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It has been a full year since the last appearance of this best of all possible fanzines, and I daresay many of you thought I was dead. This is not the case. I will admit that removal from the salubrious air of the Rocky Mountains to this damp and superheated Eastern climate has effected a diminution of energy and enthusiasm, but I beg you to note that I retain enough life to prepare for you--just in the nick of time to retain my membership--this new, effete, Eastern version of

#### THE VINEGAR WORM

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#### THE DAVENPORT

(A grieved reaction to The Couch, a "novelization" by  
our old friend, Robert Bloch.)

Orville held the book in his hand.

The book had a cover.

The cover was of paper. Or, rather, cardboard.

Cardboard? It seemed to be cardboard, and yet there was something about its extreme flexibility that felt other than cardboard. It was, somehow, thinner than cardboard. Was it paper, after all?

Perhaps.

Or perhaps not.

It was hard to tell.

But there was at least a picture on the cover. It showed a woman poking her finger into a man's eye. That was wrong! The man should poke his finger into the woman's eye. Someone would have to answer for that! He supposed he'd have to kill somebody. Tonight seemed like a good time for it.

Yes, tonight.

The assagai was conveniently at hand, behind the everyday cups in the cupboard over the sink. He moved stealthily toward it, his movements somewhat hampered by his landlady's daughter, who was clinging to his lapels. She was stark naked.

He thought perhaps she was hinting at something.

It was hard to tell.

With a swift movement he concealed the six-foot spear upon his person. No one had noticed.

Now.

He was ready.

He went out into the night.

At police headquarters the telephone rang. Charles Dickens, lieutenant of homicide, answered the phone: "Good evening. This is the homicide bureau, Lieutenant Dickens speaking. May we serve you?"

A voice said, "I'm going to kill someone at 7:06 tonight, Lieutenant Dickens."

"Why, ~~My~~ Gosh, that's terrible!" Dickens' voice was sick with apprehension. "That's no way to behave. Now just give me your name and address, and I'll—"

But the caller had hung up.

The line was dead.

There was no one to talk to.

Dickens rushed into the night to prevent the murder. He was a lean man, his ninety-five pounds hanging loosely upon his eight foot, nine inch frame, and he moved fast. He was closely followed by his assistant, Sergeant Herman Helville. The sergeant was four feet, two inches tall, and weighed 420 pounds. They made a good team.

But they were in the wrong part of town.

Orville drove along the freeway. Every now and then he patted the assagai concealed under his clothes. The traffic was heavy. There were cars and trucks and an occasional motorcycle. There were Fords, Chevrolets, Plymouths, Dodges, Oldsmobiles and Pontiacs.

There were also DeSotos, Volkswagens, Chryslers, Cadillacs and Jaguars.

Some were driven by men and some by women.

The drivers darted from lane to lane at several hundred miles an hour, at the same time making love or spanking the children or giving themselves manicures.

They don't drive that way in Kenosha.

Orville left the freeway and parked his car. He mingled with the crowd listening to a streetcorner pitchman hawkng seismographs. The people had halitosis, dahdruff, body odor, long fingernails, dirty feet and snotty noses. It would be a pleasure to kill any one of them.

He looked at his watch.

7:04.

Two minutes to go.

The watch had two hands, a minute hand and an hour hand. The hour hand was short, while the minute hand was longer.

Now!

There was a flashing movement, and then the assagai was again safely concealed. Orville strolled away in leisurely fashion. He was already in his car when his victim finally toppled over.

The next day Orville kept his regular appointment with his psychiatrist; Dr. Alldat Jasz.

"See, doc, I get like uncontrollable urges," he said. "I can't help myself. I make up my mind that I'll never do it again, but first thing you know, there I am at the telephone, giving the police advance information that I'm about to slip the assagai to somebody. If I don't cut it out they're going to catch me. You've got to cure me of this uncontrollable urge to call the police."

The psychiatrist's voice was impersonally sympathetic. "Boy, you're a real nut, all right. Just when you've made a good adjustment to your little problem of killing strangers, you pop up with this nifty neurosis. Making anonymous telephone calls is highly antisocial behavior. We'll have to get to the bottom of this. Get off my lap and lie down on the couch."

Orville stretched out.

The doctor began his therapy.

"Goddamit, Orville," he said, "it makes me so mad I could spit, the way people keep complaining about violence on television. Oh, sure, there's some violence. A few beatings, a little torture, some child molesting, rapes and murders on most shows, and all like that. Naturally they got to slosh a little blood around. That's what makes television the Great American Institution that it is. Television

is a silver symbol of all that is greatest and best in American life. And yet a few sour and desiccated old maids of both sexes would strike base blows at this hallowed medium simply because of a little so-called 'violence.' Why, Benedict Arnold did no worse. Only think what television has done to aid the national economy. Take a writer, for example, who formerly slaved for peanuts in the rural hinterland, and who now commands stiff fees for television scripts. Is that 'violence'? No siree!"

Orville rose from the couch. "Thank you, doctor," he said. "I think today's session did me a lot of good. I may be able to control the urge to warn the police next time."

"Atta boy!" said the doctor.

At this same time the early editions of the evening papers were hitting the streets. Copies were bought by various persons.

One was bought by Cordovan wisp. Wisp was thin and pale and swished when he walked. He was wearing women's underwear beneath his yellow silk shirt and mauve clam-digger pants. He read the headline: "Demented Assagai Wielder Strikes Again." He said, in a fluting voice, "Oh, isn't that just dweadful?" Wisp was as queer as a square grape.

Louella Potts also bought a copy. She hated to do it because it was a Los Angeles paper, and she hated everything about Los Angeles. It was a fleshly, reeking, sinful city. Louella reeked somewhat herself, of unclean underwear and the mouldering fragments of food that had lodged in the fissures in her skin. When she read the headline a tremor ran through her skinny frame. A demented assagai wielder! Perhaps he'd attack her, Louella Potts! He was no doubt a big, sweaty, hairy man in a torn undershirt. Why, he'd probably---. And Louella began to daydream. She was a frustrated old maid.

Bell Lett bought a copy. He was a rotten beatnik with a beard who lived in a pad. Godd old Demented Assagai Wielder, he thought. Killing the squares one at a time. He wished he had an assagai. Zip! That for Lawrence Welk! Zip! One for Norman Rockwell! Zip, zip! Jonas Salk and Albert Schweitzer. Zip, zip, zip, zip, zip! The Harlem Globetrotters. Kill all the squares! He meant like this demented assagai wielder was cool, man. Killing all them squares.

(Note to the reader: the characters sketched above need not be remembered; they have nothing to do with the story. It takes a heap o' paddin' to make a movie script a novelization.)

Lieutenant Dickens and Sergeant Melville were baffled. They were without any leads at all.

"Sergeant, I'm baffled," Dickens said. "I'm without any leads at all."

Sometimes it happened this way, he thought. You had to wait for the break. He remembered the case of the polka-dot carnation, the case of the mad meadle polisher, the case of the frozen snools, the case of the giggling barber, the case of bière. In those cases he was still waiting for the break. A policeman had to learn patience.

But he also had to relax sometimes.

Dickens decided to go to the chess tournament, to forget the case of the demented assagai wielder for a time. There, amidst the cheering throng, the cares of office would drop from his shoulders for a few hours.

There was a roar from the crowd as he entered the stadium. Black had just made a shrowd move, and white appeared to have no alternative to resigning.

Automatically, Dickens scanned the crowd. A policeman is never really off duty. He spotted a familiar face. "Hello, Doctor," he said.

"Lieutenant Dickens!" Doctor Jasz seemed pleased. "I want you to meet a patient of mine, Orville Gern,"

Dickens shook hands with Orville and sized him up shrowdly. Orville stood almost unnaturally erect, almost---Dickens chuckled at the conceit---almost as if he had a spear concealed within his clothing. He had a white, demented face, and he

twitched with some frequency. A rope of spittle hung out of the corner of his mouth. He mumbled something.

"Speak up, Orville," said the doctor.

"Seven-on-six is the time," Orville drooled.

Dickens chuckled. "I see you've been following the case of the demented assagai wielder. That's my case, you know. I don't think he'll strike today. He didn't phone me. But if he were killing today, he'd be about ready to do it. It's seven-on-five and thirty seconds right now."

A roar from the crowd caused him to look at the chess board. White had deftly turned what appeared certain defeat into a very strong position.

"How about that move, doctor?" Dickens asked, turning. And then he stared, white-faced.

Dr. Jasz was a crumpled heap on the floor.

The demented assagai wielder had struck again! And, as usual, had left no clue. Dickens wanted to ask Orville Germ if he had seen anything, but the young man was gone. Oh, well, he probably wouldn't have made a very good witness anyway. Seemed a bit giddy.

When Orville entered his rooming house his landlady's daughter attached herself to his lapels. She was dressed as before.

"Isn't it terrible, Orville?" she said.

"What?"

"About your doctor."

Orville was not foolish enough to fall into a trap. "What about him?"

"He's in the hospital. He was stabbed by the demented assagai wielder."

Orville was suddenly weak and faint. Jasz was alive! And he had seen who had stabbed him. If he recovered consciousness he would talk.

That must be prevented.

Dickens nervously prowled the hospital corridors, lighting one cigar from the stub of another. Jasz had to recover consciousness and talk before he died. He knew who had stabbed him. If he could reveal the killer's name it would be the break Dickens had been waiting for. It was only right that a man should solve at least one case after twenty-seven years on the force. It was only justice. Jasz had to talk.

Orville parked the car and strolled nonchalantly along the half-block to the hospital. His mind seethed with plans for dispatching Jasz. The tip of the assagai was razor-sharp.

The landlady was browsing through her scrapbook. She was a dear, plump, motherly little soul who made a lot of chicken soup, and her scrapbook was her hobby. In it she kept clippings from the Los Angeles papers. The clippings were about crimes of violence. She was a murder fan, but she specialized a little. Disembowelling was her favorite crime, although any visceral tampering made a crime scrapbook-worthy. Thus the demented assagai wielder was finding his way into her book. According to the reports he stirred up his victims' innards for a while with his spear before fleeing the scene of the crime. He sounded deliciously frightening.

The landlady trembled delicately. How fortunate she was that she had her noble-minded young boarder to protect her against such criminals! Why, he even kept an assagai behind the everyday cups in the cupboard over the sink, just for the protection of the household. Who cared that he looked somewhat demented?

Orville was now rising in the slow hospital elevator toward the seventh floor, where Jasz lay internally bleeding. The assagai was as sharp as an ice pick.

Dickens was astonished to see Orville emerge from the elevator. The young man appeared to be quite distraught because of his psychiatrist's misfortune. He was baying like a wolf and waving about his walking stick, which was as long as a spear.

"Come along, Orville," Dickens said. "I'll take you to the bedside of your mentor."

"Fix up his guts," Orville drooled savagely.

"Yeah, the demented assagai wielder sure tried," Dickens chuckled. "But if the sawbones can just keep Jasz kicking long enough to talk, we'll have the criminal. Well, here's his room. Go on in."

Orville entered the room.

Jasz lay still as a corpse, there in the gloom.

But his eyes were open. They seemed to be trying to say something.

It was hard to tell.

Orville raised the assagai.

Jasz spoke, in a hoarse whisper: "Orville, I've solved your problem. I know what's the matter with you."

Orville halted the downward-thrusting assagai.

"What?" he cried. "What's the matter with me?"

"You haven't really been killing all these people, Orville," Jasz said. "You've been killing me."

"You!" said Orville, suddenly shocked.

"Yes." Jasz's voice was peaceful. "You identified me with a writer you used to admire. When you found that he was producing padded potboilers like this, your mind gave way. You wanted to kill him, and since you identified me with him, you desired to kill me. But you still felt a need of my therapy, so you killed strangers, and each time you felt for a while that you'd destroyed the writer. But then you'd come across another sample of his recent work, and you'd feel the urge to kill again."

Orville gasped!

It was true!

And knowing the truth had cured him. He was well again!

He saw before him a vision of his future, now that he could retire from the vocation of demented assagai wielder: he would marry the landlady's daughter and within a few months have a cottage near the river, where his laughing children would tumble about on the sunny lawn while he raised profitable crops of sorghum.

The door burst open.

Dickens rushed in, his revolver blasting. Orville staggered under the barrage. Bullets entered his right eye, his left nostril, his liver, his stomach, his small intestine, his heart and his pancreas. He was dead.

Sergeant Melville burst into the room, his gun in his hand. It took but a moment, however, for him to realize that he had no need of the weapon.

"Well, I see ya got 'im, Loot," he said, "but with all the clues that were spread around, how come it took ya so long to catch up with this cookie?"

Dickens' voice was heavy. "I don't know, Herman," he said tiredly. "I just don't know. It almost seemed as though I had some sort of a mental Bloch."

--The End--

\*

Cincinnati, O., July 3--This is not a convention report. I've already written a convention report, about the Solacon, and I don't like to repeat. Anyhow, a midwescon is not really susceptible of being reported upon. I feel very happy and satisfied and convinced that I had a great time, but nothing really happened. It didn't have to. There's a comfortable, gemütlich atmosphere at a midwescon, and I think everybody who attends one has a strong urge to go back again, but it's hard to list reasons, apart from the atmosphere and the people.

Now on the whole, the people who were here were not from the fandom with which

I have been most closely associated. My concern has been almost entirely with publishing and exchanging and reading fanzines, and corresponding when my feeble energies permit. But the amount of correspondence has been small (as these things go in fandom) and I have never taken any serious interest in collecting or indexing or--to tell the truth-- in talking about science fiction. When I read the magazines (and I still do) the matter goes in one eye and out the other, and I'm always a little uneasy with someone who is ready at the drop of a hat to cite chapter and verse in order to establish who has precedence in the invention of the space-warp. I do not, in truth, take science fiction that seriously.

So I came to this, my first midwescan, with certain misgivings. It seemed to me that it was quite possible that I would find myself a layman in a conclave of scholars, entirely unable to contribute to any conversation whatever.

I'm glad to report that this was not the case. With only one conspicuous exception, I found the people at the North Plaza to be pleasant and friendly, with not a monomaniac in the lot.

The tenor of the gathering--which, as I say, is wholesome, warm and enjoyable--is, I have no doubt, a consequence of the personalities of the hard core of the Cincinnati group, which is, after all, responsible for the convocation. I'm speaking of Don Ford, Stan Skirvin, Lou Tabakow and Dale Tarr. All these fellows have done their fanning in a different ballpark from the one where I've had my innings, and I'm so ry it's been that way. Up till now, fandom to me has been people who publish fanzines. Like others who break out of a parochial milieu, I am perhaps inclined to gush over my discovery of this other fandom. But to put it briefly, I thought this convention was great.

I have been pretty much out of touch with fandom for a long time now, and it may be that the situation has altered since I had my finger on the pulse of the microcosm, but there used to be, I think, an invidious attitude toward the Cincinnati group, an attitude which I think might best be described as patronizing. This may not have been general, but I believe it was the case among the fans I know best. It should be recognized, of course, that these fans were interested in fandom more as an environment in which to practice belles lettres than one in which to discuss SF. I feel that way about it myself.

The question is, why this attitude? My guess is that it has (or had) two roots: quantity of publishing, and political philosophy. The scorned majority of fandom has never published very much. It has had its cherished magazines--SF TIMES, INSIDE, and now NEW FRONTIERS--but the bulk of the group were subscribers and readers, not writers and publishers. And those who wrote and published were inclined to scorn those who did not. This attitude was accentuated by the fact that much of the publishing done by the majority was in the nature of reference works--bibliographies and indices and such--and that when they did attempt writing of a less mechanical nature, the writing was usually pretty bad.

And I can't help feeling that there is also a matter of politics. The surface manifestation of the difference here is, I suggest, a division into Bohemian and bourgeois factions; but these two modes of life reflect two divergent political attitudes, one conservative and the other fundamentally unconcerned. (George Scithers will say that I'm over-simplifying, and of course that's true.)

And I may be carrying on about a situation that does not in fact exist. But if it does, I'd like to record myself as having a foot in both camps. I trust I will keep my friends among the writers and publishers, but I also must say that I liked the people at this convention very much, even though people from my customary fandom were in short supply. I was glad to see again the three or four people I'd met before, and it was a pleasure to meet Tucker at last, and I was glad to get a look at a couple of characters about whom I'd been hearing for years, and who quite evidently came from the voodtvork outd.

Anyhow, I think you ought to come to the con next year. I'd like to meet you in person.

MY LAST FANZINE  
(After Browning)

That's my last fanzine, lying on the shelf,  
A little frayed. Now even I, myself,  
Would hesitate to call it great; but still  
It's not as bad as Coulson said. Until  
At least a dozen others have agreed  
With him, I'll still believe it's fit to read.

Sit down and read the zine; I think you'll see  
That peevish Coulson was unfair to me.  
Well, yes—the reproduction: I'm aware  
That I ran into trouble here and there.  
I know page eight is blank; it's just the same  
Throughout the run. The master was to blame.  
But if you'll take a careful look you'll see  
That many words are legible on three  
and some on seven.

Yes, of course I wrote  
That editorial; but you should note  
That I was younger then—almost a year.  
I don't think any more that spelling "beer"  
As "bheer" and "God" as "Ghod" is such a crime.  
The big crusade I spoke of at the time,  
To wipe these spellings out, is wholly gone,  
Like other neofannish nonsense.

On

The matter of my story, let me say  
I wouldn't print a thing like that today.  
I've learned about fan-fiction. But you know,  
It's really not half bad. You'd have to go  
A long way back to ferret out a bom  
As foul as mine. I mean like it's a gem.  
If there were prozines like there used to be  
They'd lose no time in buying this from me.

But Coulson thought the issue stank. And I  
Propose to prove him wrong. At least I'll try.  
I'm working on the second issue now.  
The reproduction will be perfect. How  
This will be done remains in question, but  
I promise that.

Now no one but a nut  
Would use his editorial to praise  
The NBF; yet I intend to raise  
The question whether NBF may be  
The birthplace of a new philosophy.

. . . But why go into detail? You will see  
The greatest number two in history.

—Poultice Danby

\*

"People sometimes ask me, 'Where do you get all these crazy ideas?' I invariably  
reply, 'Fassbinder's Rut-rate Pharmacy, 2340 Pancreas Road, Upper Hinge, Neb.' "

—Orson Gansfather, in  
Memoirs of an Aging Reformer

## THE LAST PAGE

I think it behooves us all to do something that doesn't conform occasionally, and this issue is my own rebellious gesture. I know that everybody else is going to have a hundred pages for the hundredth mailing, so I'm squeezing in with a short eight pages. This may not be as nonconformist as wearing sandals and a black turtle-neck sweatshirt, but it does give me a certain quiet private satisfaction.

I shall write on this page some random notions, most of which are inspired by matter in past mailings. It is being written (and stencilled) in some haste, because if I don't have eight pages in this mailing I'm going to lose my membership. I regret inflicting upon you composed-on-stencil matter like most of this magazine; but I want to save my membership. Not for any selfish purpose, you understand, but because FAPA will lose a wealth of future robust adventure, rib-tickling humor, wholesome romance and scriptural exegesis if your servant passes from the scene. You don't think I enjoy the toil of pecking two-fingered at a typewriter in the awful heat of a Pittsburgh summer, do you? And yet, despite the horrors involved in producing this nonconformist issue, I'm glad to do it. I want you all, dear freinds, to know that I have your best interests at heart. I'm not really keen on retaining my membership. Another three years on the WL would be a lot of fun. But one has a certain duty.

And now, if I may drop the frivolity (the young person in the fourth row who remarked that he didn't know that that's what it was supposed to be will please leave the room) I would like to enter upon the serious matter which the last page is supposed to cover.

I want first of all to enter a public apology to A.J. Budrys. A year ago, after I had turned out a zine of thirty-odd pages, I developed delusions of grandeur, and I decided that The Worm ought properly to become a consequential and influential general fanzine. To that end, I proposed to publish good stuff by other people, and not confine the content to my own good stuff. A column by A.J. Budrys seemed like about the best counterploy to Bergeron's column by Bliss, since these are about the two most thankful follers in the business right now. I had the temerity to ask A.J. to contribute, and he (God bless him) responded with an absolutely first-rate piece which should have been the first in a series of irregular columns. Circumstances (and perhaps to some degree my own sloth) have delayed the instant publication until this date, and A.J.'s fine column has become dated and should not, in fairness to him, be reproduced. It's a damn' shame. Buttressed by matter like Ajay's piece, The Worm might, in time, come to be known as The Thinking Man's WARHOON.

And then, another matter. Bringing it up may be an indication that I've become a tetchy varmint in my old age, but I'd be interested in the general reaction to this incident.

Some of you may know a fan named Ted Pauls. He publishes a zine called KIPPLE, and has evidently done so for some time, since he is, if I remember correctly, now past number twenty. I am a little vague about the precise number because I have seen only one issue of the fanzine, and that issue (as often happens to things around here) has been lost. Anyhow, he sent me one issue. It contained a lengthy reprint from an old SAPSzine of mine. Pauls gave proper credit to both the fanzine and me.

But seeing the issue was the first I knew about the reprinting of the piece. It had always been my notion that decent manners, here in the microcosm, where reams of uncopyrighted matter are published, require that one ask permission before reprinting more than a short excerpt. There was nothing of the kind here. I received my one and only copy of the zine, and discovered then that a writing of mine was featured in the issue. And discovered further that the publisher had the consummate gall—or bad taste—to put a check in the box opposite "This is the last issue you will receive unless you do something." Or words to that effect.

I didn't do anything, and I didn't receive another copy. Which was all right, since I've never sent Pauls a Worm. But I'd like to hear some opinions on the ethics of reprinting in fanzines.