

WATCH OUT!

It's the dreaded black

DOT

Don't let it get to you!

Number Three =

= December 1977

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THE LOST WEEKEND

Well bugger I down dead!

That was another Novacon, that was, number seven, and the sixth I've been to. It hardly seems five minutes since the last one, when Skycon and Channelcon joined in battle for the right to the Eastercon in 1978, and JohnandEve Harvey was just a name. This year things seemed much quieter. There was no Best Award, for one thing. But then, the Best will always be the Best. It would surely be superfluous to give it to D. West two years running, and hugely inaccurate to give it to anyone else. Surely.

One or two things, though; one or two things....

Chris Southern's metamorphosis, for example. He changed from good, careful driver all the way up to Birmingham to manic fool as we progressed deeper into its heart---no doubt something to do with the psychopathic gestalt that enables all native Brummie drivers to know exactly what dumb thing all other native Brummie drivers are going to do next. It might have been preferable to take the alternative route---straight up and turn left at Coventry. Gets you direct to the Royal Angus, I'm told. It's a pity we're all going to have to find our way anew next year. What am I talking about? No it's not!

The Saturday night was quite a good night. A quick taxi ride got 19 assorted Rats, Gannets, Odds and Sods to the Best Indian Restaurant In Town, and in fact it probably was. It featured a very solicitous Indian gentleman in a funny hat who stood by the Gents and directed anyone who went near into it. He grinned hugely all the time and Harry Bell wanted to know if he shook the drops off for you as well. He didn't.

This was the Anti-Banquet---GoH, Graham Charnock; Fan GoH Greg Pickersgill. Big news of the evening was the name of the Nova Award Winner, which the Fan GoH prematurely announced. As predicted in Dot 2, Dave Langford got it, and deservedly so. Don't you think so, Dave?

Back at the Angus the disco was starting up. I bought myself a gin and tonic and made a solemn vow not to drink even half as much as I did last year---sixteen gins after dinner. Not pleasant.

Mike Dickinson produced a small, green, plastic tub containing small, gree, plastic slime. This revolting stuff stuck to things, such as ceilings and D. West's glasses, and dripped off very slowly, long strands of it drooping to the floor, or whoever happened to be in between. Someone unnamed ---probably half the con, or else Simone Walshe---took out a contract on John Brunner, the hit to be made in the disco. Mike spent most of the evening stalking Mr Brunner, but with no success. For a long time Mr Brunner sat against the back wall with a good clear space in front of him---a superb defensive position. At other times Mr Brunner dodged.

"Every time I get close, the bugger walks out the door," said Mike.

Maybe someone tipped off Mr Brunner, though I can't imagine it.

Someone else---probably three quarters of the con, or else Joseph Nicholas---took out another contract on Helen McCarthy. But Mike didn't get her either; he was too busy not getting John Brunner.

Miss McCarthy failed to win the fancy dress pun competition. She and two sycophants went as the Foundation Trilogy ---no prizes for guessing how: one in red, one in black, one in white. Miss McCarthy, I am reliably informed, looked as mad as muck.

Joseph Nicholas was on the fancy dress pun judges panel.

I don't remember any sparkling wit or dazzling events illuminating the proceedings thereafter, although Dave Langford was doing his pissed philosopher act at a small gannet's room party, scattering polysyllables to the four winds.

"It's frightening," Rob Holdstock said to me later. "He's more lucid when he's pissed than when he's sober."

And we did have, for a select small group, an sf book title charades session, highlight of which was Christine Atkinson's rendition of 'Brontomek', via "three women writers." (The Bronte sisters, you great oiks! Our excuse for taking fifteen minutes to get it was the lateness of the hour---4.30 am---and the booze---lots. You have no such excuse. Unless your name is Glicksohn.) That apart, the charades had about as much wit as a damp doughnut.

On the Sunday I bought the second 'Berserker' novel by Chris Carlsen and bludgeoned the author into signing it by the simple expedient of going within two hundred yards of him carrying the book and a pen. I don't know what the book is like... No, let me rephrase that; I do know what the book is like, this being the reason why I haven't read it. I don't know what the book is about. But come to think of it, I could make a damn good guess at that too. Anyway, it does have one interesting bit, round about page 70. Some very strange characters appear, called the Fai Iairian druids. This bit really is very good; it's the only bit I have read, or ever will. On the strength of that bit alone I can heartily recommend this book. Pick it up in W.H. Smith's one day, and have a flip through it.

On Sunday afternoon I went home.

THE STATE OF THE ~~ART~~ SF

On Novacon's Saturday afternoon there was a Writers' Workshop panel, in which Peter Weston held out for good, solid SF against the radical forces of Malcolm Edwards, Rob Jackson and Andrew Stephenson. These three pinkoes were going on about getting real people into stories, and exploring their feelings and reactions, and all that sort of crap. Peter had it right. "We're not talking about literature, or art," he said, "we're talking about writing SF."

And he's right! We don't want any real people. Real people just get in the way of the story. What's the good of real people, anyway, if they're going to get blasted on p. 23?

We want good old SF stories that are proper stories--- with a beginning, a middle, an end, and a glossary of words longer than two syllables. We want action. We want adventure. We want plots---simple, easy to understand plots. We want the whole universe threatened with total destruction and saved at the last minute---twice. In less than 4000 words.

We don't want morals, except easy ones that the hero can tell us at the end when he's beaten the bad guys to a pulp. We don't want any deep inner meaning, hidden in semi-colons. Hell, we don't want any meaning! We want meaningless stories.

Editors are crying out for stories like this. They're queuing up in front of Larry Niven, begging him to write a good, solid, meaningless story for them. And what do they get sent by people? Artistic stories with inner meaning---and they're rubbish, all rubbish. That's why Ursula LeGuin will never do any good. And Robert Silverberg used to be okay, but he's gone off something rotten lately.

You get these intellectual writers---posers all---talking about Art and Literature and Putting Some Of Themselves into their stories. These writers know nothing about writing.

Editors know about writing. First lines that grab 'em by the goolies. Punchy endings. Entertainment. That's writing! No need actually to have done any to know about things like that.

Read Ben Bova's book on how to write SF and then send all your good, solid, well-constructed, tightly plotted, grammatically correct, neatly typed, hollow, facile, instantly forgettable and artistically derelict stories to Peter Weston, editor of Andromeda, Keeper of the Faith.

They'll be just what he's looking for.

STRANGE DOINGS

One Saturday recently (26 November, to be accurate) I telephoned Dave Langford to warn him that I was about to set off for Reading in order to commit accountancy all over Skycon's bank statements and registration lists. Someone answered the telephone who was definitely not Dave. He sounded like an exile from a Vladivar Vodka advertisement.

"Oh, hello Andrew," I said. Well, actually, I didn't quite say that. What I actually said was more like: "Ah, that is Andreivich Stephensonski?" but you get the picture. We chatted a while, sounding like a pair of exiles from a Vladivar Vodka advertisement, until Andrew realised that I was telephoning not from a call box at Reading General, but from my own telephone in Kingston. Instantly he handed me over to Dave, so as not to run up my telephone bill too high. A very considerate chap, is Andrew.

(Incidentally, my telephone bill arrived even more recently. It contains a refugee international call, dated 23 September 1977, which no-one in the house here will accept responsibility for. Does anyone want an international call, only £2.82, + VAT? I'll just have to send it back where it came from.)

Now, the reason Andrew was at Dave's in the first place was to sell him an HP25 calculator. This is a wonderful machine which will work out your income tax and VAT if you ask it nicely. Andrew felt he could dispense with its services because he had purchased an HP97. An HP97 will not only work out your income tax and VAT (even using Andrew's patent quadruple entry, reverse fractioning with a half twist, technicolour accounting system) but also argue with the tax inspector, and even, with a bit of training, write him rude letters. (Don't talk about this, but I suspect Andrew of encouraging unnatural practices between his HP97 and his IBM golfball typewriter. Not a word to anyone.)

Dave was so keen to buy that the transaction was completed very quickly. Andrew kept his coat on, to add emphasis to his claim that he couldn't stay long, being as how he had to get

on with his book. (Deadlines, you know; terrible things.) Nevertheless he stayed several hours; it takes a long time to explain properly why you can't possibly stay for long.

But this is beside the point. When Andrew thought I was at Reading station he got up to leave. When I did in fact arrive, about two and a half hours later, Andrew had only just left. The telephone rang and Andrew was out of the door, so Dave told me.

What I would like to know is: why? Does Mr Stephenson have something against me? Or does he perhaps think that by avoiding me he can also avoid an appearance in Dot?

Wrong!

POSTSCRIPT

I'm in a bit of a quandry. You see, I've had this loc from Dave Rowe:

❏ "Dot 2 had a strange aroma...Essence of Sour Grape wasn't it? for---apart from 'voicing' a complaint some 1½ years after the event---there are certainly more than one in fandom who exchange 'one for one' which does save wasting copies on apathetic readers and also saves reading 'dozens of fnzs one wouldn't give a bent shilling for'. It also seems to have somehow escaped your notice---despite having read my editorial & copy of the 'don't note' (see over) to your co-production with Dave Langford---that I don't take credit either....in case you are still unable to comprehend lets put it this way... go unload your salvage elsewhere."

(I hope I managed to preserve the integrity of this letter. It was a little difficult to translate into typescript the original longhand.)

Now, it seems to me that Mr Rowe really ought to see my devastating total absence of reply to his self-explanatory letter. The thing is, he doesn't want a copy of Dot 3, as the duplicated bit on the other side of his loc explains fully. Mr Rowe is too busy. So am I; on to the next loc, from Rob Jackson:

❏ "I liked it all, even the nasty stuff about me. I particularly liked the bits about Nicely Nicely Rowe, which is an---er, nicely ironic title for a bloke who's strangely become dead set against Gannetfandom and all its ways (fandom and all its ways?) and in particular, against me for publishing a posh fanzine and then hinting I am trading for his duplicated letters. He thinks I am demeaning myself and is very cross. Perhaps he is right. Perhaps I will not demean myself any longer, and as he has not sent any letters of comment on Maya, just commented on me, I will not send him anymore issues. Perhaps. (See

how this present tense business is catching?) I also liked the bits about Tiny Fowler, who seemed to take one half-meant little snide comment by D. West and one well-meant but forcibly expressed criticism (or, if you're Nicely, criticism) by Ian Williams, and turn them magically into fearsome, loathsome, near-libellous disparagements, and pretend they were uttered by fannish fandom as a unified conspiracy. How anybody could pretend that fannish fans have unanimous opinions is beyond me. Those who were at Silicon will have witnessed the near-Pauline conversion of Dave Cobbledick from a reclusive BSFA fan into a gregarious fannish fan, with the intention of taking out a contract on Tom Jones, almost, for daring to conceal from him the fact that fandom was so much fun! Shows what a strange, insular, suspicious body the BSFA has become, guarding itself from the big wide world of general fandom. (See? It is quite possible to reverse what the BSFA people say about fandom, and say it about the BSFA.)"

The point to remember is that new fans are likely to discover the BSFA before fandom, since it has a central organisation, and was specifically set up for new fans to discover. But nowadays, instead of saying "Welcome to fandom" it is saying "Welcome to the BSFA, and watch out for that nasty lot over there." The new fans stop dead at the BSFA and never discover the joy of fandom. On the other hand, by acknowledging the existence of fandom the BSFA is at least showing the doorway to the most determined neos. Who are the ones we want.

Enough! Take it away, Eric Bentcliffe:

¶ "I enjoyed Dot and in particular its scurrilous and amusing characterisations of certain well known fen. I'm not sure I'd enjoy it as much if I were one of them, you understand, but in the main it's a pleasantly scurrilous job you do on them. Nicely Nicely Rowe is a bloody magnificent description. I've been wracking my brain as to the genesis of the writing style you've used therein (entertainingly and well) and Damon Runyon seems to come up to the surface. I don't like Damon Runyon, but I do like what you've done with his style!"

Nine out of ten for technical merit, Eric. Damon Runyon it is, and fairly obviously, I'd have thought. Only two for artistic impression, though. Can't have people not liking him.

No marks at all for Steve Sneyd:

¶ "...pseudo Hank Jansen monologues to excess can very easily become tedious, so congratulations on so delicately walk-

ing the line that it continued to work nearly to the end. A noble effort, though. Bogey lives!"

Hank Jansen?

Bogey lives indeed; ask Raymond Briggs.

Joseph Nicholas was close. Good try, Joe, but no cigar.

#4 "Acid-Joseph...Jesus Christ, Smith, I thought you said I didn't irritate you any more? Presumably this was just a passing phase, over which neither I nor any gods that I can pray to can hope to possess the slightest smidgin of control. Poet!

I'm not certain what to make of Dot 2; it's almost, but not quite, as unreadable as The Silmarillion; I can only assume that you adopted the Jewish idiom in an effort to get as far away from the looming spectre of Dave Langford as possible, so that I and other unkind sods like me could no longer accuse you of slavish imitation. Christ knows what you're trying to imitate now; but then Christ was a Jew, right? Right. So he ought to know. I just wish he'd tell a few people, and remind Smith that only those who have been properly circumscribed, like Sir Francis Drake and Jimmy Carter, can get away with such a load of balls.

No, no---I quite enjoyed it. But you must have been drunker than you relate to 'remember' that I have only one hair on my chest. The truth is that I have no hair at all on my chest; know you not the arcane secrets of transplantation? For in such manner do I prevent the hair on my head from receding in a manner like unto what yours does."

Now that isn't nice, Joseph. Definitely a low blow, that. How can you wonder why you used to irritate me when you are capable of such a remark? Still, as they told the guys in the trenches: "If you can't take a joke, you shouldn't have joined." Isn't that right, Mr Rowe? Oh, sorry, I forgot he isn't reading this. Silly me.

Joseph had more to say. Good grief, you can't possibly think he'd be content with a mere three paragraphs---small ones---and a couple of semi-colons? I'm not printing it, tho'.

Pamela Boal was another who couldn't place the style. Go out and read some Damon Runyon, damn you all! (There'll be a short test next issue.)

#4 "Thanks for ". I like it: Can't quite put my finger on the style. Pseudo Philip Marlowe? Anyway, it is sustained throughout and amusing.

'Finchley Central'. I claim to have won the first postal game. It lacks one essential to be a good English game. Where are the dire penalties for infringing the rules?

That masochistic element is essential for a good English game.

Final comment on Dot 2. Thank goodness for a zine which is clear---clean copy, no need for a magnifying glass or code-breaker. Do try and make the next one materialise within a couple of months rather than a dozen."

Three months okay, Pamela?

Indeed you did win the first game of postal Finchley Central, but in such a vulgar, low class manner as to be hardly worth counting. You didn't even announce the commencement of the game before winning it. Rob Jackson won a telephone game in exactly the same despicable way. My dear people, what is fandom coming to?

I'm afraid I cannot agree about having dire penalties for infringement of the rules. The fact is, there are almost no rules to infringe. The entire game is a matter of honour, most especially in respect of breaking the unwritten rules. This, surely, is the essence of its Englishness.

I will give you another chance, however--- Sloane Square. And Clapham Common to you, Mr Jackson!

I can't resist it any longer. Here come the good bits.
Bob Shaw first:

"Many thanks for the copy of Dot 2, which made me chortle the whole way through. Some fanzines only make me chortle on the outside, or from the waist up, but Dot made me chortle the whole way through. Seriously though ---as Dave Cockfield says so unnecessarily after one of his jokes---I thought the Runyon concept was very nice and extremely well executed. A sustained flight of top-quality fan writing."

Then Edgar Belka:

"Thanks for Dot 2; not much one can say about it except 'bloody good'.
Actually, I like Dot because it's produced at the same rate I produce locs---note how this loc was cleverly written to coincide with the production of Dot 2 (and it's only my second loc to you!)"

And Chris Morgan:

"Thanks for Dot 2, which is just about as silly as Dot 1 (though I'm not going to risk looking for it just to check up) but perhaps a little more clever."

Also Terry Jeeves:

"Many thanks for Dot 2, a nice handy little zine, and though I hate to admit it, far more clear to read than

ERG. Remind me to send you a time-bomb."

I must be doing something right! Already I've had obscure death threats from Allan Scott and Dermot Dobson, and more specific death threats from Mike Skelding. (Give me the map coordinates of your home, he said, so that I can put them into my ballistic missile. In fact, I gave him the coordinates of The Bricklayer's Arms, just across the road. With any luck the worst pub in the world should soon be only a memory. So long as Mr Skelding delivers the goods, of course.) Now it's a time-bomb from Terry.

INTERMISSION

Well, folks, it's happened. After a year and a half of relying on British Rail, London Transport and kind friends I am mobile again. I have a new car, a Triumph, four years old, 28,000 miles, one careful owner---a really nice motor. Well, my father had this one going cheap....

I used to have a car, an extravagant 3.4 litre Mark 2 Jaguar automatic, which was a delight to drive. Someone threatened it with an M.o.T. test, however, and it fell apart. Only a week before the test all the brakes failed. Two days after it the vehicle licence expired, and a month later the insurance ran out. All rather a coincidence, don't you think?

So the barrister pointed out in magistrates court. No, they weren't doing me, although at times I wondered. While the car was parked on the road round the back of the house, a complete and utter failure, it was nicked, towed away. The police picked up the culprits only inches from a breakers yard, while they were pushing it up a slight incline. The Ford Cortina they'd used for the towing had burned out its clutch in the process. I'm not surprised; Jaguars are heavy things.

The case came up six months later, and the basis of it was---the two guys having been caught on the job, as it were ---that it was all my fault for leaving the car lying around in the first place. One of the defence barristers was a bright young fellow, out to make a name for himself, and bent on using me for practice.

The magistrates were not fooled.

In the meantime I'd been getting to know the train and bus routes round London, and also their timetables. The 65 bus, for example. It runs between Chessington Zoo and Ealing Broadway, and was invaluable for travelling to Richmond once a month. I discovered that its timetable was extremely regular and predictable: no matter what time I left the house it would just be going round the corner away from me. The 65 was also very good at getting me to Ealing Broadway railway

station just in time to miss a train I wanted. This function was again departure time independent; the 65 would always find a traffic jam or two to slow it down.

Another interesting feature of the 65 was the 'variable destination'. Up would come a 65 clearly indicating that it was going all the way to Ealing Broadway. I would leap aboard and scramble for one of the four seats with enough leg room, beating off hordes of school kids, who could sit anywhere, due to their short legs. Five stops later the 65 would decide it only wanted to go as far as South Ealing after all, and I'd have to change onto a crowded one going all the way, and sit with compressed knees and a faceful of cigarette smoke.

(The 65 actually passes within spitting distance of Greg and Simone's flat in South Ealing. "Did you?" said Simone. "No, I gave up," I replied. "Wind plays havoc with my aim.")

Just thought you might like to know. Now, back to the letters.

QUIET POSTSCRIPT

Now I know I've hit the big time: a letter from Mike Glicksohn.

It looks as if I didn't reply to Dot 1 since nowhere do you paraphrase some witty thing I probably didn't say in the first place after assigned me an invented appellation which will teeter on the verge of being insulting but somehow maintain a balance on the side of good taste due to the deftness with which you wield it. On the other hand, you don't know me so maybe you couldn't think up an appropriate Twitty Title and simply ignored my letter so as not to break your established pattern of non-publication of response. Of course, a third possibility is that you didn't send me a copy of the first issue, which fits the facts of my failing memory, but as a lot of things that did happen don't remain intact in what passes for my brain I can't trust that evidence. Whatever, I either apologize or don't, whichever seems appropriate, and write to thank you for the second Dot. It's a most witty fanzine and strikes me as being totally incomprehensible to anyone not quite familiar with English fandom. And behind the drollery and the slightly artificial yet surprisingly successful style there's a lot of interesting reaction to recent events and personalities on the English fan scene. I'm not sure Kevin Easthope would find it all that funny, but if one isn't being dismembered by your typewriter it's very amusing reading. There is, of course, nothing one can say about this sort of material save to contribute some in the same vein, and I'll leave that to the vast stable of

brilliant fan writers who undoubtedly are on your English mailing list. This is just to say I got it and read it and enjoyed it enormously. So please don't break my arms. I need them when I'm drinking."

Mike, of course I understand your attachment to your arms. Don't worry about it. I hear it's very easy to learn to drink from a wheelchair.

The only other colonial to have written is Bob Tucker:

"I think U.K. fans and their parties and their weddings are Strange. I'm glad I'm a normal red-blooded American boy. We normal red-blooded American boys aren't Strange. If I manage to get to the Big Con in 1979 I'm going to stand silently off in a corner somewhere and watch you Strange people carry on. It should be educational, and I will have something to tell the bloody provincials here in the mid-west when I return. If you let me live to return. I was in California about a month ago (mid-September) and met one of your strange fans. His name was Peter something-or-other and he was touring the States via Greyhound Bus after attending SunCon in Florida. He was Strange too. He just sat there and lapped up my booze and said he didn't like it. He preferred to drink some vile beer of a British make. He attempted to hit me when my tongue twisted and I mistakenly called him Peter Weston. My eyes would be blackened today if our host had not stepped between us to protect me.

P.S. I address letters to 'England' because our postal clerks don't know where 'U.K.' is."

I think you're being unfair, Bob. I wouldn't call Peter Roberts strange, exactly. On the other hand, you can't really blame him for trying to hit you. Accusing someone of being Peter Weston.... It's not on, you know.

I knew it would happen. I'm running out of space. There is absolutely no room left to tell you how Keith Oborn threatened me with death by drowning in a huge bowl of Bird's Instant Whip, merely because Dot 2 caused him to cover himself and his surroundings in cherry yoghurt. Neither can I relate Chris Southern's saga of the two drunken Australians (please excuse the tautology) and their disparaging remarks about pin-striped commuters to the City. I suspect Chris of attempting to annoy me, but let me tell you that anyone making such remarks on the 8.49 Kingston to Waterloo train would not last thirty seconds.

Of David Lewis's attempt at a parody of Dot 2 I can say nothing, and of Andy Darlington's paragraph even less. And in the last line I have room only to say that I received from Coral Clarke a letter almost up to her Maya standard and a

COVER STORY

Dot 3 was produced as a means of utilising a number of letters received from various kind persons; as a trade for faneds who sent me their fanzines; and as a strange device to be visited upon those deemed deserving.

These are just some of the ways Dot can be brought upon you. The others are mostly highly original, or even unheard of, though a simple request might do the trick.

Thanks are due in arrears to Dave Langford for his generous assistance with the duplicating of Dot 2, and in advance for his generous assistance with this issue.

ERRATUM

Ian Robinson, who never writes a loc, but peers over my shoulder while I'm typing the stencils and makes snide remarks, has pointed out an error on p.2, line 11: for gree, read green.

Thanks Ian.

Ian, when drunk, is inclined to remark on the number of errors I have to corflu out when typing stencils. He says that if I got a Plug I could Plug my typewriter into a micro-processor. Then I could watch my script appear on a visual display and edit out all the mistakes before ever inserting a stencil. He is quite willing, he says, to make the necessary small modifications to my typewriter.

Thanks Ian.

SEASONS GREETINGS

May your hangovers be plentiful---and short.

This was Dot 3. God, what a way to start a new year!

If undelivered, return to:

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