

XYSTER comes to you from DAVE WOOD 1, FRIARY CLOSE, MARINE HILL, CLEVEDON, AVON. BS21 7QA

Jungle tales of XYSTER



CANESCENCE MUST BE BANISHED, THUS SPAKE THE VOICE in the night..... so what with that and the letters pouring in complaining about layout, print size, lack of adequate spacing between paragraphs, smudgy print and so on, I knew I would have to do something drastic or lose my audience to the Ophthalmic Times.

As luck would have it, I came across some duping paper at such a ridiculous low price it was just begging to be bought by any right minded fan. A trip to my tame printer ascertained that his plain paper copier would gobble the stuff quite happily. I backed the hatchback up to the destitute office stationers and the manager was only too happy to load the last of the stock of "that sickly green paper nobody wants, Bert". I also took on a few tonne of yellow, pink, and blue "just to be on the sfe side." Back home I scrubbed the typer keys and the internal gubbing, renewed my vow to use more tipp-ex and set to work.....

.....but wait, an interruption. Great Tidings come down from Asgard. Immediately, daughter Shelley is despatched to procure some new dusters, Brenda departs to the DIY shop and returns armed with paint-brush and turps, son Damon is provided with pick axe and spade and set to work on the garden. Myself? I am dragged screaming from typer stool and detailed to proceed with a haste to the nearest builders merchant and acquire a minimum of fifty porous pink Spanish Florida garden slabs and enough stone dust to provide adequate foundations for said slabs.

On my return, some one hundred and one pounds (sterling) lighter, I am confronted by a hive of activity at the front of 'Mon Repose'. Brenda is painting the front door, Shelley is dusting the windows and Damon has cleared an area some twelve feet by eighteen; gone is the verdant sward I tend so lovingly through the year, instead, bare hard packed earth.

The lorry which had pursued me from the builders yard draws up and deposits its load of stone dust on the area, fifty porous pink Spanish Florida slabs on the drive, and my weekend pleasures are assured. I am to lay yet another car standing space. Why then this activity? What was the inspired communication that turned the Wood family into a local chapter of the Cargo Cult society? Why lay yet another car standing space when there is already one in existence plus a driveway plus a garage. Thus the neighbours mut ponder. How is it that they can ever concieve of the fannish excitement that has overcome the Wood household? How can they ever hope to understand the pride which is in the collective Wood hearts? How can they know that the ASHWORTHS are coming.

The Great Spiritual Journey from the wild wastes of barren Yorkshire to the golden sun drenched beaches of Devon is about to commence. The journey the People will take shall swing westwards from the outskirts of Embsay downward to the plains of Cheshire, pausing only to collect tithes and take sustenance at the Bentcliffe bijou. Then in one majestic flowing movement it will speed through the Midlands, curtains in their carriage drawn, so that, in the manner of the late great Queen of the Empire, Victoria, they might avoid casting their sensitive gaze on those dark satanic mills. And then finally descend for the weekend on the peaceful hamlet of Clevedon.

Oh, the joy! Oh, the excitement!

THE FLASHIEST YET!

Reet lass, get
theesen int'
shafts an' weell
be off



WOOD WIND

Speaking of neighbours. And I was speaking of neighbours. If you refer back to the previous page you will find that I noted 'Thus the neighbours must ponder.' Now regardless of whether they 'must' ponder or 'must' ponder, they are all around me. No doubt they are all around you. Very few of us manage to live anywhere without neighbours breathing down our necks. I've had some neighbours in my time, I can tell you! In my ~~48 years~~ short life time I've lived in over a half dozen different houses at one time or another. This has meant I have experienced over a score of families of all types and persuasions; some good, some bad.

On the good side neighbours are kind, considerate, helpful folk who leave you with pleasant memories. As a child I was fortunate in that the families on both sides of the parental home were exceptional, and I've retained warm and pleasant memories of those days. During the war years (1939-45, for those of you who might not be too sure as to which conflict I refer.) times were hard (four to a room, we took in refugees, cold porridge and eating out of old newspapers - the usual stories) but as neighbours everyone seemed to muck in and things nearly always seemed to be better than they really were. Anyway, next door at number two, lived an oldish couple with a grown up family, three of the children were in His Majesty's Armed forces. The old man, as he was called by his offsprings drove lorries for a farmers merchant. This meant that he was one of the few essential civilian drivers around. During the school holidays he would let me accompany him round his patch which wonderfully, took in the West Riding, North Lancs and much of Westmoreland and Cumberland. This provided me unalloyed pleasure, helping no end to keep the thoughts of the war at the back of my mind, tucked away and almost forgotten. One perk he had was that with such close contact with outlying farms he managed to acquire 'little extras' which rationing and ration books didn't normally allow. One such extra was fertilised eggs. These he would carefully transport home and place in the warmth of the kitchen range where they would incubate. I can still remember that special day each spring when the Missus would bang on our back door and shout for me to come into the kitchen. Crouched there on the floor I would watch in childish wonder as, one by one, the eggs would gradually crack, a small beak poke out and then in a flurry of yellow down the new chicks would emerge and cheep cheep at their newfound world. Human nature, being what it is, the chicks, when old enough, were transferred to the chicken run, here they were fed and fattened over the summer and autumn, laying eggs for the table and eventually providing the centre piece for the Christmas table. All Christmas week the old man would be wringing their necks and, with my father, ensconce himself in the hen hut where the feathers would be plucked in a frenzy of action. I would stand fascinated as the feathers whirled and swirled round their feet gradually carpeting the floor and covering the two men from head to toe.

But things in those years were not always so happy. One day a telegram was delivered to number two. I can remember standing, small and confused, as two adult families wept in the front room. Donald, the youngest son, was lost at sea presumed drowned. Something seemed to go out of our lives that morning and things were never quite the same through that long cold winter. Then one spring the most amazing thing happened. A man from a national newspaper knocked on our door and asked my mother if she knew the next door people very well. Did she know their son Donald. Could she say anything about him. My poor mother was in confusion. Why she wondered, were the questions directed at her when the family lived next door. The man said that his associate was already next door and, well, it was good news. Donald had turned up in England. My memory is hazy about some of the detail despite the fact my mother kept newspaper clippings for many years after. They're lost now, probably thrown out when my father died and mother, for reasons of her own, purged the house of many mementoes of the past. Somehow Donald had found himself on a small life raft with a few other sailors. They were picked up and taken to the Italian mainland where they were interred in a POW camp. There he was given the task of maintaining those huge European steam trains which crossed France from Italy bound for Germany. One day, he and another POW secreted themselves in the bottom of a coal tender. There, fellow prisoners built a small roof over them and then filled the tender with coal. It was an audacious attempt to escape. And it worked. They survived the journey to the north of France, then left the train and were picked up by a group who helped them out of the country.

Another boy called David lived at the other side. He had an uncle who was something in submarines. For some reason he was always going across to Canada. On leave, he would return with bundles of American comics and the funnies section of the Toronto Star. I guess I was lucky in that he shared these prizes with me. I added them to my staple diet of English fodder and adventured with

Tarzan, Superman, Billy Batson, Terry and the Pirates, Prince Valient and all the other peoples of those wonderful worlds.

It wasn't until Brenda and I married that nasty neighbours entered my life. He liked to describe himself as a Higher Clerical Officer in the Civil Service. She was a bitch. Our first real encounter came one balmy summer's evening when the blood was running fast and we were - well, cavorting in the bedroom. Suddenly there was the most almighty banging on the bedroom wall. Caught in a state of er interruptus we were brought to a grinding (um) halt. Then the phone rang. It was HER. Would we make less noise doing whatever it was we were doing! Now, as fate would have it, Brenda was also a Civil Servant and one day she arrived home to breathlessly announce that she had seen 'him next door' in the building where she worked. It turned out he had been transferred to that department. Luckily not the same office. This move however brought on another spate of persecution. Brenda was in the habit of cycling home for lunch. Ten minutes homeward, ten minutes back and fifteen minutes for something to eat. All in half an hour. Mrs Bitch would watch her comings and goings and then ring her husband and inform him of the times. He kept a note each day until he had enough 'evidence'. This he presented to the head of the department. Fortunately, the boss had his own views on Mr Sneaky and told him he didn't want to hear such tittle-tattle and anyway, as a supervisor, surely he knew private phone calls were forbidden.

A few moves later we came across another family of creeps. They had lived in South Africa and were always bending the ear of all and sundry about the wonderful life out there; the parties, the large estate, the swimming pool and most of all the servants ("not that you could trust them to get anything right, old chap, you know, they're like children") We avoided them like the plague.

That was, until the day I was pottering in the garden and he approached, all smiles. "Look old chap, we are having a spot of wine and cheese. How about popping in with the good lady?" The good lady wasn't at all keen but we thought, what the hell, and went.

It was all very civilised and pleasant to start with. Out came the best glasses and the best wine and some delicious cheese and bickies. We chatted about this and that; the weather, the cricket, the state of the pier (it had fallen down) and what a beautiful garden I kept. Suddenly SHE leaned forward, "Brenda," she smiled sweetly, "Would you please remove your washing line."

Brenda, caught utterly off guard, could only splutter cheese crumbs and croak "Pardon?"

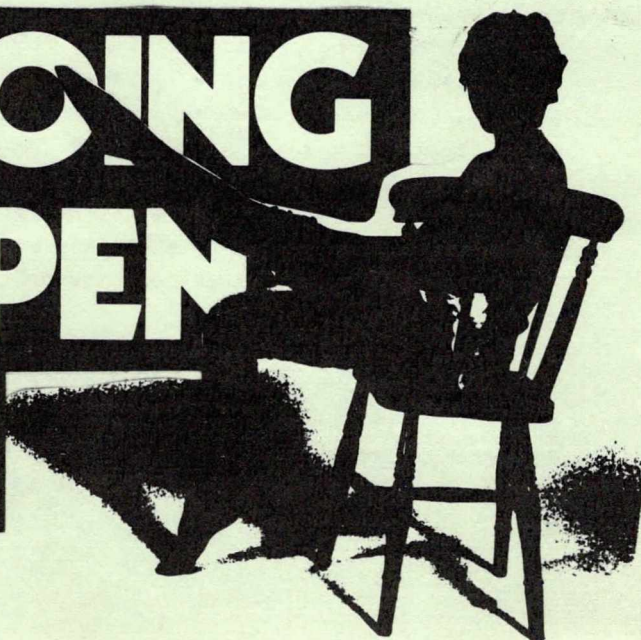
"Your washing line, Brenda. When Darling (her husband) brings home guests (his boss or clients) and we take them out on the terrace for drinks it does so obstruct the view of the channel. And you must admit, in this neighbourhood a washing line is so Coronation Street."

We left, mid drink, mid cheese, mid frozen silence.

The day they moved on we did two things. First, we sent them a postcard with a painting on it. The painting showed a pair of panties on a washing line. Second, we made great display of removing our washing line. Ah, the satisfaction.

The current family aren't much better. The kids dash up and down stairs screaming and shouting and banging doors. Even the people three houses away can hear them. They've got to go. We are plotting. WE will not be moved.

WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN IN 87?



I was listening somewhat abstractedly to a discussion about Wittgenstein and something called the mathematical experience when, without warning, Tony leaned forward and suggested it was my round. This threw me into ferment and I looked round accusingly at everyone's glass. Indeed they were all empty, including mine which I had been toying with as I pondered over the quality of conversation one finds in pubs these days.

"My," I said brightly. "Doesn't drink pass quickly when you are discussing 'Tractatus Logico-philosophicus'?"

The Ashworths untangled themselves from one another. They too had been enjoying the flow of philosophical rhetoric and a little body contact. Mal looked at his glass critically. "The inside does seem almost dry."

I took the hint and the empties and made my way across to the bar. The evening was going pretty well, I reflected, and the beer and company proving outrageously good.

Not that I hadn't had qualms earlier that day about ever getting the party under way. The Ashworths had been due at noon, having left the Bentcliffe residence soon after breakfast. However by one thirty there was still no sign of them and I was beginning to work out how much I could get for fifty slightly used pink Spanish Florida paving slabs, when my son who was at the lookout point atop the house, shouted that there was a Skoda car skulking in the drive way. The occupants emerged and it was indeed the Ashworths. Mal seemed to have some trouble in getting past the steering wheel.

"Don't worry about him," smiled Hazel, "It's the All-Bran."

"Pardon?"

"Old Benders shovelled enough of the stuff into him to keep the British Army on the move."

"Just needs tamping down." Mal grunted launching into pork pie, salad, French bread, cheeses and chili sauce. "That's better..... um, I see you've got some Ruddles County."

I hastily suggested a walk to the local bookshops to sharpen his appetite; the one thing to counter his thirst.

However the women folk had other plans for us and we found ourselves strolling the promenade, with matching pair of dogs. For a while Mal seemed content. Out came his camera and lightmeter. Carefully composed shots of the Wood family against the backdrop of the half pier were taken. Then carefully composed pictures of Hazel against the backdrop of the half pier. Then carefully composed pictures of the half pier. Then carefully composed pictures.

We strolled along in the warm February sunshine and Hazel remarked on the mild climate we seemed to enjoy. She marvelled at the fact we had seen no snow this winter and regaled us with horrifying tales of deep snowdrifts and cold biting winds. "The snow was so deep that we could hardly find the pub. But Mal's marvellous under such conditions. He bought himself a snow shovel and I dug us out in no time at all."

It was Shelley who first realised that Mal was no longer with us. In the distance we could just make out the dejected shape seated on the railings.

"What's the matter with him, then?" I asked Hazel.

"Oh, he's probably beginning to worry."

"Worry?"

"Well, you did promise to show him the bookshops. He gets so fretful. Worries a lot about someone buying the book he's been looking for."

"Do you think I ought to...?"

"I think it would be kinder...."

So I left the women and the dogs and escorted him to the utopian environs of the second hand book world.

He was so much happier for the rest of the afternoon. I found two old Patrick Campbell paper backs whilst Mal ferretted and snuffled amongst ghod knows what.....

Back at Mon Repose we settled down to Ruddles County and a conducted tour of the house. My wife and I are both proud of its special features. The splendid view over the Bristol Channel, the set of pre-war Astoundings, the large decorative garden, the Wodehouse 1st edition, the two hundred year old oak tree, the framed signed greeting from Shorty Rogers, the unusual fire place, the shelves of pulps and so on and so forth.....

Early evening Tony Walsh and Jane turned up and we settled down to fannish things, like looking at old photographs.....

"Oooh, look at old Benters."

"Ghod is that really Norman Shorrocks?"

"Whose legs are those you are on Mal?"

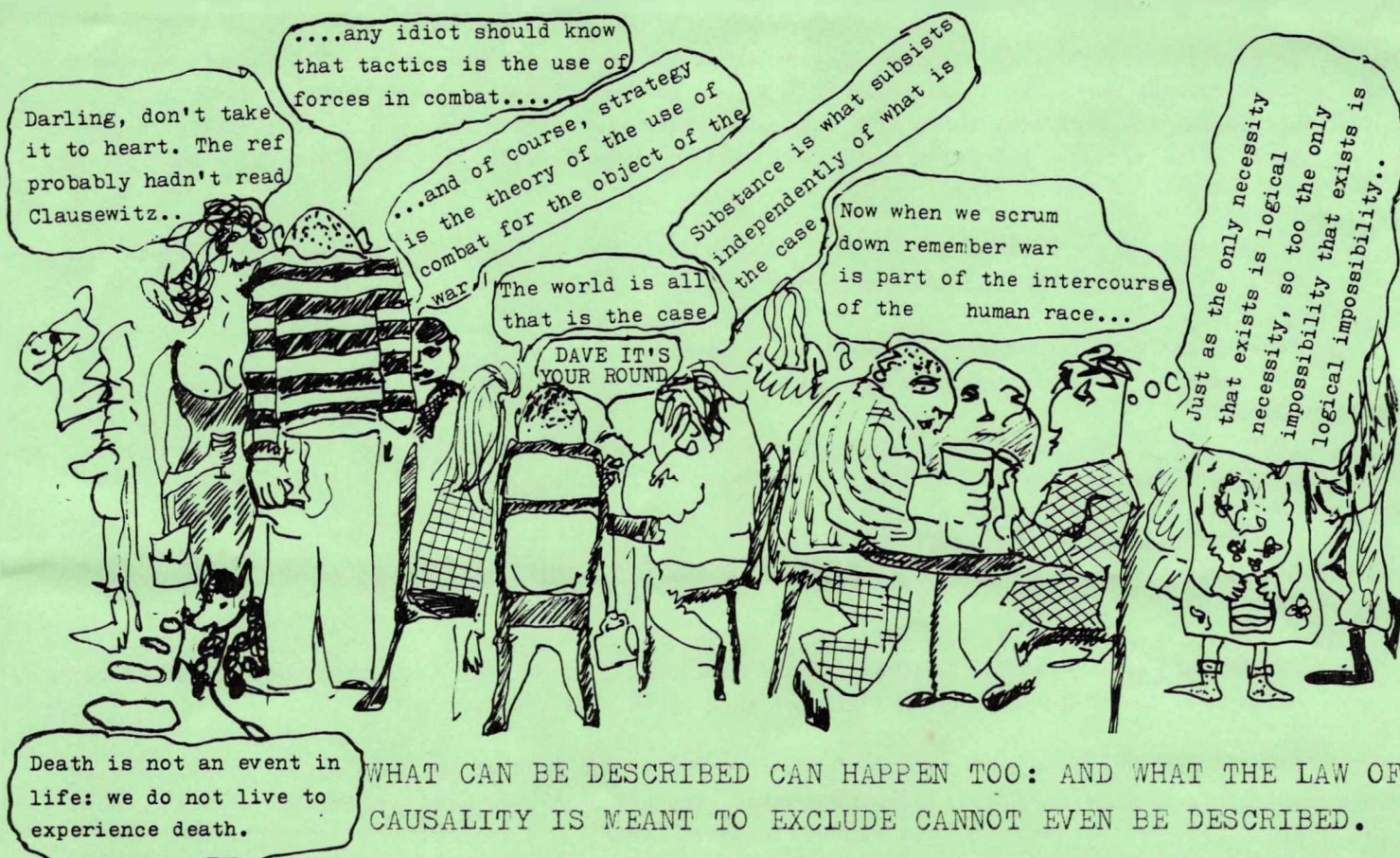
"That's just got to be Terry Jeeves' head down there!"

.....and drinking.

Then, surprise, the phone rang and it was Vin^c Clarke. A long series of animated conversations took place. I settled back contentedly counting the extra cash flowing into British Telecoms. Tony began to worry about the wine, which, in his opinion, was beginning to run dangerously low. Hazel began to make suggestions about eating and Brenda to worry about getting a table at the 'Crab Apple'. Eventually the Clarke Telemarathon ran out of steam and we set forth.

During the meal we had an interesting discussion about the precise moment Burgess had introduced pork pies on the unsuspecting convention scene but the continual intake of beer and wine gradually brought stimulating discussion to a halt and we found ourselves fragmented into groups. Brenda and Jane tackled the DHSS and teenagers and sex, Hazel and I got our heads together about the quality of life and good marmalade at the breakfast table while Tony and Mal launched into Wittgenstein.

The trouble was, both Tony and Mal suffer from poor hearing in one ear. You have to sit wind-ward side to converse at a tolerable level. Each had managed to place himself on the wrong side of the other. Much bobbing and weaving took place and voices rose in decibel level. Now, if there is one cultural spot in Clevedon where Wittgenstein philosophy would be a preferred topic of conversation over the fate of the local rugger club, then the 'Crab Apple' would not appear to be it. Wittgenstein and rugger do not go together, you might think, but one burly 'varsity type, mishearing in his cups, launched into tactical moves as propounded in Clausewitz 'On War' and the defensive techniques of Count Ludwig Adolf Peter Wittgenstein at the Battle of Austerlitz and Friedland.....



We must have tumbled to bed in the early hours of Sunday morning.

I forgot to mention the Friary situated behind our house when I was remarking on neighbours. Within its walls live a small group of Franciscan Friars who seem to exist on a Rent-A-Monk basis. Early Sunday mornings they sally forth to various Parishes in the area as locums, to conduct service. Most walk. Some ride bikes. Once in a while one of them uses the communal car. He is elected that day into the Order of the Patron Saint of Noise. A ghodly beginning to his day is to try and start the car. At six a.m. he emerges from his cell and pulling out the choke turns the engine over incessantly until the thing floods. He then gets out and slams the car door, returning to the Friary where he no doubt offers up thanks to our Maker.

This we call the first shattering of sleep.

Time is allowed for succumbing to shallow sleep.

He emerges for a second go. This follows exactly the same pattern and is equally unsuccessful. So endeth the second period.

The third time it always starts. This is not however a sign for him to depart. He leaves the engine running at full throttle, gets out, slams the door, and returns to the Friary. This is to test the devil who may be tempted to cause the engine to seize up.

This is the point at which I fling the bedclothes off and rise in disgust.

The Ashworths took it all in their stride, expressing surprise that anything had occurred. They rose late and after a hearty breakfast departed for Torquay.

Not long after they left the northern sky darkened and we had our first snow of the winter.

There was a statement from Simon Polley in Matrix 51 which caught my eye.

"It is hard to believe that there is any common ground between say, the facile rocketship book covers still being used and the gravelly SF cartoons produced by modern French Artists."

Now it wasn't the quote in its entirety which set my mind racing, but the middle phrase, about rocketships still being used. I got to thinking, wasn't that perhaps another of those sweeping statements like the hoary old one about all pulps having covers depicting semi-clad females being ravished by green BEMs.....

Being at a loose end I decided to do a little survey. Still being used? When ever were they so?

Analog 1965 to date approx 240 covers 59 with 'rocketships'

F&SF 1965 to date approx 240 covers 41 covers.

Amazing 52 copies had 39 of the critters....

Fantastic 50 copies with 6 roaring off into the void. (Incidentally I was shocked to find that all those Fantastics yielded a mere 11 nubile women..I trully expected more... another myth?)

Galaxy 97 covers sported 29 facile rocketships.

My son, being nosey as usual, read the above. "But dad, he was talking about book covers."

"I know, I know, I was just trying to make a point."

"But if he was talking about book covers why use magazines as your example?"

"What do you want me to do? Check all my book covers?"

"Well, yes. That would be only fair."

"All of 'em!"

Anyway, he got his way, partially. We examined a round thousand magazines and the same number of hardback/paperbacks from my collection.

Accepting a rocketship as something constructed for travelling the void whether propelled by liquid oxygen/ kerosene or liquid hydrogen and all the other wonders up to and including teleportation the results are as follows:-

Magazines:- 26% had the dreaded...

Books:- 14.4% displayed 'em

The poor ol' facile rocketship hardly seems to have had its fair share, does it.....

PHILIP COLLINS PHILIP COLLINS PHILIP COLLINS

PHILIP COLLINS

INTIMATE STRANGER



"Oh Philip, I'm going to be directing a play called 'Habeus Corpus' by Alan Bennett and there's a part in it I'd just love you to play. I just know you'd be absolutely wonderful."

The speaker of the above was a man always effusive with praise - at least when he wanted you to do something for him. So knowing all the compliments were just to butter me up, did I let them go to my head? You bet I did. That evening I sat down to read through the script and look in particular at the part of Sir Percy Shorter.

It was obvious from the start why I had been asked to play that part. In keeping with his name, Sir Percy Shorter lacked in height, with jokes abounding to this fact.

Vicar to Sir Percy: "Come on stand up and fight."

Sir Percy to Vicar: "I am standing up."

I did think the play was very funny though, and was enjoying reading it until I came across the following stage direction:

'Percy steps forward, places his hands on Connie's breasts, and his trousers fall down.'

WHAT? Feeling like I'd walked into a concrete post, I reread the sentence in case my mind had temporarily wandered. But no. Aghast I read on:

'Percy Kneels and puts his hand up Connie's skirt'

and later on:

'Standing up, Percy kisses Connie and follows her offstage leaving his trousers behind.'

Now I don't mind taking my trousers off, I've done this a number of times on stage. But actually having to grope somebody! And a female body to boot.....

I spoke to the director the next day and he calmly cut through my agitated state with the even more devastating news that the body I was to touch was that of a certain Pam Taylor.

BLOODY HELL!!

Pam was a slender, elegant young lady with shoulder length hair and a face of sublime beauty. Furthermore, she was a creature I had long worshipped from afar. And now I was supposed to go out and lay hands on this demi-goddess.....

Then there was one Vernon Leese. Captain of the college rugby team. A man of immense size and strength. A veritable manmountain. And, as luck would have it, Pam's boyfriend. The question now racing through my quickly siezing up mind was simply would he mind me grabbing his lady and could I afford the hospital bills if he did?

The director continued to massage my ego: my ego being bigger than my fear, I agreed to do the part. Came the first rehearsal, and the director explained to us that since he wanted realism, all kissing and touching would be done from this first moment onwards.

I did not dare to look in the direction of Pam and Vernon.

We started to work through the first act with those dreaded stage directions getting closer every minute. Then suddenly it was upon me. I stepped forward, closed my eyes, lifted up my hands and thrust them in what I thought was the general direction of Pam's breasts. And missed them entirely. Turning an interesting shade of scarlet and giggling nervously I tried again; contact. But it was all too much for me. My hands fluttered to my sides and I had to turn away to try to conceal my shame and embarrassment. The rest of the cast were killing themselves with laughter; all I wanted was for the earth to open up and swallow me.

Luckily Pam took charge of the situation. She turned me round and said, placing my hands in position, "Come on Phil let's get on with it." I was so taken aback by her commanding stage presence that I immediately sobered up and we finished the rest of the scene without a hitch.

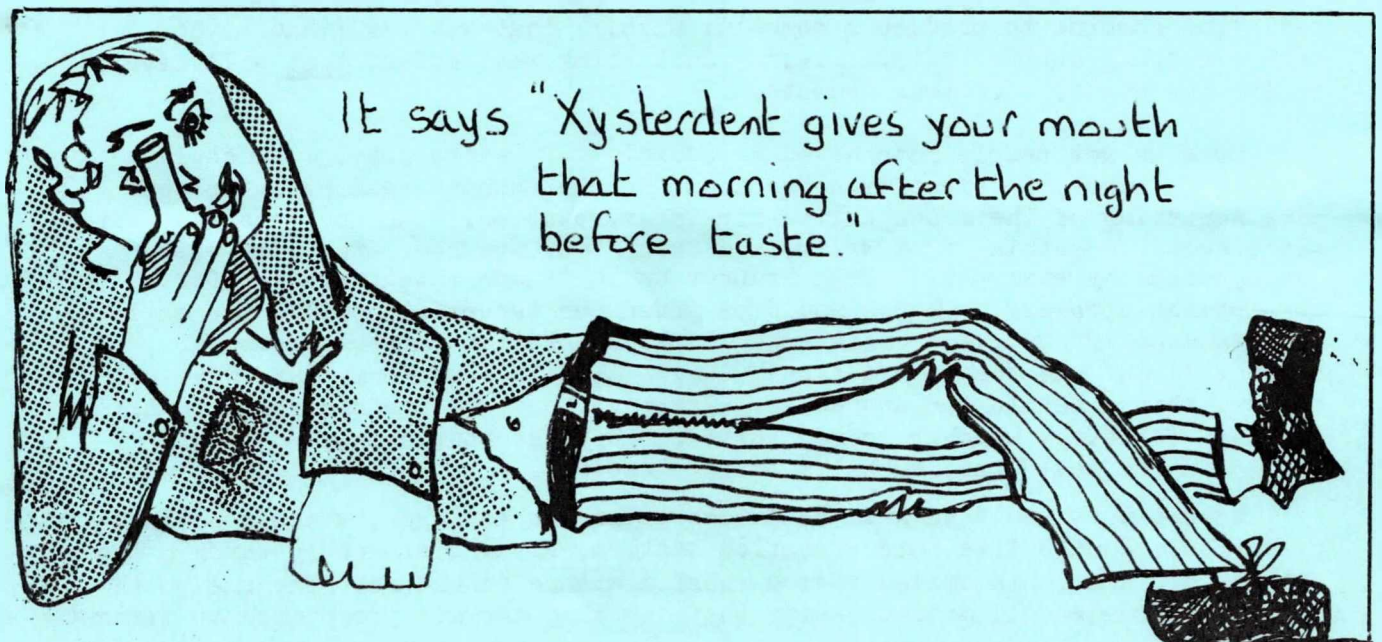
That night after rehearsal I felt a miserable failure. I'm not normally a quitter but I did seriously consider chucking it all in and going off and becoming a monk or something.

The next day I saw Pam in the library and went over to apologise for the previous night's fiasco. Pam listened and then quietly but firmly talked to me reassuring me and repairing my shattered nerves. She told me that once she had to do something similarly embarrassing on stage but one just got used to doing it. Through Pam's kind words I did continue and indeed it did quickly become just another scene to perform.

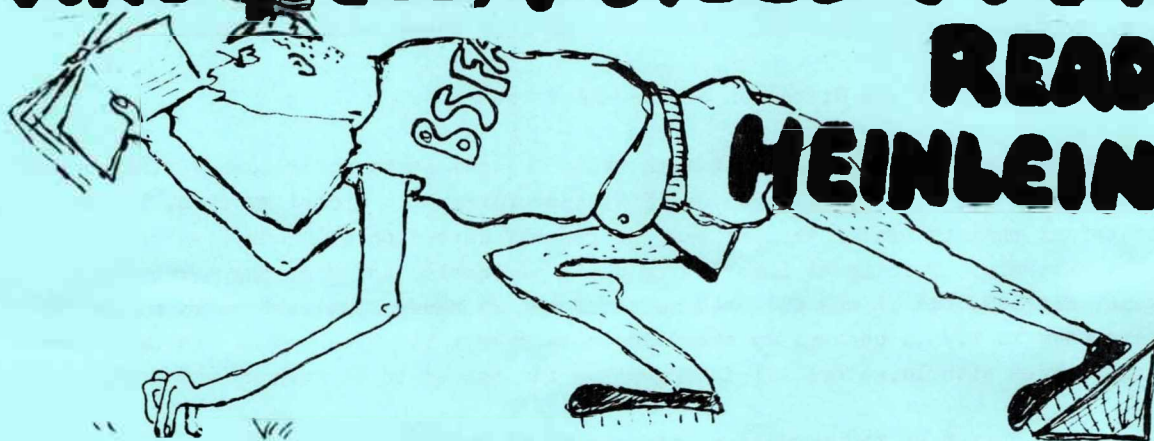
A few weeks later I was wandering around college when I saw a friend, Mary, who was normally a happy sort of woman and I waved at her anticipating a cheerful chat. Instead Mary half raised her hand in greeting and then turned and collapsed on the stairway in a flood of tears. It seemed her boyfriend and herself were close to breaking up; and she was crazy about him. At some point during the conversation I put my arm round her shoulders.

Now, as anyone who knows me will confirm I am normally a very inhibited sort of person being very nervous when it comes to bodily contact. Yet due I am sure to that play, here I was holding someone close to give them some sort of comfort. Later walking home I thought about what I had done and was rather taken aback by my uncharacteristic actions.

Mary later told me that she had found my presence a great comfort, and things did work out for her after all. In fact her boyfriend is now her husband.



"AND NOW, POISED TO START READING HEINLEIN...."



VINØ CLARKE..VINØ CLARKE..VINØ CLARKE..VINØ CLARKE..VINØ CLARKE

Science-fiction reading is not much of a spectator sport. Neither, in my opinion, is downhill slalom racing. All those weirdly dressed people with their legs tied to pieces of wood zooming out of the fog and snow to slide face-first into a thin line of spectators. Heavens - Charlie Chaplin got the most that anyone could out of elongated funny footwear many years ago. Yet slalom and equally obscure pursuits - ice-hockey, speed-skating, etc., are raised to the dignity of Olympic Winter Games. S-f reading, the winter pursuit of many more people than these frost-bitten fiascos put together, is neglected.

Let's get together and push for S-F Reading in the '88 Winter Olympics!

I know that there's a lot of work to be done on the idea - possibly it could tie in with the publicity for the '87 World Con. with the same Committee - but we're equal to anything. S-f fans ought to be running the world, anyway. A little matter like this just needs a modicum of thought from the assembled fine minds.

"But...." I hear you cry. Oh yes, the first and greatest obstacle is that s-f reading is usually carried out in the privacy of one's home, behind locked doors - in fact, in utter secrecy if you're a fanzine fan. What we should do is to come out of the closet, carrying our books and 'zines openly, not forgetting to flush the pan behind us, and read aloud. On the bus, in the train, waiting at the traffic lights, lying in bed at night, let those pearls flow out audibly. "Electro-gravitic radiation and electro-magnetic radiation oombine to produce a momentum wave. That was all I had to do - make electro-gravitic radiation..." Just think what effect that will have on the bus queue. Or your bedmate.

Once we get people interested in audible s-f, we're away. We could have, for a start, a competition based on the contestants reading set pieces plus something of their own choice for interpretation. We could have accepted set pieces...something from Wells, something from Wyndham, etc., the same passage read by everyone. John Brunner could do the interpretation for non-English speakers. Marks would be given for technical merit - the ability to pronounce 'Ptavv', the difference in pronunciation between eg. the current 'John' and the future 'Jon', being able to read from DUNE: "The man moved within a hesitation-awareness. There was an orthographic thing on his face now for every watcher to recognise..." without hesitating, and landing firmly on the next line, eyeballs moving together.

Competitors would be able to choose their own passages, whether Ballard or Norman, etc in the free interpretation section, gliding sinuously through the rhythms of "Shilohin smiled from a short distance behind me. 'The one on the left is a single-cell microorganism that contains enzymes programmed to dismantle

the DNA of its own nucleus and reassemble the pieces into a copy of the host organism's DNA' she said." , or a dramatic rendering of "Give me some light! Cry: tormented half-moan half-chant, cast out against a whispering darkness....".

Yes, there are great possibilities here, and I'm sure the editor would love to receive your suggestions. But I'm the first to recognise that, intellectually superior though S-F Reading may be to ice-dancing or four-men luge racing, and satisfying though it might be to the aficianado, the mob -the millions who think Stranger in a Strange Land is probably a book about Tibet by David Bellamy and Childhood's End a novel of seduction by Barbara Cartland - would not be satisfied. They would bay for blood and guts, the thrill of seeing someone being carried off in an ambulance.

One must bow to the majority. How else to get TV coverage and sponsorship - the free Adidas magazine carrier bags, the sweatshirts with I LOVE ASIMOV stencilled on them, the car stickers reading SF READERS DO IT WITHOUT GRAVITY? They also ~~serve~~ who sit and bleed in front of the cameras. The best solution that occurs to me is that we issue all the competitors with radio-transmitters, mount them, books and all, on skis, and send them down the side of a mountain.



THEY BROKE THE MOULD BEFORE THEY MADE PERELMAN

S J PERELMAN on S J PERELMAN

If I ever sit down like a retired Scotland Yard Inspector to write my memoirs, which I have provisionally entitled "Forty Years A Boob", one of the episodes I plan to gloss over is the night of pub-crawling I spent in Hollywood last summer with a beautiful Amazonian extra player named for purposes of this indiscretion, Audrey Merriwede. For nine tumultuous hours, her destiny and mine were interwoven (no more than our destinies I hasten to add: we never progressed even to the point of lacing fingers.) The encounter was so brief, our lack of rapport so conclusive, that when I received a postcard from her recently - an aerial view of San Bernardino with a shrunken lemon wired to it - I could not recall the creature for a few seconds. Then the whole gruesome affair came back, and I realised with an uprush of pique that the card had an ulterior significance. So I was a wizened little fruit long past its prime was I?

A classic Perelman beginning. To me, Perelman was THE master at opening a humorous piece: his ability to hook the reader has never been bettered. He was the most uniquely gifted of all those American writers who graced the pages of the New Yorker and added something special to early American cinema comedy. He came to prominence when invited to script the early Marx Brothers films in Hollywood and was a member of that band of writers who went west from New York to work on the talkies. He once said he was also the first to return east to spread the bad news. In his early days he was also a cartoonist of no mean ability. However he gave that up to concentrate on writing. One classic cartoon caption belonged to him - "I've got Bright's disease and he's got mine." Anyone interested in humorous writing can hardly say he has graduated if he is not aware of Perelman. His art can be found in such classic collections as 'Crazy Like A Fox', 'The Ill Tempered Clavicorn' and 'Bite On The Bullet (or Under The Spreading Atrophy)'. Here can be found a distillation of the art of humorous writing. Parody, literary allusion, surreal situation, knock about comedy, he polished it all to the finest of art. His titles alone give you a flavour of his bite - 'Farewell My Lovely Appetiser' (on Chandler and Marlowe) 'Who stole my Golden Metaphor' (Truman Capote) 'Come On In The Liability's Fine' (Walt Chicanery of the Hindsight Insurance Company) and 'Swindle Sheet With Blueblood Engrailed, Arrant Fibs Rampant' (Britain's indigent Lords ask for expense accounts).

His series with the overall title 'Cloudland Revisited' are a particular favourite. Here he examines the American obsession with show biz and its popular culture. Want to find some thing on Tarzan, silent movies, film stars, comics, sf, cowboys, shrinks and writers dig into this series. Here is a peculiar Perelman country where, through a twisted mirror, we see a reflection of America done with such an ability to weave words and phrases it doesn't really matter if you know the participants or even the event, you will soon find yourself immersed in his particular vision of the subject. Take for instance 'By The Waters of Razz-Ma-Tazz'

Towards the end of 1920, or just about the time the fencing foils on my bedroom wall were yielding to sepia portraits of Blanche Sweet and Carol Dempster, I became briefly enamoured of a Rhode Island schoolmate named, if memory serves, Cecilia Cahoon. Together with a dozen other unemployables that semester, Miss Cahoon and I were retracing Xenophon's footsteps to the sea, and as we toiled our daily twenty parasangs over the stony Mesopotamian plain, leaving a wake of dead and dying gerunds, I felt myself involuntarily succumbing to her spell. Though hardly the comeliest girl in the class, Cecilia possessed a figure so voluptuous that it added every male within a radius of fifty feet. Whenever she was called upon to recite, chairs began to scrape, pencils rolled off the desks, people upset ink on their trousers, and the quickened exhalations formed a steam that fogged the windows. In her senior year at Classical High, Cecilia undoubtedly came in for more accidental jostling in corridor and lunch room than any one prior to Sophia Loren.

If you haven't read Perelman do it now. If you have then its time you reread him. He's too special to leave for too long. Incidentally if anyone has a spare copy of 'Crazy Like A Fox' 'A Child's Garden of Curses' or 'Westward Ho' I'M in the market.....

I leave you with a segment from 'Short Easterly Squall With Low Visibility and Rising Gorge' a parody on W Somerset Maugham following a review Perelman spotted in the Times of 'The Vagrant Mood'.

What elfin charm, what pawky and mettlesome humour, tessellate the pages of Oliver Cudlipp's new garland of whimsical papers, 'From A Misanthrope's Inkwell'! The title, so gruff that the unwary might may not descry the impudent grin lurking beneath the domino, is a wickedly disingenuous one, for if ever author were untainted by the cheap cynicism that characterises your modernist, avant-garde scribbler, it is Cudlipp. Mellow, fantastical, un-feuilletoniste bien spirituel, he wends his roguish way, gently puncturing our foibles with his unerring quill but never overstepping the bounds of good taste. If occasionally it is impossible to tell what he is driving at, do not be fooled into thinking him insipid. Pompous, attitudinising, unreadable, yes, but never insipid.

MAL

A LITTLE OFF WHAT YOU FANCY WITH DOES YOU GOOD

ASHWORTH

WHY THEN IS MY PUMP
WELL FLOWERED (RMO)
R&J Act 11 Scene 1V

I guess vasectomy must be in the air ('In The Spring A Young Man's Fancy Lightly Turns To Thoughts Of Vasectomy'), which, as Oscar Wilde said about sex on the brain, is probably the worst possible place for it. Only a few days after reading Dave's Hammer horror films version of his experiences in Xyster, I came across the subject again in The Sunday Times. (Just occurred to me what a rich field this could be for Video Nasties. I think it was the 'Hammer' connotations that started it. Imagine the blurb: "Even when he became a respected surgeon he never forgot his early experiences on the chain-gang. Or the tools they used....." Then of course, you could re-cycle all the old stand-byes: "He wanted to do something about over-population. And a chain-saw seemed like the quickest way.....", or "A gripping film of a surgeon with an interest in wildlife. He trained piranhas to help him in his work")

According to the Sunday Times piece, headed 'Vasectomy is Good For You' ('Vasectomy, Baby, and I'll Be Good To You'), a survey of 10,000 vasectomised men in the United States has shown them to be healthier than a control group (I wonder if they're described like that because they have to exercise more control ?) of 10,000 who are still all in one piece. Healthy ? Hell, yes, my own experience precisely. I staggered across to the mirror, pausing only to trip over the cat (have to change either the carpet or the cat; damn thing blends in too well. Better change the carpet, come to think about it - the cat's pretty healthy; he's had a vital bit snipped off too. Many's the morning we lounge here in the sun exchanging snide and knowing winks. Never could work up a macho conspiracy like that with a carpet.) The mirror - oh, yeah. I parted the undergrowth hanging over my forehead and confronted a face which was clearly in the pink - well, the eyes, anyway. Every pore exuded good health (funny, good health apparently looks just like sweat). Every wrinkle was deep and well-formed, the bags under my eyes a healthy shade of mid-brown, and there was that slight quiver of the hand that betrays the pent-up nervous energy of the thoroughbred animal ready for anything. Uh huh. I let the undergrowth fall back into place. Maybe those Yankee studs knew something I didn't - like how to stay away from Tetley's Bitter. ('Tetley's Bittermen - you can't beat 'em', say the adverts. Truth is, you probably can't even find 'em. Try looking under the table.)

Well, anyway, that was the Good News. All us guys with a little bit missing and endless million sperm chasing their tails around our systems, playing Hampton-Court-Maze without a solution, are healthy as hell. (Hazel, reading this last bit, said: "It sounds terrible. I imagine if I got really stoned I'd look at you and you'd be like an aquarium full of tadpoles") (Seems like everything's got an angle today. I mean, just look at the wonderful slogan for the Vasectomy Marketing Board you could get out of that idea: "Better An Aquarium Full of Tadpoles Than A House Full of Tads". Bring 'em flocking in, that would.) We, too, can go off and chase tail, secure in the knowledge that we're ridiculously fit as well as completely harmless. What did intrigue me about the Sunday Times bit, though, was that it appeared in the 'Business News'; what gives ? Is all that jazz about Balance Sheets and Unit Trusts and whatnot really just a respectable front for The Gigolo's Gazette ?

I seem to remember it was made clear that before you actually went into the operating theatre for the quick and fateful encounter with Madame Guillotine, the area surrounding the actual target point had to be as hairless as a Convention organiser trying to run a programme on time. If you didn't choose to take care of this for yourself, they would do it for you when you got there. I chose to take care of it for myself. If it is true that the world is divided into optimists and pessimists, I come somewhere a little downwind of the latter, and while others may have every expectation of being shaved by some nubile humdinger somewhat like General Dreedle's nurse in CATCH-22 ('a purple uniform so tight that her nipples stood out like bing-cherries'), I was moderately certain of landing a fire-breathing old dragon whose scorched-earth policy would make Vietnam look like a flower-show.

Of course, all this came after several earlier hurdles, like a chat with the doctor and a more formal meeting - Hazel and I - with the surgeon, the main point of which seemed to be to make sure - and then double-sure - and then double-triple-sure - that we understood that once he had done his Hercules and the Hydra bit on me, we couldn't have children. I wondered what he thought we'd gone in hopes of before he told us that - curing diarrhoea ? Getting rid of wax in the ears ? But he was quite good really, and when he asked how long we'd been married, and we said we weren't, he very professionally refrained from racing round the walls foaming at the mouth shouting "Dirty little trollop!" and "No-good baggage!" and similar medical technicalities. He accepted with reasonably good grace that even a 'Common Law Wife' (some day somebody's going to have to look to this terminology) might have a real and ongoing interest in the parts under discussion. Mind you, he did owe me one for a certain Gall Bladder balls-up twelve years earlier that had left me looking like an anaemic pancake before anyone noticed I was losing a lot of blood, so I figured it was a sort of anatomical tit-for-tat.

There were two of us being processed at the same time, when the day came. Well - almost at the same time. The surgeon didn't exactly stand between us holding a couple of samurai swords. In the preparation room we vowed to buy each other a pint afterwards if we lived through it and they let us out in time. They took Chuckles Charlie (probably not his real name. Not that I mean he socked that to me as a convincing alias or anything. I don't for one minute suspect him of trying to sneak an anonymous operation or an incognito vasectomy; certainly he didn't keep his hat over his face. It's just that I seem to have forgotten what he was called, is all.) - anyway, whatever in hell he was called, it didn't save him - they took him down first. And me not long afterwards. (Then again, I always think that the phrase 'taking down', in this context, is, as they say, somewhat less than happy. Rather too close to 'taking out' and 'taking for a ride' to be 100% comfortable. In actual fact, they did take us for a ride. Even though nothing had happened to us at that stage and we were just as hale and hearty as when we sidled through the front door, a gaggle of porters descended on us and insisted on half lifting us onto trolleys and trundling us down endless corridors - probably all ex-taxi-drivers taking the longest route possible - to the arena, or whatever it's called. On the way back, having been hacked, mangled, slashed, carved and generally Mau-Maued, it seemed that we were welcome to climb aboard trolleys ourselves, in the hopes of catching the eye of a passing Good Samaritan, or run, crawl, roller-skate, turn cart-wheels or adopt any other form of locomotion that happened to take out fancy. Something to do with Union rules.)

So there I was, wearing a gown a bit like the angels are supposed to give you (possibly to save on administrative inconvenience if Things Went Badly), lying on a trolley in an ante-room just outside the operating theatre (an 'amphitheatre' ?), which had just swallowed Chuckles Charlie, being chatted up - well, not so much 'up' as 'along', really - by a young nurse who, while not quite in the General Dreedle class, was decidedly ~~A~~ Bit of All Right. She was trying to convince me that I was brave, stalwart, courageous, heroic even, and didn't give a damn about what was about to happen to me. She was failing. Not, I hasten to add, so much because of innate cowardice on my part, as because Chuckles Charlie, somewhere the other side of those swing doors, had stopped chuckling and was now screaming. (This minor snip of an op. was merely a local - not a general - anaesthetic job. I'm not really sure if that made it better or worse. I suppose I would have been really worried if my brave comrade there in the front line had had a general anaesthetic and still been screaming.) I wasn't worried, my nurse explained, judiciously ignoring the sounds of mayhem and genocide from The Other Side, I would take it all in my stride. I was nearly ready to take the front door in my stride - one stride - round about then, except that I was marginally more scared of the Union Shop Steward - for all I knew the Rules may require me to be driven out in an armoured jeep - than Sweeney Todd the demon chopper-lopper, who was even then doing unmentionable things to an erstwhile human being mere yards away.

Then the screaming stopped, there was a lull and a slight susurrous of sinister sibilants, and they wheeled me in.

The surgeon smiled reassuringly as they erected a green tarpaulin screen, a bit like you usually see on major construction sites, so that I couldn't actually watch them amputating me from the waist down and making Cumberland sausage out of their ill-gotten gains.

"It sounded as though Mr Chuckles Charlie was having rather a bad time", I gulped, conversationally, hoping to wring the last drops of compassion and repentance from somewhere within that heavily disguised Phantom of the Operating Theatre.

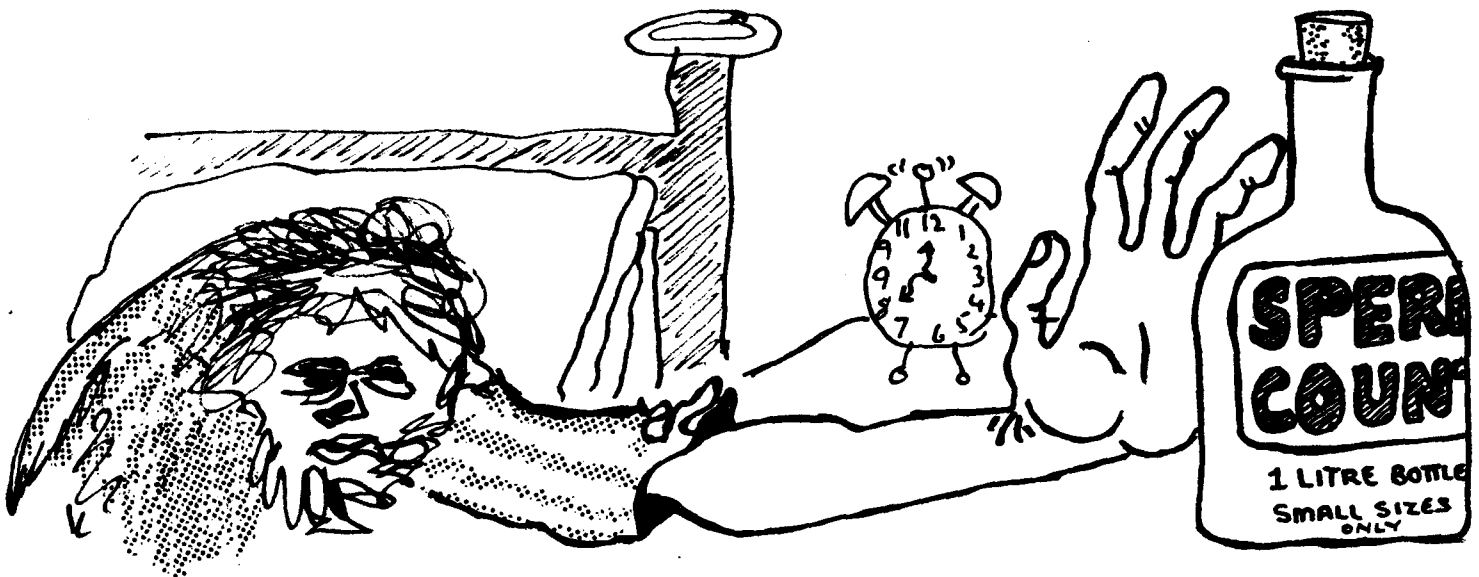
"Oh, I think he was a little nervous", the surgeon smiled in that special way they have that is meant to instil you with confidence and really makes you want to catch the first express train to Edinburgh. Or anywhere.



Yes, well, I'm glad you're so busy down the other end you can't see the inside of my head, I thought.

But he got on with his job - "And through and through the Vorple bladewent snicker-snack", as Lewis Carroll so graphically puts it - and I got on with mine - not screaming. As a matter of fact, I came round to his way of seeing things - always a good idea with a man wielding a scalpel - and we parted good friends. Safely back in our cosy old Preparation Room, Chuckles Charlie looked a bit ashamed and rather as though he wished he did have a hat to put over his face. We were given cups of tea and motherly comfort to cover up for the fact, that, in reality, we had now come to the worst part of the whole business - they didn't let us out in time to get a pint. Chuckles and I assured each other that we'd have a pint together in a week's time when we came back to have the stitches taken out, and he slunk off back to Lancashire to hide his shame. I never saw him again.

A proud new Vasectomate, I set out boldly to take the world by storm. (Well, actually I went off to pick Hazel up from school, but I can pretend, can't I ?) 'Vasecto-mate' ? I wonder. Can't quite decide whether the term is highly appropriate or ridiculously inappropriate. Hmm. Not bad, I think, not bad at all. Better than those contraceptive



pills Hazel once had. "They're called 'Eugynon' ", the doctor said, "It means 'The Good Woman', which doesn't seem entirely apt, I must say". Right then - a proud new Vasectomate, I set out boldly to take the world by storm, clutching my little trophy in my hand. Oh dear - Oh goodness me, no - it wasn't like that. No, this trophy was a package I had been given before leaving the hospital, which, according to the wrapper, contained a 'Suspensory Bandage'. And this S.B., according to what was stamped on the wrapper, was of an 'Extra Extra Large' size. So, I smiled smugly, doing a little sneaky measuring up were they, while they had my attention distracted. Ho hum. But it wasn't too much later that I thought, "Oh. They probably give everyone one marked 'Extra Extra Large' to cheer them up - a sort of psychological placebo". It was only a couple of days later, when the homeworld from which all those little sperm were now never to escape had swollen to resemble a Chesley Bonestell painting of the planet Jupiter that I finally discerned the real reason for that 'Extra Extra Large'.

Sometimes, looking back on things can give you a funny turn, I find. Especially if you are as disorganised as I am and, for instance, tend to write in one diary both the things that happen to you, and the books you read. Idly flipping open the September page of my 1979 diary recently, I confess I had a moment's unease to read:

" 10th September.
11th September.

Vasectomy
Read GANGRENE

"

A few weeks after the Day of Parting you have to deliver to the hospital a special plastic jar containing a sample of that undistinguished looking fluid on which the future of the human race depends even more than it does on beer, so that they can analyse it and make sure no wily little sperm have built themselves submarines and snuck back in. I was discussing this, much later, with a psychologist friend who was thinking of having the operation. "How big a specimen do they want ?", he asked anxiously. "Oh, you have to fill it", I told him unkindly, "They'd be very scathing if you only produced a small sample."

I hear that some fellows wear a tie proclaiming that they've had a vasectomy. Not for me, such vulgar ostentation - mainly because I never wear a tie. I did think of having it tattooed somewhere but the somewhere where I thought of having it tattooed was such that - I like to tell myself - the lady concerned would be past caring by the time she found the vital message. So I didn't bother.

The only vanity I allow myself is carrying in my wallet a photocopy of the surgeon's letter confirming that every sexy gal for miles around should take the earliest opportunity of consorting with me for a safe and satisfying experience. He didn't put it in exactly those words, but you know how stuffy and restrained these medical men are. If I get to produce it on an appropriate occasion as often as the 'Durex' I used to keep there in the bad old pre-scientific days no one will be able to read the archaic script by then anyway. I really carry it partly out of curiosity, because, if I ever do get a chance to flash it, I want to find out if the same psychological two-pronged attack which used to put paid to the 'Durex' (ouch!) will stalemate (!) the vasectomy warranty too. You must remember it. Most girls had it off pat. (Though who Pat had it off, I never did find out.) If you hadn't got one, Doing It was out of the question. And if you had got one you'd obviously planned it all and were so cold-blooded and calculating she didn't feel in the mood any longer.

I did eventually, after many years, work out a counter-ploy - but, of course, I never got to use that either. This consists of looking confidently in one's wallet with an expression of eager anticipation, while the girl awaits the outcome, poised to go into the appropriate act. One's expression gradually becomes crestfallen - "Oh, I don't seem to have one." Radiant smile from the young lady - "Oh well, we can't do it then. Never mind. At least you're not like some men, always plotting it beforehand." One's face shows little sign of consolation at this praise as the hands dance a jig of frustrated nervous energy in the jacket pockets. As they emerge (possibly on the way to lightly tear out the hair), one of them is seen to be clutching a small packet bearing the legend 'Durex'. "Oh", gasps the astonished swain, "There seems to be one there. We're saved".

As yet I haven't managed to come up with a convincing adaptation of this technique for the randy vasectomate. I can get as far as the frenzied search in the wallet, revealing ever-deepening disappointment - chagrin, even - when nothing can be found. But it is the bit where the piece of paper is accidentally pulled from the pocket, idly unfolded, and the revelation - "Oh, we're in luck. I seem to have had a vasectomy" - divulged with delight, that I feel would call for rather more acting ability than can be expected even of one who once starred as First Fieldmouse in 'Toad of Toad Hall'.

Maybe, after all, that is why vasectomy is so highly rated as a contraceptive device. If it wasn't for this robust good health that never gives me a minute's rest I might begin to wonder about that.

FANNERWOCKY



'Twas Easter, and the many fans
Did gyre and gimble in a rave:
All puzzled was the neofan,
And the beer vaults outgave.

'Beware the endzine fan, my son!
The verbs that bite, the clause that catch!
Beware the femfan bird, and shun
The profan's egolatch!'

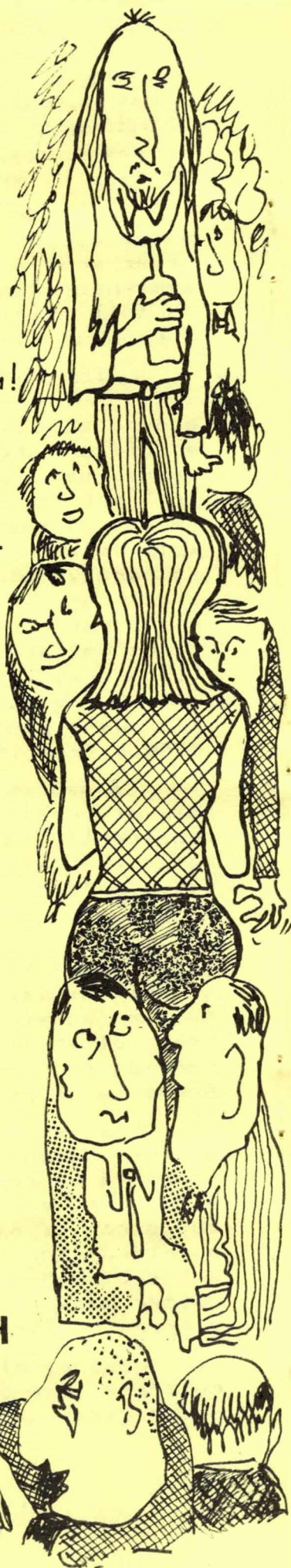
He took his corflu brush in hand:
Long time the verbsome foe he sought -
So rested he by the fanzine tree,
And stood awhile in thought.

And as in firstish thought he stood,
The endzine fan, with eyes on fame,
Came wheedling near to where he stood,
And smiled so as it came!

Dip, once! Dip, twice! And dab and dab
The corflu brush went slipper slap!
He wiped it out, and with it dead
He heard a multuous clap.

'And hast thou wiped out endzine fan?
Come to the bar, my beamish boy!
O fannish day! Collate! Callay!
He chortled in his joy.

'Twas Easter, and the many fans
Did gyre and gimble in a rave:
All happy was the neofan,
And the beer vaults outgave.



TONY WALSH

Experts have discovered that the noise of paper can cause stress and even deafness in offices and homes. Professor Elfyn Richards, of Southampton University, has been hired by IBM to invent quieter paper.
 Sunday Telegraph 29 January 1984

In February occurred the first incident which, though lightly dismissed at the time, now takes on an awesome significance in relation to current events. It was so simple an incident as to be almost negligible in the scheme of things, and could not possibly have been noticed under the circumstances; for it must be realised that since I was in the habit of receiving copious correspondence from all manner of sources and would have been absurd despite the documents origins.

What I now remember is merely this - that my wife, whose desire to keep my end of the lounge tidy became anxious to an extent wholly out of keeping with even her character. She, in the hours following my usual depositing of the mail on my desk, roved from lounge end to lounge end, restless and disturbed, costantly tidying up the piles of fan material which seemed as if under their own power, to constantly shift and tumble from their resting places. I realise how trite this sounds - like the inevitable spouse in fanzine articles, who always misunderstands true fannish nature when it comes to collecting seming rubbish - yet I cannot now honestly suppress it.

The following day my youngest child complained of a restlessness among the dogs in the house. He came to me at my desk and even as he spoke I noticed the furry form of Lady Emma creeping hesitantly along the lower book shelves scratching and whining at the bindings.

I told my son that there must be some singular odor or emanation from the carpet, imperceptible to our dulled senses, but affecting her delicate organs and no doubt caused by the unseemly toilet habits of her sister Lucy. This I truly believed, and when the child disagreed I somewhat testily told him that if he kept his own room tidy then he would have more reason to complain about my habits.

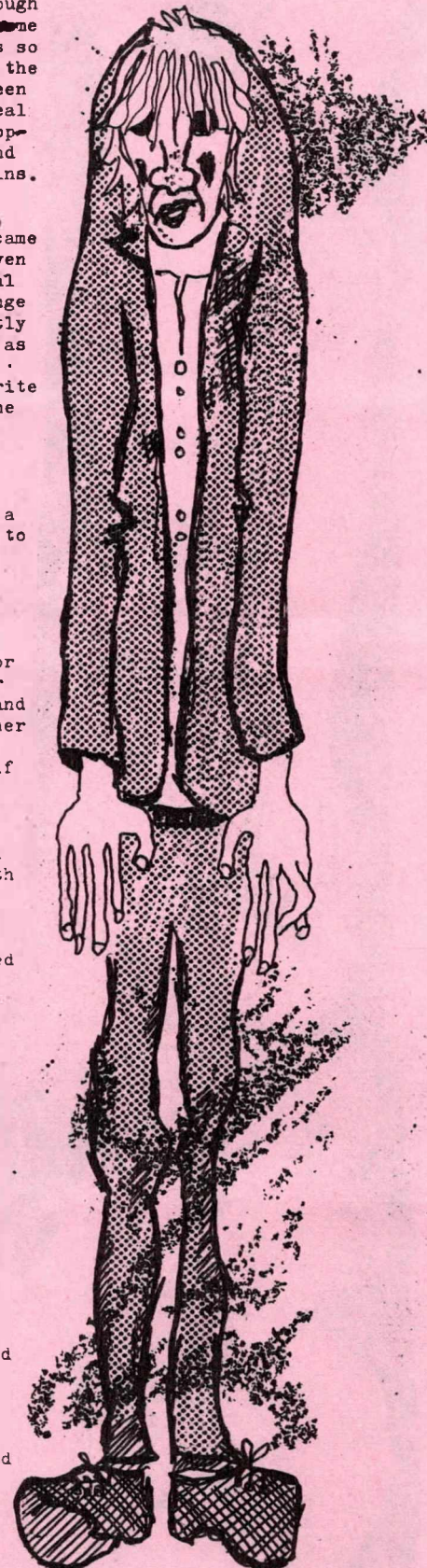
That night, my wife being immersed in postprandial observations of the activities of the denizens with in Coronation Street, I shut the heavy partitions sealing off my end of the lounge, switched on the small lamp over my typewriter and settled down to my correspondence. Lady Emma as is her want, curled up in her customary place on the couch adjacent; seemingly completely at ease.


At some time I must have become so engrossed in my typing, for I recall a distinct sense of returning to mundanity when the dog started from her placid position. She was staring intensely at a point on the fanzine shelves, a point to which my attention was now directed.

As I watched, I knew that Lady Emma was not foolishly excited. Whether the fanzines actually moved I cannot say. I think they did, very slightly. But what I can swear to is that from that direction I heard a low, distinct keening sound.

Lady Emma raced up and down the floor by this part of the shelves, pawing the fanzines and seemingly trying to reach something in their midst. She found nothing and after a time returned wearily to her place on the couch. I had not moved, but could not work again that evening.

Later I questioned my wife, and found she had heard nothing unusual, save that my wife remembered the actions of Lucy who had been resting on her knee. Lucy had stared uneasily at the closed partition seemingly transfixed by some unseen thing beyond.





I retired early, being very sleepy, but was harassed by dreams of the most horrible sort. I seemed to be in the centre of a largetwilit room, knee deep in a sea of yellow and green paper, where a white - bearded old man cranked away at a printind machine. Then as the printer paused and nodde over his task, the paper around us rose into the air and making a most god-fearing sound rained back down on us.

From this terrifying vision I was abruptly awakened by the motions of the dogs who had been sleeping as usual at the foot of the bed. This time I did not have to question thesource of their snarls and whimpers for through the whole of the house reverbarated the low keening I had experienced but few hours ago.

Charging down the stairs I rushed to the hub of the sounds. As the light bulb flickered into radiance I saw a hideous shaking all over the book shelves, causing the contents thereon to execute a singular dance; one which motions caused the paper to rub together producing the strange lament. This motion disappeared almost at once, and the sound with it. I poked away at the shelves in a somewhat fearful manner expecting all manner of things to emerge, but there was nothing there. Not even as I had began to suspect, the trace of rodents, who might, in their nocturnal runnings cause the shelves to vibrate.

I seated myself on the end of the couch and put my head in my hands. My fear for the unknown was at this point very great. Moments passed and then I felt something bump against me, something soft and pliable. I peared out from between my fingers. It was the paper, large and small, stapled and loose, yellow and sickly green moving slowly and yet determinedly across the floor, to coil and nestle against my stilled form. And the noise, growing in pitch and intensity, more anguished and sad with every passing moment. The whimpering became unbearable as did the way the paper closed in on me, clamping against me as if in some way it was seeking protection from - WHAT? Gradually the whole contents of the shelves moved away from the corner. I was transfixed! Then I SAW the source of their fear, their terrible flight, their nois- isom protest, their yowls and echoes. Alone, singly, like a viscous gelatinous ravenous rat feasting on the dead and the living, gently fluffing its pages sat a lone fanzine; impious, insidious, rising as a stiff bloated corpse on a putrid sea..... I began to scream.....West...West... sailing your cursed course.....the ory the ory a nd pra cti se pra ct i se ... what have you unleashed... begone ... th th th th pr dt tice....

That is what they say I said when they found me in the morning, found me crouched in the room amidst my torn and tattered collection. They prised the one remaining zine from my stiffened fingers. This they have destroyed, taken me away and shut me in this barred room with fearful whispers about my experience. When I scream for Ving and Eric and Mal and others they do not answer. But then I care not, no longer do I fear the sound of paper for I am quite totally deaf.

**AH, THEY'RE LOOKING
TO HEAVEN IN 87!**

7,000 MILES ON PHUT with the BIG TRUCKERS



by
**HAZEL
ASHWORTH**

Recent fanzine accounts of terrifying experiences on powerful motorbikes put me in mind of the days when I zoomed to and from work on a little Puch moped. Hardly on a par with a harrumphing great Harley-Davidson, I know, but I had my moments. I suppose it would be more exact to say 'phutted' rather than 'zoomed', but with a good following wind and a bit of a sail put up by means of one of those flapping yellow balloon-type garments that cyclists wear to protect themselves from rain, I could reach 45 m.p.h down hill, and I always overtook a heavy wagon or two as they ground their way up the steep hills that fill up most of this part of Yorkshire. These wagon drivers would accelerate like hell when we started to descend again, and if I hadn't taken full advantage of my lesser tonnage at the summit, and there wasn't a good gale to back me up, the offended wagon would thunder past to resume its rightful position as the Head of the Trail, catching me, as we reached the bottom once more, in a tail-wind that would whisk me sideways back and forth at such a rate that I would be just a yellow (if it was raining) blur, of a varying and unguessable width that would deter any attempts by following cars to copy the wagon's example.

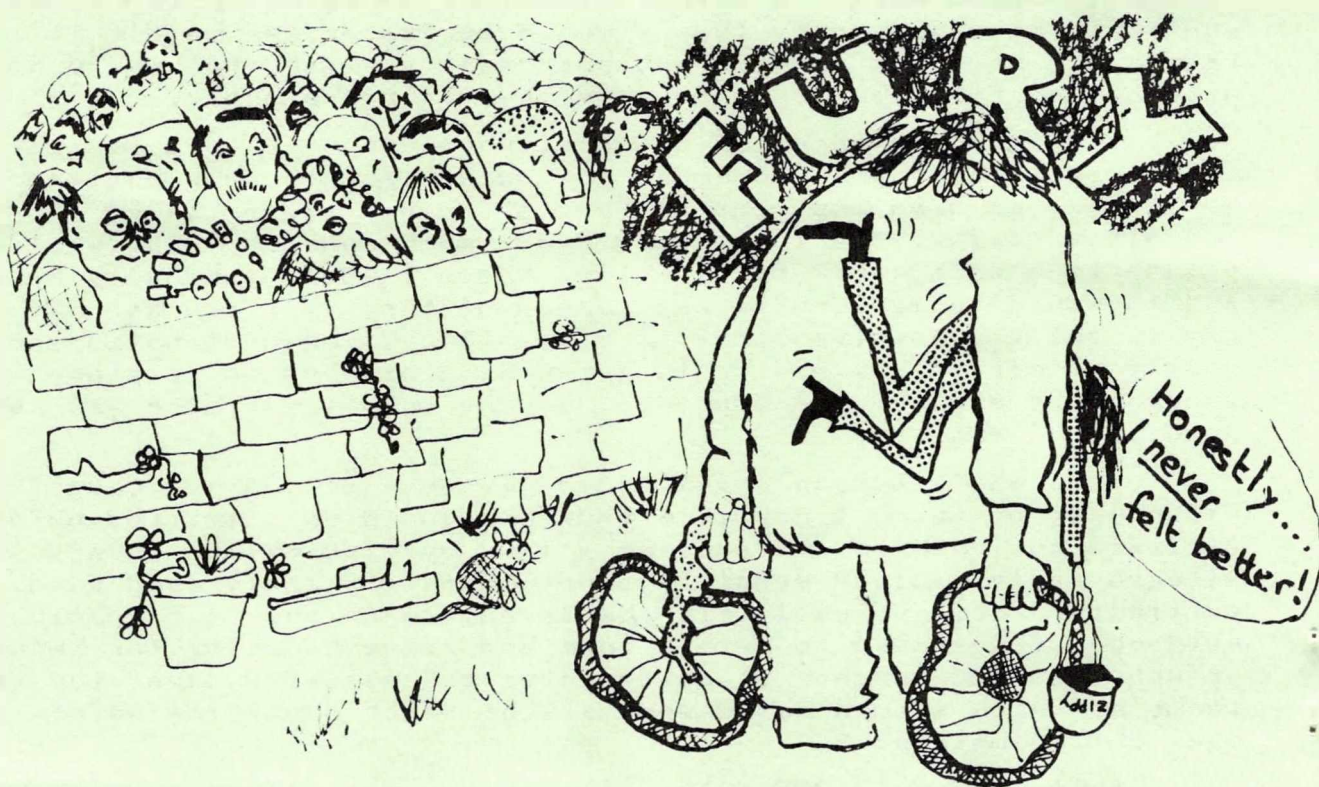
The size and speed of the real whoppers ('P. and O. Lines' and 'Ribblesdale Cement' were among the ones I got to know intimately) would keep me hovering near their rear number plates as if tied by invisible string, and there we'd stay, moth and behemoth, whale and pilot-fish, until the next incline, where I would gradually be released and it would be my turn to sail ahead of the silly trucker. It didn't pay to get too involved in this game, though, as destinations could easily be missed and one could go screeching past one's place of work, though here again I had the edge, as the school entrance was half way up a 1 in 3 hill.

This was a lesson I learned early on - if you got caught up in the excitement of it all, horrible faux pas could be committed before you realised how rash you were being - like overtaking the boss's Austin Allegro as it cruised sedately along that temptingly open road. This particular feat, which I felt should have been accepted graciously as evidence of keenness to get to work and start bouncing the infants around, evoked a number of asides over the next few days, the general theme of which seemed to be some slight doubt about the safety of my mode of locomotion.

I clocked up 7,000 miles like this - not all in one go, of course - and became one mean mopedaller who never once came to any permanent grief. My continuing survival was rather a surprise to me, and even more of one to Mal, whose faith in the appropriateness of my reactions never seemed, shall we say, extensive. I always felt that perhaps this had something to do with a trivial incident on the farm at Appletreewick, when a cat had clawed his foot and opened a small artery. As he padded across the living room leaving his mark on walls six feet away, I raced for the medical cupboard. He had his volcanic nether extremity in the sink, under the cold tap, as I breathlessly arrived back and handed him the life-saving package. Unfortunately, in my haste, I had grabbed the 'Thermogene Wadding', used to relieve lumbago and the like, instead of the cotton-wool. I was helped in making a second speedy trip by a

stentorian bellow of "I want to stop it bleeding, not keep the bloody thing warm!" I always felt that could have had something to do with his open-mouthed amazement each evening when the moped arrived home with me still aboard.

The only time I fell off the thing was in an over-enthusiastic attempt to reach the comforts of home faster than usual. At that time we had just bought a new house in a quiet, respectable village, where toddlers weren't sent out to play in the main road, and neighbours were polite to one another, which was all a welcome change from our previous residence. One of the minor drawbacks of this suburban haven was a really steep drive up to the garage, of the sort that made people say to you, "You'll have trouble when it's icy". I didn't wait that long. Mostly I got off at the bottom of this obstacle and pushed the Puch, but one day I decided to cruise in style right up to the door. Unfortunately, the incline was too much even for 49 c.c of well-tuned engine, and we stopped dead half way up. I lost my balance and oh-so-slowly, still mounted on my dying steed, tipped sideways into the freshly-dug garden, to the 'Ooohs' and 'Aaahs' of a gallery of fascinated neighbours who were out in force with lawnmowers and clippers that sunny afternoon. I had to tell the world at large that, yes, I was just fine, it wasn't as bad as it looked, and beam at them all reassuringly through my fogged-up visor. Malcolm was furious at this spectacle of public entertainment on his very doorstep, and I was scooped up in mid-sentence, tucked under one arm, and the bike under the other, and taken round the back to be dusted down and shouted at in decent privacy.



It was the sense of independence that comes with having your own transport that I valued, that and the freedom to make mistakes in your own way... On damp autumn afternoons, after work, moped travel turned out to be a super-efficient way of gathering mushrooms. If you're a highly-motivated mushroomer you can spot a good 'un at a hundred yards, even at 30 or so m.p.h, and I had refined my technique during the mushroom-glutted days of one September. On this particular afternoon, I spied a luscious clump gleaming unmistakably on the slopes of a field that ran close to the road, stopped immediately (if you try to come to a gradual standstill, you lose sight of your quarry), parked Puch Minor, and, without bothering to remove the trappings of high-speed travel, like helmet, visor, etc., jumped through the long

grass that descended from the road-edge to the stone wall boundary of the mushroom field. Unfortunately, all this treacherous greenery had covered a precipitously steep bank, and before you could say 'psilocybe' I was helmet over crampons in a perfect somersault and lying at the bottom winded and eclipsed from the rude gaze of the world by hemlock, old foxgloves, nettles in their prime, and a wealth of the other interesting flora which country roadsides offer at this time of year.

Struggling up through this undergrowth, my white helmet re-appearing out of the grasses like a giant mushroom itself, I glanced up at the road to see if my flight had been observed. Just my luck! Old Hawkeyes from 'Ribblesdale Cement' was having great trouble changing gear as he leaned out of his window, his vast double-trailer taking up most of the sky. "You alright, luv?"

"Fine, thank you". I was getting good at the long-distance reassuring beam by now. Feeling Spectacularly Silly and Conspicuous, I clambered over the wall and dropped out of sight on all fours until all traffic noises had faded away.

In a lay-by about a mile from the school a small caravan called TEAS kept the drivers of the big wagons supplied with strong tea, weak coffee, large fried breakfasts, and other high-calorie macho long-distance-trucker fare to satisfy the ravening Men of the North after a hard day in the Driving Seat. (They would have put all this on the notice-board, but it was too small.) You could see the colossal helpings quite easily as you went past, and could be forgiven for thinking that those who ate them must have pulled their wagons along with their bare hands.

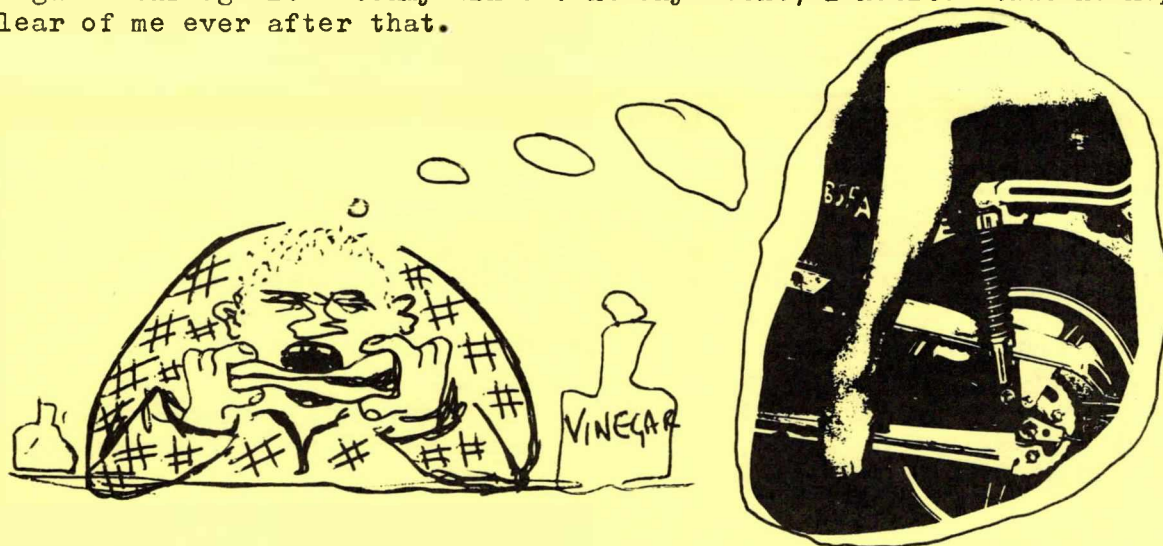
Although the smell of frying bacon wafting over the A59 on a frozen grey morning would grab my salivary glands by the throat, I always resisted the temptation to stop. I would have been late for work, for one thing, but more pressing was the thought that lurked at the back of my mind that perhaps some of these drivers might want to have A Word with me. What did they think of mopeds in general, and of me in particular? I wasn't sure I wanted to find out, but oddly enough I was showered with odd snippets of unsolicited information, as the owners of the TEAS caravan also happened to be caretakers at the school I worked at, and chatty ones, too. I had moles in Trucking land who took it upon themselves to give me the lowdown on the more entertaining aspects of their customers' lives, and so it was that I got to hear what Hawkeyes of 'Ribblesdale Cement' had confessed to 'P. & O. Lines' one morning, as he chewed his way (noisily, no doubt, but I wasn't present so you can say 'Yes/No' to sound here, like what they do in computer programs) through his second Les Routiers chip-and-Daddies-Sauce butty. Wiping the sauce from his bristly chin he unburdened himself of his dreadful secret; it appeared that he was unsuccessfully fighting a growing urge to lasso me as I overtook him on the second-and-third-hills-but-one each morning. Mrs Mole giggled as she imparted this frightening news. She imagined, no doubt, that the Cement man had fallen for my snazzy yellow silhouette as it billowed past him, my balloon-shaped cycling mackintosh undulating tantalisingly before his windscreen wipers. (There could be the makings of one of those endless fantasy trilogies in this - "HAWKEYES THE LARIAT: From the mysterious cement wastes of Ribblesdale he rode a snorting monster in pursuit of the elusive, yellow-cloaked Puch maiden".) But I knew better. It was obvious that being whopped by a phutting little moped - even though its triumph was intermittent - was too much for him, and he was about to resort to 'Death Race 2000' tactics. I could picture my trusty moped zooming faithfully into the school playground sans moi, the riderless horse returning from battle, telling its own grim tale all too clearly. And how long had the man been practising? How often had his lariat whirled above my little white helmet, as he waited for the moment when courage and skill would combine to pluck me into the air? It changed everything. I began to feel more and more like a mushroom. An uncomfortable empathy developed for the gleaming globules that thrust themselves through the grass in innocent growth, and then - curtains! My overtaking style was drastically altered to include evasive wiggles and zigzags in my flight-path, in a desperate attempt to confound Hawkeyes The Rope.

I did consider adding disguise to my confounding tactics, but the only disguise I could think of was a long, green alligator mask we had at home. Not only would this have created difficulties with the fit of my crash-helmet, but a sudden shower on that long-toothed papier-mache might easily have made the whole effect more horrifying than mystifying. Reluctantly, I abandoned the idea. Fortunately, it was unnecessary. When days and weeks went by and nothing happened, I concluded that the subtleties of my electron-like unpredictability had outmanoeuvred the Lariatman, and he had probably gone back to dreaming of his next 'Watneys Red' soaked fortnight in Benidorm. Whatever the reason, the roads became peaceful again.

But not for long. Although my evasive routines gradually became redundant, something happened one day that changed my style of riding just as dramatically: the goddamn back sprocket seized up. I hadn't known I'd got one until then, but discovered quite soon how very useful they are when they function, and how Very Inconvenient when they don't; I found that I couldn't freewheel. It was quite a painful discovery, for as I brought my knuckles towards me in that classic 'vroom vroom' wrist movement of acceleration known as 'giving it some welly', I got a whack on the left calf as a pedal shot up from its normal place of rest. I stopped, prodded ineffectually around, and tried again. Same bruising THWACK, although, for a change, this time it was the right pedal hitting the right calf. I tried setting off really slowly, and found that my newly-independent pedals - independent of me, that is - lifted my feet up and down in gentle, but continuous, rotation. Although I was proceeding so slowly that if I decelerated any more I wouldn't be going anywhere, the rate the pedals dictated was still rather too snappy for comfort, and going downhill you couldn't see my legs for the speed of their revolutions. On a racing bike in the Tour de France this might not have looked out of place; as it was, it looked a bit odd, not to say demented, and as a schoolmistress, I did have some sort of an Image to maintain. The school taxi would be coming by at any moment, filled with my dear little pupils, and young children have a most uncanny knack of noticing small details - like their teacher pedalling furiously downhill, scattering Saabs and burning-off BMWs. Next morning there would be bound to be difficult questions to answer.

There was nothing for it but to try and stay ahead of the taxi! But the moment I got beyond 10 m.p.h the pedals would whizz round far too quickly for mere human feet to follow. The bike got serviced regularly but I hadn't had my kneecaps lubricated for many a long day, and they were bound to overheat and seize up in the next half-mile. From within the hot and bothered confines of my helmet, a daring plan emerged - desperate, but feasible as long as the road was completely clear. So it was that the rest of the journey was completed in short, dramatic bursts, my feet on the handlebars, the throttle wide open, pedals rotating in mindless mechanical mania. Every time a vehicle appeared on the road I would come to a neat stop, feet lowered in the more conventional position, and admire the view. Then, when all was quiet again, VATOOK! It was a fast journey, but not a very straight one, and it made my previous deviations look like mild hiccups.

I forgot the TEAS caravan. Perhaps Hawkeyes stuck his fork in his cheek as he gazed through its steamy window. At any event, I noticed that he kept well clear of me ever after that.



WHY THIS ISSUE LOOKS DIFFERENT...

AND OTHER LETTERS OF COMMENT.

Dear Dave

Thanks for Xyster 3. And Xyster 2. And Xyster 1 as well... I'm sorry that neither Judith nor I have responded before, but we couldn't think of anything to say — it's all very enjoyable, like, but comment hooks do not exactly leap from every page.

That's to say, it's all very enjoyable when it can be read — I think that if you're going to reduce it in this fashion, then you're going to have to do something about the layout. Particularly as regards the letter column, which in its present format is simply a mess — you really ought to leave a space or two between each letter, so that we can tell where one ends and another begins, and find some means of more clearly distinguishing between the letter-writer's comments and your response to same. And keep greater control over your responses, too — you interrupt so much (sometimes in the middle of actual sentences) that trains of thought are completely derailed, and it becomes impossible to follow what someone is trying to say. (And if I were one of the writers whose letter had been so treated I'd feel pretty damn insulted at the casual butchery to which my letter had been subjected.) Paul Skelton's letter, incosequential though its contents might be, is a shining example of clarity and comprehensibility in a wilderness of confusion and incoherence — for no other reason than the fact that you printed it without interruptions. Why can't you extend the same courtesy to everyone else?

(And to your article-writers as well — it strikes me as extraordinarily crass and insensitive to shove some piffling interjection into the middle of their contributions, allegedly correcting some tedious mistake. If I were John Brunner, I'd be hopping mad at your offering up of an alternate recollection of a convention anecdote in the middle of my retelling of the recollection, for no other reason than the disruption it caused to the story — never mind to the flow of the article. Why couldn't you have waited until the end?)



Well, let's say something positive, before I begin to sound like the Joseph Nicholas of old...although what I'm about to say is that, like Martyn Taylor, I have very little inclination to read the SF of the fifties and earlier. (No matter that such as Heinlein, Asimov and Clarke — whose initials make a pleasing acronym — are still writing today, because what they're producing now is very much influenced by the trends and compulsions prevailing when they first began writing.) In the first place, it's simply not all that well written — useless for you to point to the ideas and say how tremendous they are, because (a) ideas cannot be separated from the words that contain them, and (b) "ideas" are the basis of all works of fiction, of whatever "kind" — and, in the second place, they're simply too generic. The best and most interesting SF novels, I feel, are those which only barely qualify as SF at all, such as Chris Priest's The Affirmation, Greg Benford's Timescape, Brian Aldiss's The Malacia Tapestry, J. G. Ballard's Hells America, and so on. Fredric Brown or Algis Budrys are as nothing beside these, lying well inside the borderland; the best SF now lies beyond it (and I didn't even mention Ted Mooney's Easy Travel To Other Planets).

But this is enough, since it's getting late and Judith has already gone to bed. NO CRUISE! NO TRIDENT! FREEZE THE ARMS RACE! NUCLEAR WEAPONS ARE NO DEFENCE!

Best,

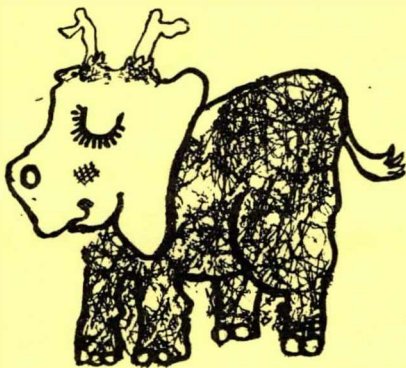
Joseph

HARRY WARNER 423 SUMMIT AVENUE HAGERSTOWN MARYLAND 21740 USA.

Dear Dave:

Xyster was almost unalloyed pleasure to read. The only impurity in the issue resulted from my personal behavior, not yours. I've been careless enough to allow corruption to creep into my optical equipment with the passing of years and your type is barely on the right side of the line that divides the readable from the unreadable for me in this sense. I must remember to purchase one of those huge magnifying glasses which all the other old fogies use to read material too small to be compatible with their worn out vision but too good to be left unread.

I don't think Hank Janson ever crossed the Atlantic in the publishing sense. But I can sense the excitement that you experienced at finding that ancient treasure from his typewriter. I haunt second-hand stores flea markets, ~~funfairs~~ jumble sales, and similar sources and periodically I snatch up something I read and loved when I was very young and hadn't seen for a half-century or thereabouts. The first science fiction with a sex injection that I encountered was in an old prozine, Marvel Tales or Marvel Science Stories or some such title. Henry Kuttner hacked out two or three spicy novels for this publication. I found them incredibly dull and my adolescent sex impulses weren't enlivened a bit by the mildly sexy passages. Just think, if I'd started out on something better, I might have become so excited and pleased that I would own today the nation's biggest collection of pornographic fiction.



Before I retired from newspaper work, I discovered in the local historical society's collection an ancient diary which in a small way is almost as interesting as A Chronicle of Small Beer. It was kept by a girl in her teens or early twenties more than a century ago. She lived with her wealthy parents in a country home about five miles from Hagerstown. Passages in it are hilarious, others are pathetic, and it conveys an enormous amount of information about what life was like in the western Maryland upper crust in the era when the rich were decidedly rich. The diary's writer had a chronic and continuing battle with her conscience, suffering agonies when she didn't listen to the Sunday sermon attentively enough. But she had the gumption to feel the generation gap, almost left home on one occasion, and had a sharp eye for times when the family physician was drunk. The most intriguing thing in the diary is the periodic appearance of a mysterious gentleman caller who fascinated but frightened the girl. Unfortunately, it's never been published. After I wrote an article about it for the newspaper, an area resident looked up the diary, studied it carefully, did a lot of research into the family and other people who play a prominent part in the diary, and then converted it into a short novel, partly factual and partly speculative, publishing the little book herself.

Novacaine was fine. It brought to mind again in its early pages a matter which I speculated about in a loc to another fanzine the other day. So many of us have been discovering vast changes when we go back to a city where we used to spend a lot of time years ago that I've begun to wonder if the solipsists are right after all. Maybe each of us has his own private and personal universe constructed for use during his lifetime and now something has gone amiss with the scheduling and these private universes are beginning to undergo demolition before the person who uses them has died. The alterations you found in Worcester have been occurring in Hagerstown which I can barely recognize nowadays. My theory gains support from the fact that some of the recent demolitions have no proper motivation. Two more downtown buildings in this city are to be torn down in the next month or two. The only reason given for these plans is to make room to park more autos. But a survey published just recently showed only about 80 per cent utilization of downtown parking areas at peak periods. I'm afraid I'm responsible in an inadvertent way.

Just last month I read a two-volume biography of Eugene Field. He is almost forgotten in the United States by now, and even the musical settings of some of his poems which were wildly popular early in this century are rarely performed nowadays. But a new edition of some of his newspaper writings might fit right into the current mania for making fun of politicians and other public figures. Extensive quotations from his daily column in the biography indicate that he spared nobody and no cause.



rumour has it
he's in league
with the opticians
union

I can't claim to be an all-out Duke Ellington enthusiast. But you might be semi-pleased to know that I have a few of his lps and usually purchase any in good condition that I find in second-hand sources. You would find a fair amount of jazz available on the radio if you lived in the United States. Several FM stations in the Washington and Baltimore area run a good bit of jazz, both old and new. One Hagerstown radio announcer is a jazz enthusiast and runs several hours of it on his Saturday evening show. But there seems to be very little of it on television over here. The public television network, the only thing in the United States remotely resembling the BBC, might have four or five hours of jazz on most of its stations each month. There is one satellite cable channel called ARTS which used to be available in Hagerstown and offered some jazz, but the cable company dropped it in favor of a Catholic-sponsored channel of religious programming. Local record stores still carry some jazz releases and there are one or two dance bands headquartered in or near Hagerstown that perform mostly jazz for their engagements. Otherwise, it's all rock or country music or something in between. Now, if you like classical music, like Terry Jeeves and me, and you live in the United States, you're really in trouble.

Yrs., &c.,
Harry Warner, Jr.
 Harry Warner, Jr.

VINCE CLARKE 16 WENDOVER WAY WELLING KENT.

Dear Dave,

You're indefatigable or something, aren't you? Another XYSTER and '84 only a few days old....what unnameable horrors has the year in store.....? The mind staggers back, pale-lipped.....

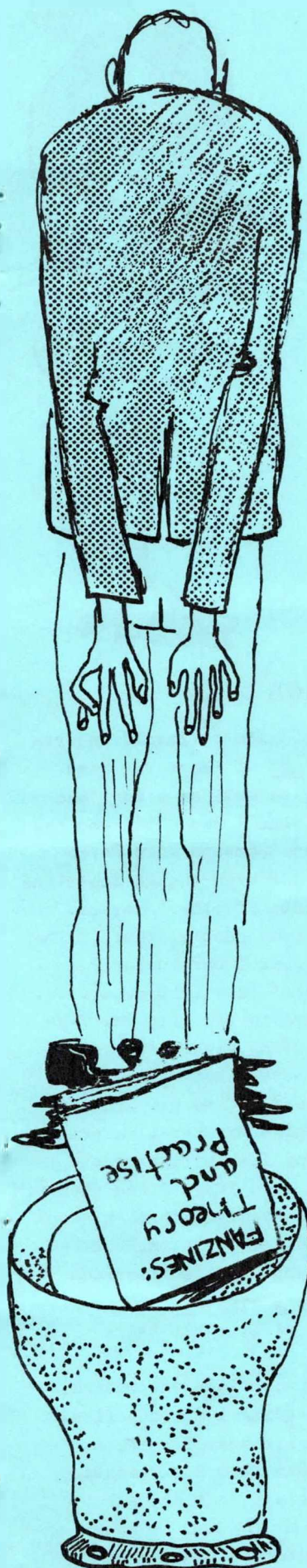
Actually, I've already been in hospital this year. Beat that. An old hernianow gone. Hernia and yet so far. It suddenly bulged out and wouldn't go back in its cosy stomach cavity, and showed signs of wandering abroad, so I had an emergency op. last Thursday and came home Monday (it was only a minor thing) and can now catch up with some fanac before going back to work. At least I'll be able to carry my bags to the EasterCon.....

XYSTER was a fanzine-as-letter-substitute carried to the point of insouciance - I had to look that up in a dictionary but it was worth it - and none the worse for that, tho' I'd have wished that you'd left a few more spaces in between paras, and paras in between text. I don't suppose those slabs of print look bad before they're photo-reduced, but it twisted an eyeball or two reading 'em at times in what I vaguely remember from the old printing machine days (see part-life in THEME) would be about 6-pt. type size. Still, it did enable you to get a lot of wordage in...I make it about 16000

You may have gathered from my tactful silence on the matter that Jazz is not my scene, tho' I well remember in the mid-'50's there was this feeling amongst the younger fen that s-f and jazz were practically soul-brothers. Remember Mike Moorcocks first fanzines were mostly about jazz, for instance. I like New Orleans type stuff, but wouldn't cross the road to a free concert of it. When I was a teenager, I liked the pop of the day - until I was about 17. There wasn't any other music worth bothering about. Then one evening, tuning our luxurious 8-valve Superhet (with its 20-foot long aerial of copper wire hung high in the garden like a washing line, and an Earth Wire buried in the earth next to the back door - a patch I religiously kept watered for good conductivity) I accidentally tuned across a heavyweight concert being given somewhere, and suddenly had a sort of revelation ...this was Music! Oddly enough, the piece I listened to wasn't, in fact, one of the popular classics at all...not Beethoven or Tchaikovsky or Dvorak or Wagner...but a piece by one Ernest Bloch (no relation to Bob) who was a Swiss Jewish composer of a reasonably minor calibre, whom I don't recall hearing from that day to this...some 40-odd years. But - it impressed me, I started to listen to classics, and relegated pop music to the realm of audible wallpaper. Jazz, I decided soon after, was interesting technically and often good listening, but couldn't evoke in me the sensations I received from classics. And so it stands to this day.

John Brunner's piece fascinating, both in the historical bits I knew about and the experiences abroad which would be completely foreign to me. The SuperManCon he mentions (in '54) was a fabulous event, not because of various things that happened - Burgess's lights (tho' it wasn't Brian who was going to be sacrificed, it was virgins -if we could find any), the Vanda-driven London taxi, etc., but because for the first time in British Con. history it was realised that the programmed items could be junked and fans could be let loose to find their own amusements in lounge get-togethers and bedroom parties. Up to that time, a Con. revolved solely around a programme during the day and evening, with only a few rebel souls sticking it out in the Bar.

John's serious ending highlights the great dilemma of our times. It's strikingly obvious that the ordinary man (or fan)-in-the-street, whether he lives in Blackpool or Baltimore or Baluchistan would like to live in peace and comparative prosperity, but democracy throws to the top of the heap the power hungry, the 'I know what's best for the country' type, in some countries the rich and corrupt who can in one way



or the other buy themselves into a top position. In un-democratic countries you get people who are willing to kill to get into power. The perfect answer would be to pick leaders who don't want the job; a paradox which I can't see how to solve. I suppose the nearest that society has come to the solving of the problem is absolute monarchy, where a King or Queen, picked by the pot-luck of genes, rules. By the laws of chance, I suppose 50% should be good for their country. Didn't Chesterton expound on this idea in The Napoleon of Notting Hill? Too many years since I read it to remember.

Enjoyed Mike Sherwood's Con Report. Trying to analyse the liking, it was partly 'cos it's the sort of thing I'd have written way back (I hope), a personal look very calculated to be understandable to everyone.

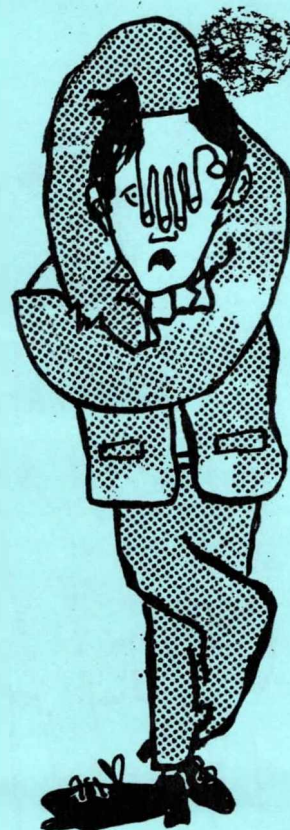
Letter column lovely.

This letter is going to become even more typo-ridden and disconnected than ever...unable to bear the clamour of my thoughts scrambling around like a rat in a bucket (I have double-glazing, so it's dead quiet except for the hiss of the gas fire and the whirr of the typer) I've put on a record of Edith Piaf. Now there's a singer; I don't speak French, but I listen with half-an-ear to something coming across. She speaks directly to the guts, and is worth approximately 79 of Boy George and all the other trash littering the air....

You ask for comments on someone not being able to relate to a mid-Western town. I think the straightforward comment is that if the guy's a professional book reviewer he's evidently in the wrong job, but if this is just an ordinary back-of-an-envelope remark (what is Yellow Dwarf?) I see nothing odd.

Me, I don't relate to mid-Western towns either, unless it's mid-Western Mars. Nor to bamboo huts in the backwoods of Burma or olde Englyshe castles. Maybe the total question is related to something that came up in some inter-fan correspondence lately, when I found to my amazement that both Chuck Harris and ATom are into historical fiction. I can't see how they can possibly relate to a bunch of characters who are, by their own premises, pushing up the churchyard daisies here and now. All I can do is to shrug hopelessly and murmur that some of my best friends are necrophiliacs.

Vind



PAMELA BOAL 4 WESTFIELD WAY CHARLTON HEIGHTS WANTAGE OXEN

..... a little bit of time in which to gather perspective is an advantage. I'm certainly enjoying fanzine ack all the more for being able to read the efforts of the BA BAFF and of those who have become active in the past year or two. As my most active period (Con going as well as zines) was the late sixties and early seventies you could call me a missing link fan (alas I was a fan who had not found fandom in the fifties) in that I know fans from each of those eras. Someone like Terry Jeeves could perhaps be called the 'silver thread' as could Ethel Lindsay, for even though Scottishe is no more I'm happy to say we can still find her in the letter cols of other zines. Yes, here here, Ethel! Shame on you Terry..... Being insatiably curious about people, their life-style, the way we they earn their living, their special knowledge and interests I particularly enjoyed Woodwind. Are you still a Buzby?one of my favourite 'breakers' is a Buzby..... I tend to work every working hour and have the sort of head that carries work to bed with me. Trying to arrange a gift of a CB for a very disabled lady in London I wound up being given one myself and rather to my surprise find it a goodly thing, especially in view of my work habit, I talkon it for about an hour before retiring, a way of winding down and switching my head off work. Apart from Martin Hoare (and I've never copied hom) I don't know of any other fannish breakers, surprising really, because it is a very fannish thing. I have met (so to speak) so many fascinating people with so many fascinating hobbies and jobs. My Buzby friend for instance, is a first class theatre organist, makes grandfather clocks, model aircraft and is an interesting raconteur on local history and geography. Another one repairs the rush chairs in Cathedrals and such places; cutting and drying the rushes have been a family business for several generations. Another has hilarious tales to tell in connection with his RSPCA work. Modellers, motor cycle trials riders, computer buffs etc etc, all in that little black box. Fandom may be my favourite way of life but there surely is life outside of it.

I do sympathise with Chuck....my baby is 23 years old and I have been trying to bridge the musical generation gap for years. Can a Disco really be the equivalent experience to going into ones first jazz cellar? Actually, my first happened to be an attic above a classical music school in Bath. Which made it all the more poignant. Mind, if one has someone like my nephew (who has reached a high standard on several instruments) to guide one, it is possible to appreciate that not all modern music is totally devoid of musicality and skill but certainly even with his help I cannot find any that has the type of marriage of words and music that Chuck mentions. Can you remember 'Gloomy Sunday' being banned? Was it really so effective as to make youngsters suicidal or was that too the generation gap; our elders over protective and uncomprehending as perhaps we are now?

Pamela.

"I've got those
way-down, low
down
MEGAAAA
WATT BLUES"



Dear Dave,

Many thanks for the copy of BIG XYSTER (when will you start running out of title changes, I wonder?). For once, I don't have this compulsion to grovel around apologising for not replying earlier, since I'm almost up-to-date, having occupied my time since finishing CS8 (and that, I hope, is in your hands now) with a frenzied attack on the backlog of mail that's piled up in the last six months. I've not quite succeeded in catching things right so that I've only got replies to CS8 in the in tray, but I'm not that far off - it's costing a bomb in postage, though!

BX is another goodie, small enough to read in a sitting (sometimes think that CS is too big - if it needs an entire evening to read it then it may be too long), yet big enough to contain a good variety of material. Not got the time to do anything vast at the moment, so I'll just skim through noting bits of interest to me.

Your comments on the 'tin ears' of the multitude reveals a certain, uh, prejudice in your thinking, though I suppose I do agree with you in some ways. I've always tried to listen to, and buy, as wide a range of music as I can. Pop hasn't held much appeal since the early 60s, Rock, as a separate entity from Pop, has had a lot of appeal. But along side the love of that music, I also listened to jazz, folk, blues, classics, ethnic music (I still find myself coming back to Indian music as a very satisfying aural experience - it's them crazy tabla rhythms, (or even rhythms) man), in as many different varieties as I could. For example, current favourites of mine include Pat Metheny (an American jazz guitarist), Wynton Marsalis (the modern jazz player at the moment), Janacek (with accents, of course) King Crimson (a seventies favourite resurrected in the eighties) and John Coltrane (whose work never seems to date - it's as fresh now as it was when he recorded it). Guys like Ellington are the Gods of my youth, people who produced music that was almost too good for my ears then, but which I like to hear now. Pity that the younger generation have so much else to choose from.

Skipping along, I later came across a reference to Alan Coren in Skel's loc. Now, I saw Coren for the first time in 15 years on the Late Clive James Show, last autumn (sorry about the syntax - you will be a nice guy and edit this won't you?), and my word he had changed. I couldn't believe it was the same guy I once knew (vaguely) at Punch. Until he did his party piece, that is, which is tearing telephone directories in half. That used to be one of the highlights of office parties at Punch, when a few of the junior editorial staff filtered down from upstairs to partake of a glass of plonk or three. There would be Coren, a little stocky guy, with fifty percent more hair than he has now (it was never exactly well-thatched), who spilled sarcasm and wise-cracks about like the rest of us spilled wine (we were a sloppy lot), finally culminating in the challenge -- 'Bet a fiver no one can tear a telephone directory in half!' Nobody could, not the London ones, anyway. But Alan could -- he'd had the Charles Atlas Dynamic Tension course and concentrated it on two areas: his hands and his wrists. Once fastened on something, you couldn't get it away from him. Naturally, his speciality was the plonk bottles, but girls and telephone directories came a short way afterwards. Nice guy, in those days -- dunno what he's like now he's editor of the old rag.

Damn, I'm out of time -- gotta get back to work to keep the roof over my wife's head, etc. Look forward to seeing more XYSTERS of various varieties. Keep 'em coming.

All the very best.

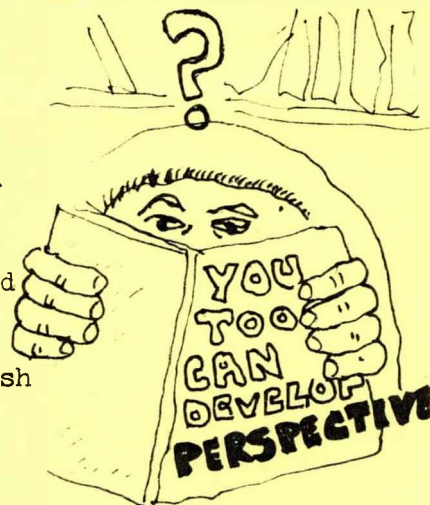
PETE CRUMP, 9, LLYS WYLFA, MYNDD ISA, MOLD, CLWYD CH7 6 XA.

Dear Dave,

Son of Xyster has been slowly creeping to the top of my 'Zines to be Locced' file since NovaCon, but the arrival of Big Xyster (nice title, by the way, even if I am getting miffed by all the unclever references to that book) hastened the process somewhat and so here I am busily tapping away, corflu in hand, mere hours after receiving it. Isn't guilt a wonderful thing?

All this chat about fifties fandom, I really do wish I could join in with these reminiscences. I agree with Skel's point about perspective, but I'm afraid I shall never develop any perspective as long as I'm in the dark about so much of fannish history. Your bits of fifties trivia are a form of in-joke and assume a certain amount of knowledge on the part of the reader. Most (lets face it: all) of the references to past fandom are lost on me, but that's to be expected. I now stand revealed as the naive, ignorant neo that I am.

Ooops! Sorry to be so negative, Dave. Besides, you can



tell me what fandom used to be like when I see you at Mexican, can't you?

BX was a much easier read than SoX - it lacked SoX's hurried texture (good word, eh? I had to use my new thesaurus there to avoid the term 'quick feel') and the interminable ramblings about jazz heroes. Not that I'm averse to any kind of music at all, it's just that it gave me very little to loc (I find locs difficult enough to write (whaddya mean, you can tell?) without having to find something to say about Duke Ellington (watch carefully as Crump extricates himself from this mess of unnecessary parentheses (Oh, Christ! Does the full stop go inside or outside the brackets? (alp!)))). The GoH speech went on a bit, but apart from that I enjoyed Big Xyster very much and look forward to seeing more.

Embarrassing moments? Yes, just one or two, but mostly mundane, ordinary embarrassments and (like yours) usually at work with a captive audience.

My worst embarrassment (in that I have never heard the last of it) happened when I was about fifteen. A friend and I raced down to the local cinema to catch the late afternoon showing of an X-rated mucky film. My friend was ushered inside but I was refused admission. "You've got no chance, mate" said the usher and nodded at my chest. I was still in my school uniform. I felt like a complete berk, but as usual theres never one around when you want one.

Well, there it is. Hardly much of a loc considering the trouble you went to to get the zines to me, is it? I promise to do much better next time.

Stay Sane,

Pete

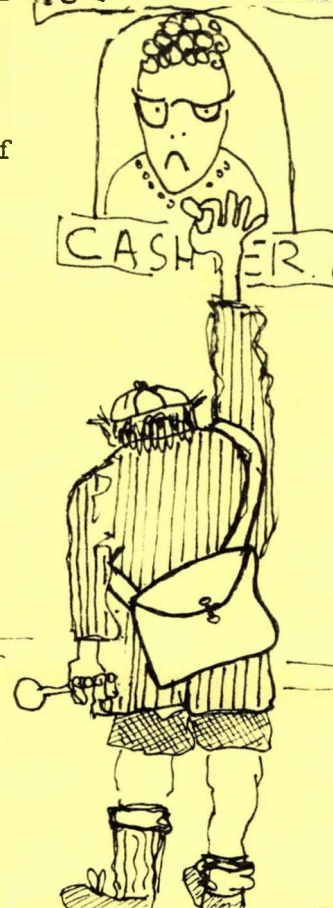
PAUL VINCENT, 25, DOVEDALE AVE, PELSALL, WALSALL, WEST MIDLANDS WS3 4HG

Dear Dave,

Many thanks for Big Xyster, and for Nephew (son of xyster=nephew, geddit? Oh well, suit yourself!). The Eighties sure does seem to be the decade for everyone stepping forward with a fanzine, from the neos of two minutes ago to the missing-presumed-gafiated Fifties fen of myth and legend. In fact, the only people who seem to be seeing print with increasing rarity are those who were so fanzine-active about two years ago (e.g. Rob Hansen's allegedly quarterly Epsilon, the last 3 ishes of which have appeared January '83, August '83 and January '84). While I didn't exactly find SoX & BX Earth shattering, they were friendly, entertaining and chatty: how can one ask for more?

I was interested to find you're a jazz buff. I don't exactly listen to the stuff all the time, or even a lot of the time, but I'm constantly amazed by the hostile attitude some folks hold towards jazz. Mind you, maybe the prevalence of jazzophobia amongst youngsters has something to do with the oh-so respectable image which jazz possesses these days. There seems to be no sense of rebellion or wildness to these rather sedate-looking gentlemen, nothing outrageous or fashion-setting. Of course, anyone who either lived through jazz's heyday (as I presume you did) or read such required books as George Melly's excellent brace of autobiographies (the second one's called 'Rum, Bum, and Concertina' - can't recall the title of the first) knows full well that jazz was considered pretty outrageous at the time, as were its practitioners. It's just the standard reaction of youth to regard anything old as boring and outdated (no doubt today's teenagers even regard Mick Jagger as a boring old fart, and look at the way he used to put the wind up worried parents!). Mind you, you seem to have an aversion to electrical instruments and high amplification which I find difficult to comprehend. Sure, if a band cranks out its entire repertoire at a uniform 200 decibels,

DOLT WINSY
PRESENTS A PROGRAMME OF
WILD, WANTON, EROTIC
SEX AND SADISM



that's just loud for loud's sake, but it needn't be so! For instance, I saw Weather Report (a fine collection of electronic jazzers, as if you didn't know) at Brum Odeon a couple of years ago, and their use of amplification as a means of dynamic contrast was amazing! At times, you could hear a pin drop (ting!) as Joe Zawinul played a quiet piano section; at others, you could almost feel your spine rattling under the impact of a shrieking, drum-driven counterpoint duet between sax and synthesizer! The volume control becomes a creative tool in the right hands, and surely an old jazzier like you should realise that's part of what jazz is about? Different strokes, I suppose.

By the way, the 'lethal cocktails' which Marty Tudor fed you at Cymrucon were composed of Guinness, Brandy, and Barley Wine - if you're interested in recreating your slumped condition, the quantities are 1 bottle Guinness, 1 bottle barley wine, and a double brandy. This mixture is known hereabouts as a Hosepipe, presumably because filling one (a hosepipe that is) with lead shot and beating oneself about the head with same produces a similar effect.

Oh yes, a friend of mine is living with a formerly-married woman by the name of Susan something-or-other, who worked, until a couple of months ago, for the Post Office in the centre of Manchester. Why do I tell you this? Well, she reckons she's been writing for years to this geezer by the name of Dave Wood who used to work in the same place. She reckons he's a Science Fiction fan or something. Now, could it be?.....

All the best, look forward to Xyster 4,

Paul

WAHFLOTS OF NICE PEOPLE INCLUDING.....

Dear Dave,
yes I know I still owe you a letter - lots
of letters, in fact - this isn't it; or them.
Mal

JOY HIBBERT:create a character as British fandom's leading sex maniac for me.

ELDA WHEELER: ...I did enjoy the John Berry letter but what can be said about a letter nearly 30 yrs old.

HAZEL ASHWORTH: ..I am enchanted....it was no end of fun...Marvellous fillip at the end of a working week.
PS. Don't you go mentioning Marvellous Fillip on the phone to Mal or I will be.....

CHRISTINA LAKE: ...John and Mike managed to make Cymrucon sound better than I've heard from other sources..
admittedly not a difficult feat!

TED TUBB:It took a lot of courage and an extra-strong magnifier before I could tackle the beast...
do something about making it easier to read....turn it into microdots perhaps?

ATOM:it seems no sooner do I set to and get a letter out on the latest XYSTER than another
comes shooting through the letterbox. I'm quite convinced that I'll post this tomorrow
and come home to find the latest ish on the fan table... that was a pretty good speech
John Brunner gave...some fans do tend to forget that John is and always has been a Faaan.

DAVE ROWLEY:Hows this for 'praising with faint damns'...enjoyed the zine but can't think of much to
say about it.....

And finally, how do you keep 'em happy down on the farm?

VING CLARKE:.....lovely letter column....

TED TUBB:as for the letter column....ugh!

THE WRITE WOODCUTS OF REPLY

JOSEPH.....UM, WELL I'VE TRIED. Hope this time you can see the trees for the wood. Oh, it aint perfect yet...but I m confident people will find it better than what has gone before. There are one or two spots where the patching marks show and I am not entirely happy with the very small type face which still tends to blotch a little here and there. Also I had a bad run through the printer with a couple of sheets and the egdes are a little too close to the staples. You will notice I never once interrupted the correspondence, though I was sorely tempted. However a photocopy of your letter is pinned above my typer, from where it glares down at me like some illuminated page from the Apocalypse..... John's piece I didn't see it as a piffling interjection (interjection:- to throw between, to interpose, to exclaim in interruption or parenthesis) but as a trifling footnote (footnote: reference or comment at the foot of a page) which, in my opinion because of its placing did not interrupt the flow of the piece....ah,well.

HARRY.....HOPE THIS ISSUE IS EASIER ON YOUR OPTICAL EQUIPMENT.

Like the sound of the Hagerstown Diary....would love to read it. It is kinda strange how the past can attract. Me, I can't stand Historical novels and the kind, but something that gets to the grass roots, I really enjoy. Am at present reading 'My Aunt Edith' the personal memoirs of a Preston (Lancs) family and their attitude towards Edith who was a suffragate...full of interesting little anecdotes about the people and area round Preston.

VINOWELL AT LEAST YOU KNOW YOUR FRIENDS WILL NEVER LEAVE YOU COLD.....

PAMELA trouble with most discos is they are so antiseptic that they attract all sorts of people You could even meet your parents in one! Now that could never happen in a jazz cellar. And how about a jazz cellar in an attic.....Inverted World?

JOHN D Prejudiced?...opinion reached on inadequate evidence: unreasonable opinion. Nope, I don't think so. And what you say only goes to reinforce my statement. Electric/ amplified music can be satisfying and pleasing to the ear. There is a long tradition of electric instruments in jazz. Guitar (Charlie Christian) vibes (Hampton, Norvo) keyboards,(Waller, Basie, Zawinul, Hancock, Ellington). Miles Davies even plays an electric trumpet..... I'm not just a jazz buff by the way and we do have in the house Chicago, Queen, Genesis, Sinatra, Dimond, Torme and son and daughter keep me up to date with some pretty way out material..... Incidentally, Wynton Marsalis... I recommend CBS Masterworks D37846 Marsalis with the National Philarmonic Orchestra playing, Haydn, Hummel and L.Mozart Trumpet Concertos.

PETE . . . Sorry to squash you between even more of the interminable ramblings about fuddy-duddy jazz. Serves you right for being born too late.....

PAUL . . . Did you and John D get together on this? What I said above goes for you too..... Thanks for details on Hosepipe. AS soon as I saw that I remembered Mart telling me about the concoction at Novacon.....Yet another Dave Wood???? What with someone of that name wriying for fanzines in the '60's and another with something to do with Ad-Astra, then there was the Rev David Wood in,I think Heinlein's Sixth Column..... None of these are I, nor a clone..... as for Susan Something-or-other....nope ain't guilty. I must tread carefully in future.....



Oh dear, what a cock up. This is supposed to be the bacover all blank so that I could put stamps and addresses and printed paper rate and a funny face to confuse your postman. However..... seem to have printed a couple of sheets wrong... must number number pages, must number pages, must number pages...

Still it gives me the chance to thank MAL and HAZEL and VINØ and PHILIP for their pieces, ATOM for his artwork, all those fanzine reviews which made oodles of fans write asking for copies of XYSTER, SKEL for his cassette (lazy blighter couldn't put pen to paper), VINØ for his hospitality, MARTIN HOARE for getting me onto the SEACON Admin (organising the BAFF geriatric creche), and finally all those wonderful fans who will be beating their way to my door with fab articles for XYSTER 5.....

RESURRECTION SHUFFLE

The following pieces are taken from BRENNSCHLUSS 4 published sometime in 1959. I make no apologies for plundering the past to fill the pages of XYSKER. The publishing of BRENN (as it was known) came at the peak of my first love affair with fandom. Issue 5 of Brenn was not to appear until the latter end of 1961 by which time I was on the verge of entering the great period of gaffiation that was to last until 1982. The editorial board of Brenn comprised Ken Potter, Irene Gore and myself. The last two issues although they contained material and illustrations by yours truly were essentially the love labours of Ken and Irene. Brenn's life cycle was six issues over a period of eleven years (1954 - 1965). During that run it was fortunate to feature such names as Mal Ashworth, Joan Carr, Bob Bloch, Archie Mercer, Chuck Harris, John Berry, Nigel Lindsay, Dick Schultz, Mike Moorcock and George Locke. Issue four was, in my humble opinion a high spot. Aside from pieces by Ken, George Locke and myself there were two particular gems from Mal and Irene respectively. Mal is still with us and I have twisted his arm to allow this reprint. Irene is lost to us, but she remains in print as one of the finest female writers of the period.... Mal is sometimes wont to say one of the finest fan writers of the period..... So from the Golden Age of Junior Fandom

AH, YOUTH

I was very disappointed when I found out I wasn't a boy. In fact it was a terrible blow - I wanted to be an engine driver.

My playmate, a boy a little older than myself, had a glorious collection of railway lines and all the trimmings, which he allowed me to watch at a safe and respectable distance, squatting delightedly on an old horse-hair couch. I remember vividly that he always dissuaded me from actually touching them by vigorously banging my head several times on a convenient brick wall.

I had a feeling that he too had been disappointed somehow, so I allowed him to occasionally play with my doll. Despite all this we both seem to have become almost normal.

My one hope was that I might secretly change sex over night. I seemed to have heard of it somewhere, but although I kept a careful watch, nothing happened, and I was doomed.

I fought back desperately. I began to climb trees, and play football and cricket - my bowling was absolutely of the lousiest nature imaginable - and once I tried flying gliders, but on its first flight it hit a haystack, and broke into innumerable pieces. I did better at school, where with great effort I managed to come out top in science and bottom in sewing. Unfortunately my triumph was short lived. I joined a ballroom dance class, and I lost the fight forever.

I had a horrible feeling that I didn't know how to be a girl either. I was shocked and horrified, and felt a miserable failure. I'd been able to knit at the age of three. Unfortunately I hadn't improved, but what else could I do? How about flirting with the boys? I glowered at them discreetly, and the more I glowered, the more worldly, wildy scruffy, and immobile they became. I decided emphatically that I had been born in the wrong century: in the wrong space-time continuum. As I knew that time travel would not be invented for some years, I told myself reasonably, "Well, there it is. I'm afraid my dear, I can do absolutely nothing whatever about it." Then I added an extra "My dear" for good measure and sympathy.

IRENE GORE

Finally I gave up the struggle and became myself.

My brother bought me improving books, and I soon buried myself in a curious mixture of writing; a set of encyclopedias, long out of date, The Swiss Family Robinson, Shakespeare, Every Woman's Home Doc, Rupert Brooke, The Bible, Little Women, and Jo's Boys Book of Science, Nature Studies, Scientific-fiction, Chas Dickens and books on Primitive Man. Primitive Man was wonderful!

I tried to write a detective novel - unsuccessfully - which began, "The little black car crawled slowly and heavily upward through the thickening fog, and as Sam sat clutching the steering wheel, he heard behind him the long low whistle of a police siren..." that was as far as I got, for I could never make up, in my litter basket mind, what sort of crime had been committed. I wanted to dedicate it to my mother - as she had now read a whole library of the stuff. A mild little woman with a gentle smile, but I knew differently. I developed a bookcase.

Around this time, I decided it was about time I was taught to swim. I went along with a group from school in a terrible state of nerves - I'd never been to the Public Baths before - to start weekly swimming lessons. After I'd been wandering up and down the bath side for about ten minutes feeling exceedingly lost, a majestic figure wearing a dazzling white overall and shiny new boots appeared before me. "You!" I looked up innocent "Go over there and get wet." Every week this female would jump up and down on the bath side and shout out "Swim! swim! swim!" I sank.

I tried other sporting activities. Jumping, long or high, was disastrous; I usually ended up by breaking some small bone in my body, which effectively stopped the lesson and ruined everything for the others. How about running? I only ran when I had to, and sometimes had to, like when our school were preparing for an interschool sports day and only three of us turned up for practice. That became one of those lousy weeks. However, I excelled in the sack race. What a performance! The other two couldn't get their feet in the sack.

I vividly remember scoring a goal at hockey once. There I was, yelling loudly, and charging down the centre of the field waving my hockey stick, oblivious of any rules of conduct or even the game, it whirled above my head, while in the distance a shrill voiced games mistress shouted "Stop her somebody. Stop her." The goalkeeper turned and fled, and the ball landed with a thud. A magical moment!

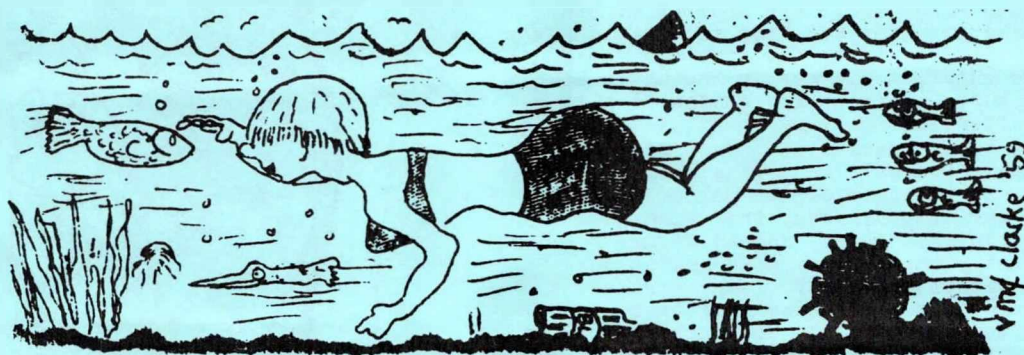
Gymnastics. The school gym was one of the most varied torture chambers I had yet come across. Those devilish ropes for example. One warm day it was early spring, and I was standing quietly by the ropes. Then I nonchalantly hung on one of them and swung a little and stopped. Dreamily I placed the rope through my legs, held the end of it with one hand, and swung off the floor. I stared down at the wooden floor blocks deep in thought. Suddenly my world was violated by a noisy shout and I was pushed several feet into the air by our crazy PT instructress, who always wanted us to find new things to do and thus develop all our muscles. The rope jerked and twisted so that I was actually sitting on my own wrist - yet still holding the rope with that very hand, I was now in the interesting position of finding my ear being in danger of scraping loose on those very wooden blocks I had only moments before been in the sothing act of contemplating. The wooden horse placed safely at the end of the hall came wooshing towards me then

receded, returned, receded, returned..... I eventually fell off; the pain in my wrist being replaced by an even more acute one at the base of my spine. I hobbled away to better things and joined a youth club.

One event springs to mind immediately, the inter Youth Clubs relay race. I was last runner. The fact that there were only two teams competing, the fact that the other team had already won before I started off, and the fact that I walked my bit didn't stop the local Corporation from presenting me with a silver runners up medal, which I still possess.

Then I got religion. And almost fainted in the choir stalls on my first Sunday morning. And had to be taken home in the vicar's car. Despite this I was back in position the next week where to my horror I found myself standing next to the Bishop of Blackburn. I hope to this day that he didn't notice the fact that I was only pretending to sing. Mind you I wasn't actually in the choir, I was only there to help fill up the seats.

Life is still piling up on me even today... still what with some of the latest things I'm finding out about you may like to know I've decided to be a girl after all.



THE MOST UNFORGETTABLE LUPIN MAN I EVER MET MAL ASHWORTH

We used to envy Ken and Irene Potter their Lupin Man.

This was when they had a flat in Lancaster; they had the ground floor; on the floor above lived a scoutmaster, and on the floor above him (or the 'attic' as it was quaintly called) lived the Lupin Man. We never saw him except from a distance, but it struck us, as Ken and Irene talked about him, that it must be a fascinating existence living in such close proximity to such a colourful character. The last time we were there he had gone out floating on the nearby canal, and he had already been gone three weeks. It isn't difficult to imagine how envy might creep in under such circumstances.

The other night, however, we took stock of our own current collection of characters, and we suddenly realised that our envy was misplaced; we were in fact the fortunate ones. How could a solitary Lupin Man, no matter how buoyant he may be on canals, compare with a list like ours, which included such prize specimens as 'Sloshing Socrates', 'The Dripping Milk Man', 'The Smiling Lady', 'Horseface Anna', and the ubiquitous 'Bugglerlugs'? Not to mention 'The Man With The Slipped Face'.

Those of course are only the most obvious examples, the ones which spring to mind; a

little more judicious casting around soon swells the collection. There are 'Big Momma' and 'Big Daddy', who live next door to us, their daughter 'Mad Aggie' who lives across the street with her husband, 'Big Bopper', and next to them 'Johnny Guitar' and his Woman. Then somewhere along the end of the street, or round the back of the street, or in the nearby allotments, or in an adjacent dustbin shed, or somewhere on that way, lives 'The Burning Grass Man' (How delectably Bradburyish that looks in cold print!) These unlike the previous set of Characters, are Local Residents, and can be ignored for the moment (a system which works admirably well the majority of the time; oh, we are very social minded citizens!), as this is mainly intended as a survey of Characters who momentarily Cross Our Path, and as soon are gone. In this category are included 'Old Herb Herbert', 'The Little Gas Man', 'The Mining Engineer', and 'Noddie'; and it would never do to leave out such stalwarts as 'Jabberwocky', 'Gunk Johnny', and 'Holy Mary'. Among those who have now happily faded from the scene, one thinks immediately of 'Quasimodo', of 'Whistler and His Mother', and of the 'Laughing Man', and I am quite sure there are many others hiding somewhere below the surface if I cared to search for them and drag them out into the daylight.

Once again, compared to Ken and Irene's uncomplicated relationship with their Lupin Man, our own delicately interwoven associations with these various Characters seems vastly complex. Their only contact with the Lupin Man would be when he bobbed his head round their kitchen door and said to Irene, "I've just brought you some lupins, love". This he did, I understand, about seven hundred and thirty times the first week he moved in, and I suppose it must have been around this time that he was christened; after that he began to feel rather more at home, and Irene's weekly supply of lupins began to dwindle somewhat. But even after the supply had slackened off to a mere fifty or so bunches per week, the name somehow stuck. And of course when he went off on prolonged canal floating expeditions, they would not see him for weeks at a time, and the house gradually became lupinless.

Now compare this simple, idyllic, state of affairs to our contact with, say, 'Sloshing Socrates'. (I have never been completely happy about this appellation for this particular mountainous, shambling hunk of semi-humanity. The truth of the matter is the real Socrates rates very near the top in my All Time Admiration List, and to be have his name attached to this shuffling cadaver, however ironically, makes me rather uneasy at times.) We are not overly keen on 'S S'; perhaps no one thing that I can put my finger on altogether accounts for this, unless it is the fact that we hate his very guts - but there are a number of small points which added together may help to explain our aversion. 'S S' travels on the same bus we do each evening. He snuffles his way up the aisle at the side of the bus, opening every window he passes, and sits, quite often, on the very front seat. Now these buses have been specially constructed by congenital idiots for cretinous morons, and this suits 'S S' to a T; the fact of the matter is, in addition to all the side windows, they also have windows at the front which open, and 'S S' apparently feels divinely impelled to make use of this function, quite without regard for such irrelevant matters as exterior circumstances; hail, rain, snow, fog or sub-zero temperatures, he opens these windows too. Completion of stage one. Then, having made himself comfortable, (which consists of settling down into his seat to an almost unbelievable degree by virtue of long and intense shuffling and bouncing) and everyone else distinctly uncomfortable, he takes out his matches and lights his pipe. If you imagine flushing an ancient toilet at the dead of night in an corrugated iron hotel, you are beginning to approach the reality of the sound effects accompanying this; it must have been some similar function, I feel sure, which inspired 'Handel's 'Water Music''. Two minutes later he takes out his matches again, and again lights his pipe, fortissimo. One minute and thirty seconds later, he does the same again, FORTE. One minute later, he repeats the operation, CRESCENDO. It is a forty minute journey. Completion of stage two. Then, as the bus fills up, somebody inevitably ends up sitting next to him; in between puffs, and sloshes, and the striking of matches, he immediately starts up a conversation, which is not so much a matter of verbal intercourse as of Sloshing Socrates addressing the whole top deck of his views on This and That and, without fail, the Other. This he does in a high nasal, complaining whine. Completion of stage three. It may be, of course, that he has been specifically sent down from Heaven to Earth as a Light and a Saviour unto the modern generation, but that is not the way we see him.

On the other hand, a character such as The Dripping Milk Man is quite harmless and inoffensive, and even, in his own retiring fashion, likeable. He is a Morning Bus Character, and stands quietly at the stop holding a mysterious brown bag, too small for a briefcase, and yet too large to hold just a toothpick. The day he stood there unaware, though, while his mysterious bag dripped large large blobs of milk into a white pool at his feet, the mystery was, in a sense, solved. Since that morning, however, he has never dribbled milk again, and for all we know, he

he may be carrying cocoa in his bag now, or even moonshine whisky, but he doesn't really look the type. In all other respects, except one, he is quite unremarkable; the one is his absence. On the rare occasions when he is not standing at the bus stop, his place is occupied by two other people - a little curly black grandmother, and a pale, bespectacled, spotty faced boy. They stand side by side, never speaking to one another; when the bus arrives, they sit side by side, never speaking to one another; they get off at the Dripping Milk Man's stop, still never speaking to one another. What sort of occupation is his, we sometimes wonder which can be carried out equally well by one small silent curly black grandmother, and one equally small, equally silent, neurotic looking young boy, who may even be perfect strangers to each other? Perhaps we shall never know.

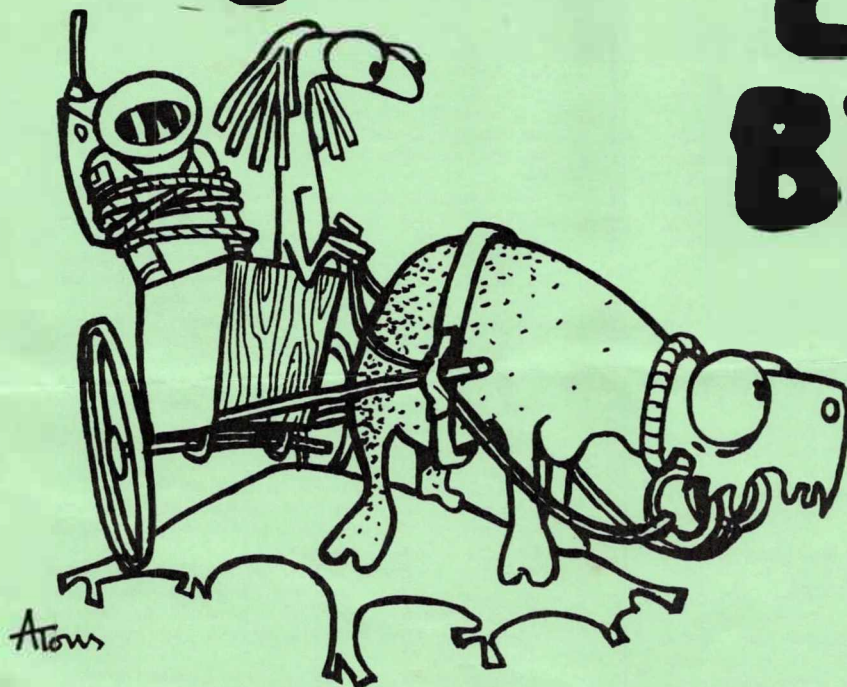


In between the extremes represented by Sloshing Socrates and The Dripping Milk Man, come such people as the The Smiling Lady who, smiles every time we see her, since the day we saw her sitting up in bed; The Man With The Slipped Face, a Morning Bus Character who would probably have lived out his life in anonymous obscurity except for the fact that one day when he caught the bus we noticed that his face had all fallen away to one corner, (thus giving rise to our modernised version of the old Fats Waller number, 'I Don't Like You 'Cause Your Face Falls Out'); and Noddie who amuses us almost every morning of the year (ungrateful wretches that we are, we might at least have sent him a Christmas card, in recognition of his efforts!) by his frantic nodding and bobbing and gyrations in the roadway, to try and induce the already overflowing bus to stop and pick him up. Buggerlugs, too, might be described as a middle of the road sort of Character, since all he did to earn recognition and identification was to take to sitting in our favourite seat on the bus, (a distinction shared with The Mining Engineer), and Holy Mary is another of the grey ghostly crew of half anonymous characters, though I seem to recall hearing her name mentioned in connection with a pretty important position of some kind.

I will pass over most of the others, each with his or her own little something, and conclude with the colourful couple who are, perhaps my favourites, Horseface Anna and Old Herbert, and their delightful little morning drama. Old Herbert is already on the bus when it arrives at our stop; he has boarded it somewhere further back along the route; or perhaps he has come from the depot with the bus; perhaps when they trundle all the buses out in the morning they trundle Old Herbert out too; maybe he sleeps on the bus, or even lives his all life on the bus shuttling backwards and forwards and never leaving it, I couldn't say for sure, but certainly every time we see him there he is sitting on the bus, upstairs, second seat from the front. Horseface Anna gets on at our stop; she is the sort of 'young lady' in her middle thirties who calls herself a 'young lady' and all her male acquaintances 'gentleman friends'; Old Herbert is the sort of faded small business man who calls himself a 'businessman' and Horseface Anna a 'young lady'. They get along famously together. So...the stage is set. Horseface Anna steps on the bus before us, minces up the stairs and along the aisle and stands quietly just to windward of Old Herbert's shoulder. Pause; the climax. A few seconds elapse. (Us standing breathlessly behind). Then - rapid denouement - Old Herbert looks up, face registers profound surprise. "Good morning" he gasps. Then he climbs laboriously down from his seat, she minces along to sit down on the inside, he climbs laboriously back again, and we breathe again and sit down to recover from the excitement. For two years we have been watching this little drama, and every morning for two years Old Herbert has been astounded beyond words to find Horseface Anna standing at his shoulder, and I'm afraid I just couldn't bear it if he ever got used to the idea of her being there and started taking her for granted. All the same, I must admit to an occasional vague longing in the murkiest depths of my unexplored subconscious to borrow a gorilla from some sympathetic zoo and just one morning, let it take Horseface Anna's place just behind Old Herbert's shoulder. But this is mere fantasy.

So on the whole we feel that Ken and Irene are entitled to their Lupin Man.

Some things just go together



LIKE BRITAIN and HEAVEN in 87

A GHODLIKE MESSAGE....

Carefully examine the coding in the little square:-

X No sweat, you'll get XYS ad nauseum

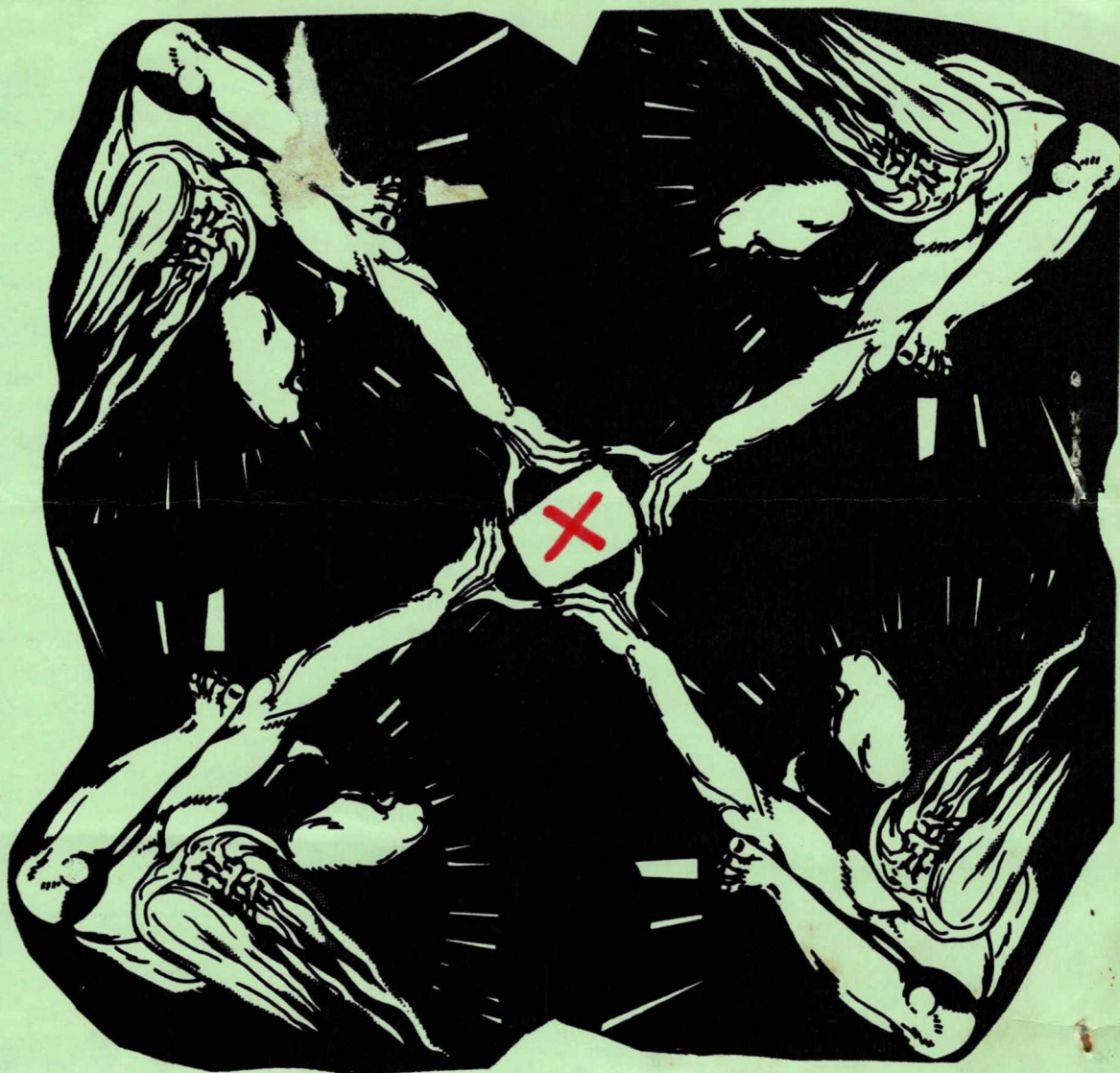
Y Why don't you write? Next ish will be last...

S So long....unless of course I hear from u...

T Take this as a sample.....

E Exchange?

R Recherché.....



IMMORTAL PROSE No 3 'DAMNED' by ANONYMOUS

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DAMNED

vigour to our line. What you are becomes merged in me. What you shall be—"

The hand that pressed up her arm and gripped her neck pricked as with many needles from his impatience. Her head he drew backward, as he rose to his knees on the couch and leaned over her. Her eyes dilated under the close gaze of his. Her lips moved to the syllables of his slow, low declaration.

"When the thought-lust in you has conquered your affectations—from the moment of the consummation of the union of our minds—you shall be a goddess—my goddess—for aye."

Strangely enough, his egotism did not offend her. An expression of power it bade fair to convince her. Warning herself that she must not be convinced, she tried to slip from his grasp.

But he held her. "I'd love to love you, sweet Grief," he murmured close to her lips. "Ask me to kiss you, Dolores, as once you asked a man of Earth. Beg me to take you, you devil's desire. Let our moment of for-ever start now."

His reminder helped her to tear her will from his and throw it, like a tangible thing, to the thought of John. Pushing him away, she found voice to defy him.

"I'll never ask you. That moment can never start."

"Fair fiend, don't try me too far. I want to want you. I desire desire."

As his fingers closed around Dolores' throat, she was weakened by the thought of strangling. She could not speak, either to deny or implore.

"And you," he rasped, "shall want me to want you until you'll pray that your mind may burn to ash from its own ardour. Or will you teach me willingly—inspire me as you best know how? I prefer to be your lover—to miss not a nibble of that smooth cheek, my luscious nectarine. But I am also your legal lord. I have tutored too many legal lords of Earth in their brutalities to miss my divine right now. I am your master. Ask me to kiss you, slave."

Dolores strove for the sort of courage that had enabled her to repel him before. Just one strong, good thought might release her. From the least likely source—his clutch of her—

DAMNED

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it came. Baby fingers had clung tight about her throat a few hours since. She was a mother, and a mother was enslaved only by her motherhood. She freed herself of his grip; struggled to her feet; started across the room.

"My wager did not include wants of my own," she defied him. "You have asked more than I can pay."

"More? I haven't begun to ask!"

From the closeness of his voice she realized without glancing back that he was following. The strength of her good thought was scattered by panic. All she could do was to flee.

She hurried to the windows, but found them shuttered against the storm. Behind object after object of the room she took a stand, only to desert it on his near approach.

He, like an evil fate, leisurely, sure to overtake, pursued. He laughed from excess of exhilaration when the inevitable occurred. Her long tulle-like veil caught about the winged foot of an illusion of Mercury. As though by jealousy of the speed god she was tripped, was about to fall. Satan caught her.

"Why did you have to stop? This has been wonderful—never could be so wonderful again! Whatever inspired you with the knowledge that the best way to ask is to deny?"

Freeing the veil, he wrapped it around and around her, binding her hands to her sides.

"Your intuition is keener than all my keenness," he panted. "Of course the fleeing woman is the woman one must overtake. To ask me, you have aroused me to ask you. Your lips, Dolores—I ask your lips."

He flung her down; knotted the ends of the scarf about her sandals; crowded over her. The lecherous look of him silenced any protest. His eyes were aflame, and from his whole person fumed that ruddy effluvium which came of his concentration.

As measured by the slow approach of his face to hers, a death-time of dreading thoughts preoccupied Dolores. Fragile as were her bonds, she could not throw them off. Her resistance, she knew, was weakening. Suppose her mind consented; what then?