

YOU ONLY



LIVE ONCE

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Published in 2007 by Kim Huett for the special amusement of all John Brosnan fans anywhere and anytime.  
All written and drawn material is by John Brosnan himself except for the editorial which is by Kim Huett.  
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# John Brosnan & Life: A Fight to the Death

I can't claim to have been a close friend of John's, I never even met him in person, nor did we exchange more than a handful of letters. It would be more accurate to say I knew of John rather than knew him. Early on in my own fannish career I discovered some of John's better writing in places such as Peter Robert's EGG and the various incarnations of John's own fanzines. It wasn't hard to to admire the gleefully scurrilous manner in which John wrote about fandom and his rather erratic life. Mind you, as much as I enjoyed the carnage that flowed out of his typewriter I did wonder what the likes of Roy Kettle, John Hall, and Chris Priest had done to deserve such drubbings, and why they hadn't taken to John with big, big sticks in return.

My only direct contact with John came when the Twentieth Anniversary of ANZAPA (the Australian & New Zealand Amateur Press Association) approached and it was decided to encourage past members to contribute. I didn't hesitate to contact John and ask if he would like to write something. (He would, and did, in the form of SON OF WHY BOTHER #4, the last item in this collection.) During the exchange of letters that my inquiry sparked I suggested that since Perry Middlemiss had already labelled me a 'larrikin writer' I was clearly his heir and thus be considered a member of Ratfandom. John responded by suggesting that I'd need to do better than that to back such a claim. So I sent him a bill for my board and education and a note that he had till the end of the month to reimburse me. He must have laughed because in his next letter he named me an Australian auxiliary, a Kangaroo Rat if you like. Trouble was he also casually let slip that he had told his publishers that as his heir I would take over his Harry Adam Knight responsibilities once he no longer able deal with them. He assured me he had supreme confidence in my ability to complete any and all undelivered books. I'm still a bit worried about that actually. . .

John Brosnan discovered fandom in the mid-sixties while still living in Perth. Back then John was a comics fan first and foremost so while he corresponded with various fans (and even met John Bangsund, editor of ASFR, during one of Bangsund's trips to Perth) it was with John Ryan that he formed his closest relationship. So much so that when John decided to expand his horizons by moving to Sydney it was with the Ryans that he first lived.

For the next couple of years John was an active part of the Sydney fan scene and Australian fandom as a whole. It wasn't enough apparently because in 1970 he became involved in a project to convert a double-decker bus and use it to travel to England (this was back in the days when young Australians who found their country of birth too limited and dull would conceive a desire for Mother England). The trip didn't run as smoothly as planned (according to John this was mostly because many of the original participants dropped out before the trip even started and their replacements were less than suitable) but despite this John survived till Greece where he decided to complete the trip on his own.

Having abandoned the bus like a rat fleeing a sinking ship it was entirely appropriate that John's next move was to become a leading light with the London based group known as Ratfandom. And so it was that in the company of characters such as Greg Pickersgill, Roy Kettle, Robert Holdstock, John Hall, and Peter Roberts, John proceeded to create havoc in both the elegant steets of London and the cultured drawing rooms of British fandom.

Not content with his reputation as a fanwriter to be reckoned with, (John was given a Novacon award for 'Best Fanzine' in 1974) he broke into the professional ranks with **James Bond in the Cinema**. After this the need to earn a living via professional sales saw John's fannish output shink and almost entirely disappear by the beginning of the eighties.

I won't attempt to summarise John's career any further as that story would be better told by the likes of John Baxter, Roy Ketter or Robert Holdstock, close friends of John's who kept in contact with him right to the end. I on the other hand had not heard from John for years when Roy Kettle passed on the news of John's death in April, 2005.

In a way it was disconcerting news because John had speculated about his own demise so often over the years that I half-expected him to outlive us all. None-the-less it didn't take me long to decide how I should respond. While I'm not sure I have what it takes to be the next Harry Adam Knight (or even the old one in clever plastic disguise) it felt right that I should offer to publish a collection of John's best fannish material.

As it happened I'd already put John's name on a list of fans who deserved to be honoured by reprinting some of their better work. I had even drawn up a preliminary list of possible articles for a Brosnan collection so actually taking on this task was hardly a reach.

Mind you, I never planned on taking so long to complete the project, but then again when I originally suggested a collection I didn't realise the end result would be quite this large. However I like to think the fact that there is so much I couldn't bring myself to leave out is a tribute to the quality of John's writing rather than a lack of taste on my part. None-the-less if it were not for Bill Burns and the eFanzines website I would have been forced to make some very difficult choices in order to keep the overall length manageable. I'd like to thank Bill for ensuring that there was no need for me to separate the cream from the merely good. While I'm at it I'd also like to thank Leroy Kettle, Ian Maule, Rob Hansen, and everybody else who made suggestions and offered financial or moral support. Projects like this are so much easier to finish when you know that there is an audience eager to see the final result.

And that is enough from me, I can only hope the wait has been worth it.

# Confessions of a Job Hopper

Since leaving the civilised part of Australia and settling in Sydney I've been indulging in a new hobby.

No, not that. It's called job-hopping.

Job-hopping is something that I've always had an urge to do but back in the West parental pressure sort of hampered me. Now, free from such influences, I'm able to act out these reckless, devil-may-care impulses. Actually I find a regular change of occupation rather refreshing and since I've been in Sydney I've had three jobs. Not much of a record for a professional job-hopper (Brian Richards tells me that at one stage of his career he had thirteen jobs within two years) but not bad for a beginner.

I landed my first job a couple of weeks after arriving in Sydney. Being in a hurry due to dwindling funds I wasn't too choosy and grabbed the first thing that came along. It was as a sales clerk with Harding and Halden, wholesalers and retailers for drawing and printing equipment. As jobs go it was a fairly uninspiring affair and I'm surprised now that I managed to stick it out for as long as I did.

Most interesting aspect of it all was the girl I worked with, a magnificent creature called Jan. Jan had been with Harding and Halden for about six years and was in charge of the art department (that department then consisting of herself. . . and me). She was also a health fanatic and a gymnastics champion, which was the reason why she looked so magnificent. Soon I learned that her husband was also a health fanatic - and a body builder. Seeing the two of them together was like getting a sample of life on Olympus.

Unfortunately, as beautiful as she was, her range of conversation didn't match her exciting exterior. In the two and a half months that I was there I received a steady barrage of words that concerned three subjects only. They were:

Gymnastics, which she also taught.

Health.

And George. George was her husband

Previously I had no particular feelings towards gymnastics, apart from the mild aversion I have for all forms of physical exertion. Now the very mention of the sport is enough to set me twitching.

One night every week Jan would hold her gymnastics class and for the rest of the week I would hear all about it. And I mean all. Nothing was omitted; not one groan escaped from a contorted class member without me hearing about it. The only respite I received from this almost perpetual onslaught was when she switched to the subject of health. . . or George.

Fanatics are all pretty much the same, whether they be health fanatics, religious fanatics, or sf fanatics. Invariably they find it incomprehensible that anyone could fail to share their enthusiasm. Jan was no exception.

Now those of you who have seen me in the flesh know that I'm not exactly what one would term a specimen of bursting health and vitality. Every morning when I arrived at work, usually numb from the neck down as a result of the Sydney winter, she would say with her usual flair for subtlety, "God, you look terrible."

I think she despised me for allowing myself to reach the miserable physical state that I was in. Constantly she told me about special diets and exercises that possibly would alleviate my terrible condition.

Jan's passion for health also extended into other areas of life, I'll always remember her comment the day after Robert Kennedy was killed, "It's such a shame," she said, "He had such white teeth."

As for George - may he now be wearing a truss.

I've always wanted to work in a bookshop. As John Bangsund can verify Perth is not exactly the city for opportunities of this type. So, since arriving in Sydney I had been keeping an eye out for vacancies. It wasn't until July that I spotted anything. The position offered was bookshop assistant at the Pocket Bookshop. I managed to wrangle an interview with the owner, who turned out to be Mr Jim Thorburn, a well-known Sydney bookseller, though I didn't know that at the time.

There were a lot of things I didn't know at that time.

Thorburn explained to me that he was opening a new shop. His current shop, on the corner of Martin Place and Pitt Street, though successful, was getting too small. He intended to keep both shops running for about a year until the new one was established, and then close the first one.

The whole thing impressed me, and I was pleased a week or so later when I learned that my application had been successful.

Heh.

The following Monday morning I arrived bright and shiny at the Martin Place shop. There I was introduced by Thorburn to the fellow he'd hired as manager of the new shop, a Dutch refugee from Indonesia. His name was Henfling.

With Henfling I walked through to the new shop in King Street. I'm not sure what I expected - possibly a book shop full of books, ready to be tidied up a bit then opened to the public. So I received a shock when I walked down the stairs.

There was nothing. And I mean nothing.

No books, no shelves, no carpet - no nothing. Just a thin layer of sawdust covering the floorboards.

"Where is it?" I asked.

"Vere is vot?" replied Henfling.

"The bookshop."

Henfling frowned, not grasping my rapier-like wit.

"Where are all the books?"

"Some of dem are in the storeroom out back. The rest have not yet arrived."

By now it was beginning to dawn on me just what I'd let myself in for. And things grew worse.

For one thing I learned that during the next week or so several thousand books would be arriving - and the storeman, a Swede by the name of Leif, was away playing ice hockey.

So for the first two days I spent my time dicing with hernia as I dragged bloody great cartons off trucks and hauled them downstairs. Somehow it didn't measure up to my pre-conceived images of working in a bookshop.

But on the third day the real fun began. A round, bearded man, a sort of larger model of John Bangsund, arrived at the shop. He turned out to be a publisher's representative from Adelaide. With him also arrived several large, heavy crates. (How he got them off the truck is a story in itself.)

These were the bookshelves. Guess who had to put them together?

The round, bearded man stayed around long enough to demonstrate how to erect one of the shelves, then he fled the state. His shelf later collapsed.

The next three weeks I spent lying on my back, or on my knees, or on my stomach, screwing.

Shelves together, that is.

I now consider myself an expert shelf mantler. (Mantler is the opposite to dismantler.) Anyone who wants to see the results of my labours can drop into the Pocket Bookshop in King Street and have a look. Of course I can't take all the credit. Henfling helped a bit, and so did a young Irish lad by the name of Brian. (Poor kid, he wandered into Thorburn's other shop looking for work; he was saving up to go back to Ireland, and the next thing he knew he was on his back screwing shelves together.) Thorburn didn't help. Every so often he would come along and give the shelf one happened to be working on a vigorous shake. Metal would groan and screws would pop out in all directions, "Not tight enough," he would say and walk away.

Eventually all the shelves were erected, the carpet laid, and the air-conditioning switched on. Thorburn declared the shop open, and to start things rolling, he organised a sale. It's still on.

But at last it began to feel the way I expected working in a bookshop to feel. The main joy came from arranging and re-arranging the sf section, which quickly I declared to be my exclusive territory. And as Thorburn's ad in THE MENTOR claimed, it is the biggest selection you're likely to find in one shop in all of Sydney.

Unfortunately this period of contentment didn't last. By this time Thorburn had decided to take over the running of the new shop himself instead of sticking to his previous plan. So Henfling got the sack.

As much as I admire Jim Thorburn, for he has a tremendous, in fact incredible knowledge of books, and is genuinely interested in sf, I have to admit that working with him proved a little difficult. Therefore I started to look around for another job. To my surprise I soon found one, this time as an accounts reconciliation clerk with Commonwealth Industrial Gases. To be honest I'd never reconciled an account before in my life but I didn't think I'd bother them at CIG with useless information like that.

My only problem then was to inform Thorburn that I was leaving, I hadn't picked the best of times, for he had just invited me to a cocktail party that he was holding to celebrate the opening of the shop. I debated

with myself whether to tell him before the party and then gracefully decline the invitation, or wait until the following morning. The prospect of all that free drink swayed me to the latter decision. And was I glad. . .because first I got loaded with the job of acting as doorman, and then I ended up serving the drinks.

But I made up for it. With Leif, the ice-hockey-playing Swede, I got blind. Later on during the night Thorburn, filled with alcoholic geniality, came over and told us both how much he appreciated our help, and how good things were going to be once the shop became established. It was a touching moment. Me being sloshed, I almost cried. Leif, who knew I was leaving, almost killed himself trying not to laugh.

The next morning it was Saturday. I came in with a hangover and guilt feelings, and resigned. I must say that Thorburn took it very well.

In a way I'm sorry I left the bookshop. In some respects it was quite enjoyable. The customers were interesting and often amusing, instead of merely being annoying as they had been during my other selling jobs.

My changes of occupation always seem to coincide with other changes in my life. At the time I left Harding and Halden and started work at the Pocket Bookshop a friend of mine from Perth, Richard Harmer, arrived in Sydney. Previously we'd decided to share a flat together, so his arrival sparked off a flat hunt and a subsequent shift from the Ryan stronghold at Fairfield to Kensington (and a sudden drop in living standards). Looking back, I can see that we were too hasty. I can't think of any other reason why we picked that dump. For \$20 we got two rooms and a kitchen. Kitchen. . . ha! Our landlord, Clive ("Call me Clive, boys.") had cunningly sub-divided a broom cupboard six times and called the result kitchens. We also got to share a bathroom. . .if we were lucky.

Before long, as was to be expected, I had committed most of the cliché mistakes of the new, naive flat-dweller.

I had blown out all the fuses in the building after changing a light globe.

I had blown up a can of steak and onions. This resulted from placing the can directly on the hot plate so as not to 'waste time mucking about with water in a saucepan'. When it swelled up like a balloon I became alarmed, "Hey," I said to Richard, "Don't be surprised if a geyser of steak and onions goes spurting up the wall."

I stuck the opener in the can and - lo and behold - a geyser of steak and onions went spurting up the wall. The stain is probably still there, unless the new occupants have cleaned up the place.

I broke an egg and not only missed the frying pan with it, but also missed the stove. They don't make egg shells like they use to.

I set fire to the kitchen stove. This was the most exciting incident. I was sitting on a stool reading while I waited for some garbage to cook, when I noticed a strange odour. (For an odour to be noticed in that place it had to be really strange.) For a time I ignored it until it became so strong that even someone as dense as me had to realise that something was amiss. Finally after much sniffing it occurred to me to check the stove. I opened the door and flames shot out.

Quickly I shut it.

My quick glance had revealed that the source of the fire was in the grease drip-tray or whatever the professionals call the thing. With this bit of info assimilated I began to wonder about putting it out. What does one do with a grease fire? Throw water on it? Or wet sand? Or was it a wet blanket? Where could I get a wet blanket?

Keeping cool and perfectly calm I decided to ignore it for awhile. I began to read again.

Black smoke started to curl out from under the door.

Panic.

It was time for decisive action. I shot out the door and almost collided with a fellow flat-dweller just coming out of his own kitchen.

"Excuse me," I said, "but my stove is on fire."

He raised his eyebrows, "What?"

"My stove is on fire," I repeated.

"Oh. . ." he said. There was a lengthy pause, and then he said, "Let's see." I led him inside and opened the oven door. On cue the flames roared out.

"Hmm," he said, and stood there staring at the bloody thing for what seemed ages. I started to fidget.

"I was considering wet sand," I ventured.

"Hmm? Oh no. . ." He reached over, grabbed a tea towel and wrapped it around his hand. Then he extended his hand into the inferno and withdrew the blazing tray. This he dropped into the sink and turned on the cold-water trap.

I know now that this wasn't the correct thing to do. An eruption of flame resulted. I yelped and tried to climb over him in an effort to reach the door. It wasn't fear. It's just that I wanted to make sure that my comic book collection was safe before the rest of the building caught fire.

"It's okay now," he said calmly, I turned around and saw that the flames had died down to a mild splutter.

"Thanks," I muttered. He grunted something and made a nonchalant exit.

I cleaned up the mess, then went to have dinner in town. Afterwards I went to see the movie I had intended seeing. It was (and this is the truth) *In the Heat Of the Night*.

As I was saying. . .every time I change jobs something happens. And when I left the bookshop and started at Commonwealth Industrial Gases it was no exception.

The Saturday night between jobs Richard and I had gone to see a terrible movie called *The Battle of Anzio*. It proved to be another prophetic title. After the show Richard suggested making a detour through Martin Place, as he wanted to post a letter. As we walked past the post office a herd of young er. . .teenagers. . .ran past us in the opposite direction.

"Boo!" yelled one of them.

Not wanting to let such an example of devastating wit go by unappreciated I turned and clapped.

It was one of my more stupid acts. We had continued about three yards when I heard the pitter patter of little feet. After that things became confused. . .and messy.

To cut a gory story short, I finished up lying in the road in a definitely kicked condition. I staggered to my feet (I would have stayed there longer but the traffic was beginning to bother me) and fell onto the bonnet of a nearby car. And came face to face with a gentleman sitting in the car who stared back with placid unconcern, Naturally I don't blame him for staying in his car during the fight (fight - ha!) but I do resent his lack of interest even when the danger was past.

Then I began to stagger down Martin Place looking for Richard. I assumed that he was lying between two cars in a similarly battered condition. I was a little surprised, then annoyed, when I saw him strolling leisurely towards me, apparently unmarked. It turned out that he had made a break for it at the start of the fight and had outrun a couple of the bastards. I must admit that he didn't escape completely unscathed - an injured neck and a few bruises, but minor compared with my own injuries.

By this time strange things were beginning to happen to my face. I'd been kicked in the jaw, among other places, and it was swelling at an alarming rate. Also it made funny crunching noises when I opened my mouth. By the time that we reached home my head was twice its normal size. I drank half a bottle of wine, took several aspirins, put a cold compress on my face, and went to bed.

By Monday the swelling had only just started to go down. I had cuts and grazes across my nose and forehead and my eyes were hideously bloodshot. It was in this condition that I arrived at my new job. My new boss took one look at me and sent me to their first-aid officer. (Little did they know that the bloodshot eyes were normal.) He took one look and sent me to the hospital to have an x-ray. After that I went home.

Now that's the way to start a new job.

So far I'm still at CIG - mainly because I'm too afraid to switch jobs again. CIG isn't a bad place to work for. Actually they paid me for that first day as well as paying for the x-rays. The place is also full of interesting people. I think it must be one of nature's compensations that, even though I am such a drab personality myself, I meet so many nuts. My office is full of them.

There's Jim Wagstaff, my co-accounts-reconciler, who attributes his success with the girls to his callused hands (he's a gymnast and the calluses are caused by parallel bars etc). "They don't like it much at first," he explains, "but then it drives them wild."

And Diane, another reconciler, who wears the shortest mini-skirts in CIG and who once told me she saw a UFO while in the back seat of a car parked at night in a national park a few years ago.

And Chris, a former ballet teacher, who has the most beautiful legs in CIG. She is also deeply religious, a fault I find it hard to overlook, and she was once profoundly shocked at the morning-tea table when Wagstaff and I argued in favour of free love. She also has an obnoxious boyfriend by the name of John who said I'd sounded 'queer' after speaking to me on the phone.

And Walter, part English, part Pakistani, who left Pakistan because of the 'increasing prejudice there' and also because he didn't want his daughter to end up marrying one of those Pakistanis.

And Charles, a refugee from Ceylon.

And Tim and Beau, refugees from the American Navy.

And God, alias the accountant, who made the most hilarious speech I've ever heard just after I started work there. "I'm not God," he kept insisting as if he didn't expect us to believe him, "I make mistakes." The speech concerned some new efficiency measures that he was enforcing. He believes that the next depression is just around the corner and if we want to keep our jobs when it arrives we'd better start working harder now, "I want to be able to guarantee your jobs," he said, "and I intend doing just that even if I have to sack people to do it!"

He's a real riot.

# Most Memorable Moment at the Melbourne Convention

Today we took our cameras to the home of that famous non-writer, John Brosnan. The purpose of our visit? To learn what moment of the Melbourne Science Fiction Convention impressed him most of all.

We found him reclining amidst the magnificent decadence of his Maroubra apartment. In the background a record player was thumping out the 'Dawn Raid on Fort Knob' theme from *Goldfinger*. Flies were tracing enigmatic patterns on a genuine Ditko *Spiderman* poster hanging on the wall. A half-eaten loaf of bread, covered with green mold, dragged itself across the floor on little legs grown especially for the purpose.

"Now, Mr Brosnan," we began, "would you mind telling us what moment of the Melbourne SF Con impressed you the most?"

Mr Brosnan took a sip from his drink, a mixture of kerosene and cheap claret, and stared at the ceiling from which hung a delightful cluster of eyeballs. "Well," he said, "I suppose it was seeing Raquel Welch's mammaries"

"Imported to the con at great expense, we presume?" we asked. He shook his head violently, dislodging a landslide of dandruff.

"Oh no. . .they were nothing to do with the con. As a matter of fact I saw them alongside a road, hovering at a height of about twenty feet. Bloody mind-boggling sight it was, I can tell you."

"So we can imagine," we agreed. "But we've heard rumours that. . .ah. . .certain. . .err. . .shall we say mind clouding materials. . .were smoked at the con. Perhaps you. . .?"

Mr Brosnan gave a sly laugh. "I see what you're getting at. No, it wasn't that at all. And I wasn't the only one to see them. Gary Mason and Peter Darling, two well known Sydney playboys, also saw them."

"We don't quite understand. . ."

"It's like this. The three of us were heading back, in Peter Darling's car, to Bangsund territory on the Saturday night of the con. As we were passing this drive-in theatre we saw them! There, in all their wide-screen panavision glory, were Raquel Welch's mammaries! And Raquel Welch too, but that's only a minor detail.

"Peter Darling immediately sent the car swerving in a tight u-turn that ended up with us on the other side of the road and facing the screen. (I can't get over the fact of how close to the road Melbourne drive-ins have their screens.) And there we stayed for I don't know how long, faces pressed against the windshield (which was pretty difficult for me being as I was in the back seat.) Every now and then one of us would utter some significant comment such as. . .COR! . . .WOW! . . .or OH MY GOD!"

We laughed. "We see it all now, Mr Brosnan. Tell us, have the SSFF made any definite plans for the 1970 Sydney convention?"

"Well, we've already written to Raquel Welch's agent and. . ."

# Rejection Slips Are a Many Splendoured Thing

Though my interest in Fleming is relatively recent in comparison to my interest in science fiction the choice of subject for my first book was a result of the former. Not that the two are unrelated. I personally consider the James Bond books to be contemporary fantasy epics. One particular aspect of Fleming's books that I find attractive is the villains. Always all-powerful, larger than life, often approaching the supernatural, they are an integral part of the Bond mystique. This is something that Fleming's imitators have overlooked in the past. One who didn't was Michael Cooney in **Doomsday England**, another, of course, was Kingsley Amis with **Colonel Sun**.

My original idea was to create the ultimate Fleming villain, who was to be called Syron Van Dam. VD, as I called him for short, was a megalomaniac who had bought an island off the coast of Queensland and was renting it to the Russians as a submarine base. Nothing new as far as the plot was concerned I know. Where my book was going to excel was in the treatment of Van Dan's character. A really ambitious study into the nature of evil. Plus a lot of sadism.

As a test run I wrote a story called *Kill Klan Kill*, in which I used my central character, Alexander Mace, who was a blatant imitation of James Bond. This I sent to *Man Junior* who promptly rejected it with the note that the 'subject was too involved for a short story'. Not wanting to let all that work go to waste I decided to extend the story into a novel. Which I did, and which took about a year. I then began to rewrite it. When I started I had no idea as to where I would send it when I was finished, but in the meantime I read a letter in *ASFR* by Ron Smith, an editor at Horwitz as you all know. His mention of paying \$200 for a novel (this was back when Horwitz actually bought new material) really excited me. So when the book was completed I sent it to him. This was in February 1968.

In April of '68 I moved East, pausing in Melbourne for the Conference. I hadn't heard anything from Smith at that time and Lee Harding effectively dampened any hopes I had of selling it to Horwitz by telling me about his own meeting with Smith. When I arrived in Sydney I rang Smith and he invited me to visit him in the offices of Horwitz. Which I did.

Smith's office seemed to be filled with unopened envelopes containing manuscripts. He fished mine out of the sludge pile and handed it back to me, telling me how bad things were at the moment in the local publishing game. I believed him. He then suggested I try a literary agency by the name of Curtis Brown. I still haven't decided if I'm grateful to Ron Smith for that piece of advice.

Anyway, I posted the manuscript away to them and sat back to await results. Two months later I received a letter from a Mr Peter Grose. Here is what it said:

'Your manuscript, **An Echo of Jackboots**, has posed me with a very difficult decision. It came back to me with an enthusiastic reader's report, and there are many aspects of the book which make it marketable.

In the end I felt I should return it to you with some suggestions for alterations, and ask that you re-submit it.

I liked the central character, Mace, but I think he has certain faults which will need some painful editing on your part. Mace moralises too much. A man who can be as ruthless as he is

in other scenes would not, I think, take the self-righteous attitude Mace adopts from time to time.

This is a question of marketing as much as anything else. The most successful books in this genre today have characters who are quite amoral.

Second, I think there is too much mayhem to keep the book believable. I lost count of the number of people killed, but it does really get out of hand. I don't think readers would accept the idea that this kind of carnage could take place in Australia today.

On the credit side, your subject matter is good. Books with a Nazi theme still sell well, and some recent spy films have taken the Nazi revival as their subject.

One other point troubles me about the book. I felt that the sadism in it was too much for the ordinary reader. Although violence is now as commercial an ingredient as sex, I found some of the torture scenes and the eye episode too sickening. I think readers would rebel against this.

I hope these suggestions make sense to you. I realise they involve quite a lot of restructuring of the book, but I think it will be a more saleable property.

I look forward to hearing from you again.'

As you can imagine the letter was a boost to my ego (a much needed one), very encouraging, and at the same time, very annoying. I disagreed with much of what he said, and realised that the term 'restructuring' would probably mean rewriting the whole thing. I was right.

I rang him up as soon as I could and he re-affirmed much of what he had said in his letter. As with the letter the phone conversation produced mixed feelings in me. It soon became apparent that his idea of what type the book should be like and mine deviated greatly. His model was John le Carre while mine, of course, was Fleming. It became obvious that I would have to write an entirely different book if I was to satisfy him. I agreed with some of his suggestions, such as cutting down the number of killings (I too had lost count when I tried to total them) and that there should be more detail.

"It should be more like the last chapter," he had said, "you obviously know a great deal about aircraft and weapons."

"Err," I replied, "actually I got all that off a single page in *Time*."

What particularly irked me was the criticism of the so-called excessive sadism. True, the book was a little on the violent side but I don't think it was as bad as he made out in his letter. And I was really annoyed at his comment about the eye episode being sickening. That was about the only original touch in the whole book.

Briefly, this is how the plot went: Alexander Mace, an ex-British agent who has been sacked by the British Secret Service for going to pieces after being tortured by a group of villains in New York, (WARNING, the first person who laughs at any of this will be thrown out) is hired by the Australian government. Apparently the Australian government is always open for slightly used spies. His first assignment is to wreck a Klu Klux Klan rally which is to be held in a NSW town. He does so, wounding and killing an indeterminate number of people along the way. It is then discovered that the Klan was backed by an organisation called Rache, which

is a worldwide Nazi conspiracy. Not only that but Rache was the same organisation that Mace ran afoul of in New York. The plot thickens and all that.

Rache (which is German for revenge. . . as you can see the book almost beats *2001* for symbolism) is trying to create chaos in Australia by all sorts of devious means. Such as working to have the White Australia Policy abolished while encouraging the growth of the Klu Klux Klan. You couldn't get any more devious than that. Rache also has a small sideline, killing Jews who testified in the War Crimes trials. It is a series of these gristly slayings that sets the hero and his friends on the track of the baddies. At this point I decided to interrupt the violent deaths for a spot of sex, so the hero finds himself in bed with a girl. Alarmed at having to fill a whole chapter with interesting pornography I hit upon the idea of having them talk a lot. As a result the hero and the girl cover a wide range of subjects, including politics, God and the Theory of Relativity, in between bouts of lovemaking. Then, with a sigh of relief, it was back to the killing.

The hero's best friend is captured by Rache and tortured to death by a fiend wielding a pair of pliers. Then the hero receives his girlfriend's hair (and attached scalp) in a paper bag. Her head is never found (thus allowing the book to end on a mysterious note). Miffed, the hero strikes back and launches a one-man raid on the headquarters of Rache, which is the mansion belonging to Adrian Spiros, blind religious fanatic and well-known philanthropist. (Someone's laughing. . .) Mace succeeds in breaking into the fortress-like building and proving that Spiros is the villain, he then calls for reinforcements. These, like all government sponsored operations, take time in coming. So Mace has time to wander around and do things like getting caught. He also discovers a trophy case full of petrified eyeballs, several of which seems familiar.

This was the part that Peter Gross found so disturbing and which I considered to be my most original touch. Spiros, you see, was a taxidermist in his youth and had kept up an interest in his hobby. Only instead of stuffing whole bodies he now concentrated on eyes. At first I described the eyeballs as being inflated with compressed air and covered with varnish, thinking that that would be all that was necessary. But on mentioning it to Brian Richards, the former Perth OPSM man, he informed me that it wouldn't work. Eyes, he informed me, lost their colour soon after death. Something to do with the pigmentation fading through lack of oxygen. This sad but intriguing fact meant that I would have to choose an alternative method. So I had the villain using touched-up contact lenses. Not very satisfactory.

But when I was rewriting the book (for the final time) I received a letter from Brian Richards in which he brought the subject up again. It was possible, he said, to have the eyes retain their colouring by replacing the corneas with a special clear plastic called polypolymethylmethacrylate (available at all chemists). I'm not sure of the spelling as Brian's handwriting is not the best, as some of you know. Naturally I couldn't let this piece of fascinating information go to waste and kept the eye sequence in despite Peter Gross and his weak stomach.

As for the rest of the story: Mace stabs the villain (only wounding him), is in turn shot (but is only wounded), and taken by the baddies when they attempt to leave the country. This he foils by blowing up their boat and everyone on it with a flamethrower. The final two chapters concern the destruction of the Nazi headquarters in Brazil. (The original had the headquarters situated in Argentina but some hasty research revealed that my deep jungle setting was in actual fact a plain.) The climax is an sf type battle in which everyone, except the hero, dies happily ever after.

"It all depends on how much work you want to put into the rewriting," Peter Gross had said during one of our phone conversations. "Instead of the \$200 you originally hoped to get, you could make as much as \$20 000."

"\$20 000?" I sort of whispered into the mouthpiece.

"At least. Providing we can sell the film rights. And it's highly possible that Reg Goldsworthy would buy it. He's desperate for material."

I put the phone down in a daze. \$20 000? It couldn't be. I couldn't believe it. There I was, at twenty years of age and almost in the big time. It couldn't be that easy. There must be a catch. There were all those years of hard work, of struggling. Where were all those rejection slips that one heard so much about? All writers were suppose to go through that stage before they finally made it. It helped build their characters, fired their spirits with an unquenchable will to succeed. It didn't seem fair that I would have to miss it.

I started rewriting almost immediately, anxious to get my hands on the \$20 000 so I could scoot off to the Riviera and soak up atmosphere or something. I even decided that I would do some research, add the detail that Gross wanted in the book. So I went to the State Library in my lunch hour.

"Have you anything on the Klu Klux Klan?" I asked one of the librarians, feeling slightly silly.

"I beg your pardon?" He answered, eyeing me uneasily.

"I'm after information on the Klu Klux Klan, preferably the Australian branch if there is one."

"Why?" He looked as if he expected me to whip out a burning cross on the spot.

"Err," I said while I thought furiously. I couldn't say I was writing a book, that would be too banal. "Err, it's for my school project."

"The Klu Klux Klan?"

"Yes. I read somewhere that there was an Australian branch of the Klan established here during the forties but I'd like some definite information."

"Hmm, I don't know if I'll be able to help you." He led me over to their index file. He poked around in the files for awhile then shook his head. It was obviously only a token effort.

"Aren't there any books about obscure Australian political movements?" I suggested.

"No. Not that I know of." He began to back off.

"Oh well, thanks anyway," I said and retreated. So endeth the research.

Four months later I had rewritten the book and returned it to the agency. Three months later I received it back with a note that said:

'Please find enclosed your manuscript, **An Echo of Jackboots**, which I return with regret. Unfortunately I find that my original criticisms still stand. Also, this field has become increasingly competitive and only a book of this type that was completely flawless would stand a chance of being launched successfully.'

I was overjoyed. No longer was my youthful spirit in danger of being corrupted. The threat of easy wealth had been removed. I was saved!

With the objectivity a year provides I realise now that there was nothing surprising in this rejection. Frankly, it was a terrible book. A bomb. Perhaps the worst ever written. My main mistake, of course, was ignoring the agent's suggestions altogether and rewriting the book in exactly the same form. But apart from my belief that the thing was fine as it was, I had the fear that if I changed it too dramatically I would lose whatever had attracted him in the first place. And, most of all, I didn't want to give up on the eyeballs.

My initial reaction was to rewrite the thing again, this time the way he wanted it. But I balked at that idea. I was fed up to the teeth with the thing and wanted to forget all about it. I had wasted too much time with it when I could have been doing other things. My next idea was to write a book around my original idea, Van Dam etc, but shelved this as the finished product would be even more far-fetched than **Jackboots** and would surely not be Gross' cup of tea. So I sent the manuscript off to Ace Books via surface mail with the hope that the ship carrying it would sink. Unfortunately it didn't and the damn thing came back, with a rejection slip.

In the past year I've received several rejection slips and now consider my character to be well and truly built. I've had them from everyone. . . Pohl, Campbell, *F&SF*. . . even John Bangsund whose slip was the nicest. The most interesting came from *Galaxy*, who included a little booklet on how to write. These rejections are all for short stories. **Jackboots** has been consigned to the bottom of a suitcase where it will stay for good. A mouldering trophy to the right to have petrified eyeballs.

# The Double-Decker Dud Disaster

Just in case there are some of you out there who haven't heard about it before (which must be unlikely considering the publicity we received) I will begin by mentioning that, at the beginning of 1969, a group of us traveled by double-decker bus to Europe. It was not what you could call a successful venture, for a number of reasons. For one thing we didn't get to where we were going. . . we aimed to get to England but only got as far as Italy (some of us only got as far as Greece) before having to abandon the bus. It was a failure due to mainly bad organisation and the type of people who made up the crew of fourteen. Everyone hated everyone, you see. Not that this state of affairs grew slowly as the trip progressed, we were quarreling before we even left Bombay. You've heard of love at first sight? Well, with some of the people involved it was hate at first sight.

If the people who were originally involved with the project had remained I don't think we would have had the problems we did have. But many of the people who finally left for India in March were fairly recent acquisitions to the group and were unfamiliar with the other people and also with the nature of the trip itself. But this doesn't excuse the relationship between Chris Guy and myself degenerating to one of barely concealed hatred as it did later in the journey. Yes, in case you're wondering, Ron Clarke and I are still on speaking terms.

Despite all this it was still enjoyable in many ways and certainly worth doing, and all of us who took part have some unique memories to carry with us. In the next couple of pages I shall attempt to recount a few of the more amusing episodes of the trip. Such as: *How We Lost the Bus*, and *Is This Afghanistan?*

## How We Lost the Bus

Just before we were due to leave New Delhi, I managed to acquire a toothache. So I went along to a dentist who turned out to be a pleasant Sikh, turban and all. On learning that I would be leaving the next day he told me, after taking an x-ray of the offending tooth, that there would not be sufficient time to do the necessary work on it. Instead he gave me a letter to take to a friend of his in Lahore (obviously a friendship that formed in the days before partition) who was a dental mechanic. This friend, he assured me, would direct me to a reliable dentist in Lahore.

We arrived in Lahore about a week later, on April 20. The first night we spent a few miles out of town, parked in front of a Police station. It was at this time that we were having our first taste of mechanical trouble with the bus (not counting the boiling over it did at the slightest hint of an incline in the road). The clutch was acting up and we were going to have to find somewhere to have it repaired the next morning. So, come the next morning, we drive the bus, on the directions of one of the policemen, down the road to a nearby village. It was thought that there was a mechanic there who would be able to help us, but it turned out he could only fix things like electric fans. Faced with a double-decker bus he sort of paled and shook his head. . .

Chris had promised to take me into Lahore to look for a dentist, so we removed the motorbike from its usual resting-place. . .the back stairs, and prepared to move off. Suddenly my toothache vanished, not from fear of the dentist but from fear of riding on the back of the bike with Chris. That bike was bad news, if it wasn't crashing it was breaking down. But I gave in, put on a crash helmet, and climbed on. While we were in town the others were going to take the bus back to the police station. After Chris had dropped me he was to rejoin the others and they would search for somewhere else where repairs could be made.

There are no such things as atheists in foxholes, they say. Nor are there atheists on the back of motorbikes

being driven by Chris Guy in Pakistani traffic. But we reached the address of the dental mechanic in one piece, physically anyway, and as the New Delhi dentist had promised, I was able to obtain the name of a good Lahore dentist from him. (He had, by the way, relatives in Randwick and was disappointed when I had to admit that I hadn't met them.) Chris then dropped me at the dentist and arranged to return in two hours time (at 12 o'clock).

I wasn't very long in the dentist, he wasn't able to do anything with my tooth as he said extensive work was needed. He gave me a prescription for some pain-killers but didn't charge a thing. So I went and had the prescription filled, spent some time wandering around Lahore, then went to the YMCA for breakfast. In there I met a Pakistani youth who turned out to be a science fiction fan! He was a university student, obviously came from a family of some means and had hopes of traveling to Europe in the near future, as soon as his father could bribe the necessary people into giving him a passport. We talked of Asimov, Bradbury, Ballard and other comic strip artists. He was shocked when I told him I was looking forward to visiting Greece. He said all Liberal minded people should boycott the place in protest of the military take-over. We also talked of India's relationship to Pakistan (a touchy subject in those parts) and he told me many things that were new to me. Our conversation ended with him offering to pay for my meal, a gesture I immediately agreed to, being as broke as ever. But I told him I had accepted only because I didn't want to offend him by refusing. And he answered that he wasn't fanatical about such things, unlike the more traditional Pakistanis, and if I had refused his offer he wouldn't have pressed me any further. We said goodbye and I went back to the place where I had arranged to meet Chris.

Twelve o'clock came and went. I became anxious. An hour went by and I was beginning to become annoyed. Then, just after one o'clock I spotted him approaching. He pulled up on the opposite corner and I made a hazardous crossing of the road to reach him. The first thing he said as I got there was. . . "I'VE LOST THE BUS!" I started laughing. I thought it hilarious. How had he managed that, I asked him.

Well it turned out that he had made it back to the bus okay, but then later, as they were driving it to a garage, the disaster occurred. Chris didn't know where this garage was and was following the bus on the bike. As they were approaching the city the bike stalled and came to a stop. Chris yelled but the bus kept going and disappeared into the distance. So there he was, stuck in Lahore with a dud bike and no money. He pushed the bike along the road until he came to a garage. The owner had a look at the bike fiddled with the ignition wiring and-eureka-the-thing started again. Chris tried to explain to the owner, who couldn't speak English, that he had no money, then hopped on the bike and drove off. He had then managed to find me, just barely in time because the bike was almost out of petrol. By this time, he was very thirsty, hungry and tired. Luckily I had some money on me and the first thing we did was to go and have a cold drink and a hamburger, then we had the bike filled. Next problem was to find the bus.

We had a map of Lahore so we were able to find the tourist office. It was only a small place. There was a man and a woman behind the counter and they were talking to a middle-aged American woman, obviously a tourist. We sat down and waited until the girl asked if she could help us.

"Err," said Chris, "We're looking for a bus."

"A double-decker bus," I added.

The girl looked puzzled but managed to smile. "A double-decker bus? But we have many of them in Lahore." Which was true, Lahore did have a double-decker bus service. As far as I know the only city, apart from Bombay, in Asia to have one.

"Ah yes, but this one is ours," said Chris.

"And you've lost it?"

We nodded shamefully. The American woman had stopped talking and was listening intently.

"How?" asked the girl. Chris told her the story and the girl started to make phone calls in an attempt to trace it. The American woman was laughing now.

Despite the fact that our bus was far from being inconspicuous no one she rang had seen it. She was unable to get through to the bus depot itself but suggested we drive out and have a look around ourselves. We decided to do this, and after thanking her, prepared to leave.

"My God!" laughed the American woman, "this is like something out of the movies!"

We made our way slowly through the streets of Lahore. Slowly is the only way possible as the Lahore traffic consists of a tangle of bicycles, trucks, carts pulled by bullocks, motorbikes and reckless pedestrians.

Main hazard is the cattle dung all over the road. On a bike one tends to get covered with it as it is scattered by the vehicle in front. So it was in a dirty and rather smelly condition that we reached the bus depot. It was a huge place and full of double-decker buses. Again we had the embarrassing task of explaining our mission.

"We're looking for a double-decker bus," we told the gatekeeper. He gestured silently at the rows upon rows of double-decker buses. "But this one is blue not red, and has a white top. Have you seen it?"

He said no and suggested we go and see the depot manager. We did but he was unable to help us either. His suggestion was that we try their other depot, a small one in the heart of the city, which was used for single decker buses. He gave us directions, we thanked him and off we went again.

Then we got lost.

We spent about an hour going round in circles, stopping and asking for directions that were no help at all, and getting covered with more cattle dung. I couldn't stop laughing, though my laughter was beginning to have a hysterical tinge to it.

Then, as we were going up a grimy backstreet, I felt a tap on my shoulder. Annoyed (who did these locals think they were?!) I looked round and was surprised to see Elaine, Chris' fiancée, loping along beside the bike in a very agitated condition.

"Chris," I yelled, "Elaine is running along behind us." He immediately stopped the bike and the poor girl collapsed into his arms. She was very upset and had apparently given up hope of seeing him again (a fear not shared by other members of the crew). While they had their touching reunion I snarled at the crowd that had quickly grown around us. But to no effect.

The bus depot was only a hundred yards behind us up the road. We had gone right past it without noticing. Elaine had been keeping a lonely vigil by the gate and had spotted us as we had chugged by. If it hadn't been for her I imagine we would still be haunting the streets of Lahore, two smelly apparitions constantly asking the one strange question: "Have you seen a double-decker bus. . .?"

We spent two days in the bus depot at Lahore while they fixed our clutch plate. For free too. The evening we left we hadn't got very far down the road when the bus broke down again.

### **Is This Afghanistan?**

Afghanistan was the most unusual country we went through. Strange, primitive, full of contrasts. We had several amusing moments while there, but the one that sticks in my mind the most is my visit to the bank.

We were just about to leave Herat, one of the three big towns of Afghanistan, and the bus was parked in the main street whilst we did some last minute shopping. I was heading back to the bus when I saw Kay, one of the girls with us, hurrying along on the other side of the road. I crossed over and asked her where she was going as it was past the deadline for our departure. She told me she was going to the bank to change a traveler's cheque. I suggested she leave it for the time being but she owed Vickey (one of the other girls) some money and wanted to settle up. So I decided to accompany her. Herat is no place for young white girls on their own. (In all truth I admit that Kay would need no assistance if attacked. She was the one who had the truck-driving license, drove a 750cc motorbike in Sydney and was a good horse rider. What's more, she looked as if she could do all those things.)

The bank was supposed to be up a side street leading off from the main one. As we staggered along what passes for a footpath in Afghanistan, we looked for a building that looked like it could be a bank. We didn't see one. I tried again to convince Kay to leave her money changing until later. It will probably take ages to have a traveler's cheque changed, I told her. But she wouldn't listen.

We finally came to a pair of large open gates set in a high wall. We looked inside. There was a long ramshackle one-story building on one side, an overgrown garden in the middle and a collection of shacks on the other side.

"This might be the place," said Kay.

"This is a bank?" I muttered. "Impossible!"

We threaded our way through the jungle-like garden towards the larger of the buildings. Up a couple of wooden steps and found ourselves in an enclosed verandah, the roof of which was sagging. There were a couple of doors leading into offices and a few wooden seats. On one of the wooden seats at the end of the verandah sat an Afghani soldier. He was dressed in the usual decaying uniform, had a slightly Chinese appearance and across his knees lay an ancient rifle, attached to which was a bayonet which looked bright and new. He looked at us without a flicker of expression on his flat round face. Kay stuck her head into one of the offices. "Can you change money here?" she asked. Someone nodded and we went inside. There we found three men sitting behind desks and a couple of American hippies, one boy, one girl. The latter were in the throes of having a traveler's cheque cashed and as I watched them my worst fears were realised. They each had a vast mound of forms in front of them and they looked as if they had been writing for days. One of the officials produced two more mounds of forms that were as equally as high. I shook my head when he offered one mound to me.

"You are not changing any money?" he asked.

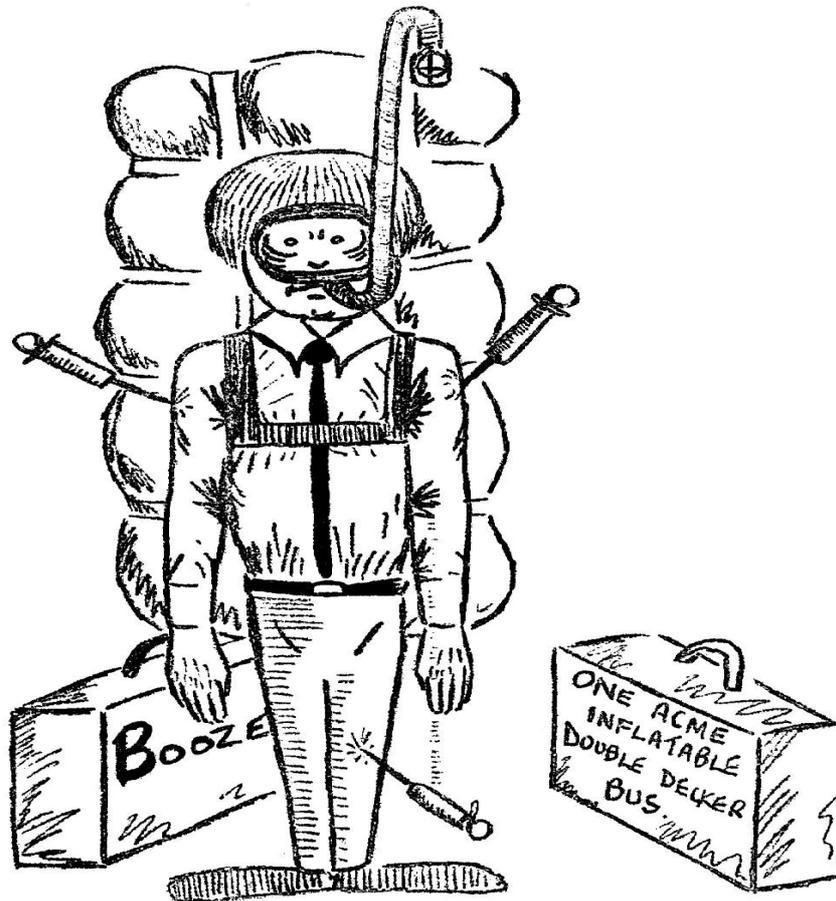
"No," I replied.

"Then you cannot wait in here. You can only come in here if you want to change money. Please wait outside."

I decided not to argue. "I'll just be outside," I said to Kay but she was already deeply involved with her forms. I went outside to the verandah and sat down on one of the benches. The guard watched me blankly. I stared back at him, wondering what would happen if I smiled at him. After some thought I decided to drop the idea. I stared at the wall. I stared at the ceiling. Finally I got up and had a closer look at the notice board. It was covered with enigmatic bits of paper. Most of them were in Afghan but there was at least one that was suppose to be in English but I still couldn't read it. I looked back at the guard. He was still watching me. I had a quick glance into the office. Kay was still working her way through the forms. I sighed and sat back down.

It took her at least an hour to finish them. Finally she appeared at the door followed by one of the officials. "Ready?" I asked eagerly. She shook her head, "I haven't got the money yet." Puzzled I followed her and the official out into the garden. He led the way over to one of the shacks. It didn't have a door. Inside sat an old man who handed over the money. No guard or anything.

"You were right," said Kay as we were leaving, "I should have waited and had it changed later." I didn't say a word.



# Ratfandom & Other Animals

See the stencil.

See John.

See John hunched over his typewriter.

See John nervously hitting each key with only one finger.

See.

John is cutting his first stencil.

Ever.

John appears to be worried.

Let us ask him how it is going.

John, how is it going?

Piss off!

\* \* \*

Much has happened since I last made an appearance in the pages of Anzapa. I have a new job, I've acquired a new flatmate, and I've sold a book. . .

The new job was a direct result of the Eastercon at Worcester. A lady copywriter there from Corgi Publications suggested that I put an ad in *The Bookseller* (a trade magazine) if I wanted to get into publishing. I did so and very quickly had a reply from the Managing Director of Fountain Press, a publishing company that specialises in photographic books and magazines (*Photography, Movie Maker*). I went for an interview, which entailed sitting with an expression of intense interest on my face while the Managing Director rambled on. Next thing I was the Publicity & Promotions Manager.

Sounds great, but there were a few drawbacks. Practically everyone who worked there was a manager of some kind. Fancy titles were the management's way of satisfying the employees without paying them reasonable wages. My own salary was ridiculous (I'd often sit at my desk and have a good giggle about it). Also I discovered that I didn't get on too well with the Managing Director, mainly because he was a pig. I did learn quite a lot while I was there; such things as layout, copy writing etc, though none of these skills will be evident in these pages. But after five months I'd had enough and chucked the job in. Now I'm more or less unemployed, and also broke. Sob.

My new flatmate is Greg Pickersgill, fandom's foulest fan. A name not widely known Down Under but here in England he's a notorious figure, feared and despised by all. His chief claim to fame is that he's co-editor of FOULER (the thorn in the side of Pommie fandom) and his feet smell something terrible. But he's still an improvement, though slight, on my last room sharer. That was the ex-police cadet hippie who smoked enormous amounts of shit, burnt incense by the ton and constantly played the guitar. He also meditated a lot and was always spouting a load of mystical crap. For instance, he told me once that the only survivors of Hiroshima were all on macrobiotic diets. I attempted, gently, to convince him that it was a load of rubbish but he was beyond all hope. But I didn't throw him out because he was crackpot (I always respect other people's beliefs no matter how stupid, in fact I've been known to speak to Christians). No, I threw him out because his alarm clock would go off at 4:30am each morning at which time he would turn the light on and meditate.

That's why I threw him out.

Compared to him Greg is a saint among men, albeit a smelly saint. Greg is fat, Welsh and hairy in that

order. He is also a manic-depressive (if there is such a thing). He has always been one of them but since he moved up to London he's got worse. One of the reasons is a London femme fatale whose name I had better not mention. Greg fell in love with her and one Globe night she condescended to letting him fondle her. He's never been the same since. Now he lies on his bed every night, sunk in a drunken stupor (he drinks more than I do), moaning, "I touched Nirvana and lived." Which isn't really true. And now his hair has started to fall out. He reckons he's only enough hair to last for another five months. If he doesn't get another fondle soon it could be pretty nasty. . .

Most of the people in our little fannish group are rather strange. There are five of us altogether and the only thing we have in common are our neuroses. Also four out of five of us are aspiring writers, some more aspiring than others. Rob Holdstock, who was once engaged to the femme fatale mentioned earlier (but I won't go into that) has sold several stories to Ted Carnell and had a story published in *New Worlds*. He's studying for his PhD in something or other. . .insects I think. His main problem is his paranoia. Whenever he comes into the room the first thing he says is, "What have you been saying about me behind my back?" And he means every word of it! Since his engagement to the femme fatale fell through he has also become rather depressed and seems to be fast retreating back into childhood. Only last week he announced that he thought that UNCLE was a real organisation. "I know many people who think it's a real organisation!" he told us indignantly.

Roy Kettle, who has sold a couple of stories, been paid for them, but for some reason never had them published, is a hopeless egomaniac. If he isn't the centre of attention he withers up and sulks. As most of us are always trying to be the centre of attention the competition can get pretty fierce at times. But I must admit that Kettle can be very funny, especially when he's dropping names like Chris Priest. The main thing I have against Kettle is that he keeps producing hideous women from his old college. The appalling creatures are invariably sprawled across his floor and one can't walk across the room without becoming romantically entangled. But more about that later. . .

John Hall. Now there's a name to play with. What a man! What a fan! He's the sort you instantly recognise if you see him walking along the street. He has a humped back, a bulging stomach (which he wraps in a bandage when he goes to parties), hair that looks as if it's been washed with toilet cleaner, tight black trousers with stitching going at the crotch, a black coat of imitation plastic leather, and a style of walking that makes him look like a badly animated dinosaur. Hall has an interesting history, pseudo Hell's Angel, member of the Nazi Party, drag racing spectator, failed businessman, failed con-man and many other things too nauseating to mention. Hall is the type who is constantly coming up with grandiose schemes that never seem to get off the ground. At the moment he's planning a pirate radio station. . .to be situated on our roof.

Actually I must be the most mentally stable of the lot. In the interests of fairness I'd list some of my faults but I just can't think of any.

Now onto a more exciting subject. As some of you know I've always been rather a James Bond fan. Most of you have tried to overlook this though a minority have sneered openly in the past. Well, it looks as if my interest in the subject is going to pay off. When *You Only Live Twice* was re-released in London some months ago it occurred to me that no one had as yet written a film about the Bond films. I checked up to make sure and found I was right.

So then I wrote to Tantivy Press, the publishers of John Baxter's **Science Fiction in the Cinema** and the hundred or so other books he's written, and suggested the idea to them. I received a letter from Peter Cowie a couple of weeks later (he's the manager or something) who said he liked the idea but of course he wanted to see a sample chapter. So I sat down and hammered one out and it was awful. So I did it again

and it was even worse. But I sent it off to Cowie and thought, well, that's that.

A few weeks later I met John Baxter at the National Film Theatre (Christopher Lee was there to talk about his career) and told him of my project. He promised to put in a word for me with Cowie when he saw him next. The following Wednesday Cowie rang me and said he wanted me to drop round to his office to discuss the book. I saw him the next Friday and he told me he was enthusiastic about the whole thing, his only fear was that Harry Saltzman, the Bond producer, might have objections. It would be difficult to publish the book without Eon Productions and United Artists' assistance. So until he found out definitely he couldn't afford to put anything in writing.

I spent the next few days waiting anxiously but the following Tuesday Cowie rang up to say, "Harry Saltzman said, go ahead!"

That was in early September and the deadline for the finished manuscript was December 1. Three months seemed plenty of time but of course there were unexpected complications. During September I roughed out first drafts for most of the chapters and had a great deal of fun selecting the stills for the book round at United Artists' London offices. I also resigned from my job, to take effect from the end of October, as I thought I'd need a whole month of full time work on the book to complete it. Then the complications began. First was one of those hideous women of Kettle's. Before I knew it I'd become involved in a sordid little relationship that was soon sapping my vital bodily fluids. Weeks began to slide past and the manuscript lay untouched. Then, in the middle of October, the second complication rose up and bit me. . .a strange illness that left me lying on my bed near death. Consumed by fever I lay helpless as I slid rapidly towards disaster. . .no job and no book would make Christmas a grim prospect.

But at least I managed to rid myself of one complication. One night when she came around I raised myself up on one elbow with difficulty and said weakly, but with conviction, "Piss off."

The illness was more difficult to handle. The local doctor was no help. "It's either jaundice, glandular fever or tonsillitis," he said one night as he held a glass of oddly coloured urine up to the light.

"I'll take tonsillitis," I said eagerly.

"Sold!" he cried, and we shook hands.

At last, at the beginning of November, a new course of antibiotics worked on whatever I had and I was able to drag myself to the typewriter. *From Russia With Love* I completed in two days, *Goldfinger* in just one, *Thunderball* in three, *You Only Live Twice* in five, *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* in six, the chapter on the imitation Bond films in four. And then it was finished! I staggered into Cowie's office with it yesterday. I won't know what he thinks of it for a couple of weeks yet.

# Mervyn Barrett Presents

Something I've been meaning to recount for ages is the saga of Merv (the Shark) Barrett's underground movie. A singer friend of his came over from Australia for a brief visit last year, bringing with him a load of movie equipment, camera, editor etc. So they decided to make an underground movie for which Merv would write the script. I became involved via the Globe (that's the pub) when Merv asked me if I'd like to take part as the male lead. "I can promise you a really attractive girl for your leading lady," Merv promised. Oh yeah, I thought to myself as I signed the contract and put on a pair of dark glasses. Lo and behold he had been telling the truth! When I went round to Ron, the singer's, place the following Sunday I found myself face to face with a genuinely attractive girl whose name was Kerry. "Hi, I'm your co-star," I said, nervously wiping my sweaty hands on my coat sleeves (beautiful women always make me sweaty and things). We then spent several hours waiting for Merv to arrive with the script. While we were waiting Ron asked me what I did for a living. He was surprised when I told him I wasn't a professional actor. The next person to arrive was Ron's American girlfriend, an attractive but talkative girl wearing mind-boggling hot pants (my palms started to sweat again). Ron amused her by telling her what I had said I thought of American girls before she had arrived. Lots of laughs there.

Merv finally arrived looking terrible. He had been to a party the night before and had overindulged somewhat. "I feel very fragile," he moaned as bits dropped off him. He passed round copies of the script. More laughs. The film was to be a satire on dirty films. I played (or was suppose to) a producer who was suppose to be talking a girl into acting in one of my films. "Me, a producer?" I asked Merv.

"You should have worn something better than that," he said, pointing at the American flack jacket embroidered with flowers that I had picked up in Athens.

"You didn't tell me to wear my good stuff," I sulked.

Our first scene was to be on location at a cinema theatre that was showing a porno type film. So we all trooped into the city to look for one (except for Ron's girlfriend who had something better to do). We found one easily enough and for the next half-hour or Kerry and I walked in and out of the foyer of this theatre while Merv and Ron filmed us surreptitiously from a traffic island. Eventually the manageress of the theatre came out of her office and asked us what we thought we were doing. At that point we decided that the scene was finished and moved on. They then filmed us getting on a double decker bus. It was hell getting off again a few hundred yards up the street and for a moment I thought we were going to be taken for a long ride. After that it was decided to call a halt to filming for the day as the light was beginning to fade (Merv had held us up too long). We had a meal together then parted our various ways, promising to all turn up again next Sunday at Ron's flat.

So next Sunday found us ready to shoot the interiors, as they say in the movie business. I was more than a little nervous as I didn't think I was going to be able to deliver a competent performance. Walking up and down a street is one thing but actual acting is something else. What made it worse was that the scenes were going to be shot in Ron's neighbour's flat as the lighting in there was better. His neighbours, a young married couple, were obviously looking forward to a show. Sweat oozed from my every pore as I tried desperately to look blase. Unfortunately, the more blase I try to look, the sicker I look.

"Look into Kerry's eyes deeply," said Ron, directing. "Look lustful. . ."

"I'm trying, I'm trying," I croaked.

"He looks sick," said Kerry.

At this point, you may have gathered, I was supposed to be reeking lust. "Now we pan to your erection," said Ron.

"My what?"

Of course it was out of the question so the special effects department was called in. This consisted of Ron's neighbour's wife and a can of furniture polish. The latter I stuffed down my pants. "Is that me?" I asked on seeing the result. (I wanted to keep wearing it after the film but they wouldn't let me.) Then things got interesting. Ron asked Kerry to stand up and take her jumper off, which she did, revealing a pair of firm, gently up-thrusting breasts, as they say in the sort of books I read. Naturally I pretended to be blase and picked up a newspaper, glancing through it idly. That's what I call blase!

"Now your jeans," said Ron and Kerry complied. "And your pants."

"Oh Ron," she said, "you said I wouldn't have to," but she hooked her thumbs into the waistband.

"Ho hum," I yawned as I flick through the paper. Who said I couldn't act?

Ron gave in, the mad fool. "Okay, we'll do the final scene by the window. Kerry, you go and stand in front of the window, and John, you go up and take her in your arms and kiss her."

Believe it or not I think I yawned again. "Sure," I drawled.

I climbed to my feet and ambled over to the tall, beautiful practically naked girl standing in front of the window.

"Action," said Ron and there was action. I don't know about Kerry but I sure had a good time. "Cut," said Ron. "You'll have to do that again, this time out of the shadow."

"Oh, damn," I moaned, "do we have to?" Yes, they were my exact words. I swear. Talk about blase! So we did it again but unfortunately this time was the last.

"Well, I'm glad that's over with," I said as I picked up the newspaper again.

"Bit of a drag for you, was it?" asked Ron.

"Yeah," I replied, and wouldn't you know it, the sonofabitch actually believed me. . .because Merv and Ron made another film with Kerry a week later but seeing as I'd been so bored with the making of the first one they didn't ask me to participate. And if you could have seen that second film they made! Oh, I can't go on. . .everything is getting misty. Sob. Choke.

I never did see either film on an actual screen but I did view them through the editing gizmo one night at Merv's. But this had the advantage of allowing the watcher to slow down the action whenever you wanted to. My big scene by the window didn't come out too well incidentally, too much shadow. Which is a pity, we should have done it again.

Ron returned to Australia last year but unfortunately the case carrying all his movie gear and the two films were lost en route, so Merv tells me. Though perhaps by now they've finally turned up. I certainly hope so. The world can't afford to lose such works of art.

# The Perils of Barley Wine: The Story of a Fan's Downfall

"I'm gonna turn myself into a limited company," announced Big John Hall with a straight face.

"Oh yeah, sure," we said.

"I'm serious," he said in pained tones, putting on that expression he wears when people piss on his stupid ideas. He wears it a lot. No one in the world can come up with more stupid ideas in a given period of time than Big John. For example, his recent ones have included taking over Centrepoint (a London skyscraper) and holding it to ransom, starting a pirate radio station (he fancies himself as a disc jockey), building a submarine, hi-jacking an airliner and buying himself a revolver (tho possibly not in that order). The schemes he's been involved in in the past have also been rather far-out. . .as a result he's a major share-holder in a fast sinking power boat manufacturing company. Hall has also written some of the most incredible science fiction that has never been published.. His classic story involved the building of a thirty mile long space ship on the surface of the moon. He was very annoyed when someone pointed out that due to the acute curvature of the moon he would end up with a thirty mile long boomerang. Oh, and I mustn't forget another company he was involved in. . .the products of which were Tolkien posters and plastic German helmets.

"You've got this idea from John Brunner, haven't you?" we sneered. "Just because Brunner calls himself Fact & Fiction Ltd you want to follow suit."

"So what's wrong with that?" he demanded, rubbing his sprawling crotch distractedly, which is what he often does when he's agitated.

"Brunner has a reason for turning himself into a limited company. He's churning out books by the hundreds."

"I've sold stuff too," muttered Big John.

"Six articles to hot rod magazines doesn't exactly place you up there with Brunner," we pointed out.

"I suppose not," he grunted. . .but you could tell that the idea hadn't completely vacated his beady little mind. Any night now we're going to get a frantic telephone call from his landlady which will probably go something like this. . .

"Come over right away." she'll 'screech with panic. "Hall's gone and turned himself into a limited company."

"Umm, he has been threatening to for some time. . .I'd leave him be if I was you. I doubt if he'll cause any trouble."

"But he can't be a limited company in his room. It's too small for one thing, and he's ruining the carpets. What,'s more, he's getting bigger."

"Bigger?"

"Yes, all the time."

"Hmmm, Hall has always been ambitious. This could be serious."

"I know! You've got to do something before it's too late."

"Now just keep calm while I think about it. . .hmmm, why don't you threaten to liquidate his assets? That should frighten him."

"Good idea, I'll try. . .arghhh!"

"What happened?"

"He just paid out another dividend! I'm covered in Chocolate Garibaldi's. He's been doing that every half hour."

"Is that all he pays out? Just Chocolate Garibaldi's?"

"No. He also gives out Gollum posters and plastic German helmets."

"Then you've nothing to worry about. Hall obviously has no business sense. Before very long he'll bankrupt himself. . .what's the matter now?" There's a scream and the phone goes dead. "We'd better get round to Cranley Gardens right away," I tell Pickersgill, "I think Hall has gone a stage further in his developments"

"No need to," says Pickersgill, jerking his thumb towards the window, "you can see it from here." I look out and see a thirty mile space ship jutting up into the clouds.

"That's incredible" I gasp.

"Yeah," says Pickersgill, "a thirty mile space ship made of plastic is pretty incredible."

It was Monday night when this cretinous conversation took place and I was sitting on Hall's bed with Pickersgill waiting for Hall to finish ironing his pretties, which include a pair of see-thru lurex briefs, a silk shirt (black) with a red swastika on each breast and a pair of rubber underparts. Pickersgill and I had just been telling him of the results of the previous Saturday night. That had been the night the three of us had been to see *Dirty Harry* then gone to London's most bizarre and tasteless pub, The Goat and Boots. By the time we'd returned to our place, Flat 101 Elsham Rd, we were all in a rather pissed state. Pickersgill was so pissed he actually dished out part of his sacred rum supply to Hall and me, That and the Barley Wine I'd been drinking earlier (Barley Wine is dangerous! Definitely one of the most toxic beverages known to mankind) combined to send me out of my skull. Before I knew it I was dancing around the room like a maniac while Pickersgill's shoddy record player pounded out a great deal of sound. Next thing I'd climbed out the window and was dancing onto the roof. I stayed out there for some time, alarming a couple of people on the street below, dancing around like crazy while Hall and Pickersgill were attempting to shove a broom handle up thru the ceiling. Eventually I danced my way back inside and then the violence really began. I can't recall offhand who it was who actually started ramming tent poles thru the walls and door but it wasn't long before all three of us were going berserk. And when we started kicking the wall in. . .

Soon after this Hall had a brief moment of sanity and realized that it was high time he got out of there. He disappeared very quickly leaving Pickersgill and me to carry on tearing the place apart without him. He told us later that he was laughing so much at the sounds of destruction still going on behind him that he fell down the stairs. By then I was tearing off the backing material from the door and Pickersgill and I were shattering it with blows from the tent poles. Not long after this Pickersgill collapsed behind our one and only armchair and I was left on my own. Some time later there came a knock on the door. I pulled it open and.

found myself face to face with the Australian cretin from next door. To my great amazement he was holding one of our tent poles.

"Are you alright?" he asked, peering past me to Pickersgill's legs protruding from behind the armchair.

"Of course," I said, "Where'd you get that?" I pointed at the tent pole in his hand.

"It came thru the wall," he said. "Look, if you don't turn it down I'm calling the police."

"Gimme it," I demanded, reaching for the tent pole. He hid it behind his back.

"No," he said. "Just turn it down or I get the cops," and he retreated back into his room.

Now that really annoyed me as many has been the time that cretin and his drongo mates have kept us awake until all sorts of ridiculous times in the morning. True, he never inflicted tent poles on us but I was in no mood to take this into consideration. I walked over to where Pickersgill lay, bent down and grabbed him by the shoulder. "Greg, the bloke next door is threatening to call the police," I told him.

He stirred, then muttered, "Kill the fucker," I let him slump back into his previous position. I could tell he wasn't going to be much help. Quickly I made a decision and strode out of the room. I banged on the cretin's door. He opened it warily, the tent pole still in his hand. I had the weird idea that he was going to use it as evidence or something, "Look," I said, "you've disturbed us lots of times before and we've never called the police. Now give me that thing. I need it." Once again he hid it behind his back. "Gimme it," I snarled. He handed it over.

"Come and look at what you've done to our wall," he said and opened the door wide. I went in, noticing a rather plain girl sitting on one of the beds. Her eyes were wide with fear. I sneered, I think, and swaggered over to the wall. "Look," he cried and pointed at a tiny tear in the wall paper.

"My God, that's terrible," I said with mock horror and walked out.

"I'm going to call the police if you don't shut that record player off," he called after me. "If they see the state that door is in they'll lock you up."

"Rubbish," I said and went back into our room. As an act of defiance it was a whole ten minutes before I switched the player off. Then I went to bed.

It was hell the next morning.

The room looked as if someone had gone crazy with a machine gun. There were holes in the door, the walls and the ceiling. . .and fragments of plasterboard lay everywhere. Pickersgill lay in bed laughing hysterically while I tried to pretend I was somewhere else. "Christ, would you look at that door!" gasped Pickersgill. "Fucking hell! Look at the size of those holes! My God, I've wrecked places before but I've never had to be around to face them the next morning." He kept this up for hours.

Finally I crawled out of bed with great difficulty (I wasn't feeling too well) and attempted to clear the place up. To cover the worst of the damage to the door I nailed some cupboard doors to the outside of it. While I was doing this Pickersgill retreated under his blanket. . .laughing like a maniac.

Despite a couple of visits from the rent collector since then (we arranged to be out) we've had no official reaction from the building owners about the damage. Of course we've covered up a lot of the holes in the wall with Gollum posters and such but it does look rather obvious. Curse that Barley Wine! Now we're anxiously looking for somewhere else to move Into. Anything will do, we're not that fussy. . .anymore.

# The Things That Go Bump in the Night Are Working Overtime

In our building the dark at the top of the stairs starts at the bottom. It's an old building, as the majority are in London, but it's somewhat more dilapidated than most because the owners are letting it fall to pieces. They figure that as it's going to be torn down anyway to make room for a new freeway why bother to keep it habitable? As for us tenants, we've got to manage as best we can, ignoring the sudden occasional fall through the floorboards and the ever increasing shaking that every passing train causes (we're right next to a railway line). My room reflects this pervading sense of decay, if you're lucky on a clear day you can see the window. The furniture is somewhat tatty, the windows rattle and admit draughts, and the walls are kept standing only by the posters stuck to them. The water heater adds to the fun by persistently going berserk and filling the room up with steam, and the electric heater gives off sparks so large that they would jolt Frankenstein's monster into life (to me, I fear, they would do just the opposite).

I dwell alone now. Pickersgill use to share all this with me but he left on his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. This highly symbolic gesture was a sort of birthday present to himself I think. I'm not quite alone though, I still have the rat. He made his presence felt for the first time a couple of weeks ago at 2am one morning while I was lying in bed and reading a Raymond Chandler novel. I heard a scuttling in the cupboard which couldn't have been caused by the old packet of fish fingers that resides in there. I got up and opened the cupboard door to investigate. It was dark in there and I couldn't see anything so I shut the door firmly and went back to bed. Not long afterwards I was startled by a loud noise coming from within the cupboard. It was the sound of something in there trying to get out. Thump, thump, it went. Startled, I got up again and went over to the cupboard. Silence. I wondered what could possibly be there. A mouse? I didn't think that a mouse would be capable of producing so much noise. . .it had to be something bigger. A cat? No. A rat? It had to be. I had trapped a rat in my cupboard. Now what? I went back to bed and continued to read.

After a few minutes there came a tremendous crash as a saucepan was knocked over inside the cupboard. I dropped the Chandler novel. Silence again, followed by another crash. I began to wonder just what manner of rat I had caught in there. King Rat it sounded like. I began to think about how to dispose of him. Let him out and attempt to bludgeon him to death with a broom handle? No, I could picture myself charging around the room knocking things over as I attempted to corner him. What would the neighbours think? It might sound to them that I was having woman trouble. I reached for the broom handle then thought again. What if the rat chased me around the room? I remembered a friend of my mother's being chased down a street once in Perth, Australia. I pictured myself in a life and death struggle with a giant rat, rolling about on the floor with the creature's jaws only inches away from my throat. I picked up the Chandler book again. The rat could stay in there till morning.

Then it began to gnaw. It was gnawing on the door. The sound was so loud it filled the room. It sounded like a sawmill. At this rate the rat would be free within minutes. I got up, went over to the cupboard, and kicked the door. From inside there was the sound of something scuttling around. Clang went the saucepans again. It was no use, I would have to deal with the creature there and then. The problem was to somehow kill it without letting it get out. A large Alsatian would have come in handy. Or a machine-gun. Napalm? That gave me an idea. Perhaps I could burn him to death? But how? Push the electric heater in there and hope that a stray spark would do the job? Throw in lighted copies of ZIMRI? Or perhaps try and douse the monster with a cup of boiling water? No. Poison? I didn't have any. . .though I could always make him a cup of coffee.

Finally I decided to try and trap him. I took a metal bread container which has a sliding door and positioned

it in front of the cupboard. Then, armed with an old TV aerial, I slowly opened the cupboard door a few inches and nudged the bread container up against the gap. My plan was to slide the container shut the moment the rat entered it. . .if he did. I was prepared for a long wait and almost fell over when a dark shape immediately flashed into the container. Recovering, I slammed the container door shut, trapping a mouse that was at least two inches long. I couldn't believe it, a tiny thing that size couldn't have caused all that noise. Warily I peered into the cupboard to make sure that he wasn't just a decoy sent out by a much larger relative, but there was nothing else in there. I picked up the container and shook it. I could barely hear the little creature skittering about inside. He must have been wearing boots when he was inside the cupboard.

I disposed of him by opening the window and shaking him out onto the roof. It was a cold night, I hoped he would be warm enough. I went back to bed and continued to read though Chandler seemed somewhat tame after all the real-life drama I had experienced. Later I dreamed of a mouse covered with frost tapping on the window to be let back in.

Things were quiet the following night but on the next night I heard the familiar sound of gnawing from somewhere in the walls I still hear it. It might be the same mouse or another member of his family. . .but I think this time it's a real rat.

# Happiness is a Warm Rejection Slip

This article has been more or less inspired by John Brunner's piece on writing in SPECULATION #30. Its purpose is to reassure those struggling would-be writers who may have been disheartened by some of what Brunner said. I want to demonstrate that lazy, untalented people, such as me, can break into the professional world. I hope my story will inspire other lazy, untalented people not to give up hope.

One of Mr Brunner's qualifications for being a successful writer is that you should have a compulsion to write. As he put it 'you're a compulsive writer if you stay home and pound the typewriter instead of giving that beautiful bird you met at a party a buzz'. Well. . .if ever such a choice presents itself to me I somehow have the feeling that my crummy typewriter will lose out. A compulsive writer I'm not (my motivation for writing this piece, for instance, is based on guilt, I feel guilty because Pete Weston keeps sending free copies of SPECULATION but I never respond in any way) but I am in love with the image of being a writer, which is obviously not the same.

My ambition to be a writer goes back a long way. Its origins lie in my being born a sickly weakling in Australia. Sickly weaklings are rather conspicuous among all those Bronzed Aussies so one is forced to compensate at an early age. When you're a hopeless failure at Aussie Rules, or behave in the surf like you're simulating the Thresher's last dive you've no choice but to try and dazzle the natives with tricks.

An early trick of mine was to say that I was going to be an atomic scientist when I grew up. Atomic scientists go down big in Australia and I reaped quite a lot of respect with this tactic. Among my mother's circle of friends I gained the reputation of being a child genius without ever having to actually demonstrate this mythical mental prowess, though I occasionally drew complicated pictures of atomic reactors that I made up as I went along. But I knew I'd never be able to keep this deception going when I reached high school, so I was forced to devise a new smokescreen. I decided to be a writer.

"I'm writing a book," I started telling people. In Australia writers are even more frightening figures than atomic scientists so it wasn't long before I'd gained an even more impressive reputation. "There goes John Brosnan, he's going to be a writer," they were soon saying at school. I was so convincing that even the teachers started saying the same thing. It got so I was forced to actually start writing a book. I wrote about five chapters, in pencil, on ruled notepaper. I never let anyone read it, just showed them all the paper. It certainly looked impressive.

The book was called **The Vanishing Boomerang** and was to be a 'children's book'. I was a condescending bastard, even then. I can't remember much about it though. I know it had a lot of sadism in it. I never completed it because of my laziness so my dream of becoming the youngest published author evaporated. None-the-less the book served its purpose and I'm sure that my old schoolmates, riddled with sunburn and VD though they may be, still think of me as John Brosnan-the-writer. . .if they ever think of me at all.

It was, I think, in 1962 that I discovered Max Shulman. For the uninitiated, Shulman is an American humorist most famous for creating Dobie Gillis (Dobie who?) and writing **Rally Round the Flag, Boys**. I can forgive him for these two major flaws because of the books he wrote during and just after WW2. Books such **as The Zebra Derby** and **Sleep Til Noon**. I haven't looked at these books for years, they're probably very bad, but at the time they had tremendous effect on me. On reflection, it was like finding a writer who combined the best of Spike Milligan, Woody Allen and Monty Python (if, after reading this, anyone digs up one of these books and decides that Shulman didn't combine the best of the above. . . I don't want to know). Immediately I decided I was going to write like Max Shulman, I wrote several stories in this vein and

even sent one off to a professional magazine. They returned it with a polite note. Being a woman's magazine it was possibly not the best of choices, but I had no idea where to send that sort of material. I still don't.

The following year I discovered Ian Fleming (six years after everyone else) and decided I was going to be the new Ian Fleming. He thoughtfully died the next year so the path seemed to be clear of obstacles. I wrote a story with an imitation James Bond as the central character and sent it off to *Man Junior*, a terrible Australian girlie magazine (no nipples). They sent it back saying the plot was too involved for a short story. I began to think about expanding it into a novel. A year later I started. Laziness had once again intervened.

By that time I was being bored to death working in a warehouse. They wanted to make me into a traveling salesman but I refused to learn how to drive which rather confused them. Then, in '66 or '67, I happened to meet a traveling salesman by the name of John Bangsund who had come to Perth, West Australia to sell books, I don't know how many books he sold but he certainly brightened up my life during that visit. I had shown him a couple of my SF shorts (written in my Max Shulman vein) and he said he thought they were good. So I started thinking about submitting them to pro SF magazines. John also left a copy of *ASFR* with me and by doing so introduced me to a whole new world.

It was in *ASFR* that I read that Ron Smith (the American bnf of the late fifties/early sixties who published *Inside*) had taken over as editor of an Australian publishing company's paperback division and was looking for material. I sent him my imitation James Bond novel which now had a title, **An Echo Of Jackboots**.

It may just possibly be the worst novel ever written. The plot concerns the activities of a group of Nazis, using the Ku Klux Klan as a front, trying to take over Australia. My hero saves the day by killing vast numbers of people. Of course the big flaw is obvious. . .who would want to take over Australia? The best thing about it is a torture scene in chapter eight. Really sick.

Ron Smith greeted the arrival of the novel manuscript with a great deal of silence. I didn't want to pressure him so I didn't write and ask what he thought of it. Instead I casually moved from Perth to Sydney and dropped in on him at the office one day. It took him a long time to dig my book out from under the great stack of unread manuscripts he had beside his desk. "Err," he said with an American accent. Then he suggested I try Curtis Brown, the literary agency, and gave me the address of their Sydney representative. With a certain amount of resignation I followed his advice.

Strangely enough the man at Curtis Brown was quite enthusiastic about it. The only drawback was that he wanted me to rewrite it. . .preferably like John Le Carre. He spurred me on by saying things like, "You could make 20,000 dollars from this. There's a good chance I can sell the film rights." I began the rewrite immediately but I didn't attempt to write like Le Carre, which was probably my big mistake. But I was too busy fantasising like crazy. 20,000 dollars! TWENTY THOUSAND DOLLARS! There I was, a callow youth of twenty (I wasn't even sure what callow meant, but whatever it was, I was it) and I'd made the big time already! Where were all those years of hard work and heartbreak? Where were all the rejection slips?

For the next 3-4 months I idly tapped out the new version of **Jackboots**. I didn't really improve it any. . .just changed some of the killings to mere woundings (the agent had complained that he lost count of all the murders) and expanded it somewhat. He had wanted me to include more technical detail. . .he had been very impressed by my description of a helicopter attack in the last chapter until I told him that all the technical info had come from a single page of *Time Magazine*. But I found research to be a tedious way of spending a lunch-hour so I abandoned the idea.

Not surprisingly he rejected the second version, saying in a brief, cold note that it contained all the faults of the first manuscript. It could have been a very depressing period in my life if it wasn't for the fact I was an alcoholic. Realisation that all my dreams of easy wealth and lying about on fur carpets were shattered didn't penetrate my foggy consciousness for several weeks and by that time I had other things to occupy my mind.

My writing career meandered somewhat after that. During the following year I became involved in the famous double-decker bus project (from Australia to the German Heicon) which provided me with new outlets for fantasising etc. The only thing I wrote during that time, apart from the odd fannish piece, was a dreary novelette about the population explosion (I'd just heard that there was one). I sent it to *Galaxy* and they returned it with a little booklet that gave instructions on how to write. I took the hint.

Always on the lookout for ways of cashing in on my vast talent it occurred to me that the bus trip should provide ample material for a funny book. So I decided to write a book about the bus trip as-it-happened. All went well until I reached page three. . . we were in Delhi by then. . . I ran out of money and had to sell my typewriter. It was sort of difficult after that.

On reaching England I attempted to complete the epic (after buying another typewriter) but it was just too tedious and boring to even contemplate, even when drunk. It still lies uncompleted in a drawer, all those laff-filled incidents lost forever. I then rewrote a few of my funny SF stories and started sending them to various magazines. The result is one of the biggest collections of rejection slips that ever graced anyone's wall. It amuses visitors anyway. My favourites come from Moorcock. . . 'If we weren't on a bi-monthly schedule we would have accepted this. . .' and later, 'If we weren't on a quarterly schedule we would have accepted this. . .' and later, 'If we weren't on a bi-annual schedule we would have accepted this. . .' I'm afraid to send him anything else.

At this point you are probably saying, why doesn't he give up? Why doesn't he throw in the towel? It's obvious that he's never going to sell anything, what keeps him going? The answer is apathy and sheer habit. I've been in the habit of pretending to be a writer for so long it's too late to change.

I started to think again. What area of writing would be most vulnerable to an assault by me? My saviour came in the guise of another Australian, John Baxter, (a real writer). John had been making his name by writing a series of books about the cinema, a subject he is well qualified to write about having been a filmmaker in Australia with the Commonwealth Film Unit. What film subjects haven't been written about I wondered. *You Only Live Twice* had just been re-released and it occurred to me to check and see if there had been anything done on James Bond. There hadn't and so I had a subject.

I wrote to Tantivy Press, a publishing company who published some of Baxter's early books and suggested my idea. To my great surprise the editor, Peter Cowie, wrote back all enthusiastic, asking for a sample chapter. This was the scary part. . . what would happen when he discovered I couldn't write? "Don't worry," said Baxter, "he won't notice". Or words to that effect.

He didn't. **James Bond in the Cinema** was published last May. It may possibly be the worst film book ever published, but I don't really care, yet. The important thing for me is to have had something published at long last. And also the fact that it opens up further possibilities. Once you get your foot in the door you have a chance of getting a knee or thigh in as well. If it doesn't work out that way, well at least I've proved something. Just what I'm not sure.

# The Good Old Days Went Thataway!!

I've been thinking a lot about old age, death, and the futility of existence lately. I think it must have something to do with the Christmas Season. Never did like it. Another reason is almost certainly my recent birthday which took me even nearer the age of thirty than usual. Me, thirty years old. *Me!* Thirty. *Thirty!* It was impossible. Why, only yesterday I was but a mere slip of a lad. Where had all the time gone? Why, before I knew it I would be holding a house-warming party for a pack of hungry worms.

In a maudlin mood I decided to flip through all my old memories, to savour the good times, to bathe in the warm glow of my past triumphs, to . . . it was then I discovered something terrible. My Good Old Days were missing! They weren't there. I didn't have any!

It was a shattering realisation and I quickly decided I would have to do something about it as soon as possible. I was going to have to swing while there was still some momentum left in the old pendulum. Naturally the first thing I did was ring up the king of swingers himself... Leroy Kettle.

"Roy!" I ejaculated over the phone, "I have to start swinging before it's too late. I've got to start having my Good Old Days." I explained the situation to him and very soon he understood my problem.

"Leave it to me," he quipped, "I'm an expert at this sort of thing. What you need is wine, women, and a good backing group, as well as the company of warm, stimulating buddies to share it all with. You need a night that will provide you with plenty of great memories to keep you happy in your fast-approaching dotage."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah!" I cried. "That's it exactly. What have you got in mind?"

"Well," he quipped, "John Hall knows of a party this Friday."

So it goes.

The warm, stimulating buddies turned out to be an American peanut by the name of Rich Coad, a ventriloquist's dummy from Newcastle called Little Ian Maule, Big John Hall (looking magnificent in a sharkskin jockstrap and leather hump support), and Leroy (Quipper) Kettle.

"Where are my bleeding warm and stimulating buddies?" I exclaimed. "This lot look as warm and stimulating as an old torch battery."

"Just be patient," quipped Leroy. "They don't reach their peak until later in the night." John Hall then began handing out a number of strangely shaped pills. "What are they?" I asked suspiciously.

"They're appetite suppressors," muttered Hall. "Shut up and swallow them." I asked him why he wanted me to swallow a number of appetite suppressors. Wasn't there going to be any food at the party? Hall leaned over and whispered loudly in my ear... "They've got *speed* in them, man. They'll freak you out."

"Wowiee!" I cried, and, immediately swallowed four of them.

"Gosh, gee!" cried Little Ian Maule in his usual squeaky voice, and swallowed a whole handful. "I haven't freaked out before, but I understand that it's very nice. Or so I've been told. Gosh, wait till I tell the lads back home!"

We all trekked over to Hampstead where Big John led us all into an American hamburger joint. "Have you freaked out yet?" I asked Little Ian Maule during the meal.

"No," he squeaked, pushing his uneaten hamburger away, "but I don't feel very hungry."

The next stop was a pub where we were to meet up with a number of other people who were also going to the same party. After several hours of drinking and living lives of quiet desperation we all tramped out into the cold air and a deluge of water that appeared to be coming out of the sky. (Have you ever wondered where rain *really* comes from? Ask Bob Rickard. He knows.) I started to follow a group of people who I assumed were a part of our party. The others followed me. Some time later the people I was following climbed into a van and drove away. I was about to commandeer a passing car when Big John pointed out to me that I had been following a troupe of complete strangers.

Big John then took the lead and before long we were in the depths of Hampstead Heath - knee-deep in mud. It was still raining very hard. It was so wet that all the Hampstead Heath locals were slinking around wearing wetsuits and snorkels.

"I'll kill you deadly, Hall!" quipped Kettle as he sank into a large mud hole.

"Little rain never hurt anyone," muttered Hall, striding along in his boots with the three-foot thick platform soles. It was soon after that Hall saw the flying saucer. Of course it wasn't a real flying saucer - it was just an aeroplane with a particularly, bright light - but to Hall it was a flying saucer. Reading SF is not good for some people.

"Quick! Hide!" he screamed, "before it sees us!" And then he threw himself down among some bushes. We kept on walking. Eventually he caught up with us. "Whew, that was lucky," he said. "They didn't see us."

Many hours later we arrived at the place where the party was supposed to be held. Not all of us had made it through the Heath. A thin, sad-faced fellow had collapsed to the ground and told us that he couldn't go any further. It was just too much for him. After some deliberation we left him with some of the supplies - a bottle of wine and a packet of cheese & onion crisps, as well as a weapon to protect himself from the locals - and then carried on without him.

Hall rang the bell, but there was no reaction from inside. Kettle tried too, but still nothing. Finally Kettle stood back and yelled up, "Let us in, we're your fucking guests!"

It worked. We were let in by a girl who turned out to be the hostess. Her name was Angie. As she saw us all enter she cried, "Oh my God!" Those were her exact words. She said them over and over.

Big John had been told by his friend Brian, who was a friend of Angie's, that there were going to be lots of spare women at the party and that he should invite plenty of guys. Groovy guys, preferably. "I told Brian to invite plenty of groovy guys," cried Angie, surveying us in horror, "but you're... Oh my God!"

Needless to say, there were about ten groovy guys to every woman. "I don't think I'm going to be able to swing tonight," I told Kettle, but he was too busy drying his hair to hear me.

We spent most of the night and following morning lying on the floor of a very dark room, listening to old Beatles records, drinking, and watching Big John Hall dance with himself. At 3am Angie started making hints that we should get out of her room so that she could go to bed. Finally she went for a walk in the rain.

When she got back we were still there. For some reason she got irritated at that point. Kettle suggested we move to another room. We did so and were just settling down when a pretty girl and an ugly man walked in. The girl asked us to leave. Why, asked someone. "Because they want to fuck," said Kettle. We moved and they did.

We went to another room. It was the final one. There were no more after that. As we were settling down again Angie appeared and Kettle began to apologise profusely. In fact he apologised so profusely the word will never be the same again. Angie was so touched she started crying. "Ahhh, Roy," said Rich Coad, "I think you're overdoing the apology." So Kettle started to talk with a pretty young man who turned out to be none other than Angie's brother. He was a hairdresser. Kettle told him that he had never met a hairdresser, but that of all the people that he always wanted to meet a hairdresser was right up there at the top of the list. Angie's brother was very impressed by all this and promised that he would try to do something for Kettle's hair.

The hours dragged on and I dropped off, lulled to sleep by the sound of Kettle's voice as he continued to tell Angie's brother why hairdressers were the salt of the earth, etc. At 6am Big John woke me up by stepping on my head.

"Get up. We're leaving," he muttered.

"Can't we wait until later?" I asked.

"No. A walk in the fresh morning air will do everyone good," he growled and shoved us all outside.

It was hell below zero out there. My one pint of blood froze immediately. Kettle took one breath and collapsed. We had to carry him up to the bus stop. Hall wanted everyone to return to his place for a cup of coffee and a talk about the true nature of God, but I declined and went straight home.

As I lay in my bed, listening to the sun coming up and the fluid congesting in my lungs, I wondered if I would ever consider the previous few hours part of my Good Old Days. Dear Christ, I decided, I hope not. . .

# SCAB #1

## What is Scab?

SCAB is British fandom's first gossip fanzine, aimed at revealing all kinds of nasty secrets about British fans, particularly those living in London. Each issue of SCAB will turn over the rock of fandom to see what horrible, scuttling things lie beneath. . .muck will be raked over, disgusting personal will be held up for ridicule and much sniggering. . .and juicy titbits will be printed for all to see. Above all, SCAB will be the fanzine you'll just love picking at.

## Flash! Peter Roberts Defects to Other Side!

Peter Roberts, epicene editor of EGG and CHECKPOINT, has left the Potteries (whatever they are) and moved down to London. His prime reason for the move is to get rich and screw lots of women and young men, depending on the weather. He was met at Paddington station by the cream of London fandom. . .John Brosnan and a few others whose names we can't recall at the moment. Roberts was accompanied by two suitcases of immense proportions which were full of books, fanzines, comics and assorted lead weights. The cream of London was expected to carry these bloody great things all the way to his new residence. One of the party, a certain John Hall (not really part of the cream, more like a dab of rancid butter) refused point blank. "I have my hump to think of," he said, and spent the journey playing with a mailbag that he had stolen off a passing letterbox. "I've always dreamed of having my own mailbag," Hall told SCAB as a pack of big dogs chased him down the street. Also present was famous TIME OUT writer Graham Charnock who kept muttering about his sore feet and the death of the novel.

Thanks to Greg Pickersgill pulling a few strings (though there was nothing on the other ends) Peter already has a new job. . .in the "Difficult Languages" section at the British Museum's library. He has to file cards in Russian which isn't proving to be very easy. For this he gets £3 a week and free copies of *Pravda*. Already the strain is beginning to show on Peter. His Guinness consumption is rising steadily and he has been saying things like "Da" and "Nyet" in Russian. It is feared that he may even start eating meat again. SCAB says. . ."Hang on in there, Pete!"

## Editor of Macroscopic Involved in Weird Religious Rites With Girl!

Tall, zany Robert P. Holdstock was seen performing strange rites in a temple belonging to an obscure group of religious fanatics known as "Arrcees". In the opinion of several experts that SCAB asked about this curious ceremony that a man and a woman held, when beginning a sexual union, to placate a mysterious, omnipotent creature known as "God". SCAB asked Mr Holdstock his reasons for reviving this ancient custom. "Of course I don't believe in 'God'", said Mr Holdstock, nervously fingering a string of little beads, "but you cant be too careful these days. Why, only yesterday a black crow flew past my head and last week I found a dead frog on my doorstep."

## Little Malcolm Loses All! Blames Magic Pudding Bowl!

Malcolm Edwards, epicene editor of VECTOR (a tedious little magazine with pretensions of grandeur) and once a trendy little groupie, has had his hair cut! The result isn't very pretty. Already old men and John Piggot have stopped feeling him up in the Globe toilets. Why, asked SCAB? "It was the little woman," said Mal, in a high-pitched voice. "She put a magic pudding bowl over my head while I was asleep and cut it all

off. When I woke up, after a very nice dream about Chris Priest and Mickey Moorcock running naked thru a field of poppies, my charisma was gone!

### **Roy Kettle Found in Compromising Position!**

Epicene Roy Kettle was arrested by members of the Hackney Vice Squad yesterday. They broke into his room to find him in a compromising position with his new colour TV set. "We're just good friends!" screamed the little creep as the officers dragged him off the set and hosed him down with cold water. "You can't do this to me! I earn £3,000 a year, after tax!" When SCAB asked him about the incident Mr Kettle replied, "Buy! Sell! Buy! Sell!" Mr Kettle's employers, a well-known bank in the City, are reconsidering his recent promotion.

### **Ian Maule Reaches 21!**

"Only five more years to puberty!" he said excitedly.

### **Alternative Globe a Disaster. . . Many Dead!**

A right twit by the name of Bernie Peake (if that's his real name) was responsible for organising an 'alternative' Globe on Friday, the 27<sup>th</sup> of July. The site for this fiasco was a pub that Mr Peake hadn't seen before but had chosen because it was called The Globe. It turned out to be one of the smallest, grottiest, nastiest pubs in London, as the poor unfortunates who accepted Mr Peake's invitation soon discovered as they stepped through the door. Those present, which included Ratfandom and other assorted cretins, decided to move onto another pub, and so the long trek was begun at approximately 9pm. The next hour was spent wandering around the deserted city as certain cretins discovered that their favourite pubs were either closed, been moved to another site, or had been pulled down years ago. Eventually the ragged horde staggered into a pub to be greeted with open hostility from the landlord, who didn't even want to let Greg Pickersgill use the toilets until the King Rat threatened to piss over the bar. Another trek was begun and it was during this that disaster struck. Big John Hall, intoxicated by his half-pint of lager and the nearness of Julia Stone, was running in carefree abandon along the street when he tripped and fell over.

"I fall over," said Hall from the ground. "Arghhhh!" he added as an afterthought. "My legs! I've broken both my legs! And my arms! And my neck! Quick, get brown paper and vinegar! Boil water! What about my baby? Will I lose it?"

Ratfandom then spent the rest of the night carrying – yes carrying – the wounded Mr Hall around the city. It was discovered that a concentrated diet of Mars bars can do terrible things to the human body, even John Hall's. He weighed a ton. Many times his supporters were tempted to leave him in some alley.

### **Holdstock House-Warming Party Ends in Disaster**

Disaster struck at a house-warming party given by the recently "married" Sheila and Robert Holdstock. During the festivities Mr Holdstock was hit over the head by a mysterious assailant in his own bedroom. SCAB reporter John Brosnan was in the Holdstock's living room and admiring the tasteful painting of a flock of ducks that hangs over the fireplace when he heard a scream. Putting down the copy of **The Analog Guide to Home Decorating** that he had been browsing through, he proceeded quickly to the bedroom where he found Holdstock lying on the floor, his head covered with blood. "What happened?" asked the SCAB man.

"I was hit over the head by a mysterious assailant," said Holdstock.

"Can you describe her?" asked SCAB.

"Not completely. She was short, dark. . .spoke in an Irish accent. . .had prominent, but cute, front teeth. In fact she looked very similar to someone I recently married."

Sheila Holdstock is now helping police with their enquires.

### **Peter Roberts Abandons Dart Career**

Epicene Peter Roberts admitted recently that he no longer plays darts. "I can't hit the dart board any more," he told a SCAB reporter. "My darts only fly a few feet then they fall on the ground. I don't know why. I haven't hit the board in years. Perhaps I shall have to start eating meat again."

### **Jean Finney Not Mentioned in First Issue of Scab!**

Jean Finney was not mentioned by name throughout the whole first issue of SCAB. The editor denies pressure from any particular source. He points out that Simone Walsh won't be mentioned in issue two. . .again not because of any pressure but just because. So there!

# SCAB #2

This issue is dedicated to Roy Kettle, Louise White, John Hall, Greg Pickersgill, Jacky Powers, and John Brunner – without whose help the following would not have been possible.

## **Scab Reporter Sees Elephant Mating Ritual. . .Exclusive!**

After attending a very nice party at the Brunner residence one of our top SCAB reporters was trying to get some sleep on the floor of Big John Hall's room when he became aware that something strange was going on. Near by, two massive, shadowy shapes had begun to act out a weird mating ritual. Our SCAB reporter lay rigid with fear as the two behemoths thrashed violently about on the floor, sometime only inches away. But despite his fright our hero's scientific curiosity remained and he did manage to take some notes – recording a few of the strange cries that the two leviathans were emitting. Such things as "Oy vey!" and "You're even better than my colour TV set!" and "Arghhhh!" followed by "Oops, sorry." Big John Hall himself saw nothing of this disturbing event but he did add something to the proceedings at three in the morning by sitting bolt upright in his bed and shouting "FUCK! DAMN!" He then went back to sleep. Our SCAB reporter has still not completely recovered from the experience.

## **Life Discovered on Roy Kettle!**

Intelligent life has been discovered on the body known as Roy Kettle. Over the years there have been many theories about the possibility of finding such life on Kettle but until now there had been no proof of any kind. Once it was believed that the non-stop stream of prattle that emanates from Kettle was a sign that a form of intelligence was involved in its production but this was later discovered to be a purely instinctive action with absolutely no intelligence behind it. Now, however, brain signals have been detected coming from a large protuberance on the top of Kettle known as The Nose. A large expedition is being planned up the left nostril in an effort to make contact.

## **Foreign Fans Visit London!**

Foreign fans Tom Penman and Ritchie Smith visited London last month and stayed at the home of millionaire banker Leroy Kettle. They both seemed very pleasant fellows but as it was impossible to understand what they were saying communication was somewhat difficult.

## **Ratfandom Groupie Changes Horses in Mid-Stream!**

Gay, vivacious Ratfandom groupie, Jackie Powess, has changed horses in mid-stream. Once devoted to Godfouler Gregory Pickersgill she is now to be seen hand-in-hand with Big John (I can keep going all night) Hall. The suddenness of the switch had most Ratfans agasp with surprise, including the Godfouler himself. When asked the reason why she now prefers Big John to Little Greg, Jackie had this to say: "Well, gosh, gee. . .I don't know, I think it's probably because Johnny is such a big hunk of man. I just love the way he smokes his cigarettes. . .he doesn't even take them out of the packet. Also he wants to make an honest woman out of me. We will probably settle down somewhere nice and breed."

SCAB wishes the happy couple all the best. SCAB also wishes the Godfouler all the best and hopes he will soon be able to remove the knife that is sticking in his back.

### **Whew! What a Bank Clerk!**

Still in a generous mood, SCAB wishes to congratulate Leroy Kettle on his promotion in Barclay's Bank. Leroy has asked SCAB to pass on to all its readers that he will be buying drinks for everyone at the Glob for the next year. With each drink he will be giving away copies of his best quips, bon mots, and throwaway lines. A large rubber nose is also included in the deal.

Leroy Kettle is 24. Almost 25.

### **Louise White Has Green Spot in Her Hair**

Ravishing, delectable Louise White has a green spot in her hair. Don't ask why.

### **SCAB Salutes Peter Roberts**

SCAB is happy to see that the ex-editor of EGG and CHECKPOINT has completely adapted to life in London. Formerly a rather epicene fellow, Roberts is now completely butch and spends most of his time drinking, sleeping and looking up girl's skirts on the escalators. Peter Rabbit is dead. Long live Butch Pete.

### **SCAB Star Reporter Invited to Brunner Party! Doesn't Throw Up on the Carpet or Anything!**

SCAB star reporter was very honoured to be invited to a John Brunner party. He was on his best behaviour and didn't sneer at a single person all night. High point of the evening for him was when Mr Brunner cured his tonsillitis by touching him on the throat with his Hugo. In return, the SCAB star promised to read **Stand on Zanzibar**.

Most of the entertainment was provided by ravishing Christine Priest (or whatever) who played some very nice tunes on the piano while John Hall and Leroy Kettle danced together. But most of the time the piano was hogged by an appalling little child of indeterminate sex who played the same piece over and over again while its mother looked on approvingly. The little, insufferable creature will be someone to avoid at the 1980 SF Convention.

### **Robert Holdstock Still Married!**

Robert Holdstock and his wife are still not divorced! Is this a record?

### **Alternative Globe Big Success!**

The Alternative Globe (held on the third Friday of each month at the Prince of Wales in Paddington), the first of which took place last month was a rip-roaring success! Fans from far and wide filled the Prince of Wales to the brim and a great time was had by all. "It's just like a big convention!" was a common cry heard by our six SCAB reporters. Among the more famous guests were Arthur C. Clarke, Brian Aldiss, Kingsley Amis, Harry Harrison, James Blish and Graham Charnock. "Just great," said Arthur C. Clarke "Much better than the usual Globe. It was high time for a change of venues!" Mr Clarke is already at work on a volume to be called **Tales from the Prince of Wales**.

"I agree with Arty," said Brian Aldiss. "The old Glob was becoming stale and dreary. This new pub will put British science fiction back on its feet."

"The novel is dead," said Graham Charnock. He is 43.

### **Australia Loses Bid for 1975 Worldcon! Exclusive!**

Australia has lost the bid for the 1975 worldcon. On hearing the news many Australian fans committed suicide. The 1975 worldcon will now be held in Kabul.

### **Christopher Priest Writes SF Bestseller!**

Christopher Priest has just finished a 380,000 word novel which promises to be a bestseller. Called **The Stygian Composers of Mars**, the book concerns a world that exists inside an empty packet of Birds Eye fishfingers. This may seem implausible at first glance but Mr Priest has taken every care to ensure that his theoretical world is scientifically sound. When I had finished reading this 380,000 word novel I was quite willing to accept a whole world inside an empty packet of Birds Eye fishfingers. Mr Priest is sure to win many Hugos for this classic effort, and probably a few Oscars too.

Nice one Chris.

## SCAB #3

HULLO you shitty bunch of ratbags. Why I waste my time producing all this good stuff for you morons I don't know. SCAB is starting to get some reaction, despite the fact I don't bother to send copies to anyone, and I can't say that I'm very impressed. I mean, just take a look at the following loc from Thom Phenhman (I can't get the hang of these fannish aitches. . .I still call beer, beerh) which was one of the more rational I've received:

'Where is my copy of SCAB 2? Stop. You nasty little phanzine editor you. Stop. Eh? Stop. I was even going to send a letter of comment on the first one, well, that is, a letter commenting on it, I hardly think a loccolumn is a SCAB thing. Stop. (Ya dig?) Stop. I didn't, but I was going to. Stop. Typing while listening to the Aetherius Society broadcast on Open Door. Stop. Oh Jesus. More laffs than FOULER or FREE ORBIT. Which reminds me. Stop. SCAB was great stuff. Stop. Fun. Fun. Fun. Stop. Fun. Fun. Stop. Oh nasty little Norstrillianyou! Stop. Were I to live in London I would fear SCAB like I fear SCAB or getting drunk on five pints of Exhibition. SCAB. Embarrassing, Society, like. Stop. Too much, too fucken much!! Stop. Yeah, anyway, real nice 'n' bitchy, SCAB. Getting really tedious this stop business, isn't it? Stop. Ratfandom stylistics 'n' atmosphere very interesting phenomenon. Stop. A self-sustaining thing really. Stop. Why have turds pointed ends? Stop. So your arse doesn't close with a clap. Stop. Whaddyamean you've heard it? Stop. Does that mean your turds don't have pointed ends? Stop.'

Thank you for your letter, Tom. I hope everything turns out okay for you.

Another of the great British fannish wits, Leroy Kettle (does anyone know his real name?) didn't exactly write a loc but dropped around in person to point out that SCAB was but a poor imitation of certain parts of *Private Eye* and so sucks, boo yah! Mind like a steel trap has Mr Kettle. He also mentioned that he is getting very weary of the Roy Kettle nose jokes that have been appearing in SCAB. In deference to Mr Kettle's wishes SCAB will no longer say anything about his big, funny-looking nose. Instead, starting in the next issue, there will be a series of very humorous jokes about his piles. Andrew Stephenson will be providing the illustrations. How's your sex life Roy? Ho, ho, ho. Laff, laff. What a rib-tickler!

### **Another Alternative Globe Bombs Out!**

Yet another Alternative Globe has failed dismally. This one was held on the third Friday of September in a rather posh pub called The Fountains. Décor was 'qhaite naice' but the atmosphere was spoilt by the aging bar manager. To be frank, he was appalling. He first demonstrated his vulgarity by harassing certain people if he didn't think they were drinking fast enough, but things got worse later on. That well-known fannish groupie, Jacky Powess, no doubt overcome by all her recent physical exertion (it's not easy having to service both of fandom's biggest pistols) placed her head on the table and went to sleep. Passed out in other words. Well, this really sent our favourite bar manager round the bend. "She's drunk," he squealed. "Get her out!" Nonsense, we told him, she's just very tired. But he wouldn't listen to reason and became more and more agitated, finally threatening the Ratfan party with the law. Again we tried to reason calmly with him (though one Ratfan got carried away and claimed that he would have the pub turned into a skating rink if the manager didn't watch his step) but it was all to no avail. Seething with self-righteous indignation we decided to stay in the pub come what may. And then it happened. We blew it. Or rather Miss Powess did. She threw up. And our defence crumbled. . . So, with dignity, Ratfandom march out of the pub, supporting the still unconscious Miss Powess between us. Unfortunately our solidarity was somewhat damaged by Mr Kettle, who had one of his funny 'turns' in a phone box outside and then returned inside the pub where he stayed for the rest of the night ("I have no son, said Pickersgill as he threw Miss Powess' limp form into a passing taxi). The remainder of us, accompanied by an American camp follower, trooped off into the night singing

the Ratfan marching song. We ended up at the Prince of Wales, the pub that had been the setting for the previous Alternate Globe disaster.

### **Another Loc From Gannetfandom**

This one is from Ian Maule:

'Please send me the 2<sup>nd</sup> issue of SCAB. I know that you've produced it. Williams is back to his routine of sitting in the bog chuckling. Of course he might be looking at his crotch but with such a BIG man I don't consider it likely, do you? On the subject of SCAB number one I must say that I enjoyed it a great deal, although I must point out that having reached the magical age of 21 years it is in fact another ten years before I reach puberty,

I remain your very admiring,  
Ian **XXX**

After reading Maule's letter and Penman's on the first page it sort of makes you what this con the Gannets are organising is going to be like. . .

### **Greg Pickersgill Finds His Dream Girl!**

"I dreamed of Jane Fonda last night," announced Pickersgill to SCAB editor John Brosnan.

"Really?" said SCAB.

"Yeah. Only she was an idealised version."

"Idealised?" asked SCAB in amazement, wondering how anyone could improve on Jane Fonda's present form.

"Yeah. She was shorter and rounder." Said Pickersgill.

### **Roy Kettle Dead!**

Fandom's zaniest comic is no more. The "Nose" is gone. While having his piles examined by a doctor using a very long and sharp instrument Kettle was overcome by a fit of violent sneezing. "It wasn't a pretty sight," said the doctor later, his uniform splattered with blood. "And it was worse after he started sneezing." Naturally all of British fandom is shocked by the unexpected loss of the "King of the Quip". Ian William's comment is typical: "It could happen to any of us."

### **Loc Column. . .Continued. . .**

SCAB is a real breath of fresh air. After the all-time low that British fanzines have reached in recent years it was heartening and refreshing to read SCAB 1 & 2. I hope other fanzine editors, like Robert Holdstock and Lisa Conesa, follow your example and start producing fanzines that have some balls, like yours.

Sincerely, Brian Aldiss.

## **Fannish Joke of the Year!**

Greg Pickersgill has said that he intends to produce a personal zine. It will be called TALES OF THE FILING SECTION and will appear on a regular basis. The staff of SCAB are still rolling about on the floor as a result of hearing this news.

## **Loc Column. . .Continued. . .**

This one came from that famous Polish war veteran, Stanislaw Lem:

Shit a brick! I've read some fucking great fanzines in my time but SCAB takes the cake! Really way out, man, way out! I was going to send my new treatise WHY I AM THE GREATEST SCIENCE FICTION WRITER EVER to Bruce Gillespie but now I've changed my mind. I'm through with that Aussie arsehole. From now on you're number one with me, you cheeky possum you!

Love and kisses,  
Stan.

## **SF Stars of the Future Gather at Holdstock's Home!**

Many of the great potential SF names of the future recently gathered at the palatial Holdstock residence to read to each other their new stories. The group, which calls itself Piranha, or Pirhea, or Pie-in-the-sky, depending on what way the wind is blowing, consists of many well-known fannish characters. Such as dashing, heavy-set Andrew Stephenson (dressed in a stunning, off-the-shoulder tweed jacket and jodpurs), who read out his new story, *Why I Want Very Much to Sell to Analog Again*. Also present was the dashy and very sexy Chris Morgan ("Have you seen my new zoom lens?") who read his new space epic **Buck Rogers VS the Galactic Surgical Boot**. Another key member was Christopher's vivacious, willowy fiance. . .Miss Hazel Reynolds. . .who just listened (not an easy task in the circumstances). Of course we mustn't overlook the star himself – Rob Holdstock. Rob read an earlier SF masterpiece aloud. . .the **Bible**.

SCAB says. . .good luck, and good selling!

## **Third World War May Affect Availability of Scab!**

Future issues of SCAB may be difficult to obtain due to the increasing likelihood of the Third World War. Order now for the special lead issue of SCAB. . .after you've finished reading it you can wrap your balls up in the pages.

# SCAB #4

## Editor of Scab Attacked!

Certain pretentious fans, such as Ian Williams and Peter Weston, have informed the editor of SCAB (sallow-faced, rheumy-eyed, rapidly-aging alcoholic John Brosnan) that the magazine is a betrayal of his vast talents and that he should be producing material of greater worth. What those venerable gentlemen based this odd belief on is unclear. Certainly it can't be the editor's one published book to date, **James Bond in the Cinema**, which was described by the BBC as fit for eight-year-olds only. So, alarmed by all this talk of untapped talent, the editor hastily organised a poll among various London fans to sound out their opinions on the matter.

The result is as follows:

We, the undersigned. . .

Gregory Pickersgill,  
Robert Holdstock,  
Leroy Kettle,  
Malcolm Edwards,  
Peter Roberts,  
John Hall,  
Jack Marsh,  
and Graham Charnock. . .

State that we firmly believe that SCAB represents the sum total of John Brosnan's talents at full stretch.

It is with relief that we can say that SCAB will continue as usual.

## I Kill You Deadly Pickersgill!

The war between Big John Hall and Short Squat Greg Pickersgill is increasing in its ferocity. Last week Big John swore that he would 'get' Pickersgill. Pickersgill immediately riposted with a withering 'Oh Yeah?' Jockstrap Powless, the witty, vivacious girl who is at the root (sic) of all this bitterness, was too bored to talk to SCAB about it.

## True Rat Flubs!

Leroy Kettle's first individual fanzine was a complete disaster! The only loc that Mr Kettle received was from Malcolm ('Isn't he a sweetie?') Edwards who wrote to point out that the first page of TRUE RAT consisted of one giant illiterate sentence. Mr Kettle has taken the disaster badly and spends most of his time wandering around his colour TV set muttering, "Donna und Blitzen!"

## ----- Finally Makes Out With ----- at Novacon!

It all happened at the Novacon when ----- finally achieved the big break-through with the lovely -----! I'm overjoyed ----- told SCAB. But ----- says that ----- and then ----- but --- and ----- scared shitless ----- husband ----- gun ----- . SCAB wishes the happy couple all the best.

### **Peter Roberts Fails MA!**

Awwwww.

### **Leroy (Donna Und Blitzen!) Kettle Disgusts Christine Edwards with Obscene Fanzine!**

After Leroy had foolishly sent a copy of his failed fanzine TROO RAT to the wife of London's feyest fan she told SCAB that she didn't know that 'Roy thought thoughts like that'. She also wrinkled her nose as she said it. We hear that Mr Kettle has been crossed off the Edwards' guest list, along with the rest of London fandom.

### **Stanislaw Lem Sues Scab!**

Famous Polish hack Stanley Lem is taking legal action against SCAB after the appearance in the last issue of a letter supposedly written by him.

"You little cunt," wrote Mr Lem recently to SCAB, "How dare you publish a fictitious letter from me, making me sound like a foul-mouthed cretin. I'll have your balls for this!"

You'll have to find them first, says SCAB.

### **Christopher Priest Approaches Dotage!**

Chris (yum!) Priest celebrated his recent thirtieth birthday by writing an 8000000000000000 word novel about a world falling off the back of a Green Shield stamp. It's to be the first part of a trilogy. Advanced sales have already reached the one mark.

### **Ritchie Smith to Learn Foreign Language!**

English.

### **Roy Kettle Struts His Stuff at the Novacon**

Mr Kettle had all the stops out at the Novacon. Not only did he conquer the heart of that dear little femfan from Down Under, Shayne McCormack, he also attracted the attentions of at least two other ravishing women (as well as the usual ones such as Julia Stone, Hazel Reynolds, John Piggot, Pauline Dungate etc who are all, or have been, devout Kettle fanciers). Perhaps it has something to do with his new beard which has obscured many of his facial features, with one exception but we won't go into that. . . it's too dark up there. First to fall under his fatal charms was Janet Shorrocks who actively pursued him on the Saturday night. Mr Kettle, or 'The Pistol' as we call him in Ratfandom circles, really knows how to handle women and managed to successfully elude the randy young Shorrocks. At one point he actually climbed out of a window to avoid her. What a smoothie!

Second was another newcomer to cons called Donna, a student and part-time skindiver. She followed Mr Kettle all through Sunday with her tongue hanging out and moist loins. Once again he demonstrated his skill at pulling in the poontang. Finding himself on the same bed as the poor girl on Monday morning he muttered, "Oh shit!", got up and moved to another bed. (All true. . . there were several witnesses).

"She didn't really fancy me," Leroy told SCAB later. "It was Pickersgill she wanted."

### **Magic Pudding Coming!**

Sercon, bourgeois, upper middle-class (and still rising), beautiful Malcolm Edwards is about to publish a personal fanzine called THE MAGIC PUDDING. The origin of this title dates back to Little Mal's courting days when he first started playing hospitals with his wife-to-be. The Magic Pudding was Mal's pet name for -----  
----- . How about that!

### **A Public Service Message On Behalf Of Leroy Kettle**

"Donna!"

End of public service message.

### **Yet Another Alternative Globe Non-Event!**

The Fountains was once again the venue for the latest Alternative (sic) Globe. Nothing much happened, except for the usual bunch of cretins and Ratfandom. (Including Pickersgill who once swore that he would never enter The Fountains again, ever!) Ratfandom left the cretins to talk about the scientific prophecies of Jules Verne and moved to the downstairs bar where things were somewhat more bearable. But all in all it was a pretty dull night. Peter Roberts didn't even knock any milk bottles over on the way home.

### **Another Public Service Message on Behalf of Leroy Kettle**

"Donna!"

"I want you! Come to me!"

End of public service message.

### **Robert Holdstock Still the Same**

Robert Holdstock is still the same despite the best efforts of everyone who knows him. His long-suffering wife, Sheila, now communicates with him by sign language only.

### **Yet Another Public Service Message on Behalf of Leroy Kettle**

"Bring your flippers!"

End of message.

# SCAB #5

## Rat Leaves Sinking Ship!

One of England's most beloved Ratfans, none other than the editor of this noble journal, has decided that England is no longer a fit place for anyone with half a brain and is preparing to make a hasty exit. On February 9th, smashed out of his brain with alcohol, the SCAB king will be dragged screaming onto a QANTAS jumbo jet.

"It's not that I'm worried about flying," he told one of our reporters. "It's just that I'm worried that the wires will break."

"Wires?"

"The wires that hold the plane up. That's what they told me at the QANTAS ticket office. All those aeroplanes are kept up with wires. I mean, how else would they stay up there? Why are you shaking your head like that? Do you know something that I don't?"

## Roy Kettle Makes It!

Leroy Arthur Kettle has made it. He has found a Good Woman and is getting it regular. . . oh shit, I can't go on. Kettle, you bastard, I hope your balls drop off and Angie treads of them while she's wearing her football boots! Shit! Shit! Shit!

(The above was reprinted from **The Great Australian Bite**, probably the funniest novel ever written by anyone. . . watch for it at your local WH Smith's. . .)

## Christopher Priest Feels A Right Tit!

And sometimes even a left one. But seriously kids. . . the author of that great SF classic about a world inside a used contraceptive (It's a **Mad, Mad, Mad, and Rather Damp World**, £26-50, Dear Books; 789pp) is showing signs of advanced senility, despite his mere 34 years. Only recently he informed *Scab* editor Brosnan that the buying up of old aerosol cans was a sound financial investment for the future: "In 20 years time they'll be worth a fortune," he ejaculated confidentially. "Buy! Buy! Buy!"

(The above is all true.)

## Bruce Gillespie Voted Houseguest of the Year by Top British SF Fans!

Tall, bronzed Ozzie fan Bruce Gillespie has been voted the houseguest of the year by the Edwards, the Westons, Christopher Priest and Brain Aldiss (star of TV and radio).

"We hated to see him go," said little Christine Edwards. "He was so nice. I'm sure he didn't think even one of those naughty Roy Kettle thoughts the whole time he was with us."

"A great lad," said Peter Weston in his usual funny accent that is so amusing to Antipodean ears and knees. "And very good in bed too, or so the wife tells me. Not one single stain on the sheets. Odd really, for a lad of his size."

"He was big," agreed Mrs Edwards. "One didn't realise just how big he was until one had to wash his underpants. I've never seen underpants like those before. They were very different from Malcolm's. . .much, much bigger."

"Best house guest I've ever had," said Christopher Priest. "In fact, I was very sorry to see him go. I'll miss all his fascinating eating habits. . .such as picking up his bacon with his fingers. I could have watched him eat for hours. . .in fact I often did. By the way, could you lend me a pound?"

"I shall always, and you may quote me on this, my rates are reasonable, consider Bruce to be a real true blue cobber (is that how you say it?)," said Brian Aldiss, science fiction superstar. "What I especially liked about him was the way he noted down every word I spoke."

### **Science Fiction Monthly Gets Hugo!**

*Science Fiction Monthly* magazine has hired Hugo Thompson as their new office boy.

### **Robert Holdstock Hot Favourite to Win Gollancz SF Competition!**

Bob Holdstock (or cretin as he is known to his friends) is the hot favourite to win the Gollancz SF competition. His novel, **Buck Rogers vs the Sentient Turnip**, was delivered to the Gollancz offices just days before the deadline. "I just feel very, very confident," said Mr Holdstock. "The fact that I've loaned my sweet little wife to a well-known SF superstar who happens to be one of the judges has nothing to do with it."

### **Gregory Pickersgill to Make Big Fannish Comeback!**

Any year now.

# BIG SCAB #1

## Editorial. . .

Well, here it is folks. BIG SCAB.

The fanzine none of you have been waiting for. At last.

No, don't worry. Little SCAB is not dead. All the wit and bite and humour of little SCAB will be incorporated within the pages of BIG SCAB. It will just be a little harder to find, that's all. Apart from wit and bite and humour BIG SCAB will also have all the attractions of more conventional fanzines, such as reviews. . .book reviews, film reviews, even fanzine reviews. It will also have serious, meaningful articles about a number of serious and meaningful subjects. . .such as tits and thighs and Roy Kettle's nose.

Sorry.

That sort of slipped out. It won't happen again.

BIG SCAB will also feature poetry. Good, serious Poetry. I intend to become the Lisa Conesa of Ratfandom. I already walk like her so why not go all the way? BIG SCAB will lift the low standard of the average British fanzine to an all-time high. Seriously, I mean that. I'm tired of being regarded by everyone as a flippant fan who produces nothing but disposable fanzines. I want people like Peter Weston and other Young Conservatives to treat me seriously and with respect. In other words, I've grown up at last. I've matured. I've become an adult, responsible fan. The childish games are over. From now on I'm deadly seriously serious. Terry Jeeves, watch out!

It's customary for fanzine editors, in their first editorials, to say – This is my fanzine and it will only publish what I want to see in it and if you don't like it you know what you can do about it – and so on. Well, I'm not going to say anything of the sort. This is your fanzine. Come in and take your shoes off. . .relax. Whatever you want to see within these pages you'll get. I am open to all suggestions, as long as they are serious. So, as my Jewish friends say. . .enjoy, enjoy!

## Great Moments in Poetry Department – Number One

Roses are red,  
Violets are blue,  
Roy Kettle's nose,  
Is full of goo.

## A Special 'Letter from Australia'

Hiya coppers!

This is yer old mate Broz writing to all you pommie bastards from that real beaut of a little nation. . .Australia. Jeemies, but it's great to be back among me own kind. . .tall bronzed men and their juicy sheilas. Beats the hell out of being stuck among you sickly, pale, weak-sighted pommie scum as I have been during the last few years. Don't know how I stood it for so long. Must have been a brick short of a load.

Guess you plurry drongos would like to know a bit about life down here in Paradise. Well, first thing in the morning I get up and slip into me denim shorts and a pair of surplus army boots. . .after shaking out the funnelweb spiders and other assorted insectual fauna, then I head down to the billabong for a quick scrub-down with a pumice stone, taking care not to step on any poisonous snakes on the way. As I wash I usually spot several of those cute little animals that are native to Australia, such as wallabies, wombats and the

occasional dingbat, coming down to the billabong for a drink. Naturally, like any other red-blooded Australian, I blast the little buggers to bits with me .303 rifle.

After a bloody huge breakfast of roast meat pie and steak and chips and eggs and steak (none of your effete foreign tucker down here!) I go out and help my old Dad supervise the milking of the kangaroos. Me Dad is one of the biggest producers of Kangaroo Butter in the state. As we work we often hum various Australian religious songs, such as Waltzing Matilda, Advance Australia Fair (our new national anthem. . .which makes me chock up), I Love a Sunburnt Country and Tie Me Kangaroo Down, Sport. Real uplifting they are. We also tell each other what a beaut little nation Australia is (Australians are always telling themselves this. . .it's sort of compulsory). We also say things like "Strewth!" "Fair crack of the whip!" "Bloody oath!" and "Crikey!" I'm not sure why.

Well, I've got to shit, I mean shoot through now and help me Dad put down a rampaging koala bear that's broken through the east fence and is killing all the chooks.

See yer, sports. . .

As is evident from the proceeding I have recently been traveling around. Australia and America, to be exact, though I didn't see much of America. . .only a small portion of it. I saw a lot of Australia, in fact I probably saw more of it during this trip than when I lived there.

I went back to Perth to see my father for the first time in six years. If he hadn't paid for the trip it would probably have been several years more before I saw him again. I left Perth in 1968 telling him I was only going to be in Sydney for three weeks. The first thing I noticed about him after six years was that he was a lot older. This is a natural thing to expect, of course, but he had aged even more than the intervening six years warranted. He's in his early sixties now and has been plagued during the last decade with diabetes and arthritis, both of which have been getting progressively worse. But that's life, I suppose.

While in Perth I stayed with him and my aunt in her old house that is on top of a hill in East Perth. East Perth is one of Perth's oldest suburbs and has definitely seen better days. In that city of milk and honey it is the nearest thing they have to a slum. Some of Perth's oldest houses are in East Perth and in the cemetery almost opposite my aunt's house there are lots of graves that date back to the early days of the colony.

My aunt, who is about sixty now, has devoted most of her life to looking after my late grandfather. He died in 1967 at a very ripe old age. Now that he's dead she looks after my father (I should point out that my mother and father are separated. . .they separated shortly after I was born and I've always wondered if there was a connection). Her main interest in life is religion. She's a strict Roman Catholic. Everyone on my father's side of the family is a Roman Catholic. . .in fact one of my aunts is a nun and one of my cousins is a monk. When my aunt isn't cooking she is going to Mass. I'm sure she must have set a world record for Mass attendance by now. Most of the rooms in her house have several of those religious paintings that I find somewhat nauseating. Those pictures, for instance, that show a rather insipid-looking Christ with his heart glowing like a 300-watt light bulb. In my grandfather's room, where I stayed, there was a crucifix that glowed in the dark.

My aunt has been engaged now for over 25 years. Her fiancé's name is Phil and he still sees her regularly. I used to wonder why they never married and presumed it was because she wanted to stay and look after her father. But only recently I found out that 25 years ago she developed breast cancer and had to have one removed. After that she refused to get married.

My stay in Perth was somewhat tedious. I spent most of the time just lying around in the sun, eating and drinking. I looked up a few old friends, saw plenty of relatives (too many, actually) but the whole thing was pretty boring. My father and I don't communicate too well. Hardly at all, in fact. As for talking to my aunt. . .well, at least she didn't bring up the subject of religion while I was there.

After a month of Perth I moved on to Melbourne by bus via the Nullarbor Plain and Adelaide. I arrived in Melbourne at around 8pm on a Thursday night, tired and pissed off after three days and two nights of sitting up in a bus. I caught a taxi round to Bruce Gillespie's place, where I arranged to stay, and before long found myself having a delicious steak dinner with Bruce's next door neighbours, one of which was a musician who had received a grant to study at some American college, and the other being an incredibly attractive and bra-less artist. . .plus a number of other interesting people. There was wine too.

The next day Bruce took me into Melbourne to visit the Space Age Bookshop which is owned and run by the legendary Merv Binns. Also in the shop was the legendary Lee Harding who it was good to see again after all these years. I saw Lee yet again when he invited me round to his place for a small party. I went there with Leigh Edmonds and his zany girlfriend Valma, after they had kindly treated Bruce and I to a meal. . .and after Leigh had shown off his Moog synthesiser. The last time I'd seen Leigh had been four years earlier at Peter Darling's home in Sydney. I always remember that because it was the occasion I walked into the toilet and came face to face with Leigh sitting there with his trousers around his ankles and a stunned look on his face. It was a very funny sight and I always like to mention it when I write or talk to Leigh. I know he gets a kick out of it too. Also at the party was John Foyster, Australian fandom's father figure, George Turner, one of John Bangsund's writers and part-time novelist, and Robin Johnston. . .part-time everything.

During my stay in Melbourne my hosts kindly took me on a tour over the beaut little hotel where the Melbourne fans will be holding a little gathering next year which they laughingly refer to as a worldcon. I was quite impressed with the hotel and its plush fittings but noted that the rooms lacked the electric trouser-presses that made the 1973 Eastercon in Bristol such a memorable occasion. It's little things like this that can make or break a convention. I also hope that the overseas guests won't mind having to walk through all that long grass at the back of the hotel whenever they want to use the little house. And let us also hope that the planning for the worldcon will be more efficient than that for the Fantasy Film Con which was held in Melbourne last Easter. The hall where the films were to be shown was owned by a Lithuanian group who suddenly announced that they expected to be able to censor the films themselves. "Nothing sexy or communistic," they demanded. Organiser Robin Johnson was left wondering if it would be possible to find enough material for a Doris Day fantasy film con.

Bruce Gillespie lives in Carlton, a pleasantly sleazy suburb of Melbourne. His flat is large and rambling and is located right opposite a park. It's a nice place to stay in and there is no shortage of reading matter. Thanks for the hospitality, Bruce, and I hope you've finally started work now instead of lazing around finding excuses not to write.

From Melbourne I traveled up to Sydney, again by bus. We passed through Canberra, Australia's capital village, which I hadn't seen before. It's an odd place but rather attractive. In Sydney I stayed with my mother at her flat in Clovelly, which is right near the sea. The coastal scenery around there with its high cliffs is very impressive. Catching a bus from there was a real pleasure because you could sit at the bus stop and see the waves breaking on miles of coastline.

My mother moved to Sydney a few years ago. I'm not sure why she stays there because most of her friends and relatives are back in Perth. But she does have a boyfriend in Sydney who she's known on and off since the 1950s. His name is Winfried, he's a German and is one of the most pleasant and intelligent people I

have ever known. . .a really civilised person. . .none of which has ever rubbed off on me during the years I've known him. He did teach he how to play chess when I was very young but he neglected to teach me how to win. He, and practically everyone else I've ever played has been beating me ever since.

My mother doesn't seem to have many interests outside of her work. She still reads a lot (she was the one who got me hooked on science fiction when I was about nine or ten) and likes going to the movies. She particularly likes horror movies so I took her to *see The Exorcist* while I was in Sydney. It scared the hell out of me but she really enjoyed it and wants to see it again.

I looked up the few fans still living in Sydney that I know. . .Peter Darling, of course, Ron Clarke and Shayne McCormack and met several that I hadn't before, such as Eric Lindsay. And one weekend Peter and I headed down to Canberra in his car to pay a visit to the fannish kingpin, Ol Banger himself. It was a good ride down except for the moment when Peter's car was charged by a large black bull (no, this is not a normal occurrence on Australian roads) while we were listening to a tape of *The Goon Show*.

Ol Banger hadn't changed much since I'd last seen him though he had acquired a new wife. Everyone in fanzines usually describes other people's wives as being attractive, intelligent, witty and all that. . .but Sally actually is attractive and intelligent and witty which really pisses me off. He's also a better chess player than I am. One day, Banger, one day.

Pete and I presented the happy newlyweds with a bottle of cheap champagne. . . which led to Banger breaking out his wine stock and we stayed pleasantly sozzled for the rest of the weekend. I had a good time, despite being beaten by Banger at chess. . .again and again and again.

After staying in Sydney for about six weeks I headed off to Hollywood, USA. I don't like flying so I can't say that the trip there was very enjoyable. I spend most of my time, when flying, sitting rigid with fear and waiting for the engines to cut out. I particularly dislike take-offs and usually pretend I'm sitting on a bus that's going up a very steep hill. Even that doesn't always work because I then start to worry about break failure. 747s aren't too bad to fly in because they're so big and smooth and they've got all sorts of things to take you're mind off it all. . .such as stereophonic head-phones which drown out the noise of the engines (that way, if the engines cut out, you won't know about it right away). The worst part of the trip was the flight from San Francisco to Los Angeles. The plan seemed very frail and flimsy compared to the 747 and at one point, when the seatbelt sign flashed on for no apparent reason, followed by the engines making an unusual sound, I almost panicked. It was hard to fight back the desire to run up to the pilot's cabin and ask if they needed any help.

The reason for my trip to Hollywood was to try and interview people for my next book, which is about horror films. Most of the time I was there I was busy trying to get in contact with people, waiting for people to contact me, and actually interviewing people, so I didn't see too much of Los Angeles. I didn't even make it to Disneyland, much to Merv Barrett's horror. One person who was a tremendous help to me while I was there was Robert Bloch who is an unbelievably nice man. Apart from helping in the way of contacts he even took me to a LASFS meeting, the less said about the better. . . reminded me of the bad old days of the Sydney Science Fiction Foundation with people reading minutes and all that sort of crap. Not one drop of alcohol in sight, either. Another very helpful person was Bill Rotsler who lives up to all I've ever read about him. He even managed to sneak me into Paramount Studios when he went there to hire a sub-machine gun. Great bloke. Sorry I couldn't make it to that photography session, Bill.

I arrived back in England early one Sunday morning. Everything seemed very peaceful and calm at Heathrow and during the taxi ride into the city. It was the same day that a car bomb was exploded out there

at the airport, though it went off long after I had gone. It was good to be back.

## **Book Reviews**

**Inverted World** by Christopher Priest: Yet another book about a hyperboloid planet. The same old story about a group of people dragging a city from China to the Atlantic Ocean because their perception has been distorted by a transliteration generator and they think their world is shaped like a solid hyperbole. Ho hum. How about a bit of originality, Mr Priest?

**Concrete Island** by J.G. Ballard: Now here is something new! A man crashes his car and finds himself trapped on a section of wasteland situated between three converging motorway routes. His efforts to escape are frustrated by two other (willing) inhabitants of the island. . .a neurotic girl and a retarded ex-circus acrobat. But Mr Ballard delivers the real coup de grace at the end of the book and I can tell you it's a real shocker! For, when the obstacles preventing the antagonist from leaving the island are removed, he decides TO STAY OF HIS OWN FREE WILL! I must say I was completely floored by this unexpected development. Ballard is, without doubt, a real genius.

## **Great Moments in Poetry Department – Number Two**

There was a young Ratfan called Greg,  
Who wanted to be very much taller,  
So he got all the Ratfans together,  
And stood on top of their heads.

## **Leroy on Hunger Strike!**

Leroy Kettle has shocked Ratfandom by announcing that he is going to give up being a super bank clerk and become a writer. He intends to forsake all his material benefits, including (gasp) his colour TV set! He is also going to give up eating and drinking. . .all for the cause of art. Ratfandom intends to support him as much as possible and will provide him with the odd scrap of bread and an occasional comic book.

Good on yer Leroy. We're all right behind you.

## **Social Worker Floors Ritchie Smith!**

Big, strapping fan Ritchie Smith was knocked flat on his back by a female social worker at a recent party. Mr Smith's subsequent remarks were, as usual, unintelligible.

# BIG SCAB #2

## Editorial. . .

This issue of BIG SCAB is dedicated to Robert P. Holdstock. Now I realise some of you out there don't know Robert P. Holdstock. In fact, some of you may have never even heard of him. You are the lucky ones.

No, of course I didn't mean that, Fob old buddy. British fandom wouldn't be the same without Bob. It would be a lot quieter, for one thing. Rob Holdstock is a force, a tower of vitality. Anyone who meets him cannot help but be affected by him and so on. He has galvanised many a festering fan to action, he has inspired people to write, to produce fanzines, stories, even novels. Anything to keep him quiet. He is sort of like a tall, gangling, bearded version of Harlan Ellison and just as insufferable. And yet, for all his importance very little has been written about him. With this issue of BIG SCAB I am trying to rectify this failing. With pieces like 'A Typical Visit from Robert P. Holdstock I hope to present a true picture of 'Our Rob', warts and all. Big goof that he is, I think it's an honour that he well and truly deserves.

Reaction to the first issue of BIG SCAB has been very gratifying. The letters have poured in, and a number of well wishers have phoned to say how much they liked the magazine. Well-wishers such as Stanislaw Lem (or 'Stan' as I call him) who said – "Bloody great little mag, John. Keep it up, baby." And Jimmy Ballard who said, "It reminds me of the time I saw two intersecting cones going down the High Street etc." And of course my old friend Artie Clarke who said, "I showed your marvelous publication to my friend Stan the film director and he expressed an interest in buying the film rights."

So folks, SCAB could be on the way up.

## Easy Pickings

I came back to England to find myself on a convention committee. The Seacon committee, no less, headed by the illustrious Little Mal and including such people as Grah Charnock, his wife, Mrs Little Mal, Holdstock and Leroy Kettle. With a committee like that Seacon should be a con to remember. It's already made history by being the first seaside convention to be held in Coventry, but that has nothing to do with me. I'm not sure about the functions of some of the other members but my own role is very clear-cut. . .I'm to organise the film programme. Now I've never organised a film programme in my life but I have written the worst film book in history so I presume there's a connection there. The only other time I was involved on the organisational side of a convention was in Australia. That was for the Syncon in 1970 and I was in charge of the auction. It was a disaster. Just before the auction was due to start I locked myself in a storeroom with Gary Mason, a mortal enemy. The auction it self was a shambles and Lee Harding had to take over.

But despite those awful memories I accepted the film job feeling that it should be a fairly straightforward thing to handle. Just pick the films, hire the equipment and Bob's your uncle (what a silly saying). So far it isn't turning out that way. Even this far ahead I can't get the films I want and we may be reduced to sitting through *Plan 9 from Outer Space* again. If I should disappear during the convention it means I've locked myself in a storeroom with Little Mal.

One of the few things of worth that Peter Roberts has done during the year he's been mincing around up here in London is introduce the kingpins of Ratfandom to bar billiard's. Now bar billiards, for the benefit of you foreigners, is a sort of billiard game. It consists of a table full of holes and with lots of little wooden mushrooms standing on it. All the little mushrooms are red except for one which is black. The object of the game is to hit all the balls down the holes (the holes have a different score marked beside them from 10 to 200 but if you send the one red ball down a hole your score is doubled). To get the balls down the holes demands the use of long sticks called cues. Do you get the idea? Yes I know it all sounds pretty infantile but it's my idea of fun these days. Pickersgill and I play this game quite a lot. We play at a nearby pub called the Crown and Sceptre. It has a basement which has two bar billiard tables, a pool table, a fruit machine (more about that later) and a poofy barman called Brian who is a part-time male model and dancer.

We get on quite well with another barman there called Tony who actually buys us drinks. To Pickersgill's amazement he found out that Tony, who comes from Northern Ireland, was once the lead guitarist or drummer or something of a group called Van Morrison (naturally I'd never heard of them). He's a very funny lad is Tony, and is always playing little jokes. Like the time he had his wife, who also works there, come and tell Pickersgill that he was barred from the pub. Much laffs resulted, except from the wife who wasn't in on the joke. Actually there was a time recently when we thought we would be barred from the 'Fun Palace', as we call it. Pickersgill was playing the fruit machine upstairs (a fruit machine is a poor man's version of a one-armed bandit. . .it pays out either twopenny pieces or tokens, I've never been able to work out what you're supposed to do with the tokens) and won 10p. He was so excited he smote the glass front of the machine and put his fist right through it. Dripping blood, he grabbed the money and made a hasty exit. Luckily they never found out who was responsible but the Charnocks didn't help matters a week or so later by indicating the repaired machine and inquiring in very loud voices, "IS THAT THE ONE THAT GREG PUT HIS FIST THROUGH?" Minds like steel traps, they have.

I should point out that I invariably beat Pickersgill at bar billiards. At least I did until recently when he began to show a rapid improvement. His main problem was not being careful enough 'with his shots and knocking over the little wooden toadstools. (You remember those? They're very important). If you knock a red toadstool over you lose your score for that break but if you knock the one black toadstool over you lose your whole score up until that point. If you knock all the toadstools over at once you've got to go and lie in the road outside for an hour. Bar billiards isn't all beer and skittles, you know. It's a man's game. And very character building too. Mine's grown out of all proportion. I'm seriously thinking of becoming a bar billiard missionary and spreading the game across the world. If every one played bar billiards I'm sure there wouldn't be as many wars. Come to think of it, there wouldn't be many trees either. Just making all those little wooden toadstools alone would wipe out whole forests.

### **Bitchings. . .or How to Start a Fannish Feud**

Here it comes. . .get ready. . .Malcolm Edwards is a creep! There, it's done. We're away. The feud has begun. Now like the rest of you I regard fannish feuds as boring, trivial affairs not worth the stencils they're typed on but circumstances beyond my control have driven me to this action. But what, you are asking, could cute, lovable Little Mal possibly do to upset anyone, even me? Well it all revolves around *Science Fiction Monthly*, Britain's only science fiction magazine. As some of you may remember, I had an article in the first issue about special effects & SF films. In February I asked the editor if she would care for any further material on SF films and said no as Phillip Strick was going to be the resident film commentator but she said she would like interviews with any SF personalities that I might come across. At that point I was preparing to leave on my trip to Australia and the USA so I told her that I would be on the look-out while in

America for suitable people to interview for the magazine. When I arrived back in May I told her I had interviews with three people - Jack Arnold, Richard Matheson and Robert Bloch - and she replied that she was interested in all three. I sent the first interview in, which they agreed to publish but then decided that the other two weren't really suitable and thought about interviewing someone else instead. Chris Priest was a fairly obvious choice seeing as NEL publish his books so I checked it out with him then sounded out *SF Monthly*. Great idea, they said, go ahead. Now comes the bitchy part. . .as soon as word of this got around Malcolm Edwards began complaining to all and sundry that I was poaching on his territory. It seems that he paid a visit to the magazine's offices some time in May or June, spent a lot of time crawling around on the floor licking platform-heeled shoes and had himself made exclusive SF personality interviewer for *SF Monthly*. At least that's his story. . .because I haven't been informed of this by the editor or anyone else there.

Now I am bloody pissed off about this! What really pisses me off is that the little horror would want an exclusive arrangement with them. It never occurred to me to ask for such an arrangement and I wouldn't want it that way. Surely there are enough SF writers around for any number of parasites like Little Mal and me to interview. I won't mention the fact that it's semi-professional hacks like me who need the money from this sort of activity rather than people who have well-paid, full-time jobs. . .like Little Mal. When I put this to him he replied that he needed the money more because he had a higher living standard to maintain.

Puke. Puke. Puke.

### **Graham Charnock Works for William Tell's Son!**

Graham Charnock, aging part (very part) -time novelist and full-time bookshop assistant, revealed recently that his boss is none other than the son of William Tell. Not the real William Tell, of course, but the TV William Tell. Charnock's boss, now a very old man (even older than Charnock) use to be a child actor and played Conrad Phillip's cute little blonde-haired son in the long-running William Tell TV series. Isn't that interesting? Of course it's possible that the whole story is just another load of old Charnock drivel.

### **Malcolm Edwards to Have Martin Walker's Baby!**

Martin Walker, alias Marvin Spart, of Guardian fame, was one of the VIPs at the first night of The One Tun, the pub that has replaced The Globe as the hub of London science fiction fandom. Spart turned out to be quite a pretty little lad and quickly won several hearts, including that of the prince of sycophants. . .Little Mal. "Gosh, gee!" lisped the little horror afterwards, "I think Martin is absolutely super! He really is sweet. . .I could spend the rest of my life with him." When quizzed about this unexpected development, Mrs Edwards lisped, "Anything that Malcolm wants is just fine with me."

### **John Piggott to Become Lumberjack!**

John Piggott, one-time fanzine editor, Seacon Committee member and all-round fop, announced that he intends to migrate to Canada and become a lumberjack. He will be greatly missed by. . .someone, surely?

### **Greg Pickersgill Has Vasectomy!**

"I owe it to my public," said the bruised looking KingRat,

## **Science Fiction Foundation to Nationwide Tit of Itself!**

SCAB has learned that the Science Fiction Foundation intends to make an Open Door TV programme. Open Door, for the foreign among you, is a TV series, copied from America, that allows suppressed minority groups to bore the general viewing public with unadulterated propaganda. Why the Foundation would want to become involved with such a project is beyond SCAB. . . apart from the obvious answer that the whole exercise will just be an excuse for Foundation members, including Christopher Priest, Malcolm Edwards and Peter Nichols (Australia's most pretentious export of the decade) to posture in front of a bigger audience than usual. Surely Mary Whitehouse will step in and spare the nation from this horrible visual fate.

The following article was written ages ago for a long-forgotten fanzine called Fowler. . . or Foulter or something. Nothing much has changed, except the names of the women.

### **A Typical Visit from Robert P. Holdstock**

The door shudders as a boot thuds into it. Pickersgill groans and gets to his feet. He opens the door and Holdstock bursts into the room. He is carrying a portable typewriter in each hand and the handle of a third machine is gripped between his teeth. "Hi gang," he greets us. We both wince. It is our first wince of the evening but more are to follow. Holdstock then drops all three typewriters on the table, knocking mine onto the floor in the process. Then he begins his usual routine which consists of sorting through all our private papers and knocking over stacks of magazines, books and records. On a good night he may even knock over chairs, bottles, radios, record players and anything else that isn't welded to the floor. I've never seen anyone like Holdstock for knocking things over. The more valuable the object the harder he knocks it. He can knock something over more than 10 feet away. . . and from a sitting position.

"And what have my buddies been up to this week?" he asks as he casually starts the TV set rocking backwards and forward with a mere nudge of his elbow. 'Buddy' is one of his favourite words. It always reminds me of a scene out of an American war movie with a crazed GI charging an enemy pillbox armed only with a can opener and yelling: 'They got Joe! The bastards got my buddy Joe!' I can't imagine Holdstock doing something like that for either Pickersgill or me.

"Nothing," I tell him as I continue to watch the TV set totter precariously. Pickersgill merely grunts as if the question wasn't worth even considering, which it wasn't. This annoys Holdstock.

"You guys really bug me," he says in his usual form of Americanese. "All you do is sit and fester. Fester, fester, fester!" (Fester is another of his words.) "You, should be writing. . . creating! Expanding your minds. Getting out and meeting new people! Living! Having new experiences!"

"You'll have a new experience if you don't shut up," I tell him.

"I had a new experience with Jacky this week," says 'Pickersgill. He gives us the details which are, as usual, quite nauseating. I shudder.

"Gee," says Holdstock enviously, "but that isn't what I meant." He then goes into a lengthy description of what he has been doing during the last week. It includes the writing of at least 3 novels, 10 short stories, a major scientific breakthrough at the London School of Medicine where he does research, a sighting of the

Virgin Mary while fondling his rosary, and the making of four women very, very happy. By the end of this Pick and I are usually slumped back with our mouths open in awe.

Then the subject invariably shifts to the subject of MACROCOSM, Holdstock's true love. (MACROCOSM was a fanzine he used to produce years ago. It published mainly bad fan fiction and execrable poetry.) "The next issue is going to be great! Really tremendous! It's going to win at least a dozen Hugos. I was up until 3am last night typing the stencils. I was typing for 8 solid hours except for a few brief moments when I made love to the poor girl in the room next door. She's crazy about me. Says she's never had an orgasm until she met me. Says I have something extra that other men don't have, Haw, haw, haw."

Pick's mouth is still open but now there are little snoring sounds coming out of it. He's had a hard day in the filing department.

"Let's go for a drink," I suggest. One of my favourite lines but it always upsets Holdstock.

"Gee whiz," he complains. "That's all you two ever do. Drink, drink, drink!"

"And fester," I remind him.

"I came to do some writing," says Holdstock plaintively. "I was hoping we could collaborate on a novel or two." He always says this. It's part of the ritual of a Holdstock visit.

I always answer with something clever like - "Okay, we collaborate on a novel, but after we have a drink. I'll do all the a's and the buts and the ands. You do the rest."

He is never amused at this. But by this time the word drink has activated Pickersgill and he is lurching about the room trying to drag on various articles of what he calls clothing. Holdstock usually watches him with horror in his eyes. He doesn't approve of Pick's loosely cut underpants. "What do women say when you're trying to fuck them and you get undressed and face them in those huge billowing underpants?"

"Oh piss off," is Pick's answer. Once he explained that he removes his underpants at the same time as his trousers. "In one sweeping gesture," is the way he put it.

Holdstock has no choice but to follow us down to the pub where a couple of drinks soon puts him in a goofish mood. He proceeds to tell us about all the times he managed to fuck Jean that week. Then he interrogates Pick about his sexual activities. This time it my turn to fall asleep.

Just as the night begins to develop a rosy glow Holdstock announces he has to go. The reason for this is that it's his turn to buy a drink but he excuses himself by saying something like - "I have to go and kill a couple of kittens for tomorrow's experiment." (Vivisection plays an important part in his research.)

"Rubbish," we say. "At least buy us a drink before you go."

"I can't," he says, eyes wide with indignation. "I'm a student."

Then he leaps to his feet and before we know it his long legs have carried him out of the pub. He is gone, but not forgotten.

You can't ever forget someone like Robert P. Holdstock.

## **A Little Bit of Scab. . .**

The name of Seacon has been changed to, wait for it. . .Malcon. The change has been brought about for obvious reasons. People who disagree will be called Malcontents. Boom. Boom.

## **Some Notes On Leroy Kettle**

Leroy Kettle was born somewhere in England well over 25 years ago. . .well, well over 25 years ago. From the beginning he stood out in a crowd, having been blessed with a nose of truly alarming proportions, but despite this handicap he worked hard and eventually succeeded in becoming a complete nonentity. After failing to graduate from university as an engineer (a vital 2nd year project, constructed out of a Meccano set, fell on his tutor) he moved to London and became a bank clerk. He has never looked back, due to an old neck injury caused by football. Very quickly he became established' in London SF fandom as a 'fun' guy and his quips were the talk of The Globe. Quips such as. . ."Oh yeah?". . ."Sez you.". . .and "Piss off, you cretin!" (A classic!) Kettle also became known as one of the key members of Ratfandom, a sub-branch of fandom personified by that long forgotten fanzine, FOULER.

Leroy Kettle is single and has numerous children. His sex life was erratic until he grew a beard which helped to off-set his prominent proboscis. Since then it has been all go. His eyes now have a perpetual 'sated' look to them and he has also started a sexual advice clinic for the many sexual outcasts that inhabit SF fandom. It's called Nookie Unlimited.

Sex also plays an important role in Kettle's writing career. He recently gave up his lucrative banking career to become a full-time pornographer. "Why waste all this fucking? he said recently. "I can make good money by writing down all my sexual experiences, far-fetched as they may seem." We have a feeling that Mr Kettle is going to go far.

## **No Nose is Good Nose**

Just before I left for Australia at the beginning of this year I had a skin cancer removed from my nose. It was only a little one and you can hardly see the scar but yesterday I went back to the hospital to have it checked.

The young Jewish specialist (he's a real riot. . . when he was cauterising my nose he told me I could scream as much as I wanted to because the door was sound-proofed) examined my nose thoughtfully and said, "I think we might be able to give you a normal nose."

Now my nose is always rather red looking and this is due, not, as some people believe, to my excessive drinking, but to a childhood accident. My pram was left out in the sun and I ended up with a badly burned nose which later became infected (I was just not designed for life in Australia). I wondered how the specialist intended to achieve this miracle.

"It's a cream which you apply every night for about six weeks."

I was relieved. It sounded quite simple.

"Unfortunately," he continued, "it will involve a certain amount of suffering."

How much suffering, I asked.

"A great deal," he admitted. "The more you apply the cream the worse it will get until finally it will become unbearable. At that point you stop applying the cream. By this time your nose will look as if it has been hit by a truck." He said all this quite cheerfully.

"Oh, yes," I said. "Then what?"

"By then the skin will start regenerating itself and you should have a normal looking nose."

"Should have?" I asked. "There's no guarantee?"

"Oh no. But it will be an interesting experiment."

I didn't answer.

"And keep your nose out of the sun," he told me as he wrote out the prescription.

Now I can keep most parts of me out of the sun without any difficulty but my nose is something else again.

He agreed it wouldn't be easy.

I got the cream from the hospital dispensary but I haven't started to apply it yet. I don't fancy walking around for two months with a nose that will look as if its been hit by a truck. According to the pamphlet that came with the cream the pattern of response is as follows: erythema, vesiculation, erosion, ulceration, necrosis and epithelization. I don't think my nose deserves that sort of treatment. Besides, I have enough trouble pulling chicks as it is.

# BIG SCAB #3

## Editorial

This issue of BIG SCAB (dedicated to William Shakespeare) is somewhat rushed. The reason is that the editor is overwhelmed with mundane work at the moment. Apart from having to complete an 80 000-word book on horror films before the end of December, he is also supposed to be ghostwriting the autobiography of a clairvoyant (honest). On top of all that he is also supposed to be working on certain material for a science fiction magazine that shall remain nameless. Needless to say, very little of all this work is actually being done. The editor spends most of his time lying around reading the *Guardian*, looking out the window at the aeroplanes or drinking Guinness. As a result there may be a large gap between this issue and the next.

This issue is also shorter than the last. This because of inflation, the sugar shortage, the French hydrogen bomb tests, dandruff, the coming elections, old age, and so on.

If all goes well, my address may undergo a radical change in the near future. Pickersgill and I, and a few others, are hoping to move into more luxurious surroundings within the next month or so. We will be creating a sort of RatShack.

The Elsham Road address is still good for the time being for both of us. Mail will either be forwarded or we will pick it up ourselves. Then again the whole thing may fall through, as do so many Rat projects.

If it comes off, it should become a hive of fannish activity with fanzines whizzing off in all directions. Alternatively, we may just sink all our money in alcohol and stay permanently pissed. A lot easier to do in the long run.

Speaking of alcohol, the more I drink the harder it is to type this crap. . .

## Easy Pickings

No sooner did I publish that piece in the last BIG SCAB about the Fun Palace than everything changed. First it was Tony, the friendly barman. He got the sack. Apparently he drank too much one Sunday night and couldn't handle the cash register so the manager threw him and his wife, who also worked there, out on the spot. Pickersgill and I were very surprised when we turned up the following day and found him gone. The other barman said it was our fault for buying him too many drinks but we find that hard to believe. He was okay when we left. . . a little boisterous perhaps, but well in control of the situation. Well, he looked okay. As for Brian, the gay barman, he left to get married. To a woman yet.

Since then we've tried to establish an amiable relationship with one of the replacements. . . a girl from Australia. Actually Pickersgill is ahead on points there. She told him he reminded her of Balzac. I mean, what can you say?

Another change is that Pick and I have graduated from bar billiards to pool (the Fun Palace has two pool tables now). This is a game which calls for a lot more skill and cunning. You need a lot of skill and cunning just to get a game, much less play it. Once again Pickersgill is ahead on points. His master-shot came when he knocked the white ball off the table, across the floor and down the stairs into the basement! Everyone in the place was amazed and several people came up and congratulated him. What he'll do next with the white ball is anyone's guess.

Several people, after reading the last BIG SCAB, seem to think I'm annoyed with little Malcolm Edwards, the well-known SF personality interviewer, SF convention organiser, publisher's reader, and full-time creep. Well, they may be right. Latest battle in the Great Interview War took place at the September One Tun night. Harry Harrison was there and Little Mal was all atwitter. . . he had been waiting for The Man to make an appearance for months so he could humbly approach him and ask him for an interview. I knew of this so I didn't make any attempt myself to talk to Harrison. Besides, I was getting weary of the whole interview business. I have enough on my plate at the moment and don't really have the time to transcribe more interviews. In fact I was making a mild attempt to plaster over my differences with the little creep that night and was actually talking to him quite pleasantly when Peter Nichols approached him. "Duh, Malcolm," said Nichols, "Harry wants to see yuh." And off the little creep went, thumbing his nose at me. It was then that hackles on the back of my neck rose (I didn't even know that I had hackles there until that moment) and all my anger came flooding back. Right, I said to myself, I'll screw you (meaning Little Mal, not me). Lo and behold, a few minutes later I found myself standing next to Harry Harrison at the bar. "Has the little creep from *SF Monthly* cornered you yet?" I asked.

"Oh yeah," he said, "but he can't interview me because he's going away on holiday or something."

Needless to say friends, a big smile spread across my ravaged features. "It just so happens," I told him, "that I interview people for *SF Monthly* too." And so I fixed up an interview with him to be held on the following Sunday. Little Mal must have known what I was doing because I could see him seething in the distance. This was later confirmed by Chris Priest who told me that Malcolm was muttering to himself all the way home in the car. Anyway, that Sunday I went around to Harrison's hotel with my little tape recorder and interviewed him. . . but the funny thing was that before we started Harrison said, "Look, Malcolm Edwards is really upset about this. Now I did tell him months ago that he could interview me for *SF Monthly* so do you mind if we sell the interview to *Vertex*? That way you'll get four times as much money."

"Mr Harrison," I said truthfully, "I don't mind at all."

\* \* \*

The above demonstrates that Little Mal has pull. He has the advantage of being part of that fascinating little organisation, the Science Fiction Foundation. This consists (for the foreign among you) of people like Peter Nichols, Christopher Priest, James Blish, Robert Holdstock (yes, him! . .he underwent the confirmation ceremony recently) and George Hay. Mr Hay was the founder of the Foundation but there are signs that his connections with the organisation may soon be forcibly severed. One of the reasons Mr Hay started the whole thing was that aliens visiting Earth would have a place where they could go to for a friendly briefing and a cup of tea or something. Sort of like an interplanetary seaman's mission. He also intended it to be an organisation similar to the one featured in Asimov's Foundation series. . . something that would be a power for good in the troublesome, possibly barbaric, centuries ahead. Now the more pretentious members of the Foundation (and that includes everyone who joined since Mr Hay) are rather embarrassed by all this and would very much like to sweep all the alien business under the carpet, and that includes Mr Hay. We are an academic institute, not a rest home for visiting aliens, said one of them recently. Actually, I think their efforts to depose poor Mr Hay are positively disgusting. It's his organisation. . . if he wants to use it to welcome travel-weary aliens, good on him! More power to his elbow. Let those pretentious fools go and start their own little club where they can posture and pontificate as much as they want. They can call it the Academy of Science Fictional Arts and Studies, which is what they want the Foundation's name to be changed to. Good on you George Hay! SCAB is behind you!

I'm still having trouble getting film for the SeaCon. One that we wanted in particular was *A Clockwork Orange* (it was a committee decision). It's listed in Rank's 16mm catalogue so I didn't think there would be any problem but it turns out that Rank don't hire out that film to just anybody. Our request was turned down but no reason was given. Apparently *A Clockwork Orange* is on Rank's special restricted list and that's that! It's time the film distribution system in this country was shaken up! . . he said angrily, striking a heroic pose on a pile of old *Films & Filming* magazines. What's worse, *Plan 9 From Outer Space* has been booked up for the next three years!

\* \* \*

## **The Thing's the Play!**

Joy of joys! Wonder of wonders! The SeaCon committee has something really great in store for you at the next Eastercon. No, not free nookie in every room. Guess again. No, not a bar that will actually stay open all night. This is something important. Give up?

It's a play.

You know, a play, with actors and scenery and everything. And it's going to be an original play, especially written for the Eastercon. . . by none other than Christopher Priest. Aren't we all very lucky? What's more he's agreed to do it for nothing, bless his heart. SCAB was so excited to hear about this that we sent a reporter along to the first sub-committee meeting held to discuss the arrangements. Here is what he heard:

Playwright: "Do you think £2 per head will be too much to charge?"

Charnock: "Oh, I think that might be a bit too much, Chris."

Playwright: "How about £1.50?"

Charnock: "Uh, I don't really see how we can charge people to see the play at the con, Chris. I mean, it's just not done."

Playwright: "They charge people to get into the banquet."

Charnock: "But that's different. I mean, people eat things at a banquet."

Playwright: "My play will give them food for thought."

Charnock: "It won't work Chris."

Playwright: "How about if we hand out a packet of peanuts to everyone who comes in?"

Charnock: "That's an idea."

Malcolm: "What's the pway going to be abowt, Cwis?"

Playwright: "I'm not sure yet. I have several ideas, all of them great. It's just a matter of picking the best one."

Malcolm: "It sounds twiffic, Cwis. Slurp. Slurp."

Playwright: "It will be, it will be. Must you keep licking my shoes, Malcolm? You're making the suede all sticky."

Charnock: "How big a cast do you plan on having?"

Playwright: "About 300."

Charnock: "Uh, that might be a few too many, Chris. I don't think our budget will run to a cast that large."

Playwright: "Oh shit! Is this true, Malcolm?"

Malcolm: "Glurghhh!"

Charnock: "You're standing on his tongue."

Playwright: "Oh, sorry."

Malcolm: "That's awight, Cwis."

Charnock: "No wonder he talks funny."

Playwright: "How man actors can you afford?"

Charnock: "Oh, about two, give or take one."

Playwright: "Only two? Oh, piss! That's no good. I need more!"

Malcolm: "Can I sit in your lap, Cwis?"

Playwright: "Not now, later."

Charnock: "We can't afford any more than two, unless we cancel the rest of the programme."

Malcolm: "Oh, yes! We'll cancel the pwogramme!"

Charnock: "I don't know about that . . . what will everyone say?"

Playwright: "They'll be overjoyed when they see what they'll be getting in its place."

Charnock: "I'm not sure. . ."

Playwright: "I can't expect Martin to go all the way to Coventry to see my play if there are only going to be two actors in it."

Charnock: "Martin who?"

Playwright: "Very funny."

Charnock: "Perhaps you could treat it as a challenge."

Playwright: "How do you mean?"

Charnock: "Well, think what an achievement it would be if you could write a really significant, metaphysical play with only two characters."

Playwright: "You may have something there. . ."

And so he did! Printed next is a sneak preview of the play that will make science fiction history.

## Waiting for Sergeant Saturn

By Christopher Priest

Scene: THE MOON. ON THE LEFT OF THE STAGE IS A CRATER. IN THE BACKGROUND IS A ROW OF MOUNTAINS.

Characters: CHUCK & FLASH, TWO ASTRONAUGHTS. THEIR SPACESHIP HAS CRASHED AND THEY ARE WAITING FOR THEIR GOOD BUDDY SERGEANT SATURN TO COME AND RESCUE THEM.

CHUCK: "I wonder what's keeping Sergeant Saturn."

FLASH: "I dunno."

CHUCK: "He's been gone a long time."

FLASH: "Two years, at least."

CHUCK: "That long. It seems like only yesterday."

FLASH: "The moon does that to you."

CHUCK: "Does what?"

FLASH: "Distorts your sense of time."

CHUCK: "Does it?"

FLASH: "What?"

CHUCK: "Distort your sense of time."

FLASH: "I don't think so. What made you ask?"

CHUCK: "I don't know."

FLASH: "He's certainly been gone a long time."

CHUCK: "Yeah."

FLASH: "My air is getting low."

CHUCK: "So is mine."

FLASH: "How much you got left?"

CHUCK: "About enough to finish this sentence."

FLASH: "That little?"

CHUCK: "Choke! Choke! Gurgle!"

FLASH: "You okay, Chuck?"

CHUCK:

FLASH: "Chuck?"

CHUCK:

FLASH: "Hey, Chuck, here comes Sergeant Saturn!"

THUNDEROUS APPLAUSE. AUTHOR TAKES SEVERAL CURTAIN CALLS.

### Peter Roberts Becomes Fortean!

Peter Roberts, who is rumoured to be living in London, has become a devout Fortean. In the latest issue of *The News*, Bob Rickard's Fortean journal, Roberts described the incident that led to his conversion to Forteanism. "I was spending the weekend at home in Bristol and on the Sunday afternoon my aunt came and told me that there was a dead elephant lying in the backyard. She asked me to go and get rid of it. I

went out with a shovel to bury it but when I touched it the thing suddenly got up and ran away. My aunt said that it had probably been dropped by a bird of some kind but I find this hard to believe. It's obvious to me that the elephant was transported from Africa by some mysterious force that science has no explanation for."

### **Tom Penman To Marry!**

Young fan Tom Penman has shocked *Scab* by announcing that he is engaged to be married. The lucky bride-to-be is a girl called Cathy Gardner. Ian Williams will be Best Man.

### **Ritchie Smith Goes Berserk**

While celebrating John Hall's 28<sup>th</sup> birthday recently in a pub, incoherent Ritchie Smith amazed everyone by suddenly taking a bite out of his beer glass. "Grooten greater," he said, then went and put his fist through a mirror in the gent's toilet. Ritchie comes from Newcastle, which might explain a lot.

### **John Piggott Not To Emigrate!**

Tall, bronzed John Piggott has been rejected by the Canadian Lumberjack Society so he will not now be leaving the country as originally planned. Instead he now intends to move to London, move in with a bunch of idiots and become a bank clerk. "Look what it did for Roy Kettle," he said.

### **Ian Williams Interviews Himself In Siddhartha -- Sued By Malcolm Edwards**

Little Ian Williams indulged in a nauseating piece of ego-tripping recently when he interviewed himself in his own fanzine. Neither interviewer or interviewee had anything interesting to say but that didn't stop Little Mal from taking legal action. "Evwyone knows that only I am awwowed to interview anywun in the science fiction world," said Little Mal from the sanctuary of his gold-plated bathtub. He is believed to be dying from a terminal lisp.

### **Sheila Holdstock KOs Hubby! Shock! Horror!**

Little Sheila Holdstock unleashed a deadly right at her long-suffering husband during a recent One Tun gathering. When asked the reason for this display of violence, Mrs Holdstock said: "Oh begorrah, there was no reason. Oi just like hitting the big fool." Mrs Holdstock is a social worker.

# SCABBY TALES #1

## Editorial

THE SCENE: Little Mal arrives home after a day of putting library books in alphabetical order. Waiting for him at the door of their little house is his little wife, Christine. Her face is ashen.

"Malcolm, bad news!" she cries.

"Don't tell me you've broken my teddy!"

"No, your teddy is fine, Malcolm. It's worse than that. It's a new SCAB fanzine."

Malcolm blanches. "Eeeek!" he cries.

"It arrived this morning. It took me an hour to get up the nerve to read it."

"It's BIG SCAB #4?"

"No, it's a new one called SCABBY TALES. According to the editorial it's going to carry on the tradition of BIG SCAB."

"Arghh! That's all I need. Does it mention my lisp again?"

"You don't have a lisp, Malcolm. You talk beautifully."

"I know, I know. Does it mention my non-existent lisp?"

"I'm afraid so, Malcolm."

"Arghh! I'll kill him! So help me, I'll kill the wotter!"

"Why don't you go and give him a jolly good smack?"

"I may just do that. With a brick."

"Or you could get that awfully nice Christopher Priest to write him a threatening letter. That might do the trick."

"Does Brosnan say why he's produced another fanzine after all this time?"

"Well, in the editorial he says its got something to do with the time of the year - his tonsils get worse than usual and he gets into a foul mood, he gets filled with an overwhelming desire to become the scourge of fandom with cruel teeth ripping at the soft underbelly of British SF. He wants to get up the noses of the pretentious pseuds, to twist the knife in deep. . .he wants pain and decay, death and destruction and another Nova award."

"He said all that? Well, at least the fucker still can't write worth a shit."

"Malcolm! What you said! Go into the bathroom and wash your mouth out with soap this instance!"

"Oh, Cwistine. . ."

"You heard me. You know I will not have swearing in this house! What would the neighbours think?"

"Awww. . ."

"Go on, into the bathroom!"

FADE OUT.

## **A Scabby Column**

I had hoped to do a sort of mood piece here. . .along the lines of what John D. Berry usually writes. I was going to start off by describing the room, the chair I'm sitting on, my state of mind, what's on the record player and all that sort of crap but I can't be bothered. Perhaps I'll do an introspective piece instead, like what Graham Charnock does in *Vibrator*. Has anyone noticed how maudlin he's getting these days? Always going on about being 30 and a failure. . . Jeez it's tedious. His fanzine's okay though, if you like well-done mediocrity. In the issue before last he had an interesting bit on alcohol and its effects. This is a subject close to my heart, and also to my liver and kidneys. I really do think that I am drinking too much these days, which is quite a confession for me to make, but when your liver starts making knocking sounds when you walk you know it's time to slow down.

Last Saturday I really overdid it. I started at about 11 o'clock in the morning drinking in a pub with a few friends and at closing time someone invited us all to his club a short distance away. It looked exactly like a pub, though it was more expensive, and the drinking continued unabated. Everything gets a bit hazy after that but I do remember being introduced to David Mercer, the playwright, and I also remember trying to sell him some Australian dollars when I heard that he was going to Australia to work on the script of Joe Losey's film version of a Patrick White novel (**Voz** or **Vos**?). For some reason he wasn't interested in my offer.

We left around 5 o'clock and I went and had a meal, I think. That night Harry Harrison and his wife were having a small soiree round at their temporary residence in Gloucester Rd. I arrived early so I naturally killed time in the nearest pub. I can remember the first hour or so at the Harrisons but not much else. I was later gleefully informed that I was rather obnoxious to poor old Chris Priest (me?) and that I made a pass at Little Mal (me?) but mercifully it's all a blank. I can't remember leaving either but I do remember getting into a cab and giving the driver my address. And I also remember standing outside the front door trying to find my key. It was then that I realised I was at 62 Elsham Rd in Shepherd's Bush. . . which was embarrassing seeing that I had moved away almost a year ago. Very annoyed I stomped around Shepherd's Bush, bouncing off parked cars and stop signs, trying to find another cab. I eventually stopped one and informed the driver that I wanted to go to South Ealing. "No chance, mate," he said and roared off. The same thing happened with the next two cabs I stopped and I became even more annoyed; I remembered the law that once you get in the cab they have to take you where you wanted to go. So the next time one stopped I immediately leapt in and snarled at the driver, "Congratulations, you're going to South fucking Ealing." Amazingly he took me there and it was only later that it occurred to me that the law I was thinking of was an Australian one, not English.

The following day, while enduring the ultimate hang-over (complete with twitches) I used my pocket calculator to work out how many brain cells I had wiped out with my years of boozing. It turns out I only

have three live ones left, which explains why it hurts so much to think these days.

\* \* \*

Speaking of being obnoxious to Chris Priest (one of my favourite subjects) I would like to state here and now that it was not my idea to ring him up during Little Mal's party, which coincided with the worldcon Down Under, and tell him that he had won the Hugo. I cannot tell a lie - it was Leroy Atkinson's (then Leroy Kettle). "We can't do such a thing," I cried in horror when Leroy first suggested it to me, but a few drinks later I gave in and accompanied Leroy to a nearby public phone box. "This is Australia calling," I said in my best Australian accent. "Congratulations Mr Priest, you have won the Hugo!"

"Oh, fucking great!" the silly nerd cried. I was so surprised that that he believed me that I passed the phone to Leroy who immediately dropped it and fled. When we got back to Little Mal's Old Bony Knees was waiting outside. We could see the gleam in his eye a whole block away. For some reason it was me that he chased down the street and kneed in the groin - bloody Leroy got off with a simple reprimand.

Never mind Chris. Better luck next year. (Most fun I've had since BIG SCAB #3.)

\* \* \*

And speaking of that illustrious organ, issue three did produce a lot of interesting reactions. A few people were actually quite incensed by it - namely Little Malcolm, Old Bony Knees, Peter Nichols and Grah Charredcok. They succeeded in putting the fear of death into the cowardly editor who started wearing dark glasses and a dress. He spent many nights worrying about how the pseuds of British SF would take their revenge - would a knock at his door herald the arrival of the SF Foundation Death Squad? Would he find himself face to face with a bone-wielding Peter Nichols? Would Little Mal beat him to death with his tape recorder? Would a lead-weighted handbag thud across the back of his neck? He could see the headlines: JOHN BORSNAN FOUND DEAD IN NOTTINGHILL GATE TUBE TOILETS. TALL, BONY-KNEED MAN WITH HANDBAG SEEN RUNNING AWAY. But nothing happened.

Actually Priest was so annoyed he showed the issue to his solicitor to see if I could be sued but the solicitor just fell off his seat laughing. Holdcock had tried a similar ploy with issue 2; he showed it to his father who is a policeman, but that noble gentleman simply said he didn't know he had such a silly goof for a son and hit him over the head with his truncheon. Little Mal showed 3 to his teddy but didn't get any reaction at all.

Graham Charnock said that issue 3 had made him feel a right tit (I wouldn't touch a straight line like that for a free week at Pizmo Beach). "I have lots of smarts," he told *Scab*. "Print in your next issue that I have lots of smarts." He's deep too.

Anyway, SCAB #3 served its purpose; nobody had to sit through a Chris Priest play at Seacon. (Some people were under the impression that I was making it all up about the dreaded play but it was true, I swear.)

For reasons too boring to relate I have no idea when SCABBY TALES #2 will appear but be assured that the tradition of Scab will continue one way or another. Tough shit. (Exits to the accompaniment of boos and a rain of rotten eggs.)

### **Old Tyrant Hangs Onto Power!**

Christopher Priest, despite his great age, has continued to hang onto the title of 'BRITAIN'S MOST

PROMISING YOUNG SF WRITER' even though there are several new contenders for the title. One of them, a Mr Rob Holdstock, said bitterly: "It's not fair. He's old, he's sick but he won't let go. It's ridiculous as everyone knows that I'm now the youngest, most promising sf writer in Britain." Another contender, a Mr Ritchie Smith, who is even younger than Holdstock, said: "grooten graaten." To help him in his struggle against oblivion Mr Priest has been praying constantly to the gods of sf and has even kissed the fossilised nose of St Hugo, a holy relic that he always keeps nearby. However the experts from the SF Foundation say there's little hope for the Grand Old Man of sf. "His ego has ruptured in three places," said one of them. "It can only be a matter of time."

### **Leroy Kettle Marries!**

Yes, it's true. 'The Nose' is now a married man. It seems only yesterday that he and the editor of SCAB were roaming Soho, knocking over milk bottles and picking up chicks, and the occasional rooster. But now he has given up the wild life for the gentler shores of married bliss and spends his time helping his wife, Mrs Atkinson, with her karate lessons. Mrs Atkinson is a social worker, you see. Why is she still called Mrs Atkinson now she's married to Leroy? Well, as she asked the editor of SCAB once: "Who in their right mind would want to be called Mrs Kettle?"

### **Harlan Ellison Visits England!**

Harlan Ellison, the famous sf writer, visited London recently where he was given a very warm reception by the SF fraternity, in particular Chris Priest. During his stay he was, of course, interviewed by Little Mal. (Little Mal has now interviewed every sf writer in the world - some of them he's interviewed twice. Having run out of sf writers he was recently seen interviewing a garden gnome.) Harlan apparently enjoyed his visit and hopes to return soon, with several of his friends from the Mafia.

### **Chris Priest Plans To Leave Country!**

We have just heard that Chris Priest is leaving the country in a hurry.

### **Jerry Webb Not Long For This World**

London sf's tame scientist Sir Jerry Webb has volunteered to take part in Project Dildous, an audacious plan by a group of scientists to fire a four hundred-foot long manned dildo at Alpha Centauri. "I may be gone awhile," said Sir Jerry. "Weeks even. It's hard to tell. I read in a book once that Alpha Centauri may be a long way away. Miles and miles. Even more than this." At this point he held up all his fingers. "There probably isn't even any air up there either so I'm taking a whole plastic bag in case I run out." The first part of Project Dildous involved firing a ten-foot model of the dildo at Venus. Attached to the model was a metal plate with a picture of Leroy Kettle, Mrs Atkinson and Rob Holdstock. The inscription read: "Earthman, Earthwoman, SUPERMAN."

# SCABBY TALES #2

## Editorial

I could tell the moment I saw Pete Weston lurch up to me at the One Tun bar that something terrible had happened. His face was ashen, there were dark circles under his eyes and his nose was bleeding.

"My God, Pete!" I cried. "What in the world is wrong with you?"

But he didn't answer me right away. First he ordered a double whiskey, threw it down his throat with one violent flick of his wrist, then ordered another. When the second double had followed the first he finally spoke, "*Science Fiction Monthly* is folding."

A black pit opened up beneath my feet and I fell into it.

"Shit," I gasped, blanching audibly.

"It's true," said Pete. "It's going to be replaced by a smaller magazine that will only publish high quality material."

I gave a pathetic little shriek. "But where does that leave us?"

"Exactly," said Pete.

I immediately called the barman over and handed him my half-empty glass of Guinness. "Put it back in the bottle," I told him. "All of a sudden I can't afford it."

"What about me?" wailed Pete. "I'm going to have to sell the backyard. . .or one of the kids."

"Can't something be done to save it?" I cried. "What about the Arts Council?"

"They're not going to fall for that twice," he said.

"I suppose not. What are you going to do now?"

"I don't know. . .become a full-time gardener or something. I'll have to talk it over with the wife. She doesn't know yet."

"It'll come as a big shock to her."

"I know. We depend so much on SFM. The colour TV set, the private tutor for the kids, the extra wing on the house. . .all SFM."

"I guess I'll have to sell my Aston Martin," I muttered. "And I was planning to do a ten part series of articles for SFM titled 'The Homosexual in Science Fiction'. It would have run to 180,000 words."

"I was planning a twenty part series, 'Intelligent Plants in Science Fiction'," said Pete, "It would have to at least 350,000 words."

"Tough."

"It's a cruel world."

"It's the end of an era," I said sadly. "That's what it is."

"We'll never see anything like *Science Fiction Monthly* again," said Pete. "At least not during our lifetimes."

"Well, it had to happen. People have been expecting it to fold for some time now."

"Since the first issue, in fact."

"Yeah, and now it's happened. . ."

We burst into tears and then staggered off into the night, going our separate ways. We both knew we would never be the same again.

### **A Scabby Column**

"Make room! Make room!" yelled Harry Harrison as he pushed his way through a large group of nuns. "You should all be on the pill!" he told them. "Then you wouldn't have to dress up in those silly costumes."

The scene was Dublin and I was following in the wake of the Man as he bulldozed his way down O'Connell Street. "Uh, Harry. . ." I said, somewhat nervously, "Do you think it's wise to talk to the natives that way? I mean, they could be members of the IRA."

"Nonsense," he replied as he tripped over a priest. "You're just being paranoid."

I had to admit I was feeling just a little paranoid. . .which was the reason why I was carrying a sign that read, I AM AUSTRALIAN, NOT ENGLISH and wearing two badges that read UP THE PROVOS! And KICK A BRIT TODAY! But after a few days my paranoia wore off and I stopped seeing the IRA behind every man and granny. Not that I was alone in experiencing this sort of thing. When my agent's husband arrived for a visit during Christmas he got off the ferry wearing a slouch hat and speaking in the most terrible Australian accent ever heard by human ears. It was three days before anyone could understand a word he was saying. And he's not even a real Australian.

What can you say about Ireland that hasn't been said before? Very little. More to the point, what can I say about Ireland that hasn't been said before? And again the answer is very little. So what were my impressions? Well. . .the Guinness isn't any different to the stuff you can buy in England. So that's one myth we can dispose of for a start. Dublin is rather strange, at times you wouldn't know you've left London and at other times the differences are suddenly obvious. Like the phone boxes for instance. In England they're red while in Ireland they're green and yellow and look as if they've been designed and built by a very sick child. They look like homemade phone boxes really, and the phones themselves aren't that hot either. Another strange thing about Dublin is that all the street signs have been disfigured with odd gibberish writing. I asked one of the natives what it was all about and he replied that it was 'garlic' writing. Superstitious lot the Irish, I can only presume all this garlic writing is suppose to keep vampires away or something.

Went into a pub with Harry on my first day in Dublin. He ordered two pints of Guinness then asked if I wanted a 'Paddy' as well. I thought fast. What the fuck was a 'Paddy'? Then it all became clear. . .as things

like strippers and bar hostesses aren't allowed in Ireland a 'Paddy' was the obvious alternative. A Paddy would be a little man dressed in a green leprechaun's suit who would come and sit beside you while you drank, and entertained you with Irish folk stories and songs. It sounded interesting so I said to Harry, "Sure, I'll have a Paddy!" Unfortunately a Paddy turned out to be a glass of Irish whiskey. . .and not very good whiskey either. Poot.

One good thing about Ireland, the pubs stay open longer than in England. From about 10am to 10:30pm. . .except that in Dublin there is the 'Holy Hour' from 2:30pm to 3:30pm when you can't buy a drink unless you're a priest or a nun.

Another odd thing about the place is that most of the women tend to wear headscarves. I was puzzled by this at first but finally came to the conclusion that this is a result of the strong influence of the Church: the women are basically guilty about not being nuns so they try and look like nuns as much as possible.

One thing about Ireland (Southern Ireland that is) it's certainly quiet compared to London as far as things like explosions are concerned. In fact, apart from the occasional strafing run down O'Connell Street by RAF Jets I didn't hear one single explosion while I was in Dublin. London, on the other hand, is a series of non-stop bangs these days. Where I'm staying in Maida Vale at the moment most of them have been quite audible. . .a mere one pound bomb that went off under a car on Edgeware Rd sounded like Centrepont falling over. And now that the gallant Provos have started blowing up trains there's a definite atmosphere of paranoia on the London tubes all of a sudden. Actually I've been paranoid about bombs in the underground for years. About three years ago, when I was working near Oxford Circus, I was always expecting a bomb to go off in the Oxford Circus station as I passed hurriedly through. It was at this time that I came up with the idea of a special 'Emergency Rehabilitation Kit' that could be installed in the tube stations It would contain booklets on basket-weaving and foot-painting which could be distributed to bomb victims on the spot, thus enabling them to begin learning how to become useful members of society again while waiting for the ambulances to arrive. People who have all their arms and legs blown off did present me with a tough problem for awhile until I came with a booklet entitled **101 Things to do With Your Tongue**. People who have their heads blown off are on their own.

Paranoia on a larger scale is also present in England now. . . especially since that nice Russian writer, Tolstoy, appeared on British TV and warned that the Soviet tanks would soon be crushing English babies beneath their treads. Personally I was so impressed by his speech I immediately went out and shot several communists with my air pistol (they looked like communists). John Piggott, who put the T in Tory, has come up with the marvelous idea that we form a Fannish Militia in preparation for the day when the Ruski tanks roll across the channel and I'm giving him my whole support. But I'm also making my own preparations. . .I'm stocking up on plenty of pepper to throw in the faces of the tank drivers as they trundle by. When they crawl, coughing and blinded, out of their tanks I shall then hit them over the head with a copy of **Stand on Zanzibar**. SF will prevail! On second thoughts Australia is very nice at this time of the year.

And speaking of the Lucky Land of Oz I was shattered to hear, while in Dublin, of the defeat of my idol, Gough Whitlam, by the horrible Malcolm Fraser. A dark cloud has now settled over that fair and distant land and I have sworn never to set foot in it again until Big Mal has been removed. . .either by fair or foul means. (Yes, I know violence is not the Australian way in politics but a situation like this calls for drastic measures.) Come to think of it. . .there are several similarities between our own dreaded Little Mal and Australia's Big Mal: the same close-set, piggy little eyes, the sneaky tactics that both employ to gain the upper hand, and the same mad lust for power. True, Big Mal is six foot six inches tall while Little Mal is only five foot two inches, but a creep is a creep. . .no matter what the size.

Now, where was I. . .oh, yes. . .Ireland. Not many of you will be aware of this but Brosnan is an Irish name. All my ancestors on my father's side of the family came from Ireland and according to my father Ireland was full of Brosnans. "There are thousands of them," he told me once. So when I got to Dublin I had a look in the phone book intrigued by the idea of seeing pages and pages of Brosnans. . .and found that there were only about 20 Brosnans living in Dublin (or there were 20 who could afford a phone) which is much less than the number of Brosnans living in London. With the help of a friend of Harry Harrison's who works in the Irish tourist office I tracked down the missing Brosnan tribe. It seems they all emigrated to places like America, England, and Australia, leaving a grand total of about 300 in County Kerry, the area where the Brosnan name originated. The name Brosnan I found out means 'a bundle of dry sticks'. No comment.

Christmas at Anne McCaffrey's: an amusing occasion during which I (surprise) drank too much. Apart from Anne's immediate family the other guests included my agent and her husband, Peter, a movie stunt man named Mick, a French girl whose name I can't remember, and a friend of Anne's called Jan. Jan was a thin, dark girl with razor sharp teeth and matching disposition, "You're the first Australian I've met," she said to me, "and you're something of a disappointment. Are all Australian men like you?"

"No," I quipped, quick as a flash, "but a lot of the women are." First blood to me but later, when the conversation turned to the subject of ambition, I happened to say, "My ambition is to drink myself to death before I'm 40." Which left me wide open.

"You're a couple of years overdue already," said Jan. I thought of a good retort the next morning but by then it was too late.

While in Ireland I went horse-riding a couple of times with Anne. Th-e last time I had gone riding was many years ago in deepest Australia but I had long forgotten anything I ever learnt about horses and the art of staying on their backs. (Though I've never been able to expunge the memory of being taken on a nightmarish stroll on the back of a horse across a golf course. . .hotly pursued by a group of angry golfers.) My first sight of the horses at Anne's stable was reassuring: they were small, hairy little beasts. "Irish horses sure are tiny," I said to Anne.

"You cretin," she said bisecting my left ear with a quick flick of her riding crop, "those are ponies. The real horses are over there." The real horses turned out to be huge beasts with their heads in the clouds. I was introduced to mine: its name was 'Greggy'.

"Are you kidding?" I cried. "I'm not getting on any horse called 'Greggy'. . .not unless I get to wear very long spurs." Greggy turned out to be a real cunt of a horse, pausing every few yards to lower his head and nibble at the grass. . .with the result that I kept toppling forward. But the real fun moment came when a dog leapt out of the bushes and sent Greggy rearing up in fright. "Shit!" I screamed manfully as the world turned upside-down. It's the last time I'll ever get on a horse called Greggy. It's the last time I'll get on anything called 'Greggy'.

SCAB fans with long memories may recall, in BIG SCAB 2, my story about the nose (mine) and the cancer specialist. They may also recall that I was given a special cream to put on my nose that would, according to the specialist, turn it into an awful, suppurating mess before it worked its miracle and made my nose look 'normal'. Well, being a coward, I never took the big gamble with the cream (the skull & crossbones on the tube sort of worried me), but recently I had cause to return to the hospital. This time it was my lower lip that was the cause of some concern. "Hmmm," said the specialist (a different one) as he examined the large, ultra-violet burn (another legacy from the Lucky Country), "it's not malignant." I sighed "Yet. . ." he added. I took the opportunity to ask him about the nose cream that the other doctor had given me. He

laughed, "That only works on skin where the cells are actually dividing (ie, cancerous). It wouldn't have had any effect on your nose. But there is a treatment that will give you a normal nose." Here we go again I said to myself. His 'treatment' consisted of a huge jar of pills. "Take one in the morning and one at night for six months. . .and on an empty stomach otherwise they won't work," he ordered.

"You're kidding," I suggested hopefully, but he wasn't. "Does a stomach full of Guinness count as a 'full' stomach?" I asked. It did. Poot.

"And keep your lip out of the sun. . .and your nose," he said. So, if next summer you happen to pass someone in the street with one hand over his nose and the other hand over his mouth. . .that will be me. Laugh and I'll kill you.

\* \* \*

Let's all take a moment out to salute the ex-editor of SFM. While most SF fans are laughing over the demise of that great magazine we feel it is our duty to point out that Ms Davis has met a fate worse than death. . .she has been transferred to a magazine called '*Teenage True Love Confessions*' (whether or not this is a step up the publishing ladder from SFM it's hard to say). I don't know about the rest of you but already I'm hard at work translating all the stuff I had planned for submission to SFM. . ."Nicola Nova, teenage intergalactic heroine, stood gazing at Rocky Spaceways, the heartthrob of Star System 2134X9. She couldn't take her eyes of his well-formed pectorals. . .the swell of his biceps, his calves, the bulge at his crotch. "One day," murmured Nicola, pressing her knees together, "one day. . ." And so on.

\* \* \*

Several people seem to think, as a result of the last SCABBY TALES, that I hold bad feelings towards good old Chris Priest. Nothing could be further from the truth. We're like brothers really (Cain & Abel. . .oops). And just to prove it. . .

Congratulations to Chris Priest for winning Third Prize in the John W. Campbell Awards. Just one thing Chris. . .when did you change your name to 'No Award'?

# Urethra! I've Got It!

June 1976 was an eventful month for me. It was the month I met Harlan Ellison for the first time and also started pissing blood. I'm still not sure if there's any connection between the two events but I have my suspicions. The year before he visited London to meet his British agent for the first time (Janet Freer, who also happens to be my agent) and a few days later she was in the hospital with a temperature of 106 degrees, Perhaps it's true what they say about Harlan.

Actually I blame Bruce Gillespie most of all. I was lying on the roof last summer soaking up the weak English sun and reading a copy of Bruce's fanzine SF COMMENTARY in which he extolled the virtues of swimming as a form of exercise. In a mere matter of months, it seemed,, Bruce's shambling, over-weight form had been transformed into that of a trim, healthy athlete. I raised the Guinness bottle to my lips and mused – it was time I started doing some form of exercise too. I decided I wanted to be like Bruce: bright-tailed and bushy-eyed. I too would start swimming.

It was on a Tuesday I took the plunge. The Saturday night before I had met Harlan at a sort of dinner party held at the W.C. Fields. The 'Fields' is a trendy restaurant in St John's Wood which specializes in American-Jewish food, such as salt beef, potato laptkes, etc., and hamburgers, of course. I'd been there often before and while I admit the food is good the service lacks anything approaching efficiency. I always remember the time I was having a meal there with Janet and her husband Peter. We were having a lot of difficulty with a waiter whose command of the English language was slippery to say the least. Finally Peter snapped: "I don't like your attitude. . . it's arrogant!"

The waiter stared at him blankly. "What?" he asked.

"I said you're arrogant!" snarled Peter as only he can.

"No. . .I'm not," mumbled the waiter defensively, "I'm, South American."

Anyway, the night Harlan showed up there was quite amusing. He did his W.C. Fields imitation as expected but after that he was charm itself and even had a good thing going with the waiter (not the South American one I hasten to add). "I will teach you how to make a good Jewish sandwich," said Harlan jovially, "Where are you from anyway?"

"Egypt," replied the waiter.

It's a great restaurant.

Anyway, the following Tuesday I finally made it to the Swiss Cottage public swimming pool complex. It turned out to be quite a modern, clean-looking place and I confidently jumped into the water and prepared to do several lengths of the Olympic-size pool. But I had forgotten that swimming, especially in fresh water, involves a certain amount of effort, and halfway during the first length I decided I would do several 'widths' of the pool instead. But even this compromise proved strenuous and after about four widths I was thrashing about in a foam of impotence. "Good grief," I muttered to myself, "gone are the days when I could swim a mile each day through the raging Australian surf and then wrestle a Great White before breakfast. Face it, Brosnan, you're getting old." I sunk gracefully to the bottom of the pool.

Later, while clinging to the side, I decided I would only do another two widths and then retreat home in defeat. But by the time I had dragged myself out of the pool I was feeling utterly and completely bugged.

I had never felt so exhausted before in my life. I could hardly stand and my mouth felt like it was full of broken glass. "So much for exercise," I groaned as I tottered out into the street and fell into a taxi.

With great difficulty I hauled myself up the four flights of stairs, drunk the refrigerator dry of cold water and then went and collapsed on the floor of the front room where I remained for the next couple of hours, stirring only to emit little moans of pain. It was a pathetic sight.

"You look terrible," said Jill, looking in briefly during the period between her return from work and her departure for a press show. "What have you been doing?"

"I've been getting fit," I groaned. "I want to be like Bruce Gillespie."

"Who?" she asked. By the time I'd finished explaining who Bruce Gillespie was she'd gone.

Thirty minutes later I was feeling a lot better. I raised one arm off the floor, then the other. Soon I was on my feet thinking about food. I walked up to Kilburn and had a pizza in the local Pizza Hut, had a few drinks, bought my usual booze quota for the night, then walked back home. It was a balmy summer night. I went out onto the roof, played with the cats and drank my booze. Nice. Then I went to the bathroom for a piss. My mind was comfortably blank until I happened to glance down and see that I was pissing what appeared to be Guinness. "Uh oh," I said to myself, "that's funny." Black Piss. . .that can only mean blood. I'm bleeding internally and that can be bad. First let's examine the possibilities before breaking into Panic. Pissing blood...could mean my first period? No, doubtful. Very. My heart? Had I ruptured my heart with all that exertion? But surely there would be other symptoms, like a deep coma, for instance. I felt my heart. It was still beating, sort of. But was that a stabbing pain I felt running down my left arm? Was I about to pass out? No.

I took a deep breath, went to the refrigerator, removed a bottle of Guinness and swiftly consumed it. Then I took a second bottle and went back on the roof. No use getting over-excited about this phenomenon. So I was bleeding internally. So what?

That night I went to bed feeling reasonably okay, except for being a bit pissed. 'I wonder if I'm dying, I asked myself? Is there an artery flailing about inside me like a bisected fire hose, spurting blood all over the place? If so, I probably wouldn't wake up in the morning. But I did, so I leapt out of bed, went into the bathroom and pissed a pint of blood into the bowl. Bugger!

It was Wednesday and that evening I was supposed to be going to Harlan Ellison's publisher's party. I was also supposed to be meeting Roy Kettle beforehand. I rang him up and said: "Look, I'm not sure if I'm going to make it tonight because I'm not feeling too well (actually I felt fine but it seemed wrong to say that. . .and I didn't feel like telling him I was pissing blood as that would have sounded pretentious) but if I do make it I'll see you in the Cockney Pride at 6:00."

I spent the rest of 'the day drinking two bottles of white wine while sitting on the roof in the sun and contemplating the mystery of the universe. "Why me?" was the question that provided the basis of my philosophic meanderings.

I met Kettle in the pub as planned then we wandered around to the National Book League headquarters where the party was being held. It was a suitably distracting affair, for reasons no one who was present is allowed to reveal on pain of death, and I also managed to consume a large amount of booze. A minor annoyance was the presence of the appalling Little Mal. I sincerely hoped I wouldn't drop dead at his feet as

that sort of oneupmanship on his part would have been unbearable. Near the end of the affair I finally gave in and wandered down to the toilet to relieve myself. It was something I had kept putting off but the pressure had reached an intolerable level.

I didn't want to be reminded of my obviously fast-approaching demise so at first I shut my eyes, but at the last moment I looked down. No blood. . .it was crystal-clear! It was as if I was pissing pure champagne. I was saved! I immediately raced back upstairs and consumed several glasses of wine. "I'm saved! I live again!" I told anyone who would listen. How had it happened? What had changed? Had Harlan accidentally touched me? Was it true what they said about him?

I subsequently got so pissed I ended up eating in an Italian restaurant with a party of people that included the obnoxious Little Mal but I was feeling so mellow I restrained my natural impulses to throw pointed objects at him. Actually I was so pissed I would have had difficulty hitting him with a chair but I did my best to conceal my alcoholic state, making tedious small-talk to the androgynous Pat Charnock. Unfortunately the mask slipped a little when I got over-enthusiastic while trying to cut my steak and sent the whole thing flying into the air where it stayed for a brief time before falling first onto my lap and then to the floor. "Do you want another steak?" the waiter asked me. "No," I replied easily, "just wipe it down and put it back on my plate." And that's just what the Italian sod did.

The incident was to result in an embarrassing scene in my local dry cleaners: "What's this?" asked the woman behind the counter.

"Food stains," I replied indignantly, aware of the queue forming behind me.

"It looks like vomit," she said authoritatively.

"No, it's not...it's steak, mushroom and sauce stains," I replied.

"Are you sure it's not vomit?" she persisted.

There were now approximately three hundred people in the shop, all looking suspiciously at the stains on my trousers. I resisted the temptation to grab her by the throat and scream: "Alright," I confess! It's vomit! And sperm! And blood! I'm really Jack the Ripper!" But I didn't.

The next day I asked Peter, my agent's husband and sometimes script collaborator, what it meant when you pissed blood. He looked at me with alarm. "Blood? You've been pissing blood? That's bad."

"I was afraid of that," I said. "What does it mean?"

"It could mean several things. It could mean your liver, or your kidneys... or your bowels."

"Bowels!" I gasped. Immediately I felt a sharp stabbing pain in my bowels. I had cancer of the lower bowel, I knew it. "Quick, give me a double whiskey," I muttered as I toppled from my stool (sorry). Peter told me about a friend of his who had had a colotomy. Apparently they cut out several feet of bowel and give you an artificial anus in some incredibly inconvenient place, such as on the side of your neck or your groin or somewhere. To make you feel better about the operation the hospital gives you a little booklet that includes the names of all the famous people who have had colostomies. It seems that anyone who is anyone is walking around with little plastic bags of warm shit attached to their bodies. Strange as it may seem, this knowledge does not make me want to emulate them. I mean, lots of famous people are dead but that

doesn't make me any keener to take the Big Drop myself.

"Why not see a doctor?" suggested someone. It was a revolutionary idea and I gave it some serious thought.

Eventually I did see one. "I've been pissing blood," I told him. "What does it mean?"

"Hmmm," he replied and started scribbling on his notepad. So much for medical science. I mean, I can go 'hmmm' and scribble doodles on a piece of paper whenever someone asks me a medical question. Finally he did write me a letter which I sent to the local hospital. It was a request for an appointment with a piss specialist. (At what point in his career does a young medical student decide that he wants to devote the rest of his life to urine?). But before I got to see the Man himself I had to undergo a series of blood tests, x-rays, etc. I also had to deliver vast amounts of piss to the hospital for analysis. The first time I did this I went with the three little bottles discreetly wrapped in a brown paper bag. I finally located the pathology department which seemed to be staffed entirely by fourteen year old girls. I hastily deposited my cache in a metal tray marked "Urine samples" and prepared to make a fast retreat but the girl nearest the tray looked up from her typing and asked: "What's that?"

"Whisper, whisper," T replied.

"What?"

"Well, actually. . .it's urine. . .uh, mine," I muttered. To my annoyance she unwrapped the bottles and held one up to the light as if she was examining a bottle of vintage claret. "You haven't signed them," she said. The other girls in the office had now stopped work and were staring at my precious bodily fluids.

"What?" I asked, disbelievingly.

"You're supposed to put your name on each of the bottles, and the date," she said. She handed me a pen. Have you ever tried to sign your name on a bottle of your own piss while being watched by a horde of female office workers? It's not easy, but at least I didn't drop any of the bottles.

The worst test was the kidney x-ray. This involved being strapped down on a table with a large strip of rubber tight across the pelvis. This was to force the blood through the kidneys or out the nose or somewhere. They then injected some sort of dye into my arm. "You will feel a sensation of heat rising through your body and then nausea," said the doctor. He must have done that sort of thing before because he was quite right.

Finally I got to see the piss specialist, who looked exactly what you would expect an English piss expert to look like. He shuffled through the stack of papers that contained the results of my tests. "Well, we can't find anything wrong with you," he said, almost regretfully.

"Yay," I replied.

"Rut we would like to perform one more test," he said. "We want to x-ray. your bladder."

"X-ray away," I replied easily.

"It involves inserting a tube up your urethra." "Up my what?"

"Urethra. You'll be given a local anesthetic, of course."

By now I had worked out what my urethra was. "No way," I replied. It was his turn to say: "What?"

"I think I'll skip the bladder x-ray, if you don't mind," I said. He gave a faint smile. "Well, that's your prerogative," he said.

"And it's my urethra too," I said as I ran out the door.

I found out later that there's a condition that sometimes occurs in soldiers who have marched a long way -- they get blood in the urine, due to some temporary strain to the kidneys, I think -- and I've decided that's what happened to me (true, I was swimming instead of marching but let's not quibble over minor details).

"Anyway, even if 'you 'nave got cancer of the bladder," said John Baxter, the famous writer and wit who lives nearby, "it's not the end of the world. Look at Hubert Humphrey."

"Yes," I said, "look at Hubert Humphrey." Funny guy, John.

# A Different Set of Jaws

I'm not superstitious, but I have this phobia about the number seven. I believe it's my unlucky number you see, and as you've probably noticed 1977 has two of the little buggers in it. The year before only had one and that was traumatic enough. I don't think I'm going to make it through 1977 if it's twice as harrowing as 1976. That was the year I didn't sell half a book about the director Richard Lester and didn't break into the film business. It was also the year that the building foundations subsided (it's the clay, you know) and the whole place threatened to fall over. Now the builders have put little strips of glass over the Grand Canyon-sized cracks and have assured us the building is quite safe. Of course, there were a few bright spots in 1976, like the day I met Johnny Wiesmuller at the Savoy Hotel - we didn't chat for long - he just had time to tell me that he was speaking funny because he had laryngitis before he was dragged away by a photographer, so I didn't have time to tell him about my chronic tonsillitis. But that's another story and I shall not digress.

You may remember that at the beginning of 1976 a film called *Jaws* was doing rather good business. It occurred to me, like it occurred to countless other exploitation-minded people that one might be able to cash in on the situation. I thought hard (well, not very hard) and came up with a possible idea. I mentioned it to my agent's husband, Peter, and he was very enthusiastic about it. Basically, my idea was to write a film script about a scientist who injects himself with shark antibodies (he's trying to find a cure for cancer) and keeps turning into a shark-man. First he goes berserk in a fish restaurant, then he starts attacking people in the sea, then in the public swimming pool, and finally in people's bath tubs. At the climax of the film he is harpooned and netted on a seaside pier, but manages to escape into the sea. Later a shark is caught by a local fisherman and the last shots of the film show the hooked shark, dangling on the pier, slowly turning back into a man.

I'll pause here while you pick yourselves off the floor. Thank you. Yes, it was meant to be a spoof. A combination of *Jaws*, **Dr Jekyll & Mr Hyde**, and *The Creature From the Black Lagoon*. Well, Peter and I quickly wrote the script, which was the easiest part, and then the fun started. Actually Peter had all the hard selling work to do - I just sat back and sweated. First he approached Sir John Terry of the National Film Finance Board which is a government-backed set-up run on purely commercial grounds. That is, they don't put money into just good or artistically deserving film projects, but ones which they think might make a profit (it has nothing to do with the British Film Institute whose policy is just the opposite). To my amazement Sir John liked our script and offered to put up half the total budget, providing we found a distributor and the other half of the money. Now I won't go into a long and tedious moan about the problems of the British film industry, but the main one involves distribution. All the main distribution outlets are in the hands of just two companies - Rank and EMI. However, when we were trying to launch our shark-man there were still three - British Lion then existed as a separate organisation though it's since merged with EMI. Anyway, it turned out that Peter had known the head of British Lion, Mike Deeley, when they were both callow youths together at Pinewood Studios many years ago, so he decided to approach him personally. Pleased to do an old buddy a favour, Deeley saw Peter and agreed to read our script; then, a few days later, he asked Peter to come and see him again. Peter did.

That night I saw Peter in our local pub. He looked pale and wan and was knocking back the whiskeys.

"Well?" I squeaked.

"Mike loves it," Peter told me. "There's just one thing he wants changed."

"Yes? Yes! Anything! Anything he wants! When do we get the money? Have another drink! Drinks for the

house! On me!"

"He wants John Cleese to play the shark-man."

"John Cleese? The John Cleese? Of Monty Python fame? But. . .but. . ." Peter nodded sadly. I went on: "But Cleese wouldn't. . .and besides, it's not that sort of movie. . .and even if Cleese did show some interest, he'd rewrite the script his way. . .and. . .and. . ."

"I know. I tried to tell Mike," said Peter.

That was Major Setback Number One.

Around this time we acquired a producer. It's hard to raise money for a commercial film if you don't have a fairly well known producer, so Peter contacted one he had worked with in the past - Norman Priggin, known as 'Spike' in the trade. He'd been Joe Losey's producer on most of his films for the last decade, but had recently come to a parting of the ways with Losey and since then had made a couple of horror films.

Spike read the script and agreed to join us, providing he could make several changes. After all, as he said, he had his reputation to think of. When I met Spike at our first script conference it immediately occurred to me that he would, if he'd been a few years younger, have been perfect for the role of the shark-man himself, as he had the sort of jutting jaw that looked as if it could slice through two inch armour plate with ease. "He can be pretty ferocious," Peter had warned me beforehand. We spent days arguing with Spike as he went slowly through it word by tedious word. At first I was hesitant to cross swords with him in case he leapt up and bit me in the leg, but soon I was putting up a strong battle to protect my golden words:

"But that's a very funny line. The funniest in the whole script! And it's important too! It's a plot point!"

"No, it's not," Spike would say. "It's weak, schoolboy humour. Cut it!"

I cut. And cut, and cut. But I must admit that by the time Spike had hacked his way through the whole script it was much improved. In fact, it was bloody good.

So next we approached Rank, which is headed by Sir Frank Poole. Now Rank distributes a lot of crap - soft porn, shoddy horror films, etc. - but it turns out that they get all moralistic when it comes to films they actually put money into, and when Sir Frank showed our script to his wife, who apparently advises him in all such matters, she told him she thought it was all very distasteful. Distasteful? Now I ask you, members of fandom, could I possibly write something that was in any way distasteful?

Major Setback Number Two.

EMI didn't even come up with 'distasteful'. They weren't in the least interested, particularly when they found out that Deeley had been approached first. As the merger with British Lion was then imminent, it was possible that Deeley would be their new boss, so they weren't willing even to consider something he had already rejected (we didn't tell them about Deeley's John Cleese fixation).

Major Setback Number Three.

But all was not lost (well, actually everything was lost, but. . .). Peter had been doing work on documentaries, children's films, etc, for a man called Ian Shand, and just as our shark-man project got

under way Shand came into a small fortune (if you call £500,000 small). So he decided to try to get into feature film production and his first step was to open up an office at Pinewood Studios where he tried to launch both our film and a film property of his own. As he was willing to pay us for an option on our script, we decided he would make a better producer than Spike (the film industry is no place for squeamish morality), so Spike went. Then, for the first time since Sir John offered to put up half the budget, something really incredible happened. While at Pinewood, Shand had met the English representative for AIP Pictures, America's leading exploitation film producers and natural backers for our film. His name was Steve Previn and he turned out to be Andre Previn's brother (makes you think) - and he loved our shark-man. I mean, baby, he LOVED it! "I'm sending this to the States right away with a recommendation that we do it! They always follow my advice, so you can count on shooting this in October without fail!"

Ecstasy! Success! Gee, breaking into the film industry was easy!

Preparations were made at Pinewood. Studio space was booked, an art director was hired, and we started thinking seriously about sharks. A lot of the film's action took place in an old seaside aquarium that had been converted into a laboratory, and the centrepiece of the whole thing was a large glass tank containing a ten-foot long tiger shark. Peter started ringing up animal-renters to see if he could hire a shark, but for some reason sharks were a scarce commodity, though there were plenty of lions, monkeys, dogs, bears, and rabbits available (we could have changed the script slightly and made it about a scientist who becomes a rabbit-man and breeds people to death). It was then decided to cheat by using front projection; but that still left the problem of locating a shark. Peter checked to see if there were any aquariums in England that possessed a shark, but none did. No wonder this country is in a mess. He did hear of a pub owner who had a twelve foot basking shark penned up in a creek somewhere, but that wasn't really much help to us. Peter even rang up Gerald Durrell, who has an aquarium on Jersey (or Guernsey - one of those odd little islands), and asked him if he happened to have a shark. He had three, actually, but they were only three feet long. I suggested we make a nine-foot shark costume and train Durrell's three sharks to work inside it, but no one leapt at the idea and I went back to my crayons. Peter then decided that someone (preferably him) would have to take a camera crew to Florida and shoot the necessary footage in one of the oceanariums there. He was discussing this with a technician at Pinewood when the fellow suddenly said: "You should have arranged to go along with the James Bond unit. They're shooting front projection plates of a shark out in the Bahamas right now."

WHAT?

Peter did some quick checking and discovered that one of the main sets in the new Bond film includes a huge glass tank that is supposed to contain a shark. But that wasn't all. One of the villain's henchmen is a giant with metal teeth, nicknamed 'Jaws'. And at one point in the film he gets into the tank and eats the shark. Even we hadn't come up with something that. . .good. "Don't worry," said Peter. "Our movie will be out long before theirs." It was our fish-man against theirs, and I threw away a quip 'the Bond people biting off more than they could chew this time'. You can see why I threw it away.

Preparations continued while we waited for the go-ahead from America. The art director did some marvelous designs for the aquarium set and various actors were approached and asked how well they could swim. The tension mounted. . .it got so bad I took to heavy drinking.

Then came the Mother Of Major Setbacks. A mere two weeks before everything was due to get under way, word came through from the States that AIP had finally decided not to do *Jaw Man*. Their reasons? Well, they thought it was too close to a fifties horror film in plot. Of course it was. It was supposed to be; but apparently no one had told the AIP mob that it was a spoof. "I can't understand it," said a disheartened

Steve Previn. The other reason AIP turned it down was because it was too cheap. No one, we were told, is making cheap films any more. "We're into prestige movies these days," said AIP. Hah!

And that was that. Our shark-man sunk like a stone into the waters of oblivion, metaphorically speaking. But I took it well, all things considered.

Not that everyone has given up on *Jaw Man*. Shand is trying to interest some Arab friends in the idea and Peter is thinking seriously of going back to Deeley and saying that he's changed his mind about John Cleese.

# London Life & Loathing

Those Anzapans who know of my drinking habits no doubt think that the name of my street - Lushington Road - is very appropriate. But while the name may conjure up a picture of quaint, tipsy charm the reality is quite different. Lushington Road is a bleak, featureless little street in one of West London's most depressing areas. In fact, it's such a grotty place that some residents have painted COME BACK LUFTWAFFE ALL IS FORGIVEN on their roofs. As the inhabitants are predominantly coloured immigrants there is always a feeling of vague tension in the air, largely created by the older white residents who resent their presence. Naturally it's become a focus for the National Front's activities (the National Front is Britain's fascist party) and last year they firebombed a black bookshop in the nearby Harrow Road. Muggings are also rife in the area - the muggers either beings gangs of black youths or gangs of white youths (please note your colour preference on a card and send it to the NW10 Mugging Service).

It's all Mervyn Barrett's fault that I'm living here. He introduced me to his friend Jill and when he left England back in 1975 I took over as Jill's official cat minder whenever she went away. At that time Jill lived in a large, rambling flat on the top floor of an old building in St John's Wood, one of London's most pleasant inner-city areas. The flat was run-down and the neighbours below were appallingly noisy, but its main advantage was its roof - a great spot on which to spend summer days, with much of London spread out below, and a great spot to get drunk on summer nights. . . The flat was also ideally suited for underground stations, shops and, most importantly, pubs (my favourite local became the Abbey Tavern run by a fellow West Australian expatriate). At the beginning of 1976, after a spell in Ireland, I moved into the place on a full-time basis and for the next year or so life was relatively pleasant apart from the running battle with the neighbours (they were all in the entertainment business - out of work musicians, out of work singers and one actor - and made noise round the clock. I particularly disliked the actor who had the habit of getting up and thumping the piano whenever he had achieved a satisfactory orgasm, which was often. I was overjoyed when he left to go on tour as Basil Brush's partner but apparently even that awful fox couldn't stand him and he returned after only a few weeks. (Basil Brush, I hasten to point out, is a glove puppet in the shape of a fox and has his own TV show over here.)

But then, at the end of 1976, Jill, who works on a BBC TV film program, decided that the time had come to burden herself with a house and mortgage. I tried to point out that living in a low rent flat in a posh neighbourhood was more desirable than paying a fortune for a house of her own in a less attractive area but her mind was made up and a few months later she announced that she'd made an offer on a ground floor flat, complete with garden (for the cats) in NW10. My first sight of 23 Lushington Road was not a happy one and this feeling of doom was reinforced when we actually moved in. For one thing it's not near any tube station - instead one is serviced by a primitive little surface line that eventually links up with the underground if you're very, very lucky. And the nearest pub, which is a good fifteen minutes walk away, can best be described as incredibly gruesome.

Of course, no sooner had we moved in than Jill decided she hated the place and immediately put the flat up for sale. That was almost a year ago and as you can see we're still here. After months of being plagued by cretins coming to look the flat over every weekend we finally found a buyer (actually that was all my own work - Jill was away at the time - I lied and lied to a tall, attractive blonde who came around one evening and succeeded in persuading here that it was an ideal place to live in. She never saw it by daylight). Then Jill found a suitable flat in Kilburn, which is fairly near our old neighbourhood, and made an offer which was accepted. But the months then passed without anything seeming to be happening and eventually we discovered that the owners, despite accepting Jill's offer, had sold it privately for an extra £5,000!

So naturally Jill had to call off the sale of her place and we're now back to square one. Since Jill had to spend the last couple of months on assignment for the BBC in America she hasn't yet had the opportunity to look for another flat and so the situation is in limbo at the moment.

One of the many drawbacks of living here is that we have a pair of mangy, unpleasant old-age-pensioners living above who are constantly being visited by hordes of their noisy little grandchildren. I've discovered that I prefer to have noisy neighbours below me rather than on top (admittedly I'm not the most tolerant of people to share a house with). And I'm also getting worried about the guy who drives around on a motorbike and sidecar wearing a full World War II German soldier's uniform complete with square helmet. When I first saw him I thought I was having an attack of the DTs, then I decided that he was a movie extra returning equipment to the big theatrical hire company in the Harrow Road (called Bapty's - it specialises in hiring out guns and military equipment to movie companies) but I've seen him in the same gear since then, and on one occasion he had a woman and child in the sidecar, so I can only presume he's a Nazi buff.

Jill's disillusionment with the place grew in leaps and bounds, particularly after an incident that took place just before Christmas. I'd been away minding John Baxter's flat while he and Joyce were in America (when I'm finally forced out of writing I shall become a full-time flat and pet minder) and dropped back on Christmas Eve to say goodbye to Jill before she left for her parent's place in Bognor. I arrived to find her looking flushed and excited. At first I assumed it was the result of Christmas good cheer but it turned out she had been mugged right outside the front door a few hours previously. She decided the best thing to do was scream and drop her bicycle on the guy's foot, which resulted in him running off. Later she called the police and they actually succeeded in picking the guy up, who turned out to be a drunken teenager - a drunken teenager with a stiletto in his back pocket. Now when I come home I always examine the bushes in the front garden before opening the front door.

Speaking of minding John Baxter's flat - John happens to be a collector of objects d'art and while I was there I was worried that sooner or later I was going to accidentally wreck havoc on some valuable piece. But I lasted the three weeks or so without doing any obvious damage - or so I thought. I had just turned on the TV set to watch an obscure sf movie based on a short story by John Wyndham (the movie was called *Quest for Love* but I can't remember the name of the short story\*) when there came a knock at the door. It was the girl in the next flat (John has a basement flat) who asked if I would mind keeping an eye on her place as well while she was in Canada over the Christmas period. Of course, I said, hoping to quickly close the door to get back to the movie. It wasn't that the movie was any good - in fact it was rotten - but as I'd never seen it before I thought it would be a good idea if I at least had a glimpse of it before writing about it in my book on sf films (in the past, I must confess, I've often written about films that I've never seen, only to later discover that they bear no resemblance to my descriptions. Then she said to come and have a quick look at her flat, so I went out into the hall and immediately the door of John's flat slammed shut, leaving me locked out.

While this stupid female was pointing out the security flaws in her flat to me I was pondering on more important matters - how to get back inside John's place. I kept muttering to her - I'm locked out, I'm locked out - but she failed to appreciate the enormity of my predicament, showed me to the door and then hurried off on some romantic errand, leaving me to my own devices. After trying the windows, which were all locked, I sat in the flowerbed for awhile watching the TV through the front window and trying to lip-read Joan Collins but without success (if you wonder why I didn't devote much space to this film in my forthcoming book, this is the reason). Then it started to rain.

\* A quick search online by ye editor reveals that Ralph Thomas's film, *Quest for Love* (1971), which starred Tom Bell, Joan Collins and Denholm Elliott, was based on the John Wyndham short story, *Random Quest*.

After standing around getting wet for some minutes I decided to wander down to the local police station and ask for assistance. A wasted journey - all they could offer was the number for a 24-hour locksmith and I didn't even have enough money for a phone call. So I returned to the flat, getting angrier and angrier. There was nothing for it but to unleash my brute strength and break in. First I launched myself at the front door but bounced off like a rubber ball full of water, then I picked up a large brick that was lying in the hallway and acting like a doorstep. With all my strength, and with a hand over my eyes, I swung it at the pane of pebbled, wire-reinforced glass at the top of the door. It too bounced off without leaving a mark. Then I tried pushing my arm through the letterbox flap in order to reach the latch inside but though thin my arm wasn't quite thin enough. What next, I wondered as I nursed my flayed arm. Then I had an inspiration!

Using the key of Jill's front door I began levering the front of the letterbox away from the door. Finally I had enough of a gap to enable me to get my fingers into it and I then wrenched the whole letterbox out of the door. This, of course, left a much bigger hole in the door than before and I was then able to put my arm through and reach the latch inside. With one bound I was back in front of the TV set watching the end credits roll by. Needless to say, the letterbox was a total write-off. I made a few temporary repairs to the door, planning to reimburse John for the cost of a new letterbox later, but didn't really think much more about it. It was only when he returned that I learned the letterbox was a very valuable piece of art deco and virtually irreplaceable.

(Only John Baxter would have an irreplaceable letterbox.)

Ironic Footnote: My use of the key to Jill's front door to pry off Baxter's letter box resulted in the key being so badly damaged that when I returned home a couple of weeks later I was unable to open the front door. . . so I had to go and have a duplicate key made before I could get in. Talk about irony!

# Oh No, Not Another Bloody Con Trip Report

Some months ago (June to be exact) the famous best-selling author John Baxter, rich young publisher Dez Skinn and freelance alcoholic John Brosnan gathered at Euston Station, London, to begin an epic journey that would take them across the Irish Sea to Harry Harrison's World SF Writers Conference. But first there was the little matter of the tickets to sort out. Each of us had bought 1st Class Return tickets but for some reason we had been each charged a different price. We thought this might be due to an error on the part of British Rail's staff but no - apparently it was all our fault. At least this was the impression conveyed by the charming British Rail employee behind the counter, but after much pleading for forgiveness and promising never to be so stupid again he relented and provided us with new tickets.

On the way to the platform we encountered the famous Jerry Webb and his girlfriend Anne who were also en route to Dublin. "Who was that?" Baxter asked me later. "That was the famous Jerry Webb," I told him. "Jerry was almost Britain's first astronaut and he's currently involved in something called Project Daedalus or Dildo or something. It's a scheme to ship twenty tons of frozen human sperm (male) to Alpha Centauri and thus guarantee the survival of the human race." "Jerry who?" asked John.

The train journey to Holyhead was uneventful and much of it was spent listening to Dez Skinn telling Baxter how his publishing empire would one day make William Randolph Hearst's look puny by comparison. Dez, I should point out, is the publisher of *House of Horror* magazine and *Starburst* (I don't know if they ever reach Australia - probably not, you lucky people). Baxter later had his revenge when Jerry Webb dropped into our compartment and proceeded to tell Dez the whole history of his Project Daedalus and also that of the British Interplanetary Society. From time to time Dez would desperately try to rope Baxter and myself into the conversation but we would ignore his attempts and continue to stare out of the window, fielding his plaintive: "That's very interesting, Jerry. . . isn't it John? John?" with such things as "Crumbs, what a fascinating tree, John," and "Oh look, John, another cow!"

The changeover from train to ferry was interrupted by the inevitable interrogation by a Customs/Special/Branch/Immigration Officer (I'm never sure what they are at Holyhead). I don't know why they always pick on me when I make the trip to and from Ireland but they do. Perhaps I look like Bernadette Devlin.

Once on the ferry I immediately made my way to the bar where I found my agent, Janet Freer, talking to a publisher called Peter Lavery. Janet looked pleased. "I've just sold him three books and the ferry hasn't moved yet," she told me.

It was a pleasant, calm crossing and I passed the time drinking and playing poker with Dez, and listened to him telling me how his publishing empire would one day etc, etc. Within four hours we had docked at Dun Laoghaire and it was only a short walk from the terminal up the hill to the Royal Marine Hotel where the conference was being held.

Arriving in Ireland is always a disconcerting experience for me, mainly because it reminds me so much of Australia, particularly Western Australia where I come from. Dun Laoghaire, for instance, and its surrounds, is very similar to Fremantle, due to both a similarity in architecture and the fact that the same colour stone - a dirty grey - has been used in the construction of so many of the buildings. The Dubliners themselves also remind me of Australians in their appearance, which shouldn't be surprising considering that so many Australians are of Irish descent. However it is unsettling to keep seeing people who look uncannily like

various uncles, aunts, cousins and even a deceased grandfather. One also sees a lot of girls in Dublin who bear a more than passing resemblance to Robert Holdstock's wife Sheila, but that shouldn't be surprising either as the beautiful Sheila herself actually comes from Dublin. And seeing lots of Sheila Holdstocks in the street is preferable to seeing lots of dead grandfathers.

Officially I was attending the conference as the representative of Panther paperbacks (for whom I've been working for in the capacity of 'science fiction adviser' for the past year) but I was also there to promote my forthcoming book on SF films, **Future Tense**, (but that's not my title, I hasten to point out). Knowing of my interest in the SF cinema Harry Harrison had asked - well, told me - to give a talk on the state of the field. "Actually I need you as a replacement for Forry Ackerman, who can't make it this year," said Harry. I was not happy to hear this. For one thing I'm not sure if I like being considered as a stand-in for Ackerman (I'm not tall enough) and the other thing is that I hate speaking in front of more than two people at a time. In fact I am almost physically incapable of speaking in public. But I couldn't really refuse Harry's request because he had done me the favour of writing the forward for **Future Tense**, and also because he would have no doubt presented me with a knuckle sandwich if I had. I knew that I would have to give the talk on the first day of the conference and my only hope was that it would be programmed late enough for me to get very pissed before going on stage.

Though the conference wasn't officially due to start until the following day a lot of people had arrived at the hotel that night and the place was oozing with famous SF personalities and various parasites such as 'science fiction advisers'. Among the Big Names were Alfred Bester, Brian Aldiss, Joe Haldeman, Gordon Dickson, Ben Bova, Ted Sturgeon, Fred Pohl, Kelly Freas, Bob Shaw, James White and Robert Holdstock. There were also a lot of publishers, editors, foreign guests and even a few agents (hiss). I looked in vain for the beautiful Julie Davis who I've lusted after ever since she used to edit the hilarious *Science Fiction Monthly* magazine. "She was coming," her then boss Tom Tessia of Millingtons told me, "but she remembered at the last moment that she'd booked for a package tour of Yugoslavia." "The sort of mistake anyone could make," I replied, "particularly Julie." Since then she has left Millingtons and now works for a Christian publisher, whatever that is. And Harry Harrison recently informed me, with great glee, that she was at present having a Deep and Meaningful Relationship with none other than Kyril Bonfiglioli, who also lives in Ireland, but I took the news with a pinch of salt, and half a pint of vodka. But enough of my morbid sexual fantasies - back to the con. . .

The first night is a bit of a haze. . . I remember eating reasonably good Chinese food at a Chinese restaurant, which is something of an achievement in Ireland, drinking a lot and playing poker. I gave up the latter fairly early in the morning but when I went to bed the game was continuing. The players included Joe Haldeman, Dez Skinn and an excitable young man called Bob Asprin who I understand is an up and coming author (**The Cold Cash War** etc). The next morning Mr Skinn was at my door with his luggage in his hands. "Mind if I use your spare bed?" he asked as he marched in and dumped his suitcase on said bed. He then told me that he had been forced to check out of the hotel as a result of losing most of his money in a certain poker game to a certain Mr Asprin. I would have laughed aloud but as Mr Skinn is an occasional employer of mine I merely chuckled quietly. From then on Mr Skinn's attitude towards Mr Asprin can be described as one of barely veiled hostility. But as somebody had told Mr Skinn that Mr Asprin was heavily into guns and karate the bad feelings remained under cover.

That morning I accompanied Baxter, who had hired a car, into Dublin and followed him around various bookshops. Baxter can't really be described as an SF fan any more and his main reason for coming to the conference was to check out the Irish second-hand bookshops. He's a big collector of first editions and it was educational watching him at work - within moments of entering a shop he would be clutching five or six volumes and be telling me that he'd made a profit of fifty pounds or so. All I found was a 1954 edition of

**Live & Let Die** and I was feeling pleased with myself until Baxter informed me that it was the worthless book club edition. All you can do with book club editions, apparently, is read them.

By the time we returned to the hotel the program had been typed out and I was able to see when I would be expected to give my speech. I breathed a sigh of relief when I saw that I wasn't on until about halfway through the afternoon.

The conference officially began at 1pm and the first item was 'introductions'. For this Harry Harrison and Brian Aldiss sat up on the dais and introduced every person in the hall except me. There I sat waiting for Harry to mention me, and plug **Future Tense** at the same time. . .and I waited and I waited . . . Baxter, who was sitting on my right, was introduced, and Dez Skinn, who was sitting on my left, was also introduced but me? No. Later I complained about this to Harry and he told me I should have said something. Actually I was saying a lot but it was all under my breath.

After the introductions (ha!), and while I was still fuming, Harry dropped a bombshell: "As certain people have not yet arrived we're going to have to skip the first few items and go straight to the talks on 'Science Fiction and the Media'. Needless to say my speech was included in this item. I let out a little yelp. Not only was I psychologically unprepared but I was still sober!

Moments later I was sitting on the dais flanked by Harry, Brian & Dez Skinn (who was to give a talk on magazines- his, of course - after me). There was also supposed to be a publisher of illustrated SF books on the panel but he hadn't arrived yet. In front of me was a sea of expectant faces. I decided to ignore them and concentrate on my speech which consisted of lots of little bits of paper stuck together with sticky tape. I resembled a toilet roll covered in graffiti. Basically it was a list of information about forthcoming SF movies and planned productions but peppered with little jokes and witticisms. At least I thought I'd peppered the pages with little jokes and witticisms but as I quickly scanned through it I discovered that they had all disappeared. I looked under the table, thinking that perhaps I'd dropped them but they weren't there either.

At this point Harry at last introduced me (but without mentioning **Future Tense**) and I began my speech, eyes glued to the page and in a tone of voice that resembled a 'Speak-Your-Weight' machine. Before long a foreign voice interrupted to ask me to speak louder. Not long afterwards another foreign voice requested me to speak louder. I continued on. It now seemed that my short speech was growing in length - the original few pages had expanded into something the size of a telephone directory - so I decided to start skipping certain passages. At last I found one of my little jokes - I unleashed it on the audience and waited for the reaction. There was none. Another foreign voice interrupted to ask if they could have printed copies of the speech afterwards as they weren't really understanding much of it in its oral form. I wondered yet again why it had been necessary to invite so many stupid foreigners to the conference. Then Aldiss interrupted to make what I thought was a particularly unfunny comment but the audience thought otherwise. Everyone roared with laughter and several people fell off their chairs and injured themselves. I continued on through gritted teeth (thus sounding like a demented ventriloquist's dummy).

Finally I came to the end. All I wanted to do then was run (sobbing) out of the hall and have a long piss and an even longer drink but unfortunately the missing publisher then arrived and I was obliged to remain on the dais while he raved on and on about his silly picture books. Needless to say I was not in a good mood by the end of the first part of the conference.

The evening was better. Having failed at promoting myself and my book I thought I'd better have a go at promoting Panther, so during an impromptu gathering in someone's room I announced that this was a 'Panther Sponsored Room Party'. At the suggestion of someone that it might be a good idea if there was

something to drink at this Panther Room Party I staggered down to the bar and asked for a bottle of whiskey. They gave me one and asked for fourteen pounds. I almost opened my lunch on the spot but then remembered that Panther would eventually be paying for this folly and so I handed over the money. I think it was a good party.

The next morning saw the formation of the World Science Fiction Association, an event that ranks with the sinking of the Titanic as far as its intrinsic value to the human race is concerned (I am one of those people who doesn't believe that SF Holds All the Answers). Symbolically the chairs in the auditorium were arranged in a circle and then various people stood up and made fools of themselves. One got the impression that if the evangelical zeal got any stronger we would all be out overrunning Poland before the weekend was over. But everyone was effectively stopped in their tracks by Katherine MacLean standing up and saying that SF should stop wasting its time dealing with human characters, and human relationships, and concentrate on providing a dynamic interface between the human race as a whole and the universe. At least I think that's what she said but I'm not sure because after listening to her for about 15 minutes my ears started to bleed. After Ms MacLean had been carried out by several volunteers and doused with cold water things returned to a more mundane level and it was decided that the World SF Association would simply act as a clearing house for information, enabling publishers to keep up on what was happening with SF in other countries, etc.

I left at this point and retired to the bar where I joined Bob Shaw who was also dabbing at his ears with a blood-spotted kleenex. He wasn't too excited about the World SF Association either and was of the opinion that the less publishers knew about what was going on in other countries the better it was for SF writers in this country. I agreed. Knowledgeable publishers might mean the end of civilisation as we know it, and my job at Panther.

That afternoon there was an even more boring event. This was the speech by the three Russian guests and it was a foretaste of purgatory. It was so boring that birds and low-flying 'planes began dropping out of the sky in the vicinity of the hotel. Nor was there any way to escape - unlike an ordinary con this one was ruled with a rod of iron by Harry. If you tried to sneak out during an item and he spotted you he would subject you to a great deal of sarcastic comment from the dais. Usually the guilty party would capitulate and return to his or her seat though a few brave ones, like Bob Shaw, would calmly ignore Harry and keep walking. All very ironic really, considering that in the past it's often been Harry (and Aldiss) who's enlivened many a boring con talk by creating comical diversions. . .

Anyway, because Baxter and I had been seen sneaking out of an item earlier in the day we decided to get back into Harry's good books by sitting in the front row during the Russians' speeches. This was a big mistake. It wasn't so much that what the Russians had to say that was boring (well, it was actually) but the way they said it. There were three of them, one of whom could speak Russian and broken English (very slowly), one who could speak Russian and French, and one who could only speak Russian. First the one who could speak fractured English fluently gave his speech. This was pretty dull and seemed to last three days but was relatively bearable compared to what was to follow - the speech by the Russian who could only speak Russian. He would speak a few words and this was then translated by the Russian who could speak both Russian and French into French. This was then in turn translated into broken English by a fourth person - a Frenchman or 'Frog', as they are known over here. As you can imagine the whole process took a considerable length of time, and because the speech was so disjointed it was difficult to follow what was being said. One fragment that remains lodged in my mind like a broken piece of fish bone was that science fiction was used in Russia to ensure that young people developed normal ideas. At least that's what I think was said - I might be getting the Russians mixed up with Katherine MacLean.

As the horrible ordeal went on and on I fought back the impulse to leap up from my seat and run screaming from the hall. Baxter escaped temporarily by falling into a deep slumber but was publicly snapped back to consciousness by Harry - "Baxter, wake up!"

I was very struck by the way the three Russians looked so much like Russians. One looked like Stalin and the other two looked like Kosygin. The two that looked like Kosygin were older than Stalin and all three were dressed in suits that looked as if they were Khrushchev's cast-offs. There was a lot of conjecture about which one was the KGB agent. I favoured Stalin but he turned out to be both a genuine SF writer and a Jew so I thought it was unlikely that he also worked for the KGB. . .the one who could only speak Russian was the head of the Soviet Writers Union so I guess that leaves the one who could speak both Russian and French. . .

I can't help thinking that they represented the thin edge of the wedge and that the Russian plan to take over Western SF. No doubt more and more Russians will be attending future SF conventions in Britain. We all know that some of the brightest minds in Britain regularly go to conventions' - imagine the effects on these minds after a sustained exposure to Russian speeches of the type we had in Dublin. Naturally the nation would soon collapse (a mentally deranged Jerry Webb, for instance, would mean the end of the British space program and his hopes of being the first man on the moon) and the Russians could simply move in. I have already written to Whitehall to warn them that there may be Russian tanks rolling through the streets of Brighton next August on their way to the Worldcon. We must be vigilant.

That night saw the presentation of two Ken Campbell productions (has Campbell's fame spread to Oz?) One was a shortish play about an immortal man being interviewed by a TV reporter. The latter was played by the beautiful Prunella Gee who is married to Campbell. She didn't give a very good performance that night but that was due to a number of factors outside of her control. One was that she was pregnant, another was that she had the mumps (if I'd known this at the time I would have moved my chair nearer the back - we potential donors to Project Daedalus must always put the fate of the human race first) but the main factor was that there was an Irish wedding reception taking place in the room above the auditorium, complete with a live band playing traditional Irish music very, very loudly. Despite several visits from an angry Harry the noise continued unabated throughout the first play. Pissed off with the situation, Baxter, Dez and I retreated from the hotel and went to a nearby restaurant, thus missing the second play - an adaptation of a Sturgeon story. Of course on our return we were told by everyone that we had missed the event of a lifetime etc, etc. So it goes.

There were more room parties that night and later the inevitable game of poker, though thankfully without Bob Asprin. One of the players this time was a young American publisher called Richard Garrison who told me about the local Emergency Service he was a member of back in California. "It's great", he said, "I get to kick people's doors in."

The next morning Baxter drove Dez and I to the Dublin zoo to look at the Siberian Tigers. The tigers were impressive but the thing that impressed me most was the large male orangutan that attempted to form a meaningful relationship with Dez. As soon as it saw him it waddled to the front of its open-plan compound, squatted by the ditch that separated it from the outside world and proceeded to throw things at Dez - bits of stick, pebbles etc. Dez, being a typical publisher, picked these missiles up and threw them back at the ape. Immediately the ape went glassy-eyed with joy. "Dez doesn't realise it," whispered Baxter, "but he is participating in an elaborate courting ritual." This was borne out by the behaviour of the female orangutan who watched the display of mutual affection with growing distress. As more and more people gathered to watch this remarkable relationship grow between Man and Ape, Baxter and I, extremely embarrassed, made our excuses and left.

That night the banquet was held. Normally I don't attend banquets at conventions but seeing as how this one was different I thought it would be diplomatic if I did (in other words, I could charge it to Panther). Actually it confirmed all my worst suspicions about banquets, or con banquets at least, the service was slow (there's no way you can efficiently serve hot food to a 150 or so people without using a 150 or so waiters), the drinks scarce and the speeches mostly boring. The exception in the latter category was Fred Pohl's speech which was very amusing. When one of the Russians started to speak (the one who could speak a little English) I almost decided to open my veins with one of the blunt pieces of cutlery provided but mercifully his speech was short. And later, when Alfred Bester started to speak, the same Russian made what was almost an amusing quip. It didn't amuse Bester, however, who promptly sat down and had to be persuaded to stand up again and finish what turned out to be a very unfunny joke.

The awards were also presented and among the winners - surprise - was a pair of Russian writers called, I think, the Boroni Brothers. They won the prize for a book called *Roadside Picnic*. I've read this - it's a rewrite of Algis Budrys' *Rogue Moon*. I am now busily rewriting *Tiger Tiger* into Russian.\*

Dez missed the banquet because he was busily chatting up two giggly yank girls who were in the process of 'doing Europe'. Afterwards he told me that both had promised to visit him at different times in London (neither ever showed up. . . heh, heh). He also said they showed him the weapons they were carrying to protect themselves in Darkest Europe - one had a can of Mace and the other had a large Bowie knife. Both could bring tears to your eyes.

Later that night Dez and I finally managed to drag Joe Haldeman away to interview him, something we'd been threatening to do for days. The big problem was that we were all pissed as newts, especially me (it was around 1am in the morning) which made the whole thing somewhat difficult. But eventually I succeeded in finding the 'on' button and in the privacy of our room the interview began: "Tell me, Joe . . . how much of an inshprashion wash **Starshit Troopers** in the writing of **Forever Warsh**?"

Actually Haldeman was amazingly articulate despite the amount of alcohol circulating through him and gave a good interview (you can read it in *Starburst*) but it became apparent just how pissed he was when the interview had long finished and we were about to return to the bar. For some of the time a French editor called Ann Marie (Marie Ann?) had been in the room with us and contributing questions of her own during the interview but she had left about an hour before. However as we three were staggering to our feet Joe suddenly said: "She's been in there a long time", indicating the toilet. I looked at Dez, who said: "You mean Ann Marie? She left ages ago. She's not in the toilet."

\* Later John was to write: You could have knocked me down with a rejection slip when Paul Stevens sent me a copy of a letter sent to him by George Turner. Apparently dear old George had taken exception to something in *SON OF WHY BOTHER?* #2; in fact it was my comment about **Roadside Picnic**, the book by the two Russian brothers whose surname I can never remember. According to dear George my opinion that the book was a rewrite of **Rogue Moon** was incredibly wrong, mainly because George doesn't share this opinion. He then went to tedious but unconvincing length to show why the two books were supposed to be different, but what really annoyed me was his following statement: 'What annoys me into writing at such length is that Brosnan is "professional" (has a few publications to his name) and therefore apt to be regarded as vox Dei by worshipful readers who tend to think writers are something special. (Very few are.)'

So let that be a warning to you all. Even though I have published such great works as **James Bond in the Cinema** I am not a vox Dei and my opinions are not to be taken seriously, unlike George's which are. Also try and not to worship writers. They are not as special as you may think. Isn't it nice of Uncle George to worry about your poor unprotected minds in this way? He is a clever man and do you know what. . . I think he may just be one of those rare writers who is a little bit special. He's certainly special in my book.

"Then why'd she leave her shoes?" asked Joe triumphantly, producing a pair of shoes.

"They're awfully big shoes," I said, focusing my eyes with difficulty.

"They're mine," said Dez.

Joe looked hard at the shoes: "Hell, I thought she had big feet for a woman," he said.

By the following day it was all over and people began to wend their way back to their various countries - the Swedes back to Sweden, the Froggies back to Frogland, the Poms back to England, the Russkies back to Siberia, the Yanks back to America. . . and so on (I think you get the picture by now). The Australian contingent, however, stayed on in Ireland for a while - Baxter and I drove down the coast on a sight-seeing, and in John's case, a book-buying, tour that lasted four or five days. We almost made it as far as a little town in County Kerry called Brosna but decided that there were some things that Man should leave undisturbed. Then we returned to Dublin and paid our respects to Harry and his wife Joan (who were just beginning to recover from the con) before catching the ferry back to Pommie-land. Naturally I was stopped by the Customs official on the other side - this time they wanted to know why my luggage was full of second-hand books. Baxter, whose books they were, of course, had long since vanished through the barrier.

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# Great Moments in Unpublished Science Fiction

'Once Matrix spotted them there was no doubt left about what he had in mind. He walked quickly up to their cushion and stood directly before Bea, his semi-erect organ dangling in her face.

"I choose you, heathen," Matrix said with a grim smile. His face was like a viper's.

"No" Bea responded, and her eyes were cold and unbending. She regarded his rigidity as if it were a dead mackerel.

A slight surprise showed on his countenance, but determination was also there. "It is not lawful to refuse a priest of Complan," he retorted.'

## Lifekeeper

Ah, priceless stuff. It was the occasional encounter with that sort of thing that kept me sane during my five years of reading for Granada Paperbacks. One presumes (or at least I did) that reading for a publishing house is a fairly easy task but it's amazing how difficult it becomes, unless you're Malcolm Edwards. . . By the end of my tenure with Granada I was finding it almost physically impossible to read any submissions. I just couldn't face opening yet another manuscript folder and finding yet another map and the dreaded words 'Part 1 of a 3 part Fantasy Saga.' Nor would I face the piles of glossy American fantasy paperbacks, inevitably written by women, with their appalling covers and their terrible, turgid prose. And, worst of all, waiting each week for me in my tray would be the latest stack of Piers Anthony books (the best thing about no longer being Granada's 'SF Consultant' is that I will never have to read another Piers Anthony book again as long as I live. That man is a menace. In a just world he would have had his typing fingers amputated years ago. . .)

Occasionally, of course, you would get to read something good, but then would come the depressing process of trying to get it published. Science fiction publishing being what it is these days getting publishers to take on anyone new is practically impossible.

No, the thing that really used to cheer me up was coming across something bad. Now I know it's cynical, and not very nice, to laugh at people's writing failures and that all of us have probably at some time or other written something that looks pretty embarrassing in retrospect (apart from such efforts of my own that have unfortunately been preserved between hardcovers I have an unpublished novel called **Echo of Jackboots** which registers 10 on the embarrassment scale) but I just can't help it. And bad science fiction/fantasy strikes me as being particularly funny, possibly because the gap between the author's intent and his/her actual achievement can be so enormous. . .

I saw a lot of manuscripts while I was at Granada from people who obviously knew nothing about either science fiction or science but who didn't consider this to be a handicap in writing an sf novel. One such work was called **Deadline 2008** by Mary Patchett. According to her agent Ms Patchett is a distinguished author of both children's and adult books but that this book was 'something of a departure' for her. You could say that again. What he really meant was that this was Ms Patchett's first attempt at science fiction. . .

The novel begins with the destruction of almost all human life in the space of one night due to a 'world-wide tornado' and a series of volcanic eruptions. The protagonists - a family of three - speculate on the cause of the catastrophe and come to the conclusion that Man's 'interference with Nature' was to blame. Then, as they wander through a desolate landscape littered with wreckage and outcrops of 'still sticky' lava they notice that the sky is grey and misty. They decide that this has something to do with the ozone layer. "Ozone," explains one of the characters, "Is a kind of oxygen that forms when ordinary oxygen is destroyed by radiation, sometimes by lightning." Later the same character says, "What would you say to us being in a disruptive ozone layer plus a rehearsal for the ice age?"

Well, there's not much you can say to a question like that.

Earlier on one of the men had found a pair of binoculars and exclaimed, "They might be the ultra new kind you can see through at night!" (the book is set in the year 2008). Then he lifts them to his eyes and cries, "They're absolutely slap-up! They are the new kind. They bring distance almost close enough to touch it!"

All this is pretty exciting on its own but Ms Patchett has daringly decided to thicken the brew even further by introducing a bunch of evil aliens. For on the very same night the world was being destroyed by the 'tornado' a giant spaceship had crashed-landed in the vicinity of our three heroes. Can there be a connection between the tornado and the crashed spaceship? Yes. As one of the characters puts it, "'It was bad luck for them and for us that they came low enough to get caught in our orbit at a time when that frightful turmoil was on."

It turns out that the giant spaceship contains a horde of little cloaked creatures with a lust for blood - human blood, animal blood, any blood. Their metabolisms are not fussy in this respect. The humans are forced to take refuge in the remains of a wrecked castle by the sea and spend the next ten years or so fighting off these creatures, who have an intense dislike of the sea (though rainwater doesn't bother them).

In the middle of the book the protagonists start referring to the creatures as 'clones' though the author gives no indication to the reader why this should be so. Then, later on, she has one of the characters explain that the alien creatures must be the result of genetic experiments on some distant world. Not wanting to kill their creations the scientists had put the clones in an automatic spaceship and sent them off into the void. Fine, but the author doesn't show why the character has come to this conclusion. No evidence is presented within the context of the story to enable the characters to deduce the true nature of the aliens, instead this explanation has simply been handed down, gift-wrapped, from the omniscient author. One gets the impression that halfway through the manuscript Ms Patchett happened to read a newspaper piece about clones and genetic engineering, probably in the *Daily Mail*, and decided to incorporate this amazing new concept in her story.

Anyway it all ends happily when suddenly the sun breaks through the clouds and the sunlight causes the clones to wither away into piles of dust (a minor design flaw overlooked by their creators). Why have the clouds gone? Well, as one of the characters explains, "I suppose the ozone layer has built itself up beyond all those clouds until it's ready to keep out harmful radiation from the sun." Yes, of course! Why didn't I think of that? And when the ozone layer had restored itself it sent down an all-clear message to the cloud layer. . .

I doubt if Ms Patchett's agent ever succeeded in selling this mess and presumably the 'distinguished' author has gone back to writing children's and 'adult' books. Good luck to her.

And now for some short extracts from a fantasy novel called **Ronar of 'Tlantis** (I thought a better title would have been **Trouble at 'Tlantis**). . . In the first one the hero has just come face to face with a ferocious monster:

'Something comes from the bottom of my memories. That is a sabre-toothed tiger. A beast from the primeval caves, which had been extinct from the earth thousands of years ago. But there is no time for paleontological digressions. . .'

'She is wearing the briefest loincloth of golden embroidery, protecting her magnificent womanhood.'

'A prehistoric maiden and a spaceman have found love caressed by the waves of the sea that beats ceaselessly against the wharfs (sic) of the city. An everlasting and monotonous (sic) whispering song to life that must depend on death to go on.'

'A grimace separates his lips, but there is no gaiety in it.'

"'I told you to go to sleep," he says, annoyed.

"I can't. Come to me. . .please!" Ronar hears the soft touch of silk gliding over Niktra's copper-coloured skin. He gives a sigh and stands up. Loneliness can become intolerable, even for the strongest man on Earth.'

\*Sigh\*

Occasionally the deluge of bad fiction that poured into my Granada in-tray was enlivened by some bad non-fiction. A memorable example of the latter was called **Titans in Antiquity** by W. Raymond Drake. He was, and probably still is, a UFO campaigner and his accompanying letter with the manuscript explained that he was due to address the House of Lords on the subject of UFOs the following week and it would be really nice if he could announce at the same time that Granada would be buying his book.

I found this audacity impressive even though I found his book almost unreadable. It began with a brief fiction section describing the long-ago journey of two people traveling from Sirius to Earth. Their names are Zeto and Tania and they are on their way to Earth to genetically transform primitive man into modern man. The journey is via black hole (what else?) and Mr Drake's description of the experience is worth repeating:

'As in a dream she murmured, "What is happening? This must be magic."

"We are modulating the atoms of the ship with a psycho-beam more potent than the electro-magnetic forces of the physical universe. You, Tania, all the crew and myself within the psychic-field experience transcendence beyond the titanic tides of gravitation, which would annihilate us. Our fleshly bodies slowly fade out but the mental matrix remains since we return to our normal selves." He marveled at her radiant beauty. "'My darling you look even more lovely.'"

Which goes to show that traveling into a black hole can be good for the complexion and probably tones up the facial muscles as well.

But then things get tedious as we leave Zeto and the radiant Tania behind and are faced with Mr Drake's lengthy rehashing of every crackpot theory that ever crawled out of a black hole (it's like reading a straight

version of Sladek's **The New Apocrypha**). In the space of several hundred pages he covers such things as Atlantis (built by spacemen), Shaverism (the world is hollow and full of spacemen), the pyramids (built by spacemen), mermaids (spacewomen), leprechauns (little spacemen, green presumably) and even Hannibal's invasion of Italy (no, Hannibal wasn't a spaceman but according to Dr Drake spacemen influenced events in ancient Rome) and a lot of other subjects besides, all of which involved spacemen in some way. Drake sees spacemen everywhere - their grubby, alien fingerprints are on every human achievement. By comparison Von Daniken seems almost scholarly. . .

And in case you're wondering; no, Mr Drake was not able to announce in the House of Lords that Granada had bought his book. Perhaps he regarded it as more evidence of the sinister conspiracy to prevent the truth about UFOs from getting out.

During my years at Granada one often received manuscripts that seemed to be written by people whose perception of reality appeared to be totally at odds with my own. These type of people only ever decide to write science fiction novels; they don't spend their free time night after night for a year or more trying to produce a thriller, a western, a historical romance or even a PG Wodehouse pastiche, instead they zero in on sf like moths to a flame. Best example of this kind of work was a novel called **Rebekah** (I won't name the author; who knows, he may be a reader of NABU. . .)

The protagonist is a young Englishman called John Willet who arrives in New York to do a story on the Harlem blacks. However he is not a professional journalist - he works as a storeman in a warehouse (as does, I suspect, the author) - and has saved up to come to America out of his own pocket. He hopes to sell his article to an underground (wait for it) Tory magazine, the last bastion of the 'once free British press since Margaret Thatcher's government was toppled by the unions and the socialists had voted themselves into perpetual power'. The world is in a mess. There are wars and rumours of wars, earthquakes and famines, and fiery lights are seen in the skies. For an expert on the Book of Revelations, as John is, it's obvious that Something Big is about to happen. . .

In Harlem John encounters a friendly black couple who invite him home. He decides that they are 'nice, warm-hearted folk who would never harm a fly'. Next day he is introduced to some of their friends and they take him to their 'local for some beer and sandwiches'. On the way a flying saucer appears overhead. This causes some excitement and in the discussion that follows John puts forward his theory that all these UFO sightings indicate that the Second Coming is just around the corner.

John returns to England with a cake that the Harlem couple have given him as a present. But at Heathrow the nasty socialist Customs officers insist on searching his cake for drugs. John is arrested but he escapes from the police and goes to London where he makes contact with the leaders of the Tory underground movement who are eager to buy his story about conditions in Harlem. John tells them he wants to go to Israel and investigate what's been happening there since the Germans overran it. The Tories agree to assist him.

First John goes to Greece where he meets the beautiful Rachael. They soon fall in love. Here is one of their romantic encounters:

'Still holding each other they lay kissing and caressing, though Rachael ruled out any adventurous hand wandering, which John attempted every few minutes. Eventually John realised it was getting late as well as cold and said, "Have to get up early tomorrow as the boat leaves at 8. You can come up to my hotel if you want."

"Why, so you can be naughty?" Rachael replies.'

John, frustrated by a distinct failure in the naughty hand-wanderings department, boards the boat that will smuggle him into Israel. The boat is operated by Alex, a Greek fisherman who is constantly 'beaming a smile over his rough features' and who reminds John of his favourite actor Jack Palance, though Alex 'didn't look quite so evil'.

During the journey John discusses politics with Alex (John discusses politics with everyone he meets). "I have been struggling to retain my individuality in England, which must be the worst country apart from Russia for those who do not want to conform. Thankfully I had the courage to resist. That's the trouble with the English, they have plenty of phisical (sic) courage but very little moral courage." John ended, feeling the bitterness well up in his heart. Tears came to John's eyes, and so he hurriedly went into his cabin to study some German.'

(Don't we all feel the urge to study German in times of stress?)

John arrives in Israel and almost immediately is offered a meal of bacon and eggs. He makes contact with some members of an underground religion and attends one of the services where he meets a mysterious man called Daniel. During the service Daniel informs the congregation that World War 3 is about to begin but that only true believers will survive. Daniel, John learns to his surprise, comes from Saturn.

John wisely decides to become a 'true believer' (no fool he). He is given a ride in Daniel's flying saucer up to the vast mothership that is orbiting the Earth and waiting for World War 3. It is full of other Earth people who have also become 'true believers'. John soon settles down to life on the ship which contains such things as bars and night clubs.

The aliens (a sanctimonious lot) have no intention of trying to stop the war as it's 'divine retribution' in their opinion but they are offering the chance of survival to a select few. John asks if Rachael can join him and receives permission to go down and collect her. On the way they are attacked by one of Satan's flying saucers (these exist in giant underground caverns that have their exit points in places like California) but are saved by the 'good' aliens.

John is reunited with Rachael and tells her about the imminent world war. Rachael, understandably, quickly agrees to become a 'true believer' too but asks if her parents might also be saved. John, reluctantly, tells her that as they are Roman Catholics they will find it difficult to be accepted by the aliens. . .

(Tough luck, Holdstock. You're doomed. . .)

Back on the mothership John, Rachael and the other 'true believers' have a grandstand view of World War 3. John quite enjoys the spectacle though he does have the grace to feel a little guilty about this. After the war John then has the choice of returning to Israel, which for some reason escaped damage, remaining on board the mothership or going to a city that the aliens are building in Brazil. He opts to go to Brazil, remarking to Daniel that, "Truth is indeed many times stranger than fiction."

I dunno. I reckon Truth would be hard-pressed to produce anything as strange as **Rebekah**.

The author asked for constructive criticism, incidentally, which I thought was a bit presumptuous of him. Sort of like the owners of the Titanic asking the survivors if they had any complaints about the voyage.

Finally an extract that borders on the sublime. It comes from a collection of original stories by an author whose name I have fortunately forgotten. One of the stories was called *The Trouble at Brain-Bank 42*. The protagonist learns about religion and the True Way of Life from a pickled brain linked to a computer and decides to opt out of the inevitable totalitarian system. He escapes to the Great Outside where he encounters:

'A strangely garbed man who blew into a pipe connected to a kind of sack under his arm; later I was to learn that these were the bagpipes still played by the surviving race of Scots. The man saw me, and smiled, and then cut short his playing - making a strange animal-like sound - and approached me. . . He took my hand and gripped it warmly, and called over his shoulder to the woman in the house.

"Maggie! We've got another recruit! An' I'm thinking that he'd be gei' grateful for a guid bowl o' yewr parridge!"

I had become a Primitive.'

I know the feeling. Is it any wonder that after five years of reading such stuff my eyes became cold and unbending and my rigidity like a dead mackerel?

# SON OF WHY BOTHER #4

## If This Is Anzapa It Must Be 1993

I think this is issue #4 of SON OF WHY BOTHER? because the most recent contribution of mine that I can find in an Anzapa mailing is numbered #3 and I suspect that must have been my - until now - final one. The mailing it appeared in was the June 1979 edition, a whole fourteen years ago. Gosh. Re-reading that contribution now is a bit embarrassing - but that's to be expected considering how much I've matured during the last fourteen years.

Back then I lived with a woman called Jill in a flat in Harlesden, an armpit of a London suburb; these days I live alone in a flat in Harrow, a rather pleasant London suburb (from where I'm sitting I can see one of the famous cricket fields of Harrow School just across the road). Ortygia House has some special relevance for the sf genre: first Christopher Priest moved into the basement flat in 1971 and stayed until 1985. In 1980 he was joined by Lisa Tuttle, who he had just married. When he left both the flat, and her, she stayed on until 1990 when she moved, with leading sf editor Colin Murray (who had moved in with Lisa in 1989), to a remote part of Scotland. In the early 80s sf writer Chris Evans lived for awhile in the flat I now have. He was followed by an actor, Ian Marter, who appeared in *Dr Who* and also wrote *Dr Who* novelisations. I never met Ian who, unfortunately, died suddenly towards the end of 1986. I was looking for somewhere to live at the time, having been understandably asked to leave by Jill, and so I moved in here at the start of 1987. About three years ago Colin Greenland moved into the adjacent flat on my floor, and a few months ago an American horror writer called Jessica Palmer moved into the flat above.

The reason the house has provided shelter for so many writers is that the owner, Mrs Evelyn Smith, had a preference for having writers as tenants - even if they were sf writers - and charged us relatively low rents. Alas, she died earlier in the year - though it was a merciful event for her as she was nearly a hundred and had been in very poor health - and we have yet to discover the fate of Ortygia House. It is possible it will be sold and torn down to provide a site for a luxury apartment block. This was the fate of the two similar houses that once stood on either side of Ortygia House. This is a prime property site and must be worth a lot (it has a huge garden out back). Mrs Smith's relatives would be foolish not to sell it off. Colin Greenland recently put forward the suggestion that we tenants club together and buy it ourselves but I think he was on medication at the time. Where I will be living this time next year is anyone's guess.

And I may be indulging in unwarranted optimism in presuming I will be alive this time next year. In my 1979 contribution I was worrying about an imminent heart attack, mainly because the actor Richard Beckinsale had dropped dead of one at the age of 31. I was also 31 at the time. Now I'm worried because James Hunt, the ex-racing driver, recently dropped dead of a heart attack. He was 45. So am I. He had even given up smoking. I haven't. Next month I turn 46. I'm starting to outlive people, which is worrying. Back in 1990 my mother cheerfully informed me over the phone from Sydney that I was now older than her father was at the time of his death. He'd died of a heart attack at the age of 41. My mother then died of a heart attack in 1991. She was 64. My father has had two heart attacks but has made it to 80. Unfortunately he is currently fighting throat cancer. And I've just become aware of a sore spot in my mouth right where I normally position a cigarette. Mouth cancer? My father, incidentally, has never smoked. Phillip Larkin was a heavy smoker. . .

Phillip Larkin died of throat cancer. I've just been perusing the volume of his collected letters and discovered, to my chagrin, that I had a lot in common with the miserable old sod. Morbid obsession with death, hypochondria, disgust at the ageing process, serious alcohol dependence, heavy smoking. . .the lot. About the only thing we don't have in common, come to think of it, is the ability to write great poetry. But

then Larkin was probably incapable of writing something like **James Bond in the Cinema**. . .or **Slimier**.

One final moan about growing old before I adjust the fine tuning of this contribution to more amusing (I hope) matters: last year I took part in a tv documentary about science fiction. It ended up being transmitted at some ungodly hour on Good Friday this year but I was sent a preview copy on video about a month before. So I started watching it, waiting for me to pop into view and hoping that whatever the makers had selected from my long interview to include wouldn't be too embarrassing. Well, as the video rolled and face after familiar face appeared - Brian Aldiss, Dick Jude, Bill Gibson, J.G. Ballard etc - I became absorbed in the proceedings and forgot all about my own impending participation. . . so when an unfamiliar bloke suddenly popped up on the screen, puffing on a cigarette, I automatically wondered who this fat old tart with the Funny haircut could possibly be. And then the caption identifying him appeared. And yes, it was me.

### **Has Anyone Seen the Last Quarter of a Century?**

Twenty- five years since Anzapa began, eh? Bloody hell. I don't think I was in the very first issue but I was around pretty near the start. Maybe my first installment of WHY BOTHER? appeared in issue #3. I no longer possess any of the early issues: they, along with a lot of now incredibly valuable comic books, were left in a crate, back in Sydney, that went into storage when I left the country in 1970. Having lost the receipt, and even the name of the storage company, it was never possible to have someone reclaim said crate on my behalf. If I had those comics now I could sell them for a fortune and retire. Sob. But then I know a lot of people who say the same thing. Anyway, 1968 was the year I moved from Perth to Sydney. First I stayed with John Ryan and his wife Jan out at Fairfield, then I shared a grotty bedsit with a friend from Perth in a Kensington slum building, then I lived in a flat on my own in. . . God, I can't remember.

The Sydney sf scene was small but fairly active in those days. It consisted of Ron Clarke, Gary Mason, Peter Darling, Robin Johnson and er, some other people whose faces I can vaguely recall but whose names have been off-loaded from my memory system. I do remember John and Debbie Dowden though (I cheated by checking up on their names in the old, unfinished 'bus book' manuscript). We would have regular gatherings at the Dowden's flat, pretending we were holding meetings of the Sydney Science Fiction Foundation (Gary Mason particularly enjoyed this game but the rest of us, particularly me, were less enthused by it). It was at one of these gatherings that I heard about the planned bus trip to Europe in order to attend the Worldcon being held in Heidelberg (Heicon it was called) in 1970. I immediately signed on and that's why I'm writing this in a flat in Harrow, England. I'd always wanted to go to England but I don't think I would have overcome my overwhelming inertia on my own - it needed a group project like the 'bus trip' to get me moving. For the benefit of newer members of Anzapa who have never heard of the 'bus trip' I will just briefly explain that it was a farce from start to finish. The idea of a double-decker bus, full of Aussie sf fans driving all the way to Heicon soon fell by the wayside. Most of the original participants pulled out and when the trip actually began only three of us remained: Chris Guy, Ron Clarke and myself. The bus made it as far as Italy before self-destructing but I had given up in Greece and continued the rest of the journey to Britain by rail. Oh, and I never made it to Heicon either.

I have lost touch with everyone mentioned above (John Ryan, of course, is no longer with us) - the sf fans and all the people who shared in the 'bus trip' experience. Well, that's not strictly true. . .I'm sort of in touch with Ron Clarke. Out of the blue he sent me a copy of THE MENTOR at the beginning of the year. I was amazed that the fanzine was still chugging along. Anyway I wrote Ron a personal note asking him, among other things, the current whereabouts of various people. Ron didn't reply but printed an edited version of the letter in a subsequent issue of THE MENTOR. I was tempted to write him another letter pointing out that the first had been a personal one and not really meant for publication and could he please answer it, but it occurred to me that he would print that one as well. I would be trapped in a never-ending Catch-22

situation. Good old Ron. Some things never change. I still have a fond memory of him turning up at my tiny Earls Court bedsit sometime towards the end of 1970: he was wearing a suit at least one size too big for him and informed me, excitedly, that he was off to see *'The Black and White Minstrel Show'*.

### **Where Are they Now?**

Still on the same theme of tracking down people: Perry Middlemiss sent me a copy of his HARD YAKKA in which there was a Lost Souls Department listing all the people that he and other organisers of this anniversary issue had failed to trace. I was surprised at how many there were, and at how many were completely unfamiliar to me. I know it's too late now but I can pinpoint the location of Mervyn Barrett - he lives in Wellington, NZ - though I didn't realise he'd ever been a member of Anzapa. We're in occasional contact and, in fact, he owes me a letter. And as for Randall Flynn, all I know is that he's somewhere in the UK but I don't know where. Haven't seen him for ages. Pity about the people who haven't responded. I'd like to know what Peter Darling, Terry Hughes, Robin Johnson (I've just remembered: in his last letter, written at the end of '92, Merv Barrett described his visit to the worldcon at Orlando and mentioned running into Robin Johnson who was driving around in a very expensive computerised hire car), Peter Roberts, Paul Stevens, Shayne McCormack - to name but a few - are up to these days. Peter Roberts, for example, was Mister British Fandom in the seventies; he was a fannish historian, published a regular newsletter and a fanzine called EGG. He was also the hippest hippy I'd ever met, a devout Fortean and a strict vegetarian. And then - Shazam! - he moved out of London and dropped out of fandom completely. The next time I saw him was a few years later at the London Book Fair. I didn't even recognise him until he identified himself. Here was this butch looking guy with close-cropped hair, dressed in a suitably butch dark jacket and jeans. Where was the pink suit, the floppy scarf, the long flowing hair? It was the most impressive job of personal reconstruction I'd ever seen. And I think he mentioned that he now drove a BMW but I could be mistaken. I wouldn't have been surprised if he'd also started eating meat. Spooky.

### **Son Of Slimer**

Kim Huett informs me that the blessed John Bangsund would like to hear the end of the shark story. I'm happy to oblige. It began shortly after the release of *Jaws*, when Peter, the husband of my then agent, and I were having a drink in a pub and mulling over ideas for possible movies (Peter, who died in 1988, was in the film industry then working as both editor and first assistant director). We came up with *The Incredible Jawman*, a spoof on *Jaws* about a scientist who, using shark cells as a possible cure for cancer, experiments on himself and keeps turning into a shark-man at embarrassing moments as a result. A sure winner, I'm sure you'll agree. Surprisingly enough, it almost got made but the American would-be producers pulled the plug at the last minute. Years later, in 1982, when my new agent said there was this film producer looking for an idea for a cheap horror movie I recycled, with the help of Leroy Kettle, the *Jawman* idea into a kind of combination of *The Thing* with *The Quatermass Experiment* which we called *Shaper* (a shark does play a role in the plot but don't ask me to explain). The possible film deal never happened, which is par for the course, so I suggested to my new agent, John Parker, that he try to sell the movie outline as a book outline. He said he'd think about it. Months passed so I sent the outline myself to an editor I knew at Star Books. He bought it, changed the title to **Slimer**, and so Roy and I quickly wrote the novel. We came up with a pseudonym, Harry Adam Knight, in the hope that Parker would never suspect a thing. Imagine my surprise, some months later, when I got a call from the editor at Star telling me that he had just received an outline from John Parker. It was **Shaper**. The editor suggested that I should be the one to inform John that not only had he already bought it but the novel was about to be published shortly. This I did, during a deeply embarrassing meeting in John's office. He took it well, but I decided not to tell him that Harry Adam Knight had since sold a second novel to Star (he found out eventually, of course, as he eventually found out about the third HAK novel we'd sold behind his back).

From 1986 onwards a series of people, for reasons of their own, attempted to get **Slimer** off the ground as a movie and various screenplays were written. At the end of 1991 I wrote my own version and, coincidentally, at the same time John Parker introduced me to a film producer called Kent Walwin. I was initially impressed by Kent, though I did find it rather off-putting that he had been a co-producer of the truly awful *Biggles*, he even had a poster from the movie proudly displayed on his office wall! But after a couple of encouraging meetings my hopes began to fall. First he told me that he hoped to film **Slimer** back-to-back in the Philippines with another movie called *Teddy's Revenge*, which had been written by the young man who would be directing both films. He gave me a copy of the teddy script. It was a long, rambling mess, set in America, about a homicidal teddy bear. It wasn't scary, it wasn't funny, it wasn't anything. I told Kent I was less than impressed by it but he assured me that the script could be fixed, and that the setting was being switched, natch, to the Philippines. Then came a serious stumbling block: the monster in **Slimer** is finally killed when it becomes addicted to heroin, overdoses and self-destructs. Kent said that any potential American distributors wouldn't be happy with this positive image of heroin. I asked him how he could interpret the use of heroin in the plot as positive, pointing out to him that heroin is presented as being so dangerous it brings about the destruction of a genetically-engineered unkillable killing machine. But no, Kent said the Americans wouldn't see it that way and I would have to change the ending. So I did - I mean we're obviously not talking art here - and I've never heard another word from him. I don't think *Slimer - The Movie* will ever see the light of day but other HAK projects have been more successful in this area. And after a short commercial break I shall tell you about them. . .

### Call Me Harry

Harry Adam Knight has certainly been having a more eventful career than me. Back in mid-1991 an American woman rang me one morning and asked if I was Harry Adam Knight. Suspicious, I told her I 'sort' of was. She then said she was Julie Corman, the wife of Roger Corman, and that not only did Roger want to buy the film rights to Harry's **Carnosaur**, he also wanted me (Harry) to write the screenplay. And no, it wasn't a practical joke as I first thought - she was genuine. We met at my drinking club that very night and she drew up the contract on a couple of the club's paper napkins, just like Godard and Cannon once did at Cannes. Gosh! A dream come true! I would be getting a screenwriting credit on a Hollywood movie! Hah. . .

I should explain about **Carnosaur**: back in 1983 a film journalist colleague of mine, Alan Jones, returned from a visit to Hollywood with the news that the next big Hollywood trend would be dinosaur movies. A whole, big line-up of dino pics were on the drawing boards, he told me. So I immediately came up with a clever and cunning plan. I quickly whipped up an outline about genetically engineered dinosaurs being created in a private zoo owned by a deranged aristocrat in deepest Cambridgeshire. The dinosaurs naturally get out of the zoo with the inevitable results. I sent it to the editor at Star who had bought **Slimer** and it was published in 1984. The expected dino-movie explosion of 1984, as you might have noticed, never occurred. The only one of the many dino projects to reach the screen was the lamentable *Baby*. But as hack novels go I thought, and still do, that **Carnosaur** was pretty good and I also thought, at the time, that it might do well. It didn't. Like **Slimer** it sank without a trace. It did get a limited distribution in the USA though, and on returning from a trip to her home town of Austin, Texas, Lisa Tuttle informed me in 1987 that Harry, and **Carnosaur**, had a small, hard-core group of fans back there. And in 1989 it was published in the States by a small paperback company called Bart Books that swiftly went into liquidation. It was around that time that I think I first heard about Spielberg's plan to make a dinosaur movie called *Jurassic Park* based on a screenplay by Michael Crichton. The film got postponed but Crichton's novel turned up in 1991. Intrigued by reviews that lauded Crichton for writing about dinosaurs in a way that no one had ever done before I actually bought a hardback copy of the novel. And noticed a lot of interesting similarities (eg, the same dinosaurs were described in the same 'unique' way) between it and *Carnosaur*. I was pondering on what to do about the situation when the call from Corman came. . .

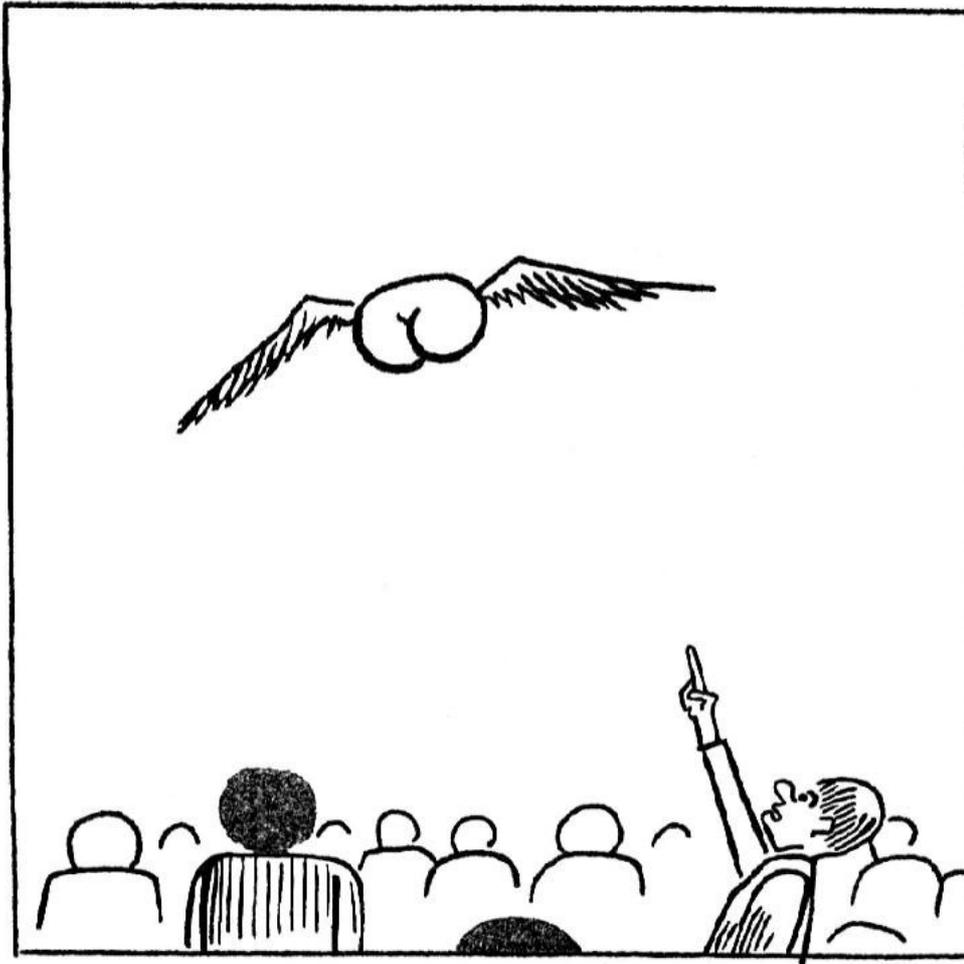
From the outset I was suspicious about Harry being offered the chance to write the screenplay and guessed it was a ploy to sweeten Corman's financial offer which, it must be said, was pretty small by Hollywood standards. Anyway, I first wrote an outline, as requested, and sent it off to Corman who was staying in Paris. He rang me a couple of times on a pay phone which kept cutting him off in mid-sentence. An inauspicious start to our relationship I thought. When he finally got to a phone that worked he made a few useful suggestions about the plot before he dropped a bombshell. I'd assumed, seeing as he was trying to compete with *Jurassic Park*, that he would be making *Carnosaur* on a bigger budget than he spent on the usual Corman product. But no, he told me the budget would be one million dollars. I couldn't see how *Carnosaur* could be made for that amount of money so I asked if I should drastically cut back on the dinosaur scenes in the first draft. He said, no, I was to write whatever I wanted and that modifications would be made in the later drafts. Hmm. So I wrote the first draft, sent it to him in Hollywood, and never heard another word from him. The shutters came down - *clank!* - and all lines of communication were cut. Corman had what he wanted - by that time the official contract for the rights had been signed and sealed - and I was no longer needed. One of his minions did eventually write - after many faxes from my agent - to say that my screenplay was okay considering I'd never written one before (I'd written several) but that Corman would be using writers more familiar with his working methods. Ho ho.

Time passed, as it tends to do, and I heard various rumours about the making of *Carnosaur*, ie, that all the dinosaurs had been reduced to one and that it was being achieved with a glove puppet. Then Alan Jones (yes, it's that man again) returned from yet another trip to Hollywood to say that he'd paid a visit to the studio of the people who'd done the dinosaur effects for the movie and was highly impressed by their models. My hopes rose. Then *Carnosaur* got previewed in the States and I heard it got some good reviews. My hopes rose further. Then bloody Alan Jones returned from a film festival in Milan where *Carnosaur* was screened and said, "It's crap."

I've since seen it on video and yes, it is crap and, compared to the film of *Jurassic Park* the dinosaurs are laughable, but it's interesting crap. And thanks to the movie the novel has been reprinted both in the States and here in the U.K. And in fact we are having a re-launch party for the book at my drinking club this very night. The video will also be screened and I will no doubt take the lead in shouting abuse at the screen.

### **Au Revoir**

I don't know when I shall appear in Anzapa again but hopefully it won't be too long. It will certainly be before 2018. All the best from me. . . and Harry.



**"LOOK, UP IN THE SKY. THE FLYING BUM!"**

You're getting this fanzine because you never put those terrible 'You're getting this fanzine because. . .' lists in your fanzine.

You're getting this fanzine because I fancy your wife.

You're getting this fanzine because I fancy you.

You're getting this fanzine because I fancy both of you. Any ideas?

You're getting this fanzine because I fancy your colour TV set.

You're getting this fanzine because I often dream of you lying naked in a field of red poppies with a little white pony grazing in the background.

You're getting sleepy.

You're getting old.