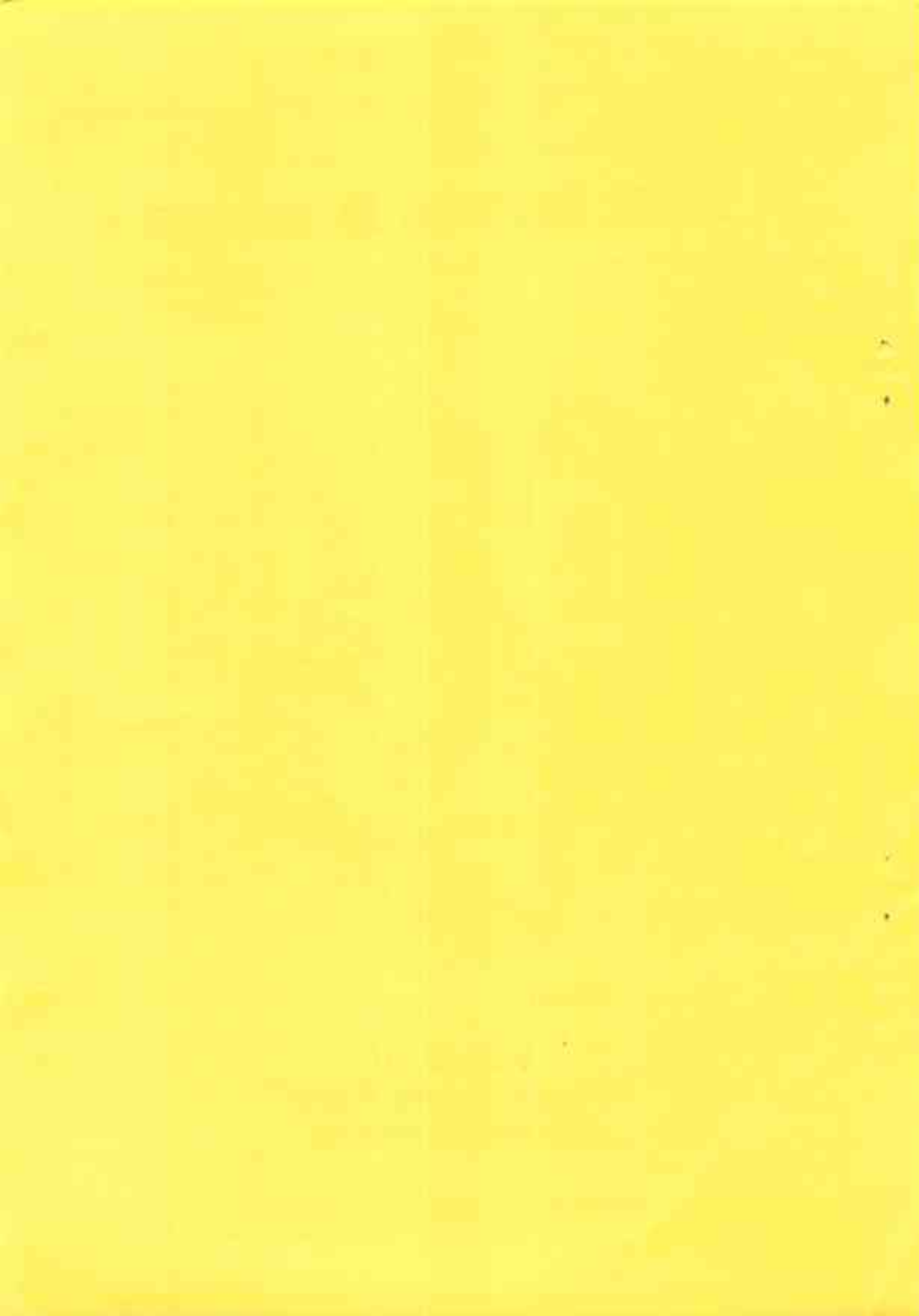


THE MIDDLE AGES



Atom

Vol. 2 of
"The Bleary Eyes"
by John Berry



contents

THE BLEARY EYES - Vol. 2 - THE MIDDLE AGES

	Page
CONTENTS.....	i
EXEGESIS.....	11
INTRODUCTION.....	1v
I SLEPT WITH THE GOON - RETRIBUTION 12 - Berry & Thomson - 1959.....	1
STAGE FLIGHT - RETRIBUTION 8 - -ditto- - 1957.....	3
THE GOON AND SIXPENCE - Oneshot - John Berry - 1959.....	7
THE FAN WHO NEVER WAS - RETRIBUTION 15 - Berry & Thomson - 1960.....	21
RETURN OF THE GOON - POT POURRI 30 - John Berry - 1963.....	31

Artwork as originally published - Arthur Thomson, John Berry, Jim Cawthorn
Additional art (?) - Charles Atlas

Acknowledgments and thanks to John Berry for permission to reprint

Re-typing by Vine Clarke

Publication by Ken Cheslin

GUINEAPIG PRESS
10 Coney Green,
Stourbridge,
West Midlands,
DY8 1LA
ENGLAND

THIS IS No. 86 OF AN EDITION OF 100 - DATED 1993



exegesis.....Ken & Vinc

It is assumed the reader has Vol. 1, and therefore those explanations are not repeated.

I SLEPT WITH THE GOON

Pages 1 & 2) In well known (at the time) article in HYPHEN 18, May '57, Berry advocated launching oneself from the top of the bedroom wardrobe as a means of introducing variety into one's love life.

STAGE FLIGHT

Page 3) *Quote cards* - small card containing fannish quotation; popular in fandom in mid-late '50s.

THE GOON AND SIXPENCE

Absolutely no reference to Somerset Maugham's *Moon and Sixpence* except for lousy pun at end.

There was some rivalry between Southern and Northern fans in early '50s (due to siting of the one annual Convention), but this had disappeared by time of JB's playful exaggeration.

Page 8) *Ron Bennett* was very active editor of fanzine PLOY and the fan newzine SKYRACK.

Page 8) *I or EYE* - London fanzine of mid-'50s, edited by Ted Tubb and others.

Page 8) *APE* - nickname of 'Sandy' Sanderson's fanzine APORRHETA.

Page 9) *NGW* - Norman George Wansborough, somewhat slow fan. Note 'legible one shot'.

Page 9) *G. M. Carr FAPazine* - An American Mrs. Thatcher-type character, very prominent in fandom at the time.

Page 9) '*17 Brockham House*', '*Tresco*', '*Inchmery*' - Fannish addresses of Arthur Thomson, Bulmers/Roberta Wild and Clarkes/Sanderson respectively.

Page 10) *Stale kippers...* - A Clacton-on-Sea fanzine-producing group met above a fish-shop owned by the parents of one of them.

Page 10) '*7 Southway*' etc. More fannish addresses, of Ron Bennett, Eric Bentcliffe and Norman Shorrocks (leading Liverpool fan).

Page 11) *Celebrated Shaw-Berry typer* - decrepit machine, famous for having a tin of baked beans tied to it in lieu of missing carriage return mechanism.

Page 12) Roster of names includes some extremely unlikely ones.

Page 13) -ditto-

Page 16) *Cecil* - Bennett's mythical elephant.

Page 18) *Leman* - Bob L. was notoriously well-read US fan.

Page 20) *Don Allen* was indeed in the RAF for two years - conscription interrupted many young lives in the '50s. Don published fanzines before and after his service.

THE FAN WHO NEVER WAS

Title is parody of THE MAN WHO NEVER WAS, popular spy novel/film of mid-'50s.

Page 21) ... wardrobe... see pages 1 & 2 above.

Page 22) *Operation North Pole* - wartime German spy trap which enticed a number of our own agents into their hands. (Thank you JB for information!)

Page 22) *H. P. (Sandy) Sanderson* - one of the most active '50s fans, was in the Regular Army, perpetrated large-scale hoax under name of 'Joan Carr'.

Page 22) *Inchmery Diary* - blow by blow account of fan household by Sanderson published in *Aporrheta*, which was very popular.

Page 22) *Penny (Penelope) Fandergaste* - this blatantly obvious pen-name had articles, etc., in late-'50s fanzines. 'She' was, in fact, yet another Sanderson hoax.

Page 25) *Eric Delaney* - jazz drummer? Band leader?

Page 27) *Ashenden* - hero of spy stories by Somerset Maugham, tho' it was Sherlock Holmes who turned to bee-keeping.

Page 27) *MANA* - short-lived mid-'50s fanzine by US fan Bill Courval.

THE RETURN OF THE GOON

John Berry's venture into le Carre territory (*The Spy Who Came in From the Cold* was written shortly before this story).

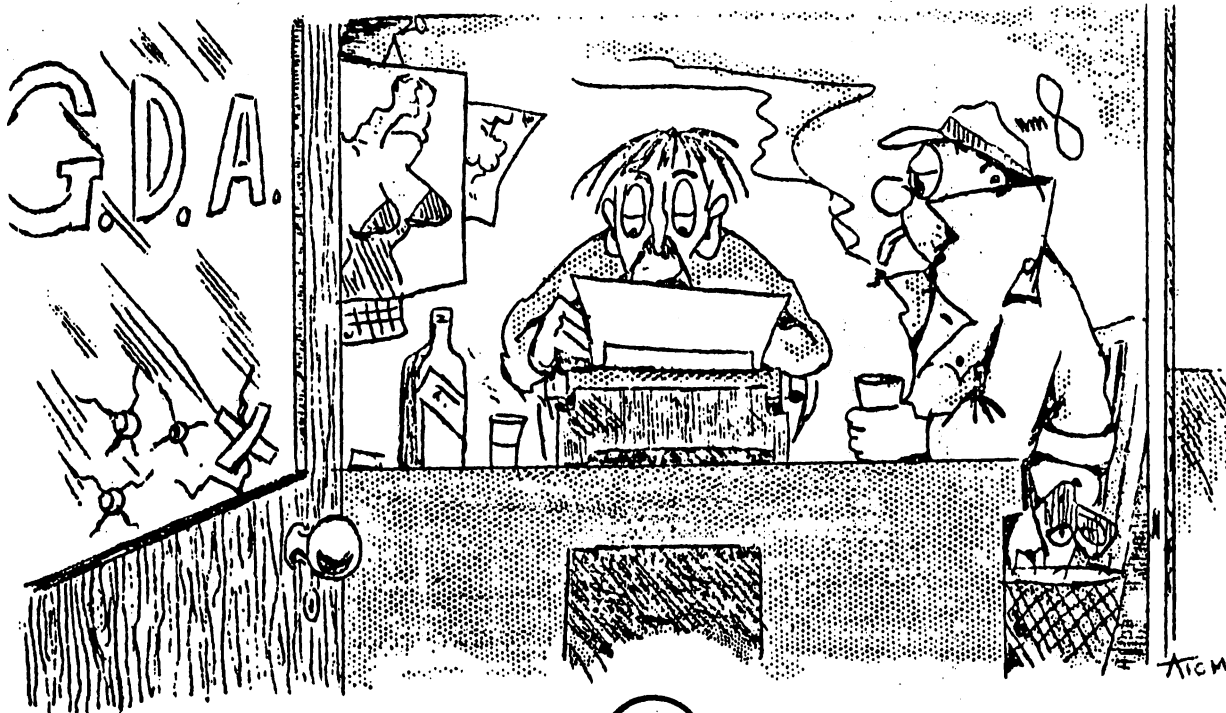
Virtually all fannish references are fictional.

Page 37) *Corflu* - fannish abbreviation for 'correcting fluid', used to cover mistakes on cut duplicating stencils.

ERRATA in Exegesis Vol. 1

Given name of Multog, editor of *STAR ROCKETS*, was 'Raleigh', not 'Ralph'. (Thanks, Rob Hansen).

Terry Jeeves was - surprisingly -not a TAFF winner. (Thanks, Terry)



introduction

I admit I was somewhat apprehensive when Ken Cheslin wrote to me a few months back to state that all THE BLEARY EYES Vol. 1 copies had been posted around the fannish world. I mentally propelled myself back in time to the wonderful day in 1954 when I first attended Oblique House. What if Walt Willis had been cranking his Gestetner and had explained to me that he was reprinting fannish articles which had been written in 1917?

I'm sure I would have felt that the material was bound to be obsolete and beyond the comprehension of the fans of '54. The same thought worried me about the stories in Vol. 1, but my fears were unwarranted. The response to THE BLEARY EYES stories has been extremely pleasing, denoting that the fannish spirit of almost four decades ago is understood and appreciated by the nineties fans. I was very moved, even reaching for a tissue, when I read the Bernie Evans review in CRITICAL WAVE 31, wherein she concluded: "read it and weep, for the fans who've passed on, for the fandom many of us have never known and never will, and weep tears of laughter and of joy for the sheer fun of it."

As I said in a letter to Ken, 'this made everything worth-while.'

Considerable praise must be accorded to the two stalwarts behind the printed page... Vinç Clarke has re-typed all the stories, patiently seeking my advice if he felt that a certain reference was not clear. Ken Cheslin has had considerable trouble with his copier, but has fought all the frustrations which have come his way in order to get the second volume of Bleary stories into your letterbox. I did my part of the work in the fifties, but the two fans mentioned are entirely responsible for what you now hold in your perspiring fingers. To them the egoboo.....

JOHN BERRY
Hatfield,
August, 1993

My story is so sordid that for long years I have had no recourse but to keep the dreadful details to myself. But with this new age of enlightenment, I feel that followers of the GDA, who look to the Goon as being a fine upstanding figure of fanhood, should know some of the little known details of his physical and mental make-up....details I have discovered the hard way. You see, girls:



Picture to yourself a night - any night - at the marital bed-chamber of 'Mon Debris', our house. The room is tastefully decorated (I modestly confess, for I decorated it myself) in light pastel shades of green, with a few delicate pinks here and there. The sheets and pillows are detergent white, and the soft eiderdown is of red velvet. A few water-colour paintings of wild flowers are arranged in sets of six on each wall, and the carpet is a light brown.

I am lying in bed, propped against a pillow, reading the details of Princess Margaret's love-life in a weekly woman's magazine, when a heavy clumping up the stairs denotes to myself and the neighbours two blocks either side of us that the Goon is preparing to retire.

He enters the boudoir, and girls, I shudder. His hair is as orderly as a new mop, and his eyes are somehow bewildered-looking, as if he expects a creditor to come prancing from behind the wardrobe bearing a Final Demand. He looks at me, and with difficulty he manages to keep his lower row of teeth within three inches of his upper set. He snaps his fingers, clumps over to the wardrobe where - now get this, girls - he pulls out a little oilcan from an inside pocket and oils the castors.

He wipes the saliva off both moustache ends, and he proceeds to divest himself of his outer garments.

Now please understand that I was an innocent and delicately reared girl, and my mother, sad to say, never warned me that such horrors would manifest themselves in the privacy of the bedchamber. For the Goon, casting aside jacket, shirt and trousers, stands revealed in a strange, loosely-fitted red flannel item of apparel, similar to what swimmers wore in 1909.

He looks at me, blinks his eyes once or twice, and utters the menacing call 'Yuk yuk'. He pulls up a red flannel sleeve, raises a scrawny arm, flexes his muscle, mutters 'damn and blast Charles Atlas - him and his promises' and hurriedly pulls the sleeve down again.

To demonstrate to me that he still bears a resemblance, however remote, to

the 'rugged male', he does a few press-ups with a set of weights, which I happen to know are manufactured from our small son's 'Kiddy Scales', and must weigh all of 3½lbs. The Goon then shows his teeth.

LET ME PROVE IN 7 DAYS
that I can make
YOU
a **NEW MAN!**

by
Charles Atlas
Holder of the Title:
"The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man."

ALL I want is one week to prove that I can give you a powerful body of muscle and tone - be like mine - with my quick DYNAMIC TENSION method.

Thousands of fellows all over the world have used my methods - and now you can too. Like them, you can put on firm layers of muscle where you need it most; tone up your whole system; banish constipation, poor digestion, bad breath, pimples and other conditions that rob you of the good things and hours of life, and get the "drips" that'll take you to the top of the ladder.

It's Easy My Way

I HAVEN'T any use for any tricky weights or pulleys that may strain your heart and other vital organs. I don't dance or do for you. DYNAMIC TENSION is all I need. It's the natural, tested method for developing real men inside and out. It distributes added pounds of powerful muscles over your body, gets rid of surplus and surplus fat, and gives you the vitality, strength and pep that win you the admiration of every woman and the respect of any man.

48 Page Book FREE

WHY do only 50% of the men you can be? I send NOW for a free copy of my new large illustrated book loaded with pictures of myself and others who have used my secret methods. Read what I did for them. And find out what I can do for YOU! Don't cut off becoming the lanky, luscious NEW MAN you can be. Post the coupon TODAY.

CHARLES ATLAS (Dept. 112-8), 1 Dean Street, London, W.1.

I want the proof that your system of DYNAMIC TENSION will make me a New Man. Send me your book, "Exercising Health and Strength," and details of your amazing 7-DAY TRIAL OFFER.

Name _____
Please print or write clearly
Address _____
City _____

FREE BOOK

My free book "Exercising Health and Strength" will show you how to get the best results from my methods. It's a complete guide to the DYNAMIC TENSION method. It's yours for 7 days. No money back. No obligation. Just send me your coupon today.

The climax of the grim episode is drawing near, for with another mellow 'Yuk yuk' he trundles towards the wardrobe.

THE WARDROBE???

With a practised eye he squints at the wardrobe, looks at me, makes an obviously complicated mathematical calculation, and grunts to himself. He slowly puts his hands on the top of the wardrobe, his shoulders flex, and he begins to draaaaaaw himself up the side of the wardrobe, obviously, for some obscure reason, intent upon climbing to the top of it.

The great physical effort he brings into play ultimately drags him at the very least 4½ inches off the ground, and with an exasperated grunt of frustration he relaxes his grip and falls in a panting mass on the carpet, out of my sight.

There is a pause, a silent, meaning pause, and then two grimy hands grip the polished end of the bed, they grip until the fingernails turn red, and then a tuft of hair jerks into view, followed by two completely bloodshot eyes, a hooked nose, two droopy moustachios, and, finally, a pointed chin.

The chin struggles feebly for position until it is able to hang over the veneered bed end, and there the Goon remains, a grim visage, depicting a moron completely and utterly physically wrecked.

The lips move frantically.

"Don't sit there laffin', DO something", he pleads, and with soft words of love I get out of bed, put my hands under his armpits, and drag him into bed.

He soon falls asleep, interrupted once or twice by muttered curses, and an occasional meaningful phrase, such as 'Oh for a step-ladder', or 'I wonder how Schultheis managed?' or 'Must warn Ted White'.

Yes, this is the Goon I know, kind but befuddled, well-meaning but unfortunate, earnest and keen, but utterly utterly useless!

ANON.



We of the G.D.A...Fandom's Watchdogs, have done some very strange jobs for our fannish clients, but none, I would say, even approach the little business I did for James 'Typer' White 18 months ago. As it turned out, it could have held great possibilities for me, I could maybe have earned thousands of pounds per annum doing as....well, now, that would give the climax of the story away, and I want you all to be as befuddled as I was during the caper known in the Goon Casebook as THE CASE OF THE BEWILDERED BUDGERIGARS.....

I recall I was busy in my office, typing out a long letter of complaint, which I intended to duplicate and send out to the rest of fandom. It concerned my quote cards. I was a little mixed up with quote cards in my early fannish days, and it wasn't until I'd collected 173 that Willis informed me that the whole idea was to sign them and pass them on, and not to see how many one could collect, like pre-war cigarette cards. I immediately sent batches of them out, and then created the quote card to beat all quote cards. It was a picture of Miss Monroe (you know the one), and I had some friends of mine who were in the photography business enlarge the picture to half life size. I then cut the picture into 24 smaller squares, and sent them all over the world, with instructions for fen to sign 'em and send 'em back....quick. A year later, 22 were still outstanding, although I noted with a certain amount of modest pride that the two fen who had deigned to return the completed cards obviously had my interests at heart. I felt, however, that the other 22 pictures, though not absolutely essential, should have been returned, and that was the complaint I was voicing on stencil, when Colin, Goon junior, brushed aside the sacking hanging over the empty doorway, and handed me a note.

It was from James White. It merely said.."Meet me outside my place of work at 6.30 p.m. tonight." The only significant thing about the notepaper was the fact that it was a half section of a £5 note. Of course, James, the recipient of four-figure cheques from the U.S.A. could afford to be ostentatious, although I fervently hoped that it was a hint that I would get the other half for a job well done. Realising in a flash that I would probably never see the money, for the G.D.A was at that period in a deep rut, I nevertheless pinned it on the wall, and seeing the time to be almost six o'clock (by the simple expedient of gazing with my ex-U-boat binoculars through the blonde's window who lived across the way, and who kept a small travelling clock on her bedside table), I jammed on my trusted trilby, fitted a sucker to my plonker gun, mounted my motor-assisted pedal cycle and pedalled to town. I left the bike outside a scrap-yard, where I

knew it would camouflage itself with its surroundings, and walked to where James White was supposed to work.

James White was, and is, by profession a Certified Sartorial Consultant, A Gentleman's Outfitter (although he has fixed up some ladies in his time). Promptly at the appointed time he came out of the main door, his Anthony Eden hat set at a typically sartorial angle, a small parcel in his right hand. He straightened the tip of my trilby with the tip of his umbrella, and asked me to carry his typer. I took the worn handle and followed him.

We eventually finished up outside the local Music Hall. "I'm sure the cashier at the box office cannot change a £10 note," observed James, "so get the tickets, will you? Two seats in the box nearest to the stage."

I emptied my pockets of small change, thankful I had had the foresight to raid the kid's money box. I paid for the tickets and followed James up the carpeted stairway to our seats.

Frankly, I was mystified with White's demeanour, even more so when he asked me for a sixpence, put it in a small box attached to the arm-rest in front of us, and obtained a pair of opera glasses. The corners of his mouth twisted upwards in a triumphant manner as he focused the glasses on to the middle of the stage.

A few moments later the orchestra struggled to life, the lights were dimmed one by one, the curtains parted, and the evening performance began. James White was silent, Sphinx-like in his inscrutable omnipotence.

A line of ancient crones staggered onto the stage, looking positively indecent in short frilly skirts, struggling to keep in time with the orchestra. The most horrible troupe of dancers I ever saw.

James sat unblinking.

A juggler came on, seemingly, by the way he groped all over the stage for his clubs, 100% blind.

James sat unmoved.

Two comedians came on. They were awful. Their first joke was "Why did the chicken cross the road?", and their best was "When is a door not a door?"... "When it's ajar."

James sat unworried.

Then there was a roll of drums, a stir in the pits, and a loud voice announced the impending appearance of: "Madame Zaza."

At this, James passed me the small parcel he had been carrying earlier, a trickle of saliva dribbled down his chin. The look on his face nearly cracked his glasses. He raised the opera glasses to his eyes, and aimed them at the wings.

A young girl emerged, dressed entirely in budgerigars.

There seemed to be a thin cord round her...er...bosom and her...er...nether regions, and little blue and green budgerigars hung on, ruffling their feathers periodically with the lithe movements of her body.

She reached the centre of the stage, and raised her arms, sylph-like.

James ripped off his tie and stretched so far over the edge of the box he seemed to be hanging on only by his shoe laces.

"Quick, Goon, quick," he steamed, "what are you waiting for?"

"What do you want me to do?" I asked, slightly perplexed by his strange demeanour.

He flung me a frustrated look. "You're the budgerigar expert," he panted, his thin sensual lips twitching, "shift 'em, quick!"

The impact of his request hit me immediately. It seemed that after all Chuch Harris was quite correct in his assessment of James White. The utter fiend wanted me to misuse my powers over the birds, and so make them fly away, revealing the nude body of the...hmmmmmm....I moved my U-boat binoculars from the feather formation of a really well-bred budgerigar to the girl's anatomy, and....

I pursed my lips, allowed the tip of my tongue to titillate my upper palate, and blew a delicate "Phutteeeee."

There was a blur of little wings, and a row of budgies settled on the velvet plush front of our box, looking inquiringly at me.

"Good boy!" breathed James.

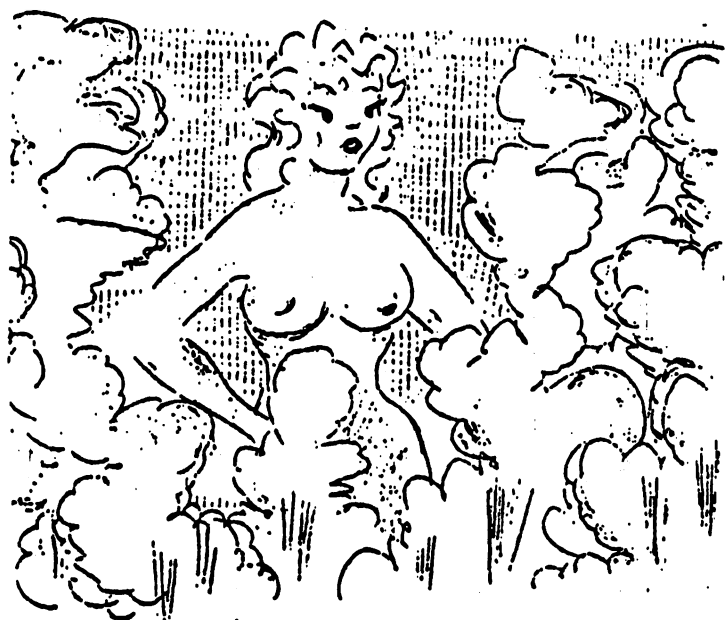
I followed his gaze.

The girl, though young, was obviously acquainted with the Lord Chamberlain's strict dictum that nudes must not move on stage. She stood on one leg, a horrified expression on her face, arms akimbo. Then she disappeared from view, due to a slowly rising cloud of steam from the pits.

Then, dramatically, a dark face appeared from a wing of the stage, and I heard a really strident "PHUTTEEEEEE"

As one, the budgerigars took off in formation from our box and re-covered the girl.

James looked at me, his eyes going round like roulette wheels.



"Don't just sit there....DO something!" he screamed.

I screwed up my lips once more, took a deep breath, and imitated the mating call of a desperate female budgerigar.

Another whirr of wings, and I was covered in budgerigars.

A sigh of celestial bliss reverberated through the auditorium as the girl, just in the middle of a complicated gymnastic feat, reluctantly maintained the show business tradition, and remained static.

I divested myself of budgerigars, and looked at the stage.

A shaking hand appeared from the wings, there was a noise like rain against a window, and the girl was covered, confetti-like, in birdseed.

A flash of blue and green, and the birds flew back to their respective positions, fluttering to the ground every so often in search of vagrant titbits.

James looked at me. "Weeeell?"

I focussed my binoculars on the birdseed. Ah ha! The seed was poor quality stuff, with bits of grit and black seed and canary seed all mixed up in it. I sighed. If only I had a handful of my own pure...

"Open the parcel," hissed James. I ripped off the paper, and discovered a little parcel of 100% pure budgerigar seed...plain white millet. I threw some on to the stage as a bait, then sprinkled a line along the edge of our box.

In three seconds the birds were once more decorating my box, as James leaned forward again to see the girl, who, as the climax of her act, was standing on her head.

A hand streeeched out from behind the rear curtains, and with trembling fingers fingers draped a millet spray clumsily around the girl. The birds, somewhat bewildered by this time, staggered back to the girl, and resumed their original position.

By this time, however, the theatre audience had become aware of the titanic battle of wits and, beside shouts of encouragement, many coins began to rain into the box from optimistic theatregoers. After stamping on James's fingers, I managed to collect 11/2d. for myself.

The curtains came down over the empty stage, and the performance ended.

James patted me on the back, congratulated me on my prowess, asked me to return the torn half of the £5 note as that was the only means of sending me the message, he said, and borrowed the bus fare home. I shook myself to remove

any possible evidence of the affair, and pedalled home, somewhat perplexed.

The following night, just after ten o'clock, I went upstairs to my office, and surveyed my latest acquisition. It....

The sacking over the doorway moved, and in a flash, before the shadowy figure entered, I was just able to cover it. Phew.

"Anyone about?" asked the figure, nestling deeply in a huge coat collar.

"All downstairs, Bob," I said.

He sighed, quickly gorged a ham shank, peeled a banana with reckless abandon, and sat down on the cover of my Gestetner. I made a mental note to get some more orange boxes, seating accommodation being totally inadequate.

Wiping his lips with my hat, he opened an envelope, and withdrew an official-looking document. "Sign on the dotted line," he grimaced.

"What is it all about?" I asked. So intent was he that I should obey him that he totally ignored the dull 'plop-plop-plop' as apples and oranges fell out of his coat pocket, where he had caught it on a nail sticking out of my desk. Them tea-chests are very roughly finished.

"Sign," he persisted. "It's worth £10 a week to you."

"But I...."

"I said £15 per week."

"I can't...."

"£20 per week."

"But...."

"O.K. £30 a week."

"Robert," I said, "what the heck is this all about?"

He came close, and whispered confidentially.

"I saw you in action with them budgerigars last night, bhoy," he said. "You showed great control, although naturally the chap in the wings was better."

"But he had the advantage of having a millet spray handy," I pointed out.

Bob looked rather coy. "Look here, Goon," he confided, "don't spread it around, but that was me. I've got them birds trained to perfection, see, and with Yvonne, a girl in my office, who acts as Madame Zaza, I'm in the big time. Naturally, it's difficult enough for me to find enough excuses to satisfy Sadie for my absence, but if you'll join the act, doing what you did last night, I can get a three year contract, with a special dispensation allowing me complete freedom of the refreshment counter of the theatre in which we're playin'."

For a moment I could see the neon lights....'Shaw, Goon, Madam Zaza and their Feathered Friends.'

I shook my head. "Couldn't do it, Bob," I said. "It would mean getting James White to join the act too. He wouldn't miss that for all the money in Carnell's account. No can do."

Bob looked despondent, then sighed resignedly. His jaws started to move again, in a rhythmic grinding motion as he speedily ate a bunch of grapes, so I could see he hadn't taken it too badly.

"No hard feelin's," he said. "I proved to everyone last night that I'm a better budgie handler than you, and that's some consolation. The millet spray is the ultimate. Ah, well, adieu."

Kicking a couple of oranges in front of him he brushed past the sacking.

After Bob had gone, I telephoned the theatre again, and booked the same box. The G.D.A. had got exactly nowhere with the business, and it was imperative that I, as the Goon, should do something to try and rebuild our lost prestige...after such disasters as The Cedric Affair, we were at rock bottom.

So Bob fondly imagined that the millet spray was the ultimate? I allowed a grin to disturb a few hairs on my upper lip, crossed the room, and gently lifted the cover off my latest buy.

I fed a handful of breadcrumbs to my trained hawk.

THE GOON AND SKIPPER



PREFACE

I watched from afar. I saw the situation gradually worsen. I knew that it was only a matter of time before my services were urgently requested - and I found it most interesting to conjecture which of the two groups would approach me first. When that happened, I foresaw a major difficulty would assert itself. Understand, a fee is a fee, and business has been so slack that I haven't always been particular where the fee came from - I recall I once settled for a photo of Jayne Mansfield in a sweater instead of pornography - that shows how desperate I was.

But in this horrible North and South affair I planned ahead in my usual farsighted manner. I saw that it was essential that someone should have a finger (admitted a grimy finger) on the planning organisations of each faction. That was the cleverest part of my scheme. But it would spoil everything if I gave you details at this juncture. Things were complicated even at the beginning of the sordid affair. Art Thomson, my chief lieutenant of the GDA, by allegiance remained a staunch GDA agent, although his sympathies were undoubtedly with the South.

I must confess that I saw a chance in all the confusion to reap most of the pornography from English fandom, but as the conflict grew more serious, I vowed that the GDA's services to fandom should remain my first priority.

And then, one day, Bentcliffe came to my office, asking for help to fight the Southerners.....

CHAPTER ONE

It is difficult to pinpoint any definite feature and say - 'that started the war'. For war it undoubtedly was. The plain tap water in the zap was replaced by such nefarious fuels as red ink, watered-down duplicating ink, sour milk, Evening in Paris, and in one heinous case, a secret concoction brewed by Joy and Vince Clarke which defied analysis, although it did bring back the following cryptic report from the local Forensic Laboratory - 'this horse is overworked'.

A lot of Northern fen saw red when H.P.Sanderson's column in PLOY, dated March 1958, said a few nasty things about Eric Bentcliffe. It may seem strange that Bennett, a Northerner, should have seen fit to publish an article attacking a fellow Northerner, but one must understand that PLOY was not the mouthpiece of the North, but a subzine of some considerable repute, catering for the whole of fandom, and with a large American circulation. At the commencement of the column ('The Goddam Hobbyist'), Bennett made a shrewd statement to the effect that what his columnist said didn't imply that he, Bennett, shared the same opinions. This, rather naturally, (especially as things turned out), was one of the shrewdest things Bennett ever did, and it emphasises his particular affinity for intellectual deduction, and exhibits the deft touch of the knowledgeable faned.

The Sanderson-Bentcliffe Affair (as it was termed in the 1959 Fancyclopedia) gradually subsided, even though Sanderson's subzine APORRHETA brought its many readers up to date with events, and was actually forgotten altogether when the 1960 issue of 'I' appeared.

This was one of the most magnificent hoaxes ever perpetrated in fandom. The fanzine contained 30 pages in the usual distinctive 'I' pattern, even though it was some years previously that an issue had appeared. The issue contained a long article by a pen name new to the scene, 'Inquisitor', and it gave in gory detail a history (totally inaccurate, as it transpired), of the supposed slights suffered by the London Circle from other fen, notably Northerners. The fanzines were posted in Catford, and the stencils were cut on Vince's typer - this was conclusively proved. Vince and Joy, however, explained in affidavit form that they definitely did not publish the issue. H.P.Sanderson, in APE, offered a

substantial reward for information leading to the person or persons who had published it.

At one time I was tempted to look into the matter myself, and I also believe Art did some preliminary field work on the hoax, being hired by Sanderson, until I diverted Art's interests to a more fruitful field.

The 1960 Harrogate Convention was a complete failure. No one turned up, except NGW. The London Circle had been informed by telegram at the last moment that it had been cancelled. The Northern fan had previously banned the Harrogate Con, even though it was on their home ground, if any members of the London Circle attended. They gave their word of honour, however, that to their knowledge no one in the Northern Group had sent the telegram. No one knew who had sent it.

NGW made a studied complaint three months afterwards in a legible one-shot, CHAPPED-HANDS, stating that he had been forced to work at the Harrogate Hotel to work out the outstanding Con expenses, and that he had personally washed and dried 230,000 cups, 230,000 saucers, and many thousands of other culinary utensils.

Meanwhile, other momentous affairs happened.

Eric Bentcliffe, in his one-shot VINDICATION, reprinted a signed statement from three psychiatrists which said in effect that they had examined him and found his sex drive to be completely normal.

Chuck Harris, in his masterful PRIVATE RITES a little later, announced that that sixteen psychiatrists had opined that his sex drive was completely abnormal. He suggested that Bentcliffe shouldn't dabble in things he knew nothing about.

Bentcliffe, in his NASTY MAN (illosed by Jeeves) stated that Harris had wasted his money visiting psychiatrists - he, Bentcliffe, had signed statements from forty-three females (all Con-goers) over the past ten years which proved exactly the same thing!

Ted Tubb published another plaintive plea in CLEEN SWEAP, reiterating that fandom was all wrong and that fanzines, especially the Northern ones, were still printing cruddy efforts and personal essays, but no sf.

The Northerners didn't like this at all, as they were the only ones pubbing fanzines. A fanzine as such hadn't appeared from the South for two years, except that notorious 'I', but fan didn't count that.

One thing added to another kindled a flame of such intensity that a break occurred in 1962 which was as complete and utter in its potent invincibility as a G.M.Carr FAPazine.

Ken Bulmer's now famous ULTIMATUM appeared in all fannish letter boxes north of a line drawn from Birmingham to the Wash. It said that Bulmer had concrete proof that a Northern organisation had sent the Harrogate Telegram, and had published the libellous 'I'. The one-shot stated that if an apology was not printed in one-shot format within three weeks, a state of war would exist between the North and the South. After that date, any Northern fan seen in London would be zapped unmercifully.

The most astounding aspect of ULTIMATUM was the simple fact that Bulmer denied emphatically that he had ever pubbed it! He was too busy, he said, when pressed for a statement. He admitted he didn't think much of the Northerners, "but I never sent that ULTIMATUM, honest to Gord I didn't, mate," he vouchsafed.

His denial came too late. The Northerners replied with action instead of words on the night the ultimatum concluded. This was only too obvious the following morning.

Duplicating ink was found to be splattered over the front doors of 17 Brockham House, 'Tresco', 'Inchmerry' and all the other notable London and Southern addresses. A large poster announcing that the premises were CLOSED FOR ALTERATION was pasted over the windows of the Globe. Whilst taking a constitutional walk round the gardens of Courage House, Ethel Lindsay was

mysteriously zapped with an implement which obviously had a cubic capacity much in excess of the normal hand zap. Paul Enever found two tons of ripe manure on his front lawn, and the account from a local farmer came next day. NGW discovered seven volumes of Robertson's ALGEBRAIC EQUATIONS DEMONSTRATING PROOF OF THE INFINITE UNIVERSE on his front door step. A griddle of stale kippers was hung around the chimney of a certain house at Clacton-on-Sea, bearing the legend "You'll be eating these tonight". Alan Dodd removed the duplicating inked rude remark from his front door before anyone else could read it, and to this day has refused to divulge its essence, although rumour has it that it referred to him as a 'Nonconpoop'.

And so it went on. The slaughter was merciless.

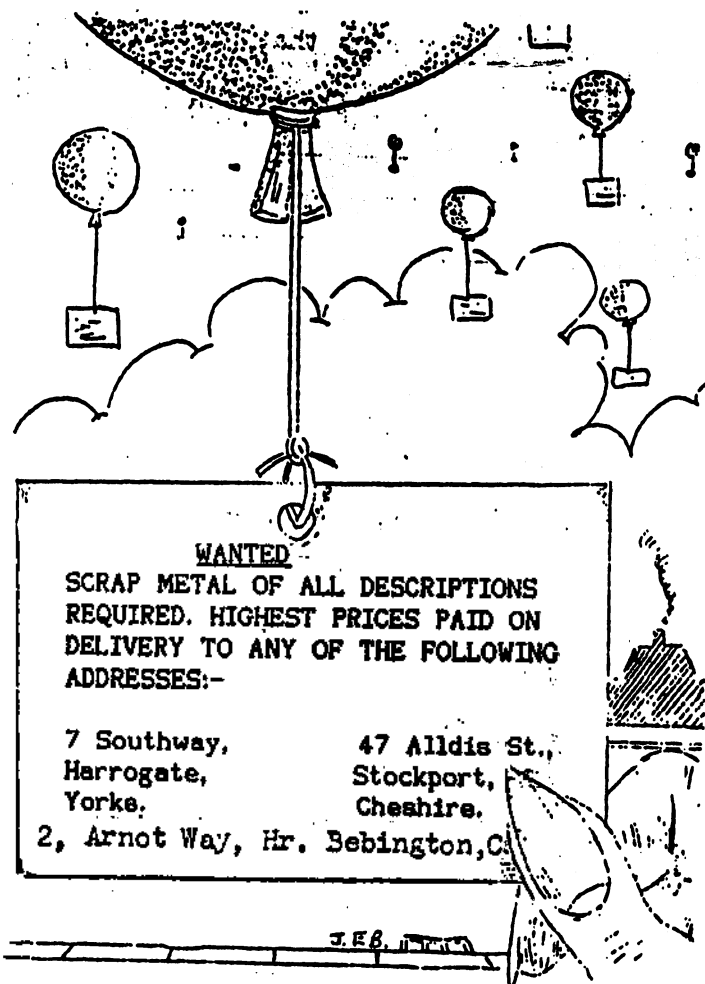
It was obvious, even to the youngest neo, that the South wouldn't take this lying down without expressing their disapproval in a practical way - even though the North issued a proclamation via post and tape stating that none of their members had done the various misdeeds, "...although we agree with them in principle."

The South's reply (see FANHISTORY Chapter IV, 1966) happened on the 19th. of March 1963. Early in the morning on this vital date Ken Bulmer was seen walking around the Catford area sucking his right forefinger and holding it aloft. At 8 am., John Brunner, Ted Tubb and Arthur Thomson were seen to creep furtively up the puddled pathway of 'Tresco', each bearing under his arm a large bellows. They slipped through the front door, which quietly closed behind them.

At 8.15 am. Vince Clarke drew up in a taxi, dragging a large suitcase with him, and he also disappeared into 'Tresco'. From then on, until 10 am., most of the important Southerners gathered at this famous shrine of fanac in the South. Even Dodd shook the dust of Hoddesdon from his heels for the first time in fifteen years, and following directions from a 25 inch scale map of London, eventually arrived at 'Tresco'.

From 10 am. until 2 pm. no sign of movement was seen from 'Tresco', although a gale from the south had sprung up during the morning, and it rattled the bedroom windows of 'Tresco', until they were flung open at exactly 2.15 pm. Roberta Wild and Pam Bulmer edged precariously out of the windows, and seated themselves on the wooden window sills. They were seen to reach inside and make a rapid movement above their heads, and during the next hour and a half they launched skywards 7,169 multi-coloured hydrogen-filled balloons, each bearing below itself on a short length of twine a square label on which was duplicated a cryptic announcement.

The high wind blew the balloons rapidly northwards. It



was a fantastic sight to see the sky above Catford dotted with these deadly missives.

It was exactly one week after this that Bentcliffe came to see me.....

CHAPTER TWO

I can recall the scene and the conversation as well as any telerecorder could do.

Bentcliffe seated himself on the edge of the orange box, and gazed in awe at my collection of pin-ups plastered all over the walls. A glassy spasm contorted his eyes, the instinctive sign of a pending pun - a really horrible Bentcliffe-type pun - so I speedily tried to divert his mind from such unhealthy and torturous channels.

"My TRIODE sub expired?" I grinned.

"No - no, Bleary," he said, "something fantastic has happened. My front and back gardens and, indeed, most of the rooms at 47 Alldis Street, are packed full of old prams and rusty cycle frames, bottomless buckets and other hunks of useless metal."

He shot a glance at my typer, and even as I watched, he became deflated.

"Have they been sending the stuff to you, too?" he asked anxiously.

I snorted disgustedly.

"This is the celebrated Shaw-Berry typer, or what's left of it," I hissed.

"But what do you mean, have they started sending the stuff?"

"This flipping scrap iron. It's come to my house in carts, wagons, lorries and tractors. My mother is very annoyed about it - especially as these folks who bring the scrap ask extortionate prices for it. They say I advertised. On my way here I met Norman Shorrocks, and he's in the same position. Bennett too, alas. It is obviously the work of the London Circle."

"Tut tut, Eric," I commiserated. "I presume you want the Agency to help you to get rid of the scrap iron?"

"Oh, could you?" gasped Eric, delightedly.

"I'll fix it," I said. "I'll see it's all taken away within forty-eight hours. I met a scrap-metal merchant recently on the Liverpool cattle boat. He'll shift it."

Eric looked at me from under lowered eyelids. He looked a mite like Victor Mature in heat.

"I hate to ask, but could you....WOULD you join forces with the Northerners against the London Circle and the rest of the Southerners?"

I creased my forehead and ran a leathery tongue over my cracked lips.

"This is a most serious question, Benters," I frowned. "I mean, it'll cost you a lot. I'm already negotiating with the London Circle," I lied.

A look of fear crossed his face.

"Not that!" He sagged. "I'm acting as spokesman for the North, and I've got the necessary authority to come to terms with you. Rosenblum has drawn up this agreement. It specifies twenty four assorted books on sex, including Havelock Willis's 'Advice For Young Girls'.....'The Arabian Nights' with two hundred and forty seven technicolour illoes.....a collection of fifty-eight art studies from Antwerp, which, I must confess, constitutes my entire collection....Shirley Marriott's autobiography..... and a life size enlargement of the Marilyn Monroe Calendar photograph....all these for your services."

My eye gleamed. I almost shouted 'Snap'. That little lot constituted, as I had envisaged, the whole of the Northern pornography. For Bentcliffe to get rid of his collection clearly demonstrated how seriously the intellectuals amongst the North regarded the war.

"It's a deal, Eric," I said. "I'll expect all that stuff shipped to me immediately. Now then, let's get down to detail....."

CHAPTER THREE

The wind, a soft but monotonous wind, blew across the moorland, a few miles to the south-west of Harrogate. It helped a little to cool the sweat on my forehead...sweat, globules of it, brought forth by the horrible sight my protesting peepers had gazed upon. Nothing less than the Combined Armed Forces of Northern Fandom.

Ron Bennett stood by my side, obviously embarrassed to the extreme.

"Parade shun," he stammered, and the motley collection - the avowed cream of the North - shuffled to a more or less rigid stance.

"For inspection....draw....plonkers," Bennett ordered. The assembled fen, most of them grinning sheepishly, withdrew the Bulmer type Plonker guns from their waist belts, and held them at an angle of 45 degrees from the ground.

"Parade ready for inspection, Mr. Bleary," saluted Bennett with two fingers, and replying in a like manner I strode to the ranks.

I looked searchingly at the right hand marker, Peter Reaney.

"Mr. Bennett was referring to your side armament, you dolt," I thundered, and passed to the next fen, John Roles. He had a belt across his shoulder, into which were stuffed 20 or 30 rubber suckers about 6 inches long, standard ammunition for the Bulmer type Plonker. I nodded approvingly at this show of power, and passed down the ranks...Frank Milnes, Jim Marshall, Bill Harry, John Russell Fearn, Pete Emery, Jim Cawthorn, Alan Burns, Sid Birchby, Mal Ashworth, John Ashcroft, Don Allen, George Richards, Eric Frank Russell, Dave Cohen, Ken Slater, Pete Daniels, Eric Bentcliffe, Terry Jeeves, Norman Shorrocks, Archie Mercer, Mike Rosenblum, Con Turner and Ken Potter.

They were all armed with the Plonker, and seemed to be fairly well supplied with ammunition.

I walked down the rear of the ranks, and after checking Eric Frank Russell for a haircut, I surveyed them again from the front.

"A fine body of fen, Mr. Bennett," I lied. "I presume they are all accurate shots? For the plan I have in mind, this is most essential."

Bennett pointed to a patch over his right eye, and grimaced.

"During the last target practice we had," he moaned, "I got a sucker slap bang in my right eye, and I was standing behind them."

"I must make sure they can fire accurately," I observed. I turned to face them.

"Fen," I shouted. "A great deal depends upon the speed of your draw and the sureness of your fire. I'd like to give you an example. See Mr. Bennett standing there? No, no...keep still, Ron. Now, do you all see that butterfly flapping round his left ear? Good...now watch!"

I stood transfixed. My right hand was six inches from the butt of my supercharged Plonker. I flexed my fingers, drew like a flash of forked lightning, aligned the barrel and fired, all in a split second.

Damn.

I threw Bennett a spare eye-patch from my disguise outfit.

"As I said," I panted to the swaying ranks, "see that butterfly still flapping by Mr. Bennett's left ear? It's a very rare species, a Purple Emperor. Now you can all say you've seen one."

Sometimes, folks, it's only the sheer scintillating sharpness of my mind that enables me to keep abreast of things.

"Corporal Reaney," I said, after a long pause, "give these fen a drill lesson whilst I have a conference with Mr. Bennett."

Whilst Reaney made them run at the double in ever-decreasing circles, I guided Bennett back to his tent, and poured him a drink of water. I looked at him. His crossed eye patches gave him a grim expression, depicting a soul in terrible mental torment.

"In my opinion, Ron," I said, "the fire power of your forces is inadequate. I would suggest you reorganise the fen into Stirrup Pump Groups. One pumper,

one pourer, and two carriers. Think of the total water power being used, when compared with the dribble from the mundane zap. Now, if you'll agree, for a small charge I can get half-a-dozen for you, all in perfect mechanical order."

Bennett nodded slowly. He didn't say anything, not even when I guided his hand over the blank cheque. He seemed....how can I put it?bewildered.

I went outside into the sunshine once more, and observed the Northern Fannish Army still running at the double, except that now they seemed to be in hot pursuit of Corp. Reaney, who bounded over the ferns like a deer...a rather frightened deer.

I sat down on a clump of dry grass and allowed the sun to play on my moustache. It was about time....

"Pssst....pssst."

I looked around. I wasn't really surprised. However, I couldn't see anything.

A clump of ferns slithered towards me - two really big fronds parted, and I recognised the features of Vince Clarke.

I breathed on my finger nails and rubbed them up and down on my old paratroop camouflage jacket. "About time," I sniffed.

"You were expecting me?" he hissed.

"Not necessarily you," I yawned, "but someone from the London Circle. I presume you want to avail of the GDA?"

Vince nodded enthusiastically. "We've got Art with us," he explained, "but he won't do any Intelligence Work for us until you give him official sanction."

"My fee," I said. This promised to be good...very good...much better than I had expected. Fans as a whole aren't really gullible (except for members of the GDA), but I could see at least half a chance to spread the load, to use a common cliché.

"We can offer you fifty book tokens," explained Vince, "and you can spend them at some of the bookshops down Petticoat Lane - you know what sort of books you can get there?"

"A deal, Vince," I told him. "I can see that this needs my personal intervention. I must insist, however, that my contact with the London Circle shall remain a secret, and not only flaunted in a special one-shot, such as the North put out. That Jeeves illo of me didn't give sufficient credit to my moustache....ATOM does a much better job. Besides which, the GDA is supposed to be impartial."

Vince sniggered. "Suits us," he said, "but we shall require a certificate signed by yourself to the effect that you guarantee not to assist the North any more."

Suffering Catfish. I looked aghast at Vince.

"My dear fellah," I grated. "Do you mean to say that you doubt the Goon to be a square-shooter? I've never let a client down yet...and anyway, I can't spell guarantee."

"But you'll work for us exclusively?" he asked, with narrowed eyes.

"Exclusively," I said. "Expect me in a few days."

I watched as he drew the ferns over his face, turned round and crawled away into the undergrowth on his hands and knees.

I laughed to myself.

There were certain benefits to being semi-illiterate. For instance, quite frankly, I had a pretty good idea of what 'exclusively' meant...but I wasn't quite certain!

CHAPTER FOUR

The entire Combined London Circle and Southern Fandom Militia were paraded for my inspection on the flat roof of the block of flats known as Brockham House. H.Ken Bulmer, in charge of the outfit, wanted the parade to be held in the utmost secrecy, safe from the prying eyes of any vagrant Northerners, and possible stares of normal Londoners.

I must confess, looking back to that occasion, that the militia did look a more militant body, when compared with the Northern rabble. The parade was in three ranks, and, slightly behind and to the left, was the Femme Brigade, but I'll give details of this superb array later. Bulmer, senior officer present, a highly polished beanie on his head and with his World War II campaign medals on his chest, cut a most imposing figure. His beard had been trimmed neatly, and in his left hand he carried a gavel (painted silver), the self-same one that the GDA had rescued during the 1957 WorldCon.

Bulmer called the parade to attention, and with him on my right and Art on my left, I inspected this fantastic display of the London Circle's might!

In the ranks I spotted the following fen: John Brunner, Vince Clarke, Chuck Harris, Brian Welham, Barry Hall, George Locke, John Wyndham, NGW, Nigel Lindsay, Alan Dodd, Mike Moorcock, Ivor Mayne, Paul Enever (in his bath chair), Frank Arnold, Ted Carnell, Bruce Kidd, Brian Lewis, Derek Oldham, Jim Rattigan and Tony Thorne.

The Femme Brigade, which I've previously mentioned, had Ethel Lindsay in her full nurse's uniform, with the roll of St. John's slings under her left arm and an enema under her right arm. Slightly behind her was the Militia's mobile kitchen. Olive Thomson, Ella Parker, Sandra Hall, Joy Clarke and Roberta Wild stood in front of the metal oven mounted on a handcart holding at the port position polished frying pans and saucepans in their left and right hands respectively. On top of the oven Pamela Bulmer sat cross-legged, peeling potatoes like mad.

After touring the ranks, I bade Bulmer to stand them all at ease, and I had an animated conversation with Ken.

"A fine body of fen, Ken," I said approvingly, "but, if I may say so, completely at the mercy of the Northern secret weapon!"

Bulmer staggered backwards, aghast. Art looked at me anxiously.

"Have you seen the secret weapon?" Ken asked, his eyes wide.

"I should say so," I hissed, "seeing it was me who supplied 'em with it. If only you'd had the initiative to contact me before."

"What....what is it?" asked Art, and heavy breathing behind me denoted that I was encircled by the Militia, all of whom bore worried expressions.

I addressed them.

"Fen!" I said loudly. "I note you are all armed with zaps. This, whilst remaining true to ancient fannish tradition, is but a retrograde step. Mr. Bulmer here presented me with twin plonker guns in Belfast back in '56, and it then became standard GDA equipment. The entire Northern Group is also armed with plonker guns, and it is a fearful sight to see them standing there with bandoliers jammed full of suckers. Admittedly your zaps require less maintenance and have a more sustained fire power, even if the range is limited. But the North, with my secret weapon, have you completely at their mercy."

As one, the Militia dropped their zaps, turned on their heels, and ran like hares back to the lift.

"Mutiny," roared Bulmer, and with a loud raucous shout just in the nick of time I informed them "BUT I HAVE THE ONLY ANECDOTE!"

The rabble stopped, turned, and sheepishly advanced to their original position.

"The North's secret weapon," I said, "consist of half-a-dozen Stirrup Pump teams, all fully trained, and adept at moving from 'jet' to 'spray' in one tenth of a second. My Ghod, fen, it is a fascinating experience to see their slick drill. Their crack team, consisting of Bentcliffe, Jeeves, Cawthorn and Reaney, is one of the most polished outfits I've ever seen. Cawthorn holds the hose pipe with his finger on the 'jet' or 'spray' nozzle lever. He crouches, a sadistic, hell-bent buckaroo. On the word 'Fire' he runs forward, jumping from side to side, and Reaney, at the pump, pushes the handle up and down at tremendous speed. Bentcliffe pours buckets of water (carried by Jeeves) into the pump

bucket, and the result is a slashing inferno of H2O. I tell you, fen, the North have SIX such teams ready for action. There is only one way to stop this elemental avalanche of liquid."

"What is it...WHAT IS IT, GOON?" they chorused.

"Art will go round for a silver collection whilst I explain," I hinted. I waited for the first delightful chinks of cupro-nickel.

"What the hell is it?" roared Bulmer, blowing through his hairs like an outraged orang-utan.

"Fen," I shouted, "the only answer is a specially camouflaged rubber waterproof groundsheet, and I can supply you within twenty-four hours."

"Thank Ghu," sobbed Bulmer, "saved again!"

"Think nothing of it, Ken," I said. "Dismiss the parade now, please. I want you to come with me to Art's flat...we have to discuss tactics."

* * * * *

Olive poured tea into three delicate china cups and a pint mug and passed round thin salmon sandwiches and a great big crust of bread and jam.

"....and I agree with all you say, Goon," said Bulmer, "admittedly the waterproof capes protect us, but, after all, it is essentially a defensive measure. Are you sure you can supply sufficient ball bearings and catapults to arm all the Militia?"

"Certainly I can, Ken," I affirmed, wiping jam off my moustache and putting the empty mug under the settee. "I'll go back to Belfast tonight and arrange transport to 'Tresco'. Now, as far as I can see, the situation is that your fire power is more than three hundred per cent as effective as the North's, and I can guarantee that when the conflict comes about, the South will win. I'm sure of it."

"Most gratifying," said Ken. "All that remains to be done is to decide a time and place for the battle to commence. The North want it to be on the Sheffield United football ground, and we want it at the White City. Do you know what I think? I think you should mediate. The North hold you in great esteem, as do we, and if you suggest a place, we, and I'm sure they, will agree. Think, Goon, think."

I thought and thought, and motivated by a subconscious idea I couldn't submerge, I committed myself.

"Stonehenge," I said. It was probably because I'd read about Stonehenge in an old CAMBER editorial...there was also the fact that, as a symbol, it was ideal.. a merger of the Ancient and the Futuristic! But the fact remains that I suggested Stonehenge, and Bulmer went into raptures over it.

"I'll send Art up to issue the challenge," he enthused, "and I also suggest that you, Goon, be umpire. I can see you on top of the highest lintel, gazing down at the battling horde below, and then giving the 'thumbs down' sign at the end, when we are all worn and spent. I'm confident that we can rely on you to give the correct decision, Goon?"

He winked meaningly, but I was in too much of a hurry to bother with pleasantries. I had a lot of work to do.

I had to catch the Harrogate train and have a discussion with Bennett. I had to reveal to him that the South were going to use inter-continental ball bearings, fired by extra strong elastic, and that I could supply him with the only defence. After he'd signed the contract, as he'd have to, I had to get back to Belfast, as soon as possible. I had a most difficult chore to do in my office. I didn't want anyone to see, so I had to do it myself. After all, it would take a lot of explaining if I was seen cutting up ladies knickers!

CHAPTER FIVE

To British readers of this fantastic account, a description of Stonehenge is superfluous. Perchance some of you Americans who studied the Ancient Britons may have heard of it. However, if only to inject a mite of culture into this...this...story, a little description of this most interesting monument is

not out of place.

Stonehenge is in NGW's home county, Wiltshire. The guide book says: *The design of Stonehenge is easily understood if one remembers that it is composed of two circles enclosing two series of standing stones, each in the shape of a horseshoe.*

Pretty straightforward that, eh?

A few more facts. In the outer circle, measuring 100 feet in diameter, 16 stones are standing, the remaining 14 fallen or missing. Half the stones in the inner circle are missing. Completely surrounding the monument (built about 4,000 years ago, by the way) is a ditch, its diameter being 350 feet.

Well, on the 23rd. July 1963, I was standing on top of one of the trilithons in the centre circle. It was a warm sunny day, and I was effectively shaded by a large red and blue umbrella. I felt pleased...elated...thrilled.

To the north, between the ditch and the first circle, about 120 feet away, stood the combined forces of Northern Fandom in battle array. Bennett stood in front of his troops, a magnificent figure mounted on Cecil. On Bennett's head was a highly polished coal scuttle, the reason for my last visit to Harrogate...I'd sold 50 of them to the Northerners as the only defence against the ball bearings.

Slightly behind Bennett were the stirrup pump teams, each nozzle held high by its sharpshooter. A mobile ex-Army water tank was just behind, with groups of fen clustered round it with red fire buckets in their hands and coal scuttles on their heads.

A frighteningly unmilitant militant body!

At the rear of the troops stood Jim Cawthorn, holding aloft a banner bearing a legend which up to date has not been deciphered, but rumour connects it with a word once printed in HYPHEN.

I cast my eyes southwards.

The Combined London Circle and Southern Fandom Militia was also in battle formation. I was glad to see that they had taken my advice. Some time before I had read in my son's history book about the battle of Crecy, where the English archers had stood at the rear and showered arrows at the enemy over the heads of their forward troops. For a fee, I had mentioned this to Bulmer - he told me at the time that he knew all about it, but that I'd reminded him of it.

Looking southwards, I could see he'd obviously given it much consideration when planning his tactics for the Stonehenge battle. In the outlying ditch, at intervals of five yards, lay ten of the strongest members of the Southern Outfit. Beside each man was an upturned beanie jammed full of $\frac{1}{2}$ " ball bearings. The sharpshooters held the catapults with their left hands, and at full streeetch, each right hand enclosed a ball bearing. Each catapult was held at an angle of 45 degrees. The plan, so it seemed to me, was to shower the Northerners with ball bearings, and in the resultant confusion allow the forward troops to advance to point blank range with their hand zaps.

Both factions stood perfectly still, waiting for me to give the signal for a bitter fight to be contested to its ultimate gory conclusion.

The silence was uncanny....several score fen tuned to a pitch of vicious expectancy. The sun relentlessly beat down, covering the ancient arena with a golden mantle of radiant heat. (I copied that last sentence from Chapter 34 of 'Orgies of Ancient Rome'.)

I smiled to myself. I had done my duty reasonably honestly towards both groups. If I had given one a superior weapon - I had sportingly supplied the other with the antidote. It was only fair. The GDA, as always, played square with its clients....

I gazed down. I knew how the Roman Emperors had felt...that elemental feeling of POWER....being able to start a mass battle by merely raising an eyebrow!

The time had come. I felt in a pocket of my camouflage jacket, and pulled out a dirty handkerchief. I raised it slowly in my right hand...the protagonists appeared to swell to their full heights, and every second seemed to assert itself.

Quickly, I dropped the handkerchief, watched it drift below me and flutter to the green Wiltshire grass below.

The result was all that I had envisaged. The two opposing commanders, Bulmer and Bennett, turned to their troops and shouted rapid orders. Bulmer's sharpshooters in the ditch rose to a kneeling position, and pulled the elastic to full stretch behind their right ears...I could almost hear the elastic twanging with the strain...the fen, waiting for the word to fire...the shock troops on the move forward...invincible...inexorable...dominant....overpowering!!!

To the north, Bennett's mob also swung into action, lashed by his tongue. The pumpers started to push their handles up and down, and the re-fuelers filled their red buckets from the water tanks and queued up ready to pour their fuel into the buckets. The nozzle bearers started to move forward, flicking the little switch to 'jet'...and even as I watched, water started to dribble out of the nozzles...gradually turning to an arch of water, then a firm vibrant jet.

"FIRE!"

The clarion call echoed loudly from both directions. The troops started to trot forward, and glancing quickly southwards I saw the ditch-bourne catapultists let go, then hurriedly re-load and fire again and again.

A plague of hornets surrounded me at that exact second! They buzzed dangerously past my ears, through my hair, under my moustache and even (and this shook me), even through the fabric of my sun-umbrella.

And then, to add to my troubles, it started to rain. A steady drizzle. I peered skywards from under the umbrella (which didn't afford me much protection) and noticed there wasn't a cloud in the sky.

Perplexed and not a little bewildered I looked at the two groups, expecting them to be combined together in a mortal combat of frightening yelling hordes. Instead, in fan-like formation, they swung towards me, a most uncanny sight...ball bearings began to skim off the stone lintel...the jets from the stirrup pumps, mysteriously, arched across my trembling form. I brought the umbrella down for protection, and discovered the hard way that a squad of ball bearingites had infiltrated to the rear.

The horrible shocking situation became more and more obvious!

Me, Goon Bleary, was the target, and both North and South fandoms had combined to make a concerted effort to speedily despatch the head of the GDA. After all I'd done for them...after all the sacrifices I'd made....

Above the humming ball bearings, and the thud of the plonkers sticking round the side of the trilithons like spikes on a porcupine, and the hissing pump and zap spray, I heard the toot of a motor cycle horn.

I peered round the side of the umbrella, loosed off a plonker accurately in the direction of Ted Tubb, and scanned the horizon for the source of the toot.

In the distance, a few yards on the other side of the ditch, was Art Thomson, seated on his motor cycle, his right thumb pressed on the horn. His left arm arched in a flowing movement, indicating he desired my presence.

By this time, in order to avoid the plonkers and ball bearings, I was lying prostrate on the lintel, thankful it was 29 feet high. It was fairly

easy to reach over the side, pluck a few plonkers, and fire them at the mass of fen below. I kept up a pretty moderate rate of fire, and I definitely scored direct hits on John Brunner, Don Allen, Paul Enever, George Locke and Ethel Lindsay.

Then the idea came to me.

I knew if the crowd below got hold of me, I'd be lynched. That, at least, seemed to be the general opinion I was able to glean from the shouts and curses of the rabble. They seemed to have gotten hold of the notion that I'd cheated them. I couldn't quite understand....

I had no alternative but to attempt one last desperate gamble. I stood upright, taking full advantage of my 5ft. 7 inches, and, with a nonchalant grin, I rushed forward and, gripping the stem of the umbrella tightly, I leapt into space.

The umbrella bore me like a parachute, and deposited me twenty yards away. For a moment the fen surrounding the trilithon I had just vacated stood watching me in amazement....open mouthed...then, as one, they rushed in pursuit.

Casting the umbrella aside, I turned to the advancing fen, sent two plonkers into their midst, then raced as fast as my legs could carry me, over the ditch like a swallow, onto the pillion of Art's bike. I slapped him on the shoulder, and he twisted the accelerator as far as he could....

For some seconds the ball bearings hissed alongside us, but after crossing five fields we reached the main road.

Art turned the handlebars towards London.

CHAPTER SIX

"What went wrong?" asked Art, as we sank back on the settee at Brockham House, exhausted. "It seemed such a fool-proof scheme...they couldn't have known."

I got up again and pushed a highly polished sideboard across the door.

"Heck, I don't know," I grumbled. "When both groups were given the order to fire, and started to advance, I thought we had finally triumphed. I'm sure I didn't give myself away...I'm certain I didn't. And yet we two are the only ones who...hey...was it you?"

"Not me, Goon," said Art. "I followed all your instructions to the letter."

"How did they know?" I asked myself aloud.

"Did they guess, do you think?" asked Art.

"No-o-o-o," I ruminated. "They must have had some concrete evidence. And I thought I had every item button-holed nicely. It just goes to show. Who was it originally said that quotation about the best laid plans of mice and fen...was it Leman? Anyway, somehow, we've slipped up."

"What'll happen now?" mused Art, pushing a table against the sideboard against the door.

"They must come here," I said, "at least, the locals will."

We heard the door kicked.

"Open up," Bulmer shouted, "we've got the place surrounded."

I walked across to the window, and looked through it. A pattern of plonkers described a halo above my head on the other side of the glass.

"Suffering Catfish, Art," I cringed, "get out from under that bed and make a suggestion. How the heck do we get out of this mess?"

"Hey, Ken," yelled Art, "what's the situation?"

There was a whispered suggestion of a muffled conference outside. Finally, Ken shouted: "Give us our money back, and we'll call it evens...let's come in and discuss it...we'll declare a truce, if you like."

"Heck, open the door, Art," I panted. What would the Americans think of this utter ignominy - the Goon sheltering under a white flag, we-e-ell, my vest wasn't exactly white, but I waved it just the same as Bennett, Bulmer, Sanderson and Shorrocks pounded into the room, a gleam of utter triumph in their eyes.

"Sixty-one pounds, seven shillings and eightpence halfpenny," said Bulmer, reading from a small black notebook. "If you repay us here and now...and not by cheque...we-e-e-ell, we'll not deal with you as we originally planned. You know, your little scheme would've worked, except for one small stroke of bad luck. Actually, I'm the first to admit that you should've got away with it, it was all so damned clever."

I reluctantly pulled a roll of banknotes from my trousers pocket.

"What was the stroke of bad luck?" I hissed.

The four looked at each other and smiled...nay...gloated!

"Let me tell you a little story," smirked Bulmer. "Tell me if I'm wrong, but there just isn't a chance...you see, we've got proof. But listen to this. In March 1957 there was a sale of Army and R.A.F. surplus equipment at Little Ballymurphy Aerodrome in County Antrim."

Suffering Catfish! The works...they knew everything!

"You went because you wanted one special lot. When it came to be auctioned, the price you had to pay for the item you wanted was reasonably small, but the deal included a lot of other miscellaneous equipment, which you didn't want. But before I continue, what the hell did you want an Army Surplus Haze Eliminator for?"

I puffed out my chest. "It's a small gadget with a wooden handle and coloured glass. It was originally used by artillery observers to hold up against the sun, so that they could see enemy aeroplanes coming out of the sun."

"What did you want it for?" asked Sanderson, with furrowed eyebrows.

"We-e-e-ell," I said modestly. I looked down. "There is a total eclipse of the sun in 1999, isn't there?"

Art and I stood up, and let them sort themselves out on the settee as best they could. After drinks of cold water and cold compresses on their foreheads, Bulmer continued.

"Ahem...where was - er - oh yes, you had your Haze thing O.K., but what to do with the rest of the lot...red fire buckets, stirrup pumps, 174 pairs of ladies khaki knickers, 10,000 ball bearings, waterproof coats, gas capes, etc., etc.?"

"You had the stuff stored away for years, waiting for a chance to get rid of it at a profit, and then you had a magnificent idea which, as I've said, you almost deserved to get away with. You re-started a long dormant friction between North and South British Fandom, hoping that open conflict would ensue, and you would be able to dispose of the stuff and at the same time get a fee."

"But how did you....?" I asked.

"Wait," interrupted Bulmer sternly. "It was you who put out that false issue of 'I'...Art cut the stencils on Vince's machine...and you did all the rest of the things which had apparently been done by us Southerners or our buddies here, the Northerners."

The two pairs of fans looked at each other...Shorrocks and Bennett from the North, and Sanderson and Bulmer from the South. They sort of fluttered their eyebrows at each other a mite, a rather ostentatious display of a newly found esprit de corps.

I held out my hands in a gesture of hopelessness. They had everything just pat. The complete works...everything... Could I just manage to salvage something out of the debris with the sheer force of my personality?

"O.K.," I grimaced. "What can I say except to agree with you in every single detail? It was the GDA fostered the ill-being between you two groups. The GDA pubbed all those one-shots, in fact we did everything until the South sent up them balloons."

Bennett looked at Sanderson.

"I thought you said the Goon sent up the balloons, too?"

"I - er -"

"No recriminations, lads," said Bulmer, in his stiff upper-lip voice, "the Goon has admitted everything. And if he'll just give us our money back, well, we'll just let him smoulder there and wonder where he went wrong."

"Where did I go wrong?" I pleaded.

The others looked at each other. Bulmer seemed to make up his mind.

"O.K., this is how we did it. We fell for everything. You had us really convinced that the North were against us, and the Northerners were equally convinced that we were gunning after them. You went to each of us in turn, offering secret weapons, and defences against the other sides secret equipment. Carry on, Ron."

Bennett looked modest, as far as anyone can look modest with crossed eye-patches on.

"We were sitting up on the moors near Harrogate the other day, thinking about things, when suddenly a fan jumped to his feet and rushed over to me. He said he'd been thinking about all the equipment we'd got, and he'd been thinking about the Goon too, and then he realised that he'd been thinking about them because his sub-conscious mind associated them together.

"It was simple then, he said, for he'd been in Northern Ireland when that sale was on, and he remembered you bidding for the Haze Eliminator, and getting all the other 'junk' too."

"You mean...you mean it was...?"

"Yeah. Don Allen was in the R.A.F., and was stationed at the aerodrome concerned. He had the brainwave. I got into touch with my pals from the South, and we agreed to go forward to Stonehenge and then, when you gave the word to start, we all turned on you. A magnificent sight it was, too...."

Bulmer clicked his fingers, and I had no alternative but to give 'em their money back. Foll'd by the merest fluke! I counted out £61.7.8½d, and passed it to Bulmer.

"Look at that," I said, "after all my time and trouble and intrigue, all I've got to show is the paltry sum of one halfpenny, dated 1937."

The others stood up, grinned widely, and crossed to the door.

After the other three had gone, Bulmer stopped, and looked back at Art and myself. A grin crept up the side of his face. He put his hand in his pocket, and I heard the jingle of coins. My heart leapt...was he going to...? No, he wasn't. He put five pennies and a halfpenny on the table.

"What's that for?" I cringed, bewildered.

"You have to get a title for this story, don't you?" he said.

* * * * *

THE FAN

WHO NEVER WAS

I was half-way through page 763 of my reference book on pornography when a rap on the window almost knocked me off my chair. I was working in my bedroom, you see, and although it was only up one flight of stairs, I knew the person who had so rapped must have been twenty-five feet tall. I whipped out my twin plonker guns, switched off the light, drew the curtains back half-an-inch, and saw the head and shoulders of a captain in the Highland Light Infantry staring at me with bulging eyes.

I closed my eyes and shook my head so hard that I heard my eyeballs click. I knew that home brew in the bath had been much too strong. I... and once more the window was knocked, this time much harder, and I threw caution to the wind. I drew the curtains apart, opened the window, and jumped backwards. plonkers levelled, as the officer climbed through, his face red with exhaustion.

"Why didn't you put 'Wet Paint' on that drainpipe?" the kilted figure demanded, trying to hide the vertical green stripe which almost seemed to divide him in two.

"Heck," I said, my trigger finger itching for the slightest move, "folk usually come in via the front door downstairs."

"I never do," the man said, in a cultivated Oxford accent.

"Why are you wearing that Scottish uniform," I asked, trying to show my powers of observation. "and speaking with an Oxford accent?"

"'cos I'm Blake McKendrick of M.I.5" he grinned, trying to wipe the green paint off his nose, "and surely you'll admit it's a perfect disguise."

"I do...I do..." I said quickly. I sensed that M.I.5 were after my services again, after my last triumph. (*Fission in Troubled Waters*).

"Look, Goon," said McKendrick, sitting on the edge of the bed and nervously tucking his kilt around his knees, "something has cropped up again, and remembering the miracles you did for us a couple of years ago, my chief has asked me to contact you with a view to employing the GDA once again."

"The situation is as bad as that?" I said. If I could get him to admit that, the fee would rise accordingly.

He gave with the hunted expression, and licked his lips. His eyes searched out every nook and cranny in the room. I suddenly remembered....

"Blaze," I said, soothingly, "I told you before that my son got rid of his pet duck."

A satisfied smile wreathed his face.

"Yup," I grinned. "I told him ducks were too messy...but watch where you put your hat, you might disturb his pet fleas."

Blaze looked down at me from the top of the wardrobe.

"Hey," I began, indignant, and then remembered that he didn't sub. to HYPHEN. "Look, Blaze. get to the point. I'm busy at the moment but, we-e-all, if Mr. MacMillan wants me, my country comes first."

McKendrick gave his rump a hearty smack, uncrossed his eyes, and spoke in an apprehensive voice.

"The fact is, Goon, we are having trouble at the War Office."

I stuck out my chest.

"This is a kind of record, you know, Blaze," I said amiably, "never cracked a case in ten seconds before."

He looked down at me, incredulous. I reasoned this way...for Blaze to contact me, the trouble concerned fandom, and Sandy Sanderson worked in the War Office....QED....

"The spy is Sergeant H.P.Sanderson," I cooed confidentially, "he's trying to work a posting to Washington D.C. I knew about it ages ago."

Blaze was so flabbergasted that he nipped off the top of the wardrobe and shook my hand.

"What a wonderful web of intrigue you must control," he sighed, "you've even got roots in the War Office...well...well...well.." He shrugged his shoulders and held out his arms in a gesture of complete humility. "If only we'd had you in the war the Germans would never have got away with Operation North Pole, we'd have sent you instead, that would have baffled 'em but good."

His eyes bore a nostalgic gleam, but he shook himself and slapped a hand very hard on his right calf.

"I used to tell them when I was cleaning out the ablutions at Scunthorpe," I said modestly, "I surely earned that Defence Medal. But my fee, if you please."

"No," he frowned, "you haven't actually solved the case, but how close you were! You see, Sergeant Sanderson's office was ransacked."

"He probably lost an APE stencil," I observed dryly.

"Lost an ape stencil?" he panted. He smacked himself between the shoulder blades and clambered on top of the wardrobe again. He literally cowered there...all I could see were two big eyes looking at each other.

"Probably an important one, too," I said, thinking deeply, "could be from the Inchmery Diary."

The eyeballs suddenly became bloodshot.

"An inch merry diary...an ape stencil...Good God, man, pull yourself together," he sobbed. Tears ran in rivulets down the withered veneer of my well-worn wardrobe. His right hand rose up vertically, waving a white handkerchief. "I surrender unconditionally," he breathed. "NOW CALL OFF THOSE BLASTED FLEAS!"

"Come and have a drink, Blaze ol' buddy," I smiled, led him gibbering into the bathroom and filled a tumbler from the home brew in the bath. He took a sip, then a bigger one, and his fears seemed to vanish. He helped himself to a refill...then another.

"I like thish," he dribbled, sitting on the only available seat, "we've followed Sanderson for three weeks, and we know definitely that he isn't the shpy. We thought at first that the offish being ransacked was a double bluff..but here's the important thing...SOMEONE ELSE IS FOLLOWING SANDERSON!"

"Probably Penny Fandergaste with her latest column," I quipped, but I think my sense of humour was too much for him.

"Nunno," he continued, "let me continue. We put an agent to follow the person who was following my other agent who was following Sanderson. Hey, this shtuff's lovely...and when an opportunity presented itself, my second agent, the one who was following the one who was...we-e-ell, you know all that. Blurp. Poddon. Well, my second agent bumped accidentally on purpose into the unknown man, went through his pockets and found something of great significance. But here is the crucial thing. My seniors in M.I.5 want you to find out who is following Sanderson, who ransacked his office, and what the whole thing is all about. There's an old mill by the stream, Nellie Deeeeen. Where we used - hic - used to...er...Mr. Macmillan is very worried about the whole thing."

"Listen, McKendrick," I hissed. "I'll accept that case. But why employ the G.D.A.?"

He gave me a smile which made his ear lobes wobble, and tossed me a card.
"This wash taken from the pocket of the unknown man who was being followed by my second agent who was following the...oh hell! Take it!"
I examined it carefully.
It was a field agent's G.D.A. card!

* * * * *

I had met Sanderson back in '58, so I reasoned that if I was going to work near him I obviously would have to wear a disguise. I was discussing the problem with Colonel Buckshot of M.I.5 in his office two days later.

"The thing is, Bleary," he scowled, knocking the ash off the end of his cigar, "what can we disguise you as?"

"Almost anything," I said, modestly.

"Humph. One essential is that the disguise must of necessity be such as will allow you into the War Office, unnoticed, and yet be inconspicuous outside too."

"I was thinking of a major in the Intelligence Corps," I said.

He stuck the wrong end of his cigar in his mouth and blew smoke rings out of his ears. "I was thinking of a lance-corporal in the Pioneer Corps."

"But surely you don't have lance corporals of the Pioneer Corps working in the War Office, do you?" I gasped.

"Who do you think cleans out the washroom?"

I stood up and turned to go. "No fee would make that worth my while," I said over my shoulder.

"No, no, come back, Bleary, we need you...er...ah...I've got it!" He snapped his fingers and tried to hide the suspicion of a grin forming behind his closely clipped grey moustache. Then he burst out laughing.

"We-e-e-ell?" I hinted.

"The most innocent disguise of the whole lot. Of course, it will require a bit of work, and you'd have to shave off your moustache...but you see, I've just remembered, there is a vacancy for a typist in Sergeant Sanderson's office. How about a lance corporal in the Woman's Royal Army Corps?"

"Good God, sah!" I hissed. "The very idea, the Goon dressed as a woman! What would the Americans think?"

"No one will ever know," he whispered, "and imagine you, a man, in the ladies rest room....why, if I was younger I'd do it myself."

"Well, if you put it that way," I said. "And of course, my fee will have to be doubled...it's a helluva sacrifice shaving this off. But if it has to go, well...."

"Good man," he grunted, and burst out laughing again. "Now, if you'll kindly go up to Room 109X on the top floor, our disguise expert will fix you up. I'll ring down and tell Sanderson to expect a Lance Corporal La Verne in half-an-hour."

* * * * *

I went to Room 109X as a superb example of British manhood, and twenty minutes later I swayed out as a seductive member of the WRACs. The disguise expert had shaved off my moustache, fitted a blond wig on my head, removed all the hairs off my legs with a potent cream, made me put on a specially padded uniform and a nifty hat, and told me the exact location of the ladies rest room.

I went down to the bottom floor via the lift, went to Room 13 as I had been directed, and knocked at the door.

Sanderson opened it.

"Lance Corporal La Verne reporting, Sergeant," I simpered in a cracked falsetto.

His eyes opened wide, then worked into mere slits. He looked me up and down. "Come in, my deah," he said, sort of throbbing like.

I went in. There was a long table with two chairs at it. He sat on one, told me to sit on the other.

"What is your christian name, deah?" he asked, breathing down my neck.

"Daphne," I said coyly.

"Your voice sounds hoarse."

"I left the five barred gate open last night."

"Ah ha, you're the sporty type, are you? he whispered. "Look, Daphne, I'm not a hard man to work for...you play ball with me, and I'll see you get all the time off you want, and I'll buy you nylons and boxes of chocolates and things."

"Please, Sergeant Sanderson," I said primly, "I'm only nineteen, and my father, the Vicar of Wensdale, told me never to..."

"Well, let's get this list of names typed first, and then we can sort of..." and he gave me a meaning wink and passed me two sheets of paper and a carbon.

I hammered away slowly with two fingers at the typer. Three times I ripped the paper up. I definitely didn't want to finish the job, I had my status quo to think of.... And then the situation was saved, because his 'phone rang.

"Oh, who is that speaking? Oh...OK...if it's about fanac I'll certainly come..in fifteen minutes you say...OK...cheerio."

"Listen, Daphne," he said, turning to me and pinching my cheek, "I have to go out for half-an-hour. I'll soon be back, though. Kuchykoo."

He put on his cap, straightened his tie, brushed his boots on the curtains, and departed. I knew that this was my chance. McKendrick had said that Sanderson was being followed, and therefore if I sneaked out behind him, I would almost certainly find out who was following him. I put on my hat, fluffed my curls, shifted the centres of gravity of my padded uniform, and tiptoed out of the door.

I walked down the corridor to the exit, bent down to tie up my shoelaces, and craftily looked up and down the street.

I saw Sanderson striding along. Ten yards behind him was a scruffy figure with sandwich-boards either side of him advertising HAVE KIPPERS FOR TEA TONIGHT, and this character was following Sanderson. Ten yards behind the kipper man was an Indian with a red turban with a big suitcase in each hand. It figured. The man behind Sanderson was the M.I.5 agent watching him, and the Indian behind the agent was the mysterious individual who had presumably been concerned in ransacking Sanderson's office. I looked again, and ten yards behind the Indian was a sweep with a black face and a bundle of rods and brushes over his shoulder. This was obviously the agent who was following the man who was following the agent who was following Sanderson. It still figured.

I straightened up and walked quickly along behind the sweep. I glanced into a shop window and saw a captain of the Highland Light Infantry following me, about ten yards behind. So. Again it all fitted into place. McKendrick was keeping an eye on me, and I was watching the sweep who watching the Indian...but I guess the situation is so lucid in your minds that further explanation from me is superfluous.

And so we walked along until Sanderson turned into 'Joe's Cafe' on the corner of Albemarle Street and Piccadilly.

* * * * *

I will not dwell on the chaotic muddle in Joe's Cafe.

You see, I just had to go in, and all the rest of the agents and counter-agents thought so too. The trouble was, Joe was having a busy day, and most of the seats were taken up. I spotted Sanderson sitting in between Blaze McKendrick and the sweep. I couldn't spot the Indian, but I had other troubles to contend with. Joe, the proprietor, flashed me a saucy look. (Please to remember that I still had that padded uniform on, and the weight of it was dragging me forward at an angle of 45 degrees.) He insisted on giving me the seat in the

establishment. It was exactly behind Sanderson, our backs touched. This was horrible. If he saw me, the whole plot would fall asunder. And if I asked for another seat, or made any kind of disturbance, Sanderson would undoubtedly look round and see me.

I managed to ease the situation, though. The agent with the sandwich-boards was next to me, and I whispered to him that I was getting a draught from somewhere, and although it was rather unconventional and provoked much discussion, he placed the sandwich boards over me like a tent. The place was so crowded that I hoped Sanderson wouldn't investigate me. I ordered egg and chips, which Joe served with much blankness of expression.

But the strain was too much. The boards kept me reasonably safe from observation from Sanderson, but I couldn't see what he was doing, or when he left. And there was bound to be confusion when I stood up.

So I thought for a moment, then took a deep breath, held my nose and submerged under the table. I crawled on my hands and knees in a most undignified manner towards where I thought the exit would be. My journey wasn't wasted. I picked up sixteen cigarette butts, which I pushed into the left breast pocket of my uniform (I could hardly open it, it was stretched so much.) I also garnered three halfpennies and one half of a card with a telephone number on it. I conjectured what would be on the other half, but my job was top government priority, so after twenty minutes I gave up looking for it.

Once outside, I took up a position of observation in a 'phone booth opposite...and realised I'd missed them. The whole blasted troupe of agents had obviously departed whilst I'd been mucking about under the tables. I leapt out of the 'phone booth and literally ran back towards the War Office. Near it, I saw the sweep. I rushed past him and saw my main quarry, the Indian, walk straight past the War Office without a glance. Sanderson had probably gone inside, and I knew there'd be trouble when I reported for duty again, if I reported. Because I could see that I was enmeshed in a conspiracy which would make my other adventures seem tame.

MY chance was too good to be missed. I had to follow the Indian, corner him, and get the facts. It seemed that he was the key to the whole fantastic affair.

* * * * *

I followed that Indian for miles. It was pretty easy to keep tab on his red turban. He called at a lot of stalls in Petticoat Lane, and I made one or two purchases there myself, which assured me that my work on pornography would pass the 2,000 page mark.

But at nine thirty that night, the Indian went home.

My shadowing was perfect, he never had a clue that I was behind him. And my heart pounded like Eric Delaney gone berserk as I tiptoed to the door and knocked.

My, he was big and strong in his vest. He wore grey flannels, and had a towel draped round his neck. I could see that I had disturbed his toilet.

"Yes?" he asked, giving me the once-over, and I am modestly forced to admit he did so with some enthusiasm.

"No!" I answered quickly. "Er, is this where Mr. Blenkinsop lives?"

"No, deah, but come in, honey," the Indian purred. He opened the door wide, and I went in. The place was nicely furnished. No one else was around. He flung the towel over the back of a chair, and bade me sit on the divan. I had to. This was my chance to crack the case.

"Have a drink, my deah," the Indian said. He poured me a sherry in a pint tumbler.

"You naughty man," I hissed, playin' hard to get, "I do believe you are trying to get me drunk."

"No-o-o-o," he said. "It's nice stuff, and I get it wholesale."

"Trade good?" I asked conversationally, as he opened the fifth bottle.

"So so..." he said, and then made a leap across the room and landed next to me on the divan.

"Down, bhoy," I hissed.

"You are boootiful, my deah," he said, "and when you've finished that sixth bottle...."

And then I noticed something. Something which gave me palpitations in triplicate.

"Great suffering Catfish!" I yelled, and whipped off his turban.

"No-o-o-o-o-o" yelled the Indian, pulling off my wig.

"It's...it's..." and I couldn't say it.

"It's YOU, GOON!" the pseudo Indian yelled even louder.

"What are you doing, Art?" I cringed.

We both fell back on the divan, exhausted with our discoveries.

Had I slipped up yet again???

* * * * *

"How did you spot me, Goon?" asked Art later, after he had cleaned himself up.

"Just plain honest-to-goodness observation," I preened myself smugly, "you see, your face was dark brown but your neck and shoulders were white."

"struth!" he hissed. "No wonder they say about you what they do."

"Well, what do they say about me, Art?" I asked casually.

"Ah...er...um...by the way, Goon, what are you doing in London, disguised as a member of the WRAC?"

"I can't tell you, much, Art, because I'm working for M.I.5. But I want to know why you are following Sanderson?"

"I don't know if I can tell you, Goon, because it isn't G.D.A. business. The girl came to the London G.D.A. office, but after she told me her story I decided to work for her for free."

I sank back, a beaten man.

"Great Galloping Ghu's," I sobbed, "no woman can be worth that sacrifice."

"She is," sighed Art. "Heck, I'll take you over and you can meet her, and you'll see what I mean."

* * * * *

We stood in the doorway of a street in North London. It was raining. I had borrowed an old suit and a raincoat from Art. Our vantage point was hidden in the shadows. Suddenly, I felt Art tug at my arm.

"There she is," he whispered.

The girl's high heels tapped on the pavement, and as she walked past I saw her lovely face. She carried her head high, and she relayed an aura of simple dignity.

"Stop here, Goon," hissed Art, "don't let her see you...this area is heavily patrolled, and we don't want her to scream!"

Art stepped from my side, and knocked at the front door of the house she'd entered. After it was opened, there was the sounds of muffled conversation, and he called me over.

"This is the Goon, Joan," said Art, and she proffered a lily-white hand. She was even prettier than I'd thought, and bore a wistful, a long-suffering expression. She invited us in, and over coffee in cute little china cups, Art persuaded her to tell me the full story.

If ever a girl suffered, she did. My Ghod, what Sanderson had done to her was something shocking. She was young, innocent, had never done anyone any harm, and yet she was blighted. No self-respecting person who knew the inner story could look at her without feeling a surge of pity, a more vigorous thump of the pump.

She was seventeen, but that was no excuse.

Art was giving with the paternal technique, and even I put my arm round her and she sobbed on my shoulder.

Look, if you can't stand the strain, if you're of a nervous disposition, don't read further. If you do read it, remember this warning!

You see.....

HER NAME WAS JOAN CARR!!!

She had joined fandom, and after a perusal of fanzines borrowed from the BSFA library, had discovered the awful hoax which Sanderson had perpetrated. Admittedly, from everyone else's point of view, it was a most excellently contrived hoax, but she was Joan Carr, that was her name. She had a most creditable writing technique, but she knew she couldn't go to Conventions and write to people and say she was Joan Carr, because they would laugh. She had gotten by so far in fandom by writing under the pseudonym of Penelope Fandergaste, but her real self was bogged down in a morass of frustration and indignity. She couldn't meet other fans face to face because of her guilty secret. They would laugh at her, revile her, maybe even suggest she was a hoax and was using the name for notoriety.

But why had she asked Art to work for her?

"I cannot tell you, Goon," she said, tears in her eyes. "Art will never reveal the truth either, but I have made up my mind to get my revenge on Sanderson in its most vile form. *I am living for the day!*"

She turned to Art.

"Have you got it?"

Art gave her a look which would have made Ashenden turn to bee-keeping.

"Of course I have, sweetheart," he smiled, and slipped her an envelope.

I would have given my copy of MANA to have read the contents of that envelope.

"Well, Art has fixed you up," I said craftily, "and I feel so sorry for you that I shall not do anything to interfere with your plot. By the way, could you lend me such a thing as a pot of glue?"

She staggered back in bewilderment, and Art nudged me with his boot, but she forced a smile, crossed the room, opened a drawer and came back with a little bottle of gum arabic. I thanked her. She gave Art a big kiss, and I told her I was in charge of the G.D.A., and she shook my hand, and we went out into the cold London night.

"I'll see you anon," I said to Art, and we parted.

I walked along the road for a few moments, until I saw an entry. I whipped down it, opened a back door, and saw a brush leaning against the wall. I got out my penknife and hacked off a few hairs.

I took the tube across to Inchmery, and stood in the doorway. I wiped some gum arabic across my upper lip, and slammed on two sets of hairs from the brush. I pulled up my coat collar, pulled my trilby low, and hammered at the door....

* * * * *

I helped put the baby to bed, tasted some Clarke Home Brew, talked over old times, then said I wanted to speak to Sanderson in private.

"I've just come over from Belfast, Sandy," I said, "and you are in great danger."

"How so, Goon?"

"Your office was ransacked the other day, yes?"

"How did you know?"

"There is a great plot afoot to ruin you," I said sternly. "The fact that I knew your office was ransacked must show you that I know what I'm talking about. For a fee, I'll look after your interests."

He was in great torment. His problem - to trust his future to the Goon. But what else could he do? We discussed terms, and he agreed to try and get me permission to study the pornography collection in the British Museum, the second largest in the world according to Bob Tucker in YANDRO.

* * * * *

Leaving him in a pool of sweat, I took a taxi to Art's place, and stopped the night. Next morning, looking kinda prim in my WRAC outfit, I went back to the War Office.

* * * * *

The day passed without anything really unforeseen happening. Sanderson sat all day with a perplexed expression on his kisser, looking at me out of the corner of his eyes.

I did have a bit of fun in the ladies rest room. Well, I was only there for three hours, and, boy, I saw some smasheroos. One blonde was real spiffing. She asked me if the seams of her nylons were straight, and I said I could tell better if she'd lift her skirt, but she gave me a funny look and went away.

* * * * *

After a week I began to get tired of sitting all day in the War Office watching Sanderson watching me. I didn't see the blonde again, unfortunately.

I had made up my mind to throw the whole job up. I mean, I had gotten nowhere. Nothing had been attempted on Sanderson, and Colonel Buckshot was pressing me for a report, giving the whole story of the exposing of the spy in the War Office. I had provisionally framed a report suggesting better seating accommodation in the rest room, but time was heavy on my hands.

And then, strangely, without giving any notice of his intentions, Sanderson went absent. On the eighth morning he didn't come in.

I sat there scribbling on the blotter when the 'phone rang.

"Sergeant Sanderson's office," I yawned.

"Not any more it isn't," I heard. "This is Sanderson here. Look, Goon, come down to Southampton immediately. Make out a travel warrant, there's some blanks in the top right hand drawer of my desk. I'll have a taxi waiting for you outside the railway station at Southampton. AND FOR GHOD'S SAKE, BE QUICK!

Sufferin' Catfish.

Sanderson had known who I was all the time.

* * * * *

I changed at Art's and took a taxi to Waterloo. I called in a shop en route and purchased a moustache, I felt sorta naked without a mess of hairs under my snooter.

At Southampton a taxi was waiting. A man with a flat cap approached me and asked me if I was the Goon? I nodded, and he said "op in quick, mate" and I 'opped in. After fifteen minutes reckless driving he dropped me at the docks.

Sanderson was waiting for me.

He was in full tropical kit, complete in Field Service Marching Order, with a rifle, boots and two rusty mess tins hanging from his belt. He just looked at me with a frustrated expression on his face. Mutely he turned round.

On his back hung a white pith helmet.

"What gives, Sandy?" I panted.

"Fine mess you made of looking after my interests," he said with disgust.

"See that troopship over there?"

I looked dockwards. A big ship with two funnels, the OTRANTO, with three gangways running up to it, and soldiers were marching up and disappearing into the bowels of the ship.

"Yesh," I said. "I see it. So what?"

"It's going to Christmas Islands, in the middle of the Pacific," he sobbed.

"I'M GOING ON IT! I'VE BEEN POSTED THERE FOR FIVE YEARS!"

"Goodness," I said, aghast. "What will happen to APE?"

"What will happen to my fanac?" he panted.

And then, in a blazing flash of utter genius, I saw it all...the whole horrible plot to deprive British Fandom of Sanderson...the work of an embittered girl labouring under the delusion that Sanderson had wronged her, just because her name happened to be Joan Carr.

I knew exactly what had happened. I knew every move in the whole fantastic

plot. And, as my mind raced onwards, I saw that there was a chance, the slightest chance, to rescue Sanderson.

Sandy looked at his watch.

"I've got to be on that troopship in eleven minutes," he said, "and if you want to see the British Museum's pornography collection - yes, I've fixed it - if you want to see it, I'd better not be on that boat when she sails in...er...ten minutes."

* * * * *

Colonel Buckshot's office looked like a scene from 'Carrington V.C.'...the court martial scene. In fact, as Buckshot jokingly told me before the rest of them arrived, it could quite easily have been a court martial.

Anyway, he sat at the head of the table, and on his right sat Blaze McKendrick, who seemed to be impatient. He had on a sports coat and grey flannels, and looked as though he was all set for a bit of sport. Opposite him sat Sanderson, the three stripes on his uniform freshly painted white. I sat next to Sandy, and Art sat opposite me.

"Well, gentlemen and Goon," coughed Buckshot. "I think everything has worked out well again. You, Goon, have once again successfully investigated a job for the British Government, and this comes from the heart, sah, I don't know how you do it but, by Gad, you get results."

I looked down modestly, and felt my upper lip, glad to find that hairs had started to grow again.

"How did you find out, Bleary?" asked Blaze. I saw a bead of sweat on his forehead.

"Actually," I lied, "I knew all the time that Art here had ransacked Sergeant Sanderson's office, and putting two and two together I deduced that he was after a blank posting form."

"Ah," said Buckshot gravely, "so I order this Thomson chap to be arrested for breaking into the War Office?"

"No, no, you can't do that," I panted. "He should get decorated. You see, he has shown that it is possible actually to get into the War Office. I mean, look at that chart over there, showing the position of all your agents in Russia, if Art can get in, anyone can....no disrespect, Art...but you see what I mean, Colonel?"

Buckshot poured himself a slug of Johnny Walker, and passed the remains of the bottle round for us to sniff it. McKendrick took two sniffs, looked at me.

"You're quite right, sah," he said. "What happened next?"

"Well," I said, "Art telephoned Sanderson at his office, and said that he wanted to speak to him about some illos for APE, and that he'd see him in Joe's Cafe. The entourage of spies and counter-spies followed him, so that no one was watching Sanderson's office. Miss X, this strange girl who had an obsession that Sanderson had wronged her, disguised herself as a member of the WRAC, went to Sanderson's office and obtained a sample signature of his. Art, you see, as local G.D.A. agent, was working for this girl."

Buckshot uncrossed his eyes.

"You mean....?"

"Yes, this girl, Miss X prepared a Form S.34 X, which is an army form requesting a posting overseas. She filled up all Sergeant Sanderson's personal details, and on yet another occasion, also in disguise, she came back here with the completed form and sent it on its way through the proper channels with a request to be posted to the Christmas Islands.

"I actually saw her in the, er, ladies rest room. She wore a blonde wig. Well, the posting request was considered and allowed. The posting orders came through, and Sergeant Sanderson had no compassionate grounds for appealing. In any case, even if he had forced an enquiry, and denied that he had applied for the posting or signed it, well, a perfect replica of his signature was on it, and it would be presumed that he had regretted his earlier request."

"Ah, superb, Goon," said Buckshot. "Now then, we shall want you all as witnesses. We'll prosecute the girl for two cases of illegal entry, for forgery, for uttering a forged document, we can throw the book at her. What's her name?"

Art and Sanderson looked at me with their mouths open, as though they thought I couldn't possibly talk my way out of that one. But I had arranged all that too.

"It wouldn't be wise, Colonel," I said with a crafty smile. "You see, it is possible to bring forward proof that THIS GIRL DOES NOT EXIST! It is possible to provide documentary proof and hundreds of witnesses who will swear she does not exist. Therefore, the case would fall through, and M.I.5 would look, er, stupid."

Buckshot and McKendrick looked at each other and sighed. McKendrick caught my eye and snapped his fingers impatiently.

"Very well, Goon," said Buckshot, "I see we have no alternative. You've tied up all the details very nicely."

"My fee," I hissed, standing up.

"I am prepared to consider anything within - "

"Could you get Sergeant Sanderson posted to that plum position in Washington D.C.?"

"That's a married man's posting," smiled Buckshot, "otherwise - "

Sanderson stood up with a big grin on his face. "The Goon looks pretty good disguised as a woman," he laughed, "and Goon, think of all the fun we could have with Pavlat and Co."

I blushed. "Shucks, Sandy," I said, "I'm not prepared to go that far."

Buckshot dismissed us with a snort of cigar smoke, and we stood up, bowed, saluted, and backed out. McKendrick was standing by the door, looking at me expectantly, and as I sidled past him I slipped a small envelope into the patch pocket of his jacket. He patted it happily, and waved goodbye.

* * * * *

I sat next to Sandy in the lounge at London Airport. We sipped coffee and biscuits, and talked over the case.

"One thing I haven't got quite clear yet, Goon," he said, "is how you managed to arrange the cancellation of the posting in ten minutes."

"I played a hunch," I smiled smugly. "I worked on the theory that McKendrick stuck close to me when we all followed you that day to Joe's Cafe. You may not know it, but I was sitting behind you in my WRAC disguise, and so that you wouldn't notice me I crawled out under the tables. On my way out, I picked up half a torn card with a telephone number on it. When I spoke on the telephone to McKendrick from Southampton, he told me he couldn't alter the posting. I asked him if he had followed me under the tables, he said he had, and I asked him if he found anything and he said, yes, he had, a half card with FIFI IS AVAILABLE FOR ARTISTIC POSES on it. I told him I had the other half with the telephone number on it. You know the rest, it took only six minutes for that Military Policeman to rush up to us and tell you to report back to the War Office. All part of the service, Sandy....er, I got the impression that you knew your typist was the Goon all the time?"

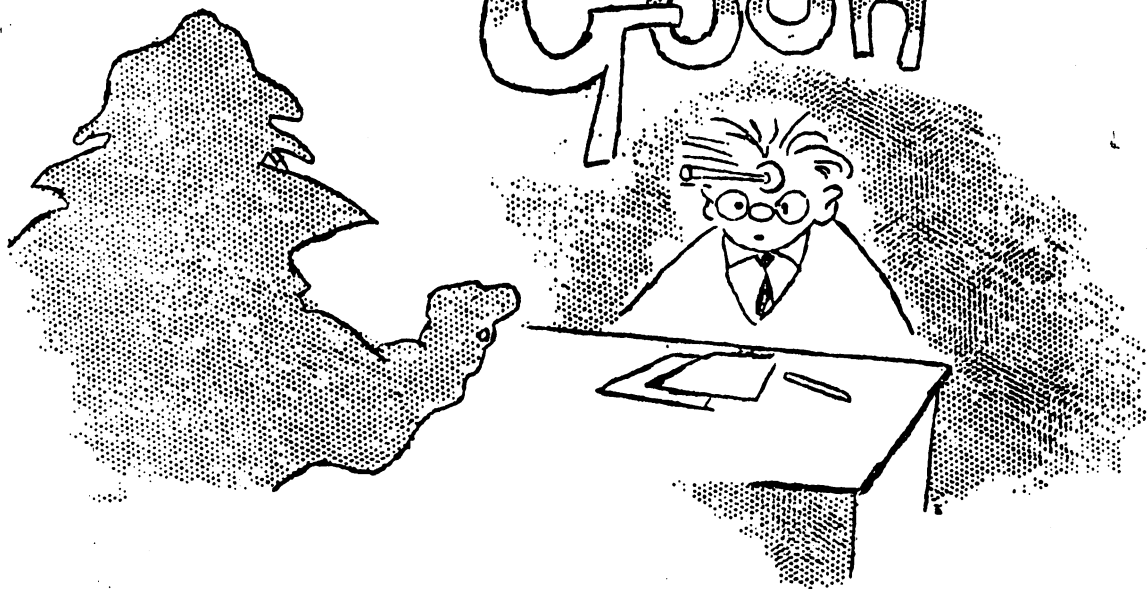
Sanderson smiled, just as my flight number was called. He stood up and walked along with me to the line of passengers waiting to embark on the Belfast plane.

"Remember that night you came to Inchmery, Goon," he laughed. "I didn't know what you'd been doing, but it was obvious you had a false moustache because the bristles were bright red. Once I knew you were in town, clean shaven, and working on the case of the ransacked office, the strange demeanour of my typist, who spent most of her time in the rest room, was explained."

I tried to grin as we shook hands. I walked towards to Viscount, but I didn't look back. Some things are sacred.

* * * * *

The Return of the Goon



1.

It was only a short item...actually, it was written specifically to change the mood of two acts of an opera...from a love scene to a death scene. Puccini's *Manon Lescaut*, to keep the facts in order...but must romantic and moving music...a little classical gem. As it concluded, I sighed. With my right thumb and forefinger I smoothed a vagrant silken strand, it was lilac in colour, on the left lapel of my smoking jacket.

I reached to the ash tray, handled the business end of the ivory cigarette holder, took a deep lungful of smoke. This was living. I almost hypnotised myself looking at the original oil-painting over the Adam fireplace...it depicted Pegasus-type horses, pure white in colour, rising from the foam-topped waves, pale blueish-green in colour...the bodies of the horses changing cleverly into the waves. Possibly difficult for you to imagine, but to me a very moving sight. The work of an unrecognised genius, but I knew it would all change once I'd made my first sale...

I pondered. What to play next? No one had told me, but I had, just the previous day, identified one of the variations of Dohnanyi's *Variations on a Nursery Song Op.25*...it was a 'play' on the theme of the last movement of Brahms's *Second Piano Concerto*. Mine was a particularly good version of the concerto...on the Helidor label...and who better than the Germans to portray the work of a fellow...

My wife entered the Music Room.

"Man to see you," she said.

"Blast," I scolded. "Just going to hear some of Brahms. Who is it?"

She handed me a card. It was the usual business type...something about insurance. "He wrote on the back," remarked my wife. I flipped it over and my heart stopped...

'Blaze McKendrick to you', it read.

"Show him in," I panted. After all these years...good old Blaze...what exciting adventures we'd had together....

2.

He hadn't changed much. One or two grey streaks just above his ears. But athletic-looking, notwithstanding. Usual dress, as I always recalled him...trench coat and trilby. Brown shoes and check socks. He sat down in one of the plum-red chairs.

I gave him a Balkan Sobrani. He lit up.

"I'll give it you straight," he said...with something of a stiff upper lip, "we want you back...Goon."

My heart leapt once more. That's the sort of worn cliché you trip over at the films and on TV...but it's apt.

"That's all in the past, Blaze," I said. "All those exciting adventures we had in the old days have all been perpetuated in my memoirs and, sometimes, when I feel nostalgic, I read them over once more. We had some great times together. remember? But as I say, it's all in the past. The GDA is long forgotten. Sorry."

"Bleary." He said the name with much emotion. "Bleary, we need you. There isn't time for reminiscences. I've been flown over especially to see you. Remember that you worked for M.I.5 several times, and although your methods were unconventional, you never let us down. Now something really big has come to the fore...you are the only one who can assist. Just you. Our best agents have failed, and the Prime Minister thinks that someone is required who doesn't go by the book...someone with drive, initiative, high intellect, drive..."

"Go on," I panted, revelling in the egoboo....

"...and so I am asked to plead...will you come back for one last case...you may think I'm exaggerating but the safety of the whole country depends on your answer."

I reached over and switched the record player off.

"It so happens that I can spare a few days," I sighed. It felt somehow exhilarating to sense the old surge of anticipation as I came face to face with the 'ungodly' (didn't George Charters put it that way?)...to hear once more the dull 'splat' as a plonker thudded against a sweating forehead....

"Yes, yes, I'll certainly work for M.I.5 again...what do you want me to do?"

3.

Later, I went to the Lumber Room. Not a nice name to give a place where hundreds of fanzines were enshrined...to say nothing of what was in the brass-bound trunk. The lock was rusted, so I forced it...it gave quite easily. Only by supreme will power did I stifle a tear as I sorted through the miscellaneous junk it contained...a small bottle of solidified correctine...a bent stylo...a pitted roller off a Gestetner...a small pile of cents and quarters (old RETRIBUTION subs) wrapped in slip sheets...and then, at the bottom of the trunk was an untidy roll of dirty brownish material.

Carefully I pulled the bundle out, blew some of the dust away, and with a rather hard wipe with the side of my right hand I removed the cobweb covering. It was my old G.D.A. trench coat. Moths had been at it. I shook it open and my old battered trilby hat fell to the floor. I must confess this, I had to open a window to allow the dank musty smell to evaporate. I rubbed both the trench coat and the trilby vigorously with a clothes brush, eventually they looked semi-respectable...semi-respectable for a tramp, I mean. I wondered where the old hobnail boots were...perhaps my wife had put them in the shed at the bottom of the garden, for when I sometimes pottered about the half-acre of meadow behind the house.

Yes, they were there alright. I didn't kill the mice, I thought it would be cruel to do so...I found an old pair of football boots, mildewed with age, and put them in place of the hobnails.

When the house was empty, I couldn't restrain the temptation any longer. I

went to the Lumber Room, took off my smoking jacket and purple corduroys, and put on the G.D.A. outfit. I looked at my reflection in the mirror. Yes...the whole vista came before my eyes...the reflection in the mirror changed...I saw myself as I had been years before, a dashing detective...plonker in hand...hmmm...I wondered...where exactly was the plonker? I searched feverishly through the remains of the rubbish in the trunk...yes, there it was, red with rust. I recalled I had oiled it, but with the passing decade...

I fitted a plonker in the barrel...put a plonker in the specially prepared inside pocket of the trench coat, then backed away from the mirror. I had to test...once a lightning draw, enabling me at my peak to shoot off five plonkers before the first one splatted home. Always with dead accuracy.

I went out of the room, smiled to myself as I opened the door casually, as if I wasn't expecting anything. I saw my reflection in the mirror, drew and fired in one slashing movement.

I shook my head sadly as I pulled the plonker from the ceiling.

I would have to practice hard before commencing work with M.I.5 in a couple of days. Maybe I would get plenty of chance on the cattle boat whilst crossing to England....

4.

I did not like the obvious changes in the War Office. Amongst the staff, I mean. Last time I was there, there had been lots of beautiful WAC's gracefully swaying up and down the corridors. Now, it seemed, they had been replaced with senior civil servants, female ones, the frigid sort who, besides not having been married, didn't even take advantage of the two out-of-wedlock pregnancies judiciously (and I feel, rather sportingly) permitted to the Civil Service. And Colonel Bunting...I didn't like him at all....

Blaze took me in to see him. He made Blaze stand. He intended that I should too, but the sole of my left hobnail had come away from the upper, and the assorted flotsam and jetsam which had accumulated round my toes hurt me something shocking. I dragged up a chair, crossed my feet on the edge of his desk. What a relief. Bunting sniffed distastefully, then lit a cigar...a rather strong smelling one.

"This is the Goon, sir," said Blaze, trying hard to squeeze some egoboo into the announcement.

Bunting was fortyish...the keen age for senior military officers. His clipped moustache was in direct contrast to my own uncontrolled, nay, uncontrollable growth.

"Gad, man, you're joking, surely." There was a sneer on his face.

"No, sir. This is the man who solved the case of the spy in the War Office several years ago...the strange happenings at the secret atomic research station before that...he helped to put into orbit the first British satellite containing, er, fanzines..."

"I presume, I hope he's in disguise."

"Well, not actually, sir..."

And then I started to itch. I guessed what it was. First of all those Aberdeen Angus bullocks on the boat across the Irish Sea. Then I was incarcerated with fifteen crates of racing pigeons in the Liverpool-London express train.... The flea was using my middle vertebrae as an obstacle course, and I knew it was just out of reach of my groping fingers. I gave up questing for it, but it was killing me. At last I couldn't stand it any longer. I leapt to my feet, vaulted Bunting's desk, picked up his rolled umbrella, grasped the spiked end, rammed the curved handle down my back and rubbed...hard. I replaced the umbrella against the wall behind the desk, walked back round the desk to my chair. I grinned. What a relief.

I'll never forget the petrified look on Bunting's face. All I could see was the whites of his eyes. He unscrewed a hip flask with trembling fingers, held it upside-down until his Adam's apple bobbed no more.

"I told you he was, er, unconventional, sir," suggested Blaze.

"If he fails on this job, you've lost your pension," hissed Bunting, replacing the limp handkerchief in the breast pocket after feverishly mopping his brow.

"He won't fail, sir," replied McKendrick, not, I'm sorry to say, with as much confidence as I would have liked.

Bunting closed his eyes, shook his head.

"I, er, have an appointment in three minutes with the Director," he panted, "so I'll brief you verbally...at least, I'll give you some instructions. Go to your hotel, read these directions, then chew the paper. It tastes of peppermint, a refinement I introduced when I took over this department. Where are you staying, by the way? The King's Court Hotel?"

"No, I've rented the attic at Joe's Cafe," I replied, snatched the envelope off him, and stuffed it in the inside pocket of my old Harris tweed jacket, given to me by a grateful army when I was demobbed in '48.

I've never heard such a deep and prolonged intake of breath in all my life.

"Better issue him with a .45 Webley," gasped Bunting, "or a .38."

Like I said, I didn't like Bunting.

"I don't need a .45 or a .38, old cock," I grated. I stopped at the door, swivelled, drew, and landed a plonker with deadly accuracy in my old favourite place, right slap in the middle of the wrinkled forehead.

Last I saw of Bunting, he was still half-standing behind his desk, his mouth open, eyes wide, face a detergent white, plonker rampant. He looked like a unicorn looking for a Coat of Arms....

5.

The attic was shaped like a triangle. My small iron bed was against the perpendicular wall, at least, the head of it was, and my feet, big toes vertical, pointed to the 45 degree angle roof. But it was warm. I switched on the crude bedside lamp (a 25 watt bulb somehow screwed into an empty VAT bottle) and opened the envelope Bunting had given me.

It would take too long to print several closely typed pages (even if I could remember them) but I'll give you a quick precis. This British agent named Michael Hawkins (maybe that was a code name) had infiltrated into East Berlin, disguised as an East German policeman. He paid a nocturnal visit to a house which he knew was used by Red secret agents as a sort of spy transit camp...a clearing house for information...a place for agents to rest, and get kitted out for operations against the West. Why he did it wasn't explained.

All Hawkins found was an empty house. The premises had obviously just been vacated, presumably word had gotten out about what they were being used for, probably (and this was hinted) from a senior East German security official who had gone West, and I mean that in the nicest sense. Hawkins did a quick scuttle round the place, and didn't find anything. In fact, little less than an hour after he left the place burned down, probably from a time incendiary contraption. But Hawkins did find one torn scrap of paper under a rug, where it had fallen and had been swept. A photostat copy was attached to the papers Bunting had given me. There were a few words on it, but to me it was obvious what it was. Along the straight edge were two small pin-type holes, just under half-an-inch apart. A staple had once fitted there. Franking marks could also be seen, sort of wavy lines, and even the corner of a stamp...an English 3d. stamp. The words were "X after your name means this is the last issue you get until you do something".

That was just about the sum total of the 'meat' of the pages...which, incidentally, didn't taste like peppermint at all, more like blotting paper. I finally ripped the pages up small and dropped 'em down the back of the skirting board at the bottom of the wall, where it had warped outwards about an inch.

One more thing I've forgotten. Someone, presumably Bunting, had scrawled not too neatly... 'Your job - find out who posted this'.

Several things became clear. The scrap of paper Hawkins had found came from a fanzine. I was positive of this. This explained why I had been brought on the case...my connection with fandom had been the reason for my working for M.I.5 before.

But just a moment. That was too easy. Suppose all that was wanted was to discover who had sent the fanzine...and make no mistake about it, Bunting knew it was a fanzine...what better way than to shanghai a local London fan and, after signing the Oath of Secrecy, get him to work through his fanzine collection and see if he could come across its brother. After all, I hadn't been active in general fandom for a number of years, and although it would have been relatively simple for me to discover what fanzine it was and who had sent it, it wasn't by any means, as Blaze McKendrick put it, a situation where 'the safety of the whole country depends on your answer'. Nothing in Bunting's instructions had intimated that the work was even urgent. QED, McKendrick had been exaggerating to make certain that I took the case. But why me, when I had retired from fannish detecting...and also from active fanning?

I had no idea...then. I couldn't have realised what a fantastic game Bunting was playing. But I didn't go to sleep immediately...and it wasn't just because of the blasted flea which was still playing hide and seek up and down my blasted vertebrae.

6.

McKendrick came to see me at 10.30pm the following night. I was lying in bed reading or rather looking at the latest issue of *La Vie Parisienne* which a London BNF had lent me that morning.

"Take a chair, Blaze," I said, folding the magazine and putting it under the pillow so that I could forget about gals for a few moments.

He did so, looking warily about him.

"It's O.K., I killed the flea this morning," I told him, to try and calm him down.

"Did you...?"

"Yeah. Took me less than half-an-hour. You know, Blaze, I'm not complaining, because I'm asking a big fee for my services, but you could have found out which fanzine it was without my help. Actually, it was the back page from the new Birmingham fanzine COSY FAAN TATTY...published by a nice young lad named Brian Fleming, of 147 Tavistock Street, Shirley. He has trade with at least one fan in West Berlin. That's all Bunting wants to know, isn't it...eh?"

I knew it wasn't, but I wanted to get the facts. I knew Blaze well, and it was transparent that he was itching to tell me something, but that Bunting had told him not to. I knew he wouldn't...he couldn't...but I was going to try just the same.

"Not exactly," said Blaze, rather coyly. "That was just a preliminary objective. Now, Bunting wants you to discover why the fanzine, or at least that portion of it, was lying in the spy house in East Berlin?"

"How the hell am I going to do that?" I countered.

"That's your problem. Perhaps it would be a good idea to start at the Birmingham end."

"Another thing," I said. "Why is Bunting having me followed?"

"He isn't," snapped Blaze. I got the impression that he gave a truthful answer, to the best of his knowledge, but that he regretted answering so swiftly that he didn't have time to think what he was saying.

"I was definitely followed today," I repeated. It had been the two man job...you know? One man blatantly shadowing so that the first impulse was to try and shake him off. That way, all your attention was on him, and the number two man was surreptitiously in there pitchin' just the same. To be honest, I really feel they had a three-man job, the first blatant, as I said, the second one very good but just ducking out of the way a slight fraction too late...I never did see the third, I only suspect there was one.

"I'd say it was imagination, Goon," said Blaze pensively. "No one knows you're in London except M.I.5."

"I need some cash," I said. "It cost me fifteen bob at the garage this afternoon."

He handed me a bundle of notes. I guessed that he was going to give them to me anyway...I'd just reminded him of it before his trained mind reached that particular detail.

"What were you at the garage for?" he asked.

I shrugged. Actually, I'd decided that my plonker gun was obsolete, at least, the spring wasn't powerful enough. It was O.K. for short range work, but I envisaged something with longer range. The garage attendant, after he'd taken the aspirin, agreed to fit a new barrel with a three inch long, half-inch diameter steel coil spring. I didn't know how powerful it was, but I had a pretty good idea it was potent.

"Sure you won't take the .38?" McKendrick suggested, I might even say he almost pleaded.

"Nossir," and then I unfolded *La Vie Parisienne* again...

McKendrick took the subtle hint. "I've only one thing to say," he breathed..."be careful...I cannot say any more, but just be careful."

He put his right hand on my shoulder, and gripped firmly, as if to impart some of his vastly superior physical strength. I'd never known him to be so thoughtful for my welfare. Of course, the other capers had been comparatively mild fannish escapades...this job smacked of a bunch of Reds in the background...

Tomorrow, anyway...it was a few short hours away, and I guessed I'd have to map out a plan of campaign...it was easy to guess why the fanzine had been found in the house...what concerned me more (and I'm sure Bunting had the same query in mind) was who had sent it for the purpose for which it had obviously been intended.

It would be relatively easy to...woosh...an untouched photograph of a dancing girl...to think I'd cancelled my order a couple of years previously...

7.

The clerk rapped the door gently. He was effeminate, but it wasn't his fault. He was an expert code decipherer. On hearing a grunt he sidled in, dropping a sheet of paper on Major Smerkov's desk top.

The major glanced at it briefly, although his keen mind had, in that instant, remembered it for all time. Every word. He had that sort of memory. He looked up at the clerk. He tapped his right forefinger at the *Daily Mail* crossword puzzle. The big one. He did it every day. He even glanced at it before dealing with the official mail. It helped his study of English...both the language and the people. He said it helped him in his job. He did well in his job.

"Can't get this one," he said. "Clue...match the devil...seven letters."

"Lucifer," said the clerk, the corner of his thin lips twisting upwards.

"So," Smerkov pondered. He pushed the torn corner of the paper with the crossword puzzle on it under the green blotting paper. He looked again at the message the clerk had given him...he didn't read it...it helped his thoughts actually to have personal contact with the problem which had priority.

"So," he said pensively, once more. "Send a message to 'K' in Birmingham. Tell him to put 'J' on this new agent G.Bleary...play it along for a couple of days...let me know the situation before doing anything final."

He scribbled the file number on the message, dropped it in the filing tray. He pressed a button on the dictaphone. "Memo...start a new file on agent G.Bleary of M.I.5. It'll be a thin file."

He allowed himself a generous grin. Did they think he was as stupid as that?

8.

I knew the address of the Birmingham Science Fiction Club...478 Bristol Avenue. I had noted it as I'd flipped through the pages of COSY FAAN TUTTY. I

also knew the names of the prominent Birmingham fans - there were five of them. It was Tuesday, and this was the night for their weekly meeting. I didn't know any of them, hadn't even corresponded with any of them, but I told you I hadn't been active in fandom for years. The London BNF had told me they were a talented group, and I had to admit that COSY FAAN TUTTY was as good as any fanzine I'd ever seen, appearance-wise, anyway.

It was possible that some of them had heard of me...they had an extensive fanzine collection, so I was forced to adopt the disguise of a normal man. This didn't prove too difficult...a new sports coat and flannels and a pair of size 9 TUF shoes...and, most important of all, my moustache was trimmed down to Clark Gable dimensions.

I pushed the door open, mounted the stairs, knocked, and pushed the door open.

Comfortable room, Gestetner in the middle of it, sort of throbbing...fanzines in a bookcase lining one wall...piles of prozines in the corner...four fans there...three young men and an absolutely beeeootiful girl. She wore a white blouse, with the top button undone. Her eyes lit up when she saw me standing nervously on the threshold.

She crossed to me, holding out a white hand with a slight trace of duper ink on it.

"Welcome," she said. "You are a fan?"

"Yes and no," I smiled coyly. "I'm actually in the army, and was stationed in Northern Ireland. I called to see Willis several times, and when I was posted back to England he said I should call to see you. I like your fanzine...a very unusual but fannish name."

She introduced me to the others, and before I knew where I was I'd bought a couple of mint Vargo Statten's and AUTHENTIC #37, which I was assured was a collector's item. It was pleasant to absorb some of the keen fannish atmosphere, and before an hour had gone by I was cutting stencils like mad. Once, when someone mentioned CRY OF THE NAMELESS folding, it was actually on the tip of my tongue to say I'd been in the den where it was dupered. It was only the feel of the girl pressing herself against me (and I'd got my jacket off at the time) which saved the day. I sensed that this could be a joyous investigation. I turned to smile at her, and her lips were nibbling my ears. Fandom, as I'd known it of yore, had never been like this.

Someone suggested that as the next issue was almost ready, why not make a night of it and finish it off...there were enough fans to do it in an hour or so? Rarely, I'm sure, has such a fannish sessions happened, with every aspect of fandom exposed for all to see...and to wonder at. The last stencil being cut, with ribald remarks from the rest as I applied copious corflu...preliminary churning of the crank, then the final 'thrum-thrum' as the roller flashed out the nicely dupered pages...the 'thwack' as the finished pages were automatically bumped into piles for collating...the rhythmic 'boing' as the stapler bit into the pages....

The envelopes were already addressed, and whilst the a young neo nipped out for fish and chips, we completed the job. They each took a bundle to post, and therefore paid the costs of postage individually, a most democratic fan group if ever I saw one.

The girl was called Petal. Damn silly, maybe a nickname, because she certainly had that sort of complexion. Maybe it was my maturity, plus my unusual smartness, but I asked if I could see her home, and she flashed her long eyelashes and said 'yes'. We caught a double-decker Midland Rd bus, she had a flat in Hall Green, on the southern outskirts of Birmingham.

9.

The flat was comfortable...luxuriously furnished...incredible, I thought, considering she was a clerk at one of the stores in the city centre.

We dumped our piles of fanzines on the table...she put the record-player

on, flamenco-type jazz and all that. Innocently, I asked what the orchestra was. As she gave me that inscrutable smile which females manage so well, she switched on a subtle wall light, and nodded for me to turn off the 150w. bulb hanging from the centre of the room. I gulped.

"Back soon, deah," she cooed.

I lost interest in the flamenco...I felt that things were getting out of hand. Readers of my factual narratives when the GDA was in vogue will no doubt recall that I'm O.K. as long as I'm in control, but I get somewhat bewildered when things go at too fast a pace. Even before she came back into the room, I knew she'd be wearing a negligee...men get that sixth sense in such circumstances, don't they?

She stood in the doorway, big eyes sparkling like the Pole Star on a freezing cold night. Bad comparison, that, because she certainly wasn't cold.

Torrid, I think is the word. Cleverly, she'd left the light on in the bedroom. She'd half-closed the door. The concealed lighting, therefore, showed Petal in silhouette form. Like, the negligee was transparent...and just about level with her thighs...excuse me a sec, phew, that collar was too tight, sorry, where was I?...yes, level with her thighs was a gossamer-thin line which I took to be the hem of the Baby-Doll nightie.

As I said before, fanac was never like this.

"As soon as I saw you," she throbbed, "I knew you were a real MAN."

"Tell me about the Birmingham Science Fiction Club," I breathed, as she swayed towards me. Heck. She sat on the plush settee next to me, and put her arms round my neck. She was warm. Bit my ear, playfully putting the pink tip of her tongue at the corner of my left eye. I took a deep breath. And then the tornado struck...

After the burst of thunder, the main lights came on. McKendrick was standing at the door, at the sides of which the hinges still quivered. Behind him were two obvious agents, complete with big boots, fedora

hats, trench coats and drawn .38's. Behind the three of them stood a matronly woman.

McKendrick's eyes opened wide. "My God, Bleary," he said in a shocked but somewhat pleased voice, "you've beaten us to it again. How did you know she was 'J', a top Red agent?"

I stood up, and Petal, er, 'J' dropped off my lap. Her negligee flared, but I wasn't watching closely, you can tell how surprised I was...

"I...er..." and then had one of those rare flashes. I have one about twice a year. This was a wow, if it worked. I had nothing to lose if it didn't. I leapt over the settee, sorted through the fanzines to be posted...

"Miss Rogers, take her to the bedroom and get her dressed," ordered Blaze, whilst I searched. He handed her the .38, and posted an agent outside the door.

Ah ha! One of the fanzines was addressed to Berlin.

"Guess you'll find a micro-dot under that postage stamp, Blaze," I hissed, praying like mad. He shoved the fanzine in a pocket, his eyes were glazed.



Petal came out again, held firmly by the arm by Miss Rogers. She didn't say anything...just looked sort of strained and white...

10.

Major Smerkov finished the most recent 'Daily Mail' crossword, and played a tattoo with his pencil on the edge of the desk. That last clue, or rather, the last one he'd been left with, was a classic. 'This word must be spelled correctly - twelve letters'. He hoped there was such an English word as 'orthographic'. He never checked in the Russian-English dictionary. This would be an admission of defeat.

The clerk came in with a message. There was just the slightest suggestion of a thin crimson line around his lips.

"Is there such an English word as 'orthographic'?" asked Smerkov.

"Yes... it means correct or standard spelling...this has just been sent from Birmingham."

He went out. Smerkov looked at the message...and his hands suddenly became rigid...fingers clenched...until they were white.

"Bleary isn't a stooge after all," he said softly to himself.

He rapped the table some more with the pencil...sharply this time. He flipped the dictaphone switch. "Igor, send this to 'K'...'Eliminate' Bleary. Put TSR 2 documents in Cache 17. Await further orders." When you've done that, Igor, send a shorthand writer in with the Bleary file."

11.

The situation had become static. I had returned to the attic in London, and for a couple of days I just hung about waiting for Blaze to contact me. Bunting especially had commended me for my capture of 'J'...although frankly, it was all a mystery to me. The fact had to be faced that 'J' was a top communist agent, and if M.I.5 were under the impression that I, personally, had brought off a superb coup by 'getting on' to her, and were more than profuse in their praise, and promised me a gratuity. I had been around long enough to play along and pretend that I knew what I'd been doing all the time. It's a great luxury when you're able to do that. Speaks well for one's instinct...one's subconscious appraisal of a given situation.

But things were slack. Blaze had given me another roll of five-pound notes, so I decided to take myself out and see some of the sights of London. Specifically, I wanted to go to one of the strip clubs I had heard so much about. Once again I disdained wearing my GDA outfit. I preferred the smartness of a black blazer and charcoal-grey flannels, with still a pencil-thin moustache, and with ox-blood coloured sandals. I reasoned that if disguise was necessary (and, let's face it, I was still working for M.I.5) that was as good as any. No one who knew me would recognise me.

I climbed down the stairs, out via the back door, and along the narrow street. I signalled a taxi.

"A strip club," I said, slipping the driver a broad wink, and folks have told me that such a wink, given by me, is very lecherous.

"Surely, sir," he said, smoothly gliding away from the kerb. "Yer interested in wimmin, sir?" he asked confidentially, negotiating the traffic with practised ease.

"Oh, er, ye-e-es," I confirmed.

"Glad to hear about that, sir," he said. "I get photographs from Sweden, y'know."

"Any swaps?" I asked conversationally.

"Heh heh," he chortled, in appreciation of my ready wit. "Got a smasher this morning...Denise...44:18:21...she's a real wow."

I reached forward and let the window down a couple of inches. I let the cool air play around the sweat on my brow. "44:18:21?" I repeated incredulously.

"s'fact," he said. His fingers were clenched on the wheel.

"You wouldn't have the photo's with you?" I asked. Even my worst enemies

would have to admit that I'm an optimist.

"No," he replied.

"44:18:21..." I whispered, "er, artistic poses, of course?"

The taxi swerved a little...and he let his window down, inhaling deeply. That was enough confirmation for me..

"You...er...don't happen to live around here?" I panted. "I mean, we could call round, I'll pay the extra fare, and give you a good tip, too."

"We-e-ell. I suppose so. I mean, a real enthusiast isn't often met. O.K....if you insist."

Took us ten minutes. I wiped the sweat off my palms onto the knees of my slacks, as we climbed the stairs to his room. It was surprisingly well furnished for a taxi driver, I thought. It seemed somehow incongruous to see the Wedgwood wall plaques over the wide brick fireplace...the Japanese silks hanging from the walls. I was jolted back to reality by the jab of what turned out to be a Webley revolver.

"Got you, Bleary," he hissed. I had forgotten to bring my reinforced plonker, but it wouldn't have mattered, he was so deft in handling the Webley, it wavered nary an inch...and soon he had me trussed up like a (to flog another well-worn cliché to death) turkey. There was just nothing I could do.

"Sorry I haven't a photo of Denise to show you, as a final consolation," he purred. He seemed pleased with himself...and then damned if the door didn't burst off its hinges, and there, like the demon on a pantomime stage, stood Blaze and his two stooges. In a second the pseudo taxi driver was handcuffed and being led away, muttering curses.

"How do you do it, Bleary?" breathed McKendrick, shaking his head from side to side..."joking aside, how the hell do you do it?"

"How do I do WHAT?" I screamed.

"How do you manage to capture these commie agents?"

"Capture them?" I breathed. "Of course...well...if you'll untie me, and not just stand there, I'll tell you all about it. Actually," I lied, "you were seven seconds behind schedule."

D'you know...honestly...I think he believed me.

12.

Smerkov had his own room at Security Headquarters. His family lived in Smolensk. but it wasn't often he got to see them. It was just after midnight when he'd heard the urgent tapping at the door. He put on his rather austere dressing gown, yawned, crossed to the door and opened it. His face grew ashen behind the slight suggestion of stubble. It was Ivor, the clerk, the effeminate one. He didn't ask the clerk in, but gave a brusque..."Well, it had better be important."

"It is," smiled the clerk, his usual puppet-like smile...puppet-like in that it was fixed, teeth showing, as if controlled by a hand stuffed up the back of his tunic.

Smerkov took the paper. He closed the door hurriedly. He didn't want word to get around that the clerk was seen making assignments at his door early in the morning. Thing was, the clerk was so blasted efficient.

He lay on the bed, looked at the paper...looked and read, and then his eyes were unseeing. So, it had happened...the thing dreaded by all secret service directors - the utter disintegration of his organisation. The message had come from Moscow...a reference to the B.B.C. Overseas News where it had been reported that a Russian spy had been captured in London by M.I.5. The message from Moscow asked Smerkov what he was going to do about getting the TSR 2 documents from England, now that he had no agents left?

Smerkov had no alternative. An associate controlled the Cambridge Group, and he could have got one of their operatives to pick up the documents from Cache 17, but that meant revealing where Cache 17 was, but it was also unsporting in secret service groups to borrow an operative when you'd lost all

your own in enemy territory. Other chiefs didn't like it.

He picked up the red telephone, called a captain in East Berlin, arranging for his passage through the tunnel to West Berlin the following night.

He lay back on the bed, hands behind his head, in the darkness...thinking. He was close to ruin ...but he could salvage everything by going to London, getting the TSR2 documents from Cache 17...and providing the final touch to the coup by disposing of G.Bleary.

13.

I wanted to return to Belfast. I daren't be away from my mundane work any longer, and even though I had done nothing myself to capture the two commie spies, McKendrick seemed to go out of his way to lavish egoboo on me. I'd gotten another gratuity, and so extreme was Blaze's hero worship that it eventually began to sink in; maybe I had done all the groundwork, maybe I had led M.I.5 to the two top spies who had so cleverly and quietly financed the Birmingham Science fiction Group to enable them to send secret information by microdot to West Berlin.

But Blaze said that Colonel Bunting didn't want me to return home. He gave express instructions that I was to stay in London for a while...there was some subtle hint that I'd be contravening the Official Secrets Act...you all know that I'm interested in visiting old castles, but I wasn't keen to inspect the Tower of London without being able to get out again afterwards.

So I stayed in London...I stayed at the attic...I read *Tropic of Cancer* four times without sleep in between...took me seventeen hours, that time of course including five cold showers. Again, I sensed I was being shadowed, by whom I knew not, and I must confess cared not. I made sure my plonker was well oiled, and slipped out of the shoulder holster with speed.

One day it occurred to me that I hadn't tested the new plonker, now that I'd had it re-sprung. I crawled on to the roof from the attic window...found myself amongst smoking chimneys. I sat for a moment, it was lonely up there...then, following the sound of traffic from down below, I crawled on my hands and knees for several yards across several roofs, then looked below me.

A policeman was standing in the middle of busy cross-roads, directing traffic. His large blue helmet seemed to hypnotize me. It must have been at least one hundred yards away, a much longer range than any known plonker was capable of. I took my time, I aimed high, allowing for the extra power and the distance, and the fact that I was aiming below the horizontal.

I squeezed the trigger, and the plonker gun leapt in my hand. I lost sight of the missile, but I kept my eye on the helmet, which suddenly bucked in the air. The policeman leapt about three feet into the air, and a jumble of cars met headlong at the intersection.

I didn't hear the sound of the collision, though. Tiles started to rain down over me, and accompanying the fusillade was a loud 'crump'.

14.

"You must have left the gas on," said Blaze earnestly..."it's easily done...you went out for a moment, and due to instantaneous combustion a spark blew your room up. It's as simple as that."

"But why the publicity?" I asked, bewildered.

I pointed to the *Daily Mirror*, which had on the front page a story about an explosion at a rooming house where a spy was living incognito.

"That's...that's to satisfy a sensation-seeking public," said Blaze quickly, as if trying to change the subject, "...er, where were you, by the way?"

"Testing my plonker. I aimed at a policeman's helmet from one hundred yards and knocked it off, first plonk."

He cleared his throat.

"Any chance of my being allowed to go home?" I asked.

"Soon, I think," he said...slowly, as if considering..."not long now."

15.

"Darling!"

The voice throbbed. It was sort of husky.

"Er...yes?" I said down the 'phone. It was 1.30am...I was at an hotel Blaze had recommended...the 'phone call had woken me up. I hadn't quite gained full control of my thought processes..."yes, this is darling."

"Why didn't you come over tonight? I've been waiting for you."

"ME?"

"Yes, hunk. You."

"I don't know who you are, do I?" I hissed. What a voice!

"But I know who you are...I'm waiting for you, if you want to come."

I didn't answer immediately. I was tying my boot laces.

"We-e-e-ell," I said, trying to put on my tie with the receiver cradled under my chin.

"Think what a wonderful time we could have," the voice said. "I'm only seventeen years old, and very inexperienced."

"Coming," I said, and rammed down the 'phone. I was half-way down the corridor when I suddenly remembered I hadn't asked where she was. Fuming at my lack of control, I walked despondently back to my room again. I'd just ripped off my tie when the 'phone rang again.

"Darl..."

"Don't go over all that again," I snarled. "Where the, er, where are you, angel?"

"Flat 23B, Andover Court, W.1."

"Be there in ten minutes...quicker if I can't get a taxi."

I got one, though....

16.

It was dark in the corridor. I struck a match on the wall, and wandered from door to door until I came to 23B. I stood outside it, in the darkness. Maybe it was because it was early in the morning, and silent, but somehow I felt uneasy. I knocked the door gently, and was surprised at the ease with which it swung inwards at my seductive touch. I put my head into the space where the door had been.

"It's me," I whispered, trying to give my voice a suave French accent.

I heard bed-springs twang, and my heart leapt.

I reached my right hand tentatively forward, let the fingers creep to the right, searching for the light switch. I found it...flicked it down.

A soft light flowed from a bulb secreted somewhere in the wall, throwing a light upwards and allowing it to reflect from the ceiling. A long shape was stretched on the bed.

I tiptoed forward, my hobnails noiseless on the heavy pile. I reached the bed.

"Goon Bleary....spy?" I heard from behind me. I felt chilled, as though someone had placed a lump of refrigerated cod against the back of my neck.

I turned very slowly, the menace in the voice suggesting it would be

a good idea.

I could tell he was a Russian...the cheekbones and the eyes. The gun was German, though, a Luger.

"I...er..." Sometimes I find myself stumped for words. This was one of them.

I turned to look at the bed. The shape was still there...I prodded it gently, but it didn't move.

"Two rolled blankets," sneered the Russian. "I'm Smerkov."

I scratched my head. A fan feud was about the most violent thing I'd ever actually faced. This seemed so flicking unreal. Was it really Willis? Was the whole thing a gigantic hoax?

"So you're the agent who captured my top operatives," sneered Smerkov. "Well, I've got you, and I've also got these."

He held up a brief case. I had no idea what he was nattering about. I was tempted to say to him 'Wipe that Smerkov your face', but I knew if it was really Willis he'd expire on the spot with that superb example of my ready wit.

"Take your gun out gently and drop it at your feet."

"Gun?" I said. I was incredulous. "I've only got a plonker."

"You've only got a plonker?"

For the first time I saw a flicker of doubt come into his eyes. Slowly, I reached inside my jacket and withdrew the plonker, somewhat red with rust, rubber sucker rampant. His eyes were like roulette wheels, both in size and movement...the left eye clockwise, the right eye anti-clockwise. He couldn't help himself. The Luger wobbled, and I saw I wasn't ever going to get another chance. I fired from the hip, the plonker bucked again, and like a sliver of light the missile shot across the room and with a 'phuttt' landed, as always, slap in the middle of the forehead, an inch and a half above the bridge of Smerkov's nose.

I'll never see another face like that one. I've seen bewilderment many times (especially when I look in a mirror) but never such a perfect representation of it.

Then a body hit the door hard outside, and it jolted Smerkov back to reality. The Luger jerked, he fired one round, and everything went black...

17.

Everything went black because he'd shot the blasted light out. Then there was a confused sound of fighting and cursing. I could see it was no place for me, so I felt for the curtains, sneaked behind them, and felt for the window frame. I hefted upwards...I knew the window ledge was about 20 feet above the ground, but I didn't care. Then there was another shot, I suspected from the Luger.

So I jumped.

I landed on a man. A brief case fell from his fingers. As I started to sprint away, hobnails smacking hard on the pavement, I went back for the briefcase. It was purely instinctive. I still don't know why I did it...at the time I suppose I must have thought it contained pornography.

18.

Bunting's head was swathed in bandages. A crutch leaned against the end of his desk. The right eye was closed...a corona, deeply purple in colour, surrounded it. The left eye had a sort of rainbow effect around it. The nose, I thought, had been smaller the last time I'd seen him. When he opened his mouth to speak, I saw that a front tooth was missing.

"So it was you, Bleary," he mouthed...it seemed to hurt him to even

open his mouth, or perhaps just his expression showed what he thought of me.

"So help me, Bunting," I rasped, "how the hell was I to know that you were passing under the window when I jumped?"

I handed over the brief case. He passed it to a uniformed captain who struggled hard not to grin as he took the brief case out. He didn't come back.

"You don't know what's in the brief case, do you, Bleary?" asked Bunting.

"Copies of the most important of the TSR 2 specifications," I leered.

"Do you know what they deal with?" he asked. I couldn't tell whether it was a frown of annoyance or sheer physical pain which caused his head to twitch.

"Sure. Any aerophile should know," I said. "The initials stand for 'Tactical Strike Reconnaissance', a revolutionary new British warplane, with a speed twice that of sound, with a range of 2,000 miles, which means it can fly an H-bomb to Moscow, and then get a third of the way home again before its fuel runs out."

Bunting took a quick slug from his hip flask.

"Er...excuse me, sir," interrupted McKendrick, who'd been standing silently behind Bunting, "can Bleary return home now?"

"He can go. No need for a travel warrant to be made out...I'll pay." He handed me a ten pound note. Then another envelope. It was full of folding money.

"Your fee is in the envelope," he hissed. I grunted.

"You don't seem satisfied?"

"I was expecting pornography," I observed.

I held out my hand. He shook it. It felt like a piece of cold putty.

19.

I sat in the airport lounge, chatting to Blaze.

"I guess your methods shook Bunting," said Blaze, not unkindly.

"Yep, I was sort of on the ball, wasn't I?" I said. There was no need to excuse my seeming lack of modesty. Blaze knew that I was naturally modest. "I get the idea I was a sort of clay pigeon?"

"Correct. I tried to give you hints, but I couldn't do so directly, otherwise you'd have been on the alert. Your behaviour had to be completely natural. You shook Bunting, though. My God, when you jumped on him and took the TSR 2 documents, he thought he'd be sent to the Tower for dereliction of duty. When he eventually heard it was you, he was torn between hatred for you and thankfulness that the situation was saved."

"Of course, I knew the TSR 2 documents were in the brief case," I lied, "but I thought it was another Red agent escaping with them, that's why I decided to pounce."

He gave me a smile which suggested that he didn't believe me, and I gave one back which showed that I thought that he didn't know that I knew he didn't believe me.

"This is what happened, Bleary," McKendrick explained. "Bunting set everything up so that you got the credit for catching 'J' and 'K'. This had the effect of eliminating one complete cell in England, but at the same time the documents were hidden somewhere, known as Cache 17.

"Naturally, Bunting had to get the TSR 2 documents back again. The only way was to set you up as the hero of the smashing of the spy cell. Smerkov had to collect the things from Cache 17, and at the same time to eliminate you to appease his own authorities.

"So Bunting let out subtle hints to double-agents to make sure

Smerkov knew all about you and your movements. You were followed all the time, sometimes by us and them at the same time. Then Smerkov himself came over. He had to, otherwise it was Siberia. Smerkov thought he'd got you with the plastic bomb, but the way we splashed your escape in the newspapers served to make Smerkov even more determined to complete the job by disposing of you. We have it on good authority, via a double agent, that Smerkov planned to take you back to Russia."

"No-o-o" I panted.

"Yeah. And I guarantee that if it hadn't been for the TSR 2 papers, Bunting would have let him take you. See how it is? In order to snare Smerkov he had to give you the credit for the capture of 'J' and 'K'. The final coup was the capture of Smerkov, which we affected, and then he planned to return to the War Office in great triumph, bearing the TSR 2 data. He wanted to grab the egoboo. That's the word, isn't it?"

I nodded.

"When in fact it was you who returned to the War Office with the documents. That was the final humiliation for him."

"Ah well," I philosophised. "Egoboo is egoboo, after all. I suppose Bunting will get the M.B.E. for the caper."

"I expect he will," agreed McKendrick. "But after all you have to admit that it was a superb ploy, which worked perfectly. But we know what happened, don't we? And when Bunting goes to Buckingham Palace, he'll realise that you should be there instead of him."

"Shucks, Blaze," I said coyly, looking down and making circles with the toe-cap of my hobnails, "the rest of you all helped a mite, too."

"Well, this is cheerio," said Blaze. He straightened himself.

"Sure." Then it struck me. "Hey, wait a minute. What I cannot understand is this. Why not let an ordinary operative be the clay pigeon instead of me? Although I do see that Fandom was involved."

"Uh huh. And we had to have someone with fannish knowledge to deal with the Birmingham end. No one in M.I.5 had the knowledge."

That was true. I suppose they had realised that there wasn't time for James Bond to learn to be a faan.

A female voice announced that passengers for the Belfast 'plane should follow the red light. We stood up. I grabbed my trilby. I shook hands with Blaze. He said he hoped he'd see me again. I reciprocated.

20.

The Vanguard circled once, then headed north-west, gaining height. I leaned back, looking at the houses and fields beneath. Another long story for my memoirs...I would have to keep the old trilby and trench coat, because it was just possible that M.I.5 would be after my services again.

Then I espied the air hostesses legs...long, lithe, and I followed upwards, to the hem of her skirt, the flare at the hips...the hour-glass squeeze, then the out-thrust again, then to the long fair hair, curled up at the ends...and all my adventures of the previous weeks were forgotten...because I felt that things were getting back to normal again...I was thinking of gals once more...

I couldn't have known then that Bunting, seething with rage and frustration, was working on a scheme to get the War Office to send me to Russia...and Bunting had a little trick up his sleeve to make sure that I wouldn't be coming back again....

- finis -



THE ARTIST, AT WORK



Watch for the Goon



He will return!