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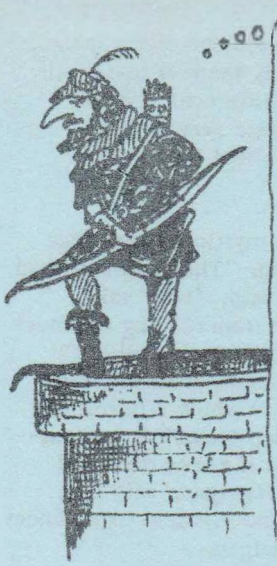

Philosophical Gas

NUMBER FIFTY-ONE JULY 1980

Philosophical Gas is published by John Bangsund PO Box 171, Fairfield, Victoria 3078, Australia — 'that delirious man, / who mingles all without a plan', as one of his kinder critics has described him. Subscription A$5.00 per annum (institutions A$20), letters preferred, trades by arrangement. At present there is no mailing list as such. If you think I might forget to send you the next issue, you know what to do. Patricia Alonso knows what to do: she sent me a pretty picture postcard. I collect pretty picture postcards. That's one way of making sure I always have your address.

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4 July 'I'll be a bit late home tonight, love, I'm going down to VISE.'
'Who the hell is Vi?'
'You wouldn't know her. Keeps the best massage parlour in St Kilda Road.'

How to break up a marriage, ten easy lessons, inquire within. Actually VISE is the Victorian Institute of Secondary Education, and I have spent the week doing a bit of proofreading there. Rewriting, some would call it. One could hardly expect the educators of Australia's youth to know much about English, especially the tricky bits like verbs and commas and stuff, and if they did there'd be no work for me, so I'm not complaining. They're a good crowd to work with there at VISE and altogether it has been a most pleasant and interesting week. Exhausting, too.

One of the best things about the job is that there's a Foyster in the building. I won't reveal his shameful reason for being there. Neither will anyone else. It seems to be some kind of state secret. Also, within fairly easy walking distance of the place is one of the best bookshops in Australia, Kenneth Hince's, so naturally I went there during my lunch break on Monday. And on Tuesday, with John. Ken was shocked to see me two days running, since the last time we'd met there was in 1976. But he recovered himself enough to mention some first-edition Peacocks he hopes to have in soon. John could see me calculating whether I'd have enough left over from selling the Renault to buy an old VW as well as the books (how to break up a marriage, advanced diploma) and somehow spirited me out of the shop.

I haven't been back again, not out of consideration for Ken's nerves, but because we've decided it's much more efficient for me to work at home most of the time. I have a desk at home, for a start, and a dictionary all to myself. Some of the staff reckon I've been ejected from the building because I've been seen fraternizing with Foyster, but that can't be true. All sorts of people there fraternize with Foyster, from the tea-lady down.

And suddenly light dawns! It's nothing to do with efficiency! Like any seasoned pro, I turned up for work with a good supply of coffee and tea, and a mug (and an ashtray, but they had one). But on Tuesday, at a time not appointed for tea breaks, and entirely without the tea-lady's permission, I

made a cup of coffee — and I used one of her spoons. That was stupid. That's probably the real reason why I'm back working from home. How could I have forgotten so much about the Public Service as to slight the tea-lady? Oh, what a fool I've been.

5 July Lee Harding has had a mystical experience in a tower. At Geelong. 'The Buck Mulligan of the science fiction world,' I said. 'Who' said Harding, whose brain has rotted from reading too much of that crazy Buck Rogers stuff, 'is Buck Mulligan?' 'Stately, plump Buck Mulligan came from the stair-head, bearing a bowl of lather on which a mirror and a razor lay crossed,' said Damien Broderick, approximately. Damien reads as much sf as Lee does, but he's younger. 'You mean Hop Harrigan,' said Lee, and went on to tell us about some mystical experiences he had as a youth with Hop Harrigan.

Diane and Damien have acquired a very pleasant house in the better part of Brunswick, and we were dining there last night. The food was heavenly, the talk almost as good. I'm not sure how the ladies felt about it, but I became a little irritated — no, envious is a better word — by all the high-powered professional writers' talk that was flying about, so I was forced to admit modestly that I have just made my first sale to the U.K. That shut them up, by crikey, for a few seconds. They didn't seem to be pestering me for details, so I volunteered them before they could change the subject. I won four quid in the New Statesman's comp. Look it up. It's the issue for 27 June, vol. 99 no. 2571. 'I'm thinking of joining the SFWA,' I said. 'You can't,' said Lee. 'Why ever not?' I said. 'It's the Science Fiction Writers of America,' said Lee, 'and sales to other countries don't count.' What a blow! I thought they would let anyone join. Quickly recovering, I let slip that I was considering an offer from Collingwood Tech to take up an appointment as proofreader in residence. A damnable lie, as it happens, and it didn't impress them in the least, so I gave up and listened to Irene and Diane talking about the real world.

KEATS AND CHAPMAN often had mystical experiences in towers. The most recent occurred while they were in Germany, doing a bit of proofreading for a local publisher. The first few books they read in their rented tower did not overtax their knowledge of the German language, but during the third week there they were given a job that nearly drove them crazy. It was a very long, intense, convoluted novel by someone named Dan Vinniken about twenty-four hours in the life of an ancient astronaut. This rather improbable, if not entirely mythological, being had spent a day in June 1904 wandering the streets of Darmstadt, apparently quite undetected, observing the stolid Hessian burghers and poking about in their minds by some sort of alien psychic means. The story was quite spooky. The author's style was the most complicated abuse of the German language the friends had ever seen, and after a while they gave up checking the spelling, as the typesetters had before them. Altogether they spent six weeks on the book, and for most of that time they were haunted by a vague feeling that they had been there before, a feeling intensified by the author's frequent use of the mystical term 'deja voodoo', and many other slogans and names that began with the letters DV. At weary last they reached the end, and were annoyed rather than surprised to discover that the last sentence in the book ran on back into the first sentence in the book. 'Well, ' said Keats, 'what do you think of that?' Stately, plump Chapman took off his spectacles, rubbed them, and said: 'Vinniken's fake.' 'Of course!' cried Keats, and fell weeping on a great pile of galley proofs.

That story, such as it is, first-draft and all, is dedicated to Lee Harding. Lee and I had a mystical experience on a mountain one night, some years ago. I'm not sure about me, but he has never come down from it, bless him. And I rejoyce, pardon me, rejoice for him, winner of the Children's Book of the Year award in this year of some surviving grace 1980. The book is called DISPLACED PERSON, it is not (despite its title) an autobiography, and if you don't rush out and buy a copy you're an enemy of the people.

Memo self: I must try, desperately even if need be, to stop writing literary allusions. In this age of the horseless carriage and wireless broadcasts, of universal education and the glottal villein, who is likely to make the connexion between Lee Harding and Henrik Ibsen, despite the heavy hints I have dropped? Who, apart from George Turner or Harry Warner Jr, is likely instantly to think of Dr Stockmann the moment I announce that clue? 'The strongest man in the world is he who stands most alone.' It didn't even occur to me until I wrote it.

But then, that's the way I write. My subconscious has direct access to my fingers, a frightening thing. And it only works when I'm typing stencils. Damien rang me some weeks ago and explained what my Keats & Chapman story in the June Society of Editors Newsletter was about. I had no idea. Furthermore, it's utterly disgusting, and I wish there were some way of suppressing it. It's good to have someone like Damien close to hand to tell me what I've been writing about. It's also good that I don't write drafts. If I did, I'd probably show them to Damien and be so embarrassed that I'd never publish them. Then again, it might improve my writing no end. Who knows?

And now, a few words from our patron. Constant readers will know that this journal is named after a small treatise, subtitled 'A Project for a General Illumination of the Human Mind', written by one Scythrop Glowry, who is by way of being the hero of a novel called Nightmare Abbey, by Thomas Love Peacock (1785-1866). Nightmare Abbey was published in 1819. The following piece was written by Peacock in 1861 or 1862, and was published in the National Review, September 1887. George Turner says he missed that issue. It's a bit hard to come by now.

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() THE LAST DAY OF ()
() WINDSOR FOREST ()
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() Thomas Love Peacock ()
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MANY of my younger, and some of my maturer years, were passed on the borders of Windsor Forest. I was early given to long walks and rural explorations, and there was scarcely a spot of the Park or the Forest, with which I was not intimately acquainted. There were two very different scenes, to which I was especially attached: Virginia Water, and a dell near Winkfield Plain.

The bank of Virginia Water, on which the public enter from the Wheatsheaf Inn, is bordered, between the cascade to the left and the iron gates to the right, by groves of trees, which, with the exception of a few old ones near the water, have grown up within my memory. They were planted by George the Third, and the entire space was called the King's Plantation. Perhaps they were more beautiful in an earlier stage than they are now: or I may so think and feel, through the general preference of the past to the present, which seems inseparable from old age. In my first acquaintance with the place, and for some years subsequently, sitting in the large upper room of the Inn, I could look on the cascade and the expanse of the lake, which have long been masked by trees.

Virginia Water was always open to the public, through the Wheatsheaf Inn, except during the Regency and reign of George the Fourth, who not only shut up the grounds, but enclosed them, where they were open to a road, with higher fences than even the outside passengers of stage-coaches could look over, that he might be invisible in his punt, while fishing on the lake. William the Fourth lowered the fences, and re-opened the old access.

While George the Third was king, Virginia Water was a very solitary place. I have been there day after day, without seeing another visitor. Now it has many visitors. It is a source of great enjoyment to many, though no longer suitable to Les Reveries d'un Promeneur Solitaire.

A still more solitary spot, which had especial charms for me, was the deep forest dell already mentioned, on the borders of Winkfield Plain. This dell, I think, had the name of the Bourne, but I always called it the Dingle. In the bottom was a water-course, which was a stream only in times of continuous rain. Old trees clothed it on both sides to the summit, and it was a favourite resort of deer. I was a witness of their banishment from their forest-haunts. The dell itself remained some time unchanged: but I have not seen it since 1815, when I frequently visited it in company with Shelley, during his residence at Bishopgate, on the eastern side of the Park. I do not know what changes it may have since undergone. Not much, perhaps, being now a portion of the Park. But many portions of the Park and its vicinity, as well as of the immediate neighbourhood of Windsor, which were then open to the public, have ceased to be so, and such may be the case with this. I have never ventured to ascertain the point. In all the portions of the old forest, which were distributed in private allotments, I know what to expect. I shrink from the ghosts of my old associations in scenery, and never, if I can help it, revisit an enclosed locality, with which I have been familiar in its openness.

Wordsworth would not visit Yarrow, because he feared to disappoint his imagination:

Be Yarrow stream unseen, unknown!
It must, or we shall rue it:
We have a vision of our own,
Ah! why should we undo it?
The treasured dreams of times long past,
We'll keep them, winsome Marrow!
For when we're there, although 'tis fair,
'Twill be another Yarrow.

Yet, when he afterwards visited it, though it was not what he had dreamed, he still found it beautiful, and rejoiced in having seen it:

The vapours linger round the heights:
They melt, and soon must vanish:
One hour is theirs, nor more is mine:
Sad thought, which I would banish,
But that I know, where'er I go,
Thy genuine image, Yarrow!
Will dwell with me, to heighten joy,
And cheer my mind in sorrow.

He found compensation in the reality, for the difference of the imagined scene: but there is no such compensation for the disappointments of memory: and when – in the place of scenes of youth, where we have wandered under antique trees, through groves and glades, through bushes and

underwood, among fern, and foxglove, and bounding deer; where, perhaps, every 'minutest circumstance of place' has been not only 'as a friend' in itself, but has recalled some association of early friendship, or youthful love — we can only pass between high fences along dusty roads, I think it best to avoid the sight of the reality, and to make the best of cherishing at a distance

The memory of what has been,
And never more will be.

I do not express, or imply, any opinion on the general utility of enclosures. For the most part, they illustrate the scriptural maxim: 'To him that hath much, much shall be given; and from him that hath little shall be taken away, even the little he hath.' They are, like most events in this world, 'Good to some, bad to others, and indifferent to the majority.' They are good to the land-owner, who gets an addition to his land: they are bad to the poor parishioner, who loses his rights of common: they are bad to the lover of rural walks, for whom footpaths are annihilated: they are bad to those, for whom the scenes of their youth are blotted from the face of the world. These last are of no account in ledger balances, which profess to demonstrate that the loss of the poor is more than counterbalanced by the gain of the rich; that the aggregate gain is the gain of the community; and that all matters of taste and feeling are fitly represented by a cypher. So be it.

George the Fourth's exclusions and high fences had not, however, effectually secured to him the secrecy he desired. On an eminence outside of the royal grounds, stood, and still stands, in the midst of a pine-grove, a tower, which from its form was commonly called the Clock-case. This tower, and the land round it, had been sold for a small sum, as a lot in a sale of Crown Lands. The tower was in two or three stories, and was inhabited by a poor family, who had a telescope, supplied, most probably, by the new proprietor, on the platform of the roof, which rose high above the trees, and commanded an extensive view of the lake. This tower and its grounds became a place of great resort for pic-nic parties, and visitors of all kinds, who kept up a perpetual succession at the telescope, while the Royal Angler and his fair companion were fishing. This became an intolerable nuisance to the would-be recluse. He set on foot a negociation for re-purchasing the Clock-case. The sum demanded was many times the multiple of the purchase-money. The demand was for some time resisted, but the proprietor was inflexible. The sum required was paid, the property reverted to the Crown, and the public were shut out from the Clock-case and its territory. When William the Fourth succeeded, this story was told to him, and he said: 'A good place for a view, is it? I will put an old couple into it, and give them a telescope': which was done without loss of time. I saw and conversed with this old couple, and looked through their telescope.

About the same time, William the Fourth was sitting one Sunday evening in a window of Windsor Castle, when the terrace was thronged with people. A heavy rain came on, and the people ran in all directions. He said to some one near him: 'This is the strangest thing I ever saw: so many English people, without an umbrella among them.' He was told that, by order of his late Majesty, umbrellas were prohibited on the terrace. 'Then,' he said, 'let the prohibition be immediately withdrawn.'

In the early days of his reign, he was fond of walking about, not only in Windsor, but in London. It pleased him to be among the people. In one of his walks, he noticed, in Windsor Little Park, a board with an inscription, by which all persons were 'ordered' to keep the footpath. He desired that 'requested' might be substituted. He was told, that 'requested' would not be attended to. He said: 'If they will not attend to "requested" that is their affair: I will not have "ordered".'

A most good-natured, kind-hearted gentleman was William the Fourth: but to record the many instances of good feeling in his sayings and doings, which came within my knowledge, would be foreign to the purpose of the present paper.

The Act for the enclosure of Windsor Forest contained the following clause:

WINDSOR FOREST.
53rd George III. Cap. 158.

LXIV. — And be it further enacted, That from and after the first day of July one thousand eight hundred and fourteen, all and singular the Lands, Tenements and Hereditaments within the said respective Parishes and Liberties (save and except such Parts thereof respectively as are now or shall or may become vested in His Majesty, or any Person or Persons in Trust for Him by virtue hereof) shall be, and the same is and are hereby disafforested to all Intents and Purposes whatsoever; and that from thenceforth no Person or Persons shall be questioned or liable to any Pain, Penalty or Punishment for hunting, coursing, killing, destroying or taking any Deer whatsoever within the same, wake up there Brosnan we're just getting to the point of all this nonsense, save and except within such Part or Parts thereof (if any) as shall be enclosed with Pales and kept for a Park or Parks by the Owners, Lessees, or Tenants thereof.

There can be little doubt, that the exception in favour of the Crown was intended to apply to all

the provisions of the clause: but it was held by Counsel learned in the law, that it applied to the first half only, and that, after the specified day, it was lawful to kill deer in any portion of the old forest, not enclosed with pales, whether such portion had, or had not, been vested in the Crown. The Crown allotment had been left as it was.

Armed with this opinion, a farmer of Water Oakley, whose real I have forgotten in his assumed name, calling himself Robin Hood, and taking with him two of his men, whom he called Scarlet and Little John, sallied forth daily into the forest to kill the king's deer, and returned home every evening, loaded with spoil.

Lord Harcourt, who was then Deputy Ranger of the Forest, and discharged all the duties of superintendence (for the Ranger, who was a Royal Highness, of course did nothing), went forth also, as the representative of Majesty, to put down these audacious trespassers. In my forest-rambles, I was a witness to some of their altercations: Lord Harcourt threatening to ruin Robin Hood by process in the Court of Exchequer; Robin Hood setting him at defiance, flourishing the Act of Parliament, and saying: 'My Lord, if you don't know how to make Acts of Parliament, I'll teach you.'

One day, I was walking towards the Dingle, when I met a man with a gun, who asked me, if I had seen Robin Hood? I said, I had just seen him at a little distance, in discussion with Lord Harcourt, who was on horseback, Robin Hood being on foot. He asked me to point out the direction, which I did; and in return I asked him, Who he might be? He told me, he was Scarlet. He was a pleasant-looking man, and seemed as merry as his original: like one in high enjoyment of sport.

This went on some time. The law was not brought to bear on Robin Hood, and it was finally determined to settle the matter, by driving the deer out of the forest into the Park. Two regiments of cavalry were employed for this purpose, which was kept as secret as possible, for a concourse of people would have been a serious impediment to the operation. I received intelligence of it from a friend at court, who pointed out to me a good position, from which to view the close of the proceedings.

My position was on a rising ground, covered with trees, and overlooking an extensive glade. The park was on my left hand: the main part of the forest on the right and before me. A wide extent of the park paling had been removed, and rope fencing had been carried to a great length, at oblique angles from the opening. It was a clear calm sunny day, and for a time there was profound silence. This was first broken by the faint sound of bugles, answering each other's signals from remote points in the distance: drawing nearer by degrees, and growing progressively loud. Then came two or three straggling deer, bounding from the trees, and flying through the opening of the park pales. Then came greater numbers, and ultimately congregated herds: the beatings of their multitudinous feet mingled with the trampling of the yet unseen horses, and the full sounds of the bugles. Last appeared the cavalry, issuing from the wood, and ranging themselves in a semi-circle, from horn to horn of the rope fencing. The open space was filled with deer, terrified by the chase, confused by their own numbers, and rushing in all directions: the greater part through the park opening: many trying to leap the rope fencing, in which a few were hurt, and one or two succeeded: escaping to their old haunts, most probably to furnish Robin Hood with his last venison feast. By degrees, the mass grew thinner: at last, all had disappeared: the rope fencing shut up the park for the night: the cavalry rode off towards Windsor: and all again was silent.

This was, without any exception, the most beautiful sight I ever witnessed: but I saw it with deep regret: for, with the expulsion of the deer, the life of the old scenes was gone, and I have always looked back on that day, as the last day of Windsor Forest.

Well now, I have to admit that reading Peacock is a lot more fun than typing him. You can skip the dull bits while you're reading. The trick is not to mistake the droll bits for dull bits.
Typing that stuff about Robin Hood reminded me that somewhere in my files I had some unpublished Chandler. The following was written in 1974.

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() STARBOARD WATCH ()
() ()
() A. Bertram Chandler ()
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DURABLE DESPERADOES

Not so long ago I took out from our local library a book called The Durable Desperadoes, subtitled A Critical Study of Some Enduring Heroes. It is by William Vivian Butler and is published by Macmillan. Unfortunately, from the viewpoint of the likes of us, the author confines himself to crime and secret-agent thrillers. There is no mention of the most durable desperado of them all, Tarzan of the Apes – although after Mr Farmer's recent works no other author would dare do so much as mention Lord Greystoke.

(After reading Tarzan Lives!, which I thoroughly enjoyed, I wrote to Mr Farmer to tell him of my

appreciation but, possibly, rather annoyed him by suggesting that Kipling's Mowgli should have been swinging from one of the branches of the Greystoke family tree. I have had no reply to my letter.)

Mr Butler's archetypal durable desperado is Robin Hood. Like the majority of his fictional successors (but was Robin Hood non-fictional?) he stole from the rich to give to the poor, no doubt making a generous deduction for operating expenses before passing on the ill-gotten gains to the deserving cases. Just as the Saint (before his emigration to the USA) had his perpetual feud with Inspector Teal to keep him busy, so Robin Hood had his private war with the Sheriff of Nottingham.

Robin Hood, Raffles, Blackshirt, Norman Conquest, the Toff, the Baron, the Saint...

Mr Butler deals with them all, as well as several gentlemen who were (are?) more or less on the side of Laura Norder, although not always operating in a conventional manner. These include Bulldog Drummond, Sexton Blake, Nelson Lee and, finally, James Bond.

All in all the book is well worth reading, even if only for the account of the late John Creasey's early struggles. What I found really fascinating, however, was the insight that it gave me into my own psychology.

My origins are proletarian. Ever since I've taken an interest in politics I've had a distinct list to port. Recent Australian political history has persuaded me to pump out the port ballast tanks, but I still have no urge to fill the starboard ones.

((In the paragraph deleted here Captain Chandler still hasn't forgiven Gough Whitlam for his 'childish outburst on the occasion of the Tasman Bridge disaster', but can't bring himself to vote for Billy Snedden, 'and Anthony's spiritual home is Dogpatch'. So, um, make it 1975.))

Mr Butler started reading thrillers when he was a schoolboy. So did I. He lapped up everything available. I was more discriminating. I endured Bulldog Drummond - although I was inclined to think that the Red Peril was preferable to Drummond's smug upper-middle-class England - because there was more than a slight hint of science fiction in the stories. I put up with Nelson Lee - as well as being a detective he was a housemaster at a public school - for the same reason. Sexton Blake was relatively classless, and some of his cases verged on science fiction and, even, fantasy. I recall one with a plot based on astrology. (For real reading there was Wells, along with the rather primitive sf serials in the boys' magazines.)

As I recall it, the Raffles novels were still available while I was at school, and Blackshirt, the first of his successors, was just making his debut. Neither Raffles nor Blackshirt made any appeal to me. They were both Gentlemen Cracksmen, and Blackshirt actually dressed in full evening regalia (but with a black shirt) for the commission of his crimes. My inverted snobbery made it impossible for me to read about the adventures of either gentleman. Besides, even at a tender age I already had a strong dislike for what I call stories by, for and about boy scouts.

The Saint I rather liked, however. He, for all his affectations, was relatively classless. He was known to stray from the Mayfair so beloved of Raffles and his uppercrust imitators. Could you imagine Raffles, Blackshirt, the Toff, the Baron or Norman Conquest having an adventure at a French nudist resort on the Mediterranean? The Saint did. Could you imagine the Gentlemen Cracksmen getting involved with giant ants, the Loch Ness Monster, or assorted goodies and baddies in someone else's dream? Again, the Saint did.

The Toff, the Baron and Norman Conquest became available after I had left school. I tried them all. I didn't like any of them. They were all too damned upper crust for my taste and, apart from their larcenous propensities, they were all too damned strait-laced. Most of the science fiction kicking around at that time consisted also of stories by, for and about boy scouts - but even at its very worst it was kicking ideas around to see if they yelped.

It has been said by some critics that the James Bond stories are reeking with snobbery. This may be so, but I enjoyed them all. The snobbery is of a kind that I can appreciate, being guilty of it now and then myself - food and drink snobbery. James Bond himself is essentially classless. You don't have to be the son of a belted earl to enjoy caviare. Len Deighton's narrator/hero (anti-hero?) is, in spite of his proletarian origins, classless, although along the way he has picked up expensive tastes in food and drink. Callan is unashamedly lower class and rather prickly with it (although towards the end of the last tv series he was showing signs of having picked up expensive tastes). Boysie Oaks soon came to appreciate pricey booze and tucker once he was transferred from the sergeants' mess to whichever one of the MIs it was that he infested.

I can imagine Grimes getting on quite well with my favourite durable desperadoes, but he would be sorely tempted to shove Mr Butler's favourites out of the airlock without a spacesuit. In all fairness, I can't imagine the Toff, the Baron, Blackshirt or Norman Conquest thinking much of Grimes either.

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9 July A brief letter today from Bruce Page, Editor, New Statesman. An assignment? A commission? No, a clerihew:

'Verse
Is really a terrible curse
Whenever the urge comes on to write it
One should, on the whole, fight it.'

Thanks, Bruce. I'll publish you if you publish me. And that, despite much temptation, is all for this issue. See you next month.