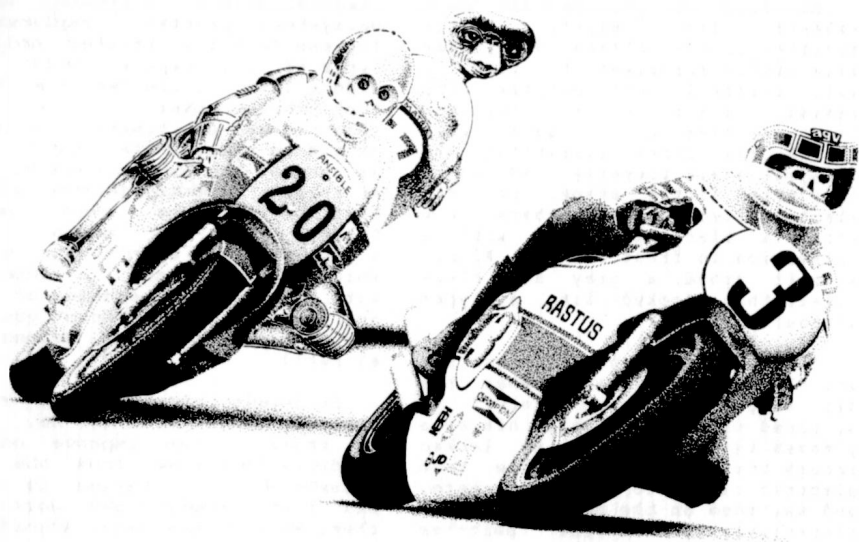


RASTUS



RASTUS 3 is the Owen Organisation version of an 'ensmalled' fanzine, ensmalled by relation to behemoths like **CRYSTAL SHIP** at any rate, though it still comes out looking a bit high on the word count in comparison with some of the APathetic excuses for fanzines that circulate nowadays. It is available for the flimsiest of reasons from the following address: **John D.Owen, 4,Highfield Close, Newport Pagnell,Bucks,MK16 9AZ.** It's frequency of publication is subject to even more whimsy than the circulation: in other words, you see it when you see it and not before!

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The Captain scratched at his beard. "Hmm, that ought to give that damned wharf rat something to think about", he muttered to himself, caressing the keyboard of the newly installed computer, making one last check of the power points to make sure the two items of equipment (for alongside the computer stood an equally pristine printer) were safely switched off for the night. "It'll take him all night just to figure out how to switch these little beauties on, let alone get on with any fanac." He picked up his cap from the hatrack and left the office for the night, carefully avoiding any recognition of the shadow that stood in the corner of the shipyard, breathing hoarsely enough for even a Langford to hear.

As soon as the Captain disappeared from sight, Rastus scuttled to the office door, was only mildly surprised to find it left unlocked, and quickly slid inside, intent on an evenings fanac. He came to a sudden halt inside the door: everything had changed! Where formerly had stood the trim little shape of the electric typewriter, there now stood a black keyboard, with a television in front of it. Alongside it stood a grey and black object that looked like a typer without any keys.

"Well, 'ere's a bleeding rum do, and that's no mistake. What the hell is the Captain up to now?" He muttered to himself, while his eyes gleamed in the twilight. He looked around the desk, traced the twin electric cables to their sockets, and switched on the power. Then he tentatively pushed the switches marked 'power' on the two items.

In a second or two an image appeared on the television screen, the grey and black object gave a short purr and a rattle, and Rastus found himself staring at a message the Captain had left him, which said: "Instruction manuals in the top right-hand drawer -- good luck!"

Rastus pulled open the drawer to be confronted with three books of substantial thickness, all of them written in mumbo-jumbo. "Heck, it looks like it's goin' to be a bloody long night!"

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Yes folks, it's happened! The twentieth century has finally caught up with Crystal Ship Enterprises, in the shape of a micro-computer (an Amstrad CPC464) and a daisywheel printer, replacements for the faithful Brother golfball typer of ill repute (well, Geis didn't like it, and Ted the Wight took umbrage over it too). With this new set-up, however, I fully intend to conquer the world (just as long as Kev Rattan doesn't beat me to it), flooding fandom with a host of fanzines every second Tuesday of the month. Well, I **would** if it wasn't for work, which rather tends to interfere with the grandiose schemes of mice and men (and no lip from you lot about which species I belong to, either!).

Seriously though, this is an exciting development for me, since it means I can improve on the products that come from the Owen household without having to spend all night **every** night working on them. With my new mate, Arnold, and his sidekick Margarita, I shall be

be churning out fanzines just as fast as I can pay for them (which won't be very fast, admittedly, though a good deal quicker than in previous years). I think RASTUS will probably end up as the main zine to gain out of all this, with much more frequent issues, while CS cruises along at one issue per year, or thereabouts. Anyway, enough of this rambling discourse, let's get on with the fanzine.

Open The Box

Once upon a time, there was a lady very much involved with the British fannish scene, who pubbed her ish with gusto, consorted with Greg Pickersgill and generally made a name for herself.

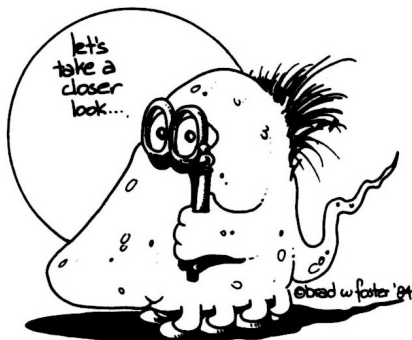
Then she vanished from the scene, seemingly into thin air, in the way that fans do when the impetus vanishes. But, this one has made a small comeback, in the form of a letter to EPSILON, which Rob Hansen published in his issue 15 last year. It's worth looking at a paragraph of that letter to see what Simone Walsh thinks about fandom now. The excerpt is as follows:

"Reading fanzines is like opening a music-box -- the music comes out but it's always the same tune. I don't mean that nastily, it's just that fannish topics are always the same ones. I remember Greg getting very irate when I made that comment a couple of years ago -- he seems to thrive on sameness and the status quo -- and declared that it was an important part of fandom. You know: It Is Written, and The Way Things Are, etc, and I had lost the divine right to knock because I had lost my union card, so-to-speak, since I had been out of things so long. To me that attitude is the Archie Mercer of the 80s attitude."

I can't help agreeing with the lady: I suppose I've been involved in fandom for about nine years now, and already I've lost count

of the number of times certain issues have been raised, given a brief going over before being salted away again for a year or two. Malcolm Edwards once tried to persuade me that this Was The Way Of Things, too: the way he put it, these well-trod paths of fannish thought were the fannish equivalent of the twelve-bar blues, a structure of great simplicity, but capable of a great deal of variety, and therefore well worth the efforts of successive generations of fans to restate the Great Themes.

Well, I didn't buy the idea then, and I still don't. The reason that the same themes keep raising their moribund little heads is due



to a lack of imagination on the part of the fannish fans, a treading of the same ground over and over again, like some ghastly pavane presided over by haggard dancing masters, intent on making every step the exact replica of the previous one. Personally, I think it is time to call it a day on the dance floor, and let fans do their own thing entirely, without the cackle from the past. So what if a few "traditions" get ditched along the way: some of them need weeding out anyway.

So, don't expect the normal "fannish" fare from RASTUS, 'cos that's not what it's about!

Martyn Taylor

MOVIN' DOWN THE QUEEN'S HIGHWAY

Saturday May 23rd. I am in that delicious half awake state which precedes the return of well earned sleep when there comes a throbbing, spluttering, low roaring outside my window. Oh no! It's happened! Ronnie Baggins has decided he's hobbit enough to take on Konstantin the Black! Terrified I tweak back a corner of the curtain and look out, expecting to see at least one of those four good friends of ours -- War, Anarchy, Judgement and Death -- reining in down there.

I see one tiny little fellow perched atop a Ducati V twin trying to park it outside the boarding house opposite our flat. He's off the first midnight ferry of the season. It's practice week. Man has been occupied!

TT -- the Tourist Trophy, the only major motorcycle road racing event still to take place in Britain, and its right on my doorstep -- literally, as the circuit is just a hundred or so yards up the hill. Our stereotype of a biker is something like a composite of Peter Fonda, languidly guiding his chopper through the leafy lanes of fictional USA, those fun loving coppers in "Mad Max", and the idiot boy revving his 75cc sewing machine outside your bedroom window at 2.00 in the morning. All this, and leather, too! Small wonder the prospect of 20,000 of this horde descending on Man for two weeks in June sends many locals heading somewhere else, anywhere else, it doesn't matter. The truth, though, is a little different. Oh, hair is still unfashionably long, and you do see the odd colours being worn, but the simple fact is that the bikers who come here year after year (as many do) are mostly petit

bourgeois to their fingertips, middle-aged enthusiasts holding good jobs in the mundane world -- they must, because one glance at their machines shouts big bucks (or, to be truthful, megayen) -- whose sole bent is a love of motorbikes. Johnson and Johnson Inc. would go bust without these guys consumption of Simoniz and Turtle Wax! There may not be too many American boys, but they do love their machines, which aren't 175cc putt putts for pottering through the rush hour. These are touring bikes. In 1983 it seemed de rigeur to have at least 650cc of Japanese metalwork throbbing between your thighs -- anything smaller and it better have been something *real* special or you couldn't hold your head up in the Legs o' Man. The grey spacey-looking Suzuki RS model was in fashion, the bigger the better. This year -- 1984 -- saw a change in style, towards multi-coloured leathers and smaller bikes in the 400-550cc range. Has fiendish Nipponese engineering raised the opsi factor to levels at which even bikers quail? (Ops? Oomph per cc.)

I have been on a bike once. I don't like to think of the immediate threat to my good looks which would get me back on one. I *know* what is a fate worse than death. Bikers are crazy, and those who want to race the bloody things ought to be locked up.

Which makes the TT racer some sort of special kind of crazy. Take a look out of your window at the road out there. That is what these nutters race on at speeds up to 180mph. The TT course is 39 odd miles of bog standard single carriageway suburban and rural roads cordoned off from ordinary traffic a few minutes before racing begins.

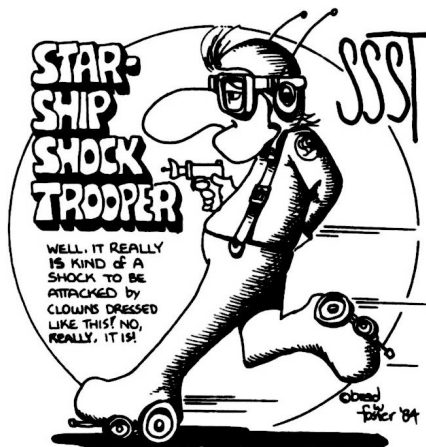
Lay it down on an ordinary bike circuit and you'll slide a few yards, maybe lose some skin, and end up in the straw bales. Lay it down on the island and you are liable to enter into a brief relationship with a very solid stone wall! The races are six laps of rough, bumpy climbing roads, and must come pretty close to being the ultimate test of man and machine.

What they would be like if they were real races is nobody's business. The TT "Races" are not races, but time trials with pairs of riders setting off at ten second intervals. The 'leader on the road' can be way down on a man who started at number 160 and is half a lap behind him. Then the nature of the course militates against dicing. There isn't much need to outbrake the guy in front when there are plenty of places on the course to make your extra power pay. But if that sounds easy then take another look at the road outside and realise that the current lap record for the TT course is 118.47 mph, while the fastest average race speed is just slightly slower at 116.35 mph. How many of us have driven a car on a clear motorway at 118 mph? How many of us have driven for 2 hours at 116 mph? Which is what these guys are doing on roads you and I would be hard put to average 45 mph on in a fast car.

You see what I mean about some special sort of crazy?

In terms of spectator excitement the TT is second division stuff, processions of bikes with only the excellent radio commentary to tell you who is winning. Why then does this event hold such a special place in biking mythology? Simple. It is road racing. It is what each biker makes believe he or she does when they climb aboard those two-wheeled stallions and take to the open road, and the racers do it on machines only a little way removed from those the fans themselves

ride. The star riders are the fans in a way footballers were before Jimmy Hill had his way. The star riders do what the fans would do if only... If only they had the money, the time, the bottle. Which is another difference. 'Bottling out' as become a term of derision flung by spectators at everything from a footballer choosing not to risk wind and limb in a tackle with Norman Hunter to Terry Griffiths leaving a pink over the pocket which you and I (in common with 99% of all known fans) wouldn't have got within a foot of potting. Nobody ever accuses a TT rider of 'bottling out'. A definition of 'bottle' is the ability to let in the clutch on Glencrutchery Road in



in a TT. Which is why, much as they admire them, the bikers don't hold the current crop of big name racers -- Roberts and Lawson and Sheene and the rest -- in quite the same esteem as they hold the old timers -- Surtees and Minter and Agostini. The old guys rode the island and until today's racers tell the f***ing Japanese that it doesn't matter how many commuter bikes Grand Prix success may sell in Japan and California they are going to ride the TT then the enthusiasts will smile, and revere the old timers.

The odd thing is that for the racers the TT is much safer than the circuit races, whatever its reputation.

Which brings us to the greatest of all the bike racers. Say bike, say Mike. Hailwood, world champion and 13 TT wins, the man who did everything on a bike, went and raced cars, and then came back to pick up another 2 TT wins. Like Graham Hill and Mike Hawthorne, he took everything the track could hand out, laughed, and then went and got himself wiped out off it. Maybe it is a touch too much to say the fans worship Hailwood, but of all the mighty sportsmen I can name -- Pele, Nurmi, Zatopek, di Maggio, Stephenson -- I can think of none so absolutely respected by the devotees as Mike the Bike Hailwood. There really isn't much more to say.

Which doesn't keep charisma off the track today, certainly not. When I came to the island I saw, painted on the pavement outside a seafront cafe, "There's only one Joey Dunlop". Joey Who? Then I remembered an Ulster TV programme about three young bike racers, one of whom couldn't afford the ferry fare to the island, so he loaded his self-prepared Suzuki onto a fishing smack and came across that way. He blew them all away in the Senior TT. Oh, THAT Joey Dunlop. If the fairy tale was blighted a little by the other two getting themselves killed before the programme was transmitted it hasn't kept Joey from going on to ride Grands Prix for Honda, becoming World Formula 1 Champion and Yer Man, the best road racer in the world, the man you have to beat if you want to win a TT because if you don't beat Joey you don't win.

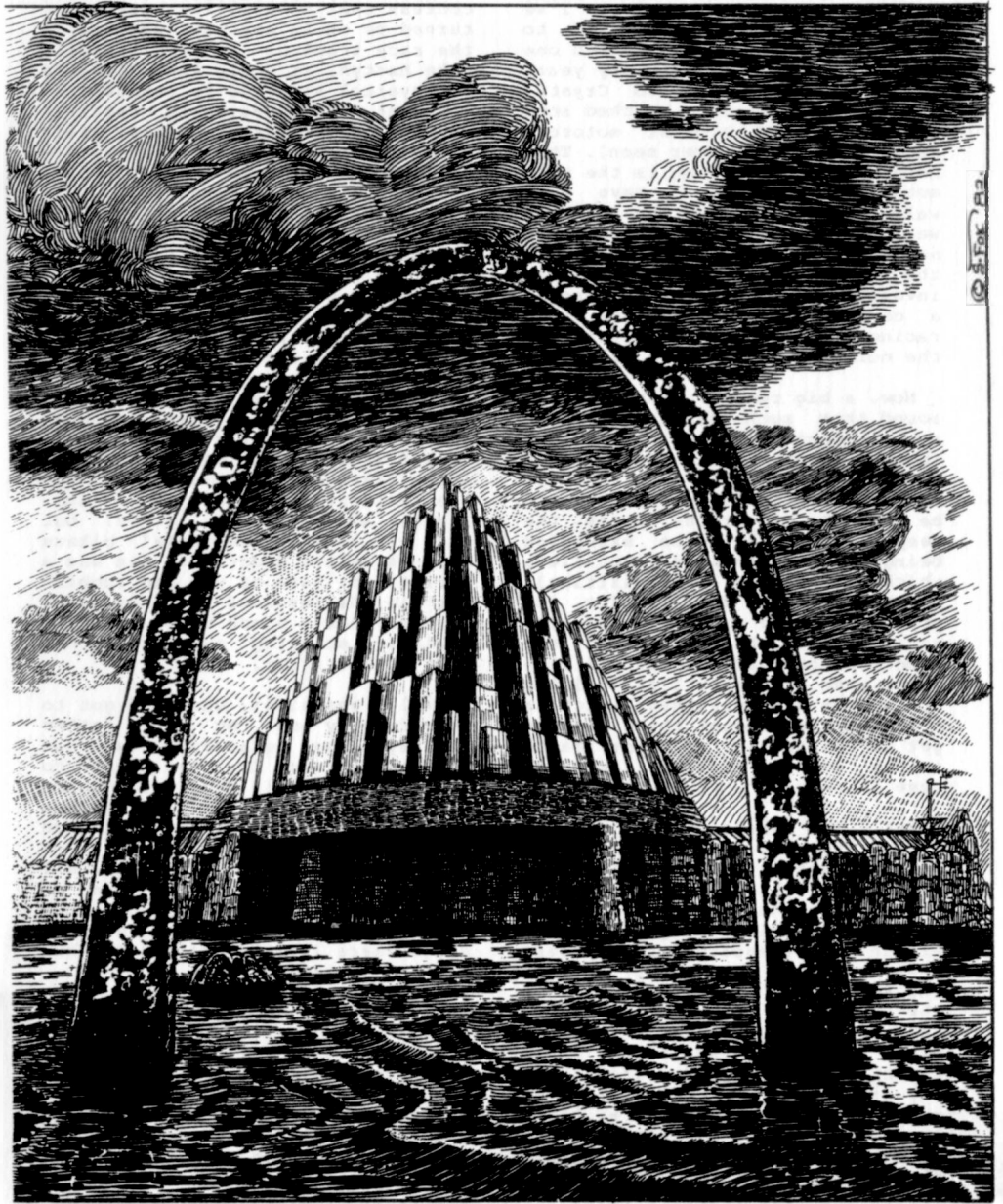
I mentioned above the TT's reputation, and before I came here it was my impression that the TT was the festival of death, and there can be no doubting that the course is demanding and dangerous. Yet during the last 2 years there has been just one fatality during

the hundreds of thousands of racing miles -- a sidecar passenger during practice in 1984. Not too bad a score for a sport in which world title holders die regularly in competition. Which isn't to say that the two weeks aren't a good time to be in the undertaking trade. There is carnage among the fans. In 1984 six bikers died in accidents on or around the course, which is about the par. Strangely, though, none of these fatalities occurred on what is appositely known as "Mad Sunday", that middle Sunday of the three weekend festival when all the bikers take to the course and make believe they are Joey, or Mick Grant, or Rob MacElnea, or -- God help us -- Helmut Dahne. Now I like the TT. I like the bikers, well behaved as they are (parading up and down in gangs, singing obscene songs, pissing in doorways and assaulting the local womenfolk is confined to the drunken rugby scum who turn up over here twice a year), and the colour, noise and vitality of it all. On Mad Sunday, though, doors are locked and we wait for Monday. It may not be amoktime, but it will do for me. Still, the whole fortnight is really an exercise in shared fantasy, an act of worship almost, and in all religions there comes a time when even the most sympathetic observer is excluded from the ritual, and I am a very firm believer in respecting the trappings of another's religion.

I just wish there was some way we didn't have to pick up the bill for the casualty department. Mind you, it is only because of the generosity of the bikers that Noble's has a superbly equipped physiotherapy department from which I've had more than my money's worth, so no drinking the wine of sour grapes for me.

The Isle Of Man TT races are special. They have a mystique and attraction all their own, and I think I'm being seduced. Who knows, I may even watch some of the racing next year, from a distance...

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Man, motorcycles: despite being a life long motor sport fan, I've never really been attracted to motorbike racing. I did attend one motorbike race meeting, many years ago at the much-lamented Crystal Palace track (where I watched some of the best and closest motorcar races that I have ever seen). That motorbike race meeting is the only motor sport event I have ever walked out on before the meeting was finished. The reason had nothing to do with the quality of the racing, or the spectacle involved (though to me both lacked a certain something over car racing), but was down entirely to the noise of the smaller bikes.

Now, a big racing bike doesn't sound that much different to a small capacity racing car engine (both are capable of leaving the eardrums singing for hours afterwards), and the rule seems to be that the bigger the engine, the deeper the tone (the exception being rotary-engined vehicles, which are simply ear-splitting), and the tendency for is for the ground to shake rather than the ears bleed. I have been in the Woodcote grandstands at Silverstone when a grid full of 8-litre sportscars was unleashed, which is probably the closest thing you can get to being in a major earth tremor without having the roof cave in on you.

But, for sheer mind-jellying noise, there is nothing that beats a small capacity racing bike. It would seem that anything under about 200ccs has to be screwed up to such incredibly high revs to attain the necessary horse power, that the noise generated ascends the scale to a point very close to the limits of human aural endurance. It certainly breached mine! After two or three small capacity classes had raced that day at Crystal Palace, I had had enough! My head ached, my ears were physically hurting, and I just wanted out. I've never felt the inclination to re-acquaint myself with the breed, either!

Actually, I suppose I should confess that motorcycles have never turned me on in any way, whether on the race track or on the street. Like Martyn, it would take threats of physical violence to persuade me to mount one nowadays. In fact, I would guess it must be twenty years since I last sat astride a motorbike, and that was merely as a pillion passenger. Mind you, that event did rather colour my prejudices, since it scared the daylights out of me.

A group of us were in the habit of gathering in Iver for an alcoholic beverage or four, a regular event that we kept up until we were all of an age where it was legal for us to be seen in pubs, whereupon we lost interest and went out and pursued girls instead. One friend of mine, who rejoiced in the appropriate name of Ken Speed, was the resident motorbike nut -- not, I might add, a greasy rocker, but one of the "respectable" bikers such as Martyn describes. Ken was a purist too: none of yer Jap rubbish for him. He favoured twin-cylinder Nortons, heavy black bikes with a cylinder sticking out of either side of the frame.

Well, one night, when I'd got to Iver from my home by bus, rather than my normal pedal cycle, and had then hung around for too long to get a bus home (it tended to happen quite frequently that way), Ken decided he'd be bighearted and give me a lift back home on the back of the Norton, which I accepted, all too ready to brave the terrors of the bike rather than the long, cold walk back to Cowley, the nearest point where I could still get a bus back to my home.

Now, the road between Iver and Cowley consists of an initial two or three bends, followed by a two-mile straight, at the end of which stands a pair of hump-backed bridges, one over a river, the next over a canal, with about fifty yards between them. I happened to be carrying a case of records that night, so my grip on the grabhandle

of the Norton was a little precarious at the best of times. By the time Ken had scared me rigid by opening the bike right up on the straight, I was in no position to handle the bridges. To this day I shall swear on my grandmother's grave that I lost all contact with the Norton at the crest of the first bridge, only to regain it at the crest of the second. Ken practically had to lift me off the bike at the end of the drive, and I made damned sure I never had to get on the back of such a beast again. I'm not about to break the habit of half a lifetime, either!

Right, now for something completely different.



John Berry

I regard my sense of humour as being reasonably subtle, although during translation to the written word I have the tendency to (as one critic wrote several years ago) use sledge hammer blows to emphasise a point.

Fifteen years or so ago, I published in my POT POURRI what I thought to be an extremely witty

account of an archaeological investigation carried out by myself and my son Colin. We lived in Northern Ireland at that time and we discovered the ruins of a large country house built to the design of the Bishop of Londonderry three centuries earlier. During World War II it had been used as the living quarters for military personnel, which of course hadn't helped to maintain its historic virginity. After the war, the house was sold to a 'Philistine' for an amazingly small sum, and he made a quick fortune by ripping off the roof and selling the lead. So, Colin and I came across this pathetic ruin, and I noted that around the high ceilings there remained in place a few strips of magnificent Italian stucco. I immediately considered that it would be a wonderful thing to salvage the work of these imported craftsmen and attempt to collect sufficient sections to perhaps encircle my den in my house in Belfast. Therefore, with the use of accurately aimed lumps of brickwork, we managed to retain small strips, still clean and pure white, though abruptly exposed to the elements. Unfortunately, some of the strips smashed on impact like shrapnel, but I did collect enough to make a small frieze, much admired by friends. I was rather surprised at the adverse comment this article received in fanzines, one prominent critic stating it was a classic example of "serious constructive vandalism".

Therefore I must warn that my story herewith will be likely once again to lead to adverse comment, but it is an incident I must write about in order to expunge it from my mind...frequently, in the early hours when sleep becomes an unavailable commodity, I think about the sordid affair, and therefore I have taken this opportunity to enter the abstract confession box in the hope that the unexpurgated revelation will serve as a salve to my conscience.

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County Fermanagh is the western county of the Ulster six, and only a few miles west, in Republic of Ireland territory, the Atlantic pounds across the western coast of Ireland. It is a beautiful county, with large lakes of blue water, flat grassland, trees, ancient artifacts, and superb fishing and shooting. One of my friends in Belfast had relatives living in Fermanagh, and he stated he was going to have a day's shooting... specifically, attempting to decimate the duck population. He asked if I would like to spend the day with him. I do not like to see ducks getting blasted -- indeed, I have an affinity with ducks -- but they are still delicious when roasted, with green peas and roast potatoes, so I took a days leave, prepared to have a complete rest from the pressures surrounding me, to commune once more with the countryside, to hear the delicate whistle of the lesser spotted tit warbler, to breathe the pure clean air wafted in via the Gulf Stream.

The day prior to the trip, I told a neighbour about it and he snapped his fingers.

"Listen", he enthused, "do me a favour, will you? I have a fantastic racing pigeon -- cost me a fortune, it did. Will you take it to Fermanagh with you, and release it. It's around a hundred miles which is reasonable intermediate training."

Naturally I said I would be delighted. Next morning, my friend, Rupert Nicholson, called at my house in his car. We accompanied my neighbour to his pigeon loft. Jerking heads surveyed as warily, as if Pigeon Ghod had been in contact with the shapely blue and grey birds.

The neighbour proudly waved a hand in front of a cage displaying a touching scene. A female pigeon was sitting proudly in a nesting box, and strutting in front of her was this magnificent creature, a pigeon such as I had never seen

before, streamlined to perfection, pouting like mad, and uttering a seductive cooing noise. The neighbour then performed a most unsporting act. He picked up a young pigeon buck from a nearby cage, opened the family cage, pulled out the protesting racer and replaced him with the itinerant young pigeon, who couldn't believe his luck. The final act of devastating cruelty was performed before our eyes. The man held the frantic pigeon in front of the cage so he could see the newcomer energetically pressing his suite. He was a writhing mass of spewing feathers in my neighbour's hands. He was put in a basket and it was handed to me. The basket jangled in my hand as the pigeon strove to escape.

"Why did you do that, Reg?" I asked in a rather aggressive manner.

"Simple", he smirked. "When you release that pigeon, he'll bust a gut to get here as soon as possible."

Hmm. I pondered on this logic as we drove westwards along the motorway to Dungannon, thence to Ballygawly, finally into beautiful Fermanagh, and the weather had changed with us to finally conform to autumnal brilliance.

Rupert's relatives were really kind, and had prepared a huge meal on the long table in the farmhouse. We drank copiously, so much so that Rupert's slurred speech suggested that in the afternoon the ducks would be quite safe, but perhaps I wouldn't. Strong coffee was served to Rupert, and in the surprisingly hot blaze of the afternoon sun, he staggered out with the shotgun under his arm. Our host passed comment on the heat of the sun on the car, and should he not put it in the shed, but Rupert said something about the heat being good for his low batteries.

Rupert used a lot of ammunition that afternoon, adding to the lead content of the countryside. I

always stood directly behind him, and he was so befuddled that he didn't seem to notice my surreptitious nudges on his gun arm when the tottering gun barrels were roughly aimed in the right direction. On one occasion a floating feather dappled onto the nearby lake, and Rupert insisted on stepping into the placid water and threshing about in a vain search for a defunct duck. The cold water alerted him to his lack of success, but when we returned to the farm, devoid of a kill, he said he had really enjoyed himself, and was in really good form, smiling and telling rude anecdotes to the host and his boggle-eyed family. At least Rupert accepted his responsibilities as a driver, and refused the proffered alcohol.

The sun was seeking the seclusion of the horizon as we left. The farmer gave us boxes of eggs and muslin-wrapped sides of ham. Rupert opened the boot to receive them, and suddenly uttered a blistering oath as he saw the inert pigeon basket.

"Christ," he mouthed, "you forgot to release the frigging pigeon."

I tried to explain that it was a joint misdemeanour but words failed me as Rupert gingerly opened the basket.

It was pitiful -- a throbbing eye full of frustration signified that the bird was just about with us. It tried to lift itself up on one wing, as if to address us with a homily about man's inhumanity to bird, but it just had no strength. Its feathers fluffed pathetically, it gave one last sustained squawk, riddled with antipathy, and was pronounced close to death. It would not give in, though: its head turned occasionally and the crossed eyes looked at me accusingly.

Rupert hit the accelerator that night. I held the pigeon in the

crook of my arm and, at Rupert's suggestion, breathed on it. Flashing headlights of approaching cars illuminated the grim scene, and there was a slight movement of feathers as my breath caressed the dying bird.

I reckon we created a record that night -- twenty-six minutes from Dungannon to Belfast on the motorway. We reached Belfast and Rupert cut corners and crossed traffic lights until we reached my house. We went into the lounge, and I announced, with a lump in my throat, that birdie rigor mortis had set in. What to do?

A smile of triumph flitted across Rupert's face. He took the bird from my hands and motioned me to follow him. He tracked down my garden hedge towards the light in the pigeon loft. Reg was standing outside, emitting some sort of mystic noise like a gurgling of spittle, intelligible only to pigeons. He ceased the coaxing call, switched off the pigeon loft light, and walked up the path to his house. I could have sworn I heard a stifled sob. As soon as Reg closed the door, Rupert lobbed the torso into the next garden and we tiptoed back to my house.



I made a point of leaving for the office very early next morning, and worked until late at night, but when I got home, my wife said that Reg wanted to see me, no matter how late I got home.

I knocked on his front door, and he invited me in. I was struggling for words, trying to lie myself out of the grim situation, the "did he arrive home in a fast time?" sort of thing, but he shook my hand warmly.

"So sad," he said, eyes creased in torment. "Do you know that he actually reached the steps of the loft. He must have tried too hard to get back to his mate, and he strained his heart. I'll never do that again."

I was so carried away with the utter pathos revealed in the scenario that I was on the point of making an admission, but sanity prevailed. I reasoned that my silence would be a definite boost for local pigeon domesticity.

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Locspiel

((Time to do a quick skim through the locs-pile. To start with, I'm taken to task by **Dave Redd** for the sublime beauty of my work.))

"Your trouble is that you're not **capable** of rushing out a quick in-between zine of cruddy illegible inanities like the rest of us -- you insist on producing something which is visually superb, delightful to hold, fast-moving enough to interest everybody, cast of thousands, beautifully framed n by Gumbo and Rastus (as good as a Bertram Chandler story any day)."

"In other words, RASTUS 2 doesn't look like a hasty in-between zine to me. It looks like the six-months labour of some cultured mandarin (hmm, some OU influence here?), and will soon be demanding equal time on the slipways..."

((I can only hope that this one is rough and ready (reddy?) enough for you, Dave. Several subjects in RASTUS 2 agitated the minds of its

readers, with the Von Neumann probe piece attracting a lot of attention. I'll stick with **Dave Redd** to kick the thing off.))

"Your Von Neumann article has a logical flaw which I'm sure David Langford, esq., could demolish most pleasantly, i.e. that an accumulation of defective Von Neumann probes would result in high density matter. High mass totals yes, but **not** high densities (mass/volume). In fact as probes splattered against each other and the resulting debris sprayed **outwards** the overall density would reduce, eh what?"

"Moreover, as any Guardian science columnist would tell you, incoming Von Neumann probes would still be self-replicating themselves, with a defective percentage of the newly-formed probes still on course for the target star. Consider one probe which self-replicates and produces two defective probes, both trying to head towards the target yet **trying to seperate** at the same time. Separation would require a minute deviation of course **away** from the target in contradiction of the 'defective' programme, and the resulting paradox of probes having to simultaneously obey **and** disobey programming would cause a multiplicity of parallel worlds at the very least. Since we have no proof of the existence of parallel worlds, we have no proof of the existence of Von Neumann probes. Which is where we started."

((Now that's what I call a really neat piece of circular argument. **Roger Waddington** had a much easier explanation for the absence of probes.))

"Not sure of the science involved..., or of what's gone before, but it seems to me that the non-proliferation of Von Neumann probes isn't a sign of a lack of galactic civilisation, but of the universality of **Murphy's Law**: i.e. 'anything that can go wrong, will'. That's surely the best self-checking mechanism of

all, and it doesn't upset your black hole theory at all."

((Hmm, I'll buy the theory that says that if there is any law that is truly universal it is Murphy's law. Meanwhile, a number of you came up with an elegant solution to the problem. Iain Byers was just ahead of the others by a short nose.))

"I really liked your opening bit on the Von Neumann probes. Just the kind of daft idea I while away my spare moments with. How about this? This universe is teeming with Von Neumann probes. Looking out my window, I can see dozens of examples in the garden. I think its called Life. Replicating away like crazy. Actually, it's even devised something to avoid polluting the Universe by excessive reproduction. It's called Death. Seriously though, there's no reason why such probes couldn't have a built-in destruct mechanism, timed to go off after a certain interval. Simple arithmetic could decide the maximum number of probes needed, and by estimating the time it would take for a probe to reproduce, one could work out a practical life-span for the individual probe or even for the entire species... Hell, anyone smart enough to build such a probe would surely be smart enough to foresee the problems and smart enough to circumvent them... What's the big problem? Maybe Carl Sagan ain't as brainy as I thought."

((Some people got even more contemplative about the issue. Take Oscar Dalglish for example.))

"Frank Tipler's statement quoted in 'Synchronicity' annoys me mainly because he uses false logic. He presupposes that if a species is intelligent, then it must necessarily resort to Von Neumann probes in order to identify the presence or absence of intelligent life elsewhere. Apart from the obvious fact that eventually you will run out of

galaxy in a given space to use as raw material, which is one factor against their use, it presupposes a good deal about the nature of the chemistry, mechanics, sociology, and resources of a form of life whose existence isn't even proven, never mind their status identified. It raises the question of what constitutes intelligent life, and given that the life concerned is intelligent, it assumes that life cares whether or not there is any life off its own planet."

"Intelligence must not be confused with technological development. The Greeks are remembered for their social and philosophical development, but were technologically rather underdeveloped. Many questions are being asked just now along the lines of 'Does an intelligent species adapt its environment, or to its environment, where adaptation of its environment is potentially harmful in the long run'. Potential damage need not be measured in terms of the galaxy as a whole, but in terms of the planet itself. The argument assumes such a bad case of parallel development, not only of technologies but also of philosophies, that it is hard to believe that anyone actually thought about this idea before spouting it forth."

((Now onto the other subject that attracted a lot of comment, namely Chuck Connor's diatribe on the state of fandom. On the principle of ladies first, I shall let **Mary Gentle** kick it off.))

"What is this thing called Fandom? That's a question prompted by Chuck's article. I ask because I've been vaguely involved with bits and pieces of it for some time, and I'm still not sure. I don't think it's a great sheep-like mass, oppressed by the inflexible standards of a self-styled elite -- and I could be quite wrong, maybe that's just what it is. The trouble is, I rarely get the 'elite' fanzines, and when I have done, the amount

of incomprehensible in-jokes and obscure references has tended to put me off. But do I worry about it? Do I lie awake nights wondering what a fanzine should be, and if the ones I enjoy reading are it? To be honest: no. The Fandom that suits me seems to be what Sue Thomason refers to as 'postal fandom'. Fine. Maybe that's the anarchic aspect: that you can choose what you want to belong to, and not be overly concerned with the rest. (I still think it's anarchy, and not communo-anarchy; too many individuals and too few groups for the latter.)"

((Mary professes confusion, while **Nigel Richardson** seems to think he has the problem under control.))

"I've yet to see any of the fanzines Chuck has mentioned, and the only time I've heard of them has been during vilification sessions from various folks like Chuck, so I can't really comment. I've never given any consideration to any dogmatic does and don'ts about fanzines and fandom: it's all a daft lark when you come to think of it, a bunch of overlapping conspiracies that just happens to have evolved into something that everyone wants to claim as their own. Most fanzine fiction bores me to tears, but tomorrow I might see a piece that'll change my mind. No-one owns fandom, and whatever Dorey, Hansen, Nicholas, Chuck, you, me, some kid who received his first fanzine this morning, or anyone else has to say about fanzines and fandom is about as intrinsically important as Rolf Harris farting. Fanzines and fandom ought to be fun, interesting and lively; diatribes about standards, excellence, fan-nishness and all that poop are wastebin fodder. But who am I to say anything? There is more to life than criticising Pete Presford's spelling...unless someone has been telling me whoppers."

((Hmm, I'm inclined to think that Nigel's right: it is a pretty daft

thing to be arguing about, really, though that's not stopping **Dave Langford** for a moment.))

"Cuddly Chuck Connor's footwork is really quite remarkable, the way in which he starts off about 'jerkbrain reject hippies' (who he complains are living in the past, etc.), and modulates to complaints about contemporary 'screams of KILL THE FUCKER! to a backing chorus of "I don't understand this so I rips it to shreds"...' Does this make Chuck a jerkbrain reject punk living in the past, or something of the sort -- since the style of fanzine reviewing he's complaining about as a present abuse hasn't actually been seen around for years?..."

((**Richard Faulder** picked up on one aspect of Chuck's piece that is worth commenting further on.))

"...By and large, the thing which distinguishes fan (as opposed to fannish) literature is not the competency of its word-smithing, but the brevity of the piece. Most stories published in fanzines would not take up more than a page or two in a prozine, and even among short stories, this is a bit short for professional publication. In this sense, fiction in fanzines is inherently poor, although what the critics and their critics always seem to mean by this that it is the word-smithing which is poor, and this is only occasionally true. However until would-be writers learn to write at greater length, their work will remain unsaleable."

((A good point, that last one, Richard, and a conclusion that I came to some while ago. As a result, I've set a **lower** limit on fiction submitted to **QUIET SUN** (yes, it is still in progress, folks), in order to encourage people to write to a more natural length, not to cramp an idea into a strait jacket to start with.))

((And now, for a complete change of subject, here's **Dorothy Davies**..))

"I wonder if we simply grow out of music and grow old retaining our youthful loves? I have this recurring picture, which I've tried to incorporate into fiction, so far unsuccessfully, of old people round a piano at the local Old Folks Home, rocking to Jerry Lee Lewis, Little Richard, Elvis (the King) Presley and the like. I wonder if I'll spontaneously start singing along with the oldies when I'm old, just as my mother did recently listening to a Harry Roy record?"

((By pure coincidence, Andy Sawyer sent me the following pic, which illustrates Dorothy's point rather well, I think.))



((Dunno who did the original of that (Andy?), but I make no excuses for using it, since it was so appropriate. And, since I've now already mentioned his name, let's give a little space to the man himself, **Andy Sawyer**.))

"I liked your anecdote about the Dickens pamphlets, the sort of thing that appeals to me. I often find the original editions of books much more attractive than reprints, or rather, I like things which have a bit of history about them. I like the feeling that other people have read and responded to what I'm reading, which is why I don't get too worked up about coming across heavily annotated books. I've got several books from second hand shops which range from old school prizes to books in which a previous owner has written mini-essays on the end-covers, and these books have a sense of personality about them which a more up-to-date reprint would lack. Similarly with my one-and-only copy of **WEIRD TALES**, minus its covers and crumbling away visibly."

((From ancient printed material, to the modern, in the shape of **Shep Kirkbride**.))

"Harry Warner's letter made me realise that the printing trade is changing at an alarming rate. It is not as evident to the man on the street, who is really only interested in picking up his newspaper every morning, but to the likes of myself and Steve Green and thousands of others in the trade it's getting to the point of grabbing the horse's tail and hoping it will pull you towards its destination. To illustrate my point:

Sixteen years ago, during my apprenticeship, I spent a majority of my last year's training on a Model 1 Linotype, only to find that we were changing over to a new system. The Linotype in question now stands in the front foyer of our offices, all painted and gleaming as an antique, a sparkling example of things long gone! Ghod, and I'm only a young chap!"

((I know what you mean, Shep -- I have to deal with printers a lot at the OU, and in ten years, the

methods of production have been changed out of all recognition))

((Time for a little egoboo -- not for me, you understand, but for the artists in RASTUS 2, from the best source, another artist, namely **Dave Collins.**))

"I was surprised to see Shep's signature on the cover; it's quite a bit different from the style he has entertained us with on other fanzine covers. It took quite a while but it did grow on me, though not a great deal I'm afraid. it did illustrate the editorial well."

"Shep's full pager on page nine is a totally different matter. 'Faceache' is one of the finest pieces of cartooning I've seen in a fanzine this year (it says a lot when the majority of other pieces to catch my eye are also by Shep). The man's mind must be blown out of the top of his skull...There

have been a small number of British fan artists who always seem to reap the praise and rewards: I can see Shep Kirkbride smashing apart their dominance of fanzine artwork single handed."

"Okay, now that Shep is feeling justly proud of himself, I'd better reveal that 'Faceache' is the second best piece of artwork in RASTUS 2."

"Take a bow Earl Geier for that beautiful back cover. So far, Earl has had the best cover of the year (RASTUS 1), one of the best inside illustrations (CRYSTAL SHIP 8), and now the best back cover. As in all his pieces the composition and execution are flawless, and the result is both eyecatching and funny..."

((Steady on, Dave, all this praise will have the guys beginning to think in terms of m*o*n*e*y for their work, and that would be a real killer on my costs!))



Phew, just enough room for the credits. Cover was by Iain Byers, Brad Foster did the illos on p.3 and p.5, Steve Fox did p.7 and 16,

Atom did the illos to John Berry's article, and the famous artist Anon did the one on p.15. RASTUS 4 will be out rather quickly, so loc soon!

