



Walt Willis's
Fan Columns
from
NEBULA SF



Fanorama

Walt Willis's Fan Columns from *Nebula Science Fiction*

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These columns were first collected and introduced by Robert Lichtman as *Fanorama: Walt Willis' Fan Columns from Nebula Science Fiction* (November 1998), including “The Post-*Nebula* Columns” that appeared in *Psi-Phi* edited by Robert Lichtman and *Zenith* (later to become *Speculation*) edited by Peter Weston. This ebook text is based on the digital version now hosted by Bill Burns at <http://efanzines.com/Willis/index.htm>, with a few minor corrections. The interior artwork mentioned in the Introduction is not included.

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Introduction

Robert Lichtman

In the autumn of 1952, while still in his teens, editor/publisher Peter Hamilton launched [*Nebula Science Fiction*](#), Scotland's first (and still only) professional science fiction magazine. From the beginning, *Nebula* carried Walt Willis's column, which at first was called "The Electric Fan". Walt changed its name to "Fanorama" after, mysteriously, skipping the thirteenth issue. A savvy editor, Hamilton catered to fandom in a big way – besides "Fanorama", *Nebula* also carried "scientifilm" reviews by Forry Ackerman, book reviews by Ken Slater, and a lively letter column. Hamilton was also no slouch when it came to selecting stories for the magazine. *Nebula* carried the first published work of Bob Silverberg, Bob Shaw and Brian Aldiss.

Production of *Nebula* was obviously done "on the cheap", as the printer credit changed frequently throughout the run. Some of the copies in my set are in better shape than others, which partly accounts for some of the variability of print quality; but mostly it's due to what might be considered the professional equivalent of mimeo problems: broken type, irregular print density, offset, etc. For greater readability they're 25% larger than in their original appearance, which, I hope, helps to mitigate these irregularities.

I have no idea how many people discovered and entered fandom as a result of "Fanorama"; Walt acknowledges that the late Ethel Lindsay was one such recruit (see page 45). When I first announced this collection, I solicited introductions from anyone whose fannish origins could be traced to Walt's columns. Only one person responded, Darroll Pardoe, who wrote:

Walt didn't actually get me into fandom directly, but he prepared the ground in my mind. I discovered and was captivated by science fiction at a remarkably tender age. I was seven when *The Eagle* children's comic started publishing with its "Dan Dare: Pilot of the Future" strip, and soon afterwards Radio Luxembourg started a series based on the same character which I listened to devotedly. By 1953 I had discovered the magazines, which back then consisted of British Reprint Editions of some American titles such

as *Galaxy* and *If*, together with Ted Carnell's stable – and *Nebula*. I was always fascinated by Walt's column, and intrigued by this sub-culture of conventions and fanzines. I never related to it as something I would get involved with myself, but remember that I was very young and my actual experience (as opposed to my imagination) was limited.

Nevertheless, Walt made it sound as though SF fans were having a wonderful time and over the years I picked up a lot of information about fandom from his columns. So when Ken Cheslin (bless him) put an advert into *New Worlds* early in 1960 for the newly founded Stourbridge & District SF Circle (SADO), Dave Hale and I spotted it and were astonished. Suddenly everything fell into place for me. Fandom was no longer a distant concept visible only in the pages of *Nebula*; it was real and existed right in our own village. We contacted Ken and that was it. But without the years of preparation when Walt had given me, I might have ignored that advert. And my life would then, certainly, have taken some very different turns.

So I shall always be grateful to Walt Willis, and I look forward to rereading his *Nebula* columns. I wonder how they will compare to my memory of them.

Most of the artwork in this collection is by the late Arthur Thomson (ATom), all taken from *Nebula*, where Arthur's artwork was featured extensively. He illustrated many stories, provided spot cartoons, and did 23 of its 41 bacovers. Arthur wasn't the only artist coming out of fandom to contribute to *Nebula*: the headings for "The Electric Fan" and the earlier "Fanorama" columns were done by Alan Hunter. Other fan artists who appeared in its pages were Terry Jeeves, Eddie Jones and Harry Turner.

Nebula folded in June 1959, but that wasn't the end of "Fanorama". When I asked Walt later that year to contribute to the first anniversary of my own first fanzine, *Psi-Phi*, he sent me a column that had been orphaned with *Nebula*'s demise; it also appears here. Walt revived "Fanorama" in 1964 and produced four more installments for Pete Weston's *Zenith*. Those columns also appear in this collection. In addition, I've included a letter from Beryl Henley Mercer that provides context for Walt's final column.

And now, Himself....

Robert Lichtman
November 1998

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The Electric Fan: Autumn 1952

(Introductory) **A GAEL FROM WALT WILLIS**

Some people are quite baffled by the phenomenon known as science fiction fandom. After all, they point out, you don't find readers of detective stories publishing amateur magazines or travelling hundreds of miles to conventions. Why should readers of science fiction behave the way they do?

Well, part of the answer is probably that nobody sneers at people for reading detective stories. (Because, of course, reading about people being murdered in brutal and complicated ways is a healthy relaxation, whereas reading about atomic energy and spaceships is escapist and a bit queer. But now, imagine a young fellow who has an unusual hobby, such as, say, studying old tramcars. He has been interested in trams for years, but he's never found anyone else whose interests run along those lines. All his friends think he's crazy, but he's got used to that by now. Then one day he's in a strange part of the town looking for a tram depot when he comes across one of those newsagent's shops that specialize in foreign newspapers and hobby magazines – and, there it is!

THE TRAMCAR CONNOISSEUR ***(Incorporating The Bus Fancier's Bulletin)***

As he leafs through the magazine with trembling fingers he realizes that he is *not* alone. All over the world, it seems, there are tramcar fans, kindred souls who think everyone else is a bit crazy for not taking an interest in tramcars. He writes to one of the addresses in the magazine and in no time at all there he is, a fully fledged member of the National Tramcar Association, joining enthusiastically in their bitter controversy with the British Tramcar League. He has found a new world, far more congenial than his workaday one. He wonders how he used to live without it.

Well, of course, there actually are organizations of tramcar fans, so it's not so

surprising that there's such a thing as science fiction fandom. What is unusual about it is that it's about a hundred times more lively and literate and interesting than any other specialized group. Let's tell ourselves this is because people like us who read science fiction are more imaginative and intelligent than the average; and prove it by taking a look at fandom for yourself. It's not an organized society. There's no door you have to batter down to come in. Just write some fan editor for a copy of his magazine, and if you don't like it, that's that. But you probably will. Who knows, you may even find yourself wanting – to write an article or story yourself. Plenty of people have found that fandom has released talents they never suspected they had. More than half the famous editors and authors whose names you see in your favourite science fiction magazines, British and American, started off as ordinary fans like you and me.

There are ten fan magazines in Britain at the moment, but the best ones for anyone to start with are *Operation Fantast* (Captain Ken Slater, 13 Gp. RPC, BAOR 29, 1/3 per issue) and *Science Fantasy News* (A.V. Clarke, 16 Wendover Way, Welling, Kent. 6d. per issue). Both these feature news and reviews of magazines, books and films, and both are tops in their class. Their editors will be glad to answer any questions you ask, but don't forget to enclose a stamp for the reply. Fan publishers are not interested in making money, but they're not very keen on losing it either.

By WALT WILLIS.
from *Nebula* No. 1, Autumn 1952

The Electric Fan: Spring 1953

Latest fan news from the leading light of British fandom

A couple of months ago I was a guest at the biggest science fiction gathering of all time, the Tenth Anniversary World Convention in Chicago. The hotel where it was held – or rather where the organizers tried to hold it, for sometimes it seemed to be getting away from them – was one of those places where you change from “local” to “express” elevators at the 20th Floor, and so vast that there were two other conventions going on in it at the same time as ours. Milling around in this metropolis were nearly a thousand science fiction writers, editors, publishers and fans, all as anxious to meet and talk to one another as to attend the official programme. It’s no wonder the Convention Committee were almost overwhelmed, but, given that hotel – or rather, to judge from the bill, having bought and paid for it – no one could have done a better job. Their star-studded programme was put on with no more unpunctuality than seems to be traditional at sf conventions, whether in London or America, and very few items had to be left out. It might have been better if some of them had, because the only people at the morning sessions seemed to be the few who had had their all night parties closed down by the house detectives or who had finally broken themselves of the habit of sleep.

The main feature on the first day was a debate on flying saucers between Willy Ley and Raymond Palmer which ended with the subject still very much in the air but still unexplained, and a lecture on “Life – Elsewhere and Elsewhen” by Nobel Prizewinner, H.J. Muller.

Next day there was a discussion among the editors of the main American sf magazines, all patting one another on the back with only occasionally a knife concealed in the hand; and a banquet at which the speakers were Hugo Gernsback, Sprague de Camp, E. E. Smith, Clifford Simak, me and Anthony Boucher. Even these brilliant minds were outshone however by the wit of toastmaster Robert Bloch, who seems to be America’s final answer to our William F. Temple. After this there was a Masquerade Ball lasting until dawn, at which half the fans seemed to be disguised as extra-terrestrial

monsters and the rest as human beings.

On the third and last day everyone who was still conscious crowded down to hear addresses by John W. Campbell and Robert Bloch, each brilliant in their own way. A surprise item was a “Lecture on the Atom” by one “Professor Updiddle”, which turned out to be an excellent music-hall act by “World Citizen” Garry Davis, whom few of us had known to be both a science fiction fan and an accomplished comedian.

Other odd items scattered through the three days’ programmes were talks on various subjects, a debate on the importance of fandom, a book publishers panel, a guitar and song recital by Ted Sturgeon, an auction, a play, some TV science fiction films and a science fiction ballet. No one could have said the programme lacked variety.

In those three hectic days I met just about everyone in American science fiction, and came out of the whirlwind with pleasant memories of many interesting people and a few general impressions. For instance. Famous authors, there, as here, are just ordinary people, who have never quite recovered from their astonishment at finding themselves revered by young fans, but who rather like the sensation all the same. Professionals and fans mix less with each other than we do in Britain, probably because there are so many more of both. Reports of rowdiness at American conventions are greatly exaggerated. American fans are more enthusiastic and less self-conscious than British fans, which is maybe why they enjoy their Conventions more.

I found both them and the pros very likeable and friendly people, less “foreign” in outlook than non-fans at home. It’s nice to feel you can go nearly anywhere in the English-speaking world and find people who are already friends.

One item of topical interest to us was the voting for the site of next year’s convention. This really was fiercely contested, and the San Francisco group spent some \$800 propagandizing their cause only to see the nomination go by a narrow majority to Philadelphia. I can’t imagine this happening in Britain, where there’s neither the enthusiasm nor the money, but we are beginning to have the same problem since the rise of powerful fan movements in the North of England. The trouble here is that while the Northerners have the energy and the ability to put on a convention, their cities lack the tourist attractions

of London and the fan attractions of its famous authors. And that it seems as hard to bring one up North as the other. At any rate no Londoners showed up at the recent Manchester Convention. There's been some resentment about this in the North but the reason was nothing more than London lethargy plus the firm conviction that there was nothing up North that there wasn't more of at home.

However as a local gathering the Mancon was a success. About 80 people attended, mostly from the Liverpool and Manchester areas. The lion of the affair was John Russell Fearn, who very sportingly, came out of his den to be bearded. In a lively question and answer session Fearn, who is also Vargo Statten and some fourteen other pocketbook authors, frankly admitted that he wrote down to his audience because he didn't believe there was a market in Britain for good science fiction. It's up to us to show him otherwise. Fearn also showed a film he had made and acted in himself, and generally heaped coals of fire on fandom's head for some of the harsh things it has said about him. The only other professional author present was eighteen year old John Brunner, who has just sold a thousand dollars worth of fiction to American markets since his first story appeared in *Slant* a year ago. He reported on the progress of *Nebula* to an audience eager to do all they could to help.

The rest of the Mancon programme was put over with such efficiency as to prove that the organizers are quite capable of putting on a National Convention and need only the material to work with. Whether they get this or not depends on the London Circle, who will have to make up their minds soon whether to continue to hold the Convention themselves or give their wholehearted support to the North.

NOTE. – In fairness to all concerned I'd like to make it clear that all credit for the title "The Electric Fan" should go to your editor.

WALTER WILLIS
from *Nebula* No. 2, Spring 1953

The Electric Fan: Summer 1953

News and Views from the World's Favourite Science Fiction Fan **WALTER A. WILLIS**

When you go burying your nose in this magazine to get that nice new-book smell, don't do it between these pages. Ordinarily I'd be only too happy to have you use my column for a nasal cemetery, but this time it wouldn't be safe. This instalment is being written while I'm suffering from flu, gravely complicated by something called influenza. It must be a particularly violent form of it too, because I've already used up two boxes of sulfa pills and one doctor. The poor fellow took one look at me and then went to bed with nausea and a high temperature. People don't usually get a high temperature from looking at me, however much they may claim I make their blood boil, and this worried my sensitive soul. I visualized myself as a Scourge, eliminating one by one the entire medical profession, perhaps even the human race, and finally dying alone behind barbed-wire entanglements while the survivors argued whether I should be atom-bombed, fired off into space, or merely walled in with lead. However the second doctor lurked at a safe distance, just sending a volunteer nurse into the area with a syringe full of penicillin, and it looks as if we may all live.

On the whole I can't recommend flu as a disease for fans. From time immemorial we have been looking for a nice little disease that is just serious enough to keep us away from work, but not serious enough to interfere with the really important activities of life like reading science fiction, writing, and looking out for the postman. Some fans claim to have discovered such a disease. they call it Stigwort's Disease and point out that it is the most dangerous disease of all because it has absolutely no symptoms! You don't even know you have it and might go on living with it in ignorance for eighty, maybe a hundred years ... then poof; out you go like a light. Horrifying. But though obviously it must be pretty common it hasn't yet been recognized by our backward medical authorities, and us fans will just have to continue looking among their existing stock. Definitely this flu thing won't do.

Your editor suggests that this time I might review some fanmags. A good idea, son. I could almost forgive you for that Electric Fan title. He also suggests that maybe I could be a bit funnier this time. Nerve! Friends, you won't believe this, but as originally written the first two instalments of this column were so brilliant, so crammed with wit and humour, and so obviously the work of an inspired genius, that your editor was afraid the rest of the magazine would be completely overshadowed by them. Accordingly he substituted something less spectacular and sold the original manuscripts to a syndicate of script-writers for an enormous sum.

I said you wouldn't believe it. Ah well, on to the reviews.

Space Times, December, 1952/January, 1953. Published by Eric Jones, for the Norwest Science Fantasy Club of Manchester. Editor Eric Bentcliffe, 47 Alldis St., Stockport, Cheshire, Subscription 6/- a year (12 issues). This is really two separate issues of *ST*, huddled together for warmth in the financial blizzard which recently struck the N.S.F.C. Among the cleverer items is a wicked parody of the weighty, not to say heavy type of article that Ken Slater likes to write about semi-mythological characters such as Robin Hood. The anonymous parodist (suspected of being London fan Vince Clarke) knifes various respected fan personalities in the back in the course of a dead-pan biography of one Roobin Hod, complete with scholarly footnotes and an epitaph reading:

“Benyth thys clodd lyes Hod the Ghod,
Thou'rt trod t'sod o'er a reet odd bod.”

There are also two instalments of a well-written column by one Dale Smith of America, the first devoted to telling us how much better off everyone is in America than we are here, and the second to bemoaning the fact that the life of science fiction magazines is limited to a couple of hundred years on account of “the oxidizing effects of sunlight and oxygen”. Obviously Mr. Smith's conscience has been gnawing him after he wrote that heartless first instalment and he is trying tactfully to make amends for having reminded his Manchester friends of their terrible plight. His message of hope is that while they may all be perishing miserably from starvation, poverty, and ignorance of the American way of life, they can at least die happy in the assurance that their collections will live after them, preserved for eternity against oxidizing agents by the inimitable climate of their city.

Operation Fantast, Winter, 1952. Editor Capt. K. F. Slater, 13 Gp. R.P.C., B.A.O.R. 29. Subscriptions: four issues for 5/- or 75¢. This issue starts off with a bang-up-to-the-year report on the 1952 London Convention called “With Bentcliffe and Cohen Through Darkest Bloomsbury”. I wondered about the reference to “darkest” Bloomsbury until I realized that the black rectangles lying here and there about the report like coffins were intended to be photographs of the proceedings. They look as if they had been taken in a coal cellar by someone with a broken cigarette lighter and unquenchable optimism. However the report itself, by Peter Campbell, is bright enough to make up for them. The last thing in the issue is a short but completely pointless story about a were-skunk. It stinks. Fortunately the rest of *Operation Fantast*, reviews of mags and books and articles about writers and writing, is of the usual high standard. The only item I found disappointing was one called “Lovecraft’s Amateur Press Works”. This sounded a nice cheerful article and I started it full of interest to find out what had been wrong with the press in the first place and how they’d managed to get it going again. Imagine my disappointment when it turned out to be just a list of hitherto unknown works by H. P. Lovecraft, the Weird Horror author of American Literature. I don’t know why they keep digging up more of this stuff when no one can read what’s cluttering up the place already. Let’s hope they eventually find something worth reading, even if it’s only a dirty limerick Lovecraft threw off in a human moment.

Well, that’ll have to be all the reviews for now – I’m beginning to see spots before my eyes again. Nothing serious, I suppose, but I can’t help feeling my eyes should see them first. However I’ll probably be recovered in time to see you at the London Convention, Bonnington Hotel, 23/24 May. (Particulars from Convention Secretary, White Horse Tavern, Fetter Lane, London E.C. 4.)

from *Nebula* No. 3, Summer 1953

The Electric Fan: Autumn 1953

Latest News of Fan Activities From **WALTER A. WILLIS**

Even 'way back last autumn there were signs that this year's British Convention was going to be a very different thing from the desultory lecture sessions of previous years. At one time, for instance, it was whispered that the proceedings were to open by everyone dancing the conga, by way of breaking the ice – or more probably a few legs. There were few possible events in science fiction I'd rather have seen than this, even Man's first landing on the Moon. The prospect of the more staid British authors and editors cutting a rug under the shocked eyes of their younger admirers seemed far more entrancing than Arthur C. Clarke running up a flag, and a good deal less probable. In fact, I wouldn't even have thought it was possible if I hadn't known that the London Circle had recently received a blood transfusion called Bert Campbell (editor of *Authentic*, if your editor is one of those who thinks his readers strong enough not to expire with shock at the news that there are other s.f. magazines) and that anything was likely to happen.

In fact the Convention opened quietly enough, with the usual ritual delays and apologies for the cancellation of the proposed film showings. Experienced conventioners were so accustomed to these that they hardly noticed them. There followed a speech by prominent author Wm. F. Temple, mainly on his traditional subject, Arthur Clarke, who this time had to be insulted some 3000 miles behind his back since he is busy spending our money in underwater fishing in Florida – engaged, as Temple sinisterly put it, “in submersive activities”. For the rest of the day various talks, plays, discussions, etc. of varying merit succeeded one another with the efficiency of a well oiled machine.

Unfortunately, at some period during the night the machine seems to have got too well oiled. The worst thing that can possibly happen to a Convention had happened – the Committee had started to enjoy themselves. The first part of the second day's programme staggered dazedly through confusion to chaos, a

large part of the audience leaving for what it thought was a lunch interval and coming back just in time to meet everyone else going out for the same meal.

However by teatime the Convention had pulled itself together with a jerk. U.S. author L. Ron Hubbard made an unexpected appearance and proved himself a very accomplished public speaker, though handicapped on this occasion by being both privately and publicly warned not to say anything about dianetics. Instead he announced his return to science fiction writing and deftly inserted several plugs for his forthcoming novel which, he said, was calculated to drive insane everyone who read it. Judgement must be reserved on this claim, since apparently no one has yet read the book except Hubbard. In the same session there were also interviews with guest of honour Bea Mahaffey, editoress of American *Other Worlds* and with your own Peter Hamilton, who though not as pretty as Bea, acquitted himself even more competently under Ted Carnell's cross examination.

This was the last serious note in the Convention which seemed to have been designed to upset all Miss Mahaffey's notions about reserved Englishmen. A knockabout skit in which Bert Campbell and Bryan Berry played the parts of eccentric scientists was followed by what was solemnly announced as a visit from the D'Oyley Carte Ballet Coy. However the "Company" decided to put the horseplay before the D'Oyley Carte and we were treated to the breathtaking spectacle of critic Fred brown, author Ted Tubb, Convention Treasurer Charlie Duncombe, and fan Don Buckmaster, all dressed as young ladies and cavorting coyly about the stage to the strains of "Danse Macabre", protecting their honour against male impersonators Dorothy Rattigan and Daphne Buckmaster.

After this the Convention petered out with an auction, in an atmosphere of premature post mortem. In spite of the irritatingly clammy weather and the thought emanations of the powerful and highly critical Northern contingent (all convinced they could do much better and determined to try next year) it seemed to be the general opinion that the Convention Committee had made a magnificent and on the whole successful attempt to put over a really lively Convention.

There was one item of serious business I'd like to mention. A Two-Way Transatlantic Fund has been inaugurated to send chosen British fans to American Conventions and also to bring American fans to ours. I think there

are very few of us who haven't cause to be grateful in one way or another for the generosity of American fans, and here's our opportunity to do something in return. Contributions should be sent to me at 170 Upper Newtownards Road, Belfast, Northern Ireland, and will be publicly acknowledged in the fan press.

from *Nebula* No. 4, Autumn 1953

The Electric Fan: September 1953

***Latest News of Fan Activities* From WALTER A. WILLIS**

It seems to be raining fanmags in Manchester these days, which must be a nice change for the inhabitants. While the rest of English fandom seems to have been paralysed by the Convention the Mancunians have been living up to their own modest description of themselves as “Great Britain’s Most Active Fan Group” to the extent of producing both the fanmags I have to review, plus another one which I think is on the way but hasn’t arrived in time. I hope it’s not using the same mode of travel as another Manchester magazine I remember, which was described by a more hair-raising reviewer as “looking as if it had been kicked all the way from Salford”. An unkind remark but justified, though recalling the muddy printing and washed-out appearance of that issue I think maybe “dribbled” would have been a better word than “kicked”. On the other hand, these two magazines are the most attractive looking fanmags published in England since oldtime fan Harry Turner retired from amateur publishing some twelve years ago. This isn’t surprising, since the new publisher of both of them is that same Harry Turner, walking the earth again like a giant from a former era and shaking the ground for complacency from under the feats of the lesser publishers of today.

Astroneer, a Nor-West Science Fantasy Club Publication (How I love these long names the fans think up. I get paid for every word.) edited by Paul Sowerby and Harry Turner, 9 Willow Bank, Church Lane, Moston, Manchester 9. Quarterly, 1/- per copy. This one has a nicely executed two-colour cover and the reproduction throughout is of such a high standard that I think the manufacturers of the duplicator used would do well to buy Harry Turner and put him on exhibition throughout the country. He wouldn’t be the first fan to make an exhibition of himself, judging from the vignettes of the London Convention published here under discreet anonymity and the title “Coroncon Comments”. Such goings-on! Another more serious article deals with the science of general semantics, which used to be a very popular

subject in fanmags until Korczybski's book was published in a cheap edition and fans actually tried to read it. Most notable of the other comments is a fanciful little story called "Love Among The Robots", all about a romance between a shoe-shine machine and an automatic timekeeper. It ends unhappily, but then stories which deal with robots as people inevitably do. There's always some flaw when machines try to have love affairs with one another ... a screw missing, as it were.

Zenith, Harry Turner, address as above. Irregular, 1/- per copy. This mag is Turner's own personal brainchild, and something of a prodigal son too since it's the same mag that made his name twelve years ago. He has certainly killed the fatted calf for this issue. The contents can't really live up to their presentation but they go down fighting. They include a drily humorous "Lament for Science Fiction" by D. R. Smith, desiccated to the proposition that there has been no true science fiction since 1930. Mr. Smith's criterion for true science fiction is apparently that it has *footnotes*, presumably like the ones the old stagers will remember....

NOTE. – The reason Jon Bronson's blood ran cold at the sight of the hideous monster from the Asteroid Belt was presumably that the waving of the creature's tentacles agitated the molecules of air in the room which in accordance with the Second Law of Thermodynamics (p. 257) thereby in turn reduced the temperature of the corpuscles in Jon's bloodstream, increasing their viscosity and slowing down their rate of flow in accordance with Bode's law (p. 345). Actually, of course, the intrepid space explorers of the future will guard against this contingency by the use of miniature immersion heaters in the main arteries, as predicted in the last issue of *The Electrical Experimenter* in my article "I Make People's Blood Boil". – Hugo Gernsback.

This was known at the time as "the educative value of science fiction", but is now referred to in literary circles as turgid crud. Smith goes on to admit that we are well rid of this sort of thing, which makes one wonder was there any point to the article other than to illustrate how well Smith can write with his tongue in his cheek – admittedly neither the best implement nor the best surface for fine writing. The most promising feature is one called BLAST, which is to be devoted to denunciation, satire and sheer vulgar abuse of various personalities in the s.f. world. Even the most respected and venerable

figures are not to be spared, it seems, for the first victim is none other than myself. Not, I am surprised to see, for any of the things I am ashamed of, but for relaying an article to an American fanmag that spoke too well of Ted Carnell (By which true but thoroughly misleading description I think I've got my own back). But probably the best things in this excellent magazine are the cartoons by Denness Morton who is, I am told, 78 years of age, female, and a Scottish Nationalist. In spite of all this she seems to have a keen sense of humour. I was told she's a dianeticist, too, but I have an idea someone has been pulling my leg and I don't want to be sued for libel.

from *Nebula* No. 5, September 1953

The Electric Fan: December 1953

Latest News of Fan Activities **From WALTER A. WILLIS**

Despite the fact that most people seemed to think that last year's World Convention in Chicago was too big, the organizers of this year's one at Philadelphia persisted in advertising that theirs would be even bigger. Well, of course, it wasn't. Attendance was a mere 650, which hardly seems enough for a quorum after the hordes of Chicago. However, by all accounts – except the financial variety – it seems to have been a success, at least from the point of view of the ordinary guest. One of the far from ordinary guests, incidentally, was editor Bert Campbell, of *Authentic*, paying his first visit to America. (By the way, I'd like to make it clear that it was he that paid it – he wasn't subsidized by British fandom in any way as their representative, and indeed wouldn't even let his name be considered when we were thinking of sending someone to the Philcon. Our representative won't be going until next year and he will be chosen by vote). Bert caused quite a sensation, one awed American fan commenting that his beard was the most fantastic thing in all science fiction, several people asking him did he come over by submarine, and some asking was he going to describe his hair-raising experiences during the programme or, alternatively, challenge Richard Shaver to a debate. Unfortunately his spot on the programme came in the morning when few conventioners are awake, except possibly those who are just staggering off to bed. I can imagine some of these late revellers casting a delirious look at Bert and deciding they'd lay off the stuff for good. The morning is the time they always put strangers on because they don't know how they're going to turn out. (I remember turning out myself in answer to a frantic telephone call and rushing onto the speakers' dais without even having had time to shave. The audience must have thought from Bert's chin that *he'd* overslept from the last Philcon in 1946).

Fortunately the irrepressible Bert made another and unscheduled appearance later on in the day when during the voting for the site of the 1954 Convention he put in an unexpected bid for London. He actually got 61 votes, too, which

makes one speculate what would have happened if in some moment of madness he'd been given a majority. Since only about two of those present would have been likely to afford to come to London, the other 648 would presumably have had to vote all over again for their "regional" convention or do without one altogether. An unthinkable thought. The nomination actually went to San Francisco, being pushed through by the Philadelphia group who thereby made some amends for having captured the honour from 'Frisco last year by adroit political manoeuvring.

Other notable events were a hilarious speech by Isaac Asimov as toastmaster at the banquet, where the awards were presented. That for the fan personality of the year went to Forry Ackerman, who announced he was passing it on to our own Ken Slater for the great work he has done for fandom and science fiction. The award for best American promag was diplomatically split between *Galaxy* and *ASF*. The award for the best novel went to Bester for *The Demolished Man*. The vote for the best fanmag was so widely dispersed, the only people really concerned being fan editors and each doubtless voting for his own, so that no award was made.

One original feature of the Convention was the publication of a daily newsheet, which must have been a great boon for people who were wondering where they'd been last night.

Reviews.

Space Times (Organ of the Nor-west Science-Fantasy Club). Editors Eric Bentcliffe and Eric Jones, 47 Alldis St., Gt. Moor, Stockport, Cheshire. Subscription 7/6 for 12 issues.

From the June issue the covers take a Turner for the better, by way of celebrating the magazine's anniversary. This issue is nicely turned out but suffers from a surfeit of fiction. There are no less than five stories in this issue, four by fans and one by John Russell Fearn – Vargo Statten to you and half the British pocketbook industry. Two of them are utter drivel. The shortest and best, terms usually synonymous in fanmag fiction, is by Eric Bentcliffe.

Orbit (Leeds Science Fiction Association), Sept./Oct., 1953. Editor G. Gibson. Subscription 1/- per issue to J. Smillie, 3 New Inn St., Wortley,

Leeds, 12. I'm afraid I couldn't possibly recommend you to start your subscription with this first issue – I sometimes think that all fan editors should start with their second issues, just as the week should begin on Tuesday – but it does show a great deal of promise. The most interesting article in this rather small first edition is by Mike Rosenblum, recounting the proud story of how British organized fandom started in Leeds 17 years ago.

from *Nebula* No. 6, December 1953

The Electric Fan: February 1954

Latest News of Fan Activities **From WALTER A. WILLIS**

You may remember that in the last *Nebula* I mentioned there would be an election to choose a representative to be sent to the San Francisco Convention next September. Well, seven candidates have been duly nominated and the election is now raging in all its fury. The seven are Peter Campbell, Vincent Clarke, Walter Gillings, Derek Pickles, Michael Rosenblum, Tony Thorne and James White. Ballot forms and election literature can be obtained from me at 170 Upper Newtownards Road, Belfast. There's not much more I can tell you that wouldn't be out of date by the time this is published, but if you are interested please write. And, of course, all contributions will be thankfully received, however great. After all, it's not the thought behind them that counts so much as the money.

Now, forward to the fan-magazines: –

Space Diversions No. 7. Editors Norman Shorrock, John Roles and David Gardner, 12a Rumford Place, Liverpool, 3. 1/- per copy. This bi-monthly magazine, having been absent for something like six months, now breaks the news that it has gone irregular. To dry our tears, however, we're presented with almost a quarter ream of duplicating paper in the form of a large family size Christmas number. The strain of giving birth to this mammoth issue seems unfortunately to have overcome the Christmas spirit, and to some this Christmas box will feel more like one on the ears. The Londoners will be particularly troubled by the North wind: a bitter blast about the last Convention is all they get for their trouble in organizing it. All I can say is that the next one, at Manchester, had better be good. Other things in this Christmas stocking, apart from a Liverishpudlian foot, include a Staple-donnish "History of Mars" by "Anon" (an author who has written some excellent if old-fashioned poetry, but whom I never expected to see in a fanmag) and a novelette by Dave Gardner which is good enough for a promag – in fact too good for some. There is also, thank goodness, the final instalment of a "round robin" serial which has been round far too long. This

poor little robin, like the one in the song, should have long ago been put out of its Missouri.

Space Times No. 12. Eric Bentcliffe, 47 Alldis Street, Gt. Moor, Stockport, Cheshire. 6d. per copy. This 60 page Christmas issue still shows the aftereffects of a recent change in publishers, but most of it is worth a little eye-strain. Most legible, and readable, is a little gem by that jewel personality Vincent Clarke, a brilliant and subtle satire called “Scrooge on Ice” which is pleasantly unexpected after the rather broad and simple humour of the Northern fans. Wickedly mimicking Dickens’s *Christmas Carol*, it describes how Scrooge, a fan about to abandon fandom for the fleshpots of professional writing, is shown the error of his ways by the ghosts of Fandom Past, Fandom Present – and the Fandom That May Be.

Outside, a small boy was whistling “Two Little Men On A Flying Saucer”. Glorious! Glorious!

“Hey, boy! Do you know the all-night Post Office?”

“Yus, mate.”

“What an intelligent boy!” said Scrooge. “He should grow up to be a fan. Go around there now, my little man, and tell them to send a messenger with some Postal Orders. Here, I’ll give you a letter to take to them. Come back in five minutes and there’s five shillings for you.”

The boy was off like an A-bomb.

“I’ll send for all the fanzines I’ve ever heard of,” whispered Scrooge, rubbing his hands and splitting with a laugh. “And an extra big one ... no, two, for my membership of the Supermancon and a contribution to the Transatlantic Fan Fund.”

With a sweep of his hand he sent story manuscripts and rough drafts flying from his desk, and sat down at the typewriter. Perhaps he could put out a oneshot fanzine to send with the Postal Orders? Ideas were bubbling up inside him; supremely fannish ideas that weren’t worth a light on the market. Whistling merrily he started typing away.

The piece is a notable example of a recent trend in fan writing, the humorous

story which carries a half-concealed, half-sincere message, in this case “What shall it profit a fan ...?” I’m sure that it’s without any intention of pointing the moral that the editor runs in the same issue a humorous story by Arthur C. Clarke exhumed from a 1938 fan magazine. (Ah, what genius he had then!)

Fission No. 1. Colin Parsons and G. M. Wingrove, 31 Benwood Court, Benhillwood Road, Sutton, Surrey, England. 9d. per copy. Lithographed. What are things coming to? It’s always been a fine old tradition of amateur publishing that first issues are illegible, unreadable, and consist almost entirely of a long apologetic editorial. This one, however, is well produced and interesting, and the editorial consists of six succinct sentences. In fact, there’s a blank space below it which must be one of the largest blank spaces to appear on purpose in a British fanmag since before the war. What’s more there are hardly any misprints, though you might expect a few clerical errors from anyone named Parsons. The contents include an article by Ken Slater about the influence of Lee Hoffman and myself on British fandom, modestly overlooking his own far greater services; reviews of S.F. magazines published or reprinted in Britain; a fascinating article by Bryan Berry on the life (if you can call that living) of a free lance writer and several stories of varying merit by F.G. Rayer, H.J. Campbell, and the editor. I’m told that Asst. Editor Wingrove is soon leaving to publish his own magazine. Apparently the name *Fission* was well chosen.

from *Nebula* No. 7, February 1954

The Electric Fan: April 1954

Latest News of Fan Activities **From WALTER A. WILLIS**

Orbit, organ of the Leeds Science Fiction Association. Editor George Gibson, The Adelphi, Leeds Bridge, Leeds, 1. Quarterly. 1/- per copy. The title of this magazine always reminds me of two lines of dreadful dialogue from a mercifully unfinished story by Bob Shaw :

Pilot to Navigator: "Give me an orbit."

Navigator to Pilot: "Why, what did you do with the bit I gave you?"

The thought that this dialogue is liable actually to occur on some spaceship is enough to bring the human race to a screeching halt on its march towards space flight and send it screaming back to savagery. Not so *Orbit* 3, however, a fanmag which has improved immensely since its first issue was reviewed here a while back. The contents this time include a revealing article by R.M. Bennett on science fiction in schools. Apparently Mr. Bennett, a primary school teacher, made his pupils write an essay on science fiction and here are some of the results. According to one of these youthful Heinleins, "the Moon was very big and we could see some big crates on it." Made from powdered boxite, I suppose. It seems that the part of the current sf boom which has struck these youngsters most is the counting "SEVEN ... SIX ... FIVE ... FOUR ... THREE ... TWO ... ONE ... ZERO ... WHOOSH!" which seems to be inseparable from any Hollywood take-off. It's a wonder the filmmakers didn't use it for the Dance of the Seven Veils in *Salome*. Mr. Bennett, where I don't know this magazine would be without (I leave that sentence in all its mind-shattering horror just to make you realize how well the rest of this stuff is written) has also a bright little column, and there are some other articles of varying interest. Also, alas, some amateur fiction of varying lack of it. To the more sophisticated fan, however, who prefers to skim his promag rejects in other promags, the most entertaining article is a report of the year 2006 Convention by a Big Name Fan of a bygone era, Dennis Tucker. Mr. Tucker's hero is getting on beautifully until he mentions science fiction, whereupon he is summarily ejected. This is more than a joke, for the

appearance of this article in *Orbit* is a sign that the editors of this magazine, too, are following the traditional evolution of most fans with a sense of humour and without delusions of grandeur. They start by complaining indignantly that they can't understand the fanmags of their day and intend to publish one that will deal purely with science fiction. Then after a few issues they get tired of competing with the promags or rehashing the same old subjects – My Favourite Story, Whither Science Fiction, The Influence of Franz Kafka on Vargo Statten, etc., etc. – and turn to the more rewarding and equally fantastic field of what might loosely be called the social activities of fandom. About which time some even newer fan castigates them as “esoteric” and the cycle recommences.

The Medway Journal, Tony Thorne, 21 Granville Road, Gillingham Kent. Four issues for 3/-. This little magazine consists largely of accounts of the activities of the Medway Group, who organized the very successful MEDCON last year. By all reports they are more at home with practical work of this kind than with journalism but these chatty and informal reports show what can be done towards producing an agreeable magazine with a minimum of literary talent. Other contents include serious articles on scientific subjects which I'm sure will be of immense interest to many people. Personally, though, I prefer to get any scientific knowledge I want from textbooks or scientific journals, where you can be sure of the authenticity of the information you're absorbing, or at least can assess it.

Orion, Paul Enever, 9 Churchill Avenue, Hillingdon, Middlesex. Bi-monthly. 4d. a copy. At that price this is by far the best bargain available in fan magazines. What's more, the editor makes a fetish of regularity of publication, a perversion most unusual in fan publishing circles. Either proudly or defiantly he also proclaims that 85¾% of this issue consists of amateur fiction. I'm willing to take his word for that figure ... I just wish it was less. Personally, I preferred the first issue which was almost entirely written by the editor – he's a far better writer than most of the ones he's likely to get. However, one of the stories is better than the usual run of fanmag fiction – its rejection slip isn't showing – and is almost up to the standard of the non-fiction. Best among this is Enever's editorial matter where among other things he pungently criticizes the pernicious anaemia of most criticism by fans of other people's fanmags. Of course he's quite right. What happened is that when the new provincial fanmags arose a couple of

years ago, the older fans were so pleased to see any life in the wilderness that they carefully avoided throwing cold water anywhere near the spark. Pomposity, dullness and bad writing were overlooked as they searched desperately for something that could be praised without too much insincerity. Now however that the newer fans are more self-assured the bloodbath hoped for by Enever may not be long delayed.

from *Nebula* No. 8, April 1954

The Nebula letter column, "Guided Missives", occasionally had comments on Walt Willis's pieces. Here's a letter published in Nebula 8, with a comment by editor Peter Hamilton:

As for Walt-Will his punning never cease? Honestly, this puts me in a *quandary* because he seems to have the right *slant* on things. Do you think he might be *fission* for compliments?

JOAN W. CARR*, M.E.L.F. 17.

Nice punning, Joan. You should get a Willis Cross (perhaps you have) for that last paragraph. There are plenty of fine short stories coming next time – their "snapper-endings" all carefully concealed! Don't you think you are being just a little harsh when you class Clothier's fine cover painting for my last issue as commonplace? However, his next two for me, in all modesty, are ABSOLUTELY TERRIFIC.

* Jim Linwood notes: "Joan W. Carr" was, of course, a Sandy Sanderson hoax.

The Electric Fan: August 1954

WALTER A. WILLIS
Looks at British fandom

Sometimes I ask myself what I am writing this column for. I don't mean that the money I get – for it is too much to be counted – actually it's hardly enough to keep me in yachts and dancing girls – but what is the Purpose Of It All ? I suppose part of it is to interest you in the field of literate self-expression known as science fiction fandom, which is why I've mostly been reviewing fanmags so far. But looking at the four I might review this time I begin to have doubts. One of them, I hear indirectly from rival fan editors – what you might call the sour grape vine – is about to cease publication. I wouldn't like to recommend you to subscribe and give the editor the job of sending back hundreds of pounds from the thousands of people who hang on my every word. Another is a new magazine, which so far is frankly not worth your money. I could probably write a review tearing it to pieces which everybody but the editor would enjoy – as La Rochefoucauld said, there is always something not altogether displeasing about the misfortunes of even our best friends – but there's not much point in my persuading you not to subscribe to a magazine you might otherwise never have heard of. That leaves two which I personally enjoyed but which I hesitate to recommend to anyone who hasn't seen a fan magazine before. Rog Phillips, who used to do a column like this in *Amazing*, once offered to make refunds out of his own pocket to any reader who'd bought a fanmag on his recommendation and wasn't satisfied with it, but then *Amazing* didn't circulate widely in Scotland.

But when you come to think of it, it's often difficult to recommend any fanmag without reservations. The serious ones dealing wholly with s-f are often so poorly written as to annoy the sort of non-fans who might otherwise be interested in literary criticism ... it annoys some people to see writers unable to distinguish between "its" and "it's" or separating sentences by commas ... and the better written ones are sometimes incomprehensible to the novice. Sometimes I wonder how anybody ever finds their way into fandom at all. As Robert Bloch said recently in the U.S. fanmag *Psychotic*, "fandom's

publications offer the widest possible cross-section of contemporary expression: ranging from the childishly puerile to the most erudite and polished work.” The trouble is that often it’s only the inferior fanmags who go hunting for new subscribers, and accordingly it’s those which the newcomer tends to see first.

However, there can be exceptions. For what this is worth, I personally liked the first issue of a new fanmag called *BEM*, edited by Tom White and Mal Ashworth. 1/6 for two issues from 3 Vine St., Cutler Heights, Bradford, 4, Yorks. This is no ordinary first issue; but one published by fans who are already familiar with the field. Even so, I think the newcomer might enjoy it. Partly for the brightly written editorial matter, and partly for the first of a series of articles by Vince Clarke about the flat where he and Ken Bulmer used to live, known in fandom as The Epicentre. I enjoyed Vince’s reminiscences of this fabulous place, a fascinating conglomeration of thousands of promags, countless fanmags, undetermined numbers of typewriters, duplicators and two wayward geniuses – all, especially the last two, in a state of perpetual and happy confusion.

I remember saying once that when good fans died they went to The Epicentre, and that two of them were already there. That last remark was an unkind allusion to the delay in publication of Clarke and Bulmer’s *S.F. News*, and I was reminded of that famous fanmag by an article I saw in a new one the other day. The author, G.E. Mason, makes a clarion call for British fandom to unite in one representative organization and publish a representative fanmag designed to attract newcomers into the field. I admire Mr. Mason’s good intentions, but I can’t help feeling this is where I came in. Many years ago British fandom was very keen on organization. The British Science Fiction Association of pre-war days was at one time so strong that American fans were considering abandoning their own organizations and joining the British one. But of course the war broke up the S.F.A., and afterwards British fans never seemed so keen on being organized. Personally I think they grew out of it. There was a gallant attempt a few years after the war by that organizing genius Captain Ken Slater to form a new organization, and he did actually set up an elaborate structure with regional commissars and everything, but when he was posted to Germany the whole thing just fell to pieces. The trouble was, as usual, with the official organ, in this case the *S.F. News*. An organization can’t exist without an official organ, but either it

is a dull affair in which the editor can't take any personal interest, or sooner or later there is a row between the editor and the club. *S.F. News* kept falling between these stools for years, and gradually disappeared altogether. The result is that nowadays there is no representative British fan organization, but I don't think it's anything to worry about. Everything worth while in fandom, even big projects like the Fancyclopoedia, The Immortal Storm, the Fantasy Annual, The Enchanted Duplicator, the Checklist, Operation Fantast, The Transatlantic Fan Funds and so on, have all been accomplished by individuals or *ad hoc* associations of them. It seems that the true s-f fan is essentially individualistic.

from *Nebula* No. 9, August 1954

The Electric Fan: October 1954

WALTER A. WILLIS ***Looks at British fandom***

“i” No. 1, E.C. Tubb, A.V. Clarke and S. Mackenzie, 5, Hans Place, London, S.W.1. 42 pages, 1/6 per copy.

To say that this is better than most first issues would be not only an understatement but irrelevant. An understatement because in fact it's better than most umpteenth issues, and irrelevant because in a sense it's not a first issue at all. All the editors are experienced writers or publishers and in the London Circle they have such a repository of unrealized resources that only a catalyst was needed to produce a magazine which can take its place at the top without going through any of the usual tedious intermediate processes. Outstanding among the contents of this issue are a telling satire on fan organizers by Nigel Lindsay, a thoughtful article by Stuart Mackenzie about children's "space" toys (he points out that for the first time children are playing with toys which do not simulate the existing adult world), a serious instructive article by Bryan Berry about the lesser-known non-fantasy works of August Derleth which will be of avid interest to all fans interested in the lesser-known non-fantasy works of August Derleth, a brilliant piece of fannish mythology by Ted Tubb, a charming little fannish vignette by Daphne Buckmaster, and an analysis of the fan by John Brunner. Everything in the magazine is well worth reading and its sole defect is the impression it gives of a rather unsympathetic editorial personality, unfortunate in a magazine so thoroughly esoteric. It seems to me that the natural hostility of the newcomer to things he doesn't understand should be met by an editorial attitude which goes out of its way to be friendly and welcoming – things which fans in fact are. Allowances should be made however for the inevitable defects of anything composed by an editorial board, and it's very pleasant to see London returning to fan activity, especially with a production as good as this.

The New Futurian No. 2, J.M. Rosenblum, 7, Grosvenor Park, Chapel Allerton, Leeds, 7, England, 42 pages, 9d. per copy.

This revival of a famous war-time magazine fills very satisfactorily a gap I've been bemoaning for some time. It's that rare phenomenon, a really good fan magazine which deals primarily with science fiction. Since this is what most newcomers innocently expect a science fiction fan magazine to be like, *The New Futurian* is a good one for them to start with. They'll find a vast amount of interesting discussion ranging from Eric Hopkins's vehement assertion that "science fiction is rubbish" (compared, apparently, with Shakespeare, the Bible, Thucydides and Ray Bradbury) to John Brunner's interesting theory that present-day science fiction stories are more accomplished than the classic short stories of the past because all the techniques have been worked out. There is also the second instalment of Walter Gillings's history of English fandom, which is still dealing with the origins of English science fiction. In fact so far it has read more like an autobiography of Walter Gillings, but then that's only to be expected. Gillings is the father of both English fandom and English s-f, and his procreative reminiscences have their place in history.

The only item I'd find fault with in this magazine is an article about the Mount Palomar telescope which, though interesting enough, has its spiritual home in a popular science journal. But then I always feel that way about science articles in science fiction magazines. The way I look at it, science is the bugbear of science fiction. The more science you know the less science fiction you can enjoy. And I don't mean that as a criticism of the stories. It seems to me that the true importance of science fiction is not as a sort of suggestion box for inventors, as Gernsback seems to think, nor as a literary genre, as Hopkins and Brunner would have it, but rather as an intellectual stimulant. A little learning leads you into the dangers of mental quibbling with the author about minor scientific errors in his story and overlooking its merits as an exercise in the creative imagination. And after all, most of the great things that have been done in the world have been the work of people who went and did them before they knew they were impossible. Whereas it had to be a real scientific expert who could sit down and prove that aeroplanes couldn't fly.

Orion No. 5, Paul Enever, 9, Churchill Avenue, Hillingdon, Middlesex, England, 36 pages (small size), 5d. per copy.

This issue of the best bargain in fandom contains a delightful piece of humorous writing by that wayward genius Bob Shaw, a fascinating column by George Whiting, a really excellent piece of serious fiction by someone

masquerading under the name of James Keeping, and the editor's own agreeably written comments on various matters of interest. Heartily recommended. This is the magazine that was so unfairly reviewed in a rival science-fiction magazine recently, but if you write for it on my recommendation and aren't satisfied I will personally refund your money. I don't think I'll have to start saving up.

The Medway Journal Literary and News Supplement, Brian Lewis and Tony Thorne, 21, Granville Road, Gillingham, Kent, England, 4½d. per issue. News, reviews and comments on the pro and fan world interestingly written and well presented.

My apologies to the other editors whose reviews were crowded out. Next time perhaps.

from *Nebula* No. 10, October 1954

The Electric Fan: December 1954

WALTER A. WILLIS *Looks at British fandom*

When I wasn't notified of any deadline for this issue, I unassumingly assumed I had been given the push. I didn't even console myself with the reflection that shortly hordes of enraged readers would be marching on Glasgow shouting for Peter Hamilton's blood. Most of them, I realized, would do no more than sob broken-heartedly for a few days over the demise of this column – after all there are, as you may have noticed, stories and things in the magazine as well; the rest of this high quality paper is not there just to keep my column from being soiled. I decided to wait with quiet dignity until John W. Campbell or Horace Gold cabled me and then start again under another name. I never did like that Electric Fan title anyway.

But I've just had a hurried note from Pete and it seems I'm still on the payroll after all. It was just a clerical error in the vast *Nebula* Organization. (I suppose they call it a clerical error because it could happen to a bishop). Anyhow it means I have to do this instalment in a hurry and I mention the fact so that literary critics won't complain of the absence of the usual polished brilliance of style or fan editors that I've ignored their magazine. I haven't time to get out the polishing rags or search my friends' bookcases for my fanmags.

BEM No. 3, Tom White & Mal Ashworth, 3 Vine St., Cutler Heights, Bradford 4, Yorks, 40 pages. 9d. per copy.

Another fine issue of this cheerful and very pleasant fanmag. The best of the contents are an article by Robert Bloch, Wisconsin's finest attempt to make amends to the world for Senator McCarthy, and a parody of Dostoevsky by Bob Shaw. This latter is probably the best parody on Dostoevsky ever to appear in a fanmag... I think I am safe in saying that...and for it we are indirectly indebted to Groff Conklin. I happen to know that he said once that Bob Shaw was a second Dostoevsky (or was it a secondhand Dostoevsky?) whereupon Bob immediately read *Crime and Punishment* to see if it was true, and this is the hilarious result. You don't have to know Dostoevsky to

appreciate it though – in fact it's better if you can ignore altogether that whirring noise coming from his grave. There is also a fine piece of satire by Nigel Lindsay about an eskimo fan (incidentally did you hear about the new 3D film, *Mobius Dick*? The first film with unlimited running time) and other entertaining hit-or-miscellanea by Vince Clarke, Paul Enever and Archie Mercer. And as usual the editorials almost outclass the contents.

Alpha No. 7, Dave Vendelmans and Jan Jansen, 130 Strydhoflaan, Berchen, Antwerp, Belgium, 22 pages, 9d per copy.

This is the first manifestation outside the English-speaking world of the peculiar form of self-expression known as the fan magazine. The editors are two young Belgians who, fortunately, write better English than most of us. Contents include fiction, articles, reports, and reviews. All of a high standard and excellently presented. The mag is intended to be of interest to British and U.S. readers, and succeeds. Don't forget the postage on letters to Europe is 4d.

Phantasmagoria No. 2 (New Series), Derek Pickles and Stan Thomas, 197 Cutler Heights Lane, Bradford 4, Yorks, 24 pages (small size), no price asked, but send 6d for sample.

This issue is notable for a brilliant little humorous fantasy by Nigel Lindsay about a Bradford trolley-bus called Dolly who migrated to Devon and had an affair with a petrol bus. These transports of joy come to a rude end with a most original denouement. All I can say about it is that if vehicular transport were governing the country this story would be banned.

Operation Fantast No. 16, Ken Slater, 22 Broad St., Syston, Leics., 22 pages, 7/- for four issues, including membership of the OF organization. Printed.

This, the first issue in far too long of this very reputable magazine, still shows signs of the troubles Ken has been having lately. Best among the contents is an article by J. T. McIntosh on how to write science fiction and sell it.

However the magazine is only one of the benefits of the Operation Fantast organization, which everyone with more than a passing interest in sf would do well to join. KFS and his multi-tentacled organization will get you books and magazines from all over the world, arrange contacts, and generally help you to get more out of science fiction.

I've also received a copy of *The Immortal Storm*, a history of science fiction fandom by Sam Moskowitz, published by the Asfo Press at 713 Coventry

Road, Decatur, Georgia, U.S.A., at \$5.00 a copy. You should be able to get it through Ken Slater (address above). There are two reasons why you might like to. In the first place, if you are interested in the origins and development of this strange and fascinating microcosm you'll find all the answers here.

The second reason is that although ... or perhaps because ... Moskowitz has no sense of humour, he has written here what is in some ways one of the funniest books ever. He accomplishes this remarkable feat by treating his subject with deadpan seriousness throughout, as if the events he described were of world-shaking significance. A random quotation will show you what I mean. "But again stark drama was preparing her lines ... and what was to follow ... was to deal catastrophe to fandom as a whole. Ragnorak had caught the entire fan world napping!" Fascinating.

from *Nebula* No. 11, December 1954

The Electric Fan: April 1955

WALTER A. WILLIS *Looks at British fandom*

Triode No. 2. Eric Bentcliffe, Terry Jeeves and Eric Jones, 58 Sharrard Grove, Sheffield, 12. 48 pages, 9d. This has been one of the leading British fanmags since its excellent first issue, and this second one maintains the standard with a wide range of good material, including a page of photographs. Tony Thorne fancifully recounts adventures with a book club which was so over-generous as to move a subscriber to tears (it must have been Readers' Onion) and a pseudonymous author tells of early struggles so protracted that his victory was dust in his mouth. Dale Smith has some booknotes which will be of interest to collectors (if there are any left these days) and Mal Ashworth succeeds in writing three entertaining pages about not spending a night in a haunted house, a new approach of seance fiction. The best line is "On a sunny afternoon like this I'd spend a night in Bolling Castle on my own any time." There is also a promising column by Mike Wallace, reviews, editorials, cartoons, and a thing by me. However, the most interesting item is probably a symposium called "Grab Up That Torch", in which Ken Slater proffers a few helpful if impractical suggestions as how British science fiction magazines might increase their circulation, and is promptly trampled into the mire by two English professional editors. One of them goes so far as to say that because American magazines pay more, they "will have first call on the best stories – apart from the odd story that is sold to a British publisher out of kindness, drunkenness or sheer stupidity." Of course I know I'm only a fan, and probably a misfit to boot, but I'd thought there might be a few more reasons why some struggling native Sturgeon with a hard roe to hoe just might send his story to a British editor. Because, for instance, he has been given help and encouragement to write it, or because he can hope for an early decision and a prompt cheque, or because he likes the editor (and this is more important than one would think), or because his story is more suited to a British magazine (due to American political taboos, for instance, or stylistic conventions or reasons of locale). I have known British fan editors who offer authors no money at all but who have yet managed to

get stories which are subsequently bought for hardcover anthologies. What science fiction everywhere needs is not more kindness, drunkenness or stupidity, but more editors with enough gumption to go out looking for material and enough talent to help their authors to make a good story out of a mediocre one. As it is some of them cannot even be trusted to correct spelling.

Femizine Nos. 3 and 4. Joan Carr, Ethel Lindsay and Frances Evans, School House, Teignmouth St., Collyhurst, Manchester, 9. 62 pages (double issue), 1/6. A very gay and charming magazine produced by that most opposite of sexes, men not even being allowed to contribute. Typical is Pamela Bulmer's quarter-serious exhortation to girl fans to revolt against the domination of the men. Among the deeds to which she urges them is to chain themselves to the lamp-posts outside the Globe Tavern, where the London Circle now meet. (Is this why they moved from Fetter Lane?) Personally I think they'd have a better chance of being noticed if they were chained to the bar inside, like some of the men. Pamela also has a very entertaining column called "Wigwam", which might have been sub-titled "Watch Out For Squaws" Frances Evans contributes a nice little vignette about a misogynist and Daphne Buckmaster writes futuristic nuclear-fashion notes on the design of female spacesuits. (I thought it was established that young females can endure the cold of interstellar space in a bikini, or nothing at all.) I notice that the model illustrated has very narrow lapels, which bears out the male contention that when women usurp men's place they cease to be so widely revered. Another 2054 item is Ethel Lindsay's "Dear Diary", a sort of Pepys into the future. This magazine is actually published in Egypt, where one of the girls is stationed in the WRAC, which makes the nickname "Fez" very appropriate. I hope no one will try turban it.

Satellite No. 4. Don Allen, 3 Arkle St., Gateshead, 8, Co. Durham. 56 pages, 1/6. A bright and neatly produced magazine by a very promising young editor, with material varying widely in type and quality. The most interesting are probably Jan Jansen's fascinatingly frank survey of Belgian fandom and "Vitriol's" determinedly malignant column "Fanalysis". The main defect of the latter is that the anonymous author's acquaintanceship with genuine dragons is slight, and some of his victims look more like windmills to me, but it's pungently written and with a little more evidence of a sense of humour should make a very fine column indeed. This is a special issue of *Satellite*

(the usual price being 1/-) and incorporates the second issue of a cartoon magazine called *Dizzy*, which normally sells at 9d per copy. The first issue of this magazine would have made a good thing for a bride to take to her wedding, containing as it did something old, something new, something borrowed and something blue, but the original material is more plentiful in this issue and many of the cartoons are genuinely funny. As for the blue ones, they seem to my twisted mind to be good too, but I was amused to notice "Vitriol" sounding off against similar mild indecency in fanmags. Evidently charity begins, and ends, at home.

from *Nebula* No. 12, April 1955

Fanorama: November 1955

WALTER WILLIS writes for you

All unknown to the mundane world, a unique little occasion took place in Dublin one Monday evening late in July. In the cabin of a tramp steamer in the dock area five science fiction fans from various parts of the United Kingdom sat talking excitedly while the boat got ready to sail for Baltimore, U.S.A. Two of them were Ken and Pamela Bulmer of London, who were having their fare across the Atlantic paid by contributions from the rest of fandom. The others were English fan Chuck Harris, my wife Madeleine and myself, who had come down to Dublin by train to see them off.

We'd all met at Eden Quay, near O'Connell Bridge, and then I took them on a tour round the central Dublin area. I'm afraid this was unintentional – I was really looking for St. Stephen's Green, which the IRA had apparently stolen and hidden somewhere since I was there last. However the English visitors liked Dublin, being particularly interested in the fact that the public notices were all in Irish. (I translated some of them for their benefit and Chuck affected incredulity. "If 'Oifig an Phuist' doesn't mean 'Gents'", he said gravely, "I did a very silly thing in the Post Office this morning.")

I tracked down St. Stephen's Green eventually, in time for us to rest a while on the grass until it was time to go down to the docks. There we inspected the ship and decided it would probably last out the voyage, provided no one leaned too heavily against anything. Chuck took photographs of the historic occasion and then, having been unable to find any place to stow away, us visitors had to get off. Looking at the Bulmers waving to us from the rail of the ship I felt a sense of unutterable awe: this was the culmination of two years' work on the Transatlantic Fan Fund and I couldn't believe it was really happening.

There was still plenty to worry about too. On account of the dock strike the boat's sailing date had abruptly been advanced more than two weeks, so that Ken and Pamela were arriving in a strange country three weeks before the Convention at which they were to be guests, with very little money and no arrangements made for their accommodation. As soon as we got home,

Chuck and I published a duplicated letter explaining the situation and airmailed it to a dozen fans on the East Coast of the United States.

It arrived three weeks before the boat, and the response was wonderful. Representatives of the Baltimore and Washington fans – John Hitchcock, Bob Pavlat and John Magnus – met the Bulmers coming off the gangplank with two cars and detailed arrangements for looking after them until the Convention. But they'd hardly got properly introduced to one another when another welcoming contingent – Larry Shaw, Dick Ellington and Phyllis Scott – tore in from New York with another car and the key of a furnished flat. After an amicable tug of war the Bulmers regretfully allowed themselves to be torn away temporarily from their other hosts and driven off in triumph to New York. At the moment of writing they are comfortably ensconced in a flat lent by publisher Dave Kyle ... one of those riverside ones you see in realistic American films, all foghorns, washing and people sleeping on fire escapes. They have so many invitations that one of the New York fans has appointed herself their social secretary and gives them a daily list of their engagements!

There you have one of the wonderful things about the odd phenomenon known as science fiction fandom: that you can go almost anywhere in the world and get a warm welcome. The Transatlantic Fan Fund is just an organized extension of this individual goodwill, a development of the private Funds that in previous years brought Ted Carnell to Cincinnati and me to Chicago. It's next aim is to bring an American fan to Britain, a thing which has never been done before. Most of us in science-fiction have reason to be grateful for the generosity of American fans, and here's a wonderful way to repay it. Contributions should be sent to me at 170 Upper Newtonards Road, Belfast, N. Ireland. The U.S. fan to be brought over hasn't been decided yet, but there's a strong movement in Britain to invite Robert Bloch.

Incidentally it's not only the fans who have been helping. The professionals, including your own Peter Hamilton, have been more than generous with cash donations and gifts of artwork for Convention auctions, and I'd like to acknowledge their help here.

Hyphen 14, Chuck Harris, Lake Ave., Rainham, Essex. 42 pages, 1/- or 15¢. per copy. This is the only major British fanmagazine that hasn't been reviewed here before, the reason being that I'm usually largely concerned in

it myself. However the present issue is entirely the work of my coeditor Chuck Harris, so I suppose I can stop discriminating against it for once. This issue is clearly and elegantly produced with many of Associate Editor Arthur Thomson's brilliant cartoons and contains lots of good material – mainly humorous and dealing as usual with science personalities rather than science fiction itself, including also Damon Knight's serious and destructive book review column.

from *Nebula* No. 14, November 1955

Fanorama: January 1956

WALTER WILLIS writes for you

Last time, I had better explain for the benefit of any among you who don't cut this column out and learn it by heart, I was telling the thrilling story of how Ken and Pamela Bulmer went off to the States as representatives of British fandom under the Transatlantic Fan Fund. In case you've been lying awake nights wondering what happened to them, well they've since been in Cincinnati, Cleveland, Savannah and Washington. Ken has grown a beard, and from reports of his appearance the most charitable explanation is that he hopes to get deported and thus save his fare home. (I could say that is an example of growing fare hair, but I won't.) However, in spite of his ferocious appearance, he and Pamela have been encountering wonderful hospitality from American fans everywhere they go.

In Cleveland, of course, they were guests of the Convention Committee and one of the things they had orders from British fandom to do, apart from having a good time, was to put in a bid for London as the site of the World Convention in 1956. Well, of course, as it says in Whitaker's Almanac, orders must be obeyed at all times, but when Ken got to Cleveland he found that New York had done everything conceivable to ensure getting the nomination themselves, short of extending the city boundaries by 12,500 miles in every direction. When New York decides to do a thing, no one else has much of a chance of beating them at it. As Robert Briggs of Washington was heard to put it once, "New York would rather be the dirtiest city in the world than the second cleanest." In the circumstances all Ken could do was withdraw as gracefully as possible and make it unanimous. So it will be just an ordinary British Convention this year, inasmuch as any British Convention can be described as ordinary, and it will be held in the George Hotel, Kettering, over the Easter weekend – same place and date as the happy affair last year.

However, there's now a very good chance that London will get the World Convention in 1957, and plans will be laid for this at Kettering, with the appointment of representative committees with regional members and

everything. Not that this will mean that a few Londoners won't have to do all the work, as they usually do, but it will mean that there will be someone else to blame when things go wrong, as they usually do. Sometimes it seems to me that the only way to avoid the disasters to which Convention programmes are always succumbing is to have the entire official programme prerecorded on tape or film. In other words, automation. It doesn't seem to be so far off, either. It's been only too noticeable in recent years that the only items which went according to plan were the tape-recorded plays and the film show. Basically, of course, the trouble is that Conventions are becoming too enjoyable. The people who should be running things are far too busy having fun to worry about schedules, and since they are the people who write the affair up afterwards, it passes into history as a highly successful Convention. But there must be newcomers attracted by the advance publicity who attend unnoticed, watch in perplexity, and leave in silence. This won't do. Science fiction fans are friendly and likeable people but it's asking too much to expect a newcomer to walk into a conversation and introduce himself. If we are going to advertise a science fiction convention to the general science fiction public we must put on a genuine programme of interest to it. It seems to me the only practical alternatives are either to hand over the official programme to the professional publishers or to prepare a packaged one which will grind remorselessly on even if everyone responsible is whooping it up on the third floor. Prefabricated programmes have the further immense advantage that they can be used again. It would be possible for a keen but introverted fan group to put on a Convention just by booking an hotel and buying a dozen reels of guaranteed high-class programme.

One thing that occurs to me is that when all our distinguished American visitors come over in 1957, we should be able to show them something that hasn't existed for a long time – a good new British sf film. There hasn't been one since *Things to Come*, that classic of the Thirties, and it was beginning to look as if every planet in the solar system was going to be overrun by third-rate bit players from Brooklyn. Now, however, we have *The Quatermass Experiment*. By all accounts it sticks loyally to the original TV serial, which held all of us here enthralled for six weeks, right from the opening with the crashed spaceship to the climax where the hero has his back to the wall in Westminster Abbey, while the horrible vegetable alien rustles its fernlike tentacles all round him. (Courtesy of John Rustle Fern, no doubt.) Though I must admit that at this awe-inspiring moment one inveterate punster was

heard to murmur, “Don’t be afraid, Quatermass; you are among fronds.” What we liked about the story, apart from the fact that it was the best piece of science fiction we’d ever seen on a screen, was that it made no feeble concessions to the science fiction ignoramus. No earnest lectures on elementary astronautics, no hackneyed quotations about Heaven and Horatio, no desperate attempts to explain why it doesn’t have to have air to push against up there – just a good science fantasy. Judging from the reaction of the critics and, the public it doesn’t seem to have done the film a bit of harm.

from *Nebula* No. 15, January 1956

Fanorama: March 1956

WALTER WILLIS writes for you

In a recent issue of *Wireless World* a contributor bemoans the way the spaceships of science fiction still seem to be using outmoded radio techniques ... like calling “Over” after each message as if it were still beyond human ingenuity to design a set that would transmit and receive simultaneously. He can’t have read much science fiction, because he doesn’t know the half of it. Most of our current spaceships are using radio equipment so far behind the times it’s a wonder that when they are tuning in on the latest from Earth Control they don’t get the Savoy Orpheans. The item that’s always annoyed me most are those blooming rheostats. Every time an author takes you into the Mad Scientist’s laboratory or a spaceship control room it’s a hundred to one there’ll be some character there madly twiddling a rheostat. Now a rheostat happens to be a big ignorant-looking wirewound variable resistance that was last used to control the filaments of valves when they still had directly-heated filaments and looked rather like drunken electric light bulbs.

Of course the trouble is that rheostats and big glass valves ... or, as the Americans call them, toobs ... were all the rage back in the ’Twenties when sf started, and most of the writers learned what they know about radio, which isn’t much, from sf stories crammed in between articles describing How to Astound Your Friends by Building This Loudspeaker Radio Apparatus Guaranteed to Play. All the authors aren’t like this of course – George O. Smith knows nearly as much about electronics as the characters in his stories – but most of them fall output over input when they try to be authentic. What they need is an Electronics Consultant. As an old ham from way back (I once built a piece of apparatus so like a mass of spaghetti that it might have been designed by Signor Macaroni himself) I’m willing to offer my services for a moderate fee, in the interests of scientific truth, the integrity of science fiction, and me. I could even advise the film industry on such points as that modern radio and TV sets don’t leap into life the moment the heroine switches them on: even if it’s Marilyn Monroe, they still need a little time to warm up. Take the B.B.C. too, and *Journey Into Space*.

Now I haven't been listening to this programme much recently – I chop the firewood at a different time these days – but from what I remember a sample five minutes used to go something like this.

Our intrepid spacemen are about 50 million miles from Earth, three in one ship and one in another ...

“Freighter No. 1 to Discovery, Freighter No. 1 to Discovery. Over.”

“Discovery to Freighter No. 1. Discovery to Freighter No. 1. Over.”

“Freighter No. 1 to Discovery. Are you receiving me? Over.”

“Discovery to Freighter No. 1. Receiving you loud and clear, strength QSFL5. Are you receiving me? Over.”

“Freighter No. 1 to Discovery. Receiving you loud and clear, strength N3F. I have an Important Message. Over.”

“Discovery to Freighter No. 1. What is your Important Message? Over.”

“Freighter No. 1 to Discovery. Stand by to receive Important Message. Over.”

“Discovery to Freighter No. 1. Standing by to receive Important Message. Over.”

“Freighter No. 1 to Discovery. Here is Important Message. Important Message begins. The Mars Invasion Fleet — aaaaaagggghhh!”

“Jet, I think there's something wrong.”

“Discovery to Freighter No. 1. Important Message not received. Repeat Important Message. Over.”

“Jet, he doesn't answer.”

“Discovery to Freighter No. 1. Am not receiving you loud and clear. Are you receiving me loud and clear? What is your Important Message. Over.”

“Freighter No. 1 to Discovery. Receiving you loud and clear. Here is Important Message. Orders must be obeyed without question at all times. That is all. Over and out.”

“I don't care, Jet. I've still got a feeling there's something wrong.”

Now visualize this situation. Here we have two Earth spaceships, the only

ones in the entire Universe. Is it really necessary for them to proclaim their identity every time they open their transmitters, or indeed at all? One would think that space was packed with spaceships like sardines all the way from Mercury to Uranus, all blaring away at one another like commercial radio stations.

Of course science fiction people aren't the only ones who do this. Take the climax of the average aeroplane film . . .

“Able Baker 69 Roger Lodger calling Control. Over.”

“Control to Able Baker 69 Roger Lodger. Receiving you loud and clear. What is your report? Over.”

“Able Baker 69 Roger Lodger to Control. Wing has dropped off, fuselage is on fire and dashboard clock has stopped. Instructions requested. Over.”

“Control to Able Baker 69 Roger Lodger. Stand by for instructions.... Hello, Able Baker 69 Roger Lodger. Try winding it up. Over.”

“Able Baker 69 Roger Lodger calling Control. Too late. Other wing has fallen off. Tell them I died for good old BOAC and give my love to Sir Miles –” CRUNCH. Screams. Ambulance noises.

“Control to Able Baker 69 Roger Lodger. No longer receiving you loud and clear. Come in, Able Baker 69 Roger Lodger. Over.”

Now if these people hadn't been so fond of the sound of their own names that brave young test pilot would have had a less untimely death, and the Important Message would have come through so we could all have switched back to the Third Programme.

from *Nebula* No. 16, March 1956

Fanorama: July 1956

WALTER WILLIS writes for you

One wet day in Connemara, as I was fanning some smouldering twigs in the forlorn hope of cooking tea, a profound thought struck me. “The trouble with the Simple Life,” I remarked to our distinguished guest, Bea Mahaffey, who was holding an umbrella over the camp fire ... which we later rechristened the gamp fire ... “The trouble with the Simple Life is that it’s so darned complicated.” It’s true, you know. All this talk about the complexity of modern life is so much balderdash. A flick of the finger and you have heat, light and the Third : what could be more simple? Whereas in the old days, what with oil lamps and charcoal and countless other fiddling nuisances, life was so complex that it took you all your time just to continue to exist.

Obviously this trend must continue, and the better machines we have the simpler they will be, like the electric motor and the jet engine. Why, then, must some s-f authors persist in mucking about with mechanisms that are already perfectly simple and efficient? I am referring, of course, to doors. The ordinary simple door we have nowadays is not good enough for s-f authors. Ho, no. Their characters must make their entrances through apertures that dilate, slide, or dissolve or do something else ostentatiously superscientific – anything but just swing open on unpretentious hinges. They never seem to give a thought to the masses of electronic gear these useless refinements would involve, the expense and difficulty of installation and maintenance, and the embarrassment that would be caused when something went wrong, which it’s bound to do with all that complicated machinery. Wait until they’re locked in the laboratory from Monday to Saturday, and they’ll wish they’d kept the simple dependable door, with only one moving part and nothing to go wrong.

And, of course, their characters, with their doors worked by photo-electric cells instead of handles, are laying themselves open to other troubles than purely physical ones. Why, a whole thesis could be written on the importance of the old-fashioned door in the emotional life of humanity, an emotional life that would be thwarted and embittered by handing door-opening over to

robots. Consider, for instance, just one consequence of installing the new-fangled dissolving or dilating door in your home. *How would you slam it?* Just imagine what would happen if all the psychic disturbance at present dissipated in door-slamming were bottled up and vented on your fellow-men. No wonder the future societies imagined by these authors are generally neurotic and heading for a bad end. They're suffering from an ailment which I diagnose as slamnesia. an unconscious urge to slam doors, frustrated by having forgotten what they are.

If van Vogt wants to use this idea for a novel, I could suggest a very good title.

Alpha No. 13: Jan Jansen & Dave Vendelmans, 229 Berchemlet, Borgerhout, Belgium. Subscription 1/- per issue to British agent, Ron Bennett, 7 Southway, Arthur's Avenue, Harrogate, Yorks. As I've said before, one of the snags of reviewing fan magazines is that some of the best and most amusing are too esoteric to appeal to a newcomer. The subscribers and the editor have known each other for a long time, and naturally they have evolved their own family jokes, just as a longstanding radio programme has its own frames of reference. But to a person who, as it were, comes in in the middle, it is bound to be a little frustrating, which has made me feel guilty about recommending some of what I consider to be the best magazines. So it's with pleasure that I note the growth of a new trend in recent fan writing. Fanmags started by being exclusively devoted to amateur science, then to science fiction and then to fandom itself, each step in their evolution being the subject of bitter controversy. Now some of them seem to be progressing through the ultra-esotericism of the "fannish" fanzine and coming out on the other side. A common cultural matrix for s-f fandom having been securely established, fan writers are beginning to write about the outside world from the vantage of that viewpoint. The prime exponent of this style has been Bob Shaw, an unacknowledged pioneer in so many fields, and there is a prime example of his work in this *Alpha*. It is an account of a fogbound voyage from Liverpool to Belfast which is not only funny in the peculiarly wacky way we think of as "fannish", but is completely comprehensible to an outsider and enjoyable to anyone who happens to share that sense of humour.

Retribution, No. 1; John Berry, 1 Knockeden Crescent, Belfast & Arthur Thomson, 17 Brockham House, Brockham Drive, London, S.W.2. Send 2½d stamp for free sample issue. This is an even more startling variant the trend

mentioned above. This magazine might in some ways be even more attractive to the outsider than to the experienced fan, and for a most unusual reason. It is an entirely new phenomenon in fandom, a magazine primarily devoted to the exploits of an imaginary character, like The Saint or Dock Savage or The Shadow. In this case it is a farcical fan detective called Goon Bleary, an alter ego of nova fan John Berry and a cross between Mike Harmer and a sort of Pekinese Drummond. His adventures are embellished by the cartoons of the equally brilliant fan artist, Arthur Thomson of Hyphen, some of whose work you've also been seeing in *Nebula*. The other characters in the Goon Bleary stories are well-known fans ... or at least they have their names.

from *Nebula* No. 17, July 1956

Fanorama: November 1956

WALTER WILLIS writes for you

“They watched anxiously as Kcid came to them across the treacherous *ttornot*. ‘He’ll be here in less than a *glb*,’ muttered Arck tensely.”

This is a typical example of the sort of thing you find in many modern science fiction stories and which infuriates anyone with a logical mind. Why, it even annoys me. I refer of course to those alien words and names which the author uses to impart an appearance of verisimilitude to his narrative, much as Indian Army colonels pepper their memoirs with *chota pegs*, *mem sahibs* and *tiffin*. The idea, you see, is that the author was there on the spot witnessing these stirring events, and is so intimately acquainted with the locale that he can’t even think what the English equivalents might be for the local terms. He’ll do his best of course, but he can’t be expected to descend to the level of you day trippers.

I don’t mind that so much, though it is a cheap trick. What I object to is the names themselves. These are all ones that have been used in professional stories recently. Just look at them. I concede that you can’t very well call your extra-terrestrials Smith and Jones, and it’s legitimate enough to give them names that look strange and exotic with lots of consonants, especially “X” and “K”. But I do claim that they ought to have proper names, not mere random collections of letters.

I take it that these aliens do not use the English alphabet, and that the “words” quoted are transliterations into the English alphabet of the sounds of their language – an actual sound which can be uttered in some way or other, transmitted through a physical medium and received at the other end. In that case the English letters used must be assumed to have some phonetic value. But if so, just how do you pronounce “Kcid”? What is the phonetic significance of the extra “t” in “ttornot”? Just how do you get your tongue round “glb” without the aid of a vowel? And what is the exact shade of difference between “Arck” and the ordinary English word “ark”?

No, these little tricks do not convince me that the author was *there*: they just

make me suspect he thinks we're not all there. These phoney phonetics are examples of rank bad writing and careless thinking, and an insult to our intelligence.

As you may have noticed, I haven't been reviewing fan magazines here so much recently, for various reasons. However, they're still going strong, and subscribing to one is the best and easiest way to get in touch with the friendly and interesting people all over the world who are united in the loosely organized and tightly knit society known as science fiction fandom.

One of the reasons I haven't been doing so much reviewing in this column is the long time-lag before its publication. By the time you read it, the issue of the fanmag I reviewed may be sold out, or worse, the editor may have give up publishing altogether. In either case, you'd feel dissatisfied and I'd feel responsible. So Ken Bulmer of London and I have thought up a project which might solve this little difficulty. We propose to set up a bureau to be called the Nirvana Guild (named after a legendary perfect fanmag), which will be a sort of combination between a Fanmag of the Month Club and a clippings bureau. Its aim will be to help people who'd like to see something of the best in science fiction fan publishing, but who haven't the time or the resources to search it out themselves. The idea is that they send us a small deposit, from which we pay for them to be sent the next fanmag that comes out which we think they might enjoy. If you'd like to try this, send a couple of experimental shillings to me (at 170 Upper Newtonards Road, Belfast, N. Ireland) or to Ken Bulmer, 204 Wellmeadow Road, Catford, London, S.E.6, and see what you get. Both Ken and I have been around so long we're about due to be scheduled as ancient monuments, so you needn't worry about losing your money, and we get pretty well everything published in fandom, so you won't miss anything outstanding. As an example of what you might get I'll list below a few British fanmags: in addition of course there are dozens of American ones, which I've never reviewed here but which will also be available to you.

Eye, the London Circle fanmag. News, views and reviews from the centre of English sf publishing, intelligently and humorously presented.

Triode, the leading Northern fanzine. All types of material, most of it of the highest standard.

Hyphen, an international fanmag devoted mainly to humour and personalities

rather than sf itself, but featuring also reviews by Damon Knight.

Fez, a lively and controversial fanmag mainly the work of young ladies. Formerly *Femizine*, it had a curious history, being started ostensibly to demonstrate the competence of female fans to produce an exclusively female fanmag, by a young lady who eventually turned out to be a male hoaxter.

Contact, a lively and enterprising news magazine published in English by a Belgian fan.

from *Nebula* No. 18, November 1956

Fanorama: December 1956

WALTER WILLIS writes for you

Have you ever noticed how oddly the people in stories behave? I mean the extreme reactions they have, and the way they get into all sorts of unnecessary bother through silly misunderstandings, and how at the beginning of stories they keep telling each other things that they know quite well, and then don't explain anything else until the last page, and so on. There's something wrong with the lot of them, and I think I've found out what it is.

They smoke too much.

I've been noticing this for years. but I never bothered drawing it to your attention, because I figured that after all it was no business of mine. We all have our faults and it ill behoves anyone to point the finger of scorn. But the other day I was reading a story in an American SF magazine and a new aspect of the matter struck me.

This story was called "Breakaway", and it's all about how this fellow wanted to go to space and his wife was mad at him because she wanted him to stay home and he got so worked up about her attitude that the psychologists wouldn't let him go after all and then he got mad at his wife, so everybody was unhappy in the end. You can see rightaway that there's something wrong with these people, and you don't have to look far to see exactly what it is.

At the bottom of the first page the hero comes into the living room and finds his wife with a cigarette in her fingers, "burned down too far". (The cigarette, I assume, not her fingers.) The observant author goes on to describe how she crushes it in the ashtray on the maple coffee table (note that, *maple* coffee table. This is *literature*, man. Realism. An ordinary superficial author would have missed out on subtle nuances like that), and takes another from the pack. During the next two-thirds of a page she says 103 words, turns her head away, brushes away tears, holds the hero's arms tightly, drops her eyes and picks up *yet another* cigarette from the pack on the coffee table. (See, it's still there. This is known as the dramatic unities.) In the intervals her voice has

been breaking, her shoulders shaking with quiet sobs and the colour has drained from her cheeks.

Now this may seem like quite an eventful evening, especially when she was apparently puffing away hard at that cigarette all the time, but you know, when you work it out, that programme of activities doesn't really take so very long. Such is my selfless devotion to the cause of truth and literature that I have actually personally carried out the experiment; and I assure you that even reading her and the hero's dialogue at dictation speed and performing all the actions in slow motion, the whole performance can be gone through in 1 minute 75 seconds dead.

You see what I'm driving at. This girl has smoked a whole cigarette in less than two minutes. A good deal less, actually, if you deduct the time taken up by talking, armgripping and tearbrushing. An American cigarette too, none of your Woodbines. Why, the girl must have been drawing like a furnace. No wonder the colour drained from her face. No wonder she's in such a nervous state. No wonder she doesn't want her husband to go to space. Who's going to keep her in cigarettes?

You may say she must have put the cigarette down and let it go out, and I agree that's plausible what with all that armgripping and tearbrushing, hazardous things to do with a lighted cigarette smouldering away, probably burning a hole in the maple coffee table. Sheer waste any way you look at it. You may say, hell it's her cigarette and her coffee table, but look at it this way. That first cigarette took 25 words just to put out, and the second one took 38 more words just to light. That means that at 3¢ a word each cigarette is costing the editor nearly two dollars, and that's not counting the cost of the ashtray and the maple coffee table. That's what I call an expensive vice – and don't forget, friends, it's *our money*.

Reviews

Triode No. 8. Eric Bentcliffe and Terry Jeeves, 47 Alldis St., Great Moor, Stockport, Cheshire. 1/-. This large well-filled issue contains columns by the editors and Mal Ashworth, a fascinating report of a Swedish fan convention by Lars Helander, a hilariously esoteric instalment of a Future History of Fandom by the inventive John Berry, and lots of interesting letters, but to me

the high point of the issue is a blow-by-blow account by Dave Newman of the events behind the scenes before and after the appearance of the Liverpool Group on a commercial television programme. After reading this graphic report you wonder how any such program ever gets on the air and manages to stay there. It's amazing how little of this psychic disturbance that pervades the studio is transmitted to the viewers.

Ploy No. 7. Ron Bennett, 7 Southway, Arthurs Avenue, Harrogate, Yorks. 1/-. The most notable item here is a long, polished and extremely interesting column by someone who hides his light under a bushel called "Phoenix", but the magazine has lots of other varied material including an amusing personal account by Stuart Mackenzie of his troubles as a kilt-wearer in getting aboard a U.S. Army plane during the Berlin airlift. The Regulations said, presumably to protect the modesty or health of female passengers, that "all personnel will wear pants", and rather than throw their planes out of kilter, they were prepared to throw this kilter out of their planes.

from *Nebula* No. 19, December 1956

Fanorama: March 1957

WALTER A. WILLIS writes for you

Perhaps science fiction fandom leaves you agog with indifference and you read this column only because you are compelled to by the sheer literary brilliance of my writing, or because you have inadvertently turned over two pages at once. Nevertheless you may have wondered, as you fumble hastily back to your proper place, what on earth people find to write about in all these fan magazines I keep talking about. Well, of course most of their contents are ephemeral stuff, but usually there is some controversy of lasting interest raging through the whole field, with skirmishes being fought out in fan magazines all over the world. Some years back, for instance, there was a battle of the so-called "Shaver Mystery"; a series of stories based on a lunatic mish-mosh of weird ideas, such as that mankind was being persecuted by an evil race called "deroes" who lived in caves under the earth. The editor claimed that they were true and built up a large circulation among the crackpot fringe. Science fiction fandom proper was of course furious, but the argument as to the best way of dealing with this menace to the good name of science fiction caused disturbances which reverberate to this day. Then somewhat later there was the dianetics battle, as fandom ... hostile, sympathetic or just bored stiff ... witnessed or assisted L. Ron Hubbard's eventful progress from pulp to pulpit.

The current controversy is "Has Science Fiction Lost Its Sense of Wonder?" and it's almost entirely the work of one man. New York fan Sam Moskowitz has been asking this question so loudly and so long that by now practically everyone in fandom is trying to answer it, if only to keep him quiet. Sam's oft-reiterated view is that in the Twenties and Thirties science fiction had a simple and sincere appeal to the imagination which the clever literary-psychological stories of today have lost. They have, as it were, thrown out the baby of childlike wonder with the bathos water of bad writing. The usual answer, given most trenchantly by Damon Knight (whose brilliant reviews have now been anthologized in *In Search of Wonder*, Advent, Chicago, \$4.00) is, simply, that Sam only thought those old stories were good because

he was young when he read them. Another answer is that wonder isn't so easy to excite these days, with fantastic things in every morning's newspaper. This point of view was put with devastating effect in a story by Randy Garrett in the American fanmag *Inside*. Purporting to be the first instalment of an old-type serial, it merely described the journey of the hero, Sam, to his office in the morning: but everything – the car, the subway train, etc. – was described in awed tones as a superscientific marvel, in a hilarious burlesque of the prolix style of the old masters.

For a long time I was pretty sure myself that the Knight school had the right answer: that was because I'd recently reread all those great stories of the Thirties I'd last read as a schoolboy. They were all tripe, every last dull one of them. I could work up not the slightest enthusiasm for the Cummings and goings of the cardboard heroes, nor even the blowing of planets into E.E. Smithereens. It was quite clear to me that no sf worth reading had been written in magazines prior to August, 1939. But then lately I've begun to realize that I don't care much for most present-day sf either. No doubt my palate is jaded, but I'm not sure that that's a sufficient answer. The question is, it seems to me, whether the sf of today is capable of putting stars in the eyes of the modern youngster, as the sf of the Thirties did in mine. If it's not, heaven help us all. Us old stagers will keep ploughing through the contemporary output looking for the unforgettable thrill we once knew, but there'll be no such lure for the new generation. It seems to me that most of today's high grade work is not science fiction in the old wondrous sense at all, but merely human interest fiction with a scientific background. Better written, of course, but the authors are so determined to be so sophisticated that they deliberately make the marvellous commonplace, as if space and the future were all old hat. Whereas I devoutly believe that not one author has so far even touched the depth of emotions that will be felt by the first man to leave the Earth's atmosphere. Could we not have more authors with stars in their eyes and fires in their bellies and an urge to the thrill of discovery?

Reviews

Meuh No. 2. Jean Linard, 24 Rue Petit, Vesoul, Hte. Sne, France. 1/6. This huge and wonderful *pot-pourri* is 100 pages long and is published by a

Frenchman who started to learn English, by reading sf, only about a year ago. In its fantastic conglomeration of contents the principal item is a 26-page report on the recent New York Convention by Ron Ellik, who hitch-hiked to it all the way from Los Angeles. Pungently written, the report is entitled "You Can't Sit Here", the villain of the piece being the Convention Chairman, whose allegedly officious restrictions infuriated Ellik. Naturally, after thumbing his way some 4,000 miles Ellik must have felt himself morally entitled to sit down anywhere he chose.

Eye No. 6, Joy & Vince Clarke, 7 Inchmery Road, Cat-ford, London, S.E.6. 1/-. Most interesting items this time are a long editorial by Joy and some very fine reviews by Vince. There is also a brilliant criticism in cartoon form by Arthur Thomson, of the film *Conquest of Space*.

from *Nebula* No. 20, March 1957

Fanorama: May 1957

WALTER WILLIS writes for you

We all know what the intrepid spaceman will look like, don't we? A tall, bronzed, clean-limbed godlike young man, resplendent from jackboots to epaulettes, with steely blue eyes focused firmly on Alpha Centauri and chin jutting determinedly in the direction of Rigel: At least, that's how he looked from a couple of dozen years away. Now that we're so much nearer, how about a closer look?

Ted Tubb has already broken the news to us that he's probably a midget, to save vital space and weight. For the same reason, that useless gaudy uniform will have to go. Hell have to wear some clothes to prevent spacesuit sores, but something resembling long woollen underwear would cover his requirements admirably. The torso can be baggy but the legs will almost certainly be elasticized on account of the poor fellow's varicose veins – all those changes in gravity, you know. But no jackboots, I'm afraid. They're just the job for stamping on the villain's hand as he's scrabbling for his blaster, but no good at all for clambering round 180 degree angles in free fall. Something like tennis shoes would be far more comfortable for all hands, including that of the villain. The "uniform" will probably be grey in colour ... or at least it will end up that way, it being difficult to wash out one's smalls in a spaceship. For similar reasons his teeth will be in a bad way; which is unfortunate really because his health isn't too good anyway (not much roughage in those concentrates you know) and the pimples show up rather against his pale complexion. (He has to be screened against that dangerous solar radiation.) Not that his stomach has much of a chance in any case, what with him going about on all fours most of the time. This is obviously the only sensible means of progression in free fall if he's to make proper use of his magnetic wristbands. It's a pity he has to pad about like an ape, but those magnetic boots are tricky things and if he tries to stand upright he'll almost certainly kick himself off and hang there in space upside down. Another little snag about, those magnetic boots is that unless he keeps them well apart they're liable to stick to each other every time he takes a step, throwing him

flat on his face. Fortunately he has acquired a special sort of waddling gait to lessen the incidence of this embarrassment.

So what does our intrepid spaceman look like on closer inspection? A skinny knock-kneed round-shouldered pimply dwarf, suffering from toothache, varicose veins, constipation, halitosis, B.O., ulcers, agoraphobia and duck's disease, shambling about in long combinations with his hands brushing the ground. Momentarily he gives the impression that after half a million years of evolution we're back where we started. But I wouldn't waste any sympathy on *him*. Not only beauty, but handsomeness, is in the eyes of the beholder. And since homo spaceman is the new pioneer survival type, all the girls will be crazy about his style of looks. No, he'll be all right, Jack. What's worrying me is us. What's going to happen to all us tall bronzed clean-limbed godlike young men?

Fanzine Reviews

Camber No. 7. Alan Dodd, 77 Stanstead Road, Herts., England. 1/- per copy. This magazine has always been impeccably produced under its present editor, but has made great advances in the standard of its contents since its early issues. The main feature this time is a hilarious piece of fictional nonsense by John Berry, but the most unusual one is a report on a Swedish s.f. fan convention by Alvar Appeltoft. Continental fandom is growing like a forest fire: or perhaps I should say a Forrest fire, in recognition of the services to international fandom of Forrest J. Ackerman. Other contents of this *Camber* include engaging little columns by Warren Link, Terry Carr and Robert Coulson, all Americans (*Camber* has always been more oriented towards the States ... or should that be occidented ... than most British fanmags), a well-written but confusing piece of fannish fiction by Ron Bennett, and a simply dreadful piece of shaggy-dogery by Dave Jenrette. There are also reviews and readers' letters. In one of the latter Warren Link complains about the staples falling out of the last issue and makes the revolutionary suggestion that this is an attempt by fanzines to reproduce themselves. As a publisher myself, I consider this a consummation devoutly to be wished.

The New Futurian No. 6 Mike Rosenblum and Ron Bennett, 7 Grosvenor Park, Leeds 7, England. 9d. per copy. Mike Rosenblum has now gone into partnership with the editor/publisher of *Ploy*, Ron Bennett, and the idea is to

issue each fanzine alternately. A very fine thing too if Bennett's energy can bring out *The New Futurian* more frequently. This is a serious (but not solemn) fanmag devoted primarily to the intelligent discussion of science fiction, and has been much missed during its period of suspended animation. The frothy fanmags full of fun that are popular nowadays are all very well, but they need the subsoil of serious interest in s.f. to grow from. The contents of this issue include an article by E.R. James touching on his own methods of writing, an article about modern music by Harry Warner, a vivid report on the New York Convention by Bob Pavlat, a piece of fan history by veteran Sid Birchby and other excellent material.

from *Nebula* No. 21, May 1957

Fanorama: July 1957

WALTER WILLIS writes for you

It's curious, but the people who are most sceptical about flying saucers are us oldtime science fiction fans. Most of us would be only too happy to believe in visits from extra-terrestrials, but we've been thinking about the possibility long enough to know that there's something wrong with those queer books about little green men illustrated by blurry photographs of lampshades. Things just don't happen that way. If alien intelligences were really to contact us it wouldn't be in such a hole and corner fashion: it would be the sensation of the century. Or else, come to think of it....

You know, Earth has been invaded thousands of times in science fiction and we have valiantly overcome the fiendish aliens in just about every conceivable way – with courage, microbes, atomic energy, bluff, psionics, guerrilla warfare, passive resistance, subversion and clever gadgets cooked up in underground laboratories by the hero's fiancée's father. But there is one dreadful weapon no one seems to have thought of yet. The dead hand of bureaucracy.

I wouldn't be surprised if at this moment there lies in some government office a highly secret file containing full details of an alien invasion that happened only last month. It won't come to light for another 25 years, when some energetic clerk moves it out of the cupboard to make more room for the teapot, but I can see it now.....

It starts, of course, with a report from the Police. An alien spaceship, proceeding in the direction of down, has landed in sub-district 14 and issued an ultimatum: surrender or be vaporized by horrible green rays. The police have confined themselves to keeping it secret, diverting traffic round it and asking for instructions from Whitehall. Now this may come as a shock to some innocent voters, and don't tell your MP I told you, but I have it on good authority that Cabinet Ministers do not themselves answer the phone in their Departments or open letters. Everything comes to them pre-digested by the Civil Service. So this police report comes to a civil servant in the Registry, where papers are sorted and they decide who should deal with them.

“Invasion ... ultimatum” he reads. Of course, the Foreign Office deals with all that sort of thing. He packs the papers off to them and goes back to his indexing. To his surprise, they arrive back with bewildering speed. It has taken the Foreign Office a mere three weeks to decide that the matter isn't for them. Their function, they point out in a lot more than as many words, is to handle the negotiations of Her Majesty's Government with the accredited representatives of recognized foreign governments. The alleged government of the alleged planet Xtyzzll has not been accorded either de facto or de jure recognition. Since its alleged emissaries are actually in this country, moreover, it is obviously a matter of internal security, like the IRA. Finally, they point out blandly that the Home Office already has a Division specially for dealing with aliens arriving in the country without passports. The Registry official tries the Security Division; they report that MI5 has the aliens under surveillance but they don't seem to be doing anything subversive or even committing any offence except holding up traffic: perhaps the Ministry of Transport ...? The Ministry of Transport say that as a matter of fact the alien spaceship is correctly parked on the lefthand side of the road, it's the police that are causing the obstruction. Four months have elapsed by now and the papers are showing signs of wear. In desperation the Registry official sends them to the Aliens Division. They reply, reasonably enough, that they are only concerned with human beings, and there's no evidence that these aliens are human. In fact, from what the Publications Division say, it seems highly unlikely. Startled, the Registry official asks the Publications Division what they know about it. He learns to his surprise that their Inspectors are quite experts on the subject. Frequently while searching bookshops for indecent literature they accidentally pick up magazines containing something known as science fiction which is full of accounts of aliens. Almost invariably they appear to be giant insects or vegetables. The wretched Registry official heaves a sigh of relief. Insects. Vegetables. Of course. Obviously a matter for the Ministry of Agriculture. He sends off the now bulky file in a large envelope marked “Insects/Vegetables” to the Ministry of Agriculture, where they are put among the papers for an Advisory Committee on the Colorado beetle and are never heard of again. Once again, England has been saved by the Civil Service.

You may ask what have the aliens been doing all this time. All I can say is that all big organizations have a bureaucracy, and the aliens have their own Regulations to observe. They say to deliver an ultimatum and wait for an

answer, and that's what the expedition does. They sit there quietly year after year patiently waiting, smothered in security blanket and red tape, until eventually they do succeed in getting action from the Civil Service ... even if it's only the Department of Sanitation.

from *Nebula* No. 22, July 1957

Fanorama: August 1957

WALTER WILLIS writes for you

Having spent the two weeks of my summer holidays shivering under a cloudy sky and two pullovers on the exposed East coast, I have just brought my family home through the first blaze of a heat wave. The journey was accomplished without incident – the bus driver did get out once to examine his gears, but it was only us gnashing our teeth – until I found something lurking in wait behind the front door. It was a telegram from your editor asking for this column for the day after tomorrow. Naturally, at a time like this, all I am capable of thinking about is the weather. And, as one Harry Warner has pointed out recently in his magazine *Horizons*, it is a subject which has been unaccountably neglected by our s-f authors. It's important, though. There's a theory, for instance, that the Dark Ages in Europe were caused by fine weather, an increase in mean temperatures over several centuries having sapped everyone's energy and initiative. Apparently they should have been called The Fair Ages.

Looking round at this usually drab industrial city I can well believe this theory. For a long number of years, during which the only way we could tell it was the summer was that the rain was warmer, we were sober, industrious and severe. But look at us now. After a mere four days of fine weather men are going about without their jackets, women without practically everything, and both are lolling about in the shade of Keep Off The Grass signs when they should be writing each other memoranda. I tell you, decadence is setting in fast. Next thing we'll have cafes on the pavements, floral shirts and sunburned people being lynched by those who took their holidays too early. A few more months of this and the whole country will go native and the Eskimos or Saturnians will move in. The heat is on, friends. You have been warmed!

Fanzine Reviews.

Triode 10. Eric Bentcliffe and Terry Jeeves 47 Alldis Street, Great Moor,

Stockport, Cheshire. 1/- per copy. This magazine has steadily improved over the years until it is now in a leading position in the field. The varied contents this time include an indescribable story by Nigel Lindsay about a man who had himself hypnotized into seeing sharks chasing him to improve his swimming speed and then couldn't get rid of them on dry land ... a case of mirage in haste and repentance at leisure ... another esoteric gem from John Berry, some agreeably frank fanmag reviews and lively editorials and letter section.

The New Futurian 7. Mike Rosenblum and Ron Bennett, 7 Grosvenor Park, Chapel-Allerton, Leeds 7, 9d per copy. (They might have charged 7d, just this once). As I've said before, this is a fine magazine for the newcomer to the field, since it has a more direct reference to science fiction than many fanmags. This time for instance there is an unusually brilliant satire on Ray Bradbury by D.R. Smith ("The Bradbury *Alice*"), another instalment in Walter Gillings's version of *Mein Kampf*, about early days of British s-f, the last in a series of scholarly articles about fantasy in music by Harry Warner, a brilliant column by someone hiding his light under a bushel called "Phoenix", and some excellent book and magazine reviews. It didn't need another 11 pages of provocative readers' letters to make this one of the best bargains available in the fan publishing field.

Retribution 7. John Berry and Arthur Thomson, 31 Campbell Park Avenue, Belfast. 1/- per copy. Dual editorships seem to be all the rage these days, and this is a classic example of the merits of symbiosis. Arthur is the best cartoonist the fanmag field has ever seen and John the best exponent of the peculiar genre known as fanfiction, i.e. fiction, sometimes thinly disguised as fact, involving various personalities in the s-f world. Between them they produce a magazine which is in its way an utter gem of perfection. You need some knowledge of the dramatis personae and their alleged characteristics to appreciate some of the stories (as indeed you do with any situation comedy series) but the effort is well worth while. Best thing in this issue is a nostalgic half serious story by Irish exile Bob Shaw, who characteristically lavishes more good writing on this little labour of love than some professional authors do on a whole novel. A comparatively new departure for *Retribution* is a fanmag review column conducted by a bright and perceptive Scots girl called Ethel Lindsay, who I'm proud to say was one of the people introduced to fandom through this column.

from *Nebula* No. 23, August 1957

Fanorama: September 1957

WALTER WILLIS writes for you

It occurred to me the other day, partly as a result of my own sensitive perceptiveness and partly because your editor had written suggesting it, that when I mention a science fiction personality and you read about him, we are probably thinking of two entirely different people. Take Mr. E.C. Tubb, for instance, whose name keeps cropping up both in this column and in the rest of the magazine, which I understand some of you read as well. You keep voting Mr. Tubb your favourite author year after year, but you probably know only two things about him. First, that he writes pretty good stories. Second, that he is short and fat in appearance. I have news for you. Only one of those statements is true.

I have read as many Tubb stories as anyone ... in fact probably more, because when we were both humble little fans I rejected one of his stories for my fan magazine and I haven't seen it since ... but I still don't *think* of him primarily as an author. He has other talents, and there is one sphere of activity in which they can all be brought into play at once, with prodigious results. I remember vividly the first time I witnessed this remarkable phenomenon. It was at the first science fiction Convention I ever attended, some six years ago. I had been out for a cup of tea and when I got back the programme seemed to be over. All there was to be seen in the hall was a mass of fans grouped round a tall hungry-looking figure holding up a book and shouting "*What offers for this book by Olaf Stapledon?*" The auction, I thought. I had little interest and less money. I started drifting away. "*They'll never be another Olaf Stapledon you know,*" the auctioneer continued. "*There was only a limited supply.*" I stopped. The resonant voice went on. "*Look. at it. Beautifully bound in gun metal grey, showing up fingerprints to advantage. Observe the narrow margins – no hunting all over the page for the print. For another sixpence I'll sign it for you.*" Fascinated, I joined the crowd. "Who is it?" I asked someone. "Ted Tubb, of course," he said. "Shhh." Now he was trying to get rid of a lurid pulp magazine. "*An hour of erotic entertainment. This sort of stuff will make you independent of your girl friend.*" Someone who had read

it jeered incredulously. Ted opened the magazine at random and pretended to read aloud a brilliant parody of a pulp author's purple paragraph. He has an utterly fantastic ability to improvise at will whole fluent passages in any particular style. "*A First Edition!*" he declared, "*The plates have been smashed. Burned in effigy in France and smuggled into the country in the guise of nylons. Did I hear a shilling? Come out from below that chair and say 1/3. We sold one of these for ten bob and it was stolen from the purchaser by an outraged fan. What, only 1/3 for this hideous travesty of human drama? Do you want me to commit suicide right here on the floor? All right then, 1/3. I'll take your trousers for deposit.*" And so on, inexhaustibly, for hour after hour. It was a veritable tour de force, and I have never seen anything to surpass it.

Until, that is, another British Convention some years later. The programme had collapsed in utter chaos, the Committee wondering whether they had the strength to throw themselves in the canal or whether they should just lie there waiting to be lynched. Suddenly the sullen muttering of the audience was stilled: a tall dark pale-faced figure had mounted the platform. With an almost audible *click* everything came right again. "Ted's here," people whispered to one another, and sat back happily. Their confidence wasn't misplaced. Single-handed and without any preparation he took over from the battered corpse of the Official Programme and carried the Convention to a hilariously successful conclusion some six hours later. I can think of only a few people who could have done this, and most of them live in penthouses with a pride of press agents and drive around in Cadillacs. Ted on the other hand lives in a small suburban semi-detached villa with his wife and two children, and drives a car which looks like a pile of junk on the way to the scrap-heap to give itself up. He's an example of a phenomenon which seems to me peculiar to science fiction fandom: people who are little short of geniuses but who restrict their gifts to the tiny world of fandom, either because of some impractical streak in their nature or because what they do, they do for fun, and it would spoil it if they did it for money.

Ted Tubb doesn't seem impractical: he is always thinking up ingenious schemes for making money and discussing them hilariously with friends until the early hours of the morning when everyone goes to be firmly convinced they're going to be millionaires tomorrow. They aren't, though. The schemes never seem to come to anything : the idea was the thing ... the actual work is

too much trouble and it's more fun to think up another idea. With some other London fans, for instance, Ted invented a science fiction parlour game which would have superseded every indoor sport played by more than two people. It was fascinating, but by the time they had finished with it, it took three hours to learn the rules and one game lasted a week. They couldn't bear to destroy its subtle beauty by simplifying it for the crass world of commerce, so now they just play it among themselves.

This is typical, and more symbolic than you might think.

Fanzine Review.

Ploy No.9 Ron Bennett, 7 Southway, Arthur's Avenue, Harrogate, Yorks. 1/- per copy. This issue of what has become one of the best and most reliable of British fan magazines is distinguished by another instalment of the brilliant column by Phoenix (which can be appreciated by anyone with a sense of humour even if he wouldn't know a fan if one came up and bit him in the leg) and an article by John Berry to which almost the same applies. Highly recommended for these alone, and you may find much else of interest too.

from *Nebula* No. 24, September 1957

Fanorama: October 1957

WALTER WILLIS writes for you

A few years ago, all the good science fiction stories having already been picked over several times, somebody got the bright idea of reshuffling them and dealing them out again to the public arranged as “idea” anthologies. That is, collections of stories all taking a single theme, like robots or mutations or time travel, and trampling it to death. This having been done to each of the themes in turn, the anthologists now sit nervously on the pile of bodies, gazing dementedly at the retreating public and wondering what to do next to attract their attention.

I have a suggestion. Someone, probably either Sprague de Camp or Vincent Clarke, suggested a long time ago that what science fiction needs is a series character who would do for science fiction what Sherlock Holmes did for the detective story. You see, the trouble with science fiction as far as the general public is concerned is that it requires mental effort. Start off a story with “The sun was setting slowly behind the mesa as a lanky stranger rode up to the Bar 20 ranch” and the reader knows exactly when and where he is. In fact he knows pretty well just what’s going to happen – he’s just like a child with a favourite story he likes to hear again and again. This is predigested literature. But science fiction is different. Not only does the reader have to learn the names, appearances and characteristics of the protagonists of the story (who may as an additional hazard include aliens with unpronounceable names – and the people to whom much of current science fiction is evidently directed cannot read without saying the words to themselves) but he has to work out where the story is set within a radius of several million light years and when within a range of several thousand heavy ones. When he’s got all that clear in his mind he has to familiarize himself with the social set-up, economics, fashions, customs, politics and linguistic peculiarities of the environment in which the author has put them. Then he can start finding out what the technology is and struggle through whatever gobbledygook the author has invented to explain it. Having accomplished all this, the carefree reader plunges into the story – all ten pages of it. As if this wasn’t enough, some

stories are deliberately obscure. I read about five sf magazines a week and although nobody likes science fiction more than I do (except Forry Ackerman, of course) I must admit I find it hard going to fight my way into yet another story starting off with two pages of italics. And don't forget, I'm a *fan*. I'm looking, jaded but still hopeful, for something the general public doesn't even know exists.

Well, what's the answer. When I was talking to Bradbury in Los Angeles (ahem), good ol' Ray (so who's name-dropping? For all you know he goes around telling everyone he met me!) suggested that all that was needed for the public to take sf to their hearts was for them to become as well acquainted with its conventions as they are with those of the Western. That might be possible as far as Bradbury's stories are concerned – the most important thing about any Bradbury story is Bradbury – but there are all the other authors to think of. There are as many science fiction frames of reference as there are authors: in fact more, because Heinlein is I think the only one who has worked out a consistent future history to place his stories in.

No, it looks as if the reader will always have to learn a new environment for each story. But can't we help him out some other way? Which brings me back to that series character idea. Why not a whole group of series characters, a sort of science fiction stock repertory company? I don't mean that they'd be supposed to be the same people in every story – that would be impossible with the time range to be covered – but though they'd have different names they'd be recognisably the same characters with the same physical appearances and attributes, just as every hotel manager in Hollywood films is Franklin Pangborn. In fact Hollywood has already shown us the way by putting a Brooklyn cook in every spaceship. The reader would only have to learn off these characters once and he'd be able to get a running start at every other story and absorb great gobs of extra sociology without turning a hair. For the basic cast I suggest:

Hero –

Normal. Age 30, introvert, technician, lonely, drinks Scotch, overworked, likes jazz and some classics and Gershwin, has doubts about The System but is basically 100 per cent American. May be recognized by monosyllabic name, like Mark or John. (Authors get paid by the word, not the letter.)

Hero, Mark II –

With hole in head. More mature, hardbitten, private detective or journalist, cynical but astringently sentimental in last paragraph. Has hole in head with metal plate which makes him either telepathic or immune to deadly alien radiation. In short, same as Mark I, but older and a little tin on top.

Aliens, cuddly –
Nice.

Aliens, slimy –
Nasty.

Scientist, Mad –
Found in older stories, but now retired ... except in stories which are intentionally humorous.

General/Security Officer –
Stupid. Hidebound.

Scientist, psychopathological –
New and improved model of mad scientist. Either has dangerous invention which, he stupidly wants to release to the world or is stupidly preventing hero from developing his.

Heroine, single –
Tall, dark, poised, sophisticated. Journalist or secretary. Stows away in spaceships. Always hates hero to start with.

Heroine, married –
Small, blonde, pregnant.

And so on. I suggest that as a start all the editors get together and announce they'll refuse to accept any stories that don't use these characters and only these. I venture the opinion that few authors will notice any hardship.

from *Nebula* No. 25, October 1957

Fanorama: January 1958

WALTER WILLIS writes for you

It is a proud and lonely thing to be a fan. That used to be a wryly half-humorous saying in science fiction fandom, and it was true – even if nobody else thought we had any reason to be proud. Now we have, but we're no longer lonely. All of a sudden we have some 1,578 million new fans to keep us company: or at least, even if the whole world hasn't started reading science fiction, they have come to believe what we have been telling them for years and have accepted the basic sciencefictional premise about the destiny of Man. In thousands of offices, shops and schools fans who yesterday were mocked at as crackpots are today approached deferentially as experts. We will no doubt behave with becoming modesty, forbearing to say "I told you so" *too* often, but between ourselves, let's be proud. Not just because we were right all along on a question of fact, but because we fought a hard fight and won. I don't mean space flight itself ... that isn't the job of s.f. fans, but of scientists ... but the preparation of public opinion. Didn't you notice that the reaction of the Press and radio to the "Dawn of the Space Age", as they called it, was instantaneously *right*? Why, the leader columns of the national newspapers read exactly like fan magazine editorials: occasionally better written, perhaps, but imbued with exactly the same idealistic enthusiasm for the concept of Man putting his tribal squabbles behind him and setting his face towards the stars. I don't mean to imply that the editors of the national newspapers have been secret fan magazine subscribers for years, but I do suggest that there can hardly be any literate person who has not at some time or another been exposed to a science fiction enthusiast and his ideas. We may not be numerous, but we're certainly articulate, and we've been arguing our case for more than thirty years. That's a lot of words in a lot of ears, and it looks as if some of them have stuck. If we are responsible, even in part, for the fact that Man is approaching the stars in his right mind, we have very good reason to be proud.

But what now? In a way fans were less thrilled than anyone about recent events, because we knew what was coining – if not just where it was going to

come from! Some fans are still looking further ahead than the newspapers, which takes a bit of doing these days. The most interesting reaction I've come across so far has been that of Pierre Versins, of Switzerland. He published a special issue of his fan magazine when he heard the news, and here are some quotations from what he had to say. You might be surprised ...

Friends, I am scared....

Cold. It's cold. I feel like a man in a room, warm and quiet, dreaming. It is winter, and outside there is snow on the soil and on the trees, frozen snow. Nobody in the streets, no noise ... And then, suddenly, the window is wide open and there is no one standing outside. But THE COLD is creeping in.... Anyone may enter now, with the cold....

In outer space there is either someone waiting for us, or no one. And each part of this alternative scares me.

Because I fear the emptiness of the universe.

Because I fear its fullness.

Another thing to be turned over in the light of these New Moons is science fiction itself, but that will have to wait till next time. Meanwhile, a few words about the subject this column would have been full of in less stirring times.

Among the more predictable results of the satellite sensation was that the B.B.C. showed again on television the film it took at the World Convention in London in September, with a comment to the effect that these people hadn't been as crazy as they looked. They looked crazy, incidentally, because they were in fancy dress for the Masquerade Ball, but the B.B.C. omitted to mention this fact and no doubt eight million people are quietly convinced that s.f. writers and fans go about normally dressed as tendrilled spacemen and tentacled monstrosities. Fortunately, however, John W. Campbell was not in fancy dress, was interviewed seriously and talked convincingly ... and, as it turned out, prophetically about the immediate prospects for space flight. John W. Campbell was, of course, the Convention's Guest of Honour, but the most interesting speech from a science fiction point of view was probably that of Sam Moskowitz, fan, collector and critic, and one of the leading authorities in the field. He gave a startling analysis of a market survey of s.f. readership. Sam is an expert in this type of thing, since he does similar work for a

company marketing frozen foods, and it said a great deal for the force of his personality that he was able to talk seriously about s.f. mags and frozen pies in the same breath without anyone raising so much as a titter. Probably the most interesting fact to emerge from the survey analysis was that 9.8 per cent. of s.f. readers buy between 10 and 16 magazines regularly, accounting for 32 per cent. of all copies sold, and if they reduced their purchases to the average, the average sales of all magazines would drop 25 per cent., and less than a quarter of them could continue to exist. From all of which the interesting conclusion emerges that fans are not just a vociferous and unimportant minority as some editors have claimed, but the mainstay of the field and representatives of its development.

from *Nebula* No. 26, January 1958

Fanorama: February 1958

WALTER WILLIS writes for you

In one of Nigel Balchin's novels – *The Small Back Room*, I think – there was a character whose interest in life was hunting for correlations. That is to say that he would, armed only with a computer and some punched cards, venture into the morass of statistics and bring back wild and peculiar facts which he would then attempt to tame into significance. Sometimes this took quite some doing. The instance quoted in the book, as I remember, was that tall men had slightly better scores in rifle-shooting than short ones. The possible explanations for the tiny discrepancy include that tall men were nearer the target when they lay down, or their bullets less subject to gravity drag and atmospheric resistance when they stood up. You see what I mean.

It would be interesting to apply the same techniques to people's literary tastes. If we could find a correlation between a fondness for science fiction and some other trait we might be able to explain why it is that out of the entire population of the English-speaking world, only such a comparatively small proportion are devotees of the literature that seems so vital and significant to us. Maybe some day someone like Sam Moskowitz will undertake this assignment, but in the meantime all we can do is to speculate. One line of approach that occurred to me recently was to see what sort of non-science-fiction literature science fiction fans liked. If you could find some such correlation, it would be a reasonable hope that other readers of that type of literature might be potential science fiction fans.

One that occurred to me right-away was, of all things, Forester's Hornblower stories. Many of the fans I know are admirers of this series, but it was Ken Bulmer who put me on to it first. I ignored him valiantly for years – I hate historical novels because the characters seem so dead, if you know what I mean – but then one day I read one and I was hooked. Ever since I've been wondering why. There's nothing fantastic about them to appeal to my sense of wonder. There's no personal interest, because it's extremely unlikely that I'll ever be in command of a four-masted brigantine. (I'm sort of set in my ways now.) Finally I decided that it was because they appealed to something

very similar to the sense of wonder, and equally the soul of what science fiction should be, the thrill of discovery. Not the vicarious thrill of discovery you feel with the characters in stories of real or imaginary exploration, but the thrill of discovering things for oneself. Mere information. But my point is that information isn't so mere, and it's time that science fiction authors realized this. They're still reacting against the time thirty years ago when a science fiction story was apt to consist of one sentence of action to four inches of footnote, and some editors now boast that their stories are pure "entertainment", as if there were anything entertaining in the hero getting chased and knocked down with monotonous regularity on every page. Information can be entertainment, as many best-sellers show, from straight travelogues and exploration accounts to novels set in specialized settings, like Dorothy Sayers's or Balchin's, or scores of others. But the Hornblower saga is one of the best examples, because if it was put to you in cold blood you could hardly imagine anything less interesting than old Admiralty regulations and store accounting instructions. But, presented properly, they're utterly fascinating, and the spectacle of the average circulating library reader avidly absorbing page after page of abstruse technicalities should give us scientifictionists something to think about. If people like to be informed, surely science fiction has something even more interesting to offer than details of the navigation, administration, maintenance and revictualling of sailing-ships during the Napoleonic Wars?

This is Forry Ackerman's Life:

A happy little event took place in Los Angeles recently: a little boy suffering from leukaemia died and left Forrest J. Ackerman a tape recorder. No, wait, this isn't as callous as it sounds – quite the reverse in fact. You see, some fifty of Forry's friends got the idea of giving him a testimonial dinner on the eve of his departure for Europe and the World Convention, and a going-away present of a tape recorder. They wanted it to be a complete surprise, but your film correspondent is a very busy man and they figured that to make him break his work schedule without notice would need something like a sick little boy who wanted to talk to him about science fiction. So they invented one. Bobbie Benson was his name, and he was completely documented. But when one of the conspirators brought Forry along, arms full of books and heart full of sympathy, the door opened on a banquet instead of a sick-bed. It must have been a nice moment, and well worth recording, but the main reason I mention it is that it tells you so much about Forry Ackerman.

Arthur, Sea Clerk:

Arthur C. Clarke, expert on deep space and shallow seas, has set up another record by being the first science fiction author to be advertised as a tourist attraction. A travel folder published by the Government of Ceylon, where he is now living, features on the cover one of his fine colour photographs showing Arthur himself engaged in what his old sparring partner, Bill Temple, once called “submersive activities”. This certainly makes a change from bathing beauties, and let’s hope it opens up a new source of income for science fiction personalities. Why, for instance, should the finest things in Scotland always be represented by photographs of the Cairngorms and Edinburgh Castle? Let’s have an action shot of 159 Crownpoint Road showing Peter Hamilton At Bay.

It’s reported that the well-known rocket expert who writes under the name of Lee Correy has left his company because of disagreements about the progress, or otherwise, of the U.S. satellite programme.

Ted Tubb and Ken Bulmer have formed an amateur ciné club to produce their own motion pictures.

A new film society in Liverpool (The New Shakespeare) was reported in *The Observer* to have resolved to exclude “films of violence, horror, science fiction or exaggerated sex”. As a result of written protests from fans all over the country, led by Vince Clarke, of London, the film society has now agreed that each film should be judged on its merits, and science fiction films will *not* be automatically excluded.

from *Nebula* No. 27, February 1958

Fanorama: March 1958

WALTER WILLIS writes for you

That little piece I wrote about Ted Tubb a while ago seems to have been digested without any harmful after-effects: at least shortly after it was published I met Mr. Tubb at a party during the world convention and he was still speaking to me, even if slightly indistinctly. I was relieved. Not that Ted is hypersensitive, but I thought he might have taken umbrage at what I said about his car – haven't you noticed that motorists are far more sensitive about their car than their character? However, the autobiography didn't produce any writs for libel from Ted's solicitors, or even the car's, so I thought I might tell you something about the backstage personality of the author who recently won the 1957 Nebula Award, Mr. William F. Temple.

Many sympathetic friends are probably feeling at this point that I should get danger money for this job of rending the Temple veil (or perhaps, if what I say isn't accurate, "hard lying money"), for Mr. Temple has quite a reputation as a devastating wit. Even a swashbuckling desperado like Chuck Harris quietly unbuckles his swash and steals away at the prospect of crossing his path. This is not because Bill Temple is in the habit of sweeping victims into oblivion with his little finger, but because it's only too obvious that he could do so if he wanted to. To the average reader William F. Temple is a serious and sensitive author whose work reflects a thoughtful concern for humanity. This is Bill Temple all right, but he is also a brilliant comedian whose writing for fun has been delighting his friends for two decades.

At which point I think I had better introduce his stooge. You may have heard of him, a fellow called Arthur C. Clarke. It's hard for me to realize that to the ordinary reader there's no connection between these two, because to me they're as inseparable as Abbott and Costello ... on a higher plane, of course. These two have been a sort of cross-talk comedy act behind the science fiction scenes for many wonderful years. It's hardly fair to class Arthur C. Clarke as a stooge, because he gives as good as he gets, but the fact remains that Temple has got his mythology accepted by his small but appreciative audience, and all Arthur has been able to do is to fight a gallant rearguard

action. All this started way back in the mid-thirties, when both of them were unknown young fans and Arthur was always talking about a wonderful novel he was going to write (and which eventually became *Against the Fall of Night* and later *The City and the Stars*), and Bill's series, *The British Fan in His Natural Haunts*, was the glory of *Novae Terrae*, the leading amateur magazine of the day. The mythology then created by Bill depicted Arthur as "Ego", an eager-beaver egocentric scientific crackpot, and Bill himself as an innocent Robert-Benchley-type victim. Since those early days their energies have been largely dissipated in professional commitments and prosperity – as Bill put it at the 1953 Convention, "Arthur has beaten me to the paunch" – but the old flames flare up wonderfully now and again. And now modern readers are able to relive the old days with the publication in the fanmag *Hyphen* of excerpts from Bill's memoirs of the early days of the British Interplanetary Society. This is all fabulous stuff, but my favourite is the one about the time they had at a B.I.S. meeting in Bill and Arthur's flat to test a new high-power rocket fuel invented by Frank Edward Arnold. How first they couldn't even get it lit, and then they decided they needed a pressure chamber, and then the Director has the bright idea of using the gas oven, baking a gram of the fuel until it exploded, the idea being that the expanding gases from the fuel would enter the stove burners and push the coal gas back along the pipe, registering their speed on the dials of the gas meter: and how they got into an argument about which way the pointers would revolve, and that developed into a bitter controversy as to whether water spirals out of a bath in the Northern Hemisphere clockwise or anticlockwise, and they roamed all over the apartment house filling and emptying baths: and what happens when they finally do explode the rocket fuel in the gas stove. I'm not sure exactly how much of it is cold fact, though in an introduction to the first of the series Arthur Clarke said it was based quite closely on a specific event (though "the character described as 'Ego' is purely a figment of Mr. Temple's imagination, possibly a synthesis of his better qualities"), but it's wonderful reading especially now the British Interplanetary Society is so serious and respectable, and I wonder someone doesn't publish it professionally. But then, as I was saying in connection with Ted Tubb, that's the way it often is in the science fiction field. So many Hamlets playing comedian so well – or is it the other way about? – and so few to appreciate these multiple facets of genius.

from *Nebula* No. 28, March 1958

Fanorama: April 1958

WALTER WILLIS writes for you

I hesitate to suggest this of such intelligent and well-read people as the readership of *Nebula*, but it is possible that some of you may have missed a recent article in the *Justice of the Peace and Local Government Review*. It was called “Bleep Law”, an unusually snappy title for this serious minded publication, and it dealt with the fascinating legal problems raised by space flight. Being something of a legal expert myself ... well, I once got sixpence worth of chips wrapped in the *News of the World* ... I thought I would explain it all to you. Apparently up until recently the legal position in these matters has been governed by the old common law maxim *cujus est solum, ejus est usque ad saelum et ad inferos*. (And you must admit that you don't get high class stuff like that in just any old magazine column.) My Latin has got a bit rusty. I should never have left him out in the rain ... but looking at that lot with my eyes half closed I figure it means he who owns the land owns above it as far as the heavens and below it as far as you care to mention. You can see the sense of that – you can't have people digging subways under your rhododendrons or viaducts half an inch above your convolvulus – but you can also see it might get pretty silly when the same people get up to their antics a hundred miles up. It seems, for instance, that when the first Russian satellite went up into its orbit the Americans complained it was violating their airspace: nuts said the Russians in diplomatic language, we fired our sputnik straight up into our airspace and it's still there, it's just that America keeps sneaking round underneath it. Well, you can see both points of view, and it's obvious that our old friend *cujus est solum* has just about had it, the same as happened to poor old Isaac Newton's laws when they came up against space. I can't help feeling it's a pity though, because the old law had some wonderful implications. It meant that if you owned a bit of ground, you owned it not only right down to the centre of the earth, a long narrow cone 4,000 miles long, but that you owned everything contained in the continuation of this cone upwards. Since your fences are at right angles to the ground and the earth is curved, your cone of possession keeps getting wider and wider and wider. Do you realize that at this very moment you probably

own a couple of nebulae? Makes you feel good, doesn't it, even if they don't contain copies of this column. Unfortunately you won't own them long, because your cone of possession is sweeping through space like a demented searchlight, and possession has probably already passed to the man next door. Ah well, they wouldn't have been much use to you anyway. Even if you were fortunate enough to live on the Equator you wouldn't own the Sun long enough to file an injunction on other people using it, and anyhow they'd probably plead ancient lights or something. Maybe it's just as well they're going to change the law, come to think of it. Think of the rates on the Sun! No, it's a sticky problem and we'd better leave it to the legal Einsteins to fix up.

Talking about sticky problems, I notice that a certain American science fiction magazine has been running articles about a psionic machine. I have skipped other articles in this magazine because they contain mathematics, and mathematics always sends me into a sort of coma from which I awake to find myself reading some other magazine, but I've been reading these articles and I think I've found out where everybody has been going wrong. As far as I can make out, they've been feeding electricity in at one end of this machine and getting a sticky feeling on a plate at the other end. Well, it seems to me that this is going about it the wrong way altogether. What good is a sticky plate to anyone? (Except of course people who have lost their teeth.) My own view is that, generally speaking, there is far too much stickiness in the world as it is. Why, just look at all the energy, lubrication and talcum powder we expend trying to get rid of it. Why produce more? Conversely, there isn't nearly enough electricity. The sensible thing, it seems to me, is just to reverse the connections on this machine so that it absorbs stickiness at one end and produces electricity at the other! There could be great psionic power stations all over the country, fed by wads of chewing gum; old stamps, bits of cellotape, burnt rubber, old caramels and similar hitherto useless junk and producing clean useful electricity, not to mention reconditioned caramels. You might even develop a new type of motor car driven by a miniature psionic pile powered by the friction between the tyres and the road – the faster you went the more power the pile would deliver. I think I'll take out a patent on this, as soon as I can figure out a way to get it started.

Review

British fandom has been resting on its rather wilted laurels since the World Convention and things have been preternaturally quiet in the fan publishing world. So it's a pleasant surprise to be able to welcome the reappearance of *SF News*, a guiding light which has left us in the dark for far too long. It's published by Vincent Clarke at 7 Inchmery Road, Catford, London, SE6, with the assistance of Joy Clarke and H. P. Sanderson. The price is 6d. per copy and worth much more to anyone interested in what's going on in the science fiction world, and who appreciates intelligent comment and thoughtful reviews. Very highly recommended. Why not send for a sample copy?

from *Nebula* No. 29, April 1958

Fanorama: May 1958

WALTER WILLIS writes for you

Not even my worst enemy would call me a worshipper of Lonnie Donnegan – I like my jazz hot or cool, not half-baked – but the other day I read about something he did which put him right up in my estimation. Apparently at one of his recitals a gentleman in the front row of the stalls squirted him with a water-pistol. Mr. Donnegan, I was delighted to read, did not fall for that silly The Show Must Go On stuff and carry on as if nothing had happened, with evidence to the contrary dripping down his lapels. No, he retired briefly into the wings and returned with a soda syphon with which he drenched his opponent. It seems to me this shows a fine originality of mind, and if something similar could be guaranteed to happen at each of his performances I believe I would attend one, if I could afford the cost of admission after buying a stirrup pump.

The reason this trivial incident finds its way into this thoughtful and cultured column is that it reminds me vividly of the Manchester Science Fiction Convention of 1954, when an unscheduled incident exactly like this was scheduled to happen during an ostensibly serious lecture. But perhaps I had better explain here that this Convention was the only public function I ever heard of that was better planned by the audience than by the organizers. How this odd state of affairs came about was that the organizers happened to be largely a group of serious-minded northern fans who had been very critical of the previous year's Convention in London and who had decided to try to do better themselves. The London fans were only too familiar from bitter experience with the things that could go wrong at Conventions, and it released some deep well of frustration in their souls to plan things to go wrong deliberately. I've come upon a scrap of paper on which some of the earlier simpler ideas were noted down, and most of even these were so fiendish I hesitate to quote them here in case they're taken up by the League of Empire Loyalists and public life in this country is brought to a standstill. The simplest one was to spread a little sugar in the aisles, down which "late-comers" would tiptoe at intervals, pausing in their crunching progress only to

ask in stage whispers, “Have I missed anything”, and to be answered “No”. It was felt that the effect of this would increase as the programme wore on. Meanwhile other saboteurs would sit in the front row with a blown-up balloon in one hand and a pin in the other. They wouldn’t actually *do* anything, but it was thought that the psychological effect on the more timid speakers would be considerable. There were dozens of these playful suggestions, summarized in top-secret circulars under the code name Operation Armageddon, but I must admit, even if it means this is the last of these columns you’ll see in *Nebula*, that my favourite was the one involving one of those sets of little metal plates which, when dropped, sound more like breaking glass than an elephant sitting on a conservatory. At intervals during the programme, this terrible glass-breaking noise would be heard from the bar, accompanied by a drunken voice singing “I belong to Glasgow”. I should perhaps explain that Peter Hamilton, that year’s Convention chairman, was well known to be a strict abstainer.

But of course it all turned out to be what in science fiction fan circles is known as a Daugherty Project, after one Walter J. Daugherty, of the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society. (“Why, it will be just like a Daugherty Project, except that it will actually happen!”) In any case I doubt if the Londoners would have been one-tenth as fiendish as their imaginations, but what actually happened was that the Convention Committee ran into so much trouble of their own that they were anaesthetized; the London people rallied round and helped and after all it turned into one of the happiest Conventions of all time, and certainly the most disorganized. The single exception was the start. The last year’s committee had been criticized for programme delays, whereas everyone knows these are a Law of Nature at Conventions, and the Operation Armageddon schedule for this point involved a chanted count of “Sixty ... fifty-nine ... fifty-eight ...” and so on, ending at the advertized time of commencement, when a starter’s pistol would be fired. By an amazing coincidence the official programme organizers had had the same idea and the programme did start off with a take-off count, and on time. That was the only thing in that extraordinary weekend that went according to anyone’s schedule. You should have been there.

Reviews.

Perihelion No. 2. Bryan Welham, 179 Old Road, Clacton-on-Sea, Essex. 1/- per copy. A new fanzine produced by a new fan group with headquarters over a fish shop. There may be no hum like plaice, but the only smell off this magazine is of hard work. It's beautifully produced and the material varies from excellent to only as far as mediocre, which is surprising for such a young magazine.

Camber No. 9. Alan Dodd, 77 Stanstead Road, Hoddesdon, Herts. 1/- per copy. A not so sophisticated newcomer to the science fiction list. The content is varied and of interest to the newcomer. Reviews, stories, news and gossip, about science fiction on films and television.

from *Nebula* No. 30, May 1958

Fanorama: June 1958

WALTER WILLIS writes for you –

“Let’s take science fiction away from the people and give it back to the fans!” The first time I heard this ironic sentiment expressed was in a hotel room during the Manchester Convention a few years ago, and at the time I thought little about it. There were about thirty other people talking at the same time and it was a very small room.... I think we would all have suffocated if someone hadn’t had the presence of mind to take the telephone off the hook ... and the atmosphere was not conducive to thought. Besides, some zany humorist chose that moment to open the window and lob a bottle into the canal, proclaiming: “I name this city ... Manchester!” A lot of water, or whatever that liquid was, has flowed down the Manchester Ship Canal since those days, but the serious question concealed in that first facetious suggestion is now being asked by a lot of people. It is, briefly, when science fiction is really popular will there still be science fiction fans?

Some people would make an even wider issue of it; viz., when space flight becomes a reality will there still be science fiction? But, as Sid Birchby points out in the current *Triode* where both sides of this question are cogently put, in fact quite a small proportion of current science fiction stories are primarily concerned with space flight, and still less with any sort of space flight we’re likely to see this century. Besides, if there’s one sure thing about science, it is that every discovery uncovers more of our ignorance than it covers. No, I think science fiction will be all right, Jack. But has it pulled up the gangplank and left us behind?

I’m not talking about the keen science fiction reader. It has been suggested that when science fiction becomes widely popular – becomes part of mainstream literature as the intellectuals put it – the specialist reader will die out, but I can’t see it myself. Admittedly many of us no longer feel the ravening hunger for it we used to feel when the only magazine was a slim reprint from *Astounding*, but the point is we would still rather read good science fiction than anything else.

No, what I’m thinking about is the few thousand vocal fans who make up

what we know as fandom, those who are sufficiently interested in science fiction to want to communicate with one another and some of whom publish the amateur magazines I review in this column. And here there are two quite separate arguments being advanced in the fanmags. The first is that when science fiction becomes popular and “respectable” there will be no urge for its readers to band together as a sort of persecuted minority, and the bond which makes science fiction fans all over the world feel closer together than their next door neighbours will weaken. There may be something in this, but I doubt if science fiction will ever become popular in that sense. There will always be the minority who look up at the stars in wonder and the majority who grub along the gutter for pennies.

Take, for instance, as a lighthearted example the researches of two young fans, Ken Potter and Dave Wood, among the inhabitants of Lancaster, as reported in the current *Brennschluss*. Some eight years ago, when the researchers were still small boys, they got to wondering what the public reaction would actually be to an alien visitation. Hundreds of science fiction authors had speculated about it, but apparently no one had actually done any practical work on it, which seemed very unworthy for people dedicated to the Scientific Method. So Dave dressed up in an outlandishly painted shroud decked out with vacuum cleaner attachments, and Ken dashed along the street ahead of him shouting “A Martian’s landed!” I regret to have to inform you that some of the natives ignored the Invasion altogether and the rest told it to go away. So there you are; I almost feel sorry for the Martians when they do come. Atomic bombs, death rays and blasters are sort of compliments in a way, but to be cut dead! Mind you, I suspect that the psychological technique in this instance may have prejudiced the result. Ken’s panic-stricken cry was just the sort of thing to bring out the famous English stolidity in the face of danger: they went on with their metaphorical game of bowls. Whereas if Ken had murmured politely: “I say, there’s a small boy dressed up in a vacuum cleaner” I daresay they would have flown into a panic and written a letter to *The Times*: “Sir, I saw a Martian in Lancaster this morning, February 27th. Is this a record?”

The other problem is the one you may have guessed yourself from my quotations from current fanmags. It is that nowadays fans don’t talk about science fiction all the time, and that’s putting it mildly. This is what’s been worrying me ever since I started to write this column and what is now

worrying all science fiction fans. Our fear is that you, a keen science fiction reader, may write away for a copy of what you understand to be a science fiction fan magazine and be annoyed to find there isn't a lot about science fiction in it. I could say you were just unlucky and advise you to try again, that there are some very good fan magazines entirely devoted to discussion of science fiction, but I think it's better to be frank about it. We are all science fiction fans and we all like to read and talk about it, but many of us have been doing that for years and we know what we and each other like, and after a while we find people more fun to write about ... ourselves and each other and the personalities of the science fiction world. I'd ask you to make allowances for that, if you write away for a fan magazine on my recommendation and find something in it you don't immediately understand. The important thing it seems to me is to make it clear to you that this isn't a clique or a closed shop. New people are coming in all the time, though not as many as we'd like, and you're welcome even if all you want to do is sit and watch. But if you do send for a sample I promise you'll find a little world of interesting people of all types and, if you've ever wanted to write or draw and especially if you've a sense of humour, you might even find the gateway to the most fascinating hobby there is.

Here are the addresses of the two fan magazines mentioned: *Triode*, Eric Bentcliffe and Terry Jeeves, 47 Alldis St., Gt. Moor, Stockport, Cheshire; 1/6 per copy. *Brennschluss*, Ken and Irene Potter and Dave Wood, 72 Dallas Rd., Lancaster; 1/- per copy.

from *Nebula* No. 31, June 1958

Fanorama: July 1958

WALTER WILLIS writes for you –

For some reason I seem to have no fan magazines to review this time round, so you can take the knife out of your piggy-bank and relax – your bacon has been saved for another month. All that can be heard from British amateur publishers these days is a plaintive keening about the new postal rates, which are not only so harsh but so anomalous in their effects that they seem to have thrown British science-fiction fans into a sort of delirium. No doubt the Government would have quailed if they had realized what a blow they were going to strike at this finest delicate flower of western culture, but apparently all the members of the Cabinet must have failed to renew their fanmag subscriptions simultaneously and this is the dire result.

There have been postal increases in the States, too, but there the Government was cunning enough to announce beforehand that the revenue was going to be used to finance the space flight programme. In such a case, of course, no true science fiction fan could possibly raise the slightest objection. Every time he posts something he knows he is licking the Russians as well as the stamp – every postal item is a sort of mailed fist, as it were – and helping the march of Man towards the stars. Looking at the envelopes I get from America, I can only imagine that each American fan is determined to finance the whole project single-handed.

But here in Britain we have no space flight programme (shame!) and the money we give to the Government is just frittered away on necessities. I warn them they are asking for trouble. One of these days the ingenious minds of science fiction fans are going to work out a way to retaliate and get their own back from the Post Office. To clear logical minds like ours the approach is quite obvious – a simple anti-gravity device, small enough to be popped inside a postal package – and no doubt some science fiction fan, after a diligent perusal of all the stories dealing with this development, is at this moment knocking one together in his laboratory. No wonder he hasn't published an issue of his fanmag lately! While he is toiling away there I suggest we might start operations with an even simpler weapon, the flat

balloon. Made out of the new pre-stressed plastic, each balloon would contain enough helium or similar light gas to lift a weight of 2 oz. By merely tucking one of these inside a 4 oz. parcel you would be able to send it at the 2 oz. rate. Or by enclosing two minus-2 oz. balloons you could, of course, send it for nothing, since the Post Office in its helpless innocence bases its charges on weight not volume. But this would only be the trial skirmish. When sufficient supplies of balloons or anti-gravity plates are available, every fan publisher will flood the Post Office with packets weighing huge minus quantities. The Postmaster-General will then go bankrupt paying out money and the Government will be brought to its knees. Simple, isn't it?

Tentacles Across the Sea

In progress at the moment is the 1958 election campaign for the Transatlantic Fan Fund, a project to send a British fan to the American Convention in Los Angeles in September by public subscription. Any contribution to this worthy cause, however large, would be welcomed by the British organizer, Ken Bulmer, 204 Wellmeadow Road, Catford, London, S.E. 6, who is even now trudging from travel agent to travel agent trying to find a way to Los Angeles on the limited funds at present available. In this case money seems to be the evil of all routes.

In Memoriam

Within the past few months the science fiction world has suffered two very great bereavements, with the sudden deaths of Henry Kuttner and Cyril Kornbluth. I haven't space here even to start summarizing the debt we all owe to these two writers, and even those of us who have been familiar with the science fiction field for a long time find it difficult to take in at once the extent of the loss it has sustained. It is a shock, for instance, to realize that in the same grave as Henry Kuttner are interred the ghostly figures of Lewis Padgett, Edward Benin, Paul Edmonds, Noel Gardner, Will Garth, James Hall, Keith Hammond, Hudson Hastings, Kelvin Kent, Woodrow Wilson Smith, Robert Kenyon, C. H. Liddell, Scott Morgan and Laurence O'Donnell. Not to mention half of several famous collaborations.

The End of Anarchy

British Fandom seems to have taken to heart the remark made some months ago by your editor about the dearth of properly organized science fiction clubs in Britain. Anyway, at the British Convention at Easter, a new national organization has been set up, the British Science Fiction Association. In the

past, British fan organizations have had a fine record for stability and efficiency, and it looks as if this one will be well worth joining. At the moment of writing all the details have not been quite finalized, but enquiries may be made to Eric Bentcliffe, 47 Alldis Street, Great Moor, Stockport, Cheshire. One of the most interesting things about the new organization is that Ted Tubb has been named editor of the Official Organ.

News and Gossip

Bob Shaw, fan writer of genius, and a *Nebula* discovery as a professional author, is returning to Ireland at the end of this summer after a two-year stay in Canada.... Your film correspondent, Forrest J. Ackerman, recently edited a highly successful 300,000 circulation oneshot magazine entitled *Famous Monsters of Filmland*....

from *Nebula* No. 32, July 1958

Fanorama: August 1958

WALTER WILLIS writes for you –

Many of you, I know, are in the habit of going to see a science fiction film every time you're down in the dumps (convenient, because that's where they're usually playing these days) and you may have noticed that often there are other films in the programme. These are sneaked on by the management in a feeble attempt to discourage you from waiting for the sf film to come up for the third time, and the result of this unethical practice is that acknowledged masterpieces of the cinematographic art like *I Was a Teenage Thing* and *The Earwigs from Outer Space* are flanked by fillers with queer names like *Shane* and *High Noon*. As a result of a lifetime's study of the cinema as an art form (my mother used a lot of jam) I am in a position to explain some of the oddities of these supporting films to you fellow science fiction fans, so that you may be able to gain some slight interest from them as you sit there patiently munching your potato crisps and waiting for the real programme to start. (A member of the younger generation reading over my shoulder queries that reference to getting into cinemas for jamjars. Apparently nowadays they have to surrender other articles – razors, bicycle chains....)

In the first place perhaps I had better warn you that these “westerns”, as they are called, are pretty fantastic. Far-fetched, I would call them, and you'll have to exercise your credulity pretty hard. Unlike science fiction, which takes place in the infinitude of the future where everything is possible – even likely – they are set in an era of the past which is not only imaginary but frankly impossible. However, many of the plots are obvious adaptations of the plots of some of our lesser science fiction writers and with a little imagination you should be able to visualize them as a sort of half-baked science fiction. It helps that the scenery is vaguely reminiscent of that of Mars or the Moon. The local inhabitants are made up of two races living in a symbiotic relationship, one biped and humanoid, the other quadruped. It is obvious that the quadrupeds are the ruling race because none of them is ever hurt in the frequent ray-gun battles in which the humanoids fall like flies. Obviously

they are protected by force-fields. They transport the humanoids about in cages called “wagons”, obviously much against their will because they’re always trying from inside to turn the wheels backwards and go in the opposite direction.

The humanoids are of two kinds, the normal ones and the evil mutants. The latter are unable to face solar radiation and spend their time in banks and offices further protected by black clothes and moustaches. The normal humanoids are protected from them by an ability to move their own guns and deflect the bullets of their enemies by telekinesis. Further evidence of this telekinetic ability is shown by the recurring episode of the small town newspaper. This scene has always been a favourite of mine as an amateur publisher and I have studied the details very carefully. Briefly, what happens is that the villain holds up the newspaper editor at ray-gun point and forces him to run off, there and then, a special edition containing false news. I have studied this newspaper office very carefully and the only equipment seems to be a flat-bed proofing press and an old man with a rusty composing stick. It would, I calculate, take him approximately three days to set up one page of the newspaper, letter by letter, and another half day to run it off on that old press, by which time the old man would have collapsed from exhaustion and the Mon-Tues-Wed audience would have gone home and left the Thurs-Fri-Sat audience wondering what it was all about. Obviously what happens is that the stress of the situation awakes the old man’s supernormal faculties. This is just one of the unsuspected facets of westerns which can be appreciated by the science fiction fan.

Being held up at gun point isn’t a thing that happens to science fiction magazine editors much these days, presumably because most of our villains live on Mars or even further afield, but the stress of the job must be pretty tough all the same. Just think, for example, the time it must take my boss Peter Hamilton to re-arrange the words of all the stories so that all the lines end neatly together! I hear the turnover in some magazines has been so rapid the publishers were thinking of asking De Gaulle to take over. One of the most interesting new appointments has been that of Damon Knight as the new editor of the American magazine, *If*. Knight, an old time science fiction fan, an efficient critic and one of the best writers in the field, had a previous brief spell as a professional editor of a magazine called *Worlds Beyond*. Unfortunately the magazine was sunk in the backwash from the collapse of

the last boom in science fiction, but its three issues are still remembered with keen nostalgia.

from *Nebula* No. 33, August 1958

Fanorama: September 1958

WALTER WILLIS writes for you –

In the latest issue of the fan magazine *Ploy*, H.P. (Sandy) Sanderson mentions an experience that a lot of us must be having for the first time these days:

“At the office each new science-fiction-type news release leads to a barrage of questions from the mundane types who tend to regard one with awe as an expert on these things because of prior knowledge.”

True, true. But one of the snags of being bowed down to as an idol is that your feet of clay tend to loom uncomfortably large in your worshippers' field of vision. There is a danger that in time people might find out that we don't know *everything*, especially since few of us have had practice in the technique of being an Informed Source. Sandy goes on to offer a helpful hint for avoiding this catastrophe:

“What these mundane types don't know is that a system of dealing with these questions has been developed whereby the ones that can be answered by a hasty mental reference to one of the Arthur C. Clarke books are answered in detail, and the ones that can't are answered in such a way as to show that of course the speaker knows the full answer but isn't allowed to reveal it because the information is still classified.”

Well, you can see at once that there opens out before us a glorious new field for the exercise of the techniques of “OneUpmanship”, as pioneered by Stephen Potter, one which we have entirely to ourselves and which is full of possibilities. For instance, American fans are in the happy position of being able to use this Top Secret Defensive Gambit as the basis for an offensive sortie. When faced with a question casting doubt on the usefulness of the space flight programme, especially from somebody who has in the past been particularly nasty and sneering about our ideas, it is sufficient to whip out a little black notebook and ask “What Communist Front organizations have you been a member of?”

Obviously there is a lot of research to be done and any suggestions you have would be welcome, addressed to me in care of this magazine. For instance, there are a lot of questions which can't be countered by Sandy's defensive gambit and which are awkward for those of us, few in number admittedly, who don't have all the works of Arthur Clarke off by heart. Like "How do you know how far away the stars are?" and similarly deceptively simple queries. If you haven't got the self-confidence to launch into a glib lecture about spectra, Doppler effects, locomotive whistles and red shifts – and we must admit that the whole thing sounds lots less convincing than a tape measure – all I can suggest is the Condescension Counter. This involves whipping out several sheets of blank paper, a sharp pencil (and if possible a slide rule), meanwhile asking confidently, "Of course, you understand the differential calculus?" There is something about these last two words which strikes terror into the heart of the average moron – I can hardly bring myself to type them – and fills him with a crushing sense of inferiority. On hearing, with a politely incredulous air, the reply "Well ... I'm afraid not", you look pitying, then puzzled and just stand there with the air of one looking helplessly around for a child's abacus until the questioner apologizes and retreats in disorder. Of course if he *does* happen to understand the differential calculus I admit you're in a bit of a spot. All I can suggest is that you raise the ante by mentioning all the mathematical esoterica you've ever heard of in the hope that eventually you will reach the stage where you can safely say, "Well, it should be pretty obvious then?" Of course, you might be up against an experienced counter-bluffer....

News and Gossip

The Transatlantic Fan Fund election has been won by Ron Bennett, editor of *Ploy*, and on all counts a very fine choice. By the time you read this he will be in America attending the World Convention in Los Angeles. Meanwhile out there another dream is coming true in an almost fairy-like fashion. This 1958 Convention is the result of a propaganda campaign which started ten years ago almost as a joke with the slogan "South Gate in '58". South Gate is a small town just outside Los Angeles. Editors of fanzines used the slogan as a filler until it became a tradition in the fan world and in 1957 the convention was voted to the South Gate fans without any opposing contenders, the first time this has ever happened and probably the last. Unfortunately South Gate does not actually have any big hotels so the Convention had to be arranged for Los Angeles itself, and it looked as if the legend would fail to come true

by a matter of a few niggling miles. But we reckoned without the ingenuity of the South Gate fans. They have arranged with the Mayors of Los Angeles and South Gate for the territory of the Convention Hotel to be legally ceded by Los Angeles to South Gate for the duration of the Convention, and the Mayor of South Gate will attend at the opening to claim the territory formally for his municipality.

Sadder news comes from the West Coast with reports of the deaths of two very well-known fans, Francis Towner Laney and Vernon McCain. F.T. Laney was in many ways a controversial character with many enemies he had made himself with his sardonic sense of humour and vitriolic style, but Vernon McCain was universally popular. Both of them contributed to the interest of the fan world for hundreds of us all over the world, though neither had been active recently, and it certainly will not seem quite the same without them.

from *Nebula* No. 34, September 1958

Fanorama: October 1958

WALTER WILLIS writes for you –

If my calculations are correct, and I figure this is bound to happen sometime by the law of averages, this column should be making its appearance just about the time *Nebula's* first four-part serial is sweeping majestically towards its climax. In the circumstances, maybe I should try and tell you something about its author, Mr. H. Kenneth Bulmer. As a matter of fact the only reason I haven't done this before is that I know too much about him. No, relax, this isn't going to be a Sunday newspaper exposure of authors in the *Nebula* stable kicking over the traces, it's just that I know and like Ken Bulmer too well to be confident I can do him justice. When you don't know very intimately the people you're writing about you have no trouble with selection. All you do is pass on to the reader your impressions of them and you have done your best: he has a nice clear little picture of the subject, on thin cardboard, just like yours. But I have known Ken Bulmer very well for more than ten years. I have put him up in my house and he has put up with me in his, and we have spent holidays together in various rainswept bungalows along the Irish coast. So when I think of him I'm inclined to forget the respected professional author: I tend to remember a bleary-eyed figure leaning against the kitchen doorway saying something like, "The best thing about having a hardboiled cigarette for breakfast is that you have time to smoke an egg."

Ken Bulmer is about thirty-five, dark-haired, wears glasses and has what in other people might be called round shoulders but in his case is obviously a scholarly stoop. When I first met him he owned a vehicle which in deference to the feelings of the automobile industry I always referred to as a horseless carriage. The importance of this contraption to the history of science fiction was that one journey in it so harrowed the soul of a friend of mine that he wrote an account of it in a fan magazine, and this was the start of the writing career of another pillar of British science fiction, James White. Eventually, having fulfilled its destiny and understandably depressed by the gloomy prognostications of all Ken's friends, the engine of the vehicle did fall out.

Leaving it smoking in the road, Ken married a vivacious brunette called Pamela who is still in good running order and now drives him. They live in an old house with a red door in an endless road in South East London.

At the time I first met him, Ken had no thought of being a professional author, though I was publishing fiction by him in my fan magazine. The nearest either of us had got to professional publication at that time was a short story we collaborated on one Sunday morning in Regent's Park Zoo, about the crew of a spaceship who were wrecked on the night side of an unknown planet and were eaten one by one by various kinds of horrible monsters until dawn, when the lone survivor found they had landed inside a wall bearing the notice "Please Do Not Feed The Animals". This story was at one time to be published by a reckless professional editor in Australia, but the publishers got wind of it and promptly went into voluntary liquidation. Undismayed, and encouraged by Pamela, Ken fought on and is now one of the very few people able to make a living by whole-time science fiction writing.

As well as the scientific knowledge shown in his stories and as half of Kenneth Johns, Ken is a mine of information on all sorts of odd subjects, from sailing ships and aerodynamics to old weapons and fortifications. But I wouldn't like you to think he is just a dilettante, an academic theorist. He puts his knowledge to sound practical use, as you would realize if you saw the fantastic galleons and brigantines he makes for my children. out of old Woodbine packets and iced lollie sticks. Or witnessed him flying his own design of a kite, half strangled in a cocoon of a peculiar string we had got from the local general store, so bent on its own destruction we called it the Gadarene twine. Or defying the incoming tide inside a beautifully castellated and complex fort of sand. As Wilde said, simple pleasures are the last refuge of the complex, and Ken is one of those all too rare people who have the capacity to preserve in maturity the joyous enthusiasm of childhood. In this, perhaps, is the sense of wonder so many of us miss in current science fiction? If so, Ken Bulmer is the author who may supply it and, if he continues to show in his published work half the human understanding that endears him to his friends, he may one of these days be a very great writer.

Reviews

Satellite No. 7. Don Allen, 34a Cumberland St., Gateshead 8, Co. Durham. 1/-. The cover proclaims in huge black capitals, "They took this fan ... they gave him a gun ... injected ... drilled ... deported ... His fannish spirit yet survived ... to bring you the full shocking story ... It's Raw ... Stark ... Brutal." From which you may gather that the engaging Don Allen has returned from his national service with his sense of humour unimpaired. This issue starts off with the first part of Don's account of his various travels and the fans he met in the course of them and the rest of the issue, while containing little about science fiction itself, is interesting if you would like to know more about science fiction fans, or indeed if you are interested in interesting people.

from *Nebula* No. 35, October 1958

Fanorama: November 1958

WALTER WILLIS writes for you –

There was once a man in America who made his living by putting small ads in large circulation magazines reading ACT NOW. DON'T DELAY. SEND \$1.00 TO ME IMMEDIATELY AT THE ADDRESS BELOW. HURRY – TOMORROW MAY BE TOO LATE. Among the hundreds of millions of people in America there were always enough of the idly curious or simple minded to provide him with an adequate income. The law got after him once, but it was ruled that since he offered nothing at all he couldn't be accused of fraud.

Only slightly less startling are the people who live by selling names and addresses. I don't know if you've ever noticed their advertisements, but they read RECEIVE INTERESTING MAIL. APPLY TO ... These people make lists of those who write in and sell them for hard cash to mail order firms, charity organizers, etc., rather like the mathematicians who sell lists of random numbers to research workers. The product is known as "sucker lists" and the reasoning is that people who answer such an advertisement are likely to be people who will write away for things, or who at least can read.

To want to "receive interesting mail" is a very understandable desire, but one not so easily satisfied. I suppose it all started for us as children, when about Christmas and birthday time the postman became a rich unpredictable uncle delivering surprises from all over the world into our hot little hands. But, alas, most of us have long lost the thrill of seeing the postman coming up our path: we expect nothing more colourful than a Final Demand in red ink, and we almost wish we were a dog so we could bite him. This all changed for me when I became actively interested in science fiction fandom, and it's one of the most rewarding things about the hobby. Instead of lying resentfully in bed in the mornings I dash downstairs for the morning's mail – driven, as you might say, from pillow to post – and instead of every day being a dull stepping-stone to Saturday it's enlivened by two consignments of the Unexpected. Everything comes that you can think of, and a lot that you can't, because sf fans are people with highly original minds – complimentary copies

of books, gramophone records, picture postcards from the most unexpected places, recorded tapes, quotecards, toys, novelties, souvenirs, photographs, maps and of course fan magazines and letters from all parts of the globe full of friendliness, humour, drama and sheer incomprehensibility. I've also received in my time such unlikely items as a wooden box of exotic fruit from Disneyland (that was Forrest J. Ackerman), letters with handpainted full colour illustrations in the margins, a slab of guava jelly from New York and a device for blowing bubbles from the top of your head from Damon Knight. When I was a very active fan stuff like this used to surge in by every post and when on rare occasions the postman didn't call we began secretly to suspect that the world had been plunged into atomic war and it was being kept out of the local papers. Once I didn't get any mail for a whole day and was considering digging a hole in the front garden when a red van drew up outside with my mail all tied up in an enormous bundle with thick, rope, in what I thought was an unnecessarily pointed manner.

This was all brought home to me by reading Sandy Sanderson's "Inchmery Fan Diary" in his fan magazine *Aporrheta*, in which he recounts day by day the variegated imports of that lively fan household. This is heady stuff and I can well imagine a newcomer being fascinated by the colourful life which active sf fans live. In which case perhaps a word of warning might be in order. This is not quite like sending a postcard with your name and address and getting a seed catalogue.

Before you can attain the dizzy eminence of receiving devices for blowing bubbles from the top of your head from Damon Knight – and understand I cannot positively guarantee that – a certain amount of activity on your part is necessary. The Diary of a new fan might read more like:

“Jan. 1st. Got *Nebula* and read Willis's column by mistake. Remembered that out-of-date Postal Order they wouldn't cash and sent away for a sample fan magazine.

Jan. 10th. Fanzine arrived: Sent away for another.

Jan. 15th. Discharged from hospital, having promised doctor not to open staples with my fingernails again.

Jan. 25th. Second fanzine arrived. Decided to publish one of my own and show these people how it should be done. Jewel-like

reproduction, tasteful lay-out, multi-colour illustrations, regular monthly schedule, mailed in envelopes. Wrote for material to Robert Heinlein, Arthur Clarke and a couple of Big Name Fans.

Jan. 28th. Still no word from Clarke. Wonder if I should have sent a stamped envelope – that frogman stuff must be expensive. The BNFs don't answer either, the slob.

Feb. 10th. No word from Heinlein. Wonder if 'Robert Heinlein, America', was sufficient address.

Feb. 11th. Soap coupons.

Feb: 12th. More soap coupons.

Feb. 13th. Letter from Mr. Littlewood.

Feb. 14th. Letter from Mr. Vernon. Decided to give up idea of fanzine of my own for the time being. Wrote letters of comment to the editors of the two I got and to a couple of people who sounded nice from their letters in the readers' sections.

June 12th. Haven't had time to keep up this diary but nothing much today so can catch up with my reading, just a letter from some neofan looking for material for his crudzine (some hope) and a note from Damon Knight that he's sending me a parcel."

Sandy Sanderson's address is 7 Inchmery Road, Catford, London, S.E.6, and if *Aporrheta* isn't available at the time he'll have you sent something else equally worth your money. If he doesn't, ask me for a refund. I'll bet I don't get enough requests to force me to leave for South America. Among the fascinating melange of news and views in the current issue, incidentally, are quotes from the hurried notes of Ron Bennett, Transatlantic Fan Fund winner and Bradbury worshipper, written during his hectic tour of the States. One typical one reads, "Have shaken hands with Bradbury six times. So far."

from *Nebula* No. 36, November 1958

Fanorama: December 1958

WALTER WILLIS writes for you –

In a forthcoming issue of *Nebula* there will be a story by James White, who is known as one of the best of the new generation of British sf authors. What is not so well known is that James once nearly gave his life for science fiction.

One day in his ceaseless combing of the second-hand bookshops of Belfast James was rewarded by the discovery of a 1935 issue of wonder stories. Concealing his emotion, he bought it from the trusting dealer for a mere six times its face value and, like a true fan, opened it at the fan department. There, in faded grey and brown, was the startling intelligence that a Chapter of the Science Fiction League had been founded in Belfast by one Hugh O'Hara. The address was a mere twenty minutes walk from where James was now rooted to the pavement and he decided to track down this hitherto unknown founder of Irish fandom.

The address was one of a long row of working class houses in a narrow street. The door was opened by a middle-aged woman with a truculent expression.

“Mr. O'Hara?” asked James politely.

She gave him a suspicious look and would probably have slammed the door in his face if it hadn't been for the fact that James is roughly a mile high. She contented herself by gradually reducing the width of the aperture until she seemed in danger of cutting her head off.

“Which Mr. O'Hara?” she asked warily.

“Hugh,” said James.

“Me?” she protested angrily. Her moustache bristled.

“Not *you*,” said James. He gave her an aspirate to relieve her pain. “Hhh-ugh. Hugh O'Hara.”

Malevolently, the woman seized her opportunity for further obstruction.

“Which Hugh O'Hara?”

Now I have the sober type of mind that mentally falls off every bridge before I come to it. If I had been going to make this call of James's I'd have cased the joint first.

"Er ... the one who's interested in science fiction," said James at last.

The woman looked at him blankly. It seemed to come naturally to her. "Signs?" she asked. "Fixing what signs?"

Faced so suddenly with the task of explaining what science fiction was, I am afraid that James quailed. It was a pity he hadn't been studying his John W. Campbell or he could have said: "Oh, you know, fictional extrapolation from current or potential technological or psychical development." If he had, I venture to suggest that he would have remained master of the situation.

As it was, all he could do was fall back on the copy of *Wonder Stories*. He started to undo his overcoat to withdraw the magazine. The woman assumed the expression of a cover girl on *True Detective*, and her apprehensions were not allayed when James finally produced his magazine, opened it at the page and showed it to her. She screamed.

Raised as you have been in the pure clean air of *Nebula*, it will be difficult for you younger readers to realize what some of the advertisements in the back pages of old time pulp magazines were like. As for James, he is a very high-minded character ... not only in the sense that his head is occasionally surrounded by cirrus clouds ... and devoted to science fiction, so the advertisements in pulps simply did not exist for him. He probably knew vaguely that there was something on the page other than the fan department but I am sure he did not know what it was, far less suspect that it might cause him to be regarded as some kind of maniac.

Fortunately for James, Mrs. O'Hara attempted to withdraw her head without remembering to open the door again and the volume of her alarm was throttled down by several decibels. It also gave James time to disavow responsibility for the advertisement, hastily closing the magazine and showing the cover. It was an innocuous painting, merely showing several thousand human beings being eaten alive by multi-tentacled monstrosities, and its idyllic charm quietened her immediately.

"Our Hughie used to read them magazines," she vouchsafed, reflectively.

"Where is he?" asked James.

“He’s away,” she replied defensively and with renewed alarm.

“*Where?*” asked James, so hot on the trail that he failed to notice the warning signs. The hunted expression, the furtive glance up the street.

She gave him a hostile look, this time more of hate than fear. It lingered at his feet, which *are* rather big. Suddenly James realized that this was Belfast, where there are more desperate minority organizations than the Science Fiction League. He looked round in alarm. A number of lean hungry-looking men had materialized, with their hands in their jacket pockets. James quickly tried to explain that he was only interested in magazines. One of them caught the word and nodded to the others. They moved forward slowly. James knew it was time to go, but the instinct of the true collector *is* strong.

“Did Hughie leave any of them?” he asked. But he was already walking away, because he knew what the answer would be. Sure enough it came, the ritual reply known to collectors the world over: “Oh, there were hundreds of them in the attic but they were threw away last week.”

So James hadn’t bothered to wait, and gained the safety of the main road with milliseconds to spare. Otherwise there might have been a dozen blank pages in a forthcoming issue of *Nebula*.

from *Nebula* No. 37, December 1958

Fanorama: January 1959

WALTER WILLIS writes for you –

Does this plot seem familiar? In the far future, Earth has been enslaved by an alien race with invincible psionic ability. In course of time a mutant strain with similar ability develops in humanity but unhappily the aliens have a detector of psionic radiation and orders are given for the execution of the mutants. The human servants, at the cost of their own lives, disobey the order and send the young mutants off in a spaceship which eventually lands on a distant planet peopled by a kindly but backward race. The human mutants thrive, but eventually their increased psionic powers again register on the alien detection apparatus and an expedition is sent to exterminate them. They are concealed by their loyal protectors, but the aliens are able to transmit a ray which paralyses the human psionic functions. They live and multiply, but are no longer a threat until another race persecuted by the aliens seeks refuge on the same planet. They enter into a symbiotic relationship with the humans and are able to remove the psionic block; together the new allies reconquer Earth, and the backward race is rewarded. Well, of course, this is Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, and the fact that nowadays it is quite an acceptable science fiction plot shows how vague the dividing line has become between science fiction and fantasy. Drawing this line has been a sort of game in the fan world for many years, the most recent attempt being in a scholarly and well-written survey by George Locke of imaginative novels published before the first world war, and it reminds me of nothing so much as the children's party game where you are blindfolded and told to pin the tail on a drawing of a donkey. It's difficult to do, and you haven't got much when you've finished.

However, making the attempt on present-day science fiction does elicit one interesting fact, that much of to-day's science fiction isn't science fiction at all, but fairy stories in which charms, spells and magic have been replaced by pseudo-scientific gobbledygook about spacewarps, forcefields and psionics. I like a good fairy story as well as anyone, but I'd like some real science fiction too, with some of the thrill and achievement of real scientific

discovery in it. They say this is what Russian science fiction aims at, and if so there might be a lesson for us there. The trouble, of course, is that too few of our authors have any intimate knowledge of scientific research and too few of our scientific workers have enough literary talent to produce the polished writing required to-day. It seems that more collaborations are indicated.

But even if young man with thrilling scientific idea meets young man with writing ability, there is still the problem of combining their properties into a story. This process seems to be a mystery to most people, judging from the fact that the question authors are most often asked is “How on earth do you think of your plots?” Well, I’ll tell you it’s just a trick, an attitude of mind, and anybody can acquire it. I’ve been present at the conception of dozens of stories and, all you need is a couple of friends with lively minds. If you’re completely stuck just visualize a situation, any situation, and kick the components around. Twist them, invert them, extrapolate them or turn them inside out. I remember one afternoon James White, Bob Shaw and I just for fun took the simplest situation we could think of, a man sitting on a rock, and by asking ourselves questions about it – what was he waiting for, how long had he been there, was the rock really a rock or could it be alive (“Boy meets rock”), why *that* rock and so on – we had five separate plots after a couple of hours, two of which eventually sold. Of course it’s even easier if you’ve got even the smallest original idea. Once you acquire the habit, you can see a whole story in the slightest thing. For instance, Eric Frank Russell told me he got, a plot for a detective story through not being able to close the boot on his car. It was about a man who carried out a carefully planned murder and carried the body in a trunk in the boot of his car to bury the lot in the woods. He stopped for petrol on the way and the garage attendant, noticing that the rear numberplate couldn’t be seen because the boot wouldn’t close down, thoughtfully chalked the car number on the trunk. Then I remember once I was coming home from work when I noticed that all the little girls seemed to have started playing with curious little three-dimensional crosses called jacks. I asked at a shop for some for my own daughter and they told me the factory was working overtime, unable to meet the sudden demand. It occurred to me to wonder who told children all to start playing the same game at the same time the way they do. Ken Bulmer was staying with me at the time and we worked out a story about aliens who were stranded on Earth because a small but delicately machined part was broken in their spaceship drive. Their problem is to get this part made without revealing themselves to agents of

another race who are on Earth looking for them. They solve it by inventing a children's game the rules of which are carefully calculated to ensure that maximum mass production efficiency will produce a toy with the properties they want, so all they have to do is buy one in a shop. And that explains why in a recent story a part of an alien spaceship happened to be called a Wyllys.

from *Nebula* No. 38, January 1959

Fanorama: February 1959

WALTER WILLIS writes for you –

While James White was having tea with us the other night he mentioned casually that he'd just sold a story in Italy. Naturally I was spiritually uplifted to learn of this fresh advance of culture and enlightenment and I cast about for some diplomatic way of putting the question which lies nearest to the hearts of all us dedicated missionaries of science fiction. "How much?" was how I phrased it. "Eleven thousand lira," he said sonorously, and went on to talk about his model train set. "And how much is that in sordid sterling?" I pursued, wondering if he'd let me drive his Maserati. James had already made his mark in Germany, not to mention his kroner in Sweden, and we were becoming minor authorities on currency exchange rates. "I suppose you'll keep on your job at the Co for a while?" "Yes," said James, "I think I'd better. After deductions it works out at £4 14s. 10d." "Still a five-figure cheque," I pointed out. "Yes," said James, brightening, "and, besides, you must admit it's nicer to be paid two lira a word than a few guineas a thousand."

I agreed. You have to be pretty famous to be paid by the single word in Britain. I've heard that Arthur Conan Doyle got 5/- a word for the later Sherlock Holmes stories but I hope I'm not destroying any illusions when I say that few science fiction magazines, even *Nebula*, can afford to pay that much, even to authors who are turning out better science fiction than Doyle ever did.

Last month, as you probably don't remember, I mentioned how much science fiction was just fairy stories. The same thought has occurred to Edmund Crispin, anthologist of *Best SF Three*, and he has come up with a very snappy comeback which you can quote if anyone ever makes this criticism in your presence. Towards the end of his preface Edmund hauls off and delivers the following telling counterpunch:

"... they differ from conventional fairy tales in carrying a massive, so to say epiphenomenal, load of religious, political, ethical and sociological implication, and so, at their best, provide intellectual

stimulation of a generalized variety which mainstream fiction is incapable of embodying in any tolerable form.”

I'll bet this will silence your opponent, at least until he has a chance to sneak off and look up “epiphenomenal” in the dictionary.

Which brings me back to this question of word rates. Don't you think it's ridiculous to treat all words as if they were the same value? It's obvious that a complicated piece of semantic machinery like “epiphenomenal” is worth a dozen “ands” and “buts”, and an author capable of operating it without it falling on him deserves a bonus. I'm not suggesting we should go back to paying authors by the line – I don't like stories consisting entirely of dialogue any more than you do – but that science fiction could be improved if we introduced a differential scale for words. Why, for instance, should an author get paid for conjunctions when he doesn't get paid for full stops? And then, take adjectives. Everyone knows that the excessive use of adjectives is a sign of bad writing and after you've written anything you should go over it and strike them all out. But you can't expect an author paid the present way to do it when every stroke of the pencil is taking bread out of the mouths of his starving children.. So suppose we pay half the standard rate for adjectives, and of course adverbs. Nouns and verbs, on the other hand, are good since they mean thought and action, so we'll pay double for those. Taking it even further, we could encourage colourful and poetic writing by paying special bonuses for “like” and “as if”. Eventually we might work out a point value for every word in the language.

You may suggest this would be too complicated, but I'd reply that this is the sort of problem that would be child's play to the keen mathematical minds of our professional editors, easy as falling off a logarithm. In fact this sort of thing is being done already, by the electronic computer school of literary critics. What these people do is count all the words in an author's work and find the number of times each of them recurs. Then by comparing these frequencies with statistical norms, they can deduce such things as that Shakespeare was two other people or that Dickens had an Oedipus complex. What interests me, though, is that they really can make quite legitimate deductions about an author's education, background, knowledge and method of thinking, whether imaginative or concrete and so on. It seems to me that all that is needed to improve the standard of science fiction is for our editors to subject to statistical analysis the words used in all the really good science

fiction that's been published so far and base their rates on the results. Naturally this would have to be kept dark to prevent authors cashing in unfairly and if Peter Hamilton adopts the system I promise to tell hardly anyone. I wonder if James will let me drive his Jaguar?

from *Nebula* No. 39, February 1959

Fanorama: May 1959

WALTER WILLIS writes for you –

Did it ever occur to you how wantonly destructive some science fiction authors are? I'm not thinking of people like Edmond Hamilton, who used to be nicknamed "World-wrecker Ed" because he used up planets the way some authors use up cigarettes or Micky Spillane blondes, but the ordinary pulp-type authors who like to finish their stories with the hero and heroine clinging to each other amid the ruins of every other element in the plot. The earliest example of this kind of thing I can think of is Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea*, but there have been all too many lesser instances since. The mad scientist blown up with his laboratory, the man-eating orchid incinerated with the conservatory, the djinn bottle dropped back into the sea, the Secret Formula put in the fire, the strange machine battered to fragments and generally everything reverting to how it was when the story started, except that the author is a few pounds richer.

Well, I can see one reason for this, which is that a nice big bang is an easy way of ending a story. Probably the author, with the wild optimism of his profession (Motto: "After Youd!"), has his eyes on the film rights of his story and realizes that a big bang not only looks well in technicolor but wakens up the patrons in time for them to buy ice cream. Thus endearing him to the cinema industry, which nowadays has to fall back on such frozen assets; it is in the Lyons' den with its back to the Walls, as you might say. But I wonder if even this is psychologically sound. I'm sure the reaction of my subconscious to the destruction of Captain Nemo's wonderful palace, with all its treasures and inventions, was that after all that waste things were going to be tough all over and I'd better save my money.

But I think there's more to it than that. I suspect the authors like blowing things up because they don't really approve of science and imagination. For one thing they're so obviously smug about what's happening, right from the start. Most of them belong to what I think of as the "hadibut" school of writing. They keep downing tools and breathing plaintive remarks in your face starting with "Had I but ..." You can see rightaway that whatever the

invention or discovery is, the author is determined that no good shall come of it. Suppose the scientist invents, say, a new can opener. He's hardly started twiddling the rheostats before he's making with the hadibuts. "Had I but known what I do now, I'd never have done what I did." And his fiancée isn't any better, with that confounded feminine intuition of hers: "It is evil, John, evil!" Even the little dog backs away, growling, so that the audience can nod sagely to itself and do their impression of Hilda Baker to each other. Worst of all is the kindly old father with his wise old "There-are-secrets-into-which-Man-is-not-meant-to-pry" routine.

Well, after all this you can pretty well write the rest of the story yourself. The scientist, too drunk with power to heed the warnings of his fiancée, father, dog or the little boys in the front row of the stalls, keeps feeding the super-scientific can opener with bigger and bigger cans until one terrible night it is struck by lightning and runs amok. It starts opening everything, including people. The police are called in, followed in breathless succession by the F.B.I., the Federal Guard and the U.S. Marines, but the machine catches all the shells and bullets in mid air and neatly extracts the contents before they can explode. Finally, the Air Force, on advice from the scientist, drops a hydrogen bomb, which has as you know a dinky little ordinary atomic bomb inside, and that's that. Silhouetted against the mushroom cloud the hero clutches the heroine with one hand and burns the blueprints with the other and after a few further philosophic remarks, the picture fades out in a final clinch and a lingering odour of hadibut. The audience is supposed to feel relieved and a little pleased with itself for having seen the danger quicker than that smart-alick scientist, but speaking personally, I'd rather have seen the bomb land on the hero, heroine, wise old father and dog. I preferred the can opener.

The "Youd" mentioned up there is of course old-time fan Sam Youd, better known nowadays as John (*Death of Grass*) Christopher. I hear that he's just made another big sale (*Caves*) to the movie industry, so big in fact that he's been forced to take the Coward's way out from income tax; like Noel, he can no longer afford to stay in England. I suppose this means another regular missing from the weekly gatherings of the London Circle of writers and fans, though for a happier reason. These weekly meetings used to take place in a pub called The White Horse, featured in the popular Arthur Clarke series of stories as *The White Hart*, but some while ago they followed their popular

landlord to The Globe in Hatton Gardens. There, every Thursday night, people professionally or amateurly interested in science fiction meet informally to talk, as they've been doing so for many, many years. Newcomers are always welcome, but occasionally it has happened that they have gone away disgruntled because nobody spoke to them. The trouble was of course, that this is just an ordinary pub and there's no way for the London Circle members to tell science fiction readers from ordinary thirsty citizens.

from *Nebula* No. 40, May 1959

Fanorama: June 1959

WALTER WILLIS writes for you –

For many years it has been the dream of science fiction fans that one day the people would take our favourite literature to their hearts: instead of being a ridiculed minority, we should be looked up to as pioneers, like a resistance movement after an unexpected liberation. Well, don't look now, but it's just all happened. The only difference was that the populace wasn't reading science fiction in magazines. It was watching it on television.

The impact of the *Quatermass* serial on fans was predictable enough. Take prominent fan and *Nebula* artist Arthur Thomson. On the night of the last instalment there he was poised quivering in space between the edge of his armchair and the end of his fifth cigarette, when a terrible disaster struck, one second only in horror to the TV set breaking down – a knock at the door. Backing through his bijou flat, Arthur opened the door and wrested his eyes away from the screen to find a tall, dark man with a sheaf of papers moving forward and saying (the man, that is, not the papers: the papers kept quiet, or at least remained stationary), “Good evening, Sir; I am from –” That was as far as he got, because the distraught Arthur instinctively made a warding-off gesture and whispered: “I'm sorry. *Quatermass* is on.” The stranger said understandingly, “Oh,” and Arthur gently closed the door.

After the world had duly been saved by the palaeontologist and his piece of chain, Arthur was free to turn his mind to less vital matters and wondered who or what the man *had* been from, but alas at the moment of writing this question looks like ousting the Marie Celeste from the first rank of famous mysteries. (I hate to suggest to Arthur that he may have been from Littlewood's.) However the most interesting thing about this little episode, it seems to me, is that he seemed to see the utter reasonableness of Arthur's explanation for not being At Home to casual callers. The fact is that for half an hour on six consecutive Mondays a new social convention entered the British way of life: Bateman could certainly have published a cartoon captioned *The Man Who Interrupted Quatermass*. In fact the most mystifying thing about Arthur's visitor is why he wasn't watching it himself. All I can

suggest is that if the B.B.C. say twelve million people were watching the programme, they must have had people out counting them. In which case of course Arthur's behaviour was impeccably correct.

There have been many attempts in the press to explain the success of the *Quatermass* serial, but they've all been written by non-fans and to us they leave the major mystery unexplained. What they say is true enough, but we fans know that the qualities they ascribe to it are common to all good science fiction, quite a lot of which has appeared in magazines from time to time. Yet the hard fact remains that the total readership of all the science fiction magazines in the English speaking world is not and never has been more than one tenth of one per cent. of the population. This has remained so obstinately true through A-bombs, H-bombs, sputniks and luniks that some fans have reluctantly been driven to the conclusion that the ability to appreciate science fiction is a sort of rare mutation, and that the few occasions on which a science fiction novel or film has enjoyed popular success have been due to extraneous factors like sex or horror. I think the success of *Quatermass* finally disposes of that pessimistic hypothesis. *Quatermass* was true science fiction: tense, but not horrific. There seems therefore no reason at all why the mass audience shouldn't appreciate other science fiction, if properly presented. It's up to us to find out what the *Quatermass* serial had that some authors haven't got.

One quality might be sincerity. In press interviews afterwards Nigel Kneale confessed that he identified himself with the hero and wrote the story for love not money, but I think this was obvious enough from the script itself. Kneale had a story to tell, a story no better than dozens we have read, but he told it as he felt and believed it, without either talking down to his audience or trying to impress it with high-sounding phoniness. It's obvious for instance that he's personally concerned about the H-bomb, current NATO strategy, the perversion of science by politicians and racial intolerance, and all these came into the story. Not as elements in the plot, but as background. And since these are real things that concern us, they helped to make the story real to us in the same way as did the documentary realism of Cartier's production. The story seemed founded in fact, if not on it. And since the public have sometimes an uncanny ability to recognize and appreciate honesty, I think they appreciated that Kneale/*Quatermass* loved humanity and believed in science. I wish more of our authors and characters did.

from *Nebula* No. 41, June 1959

The Post-*Nebula* Columns

Fanorama: March 1960

I've been just a little alarmed to see that in the latest Vector, Eric Jones has been giving instructions for a sort of Do-It-Yourself psionics kit. Eric has been in cahoots with John W. Campbell over this psionics business ... if that Great Man would allow himself to be in anything so vulgar as a cahoot with a mere fan ... so he should know what he's talking about, and according to him all you need is a pair of bent metal rods. (If you have any difficulty finding these, just follow me round the golf course on one of my off days.) With these you can stalk all over the place finding concealed pennies and other useful items. All you have to do is concentrate and it seems you can find practically anything.

I suppose that's harmless enough, but I find the trouble with these psionics people is that they don't seem to know where to stop. I know a fan who started modestly enough by dowsing for water in his back garden and worked his way up, or rather down, to pipes, cables and other archaeological artifacts. Next thing he discovered, like Mr. Campbell, is that he could do his stuff in the privacy of his home, merely by dowsing over maps, or even crude diagrams. The last I heard was that having settled to his own satisfaction the constitution of the Venusian atmosphere, he was dowsing happily over astronomical charts to determine what other stars had water-bearing planets.

Well, you can see right away that this sort of thing is going to put the astronomers out of work, and in no time at all we'll have haggard groups of them at every street corner trying to peddle their spectroscopes for a cup of coffee. But I'm not going to waste any sympathy on them: they were always very stuffy about space flight (imagine preferring peeping at heavenly bodies to exploring them – there's a name for that sort of thing) and it serves them right. No, it's science fiction itself I'm worried about. Any moment now it's going to occur to a professional editor to apply his wonderful discoveries to his job, thereby saving valuable time for his real interests. I can visualize quite clearly the scene in the editorial office when the contents of the next issue are being decided. All the manuscripts that have come in during the last month are carefully spread out on the floor by his secretary ready for the editor's decision. When he has a free moment he dashes in from his

laboratory, puts down his sandwich and picks up a pair of long blue pencils mounted on swivels. Holding one in each hand he marches up and down the office with his eyes closed, his secretary picking up behind him the stories the pencils dipped over. Then having signed the requisite number of cheques and rejection slips, the editor disappears for another month.

So what, you may ask, adding cynically that many magazine editors as it is seem to pick their stories with their eyes closed. Tch tch, you've overlooked the fact that SF readers are pretty bright too, and what editors can do, they can do just as well. They're already well briefed on this psionics caper and pretty psoon they're going to start using it themselves. I can just see it, thousands of fans up and down the country dowsing the magazine racks for good stories, using probably the stems of a pair of reading glasses. Since probably half of all the SF magazines are bought by optimists on spec, there will be a drastic drop in sales when they're bought by pessimists with specs, and most of the magazines will fold. Come to think of it, that's what's happening right now. Do you suppose my warning has come too late?

That psionics piece by Jones was a small sample of the varied contents of the latest issue of *Vector*, the official organ of the British Science Fiction Association. Probably the best of the rest is a thoughtful comparison by A.R. Weir of Christopher's *Death of Grass* with Connington's *Nordenholt's Million*, an older book with a remarkably similar theme. This comparison is by no means entirely in Christopher's favour, and it made me for one to resolve to reread the older book, which I had almost forgotten. It's curious, isn't it, how sometimes you can forget a book just because it's too memorable? I mean, it stays in the memory so long that it doesn't occur to you to reread it until someone else points out how vague your memory of it really is. There should be a sort of literary vomitorium where you could have selected segments of your memory erased so you could read the same books over and over again with the same enjoyment. But then what would the new authors do? (Sealed tenders for the use of this plot to me, please.)

from *Psi-Phi* No. 5, March 1960

Fanorama: June 1964

There's no doubt that reviewing fanzines without going through the formality of reading them first, as a former editor of *Startling* and *Thrilling Wonder* admitted to have been his practice, is a great timesaver. Also it is a help in the forming of opinions not to allow oneself to be confused with facts. Before starting this column, for instance, I had a reasonably clear idea of the sort of thing I was going to say about *Beyond 5* (Charles Platt, 8 Sollershott West, Letchworth, Herts, 1/3 per copy). Platt, I knew, was a cocky know-all afflicted with the disease once diagnosed by Redd Boggs as pseudocampbellism, the delusion that fanzines are imitation prozines. Very well, I thought, if that's the way he wants it, I will simply review his fanzine by professional standards, as he himself has apparently done to the Manchester Group's amateur films. I had, I figured, skimmed enough of the magazine to be able to dismiss the editorial matter as completely devoid of wit or originality, the Convention Report as the sort of subjective reporting of social events the editor hypocritically denounces in fannish fanzines, and the articles as either dull or crackpot or both. As for the fiction, after fifteen years of reading prozine rejects, or what ought to have been prozine rejects, I thought I need only read three paragraphs of any story, the first two to guess the ending, and the third to verify it.

Well, it is true that the editorial wastes a whole page on a pedestrian defence of the new sub rate, a thing which even a professional editor would never do, but I would have been unjust to the rest of the contents. The Convention Report is well-written enough to give a vivid mental picture of the reaction of a serious-minded and intelligent newcomer to his first convention, and I found it quite fascinating ... not least in its resemblance to my own first convention report. There is the same ambivalent attitude of being in but not of the Convention, and the same almost defensive readiness to attack what seems to be established authority. This leads Platt to drop such a fantastic clanger as this comment on the favourable reactions of other fans to the Manchester movies:

“... to an older fan, unused to seeing invention or initiative in fandom, which is, after all, the same now as it was 20 years ago, the very idea that someone

would have shown so much initiative must in itself have been astounding.”

I shall leave this extraordinary statement to the hordes of angry admirers of the work of the Liverpool and Los Angeles groups, who must even now be converging on Letchworth. To me it just seems the latest example of what I think of as The Potter Syndrome. Many years ago, Bob Shaw received a very juvenile fanzine from a very young Ken Potter, with a request for his opinion. Being both honest and kind-hearted, Bob had the greatest difficulty thinking of anything un hurtful to say, but finally concocted a letter which was as encouraging as he could make it. Unfortunately, in the intervening weeks, Ken had matured, and now regarded his first issue with utter contempt. “If you thought it was any good,” he informed Bob coldly, “you must have no taste.”

Platt makes several more perceptive points, including the difficulty natural introverts have in becoming three-day-a-year extroverts, though I don’t see what the Convention Committee could do about that. He seems to have been expecting them to make friends for him, a task which I imagine would have been beyond their powers.

The article by Beryl Henley about reincarnation is crackpot by my standards, but it is quite well-written, and makes some attempt, if in my view an inadequate one, to deal with the basic reason why I consider the question as crackpot – viz, that if memory does not survive, then personality does not in any meaningful sense, and the whole concept is therefore pointless. The article about Poe is dull to anyone who knows the five stories Richard Mayall summarizes, because that’s all he does, but to someone who doesn’t it might be a rewarding signpost. I think myself that mention might have been made also of “The 1002nd Tale of Scheherazade”, which while not strictly SF, does more than any of the stories cited to arouse the science-fictional sense of wonder. In this, Scheherazade, finally reprieved, takes a rest from spinning fantasies to tell the king the mere facts about the modern world; his intelligence affronted, he strangles her after all. It is as beautifully done as I’ve seen anywhere, except in Garrett’s lampoon of Moskowitz (“IM4SFPlus” in the fanzine *Inside* some years ago) and reveals Poe to have been keenly interested not only in the occult, but in such contemporary marvels as the electrotelegraph, the teleprinter, the Daguerrotype, the distant nebulae, the properties of light waves and ultraviolet rays. Maybe it wasn’t so inappropriate after all that he should have been a contributor to the first issue

of *Amazing*.

Definitely neither dull nor crackpot is a thoughtful article on J. G. Ballard by Peter White, though he does not seem to me to be wholly justified in roping in William Golding as a member of the 'environmental' group, to coin an expression. It seems to me that in *Pincher Martin*, that remarkable book, the environment described had no objective existence at all and that the entire action of the novel took place in the few seconds while the hero was drowning.

To my surprise, none of the fiction is about survivors of atomic catastrophe who turn out to be called Adam and Eve, or about the Moon proving to be really made of green cheese; in fact some of it is quite good enough for the prozines.

This is known as damning with faint praise, but in fact two of the stories, by Terence Bishop and Allan Milne, are quite original in plot, and the latter is handled so deftly as to be altogether pleasing. The rest suffer in varying degrees from the usual faults of over-writing, vagueness, derivativeness and pretension, but there's no doubt that they are well above the usual run of amateur fiction. It is possible that Carnell gave up just too soon, and that Moorcock will reap a rich harvest.

Altogether *Beyond* is an excellent introduction for some types of new fan, and is accordingly serving a very worthwhile purpose. All it needs to be perfect for that purpose is more evidence of a sense of humour, or at least, a more sophisticated one than is evidenced by the three fillers in this issue. I am quite sure that one of them was meant to be funny. This would make it more attractive to the older fans, who at the moment have to choose between feigning interest and risking Potter's Syndrome, or keeping quiet; and unfortunately this latter reaction is sometimes mistaken for hostility. Whereas older fans cordially welcome fanzines like this, recognizing them as essential for the continuation of fandom; it is just that having published them themselves for years, they are surfeited with science fiction and talk of science fiction, and view these reincarnations of their former selves with a mixture of nostalgia and guilt. Not patronizingly, like students who have graduated, but like pensioners who have already done their part in the propagation of the species.

from *Zenith* No. 5, June 1964

Fanorama: September 1964

Alien No. 10. Harry Nadler and Charles Partington, 5 South Mesnefield Road, Lower Kersal, Salford 7, Lancs, 1/3 or 25¢ per issue to – Tony Edwards, 10 Cheltenham Place, C- on -M, Manchester 13, or Bob Bell, RFD No. 1, Lower Salem Lane, South Salem, New York. Now there's the sort of thing that puts fanzine reviewers off a magazine – three complicated to type addresses where one would have done. It wouldn't be so bad if I was still getting paid for this stuff, why already I would have made enough for half an ounce of tobacco without batting a brain cell, but it's still bad for the fanzine. Not only does all that stuff take up space which might have been filled with nourishing egoboo, it puts off the reader too. Faced with two addresses, one for letters and one for money, he is likely to send neither. My advice to any casual reader who feels this way is to send everything to the poor downtrodden workers who are actually doing the publishing, and ignore those groping financiers. Even the American one. It seems to be a well-kept secret in British fandom, but dollar bills can be mailed to the U.K. and easily changed into real money.

Any casual reader who nerves himself to take this step should not have cause to regret it, providing he has no unreasonable prejudices. It used to be my practice, for instance, to stop reading immediately any printed matter in which the possessive pronoun "its" was spelt with an apostrophe – I figured that anyone who couldn't be bothered to spell a three-letter word correctly hadn't much on the ball – until I found it spelt that way in *Fanny Hill*. And normally I would be as reluctant to read a fanzine with a department in it titled "LAFFS" as I would be to trust a driver with stickers on his windscreen; but then I showed one of the cartoons in it to Burnett Toskey, PhD, and he laughed immoderately. Which proves that this fanzine has great potentialities among Seattle mathematics teachers. For the rest of us there are four more or less successful attempts at serious fiction. The first, by Aub Marks, has a spark of originality almost entirely extinguished by a coyly over-conversational style. The second, about robots taking over the world, seemed so utterly pointless that I couldn't believe it, and read it again to see if it had concealed subtlety. It hadn't; it was full of what you might call deep hidden insignificance. "The Jewel", by Dave West, was apparently stencilled

by the author himself, in self defence, a wise move. It is one of those moody mystical things which leave you with the impression that the author could probably write quite well if he had anything to write about. The fourth did not do this.

I notice in the letter section a reader says that “Alan Dodd’s film reviews are goo, in his own inimitable style.” There is a temptation to merely agree with this accidental indictment, because it perfectly describes some of Dodd’s writing in the past, but in this instance it would be unfair. The reviews are interesting, pointed, and informative.

And that’s all, except for the editorial and club news which are merely informative. Objectively it doesn’t seem very much to commend the magazine to you, but I do. It has a refreshing air of enthusiasm, and to those who are in the same situation vis a vis fandom and science fiction as the editors, it will all be intensely interesting. Like so many questions of controversy in fandom, it boils down to one of community of interest. Take for instance

The Scarr No. 4. George Charters, 3 Lancaster Avenue, Bangor, Co. Down. Free for comment. I remember it came as quite a shock to me to find this fanzine listed among the members of the *Novelle Vague*, because it is nothing of the sort. It is published by one who has been active in fandom in a quiet way for over ten years, and is the type of fanzine which the *New Wave* is inclined to despise. This used to puzzle me, because the standards of this type of fanzine seemed to me immeasurably superior in every respect. Was it, I occasionally dared to wonder, that the critics simply did not understand the various subtleties of humour, felicities of style and originalities of thought with which the older fanzines abound and which are still so rare in the new ones? I dismissed this theory almost immediately, because these new fans are obviously intelligent. Was it then that they dismissed most of their contents as irrelevant, believing that fanzines should be about science fiction and not about fans? No, because they are quite happy themselves to tear each other’s fanzines to pieces, and discuss conventions and club events.

On the whole, I think it is almost entirely a question of in-groups and out-groups. The new fan, for instance, skims over Ian McAulay’s piece in this *Scarr*, and finds it seems to be about some people, whom he is expected to know by their first names, eating chips. He resents it in the same human way

as one resents TV interviewers revealing that they are on intimate terms with the people they are supposed to be interrogating on our behalf. Something is being cooked up against us, one feels, and however good the program one does not feel it is on the level. Formerly this didn't matter, or didn't seem to matter, because either the new fan went away without our noticing him, or he introduced himself and found he was welcome in the in-group. But now there are enough of him to go away and form his own in-group, and we have two sets of people who feel they are reciprocally excluded.

It's all very sad, and quite unnecessary because we are all fans. The older ones could help by not presuming quite so much esoteric knowledge among their readers, but the new ones should meet them halfway by not resenting material merely because they do not fully understand the background. If they could for example regard this Ian McAulay article as an excerpt from an unpublished novel by some contemporary Jerome K. Jerome they might find it funny. And having made this effort towards friendship they might find they appreciate more the rest of the contents, even if they haven't got much to do with science fiction. Bob Shaw, for example, presents some newspaper cuttings which deserve some sort of immortality, a newcomer called Peebles has a column part of which is merely amusing, but the rest of which almost makes a major breakthrough into something or other, and George Charters has the first informative article I have seen about the great Scottish nit William McGonagall, who was born in 1830 and mercifully forgotten until excerpts from his work were declaimed in the immortal BBC Goon Show. All in all it's great fun, as long as you are not expecting to read an amateur science fiction magazine. Charters, being one of the few completist collectors left, no doubt feels there are quite enough SF magazines as it is. Nor is he trying to sell you something, or become a power in fandom. He is simply showing you things he thinks might interest and amuse you, as he would do if you visited him in his home. And since he is an interesting and likeable character, so is his fanzine.

from *Zenith* No. 6, September 1964

Fanorama: December 1964

“An excess of credulity is an excellent fault in females, assuring as it does the perpetuation of the species.” I found this remark in my notebook, without any initials after it, so that now I’m not quite sure whether I said it, or Dr. Johnson. Mind you this is not a problem which I run across very often, and before someone jumps on me for bigheadedness on this occasion let me hasten to point out that many of the pronouncements attributed to the famous Doctor are just as stupid as anything I could say. They would be ignored as those of an opinionated old boor, if it weren’t for the famous name and that pontifical style, which I think I was imitating. One thing I do know was that the Doctor couldn’t have been thinking of Beryl Henley, and I’m pretty sure I was.

Beryl, you will remember, wrote an article about reincarnation, and I said in this column that I had always thought of it as a crackpot idea. Subsequently in a letter somewhere Beryl defined fandom as a place where being called a crackpot could make you feel ten feet tall. Well good for her, I thought. And good for us, I added; here we have a likeable girl who is a good sport, can write well, has a sense of humour, and doesn’t take criticism of her work as a personal affront. You don’t get people like that coming into fandom every day. She is my very favourite ten foot tall crackpot.

So it was with pleasant expectations that I started to read *Link 1* (Beryl Henley, 59 The Fearnings, Crabbs Cross, Reddinton, Worcs, 1/- per copy), especially as it was billed as a humorous fanzine. Unfortunately as it turned out, it seems as far as I was concerned to have one defect which was quite serious for such a publication. It wasn’t funny. I admit that if you fed it into a computer you wouldn’t get this assessment, because it has all of the superficial attributes of humour. The style is informal, it deals with interesting people in potentially amusing situations, and it even has the characteristics of the best type of fannish humour – wild logic, allusiveness, running gags, word-play, and an element of fantasy. What we have here, I concluded, is the raw material of humour. It is an interesting lode, but it has just been dug up and left there in a heap.

It’s unfair to criticize anything as subjective as humour without giving an

example, so let me quote from a paragraph dealing with Beryl's part in an amateur dramatic production:

"I dropped an ad-lib line which I'd been saving for weeks, and ruined me Injun Dad's war-cry. 'I call braves!' he ranted, 'and we make war on these paleface weaklings. Too long they have trodden us down!' 'Pore soles!' I howled. 'Collapse of chief.'"

Now I know that nearly anything goes on the stage, especially in amateur dramatics, and I am prepared to admit that this was a very good pun at the time and probably brought the house down. I am concerned only with the literary presentation of the incident to us. From our point of view, sitting as we are reading it in cold blood (an uncomfortable situation at the best of times unless you happen to be wearing waterproof trousers) this is not a very good pun, partly because it has only one layer of meaning. A pun is successful to the degree in which it reveals unexpected associations; all this one shows you is people's feet, which were there anyway. Worse, the word "pore" clutters up the scene. I thought for a moment this was part of the gag, some reference being intended to the pores in the skin of the soles of the savage's feet, the sweat from which is supposed to enable them to walk on burning coals. Whether this is so or not, the momentary doubt is fatal. In fact I think the only reason "pore" is there is to provide a signpost to "souls". It might have been better to say simply "the heels", which while not very good either would have avoided that fatal doubt.

But in any event all that we the reading audience get from the account is this single pun, which looks weak in print. For us the humour of the incident can lie only in the effects of the pun, and for this "Collapse of chief" is inadequate. For one thing an author must describe a character before we can appreciate his reactions – even such a simple surefire piece of slapstick as a man slipping on a banana peel will not be funny unless we have reason to think the victim was pompous. It was necessary here, I think, to portray the other actor as pedantic, humourless and perhaps over conscientious about learning his lines, so that we have some interest in his reactions. And then those reactions should have been described as vividly as possible. As it stands the account is like rendering the famous episode of Harris and the missing can-opener in *Three Men In A Boat* as "Then we saw a passing stranger try to open a tin."

All this may seem like using a steam hammer to crack a very small chestnut, but humour needs as much attention to detail as poetry. For instance the ambiguity of the word “pore” above originates in a basic defect of Beryl’s style, the notion that there is something intrinsically humorous about colloquial mispronunciation. This may occasionally be true when it is used unexpectedly, but not when the whole thing is written that way in what is presumably an attempt at casual spontaneity. This is a laudable ambition, but doomed. In fact casual spontaneity is a very difficult style to achieve, requiring much hard work. All we have here is a first draft.

I was so frustrated about the humorous part of this fanzine that in desperation I actually read the serious poems at the back. Generally serious poetry in fanzines has the effect of sending me into a sort of coma, from which I awake to find myself reading some other fanzine, but not this time. Beryl’s poem shows she can write very well when she works at it. It is in the form of answers to that Zen Buddhist saying, “What is the sound of one hand clapping?” which has always seemed to me such a silly meaningless question as to make one suspect that the entire wisdom of the inscrutable East is just a load of old codswallop, but Beryl’s answers are not silly.

Indeed, they show a sensitivity and ability to handle words which makes one realize that the first draft we have just been reading may be one of a very good humorous fanzine indeed. To believe that humour is easier to write than poetry shows nothing worse than an excess of credulity, which is, as I or Dr. Johnson said, hardly a fault at all.

Con 1. Chris Priest, “Cornerways”, Willow Close, Doddinghurst, Brentwood, Essex. 1/- per copy.

It seems to me that British addresses get more cumbersome every year. How is it that three words are often enough to pinpoint one house in the entire sub-continent of North America, whereas for these tiny islands we need envelopes that look like miniature gazetteers? Oh well.

This fanzine comes complete with a book of matches, a striking innovation, but the editor himself feels it needs a lighter touch. I feel that his little Department of Useless Information is more effective than many longer and less original attempts at humour. He offers a free lifetime subscription to anyone who can find a profitable use for one of these fascinating items, and I would like to make my own bid in respect to the statement that St. Pauls is

sliding down Ludgate Hill at a rate of half an inch per century. I have read that in America people make fortunes by finding tiny inaccuracies in land deeds, so that they can, for instance, go and demand that a half inch strip of the Empire State Building be torn down, and it seems to me that the headlong descent of St. Pauls must by now have produced some quite profitable discrepancies.

I hope I win because this is a very likely-looking fanzine. One of the scientific items shows signs of over credulity – the only thing one can be certain of in newspaper reports is that they have got their facts wrong – and the fiction is quietly regrettable, but the remainder of the contents, which are all science-based – including the sixteen pieces of apparatus necessary for demonstrating the Second Law of Thermodynamics – show intelligence, literacy, and a refreshing degree of originality.

from *Zenith* No. 7, December 1964

Walt's comments on Beryl's fanzine drew this response from her in Zenith No. 8:

When Pete told me that Fanorama in *Zenith* 7 dealt almost exclusively with *Link*, I alternated between being terrified and elated. Well, I told myself, even if he pans it to hell-an'-gone, at least we'll get some clever and constructive criticism.

I was keenly disappointed. Not because you found *Link* unfunny; a sense of humour, as you said, is a subjective thing, and very elusive of definition. In any case, as you will have observed from the LoCs in *Link* 2, you are in a minority.

Not because you referred to *Link* as “an interesting lode which has just been dug up and left there in a heap.” I accept that assessment without rancour

No, my disappointment was three-fold.

1. A steam-hammer to crack a very small chestnut? Walt, it sounds more like a man digging for gold in a field of buttercups. Why search for hidden significances which were never intended to be there anyway? I'm a Midlander. I speak with a Brummie accent. And I wrote “pore” because that's the way I pronounce the word. That's *all*, I assure you! It wasn't meant to be a “very good pun.” Nearly a whole Z-page to analyse

two words to death ... what a waste of Willis!

2. Anyone who had not read *Link* before reading Fanorama would probably assume that the zine was a solo job. It wasn't. As editor, I cheerfully carry the cans and accept the brickbats, but if there is any praise going – even the faint variety that is said to damn – I want it shared. I did not produce *Link* alone. In fact, had it not been for the encouragement, and promises of help from Mary Reed, Anne Campbell, Archie Mercer, Doreen Parker, Mike Higgs and Ken Cheslin – plus the concerted nagging of assorted Brummies, and Charles Platt! – it's doubtful I would have tackled a zine as yet.
3. No wonder serious poetry usually sends you into “a sort of coma”: “... shows she can write very well when she works at it.” But as far as poetry is concerned, I *don't* work at it. At least, not initially. I don't write poetry, it happens to me.

Anyway, thank you for the nice things you said. I stress that this is not intended as a letter of self-defense, I'm not protesting against your criticisms. It's just that I expected so much more from the doyen of zine reviewers. You're not *quite* as mute as if your soul were dead ... but this certainly isn't the type of music I'd anticipated hearing from my position as a supplicant outside Tara's walls.

May I also take you up on a remark you made in your review of Chris Priest's *Con*? “The only thing one can be certain of in newspaper reports is that they have got their facts wrong.” Even if that statement was made tongue-in-cheek, and I hope it was! – (a) it's a sweeping generalization of the kind I dislike most, and (b) it's blatantly untrue. You are, I think, due to have Gray Hall at least, breathing brimstone all over your pet shamrock! I have no personal peppercorn to grind here – I packed up hacking for a newspaper in 1958 – but I can assure you that any journalist who does get his facts wrong quickly finds himself between the Scylla of editorial wrath, and the Charybdis of the indignation of those who have been misreported. With, occasionally, the Damoclean sword of a threatened civil suit to add to his predicament.

Fanorama: March 1965

Some while ago I wrote in an American fanzine about meeting the new English fandom in Peterborough, and poked fun at the discomfiture of us old has-BNFs. To my utter incredulity [Ron Bennett reported to British fandom](#) that I had been “snide”.

Naturally I was quite overwhelmed at the revelation of this new and unsuspected facet of my genius – in 17 years of fandom nobody had ever called me snide before – but after searching vainly for those hidden subtleties in which I actually wrote, I was forced to the reluctant conclusion that Ron’s judgment revealed more about himself than about me. I remembered that a year or so ago he had said something else peculiar, something about Irish Fandom’s “–air of wry superiority”. At the time we all thought this was one of his more obscure jokes, but it looks as if he actually meant it, and now I wouldn’t be surprised to hear that he reads aloud everything I write with a sneering expression and a John Brunner accent. No wonder he gets the wrong impression, because anyone thinking of giving public readings from my works should do so in a rather diffident Belfast brogue, to a rhythmic accompaniment of knees knocking in a cold attic. It would never fill Carnegie Hall.

Faced with a communications breakdown as serious as this, it seems to me I had better say something about the purpose of this column, in this breathing space between new British fanzines.

One of the reasons Fanorama was disinterred from the vaults and given its present lease of weird creaking pseudolife is that it seemed to me at the time that there were emerging two standards of fanzine reviewing. There have always been two types of fanzines and there is room in fandom for both, but in England last year this looked like being forgotten. Proponents of type A were castigating fanzines of type B, not because they were bad type B fanzines, but because the editor had somehow stupidly failed to produce a type A fanzine. Conversely the defenders of type B fanzines were praising them indiscriminately, whether they were good by type B standards or not. Before the situation got any worse I thought it would be a good thing if someone would try and review both sets of fanzines honestly and objectively,

judging them only by the standards of what they set out to achieve. I thought that as someone who had published both types, I might make a go of it.

Now I'm beginning to wonder. It's easy to write reviews that are all kindness, if you don't mind wasting everyone's time; and it's easy to write honest review, if you don't care about people's feelings; but it's hard to be both honest and kind. Unfortunately I do care about people's feelings, and I have been brooding quite a bit recently about Beryl Henley, whose indignant letter you'll find elsewhere in this issue along with ghod knows how many more. Despite the sleep I've lost over Beryl's letter I still can't think of any answer I could give her that wasn't in the original review. For instance, I explained that I analysed the passage in question (not just two words) because I thought it was unfair to criticize technique without giving an example, and that I chose that particular passage because I could be sure she thought it was funny. As for her second point, as I implied in the following review, nobody can give all the data about fanzines and still have space left to review them. Peter and I were offering an ordinary fanzine review column, not an advertising supplement. On the third point, Beryl's description of how she writes poetry – inspiration, followed by revision and polishing – is exactly the way I suggest she should write humour. That's what I said.

I admire her simile about gold and buttercups – I told you she could write when she tried – but in fact I looked for no more than I look for in any field of fandom. And no less. If it's any comfort to her I would say that the type of fanzine she has chosen to publish is the most difficult of all, as well as the most rewarding. In a fanzine dealing with the social activities of fans, the background for the new reader has to be created by the writer, whereas in a fanzine dealing with science fiction, the background is already there. Anyone writing about his friends must resist the insidious illusion that they have prefabricated characterization; unless they are very well known they must be treated as if they were fictional. (Which is why, incidentally, fannish fanzines have produced more professional writers than the other kind.) And he must learn to take with a pinch of salt the praise of intimates who have really enjoyed their recollection of events rather than the description.

I've offered Beryl a deal whereby we each promise to read *Link* 1 and its review eight months from now, and the one who admits he or she was wrong buys the other a drink at the London Worldcon. If it's me I'll buy you one too. I hope by then I'll have progressed with Beryl to something like the

status I had with Chuch Harris during our most violent altercations, when I used to sign my letters, “Your best friend and severest critic ... alternately.”

To change gear for a moment, I admit to Graham Hall that I may have been unfair to our Press. I acknowledge its fearless crusading zeal in the persecution of Royalty, the bereaved, civil servants, untitled sexual offenders, and others unable to answer back. I recognize its discreet respect for the privacy of other press lords, patent medicine manufacturers, and powerful millionaires. I will even concede that it may have reported an event with fairness and accuracy; all I say is that the event was not a science fiction convention.

That paragraph was dedicated to Ron Bennett.

One of the hardest arguments we SF fans have had to counter when urging the exploration of space is the simple word, “why?” We just cannot say what physical benefit space flight will bring to humanity, any more than Columbus could promise the potato. But we did offer a spiritual reward. We said that when man got into space he would see the world differently. He would see that his home was a planet, not a country, and his race mankind. If anyone thought that was visionary talk, let him read this:

“Think of our world as it looks from that rocket heading toward Mars. It is like a child’s globe, hanging in space, the continents stuck to its side like coloured maps. We are all fellow passengers on a dot of earth. And each of us, in the span of time, has only a moment among his companions. How incredible it is that in this fragile existence we should hate and destroy one another.”

That was from President Johnson’s inaugural address, January 1965. That is sciencefictional thinking, friends, and it is changing the world.

from *Zenith* No. 8, March 1965
– Walt’s final column

The End

This free ebook of *Fanorama* is exclusive to the unofficial TAFF website at taff.org.uk. If you enjoy reading it, a donation to TAFF is a fine way to express your appreciation.

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