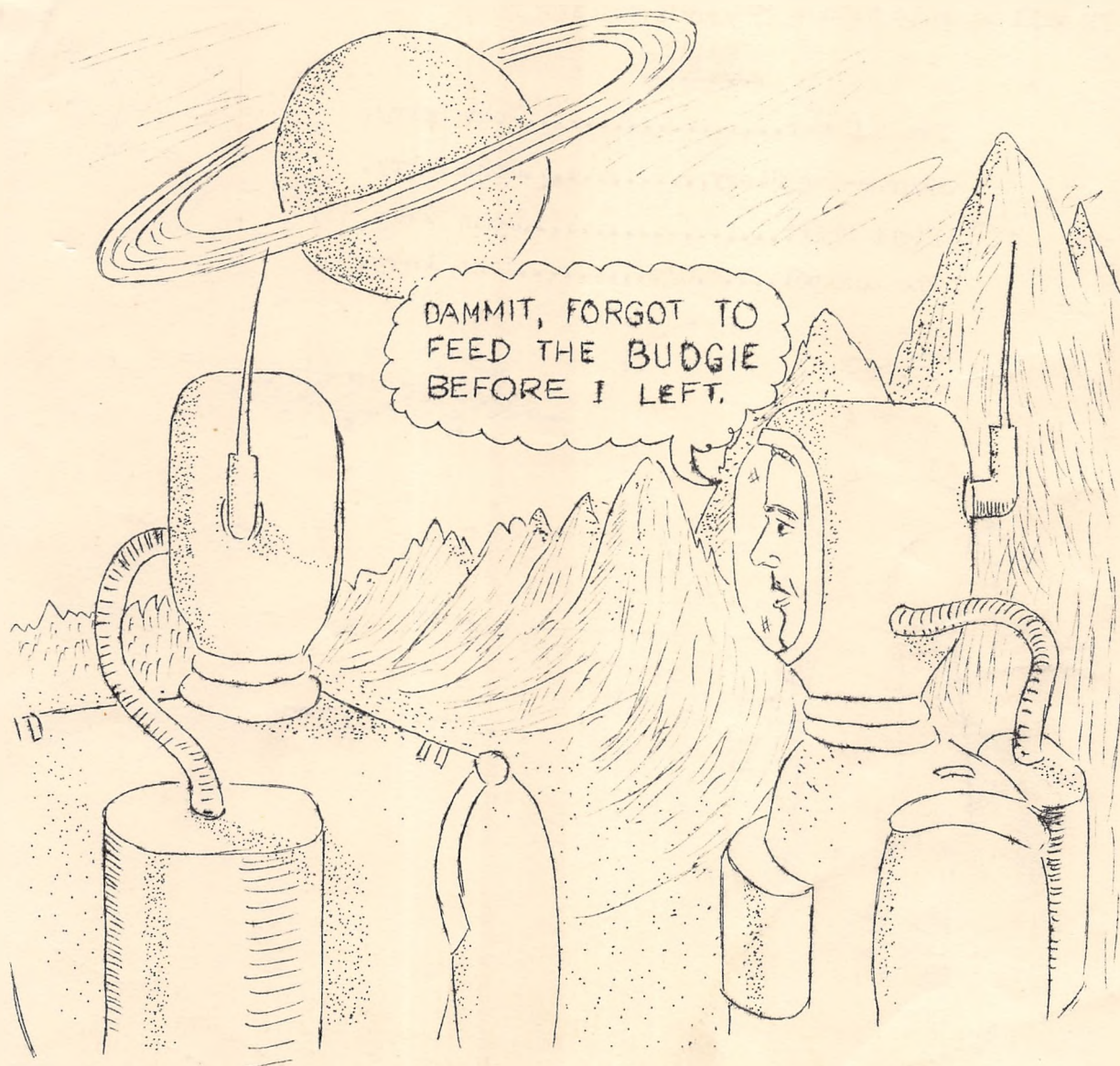


# POT·POURRI



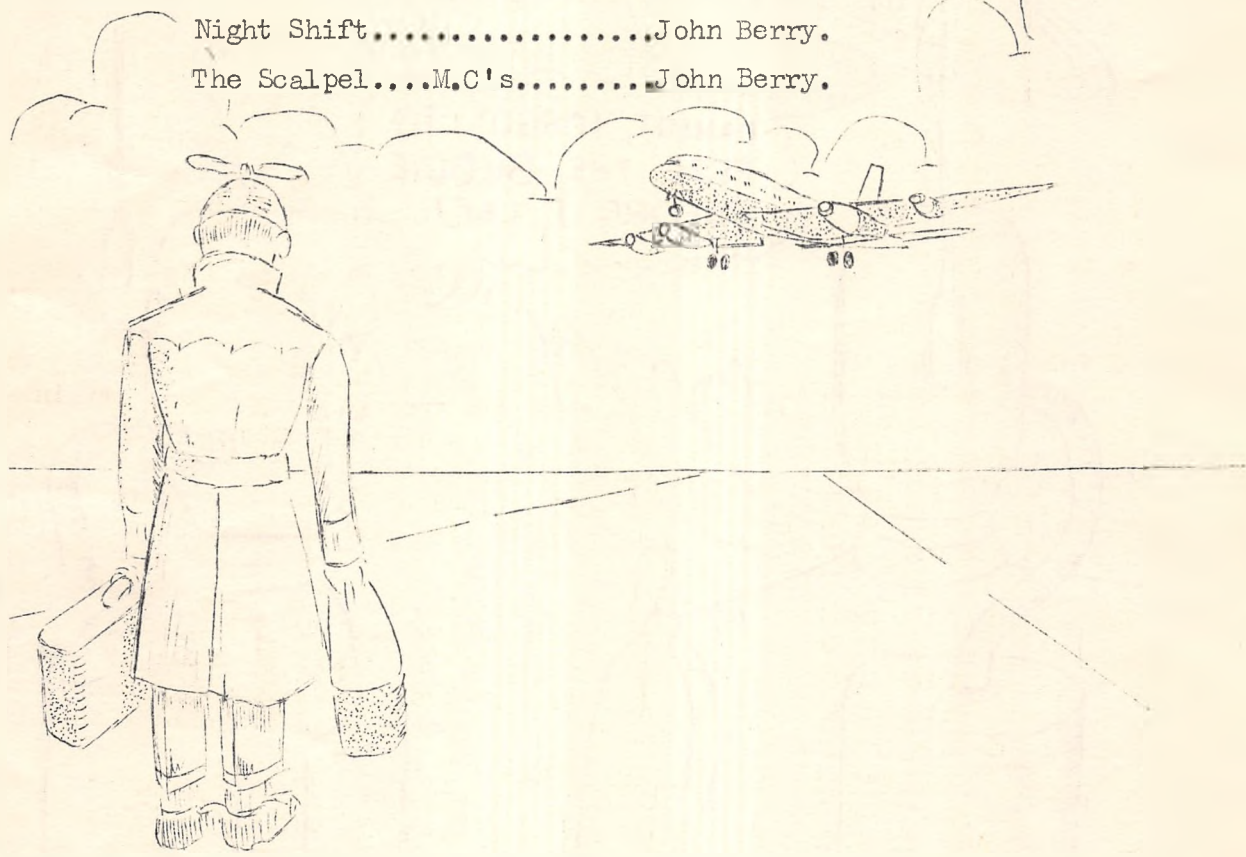
NO. EIGHT

BERRY.

This is POT POURRI No. 8, published for the SAPS outfit. I've been castigated by our noble and talented OE, and have pubbed a twenty page PP in an effort to appease him. PP 8 has been published eight weeks before the next SAPS deadline, but the BERRY FUND has given me the chance to go to America, and I hope that the rest of you SAPSites number amongst the people I shall meet. I've noticed over the past year that quite a lot of you have mentioned the Berry Fund, and I know for a fact that a lot of you have contributed to it. It is a bad policy to mention names, because of a surety I shall miss some one out, but I want to tell you all how much I regard this wonderful chance to see you all, and see America. Rest assured that the future pages of PP will sparkle with a new fire and lustre and exuberance.

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POT POURRI is printed and published by John Berry; 31, Campbell Park Ave, Belmont, Belfast, Northern Ireland during late August 1959. At the beginning I sent out lots of spare copies, but I've had to prune this buckshee list quite drastically. Besides the forty copies to SAPS, the following fans also get a copy..Steve Schultheis, Archie Mercer, Ron Bennett and H.P.Sanderson. My main task is to try and get them on the SAPS wl.....

# MOURNE-ING (BERRY<sup>A</sup> FACTUAL) GLORY

Everyone in the civilised world must have heard of the yearning Irish refrain which ends with the nostalgic words :-

'But for all that I've seen there,  
I might as well be  
Where the Mountains of Mourne  
Sweep down to the sea.'

It so happens that in June 1959, a group of friends - my family - my wifes sister and her husband and baby - and my wifes sister's friend and her husband and baby - spent two weeks at the beautiful seaside holiday resort of Newcastle, in County Down, where the Mournes actually do sweep down to the sea.

Naturally, some idiot broached the topic of a climb to the summit of the highest mountain in the Mournes, Slieve Donard, and although I tried to change the subject by dealing a quick Canasta hand, I found myself outvoted. The women said how nice it would be to get us out of the way for a day, and I pointed out to my wife that the tremendous physical strain the 2,800 foot climb would entail - to say nothing of getting back down again - would probably put paid permanently to the intimate side of our marital status, and my wife looked with glazed eyes, as only women can, and expressed her disappointment that I hadn't attempted mountaineering years ago !

The male members of the party...Colin, my son, aged almost nine years old, Leslie McConnell, my brother-in-law, and Donny Rutledge (wait for it ) my wifes sister's friend's husband, said that the holiday wouldn't be complete without the ascent, and McConnell demonstrated the weak mentality in his heritage by claiming without the slightest sign of remorse that he had actually climbed Slieve Donard before !

To me, this was incredible. I can understand and appreciate that the Irish Male is keen to demonstrate his virility, but to actually volunteer to climb a mountain already climbed smacks merely of vulgar ostentation.

Of course, I could have refused to join the expedition, but Colin had been weaned on stories of my fantastic physical strength, and in gory detail I'd often told him about parachute jumps and fifty-mile-a-day route marches and trocks through the Black Forest in Germany - and there is no doubt whatsoever that my paternal prestige would have sunk to rock bottom if I'd demonstrated my lack of keenness.

I could see that my fate was sealed, and so I joined the Slieve Donard Climbing Expedition, With berry group, and we began our careful planning.

I must digress for a moment and give a word picture of each of these

stalwarts.

Colin's claim to fame, in Bob Shaw's outlook, is Colin's unfortunate allergy to budgerigars and others of the feathered ilk, including pillows (stuffed with feathers, of course). Bob Shaw, whom some of you may have heard of, is a noted anti-budgerigar fiend, and he in fact graciously awarded Colin a sum of money when he heard that, because of the allergy which caused asthma, my budgie, Joey, famed far and wide for his prowess as a raconteur, had been stuffed and exhibited permanently in the Belfast Oral College.

Colin's high intellectual ability is demonstrated by his classical quip to my observation that, after an illness, he'd soon be back at school doing his lessons. He said - "The only lessons I want are convalescence."

Leslie McConnell, an Insurance Inspector, aged about twenty nine, is the open air type. He is also a Scout Master, and takes Boy Scouts on camping expeditions. He once wanted me to go, too, but I look pretty sordid in shorts, and anyway, I think it's mad lying hunched up in a wet tent with earwigs playing hide and seek in ones underpants, and eating burned potatoes.

Donny Rutledge is the strong silent type. Bespectacled, he quietly sat back for the first few days of our holiday, listening to me explaining my prowess at different sports..tennis, football, cricket, etc, and then as each sport came about, he displayed that he was much better than I. He also has that sadistic punning streak. I remember I told him one day that his baby son was eating sand, and that I thought it wouldn't do him any harm, and in fact, would make him grow up strong and healthy. "He'll certainly have plenty of grit," said Donny.

And so the quartet was made up. Colin, young and enthusiastic..Leslie a keen open air type...Donny strong and athletic, and me... slightly flabby, slightly tired, slightly frustrated, slightly apprehensive, and most definitely fed up with the whole blasted affair !

The morning of the expedition heralded a clear, sunny day. The summit of Slieve Donard was obscured by cloud, but local folks said that this was a good sign, and that by noon it would be cleared away.

McConnell and Rutledge, taking the whole thing seriously, wore hob-nailed boots, shorts and woollen jumpers. Colin, similarly clad, had a belt round his middle with a knife, a compass and a packet of humbugs dangling from it. I had on my grey flannel trousers, boots and shirt.

"Let's get started, men," said McConnell, and as the women gazed at us with pride and awe, we picked up our kit. McConnell heaved a rucksack on his back, Rutledge, with bulging muscles, gripped a kitbag full of food, and Colin had three waterproof coats bundled up and suspended round his neck.

Gripping my camera with both hands, I followed them to the car.

The women gave vent to their conclusion that one didn't climb a mountain in a car. McConnell explained that we had to go through the town on Newcastle first, and that, therefore, the car would serve admirably.

"And you never know," he added, taking a sidelong glance at me, "John might be tired by the time we drive to the bottom of the mountain, and it's essential he has somewhere to rest."

I secretly vowed there and then that, regardless of how I felt, I would always stride at the front and whistle and sing no matter what the physical strain. In fact, so keen did I become to display my physical power that I actually said in a loud voice, so that the women heard,

"I might even help you to carry something."

Would that I had not been so outspoken !

We drove through Newcastle, and parked the car at the edge of a forest. McConnell lined us up, examined us, and gave us a stiff upper lip talk.

"Alright, boys, this is it," he concluded, and hacked his way into the dense undergrowth.

Colin was O.K. He was so small that the swishing branches whipped over his head, but to us behind McConnell it was an occupational hazard to follow him. Gradually, as we ascended, our progress became slower, and for some considerable time, we followed a compass course, set by Colin.

Then, marvel of marvels, I heard McConnell in front shout, "O.K, chaps, we're there."

Honestly, I felt magnificent. A mite puffed, but nevertheless quietly thrilled at my strength. I stepped out of the undergrowth, looking downwards for the panorama, and all I saw was McConnell's boots. Aghast, I looked upwards, and way, way above I saw the summit of Slieve Donard.

"I thought you said we were there?" I complained bitterly to McConnell.

"Stupid," he chided, "I meant we had reached the end of the wooded zone. The climb starts now."

Without further conference, McConnell strode away up the bracken-covered slope, which was at an angle of about 45 degrees. Rutledge swung along behind him, taking ostentatious breathfuls of air, and remarking how healthy and exhilarating it was. Colin nipped from boulder to boulder like a mountain goat, and I struggled to keep up with them.

For over an hour we travelled parallel to the summit, McConnell telling us confidentially that he was making the rear ascent. My legs grew heavy and my breath came in shorts pants, and I was just about to plead for someone to carry my camera, when I heard McConnell order a halt.

I drooped where I was, closed my eyes, and let the soft breeze ruffle my moustache, when I felt rough hands grabbing my shoulder.

"We're not resting," grinned McConnell. "'It's your turn to carry the kitbag."

They propped me up, and I gripped the end of the kitbag and swung it in the air, and such was the brutality of the swing that I couldn't stop the momentum, and it's quite possible, but for the timely clutching hands of McConnell and Rutledge, that I would have whirled into the infinit like a helicopter.

The climb progressed, and every step I took forward I found I was getting two steps further away from them. This meant that they had periodic rests to wait for me, and as I staggered up, and prepared to drop, they leapt up again and I had no alternative but to stagger along, trying to maintain contact.

"Another twenty five minutes, and we have a snack," I heard McConnell shout from the horizon, and grinding my protesting muscles forward and ever onward, I eventually reached the snack site, to note with dismay that they had just finished their meal.

"But we'll give you ten minutes for a quickie," McConnell condescended.

The two adults spoke in glowing terms of Colin's ability, and how strong he was, and what a pleasure it was to have him with them, and they hoped that if we went on an expedition again, I would tell them from the beginning that I was 'a bit past it.'

I must digress again and explain that half a century ago, some half wit had the idea of building a wall, about seven feet high, and a yard thick at the base, to join the summits of all the mountains in the Mourne. I haven't the foggiest idea what purpose this serves, except that, as we lay there, it kept the wind from us. But even though I was exhausted, I couldn't resist

staggering to my feet and seeing what was beyond. I gripped the top of the wall, and pulled myself up, and quite a fantastic sight met my eyes.

I'll try and find words to do the scene justice.

On my side of the wall all was quiet. Looking downwards, one could see the pathway we'd climbed up the side of Slieve Donard, and in the distance, the coastline was visible, and even the different hues of the sea. But over the wall, all was different.

At eye level, and below, stretching for miles, I saw the peaks of mountains reaching upwards out of the mist. The sun illuminated one side of the peaks, the other side was purple. Nearer, wraiths of mist floated about, giving the scene an uncanny appearance, like something from 'The Damnation of Faust.' The whole panorama before me was nature in the raw. Nothing man-made was visible. I felt an intruder looking at the scene. For an instant, I sort of imagined that, like an alien, I had tumbled across a new world. I was as excited and enthralled as will be the first man to see the other side of the Moon. I felt, looking at the power and the majesty of it all, that Man, with all his great achievements, is really nothing when compared with the raw material from which he came.

The atmosphere of wonder was shattered the instant I saw a large piece of newspaper flutter away into the mist, and I looked round and saw Colin sitting beside me. His eyes opened when he saw the look on my face, but it was no use explaining to him of the poetry of my soul. I had had one of those rare moments of realization when things slide into their true perspective. I learned later that one of the disciples of Saint Patrick, many centuries ago, lived at the top of Slieve Donard, and wandered about the mountains to meditate, and I saw that he knew what he was doing. I can understand why the basic mysteries of life are appreciated more by the Holy Men in the Himalayas, than anyone else on Earth. For in the presence of Nature at its most wonderful, the creation of Mountains, one's whole mind is filled with the philosophy of things. That's how I felt anyway, but McConnell didn't. He shouted out that we would soon be at the summit, and for us to get moving.

The wall sheltered us from the wind, as I've explained, and we had the good fortune to have that protection until we reached the summit. The wall ran directly to the peak, and although the climb became steeper, and even Colin was slowed down to a walking pace, I didn't feel so tired as I had done previously.

Half an hour later, we were at the top. We had done it...climbed the highest mountain in Northern Ireland, and, for all I know, the whole of Ireland !

The wall turned sharp right, for its journey to the next peak, and at the junction was a stone tower, about fifteen feet high, which bore the fantastic legend :-

TRESPASSERS WILL BE PROSECUTED.

So help me, that's what it said.

The wind blew really strongly at the summit, and it was difficult to stand up. The whole panorama of south County Down lay before us, like a one inch map, and McConnell produced binoculars, and we spotted our house in Newcastle, miles away, and Rutledge swore he could see girls changing on the beach, but I think he was joking, because after two hours I handed the binoculars back to Rutledge and told him I didn't think much of his sense of humour !

The wind grew so strong that I had serious thoughts that Colin might soon be blown away, and suggested we descend. McConnell said it was a good

idea, and that we would ' go back down the quick way, via the face of the mountain.'

It may have been the quick way as far as geometry is concerned, but the steep face of the mountain was heavily covered with large, sharp-edged rocks, and , in some cases, miniature swamps, and it was necessary for us to take it in turn to grip Colin's hand, lest gravity assert itself too keenly.

The view of Newcastle Bay was magnificent. Several times we stopped and sat down and just let our eyes wander over the scenery. Then I began to discover that it was I who was in a hurry to continue, and the others who began to look a little laboured.

It took us under an hour to reach the forest, and another hour to negotiate that before we reached the car.

We sat back in the seats, and for my part, I felt really GOOD. I told the others that I quite felt ready to do the whole trip over again, and that with the slightest urging, and a reasonable wager, I would do it.

McConnell smiled and said "You'd better get moving, I think you left your camera at the summit."

My heart turned to stone, and they all grinned, and then McConnell showed me the camera."You dropped it half way down," he laughed.

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Back at the house, the women were suitably impressed with our story of the climb. We sat back in the sunshine, and gazed to the west, where the peak of Slieve Donard was just beginning to be covered with mist.

It just didn't seem true that we had successfully climbed it. Colin especially was thrilled with his performance, and he had good reason to be.

I left them talking, and I sat and watched the peak.

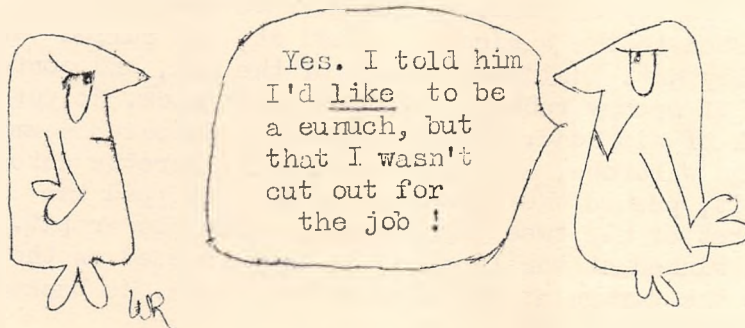
I thought about the afternoon, when I'd looked over the wall, and for a few moments felt that I was on a different plane.

I asked myself, was it just imagination, or, for an instant, did I become part of a deeper significance ?

By a strange coincidence, I watched a TV programme the other day, regarding the Sherpa's on the border of Tibet, and the closing shots of the film showed an old man climbing up a snow-covered peak. When he reached the top, he sat down, cross-legged, with an inscrutable smile on his face, and I forget the commentator's words, but they explained that such a locale was considered by the Sherpa's and other Holy Men to be the only place suitable for contemplation, and meditation. But, of course, it had to be in solitude.

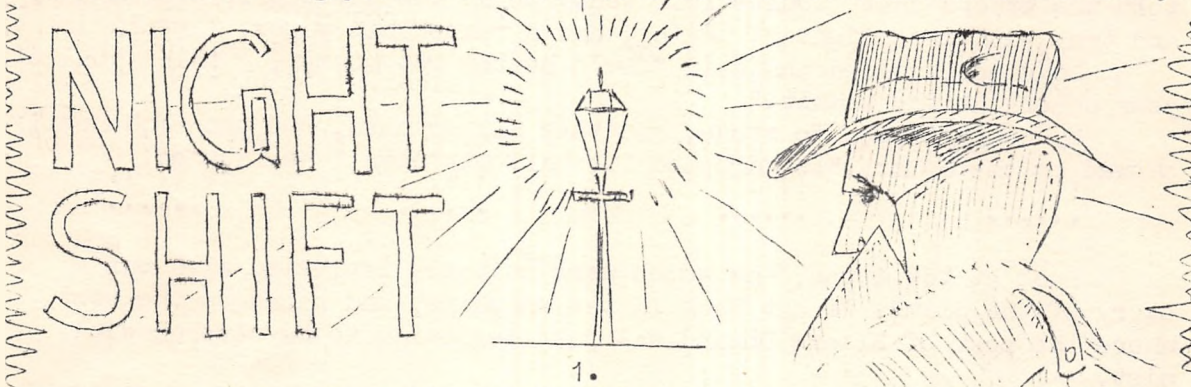
I wonder.....

John Berry  
1959.



Before I became an active writer for fanzines in 1954 and onwards, I always had a dormant urge to write smouldering within me. On one occasion, in about six weeks, I wrote a 40,000 word secret service novel, with my character Larry Mitchell as the rough, tough hero. ((This is the story I wrote about in Moomaw's (((R.I.P.)) ABBERRATION.....I re-read the mss after it had been hibernating for some years - I couldn't find the last page, and forgot who my spy was....and I couldn't find the brilliant clue that should have given him away ! ))

Siezed with awe at the utter magnificence of Larry Mitchell, I speedily wrote several more short stories about him, of which this is one. Bob Shaw read it way back in '54, and liked it. He suggested a few amendments ( mostly trying to cut out what he referred to as my 'Chandler Complex' ) and I've stencilled accordingly.....John Berry.



1.

Larry Mitchell, tall, broad, fair-haired, sprawled artistically on the easy chair in his room, reading the Sporting News. A cigarette drooped from the corner of his mouth, and blue smoke curled past his half closed eyes. He felt tense, excited, and a thrill of anticipation shot through him. Three weeks previously, as the result of a hot tip from one of his shadier contacts, he had put a tenner on an outsider named 'Back Scratcher' when it was 33 to 1. Now it was highly favoured.

He glanced at his watch, saw that there was ten minutes to go before the race commentary was due to be broadcast. He leaned back on the chair, and switched the wireless on.

The door opened, and Richardson, the Admin. man, peered round it.

"Sopwith wants you immediately, Larry," he grinned, " at the Greek Street place."

"Damn and blast him," swore Larry in disgust.

Richardson smiled sympathetically, and withdrew.

Mitchell switched the wireless off, flicked the cigarette butt into the empty fireplace. Just his rotten luck, he thought. He shrugged. To hell with Sopwith. He crossed to the wardrobe, opened it, and pulled out a rather battered green trilby hat. Inside the crown of the hat, and conforming to its shape, was a layer of spongy rubber, about an inch thick. He put the hat carelessly on the back of his head. Kneeling down, he unlocked a small drawer at the bottom of the wardrobe, and took out a small Beretta automatic pistol. He checked it, pushed the safety catch off, slipped the pistol into an inside pocket of his tweed sportscoat, under the armpit.

He left the room, winked at the landlady as they crossed on the stairs, and went round to the garage at the back of the house. He backed his red M.G. sports car on to the road.

2.

Twenty minutes later, he drew up outside number 17, Greek Street,



Hornsey, London. It was an inconspicuous, drab-looking building, in keeping with the rest of the houses and shops in the same row. An unpolished brass plate on the grimy, green painted front door read :-

MARKHAM AND SOPWITH  
SOLICITORS.

Mitchell pushed the door open, climbed the stairs and entered an office at the end of a narrow corridor. A young girl, wearing large spectacles, was typing industriously, and she smiled sweetly as she recognised Mitchell. He waved to her as he pushed open Sopwith's door.

Sopwith sat behind an untidy desk. He was a large man. His shirt sleeves were rolled up, and he was perspiring freely. The rays of the afternoon sun shining through the window seemed to reflect from his bald head. Through small eyes he surveyed his visitor. He belched loudly.

"Ah....Mitchell," he said, a slight sneer on his face.

Mitchell didn't answer, but sat down, crossed his legs, and lit a cigarette. He didn't hurry the movement. A large pulsing vein on Sopwith's head proved he was infuriated. Mitchell was pleased. He'd planned it that way. There was always a certain tension in the air when the two of them were together. It sprung from a mutual dislike when they first met a couple of years previously, and was further exaggerated by incidents which had happened since. Sopwith, who ran a peculiar organisation under cover of his solicitors office, would admit to no one, not even himself, that Mitchell was one of his best operatives.

"When you're quite settled down," said Sopwith sarcastically.

Mitchell waved a hand airily.

"Carry on," he said.

Sopwith closed his eyes for a moment, as if to stifle a rising surge of temper. He belched again, the action making his heavy eyelids shoot up and down like a Venetian Blind. He glared at Mitchell steadily, then shrugged.

"I see by your personal file that you were born near Birmingham, Mitchell," he said.

Mitchell nodded confirmation.

"Well," smiled Sopwith smugly, "I've got an easy job for you on your own home ground."

Mitchell edged forward slightly on his chair. This was unusual. Sopwith never gave him easy jobs. Just the reverse, in fact. He waited with interest for the other to continue.

"Do you know the Yardley Swimming Baths on the Warwick Road?" Sopwith asked, running a spatulate finger round the inside of his collar.

"I know the place well," grinned Mitchell, watching fascinated as a large globule of sweat trickled down Sopwith's face. Sopwith produced a red spotted handkerchief and mopped his brow. With a muttered curse, he levered himself to his feet, crossed to a window and opened it wide. Returning to his chair, he dropped his eighteen stone into it. The chair creaked pathetically. The welcome breath of fresh air made Sopwith sigh with relief.

"Listen carefully," he grunted. "I have just discovered that this swimming pool is being used as a sort of post box by a subversive group in the Midlands. I have been on the track of this organisation for a long time. Let me explain. Down both sides of the swimming pool are eight water outlets. Above, and just inside one of these outlets is a small recess, whether made purposely or by accident I just don't know. Small plastic packages containing microfilms or documents are placed there by one

agent, and collected by another. If you use your imagination, you can see how clever it is."

"I see what you mean," said Mitchell. "It would be simple to conceal a small package in a bathing costume - say in the waistband of a pair of trunks. The agent concerned need only dive in and place the package in the recess. No one would ever notice, the pool is always crowded. In the same way, it could be recovered."

"Exactly," purred Sopwith. He seemed pleased - too pleased. "Now this is where you come in. Information has reached me that micro-film copies of the drawings of the Vickers Armstrong Nuclear Submarine Engine are being left in this recess this evening, and are to be collected tomorrow morning, as soon as the place opens. I want you to go after dark tonight, and get me those films. Drive to and from Birmingham in your car via Banbury and Warwick. When you start your return journey, don't leave Birmingham until after nine am tomorrow morning. There is a room for you booked at the Royal. Bring the films here to me. O.K.?"

Mitchell took a drag of his cigarette, and looked at Sopwith squarely.

"It stinks," he said.

Sopwith gritted his teeth, clenched his fists. Then he suddenly relaxed, as if a happy thought had come to him. A smile flitted across his face.

"I know, Mitchell," he said softly, "that's why I'm sending you."

3

Mitchell lay on his bed in the Royal. The room was in darkness. He glanced at the luminous dial of his wrist watch, saw that it was almost eleven thirty. It was quite dark outside, had been for the last hour. He sighed deeply. There was something very strange about the swimming pool business, he thought. It seemed to him that the obvious thing for Sopwith to do was to keep the pool under observation, and nab the agent as he collected the films. But, on the other hand, if Sopwith wanted to play it the way he had said, why did he not use an operative from the Midland Branch he controlled. Again, why did Sopwith specify that he, Mitchell, should use his own car, a conspicuous red in colour? If the films were so important, why not take them to London immediately, instead of waiting for the morning? Finally, strangest of all, why did Sopwith specify his route, when it seemed to have nothing at all to do with the job?

Mitchell admitted to himself that Sopwith's schemes, though usually complex, never left anything to chance, but invariably ran smoothly to a carefully prepared schedule that catered for all eventualities.

But this was different, he thought. Mitchell knew he was one of Sopwith's top grade operatives, and would not normally be given such an easy task. It was the sort of assignment that would be thrown to a probationer from one of the "I" schools.

But he had his instructions.....

He left the hotel, collected his car from a nearby garage, and drove through the centre of the city to the Stratford Road, later turning off on to the Warwick Road. After driving for half a mile, he parked the car in a side street. There was no one around. He lit a cigarette, and pondered deeply. What the hell was Sopwith's game?

When the cigarette was finished, he flipped the butt through the air, saw it arch in the darkness and hit the road in a shower of sparks. Reaching behind the driving seat, he dragged out an old military-type raincoat, stepped out of the car and put the coat on. He pulled the brim of the trilby low over

his eyes, and pulled the raincoat collar up. Reaching the main road, he turned left and walked slowly, with hands thrust deep in pockets.

Mitchell walked past the swimming baths, looking at the building out of the corner of his eyes. The four front doors were solid looking, confirming that he would have to effect an entrance from the rear. Not necessarily because the doors would be difficult to open, but because of the possible attention of patrolling policemen...and he didn't like hurting policemen if he could help it !

He turned down a dimly lit side street next to the building. He kept to the wall. A large figure, sporting a cap and a muffler, stood in front of him. A gruff voice demanded :-

"Giv' us a light, mate."

"Surely," answered Mitchell politely, and lifted up the corner of his raincoat, as if to get at a trouser pocket. Then he moved with the swiftness of a coiled spring, and the man dropped to his knees. But he was strong. He struggled to rise. Mitchell brought the side of the palm of his hand down like a chopper at the side of the man's head. Even this wasn't enough. Mitchell was astonished as he saw the man shake his head, utter a frequently used obscenity, and try to get up.

Mitchell bared his teeth in the darkness, then delivered a sharp kick with his reinforced toecap behind the man's ear. He knelt down and dragged the inert form across the entry which he found separated two rows of back gardens.

Quickly, Mitchell went through the man's pockets. He found a bunch of keys, some loose change, and a .38 revolver. That settled it. For a brief moment, Mitchell had begun to think maybe the chap really did want a light. But Mitchell had no conscience. He had learned his lesson the hard way, and had a two inch scar on top of his head to prove it. His maxim was, if in doubt, hit first, make apologies afterwards...if necessary!

Grabbing the man's boots, Mitchell dragged him feet first through the first back gate that would open, and slumped him against an evil-smelling dustbin. He screwed up his nose, lifted the dustbin lid, and forced the .38 through a sticky mass of refuse, thankfully replacing the lid silently. He wiped his fingers on the man's jacket, slipped through the back gate into the entry. Keeping in the shadow, he reached the side of the swimming pool building, and edged round to the rear of it.

There was no door along the rear wall, but a drain pipe running down the side of the building seemed to be the answer. He shinned up like a monkey, and found himself on a small flat roof. Round three sides of the roof was a low brick wall about eighteen inches high. Opposite him, on the fourth side, was the beginning of a glass roof that completely covered the actual pool.

Mitchell sat against the low wall, and lit a cigarette between cupped hands. He wondered about the man he had just disposed of. He wondered why he was there ? But Mitchell composed himself with the thought that he wouldn't be in the way for the next few hours, anyway.

When the cigarette was finished, Mitchell stood up and walked across the flat roof to the glass that rose in front of him. The moon was hidden by swiftly passing clouds, although it sometimes shone through. Nevertheless the light was insufficient for his needs, so he unclipped a small pencil-sized flashlight from his breast pocket.

A few moments examination of the glass roof confirmed his fears that he wouldn't be able to force an entry that way. Not without making a hell of a noise. And breaking large panes of thick glass did make a hell of a

noise, especially with a constabulary beat only twenty yards or so away. Indeed, at that instant, he could hear the measured tread of a pair of size twelves approaching. Mitchell lay down in the darkness as he heard the footsteps stop. A light flashed up and down the side of the building. Then the steps continued and grew fainter.

Mitchell walked round the low wall, and on two sides, about three feet below the parapet, he could see a window. Looking up, he saw that the moon would be covered for several moments. So he climbed over the parapet, and hung at full length. His feet just touched the narrow ledge of the window. Gently, he lowered one hand and examined the window. It was closed. The performance was repeated with the other window, with the same result.

He cursed under his breath.

Quickly, he took off his raincoat, and lay it over the parapet, so that it hung down and covered the top of the window. He pulled out the Beretta, and held it by the short barrel. He leaned over the parapet, on the coat, giving one hammer blow with the butt of the automatic. A faint tinkle of glass reached his ears.

He grinned in the darkness as he replaced the Beretta and put the coat back on. A quick look round, and he swung over the parapet again, even as the moon re-appeared. Slipping his hand through the hole in the glass, he opened the large window, and vanished inside the building like a rabbit being followed like a ferret into its hole.

4.

Mitchell found himself in the lavatory. Crossing, he opened the door silently, and listened for several moments. It was as quiet as a tomb. Slipping through the door, he found he was on a wide balcony that surrounded the pool, which he could see below. He walked silently on rubber soled shoes along the balcony, down metal steps.

He withdrew into the open doorway of an adjacent dressing room as the moonlight flooded through the glass roof. He looked at the pool, and saw that it was full. He cursed once more - his luck was definitely out. Softly, to himself, he said a few nasty things about Sopwith, and the owners of the pool. Feeling better, he stripped off his clothing. He was resigned to his watery fate.

Pulling off his raincoat, jacket, shirt and vest, he dumped them on a seat. It was whilst removing his shirt that he discovered he'd lost his trilby. For an instant he went cold, then thought what the hell. First things first. Bending down, he pulled off shoes and socks, and straightened up to remove his trousers, when he heard a door click shut. He didn't move an inch, but remained in a half crouching stance. A chill ran through his body, and his stomach seemed to tie itself in knots. What the....?

The moon was behind the cloud again, and it was dark. He peered round the door, but couldn't see anything. For three long moments he stood motionless, every sense straining. A soft splash came from the far corner of the pool. Someone had beaten him to it. Someone was also after the microfilm, and whoever it was hadn't been sent by Sopwith.

Clad only in his trousers, he slipped past the door and tip-toed on bare feet to the far corner of the pool, keeping in close to the changing rooms. It was odds on that if he could see no one, the reverse applied. He hoped. Nipping silently into another changing room, he looked round the door. At that second, moonlight filled the building and he spotted a pile of clothing about a foot from the edge of the pool. His eyes nearly popped out of their sockets as he espied a pair of high-heeled shoes, and something white and frilly. Then came the biggest shock of all. The moonlight revealed a slim

girlish figure climbing out of the pool. Water was dripping from her, and he saw that her left hand was tightly clenched. Suddenly she looked in his direction and screamed.

When Mitchell thought about the incident afterwards ( which he quite often did,)he decided it must have been the whites of his eyes which gave him away. Anyway, at the moment she screamed, the moon disappeared in a cloud, and once more everything was in darkness.

Mitchell had been around. He had had his share of queer experiences in a career which had taken him all over the world, but this was definitely the most unique. Yet even that situation turned to his advantage. At the instant the moon vanished, he leaped forward like a tiger, grasped her left wrist with both hands and twisted...hard. A soft smack denoted the sodden contents of her hand had landed on the tiles, but he was too busy to notice. He heard a soft hiss of anger, and felt his arms and shoulders gripped. Instinctively, he bent his body, and hurled the woman over his shoulder. Long fingernails tore furrows across his shoulders and down his arm in searing agony. He disregarded the pain, and didn't even hear the splash of water from the hurtling body in his anxiety to find what she had dropped. Fumbling fingers over the wet tiles suddenly contacted a small..a very small package, which he picked up. He felt the warm blood trickling down his back- he took an angry kick at the pile of clothing, sending it scattering into the water. He picked up the high heeled shoes, and hurled them as far as he could.

He padded round the pool, found the cubicle where he had left his clothes, gathered them, and climbed the stairway finding the lavatory he had originally entered by. He dressed hurriedly, and as luck would have it, found his trilby hat on the floor whilst fumbling for a shoe. The small package was thrust into a trouser pocket. He opened the window a couple of inches and listened carefully. Not a sound, save for the faint sighing of the wind. He leapt from the window sill to the ground about twenty odd feet below, rolling over safely on his shoulders upon landing, as he had been taught to do in the Special Air Service years before.

It took him half an hour to reach his parked car, having travelled to it by a circuitous route. A further thirty minutes found him in his hotel room.

## 5.

Next morning he breakfasted early, leaving the hotel just after nine am, as he'd been specifically directed. The sky was clear and blue, and already it was warm. Mitchell, poetic at heart, decided to motor back to London without undue haste, and thus appreciate the beautiful scenery.

Four miles past Warwick, on a fairly straight stretch of road, he saw a green sports car, an MG, parked on the grass verge, and as he approached, he saw a girl, aged about twenty two, hands on hips, staring at the car in perplexity. He drew alongside, applied the brake, grimed at the girl.

"Anything I can do, dear?"

She pouted slightly, ran a hand through her hair, which was cut short in the modern style, of which Mitchell did not really approve. She was wearing a light summer dress and white sandals.

"That's very good of you," she smiled, " I think something is wrong with the engine."

Mitchell vaulted out of his car, made a couple of witty remarks as he walked round her car and raised the bonnet.

He peered at the engine, and the girl looked over his shoulder, her head close to his. He looked out of the corner of his eyes at her fresh skin

and full red lips. It was the last thing he saw for some time.

A man with a large bruise on his left cheek and a strip of plaster on the back of his head crept through a gap in the hedge, in front of which the car was conveniently parked. He contemplated the top of Mitchell's trilby with a gleam in his eyes, gripping the barrel of a .38. With all his strength he brought the butt down on the trilby.

"Quick," the girl shouted, and another man, rather young, ran from behind the hedge, and helped the other to drag Mitchell out of view.

Once behind the hedge the younger man worked quickly through Mitchell's pockets, ignored the Beretta, and eventually found the small oilskin package in a secret inside pocket of the jacket. He passed it to the girl. She looked down at Mitchell with a scowl transforming her features into a mask of hatred.

"Throw him in the ditch," she ordered. The two men picked him up and dropped him into about twelve inches of slimy water. The girl stepped forward, lifted her dress a few inches, and ground her foot into Mitchell's face, forcing it under the water.

"I hear a car," the young man shouted. They left Mitchell and ran for the MG.

6.

Mitchell gradually became aware of a dull humming noise, and three white blurs in front of his face. Low conversation came from the white patches, which moved in and out of focus several times, until they finally settled into three faces looking down at him. He recognised Sopwith, saw that of the other two, one was an elderly nurse who looked as though she'd been sucking a sour gooseberry. The other, in a white overall, was probably a doctor. Mitchell gradually caught up with the conversation...

"...hasn't a fractured skull, but it was a near thing. A couple of weeks rest should see him in good condition."

The doctor and nurse turned away.

Mitchell grinned at Sopwith, then asked the nurse to come back. She did so, but had a disgusted look on her face.

"Nurse," said Mitchell, I wonder if you would find out for me the name of the winner of the three-thirty at Epsom yesterday?"

She sniffed and walked away. When she closed the door behind her, Sopwith drew a chair to the side of the bed, and looked triumphantly at Mitchell.

"So the great Mitchell has slipped up at last," he sneered.

"Oh, jeeze, no," smiled Mitchell. "Sorry to trouble you, but I'm not that stupid. You'll find the secret microfilm rolled up inside that fountain pen in my breast pocket."

Sopwith looked surprised, but he grinned just the same.

"It doesn't matter, anyway. Keep it as a souvenir."

Then Mitchell suddenly saw the whole thing.

"You mean...." he began.

"Yes. Sorry I had to use you, Mitchell, but I couldn't let you into the secret. It was one of the most successful coups I've ever pulled off. You see, three agents in the pay of You Know Who, have been giving a great deal of trouble in the Midlands lately, causing strikes and other things we haven't been able to prove, including the odd spot of sabotage. So I arranged for them through an informant who is in their pay, to hear about the swimming pool, and led them to believe that the package contained the report of an undercover agent who had been building up a dossier against them. Also that the papers were going to be picked up the following morning. Of course, there

was a 50-50 chance that they wouldn't fall for the bait, but they really didn't have an alternative. Clever, what ?"

"But why the hell didn't you get them picked up when they collected the papers from the swimming pool ?" demanded Mitchell.

"Good Lord, Mitchell, use your brains," soothed Sopwith with a sneer," and please, you heard the doctor tell you not to get excited." Mitchell snorted.

"It's a matter of evidence," continued Sopwith. "The three agents were all British subjects and their political inclinations led them to eventually betray their own country. As I told you just now, I've been after them for a long time, and have in fact built up a fairly good case against them, the evidence, unfortunately, being mostly circumstantial. So you can see that I needed a choice bit of direct evidence to clinch the matter."

Mitchell gritted his teeth.

"I get the idea," he rasped. "I'm the sucker. I get my head split open just so that you can produce me at the trial as a Security Officer, and say I was attacked by those three, and secret documents taken from me ?"

"Something like that," grinned Sopwith, pleased with himself." Of course, the great Mitchell had to be too clever, and nearly ruined the plot by letting them take the wrong papers. But forget about that, they don't know. They didn't even get a chance to get the package opened before I picked them up."

Mitchell opened his eyes.

"How did you manage that ?" he asked.

Sopwith seemed to find the whole thing highly amusing.

"I followed you with a couple of the boys. Lucky for you, too, or you would've been a goner. You weren't in the ditch for more than thirty seconds."

Sopwith paused. He looked at Mitchell suspiciously.

"By the way, how did you get those marks on your back ? The doctor says they are scratches caused by a woman in the last twelve hours."

It was Mitchell's turn to take the initiative. He was just about to make a witty ( and untruthful)retort, when the nurse came in. She waved a newspaper, threw it down on the bed, and looked at Mitchell as if she'd been insulted.

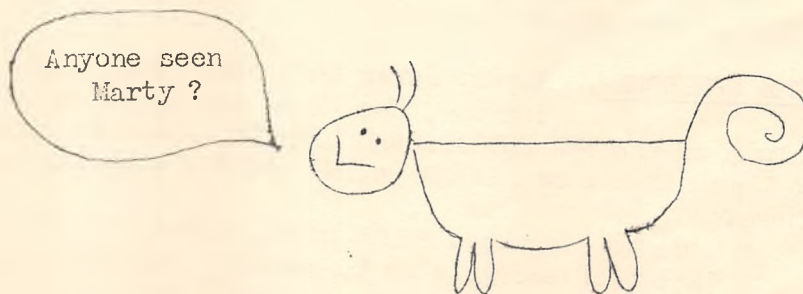
"I think your sense of humour is rather warped," she said, before turning away.

Mitchell looked at her in amazement. What the.....?

Sopwith picked up the paper. He looked at it for a moment, and then burst out laughing. Tears ran down his face as he put his chair against the wall. He staggered towards the door, and seconds later, Mitchell could still hear his laughter echoing down the corridor.

Finis.

John Berry  
1954.



# THE SCALPEL

MC'S

I was sprawled out in the sun, thinking about my pending trip to America, when the house dropped on me. This was on the 10th of August '59.

At least, it was the latest SAPS mailing, but the SIZE of it as it landed on my bare back ( I had my trousers on, bhoys, I was sun bathing, trying to get a tan in case the superb Berry Physique is to be displayed at the Detention for a worthy cause) followed by my two children.

I decided to crawl back in the house, in the coolness and quietness of the house, to peruse the mailing, and that's what I've just been doing.

SPECTATOR. I called for a couple of aspirins when I read that I was obviously up the creek, the SAPS CREEK, and Tosk had the paddles, but I appreciate that the OE must be HARD to keep such a pack in order. The trouble is, I ain't got five copies of POT POURRI 7 to send, so I've doubled my penalty ; in fact, when this issue has sorted itself out, I've probably TREBLED it.

Sorry, Tosk, honest.

NEMATODE. Yep, Bob, SOD, in England, is a word to describe someone you detest and hate. In Ireland, it is a term used to describe a spadeful of soil.

Ah, so you've completely swung round and pubbed an all MC ish-gets you, don't it ?

THE BIBLE COLLECTOR. Kindly attach a compass or an aspirin or a match, or all three, if you continue this format. By the time I got to the last page my wrist ached so much I walked round it.

THE BULLFROG BUGLE. You've done it again, this ultra blackness and virgin whiteness. Superb Harry Turner illos - nice chap, Harry. Once, I beat the hell outa him at ghoodminton.

BRONCO. Saw Bronco Layne on TV coupla hours ago, and thought about you. Horses and all that. At first, when he came on our screens about two months ago, I thought BRONCO to be a bit of a drip. But recently he's been shooting a few more people and looking a bit more masculine. The first time he was on he looked like a refugee from Swan Lake - now he's real mean. Not as good as Jim Hardie, though. Oh, where was I - er- nice tender illos - the one on page three I seem to see in every western on TV or the movies - but, Wyoming, it figures.

THE SPELEOHEM. Nicest cover in the mailing, bhoy. And I do too like puns. Yoo hoo, Dee. I've got your picture hidden in the ECONOMICS volume of the NEW EDUCATIONAL LIBRARY, which I purchased to try and talk to Leman in his own language. My wife'll never think of looking for yourfoto there.

Good to see these THICK zines, Bruce.

'A lot of energy goes to waist,' indeed. Chee, Bruce, you would have been a natural in Irish Fandom - they'd have put you on a pedestal, or struck



you in bronze - I'd probably have done the latter myself.

One of my favourites, this SPELEOBEM...keep it up.

SAPS INDEX. Nice work, Dick, a welcome addition to my SAPS file. Nuts to paratroops being superhuman as you suggest. I did seventeen jumps, and I never saw anyone refuse or even look worried. Why, Dick, parachuting is the second finest sensation in the world !

SAFARI. Brilliant cover- my idol Bloch plastered all over the place (especially in photo. No. 1. ) Right enough, your group have made some sacrifices for the Berry Fund - a beard and a litter of cats, shucks, this is what I really call esprit de corps.  
Definitely a BNF's zine !

COASTER. Very nearly managed a MANA word, didn't you ? Yep, I think that 'kneeing Russians in the groin ' to be somewhat ostentatious. Seems to be a very sadistic way of tackling anyone, rather unsporting, too. Yuk yuk, liked your very clever ' fandom is the most confused and illiterate fields of writing there is ' --- shouldn't it be ' writing there am ' ?

SAPSTYPE. Lovely front cover.

What hospital were you at - did all that 'standing room only ' (tee hee) and 30% fall out ( yak yak ) come under the heading of occupational therapy ?

THE BEM AND I. NICE first ish, and welcome to SAPS. Suffering Catfish, Bob, I'd certainly print my 30,000 word story in serial form in SAPS, but people would only say it was the most brilliant and wonderfully humorous thing I'd ever done - AND IT'S SERCON. However, I'll leave it to the vote.

BOG Cute front cover, in a mailing which has some good ones. I haven't come to the Soames story yet - crumbs, where's CREEP ? - but I'd like you to write a short precis about the Soames/Squink Blog/ GDA biz for RET. Wilst do, pliz ?

THE ZED. Poul is a genius - there's quite a few of us in SAPS these days, isn't there ?

Karen, I seem to be in one of my special artistic moods just now - I've been praising one or two of the front covers, but I would also like to express my approval of the most original style of artwork in THE ZED. Particularly I like the stark simplicity and wonderment of the two back page illos. I look forward to more.

CREEP. Come back in half an hour when I've brought my Squink Blog File up to date. You see, Wally, my CREEP file is distinct from the rest of my SAPS file....it is permanently attached to my GDA screed.

Read for the first time of the details of the BJO accident. Car accidents make me very sick at heart, too - how much more worse it must be when the victims are personal friends, or, even worse, fans.

Gory but good.

RETRO. I've been keenly following this TOSK-BUZ dianetics controversy. I haven't learned anything yet, but I'm building up a wonderful psychological casebook about Buz for my new publishing project, dedicated to my wife, 'THE FAN AND DIANE-ETHICS'

I'll tell you all about my sex life, sometime  
Natty BJO cover.

Really, Buz, I was touched by the Bemmy Requiem. I too have suffered the terrible pangs at the sight of a budgie lying upside down with its wee feet poiting upwards at an angle of 45 %.

Alas, wee critters.....

FLABBERCON. Another choice BJO cover...goody.

Absorbing report - a classic in its way, if I may say so. Why are you not a Terry Carr fan ?

OUTSIDERS. Wrai, I note with alarm that you had the utter audacity to spell ESMOND ADAMS in small print. Capitals every time for the bhoy, pulheeze.

Yep, I'm a Western fan - I actually cried whilst reading SHANE. I want to be really sercon for a moment. I've noticed in Westerns concerning Indians that the redskins are always shown in a bad light..they are, if the stories are to be believed ( I'm speaking also of the classical Western stories which are based on fact ), cruel, sneaking, unmerciful, untrustworthy, no tactical sense of attack or defence, raping white women, keeping slaves, crude, and saying 'Ugh' all the time. A few writers show Indians as being honourable, for instance, COCHISE, which I read recently. I'd like these questions answered, Wrai, to bring my observations into line :-

- a. Wasn't it the white man who originated taking scalps ?
- b. Films always demonstrate that the redskin have only one tactical idea of attacking anything..I.E. charge like mad all the time, regardless of how many of their kin are biting the dust. In COCHISE, I read that Cochise was a better tactician than US Army officers...the facts ?
- c. Were Indians badly treated in reservations ( particularly the Apache ) or were their wholesale defections purely instinct ?
- d. Is it true that the wholesale slaughter of buffalo was organised mainly to kill off Indians by taking their food ?
- e. Did Indians always violate their white women prisoners ?
- f. In COCHISE I read that the bucks had a high moral code, and an instance is cited where bucks came across Indian girls bathing in a stream, and went away. In the film THE SEARCHERS, to give an example, it tells how Indiana sell their wives to bucks in the same tribe. What is the true version of their moral code ?

There are many other questions I could ask, Wrai, but I've been really interested in the subject for years, as have some of my friends in my office. Can you help me ?

SPACEWARP. Ah ha, Art, I've written that 'According to Hoyle' verse on the flyleaf of my copy of THE NEW COSMOLOGY.

SPRING SONG is most ingenious and is a certainty for reprint.

THE CURVACIOUS CUBICAL CAPER was just too much for me - it seems like a damn silly problem, anyway. I wish you'd work out a mathematical equation for detecting falsies.

You could do it.

FLABBERGASTING. Having already trodden on the toes of our respected OE, I should now go into spasms of pure delight at this ultra-thick FLABBER, in an attempt to placate him.

I'm going to lavish praise, Tosk, but not for that reason. This FLABBER is is a FLABBER to beat all FLABBERS. Never was a SAPSzine so aptly named. Even the Garcone claw marks on the front cover have a more-than-usual appeal.

FLABBER (cont.) I agree with you wholeheartedly about CARR's SAPSzine.

You'll note I didn't review it hereunder - frankly I couldn't, because I didn't read it....the first SAPSzine that has suffered such a fate in my hands. I'm not prude at all, in fact, I consider myself to be one of the bhoys, but the title S--- seems to me to be in extremely bad taste. I get the impression he thinks it typifies the contents of SAPS. Carr is so talented that I was very surprised at the low level of humour so ostentatiously displayed for all to see.

Re. humour in music, I would refer you you to the Facade Suite, I think by William Walton.

My opinions regarding educated girls is herewith :- The more clever and educated a girl is, the more difficult and catty and unreasonable she becomes. My wife is chock full of good sense ( she married me ) and she can cook marvellous dishes and sew socks and knit pullovers, but she left school when she was fourteen years old. The girls in my office, who had five or six years more schooling than her, seem neurotic, as if their higher education has made them more aware of the pitfalls that life holds for them.

Re. the Carr/Willis affair, I think Willis was so hurt at the personal attack that he was completely bewildered. Your defence of GM is very sporting, but I'm sure Willis wouldn't agree with your diagnosis !

Although I rarely compose on stencil ( these notes are written in pencil first of all ) I do agree with your theory that first thoughts are usually the most pertinent.

I wouldn't sell my FLABBER file for anything.

MAINE-IAC. A very small helping this time round.

Yep, the Seattle Pubbers are so kind - when I was ill in May they offered to pub all my MC notes - and I would've let them, too, except they'd never have been able to read the blasted things.

SATURDAY EVENING GHOST. Another GOOD COVER.

You seem to like interlineations, don't you ?  
Here are a few true ones which I'd saved up for the next RET :-

.....  
"That's just the height of ignorancy".....Diane Berry.

"Your moustache is your plume-de-nom".....Donny Rutledge.

"I'd rather be hit than punished".....Colin Berry.  
.....

don't knock the ROCK. Please sit down and write what comes out, as you threaten, ESMOND.

Yes, I'll move to Huntsville, boy, iffen you can fix it. I'd be near the rocket factory, wouldn't I, and you know how interested I am in such things? I could always raid your place iffen I got hungry.

STOP PRESS. At this juncture, the mailing has been reduced to chaos. I had a surprise visit for a week by German fan Klaus Eylmann, and he evinced such an interest in SAPS that I couldn't control his clutching fingers, and the 48th SAPS mailing is now strewn all over the floor. A lot of the MC stencils are in my office, and I cannot recall exactly what I've kommented on, and I've one day left to catch the deadline before I leave for America. So I'm hunched up here trying to decide which are the virgin pubs, and herewith my conclusions. If I've missed a SAPSzine out ( other than Carr's ) it's not intentional. The good thing about all this confusion is that Klaus has decided to join SAPS, and

has been speaking very enthusiastically about his proposed SAPSzine HEUTE AND TOMORROW. However, with a deft flick of the wrist, I use the scalpel on :-

NANDU. I was muchly absorbed with the diverse subjects you discussed.

I was impressed with your comments to Rich Brown on page 8. I tried to express the same sort of thing to him in an airmail after reading poor Rich's mundane troubles in the last mailing. You've expressed how I feel much much better.

SAPLING. Welcome, Guy, welcome, and congrats on a brilliant title for your SAPSzine. I think your reference to putting lipstick on a cat and perfume behind its ears comes under the category of vulgar ostentation. Your admission that you drove a cat to prostitution savours of the same type of genius that the hard grunting bats developed from.

Most certainly let's know all about Evie..sounds as though it might interest me.

POOR RICHARDS ALMANAC. First inside page, re BJO, very witty.

DEF. BJO FOR TAFF'!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

So, you've seen a flying saucer. I'd very much like further information. A detailed article, pliz? I'm an Unbeliever, but have certain mundane theories ( see TRIODE, 'bout four years ago ) which you might help to confirm.

SUBSTITUTE. Good news that I shall be staying in the Committee Suite - although of course by the time you read this I shall have come and gone like an Arab in the night. Novel way of stapling.

FENDENIZEN. Chee, I'm praising front covers all the time - my main interest in this one lies in the fact that it is very similar to an interior illo in my privately printed copy of the Decameron of Boccaccio. Is your copy pubbed by the Navarro Press?

BLABBERCASTING TALES. Readable and interesting.

Yessir, Chan knew his onions alright !

GIM TREE. Yummy cover.

Wonderful, WONDERFUL and eminently readable story about the Randolph Scott film location.

Becoming a major SAPS item !

TTT REVISITED. The utter delight of SAPS is demonstrated in this mailing by the great variety of subject matter discussed. Take animals.. frinstance, we've hard grunting bats - pussy prostitutes- and now oversexed hamsters. You're all tempting me to tell you about the great SHAW-BERRY TALKING BUDGERIGAR FUED which startled OMPA a coupla years back.

PENCIL POINT. Yeah, I get the idea alright. I know what you've done.

Methinks you could almost of called it FOT POURRI. But then, you aren't a plagiarist, are you ???

'Sall, folks.

I'm hoping to meet most of you during my Stateside Trip, and perchance, in future, my MC's will have that little extra personal touch.

Now to polish the duper handle with my palm.....

John Berry