

A Literary Fragment

Produced by Marc Ortlieb of P.O. Box 215, Forest Hill, Vic
3131, at the very last minute—5/2/93 3-26 pm—for ANZAPA.

A red tell-tale lit up on the main screen. Ortlieb was shocked into full consciousness. That tell-tale could mean only one thing. There was a stowaway on board. It had never happened to him before. Oh sure, he'd heard of other apahacks who'd had to deal with stowaways but he never thought it'd happen to him. Through his mind ran all the scenarios and in each he saw himself doing what had to be done and the mind-wrenching anguish that would follow. With heart in mouth, an unpleasant feeling in itself, he flung open the door to the cargo hold.

"No point in hiding," he said, trying to hide the tremour in his voice. "I know you're in there."

Sheepishly the fanzine unfolded itself from the space behind the letter column. Ghod, it's a fat one, thought Ortlieb. This isn't going to be easy. The dry paper rustled as the zine edged nervously towards him. "I'm sorry sir," it said. "I didn't mean to stowaway like this. It's just that it seemed that this would be the only way I'd possibly get into ANZAPA. I couldn't afford to get there through the postal system and besides, you know how they are. Even if I'd been able to afford the fare, it would have taken them years to get me there."

Ortlieb was lost for words. Suddenly all the scenarios he'd so laboriously constructed dissolved into the aether. This foolish great fat fanzine had signed its own death warrant without ever realizing it.

"But surely you knew," he stuttered, "that stowaways-aren't permitted."

"Oh sure," it said. "But I figured that I'd get to ANZAPA and then pay the fine. It may be a lot, but I'm sure I can pay it off in minac, even if it takes all year. I'm really a useful fanzine you know." It swelled with pride. "I contain the complete and full details on everything that has ever beer done in Australian fandom. Do you want to know how many times John Bangsund has said he'd be a Fan Fund candidate and then dropped out at the last minute? Do you want to know the species of marmoset that won a Gold-Plated Caterpillar for showing that Terry Frost is worth pissing on? Do you want to see how many conventions offered high power guests of honour but then didn't deliver? Try me out. I know it all."

Ortlieb cringed. How could he break this gently. "You do know what happens to stowaways in ANZAPA don't you?"

"You mean apart from having to pay the mailing costs?"

"No. Not that. You see, ANZAPA can't afford to carry dead weight like convention fliers, old books of poetry, or Telecom Educational Kits. Stowaways are jettisonned."

"Oh. But I threw away all that stuff you'd put in the hold—the stuff on Natalie's birth, and Michael's illness and the Warren Zevon concert. There wasn't room for that and me. What are you going to do for minac now?"

"Bugged if I know. But, the rules are the rules. It's those equations — $E=mc^2$, $pV=nRT$, $F=ma$...cold comfort I know, but there it is. Goodbye."

"Goodbye," there was a hissing as the airlock emptied the best intentions into the void.