

# NOVIACON

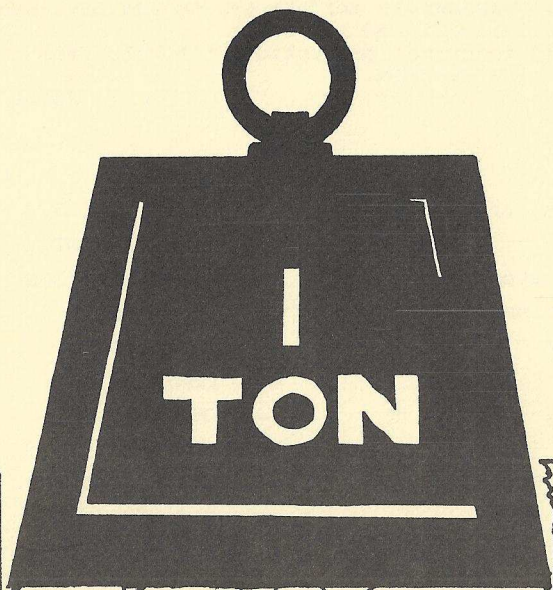
**SUMMER PR.**

4 NOV-6 NOV 1983  
ROYAL ANGUS HOTEL  
BIRMINGHAM

GUEST OF HONOUR

LISA TUTTLE

# 13



# DOCTER SPECIAL

# NOVACON

## THIRTEEN

### CHAIRMAN'S HOT WAFFLES.....

It was my idea, long before I became Chairman of NOVACON 13, to do something like this. Conventions, I reasoned, hardly ever contributed to the world of fanzines apart from giving out awards. Yet loads of money is spent on progress reports that at best make light reading.

So this year, I thought, 'Why not do a disaster Special?' A progress report with a difference. One that tells you nothing about the convention, only about peoples disasters.....A Summer Disaster Special! One that would go out when most of you have returned from your holidays and are now looking forward to NOVACON 13.

Being no fool, I got someone else to do it.

So here is is- The NOVACON 13 SUMMER DISASTER SPECIAL. With favourite disasters from the famous, not so famous and the downright unknown!! Most of the contributors have either won a NOVA AWARD or been a Guest of Honour at a NOVACON. Anyone else represented here is simply too good to be missed out.

Those SEACON 84 stalwarts, Chris Donaldson and Paul Oldroyd were the editors from 46 Colwyn Road, Beeston, Leeds 11. John Wilkes is (held) responsible for the typoning and Dave Haden did the artwork on pages 8, 10, 13, 23, 27 and the cover. Phill Probert (me) did the final production with help from the super sexy Eunice Pearson.

PHILL PROBERT.

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CHAIRMAN: Phill Probert.

COMMITTEE: Chris Donaldson, Steve Green, Dave Haden, Jan Huxley  
Paul Oldroyd, Eunice Pearson, Paul Vincent & John Wilkes.

NOVACON is organised by the Birmingham Science Fiction Group...

# THE IMMORTAL STORM STRIKES AGAIN.

You write and ask me to speak about my favourite disaster; you go on to say that you want only one disaster, and that two would be too much for you. One was too much for me, you understand.

There was only one disaster, although it has multiplied and replicated itself into many forms, some of which assail me even now. It struck again only yesterday when - but I might as well speak of that incident first, so that you will understand.

I had been to a shop and went slightly out of my way to return home along the canal towpath. It is peaceful there. On one side of the canal are little houses with alleys between, and neat gardens full of vegetables. On the other side are hedgerows and fields. There were a few narrow boats moored along the canal bank; no one was in sight. The sun shone. It was an ordinary day, and I was content enough with my own company.

As I passed one of the alleys between the houses, I happened to glance along it. I stopped. There, in the shadow of the houses, a man-like thing was playing the bagpipes. He was naked.

It is beyond me now to describe this apparition clearly, or to say how much it dismayed me. The creature was the colour of a clay pot after baking, a raw terra cotta brown from head to foot. His legs were thin, his feet large, his knees boney. His face was contorted by the effort of playing his instrument, the bladder of which was tucked under his left arm, as with most bagpipes. His piercing grey eyes were fixed on me. Indeed, I knew he played for me alone.

Everything stopped but the low drone of the pipes. A bee hung suspended above a blue aster. Utter stillness had seized everything.

I saw that this large gnome-like creature had swung its stomach under its arm. It was the stomach which served as a wind-bag, and from the stomach the low dismaying drone came.

The creature began to dance. I knew by its dancing that the world was about to end.

The spell broken, I hastened home and flung myself down in a chair in my room. Consternation filled me. I knew with firm conviction that I had seen the sign that the world was about to end. It was nothing dramatic - not an earthquake, say, or a nuclear war: merely a little man in Walton Well Road, playing a dirge in the shadows. But it was enough.

Then I recalled that I was a science fiction writer. I had been seeing things again.

There's only one disaster in my life as far as I'm concerned, and there all my uncles and aunts and parents would agree. Well

my parents are dead now - they died some while before I was born - but they would somehow manage to sit up and agree if questioned on that score. So would my wife, my children, my pet warthog, and the talking budgerigar, Rover. I found science fiction, didn't I? Isn't that enough?

My driving ambition was to be a chartered accountant. I had the features for it, slender aquiline nose, eyes close-set, light ginger moustache, bald head, treacherously deferential air. I was six. Already I had passed my 'O' levels in maths, domestic science and Urdu. I was all set for a decent career. Then it happened.

And what's my personal grief to you? The trouble is, you've heard this sort of confession before, this terrible outpouring of guilt and swagger, from Bob Shaw, Lester del Rey, Arthur C. Clarke and all the rest of the pack. There they were, innocent kids, nice kids by all accounts, no harm in them, some of them already setting out on decent careers as plasterers, air raid wardens, or bacteriological warfare specialists, and they walk into this drug store, or this library, or Woolworth's, or this fucking emporium in Paris, Saskatchewan, and there they are - confronted by a copy of Hugo Gernsback's Wonder Stories or John Russell Fearn's Star of Steaming Stupor. Zap. Click. Kerpow. Blooey.

What happens? Immediately, they lose all interest in studies, girls, masturbation, herpes, archaeology, and the wonders of roller-skating, and become addicted to this stuff called scientificfiction. Over-night. Like the 1890's outbreak of leprosy in Tierra del Fuego.

Down goes another budding chartered accountant. It's a loss to the world.

Thus it was with me. Zap. Click. Kerpow. Blooey. The disease is always the same; only the symptoms change a bit, to baffle the innocent. In my case, it was a van Vogt story about Grand Captain Laurr and the war against the Mixed Men, and this enormous spaceship which breaks up in an interstellar storm. Ever since reading that story, I have believed that the universe was going into a crash dive, and I have reiterated my faith through fifty-five novels (some under my pen name, John Brunner), all of which have been published at some time or another with almost identical covers showing a socking great spaceship breaking apart in an interstellar storm. Sometimes you can see little naked women tumbling among the stars. They must have been in the shower when the storm struck. Maybe it was just before cocktail time.

I read that magazine over and over. I can honestly say that it changed my life. I took to sleeping under the bed, to talking to myself, to quarrelling with Rover, to hoarding empty milk bottles, and many similar habits, harmless in themselves but cumulatively indicative of terminal character deterioration.

It didn't just change my life. It changed my view of reality. Oh, I'm so mad at van Vogt. This sort of thing always happens at puberty, just when you've got other problems. Bob Shaw and the others don't tell you about that. In those days, I was a crack shot with my air rifle. I was leaning out of my bedroom window looking for cats when an angel came and perched in our apple tree. It zoomed right down out of heaven and perched in our apple tree. Its feathers were dripping wet. Maybe it had been in the shower when the storm broke.

It didn't look at all like an ordinary angel, which is what convinces me this really did happen. It was only about three feet high, and its wings were sharp and made of multi-coloured feathers, like pheasant feathers. Its hair was blonde, green, and black, like a punk's. It scared me stiff, particularly since it stared at me in a meaningful way. I shot it in the left eye. It fell down and hit a row of young lettuces with a terrible zonk.

I ran down through the house yelling, "I got an angel! I got an angel!" - to which of course no one paid a blind bit of notice and as I ran out of the back door it was disappearing over the fence. It was weeks before I could sleep safely at nights.

The Mixed Men had something to answer for. After talking things over with the talking budgerigar, I went to a psychiatrist. He went on a bit about loss of innocence, but was baffled. He called in a second opinion. They got married.

Although I attended the wedding, it was not without difficulty. I was then busy memorising the Lensman series. While they were away on honeymoon in Benidorm, I packed some fishpaste sandwiches - the bloater flavour which I love - and left for Birmingham. My uncle Barnaby lived there. He was a Methodist horse-breaker, with a small corall at the north end of South Wolverhampton Street. My hope was that he would be understanding.

He was. Uncle Barnaby was also a deaf mute, so that no conversation was required. I could go on uninterruptedly reading Moon of Mad Atavism and all the rest of the world's masterpieces available at Woolworth's counter. In the next room, little Harry was doing the same thing. We never spoke. Ten years went by. We passed each other occasionally as we entered or left the emporium.

"Tried 'City of Stinging Silicon'?", he might ask.

"Read 'The Day They Defenestated Denver'?", I might counter.

At this point in my disastrous autobiography, I'd like to break off and ask you, the damned, what you expect was the next development in my life?

You think some further revelation is in the pipeline?

Not on your nelly. SF readers get only one revelation, the revelation that they can't live without science fiction, that they

have to incantate the names of Marion Zimmer Bradley and Philip Jose Farmer a dozen times a day. After that - nothing. No further development is possible.

It's true I did see the angel-thing once more. It was in the hall, walking towards the front door. I was petrified.

It wore a shining grey robe and walked with a limp. Again it was about three feet high, with bedraggled limbs. It turned and looked at me.

It had a face like a ferret, with tiny sharp teeth, which it bared. Then it walked into the broom closet and disappeared. An alien if ever I saw one.

Horror seized me. I walked shaking back to the living room and picked up the nearest Julian May.

As I have said, science fiction, once discovered, alters your appreciation of reality.

There is a scientific explanation for the trouble. Dianetics. Dianetics are small particles in the brain which, seen under the electron microscope, resemble bits of All-Bran. In the normal brain, unsullied by SF, each dianetic drifts through the brain haphazardly, providing a small magnetic charge which actually aids thinking and, according to latest research, prevents haemorrhaging and constipation. On contact with a page of von Vogt, however, a sort of polarisation takes place. The dianetics join together, end to end, like logs trying to get down a river. Not a wide Canadian river, exactly, but a small river like the Avon or the Cherwell. Say about nine feet wide, or less if you are looking at it through a microscope.

The dianetics clog the cells of the neocortex on a solid jam and cannot change direction. Thus, the victim can only think in science fictional terms. Development is impossible for him or her. He rapidly becomes unable to enjoy "Finnegans Wake", Proust, or "The Thorn Birds", or other classics of world literature. His mental age remains paralysed, and his talk becomes rapid and extravagant, as Harry will tell you. L. Ron Hubbard understood all this, and brought these irritating little particles to the public notice. Rapid and extravagant public notice. Understood?

Actually, the only thing that has any alleviating effect on blocked dianetics is either;

- a) further doses of sci-fi, as my doctor calls it, or
  - b) large applications of alcohol to the afflicted parts.
- Hence the necessity for frequent conventions.

Disaster? And I haven't told you yet what happened to Rover.

Brian Aldiss

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## MEDICAL MATTERS.

I'll be honest with you, I'm a little apprehensive about the impending Novacon, which draws ever nearer even as I write. What's this? Getting cold feet about the endless toil involved in organising the con, or the awesome responsibilities? Not at all. Such things are naught compared to the loathsome demands of my sadistic spare-time task masters at the Open University. No it's just that I have doubts whether I'll be in one piece come November. Y'see, viruses, bacteria and the like have a habit of maliciously bad timing when it comes to yours truly.....

At the tender age of 7, just a few days before my parents were to whisk me off on the annual Summer Hols, my appendix decided to call it a day and promptly burst, very inconsiderately I thought. What perfect timing! One cancelled holiday and two weeks in hospital. Had I been older and supposedly wiser I might have seen this episode as the shape of things to come (there's the SF connection for those who seek one). The following year, one day before the hols, my parents' wary glances in my direction proved entirely grounded as a suddenly spotty, very spotty, measles spotty Vincent came out with another immaculately timed illness. This was getting to be a habit! Fortunately we successfully escaped further incidents the next Summer and holidayed with some relief, unhindered by the Bubonic Plague, leprosy or ingrowing toenails. Then came Christmas morning, with my neck doing a very unsightly impression of a half-inflated balloon. This is known as mumps. While my lymph nodes celebrated their mischief-making I unfestively spent the whole holiday in bed, head and neck swathed in scarves like a miniature Tom Baker, unable to swallow anything more solid than platefuls of mush.

Fate chuckled merrily and then relented. For the next ten years my illnesses chose less ostentatious times to make their occasional appearances. Then, at age 20, synchronicity stepped in again to let me know that I was not finished with. The day after a particularly inebriated pre-Christmas party I stumbled with ravaged brain to the shower. In the course of washing away the hangover I discovered a small colony of blisters, looking like Moonbase Alpha, squinting cheerfully at me from my shoulder. The significance escaped me. Next day, face covered in glistening green pustules, (as was every other square inch of skin on my body),

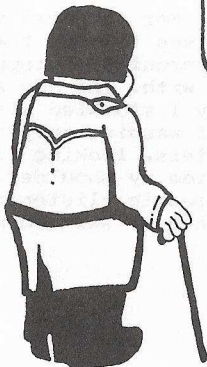
I returned from the doctor bearing the dread news: Chicken Pox. Chicken Pox for Chiist's sake! This is not a fun disease once you've reached adulthood, affecting as it does all those delicate gonads, and more. It was a simply wonderful way to spend Christmas - some of my hallucinations easily put the festive TV programmes in the shade, and they didn't cost me a penny!

What worries me is that I've never yet had to miss a convention due to illness, so fate must be saving up a real humdinger for when it decides to strike. Of course, the infamous 'convention tummy', brought on by eating plastic foods at irregular hours (not to mention an overenthusiastic uptake of dubious alcoholic beverages), constantly strikes, as do those mysterious bruises and abrasions which appear like stigmata on the body the mornings after a particularly good room party. However, these are mere warning shots, softening me up for The Big One. Novacon 13, being the first con for which I've been a committee member, looks an unsettlingly suitable moment for my medical bad timing to make a comeback. "What a time for Paul to break his legs", Phill Probert will say, shaking his head in shocked surprise while I lie elsewhere in a hospital bed, smirking ironically and thinking "Told you so!".....

Paul Vincent

NOVACON 13

"...THEN THIS IS NOT  
THE CORRECT  
PLACE FOR THE  
ST STEPHENS  
WHIST DRIVE?"



DAVE HADEN, 03.

# MY FAVOURITE DISASTERS

While the two terms are mutually exclusive, a disaster can have a certain attraction well after the fact. So that an occasion that seemed quite disastrous at the time may later be viewed in a completely different light.

The disaster that befell me occurred early in 1943. I was drafted into the Army of the United States. From the sheltered womb of childhood untimely ripped. Quite a change for a lot of us. Fifteen million or so. My group, assembled like cattle in a slaughteryard, were loaded onto a train and rushed off to Grand Central Palace in New York City. This was a large office building taken over by the military to turn pimply lads into killing machines.

This process involves first stripping away all individuality and human dignity. We were assembled in groups of twenty and handed folders with our records. Then told to strip and place our clothing in paper bags. Well not strip completely; we kept our shoes on so our little footsies didn't get cold. Shivering and blue we marched in a group into the large lift and were whisked up a few floors. Intimidation began. Medical technicians in blood-soaked white wrapped rubber tubes about our arms, pushed us forward, needles were jammed in, great hypodermics filled, squirted into tubes, hurled dripping aside. We fled the abattoir to even worse.

Shall I tell you what the urinalysis section looked like? I dare not. Fannish constitutions should not face such horror. Can I mention the mass proctological examination with the protologist hurrying by at the quickstep, flashlight probing? It would be too revolting. But mention can be made of the exhausting, in-depth psychological examination. The shrink speaks;

"Sit down." Cold wood on bare buttock, an uncontrollable ahiver.

"Are you afraid of me son?" Shake of head, jaw clamped shut by cold. "No, good. Answer these questions truthfully." Glare of anger before proceeding; internal resolution to speak only the truth no matter how revealing.

"Do you like girls? You do? Move on. Next."

Did anyone ever say no? Was the possibility of homosexual tendencies the only psychological quirk the military was interested in? If so, why? Officers seeking out bum boys? There was no time for deep thoughts like that at the time. Press on! Another room, another doctor. A specialist this one, an authority on bones and muscles, wise in his vast knowledge. No physical deformity would escape his all-seeing eye. "Bend your arm," he orders. I bend. He clutches my frigid wrist. "Straighten

it out." I do. He turns swiftly away. "Next." No more? Perhaps the other arm is paralysed, a leg withered, a spine bent. "Next."

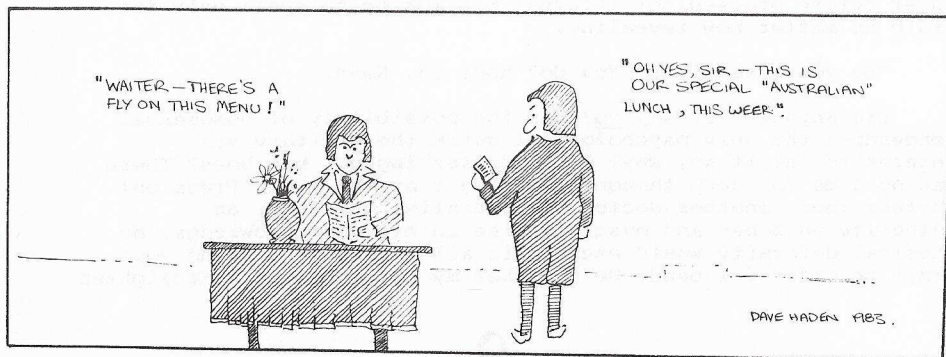
The examinations done it is back into the lift, which grinds down towards the lower floors again. It stops. The doors slide open. A button has been pressed by mistake. This is the wrong floor. The vast room before our horrified eyes is filled with female typists typing away as far as the eye can see. We stand, nude and shivering, paper folders clutched strategically before us, our blue skins now flushed red with embarrassment, but not a head turns. Perhaps they have seen this desperate sight too often before. The doors slide slowly shut and we are on our way again.

The deed is done. Our clothes are returned. We have all passed the exacting physical examinations. Quickly, before we can recover any grain of self-esteem, an officer appears and swears us into the Army. In an instant we have been transformed from schoolboys to soldiers. A few moments earlier if we played truant we would have been spoken to harshly. If we try it now it is called desertion and we will be shot.

A disaster? At the time. Now? More of an experience, or rather the beginning of an experience that included learning to kill other people before they killed you, the gaining of proficiency in military specialities like cursing, chasing girls, avoiding work and drinking until one threw up. Years later, older if not wiser, the war won, we were returned to civilian life. The little disaster that had pulled us into the military completely engulfed in the disasters that followed it. A disaster at the time but really a favourite by hindsight because it was really so minor. A tiny tremor heralding the earthquake to come.

If you want to know more about the repulsive military and their disgusting ways, your sadistic tastes will be satiated by reading Bill, the Galactic Hero.

Harry Harrison



# HOW TO BECOME A DISASTER SCHOLAR ....

The trouble with disasters is that they are too commonplace. Indeed, history would be so dull but for their annoying regularity. The passage of millenia punctuated by misfortune - or so you might be led to think.

Historical disasters are the most problematical; no witnesses survive, so how can we be sure that the events took the course we have always supposed? How do we know that the contemporary chronicler wasn't deaf, dumb and drunk? Or illiterate? Or a member of some erstwhile SDP? The Ladybird Book Of History may well note that Nero fiddled while Rome burned; what it doesn't say though is that his chip-pan catching fire started off the whole conflagration. Nero's fatal error was to ignore an earlier warning to Caesar, namely, "Beware the Fries of March".

Costly mistakes such as these are bountiful. King Alfred burning the cakes (Forgot to use the oven-timer), the Great Fire of London (an absent-minded baker overfilled his cigarette lighter) and the burning of the White House (a junior Yankee official had over-ordered on the white emulsion). The search for these errors, and their causes is fascinating. The Titanic passenger who ordered Scotch on the Rocks isn't recorded by History, and if Neville Chamberlain hadn't run out of Bog-Roll, would he have come back from Munich brandishing his piece of paper?

These are the obvious examples. Historical events are recorded as interpreted by the contemporary expert - the real significance is often missed. We, as potential disaster scholars, must look beyond the obvious. We must think laterally.

Quite often though, the facts stand for themselves. Queen Victoria's comment about "Not being amused" proves beyond all doubt that Keith Walkers ancestors were producing fanzines in the nineteenth century; Sir Walter Raleigh laying down his cloak proves that even then duplicators leaked ink - and the failure of Guy Fawkes amply demonstrates the folly of seizing power without following the example of the BSFA.

As Disaster Scholars, we can learn from Historical Precedent. Politicians don't manage to do this. As elections roll by from time to time, so do election promises and the inevitable non-fulfillment. They always fall for the same old trap of never heeding history. For scholars to enter the Academy of Disasters (A.K.A "Owens Park", Manchester), this sort of folly must be avoided. If the bars close on a convention night at 11pm, this must never be allowed to happen again. A good way to ensure this is to publicly disembowel the con-committee - this also has the bonus of adding subject matter to a game of charades, try "Entrails of Mystery and Imagination". Similarly, fanzines

praising the works of Isaac Astral must be stamped out and wiped from the face of the earth - and fans failing to pay D.West 50p for Cosmic Harmony must be consigned to the wastelands of Ordinary Life. This latter threat demonstrates the gravity of the situation, usually 1036 Tetley's Bitter.

A good way to spot a Disaster is to watch the News on TV. Not so long ago, Reggie Beaujolais on ITN was a good indicator of when a Disaster was about to strike. His eyes would glaze over, that curious slur would work itself through the corner of his mouth, the strange bottle of green medication would be raised to the lips and, yes, you knew it - disaster of disasters, the autocue had stuck. Pictures of Pamela Stephenson would appear behind him and the voice-over would be talking about some desparate criminal having escaped from Wormwood Scrubs. Beaujolais would, meanwhile, be slowly sliding from view. Other TV disasters would be England's poor showing in soccer, Trade Figures, Ronald Reagan's latest speech, the latest motorway pile-up, Ted White's latest diatribe against D.West, D.West's latest diatribe against Ted White and how come Ansible found out about the latest misdemeanours concerning Joseph Nicholas and a helicopter pilot from Vietnam.

A Disaster Scholar, however, doesn't just know the real causes of any disaster. He must aspire to greater heights if he is to make a success of his chosen profession. It is the originality of the analysis and research that goes into the investigation of the known facts that really counts. A Grade 1 Scholar will lack sufficient imagination and determination to uncover the truth. To him, the reason that King Harold lost the Battle of Hastings was because he was shouting at a deaf American Bar-tender that he wanted a shot of red-eye. A Grandmaster Scholar after years of experience and blind dedication to his craft, would know better. Harold was doomed right from the start - his Chief Scientific Officer having just invented a new version of the traditional arrow, called it the telescope. Harold, an ever ambitious chap (with a touch of Future Prediction about him) on asking what this new instrument was, was told it was a telescope, and promptly raised it to his eye and stabbed himself to death. The logic behind this is simple. We ALL KNOW that America hadn't been discovered in 1066, and thus how could there be an American bartender in deepest Sussex?

We have now briefly touched upon the various levels of scholar - a complete subject in its own right. We will not dwell on this; too intense a desire for knowledge will remove much of the mystical qualities possessed by Scholars. However, it is of use to know that Scholars have to subject themselves to rigourous training and annual examinations. Any diminution of their imaginative ability, and they could be downgraded. Thus when the first circumcision is explained away as a mere "Freudian Slip", we must begin to worry for the Scholar's ability.

Some scholars progress to great things - often creating their own unique brand of disaster. They are easy to identify; not for them the financial rewards of authenticating false diaries. No, they aspire to higher matters. They run newspapers,

they run radio-phone-ins, but best of all, they run Breakfast television. This is the best known example of the modern day disaster. It is as if it was almost designed to occupy this special position on our screens.

But for the true Disaster Scholar once in a generation there comes the Ultimate Disaster. This is the Grand-daddy of them all. The biggy. The one that changes the course of history as we know it. The one that makes brave men quake with fear; bowel control becomes a forgotten art and civilisation collapses. Few have experienced such catastrophies; those that have are but nervous, gibbering wrecks - whole lives shattered, irreparable damage caused to once itelligent minds. The cross is too big to bear. But we - we are on the threshold of an Ultimate Disaster; we the chosen few will witness this holocaust to end all holocausts -

Not Rog Peyton failing to make a profit in the Bookroom.

Not D.West losing at dominoes.

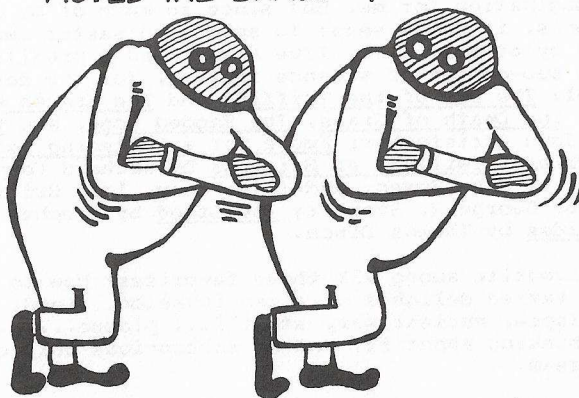
Not even Peter Weston trying to rejeuvenate the Brum Group.

No - much worse than that; a combination of events destined to destroy all that we cherish - the Thatcher government being elected for a further term and banning alcohol at all conventions.

Doom and Gloom indeed.

Alan Dorey

"THE ANGUS HASN'T BEEN  
THE SAME SINCE THEY  
MOVED THE BAR... "



DAVE HADEN '83.

# MY DREAM DISASTER.

My favorite disaster....my favorite disaster.....the Novacon committee has asked me to write a couple of pages about my "Favourite disaster". The idea haunts me (also the spelling - "favourite" is more succulent, more full of promise, than my de-u-ded American version) and I've been brooding on it for weeks now without success.

The trouble is, I've led such a sheltered life. All my flights have landed safely (although I was once stranded in the Seattle Airport for six hours with nothing to read but The Omega Point because a hijacked plane was on the runway), and none of my many visits to Southern California have featured an earthquake. The Texas Gulf Coast is often threatened by hurricanes, but although one of the memories of my childhood os of taping up the windows and moving the beds into the hall while the wind howled outside, Houston, where I lived, is too far inland to feel more than the edge of a hurricane's fury.

In 1972, newspapers all over America featured the derailment of a train just outside Chicago. One of the passengers who was trapped beneath the wreckage for hours before being rescued was Lisa Tuttle, 19, daughter of Robert Tuttle. However, you humble author (20, daughter of Robert Tuttle) was safe in her dormitory in Syracuse, New York.

Although I worked as a journalist for several years, the closest I came to any derailments, earthquakes, forest fires or tidal waves was watching made-for-TV disasters on the small screen: television was my beat.

Clearly, to write about "my favourite disaster" must be an act of the imagination for me. But since so much of my life has to do with books, it makes sense to seek my disaster among the pages written by others. Also, I've always had a predilection, among all the sub-genres of science fiction, for the cosy British disaster novel: The Day of the Triffids and The Kraken Wakes by John Wyndham; The Death of Grass, The Ragged Edge, and The World in Winter by John Christopher; Fugue for a Darkening Island by Christopher Priest; Twilight of Briareus by Richard Cowper; After the Rain by John Bowen; and (less cosy, less British) Earth Abides by George R. Stewart; The Stand by Stephen King, and The Genocides by Thomas Disch.

But my favourite among all those favorites? How to choose one among the varied delights of alien invasion, flood, famine, political collapse, nuclear war, sterility, plague..... I went to bed thinking about it, and my subconscious obliged by providing a dream.

To keep it cosy - no nightmare, this - my dream began as a

new, low-budget film based on a feminist novel about an earthquake. I admired the special effects: a mirror-glass skyscraper shattering like a golden waterfall. Imperceptibly I became a participant rather than merely an observer. Hurrying through the shaking streets, dodging falling masonry, I made my way to an underground shelter. There I found not a bunch of strangers, as I would have in either life or a novel, but a lot of my friends. My parents were there, and even my dog. We were all safe! You couldn't ask for anything cosier or more pleasant. The chaos outside was forgotten. I woke up realising my favourite disaster wasn't a disaster at all. Too bad it was only a dream.

Lisa Tuttle

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## HATLESS IN WALES.

I'm about to describe something that happened in the 1950's, that far-flung epoch of time so distant that even Harry Harrison barely recalls it. I was just sixteen, and had entered the period of my life which still today gives my enemies the opportunity for cheap jokes: I had become a trainee accountant. This five-year period was to become what was probably the great calamity of my early life, but in 1959 the realisation was barely dawning.

The day I first suspected I was never going to make it as an accountant was actually my first or second in the job. Two of the trainees who had started a couple of years before me, Jeff and Phil by name, were celebrating the fact that they had passed their intermediate exams. Jeff and Phil were beardless eighteen-year-olds, and how do you suppose they celebrated this landmark event? They went out for a drink, perhaps, or treated themselves to dinner? They went to see a movie? Or visited a theatre? Threw a party? Maybe they had a night on the town, and got laid?

Actually, what they did was none of these. They went out and bought themselves bowler hats.

You don't get many moments of penetrating insight during a lifetime, but for me this was one of them. As I sat there, naively adolescent, watching Jeff and Phil parade up and down the office showing off their new hats, I knew beyond any doubt or hope that however much I applied myself to my studies, however much I tried to play the part, I was never going to be a very good accountant.

The following winter, as the dreaded 1950's turned into the trendy 1960's, I was working with Jeff and Phil in a dull little

town in the Clwyd valley of North Wales, called Ruthin. Ruthin was just about the last sort of place one would wish to spend a weekend with Jeff and Phil, but because it was more than 200 miles back to London, and because the firm we worked for was mean and Dickensian, we were allowed home only one weekend in three. Jeff and Phil were unstimulating company. They talked accountancy rather more than you would think possible, and the only thing they read was the Financial Times. The roads in and out of Ruthin all ran through mountains, and Mold was the nearest town. Not much fun in Ruthin, whichever way you looked at it.

One Sunday the clouds came lowering in, and daylight was in short supply. Jeff suddenly proposed that the three of us should go for a drive in his car, and it was by far the best offer in three long weeks. After lunch we set off north-westwards, passing through Denbigh towards the coast.

By the time we reached Llandudno it was snowing, and as we drove down the coast towards Bangor it turned into a full-scale blizzard. Jeff fancied himself as a bit of a lad when it came to driving, and pressed on as if it were a sunny day. I was sitting in the back, white-knuckled, and peering anxiously between their twin bowler hats at the slippery road ahead. At Bangor we at last turned inland and homewards, heading down the A5 through Snowdonia. Being the trunk road to Holyhead the A5 was still open, because of the pressure of traffic, but it was obvious that by nightfall - now only half an hour away - the road would probably close until the snow let up. We carried on, and the weather worsened.

There was a delay in Betws-y-coed because of drifting ahead, but then by a miracle a snow-plough appeared and moved helpfully eastwards. We followed this, at walking pace, as far as the village of Cerrigyrudion.

Jeff, however, was impatient with our slow progress. "I'm fed up with this," he said. "I know a short cut back to Ruthin."

He swung left, and accelerated the car up a narrow road leading into the mountains.

Sitting in the back I uttered a feeble protest, actually beginning to fear for my life. But my two colleagues were united in their wish to take the short cut, pointing out that the narrow road ahead had been recently cleared by a snow-plough, as indeed it had. Night had now fallen, and the snow was blowing furiously in the headlight beams. Visibility beyond these narrow arcs was almost nil.

But I did notice, about five miles outside Cerrig, that a tractor had been parked on the side of the road, and a snow-ploughshare was attached to the front of it.

As we slithered past, I said: "Hey, Jeff, did you see...?"

But Jeff was accelerating. Ahead, in the glare of the

headlights, he had seen the place where the snow-plough had ceased to plough. Beyond were virgin snowdrifts, and Jeff was going to try to batter his way through.

We plunged into the nearest drift at about forty miles an hour, and came to a dead stop. The engine stalled, and the lights went out. It became totally dark, silent but for the wind, and almost at once the inside of the car grew very cold.

Jeff said: "I think we'd better try to reverse out, and drive back to Cerrig....."

He re-started the engine, got into reverse....but nothing happened.

"It's all right," said Jeff. "I've brought a shovel and some sacking. We'll dig our way out."

I had never before tried to climb out of the back seat of a two-door car into four feet of snowdrift, and I hope I never have to again. As soon as we were outside the false security of the car, the elements assaulted us. Visions of dying of frostbite on this blizzard-swept mountainside became ever more vivid, and likely. Even Jeff and Phil were stricken with the urgency of it, and removed their damned hats.

We spent the next part of eternity trying to dig the car out, and clear a passage back through the twelve feet or so the car had managed to penetrate before being brought to a halt. At last we felt we had a chance of getting the car out, but whenever Jeff tried to drive the back wheels spun on the compacted snow. We attempted to give the tyres grip by using the sacking, but fumbling around in the dark we were obviously doing something wrong.

While Phil went around to the front of the car to push, I looked after the sacking. I slipped it under the nearest wheel, and shouted I was ready. Phil pushed, and Jeff revved the engine. The sacking shot out from under the wheel. I retrieved the piece of sack from where it had been thrown, and we tried again. Once more the sack shot out from under the wheel.

Then it happened a third time.

It was clearly time for me to exercise the powers of imagination for which I have subsequently become famous, and so I did. I retrieved the sack and fed it under the wheel. Then, while Phil pushed and Jeff ran the engine, I stood on the sacking to help it grip.

I distinctly recall hearing Jeff rev up the engine.... but my next memory is of being head-down in the heart of a snowdrift, some distance from the car. Lying there in the cold and silent darkness, having difficulty drawing breath, it seemed to me that life had attained a kind of nadir. It was not at that exact moment I decided to become a science fiction writer, but it was

around then that my disillusionment with the world of accountancy became complete and final.

As things turned out, the 1960's were a lot more fun than the 1950's

Chris Priest

## ITS ONLY NATURAL.

He looked a bit peeved. Well I don't suppose it was anything to do with me. It's such a lousy place to work and he'd probably been on the nightshift. He almost dropped the plate onto the table. I said a cheery thank you and I thought I almost caught him looking at me. I supposed that surprised him a bit. I doubt many people say thanks to him. It's not much to serve to someone; a bowl of porridge, toast and marge and a plastic pint mug of tea. The mug was only half full and was cold and so sweet that it carpeted my mouth, wall to wall. He doesn't even make it so I don't suppose that he cares. I shan't take it personally. He did look fed up. All in all he's got a rum deal, so it's only natural.

I could do with a cup of water. You could use that tea as an emulsion. That reminds me, I still haven't finished painting through the hallway. I don't suppose I shall now. I don't expect that I'll ever go back there. Someone'll clear away the ladders and boards. They put us back a bit those ladders. I wonder what they'll think when whoever buys the place moves in? A hallway half painted in ox blood! I don't suppose they'll like maroon... very unusual it is, but it suited us. Ruthie said it would be nice having it dark. It wouldn't show the dirt. Not that we've got children. Ruthie never wanted children. I wasn't so sure about the colour, but I expect it would grow on me. Ruthie's got real taste that way.

She said kids would only tie us down, and anyway we couldn't afford them. She was right of course, specially seeing the way things have turned out. With this Government and this and that I mean. I tried for a long while to get a job. I still pop into the Job Centre when I'm in town. But after a few months you sort of give up a bit, don't you? It's only natural really. I'm not old. I'm in tip top shape for my age. Ruthie says I've got a bit of a belly coming on but that catches up with all of us, doesn't it? But there's plenty down there who are all of twenty years younger and you can train them, can't you? It makes sense to give them first pick, doesn't it?

Sometimes when I see them down there I think again that Ruthie was right about kids. What a world to bring them into. You've only got to pick up paper to see that Ruthie was right. You hardly know whether any of us are going to be here in ten years time, what with nuclear cruises and things you can't even see. I'd have been right on edge whenever the kids were out of sight. You'd worry nowadays being a parent, wouldn't you? That's only natural. I've got to admit Ruthie, you were absolutely right there, no doubt about it. It's only now and then that I think to myself how things could have been different. That is, if we'd had kids. It's just when I see the youngsters down at the Job Centre. If we'd had a girl when we were first married she'd be that age now. It might have given me something else, Ruthie. I might have had something to fall back on. But that's only natural love, isn't it? You can't blame me for that.

Ruthie, I still find myself talking to you. Is that strange? Do you remember, when we were courting, do you remember how one of us would be thinking something and the other of us would say the selfsame thing? Christ! We were so close then, love, weren't we? And do you remember how there were some mornings you wouldn't let me get out of bed, even when I had to go to work! I know, Ruthie, I know. You don't like me harking back like this, do you? But we were close. You call it living in the past. Yes, I see what you mean. I know that love. It's no good going on wishing that things are what they were. But we were close, weren't we?

That's not to say that it wasn't like that for me, love. I mean, things never really were as I remember them. Not when I say them out loud to you. But remembering the good times makes me feel really nice all over. Do you remember the walks we had in Regent's Park? We used to call it your park. There were lots of other young couples used to go there too. Do you remember how we used to give each other little presents, even when it wasn't a birthday. Happy unbirthday to you! I know Ruthie, I'm soppy like that. Your friend from evening class said I had a selective memory, that I'm a romantic. I liked that. You tell me that I should remember some of the bad bits as well, that it would help our relationship. I didn't put you on a pedestal. I like to remember the good bits. It's only natural.

You were livid when I got that watch for you last week, weren't you Ruthie? Christ, love, I feel like crying when I think about it. I know we couldn't afford it, but I said I wouldn't go out for a few Friday evenings. That seemed to make things worse. You say that I should have a life of my own, but I don't even like it down at the 'Feathers'. In my position you can't afford to get chatting to anybody. I couldn't afford to buy them a drink so I keep myself to myself. It's different for you love, having a job. But I really wanted to buy you that watch. Christ, love! It crucified me, that evening did. I felt so excited when I was wrapping it, I remember that. I wrapped it about three times before I had it right, before it was presentable. I made that little ribbon myself, you know? When you started crying I didn't know what to do with myself. I thought maybe that I'd touched you. You stood by the mantelpiece. I was watching your face. I thought

you were going to hug me.....well, I still don't know what to say, love. I felt like a kid when I'd just wet myself. I've never felt so hopeless. I sort of collapsed from inside. I just wanted you to be happy. That's all I ever wanted. Christ! Ruthie! Oh, God. I still find myself talking to you. You were angry. It's only natural that you say things that you don't mean. I went and did some decorating for a few hours.

No chance of getting any water in here. I could bang on the door, but he did look upset. I'll just wait. He'll come back in his own time to see if I'm O.K. I'm not in any hurry. I've got to talk to you love. And there's so much to say. I've got good at not being bored. You said that I didn't have enough to do. I hope you don't take offence, Ruthie, but I think you don't always give me credit. I've got quite good at being alone.

I suppose all our things'll be put in cardboard boxes and given away. Ah, well, I hope they find another good home. There's not anything that I really need, that I'll miss. I thought about the photo album, and about the watch. It's still on the mantelpiece I think. I don't need any of it now. I've not got much to look forward to now but, as you say love, there's no future in dwelling in bygones.

I killed you, didn't I? It sounds funny when I just say it like that, I mean, peculiar. I don't like the way the policeman talked about it. They weren't very nice about you either Ruthie. I had to tell them that I'd found out about you and that other bloke but they went on about it asking how many more there were and things like that. There weren't any more were there, love? Were there, Ruthie, my love? You told me you loved him. It was just a fling at your time of life, wasn't it? I can understand that. To tell you the truth, Ruthie, when I see some of those young things down at the Job Centre..... but you can't have loved him like it used to be with us. You said you felt trapped. When you've been together for twenty years it's only natural that you feel that way sometimes. But I couldn't let you leave.

They'll keep me locked up. I hope they're not all as miserable. There's nowhere I want to go. They know I won't give them any trouble. I didn't try and deceive them, Ruthie. I made things tidy in the house before I called them. I couldn't do much about tidying the front hall 'cause of all the paint pots and things and then I phoned to tell them to come. They took their time in bloody....sorry love, they took their time in coming. They've had all sorts in to talk to me but I don't feel like talking to anyone but you. It's our business, isn't it love? They know I'll not give them any trouble. That should be enough for them. But they won't let me go. It's only natural, they couldn't let me go.

Des Ryan

# "BLEEP!"

My biggest disaster in recent years was the time I fell off a castle.

It happened during my metal detector craze which lasted for about three years, on and off. People who buy metal detectors always assure you that they are not trying to find buried treasure. What they are doing, they always say, is indulging in a practical interest in the past, and the idea of turning up treasure trove is far from their minds. They are, of course, telling lies.

I'm as interested in the past as anybody else, and I can also recommend metal detecting in a rural area as a lovely relaxing way to spend a few hours. Dry land fishing is the term I invented for it. There is a strange, ineffable thrill - vaguely science fictional and fannish in nature - in lifting a grassy clod and gradually breaking it apart, checking each fragment with your detector, knowing that somewhere inside it is a metal object which may have been there for hundreds of years, and that you are going to be the first to see it in all that time. But, at the same time, only an absolute prune would try to claim that he would be just as happy to uncover a 1930's Boy Scout badge as an 1830's gold coin.

The only thing I ever found which could vaguely be classed as historical was a musket ball, which I detected in my own front garden in Ulverston. People who have never done any metal detecting may be surprised to learn that there were two classes of object which I turned up every time I went out on the prowl. The first one is money. The entire country is seeded with low value coinage of fairly recent manufacture. The second class of object was used cartridges. Perhaps that says a lot about the chief preoccupations of the human race.

Anyway, I eventually managed to found a little club in the Ulverston area so that I wouldn't feel so conspicuous when out alone with my detector. That was another difficulty - I hated being seen with the damned instrument. Groups of urchins would follow me around, the bleeping of the detector would often attract cows from miles away, and every casual passer-by would go hundreds of yards out of his way to ask what I was turning up. Oddly enough, this embarrassment factor has resulted in a wierd phenomenon. People who do find treasure are often making their first sortie with a brand new detector - and this annoys the real pros in much the same way as expert pools investors get upset when fortunes are scooped by old ladies with their first entry.

The explanation is that the metal detector neofan is highly embarrassed at making a spectacle of himself, so he racks his brain to think of a private spot, near at hand, where he can operate unseen. And this is exactly the same kind of thinking employed by somebody who has some loot that he wants to put away

and yet have easy access to.

My metal detector club did not fare very well. It turned out that MD fans are every bit as hard to regulate as SF fans. When a bunch of us went out on a group search we would solemnly vow to proceed exactly line abreast at a fixed pace and to pool all our finds for equal division later on. What always happened was that two or three would scurry ahead, and you would hear their bleeps in the distance and look up to see them cramming stuff onto their pockets. And, when asked what it was, they always claimed it was nails or barbed wire they wanted to remove from the land in case some sheep got choked. Hah!

That kind of inconsiderate behaviour had shrunk the club to two by the time we got around to trying our luck at Stank Castle, near Barrow. Joe and I poked around the ruins for a while without any success. The castle was part of a farmer's land, and farming land is very bad for metal detecting, mainly because agricultural machines keep shedding bits of themselves all over the place and giving useless signals.

After a while I got fed up and was thinking of heading to the nearest boozer for a few pints of bitter - then I got one of my brainwaves. About twenty feet up in a ruined wall was a little window. I got this vision of a distraught maiden up there, when the wooden floors still existed, watching her lover go off to battle and getting so agitated that she didn't even notice showering gold rings, necklaces, ear rings and so forth all over the window sill.

This is it, I thought. I clambered over a pile of sharp-edged boulders beneath the window and climbed up the wall like Dracula in heat, finding a toehold on every little projection. When I got to the window I checked it out - and there was nothing. Puffing reflectively on my pipe, I began to edge down the wall again - but the very first stone I entrusted my weight to flipped itself out of the wall on something like a billionth of a second.

There was no time to react. I fell that twenty feet in a kind of slow-motion consciousness, fully aware that life or death depended on the disposition of the rocks I had clambered over the way up. Strangely, I felt no fear - only sick rage over having put my one and only life at risk in such trivial circumstances. I'm glad I didn't get killed, because the sort of language I was using when I hit the rocks would have almost certainly offended St. Peter. I smashed into the boulders on my back, bounced a couple of times and rolled down onto the grass. The metal detector, following a different trajectory, somehow managed to land on top of me, inflicting further bruises - but, miracle of miracles, I was still smoking my pipe and it was undamaged.

It took weeks for me to get over that fall. My back, shoulders, arms and legs were covered with huge contusions which went through the strangest colour combinations - yellow, green, black, magenta, brown, purple..... If I hadn't managed to get

to a pub with Joe and down six pints of Hartley's best bitter within the hour it is quite possible that I would have died.

That was the main part of the disaster, but there was more to come. The salt had not yet been rubbed into the wounds.

A few days later I heard from another bloke in metal detector fandom who lived a bit further south. He had just bought his first instrument and had been trying to think of a place to try it out. He remembered seeing some ground near where he lived which was plentifully seeded with old broken red tiles. Somebody had told him that was a sign there had been Roman villas on the spot. So he went there, and while he was tuning up his detector he happened to glance down at his feet - and he found three Roman coins. They had been lying there, on the bloody surface, for almost twenty bloody centuries, and he got them - without even giving one wave of his detector.

That was me finished! I flogged my metal detector soon afterwards and am now devoting my time to much more profitable pastimes.

Finding the Loch Ness monster is going to make me rich and famous.

Bob Shaw



# THE DAY THE ROOF FELL IN .....

On my last discharge from hospital, I returned home to find a large slate lying in the middle of the front path, just outside the door. Fighting down my disappointment that it had not decapitated any itinerant Jehovah's witnesses or double glazing representatives, I gazed upwards towards its source, and discovered to my unease that there were quite a few more up there poised for the plunge to oblivion. I rubbed the top of my head protectively. Something would have to be done.

A few days later, I found myself playing host to a pair of grave looking roof repair men.

"I don't like the look of that, squire....er....madam, don't like the look of it at all. It's these here bits of wood, see, what hold the tiles up. I mean, your tiling is all right, I suppose, but your problem is up there in the battens, see. Wouldn't hold up a feather, they wouldn't. If I was you, squire, er, miss, I'd ask the council for a grant. Could do you a nice new roof for, say, a couple of thousand....."

"What's wrong with the battens?" I asked, trying to sound as though I knew all there was to know about the roofing business.

"Well.....", he said, meaningfully. He picked up a gnawed looking piece of wood, and squeezed it gently, whereupon it disintegrated into a pile of splinters and greyish powder.

"Oh shit. Is that....dry rot?" I asked, taking a nervous step backwards in case it infected my wooden leg.

"Well.....", said the roofer again, repeating the crumbling process with yet another piece of wood.

"Woodworm? Death Watch Beetle?" I offered, hoping to encourage a more informative conversation.

"Well.....", repeated the roofer. Then, just as I was giving up hope of extracting anything more from him, he seemed to remember the rest of his vocabulary. He turned to his mate.

"Well, could be...bit o' this, bit o' that, watcha think, young Barry, dry rot?" Barry grunted and spat into the flowerbed. The older roofer nodded, as though the spittle were an occult sign.

"Yes, could be. Not safe, though. Fall in, soon as look at it. And, what's more, you've had other people walking in your roof".

"What?" I said, startled, imagining hordes of Saturday shoppers taking a shortcut amongst the gables.

"Oh yes, definitely, there's sure signs, probably the neighbours, if you ask me," he suggested, leaving me more puzzled than ever. I mean, the neighbours may be Turkish, but surely their quaint ethnic customs don't involve walking on other people's rotting battens?

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The men from the council came round to see me with amazing speed. (Perhaps our exorbitant rates are spent on services to the public after all?) There was one youngish man, ("Forbes, Environmental Health"), and one man of about 60 with a large purple nose, who preferred to remain anonymous. I showed them up to the loft. Purple nose went up first.

"You've got lots of cobwebs", he announced.

"But is there any dry rot?" I asked impatiently, anxious to get back to my prescribed reclining position.

"What - dry rot?" he chortled, as though this were the best joke he'd heard for years. "You've got open eaves! Dry rot, with open eaves? Tell my another. Boring weevils, maybe, wet rot in the struts, rusting pins, definitely, and, for that matter, you could do with a new step ladder, too. But dry rot? Oh, no."

Mr. Forbes waved his clip-board dismissively.

"Come down here, and let me have a look", he said, and then added, in an aside to me, "Not that I'll be able to tell what it is." So down came Purple Nose, and up went Mr. Forbes, poking his head through the loft door gingerly, wary of contaminating his suit with our cobwebs and boring weevils.

"Oh yes, madam, that will definitely have to come off," he announced, on his descent. "Wet rot in the struts, you know. It creeps." I suppressed a shudder.

"Still," he said, cheerfully, "What's a bit of boring weevil, wet rot and rusting pins? At least it's not dry rot."

"So does that mean we don't have to have a new roof?" I asked, hopefully.

"Oh dear me, no, madam, wet rot, dry rot, makes no difference, either way, it will have to come off."

"So could I get a council grant for that?" I suggested, hoping to conclude our negotiations. Purple Nose, hovering in the background, laughed hollowly.

"Ho ho ho, it's not as easy as that, my dear. First of all we'll have to do a little tour, won't we, Mr. Forbes, just in case you have one or two minor faults that need rectifying, if you see what I mean. Mr. Forbes? When you're ready, I'll take the front, you take the back, and let's see what we can find." They

hurried off gleefully.

I waited downstairs for what seemed like hours. Then, finally, the two of them reappeared, Mr. Forbes' clipboard now containing a mass of ominous looking notes and drawings.

"Just one or two little things, Madam. New ceiling in the top back room, new windows in all south facing rooms....new plastering in the sitting room, replacement window pane and catch in the bedroom, new damp course.....all fairly minor stuff. Oh, but there is one thing that's a wee bit serious, Madam, if you don't mind coming with me." I stood up weakly, and followed the men into the back garden. Surely they hadn't found the bodies? But no. Mr. Forbes pointed triumphantly at the back wall of the house.

"Look at that then," he said, proudly.

"What?" I asked. It looked like a wall to me. ———

"I'd never have noticed if it hadn't been raining," he said, but luckily the drips from the coping showed it off a treat. It's bowed right out, see?"

"Well, fancy," said Purple Nose, scratching his head, "Whatever could have caused that?"

"Bombs?" suggested Mr. Forbes darkly, evidently wondering about IRA connections.

"Or zinc," offered Purple Nose, "there's a lot of it about round here. Nasty stuff, zinc," he said, rubbing the side of his nose.

"Yeah," said Mr. Forbes, "funny though. You'd have thought they'd all have bowed. But the other walls are dead straight. Like chimneys," he mused. "when they go, they always lean into the prevailing wind. Funny that."

"But...er...about the wall," I asked holding my breath with tension.

"Oh, the wall. Yes, well, not a very big job. Needs pulling down and rebuilding of course. Still, you can have it done at the same time as the new ceiling, can't you? Lucky it all affects the same room, isn't it?"

"Uh huh," I groaned, weakly. We'd just spent £200 having that room decorated for the new baby. I thought vaguely of suicide, or perhaps arson.

"I can see you're a bit worried about all this," said Mr. Forbes, in an understanding voice. (I had introduced myself as Miss Atkinson, so I expect he thought I was an unmarried mother.)

"Well, yes, I suppose I am rather," I mumbled, trying to collect my wits as best I could.

"Well, I tell you what. I'll write to you, telling you what needs to be done, then you write to me, telling me you can't do it and what the alternatives are, and then I'll write to you again, and we can negotiate. How's that?"

As a council employee myself, I immediately recognised that he was trying to steer me diplomatically towards a loophole, but it still sounded a little odd. I mean, how do you negotiate over a house that's about to fall apart? However, at this stage, I just wanted to get them out of the place before they discovered the subsidence and the peculiarly placed RSJ in the sitting room. "Fine," I said, "I'll look forward to hearing from you."

As they left, Purple Nose tapped the walls by the front door, apparently anxious to find one last fault.

"Studs," he observed to me, as he stepped over the threshold.

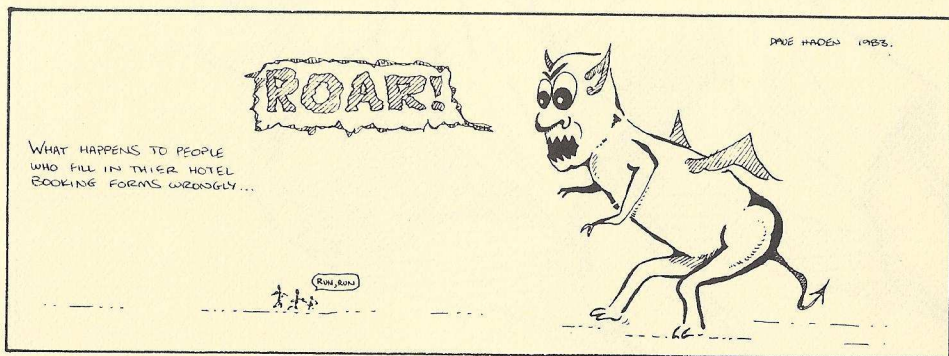
"Studs?"

"Stud walls. Funny that." And with that cryptic comment, he scurried off after Mr. Forbes, his nose glowing softly in the rain.

Alone in the house at last, I walked cautiously back into the sitting room, being careful not to dislodge any loose plaster on my way. I collapsed back into the chaise longue, my eyes drawn magnetically to the hairline cracks that extend across the ceiling. My ears strained to catch the sound of shifting foundations. Strange, the house always felt quite solid before today, and now, suddenly, it seemed to have been transformed into a rotting, derelict heap.

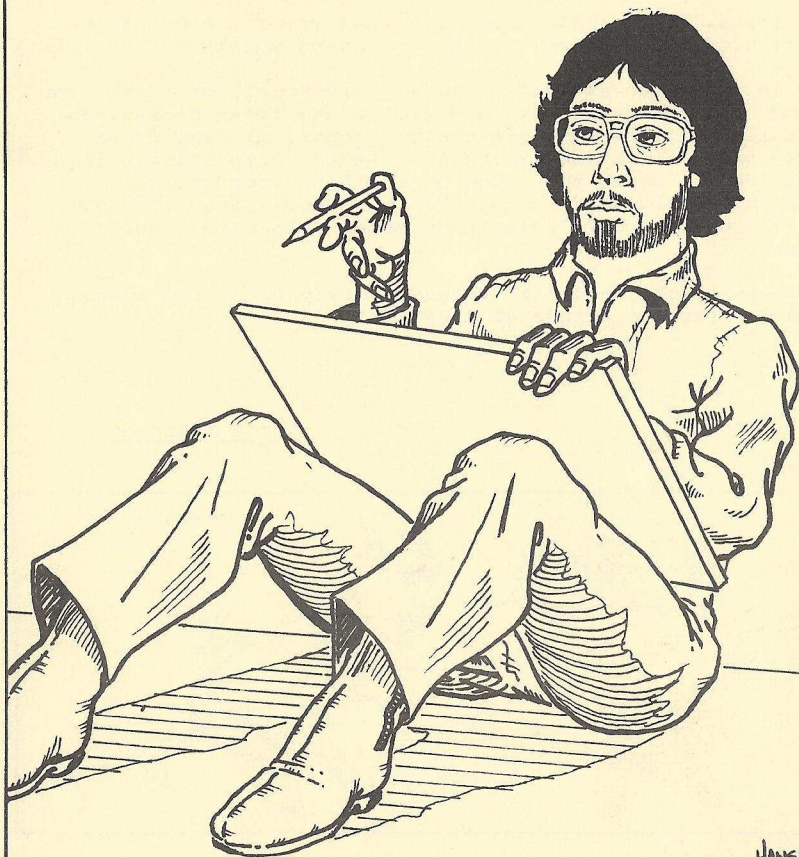
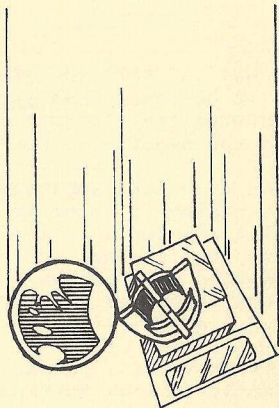
Would anyone out there like to buy a newly decorated house in Haringay? Offers in excess of £1.50 only.

Chris Atkinson



# collapsing nobas!

WHILE NOT EXACTLY MY 'FAVOURITE' THE 'DISASTER' IT'S MOST APT TO MENTION HERE IS THE FANARTIST NOVA AWARD FALLING APART IN MY HANDS LAST YEAR. IT WAS AT THE AWARDS CEREMONY ITSELF AND FEW WHO THOUGHT THE EXPRESSION ON MY FACE LOOKED STRAINED REALISED THE EFFORT IT TOOK TO HOLD THE NOVA TOGETHER UNTIL I GOT BACK TO MY SEAT. OF COURSE, I'VE REPAIRED IT SINCE AND THERE'S NO CHANCE OF IT COMING APART AGAIN.....



HANSEN '83....