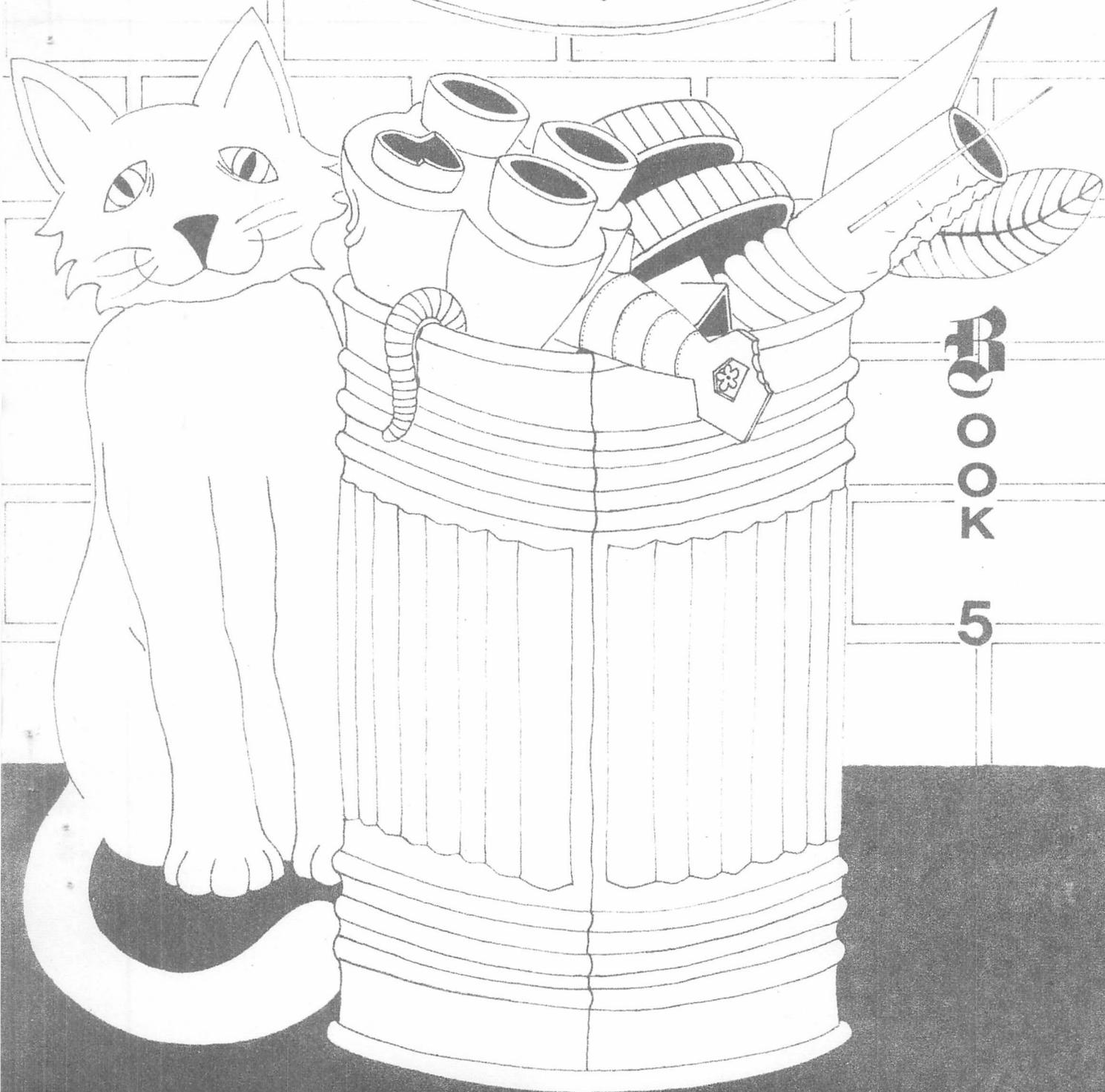


GANNET

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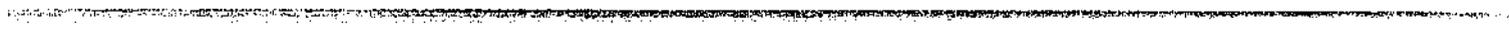
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GANNETSCRAPBOOK 5

The most astute amongst you will have noticed by now that this fanzine has begun to arrive on your doorstep with alarming regularity. This fact is as surprising to the Gannets as it is to you. We're still the same old lazy, beer-guzzling faneds who pub their ish, "REAL SOON NOW", at every opportunity. Perhaps that is why the Gannetscrapbook is such a success in terms of rapidity, if not quality, even without the use of Senna Pods.

A number of fen have responded to the two previous issues for which they have our thanks. However they have not seen their efforts in print for one main reason. Most of the locs have pointed out that the fanzine lacks quality because there is no evidence of the editor exercising his power to edit contributions or even control what is printed. All are totally correct. Therefore it is necessary to examine the purpose of Gannetscrapbook.

Most of the Gannets are active in faandom and in particular are connected with fanzines. Unfortunately for a variety of reasons, all of which should now be common knowledge throughout faandom, our activities have been at a low ebb. To combat this, Gannetscrapbook was pulled out of the fanzine pile to provide a means for us to keep in contact without the hassle and total commitment which would normally accompany the production of one's own fanzine. Each contributor is responsible for his/her own contribution, the cost of printing it, and a share of the postage. The editor is there to cram the resultant mass of stencils into some sort of cohesive whole if at all possible. Naturally if we continue in this manner the fanzine will always seem nothing more than a collection of unrelated articles. The only real control is that which each of us should exercise in relation to our own work.

There are faults with the system but I think that the last issue set an acceptable standard in content and quality which we can sustain. I still stand by that statement even though this issue does not bear me out. If Gannetscrapbook is a failure the fault is ours. Needless to say, that is the last thing we want and we are working on ways and means of improving. One of the main considerations being a full-time editor. Eventually our problems will be resolved and who knows, even Dave Rowe might praise our efforts.

Until next time I hope that you enjoy something in this issue which includes contributions from, myself, Kev Williams, Bob Day, and Andy Firth. Artwork by Andy Firth and Harry Bell. Little Ian may be found in here somewhere if you search hard.

Dave Cockfield. 12/6/78

LOCS RECEIVED : Mary Long, Mike Glicksohn, Joyce Scrivner, Pam Boal,
Ben Indick, Roger Waddington, Paul Kincaid, Joseph Nicholas,
and Mary again.

(My second paragraph was not meant to imply that locs received lacked in quality, only that the same views were predominant in most. Consequently it was pointless printing half a dozen locs saying the same thing.)

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THERE WILL NOW BE A SHORT INTERVAL FOR REFRESHMENTS.

In that moment, my lower bowel liquified and my stomach, duodenum and upper intestine rotated once and violently. MY PASSPORT! Now don't get the idea that I didn't know where it was - I'm not a complete dummy. It was in the top left-hand drawer of my desk in my office, fifteen miles away. The flight was due off in five minutes. Just in case there was someone on the face of the Earth who hadn't yet noticed my embarrassment, the P.A. system informed them. After a musical *DONC* a flat, nasal voice intoned:

"Would Dr. Williams travelling on the 14:30 flight number BF445 to Brussels please attend immediately at Gate A. The flight is about to depart."

I managed to get my first words out:

"I....er.....seem to have.....er.....forgotten it!"

Her smile switched to a look of professional concern,

"But how are you going to travel, sir?"

"Bloody good point", I numbed. But she wouldn't have heard it, for by this time I was scurrying back to the flight desk. The desk girl smiled patiently as I blurted out my story and then galvanised into action. She grabbed the phone, asked for the flight to be held and in the same breath commanded an underling to sprint to the plane to remove my case (which by this time would've been loaded on board). This done, she looked coolly back at me and said:

"What do you want to do, sir?"

Visions of me arriving shame-faced back at work (I'd boasted for a fortnight at how I'd swung the trip) with my story of lame-brainedness, stung. I had a sudden picture of my bosses face turning the colour of his hair (he was a classic Scot) and burring invective being hurled. On top of this was another problem. One of the main justifications for my trip was that the half-dozen people I needed to talk to in Brussels were all there the next day - an occurrence as likely as a major planetary conjunction. To delay the trip by even a day, could probably mean its cancellation. All of this flashed through my mind before I answered. There was just a chance.....

"Is there a later flight?" (I'd miss my night out on the town tonight I thought. But beggars.....especially daft beggars....)

"Not until tomorrow morning, I'm afraid, sir".

Hope faded, but....she continued.....

"However, you could sign an ARF and travel without your passport, if you choose".

Like a drowning man grasping at straws, I immediately agreed. But a sudden doubt assailed me...

"Eeerrr...will it be alright, then?"

"Oh, I should think so, sir. After all, we don't get many international terrorists flying out of Newcastle", she stated smilingly.

Uplifted like a reprieved convict, I gladly signed the large and detailed form she thrust under my nose (Images of the EEC and friendly Pan-European cooperation passed before my eyes. "Why, we don't really need passports now in the Common Market", I thought).

I stuffed my copy of the form in my pocket and sprinted for the exit gate. I waved the already crumpled copy at the official at passport control and gasped out my story. He looked uncomprehendingly at me, as if I was an escaped loony. But after a brief pause, he raised his

shoulders in resignation and stamped the form. You see, they don't care who goes out.

I dashed off to the assigned gate, but halfway there, was brought to a dead stop by a sudden thought. My case! It would be off the plane by now!

I wished a hole would open and swallow me.

I was halfway through a 180° turn, when a voice stopped me:

"I've got your case here, sir".

I turned back, and there at the gate was the porter with my case. The desk girl had been more than efficient!

I gratefully grabbed the bag and dashed across the tarmac to the waiting Trident. The co-pilot glared at me from the cockpit and revved the engines up a few million more revs (possibly in the hope of sucking me through them) to let me know I'd delayed him. An impatient hostess, clinging to her hat in the tormented air beneath the engines, met me at the bottom of the steps and ushered me up into the sudden peace of the cabin.

It was like a scene from 'The Ipcress File'.

I squeezed down the entire length of the cabin bearing the gamut of hostile and amused stares from the other passengers and finally slumped into my seat with my case on my lap.

Relief washed over me. I closed my eyes and enjoyed the sensation of take-off.

Once aloft, I organised myself. After a titanic struggle, I succeeded in stowing my case under the seat in front (but not until after inadvertently triggering my seat recline mechanism which all but deposited me in the lap of a vast Bavarian dowager sitting behind - who proceeded to show how good was here command of English).

But nothing could ruffle me now. I was on my way, on a wing and a prayer (or, at least awing and a form). I visited the all-steel microscopic W.C. and sat down to a very pleasant salad tea, served on the usual 'Tiny Tots Play House' miniature plastic tray. All was well with the world and I exuded bonhomie.

I reached into my jacket pocket for my copy of the 'Forever War' and discovered the infamous ARF form kindly provided by the airline desk girl.

"Aha!", I thought. "I'll just take a look at this - probably some kind of temporary passport".

A moments inspection totally evaporated my cool and rotated my digestive system one more time.

ARF stood for "Airline Release Form". All that it did was absolve the airline of any responsibility if I was not allowed into or out of Belgium, and anything that might happen to me during this period. "Bastards!", I thought. "They've dropped me in it for the price of my ticket!"

I had to change planes at Amsterdam, but in doing so, did not have to pass through passport control. So my now apparently powerless,

crumpled and sweat-stained document was not put to the test. No one could tell me what was likely to happen in Brussels. I toyed with the safe bet of returning straight home, but was deterred by my previous reflections on what would occur at work on my premature return. Only this time it would be made worse by the wasting of actual money, rather than just peoples time (and that P&G hates!) - ie., the cost of a return flight to Amsterdam airport! So with a new, gritty determination born of hatred for North-East Airways, I resolved to continue.

The flight from Amsterdam to Brussels only takes about half an hour, but they use barely modified DC3's last used in the Berlin airlift.

So it was that I arrived at passport control in Brussels with ears aching from depressurisation-pop and bones still sore after the landing.

I proffered the crumpled form.

The burly control official sneered at it and thrust it back, together with a small white card indicating that it be filled in. It demanded simple facts like name, address etc., and I quickly completed and returned it.

"This is easy," I thought. "I'm glad I voted for the Common Market - sensible, civilised - just fill out a form and you're in!"

I was about to be disillusioned.

The controller inspected my card, "Gendarmarie", he said, simply - which in any language means fuzz, and indicated an office on the far side of the airport foyer. I was through!...or was I?

I walked across to the police post, innocently holding my white card in front of me like a Crusader, but feeling like a refugee. I was about ten yards from the door, when it burst open and an unshaven, scruffy-looking Arab exited head-first into a heap on the floor. He was followed by two giants, guns at hips, wearing the unmistakable blue livery which means authority anywhere. There then followed a vigorous exchange of invective, Arabic vs Flemish, and the miscreant was frog-marched off. "Christ", I thought, "I wonder if he'd forgotten his passport?"

I approached the large officer with stomach bulging over the top of the reception desk, and outlined my plight. He was unimpressed by my form and card, and insisted that I provide proper identification. This, I was only too pleased to do and I emptied a wallet-full of driving-licence, club membership, credit and insurance cards in front of him. He poked at them disinterestedly and told me that none of these were of any use, since not one had a photograph of me attached.

"Do you have an I.D. card?", he asked.

"No", I replied (not without a little pride), "we don't have that sort of thing in Britain".

"Then how do I know that you are the person on these documents?"

I had no answer.

He had an ultimatum.

"I'm afraid I cannot allow you into Belgium until you can convince me of your identity".

My spirit sank yet again. I could only croak:

"What can I do?"

"You can return to Britain or contact your embassy to see if they can help to substantiate your identity."

Now I felt like some kind of international criminal. But I grasped at the chance and rang the embassy. After ringing for about two minutes an impatient voice answered:

"I'm sorry, the embassy is closed".

Isaw red.

"What!" I cried. "Closed! What the hell are embassies for? Once in your entire life that you need one, and they're closed! Don't they realise that there's a British citizen in trouble here?"

The nightwatchman was phlegmatic and unhelpful.

Civilization seemed to have drained away all around me. Here I was in a foreign (and not particularly welcoming) country and the only patriotic support within call, had knocked-off!

Protestations were to no avail. The embassy was not open until 9:30 the next morning.

"It seems you will have to spent the night at the airport", the gendarme stated flatly.

I was a stateless person. Would they one day discover my dusty skeleton clutching a crumbling form in a disused airport loo and wonder who I'd been?

This prospect fired a new resolve and I assailed the official in my best (managerially trained) persuasive manner. I told him I worked for P&G (blank stare), I was staying at the 'Royal Windsor' hotel - they would have my reservation telexed from England (a flicker of an eyebrow?) and I gave a list of ten people in Brussels who could confirm my identity (a definite twitch!). After a five-minute harangue, he gave in and to my joy allowed me in, provided:

"You must obtain authorized identification from the British embassy in Brussels, or you will not be allowed out".

This was a totally new problem. But tomorrow's, not today's.

I was completely shagged out, physically and emotionally on arrival at the hotel, and only just managed to cram down a 5-course meal of Pate, Seafood and Steak, before retiring and sleeping like a dead man.

At the Technical Centre the next day, my colleagues thought the story hilarious, much to my disgust at the time, for I wasn't out of the woods yet. In fact, my main contact, Emile (ASIDE: his surname is DEMESSMAKERS, and he is unmoved by its idiomantic force in English - neither is his technician, O.K. WACK!) went so far as to jokingly accuse me of not being who I claimed, but an imposter, a Lever Bros. spy who'd done away with the real Kevin Williams. But I got him really worried when I left, that evening with his briefcase by mistake!

I rang the embassy during the day and was put through to the Concilliary department (whatever that is) and I found myself talking to a Mr. David Davies:

"You're Welsh, aren't you?" he said.

"Yes, I come from Swansea", I replied.

"Bloody Hell! So do I! Treboath."

"Brynmelyn", I said. We'd lived about two miles apart!
"Christ, you should have been here last night", he said. "We had Carwyn James (Welsh national team rugby coach) over to talk to the 'Welsh in Brussels' Society. It was a mammoth piss-up!"

For the first time in two days, I felt safe. Something familiar - a Welshman and a piss-up!

"Err...what about my passport?", I ventured.

"Oh, don't worry, boy. We'll fix you up".

Greatly relieved, I went to the embassy that evening and met David Davies and his attractive young secretary, Sian Prothero from Aberdovey. We had a very pleasant chat, and eventually got around to drawing up my temporary passport.

"Have you got a photograph of yourself?"

"Er..no. If I'd had one at the beginning, I wouldn't be in this predicament", I explained.

"Well we can't give you an authorized document until we have one."

A red mist began to film my eyes. But, he continued.....

"You should be able to get one at 'L'Auto-Club de Belgique' around the corner. But they close in five minutes and ...er...so do we."

I seemed to have sprinted to Brussels, not flown.

I arrived breathlessly just as the door was being closed by a small, Flemish gentleman, whom, I'm afraid, I barged rather unceremoniously out of the way. He brought me down with a tackle that JPR himself would have been proud of. I hit the floor heavily. He clearly thought me some kind of Urban Guerrilla. Unfortunately, he spoke no English or French, and since I was also massaging the point on my jaw which had come into contact with the concrete floor, communication proved difficult. But, eventually, via an impromptu interpreter, I managed to persuade the staff that the Gendarmarie need not be called, and all that I wanted was a photograph.

The entire staff were about to depart for home, so for the ten minutes it took for the machine to warm up again (it had just been turned off) and develop the prints, I was fixed with baleful stares.

I arrived back at the embassy (which they'd kept open for me), and my temporary passport was prepared.

Miss Prothero was most sympathetic to my plight, so in return I treated her to a meal out on P&G in the 'Grande Place' area of Brussels - supposedly one of the best gourmet eating areas in Europe. To try something a bit out of the ordinary, we went to a Tunisian restaurant. As a final stab of fate, the meal was awful! Take my advice, stay a long way away from Kus-Kus if you value the wall of your stomach. But we made up for it in drink, and in all, it proved a very pleasant end to a nightmare of a trip.

The return journey was just as uneventfull as I'd hoped.

I haven't been back since.

In a way, I'm glad.

KEVIN WILLIAMS 17/6/78.

NOT BLOODY LIKELY!

say Ritchie Smith, Annie Mullins, and sundry others.

I (Ritchie Smith) remember "thinking about producing a fanzine" way back in 1970 when Greg Pickersgill and Leroy Kettle were the New Wave of British fandom. Look at them now. Look at me now. And this isn't the fanzine, either. Anyway, two articles for you. Ann M. Mullins is responsible for '...' I am responsible for the rest.

i) Sex and drugs and rock and roll.

I saw a few posters in Newcastle. --Never mind the bollocks, they told me, get bored Stiff--

So we did, me and the little lady. Likely to be a good night for £1, I imagined as I bought the tickets. ..Elvis Costello, Nick Lowe, Wreckless Eric, Larry Wallis and Ian Dury on stage, a thousand-odd loonies doing the pogo in the barn-like ballroom of Newcastle upon Tyne Polytechnic.

Finally Friday arrived. Annie and I entered the students' union, and I unwrapped my $\frac{1}{2}$ -bottle of good old Captain Morgan; I knocked back some strong, fiery rum as we walked, passed the water of life on to Annie. We sat down in the nasty concrete corridor that leads to the ballroom, and suddenly saw our favourite transvestite and radio star, Moondancer. I beckoned him over, shared our booze.

Moondancer said thanks, and as the discotheque music got louder he took a few swallows.

"..how you been, man?" I asked. "How're things on the James Whale show? What d'you think of the bands tonight?"

Everything was OK, the saintly fool told me, nodding in stoned, wild-eyed enthusiasm. 'Moondancer has an unusual life-style. He has no home but because of his great popularity on radio, people regularly phone into the programme offering to put him up for a few nights, and so he just keeps moving around from one host to the next; also, people often give him things. During the day he wanders about the streets of Newcastle playing his guitar for anyone who wants to listen. Moondancer is a sweet-natured person and all the words he says are kind'. A great guy, and to think that some few stick-in-the-muds put him down just because he sometimes wears dresses..

I heard the sounds of a band tuning up, so we all said our goodbyes. Inside, things were hotting up; people were beginning to go a little bit beserk; multicoloured disco-lights were flashing, reflected, on the far wall.

We passed one of the New Wave stalwarts, a lad who dresses up as the Cambridge Rapist: a cloth hood, with slit eye-holes, and the word Rapist stencilled on the forehead. We saw other people, in embroidered boiler-suits, plastic macs and plastic sunglasses, torn woollies, cans, chains, razorblade necklaces. An amazing sight. Some of the kids could really dance, though, really let themselves go and have a good time.

Annie and me linked arms and looked up at the stage.

I don't remember. Maybe it was boring (except for 'Police Car') Larry Wallis; or the fat grinning Nick Lowe doing his superb single 'So it goes', which sold 30,000 copies on Stiff records. Mr. Lowe was (someone said) helped out by Dave Edmunds, the rock-'n-roller.

Next, I noticed super-cool Ian Penman, another radio star; he co-presents Radio Newcastle's 'Bedrock'. That's the BBC, but it's only local. Mr. J. Strummer once told an assembled audience of Clash freaks that Radio Newcastle were "a bunch of shits.." I was there. Our man Mr. Penman was also able to interview the dubious ladies in the Slits (whose act was nasty musical excretion, at least on that night) and, for all you folks who want to know what it's really like to be a punk rocker, he has this message: "they were dirty, filthy. I mean, unwashed.."

I enjoy talking to Ian Penman because his point of view is so radically different.

Everything was loud and sweaty. Annie and I saw a few more people, Eleanor A, others, and made vaguely social gestures. Then, finally, the IAN DURY took the stage. As Annie puts it: 'a fairground-cockney caricature producing large silk handkerchiefs from voluminous pockets and fondling a cane. Beneath a bowler hat that was two sizes too large was the most strikingly ugly face ever seen on a stage - and when he smiled it was hideous!'

It was the real highlight of a hot and exciting evening. Dury's sweatily degenerate face leered at the audience; his band set up an old-fashioned r&b style toe-tapping beat, with plenty of solid guitar licks. We were fascinated, compelled: that's stage-presence.. The great man himself performed a few passes with scarf, bowler-hat and cane--true mastery of an art--and was revealed as the possessor of intimate presence, warmth, good humour, aggression, pathos, and a face ugly enough to make strong men wince.

Then Ian Dury sang:

"Sex and drugs and rock'n roll.. Sex..and drugs.. and rock.. and roll.."

--and had the audience, as the saying goes, in the palm of his hand. We were all bouncing, jostling, shouting; it was like a Bill Tidy cartoon of 'a good thrash'. We all put on steely, blank expressions. We all fell over, and got up again. It didn't matter. Some of the more original among us invented a new dance: you lie on your backs and wave arms and legs in the air, and friends pour beer onto your heads..

A great night, then, and not even the excellent Elvis Costello could surpass that. Dury is definitely doomed to success.

Later, we bought his album, £2.70 from Virgin. 'New Boots and Panties', it's called. As Greg Pickersgill has said, 'It's really the first British rock and roll album..' It's excellent stuff: the music is vastly varied, and backs song-lyrics that extend from the surly, roaring 'Blockheads' (with a tune absolutely guaranteed to make you feel good every time you remember it) to the wonderful bittersweet elegy about (one presumes) Dury's father, 'My Old Man', and the hilarious comic monologue 'Billericay Dickie'.

We love that album.

And as for blockheads, how would you like one puffing and blowing in your earhole? Or pissing in your swimmingpool? I like the cover, too, which is just a collage of pictures of Dury and his band. So, let me tell you, people, this is excellent stuff--oy oy!

"..if I was with a woman
she'd have to learn to cherish
the purity and depth of my disdain.."

That was the music section for this issue. Next, a little meditation on writing, which goes under the title of:

ii) All My Own Work.

Like a lot of fans (including personalities as diverse as Gray Boak and Greg Pickersgill) I rather fancied seeing my name as a by-line under SF stories--a pure case of creative itch.

Not too long ago (..he lied..) I sold three SF short stories to good old Ken Bulmer. More precisely, I sold 60% of a thing called 'The Seafarer' (literary buffs among the readers can check out the allusion to an Anglo-Saxon poem), 90% of a novella known as 'The Banks of the Nile' (music buffs among the readers can check out--oh never mind), and, all my own work, an erstwhile novel-fragment, 'Amsterdam'.

Not too surprisingly, the ramshackle cubbyhole of the 'great British publishing industry' known as 'New Writings in SF' collapsed under the strain. I was left with some cheques, reviews in 'Vector' and the TL3, and some additional stories. I sat there among prosaic fragments. I was twenty-two, and knew I ought to get down to it. I found a colourful story written with Thom Penman; this time he had the lion's share. Eventually, though, after a number (a small number) of rejection-slips he succeeded in putting me off it, and it remains unsold and unpublished to this very day (12/3/78). I also had a story about..well, let's see, reincarnation, the far future, 'gods', the United States in the 1920s and a black guy who played blues with the early masters.. Somehow, I couldn't exactly imagine Ben Bova falling upon the manuscript with cries of glee. ('Glee..glee..!')

I was worried. Nothing was working out, 2 + 2 didn't always equal 4. What I produced that did satisfy me aesthetically was neither what I wanted to produce, nor what I needed to produce. I thought back to the great old London days of '74, to a falling-away that has always made me pause and brood a little. I wrote poems before I was twenty-one, and afterwards I didn't (which of course translates out as I couldn't). Not exactly ~~exist~~ distinguished literature, but as a means of self-expression it was important to me. Slowly and surely, though, my words of poetry were becoming irrelevant to my experiences. Finally, I sat down intending to confront life as I knew it: I wanted to write poems about three people I knew and had great respect for. One of these persons was Leroy Kettle, the (justly famous) fan and poor man's Woody Allen (or the Jasper Carrot of many tedious hours and places that were redeemed only by the master..)

It is of absolutely crucial significance that, when I did write one of the three poems, it was not even really about the civilized lady who (under a misspelling) gave it its title; it was only about my relationship to certain refined qualities it was poetically convenient for me to regard as being symbolized in her. (..and just for completeness' sake, the poem about the Ms. in question is to be found in Lisa Conesa's 'Zimri 8'.) As for the other two poems, I failed, totally, forever. I cannot write such things, anymore.

So I sometimes worry that prose too might someday fail me. As I grow older I am naturally more and more submerged in 'real life'; I lack the excess emotional energy of adolescence, I did, once, need to fantasize and brood and create (imaginary) versions of me, but no longer. I suppose so many SF/fantasy writers start out so young, and so colourfully, and so well, and fade away into mundane greyness, gimmicks and self-plagiarism, and 'series' novels, for essentially similar reasons. Most adults finally declare a separate peace; the real texture of our lives becomes, if not totally fulfilling, certainly totally pre-eminent over mere daydreams and wish-fulfillments.

This is, of course, in so many, many ways, really the end.

Ritchie Smith.

'For eccentrics become the norm when the centre no longer holds; and when the limits of a pattern are reached, what else can there be but border-line cases? Where there is no order, the extraordinary becomes trivial, uniqueness common, the outsider the rule, and in the general confusion any raucous sounds of anger may easily be mistaken for a calling to higher things..' -- 'The Ironic German', by Erich Heller.

IN THE STEPS OF HARRY AND IAN: A post-con report.

Easter Monday. I sit on the train, heading north through the Bank Holiday lunch-time. I am quite comfortable, though tired and suffering from the remains of a hangover. The BR pork pie I had just consumed tasted quite reasonable.

My immediate destination: Derby. My point of origin: Skycon. My further destination: Etretat, some twelve kilometers north-east of Le Havre.

Je me va a la France.

I arrive in Derby at three in the afternoon. Twelve hours later, I am getting up; another hour-and-a-half, our coach leaves Belper. By the time we reach Oxford, day has broken and we stop for coffee. I go to buy a paper and see Chris Priest's Fugue for a Darkening Island on sale in paperback. I have just bought the hardback at the con. Grr. We hammer on to get the eleven o'clock sailing from Southampton.

We board; we wait. Then the nice lady on the Tannoy tells us that the departure has been delayed for an hour. Two juggernauts are being loaded onto the open deck of the ship, and the loading bridge has yet to be disconnected. The wind increases; rain lashes the ship. Finally, we leave, an hour late.

The trip down the Solent is quiet. Kids race around swigging coke, chomping crisps, and eating chips-beans-and-sausages from the cafeteria. The one-armed bandits start whirring as 50p pieces are fed to them. Within half-an-hour, all the loose change in the ship has been exchanged to satisfy these voracious maws. As we emerge from behind the Isle of Wight, things hot up a little. I go to the shop and buy a book; I'd prefer to do some writing but I have no notebook. There's still another six-and-a-half hours to go.

Half-way over, the Channel gets playful. The one-armed bandits suddenly fall silent. The kids who have been racing round disappear somewhere. The cafeteria is strangely deserted. One of our party is no help; he keeps on telling us that the Atlantic is much worse, telling of how men have been seasick for weeks on end, how ships have disappeared from sight in forty-foot waves. Shut up, friend. Please.

Over on the other side of the saloon, two kids are sick. Their father addresses a steward thus; "Could someone come and clean this up?" He is given a sack of sawdust and a dustpan. He then proceeds to take revenge on me for being amused at his arrogance by dumping the vomit-and-sawdust mixture in a litter bin behind my left shoulder. When he has quite finished, I borrow a perfume spray - 'April Violets' - from one of our number and liberally douse the litter bin. The spray turns out to almost be worse than the vomit. I find some paper and I must write.

The French coast creeps up on us out of the mist; no-one is quite certain when it appears. It is calm as we pull into Le Havre. Half the passengers are out on deck; there is an air of expectancy. No-one puts their hands on the handrail - it is slightly sticky. It is dark when we disembark; we lurch along ill-repaired roads at high speed to get to Etretat in time for dinner.

The Hotel d'Angleterre has peeling paint; the stairs are steep and badly lit, and the electrics are suitably archaic. I enter my room to drop my bag, and admire the huge wardrobe. This is a mistake; it is not, in fact, a wardrobe, but a cabinet de toilette. Dark imitation wood

outside, bright orange plastic inside, with toilet, washbasin and shower. I go down to dinner; a magnificent display of simple French cooking, plenty of spring water (eau de source), bread, and interesting local cheeses.

Wednesday morning. Exploration of Etretat. I find a Vietnamese restaurant in the square (Place Charles de Gaulle - the French aren't short on patriotism), and try to buy an English paper.

"Avez-vous des journaux Anglais?"

"Des jeux Anglais?" Evidently my French accent is good enough to let me make strange requests; instead of being one of the Mad English, I am just an eccentric Frenchman wanting 'English games'. I wonder what I would have got?

Eventually, I pay 3 francs (34p, my calculator tells me) for the Daily Telegraph. Not my favourite paper. I later find, back at the hotel, that it is yesterday's paper; time-lag. I do not buy another paper all week.

We climb the hill to the Nungesser and Coli Monument, commemorating two French airmen who took off from Etretat in 1927 to attempt the first East-West Atlantic crossing. (They failed). During the war, the Germans destroyed the monument; it was rebuilt, with a skywards-sweeping needle, in 1951. The wind is intent on pushing us off the cliff.

In the afternoon, we go to Fecamp and visit the Benedictine distillery. We are shown through a storehouse of art relics collected by the distillery's founder. The English commentary (recorded in American) gives the entire building and many of its treasures the impression of being hundreds of years old. It is really Victorian High Gothic; but tourists are told what to look at without knowing what they are looking at; they will never know the difference.

The distillery itself is full of exotic smells, as the herbs that go into Benedictine are stockpiled, left to mature, and eventually loaded into the huge brass-bound stills. The still-room itself is full of noise, whirring pumps and bubbling liquor. And not an inch of stainless steel in sight.

On the way out, I experience a French public toilet. Public is the word; the Continent is no place for faint hearts...

That evening after dinner, our driver asks if he can phone his wife in Barnsley; his daughter is ill with tonsillitis, and he wants to see how she is. A few minutes later, he comes back; "What's the French for 'I'm sorry, I've got the wrong number?'" England can be dialled direct, given the courage; the code is 44, followed by the ordinary STD number without the preliminary zero of the code. He tries again, and gets a guy in Leeds. At 40p a minute, this idiot engages the driver in a conversation of monumental banality.

"We get a lot of wrong calls from Bradford. Are you phoning from Bradford?"

"No. France!" He puts the phone down; third time is lucky.

On Thursday, we go to Paris. Three hours hard slog along the autoroute brings home to me a basic fact. France has the same population as England and Wales, but is three to four times the size. Therefore, it seems a better place to live; fewer people per square mile, a slower pace to life, a different life-style. There are fewer cars. The Channel ferries are actually time machines; France is forty years behind England.

I like it.

We pass through innumerable toll-booths, along the Seine Valley, and eventually drive through woods near Versailles and plunge under hills

to re-cross the river and join the Boulevard Peripherique. Four exits, then roll up the ramp to pick up our guide at the Palais de Congres. If you're interested, the Eurovision Song Contest was held there this year; but it's still a nice place. We stop for toilets, while our driver gently informs us that his tachograph has packed in. He should phone Wallace Arnold's long-distance, then rush back to Le Havre and wait for an engineer to come over and fix it. Tuff. "If anyone asks, you don't know anything about it."

Paris is still in the seventeenth century; perhaps it is moving forward to the eighteenth. There is little sign of the new developments that are supposed to be over-shadowing the Eiffel Tower. We drive along the streets until we reach Montmartre, home of a thousand rip-offs. This isn't seventeenth century; it is medieval. We walk around, marvelling at the artists painting other tourists and ignoring those that want to paint us. But this won't last long; Montmartre is becoming the haunt of the rich, wanting to live amongst the olde-worlde charm. Their new apartments are elbowing out the very charm they want to live amongst; the artists can't afford to live there anymore.

We stop for photographs at numerous other places; and then we stop at a duty-free perfume shop where the guide gets her commission. I do not go in, but stay with the coach. Five minutes later, a businessman in a new-looking Citroën reverses into the parking space in front of us. He does it neatly, leaving six inches between the back of his car and the front of our coach. I look pointedly at the narrowing gap, then glare at him as he gets out. He glares back. I roll the French words round in my head, then blast him with them in a coherent string.

"Eh! Nous partons en dix minutes!"

"Tuff!" he says (or its French equivalent.)

When everyone comes back, we bounce his car out of the way. I have a vision of a Citroën on its back, like a disabled beetle.

That evening, it is the driver's turn to buy the wine. When it comes, he drapes his serviette over his right forearm and serves each of us individually, much to the amusement of the Maitre d'Hotel.

On Friday, we drive to Chateau Gaillard; on the border between Normandy and France in times past, this castle of Richard I's is perched on a rock high over the Seine. The only problem is that it is locked all the time we are there; but that's no great problem - we don't miss much. The local kids are riding up and down the steep paths on motorbikes; there is a magnificent view over the valley of the flooded Seine.

Thence to Rouen. This city really is medieval, with little dark streets, back yards, jettied buildings and hidden courtyards. I walk around for a couple of hours and loose off lots of film. Open-fronted shops on the ancient pattern, the great clock straddling the street in the Rue de l'Horloge, an incongruous Art Nouveau building selling prints, headed notepaper to order and quill pens; and a C&A that merges into the rest of the scene. Only a few blocks of modern building show where someone - and no-one says who - bombed the commercial zone. The cathedral here has the tomb of Richard I, the Lionheart. It is quiet, deserted, dark. France is still a religious society; only Notre Dame is nearly as commercialised as a British cathedral.

Saturday is April 1st. The French call it 'Jour de Poissons' - 'Fish Day'. There are cakes in fish shapes, pastries in fish shapes, brioche in fish shapes. Fish-shaped papers are attached to people without their noticing, proclaiming them 'Poissons d'Avril'. The driver tells one of us that he thinks he's forgotten to lock the boot - can we go and see? April Fool.

We stop off at Caen - 'Anvil of Victory'. Much of the city has been rebuilt; that which hasn't still has pock-marks made by shrapnel and bullets. The castle is very intact, though. Little could affect it. From there to Bayeux, where we see the famous strip-cartoon. We are mistaken for Germans - I was warned that this might happen; English French often sounds like German French. But we get the right translation machines. They turn out to be almost useless, as there are so many people in the room that the induction circuit that the earphones pick up from overload, and either cut out for safety or get spurious signals from the other side of the room or from other languages. The photographs the books have are far too bright; the real thing is tapestry-coloured, and has the 'flat' appearance of any old needlework. Yet it contains a fairly complete picture of eleventh-century life and death; well worth seeing.

From one invasion to another; last stop Arranches and the museum devoted to the Normandy landings of 1944. This is run by veterans of the Maquis, or so it seems; they are all military types and run the museum accordingly. You shall pay attention, even if you don't understand what I am saying. All sport handlebar moustaches and rugby-club blazers. We see a newsreel film of the building of the Mulberry harbours. It includes footage of the July storm that destroyed the American harbour. A voice echoes from the recent past... 'forty foot waves'. We all count our blessings and wonder about the return trip.

Outside the rain has stopped. (Alright, so I never said it had started. Take it from me, it had.) We can now see the remains of the artificial harbour. Designed to last for eighteen months, pieces of it still sit there, thirty-four years later. The tide is in, but bits of concrete jut out of the water. Eventually, all the harbour sections will break up; but for now, they remain.

That night in the hotel, I am demonstrating how to tread grapes into one's glass when the glass meets the radiator I sit by. Not surprisingly, the radiator does not break. I spend the rest of the meal composing my apology to M'sieur. Eventually, he comes to clear away the empty glasses.

"Pardon...je regret, M'sieur, que j'ai casse ce verre."

"Oh, c'est un accident." He laughs.

Later..."You did that very well..." "I don't know what you said, but it sounded very good." (Blush). Grade five at 'O' level French isn't a recommendation for good conversation, especially when it's had five years of total disuse.

Sunday we go to Honfleur, thirty kilometers the other side of Le Havre. This is another medieval town; more of Rouen, but smaller. I can't use words to describe these places anymore - only pictures will do. And my pictures aren't developed yet. Oh, well.

And Monday we come back. The eleven o'clock sailing from Le Havre is in the hands of a Norwegian ship on loan to Normandy Ferries. It is only designed for bread-and-butter runs in fjords; therefore, it has four car decks and limited saloon accomodation. Plenty of seats on deck, though. Either it's summer and everyone wants to see the scenery, or it's winter and no-one's travelling. It is not fitted to the seven-hour Channel crossing, but the management have thoughtfully put deckchairs in the saloon.

We watch the undocking procedure. The wait before the stern hatch is raised seems interminable. "Any minute now, there'll be a WA come along here at 100 kmph and try to make the boat." our driver predicts. Unfortunately, he is wrong. Pity - it would have been fun to watch.

As we pull out, I vow to return under my own steam. I like the place; uncluttered, quiet, slow. I shall start looking for second-hand 2CV's. I shall save up until I've made my first million and retire to a Normandy villa to write. I shall brush up on my rusty French.

Seven hours later, we come into Southampton Water, escorted by an RN patrol submarine - quite coincidentally, I hope. The residential houses of Southampton crowd up the banks, and the early evening traffic packs the streets.

Between Southampton and Belper, I finish off 'A Scanner Darkly' and get quite depressed (temporarily). I can tell by this, and other signs, that I am home.

Yet England looks no different to France - not in the appearance of the countryside and houses, for those are different - but there is nothing in the air which pronounces 'This is England' or 'C'est France'. Instead, there are just places, and the people in them who build things, write things, and make the real differences between countries.

But what people!

Robert Day April '78.

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FOOTNOTE.

On looking at the editorial of GSE:4 (the one I missed), I see that Kevin Williams has described me as the 'university surrogate Gannet'. The 'surrogate Gannet' bit I don't mind; in the past, I've been called (to my face) a proto-Gannet, semi-Gannet, and even, once, an Honourary Gannet.

What I do object just a little bit to is the description of me as being 'university'. To most Gannets, (and to others who've met him), University means Bob Carter and the Newcastle University SF Society. I do know, and sometimes drink with, these people; but I am not, by any stretch of the imagination, a University Gannet. Instead, I am a Polytechnic Gannet, and proud of it!

Whether or not I'm still a Gannet depends. The morning after this goes to print, I move out of the North-East, not to return in the foreseeable future. So this article marks a turning-point in my fannish career. The future? Silicon, Novacon, Seacon. And then? Unknown. But you'll all be hearing from me.

And that's a promise (if not a threat).

Best wishes to all,

Robert Day (May '78).

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GANNETFATHER

OF THE
MONTH



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IS IT WORTH THE EFFORT?

In the last Gannetscrapbook I took a lighthearted look at my efforts to attain a Godlike form in keeping with my mental and spiritual being. I detailed some of the intricacies of weight training, the resultant aftereffects, and briefly described the types of people who indulged in that particular form of masochism. In this issue I would like to expand on some of the characters I've noticed. I've been exercising regularly now for something like three months and in that time about five people have come to my attention through familiarity with their faces.

One pair of guys invite immediate attention because of their difference in appearance to one another. The first is about five foot seven, has sharp bony features, and sports a body reminiscent of a dozen pork chops stitched together with catgut. The other is about the same height but very stocky above the waist, his barrel-like form being supported upon two muscular but very spindly legs. Add to this his beatnik like features and you have a strange looking guy. Their approach is always the same. The skinny guy adjusts the settings on the weights as light as possible and has a thorough workout putting every muscle conceivable through its paces. Meanwhile his partner concentrates on developing his biceps and thigh muscles which even to the untrained eye appear to be already overdeveloped. One would have expected him to be more concerned with obtaining an overall balance in his body make-up. From the few occasions that I've studied him I've come to the conclusion that he is an arrogant show-off, always trying to impress, and consequently strengthening the muscles one can most demonstrate. Either by lifting objects, trials of strength, or in running.

Two more men who work in partnership take the form of pupil and mentor. The elder is about thirty five, very muscular, short cropped hair, and from his manner is almost certainly in the armed forces. His pupil is remarkably similar. Younger but only differing by the fact of an almost subservient deference to his teacher. The elder always limbers up first in front of the mirror practicing a variety of breathing styles. When he is ready he sets the weight required, verbally announces a target, and then half kills himself lifting the weights as quickly as possible. After a short breather his friend always attempts the same but I have never yet seen him achieve the target set despite ferocious encouragement from his supervisor. One thing is quite obvious about each of them. The instructor regards himself as the ultimate in physical perfection and relishes driving his body to its limits despite the obvious agony involved. His friend? He hates every minute of it and takes every opportunity to shirk or give up whenever he is not being directly supervised. I'm still not sure why he persists in his charade but I think it may well be fear of embarrassment. Having to admit that his friend is obsessed with something of no real consequence into which he has also been inescapably roped.

The fifth person whom I have observed is a fit, well-built young man of approximately my own age. I've visited the fitness room on a number of different evenings and he is always there. I get the impression that he exercises for an hour every evening in spite of the obvious expense. He is the only enigma there. Most of the attendees are overweight or obvious muscle-developing freaks. However this man looks to have everything going for him. He looks healthy in every department, and would appear to have no need to extend himself with uncomfortable forms of exercise. Yet on every occasion that I have seen him he devotes his complete attention to the development of a particular set of muscles. For example; one evening he confined himself to press-ups, and an exercise for which I have no name. You grasp two bars above your head and proceed to lift your body off the floor, pulling with your arms until the bars are level with your chin. He persevered with these exercises for the whole forty five minutes that I was there and succeeded in leaving me totally breathless. On another occasion he would concentrate on squats to extend his thigh muscles. In marked contrast to the others I have mentioned this guy does all of his exercises slowly which is far more strenuous but correct.

Except for Harry and myself none of the other participants ever seem to return for a second session. This I can well understand because weight training is not enjoyable. It is very fatiguing, painful, and purely a matter of will power, determination, and endurance. But, unless you are prepared to suffer and really work at it there is no benefit to be gained. Both Harry and I are fitter and have that extra bite in things we do than we did before we began. Naturally because we are noticeably becoming healthier we will stick at it but there have been times when the sweat has been pouring down my face that I've wondered whether or not it is all worth it. I think it is and can always console myself by thinking of all those who quit. Especially the two young ladies who came into the room, tried every machine without budging the weights, and left blissfully unaware that male domination ruled supreme only because they were ignorant of how to adjust the weights. One actually attempted to lift 240 lbs!

DAVE COCKFIELD.

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In the last issue Andy Firth cracked a joke in his article at the expense of Robert Sheckley. It was in somewhat bad taste and Andy extends his apologies to Robert.

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SOME OF US GOT IT - (or how to slim at the best restaurants in town.)

In my business you often have to eat out. Initially I suppose this could sound quite grandiose, concocting images of well tailored tycoons nibbling expense account oysters in expense account sauce, or it could sound rough and romantic conjuring visions of hard-boiled lorry drivers shovelling down egg and chips in some seedy transport cafe. But it isn't like that. At least not in my business. Poverty precludes me from the first set. The nearest you get to Claridges is about twenty four thousand feet, as you fly over London. I did fall over the cork of a bottle of Dom Perignon once. It had rolled out of the first class lounge of the plane, and I believe it was a good year. My heart lies in the second set, but I generally have to appear too smart to be socially acceptable in such worthy institutions. Thus it is that my regular haunts lie somewhere in between the two extremes. But I digress (so soon?). This is not what I intended to write about. I intended to write about IT. Now I have to announce with some regret and much embarrassment, that I haven't got IT. But before you go off half cocked (not a well chosen phrase), before you misconstrue my meaning, let me explain what IT is. Well, I can't do that either I'm afraid. You see, if I knew what IT was, I would probably have IT, and being in possession of IT, I wouldn't find it necessary to talk about the lack of IT that currently afflicts me.

IT defies description. However I will attempt to define that thing of which I have no real concept. (If there ever was a case of a blind man describing an elephant this is a classic). IT is that colourless odourless but occasionally tasteful quality, which certain people have, of attracting a waiter's eye. Now IT isn't charisma. I know charisma when I see it. Charismatic (sounds like an affliction of the lungs don't it?) people sometimes don't have it, and yet there are some folk with all the charisma of a used banana peel, who do have IT. IT is rather like phlogiston, something of an unknown quantity which is necessary to explain certain phenomenon, but somehow doesn't satisfy all the conditions. Some of us got IT therefore, and some of us don't.

I first became aware of the fact that I didn't have IT soon after I was married (Now, now you're misconstruing again). I wasn't in the habit of eating out before then - no, the wife's cooking didn't drive me out of the house. The Mrs. is an excellent cooker. Shortly after our marriage, I began to work abroad. Suddenly I was thrown into an alien and hostile environment, without so much as an Egon Ronay guide to give me a clue.

The first inkling I had that the human race was cruelly divided into two categories, those who have IT and those who don't, came to me in Hemse (Sweden). I was a green trainee who had been inflicted on the Island of Gotland to learn the noble art of drilling, from a guy named Stewart S. Now Stewart was in possession of IT. He also had charisma. He was always immaculately dressed and flawlessly groomed. In my business this is remarkable. But Stewart was the sort of guy who could nose dive into a cess pool and emerge flicking the last speck of offensive dust from a cuff. Dirt was afraid of this man.

He had a suave almost sneering disdain for filth. His very manner issued a challenge to it. Soil my person at your peril he seemed to be saying.

I envied Stewart, because if muck had to contravene a law of nature to get at him, it positively gravitated towards me. I am about to confess another dark secret. I am naturally a dirty person. No matter how hard I try, I always look as though I just spent twelve hours in the sump of the Q.E. 2. Somehow I find it impossible to stay clean. I am forever stepping in it, or worse falling in it, spilling it over me, etc. It is always falling on me, usually from a great height ... er, this is a different kind of it I am talking about now. It must not be confused with the IT of the title. So be warned, I am the ground zero for a mobile garbage holocaust.

You can imagine what happened when Stewart and I worked together for the first time. All the grime and rubbish which had been trying desperately to adhere to him, suddenly found an easier target - me. This phenomenon which I have called the WTSHTFICTL effect (When the Shit Hits the Fan, I cop the Lot - see Firth et al. Quarterly Journal of Refuse Disposal Officers) was never more apparent than the day a pipe link burst spraying drilling mud in all directions, but mainly mine. Stewart walked away unscathed. He had been standing in my lee. I was covered in his share as well as my own. It's a hard world alright, but I digress (again).

Stewart had charisma. He was unflappable. When I crashed the crew change car (a mercedes) into a ditch, he didn't turn a hair. All he said was, "Stupid law, driving on the right". He could take any thing in his stride. One day I recall two red mini-vans turned up at the well-site, and spewed forth some thirty odd chinamen. They were all wearing identical grey uniforms. "Can't be red chinese." observed Stewart. The American Toolpusher fearing an invasion by the Khymer Rouge paused only to scoop up a box of cigars before locking himself in his office. I suppose he thought that if he ignored them, they'd all go away. But Stewart didn't bat an eyelid, and pretty soon, thirty oriental communist drilling engineers were being introduced to western methods, as if it happened all the time.

I see I've digressed again.

Stewart had charisma. He was the first Englishman to find a place in Gotland that sold a half litre of lager for less than forty pence (the proprietor is a fanatical Q.P.R. supporter). He is the only man I know with the self control not to go immediately apeshit when his wife told him she had just purchased a lampstand for thirty pounds.

But I was talking about restaurants. It was here that Stewart was in his element. His talents were wasted in Sweden. Anyone who knows Gotland (a poor Swede's Isle of Wight) will know that out of season catching the waiter's eye is like shooting ducks in a barrel. You are likely to be eating alone, literally wherever you go.

However when I saw Stewart again a few years later in London, I noted that none of his old flair was missing. Be it an Original Cockney Food Palace or a Traditional Japanese Raw Fish Emporium, he always

got prompt service, and always got what he ordered. There was always a waiter hovering at his elbow. He had that savoir faire air, that je ne sais croix. "How do you manage it?" I once asked him in desperation. "Aha," he smiled knowingly, "Try to look as though you will leave a big tip." he replied. Well, I tried, but I guess some of us got IT, some of us don't.

Another guy who might cast some light on the quality of IT was Dave O. I met big Dave in Pescara. Now then, if you really want to test to see if you got IT or not, just try catching the eye of an Italian waiter. How they manage to negotiate a room full of tables and feet without looking down occasionally, I shall never know. They always seem to be staring straight ahead at some mystic point midway between their nose and the horizon. I have never seen one fall over. The closest thing to disaster I have seen was in Newcastle, when a plate of rattatui was precipitated over a handbag. "Don't worry I like my handbag well seasoned," quipped my mate Bill (another logger) who was pissed at the time. I don't know. They never look at you or the floor, but they never trip over. Perhaps there is a secret training school for Italian Waiters in the High Alps somewhere. Perhaps this prescient perambulation can be attributed to the cut of their trousers or something in the vino. I just don't know. I've digressed again. Sorry. Now Dave O. is a guy of little or no charisma, and sadly no IT either. But he had come to terms with his deficiency. He had learned to live life to the full without resort to exercising his IT or lack of IT. "Bugger the restaurants," he says, "I'm off for a pizza". "Pizza what?" I ask ingenuously.

"Shut up," he replies with that devastating repartee for which he is renowned. And so saying, he hauls his six foot six, seventeen stone hulk out into the busy streets of dusty downtown Pescara. I follow in his slipstream. Watching Dave walk down the street is rather like observing a bowling ball going through a queue of ninepins. The natives are bouncing off him into the gutter, ricocheting into walls. The last time I have seen anything like it earned the Leeds prop-forward an early bath in the 1974 Rugby League Cup Final.

I've digressed yet again. I'm sorry about this. I can't help it.

Dave had developed a keen sense of anti-IT. This was never more cunningly displayed than when he went in search of a self service pizza-place. "Here we are", he announces triumphantly after about thirty minutes slogging through scorching backstreets knee deep in Italians. 'Here' is a narrow lane trying hard to be an alley. Traffic at both ends is log jammed with wailing honking cars, because four bloody idiots have parked their articulated juggernauts on either side of the road, creating a bottle-neck just outside a little cafe. The bottle-neck is one car wide, and the Italians, being what they are, have tried to get through it from both sides at once. The street is a canal of noise, as the two factions, the up the roaders and the down the roaders argue over who should back off. Arms are being waved, tears are being shed. If Dantes vision of chaos was inspired, I can see the source. Blood feuds and vendettas are being initiated by the dozen.

"Leave them. They're happy" says Dave "it's their national sport."

We enter the small dimly lit cafe, and find the four bloody idiots calmly eating pizza. There is a civil war raging outside, but why should they care, it's siesta time.

There is only one dish on sale here. It is pizza. There is only one drink available. It is beer. Beer in large pint bottles. There is one man at the counter. He is grimy with charcoal, and huddled over an equally grimy griddle. As soon as we enter he places two enormous slabs of pizza on the hot-plate. Within minutes I am gorging one of the best Italian meals I've ever eaten, and guzzling an unbelievably civilised pint of beer. It is somehow cooler, quieter in here. There is no conversation, no radio, none of the frenzy associated with everyday Italian life. It is a half past two in the afternoon place. Time seems to stand still here. There is an atmosphere of relaxed hiatus, where the only sound is of eating, and pizza on the griddle. Several beers later, we decide to leave. The proprietor hands us the bill without a word being exchanged. My immense pizza and three beers cost less than a pound. I have to pinch myself to make sure I'm awake. And Dave was always finding these places. I believe he had evolved, adapted if you like, to survive without IT. Guys like big Dave don't need IT, they simply don't care about IT. They will go through life without ever needing to catch the waiter's eye. But I won't. Sooner or later I will be obliged to eat in a good restaurant, and inevitably my lack of IT will rear ITS ugly head.

I've talked about guys with charisma and IT, and guys with no charisma and no IT.

I suppose I should say a few words about that rare breed of men who have charisma but no IT. One such man was Alex D., an engineer from Glasgow (cliched but quite true). Alex was the sort of guy who could make a machine sit up and beg for him, and if that's not charisma it's damn good engineering. One of his favourite tricks was to wait until the chopper was about five thousand feet up and still ascending before he began to tell you all the things that could go wrong with them. You were generally a quaking jelly by the time you realised the thing had landed safely.

Okay, okay, I will make a real effort to stop digressing. Sorry, again. Alas, Alex did not have IT. The first I knew of this was when we decided to dine in the hotel restaurant in Pescara (where else?). The waiter looked as if people had died of starvation beneath his feet and he hadn't deigned to notice. He was busy fawning over some wealthy Italians in the far corner of the restaurant. Repeated attempts to attract his attention by Alex and myself failed. With typical style just when I thought we were a lost cause (about three quarters of an hour) the man took our orders. Half an hour later it arrived. Cold, not what we ordered, and incomplete at that. Alex protested, loudly. "Ah, you English. All de same eh? always de trouble" said the waiter. This now classic line can be found on page one of a very short book called 'Quick and Easy Ways to Commit Suicide without Really Thinking About It' by an unknown and probably disabled Italian waiter.

"He may be English" shouted Alex, pointing at me, and knocking the table with its cold and inedible contents all over the waiter, "He

may be English, but I frae Glasgae."

What followed can only be likened to the landings at Gallipoli, and Reluctant Pugilists entitled 'Strategic Withdrawal: Was Einstein wrong about the Light Barrier?' In spite of overwhelming odds and armed police, they couldn't deny Alex his revenge. That night he systematically dismantled his hotel room.

He confided in me on the plane home the following day. "Yev onla gorra sneeze inna room, an' she'll collapse like a tent w' nae poles." Never antagonise an engineer.

Finally then guys with no charisma but plenty of IT. This business of attracting the waiter's eye was never more embarrassingly acute than one time in Kavala (Greece) in (home at last), a bar. There were three of us. My boss John A., my second in command (I had about as much command as Canute did), Dave F., and myself. We had just finished a well and were drinking away the time to the plane. In this particular bar a young waiter was zooming amongst the crowded tables taking orders and delivering drinks single handed to about thirty people.

Over the first beer I speculated on the strange and terrible power of IT, and how IT might be acquired. "Oh IT can never be acquired." said John "IT can only be developed. If you ain't got IT, there's no chance you ever will."

"Surely you can take lessons or treatment." I argued.

"No," he replied. "Let's put it to the test".

The way he reasoned was this. We should take it in turn to order a round of drinks. If my theory was correct, experience would tell and John should get the waiter most easily, having being eating out the longest. I should get the waiter with more difficulty than John but less difficulty than Dave, who was fairly new to the life.

If John's theory was correct, true IT would out and those without IT would remain sequestered and unrecognised. Whilst he was explaining this he had snapped his fingers once. The waiter did a neat U-turn and hovered at John's elbow poised to take an order. John had not only got it. He had an over abundance of the stuff.

It was with a feeling of inevitable doom that I watched Dave summon the waiter from fully thirty yards with nothing more than a raised eyebrow.

They waited thirty minutes with empty glasses whilst I tried in vain to catch that same waiter. We swapped seats, I tried snapping fingers, raising eyebrows, juggling drachmas, everything. It was the most humiliating half an hour of my life. Eventually I threw discretion to the wind and accosted the lad bodily.

"Why are you ignoring me?" I asked in broken Greek.

"Please meester because your two friends pay me one hundred drachmas to do so whilst you were away in the toilet". he says cowering. Did I say John and Dave had no charisma? I suppose it depends where

you draw the line between that and low animal guile. But there is no escaping from the fact that my giving up and confronting the waiter face to face was an admission of defeat. Furthermore an admission that all men are not born equal because some of us got IT and some of us don't.

There is one crumb of comfort, one element of equality about this indiscriminate inequality. The random allotment of IT also applies to women and waitresses. I'm not sure but I think that the older women get the more preoccupied with IT they become. This may have something to do with the vast numbers of old ladies filling up afternoon tearooms and the like that I accidentally stumble into. It can't be much fun being a waitress or a waiter if there's no prospect of anything better in the future so I guess this game of Gods and mortals is all they have to amuse them.

So what about mixed IT? I would say my Mrs. has IT. I also think she has a certain charisma, but then again I'M biased. But one thing I have noticed when we eat out, is the way the waiter will hang around 'madame' asking what 'madame' would like, and what can he do for 'madame'. Then begrudgingly, almost as an afterthought he will ask what 'sir' requires, although his eyes betray that what 'sir' really requires is euthanasia, and quickly. 'Sir' is never assumed to have the gumption to be able to choose anything. 'Madame' it is believed has dragged 'sir' out of the gutter where he belongs, according to some whim of her own, and 'sir' will be tolerated, just so long as he doesn't eat with his hands.

So what the hell has all this got to do with science fiction? you ask. Well, I was reading this book by Michael Coney called (you guessed it) Charisma (this book incidentally has as much charm as an isolated quark, but I'm digressing inside the brackets now. Egad! It's broken through). Simultaneously I was waiting for service in a restaurant in Amsterdam. (I've been ignored by waiters in eating places throughout Europe you know) and it occurred to me that perhaps nature would intervene and save the ITless millions. It occurred to me that perhaps evolution would arm or equip sufferers of a lack of IT, with some strange new power. A means of retaliation maybe against the waiters, compelling them to stare at the menu for hours on end, or perhaps making the waiters incredibly clumsy causing them to drop food over each other or break crockery. Then, taking a leaf out of Philip Dick's worthy books (telepaths vs. inertials) I realised that IT is essentially a survival quality. Those who have IT, eat. Those who don't have IT, don't eat. So maybe this new thing whatever it is would be directed against fellow gourmets rather than the hand that feeds them. But there you have it, or not as the case may be. Not knowing what IT is, I can't be sure how this anti-IT would manifest itself. Sudden disintegration of ITful cravats inside restaurants where 'a tie must be worn' perhaps. Sir's composure being rattled as he feels the warm security of his Diners Club Card melting away in his inside pocket, maybe. The tasteful vase of flowers spontaneously going flambe at an ITful table due to the invisible psychokinesis of the ITless dozens focusing in upon IT. Poltergeists in Madame's soup. Half seen ITless demons that look as nasty as madame they will taste, but which

submerge without trace before madame can get an ITful spoon to them. Cries of pain and struggles issuing from the kitchen, which only the ITful seem to notice. Heinous ITless odours which only the ITful nose can detect. I know there must be others.

But how about the problem from the other side of the fence, or is it the table. I suppose a waiter must regard his clientele rather like a mother gannet regards her FLEDGELINGS. Just so many cavernous mouths demanding to be stuffed with worms. And if you've been to that kebab house in Cairo worms is what you might get ... but I digress and I promised I wouldn't (it makes you go blind).

I see you've guessed my masterplan. Yes, in my quest for IT, I've decided to defect; I'm going over to the other side. I shall become a waiter. They do say that to catch one, first you have to think like one.

Better, I shall open my own restaurant. I shall cater only for the blandest, most inconsequential looking customers. Those who betray by their actions and demeanour a massive deficit of IT, those poor people are the ones I shall serve first. But will I be able to recognise IT when I see IT? Is John correct, if you have IT, do you need to ask? Or is becoming a waiter a religious experience, an initiation into the ways of IT?

Well, whatever. I think my restaurant will be a roaring success. It is bound to have a massive turnover, catering as it will for the ITless ninety per cent of the population. Yes, I think people will like my restaurant, not 'because the food is exceptional' but 'because the service is so good.'

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GANNETSCRAPBOOK 5
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