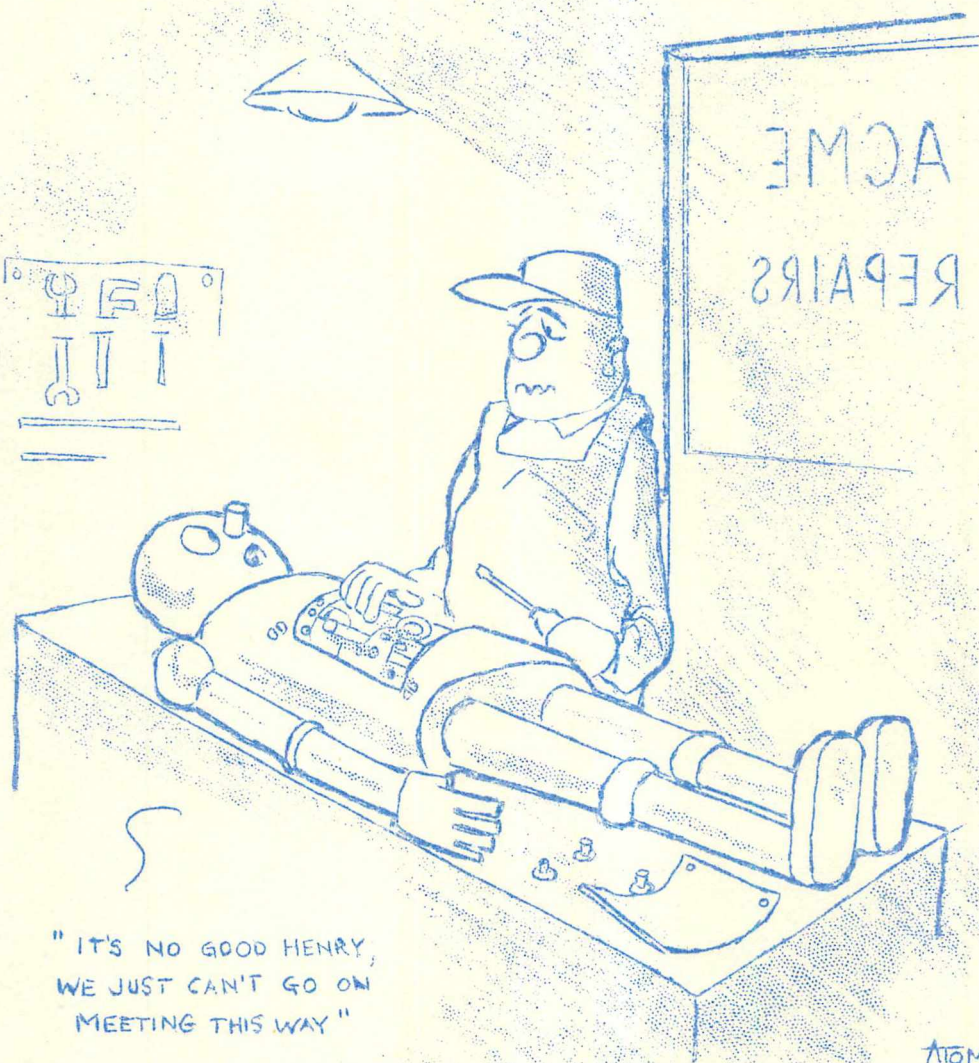


THE SCARR



People laugh at the funniest things. (Jas White)



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THE SCARR

November 1966 # 111 OMFA 50

Once again the deadline is here and after much burning of midnight oil (like, "Oi'll do it later — much later!") the issue is almost finished. Only things left to do are collating and stapling and addressing envelopes and buying stamps.... Sometimes I wish The SCARR was published irregularly — like HYPHEN.

There is no letter column: I will not admit that two letters can stretch that far. On the other hand a reduction in the number of letters reduces the work....

I had intended in this issue to have a few remarks about our Government and the two main political parties, the Knaves and the Fools, but time is fugiting.

The artwork in this issue (as if you didn't know it already) is by the one and only Arthur Thomson.

For those interested in AUTObiography: I have traded in the Austin Cambridge for an Anglia, and although I've had it now for three months I've only had it repaired twice.

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ON November 13 the Sunday Post, a Scottish newspaper reported: "The men were driving their 60-foot truck loaded with two 50-ton girders weighing over 25 tons each when suddenly the truck went out of control." It wasn't until the 16th that the Belfast Telegraph retorted with: "Since he took over a year ago profits have doubled from £550,000 to over £4,000,000."

There has been no reply from Scotland yet.

My name will live for ever. —Anon.

The Northern Ireland Milk Publicity Council recently issued a leaflet containing some recipes. The first one reads: "WITCHES' CAULDRON SOUP: Serve any type of soup in a large preserving pan, decorating the handle

with black paper."

Just shows how easy cookery is, doesn't it?

"...when Orusan died so unwontedly..." —Brian Aldiss, IMPULSE.

It is traditional to have a blurb before every story in a s-f magazine and it is also traditional that the blurb must be idiotic as possible. At last they got so bad that I quit reading them — any merit a story had was ruined completely by the editorial maundering. However, Fantastic and Amazing are now reprint magazines so instead of reading the stories I now just read the blurbs. (The result is the same, anyway.) The November Fantastic has a classic example: the story is Breakfast at Twilight by Philip K Dick. The story is about a family thrown forward in time (to meet war, death and destruction) and returning. The blurb says: New Algis Budrys stories are hard to come by these days — especially since ROGUE MOON just missed taking a Hugo back in 1960 — but at least we can offer you a vintage short you may have missed, a tale of doom stripped down to its essentials — to a castaway, a cat, and the usual sea waiting to devour them both!

Oh, well, at any rate they spelt its correctly!

Things will be much better in a thousand years time. Wanna bet?

From a religious tract pinned up on a wall in the Aircraft Factory I quote the following:

There is no other friend that I love so dear,
Who bears all our sorrows, wipes away every tear.
I was once a Protestant, later a Catholic I became,
But now, praise God, I have been born again.

It is signed Mary Wilson, but I feel sure there are more Mary Wilson's than the wife of the Prime Minister.

"Everything they do nowadays is contemporary." —BoSh.

AD ASTRA?

BOB SHAW

AT THE AGE of 14 I decided to become an astronomer.

As a first step in achieving this ambition, I read every book on the subject in the public library at the rate of one or two a week. This second-hand stargazing was satisfying enough for some months, but, as time wore on, it became apparent that a telescope of one's own was de rigueur for up-and-coming astronomers.

The concentrated reading course had taught me quite a bit about astronomical instruments and I was able to decide at once that the best one for my purpose would be a five-inch telescope, which, in non-technical language, is a telescope which measures five inches across the fat end. Unfortunately, although the library books had dealt very thoroughly with matters like focal lengths, chromatic aberration and alt-azimuth mountings, they had been completely mute on the subject of prices. There was, as I was later to learn, a very good reason for this omission. A first-class five-inch telescope with accessories can easily cost several hundred pounds, and as the theme of most of the authors was, "How foolish it is to waste money going to the cinema when you can survey the limitless splendours of the Universe for nothing?" they were understandably reluctant to descend to the vulgar financial details. However, I was unaware of all this at the time, and in the absence of guidance estimated a price by myself. The calculation was quite simple — I had once owned a telescope measuring about one inch across which had cost me three shillings; the one I wanted to buy was five times thicker and therefore should cost three shillings multiplied by five, equals fifteen shillings. Allowing a bit extra for inflation I reckoned that if I raised eighteen shillings I would be in a position to put up a serious challenge to Armagh Observatory.

Some weeks later — slightly weakened by total abstinence from regular items of diet such as Nutty Nibs and Jap Dessert, but filled with an unbearably delicious sense of anticipation — I cycled downtown on a brisk Saturday morning to purchase a telescope, with almost a pound safely buttoned in my hip pocket. Saving the money had been hard work so I decided not to actually go into the first instrument maker's shop I came to in case he hadn't got a five-inch telescope in stock and talked me into buying a less powerful four-inch, or even a miserable little three-inch. Accordingly, I went round all the instrument makers and after hours of studying their window displays and peering in through their doors began to feel slightly disappointed. None of them seemed to have

any decent-sized telescopes, and I could hear in my imagination the familiar phrase, "Oh, we'd have to send away to England for that."

Finally dusk began to fall and, as it was bitterly cold and lunch-time was several hours past, I decided to compromise. One of the shops had had a skimpy little thing of not more than two inches diameter in the window and although it was a pale imitation of what I wanted it would at least let me get cracking on the limitless splendours of the universe that very evening. The money left over after buying it, I consoled myself, would be a good start towards the price of a proper telescope.

The thin, meticulously neat, severe-looking man behind the counter did not seem particularly pleased to see me. He jerked his head inquiringly and went on polishing a row of expensive cameras.

"I'm interested in the telescope you have in the window."

He stopped polishing and fixed a cold gaze on my cycle clips. I withstood the scrutiny confidently, knowing the cycle clips were as good as money could buy. I decided to let him know that here was a fellow expert on precision instruments.

"It's got an object glass of about two inches," I said, realizing it might be a good idea to chat about technical details for a while, and only after he had seen that I knew something about telescopes bring up the subject of price.

"It's thirty two pounds ten," he said with a complete lack of finesse or preamble, and went back to polishing the cameras.

The blow did not hit me right away. I sneered at the back of his head a couple of times then dashed out of the shop with two objectives in mind — to buy the telescope before closing time and to spread word around the trade that one of its members was trying to sell six-shilling telescopes for thirty two pounds ten. Half an hour later I was slowly cycling homewards, sickened by the discovery that they were all in it together. It seemed I was shut off from the stars as effectively as if huge steel shutters had sprung up from behind the Castlereagh Hills on one side and the Black Mountain on the other and had clanged together overhead.

The despair lasted several days, then, with a resurgence of hope, I realised what had to be done. It was all so simple. If the people who sold brand new telescopes had formed a price ring the thing was to pick up a second-hand instrument from some friendly old junk dealer who had no idea of its current market value. Within a week I had developed a deep and implacable hatred for friendly old junk dealers — obviously somebody had told them what the telescope makers were up to and the unscrupulous rogues had pushed their own prices up to within shillings of the brand-new prices. The stars would have to wait, but this time the situation didn't seem quite so hopeless. I couldn't believe that junk dealers would be as well organized as instrument makers and there was always the chance that one day one of them would make a mistake.

Then began a phase of my life which lasted several years and

gave me an unrivalled knowledge of Belfast's second-hand shops, even those in distant quarters of the city. On Saturdays and lunch hours and holidays I spent my time checking the dingy little shops, going in hopefully each time a new telescope appeared, coming out in renewed despair on hearing the price. Not once during those years did a friendly old junk dealer make a mistake. They maintained the price barrier which separated me from the distant untrodden reaches of the universe as though it was all part of a gigantic plot.

Fruitless though the search was, it produced an occasional memorable experience. One Saturday afternoon I was prowling through the darker corners of Smithfield Market when I discovered a tiny brass object which I immediately recognized as being the eye-piece of a fairly large telescope. It was completely useless to me, but out of sheer force of habit, I asked the price from the old woman in charge. After sizing me up carefully she announced that it was seven and sixpence. Her business sense must have been remarkably good for I had about eighteen shillings in my pocket at that moment, and immediately said I would buy. There was absolutely nothing I could do with the eye-piece of course, but it was the first thing in the telescope line that had come into my price range, and I had to have it. I had come a long way from that first morning when I set out to buy a five-inch telescope.

The old lady knew the object was only an eye-piece from a perhaps six-foot long instrument but she had no way of knowing that I too fully understood this, and, when she saw my obvious delight at the price, seemed to feel a pang of unprofessional remorse. She stood for a while as greed battled with guilt, then slowly handed the tiny tube over and took my money. As I was going out through the door she emitted a faint strangling sound which made me look back, and I realised she was going to speak.

"You know," she finally ground out, "there's a piece missing."

I nodded. Having gone that far she had made peace with her conscience and we parted in a glow of mutual satisfaction. Surprisingly enough, my money was not altogether wasted because I began to pick up other vaguely telescopic items in the form of magnifying glasses and spectacle lenses, and discovered that it was possible to make telescopes — after a fashion, that is. My first one was constructed from a piece of lead piping, made stars look like little balls of illuminated candy floss, and was so heavy that when I let it fall from the bedroom window one night it woke half the street and threw one of my father's dogs into some kind of fit.

That was the first occasion on which I became aware of a rather odd fact. Astronomy was presumably the quietest and most respectable pursuit any teenager could be expected to take up, but every time I got into my stride people and small animals kicked up hell. There was the time I built a telescope with a wooden tube and made the marvellous discovery that some of the tiles on our roof could be slid out of the way, leaving a hole big enough to poke the telescope through from the attic. I began work on a suitable telescope mounting right away but during the first half hour our front door was almost pounded down by panic-stricken passers-by coming to warn us that our roof was collapsing. So great was the consternation caused by my private observatory that one of the first people to

Peeps into my Diary



1965

Mar 14 Sun In Berlin a number of nurses have just been tried for murdering patients during the war. In extenuation they pleaded that they had never killed anyone on Sundays or Christmas Day. German judges have a sense of humour: case dismissed.

Mar 17 Wed Three books I'd like to have written, for personal satisfaction, not for egoboo: The Soft Impeachment, Lord Baba, Turnabout. LA's preference: Lucky Jim, Wuthering Heights, Ulysses.

Mar 25 Thu C M Kornbluth 70 THE SYNDIC. Do not remember reading this as a serial. Earth 1000 or so in future. The Syndic, the Mob and the Government, with Charles as shuttlecock. Very good final chapter.

Mar 29 Mon Fred Hoyle 70 OSSIAN'S RIDE. Aliens bring super technology to 30,000 acre area in Co. Cork. Entrance forbidden. Acting as Secret Agent Thomas Sherwood goes via Fishguard/Rossalare/Dublin/Armagh/Longford/Mitchelstown/Limerick/Kilkee into this area and meets the "aliens." A let-down.

Mar 30 Tue Last week the Tories introduced a bill to help old people financially. Probably a political stunt (what else could one expect?), but the Labour party filibustered it out of existence. Pity they didn't do that to the huge increases they voted themselves (what else could one expect?). The Labs also brought in two sorta Hungarians to help with their sums. Also an American to help with P.O. problems. To help the aircraft industry they have decided to buy planes from America for £500 million.

All Fool's Day John O'Hara 70 ASSEMBLY. 26 shorts & Foreword. He says that one cannot excerpt a passage from a novel and let it stand on its own as a short. Even if this is true there are bound to be exceptions, but darned if I can think of one.

Apr 9 Jack Finney 60 I LOVE GALESBURG IN THE SPRINGTIME. Sorta sf, sorta time-travel. I liked.

Apr 13 D'Arcy Niland 70 DADDA JUMPED OVER TWO ELEPHANTS. Two books with catchy titles in one week. Australian. Shorts.

Apr 26 To 170 Upper Newtownards for last time. To mark occasion a time capsule was buried in the garden!

May 7 Damon Knight 50 BEYOND THE BARRIER. An expanded version of F & SF serial. Professor Gordon Naismith gradually realises that he is being driven, by a couple who can travel in time, to go with them into the future to kill a Zug. He goes — and finds that he himself is the Zug. Plot is intricate & should be clearly explained but isn't, probably because Knight couldn't: time-travel is too paradoxical for explanation. Me, I don't care much for stories about time-travel. As I've said before (and will again) there's no future in it.

May 10 John Lymington 30 THE SCREAMING FACE. Lordy, lordy! but it is wordy. In this one the earth has a twin sister, but the bright boys say it's impossible, so the story falls flat on its face!

May 16 Katherine McLean 60 THE DIPLOIDS. Funny: she says factorial 24 is 24 plus 23 plus 22...&c, which comes to (quote) a very large number. I'm no mathematician. (Unquote) She can say that again!

May 21 Zane Grey 60 BOULDER DAM. First time I ever heard (or read) of three-decker buses.

May 22 Charles Eric Maine 70 NEVER LET UP. First non-sf I ever read by CEM and the first story by him I've liked. There's a moral in this, somewhere!

Jun 11 Harry Patterson 90 CRY OF THE HUNTER. Unusual kind of story though it will never be classed as the Great Irish Novel. Martin Fallon, retired old-timer of the I.R.A. is persuaded to leave his cottage near the Border & enter Ulster to rescue the head of the organisation there. He rescues Rogan & gradually realises that Rogan is just a blood-crazy hoodlum, typical of the scum of which the IRA is now composed. He kills Rogan & is himself killed.

Jun 26 Helen McCloy 80 SURPRISE, SURPRISE. 8 shorts, mostly sf-based. Title story is about Martians on a visit to Earth. They are all one sex but paired off as chewers & digesters. Former chew the food, latter digest it, returning half to chewer.

Jun 27 Edgar Wallace 70 THE DOUBLE. Quote: "The only thing he had heard in his disfavour was that on one occasion, when a poor cousin, his sole relative, had called at the house to secure his help in a time of trouble, Mr Derriek had sent for the police....which was curiously unlike the big, genial soul." When Wallace's mother called on him for help (says Margaret Lane) he refused even to see her.

Jul 2 James Blish 50 A CLASH OF CYMBALS. Last of the Okie stories. About three-quarters of the book is gobbledegook conversation. The

end of everything comes as a result of two cosmoses meeting. Hamilton used to wreck worlds, Blish wrecks cosmoseses!

Jul 14 B N Ball 60 SUNDG. SF. Future; here breaks up monopolistic, unbenevolent government. No feminine interest at all, at all!

Jul 20 Brian W Aldiss 50 GREYBEARD. After the Big accident of 1981 men and women are sterile. Famine & plague kill off most of the population. Finally Greybeard and his wife discover some children. All the other authors who've tried this theme did it better. It reads like a pot-boiler — it IS a pot-boiler.

Jul 25 Mary C Bromage DE VALTRA AND THE MARCH OF A NATION. 300pp. She does not say if his name is accented on penultimate or antepenultimate syllable, but she does explain how he was baptised Edward, but registered in NY where he was born as George. He preferred the Irish form of Edward: Eamon. His story from boyhood in Co Limerick to his return to power in the Dail in 1953. He had a sense of humour, conscious and unconscious. Former illustrated by an incident in Ennis in 1924. While making a speech there the previous year he had been arrested. On his release eleven months later he went back to Ennis, got a boisterous welcome and spoke to the crowd: "People of Ennis, as I was saying when I was interrupted...." He showed unconscious humour when the US entered the war in 1942 and a battalion of US troops landed in Ulster. He at once protested to Washington that he had not been consulted about this! A great Irishman, though.

Jul 26 John Lymington 30 THE GREEN DRIFT. Earth invaded by tiny insects from outer space! They live on electricity so when the juice is cut off they depart. Ha! But the oddest thing about this book is the conversations: they go on and on and on. Every page except three or four has a big quota of talk-talk-talk. There is also a bit of time-travel which is as ridiculous as it always is.

Jul 29 J Hunter Holly 40 THE TIME TWISTERS. People of the future come back to kidnap children who are becoming scarce in their age, as aliens have demanded millions of children from them. (What for? I dunno!) So they come back into their past (our present) when kids are plentiful to get a few million children to give them ol' aliens. They fail in this attempt and history would already have told them they'd failed so why did they come back at all? Tchhh!

Jul 31 Visiting brother Bob I wore a beautiful vividly-coloured shirt. Bob said, "For goodness' sake, why do you not wear a plain shirt?" Me: "This is not a plane shirt, this is my CAR shirt." Bob: "A little garish, innit?"

Aug 8 Russell Braddon 70 THE PROUD AMERICAN BOY. Eight-year-old negro in Alabama sent to jail for rape. Civil rights workers, reporters, &c, fight for his freedom, opposed, naturally, by KKK & their adherents. Boy is accidentally poisoned and dies repeating: "I believe in the United States of America as a Government whose just powers are derived from the consent....." This is phony: impossible to believe that a grown man, never mind an eight-year-old, dying in agony, would say this. A pity — the rest of the book is good.

the end of the scarr number 111 from 3 Lancaster Av BANGOR N.IRELAND.

