

Bel-Marduk

Being, after a fashion, the first issue of an apazine for the Southern Fan Press Alliance. The title "Bel-Marduk" is derived from the name of the chief god of the Babylonians, and also from a god mentioned in Charles Finney's The Circus of Dr. Lao. Compton's encyclopedia actually lists this deity as "Marduk," but we shall be generous and give Mr. Finney the benefit of a doubt, as it is possible that the authorities differ in opinion. Any person who in any place abbreviates the name of this fanzine by its two initial letters shall be allotted an incredible quota of pain. Be thou warned.

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All material editor-written or drawn



Tom Dandy

It was stated in various places by myself and others that I was leaving fandom and discontinuing STF. Since then my plans have changed. I'm not giving up my chance to attend Treadwell, but by assessing my schedule and free-time plans, I find that I should be able to continue STF on an irregular basis and manage a small apazine. The main reason that I'm going to do this is that the

reaction to my leaving fandom was somewhat more unhappy than I had expected. Apparently a lot of people enjoyed STF more than they let on. I appreciate this, and because it made me feel kind of good to be missed before I was even gone, I've decided to drop some of my minor plans and devote that time to fanning.

Thanks to those who voted for STF and myself in the egoboo poll. STF will be sent through SIFA whenever an issue is published.

This summer has been rather dry so far, except on weekends, of course. Greenwood is an incredibly dull town. Every night a group of us pile into someone's car and ride around all over town. And group, that's all we do. On the weekends things are somewhat different, as we drive to Grenada lake, camp out, go water skiing, and so on. (Speaking of water skiing, has anyone tried the new hydrofoil attachment for skis? It looks groovy in pictures.) The only trouble is that these places are from thirty to sixty miles away, and by the time we pay for gas for both speedboat and cars, it stings. However, this situation will be rectified (for me, at least) when I leave for school: Memphis is a swinging town.

Be that as it may, I've done a lot of reading this summer, though not a great deal was stf. The best book I came across was Rosemary Sutcliff's Sword and Sunset. This is a brilliant historical novel based on the premise that the Arthurian legend, hung as it is with the trappings of myth, is founded on actual events. Such parts of Malory's Arthur as seemed to ring true were retained; other parts came from extensive research and study of old documents and obscure bits of history. It's a beautifully written, strong novel, depicting Arthur as head of his band of Companions, the main bulwark against the barbarian hordes who have threatened Britain since the withdrawal of the Roman legions. For 95¢ you can get 476 pages of the best novel of knighthood and heroic events since Ivanhoe and The White Company.

Quick, Before It Melts is a lighthearted farce in the vein of The Happy Sadist. It concerns a budding journalist sent to the antarctic by his magazine. He muddles through the story in an enraged astonishment, and emerges a better man than before. Two hours of fun and games, with the inhibitions of Cat's Cradle.

Also noted: Here Comes, There Goes, You Know Who, by William Saroyan; The Hopkins Manuscript, by R. C. Sheriff (fie on you, Buck Coulson -- it's a very good novel); Looking for the General, by Warren Miller. These are all outstanding and currently available books, and well worth the time spent reading them. Therefore goeth forth and do thusly.

As many of you may know, Greenwood has been the target of many civil rights demonstrations this summer, and from what I like to think of as an objective viewpoint, I must say that it has been a nasty business. I have stated my position before in various places, but for the record I support Negro equality. I do not, however, support the civil rights bill (for essentially the same reasons as Goldwater) nor do I support Negro supremacy -- that is, the right of the Negro to be above the law, to go unpunished for crimes that normally carry stiff fines and/or imprisonment as punishment. The sweet breath of freedom is becoming a bit fetid, methinks, and each event such as the Harlem riots merely serves to alienate more people to the cause of the Negroes. The more responsible Negro leaders are beginning to realize this, though the influential ones such as "Dr." King and his ilk continue the same

"civil" disobedience tactics.

In Greenwood, there has been surprisingly little violence, and what fighting that has occurred has been usually provoked by a certain group of white people. On the west coast, this type is known as the ho-dad: blue jeans, sweaty and greasy t-shirts, long, slicked back haircuts, the characteristics seldom vary. Here we call them rednecks. They assemble mostly outside one of the local theaters, carrying rebel flags and other battle standards. A prominent member of the "home guard" is the son of Byron de la Beckwith. The whole spectacle is ludicrous.

But I think I prefer to ridiculous to the alternative offered in Harlem and Brooklyn. Where do these pitiful geeks get their gall? You've seen the stickers they carry on their cars when visiting here: "Proceed with caution. You are know in occupied Mississippi." Brother! How melodramatic can you get? And the freedom "invasion" by college students -- mustn't forget that. A more motley group you'd be hard put to find. Their conceit is stupendous; a few thousand beatniks and young radicals who propose to undo in one summer the sociological tangle that has been tightening for over a hundred years. If it weren't so likely to explode, the situation would be laughable.

In the last mailing someone said we ought to be thinking about the possibilities of a regional convention. I agree; I'd be interested in contacting any person willing to be host at such a convention. The logical place would be Memphis, but I'm in no position to do any inviting, as I'll be a roomer myself. Janey Lamb has evinced no interest in southern fanatic, so she's out. But there are 15 members in the SFFA beside myself, so someone ought to be able to offer an arrangement.

If, on the other hand, we could guarantee a large enough attendance to come to an agreement with a hotel or motel, Memphis would be the ideal place. In fact, if we are to go that far, I think we should go all the way, with a pro guest, panels, and so on. A really good convention in an easily accessible city might be just the tonic needed by the SFFA. Those interested please contact me via STP's editorial address. This will take coordinated and fast work; we can't swing it by batting the idea around in quarterly fanzines. But we have a full year to line up necessities, and plenty of talent to do that -- if we use it.

Tally ho, gentlemen.

Jim Harkness



Mauling Comments

Warlock # 4: Hey, group. I've just discovered a peachy-keen new way to cut stencils and things. You sit in your favorite chair hunched over a footstool. Place your knees to the sides of the thing and prop the type on it, leaning against the inside of your thighs, bongo drum-fashion. It gives great leverage and makes the stencil cut better. It's also terribly uncomfortable.

I have the darndest feeling that my cushion sheet is in wrong...

Sorry, Larry. You misunderstood me. I meant I had rejected a lot of the art you had accepted for Warlock. Forget it. I was just bee(agh)ing nasty anyway. Nice cover -- you stencil that, or did Gilbert?

I'm sorry you didn't like my article in TW 2. (Commenting on your comments on another person's magazine...oh, well.) Actually it was pretty chopped up, as I hadn't told Joe how much space to save and he didn't expect so long a tale. Of course, it's your privilege to dislike that type of article. However, Hot Rodding (I know of no magazine called Hot Rod) is not at all a bad mag -- suggest you read it sometime. You might find that you do like it.

Joe Staton's illo on page 10 looks suspiciously like a certain character in an old issue of Green Lantern Comics. (Yes gang, I once was One Of THEM.)

JD-Argassy # 60 and company: Gee, Lynn. I wish I knew what to say about JD-A. I just can not get interested in the old pulps -- their covers, contents, or collectors. Beautiful zines like yours always leave me feeling a little sad that this is so, but I can't help it. I read the recent anthology from Wierd Tales and was left cold. I read a great many of the old TWS and was bored. I envy you your nostalgia, but I'm afraid I can't share it.

Artwork and reproduction are outstanding. I fail to understand why the pro-zines struggle along with such trash as they use when material like yours is available. I mean, good grief. They even pay money. I guess they do, anyway.

Old man Kritz (only it's Critz) still has the Linc-Merc dealership here, Lynn. I know him slightly. Runs around in a sport shirt and a cowboy hat all the time. Typical Greenwoodian personage. Can't see why anyone who'd seen the big times would settle back into this hick town. I don't lose any sleep over it, though.

Awfully good work you've done. Thanks for the kind comments on STF.

Iscariot # 12: There is something about Iscariot that renders me unable to think of comments... I bet the only reason you didn't include a bunch of cartoons is that you were too lazy to dream up some captions. My gosh, Andrews, what kind of example of something or other is that? I mean, it just isn't fannish to let a little thing like having nothing to say keep you from saying anything. Look at Fran Laney. Look at Arnold Katz. Look at Pete Locket! (Hey, did you know you can't slash a period?)

As a mildly heretical solution to your commenting on comments problem in the lettercolumn, why not just use double shash (*hic*! slash, tha' iss...) or parentheses? It ain't terribly original, but it's unambiguous. I get the feeling you are screaming at me.

Andrews, are you going to you (no conflu, gang) use that illo I sent you, or are you going to send it back, or what? I'd like to know. After all, six months?

This stinking stencil is slipping in the carriage, for some stinking reason, and if it goofs up the stinking typeface I'm going to be stinking mad as a stinking fan whose stinking stencil kept slipping in the carriage and goofed up his stinking typeface.

Wormfarm # 3: How does one get a large contribution from someone like Rhine? One writes a brilliantly literate letter to him, explaining certain concepts and being generally inspiring. One dazzles him with intellect. One sneaks up on him from behind and hits him over the head and swipes anything one finds in his coat. Seriously, why shouldn't I have the nerve to ask Dr. Rhine for an article? All that could happen would be for him to say no -- and look what happened when I did ask.

"Coke Bottle Fandom" reminds me of a recent incident at the Kiwanis club pool. I was lying on top of the sun platform, discussing with some other guys the relative merits and virtues of certain mutually known members of the gentler sex. A blond girl in a two-piece swimsuit flounced up and climbed to the area where we were. Sitting down, she tugged at the top of her suit and said, "This thing is too tight." I made the natural observation. She giggled and murmured, "Is that sort of thing all you Greenwood Boys ever think about?" I explained that that sort of thing was all any boys ever thought about -- that, indeed, the situation was universal. "Oh," she said. "Well, in that case..."

"Olm Brew!" huh? You know what? I believe it. Every word of it.

I don't normally reveal such tender moments as those in paragraph two, but I'M listening to Beach Boys records, which have a Damaging Effect on my concentration. I say, are there any other Beach Boys fans out there? Beach Boy Fandom, unite! You have nothing to lose but your minds! Surfers, arise! We'll duel with Jan and Dean acolytes.

Sporadic # 11: Congratulations, Bill! Married, yet. Good grief, as good ol' Charlie Brown used to say. I could ask you what Larry Sokol asked Marty Something in similar circumstances, but I don't think it would be appropriate. Anyway, good luck. I mean it. Tell Staton to take a leap.

Fundamentals of Oral WHAT? Yeah, okay, I dig it. We had something like that in my soph year. Old gushface, our teacher, made us memorize 120 lines of Shakespeare's Julius Caesar. Dull as rocks. Anyway, we had to get up and interpret it. All the class got up and did it in a fast monotone and took the flunk, except one geek who was somewhat off to begin with. Gung-ho. The guy roamed around the room, beating on desks and lecterns and things, yelling lines at the top of his lungs. Birds on telephone wires hundreds of yards away heard him and fell silent in wonder. He only got a B and didn't come back to school for three weeks. The last I heard he was giving out with poetry in some walkup in the Village.

I'm sorry, but I'm sick and tired of people telling me how to write an editorial. No matter how I do it, some people are going to gripe. From now on, my editorials will be the way I like them.

Zaje Zaculo # 2: I don't want to offend you, Bailes, but I think that you have an awfully dumb title. Why don't you think up something a little less obscure?

You can be as objective about smoking as you like. Me, when some clod gets in my car and lights up, he either gets out or throws away his little cancer-maker. Don't tell me to roll down a window -- what if it's raining, or what if it's hot enough that I want to use the air conditioner? To blazes with the South's economy. The stupid government will pay any farmer not to grow tobacco. I'm not in favor of that, but I'd rather have my taxes cut down tobacco production than cut down production of some useful crop. By your doctrines, we'd have to make dope peddling legal.

I swear, what's the matter with you and Katz? Do you think you're the only ones in the world whom people send 'sample copies' of their apazines to? I received seventeen of the N'APA idiocies within a week after I was announced as a new member of the N3F. Sure, there is some good stuff in N'APA, but then there is an awful lot of stuff like Excaliber and Mickey and Starling and Gemzine, and frankly I'm not inter-

ested enough to sort the small amount of passable material from the great heaps of crud. Next time you pick a fight, Len, know what the devil you're talking about.

I'm glad you think Stranger is improving. I sincerely wish I could say the same for Zaja Zamulo.

Invader # 3: "Rocks" seems to have something to say, but I can't for the life of me figure out what. Mr. Raines is somewhat ambiguous. In certain places, the narrator gives the impression of a sensitive person whose tendencies are being stifled by the narrow-minded and stupid people who have authority over him. The ending, on the other hand, pictures him as not undeservedly confined to a mental institution. I suppose the story might be one of a sensitive person never mad, but somehow I don't think this is the case.

While "Rocks" is not as smoothly written, from a commercial standpoint, as some fan fiction, it does possess elements not found in much of the material turned out by members of this microcosm. There is a very good attempt at real characterization and the characters, while mildly stereotypical, are far more believable than those in a great deal of fanzine fiction. With practice and study, Mr. Raines might become quite a good professional writer.

"A Broken Moon" is quite good. The ending lines -- "For a moon is a big thing - let it weep for itself." -- are surprisingly powerful for amateur stuff. They illustrate perfectly the attitude of far too many people today; witness the tendency of civil juries to award damages against insurance companies simply because the companies "are big enough to afford it."

Clinton Brake should go back to Jack and Jill. I don't want to downgrade a newcomer, but this is an insult to the intelligence of anyone over eight. Now, I realize it was an attempt at flippancy and slapstick, but as an attempt it's bad. I know Clint is your buddy, Joe, but I think personal friendship is no reason for printing something.

An aside to Al Andrews here: I'm the 'jch' you were wondering about, but that cartoon was drawn by Joe from one I kiddingly ended a letter with. The general situation and caption are mine, but Joe redid the picture itself. I thought it was kind of silly, myself.

del-stun # 3: There, darn it. No capitals. Are you satisfied?

You don't like the kind of material I publish. This is an interesting statement. You've never read the stuff you claim you don't like, but you know you don't like it. There's an analog in the situation of the seven year old who had never eaten asparagus but "know he didn't like it." Only the seven year old could at least say he knew what it tasted like because he could smell it. Could it be that STF has some disagreeable odor that repels you? If so, by all means let me know: I shall take inventory with all possible haste, or at the very least spray my printing office and equipment with Right Guard, I mean, that's the very finest bit I could do.

Yes, Dave, I'm being a brat, and I know it isn't becoming. It's no more so on me, in fact, than it is on you. I realize you don't like fiction and you don't like facts if they're serious and you've told me a thousand times and you're beginning to use the same cuss words. After a while it stops sounding like sarcasm and begins to resemble petulance. If you would go to the trouble to tell me what you do like (if you know) I might even try to publish something of that nature. But you aren't interested enough, and frankly I couldn't care less.

Okay, "Charlie"?

"It was probably the coldest but quickest response to the call of nature I had ever given. It was over in about twenty-five seconds."

-- Philip Benjamin, in Quick, Before It Melts

THE UNENCHANTED DUPLICATOR

As a fan of one and a half summers, I sometimes get other people's fanzines. Occasionally this can be a traumatic experience. I feel at times that no matter how fast I run, it'll be impossible to catch and overhaul such esteemed publications as Yandro, Double:Bill, and Anna. The main factor that discourages me is not their material, however, but their beautiful, flawless reproduction.

Now, in magazines like PAS-tell, people write articles about how to achieve just such perfection. They discourse interminably on the various idiosyncrasies of the Gestetner, Rex Rotary, and Multilith, seemingly unaware that the fans who really need pointers are those who can't afford the expensive machines, but who must muddle along with obsolete J. J. Crudd brush-inking handfoeds and the like -- the type most fans use.

As a friend of the common ~~fan~~ fan, therefore, I herewith offer account of a series of experiences, observations, and suggestions concerning fan publishing, that those less sophisticated in the lore of the aged mimeograph might be spared certain trials of passage.

The first piece of advice I have for the novice is to drop the whole idea.

But we all know fans are stubborn.

Selecting a mimeograph is a mating of both art and science. For one thing, one must understand the general workings of the mechanism, so as to be able to determine its condition and what parts the dealer has stripped off & hoarded. Second, one must be skilled in dramatics. For instance, when I bought my press...

...I walked into the store with fifty dollars. After I had explained my problem to the clerk, he ushered me into a back room where the duplicators were kept. Most of them were new and costly. Some were old and costly. On a back shelf, though, I spotted a likely looking A. B. Dick. I walked over and examined it.

"That's a fine machine," the clerk said, and was abruptly taken with a coughing seizure.

"Where," I asked, "is the crank?" He assured me one would be secured. "What do you want for it?" I said.

"I couldn't possibly let it go for less than forty dollars," he replied.

"Aw," I said, looking infinitely disappointed. "I only have twenty-five."

"Sold," he proclaimed. Then I talked him into delivering it and sending a service man to familiarize me with the technical details of its operation. I had to. It was made in 1939 and weighed darn near a hundred pounds.

This was a mistake; it leads us to the second piece of advice I have for you happy masochists.

Avoid, at all costs, service men.

"Your machine has a high drum-to-roller pressure ratio," this specimen said when we began to go over the press. "But you can adjust it by this little thing, or this." He indicated two bolts on either side of the drum. They were attached to springs, whose degree of tautness determined the amount of pressure.

"You should operate on low pressure as long as you've plenty of ink," he went on, beginning to unscrew the bolts.

"That spring attachment is about to come loose," I observed nervously.

"No," he said tolerantly, "it can't possibly -- "

THWAAANNNG!

There was a pregnant silence. "Why did you do that?" I asked.

There was another silence, some months further advanced than the latter. "Well," he muttered, "I could have sworn,..."

For the sake of appearances, we won't go into the details of the obscene monolog that ensued. This brings us to a third bit of advice, which is for you to reconsider my first piece of advice.

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One of the most unforgettable moments in a fan's life is the first time he cranks his mimeograph. This is so because in 99.99% of the cases something goes incredibly and spectacularly wrong. For numerous reasons, usually included, the disaster involves an improperly attached stencil and an ink-coated front porch. I have talked to people who had forgotten to replace the top to the inking drum and those who had forgotten to release the brake. Suffice it to say that it is best to practice printing in old clothes and an open field.

After a while one learns.

Nonetheless, it isn't good to get the idea that you know all your machine's tricks. Such complacency is often shattered when the stops jam in the middle of a press run, resulting in up to seven expertly demolished sheets of paper and a beautifully inked roller.

We get serious for a moment here, I'd like to point out that when this happens, the wet ink on the roller will offset back onto the front of the stencil if the drum manages to revolve more than once after the stops jammed. When this happens, the only thing you can do is to remove the stencil and clean it. Then it is necessary to run a few sheets through the press to dry the stencil -- and then you must remember to reset the counter.

Eventually the novice has used his mimeograph enough for some minor part to need replacement. For me the rubber traction grips on the autofeed mechanism were thin. This frequently caused two pieces of paper to feed at once -- sort of a self-slip-sheeting thing. (I must give that idea further thought.) However, one of the few curses I'm not afflicted with, in normal circumstances (that mythical concept), is that of offsetting, and I've never found slip-sheeting necessary. Through a roundabout process, therefore, we've come to a fourth bit of wisdom.

Do not, under any circumstances, attempt to purchase replacement parts. That way leads madness.

As I have taken care to make plain in the opening passages of this narrative, all persons connected with the merchandising of printing supplies are a singularly dense and surly lot. The universal axiom that "The only constant is the absence of constants," is in this instance violated; there are no exceptions to the rule.

Having become leery of local dealers because of past experience, I waited until I had a chance to go to Memphis to go shopping for the piece of equipment that I needed. I journeyed to the A.B. Dick retail house on Monroe Avenue. I entered. I approached a salesperson. He sneered down his nose at me, no mean feat, as I was six inches the taller.

Doggedly ignoring what I can only label a bristling hostility, I explained what I needed. Looking as if he was struggling with an overwhelming desire to spit on my shoes, the salesman acknowledged my existence and pointed crossly to a glass showcase two feet away. "That small rubber square is what you need," he admitted unhelpfully. I examined it and found he was correct. Hopefully I asked for three.

"You can't," he replied, not without malice.

I had been expecting that. I asked him why.

"Those are only for display," he said, hating me for my gross ignorance. "We fill orders out of the warehouse."

"Well," I said, "couldn't you give me a receipt or something? I could go by the warehouse and pick up what I need."

"No," he said.

"Why?" I asked. He was beginning to get a panicked look about the eyes. I think prolonged contact with a rational being was shorting his circuits.

"The warehouse is in Nevada."

"I guess I'll have to order some, then," I sighed. "Can I have an order form? I'll need three copies."

He smiled evilly, a trace of spiteful sneering in his cheek. "We only sell them by the gross."

Does anyone want to buy 144 auto-feed grips?

+ 9 = 9-6 = 6 +

I suppose some will wonder why I should include the foregoing piece in a magazine distributed mainly to members of a press alliance, who presumably have learned all these things first hand. Actually "The Enchanted (oh, blank! I mean 'Unenchanted') Duplicator" was written for Gloria Stoeckel's literary magazine Schriener, and was returned to me from her files of material to be used when she decided, on re-reading, that it was slanted only to the small group of amateur publishers in the mundane field. Not wanting to go to the trouble of resubmitting it to another magazine, I revised certain portions so fans would appreciate it and have printed it here. Of course, it really doesn't have much to do with the mechanics of printing at all, and wasn't intended to -- I really don't think of the SFPAns as a group of novices, except for one creep who is too stupid to swallow water anyhow.

Filling the rest of this stencil is going to kill me. My hands hurt like the very devil anyway. Since the city pool went private (guess why, kiddies?) myself and a few of my friends have had it pretty much to ourselves, except for a couple or so of little kids who don't count. Now that no one is around to see us make fools of ourselves, we've been practicing some difficult dives, mostly back gainers and cutaways. One "dive" involves doing a handstand on the very end of the board and flipping out. Now, the high board we use is coated with a gravelly non-slip material, and my hands are not the toughest in the world. Hence hamburger of a sort, et pain. I'll live, I guess, but it is difficult to type.

As I said earlier in the mag, I didn't think much of the Wierd Tales anthology that came out recently, except for the nicely done story by Lovecraft and the last tale in the book. That was "Pigeons from Hell," by, of all people, swashbuckling old R. B. Howard. The story was, I may honestly say, the most effective horror story I've ever read. Besides, extremely outstanding literary craftsmanship is hard to find even in Unknown, and to come across it in so unexpected a quarter is gratifying. I heartily recommend it to anyone.

Oh, in that same collection Dyalhis' "The Sea Witch" is a competent job, but one that did not appeal to me personally. Dave Hulan would dig it -- ghostly wildings and Horse witches and vendettas and all that scam.

In case anybody gives a grasshopper, my choices for the Hugo award are as follows:

Best novel - <u>Dune World</u> , by Frank Herbert	Best Fanzine - <u>Yandro</u>
Best short - "A Rose For Ecclesiastes," by Roger Zelazny	Best Prozine - <u>Galaxy</u>
Best Artist - John Schoenherr	Best Book Publisher - Pyramid

I'm sure that some will win, and some won't. However, I was very disgusted that Gordy Dickson's "Home from the Shore," one of the best stories Galaxy has ever published, did not even make the nominations. It only reaffirms what I've contended all along: only those works or persons who are backed by Big Name Fans are likely to receive support. Quality must often bow out to publicity, eh, gang?

THREE CLUCKS AND THE KLAN

A few weeks ago, on a rainy day, Charles Wax, John Conner, and myself were sitting around John's house wondering what to do. Ever so often a random suggestion was made and discussed. One such suggestion was considered favorably: a trip down the Yalobusha River by raft from Grenada to Greenwood, a distance of about fifty miles. The plans were made, the raft was cut and packed for easy construction at the starting point. Supplies were purchased. We drove to Grenada and quickly pulled together the raft, wiring six 55-gallon drums under it for extra supports. At three o'clock on August 12, we cast off.

For lack of time and space, we will dwell upon only one incident.

It was dusk. The hazy sky was losing its gold tinge in the west, and a gray mist was settling onto the wide river. On the bank frogs and insects chorused incessantly. John, Charlie, and I were wrapped in sleeping bags; the river was cold at night. Stars glimmered halfheartedly, and a nebula blazed into the atmosphere. The raft smelted of hardtack and Vienna sausages. John and I had buried our faces in the sleeping bags, as a concession to that fact; Charlie, having a cast iron stomach and a warped sense of humor, was enjoying the situation.

As we rounded a bend, a cry from Charlie roused us. Far down a straight stretch a huge bonfire danced. "Good grief," screamed Charlie, "it's the Klan!" This we put down in properly sarcastic manner. Deprived of his theory, Wax sulked until we heard the howling of hounds in the distance and a gunshot. "God," he yelled, "it's COON. It's the NAACP! The _____s want revenge! Harkness, why did you make me come on this stupid trip?"

"It's a coon hunt, you gimpy," observed John dryly. "I wonder if they've tread it yet?"

"We're getting pretty close to the bank," said Charlie nervously. "Right full rudder."

"What rudder?" I wanted to know from the back of the raft. "We lost it when we ran up under that barge."

"What kind of gimpy leaves a barge in the middle of a river, anyway?" Conner remarked from the back of the raft. (We were spinning slowly, by the way.)

"It busted my barbeque grill, too," Charlie complained. "That was your fault, Harkness."

"What busted? It bont the stupid leg, gimpy," said Conner. "Reckon we should tie up for the night?"

"Neh, let's float a while longer. We ain't made the Holcomb bridge yet," I said from the back of the raft.

"We'll hit it in the dark and bust up the raft and drown and those that don't drown'll get eaten by alligators and timber wolves," muttered Charlie.

"Alligators prefer still water," I said sturdiously. "At any rate, the local variety, *Alligator mississippiensis*, enters the water only in the heat of the day. At night it is easily located by its roaring, which is said to roar -- "

"Harkness, you've been reading again," said Conner from the bank of the raft. "Wax, did I ever mention to you that you're a gimpy?"

"Gee, John, I don't know why you have to say things like that," Charlie said in an injured tone.

"Hey, y'all," I said. "Look at the bats." I pointed to several dark shapes darting overhead.

"No!" shouted Charlie, diving into his sleeping bag. "They're vampires!"

"Aw, you gimpy," said Conner.