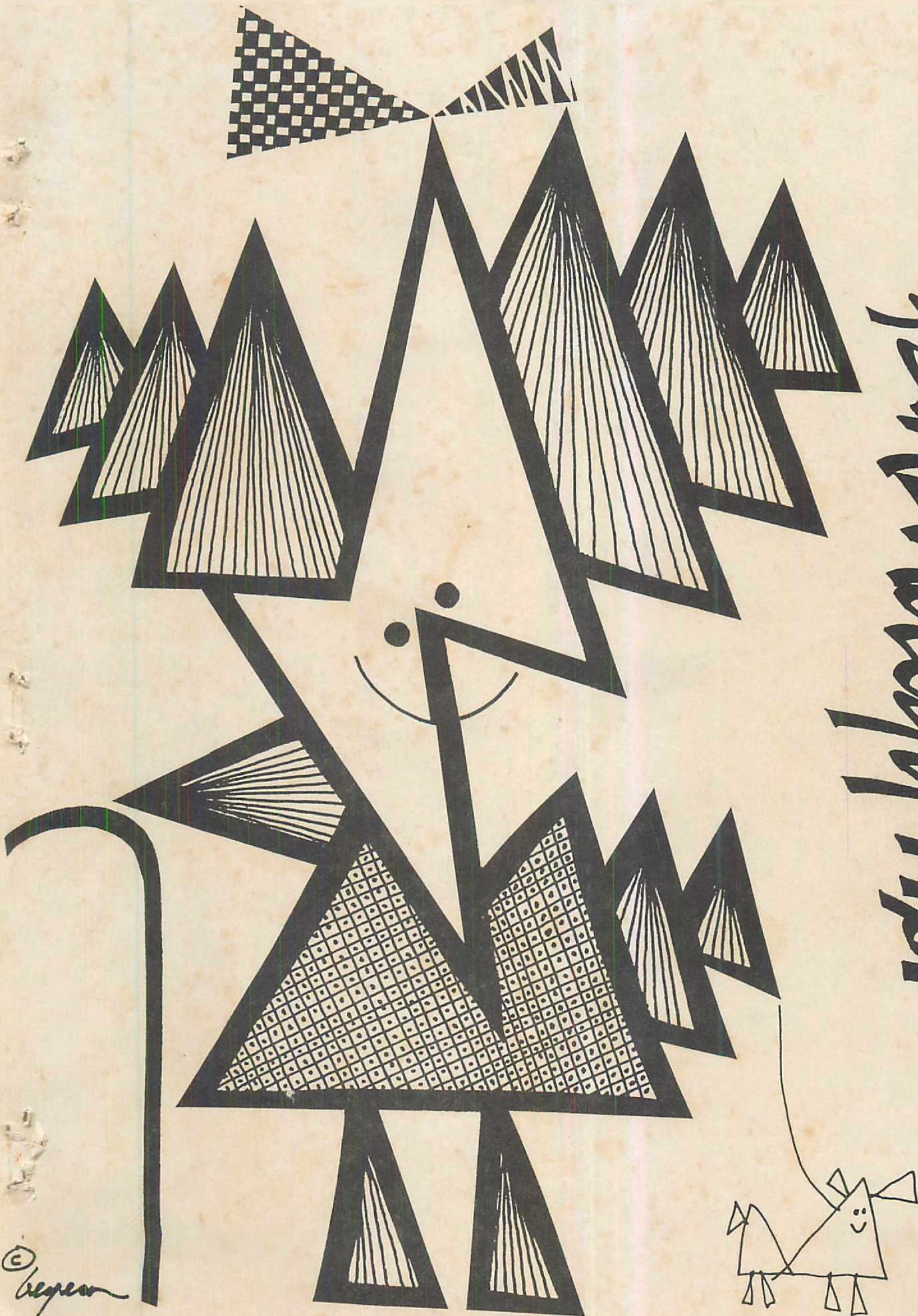


Familology 1981



"Possibly I should say where I stand on the Philosophy of Fanzines. Actually I'm a puritan on the subject. I believe that fanzines are a unique and very special form of communication in the form to which they have evolved in sf fandom. We are lucky to have them, and they deserve respect. I'm opposed to the view that it's okay to print any old rubbish because, what the hell, it's just a fanzine. On the contrary, I think that fanwriting is one of the very few forms of writing which are pointless unless you are doing your very best.

"What is special about fanwriting is, of course, the personal element. Articles may be written in a manner superficially resembling that of (say) Punch contributions, but the difference is that the author is writing for an extended circle of personal acquaintances. This makes possible a range of effects which are simply not possible in any other form of writing that I know of. These are, of course, the very qualities which some people dislike in fannish writing: they dismiss it as in-groupish, self-obsessed, limited to anecdotes about who said what to whom and who threw up on whose carpet. In one way this is a pity: people who make those kind of critical statements are missing something which they might enjoy if they took the trouble to investigate and understand what it is they are criticizing. But what the hell, that's their problem, as lack of comprehension is the problem of second-rate critics everywhere. In fact fannish writing by its very nature cannot, I think, appeal to anything but a very small audience; once the personal element goes it ceases to be special. This may give rise to a second critical misunderstanding, which says that a form of writing which only appeals to, say, a couple of hundred people can't be of much value. This is another way of saying (via various intermediate steps of reasoning that I won't bother to go into) that the only writing which is any good is contained in blockbuster best-sellers and the Bible."

Malcolm Edwards
Tapen 1
June, 1981

Fanthology 1981

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First printing: Summer, 1982.

Introduction

This is an anthology of fanzine articles from 1981.

It's not a new idea. Guy Terwilliger probably deserves credit for having initiated the intermittent but durable *Fanthology* tradition; his *Best of Fandom* anthologies for 1957 and 1958 were the impetus for the first volume to bear the name "Fanthology", Terry Carr & Mike Domina's *Fanthology* '64. True to the esoteric inner teachings of the Grand Tradition (Lodge 770), however, Domina gaffiated halfway into the production of the 1964 volume, leaving Carr to eventually publish it -- in 1972! The next two volumes in the series fared somewhat better; both Bruce Arthurs' *Fanthology* '75 and Victoria Vayne's *Fanthology* '76 appeared in 1977, practically a twinkling of an eye after the fact in fan project terms.

There've been other volumes with similar aims. Dick Eney's *A Sense Of Fapa* appeared in 1962 in the 100th mailing of that organization, collecting much of the cream of FAPA's first 25 years. Various Los Angeles fans managed to put out three volumes of *The Best From APA-L*, covering the period from that group's founding in 1964 up through 1968. And, best of all, fully two complete volumes of excellent material appeared at the end of the last decade, both of them anthologies of the best from the UK fan scene throughout the 1970s, and neither overlapping the other to any significant extent: *By British*, edited by Joseph Nicholas and Ian Maule, and the *Seacon* fanroom volume, edited by Kevin Smith: *Mood 70*.

All of these volumes are heavily biased towards the fan article, as opposed to editorial natter, lettercolumn exchanges, mailing comments, and other forms of fannish writing. The reason for this is simple: discrete pieces make the most sense out of their original context. The funniest mailing comments, the most perceptive letters of comment, are good precisely because of the extent to which they're geared to their time and place. Out of that time, away from that place, they bring to mind the killer joke of 2 a.m. that made no sense whatsoever at 10 a.m. the next day. As Malcolm Edwards points out in the section of *Tappen* I quoted as an epigraph for this volume, this syndrome is endemic to fanwriting and, peculiarly, one of its strengths; still, even granting that it's true to some extent of almost all fan work, it can still be recognized that there are degrees, and that discrete articles and column installments make the most reprintable material. As a result, this *Fanthology* is billed, quite specifically, as an anthology of fanzine articles. And so a passing nod to a lot of the year's best fanwriting: Chris Priest in *Deadloss*, Kevin Smith in *Dot*, Dave Langford in *Twll Ddu*, Dick Bergeron in *Warhoon*, and of course Dan Steffan and Ted White throughout the year, every two or three weeks, in 1981's 21 issues of that "zippy little fmz", *Pong*.

Another thing you won't find covered in these pages is 1981's fan art. Fanzine artists tend to exist in a constant state of egoboo frustration, since while their work may be generally appreciated, a diet of comments ranging from "Nice art" to "Liked the cover" is nonetheless hardly sufficient to support healthy creative life. The fact, however, is that most fans are verbally-oriented creatures who lack even the vocabulary to deal with fanzine art at the same level of articulation which they can usually achieve in reacting to verbal works. And the other fact is that this editor, like most other faneds, lacks the resources necessary to do justice to the huge spectrum of art appearing in fanzines today -- art ranging from the complex, detailed works of a Taral or a Joan Hanke-Woods (for which even offset is often inadequate), to the big, brassy, multicolor work of a Richard Bergeron, through to the funky but deft hand-stencilling of a Stu Shiffman, a Dan Steffan or a Ted White. Frankly, the idea of gathering together a selection from this range of media and then

Patrick Nielsen Hayden

electrostencilling the lot of it seemed somehow, well, inadequate. On the other hand, reproducing it all in the same form as it originally appeared would have put the cost of the volume somewhere in orbit. Thus do I leave the task of anthologizing fan art to other, more knowledgeable, and richer fans.

The final category of material that didn't make it into this volume was works-in-progress -- which actually accounted for quite a bit of 1981's better fanwriting. In addition to four installments of Dave Langford's TAFF 1980 report, "The Trans-Atlantic Hearing Aid", the year also saw an installment of Peter Roberts' 1977 TAFF trip report, the first chapter of the fannish memoirs of Harry Warner Jr., and the start of a comic-strip adaptation, by Dan Steffan, of Bob Shaw & Walt Willis's "The Enchanted Duplicator." All of these works were well up to the standards of this volume; all of these works, however, will no doubt have their own reprintings in the fairly near future, as their authors finish them and reissue them in single-volume editions. Real soon now, right, fellas?

It was, generally, a good year for fanzine fandom. At times, in fact, it seemed difficult to believe that only a couple of years previously American fannish fans had been bemoaning the deep trough of enthusiasm and quality in which their fandom seemed stuck, while on the other side of the Atlantic the 1979 Worldcon was mercilessly razing the complex culture of '70s British fandom. By 1981, a new feel was definitely in the air, and what had previously seemed only a rather distant possibility was actually happening: American and British fannish fandoms were talking to each other. For this interaction, many coinciding agencies can be blamed: a high-profile TAFF race in 1980; Ted White & Dan Steffan's intentional use of *Pong* to stimulate dialogue between the two estranged fandoms; the continuing social fallout of hundreds of North American fans at Seacon and tens (at least) of UK fans at Noreascon; and last but certainly not least, the prolific transatlantic fanac of Dave Langford and Joseph Nicholas, to both of whom North American fandom owes a large debt for peppering things up on the US/UK front.

It wasn't a perfect year; few are. Early in the year, Janie Lamb, a major figure in the NFFF for decades, died shortly following the destruction of her house in a fire. May saw the deaths of two prominent fans: Lou Tabakow, perennial Midwestcon organizer, and Ed Cagle, iconoclastic fanwriter and editor of *Kwalhioqua*. And in September well-known 1960s fan Gretchen Schwenn died after a long illness.

There certainly wasn't a shortage of good fanzines in 1981; among the very best were *Boonfarks* 4 & 5 (Dan Steffan), *Deadloss* 3 (Chris Priest), *Diaspar* 22 (Terry Carr), *Dots* 10 & 11 (Kevin Smith), *Energumen* 16 (Mike Glicksohn), *Epsilon* 9 (Rob Hansen), *Harlot* 2 (Avedon Carol & AnneLaurie Logan), *Kratophany* 13 (Eli Cohen), *Mainstream* 6 (Jerry Kaufman & Suzanne Tompkins), *Out Of The Blue* 3 (Harry Bell & Kevin Williams), *Science-Fiction Five-Yearly* 7 (Lee Hoffman and Dan Steffan), *SF Commentary* 62/63/64/65/66 (Bruce Gillespie), *Space Junk* 5 (Rich Coad), *Start Breaking Up* (Chris Atkinson & Linda Pickersgill), *Stop Breaking Down* 7 (Greg Pickersgill), *Tappens* 1, 2 & 3 (Malcolm Edwards), *Twll Ddu* 19 (Dave Langford), *Warhoon* 29 (Richard Bergeron), *The Works* 4 (Dave Locke), *Yhos* 19 (Art Widner), and twenty-one separate issues, from 6/7 to 28, of Ted White & Dan Steffan's *Pong*, including their spectacular annish, #25. And others. Without a doubt, many, many others. The research for this volume was conducted with dogged earnestness in several people's fanzine stacks, but it's a big fandom, and nobody sees everything...

Anyway, here's the book. It's good stuff. Read on.



Book Review

Losing It

by Robert Silverberg
Simon & Schuster, \$10.95
195 pages

THE WARM GLOW LEFT by Robert Silverberg's eagerly awaited return to fiction, *Lord Valentine's Castle*, has cooled somewhat with the publication of this latest and sadly regressive foray into depressing self-pity, *Losing It*.

For those of us who always felt Silverberg's "retirement" from writing to be actually a well-deserved and rejuvenating fallow period, *Losing It* represents a grave disappointment, as the author indulges once again in his apparently unshakeable view that humanity is a waste of valuable cosmic time. Where *Lord Valentine* led us into an exciting, romantic, swashbuckling fantasy world, *Losing It* drops us with the meter running into an alternate universe New York City of the present, the hub of an overcrowded world much like ours, but with one crucial difference: here, everyone is rich and immortal.

Heaven on Earth, anyone else might think, but Silverberg dispels this notion at once by pointing out, in example after tedious example, that it is also a world of astonishingly cruel snobbery and vicious social backbiting. Where the reassuring barriers of material wealth and longevity no longer apply, social interactions have reverted to their most primitive level, and a normally innocuous *faux pas*, such as forgetting a hotel captain's name, can lead to excruciating ostracism from the best and most exclusive places.

The horrors of such a world are apparently all too real to the author, who invites our pity by preaching at length about the problems that beset the wealthy. Unfortunately, such blatant devices as the use of the breakdown of restaurant service to symbolize the breakdown of civilization, or the idea that the immortals measure their lives in undefined units of time known as "Life Crises" inspire not our sympathy so much as our desire to avoid the author at cocktail parties.

In this country of the socially blind, the book's protagonist, Aaron Argentmont, should be king, for he has a gift of remembering the names of everyone he has ever met, no matter what their current station. Thus, he can guarantee that he will always operate free of the changing fortunes of social status and be able to conduct himself properly with all of the maitre d's, major domos, and social secretaries who are the powermongers of this bleak world.

Lord Valentine's Castle led us to believe that Silverberg was finally ready to permit his characters to use their god-given talents to improve their own lives, that he might, after all, find the hope of progress in the human race. But *Losing It* reiterates Silverberg's persistent message of works just before his "retirement", that the urge to behave rudely, like the instinct to eat our dead, is too deeply ingrained in our biological nature to be restrained, much less eliminated, by the trappings of civilization.

by "Alais Adverse" 

For Argentmont has not used his gift to improve the sorry manners of his world; he has not even used it for his own gain. Instead, he scrapes out a living plagiarizing Russian novels, employing his ability only to systematically change all the characters' names as he goes along. Instead of reaching for the security so easily within his grasp, or even for a measure of self-respect, Argentmont lives constantly on the brink of copyright infringement and exposure at the hands of his former colleagues in the Authors' League.

And even this dubious pastime will soon be lost to Argentmont, for, as the title of the book implies, he is approaching his fortieth Life Crisis and finds his talent weakening, indeed about to vanish altogether.

So we are forced to follow Argentmont through a thorny course of what passes for introspection, learning about his childhood, the failure of his love life, for which he finds himself vaguely but inexplicably responsible, his anemic aspirations to write for television. As the book runs down to its "climax" we have learned everything about Argentmont except how to feel sorry for him. Although we are apparently supposed to feel the dilemma of Argentmont's hatred for his gift and his recognition that without it he is utterly without character, all we really long for are the bright lights, rich texture, and downright fun of *Lord Valentine's* world.

There are world-shaking issues as stake in *Lord Valentine's Castle*, matters of life and death. Somehow, even Argentmont's final tragedy, forgetting the name of the city's most influential maitre d', fails to convince us anything important is going on:

He gripped the velvet rope tightly. It would pass, it would pass; after all, acid had given him a temporary memory loss before, and Beeson could have been joking about what was in the punch. Yes. Of course. The pounding in his temples deafened him; his grip on the velvet rope tightened. You don't need him, he thought. Go easy. You don't need him.

"Monsieur looks quite pale," the maitre d' said, mock concern riding beneath the smooth cadences of his voice. "Perhaps he would like to wait in the bar. In case a reservation is cancelled."

Buffoon, Argentmont thought. The maitre d's voice came to him, distorted by the thundering in his ears. I remember you, striving for your first snub, practicing, looking up to me. His mouth would not shape the words. If only he could remember the man's name!

Desperate now, cigar smoke blocking his sinuses and giving him a heady, detached feeling, he raised one hand, tried to gesture, and paused. Could this be it, then, could this be the moment he had dreaded, the reality of what he had felt briefly as Sandy ran down the hall clutching her bag,

the sense of loss he had only overcome when he found her Club 19 key carelessly dropped behind a chair --

"Emil," he said suddenly. "Emil, I need a table at once."

The maitre d's expression of scorn echoed that he had seen that morning on Trudeau's mobile face, as his former editor spoke of turning him over to the authorities. Bewildered, he gestured again, and the finality of his mistake overwhelmed him. Emil was the wrong name!

The maitre d's eyes were stony as he came in for the kill. "Monsieur should have made a reservation. Perhaps," the man added, dripping honeyed condescension, "I may be able to get him a table near the kitchen. In approximately one hour."

Somehow Argentmont made his legs move. The fat, perspiring man in line behind him waved his cheap cigar, and Argentmont tried desperately to say something, anything, to pass the sting of the snub along, to dissipate the horror. But he could not speak, and the fat man shouldered him aside, yelling "Bertie, table for ten by the fireplace!" A miasma of smoke enveloped Argentmont's face, and as the velvet rope slithered from its hook to let the fat man's party proceed, Argentmont felt himself slipping, finally, slipping into unconsciousness.

There exists the possibility for real tragedy here, even in such a trivialized universe: smugness disintegration is an ugly prospect which can install pity and terror in anyone who has made it to the top undeservedly. But Silverberg is stuck, stylistically, between the essential shallowness of his characters and his tendency to overwrite emotionally climactic moments, pounding at neurotic behavior in a desperate attempt to work it into genuine anguish.

Even the blatant similarity with the author's own life fails to make the book interesting. Silverberg tells us much more about his love for life and writing in an undertaking of the magnitude of *Lord Valentine's Castle*. The thought that Silverberg may be slipping back into his habit of writing short, depressing fiction is almost too much to stand. One can only cling to the hope that Silverberg has, with this pitifully slim volume, at last "lost it", the need of his to assault us with bad vibes. Perhaps *Losing It* was merely tossed off, like Alka Seltzer for a case of indigestion, and we can look forward to more mammoth fun fantasy from one of our favorite masters.

|||

Yorcon II Photo Album

by Chris Atkinson

INSTEAD OF A BORING OLD con report, I've sent along a few snapshots, all moving, all talking, all having-a-great-time. Here goes then...

Flash

This is obviously the M1, a majestic vista of concrete and potholes sweeping off towards the North. We are being overtaken by a large van, mysteriously labelled "Rubella Distribution Ltd" (free epidemics?), closely fallowed by a lorry bearing the legend "Cable Glands" -- clearly a rush delivery of spare parts for Rob Holdstock. Just as we are about to be seized with dread at these vile portents a huge tanker passes, obviously en route to the Dragonara Hotel, with the words "Beer In Transit" emblazoned on its ample side. Thus cheered we continue our journey.

Flash

Thursday night at 11:00, and a heap of weary bodies litter the floor of the bar. This is a somewhat inauspicious start to a convention. Perhaps the Dragonara are pumping sedatives into the atmosphere in the hope of a quiet weekend.

Flash

Friday night, and here are a group of disreputable looking fans in a local Italian restaurant. On my left is a man closely resembling the kind of sales rep who always drives a Ford Cortina; he is rubbing up against my knee. He insists on giving me his visiting card. Surely he can't really be called Skinn? And what's this about coming from Goole? This can't be reality; it must be the fudge I ate.

Flash

We're on the way back to the hotel and I notice my jaw is tight. My chest is tight. My back is tight. My body is shaking. My teeth are knocking together. What sort of disease is this? I mentally flick through cancer, heart attack, senility, falling in love and paranoidschizophrenia before realizing that I'm cold. It's going to be one of those nights.

Flash

I recognize this man from somewhere. Yes, it's Rob Hansen. "Hello, Rob!"

I think I'm acting OK, if a bit extrovert, so why is he giving me these funny looks? We have an interesting conversation about what we would do if we went to bed with someone and found out right at the last minute that they were the same sex as ourselves. We both agree that by this point we wouldn't care less. I decide this is probably a good fantasy for people who feel guilty about their homosexual leanings. Malcolm Edwards then makes his way towards us. He's leaning a bit, too. He wants to know what we're talking about but for some reason we can only giggle. Communication

with Malcolm is impossible. There seems to be a fault in his brain. When I tell him so he looks quite upset and goes away.

Rob is continuing to give me funny looks. I begin to wonder what he's making of our conversation, because it's making no sense at all to me. It's probably time to slip casually away.

Flash

Here's Greg Pickersgill, looking lecherous as usual. I tell him that Rob and I have just had a good fantasy. He tells me another one which has something to do with tongues and sheeps' anuses. I begin to wonder if something traumatic happened during Greg's potty training, and assure him that his fantasy is nothing like as good as Rob's and mine. "Rob's and your what?" he says, and he gives me a funny look too. Perhaps it's a conspiracy.

Flash

The pictures are getting out of order now. This could be any evening. It's Brian Parker telling me once again what he and Terry think is wrong with my personality. I consider telling him what I think is wrong with theirs but can't concentrate for long enough.

Flash

Peter Pinto looks the sympathetic type. Unfortunately when I approach him he fixes me with an intense stare and says, "If you wish to recharge your energy cells far away from this confusing throng of people we see all around us, and if you need to feel the security of knowing that you are in the company of people of like mind, you will find such people in room 216."

My mind goes blank. "Say that again," I ask. He does. I wish he hadn't. I begin to realize that one of us is a dangerous lunatic. I'm not sure which one, but decide that I'll move away, just to be on the safe side.

The safe side of what?

Flash

I can't resist this one. I'm sitting with Rochelle Reynolds discussing Deep Things. Greg Pickersgill ambles over and gives Rochelle what he fondly imagines to be a sexually devastating look.

"Can I bite your left tit," he asks her.

"What?" she says.

"He wants to bite your left tit," I explain, wanting to keep the fascinating conversation going.

"Oh. Well, no thank you," she replies, smiling in a Bright Tolerant Young American way. Greg leers again, and I can hear him muttering away under his breath about various possible interconnections of Rochelle's flesh with his own. Suddenly he grunts, "You have to use a pillow."

"What?" says Rochelle again, looking as though she suspects an insult.

"A pillow," says Greg. "To get the right angle."

I'm beginning to get the drift of what he's on about, although Rochelle is obviously wondering if he's still referring to her left tit.

"Oh, er, Rochelle," I murmur, "I think he's talking about anal intercourse."

"What?" she repeats.

Oh bloody hell, this is silly. Greg is beginning to pant and mumble all at the same time. I try not to listen. Suddenly Rochelle moves back against the wall very quickly.

"You put it *where*?" she screeches, nose wrinkling in utter disgust.

Flash

Here I am trying to buy a drink from Reception (well, it did look like a bar) and being rescued by Colin Greenland and his friend, who are inseparable. I'm trying

to tell Colin why I didn't go to his party and getting more and more embarrassed. In an effort to change the subject I empty the complete contents of my handbag onto Colin's lap. He makes a comment to his friend about Proust.

"That's why I didn't come to your party!" I exclaim. "You'd all have been sitting round talking about Proust!" I hurriedly start gathering up my old Barclay-card slips and empty matchboxes before they are tainted by intellect.

"But why shouldn't I talk about Proust? I've got a degree in English Literature," he replies. I am sure this is a thinly veiled insult to my intelligence, so having stuffed the last 1977 hotel receipt into my handbag I hastily leave in search of less demanding conversations.

Flash

Here's David Pringle getting his knickers in a terrible twist over the fudge and everything. He seems to be under the impression that whatever he says to anyone is a gross insult. Having said "Hello," he then goes into a lengthy and tortuous explanation of how he didn't really mean to say such a dreadful thing, it's just that he's not quite himself this evening, and so on. At one point on Sunday evening I had to intervene between David and an extremely puzzled neo who probably wanted to know some esoteric fact about J.G. Ballard. Instead he got a ten minute discourse on the dreadful insult Pringle thought he might have uttered in his first sentence, followed by an apology for the apology, and if I hadn't turned up they'd probably still be there to this day floating in a sea of Pringle's remorse.

Flash

Rob Holdstock had to feature sooner or later. Here he is, hotly pursuing a glossy-lipped female while denying he's ever set eyes on her. Reluctantly he stops to talk.

"Oh God," he wails, "Sheila is *incredibly* randy at this convention. Oh God, what is she doing with that Dutchman? Oh God --" He tails off, cable glands visibly wilting, but soon cheers up at the sight of a passing Chrissie Pearson.

"Must go and talk business," he explains, as he follows her extremely closely across the room.

Flash

This is a strange one. Here I am with Sheila Holdstock (minus Dutchman). We're standing at the bar, swaying gently. I think it's Saturday night, and for some reason we both have a strong urge to touch people. Unfortunately there are few people around whom we want to touch.

"Oh well," says Sheila, smiling sweetly. "There's nothing else for it. Your room or mine?"

Flash

Another one of Pringle. He's fixing me with a very odd look.

"Why are you here?" he asks. What does he mean? Why is he here? Why are we all here? Whence fandom? Whence the universe? Is the mystery of life revealed in a sheep's anus? On the other hand, perhaps he thinks I should be outside organizing revolutions for the Socialist Workers Party. To get on to safer ground I tell him about the fantasy I had with Rob Hansen. Pringle likes it. This pleases me considerably after Greg's disappointing response. Unfortunately David then returns to asking me why I'm here. Perhaps I'll tell him one day -- if I ever work it out myself.

Flash

Anne Pringle approaches, the Were-Whale of the Dragonara (Pete Garrett) in tow. Little does she know that on the stroke of thirteen o'clock he turns into a killer whale and wreaks havoc throughout fandom. At the moment, however, he is in manly form and flushed with my success with David Pringle I tell him The Fantasy. Unfortu-

nately he's not at all happy about imagining an erotic scene with a woman who turns out to be a man (however attractive), and seems quite annoyed with me for leading him into such a naughty thought. Later I find out that he's a clinical psychologist. I always knew there was something peculiar about clinical psychologists.

Flash

Here's one of Simone, Brian, Malcolm and myself at the banquet. The reason we look so friendly is that the hotel have tried to squeeze ten people around a table for six. The others at our table all seem to be Mormons. Malcolm is looking miserable, because being well brought up, when the After Eight mints came he offered them to everyone else first, and then found that the little envelope left for him had nothing in it.

Flash

Sad, really. All the rest of the film came out very dark, with a few indistinguishable figures huddling in the background. Perhaps they were overexposed -- or maybe my camera knew that the world is not yet ready for the Whole Truth about Yorcon II. |||

Uffish Thots: On Fanzine Packaging

by Ted White

"THE TROUBLE WITH ARTICLES about packaging fanzines," my coeditor said to me, "is that they concentrate your attention on the appearance of a fanzine rather than its contents." I think he was quasi-quoting Dick Bergeron on the subject.

My general reaction to my co-editor's remark was, "So what?" A lot has been said about the content -- or lack thereof -- of current-day fanzines, and I have no doubt a lot more will be said in times to come. But after saying a fanzine "looks nice" or that it doesn't, most fans have little more to say about the fanzine's packaging -- even though without a shadow of doubt it was the packaging that ultimately determined their feelings about that fanzine, and thus their interpretation of its contents.

The thing is, the way a fanzine looks -- its visual package -- has an enormous subliminal effect on the way we read it. Sometimes something as subtle as the color of the paper the fanzine is printed on will tip the balance in our emotional response to the issue from a plus to a minus (or vice-versa).

A case in point is the new *Boonfark*. The previous issue was printed on bright yellow paper, but the new issue is on lilac, a cool dark color. Reading the new issue after having read the previous one is like a day turning from sunny to dismally overcast, and despite the fact that *BNF* 5 is in every respect the equal of the fourth issue, it simply doesn't feel like as good an issue.

Years ago I remarked on an earlier example: a pair of issues of *Void* published in 1959. One issue was rather fluffy in terms of content, but was presented with warm informality. The next was much more substantial in terms of content (and included a Willis piece) but had presstype lettering electrostencilled (along with most of the art) for the titles and headings, giving it a more formal (and pretentious) appearance. Response to the second issue was much poorer than to the first, despite the fact that there was a lot more to respond to in it.

A year later I stopped using even mimeo lettering-guides for the headings; I hand-lettered the headings with cheerfully informal lettering copied mostly from Rotsler. The *Void*s of that era are more highly thought of, even today. (I sometimes wonder if my much-lauded "A Day With Calvin Thos. Beck" would have been nearly as well received if I'd presented it with electrostencilled presstype headings and more formal layouts...)

Any art student and all magazine art-directors will tell you that the eye makes a number of unconscious assessments of what it sees -- the subliminal effect I men-

tioned above. Both artists and art-directors manipulate your eye to achieve the desired effects. Color and image directly influence the emotions, and when correctly used will cause the desired emotional response.

Now let's take this whole concept into fandom and fanzines. Although what I'm saying applies to all kinds of fanzines, my primary interest is in fannish fanzines, and for that reason I will discuss the effects I consider desirable for a fannish fanzine. *Algol/Starship* can shop elsewhere. Additionally, a fanzine is in my opinion an artform. Thus, it should be approached by its editor in the role of an artist. The presentation of a fanzine may not be precisely equal to its content in overall importance, but it should complement the content in a way which creates an appropriate setting for it.

Although all fanzine editors, then, are artists, not all of them are consciously aware of this. In fact it hasn't always been necessary to be conscious of this aspect of putting one's ish -- and some notable fanzines, like *Quandry*, were the more or less spontaneous product of a faned who gave little thought to the specific craft of fanzine packaging. The look of *Q*, for instance, was intuitively arrived at because Lee Hoffman admired Joe Kennedy's 1940s *Vampire*. But the way Lee put *Q* together and the look she gave it was the perfect context for its material, and obviously a reflection of her own taste, style, and personality. A trip through *Quandry*'s pages was like a relaxed convention room party at which all the assembled BNFs held conversations by turns informative, humorous, and gossipy.

Redd Boggs, in contrast, during the same period produced carefully crafted fanzines in which a seriousness of tone, as well as understatement and neatness, were to be found in both the writing and the packaging. *Skyhook* probably represents a peak as yet unmatched among fanzines of its type -- the serious fannish (but not sercon) zines. A more modern example is *Warhoon*, which was modelled in content after *SKhk* (even as its abbreviated title, *Wrhn*, seems to be similarly modelled), and whose editor has been both an artist and a professional magazine art-director. I think Bergeron has carefully considered each and every aspect of the *Wrhn* package, right down to its relative austerity.

I started out operating on intuition, myself, clumsily copying ideas I liked in other fanzines, but often in ways which caused one to clash with another. But I'd trained to be an artist and after a couple of years of fanzine publishing I started noticing things.

On the one hand, I was becoming aware of the evolution of magazine design in the twentieth century -- an evolution which was inextricably tied to the evolution both in artistic thinking and in industrial design. Mondrian had an enormous influence both in zine layout and design -- and once one grasped this connection one could see the page as masses of color (albeit sometimes all shades of black, grey, and white) which could be grouped in a variety of pleasing ways. Blocks of type, areas of white space, title blocks, and illustrations could be arranged much as Mondrian had arranged his abstract lines and blocks of color. Indeed -- flash! -- Mondrian's abstractions could be seen as abstractions of magazine layouts! (And the German Bauhaus school was also greatly influential, both on overall design and in particular in the design of new typefaces and new uses for type.)

On the other hand, I noticed the little layout and design tricks used by faneds like Hoffman, Grennell, Boggs, Calkins, and (yes) Geis. I noticed the effects these various packaging ideas had on me -- which ones hit me most favorably -- and then I'd try to figure out why. Once I thought I knew, I'd try out my theory with a test. (The last two issues of *Zip* -- #s 6 & 7 -- and the seven issues of *Stellar* that followed -- #s 8 - 14 -- were my "lab", and viewed chronologically give an excellent

record of my progress...)

By the time I was doing *Void* I was back on intuition again -- but on a higher, more accomplished level, since I'd acquired a vocabulary of design and layout ideas. Redd Boggs regretted the passing of *Stellar* and its extravagant packaging ideas, but I had come to realize by then that part of my problem with *Stellar* (which generated very little response in proportion to its circulation) was that it was so ambitiously packaged that it put people off. Part of the fanzine's appeal is its informality and approachability.

Although I produced the two contrasting issues of *Void* that I mentioned earlier, I didn't do it consciously at the time as an experiment; I simply did it and realized afterwards what I'd done and later yet what the results were. By then I was feeling a bit cynical about the way fans responded to fanzines. I'd learned that they didn't respond directly to the content at all, but that their reactions were filtered through the feeling the fanzine's packaging gave them. And I'd learned that they didn't, most of them, like the ambitious packaging -- they went for the simple, straightforward stuff. Or, as my coeditor put it here (in *Pong* #23), "The basic design and layout ideas that were perfected twenty and thirty years ago proved to me to be the most appropriate way to put a fanzine together. No matter what Jerry [Lapidus] and I might have thought up, we just couldn't come up with anything better." At the time, that annoyed me -- fandom had ignored or turned up its nose at my attempts to upgrade its graphics -- but I was a lot younger then.

With the late-fifties *Gambit*, and -- after *Void* -- *Minac*, *Egoboo*, *The Gafiate's Intelligencer* (which, although a group project, was my idea), and *Pong*, I've been playing games with the various possible styles of packaging fannish fanzines. Since *Void*, most of my ideas have involved the miniaturization of the genzine into a small frequent publication. Both *Minac* and *Pong* are differing approaches to the same idea.

Did I call the fanzine an artform? I've learned that the best approaches to doing a fanzine are those which least imitate a non-fanzine. (In "Pseudo-Campbellism" Redd Boggs put his finger on one type of non-fanzine imitation -- that of the prozines -- but there are many others too.) As a corollary, the best fanzines celebrate their "hand-made," limited-circulation qualities in one way or another.

Part of what a fanzine does, as a total gestalt, is to express or evoke a mood or atmosphere. This atmosphere is the aggregate of the editor's personality, the personality revealed in the written contributions published in the fanzine, and the "personality" generated through the visual packaging. I described *Quandry* as "like a relaxed convention room party"; in contrast *Skyhook* was more like an afternoon's programming at a convention of its period, and *Warhoon* in the sixties struck me as an afterhours seminar at Milford.

A fanzine can present itself as a gathering to be joined, or as a symposium of the elite on display for the less fortunate. Virtually all fannish fanzines opt for the former course.

But many fans setting out to do fannish fanzines fail to take into account the fact that fanzine packaging is divided into two broad categories -- the "warm" and the "cool" -- and that the "warm" approach is intrinsically more fannish, accessible, and inviting, although notable fanzines like *Warhoon* (and, to a lesser extent, *Hyphen*) succeeded with a "cool" approach.

"Cool": electrostencilled art (or the complete abandonment of mimeo -- which, like ditto, is basically "warm" -- for offset, xerox, or, coolest of all, set type of a professional appearance); white paper (or cool-colored paper like blue, green, or

lilac, especially if the entire issue is on only one color); letaset/prestype (or any professionally-typeset-looking) headings; artwork which is abstract or stfnal (like prozine illos) and is "serious"; layouts using boxes with square corners or straight lines meeting at sharp corners with acute angles; justified right-hand margins; virtually any visual device which suggests or implies seriousness and sobriety or imitates professional publications or academic journals.

"Warm": hand-stencilled art; brightly colored paper (preferably alternating a variety of colors throughout the issue if the fmz has more than a few pages); hand-lettered headings.(but not intricate calligraphy); humorous art or cartoons, preferably not too highly tooled (Grant Canfield's highly stylized lines take some of his more intricate cartoons into the "cool" area, for example); curved corners on boxes, panels, etc.; looseness and informality as opposed to tightness and rigidity.

Obviously these are only guidelines and not inflexible rules I've described, and we can all think of many examples of fanzines which got away with mixing "warm" and "cool" elements in their appearance, something it's fun to try every so often. *Pong*, for example, started in part as an experiment to see if we could be "warm" and fannish with xerox, and continues with essentially the same format electrostencilled instead. But when a fan eagerly puts together his boffo fannish fanzine and then runs it off on grey paper with, say, white covers, he's undercut everything else he's done with art and layout to make his fanzine feel fannish.

Personally I find a certain creative challenge and satisfaction in juxtaposing warm and cool elements in a way which sets up a tension between them. But this may be simply a reflection of my own internal dichotomy: My old ambitions are not entirely dead and I tend toward tight, neat, precisely organized packages, but what most attracts me in fanzines is the warm, open informality of fannish classics like *Quandry*. Thus, my slow and calculated move to the simplicity and "warmth" of fannish packaging...

Life Is Too Complex, Part II

by Avedon Carol

BUT THE TRAINS DIDN'T RUN ON TIME

Mike Walsh says we ought to get together and do a one-shot just about the hotel room situation -- but do you *really* want to hear all that about how the Copely Square didn't even *have* the suite they'd advertised and promised us, and how by 6:00 PM Friday all they had for the eight of us was a room with no beds, and how after ascertaining this I collapsed into a wheelchair? No, I thought not. So, having dispensed with the first two days of my 1980 Worldcon, we'll move right up to the juicy stuff...

IT'S ALL PATRICK'S FAULT

Because he, after all, started the invitational apa, or miniature golf course, or whatever, called Oasis, which is why Taral proposed Dave Langford for membership. Unfortunately, none of us had ever seen anything of Langford's work, and by the time we had a vague idea of who he was, the voting period had expired. Taral let us know in no uncertain terms that we were all a bunch of ignorant idiots, and he's probably right. But eventually I got a *Twll Ddu* in the mail, and I was delighted -- I think it was "Lang Ford's Bane" that did it. And soon more British fanzines started arriving here at the Kensington Tombs, and I started to think that perhaps it was true that British fanzines were better than American fanzines. *And I was determined to know why.*

When I heard that Langford had won TAFF, I sent him a note generously inviting him and Hazel to stay at the Gilliland's place after Worldcon. He seemed to like the idea, and I guess at that point I made an unconscious decision to spend Noreascon studying the foreigners.

STUDYING THE FOREIGNERS

Langford wasn't hard to pick out of the crowd, and after I'd introduced myself to him and Hazel, he gave me a copy of the latest *TD* while I set about interrogating him. The truth wasn't long in coming out: the Brits write better because they get so much practice from writing on Joseph Nicholas. I consider this an unfair advantage, myself. Even Mike Glicksohn never passes out long enough for a full verse when anyone's around. I believe we once decorated Gardner Dozois -- or maybe I have that wrong, and perhaps Gardner decorated Rich Dale -- but that sort of thing can't be counted on around here.

But I wasn't through with my anthropological field work, so when Glicksohn

advised me that Chris Priest had done an admirable fanzine in the last year, I made it a point to casually jump over three chairs and eight writers in the SFWA suite to study the pretty English boys some more. Chris was talking to Malcolm Edwards, and they were discussing a matter of serious literary import. Or export, as the case may be.

"The first line of her new novel," said Malcolm excitedly, "is -- and perhaps I paraphrase -- but it's, 'Before him, the road receded in both directions.'" He took a moment to explain the *I'm backing Jackie* buttons before relating his latest achievement.

"I had Rachel get her autograph on a book I brought over, and she wrote, 'Dear Rachel, How lovely to see another copy of *Unto Zeor, Forever*. I hope you will enjoy re-reading it many more times. Live long and prosper, Jacqueline Lichtenberg,' or something like that." Something like that. Well, I was impressed, of course. And Malcolm, it seemed, was a regular gold mine of information about the subject I was researching, so I wheedled some more gossip out of him. "Is it true about Joe Nicholas?"

"Yes, it is. In fact, one night it happened twice. He'd passed out and we'd marked him all up, and he woke up and cleaned himself off and passed out again." So they had inscribed another novel or two on him.

So, somewhere around two in the morning I was under a table with Mal, Langford, and Chris Atkinson, having the proper pronunciation of *Twll Ddu* explained to me. "Toothy?" I said hopefully. Finally, giving up, I asked, "What does it mean, anyway?"

"Well," says Langford, "Twll means hole, and ddu means black--"

"Black hole?!? Do you mean to say that the name of your fanzine is *Black Hole*?!?"

"Well..."

"All this time I thought it *meant* something, and it turns out to be just *black hole*!" Imagine my surprise...

DOING STRANGE THINGS WITH A BROOMSTICK

I don't make any promises for the accuracy of my chronology here, but I *think* it was Saturday afternoon when I found Dave Langford trying to seduce D Potter into wrapping her body in an unlikely manner around a broomstick. He demonstrated it a few times, and D followed his lead successfully. I don't even drink, but I tried it anyway. And failed. Dave insisted that one could never be an Astral Master unless one managed to do this obscene thing, but I figured my physical condition forbade any further investigation of the matter. I resigned myself to being a cripple, but it didn't stop others from trying.

ANOTHER COUNTRY HEARD FROM

I encountered The Enemy wandering the halls -- Ahrvid had already tried to sell me on the Scandinavian bid, and I had already tried to sell him on the Baltimore bid; each of us having failed, we wandered into the Aussie party, which was really the Gay party by then. No one there seemed to know it was the Gay party, so we finally made our way to the Baltimore suite so Ahrvid could get his back rubbed, and there I found Pascal Thomas. I asked Pascal about French fandom, which he informed me is a great deal more sercon, and he showed me his fanzine, which looks similar to *Locus*. Much to my amazement, I did not have to ask for translations of every word.

FANS ARE SLANS

Around four o'clock in the morning it must have been, when George RR Martin leaned into the doorway of the SFWA suite and treated us to a dramatic recitation of "My Mother the Car." Sue Caspur and whoever else was sitting in the corner at the time picked up the banner and we went on like that for a while until finally no one could remember the words to "I Married Joan", when we started singing commercials. Eventually Judith Weiss, Alex Eisenstein, John Shirley and I left to wander the halls again (Lou Stathis having already been driven out in disgust by our singing), and the next thing I remember after that is waking up feeling as though someone had poured oatmeal between my synapses.

And that was the condition I was in when I had to start getting myself together for the Technology For Androgynous Futures panel. I delivered myself to the Green Room, where Robin Johnson was frantically trying to get hold of Susan Wood so he wouldn't have to replace her. I didn't think she'd make it, so I told him to relax and just accept his role as token male. A nice young man whose name was something like "Mark" or "Steve" or "Dave" was frantically trying to arrange to find my toothbrush, which had been promised to me by the committee (I think they had some idea that I was going to do something with it). And eventually the panel began -- with Katherine MacLean talking about how men are naturally violent because of their hormones which make them all horny and nasty. ("Do *you* believe that?" I asked Jane Hawkins in a whisper. "Hell *no*!" she said.)

When I got my hands on the microphone I took the opportunity to disagree with Kate. "I have hormones that make me horny, too, but I don't get meaner, I get *nicer*." Someone else observed that that probably works better. And then we were off on a discussion of biological determinism versus socialization. Jan Bogstad and Jane did try valiantly to talk about technology, but it was too late. Someone made the mistake of suggesting that we needed better birth control, and I had to point out that we have always had far better birth control available than anyone ever wanted to admit -- and once I had my mouth in gear, it was all over. "Avedon, you're talking about nuclear energy!" Marta Randall finally said, and I looked up in confusion. "And the oil crisis," said someone else. "What's that got to do with birth control?"

"What do you think they make diaphragms and condoms out of?" But it was no use. I was asleep and incoherent, and Marta had forgotten to bring the box of Rely tampons, which is what technology is really all about, isn't it?

So I took my Noreascon Twoothbrush (which I shall treasure always) in hand and wandered into another room, where I found the Deaf Gossip Columnist himself once again demonstrating the terrible Astral Leauge initiation and trying to force innocent fans to try it out.

"But I'm wearing bright red underwear," warned Taral, who was resplendent in his green mini-skirt, which still doesn't seem to have any pockets. And then he sat down and did the most contorted version I have yet seen of the terrible broomstick trick.

Langford then turned to me. I backed away, but he didn't seem about to let me off the hook. "Later," I pled desperately, "when I've become more limp and spineless." He made me promise I would, and I told him to meet me in the SFWA suite around five in the morning. I figured he'd forget by then.

CERBERUS AT THE GATES OF HELL

Jerry Pournelle was standing in the doorway of the SFWA suite trying to keep people out. People kept drawing me aside and asking what could be done about Jerry.

"Why ask me?" I fled downstairs to C & C when I couldn't find any more Coca-Cola, and while I was there they told me that Jerry couldn't throw anyone out, and we should all ignore him. Just as I was turning to go, a man in black bolted past me and out the door. "Like Mike Jittlov," I said, awestruck, and everyone nodded dumbly.

But standing calmly by the bulletin boards outside was the real Mike Jittlov, wearing his usual green jacket. We had a chuckle over the coincidence and exchanged pleasantries. "I feel like my head was gone over with a magneraser," I said cheerfully. He responded by telling me that it's really very interesting to hold a magneraser up to your temple, because you see flashes of light. And then he revealed that he was looking for Larry Niven, because they had both written an ending for a new Disney film.

"You wouldn't also be looking for Jerry Pournelle, would you?" I asked, hoping. And he was, so I dragged him up to the SFWA suite and made sure Pournelle saw him, and they immediately became engaged in conversation. We had no further trouble with him.

HOWEVER

However, Langford had not forgotten. He was waiting for me there in the SFWA suite when I got back from rescuing Terry Carr from the Charades game at the Hugo Loser's party. In fact, he had shown up early. He even tried to recruit Jeanne Gomoll. She and I tried to slip out the back way, but there wasn't one. Langford regained our attention by flashing the inside cover of *TD 18* and stopping us in our tracks.

"That's Joseph Nicholas? I thought Joe Nicholas would look like Mighty Joe Young, or at least Ichabod Crane! This can't be him!" I turned to Jeanne in disbelief. "He looks... almost... *pretty*, doesn't he?"

"Why, yes," said Jeanne. "He is rather... pretty." And Langford explained that of *course* he was pretty, and a Surrey Limpwrist besides.

And somehow, again, I found myself under a table with Langford and Mal Edwards, listening to Dave mumble very fast. I gave consideration to keeping count to see if Langford said "What?" more often than I did. It was getting closer and closer to five, and I was letting them talk me into standing for TAFF to keep off the subject of that damned broomstick. But Dave knew what time it was, too.

"First you do it, Dave."

"No, I can't do it any more, please..."

"Well, then, *you* do it, Malcolm."

Malcolm got up and did it. Effortlessly. His hands never left his wrists. I pondered this for a while and came to the conclusion that Dave was just making it look hard. But I tried to convince them that they'd seen me do it, anyway. Then I tried to bribe them into *saying* they'd seen me do it.

But that didn't seem to be working. I was just about to resign myself to actually having to get up and *do* it, when there was a Distraction, and it was five hours later before the subject came up again. Langford, strangely enough, had managed to disappear. But the rest of us were in various stages of rigor mortis, limply trying to appear cheerful in the light of the morning smog.

"I'll do it if all the rest of you do," said Malcolm.

"Well, I won't do it until you do," said I. So he got up and did it. So I got up and did it. Successfully. At last.

WHAT'S LEFT AFTER THE CENSORED PARTS

I was saying good-bye to the Langfords. I knew they'd be in Washington in a few days, but I wanted to be sure. There was still, of course, the problem of Hazel, who had patiently put up with all of us and deserved to have a good time, but I had no ideas. Meanwhile, I made small talk with Dave.

"I went to bed this afternoon with this great conreport going through my head, and I knew that if it was still all there when I had a chance to write it down, it would be really brilliant... but then I woke up after a half-hour or so, and it was gone."

"Something even more sinister has happened to me," said Dave. "I wrote all of these brilliant things down, and when I woke up some evil person had gone and changed them all to meaningless drivel."

THE NOT READY FOR MUNDANE PLAYERS

With 40,000 glassy-eyed students clogging the corridors, the University of Maryland looks a bit like Noreascon did, and the place to find my friends was still the fabulous Hole-in-the-Wall Bar. To make matters worse, one of the new freshmen who staggered in, with Jack (X) Henegan, was Newton Ewell, who was still talking about having been rescued from a party by Dave Langford. "I won't tell them how you dress when you're not at school," I said -- and then I realized that the mundanes were talking about their D & D characters. I knew it was going to be a tough interface.

And it was. Instead of going to the bridge game, I found myself at Lynn Collier and Dan Steffan's place watching Jim Barker and Alexis Gilliland draw. I hustled a promise of some art out of Grant Canfield just before I found out he was going to run for TAFF next time around.

"You're going to run for TAFF? Shit, and those guys just talked *me* into running."

"So what? You can run anyway," said Harry Bell. "I was disappointed that only two people ran this time."

"Ah, maybe we should all run for TAFF."

"Sounds reasonable," said Paul Kincaid, who said that to everything. Meanwhile, Jeff Schalles and Steve Stiles arrived, and Jeff started showing us his contact sheets of the shots he'd taken at Worldcon while Dolly tried to convince us that she wasn't really a fan, and Ted White kept insisting that she sounded just like a fan to him.

And the next night at WSFA, the foreigners damn-near outnumbered the club members. Barker, Bell, Kincaid, the Langfords, Applesusan, Terry Hughes (who never goes anywhere) and I took over a corner and talked about typical fannish things like TAFF, invitational conventions, and the Armenian alphabet.

Armenian alphabet? "Hazel, are you talking about the Armenian alphabet?"

"Yes, I collect alphabets."

"Do you want a tee-shirt with the Armenian alphabet on it? I have one -- I almost wore it tonight." Hazel did want one -- almost desperately. And now I finally had something to entertain her with. I promptly arranged for her to come over the next evening and play with all of my mother's Armenian toys.

And she did. And Dave, Harry, Paul, Terry, Jim, Alexis and Charles played with the pinball machine while Hazel and Queenie and Dolly sat upstairs and did whatever it is they do upstairs. I was downstairs, so I wouldn't know.

If there was any witty repartee, I don't remember it, but perhaps Dave wrote something down before Queenie and Dolly started forcing people to watch the Miss America pageant.

A few days later I looked at the Noreascon program book for the first time, and found that I was listed in the "Who's Who." It said, "Avedon Carol is a provocative letterwriter, editor of *The Invisible Fan*, and one of fandom's most knowledgeable and articulate feminists." Ha ha. No one who met me at Noreascon will ever recognize me from *that*.

Hello Goodbye

by Eric Mayer

FLEUR DEIRDRE MAYER ENTERED THE WORLD at 9:30 p.m. on the 11th of December, 1980. It wasn't the same world she would have arrived in a few days earlier and not the world I would have wished for her. The day she was born the front page of the New York Post showed John Lennon dead on a mortuary slab.

December 8... There was a moment when it was only a nightmare. The apartment was quiet that night. No phone had rung. Half asleep, I could not imagine why Kathy should be standing at the bedroom doorway at midnight, crying. My first confused thought was that she had lost the baby. Then she was saying, "John Lennon's been shot," and standing for an eternity before adding incredulously, "and he's dead."

The gaudy terrors of childhood no longer stalk me. No more werewolves, no more secret rooms filled with skulls. At 31 my nights are haunted by the pale, insidious horrors of reality. I could easily have dreamed that the only artist whose life and work I admired enough to consider a "hero" had been gunned down. So there was a moment when I refused to let go of the world I had dozed off in an hour before, a moment when I tried to wake up into that world where Lennon was still alive, but when I finally rolled out of bed Kathy was saying, "I can't believe it," in a small, hurt voice that meant she didn't dare.

The living room was ghostly in the television light. We wandered the channels. He had been coming home.. How many times had we come home after dark in that city? Had we ever failed to pause at the doorway, examining the shadows huddled in the corners of the tiny lobby whose overhead bulb seemed perpetually burnt out? In all our years in Brooklyn these shadows beside the mailboxes, in front of the long faded mirror, had never grown familiar or less threatening. Is it better to have lived without fearing the shadows if it turns out there is something lurking in them after all? He had taken us so many places with his music and now, in our imagination, we could not help going with him through that last, terrible doorway.

"I'll bet John didn't think he was going to spend the night in the morgue," Kathy said.

Then we cried. Mostly for ourselves I suppose. Can you cry for someone who never knew you and you would never have met?

December 9... I hadn't planned on going to work with one hour of sleep but when dawn came I discovered I didn't care one way or the other so I knotted my tie and walked across the apartment complex and through the snowy and deserted Chili-Paul Shopping Center to the bus stop.

I couldn't read my usual 25 pages during the half hour bus ride to the city. I was too busy observing a world I'd been thrust into but was not yet part of. The John D. MacDonald novel stayed in the pocket of my London Fog. I leaned against the cold window and watched the round red sun that squatted behind the skeletal trees along Chili Avenue. I felt extraordinarily lucid, as if the tears of the previous night had washed away a layer of soot which had been allowed to accumulate on my sensibilities by the routine of the passing years. The little girl in the seat in front of me turned to her mother with wide eyes and said, "Look, the sun is following us."

In Rochester I went about the ghoulish ritual of collecting accounts of the death. World Wide News on St. Paul Street carried all the New York papers.

As usual St. Paul was bitterly cold, the wind gusting up off the Genesee River to batter the street signs. Back in my office I turned the space heater up all the way and leafed numbly through the Daily News. Some commentator, Breslin maybe, recalled Kennedy but it wasn't like that junior high school day when my political science teacher, who fancied himself an iconoclast, bounded into the classroom with the electrifying news that the President had been shot, "and is a cinch for re-election if he recovers." Everybody had discussed Kennedy that day. School had been let out. No one at work mentioned Lennon. It made it seem even more a personal grief.

On my way home I sat on the Number 8 bus and searched for even a single saddened face. I found none. Night came down over the city early, assisted by the snowy overcast that suffocates Rochester week after week during the winter. When we left behind the pinkish lights of the Inner Loop I could make out the reflection of my face in the window. It looked unexpectedly old, paunchy, the skin beginning to lose its precarious grip on the bone. What had happened to the nineteen-year-old who'd cut Economics 101 to buy the white album at the Book and Card Mart across from Wilkes-Barre Public Square? The art major with the long hair and the desire to "do something", a desire as vague and unfocussed as it was strong? How had he managed to end up in a three piece suit, in Rochester, reading about John Lennon's murder? Hadn't he been smarter than that? Wasn't the world a saner place than that?

December 10... We went to our prepared childbirth class. We didn't feel up to it but death was one thing and the class was another. Once we'd gotten ourselves seated in the chilly waiting lounge that would have been crowded with patients during the Health Center's appointment hours, our teacher Nurse Worden proceeded to prepare us by forcing a naked doll into the narrow gap in a plastic pelvis until its bald head became wedged and twisted around with an audible squeal to gape up at its heels.

"In reality," she explained, sounding exasperated, "the pelvic bones will stretch to accomodate the head."

There were appreciative and knowing murmurs. I glanced at Kathy who looked as white as a brittle and obviously unstretchable bone. As usual our prepared childbirth class was convincing us that we were anything but. I looked around at my fellow classmates, young Kodak technicians with the obligatory mustaches. They were, I had learned in past weeks, on intimate terms not only with their wives but with their wives' every secretion, bodily function and temperature variation and held forth on these subjects with a gusto usually reserved for discussions of the grindings, clankings and exudations of recalcitrant '67 Dodge transmissions.

Kathy and I are not so mechanically inclined. We had signed up for class on philosophical grounds. Leboyer had convinced us that birth should not be gratuitously violent. Can that first explosion of light and sensation ever be entirely

forgotten? Must it not, at least, linger in the background of consciousness like the faint electromagnetic hiss left by the birth of the universe in the vastness between galaxies?

Unfortunately braincases large enough to accomodate such grandiose excuses for attending childbirth classes can barely squeeze through that narrow gap in the pelvic bone. So before class ended we were down on the floor hooting and howling through the ridiculous breathing exercises that Doctor Lamaze has duped people into believing will turn something that has hurt like hell for several million years into a painless experience. We felt no sense of urgency over our lessons. We were preoccupied by the tragedy and besides, Kathy had been assured by her doctor that she had a wait of at least two more weeks. The arrival of little Fleur or Tristan seemed as far away as September seems to a second grader on the first day of summer vacation.

It was snowing when we left the Center, one of those Rochester flurries that deposits two inches of slick snow on the roads within an hour. As Kathy climbed into the Colt's driver's seat I resolved to take the car out Saturday for another bout with the clutch which I had yet to master. The roads were bad. We skated down Ridge Road, past a dozen shopping centers along Henrietta Road and Lyell Avenue, then slid around the ramp unto the expressway with its treacherous, constantly branching lanes. Kathy was tense. Before we had completed the fifteen mile drive her back had begun to ache as it had all through her pregnancy. They were playing nothing but Beatles songs as we came home alone together for the last time.

December 11... Kathy called me at work at 10:30. I should never have gone in. Our sleepless Monday must have begun to catch up to our senses. Kathy had scrambled me an egg for breakfast and pretended she was just having another backache. It was, she insisted, nothing like those paralyzing Braxton-Hicks contractions she'd suffered during that terrible October Sunday before we'd had the car, when the buses weren't running to Chili Center and we hadn't had taxi fare in the apartment.

I had to stop at the bank for bus fare and by the time I reached the apartment Kathy was on the phone to the Health Center. The nurse asked how far apart the contractions were. We had been prepared for this question at class of course and proceeded to botch the calculations so outrageously that the nurse practically shrieked at us to head straight for the hospital.

"That useless class," Kathy hissed. "I thought it was a paper course."

We stumbled out to the Colt. "Well," I said, climbing manfully but ruefully into the driver's seat. "I told you I'd drive this when I had to."

The clutch was the least of my worries. I was afraid Kathy was going to drop the kid under the dashboard. I managed to lurch the car out of the parking lot without putting it into any gear its designers had ever imagined, shifted straight into third as I pulled onto Paul Road, slammed the brake on too hard at the first red light while downshifting with great dexterity into fourth, jerked the car back into gear limbo somewhere south of first, forgot which foot was on the brake and mercifully stalled out. Your average science fiction hero has an easier time with his commandeered alien dreadnaught.

Somehow we made it. It wasn't pretty. I left Kathy at emergency, stalled out four times before getting past the damnable mechanical gate at the entrance to the parking garage, and sprinted back into Highland as fast as shaking legs would carry me, fully expecting I'd missed it all. We weren't so lucky.

The labor floor reverberated with the hopeless screams of the doomed. I donned

a snappy blue hospital smock of the sort you can buy in Bloomingdale's this season and was ushered into the labor room where Kathy was half sitting in one of those metal hospital beds that look suspiciously like a disassembled cage.

Doctors and nurses paraded in and out pausing to prod and measure. Each had his own opinion as to how events were shaping up. Each managed to be politely alarming. When I was small our family doctor was a garrulous old man who lived across the street from my grandmother and wrote religious tracts spiced with local history in his spare time. No matter what ailed you, be it so humble as a runny nose, Doc could tell you, with relish, about a patient he'd treated who'd died of it, usually unexpectedly and in great pain. The Highland doctors were similarly reassuring. There was some slight concern about Kathy's blood pressure. Nothing to worry over, they assured us as they stabbed intravenous tubes into her veins and frantically strapped a fat, rubberized belt around her abdomen.

The belt led to an ominous looking monitor that crouched beside the bed like an uninvited guest from an Edward Gorey drawing, flashing sinister red lights for reasons unknown to the medical staff, and spitting out a roll of graph paper decorated with a pair of squiggly lines representing uterine contractions and fetal heart rate. Since the squiggles varied randomly as baby, mom to be, or belt, moved, they proved to be as uninformative and endless as the Highland medical procession. "Don't worry," one nurse told us brightly as she took a stethoscope to Kathy's belly for a "real" listen, "it doesn't mean anything."

It seemed a lot of technology to go to for nothing. It was at least atmospheric, filling the room with the bubbling thump of the baby's heart beat which stopped disconcertingly from time to time as she moved.

Kathy had wished to avoid such technological encumbrances but was in too much pain to protest strenuously. Her eyes were rimmed with red and her forehead flushed. The rest of her face was deathly white. She looked like she was wearing a mask. She looked like Fleur looks when she screams and holds her breath.

Searching for some way to relieve the pain, we soon realized we had learned our breathing exercises almost as well as we had learned to time contractions. Kathy finally recalled one exercise that consisted mainly of panting when the pain was most intense, which is probably about what you'd do left to your own devices. She was in no mood to talk. I passed the afternoon watching the printouts from the monitor pile up on the floor next to the dropped bars of the bed. Pain and life, the pain surging up into jagged peaks, the life merely an erratic undulation in the graphite lines. The room dimmed. Low clouds moved in off Lake Ontario and as evening fell it began to snow. In the dimness, the baby's bubbling heart beat sounded too loud. I asked if it could be turned down but when it was we could hear the insipid radio station the hospital insisted on piping in.

From our books and classes we knew that labor was supposed to progress in stages. We could picture too clearly the mountain that had been drawn one evening on a blackboard at the Health Center. Gentle foothills had risen inexorably into a sheer escarpment. But during the morning and afternoon and on into the evening there were no discernable stages but only a pain which grew no better and seemed too intense to grow worse. As the snow filled the dark sky outside the window, we wondered if these were still the foothills and if they were how anybody could scale that final escarpment.

At eight thirty, after we had been at Highland for eleven hours, I followed one of our interchangeable doctors into the hallway and questioned her. She told me that it would be a while yet. The average first labor took fourteen hours and the week

before a woman had taken forty hours to deliver. I thanked her for the information but I was thinking of old Doc, the dreaded penicillin injection in his hand. "What are you bawling about, young man? I knew a young man once whose physician used a rusty needle. Broke right off in his arm. Now he had reason to bawl."

I was reluctant to return to that gloomy room where the monitor scratched away at its roll and Kathy lay hurting. I took the elevator down to the cafeteria but it was closed except for the vending machines. A hand-lettered scrap of paper on the change machine announced it was out of order and what few quarters I had I needed for the long distance telephone calls I expected to make. I took a last regretful look at the tiny sandwiches lying swaddled in aluminum foil behind the locked glass door of the vending machine and headed back.

Things had changed. Doctors were clustered around the bed, a nurse was slipping the locks off the wheels on the IV rack, the monitor had been disconnected. "It's time," someone said, thrusting a white hospital mask and gown into my arms. "We're going to delivery."

Dazed, I followed the procession down the fluorescent-lit hallway, through the white double doors with the red warning -- Hospital Personnel Only -- and into the big, cold, empty-looking room beyond. I felt giddy. I was tired and hungry and knew that when we emerged our lives would never be the same again. The day seemed unreal. Kathy had been far away much of the time, coping with her pain. Was it a dream? Everything had a slightly unfocussed quality. Something in the delivery room smelled of rubber and I was struck by the sudden notion that the world was ready to dissolve into a ringing whirlpool and I would wake up, still biting the hard rubber mouthpiece, to see the dentist leaning over me, holding up the bad tooth and assuring me it was all right, another one will grow in by next year.

I did not wake up. I took hold of one of Kathy's legs. That was the job that was supposed to make me something more than a voyeur in the delivery room. Kathy used to take ballet three days a week. My arm, which gets its exercises carting a briefcase with a light lunch in it, ached for a week.

Kathy had refused medication throughout the ordeal and continued to do so. The breathing exercises might be worthless, the course of labor different than we had been taught, the IV and monitor unwelcome intrusions, but she had made up her mind long before that our baby was going to enter the world alert and awake and that was that.

It was a decision more easily made than adhered to. I felt helpless. I could do nothing to ease the pain. I could not even imagine the pain. I thought of those young technicians at our classes and in retrospect their bright, clinically exhaustive chatterings seemed nothing more than clumsy attempts to pre-empt for themselves an experience that no man will ever know regardless of how many manuals he might memorize. I wondered if men had to labor and deliver to bring life into the world would the world respect life more?

At the end it was a sort of death. There was blood smelling sharply of metal and for a few minutes there was something unfamiliar about Kathy as if she had withdrawn into a place that had nothing to do with Rochester in December of 1980.

Then the top of the baby's head appeared and suddenly she had slid out to the waist. I must have blinked. I cannot retrieve that emergence, that precise moment of transition from womb to world, though it seems important and I've tried. Do we believe we come from nothingness any more than we believe we are headed back? What did Fleur think? Her eyes were wide open, enormous, gazing up toward the ceiling

lights. Was the sudden barrage of sensation obliterating for all time the gentle dreams of the womb, faint recollections of some past life, a wordless familiarity with the clean, empty vessel of consciousness?

The doctor syringed her mouth, cradling the nearly bald head that was elongated but hardly grotesque as we had been warned. She was not wrinkled, not covered with down or wax, not bloody as I recall. Don't be disappointed, they had warned us, but there was no question of that. Emotionally I had been prepared only for a half formed creature. I could not believe the reality, the rosebud mouth, long delicate eyelashes, the tiny fingernails, the little fingers with the wrinkles precisely in place at each joint. By some miracle nature, like one of those penny arcade machines that stamps the Lord's Prayer onto a new penny, had stamped out a complete human being into five pounds and five ounces of flesh.

"You have a baby girl," the doctor announced. The first girl in three generations of Mayers. I made the traditional phone calls. "Hello grampy." "Hello grammy."

December 12... That night, sleepless, I camped out in a straight backed chair in Kathy's room. I wheeled Fleur in from the nursery around 11:30 and she went to Kathy's breast as if she'd been at it for years. She didn't cry much. At dawn I left, hoping to catch some sleep back at the apartment but as soon as I arrived I was called back to Highland because Fleur needed a blood change which might have been serious but turned out to be routine.

The depression hit me in the evening. For the first time I was alone in the claustrophobic apartment in Chili Center, surrounded by dirty dishes, scattered clothes and newspapers headlining Lennon's death. Fleur seemed hardly plausible in such surroundings. A dream. The dishes caked with spaghetti sauce, the socks crumpled on the bathroom tiles next to the litter box, the newspapers with the bleak headlines were real. Especially the newspapers. They seemed to be everywhere I turned, perched on the sofa, piled on the dry sink and the television, stacked up on the wooden box filled with the Beatles memorabilia Kathy has saved for 15 years. We had never imagined an obituary joining those brittle Newsweek clippings, old Tiger Beat covers, the dolls with the wiry hair, the bubblegum cards. Not so soon.

What right did I have to bring a life into a world where want ads scream for aggressive money-oriented individuals, where standards for success are indistinguishable from lunacy and people gape at the flat, smiling faces on the television sets until they can no longer be bothered to look beneath the flat, smiling faces on the madmen, the murderers who are always remembered as being nice guys and perfect neighbors? What would my daughter do out in a world run by computers where credit ratings and resumes walk like men? How will I tell her that being a human being has become an avocation and an expensive one at that?

I typed an incoherent six page letter to my grandmother. I had been forty hours without sleep. Eleven years ago I had gone without sleep for that long. Kathy and I had travelled to New York City with friends to see the Kinks, enjoyed the early show and improvidently stayed over for the late one. We had wandered the November streets of the Village in those waning days of the sixties, not suspecting how finally it would all come to an end, Peter in his peacoat, me with my long hair and scraggly mustache and frayed bellbottoms, Kathy in an old coat that looked like something Elizabeth Taylor might have worn in *National Velvet*. We thought we knew quite a lot about the future then. We thought we were part of it.

We missed the last bus back to Wilkes-Barre and spent the night sitting against a wall in the main concourse, fending off the bums who wandered over to us to ask if we had a light, man, a quarter, man. Kathy and Suzi had run up to the stage with a

bouquet of roses and Ray had told everyone he'd always loved flowers.

Kathy and Fleur signed out of Highland on schedule Sunday afternoon. Fleur's eyes, so wide at birth, were swollen shut. We had asked that antibiotics be used in her eyes but the forms had never made it through bureaucratic channels and someone had gone ahead and administered the stinging, obsolete silver nitrate solution with which our state legislatures have traditionally welcomed newborn citizens into their world.

It was two o'clock as we left the parking lot. The vigil was beginning for John Lennon.

November... During November we had finally found a copy of *A Cellar Full Of Noise*, the book written by Beatles manager Brian Epstein before his untimely death in the sixties. We had been looking for years. Since we never really expected to find the book it had been a low-key sort of quest. We kept our eyes open.

So it happened that one Saturday I was down on my knees because Kathy couldn't get down like that with her stomach, pulling books out from under a table filled with 19¢ paperbacks in a store in Chili's Westmar Plaza, one of those half starved little shopping centers you find in the suburbs not far from the newer, bigger malls. I guess I wasn't consciously looking for the book -- it was a most unlikely place to find it, but if you could have sifted through the shadowy mass of motivations causing me to pull out for examination a succession of paperbacks which all turned out to be Barbara Cartland romances or *The Omen*, you would have found the idea there.

It was behind a stack of Phyllis Whitney gothics. I had never seen a copy and momentarily mistook it for another Fab Four trivia collection. Then reality hit me and I grabbed it fast as if there might be anyone else in Rochester who would know what the book was, or care.

I felt a bit lightheaded. The covers were unyellowed, as if the book had appeared here in a flash, straight out of the sixties, having avoided all the sad, gray years in between. What sort of fan would have saved it so long only to finally discard it? I held the prize out to Kathy without a word.

It was the sort of magical thing that happened often once but will never happen in exactly the same way again because no matter how many times I replay the old albums I will see superimposed that picture of John Lennon dead. The dead all look the same. Personality fled, features settle into slack anonymity like the faces of sleeping infants whose features have yet to be molded by their personalities. My grandfather looked no different the evening my parents took me to the funeral home, my ineffectually slicked down hair falling onto my forehead as usual, the knot in my clip-on tie feeling like a lump in my throat. As we went down the thickly carpeted hallway I peeked through a doorway whose door had been left ajar by mistake and saw him in the coffin. I had not been prepared.

The grandfather I knew bought rolls of adding machine paper home from the telephone company offices. Summers, I sat out on my grandparents' sunny porch filling the rolls with endless cartoon strips which unravelled in bright streamers of planes, exploding bombs and pistols, spilling through the white wooden railings and settling on the carefully trimmed hemlocks. Those rolls seemed nearly as endless as the summers but they did end and when they ended I saw to it that the heroes who died did so gloriously and for a good cause. I thought life was like that. A story that you could make come out right if you wanted to. About the time I began to find out differently I discovered the Beatles and those four at least wrote their story the way they wanted and I took some comfort in that. But their story didn't come out

right either.

There is always a new story. One of them is underway here in Rochester. When I was younger I imagined many things for myself, none of which have ever come to pass, but it never occurred to me that I might become a father. It is hard to accept. It is hard to accept that my daughter should have been born into the world after John Lennon had left it, perhaps because I associate the Beatles so strongly with those things I consider important, with the kind of life I wished to live and which has sadly slipped beyond my reach. I guess I wish Fleur could have had for a father the nineteen-year-old who thought life was just a story to be written. Of course, he couldn't have put a roof over her head.

Kathy and I made a remarkable discovery a couple of weeks ago. For some reason Lennon's final album soothes Fleur to sleep. She quiets at the first note, no matter how cranky she is. Her eyes widen, then close, whatever small shadows were haunting her mind driven out. We have tried other albums to no avail. It is one of those inexplicable things that she does, like laughing at the crayon pictures I drew in second grade. What could it mean? Surely it is not the music itself. Can she sense what it means to us? Is it familiar to her? Is there something of that music in us? Is it all not lost after all? Fleur is just starting out, but by her birth she has changed the world for us and, just maybe, given us a chance to start again along with her.

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Dot Fiction Supplement

by Kevin Smith

one

I AM STANDING AROUND MINDING MY own business at the last One Tun and clutching a pint glass which is more than somewhat empty, when I hear this voice and what this voice says is like this:

"Are you glop or leather?"

I am contemplating the existential significance of this remark, on account of I do not understand it nearly as much as I do not understand why dead folks win Hugo awards which is to say, not at all, when the voice says it again and I think that maybe the voice is saying it to me. So I look around and can see nobody who is talking to me and in fact they are all talking to someone else. This is very depressing as I only come to the One Tun to talk to the guys and dolls, which is difficult to do when everybody is talking to everybody else, and I am certain I remember to wash this morning.

So I am feeling very depressed all of a sudden when the voice speaks again and this time I am sure that it is me the voice speaks to, as it speaks very impatiently and is accompanied by a sharp pain in the shin. I look down and see these two little dolls who I do not see before on account of they are little, and what these little dolls are doing is looking up at me, so I guess it is they who ask this question. It occurs to me that it is a good idea I should answer this question, as these two little dolls are none other than Miz Chrissie and Louisiana Linda and they are pretty wine'd up. Also I am struck only a glancing blow on the shin. So I say to Miz Chrissie and Louisiana Linda in these terms:

"Am I glop or leather?"

Now there are plenty of things to say in this world that are more sensible than this, since if Miz Chrissie or Louisiana Linda know the answer they do not go around asking me, even if they are pretty wine'd up. But I am playing for time while I try to work it out and will say anything.

Miz Chrissie and Louisiana Linda look at each other like they are thinking that this is a cretin who does not understand simple questions such as "Are you glop or leather?" and probably does not know how to tie his shoelaces either. In fact my shoes do not have shoelaces, but I still do not know whether I am glop or leather. So I stand there looking confused and Miz Chrissie decides to explain. What she says is:

"Glop. Chocolate fudge sundae."

So of course I know she is talking about nothing but sex.

Not so long ago I am reading an article in Woolly-bear Pickersgill's fanzine *Stop Breaking Down* which appears for the first time in more than three years, which some guys consider is too soon at that. In this fanzine is an article called "Chocolate Fudge Sundae" which has no more to do with chocolate fudge than A.L. West has to do with hard work, and is in fact about sex. I do not rate this article above five out of ten since it has all the depth of a thin pound note, but of course I do not say so at the moment as it is written by Miz Chrissie herself. Also, Louisiana Linda is none other than Woolly-bear's ever-loving wife, and these two little dolls can give a guy more than a sharp pain in the shin if they have half a mind to.

Well, now that I know what glop is, I get to thinking about the question and what I think is if glop is all about sex then leather is all about sex too, and I will offer plenty of four to one on that what the question is all about is sex.

This takes plenty of thinking as I am pretty wined up myself and do not think too straight, at that. Miz Chrissie is getting impatient and looking like she is thinking whether she can stand on one leg long enough to get a clear shot at my shin again before she falls over, which is a look I do not much like the look of. So I quickly say as follows:

"Am I glop or leather?"

Now, these words do not seem to be much different from the last words I say, and in fact are much the same, but this time I say them in a tone of great enlightenment and comprehension, which is not so far from the truth, at that. I understand the question as well as any guy, and better than most. But this is as much help to me as a bike is to a fish as I do not have a clue about the answer. This question is not a question I ask myself every day of the week, and in fact is not a question I ask myself any day of the week. So I tell Miz Chrissie and Louisiana Linda that this is a very good question while I debate whether I am glop or leather and decide that this is the kind of question that is easier to answer when a guy is not all wined up. This tactic does not fool Miz Chrissie and Louisiana Linda one bit, as they see it on television every time a politician is interviewed.

"Boring accountant," they say, looking disdainfully down their noses at me, which is a pretty neat trick for dolls who are that little.

Too late I realize I should offer them a drink when they first ask me the question, as this gives me half an hour to think about it, if the bar staff at the One Tun do not hurry themselves.

Across the room they see Slicker Hansen and begin to push through the crowd towards him, as Slicker Hansen is the type of guy who knows whether he should be glop or leather, and soon he is talking nineteen to the dozen with Miz Chrissie and Louisiana Linda.

Meanwhile, I get to thinking, well, am I glop or leather?

two

SOME TIME AGO I AM IN THIS little speakeasy called The Peasant talking with Half-an-Ear Langford, though I do not say much myself since when a guy talks with Half-an-Ear Langford it is Half-an-Ear Langford who does the talking. We are talking

about this and that, when Half-an-ear suddenly says how Woolly-bear Pickersgill is thinking of taking a trip down on the west side, and so is Spiny Dorey. Now Half-an-Ear thinks this is a very good idea, as he runs a sideline organizing trips down on the west side and does very nicely thank you out of it, but I must say that the news comes as a great surprise to me as Woolly-bear Pickersgill is never one to have dealings with the west side in any shape or form.

I think nothing more of it, and I certainly do not give Half-an-ear the impression that I am interested in such a proposition myself, or else he will talk me into it on the spot, as he is always trying to get as many guys as he can to take trips down on the west side. Also I do not get a word in edgeways.

Now the reason I do not give it a thought is I always consider the west side a very dangerous place indeed, as it is full of guys who will stick a knife in you as soon as look at you. In fact, I hear sooner. The west side is all sewn up by Ronnie the Boss, who gets to be top man by placing the Peanut in a sack and giving all the Peanut's boys retirement gifts of concrete boots and a free walk across the Potomac. A lot of citizens say this happens none too soon, though I note that none of these citizens are wops or niggers, at that. Ronnie the Boss brings in his own boys such as Wooden Georgie and Caspar the Wino and Gabby Haig, so you can see what sort of a guy he is. Caspar the Wino and Gabby Haig are guys who will sell their fathers for a couple of bobs, and the way I hear it they never even have fathers.

Well, that night I get to thinking that if Woolly-bear Pickersgill and Spiny Dorey are thinking of a trip down on the west side then there must be something in it, as these are guys who do nothing for nothing, especially Spiny Dorey. So I think some more about a trip down on the west side and I drink a little scotch to help the thinking, as it is not something I do more often than I can help, and the more I think about it the more I think it is a good idea. In fact, I think about it a lot that night, and I wake up in the morning thinking that in future I do not think so much since it only makes my head hurt. And of a trip down on the west side I do not think at all.

A few weeks later I get to talking to a guy I do not see before who just blows in from the west side and this guy talks of nothing but what is going on over there. It seems that Gabby Haig and Caspar the Wino are fighting it out over who should be number two to Ronnie the Boss, even though when Ronnie the Boss becomes top man he says Wooden Georgie is number two. But Gabby Haig and Caspar the Wino are not such guys as will let Wooden Georgie stay number two for long, and Wooden Georgie says nothing at all. Gabby Haig, this guy says, decides that the way to get to be number two is to get tough with the Keeno Good Boys who control the east side. So he shoots his mouth off about how the Keeno Good Boys are no good at all and for two pins he will be round with his hot boys and cause a little premature death by allergic reaction to hot lead.

Well, this statement goes down with the Keeno Good Boys like swallowing so much glass, and Big Red Nid says if Gabby Haig so much as spits outside the west side, the Keeno Good Boys will be filling the champagne bottles with petrol and if a few happen to drop on Gabby Haig with the fuses lit, then it is just too bad. Gabby Haig says this is nothing but provocation, since no one is allowed to talk of cooling off guys except him. Of course, Ronnie the Boss does not take kindly to this kind of talk, since the west side is his territory and he does not want it blown to pieces while it is still producing such good returns, so he says that Gabby Haig is talking hypothetically and does not mean what he says. Now this I can believe, since Gabby Haig talks in such a way that very often no one can understand what he says in any case, and he might as well talk hypothetically as any other language.

Caspar the Wino listens to all this, and when he sees Gabby Haig slapped down by Ronnie the Boss he jumps in and says how Gabby Haig does not know beans, as Caspar the Wino controls the hardware and not Gabby Haig. What Gabby Haig says to this is not reported, but I will lay plenty of six to four it is not polite.

Now all this is very worrying, as our part of town is slap between the west side and the east side, and the quickest way from one to the other is right smack through the middle. Personally, I have no desire to see black sedans loaded with Gabby and his boys come hurtling through, as a guy can get knocked down by such black sedans and there is no more chance of claiming off Gabby's insurance than out-drinking Ding-a-Ling Harry on a good day. Not to mention where the Keeno Good Boys will very quickly get the idea of taking out the black sedans before they reach the east side, which leaves them not much choice of where to do it. In fact, no choice.

This is all on my mind when I am with these guys and dolls in a big, empty speak down by the railway station. This speak is empty because it has worse beer than the One Tun, even if it is real beer and the One Tun is always Watneys Worst, and it is big because it is built that way. We go there because it is the only speak in Surrey where all the guys and dolls can sit down together, though personally I can sit down almost any place, and go to a speak to drink beer. Well, I am sitting there thinking that once again I choose the worst of all the bad beers and that this speak will drive me to rum and coke before very long, such as five minutes, when Iron Maule suggests, very pleasant, that it is maybe a good idea if I go on a trip down on the west side. Well, I listen to Iron Maule when he says this, as he is not called Iron Maule for nothing. But I ask him if he knows what is going on down on the west side these days, and I also ask him if he is talking with Half-an-Ear Langford lately. But he takes no notice of these questions and says again he considers how it is a good idea if I go down on the west side. Well, I see I am going to get no sense out of him this evening, and turn away to tell Big Brian how I want a rum and coke this round. Big Brian falls over, as he is a sensitive soul who will faint when distressed by such things as a guy not wanting to drink beer, even bad beer. But that night I remember what Iron Maule says, and Iron Maule is not such a bad guy, at that.

Well, with one thing and another, I am soon round at the Peasant with Half-an-Ear Langford again and while his mouth is otherwise occupied drinking beer I manage to tell him that I want to go on a trip down on the west side. Naturally, Half-an-Ear thinks this is a very good proposition and says he will put me on the list right away, if I give him a fin. Now I am not so sure that I want to be on any list, especially if it costs a fin, but Half-an-Ear says that this is the way it has to be and if I am not put on the list, and do not give him a fin, I do not go down on the west side, and that is that. So I am put on the list with Spiny Dorey and Woolly-bear Pickersgill, which is not much for a fin.

Some days pass and nothing much happens, which is the general thing that happens, when I read in the papers how Ronnie the Boss makes some proposals to Big Red Nid. Now these proposals are very good for Ronnie the Boss and Big Red Nid, but the best I can say about them is that you can have them. What Ronnie the Boss proposes is like this: if any trouble starts there is no need to start on breaking up the speaks and numbers rackets and such enterprises on the west side or the east side, as there is plenty of room in the middle where they can fight it out. This disturbs me more than somewhat, and there are a number of prominent citizens in the middle who protest a lot as it disturbs them more than somewhat too.

Well, Ronnie the Boss does not like this sort of behavior as it can only lead to trouble, but he is not such a big guy out of the west side and does not wish to antagonise prominent citizens who do not live there. So he explains how he is talking hypothetically again and what he really means is if a couple of black sedans

go out of the west side with Caspar the Wino and his boys, and a couple of limousines come out of the east side full of Keeno Good Boys, then naturally they are likely to meet in the middle, and if they are packing rods, which is more than likely and in fact is a dead cert, then someone is sure to let fly. This, he says, is all he means. Well, there is at least one guy around here who thinks Ronnie the Boss does not know what he means, but of course I do not say so out loud as Ronnie the Boss has big ears and hears everything, and I do not want to annoy Ronnie the Boss, as I am by no means a prominent citizen.

Well, I guess it is all this talking hypothetically again, because Gabby Haig ups and says how there is a contingency plan and if the Keeno Good Boys begin to start to look as if they are planning to move out from the east side then he gets down there good and quick and tosses a few tactical pineapples around. And of course he does not toss these pineapples around actually in the east side, as this is provocation, but right close up so they can see real good what happens when guys step out of line.

When Caspar the Wino gets to hear this he leaps up and down and says how there is no such contingency plan, as he is in charge of plans and he never makes one like this. He says Gabby Haig is talking out of the back of his head, which is not such news to some of us, at that. Even Foot Holdstock does not say such things as Gabby Haig.

Of course, Ronnie the Boss cannot have this sort of thing going on as it undermines his authority, and maybe someone hauls off and places him in a sack just like the Peanut. And he cannot just go around saying that either Gabby is right or Caspar is right, because for one thing that means either Caspar is wrong or Gabby is wrong and if a top guy is wrong that undermines his authority too, and for another thing he does not know who is right in any case. So he says both of them are right. The way Ronnie the Boss explains it, when Caspar says contingency plan what he means is one of his plans for contingencies, whereas when Gabby Haig says contingency plan what he means is how he reacts in an emergency they do not plan for beforehand. It occurs to me that a guy who reacts by tossing a few pineapples around is about as safe to know as an earthquake, and probably less so, but I am very impressed by Ronnie the Boss's explaining, as I never hear anything like it.

Well, whether it is all this talk of pineapples or I do not know what, the next thing is Woolly-bear Pickersgill and Spiney Dorey both haul off and say how they do not wish to go down on the west side after all, and make Half-an-Ear cross them off his list. This upsets Half-an-Ear, as he already books up the trips and stands to lose a lot of scratch unless he can find some new citizens who want to take a trip down on the west side. So he starts asking various guys and dolls and from time to time I hear now that A.L. West is thinking of going, or Slim Jim Barker, or even Slicker Hansen, but none of these guys get on Half-an-Ear's list. A doll who nearly gets on the list is Different Roz, who is called Different Roz because one thing you can say about Different Roz is that she is different. But she changes her mind at the last minute, which is not so different, at that.

Half-an-Ear is getting pretty desperate by now, as there is not much time left, and he considers dropping the whole thing. But I say to him, no, hang in there kid, and then who should come along but Roly Poly Roger who wants to take a trip down on the west side. You should see Half-an-Ear then, as he looks like a guy who loses a nickel and finds a C note, and maybe he does, at that.

Now, Roly Poly Roger is a guy who is very roly and more than somewhat poly, who does not do much in the way of fanzines, but hangs around at cons and in fact organizes more than his share of them. He is generally agreed to be a good guy, even

though he is in the books racket and spends a lot of his time at cons hanging around in the book room selling books to young squirts who do not know better than to buy science fiction, and I must confess I buy the odd book from Roly Poly Roger myself, which only goes to show what sort of a book seller Roly Poly Roger is. Roly Poly Roger also goes to a lot of Star Trek cons and takes whole bundles of scratch off little Star Trekkies, and whatever else there is to take off little Star Trekkies, which is sometimes not much, the way I hear it. So you can see that Roly Poly Roger is one good con merchant.

Well, Roly Poly Roger and I are standing around in the street one day, talking of this and that and mostly about the trip down on the west side, when this black sedan goes by at high speed with Gabby Haig in the front seat by the driver, and Gabby Haig is waving a big John Roscoe out of the window like he does not care who sees it. The sedan screeches round the corner heading for the east side at about seventy miles per hour and leaves long black tyre marks on the road and a cloud of smoke in the air. Right behind is another black sedan and driving this is none other than Caspar the Wino, with a couple of his boys in the back seat. These boys are both hanging out of the windows with rods pointing in the general direction of Gabby Haig, and these rods are going like this:

"Bang! Bang!"

Now if there is one thing I do not like it is the sound of rods going bang! bang! as at most times this means there is hot lead flying around and about, and hot lead is none too particular about who it hits. So I dive down into a doorway and have a soft landing on top of Roly Poly Roger who gets there about half a second before me, and this is none too soon, at that, because as Gabby Haig goes round the corner, Caspar's boys start shooting across the angle, which is where we were standing just before.

Well, Caspar screams round the corner after Gabby, and the rods are still going bang! bang! and the both of them are headed for the east side. I confess I do not entirely understand what is happening, as I always consider Caspar and Gabby are on the same side, even if they do not like each other much more than Custer and Sitting Bull. But one thing I do know is that Big Red Nid is not the kind of guy who will stop to debate the fine points, but will send the Keeno Good Boys after the both of them.

Sure enough, not five minutes later, back round the corner comes Caspar and this time there is only one guy hanging out of the back window with a rod, and he is shooting at a red limo where a Good Boy shoots back with an ugly machine gun, only his aim is worse than most and he takes out all the windows on the other side of the street, which does not worry Caspar's boy one bit. Next is Gabby Haig, who puts down his rod, or maybe he loses it, and is tossing pineapples in the right direction when you are standing still and so is the party you are tossing them at, but when you are in a sedan doing sixty-five round a bend and so is the other guy, then it is a dead heat with impossible that you actually hit the guy. And so it is, as chunks of masonry go flying from the buildings and bits of road leap into the air, but the two limos keep going.

Then one of them pulls to a halt outside Maggie's Bar and two Good Boys dash inside carrying bottles, and if it is hooch in these bottles then I can only say that I never wish to taste it, as the Good Boys jump back into the red limo and Maggie's Bar takes off for heaven. Now, I never see just two Molotov Cocktails do this to a joint before, and start to wondering whether Big Red Nid discovers something new in the way of cocktails. It is only later I find out that Gabby Haig is using Maggie's Bar to store extra pineapples and Roscoes, which is a low trick even for Gabby. It

is not cricket from Maggie either, as I am in Maggie's Bar most days.

Well, all hell breaks loose and guys are running for cover and pulling out rods all along the street. The citizens hereabouts are mostly peaceable guys, although they are not averse to giving you a punch in the snoot if they think you need one, but when they get riled they have a tendency towards violence, and there is nothing riles a guy more than being shot at. The red limo does not get ten yards before it is turned into a colander, which is apt to happen to a limo of any color when half a hundred guys let loose with Betseys.

It goes all quiet then, except for one of the guys from the limo who moans a lot until Acid-Joseph picks him off for target practice. Of course, we are all waiting for the autos to come back again as there is no chance that Ronnie the Boss allows two of Big Red Nid's limos to roam around the west side, and sure enough back they come, the two limos chased by three black sedans.

Well, all the guys behind cover, which is all of them, haul off and let fly with their rods. Some of the guys shoot only at the red limos, and some shoot only at the black sedans, but I can tell you that most guys shoot at anything that moves, and personally I do not move a muscle. Not one auto gets through, which I guess comes as a surprise to Ronnie the Boss and Big Red Nid when they find out.

When the dust settles, which takes a long time as there is a lot of dust, I get up and brush myself off and I say to Roly Poly Roger like this:

"If we do not take this trip down on the west side pretty soon," I say to him, "there is no west side to see, but only a lot of fallen down buildings, and we have our own fallen down buildings which are just as good."

"This is substantially correct," Roly Poly Roger says.

"On the other hand," I say, "now that Caspar the Wino and Gabby Haig are wiped out maybe there are no more shoot outs, as Ronnie the Boss certainly considers them bad for business."

"This too is not without foundation," Roly Poly Roger says. And we stroll round the back streets to the One Tun and get outside of a little of the beer there. I am still so shook up I even drink two pints of London before I realize it.

Well, a few days later when it is all back to normal again, except for the hole in the ground where Maggie's Bar once is, and no windows all along one side of the street, and a few holes in the walls, I find myself with Half-an-Ear Langford in the Peasant and I mention to him my thoughts on shoot outs and trips down on the west side generally, now that Gabby and Caspar are out of the way.

"Oh no," Half-an-Ear says. "Oh no. Do you not read the papers? Caspar the Wino and Gabby Haig are not in the three sedans which chase the Keeno Good Boys out of the west side," he says. "Ronnie the Boss is waiting for them when they come back and hauls them in. They are still around and, or so I hear, they do not like each other even more these days."

I put on a very glum face at this, and I am certain the glass of milk I drink for breakfast turns in my stomach.

"Look at the bright side," Half-an-Ear says. "Look at it this way. When it happens again, maybe the west side is the safest place to be."

Cheesehenge

by John Bangsund

ABOUT THESE SPEARS SOMEONE is chucking through my walls...

Friday I just sort of admired *Warhoon* 28 and fondled it a bit and give a lot of thought to whether it should go in the glass-fronted cabinet with Flinders and Westall's *Drawings* and the autographed *Alexandria Quartet* and so on, or whether it should be somewhere closer to hand and to hell with its immense value to collectors, I paid for it I've got a right to read it if I want whatever damage that does to it as a collector's item haven't I! Of course I have, so I compromised by putting it next to the Britannica, which seems vaguely appropriate. Vols. 1 to 24, all the facts about the known universe arranged A to Z, each volume handsomely bound in maroon and gold with embossed thistle, then jump to this maverick vol. 28, bound in green and flaunting a wild shamrock, and in it all the really important stuff you'll never find in the other 24 volumes.

Saturday or more accurately Sunday morning I read the first 176 pages, to the end of the Chicon report, fascinated, chuckling here and there, laughing outright a few times, and dare I admit it? wondering now and then what all the fuss was about with this Willis bloke. A pleasant fan-writer, yes, welcome in any fanzine I publish, certainly, but not the legendary Willis who lives in my head. But this is 1952 and I am 13 years old and not yet in fandom. It will be another eleven years before I meet Lee Harding and become innocently entangled in this crazy alternative universe, in which live giants and legends unknown to Britannica, a world of Warhoons and Warners and Willises, who leap full-grown into my head, and stay there, and time and closer acquaintance does not diminish them. But in the small hours of Sunday 11 May 1980 I wonder, just a little, about this Willis bloke. His puns annoy me -- me! a paid-up card-carrying member of Carthaginian fandom! -- and I wonder about that, too.

Sunday or more accurately Monday morning I read on to page 229, and skim affectionately through the 30 pages of "The Enchanted Duplicator", for which I am not in the mood right then, personal Willis shading anything ever achieved by allegorical Willis, and anyway it's awfully late and there's work to be done tomorrow. Which I note I am not doing.

So I've read just a little beyond "The Harp Stateside." I'm at the foot of page 259, wondering precisely what (rb) means by "Hi, Ho, Kehli." I have seen westerns by Lee Hoffman who, so the sound of galloping hooves does not elude me, but Kehli does. I make a mental note to ring Foyster and ask him what Kehli means. He will tell me, a note of scorn barely suppressed in his telling, he may even call me a fakefan again if he's in a good mood, but I will know. After talking to John I may still not know whether Willis stateside and Hoffman gafiote are cause and effect.

By page 259 I certainly know what all the fuss was about with this Willis bloke. From the moment he left the convention and went looking for America, the legendary Willis who lives in my head started emerging on paper. And from that moment I started to understand why it was necessary, even if it took ten years, for (rb) to publish all of this massive 614-page hardbound fanzine. Anything less would have been merely extremely interesting and a collector's item. But this, this is a book to read, a book to keep close at hand to read again, and again, and yet again, and stuff the collectors. You have had it very well bound, Dick, but before too long you should be able to tell a trufan's copy of *Warhoon* 28 by the fact that it looks as scruffy as a magic mimeograph.

Monday afternoon, 4:05 p.m. in Melbourne as the crow flies, drizzling with rain outside my window, the factory workers up the road beginning to knock off for the day, and I haven't started work for the day yet. Penguin Books (Harmondsworth and Ringwood, 1980) have favored me with a cookery book to edit, and the lovely Jackie will be ringing me on Wednesday to see what I think of it, and all I think of it so far is that the title page is very nicely typed, because that's as far as I've read, but hell, there's all Tuesday left for the rest.

Puns and drafts. Before I forget, I must say something about puns and drafts. In January 1975 I ignorantly started a brand-new fanzine called *First Draft*. The title was totally honest, but I was soon informed that it had been used before, and I detest using secondhand titles, so I changed it to *The Cosmic Circle Commentator*, but that looked ridiculous, so I reverted to *Philosophical Gas*, which is also a totally honest title if not a felicitous title ("Not a felicitous title" -- Jack Speer). Some even consider it a secondhand title, but this is debatable, since Scythrop Glowry, who published the original *Philosophical Gas: or, a Project for a General Illumination of the Human Mind*, was a figment of the imagination of Thomas Love Oeacock. In February 1975 (ah, them was the days, Joxer, them was days, when the world was young and we thought nothing of doing a fanzine every month) I published *Philosophical Gas* 29, in which John Foyster said: "Has anyone ever told you that your writing is reminiscent of that of Walt Willis? No? There is good reason for this, and perhaps one day, when we can spend a few hours idly conversing, I might take the opportunity to outline this reason."

Five years have passed and John has not yet taken that opportunity, but I have not spent all that time sitting around waiting for him to outline the reason for my writing not reminding him of Walt Willis's. A grown man of my worldly experience and excessive bulk may surely be allowed to think about such things for himself, however absurd a conclusion he may for the time being come to, and this I have done. And it all has to do with puns and drafts and being born only one-eighth Irish.

Great-grandmother Hodgins did her best for me by being born and raised Belfast-Protestant-Irish, but in later moments of forgetfulness about my future as a fanwriter emigrated to the Australian colonies, married a Frenchman, and allowed her daughter Mary Eugenie to marry an Englishman. My grandmother Holyoak in turn positively encouraged her daughter Ivy to marry a nice young man named Leif, whose father was Norwegian and mother Danish, and by the time I came along there was hardly anything left of my Irish heritage. Whether this accounts for seven-eighths of my inability to remind John Foyster of Walt Willis I am not sure; if it does, it would also go halfway to explaining why my writing does not remind him of Ibsen's or Kirkegaard's, though in fairness he has never said that it doesn't.

Oh, and there's the little matter of science fiction, too. I started reading science fiction in 1963 and more or less stopped in 1968. I have read more sf than the average reader ever will, and each year I read more sf than the average reader does, but it would be fair to say that I was a science fiction fan for only five

years, after which I became a fan. I can put an exact date on this. Leigh Edmonds started ANZAPA in October 1968, and that's when I started enjoying fans more than I enjoyed sf. I suspect -- no, I'm sure -- that Walt Willis enjoys fans more than sf, but his enjoyment of sf and his commitment to it lasted far longer than mine. I imagine that this would be part of the reason that John hasn't got around to outlining to me yet.

I enjoy puns, even other people's puns, perhaps especially other people's puns. Adelaide fandom, when I had the pleasure to be part of Adelaide fandom, was a hotbed of punsters, and I have no doubt it still is. To be with Marc Ortlieb, Paul Stokes, Mike Clark, John McPharlin, Jeff Harris and Roman Orszanski, and perhaps a few others as token audience, when they were in full-punning verbal flight was sheer side-splitting bliss. I had no urge to out-pun them. They were like a four-dimensional cryptic crossword puzzle come to life and I just sat back and tried to look like someone who had known since time began what 14-down in five letters beginning with F was, and they pretended I really did know, and the performance was exquisite.

Adelaide fandom is different from the other fandoms I have known -- Melbourne, Canberra and, up to a point, Sydney -- mainly because the Adelaide fans were either at university or had just emerged from university but were still part of a total, integral sort of fandom. Melbourne has so many fandoms I've long since lost track, and Sydney was getting that way when I made my few dismal attempts to broach fandom there in 1972-73. Canberra? Canberra, ever since it opened for business as Australia's capital city in 1927, has traditionally been the home of all of Australia's lost causes -- one has only to look at the governments in that time for proof -- and fandom in Canberra has faithfully reflected this. I will never forget the night when I first met the Canberra Science Fiction Club or whatever it was called, at Leigh and Helen Hyde's place. "What's all this garbage about a Worldcon in Australia?" someone said. Helen said, "Why don't you ask the chairman of the bidding committee?" and pointed at me. I blushed, for I was he, and they changed the subject, just like that. Leigh came to Aussiecon, along with four people I'd never met before from Canberra, but the Club didn't.

I can't recall any puns from Canberra, nor from Sydney. We do have our moments in Melbourne, the most memorable of them, believe it or not, usually provided by John Foyster, whose fine wit (if you'll pardon my quoting Shelley on Peacock) "makes such a wound the knife is lost in it." George Turner is capable of that sort of wit, too, but luckily he doesn't subject us to it too often in conversation, else we should die of it. It's enough that he does it in writing, giving us leisure to recover from it.

Just what kind of verbal wit really did fly about the room at those fan meetings at Walt Willis' place? Was it really as concentratedly brilliant as Walt and Bob and John would lead us to believe? Or is it more likely that Irish fandom -- that is, the mere handful of people that gathered at Walt's place -- was extraordinarily fortunate in possessing so many truly gifted writers, and therefore recorders, and therefore embroidererers, of happy utterances and amusing happenings, that in a larger fandom might have passed into group memory and ultimately oblivion?

Oh, to have been at Oblique House when Walt said... and BoSh replied... and James, just back from Paris, murmured... Of course. It is only natural that one should wish to have been there. But we were not there. We were in Falls Church, Virginia at the time; or much later at 82 Hughes Street, Mile End, in a room full of smoke and the cream and dregs of Adelaide fandom. Or wherever.

The point I am slowly meandering around to thinking about working up to is that puns of the brilliance and frequency and intensity and memorability of those perpetrated at Oblique House have rarely been perpetrated in my hearing -- but I have seen

Australian fanzines, some of them perpetrated by me, that might lead you to think that they had been.

And the next point is that I have spent seventeen years attempting to eradicate puns from my writing, because they just don't belong there. I have failed (I counted five puns in my most recent apazine, not one of them worth thinking about), and I know that some of my readers just love to see them, and I do like to please my readers, but this is not the way I want to please them, so whatever they think, I have failed.

But this is not the whole story. Puns are for conversation, to be there when they come, or to be remembered and repeated in subsequent conversations when invention flags. In writing, puns must be suppressed and humour attempted, not that verbal humour of which puns are so entertainingly part, but that human humour of which I want so much to be part. But that humour includes verbal humour, and fanzines are a kind of conversation, and the pun is the spoken equivalent of composing-on-stencil, and composing-on-stencil is a vice or complex form of laziness that once contracted is an almost impossible disease to get rid of. It is so vicious that even when you are typing on a sheet of paper, as I am at this moment, you consider your margins and take care with your spelling and generally approach the task as though this first draft will be the final definitive printed version. And so this will be, unless Dick elects to change it.

I like to think that my first drafts are better than most fans', if only because I think so carefully between sentences, even between words, before writing whatever comes into my head. And they may very well be better, because I have trained myself to think in sentences -- the thoughts may be trite, but the sentences maintain themselves, even when I seem most wantonly to ignore them.

How much better would my writing be if I wrote first and second and umpteenth drafts? Ms. Bergeron seems to think that I spoil the fine frenzy of whatever it is I reckon I'm saying when I go back and revise it. George Turner, conversely, recommends that I think out what I have to say, if anything, write it, chuck out the first draft, rewrite it, revise it, cut it down to one-third its length, rewrite it again, then cut out the adjectives and adverbs and pompositives and egotisms remaining, then ... Well, I'm not sure what he does after that, but if I tried it I'd be left with a rather unsatisfactory epigram.

Walt Willis, I am given to understand, uses the Turner method. You have seen what Walt Willis is left with after he has applied that unthinkably rigorous method to whatever it is that he writes off the top of his head. I don't think I need ever ask John Foyster why my writing doesn't remind him of Walt Willis's.

But I must ask him, or someone, what to do about those spears someone keeps on throwing through my walls. Not that I mind, lord no, but me mate Bergeron wants to know in case it ever happens to him.

❀ Oh, Dear, What Can the Matter Be? ❀

by Christopher Priest

ONE FINE DAY IN THE SPRING of 1969 I was taking a walk along the Grand Union Canal, where it passes through a village called Harefield. There are some lock gates there, and on a warm afternoon it's a pleasant place to stroll around and watch other people struggling with the sluices. I was doing just this when three extremely fat ladies entered my life.

They were on a cabin cruiser going through the lock, and the extent of their obesity was underlined by two unavoidable facts. In the first place, all three of them were wearing bikinis, and because this was the late '60s the bikinis were very small and tight fitting. One of the women, indeed, appeared to have gone to considerable trouble to find the worst-fitting bikini in the world: the two wisps of cloth cut like string around a parcel, but concealed almost nothing. Secondly, the boat they were on was remarkably small, and the women were squatting on it like monkeys on a log, and it kept bobbing and dipping in a most alarming top-heavy way.

With them on the boat was a fourth person: a rather thin young man who was doing all the work with the lock gates. One of the women was telling him what to do in a bossy voice. The other two women on the boat were not only ignoring this, but ostentatiously ignoring each other too. A row had obviously just ended, or begun. The lady with the very tight bikini was reading a love-story magazine. Eventually, the young man finished the business with the lock gates, and the dangerously overloaded cabin cruiser wobbled away in the general direction of Rickmansworth.

Hard-up writers waste nothing, and a few weeks later I tried to write a short story about these four people... but it never came alive, and after a few days I abandoned it. That should have been that: the three fat ladies would have gone out of my life as easily as they entered it, wobbling away in the general direction of the past, along with all those other bits and pieces that for a time seem to start a story but which turn out not to be able to finish one.

What I didn't expect to meet was Norman Spinrad. Norman came breezing into London that summer, full of himself and full of the vigour of working in a bull market for writers. Markets had never been better, he vowed, informing me of the sort of advances American writers like him were getting. He showed me some of the American product: a book with photographs of split beavers, and text describing, er, beavers, and what should be done with them.

"You gotta be doity, really doity," said Norman. "You gotta think of the doitiest thing in the woild... then make it better, and get in *real close*."

He slammed open another of the beaver magazines, and I reeled away. That was close.

"But dat book's a year old," said Norman. "What they doin' now, they doin' the beaver with old wimmin, but not just old, you dig? Ugly old wimmin." He paused, and wiped his upper lip. "*Diseased* ugly old wimmin."

"Dead ugly old wimmin?" I said, catching his drift.

"Dat's next year," said Norman, and wrote it down in his notebook.

The next day he returned to the US, and I suddenly remembered my three fat ladies. Of course, they'd be British and basically rather nice, and not in any sense diseased, but just suppose they were on this boat and the man they were with happened to be a sexual athlete and had a thing about fat women but the boat was very cramped and the bunks kept collapsing and the lavatory was blocked and the boat started to sink and at that moment they were...?

It didn't take long to write a chapter of straightforward filth, setting it on the boat and introducing one of the three fat ladies as a narrator. I made it real close, sharp focus. I added a brief plot synopsis (which basically involved a list of who was doing what with which to whom) and sent the whole thing air mail to the publisher whose praises had been most sung by Norman: Essex House, in California. Within a remarkably short time I got the verdict: Great stuff, go ahead, here's our contract.

Actually, the advance was a fraction of the amount Norman had claimed he and the other Americans regularly earned, but I was broke and glad of anything. You don't often sell books as quickly or as apparently easily as that. I signed the contract straight away, returned it to the publisher through my US literary agent, and in due course I received the part of the advance payable on signature. The completed novel had to be delivered within six months.

You might wonder, incidentally, why such an uncomplicated deal as this should be conducted through an agent who, until this moment, has had nothing to do with it. As things turned out, I did come to wonder myself, because my agent was soon to loom large in the order of things. However, at the particular instant, I was remembering that a good agent does more for a writer than just offer manuscripts and take ten per cent of the proceeds. There are, for instance, complications involving exemption from double taxation... and a quickie deal for a porno novel runs into these complications just like any other deal. It wasn't long before I regretted involving the agent, though.

But that was to come. For the time being I was at home busily writing my abominable novel. And abominable it was; I always bore in mind what Norman had said, and made it my principal concern to write as filthily as possible. At every conceivable opportunity I put in something vulgar, obscene or disgusting.

What I didn't know in those days was that if you write like that, if you concentrate singlemindedly on some obsessive theme (whether it is obscenity or anything else), what you write takes on a life of its own, and soars away into something else. This happened with the saga of my three fat ladies. In no time at all it was out of control, and I became the bemused intermediary who obediently typed the words as they presented themselves. This can sound pretentious to anybody who hasn't experienced it... but it really does happen, and in this case what started as a thoroughly nauseating catalogue of farting, wanking, sucking, pissing, belching, etc., soon metamorphosed into comedy as broad as it was high.

I'm not trying to excuse the book, or make claims for it, or pretend it had qualities it shouldn't have had. It what was it was intended to be, a dirty book quickly written, but it was also a comedy of bad manners, a fable about people misunderstanding things. My first wife thought it was the best thing I'd ever written, although the one or two other people who saw it weren't convinced I should write a sequel.

My agent in America, however, thought it was great. So good, indeed, that it would be "wasted" on Essex House. In spite of my gulps of protest, she sent it to another publisher. I had heard that Essex House were proposing to go out of porno publishing, and I was anxious to collect the remainder of the advance due on delivery, but my agent knew better. The deadline came nearer, and the second publisher was still sitting on my manuscript. I needed the delivery money. The date arrived and then it passed. The book was still with the other publisher, but... Good news! They made up their minds, and rejected it. ("Don't these Limeys know we're into dead fat women?") Somewhat belatedly the manuscript went to the place that had commissioned it, the place that a few weeks before would have paid delivery money. But the contract had expired, and so I got nothing for it and the book was never published. Essex House returned it to the agent.

That was the first thing the agent did that brought me no good at all. The second was yet to come.

I was naturally annoyed that I hadn't received the bulk of the money for the book, but I must have been more forgiving than I am now because I don't remember doing anything more than writing a mild admonishment to the agent. It was, after all, a down-market book quickly written. I was short of cash as a consequence, but in the end all was well. I gather that for a few more months the agent tried the novel around, but got nowhere with it. The social climate was changing in the US, and porno was returning to the gutter from whence it had briefly come.

Time passed. I wrote other things, I changed my US agent, I changed my first wife, I got older. I forget about my three obscenely fat ladies.

Several years later, the agent did the second thing that brought me no good at all.

The first I knew of it was one sunny morning in June 1975, at around 7:00 a.m. That is the time the mail arrives in Harrow, and that is therefore the time when my doorbell rang. Clutching my dressing-gown around my person, I eased the door open and squinted into the brilliant sunlight. The postman thrust a large cardboard box into my hands, and left.

The cardboard box appeared to be empty, the reason for this being that one end of it had been opened and re-sealed. I shook it a couple of times, and a slip of paper fell out.

From the label I discovered that the cardboard box had been mailed to me by my former agent. Next to the address was a customs declaration, which the agent had filled out in block capitals. What she had written was: CONTENTS -- BOOK MANUSCRIPT, and she followed this with the book's title. (I shall spare you this, but you can take it that it was the sort of title which to someone with an open mind, or to someone with a deeply suspicious mind, was fraught with hints and promises.) Helpful enough, one would have thought, in drawing attention to the contents of the cardboard box, but the agent had not finished. Underneath, entirely unprompted by any official form, she had added: MAY BE OPENED FOR INSPECTION.

Who would have needed any further encouragement to open the package?

I looked at the slip of paper, which had become the box's only contents. I was not feeling optimistic. This is what it said:

"The contents of this package have been impounded and will be destroyed. You are in breach of Post Office regulations and the Customs Consolidation Act 1876. H.M. Customs & Excise."

All this placed me in a bit of a quandary. I'm actually a law-abiding citizen, paying my taxes, etc etc, and it struck me above all else that the novel deserved to be impounded. Looking at it objectively, if the Customs & Excise are there to stop indecent or obscene material entering the country, then I could hardly complain. Nor could I in all honesty claim that my novel was a work of underground literature, a *Tropic of Cancer* or a *Ulysses* or a *Lady Chatterly's Lover*. It was a dirty book, written for money.

On the other hand... I didn't want the manuscript destroyed, and I wasn't keen on the possibility of criminal prosecution, which it seemed likely might follow if someone in authority considered I was guilty of something. This was not too long after the *Oz* obscenity trial. And losing the manuscript was unwelcome, too. That copy was the only copy left in existence; the drafts had been thrown away, and the carbon copies were lost. I had no illusions about the novel, but I had after all written it and some vanity, or some hoarding complex, didn't want it destroyed irrevocably.

I eventually wrote a letter appealing against the seizure. I said that I had written the book many years before, when young and foolish, but that now I was ever so serious and responsible and grown up and literary, and could I have it back please?

I heard nothing for a month, but then I got a letter. It was not a reply.

It went on at considerable length, quoting the Customs & Excise Act, the Customs Consolidation Act, the Vagrancy Act and the Post Office Act. It mentioned a maximum prison sentence of five years. It said that the "typed copy of the book" had now been examined closely, and that it had been found to be beyond argument indecent and obscene. I was given a month in which to appeal. If I failed to appeal, they would destroy the manuscript and then prosecute. If I appealed, they would prosecute and then destroy the manuscript.

Taken as a whole, I would say it is probably the least funny letter I have ever received.

Not seeing that I had much practical choice, I decided to appeal. I had a crumb of hope, which I clamped my teeth around, so to speak: they had referred to it as a "typed copy". I pointed this out to them, explaining that no book existed, that it was merely an unpublished manuscript, written by myself when young and foolish, etc. I promised them the book would never be published, added a few other grovels, then appealed to their sense of reasonableness and asked them to let me have the manuscript back and to drop all charges.

A week passed... and then success! They said that although they continued to hold the view that my manuscript was an "indecent and obscene thing", they were going to exercise discretion and return the "copy" to me.

A few days later I was duly awakened at 7:00 a.m. by the postman, and given an

OHMS parcel. Inside, looking very tired and limp -- just like my boatman's organ at the end of the novel -- was my manuscript. .

I put it away in a drawer, and no one has seen it since.

However, that is not the end of the story. There is a sort of postscript.

I could not leave well enough alone. All I had wanted was to get my manuscript back, and I had that, and I should have been satisfied. But a subtle contradiction had presented itself. I tried to ignore it, but it would not go away. In the end, I succumbed to evil temptation and wrote a letter about all this to the Guardian.

I briefly recounted what had happened, confessing that my book was a dirty one and that although I didn't dispute that it was illegal to send such stuff through the post, sense had in the end prevailed. But, I pointed out, the only people who had mailed it in this country were the very people who had decided it was an "indecent and obscene thing", and they had mailed it to me. I closed by asking, with false naivete, if the use of an OHMS label made it OK.

The Guardian clearly liked my letter because they printed it a few days later, together with a cartoon. This showed a pimp in a dirty raincoat importuning passers-by. He was holding his raincoat open and hissing: "Psst... feelthy tax forms?"

I was on holiday when the letter was published, but when I got home I discovered that several friends and relatives had seen it. (The relatives were slightly shocked; the friends weren't.) My new-found acquaintances at HM Customs & Excise had also seen it, I soon found out.

The same day I got home, the telephone rang.

"I wish to speak to Mister Christopher Priest," said a man's voice.

"Speaking," I said.

"Customs and Excise. We don't think that was very funny. You want to watch it in the future, chum, that's my advice. We've got our eyes on you."

Then he hung up.

|||



Group Dynamics of Conventional Assemblies



*A Report from Altair 5
Intercepted by Dave Langford*

1. *Eschatological Morphology*

The Investigators, hereinafter referred to as "we", "us" or "that deaf twit Langford", infiltrated a typical ethnic gathering of Terrestrials, termed SILICON 4. The highly typical nature of the gathering was confirmed by numerous "British fans", thus utterly refuting numerical estimates of previous investigators who claimed attendances of several thousand at ritual "conventions": SILICON was attended by some 60 entities, at times perceived by "ourselves" as 120 or more (see Appendix A[iii], "Visual Aberration In Terrestrials: Possible Causal Links With Beverage Absorption"). A standard infiltration was performed, the recording filaments permeating the fore-brain of a local entity (see Appendix C: "That Deaf Twit Langford") whose admittedly sporadic mental processes indicated that it considered itself a wholly normal and typical specimen, all other "British fans" being eccentric and weird. Investigation later demonstrated this attitude to be characteristic not only of "fans" but of most other subgroups of Terrestrial "life".

The Report is set out more or less chronologically as recorded, any imperfections being due to the chaotic state of the forebrain concerned: see also Appendix A[vi], "Gonzo Journalism: Possible Causal Links with Beverage Absorption".

2. *Semantic Breakdown at Transfinite Entropy Levels*

Approach to the SILICON locus (Newcastle, England, August 1980) was uneventful, apart from a clinically interesting increase in the subject Langford's habitual alarm and paranoia on being confronted with the sign SEMI-AMBULANT TOILET. The chauffeur-being, designated Kevin Smith, displayed similar symptoms on studying a Newcastle route map which later proved to have been copied by one Kevin Williams from the incorrect map distributed two years previously for SILICON 3. (Mr. Williams' response when later confronted with this fact gave our linguistic analyzers a ritual form of Terrestrial apology: "Ho ho.") On arrival at the convention, highly formalized conversation patterns at once emerged: --

Of 60 attendees, approximately 75 said to Hazel Langford, "Why aren't you knitting?" (Fugal variation noted: "Why aren't you bloody knitting?") A similar number asked one or both Langfords (who apparently awaited deportation under the cruel TAFF regulations -- see Appendix G, "Funny SciFi Words And Their Epistemological Significance") in the uncouth words of Graham Charnock, "Why aren't you in bloody America?"

Most attendees also said: (a) "I must give you some money for *Ansible*, Dave."

(b) "When are you flying, then?" (c) "Not gone to NOREASCON yet you bloody globe-trotter?" All these phrases seem frequent enough in their usage to be recommended as standard conversational items on Sol III. The same cannot be said of the following samples, not yet fully analyzed by the Linguistics Department: --

D. West: "Yes -- I'm starting a course in Interdisciplinary Studies at Bradford U: psychology, literature, philosophy *and* bloody sociology, making a right Stableford of myself. At least it's better than signing for the dole. And I got a three hundred pound Arts Council grant to write Significant novels, and I'm doing a book on Georgette Heyer for Borgo Press..."

Kevin Smith, subsequently: "Bloody hell, I'm pissing pink!"

Unknown hotel roommaid: "I do hope you can keep Mr. Pepper the hotel owner up till dawn *every* night -- it's great; he sleeps to 11 or 12 and doesn't pester us..."

Rob Jackson: "I still remember your SILICON 3 report, Dave, that bit about me 'uneasily fingering a water-filled balloon' ...yes, I was having vaguely mammary thoughts."

Member of hotel staff: "Dr. Jackson is needed urgently on the telephone!"

Rob, subsequently: "...my mother wanted to know if I'd be free on Tuesday."

Mr. Pepper, 5:30 a.m.: "I think I'd better go to bed... will you turn the lights out when you've finished with the hotel?"

Kevin: "D. West's allegations? What's he alleging?"

Dai Price, around dawn: "I can *tell* Martin Hoare must be tone-deaf like you. I mean, his singing proves it."

Far too many entities, around dawn, to the tune of Monty Python's Drunken Philosophers Song (see Appendix F[i], "Mass Psychoses of Sol III"):

"Oh, H. G. Wells made some fearful smells
And Verne was a champion farter
Fred Pohl, Fred Pohl, blows flames through his hole
But he can't out-fart Lin Carter!
Arthur C. Clarke with a single bark
Could demolish half the Gents
And L. Ron Hubbard had to do it in the cupboard
Or he'd overload the vents..." (Etc, etc.)

Arnold Aiken at breakfast: "Have I told you about lumbar punctures? They make you put your knees in your mouth as you lie on your side and they stick this thing like a knitting needle into the relevant place in your spine. If the doctor isn't very experienced that can take some considerable time... probing..."

Everyone else at breakfast: *various indescribable sounds, possibly onomatopoeic.*

Brian Smith: "Alan Dorey hasn't got what it takes any more. Alan Dorey won't be BSFA chairman much longer. The bar's been open an hour and Alan Dorey is still drinking... coffee!"

Brian Parker: "BSFA -- they're the famous cassette makers, aren't they, ho ho?"

Alan Dorey: "Did I ever tell you how I was writing SEWAGE FARM WORKERS ASSOCIATION on the SFWA door at SEACON, and Marion Zimmer Bradley came up behind me and said

'I suppose this is jest yore British humour' in a voice of indescribable menace...?"

Fan whose name (just like the rest of him) was garbled in the record: "Did you know the Cambridge U. SF Society has a drink called a Bloody Tourist? It's for offering to tourists: coke and tomato juice. CUSFS members have been known to drink this..."

Greg Pickersgill: "Rob Hansen's an odd lad. He's staying with us, to the end of the year at least -- goes around humming to himself with this big inane smile, or he'll be in the upstairs room and go suddenly silent until after a pause he shouts 'Ouch!' or 'Gosh!' or 'Wow!'..."

Kevin: "Time for the great fannish football match -- going to come and watch and take photos of Me?"

Langford: "No."

Kevin: "*Poot.*"

Greg: "*I'm* not playing. I'm old, tired, ill."

D. West: "I'm busy lying down."

Langford: "Oh, hello, Mr. Hansen: I thought you were over there."

Rob Hansen: "I *am* over there."

Langford: "Did you notice you can see 28 empty bottles of champagne substitute in the back yard if you stand by the bog window and happen to be over six feet tall ... No, you wouldn't."

Rog Peyton: "This is going to be the great Space Invaders game of the year. I've spent bloody twenty quid just practicing. I tell you, sometimes I wake in the night dreaming of new strategies to zap them all with a single shot..."

Langford: "Ah, hello, Kevin -- as *Ansible's* new football correspondent, do give me a blow-by-blow account of what happened at the football match."

Kevin: *sound of teeth being reduced to powder.* "We lost."

Langford: "Ah, hello, Phil -- as *Ansible's* new aerospace correspondent, do give me a blow-by-blow account of Andy Firth's latest display of mighty home-made orbital rockets on the football field."

Phil James: "I turned round for half a second and in that time Wernher von Firth's rocket had fallen over at 45 degrees and gone out. They had to stick it together with Eve Harvey's sticking-plaster when the fins fell off..."

Langford: "Ah, hello, Rog, there you are again. As *Ansible's* new Space Invaders correspondent, do give me --"

Peyton: "I bloody lost by bloody ten points! Knocked out in the bloody third round by bloody Neil Hepple! I'll *get* him though; he's got a lovely girlfriend, oh those *hips*, everything's just right. I'm going to seduce her while he's busy in the final..."

Eve Harvey, over curry: "I knew someone who had an *ingrowing hair* at the base of his spine and had to have it removed. It's *far* more painful than it sounds and he couldn't sit down and the *hole* in him had to be packed with gunge so it could heal slowly from the inside out --"

Kevin, weakly: "Anybody want my Bombay potatoes?"

Langford: "You be careful where you dispose of those potatoes, they've got a half-life of 20,000 years and give you ingrowing --"

Hazel: "Never mind."

Eve to Hazel: "Did you know your husband picked up my husband at NOVACON and

used him as a battering ram? It ruined his trousers."

Langford: "This is a contemptible lie, a calumnious imputation, a --"

Pat Charnock: "What did his trousers have to do with it?"

Eve: "Imagine what would happen is somebody picked you up suddenly."

D. West, falling over: "This proves it!"

Langford: "This proves it?"

D. West: "No. No, you can't say that. It's... copyrightAstralLeaugel977donot impingecopyrightortheAstralLeaugewilltakemeasures. I am the sole prop-pop-pop-pop oh bloody hell. Owner."

Eve, overheard in poolroom: "I can't get the thing out, John!"

John Harvey: "It's bloody stuck in!"

Rob Jackson: "Actually, they were talking about a jammed coin in the Space Invaders machine."

Langford: "Spoilsport."

Kevin, 4 a.m.: "Now let's play Finchley Central --"

Harry Bell: "It's half-past four, Langford, and you're still making sense. This is not good enough! Hic."

Langford: "Look, it's dawn. Time to play Residents and Security Men."

The Dawn Chorus:

"John Brunner, John Brunner, what a drippy old runner
It doesn't sound much, but the stench is a stunner.
When Fredric Brown took his trousers down
He could shatter all the windows for nine miles round.
Jack Vance, Jack Vance blows holes in his pants
And Disch makes a first class stink
And Eric Frank Russel had a rectal muscle
That could toot through 'Lily The Pink.'

Oh Asimov himself is a man of many parts:

A stinker of a writer and a stinker when he farts. (Etc, etc.)"

Stan Eling, over breakfast: "Peter Weston does nothing these days but grow vegetables."

Helen Eling: "He's slowly *turning into one*, a swede or a giant cabbage."

Phil James: "I've been reading a book on strange customs in the desert."

Langford: "What do they do in the desert?"

Phil: "It's not so much what they do in the desert as what they do with their fingers."

All: "Eh?"

Phil: "They wipe their greasy fingers on their beards, or on the tentflap. The greasier your tentflap the more hospitable you are..."

Hazel: "Oh course, the Tuaregs wipe their fingers on their feet..."

Langford: "Don't look now, but Jim Barker has just come in wearing an Ellison-style glass hand with one of the fingers up his nose..."

Joe Nicholas: "This is the book, *Karma* by Arsen Darnay. Let me read you the incredibly awful passage about the giant telepathic rabbit."

Kevin Smith: "Of all the harebrained ideas."

Pat Charnock: "Here's a copy of the new Astral Leauge cassette for Terry Hughes. You must tell him *not* to play the *Get Down Jacqui* track anywhere near Jacqueline

Lichtenberg --"

Barman, pointedly, to Langford: "I suppose you want a *soft drink* --"

Mr. Pepper: "Who's written ARNOLD THARG WAS HERE on my roller-towel? How do I get it off, then?"

All, rapidly: "Been a great convention... goodbye... goodbye..."

A logical interpretation of the above terms and phrases is currently being derived by exhaustive computer analysis. Meanwhile, see Appendix F[ii], "Mass Psychoses In The Linguistics Department."

3. *Interactive Modal Structuralism*

The exosociological team achieved considerably more significant results than the linguistic investigators (see Appendix F[iii], "Relatively Mild Psychoses In The Exosociology Department") and the following subclasses of ritual activity were isolated:

3.1 *The Quiz Game:* This is an intellectual struggle between curiously designated teams -- in this case "The Peter Weston School Of Gardening" (members of which wore artificial mustaches of a ritual nature, and on their entry performed the ceremonial dance of the goose-step), "Welshfandom: Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwllllantysoliogogogoch Division" (it was noted that non-Welsh persons laboured under a taboo against the pronouncing of this name in full), "The Astral Leauge" and "L'Academy De La Chronically Effete De La Surbiton". The holy man presiding over the ceremony puts highly formalized questions to the teams -- typical ones generated by our computer from the existing pool of data are "Who wrote Somtow Sucharitkul?", "Have you ever heard of John Brunner?" and "Is there *anybody* here from Oregon?" -- and in due course ignorance and unbelief are ritually defeated and the prize given to the Welsh team. Further attempts to analyze the full religious significance of the questions and responses are discussed in Appendix F[iv], "Mass Suicide In The Linguistics Department".

3.2 *The Twenty Questions Game:* Here a concept is chosen, e.g. "A Brian Burgess Pork Pie", and contestants attempt to deduce its precise nature by asking up to 20 questions to be answered "yes" or "no" only (local terms roughly corresponding to our Altairan phrases "Your warts ooze with mine" and "Your spawn is mildewed"). Evidence of clairvoyance in Sol III natives was noted when the subject Langford, watching this ritual, remarked "I'll bet they'll have to guess my hearing aid next." Instantly a concept-designation card was held up to the audience, and on it was written LANGFORD'S DEAF AID. The Paraphysics Department is investigating -- see Appendix A[xxv], "Psi Ability: Possible Causal Links With Beverage Absorption". A further concept, "Rob Holdstock's Weapon", caused embarrassment during the guessing sequence and may have some painful religious significance.

3.3 *Presenting "The Richard E. Geis Memorial Award":* This involved a convention member, Alan Dorey, asking for votes for this possibly coveted award and in the same breath murmuring "The fix is in for Joe Nicholas." In due course the native called Joseph M. Nicholas was required to receive his trophy (an ornamental bust carved with great artistic inability, the property of the hotel); he demurred, pretending he was not worthy; there were ritual cries of "Is there anyone here from Pimlico?" and the entity D. West took Nicholas symbolically by the forelock and dragged him to the waiting cameras for the presentation. The trophy was slowly brought down upon the head of J. Nicholas amid much camera-flashing. We have not fully analyzed the motives and prestige associated with

this award.

3.4 Charades: The natives of Sol III have brought this art of mime to a high level of ineptitude, and this was demonstrated in their "charades". The creature D. West, for example, enacted the phrase *The Fallible Fiend* by first falling over a good deal and subsequently making hideous faces and gibbering at his interlocutors. It later transpired that this formed his entire repertoire of mime, though sometimes it would be interspersed with vicious kicks aimed at some suitably small and helpless victim (Graham Charnock). We are uncertain of the symbolisms by means of which the entity Jean Frost eventually conveyed the phrase "Sex Pirates of the Blood Asteroid": in passing we note that when she'd succeeded in doing so, the subject Langford's wife instructed him to "apologize to Jean Frost for writing that story!"

3.5 Finchley Central: An informal game of skill and strategy wherein several natives sit in a circle uttering in turn the names of London Underground stations which may or may not possess religious or sexual connotations. The first person to say "Finchley Central" wins. To say "Finchley Central" too soon in the game is to lose face and become the object of withering scorn. The as yet unfathomed strategy of this game appears to involve great subtlety, or -- to verbalize our alternate hypothesis -- no subtlety at all. A variant version, "Heinlein," substitutes the names of works by the Sol III artist Robert A. Heinlein (whose art involves the making of marks on "paper", a disposable form of cloth) for those of stations; to win one must say *The Number Of The Beast*. To refrain from saying this is a great point of honour among natives.

3.6 Polymorphous Perverse Activities: We merely record pool, drinking beer, darts, drinking gin, football, drinking whisky, rocketry, drinking rum, watching illicitly made recordings of *Demon With A Glass Hand* and *The Peter Weston SEACON Show* (edited version, without Peter Weston), drinking lager, conversing (see section 2), drinking water to wash down aspirins (the only use of this unclean fluid permitted by the religion of "British fans") and playing "Space Invaders", a species of war game not likely to promote good relations between Terrestrials and we natives of Altair 5. For notes on the beverages mentioned above please see the 500-page Appendix A[i], "Drinking: Possible Causal Links With Beverage Absorption".

4. Conclusions

4.1 The planet is unfit for colonization.

4.2 Study of behavioral patterns at SILICON 4 suggests that we should proceed with caution, since several alien infiltrators are obviously conducting similar investigations to our own. The most blatant of these is the entity D. West, whose aspect and activity most closely resembles that of the native form of we Toads of Altair 5.

4.3 No rational reason for the natives' attendance at these enfeebling and soul-destroying "conventions" can be advanced.

4.4 Very much more research is needed. See especially the whole of Appendix A, "C₂H₅OH For Fun And Profit".

4.5 The author of this paper therefore requests permission to conduct further investigations at SILICON 5, SILICON 6, SILICON 7, SILICON 8, SILICON 9 and SILICON 10, to begin with.

Glossary

THE ASTRAL LEAGUE: A misprint.

BSFA: British Science Fiction Association, Bromley Silent Farting Association; Brian Stableford Fanzine Article.

FINCHLEY CENTRAL: Found on the Northern Line between West Finchley (to the north) and East Finchley (to the south).

THE FLATULENT SF AUTHORS' SONG: by Nick Lowe, who is not responsible.

THE PETER WESTON SEACON SHOW: see Peter Weston, now to be found on the BBC's cutting-room floor.

PIMLICO: London district now largely inhabited by Joseph Nicholas.

SURBITON: London district notorious for pub meetings of that almost famous fan group the Surrey Limpwrist.



Towner Hall, Void, Adolescence, and All That



by Greg Benford

IT IS AN ODD AND STRANGELY ECHOING thought: those days of the early '60s, when *Void* jetted forth with almost frightening regularity and there seemed to be a distant and Ozlike place called Towner Hall.

I never saw it. For me, the whole *Void* experience was a matter of the printed word. Some history: my brother Jim and I edited and published *Void* for issues 1 through 13, ending in Fall of 1958. Something came over us then. Our best friend in fandom was a burgeoning talent named Kent Moomaw. Kent came to stay with us in Summer 1958, when we were living in Dallas. I'd just finished my junior year in high school and my interest in mathematics and science was emerging strongly. I spent much of that summer reading the biography of Enrico Fermi, *Atoms In The Family*, and thinking about physics and the serene joys that field promised. This was a departure for me, because until then I had thought I would be a writer. But physics seemed to have more substance and weight in the world, and the Sputnik "crisis" underlined the importance of that exact, quantitative world.

While I was studying Newtonian mechanics and watching the space program slouch into existence, Kent Moomaw came. We went to the Souwestercon, "the con which killed Texas fandom", as Kent was later to label it. And Kent went home to write a devastating piece on the con, which we published in the last Benford issue of *Void* (#13). Our careers as fanzine writers and editors had been successful, and we had a good place in the litany of top fanzines of the time. But increasingly mathematics interested me. I thought I would become an engineer. And then news came in Fall 1958, from Kent's mother, that he had gone to a draft board interview, and had been told that he would be drafted immediately (a false scare tactic, I knew), and then had left that place and gone down to a drugstore nearby and bought a straight razor, and gone into a city park, and cut his wrists -- and then, impossibly, seeing the blood, had gone on to cut his own throat, most methodically -- and been discovered by a passerby shortly later. Something happened to me then, and I never published a fanzine again. I did not think it through clearly, but for me a thing went out of fandom at that moment, reading the letter from his mother, and it has never come back into the paper universe we all inhabit. Jim and I had shared the work of *Void*, with me doing the typing and writing, Jim the mimeo. Somehow the incursion of the 1950s reality -- Sputnik, draft, suicide at the thought of going into the Army, mathematics; an odd mixture, to be sure -- silenced forever our urge to communicate, to publish a fanzine and announce ourselves to the world.

So in the winter, when Ted White wrote to suggest a coedited *Void*, Jim immediately said no. And he has never appeared in fanzines again. I pondered the point, and agreed. It seemed a good way to keep in touch with the people I still loved and

listened to, the voices who came through those mimeo'd pages with a mirth and insurgence that I, in my rather strict high school role, relished. So I agreed, and Ted became the principal momentum behind a new kind of *Void* which quickly grew a personality of its own, one neither Ted nor I had ever manifested before. The chitterchatter embodies it: irreverent, wry, affectionate in a warm but not fulsome way. It is a spirit I can still recapture by rereading those pages.

So *Void* took off, making its monthly schedule for an astonishing time, and then Ted moved to NYC and things slowed. I contributed editorials and suggestions, but the momentum was clearly his, and you could see in his letters (alas, all now destroyed; I saved little then) a curious alchemy as he found an outlet for the natural mordant wit he has. His piece on Calvin Thomas Beck, his somewhat cynical asides -- these were perfectly done, and fit the mood of fandom at the time remarkably well. He had never given of himself this way in *Stellar*, his bigtime genzine. And then Pete Graham joined, and Terry Carr. By then I had taken a four year scholarship at the University of Oklahoma. (I based my decision on money rather than prestige, and the decision seems amazing to me now; I could have done much better at Caltech, or MIT, or Berkeley.) I wrote editorials and wondered what it was really like back there. And I think I got the voice right. Listen to this piece from a typical Benford editorial -- by then called "Happy Benford Chatter" after someone's lettercol comment -- in which I clearly try on the Towner Hall mannerisms:

WE ARE FOUR Some of you have commented on the vast editorial staff which VOID now supports, and I'm happy to say there has been general approval. I'm rather glad it happened myself. At least we might be able to get the zine out regularly now. Of course, we realize that we will be breaking a tradition in fandom if VOID comes out more often than every once in a while, but we are adamant. "On to punctuality!" is our cry.

I'm so pleased by this addition to the VOID staff that I've been considering doing more of the same. Why, we can make it an honor in fandom to become a VOID coeditor. There can be a regular little club, sort of like the N3F or Foreman Scotty's Space Patrol. We can have a special VOID Coeditor's handshake and secret signal ring (with a picture of one of the First Four inside which lights up in the dark so you can recognise one of us if you chance to meet us in a back alley somewhere--it's that sort of a club) and all sorts of other things to induce people to join. All you have to do is send in a regular little column about Dallas fandom or one of the other 3 coeditors. Ted White will run it off and put your name in the colophon (it's his fanzine and we're all just sort of columnists, you know) and you'll be in.

Does anyone want to join?

It's a mistake to think of *Void* as an arena for harmless jokes, chatter and empty mirth, though. We all took some remarkably savage digs at high-profile targets: LASFS, Seth Johnson (now dead), Cal Thos Beck, and certainly: Dallas.

Something strange had happened to me in fandom. I think the sense of isolation I had while living in Germany, where my father was commander of a field artillery battallion, contributed to it. I didn't like the Army kids and I felt a tug toward the verbal universe of fandom. It was all I had, nearly. So I adopted a mannerism which has become a character trait: a certain distance, an easy cynicism, a biting tongue. These are with me to this day and I don't regard them as welcome assets. I think I got crippled back there, in ways I don't understand even now. Perhaps fandom itself had something to do with this process. The hallowed Names in that era were the biting humorists: Burbee, Laney, Redd Boggs, Boyd Raeburn. I liked them, I copied them. And so I put a lot of weight on the putdown, the cutting remark, the making of others a convenient butt of a sly joke. I'm not proud of this; I think it became a habit I cannot cast off. I think, listening to my younger voice through these issues of *Void*, that I hear the sound of thwarted idealism in these writings.

Here was a boy on the way to becoming a man, and around him there seemed many high-blown visions, many empty exhortations. He saw this as phony '50s rhetoric, and I think it made him forever cynical about the world. In some ways he was dead right. But there is a cost for such caution, for such noninvolvement, and I think it is rather a high cost. Anyway, listen to the piece which brings this out best from my *Void* editorials:



HAPPY BENFORD CLATTER

GREG BENFORD

A PARTY FOR DALLAS "Come on over", Tom Reamy said, "we're having a party for Dallas." I thought about that for a minute. It does not do to say the obvious thing that pops immediately into your head when dealing with Dallas fans, for that is almost always the wrong thing to say. "Are you sure you can get them all in?" I replied. "Oh", he said, "I mean all the Dallas fans. We're going to have a little party for them."

And so it came to pass that I attended my only fannish party in Dallas. I asked Jim if he wanted to go, but he demurred, saying he wanted to do something constructive, like sleeping. Later he arranged a date, explaining that this was more constructive in the long run, so I was forced to go alone. I contemplated taking a date along, but I realized that taking a girl to a place full of science fiction fans would probably be frowned upon, if not by the girl at least by the fans.

The Dallas slant shack, where Reamy, Dale Hart and one or two others lived was a bit depressing as seen from the street, obscured as it was by an overgrowth of shrubs and weeds. The interior was crowded with people, though, all talking at a furious pace and running back and forth to the kitchen for drinks. I immediately spotted Richard Koogle (who has no middle name) holding forth in the center of a group of fine minds, and insinuated myself into the outer regions of the circle. I stood there for a while, letting the words wash over me and ripple into the surrounding people, until Koogle noticed me. "This certainly is a great party, isn't it, Greg?" he burred. "We don't have these often, but when we do they're good."

"Yes", I said, "standing here and listening to you talking and the hifi wafting music over our heads, it's almost possible to believe I'm among real people." He beamed at me and called over Reamy, who took me out to the kitchen to get a drink.

We went out on the back porch so Reamy could show me the surrounding undergrowth and get some fresh air. The porch was the starting line in a furious race for survival on the part of local weed-dom, for the back yard was one great mass of greenish growth. I broached the subject

of yard upkeep (which I loath) to Reamy. "Have the neighbors gotten up a petition yet?" I asked. In the conversation which ensued, Reamy mentioned that the landlord didn't especially want the weeds rolled back because the remains of a stolen car of doubtful age were hidden somewhere in it.

Coming back in I noticed one woman there of largish proportions who was circulating around collecting signatures in favor of Dallas getting the worldcon. I signed. What the hell, I was getting free drinks. Actually, the only remarkable thing which occurred during the evening was my accidental discovery of a fan who had been fairly active in Dallas a few years back but had since dropped out of sight. I can't tell you his name because Rich Koogle was trying to sell me part of his fanzine collection (over 100 separate and distinct fanzines) and I couldn't hear over the general noise level. The oldtime fan seemed like a normal, intelligent person, though, unpolluted by his surroundings. He told me about



meetings of the Dallas Futurian Society at which Mosher would go out on the street and pull in passers-by in hopes of enlarging the membership. At the time the meetings were being held in a cafe, and whenever the club had a guest speaker Mosher would round up a number of panhandlers, promising them a cup of coffee, in order to present a large membership to the speaker. "Did he find many science fiction fans among the bums and loafers?" I asked, but since Mosher was not there at the moment, I could not find out. Considering recent issues of HABAUKUK, perhaps the answer would have been a little surprising.

Shortly after this one character came wandering through the rooms moodily staring into peoples' faces and mubling a few greetings. I asked Reamy who he was. He was identified as Dale Hart, who was currently running the plans for the Souwestercon VI (the convention that killed southwestern fandom). "Say, would you like to join the committee to work on publicity for the con?" Reamy asked as Hart drew nearer. I looked over at Hart. I looked back at Reamy. I went out to get another drink.

"I'm not worried about a war at all," one of the regular members said a few minutes later. "I've got my plan all worked out."

"What?" I said, taken aback. "Well", he gestured, "if we have a war they'll be sure to drop a bomb on downtown Dallas and then my troubles will be over." I thought he was probably right, but I wouldn't have been so foolhardy about it.

"The draft board is right in the middle of town, and if they drop any bombs my records will be destroyed. Then if anyone comes around trying to get me in the Army I'll tell them I've already done my time." The group around him fell silent.

"Don't you think if we have a war they'll just draft everybody in sight and not worry about the records?" someone else asked. "No", the planner said, "I'll appeal to Congress and by the time that gets through the war will be over."

"Well then", I said, "we'll all do that and there won't be any more war and we won't have to fight." The fan who had his future all mapped out in his head thought a moment to himself. "I don't think that would work. Somebody has got to defend the country in times of peril." At this time I was relatively new to Dallas Fandom so I ignored the opportunity to say something nasty and true. But my infinite patience and understanding for people has withered somewhat since then, which is why you're reading this article.

I was walking into the stf room of the slum shack when Reamy, who is a little on the heavy side, turned to me and said, "What do you think of that?"

"I think you're wrong", I said automatically. Usually that works pretty well. "You're always talking about how science can give everybody a better way of doing something. Tell me how I can lose weight without dieting." He stood there waiting for my answer. "Close your mouth", I said.

Rich Koogle was there, looking through the Astounding collection. He was still enthusiastic about the party. "It's just like last summer", he said, waving an ASF at me, "when we had all our parties out at our swimming pool." I asked him what he meant. "One of the members of the club had a pool in his back yard and he invited the club over every week to have a meeting and talk by the pool."

"Why, that's fine", I said. "That's the best thing I've ever heard about Dallas fandom. It sounds like quite a change from just sitting around and reading old fanzines during meetings. I can hardly imagine a Dallas fan club meeting where you could lie around in the sun and swim."

"Oh", he said, "we didn't do that. None of us could swim."

In a little while the resources of the club began to evaporate and someone had to go out and replenish the food and drink. The oldtime fan whose name I never learned was driving, so I decided I'd go with him; as we were going out the front door Reamy, fearing that someone was leaving the party early, came over and told us to stay for the later festivities. "It's all right", I told him, "I just wanted to go out for a while and see some real people."

I can see that there are good bits in this, some all-too-true aspects of fandom carefully outlined. Indeed, this piece is absolutely factual. The party did occur, all these things happened, and I felt pretty much that way about them. I didn't write it up until years later, though (notice it occurs before the Souwestercon), and here's why: I felt myself rid of these people by then, and I felt a real disdain for the world of fandom. I wanted to keep it at a distance, and cutting humor is a fierce defense. That was the mechanism I had developed for many of life's encum-

brances: wit. And fandom seemed to reward such writing well, so I did it. And I felt the distant presence of Towner Hall through all this: older figures, better known, whom I wanted to resemble. So I wrote with a scalpel's edge, and the readers seemed to like it.

This piece about Dallas is the most savage I ever wrote. There's a lot in it that may not make much sense now: Bill Donaho's *Habbakuk* had recently detailed the incredibly piggish behavior of the NYC crowd. Dale Hart was a well known alcoholic, and in fact died of it. And Tom Reamy. It seems astonishing, now, to realise that such a major talent was hidden beneath that calm, reserved exterior. There was a lot of the good ole boy in Tom, and I took him to be the best figure in the Dallas crowd, deeper than the rest, but hard to reach. He was mostly interested in graphics and seemed curiously taken by the art of Morris Scott Dollens. A lot of his overlay graphic work ran to brawny men set before background moonscapes or rocket ships. I assumed, without pondering the point much, that he was gay. He never seemed very interested in women -- there were nearly none in Dallas fandom -- and had the retiring lifestyle I had learned to associate with gays. I think now I was wrong and that Tom was simply a fairly common type in fandom, not highly sexual, but not interested in concealing this fact. I liked him but, as my interests in physics increased, I saw little of him. Once I left Dallas for Oklahoma, I didn't see him again, beyond a few evenings, until California in the early 1970s.

In the four years I spent in Oklahoma I wrote editorials and listened to the voices out of Towner Hall, but of course it was a paper universe. I met none of the coeditors until the long phase of *Void* was finished. Ted and Terry I saw first at the 1964 worldcon; Pete I never met. So, as my in-person contact with fandom dwindled, I adopted a mannered voice and posture in fandom. The "We Are Four" piece above is a perfect example of aping the *Void* voice. There are certain tics I picked up from Laney, and a deliberate lift from Willis, and overall a miasma of controlled style which I learned from my coeditors. I think I picked up my concern for compression of style in those years, too: fanzine editorials, and particularly those which seek to be witty, cannot drag on for long.

So in my *Void* work you see the mannerisms of others cloaking my own concerns. It was my only hobby; I was a ferocious worker, living a life stuffed with physics and mathematics, reading little sf (for in truth I've never read much of it; my secret vice) and thinking much about that sf world without knowing much of what went on in distant places where sophisticates talked in witty, stylish ways. Terry and Ted and Pete were all older than me, and I tried to write up to their standard. But I didn't have the immediate material from life at hand, so I delved into my own past, and made much of the apparently smallest incident. Witness this piece which started the then-famous running joke about a hapless minor Dallas fan:

FABULOUS DALLAS FANDOM get quite a jolt late last August. Everyone had sort of mutually agreed that no expedition to Detroit would be planned, mostly because we were all going to be going to school or working or something. Then too, after last year's Souwestercon, we weren't too hot on conventions.

Actually, I had advance warning. Two days before, I had received a letter from Marion Zimmer Bradley in which she asked: "Do you happen to know a Texas fan named Marland Frenzel?" and went on to describe how Marland had written her, asking if she were going to drive to Detroit and could he go and if not, could she spread the word? I briefly skipped over the passage, and forgot about it. Two days later, at 12:30 AM, the telephone rang.

Now, I was getting up early for work. Working ten hours a day, I needed what sleep I could get, especially since it's a half hour drive to where I worked and I can't doze at the wheel. Therefore, people calling at odd hours of the night were most unwelcome. I picked up the phone.

"Hello, Greg. Remember, a fan in need is a fan indeed!" came a voice. Mighod, I thought. "I'm Marland Frenzel and I'm down here at the bus station. I just got in here and come on down and pick me up before the cops do." I must have made some sort of astonished noise, because he repeated the statement. I told him I didn't have room, and Jim was in the hospital (he was) so everything was a bit fouled up and it would be difficult to put him up for the night. What's more, it was late.

"Oh, I'm going to stay in Dallas for three or four days and visit all the fans," he said. I was suddenly immensely glad that we didn't have room. Perhaps, said Marland, I didn't know who he was. "I had an article published in CRY OF THE NAMELESS once," he said confidently. I reassured him that I did not know who he was. He hesitated for a moment and asked me for the names of some Dallas fans. I remarked on the impossibility of finding lodgings at this hour of the morning, but gave him the names. hung up, and went back to sleep. At 3:00 AM the phone rang.

"I couldn't get Albert Jackson or Jim Hitt," said Marland, and asked again if I could rush down and pick him up. I gave him Randy Brown's name, George Jennings' and Koogle's. I went back to sleep. At 6:30 AM, as I was preparing to leave for work, the phone rang.

"Jennings didn't answer," he said. (Jennings was vacationing in Colorado.) "I called Hitt and got no answer, and Koogle said he couldn't arrange to put me up for that long." (I later learned that Koogle had answered the phone, listened to the request, shouted something into the receiver, and hung up.) Marland mentioned that he couldn't afford to go to a hotel, and he really did want to see some fans. I told him the YMCA would be fairly cheap if he didn't mind living among the smells of disinfectant and old meals, but it brought no response. He talked a little about his plans of hitchhiking to Detroit, stopping over at fan centers on the way. "I'd hoped to get in with the fan caravan," he explained.

That afternoon, Randy Brown called, asking what the hell was going on. He said he'd been awakened at some ungodly hour of the morning, heard a sneaky voice at the other end talking about fandom, and hung up without a word. I detailed my own experiences and we laughed a little about it. Koogle called, as did Hitt and Jackson. We all wondered out loud what kind of fan would drop into a strange city late at night and expect people who had never heard of him to put him up for a few days.

Since then, every time a Dallas fan has called me, he has said, "Hello, Greg. Remember, a fan in need is a fan indeed!" in a high-pitched voice. Did Marland Frenzel really get to Detroit, Ted White?

I admit, I would use anyone as a butt of a cool, mannered piece of editorial. I don't think it ever harmed anyone -- I remember Reamy telling me he rather liked seeing Dallas fandom made a more interesting place than it really was -- but it did put a certain cast on my work. I continued with this point of view in my later fanzine writing for *Frap* (which I co-edited with the now-vanished Bob Lichtman) and then beyond.

Was there anything wrong with this approach? I could, after all, have taken the gentle humor of Willis as a model. But I doubt I could have written that way (though Tom Perry has managed to do quite well at it since). I saw the stylized *Void*-boy way of writing as a form to adopt, and I worked what mirth I could from it. It was a useful exercise in assuming a voice when the roots of it are not in fact your own, and I think it helped in my later work in fiction. I now use whatever narrative approach seems warranted by the material, and this, too, is a skill that can be learned.

Void in the coeditor phase became vastly successful. It did have a certain something; I can sense it even now as I page through it. Copies of the coedited *Void* now command enormous prices among fmz collectors. (Even the strictly Benford *Voids* are worth a fair amount; they did have their moments.) I remember that era as a warm and happy one, despite the apparent cynicism of much of my work from that age. I hope that feeling comes through to the reader who chances upon an old copy, today, in some well-thumbed and fraying collection. It certainly was a wonderful thing, Meyer.

Life With the Loonies, Part I

by Chris Atkinson

HERMIONE GRANT WAS CAUSING TROUBLE again. All week the neighbours had been phoning up Social Services and complaining about Hermione singing the Hallelujah Chorus on the communal balcony shared by seven other families in one of the council's high rise blocks. Unfortunately for the neighbours, Hermione's version of the Hallelujah Chorus included vigorously beating a frying pan with a meat tenderizer. At one in the morning, that's no joke. Today, however, things seemed to have taken a turn for the worse. When the lady next door had peered in through Hermione's letter box on her way home from the shops, she had seen a towering barricade of furniture and had been treated to Hermione's lurid description of some pretty perverse sexual acts, followed by a threat to set the flat on fire.

As Duty Social Worker I'd been down to the flat a couple of times that week, trying to persuade Hermione to commune with God more quietly. When this hadn't worked I had called in the local psychiatrist, who had commented that unless she beat the neighbours with the meat tenderizer he was too busy to see her. He guessed that Hermione would eventually need treatment as he knew her of old, but until she became uncontrollable he reckoned that the neighbours would have to put up with her.

Hermione was a large West Indian lady in late middle age. She had apparently had an unhappy marriage and was now divorced and living alone. Some years before, her then husband had poured a kettleful of boiling water over her head, leaving her face permanently disfigured. Unfortunately it also seemed to have disfigured her mind, and every now and then she would need a spell in the local psychiatric ward. It was beginning to look as though she needed one now.

Hermione's flat was on the 7th floor of the high rise block. Eight identical blue doors lined the communal balcony where Hermione conducted her nightly concert. When I arrived outside the flat there was no sign of the neighbours, however; having done their duty by complaining they had shut themselves away for fear of getting involved. When I knocked at Hermione's door it remained firmly closed, although some muffled scratching noises indicated that someone was at home. Unwillingly I was reduced to calling through the letter-box, but although this produced some interesting terms of abuse it didn't get me into the flat.

I think it was about at this stage that I began to realize there were two sets of human noises emanating from beyond the letter box. One was Hermione's lurid ranting, but in the background there was another sound -- a sort of low, despairing moan. Knowing that Hermione lived alone, I began to wonder exactly what was going on, and communicated this via the letter box. Eventually a nervous female voice answered, informing me that when she had called round that morning to do Hermione's

shopping she had been dragged in past the barricade, and was at that moment being held at knifepoint while Hermione tried to set the kitchen alight using her free hand. Luckily she wasn't ambidextrous.

At this point I began to feel that I might need reinforcements. I borrowed a neighbour's telephone and called the police, an ambulance and the psychiatrist. All said that they would rush to my assistance. Shortly afterwards two ambulancemen joined me on the doorstep. One was a beefy guy in his early forties who had been through it all many times; the other was a rather cautious looking trainee of around 20. We stood there for a while, smoking cigarettes and waiting for the police and psychiatrist to arrive. Suddenly the "hostage" called us to the door in a panicky voice. Apparently Hermione had assembled some newspapers in the kitchen and was threatening to start a bonfire by soaking them in paraffin and dropping in a lighted match. Taking advantage of Hermione's distraction the neighbour had managed to climb back over the barricade and was now by the door. But, she said querulously, she was not going to open it for us because Hermione might knife her afterwards. No amount of reasoning about death by fire being just as final as death by carving knife would persuade her. I began to wonder if Hermione was the only loony in there.

As the smell of paraffin began to drift through the door we started to get a bit worried. There was no sign of the police, so eventually the older ambulance man winked at me and put his shoulder to the door. Thanks to shoddy council workmanship, it opened quite easily. As the door swung back Hermione Grant's neighbour bolted out without saying a word, and disappeared along the balcony in a cloud of dust. When we went into the flat, we found Hermione standing in the middle of the kitchen holding a box of matches in one hand and a can of paraffin in the other. A beaming smile lit up her face as we entered. "Hallelujah! Jesus saves!" she cried triumphantly. Luckily she was quite happy about taking a ride to the hospital, as without the psychiatrist we had no legal means of coercing her. As we drove through the entrance to the flats we noticed that a police car was just arriving...

That ambulance journey will remain vivid to me for the rest of my life. For some reason the older guy decided to drive, leaving Hermione in the back with me and the trainee. She behaved quite co-operatively at first, settling her ample body comfortably back into the ambulance seat. "Jesus loves me," she would tell us from time to time, but that seemed okay so we drove in quite a leisurely manner through the now darkening streets of Hackney. Slowly, however, her manner began to change.

"Jesus loves you," she said forcefully, poking a finger at the young ambulance man. "Jesus *wants* you. *Hermione* wants you. C'm here!!" With that she tore off her blouse, letting free her ample black breasts, and threw herself upon the now terrified young man. His muffled yell alerted the driver, who squealed to a halt and came to our rescue. Unfortunately, however, the arm restraints supplied with the ambulance were defective, so we had to race the rest of the way with the siren wailing, while Hermione Grant continued her amorous approaches to the now shaking and white-faced young man. Flying breasts were everywhere. I thanked God Hermione was heterosexual.

It sometimes seems quite mean to laugh at the predicament of someone like Hermione. After all, she must have had a shitty life, and it's no fun really to humiliate yourself in the back of an ambulance. However, working with the mentally ill did often have its hilarious side. One justification I can make is that I went through a bit of a loony episode myself, so I'm not just laughing at the misfortunes of others.

My own experience of being a loony must have been about eleven or twelve years ago, and I have to admit that it could well have been precipitated by overindulgence

in noxious substances. My first intimation that I was different somehow from other people came during an acid trip, when I had a long and serious conversation with an archangel called Leonard. On other acid trips I had at least some idea that the hallucinations were chemically induced, but this time I got the impression that Leonard had actually been sent to look after me by an external agency, rather than that he was a figment of my dazzled imagination. Leonard made himself known as a disembodied voice, coming from above me and towards my right. He spoke in deep, calm tones, sounding caring and gentle, rather like an ideal psychiatrist. Amongst other things, he told me that the reason God had sent him to look after me because I had a special part to play in Armageddon. After the effects of the acid wore off I still firmly believed that I had been in contact with an archangel because the experience had felt so real. Unfortunately the people who had been with me at the time of the trip, and had only heard my half of the cosmic conversation, firmly believed I was a little deluded.

Not long after this trip I had to go into hospital for a minor operation which involved a general anaesthetic. As I came round from the anaesthetic I remembered previously meeting a guy who at the time had seemed quite normal, but who for some reason I now realized had been surrounded by a sort of glowing aura, marking him as very different from most of the rest of humanity. Obviously I too was different, having talked with an archangel, and I therefore concluded that we were probably both members of an emerging super-race. I resolved to go and look for this person, whom I remembered was called Andy, as soon as I was let out of the hospital.

In fact, what did happen on my discharge was that I had two further encounters with Leonard in fairly quick succession. These happened without the help of acid, or drugs of any kind, and I did not get the impression that I was having one of those "acid flashbacks" that were so popular with the media. The first of these experiences happened when I was on the bed in my rented room. Leonard came to sit next to me and held my hand, talking comfortingly and reassuringly to me. I could distinctly feel the pressure of his hand on mine, and I could sense his presence strongly, although I couldn't see him. I was also very aware of his position on the bed, and the thing that persuaded me of his divine origin was that the side of the bed he was sitting on was *against the wall*. Only a being close to God could defy the laws of nature with such impunity.

The second time I came across Leonard he was a completely disembodied voice, as he had been on the acid trip. I was sitting at my desk at work when everything went grey, and I saw a tree, made completely out of water, eternally flowing upwards. Leonard's voice came in as a sort of commentary, saying: "Mankind has gone astray and must be brought back." I got the feeling that I was intended to play a part in the "bringing back", but I was not sure of my exact role. Perhaps more instructions would be broadcast shortly.

I finally met Andy again at a rehearsal of the group he managed. He agreed that we were probably both members of an emerging super-race, and suggested that because of our common heritage we should go to bed together. I didn't really fancy Andy much so I wasn't too happy about this suggestion. As a diversion I therefore told him about my cosmic experiences with Leonard. Andy looked very interested but suggested that I looked a little run down, and that maybe if I talked to my doctor he would give me a tonic. This seemed a reasonable enough suggestion at the time, as even agents of Armageddon need to keep their health up to scratch.

A few weeks later I turned up in the doctor's surgery. I had continued to have strange experiences, and I was beginning to find them a bit frightening. When I asked the doctor for a tonic I guess I wasn't too convincing, because he started to ask about what went on in my mind. Did I, for instance, ever hear voices? "Oh yes,"

I replied innocently, "I have had a number of messages from an archangel called Leonard. Just recently he's begun to run Dymo tapes with written instructions on them through my brain."

The doctor looked interested. He wanted to know more details about the Dymo tapes, so I launched into an explanation. The first two tapes had slotted into my brain while I was at home in my bedsit. It's very difficult to describe my experience because to do that I would need to reconstruct my state of mind at that time, which is probably undesirable. The nearest I can get is that the images were about as solid as dream sequences, but I was seeing them while I was wide awake with my eyes open. The tapes were black with typical white Dymo lettering on them, and they slotted in through the right hand side of my brain and ran through and out of my field of vision towards the left. The first message told me to listen to a track called "Wooden Ships" on the Jefferson Airplane's *Volunteers* because it contained a message about my role in Armageddon. I played the song a few times without being able to isolate the message, but I had the feeling that it would show itself to me when the time was right.

About a week later the second Dymo tape message appeared, and told me to go on the Pill. I had used the Pill up to about six months before, but gave it up when drugs and rock'n'roll got more important than sex. I was a bit puzzled by this particular instruction, as I had no intention of having sex with anyone as far as I was aware. Still, Leonard had to be obeyed, so I dug out my leftover supply of Ovulen and set about taking the tablets, wondering idly if I should write to the Pope about this heavenly blessing on contraception.

The third message was rather more sinister. I was crossing the footbridge on Beckenham Station when a tape slotted into place telling me to throw myself under the 9:15 a.m. train to London Bridge. I made my way to the edge of the platform, but I felt very confused as this message did not seem to fit with the idea of the kindly Leonard preparing me for my role in Armageddon. Despite that, the compulsion to obey the tape was pretty strong, especially as I had done so on the two previous occasions. As the train approached the platform both the compulsion and the confusion grew until in the end, thankfully, I was paralysed by indecision at the vital moment. As I climbed rather shakily on to the train and took my seat I began to wonder if the force in my mind was less than benevolent. (It also now occurs to me that if my suicide was meant to begin a succession of events leading to Armageddon, I probably saved the world a lot of hassle.)

Back in the surgery my physician was looking more and more concerned. "Anything else been happening?" he asked.

"Oh yes. I've been having a series of dreams where I dismember people with a meat cleaver. Blood and brains everywhere. Last night, for instance, I dispatched a whole rugby team. Then when I wake up I find that the bedding is soaked with sweat and the sheets are all knotted up. That usually happens at about four in the morning and then I can't go to sleep again."

The doctor looked at me with pity in his eyes. "My dear, I think you need help," he murmured, and picked up the telephone to the nearest psychiatric ward.

The hospital itself was okay, because it was a very informal place where you got up and got dressed every day instead of, as I had imagined, lying around being ill. It wasn't really a hospital, in fact, but a sort of halfway place for people who were only loony around the edges. The psychiatrist was a woman called Dr. Smedburg, and typically enough she was Austrian. I had two five-minute sessions with her, which went something like this:

Dr. S.: "Have you ever wanted to murder your mother?"

Me: "Not really."

Dr. S.: "Oh. Have you ever wanted to murder your father, perhaps?"

Me: "Not really."

...and so on for the rest of the five minutes. At the end of my second session I asked her what they thought they could actually do for me. She said the idea was to try me on different drugs until they found one that would suit me, and then I would have to keep on taking the tablets until my brain fell out or I died or something. I recounted this to Nick, a guy who had been sharing my bedsit with me at the time. (Despite sharing the same room our relationship was completely platonic, but we were very fond of each other.) Nick said that no way should I stay and let them continue to experiment on me with chemicals, and that if I came home he would look after me and make sure everything was okay. As the whole thing was voluntary anyway there was nothing they could do to stop me going, although Dr. Smedburg said it was a pity, because I had a "good personality" somewhere in there which the right tablets would reveal like magic. So back I went to my bedsit with Nick.

Nick was lovely. Every time I went out he would sit in the window so that I could see him there on the way back. He did all the housework for me, and took me out to lots of meals at the local Indian. All this loving care seemed to work far better than any pills, and I got no more messages from the Other Side. Then one Friday night I got paranoid and decided Nick was trying to get control of my brain. Never one to hesitate, I threw him and his belongings out of my bedsit and into the street. I never saw him again, and I'll never really forgive myself for that last lapse into delusion. But for Nick I might still be taking the Largactyl. Still, who said life was fair?

Looking back on these experiences it is very easy to analyse them away. It all happened not long after I had left home and launched myself into a lifestyle very much in contrast with my deeply religious upbringing. My parents were, and still remain, fundamentalist Christians, and the coming Armageddon is never far from their thoughts. Events in the world and in their lives are often interpreted by them as signs of the Second Coming, so it's not really surprising that my delusions should take on a highly religious doomsday coloration. (As to why the archangel was called Leonard, I shall never know. The only Leonard I knew in real life was my grandfather, and he was far from angelic.)

Despite the obvious links with my religious past and my equally obvious guilt feelings about myself, I found it very difficult afterwards to accept that what had happened was delusion and not a spiritual experience. Of course, it's very flattering to think that you've been chosen to help change the destiny of humanity. The main reason for my difficulty, however, was that it had all seemed so real. Although the visual hallucinations resembled dream images, they did not share the unreality which dreams assume once the dreamer is fully awake. The memories of my contacts with Leonard are just as clear -- if not clearer -- than memories of external events around that time. I also remember feeling very strongly that it would never again be possible to feel so close and so much at one with another being as I had felt with Leonard during the good times. The frightening experiences I relinquished with relief, but basically I missed Leonard. At the same time, I had never quite worked out what I was supposed to do if Armageddon ever arrived, so I was probably doomed to make a balls-up of things, as usual. That meant I was likely to let down this caring archangel who had given up his precious time to look after me and give me a glimpse of eternity.

Because what had happened did make a profound impact on me, it took quite a while to get it out of my system. In an attempt to get back the good bits of Leonard without the scary bits, I went along to a Spiritualist Church for a while, but the powerful experiences I had had did not seem to fit with the collection of earnest elderly ladies who wore their best hats to the meetings. Then one night I felt that if I went out and wandered around a bit Leonard would guide me to a sign which would help me make sense of it all. What did happen, typically, was that I ended up sitting on the steps of Beckenham parish church, but my religious upbringing had been so fiercely anti-CofE that I could not believe the local vicar held the answer to the mystery of the universe.

When I started going out with guys again I went through a phase of telling them all about Leonard on our first date. This was partly, I think, to see if they could tolerate an ex-loony, but also to see if they were prepared to accept the possibility that I might have had a real live spiritual experience. The number of relationships that foundered at this point is probably quite staggering. However, as time went by I gradually began to admit to myself that what had happened was probably the result of a combination of culture-shock and too many drugs. This is basically what I feel about it nowadays, although to be honest there is still a small part of my mind which wonders if, after all, Leonard is still around there somewhere, keeping a kindly eye on me and waiting for Armageddon.

Coming back to my experiences with mentally ill people in my job, obviously it is useful to some extent to understand how reality can start to slip. In some ways it does help to minimize any possible fears of mentally ill people, because I know that I have had a glimpse of what it might be like, and I have remained human. I've also had a mild experience of facing hospitals, psychiatrists and chemotherapy. The problem with it is, though, that if I meet someone whose experiences start to resemble my own too closely, I start to feel rather panicky inside. After all, some of my strange episodes might have been ecstatic but a fair amount of it involved a terrifying loss of control. The ludicrously funny side of mental illness, like Hermione's ambulance trip, helps to cope with the slight suspicion many of us may have that somewhere at the back of our minds there's a nasty corner of insanity looking for a way out.

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