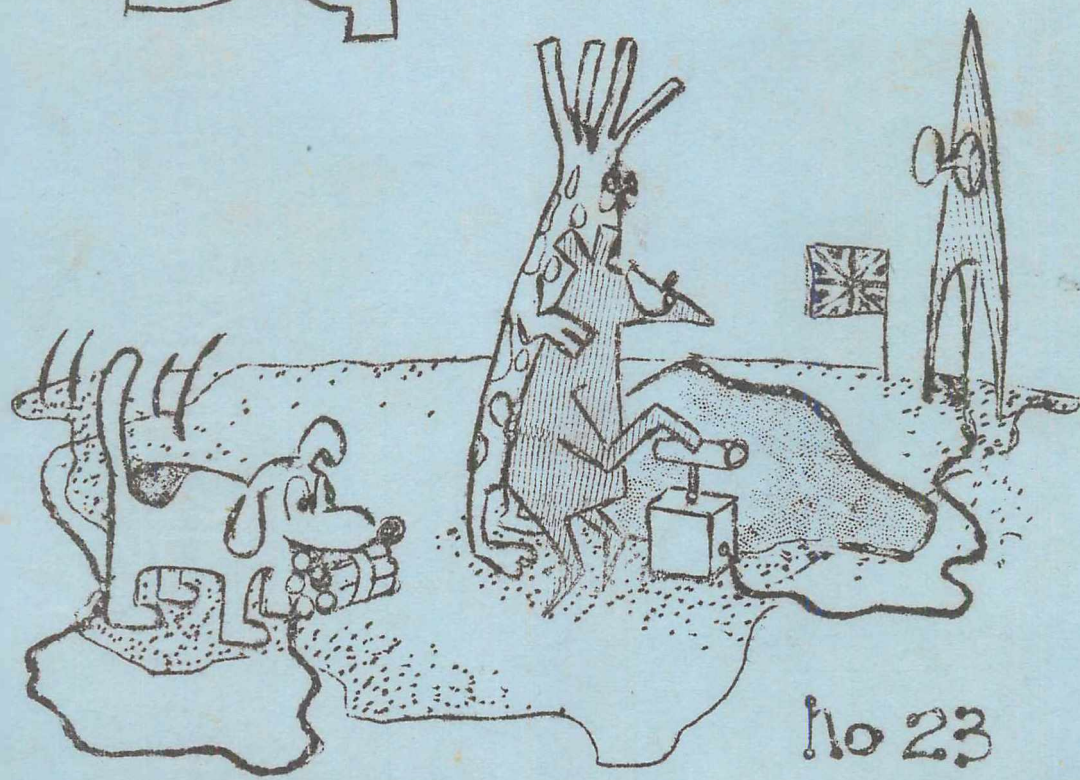
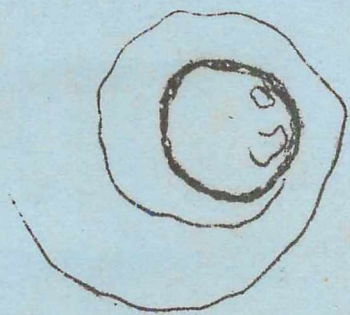


# SMALL FRIENDLY DOG



Atom

No 23





Lucky WAHF-FULL readers! But would they like to spend their evenings watching programming in Urdu or Serbo-Croatian? Me, I prefer to be able to understand what I'm watching.

"I am not a racist... I see no genetic reasons as to why the lesser races can't be brought to a level equal to or above our own."

James Styles writing in THE MENTOR 43 (April 1983).

I'm sure all members of those 'lesser races' will be chuffed-to-little-butties about that, James. And from that same issue of THE MENTOR, Diane Fox talks about one SF book that I definitely think I'll pass on:-

"I plan to set a future novel on Mars. I don't know why, the idea just appeals."

Aha! "What we doing on Mars, Kemo Sabe?" "Dammit Tonto, why do you lesser races never understand anything? We are on Mars 'cos it's such an appealing idea. Now shut up and eat your marsburger!" The bind moggles! And finally here's a near neighbour in New Zealand getting in on the act, the infection presumably having been carried on the prevailing wind:-

"Interestingly enough he was part of an experiment to grow a baby from a fetus..."

Graham Ferner (who presumably still supports the 'stork' theory) writing in SNEETCH 1 (March 1983).

A previous winner of the 'blush-of-the month' award, Richard Faulder, taking it in the spirit in which it was intended, replied:-

"My first reaction to the back-page quote was 'I didn't write anything so awfully pompous, did I?' Took me a while to find the original quote, in fact. Thanks for bringing it to my attention. It's good to laugh at oneself once in a while."



Now me, when I make a fool of myself in print it's rarely in a manner that can be laughed-off to experience. Usually it's a sackcloth-and-ashes job, like later on in this issue (yes, again), but I already told you Michael, you'll have to be a bit patient. I'll get to it. In a more recent letter Richard had a few more things to say, zeroing straight in upon the most important topic of the last SFD:- "What's the point of a covered vase? I would have thought that it would make it rather difficult to get the flowers in." Look, dummy, you take the lid off to put the flowers in, kapische? Then, when you put the lid back on the buggers can't get out and you don't have to look at the stupid rotting things either. However, we can't keep talking amongst ourselves like this Richard, everyone else will start to lose track of who's saying what, where, and to whom. Get up there on stage and do it properly.

RICHARD FAULDER PO box 136, Yanco, N.S.W. 2703, Australia.

Well, it looks as though you were able to open that Slaver stasis box fairly smartly, for which I'm suitably grateful.

I predict that Arthur Thomson is heading for another heart attack, caused by obesity this time rather than smoking. That expression 'post industrial society' has always struck me as a bit odd. To my mind there's never been any intimation that it meant a return to a pre-industrial society. However, it's never been quite clear to me just what those who use it have in mind when considering how goods and services will be provided in this brave, new, but unspecified world.

The trouble with platitudes is that they represent only an incomplete truth. (For the purposes of further discussion I declare that the foregoing sentence is not a platitude.) The statement from Arthur D. Hlavaty that you quote on page 25 rather assumes that an unprincipled selfish person is capable of loving anybody besides (or perhaps even) themselves. From this I rather get the impression that Arthur likes to see himself as an unprincipled selfish person, opposed to liberals and environmentalists. I'll bet ~~he's~~ a Republican.

The sort of material that you are describing as fannish material salable to mundanes isn't really fannish at all except

in the sense that it is written by fans and published in fanzines. Thurber is a good example of the sort of writer you are talking about, but so was Saki or, to name a couple of examples from the other side of the Atlantic, Alfred Toombes or the woman who wrote 'The Egg and I' and its sequels. These are all examples of people who have the ability to take ordinary events in one's life and write about them with wit and humour (not always or necessarily the same thing). Now, if you want to compile similar material from the fanzines go right ahead by all means, but they can be sold to people who do not even read SF, let alone those who enter fandom. True fanwriting deals with science fiction and the subculture which has grown up around it. I notice a tendency in yourself and Eric Mayer, a tendency to consider any material which is witty and humorous as fanwriting, which is very flattering to yourselves and us, but does rather smack of the ghetto. It is true that there isn't so much of that sort of material being published by the general publishing industry as there once was, but this is probably attributable more to editorial fashion than anything else. Editors don't seem to think that a generation conditioned to the instant visual humour of TV will appreciate such material, so that, by and large, they don't buy it. If such material again became salable I'm sure that a new generation of humorous writers would appear, perhaps from fandom, perhaps from elsewhere.

Why the re-use of the 'Small Friendly Dog' title?

23 June 1983 (Skel)

Whow! I know that Patrick accused me of taking an informal approach to my fanac last issue, but it never occurred to me that some of the people on my mailing list might not even know what this fanzine is called. No matter what play I may make with the initials 'SFD' it is actually called SMALL FRIENDLY DOG. Also, notwithstanding cockups on last issue's back cover, this is the twentythird issue and is published by Skel and Cas from their secret den at 25 Bowland Close, Offerton, Stockport, Cheshire, SK2 5NW, England. Hand up all those who can honestly say that they realised that they were still in the colophon even though they'd gotten right to the bottom of page six? Is this a

record, I ask myself. I suspect that myself and others will come back to the topic of what is or isn't fanwriting later on but Richard did make one other comment:- "And whatever happened to the discussion of 'nice' fandom?"

Well yes, we never did get around to that, did we? OK, let's move right on to it, and whose name is first out of the hat...Oh No! It's Richard Faulder who wrote, "Ah, back to the middle agers. As a general principle I tend to agree with you that '...as you get older you tend to change at a slower rate'. However, all this depends on your capacity for change, and how much change you're prepared to allow yourself. For various reasons too complicated to go into now my own social development was held almost static during my adolescent, university and teaching years, which meant that at 28 I had an awful lot to catch up on (and still do). Truth to tell, the whole thing is proving fairly traumatic. On the other hand, I know people who have blocked themselves off from any sort of meaningful change by convincing themselves of their own perfection in order to protect themselves from their own insecurity. Such people need to reassure themselves of this perfection, so they spend their time shouting down anyone who disagrees with them. As you say, an immature reaction."

Oh come on now, I wouldn't say I was that bad. In fact, there seems to be some question as to whether or not I'm even middle-aged. Cas says it's ridiculous to think oneself middle-aged at thirty-five (she's thirty-six and presumably afraid of 'guilt' by association). I suspect that to her way of thinking you're young until you're 98, middle aged until 99, and old when you reach 100. Mind you, she isn't the only one to disagree with me on this.

Laurraine Tutihasi says:- "This issue of STAGNANT FOUL DUNGEONS seems rather depressing, especially the way you went on and on about middle-age. You think thirty-five is middle-age? I'm only a year younger and I don't feel middle-aged. The only difference is I'm not married. Does being married make one feel older?"

Well yes, I suppose it does in a way. Not so much being



married per se (but being married to Cas, YES!) but the constant proximity of the skelhorde is an ever-present reminder of the way I used to be and the amount that I've changed. Oh, I don't feel particularly middle-aged (except when I wake up with a grinding hangover), but I wonder if anyone ever does. To paraphrase Avedon Carol, I am the star of my own movie and as everybody knows stars are mighty-thewed and handsome...and young. I've already won the hand of my princess but I suspect that the scriptwriter was saving the riches of the kingdom, the fame and fortune, for the sequel, 'Skel-life II'. I still feel a little cheated that they're going to re-title and re-cast it. I'm sure, with what I've learned and with what I'll continue to learn, that I could play a much better part given another chance. Phil Stephenson-Payne has some similar thoughts:-

"I found your comments on 'growing' and 'middle-aged' profoundly depressing. Not because I think them untrue, but it seems such an awful waste of time everybody having to go through the same process. When a child you never listen to anybody who says you will 'grow out of it' or that they 'know better because they've been through it', and then as an adult you find yourself wanting to say the same to children you meet. It is also depressing because I'm not sure how much of what we acquire is 'tolerance' and how much is sheer 'conformity'. I remember I was certainly more of an idealist when younger, and concerned with doing things I believed in rather than the things society expected of me. That's hard work though, and gradually I've found myself conforming because it's the 'easier way out'. How many middle-aged rebels are there?

Do we really grow older and wiser and more tolerant? Or is it just that we always feel that the state we are in and the age we are at is the best state/age to be, and that those younger than us are too immature, those older too set in their ways? I incline to think the second version is perhaps more accurate."

There's a lot in that last point, Phil, but I get the impression that you think such an attitude means we are fooling ourselves. I see it as a natural, inevitable and advantageous state of affairs. At whatever age and state we have reached we



have developed just enough to appreciate the advantages and disadvantages of being where we are. We know too where we've been but cannot 'know' where we're going. I don't think we rationalise that our state is 'better' so much as that it is 'different', that it does have advantages as well as disadvantages and that we accept the trade because we have no other choice. We dwell on the benefits because that is only natural. Our bodies start to go downhill from about the age of eighteen but we don't all rush out and throw ourselves over a cliff when that birthday comes around. If we all dwelled upon the debit side of growing older the world would be full of grotch-heads.

I suspect that we were all far more idealistic when we were younger. How could it be otherwise? Youth hasn't had the chance to learn that wishing won't make it so. Ideals have to be translated into practicalities and suddenly you discover that different people have slightly different ideals, and that ideals have to be paid for. I'd be quite prepared to pay for my ideals but I'm buggred if I'll foot the bill for yours. So it goes. It's an imperfect world and no magic fairy is going to wave her wand and make it all come right overnight, not that it'd be easy getting a consensus on how to define that 'right'. Idealists seem to think that you can just unplug some of the unjust bits and plug in replacements. The world is not black and white, but a complete range of grey shades. You've got to compromise. Youthful idealists see compromise as weakness, as giving in. Heros never compromise, they fight and win.....on rare occasions. Generally they fight and lose. Like evolution you must change and adapt, compromise, or go under. But what am I doing going on like this? After all, Alexis Gilliland points out:-

"Middle-aged and nice fans usually aren't burning to write. Thus they lack the blazing energy that characterizes the typical young fanwriter. Of course, that might also be 'flaming idiocy' I'm thinking of." Paula Lieberman gets down to specifics with:-

"I suppose some people get their jollies looking at fan feuds in print. Personally there have been situations where people have made unfavorable comments about me in fanzines with

unrestricted circulation, but hadn't bothered to send me copies of them. Rather tacky of them (it was the faneditors who had made the comments, not the LoCers). And looking on while other people insist on quarreling in a fanzine is only briefly, if for any length of time, amusing to me. 'SFD may be the ultimate in harmlessness' might be an insult from various and sundry fanzine reviewers, but I wish that 'harlessness' like SFD's were a more widespread characteristic."

Ned Brooks pushed aside his coffin lid, staggered forth, dusted off his typewriter-keys and wrote:- "I quite agree with Eric Mayer about fandom. One of the things that most attracted me to it in the early 60s was the impression that not only were the fans I met intelligent and had a common background in The Literature, they were also, for the most part, Nice People. They were pleasant, kind, and for the most part free of irrational prejudices. Fandom then could not be bought or sold. It was given away, freely, to anyone who could grasp it. Ah well, perhaps the cycle will come round again."

'S funny you should mention that - about fandom not being bought or sold, because I got this really weird letter recently. It was from the 'New York in '86' people and as near as I could make out they wanted to pay me twenty-five bucks for the privilege, such as it is, of associating my name with their bid. I told them to shove it, though I phrased it somewhat more politely. I do still have some ideals....or do I? My first reaction was that my good name (hah!) was not for sale. The simple fact though is that they simply hadn't reached anywhere near my price, nor is anyone in fandom ever likely to. If I'm going to peddle my arse it's not going to be for a measly twenty-five bucks. My name means more to me than that. So, I can appear to have ideals in fandom simply because the ante is never likely to get upped anywhere near high enough.

Let me hasten to add here that I've not actually got anything against the NY bid - I know nothing about it or any of its competition. It's buggar all to do with me. But we're drifting off course here, and as anyone will tell you, SFD is not a zine that rambles. Steve George might even agree with that (or he might not) but then the term 'dumb Canuck' must've

come from somewhere. Steve though is sensible (he agrees with me) and says:- "I prefer 'nice' fandom to grotty back-stabbing purposefully offensive screaming young rip 'em to shreds and kick 'em in the nuts 'not so nice' fandom. But I've never considered SFD to be bland or middle-aged or nostalgic. I'm 22 but maybe I've aged before my time because I find SFD to be about as loud and controversial as I can handle. But then, I'm a suck. What the hell is Mike Ashley talking about? Who needs a fanzine that evolves with every issue? You evolve until you find your niche and then you stay there and you stick with the people who like what you're doing and everyone is happy. And evolution is a slow process anyway, unless you take into account drastic mutation, and unless you've recently acquired a second head then I expect SFD won't drastically change in the next few issues."

Why, even Joseph Nicholas is in danger of becoming a Boring Old Fart and agreeing:- "I could always add some sort of murmur to the burgeoning Higgins versus 'nice' fandom debate to the effect that two years ago I might have agreed with him - to the extent, no doubt, of actually saying what he did, albeit at thrice the verbosity and one-tenth the intelligibility - but would now find myself on entirely the opposite side of the fence, agreeing with you and Eric and Mike and all the rest. But I'd qualify this /Gosh, what a surprise!/ by pointing out that this in no way commits me to upholding, or even acknowledging, all the supposed virtues or defects of 'niceness', for the simple reason that the indiscriminate application of the credo can only result (as far as I'm concerned) in a species of wholesale hypocrisy -- uncritical acceptance of the second or third-rate for instance, on the grounds that being 'nice' involves not making waves or in anyway upsetting anyone, with the inevitable result that a mood of 'anything goes' eventually comes to prevail and standards as a whole nose-dive into ignominy. Tolerance has little or nothing to do with it: the truth is that quality, originality, skill, insight, whathaveyou remain at a premium regardless of where you happen to stand, and the only difference lies in the manner in which such goals are pursued. The trouble is of course, that of late the pursuit of quality appears to have become bound up with aggressiveness, as though everyone were under the impression that



standards can only be raised by shouting about them. This of course results in the opposite of aggressiveness, niceness, being automatically equated with hypocrisy and uncritical acceptance of the third-rate, as above; but -- aside from the fact that this is an entirely justifiable argument, if for no other reason than that history tends to bear it out time and time again -- such is not the case at all....."

Of course it bloody well isn't! It is possible to disagree with someone, to be critical of them in some way, without being nasty or aggressive. Such approaches in fact are counter-productive as they get people's backs up and prejudice them against the content of the criticism. If you antagonise people they are far less likely to be able to respond to the validity, if any, of your comments. People tend to react emotionally to the tone of criticism rather than to its content.

When Dan Steffan says I am not one of fandom's premier writers I can accept this, not only because it's true, but because he hasn't muddied up the waters in the way he's said it. If he'd said, "Bloody hell, this mong-brained asshole couldn't string a coherent sentence together to save his miserable, worthless life." I would have resented it not because it would not have been true (which it wouldn't), but because of it's tone. Conversely he, or anyone else could have said, "Bloody hell, this mong-brained asshole sometimes utters such total crap that he end up with both feet in his stupid mouth, both of them at the end of the one of the mis-shapen little legs that he doesn't have to stand on.", and that would be perfectly true and I'd still resent it because of the tone and, resenting it, get into a brouha over it rather than respond to the validity of it. Nastiness and aggressiveness is counter-productive. If someone really cares about standards then it behoves them to phrase their criticism in a fashion that makes it liable to be accepted, rather than in a manner that maintains their image and street credibility, the big bad macho critic shtick, but has just the opposite effect to the one they profess to want.

But, because Dan delivered his comment without any emotive language I can not only respond to its validity but can even pick it up and use it myself in a couple of places because I feel it's important to be aware of one's abilities and limit-



ations - and to keep the whole fanac bit in perspective. I mean, what if I'm not as good a fanwriter as Chris Atkinson or Eric Mayer or Teresa Nielsen-Hayden or Avedon Carol or any number of other people.....so what? I'm not in competition with these people, for God's sake! The question isn't, 'Am I as good?', but rather 'Am I good enough?' Can I write interestingly enough to entertain most of the readers most of the time? Obviously I think the answer to this is 'yes', otherwise I'd be wasting all our time here.

Another fault I find with the young Turks is that they are too concerned with their own image. In the film 'Don't Eat The Daisies' where one of the characters says, of a critic, "There comes a time when a certain joke should not be made, but because it's a good joke, he makes it.", remains with me always. God, I should scrap that sentence and start again, but I think the meaning is clearer than the grammar -- anyway, the young turks are obsessed with their own image. Let the fire fall etc. Who cares who is on the receiving end? If they can't stand the heat they should stay out of the kitchen. Ah, but some kites ... chens are hotter than others. To me the term 'neo' means two things. On the one hand it means that the person in question is just getting started in fandom. It doesn't have any elitist connotations or contain any value judgements, it is simply a statement of fact. We were all neos once - everyone has to get their start in fandom sometime. The thing about fandom is that it is far less stratified than other hobby-interest areas. One remains a neo whilst one behaves like a neo. How long one remains a neo is up to the individual. Some people remain neos for years, others get into the swim of things remarkably quickly. To me a neo is a potentially active fan who is still testing the water. Which brings me to the other thing that the word 'neo' means to me. It means 'handle with care'. When you go to the swimming pool and see a group of people just learning to swim you don't start diving in amongst them and scaring the shit out of them.

To me every neo is a person who not only might fandom an enriching experience, but who might, in their turn, add their own talents to the body of fandom, enriching us all. This does not mean one should praise their efforts willy-nilly, but that

one should temper one's criticisms in certain circumstances. KTF reviewers however are more interested in their own credibility, in 'killing', than in the 'fuckers' themselves. I can remember back when I was a neo.

The first fanzine I ever got was ERG. The second was FOULER. Strange bedfellows. What's more, my first FOULER arrived in the same post as my second or third ERG. Unable to resist such a juxtaposition I wrote a joint LoC to both fanzines. Terry said something to the effect that he wasn't too happy at being compared with FOULER. Greg and Leroy however pissed all over me. They claimed my letter was so tedious they couldn't be bothered reading it beyond the first few paragraphs. They mocked me, and it hurt. Well, maybe it was, I dunno, but I was a neo and unable to handle such shit at the time. I never again wrote to FOULER, nor to any other ratfan fanzines (with the exception of a LoC to the ~~Charnox~~ of such utter banality that the only comment they could find to publish was my question "What technique did you use to print the cover?", a LoC whose sole aim was to keep me on their mailing list as my own fanzine production at the time was insufficient). To this day there are no ratfans on my mailing list (except for the recently re-contacted Malcolm Edwards) and I missed out on a lot of the good seventies fanwriting coming from Greg and Simone. But I hung on in there. Now I accept that there was (presumably) no intention of driving people out of fandom back there, but from comments seen since it is apparent, to me at least, that many fans realised they simply didn't need all this aggro and simply got the hell out. I kept right on sailing but made sure I never went anywhere near the ratfan reefs.

In fact, I avoided all shoal waters. The point I'm trying to make (and whether or not I can recapture the thread should be quite interesting of itself because nearly five whole months have passed since I typed the previous sentence) is that one should temper the tone of one's criticism in certain instances. Also, one should try to be encouraging. This does not mean 'Don't be critical' -- the implication that it does, the implication mirrored in your comments, Joseph, is one of the greatest confidence tricks pulled upon fandom in living memory.

Unfortunately it all comes back to a matter of personal

belief. Obviously I can't point to all the fantastic fan-writing that we've been deprived of by people dropping out of fandom before they've been able to properly develop their talents - because it isn't there! But can anyone point to anyone else who developed into an ace fanwriter because of a KLF review?

But enough of this pretence. Back when I started all this it was going to lead, inexorably, onto Mike Ashley's LoC, of which I was going to use \*vast amounts\*. Alas, someone has been twitching the curtains of the fabric of reality. I have had a Summer of intense fanac (well, intense for me, at any rate). I have gotten out and visited other fans. I have written more articles for other faneds than ever before. And, when I haven't been doing these things, I've been reading fanzines...and if there were no current fanzines to read I've been pulling old ones from the shelves (at the moment I am halfway through CRY 140 from June 1960) -- I would even have attended a (whisper it) convention were it not for a last-minute case of enforced poverty. Everything, in fact, except pubbing my ish. The result is that SFD 23 Mk1 will never appear. Who can say what directions it would have taken, and hence what directions all subsequent SFD's would have taken? We shall never know. It would have been based, to a large degree, on the LoCs in my letter file, but no more. How do I know this? Simple, because I've already written most of it. That's right, this issue SFD is not mostly straight-on-stencil stuff. Yes, this time the bulk of SFD will have had two drafts! Read and tremble. Mike, that wasn't a tremble, that was a yawn - watch it!

Anyway, no more. There's no longer going to be room for some of the things I'd intended to do, but there are some aspects of Mike's letter that I can't skip. So, let's get it over with :-

MICHAEL ASHLEY 86 St. James Road, Mitcham, Surrey, CR4 2DB.

As it happens I do read all the fanzines I get (with the exception of the less readable foreign material -- "foreign" includes both American and Australian), because fandom is a curious phenomenon and -- as far as I know -- artistically unique. However, it's no big deal (another of my offending



comments) because it's only a small part of my life. I have no real friends in fandom /Oh really Mike? You do surprise me./ I do read SFD, although it's close at times to being a 'foreign' fanzine in that the values you appear to embrace I find either incomprehensible or repugnant. Perversely, this makes me more inclined to read each issue. As for the current SFD, I read it with a kind of fascinated horror. This is the world where people not only read the 'Daily Express' but actually believe it. This is the world where housewives do have breakdowns and listen to Barbara Streisand and Dr. Hook records and have Magimix food processors and Jean Plaidy novels bought for them for Christmas /This is the world where Mike Ashley oversteps the bounds of decency and good taste/. This is the world where Ted White (world's worst imitation of a critic) suddenly becomes more worthy of respect than D. West (whose series of major articles attempting to examine the nature of fandom instead of chucking out meaningless, baseless value judgements, is dismissed because he has "such a narrow base of experience that if he turned around twice he'd fall right off" -- actually he got into fandom in the 60s; perhaps you'd care to write and tell him just when he can start passing comments on fandom).

15 Nov 1983 (Skel)

What pisses me off is how you can be so right - for all the wrong reasons. Firstly, he can pass all the comments he likes, as can the veriest neo. What I said was that I had no respect for his opinions, and I said why. Perhaps I didn't phrase my remarks clearly enough. I never meant to imply that he hadn't been around a long time, though it seems to me (and presumably also to someone else who recently described him as a "sixties fringe-fan") that he was always on the fringes back then. What I meant was that, from all I've seen of his writings, he seems to have walked a very narrow path, whereas Ted has been involved in many aspects of SF/fandom.

The fact is though that it is Don's very insubstantiality (as regards his sixties fanac) that makes my remarks so wrong. I've no idea what he was doing back then, and thus I've no idea that he was actually walking the same paths he now walks. Thus I take upon myself the first aspects of arsehole-ness. We then come back to Paula Lieberman's comments earlier (I told you it



all fitted together) about folks making remarks about other people in their fanzines; and then not sending them copies. Well, suffice to say that I didn't send Don a copy of the last SFD. The comment was, so it seemed to me, very minor and , bearing in mind Don's apparent disinterest in receiving SFD (as indicated by his lack of response to previous issues), didn't seem enough mention to call for me 'wasting' a copy. Well, that teaches me, doesn't it. Now I get to waste a copy of this issue instead.

And while I'm on the subject, it seems I really stuffed my mouth full of feet last issue. I also chuckled at all those 'cretins' who voted, or at least nominated, Arthur D. Hlavaty for 'best fanwriter'. Arthur, quite rightly, took me to task for my comments and in defending my point of view I discovered that my criteria for evaluating who does and who does not deserve nominating in this category are so wierd as to mean that I'm going to have to do a lot of re-thinking on this matter. By my original standards, when vigouressly applied, nobody deserves a fanwriter Hugo. Shurely shome mishtake.....

MOUHPFACE 2, says Wayne Brenner, is available for information about pheasants. OK, Wayne: You cook them (but not the feathers). Then you eat them (but not the bones). End of information about pheasants (thinks: should be good for two or three issues).

I also recently received this starnge (nct a typo) missive from Scorpio International Ltd., trying to interest me in Dr. Who videos, and addressed to 'INFERNO Magazine'. Gollygosh! There hasn't been an INFERNO magazine, oh, since Adam was a lad. Also a leaflet from 'Fandom Computer Services' offering me free advertising for my 'fanzine or convention', simply because my 'fanzine or convention' is listed in the Fandom Directory. And what, pray tell, is the Fandom Directory? Pardon me for mentioning it, but I suspect that the guys in CRY 140 would be pissing themselves over this if only they were contemporaneous (and yes, Terry Carr, this does mean you - are you contemporaneous? No bugger else from the CRY-crew is, except for the Goon, and he doesn't get SFD...and no, Ashworth, I don't include you -- last minute resurrections don't count.).

Walt Willis writes "What happened, I ask myself, that I didn't comment on SFD 22, which I did enjoy. No answer." Hmm, somehow receiving a communication from Walt isn't quite what all those fifties fans cracked it up to be. Also a strange (even less of a typo) pootsacrd from Roger Weddall full of writing so small that it had to be enlarged into a microdot! As far as the scientists with the electron microscope at the Stockport Institute of Science & Technology (& Islamic Frog Knitting) can make out, he's just found a letter he never posted to me, and if I'll only write back telling him I didn't get it, he'll at least know that we're both existing in the same probability universe...or something. I dunno, maybe it's something to do with all that crook beer they drink down there. On with the motley. This next bit was written a while back but has had to wait upon the tides of my enthusiasm. OK, Cas, tell them all about it.

#### CAS'S TWO PENN'ORTH

Jesus, but this typer sure sounds noisy at 3.00 a.m. on a Saturday morn. It could be the fact that the rest of the world is fast asleep. Not me though. Nope, me is sat sitting typing. "Why," you may be asking yourselves, "is Cas sat typing at 3 o'clock in the morning?" I'll tell you why...BECAUSE I'M BLOODY STARVING...that's why. I can't sleep and I must do something to occupy my mind or I'll start eating. I could of course have done my ironing and spared you all of this, but if I've got to suffer then the least you can do is suffer with me. I'd give my right arm for a huge plate of fish and chips, or liver and onions with mashed potatoes, or some lovely thick slices of toast dripping with peanut butter, or...STOP IT CAS YOU FOOL!

I woke up at 2.00 with a rumbling tum and try as I might I just couldn't get back to sleep - I'm dieting yet again. I did a very silly thing whilst we were on our fortnight's cycling holiday - I thought that, because I would be using up all those extra calories, I could eat more than 1,000-a-day. Stupid, wasn't I? Put on 16lbs in two weeks, didn't I? HATE THE WORLD LOTS, don't I? Isn't it difficult to get back on a diet once you break it? We've been back for a fortnight and I've tried, honestly I have, but oh, the pangs, THE PANGS I TELL YOU! I can manage as long as I keep myself busy and away from food. It's

having to cook meals for Paul and the kids that really tests my willpower - well, it would if I had any willpower (Anybody out there got a bit of willpower to spare?). A dishevelled hulk has just shambled in, mumbled something about; was it his snoring that had kept me awake and if I was to make him a cup of tea he would stop taking me for granted, honest, and whilst I was bringing him the tea up could I possibly bring some buns with it? Just hang on a mo while I scream and stamp my feet.

Knew I had something to tell you, the D.H.S.S. in all its wisdom has certified me sane and fit for work, and stopped paying me my Invalidity Benefit. SWINES! The thought of going back to work scares me silly. I have a dread of not being able to cope and that IT will happen all over again. Not that there is much chance of me working - the place where I used to work closed down over a year ago - so I signed on the dole. Not a very helpful lot down at the Unemployment Office. I went to enquire whether or not I was entitled to Unemployment Benefit and the woman who was supposed to help me did her damndest to dissuade me from filling in the various forms. "You won't get anything if you are married and your husband is working." I informed her that I was taxed and insured as a single person when I was working. "Oh, well, the tax year we're working on at the moment is April 1980 to April 1981." I told her that I worked until the second week of November 1980. "Oh, well, you might get something, but I doubt it." Much to her chagrin I decided to fill in the forms. A good job I did cos I'm entitled to £25 a week - not as much as my Invalidity Benefit, but better than a kick in the teeth.

O=O=O=O=O

There we all were, t'other night, watching television when out of the blue Bethany, our 9-year-old, says, "Jenny says she's going to start her periods soon."

"Oh, I don't think that will be for another couple of years yet." I reply.

"What are periods, anyway?"

I go into an explanation about eggs and sperms, womb lin-



ings, etc.

"Yeauch!" says Beth, "I'm not having them."

O=O=O=O=O

Some months ago now, I was bored, needed cheering up, so decided on a home beauty treatment. You know the kind - long soak in a bath with fragrant bath oils, face pack and (to hell with the expense!) I decided to colour my hair.


Off I trot to the local chemist, spend a fortune on things required, decide that 'Deep Auburn' is definitely me, and trot back home again. Decide best plan of action is to put hair colour on, then apply face pack and, last but not least, soak in bath whilst all else works wonders on my hair and body. First of all I read instructions on the hair colour leaflet. 'Test for allergic reaction 48 hours before application' - SHIT A BRICK, thinks I. Oh well, haven't coloured my hair for umpty-squidge years, wasn't allergic then, so we'll forget that one. Down the page we go to :- EASY DIRECTIONS (before we go any further better tell you that I've got waist-length hair and wear specs).

- 1 - Mix and apply
- 2 - Work into lather with fingertips. Distribute evenly through hair. Don't rub into scalp. Wait 20 minutes, add a little more water and work up a rich lather once more.
- 3 - Rinse until water runs clear.
- 4 - Use special 'after colourant' conditioning shampoo.

Dead easy. Nothing to it.

Mix solution up in little plastic bottle, remove glasses, apply evil smelly stuff to hair, forget what I'm supposed to do next. Shake kair out of eyes, grope around for instruction leaflet, can't see a bloody thing, grope around for specs, hair swinging from side to side. Find specs, read instructions, take off specs, work into lather, distribute evenly through hair,





"The use of magic is restrained and realistic..."

"My little sister was thrown out of (Presbyterian) Sunday School at the age of two-and-a-bit for having a shitting competition with her best friend on the church steps."

..21..

# SADDLED





# WITH US

BY

SKEL

What have Cas and I been doing with ourselves, this summer so recently passed into fond memory? At least I am assuming that to be the question which is uppermost in all your minds. Of course, I could be wrong, but in that case you will be bored....because I'm going to tell you anyway.

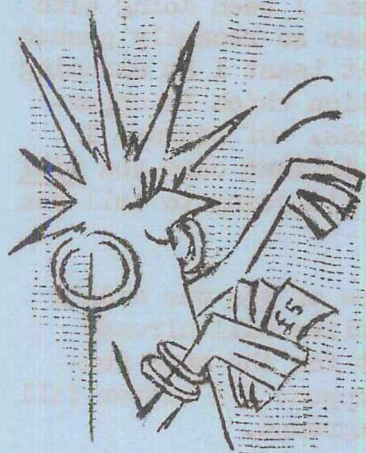
Of course, those of you who didn't skip Cas's piece earlier will already have had a clue, but for the more sensible among you I suppose I'd better fill in a bit of the background.

Well, the fact is that we hadn't had a holiday for three years, mainly due to reasons of near-absolute poverty coupled with the problems involved in my redundancy / re-training / non-permanent job status. Now that my position is 'permanent' - or at least as permanent as any job can be these days - we decided to take advantage of my parents' fit of temporary insanity and get away for a fortnight. This brainstorm of my parents' involved their annual holiday at St. Ives.



This year they decided to take Nicholas and Bethany with them for a fortnight in sunny Cornwall. Hotdamn! That just left us and Deborah, so Cas and I decided we'd go and spend the two weeks in question visiting her parents in Lincolnshire -- Stamford to be precise.

Now Stamford is one of the nicer English towns, all very picturesque, and ideal for people like Cas and I, whose idea of enjoying ourselves is simply to not do any decorating -- and we enjoy ourselves almost all the time -- but a vibrant youth culture it does not have. It certainly isn't a sixteen-year-old, orange-haired, punk-rocker's idea of where it's at. Be there and be square. Aceness is elsewhere. Anywhere elsewhere. Fortunately it transpired that Deborah's idea of a great holiday was for Cas and I to go away for the fortnight, leaving her (and a fairly substantial ~~£100~~ allowance) two weeks in which she could have friends round, host parties, spend time with her boyfriend -- all without a single nagging earache. We gave her suggestion much serious consideration -- about seven nano-seconds' worth, and began making feverish plans.



Paradise! Two whole weeks with no kids. This is surely what Heaven will be like, and we didn't even have to die for it. The thing which tipped the balance, which finally decided it for us, was the fact that Lincolnshire is very flat. No hills! It simply had to be great cycling country. We would take our bikes down with us on the train and spend the entire fortnight cycling out each day to all points of the compass, maybe even staying out overnight somewhere. Ah, such grandiose plans. Besides, it would be a fairly cheap holiday as we'd be using Cas's parents' house as a base for our trips -- no hotel bills, and meals provided whilst we were there. Of course, we'd need to get our 'cycling legs' first. We immediately began to consider a fitness/training routine of gradually increasing toughness. This was all very well in theory -- except that we started, unintentionally it's true, with a day trip of just under 85 miles.

0=0=0=0=0

"Bob Shaw's just moved to Grappenhall," said Cas. "Why don't we give it a try?"

"It's a bit far." I replied. "What if your bad knee gives out? Tell you what," I suggested, "...let's not arrange it with them in advance. Let's just go. If we don't make it nobody's inconvenienced. If we do get there we can give them a ring from somewhere in the village. If they're not in, or if it's inconvenient for them, then at least we'll have had the ride."

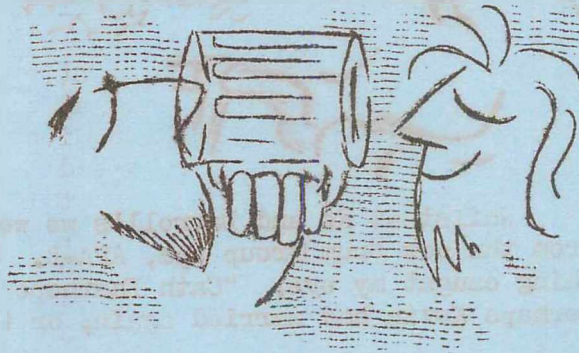
The fact is, we didn't really expect to make it. We didn't even take the direct route but instead went 'the pretty way', so that we'd at least get a nice ride out of it. We cycled out to Alderley Edge which is on the very fringe of the Cheshire plain, from there across to Knutsford and then, feeling terribly bold and far-from-home, off into the great unknown. Course, it was a doddle, wasn't it? No-ooo problem. In next to no time at all, or so it seemed to we intrepid explorers, we were in Grappenhall. Fortunately Bob and Sadie were at home and we were able to provide Bob with just the excuse he was seeking not to start a new story (shades of 'Don't Forget To Write'). Tough luck SF readers everywhere.

"It's too hot to write." said Bob.

"We could go out to the...

...pub." I finished lamely, suddenly finding myself transported a couple of miles to Bob's favourite watering hole. Only an SF author would have an FTL drive fitted to an Austin Princess. We spent a pleasant hour or so while Bob regaled us with tales of his visits to Poland which were undertaken primarily to spend his royalties which cannot be taken out of the country.....

"You know how, when you go out for a meal in



this country you look at the prices on the menu outside, and you think 'Ooh, dear no - can't go there, it's far too expensive.'? Well, there we were - we'd see a place that looked promising, we'd look at the prices and say, 'Nope, too cheap. We'll never get it spent at that rate.', and off we'd go looking for a more expensive place. And then, when we'd get back to the hotel the lobby would be full of prostitutes, all milling around waiting for the tourists to return...and they'd approach me as Sadie and I walked towards the lifts."

"Maybe," I offered, "It's their only way of obtaining 'hard' currency."

Back at Bob and Sadie's we asked how far we were from Runcorn, where Ro and Darroll Pardoe are domiciled. Our thinking was that, if it was really close, it'd be a shame to come so far and not take the opportunity of visiting them too. "Oh," said Bob casually, "...it's just a few miles." So we rang Ro an and arranged to visit them. As we were leaving we passed Bob's bike in the hall. Another closet cyclist in fandom.



After we'd been cycling towards Ro and Darroll's for about fifteen minutes we saw the first signpost - Runcorn  $9\frac{3}{4}$  miles. "Bloody Hell!" I said, "That sod Shaw's really stitched us up for dropping in on him unexpectedly. This is going to put twenty-odd miles on the trip. God knows what time we'll get back. 'Just a few miles' indeed!"

Whilst at Ro and Darroll's we were shown the first mailing from the new Brum Group apa, APA-B. Glancing through it something caught my eye. "Cath Easthope?" I asked, thinking that perhaps Kevin had married again, or that a previously unmen-



tioned sister was also getting into fandom. Not so! Evidently times have been difficult for ~~him~~ Cath recently. Bloody Hell! Bit of a shock - difficult to accept. Oh, not intellectually - that's easy - but all my memories of 'Kevin' are of HIM. It's impossible to think of 'him' as 'her' without having met 'her'.

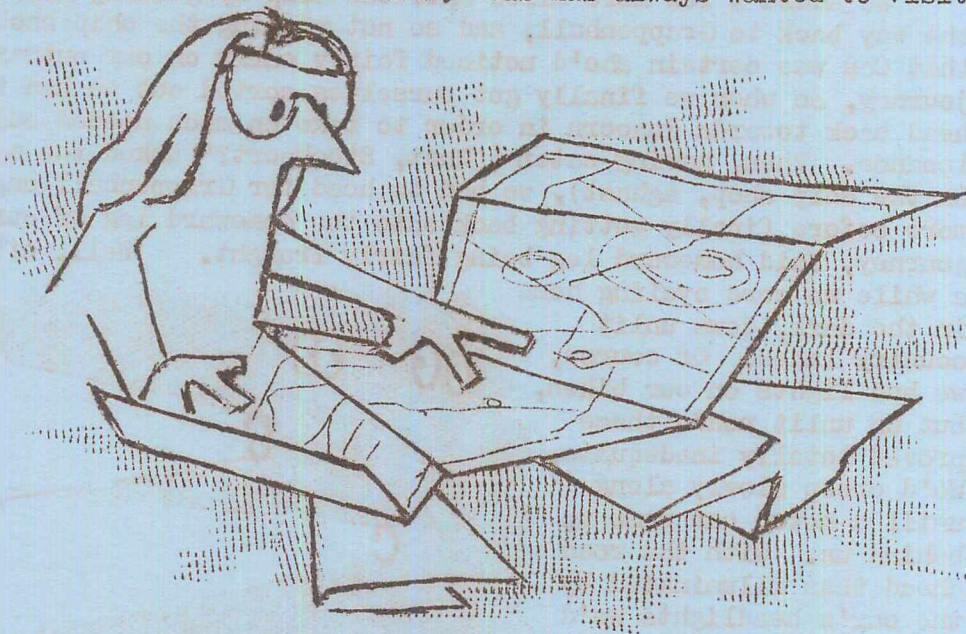
Too soon it was time to leave. As we were leaving the Runcorn Urban Complex that masquerades as 'Chez Darroll' a youngster asked Cas where she was going. At her reply of 'Stockport' he gasped. "What," he said in disbelief, "...on yer bike?" "You and me too, son." I thought to myself.

We added a few more miles onto the trip by getting lost on the way back to Grappenhall, and so not passing the chip shop that Cas was certain she'd noticed fairly early on our outward journey, so when we finally got ourselves sorted out we had to head back towards Runcorn in order to take on much needed sustenance. Then, having eaten ("What, Stockport?" asked the man in the chip shop, aghast), we had to head for Grappenhall once more before finally getting back onto the homeward leg of our journey, said homeward leg being fairly fraught. Well, after a while we were cycling home in the dark, down unlit country lanes. Of course, we had lights on our bikes, but on unlit roads these proved totally inadequate. We'd creep slowly along until a motor car came up behind us. With the road ahead thus illuminated by the car's headlights we'd pedal like buggery until he'd overtaken us and gotten so far ahead that we were once more forced to slow down and rely upon our own poor lamps. On the way we had to cycle through the tunnels under Manchester Airport, whilst the jets rumbled overhead. A wierd experience - the tunnel, a narrow cycleway, curved continually to the left, so that you always seemed to be cycling into the wall. The world ended, beyond the

curve, a few dozen feet in front of and behind us. Very claustrophobic, especially knowing that, when we went into the tunnel, we were right in the middle of the Cheshire countryside, and would be again when we emerged -- and totally silent when there were no planes taxiing overhead. We finally made it back home at around one a.m. God, were our bums sore!

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After we'd recovered we began to wonder how we were going to survive any regimen of increasing toughness.....at least I wondered -- Cas simply dragged out our Ordnance Survey Atlas and scrutinised the Yorkshire Dales. Cas has always wanted to visit



Middleham Castle, being very much interested in history. Mind you, she does specialise -- according to Cas 'history' starts with the birth of Richard III and ends with his defeat at the hands of that "Lousy, slimy, traitorous ratfink turd-heap of a bastard" Henry Tudor. Cas's approach, you will notice, is to get involved with her subject. "We could get a train to Harrogate," she suggested, "...and cycle from there. We could



go up, through Masham, to Middleham, and afterwards we could cycle through the Dales, back down through Skipton.....don't we know somebody who lives in Skipton?"

"Nope!" I firmly responded. "You're thinking of Mal Ashworth who lives just outside, and he's nowhere near being a 'somebody'. Besides, we don't know him from Adam -- which is a pity really, because the only way we could manage that trip would be to make it a two-day affair, staying overnight somewhere inexpensive or, even better, free."

"Are you sure?" she asked. "It's only about eighteen inches or so," she added, pointing with both hands to the head and arse of an imaginary ferret apparently suspended in front of her face.

"The map," I said, "is not the territory."

"What's that supposed to mean, you pompous twit?"

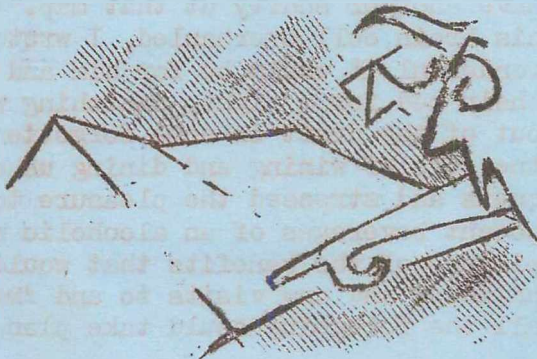
"It means," I said, "that it's more than eighteen bleeding inches for starters."

"I know that," she said witheringly.

"Yes, but it's also very difficult cycling country -- lots of steep hills."

"Rubbish!" she said. "It looks pretty flat to me."

I kid you not. I honestly think that she expects the sodding map to have bumps in it if it's hilly. "Look." I said, "See these lines? Every time you cross one you've gone up a hundred feet, and here, where they get closer together, it means you're going





uphill very steeply. See here, and here, and there -- Jeezus, they're almost bleedin' cliffs."

"Oh." she muttered.

And that was that -- until we got this letter.....

MAL ASHWORTH 16 Rockville Drive, Embsay, Skipton, North Yorks.

Today we came home from work, Hazel and I; not so strange, I hear you think, nor is it - we do it most days, usually faster than true decorum allows (which is a polite suburban way of saying 'like fucking greased lightning'). The sky was grey, the wind keen, the temperature minimal and the central heating knackered. Hazel would have to turn out again soon to teach her evening Yoga class. I would have to turn out, at approximately the same time, to drive her there. Awaiting us was an Access bill for £97 and a demand from the Electricity Board for £87 - and this here SMALL FRIENDLY DOG. Two SMALL FRIENDLY DOGS in fact - a yellow one called 'No. 21' and a blue one called 'No. 21'. We grabbed one each, sat in front of the mobile gas heater and hooted for about three quarters of an hour, breaking each other off frequently to read out another outrageous Skelism. Let nobody tell you you've lived in vain, mate. SFD, in my 'umble view, is topnotch.

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"Aha!" I thought, "This boy's a fool. Quick Cas, let's have another shufty at that map." Quickly, before he could have his brain cell overhauled, I wrote back to Mal, suggesting how wonderful it would be for him and Hazel if they should give us their bed for a night, snatching what rest they could curled up out of the draft in some forgotten corner. I explained to him the joys of wining and dining us on exotic, eighteen course banquets and stressed the pleasure to be gained from plying me with potent beverages of an alcoholic nature. I painted a glossy picture of the benefits that would accrue from cancelling his holidays and any visits to and from obscure relatives so that all the foregoing could take place on a specific date convenient

to Cas and I.

"Nobody," said Cas, "is that stupid. He'll never buy it."

"Look," I replied, "Skipton is out in the boonies, isn't it? The people who live in the back of beyond know nothing. He probably thinks I'm a pseudonym for Vargo Statten or R.L.Fan-thingy, or somebody equally famous. These yokels will believe anything." I waited confidently for Mal's next letter.....

MAL ASHWORTH 16 Rockville Drive, Embsay, Skipton, North Yorks.

C-R-A-Z-E-E! He go K-E-R-A-Z-E-E!

I've known some importunate faneds in my time, but a man who would cycle over 9,000 miles of the worst terrain this side of Cuzco to drag a letter-of-comment out of me.....!

Cycle? To Middleham?

Do you know, I've known grown men tear their heads off rather than cycle to Middleham? Oh well, it's your life; or it is until you meet the cannibal tribes about three miles out of Harrogate (and that's assuming you even get out of Harrogate without falling prey to the blood-sucking Vile Hucksters). Well, all I can say is I'd recommend an early start - like, about 1981. If you start early enough you may just have a chance of avoiding the avalanches, monsoons, tsunamis, okapis, and even a few of the grockles. The grockles are the deadliest of all. I don't believe I've ever known anyone 'So Bloody Intrepid They Make Your Blood Turn To Water' before, so this should be interesting.

How, or why, Cas picked Middleham, I will probably never understand unless, of course, she has some sort of thing about long-dead little men with humps on their backs - but it is, in one sense, opportune in that if you are going to be so nerve-shatteringly death-defying as to get to Middleham, you might as well come and see our new house (new to us that is, but pretty old in reality) which, rather oddly, happens to be in that area,

before coming on back down to Skipton. Yes? That will make you the first British fans to have seen it (Bill and Mary Burns just beat you to the world record. I got the impression that it gave Mary, who used to live in the wilds of Oregon, a bad case of agoraphobia being so totally out in the wilds away from all habitation, human life, familiar star constellations, etc.) We could meet you there sometime on the Saturday afternoon with sustenance, fresh dog-teams (to eat, of course), and then back on down to Embsay for the food and the alcoholic drinks you will so richly deserve but will be too knackered to get down, heh? Heh, heh!

From Middleham go west to Wensley and thence wester to West Burton, a staggeringly idyllic little village. Up through the village and out on the road at the top left marked 'Walden Only', 'No Through Road', 'For Christ's Sake Turn Back If You Value Your Life And Sanity' and, a little further on, 'Oh My God, Too Late Now'. That's the road you want. Take the right-hand fork, when it splits, to Walden North. This goes uphill. And uphill. And uphill. Keep going (up) for four miles, an incredibly beautiful but gut-wrenching route. Watch out for rhinoceros (I didn't tell you, did I, about the first reference to the area I found, after we'd bought the farmhouse. From Gordon Home's 'Yorkshire' :- "Waldendale. So remote is this little dale that wild animals long extinct in other parts of the country have been seen here in recent times."). Eventually a lo-o-o-ng hill brings you back down into the beck bottom and a short way on the road bends left over a tiny packhorse bridge. Keep going that-aways and our place (Grange Farm) is the first set of buildings on your left after that, about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile. No sweat if you miss it; when the road ends altogether just backtrack about 200 yards

It just occurred to me what a fine fannish hoax it would have been to lure you to such an out of the way spot if it hadn't been ours; almost worth selling it in the next fortnight, come to that. The best way to Skipton subsequently, is back down Waldendale, up Bishopdale, down to Buckden and right down Wharfedale to Threshfield, then Cracoe and finally down into Embsay, about a mile before you get to Skipton. But you sure are in for some tough cycling, mate. We will arrange some kind



of sleeping arrangements. Dunno what yet, but we will. No doubt by then you will be ready to sleep hanging up in the wardrobe.

I know what it is - suddenly I have got it! All the things you miss when you forget what's in your own old fanzines. You read my account, in DUPE 3, of my attempted two-day cycle tour of the North York Moors, Scotland, the West Coast, and the Lake District - and you want to prove to me just how tough you are too. Oh, well, of course, that was easy stuff - but you wouldn't have caught me tackling Middleham. No, sir! And as for Walden.....

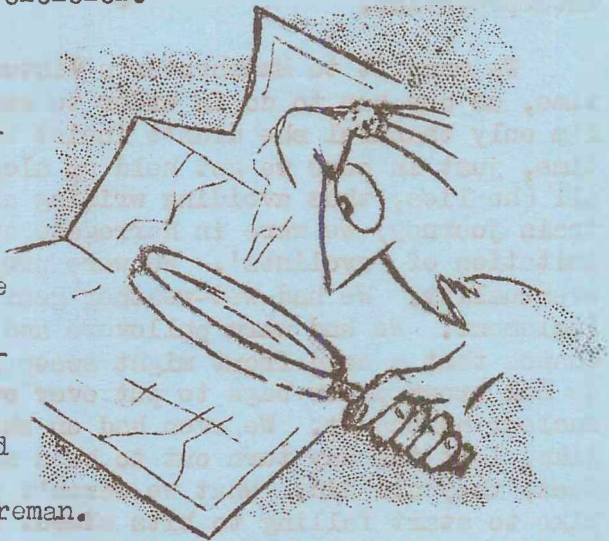
I'm rather proud of that fact you point out, about DUPE 2, that the ink still wasn't dry on the copy I sent you - after 28 years. Do you realise this means that, probably for the rest of my life, I can go on saying things like, "And then, even before the ink was dry on DUPE 2.....". All I need then is someone to understand what the hell I'm talking about.

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"Hang on a minute." I said to Cas, after reading Mal's words about the local terrain. "Let's have another look at that map."

"It's too late now dear." she smugged. "We're committed. Anyway, maybe he's exaggerating in an attempt to scare us off."

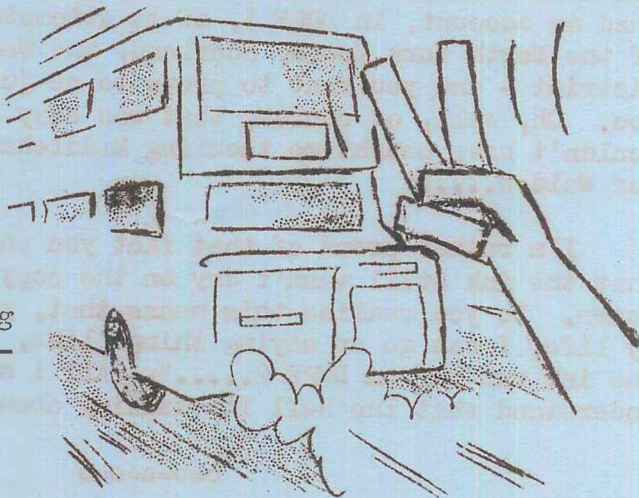
"Nonsense! That would take brains and everyone knows that Mal's a Yorkshireman."



"Yes dear." she said, patiently. "The problem is, so are you."

O=O=O=O=O

The following Friday Cas and I were creeping about the house long before dawn had even contemplated cracking. By six o'clock we were speeding along a strangely almost deserted A6, duelling with a liverish bus driver who figured that, as his day was spoiled by being up early, he'd do his best to put the shits up us by way of entertainment. His skill at overtaking us just before bus-stops, and then pulling in and stopping right in front of us, was worthy of high praise indeed. In fact, many were the occasions when I acknowledged this by gesturing to him that I was awarding him 'deux points' for both technical excellence and artistic interpretation.



We made it to Manchester's Victoria station in plenty of time, as one has to do in order to keep Cas happy. Bloody Hell! I'm only thankful she didn't insist we set off Thursday lunch-time, just in case we got held up along the way. In no time at all (he lies, thus avoiding writing about a pretty uneventful train journey) we were in Harrogate and ready to commence our imitation of 'cyclists'. We were prepared for just about every eventuality. We had wet-weather gear in case the climate proved inclement. We had warm pullovers and cardigans on the off-chance that a cold front might sweep in from the Arctic Circle. We had brown paper bags to put over our heads in the event of a nuclear holocaust. We even had on shorts and t-shirts and the like, lest the day turn out to be a scorcher, which it did. In fact, they all did. What we weren't prepared for was for my bike to start falling to bits almost immediately. Basically, what happened was that one of the supports on the 'light-weight' carrier I had affixed over my rear wheel, as a frame for the paniers carrying all those tons of equipment I've just reeled



off - well, it simply snapped under the strain, placing an unbalanced load upon my rear wheel which then proceeded, quite reasonably, to \*sprong\* a spoke or two and buckle somewhat alarmingly, causing it to catch on my brake-blocks and squeak intermittently, like a banshee with hiccups. In order to prevent this racket, which soon began to drive me round the bend, I had to loosen the brakes which now meant that I couldn't actually stop the bike if I exceeded even the most moderate of speeds, which didn't do much for our schedule. When we got to Ripley I was forced to permit an avaricious local yokel to rip me off unashamedly in buying some adhesive tape with which to effect a temporary repair. Still rankled over this, and by our tardy progress, we decided not to look around the village and the castle, but instead pressed on.

We were making for Ripon, via Fountains Abbey, along quiet country lanes. The country cycling was the main requirement, but I thought it'd be nice to cycle along past some picturesque ruins, getting a few snaps for our album. I'd no desire to actually waste time stopping to look around anything so boring as an old ruined abbey, especially as when we got there we discovered that it cost some enormous sum to go into the grounds and look around. Good grief, I still had the monumental boredom of Middleham Castle to look forward to. The last thing I needed was an appetitif. The sodding monks got their own back though. Doubtless aware of the money to be made, after their dissolution, from the entire tourism schtick, they cunningly built their abbey down in a wooded valley so that nary a glimpse of it should be visible from the road, to freeloaders seeking only a pretty background for their snapshots.

The weather, and the countryside, were both magnificent. From time to time I'd stop and lift up my sunglasses, and gasp, "Whow, the colours, man!" That weekend I O-D'd on the scenery - it completely wiped me out, time and time again. The sunlight was blasting back from the countryside, very much in the way I imagine it does in the Mediterranean countries, but because this was North Yorkshire, with centuries of rains and mists held in some sub-soil reservoirs, the colours were not the washed-out affairs of the travelogues, but bright and vivid - somehow



'hard', though never 'harsh'. Whenever I tilted up my sunglasses the colours would slam right through my eyeballs as if they didn't exist, impacting directly upon my brain like some awesome optical avalanche.

"Just look at that corn." said Cas, with the contented smugness of a Yorkshire heart come home at last. "You just don't get corn that colour round our way."

And, of course, she was right. It wasn't the common-or-garden yellow-gold of wheat that somehow gives the impression that it's been left out in the rain -- which of course it has -- but there was a burning redness to the colour which at the same time remained undisputably 'golden'. It was as if every grain of corn contained within it an intense furnace, as if it somehow held captive a small portion of the sun itself.

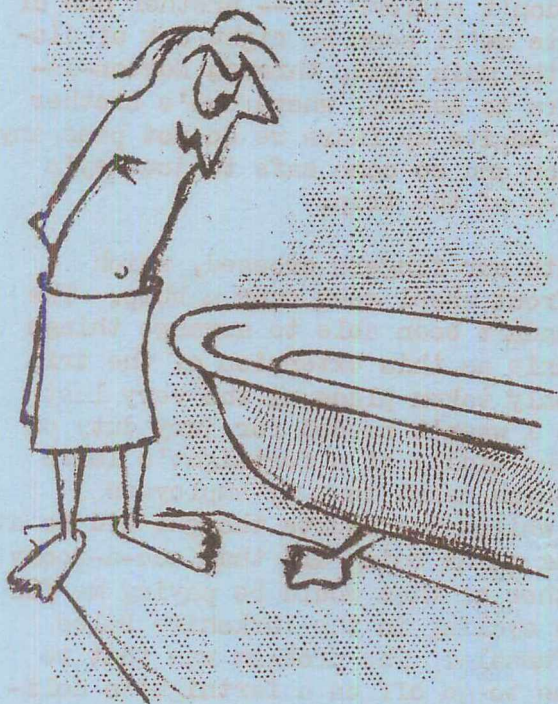
We made it to Ripon for a late lunch, and there was just time for me to quaff a pint of Theakston's at the Black Bull before we once more took to the open road, heading down through Skelton (ah, the fame -- but they shouldn't have, really) to Boroughbridge, the site of one of the many schools Cas had attended whilst she accompanied her father on his postings around all the RAF camps in the known universe. They say you can never go back. Cas can -- and does. Unfortunately she insists on taking me back with her so that I too can experience, at second-hand and 20-to-30 years remove, all the wild delights that comprised her childhood ("...and here's where I once blew my nose, or was it there? And here's where I started my first period, and I once bought some sweets from that sweet-shop, and..."). Let us draw a discreet veil over 'The Boroughbridge Experience'. Not that the excitement might prove too much for you, but I'm not sure I could stay awake through the recounting of it. Suddenly, as far as you are concerned, there is a timeshift -- a fracturing of the temporal strata (Bloody Hell! Maybe I am Vargo Statten.) -- and Cas and I are cycling away from Boroughbridge. Briefly you may feel like a character from a TV SF series, whose mind has been clouded by some superior intelligence (or some inferior scriptwriter) -- isn't there something missing? Something you should remember but which flits away

into the mists of amnesia? Then the feeling is gone and you shake your head. Boroughbridge is no longer even a memory. You are back with us once more as we cycle from Skelton to Kirby Hill, a small village that contains.....arrgh, no! It is, it's another of Cas's schools. Quick, bring back that discreet veil. Phew, that was close. Right, now we're cycling from Skelton, through Kirby Hill, towards Norton-le-Clay. Just before getting there we turned off, down an unmade road, towards Dishforth Aerodrome and, oh-my-god! I don't believe it -- another one of Cas' old schools. At this rate we'll soon be right out of discreet veils. Quick, back to the main road, through Norton-le-Clay, to Cundall and from there to Asenby, where Cas's brother Malc lives with his family. Despite my fears we do not pass any more schools of any description and so come safe to journey's end, at least for the first leg of the trip.

We cycled into Asenby with our fingers crossed, which doesn't half hurt when your front wheel goes over a bump. The reason for this was that we hadn't been able to arrange things in advance with Malc and Jeannie as this extension of the trip into a three-day affair had only taken place at the very last minute when I discovered that I wasn't needed for jury duty on that Friday (I was right in the middle of a fortnight's leave from work for this purpose) which meant that my employers thought I'd be at the Courts whilst the Courts thought I'd be at work - neither of which struck me as being all that ace-a-roony of an idea. As one or the other of them would be paying me for that day anyway, an extra day cycling in the Yorkshire Dales beckoned siren-like and irrefusable. The problem was that we knew Malc and Jeannie were due to go off on a fortnight's holiday in sunny Scarborough and we were hoping and praying that it wouldn't be until the following weekend. We'd taken the precaution, just in case, of getting the name of a nearby real-ale pub that did 'Bed & Breakfast'. Our fears however were immediately allayed when we cycled into the village and saw Jeannie walking along the road with Philip and Gareth, our nephews, riding along in close attendance. Needless to say they were completely gobsmacked at seeing their car-less, and therefore transport-less, relatives turning up out of the blue in such an out-of-the-way spot. Naturally (thank god) they pooh-poohed our



statement that we were all prepared to stay at a nearby hostelry and offered us their spare room for the night. Their house is really wierd. They aren't fans and you go in...and there isn't a book in sight. No fanzines either. The rooms just contain furniture and things -- not a single mimeo machine anywhere about the place.



One of the first things I had to do was take a cold bath. Not, I hasten to add, because I have the sexual appetite of a Cabinet Minister or anything like that, but because I'd gotten a nasty bit of sunburn whilst wearing my t-shirt and shorts. As luck would have it our route and pace had ensured that the sun had remained, at all times, in the same quarter of the sky relative to my pasty-white tender bits. I sat in near-freezing water for  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an hour trying to cool my forearms, thighs and calves, teeth chattering like buggery. It worked though as this, coupled with the application of a higher-factor

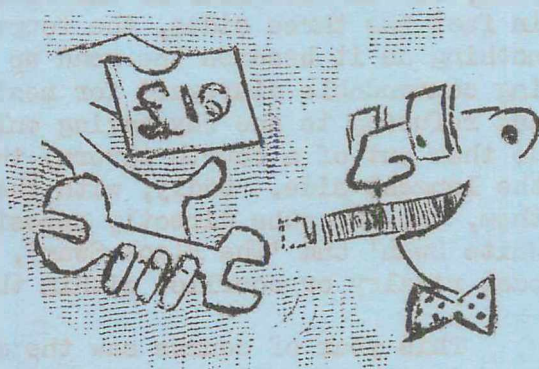
screening creme for the rest of the weekend, prevented any further discomfort, even if I did look like a lobster-on-wheels. That night we walked into Topcliffe where I soothed the only irritation I was to feel in one of the many pubs. Then it was back for an early night so that we could be out upon the road at dawn's early light.

As we were about to set forth next morning young Gareth screeched into the living room on his little plastic tractor and in his guise as an icecream-man, sold Cas a cornet. I could



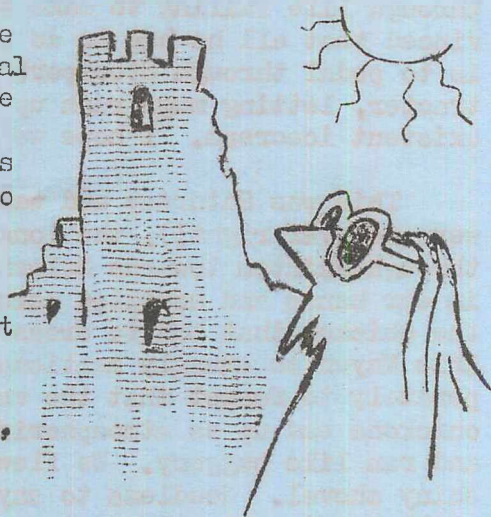
only admire his aplomb as he took in his stride the fact that he was paid, in real pound notes, for this invisible icecream (by way of incrementing his holiday money). I could see young Philip's mind trying to decide what invisible wares he might purvey to these dumb relatives, before Cas slipped him a similar amount. I worry though, that young Gareth might now drift through life failing to make the most of his opportunities, convinced that all he has to do to earn a living when he grows up is to pedal through Stockport on a large red and yellow plastic tractor, letting mugs rush up and give him money for non-existent icecream. I hope we haven't done the wrong thing.

This was Saturday and was to be, so we suspected (and boy, were we ever right!), the longest leg of the trip. We sped through Rainton towards Melmerby and on the way took our lives in our hands and scuttled across the A1, feeling very much like the chicken that had to cross the road in the video game that Eric Mayer so smuggly mentioned his prowess at. We tried desperately to forget that the vast majority of such inexperienced chickens end up as atmospheric pollution of a feathery nature, and ran like buggery. We flew across that road like shit off a shiny shovel. Needless to say, we made it across OK, but Cas still has trouble sleeping some nights and neither of us can remember much about the ride, through Wath and West Tansfield, into Masham, where we stopped for to get me the aforementioned sun-creme. We had a shuftly around the market square, which seemed full of stalls selling junk to tourists at wildly outrageous prices ("Gee, look Martha, a rusty wrench for only fifteen bucks. A real antique, and useful too. We used to use wrenches like that in the war. In fact I'll bet they used that very wrench to tighten the nuts on the B-15s we used to fly out of the nearby aerodrome during the war. They call them 'spanners' you know." "What, B-15s?").



Sickened at such commercialisation we stocked up at the village supermarket, which had about as much storage space as Cas's handbag, and headed onwards for our date with destiny -- on past Jervaux Abbey (number two in the series 'Great Abbeys We Haven't Seen') and through East Witton to Middleham, with me doing my "Whow, the colours, man." schtick every few miles.

Middleham Castle is of course a ruin, though a fairly substantial and imposing one. I spent my time skulking in the shadows in the cooler courtyards. Whenever I was foolish enough to venture out into the sunlight the sun, reflecting fiendishly from every available facet of the stonework, bounced unerringly onto the tenderest spot on my sores leg. I soon became convinced that the ancients knew more than we give them credit for, and that Middleham Castle was in fact an early British microwave oven of enormous proportion. The peasants would just drive their oxen in through the front gate on feast days and they'd arrive in the main hall done to a turn.



Middleham village itself is quite small, but there are four pubs, one on each side of the village square. The square only in fact has three sides, the fourth sort of dribbling away to nothing as it becomes the road up to the Castle. However, showing commendable disregard for neat and tidy geometric niceties, and refusing to see why having only a three-sided square should do them out of a fourth tavern, the locals built an extra one on the longest side. Oddly, with the myriad names available to them, the two pubs directly opposite each other are called 'The White Swan' and 'The Black Swan', hinting perhaps at some long-past rivalry or conflict within the village.

This year of course saw the quincentennial celebrations, organised by the Richard III Society, of Richard's coronation



and Middleham Castle was pretty much 'our house' to Richard and his young bride. Not massive as some castles go, but even in those days one assumes it was traditional for newlyweds to set up their first home at the cheaper end of the house/castle market, only moving up-market to places like Windsor when you were well-established and successful in the Kinging business. Anyway, the Richard III Society, by way of getting its own back on that lying Tudor propagandist William Shakespeare, had as part of these celebrations, put on a play in Middleham, namely 'Shakespeare Was A Hunchback', and Cas insisted on me getting a photograph of her standing under one of the publicity posters for this event. I'm not sure how satisfactory this revenge will prove to be for, whilst admittedly not having seen this new play I suspect that Shakespeare's original work probably had a slight edge in quality and may yet prove to have greater staying power. After a brief detour to the local church in order to get Cas a snapshot of the 'Richard III Memorial Window' (number one in a set of 'Boring Church Windows I have Known' -- do not collect the entire series) we noshed our butties and headed off in the general direction of Leyburn.

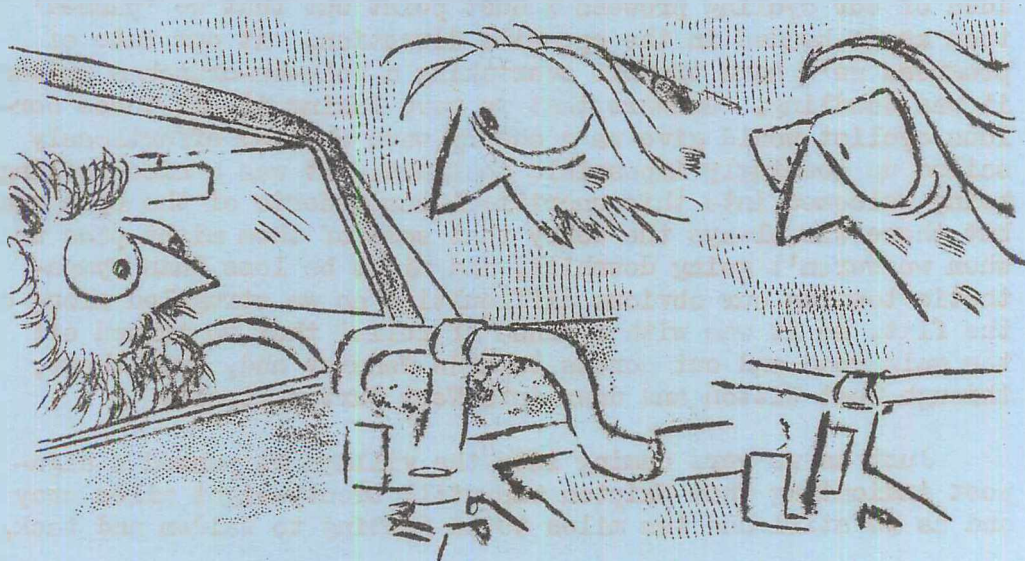
On this leg of the journey we passed several organised groups of cyclists. Least you should come away with the wrong idea of our cycling prowess I must point out that we 'passed' them as we headed in the opposite direction. At our rate of progress we'd have trouble overtaking a vole-on-crutches unless it was dawdling. Unaware that we were faking it all these serious cyclist would give us a cheery wave as they effortlessly sailed up seemingly impossible inclines. It was a nice feeling, being welcomed into this uncritical camaraderie of the open road but there was always the worry that some of them might pass us when we weren't going downhill, and might be less than sympathetic towards our obvious difficulties as we struggled along on the flat, so it was with a sense of relief that we turned off the main road and cut across towards Wensley and, from there, through West Witton and down into West Burton itself.

Just as we were coming into the village we passed a signpost indicating that Skipton was still twenty-eight miles away and as we still had ten miles to do getting to Walden and back,



and as a fair proportion of this distance was to be 'difficult' (if Mal could be believed), we began to have our first doubts. However, we were comitted to this detour and ~~anyway~~, after Mal's description we wouldn't have missed it for the world. West Burton itself was every bit as staggeringly idyllic as Mal had intimated, and struck me as being THE perfect English village... but for one overwhelming drawback. The village pub was a John Smith's House and John Smith's is a brewery whose committment to unreal ale, better living through chemistry, is a byword -- or more accurately a goodbye word -- among discerning beer-drinkers everywhere.

The trip up to Walden itself was also everything that Mal had claimed it to be. Every time we thought we were nearing the top, and could therefore get back on our bikes, we'd turn a corner and see the road continue heartbreakingly upwards. Further on we passed a message scratched onto a fence. "Can't go on any longer. Oxygen exhausted and have been forced to eat Tensing - Hilary". Then, to paraphrase the immortal words of Gerald Hoffnung, "Halfway up, we met Ashworth coming down." Concerned at our non-arrival Mal had started back down to the village. He drew up before us warily. Could this disreputable pair be the dashing Skel and stylish concubine?



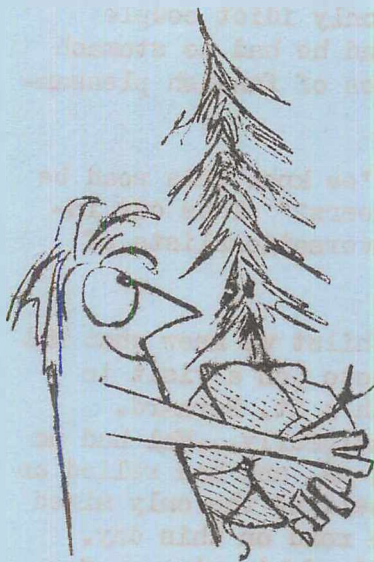
Cautiously, for apparently we weren't the only idiot couple who'd cycled out that way that very day, and he had no stomach for further embarrassing one-sided exchanges of fannish pleasantries, he wound down the window.

"Wer be 'ee goin'?" he asked. "Does 'ee know this road be a dead-end? Does 'ee know it dunt go nowheers?" Thus our introduction to one of the more dazzling conversationalists of fabulous fifties fandom.

It was only then that I realised -- whilst we knew what Mal looked like, having been shown a recent photo (on a visit to Eric Bentcliffe's) of Mal face to face with a St. Bernard. "Mal's the one on the right." said Eric, helpfully...Mal had no such advantage when it came to recognising us, and had relied on the sensible but invalid assumption that we'd be the only mixed couple mad enough to cycle down the Walden road on this day. "Why," I replied, attempting to put him out of his misery, "we are going to your house." Somehow he did not give me the impression that my attempt was successful. He never gave us all the details of his experiences with the earlier "smart young couple", but the way he kept stressing the word 'smart' and edging away whenever I got too close to him, left me with the feeling that he considered Fate had given him a bum hand and that he'd cheerfully have stuck with the couple he'd first been dealt. However, he quickly put a brave face on it and shot back to the farm to make sure everything was ready for us, there being one or two things he'd forgotten to do. From the look he gave me as he left I suspected he meant that hadn't put the chastity belts on the sheep, or locked them away, and this was borne out when we got there because there wasn't a sheep in sight, and Mal seemed much more relaxed in our company. He gave us a tour of the new homestead, accompanied by Cas's constant mutterings of "I want one!", and pointed to a box of refreshments -- sandwiches and beery substances -- which we fell upon in an unseemly but appreciative manner. Then he took us into the back "garden" and told us of his plans for it.

"I'm thinking of having a forest there." he said with an airy wave of his hand towards the far horizon, somewhere in the





general direction of Scotland. "The Forestry Commission will plant one for you, free of charge if you ask them." There, I thought, speaks a typical Yorkshireman. To hell with whether or not it's any use...is it free? Hmmm, I wonder where I could fit a small forest....

Cas and I were having a great time. Mal is the easiest person to get along with that I've ever met and I felt none of my usual awkwardness around people that I haven't gotten to know. Too soon, it was time for us to leave, but we consoled ourselves with the fact that Mal would be waiting for us when we got to Embsay.

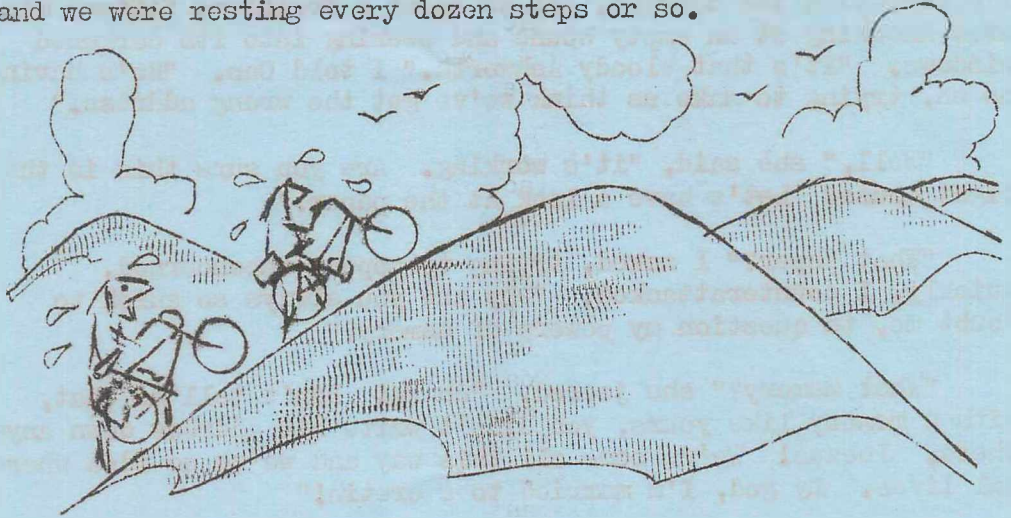
The run back into West Burton was every bit as easy as the trip out had been hard, except for when Cas belted around a blind corner and almost ran over a stupid pheasant that was sun-bathing in the middle of the road. The bird shot up, like a bat out of hell, from right under her front wheel, which scared the shit out of her. The pheasant didn't take it all that calmly either. In no time at all we were back, past the daunting signpost, onto the main road and heading ultimately towards far Skipton.

This bit of the journey, initially, was supposed to be fairly easy but unfortunately a strong headwind had sprung up and we were forced to get off and walk up even the slightest incline. When we reached Thoraby we stopped at a caravan-site and went into the site shop for an ice-lolly. The proprietress took one look at my bright red calves and opined





that cyclists don't half get sunburned in some funny places. We fell to talking and she asked us where we were heading. We told her and were somewhat alarmed at her response. Her jaw dropped. "You do know what's coming up ahead of you, don't you?" Oh, shit! Apparently Mal had been understating the difficulties of the terrain on this section of the trip. Chastened, we set off once more and before too long we came to it; Kidstone Pass. This turned out to be the longest walking stretch of the entire journey, and also the steepest. Approaching the summit it was almost more than we could manage to push our bikes up the hill and we were resting every dozen steps or so.



Once over this though we were in clover. We stopped and ate the last of our sandwiches and just drank in the view. It was obvious at this juncture that we wouldn't make Mal and Hazel's until very late so we sat a while and waved back to the middle-aged motorists as they spied us upon the hillside and were doubtless reminded of their own more youthful follies. "God, love, it's almost too beautiful to bear. Come on, take one last look. We've got to be getting on." And get on we did. Once back in the saddle we fairly flew. Having climbed up Bishopdale we now sped down Wharfedale, through some magnificent scenery, and also through some tremendously picturesque villages. My one regret was that we did not have time to stop,

like so many of the other cyclists were doing, at the village pubs we were passing. They'd raise their hands in acknowledgement as they sat and quaffed their dark refreshing ales in the pub forecourts, in the shade of the colourful sunshades. Alas, there simply wasn't time. As it was we didn't get to Mal's until nearly ten o'clock. Worried, Hazel had sent Mal out once more to see what had befallen us and we met him just as we were about to turn off the Skipton road, on the last leg of the day's journey. Once more Mal headed off ahead and we followed at our more studied pace, heading straight for 11 Rockville Drive. Yes I'd forgotten the address, and we spent a fruitless fifteen minutes knocking at an empty house and peering into its darkened windows. "It's that bloody Ashworth." I told Cas. "He's having us on, trying to make us think we've got the wrong address."

"Well," she said, "it's working. Are you sure this is the right house? Let's have a look at the paper."

"What paper?" I asked, trying to appear unconcerned. Quickly, I counterattacked. "Why are you always so quick to doubt me, to question my powers of memory?"

"What memory?" she jeered. "Oh No! Don't tell me that, with a memory like yours, you didn't write his address down anywhere. Jeezus! We've come all this way and we've no idea where Mal lives. My god, I'm married to a cretin!"

"Mea culpa (which, as Rich Brown will tell you, means 'How come I married this walking earache?'). So maybe I have got the wrong number. So what? It's not that big a road. We'll just have to ask somebody. After all, Mal is a fabulously fannish character -- everyone in Embsay must know him. There, let's start with that lady who's just about to get into her car."

In response to my query she looked even more blank than most of Steve Sneyd's verse. She pointed to an old gentleman shuffling towards us. "Try him," she suggested. "He's the milkman."

"Not the Dripping Milk man?" I replied.

She looked at me as if I'd gone out...and as if she wished she hadn't. I looked briefly towards the old gentleman and before I could thank her for her assistance, be it ever so marginal, she was away down the hill with the screech of tyres on gravel. In the gathering gloom we headed back down the road towards the dimly discerned figure of the milkman who, having witnessed the hasty departure of the lady in the car, had now come to a halt and was shuffling from one foot to the other in apparent indecision. We didn't actually reach him as, passing the end of a house-drive, one of the trees talked to me and, being a polite sort of person, I stopped to answer it.

"Aren't you coming in then?" it asked.

"My parents always taught me never to speak to strange trees." I replied. The milkman decided that discretion was indeed the better part of valour and hastened back from whence he came, presumably deciding that he could get by another couple of days before collecting the monies due to him from the top end of the Drive. Perhaps he'd never heard of the old song 'I Talk To The Trees'. I turned back to the inquisitive conifer just as Mal stepped forth from its shadow to welcome us, at long last, to Hotel Ashworth.

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We dined in the cosy little hotel dining room, on an excellent meal featuring mussels in a mushroom sauce (all except Cas that is, who held out for bacon and eggs with brown rice.....but that's another story entirely, and one for which fandom is not yet ready). My expectations of mussels were that they would be tough and rubbery, each one taking at least a fortnight to masticate into a swallowable condition. For this notion I can only blame Hazel Langford whose description of "small rubbery sea-creatures" has lodged in my memory. Needless to say this turned out to be a vile canard, and I was somewhat reassured to realise that if I were ever to be cast away upon some mussel-strewn beach I could survive quite happily until the last packet of mushroom sauce ran out. Afterwards we sat and talked about fandom past and present. Mal dragged out some ancient photographs



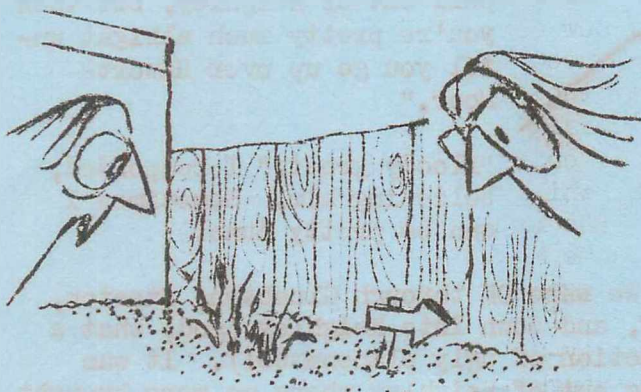
and we all croggled at how the fans concerned have changed in the intervening years, and how ATom hadn't. Could it be....? Apparently Mal had felt the need for at least some mystery in his background for this was the first time Hazel had seen these photos. It was a pleasant, laid-back evening, with Mal entertaining us with the low-down on the way things really were back in Fabulous Fifties Fandom, whilst I blackened the characters of all the present-day fans whose names cropped up from time to time. Much too soon it became much too late, and the exertions of the day overcame us. Shagged-out but happy we made our way to bed where, tired as I was, I was far too excited to sleep. I had met Mal Ashworth! Yippety-Shit! I lay in bed and read some old fanzines that Mal had thoughtfully provided, whilst the day sorted itself out in my mind, settled itself down and permitted sleep to finally claim me. Yes indeed, old Mal Ashworth fanzines are the perfect soporific.

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Sunday morning, coming down.....

.....but not too far down -- we were, after all, still at Mal and Hazel's.

After eating our way through about two hundred jars of Hazel's home-made marmalade we sauntered out into the garden where Cas obtained cuttings from just about every plant that caught her fancy, namely several varieties of mint which turned out to be the only edible items currently in season. Hazel advised us to plant them in a bucket or something, in order to prevent them from spreading like wildfire and taking over the entire garden. The concept of anything other than weeds spreading through our 'garden' without vast effort on our part ('vast effort' translates as looking up from the typewriter occasionally and glancing out of the window into the back garden) was so enticing that not only did we plant the cuttings without benefit of bucket, but we drew arrows in the dirt to indicate the direction in which they should first take off. As of this writing they are still huddling in a corner by the shed, but are looking



disgustingly healthy and doubtless merely await the coming of Spring in order to sal-ly forth and take over the entire border which surrounds the lawn (a euphemism for the patch of bare ground which the skelkids play upon and scrag to buggery) before moving on to an-nexe the Sudatenland.

With a bit of luck and tuppence next Summer we should have enough mint for an entire flock of lambs. I have planted the lamb cuttings -- a few chops and cutlets -- at the other end of the border and with any luck they'll meet up under the kitchen window some Sunday lunchtime.

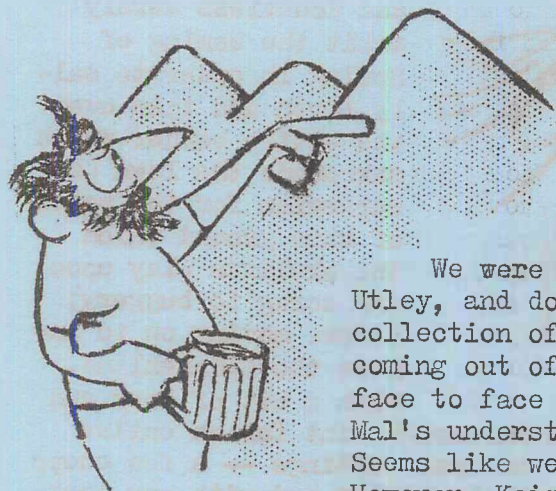
Between the Ashworth kitchen and the Ashworth garden...lies the Ashworth garage, and therein we espied two bicycles nuzzling off to one side. Yes, more closet cyclists! Apparently Mal's bike is currently off the road pending major engineering work beyond the competence of the average fan. However, as soon as this puncture is fixed, he will once more flash his thighs to the startled residents of the Yorkshire Dales. Is it any wonder that people are moving south in droves, I ask myself. I don't understand this problem with punctures, but then I do have a highly advanced puncture-repair kit called Nicholas. I simply slip him fifty pence to fix the fucker every time I get a puncture and there's no problem. Of course the overheads (Christmas and Birthdays, school uniforms, pocket-money, food, etc.) are pretty high, but it does keep you on the road.

It strikes me that there are enough of us cycling fans to form a group -- the Bicycling Beanies, or the BB's for short (so called because we're usually pretty shot).

Came the time to depart and Mal gave us the benefit of all his local knowledge of our intended route. "There's a bit of a

pull out of Keighley, but then you're pretty much alright until you go up over Haworth Moor."

"Bloody great." I responded, believing him. Sometimes I can be pretty dumb!



We were OK through Glusbern, Steeton, Utley, and down into Keighley (god, what a collection of ugly placenames!). It was coming out of Keighley where we were brought face to face with yet another example of Mal's understatement. 'A bit of a pull'? Seems like we were walking uphill for hours. However, Keighley is right next door to Bingley and so it's probably not too surprising that one's appreciation of the universe might become a little warped. We got to do a little riding, through Haworth and Oxenhope, before tackling the walk up over Haworth Moor. Almost at the very summit we took time out at the Waggon & Horses (if memory serves) for two helpings of beef salad which must have decimated entire herds, plus of course the odd pint or two, before once more heading on our way. Virtually from there on it was downhill all the way...in more ways than one.

The weather was still glorious and the scenery was superb. Scenically this was probably one of the highspots of the entire trip, though the view in the distance was becoming mistily enshrouded -- portending events of which we remained blissfully ignorant. We sped down through Pecket Well to Hebden Bridge and from there through Eastwood to Todmorden, where I went in search of a signposted toilet I never found (Paul Skelton has seen them ...). I ended up pissing down the side of a shed in the yard of a 'seafood' firm, fortunately deserted on a Sunday lunchtime, though what a seafood firm is doing in the backstreets of Todmorden, just about as far from the sea as it is possible to get in Lancashire, one neither knows nor cares -- especially



when one's bladder is assuming the proportions of a black hole. I did not contemplate such esoteric questions, merely stood facing this huge bin of seashells and felt \*relieved\* as the warm vapours arose in front of me. I did not even stop to think that these shells might include the remains of the very mussels I'd eaten the night before, and that I might be adding insult to injury in a rather personal way. Once more at peace with the world I made my way back to Cas who had been watching the ducks scrabbling about in this bright orange stream. I looked down at it and refused to take all the blame. We climbed back on our bikes and headed, through Walsden and Summit, to Littleborough.

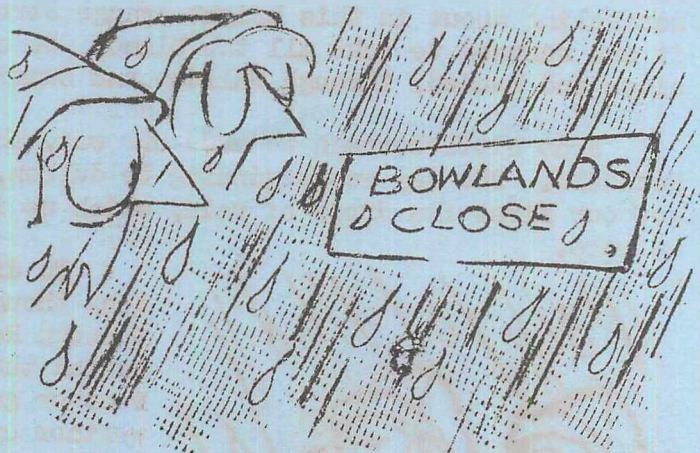
From Littleborough we made our way, through Smallbridge, to Rochdale. The day was beginning to dullen, and in Rochdale we got our first few drops of rain, which we ignored...fools that we were.



We didn't ignore them for long though. Before we were through Rochdale it had become so bad that we put on our wet-weather gear (what every wet-weather cyclist should wear -- number eight, 'The Scuba Outfit'). It was then that we discovered that our rainwear, which we had carted all around the Yorkshire Dales, was so old that it had ceased to be waterproof. SHIT!!!

What's more it got worse. We sped through Middleton with hardly a thought of calling in on Alan and Rochelle Doerey, heading towards Manchester before cutting off left through Gorton. Jeezus, but did it ever piss down when we were in Gorton! It was raining so hard that Cas could no longer cycle on, the rain on her spectacles making it impossible for her to see where she was going. However, as we were already as wet as we could possibly get we simply dismounted and carried on walking through it. Cas would cheerfully paddle through puddles on the grounds that her feet couldn't be wetter. What's more she

was right. I didn't walk through any puddles but our socks, when we finally arrived back at the skel-shelter and wrang them out, disgorged equall amounts of water. It was lucky that the weather broke when we were so close to home as I don't think I could have maintained my cheerfulness for more than a few miles of soggy cycling. As it was we squelched our way into 25 Bowland Close with an enormous sense of achievement. Christ, we were almost bleeding Gypsies. You wouldn't believe, after a brief half-hour's towelling dry, how much of a doddle our contemplated Summer's holiday was beginning to seem (but that will be another, and much shorter, story). However, I still had a bone or two to pick with Mal, about that 'bit of a pull up out of Keighley'. I dashed off a quick letter and received the following reply :-



MAL ASHWORTH 16 Rockville Drive, Embsay, Skipton, North Yorks.

A brief word before I am dragged, kicking and screaming, off to Devon tomorrow for my annual two weeks geriatric rest-and-recuperation-or-else period. I am glad that lying through my teeth about the escape route from Keighley gave you both the courage to go on in the face of a hostile environment. Hell, to anyone who'd cycled over the terrain you two covered the previous day, a ride up the South Face of Annapurna should be no more than a short sprint. We were -- and still are -- lost in admiration though, unlike Bob Shaw (as we hear from Eric Bentcliffe), not necessarily a crazy desire to emulate. We'll leave to the emus.

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"SFD is one publication of which I wish, at times, I had a complete file."

"Consider this -- Who is more likely to be a science fiction reader? A plumber or a nuclear physicist? A politician or a computer scientist? Am I over-simplifying? Perhaps. But then why do our bombs and computers work just fine while our pipes and our government clog up and smell?"

I didn't vote in the last PONG poll - my memory, such as it isn't, wasn't up to it. So, I kept a very careful record of all my incoming fannish mail in 1983, using a spare diary as a sort of 'day book'. Interestingly (to me at any rate) this reveals the following facts :-

Another zine which gave me great pleasure in 1983 was WARHOON 28 which I have re-read getting on for half-a-dozen



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