

There is no  
escape from...

Number Six



April 1979

...the special  
Deep issue

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WHISTLEBLOWER

There are a few odds and ends left over from last issue. One of them is the ostentatiously announced competition, which was made deliberately too difficult for anyone to answer. Mulligrubs Collick was closest. "What are mulligrubs?" he plaintively wailed in the pages of his new fanzine 101. (Well, just on page 4, actually; I don't want to exaggerate, much.) Right question, Mulligrubs---or can I call you Mulli for short?---but you needed the answer to win the prize, and it's too late now. I will send you a consolation prize of DOT 6, though. What are mulligrubs? Look it up, people. There are lots of interesting words in the dictionary.

For example: "tribble". (I was idly browsing through for a six letter word beginning with T to fit in the Guardian crossword. I do this when I get stuck, because the Gaurdian likes words no-one else ever uses, and not only in its crosswords. 'Thnuderstorms', for example.) A "tribble" is a horizontal frame with wires stretched across it for drying paper. With a little strengthening---such as making the frame out of tungsten steel---it could also be used for slicing little furry creatures, or Trekkies.

While on the subject of meanings, I found out about Nabu. First off, it should have a circumflex accent on the 'u', but you can understand why Ian Maule omitted it. Take your pick between an accentless typewriter and ignorance. Nabu was the Babylonian god who originated language, or so the Babylonians believed. Maybe Nabu-the-fanzine ought to be in Babylonian. Fans do get in trouble when they use foreign for fanzine titles. Twill-Ddu has been wrong all this time, but it can't be changed now. And people ask why I called this DOT! You can only spell it wrong if you try hard. (I have little doubt that some fools will try.)

Absolutely the last strange word discovered whilst meandering through the dictionary: "skelder", meaning to beg, or to swindle. Hence "skelding", of course, Mike.

### A FUNNY THING

There's been a lot of talk and a lot of words written recently about fandom. Rob Hansen, in the Pickersgill-delayed Epsilon 6, was full of gloom and despondency about fandom's future. "It will be sercon," he said, "and SF orientated." Then, in 101, there's young Mulligrubs on the subject of Fandom's supposed barriers, and Alan Dorey on the nurds who fail to 'crash' them. There's a flaw in what they say, engendered by the terminology.

'Fandom' they say, or perhaps 'Fannish Fandom'---and there it is, defined. A single entity to be discussed; a group to be joined, or not; and if not, a restrictive elite to be criticised. The development of the argument is logical, but that doesn't stop it being a load of crap. 'Fandom' can't be defined as easily as that; saying it don't make it so. It isn't a single entity; it isn't a group; and it isn't a restrictive elite. If 'fandom' can be defined at all, it can't be done in static terms ---entities, groups, and the like. It has to be defined dynamically.

Fandom is a process more than anything else. Fandom is what results when fans get together, and letters, fanzines, conventions and having a pint with another fan in a pub all count as getting together, and they all create fandom. The common factor is a dynamic one; you have to do something. You can't wait around for fandom to happen to you; it won't. And fanzines remain the best way of 'getting into' fandom, because a fanzine requires a lot of effort and commitment.

So where does this leave Master Hansen? Firmly hooked into a red herring, really. If a sercon, sf orientated fandom does arise in the next few years it won't affect him greatly, because he won't be active in it. Eastercons already cater for the sci-fi fan, so they won't need to change, and Silicons will always be fannish so long as there are Hansens and Langfords and Doreys and Collicks and Walshes and Pickersgills and Kettles and...

Mulligrubs' barriers reveal themselves to be the result of different spheres of activity happening across each other. If the activities are compatible there'll be little barrier. If they are not, the barrier will be immense, and the only thing either 'side' can do about it is change, which isn't very likely. The whole thing was typified by a remark of Katie Davies in one of those wierd post-Tun conversations I had with her. She'd heard that attendance at Silicon this year was to be by invitation only (and seemed disinclined to believe me when I said

there wouldn't be one) and because of that---only because of that, mind---she was determined to go. Well, if her idea of fun is to spend a weekend in Newcastle with people she doesn't much like, who don't much like her and have different ways of enjoying themselves---fine. (In a way it's rather nice to be thought one of an elite. Doesn't often happen.)

Good grief!

"A WEDDING" BY FRANK ANDOM : REVIEWED

This is a curious little story of a middle-class society wedding in Surbiton---that heartland of the middle-class. The plot is very simple and there are no twists, so that the story depends very much on the author's handling of his viewpoint character (one of the ushers, and the 'I' of the narrative) and the observations he puts into that character's words and thoughts. The narrative style is similarly straightforward, almost deadpan, and the observations are wry, though some are more successful than others. For example, as the happy couple (Rob and Coral) are being reminded by the minister of the eternal and irrevocable nature of holy matrimony, the usher notes that not only is the bride hearing it for the second time in that capacity, but that eight of the nine people with him in the back two rows are divorced or living in sin. "A scene of veritable marital devastation," he thinks to himself, though of course he cannot resist telling one or two others later.

The story opens with a stag night in a real ale pub next to Surbiton Station, at which the real ale fanatic of the group ---one Martin Hoare---is the last to arrive. Martin quickly makes up for lost time. Nothing much happens, except that the usher and a character called Gregory Pickersgill are, for reasons of their own, highly delighted, not to say astounded, when the best man buys a round for everyone after hardly any persuasion and no duress. The usher is also highly amused when the groom-to-be, Rob Jackson, telephones his beloved halfway through the evening to see how she is. In a very middle-class way, Rob stays sober and does not need to be carried home.

On the night before the wedding, the usher receives a telephone call from the groom, asking the very strange question: "Is your car going?" The usher replies that at this precise moment it isn't, but that it was last time he tried it, and confidently expects to be asked to use it in some manner for the wedding. But instead Jackson launches off into a wierd and tedious rigmarole about his parents' car being snowed in, and the best man's car being mended, so that they can't be used, and how there were several other possibilities all of which have failed, so could the usher please pick up Ian and Janice (the best man and his wife) and Rob himself and take them to the church on time? The usher of course agrees and thinks that although Rob

no doubt intended to reassure him that he would not have been bothered had it not been an emergency, he nonetheless has the uncomfortable feeling of being only seventh choice. He wonders if Dr Robert Anthony Jackson is that good a psychiatrist, particularly as the phone call took about four times as long as it needed. But Jackson's actions are entirely in character.

The wedding scene is a fairly average wedding scene, enlivened only by the early arrival and entry of the bride. So, when a dozen guests arrive bang on time after a hectic dash from the pub the usher complains of their lateness, for which he is taken to task afterwards at the reception.

After the reception the bride and groom successfully depart without having their getaway car decorated, and the wedding is over.

All in all it isn't a very inspiring tale, but it is greatly uplifted by the odd nice touch here and there, some of which have already been mentioned. The moment when Pickersgill mistook a long fair haired figure seated next to Andrew Stephenson for a 'new woman', only to discover it was in fact a fellow called Dave Rowe sticks in the mind---a rare piece of comic genius. So does the usher's bafflement at being expected to know the whereabouts of the toilets in The Hotel Antoinette despite never having been there---the nearest thing to a running joke in the story. Some things can only be explained by the assumption that the author was playing purely for laughs, without any deeper intent; making half the guests science fiction fans and then never having them even mention sci-fi, for example. Having a tall thin character continually referred to by the other guests as a little Hitler, for another.

Still, the story is worth having a look at, even if it will never be considered a classic.

#### MAULE'S PARTY

No-one really wants to know this sort of trivia. After all, it's very similar to the sort of trivia they've seen time and again in personalzines. Only the location has changed, and that only because the Maules recently moved house. Martin Hoare's 'taxi only' U-turn to take him away from the convoy headed for a Chinese restaurant in Kingston straight after the reception, which was apparently my fault, is totally tedious information. And who cares that Harry Bell got revoltingly drunk again, after staking a claim to a bottle of whisky labelled 'Bell's' and drinking it all? And that Greg Pickersgill got slightly less drunk than Master Harry and was at least prepared to get into the car taking him home, even if he did later decide that the centre of Kingston was home, and got out? I mean, it's all elitist, ain't it? But it does get to the bottom of the page.

HEADS DOWN, NO NONSENSE, MINDLESS BOOGIE

I don't often do fanzine reviews. When I do, they are short and 'laid back', whatever Joe Nicholas means by that. Why, then, break the habit of a lifetime? For God's sake, why? A coincidence, really. Many weeks ago I rashly told John Harvey I'd write the next Matrix fanzine review column (I was probably under duress at the time, or drunk) and less than a week ago John tactfully reminded me of it. "You've got a week to do them, nearly," he said. That isn't coincidence, of course, just the new BSFA dynamism. I was partway through writing the article when I realised I wanted to inflict it on the DOT readership too, though with subtle alterations, such as the introduction. And now we come to the other half of the coincidence. You see, I'd received this fanzine from Tom Jones, called Waif 3.

Waifs 1 and 2 consisted of a lot of short, uncredited pieces strung together and posted out. They were unconventional, as Tom meant them to be. Also incomprehensible. No 3 is more conventional, and Tom actually gets round to explaining the first two: "Waif was meant to...consist of short, but interesting pieces..." Well, Tom, one out of two ain't bad: they were short all right.

No 3 is a better issue, in that Tom not only has an end or two in mind, but also manages to convey them to the reader. After a tewwibly tewwibly tharcathtic editorial about science presenters on television, and an interview with Joe Haldeman about how well Joe Haldeman is doing, and Oh God! not another article about editing a fanzine---this one from erstwhile Matrix compiler Andy Sawyer---we come to something prominently headed 'Bitch'. Now that title is probably the best thing in the fanzine. It sums up quite beautifully the next six pages, and I can just imagine Tom stamping his little feet as he typed them out. The introductory blurb describes it as an occasional fanzine review section, and the occasional fanzine Tom reviews this time is Sirius 1 (from Mike Dickinson and Alan Dorey) and also, apparently, Joseph Nicholas---but I'll come to that later. Tom spends two pages kicking and spitting, and one comes to the conclusion that Tom doesn't much like Mike and Alan, or J.G. Ballard. Then he gets onto the contents.

Next, still under the heading 'Bitch' (the fanzine review section, remember) Tom starts to bitch about Joseph Nicholas, who has never done a fanzine in his life. Joe has had the temerity to say in print that he doesn't like Waif, or the writing of Samuel R. Delany---two things of divine perfection in the eyes of Tom. Because Joe doesn't like these things he obviously doesn't understand them, and is therefore a simpleton, says Tom. Simpleton!

Finally, magnanimous Tom allows a reader to express a

contrary view on the relative merits of the films 2001 and Solaris. Tom likes 2001 and does not like Solaris, and cleverly destroys his opponent's argument as follows:

"2001 is a true epic, an attempt to examine the eternal question 'just what the hell are we doing here'/'where are we going.' On the other hand Solaris was a first contact story with an intelligent ocean causing hallucinations amongst the humans."

Good on yer, Tom! And Perry Rhodan is an attempt to examine the eternal question of good and evil, whereas The Left Hand Of Darkness was a first contact story about people who can be both male and female, right?

This is the most obvious example of Tom's great talent for selective interpretation. Anyone who can pull the ontological question out of 2001 (particularly when it was answered---if that's quite the right word---in such a trite and banal fashion) and then fail to see past the surface storyline in Solaris is doing it deliberately, because his argument will collapse if he doesn't. He uses the same technique elsewhere in Waif 3. Tom is also a dab hand at imputing motives to people so that they appear to be great fools, and thus easier targets. In this Tom shows scant regard for logic or fairness---just for winning.

Of course, Tom himself says that everything in 'Bitch' is 100% subjective, so that makes it all all right. Well, no; actually, it doesn't.

Let's get on to some good stuff before I'm accused of usurping the title currently held by either Alan Dorey or Joe Nicholas of 'shit-kickingest fanzine reviewer of them all'.

Seamonsters 3 from Simone Walsh is good stuff. Not brilliant, not inspiring, not the last word in fanzines, but good. Chris Priest writes on how he was asked to write a Doctor Who script. His best idea:

"The Doctor gets trapped in a blast-furnace, and K9 goes in to rescue him. The Doctor escapes, but K9 doesn't, and gets melted down."

Oh nice, says I. Oh no! said the BBC. K9, apparently, gets more fan-mail than the Doctor. I wonder how much of it is signed Spot, or Rover.

The other guest article is from D. West---a con report of Novacon 8. Typically, it is very well written and highly entertaining, as was the Priest piece. Both, though, are closed-ended. You read them and say to yourself, "Good!" and that's it. Nothing in either one stimulates you to put pen to paper and write to the editor.

Provocation, such as it is, comes in the editor's own piece. Simone wants to know why fans, particularly fat, American fans, go skinny-dipping---something that horrifies her---and whether American women fans are really much more predatory than their British counterparts. While they might generate some amusing, and amused, correspondence (and some deadly serious letters from America, if this issue's letter column is anything to judge by) they are hardly issues to set the world---or even fandom---alight.

When Seamonsters 1 came out, it was wondered aloud whether it could become the much wanted 'focal point British fanzine'. So far it hasn't. You won't find much better fan writing than the West and Priest articles here; both are at least the equal of Bernard Levin in facetious mood. But no-one writes to The Times when Levin goes on about Wagner again; they wait till he tackles Russian dissidents, repression in Cambodia, or South African banning orders. To become the 'focal point fanzine', Seamonsters needs the vital spark of guest articles that provoke as much or more than the editorials. Then Simone's rather plaintive command to write to her would become unnecessary.

John Collick describes his new fanzine 101 as a means of keeping in touch without too much grind whilst his A-levels come and go. Yes, he really is that young (or perhaps the rest of us are that old) but despite this he has already produced five issues of Procyon, so he isn't exactly a newcomer to the fanzine field. In a number of ways 101 shows this. It's well written and well produced, for a start.

Mostly it is a personalzine, with John writing about this and that: Novacon 8, a party in Leeds and university interviews all get a mention. His big piece for the issue is about fandom and the barriers some people claim to meet when trying to join. I've gone on about that earlier, so all I'll say here is that he puts forward a few sensible suggestions for vanishing the barriers as if they had never been, which they hadn't.

Mulligrubs does let in a guest writer this time---the ubiquitous Alan Dorey. Alan follows up John's piece on fandom with a vivid description of various types who fail to get into fandom and are too crass to realise why. It is written in his usual subtle-as-a-ton-of-bricks style, with a cast of expletives, insults, rhetorical questions and exclamation marks. Jolly good fun, and all that, but after five issues of Gross Encounters and seemingly dozens of guest articles it does become just the teensiest bit overpowering. The pace is breathless and unvarying; cheap insult is substituted for wit in the search for laughs; and the tone is hostile throughout. Understandably so: Alan is right in what he says, and his victims do deserve it, but I wish he'd try a different way of saying it now and again.

His output is ridiculously high, and it shows in slackness all too often. Must try harder.

For 35p in new stamps you can become the owner of a remarkable publication from Dave Bridges, who is known for his rather good fanzine One-Off. It is called A Ragged Trousered Pedalcyclist and relates the saga of Dave's bicycle trip from his home in Sheffield to London. It may not seem the greatest subject for the world's first bicycle fanzine, but under Dave's careful guidance it yields a lot more than most fanzines. He has a sure, rather delicate style, writing about himself and his friends without playing hard for laughs in the manner of a Langford. But the smiles and chuckles come anyway, from Dave's way of looking at things, and writing them down.

A feature of One-Off has always been the effort Dave puts into the presentation; I fondly remember the gift-wrapped Christmas issue, complete with tinsel. This is maintained in Pedalcyclist. It looks like a thin paperback book, with a squared-off spine, good printed cover, clean duplication and ---amazingly---a fold-out map of his route glued to the inside back cover. When it is folded out you can look at the map whilst reading the book.

Send him the 35p and hope he has a few copies left.

Ah! You'd better have the address, in that case. Or all of them, in the name of fairness.

Waif: Tom Jones, 39 Ripplesmere, Bracknell, Berks, RG12 3QA

Seamonsters: Simone Walsh, 7a Lawrence Road, South Ealing,  
London W5

101: John Collick, 'The Goosewell Gallery', Westbourne Drive,  
Menston, Ilkley, Yorkshire

A Ragged Trousered Pedalcyclist: David Bridges, 130 Valley Road,  
Meersbrook, Sheffield, South Yorkshire, S8 9GA

#### POSTSCRIPT

Let's start the one constant of DOT in absolutely the right way, with Paul Kincaid.

☞ "Your guide to the fannish motor show was exceptional, priceless, surely one of your better pieces. I can only bemoan the fact that it is spoiled by one or two minor omissions. Chief among these is your cruel neglect of the Kincaid Bicycle. This is a reliable, perhaps rather staid model that always manages to get where it is going. Usually about ten minutes after everyone else has left."

Further omissions and corrections for them were pointed out by Chris Priest.



## "Of course, for some reason you missed out the Weston Crawler, at first sight a respectable family saloon. It is in fact much fancied by young blades who wish to draw attention to themselves. It travels best when following in the slipstream of famous marques. It requires a great deal of servicing and has many greasing points. A car for the do-it-yourself fanatic. Then there is the Nicholls Smartass, an unwelcome import. A car for the aging wolf, it has an appearance of efficiency and competence, but rarely goes the full course. It has a prominent, low-slung belly, and the makers forgot to put the boot in. In summer it gives out short pants."

Tee hee! A number of people had words to say on the subject of fandom's barriers. Andy Firth agreed with David V Lewis that fanzines do tend to be full of the same names doing about the same things. "Monotonous", "too restricting and too cloistering" he said. This leads to a clique's forming. It's a valid point, of course, but I for one am not going to write about the Brum group or the Friends of Kilgore Trout, simply because I don't know them, and don't know what they get up to. So, no new names until they become friends, more or less. Naturally it will come as a surprise to know that Joseph Nicholas has an opinion on the subject.

## "I certainly had no trouble getting into fandom, although it took about two years before I began to feel comfortably part of the 'establishment'. But perhaps my circumstances were slightly unusual; I'd received a couple of fanzines, responded to them, met the editors at my first convention (Seacon 75), and through them was able to meet various other people. Perhaps it's not unusual after all; I remember Steev Higgins stating at Novacon that he got into fandom in exactly the same fashion. Perhaps fanzines are the key that unlocks the gate to fannish fandom. A lack of interest in fannish fanzines is evident amongst those who complain of our 'elitism'."

As you'll have seen in 'A Funny Thing' earlier on, I've come to much the same conclusion, but in more general terms. 'Unlocking the gate' is an unfortunate choice of words, because (as Joe said later in his letter) "the gate is always open." Joe mentioned Steev Higgins; Steev himself doesn't quite see it that way, apparently.

## "To suggest that I know nothing about this barrier around fandom is a fallacy. I know what you've all been doing. As soon as I walked into Silicon I saw Greg Pickersgill take one look at me and then whisper urgently to Rob Hansen. What he did not realise was my superb hearing, and I am certain that what he said was 'Plan B'. And what has happened ever since? People have bought me drinks, talked to me and involved me in their activities. Well, I wasn't

born yesterday, I know what you're up to, and you're not going to scare me off by behaving like that! I'm going to stick around until you accept me as one of you and do fan-nish and normal things to me like snub me, insult me, discuss me in stage whispers behind my back, glare belligerently when I try to join in, and all that. You might as well start now and stop putting yourselves out just for me."

Last word, for now, goes to Peter Roberts.

\*\*\* "A Trekkie's scorn should be considered in context, remember. Thus, 'boring' means 'not interested in Star Trek', 'pseudo-intellectual' means 'not interested in Star Trek', and 'snobbish' (strangely enough) also means 'not interested in Star Trek'. We shouldn't jeer, though---far better to build bridges, even if they're to be little used. I myself once won the respect of a whole clutch of Trekkies by recognising a picture of Mr Spock's father, and should the need arise again I've recently studied the niceties of Romulan cookery (thanks to the Star Trek Cooking Manual, now in paperback) which I reckon should stand me in good stead with any honest Trekkie. If you're not prepared to do even that much, well, if you've no scruples at all you could always claim to be a Space 1999 fan---and dare the Trekkies to call you 'pseudo-intellectual'."

I Also Heard From: Pamela Boal, Bob Day, Steve Sneyd, John Nixon (Hon Sec. of Leeds University U S F S), David V Lewis (who didn't take offence and asserted that there would be no cure for him until he gets tired of fandom. While he writes letters like this one I think we can find a space for him. That he said that yours truly is a better writer than ole Hunky Dorey any day did nothing but bias my opinion), Victoria Vayne (who wrote a loc on Simulacrum; funny, I could have sworn that used to be her fanzine), Andy Richards, Steve McDonald (who described DOT as the in-group answer to Twll-Ddu, and wants to win the John W Campbell award for Best New Writer. Good grief!), Michael Ashley, Rune Forsgren, and Ira M Thornhill (who wrote about DOT 4. Maybe DOT 5 will have swum across the Atlantic by next Christmas.) There are 17, to save you counting, Simone.

NU?

There are these two guys talking to each other and the first guy says to the other: "Life. Life is like a banana." And the second guy says: "Why?" And the first guy says: "OK, so life isn't like a banana."

Well, I thought, the joke's no good, but the first guy reminds me irresistibly of Ian Maule (or maybe Rob Jackson). Then I decided there could be a lot of other punchlines to that particular opening. All you need is the appropriate First Guy.

AND THE FIRST GUY SAYS:

"How about an apple? An orange? A bowl of prunes and custard?"  
(Rob Jackson) (or maybe Ian Maule)

"Of course it is, you fucking cretin!" (Greg Pickersgill)

"Greg's right." (Simone Walsh)

"How the shit do I know? Am I a fucknig philosopher?" (Alan Dorey)

"Pardon?" (Dave Langford) (Sorry)

"Now look here: Just because my wrist isn't rock steady and I wear yellow chiffon scarves and carry a handbag and pass out at parties and haven't edited a fanzine and go on too long in locs that doesn't mean there's any need to come over all aggressive like that." (Mike Dickinson) (You could tell I was lying, couldn't you? I won't deny it.)

"The BSFA Council decreed it." (Tom Jones)

"The BSFA Council denied it." (D. West)

"Mine's a pint." (Martin Hoare)

"Nobody believes a word I say." (Peter Weston)

"...psycho-sociological....ideative....artistic....Brian..."  
(Dave Wingrove)

"Pass." (Graham Charnock)

"Actually, it's only the case in a small African country where the months are not named after obscure Roman gods or more obscure Roman numbers---November, the ninth month---but after fruit. Now, in one of these months the natives play practical jokes on each other and when a native falls for one the other natives pour custard all over him and shout, 'Banana fool!'" (Bob Shaw)

"Ah, well, it is really, you see, but I mustn't tell you why."  
(Andrew Stephenson)

"Oh, have I said the wrong thing?" (Rob Holdstock)

"You're not going to catch me with trick questions." (Kevin Smith)

(The true answer to number six is Harry Bell, of course)

THE QUALITY OF MERCY

This has been DOT 6, the special in-time-for-Yorcon issue, duplicated on Wednesday with the Langford duper and the Langford. Thanks, Dave. I said, THANKS, DAVE!

The real answer to number six isn't Harry Bell, either, in fact.

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