

YOU ONLY LIVE ONCE



FAN WRITING BY
JOHN BROSINAN

You Only Live Once

John Brosnan

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*Artwork by John Brosnan – used on
cover of PDF edition*

Introduction: Torching John Brosnan

David Langford

Although that witty writer and fan John Brosnan had been a chronic depressive, the pathetic fallacy refused to play along. A week of British gloom and rain gave way to bright sunshine for his funeral on 29 April 2005. Despite a few large, would-be ominous crows amid the flowers, Kensal Green cemetery and the West London Crematorium looked positively cheerful.

I was a bit nervous about attending the actual ceremony, never having been very close to John; indeed I hadn't seen him for some while. But Rob Holdstock – who with John Baxter, Malcolm Edwards and Leroy Kettle organized this funeral and wake – had made encouraging, even begging, noises. A mere nine years after following the same route by rail and Tube to see off Gollancz editor Richard Evans, I'd forgotten just how long the journey to Kensal Green took, and ineptly arrived an hour early. Worries about appearing morbidly keen on these events were dispelled by the sight of a besuited figure who looked the way that long-time UK fan Ian Maule might have looked if miraculously unchanged since the 1980s. Bloody hell, it *was* Ian Maule!

Then Chris Priest appeared, and Harry Harrison, and the maudlin reminiscences began, interrupted by cries of “Bloody hell, it *is* Ian Maule!” The growing and mostly greying crowd could be partitioned in several ways, though I'll spare you the Venn diagram. There were the old buddies who knew John Brosnan in his home country of Australia – i.e. John Baxter – or from his first appearance at a London Globe meeting in 1970: Graham Charnock, Edwards (now a supremo at Orion Books, whose Gollancz imprint publishes John's SF), Kettle, Holdstock, and Priest. There was what might be the final muster of the seventies Ratfandom scene which had featured John's scurrilous fanzines *Big Scab* and *Scabby Tales*. “The Last Hurrah of the Silver Horde?” said Malcolm later: “Maybe”. This contingent included both Graham and Pat Charnock, Edwards, John Hall (not sighted in fandom for

decades), Holdstock, Kettle and Kathleen Mitchell, Maule, and Peter Roberts. Only the Ratfather himself was missing, now gone into seclusion as the Hermit of Haverfordwest: Greg Pickersgill.

Then there were ex-inmates of the Ortygia House writers' colony in Harrow, whose various flats had housed a variety of SF professionals: Priest (the first to move in), Chris Evans, Lisa Tuttle (who journeyed from the remote wilds of Scotland for this funeral) and of course John Brosnan himself, who actually died in Ortygia House. He wasn't the first Ortygia writer to go. The former occupant of John's own flat was Ian Marter, an actor who appeared in *Doctor Who*, published ten *Who* novelizations and died in late 1986. According to John in 1993, "I moved in 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."

Other pros: Pat Cadigan, marking this solemn occasion by not once saying "Langford, you dog!"; Jo Fletcher of Gollancz, Harry Harrison, Steve Jones, Roz Kaveney, Garry & Annette Kilworth, literary agent John Parker, and some guy called Langford. Other fans: Rob Holdstock's partner Sarah Biggs, Rob Hansen, Linda Krawecka (once Linda Pickersgill) and ... well, most of the above. And some unfamiliar, er, young adults who I slowly realized were the Charnock and Kettle offspring. Where does the time go?

As is now traditional, this gathering was billed as a celebration of John's life and work rather than a mere funeral. A couple of days beforehand I'd noticed a *Private Eye* cartoon of a priest addressing near-empty pews with, "I see this as not so much a funeral, more a celebration of his life ..." We knew that John was in safe fannish hands when the same cartoon reappeared on the back of the photocopied Order of Ceremony for JOHN RAYMOND BROSNAN (1947-2005).

In the crematorium chapel, the coffin was conspicuously decorated with a plastic dinosaur and a garishly-jacketed Brosnan SF epic whose title I was unable to parse, however hard I squinted. Something *Mission*? This unintelligibility was to be explained. Malcolm Edwards and John Baxter spoke, and as is traditional I couldn't hear a thing, though I must say I've never seen Malcolm, Master of Cool, look quite so visibly distressed in front of an audience. He let me consult his prepared script afterwards, pointing out that "it was written to be read aloud to an audience of John's close friends," rather than as a formal obituary for, say, the *Christian Science Monitor* or

Locus.

This began by quoting a John Brosnan letter: “I occasionally watch *Neighbours*, just to keep in touch with my cultural roots, and whenever a character is written out of the series people say that he or she has gone to ‘Perth’, which I’ve deciphered as being a metaphor for being dead. I should know.” Well, quite.

Malcolm went on to talk about John’s vigorous atheism, his bouts of depression, his professionalism as an author (“he was very disciplined, writing in the mornings and drinking in the afternoons and evenings”), and his failing health as alcohol and despair got the better of him. Sadness at losing an old friend was mixed with anger at John’s stubborn refusal to call in the doctors.

Nevertheless, tirelessly supported by the same friends who’d organized this funeral, John had lasted a great deal longer than medical science might have thought possible. (His general appearance at Novacon in 1995 had suggested that even then the sands were running out.) And although it’s easy to moralize about a wasted life, there are plenty of longer lives which couldn’t match his output of some thirty books, several acidly funny fanzines – one of which shared the first Nova Award in 1974 – and a huge run of humorous magazine columns which brought his fanwriting talents and movie erudition to a wide, appreciative audience. This last was a career move which I found personally inspirational.

Even his struggle with depression provided a source of melancholy vindication, as noted by Rob Holdstock and Roy Kettle in their *Ansible* tribute:

There are many truths about John Brosnan, and many conundrums. A simple truth is that John had more years left in him than he was finally prepared to fight for. He lost the spirit for life. Not even the success of a book published (*Mothership*, 2004), its sequel almost completed and a humorous book in the preparation stage could elevate him from the demonic depression into which he had descended. But by then his health was in free-fall and he was refusing to do anything about it. And yet: John’s demon was also his triumph.

He leaves some bloody funny memories, and one superb piece of theoretical human psychology. John’s twin pet hates – organised religion (he was an ardent Dawkinist) and alternative therapies,

especially homeopathy, were often the starting pistol for spirited and hilarious evening discussions with his friends. And the theory? He always believed that the “default” condition of the human mind was “depression”, and all other emotions – happiness, contentment, libido, ambition and so forth – merely the unfortunate side effects of the evolution of intelligence. He fought this corner fiercely. Then, in the mid 90s, an article appeared in *New Scientist* claiming much the same. The triumphant crowing of that boy went on for years! John was never more happy than when being proved right: that depression was the best! We’ll all miss him hugely.

Ansible #214, May 2005

The brief ceremony ended on a cheerier note, nodding to the legendary bad taste of those 1970s Brosnan fanzines. Malcolm again:

One of the things John was interested in was the phenomenon of spontaneous human combustion. One could even theorise that he kept up his liquid intake to minimise the risk of it happening to him. He wrote a novel – *Torched* – about it, in collaboration with John Baxter. What we’re going to move on to now is something slightly different – premeditated human combustion. You’ll notice that we’ve put a couple of symbolic objects on the coffin: a plastic dinosaur, in the absence of a bust of Roger Corman, and a copy of one of John’s books, in what I firmly believe to be a Polish edition. I wanted to launch the coffin by breaking a bottle of red wine against it, but apparently that isn’t allowed. But I will now press this button, and the coffin will slide away, and I’m sure John would have appreciated the irony of his being torched now.

Whereupon, without any discreet veiling of euphemistic curtains, John Brosnan’s final receptacle – dinosaur, Polish space opera, and all – moved off through automatic doors, to the jaunty sound of the James Bond movie theme. For everyone else’s exit into the sunlight, the soundtrack was “The Time Warp” ... explained by Malcolm as “the only piece of music I can remember seeing John dance to. Feel free to try a few pelvic thrusts as you go.”

The day’s thoughtful organization didn’t stop there. A well-timed fleet of taxis wafted the entire crowd across London to the next stage; I found myself crammed in with Messrs Maule, Roberts, and Hansen – “There’s three

TAFF winners in this cab!” said Rob excitably. An ideal if somewhat seedy venue for a farewell party would have been the Troy Club just off Tottenham Court Road, where John spent so many long and liquid afternoons (as Terry Pratchett wrote, “I never really knew him well, but if you went into the Troy Club in the late 80s he was *always* in there.”). But the club closed years ago, its proprietor “Helen of Troy” died of liver failure, and considerable research must have been needed to find an equally tiny upstairs room for the Brosnan wake, at The French House pub in Dean Street, Soho.

Much preparation was in evidence: Malcolm’s wife Jacks had been hard at work. The walls, tables and window-sills were covered with block-mounted photos of John as toddler, neofan and sophisticate, and of his book jackets. Covers from serious and genuinely notable works of film criticism like *James Bond in the Cinema*, *Movie Magic*, and *The Primal Screen* were varied with such modernist literary novels as *The Fungus*, *Bedlam* and *Carnosaur* (the one which became a Roger Corman dinosaur exploitation flick, loyally characterized by John as “crap ... but it’s *interesting* crap.”). Also reproduced was a testimonial from the great Alasdair Gray, who made ink sketches of various fans at the first Mexicon in 1984, and whose Brosnan drawing is inscribed: “The Author of *Slimer*, a seminal work which has influenced everything I have ever written.”

Later, Roy (co-author of *The Fungus* by “Harry Adam Knight”, who was praised as “The New Stephen King” in a *Starburst* movie column whose authorship I shall not reveal) produced an armload of photocopies of John’s 1993 ANZAPAZine *Son of Why Bother?*, containing this fragment of introspection:

Philip 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 *Slimer*.

Cynical bastards that we are, the guests expected no more than a few glasses of plonk and some nibbles, and were taken aback by the ceaseless flow of good wine and premium lager, the sit-down meal of plentiful cold salmon,

ham and other treats, the high-calorie desserts.... Several of us muttered that we'd quite like the same team to organize *our* funeral celebrations, though perhaps not just yet.

All along, further people turned up and squeezed in somehow, including Faith Brooker (late of Gollancz), Avedon Carol, Chris Fowler, David Garnett, Alun Harries, John Jarrold, Paul McAuley, Kim Newman, Andy Richards, Jimmy Robertson, and doubtless others who escaped my notebook. Sorry about these boring lists: I have the notes and I'm damn well going to use them. You're lucky I didn't take photos. Come to think of it, Rob Hansen and Ian Maule took lots; some of Ian's can be seen on line at <http://www.nabu.net/Brosnan>.

There were, of course, informal speeches. Roy Kettle stole the show, I think, explaining this wake as striving to be "the sort of event that John would want to gatecrash – that he would have enjoyed – that he wouldn't want to be remembered." Or something like that. He followed up with some droll extracts from *The Dirty Movie Book* by John Brosnan and "Leroy Mitchell", the pusillanimous co-author having borrowed his partner's surname for fear of prejudicing a fast-track Civil Service career. "This book, published 17 years ago, is as popular today as it was then." It took a moment for the penny to drop. Malcolm: "Is that the last copy?" Roy: "Yes."

That day, Roy's most reliable weapons of mass hilarity were John Brosnan's own words – like this all too characteristic fragment from his 1975 fanzine *Scabby Tales 1* (I still have the copy that he mailed to me at the dread Atomic Weapons Research Establishment hostel: Boundary Hall, Tadley, Hampshire ...), in which our hero muses 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 [...]

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 realized 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.

Several other people spoke, as recalled out of order by my random-access memory. John Parker set some kind of record for inaudibility, and for once this wasn't just me: Chris Priest later grumbled that he "seemed to be whispering deliberately." Lisa Tuttle bravely revealed an uncharacteristic escapade from her Ortygia House days, when she'd become seriously tiddly and John was filled with utter delight and wonderment by the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to steer someone drunker than himself. This led Malcolm to remember John's proud calculation that his alcohol intake *did not exceed* the UK medically recommended maximum of 28 units, a startling conclusion made possible only by failure to grasp that this was a weekly rather than a daily figure. Jo Fletcher treated us to passages of idiosyncratic dialogue from the latest Brosnan SF epic *Mothership*, or possibly its sequel. Someone else read out a comic tirade against ill-mannered cinema-goers from his film column – traditionally the first page turned to by readers of *Starburst*

magazine.

(For one year beginning in December 1999, John also had a column in *SFX*, where I've been a regular since its 1995 launch. I lived in terror of being dropped in favour of the wiser and funnier Brosnan, but something went wrong after his piece for the December 2000 issue. Despite weeks of editorial entreaties, John simply stopped delivering copy and let it be known through a bemused third party that he was giving up writing to become a teacher. This seemed wildly unlikely.)

What else? Faith Brooker, full of editorial memories, favoured us with a threnody in the manner of *Private Eye*'s E.J. Thribb:

Ode to JB (with apologies, etc)

So, farewell then, John Brosnan, Harry Adam Knight, Simon Ian Childer, et al.,

Master of Horror and the vicious bon mot

At last you go to that great Troy Club in the sky

Where Peter Cook and Richard Evans

wait to hear you score points off the Pope

You, like the Scotch Eggs,

are now immortal

And the drinks are on the house –

Suddenly three guys break the door down,

Carrying machine guns ...

Any perceived connection between those final lines and John's favourite way to liven up unpromising scenes in potboilers would be both libellous and accurate. Simon Ian Childer, for those not in the know, was another Brosnan/Kettle pseudonym, the distinction apparently being that Harry Adam Knight wrote HAK horror while Simon Ian Childer produced SIC jokes. Blame them, not me.

In the wake (as it were) of so much coruscating stuff, it didn't seem worth barging in with my own tiny and not particularly funny Brosnan anecdote. John consulted me on the physics of his 1981 technothriller *Skyship* – involving a giant atomic-powered zeppelin whose overheating reactor he wanted to have cooled by an emergency plunge into Niagara Falls – and bore up bravely when I revealed that nuclear fission was somewhat more complex than depicted in *Doctor No*. As my reward I received not only a thank-you in the acknowledgements but my very own Tuckerization, a chief engineer

called Langford whose big line was the crucial engineering diagnosis, “Bullet holes.” Another fellow-author got off less lightly in *Skyship*: “Ballard’s a megalomaniac ...”

But enough of me. Once again, much applause to the whole organizing team for giving John such a splendid send-off. “The room was full of love for the man and the knowledge that he will be truly missed,” Linda Krawecke wrote afterwards. Inevitably there’s a certain grim irony in enjoying a lavishly boozy party in memory of a friend who died of acute pancreatitis brought on by alcohol-induced liver damage. But – for once, I think, the usual easy assumption of the views of the departed is entirely justified – it was most definitely what he would have wanted.

Afterwards, making my unsteady way up Dean Street in search of an Underground station, I came across a chance epitaph for John Brosnan. It was chalked on the blackboard outside another Soho pub: “When I read about the perils of drinking ... I gave up reading.”

David Langford, *Chunga* #10, June 2005



*John Brosnan in typical pose
Photo by Leroy Kettle*

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 used 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 Knox* 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 mould, 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 Welsh’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 grisly 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 flame-thrower. 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 ended 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 travelled 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 quarrelling 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.

Bus & Banality

Is your life drab, humdrum? Need excitement? Well, this is what you do. Buy a share in a double-decker bus. Preferably a double-decker bus that is going to travel across Asia and Europe. Then sit back and quietly go mad.

Things began happening fast and furiously. Keith Chatto filmed the bus and some of the crew the weekend after Syncon and the result appeared on Channel 2's newsreel the following Monday night. Then the travel agent

admitted that he had booked passage for only six on the SS Malaysia instead of twelve which meant we would have to fly to Singapore instead of go by ship. This meant extra cost of course but Chris Guy (our glorious leader) threatened them with court action with the result that the agency offered to pay the difference between the air and boat fare (about \$500).

Of course our date of departure was altered. We had intended leaving on the 20th of February but now we would be leaving about the 12th of March. I was disappointed as I had been looking forward to the boat trip but it meant the chance of earning extra money. Or it did. Then I learnt that there might still be a chance of a few of us to going by boat. Which meant I was up in the air. I'd already changed the date of my resignation twice and CIG was getting touchy.

Then TV fame hit us again. This time it was Channel 7 who had been informed about our venture by one of our sponsors (I should say by one of our two sponsors). We left the bus in Channel 7's car park on the Sunday night. Chris intended spending the night in it but I joined those well-known Sinney fans, Peter Darling, Gary Mason, and Robin Johnson at a midnight drive-in. We went to see *Targets*, one of the greatest films ever to be so overlooked and ignored. *Crack In the World* was the first feature and provided ample comedy relief. Robin had seen it before but he spent the time watching Peter's portable TV in the back seat. Peter earned my undying wrath when he dropped my packet of Jaffas while it was being passed between cars. He says he picked all of them up but I refuse to believe him.

I returned to the bus around 5am as the sun was beginning to rise. I spent an hour lying on my back on one of the bunks listening to the sparrows running up and down the roof before it was time to rise. Chris, who was babbling in an alarming manner, was obviously getting nervous. I wasn't because I had no intention of going on camera. Just how nervous he was became apparent when he locked his car up with the keys lying on the back seat. He had to push one of the back windows in to get them.

Ron Clarke arrived a little while later wearing a *suit*, and the bus was driven round to the front of Channel 7 (I had better explain at this point that the reason for all this early morning activity was that we were to appear on the breakfast program). We were greeted by a TV camera, a couple of technicians, and Bruce Webster, the star(?) of the show, who was still doing up his tie. Leaving the bus unattended we descended into the bowels (a good description) of Channel 7. When we reached the studio where the *Today*

Show was to be filmed we were surprised to see our bus on the monitor. We hadn't realised the outside TV camera was operating. I fought down the urge to run back outside and do something in front of it.

The studio was total confusion. Everyone gave the impression that they didn't know what they were doing. Oh ho, I said to myself, it just looks that way. In actual fact this chaos is just an illusion. But as time went on it gradually sunk in that they *really* didn't know what they were doing. No one explained anything to us and we were kept in the dark until the last minute when the three who were going to be interviewed were told that they would be filmed outside by the bus. Out they ran. I stayed in the studio to watch the fun on the monitor.

As soon as *Crusader Rabbit* was finished the show began. Being Australia Day they started it with a flag raising ceremony. During this emotional period the camera slipped too far to the left and we got a quick view of the back end of our bus. Then they switched back to the studio for the weather. Tension mounted. Webster, the star(?), came running back into the studio after his flagpole stint. He and his female partner sat like emotionless dummies at their desk until it was time for them to go on. Then, as the light on top of the camera lit up, they suddenly came alive and began to exchange banalities. As soon as this was over the expressions dropped from their faces and they resumed their former passive state.

A commercial or something followed and then it was time for the bus. Just before this the continuity girl or whatever she was came running over and asked where the three who were to be interviewed were. Outside, I replied. She seemed a bit staggered by this and started to shuffle through her sheaf of papers. Oh yes, she said at last and disappeared at great speed out of the studio.

Ron Clarke and I leaned back in our seats and waited nervously. The great moment arrived. The bus filled the screen. Bruce Webster began to utter his usual brand of banalities. Our three intrepid crew members stood with their loins girded (not a comfortable state on such a warm day) and their kneecaps firm. Kaye was the first to be submitted to Webster's ruthless line of questioning. Now Kaye isn't exactly familiar with all the details of the trip, not being involved with the actual planning. So most of the questions Webster asked she didn't know the answers to. But she ad libbed very well.

Chris was next. Mumble, he said. Then someone in the control room turned the volume up and we could here him. He did rather well except near

the end when he got a bit grandiose and began to rave about "... an achievement for the youth of Australia ..." and rot like that. David was next and he too got carried away, mentioning the \$700 worth of duty-free film we hoped to pick up in Singapore.

Then it was all over. Ron and I left the studio and joined the others outside. There was complimenting, backslapping, and a small argument about the increasing price of fares. Then we began to go our separate ways. Chris and I climbed into the bus and choofed off. We got halfway back to our base when the bloody thing ran out of fuel. The fuel gauge was stuck again.

Finally the bus was due to be loaded on the ship. "Don't go and watch it being loaded," the shipping agent advised us, "it would break your heart."

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 travelling 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 me 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 traveller'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.

On & Off the Abomnibus

When I received Banger's sensually typed letter requesting (nay, demanding) an article from me on the bus trip, my experiences in London, British fandom, world politics, and the environmental crisis, I was overcome with emotion. Emitting sharp little cries of pleasure, I hastily inflated my typewriter, combed my hair, changed my underpants, and sat down to begin. Then I reread his letter, and my tense fingers fell limp over the keys. It appeared that the article was required for something called a Yearbook. A YEARBOOK, I muttered to myself in capital letters, not a simple, common fanzine as I had first assumed. The idea daunted me. A Yearbook is something important; it has a touch of permanence to it. Perhaps the frivolous claptrap I had intended writing would not be suitable for such an illustrious project. But then, what could I write instead? Frivolous claptrap is all I know! Surely Banger didn't want something literate, balanced, well-constructed, learned, and intelligent – otherwise he wouldn't have asked me. So, with confidence returning, I took up my typewriter and scribbled the following ...

The Bus Trip

First of all, I would like to clear up a popular misconception; it was no bus-load of fans which made the recent epic journey halfway across the world. True, it was a fannish project to begin with. The originator, Chris Guy, was a fan, and the other three people who had a great deal to do with the early stages of the trip were fans too. They were Ron Clarke, John Dowden, and his wife Debbie. Later on, of course, there was me, which made the total of fans five, but the Dowdens were forced to drop out months before we got underway, so out of the fourteen who actually went there were only three fans. The rest were all mundanes, and some of them were very mundane. Therefore I must reluctantly destroy the delusion that there was a whole double-decker bus full of fans valiantly trying to reach Heicon. It would look great in some future Australian chapter of *All Our Yesterdays*, but it just wasn't that way.

As for the trip itself (mumbled the writer, shifting uneasily within the confines of his plaster casts), no doubt most of you reading this have a rough

idea of what we attempted to do and what happened. Briefly, we shipped the bus to Bombay early in 1970 and then followed it by various means. We assembled in Madras, caught a train to Bombay, picked up the bus and pointed it in the direction of England. We only got as far as Italy (and some of us didn't even get that far) owing to a mechanical fault. Namely, that the engine fell to pieces.

Oh, how dearly I would love to tell of all the horrors, dangers, and misfortunes we endured, the passions and emotional turbulences that shook the passengers, but I haven't the space. I ache to recount the acts of bravery, such as the time Ron Clarke fought off fifty mountain tribesmen with a surplus army boot ... Seriously though, there are many amusing incidents I could write about ... such as our entrance into New Delhi – on the wrong side of the road ... or the way we sang our way through the customs barrier between India and Pakistan ... or the ease with which we conquered the Khyber Pass ... or how Chris and I lost the bus in Lahore ... or the night we were raided by the Turkish police ... or how we sold our fridge to a flying doctor we met in Greece ... But I can't; I get too nauseated. However, I *will* tell you about ...

Mary

We met Mary at the Red Shield Salvation Army Hotel in Bombay. (In case you ever want to stay there, it's near the Rex/Stiffles Hotel. You can't miss the Rex/Stiffles. The three lower floors are called The Rex, and from there on up it's The Stiffles. Or maybe it's the other way round.) Mary was an odd creature to say the least. She was Jewish, born in Scotland, and she had spent several years studying in France. As far as appearances was concerned she was sort of plumpish with fair skin and reddish hair. But her most outstanding feature was the way she talked. She talked at an incredible speed, automatically dominating any conversation she happened upon (which is how she came in contact with us: anyone who can out-talk fourteen people, including three science fiction fans, just has to be good). But it wasn't only how she spoke but what she said! At first we believed it all, and naturally became rather alarmed when she started talking about countries we intended travelling through. We were relieved when we gradually came to realise that much of what she said was ... exaggeration. This did result in some disappointment too. I was particularly intrigued with what she once told us

about the relations men had with donkeys in Turkey. When travelling through that country I still looked about hopefully ...

One afternoon when I staggered into the boy's room at the hotel I was met with a burst of laughter. Mary and three of the fellows were sprawls on various beds, all laughing like crazy. I know the way I enter a room can be pretty amusing at times but this was puzzling. I collapsed on my bed and watched them wearily. It soon became apparent that the three boys were laughing *at* Mary rather than with her. Then it eventually sank in that she was high. Hash and so on is very easy to get in Bombay, especially that area. The Rex/Stiffles was swarming with hippies, you could almost see the fumes coming out of the windows.

As her ride started on its downward curve she began to get depressed, so she decided to stoke up again. This time, though, she was going to *eat* the stuff so that the effect would hit her more quickly. This could be dangerous, she said, and she implored us to get her medical attention if she should have a bad reaction. Someone nodded and she immediately swallowed some of the brown gunk. It hit her pretty fast and she was soon away again, laughing and giggling. When we grew tired of watching her someone suggested a game of chess. Mary challenged someone, she said she had been a champion in France. About ten minutes later she started groaning and complaining about stomach pains. She started to roll about on the bed, clutching at her stomach. We sat watching her. No-one made any effort to get a doctor. I didn't say anything but I was worried. It wouldn't look very good if she dropped dead in our room. Finally she got up and staggered off to her own room. I don't know if the others were as disturbed as I was but the games kept going.

I was worried right up until dinner time when I walked into the dining-room and saw her attacking her meal with gusto. She had obviously come out on top in her brush with death.

It was thanks to Mary that I gave up on golf once and for all. I had given up golf once before when I left Western Australia and moved east. That way I escaped being dragged around the golf course by my father every weekend. The trouble was that I *liked* golf – until I reached the end of the first fairway, when the rot would set in. This happened every week. I use to work myself up into such a rage of frenzy and frustration that by the end of a game I would be limp with exhaustion.

But when Mary suggested one afternoon that we all go and have a game of golf I was the first to agree. All my golfing traumas had been interred in

my murky subconscious. Except for Peter, one of the mundanes, I was the only one to show any interest. So, after warning the others that they would be missing out on a great experience, we left to look for a golf course.

Mary managed to scare a taxi driver into cowering submission (not an easy thing to do) and we found ourselves at the Bombay Golf Club. As soon as I saw the place I began to regret my coming. It looked like a rich man's version of the Taj Mahal. One could imagine the place festooned with sahibs and their memsahibs in the days of the Empire's glory. "Uh-oh", I said to myself, "We'll never get in there and if we do it will cost a fortune."

I was all for turning back, but Mary took charge. She swept in and we could do nothing but follow meekly in her wake. She eventually cornered some poor official and with a mixture of charm and threats bent him to her will. The next thing we were being outfitted with clubs and caddies. The latter we didn't really want since we were quite willing to save money and lug the bags around ourselves. But that was not permitted and we were forced to accept them. Not that the charges were very high compared with Australian standards, but as I was almost broke at the time they were a financial disaster as far as I was concerned.

We went to order drinks, getting thirsty even before we started playing. My caddy, who looked old enough to have carried Clive of India's clubs, whispered in my ear that it would be a good idea if I bought the caddies a drink too. Sort of to improve employer-labour relations. So Sahib Brosnan, not wishing to commit a social gaffe at the Bombay Golf Course, reaching into his rapidly emptying pocket again.

Then we took our places on the first tee. A small crowd of onlookers quickly formed to see what this strange trio of Europeans would do. We didn't disappoint them as far as entertainment was concerned. My first hit was satisfactory – as it usually is – but Mary tore up an embarrassing amount of soil and sent her ball dribbling only a few feet. And she had said earlier that she had been a junior champion in Scotland. It was the donkey business all over again.

But Peter was the one who delivered the real coup de grace. He gave a mighty swing which sent the ball hurtling forward – less than inch above the ground. It hit the tee marker a few feet in front of him and ricocheted away at right angles while still travelling at colossal speed. It passed at kneecap level through the crowd of spectators, tore through a hedge, and struck the side of the club-house with a terrific "thunk". I was sure it had gone right through the

wall. It was a suitable beginning to the most horrendous game of golf in history.

As was to be expected my hitting quality deteriorated steadily after the first couple of holes until it reached Peter's level. Meanwhile Mary started to fall over every time she swung at the ball. Each time she would climb to her feet, swear horribly, and attack the ball with wild swings which gouged great holes in the ancient turf, thoroughly alarming her caddy. I wish I could have understood what the caddies were saying. I'm sure it was priceless. My old fellow looked as if he was going to burst into tears with every swing I made. He kept offering to give me a few tips on the game despite my repeated assurances that it didn't really matter and that we were only there to have fun.

Fun ... As the game wore on it grew inexorably worse. The unique playing conditions afforded by the Bombay Golf Club weren't helping either. For one thing it was getting hot and I was sweating like crazy. As for the vultures ... Yeah, real vultures – or, if not vultures technically, they looked like vultures. We saw a lot of them in India and they were always hovering around over Bombay. Ever tried concentrating on your putting while huge shadows flit across the green about you? I had the feeling that if I stopped to rest they would presume me dead and move in for a feed.

At one point the fairway ran alongside a collection of ramshackle houses, which meant there was a crowd of jeering kids hanging over the fence. To prevent them rushing onto the fairway there were a couple of guards patrolling with long sticks. Despite their presence I lost a couple of balls which I suspect were snatched by some fleet-footed kids. Learning to play golf in Western Australia doesn't prepare you for this kind of hazard.

After nine holes we staggered into the open-air restaurant for refreshments. Our caddies disappeared, no doubt in search of some quiet place where they could laugh themselves sick. As we sat there drinking we could hear a group of Indian women talking at the table behind us. They were talking in English and for some reason this infuriated Mary. She began to describe them as pseudo-British snobs, ashamed of their own language and so on, and all this in a loud voice so they could hear her. I know they did hear her because they stopped talking to listen to her. It was one of the most embarrassing moments of my life and I came close to braining Mary with a Number 1 iron. Instead Peter and I just sank into our seats and wished we were somewhere else.

After that traumatic interlude we hobbled back onto the fairway to

continue with our own version of a Carry-On film. I wanted to pack the whole thing in but the others wanted their money's worth. Within a couple of holes though I had lost our remaining spare balls and ended up merely following the other two around. This suited me fine until Mary suddenly discovered that she was exhausted and insisted I carry on in her place. So I was forced to complete the grisly farce while she retreated to the restaurant. At the end of it I once again solemnly swore of golf once and for all and really meant it.

When we left Bombay we naturally didn't expect ever to see Mary again. Not that this prospect particularly disturbed us, especially the girls as they loathed her on sight. But one cold and windy night in Iran there was a knock on our door. The few of us still up thought this odd since we were parked in the middle of a poppy field miles from anywhere. Someone warily opened the door expecting bandits or poppy-pickers, but instead in burst Mary babbling away like mad and wearing an Afghan coat. It was a very brief and confused conversation but basically the story was that she had been robbed of everything by a student she had started travelling with. Then she took up with a couple of Germans who had some sort of incredible car who had offered her a lift back to Europe.

She dragged us out into the cold to meet them. I can't remember the name of the car but it must have been something special judging by the way the mundanes went mad over it. The Germans were a large, dour couple who looked faintly surprised at finding a double-decker bus parked in a poppy field in the middle of Iran. And they were anxious to be on their way, so before Mary had time to get into her conversational top gear she was whisked away. I had to hand it to those two gentlemen. It takes guts to shut yourself in a car with Mary and drive from India to Germany. I wonder if they made it?

The bus, as you know, broke down in Italy and was sold for scrap. But it had broken down earlier while in Greece, and that was where the first group of passengers deserted. I, of course, was among them. After a couple of weeks down in the south of Greece I caught a train direct to London. Well ... almost direct ... but that's another story. Again, I haven't the space to tell you of my experiences in the land of mythology, but must pass directly on to ...

London

... which is where I am now. England. Many was the time when I was dying

of thirst and heat prostration in darkest India that I dreamt of the green fields and pubs of England. And now that I'm here I find that the wages are diabolical, the taxes unbelievable, the cost of living higher than in Australia, the prices of drinks sickening, and the monotonous suburban architecture depressing. But apart from these few quibbles things aren't that bad. There is an abundance of beautiful dollies, a marvellous range of uncut films to choose from, the London bookshops, the National Film Theatre, and things like the recent cinema exhibition at the Round House. The latter enabled me to see two of my idols, Spike Milligan and Peter Sellers, in the flesh.

As I type this I am sitting in a tiny room in the heart of Earl's Court, that much maligned London suburb which is also known as Kangaroo Valley. But it's all a myth; there are no kangaroos here, no hordes of bronzed Bazza McKenzies lounging on the street corners. In fact I suspect I might be the only Australian in Earl's Court, which is a rather frightening thought. It means it is up to me to keep the legend going. I have to deliberately adopt a dinki-di accent every time I go out, sprinkling my conversation with crikeys, too-right-sports, and the odd cooe. Sometimes this isn't easy.

My address use to be Flat 5 until I became honest and started calling it a room. Perhaps even that is an exaggeration. If you can imagine a toilet without a toilet you get some idea of just how big it is. Or better still, ask Ron Clarke or Robin Johnson, both of whom have slept on my floor at odd times. In Robin's case we had to move the stove before he could find room for his feet. I wouldn't be surprised to learn that my room had actually been a toilet originally. I have this fear that one night someone will mistake my door for the real toilet which is just opposite and flush me into oblivion.

I have neighbour problems too. There is a connecting door between our rooms. It doesn't open – it can't, because it's covered with plumbing – but it does make an excellent sounding-board. If someone breaks wind next door not only do I hear him but my stack of beer cans collapses. When I first moved in a young married couple was living there. They were a very trendy pair; both had long hair, wore the latest gear, and all that. She played the drums, he played a guitar. He also sang. Every night he would sing to her in this incredibly corroded voice, and this apparently had the desired effect on her because almost every night they would make violent love afterwards. It was so violent I would have to get up, get dressed, and go for long walks in the rain to cool off. But they moved out after a couple of weeks and a horde of Yugoslavs moved in. I don't think there is any particular tenant, just a

constantly floating population. The room is used mainly as a place for them to bring their birds to for a quick tumble. Some of these are amusing to listen to, especially when they carry out their seduction attempts in broken English, but on the whole they are not up to the standard of the previous tenants.

Their worst habit is talking very loudly in Yugoslavian until the early hours of the morning. I never realised before just how hideous the Yugoslavian spoken tongue is. I tried everything to make them stop; I swore, threw shoes at the door, screamed obscenities – but to no avail. In the end I bought a transistor radio to drown them out, but in retaliation they bought one too. My next move was to make sure I was always on a different station from them. They play pop, I play classical, they switch to classical and I hit them with the replay of *Housewives Choice*. Really, it's quite fun.

As a fan one of London's main attractions is the Globe pub. Here one can drink warm beer (yes, it's true – the beer *is* warm) surrounded by the gig names in fandom and prodom. The New Wave and the Old Wave mingle happily, snivelling neos corner the colossi of sf and engage them in trivial conversation, and aloof from everything John Brunner does his thing. (John Brunner is a sort of rich man's Gary Mason.)

My first Globe night was a bit overwhelming. I found it a bit hard to believe that all these people were actually fans or pros. The only place you get that many sf nuts together in Australia is at a convention. Needless to say I enjoyed myself immensely. I think the idea of holding such a gathering in a pub is great and one which the Sydney SF Foundation should adopt. I admit I did miss the trappings I normally associate with an sf meeting. No-one read out the minutes from the last meeting or attacked the constitution (somebody told me there wasn't any constitution, but I didn't believe him of course) and I had to fight the urge all night to put forward a motion or two.

Naturally I was curious about the impression that English fans had of Australian fandom. How do they regard us? What do they think of us? The answer is that they don't think much about us at all. Most English fans are familiar with the names of Foyster, Bangsund, and to a lesser extent, Gillespie, but a surprising number I've met didn't even know there were any fans in Australia.

Obviously this is going to affect our bid for the World Convention in 1975, which is already unfavourably regarded by most people I've met. The most common complaint is that Australia is just too far away for English fans to attend a con there. An example of what the average fan thinks of the bid is

provided by Pete Weston in *Speculation*. It now appears that there might even be an English bid for '75. So let's pack it all in and think of something more constructive to do, eh?

I can only remember a couple of times when someone specifically asked me about fandom in Australia. One of them was at the mini-con held at Sam Long's place during the weekend of the Heicon. A few of us, miffed at not being able to attend that great event, gathered at Sam's to ease the pain. We stayed up all Saturday night drinking, talking, drinking, singing, drinking, and so on. Around 2am I was sitting in front of a roaring log fire with the famous Julia Stone. Churl Legg, husband of the famous Mary Reed (who is now of course the famous Mary Legg), had just finished playing the guitar. A momentary silence fell on the group.

"Tell me," said Julia in a dreamy voice, "about Australian fans. Tell me about Leigh Edmonds. Is he handsome?"

I began to choke and almost spilt my wine. "Leigh Edmonds?" I gasped. "Why on earth do you want to know about him?"

"I use to correspond with him," Julia replied. "Go on, tell me what he's like. I always imagined him as being a good sort."

I can't remember what I said after that. I think I told her some colourful lies so as not to shatter her romantic illusions. I was extremely shaken. God knows who she might of asked me about next.

Mrs B's Wandering Boy

Extract from *The Times*:

“Great Britain greeted the arrival of St John of Brosnan (recently granted Sainthood by the Pope for by-passing Rome on his travels) on Sunday, the 25th June at Charing Cross railway station with typical British coolness. As he stepped off the train displaying his personal coat-of-arms (a rampant chicken on a yellow background) he was met with joyful cries of ‘Shit! ... Aussie bastard ... Poo!’ from the crowd of two West Indian porters who had gathered to meet him.

“Depositing his second-hand duffle bag at the LEFT LUGGAGE department he left on a quick tour of London. Saint John told reporters that he was particularly impressed with Big Ben and the Houses of Parliament and was pleased that they had been completely rebuilt after being knocked down by Gorgo’s mother in 1960. Then, after picking up his second-hand duffle bag from the LEFT LUGGAGE department, he made his way to the Youth Hostel at Earl’s Court, where a luxury suite had been prepared for him.”

As you can see from the above I have reached England. I have but the bus hasn't. You may be already familiar with the woeful facts concerning “Pegasus” (which is what we called the thing) but for any of you who aren't here's what happened. On our third day in Greece the bus developed engine trouble, or to put it in the terms of the layman, it stopped moving. We were forced to have it towed into the nearest town, which was Thessaloniki. There we were told it would cost the ridiculous sum of \$300 to have it repaired. Main bearings worn or something. We were obviously in trouble. As the bus was on Chris Guy's passport it had to leave the country with him. We couldn't sell it or even abandon it. A few schemes were tossed around to enable us to bypass this little setback, such as having Chris swim to Italy. But then the Australian Embassy stepped in and arranged with the Greek government to allow us to dump it with them.

After that people were divided as to what they wanted to do. All but

three people had contributed to the “Carnet de Passage” (if you don’t know what that is, tough) as the majority wanted to stay with the bus until the “Carnet” money was refunded from the NRMA in Australia. (It only applied up to Turkey.) By some strange coincidence the three people who hadn’t contributed to the “Carnet” were anxious to be pushing off towards Athens. Which we did. I just happened to be one of the three.

You may be thinking that that was the end of the bus ... but you may be wrong. A telegram was sent to BARDAHL, our chief sponsor, for help. The last I heard was that they had agreed to lend \$200 towards the cost of repairs. Whether or not the bus has been repaired and is on its way again I don’t know. I certainly hope so. There are still seven people on it as far as I know, including Chris Guy and Ron Clarke. The others are making their way across Europe by various means, having left the bus for financial and emotional reasons.

While in Athens I went to Mykonos with one of the girls and spent a week there. Some may think this an ideal situation. A beautiful girl, a Greek island, and plenty of sunshine. But the girl was engaged and the last I heard her boyfriend was flying to Greece to take her back home for their planned July 10 wedding date. Mykonos was crawling with rich Americans and very expensive. I had a splitting headache the whole time and I got my knees sunburnt!

Back in Athens I booked myself on a train to London. It was due to leave on June 18. When does it reach London I asked the girl at the booking office. She seemed puzzled so I asked her again. Next Wednesday she told me. I did some quick calculations and realised that it would take me six days to reach England. That seemed odd considering the relative closeness, but I took her word for it. Do I have to change trains I asked? Yes, she replied, once only at Monaco. That seemed odder still as I was positive the route didn’t go anywhere near Monaco.

The train left Athens at 6pm on the Thursday. There were only three other people in my compartment which meant it was possible to get reasonably comfortable. But around midnight we stopped at some station and the compartment was suddenly filled with Greek peasant women carrying babies. Thus ended the sleep. Christ, I thought, six days of this.

But in actual fact the trip only lasted two days and three nights, and we *didn’t* change at Monaco (a physical impossibility) but at Cologne. I was also under the ludicrous impression that the train I was on was to be shipped

across the Channel ... but at 11pm on Saturday night I found myself staring at the channel, at a place called Ostende in Belgium. I had run out of train. My ticket did cover me all the way to London ... but from the Belgium coast onwards it was up to me to figure out just how I was going to get there.

I arrived in Dover at 6am on Sunday and, after successfully getting by the Immigration people (despite no proof of assets), immediately got lost looking for the railway station. I eventually reached London about 11am.

Though dead tired I spent the day wandering around London staring at famous sights through sticky eyelids. This was because the Youth Hostel didn't open until 5 pm, unlike the one I had stayed in at Athens which was open all day and had a restaurant that served food and drinks, including beer and wine, from 7am to 11pm. In comparison the English one was amusing as the supervisors ran around in little white shorts and reminded me of scout masters. They contrasted sharply with their mostly, hippie type patrons. They had some quaint little customs too as I was to find out the next morning when I went to sign out.

“Have you done a duty?” asked the little fellow at the desk.

“Have I what?” This was a new one on me.

“Have you performed a duty this morning?”

It sunk in. Apparently one had to perform some sort of ritual deed before one could escape from the place. I thought fast and attempted to bluff my way through.

“Err, yes ... I helped tidy up the room this morning.”

“What room were you in?”

“Number three.”

“Hmm ... That's strange. I gave that duty to two other chaps. Let's see if I can find something else for you to do.”

My bluff had failed.

Not wishing to stay in the Youth Hostel another night I spent the rest of the day looking for accommodation. I finally ended up with a bed-and-breakfast arrangement for 25 bob a night at Tulse Hill. You haven't heard of Tulse Hill? That's not surprising. It's not exactly the excitement centre of London. It's not even connected to the Underground – one has to use a mundane surface train to get there ... and the surface train system is even more confusing than the Underground. Even though Tulse Hill is only 10 minutes from the heart of London one still has to change trains on the journey out there. On my first night I caught the wrong train and ended up miles

away. It was the last train of course so I had to walk back ... guided by my A TO Z ATLAS OF LONDON. I was carrying my kit-bag, which was heavy, and naturally it started to rain.

Then the police picked me up.

As I skulked along the back streets, keeping under the trees to avoid getting wet, a police van passed me. It stopped up the street, turned around, and came back.

“Where are you off to?” came this authentic London copper’s voice.

I scampered over to the van, looking innocent.

“Tulse Hill,” I replied.

“That’s a fair way off, isn’t it?”

“Yes, I know.”

“What are you, a cadet or something?”

“No ... I’ve just arrived,” I said inanely.

“Arrived? Arrived from where?”

“Australia,” I replied, thinking it should be glaringly obvious.

“Oh.” Moment’s silence. “Do you want a lift then?”

“Yes, I’d love one.”

Which was how I got picked up by the police on my second night in London.

Later that week I moved to a bed-sitter in Earl’s Court. I didn’t exactly choose Earl’s Court, but I wanted something in that area (Kensington, etc) because it’s close to the City and a direct route on the Underground. There wasn’t much available and I was lucky to get the place I finished up with. Earl’s Court is different from what I had expected. Judging by the horror stories you hear at home the place is crawling with diggers, cockies, wombats, and the air is thick with boomerangs. So far I haven’t met one Australian and have only heard one Australian accent while in a shop. It’s very cosmopolitan though and you can see an interesting variety of types in the main street. One thing I like about it is that everything stays open until very late.

My bed-sitter isn’t exactly what you’d term a bed-sitter. More like a bed ... or a sit. In other words, it’s a bit small.

It has atmosphere though. A sort of “Marie Celeste” atmosphere. This is because the possessions of the previous occupant that are still scattered around. A scarf, a half-empty bottle of after-shave, a pipe, a shaving mug, a pile of china plates, an almost full bottle of shampoo, a membership card to

the Casino Club (expired 1-4-1970) and a plastic spoon. I began to suspect that Mr Elwick (I saw his name on the club membership card) had to leave in a hurry. And my suspicions were confirmed early one morning during my first week here when a banging on the door brought me abruptly out of an innocent slumber. I staggered to the door and opened it, revealing a balding man wearing a rain coat.

“I’m a police officer,” he said. “Is Mr Elwick in?”

“No ... he no longer lives here,” I said. “I’ve been here a week.”

“Ah, I’ve just missed him then. Sorry to have disturbed you,” and he trotted downstairs. In hotblooded pursuit of the mysterious Mr Elwick I presume.

One thing wrong with Earl’s Court Square is that in all the surrounding buildings are people learning to play various musical instruments. And I emphasise the word “learning”! None of them seem to be accomplished musicians, and I have doubts that any of them ever will be.

Being an old building, the walls are solid so I don’t hear much of my fellow flat dwellers. Except for the flat directly next to me. We’re connected by a door (I suspect my room was once their bathroom ... or worse) and though it’s sealed it still transmits sound very sufficiently. The flat is occupied by a young couple who manage to obtain, judging by the sound they make, a perfect orgasm on every night I’ve been home.

If it wasn’t for a few incidental things like Buckingham Palace, Big Ben, etc, I’d swear I was in some American city. London is full, and I mean *full*, of Americans. They are everywhere. Walk along a street and 9 out of 10 voices you hear have American accents. The other voice is usually French, Dutch, German, Italian, Indian, Spanish, or Swedish. I’m beginning to think that real English people no longer exist – they’ve all been wiped out by some secret invasion. It should be interesting when summer is over and all the foreigners go home. According to my theory the only people left in London will be the Queen and myself.

At the time of writing I haven’t got a job. I applied for one with the Civil Service but I don’t think I got it. I haven’t been officially informed yet, but the interviewer gave me the impression he didn’t think I was civil servant material. It could have something to do with my appearance. I haven’t had a haircut since I left Australia (my hair would make Mick Jagger grin) and I was wearing my genuine Iranian-made suede shoes, which began to fall to pieces the day I bought them. The interviewer was an enthusiastic, eager

young man who spoke like this: “Ah, Mr Brosnan, I presume? Great, fine, marvellous ... come this way ... good, marvellous ... in here please ... fine, fine, marvellous ... take a seat ... great, marvellous, good, good ... and now ...” He kept this up during the entire interview.

Perhaps I should take it as a compliment that I’m not considered civil servant material.

27 July, 1970

I started work as a civil servant today. Yes, I’ve gone Establishment. Lousy work, miserable pay (£16/10/- before tax ... after tax it’s not worth mentioning). Yet I had to sign the Official Secrets Act before I could start work. It’s the Kensington District Tax Department and they’re afraid their employees may try to supplement their incomes with a bit of blackmail.

Ron Clarke manifested himself last Friday with an invitation to a meeting at Welwyn Garden City of the Herts Fan Group. I naturally accompanied him and we left by train on Saturday morning, arriving at Garden City later the same morning as it is only about 16 miles from London. We, for some reason, thought it was further and were surprised when we got there in just under half an hour. Perhaps it was the high price of the ticket that misled us. The British Railways are not cheap. The fan meeting was being held in the weekend home of two of the fans, Keith and Jill Brijs a jolly couple. Unofficial guest of honour was Ed Reed, an American fan of whom I hadn’t heard before. It was quite an enjoyable affair and lasted from Saturday morning to Sunday afternoon. Ron was horrified when he discovered no one intended going to sleep. Also present was Mary Reed (no relation to the Ed above) who produces a magazine called *Crabapple*. I haven’t heard of it before but you may have. Mary is an attractive young femmefan who unfortunately marries a young fan genius by the name of Churl Legg next month. The Herts group even have a clever replica of Lee Harding by the name of Arthur something or other. Arthur is a zany nut with bright red hair and beard who keeps up a constant supply of atrocious puns. He intends travelling to Heicon on a tandem bike.

I doubt if I will be able to attend the Con now. My financial position has become dangerous. Ron is not sure at the moment whether he will or not. I’ve heard from Pete Weston and hope to visit him and Peter Roberts one weekend. At the moment even Bristol is a long way money-wise.

As for the bus – I’ve since found out that it managed to get all the way from Greece to Italy. It was repaired after I left and got as far as Florence before expiring for a second and final time. On this occasion the engine actually blew up. I’m truly sorry I missed seeing it happen. It was later sold for scrap, fetching about 160 dollars.

26 August, 1970

Well, the Heicon is all over now. I don’t know yet how it went. Robin Johnson should have arrived in England yesterday but I haven’t heard anything from him yet. I spent the weekend at the NotHeiCon, an affair held by a small group of fans who couldn’t attend the con itself. It was held in Shiplake (near Oxford) at the home of US fan Sam Long who is currently stationed in England with the US Air Force. With the help of a large amount of alcoholic beverages we managed to soothe the pain of not being at the HeiCon.

I met quite a few pros and fans during the last few weeks, including Mike Moorcock, Larry Niven, Ken and Pam Bulmer, Pete Weston, John Brunner, and (as they say in Hollywood) a host of others. This is mainly through attendance at the Globe, the pub where the London SF world meets. *New Worlds*, I learned, lives, but in a vastly different form. It will be brought out by some American mob who will publish it every three months in an anthology disguise. Moorcock will still be the editor. Sorry I can’t give you any more definite information than that as I was sort of fuzzy at the time of hearing it.

At the pre-Con party held at the London home of Billy Pettit a couple of Sundays ago I had an interesting conversation with Pam Bulmer. Our talk covered a wide range of subjects, from her reviews for *Vision of Tomorrow* (I didn’t know she was Kathryn Buckley – but I still want to know who Donald Malcolm is), her opinion of the magazine, male masturbation, the futility of existence, and the sword and sorcery magazine her husband was editing. On that count we had just heard the news that night about Ron Graham’s heart attack which seemed to signify the end of the project for sure. Which is a great shame – Ken Bulmer had put a lot of work into it, and the first issue was actually being printed the last I heard.

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 book 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.

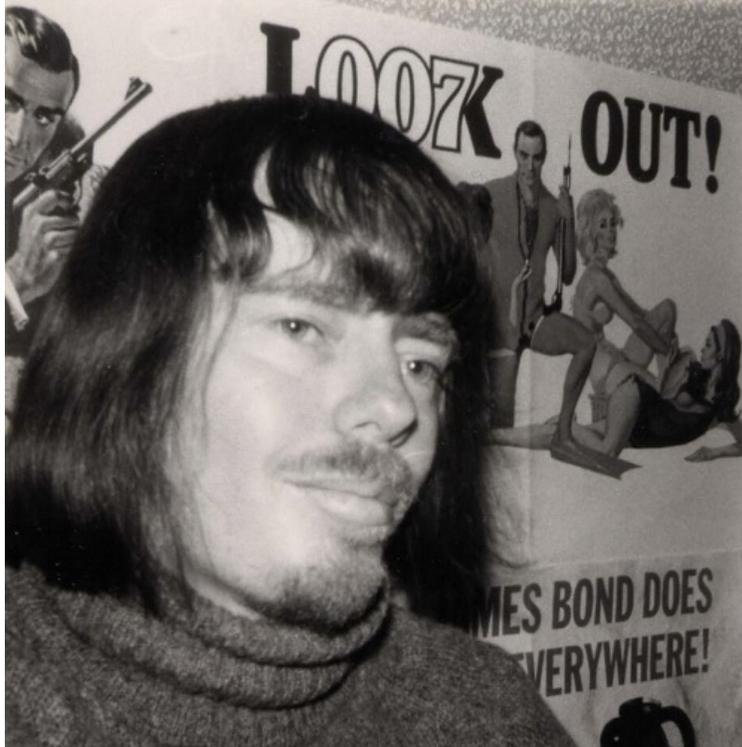
But at least I managed to rid myself of one complication. One night when she came around I raised myself up on one elbow with difficulty and said weakly, but with conviction, "Piss off."

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.



*John Brosnan and 007
Photographer unknown: from John's own
photo collection*

“Yes Virginia, There Was a Goat In Boots.”

I was sitting in The Kensington listening to Pickersgill and Holdstock discuss their respective (sic) sex lives. I was bored. I'd heard it all before and it never seems to change. Pickersgill, as he has mentioned more than a few times to the fannish mass media, has only recently discovered sex and therefore his recounting of his exploits has a zest that the older, infinitely more experienced Holdstock lacks. But it's all rather boring just the same. (Incidentally, in mentioning that Pick has only recently discovered sex, I don't want to give the impression that he was unaware of its existence. He knew it was around, it was getting his hands on it that was giving him all the trouble.)

He eventually stumbled over it in the dark of the British Museum's Filing Section. No one was more surprised than Pick, who came home that evening with his stained underpants around his knees and muttering, "I've got it! I've found it at last." I must digress a moment and comment on Pick's underpants. Holdstock finds the sight of Pick in his underpants somewhat harrowing and can't understand how his woman (Pick's that is) fails to be completely put off when she sees him that way. Holdstock is very hygienic. He soaks his member in a bowl full of warm disinfectant for six hours before he even thinks of approaching his own little (sic) woman. It's going all black, he complained recently. Don't worry, that's natural for a man of your size, we said encouragingly as we backed away.

Anyway, back at The Kensington where all this sex talk was going on. As I said, I was sort of bored by it all and was about to interject with the story of how I once had an erection, almost, but they'd heard it before so I didn't bother. Instead I gazed around at the interior of The Kensington, staring at the various people, many of whom have Australian accents. The Kensington is a rather featureless, sterile pub – too modern looking. The only reason we ever visit it is because it's the nearest one, and since The Goat In Boots is no more.

Ah, The Goat In Boots, now there was a pub! It used to be the big hangout for Ratfandom and was a bizarre and garish pub located in Fulham

Road, right opposite The Great American Disaster. It was a unique place, not so much from the outside, but inside it was wild. It resembled what you'd always thought the inside of the Sydney Opera House would look like if they hadn't filled it up with concrete – strange cement hemispheres all over the place with tables and seats in them and all painted the most horrible colours. Pickersgill loved it at first sight and I must admit it had a certain something ...

Back in the Old Days we used to meet there every Monday night regular as a clockwork grapefruit – Kettle, Hall, Holdstock and myself (Pickersgill was a later member). God, I had some great boring times there!

Hall used to fling himself behind the circular table and let his bulky, odd body sprawl out in all directions, which created the impression that he had six legs and four arms, all radiating from a massive crotch, and a hairy stomach that invariably protruded from beneath his t-shirt.

Kettle, his nose getting in everyone's drinks, would launch himself into his familiar Kettle routine. Holdstock would describe with relish the nauseating new experiment they had performed that day on some hapless pussy cat at his college, and I would look at the three barmaids huddled behind the pitiful little bench that served as the bar. Ah, the barmaids! There were four regulars, three looked okay, but none of them knew what they were doing when it came to serving drinks. They all gave the impression they were there filling in time until IT happened. I hope IT happened for them eventually. God knows what IT was, but it certainly had nothing to do with the pub business.

Ah, the hilarious stories and anecdotes I could recount about The Goat In Boots, if I could remember any ...

There was the time Pickersgill fell down the steps that lead to the bar. Boom, boom, crash, he went. Everyone laughed except us. We didn't dare. But he took it well. "I fell down the stairs," he told us on his return to the table. We agreed with him. Phew.

Pickersgill's main contribution to The Goat In Boots evenings after he moved up to London was sulking. He turned sulking into a high art and it's never been the same since. With shoulders hunched forward, mouth set in a grim line, his moustache slightly twitching, his rum and Coke set firmly in front of him, he could sulk the pants off anyone in the place.

The classic demonstration came the night he and Hall and I went to see *Dr. Strangelove* at the Electric Cinema in the Portobello Road. Hall happened to tell him that Kettle was meeting Chris Priest and Graham Charnock at The

Goat and Pickersgill became very disconcerted when he heard this. When *Strangelove* was over, Pick led us down Portobello Road at high speed. “Quick, quick,” he urged us, “before they can talk about me too much.” Onto the tube to Gloucester Road, then a fast trot down the back streets to The Goat In Boots. (Pick actually broke into a run at some points.)

Into The Goat he hurtled, up to the table where Kettle and co. were and, without pausing, flung himself into a vacant space and began to sulk. It was an incredible performance, and by the end of the night he was getting applause from surrounding tables. American tourists kept coming up and shaking him by the hand. It was the sulk to end all sulks. Even the barmaids were impressed and clubbed together to buy Pick a small commemorative cup for the occasion. I’ll never forget it.

Or the table – our regular table that was built in such a way that the beer slop always dribbled down my leg no matter where I was sitting. Or the tall barmaid with the long blonde hair. “She fancies me,” announced Hall one night. “Who?” we asked. “The barmaid,” he replied. “Which one?” “That one ... and that one, and that one ... and ...” Good old Hall.

My God, I can remember so far back that I recall the times that Jean Finney herself used to make an appearance at The Goat – that was before Pick’s time, thank Christ. Those were the days.

Of course, it didn’t last. Tensions formed – habits and routines changed. I suddenly became aware that Hall thought Holdstock was a cretin – but one shouldn’t hold that against him; my sister married one – and couldn’t stand his presence. Kettle moved, etc., and eventually it was just Hall, Pick and me who continued to meet there on Monday nights. Hall and Pick would invariably discuss rock music which I found even more boring than the later sex talks between Holdstock and Pick. Then Hall announced that he was through with all this trivia and was moving in with the Brunners as a resident ... thing, I suppose.

We still visited The Goat occasionally, but it was sort of out of the way. Then, a few weeks ago, came a shattering discovery. Pick and his “strange woman” (Pick’s description) were meeting Kettle there one Friday night and, horror of horrors, it was no longer there! “Nothing left but a shell,” moaned Pick. “All boarded up. It must have burned down.” But I’ve since found out that the whole block is being demolished for re-development. What a loss!

All those plans for the future – the blue enamel plaque that we were going to have mounted on the wall outside one day: **Ratfandom met here.**

And got pissed here. And fell over here. Etc. 1971-72. Ah, me! It's terrible the way the heritage of Great Britain is being eaten away these days. There will never be another Goat In Boots. Which is why I'm currently being bored at The Kensington these days.

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 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. He’s been doing that every half hour.”

“Is that all he pays out? Just Chocolate Garibaldi?”

“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 underpants.

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 realised 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 21st 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.

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.”

“Wowie!” 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. “Ah, 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.

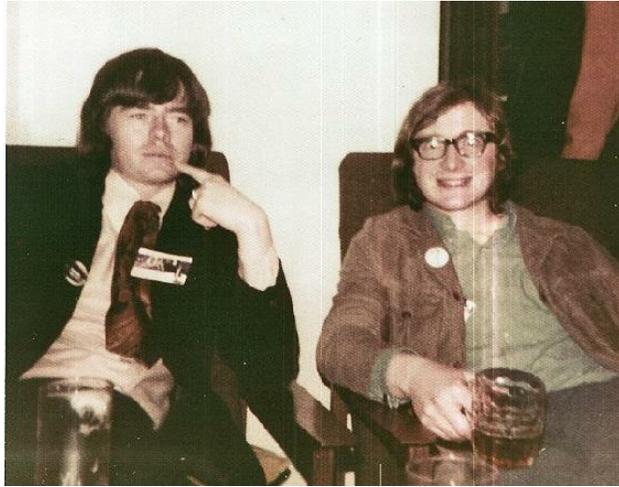
The hours dragged on and I dropped off, lulled to sleep by the sound of Kettle’s voice as he continued to tell Angie’s brother why hairdressers were the salt of the earth, etc. At 6am Big John woke me up by stepping on my head.

“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 ...



*Collaborators-to-be: John Brosnan
and Leroy Kettle at Eastercon 22
(1971)
Photo by Mary Peek*

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 blasé. Unfortunately, the more blasé 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 blasé and picked up a newspaper, glancing through it idly. That's what I call blasé!

"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 blasé! 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 Wedding

You all remember Chris Guy of course, he was the one who organised *the* bus trip. Well, last weekend, on the 13th of February, he got married to Trundles and I was best man. Actually I was a bit surprised to be best man, though he had asked me as long ago as last March, because near the end of the trip we were feeling a little antagonistic towards each other. Not only didn't I think I'd be best man I doubted that I would even get an invite to the wedding. But with the soothing passage of time all the old hates faded, we forgave and forgot (though not completely) and once more I was honoured with the choice position. I did stipulate though that there were to be no speeches (by me) and no bloody bridal waltzes. Chris agreed, especially since the reception would be buffet style and not formal.

I didn't think much about it until a few weeks ago when it dawned on me that I'd probably have to buy them a present. Shaken I checked up and sure enough I did have to. Not only was this financially disturbing, I didn't have a clue as to what to get them. Jennifer, my ex-flatmate (or she will be by the time you read this) volunteered to do the deal for me.

"How much will it cost?" I asked her apprehensively.

"Just give me a couple of pounds," she said.

Even to my miserly way of reckoning this seemed a bit cheap, but presuming she knew more about these things than I did so I gave her the money.

About a week later she walks in one evening with a package "I got it," she says and hands me some change. The she unwrapped it. It was a plastic tube with a plunger on the end of it. I looked at it without saying anything. "It's a vegetable chopper," she explained. "I just walked into a store at lunch time and picked up the first thing I saw." I nodded. "Let's try it out," she said and promptly got a potato jammed up the end of it. It was exactly the sort of thing they would expect from me.

The wedding was to be held in Gosport, a town near Portsmouth where Chris' relatives thrived in their millions. I arranged to go down on the Friday night with Clive and Charles, two more of the bus crew. Clive and Charles are what one could describe as characters, though some prefer other descriptions. I myself find them very interesting, their conversation sounds as

if it could have been written by Barry Humphries for the Barry Mackenzie comic strip in *Private Eye*. Clive is very tall and dark, has an incredibly loud voice and laugh, and vaguely resembles a slightly distorted Omar Sharif. Charles is an athletic looking, fair-headed Australian “surfy” type. Both are extroverts and both regard Chris and Trundles with deep loathing. I was sure that they would liven up what might be a dull affair. (Incidentally, Trundles is a nickname given to Elaine by an actor we met on the ship to Singapore. He saw her dancing and claimed that she sort of trundled her way around the floor.)

Clive and Charles were supposed to pick me up on the eve of the wedding at 7:30. I told Chris this over the phone and he, working out that it would about 2 hours to drive down to Gosport, said he would meet us just outside the town at 9:30 to guide us in as the address was a bit difficult to locate. Clive and Charles didn’t arrive until 8:00 and then went to visit the girls in the bottom flat who are old friends of theirs. (Clive & Co use to live in the flat I’m in now.) It was almost 8:30 when we left. I told them that Chris wanted to meet us at 9:30 and they laughed. “No chance,” they said.

Our vehicular conveyance was Clive’s company van. He’s a representative for a linen wholesaler. “By the way,” he said just after we got started, “we’re stopping in at Newbury and Reading on the way back.” I asked why? “I’ve got to change the price tickets on our stock at two stores for the decimal change over thing. I figure with the three of us doing it we’ll be through in no time.”

“The three of us?” I asked.

“Yeah. Give a hand and I’ll knock two bob off the petrol money.” I forget what I said then.

After about an hours drive it was decided by all three of us that we should look for a pub (I had by then given up all hope of making Chris’ deadline). We found a likely looking one and pulled off the road. Two pints each and 20 minutes later we were off again. I felt a lot cheerier.

We reached the place where Chris was suppose to meet us at about 10:40. It was a roundabout with several roads leading off. Clive circled it once, wound down the window and yelled CHRIS at the top of his voice. No one answered. So he picked the road with the Gosport sign on it and drove down it.

“We’ll have to stop and ask someone the way,” he said. By the time the two pints had made their sordid way through my system and we now playing

havoc with my bladder.

“Stop at a pub.” I pleaded. We stopped at the next pub. Clive and I raced for the Gents while Charles ordered the drinks. In the toilet we met a middle-aged fellow who gave us drunken directions to where we wanted to go, pausing in the middle of his urinating so as to be able to illustrate with hand gestures.

After losing two bob each on a poker machine and two more pints apiece we were away again. We found the street without too much trouble and roared into it with the horn blowing. It ended in a cul-de-sac Clive soon discovered, and we screeched around it inches from disaster. A squeal of brakes and we had pulled up outside the house. Gosport shuddered. So did I but being anaesthetised with four pints of whatever it was I had been drinking I wasn't feeling too guilty.

Chris was waiting on the doorstep, hands on hips and frowning. Clive, Charles, and I followed him inside. The lounge room seemed full of relatives who stared at the three of us with expressions that ranged from wariness to outright disapproval. I began to waffle on with some nonsense about us becoming lost but Charles came straight out and said we had been doing a pub-crawl. It was easy to see that we were in the doghouse. The people who had volunteered to put Clive and Charles up for the night had given up and gone home. We were told they would have to sleep on the floor where they were.

I followed Chris out to his car and we headed for his cousins where we were going to spend the night. With us was Neville, Elaine's brother, a disc jockey working in Holland who had driven over in his Mercedes Convertible for the wedding.

We all slept in the same room. The next morning I tried on the dinner suit Chris had hired me. I hadn't been able to have a fitting for it and I was afraid it might not be suitable. I was right. The coat had room for two of me and the trousers had to be seen to be believed. Chris and Neville almost died laughing. I suggested that I drop out of the best man business, leaving it up to Neville instead, but Chris wouldn't hear of it. Besides, Neville was giving Elaine away. So it was decided that Chris would drive me over to Portsmouth where there was a Moss Bros. branch and we would try and get the suit exchanged for a better fit.

And so away we went. Moss Bros. was able to help with a similar size of pants but couldn't help with the coat. I would have to look like Droopy the

dwarf with my cuffs hanging down over my hands. On the frantic drive back to Gosport I asked Chris what the bridesmaid, a part filled by Elaine's cousin, was like.

"Err, she's very nice," said Chris, "and intelligent."

"Oh," I said and dropped the subject.

After lunch I shot round to the pub nearby and had a double vodka. The wedding was to be at 8:30pm and we only had an hour to go. I was so nervous that the vodka didn't stand a chance. Then I went back and climbed into my ridiculous costume. 2:30 and Chris and I drove round to the church. I had trouble getting out because my hand was lost up my coat sleeve. There were several relatives lurking round outside the church and as we climbed out of the car they began to grin and take pictures. I snarled at them as I followed Chris across the road feeling like an organ grinder's monkey.

Inside the church we were met by a bored looking priest. He showed us where the registry book was, then led us to the front and showed us where to sit. Chris was even more nervous than I was. I tried to take his mind off it all by making witty remarks but they didn't have much effect. So I looked around the church which was interesting because I hadn't been inside one for years.

"This reminds me of the church used in *Taste the Blood of Dracula*," I told Chris, thinking he would be interested. But he only grunted.

Somewhere an organist was playing, lo and behold, an organ. At the finish of each number Chris would tense up, expecting to hear the beginning of *Here Comes the Bride*. I told him I thought Oliver Reed did a much better job of playing the organ in *Paranoiac*.

They don't have rehearsals any more these days and as I had never played a best man before I was more than a little curious about what I was suppose to do. Chris was as clueless as I was.

"Just stand behind me," he kept saying.

"I don't have to kneel down or say anything, do I?"

"No, just place the rings on the bible when he asks for them."

"Are you sure that's all I have to do?"

"Just do what the bridesmaid does. She's had plenty of experience at weddings. Do everything she does."

"You're kidding." I said.

Finally, six minutes late, the organist let loose with *Here Comes the Bride*. Chris and I sprung to our feet and waited for Elaine to arrive at the

altar. We waited and waited but they seemed to be taking ages to come down that little short aisle. Not daring to look around I wondered where they had gone, for a quick drink perhaps, or had the floor silently collapsed beneath them.

At long last she arrived, trailing a long train and a bridesmaid. She also had her brother with her, which surprised me because I had forgotten that he was going to give her away. This meant a problem because the aisle wasn't big enough for three of us to stand abreast and as he was standing beside the bridesmaid I had to find some place else. So I ended up stuck halfway between Chris and Elaine and the others.

The ceremony didn't take very long but it seemed to by God. I won't bore you with the gory details except to mention that I didn't drop the rings. We did a slow march along the aisle up to the register near the door where we all had to sign the marriage certificate. Here came an embarrassing moment when I had to hold Elaine's corsage while she signed.

Then it was outside where we had to spend an excruciating amount of time posing for photographs. The photographer was the type I take an instant dislike to, great grin showing a vast number of teeth and an obscene amount of gum and bubbling over with cheerful enthusiasm. He kept telling me to stop holding my hands together in front of me. Every time I let them go my coat cuffs slid over my fingers.

First he took a photo of the bride and groom, then he took one of the bride, groom, the bridesmaid, and me, then he included the parents, then he added the immediate relatives, finally he included everyone – even people who had just been walking by plus a gardener and a couple of stray dogs. For this he had to retreat a fair way back so as to fit us all in his lens. To my amusement he almost toppled backwards over the fence while doing this.

That torture over we escaped into the cars and were whisked away to the reception. Not long to the drinks now, I told my craving throat, not long. We were almost the first to arrive at the reception, the place was empty except for Chris and Elaine. I had a quick look at the food laid out on the tables, decided it would be risky to try and eat it, and looked for something to drink instead. There wasn't anything available yet so I just stood and fretted silently to myself.

By then the other guests had begun to arrive so the four of us lined up by the door and greeted them effusively as they came in. I didn't enjoy that much either. Some of Chris' relatives were obviously a bit puzzled when they

came to me. They weren't sure exactly who I was so I kept announcing very loudly over and over again, "How do you do, I'm the best man. How do you do, I'm the best man." None seemed very cheered by the news.

Then the stupid photographer reappeared and we all found ourselves posing again. ("Would you please unclench your hands ...") At this point someone began serving drinks, if you call them that ..., tiny glasses filled with sherry, I grabbed one, drained it, and grabbed another one which I began to sip very daintily.

I must mention here that on leaving the church I made a rather important discovery. Elaine's cousin, the bridesmaid, could be described as almost beautiful. I either got the wrong impression from Chris earlier or his taste had become distorted by the close proximity of nuptial disaster. Her name was Robyn, she was 17 years old, and was spending a year in Germany by means of the Rotary Exchange set-up. As the evening wore on she became, due to a combination of alcohol and the fact that she was the only young female in the place worth looking at, more and more beautiful.

To be honest it was a pretty dull affair. It reminded me of some kind of Australian tennis club social gathering, especially when they started dancing to Mantovani records. Clive told me that he and Charles were going into Portsmouth after as Neville had told them that he had read that a topless club was opening that very night. I said I'd come too. Later Neville said he intended coming as well. I began to look forward to it, it seemed that it might be a fun night after all.

The reception finished at 10 o'clock but it felt much later as we had begun drinking at four in the afternoon. Clive, Charles, and Neville were smashed and I don't think I was exactly steady myself. The gauntlet of beverages we had run of was formidable, ranging through sherry, champagne, beer, and whiskey. By this time Clive and Charles were insulting the relatives quite openly, not that the relatives seemed to mind, in fact they appeared to be enjoying it all. I don't think they had ever come in contact with anyone remotely like Clive and Charles before.

The plan after the reception was to meet at Chris' aunt's house. From there Neville and I were to go to where we had spent the previous night and change into normal clothes. From there we would return to the aunt's, meet up with the boys and Robyn (who had decided that she wanted to come too) and away we'd go to the topless restaurant or whatever. The best laid plans etc ...

I left the reception with the boys in the van. We hadn't gone far when I realised it was a mistake. Clive jammed his foot down on the accelerator and sped through Gosport at 60 miles per hour with the horn blaring. We soon caught up with Neville in the Mercedes who pulled over to the side of the road to see why we were sounding the horn. Clive stopped in front of him and got out to explain there was nothing wrong. Neville then drove on. While Clive was outside Charles slid over behind the wheel, started the van up, and away we roared with Clive running after us. I became helpless with laughter. Charles finally stopped the van five hundred yards up the street and we waited for Clive to catch up with us.

"YOU BLOODY BASTARDS!" he roared good-humouredly as he jumped in. We started up and were soon doing sixty again, the horn still blaring. Fortunately we didn't pass a policeman of any kind otherwise we'd still be locked up somewhere in Gosport. We did scare a Salvation Army man though who almost fell off his bike as we zoomed by. I found myself enjoying the ride immensely until we reached a stretch in the road that was very narrow due to road works and I saw a pair of lights coming directly at us. This is it I said to myself.

There was a screech of brakes and suddenly we were up on the footpath, then back onto the road and off again at top speed, Clive and Charles whooped with laughter. I sunk low into my seat, numb. The rest of the ride was a nightmare.

We actually reached Chris' aunt's place in one piece and screeched to a halt behind the Mercedes. I fell out of the van quivering. While we waited outside for the others to arrive the Salvation Army man appeared on his bike. He turned down the street toward us, rode past without saying anything, turned and rode back up the street. Gone for reinforcements I presumed and wondered how long we'd have to wait before a Salvation Army brass band arrived.

Inside the drinking continued and the more obnoxious the two boys became the more the relatives enjoyed it. I finally convinced Neville that we had better go and change before Chris' cousin went to bed. Neville was really high by this time but the ride in his Mercedes wasn't as nerve wracking as the previous one except that he would persist in driving on the right hand side of the road.

We reached the cousin's place, changed, borrowed a front door key, and left. As we were leaving Neville promised that we would be quiet as mice on

our return. Then he tripped and fell into a rose bush. I began to have doubts that we would ever see the topless restaurant.

We hadn't been back at the aunt's long when an argument developed over our plans for the evening. The relatives scoffed at the idea of anything like a topless restaurant opening in Portsmouth (permissive England ends on the outskirts of London) and besides the ones who were putting Clive and Charles up for the night wanted them to come home with them right away. If you don't, they warned, no warm beds and no breakfast the next morning. Incredibly the boys actually gave in and allowed themselves to be meekly led away.

Neville and I were both shattered and disillusioned by this passive display. That meant chucking in the topless plans so we settled in for a night of drinking and talking. Neville did most of both activities, finally running out of steam at 2:00am. I can't remember the ride back to the cousin's place though I remember telling Neville that we were on the wrong side of the road.

The next day is hazy too. I remember a hangover, saying goodbye to Neville, eating a roast dinner that I didn't really enjoy, seeing the bride and groom return (it was a short honeymoon), making plans to ask Robyn out, and the trip back to London. I particularly remember the trip back to London as it was intersected by a hideously lengthy period in Newbury where Charles and I helped Clive change the price tickets on his bloody stock in some Newbury shop.

And of course I'll never forget the look on Chris and Elaine's faces when they opened the wedding present I gave them.

The Scars of Dracula

(A Horror Film Review)

As a fan of horror films naturally one of the big attractions of being in England is seeing horror films that have been banned in Australia. These include, of course, most of Hammer's Dracula efforts, of which, as far as I know, only one has managed to break through the big brother barrier erected by Australia's protectors of our national purity. That was *Dracula is Rising From the Grave* and, strangely enough, was the best of the Lee-Hammer-Dracula films I've seen.

The big criticism of most Hammer films is the so-called "Hammer Method" which consists of serving everything up with great lashings of blood and gore. This applies to almost any horror film made these days but Hammer are particularly guilty in this respect. Why the producers feel that this emphasis on blood is necessary I'm not sure, perhaps because it's easier to simulate gore than an atmosphere of genuine horror. The prevailing custom is to simply shock with some nauseating scene of mutilation instead of trying to horrify. And with the new English X Certificate in force which permits films to be much more explicit than they were previously Hammer has let out all stops. Not that I don't think that the more liberal censorship laws are a good thing. I'm all for them in fact. But I regret that Hammer is taking advantage of them in this way. They can only do horror films in general a great deal of harm and ensure that even fewer of their products get into Australia.

One of the latest examples of this was a double-bill recently released which consisted of *The Horror of Frankenstein & The Scars of Dracula*. So much blood was sprayed around during the program that at interval the usherettes were going up and down the aisles with mops. The Frankenstein film, the first half of the bill, was bad enough – it concerned the exploits of Franky as a young man (Peter Cushing was absent for once, the youthful Baron was being played by a new Hammer property, Ralph Bates) and follows him from high school to the making of his first monster. There are several heads, hands, arms, and legs galore and then, with the arrival of the monster (a new-type monster as well, played by a well-known London body-

building expert, he resembled a bald, bandaged Mr. Universe) there are several gory murders. Relief is provided by the humorous manner in which the film is treated ... young Frankenstein is marvellously ruthless, killing off his father and best friend casually and without a qualm when they begin to inhibit his ambitions, and poisoning his girlfriend's father so as to obtain a brain for his experiment. An example of the light hearted treatment the film had is the ending in which the monster is accidentally flushed away in an acid by a little girl.

There isn't much humorous relief in *The Scars of Dracula* though, except for a few scenes near the beginning, and the gore is much more sickening. There are several scenes that I considered to be crudely overdone and unnecessary. One is at the opening of the film, after the preliminary part which shows Dracula being resurrected. (A clockwork bat flies in and vomits blood over his remains causing him to reform. The fact that his remains are back in his own castle despite his being destroyed in England at the finish of the last film – *Taste the Blood of Dracula* – is not dwelt upon.) The next scene concerns the forming of a mob to revenge themselves on the good Count for killing (again) one of the local maidens. They go and set fire to his castle but when they return to their village and go to the church where they had left the women and children they receive a nasty surprise. On opening the church doors they see bats fly out. Inside everyone has been slaughtered and the camera lingers lovingly on a collection of hideously mutilated faces.

Another bad scene is when Dracula surprises his female follower in bed with one of the heroes. This, by the way, is a standard scene in all but one of the Dracula films. It was staged best of all in Hammer's fist version of *Dracula* (1958) and repeated almost exactly, but not as effectively, in *Dracula, Prince of Darkness*. The formula goes this way – a girl approaches the hero while he is in Dracula's castle and asks for his help. She embraces him then attempts to sink her teeth into his neck. At this point Dracula appears, fangs bare and furious, drags the girl away after a struggle, then he himself attacks the hero. In *Scars of Dracula* it went this way – the girl vampire gives the hero the usual line about being a prisoner but doesn't give way to the urge for blood drinking until after they have spent the night in bed together. (Hammer, you see, has discovered sex. In the Frankenstein film, when he wasn't carving up bodies he was in bed with his housekeeper.) At dawn, when she awakes, she is just about to let loose into his jugular vein when the curtains around the bed are ripped aside and Dracula is revealed. He

throws the hero out, knocking him unconscious, then stabs the girl several times in the stomach as she lies there. Blood literally splatters everywhere. Later Dracula's servant, Klove, arrives and saws her body up, dumping the pieces into a bath of acid. The latter really annoyed me as there was no real need for it.

Another nasty piece is when Dracula punishes his servant by burning his already mangled back with a white-hot sabre. And the village priest has his face torn to pieces by one of the bats near the end of the film.

The film does have a few interesting touches despite everything. I was pleased that Dracula's voice had been returned to normal. The only other time he spoke normally was in the beginning of the 1958 version. In *Prince of Darkness* he didn't speak once during the whole film and in *Rising From the Grave* and *Taste the Blood* he was confined to snarling short sentences in a voice that sounded like a rusty gate. They also restored another touch from the book itself, his ability to climb walls like a spider. But the biggest disappointment in this film I think is Lee himself. For once he slips up and manages to reduce Dracula to a figure of fun, something he has always avoided before. It happens at the climax of the film, which is a pity, because it was the best part. The heroine is being menaced by him on the battlements of the castle and as he approaches he spots her crucifix. He then gives an embarrassing series of facial contortions, rolling his eyes about frantically, and giving the impression he is smelling something bad. It breaks the audience up into helpless laughter. I can't understand why this scene wasn't re-filmed. Surely someone noticed at Hammer how bad it was. But perhaps their budget is so lousy they can't afford such luxuries.

Dracula's death scene is quite good though not as impressive as that in *Rising From the Grave*, nor as good as the 1958 *Dracula* which contains one of the best "dissolves in dust" scenes I've seen. (For Aussie fans who haven't had the opportunity to see this I'll briefly describe it – Peter Cushing and Dracula are locked in a fight to the death ... Cushing breaks free, bounds onto a table and runs down it to the curtain which he rips aside and lets the daylight in. Dracula tries to escape the deadly rays but Cushing forming a cross with a couple of fire pokers forces him back into the shaft of light. Dracula's foot is the first part of him to be destroyed, it crumbles away and his trouser leg collapses. He falls backwards ... his hand shatters into pieces next, and finally his face is forced into the sunlight. He raises his remaining hand for protection ... it falls, revealing a crumbled caricature of a face with

two mad, red eyes peering through the ruins. Great stuff! This is how fantasy sadism should be done! And of course all Aussie fans saw the grandiose ending of *Rising From the Grave* when Dracula is impaled on a giant cross, writhing and twisting like a fly on a pin wheel.)

In *Scars of Dracula* the hero appears, pulls a metal spike out of the wall and hurls it at Dracula. It hits him in the chest. He smiles, plucks it out, and holds it above him as he prepares to throw it back at the hero. At this point lightning strikes the spike accompanied by a crash of thunder. Dracula shrieks and flames start to move down his arm. He is soon enveloped in flames. Screaming, he staggers about the battlements for a few seconds then topples over the side. A shame the rest of the film wasn't as impressive as this sequence.

A much better vampire film is *Count Yorga – Vampire*. Despite the stupid title this is certainly worth seeing. If it manages to get into Australia I recommend it. It is set in modern times and the vampire is played by someone called Robert Quarry who I haven't heard of before, but that doesn't mean anything. His portrayal of a vampire is more subtle than Lee's and so he avoids falling into the trap of making himself look ridiculous. The film itself is made on a low budget but the script is definitely above average for this type of production. The dialogue is clever and there are some wonderful ironical touches. My favourite was near the end when one of the heroes is surprised by the Count as he tries to break into his home armed with a makeshift stake made from a broom handle. The next scene shows the two of them sitting in the Count's study making small talk, both pretending to ignore the crude stake lying across the hero's knees.

The only thing that really marred it for me was the Count's servant who was made up to resemble Jerry Lewis in *The Nutty Professor*. There are some blood and gore scenes but less offensive than Hammer's product, even the shocking one when one of the heroes discovers his girlfriend eating a cat. And the ending is satisfyingly bitter with the vampires (though not the poor Count who ends up impaled on the above mentioned broom handle) winning the struggle.

Another good horror film is *Night of the Living Dead* ... but hang on, that's about ghouls, not vampires, so I'd better not go any further.

The London Movie Scene

All I've been doing so far is looking around London, spending money, and going to the movies. In regards to the latter department I've run up quite a score. There are so many movies showing in London that I want to see that I'm having a hard time ...

Beneath the Planet Of the Apes

If you were a fan of *Star Trek* you'll love this movie. The plot is that bad.

Now I don't think *Planet of the Apes* was a great movie. The storyline was skimpy and had to be padded out with action (too much action), the satire was heavy-handed, it couldn't make up its mind what kind of a movie it was, and it was full of glaring flaws (such as the language fiasco). But it was mildly entertaining and I certainly didn't think it was bad enough to deserve a sequel. And certainly not a sequel as bad as *Beneath the Planet of the Apes*, which follows the scene where Charlton Heston has a trauma after seeing a crudely super-imposed Statue of Liberty.

Now as far as I'm concerned *Planet of the Apes* was self-contained as a movie. There is no logical reason for any continuation. It's "aim", weak as it was, the parody of humans by the apes, was fulfilled. The writers of *Beneath the Planet of the Apes* also seem to realise this and they don't dwell too deeply on this theme in the later movie. There is a painful episode where the ape army is confronted by a group of peace demonstrators, placards and all (God, what symbolism!) but it is mercifully short. No, this time the writers have had to find another theme to exploit and what do you think they come up with? Nothing less than *the bomb* itself.

So we find ourselves confronted with a race of underground super-beings who worship the bomb with all the satirical subtlety that we saw in *Planet of the Apes*. ("Glory be to the Holy Fall-out ..." etc). But this wasn't enough. For the sake of some action in the movie the apes suddenly discover the existence of these super-beings and move in with an army (why it took them so long isn't mentioned of course). The climax is like something out of *The Wild Bunch* with everyone gorily and without reason (we have to keep up with the times).

In other words the plot is horribly contorted and utterly illogical with even more flaws than its predecessor. It is annoying when yet another character is introduced, especially as Charlton Heston remains at both the beginning and ending of the film. Perhaps the introduction of a new main character is a device to assist the viewer who did not see the original, as the new character, played by James Franciscus (of *Mr Novak* fame) arrives on the planet in the same manner as Heston. Whatever the reason, coincidence is stretched out of line.

The special affects vary in quality. On the whole they're not too good. The best sequence is where the ape army is faced with a series of illusions transmitted by the underground people.

You'll go and see the damn movie, of course, but just don't forget that I warned you.

The Dunwich Horror

Can you imagine a movie where Gidget is raped by one of H.P. Lovecraft's OLD ONES. No? Well, believe it or not, such a movie has been made. It's called *The Dunwich Horror*, and not to be confused with the story of the same name. When I first heard about this movie I was under the impression that this was the first Lovecraft story to be filmed but I've since discovered that there is another one called *The Shuttered Room*. If it is as bad as this then thank God Lovecraft is dead.

It could have been good, of course. But it isn't for several reasons. One is the clod in charge of casting who should be shot. Another is the horror movie director who failed to learn from people like Roman Polanski and his *Rosemary's Baby*. Subtlety, that's the key word. Gone are the days when all the old hoary props proved effective, props such as weird lighting and grotesque looking characters. TV shows like *The Munsters* and *The Addams Family* have ended all that. By dragging all the old horror film props out into the open and making fun of them, worse, by turning them into the props of a TV family situation show. (the ultimate horror) they destroyed whatever scary properties they still possessed.

But the maker of *The Dunwich Horror* don't realise this, or else he still thinks there are enough people around who will fall for the old methods.

I presume that Sandra Dee, the heroine, and Dean Stockwell, who plays the part of Wilbur, were chosen for their "teenage appeal". It certainly

couldn't have been for their acting ability. Dee is bad but as her role is a passive one she isn't too offensive, whereas Stockwell deals the movie such a crippling blow that it has no hope of succeeding. For one thing he looks like something out of *The Addams Family* (the make-up department must share some of the blame here), he talks funny, and keeps bulging his eyes. In a spoof of a horror movie he'd be great but in something that attempts to *be* a horror movie he's a disaster.

In the climax where the virginal Sandra is laid out on an altar waiting for the OLD ONE to possess her (and thinking to herself, beach movies were never like this!), Stockwell ruins the build-up of tension with some incredibly bad acting. In fact he sends the audience into outright laughter. Of course the audience knows the whole thing is a joke nobody wants the fact made obvious. It's the mark of a good actor if he can prevent us, momentarily, from seeing the joke in a movie like this. Stockwell hasn't a chance.

The movie isn't a total loss. There is some clever camera work in places, particularly in an orgy which takes place in daylight on a hill by the sea, and, Wilbur's monstrous brother is presented effectively (despite the over use of filters) and with subtlety, believe it or not. We don't see him clearly anywhere in the movie, but this is right and proper, for to have one of Lovecraft's "nameless, indescribable, unspeakable, horrors" portrayed on the screen would be the last straw.

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 travelling salesman but I refused to learn how to drive which rather confused them. Then, in '66 or '67, I happened to meet a travelling 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.

***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 *Macroscope* 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 can’t 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 Piggott 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 27th 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 Globe 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 Phenman (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 Norstrilian you! 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 ageing 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 2nd 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 wonder 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 jodhpurs), who read out his new story, *Why I Want Very Much to Sell to Analog Again*. Also present was the dashing 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* (sallowfaced, 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 breakthrough 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!

Awwww.

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 Piggott, 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 Shorrock 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 he managed to successfully elude the randy young Shorrock. 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.)

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 scrubdown 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 beautiful 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 trouserpresses 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 travelled 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 hyperbola. 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 marvellous 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 itself 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 billiards. 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 to 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, ageing part-time (very part) 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 King Rat.

Science Fiction Foundation to Make 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 butts 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 goofy 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 Great 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.”

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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!

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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 28th birthday recently in a pub, incoherent Ritchie Smith amazed everyone by suddenly taking a bite out of his beer glass. "Grooten greaten," 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.

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."

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.

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.

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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.

The Australian Science Fiction Scene

In 1968 I attended my first science fiction convention which was held in the tiny club rooms of the Melbourne SF Club. The total number of attendees was between forty and fifty – not very many compared to an American or even a British convention but it seemed an awful lot of people to me at the time (in my home state of Western Australia I knew of only one other SF fan). This August, seven years later, the Melbourne SF fans will be hosting the 1975 World SF Convention, which is quite a coup for such a relatively small group. But, despite its size, the Australian SF community, which is centred mainly in Melbourne, has a long tradition of being a very influential force within science fiction. One area in which its presence has been most strongly felt is that of SF criticism – Australian enthusiasts such as John Foyster, George Turner, John Bangsund and Bruce Gillespie have produced over the last decade or so criticism of such a high quality that they have earned the respect and appreciation of most of the top SF writers and fans all over the world.

Admittedly, Australia hasn't yet produced an SF writer of the stature of, say, an Isaac Asimov or Brian Aldiss, but it does possess a number of highly competent practitioners of the art. One problem that plagues Australian writers, mainstream as well as SF, is the need to produce work that has a uniquely Australian flavour. John Baxter, in the first issue of *The Australian Science Fiction Review* in 1966, wrote:

“Australian SF is rare. Only a handful of stories by Australian SF writers have had any distinctive Australian background – Frank Bryning's *Place of the Throwing Stick*, Lee Harding's *Sacrificial*, my own *Takeover Bid* – and all have been failures to some degree. *Place of the Throwing Stick* let an interesting image, the primitive Aboriginal faced with a modern rocket ship, stand in for plot and, perhaps more important, any real evocation of the conflict the story was supposed to be concerned with. There is certainly a contrast between Australia's untouched nature and the imported sophistication of places like Woomera, but it needs to be

dramatised to become art. Sacrificial is magnificent, but it is a story that depends on its atmosphere to make its point, and the atmosphere is not peculiarly Australian. This really is the problem.

The established SF and fantasy themes are rooted in the mythology of America and England rather than of this country. Class conflict, moral standards and other distinctively British themes have little relevance to Australia, just as social progress, the problems of man in a mechanised society, and the conflict between individuality and the necessities of organised existence, are more American than international. Australian writers can and do concern themselves with these questions but they can at best consider them second-hand. There are no especially Australian national social problems. In fact, it sometimes seems that we have no social problems at all. As far as contemporary SF is concerned, Australia is lacking in the basic material that makes it possible.”

Australia has changed a great deal since that was written, less than ten years ago, but much of what Baxter said still applies. Purely Australian themes and settings that can be utilised for SF are still difficult to find and the answer for most SF writers is to tailor their material to fit a particular market – usually the American one. Baxter himself, who, in the early 1960s when he was appearing regularly in Ted Carnell’s British SF magazines, gave the impression that he was going to become the major Australian SF writer, has since abandoned the genre for the more lucrative activity of writing about the cinema.

Born in Sydney, Baxter discovered SF at the age of twelve when he came across Murray Leinster’s story *First Contact* in a flying book. He later joined the Sydney SF group and edited several of its journals before publishing a fanzine of his own, *Quantum*, which later became *Bunyip*. After working for a few years as a civil servant he then fulfilled another passion of his, involving motion pictures and photography, by joining the Commonwealth Film Unit where he directed several documentaries, one of which was an award winner. In 1968 he edited *The Pacific Book of Australian Science Fiction*, Australia’s first SF anthology (that same year his SF novel *The God Killers* was published) and in 1969 he wrote *Science Fiction in the Cinema*, which traced the history and development of the SF film. He moved to Britain in 1970 and has since written what seems to be an incredibly large number of books dealing with various aspects of the cinema. He has recently announced a desire to return to SF writing but I have a strong

suspicion that fans will have a long wait before that occurs.

Another name that was very common in Ted Carnell's publications in the early 1960s, along with Brian Aldiss, JG Ballard and John Brunner, was Lee Harding. Harding was one of the original members of the Melbourne SF Club and sold his first story to Carnell in 1960. He continued to appear in both *New Worlds* and *Science Fantasy* for the next couple of years but his writing output slackened after that due to such distractions as marriage and children, which meant that he had to devote more time to his other, and more profitable, profession – photo-journalism. He made a determined comeback in 1970 when the magazine *Vision of Tomorrow* began. He wrote full-time for a year and sold everything he wrote: not only to *Vision of Tomorrow* but also to US magazines such as *IF* (his story was given the cover illustration on the April 1971 issue of *IF*). Also in 1970 he wrote and sold to Berkley Books in the US his first novel, *A World of Shadows*. But though they had paid for it in full Berkley postponed publication indefinitely when the recession began to make its presence felt. At long last a British edition of the novel will be published by Robert Hale later this year.

“1970 was a great year for me”, said Harding, “but there were a few bad ones afterwards. *Vision of Tomorrow* folded, and then Ted Carnell died. Ted had been a friend, an editor and an agent for me for more than a dozen years: his passing was a dreadful blow. Even now, several years after the event, I find it hard to believe that this marvellous man, who virtually created the UK SF market, alone and single-handed, was allowed to leave the SF world, which prides itself so much on brotherhood, unsung and forgotten.”

Since then Harding has had a great deal of success in Australia and in the UK with a series of children's SF written in Remedial English for slow readers. He also plans to write a straight juvenile SF novel which he hopes will come as close as need be to the high standards of Heinlein and Le Guin. He has also recently edited the first ever hardcover SF anthology to be published in Australia – *Beyond Tomorrow: An Anthology of Modern Science Fiction*, which contains stories from Australian, British and American writers, some of which will be appearing in collected form for the first time.

A well-known SF writer who has now become associated with Australia, though he was born in England, is A. Bertram Chandler. He was born in the Army hospital at Aldershot in 1912 but, although his father was a British

regular soldier, young Chandler opted for a life at sea. He claims that he was the first seaman in the family since an ancestor, Roger Chandler, was hanged from his own yard-arm for piracy. After leaving school, Chandler went to sea as an apprentice for the Sun Shipping Company in 1928. In 1932 he returned to England to attend the King Edward VII Nautical School in London and later rejoined the Sun Company as a third officer, becoming a first mate during his first tour of duty. In 1936 he joined the Shaw Savill shipping line and while on their ships came to know Australia and New Zealand well. In 1955 a domestic upheaval led him to resign from Shaw Savill and emigrate to Australia where he became third mate on a small coaster that travelled between Australia and New Zealand. He rose rapidly to chief officer and then later became a ship's master.

Chandler's interest in SF began at the age of twelve when he discovered a copy of *The Time Machine* in his school library. Later came Hugo Gernsback's magazine *Science and Invention* and from there he graduated to *Amazing Stories*.

"My boyhood heroes were seamen and spacemen," said Chandler. "I was born in the wrong time and place to become one of the latter, but I can, at least, write about them. At which juncture someone is bound to remark that my space stories are really sea stories, and so they are. It was Heinlein who said, quite some time ago, that only people who know ships can write convincingly about spaceships. This is true, I think."

It was during the war, while on a convoy run across the Atlantic, that Chandler visited New York for the first time and, as a long-time fan of *Astounding*, decided to pay the editor, John Campbell Jr, a visit. It was Campbell himself who suggested that Chandler try his hand at writing and so the next time he was in New York he handed Campbell a 4,000-word story called *This Means War!*. To his surprise, Campbell didn't hand it back, and so Chandler's SF career was launched. During the remaining years of the war he wrote exclusively for *Astounding*, though his rejects appeared in less particular magazines under a pseudonym. As the years went by he became more and more prolific and his stories appeared in almost every SF magazine, but his promotion to chief officer meant that free time became scarce and his output dwindled accordingly. It was only after his move to Australia that he once again began contributing to the magazines, and when the SF magazine

boom came to an end in the mid-1950s he switched to writing SF novels. In issue 22 of John Bangsund's fanzine *Scythrop*, Chandler wrote:

“One result of the upheavals in my life was the creation of the Rim Worlds. The resemblance between the Rim Runners – the company owning and operating the Merchant Fleet of the Rim Worlds Confederacy – and my present employers is rather more than coincidental. Rim Runners' ships are officered by refugees from the major shipping lines of the Galaxy, just as the ships in which I now serve are officered by refugees from the major overseas shipping lines. Again, some of our trades are as close to rim-running as you could get on this planet. Years and years ago I was annoyed by the blurb for one of my short stories in the now defunct *Fantastic Universe*. It stated that I was a ‘chief officer in the Australian Merchant Marine’. At that time I was a chief officer, but in a British liner company. (Today I would say that I was ‘Mate of a Pommy Ship ...’) I used to consider myself as an English writer and I used to think that the late Neville Shute's love affair with Australia was embarrassing to read about. But now that I have seen Alice Springs I can appreciate *A Town Like Alice*, just as I have a deeper understanding of Cordwainer Smith's *Old North Australia* after having travelled through the Northern Territory and northern and central Queensland. My own Rim Worlds series of novels and stories, of course, are more Australian than otherwise. I may not be Australian born, but I like to kid myself that I have become an Australian writer.”

One name in the Australian SF Hall of Fame that not even many Australian fans have heard of is that of Erle Cox. He was probably Australia's first SF writer and was born in Victoria in 1873, the son of an Irish immigrant. He produced a sizeable number of short stories before the First World War, some of which were SF, such as *The Social Code*, which was about a love affair between an Australian astronomer and a Martian woman. But Cox's chief claim to fame lies in a novel he wrote called *Out of the Silence*. Set in Australia, it was about the discovery of a gigantic buried sphere containing the accumulated knowledge of a past civilisation, as well as a beautiful woman in a state of suspended animation. The hero, Alan Dundas, succeeds in penetrating the sphere and awakening the woman who turns out to be a

super-being with vast powers. Cox began writing *Out of the Silence* in 1913 but it wasn't published until 1919 when it appeared as a weekly serial in a newspaper called *The Argus*. A book version finally appeared in 1925 in both Australia and Britain and three years later it was published in the USA. It was moderately successful in all three countries but didn't achieve any kind of lasting fame. It was really more of an exotic romance than science fiction and was obviously inspired by the work of writers like H Rider Haggard and Edgar Rice Burroughs. Cox spent most of his career as a book and film reviewer for various newspapers, but he did write a further two novels after *Out of the Silence*. His second, *Fool's Harvest*, published in 1939, was a prophetic book about the fall of Singapore and the invasion of Australia by an enemy from the north. His third novel, *The Missing Angel*, published in 1947, was along the lines of the work of Thorne Smith with a farcical plot about a Melbourne businessman who sold his soul to the devil in return for some fun and excitement in his life. Cox died in 1950 and, unfortunately, all his books are now out of print.

Another SF writer associated with Australia is Jack Wodhams, though, like A. Bertram Chandler, he was born in England (in London, 1931). He later migrated to Australia and after a variety of jobs decided to try and break into writing. Living frugally in a remote part of Queensland, he experimented with all the various writing markets but it wasn't until he attempted SF that he had his first real success. As a result he became a regular contributor to *Analog* and, later, other magazines. Though he had no previous interest in SF, his success in the field led him to become involved with SF fandom in Australia and he has subsequently attended several conventions (he was Guest of Honour at two of them), and has appeared frequently in the letter columns of both Australian and American fanzines.

Someone else with a foot in both the professional and fannish Australian SF camps is Ron Graham, whose interest in SF goes all the way back to the 1930s when he had a letter published in an issue of *Amazing*. But SF remained just a hobby with him until 1969 when, as a successful design engineer and owner of the Graham group of companies, he decided to publish a professional SF magazine. (Australia has never had its own original SF magazine. During the boom of the 1950s a couple of SF magazines were published in Australia but they contained only reprints from overseas.)

Graham's magazine, called *Vision of Tomorrow*, was published in Britain and edited by Phil Harbottle. It featured the work of both Australian

and British writers and, though it was rather crude to begin with, it was developing into an interesting magazine when distribution problems forced it to fold after issue number 12. Ron Graham is still deeply involved in SF; he has one of the world's largest collections of SF magazines and books in his Sydney home, is a familiar sight at World SF Conventions and has provided financial backing for a number of SF projects within Australia, including the Space Age Bookshop, the hub of SF activity in Melbourne.

Apart from those mentioned above, there are a number of other people who have dabbled in professional SF, and the names of several will probably be familiar to British readers – such as Damien Broderick, David Rome, Robert Bowden, David Grigg, Ron Smith (an ex-American fan), and a newcomer, a lady, called Cherry Wilder who has had, so far, two stories published in Ken Bulmer's *New Writings in SF*.

Organised SF fandom in Australia goes back a long way – almost as far, in fact, as it does in the USA. The first known gathering of fans in Australia took place in Sydney in 1935 and consisted of three young members of Hugo Gernsback's international Science Fiction League. They formed a Sydney chapter of the League but it only lasted until the end of 1936. The following year four Sydney high school students discovered that they had a common interest in SF and began publishing a small hand-written fanzine called *Spacehounds* which ran for ten weekly issues. One of these students, William Veney, was later instrumental, in 1939, in contacting SF fans all over Australia, including J.K. Moxon in Queensland, Donald Tuck (who was later to become well known for his SF bibliographies) in Tasmania, Marshall McLennan in Victoria and John Devern in South Australia. It was Devern who produced Australia's first printed fanzine, the *Science Fiction Review*, but only eighteen copies were printed and there was no second issue. Devern was obliged to give up his interest in SF shortly afterwards in exchange for the army and was never heard of again in SF circles.

At the first formal meeting of the Junior Australian SF Correspondence Club, organised by Veney and other Sydney fans in 1939, it was decided to produce a fan magazine to be called *Australian Fan News*. As with *Science Fiction Review*, only one issue ever appeared, but at least its print run was somewhat higher – two hundred copies. That year another SF club was formed in Sydney, the Junior Science Club, which consisted of a group of young students headed by Vol Molesworth. For a brief period the two clubs were rivals, bitterly competing over new members, but both clubs closed in

late 1939. Veney, meanwhile, had been corresponding with prominent American fans such as Fred Pohl and Donald Wollheim. Wollheim was then head of the Futurian Society of New York (“Futurian” was defined as being someone interested in the future) and when Veney mentioned his plans for a new club Wollheim suggested he call it the Sydney Futurian Society, which he did. But Sydney’s Futurian Society, when it was formed, consisted of members from both the former rival clubs with the result that the two factions spent a lot of time arguing with each other. Of course, at first, the Society was just a group of schoolboys and it’s understandable that there should have been some petty squabbling, but the feuding continued right up until the Society came to an end in the 1960s.

SF fandom may have originated in Sydney but it was in Melbourne that Australian fans proved to be most productive, and it’s appropriate that Australia’s first World Convention should be held in that city. One of the earliest Melbourne SF fans was Marshall McLennan who became interested in SF in 1928 after buying a copy of *Amazing Stories*. It was a letter that McLennan wrote to *Astounding* in 1935 that led him into contact with fans in America and Britain. He began corresponding with such SF luminaries as Harry Warner Jnr and Sam Moskowitz in the USA and with Walter Gillings in Britain. McLennan also came into contact with other Melbourne fans, as well as Tasmanian Don Tuck, and irregular meetings were held in various people’s homes, before and during the war years.

After the war Melbourne fandom continued in its relaxed and informal way, despite the efforts of Sydney fan William Veney to organise the Melbourne group into a body with iron-clad rules, office-bearers and so on (Sydney fans have always been obsessed with such trivia, for some reason). However, in the early 1950s the Melbourne SF Group was officially formed, due mainly to the persistence of Veney. It held its first meeting on 14 August 1952 in a place called Val’s Coffee Lounge. Only five members attended that night but by the following November thirty people were regularly turning up. The membership in those days included McLennan, Race Mathews, Bob McCubbin, Dick Jensen, Lee Harding and Mervyn Binns. The latter was instrumental in causing the membership increase; he began the practice of inserting advertising material about the MSFG into the SF magazines and books at the bookshop, McGills, where he then worked.

Shortly after its formation the MSFG rented a room in which to hold its meeting and to store its ever-growing collection of SF. It has remained in

existence ever since then (though along the way it became the Melbourne SF Club), moving at first from rented room to rented room before, in 1963, it settled in a loft behind McGill's bookshop at 19 Somerset Place, which was large enough to seat up to a hundred people, which it often did when the MSFC Film Society (created by Mervyn Barrett and now run by Paul Stevens) showed films there. It was this latter activity that caused the City Health Department to step in 1970 and ask the club to move elsewhere, which it was obliged to do. For a time it was back to rented rooms but now the MSFC resides above the Space Age Bookshop, run by the ever reliable Mervyn Binns who finally left McGill's in 1971 to go into business for himself.

A very influential member of the club has been John Foyster who became involved with it in the late 1950s.

"I was caught up in SF in a moment of weakness", said Foyster recently. "I was flat on my back in a hospital in 1956, and facing two months or more of the same, and I was willing to read anything. One of the first things that happened along was a handful of SF magazines, and by the time I got out of hospital I had read quite a bit of SF. After that I haunted secondhand bookshops and gradually built up a modest collection, and I started to buy *Etherline* (the MSFC's official magazine) at McGill's which I used to read with enthusiasm but I didn't really want to get mixed up with that crazy Buck Rogers crowd. However, in 1958, when a convention was held at the Richmond Town Hall I decided to go and take a look. So I went there and watched these freaky old guys swapping dirty old SF pulp magazines and it was enough to turn me off fandom for quite some time. But in 1959 I began to occasionally attend MSFC meetings and at the end of that year I was subscribing to some of the better US fanzines, which were a long way from *Etherline* in quality. In 1960 I came into contact with John Baxter and started writing for his fanzine, and the following year published my own first fanzine, *Emanation*."

In 1966 Foyster was responsible for a renaissance within Australian fandom when he organised the first Melbourne convention since 1958. It took place in the MSFC clubrooms and generated such a great deal of enthusiasm that, towards the end, a suggestion was made to keep the spirit of the occasion

alive by starting a magazine. The result was *The Australian Science Fiction Review*, which became the most popular Australian fanzine overseas and was nominated for a Hugo in 1967 and 1968. It contained criticism and writing of the highest standard and attracted the support of such noted writers as Brian Aldiss and James Blish. During its run it also served to act as a focus for SF fans throughout Australia and was partly responsible for the formation of a new group in Sydney (unconnected with the Futurians) called The Sydney SF Foundation.

The person who made the suggestion to start the magazine, and who subsequently became its editor, was a cultivated young man by the name of John Bangsund. He has since become one of Australia's best-known SF personalities and his writing is rated among the best ever to appear in fanzines (to date, unfortunately, he hasn't shown much inclination to extend his writing talents outside of fandom).

"After leaving school", he said, "I enjoyed myself immensely for a decade or so wallowing in the world's best books, and if anyone ever mentioned the words "science fiction" in my presence I would just look pityingly at him, as an Olympic champion might look at someone talking about the fun to be had playing dominoes. But at the ripe old age of twenty-five I met an amiable sort of bloke who was as interested in good books and classical music as I was, and we talked for hours about these things. I knew right from the start that he not only read SF but also wrote the stuff, but everyone has some harmless eccentricity you have to forgive if you are to get on with people, and he was tactful enough not to talk too much about it. Tactful? The man was diabolically cunning! Before I had known him six months he had turned me into an addict! The funny thing is that I was on my guard all the time, but he broke through it; he handed me a story by Arthur C. Clarke called *The Star*, and asked me to read it so we could talk about the theology in it. That's how it all started. So I want it clearly understood: anything I have done in the science fiction line is all Lee Harding's fault."

Though the convention in August will be Australia's first World Con, ordinary conventions have been held in various cities since the early 1950s. One of the first, though it was more of a conference than a convention, was held by the Sydney Futurians in December, 1940. Ten people attended. The following year they held another and this time twelve people attended but, as usual with the Futurians, the only thing that took place was a great deal of arguing. It wasn't until the 1950s that proper SF conventions were held in

Sydney. Organised by Lyell Crane in 1952 the first one had approximately sixty members. It was relatively successful and Crane organised the second Sydney convention the following year which had eighty-five attendees, five of whom were from out-of-state. The convention became a regular event in Sydney each year until 1956 when it was held for the first time in Melbourne. It coincided with the Olympic Games that were being held in Melbourne that year and it was called, appropriately enough, the Olympicon. It was quite a large affair for Australia at that time, the paid-up membership was one hundred and fifty, and was very successful. It even attracted some attention from the newspapers, though it was more than slightly over-shadowed by the Olympic Games. The next Australian convention, which was of a similar size, was also held in Melbourne two years later. But for some reason, Australian fannish activity went into the doldrums after that and it wasn't until eight years later that another con was held – the previously mentioned one in 1966 organised by John Foyster. Since then conventions have been held much more frequently, sometimes as many as two or three in the same year in different states. In 1970 Sydney had its first con after a gap of fifteen years. Called the Syncon, it was held in a Girl Guide's hall in Epping but it was a great success and attracted several interstate visitors. Since then there have been cons in Queensland and South Australia too.

It was at Syncon '70, and later at the Melbourne Con held in Easter that year, that the proposal to host the 1975 World Convention was first considered, then seriously put forward. The ring-leader, as ever, was John Foyster, aided and abetted by John Bangsund and Leigh Edmonds. Since then the Melbourne group, with the support of fans all over the country, have put a tremendous amount of work into the planning and organising of the Con. This effort became even more intensive after the Australian bid for the Con was confirmed at the World Con held in Toronto in 1973. Apart from Foyster, a lot of the work has come from Robin Johnson (formerly of England), David Grigg and Leigh Edmonds.

The AussieCon, to be held in Melbourne's luxurious Southern Cross Hotel, will be the culmination of the efforts of not only the Con committee but also of all those Australian fans who, over the years, have tried to promote SF and SF fandom. Let us hope that the Con won't serve as a termination point to those efforts but will, instead, promote within Australia an even greater interest in SF and its attendant pleasures.

Dark Star

(An SF Film Review)

Dark Star is a unique science fiction film for several reasons. First of all, its visual quality and special effects almost rival those of *2001 : A Space Odyssey*. Secondly, it's a very funny science fiction film which makes it something of a rarity, and thirdly, and most interesting of all – it's an amateur film made by a group of students at the University of Southern California. Now the term “amateur” when applied to film-making usually conjures up images of films with fuzzy photography, bad acting, makeshift sets and immature script-writing but, happily, none of these faults are to be found in *Dark Star*. On the contrary, it is probably one of the best science fiction films to be made during the last decade.

Dark Star is full of cinematic science fiction devices, cinematic as well as literary, such as talking computers, alien creatures, meteor swarms, suspended animation, hyper-drives, etc, but the film succeeds in turning all these familiar things upside-down and treats them in a fresh and very amusing fashion. It is no exaggeration to describe it as a more effective science fiction spoof than Woody Allen's film *Sleeper*, which won a Hugo as this year's best science fiction dramatic presentation ... and that's saying something.

Dark Star is the name of the spaceship in which four men are roaming about the universe on a long and boring mission. Their job is to find “unstable” worlds, that might one day collide with a star and thus cause a super-nova, and destroy them with “thermostellar” bombs. They've been doing this for a very long time and the rot has begun to set in. Things are breaking down ... the talking computer, which has a voice similar to that of the late Marilyn Monroe, is having trouble controlling the ship's vital life support systems. To add to its problems the bombs used to destroy the worlds are also intelligent and have voices of their own – and one of them keeps threatening to explode ahead of schedule, which means the computer must keep persuading it not to. The crew's sleeping quarters have been destroyed by a meteor so the men are forced to sleep together in an empty cabin which resembles a hippy hide-out – dirty mattresses on the floor and slogans

scrawled in paint all over the walls.

The men themselves are also beginning to break down. One of them spends all of his time in the observation dome staring at the stars, another, an ex-surfer, yearns for his surfboard and Malibu Beach. The other two are becoming increasingly paranoid. A fifth member of the crew, the former captain, has been killed when his control panel blew up. Though technically “dead” he has been frozen and stored in a cryogenic tank and the crew can still communicate with him, by means of electrodes implanted in his brain, when emergencies arise. Not surprisingly, he is not overly concerned with the problems of the living and would much rather talk about his favourite baseball team.

Also on board is the ship’s mascot, a rather nasty alien creature that resembles a large beach ball with claws. One of the crewmen, Pinback (played by Dan O’Bannon who not only gives a fine comic performance but who also designed and handled the special effects), spends a good part of the film trying to recapture this murderous “pet” after it gets loose in the ship. He finally shoots it with an anaesthetic dart-gun, only to have it explode and whizz about the cabin like a punctured balloon.

This symphony of comic disasters reaches a crescendo when everything in the ship goes wrong at once – leaving one of the talking bombs outside the ship and ready to explode. This time the bomb is determined to go off and ignores the computer, so one of the crewmen goes outside the ship in an attempt to argue it out of exploding by the use of phenomenology. This has both tragic and hilarious results.

Dark Star, which has been described as “an absurdist comedy, a sort of *Waiting for Godot* in outer space”, cost just over \$6,000 to make. For a film that often looks as lavish as some of Hollywood’s most expensive productions, that’s an incredibly small amount. It was the brainchild of John Carpenter who produced, directed and also wrote the screenplay. He started planning it in 1970 and shortly afterwards interested Dan O’Bannon, actor and film student, in the project. For the next three years they spent all their spare time working on the film, financing it out of their own pockets. They were influenced by *2001: A Space Odyssey* as far as the interior design of the spaceship and many of the exterior shots were concerned but, O’Bannon maintains that the talking bomb, one of the film’s most fascinating devices, was not based on HAL 9000 but on an old idea of his own.

The Other Cinema, who own the rights to *Dark Star* in this country, are

currently negotiating with a distributor and are hopeful that the film will have a release in England sometime in 1975. It is also likely that the film will be included in the National Film Theatre's Special Effects Season to be held in February and March this year. It is definitely a film that all science fiction fans should go out of their way to see. After *Dark Star* it will be hard to watch any other science fiction film with a straight face.

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.

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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."

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You're getting this because ...

- I hate your guts.
- Your guts are okay but your feet smell.
- You're just very unlucky.
- You're not Chris Priest.
- You wear low-cut dresses.
- You wear tight trousers.
- You wear both ... at the same time.
- You once helped Peter Roberts across the street.
- You're very boring.

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 as 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 run 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 whisky ... and not very good whisky 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 nonstop 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 Edgware Rd sounded like

Centrepoint 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 Russki 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. The 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

tuned 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.

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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.

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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"?

My Secret Revealed!!!

Most people who have met me have always noticed that there was something a little ... dare I say it ... "special" about me. In the way I walk, in the way I talk, this special quality manifests itself in many ways. Why, perfect strangers have come up to me in pubs and said: "Here, mate, did you know that you had a strange inner light shining out of your eyes?" And they are right. Even those who have come across me at conventions lying drunk in a gutter with Guinness oozing out of my nose have been aware of the majestic aura that surrounds me. What is my secret, you ask. What is the reason for my mastery over my surroundings ... for my magnetic appeal to other people. Well, the time has come for me to reveal all ... I AM A ROSICRUCIAN!

Yes folks, for many years now I have been a practising Rosicrucian, slowly developing my previously undreamed of powers and abilities. For example, I can now type at the incredible speed of 35 (yes, 35) words a minute, solve the *Evening Standard* chess problems within days, read *Time* magazine from cover to cover without falling asleep, walk several blocks without having to sit down and rest and read the numbers on buses that are even 20 feet away from me. I have become, in effect, a sort of superman. Whereas once I had a rather dull and lack-lustre personality (boring, was how someone once described me before my transformation ... yes, I know it's hard

to accept now) I am now dazzling, witty and downright cool in the company of groups of people numbering up to nine or ten. People even come up to me in the street and ask me questions (like, “Where the hell is Earl’s Court?” or “Know any good gay bars?”) ... and I owe it all to the Rosicrucians. The day that I came across their advertisement in *Forum* turned out to be the most important day of my life, bar none. And to think once I couldn’t even *spell* Rosicrustacean.

You may find this difficult to believe but a lot of people still don’t know much about this marvellous organisation so I have decided to fill in the readers of *Scabby Tales*, so to speak. The International Rosicrucian Order was founded ten million years ago by an Egyptian Pharaoh called Titmost the Third who had a number of visions after falling off a pyramid. “I see the light!” he kept crying, and this was many years before the invention of the electric light bulb (it makes you think, you’ve got to admit). So Titmouse gathered together many of the great sages of the day and told them of his visions. The sages included Aristotle, Plato, Galileo, Leonardo Da Vinci and many other famous Egyptians of that era. Armed with this sacred knowledge the sages travelled all over the world and set up special Rosicrucian schools that are still in existence today. This was how universities like Oxford and Cambridge came into being.

Of course, it wasn’t all plain sailing for the early Rosicrucians (especially round the Cape of Good Hope) and many had a great deal of difficulty in getting their message across to the simple inhabitants of the various countries they visited. One Rosicrucian missionary was held prisoner in a small English village for several years ... he was kept in a wooden cage and referred to by the villagers as “that loony”. But the Rosicrucians had a great deal of success during this period and one of their greatest achievements was the founding of Atlantis, a nation dedicated to the ideals of Rosicrucianism. Things were fine until, about 2,000 years ago, a rival organisation appeared on the scene. It was called Christianity, and it signalled the beginning of a dark age in the history of Rosicrucianism, which was ironical because the founder of the Christians, Jesus Christ, had originally been a Rosicrucian but had been thrown out of the organisation for being behind in his dues. Embittered by this rejection, he had started his own religion.

The Christians persecuted the Rosicrucians mercilessly ... burning down their schools and sacking their towns. Many Rosicrucians were thrown to the

dogs by the Christians (being rather poor at that time the Christians couldn't afford lions, though occasionally they did rent second-hand lions from the Romans but these weren't very effective as they lacked teeth. Of course, being sucked to death by a gummy lion was no fun either). Due to this persecution the Rosicrucians were forced to underground, where they remained for hundreds of years. Naturally, you won't have read about any of this in the Bible or any history books due to the evil conspiracy that has existed between Christians and historians to remove all mention of the Rosicrucians in any written record (it's similar to the conspiracy that keeps the truth about flying saucers from reaching the public).

It wasn't until 1909 that an American called Colonel Sanders brought Rosicrucianism back into the open. The Colonel had originally been a travelling showman before a fall off his horse showed him the light. After that he set up The New American Temple of Rosicrucianism and began attracting new disciples to the Order. Colonel Sanders remained the head of the American Temple until his retirement in 1939. He died in 1963 at his palace in Brazil. His good work was continued by his sons Jimmy and Fred who have helped to spread Rosicrucianism all over the world once again.

The Order, I must stress, is not a religious one nor just a philosophical cult – it is an Order dedicated to personal fulfillment and the establishment of a society on Earth that is free from the shackles of superstition, disease, ignorance, pain and vampires. Many famous men have been Rosicrucians, including Alexander the Great, Sir Francis Bacon, Julius Caesar, Adam and Eve, Buddha, Mohammed Ali, Bob Hope, Shakespeare, Marilyn Monroe, Pete Weston, D.W. Griffith, Napoleon, Benjamin Franklin, and me (two people who are definitely *not* Rosicrucians are Malcolm Edwards and Chris Priest).

You too can become one of us. Simply send me £100 in used notes and I will forward it on to Jimmy Sanders in Brazil. Then all you will have to do is sit back until you see the light.

The Land That Time Forgot

(A Lost World Film Review)

There's a theory going around that the worse the economic situation gets the more escapist our films become. Perhaps that explains all the "family entertainment" films that have been appearing and doing well at the box-office lately, such as *The Golden Voyage of Sinbad*, *Earthquake*, *Island at the Top of the World* and *Airport 75* (disaster films count as escapism because when times are bad people apparently enjoy watching other people who are having an even worse time). One thing they all have in common is spectacular visual effects, as well as hackneyed storylines and cardboard characters. Latest in the cycle is *The Land That Time Forgot*, a British production from Amicus, a company that has, up to now, specialised in making horror films.

Based very, very loosely on a novel by Edgar Rice Burroughs, it's about a group of people who discover Caprona, a long-forgotten land mass near the South Pole that is kept warm and habitable by volcanic activity. The group consists of one American, played by Doug McClure (which ensures that American audiences will be able to watch the picture without suffering from a crisis of identity), several British seamen and several German seamen, plus one token girl. It all takes place during the First World War and the means by which this diverse group reach the "lost world" is a German U-Boat. Much of the first quarter of the film is taken up by the two factions fighting for control of the vessel (the U-Boat had sunk the freighter on which the hero and his companions had been travelling but had then unwittingly surfaced to recharge its batteries near the survivors' life-boats) before they decide to forget their differences temporarily and work together. Once in Caprona they find themselves menaced by prehistoric monsters and cavemen, but also find a source of crude oil which they refine to fuel their submarine. The film ends with the inevitable volcanic eruption which destroys everything and everyone, except for the hero, of course, and the girl.

One reason why the picture should be of interest to science fiction fans is that Michael Moorcock and James Cawthorn wrote the screenplay. Just how much of their work remains in the finished picture it is hard to say but

one has a strong suspicion that there is very little. Apparently the whole volcano sequence wasn't in the original script and some of the dialogue is so laughable it's hard to imagine that Moorcock had anything to do with it. For example, the hero, in a lifeboat completely surrounded by fog, calls out for help to another lifeboat ... "Where are you?" yells one of the occupants of the second boat as he peers around at the dense fog. "Over here," replies the hero unhelpfully.

Considered purely as a special effects extravaganza, the film is more interesting. There are a lot of model shots, mainly of the submarine and other sea vessels, which, though impressive, aren't really convincing (it's possible to be impressed by special effects while finding them unconvincing at the same time). The problem, as with any model shot involving water, is that you can't miniaturise water, so that no matter how fast you speed up the camera (which slows down the action) when filming a model boat ploughing through a studio sea, the effect remains unreal.

The dinosaurs, which play an important part in the picture, are also unconvincing. Ray Harryhausen's stop-motion animation techniques would have been ideal for this sort of story, but Harryhausen's methods are expensive as well as time-consuming so the producers chose an alternative system. This consists of small mechanically operated models (puppets really) which are combined with shots of the live actors by means of front and rear projection screens – under the supervision of Charles Staffel. The dinosaurs, built and operated by Roger Dicken, are impressive in close-up shots but their movements in long shot, especially when they are seen walking, are very unconvincing. Use is also made of full-scale models – such as in the scene where a pterodactyl swoops down and picks up a man in its beak. That's not very convincing either – it's very stiff and you can see the supporting wires – but it's not every day you see a full-scale model of a pterodactyl in action, so one shouldn't really quibble. A full-scale section of a dinosaur's head and neck is used earlier in the picture when McClure and a seaman are attacked by one of the creatures as it looms up over the side of the sub's conning tower. It's a very well-edited and rather exciting sequence but is spoilt at the end when the head and neck, after being riddled with machine-gun bullets, flop at McClure's feet like a bundle of laundry dropped from a great height (the wobbling rubber teeth don't help either).

One of the best moments in the film comes just as the sub is surfacing in the lost world. McClure, looking through the periscope, is surprised by

something that suddenly appears from the side and snaps at the periscope. It all happens so fast that the creature isn't seen clearly and one is just left with the impression of something with a long neck and lots of teeth – a simple shock device but an effective one.

The actors, though never required to do more in this type of picture than register amazement at things they aren't really seeing (which can't be easy), are adequate enough. Doug McClure, of Virginian fame, makes a passable hero and John McEney is quite good as the captain of the U-Boat, though Anthony Ainley, who plays his second-in-command, rather overdoes the "strutting Hun" routine. Susan Penhaligon, as the girl, spends most of her time spouting a lot of nonsensical biological theories. Her relationship with McClure is a strangely muted one, there are no romantic scenes as such, yet at the end of the picture she marries him ... apparently for no reason other than that he is the only man left alive. At least in the sequence where she is being hotly pursued by a lustful caveman she doesn't trip and sprain her ankle – instead she runs straight into a bog, which is something new. But that's about the only surprise you'll receive in this picture.

The Invisible Man

(TV SF Review)

Forty-two years ago Universal Studios made a marvellous film of H G Wells' novel, *The Invisible Man*. It starred Claude Rains in the title role, was directed by the great James Whale and was not only a fast-moving, exciting film but also a very funny one, full of black humour and those eccentric touches that Whale, himself a rather eccentric person, loved to include in his work. Even when seen today it remains an admirable film, despite the occasional creaky line of dialogue, and of course the special effects also remain as impressive as ever thanks to the skill of Universal's effects chief of that period, the late John P. Fulton.

This year Universal, continuing their recent tradition of remaking their fantasy classics of the 1930s for television, have exhumed *The Invisible Man*. *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* are two others that have suffered this indignity; they were turned into four-hour specials for American TV but released in Britain, in shortened form, as feature films. *The Invisible Man*, however, has suffered an even worse fate; it's been made into an entire series (actually it's the second time that a TV series has been based on the character – some years ago there was an awful British version produced by Ralph Smart) and though I've only seen a few episodes to date that's more than enough to be able to say that any similarity between the series and the film is minimal. In fact the only thing the same, apart from the title, is that both Claude Rains and David McCallum, the star of the series, are rather short men of British origin. McCallum, unfortunately, lacks a distinctive voice – an important asset if you're playing an invisible character. It was thanks to Rains' velvety tones that his version of the character remained so memorable (and also launched him as a Hollywood star, despite no one seeing his face until the end of the film).

The story in the first episode of the series was mediocre in comparison to the Whale film, in that the Rains' character, called Griffin, was a scientist whose mind had been affected by the invisibility drug, turning him into a megalomaniac with dreams of world conquest. McCallum is also a scientist but he discovers the secret of invisibility as a spin-off while working on a

matter transmitter (that's similar to trying to find a cure for cancer and coming up with a faster-than-light drive instead). His mind isn't affected by the experience, at least not in any obvious way, and most of the drama in the first episode resulted from his trying to prevent his secret from falling into the hands of the military and a group of criminals. All rather basic formula stuff that you can see on almost any American TV series. The humour of the original was also missing, though there were one or two wary jokes about what effect being invisible was going to have on his sex life. The one touch I really liked was the sequence where he broke into a blind man's home and asked for assistance, but instead of being the kindly soul that blind men usually are in films of this type this one pulled out a gun and started blasting in the general direction of our hero.

Another major difference is that McCallum, unlike Rains, isn't invisible all the time. Instead, with the help of a plastic surgeon friend, he has devised a "life-like" mask and gloves which, when he's wearing clothes and a wig, make him seem all there. Obviously he can't open his mouth too wide, for people would see the back of his wig. The problem of his eyes was overcome with contact lenses – overlooking the basic problem that if a man was really invisible the light would pass right through his retinas, causing him to be completely blind.

Of course, the major attraction of the whole thing is the invisibility itself and the skill with which it is handled by the effects people. The major difference in the effects is that in the film they were created photographically, while in the TV series they are created electronically with the use of Video Image Transform techniques. In a recent issue of *The American Cinematographer* the head cameraman on the series wrote: "Filming the effects involved the use of two sets, each of which was shot with its own separate video camera. One was the actual set which was designed and constructed like any conventional set with very real furniture and props etc. Then there was the blue set, which was backed by a large monochromatic blue cyclorama and had duplicate furniture and props also painted in the same light monochromatic blue. When the system was properly balanced by the video engineers anything in the blue set that was blue remained invisible while anything that was not blue appeared as visible. The signal from the video camera viewing the blue set would insert anything that was not blue into the signal from the second video camera which was framed on the actual set. Thus an object, face or body that was not painted blue could be made to

appear realistically in the actual set, provided that positioning, aligning and panning of the separate cameras were matched and synchronised precisely. By using monochromatic blue make-up, blue body stockings etc, parts of a body wearing a sweater or trousers could be made to move around on the actual set. This composite picture was first recorded on video tape and transformed to film.” So now you know.

Actually, because I’m a traditionalist in most things, I prefer cinematic special effects to the rather more modernly developed video ones. No matter how well the latter are executed – and there have been some spectacular achievements in the field in recent years – they still somehow seem cheap compared to the conventional photographic methods; they seem to lack a certain artistry (I feel the same way about most aspects of the film versus videotape question). That probably just proves you can be pretentious about anything, even special effects, but I do believe that the effects in the film version of *The Invisible Man* were more impressive and more of an achievement, despite the primitive techniques, than those in the series. Obviously there’s a limit to what you can do in a TV series because of the lack of time and money and I do admit that some of the effects in the first episode were quite spectacular; particularly in the sequence where the surgeon painted McCallum’s invisible face with the rubber solution, and also the one where he inserted the contact lenses into McCallum’s eyes (it takes a brave man to allow someone to insert lenses into your eyes when he can’t even see your face), but many of the effects were just too carelessly handled. For instance, not enough care was taken with sequences that involved the collar or the cuffs of the invisible man’s sweater – naturally the camera on the blue set is only going to transmit those parts of the sweater that are visible, which means that even though McCallum’s blue-painted face, hands and neck will appear invisible in the finished composite they will still obscure parts of the sweater, such as the back of the collar. In other words, if he was really invisible you should, from certain angles, be able to see into the sweater but of course this is not possible. The same thing applied when, in one scene, he unzipped his trousers (purely in the interests of fighting crime) – you should have been able to see the back of his trousers but instead you saw through them. It would be extremely difficult to overcome this problem, it would probably involve the old and time-consuming technique of hand-painting each frame of film and that’s obviously out of the question as far as a TV series is concerned. Really, all they can do is to try and avoid using set-

ups which reveal this rather serious flaw in the system.

The possibilities of what one could do with the subject of invisibility are almost endless, but on the evidence so far the TV series isn't going to break any new ground. Instead it appears to be just another variation on the theme of cops, robbers and secret agents, and there's enough of that kind of thing on TV already.

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 bushyeyed. 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 specialises in American-Jewish food, such as salt beef, potato latkes, 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 buggered. 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 peeing 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. Peeing 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 peed. “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 peed 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 peeing 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 one upmanship 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 whisky,” I muttered as I toppled from my stool (sorry). Peter told me about a friend of his who had had a colostomy. 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,” I 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 anaesthetic, 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 have 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 sharkman 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 whiskys.

“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 marvellous 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 of you 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 her 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.

* 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". [KH]

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.

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 doorstop. 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 on 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 whisky. 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 mush of an inshiprashion 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.”

“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 ...



*John Brosnan with Dez Skinn, 1979
Photographer unknown: from John's own
photo collection*

Son Of Why Bother #3

Fame At Last!

Until last October the number of times I've been asked for my autograph were very few (in the region of one actually). I remember the first time very well – it was at the 1976 Eastercon at Manchester (not a pretty sight) when a pimply youth came up to me and asked me to sign a copy of John Baxter's SF in the Cinema. I was quite happy to oblige though I did feel a little guilty signing my name on one of Baxter's books. I yearned for the day when pimply youths would ask for my autograph for its own sake and wondered how long I was going to have to wait for that day to arrive. It didn't arrive until October 28th, 1978 – the day of Dez Skinn's Fantasy Film Convention which was held at the Bloomsbury Hotel in London.

The fans who gathered to see 24 hours of non-stop SF and fantasy films were a different breed to those who attend SF conventions. For one thing they're all autograph crazy. Now you never see SF fans at British cons running around with their autograph books open but the movie fans would pounce on any one who even vaguely looked like a celebrity, their erect little pens quivering with anticipation. The problem was that genuine celebrities were thin on the ground and so the autograph hunters had to grab whatever they could find – and this consisted of anyone who happened to be wearing a *blue* name badge. You see, according to the program booklet anyone wearing a blue badge was a VIP, but the reality was most of the people with the blue ones were simply members of the organising committee, relatives of the organisers, and freeloaders who had managed to get their hands on a blue badge because they wanted access to the free (yes, *free*) "Celebrity Bar". I, and several of my friends, happened to be in the latter category but wherever we went we were accosted by hordes of these little autograph hunters. It didn't matter who you were, just as long as you were wearing a blue badge and were capable of holding a pen (near the end of the event I wasn't). I heard Dez Skinn protest to one of them as he was signing his name: "But you've already got my name on this page!" "It doesn't matter," the kid replied, "Write it again."

One of the little loonies even followed me into the toilet. While I

wrestled with a noisy attack of alcoholic diarrhoea he called through the cubicle door: “You don’t know what this means to me. This is one of the most exciting days of my life.”

I told him it meant a lot to me too and would he please go away. At this point I realised that being a celebrity could have its drawbacks. Not that I’ll have to worry at this year’s Fantasy Film Con – because my friends and I consumed so much booze from the free Celebrity Bar the con overall failed to make a profit. So I’ve been informed that I will definitely not be getting a blue name badge this year. In fact I’ll be lucky if I’m even allowed in the door.

Life Seems To Be Just One Series Of Conventions Lately

Not that I’m complaining ... I love the excuse of not having to look at my typewriter for a whole weekend ... I love being able to have my first drink five minutes after finishing breakfast and not feel guilty ... I love the whole ambience of a British convention, it’s like returning every now and then to some endless party where most of the faces are familiar but yet there are always enough new faces to make it interesting. My idea of heaven would be a hotel in which an endless SF convention was taking place. One would wander through the corridors meeting friends and enemies, drop in on room parties join in the occasional poker hand, chat up beautiful women, and every now and then return to the central bar area where there is always a throng of people having a good time and where the drink never stop flowing. Hell, of course, would be wandering through a vast hotel where all the room parties are always on the floor above or below, the bars are always shut ... and every now and then you are forced into the main convention hall and made to sit through the Official Program consisting of speeches entitled “IS SCIENCE FICTION LITERATURE?”, “INTELLIGENT LIFE IN OUTER SPACE: FACT OR FANTASY”, “THE BEST OF *STAR TREK*” and so on ...

The other thing I like about conventions is that unlike being at an ordinary party you can opt out of the whole thing when you feel like it and retreat to the privacy of your room to wallow in luxury (depending on the hotel) and recharge your batteries. I love lying in the bath and watching fragments of whatever happens to be on TV at the time (providing you can manoeuvre the TV set into the right position). For some reason TV shows

always seem more interesting when you see them at conventions (possibly the amount of alcohol I tend to consume has something to do with this phenomenon). One of my most vivid memories from the recent Eastercon was turning on the TV and finding myself watching a psychiatrist interviewing a ventriloquist's dummy. The dummy was sitting on the lap of a large fat lady and she seemed very embarrassed by the whole thing. I watched for about five minutes and couldn't work out if it was a serious program on schizophrenia or a comedy show. On another occasion I retired to my room to nurse a fragile head and turned on the TV in time to see Burt Lancaster hurl himself out of an aeroplane and hit the ground while travelling at a speed of about 200 mph. After that I had to immediately go and have another drink.

As I type this thing yet another election broadcast is droning from the TV set. By the time you read this, in fact probably by the time I finish typing it, the election will be over and no doubt Mrs Thatcher will be in power. I don't want to sound sexist or anything (perish the thought) but that woman makes me ill. Just the sound of her voice is enough to turn my bowels inside out ... she reminds me of every woman school teacher I've ever had, especially Miss Coop who failed to teach me the fundamentals of algebra. She is the essence of everything I fear and detest in the female sex ... but apart from that I guess she's okay.

But I digress ... I was talking about conventions. The Eastercon this year was much better than last year's. I think the hotel and the locale had something to do with this. In 1978 the con was held in a small section of a huge monolith on a monstrosity on the edge of Heathrow airport but this one was in a relatively small hotel in Leeds. Leeds isn't exactly a rose among English towns (the view from my room looked like it had been painted by Heironymus Bosch) but at least it has more character than Birmingham which is where all the Novacons are held. Last November's Novacon was held in the Holiday Inn where the main bar is situated next to a swimming pool I saw most of that convention through constantly watering eyes – a condition caused by the strong chlorine fumes emanating from the pool. But at least the pool provided the usual exhibitionists the chance to strip off and make fools of themselves (there was no skinny-dipping I hasten to point out – this was a *British* convention). I was particularly impressed by the girl who kept swimming up and down the pool while smiling broadly at the people by the bar. I couldn't figure out how she did that without drowning. I suppose she

must watch a lot of old Esther Williams movies.

When you have as many enemies as I have conventions can be tense at times until I figure out who is very angry with me, merely annoyed, or who wants to throw me out of a window (I'm not exaggerating – a few years ago Robert Holdstock tried to throw me out of a hotel window during a room party. It was only three stories up and Rob was a little drunk ... no, that's not right, he was a big drunk, and still is). At this Eastercon Chris Priest amazed me by saying: "Hullo Brosnan, nice to see you. You don't believe me, do you?"

"No," I replied.

"Well, you're right not to!" he snapped and tried to take the top of my head off with his shoulder bag. Chris has never forgiven me for ringing him up during the Aussiecon in '75 and telling him that he had won a Hugo.

One person who definitely wasn't speaking to me at Eastercon was fellow Australian Peter Nichols. He's a little pissed off because some of my material that will be appearing in his *SF Encyclopedia* (due out any year now) has already appeared in my great book on sf movies *Future Tense*. On the Sunday night of the con however Peter got very drunk and tried to kiss me. I don't know if this was a good or a bad sign. Actually he was kissing a lot of people that night, male and female. He's a funny bloke (he told me once that he had his first sexual experience on that mountain thing that features in *Picnic At Hanging Rock* which might explain a lot ...)

Speaking of work I'm up to my armpits in it at the moment (pew). I'm supposed to be working on a 300,000 word history of humour in the cinema (don't laugh). So far I haven't got very far (1903 to be exact) and the publisher is starting to get anxious. I keep wasting my time trying to become rich & famous instead ... so far without success. I'm failing at two fronts simultaneously right now, television and the movies. About a year ago Roy Kettle and I wrote a TV comedy script about two writers who live adjacent to each other. One was arrogant and successful (we based him on Robert Holdstock) and the other was inept and a failure (a mixture of several people, including me). Our agent showed it around but it didn't generate much interest. One producer said he liked it but thought it was "too literary". So Roy and I went to work on another idea about a failed magician called Waldo who becomes lumbered with an eager but stupid apprentice. The same producer said that this script "lacked depth". You can't win.

Seeing as everyone is ripping off old 1950s SF movies (*Invasion of the*

Body-Snatchers, *Alien* etc) Roy and I decided to come up with an outline for a movie that would rip off practically every old SF movie ever made. It's called *Invasion of the Night Reaper* and is about this invisible thing from outer space that hides in a lake near a remote guest house and converts people into edible fungus (we're going to offer the novelisation rights to George Turner). Well AIP's English representative showed interest but when I went to see him he admitted that Head Office over in LA were really eager to do a rip-off of *National Lampoon's Animal House* and was there any way we could turn *Invasion* into a teenage farce? It's questions like this that make me realise I am never going to become rich and famous.

One person who is rapidly becoming rich if not famous is John Baxter, now a tax exile in Ireland. Money seems to fling itself into his fingers. I was with him a couple of months ago in an Irish bookshop when he picked up a first edition of Sylvia Plath's novel *The Belljar* for a mere 25p. The going price for one in America these days is 550 dollars ... John is working on his new novel at the moment. It's based on the life of Chaplin and already people are sniffing round the movie rights. One such is Alan Parker who made *Midnight Express*. Apparently his big ambition is to make a movie about Chaplin.

It is late on a Tuesday night as I type this stencil. All is quiet except for the teeth-twitching whine coming from Mrs Thatcher on the TV set – she's been talking a long time about a wide range of subjects but the gist of her rant is that everyone should vote for the Conservative Party and not the Labour Party. I should be a political journalist. I've been hitting the red wine rather heavily so this stencil may not seem as lucid as usual (lucid, a. Bright (poet); (entom., bot) with smooth shining surface; clear, pellucid, (usu. Fig. of reasoning, literary style, etc.); -*interval*, period of sanity between attacks of madness, or of quiet between disturbances.) Perhaps I picked the wrong word. Then again, perhaps not.

One convention I probably won't enjoy is the Brighton Worldcon. I'm helping Leroy Kettle with the organisation of the film program and already I get the impression that my con is going to be one long nerve-wracking grind. It's not only a case of making sure the film programs ran smoothly (there will be two – one in 16mm and one in 35mm) but also watching to make sure that the security guards are making sure that the various exhibits and stills aren't being stripped out of the Film Exhibition Hall by the dear little fans. We're also arranging an alternate film program with talks, panels etc. We've got

various celebrities coming along, hopefully including Nigel Kneale, Gary Kurtz, Val Guest, and Tom Baker (the biggest boozier this side of Alpha Centauri apparently) and hope to show such rarities as the TV version of *Quatermass & the Pit* as well as the new Quatermass film. At the moment everything is in a state of chaos – there are the usual problems with the distributors, the film hire companies etc – and it’s a toss up as to who will have a nervous breakdown first, me or Roy. If any of you out there do make it to Brighton keep a look-out for me ... if you don’t already know me by sight I’ll be the seedy looking character with a red nose carrying a glass of red wine/and/or/lager/vodka/Guinness. I’ll be slumped in a corner of the Exhibition Room watching people steal my still collection.

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.

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 Complian,” he retorted.

Lifemaker

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 nonfiction. 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 P.G. 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. Philip Larkin was a heavy smoker ...

Philip 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 *Slimmer*.

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 instalment 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 hippiest 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*

I'm told 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 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 version 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.



*John Brosnan at the Kettle home
Photo by Leroy Kettle*

Original Appearances

- [The Australian Science Fiction Scene](#) – published in *Science Fiction Monthly* V2 #7 (July 1975)
- [Big Scab #1](#) – published by John Brosnan (June 1974)
- [Big Scab #2](#) – published by John Brosnan (August 1974)
- [Big Scab #3](#) – published by John Brosnan (October 1974)
- [Confessions of a Job Hopper](#) – published by John Brosnan in *Why Bother?* #1 (December 1968) and #2 (February 1969)
- [Dark Star](#) review – published in *Science Fiction Monthly* V2 #1 (January 1975)
- [A Different Set of Jaws](#) – published by Peter Roberts in *Egg* #11 (May 1978)
- [The Double-Decker Dud Disaster](#) – “Bus & Banality” published by John Brosnan in *Why Bother?* #8 (February 1970), “How We Lost the Bus” & “Is This Afghanistan?” published by Noel Kerr in *The Somerset Gazette* #5 (January 1971)
- [The Good Old Days Went Thataway!!](#) – published by Peter Roberts in *Egg* #8 (August 1974)
- [Great Moments in Unpublished Science Fiction](#) – published by Ian Maule in *Nabu* #13 (March 1983)
- [Happiness Is a Warm Rejection Slip](#) – published by Peter Weston in *Speculation* #30 (March 1973)
- [The Invisible Man](#) review – published in *Science Fiction Monthly* V3 #2 (February 1976)
- [The Land That Time Forgot](#) review – published in *Science Fiction Monthly* V2 #4 (April 1975)
- [London Life & Loathing](#) – published by John Brosnan in *Son Of Why Bother* #1 (June 1978)
- [The London Movie Scene](#) – published by Bruce Gillespie in *SF Commentary* #18 (December 1970)
- [Mervyn Barrett Presents](#) – published by John Brosnan in *Why Bother Abroad* #3 (June 1972)
- [Most Memorable Moment at the Melbourne Convention](#) – published by John Brosnan in *Why Bother?* #4 (June 1969)

- [Mrs B's Wandering Boy](#) – published by Bruce Gillespie in *SF Commentary* #17 (November 1970) and #18 (December 1970)
- [Oh No, Not Another Bloody Con Trip Report](#) – published by John Brosnan in *Son Of Why Bother* #2 (December 1978)
- [On & Off the Abomnibus](#) – published by John Bangsund in *Scythrop* #22 (April 1971)
- [The Perils of Barley Wine: The Story of a Fan's Downfall](#) – published by Terry Hughes in *Mota* #5 (May 1972)
- [Ratfandom & Other Animals](#) – published by John Brosnan in *Why Bother Abroad* #2 (December 1971)
- [Rejection Slips Are a Many Splendoured Thing](#) – published by John Brosnan in *Why Bother?* #7 (December 1969)
- [Scab #1](#) – published by John Brosnan (1973)
- [Scab #2](#) – published by John Brosnan (September 1973)
- [Scab #3](#) – published by John Brosnan (October 1973)
- [Scab #4](#) – published by John Brosnan (1973)
- [Scab #5](#) – published by John Brosnan (February 1974)
- [Scabby Tales #1](#) – published by John Brosnan (November 1975)
- [Scabby Tales #2](#) – published by John Brosnan (April 1976)
- [The Scars of Dracula](#) review – published by Noel Kerr in *The Somerset Gazette* #6 (November 1971)
- [Son Of Why Bother #3](#) – published by John Brosnan (1979)
- [Son of Why Bother #4](#) – published by John Brosnan (1993)
- [The Things That Go Bump In The Night Are Working Overtime](#) – published by Peter Roberts in *Egg* #7 (March 1973)
- [The Wedding](#) – published by Ron Clarke in *Wombat* #1 (May 1971)
- [Urethra! I've Got It!](#) – published by Terry Hughes in *Mota* #22 (July/August 1977)
- ["Yes Virginia, There Was a Goat In Boots."](#) – published by Dan Steffan in *Fugghead* #2 (April 2016)

Links and Thanks

More about John Brosnan online:

- *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*
http://www.sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/brosnan_john
- *Fancylopedia 3*
<http://fancylopedia.org/john-brosnan>
- Internet Speculative Fiction Database
<http://www.isfdb.org/cgi-bin/ea.cgi?1755>
- Internet Movie Database
<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0112488/>
- *You Only Live Once* (2007 PDF) at eFanzines.com
<http://efanzines.com/YOLO/>

Publisher's Note

Thanks to Kim Huett for all his work in compiling this John Brosnan tribute collection as *You Only Live Once* (2007 PDF) and for expanding that version into this ebook. Kim once again thanks John Brosnan for writing all this, Bill Burns for hosting the previous incarnation of this collection, and also Mervyn Barrett, Rich Coad, Leigh Edmonds, Bruce Gillespie, Rob Hansen, Robin Johnson, Leroy Kettle, Ian Maule and Mark Plummer for providing information and/or copies of material. Further thanks from David Langford of Ansible Editions to Rob Hansen and Leroy Kettle for advice and supply of photographs.

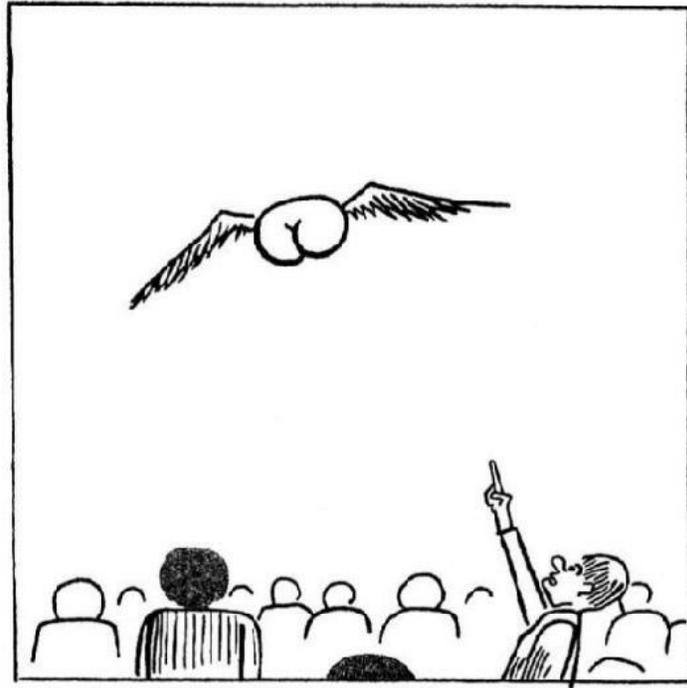
Cover photo by Leroy Kettle. Interior photos by Leroy Kettle, Mary Peek and unknown photographers as credited. Interior cartoons by John Brosnan.

David Langford, 2018

The End

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"LOOK, UP IN THE SKY. THE FLYING BUM!"

The Flying Bum
Cartoon by John Brosnan

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