," I answered.

"Five," he screamed.

"No," I said. "My house tomorrow night, at six o'clock."

"I'll be there," he said. There was a kind of earnest pleading in his voice. A lump came into my throat. Heck, it's against my nature to be sadistic.

I raced home again, and told my wife to prepare for a visit from Bob Shaw.

"Not....not the one who came with Walt Willis last March?" she gasped.

I nodded.

"Not....not the one they had to carry out after supper?" she groaned.

I nodded again.

She fainted. Poor kid. Got a good memory.

* * * * *

The next twelve hours were really grim. There is a terrific mental strain involved in working all night, but with the aid of the benzedrine, and the lemonade, and sheer willpower, I achieved the impossible.

I snatched a few hours sleep, and got up at about 10 o'clock the following morning. One more day to go, I thought, and I still hadn't got the faintest glimmer of a clue.

Bob Shaw was due at six, which gave me sufficient time to go to Oblique House. I wanted to examine the fan room.

* * * * *

I parked my bike against a wall on the Upper Newtownards Road and started towards 170. When I was a few yards from it, I saw Madeleine come out of the house, and walk in the opposite direction. She had a bulky parcel under one arm.

Heh heh. Easier than I expected. That was one of 'em out of the way. I reached 170, pushed the gate open, stepped over the slush patch, and crawled through the grass towards the front door. I rang the bell hard. When I heard footsteps approaching the door from the inside, I ran around to the back of the house, intending to sneak upstairs by the back door.

Heh, heh, I laughed to myself at the thought of Sadie opening the front door while I slipped in by the rear. Sucker, I thought, as I pushed the back door open.

"Hello, Goon," said Sadie, a twisted smile on her lips.

"Hiya," I grinned weakly. Nothing is sacred. "I - I - I just came round to tell you that Bob will be home late....he is calling at my house on confidential business". I'm smart folks, honest.

"I'm not having that typer back again," she snarled.

"No, no, Sadie," I said reassuringly. "You'll never see that again. By the way, I wonder if I might just pop upstairs....?"

"Sure," she nodded understandingly. "It is rather cold."

Upstairs, I closed the door behind me, and looked around. Everything seemed quite normal. I straightened the Marilyn Monroe calendar, kicked a length of stamp edging under a chair, and looked at a couple of Walt's letters. Shucks. No clue at all. I shouted 'thanks' to Sadie on my way out.

There was one chance left. Maybe, if my plan worked, Bob Shaw would break down and tell me something interesting.

* * * * *



At the stroke of six o'clock, I heard a violent screech of brakes. Rushing to the window, I saw a 'FAST TAXI' quivering outside the house. Vapour was rising from a badly over-heated engine, and an exhausted-looking driver drooled out of the side window, his eyes sunk into their sockets, and his tongue hanging limply from his mouth.

"Where's the feed?" I heard behind me. Bob was sitting in an armchair in front of the fire, a handkerchief tucked into his collar, fork and spoon held at the ready.

My wife rushed in. "What's the front door doing in the back kitchen?" she asked bewilderedly.

"Bob's here," I said.

She nodded, walked out, the re-entered pushing a large, sagging tea-trolley, which she guided to Bob's chair.

Moments later, Bob pushed the trolley away with his foot, and sank back into the armchair.

"I can't stop long," he said, "else my dinner will get cold."

"Sure, Bob, sure," I breathed. A great deal depended on the next ten seconds. As Bob lay back, eyes partly closed, I reached down and tugged the fuse wire.

The wire ran around the room at the junction of the wall and ceiling, and was attached to the black fabric. As I tugged the wire, the fabric was pulled upwards revealing my budgerigar cage. Now came the climax of my night's work. Joey (the bird), was lying at the bottom of the cage. He raised himself on one claw, lifted his scrawny neck, wheezed twice, then said:

"Bob Shaw, where is STAR ROCKETS?"

The bird collapsed, then, with a great effort, claws waving pathetically, lifted

his head once again and said:

"So help me, if you don't hurry up and say it, I'll drown you."

Them birds is clever.

Joey collapsed, squawked once or twice, then lay still, twitching spasmodically. I loved that bird like a father, but, I'm telling you, folks, no sacrifice is too great for Willis.

I looked at Bob's face. His eyes protruded like organ stops, his kisser was a pasty white.

"It spoke," he said. Just that, but it was said with great feeling.

"Did you hear what it said?" I asked.

He continued to stare, his eyes filled with unutterable horror, like a young girl reading Chuch Harris's autobiography. For a moment, his mouth worked before he was able to answer.

"I....I haven't got STAR ROCKETS."

I reckon he was hypnotised, the way he said it.

"Cast your mind back to the Ghoddminton game the other night," I said. "You were partnering Madeleine. What happened when the lights went out? I should tell you that I'm acting for Walt."

He shook his head and ran a leathery tongue over his cracked lips. "I just laughed at Madeleine's little joke," he said, in a husky voice.

"What joke?" I growled. Heck, I was getting nowhere, fast.

"Well," he said, "when the light bulb exploded, Madeleine said 'Someone's shot'."

I groaned. All that food gone and a paralysed budgerigar on my hands, just for one lousy crack. I began to search frantically for the telephone number I'd made a note of, when Bob got up, staggered to the cage, raised his beanie, and, with faltering footsteps, hobbled out of my house, shaking his head from side to side.

I felt....frustrated. I thought about the following afternoon. I had to be in a position to tell Walt who had stolen STAR ROCKETS, and I still had no idea at all about who had taken the damn thing. And, unless I could produce results, I was going to have a lot of explaining to do to several angry people.

* * * * *

Sunday afternoon. All right, I was in a spot. Walt had pinned great faith in my ability, and confidently expected me to expose the criminal in our midst. And, all my prestige depended on it. I sighed, loaded my gat in the goldfish bowl, slipped it into an inside pocket. (The gat, natch). I stuffed STAR ROCKETS in my hip pocket and cycled over to Oblique House. From outside there was a sort of ominous silence about the place.

Drawing my rod, I ploughed my way across the lawn, reached the front door. Just then, Carol came skipping up the path, cheeks shining, fresh from Sunday school.

"Come here, kid," I mouthed.

She smiled sweetly and came up to me. Look, that door was half open and for all I knew, there may have been a bucket of water suspended over it especially for me. Certain people of limited intelligence, James and George for instance, would take great delight in such a dastardly trick.

"I'll hold your hymn books, Carol," I said. "Just walk through that doorway."

In my racket, you've got to take risks, see?

She pushed the door open wide, and stepped through. Nothing happened.

"Thanks, kid," I grinned. I tiptoed upstairs. Jumbled words came from the fan room. There was a chance I might hear something useful. I listened. I got no scruples, see. I heard snatches of conversation.

"...and every time I press the TAB key, I get a jet of filthy water in my navel. Me, who stencilled THE ENCHANTED DUPLICATOR...."

"...and I had to buy a twenty guinea suit to soothe the General Manager..."

"...and there lay a poor innocent bird, its bloodshot eyes revolving like roulette wheels...."

I bared my teeth in a sadistic grin, drew my gat, kicked the door open, and leapt inside. "Keep your hands where I can see them, folks," I gritted.

They looked at me, bewildered. Madeleine reached for a Ghoodminton bat.

"Hold it, sister," I said, "or I'll rinse your permanent."

I'm telling you, folks, I'd stop at nothing. I leered at them, and saw George move slightly. "Put down that umbrella, George," I ordered.

Walt grinned. "I hear you've been working hard," he said.

"I get around," I said, non-committal. I was out on a limb, see.

"Well," he said sarcastically, "did you find STAR ROCKETS?"

I laid my gat on the table, nonchalantly drew the fanzine from my hip-pocket, and flung it in his lap. He closed his eyes and shuddered. I think it was emotion.

"Do you know who took it?" he finally groaned.

Heck, what could I say? "Sure I know," I bluffed. There was a sharp intake of breath. I looked at them. Walt, Madeleine, Bob, Sadie, James and George.

"Who?" they chorussed, looking at me in admiration.

"Before I tell you I want to reconstruct the scene of this heinous crime," I said.

Walt winced, but speedily took command. "Right," he said like a Sergeant Major, "you all know your jobs. On the word of command, Prepare....Ghoodminton."

In the usual 30 seconds, tables, chairs, dupers, typers, etc., had all been stowed in their assigned corners, and the barricade erected in front of the windows.

I waved my gat approvingly. "Take up the positions you had when you played ghoodminton last Wednesday evening," I ordered.

They shuffled into position. I stood by Sadie, facing Bob and Madeleine across the net. James sat in the umpire's shock-proof chair, and George and Walt sat behind him.

I picked up STAR ROCKETS and thrust it into James' clammy fingers.

"Hold that, Jas," I grated. "George, will you please draw the curtains?"

He did so.

I addressed them all. "The guilty person is in this room," I said, letting a subtle note of menace creep into my voice. Now for the bluff. "I am now going to smash the light bulb, but I must warn the culprit not to attempt to snatch STAR ROCKETS off James."

I'm crafty folks....honest.

There was silence in the room, except for the heavy breathing, and the faint hiss from George sucking his gums. I felt quite excited myself. Heck, it isn't every day that you can smash a Willis electric light bulb.

I looked around the room once more. James sat on the chair, holding STAR ROCKETS and trembling slightly.

I smashed the bulb with the butt of my gat.

A pause.

"Curtains, George," I yelled.

The rays of sunlight revealed James sitting on the chair, still holding STAR ROCKETS at arm's length, still trembling slightly.



"Don't try and take the fanzine, whoever is guilty," I panted from the landing, where I was removing an electric bulb. I refitted it in the fanroom.

I told George to draw the curtains, then I smashed the bulb again. I waited five minutes.

"Curtains, George," I yelled.

The rays of sunlight revealed James sitting in the chair, holding STAR ROCKETS at arm's length, and trembling violently.

I felt frustrated.

"There's a bulb in Sadie's room," said Madeleine, sarcastically.

"O.K., O.K., folks," I said weakly, trying hard to ooze confidence. "I've proved my point."

I was in a spot. I won't deny it, I was ruined. My bluff had been called. I had to admit defeat. I had tried everything, even an exact reconstruction of the crime....or had I? Something occurred to me. It wasn't an exact reconstruction. Madeleine hadn't shouted her supposedly witty remark about "Someone's shot." I pondered over that...someone's shot....someone's shot.

Suddenly a whole series of unrelated incidents clicked into place...the deformed hand print on the back of the fanzine...a strip of stamp edging in the fan room...someone's shot...the smashed bulb.

I knew who had taken the fanzine. Oh, bliss.

"hold it, folks," I said. This time I wasn't bluffing. I guess they all realised it. Once again they all stared at me, eager to know the indirect cause of their discomforts. I grinned delightedly. I would have kissed myself, 'cept that I blush easily.

"Your mind works quickly, Sadie," I said.

Bob swung his head round incredulously. "Dah-ah-ah-ah-ah," he mouthed.

"It's a fact," I said sadly. "When she noticed James had picked up the fanzine, with great presence of mind she smashed the bulb, and the fanzine was taken in the ensuing darkness, just as she had planned."

Everyone's eyes clicked to Sadie, then back to me again.

"But why did Sadie take STAR ROCKETS," gasped Walt. "That's what I can't understand. She's much too young."

"Sadie didn't take it," I grinned. I felt good. The excitement was intense. Why, even Madeleine stopped studying Lesson Five of her Charles Atlas course. (We all know what Lesson Five develops, don't we? Heh, heh.)

"Pray excuse the vernacular," said George, in his dignified Bangor accent, "but who the hell dun it?"

"Work it out for yourself," I said. I was thinking about my fee. I wondered if Walt would keep his word and give me those five banned copies of *La Vie Parisienne* and his unexpurgated English-French dictionary.

"Why was STAR ROCKETS stolen?" I said. "Answer: because the fanzine contained something. Why hide anything in STAR ROCKETS? Answer: can you think of a safer hiding place?"

"But who dun it?" persisted George, changing his rocking chair into fourth gear.

"It was Madeleine," I said.

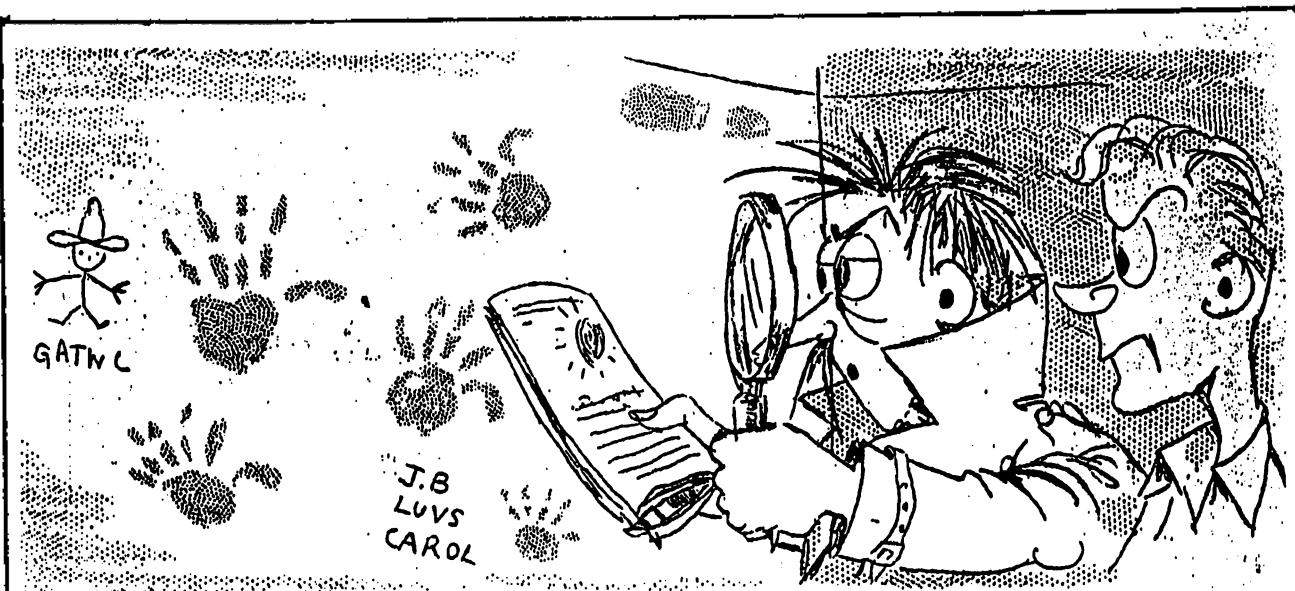
There was a deathly silence.

"Proof?" croaked Walt from under the table, tearing off his white collar and red-spotted bow tie.

"Proof?" chorussed the rest of them.

"Easy," I grinned. "I want to try an experiment. I want each of you to impress your left hand on the roller of Walt's duper, and then superimpose your handprint onto the wall." I was bringing my involved technical training into play.

I was quite surprised. They lined up, smeared their left hands on the sticky black drum, plastered their hands on the wallpaper, and added their initials below. They did it quite artistically, too. I can recommend it for all fan-rooms. James, of course, had to ruin the effect by choosing the Marilyn Monroe calendar as his



target, but I can believe his excuse that he forgot he had paint on his fingers. It cleaned up O.K. though....it didn't take me more than four hours.

"Pick up the fanzine, Walt," I told him. "On the back page you will find a hand print. Obviously, it will match one of those on the wall".

Walt crossed the room and held the bacover under Madeleine's print. They were identical, the crooked Ghoodminton finger being finally conclusive.

"Bloody hell," said Walt, wiping a hand across his sweating forehead. (His left hand, natçh.)

"It was a conspiracy," I said. "Sadie was in it too. Tell 'em, Madeleine." I smiled. I felt terrific.

"It's true," she sighed. "Sadie and I decided to bring out a one-shot..."

"That's what she said," I interrupted, "one shot, not 'someone's shot'."

"We wanted to do it secretly, whilst Walt and Bob were at their offices. We kept our notes in STAR ROCKETS for the reason Goon stated. I posted the one-shot this afternoon, and sent STAR ROCKETS back to Goon to try and put him off track"

She turned to Sadie and nodded. They turned to me and advanced slowly. I backed away. Hell hath no fury....

Strong arms gripped me, lifted me, and suspended me from the coat hook. George and James advanced with dripping zap-guns at the Firing Position. Sadie dragged forward a garden hose, and Madeleine brought in two full fire buckets. Walt was the only one who showed any respect. He advanced waving my gat. I wondered when I had last cleaned out the goldfish.

* * * * *

As I dribbled my way down the stairs and squelched through the hall, Walt followed with a mop and bucket. I paused at the front door.

"Er, the fee," I said, very casually, "shall I take them with me, or do you want to have another look through them?"

He produced a thin, wrapped packet from his pocket.

"You did a good, fannish job, Goon," he said, "a job meriting more, far more, than six eye-tracked copies of *La Vie Parisienne*. I am going to give you instead something that you will treasure, something that will be the very keystone of your Collection. You, Goon, unique among the Wheels of IF, will now be the only one of us who can boast of possessing a full, complete file of STAR ROCKETS."

He pushed the parcel into my hand.

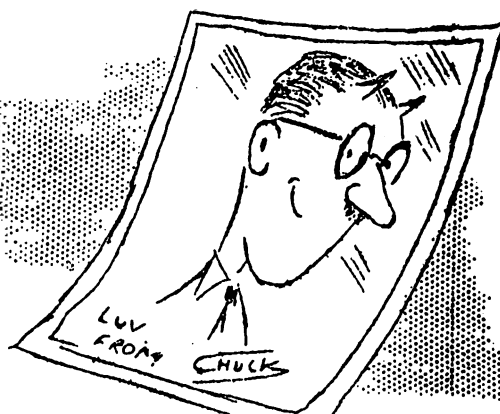
"night," he said, and closed the door behind me.

* * * * *

ESSEX FIEND

by

JOHN BERRY



The Goon Defective Agency is not afraid to tackle anything. Some of our best investigations must of necessity remain forever between the dirty, finger-marked covers of the Goon Casebook....or as long as the clients continue to subscribe to the Goon Benevolent Fund. But one case is outstanding, and even though Chuch Harris has pulled all the strings he can, we insist upon publishing this case in it's entirety. For those amongst you who haven't really lived...who blanch when Doris goes into a trance...who quaver when Willis gives you the beady eye...this is not for you. We would particularly ask that married fen put this issue where the children cannot get at it, because some parts of Art's report will make even the He-fen, the Bentcliffes, the Varleys, the Reaneys, wince in horror.



Lock all the doors, barricade the windows, turn the lights down low, and read on....

With a vast organisation like the G.D.A., it is necessary for me (The Goon) to make surprise visits to my operatives to see if they are making free with their zaps. For this reason, then, I pressed the buzzer on the puce-painted door of No.17, Brockham House, Brockham Drive, London, S.W.2.

Art opened the door, blinked his eyes a couple of times, looked at my moustache with awe, placed a boot on my grubby shirt and pushed.

"Don't want any brooms today," he rasped, and slammed the door.

Nimble dropping from the ornate chandelier, I soothed my bristling moustache, and tapped the door agin'.

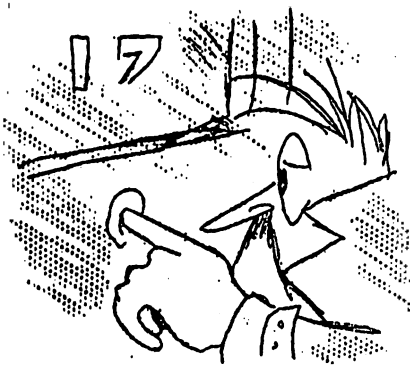
"I'm the G...," I started to say, then found myself gliding down the corridor on my nose, towards a small room. Climbing out of the plaster-board partition, I limped to the sink, filled my gat with hot water (I'm a sadist, see) and tiptoed back down the corridor.

Once more I tapped at the door, and, as it opened, I let fly at close range with both fuel tanks.

A scream rent the air. I looked aghast. Ghod, I'd rinsed a femme. Art came lumbering towards me, fingers working at his side. "You'd dare to pour water on my loving wife Olive," he hissed, saliva dripping down his square jaw.

"Arthur, I'm the Goon," I shouted.

He stopped. His eyes softened. A grin spread across his kisser. He took my hand, pumped it vigorously.



"Come in, come in," he panted, kicking Olive out the way.

I tell you, folks, I'm a great judge of character.

"Have a drink," he breathed, producing a bottle of lime cordial. Heck, I felt like the Prodigal Son.

"Nice joint you've got here," I commented, crossing my hobnail boots on the red plush settee.

"Sure, Goon, sure," he said shyly, dragging Olive out of the room and dumping her in the kitchen.

I glanced round the room, saw that something was wrong. "Er, pardon me for being so curious, Art," I smiled, allowing him to ease his slippers on my smelly feet, "but why is that large scale Hawker Hunter Mark VI jet fighter hanging from the ceiling?"

Art modestly looked downwards. "It's just a little thing I knocked up at work in my spare time," he grinned meekly, shuffling his feet.

"You should've got the Mark III," I explained, knocking the ash off my cigar into his cupped hands, "then you could have hung your electric light bulbs from the long range underwing fuel tanks."

"Ghod, Goon," he breathed, "you're a genius."

This boy Thomson is going places. I like my operatives to be shrewd.

Olive came in with a cold chicken and about seven different kinds of bread.

"Sorry I rinsed you," I grinned, acknowledging her curtsey, "but I thought you were Art."

"Think nothing of it," she sniffed, "I wanted it washed, anyway." Suffering Catfish, Art can pick 'em.

Grabbing a leg of chicken in both hands, and gnawing away, I looked at Art, sizing him up. I liked the way his yellow tie, purple corduroy jacket an' orange socks clashed together in remorseless fury.

"You're a swell dresser, Art," I munched.

"So are you, Goon," he said in a sort of strained voice, trying to ignore the bare knee sticking out of my trousers.

We moved to the lounge, allowing Olive to clean the grease marks off the settee. "What's the idea of the social visit?" asked Art.

"Just passing this way," I grinned. "Say, is this Thursday? Yeah! How about a visit to the Globe?"

"You going incognito?", asked Art

"No, the bus is good enough for me," I chuckled, allowing Art to sample the subtlety of my wit.

"Yuk yuk yuk," choked Art, tickling himself under the armpits.

I preened myself. This chap Thomson is dead clever.

Art suddenly frowned. "Hey, Goon," he shrilled. "I'm glad you've come. It saves me sending a special report. It's like this. Chuck Harris is stripping the Globe of all the femmes, both attached and unattached. He sure is a fast worker. There was a smasher talking to Burgess last Thursday, and in came Chuck, went over to 'em, and in about ten minutes he dragged her out of the Globe. That's happened about three times."

Heck. Did that mean that Harris was taking an interest in women?

"We'll go, Art," I yelled. Heck. THE GLOBE. Hobnobbing with folks like Tubb and Campbell and Carnell and Clarke....Then an afterthought struck me. Maybe I should go in disguise....if the folks saw me at the Globe, it might be bad for trade....

I looked round, saw Art polishing his AUTHENTICA. "Hey, Art," I yapped. I could go as Bert Campbell. Cut a bit off Olive's hair and glue it on my chin, and...and.." I nodded approvingly as Art strode into the kitchen with the scissors in his hand and a gleam in his eyes. I tell you, folks, this Thomson chap is a man after my own heart.

* * * * *

I followed Art along Hatton Garden, and we turned into the Globe. My one hope was that the real Bert Campbell wouldn't turn up, but Art assured me that one of

his lesser minions was scheduled to empty a loaded zap into Bert's motor cycle tank, so that I should have some time at least to witness Harris in action....and to decide whether or not to leave Art in charge of the investigation.

We walked along the corridor of the Globe, past the bar used by normal human beings and we entered the fannish lounge. I hung my duffle coat on the hatstand, and glanced towards the alcove on my left. A female was stretched out on the long seat. I nudged Art.

"Excuse me, Mr. Harrison," said Art to a gent who was bending over the prostrate form, "what's wrong with Doris?"

"It's a trance again," muttered the gent, fanning Doris with an ooja board. I was sort of basking in the fannish atmosphere when Art kicked my shin, and pointed to a vacant space near the end of the bar.

"The Buckmasters, Temple and Carnell," he hissed in my ear, "buy 'em a drink. I'll be just behind you, keeping an eye on Harris."

I saw Art sidle up and sit between Chuck and Joy, and I leaned over the bar in the way I was expected to. I ran my fingers professionally through Olive's hair hanging from my chin. Felt good. Real good.

"Ha," I saw Ted Carnell gesture in my direction. I recognised him immediately from my recollection of the life-size photograph of him hanging over the fireplace at The White House, the summer residence of James White.

"Ha," repeated Carnell, edging towards me, "just the man to settle an argument I had the other day with the Director of Harwell."

I hid my face in my pint mug. I sensed that in a few minutes I was going to regret my persistence in trying out disguises. One day, I'll get one that works.

I'm a tryer, see.

"Oh, er, um, Ted," I bubbled, trying to recollect all the scientific rot I had accumulated in my brief scholastic career.

"My problem is," said Ted, leaning past the Buckmasters in his enthusiasm, "concerning uranium 238 when bombarded by fast movin' neutrons."

I looked frantically over my shoulder for Art. I was up the creek. People always seem to persist in conversing with me in words of more than two syllables.

I saw Art was making mystic passes to me. First of all, he moved his right hand slowly up and down, as if it had a rod in it. Hmmm. Then he jerked his hand backwards, puffed out

his cheeks and started to wind up an imaginary reel in front of his waist.

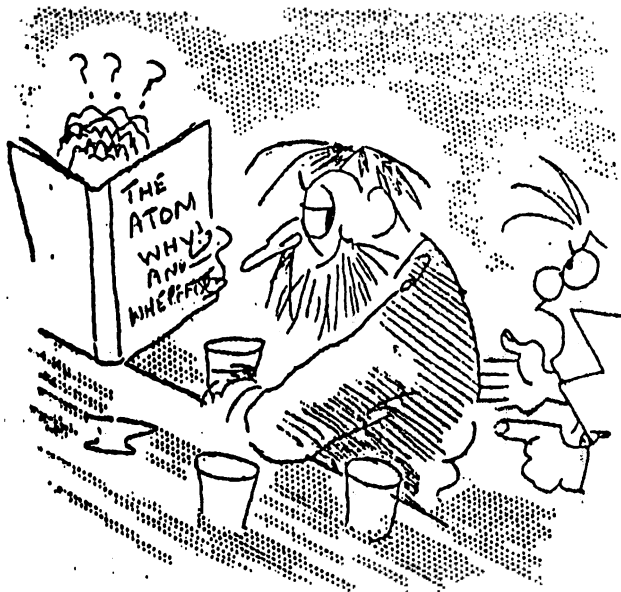
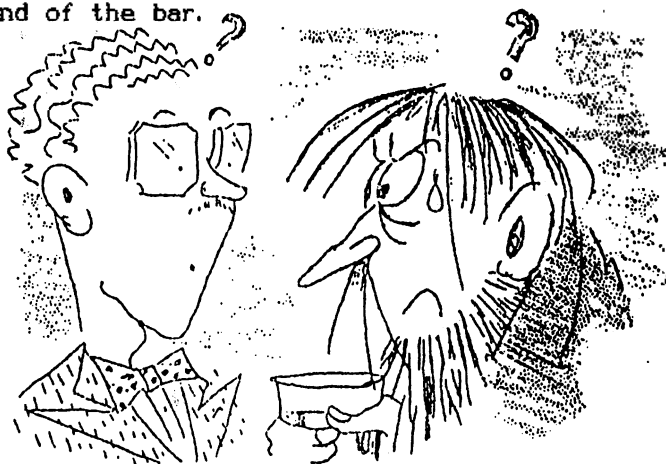
Heck.

I sensed he was trying to help me. Er.....um.....

"Fishing," I yelled.

Everyone looked around.

Ted Carnell shook my hand.



"Your scientific knowledge astounds me, Campbell," he enthused. "However, besides fission occurring, as you so rightly state, another phenomena occurs. When bombarded by neutrons at moderate speeds, and within confined limits, fission does not in fact take place, but instead, the neutrons are held by the uranium 238 nuclei. This causes X-rays to be emitted from the resulting product, which is transformed to the unstable uranium 238 isotope, which, through the emission of an electron, becomes a new element, namely, neptunium, which bears the atomic number 239. Now what I want to know is this. What radio-active element is this neptunium finally transmuted into?"

Sometimes, folks, I get to thinking what I missed by carrying betting slips when I should have been at school. Things were moving too quickly for me, and when things move too quickly, I get baffled.

I looked to Art for support, but I could see he was beyond aid. His eyes were clicking backwards and forwards like a ping pong ball, and his tongue was hanging out like a tie....a green tie.

Heck. I was the Goon. I would have to resort to bluff.

Sure, for all I knew, Carnell was bluffing me. He was using queer transformations of the planetary system, why shouldn't I? Neptunium, indeed. Huh!

I ran through the names of the planets, tryin' to choose a good one.

Saturnium?

Nah.

Marsium?

Nah.

Moonium?

Nah.

Plutonium?

Hmmm.

Plutonium. Plutonium.

Sounded good.

"Plutonium," I grinned.

Carnell's eyes bulged like goose eggs. He pushed the Buckmasters out the way, trampled over Bill Temple, and waved a sheet of paper in front of me.

"Quick, sign it," he pleaded. "It's a contract making you the scientific adviser to NEW WORLDS. Sign, pul-heeze. You're a genius. It took the Director of Harwell three days to work that out with the assistance of a mechanical brain and a book of logs."

"Get off your knees, Ted," I panted, playing for time. "No can do."

I yawned.

Bluff, see?

I looked for Art. He was walking inanely round the room, and making queer gibbering noises by rubbing his fingers up and down over his lips, and making screams like a redskin.

Heck.

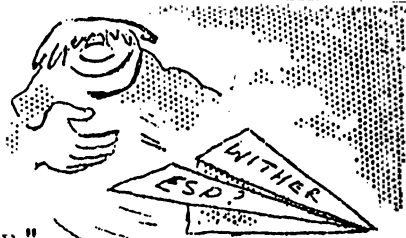
Maybe the boy was overworking.

But I pondered. Maybe I was a genius. Maybe I had second sight. Maybe Doris Harrison had seen my plight, whipped out a book of advanced physics, and gave me the answers by mental telepathy. I began to regret that I had never returned her psi experiment sheet in Orion 12. Heck, it made a good model aeroplane for Goon junior, anyways....and trying to remember all them dates and times is a great strain on a brain like mine. And then something caught my eye.

I saw Chuck Harris walking to the corridor with a femme. A smasher....a pipperoo.

"....and you can come to Rainham," I heard him say in seductive tones, gripping her by the arm, "and I'll just show you how it is done. I'll pay for damages. If it's your first time, we'll take it easy."

Suffering Catfish. Harris was in action. Art was right. Harris was taking an



interest in women, and by the tone of his conversation, what he did to my poor little budgerigar was going to be chicken feed.

I passed the remains of my pint over to Newman, and ran after Chuck, saw him disappear in a taxi.



Heck.

This was going to be a red hot investigation, a scoop for the G.D.A. I would probably make my fortune flogging the copyright of the story to the *News of the World*.

I waited outside for Art.

"Look, Art," I said as he stumbled out, a look of awe on his kisser. "I'm putting you in complete charge of the Harris investigation. Money is no object. Spend a couple of nights hanging round Lake Avenue, see if yer can get something really spicy..... something I can flog to Rotsler. Send me reports every two or three days."

He nodded. He didn't seem too enthusiastic, he seemed bewildered.

"Heck, Art," I soothed, "Here is a new Goon issue." I handed him Goon junior's black plastic pop gun. "Fires corks twenty yards, it does," I enthused, "beats the zap in range and hitting power. Give it a reliance trial, and if it works, I'll make it a general issue to Goon operatives."

He still looked at me.

"Carnell s-says your brain is better than Einsteins and Willis's put together," mumbled Art, backing away from me.

Carnell is very observant.

* * * * *

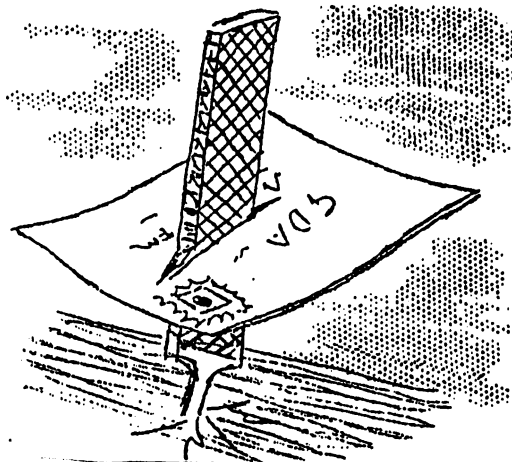
Back to Belfast...back to the usual Goon routine.

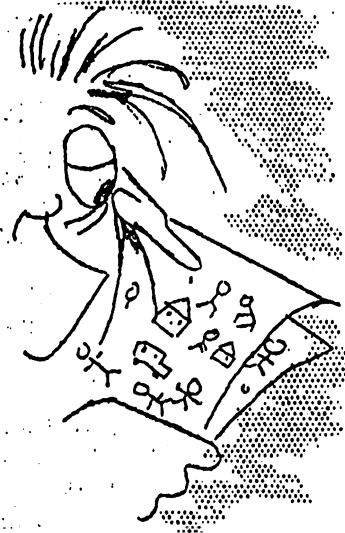
I sat back in the office chair, cursed as I caught my trousers on a rusty nail. They don't make orange boxes like they used to.

My wife had left the week's accumulation of mail on my office desk... a postcard from Mal Ashworth asking if I traced 'ghost writers'. Dumping the card in my pending file, I wondered how Art was getting on with his preliminary Harris investigations. Sure, I would like to have stayed with him, but having such a vast organisation as the G.D.A. revolving round me was a big responsibility. My place was at the hub.

Goon junior passed through my office on his way to the kid's poker school in the attic. Got to get the rent from somewhere. He flung a heavily sealed envelope on my desk en route. I espied the 'LONDON S.W.2' postmark.

Hurriedly I locked the door, barred the window.





I allowed a grin to fight its way through my moustache. I liked reading Art's reports. His style appealed to me...it was different. Heh heh. Y'see, using illos so much, it makes it easier for me to get the gist of the report, me being semi-illiterate. Nothing infuriates me more than painstakingly looking up a word in the dictionary and then forgetting it's context.

Ripping open the seal, I exposed the pages to the flickering rays of the candle stub on my desk.

This is what I read:

Dear Goon,

Herewith first report. Acting on your instructions, I went to Lake Avenue, the residence of Charles Randolph Harris, the subject of the investigation. I arrived at 7.30pm. last night, and took up a crafty position of observation in the hen coop overlooking Chuck's room. (NOTE. I would respectfully suggest you alter the phraseology of line 13, page 97

of the Defective Handbook, Second Edition, by deleting the words.. 'it is advisable to roost on the perch if using the hen coop as an observation position for long periods'... I tried this but fell off three times)).

To continue, I saw, in all, four girls arrive at 'Carolyn'...all young and innocent looking...supple, if you know what I mean. I saw Chuck size 'em up in his room, and then draw the curtains. There was a look of sheer rapture on his kisser as he did so. The saliva was dripping. The orgy continued for some hours, interjected with deep voiced expressions such as.. 'Willis does this on his back'...and... 'Charters is too old for this'...and, most revealing of all, 'There is no risk at all if you leave everything to me...'

Later on, I crept to the window, but was unable to see anything at all, although heavy breathing from within nearly made the walls vibrate.

To conclude this report, Goon, I'd like to state, off the record, that I wish I had Chuck's technique. You've got to hand it to him. For example, Olive and myself met him in London last week, and next thing I knew she was buying him potato crisps...with my money. My experience tells me that the only way to successfully conclude this investigation into Chuck's sex-life, is to make it an inside job.

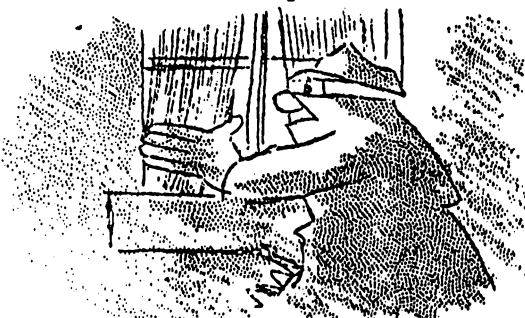
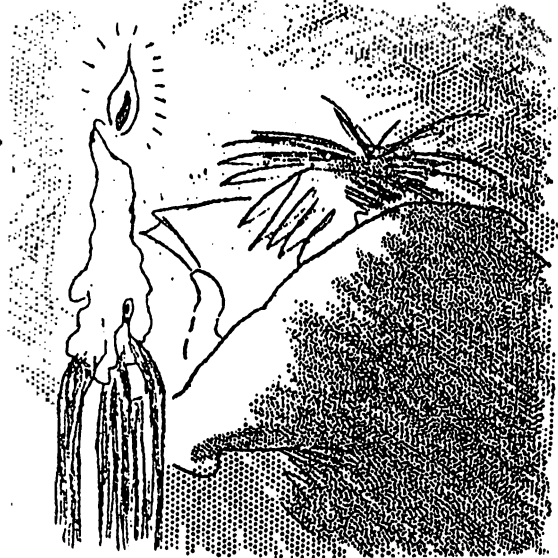
Waiting instruction,

Art.

P.S. Two dozen fresh eggs en route.

* * * * *

I contemplated for some time, and for me, folks, that's difficult. My own theory was that Chuck, as President of the Fully Certified Sex Fiends, was doing a bit of initiating on his own, like this chap Gilgamesh that Bob Tucker is always talking and writing about. I've always had a spite against Chuck ever since I was refused



admission to his society on account I wouldn't let him have the technicolour illos from my two volumes of the Decameron. It would give me great pleasure to expose Harris to fandom for what he was.

There must be some way of....

Suddenly, a hibernating cell in my brain pulsed feebly. Suppose, it suggested tentatively, just suppose....

Heh heh heh.

I sent an urgent message to Art. This was going to be really funny.

* * * * *

Three days had passed since Art had telegraphed to say that he agreed, though reluctantly, with my proposal. I was beginning to get worried. I had given Art a very difficult task, and if his luck was bad, he might be up the creek. With a chap like Harris around, anything was possible.

I mused.

Trade was slack.

We-e-ell, not exactly slack, rather, unprofitable.

Norman Wansborough had asked for my autograph, but if I sent his book back with a big 'X' on it, he might think it was a kiss.

Tsk tsk.

Madeline had asked me to try and trace her cookery book, THE GLUTTON'S BIBLE, which had mysteriously vanished about the time that Bob Shaw had left for Canada. But heck, Bob was in charge of Canfan, and I couldn't very well ask him to investigate himself.

In our racket, there's such a thing as professional etiquette.

Then there was this Charters business.

He had come hobbling into my office, and asked me to use my influence to get a summons withdrawn, after the Bangor police had caught him speeding.

I'd fixed it, with difficulty, but I'd made it plain to George that if he wanted to break the speed limit, he should take his bathchair off the public highway first.

Suddenly, the door of the office burst open, and my wife came rushing in, waving her feather duster in a very menacing attitude. Sometimes she finds it difficult to conceal her sadistic streak.

I was tempted to zap her, but, heck, I had enough ironing to do as it was.

My household is run on very democratic lines, see.

She flung down a small buff envelope on my desk top. I could see it had been opened.

"What's the meaning of this?" she yapped.

I opened the envelope, glanced nervously at the telegram.

COME AT ONCE STOP I FEAR THE WORST STOP OLIVE

"Oh, it's, er, nothing, sweetest," I winced, reaching for my steel helmet.

"I wondered what you were up to in London last week?" she sniffed suspiciously.

"I have to go back again, dearheart," I cringed, making a break for the door. "I've got to see Art."

I beat her to the attic, and removed the step ladder. I was safe for a time, and took the opportunity to join the kids at Poker. I had to make my fare to London.

* * * * *

I wiped my boots against the wall, and for the second time in a week, I

pressed the buzzer of No. 17, Brockham House.

Olive came to the front door, waving an umbrella in front of her.

"Cut it," I gritted. "I'm unarmed."

"Come quickly," she sobbed. "Art is.... mesmerised."

I followed her into the boudoir. I liked the way the light pastel shades of the wall and curtains did their best to camouflage the purple and vermilion stripes on Art's pyjamas.

"Heck, Art," I grated, flinging a box of oranges on to his bed.

I get 'em wholesale, and nothing is too good for a sick Goon operative.

"What gives?" I asked him.

"I'm physically exhausted, Goon," he bleated, his eyelids trying to squeeze against each other, and succeeding.

I looked up at two balloons floating above his bed.

"Hey, Art," I frowned. "I expect the agency to be run in a proper manner. If you're sick, then OK., but this is no time for frivolity."

"I don't get you," he panted.

"Them balloons," I said, indignant. I've got my personal prestige to think of, see.

"That was part of my disguise," he sighed, his tongue popping in and out like a ferret - a green ferret.

Sufferin' Catfish.

This boy was going places.

"You mean...?" I beamed.

"Yes," he smiled, the whites of his eyes showing for the first time. "I followed instructions to the letter."

I turned to Olive. "Git," I ordered. "This is no place for a delicately reared girl to be in. What Art has been through will affect him for the rest of his life, and it's best that no self-respecting femme should hear the gory details."

I licked my lips.

Rotsler would give his right hand for this.

I closed the door after her. I went back to the side of the bed, and got out my notebook.

"Give me the works, bhoy," I grinned.

Cor.

They'd have to bring out a new Act of Parliament to cover this little lot. Art was a good operative. There was nothing for it but to give him a rise....I would have to increase my 'Art Studies' order with Jan.

I decided it was just as well Art was too ill to do the illos. He'd have time to plan them properly. He'd be able to incorporate all the sordid details. For he had undoubtedly seen what no man had ever seen before.

What a scoop. Art propped himself up with difficulty, and cleared his throat.



* * * * *

"I went back to the hen coop last night," he croaked, "and changed into one of Olive's dresses, as per your instructions. I must say it shook the rooster.

Then I went to the front door of 'Carolyn', and Chuck opened the door to my urgent knocking. I told him one of the young ladies who had visited him last Thursday had boasted of her experiences, and I wanted to take part too.

"Chuck gave a blood-curdling grin and told me that I was the 'first tonight', and took me into his den. Producing a sheet of paper, he told me to sign on the dotted line, saying that the certificate absolved him from any blame should there be any subsequent change in my physical condition.

"Within a few moments, three other girls came. Chuck rubbed his hands with obvious satisfaction, and he said, meaningly, "I think I shall be able to satisfy all of you tonight."

I sighed as Art sank back, exhausted.

I gave him a glass of water, which he sipped slowly. The pencil dropped unheeded from my fingers as he continued his narrative. With his poignant vernacular, Art was indeed a great loss to the stage. I have oft remarked that his flow of superlatives is like honey dripping from a comb.

"Look here, Mister Harris, I said," continued Art, "just what do you mean by that? I'll have you know that I am a girl of high principles.

"Chuck sneered, went to a drawer, and held an object in the palm of his hand which confirmed my rapidly growing suspicions."

"Quick, Art," I panted.

"Yes," sighed Art, slowly turning white, "he opened his hand and revealed...a...this is going to shake you, Goon...a....a battered shuttlecock. Harris had us playing ghoddminton for over five hours. Oooooo. I'll never be able to walk agin'."

Ghod, what utter frustration.

"Heck, move over Art," I cringed.

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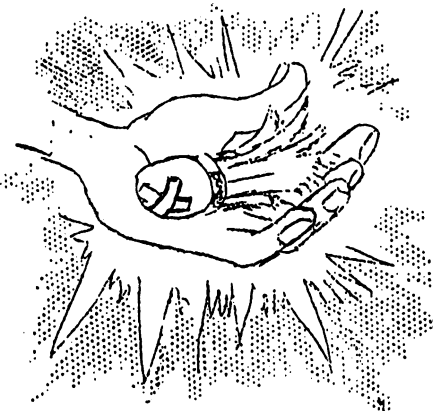
That, folks, was how Art revealed the truth about Chuck Harris.

It shook me, although, mind you, secretly I felt I had slipped up, just a wee mite.

I mean, I should've sensed the facts in time to save Art all that effort.

Y'see, a fortnight before the investigation began, I'd sold six complete Willis Ghoddminton Outfits to Chuck for his Rainham Young Ladies Ghoddminton Guild.

Sometimes, folks, I get to thinking I spend too much time dreaming of Marilyn Monroe.



* * * * *

THE CEDRIC AFFAIR

By
J.W.
BERRY

When the evening session ended, and the broken articles of furniture had been swept into the corner of the room, we all said our 'goodnights' and departed, before Walt thought about his surplus prozines. Unfortunately I was the last to leave, and as I slithered out of the door, Walt called me back.

Heck. No escape.

Now I was going to be stuck with about three hundred IF's.

"I - I - I've got no change," I muttered feebly. But I was cornered. I knew the score.

Walt tiptoed to the door, opened it softly, peered round it, closed it with great care, and glided to his desk. He handed me a pink envelope. Hmmm.

"You don't want me to buy any prozines?" I breathed.

He gave his usual good-natured guffaw.

"Yuk yuk, Goon, as if you didn't know I'm holding the auction next week. No. Tell me what you think about this letter."

I looked at the envelope. I sniffed it. A strong reek of perfume wafted into my quavering nostrils. Well well.

I grabbed Walt by the hand and shook it warmly.

"Best of luck to you, Walt," I grinned.

I'm a man of the world, see.

He snapped his fingers in exasperation. "Idiot," he grated, reaching impulsively for one of the nearby table legs, then reluctantly appearing to change his mind. "Read the letter," he hissed.

I opened the envelope, and pulled out a sheet of expensive pink notepaper. The handwriting was small and neat, and seemed to be feminine in character.

I read as follows:

My dear Mr. Willis,

A close friend of mine has told me about the joys to be found in the pages of HYPHEN. I would just love to become a subscriber. I have been further led to believe you hold dinky meetings at your house, and I would absolutely adore being invited up.

Yours till we meet,

Cedric Tweep

I sniffed distastefully. I've been around, see.

"What gives?" I asked.

"Look, Goon," whispered Walt, looking fearfully towards the door, "I haven't forgotten your brilliant handling of the missing fanzine investigation. Here is another job for your outfit. I suspect a hoax. It looks very much like the work of



Chuch Harris.

"Huh," I sneered. "The letter bears a Belfast postmark."

Honest, folks, I'm as sharp as a punctured beachball.

"If you'd let me finish," pleaded Walt, tears filling his eyes. He got up from his knees, despairingly. "I was going to say that it looks like the work of Chuch Harris, but in co-operation with one of the members of Belfast fandom."

"George Charters," I said.

Walt's eyes bulged. He moved his chair back.

"How d'you know?" he breathed in awe.

"Because of the Belfast postmark," I explained. Heck, Willis is supposed to have brains.

"But - but why does the Belfast postmark mean George posted it?" he gulped.

I was beginning to get the run around. "Simple, see," I said. "Because Charters lives in Bangor. He posts the letter in Belfast, so no one suspects him, except me."

"But Bob Shaw could've posted it," whispered Walt. He seemed to be having a little trouble following my line of reasoning.

"No," I said. "If it was Bob Shaw he would've posted it in Bangor."

Walt shuddered. Heck, I was getting worried. Walt isn't the first to find my powers of deduction a bit bewildering."

He paced up and down the room for about twenty minutes, talking to himself. Eventually he sat down again, a glazed look in his eyes. He cleared his throat meaningly.

"To continue, Goon. I have looked up the Household Directory for Belfast, and I actually find there is a Cedric Tweep at the address quoted. Cedric Tweep. His occupation is that of a choreographer. I want you to prepare a dossier on Cedric, and let me have it before we invite him up next Thursday. O.K.?"

I snapped my fingers. "My fee, my fee," I hissed.

Walt laid a fatherly hand on my shoulder. "If you clear up this case and find out who the traitor is in Irish Fandom, I will give you for your very own, the latest publication of the Kinsey Report on American Females."

Suffering Catfish. The works.

I scribbled down the address, took another sniff of the perfume, and scuttled away.

* * * * *

In my office, I dictated a certain message of instruction to Art, head of the London Branch, via Joey, my almost human budgerigar. When I saw him safely fluttering over the roof tops en route to Art, I sat down and did a bit of pondering.

* * * * *

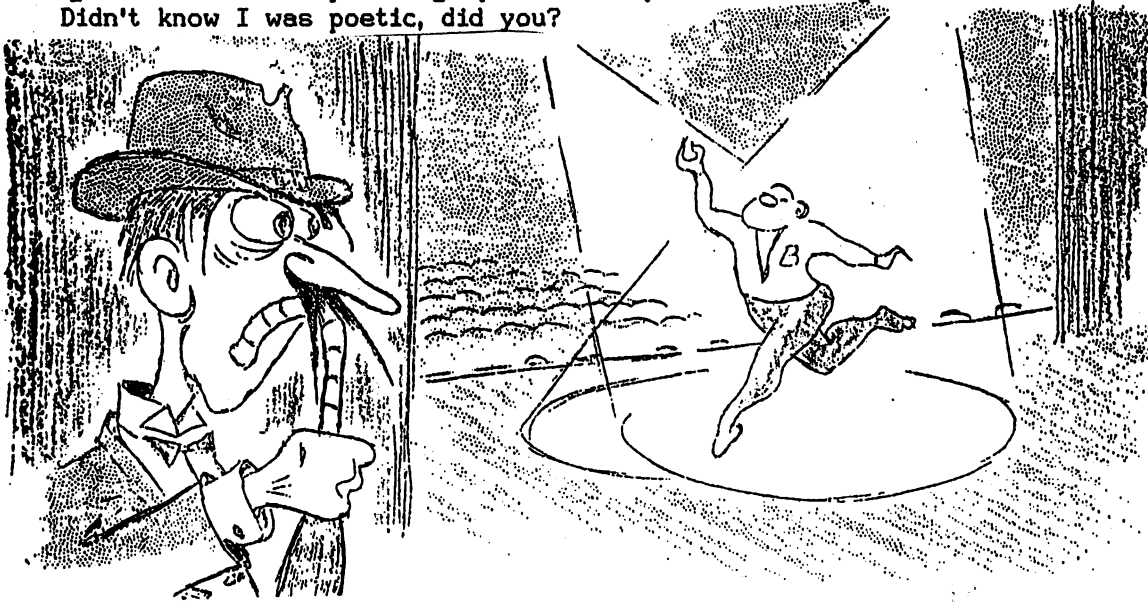
Next morning I dialled all the leading Belfast theatres, and found out that, yes, a Mr. Tweep was employed at the Royale. A visit was indicated. Natch, I had to wear a disguise. I'd discovered from experience during the missing fanzine affair that if you wear a disguise, and it's good enough, folks don't recognise you. Brilliant, isn't it?

I swiped my father-in-law's Anthony Eden hat, and dumped a rolled umbrella over my arm. I looked like James White in his honeymoon rig, 'cept I wasn't carrying my typer.

I anticipated having a little trouble entering the theatre, but when I approached the stage doorkeeper he ducked behind the counter with a strangled sob. Must have had a weak turn.

I had never been in the wings of a theatre before, so I decided to take advantage of the experience, and have me a good looksee. I walked along a brick corridor, past the dressing rooms, fought my way (slowly) through a crowd of girls dressed as sylphs, and reached the wings. I could see a dress rehearsal was taking place. Even as I watched, the conductor tapped his baton, the lights dipped, and the ballet began.

The strings of the orchestra hummed delicately, and a blue spotlight picked up the figure of a dancer prancing spontaneously onto the stage. Didn't know I was poetic, did you?



I looked keenly at the dancer. It was a male, of magnificent physique. The body was of tempered steel, and the symmetry of his movements was ethereal. As the dance progressed, it was a Cossack dance by the way, I could tell that a marvellous climax was approaching. The conductor caught the magic of the dancer's movements, and signalled to the drummer. Excitement reached a fever pitch as the drums rolled.

Everyone was watching as the climax occurred. The dancer leapt high in the air, turned a double somersault, and landed heavily on the flat of his back.

"Oh fruit," echoed across the silent stage, "always make that mistake."

I gasped. The voice was familiar.

No, no, not that. It couldn't be. I rushed across the stage and peered at the sweating kisser.

"Suffering Catfish! Bob Shaw!" I cried.

"O-h-h-h-h n-o-o-o-o-o" he sobbed, when he saw me. "What will Sadie say now?"

I clicked my fingers meaningly.

"She needn't know," I said kind of crafty-like. I never let an opportunity slide, see.

"How about the next three issues of Nebula?" he whimpered.

I thought about it. I didn't want to wait that long. A lot can happen in five years. All the same, there is such a thing as a gilt-edged long term policy.

"Will do," I said. "But tell me, Bob, what's the idea of this rig out? You...a ballet dancer?"

"It's all your fault," he said. He looked at me. I could see that he was trying to maintain his self-control. "You suggested in one of your articles in Orion," he added, "that I would make a great ballet dancer. I have noticed that I am rather dainty on my feet, and I began to think maybe you were correct. So I took the day off from the office, and you saw the result."

Just as he finished, three beautiful girls dressed as swans swayed up, grabbed Bob by his arms, and seductively dragged him away.

Heck.

"Lend me your kit, Bob," I yelled.

This racket looked good.

I had neatly cornered the third swan from the left when I thought about my mission.

* * * * *

A couple of enquiries in the theatre soon made the future seem dim for me. Mr. Tweep, it seemed, had been called away to London, and it was uncertain when he would return.

Tsk tsk.

That upset everything. I went home, disgruntled, and sat down to some more hard thinking. It was easy to prepare a dossier on Cedric, but a dossier wouldn't be any good to Walt if Cedric wasn't able to make an appearance at Oblique House the following Thursday. If he didn't go, the whole purpose of the investigation would fall through and I could say 'goodbye' to the Kinsey report. Such a disaster, such a loss to my collection was too horrible to contemplate.

S-o-o-o-o, I had to arrange a pseudo (no word is too good for me) Cedric to visit Walt. I thought I would be able to arrange that.

I felt better.

I winked at myself in the mirror.

Gee....I'm good looking....I think....if only I could see the other two thirds of my face.

Hmmmmmm.

But at the moment, I had no time to spare for the finer things in life. My new plan called for an immediate visit to Oblique House to see Bob Shaw, who lived there with Sadie, and try a little blackmail. I was going to have to be tough...but well...in this racket you've got to be in there pitching the whole time...or else.

Just before I left, I saw the postman tottering down the road, flinching visibly as he neared my house, Mon Debris. I caught the letter as he skimmed it across the road.

I ripped the envelope open....it was from Art.

"....so I got Chuch out of the way," I read, "and examined his correspondence file, as you instructed. I noticed that a fragment of paper was attached to the file between two letters, as if a carbon copy had been detached as an afterthought. The two letters were dated, which gives the approximate date of the fragment. One letter, to the International Studio Publications, Stockholm, was dated 17th. September, and the other, a cheque stub and carbon copy, was to the Artistic Pose Co., Paris, dated 19th. September. Therefore it is reasonable to assume...."

From then on Art started to use big words, but I got what he meant. The dates fitted in. If the torn fragment was a carbon of the letter to the Irish fandom contact, dated the 17th., 18th., or 19th., it compared with the date of Walt's letter, the 21st.

I counted myself lucky having Art working for me in London...he would sure come in useful if I landed that big investigation for the London Circle. I delayed my departure to 170 for a few moments, just long enough to type a couple of letters. Then I went for the big showdown.

* * * * *

On a normal weekday at Oblique House, the dump is fairly quiet. Madeleine usually serves in the prozine kiosk until Walt arrives home from the Ministry, although of late, with the seasonal decline in science fiction, she has been known to delegate the job to Carol.

As I fought my way up the Willis front path, I saw that the kiosk was empty. Good. That meant that Madeleine and Carol were away, and Bob was by himself, and believe me, he couldn't have nicer company. I eased the front door open, tiptoed across the hallway, and reached the Shaws front door.

I contemplated. I wondered just what a filthy pro did with himself when left alone to his own devices. I grinned, and put my eye to the keyhole.

Heck.

Some people have no sense of fair play. I wiped the zap spray from my eyes, and heard a muffled 'yuk yuk' from inside.

I took several paces backwards to gain momentum for my charge. A red haze seemed to pass before my eyes. The full blooded killer instinct surged over me. I kicked over a pile of prozines. I'm tellin' you I'm mean when I get aroused.

I leapt at the door, which swung open. I scrambled to my feet inside.

"Don't move, Shaw," I gritted, "or I'll scribble on your wallpaper".

"No. Not the wallpaper," he pleaded.

I sneered, but I could see his point of view. It took a lot of trouble to import enough NEW YORK POSTs to paper the living room with pages 12 and 13. All the same, with that and the NEBULA front cover pattern as floor covering, the place had a sort of repulsive fannish charm. It's hard to believe that Bob gets treatment for his inferiority complex.

"Get up and sit down," I ordered, trying to confuse him. I took an apple from one of the baskets stacked against the wall, and kicked a full basket over to Bob, in case he felt a pang of hunger.

"Suppose I told Sadie about them girls dragging you away," I suggested. I was trying to start on a subtle note, see.

He cringed in his chair like an ingrowing toenail.

"So...." he groaned, dispassionately kicking at a nearby heap of banana skins.

"So I want your co-operation," I grated, stuffing my pocket with plums.

"Sh-shure," said Bob, nervously following my glance and throwing his arm protectively round the cold ham.

"There is no need for me to go into detail," I said, "suffice to say that next Thursday night, I want you to don your green corduroy jacket, get a pair of suede shoes, fix that spotted cravat round yer neck, and slap some perfume on yer hair. Then go upstairs to the fan room, and introduce yourself to Walt as Cedric Tweep."

"No-o-o-o," sobbed Bob.

I squashed a grape between my thumb and forefinger.

"O.K....O.K....you win," he breathed.

Honest, folks, I just can't resist that sadistic streak that sometimes asserts itself.

"One false move, Bob, and Sadie gets the full facts, as only I can give them," I mouthed. This seemed to worry him even more.

"What time do I go up on Thursday night?" he said ruefully, seeing that I held all the trumps.

I looked at my watch, pondered. "Say...seven thirty," I replied. "And don't forget. Act as though you are anxious to become a fan...but don't get too realistic. I don't want to get Oblique House raided."

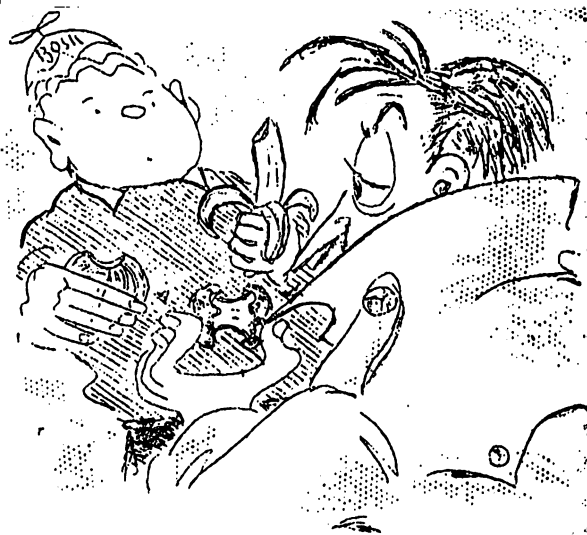
He peeled an orange absently....seemed resigned to his fate.

I slipped my zap into my waterproof shoulder holster, grabbed a pomegranate and turned to go.

"Stop for tea," Bob suggested.

Heck.

If he ain't careful, folks be liable to think he's addicted to gluttony



* * * * *

Back at the office, I felt better. All I had to do now was to fix up a

fictitious dossier to fit Bob Shaw's character study of Cedric, but it was necessary to incorporate a little factual data in it, if only to retain my passion for authenticity.

That meant a trip to Cedric's house, to the address I had memorised from Walt's letter. I decided to go at about nine o'clock that night.

* * * * *

S'funny how things happen. It was just after nine fifteen, and I was walking down Montmorency Crescent, to Cedric's house. My coat collar was well turned up, and I gripped the butt of my zap tightly. Guess the water was almost lukewarm. I had a few yards to go, and was just about to overtake the shambling figure I saw tottering in the same general direction as myself, when I had a hunch.

The figure looked somehow familiar, especially the way it stopped every few paces and wheezed for breath. I crept closer, and sneaked a looksee at the wrinkled face.

It was George Charters.

Heck.

I waited in a nearby entry, and saw George stop at number 37, Cedric's house, shuffle to the door, and knock. A muffled conversation ensued, then George coughed once or twice, tightened the muffler round his neck, and hobbled away.

This was very mysterious. Only a matter of great import would drag George away from his hormone treatment at this time of night. I decided it would be policy to follow George, and see if anything could be learned.

Half an hour later, having traversed at least a hundred and ten yards, we reached a small building, into which George crawled. It was, I saw, the:

HARD COVER RETREAT

(Crutches to be left with the receptionist)

CHILDREN UNDER 65 NOT ADMITTED.

This was indeed a problem. George was no doubt a major key to the mystery, and it was most probable that he was Chuch's liason agent to deal with the Belfast side of the hoax, supposing it was a hoax.

I made up my mind quickly. I donned my collapsable false beard, ruffled my hair, screwed up my eyes, and hobbled after George.

* * * * *

It wasn't until I'd paid the necessary 25/- initiation fee, and been issued with my provisional bath-chair driving licence, that I discovered George had staggered out via the back door. Really, I was to blame for the lapse on my part...I should've known that anyone nurtured on Max Brand would have worked that crude but effective dodge.

But...why had George been to Cedric's house in the first place, and what could I do but sup my gruel in the second place?



* * * * *

Thursday night.

I arrived at 170 before the time appointed for Bob to make his appearance. I climbed the staircase testily, and quietly slithered to the door of the fan room.

Muffled voices came from inside. I decided I might as well show from the very beginning that I was in no mood for nonsense. Gripping my zap, I kicked open the door and leapt inside.

"Hold it, folks," I gritted.

They were all there except Bob. I looked at their strained kissers...Walt, Madeleine, James, Peggy, Sadie, and old Father Time himself.

George raised his ear trumpet.

"So help me Charters," I mouthed, "if you don't keep still, I'll water the sand in your hour glass.

Honest, folks, sometimes I even amaze myself at the concentrated venom in my personality.

"Thanks for the dossier which arrived this morning," said Walt, crawling from under the table.

"O.K...O.K.." I grated. "Take it easy, folks. Cedric is due to make his appearance about now."

At that exact second, strangely enough, the door opened slowly and in walked Bob Shaw.

Listen. I never saw such superb acting. He didn't look like himself at all. If I hadn't arranged the whole thing with Bob myself, I would've been completely baffled, as obviously were the rest.

The figure was dressed in a pale green corduroy jacket, flowery yellow droop tie, tight trousers and spats. The bunch of violets in the lapel hole looked particularly effective.

BoSh certainly does things very thoroughly, I mused.

"I'm Thedric," lisped Bob.

Walt shifted awkwardly.

"I'm Walt Willis," he croaked.

"Not the Walt Willith?" said Bob.

He simpered at James meaningly, and, with great feminine hauteur shook his head slowly at George's proffered cough drops.

I caught Bob's eye, and winked encouragingly. He was doing great, see.

He winked back.

Walt wiped his brow.

"I'm editor of HYPHEN," he said, trying to break the embarrassing lull in the conversation.

"Oh how dinky," said Bob in just the right way.

He came and sat by me.

Whilst the others shuffled uncertainly, I squeezed Bob's arm.

"You look terrific, kid," I whispered, "see you outside afterwards."

I was trying to show him he was doing his stuff well, see.

Bob nudged me with his knee, and fluttered his eyebrows.

Heck. The others were looking. I told him not to act the part too well.

Just then the door opened and in walked Cedric.

ANOTHER CEDRIC?????

But worse.

This time it was undoubtedly Bob Shaw.

SUFFERING CATFISH.

WHAT HAD I DONE?????

"I'm Thedric," said the first one.

"I'm Thedric," said the definite Bob Shaw.

"I'm Walt Willith," said Walt, caught in the rapture of the thing.
 "Beggy poddon," bleated George, waving his ear trumpet aloft appealingly.
 "Shaddap, Methusaleh," grimaced Sadie to George. She looked significantly at Bob's bunch of Forget-me-nots. She walked up to him.
 "You're Bob Shaw," she hissed.
 "No, I'm Thedric," he insisted.
 "No, I'm Thedric," said the other one.
 "I'm Walt Willith," said Walt, in there pitching.
 I was on the spot, see. Things were beginning to get confused, and sometimes, if things get confused, I begin to lose my grip.

I'm human, see.
 "Don't look, Peggy," growled James, "there are some things with which you are not conversant."

Madeleine, however, brought us back to reality in her own inimitable way.
 "Until this fiasco is suitably sorted out," she said simply, "I shall refuse to make tea."

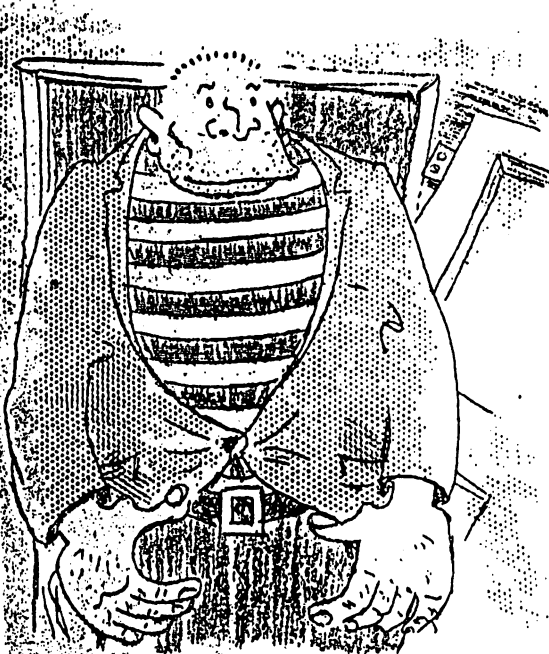
Look, folks. From the beginning it was just possible that I would make a mistake in the preparation of my complicated plot. It isn't like me to do so, get that straight, but it could happen. In this instance, I could see that I had overlooked a tiny detail in my conspiracy. The appalling error was brought home to me forcibly by seeing Bob sobbling pitifully at Madeleine's feet. In case you don't know, Bob is keen on his food, see.

I saw in a flash that positive action was called for, to try and ease the situation. I gave Bob a long blast of H2O.

"Down, boy, down," I gritted.

"Bob Shaw, go to your room immediately," interjected Sadie, selecting the strongest Ghoddminton bat.

"Tee hee, I told you I was Thedric," simpered the other one, as Sadie led Bob from the room.



Thirty seconds later the earthquake happened. The door burst off it's hinges. A big man, about six feet six inches in height, obviously a heavyweight boxer or a weight-lifter stood in the doorway. His three-day growth of beard glistened meaningly. He was as broad as a garage door. He edged sideways into the room. When he spoke, his voice had all the delicate quality of gravel being tipped from a ten ton lorry.

"I'm Thedric," he crunched.

"No, I'm Thedric," muttered the other one, although not so convincingly as before.

"He's Walt Willis," I mouthed, pointing to where Walt was banging is head against the far wall.

At this juncture, Charters, who had been happily crooning to himself in the

corner, showed signs of being with us again. He pointed a gnarled finger at the thug.

"Introduce me to the new neo-fan," he wheezed.

* * * * *

Suddenly, a dramatic change came over the pansy Thedric. He tore off his wig, threw his flowers away, and wrapped his yellow tie round James's neck. His

voice had lost the lisp. He sounded mean.

"Look here, White," he bawled. "Give me my money. I'm getting out of here. You didn't tell me I was coming to a nut-house."

Meanwhile, the pug had started to breathe through his nose like a traction engine, and he hunched forward.

'Time to go,' I said to myself.

Self-preservation rates pretty high on my list, see. As Confucius said, 'Life's full of ups and downs.'

I leapt through the open doorway, switched off the lights en route, and scuttled down the stairs so fast I singed my shoe laces.

* * * * *

"I don't know whether to give you the Kinsey report or not," frowned Walt.

"Aw heck, Walt, I did my best," I said, looking sort of dejected.

"Hmmm," pondered Walt. "You know, I secretly suspected all the time that it was James working with Chuch on the hoax."

"Huh, it was obvious. Any fool could see that," I lied. "Chuch knew the real Cedric Tweep, they used to box together in the Navy. Chuch knew that Cedric lived in Belfast, and when he saw him in London the other day, his warped mind clicked into top gear."

"He wrote to James, told him to post that letter to you and arrange for a professional actor to come to 170 disguised as an effeminate Cedric. Right enough, it was a clever hoax. Would've worked too, 'cept for me."

Walt sniffed.

"Something else I wanted to mention. What do you mean by following George all over town? You know his heart can't stand it."

"I was doing a bit of investigating, Walt" I explained.

"Mmmm. Then it must have been James who wrote that letter to George, and told him he would find a new Max Brand anthology at number 37 Mont-whatever-it-is Crescent," said Walt, "trying to make poor old George the suspect."

"I knew it was James all the time," I bluffed, trying to show Walt how good I was.

"How did you know?" asked Walt, unconvinced.

"Well, to cut a long a story short," I started, "it couldn't have been George, because he lives in Bangor, and if he posted the letter in Belfast, he would reason that we would know it wasn't him, because it wasn't a Bangor postmark. Conversely, Bob would know that if the letter was posted in Bangor, it couldn't have been George, or me, therefore..."

Walt uncrossed his eyes with difficulty.

"I see, I see," he croaked. "Look, Goon, you managed the missing fanzine affair very well, and I had no scruples about giving you the promised fee. However, on this occasion, you left me with rather a knotty problem to untangle. But let it not be said that I am a man of mean disposition. Here. Take this."

He tossed me a copy of Vargo Statten Magazine No. 3.

"It's autographed," soothed Walt.

Heck.

Like I said, life is full of ups and downs.

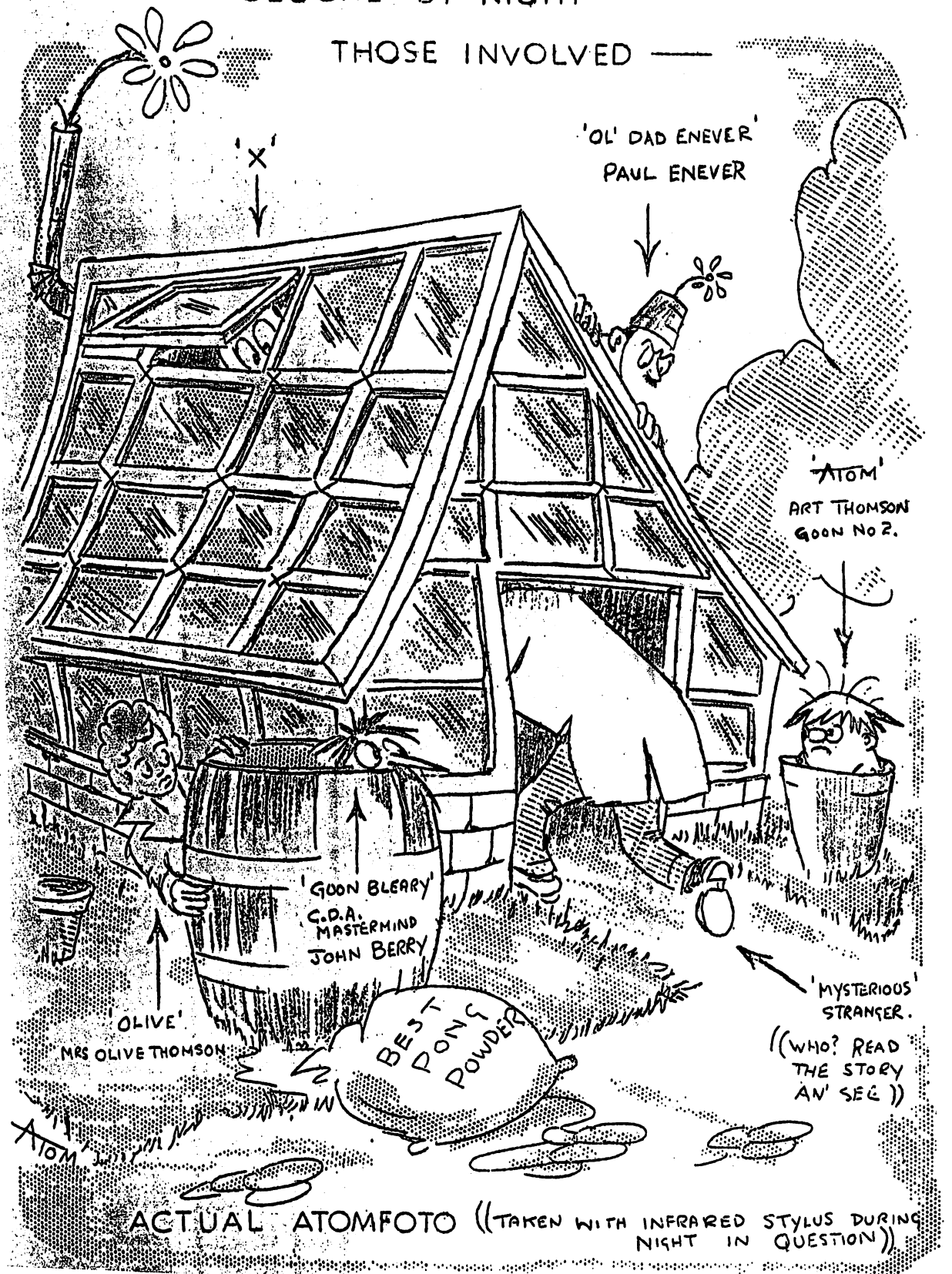
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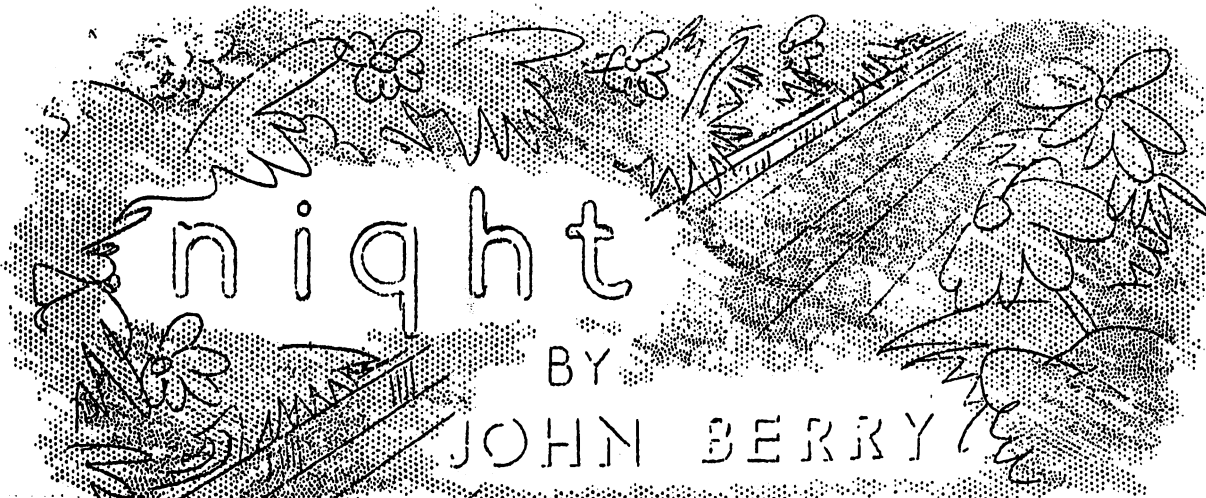
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— CLOCHE BY NIGHT

THOSE INVOLVED —







I have often been asked to recount the Goon's most unusual investigation. There was never any need for me to seek out the Goon Casebook....because the greenhouse business is branded forever on my mind. Old Man Enever hired my agency to seek out and identify the mysterious stranger who haunted his vast greenhouses and acres of market garden during the night. At the time this enquiry originated, I was extremely busy investigatin' my wife, whom I had discovered was writing articles, under my own roof, and sending them to FEMIZINE without my knowing anything about it until the cold print sneered up at me.

Of course, the fact that Arthur and myself are now known throughout fandom as the Flowerpot Men is merely one of the far reaching implications that arose from the result of the Enever biz. Hey, folks. Don't get the impression that the G.D.A. slipped up. No sir. I feel that I must inform you that so far we have a 100% record of success....weeell, that's not including the Cedric Hoax, but we of the GDA don't talk about that. I think I can safely say, on behalf of all my operatives, that we aim to serve fandom in whatever way we can, and the Enever enquiry bears out what sacrifices we are prepared to take in fulfilment of our self-imposed task. For this reason alone, I'll tell you the complete story of the thing, leaving out nothing. Take a deep breath, keep the smelling salts handy, and read on:

"Psssst," I breathed out of the corner of my mouth, "pssst."

Art flapped the palm leaf in his left hand, and shuffled his feet in the moss-filled flowerpot.

"Take the sunflower out of your mouth, Art," I hissed, "what time is it?"

With slow, tired movements, Art lifted his wrist and looked at the dial of his watch.

"It's exactly three twenty nine and fifty nine seconds a.m.," he whimpered.

"Oh no," I groaned, trying to hop out of the way, but it was too late. The overhead automatic spray fizzed into action, as it did every half-hour, and a gentle stream of water showered over us. Heck. Seventh time this morning, I gritted to myself. The water dripped down the stem of the *Selaginella Selaginoides* which was rammed down the back of my shirt, although the ferns over my head afforded some slight umbrella-like protection.

Art looked at me sort of frustrated.

"I'm thinking of resigning, Goon," he announced.

Suffering Catfish. This bhoy was deserting me in my hour of need. I had to play this careful.

"I'm kind of shrewd, see.

"Art," I said, peering through the fronds, "if you're leaving the GDA, then

O.K. Pity you'll never be able to see my illustrated pornography, 'A Thousand And One Nights', specially sent to Goon H.Q. by Chick Derry as his annual subscription. There's one 'ticular illo of a dancing girl and all her..."

The steam rose in clouds round Art.

"I was only kidding, Goon," he panted, "lemme see it tomorrow....eh?"

"Course," I said, playing it rough, "if it's a rise you want, I'll get some more of them Paris-Hollywoods from Walt. I presume you've got your own pair of 3D glasses?"

Art lifted a hand, pulled away a sunflower, grinned coyly, returned the sunflower to his mouth, and resumed his imitation of a tropical plant.

"Do you think HE will come tonight....er...this morning?" asked Art at length.

"Heck, I sure hope so," I mused. "By the way, what's the time?"

Before Art could answer, the spray told me it was 4 a.m. Good job the water was luke-warm. If nothing else, I had learned some of the complications of running a market-garden. Shaking the drops out of my moustache, I reached up and took a couple of grapes. Sure, Paul would never miss 'em.

All the same, folks, I felt stupid. I asked myself....why? Why were Art and myself standing in flower pots in one of Enever's greenhouses at 4 a.m., getting sprayed every thirty minutes, disguised as a giant *pteridophyta*. What had caused this...most un-Goonlike behaviour? My mind staggered back to those few short days ago, when Old Man Enever had applied to the London Branch of the GDA for assistance.

* * * * *

I had paid a visit to Art, head of the London Branch. Art had asked me to come over from Belfast for a discussion....the Redd Grayson case was worrying him. We put a sign 'PRIVATE - GOONS IN CONFERENCE' on the front door of number 17 Brockham House, and we both settled down to study some of the fotos Art had brought back home with him from Port Said when he was in the R.A.F. Heh heh. Yuk yuk. Hmmmm. I got out my magnifying glass.

Bzzzzz....bzzzzz....bzzzzzzz.

"That's Olive at the front door," breathed Art, the whites of his eyes showing like Cinemascope screens.

He straightened his orange and puce bow tie in the mirror, winked at himself, then blanched, rushed back to the table, flung a couple of Mickey Mouse Annuals onto it, then sprang back to the door.

"Good evening, sweetest," he cringed, looking shyly at his thick soled shoes as he opened the door.

"Hey, watch what you're doin', Art," I yelled. "You're talking to an old man! You'll get the place raided if you carry on like that."

"I say," crowed the man indignantly from the doorway.

Art grinned in a strained manner.

"Come in, Paul," he bowed.

Heck.

I whipped out my gat.

"Stand back, Enever," I rasped, "else I'll rinse you. I know my ORION sub expired last week, but there's no need to rush me. I get annoyed if folks rush me. I'm telling you....if you look like that at me agin, I'll water that weed in your buttonhole."

Sometimes, folks, I just can't control these spasms of aggression.

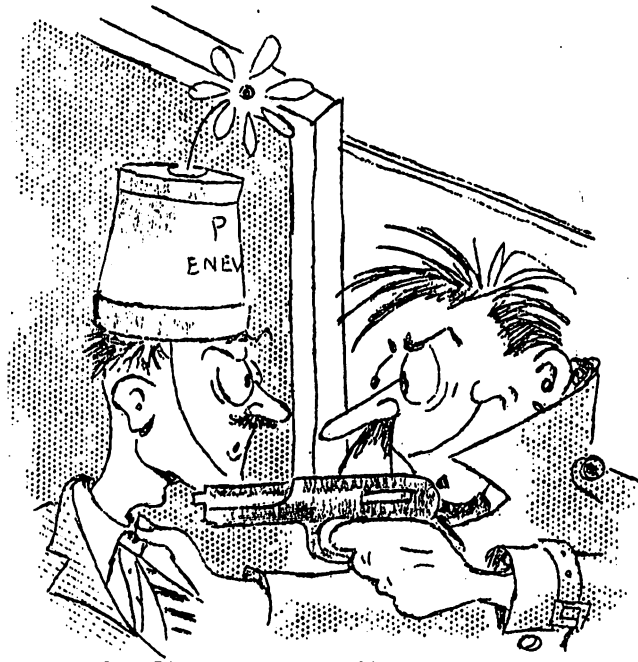
"Calm yourself, Goon," murmured Paul in a cultured accent, waving a picture of Marilyn Monroe defensively in front of him, "I've come to obtain help from the GDA."

I looked at Paul. Right enough, he gave me the impression of being a desperate man. I could tell he was in a hurry, either that or the watering can in his left hand was his last line of defence.

"Take a seat," breathed Art, acting professionally.

"M/ fee," I hissed, leaping onto Paul's chest.

My financial mind asserting itself, see.
 "I've got some packets of flower seeds," smiled Paul.
 "What sort of flower seeds?" asked Art.
 "Passion Flower seeds," replied Paul.
 "Will do," I yelled. Anything for a new sensation. "So we're working for you, Paul," I told him, ignoring his wince, "what kind of case is it...divorce?"
 "No."
 "Abduction?"
 "No."
 Hmmm.
 "Seduction?"
 "No."
 Mmmm.
 "Er...any sex in the case at all?"
 "No."
 Blast it.
 "Take over, Art," I said, disappointed.
 I could see Art was trying to impress me with his efficiency by the way he was slapping Paul across the face with TRIODE 7.
 "If you want results," reasoned Art, using my subtle approach, "you've got to tell us everything, see?"
 Paul trembled a mite, as if he had regrets.
 "Well, goons," he said, cowering under the table, "a mysterious figure is wandering around my greenhouses in the middle of the night."
 "Eric Needham," I yawned. I like simple cases. That's really the reason for my phenomenal success...that, and my brilliant analytical mind.
 "Needham?" mumbled Art, crouching next to Paul.
 "Come from under that table, Art," I growled. I was getting the run-around, folks. I'm even tempered, but sometimes when folks can't follow my reasoning, I begin to see red. I waved my gat. "It's pure logic, see. I reason thisaway. Eric begins to think he is losing his technique, and he knows Paul has a lot of glass he can practice on, so he comes in the middle of the night, and starts flapping his shammy about."
 Paul backed into the kitchen.
 "But Eric lives in Manchester," he shouted.
 "So?" I said, baffled.
 "And I live in Middlesex," I heard Paul yell.
 "And?" I frowned.
 "Tell him, Art," sobbed Paul.
 "Y'see, Goon, Manchester and Middlesex are a couple of hundred miles apart," explained Art, reaching for his umbrella.
 "That's a point," I confessed.
 Y'see, folks, sometimes the long shot doesn't always pay off.
 I looked at Paul. He was biting his lip. If I didn't know my own agency better, and appreciate the esteem with which it is held in fandom, I would have deduced that Paul was going to withdraw from the case.
 "On second thoughts," he began, leaping for the door, "I think I'll contact



Scotland Yard instead. This doesn't...."

"Impulsive Paul," I soothed, pinning him in the doorway and allowing a dribble of London County Council H2O to trickle down the back of his neck by a gentle pressure on the trigger of my zap, "don't be too hasty. The GDA hasn't been beaten yet."

I kicked Art's shin.

"Oh, er...no sirree," panted Art, taking the subtle hint, "no, we have a record of never having let a client down."

"Exactly," I soothed again, "so just give me the key to your greenhouse, and we'll do the rest. Send the fee immediately. Now go."

"Now get them Port Said fotos out, Art," I gritted, after Paul had staggered away, "I've got to think about this...good...now pass me the magnifying glass."

* * * * *

It was midnight. We stood outside the main door of:

ENEVER'S MARKET GARDEN. GUARANTEED NO DANDELION SEED CONTENT.

I pulled my coat collar higher, and squinted at Art through the button hole in the lapel. I turned, and looked at Olive, Art's wife, through the slit in the brim of my trilby. The Thomsons were a great asset to the GDA. Olive was a pimperoo, and I was hoping Paul would raise the fee if he saw I was bringing her along too. He would know that Art would be giving his all. Sometimes, folks, I even amaze myself with the power of my foresight...at my ability to plan ahead.

"Psssst," I hissed to Art, "is that tub full of green slimy water by the shed?"

"Yep," confirmed Art.

I went over and loaded my zap. This case could be dangerous.

"Follow me," I ordered, and we noiselessly tiptoed through the doorway and into Paul's market garden. There seemed to be acres of glass...dozens of greenhouses. An atmosphere settled over us like a cloud. I felt...strange...worried, if you know what I mean.

Suddenly, Olive screamed.

"What's wrong?" I snarled.

"Something...something moved over there."

I looked across a row of stunted spuds.

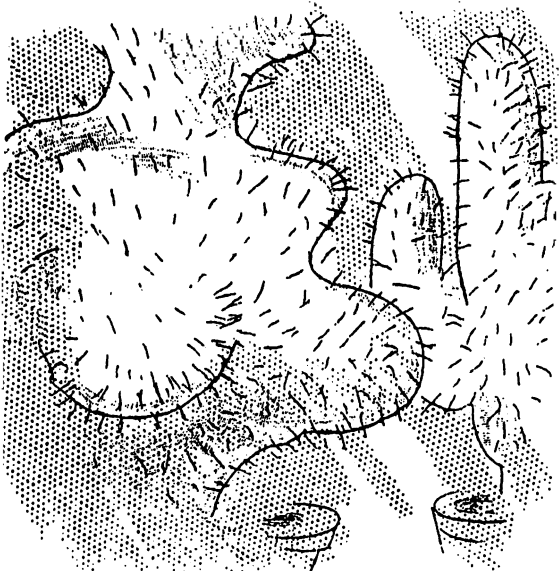
"I can't see anything," I panted.

"Oh, sorry," said Olive, with a modest wave of her hand, "it was only the shadow of that tree, made by the moonlight." I breathed a sigh of relief and got down off Art's shoulders. Daren't take a chance, see.

We continued the trek. We covered every inch of the dump. We walked round the place half-a-dozen times. No sign of anything. I led my operatives into the doorway of a greenhouse, and Art lit a cigarette.

There didn't seem much to say. We had done as much as we could. But the GDA is famed for the slick way it works. I wanted to study the situation. I wanted to give Paul the full power of my mental processes. I wanted to earn my fee. No one spoke.

I looked at the silhouette of a cactus on the greenhouse wall. If I half closed my eyes, I could imagine Anita Eckberg as she would look through a set of filmy curtains. It almost seemed to move. Sure did look like a lot like Anita. I'd



have foo....

Olive slapped my face.

"You might be the Goon," she shouted, "but that doesn't give you any authority to slap me on the small of the back."

"See here, sister," I gritted, "I was looking at Ani - at that cactus shadow on the wall. I didn't..."

"Heck, Olive," grunted Art. "I was looking at the Goon. His face was wreathed in a celestial smile. He didn't touch you."

Olive smiled at Art, her eyes full of affection.

"Shucks, honey," she said, putting her head on his shoulder.

Hey, folks, have you ever felt unwanted?

I returned to my cactus.

Cor. As a cloud moved over the moon, the silhouette rippled. Hnnnnnn.

Someone thumped me on the back.

I turned to Art.

"Look here," I grunted. "I know you're my best operative, but that ain't no excuse for frivolity when we're out on a job. I've had occasion to mention this to you before."

"Heck," panted Art, "I was whispering to Olive."

"You mean to sweat there and tell me you didn't me punch on my back?" I insisted.

"Nah," he replied.

"Did you, sister?" I asked Olive.

"I most certainly did not."

Heck.

Back to the cactus. When the moon really shone, the shadow of another cactus played on the wall. Looked a mite like Diana Dors. I looked in my pocket, produced the 'Diana Dors Book in 3D' that Bob Tucker sent me. I checked her statistics. Yessir, just like Diana Dors. No wonder Paul spent all his time in greenhouses. Heck. A thought struck me. Maybe the mysterious stranger was a sex-maniac. I mean, those silhouettes were life-like....

"Give over, Goon," shouted Art.

"Swelp me, Art, what's wrong with you? I panted.

"Aw, stop pushing me in the back," he warned. I could see he had drawn his gat. This bhoy was tough.

Sure, I didn't touch you," I said, somewhat peeved. This was queer...somebody punched Olive....somebody punched me...somebody punched me...somebody...

"O.K., Art," I said, my authority returning. "This job calls for action. You search the greenhouse, and I'll stay here in the doorway and guard Olive."

I'm a married man myself, see.

"Er...O.K., Goon," panted Art. He shuffled away...came back in about ten seconds.

"No one around, Goon," he breathed, wiping a film of sweat off his face, "you take a look."

"Nah," I replied, "your say-so is good enough for me."

I mused. This bhoy wasn't as sharp as I had thought. Did he actually think I'd go in there by myself?

We huddled in an uncertain group in the shelter of the greenhouse door.

The moon was covered with clouds.

"No point in staying here, Art," I said eventually, "let's go back to your place."

I had a lot of thinking to do.

It wouldn't take me long to build a small greenhouse of my own...and cactus is pretty easy to grow.

* * * * *

I sat enraptured at the breakfast table next morning...mebbe I should say later that morning. Art had a marvellous contraption. It was a toaster, worked, Olive maintained, by electricity. What amazed me was that when the toast was properly done, it jumped out of the machine and onto the nearest plate. Fascinating.

"Have some cereal, Goon," said Olive, the perfect hostess.

"Nah," I munched, "I like toast." Even after my eleventh slice I still hadn't formulated a theory about the toaster. Trouble was, me being a provincial....

"Have a slice of grapefruit, Goon?" asked Art, giving me the benefit of his scarlet and orange dressing gown. I drew the blanket tighter round my shoulders.

"I've suddenly developed a passion for toast," I grinned feebly. I was buttering my seventeenth slice, when the door buzzed, and Paul Enever peered round.

"Grab a chair and have a slice of toast, Paul," I yelled.

"This is business, Goons," he said. "I've decided that it was all a mistake. It was only a false alarm...there isn't any mysterious stranger visiting my greenhouses at night."

We looked at him.

"Honest there isn't," he sobbed, sinking to his knees.

A slice of toast popped out.

"Please believe me," he screamed, "please, please, PLEASE drop the case."

I reached for the butter dish. Hmmm.

This sort of thing happened to a lot of our clients. Sometimes I think we are too subtle for the ordinary fan. It takes them a little time to get on to our particular method of approach.

"Move over, Paul," I said. I waved my hand, indicating that he move two feet forward. I studied his prostrate position.

"Six inches to the left, Paul" I ordered, ignoring the desperate look in his eyes.

"Now hold it, just a leetle bit more....just a...leetle...now STEADY."

Plop. A slice of toast dropped into his breast pocket. I stroked my moustache with a marmalade-smeared finger. Bulls-eye.

"Look, Paul," I said, giving him the beady eye, "once you hire the GDA, we stick. Me and my operatives have already spent some time on the case, in fact, I have put Olive on the payroll, three pictures of Gregory Peck and a snap of Bloch in his bathing costume. That's her

fee. Hey. Olive, put that toaster back...er...where was I? Yep. Paul. I obtained a number of clues, and I think I shall be in a position to report something to you within a few days. Now git."

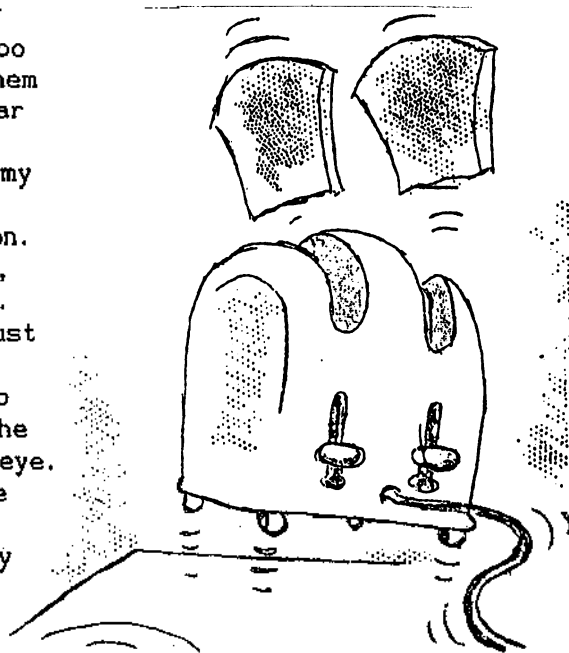
He looked a broken man as he staggered out of the room. We do have some peculiar clients. Some of them seem to have some horrible inner phobia...some deeply-ingrained fear, which seems to manifest itself when they visit us. We like to think we help them a little way on the road to recovery. Very few of our clients come back after the treatment we give them. As I said, we have a 100% record.

"What's the next move, Goon?" asked Art, pulling up his pyjama leg, and flashing his tartan socks.

"Wait a minute, Art," I gritted. Funny thing, but if I half closed my eyes, and looked at the the vase on the table, it looked a mite like the back view of Sabrina. Funny how all the different shapes seem to remind me of....

"What's the next move, I asked you?" sneered Art.

The bhoy was getting out of control. If I wasn't careful, he wouldn't ever let me play with his toaster any more.



"Calm down, Art," I hissed. "Down bhoi. That's better. Now then. To work. I suggest that we go to the greenhouse again tonight, without Olive. I suggest that we disguise ourselves as tropical plants. My theory is that we were spotted last night by the mysterious stranger, and he kept out of the way. If we go there late tonight, and stand in a flower pot, we will be unseen. If the bhoi comes in we nab him. Better bring the long barrelled zap...this could be rough."

"Tell me, Goon," said Olive, trying to move my boots off the settee without me seeing her, "what do you think was hitting us on the back last night?"

Heck.

Women.

"Looky here, gal," I reasoned. "You're tryin' to complicate things. Now pass me that bunch of grapes."

* * * * *

So that was how we came to be standing in flower pots in Enever's greenhouse at 4 a.m.

Suddenly, at the far end of the long greenhouse, I heard a slight scuffling ...a hardly noticeable shuffle of impatient feet. "Keep still," I whispered to Art, "this is it." I drew a fern over my face.

Art nodded, his face turning white. I didn't feel so good, either. I got dependants, see, and I didn't pay my last premium.

A soft laugh reached our ears. A strange, high pitched giggle. It gradually got nearer. I edged close to Art. He's got muscles, see.

The noise got nearer and nearer. I caught a few words....

"Success...I've done it! I always said I would! Heh heh..."

I felt calmer now that my greatest hour had arrived. I felt dedicated.

With calm deliberation, I reached into my waterproof holster and withdrew my rusty zap. I squeezed the trigger slightly...heard the faint drip...drip...drip ...drip on the edge of the flowerpot. I heard Art gasp, and his pot rattled. "Quiet," I hissed. This was it...the Goon had at last cracked a case.

I looked down the greenhouse, and saw a vague shape approaching. A dark trilby was pulled low over a shadowed face...the figure shuffled along...came closer...and closer....

"Heh heh. Triumph! I always said it could be done."

I felt tense...a spasm of determination shivered through me. I saw the long barrel of Art's zap appear from behind his screen of fern.

The man stopped in front of us. I could see his face illuminated by the moonlight. It was an intelligent...serene...composed...happy. I raised my zap, and took careful aim. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw the long-barrelled zap stretch out to its fullest extent.

As the man turned away, I gave him a jet of H2O down the back of his neck. A stream of H2O from the long-barrelled zap gave him a severe rinsing. Unfortunately, the village clock struck 4.30 a.m, and the overhead spray burst into action again. I jumped off the flower pot, grabbed the man by the coat and jerked him to his feet. He was bigger than me, and just as I was about to let him go, Art grabbed him too.

We turned him round.

Things happened quickly.

"Swelp me," swooned Art, and sank to his knees, salaaming with reverence.

"Heck, what gives, Art?" I shouted.

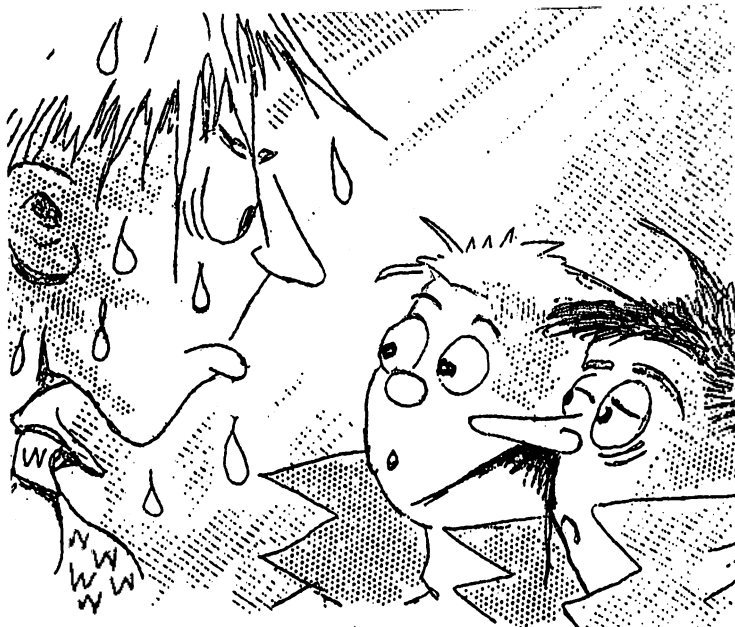
"On your knees, quick, Goon," rattled Art in a stage whisper out of the corner of his mouth.

Suffering Catfish.

I had to rely on Art's appreciation of the situation. Things were happening too fast for me. I got down on my knees and salaamed too.

"You may get up now," said the man in a cultured voice.

I shuffled to my feet, frustrated. Baffled again.



"S-s-s-sorry, sir," choked Art, dabbing the gent with my hat.

"I should think so indeed," gritted the toff. Heck. I felt I was dreaming...I hoped I was.

"Listen, mister," I growled, "my agency has been hired by Paul Enever to investigate the mysterious stranger mucking about in his greenhouse...and I reckon it's you...and...and...quit kicking me on the ankle, Art. Who is this gent, anyways?"

He told me.

"Er...let me...let me wring out your coat, sir, er...wet weather we're havin' for the time of the year, ain't it," I said, bewildered.

"Look here, you two," said the Gent, soothingly. "I have just carried out a great experiment, but I don't want anyone else to know about it until a few details have been cleared up. Would you mind keeping our little secret until I'm ready?"

"Of course, sir," grinned Art, "pray consider the incident closed."

"My fee," I shouted. The gent smiled. He pressed a bundle in my hand.

"Many thanks, sir," I gasped.

* * * * *

I sat back on the settee, drank my coffee and closed the book.

"Brilliant writing, Art," I sniffed.

"Sure is, Goon," murmured Art. I could see he was thrilled too.

"But what was the gent doing in the greenhouse?" asked Olive.

"Right enough," I mused, "we can't list the case as closed until we actually know what he was doing...even if we don't tell Paul."

"Let's go over the evidence we have accumulated," suggested Art.

A red flush swept over my face. "You're at it again," I warned. "At what again?" asked Art. "You used a five-syllable word then," I complained.

"Sorry, Goon, I forgot. Now then, what do we actually know?"

I let my mind tick over for a couple of minutes, then I began a masterly summing up of the clues.

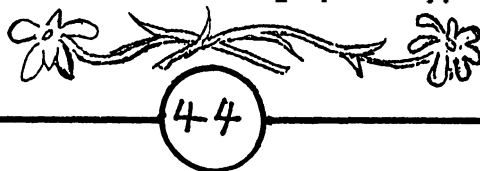
"The gent lives in London, within easy distance of Paul's greenhouse. He goes to the greenhouse at night. He is working in the greenhouse, so we know he must be experimenting with some kind of plant. Now it must be a rather strange kind of plant, else why the experiment?"

"So?" said Art.

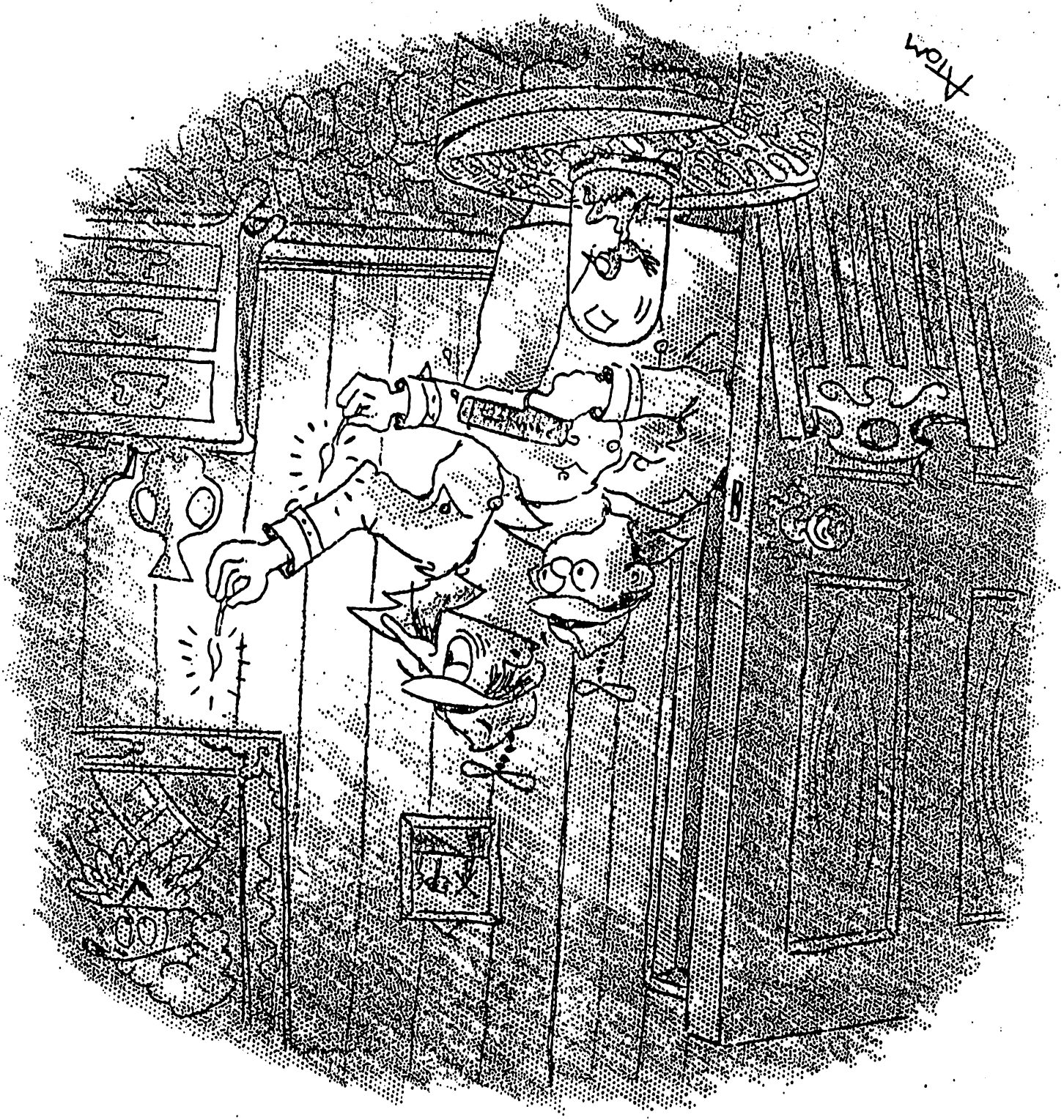
"So," I continued, "when Olive and we two were in the greenhouse the other night, we were struck by something, and yet no one was there. The inference must be that the plant or whatever the gent was cultivating was capable of movement...further...was capable of aggressive movement. Further, even, consider that, from the muttering the gent was doing, it was obvious that he was labouring under some form of obsession, trying to convince himself that the growth of this strange plant was possible."

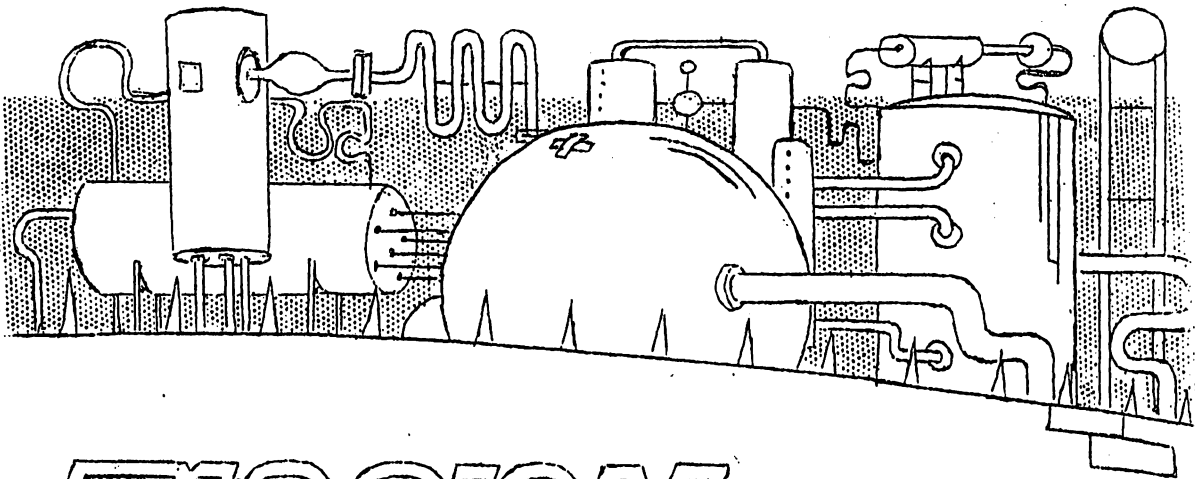
"But what was he growing?" asked Olive and Art in unison.

I shook my head. "We'll never know," I sighed. "Just the same, it was very good of John Wyndham to give us each an autographed copy of DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS.



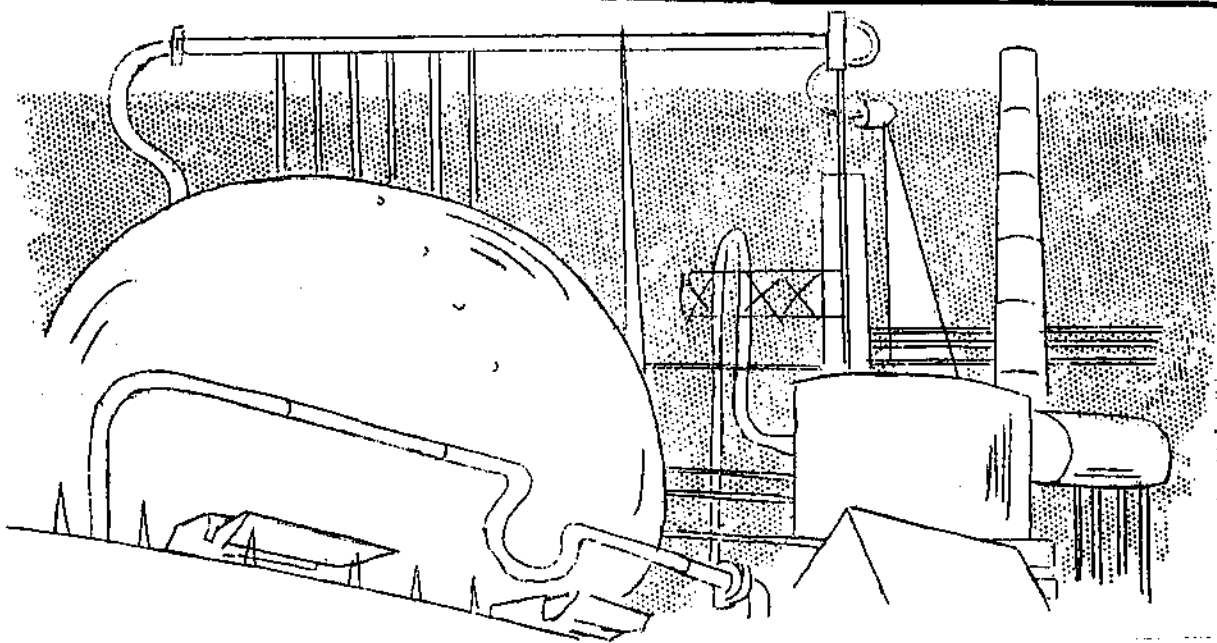
Atom





FISSION IN TROUBLED WATERS





BY
JOHN
BERRY



I gritted my teeth and attempted to abstract the length of passe partout adhering to my moustache. Messy stuff. But I had to fix a protective shield of glass over THE CALENDAR. James White had promised to visit my office next day, and if his previous visits were any guide, THE CALENDAR would have to fall under the remorseless fury of my wife's scrubbing brush. I keep telling White that it's only paper, but he insists on dabbing his fingers over....

I glanced up. A dark shape was silhouetted through the cracked glass of my office door...the silhouette of a trilby, a coat collar pulled up....

The door opened slowly and a man entered. I could tell he was mean the way he kicked Platypus (my son's pet duck) out of the way. He walked towards me, sniffed as he surveyed the fanzines scattered over my ~~desk~~ desk. His hands were thrust deeply in his coat pockets. This bhoys was tough. He stood looking at me. He produced a knotted fist and gently massaged my nostrils with it. He uncurled his fingers, which were like pork sausages, and wrapped them around the lapels of my smoking jacket. (Forgot to switch off the electric fire.)

His gaunt features...his steel blue eyes were about three inches from mine. He uttered a curse as he ripped a hunk of passe partout from his cheek.

"You the Goon?" he hissed.

"You from Wetzell?" I countered.

"No."

"O.K. I'm the Goon."

He dropped me. He walked over to the door, and locked it. He crossed to the window and drew the blinds. He returned to my desk, tripping over Platypus en route. That duck will have to go. I keep telling my son that duck must go. I....

The man drew up an orange box and looked at me again. He shook his head. He gave me the once-over twice. He undid his collar and ran a finger round the neck-band. He looked at me a third time.

His gulp sounded like a plug being pulled out of the bath.

"What's this?" he asked finally, throwing a screwed up ball of blue paper on my desk.

I unwrapped it. I examined it. I sniffed it.

Hmmmm.

"You want me to investigate this for you?" I asked.

He looked down, like a broken man.

"The British Government does," he answered, ripping off his tie and wiping a bead of sweat off his forehead. He looked in bad shape. Funny how he'd changed since coming in my office. He gave me the impression of being...deflated. I reached for....

"THE WHAT?" I screamed.

"The British Government," he sobbed. He got down on his knees and held up his hands as if in prayer.... "promise...PROMISE you won't take the case. PLEASE...PLEASE. I was told to ask you, but consider the country. PLEASE."

"What does the Government want me to do?" I hissed, playing hard to get. Mr. Macmillan reading RETRIBUTION, eh?

The man looked into my eyes earnestly...beseechingly...pleading...hoping.

"I'm Blaze McKendrick, of M.I.5," he babbled, tears dripping down his cheeks. "I was instructed to bring this exhibit to you, and ask you to accept a case for the Government if you...."

"If I...?" I prompted, kicking Platypus out of the way.

"If you know what the exhibit is?" he cried. "Say that you don't know, PULHEEZE, say that you don't know."

"But I do know," I replied, "it's page 16 of TRIODE 9, and it's obviously been used to wrap up fish and chips."

"What's TRIODE?" he asked warily. I didn't quite like the look of his hunted expression.

"It's a fanzine," I replied, "one of the best, too."

"A fanzine?" he said in bewilderment.

"Yep," I said proudly. "We're faaans see, and faaans issue fanzines. TRIODE is one, published by a chap called Bentcliffe."

He clicked his fingers. "Bentcliffe," he said under his breath, a look of query in his eyes, "Bentcliffe...let me see now, Bent...I was on a pornography case a few weeks ago, and...."

"I even publish a fanzine myself," I said modestly. "It's all about the activities of my agency, and some of the cases we've cracked. Weeell, when I say cracked, I'm maybe exaggerating a mite, but you're in the same line of business, and you know what..."

That blasted duck will have to go. The M.I.5 man stood up, and seemed to slip on something. Anyways, he fainted.

I slapped him on the face with the latest ORION, and the musty smell tickled his nostrils and brought him back to reality again.

"Where am I?" he babbled.

"Goon H.Q." I announced.

Heck. I dragged him to the corner and brought ORION into action again.

With difficulty, he dragged himself up on one elbow. The gaunt stranger of fifteen minutes previously was now a physical wreck. This worried me, because he wasn't the first. There must be something about my place...

He cleared his throat.

"Let me get this right," he breathed. "TRIODE is circulated throughout fandom, and the G.D.A investigates fandom. Check?"

"Cheque," I chequed.

He staggered to his feet, and clutched the stand of the budgerigar cage

for support.

"Report to the War Office in London tomorrow afternoon," he twitched, "say at about four thirty. NOW LET ME GET OUT OF HERE."

The door needed to be fixed, anyways, and say, them M.I.5 men sure are tough.

* * * * *

I opened the bird cage, and let my budgerigar, Joey, nibble my moustache as he perched on the end of it.

"Listen, bhoy," I said. "Whip over to London and tell Mr. Thomson to prepare for a top-secret investigation for the British Government. I'll be at Brockham House at noon tomorrow."

When Joey had safely fluttered over the horizon in a southerly direction, I prepared myself for the case. I put on a deer-stalker hat that had cost me a packet. Got to keep up appearances. I flung the Harris Tweed cloak round my shoulders ...nice of Charters to give it to me...I made a mental note to tell him about it sometime. I opened my desk (lifted the flap of plywood) and gripped my zap. It wouldn't move. The trigger-guard must have gotten caught on a rusty nail, I mused. Wouldn't need a zap working for the Government, anyways.

I said toodle-pip to the family, and raced down to the docks.

Them cattle boats leave on time.

* * * * *

"Knock on the door first, Art," I cringed. This War Office joint sure looked spick and span. No ducks, no budgerigars, just long clean corridors and smashing typists and ginks with monocles...

"Come in."

We opened the door and walked in.

A grey-haired chap with a big moustache peered at us, took a swig out of a tumbler that was lying handy, and peered again. He reached for the telephone on his desk, and spoke rapidly into it.

"Tell McKendrick to take a month's sick leave instead of two weeks," he rasped. He slammed down the receiver. He picked up a cigar, bit the end off it, spat it expertly through the slightly opened window, lit the cigar, and puffed vigorously. A large cloud of smoke soon obscured him.

"That's better," his voice panted out of the smoke. "Now listen carefully, this cigar won't last long. McKendrick told me before his nervous breakdown last night that the blue paper comes from a...a...fanzine. Harrumph. This...this fanzine circulates through fandom...and your organisation investigates fandom. Correct?"

"Yep," I wheezed trying to orientate myself.

"Right. Now pay particular attention. This is top secret information. We have discovered that a series of strange happenings have occurred at one of our secret experimental atomic research stations. Our security officers from M.I.5 can make no headway at all, but they did unearth one clue. That sheet of blue paper. Harrumph. I understand that it means something to you...although, unfortunately for us it has no significance whatsoever. However, as it has this nebulous connection with this...ahhh...fandom, we feel, Mr. Macmillan and I, that your GDA may possibly be of assistance how this blue paper got into this secret atomic station...and the reason for its being there."

Two eyes peered through the cloud, and surveyed us. The chap puffed some more.



"Here are two travel warrants to take you to the atomic centre...one of our agents will contact you at the railway station, and drive you to the place. Any questions?"

"My fee," I yelled.

I nudged Art.

"Our fee," we yelled in unison.

"We are quite prepared to consider anything within reason," the cloud of smoke observed.

"We need a typist for the Belfast branch of the G.D.A.," I panted. "I saw a very suitable one in an office downstairs, the one with the big..."

"Control yourself, sah," the smoke vibrated. "Get out."

I nudged Art again, and we tiptoed out. As I closed the door behind me, I heard him at the 'phone again, muttering something about putting McKendrick on indefinite leave.

Right enough, I was shocked. No fee. I thought all the Colonel Blimp types had been eradicated from the War Office since I had been called up for military service during World War II. Someone blamed them for it. But all the same, it would be interesting to take a peek round a secret atom station, and hob-nob with atom-splitters and folks with piles.

* * * * *

We got off the train at Little Bumblethorpe, and huddled together on the empty wind-swept platform. Bracken covered hills stretched as far as our bleary eyes could focus. A hunched-up ticket collector resembling a poor fan's George Charters staggered over to us, took our tickets and wandered off, cackling to himself.

As I gently steered Art to windwards, and sheltered behind him, I felt someone tap me on the shoulder. I looked round. I saw a coat button. I looked up, saw a pair of Shadow-type eyes glint down at me.

"The Goon?"

I nodded. He jerked a thumb and walked away. We followed...down some ivy covered steps to a long black car. The big man opened the back door and ushered us in. He hopped into the front seat, and we shot away through a deserted landscape.

"Mmmmmmm-ugh."

"Beggy poddon, Art?"

"Ain't said nothing."

"Oh."

"Ugh...ugh...ugh."

"You were saying, Art?"

"Ain't said nothing. Was thinking of the typist you wanted. The one you pointed out with the big..."

"Ugh...mmmm...ooooohhhh."

"Beggy poddon, Art?"

"...and although she hasn't got a face like Brigide Bardout, you can't have..."

"Heeeellllpppp."

"Wot you say, Art?"

"...but I never did worry about legs very much, after all, they're the first things you..."

"Gggggaaaaahhhh!"

"This seat is very bumpy, ain't it, Art?"

"...and as I said to Burgess at the Globe the other day, Shirley Marriot has certainly a..."

I flew through the air and picked myself up in the front seat next to the driver. I looked back, indignant, and saw a very angry-looking Ken Bulmer sitting next to a baffled Art.

I climbed back into the rear seat again.

"Wot you doing here, Ken?"
I said, trying to appear casual.

"You blasted blithering idiot," yelled the much bearded man, "I'm X4 of M.I.5. This isn't my own nose and beard, you clot. I'm in disguise. I bent down to let you pass when you got in the car, and you sat on me. Who's this sex-maniac on my right?"

"Meet Art Thomson, my second in command," I said in admiration. "He's a vile pro."

X4 took a quick nip out of a hip flask. "We're nearly there," he said hopefully, "so I'll brief you. You, Goon, will be known as Doktor Schnitzvobble, a specialist in kinetic energy, and you have just

carried out a series of experiments to show that in the disintegration of uranium in the fission process, a relatively large net gain of kinetic energy is released in the process...and you have ultimately proved that with the re-appearance of the lost mass, additional kinetic energy of the mass occurs every time a nucleus is disintegrated. Or, if you wish to be more technical..."

I banged my head against the window to uncross my eyes. This chap not only looked like Bulmer, he spoke like Bulmer. I thought about the typist back in the War Office, until he began to re-introduce some three or four syllable words...

"...and Thomson here will henceforth be known as Professor Gorfunkle, of Hamburg." He turned to Art. "You have just built a new cyclotron."

"Heck," mouthed Art. "My old bike is good enough for me. I ain't ostentatious. In any case, I forgot my clips."

"Stupid Goon," I taunted Art. Y'know, it's pretty difficult to get fen with sufficient gorbimey to be Goon agents. Art is one of my cleverest, as you all know, but even he has his moments. 'Forgot my clips' he said. Ho ho. Yuk yuk. I must have a serious talk with Art one of these days. I thought he was cleverer than that. I depend upon him a great deal, y'see, we can't both be slow-witted.

Throwing away his empty hip flask, X4 opened the window and took in several lungfuls of fresh air. He looked a mite composed when he sat down again.

"Put on these white coats," he said, biting his lips.

We struggled into them.

"They look a bit like strait-jackets," I quipped, and for a moment X4 looked almost happy...then he shuddered and returned to his briefing.

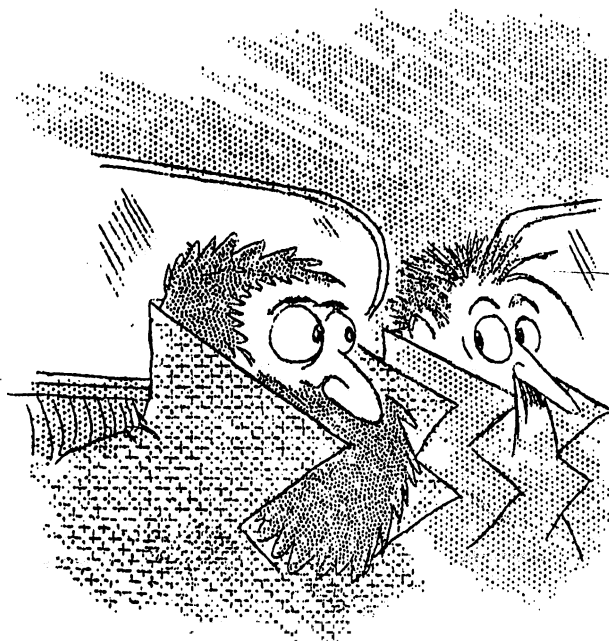
"With the passes you were given, with the aliases I have mentioned, and with the white coats you have on, you will have complete freedom to travel wherever you wish in the research station. Do the job quickly, then report to the War Office."

The car screeched to a halt, and massive iron gates swung open. X4 waved at the armed guard, who recognised him, and the car swung around to a large concrete building. The iron gates clanged shut behind us.

X4 opened the door, and kicked us out of the car. It hurtled away in top gear. Guess those M.I.5 cars are pretty tough, too.

* * * * *

A tall uniformed guard, with an ostentatious zap at his waistbelt, came



over to us and saluted smartly. "Come this way, gentlemen," he said respectfully.

I kicked Art's shin, and pointed to the retreating figure of the guard. Art ceased his mystified local reconnaissance, and hurried along with me. I made a mental note to get Arthur C. Clarke to have a talk with Art, to help Art get rid of his inferiority complex. I know I'm a gentleman, because I have walked through a door marked thusly many a time, and no one challenged me. The GDA are suckers for class distinction, see.

We followed our guide along clean, wide marble corridors. A few decibels of machinery hummed in the background. A muted symphony of civilisation. Some joint. Finally, the guard opened a door, and ushered us inside.

The large room, with the notice "ADVANCED ATOMIC THEORY" painted over the door, was full of white-smocked critters. Some black, a couple of chinks, mostly whites, and a blonde. This blonde...she was a humdinger...a pipperoo...a...

A tall dignified gent strode over to us, and held up his hand to abate the thunder of applause that had commenced when we had shown our kissers round the door.

He shook us warmly by the hand.

"I am Sir James Toolcraft," he announced. "Delighted to meet you, and to bid you welcome to Britain's finest Atomic station,"and he turned to the audience, "and fellow scientists, no matter what part of the world you may have come from, you have no doubt heard of Herr Doktor Snitzvobble and Professor Gorfunkle. The greatest scientific minds in Europe...possibly the world."

The applause broke out afresh. I bowed so low I momentarily got my moustache mixed up with my boot laces.

Sir James raised his hand again and turned to me and Art.

"These scientists before you have been sent from all parts of the Commonwealth to learn the latest advances in atomic power, both practical and theoretical."

He cleared his throat, and put a hand on my shoulder.

"I hate to ask you, but would you...could you please give us a short lecture and bring us all up to date with the latest developments of your fertile minds?"

The audience stood up to cheer, and I had my first indication of the blonde's upper measurements..

Hmmm.

I nodded my head grimly, and stalked after Sir James to his table confronting the scientists. Weeeell, I was up the creek again. I ignored the wide grin from Art as I draped the ends of my moustache over my my ears before commencing my lecture. I was at a slight disadvantage because I knew nothing about atoms 'cept that some folks split 'em. Must have very good eyesight. And yet I was the Goon, on Government service, with my second in command looking to me for an example of initiative. There was nothing else for me to do but bluff these scientists as I had once bluffed Carnell.

I looked at the blonde again. Phew. I'd say she was about twenty-two, tall, fresh lookin' and obviously rarin' to go. Her virginal expression was belied by the flash of her suspender as she crossed her legs. Cor. I....

"Carry on, please, Herr Doktor."

I leered at the scientists, took a deep breath, and spoke.

"My lecture this afternoon will deal with the Transmutation of Elements." I paused for the rustle of interest. "The gas known as neon has a nucleus which contains ten protons and twelve neutrons...therefore it occupies the tenth position in the periodic table, whilst it's mass is 22 compared with hydrogen. Now, by a simple subtraction we see that if a proton could be removed from a sodium nucleus, the remaining nucleus would be that of neon. The accomplishment of this feat would be the transmutation of one element, sodium, into the next element, neon. This transmutation is now experimentally possible, and..."

"Hey, them are my notes," yelled Sir James in indignation, pulling his pile

of papers from under my nose.

I cleared my throat and looked round for Art. Heck. He was sitting next to the blonde, looking into her eyes adoringly. Suffering Catfish. I made a mental note to slip a couple of bromide tablets in his tea at the first opportunity. Then he started looking at her....

"Continue, please, Doctor Schnitzvobble."

I coughed.

"Please open your notebooks, ladies and gentlemen. I am about to read out some restricted information about isotopes. Draw four columns, and put the following headings on top of them...first, non radio-active elements...second atomic weight, thirdly atomic number, and finally, atomic weight of isotopes in order of abundance."

The audience started to scribble energetically, and I flashed a look at Art. I didn't like the way he was looking at me. His eyeballs were down by his nostrils. His hair stood on end, and his mouth was open so wide I could see his socks. His whole appearance was that of a fan who had just read a letter from Pete Reaney.

"O.K. folks, start writing. Put the following details under the appropriate columns:

Hydrogen	1.008	1	1,2
Helium	4.003	2	4
Lithium	6.940	3	7,6
Beryllium	0.02	4	9
Boron	10.82	5	11,10....etc."

and after three quarters of an hour of this dictation, I came to the last line "and finally:

Mercury	200.61	80	202, 200, 199, 196, 201, 204. "
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I mopped my brow. One by one, the scientists finished writing. They looked at me. There was a pause. The air vibrated with awe, amazement at this superb feat of memory and knowledge. The applause caused Art to shake his head. His tongue reached to the third button of his smock. Occasionally he passed a hand over his eyes. I began to suspect the bhoys hadn't enough faith in me.

Then, in one swift movement, I leapt to the door, opened it wide and shouted "Professor Gorfunkle will now lecture on the Cyclotron."

I drew to one side as the throng burst through the open doorway. I assisted them with my size twelves. I didn't want any of 'em to see the rear wall with the big chart on it.

I went over to Art, and lifted him off the seat. I didn't like the way he was gibbering.

"You're a genius, Goon," he bleated. I turned him away from the rear wall as gently as I could. A sudden shock wouldn't do him any good, and may have been bad for discipline.

"Put that in your next VERITAS column, Art, I hissed. "Now hurry up, you're going to give a lecture on the Cyclotron."

"I haven't..." he began.

"I know," I frowned, "you haven't got your bicycle clips. Now look here, Art. Pull yourself together. Don't make such stupid remarks in company, like you did before. 'Haven't got my clips,' indeed. Folks look on us Goons as being sort of intelligent, and a remark like that is liable to make 'em think we ain't."

Stuffing my trouser ends into my socks, me and Art followed the indication signs:

CYCLOTRON. ROOM D.

* * * * *

The 'Room D' signs led us a tour of the research station, but we blindly followed the signs and eventually we saw big sliding doors with a large red 'D' painted on 'em. A buzzing noise came from behind the doors. Heck, I thought, they

must have a motor-assisted cyclotron. Then I saw the blonde slink round the corner and give me the eye. Well, anyway, her eyelids flickered up and down when she saw me. I swung away from Art, then heard Sir James shouting.

"Come along! We're waiting for you....and you, please, Doktor."

I swung round again.

"H-hello, Sir James," I said. "The Professor will lecture on his own, I..."

"Please," he insisted.

"You mean you want me to come to Room D, too. Oh."

He paused.

He pondered.

Sweat broke out on his forehead.

"Magnificent," he screamed. "That's the cause of the trouble. Oh, superb, sir. What would we have done without you? Miraculous diagnosis, if I may say so. Wonderful. Brilliant. Stupendous. Your knowledge of the essentials of atomic power must be unlimited."

I looked behind me, but there was no one else in the corridor beside ourselves. That seemed to indicate he was talking to me. Funny.

I could hear Art in the background, mumbling away in back-slang, hoping they would think he couldn't speak English, or something. That boy is sharp.

I got tired of Sir James shaking my hand, and slapping me on the back. Guess working with neutrals and piles and atoms is liable to turn one crackers, he being a case in point. I hoped he wouldn't get violent.

"Down, Sir James," I panted, "pulheeze."

He danced down the corridor, chortling to himself happily. I heard the strains of his chant 'so that was what was wrong' as he rounded a corner.

Weeell, now. That was queer. Hmmm. I tiptoed back into Room D, to see how Art was getting on with his lecture about the Cyclotron. He was still gabbling away in backslang, and he was doing chalk illos on the blackboard. His illo looked a mite like a tandem. Guess he was trying to show 'em how to split two atoms at once.



* * * * *

Art and myself sat in Sir James's office. X4 was there, too. I got off the blonde's lap and accepted a glass of sherry from Sir James. He seemed very keen to let me have what I wanted...the blonde...drinks...and a blank cheque if I promised not to send him RETRIBUTION. I can drive a hard bargain, see.

"....and so, frankly, Sir James," said X4, "we of M.I.5 have been guilty of a leetle dishonesty. You see, these two foo - these two individuals here are GDA operatives hired by M.I.5 to solve the mystery of the sabotage here, and I can only thank you for your kind observations of their ability, and to let you know that they will be passed on to the proper authorities."

We stood up.

"You there...you with the moustache," drooled Sir James, "please tell me how you managed to diagnose that it was heavy water, or rather the lack of it, which was troubling my piles?"

I managed a weak grin. I was somewhat troubled by not quite being able to follow the gist of his conversation. What was heavy water? I didn't tell him that heavy water was causing his piles not to function. He should go see a

doctor. But I had to say something, to maintain my status quo.

"It was obvious, really," I simpered, pushing Art off the blonde's lap. X4 seemed somewhat perplexed. He probably had a typist of his own. He should worry.

"Well, Sir James, now that your problem is satisfactorily solved, we can leave the premises," panted X4, making a dive for the door, "so pleased to have helped you."

He caught me and Art by our collars, and we found ourselves in the back seat of his car.

"Ghod knows how you did it," he said grudgingly, "but there is no doubt about it. Someone is or has been stealing heavy water from the reactor."

"My fee," I muttered, came to the last. I'd managed to hold on to the blonde, see, but I'd been forced to let her go as we negotiated the swing doors en route to X4's car. Pity. If I'd managed to hold on, I wasn't going to mention a fee. I mean, I wouldn't like it to get about that the G.D.A. is a mercenary outfit. But now....

"You haven't finished yet," announced X4. "Admittedly, by some obscure method you've solved one mystery, but now, you must find out who took the heavy water, and where it is now."

Heck. I'd forgotten about that page from TRIODE.

* * * * *

We decided to return and spend the night at the atomic station, and Sir James gave me and Art a room next to his.

We two had a lot of plans to discuss, and we put our heads together for some considerable time, trying to work out whose turn it was to read the sole copy of DESIREE IN PARIS that Art happened to have with him. He won. Once that was settled, we were able to plan for the morrow.

"Tell me, Art," I asked. "Who is our nearest agent?"

"Let's see," mouthed Art, "we're somewhere in East Anglia...I guess Archie Mercer is the nearest."

"So O.K." I replied. "Tomorrow I want you to take that page from TRIODE to him, and ask him to trundle his caravan to Stockport and see Bentcliffe, and find out if it is possible for Benters to say to whom he sent the copy of TRIODE with that particular inky page in it...see that small ink mark on the page, a most unusual thing to find in TRIODE? Perhaps Benters remembers who it went to. Tell Archie to get the Clydesdale cracking...this is urgent. Then I'll go and see Sir James, and try to suggest a way of tracing heavy water."

So far, in some mysterious way, the G.D.A. had triumphed.

Could we keep it up?

* * * * *

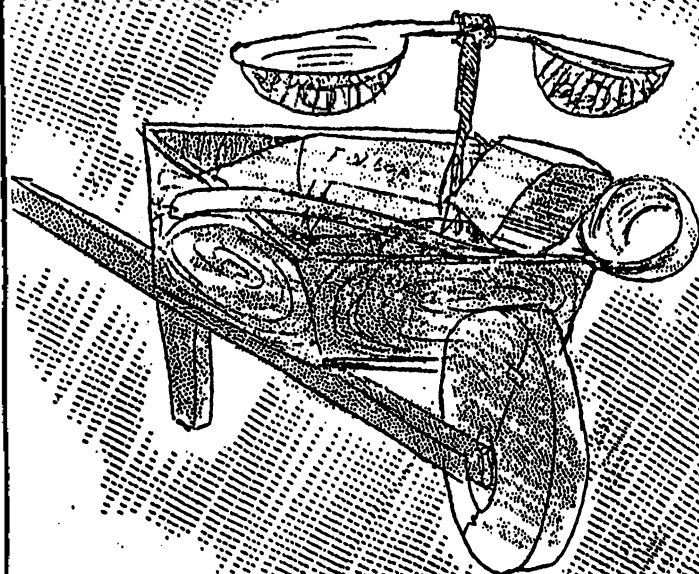
My interview the following morning with Sir James was brief in the extreme.

"My dear fellah," he grinned, "you come here and ask me to tell you how to trace heavy water, after you have revealed to myself and my fellow scientists that your knowledge is much more detailed than ours. I expect you are trying to make a joke at my expense, to stress your superiority. Go and design one of your own, and be sure to let me see the patent."

I left his study, because it was obvious he was mad. Even if I could only get the gist of what he was talking about. Somehow, he had got his facts all mixed up. I knew nothing about heavy water, and yet he declared that I had spotted that heavy water, or the larceny of it, was the cause of the sabotage. It was queer.

* * * * *

So, in my own goonish way, I worked hard all day on the practical application of heavy water divining. Art didn't arrive back until late that night, but he reported that Archie had harnessed the Clydesdale to the shaft of his caravan, and was en route to see Benters. After tea, I took Art down to a shed



next to the Cyclotron, and showed him the results of my day's work.

"This," I said proudly to Art, holding the shed door open, "this is the G.D.A. Heavy Water Diviner."

Art looked. He pondered.

"I ain't pushing the wheelbarrow," he announced with emphasis.

"We'll take it in turns, Art," I explained. "Be reasonable. If you don't push the wheelbarrow, you've got to manipulate the ladle."

"Manipulate the ladle?" asked Art, raising his eyebrows. And this was my smartest op.

"Suffering catfish, Art. You don't expect me to push and ladle the ditches too, do you? You'll have me working the scales next, at the same time."

"Working the scales?"

repeated Art, sinking back on to the left hand shaft of my water-diviner.

Heck. And to think I turned down NGW as a Goon agent.

"It seems to me, Art," I frowned, "that I shall have to go into detail about the function of my machine. You see, it's obvious that heavy water is called heavy water for a particular reason, and my theory is that it's called heavy water because it's heavier than ordinary water. See?"

"I'm with you so far," conceded Art.

"Good. Well, this is my theory. On the barrow, as you see, is a Goon-type scale, consisting of a rampant poker on which is surmounted, at it's centre of gravity, a starched brassiere belonging to that blonde. Now, in the right-hand receptacle is a dish of ordinary tap water, and an empty dish is in the other, er, receptacle. Hanging on the front of the barrow is a ladle I whipped from the Cyclotron dump. In the wheelbarrow proper are two pairs of wading boots and a collapsable dinghy. I've thought of everything, see."

"Mmmm," mused Art. "Now tell me how you're going to find out where the heavy water is, and weigh it?"

"I will admit that gave me trouble, Art, but I reasoned thisaway. Whoever whipped the heavy water had to carry it some distance, and my theory is that as they progressed with the load, it got heavier and heavier, or seemed to. So what is more natural than they should periodically empty some away in an adjacent pool, or ditch, or stream, or even river, on the way to their destination?"

"You mean...?"

"Yep. We are going to do the Oojah Bird in reverse. We are going to meander round in ever increasing circles until we come to a trace of heavy water, which we shall sample by dipping the ladle into every bit of water we come to, and testing its weight with the normal water. Once we get a bearing, we shall continue in that direction, maintained by constant ladling. Get it?"

"I'm sure Sir James wouldn't approve," murmured Art.

"Aw heck. He's mad. We'll start tomorrow, Art. Order a large hamper of sandwiches. This promises to be a long job.

* * * * *

For once in my life I didn't exaggerate. We spent seven weeks tramping round the country in ever widening circles, until one day Art dipped the ladle in the green waters of a canal just north of Birmingham, and, as he had done so many thousand of times before, dribbled the contents dejectedly into the left hand, er, container. It dropped with a thump, projecting the normal water in the right hand cup (that's the word I've been searching for) into his kisser with some considerable force.

"We've made it, Art," I shouted through my beard, "we've made it."

"Well, don't just sit there. Get out of the barrow and brew some tea," said Art. The bhoy was getting touchy. Sure, the front wheel of the barrow ran beautifully, I'd only oiled it that morning, and he couldn't expect me to walk any more on my sole-less boots.

We sat down on the banks of the towpath, and tried to ignore each others tramp-like appearance. Our first clue in seven weeks! I hobbled to the canal, and dipped the ladle in once more...could hardly lift it out.

"Y'know," said Art profoundly, "it seems to me highly improbable that whoever swiped the heavy water would walk all the way from East Anglia to here. See that railway bridge over yonder. I bet you that the heavy water merchant threw a few drops from the train as it passed over the bridge and they fell into the canal."

"Just going to say the same thing," I lied. "Let's follow the railway line northwards. I think we can dispense with the equipment now. Just keep the brassi- the scales, I promised the blonde I'd return 'em. It's a pity that there aren't any fen around here, we could get cleaned up a mite. I admit the G.D.A. isn't famed for the neat appearance of its operatives....but tramps..."

We followed the railway track to Wolverhampton, and discovered that the 'Gentlemen' on the station platform was unflushable.

"The heavy water," said Art shrewdly, "stopped the ballcock from functioning, see."

We glanced at the destination board of a train that was steaming on Platform 3..London, Birmingham, Woverhampton, Crewe, Stockport, Liverp - STOCKPORT????

"Benters," I panted, dragging Art into the Guard's Van just as the train started to shunt out of the station. Must say he looked a mite peculiar with a starched brassiere hanging from his trouser pocket.

* * * * *

"This is Alldis Street," I murmured, "lessee, number 47. Here we are, I'll knock."

I tickled the door with my left hobnailed boot.

A lady opened it.

"Eric in?" asked Art.

She sniffed.

"Who shall I say...?"

"Fen."

"Fen?"

"The G.D.A."

"The G.D.A.?"

"RETRIBUTION." I shouted.



Wonder the hinges stood the strain.

We worked our way round to the back of the house. I picked up a handful of pebbles and threw 'em at a lighted window upstairs.

Thin glass.

"The G.D.A. on business," I shouted to the Bentcliffe silhouette.

A length of knotted blankets dropped at our feet. We shinned up.

"Oh, I say," chortled Eric, "gee, or is a little more gravity in order?"

"So O.K." I grimaced. "I read VOID 9." Ever since Bentcliffe visited Oblique House he's done nothing but crack puns.

"Got any old clothes, Eric?" asked Art.

"I'll see if I've got anything to suit you," he laughed, nearly splitting a gut, "you do look a harassed weed. Get it? Harris Tweed?"

"Steady, Art," I frowned. "That starch was pretty concentrated. Eric's only trying to help, aren't you?"

"Yes, I'll sort out some clothes for you. Pull over a chair. Get it?

Pullover...."

"Steady, Art, " I repeated, as Eric nipped through the door a split second in front of his SPACE TIMES file.

And Eric obliged. It was thrifty of Eric to have kept his old clothes, but I managed to slip Art the short trousers, reasoning that if the worst came to the worst, and we had to pay our train fare to Liverpool, I would save 50% on his.

"I presume you gave Archie all the information I sent for?" I asked Benters as we sipped tea and crumpets.

"Archie?" mused Eric. "I haven't seen him since the last Convention."

"Hmmm," I said. "Weeell, it doesn't matter. Tell us. Did you send out a copy of TRIODE 7 with an ink stain on page 16?"

"Funny you should ask that," he replied, "but, as a matter of fact, I did. Wasn't that ink blob awful? I tried to blot it out of my mind. Get it, bl..."

"That's not very sociable to your host," I admonished Art. I took the photograph of Shirley Marriot from him. The heavy gilt frame might have caused a mean wound. I turned to Eric. "Who did you send it to?" I panted, trying to trap Eric into answering without giving him the opportunity of punning. Art isn't used to being in the company of habitual punners, see, and I'm hardened to it.

"Well," said Eric, "actually, Terry Jeeves sent that issue out."

"Good," I said. "Tell you what. When Archie gets here, tell him I've called, and that I've got the answer to the question he was to ask you. Instruct him to carry on to Sheffield and go and see Terry on the same quest."

"We'd better get going," said Art, recognising the look of bliss on Eric's face, indicative of an approaching pun.

Eric saw us to the door and waved.

"Alldis and Heaven too," he shouted, but Art's house-brick didn't quite reach him.

* * * * *

The 'Gentlemen's at Stockport Station wouldn't flush.

* * * * *

Nor the one at Liverpool Station.

* * * * *

"What's the next move, Goon?" asked Art, supping his cocoa. "We've exhausted all possibility of any of the Liverpool Circle dealing in heavy water. I must say Renee McKay gave me a puzzled look as I examined her toilet, but it flushed perfectly, so...."

"You're too right, Art," I mused, trying to take a bite out of the crust of bread. Still, we were lucky to get that, and we had to thank Art's artistic bent for the frugal meal...he'd illoed the wall of a low dive and the proprietor had given us a meal in exchange. The G.D.A. was at its lowest ebb...destitute and

bewildered.

"Let's take a walk round the park and think it over," I said finally, and we did just that, the proprietor giving Art a lollipop as we departed. Them short trousers had come in useful.

We sat down on a park bench, and lazily watched a bulldozer pushing down trees, and a big crane picking them up and carrying them away. Fascinating. Then a smashing nurse started to patrol up and down in front of us pushing a pram, and I gave her the...

"Funny," mused Art.

"Yes, I noticed it," I confirmed. "She's twisted the seam of her right nylon, and..."

"No! I mean them trees....see what happens when the crane lifts 'em."

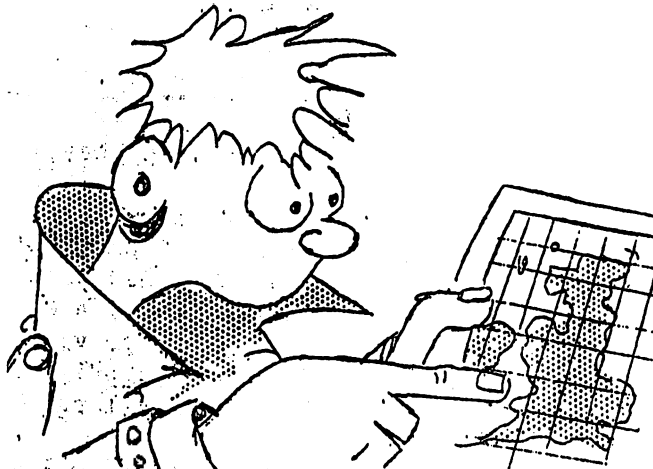
I watched. As soon as a tree was entirely lifted, it swung round and round on the big chain and finally slowed to a halt, the big branches pointing in a north-westerly direction.

Heck, Art was slippin'. He was studying cranes when a piperoo was swaying up and down in front of us. Guess the short trousers had affected his status quo. "What's wrong with that?" I asked, watching the nurse out of the corner of my eyes. I guess she was about 36...19...

"Don't you think it's funny that the last eight trees have all finished up pointing in a north-westerly direction?"

"So the chain's twisted," I said.

Art took no notice, he went up to the nurse and asked if he could borrow her watch, and she said 'Certainly, son' and gave it to him. What a technique. I decided to wear the short pants on the morrow. But Art walked away from the nurse, and over to the crane, and when a tree was lifted he waited until it stopped twisting and then looked sharply at the watch. He sprinted back to me, giving the nurse her watch back en route.



"Quick," he said, and started to run and I followed him. Looked a mite ungoonish, but Art was up to something. We arrived outside the big reference library in the centre of Liverpool, and I followed Art to the geography section. He pulled out an atlas, turned to a map of the British Isles, and made a slight calculation at the side of the map, ruled a straight line, and turned to me, his eyes alight with triumph.

"What would you use if you

wanted to divine ordinary water?" he asked.

That was easy. I'd seen Willis do it at 170.

"A forked twig," I answered, baffled by his logic.

"Well, a forked twig ain't any good for divining heavy water, but guess what, them big trees with the forked branches acted so uniformly that I decided they were influenced by heavy water, so I took a bearing with the watch, and I've extended the bearing on this map, and guess where it points to?"

I just stood there with my moustache draped round my Adam's apple. This bhoys was a genius. "So where does it point?" I breathed in awe.

He smiled inscrutably. "Belfast."

* * * * *

We sat in my office. I kicked Platypus out. This was going to be rough.

"There's only one thing to do," I said. "We've got to go and raid 170. Sure, James White returned only a short time ago from visiting Ted Carnell in London. It's obviously him. This is Tuesday, he'll be at Walts. We'll go over and threaten

to issue a special RETRIBUTION disclosing details of his sex life. Damn it, I'll do it too, if he don't play ball. I've fifteen reams of green paper, should be enough."

"I agree," said Art, and we turned to go. "Better be armed," I muttered, and reached for my zap. It seemed to be caught on a rusty nail. I couldn't move it. I pulled. Art pulled. We both pulled. Then, sloooooowly, it moved. It took our combined weight to lift it.

Suddenly, Art clicked his fingers. He whipped out the scales of the G.D.A. Heavy Water Diviner, balanced it on his forefinger, emptied his own zap fuel into one cup, and the contents of mine in the other. I wiped the fuel out of my eyes. And then I thought....I pondered. I sat down.

"Y'know, Art," I said miserably, "I feel I should have thought about that zap. Y'see, James White, when he arrived back from London recently, telephoned to say he was sending over a little phial of what he termed 'a new zap fuel.' A three-ton lorry delivered it at my door, and it took four men to help me tip the fuel into the butt of the gun. Now I begin to see why I couldn't lift my zap when I started on this case. I..."

Guess Art had been through too much in previous weeks. He'd fainted.

* * * * *

"...and we worked all that out, James, but who gave you the heavy water to bring back to Belfast?"

James adjusted his spectacles and hugged his typewriter affectionately. "I was just getting on the boat at Liverpool," he said, "when this youth stopped me, and asked me to give it to you. He said you would know who it was from. I pressed him further, and he said he wanted to be a Goon agent, and he thought it was up to him to provide some means of proving his ability as a potential G.D.A. operative. He said the fuel was primarily designed to fire at fen who were on the ground, from the top of a large building. That's all I know.

"Hmmm," I turned to Art. "Wonder who it could be? But tell me something else, James, this is between us three, mind, and I don't want the facts to get out, but I just cannot understand how Sir James Toolcraft said I had told him that heavy water was being taken from the research station. I'd never even heard of heavy water. I want to know, for my own peace of mind, what gave him that impression?"

"Let me see," said James, fingering his TAB key with passionate reserve, "can you recollect your remarks to him, just prior to his statement?"

"Weeell, now, let me see," I pondered. "I wanted to follow a blonde, and Sir James wanted me to go to Room D with Art, and I said..."

"You said 'Do I have to go to Room D too. Oh.' said James.

"Cor, James, how did you know I said that?"

"I worked it out. You see, one term used for heavy water is D-2-O."

"Oh."

"No. D-2-O."

"I see. Brilliant, James." Me and Art bowed our way out.

* * * * *

ONE YEAR LATER

At long last the cogs of the G.D.A. have enmeshed together in a crowning crescendo of glory. This morning I got a letter from our roving operative, Archie Mercer. It seems that he finally reached Sheffield last week (says the Clydesdale is getting old, and he doesn't want to rush it), and Terry Jeeves looked up his notes and discovered the blobbed TRIODE had been given to....guess who....Pete Reaney.

This seems to solve everything now, except for the position of roving Goon operative, as it will take Archie a further year to get back to base again.

One more thing.

Pete. Pete Reaney. Looky here. Next time, don't be so goddam ambitious.

A picture of Jayne Mansfield would've got you into the GDA much quicker.

FOR WHOM THE GOON TOILS



C.D.A.

The visit of Steve Schultheis, the Cleveland Op, to Goon HQ. in Belfast after the WorldCon in September 1957 was a memorable occasion. I had gone to great pains to ensure that he took home with him treasured memories of the Goon Office.

I had insisted to my offspring that Platypus, the duck, was temporarily housed in the back garden. I borrowed a chair especially for Steve as, personally, I've grown used to the austere comfort of an orange box. You see, I wanted Steve to see that the GDA was an efficient organisation!

And then came the day when I met Steve. (He should have arrived the day before, but heavy rain obscured the airport near Belfast, and his plane had been diverted to the Isle of Man for the night.)

Walt Willis drove him to MON DEBRIS, my house, and Willis opened the rear passenger door and beckoned to a figure inside. Rory Faulkner and Boyd Raeburn were there too, but they respectfully stepped to one side. The Cleveland Op emerged. There was a slight drizzle at the time, and stopping only to fit a waterproof cover over his white fedora, Steve stepped on to the pavement outside my house. I stood at the portals, and waved to him.

He looked in my direction, and as if in a daze, blundered a few paces forward. I saw for the first time the sartorial excellence of this famous Goon agent. He wore a white raincoat, in his left hand he held a brown brief case, in his right, an electric iron, which Willis had mentioned to me earlier as being an essential item of Steve's accoutrements.

"Boss, boss," shouted Steve, utter bliss transforming his voice into a choral symphony. He ran up the garden path towards me. So great was his enthusiasm that he tripped headlong, and only the split-second foresight with which we Goons are famed saved him from landing full length in one of the many puddles bordering the concrete pathway. He in fact turned a double somersault before landing at my feet.

The bhoy shook me warmly by the hand.

"Boss, it's great to see you," he panted, wiping a film of sweat off his forehead.

"You're looking well, Steve," I hissed, taking the case and the electric iron from his hands, the latter with much difficulty.

In the living room he peeled off his showerproof coat, revealing a full length tweed coat of immaculate cut. He also took this garment off. Listen, I've seen some swell dressers in my life. James White, A Certified Sartorial Consultant, had always been my standard. Once, I recall, when I first knew him, I met him in Belfast one lunch time, and was just about to make a fannish greeting, when I espied his lounge jacket and striped trousers. I turned my head away and sneaked past, hoping that the flapping of my soles didn't echo too loudly. I was glad to see that James had turned away too, and I admired the way he skilfully camouflaged his shudder into an apparent grimace of disdain at my scruffy appearance. But James, with all his training, wasn't anywhere near the peak of complete neatness and smartness as displayed by the Cleveland Op.

Steve wore a blue-grey jacket, tailored with superb skill. The material bore a faint surrealistic pattern of some obscure example of equatorial flora. His slacks, with a razor edged crease, were charcoal grey. The polished toecaps of his black shoes shafted flashes of light at each lithe movement.

"Sit down, Steve," I panted, and the bhoy took fifteen minutes to rearrange the crease of his trousers before doing so. I was secretly glad I'd dispensed with the duck. I mean....Steve was an asset to my house!

But I could see that he was troubled.

"What's wrong, Op?" I asked. "Any little thing I can get you?"

"Where did you - where did you put my iron?" he winced, his eyes searching the room wildly. I passed it to him, and with great reverence, he laid it beside him on the settee.

Hmmm.

But he still looked worried!

"Come up to my office, Steve," I said, and ushered him up the stairs to the GDA Head Office. I sat back, kind of proud and humble at the same time, and let Steve slowly meander round my office, looking with awe-filled optics at the paraphernalia I had accumulated in my two years as head of fandom's watchdogs. When Steve had carried out his inspection, he staggered a little and groped for a chair.

"Goon," he panted. "Can we talk?"

"Sure," I hissed. "What's with you, Steve?"

He winced again, and clasped and unclasped his fists several times.

"Tell me, Op, I urged. "I can tell something is wrong with you. D'you want to hire the GDA...? No, no, of course, you're one of us. And I tell you what, Steve, I won't expect any fee for working for you. No, I shall refuse, except, er...but you haven't told me what's wrong yet!"

"Someone is after me," he breathed. "Twice at the WorldCon, and now, that trip-wire at your front gate."

I stood up, aghast.

"Trip wire at my front gate?" I grated. I groped in an adjacent cardboard box for my zap. "Tell me about the World Con biz."

And Steve told me. It was a pretty horrible story. As a fellow Goon, I felt for him. The utter fiend who was behind the business had no scruples at all. I mean, can you imagine anything more dastardly than having a zap fired at you in the early hours of the morning outside room 57 - a zap loaded with duplicating ink? It was only by pure luck that at that second Steve tripped over an American BNF lying drunk on the floor of the corridor, and the black jet plastered the wall and door behind where Steve had just been standing.

Even more terrible was the King's Court Hotel Cornflake Caper. Some brute knew that Steve went down early for breakfast every morning, and on this particular Sunday, just as Steve was about to ladle a spoonful of cornflakes, a length of twine attached to the tablecloth was suddenly jerked, and the dust-covered cornflakes well soaked in milk were precipitated violently towards Steve. It was by the remotest chance that as Steve filled his spoon with cereal, he noted a speck of dust on his left trouser leg. He bent to flick it off, and at that second the cornflakes flew over his head and scattered over the waitress.

Finally, there was the third horrible attack on Steve - the trip-wire near the muddy puddle on my own doorstep!

I gave Steve my illustrated Decameron to peruse, in the hope it would take his mind off the problem...it always worked with me, trouble was it always gave me another problem!

I pondered over the clues. Obviously, if the trip-wire was directed against Steve, and, taken in conjunction with the zap-ejected duplicating ink and the precipitated cornflakes, as it appeared I should, then the vile brute was in Belfast. My list of suspects therefore had to include fen who had been to the WorldCon, and were now in Belfast. The names which I scribbled down for further investigation were: Walt Willis, Madeleine Willis, James White, Boyd Raeburn, Rory Faulkner and George Charters.

Hmmm.

Steve seemed to find some inspiration from the Decameron, as was evinced by periodic smirks and sighs of celestial bliss as he savoured the technicolour illustrations. This gave me time to formulate a psychological scheme to trap the utter cad...I thought...and thought...and suddenly....BINGO!

I gave a scream of delight at my spontaneous genius, and caused Steve to look up from his reverie. He closed his mouth with difficulty.

"You've a plan, Goon," he breathed.

I nodded. "Of course, Steve, it all depends on you," I explained. "As usual, I've brought my psychological prowess into play, and I've got a plan to trap

your antagonist, provided you are prepared to make a sacrifice."

"Anything, Goon," he gasped, dragging his eyes from the Decameron for a second.

Leaving Steve steaming in his chair, I prepared my equipment. I worked behind Steve, because I didn't want him to lose his enthusiasm if he saw the basic reasons for my preparations. I filled a tin can with duplicating ink, and suspended it by a length of cord exactly above Steve's head. With the judicious use of staples hammered into the wall (which Steve didn't seem to hear) I ran the cord round

the room, suspended the other end over my desk, with a label attached to it bearing the inspiring legend: DO NOT PULL THIS OR YOU'LL COVER STEVE WITH DUPLICATING INK.

I sat back pleased with my subtle approach to the problem. I thought about my suspects. Four were downstairs, Walt, Rory, Boyd, and Madeleine. James White had phoned MON DEBRIS because he couldn't get a baby-sitter.

George Charters BERRY 59

couldn't come for a variety of reasons, the sum total of which unfortunately added up to senility.

I shouted downstairs for Goon Junior and told him to ask Walt if he'd come up to my office for a few moments.

Walt came up. I sat him down on an orange box, so that the label was three inches from his nose.

"Evening, Walt," I said.

"Evening, Goon," he replied.

I struggled for something to say. "Nice weather for the time of the year, isn't it?" I said eventually.

"It is, isn't it?" he answered.

Ten minutes passed.

"I'm going to turn away in a minute, Walt," I said shrewdly, and I bent down and picked up an old envelope, giving Walt time to pull the twine.

But he didn't.

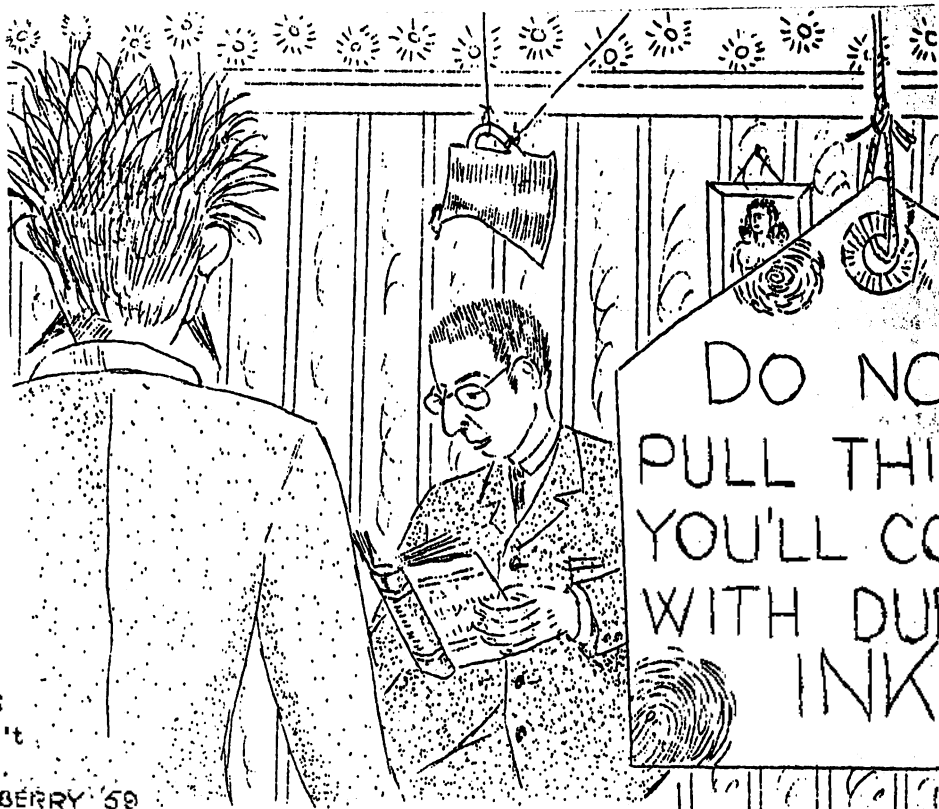
Another few moments unnerving silence was only broken by the frequent titters of delight from Steve, who had started the second volume.

"Well, cheerio, Walt," I said eventually, and he slowly rose to his feet, gave me a strange look, and clumped downstairs.

"Send Rory up," I shouted to Goon Junior.

Rory Faulkner came into my room with the calm assurance of the Santa Maria in full sail.

"Hello, Rory," I began, and for the next three and a half hours Rory talked



at great length about the fans she had met in her fannish career in the U.S. It was quite fascinating. Eventually, I bent down again on the pretext of picking up the envelope, but Rory didn't pull the string. I said 'cheerio' to her and asked her to send Madeleine up. Boyd came up instead and said that Madeleine had gone home to relieve her baby sitter. I sat Boyd down facing the notice. I decided to use a different approach.

"Boyd," I began, "I know I'm a bit stupid..."

He started to scribble wildly.

"What are you doing?" I asked, interested.

"Derogations'," he breathed. We sat looking at each other for two hours, his pencil poised menacingly over the notepaper.

I bent down to tie up my bootlace, but Boyd didn't pull the string.

I ushered him out of my office, and shook Steve.

"Only seven more pages to go, Goon," he panted, pleadingly.

"Heck, take it with you," I said, and commenced to dismantle my trap after he'd gone. I supposed to myself that this psychology racket was over-rated.

Suddenly, everything went black. I reached up and discovered my hair was sticky. I opened my eyes and I couldn't see. I funnelled my ears with rampant forefingers, and heard Goon Junior screaming with laughter.

I suppose my plan was weak anyway. I mean, Junior hadn't been to the WorldCon, and yet he'd pulled the string.

I blundered downstairs and confronted my guests.

From the resultant yells and screams of hysterical laughter I began to think the GDA had reached a new level of humiliation!

* * * * *

Early next morning I sent an urgent telegram to Vince Clarke, asking him for details of any unusual behaviour by the six suspects during the WorldCon.

* * * * *

Later that day, I met Steve in the centre of Belfast by appointment. At first, before leaving my house, I had been considerably tempted to go disguised as a nigger minstrel, which would, in point of fact, have entailed a minimum of effort. Trouble was, I couldn't find a banjo. So my wife set to work with petrol and other detergents, finally settled for a mix of them all, and started on my face and hair. Eventually, she managed to remove most of the duplicating ink. Unfortunately, the same didn't apply to my clothing. However, it was raining outside, and by wearing an old shower-proof coat that had been relegated to covering my famous motor-assisted pedal-assisted pedal cycle in the back garden, the blackened clothing was covered.

I walked up to Steve, standing outside the swankiest hotel in Belfast, held out my fingers to shake hands with him.

My hand closed round a crisp dollar.

"Things aren't as bad as they seem," he soothed, "I hope that will help you out."

"It's me, the Goon," I mumbled, indignantly. So, Schultheis had the utter temerity to think I was a tramp.

"Brilliant disguise," said Steve, looking surprised. "I thought you were a hobo."

Heck. This boy had a nerve. Just because he was superbly dressed he seemed to think that everyone else was scruffy. Crikey. The cool nerve of the fellah...me, the Goon, a hobo indeed and the recipient of charity. I snorted. I had my self respect to think of.

Pocketing the dollar, I signalled Steve to follow me. Just then, near the kerb stone of the pavement, I saw something shining. Thinking it was a sixpence,

I pushed Steve away and dived onto it, and was hit by a tremendous shower of spray from the gutter. I wiped the dirty water out of my eyes, and saw a taxi screeching away along Royal Avenue, and a horrible face peering through the back window.

Steve picked me up, and his eyes were wet with gratitude.

"What a sacrifice, Goon," he sobbed, his voice oozing with pathos, "pushing me out of the way and taking the full force of that obviously intentional drenching. That makes the fourth attempt, doesn't it? Thank you, Goon, thank you."

It was pathetic to see such hero worship.

"It's all part of the service, Steve," I said, clicking my fingers meaningly.

We continued towards the city hall, and I struggled to keep up with Steve - if I didn't know him better I would've got the impression that he was afraid of someone making a comparison between our different modes of attire.

Anyway, we had a discussion about the anti-Schultheis fiend, and made a certain arrangement for positive action at the White House, the abode of James White, that night.

* * * * *

When I got home I found a telegram awaiting me from my London contact. It was detailed...very detailed. It gave almost everything that the six of them did at the WorldCon, and although by conventional standards some of their little tricks may have seemed strange, to me they were perfectly logical. The telegram concluded: '...and I shook James's cold hand at London airport, and away they all went. I've no idea who your anti-Schultheis fiend is...I'd like to know.'

* * * * *

The party at the White House was a posh affair. The house was beautifully furnished, and the thing my wife liked about the place was the little hut which Mrs. White had had built in the garden, for James to do all his pro work, and to keep his fanzine collection in. My wife promised to emulate this!

The three visitors were going over to the White House in Walt's car, and George Charters arrived on his bath chair, so that meant that all the suspects would be in attendance.

During the early part of the evening we all sat round in a circle and discussed fannish topics, and later retired to the dining room for tea. To digress for a moment I had one unforgettable faux pas at this meal. Peggy brought in a large plate with a confection on it known as 'Gravy Rings', though I understood they were termed 'doughnuts' in America. Anyway, they are round and have a hole in the middle.

I signalled to Rory at the far side of the table to hold her index finger up, and I was going to throw one across to drop on it. I lifted the plate and discovered in rather a distressing manner that Peggy had been heating the doughnuts on the plate in a red-hot oven for some considerable time.

The fannish audience seemed to derive some amusement from my antics, which I overheard Willis remark as resembling 'the frolics of a tom-cat immediately after realising the significance of the vet's arrival.' I must confess I felt a little embarrassed at churning my blistered fingers about in the jelly, but I had a job to do later, and the lightning manipulation of my digits was essential.

At the conclusion of the magnificent repast everyone else staggered to the nearest chairs, and taking advantage of the moves, I winked at Steve and whipped into the hallway with my zap at the ready position.

The White hallstand, of polished mahogany, was a monumental structure and the visitor's coats were draped round it. I got on my hands and knees, squirmed

underneath the hanging coats, and stood up inside Steve's white showerproof coat. I allowed the business end of my zap to protrude through one of the button-holes. It was dark inside the coat, and I was prepared for a long wait.

After twenty minutes, I thought I could detect a slight scuffling. In any case, my *modus operandi* had depended upon my ability to remain absolutely still, but I found I wanted to move. I had to move. So with reckless abandon I suddenly pushed my head through the top of the coat.

Suddenly, everything went black. I reached up and discovered my hair was sticky. I opened my eyes and found I couldn't see. I funnelled my ears with rampant forefingers and heard someone screaming with laughter.

By a purely instinctive reflex, I pulled the trigger of my zap.

The only consolation I had was that once again I had saved Steve's coat from being covered with duplicating ink. And, unfortunately, I still had no idea who the fiend was!

* * * * *

When I staggered back into the living room, the *fen* gave blatant reaction to my appearance, ranging from the ribald guffaws of Willis, Schultheis, Raeburn, White, Charters, Rory, Madeleine and my wife...and sobs from Peggy White as little black blobs marked the route of my entrance.

I made myself as comfortable as possible in the circumstances, glancing through duplicating-ink stained eyes at the rest, trying to discover signs of my zap's contents on one of them, but without result.

Once again, with all my suspects before me, I had failed; the GDA had sunk to its lowest possible ebb.

Complete and utter ignominy.

I turned to the immaculate Steve, to admit defeat, when something flashed in my mind.

Of course....OF COURSE!

Another Goonish psychological experiment was indicated and I had an idea...

* * * * *

I coughed loudly and spoke to Steve.

"I think we should show them that trick the Red Indian showed you in Cleveland - you know - the mind-over-matter one?"

Steve shook his head slightly and uttered a tentative:

"Daaaaggghhh???"

The others rustled with interest.

"Heck, Steve, you know the one where everyone holds a lighted candle just in front of them, and you concentrate, and the flame goes out."

Everyone craned forward at this, and Steve appeared to have difficulty in focusing through his spectacles. I tried to get through to him, and eventually a crafty kick on the shins with my hobnails had the desired effect.

"Oh, yeeesss," he whimpered.

"Impossible," the other fans chorused, but James rushed out and came back with candles, and he issued them out and lit the. From where I sat the whole thing reminded me of some pagan ceremony.

"Right," I said, "Steve will concentrate for some seconds, and I'll ask him a question, and I guarantee that at least one flame will go out."

To add atmosphere to the proceedings, I moved to the light switch and knocked it up.

It was funny to see the circle of flickering flames with big eyes peering over them. The fans held the candles at chest height, and silence reigned for some moments.

Then I coughed.

"Tell me, Steve," I said softly, "what is that little bottle of liquid you keep in your brief case?"

"That's a bottle of THAWPIT I purchased in London. I use it to clean spots of dust off my clothes." His voice was strained.

"I thought maybe it was zap-fuel," I hissed.

"No, you couldn't use that," said Steve, shrinking back in his chair, "it's highly inflammable."

"Suffering Catfish," I panted, "I filled my zap with it earlier this evening."

One of the candles went out.

I switched the electric light on, to reveal a man with a horrified expression on his face, his right thumb and forefinger held tightly over the candle wick.

It was James White.

* * * * *

"Of course," I lied to Steve in the seclusion of the GDA office, "I knew it was James White all the time, but it was a matter of obtaining sufficient proof before I revealed the bitter truth."

"But why did he put the candle out?" gasped Steve.

"Goonish psychology, Steve," I beamed. "Just as he zapped duplicating ink in my face in the hallway, I managed to zap him. When I created the candle illusion, and you said the contents of the bottle were highly inflammable, the natural instinct of the person who had been zapped was to put the flames out, in case the fumes were ignited."

"You're a genius," said Steve, ignoring my clicking fingers, "and his motive was....?"

"Oh yes," I interrupted. "James was always famed for his smart appearance, and when you arrived he realised with a shock that you were sartorially better dressed than him. His six attempts were all designed to ruin your clothes or get you out of the way so that once again he would reign supreme."

"Five attempts," mused Steve.

"Six," I said.

"Five."

"Six."

"Two at the WorldCon," said Steve, counting on his fingers, "once on the footpath at your house, once in the centre of Belfast with the taxi, and once at James's house...that makes five."

"No, Steve," I said, "you don't realise the full extent of White's endeavours to keep you out of the way. Cast your mind back to that report from one of my London agents...the cold fingers...I'm certain that James obtained some ice just before the Viscount took off, and as he was flying over Belfast, just before he landed, he sprinkled the clouds with dry ice. This caused such heavy rain that your aeroplane had to be diverted back to the Isle of Man."

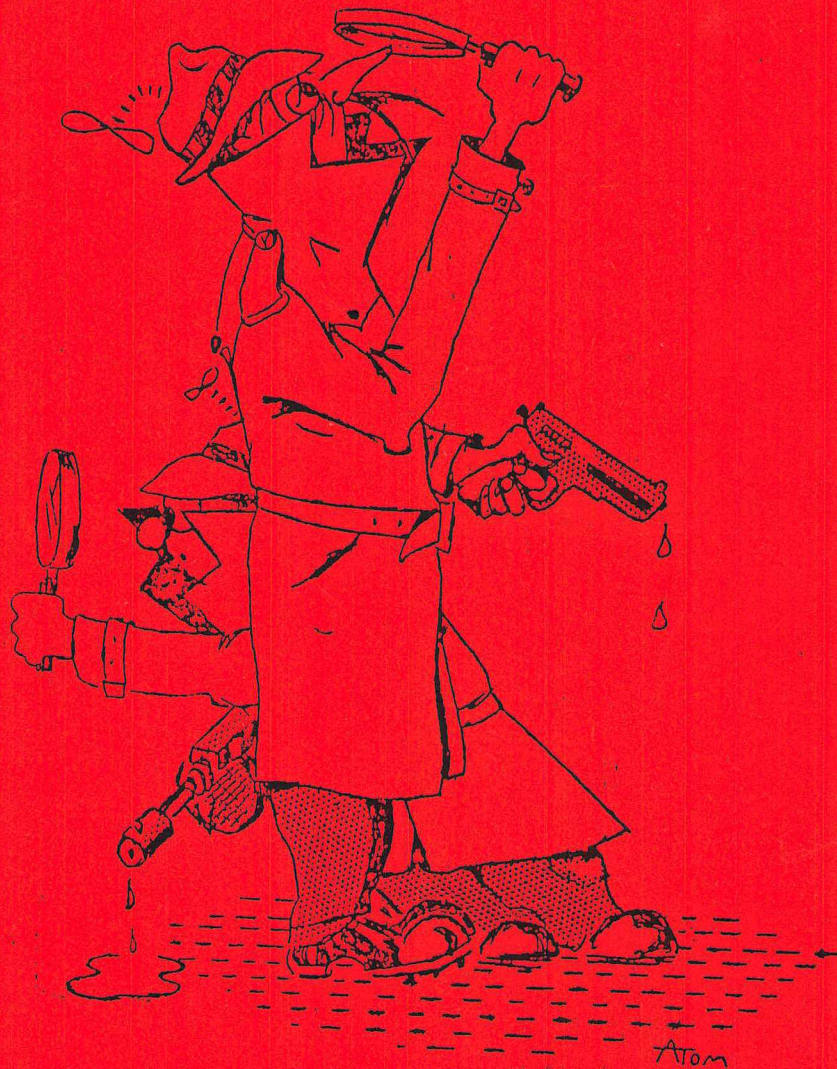
"Suffering Catfish," gasped Steve. He appeared to be incredulous. He sank back, waving his arms wildly...he staggered back towards my Gestetner, over in the corner, on which reposed the fat tube of duplicating ink I had but recently purchased. He landed on it with a 'plop', and I saw with horror that the nozzle was pointing towards me.

Suddenly, everything went black. I reached up, and discovered my hair was sticky. I opened my eyes and found I couldn't see. I funnelled my ears with rampant forefingers...heard Steve screaming with laughter.....

....finis...

THE BLEARY EYES

- The Early Years



John Berry