
APPARATCHIK

The forty-fourth issue of a bi-weekly fanzine, published by Andy Hooper, member fwa, supporter afal, at The Starliter Building, 4228 Francis Ave. N. # 103, Seattle, WA 98103, also available at APHooper@aol.com. This is Drag Bunt Press Production # 235. *Apparatchiki*: Victor Gonzalez, carl juarez, A.P. McQuiddy, Lesley Reece & Martin Tudor (British Address: 845 Alum Rock Rd., Ward End, Birmingham B8 2AG UK). Behold, puny earthing scientists!

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THE X-FANS: VILLAINY IN VEGAS

1930 hours, Tuesday, The Starliter, Republic of Fremont. Special Agent Fox Muldy pulled a package from the mailbox in his building and tore open the manila envelope as he unlocked his apartment. He draped his voluminous raincoat over a chair, then hit play on his CD remote. Zappa's *Peaches En Regalia* began to play in the background, creditably loud.

The envelope contained a micro-ROM disk without any label. He put it in the player.

A giant eyeball head with a stickman body appeared on Muldy's 60-inch monitor. The eyeball wore a tall silk tophat.

"Greetings, Muldy. Long time no see. I've come to you in this form because I don't know who might be listening. I think you should know something stinks in Vegas fandom," the giant eyeball said, its pupil varying in size for emphasis. The eyeball was replaced by a fanzine cover illustration.

"This is the cover of Wild Heirs #9. It will be released this coming Monday," the eyeball said from off screen.

The cover showed a caricatured Muldy pulling at his whiskers with a demonic look on his face. Behind him, the fanzine's editors are tied to stakes. Starter-fluid fanzines lie at their feet. The cover faded from the screen, replaced by the whirling giant eyeball.

"You know the significance of this fanzine's having 23 editors. It is a number important to the Bavarian Illuminati, the Erisians, the Assassins of Hashemite Syria. And now, unexpected persons are converging on Las Vegas. One or more of them may become initiates of the circle of Wild Heirs. And you have indicated that you understand this with your statement 'Wonder how long it takes 23 editors to burn out,' in your last case report."

The eyeball's pupil dilated radically and the top hat wobbled.

"I'm sure you understand that the circle cannot expand beyond 23. And where will that leave certain current members?"

"And what private purposes will these new members have? Some of them are far from being neofans. I don't know what they have in store for you, Special Agent Muldy, but the summons implicit in this cover cannot be ignored.

"Someone in Las Vegas fandom wants you at this gathering. Perhaps you can learn the truth. You will need to make friends with those in the desert. But be careful -- no one is who they truly seem."

The eyeball's pupil contracted like an iris door. Then the screen went dark.

Muldy picked up the phone and dialed.

"We're on."

1930 hours, Tuesday, Pathology Theater,

BY ANDY HOOPER AND VICTOR GONZALEZ

Madigan Army Medical Center.

Special Agent Dan Sculler paused, laying down his scalpel on a tray, and allowed his assistant to apply suction to the area around the corpse's left kidney. An etched steel plate, faintly gleaming with the negative image of a five dollar bill, was imbedded in the kidney, which Sculler regarded with something like disdain. He wanted a cigarette. There was a buzz and flash from the light over the door, which then swung open to reveal a military policeman standing outside in the hall.

"Call from New Jersey, Sir," said the soldier.

Sculler sighed, and pulled off his gloves with a hair-pulling snap, then tossed them onto the counterfeit plate. "Stop tape," he murmured, and walked out the door, still held open by the cop.

In the hallway, another soldier, in full dress uniform including spats, held a mustard yellow telephone receiver, connected to a rotary-dial phone on the wall. Sculler took the phone and fumbled under his greens for a cigarette. "Sculler here."

"Please hold for Deputy Director Deindorfer."

There was a series of clicks and tones, followed by the rich baritone growl of the Deputy Director. "Agent Sculler, this is Deindorfer. I want you to drop the Avedon Carol embezzlement case and head to Las Vegas. The Bureau has received information that points toward a violation of the Boggs-Rike act, and possibly a large fanzine laundering operation there, and we believe a major buy may be coming up during a local convention. And if that isn't enough, there may be a conspiracy to commit murder, or even feud. I want you and Muldy down there. He already has connections and informants in place there, from that business with the Prawn Gland Extract."

"I'll get on a plane this evening," said Sculler.

"No! No commercial air travel. If you can't get a ride from the day officer at McChord, I want you to drive down. You'll be harder to find, and there's the possibility that the Chinese are still after you for that business with the terra-cotta Nixon figurines in the Han burial site. Muldy's sense of humor may be entertaining to you, Agent Sculler, but no one will be laughing if a strike team shoots up an airport trying to find him. His career is, as usual, hanging by a thread."

"Yes sir. I think he's aware of that, sir."

"No performance trials, Agent Sculler."

"No sir. We'll stay out in the desert, two-lane roads. Responsible speeds, sir."

"Very good. You'll be given further instructions."

Sculler hung the phone back on the cradle and took a long pull at his cigarette, and peeled a fleck of dried blood off

Uh uh, chucko - you got to plug in the fe-male!

And not just by their rasping mouth-parts, either.

his watch. The phone rang again. He picked it up.

"I know," he replied.

2230 hours Wednesday, Interstate Highway 5, South of Medford, Oregon

Fang hydroplaned through the night, rain and darkness, which closed around the headlight beams like a tunnel.

Behind the wheel, Sculler worked the sophisticated windshield-wiper with his right hand tapping off his cherry between adjustments.

The car was on cruise control, moving 73 miles per hour. Large trucks loomed on the right and in the lane ahead of the white Corsica, and Sculler punched his foot down on the brake. Robert Fripp's guitar sang from the stereo speakers, seeming to create a filigree of elaborate ripples and rings in the smoke's dense thicket.

"Go! You fucking idiot! Pass him or DIE!"

Muldy bemusedly shook his head and continued to page through the fanzines in his lap. He applied a pink highlighter to certain passages. Arnie Katz' "Trufans Guide" particularly held his interest. "ACKER BILK?" he wrote in the margin, and "Unexplained stains from the NUNNERY."

The car groaned against the incline. The truck in the right lane shuddered as something gave way under the hood, and yawed clumsily toward the shoulder. The truck ahead of Fang hesitated and swerved toward the opposite shoulder, the driver worriedly looking back for the jack-knifing trailer in the other lane.

"Ah! At last!" Sculler crowed as he slapped the accelerator. The rain suddenly burst in a blinding squall against the windshield, obscuring the runaway trailer. Fang leapt forward between the two vehicles and shot through the gap at 85, the smoke from burning brakes turbidly swirling in its wake.

"So, when the Katz' popped their heads out of the sand, Vegas fandom became superactive," Sculler said, relaxing before the next trailer-truck cluster. "A group of former Insurgents making their play in a new market. Katz sub-A and sub-B, Kunkel and Chamberlain."

"Right," replied Muldy. "And you can't ignore the bicoastal nature of Insurgency. Burbee, Rotsler. The LA side. The rest of them are dead or gafiated."

"But Katz calls the tune. The greatest living theorist on the fundamental nature of Insurgency," Sculler said.

"And it looks like their first move was to recruit the newest set of Vegas fans -- cannon fodder for their battle to power. Hardin and Springer. Forman and Wilson."

"The Vegrants."

"Right," said Muldy. "Pepsi-getters from the lowest ranks of Vegas confandom. But they've certainly come into their own. The ATF considers them a well-trained militia."

Sculler smiled indulgently. "I find it hard to believe in that kind of organized menace among fans."

Muldy fixed him with a level gaze. "There's nothing imaginary about the 23, Scully. They've been around since roughly 200 BC. Alexander the Great is said to have developed primitive hekto jelly as the price of his admission to their number. Michael Faraday was one of them, and admitted as much in his memoirs. I could go on; the violinist Ole bull, Tecumseh Sherman, Robert Graves, Petula Clark . . ."

"There's nothing in the fannish record to support that supposition, Muldy."

"Then what would you call this? I've picked through the collections of a number of fans building this file. No one else in the bureau wants to know about it. And don't tell me

Deindorfer wants us to bring this to light. He's being acted on by forces we can't imagine. Smofs that don't even know their own names, things in pressurized tanks in Area 51, protocols on crumbling twilltone sealed in hermetic cases. Once we get out in the desert, Sculler, we're on our own."

"Could we focus on the Vegas fandom issue for a moment? Only certain members of the group are alleged to be members of the 23, and at least one of them has fallen out of favor with the inner circle," Sculler said.

"Yes, the inner circle, they're the key. They've suffered a certain accelerated rate of attrition in recent years. There have been only 3 of the 5 seats filled at the last two meetings, which has allowed Arnie Katz to keep the whole thing in his pocket. But there are some people who don't agree with his methods. And one of them may be on his way to Las Vegas right now.

"Who do you mean?"

"I mean the man who inspired fandom as we know it."

"What's this?"

Out of the sizzling rain, blazing light. A striped wooden gate, next to a tollbooth-shaped building, lay across the road. Huge white letters on an electric green sign proclaimed "Fruit Inspection Station." Sculler mashed the brake pedal, and Fang slithered to a halt.

"Good evening," said a bored-looking man in a khaki uniform. "Are you transporting any fruit, or agricultural products?"

"No sir."

"Any rendered animal products or raw hide clothing?"

"None."

"Any seditious or obscene materials?"

"Definitely not."

"Toxic waste, radioactive materials, alien artifacts or sorcerous implements?"

"Um . . . not as we know them sir."

"Okay." He smiled vacantly. "Have a nice evening."

Fang gunned to life, and the two sped into the blackness.

"They get better all the time," crowed Sculler. "Can you imagine, spending your whole life in a booth by the roadside, asking people if they have any fruit in their car? Must be an awesome benefit program there . . ."

But Muldy did not answer. He was looking back over his shoulder at the retreating form of Black Butte as it fell away behind the car. Against the black stone slope, the number "73" was faintly visible in white sand, where unknown hands once scraped it. "We should turn at the next exit," he muttered, barely audible under the music.

"I saw a sign."

1412 hours, Thursday, Highway 395, 3 miles south of Buntingville, California

The light danced off the dry bed of Honey Lake to the left of the car as Fang hurtled down the 6.5% grade. Sculler gnawed on a Slim Jim as he slid the car out to pass yet another recreational vehicle.

Despite the punishing volume at which the stereo was hammering Nick Lowe's "Marie Provost," Muldy's eyes had wandered shut, and his chin dropped down onto his chest. Sculler enjoyed the respite from his frequent, surreptitious glances at the speedometer.

The car had crept up to almost 90 miles an hour. The light played in mesmeric patterns on the hundreds of exploded bug-bodies that crashed into the windshield like rain. Something like a thought came out of the fragmented light as it passed among those insects, and for a moment, Sculler left the car. In his mind, he saw a vast pyramid topped by an eye,

Be Good, or I'll make you listen to Meat Loaf.

in which a door shaped like a camera lens opened, revealing a jackal-headed gopher clad in a raiment of gold lamé.

"Thank you, thankyouverrymush," said the gopher.

Sculler's eyes flashed open again to see the speedometer arcing toward 105 miles per hour. He eased his foot away from the gas, and let the car dwindle back down toward a mere 85. He cocked his right hand and rapped Muldy smartly on the chin.

"Wake up," he said, "you're supposed to be the one keeping me awake."

Muldy smacked his lips thickly. "I know exactly where we are. This should be Buntingville coming up ahead of us.

But it wasn't Buntingville. Instead, the long rows of low buildings across the dry lake were an army ordinance center, in the process of being dismantled after the end of the cold war. Hundreds of bunkers and sheds had been smashed into crumpled concrete, with twisted rebar protruding from the ruins. They quietly surveyed the desolation.

After a while, another, newer facility came into view. The heavy buildings were surrounded by bright gray chain link and glistening barbed wire. As the road made a wide, eastern turn, they passed the post entrance, with a sign that read "U.S. Department of the Navy: Nuclear Undersea Weapons Testing Center."

As the site receded in the distance, Sculler said quietly, "My father worked there for a few years."

A few miles later, Muldy replied, "I know."

1930 hours, Thursday, Highway 95, 10 miles north of Tonopah, Nevada

Sculler was fighting the clock. They had been forced off schedule when Muldy had stopped at a gas station to evacuate his bowels, and were struggling to make up the time. The dark desert flared into white before the beam of the headlights, but the road was an unending stream of recently-laid coal-black asphalt. The pre-convention meeting was to begin at 10, and both of them still hoped to be there.

Sculler had just passed a pick-up doing 68 miles per hour when the state trooper came over a little rise in front of him. Sculler hit the brakes instantly, but it was too late. The trooper illuminated the car with a single burst from his radar gun, and had taken a good clock. He flipped on the flashing lights, and began the long process of bringing his fishtailing cruiser about; he too had been doing 75, after all.

Sculler brought the car onto the shoulder and rolled down both windows. Muldy took the X-file on Vegas fandom and jammed it underneath the seat. Both of them fanned smoke out the windows, then sat quietly with their hands where the officer could see them. He took his time approaching the car, sidling up to them with a citation book in one hand and the other easily bouncing near the Glock on his belt.

"Sir, I clocked you at 82 miles per hour," said the trooper, "and that's just a little too fast. I'm afraid I'm going to have to cite you."

"Ah, yes, well," struggled Sculler, "we're a little late for a convention. Sorry about that."

"Yeah, well, Vegas is still 3 hours ahead. I'll tell you what, sir; if you set your cruise control at 70 miles per hour, you'll almost never have trouble. We understand that people want to go 70, and they can do so safely, but 82 is just a little too fast. All right?"

"I'll do that officer."

"Enjoy the Silvercon, sir," the trooper said, throwing him a little salute. Sculler jumped involuntarily: Silvercon?

The trooper froze, then scabbled for his sidearm, knowing that he had cracked out of turn.

At that moment, Muldy, who had mysteriously slipped out his door and snuck up on the trooper despite his ponderous progress across the gravel, shoved a small aerosol can under the trooper's snout and shot him full in the face.

"Squeeze the wheeze," Muldy muttered.

The aerosol, a rare distillation of certain geckos of Rora Penta land, attacked the trooper's central nervous system like deadheads at a free buffet, and he crumpled to the desert floor with a twisted smile on his face. "Mama," he murmured happily, then went rigid and pale gray.

"He'll be down for 10 to 12 hours. Look over the car while I take him for a ride." Muldy hoisted the cop onto his shoulder and bore him away into the desert. After a few minutes, he came back and shut off the patrol car's flashers.

By then, Sculler had found the tiny telemetric bug which had been attached to the windshield among the dead insects. It looked just like a badly-deformed moth. Standard stuff.

"I laid him face down so the birds won't peck out his eyes before he comes around," Muldy puffed as he climbed back up the shoulder.

"What about the fire ants?"

"Hey, he knew the job was dangerous when he signed on with the Illuminati."

"How did you know he was bad news so fast?" asked Sculler. "If it hadn't been for that Silvercon crack, I'd never have noticed."

"The clues were obvious. First of all, his haircut is at least three-quarters of an inch longer than Nevada State Patrol regulations permit. Second, the grips on the Glock are not standard issue. Third, no real trooper would tell you to drive 15 miles faster than the posted speed limit."

Sculler nodded.

"And finally, he had the word 'Fijagdh,' bent around a laurel wreath with the number 23 inside it, tattooed on his left wrist."

"Funny, I thought that was a French foreign legion parachute regiment insignia."

"And you didn't think that was suspicious?"

"Hey, Nevada has to hire who they can. Now get in the car. Four minutes to Las Vegas."

2300 hours, Thursday The Estate of Arnie and Joyce Katz, Las Vegas, Nevada

A car with darkened windows passed the Corsica as Sculler pulled into the Wild Heirs headquarters.

They were too late for the great convocation, he realized. Who knows who had been there? It was possible they had missed the most important meeting of the weekend. Now they would have to scabble for clues.

"Fuck," he said to Muldy.

Their fears were confirmed when they pulled their cramped bodies from the sedan. They felt the warm wash of a turbine engine. Muldy pointed to a spot in the dark sky. Sculler could barely make out the ominous outline of the black helicopter. It was rapidly moving away on a northeast course. Joyce Katz and Ken Forman were standing beside the driveway.

Sculler felt nervous.

"You're the one who knows them so well," he whispered to Muldy.

But Katz stepped in.

"You're here just in time," she said. Forman nodded.

"David Wittman is dead."

Becausue there's no problem Milk and Cheese can't solve -- with their fists!

"Shot?" Muldy asked. Katz simply blinked her eyes. Forman looked ashen in the floodlight's glare.

Sculler's jaw tightened. Despite the eagerness that came from his training as a pathologist, he was concerned. A distraction to throw them off? According to the reports Muldy had acquired, Wittman was no more than a minor irritation in the Vegas landscape. His greatest claim to attention was a histrionic article justifying grandiose and reprehensible plans by way of rhetorical abandon: "This is the year of the Corflu!" Could he *possibly* be a player? But here was a chance to try to figure things out.

"Where's the body?" Sculler asked, brightly. He strode into the rambling single-story house with purpose and began examining Wittman's bloody and twisted corpse, which had been stuffed into a corner in the backyard near the Jacuzzi.

Muldy took a more leisurely course, chatting with Katz and Wilson. He sat in a circle of fans who still remained to pass the magical pipe from lip to lip. Widner was there, and that seemed an ominous omen. Donaho was there, so drunk even he realized his stories had no connection to the rest of the conversation. The younger Vegrants were there, as always taking the point of lesser prestige, on the floor and beneath tables, some even holding them up on their backs.

He suddenly realized that Vegas fandom had been cast like a Billy Jack movie without Tom Laughlin. Or perhaps more regrettably, Elizabeth James.

"Or Janice Eisen," Sculler mumbled in a sudden telepathic fit.

While Sculler and the Formans laid the body across two TV trays, Muldy did his best to piece together the evening's events. The sylph-like Tom Springer offered him a classic coke, which Muldy gratefully accepted. An event that could bring Pepsi and Coke drinkers together; a vortex of disquieting power.

"Did you see the shooter? Where did it come from?"

Springer shook his head solemnly. "Tucker was telling a joke about free milk and a cow, and he was having to almost shout to drown out the jabbering of the collators and gamers and other riff-raff in the room. At first, I thought it was just an extra-loud staple report, but then I noticed blood and brains all over the lampshade next to me, and Wittman kind of rolled into the middle of the floor."

"I can see the shade in the far corner, so the shot had to come from the direction of the Xerox machine."

"Right, well, it was like someone had set a live eel among all the gamers and collators and costumers and magic freaks and adulterers and simonists --"

"I think I get the idea, Tom."

"Anyway, it could have been any one of them, we were all looking at Tucker."

"So, how did the body get all crumpled up in the yard?"

"Well, that's kind of mortifying. JoHn Hardin thought we should just bury the body ourselves. Save time and money." Springer shrugged. "Actually, I think he wanted to use it for parts, but he was embarrassed to say so."

"So he took it into the back yard?"

"Actually, he wanted to take it to his car, but he was too blotto to unlatch the gate."

Ben Wilson came over and sat down heavily in the chair next to the two of them. "Who could have thought that much blood was reaching Wittman's brain?"

Muldy turned to him. "Who was here earlier?"

"It was great! Tucker, and Speer, and Widner, and Burbee were all talking about stuff like the staple wars and the campaign to clean up fandom, and the coming end of the

world in the belly of a fiery turtle, when all the first fandom fans will rise again and place Stanley Weinbaum on the throne of the universe. I never laughed so hard in my life!"

"Yeah, and Tucker told the Rosebud story," Springer agreed. "Let me see if I can get you guys some food -- Joyce laid out an incredible spread again."

"I doubt Sculler will be wanting anything to eat right now," Muldy called after him, as the high-pitched whine of his partner's portable bone-saw came from the back yard. He was deeply angry and disappointed. Some major change in the circle of 23 had been made, statements made in code which Springer and Wilson were probably incapable of deciphering. Those First Fandom devils! They were still one step ahead.

Springer returned with several tulip-shaped sundae glasses, full to the top with lurid pink shrimp. "Time to make the secret sign!" he chortled. "Shrimp Brothers comin', they're snackin' tonight!"

Muldy disconsolately poked at his shrimp, but he didn't eat any. Springer and Wilson set to gobbling theirs with an unnatural zeal. After a few minutes of their immodest slurping and chewing, Sculler came in from the back yard. He had a dark, red-tinted fragment of something held in a forceps in his hand.

"Get this: I found it in his shirt pocket. It has every indication of having come from inside his brain, as if someone had planted a bomb inside his head. I was puzzled because I couldn't find an entrance wound, and then I noticed this. Someone must have tidied up and put it away for safe-keeping."

"There might be prints on it," Muldy suggested.

"Here, Sculler, have some shrimp," Springer said, thrusting a sundae glass toward him. He struck the forceps with the glass, knocking the fragment from his grasp. Before Sculler could react, Springer reached down and picked it up with his bare hand.

"Sorry about that."

"Yeah," Sculler glared, taking a big forkfull of shrimp and stuffing it in his mouth.

"Can I talk to you for a minute?" Muldy asked. Sculler chewed his shrimp and nodded in assent. The two of them went out into the Katz's yard and interposed a strangely batrachian statue between themselves and the big picture window.

"I know what you're going to say," Muldy said.

"I bet you do. I want to call the LVPD and have all these people held."

"Realistically, we can't do that. We have no useful evidence to tie any specific person to this crime, other than the fact that it happened in Arnie's house. And if you bust him, we'll get nothing more for the rest of the weekend."

"If we sweat Springer and Hardin, one of them will crack."

"Probably so, but even Springer, the Akebono of Las Vegas fandom, is a little fish compared to the trophies we wanted to bag this weekend. Remember what The Eyeball told me --"

"Actually, I don't remember what The Eyeball told you, but it is true that the Deputy Director wanted us to build some kind of a coherent picture of all this. Which we won't do if we throw them all in jail."

"And the death of one neofan is hardly a federal case."

"All right. Call the cleaners. That ought to make us some points around here."

"Which is just what I was thinking. A gesture to show that we've got a sense of humor about things. That we're not

so sercon after all."

"Yes, I am aglow with trufannish good cheer."

As they stepped back inside, the phone rang in the office.

An unseen person picked it up. A voice asked, "Special Agent Muldy? There's a woman named Nevenah Smith on the phone. She's at the airport and wonders if the party is still going on."

Muldy buried his face in his hands. "Aoooh my Gogh!" he moaned.

1500 hours Friday. The Mardi Gras Hotel, Las Vegas

Sculler sat at a table in the hotel cafe and tried to keep his eyelids up. He wasn't a morning person to begin with, but he had a particularly difficult time getting out of bed that morning. He felt a little dizzy, and there was a tingling in his right arm, like he had slept on it wrong. But he was on his second cup of coffee and nothing had changed. He was still tired, and his arm still buzzed.

"Whattaya need to know, fanboy?" came a voice from the chair at Sculler's left. His eyelids snapped open and he turned.

He hadn't even seen the tattooed redhead sit down. It took a moment, but then the face and the mug shot matched. Muldy had spoken of her the night before. Agent Nevenah Megan Smith of the Central Insurgency Agency. Also known as Nevanuf "the motor-operated pushover" Smith.

Her name had once been Nancy.

Sculler knew he should be on guard. Muldy had warned him. But he felt sick, and fuzzy, and his feelings about Muldy himself had bothered him during the long trip down, especially the stay at the motel in Weed, where he had woken to find Muldy's buoyant form clothed only in briefs. The sheet had been wrapped through the leg holes and around Muldy's waist.

Why didn't Muldy ever notice?

"Will you really tell me everything I want to know?" he asked.

"What do you *need* to know?"

"Why are the Insurgents trying to force Ken Forman out of the Vegrants?"

"Arnie's done with him. Forman's never really completely embraced fanzine fans. He's done more work in convention conspiracies, and he's not fitting in with the boys who just want to publish 70 pages of fanac a month and be damned," Smith said.

"Besides, Arnie has plenty of acolytes to work on. I think he's just given up on Forman, and he wants to replace him before control of the 23 slips out of his hands. And believe me, Forman's mad enough he might just try something."

Sculler felt like he'd just hit the jackpot. How far would she go?

"What is the ultimate goal of the Insurgents?" he asked.

"Why has Arnie picked Vegas to raise his forces? Will he shift position before he launches the blitzkrieg?"

"His ultimate goal is to remake the world in his Insurgent image. I don't know his reason for picking Vegas, except that it's strategically located for the west-coast Insurgents. And they're giving him plenty of support."

"Why did they kill Wittman?" Sculler asked expectantly. "That doesn't seem to fit into their plans."

"It didn't, fanboy. They killed him because he was an asshole."

Smith had placed her hand on his thigh, and he could feel hundreds of sharp points pressing through his pants. She had an evil black leather glove on her hand, and in Sculler's

woozy state it seemed the skin-inked flying lizard on her biceps was starting to glow a suede-textured purple.

"Now it's time for you to give me something" the woman said. Sculler grew fearful as she led him away from the table and toward the cafe exit.

"What do you have in mind?" he asked.

"We'll start with torture," she said as she paid the bill. Sculler couldn't break away. He wasn't really in control, it seemed., The tingling in his arm had spread to his right hand, and all, the knuckles and joints jerked and twitched unpredictably. He followed along behind her.

Smith led him to a slot machine.

"The loosest slots in town," she said with a sly grin, as she handed Sculler three quarters. She led his hand to the thin groove and helped him pump in the coins.

Sculler watched the three wheels slow and click into place. The three wheels all had jokers over bars.

"Lucky. You just won the big one, Sculler," Smith said to him as she tucked a finger into one of his belt loops. "That's three hundred bucks."

The sound reminded him of spent brass from a Ingram Mac-10 hitting the range floor at Huntington. After all 1,200 quarters had dropped into the hopper, and the cashier had traded bills for the bucket of coins, Sculler again felt himself dragged from the room through the manure-smelling courtyard and into a private room.

"Come here and objectify me, fanboy," said the vixen.

Then Sculler, his will entirely sapped, remembered what Muldy had said the night before.

"She's the most accomplished and dangerous slattern on the eastern seaboard," Muldy muttered with a dull red glow in his eyes.

2300 hours Friday. The Luxor Hotel, Las Vegas

Sculler suddenly came to his senses. He was standing on a concrete parapet, looking down at a stretch of black water dotted with papyrus reeds. Cars and airport vans whizzed by on a stretch of highway across the water. He looked down at his hand, which gripped a steel railing like some kind of claw. Was it his imagination, or was the skin becoming rough and scale-like?

The tingling sensation had gone, replaced by the feeling of a warm rush of liquid mercury in his veins. Maybe he liked it; who could say?

Behind him, he could hear voices.

"Right, the great boat into the other world! And here is Anubis again, extending his control over the underworld!"

Hardin, Muldy and Smith were avidly studying a series of stele that decorated the wall. They were done in the style of late-kingdom Egypt. Beyond that low wall, the great black shape of a huge glass pyramid loomed over them. Hardin turned to regard him. His "Chronic the Hemp Hog" T-shirt glowed under a hidden ultra-violet beam. As he stepped forward out of the other-worldly light, the shirt reverted to more prosaic Deadhead design.

"Hey, look! Sculler's come back to life!"

Nevenah approached him, and scraped one oddly-sharpened fingernail over his unshaven chin. "You have made the voyage back from the land of the dead, Sculler. You're full of surprises, aren't you?"

Sculler looked pleadingly at Muldy, who shrugged his shoulders. "Hey, you're the one who insisted on drinking that stuff. I always try to avoid blue food or drink."

"Let's celebrate," Nevenah suggested, "we'll take a walk inside and find a place to eat."

I'll name the rubber monster, and you name the city it destroyed.

At the Pharaoh Ramses' Bar and Grill, the other three made seemingly pointless conversation while Sculler struggled to remember the previous 24 hours. There had been a murder, than much he remembered, the rich arterial blood and brains all over the lampshade like a Jackson Pollack. And Nevenah with her hand full of needles, pricking, pricking, pricking. His members, on fire, restrained by an unseen bond. What had she done to him? The skin had started to scab and flake off. And his arm didn't look too good either.

Hardin was holding forth on his plans for fandom. "One little baby, that's just the beginning. Nine lines each, you think that's just because that's all that would fit? Why do you think they come out in pairs? Four times nine is 36, half the genetic code. 36 more make 72, the normal human compliment of 64 plus eight special genes taken from the cryonic facility at Area 51. Starfen! What a world they will wreak! You talk of the motor-operated pushover! Tinkertoys! I am talking about playing ducks and drakes with the very pith of the human soul! What a rush!"

Nevenah laid her fork on the table. "I thought I ordered some onion rings," she said.

Muldy was studying him. Sculler could imagine what he saw. He ran over the symptoms in his mind. Fever. Coated tongue. Scale-like lesions on the dermis. Persistent ringing in the ears. And a strong urge to eat crickets. He didn't know what it was, but it didn't look good.

When they went back to the car, Sculler tried to get behind the wheel, but Muldy stopped him. Sculler tried to struggle, but he felt like a child who didn't want to be buckled into a snow suit. The three of them belted him into the back seat and they shot away into the glittering Vegas night.

1530 hours Saturday. The Mardi Gras Hotel, Las Vegas

Muldy sat up on the bed in his hotel room. His feet fidgeted of their own accord, knocking his copy of *The Mothman Prophecies* off the bed. He sighed and reached for the micro-cassette recorder on the side table. Snapping down the record button, he began to speak.

"This is Special Agent Fox Muldy, recording notes on the Las Vegrants case. It has been almost 12 hours since I last spoke with Special Agent Dan Sculler, which is now a cause of some concern. He has failed to contact me since I left him and Central Insurgency Agency operative Nevenah Smith playing spin-the-pickle in the gazebo at Oh-four-hundred this morning. In the absence of any other course of action, I have been forced to attend the convention.

"The first thing which I have noticed about this convention is how sparsely attended it seems to be. I don't think I've ever seen more than 20 people in the same place at the same time all weekend. Events involving Joe Haldeman, the writer guest of honor, have been well-attended, but few people seem to have shown up for the other events I attended. Part of this may arise from the fact that one of the program rooms is a converted guest bedroom, which is well away from the rest of the convention locations, and smells rather strongly of bug powder. A trivia contest which I agreed to run was situated there on Friday evening, and there was barely room for one team of players to sit down. Was this actually a plan to get me as far away from the rest of the convention as possible?

"The lack of attendance could easily be explained by a disinterest in sercon programming, but even the gaming events appear to be poorly-attended. Given even one example of this level of interest, I might think twice about trying to hold a science fiction convention in Las Vegas, yet these people

continue to try, year after year. What could be driving them to this seemingly self-destructive course of action?

"Nothing here is as it seems. A panel advertised as being about the future of fandom turned out to be just another opportunity to trot out familiar opinions about on-line fanac. By the time this became clear, I was committed to participating in it. I was barely able to stay awake. And something which I thought would have drawn quite a crowd, the renewal of wedding vows by Shelby and Suzanne Vick, seemed to attract about six people, and was like some kind of ritual within a ritual I could not understand. At some point, Arnie Katz tried to get Suzanne to promise to obey Shelby in the context of their marriage, and she pushed an Eskimo Pie into his face. Nothing big ever goes down in Vegas without Arnie getting a pie in the face, but what exactly was indicated by this was beyond me.

"I am also puzzled by the presence of Agent Smith here; it can't be a coincidence that the C.I.A. chose to send in an operative that I've known since I was 15. Am I expected to back off in deference to her? Her conduct has been nothing short of outrageous. Entertaining, but outrageous.

"Things are just odd. The program book has a map of the Tucker Hotel, but no map of this hotel. The hotel doesn't seem to really notice that we're here; they dumped a ton of steer manure to fertilize the dead lawn around the gazebo and directly outside the con suite; this leant an interesting odor to Bob Tucker's dessert reception last night.

"Everyone seems to accept these limitations as a matter of course, except for Ken and Aileen Forman. They've worked tirelessly to make things run on time, and aside from a tiny handful of assistants of theirs, no one else really seems to care very much about the whole thing. I attribute this to the ongoing debate about the circle of 23 editors of the local fanzine, Wild Heirs. This is the only really enduring topic of conversation, although people do seem to stop talking about it when I enter a room. There are definitely changes planned for the near future, but I can't get anyone to tell me what is going on. Meanwhile, the convention grinds to a halt around them, and no one pays it any mind. In act, if they have any comment at all, it is to blame the whole thing on Ken and Aileen. And with plans to hold a smaller, fanzine-oriented relaxicon in Las Vegas, to be called 'Toner,' the Forman's interest in a larger, more sercon convention may prove to be very inconvenient.

"Everyone in Vegas fandom seems to have their own personal agenda apart from the convention except Ken and Aileen. Tom Springer and Tammy funk are working on aerosol neurotoxins. John Hardin is into genetic engineering. Ben Wilson seems to be pursuing a collection of odd and unusual fanzines; he paid several hundred thousand Turkish Lira for a pornographic Josie and the Pussycats fanzine at the auction this afternoon. A lot of locals seem to be big wrestling fans. And of course, Arnie Katz himself seems to be bent on reprinting something by just about every fan writer of any merit who has been active in the past 50 years. It's like he practices some kind of sympathetic magic, by publishing a writer's work, he actually takes on the role and power of that fan-writer for a short period of time. What he may plan to achieve by reprinting Tucker's writing is enough to give anyone pause.

"That leaves Ken and Aileen alone among the circle of 23 in their interest in con-running, an activity which always threatens to bring on the scrutiny of outsiders. In this instance, they have provided a convenient cover for the meeting of the 23, but its clear that their efforts to involve other people in their vision of the convention is meeting with some resistance.

Damn your eyes! I stab you with your own word balloon!

So much resistance that I fear for their lives. Imprecations against them seem to be on everyone's lips. They're being set up for a fall, I can feel it.

"I have one major opportunity left to prevent this from happening. It sounds corny, but Ken asked me to put together a performance of a fannish play I wrote last year, under happier conditions. I had a sudden Shakespearean flash -- the conscience of the king, et cetera -- and I figure I can rewrite it so that the play details the conspiracy and reveals the plot to kill the Formans. But I have to be able to finger the right person or persons or none of this will have any impact at all."

"I'll make another report tonight."

He snapped off the cassette recorder and put it back on the side table. His heels had begun bouncing on the end of the bed again.

"Sculler, where are you?" he asked, his voice sounding huge in the room.

2000 hours Saturday, 4500 block of Paradise Avenue

Sculler hunched in the back seat of the minivan as Springer rocked it into the far right lane and slammed on the brakes. Why am I here? he asked himself. The arm had become nearly useless; he couldn't move it, and the only sensation was a painful something between tickling and chafing. He knew what it was to be Bob Dole. Or perhaps Kaiser Wilhelm.

Nevenah seemed unconcerned, he realized. Didn't she fear death?

Springer seemed to be looking for someone. A salesman, perhaps?

"Damn," the fat man said. "That's not him." He shot forward and forced his way back into traffic.

"What did he tell you, again?" he asked his moll, the foxy faneditrix Tammy Funk.

"Paradise Avenue, just past the freeway. He'd be waiting, he said," she replied.

"All right, everyone, I don't want to miss him again, or it's no altered chloroflourocarbons for us! Keep your fucking eyes open!"

"You need to clean your windows, Springer," Sculler managed in a weak voice.

"Fuck you!"

Sculler struggled to remember why they were looking for this chemical in the first place, but he couldn't muster the courage to ask. Was it homemade recreational drug? A nerve toxin? Something special for tonight's shrimp cocktail?

"Relax, fanboy," Nevenah said, draping her arm over his shoulders. "We're going to have some fun tonight, like you've never seen."

The van screeched to a halt on the asphalt once again, throwing Sculler into the padded back of the front seat.

"There he is!" Springer yelled. They pulled up by a Lucky-7 and piled out.

"Stop and rob," Funk said.

They went inside to a bank of slot machines that faced the street. A small, old, balding man with a smoldering Viceroy cocked between two fingers, shoveled nickel after nickel into one of the games. An off-white cord led from one ear to a micro-cassette deck tuned unbearably loud, leaking the sound of Martin Luther King breathing heavily in a Rockland, Maryland, motel from one ear.

Sculler had heard the cut before. It was the Hoover's greatest hits collection, available only from K-Tel.

"Mr. Nickels, I presume!" Springer said.

The old man nodded. He brought a worn plastic bag from his pocket, containing silvered aluminum ampoules. "This will do it," he said, and puffed again on the wrinkled cigarette.

"Pay the man, Sculler!" Springer said.

Sculler didn't understand what the fat man was yelling. Nevenah reached into his pocket, removed his wallet, and handed Nickels two crisp hundreds.

"Now we're cookin' with gas!" Springer said as they got back into the van. Sculler peeled chunks of rotted skin from his arm as they drove back to the Mardi Gras.

Funk pulled a maze of tubes and valves from the glove compartment, and began transferring chemicals from the ampoules into larger gas dispensers.

"Hey neighbor!" he bellowed, "Want to go for a joy ride?"

Back at the hotel, Springer's interest in his tubes and pumps and gas bladders was infectious. Nevenah took huge lungfuls of the gas, and took odd delight in addressing the room in a voice like Winston Churchill. "If I were your husband, madam," she rasped, "I should drink it!"

Just as they were running out the little silver death bombs, there was an official-sounding knock at the door. Nevenah opened it, and Muldy strode into the room. "Well, here you are," he huffed. "Am I the only one maintaining some semblance of investigative procedure any more?"

"I have my own methods," Nevenah replied. "And right now, my methods indicate that we should visit a place called Cheetah's!"

"What's a 'Cheetah's'?"

"It's a strip club."

"Why should we go there?"

She slipped the needle glove onto her right hand. Sculler winced involuntarily.

"Because we'll find a lead there."

Or at least some tail, thought Sculler, dwindling back into that back-brain fog. He knew he could no longer hold the steering wheel and the stick at the same time, so the three got into a cab.

"You know where Cheetah's is?" Nevenah asked.

"Of course," he replied in a thick Mediterranean accent, and stepped on the gas.

A doorwoman wearing a negligee took their money, and the three sat down at a table near the front stage and ordered drinks. The noise of the music and the bright gel-tinted ferns blasted Sculler's unprepared brain. He felt insecure. Would they make fun of his mighty sword?

Women paraded by, one in neon green panties, one in a knit crotch-length bodysuit, one redhead with nothing but a t-shirt and panties. The women actually seemed more interested in Nevenah. They walked by her, brushing their thighs and breasts against her long red hair, and murmuring in her ear.

Sculler felt his arm grow stiff.

"Tell me again, why are we here?" he stage-whispered to Nevenah over CCR's *Run Through the Jungle*.

"Each of you will have a private dance with a dancer I select," she said. "Each will give you half of a key to decode a message I'm holding right now. I don't even know what it means, but the Eyeball told me they'd be here."

"The Eyeball?" Muldy asked suspiciously.

"What did you think he was only your source? Don't worry, we practice safe data."

"Is that mine?" Sculler asked, directing her eyes to a tall, sinewy long-haired brunette.

"I know you better than that," she replied. "She's for Muldy."

It is said that in Ulthar, that lies beyond the river Skai, no man may kill a cat . . .

Nevenah motioned the dancer over to the table and whispered into her ear.

"Her name's Samantha," she said. Then she pulled Sculler's wallet out again and handed the woman some money. An Elton John tune came on as the deejay introduced the next dancer to take her clothes off on the main stage.

"And here's . . . Tiffany!" the amplified voice said. "Look at those snow-peaked mountains!"

"Don't worry it'll be over in a few minutes," Muldy muttered to Sculler.

Muldy walked to a hidden back room with the svelte entertainer.

"Ah," Nevenah said. "here's yours." A few more bills left Sculler's wallet, and a 5-foot short-haired blonde with perfect breasts, pencil-eraser nipples and a smoothly plump figure sat in his lap.

"How are you doing tonight, sweetie?" she asked. For the first time in more than a day, Sculler was able to move his arm. But it felt different -- like the very muscles had deformed and changed into something else, like his fingernails had become claws, like his palm had grown fatter, thick.

"My name's Madison," she said. "What's yours?"

"Sculler," he answered, sneaking a look at his arm. He recalled a Herpetology course at Dartmouth: his arm had transformed into the brown, muscular padded claw of a Kwajalein reticulated gecko. What was going on?

She asked him if he wanted a dance.

"Uh, wait a couple of minutes," The Elton John was replaced by Golden Earring's Radar Love, and Madison leaned over Sculler in his chair, took off her top, and put her hands on either side of his head. She swayed her perfumed globes back and forth below his nose and rubbed her thighs against his leg.

Sculler felt his claw move involuntarily. It slipped up the back of her leg, up to her thigh, and higher, until the folds of fatty, beaded hide and the sharp claws slid into the crack of her butt.

"Don't," she giggled, squirming away from him. "I'll get in trouble."

"You don't know how much," Sculler replied, sincerely trying to regain control of the mutant limb. He had to admit the squirming wasn't all bad, though. Still, she would bring her breasts within a hair-breadth of his distended tongue which felt more bifurcated every minute. He could even smell the smoke in the air with it -- someone nearby was smoking Balkan Sobranie's -- a special Banja Luka blend, even -- but Sculler recalled that the cigarette hadn't been produced since the start of the Croatian offensive.

Then Madison swung her breasts under his nose again, and Sculler flicked his tongue and briefly licked her left nipple. An overwhelming sense of knowledge entered him: someone was an impostor, someone deep within the Silvercon cabal. And the person weighed less than 180 pounds, which eliminated about 94 percent of fandom.

The song ended, and the woman slithered over him one last time, and asked if he'd like another.

"No, thanks," he said. Muldy had also returned, with a look of heartening glee on his face. Were they close to solving the case? It didn't seem possible. Muldy sat next to him.

"She was an Olympic athlete," he said, his mouth hanging open with awe. "A fencer, she said."

"Did you get your clue?" Sculler asked.

"Uh, yeah."

The three walked to the club's exit, thanked the door-woman and stepped out into the brilliant morning sun -- how

much time had passed with that one pheromonal kiss? Nevenah hailed a cab.

1500 hours Sunday, Mardi Gras Hotel, Las Vegas

Muldy stood backstage, nervously riffling through his script. Sculler stood nearby, leaning on light post. Given that "backstage" was actually a concrete hardstand near the swimming pool, both of them felt acutely self-conscious, but there was nowhere else to go.

"So the clues add up to Forman being a spy for some big eastern fan syndicate." Sculler looked terrible; he hadn't shaved since Friday, and his seersucker jacket looked like he had squirrels living in it.

"Yeah, but I don't buy it for a second. All that elaborate chemical hokum. More smoke and mirrors from Central Insurgency. Although after this convention, I could easily imagine killing him myself.

"But we've had so much fun!"

"You're not the one who had to get up at eleven in the morning to be on panels the last two days.

"Well, I can't say I'm any closer to figuring out what the hell is going on. Do you have any crickets?"

"You're not yourself, Sculler, anyone can see that. If you were, that bogus "lead" would have turned on a little light in your brain. Our problem was that we were looking for a single culprit, just one killer. Conspiracies never have just one person behind them; the collaboration is what makes them conspiracies. Quiet now, it's time for the curtain to go up."

The play had been altered from a happy Christmas fanac story to a tale of rivalry between three fan editors, all of whom hoped to join the editorial staff of a prestigious fanzine. All they had to do to get a spot was murder one of the current editors. The three took immodest pleasure in this action, and the poor victim, who wore a T-shirt with a big turtle on the front, never had a chance. He was shot, stabbed, bludgeoned, gassed, poisoned, run over, defenestrated, burned and made to write bad checks.

And when the eager assassins returned to the senior editor, he took them in to his office one by one. Since his vision apparently wasn't the best, he had to creep up very close behind each of them, level a nail gun just behind their right ear, and then whacked them without remorse.

By the end of the play, Hardin, Springer and Nevenah all sat very quiet and pale in the front row of the audience. Everyone else applauded raucously, even the Formans. Arnie Katz was nowhere to be seen, having slipped out just before the first murder. And with that, the convention seemed to have run out of juice. Even the animé fans canceled the rest of their marathon and slunk away from the hotel.

Everyone who remained collected in room 1164, smoking, drinking, laughing, having a genuinely good time. It seemed as though there was an unspoken agreement not to mention the less-pleasant events of the weekend. When Arnie and Joyce re-appeared, there was much back-slapping and offers of Pepsi, which seemed to raise their spirits. The other members of the inner circle seemed to have left town rather suddenly, their work incomplete. But what happens, Muldy wondered, when it's time for another issue of *Wild Heirs*?

One thing remained to be resolved.

As Tom Springer opened the door to his room, almost giddy with relief, he didn't see the figure who slunk from behind the ice machine. His first clue that he was in danger was when the snake-control loop wrapped around his neck and most of the air left his lungs under a heavy kick to his ribs. Then Muldy was on him, and didn't look happy.

So they took me down to Ocean Shores and tortured me for five days.

"I want the antidote, Springer. And if I don't get it, you'll have to learn how to breathe through your ears."

Springer's struggled to speak. The loop around his neck relaxed just slightly. "I don't have it."

"You gave him the doctored shrimp cocktail."

"Hardin created it, but it was all Nevenah's idea."

"I'm not surprised. But it cramps my style to have a lizard for a partner. Who has the antidote, Springer? There's always an antidote, right?"

"Not in 'D.O.A.', there wasn't."

The noose slipped tighter around his neck.

"Nevenah! Nevenah has it!"

Nevenah was sitting calmly on the bed when Muldy stormed into her room. Before he could raise his side arm to her head, she held out the silvery teardrop and dropped it into his hand. A drop of amber liquid plashed against the stopper.

"It's been fun, Muldy, but I think I need to get back to New York. I have some real work to do there."

"What makes you think you're going anywhere?"

"Well, everyone got what they wanted, didn't they?"

Except me, of course. You could do something about that, if you wanted to . . ."

She was very, very close to him now, and she had that damn glove on again. Before the toxin-coated needles could bite his flesh, Muldy twisted her wrist deftly and stepped back away from her.

"What the hell did the C.I.A. want with all of this, anyway?"

"Insurgency is its own reward, Muldy. Besides, I work for people who get nervous when too much power collects in any one place. If I could join the inner circle, that was fine. but if I didn't make the cut, no one was supposed to."

"But why pick on Sculler?"

She laughed and laid back against the bed. Her skirt rode up, revealing the dinosaur skeleton on her leg. "Heavens, Muldy," she trilled, "A girl has to have some fun."

He shook his head. "I suppose I ought to be glad that there's something in this world that doesn't change."

1300 hours, Highway 15, Stateline, Nevada

Fang chewed up the road like an armadillo at a termite buffet.

"How do you feel?"

Sculler worked his arm experimentally. It still looked kind of scaly, but it felt a lot better. His fingernails had returned to normal, and the involuntary jerking and clawing had stopped altogether.

"I think I'm going to survive. No real thanks to you, though; why didn't you warn me about that woman?"

"No one ever believes me until they experience her for themselves."

"Hmp! You're probably right. Well, at least we saved Forman, even if we couldn't save Silvercon."

"But Toner will be an even better convention. It should attract the same kind of zinehead clientele, and cause less stress all around."

"Gosh, we're good."

"You said it. There's only one thing that worries me."

"And that is?"

"What will the accounting office say when we try to get reimbursement for a pair of lap dances?"

The desert road hummed under the wheels, and appeared to stretch away to infinity.



AND NOW, YOUR LETTERS:

[APH: Mail hasn't gushed out of the box at quite the same rate it did right after Worldcon, but at least some of that might be caused by my own tardiness in publishing one issue, followed by the precipitous appearance of the next...I'm sorry if this has been a source of frustration to anyone, but I do what I can. Anyway, we'll start off with some post-Worldcon travel reportage from GREG BENFORD (gbenford@uci.edu):

"Excellent issues . . .Victor Gonzalez fine as usual.

"Joan & I have been traveling a lot, partly to escape the massive rebuilding all around us after the Laguna fire; just returned from Europe. Hope you liked the Worldcon! We also went on a cruise in the Baltic, London & (me, for scientific reasons) Bonn, Germany.

"The Europeans are rich, indeed, with the dollar shrunken 70% since 1972. Some decidedly odd grace notes: sailing out as London bridge is raised for us; stepping ashore in Russia to a band playing "Dixie"; sailing out of St. Petersburg along miles of rusty, neglected ships and submarines of the Russian Navy, ironically toasting them with champagne and caviar.

"I took along and reread *THE HIGH CRUSADE*, and it is as marvelous as ever. A remarkable, lasting novel. I do hope someone does the movie . . ."

[APH: I remember reading it when I was at that golden age, and I recall I enjoyed it immensely . . . I think most fans have an internal list of books and stories they would love to see filmed . . . I've always wanted to see someone film *The Mote in God's Eye*, and I think you could make a whole series of S & S films based on Leiber's Fafhrd and Grey Mouser stories. I hear some is finally shooting a film of *Starship Troopers*, although I think *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress* would make a better film. And in a perfect world, someone would give John Sayles \$100,000,000 to make an epic based on *The Dispossessed*.

I'm glad you enjoyed the trip to Russia, but didn't it make you a little nervous to cruise by all the poorly-maintained nuclear reactors in those submarines? One need not be paranoid about radioactive materials to wonder what the hell will be done with all those old rods . . .

Now, KATE YULE (kyule@agora.rdrop.com) returns with her opinions on English beer, which I hasten to note are not shared by the publisher of this fanzine:]

"APAK #43 received and enjoyed. I started a PoC on the last one, but it seems to have vanished somewhere in the course of a recent road trip into the depths of NE Oregon (and I do mean depths: Hells Canyon. Hoo boy.).

"Re allegedly potable substances in the UK: A number of us vividly remember the time when Joyce Zimmersheid came up to me in the Conspiracy fanbar and asked what I was drinking. I gazed at the glass a moment, said "Anteater piss", set it down and walked away. No more Watney's bleeding Red Barrel for me, mum, I'm off to drop the bomb. Actually these days I order cider, if there's any on hand, and there frequently is.

"Your personal offerings may have been limited in this issue, but what there was (ninjas and seagulls) was cherce.

"The 'Get in, I'll drive you to the story' approach -- yes, indeed.

"Hurrah for the new lino font -- the previous one was less than comfortable. Hm. A brief rummage through the pile reveals you changed it in about April. Oh. Well, thanks anyway, we DO notice these things.

"Really."

Cold mashed potato sandwiches for Suthun Fans

[APH: Your opinions and praise are duly noted, Kate. I'm always glad to give the reader what he or she wants, especially if I can do it before they know they want it. Let us move on now to that most self-effacing of smofs, RICHARD BRANDT (4740 N Mesa #111 El Paso TX 79912, e-mail at Richbrandt@aol.com), who, by virtue of being willing to do some actual work, is accumulating more power in Texas fandom than is healthy for any one fan to possess:]

"Couldn't agree more on the acoustical problems with huge exhibit halls--first having noticed this phenomenon at, well, Magicon, where someone decided to do the TAFF/DUFF auction in the lounge beneath the Orange County Convention Center roof, and neither bidder nor auctioneer could hear the other at ten paces. Of course, at both ConDiablo and LoneStarCon the fan lounge is destined for the convention center floor...however I would insist that any actual fan programming be in an honest-to-goodness function room (which in El Paso at least are handily across the hall from the fan lounge in the Civic Center). I also think it is a Good Idea to have an after-hours fan lounge in the hotel along the lines of the '73 suite in Orlando. As fan lounge coordinator in San Antonio, I will entertain volunteers for the host position (I suspect if we're not careful in El Paso that function will automatically gravitate to the "&Smoking Suite".....)

"(Quite a bit of chatter back there about &Smoking, as I recall. I have concluded that folks like Don and myself [a second-hand kinda guy] are obliged to present ourselves at such gatherings to keep the rest of ya on your conversational toes--ensure that you find more common ground than merely temporary shortness of breath...)

"(I actually used to & some myself, but it made my friends much too amusing)

"Interesting to learn that the last two American Fanthologies differed from their British successor in the matter of seeking permissions. Interesting in that half the FUN (not to mention much of the work) of being a REAL reprint editor is just that. This was certainly the case with the FANTHOLOGY '87, which like it or not, had nearly every piece I wanted (and certainly those I had my heart set most on). This involved correspondence back and forth with writers in Australia and Britain; seeking permission from Carol Carr on behalf of her late husband; and most worrisome to me, asking Greg Benford to reprint a piece which he had, with very little revision, sold as a short story to *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*. (Greg was flattered to be asked, as it turned out.) Then there was the difficult matter of condensing a sprawling epic collection of interrelated pieces such as Teresa's "Over Rough Terrain," which required careful consultation with the author. (It did yield the enormous satisfaction however of seeing F.'87 mentioned in the acknowledgments for MAKING BOOK.) Then there was Mr. Priest, who not only proofed my excerpts from "The Last Deadloss Visions" but made some small updates and revisions to his text... (And of course if I had realized how much smaller some of the articles would be when re-typeset, I might not have abridged anyone at all. Well, live and learn.)

"In short, I never felt more like a real editor than on bringing that project to fruition. (Thank you ever so for being the one who planted the seed of the idea in my head. Well, actually, pretty much shoveled the thing in there full-grown...)

"Naturally, I regretted the decision of another fanthology editor to ignore every one of the recommendations which they solicited, which guaranteed a piece of mine didn't make it into their volume. Of course, I now learn an old article of

mine (which in the hectic course of day-to-day existence I had all but forgotten) is to appear in a forthcoming volume! Huzzah!

Don't feel nearly as bad now for deciding it would not have Been Proper to include my own Corflu IV report, which indeed was full of Good Stuff (largely quoted from other fans of course), in my own collection. Besides, I never did have a good ending for it, a flaw which another editor has since largely corrected in me. I hope.

"(Now that I'm building a Web page and could include anything I want in an electronic edition of the Fanthology, including pieces which didn't make the "first cut," all bets are off...)"

[APH: The thing that really impressed me about your Fanthology, Richard, was the wealth of quality material you managed to find in a year where I, at least, didn't see so much to choose from. At the time, I thought the suggestion to produce the volume was far from being a favor to you.

Personally, I don't see the need to place the fan lounge right in the center of the exhibition center where programming is held. This year, for example, the ideal location would have been in a suite in the Moat House hotel, about a hundred yards away from all the programming, but not right down in it. The things we most want from the fan lounge, a place to meet, a place where fanzines can be sold or traded, a place where time-binding can be conducted -- are actually limited to some degree by being in the middle of the exhibition hall. It also ought to be observed that these things appeal to such a small cross-section of the convention that it seems like a poor use of convention resources to put it in a place where things appealing to the "paying customers" could be situated. If, as Arnie Katz was saying last weekend, we are entering a period where the Worldcon will be run as a commercial concern designed to attract 20,000 people, we had best be prepared to pool our funds and use the Fortress Roscoe method to organize our fan rooms

As long as we're on the subject of alarms and excursions, we might well move to DAVID THAYER (eushar@exu.ericsson.se), who apparently saw a lot in the last two pages of issue #43:]

"I don't understand the Las Vegas crowd targeting you either. It must be an inside joke at some imagined slight you made of them in print. Apparently if you don't understand their lingo, you are obtuse or stupid. I suggest you simply laugh it off and take it in stride. Everyone with any visibility has his detractors. You are nobody if you don't. Their little barbs are not as deadly or potent as you imagine.

"Harry Andruschak's eyes will glaze over before he sees a domed-over city. He'll have to settle for a shopping mall.

"Murray Moore could take Umbrage at your remarks about his boring his readers. But I agree that a story of a thousand miles should start with the last step.

"Your review of Richard Dengrove's Jomp, Jr., contained some irresponsible journalism, attributing derogatory comments to reliable, but unnamed, sources. How credible is that? How can anyone defend himself from such invisible noxious insects?

"I wonder about individuals who simply send a one-time payment for a lifetime's worth of publications. Is it a lazy man's nirvana not having to commit to an endless stream of the usual? I'd personally miss not being required to send you that occasional spittle-flecked postcard or e-mail of comment.

"War in hindsight is always replete with mistakes. Historical revisionists tend to forget the influences of the emotional moment and delve too deeply into after-the-event facts."

Citizens! Your finest BLOOD please!

[APH: Whoa, David, get a grip there! I didn't see the Wild Heirs stuff as a serious assault on my person, I just was pointing out a few logical inconsistencies in their program. No one in Las Vegas has ever said anything that I thought seriously damaging or hurtful. They're just too goofy for that. More than anything else, I have been honored and flattered by the response they have made to me and my work.

I hope that people who purchase subscriptions to APAK will not let it stop them from making some response; in a sense, subscribing could be seen as purchasing a license to break into the lettercol on a regular basis as well.

No, irresponsible journalism would have been to name my sources, especially when dealing with something as nebulous as the subjective response to a given fanzine. People joke about not being able to talk around fan-writers for fear of ending up in print, but there have to be some limits. Anyway, I should have thought my positive review would have far outweighed some oblique reference to some negative ones.

Is there a more damning epithet in modern America than "revisionist historian?" All historians are revisionists, David, or they're just transcribers. If you didn't have some kind of agenda in regard to history, why would you spend your life pursuing it? People who claim to be devoted to the truth above all other concerns make me nervous. They're either lying or dangerously naive. Conversely, the thing that really scares me in regard to the issue at hand is the notion that history is the property of people who made it, that veterans' organizations should spend their time trying to bully historians and museologists into presenting an image of recent history that they can feel comfortable with. Japan was a truly dangerous and rapacious nation in the first half of this century, one of the more repressive regimes in history, but that fact did not justify the use of nuclear weapons on civilians. Nor do your efforts to denigrate my opinions with the all-purpose pejorative of "revisionism" do anything to refute them in detail.

Let us now welcome a new correspondent with a very long address, STEVE BREWSTER (Steve.Brewster@Bristol.ac.uk, <http://zeus.bris.ac.uk/~masjb> Room 1.19a, School of Mathematics, University of Bristol, City and County of Bristol, BS8 1TW, United Kingdom. Tel: 0117 928 7445) who writes:

"You mention the rumours of a British Worldcon bid for 2002 - I think that should read 2003; recent discussions on rec.arts.sf.fandom and in 'real life' suggest that such a bid would be conditional on Cardiff's building some decent conference facilities (it doesn't seem to have any at all at the moment).

"On the matter of cricketing analogies (Joseph's letter): towards the end of her reign, Margaret Thatcher tried to use cricket terminology in her pronouncements, and failed miserably. When her party began its final and ultimately successful push to get rid of her, she made some farcical and typically belligerent remark to journalists about 'not ducking any bouncers'. A 'bouncer' is a ball bowled so as to bounce towards the batsman's head at great speed; ducking to avoid it is one of the few sensible responses."

[APH: No one ever accused Margaret Thatcher of being any great font of sensible responses, I suppose. Now, CHRISTINA LAKE (clake@wsxwat1.demon.co.uk) offers some information in regard to the Timebytes anthologies reviewed in #42:

"I'm looking forward to receiving the current issue of Apparatchik as various people have told me and Lilian that you've done a very nice review of our fanthology! Perhaps you could put some information on how to get it in the next issue.

"Copies are available from Christina Lake, 12 Hatherley Road, Bishopston, Bristol BS7 8QA (e-mail at clake@wsxwat1.demon.co.uk) The price is £6.00 for the pair in the UK and £10.00 or \$15.00 overseas.

[APH: Thanks very much Christina, you saved me the trouble of pursuing your for this very information. Folks, think about sending her a note; these are two fanzines I consider well-worth paying for. Now, touching on things brought up back in issue #2, BRUCE PELZ (coming to us from bep@deltanet.com) writes:

"I've received a note from Judy Bemis, which reads as follows:

'Bruce, I've been getting Andy Hooper's bi-weekly fanzine Apparatchik, and he recently wondered if there was available in fanzine fandom a copy of Shaggy #58 - he wanted to read something that Arthur Hlavaty suggested might be precognitive statements by Joe Gibson, possibly about Walter Breen. I immediately thought of you. Do you have this zine, and are you still offering copying of old fanzines?'

"Yes, to both questions: I have SHAGGY 58 (Sept.-Oct. 1961), and I'll copy it if someone wants a copy. But I think the 4-page Gibson article ("Cheats, Frauds, Thieves, Whores and Moochers") will disappoint anyone looking for precog on Breen. Might be interesting to ASK Joe -- I THINK he's still alive somewhere in the BArea -- if he had WB in mind for any of his unnamed examples.

"Besides, Joe is a possible nominee for a Best Fan Artist Retro-Hugo, seeing the stuff he did for VOM"

[APH: One of the most interesting and delightful things at Silvercon was going over some of the fanzines that are eligible for the 1945 fan retro-Hugo awards. If you haven't heard about this, here's the scoop: The powers that be in Worldcon policy have approved a plan to walk the Hugo awards back through the years after the first Worldcon was held, but prior to the inception of the awards in 1953. This year, we're considering work from fifty years back, and there will be a much better chance of doing so in future years if we have a good turnout in nominations and votes this year. Write to Bruce for ballots and a list of eligible fans and materials. And, Bruce, if you could come across with a Xerox of the article in question, I'll happily reimburse you for it

Now, some news from across the pond, brought to us by DAVID LANGFORD (ansible@cix.compulink.co.uk):]

"Just to help keep you sitting squarely (if uncomfortably) on your desired Cutting Edge: at the BSFA meeting last night Abigail appeared and exfoliated many little slips of paper reading thus:

'TAFF Race '96 - the deadlines
Nominations in by 2 December 1995
Ballots available 7 December 1995
All votes to be received by midnight
Saturday, 4 May 1996

This race will select someone from Europe to travel to LAcon in the late summer of 1996. Candidates must send five written nominations (three from Europe, two from North America); a 100-word platform for reproduction on the ballot form; and £10.00 as a 'bond' to sow good faith. Further details from the European Administrator, Abigail Frost, 95 Wilmot Street, London E2 0BP (Tel: 0171-739 9772).'

I love bunt plays. I love the idea of the bunt.

"Meanwhile Christina Lake exhorts Ansible to plug post-con sales of the Intersection fanthology diptych, since --

'Now we've had a rave review from Andy Hooper, we're sure that everyone will want one!'

"Best, Dave"

[APH: I'll respond to all that by saying that I am eager to support the candidacy of one Martin Tudor (who would be a fine choice even if he wasn't acting as duplicator and mailing agent for this fanzine), and would even be willing to nominate him, not that anyone asked me . . .

Now, as if in answer to the many people who asked me for his address, here is a letter from PETER ROBERTS (36 Western Rd, Torquay, Devon TQ1 4RL, UK, e-mail at P.Roberts@rbgkew.org.uk) who has much more exciting dreams than me or most people I know:]

"Hi Andy. Good to meet you at Precursor and thanks for the Apparatchik. Pool table, beer, shady characters, thick, oozing heat...nice to see both the Shrimp Brothers in their natural environment. I could almost hear the Spanish Moss dripping off the trees, till I looked out the window and saw Stevenage. What a bummer. God's small gift to civic concrete.

"Sometimes, when I can't sleep, I lie in bed at night and try to imagine people living in places like Stevenage. Places I've briefly passed through or seen a signpost to or plotted a route past. It's a matter of continual wonderment to me that people all around the world are living in places I've barely heard of...even when I am not there. What do they do? Do they really exist when I'm not looking? If I didn't lie awake at night imagining them, would they all quietly vanish? Are they imagining me? Have I been reading too much Phil Dick again?"

"Of course, long before I get round to the answers, I fall asleep and Stevenage ceases to exist. I guess I can live with that.

"Unlike Greg Benford, I don't think I dream much about dead sci-fi authors, though I might have met William Hope Hodgson once. Instead, most of my dreams are scatological. No, that's crap....I mean eschatological. End of the world and stuff like that.

"There I am, doing the usual dream stuff with the usual dream crowd...schoolfriends, present and former colleagues, Mr. George who owned a bookshop in Bristol in 1963, his fat son, my dead granny...when suddenly I look up into the sky, and it's full of portents. Like Close Encounters on a busy night.

"Next thing you know, these portents are spilling out eveal shape-changing aliens, raining firebombs and gas, or bending reality in ways which would make even Yogg-Sothoth feel poorly.

"The End is so clearly nigh, that my reaction is always to say 'Well, sod it then', and try to find a pub to get a last pint in...though in the circumstances it's often difficult to attract the barman's attention.

"The trigger for this recurrent nightmare is looking up at the sky, which is a bad move in my dreams. So, Andy, if one night you should find yourself stuck in one of my dreams, perhaps ready for a game of softball...please remember to keep the ball low and my attention firmly on the ground. Then perhaps we can both get to the bar before the end of the world. I'll even buy you a shrimp cocktail. Hell, it's only a dream - make that a dozen!

"Meanwhile, keep pubbing your ish. Best..."

[APH: I have to admit that I have never come across a fan whose response to looking at the night sky was to descend into

nightmare, but I suppose Lovecraft must have had moments like that. On the other hand, I come from a country that has never undergone aerial bombardment, so I am not as culturally apt to imagine dreadful things coming out of the sky.

Also, my response to the impending end of the world would probably involve the satiation of different appetites than yours (answers on a postcard), but I doubt they would be any more edifying or sophisticated. Is this the race that will rule the sevagram?

Now, a note from a recent visitor to Seattle, LINDA STRICKLER (L.Strickler@lmu.ac.uk), who has been squinting at Apparatchik of late:]

"I had a glance at APAH (is that how you abbreviate it?) at Simon's last night, mostly to read the bit where Jerry Kaufman called me Simon's sweetie -- very endearing and I don't mind. I did try to read other bits, especially the first page, but both Simon and I are having eye problems, for different reasons, and the print seemed mighty small last night after a long day of teaching for me. I may bring it into work and copy it enlarged so Simon can read it."

"I'd like to say how amazing I think you are to keep up the grueling schedule of bi-weekly publication. I know others have commented on this as well. It is especially incredible that you kept up (almost) while gadding about the world!"

"It was great for me (and I think I can speak for Simon as well) to get to Seattle and meet the fans there, and then to see some of you again in Glasgow. Apparently I was the person who enjoyed the convention (so they say) because I used to be heavily involved in running them and this time I said no to every request and just enjoyed doing things and seeing people. I am looking forward to our Novacon because I need regular real breaks from my work, love it as I do, as teaching really takes a lot out of me."

"I am planning to be in Seattle again in the spring to see my frail parents, but I don't know if I'll get a chance to visit the Seattle group again. I would like to if it is feasible, so maybe I'll see you in April."

[APH: We'd be very happy to see you again, Linda; just let us know and we could at the least put together a dinner group or something.

I also felt that a part of my enjoyment of Intersection arose from the relative lack of responsibility I had at the con. But this probably applies mostly to people who have had the "pleasure" of running a convention; those who haven't can maintain the personal illusion that they could make everything work out right if they only had the power to do so. These days, I just assume that everything will be a disaster, so I can only be pleasantly surprised.

I know that the small type I've been using in APAK lately has been hard for a lot of people to read; I try to avoid going under 10-point when I can, but sometimes there's just so much stuff to cram into the zine . . .

Another first time correspondent is CHRIS BZDAWKA (913 Walnut St., Verona, WI 53593), who asks some thought-provoking questions:]

"Thank you for sending Apparatchik to me . . . From a strictly objective (yeah, right), non-fan perspective, I think what you're doing with Apparatchik is of great value to the people you send it to and to fandom at large. It seems there is no one else doing what you are doing (pubbing your ish every two weeks, allowing fans a forum for discussion on an even more regular basis than an apa can provide, spreading gossip and commentary) and by the looks of the letters you've printed, your efforts are appreciated. I also think giving Victor

... then throw away the coot and eat the brick ...

Gonzalez a forum is great, because he obviously is a good writer and he does stir up controversy, something you should never be without, like clean underwear and phone change.

"The discussion about whether Victor's columns are fannish, however, forces me to ask questions, which I look forward to discussing with you. Having read a few zines and been involved in APAs, I've always wondered what it is about a work that makes it uniquely fannish. I know what faanish is, but *fannish*? What was it about the road-tripping that made spike's zine *I-94 fannish*? What is it about the James Tiptree Jr. cookbook that makes it *fannish*? Why was *Nine Innings* considered *fannish*? Why was singing an old Scottish song at a convention considered *fannish*? And, someone please tell me, what did/does APA-69 have to do with fandom? I think that the only thing that makes a work *fannish* is its connection with a fan or people who identify themselves as fans, no matter what the subject matter. I also think that makes a work *fannish* is its perceived (by fans) alienation from or critique of the mundane. And how much of that is related to the alienation Joe Fan felt as a teenager, which is apparently when most people begin to find fandom? We've certainly discussed fan psyche before, but I think these are still valid questions and, as a non-fan, I would love to get close to an answer. Perhaps if I did, I wouldn't call myself a non-fan.

"Aren't the criticisms of Victor's non-fannish writing really criticisms of Victor himself and his place in fandom? Having never met the man, I can't speak for his character (although the pot story led me to think he may be a kindred soul, voicing the disgust of a hundred people who've had their dope taken or dumped, not because they were bothering anyone with it, but just because someone had the power to do that to them). There does seem to be some animosity toward or fear of him. However, I find his writing to be intriguing and thought-provoking, and I certainly didn't get the 'poor me' vibes others seem to have picked up with the story of his mother's death. I like the way his automobile stories sparked a discussion about driving in general, which frankly guilted me into committing to taking the bus more often.

"Your column about trying to find new fan writers begs the same questions for me. What is it about certain writers that identifies them as 'fan writers?' I understand the unicorns/elves/vampires-on-the-cover books are considered fannish, if grudgingly so by the 'Trufen', and there is cyberpunk and space opera and space colony stories. However, I am unable to determine what it is that makes Spider Robinson a fan writer but not Madison Smartt Bell. Why is *Stranger in a Strange Land* fannish and not *The Celestine Prophecy*? (I suppose it's because the main character is from Mars. Is *Time and Again* considered fannish? What quality is it that makes one writer *fannish* and another not? Perhaps if I understood this, I would stop calling myself a non-fan.

"The discussion about how to 'recruit' new fans, especially fanzine fans, was surprisingly short-lived. I am a non-fan because I don't read what is regarded as fan material, I can't carry on a discussion about Fans of Old, I don't have the time or money to pub my ish, I've got kids, something most fans just don't have and just don't get, and frankly, identifying myself with fans always seems to lessen my credibility or at least muddy it up a bit. (Not that any of my other activities doesn't do that in spades.) Doesn't anyone have any stories about how they explain their little fan secret to family, friends, acquaintances, co-workers? How they get beyond that 'gosh, you're strange' look when someone asks them what they like to read, or where they're going this weekend, or why their

apartment is filled with stacks of home-published materials, or what's up with the costume? I suppose that defining 'fandom' for me would probably answer at least some of my questions; however, I'm also aware of the 'if you define me, you diminish me' philosophy, and I kind of agree with it, so take all of these questions with a grain of salt.

"Finally, I liked the three distinctions made by whoever it was that made those three distinctions about on-line fans and not-on-line fans. With the availability of computer services and instant communication, one would think that merely owning a rotary dial phone would be proof positive of *psychotic melancholia*. But the fact is that technology belongs to those who can afford it, and this particular kind of technology costs more than most people can afford. You can't eat a hard disk, although I understand the floppy ones taste like Cap'n Crunch cereal, and do as good a job of tearing up the inside of your mouth."

[APH: You raise some very good questions here, Chris, most of which have no single answer. Most people spend their entire lives in fandom trying to figure out just what "Fannishness" is, and no two fans ever come to the same conclusion. Part of the problem is that you are trying to make the word "fannish" do the work of several words at once. Books with rocket ships or vampires on the cover are not in themselves innately fannish; they're science-fictional, or sfnal, but they don't necessarily have anything to do with fandom. In fact, a lot of fans would say that a concern with things sfnal is actually a non-fannish trait. On the other hand, it is a very valid question to ask why some books receive the genre stamp of approval and others don't. Most often, the defining characteristic of a true sf novel is the presence of a Michael Whelan painting on the cover.

Otherwise, I think you're essentially correct in your characterization of fannishness as being a condition of association with fans and their interests. It is also accurate to say that fannishness is often defined by elimination; we can point to something we consider "mundane," and say that it is not fannish, but we are at something of a loss to explain how it could be transformed into something that would be fannish.

The measure of a fan is that when they struggle to define this elusive quality of fannishness, they eventually find they are working toward a definition of themselves at the same time. So your comments, about ceasing to consider yourself a non-fan once you have a handle on just what fannishness is, are well taken

The issue of explaining one's fannishness to the mundane world is an interesting one, but I don't think it is anywhere near the problem it once was. In some ways, that's the biggest problem facing fandom today. Not only has the world at large become comfortable with the vocabulary and trappings of science fiction, but it has become a damn sight weirder than anything most fans are willing to embrace. Given that few of us face the kind of ostracism and alienation that fans once had to go through, it becomes harder and harder to justify the very existence of fandom as a social body, except through the relationships and associations we develop through it. This is a major factor in the way that some fans have actually turned away from science fiction itself in recent years; as mundanes can be seen reading Piers Anthony novels on the bus these days, reading and enjoying genre fiction does nothing to facilitate that process of fannish self-definition. It's actually more unusual to avoid reading SF, or at the least, to embrace older, classic works in preference to more contemporary, commercial works.

Thanks to you and everyone else for your great letters. I'll be back in two weeks with a somewhat more modest issue!]

FANZINE COUNTDOWN, Sept. 25th to October 10th

#1) Cube #60, edited by Hope Kiefer for SF3, Box 1624, Madison, WI 53701-1624, available to SF3 members and by arranged trade. It is a measure of the quality of most of this issue that it survives Richard S. Russell's film reviews, which seem to run 180 degrees away from my own tastes as thoroughly as they did when he began writing them more than a decade ago. His reference to 1995 as "The Summer of the Jackpot," will also have strange resonance for people familiar with fan history. At least we both liked *Apollo 13*. But this is a landmark issue for *Cube*; it weighs in at 16 pages, and much of that length is occupied by Diane Martin and Karl Hailman's report on Intersection and the fannish tours that preceded it, and Perriane Lurie's report on the Nasifc, Dragon*Con. These are issues far beyond the direct concern of the club that sponsors the fanzine, and a major step toward interesting readers outside of the club itself. I especially appreciated Lurie's account of the Nasifc, which was mercifully free of the hysterical indictments and hyperbole which has characterized most other writing on that event. Apparently, all that hooplah in Madison about not wanting to do a real, full-size fanzine a couple of years ago was just that, making the group's assault on the editorship of Steve Swartz even more reprehensible. Jae Adam's mimeography has never looked better. Basic membership in SF3 is \$12.00 a year.

#2) A little of the best of Bob Tucker, edited by Joyce and Arnie Katz, Suite 152, 330 S. Decatur, Las Vegas, NV 89107; Another collection of very fine fan-writing put together by the masters of practical time-binding. I must say, I do appreciate Arnie's approach to the preservation of classic fannish writing; regardless of what other people might prefer to see reprinted or whatever protocols some people want to apply to "official" fan histories, he just keeps cranking out these collections and offering them up for \$5.00 apiece. There's quite a lot of Tucker's stuff here that I haven't read before, sprinkled with the usual Rotsler and ATom illos and gigantic Macintosh headers. Of note is "Las Vegas Fantasy," covering Tucker's last trip to the city some 35 or more years ago, but everything included here is awfully good. The writing rises above the hype; the cover proclaims "Selections from the writing of Fandom's Will Rogers," but that doesn't do Bob justice. Will Rogers never wrote anything that made me laugh like "I remember Degler," and it's instructive to keep in mind that Bob did all of his best work for free. He's not just a picture in a book or a story someone told; he's a real person, who has dedicated much of his life to people who repaid him by repeatedly claiming that he was dead. I feel fortunate to have met him, and to have this compact collection of his stuff, in print once again.

#3) From the Kelpie's Pool #3, edited by Alison Freebairn, Police House, Kilmalcolm, Renfrewshire PA13 4LG UK; Alison told me at Intersection that she had ceased publication of this fanzine, and in fact, this issue dates from July of this year. That's a shame; this is a very

entertaining fanzine, with stuff about glove fetishes, Robyn Hitchcock's short fiction, and the editor's first impressions of the bewildering world of fanzine fandom. Nicely done, and more than enough to make us wish that Alison would publish more in the future.

#4) Kitsch in sync legends, edited by John Berry and published by Ken Cheslin, 10 Coney Green, Stourbridge, West Midlands, DY8 1LA, UK; This is the fourth volume of *The Bleary Eyes*, the collected adventures of the various members of the Goon Defective Agency, material which appeared in fanzines like *Hypnen*, *Retribution* and *Scottishe* in the mid-fifties. Oddly, I found the stories in this volume much stronger than those in #2 & 3, and the ATom illos made me laugh out loud. Kudos again to Ken and to Vinç Clarke for all the work these collections represent; unfortunately, most of the run have already been dispersed to people who got the first three numbers, but it's worth asking if there might be one or two still available. An invaluable insight into the origin of the continuing fannish obsession with puns.

#5) Thyme #105 edited by Alan Stewart, P.O. Box 222, World Trade Centre, Melbourne, Victoria, 3005, Australia. Once again, if you don't like Sercon fanzines, you may not like *Thyme*, but if you do like to read stuff about the contemporary sf world, with a narrative of things going on in Australian fandom thrown in for good measure, this is one of the best zines being published. This issue has a fine obituary of Roger Zelazny by Jack Dann, a superb interview with Kim Stanley Robinson, and a solid list of fanzines received that covers much of what is published by contemporary Australian fans. Good art, too. I wish we had this good a sercon zine in the U.S. right now.

ALSO RECEIVED: Mobius Strip, September 1995, edited by Alexandra Ceely for the EPSFFA; Opuntia #26, edited by Dale Speirs; Splish, Splash, special small press issue #2, edited by Joy V. Smith; Zorn #2, edited by Mike Scott.

APPARATCHIK is the Danny Casolaro of fandom, having tried to create the most outrageously over-the-top view of conspiracy and skullduggery imaginable, only to find that all he had done was come uncomfortably close to the truth. As Charles Fort said, "The earth is a farm. We are someone else's property." It's still available for the usual, or you can get APPARATCHIK for \$3.00 for a three month supply, or a year's worth for \$12.00 or a life-time subscription for \$19.73, or in exchange for a left-handed set-up man. If you live in The United Kingdom, Martin Tudor will accept £10.00 for an annual subscription, £19.37 for a lifetime sub, see his address in the colophon on the front cover. Lifetime subscribers include Tom Becker, Judy Bemis, Richard Brandt, Scott Custis, Don Fitch, Ken Forman, Lucy Huntzinger, Nancy Lebovitz, Robert Lichtman, Michelle Lyons, Luke McGuff, Janice Murray, Tony Parker, Greg Pickersgill, Barnaby Rapoport, Alan Rosenthal, Anita Rowland, Karen Schaffer, Leslie Smith, Nevenah Smith, Geri Sullivan, Steve Swartz, Michael Waite, and Art Widner. Langostinos!