the best of the Bushel

(complete BoSh~vol 1)

BOB SHAW

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BOB SHAW

To Joe.
With best wishes,
Bob Shaw

Illustrated by
JIM BARKER

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The Introduction is first published here. All the other articles were first published in Hyphen, edited by Walter Willis, with the exception of Ad Astra? which was first published in Vector.

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Introduction: Walter Willis

It is a great handicap for a writer or speaker to be given an excessively fulsome introduction. Too often there is nowhere for him to go from there but down. So, if only for the sake of your enjoyment of the pieces which follow, let us agree that they are mere trifles, hastily scribbled on the back of plans for bits of aeroplanes for an obscure amateur magazine of doubtful legibility and minuscule circulation.

So that's enough about Bob Shaw; let's talk about me, and in particular how I contracted this obscure mental illness I have, which causes me to believe that everything Bob Shaw writes is funny or profound, or both.

Obviously it is a rare disease, because if it were common, Bob Shaw would be much richer than he is. He would be able at least to have a separate pair of braces (US — suspenders) for each of his pairs of trousers, which he once confided to me was how he would know when he had become really well off.

I can pin-point the exact moment when I contracted my affliction. It was when I was stencilling one of Bob's early columns and I came on a phrase about someone being kind to "a poor but olean old man". With the ice-pick of that deadly little word "clean", Bob demolished the whole unstable edifice of my middle-class, patronising Left Book Club socialism. I was never quite the same again.

On another occasion I rashly exposed another facade by quoting Oscar Wilde's line, "Each man kills the thing he loves", unconsciously convinced that any statement so often quoted must be valid. Bob on the other hand considered it as if it had just been published in the letter section of the Belfast Telegraph. "That," he said, "is not true." I looked again; of course it was not true. It was romantic rubbish, like God knows how much other similar clap-trap I had believed just because it was fancy and famous.

Perhaps "profound" is not quite the right word for this quality in Bob's writing: it implies a portentousness which is foreign to him. So let's call in aid another remembered conversation. We were discussing the nature of humour, as we often used to do, and he mentioned with scorn the theory, often associated with the name of Chaplin, that there is an element of pathos in all great comedy. It was, I agreed, nonsense. Where was the pathos in W.C. Fields or the Marx Brothers? The pathos in Chaplin is a cop-out, like the sentimental song with which the old-style comic used to get himself off the stage.

But later I got to thinking there was a germ of truth in there somewhere. To be funny, humour must skate over the thin ice of pain, and this requires a mordant observation of the human condition: whether it is the discomfiture of a fat man slipping on a banana skin or that of the innocent reader tripping over a pun.

It is this element of realism which I detect in Bob Shaw's writing and which I am tempted to identify as the missing element which industrial Belfast has to add to the rather airy-fairy Celtic tradition of literature. The main characteristics of Irish writers of the tradition which culminated in James Joyce and Flann O'Brien, were fantasy and word-play, both well represented in Bob. But I also detect in his work the gritty reality of the industrial working class, always epitomised for me in the Belfast saying, "A borrowed saw cuts anything."

I see that by appearing to cast Bob in the role of a one-man Irish literary renaissance I am in danger of betraying the intentions of this introduction, but I must mention one notable remark of his. "When you've read a book and then forgotten it, you're left with a different kind of ignorance."

I have been thinking over this remark for some 25 years now and my conclusion is that it says more about the nature of education than any single sentence ever written; and that is what I meant about Bob being profound. Just think: you go to school, secondary school, maybe university and then you get a job. A year after that, what is left of all that expensive education? What facts can you actually muster about the Austrian Succession or the exports of Tasmania or whatever? What is left, and what is really important, is a matrix, a framework, into which you can put the facts when you have occasion to require them again. So it is the matrix which counts and therefore no disconnected fact or subject should ever be taught. It follows that all education should start with cosmology and work inwards to the individual, or start with the individual and work outwards to cosmology.

Writing of course is a sort of education, and the same rules apply to it. And humour, of course, since it is concerned with the individual, must work from the individual outwards. You will find this in Bob Shaw's writings. They are all part of the matrix of his own life and experience, without extraneous falsity or pretension, and when you have read them you remember them. They have integrity.

But I see I am again in danger of overselling these inconsequential fragments. Ladies and Gentlemen, in the unavoidable absence of the speaker we first invited, may I introduce Mr ..... er ..... Bob Shaw, whose talk I am sure will be of interest to .... ah ..... those who are interested in his work, and who needs no introduction.

Hyphen 12

Pyrotechnics

This column, written more than 20 years ago, remains the one which gives me the most pleasure to re-read. It is the most evocative and nostalgic, perhaps because of the ambience of Fireworks Night. Certainly, the occasion provided a perfect opportunity to bring all of the characters of Irish Fandom together on the stage and show them in action. It is sad to reflect that, because of the Northern Ireland situation, the authorities had to ban fireworks and therefore Halloween can no longer be celebrated in the way I described here, in the winter of 1954...

* * *

ON SATURDAY, October 30, the city of Belfast held its Halloween celebrations. «Note: this is the Irish equivalent of Guy Fawkes day.» There was the usual number of explosive sounds and bright flashes of light extending into the small hours of Sunday morning. By Sunday night the last newly neurotic cat had descended from the trees and all but the most cautious of old ladies had removed the plugs from the ears of their pet canaries. By Monday the city had relapsed into its normal, quietly humdrum existence...

Heh! Heh! Heh!

We held our display on Tuesday night.

At a quarter to eight George Charters arrived and I let him in. He was wearing a bulky tweed coat and a bulky tweed cap, an outfit which makes him look rather like a hairy mammoth with herring-bone skin. "Ah, there you are," he shouted. "I'm going to let you and the rest have it. I'm in form for bloodshed. Just let me get at yiz — I'm dangerous tonight."

"Wait a minute, George," I said, "we won't be playing ghoodminton for a while yet — we're having a fireworks display first."

"That's a pity," he replied, "I was looking forward to a friendly game." We went out to the back where the others were gathered watching Walter let off a few Fairy Sparklers for the benefit of his small daughter and two of her playmates. We arrived just in time to hear the last of an argument between him and James. James had tied two threepenny rockets together and fixed a sparkler onto the bottom of the sticks. Walt had said that this contraption would rise no higher than a single rocket, which remark had caused James to fall back on his BIS jargon in indignant denial. He spouted a lot of highly technical data and knelt to ignite his masterpiece. He lit the sparkler and the two fuses and leapt back, glancing resentfully at the layer of slightly leaky cloud a mere two thousand feet up. He resigned himself to losing sight of the rocket

before it really got going.

We all stood there in the damp darkness — waiting. The sparkler burned merrily inside the milk bottle for about three minutes and then went out. "Stand back," warned James as we closed in a bit. "It will go thundering skywards any second now." About a minute later the slightly touched paper was all consumed and the rockets began to blast. They thundered skywards for about ten feet, faltered, keeled over and wobbled drunkenly along the ground for a short distance. They barely cleared a fence and expired fitfully in somebody's back garden.

We could see that James was shaken, that his faith in rocketry was shattered, so nobody spoke. We just laughed.

"Let's get on with the other stuff," said Walter. "What else have we?"

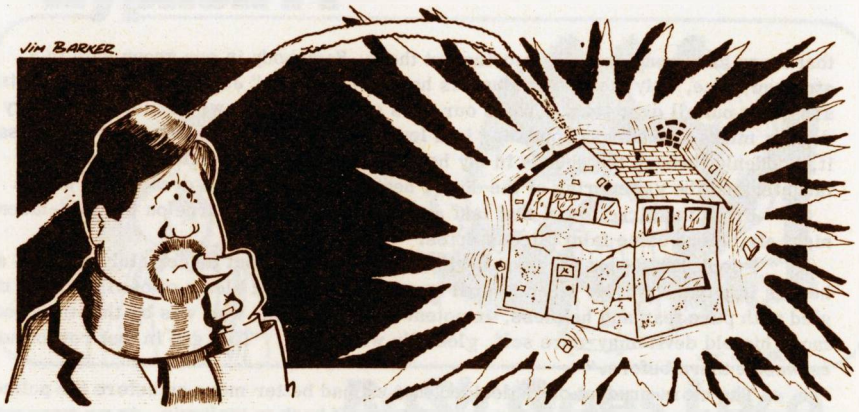
As I told him about my deadly arsenal of Atomic Crashers and Little Demons, and John Berry babbled enthusiastically about the blast areas and flame throwing abilities of his stuff, it seemed to me that Walter's face paled slightly. "I've been thinking," he announced after a few moments. "There isn't much space here — let's all go round to my father's house." This seemed a good idea so we set off. As I passed James he was staring at the point where his rocket had disappeared and muttering, "The fools! The poor fools! They'll never reach the Moon."

With rustling raincoats and squelching shoes we trooped along through the fine drizzle to a house several quiet streets away. Walter opened the front gate and ushered us all in; for some reason he seemed happier now, and placed us at the side of the house with a severe injunction to keep quiet. We huddled against the gable while Walter brought Carol and the other two little girls to the front door and rang the bell. We listened with bated breath as he explained how, out of the goodness of his kindly heart, he wanted to treat the children to a few fireworks. He reappeared and we trudged round to the back.

I saw the rain blurred faces of Walter's father and mother peering out of a side window as Walter went by with his silent retinue of small children. The faces began to withdraw, then reappeared hurriedly as Madeleine Willis and my wife Sadie passed into their ken. They remained there in silent bewilderment as James and his fiancee Peggy went by, closely followed by John, then me. They drew back instinctively as George lumbered past in the rear in his bulky tweed overcoat and bulky tweed cap. I felt sorry for those faces.

To begin the display we shot off a few rockets in their natural state. These flew quite well but they all seemed to fly in the one direction — towards a dimly seen house in the row whose back gardens abutted on the one we were in, separated from us by a tennis court. After we had tired of this we began the second part of the show — the aerodynamic section. I had brought some of the flying squibs known as "Flying Imps" and glued wings onto them making them look like tiny V2s. I felt proud of these little spaceships for they flew perfectly although the weight of the wings always brought them down again. Funnily enough, these too all landed on or around the same house. I became distinctly aware of slight stirrings of life from the direction of this ill-fated building, but it didn't seem worth mentioning.

The next item was the ascent of John's Viking. He had sawn the stick off a shilling rocket and glued on balsa wood wings and painted it in big black and white checks. It was lovely looking. We lit it and stood back. At that moment we heard an aeroplane passing over very high and somebody suggested trying to bring it down, somebody else began to hum "Dragnet" and I heard Walter muttering something about lighting the blue paper and retiring from fandom. At that moment the Viking took off. It was magnificent the way it climbed on a pillar of blinding incandescence just the way they do in the books. Everybody agreed afterwards that it was the best thing in the



show. There was only one thing wrong. John must have made one of the wings heavier than the others because pretty high up the rocket leaned to one side and turned over, still blasting away. I looked round for a shovel with the vague idea of digging a slit trench, but I need not have worried — it nosedived the same house as before.

Next I let off some of my high explosive ones but only a couple of them banged and Walter's father came out to see what was happening. He looked at his garden which we had reduced to a pretty fair imitation of Flanders. I heard him say, "This is a good place to let them off," and he wasn't even slightly sarcastic. Honest.

Sadie and Madeleine were beginning to get bored with the poor performance of the bangers so they called for something new. James must have been still carrying the mental scars of his earlier brush with the force of gravity, for he suggested tying two rockets together so that they face in opposite directions... "Let them lie there and strain." This sadistic idea was quashed by John who suggested tying four rockets together and holding them with pliers until they were all firing. James countered this by pointing out that we had no parachute to wear "just in case".

We finally decided to tie an Atomic Crasher onto a rocket. Now, I have a theory about these particular squibs. I bought them in one bundle and I think that, by some mistake in the factory, the first six I lit had had no explosive in them. Also I think that all the powder that should have gone into them went into number seven. As luck would have it that was the one we put on the rocket. While we were sellotaping it on James, who was beginning to recover his faith, worked out the chances of a good flight. "A 3d rocket and a 1d banger... hmmm! That's a pretty good lift — a three to one ratio." Getting even more hopeful, he said we might even break the sound barrier. I never heard of anything sillier — for supersonic flight you need a sixpenny rocket at least.

Anyway I lit the Atomic Crasher, waited a few seconds, and then lit the rocket. It went up at a terrific velocity. It had achieved quite a fair height when the weight of the banger pulled it over to one side. It turned and zoomed downwards, its trail of sparks now reinforced by those from the squib. It disappeared from view behind a hedge, but we could see that it had landed... yes, that's right... fair and square in the backyard of the same house. Exactly at the moment of impact the Atomic Crasher exploded. I saw the intervening hedge limned with crimson flame and the ground shook below our feet. Everybody burst out laughing except me — I had belatedly remembered

that there had been somebody moving out there. Somebody in our group said in a stricken voice, "My Ghod! The Russkis have got in first." James said, "The lights are going out all over town." When our ears stopped ringing we realised that every dog for miles around was appealing in a loud voice to its canine Ghu to come and save it. Suddenly through the sounds in my head and the, I suspect, slightly hysterical laughter and the yammering of the dogs I heard what I had been dreading to hear...

From the direction of that last appalling detonation, borne on the rain-laden night air, there came faint piteous cries.

I don't know what the poor devil was trying to say but he certainly sounded as if he was in a bad way. My sleep is still haunted by his faint bleats of bewilderment mingled with pure fear and helpless, impotent anger. James, who was by this time once more his old devil-may-care self, gleefully whispered, "That gap in that row of houses wasn't there before."

The more prudent of us decided that we had better move on before the police cars arrived, so we gathered our gear and set off back to Walter's. As we were walking back I found a Flying Imp in my pocket so I let it off in the street. I can't remember much about the ensuing few seconds but John has covered it for me...

* * *

《JOHN BERRY writing: I noticed that Bob was absent. I looked round, and saw him bending down by a front gate. I hurried on, presuming he was trying to complete the night's destruction by blowing up the gate with his last Atomic Crasher. Seconds later I heard a hissing noise, followed by a cry of frustration. I looked round, startled. There was Bob, eyes protruding, cheeks puffled out, his feet a sheer blur of slashing movement. He flashed past, coat tails akimbo, hotly pursued by a Flying Imp with a long comet-like tail. The nose of the Imp was about 2½" from Bob's nether regions. I yelled to the crowd, and they parted respectfully to make way for the strange procession. There was a final devastating explosion, then silence and utter darkness. We pulled Bob from the hedge, carefully removing the Imp. Sadie retrieved his collar and tie from a nearby lamp-post. We eventually managed to calm him down, none the worse for his impulsive flight.》

* * *

《BOB SHAW Ctd.》 Thank you, John. Personally I refuse to believe that I could ever behave in such an undignified manner, but let the readers judge for themselves. See the way when anybody makes a crack at me I just laugh?

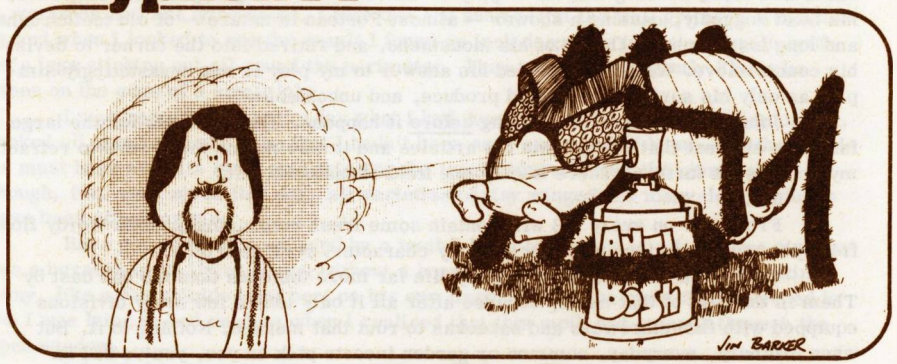
Back at Walter's I planted my remaining banger in the damp earth and lit it. To tell the truth I was still thinking about that unknown soul whose evening reverie had been so rudely shattered... that's how I failed to notice that the blue paper had broken off this one. I absent-mindedly touched the match to it and found to my horror that I was squatting (off balance too) in a shower of sparks from a prematurely exploding Atomic Crasher. Gibbering horribly with undiluted fear I took off down the path, travelling about six inches above the ground. I crashed through the world record for the twenty yards, the sound barrier and several ranks of grinning fans and femmes. I was proud of that dash — it made me fell like one of the Unkillables in "Final Blackout". Gretting my teeth to keep my heart from bouncing out onto the ground I turned to witness the explosion of the Hell-Bomb.

It went..... "phhht".

A dimly seen object that I had taken to be a huge pile of dustbins painted in zig-zag camouflage turned out to be George Charters in his bulky tweed coat and cap. It said, in a patient voice, "Now will you go up and play Ghoodminton?"

So we all went in for friendly, safe, predictable Ghoodminton.

Hyphen 14



BoSh Goes Loco

This column appeared in "-" in June of 1955. I wrote this introductory paragraph almost exactly twenty years later in a newly-completed office-cum-study which I had built in my garden, and — this is Ghu's truth — I had to stop for a minute in the middle of it because a small dark spider came running in from outside and went for me! It was moving so quickly that I had a few panicky moments before I managed to kick it to death. I have a sneaky feeling they'll get me yet...

* * *

THE OTHER DAY I was sitting as is my wont (I always sit this way. I can't help it. Sometimes as I lie taking stock of my life in the long introspective hours of the silent night I say to myself, "BoSh, old chap, you'll just have to stop this sitting as is your wont — give it up while there is still time. Before it gets to be a habit." But it is no use. My wont shakes its head, gives me a smog glance and I have to follow soot. Anything my wont won't want I won't want.) honing the edge of my ghoodminton bat and thinking to myself that if John Berry could attempt to train a budgie to talk I should be able to train one to hone my bat. Come to think of it, I was just muttering, have I not heard of pigeons that do that? Suddenly Walter spoke to me.

"Do you realise," he said, absentmindedly straightening the barbed wire on the ghoodminton bat, "that The Glass Bushel is Hyphen's oldest department? The only one in since the beginning!"

I was amazed. Here in Belfast among my circle of inmates I have a reputation for the transient nature of my projects, which usually fade out after a few short days of uncertain existence. Could I have done this glorious thing? After the initial shock had worn off I began to think about my column and all the things that had happened to me since I first began it.

One of the things that immediately springs to mind is the way in which after every GB in which I devoted all my space to a semi-pro type story, we received an anguished protest from Gregg Calkins who apparently hates that sort of thing. Write about fans! He has said this so often that I am going to do just that to please him. Now. The only fans that I know enough about to enable me to produce an article on them are those here in Ireland and since the arrival of John Berry, sometimes known here as The Chronicleer, this is not possible. He writes up everything. I did have the idea of shouting "Copyright" in a loud firm voice immediately anything of interest took place. This worked all right — once. That was the fireworks article a few months

back. But John, sensing that his supply of material was being imperilled, only shook his head doggedly, causing a shower — almost Fortean in nature — of old toothbrushes and long lost combs to fly out of his moustache, and retired into the corner to devise his countermove. When he produced his answer to my ploy it was devastatingly simple, as only his sort of brain could produce, and unbeatable.

John now writes up everything before it happens. This accounts for the large fantastic element that creeps into his articles and it also means that I have to retract my scope even further. There is only one field of material left.

Me.

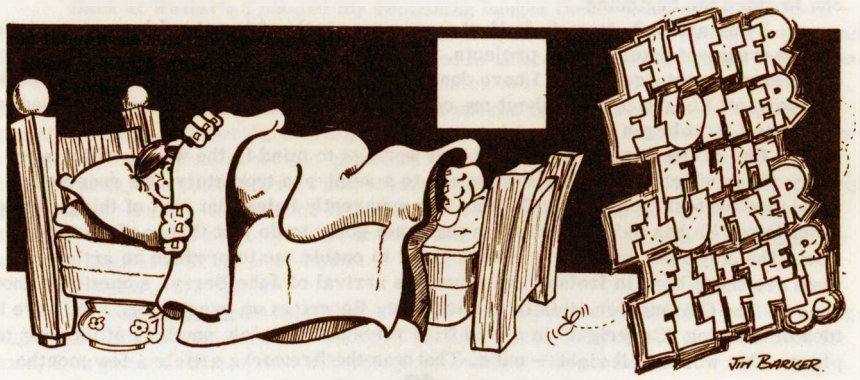
From now on every GB will contain some fresh outpourings, more wordy flows from yet another and another faucet of my character. Now read on...

There is a dark shadow over my life far more ominous than the one cast by Them in the film of that name, because after all it only took a few army divisions equipped with flamethrowers and bazookas to rout that menace. Nothing to it. But when ordinary, everyday, common or garden insects pick on you, you've had it. There is nothing you can do, you see. When fifteen-foot ants wander about knocking down houses and frightening policemen the general public is solidly behind you when you start shooting thermite about; but, just try anything like that on an ordinary insect and you'll soon find yourself a social outcast.

Why is it necessary to use such drastic measures on poor little creepers, you might say. Well, it all began with the time I brutally murdered two spiders. The first one fell victim to my airgun under very extenuating circumstances which were described in Vinć Clarke's late and very lamented SFN, so I will not go into that here. The second one I hit with a pickaxe.

I remember the day well. I came out of the drawing office in a hurry to get home to my tea and ran down to the workshop where I had left my bicycle. I was just about to jump on when I noticed a spider, a large stupid-looking spider, dangling around the chain wheel. If I rode away it would get smeared all over everything and I didn't like the idea of that, so I tried to shake it off. It refused to come.

I spent long impatient minutes trying to dislodge the brute and when I finally succeeded I was gibbering with rage. The spider scampered away up the brick wall and it seemed to me that I could detect derision in the way it wobbled its legs. I looked



around for something to hit the thing with and my gaze alighted on a huge pickaxe that a workman had left lying about. I hefted it and swung it at the wall grinning ferociously and when I looked to see the result I found an inch deep hole in the wall with spider's legs sticking out all round the perimeter. They were waving gently like palm trees on the edge of a small lake.

I was immediately sorry for what I had done so I apologised to the tiny crater, looked all about to make sure that I hadn't been seen and rode off home. Another spider must have seen its mate encountering the insect equivalent of the atom bomb though, for, ever since that day, all varieties of tiny winged and many-legged things have been attacking me.

Have you ever been savaged by a moth? I can tell you it is a fearsome sight to see a berserk moth flying at you without a hope of doing you real damage or getting away, like a Jap suicide pilot bent on his own destruction. The night that happened to me I was lying in bed reading when I realised that this moth had entered through the open window.

I decided to treat it with contemptuous disregard and contined to read. Suddenly I felt a stinging blow on the ear and then another on the face as I looked up to see what was happening. At last I realised the horrible truth. I was being attacked by a defenceless moth! Wasps I can handle with ease because I don't mind hitting them and they don't move as fast as a shuttlecock, but this was too much. Mewing with fright I drew back into the corner and made blind swipes at the moth which was keeping up its insane onslaught. I felt the way Goliath must surely have felt as he noted the fearlessness of David's advance.

Suddenly I landed an uppercut on the moth and then as it was flopping about in the air I sent in a right hook that knocked it into a big box in which I kept books and junk. I went over to have a closer look at the dead hero. I leaned over the box. Boink! It came shooting out again at tremendous speed and hit me on the face.

It was psychological stuff. By this time I was in a dead funk and it was all I could do to start throwing punches again, but after a series of panicky swipes I hit the ferocious moth and as luck would have it, it landed back in the box. This time I took no chances. I dashed over, almost hysterical now, and lifted the box and shook it up and down churning all the stuff inside about like stones in a concrete mixer. After minutes of this I set the box down and went back to bed without looking inside.

About half an hour later when I put out the light to go to sleep I was lying in the darkness when I heard something. It was the moth fluttering about inside the box among all the books, old poster colour pots, telescope parts and throwing knives. I closed my eyes tight and lay there without moving and, after a long long time, the noise went away.

* * *

The above account is quite true and it shows the horrible way in which the insects work — they can't win but they fight anyway. Like the story about the aliens whose way to fight was to dash up to their enemies and cut their own throats. Another night I came up to go to bed, threw back the sheets and was just about to hop in when I realised I had seen something black disappearing in below the blanket. Cautiously I pulled the bed clothes back a little further and discovered a beetle clinging to the sheet.

Now this was a tricky problem. I wasn't going to actually touch the thing and yet I had to get it off onto the floor so that it could be disposed of. I dragged the sheet in question to one side of the bed so that the part to which the beetle was clinging was hanging over the side and flapped it about with all my strength. When I had finished the beetle was still hanging there unperturbed. Feeling the old dread coming back I looked around wildly for something to use and I noticed one of those things like mops that are

used for polishing linoleum. It was out on the landing. I brought it in, closed the door and played several golfing shots at the beetle. It was no use. In the end I had to put the sheet right down on the floor and sweep the thing off, making a mess of the sheet as I did so. Once on the floor the beetle just sat there probably picking the torn shreds of linen out of his powerful claws or whatever it is they walk about on. Feverishly I looked about for my shoes; then I remembered I had come upstairs in my socks, so it was the mop again. I put it over the beetle with the handle sticking vertically upwards and leaned on it with all my might, turning it round and round for good measure. When I looked under the mop there was no sign of any intruder so I concluded I had crushed it right into the floor and I set the mop against the wall, changed into my slumber suit and got into bed.

A minute later I saw the beetle come walking out from under the mop. At two in the morning when your confidence in yourself has been badly shaken this is not funny. I leaped out of bed, grabbed the mop and pounded it vertically downwards onto the beetle. In the other bedrooms people began to stir and mutter in their sleep but I was past caring. I looked down and the thing was still there. I began a regular pounding heedless of the startled grunts from the room next door, and after about twelve blows there was no sign of the beetle on the floor.

This time I was not to be fooled. I turned the mop upside down and there it was clinging onto the strands. Giggling faintly I dashed out onto the landing and ran downstairs to the kitchen determined to burn the beetle to death. The fire had not been lit that day. I set the mop down and the beetle, sensing that I was really out for blood, scuttled out moving at roughly the speed of sound. It went round the room several times looking for a dark place to hide and as our kitchen is small and compact and fairly modern it didn't find one.

When I had overcome the instinctive fear that this unexpected ability to travel like a speeding racer had inspired in me I lifted one of the heavy chairs so that the front legs were about half-an-inch clear of the floor. It was very dark and safe-looking in below them. The beetle swerved sharply and skidded to a halt under one of the legs.

Feeling ashamed of myself for the underhand trick I had played, I let the chair fall and went up to my bed.

* * *

The above are only two examples taken from my casebook — there are many others. Readers of Paul Enever's Orion might remember the description of how a daddy-longlegs drowned itself in my tea, which is another method of attack. However, now that I have got this down on paper I feel better about it all because, if I am ever found dead in an empty room with my eyes glazed over with fear and a water pistol half full of insecticide in my hand, perhaps somebody will remember this and call out a few army divisions equipped with flamethrowers and bazookas and thermite bombs and tanks and rockets to hunt down and destroy the dirty rotten flea or beetle that did it.

* * *

How many fans know that there exists another worldwide organisation which has advantages and interests to offer even greater than those we derive from fandom? The name of this mysterious organisation? It is none other than the Boy Scouts!

Yes, I too have always regarded the familiar Scouts with their proverbial knobbly knees and arrays of badges as being people wasting good energy that could have been used for the production of fanzines. I used to sneer at them and shout "Come on the BB," from the window of the bus when I passed one of their troops, but that is all over now.

The reason for this change of heart? Well, the other night I happened to glance

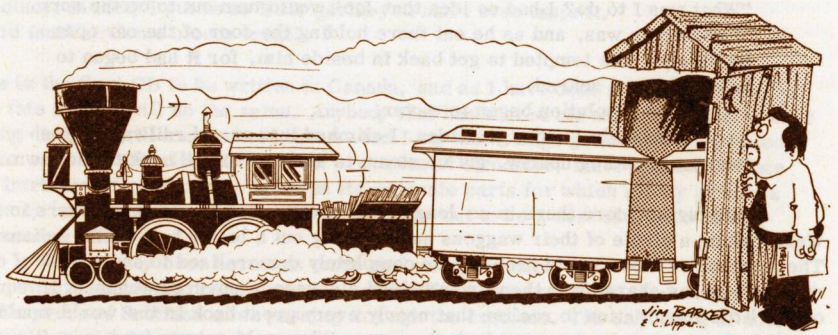
through a copy of "Scouting for Boys" by Lord Baden-Powell, which is the basic literature of the organisation. It is a series of informal lectures, called "Camp Fire Yarns", on the various topics of interest to Scouts. It is the Scout equivalent of The Enchanted Duplicator.

In CFY No. 7 which is entitled "Signals & Commands", I came across this interesting little problem. See how you get on with it: it beat me, so I'll give it exactly as in the book to keep everything fair.

> In the American Civil War, Captain Clowry, a scout officer, wanted to give warning to a large force of his own army that the enemy were going to attack it unexpectedly during the night; but he could not get to his friends because there was a flooded river between them which he could not cross, and a storm of rain was going on.
>
> What would you have done if you had been he?

Well, I sat and thought about this for some time and the best I could think of was to get into the river, swim down to the sea, take a boat to India and settle down to planting tea or cotton or something, and find out what happened in the papers. Somehow I was pretty sure this wasn't the right answer so I read on to see what an experienced scout would have done. Here it is exactly as printed on p. 56: —

> A good idea struck him. He got hold of an old railway engine that was standing near him. He lit the fire and got up steam in her, and then started to blow the whistle with long and short blasts — what is called the Morse Code alphabet. Soon his friends heard.....



You can just imagine all the Scouts who had been working on this problem slapping their knobbly knees in self disgust and saying, "Of course! Why did I not think of that? It's the obvious thing to do...." But to me, a member of the uninitiated, this casual employment of old railway engines that just happened to be standing about smacked of magic, another and alien way of thinking.

Puzzled and curious I read on through the book in the hope of finding something

that would throw light on the problem, then at last I discovered one pregnant sentence that solved the whole thing. When you knew the real facts there was actually nothing queer about the idea of a railway engine and the wherewithal to get up steam in her standing on the bank of a flooded river during a civil war.

Here is the sentence: —

> .....but it takes a good deal of practice before a tenderfoot can get into the habit of really noting everything and letting nothing escape his eyes.

There was a lot more in the same vein saying that a trained person can see things that are there all the time but which the layman cannot perceive through not knowing how. After thinking this over it dawned on me that there was no mystery or coincidence at all involved in the episode mentioned. You see, although we are blind to them and don't know they are there, the whole world is covered with old railway engines and heaps of coal! They are everywhere.

When next you go out to work look again at the trolley bus that passes you in the street. Strip away all preconceived notions and attitudes of mind. Now do you not see that it is really a large locomotive? Look at your neighbour's rock garden; is it not really a heap of nutty slack? Those prefabs across the way: is that not something suspiciously like wheels peeping out from below the window box?

Probably most of you, steeped in your habits of thought, will never be able to see through to the real nature of the world around you, and perhaps it is just as well. Just think of the tremendous impact on human affairs if this knowledge became generally accepted! Just considering one aspect of this, the field of literature would be thrown into a state of chaos.

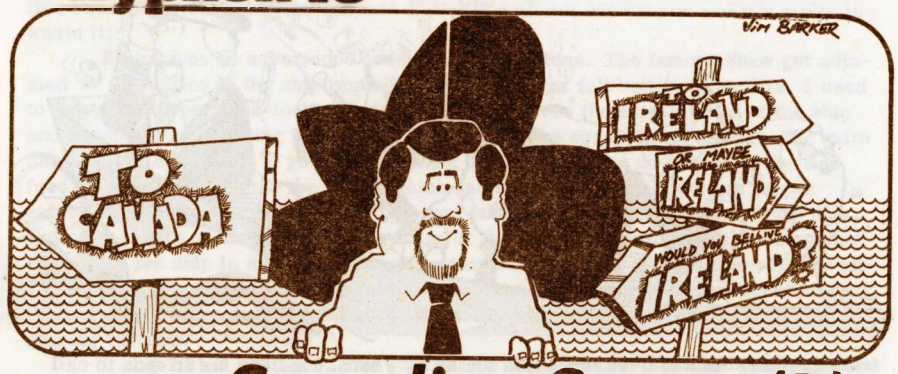
For instance, all those stories of the good girl whose boy friend drops her on a lonely country road in the middle of the night because she refuses to cooperate with him in his nature studies would look pretty silly if you read something like this: —

> "What was I to do? I had no idea that Jack would turn out to be the sort of person he was, and as he sat there holding the door of the car open invitingly I was tempted to get back in beside him, for it had begun to rain and I was scared.
>
> My resolution began to waver.
>
> Suddenly I had a good idea. I climbed into an old railway engine that was standing nearby, got up steam in her and drove back to the town...."

And furthermore there is no longer any justification for early pioneers in the West making a circle of their waggons and shooting out a losing battle with Indians. The Apaches or Sioux would probably be completely demoralised to see a fleet of old railway engines charging at them from behind a screen of covered waggons. It requires only a little imagination to realise that nearly every great book in the world would be spoiled. Even the titles wouldn't look the same. Who could enjoy a book or a film with such names as:

UNCLE TOM'S DRIVING CABIN THE ASCENT OF COALHEAP EVEREST
PANDORA & THE FLYING SCOTSMAN DESIRE UNDER THE L.M.S.

With this disquieting thought planted firmly in your minds I will now conclude this appearance of the Glass Bushel, Hyphen's longest lasting department. If any of you think of any further effects or consequences I would be glad to hear of them so that I can incorporate them into the next GB, thus giving you lots of egoboo and saving me lots of work. In the meantime, I am going to pop over to the loco for a pint.



Canadian Capers(1)

In 1956 the Shaws emigrated to Canada for almost three years, and the following column describes our first encounters with Dave Rhodes, one of the most entertaining characters I ever met. I still treasure the conversation I overheard between him and his miserly landlady when I called to give him a ride to work one morning:-

Landlady: I've given you a marvellous treat for your lunch today.
David: What is it?
Landlady: Sardine sandwiches with garlic.
David: You'll have to make me something else — I hate garlic.
Landlady: I didn't put much garlic in.
David: Doesn't matter. I can't bear the taste of garlic.
Landlady: I put hardly any in.
David: I don't care.
Landlady: In fact, I put in so little garlic you can't even taste it.
David (sniffs): Some bloody treat!

* * * * * *

This is the first GB to be written in Canada, and as I have done a lot of rambling of late this article will do the same. Anybody that has moved his abode and effects over a long distance will know what I mean when I say that things get a bit disorganised, so for once the GB will not have that precision of structure, that beautiful balance and intricacy of relationship between its separate parts for which all my previous columns have been noted. I daresay it will turn out to be a sort of trickle of consciousness effort.

The journey over here was more or less uneventful.

Sadie and I wandered around Liverpool for a few hours and then went aboard the Empress of Scotland after passing through the customs. The only thing of note there was that I found myself sitting opposite a small man with a weatherbeaten face not unlike that of a moronic gorilla. I conceived an instant hatred for him and prayed that I wouldn't see him on the voyage. We had lunch on board at one thirty and the ship sailed at four.

When the ship was wriggling out of Liverpool I went to the Chief Steward to make dining-room reservations. I joined the line and found that I was standing right behind gorilla-face. I watched his moronic face and listened to his moronic conversation with an almost equally moronic companion. It turned out he originally came

from Scotland but had lived in Canada for thirty years. He liked his friends to call him Scotty. He pronounced it Scaddy.

I was relieved when a thick-set young man who looked like an intelligent Raymond Burr tapped me on the shoulder and introduced himself as David Rhodes. He was another draughtsman going to the same firm as I was. Cook's had made us mutually aware of each other some weeks previous and Sadie had sent him up from the cabin where he had called to see me. We talked for a few minutes, but the proximity of gorilla-face was too much for David and he arranged to meet me later. I booked our places at a table and got David a seat with us. As it happened, there was another structural draughtsman, from Wales, (David is from Glasgow) at the same table. We had a sort of convention.

Nothing much happened that day as Sadie and I were tired out through not being able to sleep on the crossing from Belfast on the previous night.

I rose early next morning and went up on deck. The sea was rough and the ship was rolling quite a bit. I saw the mountainous coast of Ireland quite near and remembered that the passenger list had shown the route to pass close to Donegal. I immediately began to look for Port na Blach where the Willis and Shaw families had spent the previous summer holidays. I soon found it and a host of other familiar landmarks and was just about to dash down and arouse Sadie when I noticed something wrong.

Ireland was on the right side of the ship instead of the left. I got a bit worried over this and decided that something was wrong with the ship, and they were putting back to Liverpool without saying anything for fear of panic. Just then Glynn, the Welsh draughtsman, showed up and I explained my fears to him. He laughed uproariously for a minute at my folly and then informed me that we were passing south of Scotland. He pointed out distant mountains beyond the first range on the coast and reeled off a string of place names in the Hebrides. I was impressed.

Just then David appeared with the news that the ship had changed from the planned course to miss bad weather and that we were passing south of Ireland. Glynn muttered something about distances being deceptive over water, and went below. I took my first look at the extreme South of Ireland and marvelled at its resemblance to the North of Ireland. That was the first day out and the ship covered 316 miles in rough sea. I noticed that the dining-room crowd had been reduced to about half by the motion of the ship.

Considering that the ship weighed 26,300 tons I had expected the motion to be very slight, but the ship really rolled about. The wind was force 5, i.e., a fresh breeze. The next day the wind was 6 to 12 and we covered 415 miles. Next day the

wind was 10 to 12 (12 being hurricane) and we only did 178 miles. I'm telling you all this because on the menu for the last dinner it's all set out for you and it's a pity to waste it.

Eating was an experience under those conditions. The famous Shaw gut adjusted to the antics of the ship immediately and I never felt better in my life. I used to go up onto a perilous-looking bridge projecting over the extreme end of the ship and watch the sea fighting into the sky for hours. The spray-laden air gave me quite an appetite, and I used to go into the dining-room anxious to do justice to the fine food we got. By this time the tables which had started off with about ten people apiece were only seating one or two. It was fascinating to watch the reactions of ordinary people to the pitching and rolling of the floor. Most of them leaned against the roll of the ship in an effort to keep vertical. This was in accordance with the advice of the Chief Steward who walked around most of the time with that superior look that experienced seamen get in bad weather. He was an adept at this technique of staying vertical.

It only failed him once. The ship heeled over even further than usual, and the Steward was leaning forward with his nose almost touching the floor, smirking to himself. Just when the slope was greatest the ship gave a little kick which lifted the Steward's rubber soles clear of the floor and, obeying the law of gravity he shot down the slope like a torpedo. Accompanied by a shower of cutlery, bread rolls, baked potatoes and apples he sped through a crowd of waiters who were clinging to stanchions, and ended up below the the cutlery sideboard. He was still calling out in a muffled voice, "Lean against the roll of the ship! Stay vertical!"

There was another school of thought which deemed it better to go with the ship and remain in a plane normal to the floor. Unfortunately this group diminished sadly when its leading exponent, a thin, pale woman, went head over heels backwards out of her chained-down chair and banged her head on a table about twenty feet away. She went around for the rest of the voyage with a bewildered expression on her face and a swathe of bandages around her head.

My own idea was to go willingly with the ship, but to keep a firm grip on something immovable. I gripped the leg of the table with my knees and am happy to say that I didn't lose a bread roll during the whole trip. The rolls were great fun. We got them with every meal, and there was always a couple of dozen of them scuttling up and down the floor. Plates and saucers would often float quite leisurely off the tables, poise in the air for a tantalising instant and then dash themselves onto the floor. People would aim carefully at a piece of bread and then with great deliberation smear butter along their forearms. One waiter tore by us on one leg with his tray completely out of control and smashed into the wall. He must have had a sense of humour, for he looked the elderly lady he was serving straight in the eye, delicately lifted her upended soup-bowl and held it out to her, dripping and upside down. "Your soup, Madam," he grinned, and staggered away roaring with laughter.

On the fifth and sixth days the weather was comparatively smooth and we put into Halifax on a foggy evening. We went through the Canadian customs and boarded our train, and found that gorilla-face, who had been everywhere I went on the ship, was in the same compartment. He was within a few feet of me for the next two days, and he didn't drop dead, which shows there is nothing in thought transference. The only satisfaction I got was when they found out that David was a Scot and sent for him to have a drink. David went down, drank all their whiskey, and came back.

David is like that. Nothing daunts or hurts him. The first morning we went to work he pounded up to the front door, which is one of those modern glass efforts, and twisted the handle. It didn't open the door, so he gave an impatient push with

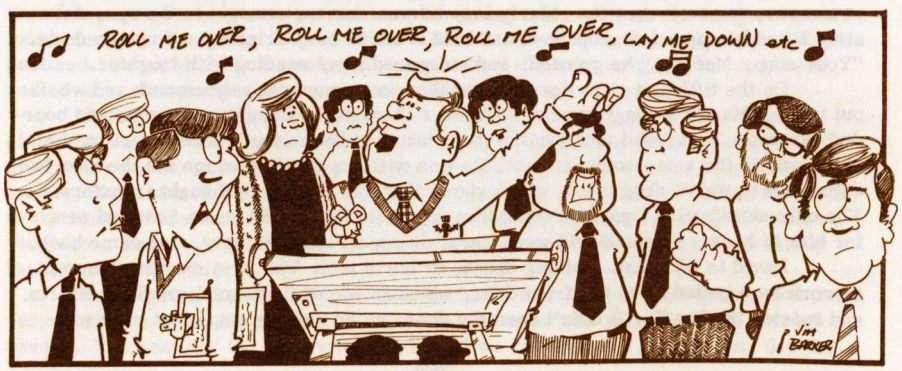
his shoulder. I said that he was like Raymond Burr — built like a grizzly bear. The door was not meant for treatment like that. It split from top to bottom, and the glass slowly disengaged itself from the frame and dropped into the porch. A number of the firm's employees were about, and while I was trying to shrink into the ground for having even been near him David surveyed them coldly and disgustedly, then crunched through the broken glass into the building. Those whom he had looked at seemed to quail slightly. He made them feel guilty about being in a firm that put up such shoddy doors.

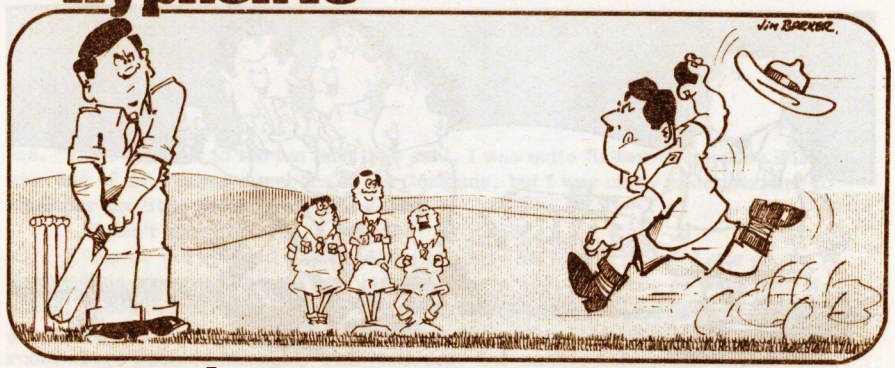
David disrupted the Drawing Office when we finally got settled into it. It was the quietest, most industrious place I ever worked in, and I felt compelled to sit down and shut up. We worked for a time during which the only sound was that of racing pencils. Suddenly, at the top of his voice, David burst into a solemn ballad called The Virgin Sturgeon, which dealt mainly with the aphrodisiacal effect of caviar upon various of the singer's relatives. Several of the draughtsmen around him went rigid with shock, then sat around with sickly smiles until he had finished. Office doors in other parts of the building opened and enquiries were made. David didn't notice.

He sang at intervals through the morning, each time with the same effect, until he felt it was time for tea. When he was told there were no tea-breaks he was astounded. The men that had broken the news to him were from Holland, and David informed them that if they had not been from such a backward, uncivilised part of the world they would never have let themselves be tricked into slave labour for a gang of profiteers. The chief draughtsman developed a pained expression during this loud speech. It grew more pronounced during the day as David, still disgruntled, held up to voluble ridicule everything about the firm that differed from the way he liked it. I think everyone was glad to see him go home that evening.

Next day he had recovered his good humour, and in an excess of good spirits jerked the lever too hard in the toilet and flooded the place out. By this time the men were beginning to get used to his singing, so things were not too bad. A couple of days later he showed up with some tremendous calculation which involved the rate of currency exchange, average wages throughout the world, the difference between lunar and calendar months, and numerous other factors. The end result of this calculation, he announced in a loud voice which carried through the whole building, was that we were all being paid the equivalent of £5-6-8 a week back home. Men that were standing near him scurried away. More doors opened. David didn't notice.

The Glass Bushel will be written in Canada for the next two years or so, but if I have to go home before that — you will know the reason why.





Rush Report re Portrush

This particular article is, to me, proof positive that everybody should keep a diary. I go around thinking I can remember all of my life in detail, but in fact I can't — and this becomes apparent when a very old piece of writing turns up to act as a memory-jogger. I read the following article after a lapse of more than twenty years, and it might have been written by a stranger. Some of the names mentioned in it were meaningless to me at first, until certain brain cells were reactivated and it all came, as they say, flooding back. I'm glad it did, because it made me realise how much my lot has improved since I was a member of the Boys' Brigade.

* * * * * *

John Berry's adventure in the last Hyphen set me thinking of the first time I saw that little holiday resort. It was during that period of my life when I was a reluctant member of the Boys' Brigade, and the Company went there for summer camp one year.

A series of minor disasters with tents and equipment had inspired in the Company officers a deeply rooted distaste for the great outdoors, and, by the time I joined, the word "camping" had come to denote taking over a cheap boarding-house for a week. The adventurous souls who had decided to make the trip in this particular year mustered in the railway station one grey, drizzly Saturday morning. The rain was coming down in leisurely, vertical lines and looked as if it could stay that way indefinitely.

Things began to go wrong almost at once.

One of the lieutenants hated me. His name was Johnny and he was a large, beefy young man with a round, red face and humourless eyes. He hated me because at that particular time I had a particular gasping sort of laugh which I was totally unable to control, and which sometimes reduced me to the point where I had to lie down to recover my power of breathing. I think he felt that this was bad for discipline.

I saw Johnny working his way down the line (we were queued at the barrier) collecting our money so that we wouldn't lose it. My parents had warned me that I was getting only a certain amount of holiday money and that I had better conserve it if I wanted to have enough for the camp. I had ignored the warning and they had remained firm — with the result that I had slightly less than a pound with me. Some of the others had ten times that.

When Johnny asked me for my cash I said, "No." I didn't want to let him

know my weak financial position. The part of his neck that bulged over his collar turned a deeper red. He lifted his gaze to the sooty trusses and rain-washed skylights of the station and stood like that for a moment. After a time he said, "Why?"

I didn't know what to say. I glanced wildly around me for succour and saw only my friend McCreedy moving away from us towards the barrier. McCreedy was a thin pale youth who had only been drawn to me by the fact that I was more persecuted in the Company than he. By a strange coincidence he too was having a difficult period as far as laughing was concerned. He was in a sort of "silent heave" stage and his efforts to control this made his face twitch in an alarming manner.

I could see from the convulsions of McCreedy's body and the spasmodic movement of his ears that he had seen me being put on the spot and the sight had brought on one of his attacks. To my horror, I felt my own lungs give a sympathetic squeeze and a preliminary sob escaped my lips.

Johnny recognised the danger signs. "Shaw," he gritted murderously, "I hope you're not going to start."

"Hhawnngghhh! Hhawngghh!" I said weakly, trying to ignore McCreedy who was now a purplish colour and twitching from head to foot like a veteran of chorea. The situation was saved by Johnny noticing that the Company had moved through the barrier and was boarding the train. He gave me a threatening-pleading-reproachful look, grabbed his bags and ran away. I could see that he was worried about how his holiday was going to turn out.

At Portrush we emerged from the body-warmed, clammy interior of the carriage (all the Privates had managed to squeeze into one section thus making it impossible for an N.C.O. to travel with us) into the same kind of light, persistent rain. We made a rough formation and marched off to the digs lugging our cases. I still remember that cheerful march vividly — jogging along through the grey, spotless, rain-scoured streets, smelling linseed oil from cricket bats, seeing muddy football boots dangling from rucksacks, being slapped with wet inner-tubes which some of us had brought to use as water-wings.

We reached the boarding house, settled in, made gleeful discoveries about who was in the same room with whom, and had our first meal. When the meal was over we went out and found that the rain had stopped.

I was lounging around the entrance when a fellow called Wishart approached

me. "Let's go down to the fun fair," he said. I was quite flattered, because Wishart was one of the leading members of the Company, but I was chary about starting to squander my little stock of cash so soon.

"I don't know if I can," I hedged. "My money....."

"Never worry about money. I've got plenty here," he said. "Let's go."

This was great! I went with him to Barry's where we rode on dodgems, shot rifles, raced in little racing cars, ate ice cream, fed the slot machines, and, in general, had a good time. When we got back to the digs at about eleven I went to my room where I played Monopoly with McCreedy and another unfortunate called Knox. I even did well at Monopoly which was unusual for me as I had a fatal weakness for buying cheap property with low returns.

The game had been in progress for about half an hour when there was a knock at the door and Wishart came in.

"Welcome, kind and noble Wishart," I blabbered loudly. "Wilt thou sit with us and share our humble repast?" McCreedy and Knox looked at me admiringly — I was Wishart's friend. I was a success.

Wishart produced a piece of paper, handed it to me and said, "There's a list of all the things we did down at Barry's. You owe me eight bob."

This was about half my stock. I mustered a trembling smile and gave him his money then went back to Monopoly. I got put out of the game and went to bed. I felt sick.

Next day things were fairly quiet. I kept out of Johnny's way and managed to reach bedtime without losing any more cash. On Monday morning the stamp-collecting fiend descended on me. "I've discovered a great shop," he told me. "Come on down and see the stamps." I went and looked them over, said they were very nice and that I was sorry I couldn't buy any as it would leave me broke.

The friend told me reproachfully that he was going to spend all his money on them, and that a real collector was prepared to give his all to the cause. I felt ashamed. Here was I trying to conserve a few miserable shillings when the fiend and I could be sharing our hobby, talking, going for long walks during which we could monkey about with our stamps and in general act like a couple of Gibbons.

I spent all my remaining cash with the exception of two shillings which I felt might see me through any emergency which might crop up. It cropped up about ten minutes later. When we left the shop the fiend said, "I think I'll go and buy some presents and stuff to take home, then I'll have a feed."

"But you spent all your money on stamps," I reminded him.

"That was all my stamp money. I still have my holiday money." He set off briskly in the direction of Woolworths.

I tottered after him, tugging his sleeve. "Wait a minute," I pleaded. "Are we not going to go long walks talking about stamps an' albums an' postmarks an' triang...."

"Are you mad?" he said, shaking my grip off. "I can talk stamps any time. Right now I'm on holiday." He quickened his pace and left me standing in the street wondering who it was up there didn't like me. I went back to the digs and sat on the front step trying to budget for the next six days with 24 pennies. Finally I got an idea.

I went and found Knox. "Knoxy," I said, "How about going up the town and buying a fishing line and hooks? Then we can have fun all week and it won't cost anything."

Knoxy's long gloomy face reflected the mental turmoil my proposal had engendered inside his untidy head. He didn't like fishing, but he liked it better than spending money — and, after all, fishing would not be too bad with company.

We bought the lines, took them back to the boarding house and met the bunch on the way to the beach for a pre-lunch swim. This was another good way to enjoy one's self — and free too. Knoxy and I grabbed our swim trunks and went along. We stayed in the water longer than anybody else — it didn't cost anything.

When it came near lunch-time, Knoxy and I staggered out of the breakers onto the bright sand and went for our clothes. All the stuff had been piled in a promiscuous heap and it seemed reasonable to assume that when all the others removed their stuff ours would be left.

That was not exactly the way things worked out. Knoxy got dressed all right but when I looked for my new shoes there was only a pair of cracked gaping things which looked as if they had kicked stones all the way round Ireland ten or twenty years before.

"Knoxy," I said, "somebody has stolen my good shoes."

Knoxy was enraged at the treatment which some unknown had meted out to his new friend. "The rat," he gritted. "Let's teach him a lesson. Let's destroy his shoes. That'll teach him." Before I could begin a refutation of his logic he seized the shoes, methodically broke the laces into tiny pieces, threw the shoes into a puddle, tramped them into the wetness, stuffed them with sand and pebbles and then buried them.

"Yow!" Knoxy said. "That'll teach him!"

It was while he was brushing the sand out of his trouser cuffs that I noticed something familiar about his footwear.

"Knoxy," I said. "Give me my shoes."

The events of the next minute are not suitable for detailed description — Knoxy's realisation of the situation, his frantic scrabbling in the sand for his shoes, his reluctance to return mine, his angry accusations...

I spent most of that week fishing in Portrush harbour — alone.

When Friday rolled around I was beginning to believe that I was going to escape without any more trouble. I was recovering pretty well from a sun-roasted back and I had hardly seen Johnny at all. In fact I had hardly seen anybody.

Friday afternoon they decided to have a cricket match — officers versus boys. I was forced to play because the boys only outnumbered the officers two to one and it was felt that this was not enough to compensate for the age difference. The pitch was a fairly level spot behind the sand dunes. It had been made treacherous by trampling down the long grass into a slippery flatness.

On this pitch the officers bowled out the boys for a total score of nine runs. The boys then dismissed six of the officers for seven runs, which meant that Johnny was left to save the day for them. All through the game Johnny had been prowling about disgustedly, sometimes lying on his back pretending to sleep, sometimes whistling at passing girls to show us that he was a worldly man encumbered by his duties to us children, sometimes taking the ball and bowling an over at blinding speed by which means he so much terrified four of the more timid boys that they fell backwards into their wickets.

When the Captain, whose name was Sammy, informed him that he was "in" and that three runs were needed, he surveyed the field reluctantly then saw that I was

holding the ball. He seized his bat and shouted, "Okay, Shaw — bowl!"

The other members of my team gave an immediate cheer, sensing something good was coming up. "Go ahead, Bob," they shouted. "Bowl him out." From the tone of their voices they obviously considered this an impossibility.

So did I.

Johnny made a great show of obtaining centre, marking his crease, examining the fielding layout, squaring his bat. At every exaggerated movement the boys laughed uproariously — it would be worth losing the match to see me getting pasted.

I ran down to bowl amid a sudden, pregnant silence. The ball, going at a good speed, landed three-quarter way down the pitch, sped up from the slippery grass and hit Johnny, who had been attempting a cut to leg, squarely on the chest. It made a peculiar booming sound and dropped at his feet.

Johnny clutched his chest and glared up the pitch at me with naked hatred in his eyes. "Shaw," he snarled, "get a grip on yourself."

I retrieved the ball, ran down to deliver it and was just about to let go when I saw McCreedy. The sight of Johnny being thumped on the chest had brought on another of his attacks. He was staggering about at mid-on, limbs twitching, eyes rolling, mouth working, face contused. The breath whooshed out of me in one gasp and I shambled to a halt, absolutely incapable of delivering the ball.

Johnny pointed one meaty finger at me and shouted, "Shaw! Stop laughing."

This reduced me to the point where I began seriously to feel that I might die of strangulation. I tried to stop. McCreedy was doing the same. I could see the panic stricken look in his eyes as he felt himself go more and more out of control.

Johnny ran down the pitch and seized my shoulder. "This is your last chance, Shaw," he gritted. "Stop it." I dangled on him, sobbing from deep down in my chest. McCreedy was down on his hands and knees, dribbling.

"All right, Shaw," Johnny said, "you've had your chance." He strode away from me and the game broke up in utter confusion.

I saw Johnny once more that day. I was walking through the dunes alone after supper when I heard a sound on the other side of one of the hillocks of sand. Hoping that it might be somebody I knew, I went up the hill and peered down the other side. I found myself looking straight into Johnny's face!

He was lying in the grass with a dark-haired girl of about nineteen. Johnny and I gazed at each other in petrified silence, both of us unable to take in what we were seeing. After a few seconds my legs regained strength and I sprinted away through the gathering twilight, bleating with panic. The look of incredulous rage on Johnny's face haunted me until I went to sleep.

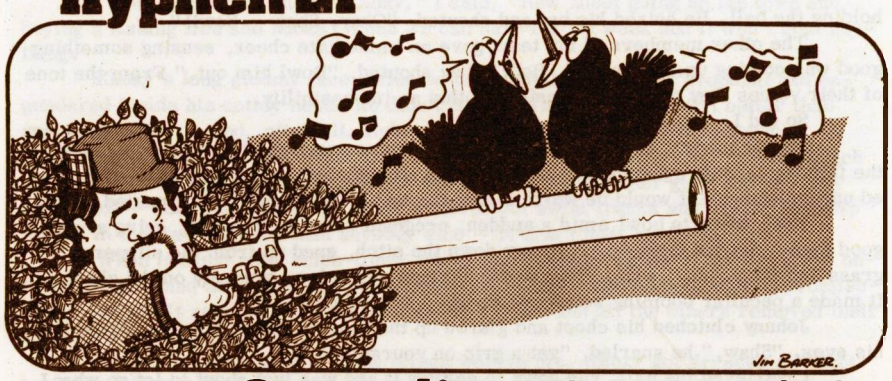
That night some of the lighter sleepers in the Company were aware of a mild disturbance in the small hours of the morning.

When daylight came most of the boys found themselves liberally daubed with shoe polish. Enquiries revealed that the Captain and a couple of senior officers had got up during the night to play a prank on the juniors by decorating them with Cherry Blossom boot polish.

My own experience of the affair differed from that of everybody else. I was fast asleep when something big and strong descended on me like an enraged incubus and showered me with vicious blows. This went on for about a minute before my terrified moans wakened the others in my room and the intruder fled.

I never found out for sure who had done it, but next morning I saw Johnny smirking contentedly at me during breakfast. As soon as possible after the holiday I resigned from the Company as a sort of dramatic protest against the senior ranks.

I don't think anybody even noticed that I had gone.



Canadian Capers(2)

Dave Rhodes was also a central figure in this Bushel. Reading back over the column I realise I forgot (or was too ashamed) to include the incident in which I tried the Great White Hunter bit. I spotted quite a large blackish bird perched high in a tree, thought it might be a turkey and was carried away by the notion that I might be the only member of the party to bag something edible. Getting down on my tummy, with the .22 rifle across my arms, I crept closer and closer to the bird, then — reckoning I had earned the right to dispose of the bird by outwitting it in its own environment — I fired a shot. The bird swung through 180° until it was upside down, hung on the twig for a few seconds, then fell down dead. It looked pretty pathetic but I consoled myself with thoughts that life in the wilds is a deadly game, and the penalty for getting careless is swift and cruel. David came galloping through the undergrowth at the sound of the shot, looked at the dead bird, and loudly identified it as a Fool Hen, a species which is rapidly becoming extinct because it has no fear of man. Later, he was able to show me a picture of a Fool Hen in one of his ornithology books, and he never tired of telling our workmates of how I had crept up to this bird, which was watching my movements with friendship and trust, and had brutally murdered it...

* * * * * *

As a film critic in a small way it came as quite a shock to me to learn that I had been under-estimating Hollywood in a rather important point — the blurbs that accompany trailers. The commentators who yammer at top speed during the trailer always seemed to me to have a strange system of logic and ethics which was peculiar to themselves alone. For example, any book which has been lying around for twenty odd years without being screened is automatically styled "the story that nobody would dare to film before." Another axiom from the chopped up world of Trailerland is that the proximity of some uncouth geographical feature will inspire like emotions in even the most turgid human breast; burning sands — burning desire: high seas — high courage: naked mountains — naked greed, hatred and so on. Strange as it may seem, this is quite true, and in defence of this statement I now present the grim saga of a fan and three nonfans cut off from the world in the cruel, primitive splendour of The Rockies where nerves are raw, endurance taxed to the limit and where the sound of wheeling vultures is drowned out by the noise of clashing teeth, gears and personalitles..... dahhh dittadittittitt did ah DAHHHH.....

Four men set out on that first overnight expedition of the Pronghorn Hunting

Club; Ken Walker (transport); Derek Houghton (artillery), Bob Shaw (beer) and Dave Rhodes (commander). Dave, who has been mentioned in two previous Canadian Chronicles, refuses to go to anything unless he is formally named Commander, a title which he interprets literally and loudly.

The way David saw it was this; we would rendezvous at Ken "The Skel" Walker's house before dawn, he would supervise and coordinate the rest of us loading the Skel's Austin, then he would call out low, terse instructions to the driver and guide the car through the grey, empty streets. The whole business was to be run with the silent grim efficiency of a Commando raid. I don't think we were to be allowed to talk.

The first thing that went wrong was Derek's wife would not let him rendezvous before dawn because he had to help her with the weekend shopping first. This meant that we met at noon under the stares of dozens of curious neighbours who came out in full force to see how we were proposing to carry in one small car, four large men, four piles of blankets, a big tent, four boxes of food, a carboy of water, five rifles, two axes and some miscellaneous effects such as beer, spare clothes, cameras, boots and a voluminous quilt which I had brought along for extra warmth at night. This last item was capable of filling the Austin by itself.

By compressing and rearranging we got everything in all right, except for the people. Dave, who was attired in Army surplus stuff as befitted his rank and was fuming at the lateness of the start and the excited chatter of several Central European types who had stopped to laugh at us, jumped into the front seat and hid behind a Texaco map. Finally Derek and I were tamped into the back seat where we had to sit on so much equipment that our heads and shoulders were pressed against the roof. The Skel got into the driving seat, started the motor, donned his sunglasses, wedged the forefinger of his left hand behind his upper front teeth and we roared off at about five miles an hour. From my lofty position up at the roof I could not see much outside the car which was probably why the Skel's peculiar driving position worried me so much.

He had learned to drive only about two weeks before and from what I could see he had not picked it up too well. The engine stalled numerous times in the first mile, we nudged the kerb at corners and narrowly missed several cars and pedestrians. During this whole performance the Skel kept his finger tucked in behind his front teeth and drove with one hand. We guessed later that he was afraid of appearing inexpert in the company of three relatively experienced drivers and that constantly poking an im-

aginary piece of filet mignon out of his teeth was merely the Skel's way of looking nonchalant. It may have made him feel better but the rest of us were terrified. Dave Rhodes had slumped down in the front seat and was not even issuing any commands — a sure sign that he was worried. The little atmosphere that had managed to seep into the car grew tense and the only sound was the wrenching of the gear lever, which the Skel seemed to be trying to remove, and the Skel's violent North of England swearing which was directed against all other road users in the vicinity.

By the time we reached Cochrane, a small place about twenty miles west of Calgary, the swerving and bouncing of the car had sifted Derek and I down into the equipment somewhat and we could see out. I spotted a hotel and said that we should all go in for a beer. Derek and Dave, both of whom dislike beer, immediately shouted, "Good idea! Let's have a few beers." Grateful to be safely out of the car we staggered into the hotel and began absorbing draught beer — all except The Skel. He didn't want to impair his driving. He sat around impatiently while we had our drinks and explained all the mistakes all the other drivers he had seen that day were making. When he got tired of that he went out and bought some chocolate for the other members, then there was a row between Dave and Derek about the change they should have received. Convinced that he had been cunningly robbed of five cents Dave stumped out to the car, the rest followed and we were off on the open road again.

Hours went by bouncing and swerving, cameras kept falling off the back window and hitting me on the nape of the neck, boxes banged against my legs and the huge quilt kept swelling up and up in horrible pink billows which threatened to smother all the occupants of the car. Gradually I was bludgeoned into a sort of beery torpor which was disturbed only by exceptionally vile oaths from the Skel or extra loud moans of panic from David in the front seat.

My fitful repose was finally terminated by the realisation that the Commander had begun commanding rapidly, jumping around in his seat and rattling his sheaf of oil company maps. I peered out and saw that we were rattling along a rutted gravel road in the mountains. We had travelled a little over a hundred miles since noon but the sun was nearing the peaks and greyness was beginning to gather under the trees and in deep clefts in the rock faces. I began to look for a place to camp and set up our base. After ten minutes I saw a little lake away down through the trees and proposed going there.

"No use," barked the Commander, "not enough open ground. Drive on." Later on I suggested another place and received a similar comment except that this time it was something about the terrain not being suitable for moose. Considering that we were armed with nothing but .22 rifles, except for my Lee Enfield, and had come out with the express purpose of shooting coyotes to have rugs made out of them and that we had no game licences and that it was not the moose hunting season I felt that the Commander's objection was of a hair splitting nature. But I kept on spotting nice little places and having them turned down. Then Derek who was getting tired of bouncing along into the gathering twilight began seconding my suggestions. Still Dave didn't like them. He had to find the one perfect spot by himself before he would be happy.

At last, when the darkness was almost complete, Dave ordered the Skel to halt. "This is it. H.Q.," he said, pointing out of the car. The place he pointed at was a steep boulder-strewn hillside where the trees grew so thick that you could not see more than a few yards in any direction. The workings of the military-type mind have always amazed me. Every objection that the Commander had made to every place I had proposed could be applied a hundredfold to this dismal place and yet everybody was leaping around with glad cries, unloading equipment, singing and having a good time. I think that the National Service that the English and Scots have to do does serious damage to their minds. In addition to all its other faults this place had one major disadvantage which the rejected spots had not shared — we had just passed a huge notice telling us that we were entering a restricted area and that firearms were forbidden under penalty of fine or imprisonment!

Getting out of the car I asked David cautiously if he didn't think it was a bad thing not being allowed to use guns if you were on a hunting trip. He brushed me off and began rushing about looking for a spot to erect the tent. Half an hour later the tent was up, the fire was going well and David had erected a little table upon which we were to put all our food so that he could select which stuff he liked best, then he would announce the menu for supper. Dutifully the Skel and I dumped our food onto it along with David's, and David began loading stuff into a huge pan that I had borrowed from my landlady. Suddenly he noticed that Derek, in a flagrant breach of discipline, had whipped out a tiny frying pan of his own and was crouched over the fire cooking sausages in it. Snorting with rage David ordered him away but Derek, eyes gleaming in the darkness like somebody in North West Passage, refused to go. David charged the fire with the communal frying pan and a war commenced to see who could take up most of the available flame. The only real loser was the fire whose every little burgeoning had a frying pan slammed down on it. By the time they had finally beaten the fire out the food had reached a point slightly above body temperature and we ate it, washing it down with instant coffee.

Strangely, it had not become any darker in the past half hour or more. The early twilight had been caused by the proximity of the Kanaskis Range on the west side of us but the upper air had remained bright and everything around us was bathed in a pearly grey light reflected down from the sky. The air was sharp and clean and filled with peace and the millions of pines seemed to be settling down for the night's sleep. The pleasant scene cheered everybody up, the camp was cleared up and a preliminary scouting expedition was made during which Derek, who had disobeyed Dave's orders to remain on guard at the tent and had wandered off, was almost fired at in the mistaken belief that he was a predatory animal sneaking up on the camp. Derek's continued disobedience was getting the Commander down — during their National Service Derek and the Skel had been privates whereas Dave had attained the lofty rank of sergeant and he could not understand why they didn't recognise his authority over them. He sat brooding over this as we gathered around the fire, dug the beer out of the snowdrift where it was stored and settled down for a camp-fire talk.

The camp-fire talk didn't work out too well.

David, who normally takes over on occasions like that, was morose. I had finished my share of the beer and I was watching Derek, who hates beer, to see if he was going to be mean enough to drink all his share simply because he had paid for it. This left it up to the Skel who was quite satisfied with this arrangement. He described the topography of his home town, all the people in it, their genealogical relationships to each other, his love affairs, his two years in the army which had made him into the mature, sophisticated person he was today, his holiday in Spain and finished up with a little dissertation on bull-fighting which he thought was a grand sport and everybody ought to take it up.

By this time Derek had finished his beer and had turned a luminous green colour. There was some desultory talk during which I watched Derek closely to see what he was going to do. Finally he turned his head round to his left and with a roaring, gurgling sound disgorged beer over everything in that direction. He immediately whipped back round and stared at us with huge, suspicious eyes as if to say, "Who did that?" A dead silence descended on the camp — somehow there didn't seem to be anything more to say. The Skel who had left some stuff in the general area which had

been inundated by Derek's were-gargoyle tendencies got up and poked around gingerly for a few minutes then disappeared into the tent. We all went in after him and settled down for the night.

For four hours I lay there trying to sleep but there were stones under the tent, I had a pain in my stomach, and the temperature had dropped to not much above zero. None of the others even stirred, they just lay there so quiet and so peaceful that I felt like murdering them in their sleep. Finally, when I was about to do a Captain Oates, I heard Dave whisper, "Hey Skel, can you sleep?" After four hours the sound of a human voice came through to me in my agony like the sweet sound of angels. With bated breath I waited to hear if there would be a reply. "No," replied the Skel, "Ah bliddy well can't." I was thrilled — another human voice in my solitude. Then Derek chimed in, "Neither can I." I was delirious with happiness, everybody was awake and had been awake all the time, I had not been alone with my torment. A silence descended inside the tent then it dawned on me that they were all listening to hear if I was awake. In the state of mind I was in this seemed unutterably funny. Clutching my aching stomach I burst into a hideous, cackling torrent of laughter through which I dimly heard people making startled noises and groping for flashlights or weapons. But I couldn't stop laughing. Still whooping like the mad woman in Jane Eyre I got to my feet and staggered out of the tent where I flopped down at the ashes of the fire and began some deep breathing exercises. After a while I calmed down and Dave came crawling out of the tent too.

We made some coffee and had bacon and eggs which we ate just as the mountain ranges up above us were beginning to glow with the dawn. They seemed to light up from inside as though they were made of ice right through and some unknown beings who lived in there were turning their lights on. Leaving the others our bedclothing, Dave and I set out on a hunt which lasted about six hours and during which we saw not one living animal. We got back to the tent about lunch time and had another meal. Not feeling up to more of the type of cuisine available I contented myself by eating a can of pork and beans cold.

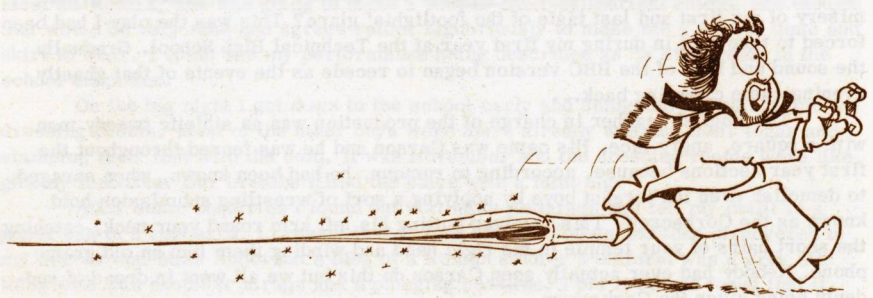
When lunch was over we climbed around a bit and shot a few gophers, but Derek kept disobeying orders — refusing to crawl on his stomach when David told him to and firing at gophers without first pointing them out to David who had not yet managed to hit anything. So we gave that up and went back to the camp — a decision which was assisted somewhat by the arrival of a Forest Ranger who told us that because he was in a good mood just this once he wasn't going to confiscate our rifles.

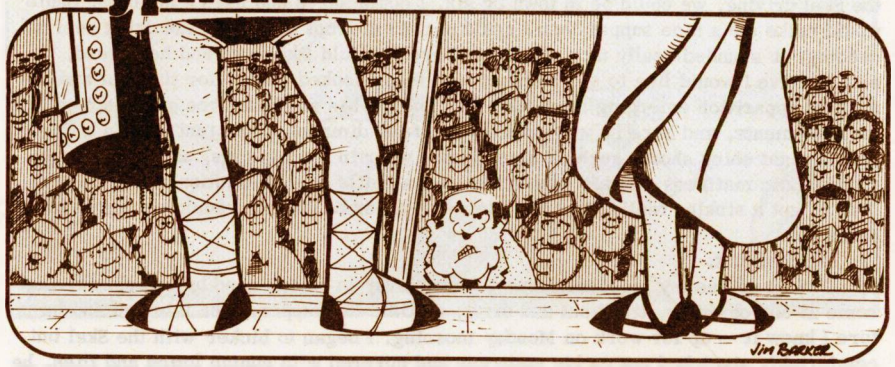
Back at the tent I looked at my watch. One fifteen. If we left at two, even with the Skel driving, we could be in town by six. I could shave and have a hot bath, Sadie would make me a nice supper then I could sprawl in front of the TV and drink beer all evening. It sounded really nice. I said to Derek I would like to go and he agreed, I said to Dave I would like to go and he agreed too, I looked around for the Skel and saw a weird apparition emerging from the tent. The Skel is six foot three and has no other measurements, and here he was coming out of the dimness of the tent clad in a tiny pair of tight shiny shorts such as muscle men wear in photographs, and carrying (a) a pneumatic mattress, (b) his sunglasses, (c) a bottle of suntan lotion and (d) a thick book. I got a sinking feeling that the Skel, the owner of the car, would not agree to go home.

He didn't.

I could see my pleasant evening fading away to be replaced by one of arriving home at eleven thirty, tired out and dirty, no time for supper, then into bed and before I knew it — up for work on Monday morning. I began to bicker with the Skel but, comfortably stretched out on his mattress and covered with suntan lotion and flies, he ignored everything I said. Presently Derek began to moan at him, and shortly after that the Commander joined in. The Skel bore it all for a while then he began roaring at us. We roared back. Everybody realised that this was the end of the Pronghorns — the mountains had won!

Presently the Skel had to give in, and in absolute silence we crammed everything back in the car and headed for Calgary. To give him credit the Skel did try to start conversation once. A car appeared in the distance and the Skel said, "Here's a Buick coming," but when we got close it was an Oldsmobile. Nobody said anything to him about it — somehow none of us wanted to talk to any of the others ever again.





The Man in the grey Flannel Toga

School days were far from being happy days for me, possibly because it never once occurred to me to listen to anything a teacher was saying. The following escapade was fairly typical...

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One evening last winter while glancing through the Radio Times I discovered that the BBC was going to give Julius Caesar the full treatment in about half an hour's time. The discovery of and the imminence of this veritable pearl sent me into a state of near oysteria. I dashed out and purchased two pint bottles of Amber Ale, got the fire well stoked up, equipped myself with glass, bottle opener, pipe, tobacco and slippers and settled down in an armchair before the TV set. Once that TV of ours gets into your chair nothing will shift it.

The play opened in a rather unfamiliar manner — nothing but grey mist and a strange, eerie silence. I was explaining to Sadie that I didn't care much for the liberties the BBC had taken with the original settings when she noticed that the set wasn't switched on. Once that was done I began to enjoy the show. Everything went well until the third act, then my memory began to stir uneasily, dredging up fragmentary glimpses of the past...

Suddenly it was all there. Of course. How could I have forgotten the sheer misery of my first and last taste of the footlights' glare? This was the play I had been forced to take part in during my first year at the Technical High School. Gradually the sound and fury of the BBC version began to recede as the events of that ghastly evening came crowding back...

The English teacher in charge of the production was an athletic tweedy man with a square, angry face. His name was Carson and he was feared throughout the first year sections because, according to rumour, he had been known, when enraged, to demolish even the largest boys by applying a sort of wrestling submission hold known as the Corkscrew. This involved putting his left arm round your neck, catching the short hairs of your temple in his right hand and winding them like an old gramophone. Nobody had ever actually seen Carson do this but we all went in dread of suddenly being given the Corkscrew.

Actually I shouldn't have been in the play at all. In fact, the only reason for

the whole business was that Carson, like so many short tempered people, believed himself to be something of a humourist. He had written a take-off of Julius Caesar for the end of term social and had realised at the last moment that all the clever bits, such as the assassination scene in which the conspirators used tommy guns, would not be appreciated by the rabble. Accordingly he had decided to do the play seriously to show us what the real thing was like, and had cast third and fourth year students in the major parts.

In English class one day I was laboriously making carbon copies of my class magazine, known for some forgotten and unguessable reason as "Le Hibou and Ku Klux Klan Journal", when Carson appeared beside me and saw what I was doing. I cowered back covering my temples but to my surprise he took the matter quite well. After a public enquiry into the policies and circulation figures of my magazine, which left the rest of the class in stitches, he asked whether my evident interest in the Arts included any desire to be a Thespian.

I had a vague idea that the word meant something peculiar and mumbled incoherently about being too young.

Carson didn't seem to notice. He handed me a copy of Julius Caesar, showed me my part, which consisted of two lines in Act 3, and told me to show up at rehearsals that evening. Some of the boys who sat nearby almost became ill with senseless laughter — this was going to be something to talk about for years.

As it turned out I only had to attend one rehearsal, due to being conscripted so late, and things went so well at it that I became reconciled with the idea of being an actor. One serious snag was the obvious impossibility of producing reasonable facsimiles of Roman army uniforms, but Carson had got round this by dressing everybody, even Mark Anthony and Pompey, in togas. These consisted of lengthy pieces of curtain material borrowed from the Art classrooms. An elderly teacher by the name of Miss Anderson fitted them on the boys with safety pins.

There was not enough material on hand to provide me with a toga so I did my bit in my ordinary clothes which at that particular time consisted of shapeless grey flannels and an ex-ARP jacket. Before I went on Miss Anderson provided me with a spear and a circular cardboard shield.

Just as I was ready to make my entrance Carson buttonhoied me. "Listen, Shaw," he said, "I want you to speak up. Don't mumble. Your part is small but it is important that the audience hear what you say, so speak up. And keep your shield on your upstage arm to give them the full benefit of your gallant warrior's physique."

I ignored the sarcasm and did all I was told and it felt pretty good. I came off fired with enthusiasm — perhaps this was the start of a new career. Still in this mood I told Miss Anderson that I was going to do away with the circular target, which was most un-Roman, and was going to make a proper semi-cylindrical shield. She thought that would be very nice and agreed rather lugubriously to make me a sort of tunic and skirt to wear. I could see my performance being described as "a little gem" in the school magazine.

On the big night I got down to the school early and smuggled my shield into the dressing rooms. Most of the other boys were there already wearing their togas and stamping their feet with the cold. It was November and the dressing rooms were like gloomy iceboxes. Our breaths filled the place with a faint fog.

After some enquiries I found out that Miss Anderson had left my outfit in a paper bag in a cupboard. I brought it out, took off my clothes and then discovered to my horror that Miss Anderson's idea of a Roman soldier's uniform was a grey silk thing with thin shoulder straps and a plunging neckline. I put it on and found that it came down just far enough to cover my trunks and no more. When the shout of laugh-

ter went up from the others I developed a sneaking suspicion that Miss Anderson had given up trying to make anything and had given me an old petticoat. Mark Antony began talking in a high pitched voice, prodding me with his rubber dagger and finally tried to make me waltz with him. I was saved by the arrival of Carson.

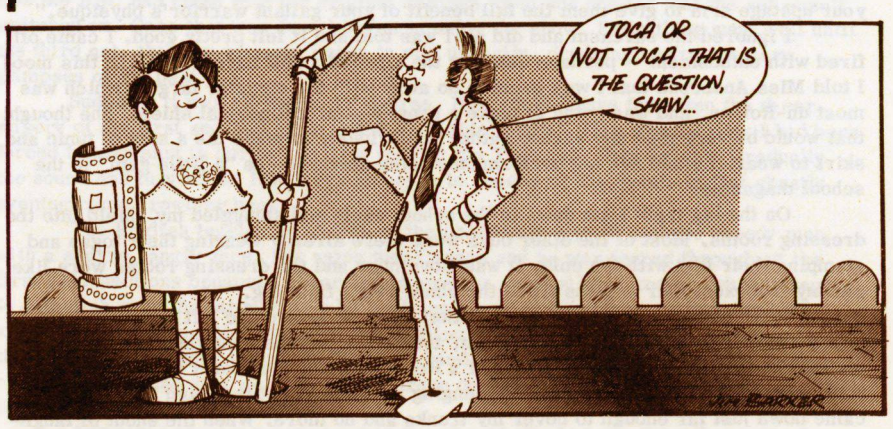
"Unhand that maiden, Marcus Antonius," he said. Carson loved to use the old form of words and names — he was a sort of ycleptomaniac. Luckily, as the play was about to commence, he had no time for further comment on my costume and I suddenly found myself alone in the dressing room. I decided not to wait in the wings with the others and slumped down in a corner to wait my turn.

An hour later, when it came, I had turned a mottled blue with touches of burgundy here and there. I was practically unable to speak. Getting through the crush in the wings was easy; I just kept putting my hand on bare arms and the crowd melted before me. It was a bit like the scene where Quasimodo frightens the people going up the cathedral steps.

Somehow I got onto the stage, husked my two lines about the approach of some army, and ran off. I found out afterwards from boys who had been there with their parents that I had carried my huge semi-cylindrical shield on my downstage arm and, as well as not hearing me, the audience hadn't even seen me. Into the bargain I was shivering so much that the flabby point of my spear had almost leapt off the stick.

Back in the throng I saw Carson bearing down on me with a look of unbridled hatred on his face. I clapped my hands over my temples, gave a despairing whimper and clawed my way into the dressing room. I threw on my trousers and ARP jacket over my costume and fled through another door.

The next day in class Carson didn't speak to me. Now that I think of it, I don't believe he ever spoke to me again.



Hyphen 25

the strange Pond of Dr Moreau

This account of an early experiment in marine eugenics was written in 1960 and illustrates how, even in one's tenderest years, the possession of a fannish turn of mind can turn a dull grey evening into something worth remembering decades later. I tried to sell this article (minus some of the fannish references) to a number of humorous journals and they wouldn't touch it. Which shows that faneds have inherent good taste...

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A couple of weeks ago, on a run down to Whitehead, I was motoring along keeping an eye open for a petrol station. Filling stations are scarce on the road to Whitehead — in fact, you might say they are fuel and far between — so I was going very slowly when I passed through Greencastle. The sight of the old huddled cottages there, examined in detail for the first time in many years, brought another of those sudden onrushes of memory which have, in the past, proved so valuable when Bushel deadlines were drawing nigh.

This time the Proustian gurglings in the subconscious dredged up an early episode that I have entitled "The Strange Pond of Dr. Moreau".

When my brother and I were small children my father periodically took us to Greencastle to swim. There is no beach there, just a dismal stretch of sand, seaweed and sharp stones; but my father is a man of simple tastes and these things did not bother him. I have since made extensive enquiries and have not yet come across one other person who has swum at Greencastle; nobody else has even considered it.

I don't blame them. Even at that age I could sense a difference between Greencastle and Miami Beach. My brother and I grew to dread those occasions on which Pater separated us from our playmates with the tidings that we were all going to "the seaside."

Resistance was futile, so we trooped onto the tram and were taken into town, onto another tram and out to the end of the lines and Greencastle. Dutifully we bared our goose pimples to the reddish light of the evening sun, then splashed around until my father decided we had had enough enjoyment for one evening. Sometimes, as a special treat, he brought a snack with him — usually massive, dry soda farls that we could hardly eat. Very rarely he would slip in a doughnut, but only very rarely — they

were few and farl between.

One sombre evening, with a chill wind nipping in from the Lough, I was sitting in near nudity amongst the rocks when I got a strange, wonderful idea that transformed the whole outing into a thing of joy. There were crabs at Greencastle, little mud-coloured crabs that I had always pitied because they were doomed to live and die right there. My idea, like all great ideas, was simple. There was a clear, clean pond in the park near home — I would bring two crabs back with me, put them in the pond and let them start a whole new breed of crabs. Bigger, better, happier crabs. I could see it all — the crabs would do well in their new surroundings, they would spread all over the pond. Soon it would be noticed, it would be in the local papers, people would come for miles to see them and wonder how they came to be there...

And nobody would know but me and, maybe, the crabs. Perhaps as I walked in the lonely twilight near the pond my little friends would sense my presence and, out in the centre, a pair of nippers would break the surface in a gesture of humble thanks.

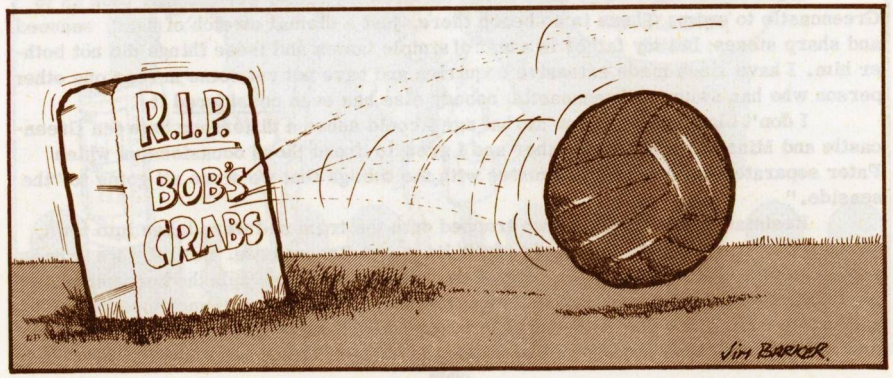
Half an hour later, Robert Shaw — Apprentice God — was on a homeward bound tram, firmly clutching a jam-jar from which two dismayed crustaceans surveyed the changing universe.

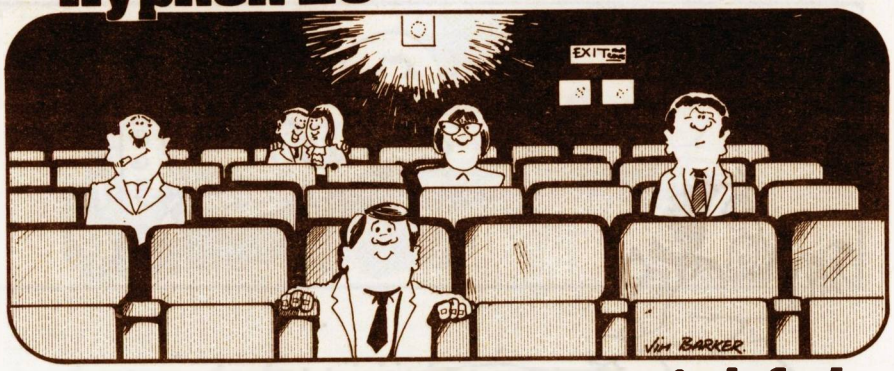
One thing about these trips was that they really made us hungry. Home and my mother's cooking never seemed so good as on arrival from Greencastle. Gerry and I usually ate twice as much as a normal meal when we got back, swilling it down with hot weak tea and feeling wonderful about being home. But this time I slipped away before the meal and got into the park just before the gates were closed. It was almost dark when I put the crabs into the still waters of the pond and fondly watched them sidle away into the depths. I dropped in a handful of salt that I had thoughtfully brought along to ease the transition from brine to fresh water, then I went home, feeling uplifted.

Childhood enthusiasm can wane as quickly as it waxes, and the next day I was too busy to go and see how things were with the crabs. Things kept cropping up and cropping up and quite a long period of time elapsed before I finally went back to the park. As I neared the gates I began to recapture some of that magical fervour and my step quickened until I was almost running. Suddenly I halted. The pond was no longer there. They had filled it in and built a football pitch in its place.

Occasionally I drive by that spot, but I never watch the football players because, somewhere under those ceaselessly pounding boots, my two little friends lie silent in the cindery soil.

I should have left them in Greencastle.





I Have Been Faithful to Thee, Cinema

Movies have been supplanted by television to a large extent, but sitting at home watching the box will never have the same magic that going to a cinema had when I was a kid. I think queueing in the rain had a lot to do with it. When you had stood for two hours, getting soaked and frozen, and then were shown to a warm and comfortable seat, any film seemed good. Even so, I still think the old movies were best — as long as they weren't too old. The golden age of Hollywood, as far as I'm converned, was the Forties and early Fifties, and I'm not sure it is entirely coincidental that this period was also the golden age of Astounding...

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The other night, having left the car in for a much needed grease job, I found myself back with the Belfast Corporation Transport after an extended absence. I was suddenly and forcibly reminded of how, when I was a small boy, my mother hated having to take me onto a bus on a dark, rainy evening. There was a strange hypnotic quality in the sombre dimness of the lights, the drumming of rain on the roof and the smell of soggy tickets which never failed to send me into a trance. I would get a seat to myself, slump down in the corner, peer out at the vari-coloured blurs of light and drift off on yet another adventure. People the bus passed would sometimes notice a pair of eyes glaring at them, from a point approximately one and a half inches above the bottom of a window, and never realise that they had just been transfixed by an arrow, perforated by a bullet or shrivelled up by a betatron ray pistol — depending on which serial was running at the local cinema.

When in one of these moods I was exceedingly difficult to arouse and often had to be led off the bus like an imbecile. On one occasion, having just seen Nelson Eddy in a film, I became so completely absorbed in my role of Bob Shaw, world-famous tenor and consort of beautiful women, that I had to be forcibly restrained from giving several bored passengers a fifth rendition of the only song I knew the whole way through. I think it was "Away In A Manger."

(It would be nice to report that I quickly passed through this stage, but such is not the case. I was out of my teens before the cold sneer of Bob Shaw, master mind, ceased to be a familiar sight on the Castlereagh Road buses on wet winter evenings. In fact, it was on such a night, in a fit of neurotic grandeur, I decided Ireland was

not big enough to hold me and I was going to Canada. I remember sitting alone on the top deck trying the idea on for size while the introspective, melancholy strains of Rachmaninov's Second rose up around me in imaginary applause, mingled with the faint pervasive odour of wet tickets on the floor...)

The films they show nowadays do not seem to be capable of exerting such a powerful effect on young minds.

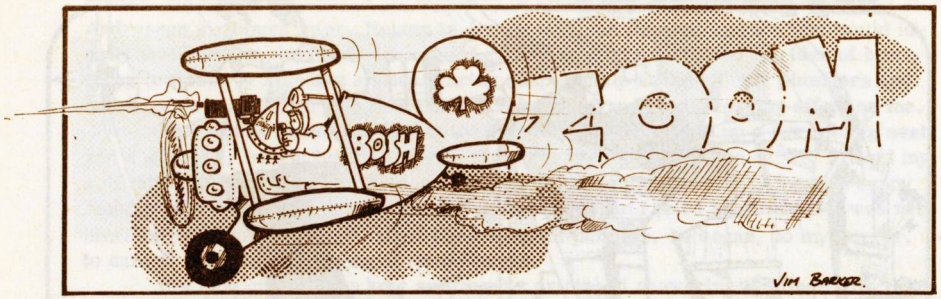
Possibly it is because the new breed of children, case hardened by television, are different to the generations for whom the weekly visit to the local cinema was a thrilling, glittering event. But I suspect the real reason is that the movie makers have discarded nearly all the best ingredients that went into the "oldies", and have kept the dross.

Look, for instance, at what has happened to the aerial combat epic. The romance, heroics and tragedy have been done away with since the coming of these supersonic broomsticks which completely enclose the pilot and give him time for just one burst before he is over the horizon and out of sight. The human element vanishes as the fliers strive to attain the efficiency and temperament of machines.

How much better were the pre-war films about the first World War where a dozen biplanes could swarm all over the one piece of sky for hours. Watching those films I was no longer in a cinema seat — I was there. As far as memory is concerned, I personally flew against dozens of German air aces with names like Heinrich von Stickelgraffer who always led, not merely a squadron or a fleet, but a Circus. There were bombs that you lifted out from under the seat and threw over the side by hand, and if you ran out of ammunition it was always possible to nail your opponent with pistol fire.

Those aeroplanes were made of wire and cloth but when they received a direct hit they did not vanish in a puff of smoke the way modern jobs do. They went down in a spectacular flat spin which always allowed ample time for victor and vanquished to stand up and exchange salutes, the tribute that one brave man extends to another. The lumps I got in my throat when such things were going on used to reduce my breathing to strangled gasps which, more than once, became so noisy as to cause alarm among people sitting nearby.

Perhaps impressed by the rigid ethics of aerial combat the film directors



developed a code of their own, and nobody ever got killed without several easily recognizable warning signs appearing in advance. You always knew that anybody who, before take off, announced his intention of making just one more run, or who fell victim to a sudden impulse to write his girlfriend a letter, was a goner. Another bad thing was to give away one's good-luck token.

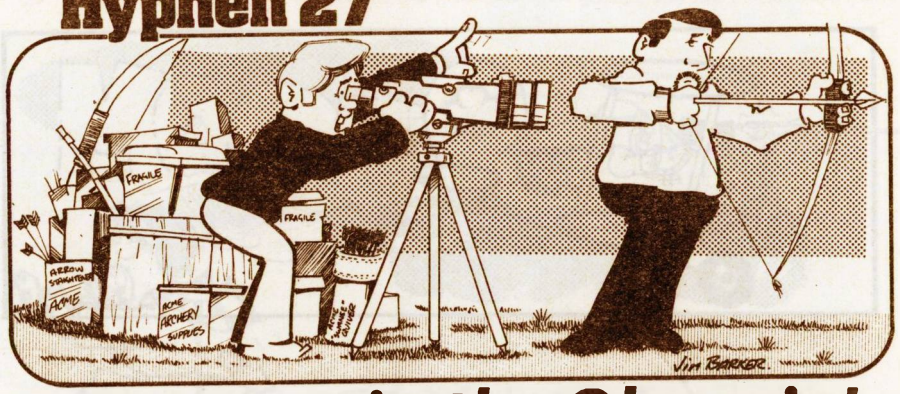
Once in battle a pilot could survive innumerable wavy lines of bullet holes all over his craft, or even, although this was more dangerous, a close-up of a wire brace snapping, but let him get hit in the face with a squirt of black oil and you knew he had had it. No amount of pushing up of goggles, knuckling of eyes or wrestling with controls could save him once that had happened.

Even the weapons were more romantic in those days. Twin machine guns synchronised to fire between the propellers were practically de rigeur, but I never trusted them. Firing between the propeller blades always seemed a risky business at the best of times, perhaps because I could never figure out just how it worked. Bob Shaw, D.F.O., used to limp home from many an imaginary engagement in his uniquely blazoned aircraft that had been crippled by its machine gun synchroniser going wrong and letting the guns whittle the propeller blades down to stumps. It was only by using all of his skill and giving the engine full throttle that he managed to stay up at all.

So acute was the film maker's understanding of the public taste in aircraft armament that they completely disregarded what was on the actual planes. The old British S.E.5 and 5a never had twin Vickers firing through the props — but they were always shown with them. Would they do that today? Would they have twin Vickers firing through the props on one of these Lightnings or Super Sabres?

No! And quibbling about the fact that these are jet aircraft reveals the kind of mind that is ruining the film industry. Now that I think of it, this is probably what has gone wrong with science fiction — can you name just one story where the spaceships have twin Vickers firing through the props?

I had intended to explain what has gone wrong with detective and Western films too, but I've used up too much space already. Perhaps at another time. Right now I've got to start work on a modification to the Shaw family car — I think I can get them firing through the fan if I move the radiator out of the way...



Bowmen in the Gloamin'

Jerome K. Jerome (a writer I admire) really hit the jackpot when he thought of taking three diverse characters, cooping them up in a small boat, and recording what happened. His follow-up book, Three Men on the Bummel, wasn't nearly so successful and I think the reason is that the characters were no longer in the pressure cooker of a closed system. The Glass Bushels I like best in retrospect are always those which dealt with people of different temperaments and outlooks thrown together in an environment from which there was no quick escape. This column, written in 1961, describes such a situation, and it might interest you to learn that I retired from archery soon after...

* * * * * *

Everybody agreed that the 1960 Ulster International Archery Team should fly over to Scotland for the big contest. National prestige demands that we fly, said Stewarty Lemon; there's no comparison between the standards of comfort in boat and plane, said Hector Simpson; we'll shoot better if we fly because there's less fatigue, said Willy Deane; flying is the only civilised gentlemanly way to go, said Nelson Park. Being a newcomer to the team, I merely nodded as each one in turn spoke his piece. Anyway, everyone agreed we were flying.

The following week we received a letter from the Archery Association informing us that, because of several financial near-disasters, the members of the International Team would have to pay their own travelling expenses....

It was grim down in the hold of that boat.

At first I thought the daylight crossing would be good fun. I had never done it before and I imagined we would have a roistering time down in the third class hold — swigging beer, smoking, playing cards all day. As it happened, things went all right for the first part of the journey, that is the bit where we all walked up the gangway. At the top of it a sailor with a red weatherbeaten face and little crinkles at the corners of his eyes (which showed that his face was beginning to crack up at the corners of his eyes) insisted on taking our cases of equipment and putting them in a huge rack along with all the other luggage.

For some reason this enraged Nelson Park and he refused to leave the vicinity of the rack. Questioning revealed that he was afraid of his stuff being stolen, and no amount of argument would convince him that a member of a notorious international gang of bow and arrow thieves was not waiting to pounce the moment his back was

turned. He finally announced his intention of standing guard until the ship docked at Ardrossan six hours later. Nelson is a very tall lean man with a face that would ideally suit him for playing Strider in a Lord of the Rings film, and the idea of him going to waste by standing all day staring suspiciously at the elderly plumbers and sweet-sucking children who surrounded us had a strangely depressing effect on me.

The others seemed to feel it too but we went below, set up a few folding seats and a suitcase, bought beer, lit pipes and cigarettes and dealt the cards. I found myself sitting beside Stewarty Lemon. This suited me quite well; he is a small happy looking man who works in an engineering toolroom and I felt I know where I was with him. But half an hour later, after two bottles of pale ale, he began, to my horror, to exhibit unmistakable signs of drunkenness.

His face got red, he kept spilling his drink and showering the floor with cards when it was his turn to deal. "This is great," he would say at intervals. "Good job the wife can't see me now — drinkin', gamlin', usin' bad language — it's great!" In between times he would sing snatches from The Desert Song, and each time an unattached woman went by he whispered, "She isn't half askin' for trouble paradin' about like that. Flauntin' herself in front of wild, drinkin' men!"

I got more and more worried about him until he reached a crescendo when he thought he detected Harry Higham, the oldest member of the team, dealing himself extra cards. He leapt to his feet and shouted, "Naw you don't, naw you don't. Those tricks don't fool me — Maverick!"

Old Harry, an ex-professional soldier with a bald head and a malarial complexion, had been growing tired of Stewarty's babbling. "Shut your mouth, you stupid looking ...," he searched his mind for another TV character and blurted the first one that came, "... William Tell."

This was an unfortunate choice. Stewarty took it as a subtle but deadly insult to his prowess with the long bow and that card game dissolved in an explosion of acrimony and near-violence. We spent the rest of the time wandering round the ship, singly or in pairs. Everywhere I went I was able to see Nelson Park's face sticking up above the crowds as he guarded his bow and arrows. The only bright spot was when Hector Simpson forgave me for being in the same club as Stewarty and tried to teach me some Latin. After I had given a few wrong answers he decided I was worse than his lowest class at school and went away to the toilet where he spent the rest of the trip marking homeworks.

The morning of the match dawned, as the saying goes, bright and fair. I hadn't slept too well. All the previous evening Stewarty had persisted with his conviction that every woman who passed by was flaunting herself at him and "askin' for trouble." I found myself sharing the same bed with him and as I was completely accustomed to being in bed with my wife I was terrified in case I should perhaps put my arm around Stewarty while sleeping. In the mood he was in there was no telling how he would have taken it so I spent the night balanced on the opposite edge of the bed.

But it was a fine sunny morning with very little wind and I recovered my good spirits as we drove to the archery ground at Troon. Having reached the ground we unpacked our little boxes and began stringing the bows and looking across arrows to make sure they were straight. Old Harry, a veteran of many matches, kept telling us to relax and be confident. Confidence, it seemed, was the main thing.

Suddenly I noticed something rather queer. The Scottish team had come out of the pavilion carrying their boxes at the same time as us, but we had our bows strung and bracers strapped on and yet the other team was still marching back and forward to the pavilion carrying out more and more boxes. When they had finally dropped the

native bearer routine I began keeping a furtive eye on the Scotsman who was sharing my target.

First of all he wrested the lid off a massive packing case and removed an ex-army artillery gunsight, bristling with lenses and knurled knobs, which he set up on a special tripod. He spent several minutes peering down into it and clicking in coloured filters of various strengths. After a while he sensed my interest in the contraption and explained that the filters were invaluable in changing light conditions. Faced with this display of scientific exactitude I felt my confidence begin to crumble slightly. I glanced down the shooting line for a reassuring glance at Old Harry but I could hardly see the rest of the Irish team for the piles of boxes that the Scots had produced. The place had begun to look like Southampton Docks in the middle of a strike.

My man, whose name was Angus, next opened another box and took out a gleaming gadget which he set up on a little bench. This, it turned out, was his arrow straightener — accurate to .001". I looked down the line and saw that the other Scots were setting up their arrow straighteners too. By this time I had begun to feel sick.

Next came his high powered binoculars which were for quick checks on arrow positions when he didn't want to move over to the gunsight. Then came a shooting stick for resting between ends, then two special silver studs for marking the position of his toes so that he could always resume exactly the same stance after retrieving arrows.

Old Harry came up to me and I noticed that his face seemed pale under its usual weatherbeaten brown. "Confidence is all that counts," he whispered. "When it comes to the bit each man is alone on the sward with his bow."

"Are you kidding?" I moaned in panic. "This client beside me has been opening boxes for half an hour and he hasn't even reached his bow yet!"

Just then Angus took out his bow. Needless to say it was one of the latest high speed, low draw weight, plastic laminate efforts which cost as much as all the Irish team's steel bows put together. When he had it braced and strung he gave the string an experimental pluck which produced a sharp clear musical note like a harp. Old Harry squeezed my arm and went away back to his place to the accompaniment of more musical plinks from Scottish plastic bows all down the line.

The whistle blew for the six sighting-in shots with which all matches lead off.

Each archer carries six arrows. He shoots three and then steps back until his opponent shoots three, then he shoots his second three. When his opponent has shot his second three they go up to the target and count the score for that end. Angus was first on my target but he was slow at starting because he had several sets of arrows in a box and he wanted to select a set whose flights were most suitable for the wind conditions, so I watched Stewarty on my left and Hector on my right. They both led off in their usual form. Stewarty, shooting too quickly and nervously, blazed off three arrows which seemed to be still rising as they passed over the target at a height of about twenty feet. Hector very calmly and deliberately placed an arrow in each leg of the stand which supported his target and then failed to nock the third one properly. It gave a horrible twang and fell on the ground about six yards in front of him.

Somehow I was reassured. Stewarty and Hector had been archers for years and I could beat them — perhaps Angus for all his equipment would be no better. By this time he had chosen a set of arrows which he felt would be suitable. He stood up to the line and in an unruffled, almost abstracted manner feathered three arrows near the centre of the target a hundred yards away.

"Very good," I said numbly.

"I'm not too happy about number two," he commented. "I'd better check the straightness — I think it's about half a thou out."

I went up to the line and sent off my first shot. At a hundred yards the arrows fade out of sight before they strike and you listen for the sound. I was overjoyed to hear a comforting thud from the target area and prepared to send another one in the same general direction.

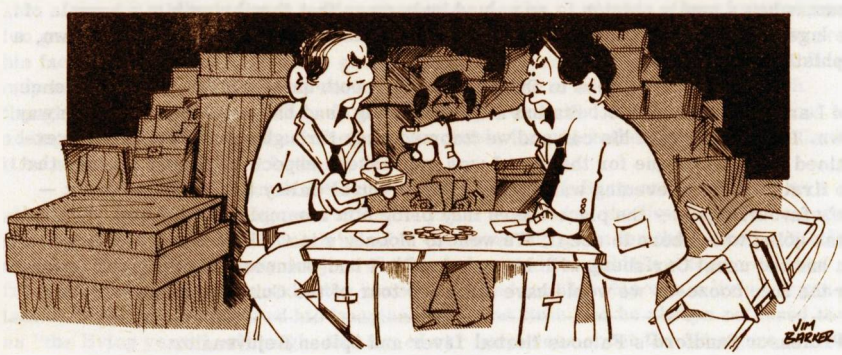
Suddenly Angus barked, "You're in the black at eight o'clock. Screw your sight out a sixteenth and aim a little higher." I glanced round and saw that he was crouched over his gunsight like a U-boat commander aiming torpedoes. I did as he suggested but my next shot missed. Angus gaped into his interociter for a moment then came marching over to me, snatched my arrows and put them through his arrow straightener one after the other. "I thought so," he muttered over each one as he tested it. "As many sides as a thrupenny bit." He straightened all my arrows and for the rest of the match took an intense personal interest in the fate of every shot. Due to his enthusiastic coaching I managed to put up one of my highest ever scores, although Angus won by a comfortable margin and the Ulster team as a whole was beaten.

Five of us sailed back to Belfast that night. We got a good seat in the first class lounge after changing our tickets from third to first class so that we would be able to get some sleeping accommodation. Things went all right for a while — we discussed the match over our beer, then Willy discovered it would have been just as cheap to fly. This led to a number of bitter wrangles then Stewarty began to notice women flaunting themselves at him again and Nelson began to worry about his stuff being stolen....

Finally we all went below. On the way down Old Harry discovered that because of the way our berth tickets were arranged only four could go into one cabin and the fifth would have to share another cabin with a stranger. "It's unfortunate," he said. "It's not very nice being away from all the boys on your own — but there's nothing else for it."

We all agreed sadly, looked at each other for a few seconds and then there was a wild charge towards our cabins. I was lucky enough to get in front so I dashed into the room with the surprised stranger and bolted the door, and I never did find out which room the others had been running for.

I slept late the following morning and when I woke up the boat had been in for ages and all the others had gone home. Somehow, I didn't mind.



Booze in the Night

Ian McAulay of Dublin is a Ghood Man, and I'm not going to say anything against him. Besides, I don't need to. I said it all in this Glass Bushel of 1961...

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To his friends up here in the Black North Ian McAulay has always been somewhat of an enigma, something like the Mona Lisa. In fact, when he sits back in an armchair with his raincoat draped over his head (he throws his clothes on carelessly) and the satisfied look he wears after polishing off a home-made apple pie, the urge to try to put him down on canvas becomes almost irresistible. We might even have tried it before this, but for the fact that none of us can box. A few facts were known about his other life in Dublin: intriguing facts such as that he lived in a haunted Grange! I ask you — a haunted Grange. Those of us who are forced to eke out prosaic existences in suburban semis turn green with envy at the very idea. Another fascinating glimpse of his Christopher Marlowe-like background was revealed to me by a casual mention of the fact that the barman in his favourite pub, knowing Ian to be an eminent expert on lager, brings him a small sample glass to ensure that the brew is exactly to his liking before he orders.

This then was no ordinary mortal I had come to visit for the day. Had it not been for the fact that I too have academic qualifications (most people don't realise I took medicine * for three years) I might have felt a certain sense of inadequacy. I mean, when a man's opinion is so valued by barmen that they bring him a sample of the lager then you are dealing with an almost god-like creature, a man about town, a sophisticate....

The non-stop express to Dublin made a smooth quick run, only stopping once, and I arrived at Amiens St. Station at 12.45 having read half a Blish book on the way down. Ian met me with his car and we zoomed away through the traffic while he explained the programme for the day. I was impressed, especially when I learned that the first call of the evening was going to be the Ouzel Galley bar in Dame Street — Ian's favourite pub — the place where they bring him a sample of the lager. To think I was going to be there to see it! We went to Mooney's in College Street for lunch and Ian had the usual Carlsberg with his salad while I had Guinness to get myself in form for the free booze-up we would have after our tour of the Guinness factory in the

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* Professor Sandford's Famous Herbal Liver and Spleen Rejuvenator

afternoon.

"Two pints each," Ian said, "and there's bound to be lots of people who don't drink much and we will probably get theirs as well."

"How about the detergent?" I asked.

"What detergent?"

"Well," I explained, "Sid Birchby once told me that a friend of his works in a place which manufactures edible detergent and Guinness buys it by the ton. Sid's friend says that's what puts the head on Guinness."

Ian was patriotically indignant. "Nonsense. We'll be through the whole place. You'll see everything. They wouldn't be able to slip detergent in, even if they wanted to."

We drove to the Guinness factory and on the way Ian showed me the place where he bought his first American Astounding. Then he parked his car with a couple of swift sure movements which left it close to the curb in a space just about two feet greater than its own length. I was impressed, but I had come to expect things like that from Ian — if barmen bring you a sample of the lager nothing is beyond your capabilities.

We went into a stoutly built reception hall where I gave my name to get onto one of the conducted tours. Ian didn't have to give his name. The girl took one look at his cool, sophisticated, slightly amused expression and respectfully waved him on. I decided that that barmen at the Ouzel Galley bar had probably told everyone in the trade about him; it was quite likely that the doors of any brewery in Ireland would be thrown open at Ian's approach. I basked in reflected glory.

The tour itself lasted over an hour. A bored individual in a dark uniform led us around in a straggling bunch, in and out of dark buildings, up and down metal stairways, over and under huge house-sized vessels some of which were full of Guinness and which could be peered into through little portholes which revealed biscuit-coloured Lunar landscapes of froth silently shifting in the dim radiance of light bulbs in their roofs. The air was laden with carbon dioxide and the smell of hops and yeast. We decided that it was a perfect place for the final chase in a detective film.

The guide seemed to know his stuff all right, but he was sorely in need of a new script writer to arrange his material. He made no effort to produce a smooth connected flow of facts, but kept saying things like, "T'iss is where we store ti grain; ti chimneys of ti par-station are over one hundred an' sixth fut hoigh," or "T'iss is ti fur brigade station, all ti men in t'ere are experts in first aid." Practically the first thing he said to us was, "T'iss is ti vat houses where ti Guinness is stored.... ah.... we don't take visitors in t'ere because.... ah.... t'ere's a lot of reconstruction going on and.... ah.... it wouldn't be safe." A sort of guilty look passed over his face and I glanced across the group at Ian. His eyes met mine in a look which can only be described, by that overworked phrase, as one of wild surmise. We both thought, ah — that's where they do it! The thought occurred to me afterwards that adding detergent to booze would be a human foible for which there is no name. Could it be sudomy? Soapistry? Lathargy?

At one point the guide activated a large box which lit up and treated us to a short film showing what happens when the yeast is added to the liquid. It was a rather gruesome epic and I didn't watch all of it — I never did go in for those double X bills anyway. Yeast was the only subject which ever caused the guide's voice to deviate from its tone of complete and utter boredom. The idea that this was a living organism had apparently captured his imagination at one time and he always referred to it as "the living yeast", although, in view of our suspicions about the detergent, "clean living yeast" might have been a better term. When showing us a tray of the stuff,

which just looked like some kind of chopped and dried vegetation*, he actually whipped himself into a frenzy of apathy, almost indifference. It was embarrassing to watch.

After sixty minutes of trudging around we were taken into the Samples Room and formally served with a tiny tankard of Guinness apiece. Ian and I knocked ours back thirstily and sat impatiently waiting for the next round. We had decided to swill down the first four or five servings quickly to get rid of our thirsts, and then take our time over the next two or three, savouring the flavour, bouquet etc.

A quarter of an hour later, when the rest of our party were standing around shuffling their feet and ready to go, it began to dawn on Ian that there was only going to be one serving. When the enormity of it sank in, assisted by the guide throwing away the butt he had been puffing in a corner and practically telling us to clear off, Ian's suave expression vanished and was replaced by a look of Hancock-like indignation. His sense of the fitness of things was outraged, of course, but one would almost have got the impression he was raging at not getting a free booze-up. However, I knew that it was worse for Ian than it would be for most people. To a person who was used to a barman bringing him a sample of the lager before he ordered, this sort of treatment was going a bit far.

We left the factory and drove out to Matt Smith's at Stepaside where, after a couple of Carlsbergs, Ian's composure returned, and we spent a pleasant half hour planning an sf story we intend writing someday. We went on and had tea at Ian's home — the haunted Grange — then played one side of a Mort Sahl LP. At about 6.30 we went for a drive in the Dublin Mountains and I saw Bray for the first time since I spent my honeymoon there seven years earlier. We arrived in Dublin at 7.30 with four hours' drinking time left before the pubs closed. On the way into the Ouzel Galley bar I mentioned to Ian that it was a big thrill to me to go in with him and see the barman bring the sample. A patient smile flitted across his countenance.

"No, no, old boy. You don't quite understand. What happens is that I go in, walk up to the bar and say, 'Good evening, Henry. How's the lager tonight?' Then he says, 'Not bad, sir,' then I say 'I think perhaps I should taste it before ordering,' and he says 'Certainly, sir.' Then he brings me some in a tiny tankard, I taste it, nod — providing it's all right, of course — and he draws me a full glass."

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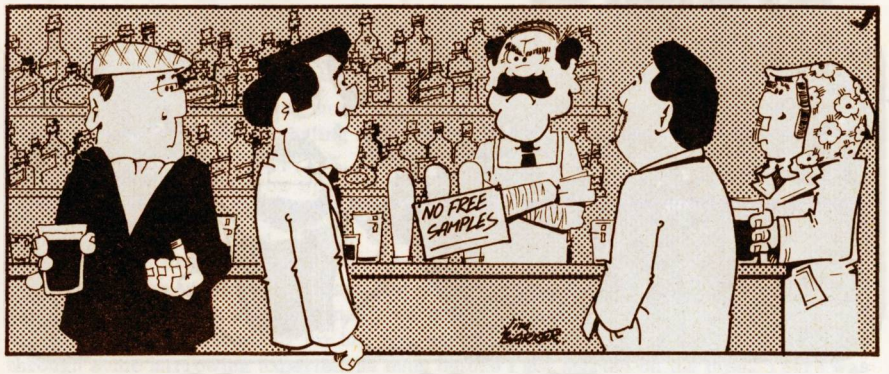
* Professor Sandford's Famous Herbal Liver and Spleen Rejuvenator



I nodded humbly — I hadn't properly appreciated the niceties, the little formalities stemming from years of tradition, the sort of thing only a cosmopolitan like Ian would really understand.

We sat on stools at the counter in an almost empty bar and the barman approached. He was a blue-chinned, rather surly type — not quite the way I had pictured Ian's barman, and even Ian seemed to have lost a little of his composure on seeing him face to face. But he carried on with the touching little tradition.

"Good evening," he said. "How's the lager, to — "

"Watchasay?"

The barman stared at us coldly — he didn't seem to be with it.

"I said, 'How's the lager?'"

The barman looked mildly surprised. "Sallright, I suppose."

"All right, is it?" Ian said: he shot a slightly worried glance at me to see if I was still watching.

"Thass right."

Suddenly, to my horror, the cool suave McAulay seemed to crumble away. A ghostly smile, the sort that Pluto in the Disney strips puts on when trying to curry favour with someone who has just kicked him, spread over his face and he said in a plaintive wheedling voice, "Could I try a wee glass?"

The barman was not moved. "I'll sell you a glass if you want it," he answered coldly, and went on wiping tumblers as though we didn't exist.

"All right then," Ian croaked miserably. "Two glasses of lager." As an afterthought, to try and regain prestige in my eyes, he called out, "Provided it's in good condition." But I don't think the man heard him — luckily I had the whole incident memorised.

It turned out afterwards as we turned Dublin's best pubs, that this had been an unfamiliar barman, but Ian had valiantly tried to bring off the routine for my benefit. We finished at 11.30 in a place called The Silver Tassie, then took six bottles back to the haunted Grange where we drank some more and played records till the wee hours.

All in all it was a great trip, but I'm looking forward to the next one even more. Ian is friendly with a director or something in a brewery and every time Ian goes there this man immediately brings out a case of lager and a glass and sets Ian down in a private room with it....

That's what we're going to do next time.

The Merry, Merry Paean of Pipes

I'm still a pipe smoker, even though the price of tobacco in the United Kingdom has risen to 75 pence an ounce. When I last visited New York I found I could buy American tobacco in 1lb cans for $1.50 or so — just about what it costs now to buy one ounce in the UK! Sorry to go on about such mundane matters in a fanzine, but this is something which really rankles with me. Pipe smokers, by dispensing pleasant aromas everywhere they go, give a lot of enjoyment to others, and they ought to be supplied with free tobacco....

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So many people ask me to teach them how to smoke a pipe properly that I am surprised correspondence schools don't run courses on the subject. (Of course, that's the trouble with these postal colleges — all they ever do is teach you to be the foreman of the local machine shop. I've seen it all in those strip cartoon advertisements. No matter what subject you write in to them about, you end up foreman of the machine shop.) When I get a request of this nature I help the bloke to eliminate his most obvious faults in things like rubbing out the tobacco and filling the bowl to the proper consistency; and if he is really a keen pupil we go on to the more subtle and abstruse points of pipe-smoking theory, such as the advantages of putting the right end into your mouth and of sucking instead of blowing. I do all this, but my heart forewarns me (I listen to the auricle) that it is useless — unless the pupil has had the proper conditioning from childhood he will never be a pipe smoker.

It helps a lot if you come from a pipe smoking family, although in this respect I wasn't particularly fortunate. None of my relatives would thank you for a cigarette, but not because they dislike cigarettes — they are just rude. But in spite of the fact that my father didn't smoke a pipe, he was instrumental in giving me the necessary conditioning. When I was a small boy, during the mid-Thirties, my greatest pleasure on a winter evening was to clear the table and settle down to a couple of hours of drawing pictures on clean white paper. I had a huge bundle of coloured pencils which I kept in large tobacco tins obtained by my father from a shopkeeper pal. Even to this day when I smell the aroma of fresh St. Bruno I am suddenly back in my mother's kitchen with a big fire sputtering and whistling in the grate and the rain lashing harmlessly on the window-panes. Another powerful influence was my father's choice of

reading material. The only magazines he took were The Gamekeeper and Wide World (later on he tried to take Field and Stream as well, but was caught on and nearly jailed), both of which carried several pages of pipe advertisements. The pipes were always shown split longitudinally, revealing fascinating details of things like juice traps, filters, smoke cooling surfaces and so on. These ads were the first things I turned to, and I sat there inhaling the sweet heavy perfume of St. Bruno which wafted ceilingwards from my pencil-box, gloating over the disembowelled pipes and promising myself that I would grow up to be a pipe smoker.

Perhaps I shouldn't have attempted that soppy sentimental passage, but I am maudlin myself after Stout, 'Saki', Graves and that great French novelist, Barsac — with perhaps a little dash of Max Brandy. The course of the narrative seems to have suffered a sharp strain and perhaps has even become disjointed so, with the customary 'Meanwhile, back at the wrench', we will return to where we broke off.

An artist must suffer for his art, and so it is with pipe smoking. In fact I went through some harrowing experiences even before I got started on the pipe. There was the occasion when I found a pipe lying in the grass during one of my forays at the bottom of our garden. At first I thought my big moment had come and that I should immediately start smoking, but as I was only sixteen at the time I decided there would be too much parental opposition. Besides, the pipe must have been lying there in the damp for years because the bowl was all soft and pulpy. Then I remembered that another youth called Joe who was in the same class at night school had announced importantly, a couple of evenings previously, that he was going to "go on to the pipe".

I brought my find into the house, dried it out for a couple of days, restored its shine by repeated applications of oxblood shoe polish, and finally took it off to school and sold it to Joe for half a crown. Joe was delighted; and he was even happier when the teacher — who used a man-to-man approach to his evening classes — gave him a fill. It was against regulations to smoke in class, but immediately afterwards Joe, surrounded by a crowd of admirers, put the pipe in his mouth and began the process of lighting it. As soon as the match got near it the bowl of the pipe burst into greenish flames and, in spite of Joe's frantic efforts to put it out, practically consumed itself in the course of a few seconds. I found out afterwards that, by some pyrotechnical miracle, the tobacco that Joe had put in wasn't even scorched.

I'll say this for Joe — he didn't hit me, and didn't even ask for his money back. (Strangely enough some years later I went to work in a structural drawing office where the selfsame Joe had once worked, but he had left and gone to Canada. A couple of years after that he returned briefly while on his way to Scotland, Spain and South America, building bridges in each place. He offered all his former workmates jobs in his team but, even though he remembered me all right, he didn't offer me a job. I didn't really want to go to South America anyway, but I did think he might have offered. After all, how was I to know the pipe would practically blow up when he lit it?)

And then there was the case of Harry. Harry took up the pipe on my advice because he was getting a bit fat and I had assured him that he would eat far less if he smoked. Harry was grateful for the suggestion because he was no good at diets. Somebody had once told him to cut out salt, but he couldn't believe that ordinary sodium chloride would be fattening — he took the story with a paunch of salt. Harry puffed away happily for a week or so, then one summer evening tragedy struck and I had the harrowing experience of seeing my protege almost maimed by his lightweight Dunhill briar.

Anyone who has smoked an elegant ¾-ounce Dunhill might scoff at the idea that it could inflict any damage on a slightly overweight adult male, and I would have agr-

eed with them until this fateful evening. One can appreciate that, in the hands of an expert, a Petersen rough-cut could inflict a nasty flesh wound, and in the dark I would hate to encounter a thug armed with a full size Ropp natural cherrywood — but a Dunhill!

Harry and I were queueing to get our coats at the end of one of the local dances. He had just ignited a heaped-up bowl and was standing with the pipe clenched in his front teeth when a scuffle developed in the line and a man in front of us was shoved backwards with great force. Harry's Dunhill was driven straight down his throat and

he received a double injury; the mouthpiece almost sheared off his tonsils, and the tip of his nose was charred medium-rare through being jammed into the bowl. The St. John's Ambulance men who were in attendance all agreed it was the most interesting case they had ever encountered, but this was no consolation for Harry. He gave up pipe-smoking and got as fat as a pig.

The most dangerous incident of all took place only a few weeks ago. Somebody had told me that blocks of firewood could be purchased cheaply in the Crumlin Road Prison and I decided to go up there one Saturday morning and give it a try. I parked my motor outside the massive wooden gate and gave a gentle knock on one of the panels; already I was beginning to regret that I hadn't spent the morning over a couple of pints and pies in Hannigan's bar.

A sort of outsize letter box sprang open and a voice from the inner darkness said, "Phwat d'ye want?"

"I want to buy some blocks."

There was a long pause, during which I could feel eye tracks being laid all over me, then said suspiciously, "Who told ye ye could get blocks in here?"

"Can you not get them?" I cried thankfully, backing away. "I must have been misinfo...."

"Stand where you are," the voice commanded and there came a sound of locks turning. I glanced up at the machine gun towers on either side and decided against making a break for it. Gradually the great doors swung open and a policeman said, "Right, bring your car in."

I drove in only to encounter another exactly similar gateway about thirty feet behind the first. Then the outer gate closed, trapping me, and two other policemen appeared and demanded proof of my identity. When this formality was cleared up and my name written in a book, one of the officers got into the car beside me, the inner gate opened and I was directed to the office where wood sales were conducted. Here things were a bit different. A genial old boy in civilian clothes ushered me into an ancient, cluttered room which was poisonously overheated by an open gas fire.

"I'm glad to see you," he told me. "You're my first customer for days. I don't know why we don't get more business in here — I expect it's because we're not allowed to advertise. Would you like a cup of tea?"

Overcome by this show of friendliness after my reception in front office, I nodded. He spoke a few words over the phone and about a minute later a brown-suited convict came trotting in carrying a metal tray, in the centre of which was a single mug of tea covered with a white napkin. I took the mug, the convict thanked me profusely and jog-trotted out again. The genial old boy beamed as I drank the tea and suddenly the whole atmosphere of the place seemed different. I relaxed. They liked me in Crumlin.

When I finally got round to the wood yard a cheery red-faced officer took my sales docket. "The boys will be glad to see you," he said. "You're the first customer today."

"They will?" I faltered.

"Yes. The boys wouldn't like a Saturday evening to go by with no customers."

The proverbial icy feeling began to develop in the pit of my stomach. There was something going on here. Something.... sinister? The officer crooked his finger and a large doleful youth came trotting over from the working party which was "hegging" logs in the yard.

"Henry," the officer said, "here's a man wants two bags of blocks. Fill up his car."

Henry's face split into a broad grin and he set to happily carrying armfuls of wood over and chucking them into sacks. As he worked the officer waxed philosophical. "Ah Henry," he boomed. "Ye chopped these logs yourself, sweating in the heat of the summer with your shirt off. Ye didn't think ye'd be back here in the middle of the winter to sell them again. Did ye?"

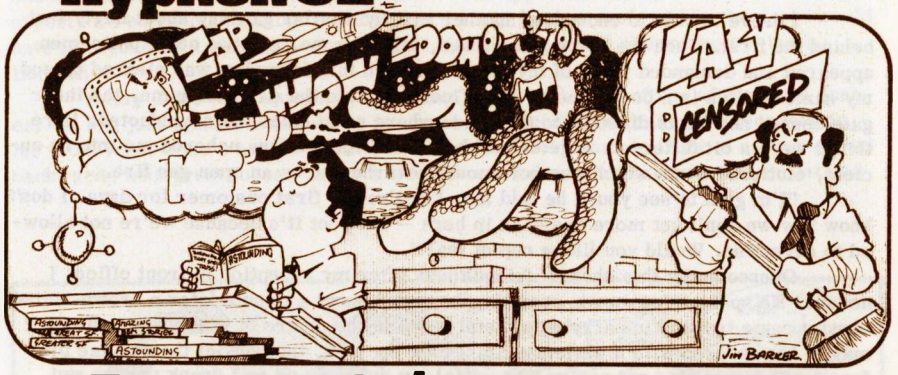
Henry became positively ecstatic under this barrage, and I grew more and more uneasy. My docket was only for two bags but there was the equivalent of at least five bags in the car before Henry was satisfied.

"What d'ye think of the weather?" the officer said suddenly. I stared at him for a few seconds trying to think up an answer when there came a cry of anguish from the general direction of Henry. I swung round and discovered that he had emptied the ashtray of my car — and then it all dawned on me. Customers for wood represented a source of cigarette ends to the inmates, BUT I SMOKE A PIPE!

In the centre of Henry's outstretched palm was a small heap of pipe ash, two apple cores and a partly chewed caramel which had been dumped on the quiet by my little daughter. It was a black, sticky, disgusting mess and, judging by the look of horror on Henry's face, he had just arrived at approximately the same conclusion. Other convicts gathered round muttering "rhubarb-rhubarb". The mob, as the saying goes, was turning ugly.

Somehow the officer got me back out into the street, but he acted as though he didn't think I was worth saving. When it dawned on me that I was free again my nerves were so shot that I just had to have a smoke.

So I bought myself five cigarettes.



Tommy Johnston versus Science Fiction

Nothing to say about this Glass Bushel, which describes events which took place in 1948, except that I still think about Tommy Johnston quite often....

* * * * * *

At the age of twelve I obtained my first copy of Astounding, read it, was hooked, and for the next five years never gave a single serious thought to anything but science fiction. This monomania gave me a lot of personal pleasure and satisfaction — in fact I was deliriously happy for those five years — but it had an unfortunate drawback in that by the time I was old enough to start work I was virtually unemployable.

During my final years at school when I was supposed to be working for matriculation it had never even occurred to me to listen to a lecture or do a homework. I drew spaceships in my class notebooks, in between times publishing a carbon-copy magazine full of bloodcurdling stories and pictures. Occasionally, during a mechanics, physics or chemistry class, my interest would be aroused for a few seconds — but only until I had made a note of a new word which looked as though it would be of use in my latest space opera.

Looking back on it, I can be amused by the spectacle of a younger Shaw, his mind literally sapped by science fiction, looking cautiously over the world of industry and commerce for a safe, out-of-the-way niche wherein he could devote his life to his bundle of BRE Astoundings and Unknowns. My father, however, failed to see the joke. As far as he could see, a lifetime of supporting a pulp magazine maniac stretched befor him, unless he could find some unsuspecting captain of industry who could be persuaded to take me on. Several weeks later, just as my father was on the point of a nervous breakdown, a small structural engineering firm agreed to start me as an apprentice draughtsman.

My salary was to be fifteen shillings a week. This was very low, even for 1947, but I didn't care — there wasn't much science fiction being published in those days so I really only needed a few shillings a month to be able to buy all that was going. As you can see, I simply wasn't wise.

The firm I was going to had its main and drawing offices on Sydenham Road, but they decided to put me in a small office attached to the works on the Castlereagh Road. This was actually only about two hundred yards from my home. It was a tiny

brick building only about eight feet across by twenty feet long, at the entrance to an incredibly mucky yard in which the company had one or two sooty-looking workshops. Inside the office was an assortment of tables and chairs along one wall, a drawing board for me, no less than three gas heaters, a monstrous cupboard in which I later found a rusty six-shooter, and a line of malodorous Wellington boots belonging to the ditch-digging squad. The smell of those rubber boots alone would today be regarded as sufficient justification for an office workers' strike.

Reigning over this assortment of junk I found Tommy Johnston, the general foreman. He was a small old man with watery eyes and a tiny row of brilliantly white false teeth, and he looked like a gypsy. This effect was helped by the deep brown colour of his face and the number of wrinkles in it, but it was mainly due to the fact that he always wore a red handkerchief knotted round his throat to keep his collar and tie clean. No matter where he had to go during the working day, no matter how important the people he had to see, no matter how neat the rest of his clothes — he always wore his red hanky at his throat. In my eyes it made him look like somebody, a man with many years of history behind him, a hard tough man. But Tommy wasn't hard or tough. He sized me up and immediately, very gently and very kindly, set to work on the task of my rehabilitation.

I probably seem to be exaggerating the state I was in in those days (and no doubt I am a little, though trying not to) but I definitely was not a commercial proposition for any employer. I cared for nothing but science fiction, knew nothing but science fiction, was bone lazy and utterly without ambition. Into the bargain I was tremendously proud — I was the only sf reader I knew and really reckoned myself one of the star-begotten.

Tommy never got angry with me the way other people did. When everybody else got peeved it merely served to convince me that the mundane world was no fit place for one of the star-begotten. But when I balled up a job for Tommy, as I frequently did through carelessness or taking too many short cuts, he only smiled and carried the results of my handiwork sadly away as though I had failed him in something big. This never failed to produce in me such a violent pang of remorse that, almost without my realisation, I began to feel that I ought to try harder when given an assignment. Tommy defended me from the worst knocks, taught me a bit of engineering, and when he wasn't too busy listened tolerantly to my fantasies, his watery eyes shining and little white teeth gleaming in his gypsy brown face. He had begun to bring me round; but there was the question of the dust.

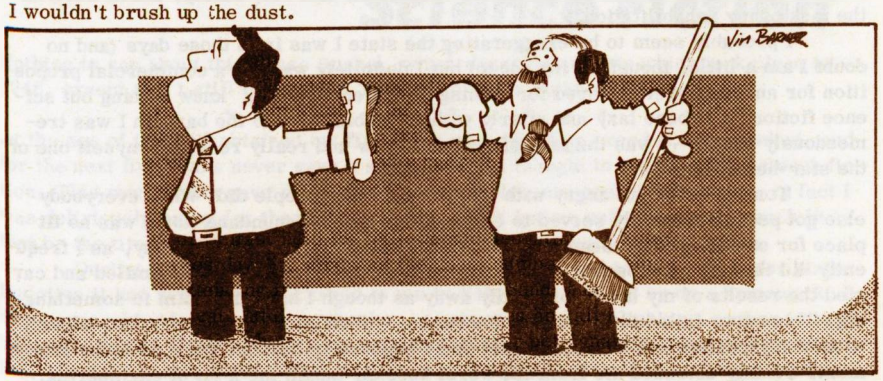
Two of the directors came up from main office for half an hour every morning to read any mail that had come in, and for the rest of the day I had the office to myself. Tommy was usually down in the workshops. Workmen going in and out for boots or special tools out of the cupboard were always plastering the floor with brown mud out of the yard. In the heat of the office this mud quickly turned into dust and, shortly after my arrival, Tommy told me that I would need to brush it out every day or two. I proudly refused to do this job, saying that I was an apprentice draughtsman and had more important things to do than brush the floor.

When I think over what those "more important things" were I marvel that even Tommy Johnston was able to keep his temper in check. Under my drawing board, supported on an elaborate arrangement of cup-hooks, was a home-made crystal set which I listened to for several hours a day. Under the same board, tucked into a disused gas radiator, was my science fiction collection, parts of which I was rapidly getting to know by heart. Coiled on a shelf behind me was my betatron ray. This was a fine oxy-acetylene welding nozzle which I had stolen from stock and fitted into the metal-coil tube of the gas ring in which we made tea three or four times a day. First

thing every morning I would get out this instrument and light it, with the gas turned very low so as to produce a thin flame about an inch long. A sudden flick of the gas tap would cause the flame to leap out about two and a half feet and, armed with this devilish weapon, I daily hunted down and incinerated every fly, mosquito and bluebottle that entered our doors. The office walls were covered with the scars of my near misses.

The small produced by this last operation was indescribable. One of the directors, an ancient and senile old boy known to everyone as Oul' Davy, was convinced that it was the small of some kind of low grade liquor. "Are you sure," he would say to me, sniffing furiously, "that that oul' bugger Johnston doesn't drink some kind of hard tack out in the toilet?" I always replied that I was sure, and blamed it on the row of rubber boots.

It was easy to fool Oul' Davy, but Tommy knew my every move. Sometimes he came in through the door with his arm flung up before his face as though to ward off a careless blast from my raygun. When he was lifting a sheaf of dockets down off the wall and found them brown round the edges he would give me one of his tolerant little smiles and glance around for flies I might have overlooked. I really liked him... but I wouldn't brush up the dust.



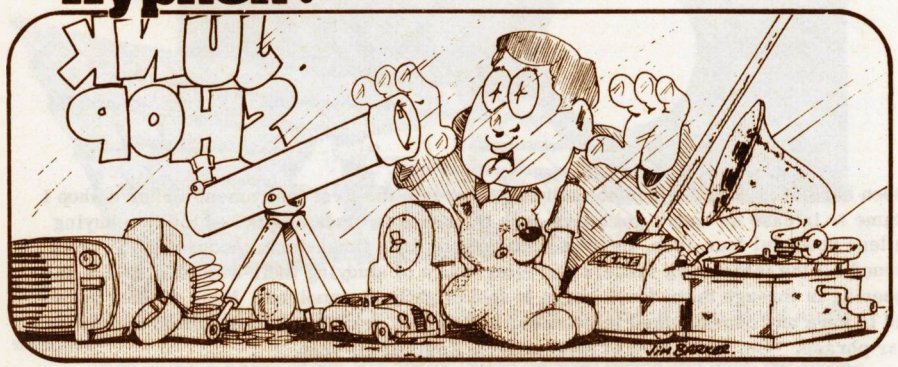
After some weeks had gone by the floor of that office was literally heaped with soft brown dust. Once or twice Tommy seized a brush and pushed some of the dust out of sight. The brush head had only to travel a couple of feet along that floor before it piled up a great crest of dust which actually made it difficult to move the brush forward. There was more dust in the office than I ever saw anywhere else in my life, but Tommy didn't use his authority to make me clean it up. He simply waited patiently for me to come round.

One morning I was dozing quietly at my board when the two directors came in to read the mail. Oul' Davy picked up the phone, dialled the main office and said to the switchboard girl at the other end, "Tommy Johnston died last night. Put my calls through here for the rest of the day."

I froze on my stool, thunderstruck, unable to take it in. I hadn't even realised that Tommy was sick. I sat there for about ten minutes listening to the two directors matter-of-factly discussing the day's letters as though nothing out of the ordinary had happened; then I realised I had to do something. I got out the brush and swept all the dust out of the office, determinedly ignoring Oul' Davy's startled protests as the great choking brown clouds enveloped everything in the place.

Later I dismantled my crystal set, broke up the betatron ray, and took my science fiction collection home. I had a feeling that my apprenticeship had just begun.

Hyphen?



Ad Astra?

The following article did not appear in Hyphen. It is included in this collection because it was written for a Hyphen which was scheduled to be published, but never saw completion. Strange to relate, quite recently I paid a largish sum of money to become joint owner of a good astronomical telescope. As anyone who reads the following column will be able to guess, I took one look through the instrument, handed it back to my partner and demanded that he buy me out. Sometimes I think I'll never learn....

* * * * * *

At the age of 14 I decided to become an astronomer.

As a first step in achieving this ambition, I read every book on the subject in the public library at the rate of one or two a week. This second-hand stargazing was satisfying enough for some months, but, as time wore on, it became apparent that a telescope of one's own was de rigueur for up-and-coming astronomers.

The concentrated reading course had taught me quite a bit about astronomical instruments and I was able to decide at once that the best one for my purpose would be a five-inch telescope, which, in non-technical language, is a telescope which measures five inches across the fat end. Unfortunately, although the library books had dealt very thoroughly with matters like focal lengths, chromatic aberration and altazimuth mountings, they had been completely mute on the subject of prices. There was, as I was later to learn, a very good reason for this omission. A first-class five-inch telescope with accessories can easily cost several hundred pounds, and as the theme of most of the authors was. "How foolish it is to waste money going to the cinema when you can survey the limitless splendours of the Universe for nothing!" they were understandably reluctant to descend to the vulgar financial details. However, I was unaware of all this at the time, and in the absence of guidance estimated a price by myself. The calculation was quite simple — I had once owned a telescope measuring about one inch across which had cost me three shillings: the one I wanted to buy was five times thicker and therefore should cost three shillings multiplied by five, equals fifteen shillings. Allowing a bit extra for inflation I reckoned that if I raised eighteen shillings I would be in a postiion to put up a serious challenge to Armagh Observatory.

Some weeks later — slightly weakened by total abstinence from regular items of diet such as Nutty Nibs and Jap Dessert, but filled with an unbearably delicious sense of anticipation — I cycled downtown on a brisk Saturday morning to purchase a telescope, with almost a pound safely buttoned in my hip pocket. Saving the money had

been hard work so I decided not actually to go into the first instrument maker's shop I came to in case he hadn't got a five-inch telescope in stock and talked me into buying a less powerful four-inch, or even a miserable little three-inch. Accordingly, I went round all the instrument makers and after hours of studying their window displays and peering in through their doors began to feel slightly disappointed. None of them seemed to have any decent-sized telescopes, and I could hear in my imagination the familiar phrase, "Oh, we'd have to send away to England for that."

Finally dusk began to fall and, as it was bitterly cold and lunchtime was several hours past, I decided to compromise. One of the shops had a skimpy little thing of not more than two inches diameter in the window and although it was a pale imitation of what I wanted it would at least get me cracking on the limitless splendours of the universe that very evening. The money left over after buying it, I consoled myself, would be a good start towards the price of a proper telescope.

The thin, meticulously neat, severe-looking man behind the counter did not look particularly pleased to see me. He jerked his head enquiringly and went on polishing a row of expensive cameras.

"I'm interested in the telescope you have in the window."

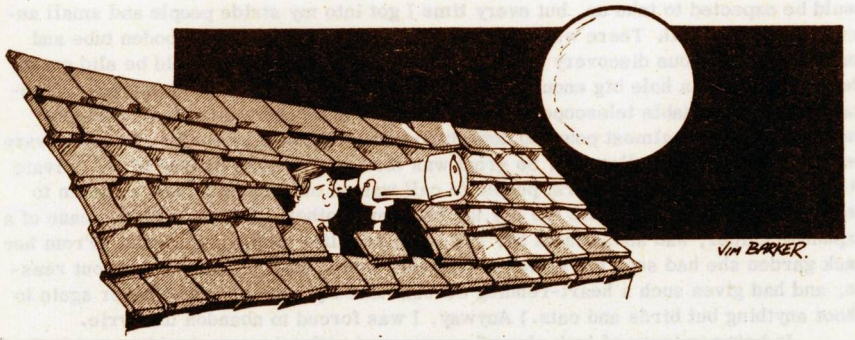
He stopped polishing and fixed a cold gaze on my cycle lips. I withstood the scrutiny confidently, knowing the cycle clips were as good as money could buy. I decided to let him know that here was a fellow expert on precision instruments.

"It's got an object glass of about two inches," I said, realising it might be a good idea to chat about technical details for a while, and only after he had seen that I knew something about telescopes bring up the subject of price.

"It's thirty-two pounds ten," he said with a complete lack of finesse or preamble, and went right back to polishing the cameras.

The blow did not hit me right away. I sneered at the back of his head a couple of times, then dashed out of the shop with two objectives in mind — to buy a telescope before closing time and to spread word around the trade that one of its members was trying to sell six-shilling telescopes for thirty-two pounds ten. Half an hour later I was slowly cycling homewards, sickened by the discovery that they were all in it together. It seemed as if I was shut off from the stars as effectively as if huge steel shutters had sprung up from behind the Castlereagh Hills on one side and the Black Mountain on the other and had clanged together overhead.

The despair lasted several days, then, with a resurgence of hope, I realised what had to be done. It was all so simple. If the people who sold brand new telescopes had formed a price ring the thing was to pick up a second-hand instrument from some friendly old junk dealer who had no idea of its current market value. Within a week I had developed a deep and implacable hatred for friendly old junk dealers — obviously somebody had told them what the telescope makers were up to and the unscrupulous rogues had pushed their own prices up to within shillings of the brand-new prices. The stars would have to wait, but this time the situation didn't seem quite so hopeless. I couldn't believe that junk dealers would be as well organised as instru-



ment makers and there was always the chance that one day one of them would make a mistake.

Then began a phase of my life which lasted several years and gave me an unrivalled knowledge of Belfast's second-hand shops, even those in distant quarters of the city. On Saturdays and lunch times and holidays I spent my time checking the dingy little shops, going in hopefully each time a new telescope appeared, coming out in renewed despair on hearing the price. Not once during those years did a friendly old junk dealer make a mistake. They maintained the price barrier which separated me from the distant untrodden reaches of the universe as though it was all part of a gigantic plot.

Fruitless though the search was, it produced an occasional memorable experience. One Saturday afternoon I was prowling through the darker corners of Smithfield Market when I discerned a tiny brass object which I immediately recognised as being the eye-piece of a fairly large telescope. It was completely useless to me, but out of sheer force of habit, I asked the price from the old woman in charge. After sizing me up cheerfully she announced that it was seven and sixpence. Her business sense must have been remarkably good for I had about eight shillings in my pocket at that moment, and immediately said I would buy. There was absolutely nothing I could do with the eye-piece of course, but it was the first thing in the telescope line that had come into my price range, and I had to have it. I had come a long way from that first morning when I set out to buy a five-inch telescope.

The old lady knew the object was only an eye-piece from an instrument perhaps six-foot long but she had no way of knowing that I too fully understood this, and, when she saw my obvious delight at the price, seemed to feel a pang of unprofessional remorse. She stood for a while as greed battled with guilt, then slowly handed the tube over and took my money. As I was going out through the door she emitted a faint strangling sound which made me look back, and I realised she was going to speak.

"You know," she finally ground out, "there's a piece missing."

I nodded. Having gone that far she had made peace with her conscience and we parted in a glow of mutual satisfaction. Surprisingly enough, my money was not altogether wasted because I began to pick up other vaguely telescopic items in the form of magnifying glasses and spectacle lenses, and discovered that it was possible to make telescopes — after a fashion, that is. My first one was constructed from a piece of lead piping, made stars look like little balls of illuminated candy floss, and was so heavy that when I let it fall from the bedroom window one night it woke half the street and threw one of my father's dogs into some kind of fit.

That was the first occasion on which I became aware of a rather strange fact. Astronomy was presumably the quietest and most respectable pursuit any teenager

could be expected to take up, but every time I got into my stride people and small animals kicked up hell. There was the time I built a telescope with a wooden tube and made the marvellous discovery that some of the tiles on our roof could be slid out of the way, leaving a hole big enough to poke the telescope through from the attic. I began work on a suitable telescope mounting right away but during the first half hour our front door was almost pounded down by panic-stricken passers-by coming to warn us that our roof was collapsing. So great was the consternation caused by my private observatory that one of the first people to call was an old lady who hadn't spoken to any of us for years, not since the day my younger brother, with the ruthless ease of a Japanese sniper, had annahilated her row of prize tulips with his air rifle. (From her back garden she had seen the flowers fold over, one by one, apparently without reason, and had given such a heart-rending scream that my brother vowed never again to shoot anything but birds and cats.) Anyway, I was forced to abandon the eyrie.

In between tours of junk shops I persevered with telescope-building and in the process learned a lot about the science of optics. I learned to calculate the magnification obtained by even the most complicated lens system, but preferred the simpler method of direct measurement. To find out how strong a telescope is, one looks through it at a brick wall and keeps the other eye open, with the result that large bricks and small bricks are seen superimposed on each other. A count of the number of small bricks that fit into a big brick gives the instrument's magnification.

The snag with this method was that every now and again the brick would be blotted out by a sudden flurry of movement and I would find myself staring at the vastly magnified and outraged face of a fat middle-aged woman. Sometimes the fat middle-aged woman gathered an excited knot of other fat middle-aged women who stood around, arms crossed protectively over their bosoms, muttering among themselves and staring in disquiet at my bedroom window. I always cringed back, appalled, wondering what I could say to my parents if the police or a deputation from the Church arrived at the door.

Finally, after about five years, I acquired a reasonable telescope. Not the five-inch job I had set out to buy on that fateful Saturday morning — that was still beyond my pocket — but a reasonable telescope, nevertheless.

Anybody who has even a superficial understanding of the workings of the human brain inside the human bonce will guess what happened next. I was disappointed. During those five years the anticipated pleasure of owning an astronomical telescope had multiplied themselves in my mind to a point which could not have been satisfied by all the resources of a modern observatory. Prolonged re-reading of the poetic astronomy books of people like Garrett P. Serviss (remember his early science fiction?) had convinced me that putting my eye to a telescope would transport me to another plane of existence in which the grey realities of mundane life would be replaced by a wonderland of celestial jewels, vari-coloured and mind-drinking; clusters like fireflies tangled in silver braid; glowing nebulae among whose filaments the imagination could wander for ever and ever.

Of course, all I saw were quivering and meaningless specks of light, and I got rid of the telescope within a few weeks.

And yet, the years-long search was not wasted. Now, twenty years further on, I still occasionally dream that I have found a friendly old junk dealer who doesn't know the price of telescopes. I smell the dust in his shop, I see the uncomprehending china dogs, I experience the limits of intellectual delight as I carry the solid, heavy instrument out into the street — moving towards a beautiful future which can never exist.

You couldn't buy dreams like that.

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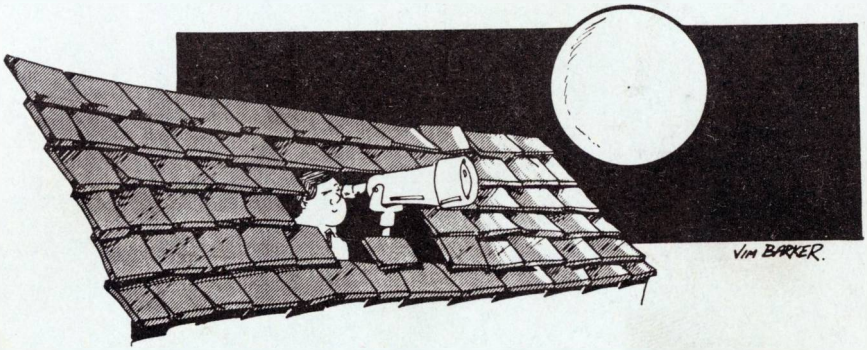
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