

From Patrick Nielsen Hayden at. Available for. Future issues will probably. ee#

"Life is a matter of having good days." -- Emerson

LIFE WITH THE LOONIES, PART III I am talking on the phone with Gary Farber (who pays us to mention him on the first page of all our fanzines) when from the next room I hear a jungle cry, followed by several abrupt thuds. "Son of a bitch!" she shouts. Crash. Crunch.

"What the hell was that?" Gary asks. Gary Farber lives in Seattle, where his phone bills finance Jane Hawkins's pension.

"Ung ung ung," Teresa expostulates, breathing hard. "There it is again!" Crack. Thud. This is getting serious. I pick up the phone and head for the next room.

"The mouse! That's what I thought it was. Quick, grab the OED!"

"I'm on the phone. The mouse isn't hurting anything. Where did you see it?" I ask.

"Over there. Under the laundry hamper! Stand back, I'm going to move it aside."

"You're barefoot. What if the mouse bites your toe? We don't want a dexedrine-crazed mouse running around, writing thirty-page fanzine articles. Let me move it." Setting the phone aside I tiptoe all the way into the room and with a grandiloquent gesture sweep the standing laundry hamper to one side. A small, grey object scuttles between my legs. I pick it up and hand it to Teresa.

"Here's your mouse. You should sweep your room more often." It is a mouse-sized dust bunny.

"Hello? Hello?" The voice of Gary Farber echoes through the electronic void. "I'm paying for this microphone. Are you all dead in New York?"

"No problem," I say, putting the receiver back to my ear. "Teresa's just having a struggle to the death with sentient dust bunnies. Do you have dust bunnies where you come from? Here, they grow teeny-weeny teeth and little pointy ears. Particularly when you forgot to take your gamma last night and are cranked up on dexedrine to compensate." Teresa glares at me. "It was a mouse," she insists. "Vermin! Bugdirt!"

This matter of Bugdirt has been going on for some time. Beyond sensible considerations of hygiene, beyond the natural aversion anyone might feel upon encountering tiny grains of cockroach shit (or "bugpoop" as Teresa calls it, her eyes glinting with a crazed energy the dexedrine doesn't explain), beyond the fact that, yes, urban vermin are rather repulsive, Teresa seems to have evolved an almost theological aversion to New York's creatures of the floorboards and walls. In this Manichaeian cosmology Bugdirt is evil incarnate and she is come not to bring peace but a sword. From her customary reclining position, surrounded by empty coffee cups and full ashtrays she hasn't had the energy to tidy up, she can accelerate to 75 m.p.h. in 4.27 seconds at the sight of a cockroach, or lift objects twice her size upon spying a mouse. "I am Shiva, destroyer of universes," she announces. "In cockroach, my name is Megadeath."

"It's just a roach. New York has billions of them," I offer.

"Bugdirt," she insists, and the fit takes her. Bang. Stomp. Well, it beats falling asleep all day.

HOW MANY FANS DOES IT TAKE TO...? Gary Farber knows. If you want the real inside scoop on fandom, forget Willis, Warner, White, and West. Ignore Nelson, Pickersgill, TCarr, even Lenny Bailes. Not even the trained mind of Anne Hamill Warren can match the discoveries in fannish depth-psychology available to any Worldcon shift supervisor who knows where to look.

Gary Farber knows this and more. As a result we may now lay an ancient controversy to rest.

Sunday morning, ConStellation, 1983: all quiet on the Convention Center front, the peaceful 102° Baltimore morning disrupted only by the soft swish of hundred-dollar bills being tossed out a second-story window. "Money, money," Mike Walsh is heard to mutter as he glides through Operations headquarters, "who cares about money? We have three rented xerox machines; we can always print more!" Three gofers scurry up to wipe the foam from his lips. Gary Farber, clad in the Fuck Robe of Power traditionally worn by the on-duty shift supervisor, pays no attention. Walsh is Committee, a mere native; his future is of no concern to the condottieri. For them, more immediate problems loom: such as the wild-eyed troubleshooter dashing into the room. All eyes turn. Lurching to a halt, the messenger blurts:

"There's a light bulb out in Miss Piggy's display case!"

Consternation. This isn't covered in the Operations Manual. Do you know, just offhand, how to open a sealed glass case and replace a burnt-out light within? A quick check of the Procedures Index reveals that the staff on hand doesn't, either. Have no fear, though: the cream of Worldcon runners is here, willing to improvise a solution, and, gathering together clipboards, walkie-talkies, ice axes, crash helmets, and miscellaneous other hardware they fondly hope will come in handy, a crowd of them sets forth down the corridor, stopping only to lovingly unfold the Facilities Diagrams in order to ascertain the Muppet display's location. (Down the hall and to the left, almost visible from the door to the Operations room.) Through it all, Gary Farber watches: small, diffident, observant, taking notes.

As usual, the crisis was averted with all the terse decisiveness for which fans are universally known. The light bulb was replaced, shadows wreathing Miss Piggy no more. As the sun climbed to noon over the awakening Worldcon, Gary Farber, scholar, still wrapped in the Robe, put the final touches on his log entry, small but perfectly formed hands underscoring the concluding words with efficient strokes of his quill pen. Minutes later, back in civilian clothes, ambling into the Fan Room, Gary smiled mysteriously and asked me, "Say, did you know how many fans it takes to screw in a light bulb?"

"Well, no, I hadn't heard that one, I confess," I said.

"Six," said Gary. Pause. "I counted."

I'm glad we got that one settled. Next issue: Greg Pickersgill sees things people don't.

 "You know, the 1920s were the 7th Fandom of twentieth-century civilization." -tnh

LESS THAN HUMAN A recent overdose of Philip K. Dick provokes a note about one of his running themes, a notion not exclusive to PKD but used to striking effect more than once in his work. Critics often note science fiction's use of The Mystical Solution, that terrific scam by which you gather up all your loose ends and imbue indifferent work with Depth and Meaning by postulating that, after all, everything's really divinely interconnected; we are all Manifestations of the Godhead, Fragments of the One etc etc, world without end. Heinlein is notable for this: after making it to page 4000000 of Time Enough for Love the reader is utterly fascinated to find that Lazarus Long and probably everyone else really is immortal, slated for incarnation and reincarnation in a cosmology of Eternal Return, gosh wow science fiction sure is a literature of ideas, you bet. Very comforting and maybe true, who knows? Still, one longs sometimes for metaphysical speculation as imaginative and elaborate as all the carefully-wrought future tech. The device Dick uses in several stories fills the bill: I call it the Half-Mystical Solution, and it raises the hairs on the back of my neck.

Simply put, the postulate is this: what if we aren't all manifestations of

the Godhead? What if only some of us are? What if, furthermore, you can have a spark of the divine, but irrevocably lose it? "Fat heard in her rational tone the harp of nihilism, the twang of the void. He was not dealing with a person; he had a reflex-arc thing at the other end of the phone line." (Valis, chapter 1.) Elsewhere, in We Can Build You and Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?, the explicit premise (completely excised in the movie Blade Runner) is that androids don't have souls, aren't fully human, utterly lack that final irreducible empathy and capacity for gratuitous acts of random kindness. In the first novel, much irony is produced by the way that, in fact, the main female character is as soulless as the simulacrum of Abraham Lincoln, perhaps more so; in the second, narrative urgency and final ambiguity spring from Decker's growing suspicion that he somehow shares, or is growing to share, the spiritual deadness of the androids he pursues. In these books, the perception is presented in terms of technologically literalized metaphor; in later and more mimetic works, as more a matter of personal perception, maybe a true observation and maybe the narrator's own craziness. (See both Valis and A Scanner Darkly for examples of this later mode.) But either way, the preoccupation is the same. Transcendence is a chancy thing: present and possible but vulnerable to loss. Basic humanity is not a birthright. Souls can die. A view many Christians would agree with, and it's worth noting that in Who's Who, Dick gave his religion as "Episcopalian."

Yet it's a strange sort of Christianity, not the simple "be good and go to heaven" variety held by most. For Dick, "good" must be active, must not simply avoid active evil. Even if engaging with the world's evil can kill you, can even kill your soul. Indeed, the world just might be full of malign, almost Lovecraftian perils: "automatics", homeostatic devices without real consciousness, "reflex-arc" posing an ever-present danger to the rest of us. Yet the kicker is this: to treat them as such -- to attempt to identify, isolate, and neutralize them -- is to condemn one's own deep self to an even worse fate. The best presentation of this dilemma occurs in "Chains of Air, Web of Aether," a 1979 short which was later reworked as the first few chapters of The Divine Invasion. In the story version, McVane looks like a glutton for punishment, continuing to exchange visits with Rybus Rommey despite the clarity with which he can see that, for him, she is Death: decay, banality, the gubbing and kipplification of his universe. Toward the end of the story, this perception of his is confirmed by advice he receives from an omniscient AI: "PROGRAM ADVICE: TOTAL AVOIDANCE ON YOUR PART. ETHICAL FACTOR: OBTIATED." Yet even with that knowledge, McVane continues to see her; at the end of the story they're still together, him suffering, her a psychotic basket case incapable of engaging another human being. In one reading, McVane simply can't leave Rybus. In conjunction with the rest of Dick's work, though, it seems more like he won't: being still alive himself, he somehow knows a worse fate awaits him if, after having let her this far into his life, he then cuts her off.

A far cry from the situational ethics and simple "karma" teleology of most sf. Philip K. Dick couldn't write his way out of a paper bag some days, and cluttered his work with unreadable potboilers like The Zap Gun, all of which are now being reprinted as materworks to the confusion of many readers new to his work. But at his best he had a sense of how fucking difficult life is, how hard it is to do any good at all, and how wrong the placid solipsism of most sf, of most Americans, can be. He knew that you can't save yourself by not paying attention to anyone else. His metaphysics may have been screwy, but, the same way other sf writers' speculative technology or economics works at its best to literalize stale metaphor in a powerful way, they work to grab the reader, to telescope endless quibbly postulations into one gigantic Given, and wake them up to the really interesting questions beyond the lame, literalistic quibblings of the intellectually bourgeois.

"NOT THIS AUGUST: A novel of the conquest of North America by C. M. Kornbluth"

-- Tor Books cover copy, 1981

FANDOM: Has anyone out there thought through, I mean really thought through, this Corflu business? I mean, we were sorry to miss the first two, and certainly won't miss the third, but the more I think about it the more it seems that the main appeal of the next one, for me, is as a small convention run by the Falls Church crowd, not as a "convention for fanzine fans." The trouble with the notion of a "convention for fanzine fans" is that it takes for granted that "fanzine fan" means anything, which it doesn't. OK, so there are a bunch of people scattered across the continent who do fanzines. Do they have that much in common, to the exclusion of all sorts of other fans we hang out with, really? I doubt this. There are "fanzine fans" more tedious than any "con fan" (though not on this mailing list, you can be sure); conversely, there are "con fans" whom we'd all recognize as members of the trufannish tribe. As a category, the concept of "fanzine fandom" grew up in reaction to the invention of "con fandom"; before that, people like us who went to cons and threw parties and participated in local groups and wrote fanzines were simply known as "fans." Now by virtue of categorization (and I don't mean just Corflu), we're "fanzine fans," our involvement in all those other areas subtly downgraded in others' eyes (goddamn fanzine fans, always trying to tell us what to do), our fanac generally felt to somehow revolve around arcane rites of the duplicator. Corflu doesn't smell like fandom to me. It smells like reaction: a festival of all those odds and ends rejected by everyone else in fandom, mimeo workshops and apa panels and who-the-hell-cares. I don't know about the rest of you, but personally I find mimeography to be of less than consuming interest. I want fandom back, not some half-life of "fanzine fandom": a gestalt of in-person and in-print (or in-print and in-person; choose your emphasis) interaction in which one can wholeheartedly participate without wincing in embarrassment. I want conventions where the intelligent attendees don't have to hide somewhere in order to have ten minutes of conversation uninterrupted by the excruciating exhibitionism of costumed cretins. (Sure, to keep getting those gawky-but-they'll-improve adolescents who used to be fandom's lifeblood, you have to have an open-door policy and be willing to tolerate some excesses, but I'm sure most people reading this fanzine will agree that, currently, the gargoyles have taken over the cathedral. Frankly, I suspect the larval trufans are being driven off by the sight of the modern variety of corridor cavorters. I remember being a neofan at 16; those were the sorts of people I came into fandom to get away from.) I'll get that sort of escape at Corflu, but I won't get the real stuff this state of affairs is a necessary precondition for. What I'll get instead will be a celebration of the wild and wacky world of duplicators, interlineations, and the latest gossip of "fanzine fandom." Fine stuff indeed, but hardly difficult to come by. What about the rest of the world? Is our choice between the shades of Doug Wright and Arnie Katz, no further options possible? Is "fanzine fandom" henceforth to be an esoteric lodge of True Believers in Roscoe, shading plates, and electrostencil technique? Fuck all. I'm still interested in literature, politics, music, and even Science Fiction. As I'm sure most attendees of Corflu are too. As I'm sure will be substantial topics of conversation there, more so than the minutiae of on-stencil artwork. So why bind ourselves to a symbolism bound to drive all sorts of people we'd like to meet away, while extending the hand of fellowship to every hopeless case with the nodding acquaintance of a typer keyboard?

Answer: because it is a symbolism we're familiar with, and it does bore away the costume drones. We know this for a fact; it worked twice already, and that's not to be sneezed at. On the whole, though, I prefer the Mexican approach, which in Britain seemed to work as well while simultaneously allowing a lot more freedom in terms of the con's programmatic content. Simply put, the idea is to put on a science fiction convention, you know, about books, the kind you read. Program items were deliberately sophisticated: serious critical discussions by fans (not boring academics), a film program of avant-garde and stfnally borderline works, Guests of Honor of the half-stfnal, half-mundane sort bound to be of interest only to those who sometimes read books without spaceships on the cover (Russell Hoban

and Alasdair Gray). Most "fanzine fans" in Britain attended. So did all the other intelligent, stimulating people we hang around in fandom for: the literate, articulate folks who simply haven't time to get involved with fanzines, the pro writers and editors who enjoy fandom on its own terms rather than as a place to meet their adoring public, the dealers with real books and magazines to sell as opposed to hologram jewelry and Dune plastic model kits. Yet despite its "literary" tone the con was classically "fannish" as all get-out, from the silly logo by Harry Bell to the drunken parties at night. (There were also program items about fanzine fandom, not as tokenism but because fanzines are an organic part of the real fannish gestalt.) Given a choice I'd rather attend a Mexican than a Corflu any day -- even if the countries they were held in were reversed.

So why don't we have something like that, over here? Probably because the whole concept turns on a concept Americans are noted for their problem with: intellectualism. In the US, no matter how smart you think you are, you don't say so for god's sake; what makes you think you're so special? We go to great lengths to avoid this sort of reaction, plumbers and Nobel laureates alike; as with gays, the onus is on intellectuals not to "flaunt" it. Something like this may also be the case in British mundane society, but it's worth noting that their greatest fanwriter, Walt Willis, took the title of his most famous column from Joyce and scattered joking references to Proust and 19th-century German literature throughout his work, while the postcard we received the other day from Dave Langford ended with a joke referring to an obscure controversy between 19th-century poets. In American fannish fandom, on the other hand, the primal image is either of Bob Tucker deflating the pomposities of sercon intellectuals with Twainesque crackerbarrel folk wisdom, or Burbee and Laney, two Normal Guys (yeah sure you betcha) hooting uproariously at the antics of such overintense, over-intellectual fruitcakes as Ackerman or E. Everett Evans. Fundamental to our fannish creation-myth is the identity of "sercon" and "fannish" with "hyper" and "mellow." Particularly in the heartland, to be "fannish" is to be laid-back, not intense, disputatious and desperate like those silly sercon fans. Relax, pull up a chair, have a drink, pass me that wrench, Burb, and what about those crazy queers, eh? Har har. Etc. This is why fannish fandom is "mature", unlike all those pretentious loonies always arguing about Technocracy or socialism or something.

Of course this model isn't how it is at all, as anyone can see. Yet it's a powerful myth, strong enough even now to intimidate people who should know better into paying lip service to it. God forbid we should consider the silly, juvenile, sercon notion that, hey, literacy and intelligence might be the key qualities of the true fandom we all instinctively want. I mean, gosh, that would involve claiming some sort of Intellectual Superiority, like we can read stuff more complicated than James P. Hogan and they can't, wouldn't it? Not done, not done at all. Far better to retreat into the customary defensive middle-class toe-scurf, "well, you know, fannish fandom, I mean, it's just us guys, we like to get together and play cards, have a few beers, shoot the breeze, nothing pretentious about us, no sir." Not like those sercon fuggheads over there. Just us, two guys in a machine shop. This is a hell of a hangup for a culture to have. What it leads to is where we are: unable to find better symbols to bond around than mimeograph correction fluid. Great.

OK: it's just silliness, it's just fannishness, I'm getting too excited over nothing. Mexican has a silly symbol too. Right. Except that in Mexican's case, the guy in the sombrero is fannish because he's irrelevant, and serves as a signal that this is no academic conference, this is fandom complete with the loony parts. In Corflu's case, though, that little blue bottle could be the one all the rest of us, all us fans who still want fandom in all its potential, have allowed ourselves to be pushed into by our own unwillingness to stand up and say, wait a minute. We are smarter, more intelligent, more articulate. We're hungry for stimulation of a sort neither poolside "relaxacons" nor three-ring circuses provide. We want fanzines and books, intense intellectual conversation and drunken revels. We want

Desperate Fun. Well, I do, anyway, and I wonder how many other people feel the same way.

"It's all part of the collapse anyway. I'm pretty sure that we -- the world -- is now gathering momentum on the downslide into chaos, anarchy, misery and suffering (coupled with no fun) that began some time around 1969. In moments of gloom I can hardly see any other track for the future that doesn't include either a war of staggering ferocity which will be carried out with weapons so intolerable that human beings will have little chance of pulling through, or a gradual grinding down of all the civilised ideas, values and institutions we've spent the last millenium or so painstakingly piecing together. As neither of these options appeal to me overmuch I think I will, when things get Tougher than Tough, have recourse to my Plan. This is an old one, really, stolen from the Nazis of the Thirties and Forties, and in those days known, I suppose, as 'Brandy and Explosives.' My modern version is to get a little gang of like-minded people into a large comfortable room plentifully supplied with whatever drink, food, drugs and sexual devices are considered necessary, seal the doors, and have at it. The only difference between this and the sort of party I'd like to get to but never seem to be invited to is that the last person left on their feet with some idea of what they're doing pulls a discreet little handle and sets off the ton or so of explosive planted under the floor.

"If you got to go, go happy, and in style."

-- Greg Pickersgill, STAGGERLEE 1, June 1981

MORE FANDOM: We get letters, gosh. Even twenty months after our last real fanzine, they keep coming in; how can this be? I think there should be an investigation, root out this creeping elitism, get to the bottom of these "us fandom" cliques, what's all this anyway, it's not in the Rules, I think it should be Stopped. Don't you? Writes JOSEPH NICHOLAS from Aussiecon: "The struggle is ceaseless. All we can hope for are brief moments of respite between the clouds of Marty Cantor's pipe smoke, although the ingestion of tobacco in the fan room is actually forbidden in deference to Valma Brown's lungs. Marty himself has forbidden all discussion of Topic A and his role in same on the grounds that exciting controversy isn't what he's here for; this is of course an evasion, but one that none seem inclined to pursue. Must be the laid-back atmosphere so typical of Australia, or similar. It would certainly explain the amazing failure of massed American fans to rip my head off for alleged misdemeanors in 1977 or 1978 or whatever; the one and only person to have said 'Oh, so you're' is Linda Lounsbury, who's probably never read my stuff anyway." Adding a P.S. to Joseph's crammed postcard, JUDITH HANNA describes herself as "Totally crushed -- have been ignored by Mortian Moose W who bored JN for several minutes before adroit escape." Ah, internationalism. Elsewhere, from Austin, BOB WEBBER advises Teresa that "It's just as well you didn't get down here -- your carefully controlled accent might have gone all to pieces. I find myself saying y'all uncontrollably, also Whai shore!" Encapsulating the NASFiC, Bob informs us that there "sure were a lot of Texans here, some just as cute as a bug's ear. They luuv their pick-up trucks." Meanwhile, from Britain, AVEDON CAROL reports "Silicon great fun but Gannets say they are tired and can't do it again. Greg was red w/depression and general horror Friday night but warmed up to being in quizzes and telling people to fuck off by Saturday. He and I won the movie quiz, but not much through any effort on my part. Girls' team (Linda's Sluts -- me, Linda, Pam, and a woman whose name I keep forgetting) beats boys' team (Greg's Guys -- GP, Steve Lawson and, um, I forget) in battle of sexes. Categories: taste, touch, smell, sight, & brains -- we won every category. Oh, yeah, Glicksohn was on the boys' team. ... I lasted through the first round of Snooker in Space (an SF quiz run along the lines of a snooker game) thanks to Rob, but Julian Headlong wiped us out and made

it for long enough to be laid low in the final by the Deaf Master. ... 'I shall wait for Malcolm's phone call tomorrow saying he hopes we don't mind the little leg-pull about the Hugo,' said Langford before leaving the hotel."

Meanwhile, flushed with success, DAVE LANGFORD writes more recently of his "New Credibility Problem: erstwhile Reading fan blows savings on Canon copier, gives duplicators (and stencils, ink, spares) to worthy causes. 'Nothing medical science can do,' Dr. Hansen said. 'Just for a handful of toner he left us...'" And from elsewhere on this year's Hugo list, BILL GIBSON remarks that "the sacred waters of Not Writing Count Zero Any More flow over me like the grace of the living God. This is to mere gafia as Peruvian flake is to lookalike diet pills." William Gibson is a distinguished alumnus of the SFPA.

Ultimately, life goes on following August's exciting spate of conventions on three continents. Ever-informative, AVEDON CAROL writes again, "We have no word of M. Pickersgill and his alarming illness. He continues to warm to the idea of co-editing with myself a fanzine with the title of DOMESTIC BLISS which particularly he finds amusing because he is a Welsh married to une Americaine and I am une Statesian married to a Welsh. However he has flatly refused to contribute to le [possible Carol-Hansen genzine] CHUCK, as is of course not surprising as you can guess ... In any case M. Langdorf he believes to give us the tragic story of his many failure to lose his virginity in the Oxford. (Oui, oui, c'est vrai.) ... 13 Septembre 1985 (Je suis not keeping track of things at hanging out avec Roz a lot etc.) Actually, I'm not in the mood for any more of this Franglais. It's warmer now than in summer; I don't understand. I went out and bought this shower-type unit, but it's just sitting around due to Rob says we don't have the tools for putting it in. (!) Roz took me out to some gallery or something on the river last night, and before that Pool Nite was ok -- Phil, Malcolm, Chris, Phil's brother Steve, and Leroy were there. (Kettle: 'Rob was very funny at Fantasycon. He was on the toilet, and he made this bleating little sound, and then this mournful wail comes out. "Why can I never fart like a man?!" I wish I could tell you the other bits.') (Holdstock has been up to the usual, of course, which we tend to get second-hand from a different reliable source.)"

"God: noise in the street." -- Ulysses

REAL LIFE: We're getting along. New York fandom provides relatively few distractions -- though we like a number of people here a great deal, as a group they can be astoundingly stodgy. (Lucy Huntzinger's accurate diagnosis of Fanoclasts as a group that desperately needs to take up bowling or mud-wrestling is only confounded by the fact that, even if a group could be rounded up to do something so silly, three of them would be tired and grumpy, four would hold the others up for two hours by being late, at least one would complain that it wasn't kosher, a long-established couple would have a fight, and the whole group would generally approach the notion with all the prickly dubiousness of an overintellectualized teenager who thinks he's being propositioned by a street hooker. I used to think I was stuffy but this crowd sometimes makes me feel like Lou Reed. Eventually, of course, we'd all go to Wo Hop's rather than upset anyone.) Anyway, in our undistracted state we've been enhancing our resumé's right and left; since last committing a fanzine (not counting TAFF stuff) I worked first as an editorial assistant for the Literary Guild, then as an Associate Editor for Chelsea House, helping to compile the 37-volume Chelsea House Library of Literary Criticism under the nominal "general editorship" of academic BNF Harold Bloom. (In fact the real boss is Managing Editor S. T. Joshi, who croggled me on my first day of work by remarking that he'd noticed on my resumé that I ran the program at Iguanacon. "I was on the program at Iguanacon," he said, and by god so he was, on the Lovecraft panel. It transpires that S. T. is an ultra-BNF in Lovecraft circles, with several books about HPL in print: currently he's editing the new, textually accurate re-issue of Lovecraft's fiction coming out from Arkham House.

He also attends cons now and then, so as you can imagine we've wound up conspiring to include lots of sf&f litcrit in the set.) Meanwhile, after working a few months for the Council on Foreign Relations, taking phone messages from David Rockefeller, Winston Lord, the vice-premier of Taiwan, you know, people like that, we hardbitten New Yorkers run into them all the time, Teresa then did a year of editorial freelance work, building up a good reputation in the process (she still gets calls begging her to accept jobs) and eventually wound up as another full-time Associate Editor for Chelsea House, one desk away from me and working on the same series. So you can see we've managed to "go pro" as co-editors, after a fashion, though we haven't managed to get them to emboss little izzards onto the volumes yet. Must try harder. But that's just the capsule version of The News; film at eleven, and IZZARD 9 out by Christmas, we devoutly hope. After that, of course, is our TAFF report, out by Easter as promised; we're too busy. And we want to go back to Britain. Now.

OWNING UP: Okay, I lied. That wasn't quite how it happened; at least, not the whole story. In fact Teresa wrote up the rest in a letter to her brother and his wife; since reading other people's mail is dear to all your hearts, doubtless you won't be averse to seeing an extract. "Later that evening, Patrick and I were simultaneously getting ready for bed and conducting a lively, yet stupid argument about something I forget now, when the mouse scrambled out from behind our headboard and into the corner that holds my files and the radiator. I yelped, as did Patrick. Taking four yards of heavy woolen cloth in one hand and a coathanger in the other, I prodded at various points in the heap. Patrick nervously remarked that he didn't have shoes on, and didn't want to be toe-bitten by what I can only imagine would have to be an insanely belligerent mouse. I had him stand on the bed. Eventually I prodded the right stack, and Mr. Mouse dashed madly out of my files and straight at me, swerved, avoided the coat-hanger, and made it back to the safety of the bed. (We have a captain's bed, with drawers underneath it. There's about 10" clearance between the mattress platform and the drawers all around it, and since it's shoved up into a corner the L-shaped clearance makes a good mouse runway.) Within mere minutes I had (1.) a large opened paper bag up against the mouth of the clearance tunnel at the head of the bed; (2.) a broomstick stuck down the side of the bed at its foot, which I joggled back and forth to discourage the mouse from escaping in that direction and instead to run into the paper bag; where (3.) Patrick stood poised with the unabridged Oxford English Dictionary (vol. 1, A-O), ready to slam said volume down on the bag at the first rustling sign of habitation. This never happened, and eventually we collapsed in giggles when we realized how we looked. A week later, when we were buying roach-bait, Patrick remarked that since that night we hadn't seen the mouse. 'He's at home,' I said, 'recuperating from his heart attack.' I thought about it a moment longer. 'Which was brought on by laughing too hard.' Patrick opined that if that were possible the mouse would have collapsed when he saw me with the coathanger in one hand and the cloth in the other -- since at that point Patrick had offered, as his constructive contribution to the process, to go get his guitar and play a little flamenco to go with the bullfight.

"Someday we'll tell our grandchildren about all this." (tnh, 13 Aug 85)

Someday, this was
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