
 ** TWLL-DDU 8 --- A Fannish Tragedy **

SCENE 1

(A Grand show. Mimes act out the message "This is Twll-Ddu 8 from Dave Langford, 22 Northumberland Avenue, Reading, Berks, RG2 7PW, UK." LANGFORD himself, who we will admit at once is determined to be the hero (or at least the anti-hero) of this production, shambles across the stage. He is 6' 2½" tall, weighs 13 stone, takes size 11 shoes, wears dark hair, bluish eyes and glasses, and is what one might rather euphemistically call clean-shaven.

(Enter a Greek Chorus, clad with luck in silly robes and clutching contributions to the TD Directory of Fandom. They point accusing fingers, and LANGFORD cringes...)

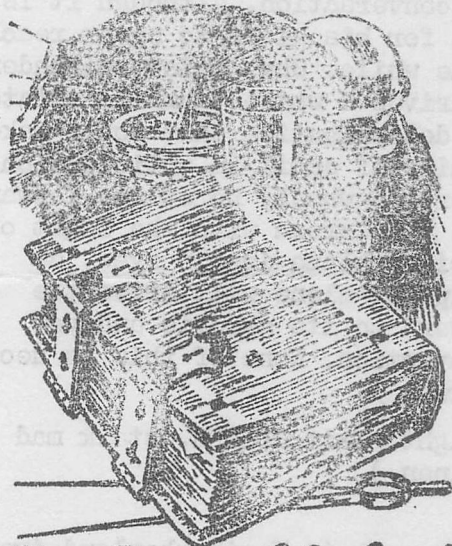
JIM LINWOOD (reads): LANGFORD (£0) is the intellectual leader of the infamous "Oxford three" who, at parties, disarms suspicious fen aware of his reputation as a fearless, muck-raking journalist by pointing to his hearing-aid and saying "I'm deaf you know sirrah" or "I don't think anything will happen here that will interest Twll-Ddu readers". "Good" replies the unsuspecting victim. "I shall start enjoying myself!"

MARTIN EASTERBROOK (reads): LANGFORD, DAVE---an Oxford University publication. An imposing edition but apt to suffer from bending of the spine when placed next to more moderately sized volumes. The artistic presentation is not quite what one might wish but the contents are generally lively, though not as explosive as some of the publisher's companion editions... The tone is usually light except for occasional mentions of obscure and vaguely threatening technical matters. Our female reviewers were divided as to whether it was the sort of thing they could take to bed for a long evening's entertainment. In all, a credit to any collection, but the current edition is showing signs of wear after only a few years and I was unable to get hold of it to check the state of its appendix.

JOSEPH NICHOLAS (reads): Dave Langford--- of little talent, he is famous throughout fandom for his deafness and his ability to use little-known words culled from obscure parts of the thesaurus in ever more complex formations the more alcoholic liquid that he imbibes. Renowned for his

AT LAST!

SECRETS ENTRUSTED
 TO A FEW



The Unpublished Facts of Life

THERE are some things that can not be generally told—*things you ought to know*. Great truths are dangerous to some—but factors for *personal power and accomplishment* in the hands of those who understand them. Behind the tales of the miracles and mysteries of the ancients, lie centuries of their secret probing into nature's laws—their amazing discoveries of *the hidden processes of man's mind, and the mastery of life's problems*. Once shrouded in mystery to avoid their destruction by mass fear and ignorance, these facts remain a useful heritage for the thousands of men and women who privately use them in their homes today.

TWLL DDU

WILL HELP YOU FIND
 A HEALTHIER
 AND HAPPIER LIFE

/2/ sobriety, his terseness, his misuse of grammatical form and his inability to identify Hartley Patterson from distances of less than two feet, his fanzine makes even Maya look interesting. Use of a telegraphic shorthand and a wife to do all his knitting for him has ensured that he remains forever in the forefront of any conversation, although it is not unknown for his glass to never reach his lips the while. Shy, quiet, misunderstood, he drives a white Vauxhall estate car with a determination that would make very Jove himself quail in anticipation; hunched over the wheel, he stares forward through the windscreen with the light of manic ferocity ablaze in his eyes, as though willpower alone will drive the vehicle onward to its nemesis and yet another convention. None of this is necessarily true.

(They fight. Exit JOSEPH, stark mad in white linen.)

SCENE 2

(A lonely room in Northumberland Avenue, filled partly with convention literature and partly with unanswered letters. LANGFORD is discovered distraught upon the floor, surrounded by much-thumbed fanzines.)

LANGFORD: Curses! Day and night I am tormented by reviewers' voices...

(Sure enough, the voices of the REVIEWERS are heard offstage.)

MALCOLM EDWARDS (synoptically): Frequent!

D. WEST (interminably): Frequent!

GREG PICKERSCILL (loudly): Hideously frequent!

KEITH WALKER (mysteriously): Frequent,

KEITH FREEMAN (analytically): Irregular.

LANGFORD: Ha! a note of hope?

KEITH FREEMAN: But frequent!

(LANGFORD sinks shattered to the floor as accusing spotlights fall upon the idle duplicator, the blank paper and stencils... Enter HAZEL.)

HAZEL: Courage, my dear! All is not dark. Remember---Kev Easthope has a low opinion of us!

LANGFORD (rallying slightly): Yes---yes---that is true. Perhaps I may regain my lost frequency by speaking of him... "At the transfiguring touch of his prose, reality wavers and bends; through his power of

Secondary Creation we glimpse a strange new world where Kevin Easthope is always in the right." I cannot go on: yet it is my moral duty to publish TWLL-DDU 8 ere long...

HAZEL: What fools these morals be. (Exit)

LANGFORD: What can I do when inspiration fails? The only answer is: to visit Wales.

SCENE 3

(A low Ale-house. Various fragments of Welshfandom are listening raptly, though not for the first time, to BRYN FORTEY'S tale of the Newport Flasher.)

BRYN: So there was Leroy lying on his back pissing himself with laughter, and my wife giggling, and ((name deleted to spare the modesty of Welsh Ratfans)) standing with his back to everyone, fumbling with his fly... He'd been sitting there all day, you see; the zip slowly slipped and he sort of flopped.

HAZEL: Oh dear.

BRYN: He hopes it'll be forgotten, but I keep spreading the story every so often, to embarrass him.

RON HANSEN: D'you want to hear Bryn's secret?

BRYN: No he doesn't.

DAI PRICE: Closely guarded secret... This year Mr Fortey will in fact be 40!

(Cries of "Gosh", "Wow", "I thought you were much older", etc.)

BRYN (changing the subject): You can be the sex symbol of Welshfandom, Hazel. We can all lust after you.

HAZEL: Mr Fortey is a dirty old man.

BRYN: And proud of it. (He leers. LANGFORD pats Hazel's knee reassuringly, as though to say "Fear not, I shall defend you---")

BRYN (lasciviously): "Mr Langford was then seen to massage his wife's knee."

ROB: Bryn was saying the other day about all these fannish marriages breaking up ---but not his own. Wasn't fair, he said.

DAIO: Arthur C. Clarke is the blackhead of British science fiction.

LANGFORD (to HAZEL): Write it down...

BRYN: Talking of SF, I'd rather see VORTEX fold* than fall into the hands of Peter Weston. (This scintillating chat continues, but one sees that LANGFORD at least is in no condition to remember more * It has. (Ed)

of it.)

SCENE 4

(A Pieria meeting. Assorted hacks and failures are gazing greenly at Andrew Stephenson's first book; the blurb description of him as an "exciting young writer" has caused unaccountable merriment. Suddenly the conversation turns to that anthology Andromeda...)

ALLAN SCOTT: Weston reminds me of a silverfish.

(Blackout.)

SCENE 5

(A domestic interior: this does not mean the tea-stained wall of some maid-servant's stomach. A loud crash is heard offstage, followed by prolonged groaning. Hazel, seated R., knits imperturbably. Enter a battered LANGFORD.)

LANGFORD: Aaughh. The stair-carpet threw me.

HAZEL: Oh. I thought you were joking.

LANGFORD: Aaughh. (Pours a large and therapeutic drink.) Could you get some tacks in town tomorrow?

HAZEL: Tacks won't hold that carpet... you need drugget pins. Those things with big heads.

(A strange light comes into LANGFORD's eyes. He senses the faint possibility of a joke. ...Five minutes pass.)

LANGFORD: So the rule with stair-carpets is, "If it moves, drugget"! (Silence. Looking around, LANGFORD sees that HAZEL has left the room. He flings himself with a curse into the nearest chair. It breaks.)

SCENE 6

(A blasted pavement outside the One Tun. Present are many fans, including tactful ROB HOLDSTOCK, who upon seeing slim DAI PRICE go by in a car has wagered £5 that DAI is in fact none other than discriminating ROB JACKSON. But the impoverished LANGFORD does not receive his winnings (then or ever), and merely earns the contempt of infrequent GRAHAM CHARNOCK and self-reproducing D.WEST, who are better at this kind of thing.

(Enter GREG PICKERSGILL in dung-coloured buskins, nervously folding and unfolding a copy of STOP BREAKING DOWN.)

GREG: Base Fortune, now I see, that in thy wheel

There is a point, to which when men aspire
They tumble headlong down; that point I

touch'd,
And, seeing there was no place to
mount up higher,
Why should I grieve at my declining fall?

VOICE OF D.WEST: Pretentious bugger this Langford, quoting Marlowe and that.

(The audience consider whether or not it's pretentious to identify quotations.)
D. (hastily): Don't get the wrong idea. I looked it up.

GREG: It's like this, see. If I put together a BEST OF SBD from the issues we've put out already, it'll be the best bloody fanzine ever. So where's there left to go?

THE CHARNOX: Just what we thought about SHREW...

(Thunder and lightning. Alarums and hautboys. Closing time.

(A month passes, during which time Greg and Simone coax SBD into print after all. Meanwhile, back at the Tun:)

ROB HOLDSTOCK (inscribing a copy of his latest hack novel for the despicable and toadying LANGFORD): "To Dave---any friend of Rob Holdstock's deserves this" Signed Chris P. Carl--- Carlson? Carlson? Carlsson? Carlssen...? How the hell do you spell it?

LANGFORD (opens the book randomly and reads): "...screams of delight as the flesh had parted before his blade, and the shaking legs of virgins before his lust."

(ROG PEYTON covers his ears and flees screaming. Rob, suddenly inspired, recaptures the book and reads his pseudonym from the cover.)

ROB: ...C-A-R-L-S-E-N.

ANDREW STEPHENSON: He wanted it to be Chris Carlsberg but the publishers wouldn't have it. (He opens the book to part 1, "The Bear God", and recoils slightly.) See? The Beer God.

LANGFORD: For that, you will be quoted.

AMES: No, no! Everyone knows I don't make jokes.

LANGFORD: There was one in Nightwatch.

AMES: Was there?

MIKE GLICKSOHN: Hi---sorry I didn't loc your last fanzine---

JOSEPH NICHOLAS: What? You mean---You don't---you don't loc every fanzine you receive???

MIKE GLICKSOHN: No.

/4/ (Joseph, illusions shattered, falls into the gutter and weeps.)

ROB: ...I wrote forty thousand words of The Thing in the Font*.at the end of all that, one character says "But what does it all mean?"

LANGFORD (straight man): What did it all mean?

ROB: Well, I saw then that it was pretty obvious the author didn't know either, so I crossed it out. (He laughs nervously)

LANGFORD: Edward Gorey had a limerick about fonts. "The babe, with a cry brief and dismal / Fell into the water baptismal; / Ere they'd gathered its plight / It had sunk out of sight, / For the depth of the font was abysmal."

ROB: Hey, I like that. Let me write it down... I could have this stupid oaf of a character who babbles it sort of meaningfully...

(Kev Smith looks on with a smile. Little does he know that two days hence the postman will hand him a copy of Berserker 1: Shadow of the Wolf, inscribed "To Kev, in memory of our night of forbidden ecstasy---Chris Carlsen"...)

SCENE 7

(HAZEL holds the stage alone. The audience realises with a gasp of anticipation that one of her epigrams is even now forcing its way into the world. What stunning blast of wit will emerge? She tenses herself---and speaks---)

HAZEL: Vicars? Let them die, and reduce the surplice population!
(Blackout.)

SCENE 8

(A party thrown by GREG and SIMONE. Enter LANGFORD.)

JIM LINWOOD (quickly): I'm going to garble everything I say, so you won't quote me. (He is slightly garbled already.)

(The curtain falls, symbolising the passage of five hours, and rises to reveal a Tableau:-

(Malcolm Edwards and Chris Atkinson

* probably not the working title of Rob's Exorcist/Omen/Carrie etc. type novel, in which Nameless Evil is wrought by an Ancient Force infesting a font apparently whittled from a standing stone. "I thought there was a place for a well-written version of those books," said Rob modestly.

have adopted certain attitudes in the spare bedroom...

(Jim Linwood is curled foetally beneath the table...

(Leroy Kettle, quips defused, is murmuring into the ear of a woman...

(Langford himself is snoring with appalling loudness upon the sofa, to the great distress of Simone and Hazel...

(Ames reclines majestically upon the stairs, eyes closed in rejection of this futile world...

(Greg and Dave Wingrove are earnestly discussing Sci-Fi or something of the sort...

(A pale and thoughtful Joe Nicholas sits all alone on the floor...

(Dato, Rob Hansen and Mike Collins are striving---and failing to various degrees---to be as lecherous, foul-mouthed and proud of it as Grand Dirty Old Man Bryn Fortey...

(No hope can be held out of any improvement in the near future. The scene ends upon this awful note of warning.)

SCENE 9

(This scene is set in a fantasy world removed from time and space, viz. 19 Ranmoor Gardens, Harrow. The transcriber suspects the truth and accuracy of the dialogue to have reached an all-time low. Meanwhile, Mike Glicksohn and Chris Atkinson take pictures---eg. Hazel and Andrew Stephenson in an almost compromising position---and Chris continually apologises for the venue's inadequate facilities, with particular reference to the lack of tumble-driers etc.)

SIMONE: ...Which fan would you least like to be locked in a dark room with, if he was angry with you?

MALCOLM: Greg.

SIMONE: Oh, I don't know. (The easy complacency of one who can cow Greg with a glance.)

MALCOLM: Not me, anyway. No-one dreads me.

SIMONE: You're not really the physical type. (Malcolm continues to look spiritual.) There's that Gannet...

LANGFORD: Not Ritchie Smith?

SIMONE: No! ...A squat guitar-playing Gannet.

LANGFORD: Ian Williams??? (Silent contempt is showered on him from every side.)

PETER NICHOLLS: I wouldn't like to be

locked up with Brian Aldiss if he'd lost control. I've seen him twice when he was mad. That's why he wrote The Primal Urge ...his face goes dead white and leaves the birthmark staring red on his forehead like an Emotional Register. I remember he attacked someone in a train once, for daring to chat up a woman he was talking to. (He pantomimes gut-punches and smittings with bottles.)

LANGFORD: If you want a really unlikely danger-fan, how about Andrew Stephenson--- if anything could enrage him...

SIMONE: No, he'd never lose control. I think Roy Kettle could be very dangerous; he's phenomenally strong. Why, he can lift me.

(And in the ensuing conversation, Leroy is established as the Fan Not To Be Locked In A Dark Room With (If He's Angry). Plan your next convention with this in mind. The action pauses for a few seconds, while we all wonder whether Leroy has anything against us.)

PETER: Josie Saxton is phenomenally strong as well. Her dancing... remember?

MALCOLM: Yes... ((Mark Adlard?)) was sitting next to Jim Blish watching her, and said "That woman is a sexual pervert." And Jim hit him, as hard as he could, which wasn't very...

PETER: Then there was the time when he turned round to find Judy on the floor with Mark Adlard.

SIMONE: Look, if Judy Blish came at you with all guns firing, could you resist her?

PETER: She's a bit statuesque. Never trust statuesque women.

MALCOLM: That Takis is rather doglike. He stood round for three hours explaining that Judy had told him to wait for her.

SIMONE (sneering): Ah, men are all alike. There aren't many who'd say "No" if they had a chance to lay a famous author's wife.

LANGFORD: You underestimate the power of masculine cowardice.

MALCOLM: Now if we had a society where sex didn't have strings attached...

SIMONE: You mean you wouldn't lay Judy Blish just because there were strings attached to her??

MALCOLM (earnestly): It's not that simple.

(Enter HAZEL. She is numbed as though by some great shock, some revelation almost too much for the human mind to withstand.) /5/

HAZEL: Mike Glicksohn just told me he came from Portsmouth. Portsmouth, Hampshire! (She swoons.)

SCENE 10

(We at TD Productions have studied Shakespeare's approach to these things and noted that often he would include a play within a play. Here follows a Modern Drama, for most of which MIKE ROHAN holds himself irresponsible.)

Waiting for Klingon by Gene Roddenbeckett
(A bare stage. SPOCK and KIRK.)

KIRK: Captain's Log Star Date... Thursday.

SPOCK: Wednesday, Captain.

KIRK: Funny day, Thursday...

SPOCK: Think they will come?

KIRK: Bound to. Said they would... didn't they? I mean...

SPOCK: It's... It's...

KIRK: Wednesday?

SPOCK: Logical.

KIRK: Today is Captain's Log Star Date Wednesday. Yesterday, I infer... Tuesday...?

SPOCK: Coalesced into the fabric of the universe, Captain.

KIRK: It has been so long...

SPOCK: Relatively speaking.

KIRK: Waiting for Einstein.

SPOCK: No, Captain. Klingon.

KIRK: It's all one. They're related.

SPOCK: ...Only relatively.

KIRK: (Pause)

SPOCK: (Pause)

KIRK: (Pause, in hysterical tone)

SPOCK: Do you think they were here on Tuesday?

KIRK: Were we here on Tuesday?

SPOCK: We may have been...

KIRK: Or not.

SPOCK: Logical.

KIRK: Was that them?

SPOCK: (Listens, pointedly)

KIRK: (Stares, in opposite direction)

SPOCK: (Sniffs) ...Perhaps not.

KIRK: No. They wouldn't make a noise like that.

SPOCK: I remember I saw a tramcar once.

KIRK: What?

SPOCK: It kept getting redder and redder.

KIRK: Everything shifts.

SPOCK: And so here we are.

KIRK: Were.

SPOCK: Will be... If...

/6/ KIRK: Waiting for Klingon.
SPOCK: The ratings are falling.
KIRK: The viewers are revolting.
SPOCK: Entirely logical.
KIRK: ...We could hang ourselves, I suppose.
SPOCK: ... It's a living.
KIRK: Nothing changes.
SPOCK: Uhura did once.
KIRK: Who?
SPOCK: ...Never mind.
KIRK: Look!
SPOCK: Where? (Peers at audience) Nothing there but emptiness... vacancy...
KIRK: Over there, perhaps...
SPOCK: It is... It is...
KIRK: ...Or someone else, of course.
SPOCK: Logic, Captain, would seem to dictate it.
KIRK: But if it were somebody else... would it be Klingon?
SPOCK: (Lifts one eyebrow) ...I am not Spock...
KIRK: (Smiles weakly)
(Curtain)

SCENE 11

(Enough of Culture. Flash back to the One Tun...)

JOSEPH NICHOLAS: God, doesn't Helen McCarthy look appalling?

HELEN MCCARTHY (who was standing nearer than he supposed): WHO looks appalling?

JOSEPH: (Silence: 20 fathoms)

HELEN: If you've got it, flaunt it! (She suits the action to the words. Joseph's silence deepens to 40 fathoms.)

KEV SMITH: You know, Joe, you don't irritate me quite as much as you used...

SCENE 12

(A swarm of babbling LETTERHACKS clad in motley dance across the stage. Their random and confused utterances are answered by the now-autocratic LANGFORD, who refuses to alter his letter-column format to conform with this silly play-script idea...)

JOSEPH NICHOLAS AGAIN: 2 Wilmot Way, Camberley, Surrey, GU15 1JA.

"I recently got hold of an old album by a pioneering New York electronics band of the late sixties, the United States of America (the title of both the group and the album), and some of the song lyrics on that are the sort of things I'd have expected to see turning up in a horror story by you. Like this, for instance, from a song called "The Garden Of Earthly

Delights": '...Poisonous gardens, lethal and sweet/Venomous blossoms/Choleric fruit, deadly to eat...' and other similarly insping lines: '...Petrified willows twisted and brown/Carrion swallows/Wait in the wet darkening ground...'; together with words about blackening mushrooms and omnivorous orchids hungrily looming across the tangled wildernesses of the average suburban garden, they all add up to a pretty good toon.

"Adding this sort of pseudo-Lovecraftian (well... almost) imagery to the bits generated by various other tracks on the album, kurling in a piece of my own imagination and grasping a pen firmly in the fingers of one palsied hand has given me the idea for a story so nauseous that even Mary Danby will find herself unable to restrain herself from reaching for her nearest ~~plastic~~ ~~book~~ large brown paper bag...

"Bloody hell, I haven't sold anything, absolutely nothing at all (apart from a few second-hand paperbacks once in a while), and yet still Gra Poole advances upon me bearing threatening messages foretelling the nameless fates I will suffer should I fail to provide him with material for the next Cyclotron. Why doesn't he go and ask someone who knows about these sort of things, rather than struggling youngs hacks like myself? Is it because authors who have sold are too busy selling yet more works of Great Art and Little Meaning to write for fanzines?"

** Quite apart from the fact that British pros are mostly signed up to write MAYA and SBD (and SHREW?) articles until the BSFA becomes fannish, I like to think that Mr Poole has taste and discrimination... refusing to associate further with those who've forfeited amateur status and sold out to the big publishing combines...

COLIN LESTER, 6 Johnston Green, Guildford, GU2 6XS.

"...I was approached (yes!) by a fella (shit!) wanting to have someone's blessing on a brilliant new scheme of his--- porno sf! what a brilliant ***new*** idea (he said). Um I said. But he went on anyway, listing his characters---the hero was called Stephen Essex (Stephen Hero/Essex House/Is-sex, geddit?); the boss was Artemis Jackson (get a bit of class in there); an unsexy woman was called something-or-other Fredon (sort of reminiscent of over-masculinity, don't you

think? in a subtle kind of way?); 'the future of mankind' was Ernest Spendour (spent a lot of time spending rather forthrightly, as I understand); and there was a genius by the name of Jason Ardwick. When I suggested Bob Argonaut for another, he liked it but thought it was a bit straight---'you see, what sci-fi's all about...' Well it seemed funny at the time. Oh yes, the pulchritudinous, luscious, super-sexy man's-dream heroine was called Sheila Griffin. 'Oh well,' he said, 'I am English, you know. You can only write what you know about.'

** Bob Argonaut would be right at home in Brian Stableford's trilogy with that hard Latin title. I recall it as being full of chaps called Eric Eponymous and Fred Armageddon etc.

TOM JONES, A government establishment somewhere in deepest Berkshire.

"Having read your Mancon report, Novacon report and this con report I think you've killed that facet of reportage stone dead. They make an all purpose package, just change the dates and places and it'll do for any occasion.

"...How sad to hear of all these fannish marriages breaking up. Obsession destroys."

** That last paragraph is perhaps the silliest I've seen this year. The exposure of its basic unreason is left as an exercise for readers... As for the con reports, I'm hoping everyone will lose their old copies of TD and be unable to make comparisons.

TERRY HUGHES, 4739 Washington Boulevard, Arlington, VA 22205, USA.

"...I opened the envelope, pulled out the fanzine, leafed through it, noticed my name was not misspelled, noticed that this issue was not as good as the issues which had mentioned my name, and chuckled a few times. Dan ((Steffan)) observed this with his keen artist's eye and peeked over my shoulder to see what I was reading. He made a retching sound, as if something had lodged in his throat without having paid in advance. He pointed at number seven's cover and asked how I pronounced the title. 'Very carefully,' I answered."

** There is a lesson for all of you here. In simple, easy-to-read words Terry has explained just how to handle TD when it arrives. "I opened the envelope"---ah, poetry. Do things Terry's

way and you could become fannish /7/
fandom incarnate without knowing what hit you...

** Herewith the flotsam & jetsam---

GRAHAM ASHLEY: "Beware of George Hay's pterodactyls, they can make a nasty mess on your windscreen."

DAI PRICE: "...Interested to read Joseph Nicholas' short treatise on the mapping of a three dimensional goldfish onto a plane surface. I notice that he carefully avoids giving equations of transformation---no doubt because the maths involved does not hold water."

CELIA PARSONS: "When armed with a dictionary, a thesaurus, a dictionary of quotations, a set of log tables, a slide rule & an analog computer, I can almost understand some of what you write."

IAN GARBUITT: "I think Twll-ddu is losing its humour."

DAVE ROWE: "Far too inane."

CHRIS EVANS: "I think I'll grow a beard, buy a gold lame dress and join a circus."

COLIN FINE: "Twll Du! (some of us care about gender!)" ((Ah, shaddap.))

MARY LONG: "I don't have any evil secrets, or if I do, can't recall them offhand."

GRA POOLE: "I have actually finished a story,, a murder mystery called THE LAWN MOWER which starts off with the three words 'Lawn mowers kill'."

ROB HANSEN: "Inept cartoon on the back." ((Actually D.West liked it, but I can't find his letter right now. So much for balance.))

(Many of the swarming letterhacks do not speak. Though the lust to communicate may gleam wildly in their eyes, a spell of silence binds them, and WAHF is written in cruel runes upon their brows. Among this throng the audience is swift to recognise CHRIS MORGAN, DEREK HARKNESS, JAN HOWARD FINDER, ADRIAN SMITH, PAMELA BOAL, BRIAN STABLEFORD, SELINA LOVETT, G.W.COPP, ALISON LOWE, ERIC BATARD, BRIAN TAWN, ANDY DARLINGTON, CAS SKELTON, EDGAR BELKA (nb spelling), ANDY RICHARDS, GEORGE HAY, CHRIS SOUTHERN, RICHARD McMAHON, JIM LINWOOD, MIKE GRAY, ALLAN SCOTT and (on a beermat as usual) STEVE SNEYD. To connoisseurs of the drama, their silence symbolises the State's (and the Editor's) abuse of power, the urge of weary LANGFORD to reach the pub before it closes... And upon this melancholy note:
THE CURTAIN FALLS.)

Back in Newport for Bryn Fortey's coming-of-senility, we find a strange American staying in the ancestral Langford home. His name is Andy and he comes from Pottstown, Pennsylvania. When my father gives us a lift to the party venue, Andy tags along to see the dismal sights of Newport; suddenly whipping off the mask, he intones at Hazel and me, "Do you go to church?" Oh dear. "Infrequently," I say. "Never," cries Hazel. "Do you believe in God?" retorts the seventeen-year-old acolyte. "No! There is no God!" cries Hazel, eclipsing my feeble comment of "No comment." The Prophet of Pottstown digests this, and informs me of the existence of the word agnostic. I rather want to scream; no more is said before the journey's merciful end.

An earlier dash to Booth's bookshop in Hay-on-Wye has unearthed not only four Cabell first editions (chortle, chortle) but an intriguing volume which we now present to Bryn; "A Guide to the Hangover". Greg declares that this party is a Momentous Event which must be covered in the gutter press (T-D); surveying the spectacle of Mr Fortey entirely engrossed in remaining upright, we fear he is in no state for compromising situations. Famed fan-hater Mrs Fortey fails as usual to appear. Chris Atkinson savages Malcolm for daring to call her "my dear". A lady called Lynn avers that she was at junior school with Daio and myself, accurately recalling my noted spindliness and his immense rotundity. "Lanky Langford" carols Bryn happily---aagh, the shadow of the past. Simone decides that my base action in forgetting Lynn is flagrant Male Chauvinist Piggery, and proclaims this to all and even sundry. To cover my shame I eat pasties, and Chris Priest confides that he disliked a story of mine: "It was too clever... And I wanted to like it; all the others in Andromeda were dreadful too." Bryn looks glumly at Chris: "I only invited him two days ago so he couldn't say I hadn't---and bloody hell, he's turned up." There is great dancing and falling about. I sink into euphoria.

At Sunday lunch my father pours out wine to celebrate the visit of long-lost son and daughter-in-law. As I accept a refill, Andy looks up from his orange squash and says "You drink a lot. Are you an alcoholic?" Such merry quips are

doubtless all the rage in Pottstown, Pennsylvania. The pride of the Langfords is now aroused; I challenge the lad at chess and, despite my alcoholic handicap, am able to destroy him utterly. This proves nothing, yet leaves me (and Hazel) strangely cheered...

cover this issue composed by D. West and thermostencilled by Keith Freeman.

WOULD YOU BELIEVE---

that Tom Perry's first words to me were "Are you Graham Charnock?"

that Liese is holding a Tupperware party?

that VORTEX has (yawn)... oh, you knew. (I have a nice letter from Keith Seddon. "Liked your story very much. Vortex has now ceased publication.")

Recent gag from Martin, in earshot of certain members of Ratfandon's recent reshuffle: "We only got married so we could commit adultery."

In a recent visit to the British Museum, Hazel found with disgust that one of the Egyptian coffin-lids is on the wrong way round. She intends to complain, but meanwhile contents herself by scrawling KHUFU RULES OK in the Museum bogs. This, she says, is an obscure joke---are any of you laughing yet?

The Biker Story, to date: Hypnotised by the limpid depths of D. West's magic nostril, Hazel confessed her leather-jacketed heyday of riding pillion with a sub-Hell's Angel bunch in Wycombe. Now forceful Eve Harvey tells us that she rode her own bike, and outdid Hazel by falling off it twice.

Another item from the Joe Nicholas Press Cutting Service:

"The Department of Education and Science has sent a circular to every education authority in the country instructing them how to make holes in the walls so that they can hang pictures. 'A wall,' the circular adds, 'is a rectangle with horizontal and vertical sides.'"

COA: Dave Staves, 6 Agden Road, Sheffield 8 ("somewhere in the top flat")

PETER ROBERTS sent a postcard bearing the Breton National Anthem, while JOHN STEWARD, in lieu of a letter, offered a photo of myself taken at Easter. I don't believe that photo. I'm glad I can't reproduce colour photos... (22-8-77)