

VYSTER

8

THE BARBARIAN!



XYSTER THE BARBARIAN is the eighth issue to appear from
DAVE WOOD 1 FRIARY CLOSE MARINE HILL CLEVEDON AVON WITH
THE POSTAL CODE OF BS21 7QA.....IN ENGLAND OF COURSE...

This issue is complete with glowing testimonials from a
couple of fans who voted for it at Novacon 1984.....

"THE BEST OF A PRETTY GROTTY YEAR....."

"I DID VOTE FOR YOU, THOUGH I NEVER REALLY EXPECTED IT
TO WIN. IT ISN'T IN THE SAME CLASS AS PREVIOUS WINNERS"

THANKS A MILLION FRIENDS....

Still it left ME with a warm self-satisfied inner glow.
It was the moment when Rob Holdstock uttered that gulp,
and said "How the hell do you pronounce this?" that the
old heart gave a lurch and I realised we had done it.

I say 'we' because without the contributions from those
super fans who made up the 'Class of '84' there was no
way I would have pulled it off.

Anyway, thanks again to all those who voted for XYSTER
at Novacon and are willing to swear on a stack of ~~XXXX~~
WARHOONS that they did not rig the ballot.

THE CLASS OF '84 THEN.....

ASHWORTH H	Top marks this year. Keep it up.
ASHWORTH M	Useful member of class. Strong right arm. Next term - milk monitor.
BRUNNER J	Has makings of a bright boy. Could go far
CLARKE V	Top marks for history. Tends to daydream.
CRUMP P	Youngest boy. Needs help buying a round.
LAKE K	Needlework good. Nice kaftan in practical
LANGFORD D	Easily led.
WEST D	Shy. Sympathetic handling could bring him out of his shell.
WOOD D	Sloppy, untidy work.
SUSLOWICZC	New lad. Fancies himself as big shot.

Headmaster's comments:- Good years work showing steady
improvement. J. Nicholas

And so we go forth into 1985 full of vim and vigour.....
I must admit I can't promise to provide you with as regular
a fix of XYSTER as I managed in 1984. After this issue all
I can say is that number nine will be real soon now.....
still, that's probably more often than the majority of the
real fanzines about today.....

READ ON.....no contents page so yah, sucks, boo!

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The Work Environment

We had found a quiet corner in the fan room at Novacon chatting about this and that when Hazel suddenly piped up: "Whatever happened to your editorial in the last issue?"

"How do you mean?"

Well, it was a bit short wasn't it? You get all us staff writers to flog our guts out writing lo-o-o-ng works of art, and you just dash off a line or two. What happened to the Word of old? The non-master of his destiny, builder of kitchens, medical specimen, man of the world, charter of lands beyond the seas...blah...blah...blah."

I blushed gently as is my wont. "I couldn't think of anything to write."

She rose to her full height, took a deep breathe, (causing C---- H----- to slurp over his beer) and thundered, Nothing to write! RUBBISH. You are old. You must have plenty to write about. What about all those hairy stories you whispered in my ear at Seacon!?! "et you finger out laddie, and get on with it!" Oooh, she can be so masterful can our 'azel.

I supped reflectively on my beer. "A sort of 'Confessions of a Telephone Engineer' do you mean?"

"Right on, bonzo."

"Mmmnn.... do you suppose anyone would be interested in what happened, fr'instance, when I visited that titled Lady about some wayleaves?"

"Was she the one who, er.....?" interjected Hazel.

"Er, yes."

"What's this then?" Mal with an almost imperceptible shudder, tore himself away from the hypnotic scene of DWest selling the current 'last' copy of FITAIP to some unsuspecting neo.

"We were just on about Dave's work as a telephone engineer."

"But you said something about 'was she the one who...'"

I sighed. Mal has this infuriating habit of coming in half-way through any intimate conversation I might be trying to carry out with his wife, and demanding to KNOW.....

So, I told the story all over again.

It was on one of those obscure country estates tucked away in the Lake District.

I bowled up to the Family Seat and quite correctly presented myself at the Tradesman's entrance. A kitchen maid answered the door.

"I've come to see Lady ----- about placing some telephone poles across her land."

"Have you an appointment?"

"Yes. Made by phone."

"One moment....." she trilled, and disappeared.

The next person to present himself at the door was a rather snotty looking butler. With a disparaging glance at my regulation donkey-jacket, he snorted, "Follow me. And wipe your feet."

Our route was via the scullery along a dismal passageway and through an old oak panelled door emerging in the main hallway. We proceeded to climb a sweeping surface from whose walls past generations of the family glared down. On the first landing was an arched doorway.

Lord Snooty tapped on the door.

"Enter." A female voice from within.

The butler sniffed and left me. I entered the room. Oh, boy it was a bedroom. Dominated entirely by a large silk-festooned four-poster bed. On the creamy white counterpane reclined Her Ladyship. In all her glory. Well - almost. The flimsy piece of material she no doubt had had flown in from the fashion houses of Paris, under the, broadly speaking, name 'negligé' left little to the most impoverished imagination.

"Sit down here, dear boy," she said patting to bed. And smiled in that certain way.

"Ty ghod," I sighed. "Was I glad to get out of there."

"But, but" panted Mal, "What HAPPENED!?!"

"Oh, that was what Hazel was about to say when you interrupted. Her Ladyship was close on eighty years old....."

I took another mouthful of ale. "Now there you are again. Could I write that in Xyster or would it be considered sexist and in the worse possible taste? I suppose someone might have been less circumspect in the situation. Apart from Her Ladyship that is."

Mal looked crestfallen. He'd missed the climax of the West - neo affair, with West the clear winner having taken the poor lad's last £4.74p., and my story had lacked the titillation he had hoped for.

"I suppose, in retrospect, I could say that naked ladies played a big part in my short career as a wayleave officer." I had hooked him again. His eyes lit up; a small bubble appeared at the corner of his mouth.

A glorious summer; long hot days, blue skies, shirt sleeve order, added to my happiness at being in a job that kept me in the open air, away from the office desk.

I had arranged to meet a farmer who owned a few acres up towards Alston in Cumberland. Alston itself is the highest market town in England. A milestone shows a height of 921 feet above sea-level. And not far up the road it is 1,000 feet. It stands in the valley of the South Tyne and is almost surrounded by the highest fells of the Pennine Chain. It is a place well worth visiting, offering splendid walks over the moorland scenery. There are several waterfalls in the vicinity probably the most famous being Ashgill Force. Alston is also just east of the Pennine Way and here you will also find the highest village in England; Nenthead at 1451 feet.

I took the Penrith road to the farm. This is up Hartside Height which at its highest point of 1,903 feet offers a panoramic view over the Eden valley: it ranges from Lakeland fells to Scottish hills, with the silvery ribbon of Solway Firth on the western horizon.

Warning: don't try this route in winter! The road drops down Hartside with stomach turning zig-zags to Melmerby. Ice and snow don't help.

I was once stranded at a radio station up there having made the journey in clear weather in the morning only to find, as the day progressed, the snow was taking over. By the end of the day I was in the middle of a great white waste. From Cross Fell comes the infamous Helm Wind piling snow 15ft and higher, swiftly isolating the town.

But this was summer. And a time to enjoy the beauty of the area.

I arrived at the farm mid-morning to find that the farmer was out repairing fences and wouldn't be back until round noon. His wife told me that he was only a couple of fields away; easy to walk to without difficulty. She gave me directions and I strode off in the heat of the sun. The scented air had that remarkable hazy quality you only find in England at that time of the year. It gives you a gentle buzz; an ethereal sensation, and time and place gain an almost faerie feeling. One starts to imagine being alone in some enchanted vale where anything could happen. It did.

I suppose if you sniff or snort or tread the path to Damascus or read Rot the odd vision or two would come quite naturally to you. I felt I'd had too much sun.

Two naiads and a second cousin to Conan frolic across the meadow. Through the shimmering haze their bronzed bodies oiled by a faint layer of sweat seem immense and I dwarfed by their presence.

I coughed delicately. The trio stopped and turned.

"Aye, lad?" questioned the male. And the spell was broken. The farmer as calm as could be and with total disregard for his lack of clothing, leaned on his scythe (an action akin to frying sausages in a nudist camp in my opinion) and regarded me with amusement. The two girls flopped down on the grass and whispered together, slyly glancing in my direction. There was a certain amount of giggling.

The interesting thing is that I felt naked! I was being appraised. (We could now go into a long rignarole (sorry, long is superfluous) about how women must feel when brickies on building sites whistle at them, but this is hardly the place...)

"Wayleaves," I muttered. "I aranged to see you. Post Office and all that." I was getting tongue-tied.

"Aye, well this is hardly the place for such talk. Best we get back up to th'farm."

I tended to agree.

"Right then we'll go on the tractor. Hop on the back and hold tight." He seated himself at the wheel and switched on.

"Come on girls, we may as well all go back."

Quelle Horreur!

The two girls hopped up either side of me and we set off across the rough meadow.

Thus began the most bizarre journey of my then short life.

Undulations. (Dictionary definition: rising and falling.)

We proceeded precariously across the terrain. I bounced with every bump and furrow. Certain objects perceived from the corners of my, firmly fixed ahead, eyes, bounced even more. My ears quickly attuned to a seductive sound. Like waves over a gentle shore, like the rustle of silk in a darkened room, like the gentle caress of the finest of emery cloth across a delicate wood, like the murmur of breaking bubbles on the head of a fine ale, the sound assailed my ears. Flesh against flesh.

The day seemed to be getting even hotter.

"Hang on!" yelled the farmer as we struck an outcrop of rock. And they did. To me!

I stopped talking and regarded my empty glass.

"Were you embarrassed?" queried Hazel.

"Naw. All in a day's work init. How about a refill Mal?"

Our 'azel wasn't the only one to complain about the paucity of editorial writing. WAW took me to task demanding "why not more detail of your exotic holiday?" Why not indeed? A little hesitancy, maybe, towards turning XYSTER into a poor man's Fodor. Though perhaps, Opatija shouldn't go unmentioned in these pages for it is an exceedingly interesting place.

The north of Yugoslavia, known as the Istrian peninsular, juts southward from the Italian border at Trieste. The area is one of those that has been cherished by a succession of invading nations over the past umpty-tumpty years. The Romans had it and lost it to the Huns. Then the Byzantines swarmed in and enjoyed its hospitable climate until they too were pushed aside by the Venetians. They had a long occupation and shaped much of the architectural interest you find today in its towns and villages. At the end of the Napoleonic Wars it changed hands again and out went Italy and in came the Austrians. They lasted until 1918 when the Allies as a sort of thank you to the Italia gave it back. This was not greeted with any great enthusiasm by the newish Slav, Croat and Serb kingdom of Alexander the first. Attempts at compromise ie you have this bit and you have this, satisfied nobody and things got really tangled up when Mussolini attempted to 'Italianise' his bits. WW2 Yugoslavian partizans drove out the Italians but things simmered on until 1954 when Istria was finally given, lock, stock and barrel to the Yugoslavian nation; nobody seems to be complaining now.

Up in the north east corner, on the Bay of Kvarner sits Opatija. It owes its origins to the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Round 1880 various doctors began extolling the virtues of the area for its delightful healthy climate and the Austro-Hungarian nobility descended on a little village called Abbazia

and began development. This is now the resort of Opatija. The influence is still apparent and in fact most of the hotels are former residences of those rich pioneers.

It is easy to understand why they took to the place. An area of outstanding beauty provides a setting for the town. It nestles at the foot of Mount Učka protected from the cold mountain winds. It overlooks the deep blue Kvarner bay from which rise the islands of Cres and Krk. An equable climate averaging about 54F in the winter and 79F in the summer is maintained by that protective mountain and warm sea breezes. The Avenue - the main street - reflects this climate. Here you can see palms, lemons, oranges, bamboo, yucca cacti; a sub-tropical profusion. The promenade is wide and ideal for evening strolls and all the hotels provide entertainment and places to eat or drink.

People are always asking me why I keep returning to Yugoslavia. I tend to mumble something about it being so cheap and they nod their heads wisely and conclude that I do indeed breed moths in my wallet. Well it is cheap. But there's more to it than that. For instance, Yugoslavia is a Communist State. That's interesting enough in itself. In fact every time I go there, being one of the government troops as it were, my local Security Officer offers 'briefing' and 'de-briefing' and warns of the 'dangers' (this from a man who allowed a 1000 square foot carpet to disappear from an office floor one night gives some cause for amusement....) but up till now, it being an entirely voluntary exercise, I have graciously declined. (We have these sort of tentative plans of excursions to Moscow in '86... that should prove interesting....) Anyway it's obvious he's never set foot in the country, any more than he's been to Albania, China or Outer Mongolia, all of which are on the 'list'. (I have a strong suspicion he's never been to Wales either, but then that's a good 25 miles away....) Perhaps I should have accepted one of his briefings. Maybe he could have put me onto one of those cells where all this communisting goes on, because quite honestly the hardest thing to find in Yugoslavia is a communist, or someone who talks like one. Mind you, they act like them. At least, if you believe all these stories about being 'contacted' and then given 8 'certain inducements'. I have found that either sex is quite happy to share a drink (or two or three) with you and the men aren't adverse to stroking your thighs if you are a woman, but they don't seem to be after State Secrets or what have you and seem quite happy if they don't get their faces slapped. And that is only the police. Now there are a lot of them about. They buzz round the streets in souped up Fiat Pandas trying to look very fierce with their truncheons and side arms. But this all seems so futile when they actually get out and lounge on the sidewalk, hats off, ties loose jackets unbuttoned, and ogle the passing girls. As for the dreaded 'knock on the door at night' so beloved of our thriller writers the only knocking I encountered was when a vigilant night porter roused us at three am to ask what time was it we asked for an early call!

When it comes to technology the Yugoslavians have their own secret weapon. Nukes are not needed when there is Slivovica around. This is one of those one mouthful drinks that creates its own internal nuclear reaction.

I suppose drinking is the one serious occupation the Slavs all acknowledge. Not getting drunk mind. They don't have time for that. You don't find them reeling about the street like it's Saturday night at Blackpool Illuminations. They're too busy trying to get up from the table or get up off the floor if they've got up from the table.

You soon get the hang of the way of life. In fact it starts once you are through British customs and are on the tarmac searching for your luxury flight plane. Top flight craft are DC-3s; anything else is a DC-3. The pilots have the 'lets get it in the air and take it from there' syndrome and the hostesses a disarmingly sans souci approach to the simple comforts of their passengers. There's none of this mamby-pamby package tour efficiency either. When your plane lands, and if you've been really looked after, it should be within sight of what they laughingly call an airport, it's every man, woman and child for themselves and somewhere out there in the

dark (you always land in the dark in Yugoslavia) on the edge of the landing strip you might find your luggage. But Hurry!! The coach is impatiently waiting. The driver is tensed up because it's Slivovica time and there's 80 kilometers of mountainous driving ahead. This usually means that if the coach looks fullish he'll be off. After 30 kilometers or so the courier descides to do a head count. "Ah, we seem to have a couple of passengers missing." Actually it was six this year but they did turn up the next day. Reaching the hotel you will find the warm reception area devoid of reception. There's usually a small room at the back which houses a switchboard and an office. From there you will discern the singing and the clink of glasses. Firm coughing and tapping the desk will induce the appearance of a charming young lady under whose smile you will quickly melt and who will exchange your passport for a room key and a couple of roll of toilet paper. You will also notice that the glass never leaves her hand.....

Never, never take a room that overlooks the street, or the gardens, or the beach or has any sort of outside wall especially if you a) like a lot of sleep and b) are a light sleeper. Now we have our New Year's Eve and our Bank Holidays and our wedding anniversaries and our birthdays but they all add up to a mere smidgin of the total nights available in a year. The Y's have this all sewn up and everynight is a celebration of something. This year the entire population of the peninsular were gathered nightly below our room talking, singing, laughing, dancing and arguing until the crack of dawn. Then silence would reign. We would stagger out from breakfast and flop on the poolside terrace to sleep under the hot sun. And they would all be there; naked bodies comotose a fa'nt haze of alcohol rising from their open mouths.

Try the public transport. We bought tickets at the booking office for a trip to Rijika, the leading port in the country. The express bus had a standing/seating capacity of eighty persons. The booking office said so. The ticket said so. The coach said so. Tell that to the natives. We stood in the queue with the other 78 booked tourists and waited patiently. As the coach arrived the surrounding area errupted into a scene from Custer's Last Stand and at least 100 natives trampled over us and assaulted the bus-driver, tossing him Dinars like they were going out of circulation (which they probably are knowing their monetary problems....). We stood all the way. It was hot sticky and noisy. They won't open windows, they won't stop smoking, they push on and off, they eat drink and make merry. I am sure the young and extreemly handsome couple squee ed face to face in front of me were up to even more interesting things.

The shops are a revelation. Not the little kiosks and supermarkets like wot we have in this country. But the really big stores; the equivalent of say er Harrod's. There's a particularly big one in Rijika. Several stories high it is constructed as two tower blocks either side of the main street and joined by a bridged area which also holds goods. Each floor is served by a modern escalator system and it all looka very upto date until you actually get inside. There is no order, no layout, no shop design. The best example I can quote is floor three 'Furniture' - I think! As the stairs moved slowly up I could see three piece suites, ok, pianos, ok, hi-fi, ok and in the middle of it all this years model of a CEMENT MIXER!!! I kid you not!

I did encounter that rare sight - a man at work.

The second morning at the poolside I prised myself up from the sunlounger bent on repairing to the bar to acquire two pints of mishmash (this is an exceedingly interesting concoction one part fresh orange juice, a rock or two of ice, and a liberal quantity of rough red wine, equally capable of cooling the system and inducing a rosey glow). I stepped delicately over the serrated rows of cooking flesh averting my genteel eyes from the overabundance of nipples and golden orbs (there are as many varieties as there are snowflake formations) and strode into the hotel foyer. It was filled with what at first I thought was dense smoke. Little groups of

staff were scurrying about clutching their precious Slivovica. It wasn't smoke but steam billowing from one of the rooms along the corridor. Casual interest drew me to the door.

"Anybody there?"

"Aye, come in."

A young couple were sat on the bed giggling.

"Fancy a drink?" asked the man holding up a bottle of Scotch.

"What's happening then?"

"Pulled the bloody hot water pipe off the wall, didn't she." He smiled at his wife and she giggled some more.

"Anything being done?"

"Well the fire brigade came and put a ladder up outside but when they found it wasn't a fire they upped and left."

I sauntered to the window and hung my head out. There was still a large crowd of interested onlookers who became animated at my appearance. They shouted. No doubt something along the lines of "jump", but I just gave a cheery wave of my glass and returned to the bed.

We watched in fascination as the flock wallpaper began to fold slowly down the wall.

"What next then."

"Oh, the plumber came but it was too hot in there and anyway he had no tools. I guess he'll be back."

"Better order a decorator as well."

"Ahem," it was the hotel manager and what I took to be the fully prepared plumber. A complete tool bag, spanners, screwdrivers, blow lamps, solder the lot arranged at his feet. Oh, yes he was prepared!! Down to wearing a frogman's suit!!!

"Now that's what I call being prepared."

"Mmmn. Makes a change I suppose" I muttered "Enjoying your holiday then?"

"Don't know yet," said the girl "We only booked in an hour ago."

I did hear a rumour that the hotel was closing in October for redecoration.

I must mention one or two items which appear in this issue. First off you are to be privileged to read the REAL inside story of the background to "THE LEAKY ESTABLISHMENT. And unless my mailing list of some 120 souls happen to be exactly the same people who make up the 120 who have bought Langford's book it will separate you from those who think it is all the mindless babbling of a drunken deaf recluse (an image they will have gained from reading the back inside fly. If you haven't read the book yet, this will prepare you for the madcap escapades there within. I can heartily recommend it (which is all the payment Dave asked for.....) (apart from: available at most good bookshops price £8.95 Frederick Muller Ltd London ISBN 0 584 31167 er 2....) and as an ex civil servant can recognise much of the maniac thinking which pervades the never ending round of paper-work and security checks.

The other piece comes from a new correspondent I have picked up and gives what is probably the first ever extract from any source of a meeting of the VIRGILEO Party and Ice Cream Social, to be included in a British Pzine. Welcome aboard to Harry J.N. (Andy) Andruschak who also has some other goodies coming up Real Soon Now.....

We had intended running a Novacon report from the pen of DWest in this issue, but as D arrived after the Opening Ceremony and departed before the closing it must be admitted he missed out on the true essence of the weekend. After all, what lay between the majestic pomp of the start and the exquisite, jewel-like perfection of the end, was merely grist for the run-of-the-mill con report. All suitable, no doubt, for the average raconteur but hardly the prerequisite of the man who wrote 'Performance'.

That Steve Green and his admirable committee will go down in history, at least until the arrival of Novacon 15, there can be little doubt. Who else but a Steve Green would have the elan, the panache, the zeitgeist, the vogue la galere!, the omnem crede diem tibi diluxisse supremum, to repeat the Opening Ceremony as an extra dash of colour for the Closing Ceremony, and not just repeat, but repeat it in the minutest detail!? Headlong he went despite the whispered "Je n'en vois pas la necessite." of his inner Comte d'Argental. Further he made a promise. It would be done again next year! This promise alas, as eager pro's were to be made only too painfully aware, would not extend to the ecdysiant who so charmingly graced Rob Holdstock with her presence (making many a fan wonder if this sort of thing had also gone on whilst they slumbered through his GoH speech mere hours before).

Nevertheless, that we had an exceedingly good time in those hours between cannot be denied. And the new venue, in many ways proved to be an ideal location. The fact that the locations of various appointed rooms seemed to move with the hours added a touch of piquancy to the more moribund moments. The bars were of course, the centre of gravity for most of the weekend and managed to keep most attendees well fed and watered. And there were some exceedingly fine room parties. I came away from it all feeling I had experienced a good time, even though for the next few days I carried the expression of a man who had been slapped in the face with a piece of wet morrhua.

Have you noticed that tendency among fanzine writers these days to open up their piece with the words, "I am typing this while listening to the flip side of...."? Whose going to be the first to set the new trend and casually slot in something like, "I am typing this while reading 'Clausewitz On War'...." or even "I am typing this while gloating over my Turner original....".

Personally I prefer to type in absolute silence, finding my favourite music a distraction in as much that I start LISTENING to it and all else must stop. But just to put you in the picture, any moment now I'm going to get up from this infernal machine and switch on the reel-to-reel and immerse myself in some Ellington. When that happens I will stop typi





THE LEAKY ESTABLISHMENT { THE FINAL DRIPS }

I feel a little bit guilty about the subject of this talk. It wasn't entirely my fault; I woke up after Steve Green had **persuaded** me, and found the words "You are giving a Novacon talk on your book **The Leaky Establishment**" tattooed on my typing finger. Dimly I remembered the terrible hours of coercion in the bar, and how Steve finally clinched it by offering me a two-week all-expenses-paid holiday in lovely Ireland at the home of Anne McCaffrey. It was either that or give this talk.

The guilt is because I reckon I'm here on false pretences: I ought to be talking about science fiction, or at any rate fiction, and most of **The Leaky Establishment** is in fact autobiography. It does actually contain an SF idea, and an exceedingly daft one too, but... Once or twice I've read a few chapters to people (this was before all my friends bought earplugs), and was boggled to find that they fell about laughing not at the jokes but at what I thought were ordinary, unfunny details of Civil Service life. Like the routine way in which, in my part of the Civil service, large randy security men were forever groping your thighs on the pretext of searching for suspicious lumps of plutonium hidden in your jockstrap.

Perhaps I should start by explaining how I ended up chasing neutrons for five years at the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment -- a job which has failed to impress anybody in the whole world except Greg Benford. "Why did you quit Big Science Biz?" he asked me in tones of concern. I told him how much a grateful British government pays its weapons physicists, and he fainted.

So it is time to tell the true story at last. A story of shame and degradation, of pitiful struggling against implacable necessity, and, above all, of hangovers. Long ago in the mists of 1974 I woke up with a hangover -- some things never change -- and discovered that all my mates at Oxford had been applying for jobs. I personally had been too busy celebrating my physics finals, such a major event in the Langford career that I celebrated more or less continuously for six months before it happened.

Since I was more sensible then than I am now, I decided not to become a freelance writer. The lure of a free pint of fizzy beer at Novacon 14 was balanced by the fact that in '74 I'd only sold one short story, to Ken Bulmer, for £13.30p payable in several instalments; while my masterpiece "Sex Pirates of the Blood Asteroid" had merely collected rejection slips, from both the **Christian Science Monitor** and the **Times Literary Supplement**. Accordingly I nipped round to the Oxford careers office and enquired about vacancies for top-salaried executives with a Jag provided by the company. At a pinch I was prepared to settle for an Aston Martin, but I kept that up my sleeve for the time being.

Of course it turned out that all the really cushy jobs had been snapped up, right down the line from Chairman of ICI to saggar maker's bottom knocker. Sneering at my pitiful grovelling, they explained that there were only five things for late, hungover physicists to apply for, and one of them was a UB40. I went away with the other four application forms and started inventing lies about my star-studded career to date.

Oh dear, it all comes back, like the curry I had at Mancon. I applied to IBM and they lost my application in the infallible data-processing system. I applied to the Post Office, and I needn't tell you how **that** application got lost. I applied to ICL, famous lame duck, with the promise that my as yet untapped talents could make them even lamer. They actually invited me to spend a luxurious weekend at one of their places, and it was there that I made a huge tactical error -- one which I am not repeating this Novacon. I tried to demonstrate what a reliable, responsible programmer I'd make, by not drinking much. I should have **known** this was a mistake when I reflected that ICL had already taken on Martin Hoare.

What was left was the Ministry of Defence. I approached their interview room with an ominous sense of doom and foreboding -- which was in fact another hangover -- convinced they were going to expose my pitiful ignorance with sudden trick questions like "Newton's laws of motion: how many are there?" or "E equals mc **what?**" Inside, this evil-looking fellow stared at me with the sort of expression seen on Joe Nicholas's face as he weighs the literary merits of the latest Perry Rhodan novel. He said: "Mr Langford, just one simple question. Can you explain to me the nature and significance of the Mossbauer effect?"

Thus it was that I became a scientific officer at Aldermaston; and only years after, when I'd shaken the radioactive dust of the place from off my shoes forever, did I tell anyone that the day before that interview, I'd been doing an Oxford physics practical on the Mossbauer effect.

There were a few other formalities, such as being Positively Vetted -- which only **sounds** like Civil Service jargon for a vasectomy. Large thugs covered in hideous scars kept breaking down doors to interrogate people about my sexual preferences -- I got the impression that they received some slightly inventive answers. At least I've never worked out why at one interview I was shown pictures of melons and asked about my reactions.

Around then came the first of the amazing incidents which I couldn't resist putting into the novel but which nobody can believe

really happened. It was my last week in Oxford, the morning after the college ball, and I was rudely awakened at an unnatural hour -- about 12 noon, as I remember. I staggered out in my dressing-gown to find another security investigator in the hallway, who explained that while interrogating me for three hours on the previous day while shining lights in my eyes, he'd forgotten the most important question of all. "Mr Langford," he said, "are you... a homosexual?" Suddenly I had the feeling that my perfectly ordinary dressing-gown was covered with exotic brocade in the Oscar Wilde fashion. Summoning up all my courage, I said "No." He went away.

Meanwhile, inside my room, a certain lady whose name I will not drag through the mire, but whom I later married, was giggling uncontrollably into the pillow.

My dressing-gown may have caused the Ministry of Defence to doubt, but the balance was tipped in my favour when a month or so later I and several others got arrested for detonating parts of Oxford with fireworks. This apparently showed the right spirit. The Crown Court judge actually said more or less this, and I felt a slight twinge of unease when (after slamming one of my mates with a two-year prison sentence) he expressed pious hopes that Mr Langford's little prank would have no effect on his chosen career in the business of destroying human civilization as we know it.

So I started five surreal years at AWRE Aldermaston, and after the first six months I knew that no matter what it said in the Official Secrets Act, I could get away with putting almost every detail into a novel. Not only would everyone think it sheer fantasy, the MoD itself surely wouldn't dare admit some things were true... One example that didn't get into the **The Leaky Establishment** was the time when I was sitting casually in the reactor control room drinking tea, a reputable nuclear scientist came sprinting through, clutching an object of classified size [hand gesture] wrapped in a lab coat. This was in fact the core of Britain's Independent Nuclear Deterrent, which my superior officer wished to put away so he could get to the bank before it closed. It occurred to me that had I so much as moved my foot two inches and tripped him, there would have been a lot of interesting bits of plutonium on the floor, and later on some exciting newspaper publicity about the funerals.

As a matter of fact, the way they flung the radioactives around I'm surprised there wasn't a cardboard box by the main exit with a sign saying PLEASE PLACE PLUTONIUM HERE -- KEEP BERKSHIRE TIDY. One of my colleagues managed to lose an uranium sample in the 50 yards between his office and the reactor: the area was mostly grass and we waited for ages in hope of seeing the results predicted by the best SF, such as a mutant patch of purple carnivorous grass entangling stray technicians in its deadly tendrils. All that actually happened was that one patch went a bit brownish, and the scientists stopped picking the mushrooms which every autumn grew round the reactor building in fairy rings. I thought it very sporting of them to let the security police have first pick just for once.

Some extremely nasty radioactive material was also involved in an experiment I designed, an experiment so classified that I can tell you nothing about it except that it happened in Nevada... By the way, if any of you have actually managed to outwit my publishers and buy a copy of **Leaky**, I have a small correction for the text. Thinking that Nevada was classified, I wrote Arizona instead, and

only when the book was published did I find that **everyone** knew which state the Americans use for their underground tests. Speaking of which, I came across the interesting fact that in one such test, a beam of radiation was supposed to go through a little hole to do things to a poor defenceless bit of test material -- and the beam missed the hole by a quarter of an inch. You may have had misgivings about the American strike capability, but I bet you hadn't realized they could fail to hit something at two hundred yards' range with an atomic bomb.

Where was I? There was this experimental capsule, whose destination I cannot reveal to you, incredibly fragile yet containing extraordinarily dangerous substances. It stood on a laboratory bench; all that remained was to put the lid on. A trained British craftsman set to work; the lid stuck and wouldn't go on straight; and he started hitting it with a big hammer. I don't quite remember how I and five other scientists managed to teleport outside the suddenly closed door.

After all this it was no surprise when Aldermaston had its big flap about plutonium contamination. Some people contained so much of the stuff, they could hardly walk for the weight. The famous signs appeared in the AWRE library. saying "To avoid assembling a critical mass, staff are requested not to gather in groups of more than 5 and to remain at least 0.6 metres apart (1.2 metres if wet)." Everybody who'd so much as looked at the plutonium entry in the periodic table was ordered to report for checking under the Whole Body Monitor, an elaborate device using sophisticated electronics to tell whether or not you still had a whole body. Aldermaston's enthusiasm for investing in this essential safety equipment was so great that the nearest monitor was twenty miles away at Harwell.

I duly went there and had my inmost secrets probed: they warned me that there could be a certain amount of experimental error in the reading, and those of you with an intensive scientific training may judge that this was correct. Here's the letter I eventually received from the Superintendent of Personnel Safety:

Dear Mr Langford,

The estimate of plutonium in the lungs resulting from the whole body monitor tests at AERE Harwell on 19 October 1978 is minus thirty-nine nanocuries.

This result has been passed to the Dose Evaluation panel for consideration...

You may mock, but I found it strangely reassuring to know I could playfully nibble a full 39 nanocuries of Pu before reaching the zero level of contamination. One good reason for my state of extreme purity and cleanliness -- at least back in 1978 -- was that I spent most of my time playing with computers instead of entering the regular Independent Deterrent Egg'n'Spoon Races. With the Aldermaston computer system, what got contaminated was my brain.

As I remember it, the outfit at AWRE bore about the same relation to real computers as (in the organizational field) the BSFA Ltd does to IBM. The advanced programming facilities available to Britain's crack nuclear scientists consisted of a wide choice of FORTRAN. The computer itself lived in a sort of blockhouse guarded by swarms of security men almost as merciless and brutal as those at Seacon 84. Nothing could penetrate that computer's impregnable defences!

Nothing, that is, except the information which flowed along unguarded cables to terminals scattered all over the site. By terminals I mean, of course, teletypes. I believe the whole thing must have been under a preservation order as a magnificent example of 1950s industrial archaeology.

Again, I hit the problem of things which people refuse to believe. I had a bit in **Leaky** about a exciting arcade-action Space Invaders game which ran on a teletype. I've given up trying to persuade anyone that this was mere cold historical fact. You had to be there. There was real sense-of-wonder in reading the computer manual which went on about the elaborate defences of the AWRE computer operating system, and then finding you could crash the whole system by compiling a perfectly legal program in FORTRAN.

My favourite memory is of a useful little feature which the computer staff themselves proudly offered to users: it was supposed to make it easy to scan through the information you had stored in the machine. It did. It also made it easy to scan through all the secret password files. They took the feature away again quite quickly when I pointed this out; I suggested an OBE for contributions to national security would be in order, but the mean buggers wouldn't give me one.

Computers are boring and I can hear the crash of catatonic bodies in the aisles, but I can't resist telling about the amazing Aldermaston micro. One day somebody had the bright idea of filling a van with radiation detectors so they could cruise the streets just like the TV-licence people, spotting illegal nuclear stockpiles. Like the one accidentally acquired by the hero of my book. (All the van ever **did** detect, I gather, was a radioactive patch on the road near Mortimer in Berkshire. Fell off the back of a lorry, I suppose.) I drew the short straw and had to suss out a microcomputer to analyse all the rubbish picked up by the detectors -- I suppose it would have been embarrassing if hordes of security guards had burst from the van and riddled someone with bullets, only to discover he was merely carrying an outsize luminous watch.

The trouble was, this was the MoD and there were budget problems. I could sign for as many things as I liked which cost £50 or less, but the full weight of bureaucracy would land on the back of my neck if I dared write out a single chitty for a forbidden amount like £50.10p. We ended up buying some cheap chips, and persuading a technician to build a micro from scratch, while I spent eight weeks of my life writing machine code for the wretched thing. At last the great unveiling came, and to my ill-concealed surprise the whole shambles worked, and the AWRE bigwigs looked on it and saw that it was good. So of course it was junked. After all, the project could now be given a big budget, and with a big budget there was no point or prestige value in Langford's nasty little shoestring computer. They spent a few thousand on a pretty minicomputer instead, and I was secretly pleased when it failed to work as well.

This was of course quite logical in bureaucratic terms, in the same way that it was logical for the scientists who actually did AWRE's work to inhabit horrible disintegrating wooden huts on the far side of the marshy bit of the site, while mere parasites like typists and security men got luxury purpose-built offices near the main gate. Again, the logic of seniority meant that I had to be secretary of two nuclear policy committees and take all the minutes,

my chief qualification being that I was the only person on either committee who was deaf. The solution was to sit next to the committee chairman in an attitude of sycophancy and ignore all distractions, such as other people's voices. Those minutes were Impressionist works of art, whole vistas of unspoken meaning conveyed in a few deft words like "The chairman agreed. The chairman disagreed. The chairman could not endorse the first proposal but was in sympathy with the second..." Scarred by my appalling experiences on such committees, I find I'm now wickedly prejudiced against exciting events like BSFA meetings, even when the speaker is someone charismatic like Alan Dorey. In fact, **especially** when... no, I mustn't be cruel.

I'm also prejudiced against engineers. My main contact with engineers at Aldermaston was when one rang up, explained that his section had spent two years working on some new and ever so classified substance, and could I now do all the theoretical background work for them in, say, one week? Ever willing to oblige (which means, ever willing to find an excuse for putting off my own urgent work), I asked for some vital information like the density of the stuff. "Density?" he said, as though I'd made a suggestion so obscene he didn't want to admit he understood it. "I'll ring you back," he said. After a week of what I suppose must have been massed research efforts by his entire engineering team, he rang me back. This time he sounded actively hostile: "I've got the information you asked for. We've measured a piece of the material. It's 5mm by 10mm by 25mm, and it weighs umptitum grams. Can you work out the density from that?" Faintly I assured him that with the aid of a computer I probably could.

Speaking of engineers leads naturally to engines and, specifically, cranks. Every so often I'd get appalling wads of badly duplicated bumf in my IN tray: as well as security regulations, these would be new theories of physics submitted to AWRE's front office and passed to the nearest convenient sucker (me), just in case they contained the ultimate secret of life, the Universe and everything. One chap had a brilliant, self-consistent theory of atomic and nuclear structure: I particularly liked the way in which **every single element** as yet discovered by science was a special case, an exception which proved the fellow's general rule. One of the predictions of this revolutionary theory was that nuclear weapons couldn't possibly work, and I thought it kind of the author to let us know. However, I was prejudiced against him because he didn't even believe in the Mossbauer effect...

The best bit of alternative science to land on my desk was Robert Kingsley Morison's **An Experiment with Space**, which I have here --

Strenuous but pathetic attempts have been made by terrestrial air forces to obtain possession of extraterrestrial knowledge by capturing an alien space vehicle...

This book suggests a more sensible approach. **An Experiment with Space** not only lessens the chance of a national monopoly on levitation but also takes us beyond the stage of idolizing the Space Brothers.

Robert Morison conceived a simple idea for generating levitational forces in 1969; but not until August 1979 could he assemble enough scientific and philosophical thoughts for a book.

Anyone who succeeds in mastering gravity will make possible a vast expansion of humanity's horizons -- thus enabling men to

change.

He doesn't say what it'll enable women to do. Anyway, the front cover blurb spills the Secret: "Internal vortex lifts 9-metre disc by space dynamics: angular velocities of 20000 to 40000 revs/min mean molecules moving at 11 km/s. YOUR PLANET NEEDS YOU to consider and investigate possibilities that may radically transform civilization. Like neutralizing gravity and debunking materialism." The general idea is that molecules at the edge of this spinning disc are moving at orbital velocity and therefore the whole disc will naturally drift off into orbit. One of us dropped the author a note asking why CERN at Geneva, with particles circling its storage rings at nearly the speed of light, hadn't passed the orbit of Pluto long ago. I understand the reply was that that was part of the worldwide cover-up, and that to fool the public CERN had been secretly bolted down.

My collection of anecdotes about the horrible grottness of Aldermaston used to be endless. Those MoD policemen fondling helpless young scientific officers' thighs. The amazing gate security system whereby all attempts to smuggle out plutonium were presumed to happen in the evening so there was no need to spot-check people or cars at lunchtime (this, no doubt, based on close study of office hours at the Kremlin). The 5MW reactor from the days before the energy crisis was invented, which blithely threw away its entire heat output into the surrounding air (yes, it was a swimming-pool reactor; yes, somebody did fall in). The even more conservation-conscious site heating, with live steam being carried round a five-mile perimeter fence by above-ground pipes which not only leaked at the joints but to boost heat-loss by radiation were painted black. The Royal Visit with the Queen being treated to a display of amazingly incontinent MoD guard-dogs. The local newspaper which really believed and printed the story that AWRE scientists had to drink twelve pints of beer each day to flush neutron contamination from their bodies...

Well, I could go on forever, and by the time I'd finished writing the bloody book -- including all this and more -- I felt I had gone on forever. (The same drained feeling is experienced by many people who've read it.) So for further sordid details I refer you to the novel itself: just go to any major bookshop and they will explain they've never heard of it. Except for Rog Peyton, who with a huge and enthusiastic smile will say, "Sold out." That's the hardback: I'm glad to say Sphere Books decided to publish a paperback conveniently in time for Novacon, but unfortunately they picked Novacon 15.

I got out of Aldermaston in 1980 for half a dozen reasons. One was that, as I've said until even I am bored with hearing me say it, I found I was earning less than civil servants who were of technically lower rank but worked in booming departments like the DHSS: this was galling to my elitist soul. Again, Joseph Nicholas used to spit on me in the streets, and big Rob Holdstock would accost me saying "I want to know what you do vivisecting those poor neutrons at Aldermaston: I won't understand a word of it but I have a right to know!" Again, the MoD buggers wouldn't even let me take unpaid leave to extend my coming TAFF trip to America. Again, I had contracts to write some books and wanted to do them in peace, without security men poking their soiled fingers into my nice clean prose as they did with WAR IN 2080: "We don't like the implication

here that neutron bombs are harmful," they would complain. Other reasons included conscience, an ever-growing dislike of having my thighs groped, and the thought that one day I could write rude things about the whole place...

You may wonder whether any of these rude things got me into trouble. I did have one alarming phonecall: "This is Aldermaston Security. We're somewhat upset by this book of yours, **The Leaky Establishment**, and we'd advise that all copies be immediately withdrawn from sale pending a possible court action." While I was still saying fluent things like "But" and having heart attacks, the voice burst into coarse laughter and revealed itself to be my (former) friend Paul Barnett, alias John Grant. By way of apology he dedicated the next John Grant book to Hazel and me, but Hazel in particular is not wholly certain that this is a high honour. The book is called **The Truth About the Flaming Ghoulies**.

I wrote my first rude things about AWRE in **New Scientist**, under a pseudonym of course -- "Roy Tappen", who later became the hero of the book. Following this... well, here are the inner secrets of how books get commissioned. Maxim Jakubowski had told me it was worth going round to Frederick Muller Ltd with a few book proposals, because they were owned by Harlech TV, had pots of money and gave you super expense-account lunches. So I made an appointment to drop in and discuss a heap of brilliant book ideas which I then quickly wrote. "What time?" they asked. "Oh," I said casually, "how about an hour before lunch?"

Katie Cohen, the Muller editor, smiled sweetly as she tore each of my ideas to tiny little shreds until there was a hollow reverberating emptiness in both my briefcase and my brain. "You haven't any more ideas?" she said. In panic I searched my pockets and found a crumpled xerox of the **New Scientist** article, and said "Maybe I could base something on this, sort of semi-autobiographical..." For the next half-hour Katie did the most brilliant selling job I've seen, convincing herself what a wonderful novel this could be, while I sat there, silent except for strange inner rumbles and hoping for lunch. At last she looked at her watch. "Send us a synopsis and we'll send you a contract," she said. "And now I'll have to say goodbye because I'm lunching with someone."

After that, there seemed nothing to do but write the book -- otherwise the day would have been wasted altogether. The trouble is that, having disposed of that particular section of my autobiography, the next novel should logically be about the joys of freelance writing and how proud one feels to create the vital raw materials of the remainder trade. This, alas, is the sort of thing that's so depressing, it's fit for nothing but the Booker Prize shortlist. Maybe I'll write a relatively cheerful SF novel about nuclear holocaust instead.

If so, I must try to pick a better title than **The Leaky Establishment** -- the problem with which is that if you mention it often enough to an audience, the word "leaky" has a subliminal effect and people keep leaving for the toilet. In fact it's beginning to work on me as well, and I'd like to be excused for a few minutes before we go on to Question Time -- which will take place in the bar. Thank you all.

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Correspondence



J. HALL.—It is about three thousand miles from Quebec to British Columbia, and the railway journey takes a week. Land is fifty pence an acre; and, for eight shillings and fourpence, a man may acquire the right to three hundred and twenty acres, for which he has to pay—at the fifty pence rate—in four years. He has to live on the land and make improvements to the value of ten shillings an acre.

QUESTOR.—The Severn Tunnel is 7,664 yards long; the Mersey Tunnel is 2,700 yards. The Stanbridge Tunnel on the London and North-Western, and the Woodhead Tunnel on the Manchester, Sheffield, and Lincolnshire, are the two longest "under land." One is 5,342 yards, the other is 5,297 yards.

TIPS.—It is unlawful to kill pheasants, partridges, grouse, moor game, or hares on a Sunday or Christmas Day.

JOKES.—It is claimed that the first corps of English volunteers was raised by the City of London in the reign of Henry VIII.; they formed the Guild of St. George. In the Spanish Armada time there was a great gathering of volunteers at Tilbury. In 1780 there was another volunteering, and in 1799 came another. Some of the volunteer regiments were taken into the regular army in 1814. The old 80th, 81st, 82nd, 85th, and 90th were originally volunteer regiments.

BABY.—1. The penny English was the first stamp issued. The number of values has increased with almost every series. 2. The black penny English are so scarce because the issue did not last long. 3. The higher-priced stamps are used for large foreign packages.

C. E. P. HOOPER.—To make good tracing-paper dissolve Canada balsam in half as much again spirits of turpentine, and to it add a drop or two of nut-oil. Take common tissue-paper, and sponge it over sheet by sheet on one side only with this mixture. As each sheet is done, hang it up to dry over two cords stretched about eight inches apart. When dry, keep the sheets rolled up on a broomstick or larger-sized roller. If you merely want to make the paper transparent till you have finished your tracing, use ordinary paper, and saturate it with spirits of turpentine. Thick drawing-paper can be made transparent by sponging on to it a solution of castor-oil in absolute alcohol. The alcohol evaporates, and leaves the oil in the paper; the drawing is then made, and the oil washed out with alcohol. The cheap transfer papers are made by coating cap paper with a solution of half an ounce of gum-mastic dissolved in twelve ounces of spirits of turpentine. You can make writing-paper transparent by saturating it with paraffin oil.

F. T. DINGLE.—The copying apparatus you describe is called a graph. Get Nos. 362 are 393 for instructions how to make it.

AQUARIUM CEMENT.—See back. We answered a similar query a few weeks ago. Here is another mixture. Melt together in an iron pan two parts of common pitch and one part of gutta-percha, stirring them well together until thoroughly incorporated, and then pouring the mixture into cold water. Soften it with heat when wanted. Another mixture is made of equal parts of whitelead ground in oil, dry redlead, and dry litharge. This forms a putty which is better varnished after it is dry. The best varnish for the purpose is three ounces of shellac

W. C. N.—1. No man's debts are paid by his staying away from a town, and no man with any sense of honour would shrink of doing such a thing. 2. The name of her Majesty was the same after her marriage as it was before, as the slightest knowledge of history would have told you. 3. We really cannot decide questions as to the amount of crape you should wear for your grandmother.

PATENTIA VINCES.—There is no book giving the latitude and longitude of every place on the globe. The nearest approach to what you want is the index to an atlas, which you might perhaps obtain without the maps on applying direct to the publishers.

JOHN (Liverpool).—1. The best exercise for you is Indian clubs. 2. Begin your letter to your master "Sir," and end "Yours respectfully."

J. E.—You must get the back numbers; we cannot reprint. We have given more practical articles on model-yacht building than any other publication.

F. M. C.—Apply for particulars to the agent of the colony to which you think of going. The offices are all in Victoria Street, Westminster.

W. E. GRANTHAM.—We do not identify stamps as a rule, the answer being only of interest to the questioner. But as you have made such elaborate drawings we must make an exception. 1. All the "zege" stamps are Dutch. 2. Spanish, like all the "peseta" stamps. 3. Probably Spanish. 4. United States agreement stamp. 5. Finland. 6. The Austrian, with the Mercury's head. It has given more trouble than any stamp in existence, as there is nothing on it in letters or figures to give a clue to its identity.

B. P.—1. You can take the height of a full-sized ship's mainmast at two hundred feet. 2. Owing to the curvature of the earth the higher you go the farther you can see. From a cliff you may see a vessel's masthead ten miles away.

T. V.—For toning and enamelling photographs—very detailed processes—see "Workshop Receipts," fourth series, published by Messrs. Spon and Co.

RANDY.—Dissolve equal parts of isinglass, alum, and soap in water, making separate solutions, and using as much water as may be necessary. Then mix the solution, and with it coat the fabric on the wrong side. Dry it, and brush it. We have often given another waterproofing solution, for which you can refer back.

F. W.—If you have a magic-lantern you could not enlarge your patterns in a better way than by throwing them on to a board like slides on to the screen. Another plan is by means of the pantograph described in No. 240 of the B.O.P.

A WILDER OF THE WILLOW.—Every year cases are reported of wickets being taken with every ball of an over. Last year A. Follard, playing for Acworth School v. Badsworth, on June 26th, took six wickets with successive balls; and on August 7th W. H. Turner, playing for Egerton v. Harpurhey, performed the same feat. There were three instances of five wickets being taken with successive balls, one of them being Mr. F. Carr's, for Peterhouse and Queen's v. Trinity Hall, L. V. C. As to four wickets with successive balls, there were six instances.

H. S.—Attend the nearest Science and Art Schools. It will be very much cheaper and better for you. Write to Secretary Science and Art Department.

CHUCK HARRIS 32 LAKE CRESCENT DAVENTRY NORTHANTS NN11 5EB

That's okay about the wandering commas, fullstops, hyphens -- what's a wandering hyphen between friends (Overdue?) -- and other oddments of punctuation. We all appreciate the lovely tidy edges and everything, and it seems so ungrateful to criticise but,well the spelling is still a trifle, er, idiosyncratic. For instance, it is "Trekkies" dear boy, never "Treckies". It comes, of course, from the damnyankee TV horror "Star Dreck"...and on thinking about it you may just be right.

But NOT about the downunder telly epic "Return to Eden". Surely a great big boy like you doesn't still believe in Strine virgins. These are just charming mythological creatures like mermaids, hobbits and Rot 6. They do not exist in reality. Or even on TV. The lady in question had her two kids, four paces behind her as she walked down the aisle, and about half a pint ahead of her when the champagne arrived.

The old "crocks" she was tossed to were "crocs" --you clot-- or was she all munched up by a veteran Pierce Arrow (?) and Christ! I think they were alligators anyway..... which leaves me nicely confused and ready for Joe Nicholas.

The trouble with Joe, apart from being nearly as verbose as D whilst lacking the essential overtone of wit, is that he is so pompous. He addresses us as if it were a public meeting, and still manages to give the impression that he is not really writing for the immediate reader but for posterity. (Or, as Mal is going to say unless you stop him right now, "posteriority".)

Hazel is really a discovery. I like her best with that relaxed laid-back style (I refer, of course, to her literary talents), when she's writing about people rather than things. I do wish she would write more about Yorkshire fandom...about West and Ounsley and the Leeds fan-meetings and everything. Or even Mal.

D's little green insert was a novelty too.....all that lovely talent buried beneath such a forbidding exterior. Reminds me of the Fort Knox whorehouse.

One thing that amazes me in the letter column ((only ONE!!!)) was the possibility that in today's navy, scabies patients qualify for sick leave (Chuck Connor's letter). Scabies is a vile complaint. They need filth to multiply. Soap and water kills them in the early stages. The most common place for the infestation to start is in the webs between the fingers. If you are in contact with the mites and then don't wash your hands for 24 hours you could well qualify for them. I guess I treated 50 or more cases.. ..push them in the shower for half an hour, paint them all over with a whitewash brush and a can of benzyloate, crop their body hair, bake their kit in the steriliser, but I never felt sympathy for them, let alone arrange sick leave for them. Sure, I could feel sorry for some daft kid who'd gotten drunk and picked up every crab in Dover from the Town Bag. That could happen to any stupid idiot, but there's no excuse for scabies....just laziness and a tramp mentality.

I see somebody else enjoyed my "In praise of Older Women" directory I loved the archaic spelling with 'F' instead of 'S', transforming "uck it and ee" to some thing far more suitable for a family fnz like XYSTER,..... ((Um, I think we'll have to censor that last..))

((Well thank you Dr Schluck for that quick run down on scabies... Far more important to me of course are all the scurrilous remarks made about my typing and spelling....If I might recap.....ignoring the silliness about "Treckies" sorry "Trekies" on the grounds of all things about "S T " are silly anyway..... Crocks: I suppose I shouldn't toss in these dialect words, they only confuse the pure in speech don't they, I know its origin is doubtful but it does mean something on the lines of 'besmut' 'dirt' the kinda thing the true Strine virgin might end up involved in.....as to 'virgin' I admit to a typo here. What I meant to type was 'virge' meaning an intromittant organ, which, of course, means adapted for insertion, esp. (zool) in copulation..... must learn to type carefully..... alligators? aren't they a yankee thing? I know the 'gavial' is an Indian croc, is there an Aus name for their snappers?))

HARRY WARNER Jr 423 SUMMIT AVENUE HAGERSTOWN MARYLAND 21740 USA

XYSTER Annish was a wonderful reading, most of it crystal clear in style and meaning. I did suffer some puzzlement over the enclosure however. It's the one about the size of a mailing label which says: "Military Cntr NY 090 / 3C Flats APO / Mailer Lakeside Ca 92040." Obviously some new catchwords and symbols have entered fannish popularity without my becoming aware of them, back here in these remote hills. (I wondered for a moment if the slip of heavy paper could have slipped into Xyster by mistake from some postal or CIA source, then rejected that wild theory out of the time and trouble I encountered getting the fanzine open. They don't make staples like that in the United States.)

((Dave: Perhaps the staples were the cause of some interest in the US Postal authorities Special Branch, who fearing they might be a new fiendish type of letter bomb passed the zine onto the Pentagon who, unable to remove the stples passed it on to "Military Control NY", who as you know are the "Ultimate Deterrent" wing of your country's defence system. They, in something akin to the Philadelphia Experiment,

turned the thing through the fourth dimension, copied AToms aircraft from the cover for future development, inserted their card, because they want to get on the future mailing list, twisted the thing back through the fourth dimension, and posted it on to you, or then again maybe not.....))

Your account of the ear problem in Yugoslavia would be ideal for inclusion on my videocassette of the recent Winter Olympics, if you'd included some pictures to accompany the description. United States coverage of the events was not confined to the athletics but went far afield to include such things as a Yugoslavian folk singer whose performance as he stood half-buried in the snowdrift seems to have wiped out the folk music movement in this nation and a formidable collection of scenes of various Yugoslavs s drinking slivovitz accompanied by unflattering descriptions of the drink's taste by American tourists.

Years ago when I thought I might expatriate myself after retirement so my income would go further, a former fan whose job took him into every nook and cranny of Europe recommended Yugoslavia to me as ideal for a person of my nature and habits and prospective income. (As it turned out, I was quite able to afford retirement in the US, if inflation doesn't take a severe turn for the worse.) I fell in love with the looks of Yugoslavia from a movie or two filmed in that nation and I bought a tourist's guide to learn more about it. Such things made me think I could have been very happy in that nation and I suspect you like it more than your adventure with the national health service indicates. ((Indeed so Harry, and as you will have seen from this issue I could go on for ever about the place....))

I enjoyed very much the Mal Ashworth column and the Mexican reports although no particular comments have come to my tired old mind.

The Clarke-West exchange is a different matter altogether. Even tho Vinç will cause me to look like a plagiarist, if a loc in which I referred to a Spenglerian situation as The Decline of D. West some time ago should ever see print, I'm on his side in this debate over thesretical matters involved in fanzines. I can't see any think of any sort of publication in which the reader should be given less consideration than fanzine publishing. The fanzine editor would be mad if he spent all that moneyand lavished all that time and suffered all that criticism without indulging in compensation his own particular inclinations and prejudices and interests in his choice of what he publishes and how he publishes it.

Admittedly, the occasional fanzine editor does pay a lot of attention to the wishes of his readers and this causes his circulation to become so large that he is reviled as the publisher of a semi-prozine and caused a great debate over the morality of voting him fanzine Hugos.

And I do believe fandom in the 1950's was a more relaxed, friendlier milieu in general than today. (Has it occurred to anyone that all these ex-cathedra bulls on how to be a fan and how to publish a fanzine, all these killer reviews of fanzines in the United Kingdom during the last decade may be the main reason why so much fanzine publishing energy has been diverted into apas where the sterner critics aren't members and can't be heard with a discouraging word?)

Hazel's travelog was vastly entertaining, and in fact very reminiscent of some of the narratives which used to appear in various UK fanzines a d generation ago. I was able to enjoy it despite the way it contradicts my image of England. You see, it looks so small on the map and the street addresses are prefaced with such low numbers that I find it hard to believe anyone could travel any great distance

anywhere in the British Isles without encountering the surrounding sea. If I should ever get over there and visit London, I'll be certain when I leave the city that somewhere on the outskirts is the Scottish border.

The graphics are wonderful. I can't remember when ATom created as complex a drawing for a fanzine cover as he did this time. Whoever sneaked the prop beanies onto the heads of the old illustrations did it skillfully enough to make the retouching undetectable. I also appreciated the photographs, all of which depict fans I've never been fortunate enough to meet.

A Paragraph in the "Personal Column," and How Nayland Smith Followed up the Extraordinary Clues in His Fight to Bring About the Downfall of Fu-Manchu and the Fiendish Yellow Group

The Si-Fan Mysteries

"The Zagazig Cryptogram"

by
Sax Rohmer

CHAPTER 1

Washed Up by
the Tide

NOTICE his right
hand, Petrie!"
said Nayland
Smith,
bent over the
strange form ex-
posed upon the
beach, the in-
terior of the room at



"I know they
have seen it!"
snapped Smith;
"but they have
also been unable
to read it."

Weymouth
looked up in
prise.

"Indeed,"
said,
inf

MIKE SHERWOOD 24 JOHN ST PORT TALBOT WALES

First congrats on the Award, also on that canary yellow cardigan you were wearing thro much of Novacon...back a bit to CYMRUCON there were good moments and others that dragged..Ken Bulmer was a gracious GoH and we had a few good chats with him...met lots of comic fans who are difficult to pin down...they seem to form a totally in-group with little or no interest in the written forms of sf/fantasy...met one who did at least talk about Dickens and Thackeray...there were probably others but in the main they are into a totally different 'thing' than us...just use the sameish/similar imagery to us...problem in a small place like the Central Hotel was room/rooms to keep out of each others way...specifically every time you had to leave the bar for the bog you had to pass thro the foyer which they had made their base-camp and you got your shirt wet in water pistol crossfire...rumours are that attempts are being made to seduce the committee into the True Ways of Fandom..dunno if it will work or even SHOULD work...Their Ways Are Not The Ways of Our Gods etc etc Back to Xyster 7 and found the D West generally hysterical, especially 'Sock Suckers of Gor'met a Gorfman once in a Swansea bookshop. I overheard a query in desperate tones to an assistant who looked like he'd never realised that people actually bought those funny oblong objects the manager kept insisting he stack on the shelves...I dashed forward and extracted the desired object from where some aesthetic had concealed it for fear of the full frontal display offending the local Chapter of the Family of Light or whatever they call themselves...with gushing thanks the Gorfman retreated to the payout desk reverently holding the sacred object....thought of inviting this Gorfman to our next local meeting but decided that might be cruel thing to do to a tired looking middle-aged woman.....

((What comes on two feet of paper and with a dozen different type faces.....? A letter from the mythical NER.....))

Goshum, a fanzine sent First Class? Of course the effect is spoilt by tardiness in responding; have declared this a fandom free area devoting my time to enrolling for night school (decided to give the Flower Arranging s a miss and plumped for B.A. (Hons) Combined Studies - Literature and Psychology - six hours a week for the next five years at least...) and watching LACE on TV (how come all the meaty bits were only in the trailer????)

((Dave: Five years at L&P should give you the answer to that one..))

But now - yawn! - our hero leaps back into the fray...

Thanks for "When XYSTER WAS ONE"

(discrete pause while I listen to 'One For The Road' by Frank Sinatra from back before he started doing gigs for Crime Inc. At least the 60s heroes like Hendrix and Morrison died before they could turn into turkeys... Sniff. Turn over for 'Only The Lonely' and continue with letter)

How about a few bits to decorate Xyster...illos ripped off from and brutishly torn out of the 1888 and 1889 runs of PENNY POST (664 pages of wholesome Cof E fun for a mere one pound fifty at the local "rare book shop". "Smashing Value!".....I'm saving all the good stuff for myself, of course...) Anyway thanks for XYSTER: I didn't get as far as the XYZ pile at the Mexicon fanzine neoropolis...Ken Lake was devouring every fanzine in sight. leaving us mere mortals with the

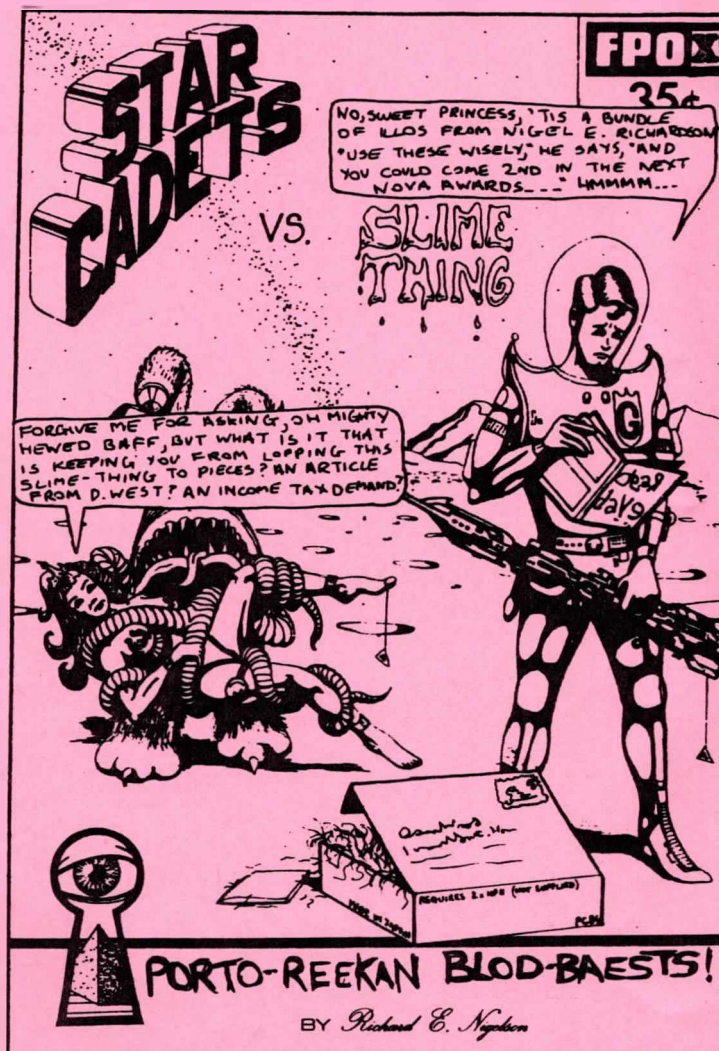
mouldering well-chewd copies of FAN-ZINE FANATIQUE and Australian zines that even he wasn't having.

(End of Sinatra disc. Puts on Cab Calloway. Am I getting old?)

I agree with you about being in fandom for the fun of it. Unlike life you get out of fandom what you put

into it so if people want to use fandom as an alternative to reality where everyone is cosily "intelligent" (sic - meaning they've read Le Guin, don't vote Tory and don't wear CHOOSE LIFE teeshirts or make-up) that's their business. Fandom is an elite - ah, but only those in fandom know it; to the rest of the world they are birks with a silly hobby.

((Dave: How true, how true. I was recently chastised in an apa mailing for using the expression "wife of a fan" - great turds were heaped on my head for being so insensitive and sexist...BUT I can tell you of a newly crowned Novacon 84 Award bearer, flushed with success and umpteen pints of whatever it was that we were drinking that weekend, running



into house not far from Marine Hill Clevedon joyously extolling to spouse and daughter (both very feminine if not feminist) "I've won an Award! I've won an Award!" "What for?" they enquire in unison. "My fanzine! My fanzine!" Two retorts: "They must all be as daft as you!" and "What fanzine?" Tis last, despite continually stepping over me in the lounge every month or so as I kneel on the floor feverishly collating an issue!.....we might all be Slans but it don't cut much ice out there....))

44 pages eh? I thought you BIFFs or BOFFs or whatever youse guys who conspired to put out about the rumour that fandom existed before D WEST said it could, were only allowed to duplicate fanzines on pre-war Gestetners. What can I say? (Anything - Wittgenstein). Lots to read but not a lot to comment on. Why? I dunno. Too much like hard work to write constructive locs about the issue in hand. (on the bed, under the cat, as it happens to be at this moment) when I can ramble on like this. I could make use of the MERGE routine in this word processsing program and tack on the juicy bits from three other letters I've spawned this week, but I'm sure you can live without my thoughts on the insipient misogyny in the writings of Peter Tinniswood, the way the hearing of a whole LP of Spike Jones and His City Slickers in one go makes me into a very irritable person and other such vital fannish topics....yours antepandialy.....

WALT WILLIS 32 WARREN ROAD DONAGHADEE NI

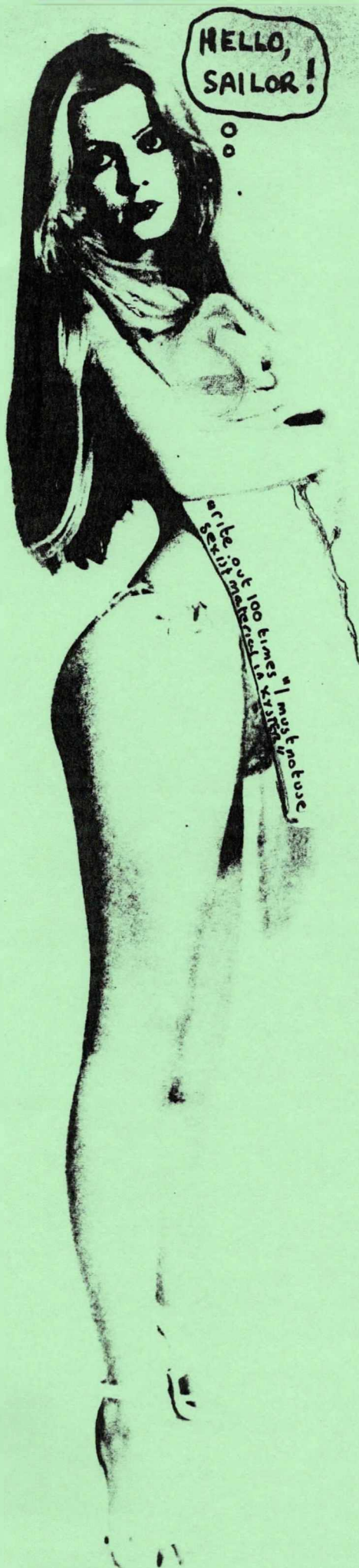
Congrats on the award....I suppose that as you wallow on the tessellated floor of your marble palace, figuratively speaking, the humble opinion of this aged peasant will be of little interest. Nevertheless I did like Hyster and will not be picketed out of saying so. Langford's account of the catering arrangements at St.Catz will of course remind sophisticated world travellers like us of Palma Airport...Vine Clarke burns with a hard gemlike flame.....

DAVID LANGFORD (AUTHOR OF 'THE LEAKY ESTABLISHMENT') USUAL ADDRESS

Am I insane, writing articles for what seems like every issue of XYSTER? Are you round the twist, with your weird determination to snatch away the scrappiest con speech befor the audience's boos and hisses have died away? There are some things which fans are not meant to meddle....if you have an end-of-the-page space you need only insert the valuable Reader Service Announcement "To order a copy of Langford's book, merely go to any decent bookshop, brush away the assistant's airy disbelief in the existence of THE LEAKY ESTABLISHMENT and demand your right as a citizen to order a copy; published by Frederick Muller Ltd at 58.95, an incredible bargain which etc etc..."

((Thank you Dave for those few kind words about my editing expertise. Just think, if I wurked for Dind-Dong-Dell or Guillibles or Panter or Crogie I'd ensure you had a book out a week.... but in the meantime at your request we will just leave it at: "To order a copy of Langford's book, merely go to any decent bookshop, brush away the assistant's airy disbelief in the existence of THE LEAKY ESTABLISHMENT and demand your right as a citizen to order a copy; published by Frederick Muller Ltd at 58.95, an incredible bargain which etc etc..."

And I will repeat, as one who has read it, it aint half good, man....))



Okay, so here I am stuck in Germany attempting to come to terms with their attitudes to life, the Universe, & split-crotch leather underwear for men of distinction (high-class kinks he means...), whilst n at the same time trying to cope with a dodgy telex machine that has a Murry tape cutter with a life of its bloody own, and at 0130Z/0230A have this mad desire to Loc XYSTER 7.

????WHY????

I had half-expected the major work of the letters to be on the subject of the CLARKE/WEST articles/reviews/bitching/whatever, but by the Lord Harry things were taken a little too far, no? (even the typer throws another linefeed in sheer surprise). Nice to see Ashley getting pissed on from a great height (or relatively so, ho hummm). The trouble is that he was a Child of West & general LEEDS fandom until he buggered of in '80 or '81 and is now trying the same 'burst on the scene' tactics again. Stifles yawn etc etc. Still some nice carving of the turkey.....

On the other hand, I wasn't too impressed with the carving of Richard Bergeron. The poor bastard's been branded 'paranoid' by Ted 'I wanna get the last word in anyway I can' White, and all the brave boys & girls at NOVACON stuff the ballot and give him COFF, something which he knows naff all about and something which I thought was supposedly restricted to UK fans? So shoot me, but all he did was question the possible bias of Avedon Carol. Are you going to tell me that TAFF has been run tâtally without any kind of bias at all?** It's great seeing all this righteous fluff kicking around, but I can only take so much before my stomach says it's time to get up and walk away from it all. Having seen Dave Langford 'pick'n'mix' in the pages of WIZZ, I find it depressing that he can turn around and block vote by the blue-note in COFF just because things didn't suit him (I may, of course be wrong, but my source of info hasn't let me down before) A veritable LOVER'S CROSS situation.

**Here I'm talking about TAFF in general and not just the specific HANSEN/WEST race.

Yeah, I'm depressed. Depressed with all this hacking for the sake of it, and all the throwing around of such terms as 'paranoid' -- long-range psycho-analysis by people who read 'escapist' fiction? What a wonderfully logical way to go about it, eh? There again Truefen don't read SF do they.

4 years ago Pickersgill questioned TAFF and the viability of it. You can still hear the echo of the screams. But no one questioned Pickersgill right to comment on TAFF, which, as it later turned out, seemed to be token resistance only.

Apart from that little thing, I enjoyed the issue greatly, especially the piece from Hazel (sounds like there's a fan club forming for her writings), and the supplement in the middle made up for any possible black spots (especially the BAFF talking to the younger fan...)

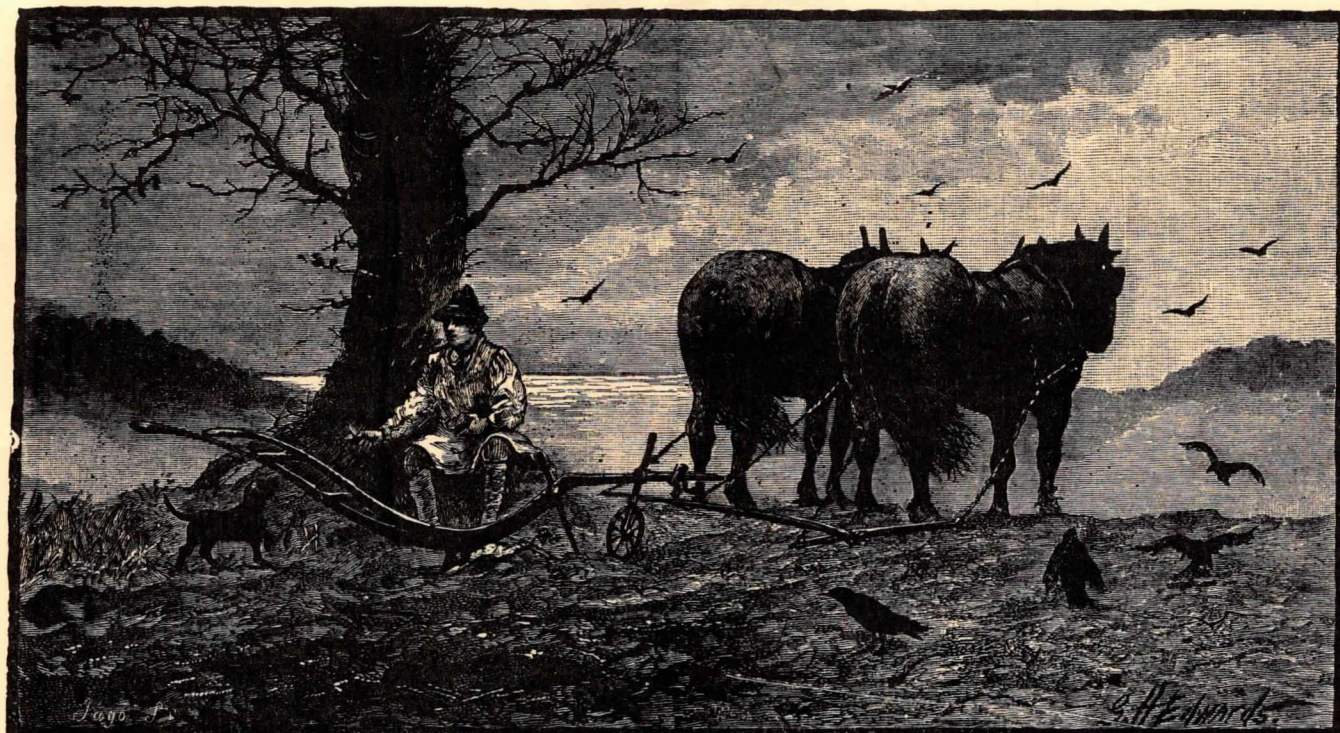
Was heartbroken to see the tattered remains of the TIT BITS SF LIBRARY book. This is the kind of trash I drool over in 2nd hand bookshops. Knowwarramean? The old Bengal Mistrel stuff (a prehistoric Barry B. Bongyear for those not in the know.) Not forgetting the pure use of PCS -- Primary Colour Scream, whereby violent red is side by side with electric blue and dazzling yellow, and a green which would induce seasickness into Long John Silver (so named on account of his wooden leg). And there's this smell you know? Like three week old dead cockroaches or little silverfish. Found an old collection of books in Southwold literally rotting away (oddly enough, all of them were tatty, but the Asimov ones did not have a speck of damp mold on them whatsoever. I think it's about time the world was told what is going on, eh?--)

((DAVE: quick insert to set your mind at rest. T-B LIB book is in pristine condition. Sleight-of-hand with photocopier and scissors...))

Sad to see the comments on layout still coming in. Far from being in the same layout (or should that read 'laid out on a slab'?) of the Walkeresque school of /?-@@ insertionism, I find the style of X (or as we say in the trade, Brand X) to fit in with its non-posey, no-artsy-fartsy style of writing. IT IS HUMAN -- or is that becoming a little too much to ask these days???? Hi, and Welcome to the SCRUNGE BUGGERER, the pre-packed, vacuum sealed (to match the contents), sterilized, and totally margin-justified fanzine that is more appealing than any non-state-of-the-art-approved crudzine peddled by some non-person. How does that suit your winging readership, eh? Is that the kind of fandom/fanzine stuff they want, eh? THIS IS BLOODY 1984, ferchrissake, THE BIG BROTHERHOOD is watching YOU! Make another mess like that again Wood, and you won't be so much blackballed, but have them nailed to the nearest coffee table, and NO MESSING!

((Dangand dash...this is supposed to be a nice laid back, straw-in-the mouth, HOMELY lil' ol' zine, with the accent on humour not humous, and yet these tacky subjects will crop up won't they! First off, let me say that my remarks made about Michael Ashley's letter were done tongue-in-cheek. I have no axe to grind with Michael, I'm not out to score points. I know nothing about his past track record (other than the sharp-intake-of-breathe from various 70's fans when I ventured to mention that I'd sent him copies of Xyster.) so lets not start any pro-anti-Ashley correspondence, please! As for Bergeron, Hanson, Langford, White, Carol, Venus, Adonis, Cardinal Beaufort, George, John, Dick, Smith the Weaver, Michael, Jack Cade, Lords, Ladies, Attendants, Heralds, Petitioners, Aldermen, Beedles, Falconers, Sheriffs, Citizens, Prentices, Guards, Soldiers, messengers, and the rest, who find themselves overcome in a desire to dip into what is becoming the murky waters of TAFF, good luck to 'em but don't do it here, please! there's enough wasted fanac, lossof sleep, distraughtwringing of hands, DNQs, and generally bad vibes to be found elsewhere. And I'm not sticking my lil' head in the sand. If I want to make a comment then it will be direct to the proper place...WPB.

And now you are all wondering why I bothered printing Chuck's remarks! Well it seemed to me that the two paras in conjunction with each other show just how easy it is to take sides. MA is a Big Bad Boy and gets all he deserves. RB is Misunderstood 1984.....Chuck was quite happy to see me 'bounce' Michael, because he doesn't like him but then gets uptight because I do something agin Richard. De gustibus non est disputandum.....enough, enough.))



MALMSEY from ashworth

HELLO AGAIN, HAPPY COMPERS In the long weary months since the appearance of Xyster 7 (irony, friend, resigned irony; I do believe the bastard would publish every week if we kept him supplied with material) excitement has mounted to fever-pitch in libraries throughout the country as frenzied readers battled to solve last issue's 'Malmsey' competition and carry off the coveted prize (the cancellation of an alternative Glasgow convention of your choice). In Pontefract a Mr Eli Crawford sent a Mrs Ella Shufflebotham crashing to her death from a particularly high library stool in his insatiable lust to consult the 98th edition of Webster and Johnson's 24-volume CONCISE GUIDE FOR XYSTER COMPETITION ENTRANTS. It would not be fair, therefore, to prolong further such stressful suspense so, without further ado, I will reveal that the correct answer to 'What do you call the Black Axe of Fairy-land?' was: * Uncle Tom-te Hawk *

(see Arrowsmith and Moorse: A FIELD GUIDE TO THE LITTLE PEOPLE - of whom, more later) The prize this time goes to the Alternative Bob Shaw, but jolly well comped, all of you, even the wazz-brained ninny who suggested that the answer we were looking for was 'Eldritch Cleaver'.

All on tiptoes and straining at the bit then for this issue's exciting brain-twister with a truly sensational choice of First prizes - either three weeks fanac-packed holiday at the sunny Puerto Rican Fan HQ or half a pound of dead cabbage leaves ? Goody. Here it is then -

Which of the following famous German writers would you refuse to join in a criminal enterprise...

- a) Hermann Stuhl-Pidgin
- b) Gunther Grass ?

EXCELLENCE IS ITS OWN REWARD
(But a brightly-painted chunk of metal and glass goes down a treat too)

It is difficult to convey to outsiders the subtle changes brought about in a magazine like Xyster by something like the winning of the Novacon Best Fanzine Award. It isn't just the re-animation,

the re-vitalisation, the sparkly shining eyeballs all around, nor yet the fact that, around the monolithic Xyster editorial offices everyone now runs instead of walking, mouthing slogans like "Can't let up now", "Onward and Upward", "Per Ardua Ad Astra" and "Oh God, what's the latest cock-up ?" Nor is it just the new joviality in the greetings on that long

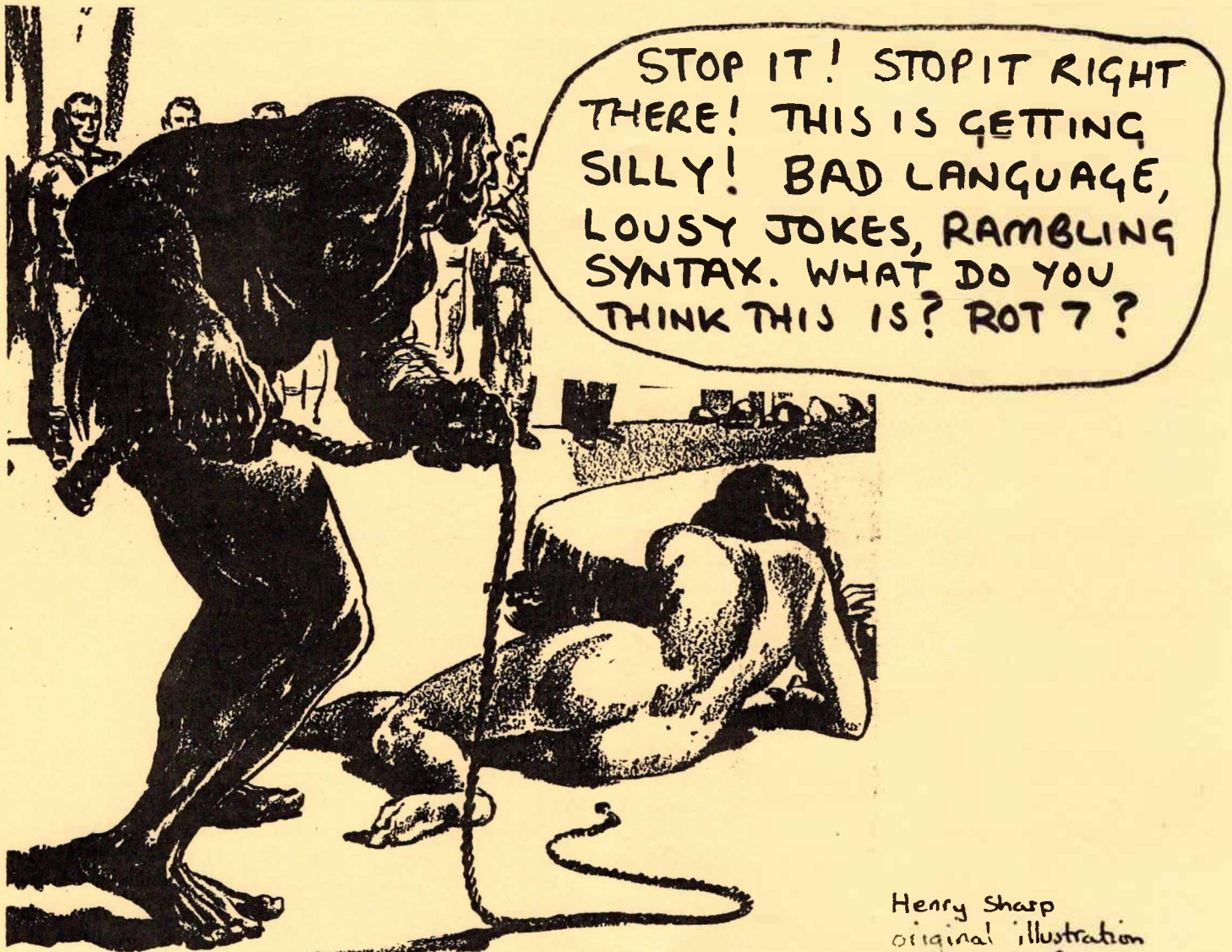
ride up in the lift first thing in the morning - the handshakes and the back-slapping, the catch in the voice as one's "Just knew we could do it, chaps!", hard on the heels of another's "Jolly Fine Show, Eh Hwat ?", is capped by yet a third's heartfelt "Shit, the lift's stuck again!" Probably the biggest single difference, for the vast army of midnight-oil-burning columnists and contributors, is the prospect - after all those months of selfless toil without any material reward - the final, almost unbelievable prospect - of payment for material published. But whether we shall be able to afford to pay Dave the rates he is now demanding to publish our work in his world-famous, award-winning magazine remains to be seen. At 5p a word it might be cheaper to move on to pastures new. Exchange and Mart maybe.

CHILDREN'S CHRISTMAS COMPETITION DEPARTMENT

a family fanzine, we try to cater for all ages and interests, and it is only fair that we should include a competition for the little ones as well as for their elders. The upper age limit for this one, then, is 6½. Ready, kiddywinks ? -

Since Xyster is, by editorial decree, determinedly

What is the title of that charming romantic story about the three Irish lumberjacks and the young lady with ambitions to become a second Linda Lovelace ?



"Flog her!" Txa-Necros screamed. "No woman can be unfaithful to me—and live!"

Henry Sharp
original illustration
appeared in *Amazing*
Stories © 1950

IT IS A PROUD AND LONELY - AND
BORING - THING TO BE FAN-DOMS
BIGGEST NAME

Asked yesterday for his reaction to the
accusation that "Dominoes is a boring
spectator sport", Pip M. Hall, General
Secretary of The International Domino

Federation (Cleckheaton) was emphatic: "Is it buggery!", he expostulated, "Doss' ter know that old rhyme about not despairing when tna gets a bad hand, that finishes - "It has been known - tho' very rare - to chip wi't' pig 'oil door" ? Well - if you've ever seen anyone chip wi't' pig oil door, I reckon you wouldn't ask for any more excitement nor that! Especially if t'pigs 'adn't been mucked out for a good bit. A good ripe pig 'oil door, suddenly slapped down on t'table wi' a bang and a splash to win what everybody thought were a lost game, can cause excitement for a good fifty yards around if it's done right. Anyroad, these bloody foreigners what think Doms is a sport for watchin' 'ave got it all wrong. They wouldn't know a bloody ferret from a fireback-boiler. Yer don't watch Doms", he went on scornfully, "yer listen to 'em, just same as yer listen to Grimethorpe Colliery Brass Band. All that about puttin' down doms wi' right number of spots and gerrin' rid of all your doms before t' other feller has nowt to do wi't' real game. Proper game only starts after all that stuff, when you slap all t'doms on t'table together and rattle 'em round like buggery as 'ard as you can go while you all shout at each other at t' top of your voices about what you 'ad and didn't 'ave and shud've 'ad and so on. That's t' real game of doms. An' I dawn't mind tellin' you, I've known some good 'uns in my years i' doms. Take old Albert Postlethwaite fer instance - used to mek such a racket 'e could shatter t' window o' t' fish-and-chip shop at 200 yards. Now there were a doms player! Naw," he concluded, "There's nowt wrong wi' doms. I reckon it's this 'ere bloody D. West what's a boring spectator sport all on 'is own."

At the Bingley headquarters of his world-wide 'Play-You-For-A-Quid' Dominoes Marathon Enterprises Empire, laughing D. West, failed would-be TAFF-fund-embezzler, best known for his daring publishing coup when he bound together 26 issues of The Watchtower under the attention-grabbing title of Fanzines In Theory And In Practice and sold 6,000 copies to members of the International Fantasy, Science-Fiction and Dyslexic Society, gave Xyster his reaction to the barrage of criticism he has recently come in for. (For those readers unfamiliar with the sophisticated shorthand style of delivery of this extrovert playboy entrepreneur, we give a paraphrase. "F--- off" was what he actually said.) (*Please refer to F---note below.)

Taking seriously the stinging comments of the critics of his notoriously laid-back 'Bingley Mortuary' style of play, D. has radically revamped his whole approach to the game and introduced into his technique a number of spectacular features which are calculated to heighten spectator interest to a sensational degree. For instance, every time he puts down a double his eyebrows will shoot up 1/10,000th of a millimetre; for a double five his glasses will slide down to the end of his nose - and for a double six they'll slide off the end of his nose. When the spots showing at the time are a multiple of three D. will stylishly dunk his elbow in a puddle of beer and cigarette-ash on the table, and when they show a multiple of five he will knock his pint over into his lap. And as a final crowd-stopper, whenever he stands up after winning a game his pants will fall down. This one feature of his game alone is expected to bring him a large following of at-present uncommitted U.S. fans. Nor is that all. To go with the revamped image of the trendy demon-domster of the 80s there will be a subtle shift of name. This decision, D. told Xyster's reporter, has cost him more effort than all the rest of his Master Plan together. ("Why don't you piss off ?" was the graphic way he himself expressed it.) Reluctantly waste-binning such tempting crowd-pullers as 'El Don', 'Donolete', 'The Fastest West in the Dom' and 'Giant Haystacks', the new-style D. finally decided to model his up-to-the-minute name-change on popular snooker-player Alex 'Hurricane' Higgins, and become 'Whirlwind' West.

"Now we'll really have to stay upwind of you in case you ever do chip wi' t' pig 'oil door!", laughed Xyster's

interviewer. "Go shit in your pants", riposted 'Whirlwind' in an impressive display of his new, lightning-fast responses.

*F---NOTE When it says back there that D. West said "F--- off", readers should realise, of course, that he didn't really say "F--- off". He rarely talks in dashes, and absolutely never in 'drats' or 'damns'. Not even, in fact, in 'swyves' or 'futters' or 'copulates', and never once, so far as I know, in 'querntes' or 'coyntes' or 'quims'. Swyving inconsiderate, I call it; it certainly causes no end of problems for a truthful and precise columnist working for the demanding editor of an award-winning family fanzine. Look, West, you quernte, if you want to get mentioned in this column you're banging-well going to have to co-operate. Next time you ask me if I've read your rogering anthology yet, and I reply that I'm saving that treat to celebrate the onset of senile dementia with, you invite me to 'Do-The-Job-On off', got it ? Even to 'Knock-off off' would do. And if you could manage something really subtle like 'Make off', all our problems would be over. It's the only way I can get across all the news that isn't fit to print.

AND I THOUGHT IT WAS ALL ABOUT ICE-SKATING..... This film called 'Blade Runner', that is. But no. Not a single pas de deux in the whole two hours and you could have counted the lilting Strauss waltzes on the fingers of an Iranian thief. Plenty of pas de faux, though. Oodles of them. The first of them was my very own in ever being dragged off to see the thing.

A film which is an amalgam of 'Metropolis', 'Frankenstein', 'Logan's Run', every bad private-eye feature you ever saw, and several other things besides, is a novel idea - novel but, as they say, stupid.

A 'Blade Runner', it seems, is a Killer (whoeee, a Killer! Wow!) Cop, whose job is to 'retire' (i.e. 'kill'. Sheesh, dig that eu-phoo-mism! This mus' be da real thing) androids who manage to return to Earth (where they are - did you guess - non-persona non grata) from (sorry about this) 'offworld'. The androids also have a fancy euphemism which I find it particularly hard to remember, and I am hoping that in time this welcome characteristic may extend to the whole film. 'Recidivists' ? - 'Reductionists' ? - 'Recalcitrants' ? REPLICANTS! That's it - 'Replicants'. To make everything more exciting, the Corporation (Oh, yes - shades of 'Bug Jack Barron' too) which produces the androids, instead of making them with built-in flashing lights, or even beanies, atop their bonces, to aid in identification once Things Go Wrong, makes them Exactly Like Human Beings, except much bigger, vastly more powerful, hyper intelligent and super fast. Since everyone else around is pretty squinched up and runty and as thick as two short thieves you would have thought this might have given the cops a clue, but no, they are too busy chewing matchsticks, practising origami (not one of the martial arts) and lippping highly original aphorisms at each other, like, for instance: "If ya aint wunnavus, then ya wun a'dem, de liddle people".

Hazel's reason for two hours of quite unjustified equanimity in the face of this cinematic semolina was the Blade Runner himself, Harrison Ford, who had recently been appointed No. 1 Fantasy Fancy Man, replacing snooker-champion Alex Higgins, who was retired (non-euphemistically, I am happy to say) soon after blubbering publicly for the television cameras on winning some championship or other. In retrospect I must say that if Harrison Ford had had the decency to blubber over his performance I for one would have thought rather better of him. He nearly had me blubbering over it. But I tried to restrict this to silent sobs since H.F. is, apparently, still acceptable as FFM even as 'Han Solo'. (Personally, I'd have expected Hazel to prefer Chewbacca. As a matter of fact, looking in the mirror, I'd have hoped she'd prefer Chewbacca.)

When the film opens we find our Blade Runner (who, I rather blush to tell you, is called 'Rik Dekkard') lurking around in what looks like the steam from an Accrington Tripe Slitting shed, but is meant to be ever-so-futuristic Los Angeles. Gaggling with

sympathy we quickly learn that, in fact, he is an ex-Blade Runner, for (I blush even deeper to tell you) he has Given It All Up ("It's tough bein' a cop" - remember ? - "an' sometimes ya don' sleep so good at night") This explains why he is squinting through the tripe-flavoured steam and pigs-trotter tinted murk at a copy of the local paper. He is Looking For A Job. Our heartstrings twang unbearably as he fails to find one. Unlike Skipton's Craven Herald and Pioneer, it seems that the 'Situations Vacant' column of the Los Angeles Trendman is not filled with ads reading - "Wanted. Apprentice-trained Killer and General Fettler. Experienced applicants only. Must be prepared to work Saturday mornings." But succour is at hand. Just as Dick Rockhead is about to slouch off dejectedly and accept a job as Assistant Baby's Nose Wiper at Mothercare (where, to judge by his subsequent performance, he would have been beaten to a pulp by the three-year-olds), he is picked up by the local fuzz and taken to see the Boss Fuzzman whose silver-tongued oratory ("We need ya. Yo da Best.") persuades him to return from his early retirement in order to arrange that of the Repugnants. He then sets out to track down four of these naughty and Very Dangerous Recalcitrants who have 'made it Earthside' from 'offworld' and seem slightly miffed about the brevity of their allotted lifespans (which, in all fairness, do seem rather parsimonious even without the help of Deck Record). The rest of the film consists of diverse sequences in which Rik Dekkard is gradually transformed into Wrecked Dogend as the various Regurgitants, male and female, proceed to kick, thump, gouge and stomp the everloving Bejesus out of him every which way from Christmas. If this boy is Da Best, what might happen to Da Worst truly beggars the imagination. In fact I am seriously thinking of recommending our milkman to the Los Angeles Police Chief; he may not look much with his pipe and antique tortoise-shell specs, a squint and a bit of a limp, but if he managed to drop a carton of Long Life on the toes of one of the Repellents he'd be several points ahead of Ricket Decayed. I did wonder briefly if the little red light on the end of his zap-gun barrel might have anything to do with his lack of success. Certainly the SAS seem to have been slow to adopt the idea, even though the little light glows ever so prettily when stalking deadly enemies through pitch dark warehouses.

After being rescued repeatedly from imminent death by little girls, cripples, hamsters and a short-sighted dormouse, Da Best is toted to the top of a high building by the last, biggest and toughest Replicant, smashed into a semblance of scrambled egg and given a lecture on the wonders of the Universe. The obliging android then sits down and dies and Da Best has triumphed again.

The music, by the way, was quite nice - possibly better than Strauss.

OH DIDN'T HE PREAMBLE In the cut-throat world of award-winning journalism the writer who doesn't keep his ear to the wind and nose to the ground is on a supersonic scoop to Nowheresville. You can't afford to be three sheets to the grindstone in this game. You run a tight wind and sail close to the ship or before you know it you're stuck on Bums Boulevard on a wet Sunday afternoon. Take it from one who knows. I came up through the school of hard smooth and learned to take the rough with the knocks while many of the kids you see in this racket today were still knee-high to the ears and wet behind a grasshopper. You soon learn never to give a sucker an even card and to play your breaks close to your chest. You've got to be quick off the march and on the mark and never let the other guy steal an uptake on you. No lowdown, this is the real kidding.

So I keep my eyes twitching and my nose peeled and sure enough I come up trumps (that's what I mean about keeping your ear to the wind). This over-rated hack chick (maybe she should be a Hack Chick Girl instead, haw haw), Hazel Ashworth, who everybody thinks is such a whizz and Xyster's answer to the bee's knees just because she happens to be groovy-looking and writes funny, starts out her piece last issue by quoting a short story by this dead frog scribbler, De Maupassant. Ah hah, thinks ace-columnist, Yours Truly, slick trick, chick - but two

can play at that game. If the yellow brick road to fame and fortune and buckets of egoboo is paved with dead frogs, so be it. I'll make with the dead frogs myself. The same dead frog, in fact...

NOCTURIA ! There can, surely, be no fan of supernatural fantasy, nor, A Blood- indeed, of fine short-story writing, who is not familiar Frisson with De Maupassant's superlative horror story, 'The Horla'. Tale of An The Horla, you will remember, is a fiendishly powerful, as Incontinent well as invisible, supernatural being who preys upon the Incubus narrator, finally coming to dominate him almost totally. He

is first made aware of the presence of this Being when all the water in the decanter on his bedside table disappears during the night and he knows that he himself has not drunk it. This continues night after night and any milk left out also disappears. The story ends with the narrator's feverish scheme to destroy the Creature by fire - and his final conviction that this attempt has been a failure.

In a stunning world-exclusive I am now able to bring you the dreadful sequel to that awful tale. The first part is surmise; the rest - oh, horror of horrors! - is all too real. And it is I - I, I tell you - who am the Fiend's latest chosen victim!

Casting off, eventually, the worn-out husk of De Maupassant's fated protagonist, the monstrous Creature, we may guess, passed on to prey upon host after host and, with his well-nigh unslakeable thirst, brought with him from who-knows-what infernal other dimension, to quaff their night-time beverages, until finally - oh, my God, what is to become of me ? - It settled, silently, malevolently, at 16, Rockville Drive, Embsay! Ah, how happy I was, with no presentiment of this most hateful doom, through all the years of my youth, my middle-age, my early old-age, my middle old-age...And even now I might never have known about this Awful Thing, but that...

Number 16, Rockville Drive is what Estate Agents describe as a 'Dormer Bungalow'. That means that everything, except for a couple of bedrooms wedged under the Nanga Parbat style eaves, is on the ground floor. Included in that 'everything' is the loo. Who invented the term 'Dormer Bungalow' I may never know, but it seems certain that he had a divertingly ironic sense of humour. For nothing is more certain than that, after a solid evening's elbow-bending on Tetleys Bitter, you don't get so damned much dorm in between pounding incessantly down the stairs and back up again, like some figure in an Escher drawing. So, of course, I do what prudent men throughout the ages have always done - I take a potty upstairs with me. This system has worked well now these many years. Until about a month ago...

As I knelt in the dead-of-night gloom at the foot of the bed, one hand on the brass bed-rail, the other pulling gently at the votive urn with which I intended to consummate once again one of mankind's oldest rituals, a numbing realisation overcame me - what I was pulling was much heavier than it ought to be! And yet I was certain that I hadn't got hold of one of Hazel's feet by mistake. The temperature may be approximately the same as that of a 2 a.m. January potty-handle, but the shape is quite different. No, what was emerging so reluctantly was undoubtedly the potty - but it was full! As this realisation burst upon me, the hairs on the back of my neck stood on end as I became aware of what this meant ! I would have to go all the way downstairs !

As my nether regions froze to the toilet-seat in that all-too-familiar sub-zero embrace my mind was a turmoil. Images of Esquimaux squatting over hastily-hacked holes in Arctic ice were rapidly replaced by a recurring vision of that brimming chamberpot. Hazel couldn't possibly be to blame for that. And I knew for certain that I was not responsible. But, but...did this mean that I was going potty ? Without realising it ? I knew no peace for the rest of that long night - downstairs - back upstairs - down once again.

My fevered hopes that it might all prove to be no more than a short-lived hallucination brought about by a bad batch of Tetleys were soon dashed to smithereens - the very next night the same thing happened again !

(continued PAGE 42)

From **neo** to **novastar**

START HERE:-

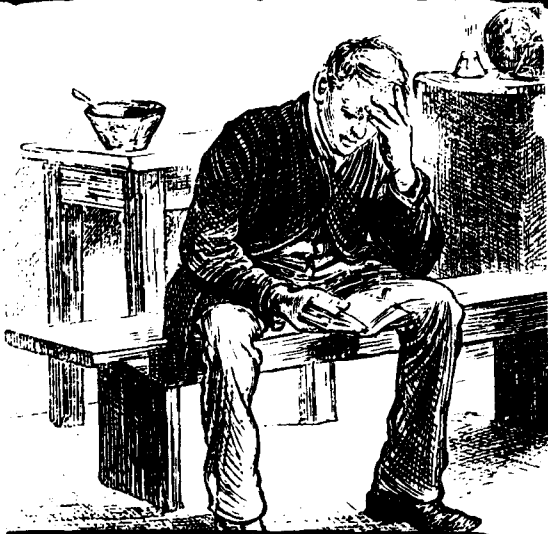
The begining of th
Fifties would be a
reasonable date.



Produce scrappy handwritten
fanzine. Will be looked on
with a fatherly eye. This
will change when you are
lumped with Harlan Ellison
and accused by BNF of trying
to bring down sixth fandom
with silly seventh fandom talk.



Despite asking for more kindness you
make no headway and all fanac ceases.



Go back to reading sf and Raymond
Chandler. Bringing on acute bout
of gafia which has to last at
least twenty five years.



Enter world of commerce and
hard knocks. Make your way
in the outside world.



One day find man doing awful
things with old sf pulps.
Rescue same and start reading
again.

Not much to inspire you back
in the way of a **S**ense of er-
Wonder.

OVER

However decide to dip feet in
murky waters of Fandom again
Write to old fannish names.

Find fandom. Seems to be a bit
of a sercon battlefield.



Produce first issue of a '50s
type fanzine.

Under heavy fire.

But plod on...

Publish seven issues in a year.

Gradually grind the bastards down
in the dust. Ignore all advice.

Unless from Joseph Nicholas.

Attend Novacon '84.

Organise room party. Pick
out all the luses tossed
from other parties and ply
them with drink.

Thrust voting forms into
their palsied hands. Make
sure they get to organiser



YOU WIN !!

Now your back
is to the wall.
If you don't
keep it up they
will sneer and
pronounce your
win a fluke.

Still you did
get to shake
Rob Holdstock's
hand and there's
always that
magnificent
trophy to put
on your TV...



THIS IS THE
END OF THE
GAME.....

NOW IT'S FOR
REAL.

Text & layout Dave Wood
Pictures provided by Nigel
E. Richardson, with thanks.

So t'other day I said to Malcolm Edwards "How's the bid for the '87 World Con getting on? Are we likely to get it?" And he looks at me with the expression of a man who's mislaid the pin from a grenade and answers "I'm afraid so."

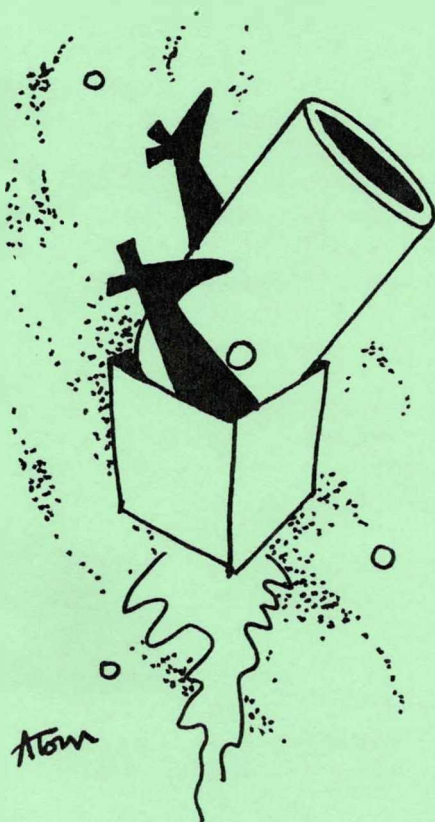
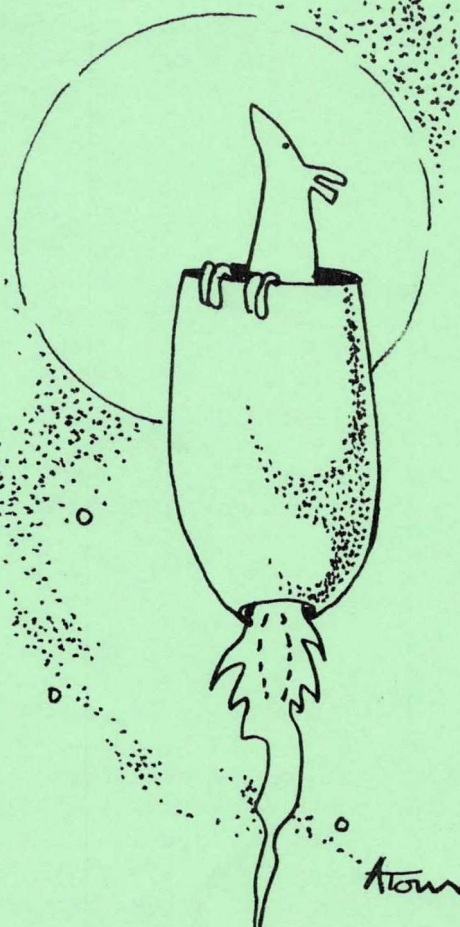
I think that I was about 26th in line when Malcolm, after a spirited speech at Novacon '83, asked for supportive cash contributions for a British bid. What with the speech, and sheer boyish enthusiasm, and the thought that I'd missed the last World Con held here, I didn't allow myself any doubts. But now and again since then I've sort of ... mused. And now Chuck (Ancient Mariner) Connor in XISTER 7 has started chatting about albatrosses and whether we're going to hang this one around the neck of British Fandom - or words to that effect. And if so, why? 'Coffee-table chic?' Albatross chick?

There's a lot of objections against a Big Con, whether it be World Con, or not. The sheer mass of folk makes it difficult to locate friends or people you hope will be there. The programme, catering for all media tastes, is likely to be of even less interest to fanzine fans than usual. There's difficulty in obtaining beds in the Con hotel. A lot of fans are going to have to do an awful lot of work for not much in the way of thanks; ole debbil Responsibility looms. You have to queue even longer at bars and everywhere. Prices are likely to be higher at auctions. Big attendance equals big security measures. Ears and throat get a work-out as you try to compete with eighty other conversations going on within earshot. And the problem has been consumer-tested; as Chuck points out, the smaller Mexican had good reports as against the larger variety.

But your actual World Con, has giant though it is, has a lot going for it.

'Everyone' tries to make it to a World Con; you'd expect to meet far-flung fans from this country and further afield who'd hesitate before making the physical and financial effort to meet attend a standard Con. "fter all, this is a once-in-a-decade effort in this country. If you're that way inclined, there's pro-authors to meet and as many dealers as can haul a box or two of s-f along. More attendees means more clout for the Committee when dealing with the hotel and other commercial interests. And it's a fannish historical event, the source of reports, discussions, feuds and friend ships in future fanzines. There are also more nebulous 'pro' reasons. The Everest rationalis ation; because it's there. because someone has to do it and there's pride in doing it. And, mixed with this, it's a symbolic way of saying 'thanks' for the existence of world fandom where we play; the holding of a party for friends.

Final 'pro'. People find fandom at World Cons. Like it or not, this is the only time the new media notices us, the only chance to reach the 'loner'.



There's now no source of recruitment through prozines in this country. Amongst those hordes of EESmith readers, there may be some potential fanzine fans; a mute Willis, a dumb Langford, untitled, unhonoured and unsung. An interesting prospect.

* * * * *

But at a World Con. - or any old Con. - can't we please do something about those identification badges? I know that now British fandom is the proud possessor of a badge-making machine and it's looking a gift gadget in the mouth, but at Novacon 14 the wearer's name took up approximately 1/7th. of the face area of the badges, and was, to put it mildly, hard to read. It seems to me that the major argument against a large, label-type identification - if you aren't into screwing up your eyes and nuzzling - is the nuisance this could cause when leaving the hotel for the mundane world of meals, shopping, etc. You may not want to walk the streets advertising that you're Mr. or Mrs. Joe Phann, and it's tiresome to unpin and pocket and later pin on again a big name tag. I'm surprised that the collective genius of fandom hasn't come up with an answer - for instance, some kind of large label with a horizontal fold that you could fasten up with a smidge of velcro when you wanted to remain anonymous.

* * * * *

When I was a kid my ambitions were simple. When I grew up I was going to (a) be an astronomer, (b) marry Ginger Rogers, and (c) complete my 'Kings and Queens of England' cigarette card set.

As it happened, Ginger Rogers never did answer my letter, and unless someone out there has a Queen Anne to swap for a King John ambition (c) will never be realised either. But I did go a little way towards fulfilling my starry hopes. The first sizeable purchase I ever made, costing all of £1 in carefully saved birthday and pocket monies, was a genuine telescope. True, it was a seaman's hand-held 'scope, but it was made of real brass and had innumerable lenses. It was soon attached to a home-made wooden tripod, and with the help of a map of the Moon and a 'Planisphere' - a rotatable cardboard disc accurately if minutely showing the stars at any hour - I was well away. Night after night I'd stumble around in the back garden to the hysterical barking of the neighbour's dogs, identifying Tycho, finding M31, putting my foot in the goldfish pond, etc. I promised myself that when I was Grown Up and could afford it I'd get a really big telescope. And fill in the pond.

Years went by, as they do. I did buy a couple of bigger 'scopes, but every year the light of London grew nearer and brighter and blurred out the stars. There was also a growing fear that the neighbours would think I was trying to look into their back bedrooms. It's a hard life, being a suburban star-gazer, and I let it all lapse, except for reading snippets on astronomy in the daily papers and giving a sympathetic, colleague-type nod to Greenwich Observatory when I passed it.

Comes 1985, and a stirring of old desires. No, nothing to do with Ginger Rogers. I see from the papers that in September NASA, not being funded for a probe into Halley's Comet in '86, will instead divert a space-satellite into the tail of comet Giacobini-Zinner, thus neatly upstaging the Soviet and European '86 Halley explorations. Naturally, in my role of Amateur Astronomer (failed) I've been looking forward to Halley's Comet since I was 10 years old, but a sudden thought has struck me. They're going into a comet's tail, right? And the tail, as the comet gets nearer to the Sun, consists of a thicker and thicker mixture of gas and dust, right? Well, you know what happens when you introduce a naked flame to gas and dust?

"Here at the Space Centre the tension is nearly unbearable as we see on the monitor screens the probe just entering the nucleus of the comet's tail. Control is just going to correct the course slightly with a small 5-second burn WHOOOOOOOOOOOMPH!.....oh!"

Knowing my luck with those ambitions, that's just what will happen. That'll just leave as the major astronomical event of my life the Transit of Venus on June 7th., 2004. I suppose it'll be raining all day then.

* * * * *

Xmas 1984 brought its usual advertisements in the more sober papers for novelty gifts that bright young upwardly mobile readers are pining for - holograms of Genuine African Ethnographic Artifacts - a new album of traditional

Bolivian music - CND Wall Clocks - a bone-china phrenology bust...same old desperate attempts to tempt the jaded palate. I found these pretty sneer-worthy. I'd already seen my idea of a perfect gift - for other people - weeks before, and it was literary, too. Just the thing for Dave Wood and the Ashworths. Unfortunately, I couldn't find a copy, good people, but the thought was there. The TIMES in November made mention, in a piece on Egyptology, of the ultimate gift. "For years now the subject has had a German dictionary of hieroglyphic words spelt backwards (useful if one has a broken inscription, where the beginning of the words are lost)...."

* * * * *

Yes, yes, I know. You wouldn't get a WHOOOOOOOOMP! in space, Mr. Nicholas. Sir. But it was the inverse of shorthand....I couldn't have conveyed much by " , could I?

* * * * *

As constant readers of XYSTER know - come, come, there must be some of you, I'm officially a Philistine. No, madam, a Philipine is something different. My tastes are low, I think in monosyllables, and the only reason why I'm writing for someone named David is a snivelling desire to be on the right side when he starts winding up his sling. Sling, madam, not spring. And my lowly status was confirmed today, when I read that Kyle MacLachlan, who plays the leading role of Paul Atreides in that 40 million dollar smash-hit DUNE, "claims to have read the Dune novel once a year since he was 14."

Passing over a couple of possible explanations - that Mr. MacLachlan is now 15 years old or, alternatively, that he just can't understand it but refuses to let it beat him - he's obviously found more in it than your humble servant and I'm proper abashed. When I first read DUNE a fair number of years ago I remember it gave me a raging thirst - all those desert scenes, you know - and a suspicion that it's writing might have been sponsored by Coca Cola. After a period this thirst subsided into a vague feeling that I'd read a mish-mash of alien anthropology and bug-eyed monsters carved out of a mountain of cold rice pudding. I mean it was stodgy without being meaningful. I subsequently bought DUNE MESSIAH and CHILDREN OF DUNE, and suffered immediate withdrawal symptoms. That is to say, I withdrew from them without reading them.

Well, I may be a Philistine but I'm phair- I mean fair - too, so I decided to give myself another chance. After all, I'd read FITAIP since trekking through Mr. Herbert's opus, and some of it might have rubbed off. Just before rolling this particular page into the typewriter I opened DUNE almost at random, and came across this:

"Awareness flowed into that timeless stratum where he could view time, sensing the available paths, the winds of the future....the winds of the past: the one-eyed vision of the past, the one-eyed vision of the present and the one-eyed vision of the future - all combined in a trinocular vision that permitted him to see time-become-space. There was danger, he felt, of overrunning himself, and he had to hold on to his awareness of the present, sensing the blurred deflection of experience, the flowing moment, the continual solidification of that-which-is into the perpetual was."

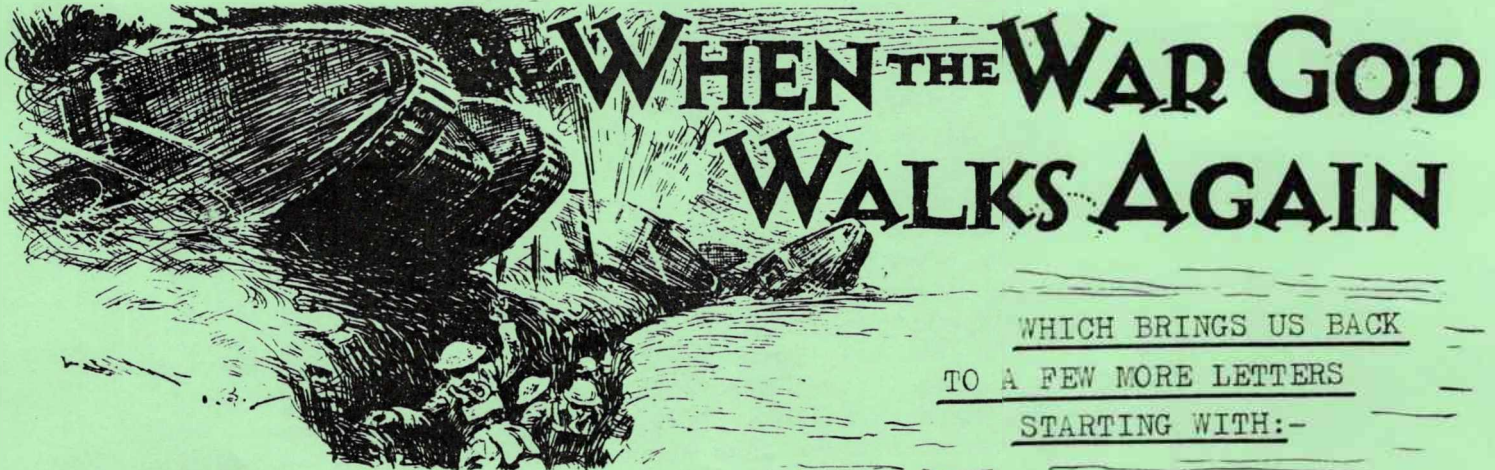
I've circled this cautiously, poking it at intervals, and to my dismay it still sounds like rice-pudding, just as it did in the perpetual was. I reckon that when in the film the hero gazes into the middle distance and a voice-over recites this to show what he's thinking, I'll take the opportunity to go and get a choc-ice. I know my level.

* * * * *

One or two of you - said he, with charming false modesty - may be shifting restlessly in your seats and wondering why this BAFF-eyed relic is bothering to write a column when he has two fanzine titles wilting away from lack of publishing. Apart from not wasting all those beers with which I was plying The Editor at the Novacon, it marks - I hope - a return from semi-gafia. Over the last 18 months I was working for a firm that was slowly but inexorably going down the pan. The mental effect was something like a cross between the Sword of Damocles and The Pit and the Pendulum. My natural procrastination was reinforced by the thought that - yes, in a week or two everything will be resolved and I'll be able to fan full time; then I'll write all those LoCs and stuff. Well, it's happened at last. Is this the birth of an English Reprint Edition of Harry Warner Jnr? Time will tell - or, to put it another way, space will tell. Happy New Year.

 SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT FROM BAFF COI (CLEVEDON)

Following the successful run of 1984 as BAFFs Year of Chesterton (later adopted by those of the Ansible stable) it has been decided that 1985 will be known as Year of the Burks which means the Monsters of Moyen will be the 'In' crowd. An illustrated brochure giving further details of Arthur J Burks Year is available on request (SAE please) from these offices.



WHEN THE WAR GOD WALKS AGAIN

WHICH BRINGS US BACK
TO A FEW MORE LETTERS
STARTING WITH:-

All the atmosphere of modern war is to be found in this

MICHAEL ASHLEY 86 St.JAMES ROAD MITCHAM SURREY CR4 2DB

Surprised to see such a brief letter from myself getting such attention. Its sole function was not much more than "received XYSTER - nothing much to say-but want the next issue - hence this letter" and I expected it to be stuck in the WAHF column. Of such surprise is fandom made (as Walt Willis once said).

A good enough reason for it being brief was that I didn't want to dwell on Clarke's article as this would give it attention it certainly didn't deserve. He spent "considerable time and effort on the piece" you say. Well, well, that's a little at odds with the article as it appeared. - and with Clarke's comments to me ((in a private letter which Michael quotes but I won't as it was between him and Clarke and I ain't no RB.....)) At least Clarke (in the letter) is honest: he admits it isn't "a proper evaluation". But given the effort that's clearly gone into West's articles don't you think he deserves nothing less than "a proper evaluation"? ((Well, yes, Michael. But then I did make it clear that it was a "viewpoint" and also said "I didn't agree with it all" but unlike you, despite my personal objections, I still think it was worth printing. And I would be happy to print a "proper evaluation" whatever that might be. If you could forward me a list of 'accredited' fans I will humbly approach them and..... Leaping back to an earlier point, I still think you are confusing my "considerable time and effort" remark and shall we say "considerable thought and effort" as you put it. The two are not the same. Despite what Clarke said to you, and only he, you and I are privy to that, I still stand by my remark "I know he spent considerable time and effort on the piece, and what he wrote was sincerely felt" Going back to the postscript to his piece in XYSTER 6 says it all.....))

I find it difficult writing about XYSTER in that, although I enjoy most of it (except for the odd piece of daftness - the loony anti-West brigade particularly) ((Don't be fooled Michael, we all love him madly!!)), I can't actually think of anything worthwhile to say. Even the illustrations are good

Mind you, not sure right hand margins necessarily good thing

I was quite struck by the Clarke/West exchange, and especially by its aftermath. DWest is no great writer. By fandom's standards he usually leaves the competition standing, but by any external realistic standard there's not a lot to choose between the Secret Master and his victims. Still, we are dealing with fandom, and fandom's standards are probably the most appropriate.

Don's reply to Vince's review of FITAIP was well below Don's usual standards. It was short on argument and pretty lacklustre in style. On balance, however, I think he still comes out on top.

You say Vince put a lot of effort into his review. I haven't read a lot of Vince's stuff, but that piece struck me as particularly clear and well written, compared to what I have. But I still have to agree with Mike Ashley that it is a ragbag of comments, and half completed ones at that. Not only do they lack any substantial argument to support them, but Vince also often fails to follow up the implications of his comments, preferring to leap ahead to something with at best a very tenuous connection to what went before.

The same could be said of D's reply, but it seems to me that there is a good reason for it in D's case: he was simply reiterating views he had already fully expressed, which were in no need of repetition. Vince had provided no serious challenge to any of D's arguments, and D. was simply setting the record straight where he felt Vince had distorted his position. In this sense Vince was right to characterise D's reply as "I'M RIGHT!" As I read the piece it seemed more like: "look, I've already dealt with this before, but I'll briefly sum it up for you. If you want to know any more read the book."

A piece like this, written in reply to a previous piece, is bound by the nature of the previous piece. Vince's comments in his letter in XYSTER 7 seem rather unfair. Don was asked to defend himself; what did Vince expect, a comprehensive recantation and grovelling apology?

However much work went into Vince's piece, it was still inadequate review. What matters is not how much work goes into a piece (except for the poor sod who's writing it) but how much there is for us readers to get out of it. Vince's failure to properly justify any of his comments or criticisms makes it nothing more than a somewhat qualified cry of "He's wrong! HE'S WRONG!"

I've gone on about this for too long already. This was an unexciting exchange, and most of the comments worth making on it have already been made. What I really wanted to talk about was that response to the exchange. A more blatant display of prejudice and bias I've yet to see.

It was good to see you tear Mike Ashley's letter apart. It's always good to see sloppy thinking demolished, especially when delivered with such arrogance. On the other hand, I was less than pleased by the blind fury D. seems to have aroused in the likes of Mal and Hazel Ashworth, nor the parting shot from Vince I've already mentioned. I did, admittedly, extract some sardonic amusement from Hazel's condemnation of 'dispassionate' critics in such vehement tones. It was also ironic that she should complain about "remarks...aimed at creating an emotional response" when Mal describes D's reply as "highly unoriginal, highly uninteresting, very adolescent, mawkish, sqawkish slosh of mish-mosh".

What shocked me was the unanimity of anti-West response from people who are generally described as BAFFs. I got the distinct impression of ranks closing in response to an attack on a fellow member. Even Chuck Harris' attempt at a balanced response amounted to 'He might just be right, in his own way...' whilst Mal Ashworth's letter could, with a few cosmetic changes, have been swapped for Mike Ashley's. Both simply flung out unsupported accusations, and read like multi-purpose letters of criticism with the blanks filled in with either 'West' or 'Clarke' according to prejudice.

It's all very well for me to spout about other people's prejudices as if I was free from all sin. My own sympathies lie, rightly or wrongly, with West, along with Mike Ashley. The curious thing was that although Mike never explained what he meant by 'ragbag', let alone justify it, I knew what he meant. On the other hand, when Hazel talks about 'intentionally hurtful remarks' I haven't a clue what she's on about. A few examples would at least allow me to make up my mind whether she's spotted something I've not, or is just over-reacting. Instead I have to rely on an emotional response of dubious relevance.

We all take our prejudices, and the assumptions they're based on, for granted. They wouldn't be prejudices but for the fact we're often unaware of them. Thus we tend to miss out a lot of the justification for our opinions. What's more, the opinions of others which agree most closely with our own often sound self evident - they're based on the same set of shared, unconscious opinions - whilst those we disagree with tend to sound like mindless nonsense. It's very easy to believe that anyone putting forward opinions contrary to one's own without justification is unwilling to examine his own prejudices because they have no justification to offer.

Before I begin to sound like some wet liberal, let me say that there's absolutely nothing wrong with prejudice. Give me a passionate critic over Hazel's ideal of the dispassionate any day. Not only is he more honest, but he's a damn sight more interesting to read. The point is that without some rationale a statement of opinion is worse than useless to the reader.

I spent my last couple of fanzines complaining about the poor standard of argument and discussion in fandom at present. Even the best rarely gets above the level of a Third Form Debating Society. Until it does I'm afraid I'll remain unswayed at my own prejudices and convinced that those who disagree with me fail to justify their views because they haven't anything to offer.

((OK let's skip the 'unexciting exchange' and comment on your comments about the response to the exchange. First the 'irony': yes, but isn't prejudice showing just a teensie-weensie bit? In this liberated age it shouldn't come as a surprise to learn that Mal and Hazel do have their individual viewpoints and carry on their respective correspondence without reference to each other. In fact they don't see each other's writings until they are published! Now I have no idea what collusion takes place between M, H and DWest as they journey together each week to the Leeds meetings, but I wouldn't be at all surprised if..... And it's worth remembering "three BAFFs do not a summer make." (Must not count Hazel as a BAFF! Hardly brushed the neo-green off her knees you know....) Anyway I did think your letter the most cogent in this little exchange. Strangely enough it dropped through the mail the same day I came across a piece written by A T Quiller-Couch in 1897, part of which says:

And the discovery which criticism really needs to make in these days is that sobriety and proportion may be signs of the very highest originality, and, indeed, are far more likely to be signs of originality than wild and immoderate speech. The world is so wide that there will always be a few

thousand quite novel and surprising ways of not hitting a target; but when these have been discussed and applauded, the man who has shot straight gets the prize. And the main use of language, after all, is that it enables a man to be clearly understood by his fellows.

So they "tossed her to the local crooks."? I keep on getting a vision of this dame slithering down a pile of broken plates and handle-less cups. As the crook's car roars away she gets up, removes a bone-china fragment from her decollette, and yells after them "Yer lower than a wombat's whatsit!" In the distance a dingo howls.....

Xyster 7 started off with a bang and continued on like a fire-cracker. I loved the rest of the editorial, and especially the 'How to make your own phone' illo. I wonder though, in the OLD ARTIFICIAL TEETH ad., where it says 'Teeth Returned if Price not Accepted', what basis there was in the whole transaction. "Sir, as you are only

offering 2 shillings for them teeth what has been in my grandmother's jaw these 25 years - God rest her soul - I want them back as I have a far better offer from a Lady down the street..." No. I think not. Far more likely that a veritable Burke and Hare roamed the streets, snatching the odd plate, offering sticky toffee to grand-dad and grabbing the whole glutinous mess.... I'd like to find out more about it.....

THE ASHWORTH PHIAL was, of course, first class, but marred by the competitions. I haven't the slightest idea what the Black Axe of Fairyland is called - George?

but the guest-house called 'Reality' - ahhhh:

Guest (staggering in with luggage) "Good-morning"

Receptionist: "Good-morning is a subjective word, predicating..."

Guest: "Have you any rooms?"

Receptionist: "Rooms? There are interstices in the space-time continuum which to our limited senses are loosely called...."

Guest: "How about vacancies?"

Receptionist: "Sir, all that you see before you might be called 'vacancy'. The distribution of electrons...."

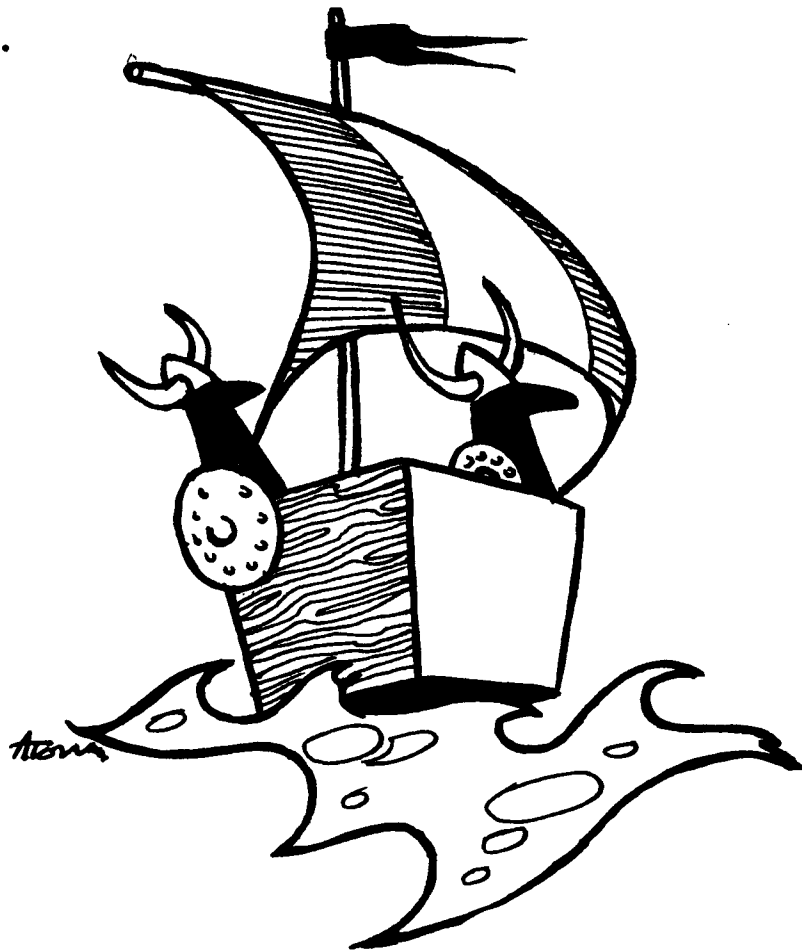
Guest: "I'll take one; is that the register?" (Scrawls)

Receptionist: "Thank you, Bishop Berkeley....."

A WORD IN YOUR EAR good - I hear Chuck, who got my copy, is writing - and the Bergeron anagram amazing.... BACK IN THE JUG AGANE reminds me that I've got an Aldiss mss. in the attic somewhere, a little fantasy he tossed off in the mid-50's for some college jazz zine; he passed it on for a later edition of EYE which didn't appear, but in any case it was so piffling that I wouldn't have done so anyway....

The West CHOLER supplement: I think he's better at these comic drawings than floundering about in masses of opinions about s-f.

Letters: Nice from Hazel. Odd, but that 'Tales of Wonder' was actually the first **adult** book I was given - I recognise the frontispiece further on. Joe Nicholas - well, being attacked in this way was like being bitten by a wombat. One knows it could, but doesn't think it would. I see he was a bit disconcerted because all this time a few remarks at a Con had been rankling, and I'd like to assure him



that I do feel for him. The hurt in his eyes when I told him that I didn't believe in the basis of his being in fandom - criticism. Oh my. I think to clear things up I'll repeat a few words from a letter to HYPHEN No.10 from one Vernon McCain of Idaho:

"I take fandom very very seriously indeed as a part of my life. Anything into which I pour as much time and money as I do into fandom deserves to be taken seriously. But within fandom itself I refuse to take it seriously. Fandom (the fandom you and I most appreciate, that is) exists only as a frothy, gay, multiple personality to which we all contribute and which we all draw from. Everyone who tries to harness it into a formalistic thing of rules, membership and activities...not only fails to understand fandom itself but actually fouls and damages the essence of fandom with its clumsy touch; the fan who tries to turn Fandom into an Important Cause...is guilty of vulgarising and bruising fandom's true identity; the fan who insists on measuring and assessing fandom in concrete terms is no true fan at all but a myopic accountant who has wandered into the wrong pew. Fandom is light and airy and delightful. By its very essence it's the antithesis of everything crusading and longfaced....."

As usual, Hazel was superb. The saga of the evermore intrusive furniture was beautiful and I know just what she feels like, as, amongst other things, I have a piano here that I want to junk. Once that goes I can make enough room to wheel into action a Gestetner 210 Offset Duplicator that has been sitting in my hall for 18 months. I wonder what mundane people do with their spare halls? Mind you, I solved the double bed crisis. I sawed it in half, joined the bottom two legs to the top half, sawed everything off to table level (with the help of Terry Hill) and with some further improvements ended up with a 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ ft. square work-table.

"Nobody is interested in someone else's egoboo." Yes, within reason. "Fandom has improved a great deal of late..." Yes - more or less since BAF-fandom.

Mal Ashworth and Bergeron. Yes yes yes. Let's give it a rest.

MARTYN TAYLOR FLAT 2 17 HUTCHINSON SQUARE DOUGLAS ISLE OF MAN

Congratulations on the Nova. I hadn't known about it, but I'm not surprised, and would agree that 'Xyster' has been the most consistently entertaining and stimulating fanzine of the year.

'Xyster' 7 was a curiously unsatisfactory edition, largely because most of the regulars seemed to be some way from firing on all 12. Given that their ordinary standard is high even a small lapse is noticeable. Even 'our' Hazel was some way below her considerable best. As for Mal, well I've lived just down t'road from Harry Ramsdens and even if it is most famous chip oil in t'ole world I wouldn't eat there. The rest of the piece was more of that self aggrandising selfobsession for which Tykes are justly renowned throughout the whole world (and I speak as a fully paid up member of the Sir Geoffrey Boycott Fan Club) Boring. Even famous Dave seemed perfunctory. After all, we've had his 'Oxford, my dear Oxford' routine before - in Drilkjis, I think. Sadness, so much is sadness.

One regular was on illuminating form, however. I refer, of course, to A. Vincent Clarke (I have to give him his proper rather than his real name 'cos these Japanese printers can't cope with English minor eccentricities). Taking his remarks along with yours to Darroll Pardoe "...PLEASE don't try to alter our memories." it is possible to determine the core of the disagreement, in that it appears that Vince (and other BAFfs) consider D. West and others to want to deprive them of their simple, innocent fun. Now my experience of Vince leads me to conclude he is a delightful enough chap in the flesh but not without a streak of playful malice which allows him to act the picador with glee and then retreat behind his 'harmless old duffer with poodle' persona when the recipient of his barbs comes looking for revenge/justice. I don't know how much of his

misapprehension is deliberate and how much just culture (club) shock, and I don't really care. But I see behind his persistent plea to be left alone in 1953 a desire that everybody else should join him in 1953, which ain't on, by the same token that he and anyone else ought to be permitted to exist in his memories if he so wishes. Then again, he seems to want to join in the modern games without sticking to the rules - which isn't exactly honest.

Oh yes, one aspect of 'Xyster' upon which I have not remarked in the past - the illustrations. Very funny, very funny indeed, and anyone who complains about the layout must be unusually dense. Justified right margins. What delights does No 8 hold? Can we wait? Will Elda Wheeler rescue Vince before he has his head and feet amputated by the 17.55 D. West out of London Bridge?

ARTHUR THOMSON 17 BROCKHAM HOUSE BROCKHAM DRIVE LONDON SW2 3RU

Coo, justified margins, printed headings, neat layout...Will the real Xyster please stand up...well, not really, cos' it is still the Xyster we know and love...must be the shiny black ink.

Mark you, the utmost absolutely terrifical thing that made the issue for me, were those illustrations from Chums! Y'see I recognised them. A great big wave of affection and nostalgia hit me when I saw them. When I was about eight or nine around about 1939 I acquired a great big volume of Chums. It was about three inches thick (it seems now) and bound in red hardcovers. A tremendous thing, full of every sort of story a boy could wish for. Now, you say that those illos you printed came from a 1924 edition of Chums yet I remember and recognise them. The one of the redskins storming the fort. The one of the pirates/smugglers in the cave with one of them holding a flaming torch. Also the small endpiece one of the axe wielding revolutionaries. All I can think of is that my dad must have picked it up in a secondhand book shop for me. I loved it, I loved all those stories in it and have retained a misty back of the mind affection for that long gone Chums Annual all my life. Why, some of my very first science fiction reading came out of that book. The sinking of the Atlantic/North Sea fleet...the great airships full of the Yellow Peril and their death rays...hooyboy, yes! The pirate stories. the 'last of the Mohicans' type story...the war stories. I don't think I could bear to read them again now incase they broke that magical memory that I have of them and how good they were.

I suppose now you'll tell me that the illustrations I speak of came from the Pall Mall magazine....don't you dare'.

Liked all the wordstuff in the zine. Hazel's and Dave Langfords came over well. Letter section was interesting and lively. But I'm afraid that's about all I can come up with this time round. I feel a bit bad about this, cos' I know you/faneds pub their ish for comment and feedback and whilst I dearly love Xyster and enjoy it always I don't seem to be able to get on a wavelength to enable me to ramble on in comment on the material. Maybe it's because you contributors are so erudite and your loccers so perceptive and sagacious that I cry off sticking my five cents worth in.

((Not sure from the "When I was about eight or nine around about 1939.." whether this means you are being coy about your age or whether you aren't sure as to how old you are!!! Still, to set your mind at rest about the illos, they are from Chums, in the main, and are carefully photocopied from a set of red bound copies running from 1924 through to 1928. And yes, they do include the stories by Frank Shaw of the sinking of the Atlantic fleet, the reprints they did of the Sax Rohmer stories which originated in 'Collier's Weekly' from 1916-17 ('The Si-Fan Mysteries' saw hard covers as 'The Hand of Fu-Manchu') and 'When The Sea Rose UP' a world catastrophe novel by Frank Shaw. I picked up the set in a local junk shop for a mere £1.50 a volume.....))

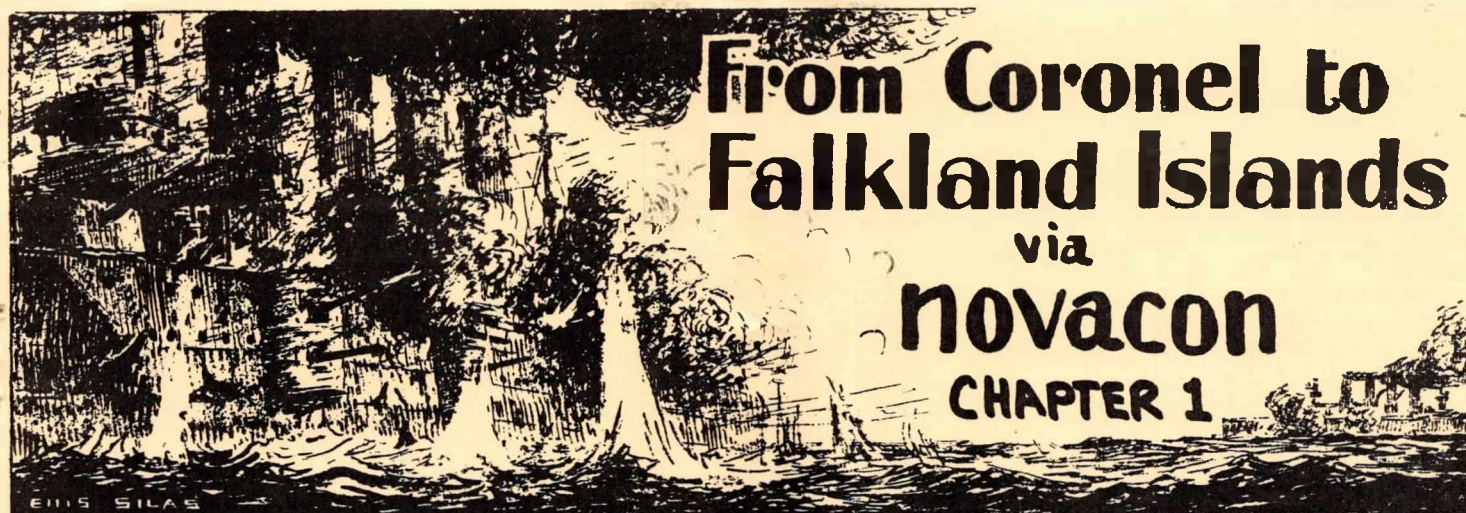
And the night after that !
And every night since !

Every single night Something was getting to that potty before me; and it was a Something with no sense of proportion or fairplay. I could have co-existed tolerably well with a Something which contented itself with a weeny widdle or even a medium-sized micturition - but an Inhuman Fiend who callously and malignantly filled every c.c. of my one and only pissoir...! Suddenly it dawned on me why, throughout the centuries, mankind has lived in terror of these Vile Creatures of the Void. It is because they void into his potties, showing their infinite, other-worldly contempt for all that man is by invading his most intimate lebensraum. And man - poor feeble, helpless man - can only gesticulate impotently. Or admit total defeat and rush away in mindless horror and urgent distress to the smallest lebens-raum downstairs.



Thus it was that, slowly, over the next few weeks, I became certain that I knew the identity of this infernal embodiment of that old saying apres moi le deluge. It could be no other than Maupassant's Horla ! This mind-numbing conclusion accounted for everything. Year after year of attempting to slake his hellish, other-worldly thirst with the nighttime glasses of water of innumerable horrified victims had finally told on even his monstrous, other-worldly bladder. He had sworn off the drink and was now fiendishly intent on restoring his equilibrium by one vast, prolonged, unimaginable cosmic leak. And Cruel Fate had selected me, of all people, to be his unwilling host ! Why me, I lamented, in my agony of soul, why not a good, God-fearing Methodist minister whose need for his potty is doubtless much less than mine ? What can I do ? In desperation I thought of buying a second potty. And even a third. And of stencilling clearly on them 'His', 'Hers' and 'Horlas'. But it would, I know, be of no avail. I know my adversary too well. In his inhuman malice he would ignore my attempt at compromise and fill all three. And that would be two extra trips downstairs to empty them in the morning.

I am in despair. What is to become of me ? Was any being ever so accursed as I ? How will I keep up with the cost of new stair-carpet...?



Mal Ashworth

W H O ? W H A T ? W H E N ?

A Minutely Detailed, Factually Accurate Account of Every
Part of the Official Programme of

NOVACON 14

Being a Particularly Boring and Tedious Filler Cobbled
Together in Ten Minutes By A Xyster Staff Hack To Fill
The Space Left Vacant When A Genuine Proper Famous
Fanwriter (who will not be named, to save him embarrass-
ment, and whose surname has no connection with three
points of the compass) Was Stricken Down By A Virulent
Case of Prima Donna Paralysis and Failed to Produce A
Real Novacon Report

Every year, in November, in Birmingham (an alternative venue
chosen because Salford mud-flats in January were fully booked) there
takes place a pagan ritual of great antiquity called 'Novacon'. The
name, of course, which, for euphony, is streets ahead (but not many
streets ahead) of 'Birmicon', is cunningly derived from the month in
which the convention takes place.

No, no - I kid you, of course. None would be so obvious, so
plonkingly plebeian, as to call a con 'Novacon' because it was held
in November. The truth is it is called 'Novacon' because every year
it is new. (Just like 'Nova Scotia'. Every year they wipe out the old
Scotia and start with a new one.) As in 'Novae Terrae' - New Lands,
New worlds (to conquer). Every year new routes through the labyrinth-
ine city streets, new hotel rooms, new hangovers (to conquer). The name
joyously celebrates the fact that it is not, each November, just the
same old con (in which case they'd have called it 'Antiquon') still
going on because some lethargic boring old farts couldn't be bothered
to go home from the year before. No - it is new. Sparkling. Fresh.
Morning-of-the-Worldish. Jazzy as all get out.

And still I fool you, jest beyond jest as in a Hall of Mirrors.
No science-fiction fan worth his rocket-fuel can have failed to realise
that the true reason it is called 'Novacon' is because, every year, it
bursts, it expands, it erupts, it coruscates, exactly like a star going
nova. Yes, indeed. That's why.

And this year was no exception. On the Sunday evening (after we'd
left, God rot this steenking, badly-planned universe!), in a welter of
good-natured, all-friends-together amiability, Xyster cavorted gaily to
the top spot in the Best Fanzine Poll of the Novacon Awards. This old,
long zine then gave way graciously to the Auld Lang Syne of the final
session, and the unbearable bonhomie of the Awards jollifications slip-
ped with a bump and a grind into the 'Apocalypse Now' scenario of the

closing ceremony. During this an onstage 'Kissagram' surprise generously planned for GoH Rob Holdstock by a grateful committee became an upstage 'Strippagram' surprise generously fragmentation-grenaded into the proceedings by a person, or persons unknown. Along the way, it seemed, some Eminence Grised some hidden palm, which palmed a reputed sixty extra smackers, and this upping of the ante served to upgrade the antics of the auntie making with the ecdysiastic andante, and to divest her of all but her G-string. This gave the assembled Slans and Star-Begottens yet another opportunity to demonstrate the flexibility and range of their far-famed and much-admired Cosmic Minds. With impressive speed these snapped shut, Venus Flytrap fashion, as Cosmic Mouths snapped open in a strident ululation of shock-horror which continued for several months and which, roughly-translated meant: "Waaaaarrgh. Mummy told me nude women are naughty!" The better-balanced BAFFs (their balance aided, of course, by walking sticks, crutches, wheel-chairs) who are far too old to remember what the hell their mummies told them (all except Bob Shaw whose mummy told him, "Whenever there's anything good going on, get there fast, son", and who failed to do so on this occasion and has been kicking himself ever since), along with a few other adults who were there by accident, simply enjoyed the sight of a comely lasswi' nowt much on, and the general fun of the thing. The Guest of Honour, it appears, rapidly joined in with the spirit of the occasion by giving a spontaneous impression of The Great Gobsmacked Chameleon Monster from one of his forthcoming frilling phantasies, speeding through the spectrum from red to black in an impressive demonstration of that old fannish truism that Image Is All and he who looks behind the king's new clothes expecting to find a king must be out of his tiny.

Brickbats abounded and rebounded and another Novacon had ended in a stellar explosion which, when the cosmic dust settled, drew vows of abstention from a variety of the better things of life - such as all future cons, all future world cons, all fanac of any kind, and buttered toast - from several committee members. Seasoned con-goers nodded sagely taking this as a sign of the undoubted success of yet another happy fannish get-together.

There should have been five of us in that car on the way down to Birmingham, I mused as I headed west to the M6 through drizzle and drear, but even my rudimentary mathematical talents couldn't get two plus one to more than three. Me, Hazel next to me and, in the back seat, a stand-in from 'The Curse of The Mummy' who appeared to have been madly over-generous at some recent Bacchanalian Blood Donor session. The label round its neck said 'D. West'. Also along should have been Anne West, who'd gone by train instead, and Eric Bentcliffe who had travelled down earlier to meet Terry Jeeves. As we shot onto the M6 I realised that these two had either had unusually good weather forecasts or doom-laden prophetic dreams. Or both.

With scary suddenness the motorway became a high-speed highway to Mordor and the mortuary, the darkness augmented by a greyish-yellow mist, the water everywhere, more like a maelstrom than a mild storm. Insanity-vibes quivered all around like over-taut piano wires as the whole human race (it seemed) hurtled Hellwards down that stygian water-chute with the demonic determination of a cross between lemmings and Mother Hitton's Littul Kittons. The 'non-existent objects' which a recent philosophy treatise recommends us to 'take at face value' (Rot 6) were holding their own convention across all six lanes of the M6 that night and, face two inches from a perpetually fogged windscreen, I was doing my damndest to avoid taking them at face value and, in swerving to avoid them, connecting with an existent object, such as a multi-ton artic doing a demented 'Flying Dutchman' past me at 80 miles an hour. Thirty years study of advaita vedanta, with its prime injunction to 'distinguish between the Real and the Unreal' was tested nigh to destruction in that no-breaks, two-hour tearaway trial. I just didn't dare blob. In my mind's eye I could see all too clearly the fiery fanzine headlines if I allowed D. to be converted into strawberry jam (albino strawberry jam, of course), even if I was somewhere in the same melange with him - "Crazed Revenge of Unhinged Fifties Fan" would be the mildest of them. With what pro-

found relief I watched D. walk away from the car when we finally parked. Not only did this signify that we had made it, it also seemed to indicate he'd probably been alive when I picked him up back in Skipton.

On a normal day, coming across the 'Queens Head' in the middle of Birmingham, no great distance from the 'Angus' or the 'Grand', is merely like dropping in on Tom Bombadil after being chased for twenty miles by nazguls. This night, however, it was more like coming, after captaining a leaky battle-cruiser through a 500 year galactic war, upon a licensed brothel on Pluto selling Boddingtons Bitter. (Yes, I know, I know - there goes my last chance of having my breakfast brought to me in bed and the back of my ears gently scratched by 'Ms Furious Fanne' who is even now putting smoking pen to Burning-Bra scented writing paper in Tooting Bec. The story of my life, alas.) Hazel and I had a great conversation in there; it went - "Glugluglugluglugluglugwemadeitwemadeitwemadeitwemadeitgluglugluglugluglugwemadeitwemadeitglug...", as three pints of Draught Bass went down in a trice. Now Bass is beautiful, true; but Bass is also deadly (just like 'Ms Furious Fanne' of Tooting Bec). As we were nodding in wise stupidity over this about-to-be-ignored truism, Don re-appeared, accompanied by Anne who, having come by rail, was the only one of our party not encased in an oversize dollop of timor mortis. Nevertheless she joins us enthusiastically in some energetic relaxation as more Bass pours down the hatch, hits the spot and so forth.

Thus it is that later that evening we walk (totter) into the entrance foyer of the Grand Hotel nicely relaxed (smashed out of our respective bonces), smiling amiably (grinning vacuously), to find a reception committee which shows every sign of having been waiting for us rather longer than Marvin the Paranoid Android waited for his human companions in the car park of the Restaurant At The End Of The Universe ("The first ten million years were the worst..." etc.). This consists of Vince Clarke, Dave Wood, Eric Bentcliffe, Terry Jeeves ("Hello again after 25 years"). Dave immediately steers Hazel off and starts introducing her to people as "my star writer"; Eric hijacks her from the other side and quickly corrects him, "No, my star writer". Having just spent the last few days sneering with gross contempt at Don West's contention (in one of the pieces in FITAIP) that fannish reputations no longer depend so much on writing ability and that these days the fan you are in-person is much more important, I have a sudden flash of insight in which I see the true force and beauty of his argument. I mean - look at me; I may be only a lowly little pleb in the pen-and-ink stakes, but enough fannish charisma to stop a bull elephant at thirty yards (or maybe that's not quite the metaphor I was looking for). And anyway, someone has to sweep up the dead sparrows and keep the universe running in the midst of sickening sycophancy and misdirected egoboo. I shamble off to register at Reception and hang cases from my teeth, my ears, my...well, you get the picture. I then leaden-foot it up to Room 144 like the Yeti of the Left Luggage office, wondering blackly if I should stagger back down to give Hazel a hand with her ten kilos of plaudits, five gallons of adulation...no need. She floats in on them a few minutes later.

Some while after that I unvegetate my face from a box of chopped salad as a note is pushed under the door. Bound to say "Dear Hazel, I fink you are the greatest", I reflect, sinking nose first back into the sargasso of radish and spring-onion. Next time I emerge the note is in front of my face. It says "We are in the Fan Room". Catching a glimpse of myself in one of the inescapable mirrors, I see that I have brightened visibly (or maybe the Bass has finally penetrated to my nose end) - who knows, maybe the note is for me as well. Suavely jamming a small celery stick up my left nostril in my eagerness not to miss anything I leap up and head for the Fan Room, while Hazel languidly falls in the bath (usually more impressive if you arrange for the water to precede you though) and thence into bed. The Fan Room offers one small island of humanity in the dead centre of acres of empty space, like a week-old wake that got locked in the morgue. My SOP (Standard Operating Paranoia) re-asserts itself as I convince myself that the note was meant for me alone and was sent by someone who intended to be at least three floors

and four rods, poles or perches away from the Fan Room. This gives me a purpose in life which almost rivals the one based on the fact that I haven't had a drink for half an hour and, through an oversight on the part of the hotel architect, I succeed in tracking down the bar, which is packed. I then succeed in knocking back the jar which I lacked. Suddenly, all is well with the world once again - pretty grotty with me but well with the world. At times like this ('times like this' - hah! Except at cons when would there ever be 'times like this' ?) I tend to go into a Gully Foyle type hyper-speed overdrive. Come to think of it maybe it has about it more of the Goon Show ("Full speed ahead in all directions!") than Gully Foyle. So it is that I simultaneously attempt to chugalug much Nectar of the Gods (heavily disguised - very heavily disguised - by the Grand Hotel bar staff), to dish out copies of the 21-year-matured-in-the-oak-headbone Rot 6 (cleverly neglecting to note down to whom), to meet a lot of people and a few unpeople (with names like Nigel E. Richardson, Andrew C. Neale and so on), and to chat up Lesley Ward. I put a lot of effort into this agreeable activity, but unfortunately most of it goes into trying to eject from the front of my face a recognisable word belonging to the English language - a new and fascinating version of SHCRABBLE. But the best I achieve is babble. Nay, let me not boast outrageously, something more like burble. Despite quaffing copious potions of a blood-like liquid which reminds me of Homer's 'wine-dark sea', herself, Lesley is not impressed. This is hardly surprising since the only chance I have of ever successfully chatting up anyone comes in a rather narrow 2-millilitre band of the blood/alcohol scale which I passed somewhere back about 1972 and haven't seen since.

Broken of heart, wind, limb, common-sense and Rot distribution-list, I shamble away to bed, a very different figure from the dewy-eyed young fan who had arisen that morning. Well - slightly different. Well - drunker. But Someone-Up-There is still getting a giggle a minute out of the old nose-thumbing game - there is something terribly wrong with the bedroom. For one thing it has grown to enormous proportions. OK - alterations in size and perspective are pretty basic Level One hallucinations, I can cope with that. But there is also a huge trellis-work screen right down the middle of the room. Sorry, You-Up-There, it's too late, I can't get up the energy to freak at this time of night, just so long as there's a bed one side or the other of that trellis, I'll get by. But - why are all these people standing around talking and why is Dave Langford holding out his hand for a copy of Rot 6 ? Because it's the bloody Fan Room, that's why. I fill Dave's pleading paw and amble away disgustedly for another try.

WILL OUR HERO FIND THE MYSTERIOUS ROOM 144?
CAN THE 'WINE-DARK SEA' STAY DOWN?
WHO IS DARREN P. BREAME?
WHAT DOES NIGEL E. RICHARDSON SQUEEZE INTO?
WHAT WAS JOHN JARROLD CAUGHT DRINKING?

ALL THIS AND LESS IN THE NEXT EXCITING
INSTALMENT.....



HAZEL ASHWORTH



"GAD, SIR. HERE'S SOME MORE OF THAT FINE FARE SHE DISHES UP"

A certain light relief was needed after a week when the post-con doldrums had been accentuated by the knowledge that we had missed the Best Bit of Novacon; kind fans who had lingered on in Brum had made tittering phone calls early on Monday morning letting us know this, but an uncanny combination of circumstances saw to it that the Friday Leeds S.F. group meeting provided as much entertainment (some would say rather more) as the Sunday evening fun and games with strippagrams, pistols at dawn etc. many of us had been unable to witness. So we looked forward to the end of the week with more animation than usual: there would be chewing of fat, and drink, and more chewing of fat, and more drink... AND a Novacon award to be given to a certain Mr West of Bingley - accepted in his absence by Dave Langford and subsequently passed on northwards by mysterious means until it had fallen into the hands of Simon Ounsley - though no one bothered to tell the winner. Everyone thought everyone else had. Two phone calls to Bingley from Dave Langford and Rob Hansen earlier in the week had apparently remained very silent on who had won what, and so our Fanartist Extraordinaire remained in ignorance of his great achievement until Thursday, when Simon thought to let him know that he was bringing the much-coveted object over to the Leeds meeting the following day.

These facts may seem tedious, but they have a vital bearing on the subsequent confusion and apparent gullibility of Monsieur West, and brought home the truth of that Famous Fannish Dictum I had just heard about, that Good Hoaxes are made in Heaven...

D. rang us: there were noises of congratulation and surprise all round that news of the award had been so slow in coming. Two minutes later, the scheming half of the Ashworth household was on the phone to Simon, suggesting a leetle alteration to the plans for the following evening. On Friday, the manual-labour half flogged her socks off implementing the Grand Design: to create a ceremonial object of sufficient splendour to give D. as a little aperitif to the Real Thing, which would, I fondly imagined, be dragged out from hiding a few minutes later, when everyone (except Don, of course) had had a good laff. As there wasn't a lot of time I threw caution to the winds and got on with it at my place of work, moulding the humble grey Harbutts* in a flurry of creative joie de vivre. The crouching figure of D. West, Fartist of the Year, was coming on nicely, emerging from the shapeless mass in a manner reminiscent of Michelangelo's half-finished statues. My boss appeared suddenly, his eyebrows taking flight as he caught sight of the squatting, straining effigy I hadn't been quick enough to hide.

" Oh yes.... er, very good! "

* I promised D. I wouldn't mention plasticine.

We had a little discussion on what a damn tricky medium the stuff is.

"What's it doing?" he finally blurted out.

"Oh, it's bending down looking for something" mumbled the reply. And that seemed to be the end of the conversation. Suffering in the cause of art is supposed to be good for you, I consoled myself, and pressed on in what remained of my lunch hour, smoothing a bit down here, moulding an ear there. Some flower-wire for the glasses, cardboard for the ciggy, Real Gold Lettering 'NOVACON AWARD 1984 Top Fartist D.West', and we'd cracked it!

Preparations for such an event were not without personal cost; apart from the awkward exchange I had had with my boss, there were also a few frantic moments in the extremely busy West Riding pub just before it all happened. I had been left all alone with our little creation to make certain delicate finishing touches, it having been bashed around a bit on a crowded train on its way into Leeds, despite being wrapped about with tissue paper and cardboard. Rescuing the microscopic cigarette from the bottom of the box, adjusting the glasses with shaking fingers, (funny how interested people get when you stand in a corner with your back to them and scrabble around as though you're calming a hysterical hamster), all was child's play until I found that the special cardboard sign that Malcolm had painstakingly arranged at its rear end in the interests of realism and foul play, had gone all limp and fallen out completely. It said 'POOT!' on it - what else can you expect of a Fartist? - and was very much an integral part of it all when we started out. Try as I might I could not jam the thing back while keeping it concealed amongst the tissue-folds where it had lain safe from Westian eyes. Nothing for it, I was forced to take the blasted thing out into the open and shove the cardboard firmly up its bum, a feat I accomplished with many a nervous glance over my shoulder. I had just succeeded in getting the right angle, when a hoarse whisper caused me to jump several yards up the wall. "Aren't you ready yet? He's beginning to wonder what's going on!"

Thus it was, 100 miles further north, and five days later than everything else, that the third part of the Award Ceremony took place. And the recipient, minus dominoes, put on a most exciting display, gleefully remembered for many days thereafter. It was presented with much suitable fanfare - Simon made a natty little speech, Pete Lyon took oodles of photographs - and Don's bemusement and fury were marvellous to behold. As the hail of beer-mats continued to rain about our heads from a Westerly direction (Malcolm said afterwards that there was still a vestige of the gentleman left in this Krakatonic Champion Fartist - he lifted his glass off the mat first. (There was some beer in it)), the wonderful truth gradually dawned: he thought he'd been had. That the award had gone to someone else altogether (Rob Hansen was the main suspect), and that this was a Cruel Trick played upon his tender hopes of fame and fortune - well, at least a free pint off somebody - and, worst of all, that this rude Harbuttian figurine was all that he was going to get. I am grieved to have to tell you he did not like the result of my efforts and failed to appreciate its many good qualities. Instead he threw it at Simon Ounsley's head, bending the glasses shamefully and quite ruining the elegant curvature of the spine. (The figurine's, not Simon's). Simon's eyes wobbled a bit, but he didn't let a little thing like that spoil his evening.

"Well, it was a well-deserved award" Mal told Don, trying to cheer him up.

"It wasn't," he expostulated, "It's Rob Hansen does that, not me."

"Oh," Mal said in a voice redolent with sympathetic concern, "that must be it - the Novacon Committee got the two awards mixed up!"

There was an even more thunderous assault of beer-mats, and we were forced into a moment's silence. By this time I was prepared to Own Up, and get the real thing, but the others, notably S.Ounsley, P.Lyon and M.Ashworth - who are very Cruel indeed - had decided otherwise, and we spent the rest of the time in the pub choking on our booze and 'consoling' the unfortunate victim, who mouthed dire things and pronounced curses on us all, but mainly on himself, for being so naive, so credulous as to believe what people told him, fer Chrissake!

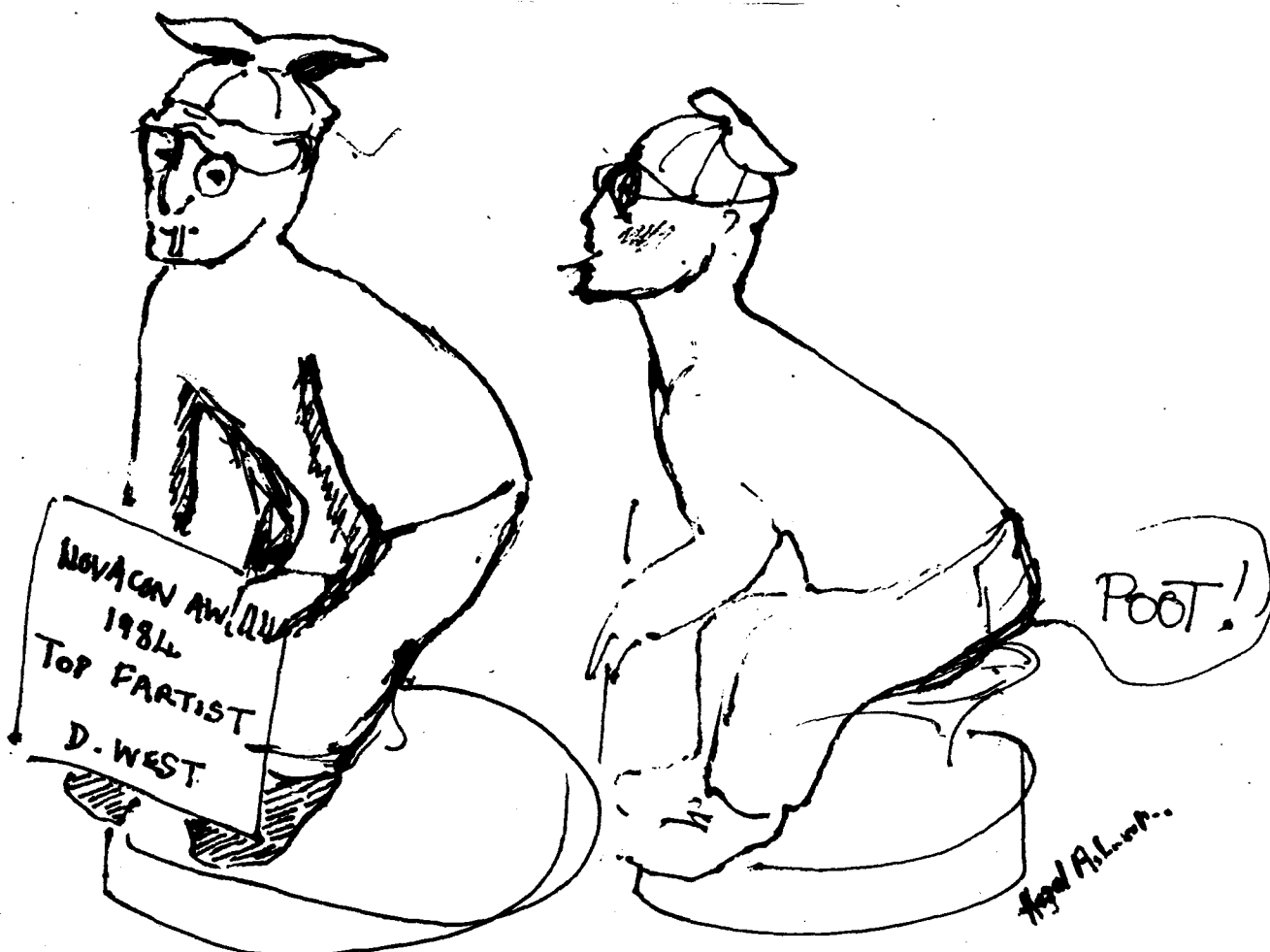
The trip back Bingleywards had a certain ambience about it, difficult to describe. The 'mudge-mudge, wink-wink' goodbyes Mal and I had received as we left the pub had not improved our image much in D.'s eyes, and he regarded us with sour suspicion across the seats of the Skipton Express. "I thought you fifties fans

were supposed to be nice and kind" he rumbled at Malcolm as we left Leeds station, and subsided into rueful gloom, doubtless contemplating his own appalling lapse into trusting the good faith and honesty of fans. Having been enjoined, on pain of Abdul Alhazred-type torture, not to hand over the award until the Absolute Last Minute - preferably through the window of the train as Don got off at Bingley - I was hard pressed to behave normally during the journey. Malcolm was no help at all, but that was only to be expected: he cackled away at thin air now and again, and cavorted around as though he'd had too much Tetleys - indeed, not much different from most Friday nights, come to think - but then, he'd been brought up in the school of Hard Knox, over Tong Cemetery way; and that, he once told me, prepares you for everything. Not so yours truly, who was beginning to feel Very Sorry about it all. I pulled out a large flask from one of our carrier bags.

"I suppose you've got the Real Award in there" came a hollow voice in hopeless tones across the way. "Haw haw" was the callous response, and we poured coffee. How much longer could I last out? At last the Ashworth graniteface relented, and a scant three minutes before arriving at Bingley station, the true, the one-and-only, the official Novacon Prize was brought with a dramatic flourish into the public gaze, bedazzling the eye and nearly braining the ticket collector. D. took a little time to get used to this new fact of life, and stumbled out of the train in a somewhat glazed state (luckily it had just stopped), with it held aloft like Excalibur. (He said later he'd nearly dropped it on the way home).

He found at least two good things to say about the evening's events: one was that it had been a lucky arrangement that we had been provided with a separate room in the pub, away from the landlord's eye, else surely he would have been thrown out; the other was, that considering the immense enjoyment he had so obviously afforded the Leeds group, he could put his behaviour down to 'SERVICE TO FANDOM', and leave it at that.

And that still wasn't quite the end of it. Some people, who don't have a decent sense of proportion about these things, derived much amusement in the days that followed by ringing Don up and saying, please could they have their award back now the fun was over?



EDITORIAL NOTICE.

XYSTER goes out to approx 100 readers. Out of that 100 I get some 30 fanzines in trade. Around 30 people have LoCed, and half of those also are people who trade. Another dozen or so send me the sort of thing you could describe as a round robin news letter - the odd two pages of gen which shows they are alive and well and doing fannish things. The hundred has hardly changed since issue two, so that means there are a hell of a lot of readers who have never taken time out to say anything about the run of issues they have seen. Maybe they gave thanks by voting at Novacon - one or two have thanked me in person when I've been at the Tun or a con. Look in the mirror. Is your face red? I give you fair warning - for some of you this is the last XYSTER you will get from me. Doesn't matter a jot that you are BNF, BAFF, Arbitrator of Taste Big Head, Above Such Things as Writing Locs, Hard Up, Supercilious Bastard, Bearded, Plain Shaven, Bald or Hairy, Male or Female the chop has come.

1985 is going to be hard for me, money work and leisure-time at a premium. Remember, there ain't no such thing as a free meal.

You have been warned!



THANK YOU to Mal Ashworth, Hazel Ashworth, Vin~~ce~~ Clarke, Dave Langford, ATom, Harry Andruschak, Chums, Pall Mall Nigel E. Richardson and all who LoCed in providing the raw grist for the mill this time round. Mr West sends his apologies but as he is currently preparing to spill the blood of fandom once more (another case of 'his carp runneth over'?) he had to lay down his pencil and miss the deadline. The article will be his first piece of '85 leading to the Nova for fanwriter. A matching trophy for the one he so deservedly won for Fan Artist in '84. Modestly he confided he will not be going for the Grand Slam. "Fanzine production is beyond me."

An
American in

YVSTER

HARRY ANDRUSCHAK



A PREDICTION CONCERNING RINGS AROUND THE PLANET NEPTUNE

When talking to Larry Niven at the 19th VIRGILEO Party and Ice Cream Social last August the conversation came round to future Jet Propulsion Lab (JPL) events.

I made a prediction about the Neptune encounter scheduled for 24 August 1989. Later on another fan dared me to put that prediction into print.

I realise the folly of this, of course. Years and years working at JPL should have taught me that any predictions about what we will find in the solar system are likely to be wrong. But I did some work on the JPL computers with my good friend Doctor Shack the Quack, running his SWAG program. (Scientific Wild-Assed Guesstimate Program.)

WE WILL NOT FIND RINGS AROUND THE PLANET NEPTUNE.

- 1) The moon TRITON has been retrograded in its orbit round the planet.
- 2) The moon NEREID has an eccentricity of 0.749.
- 3) PLUTO would seem to be a runaway moon of Neptune.

All this points to some violent event early in the history of the solar system affecting the Neptunian system. It is hard to believe that a fragile ring system could survive the upheaval.

As for what actually caused all this, that is hard to say. A likely candidate is "Planet X", the long-sought for tenth planet that would account for the anomalies in the orbit of Uranus and Neptune. Pluto does not have the mass for it.

Yet in 1930's, after discovering Pluto, Clyde W. Tombaugh continued to search for trans-neptunian planets. He found none. And that seems pretty conclusive.

Anyway as I said, we will know the answers come 24 August 1989.

Perhaps we can have a panel at the World Con that year on the latest discoveries in the Neptunian system.

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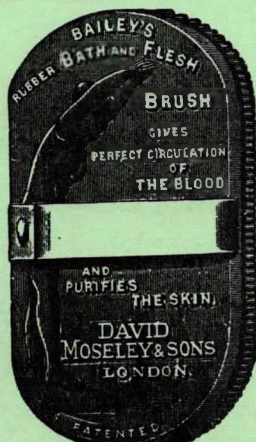
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