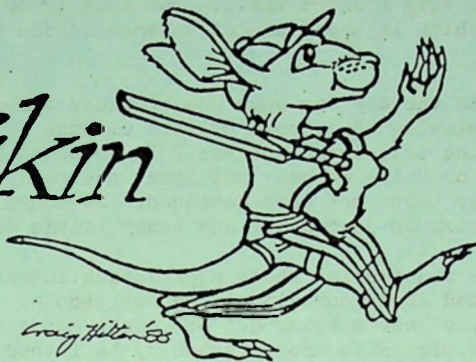


# Larrikin



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LARRIKIN 17, JULY 1988, is edited and published by Irwin Hirsh (2/416 Dandenong Road, Caulfield North, Victoria 3161, AUSTRALIA) and Perry Middlemiss (GPO Box 2708A, Melbourne, Victoria 3001, AUSTRALIA). We feel that the main problem with the new \$2 coin is not that it is an uncomfortable size, nor that it has an ugly design, but that it is a double headed coin. Now the simple matter of deciding an issue on the toss of a coin will not only rest on heads/tails but also black/white. Thanks go to our contributors, Pam Wells (UK agent), Marc Ortlieb (mailing labels), Craig Hilton (art, this page) and Dave Collins (art, last page). This fanzine is available for written contributions, artwork, letters of comment and for your fanzine in trade (one copy to each of us please). VOTE IN GUFF

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## GETTING AWAY FROM IT ALL

- Kathleen Hodgkin -

I find air travel very restful. I'm not talking about the contoured seats, or smiling hosties, or those little baby pillows that never stay where you prop them. It's not the remarkable airline coffee which relaxes me, nor is it the seven channels of gratefully inoffensive music which they pipe through those free throwaway plastic earmanglers (once you get them out of their hygienically burglar-proofed throwaway plastic bag).

No. What brings ease to my heart and a smile to my lips is the gentle bump as the plane leaves the runway. I'm safe.

For the duration of the flight I am out of touch, incommunicado, can't be reached. If the phone rings, I'm not there. The doorknocker bangs unanswered. Whatever I've done or failed to do, it's too late now. No-one can contact me, and, even better, I can't even try to contact them. If I've left the iron on, the stove on, the taps running, the front door unlocked, it's just too bad. There is nothing I can do. For a blissful hour or two, I am immune from my conscience.

On a small scale, the same applies to any journey. As I lock the front door behind me and start down the stairs, there is still the terrible danger that the phone will ring. But once I've started the car, I'm safe. I've committed myself to the trip. The phone can ring itself hoarse for all I care. None of the many manifestations of Duty - friends, boss, creditors, the tax department, bad news, good news, library fines etc - can disturb me until I choose to leave my Suzuki Tardis and return to the world of Time and Money.

Sure it's only a short while. But that 15 or 20 minutes of solitude can be bliss. Which is why I cannot understand the phenomenon of the Mobile Phone.

A phone in the car was once one of those symbols of unimaginable wealth: like a swimming pool, or a private cinema. The phone had a concealed niche between the television and the fully-stocked bar in the back seat or the Cadillac or Rolls Royce. But like the backyard pool and the home video, the mobile phone has been devalued. Nowadays it's available as a factory-fitted extra on just about any tacky little Japanese sedan.

In Europe and America these nightmarish inventions are commonplace, taken for granted among certain classes of people. And the habit of talking on the move, of never being out of touch, has given birth to new horrors. There are proposals afoot (awheel?) to introduce phones on trains in Britain. In America air passengers can already make phone calls in mid-air, though at present only while the plane is over land. But British Airways is working on a system which, within two years, should allow passengers to make international calls.

This way lies madness. No longer will the bump as the wheels lift signify irrevocable freedom. The phone booths on big planes will have long queues outside them, composed of people waiting to call the place they have just left. The ether will be filled with worries:

"No, Mother, it's only a week since I last rang, I hadn't forgotten you..."

"Darling, I'm sorry, I didn't mean it, I'll take the first flight back..."

"Could you just check, I think I left the iron on/the windows open/the cat locked in/the bath running/ the wrong forwarding address/the right forwarding address/my fingerprints on the knife..."

No longer is the aeroplane an island, entire unto itself, where only the weather can reach you (barring the occasional Libyan terrorist --and even that may be better than pleading with your bank manager).

I wonder if perhaps the trend towards escapism in movies and books is entirely a result of too much communication. I feel an ache of sympathy when I hear a pocket beeper go off in a cinema. The poor sod can't get away from work, even there.

SUE TROWBRIDGE SEZ      Our two-teen-old, Maria, seems to feel some kind of kinship with many of the crawling things in and around our apartment and frequently tries to communicate with them. On one occasion, she went so far as to approach a largish beetle and show it a photograph of herself. Another time I saw her making idle chit-chat with earthworms.

MORE SONGS ABOUT LAUNDROMATS AND FOOD

- Marc Ortlieb -

One of the nicer things about having retired to the outer suburbs is that I don't have to use a laundromat any more.

Indeed, I don't think I could locate a laundromat in East Burwood if you asked me to. They seem to be a life form best adapted to the sooty inner suburbs. Bruce Gillespie defines civilization as anywhere he can get by tram. I suspect then that laundromats are one of those trappings of civilization that never appeared out here, beyond the tram terminus.



There are ecological reasons for the paucity of laundromats in the wilderland. Laundromats and trams exist in a symbiotic relationship. Trams carry clothing, rich in coatings of organic material from the bistros of Carlton, to the laundromats. The laundromats harvest the nutrient from the clothing. The trams receive those metal disks not required by the laundromat. (There have been those who would claim that laundromats and trams are more intimately associated than that. Having noted that washing machines and trams both require electricity and poor university students to survive and that both make a lot of noise while not doing all that much, several researchers have come to the conclusion that laundromat washing machines are larval trams.)

Mind you, not using the laundromat means that I have less time for such things as fanzines, apahacking and letter writing, all of which were partially carried out in laundromats. The laundromat environment is ideal for the faned. There are no interruptions. You sit and, rather than watching the other patrons gaze at the clothes tumbling in the drier with the intensity they'd only otherwise devote to episodes of Neighbours, you bury yourself in the latest fan feud, wringing the nuances from the sentences and blowing through the froth and lather of fandom's soapies. In addition, laundromats provide one with an endless source of people from which you can populate fanzine articles. Even television shows have been inspired by laundromats, notably the episode of The Young Ones, which featured Vivian's socks and which was at least partially cribbed from for an introduction to Justin Ackroyd that I once wrote.

With marriages and mortgage, I've left all that behind me. For a start, Cath doesn't trust me with the laundry. She is of the opinion that different bits of clothing should be washed differently. She seems to feel that there is something wrong with sharing fabric dye between articles of clothing. It didn't say anything about that on the laundromat walls. All it said was that I shouldn't put rubber items in the driers. (Being a true individualist, I ignored that and found that the elastic leg bands on my underwear took on the tensile properties of the whalebone corsets of old, but that's another story altogether.)

Even on those rare occasions when I am permitted to load the washing machine - under Cath's strict instructions I hasten to add - I don't have time for my former laundromat fannish reveries. Being at home means that there are Things To Be Done. I can't sit in front of the washing machine and compose a Loc to Larrikin. For a start, the laundry at home isn't comfortable. It's covered in lino and isn't well heated. Laundromats were no better but there was no choice. At home I have all sorts of options such as washing dishes, cleaning out the cat's litter tray or even moving the lawn.

I can occasionally avoid these tasks through bribery. Cath is fond of home baked bread and I enjoy bread baking. Thus, while the washing machine spins out its sheets, I can get to work on the dough. When we were in Canberra a year ago, Cath's brother and sister-in-law took us to an Italian restaurant which served the most delicious garlic bread - it was laced with a touch of aniseed and a sprinkling of cayenne pepper. I was determined to duplicate the taste but, rather than adding the fat provided by garlic butter, I decided to do it properly, with the three flavours baked into the bread.

I'd tried that previously with ordinary garlic bread. My bible for bread baking is Doris Brett's Australian Bread Book. Brett is a psychologist with a wicked sense of humour and her recipes and hints, as well as being practical and suited to Australian conditions, make delightful reading. Take, for instance, her comments about kneading:

As you knead, you will notice the dough change in texture. It will become much smoother and much more 'elastic' - that is to say, it starts to argue with you ... when your bread dough starts to backchat you, you know that it too is growing up, getting ready to become a loaf.  
(Luckily, bread dough is more controllable than teenage children.)

Although Brett doesn't have a recipe for garlic bread, I combined her recipes for white and wholemeal breads with a recipe for baked in garlic bread from a magazine. The first time I tried it, I felt as though I'd been transported into an air-freshener commercial. Cath returned from shopping saying "You've been baking garlic bread haven't you?"

"How do you know?"

"The whole street knows! I could smell it from the corner!"

The recipe called for twenty cloves of garlic for two loaves. I was not particularly popular in the science office when I used the leftovers to make my lunch the next day. Our lab tech spent half of the afternoon searching for a gas leak. For the mixed spice bread, I decided to cut down the garlic to ten cloves and to add half a teaspoon of cayenne and a scattering of fennel seeds. That was fine, except for the burst of aniseed flavour around each seed and so, for the second attempt, I ground the fennel seed in a spice grinder first and added about half a teaspoon. That worked quite well. By that time I had also solved the inflation problem.

One of the breadmaker's eternal quests is for somewhere for the dough to rise on cold days. I sometimes cheat, warming up the oven to get a faster rising, but that means juggling times and getting the oven pre-heated for the final baking. Fortunately, doing the laundry at home on such days solves the problem. We set out the drying clothes in the spare room and crank up the central heating. The spare room also gets what little afternoon sun there might be in Melbourne in winter, thus making it the perfect place to allow bread to rise.

Therefore, I've given up on laundromats. For all their fannish merits, they can't quite match the spare room when it comes to bread rising. (I have considered the tumble drier as a possible proving ground but I suspect that it would be too hot, to say nothing of the proprietors' reactions to a drier full of dough.) It all comes down to priorities - which would I prefer, the perfect fanzine or the perfect garlic loaf. I'm afraid that the bread is the clean favourite.

FANDOM INC 4      Why do people co-edit fanzines? And how successful are the fanzines which come out of the partnerships? Looking for answers to these questions I've recently been rereading the full runs of two fanzines.

- Irwin -

So, why do people co-edit fanzines? As a social activity; to share the costs of fanzine production; to achieve a common goal; share the drudge work; to increase fannish contacts for potential contributors - these are just some of the answers I found.

I often wonder whether Perry and I have formed a successful partnership. I'm not talking, in the specific, about whether we are publishing a good fanzine. Rather are we publishing a fanzine which neither of us could publish without the other? Is there a continuity from issue to issue? Do the individual issues read as distinctly Irwin-edited or Perry-edited? I don't intend to answer these questions - I'm not sure if I'm the right



person to do so, being too close to the fanzine - but in tossing these questions up I hope you can see where I'm coming from.

Pulp and Australian Science Fiction Review provide interesting cases in co-editing. Both have a large number on the editorial 'board', something which has allowed for a change from the original team without a change in the editorial direction. And both fanzines have been very successful in attaining a healthy level of frequency, one of the stated aims of each title. ASFR has published fourteen issues since March 1986, not missing a deadline. And Pulp has seen eight issues in two years, which even after missing a number of deadlines is still good going. But the similarity ends there, as ASFR is edited by committee while Pulp is edited by each editorial household in turn. And it is for this reason that ASFR is the far more satisfying fanzine.

In the first issue of Pulp Pam Wells (who has since left the editorial fold) said that she didn't see the 'in turn' method as a liability: "After all, who wants to read the same fanzine over and over?" she said. But I'm not convinced. A single issue of a fanzine isn't read in isolation - there is some sort of expectation of continuity and of a developing editorial personality. The editors may be working towards the same goal, but I don't think this is enough. The editors of \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ (pick any three fanzines which could be said to represent a particular 'school') are all working towards a common goal, but they do so without being constricted by the preferences of the editors of the other fanzines. For instance, in the latest Pulp Vince Clarke editorialises on why he doesn't like fanzine reviews. He sees reviews as going against the idea of Fandom is Fun, and that it is fairer to record your reaction in a letter of comment to the specific editors. Vince feels quite strongly about this, and yet here he is a co-editor of a frequent fanzine which has published a fanzine review column in every issue. How can Vince work toward the same common goal as Avedon Carol, Rob Hansen and John Harvey when he disagrees so fundamentally on one of the regular features of their fanzine. Is it any wonder that Pulp reads like three different fanzines operating under one title?

The odd thing about Vince's comments is that you don't have to look any further than Pulp 7 to find a good example of how comments made in a fanzine review column work differently to those made in a letter of comment. For me, Eve Harvey's review column was the most satisfying feature in the most satisfying issue of Pulp. The strength of Eve's article was that she wasn't reviewing particular fanzines, as such; she was discussing what she looks for in fanzines, using the fanzines on hand to illustrate her points. The value of Eve's comments were built up as she went deeper into the article and as I read the article I recognised that while I sometimes disagreed with the examples Eve used I had no problem with the points she was making. Along with Joseph Nicholas's article in the third issue, Eve's article is easily the strongest review column Pulp has published, and neither of these two articles could've been effectively translated into letters of comment.

The problem with Pulp is that it doesn't speak to me in a continuous, coherent way. On a technical level Pulp works fine. It has good, reliable features/columns and a nice neat appearance. But the 'my turn now' aspect works against the best interests of the fanzine, and not just in setting up the aforementioned three fanzines in one bit. Apart from Avedon Carol, none of the co-editors have contributed articles to their co-editors' issues. And for the most part the editorial writing is limited to bitty pieces such as introductory notes and comments in the letter column - hardly conducive to setting the voice of an editorial personality.

It took a few issues for ASFR to develop a coherent personality, but I don't think this had anything to do with the piecing together of the

editorial jigsaw. As I look through the fourteen issues I see no sign of the 'many fanzines under one title' syndrome. Rather, the lack of fanzine experience of all but one of the editorial team shows in the first four or five issues. Until a momentum took hold, and until hands-on experience started to show its worth, the first few issues lacked a strong editorial drive. This tentativeness shows itself in how the editors looked at outside sources for material, relying a bit too much on reprinting articles or publishing transcripts of talks, rather than soliciting articles which met their needs.

In the last year or so ASFR has developed into a very strong fanzine, and I recommend it as a place to go if you want to read good, intelligent commentary about science fiction. ASFR continues the tradition of Australian fandom being able to publish quality fanzines for the discussion of science fiction. The editors work well as a team, and while their individual viewpoints differ they are still able to operate as one. I didn't notice just how strong this was until doing the research for this article. With Pulp I'd been aware that only Avedon Carol had contributed something to issues she hadn't produced. But with ASFR it is only now that I noticed that after the first year Jenny Blackford's written contributions have not been as frequent as her co-editors. That this wasn't so obvious shows, for me, that there is a strength in the editorial approach.

The only problem with ASFR is the sense that you are entering a one-way conversation. There is a lack of a community feel about the 'zine; it operates at a distance from its readers and is evidenced by the lack of a strong letter column. I would've thought that fourteen frequent issues would've given rise to an incredibly strong, vibrant letter column, but it simply isn't the case.

Why this is so is pretty easy to surmise and largely comes out of the editors denying their fanzine traditions. They don't trade for other fanzines and the only mode of availability listed in each issue is via subscription. I assume it is available for contribution, and it is only if you look close enough that you'll find that a letter of comment gets a return. In the ninth issue (July 1987) Yvonne Rousseau noted that while they are pleased with the response from overseas they'd found response from their Aussie readers to be lacking. And this "despite the knowledge that a published letter of comment is rewarded with one free issue." Apart from wondering if I really was aware of that knowledge, I think that Yvonne has missed the point. The subscription aspect is one which has most most strongly pushed, and by doing so the idea of a letter of comment is pushed right out of the picture. When you are already paying for a subscription, when you can't trade, the idea of devoting a couple of hours to maybe save two dollars just doesn't seem worthwhile. It is a lot easier to send more money when required. In the world of fanzines money sets up an impersonal barrier between editor and reader, hardly conducive to something as personal as a letter of comment. Which is a pity as the one thing missing from ASFR is the fannish toing-and-froing of a good letter column, because as it is the letter column they are currently presenting is a rather sad way of ending each issue.

Pulp is edited by Vinç Clarke, John Harvey, Avedon Carol and Rob Hansen, at 16 Wendover Way, Welling, Kent DA16 2BN, UK. It is available for the Usual and three copies of fanzines in trade are appreciated.

ASFR is edited by Jenny Blackford, Russell Blackford, John Foyster, Yvonne Rousseau and Janeen Webb for Ebony Books, GPO Box 1294L, Melbourne, Victoria 3001. It is available for \$2 a copy, or for \$10 for 6 issues. Cy Chauvin and Joseph Nicholas are their overseas agents and enquires can be directed their way.

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NORMAN HOLLYN SEZ      When we were growing up my brother and I used to build cities in our basement out of Lego blocks (for most of the houses), Matchbox cars (for the city's inhabitants' mode of transportation), clay (to delineate the streets) and an assortment of tiny people and various bric-a-brac that we made suit any purpose we could. After a few years the cities got quite elaborate and we would spend hours razing and rebuilding them. Eventually my mother got upset when the city threatened to take over our entire basement, so we had to regroup and the city (after another major Urban Renewal Project) became more... well... suburban. It still had a bus depot but no more train station.

Somewhere my mother has a photo or two (dimly lit and taken from too far a distance) which I should have her haul out. Ah, the imagination of boys. Too bad I had to ruin it all by becoming an adult.

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A WEEK OF SUNDAY

- Dave Langford -

"We're asking fans to write about what they do on their day off," said mighty Irwin Hirsh, secure in his possession of an infallible editorial Formula. H'mm.

In those John D. MacDonald thrillers, Travis McGee has the luxurious habit of taking advance instalments of his retirement whenever time allows. In theory I have the same approach to my day (or quarter-day, or whatever it is) off: relaxation comes in little fragments, scattered through the grey toil of the week like those rare edible bits found in a convention breakfast. While admittedly the Langford life-style isn't as exotic as McGee's, it does give me the advantage of not needing to spend this precious free time recovering from debilitating encounters with sub-machine guns or assassins armed with meat-cleavers....

Monday. Here I am reading a book, as respite from a long day of reading books. Reviews and publishers' reports (I am apparently the Gollancz expert on everything hero editor Malcolm Edwards can't stomach reading) mean endless skiffy epics of mega-genocide across the galaxies, where the fabric of time and space disintegrates in chapter six and that of style and syntax on page two. Or, alternatively, fantasy trilogies whose middle volume comprises a 3500-mile trek across harrowingly familiar landscapes to within sight of the mountain-ringed stronghold where the Black Lord in the East (vielder of Dark Powers, uncountable Troglodyte Hordes and remorseless Capital Letters) is gloating beneath his onion domes and refusing to continue the disarmament talks. Instead, now it's well into the evening, I can relax with an early Michael Innes detective story, a lightweight mathematical work, a straight modern novel... or even some sf/fantasy which, oh joy, I don't have to review! Maybe wine tasters feel like this after a day of austere judgements on spat-out mouthfuls, and fancy a long uncritical swallow of honest plonk.

Tuesday. Here I am redecorating the house, or to be more precise, tearing it apart. Endless hours of glowing green screens and tatty grey typescript have left me wanting to sublimate it all, to wrench down rotted shelving like a macho man and strip old wallpaper with the merciless cool of Rambo. "Take that!" I cry as weevil-infested timbers (representing for the moment the bony structure of the publishing executive most recently responsible for remaindering me) fail to resist my crowbar. Sometimes I can keep up this crazed killer enthusiasm for whole minutes.

Wednesday. In the garden the story's much the same as indoors. Rank grass is attacked with a sickle plus a rotating electric lash thing which would have brought moans of envy from von Sacher-Masoch. Gigantic weeds are

wrested from the ground, disgusting insects tossed over the wall for our neighbours' edification. After these delicate attentions the back garden always manages to look less kempt than before, and to camouflage this I kindle vast bonfires of dead leaves (available all the year round thanks to hordes of holly trees: evergreen also means ever-shedding, a permanent case of arboreal dandruff), cardboard boxes in which review copies have arrived, and freebie computer newspapers which appear faster than they can be wrenched from their polythene envelopes, let alone read.... Of course the proper thing to do with a garden is dig it, but there we meet the final stubborn residue of Hazel's one-time archaeological leanings. Our garden is not to be dug. Rather it is to be turned over a spoonful at a time, the grains of soil brushed delicately away with dental probe and toothbrush, to reveal an inexhaustible historical bounty of clay pipe shards, portions of earthenware beer-bottles, sheep scapulae, small indestructible plastic toy parts, powdered glassware, previous owners' lost marbles, and further fragments of the Great Megalithic Victorian Kitchen Sink which is slowly being assembled next to our back door, a process not unlike the reconstruction of Abu Simbel.

Thursday. Here I am chatting with Hazel about nothing in particular. It's surprising in retrospect to consider what a vast conversational stock of nothing in particular we've worked our way through in thirteen years. External events are mere raw material, as I remember thinking last time we drove into North Wales:

H: "There was a llama in that field...."

D: "I wanted to ask you about the car park notice in Welshpool."

H: "Either that or a sheep with a very long neck."

D: "The Welsh bit of the notice had a couple of words I couldn't find in the English text. They were underlined and bright red, which the rest of the Welsh wasn't, and I couldn't believe it, it really did say 'Bum... Punt'."

H: "...Fool. It means five pounds. I never even thought of it your low-minded way. Look, another saint."

D: "How can you tell? Looks like a sheep to me. There was a rare breeds farm back there, it could have been a rare breed. The llama."

H: "No, the sign, nearly all these Llansomething villages come from obscure Welsh saints. Llangadfan, St Cadfan with a soft-mutated C. I wish there was a book of them."

D: "Maybe Jan Morris is working on it.... My favourite saint was the gorgeous lady who kept getting propositioned by someone you couldn't say no to, the Pope maybe, and her saintliness showed itself with a miraculously off-putting growth of beard."

H: "You didn't shave very well this morning, is that an excuse? (That was a heron that just flew over.) She could be the patron saint of transsexuals."

D: "Why not? Everyone else had got one. I expect Jan Morris is working on it."

H: "I could make a collection of all the different sorts of milk bottles we buy on our travels."

D: "I forgot the camera again.... Bit difficult to put milk bottles in an album. Could you compress them for easy storage? Or you could just keep Polaroid snaps of your milk bottle collection while the originals stay in a bank vault."

H: "Fool. Sea water too. The sea has a special different smell everywhere. I could collect water samples... keep them in the milk



bottles. I could sniff them and Harlech or Barmouth or Milford-on-Sea would sort of come back to me."

D: "Snorting is safer than injecting it."

H: "Fool."

Friday. Here I am having lunch with Chris Priest. This is supposed to be business, as in how we're definitely going out of business, but cheerfulness will keep breaking in. He tells me the latest appalling things about his little Harlan Ellison rumpus. "I got a letter from XXXX saying YYYY about Harlan, but the bugger won't let me publish it!" I tell him the latest appalling things about L.Ron Hubbard's merry men. "At the Worldcon XXXX told me that YYYY of Author Services had rung some big wheel at SFWA to ask how much a Grand Master Award for L.Ron would cost... but the bugger won't let me quote him." We decide that using the Ansible Information Ltd computer-manual equipment to produce embarrassing fanzines about Harlan and L.Ron is lots more fun than actually turning a profit. It is impossible to figure out how the world's most inept salesman (me) should be in league with the world's most inept accountant (Chris) to flog software to the masses. We agree that such speculation is unimportant since we're bound to go out of business in a month or so. We've been agreeing this since the middle of 1985.

Saturday. Enough of this savage toil. Here I am watching the television. It is an old Monty Python rerun, and quite enough tv for the average week, thanks very much. (Hazel masochistically sits in on the nine o'clock news so she can tell me about the latest achievements of our glorious government, such as dismantling another portion of the National Health Service.) I usually keep quiet about this modest media requirement, since there's a widespread theory that it can only be accounted for by cultural snobbery of the most overweening and pretentious variety. It isn't permissible simply not to like tv (or theatre, or movies); this has to be a loathsome pose. We hearing-impaired snobs are just too snooty and aesthetically upmarket to Make An Effort and follow a fugitive soundtrack. This has been an exposure of the dark side of Langford.

Sunday. Here I am in the pub. It's late, and the beer has lost its virtue, and my old mate Martin Hoare is telling me in excruciating detail how he would have organized Conspiracy '87 and made it ever so much more better, with parenthetical comments on the overweening superiority of Seacon '84, and the boringness of Interzone (evident to his ideological unsoundness detector without the need actually to read it) and the despicability of all Leeds fans and conventions. I find myself impelled to speak of cheerier subjects like graphics adaptors and RS-232 interfacing. Is my fannish pose failing? The urge is to get back to the little green and amber screens which fill my days, and settle down to serious creativity along the lines of a new Ansible or a fanzine article for Irwin Hirsh....

NORMAN HOLLYN SEZ      When I was ten or eleven I developed some screaming allergies. After suffering through a few months of them, my mother took me to the allergist who proceeded to give me a series of "scratch tests", so called because they scratch about twenty types of histamines on your skin. That is, if they think that you might be allergic to cats, then they scrape cat juice on your upper arm. An hour later if that scratch has turned into a nice line of red pus then they figure that you are allergic to cats.

They scraped away at me for several weeks and finally came up with a report that said I was allergic to practically everything that a little kid could

be allergic to. Cats, dogs, mice, hamsters, flowers, ragweed, pollen, snakes, lopsided losses to the Kansas City Athletics, etc. There was only one animal which I was not allergic to - an elephant. The idea of having one of those big mamas as a pet didn't even appeal to me, so my Mom didn't have to fight me in the slightest.

There were only two solutions to all of the allergies. The first was to avoid contact with the thing that I was allergic to. That was fairly easy in the case of cats, dogs, mice, hamsters and snakes. I just walked the other way when one of them came trotting (or slithering, as the case may be) down the sidewalk. But some things weren't so easy to avoid - ragweed and pollen for instance. For those I had to take shots for nearly four years. Every two weeks Mom or Dad would drive me over to Flushing where the allergy doc had his office. I would wait outside, listening to the pitiful cries of those less manly than I. Then I'd walk inside, stick my arm out and get another shot. It got boring after a while. For a time, I tried to spice it up by looking at the needle as it went inside my arm, trying to imagine just where it was going. But even that got boring after a while. I could do nothing but just wait until the day when the allergies had gone away enough so that I no longer needed shots.

The only problem during this whole episode is that there was no shot that I could get for the inevitable Yankee losses to the Athletics. Sigh.

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#### VISIONS OF AN INNOCENT ABROAD 2

- Perry -

Arrival in London was a revelation to me - I had, after all, been waiting for something like ten years for it to happen. Justin, on the other hand, couldn't seem to care less. Having visited the place previously he casually pointed out various sights (on customs at Heathrow: "Why should I go over there to declare? I'm not even batting."; on the great number of pigeons in Victoria Station: "With all this shit flying around you'd think it was a fannish party") while boring through the crowds like a runaway ten-tonne truck. All I could do was follow behind, looking around like a kid on his first day at school. I didn't know where we were headed - Justin had made all the arrangements before leaving Australia - so the best I could do was dodge the pedestrians thrown up in his wake and take in as much as possible. Oddly enough this continued to happen for the rest of the time he and I were both in Britain.

Not to make too fine a point of it, within three hours of our arrival in London, Justin and I had crashed our first party. Granted we were in the presence of Paul Oldroyd and Chris Donaldson who had been invited, but arriving unannounced at a gathering in a writer's house is fraught with danger - even more so when you get to meet the host and find he's a good four inches taller and about ten kilos heavier than you are. Rob Holdstock, though, seems a good sort of bloke and even appeared to be rather enjoying himself when Justin launched into a long and detailed tirade about a series of horror novels Holdstock had written under a pseudonym. Justin obviously didn't care whether or not someone sunk the slipper into him but I wasn't hanging around to watch the mayhem so proceeded to ply John Brosnan with enough Australian red to get him rather nostalgic - not a very hard thing to achieve with any ex-patriot. Every time I walked out to the kitchen for another drink Justin had latched himself onto yet another writer. There seemed to be no stopping the man. Sooner or later though everyone outstays their welcome and about an hour after Justin had surpassed his we moved on to the main scheduled event of the afternoon, a party at Avedon Carol and Rob Hansen's.

I had been led to believe that this was going to be a small get-together of



about ten people so I got a bit of a shock to discover that the house was literally crammed to the rafters with fans from all over the globe. Never having been a great one for remembering names in large crowds I tended to stick around the Australian and British fans that I knew while getting Carey Handfield, Irwin and Wendy to point out people in the milling throng. Conversely, Justin appeared to move automatically into convention mode flitting from one group to another dispensing Ackroyd hugs with, what seemed to me, reckless abandon.

Keeping a favoured drink from a thirsty Australian can be a perilous undertaking at the best of times yet I had succeeded somehow and found myself among a group of non-drinking fans with an open bottle of claret in each coat pocket, reluctantly dispensing meagre amounts of throat oil to Justin as he occasionally wandered past. "Tell me Justin," I said through clenched teeth as he attempted to turn my bottle-attached wrist over his glass, "what would Jenny say if she could see you now?"

"Nothing much. She knows all about it."

I lost almost a full glass of claret as the shock made me lose concentration.

"Yeah, but you'll get yourself a reputation."

"So what? I've already got one."

Bastard, I thought.

A short time later the red ran out. Needless to say I was still thirsty. I looked despairingly at the empty bottle and, muttering expletives to the memory of John Brosnan, headed out the back for a smoke and the chance of a purloined beer.

"So you're Perry Middlemiss? You don't look anything like I thought you would." Owen Whiteoak was my kind of bloke, leaning in the corner of the kitchen with a beer in one hand and a cigarette in the other.

"What was I supposed to look like? Not like that I hope," indicating Justin as he was hugging Pam Wells.

"No, of course not. We only need one of him." God, I thought, is this never going to end.

The party finally came to a close and the two of us headed home on the tube. "Now you can see why I didn't want to get over here too soon before the convention," said Justin. "It's all a matter of pacing. You have to be careful that you don't wear yourself out before the main event."

"You call that 'pacing'. Looked more like a suicide mission to me."

"There's lots of people to catch up with. Anyway you seemed to be having a good time."

"Yeah, pity the red ran out so soon. Hope we don't have the same trouble in Brighton."

"You've never been to a really big convention before have you? Don't worry, you'll enjoy it."

I did too, though I only saw Justin fleetingly as we passed in corridors or at the other end of the fan lounge. Even sharing a room with him didn't help. I was, however, finally able to get my own back. I kept him awake

all one night by snoring, as he put it, "like a chainsaw in heat." It's just a pity I wasn't awake to enjoy it.

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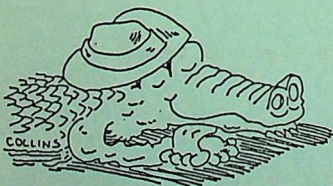
SUE TROMBRIDGE SEZ      Most of us are far too intimately acquainted with the habits and varying species of what must be The World's Most Unloved Arthropod, and spend much of our spare time comparing notes on them. My sister, Sarah, and I, for instance, have documented the existence of albino roaches, independently of each other. Sarah found one in her kitchen one day when she was home alone and caught it under a glass. That way, she figured, she could deal with the expected incredulity of her housemates by showing them the hard evidence instead of just telling them about it. Several hours later, upon their return, she escorted them in to view the catch, and the wretched thing had changed color. In fact, it was no longer distinguishable from the common or garden variety roach we find scuttling for cover every time we turn on the lights. She accused Craig (her husband) and Dan (the Other Person) of removing the albino specimen and replacing it with a brown one in order to have some fun at her expense. Needless to say, they both thought she had popped her cork. And I would be inclined to agree, except that my husband Alan, in the interest of scientific inquiry, repeated the experiment, with identical results.

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HARRY WARNER SEZ      The only books on language that I keep handy and use frequently are "10,000 Cliches for All Occasions" and "Platitudes: How To Remember and Use Them." Without their help, my locs would be brief and different things altogether.

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