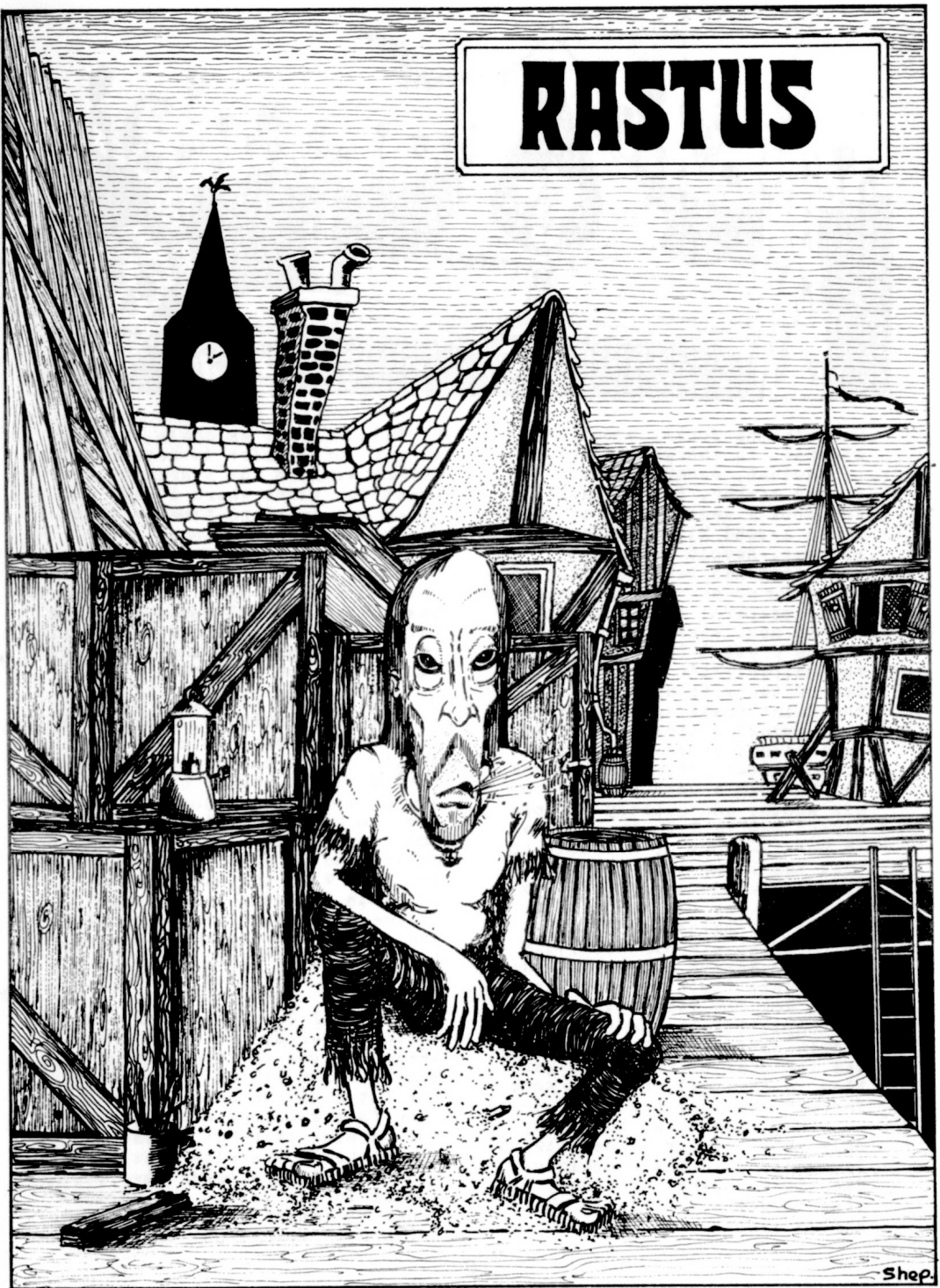


RASTUS





Down in the docks, something stirred. In amongst the piles of sawdust, scrap wood and excess timber, RASTUS awoke and took a second look at the world around him. The vacant slipway, devoid now of the Ship that had been building there for so many months, was being prepared for the keel of the next vessel, the ninth of the Crystal Ship line. From the shipwright's hut at the top of the slipway, there came the faint creaking sound created by a swinging hammock, and an occasional snore, as Captain Gumbo rested after his labours. RASTUS spat a wood chip out of his mouth, and quietly slipped across the yard to the office. It was the work of a moment to pick the lock, and slip inside. Sweeping aside the plans of the next Ship, he cleared an area around the battered old typewriter, sat himself down, and began to hammer out quick-and-dirty copy for his sneak fanzine. Not for RASTUS the long contemplation on the perfect fanzine structure -- communicating in the mail, nothing more. Through the long night he worked -- the chance to do his thing only came once or twice between launches, when the Captain was deep in recuperating sleep. No time to waste -- this is what RASTUS wrote:

Well, here I am again, trying to get out a quick in-between zine, before work on CS9 starts to rev up to the point where I have to spend all my spare time on that instead of other things. As I type this, it is the 26th of February, in the Year of the Orwell, and all but the last batch of overseas CS8s have all gone. The last batch merely awaits the application of another batch of the green stuff to get shot of that too.

I was quite surprised at the response to RASTUS 1. I mean, the letters came back so god-damned fast! I'm not complaining -- Ghod forbid that I should give that impression -- it's just that I'm used to the speed of response occasioned by CS, which naturally takes time to wade through, digest and loc. With the mere twelve pages in R1, some people were in the mail with locs even before the ink was dry on their copies! Trouble is, it'll spoil me in future for CS issues.

Before I go any further I had better clear up one thing that seemed to put off a number of people about RASTUS, that being the title of the zine itself. Some fans wondered why I should pick a name that has racist overtones. Let's exorcise that first -- I am not, and never have been, racist in the least. The closest I get to racist utterings are the sub-breath mumblings of "White is

Right!" as I sort out which contact lens goes in which eye first thing in the mornings. Mmm, that's a thought: are the manufacturers of contact lens containers being racist in their choice of cap colours? I doubt it -- the mnemonic connection between 'right' and 'white' is too obvious to miss using it. In my case, the alternative is "Blue is Left", which is a little too much of a paradox for me in the Thatcher era!

No, the reason I chose RASTUS as the zine title is a personal one, namely that RASTUS is, or was, ME. It was a nickname that my grandmother used when addressing me as a kid, and which my mother still uses when she's talking about my younger brother. In the family, Rastus is used in the context of 'a little rascal', which was precisely the connotation that I was looking for as a title for my own 'ensmalled' fanzine.

So, if you are upset or offended by the zine title, then I'm sorry. Please bear in mind, though, that the name has nothing but good connotations for me and I ain't in the least ashamed of it. I plan to try and rehabilitate my nickname, in fandom at least.

Synchronicity

Synchronicity has got it in for me! First it was the demise of Phil Dick whilst CS5 was in the mails with Iain Ewing's semi-critical article, and now there appears a spate of arguments about von Neumann probes, just as I get CS8 in the mails, complete with Allan Jones' BY-WAYS OF THE GALAXY article! Somebody up there doesn't like me. Could it be that the 'Fannish Elite' have more influence than I had previously thought?

But, all is not lost, for I think I have seen a further development of the Von Neumann Probe argument that alters the whole scope of the debate. For the benefit of those who haven't been paying attention to the scientific press (or the Guardian, which is where my info comes from) here is a recap of the situation.

First of all, we have the suggestion that it is possible to manufacture space probes that are self-

replicating, that collect material in interstellar space, build new versions of themselves, which then set off in other directions, self-replicating as they go.

That is the basic theory of the Von Neumann Probe: purely and simply, it is a way to send out into the Universe a sophisticated message in a bottle, saying "We're here, is there anybody out there?"

Frank Tipler, a physicist at the University of Tulane, USA, has used this theory to question the validity of claims made by Carl Sagan and the Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence lobby, claims which say that there may be a very large number of intelligent species in the Universe, and which has led to requests for large sums of research money to look for the supporting evidence to back up the claims.

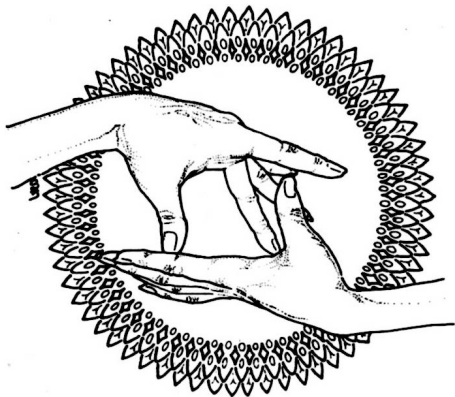
Tipler's contention is simple: If there are that many intelligent species out there, then there should be ample evidence of their existence in our own back yard, since they would have been sending out Von Neumann Probes, and the Universe would be well saturated with them by now. So, where are they around this neck of the woods? Their absence indicates that intelligence is not endemic in the Universe, that perhaps Man is unique. Naturally, Tipler therefore requests that the SETI people give up their claims for massive funding, presumably in favour of whatever Tipler is doing at the University of Tulane. (Ah, the cynicism inspired through working with scientists at the OU!)

Carl Sagan and William Newman have gone away and thought deeply about this, and have come back with a reply. Their latest theory, expounded in the Quarterly Journal of the Royal Astronomical Society, is that any intelligent life-form would not send out Von Neumann Probes since, by their very nature, they would proliferate to such an extent as to rework the entire matter in the Universe into Von Neumann Probe replicas within a couple of million years. Naturally, any intelligent species would not tolerate such an idea

since it would produce an artificially induced disaster on a cosmic scale. It therefore follows that the absence of Von Neumann Probes in the vicinity of our Solar System is no indicator to the existence or otherwise of intelligence elsewhere in the Universe.

This is all very well -- I was rather beginning to add horrors about the sudden arrival of swarms of Von Neumann Probes to the many other terrible things that could happen to our poor, fragile little planet. But, I wonder whether the scientists have taken their thinking quite far enough. Let me put another scenario before you.

Let us assume that there are other intelligent species out there



in the cosmos, lots of them in fact. Let us also assume that some of them are rightly regarded as intelligent enough to build self-replicating probes, but not bright enough to realise that this endangers the Universe. Let them incorporate into the machines the self-checking mechanism that Allan Jones suggested, whereby defective probes are re-directed to a specific point in the Universe, say a particular star. What then happens if the number of defective machines is very high, maybe as high as ninety-nine per cent of all replications?

The answer is simple: at specific points in the Universe, the defective probes accumulate, accreting very high densities of matter in those

areas. Now, all we SF freaks know what happens when you get very high densities of matter at a particular place in the Universe, don't we? Gravitational collapse takes place, the mass of the probes becomes the trigger for either a neutron star, or, with increasing numbers of probes, a black hole!

Scientists have not been able to explain entirely how black holes come about, how they accrete so much matter to bring about the collapse. So, why not Von Neumann Probes? The concept of black holes as a kind of by-product of Galactic pollution is an appalling one, since it leads directly to the awful thought that one of our near neighbours might just decide to use Sol as a dumping ground for their dud probes. Mmmm, maybe it's about time we got out there and conquered the Universe, if only to clean up the neighbourhood!

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A word of explanation before the next piece, which is a blistering piece of invective from Uncle Chuck Connor. The piece printed here was originally meant to be part of a three or four part 'article in CS9 on the subject of "what I hate about fandom", a stirring idea that may yet see the light of day either in CS or as a regular series in this little rascal. Chuck's contribution was rather topical, so I figured that I'd better print it right away, before he changed his mind!

A Room With A View And A Spleen To Vent

I've always been amused by the attitude to 'mundane' things that is displayed by the 'fannish' people in this little mudhole called SF fandom. You've got the jerkbrain reject hippies still working in a timelock of the Spirit Of '67, where to conform is to be an 'idiot', and the likes of Dylan, Jim Morrison and Joni are God. The sort of people

who go around with a massive ASH badge, and then boast about the number of joints they 'did' at Suchn-suchacon -- "which was nothing short of abysmal, darlings, just like I predicted five years ago".

They're supposedly so 'open minded' that they've never realised that the rosey colour of Fandom is nothing but an artificial playpen that some of us like to visit from time to time to 'escape' from reality. Fandom is a form of 'freedom' whic has been called Anarchy by many, when what they are trying to say is something akin to Communo-anarchy (Ted White and Rob Hansen take note, before you both fall over that little matchstick again). "There is no structure to fandom, you can do what you like!" "Fandom is the nearest thing to anarchy that we'll ever have!" Balance that load of cobblers with "A writer should do the very best he can" (Law no.1); "...more the idea of criticism as a means of maintaining standards of excellence and goading people to surpass them" (Law no.2 -- and you thought that the word 'excellence' meant 'beyond merit', eh?); "Fiction in fanzines will be inherently poor because the author hasn't been able to sell it, and it is not of saleable standard" (Law no.3), all of which fail to take into account three things.

1. What if the writer is doing his best, and he still gets slagged down for it?

2. Whose 'standards' are we supposed to work to if "...you can do what you like..." in fandom, who sets these standards, and above all, who watches the watchmen?

3. What if there is no market other than the Small Press that certain types of fiction can be sold in?

One is left with the feeling that the likes of Dorey, Hansen, Nicholas, White et al have soldered themselves together as little tin gods of fandom around whom said society of weirdos is supposee to revolve. And, again, we come back to the watchers and the watchmen.

One particularly noxious little slimemould to start having a go at himself with a blowlamp an 3lbs of best nickel-tin (complete with fluxed core) has been Steve 'Steev'

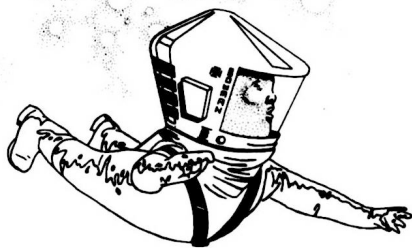
'Higgbo' Higgins. The turkey shouts for quality and standards in fanzines, yet tells the whole world just how blinkered he is by the following comment, shamefully lifted from STOMACH PUMP 4, about his view of such zines as SECONDHAND WAVE, AMANITA, and NEW RIVER BLUES: "Above all, none of them managed to be genuinely fannish fanzines, but seemed like something else masquerading as such". One wonders if Mz Steev will ever get his knickers untwisted enough to discover that there is more to life, the Universe and Fandom than Fannnish fanzines, with their in-jokes, in- references which degenerate into something akin to total obscurity. Especially when none of the above mentioned zines ever claimed to be 'fannnish' in their outlook (especially Simsa's AMANITA -- too bad Cyril's not around anymore to spit on Higgins in his sharp style). Yet, when dredging up names like AMANITA, there is no mention of the fact that it's been dead for the last three years.

And speaking of deadzines, after a lapse of two years, there comes GROSS ENCOUNTERS 11. Nice to see that it hasn't changed much, though I feel that the move to the Spirit Of '72 might me a little too progressive for some of his readers. In other words, it's still stuck in the same rut, playing the same old (and now very worn out) song. And this is the shape of fanwriting of today? I'd sooner be strapped down for four days and force fed MILLS & BOON rather than face the prospect that there's another GROSS ENCOUNTERS (or STOMACH PUMP, for that matter) in the pipeline. And this is the man who gave you Simon Polley as editor of MATRIX!

Then we come to the hypocrites of fandom (and, dear children, there are many of these crawling little worms in fandom). Take, for example, the continuous boasting of fans that "they've not read any SF for years and years", or "I wouldn't be seen dead reading that shit!". And what do we find dotted about these days, but ads for a con that's going to be only for written SF. It looks as if some people should take their heads for a shit before spieling out such crap.

But, let us leave that little thing aside, and move on. We come back to the fanzine critic (note: I do not use the term 'reviewer'). Here we find the above demands for 'Excellence' and 'Originality', yet when someone does produce something that is new/original, all you can hear are the screams of KILL THE FUCKER! to a backing chorus of "I don't understand this so I rips it to shreds!" All of which fails to take into account the fact that it's not the critic that has put up the money for the mag, nor does he/she even subscribe. Seeing as how the editor has put up the loot, then surely they have the right to put in whatever they want?

"But it's not fannish!" So who gives a shit? Open your eyes and take a look at things without the bigotted blinkers.



Oh, and before I go, I should just like to point out that you can't complain about this article on what I hate about fandom, because to do so would be to "Reveal your immaturity", and as one of the tin gods says, "who are these childish and insecure fans, anyway, that they should need such mollicoddling?" and Joey Nicholas should know, shouldn't he boys and girls? That's why he makes all his letters completely DNQ!

CHUCK CONNOR

Now you know why I rushed to get this issue out quickly -- it was a fire risk having Chuck's manuscript around the place, and I had the insurance company after me for increased cover!

Mind you, I do agree with a lot of what Chuck was prattling on about (though with some reservations, being a Dylan-Doors-Joni fan myself -- watch yer language when yer treading on my idols, Sailor boy!). While we are on the subject, I came across the following piece of verse in Colin Wilson's book *THE CRAFT OF THE NOVEL* just the other day. It was originally entitled 'Lines on Certain South African Novelists', but I've cheekily altered that to something more appropriate to the occasion.

Ode For The Ultra Fan

'You praise the firm restraint with which they write.
I'm with you there, of course.
They use the snaffle, and the curb all right,
But where's the bloody horse?'

(with profuse apologies for liberties taken to Roy Campbell.)

I think that sums up quite nicely how I feel about much of what is written in the name of 'fannish' fandom. Much of it can be read with enjoyment, but often leaves me with a sense of unease after, since it is rather self-indulgent and of limited value. That's just a personal opinion, naturally, and I hold it against no one that they should differ from it in any way.

Since CS is not really anywhere near being a 'fannish' fanzine, it could be construed that I'm 'axe-grinding' by printing a piece like Chuck's, but I've never really felt there was a need for categorisation in fandom as a whole, and in fanzines in particular, so it is more the pigeon-holing that goes on that annoys me, rather than whether this or that zine is 'fannish'.

What I'm interested in is what's in the faned's head, and whether he/she has anything interesting to tell me. Beyond that, who gives a damn?

And now for something a little bit different from the doings of fans and fandom.

Missing The Einsteins

I suppose it happens at any institution of higher learning. They must all be the recipients of 'nutty letters' from time to time. There are certainly always a few circulating round the OU Science Faculty. Take the following, for example, quoted verbatim.

"Dear Sir or Madam,

It is very important that I get in touch with somebody who works in relation with the Evolution Course. The reason is that I have made an important discovery about this matter, and it is crucial that someone with authority in this subject, may review this theory of mine, which I have named 'General Theory Of The Universal Constant', and 'The Quantum Dimension Of Light, As The Fourth State Of Matter'.

I have figured an equation which would resolve the mystery of the origin of life and the role that the driving force of Evolution (as an intelligent force) has in the Superstructure of the space-time-matter Universe."

Pretty neat, eh? I'll excuse the English, since it was written by someone with a Hispanic name, who may conceivably be a native of another country, but our Evolution course team had quiet hysterics over the letter. On checking with other areas (especially Physics) it seems that this kind of letter is a regular event, which worries some of the more concientious academics, since they've got the unenviable task of answering these people without totally anniha-lating them. Many of them, after all, may be OU undergraduates, or at the very least potential students. It worries me a little too, but for another reason.

Suppose, for example, this guy

works in a patent office, or something similar, and is this generation's Einstein, working out his theories in his head after an undistinguished academic career. How could we tell? How do we weed out the genuine nuts(all 99.99% of 'em) and follow up the new Einsteins? Can we really be so arrogant that we believe that our current way of thinking and evaluating ideas will come up with the answers, so much so that we can ignore the little guys, who might be following up a line of thinking that no 'real' scientist would even look at for a moment? On the evidence of the OU, I'd say that we are that arrogant -- which is probably a very bad thing indeed!

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Me And The Music Biz

Some people ask why there are no music articles appearing in CS anymore. Well, the reasons are quite varied, but all come back to the same thing really -- I've grown older (big Ahhh!), and I've grown apart from the current music scene, and I've come to realise the truth of Dave Wood's statements way back in CS4. I am no longer a part of the scene, and am left with only my personal tastes to guide me, with very little contact with the music that is being produced now. And yer know, I'm not in the least bit bothered by it anymore!

That is not to say that I don't still enjoy music, because I do. I certainly don't buy as much as I used to (I was once buying one or two albums a week), partly because

of economics (ie, the five pound lp, and the rival claims of things like zines) and partly because there are less albums around that I feel I need in the way that I always needed to buy certain records in the past. Now I tend to be much more circumspect about what I buy, and I tend to take fewer chances with unknown people. In the old days, with albums at a mere two quid a time, I could afford to buy a bumper or three, since I wasn't wasting that much money, really, and I did find a lot of good music that way. Today, I need to be convinced before I lay my money down.

There are still musicians whose records I'll buy unheard. However, they are a dwindling number, and are generally old favourites, people who have become a part of my life. Guys like Van Morrison (who does produce a gem every so often, before relapsing into mere musicianship), John Martyn, Weather Report or Joni Mitchell (cringe away, Connor, for I am unrepentant) continue to satisfy, so I buy their records. Others, like Bob Dylan, have slipped down into the ranks of 'hear first, then - maybe - buy'.

Where I have developed my tastes are in the classics and in jazz. Both areas have been of peripheral interest in the past, but have grown to occupy larger proportions of my listening time in recent years. A current favourite musician that I am pursuing is Pat Metheny, an American jazz guitarist recommended some years ago by Gary Deindorfer. I happened to see his band on a Channel Four jazz programme last year, and was quite impressed. Shortly after that, I came across a copy of the Pat Metheny-Lyle Mays album 'As Falls Wichita...' in the OU Record Library, which I borrowed, enjoyed immensely, and went looking for more. Since then I've bought about five Metheny albums, and am looking for the others. So, if something catches my attention, by word of mouth, or my own ears, then I do still follow-up with some enthusiasm.

Strangely enough, it does often happen that a chance reference by a fan, either in a letter or a fanzine, will send me off looking for records by a particular musician or composer. A passing reference by Ted White, for example, started me listening to the music of Janacek, borrowed from the

OU library again, but I'm slowly finding out more about the man, and may very well end up buying records of his works.

Similarly, an article by Lilian Edwards in THIS NEVER HAPPENS made me pick up a copy of the Cherry Red sampler album, 'Pillows and Prayers', which I greatly enjoyed. Mind you, I later borrowed an album by one of the featured bands, Marine Girls, which turned out to be truly awful, so there are still disappointments as well as gains!

I still play my records a lot, and my record collection is large enough, and diverse enough, to keep my ears happy, even if I never bought another album for the rest of my life (mind you, some of the more popular ones would need replacing at regular intervals!). I find that I listen to tapes of my records while I type (there's an old Boomtown Rats album in the cassette player right now), or while I drive (it was a tape of New Order's 'Power, Corruption and Lies' album that got me to and from the OU today). The records themselves are only played in the evenings, when I've settled down to listen, or while I read. The records tonight will be a new Richard Thompson album, from the ubiquitous OU library, and the latest by Wynton Marsalis, one of the most original young jazz players to come along in the last few years. His album, 'Think Of One', is a damned fine piece of music, and one I might even go out and buy for myself, if I didn't have a few more weeks of grinding poverty, while I mail out the last few CS8s! If only you people knew what I give up in order to get the zines into your hands. But that's another subject altogether!

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By coincidence, the programme I went in to see on the box after I had finished typing the article above was 'The Animals In Concert', a veritable orgy of nostalgia for an old fan like me. Recorded as part of their recent reunion tour, it really was a very good fifty minutes of rock music, with the band showing that they are still capable of coming up with the goods. Does the spirit good!



Read All About It!

I guess it was the afternoon some lunatic telephoned my newsdesk to report a close encounter of the third kind in her back garden that I began to believe in the almighty. I shan't bore you with all the mundane details, but there's no way blind fate could ever be that perverse.

But then journalism's a custom-built profession for connoisseurs of the mindblowingly absurd; indeed there are few activities members of the Fourth Estate enjoy more than swapping their favourite anecdotes, and certainly none that I can expand on in a family fanzine.

Some of the best concern (surprise surprise) journalists themselves. Me, I still squeeze the occasional chuckle from the tale of the infortunate Ed Rosenthal, London bureau chief for the United Press wire service back in 1948. Ah, poor Ed...

Y'see, in an effort to beat Reuters and Associated Press to the punch on the sex of the then-Princess Elizabeth's first-born, the ill-fated San Franciscan filed two sets of copy with his headquarters in New York, one for a girl, one for a boy. All he had to do to get the appropriate backgrounder sent out over the wire services was press a two-way key on his teletype back in London.

Visualise the scene that dark November evening. Rosenthal paces up and down his office waiting for his runner to arrive hotfoot from Buckingham Palace (these are the days before Selina Scott could lean on the railings with a remote capturing her slightest fluff for the viewers at home, so every second counted).

It was then that Ed blew it. At the crucial instant he turned away from the console, and missed one of the UP staff sitting down for a cuppa with his best mate- Rosenthal's teletype operator. As the proverbial fly in Ed's ointment leaned on the desk, his elbow depressed the special key and... Heck, you can guess the rest.

Twenty minutes after UP proudly announced the birth of the Princess of Wales to an anxious world, AP and

Reuters began flashing "boy" and Ed New York chiefs urgently teletyped client papers in an attempt to kill the story. But by then it was already too late to catch many of the confused sub-editors hastily scribbling "It's a girl!" headlines.

As Ed footnoted to colleagues later: "And that is why I am no longer bureau chief of UP..."

Of course, some journalists are so skilled in making horses back-sides of themselves that they can do without intervention from the Divine Practical Jokester. The Wiltshire Times and Chippenham News once published an extensive apology following an inspired profile of a local personality: inaccuracies retracted included statements that the amazing chap counted cycling and walking among his hobbies, was a member of 54 hunts and had an eye removed after an air raid on Calne. To compound his crime, the author of this remarkable piece of fiction wrote in his original feature: "my only disappointment when interviewing him was that I could not spare more time with this raconteur". He can say that again!

Nor is this insanity confined to the British Isles. I'm still trying to come to terms with a report I spotted in the Caribbean Insight a while back, informing readers: "In 1977 and 1978, the Dominican Republic was swept by African Swine Fever. African Swine Fever cannot be contracted by journalists."

God. It's just got to be God...

STEVE GREEN

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Hmm, while we're on the subject of the Fourth Estate, maybe I have room to slip in the following little piece about my time with Punch Magazine in Fleet St.

Missed Opportunities

Have you ever realised, years after an event, that you have missed a golden opportunity at some point in your life, an opportunity that could have made you at least a modest amount richer for

zero outlay. I realise now that I had such an opportunity when I worked for Punch Publications in the late sixties.

Punch Publications was the company that published Punch Magazine, and was a subsidiary of an old printing firm called Bradbury Agnew. That company (under various names) had been in existence since the early part of the nineteenth century and, as Bradbury and Evans, had taken over publication of Punch in its very early years, keeping a continuity of ownership right through until the end of the sixties, when the whole outfit was swallowed up by United Newspapers.

The Punch Publications office was situated at 10, Bouverie Street, a little side road off of Fleet Street, opposite the Evening News/News Of The World building, whose presses used to make the place shake in the afternoons. Number 10 was a huge old townhouse of the Bradbury family's that had been turned over to the magazine publishing end of their little empire. It was an early Victorian place, built like a rabbit warren, with lots of cubby holes and corridors, and, more importantly, a huge cellar, which was used for storing one hundred and thirty years' worth of back issues of the magazine, amongst other things.

I worked at Punch as a lowly publishing clerk, sorting out the wholesalers' order quantities each week, compiling the print figure and then preparing the package labels for the print works. I also handled many of the back number requests, and so spent a fair amount of time in the cellar, with its main denizen, Fred Doyle, a cadaverous old ex-printer, well into his seventies, who handled the back number dispatches. Fred looked very much like Boris Karloff on an off day, so the cellar, with its vaulted stonework, racks of magazines and dim lighting, was a rather strange Gothic place, like something out of Mervyn Peake. (Whenever I read Peake's books, the images of Flay that spring to mind are identical to old Fred in his cellar.) Whenever I had spare time

I used to roam around down there, looking through back issues, poking around in the debris of a hundred years or more in the corners.

That's how I came to unearth a box of pamphlets that, if I still had them now, would probably be quite valuable. Being a young twerp with little sense of the value of things, I looked at them, wondered about them -- then put them back, where they undoubtedly stayed until the entire offices were sold. Probably the pamphlets were simply consigned to the rubbish bin at that time..

What were these mysterious pamphlets? Merely the very first editions of several Charles Dickens' novels, that's all! Most of his works were initially published in monthly installments, not in magazines, as serialisation normally occurs today, but as separate pamphlets sold for about one shilling (and that seems quite expensive for the time, looking back on it). Bradbury and Evans published a number of Dickens' middle period works, stories like DOMBEY AND SON, DAVID COPPERFIELD and BLEAK HOUSE. These may have been the first material actually sold under the name of Dickens, since the previous works (including NICHOLAS NICKLEBY) had been published by Chapman and Hall under the pen name of 'Boz'.

The pamphlets were all quite small, containing 2-3 chapters on average, and were illustrated -- probably by Hablot Browne, who was Dickens' main illustrator at about that time. As far as I can recall now, the collection I unearthed contained sets of COPPERFIELD, and maybe DOMBEY AND SON, with assorted oddments of one or two others. To me, they had a curiosity value only, since I had little appreciation of Dickens (the legacy of enforced reading at school), although they were much admired by other members of the office staff. But they all went back down into the vaults, never more to see the light of day again. Pity really, since there can't be all that many pristine sets of the pamphlets around. Ah me!



A glimmer of light captured Rastus' attention momentarily, as the first light of dawn caught the roofs of the Haven. Time was getting on. The Captain would be waking soon, and he would not be amused to discover the illicit use of his typer. The very least that Rastus could expect would be a keelhauling. Rastus gnawed at his bottom lip. Just about time to hack out a quick letter column, then that was it. He dragged a mangled mess of letters from his rear pocket, and rummaged through for a choice specimen or two to set down in everlasting print. Then he began to pound away at the typer again, feverishly trying to beat the sunlight that slowly moved down the roofs towards the eastward facing window of the Captain's hut.

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The Mail Response

SUE THOMASON: "...Hmmm, so you and CS are outside the central British fan groups, are you? Who/what are the central British fan groups? Surely what is central and what is peripheral depends entirely on where you stand, what your perspective is. Were I lucky enough to live in a place large enough to have a flourishing local group, no doubt it would be central to my experience of fandom. If I were richer or more mobile, no doubt cons would play a larger part in my life. However, like you, I'm primarily a postal fan, and believe me there are lots of postal fans about....Dammit, fandom is all about being involved for the fun of it -- you obviously get at least as much pleasure from producing CS, RASTUS, etc., as I get from reading it -- more power to your elbow. Do exactly as you want to, provided it doesn't hurt anyone else (Joe Nicholas doesn't count) -- some of us out here like it. Be damned to who's in and who's out of XYZ fandom -- one of fandom's less savoury obsessions is that sort of status-seeking."

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To which, Rastus he say "Right on Sister", in his best Sixties hippie voice, and nuts to the malcontents.

JOY HIBBERT: "...I think it would be fairly correct to say that I get most fanzines produced in Britain these days (except those who wish to remain secret) and it amazes me whenever I hear references to the sad state of fanzine production. It seems to me, as you say, that a segment of fandom is considering itself to be all of fandom (or perhaps that zines produced outside their groups are by fringe fans of some kind) and by and large, this small group of fans has more contact with US fans than fans outside the group (it really is less contrived-looking to say 'clique' rather than 'this small group of fans', isn't it?). I find fanzine fandom at the moment to be wonderfully varied, and it's a shame that certain

foreign fans only see one part of it (not always the same part, admittedly -- for example, you've probably seen the latest EMPTIES, in which Martin Tudor castigates Arthur Hlavaty for thinking British fans don't write about personal things. By and large, I agree that British fans write less about personal things than foreign -- American and Australian -- fans, but then again, that might be because of the sort of foreign fanzines I get (WWW, FREEFANS JOURNAL, LMTWCA, Hlavaty's zines, HOLIER THAN THOU, BLATANT), so it works both ways. But, to get back to the point, the point was that Arthur was criticising British zines for not talking about personal subjects, whereas if he was in receipt of (say) TAPPEN, FELICITY, SECONDHAND WAVE, PELVIC WIGGLE STAMP, instead of whatever zines he does get, then he might think we're all disgustingly over-emotional!)."

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Rastus, he say "We all have our own little fandoms, and woe betide the person who says I'm not entitled to mine!"

MARY GENTLE: "...On memories, I'm reminded of what another correspondent of mine, George Hay, said recently: "When the mind starts to edit memories, it needs a new publisher". This is the kind of enigmatic remark I get from George, and now you too can worry about what it might mean! Personally, I agree



with you; but then, I don't reckon there's an objective world out there that one can be 'out of true' from (did I just split an infinitive? Ow!) so it doesn't bother me too much. Except, of course, when involved in arguments; when I tend to lay claim to a memory second only to God's, and to be highly shirty when it's questioned. An additional annoyance is quotations: I remember 'em, but I remember 'em wrong -- sometimes that's an improvement. This is not always appreciated in the academic circles I move in... NB. Don't trust biographers to get it right. If the person who lived the life can't remember it, what chance have they got!

...Got a more dismal scenario for you: chips take over the reference side of book publishing; fiction is replaced by film. The image takes over from the written word in matters of imagination. Why? Because reading is hard work and watching pictures ain't. (On the other hand, there are things like THE DRAUGHTMAN'S CONTRACT, but this is hardly likely to get as wide an exposure as CROSSROADS.) There's no reason why visual images shouldn't be as complex as written language, and carry an equal weight of meaning; but except in very few cases, this doesn't happen. Mainly, I think, because one has to invent/uncover a symbolic language, and education in this country doesn't run to much in the way of symbolic-image subtlety."

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DAVE REDD: "...I presume that your piece BOOK AND CHIPS was written in an attempt to be provocative in a deliberately annoying way? Anybody with half an eye on progress will see the flaw in your arguments about the awkwardness and inconvenience of current technology. You may well be right in saying that present-day books will be around 'for a very long time yet', but that time-scale doesn't have to be long.

For the record, my personal ideal book-of-the-future will not employ Heath Robinson devices such as cathode-ray screens, LCD units or 15-20lb microcomputers. A flat, rectangular plate the size of a paperback would do, provided that every individual microdot unit on its top surface

could be either pure white or pure black. It could have front control studs (for page number, advance, etc) and have up to 100 slots in the back for inserting information storage cells, say one book per cell (although this would depend on how much of the information the smallest handleable unit could hold).

Carry your own library around.

You see now why I disliked the false logic in your BOOK AND CHIPS? Current technology need not limit the future possibilities. I'd even say that a nice white plate could be aesthetically just as pleasing as most present day books -- think of it as an oblong of smooth ivory, or perhaps bone china, with perfect black letters as good as those from an electric typewriter today. The technology isn't feasible yet, but it is not unimaginable."

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HARRY WARNER Jr.: "...There's another advantage to books over chips which you could have added to your list. Every book ever printed can be used today just as easily as on the day it came off the presses, unless careless storage has caused physical deterioration. Contrast that with the way technology keeps coming up with new replacements for books. In just a few decades, we've had microfilmed printed matter, and then printed matter on microfiche, now videodiscs or computer chips are supposed to provide a substitute for books, and by the time the 21st Century arrives, some new scientific marvel will undoubtedly have rendered all those systems obsolete. So it's probable that a book-substitute will become obsolete before it is worn out, and quite probably equipment for using it will be unavailable. (Just think how many mechanical methods for preserving music performances have suffered that fate during the current century. Equipment for playing cylinder records, 78 rpm disc records, and piano rolls, is almost impossible to obtain except in antique shops.)

...I saw craftsmanship curl up and die in the printing profession during the forty years of newspaper work. When I became a journalist, the Hagerstown newspapers were using



linotypes. The linotype operators were proud of their ability to turn out almost mistake-free type rapidly and blamed themselves instead of the proofreaders if a serious typographic error got into print. About midway in my employment, the newspapers acquired automatic linotypes, which used punched paper tape created on typewriter-like machines. The tape acquired a fabulous ability to loaf when they should be working, had no apparent consciousness of what they were setting, and lacked the ability to correct small spelling and grammar errors in copy that the linotype operators had possessed. Now the reporters themselves set type in the sense that they use computer terminals and the editors who are supposed to correct their stories lack either the time or the literacy to do so, and nobody seems to care about the quality of what appears in print."

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JOHN D. BERRY: "...There are other printers who take pride in their work, and use the old hand technology besides the members of NAPA and other pre-SF apas. In this country, at any rate, there are dozens of small presses that set their type by hand — usually for poetry books — and print them themselves on an old letterpress. I can think of only one such press in Seattle (I learned how to operate a letterpress on theirs recently) but across the Sound in the small town of Port Townsend, there are two presses that are both renowned for the high quality of their work. What I suspect will disappear more completely is linotype and the other hot-metal forms of typesetting, because they fall in between: they're no longer the most efficient system for high-volume, high-speed production, but they don't have the handcrafted aspect of letterpress type which keeps the latter alive among individual craftsmen.

It's also not true that none of us who set type electronically take pride in our work, or produce type of fine quality. It depends on who's doing the typesetting, just as it does with any other method. In the small shop I work in, there's always a tension between getting the jobs

out quickly and doing a craftsmanlike job on each one. (To some extent the quality of the typesetting depends on the quality of the original material; if the customer obviously takes no care in preparing the manuscript and doesn't seem to care about the end result, we're much more likely to do the work quick-and-dirty. But it's the work for customers who know type and know how to ask for what they want that's the most satisfying to do.) It doesn't take long at all to learn how to operate a photo-typesetting machine — but learning how to be good at it takes at least months, and often years."

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NICK SHEARS: "...I must correct an error Harry Andrischak makes in his 'Reverting To Type'. He says "...the fandoms of the communist countries, and South Africa, and any other country where fans cannot own printing equipment". There is nothing to stop any South African fan (or any other South African, whatever his or her colour) owning a printing press or any other means for dissemination of information.

South African fandom has never been terribly important in world terms, but that has nothing to do with a lack of printing presses or mimeo machines. At the height of the SA fannish activity in the early 70s, there was Africapa, a 20 or 25 member apa; SFSA, the national SF organisation, published PROBE bi-monthly; I published ENTROPION, and later aFRICA, quarterly, and various other smaller zines; there were two Diplomacy zines as an offshoot of SF fandom, DOWN ALIEN SKIES, and FOREIGN OFFICE REPORT; Brian Lombard's personalzine, dLUMPS; Kevin Mac Donnell's manic bits and pieces...

In later years, when I was active in student politics, duplicators and printing presses were our most important tools. One activist friend said that she saw the role of the white radical as provider of facilities too expensive for black groups — printing facilities coming very clearly at the top of the list.

Of course, censorship being what it was/is in South Africa, publishing



stuff is only half the battle. Keeping it on the streets can be a great deal harder."

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ARTHUR THOMSON: "...Your two main subjects — printing and motor racing — aren't my particular cups of tea, but I enjoy reading about them none the less. I suppose that's the mark of the avid 'reader': we'll read and absorb and enjoy anything that's reasonably well written. I confess to being a member of saucebottle fandom...like Walt Willis. You'll remember that they will even read the saucebottle labels at the breakfast table for want of something to read. I know that rather than be totally out of reading material, I will start on the wife's woman's magazines, or the cornflake packets. Another thing I find strange amongst non-readers is that they can't understand how a person can read a book more than just the once. I see the looks of disbelief on the faces of people at work when they ask if the book I'm reading is any good, and I tell them I'm reading it for the fifth or sixth time...over a period of years, of course."

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And that's about all the room I can spare for locs this issue folks, so it's shut-down time. I'll even go as far as to deny you all the pleasure of a wafh column. After all, you do get complete coverage in the Ship, don't you?

I want to use some of the space left to address those of you that may be, or have been, OU students. As I hope you are aware by now, the Open University is coming under very heavy attack by the forces of evil (otherwise known as Sir Keef Joseph and his merry band of vandals), with a resultant cutback in the budget. This has been going on for a couple of years now, and things have now got to the stage where all of the 'fat' has been consumed, and still more cuts are being asked for. As things stand at the moment, the next three years will see a decline in the standards of the material that we will be sending out to the students. To put it in a nutshell, you'll be getting a lot less for your money, and will find it a lot harder to get your degree at the end

of it all. Since the scale of cuts now seems to call for a cut in the print budget of some 30% for the 1986 courses, you can judge for yourself how much that will be effecting your study plans.

What to do about it? Well, the OU is planning a national campaign, using all of its staff, and as many of the students and graduates as it can summon to the fray. The aim is to restore to the OU some of its lost funding (all of which comes direct from the Government), and enable it to keep on providing that educational 'second chance' that more than 60,000 graduates have already found to be thoroughly worth while. If you are not an OU student, then maybe you should bear in mind that the OU has been called the greatest educational experiment since the end of WWII, and has proved to be an outstanding success. But we need to move on, not stagnate, and that needs funding. The OU is, and can be, one of the factors that can create new opportunities in a country where opportunity seems to have become a forgotten word. If there is anything you can do, then, please, do it!

Hmm, 'scuse me while I stagger down off this rickety soap-box.

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The Captain fumbled with his keys as he came to his office door, and yawned widely before inserting the key into the lock. The key turned, only to lock the door. The Captain shrugged, muttered "Must have forgotten to lock up last night" to himself, and unlocked the door. As soon as he steeped through the portal, he knew that something had been going on, for the air was filled with the scent of warm typewriter. He chuckled: "That little rascal's been at it again." He felt the side of his trusty typer: it was still warm, and the ribbon was now half-used. "Just as long as he doesn't send my mail bill up too much, that's all", the aged Captain grunted, "otherwise I'll have to do something about the little runt." He sat down, and drew the plans for the next Ship, towards him. There was lots to do, even if the launch date did seem a long way away, so he had better get down to it.



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RASTUS 2 is a CS Production, the product of a deranged mind residing inside the head of one John D.Owen, normally to be found at the creepy residence known as Number Four, Highfield Close, Newport Pagnell, Bucks, MK16 9AZ, England. RASTUS is distributed on a quirky basis to those that I think deserve it — now you can all go away and worry about that, can't you?

