

Can't Get Off the Island

**A
Greg
Pickersgill
Collection**

for Interaction, the 2005 Worldcon

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Edited by Claire Brialey and Mark Plummer for
Interaction, the 2005 Worldcon

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Print copies of this publication are still available from Claire and

Mark for the cost of getting one to you. Contact fishlifter@gmail.com. For those who prefer to read online, the text is also on Greg's website at <http://www.gostak.org.uk/island/intro.htm>.

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Faces and Places

Greg Pickersgill

I was both astonished and delighted when Mark and Claire suggested they work up a collection of my fanwriting for the 2005 Worldcon. Astonished because these sort of publications can be a bizarrely dispiriting amount of effort with little or no perceptible reward and I knew they had more than enough Worldcon-related problems already; delighted because I was delightedly complimented that the two fanwriters I most enjoy and admire enormously for their planetary-class breadth of skills and qualities of writing thought it was worth their time.

I admit I had indeed prodded about for some time at the idea of a Compendium of Me with a medium-length of stick and given it up as too difficult, with no apparent audience, and not worth the time, trouble and money, but even so had been feeling guilty about not bloody getting on with it. So, a huge compliment and great relief all round – sometimes life *is* worth living!

As to their choices, who am I to complain? OK, I admit it, there are one or two pieces that I might not have rushed into print again myself (and I did put an embargo on yet *another* damned reprint of that outdated piece about fanrooms – it's totally ignored anyway so why give it another outing?) and certainly there are a couple of others I rather wish they had chosen. Overall, though, I'm quite impressed with the selection, even if I do say so myself in a quite unaccustomed unselfcritical manner. Gosh wow, boy o boy, I found myself thinking as I read through the pieces, some of this is actually pretty good! Parts of it made me laugh even, and sometimes I found myself thinking, well, that's really *right*.

As Mark and Claire proceeded with their editing task I had suggested top-and-tailing each piece with some scene-setting and annotations, notes and observations to make sense of things that might be a trifle obscure to anyone who wasn't around way-back-when; like who the hell *are* those people he keeps referring to and *why* were they of any consequence? A great idea, and totally necessary, but somehow there was this *gap* between intention and execution. I just couldn't get it all to flow the way I wanted it to within the

context of the publication. Sometimes I wasn't even sure what needed explanation or not.

Then I realised the solution was already before me in Peter Weston's online supplement to his excellent fannish autobiography *With Stars In My Eyes* (at Bill Burns's efanazines site – <http://www.efanzines.com/PW/Stars/>).

I could create a webpage for the Notes and Queries, something dynamic that could react to actual questions and be added to as and when the thought caught me, not a one-off and almost certainly incomplete print version within these covers. And coincidentally it might allay the suspicions of that breed of e-fan who give the impression that paper is just something they wipe their bottoms on, proving that we here from Fanzine Days are in fact maintaining a salient within the digital age.

So here we are then. If *you*, Dear Reader, find anything in the following sufficiently inexplicable or bizarre (not counting the project as a whole, please...) as to require amplification then please email me at what@gostak.cymru. I will certainly do my best to inform and amuse.

– Greg Pickersgill

Who's Crazy

Claire Brialey & Mark Plummer

It will, of course, come as no surprise when we say that things were not meant to happen this way. There had been a plan, but the plan had come to nothing and we – the two of us, plus bits of *Plokta* and Pat McMurray – were sitting around wondering what, if anything, we could do instead.

‘No time,’ we confidently asserted. ‘Everybody too busy.’

This was essentially correct. It was April and the Worldcon was at the beginning of August. It had seemingly passed from being a Deep Time Far Future event to being pressed up right against our faces without ever passing through a transitional zone of being close but not *that* close. This was something of a false impression given by the looming deadline for programme items to be submitted to the top secret programme (or rather program) bunker in California wherein a miracle would occur and our vague ideas would emerge as a coherent schedule. The Worldcon was not exactly imminent. But it remained *imminentish* and this didn't leave enough time to produce the hoped-for fanthology collecting the best fannish writing of the decade since Intersection.

But – and remarkably we hadn't actually discussed this before – while we were both confidently asserting ‘No time’, and ‘Everybody too busy’, we both thought there should be some kind of Greg collection, a Partial Printed Pickersgill, for the convention. The remarkably convenient fact that the back-catalogue from which it would need to draw wasn't all that extensive, coupled with the fact that Pickersgill typing and mimeography of items such as *Stop Breaking Down* and *Seamonsters* was pretty good which facilitated scanning, led to the idea moving from being not-even-on-the-drawing-board to active-ongoing-project in about twenty-four hours before we'd actually thought to check with The Man Himself that this would be OK and not too embarrassing. TMH looked at us down the phone line, in that way he does, with an implicit suggestion that we must be mad to produce something which would have a probable market of about twenty copies, but we assured him that no, no, we were entirely cool with this, it'd be good, really it would, and the market is so more than about twenty copies but we are being entirely

Realistic in our expectations and certainly won't be printing so many that we have to buy a new shed to house all the unsold remainders, and Gregory hmpfed and said, well, OK then. And here we are.

What follows has been drawn from various fanzines and elist posts, the earliest dating from 1970 and the most recent from earlier this year. The originals were never that widely available and are now even more difficult to find. It's stuff we like, and we hope you like it too.

A Note on the Purity of the Text

The text that appears here is *not* exactly the same as the original. We haven't edited it as such, but we don't believe it's doing anybody any favours to preserve an inconsequential twenty-year-old typo so we've corrected typing/spelling errors – including in a few cases where Greg has conceded it was deliberate at the time but, twenty years on, is pretty much indistinguishable from an inconsequential typo so makes no difference really. We have also applied an element of standardisation to the typesetting of common fan terms across the years, although wouldn't want to claim that we've aimed for consistency at the expense of Greg's particular style.

– Claire Brialey & Mark Plummer

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posted to Memoryhole elist, 12 October 2001

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posted to Wegenheim elist, 6 February 2005

Can't Get Off the Island has been produced and edited by Claire Brialey and Mark Plummer for distribution at Interaction, the 2005 Worldcon, and afterwards while stocks last. Editorial address: 59 Shirley Road, Croydon, Surrey CR0 7ES, UK. Arga warga, it's the big one... August 2005.

Autobiography

You Are What You Like, Like What You Are, Like

I like... the Captain Britain strip in *Daredevils*, for being genuinely imaginative comix art angled towards real live adults with a taste for the fantastic... the idea of being nostalgic for the bombing I was never under during the Second World War, and the odd feeling that I have sometimes that I actually *did* live through part of that time... watching weird South American or Japanese films and realising once again that Ballard was right and Earth *is* the only alien planet, and only cultural narrow-mindedness has prevented us from realising this years ago... RAF Buccaneers sweeping and slipping through the air over Beirut, lower than the Americans, cooler than the French, those bulky old jets having so much *presence* I wish I'd been there... the idea of William Burroughs, the man more than his fiction, the thought that maybe one day before he dies he'll write the perfect straight novel he shows he's capable of all the time... Johnny Shines, Robert Johnson, Muddy Waters, the Memphis Jug Band, Holger Czukay, Miles Davis, Robert Nighthawk... John Irving, even though he uses exactly the same tricks in virtually the same order in every book, because they fucking work *every time*... being old enough not to think of myself as young any longer, and with that the petty satisfaction to be (sort of) wise with experience... Russell Hoban, Robert Nye, George Orwell, H G Wells, William Kotzwinkle, Charles Bukowski, Tom Mallin, Algis Budrys's book reviews, Barrington Bayley's short stories, fanwriting by Bell, Bridges and Priest (short stories and *The Affirmation* after all for you too CP)... writing by Frost, Welbank (art too), Pickersgill L... the idea that some time or other people will live up to my expectation of them, and me to theirs.

from *Brand New Attitude*, Frank's APA, October 1983

Not So Much an Excuse, Anne Warren, More Like a Reason

from *GFP Antworte Nicht, Frank's APA*, February 1984

I've spent the last few days deciding whether or not to bore everyone to the point of deciphering David Bridges last mailing by going on and on again about how hard I find it writing anything for *Frank*. I finally came up with a decision, and one that took the better of the two options: the third. You see, for some time now I've been more and more aware that I actually don't like writing *at all*, and all of this *Frank*-oriented stuff just hangs over me like some horrible heavy suffocating sword of Damocles and really makes the last few days of the month miserable and uncomfortable and guilt-ridden and a general drag, and I've got more sympathy with Eve Harvey and her period pains now than I ever did before, even if I do still think she's conning herself into allowing a certain uncontrollability into her life as much as a justification as anything else. Okay?

I mean, I'd like to be able to claim this total abandonment of one of the fundamental principles of the Fan Way of Life came on me like some wonderful epiphanitic moment on the road to the One Tun or even the SRL of a dull Tuesday morning, but truth to tell it's more like a horrible suspicion that's been hanging under the front part of my brain for years waiting for a time when I could come right out and admit it. Of course, instead of admitting it I fobbed myself off with all sorts of useless excuses like not being properly motivated, or not having a typewriter that worked, or not having any ideas (you know all this) when the core of it was that I just *don't like doing it* and that's that. It's all very odd really.

At one time I certainly thought I liked writing. It probably all goes back to being the sort of smart kid who finished the Purple Reading Book in Primary School when all the others were wading their way pedestrianly through the Green or Orange Books several levels below. Not only was I wildly deluded into believing the facility to *read* words led inevitably to a heightened ability to *write* them, but this dangerous fantasy was reinforced by teachers who held up my essays as examples to the rest and eagerly printed my material in school magazines. This sort of crazy perversion of reality

persisted far uplife, even unto the time when I left school (utterly unqualified for everything and, like Ian Williams, thought of as a total failure because I wasn't even going to a teacher-training college, much less university (at Haverfordwest Grammar anyone who didn't get into fucking *Oxford* was thought of as a failure)) and actually *wrote down*, in *ink*, on *paper*, on my leaving form, that my proposed occupation was going to be 'Writer'. Bloody hell.

It seems fantastic to look back on (the para above, I mean, not just the actual event) but it is true! I really believed it, quite despite the fact I'd hardly completed anything I'd ever started, and certainly had no idea of what publishing was really all about. It took me a good year of useless aimlessness to see the true facts about things, just about as long as it took for me to realise that everything I had written (part of) was hopelessly derivative and had about as many original ideas as any Eighties rock band. So, having realised I was (surprise, surprise) fascinated with being a writer rather than writing, I joined the British Library and entered the Pit of the Employee.

However, I still thought I liked writing. But for fun, rather than profit. After all, as a fan in the arsehole of nowhere almost all my contacts had been via the GPO and they'd brought lots of fun and much rushing to the letterbox and so on, and even when I moved to London and actually met and talked to people face to face (and found what a bunch of pricks most of them were viewed up close) I still wanted to *do fanzines* and *write letters*, and while I actually did the former and forgot the latter it became more and more an imposition and a responsibility and something that had to be done rather than a simple pleasure.

At least half the trouble stems from the proximity to one's fellow fans. I mean, if you can go and see people in bars and talk out ideas or phone them up and go on and on and generally work things out of your system that way, it all gets to be a sort of useless extra to go to the trouble of actually codifying the idea and writing it in understandable language so other people can get it too. This is of course selfish, and virtually saying out loud that it is only the people close at hand that really matter and if those far away don't get it then too bad. Christ, I'm suffering from that right here, as only a week or so back I explained all this to Jimmy Robertson and Anne Warren and Pam Wells at the FIS and you know, why should I have to fucking do it again? Huh?

Of course the reason for that is that you got to bring some to get some. Just like the wider mass of fandom you've got to be a participant to get the

best. In fact, obviously, to get *Frank's* (which I concede is full of really good stuff I'm very glad I get to read) you *got* to participate, fuck. But that doesn't make it any easier. Actually I often get the urge to write, or more correctly the urge to do something about something. Like rave on at idiots like Tom Jones who is still pursuing his sour-grapes feud with fandom via the BSFA, or the cretin who wrote a bad review of the film *Malevil* in a recent *Matrix* based purely on his inability to accept the film on its own terms instead of what he wanted it to be (I thought it was superb, myself). I never do write anything, though; my time for doing twelve-page letters redressing the record and putting others in their place passed in 1978 and I'm not allowed to say who got the last of them. I just rant about the place for ten minutes or so until I've told Linda or Rastus exactly what I think in detail and then calm down and forget all about it. 'But you have a moral duty to put the correct side of things,' says Linda, usually. So Wot, I invariably respond, if anyone is so fucking thick as to think that in the first place they'll need more than a letter from me to change their way of living. Like a .45 pistol, I mutter darkly and watch television again.

So, I hate writing. It seems to me incredible that people like Barfoot not only have a sort of obviously intellectually congenial local life with Philosophy classes and Harry Bell guest-lecturing on Bunk (apt eh wot: figure-studies next no doubt) but can turn out so much thoroughly entertaining and intelligent material, even if he does rip off some of his best lines. Gee, maybe he actually likes doing it.

All Right, Now What Then, Er?

Christ. I dunno. I toyed with the idea of just not doing anything, and letting my actual membership lapse, and like, agreeing to carry on with the onerous administrative tasks until next Silicon and the election, or even getting someone else to take over altogether and just relying on reading Linda's copy. But Linda wouldn't do it anyway, and that went right down the drain. So I'll just have to go through this horrible gestation and evacuation every couple of months at least, though I do have a plan. Unlike certain others around town I like mailing comments. In fact I think I like mailing comments more than the rest of the apa, and whilst I concede that an APA of nothing but MCS could get a bit oppressive it more than suits my general attitude of being an audience rather than a performer (it dawned on me some time ago that

almost all the fanwriting I ever did was purely reactive, rather than original): kind of giving up the thinking part of writing, in a way (sounds bloody terrible, eh?) and just adding in my bit of knowledge or opinion where necessary.

Well, it's a way of living with it, innit.

'Messages from Mars Made Me Do It'

from *Follycon Souvenir Book*, Easter 1988

It was around midnight, and I was in my usual confused state. I mean, you know, nothing works right: the women, the jobs, the no-jobs, the weather, the dogs. Finally you just sit in a kind of stricken state and wait like you're sitting on the bus-stop bench waiting for death.

So here's our man, and it's not even midnight, and he's poncing around quoting Charles Bukowski as if he's been having a hard time of it. Boy, has he ever had it good. Here he is an Eastercon Fan Guest of Honour, well dug in on the lee side of the hill. What, you expect cans of Guinness brought to you as well?

An absorption in the past is often a repudiation of the present, not the least vice that nostalgia encourages, and a repudiation of the present, by distortion and false memory, is a repudiation of the self.

Geoffrey Wolff said that.

'Hush! Hush! I Heard Somebody Callin' My Name'

I used to want to be somebody. Back then I must have known who. Probably someone who had his name on the cover of *Fantasy and Science Fiction* once or twice a year, put out a good fanzine occasionally, and was Number Four or Five Fan Face (then as now I liked to have someone to look up to). Whatever happened to that? The first two seem presently unlikely to say the least, and the third seems to have become more notoriety than fame. I can't say this is exactly how I'd like it to be, but – even though I cherish some illusions still – twenty years of anything, especially fandom, has a way of making one come to terms.

In 1968 I went to my first convention. It was the second Eastercon ever to have more than 200 members and as a newcomer I was just as ignored at it as newcomers to 800+ members Eastercons are today. I had made a few contacts through the BSFA before that, though, and they helped me come

away with the idea that there was something in this convention business and it was worth waiting a whole year to try again. I've been to a lot of conventions since then, and though few have been wholly satisfying – giving that chance blend of ideas, novelty, and desperate fun that I think constitutes a truly fine convention – I still think they're a good idea someone really ought to do something with.

There were less empty barns in those days, and with only one convention a year fan activity centred around the fanzine. I did a few; too few to mention, really, though they enjoyed a certain vogue. There was *Fouler* (with assistance from now gone-fan Leroy Kettle), *Ritblat*, *Seamonsters* (with gone-fan Simone Walsh), and *Stop Breaking Down*. Nineteen issues. Not much, even with a handful of APA contributions. Actually, I still think some of the material is good. Much of my own material is as true to me today as then, and probably better written too.

Then I realised I could talk in public. Annual visits to the Silicon training farm got me going, arguing from the front and back in the Ian Williams Debate, a barely regulated shouting match that is my model for all but the most formal convention programming. Having run the Fan Room at the 1977 Eastercon, and done a lot of work in the '79 Worldcon Fan Room, I ended up working on both the Mexicons (ingroupish elitist conventions that run off with the attitude that a couple of hundred people with an interest in books and fanzines can have a good time without the benefit of other distractions) and, working under Linda Pickersgill, running the Fan Room at Conspiracy – which was a real eye-opener, not least in the way that many fans, including some of the most prominent and American, were such endless complainers and whingers.

Doesn't seem much to occupy twenty years. But hey, I do other stuff. Spending a week's pay on an encyclopaedia of SF magazines means Serious Collector to me, especially now I have this nagging urge to convert the few stray copies of *Imaginative Tales*, *SFS*, and *Future* I have into complete sets. And I'm still missing a few early SF Book Club editions too. I dunno, though: is this an adequate interest in science fiction (which of course it is widely believed no true fan should have. Hah!) or just what non-collectors call anal-retentive? Who cares. I am what I am and that's all that I am.

Fandom – As Serious As Your Life

In a way I've been unlucky. By nature a home-type person and coming originally from a time and place where an interest in science fiction placed one well outside the norm, circumstances have conspired so that my entire social life is composed of fans and fan-oriented events. In a way I've been lucky, because this means there's a nice set-up available whenever TV and blues records and old SF magazines and histories and biographies need a bit of competition. Sometimes I even get to talk about some of these things too, amidst the gossip, backbiting, and character assassination that fans do so enjoy. But as unluck would have it, though, this means one also has to contend with the loonies, schizos, hyperactive kids of all ages, and gunfighters ('Hah, you think you're somebody; I'll show everybody what a shit you really are...'). None of that makes for happy partying or the deep pursuance of great thought, and certainly dispels childish notions of the joyful family of friends that is fandom. The fortunate part, though, is that it *is*, sometimes. Depending on who you talk to. Fans aren't slans, it's true, some aren't even real human beings; but Tony Berry, he's all right.

A fellow called David Piper asked me at the Worldcon whether I'd become a Fandom is a Way of Life guy deliberately. Obviously not, though I do believe that all life is fandom of one sort or another, ours being the only one (probably) that calls itself by that name. I take fandom seriously enough, that's true, as seriously as anything that involves other people deserves to be. What you're doing, you might as well do properly; it's as serious as that.

Leader Without a Country, Prophet Without a Following

Fan Guest of Honour. Me. Now there's a funny thing. I've always worried about Guests of Honour. Are they? What does it mean? Whose choice? What Honour anyway? I dunno. I dithered and moped about this for months and was finally talked into it by people like Linda and Martin Tudor and John Jarrold and Anne Hammill, all of whose opinions I respect. I was made to believe I would be doing something useful and helpful, that I could carry the flag this time for our small world. I like to be helpful and do the decent thing; I like heroic gestures. Lilian Edwards, whose opinion I equally value, thought I was crazy and was selling out my principles, but by then that bit of reinforcement was too late. It always seems too late. I hadn't even been doing much of anything at the time other than frontline Worldcon stuff, and of

course mind-controlling a large segment of British fandom, all of whom are too dumb to come up with an individual idea between them. (I masked this latter pernicious activity by lying around on the floor at home playing Muddy Waters LPs.) Anyway, Fan of What, for godsake? SF fan, comics fan, media fan, I'm bits of all those. Games fan or computer fan, certainly not, no more than costume fan or re-creation fan. Fan fan almost certainly, but these days the 'fannish' fans occupy so many tracks I don't have the wheels or time to cover them all. So what does it come down to? Maybe being in the same place for so long turns you into a monument. Coelacanth or croc, me, an old rhino left over from a mythical Golden Age when all people at conventions were fans and all fans went to conventions. Is this perhaps just a reflex accolade given because I've managed to hang on this long, or what? Are the criteria for Guest of Honour choices wrong; should someone on the way up, or in the central heat of their fan career, be a better choice of Fan Guest of Honour? Should we be aware that FGoH might translate as Boring Old Fart?

Who I am or what I've done means little to most of you reading this, other than perhaps a memory of that bastard who tried to stop you throwing paper planes in the Conspiracy Fan Room. And a fair proportion of those who do know me are less than delighted to see me in this position. I'm not so sure about it myself. Fan Guests of Honour have been scooped from some pretty deep trenches in the course of this decade (and isn't it peculiar that as the proportion of 'fans' in the classic sense has declined within Eastercon membership, so the FGOH, a rarity before 1979, has become a near fixture) and I'm hardly ecstatic about standing shoulder to shoulder with a couple of them. It all seems a bit hopeless and futile and a pathetic remnant of the past, a ceremonial of lost empire, a cheap aristocracy of no real validity. It's kind of sad and lacks dignity.

So why did I do it? I don't know. They asked me nicely. Linda said I deserved it. Jimmy Robertson was doing the Fan Room. I'm guilty. We all like our heads patted. What can you say? In fandom success is best measured by others' reactions; you find where you are by a sort of radar plot of other people's opinions. You can't be a great fanwriter by declaiming yourself one. You can't do anything unless other people think your ideas are worthwhile. You become, god help us, a Big Name Fan because other people think you are. You can't elect yourself. In my case some people think I've done good, some think I'm an evil bastard, and some used to think I shit gold and now proclaim I was putting lead in the water supply all along. Oh well, you know

what they say: consistency requires us to be as ignorant today as we were a year ago. All I did was what I did, anyway.

Despite what I've said, I like fandom. I like a lot of the people in it, and I love a few. Some are my best friends. A good time in fandom, at a convention or elsewhere, is one of the best times on Earth, and one reason I sometimes get more than a little harsh about it is that I can't help wanting to do something about the things and people I feel are jamming up the works.

Why am I Here and What am I Supposed to Do?

Hello, I am your Fan Guest of Honour, and I will give it all I can. All questions answered honestly.

My name is Greg Pickersgill.

I am tired of sitting behind the lines with an imperfect recording device receiving inaccurate bulletins... I must reach the Front.

– William Burroughs.

The one and only.

I Sighted the Boundary of Space-Time with Vincent

from *Rastus Johnson's Cakewalk* #1, September 1993

I used to have this sporadic disagreement with Vince Clarke about him not wanting to join the BSFA. But I'm not interested in SF, he used to say, not the modern stuff anyway. I would contend this near heresy: you have to keep up, how do you know anyway, what if, and so on. He would gesture vaguely, say Maybe you are right, but – and smile with the assurance of someone who Is Not Going To Change Their Ways Now. I would accept this with some flippant comment or other about it always being 1932 somewhere. And then like as not we'd get into some serious talk about how good *Galaxy* was in 1952 or what I'd missed by not getting *Thrilling Wonder* regular in the Forties.

But underneath I actually knew what he meant and felt guilty about arguing the toss about it. In those days I was a lot more idealistic and I guess genuinely felt there was a True Path that could be followed if only we could get enough people bloody looking for it.

Now of course I see things different. Whether more clearly or not is another proposition.

I recently, for example, forced myself to accept that I not only no longer read SF – in the sense of choosing to read it regularly and frequently – but actually haven't done since, oh, probably 1970. Yes, that surprised me too. It might even be earlier in fact, but that's arguable.

I used to admit – only to myself, and guiltily – that I hadn't really read a lot of SF since moving to London in 1971. Too much socialising got in the way. Though I always read a lot of reviews and commentary, and through this second-hand view could convince others – and myself, occasionally – that I was really *au courant*. Believe it or not, this was actually necessary. Within the fandom of the day it was still a given that one followed SF – it was still almost possible, even desirable, to read all the SF published in a year. Also, I was in fact interested in science fiction. How unlike the new age of today when people read SF voraciously but seem to have no interest in it at all. Anyway, thinking back seriously, I can't remember reading anything much

from about 1969 onwards.

This is, of course, something of an exaggeration. I certainly read pretty much all the magazines between 1970 and 1980, though rarely as they were issued. I definitely read all the Philip Dick books as they appeared, and in the early Eighties read Barry Bayley's complete works more than once. I also re-read a lot of the books I had read prior to 1970 – which confirmed my suspicion that a lot of SF books are not properly appreciated because they are read at too young – or perhaps too inexperienced is better – an age. What I really mean is, like Vince, there had come a time when I felt that even though it might be arguable that there was nothing new I could be shown, there was nothing new I wanted to see. My capacity for novelty, *à propos* SF at least, had been reached.

So where does this leave me today? Adrift. Overboard the pretence of reading Jonathon Carroll, whose every book after *Land of Laughs* has struck me as annoyingly self-referential and preciously-written, and I gave up halfway through the third and read but a few preconception-confirming pages of others. And that's just the first name off the top of my head. Overboard with Eric Brown, Ian McDonald, Colin Greenland, Robert Holdstock, Paul McAulay, all the Americans, *Interzone* (*Interzone*, the mystery of. I've wandered from BSFA Gauleiter to pro-writer via long-time SF fan and found few who'll admit to buying it, much less reading or enjoying it. Will no one own up to buying a magazine which has had such utterly dreadful cover artwork for years? The self-important editorial presence doesn't help much either, and for myself I'd say the very idea of Nick Lowe reviewing film brings on an academophobe attack. I don't know why *Interzone* induces such disinterest; in principle all the right components are there but just put together wrong) and the rest. In the corner of the boat lurk people like Chris Evans who has done a couple of novels I'd recommend to anyone, and a sort of shade of Rob Holdstock who wrote short stories of gripping emotional energy. And others, of course. But the whole point is I've sort of been living a lie.

What I really wonder is, how many of the rest of you are as well?

Self Explanatory

from *Rastus Johnson's Cakewalk #3*, December 1993

What's the first thing you do when you wake in the morning?

Move Rastus the cat from off my head, drink some water, feel grateful I'm still alive, hug Catherine, wonder when the postman's going to come.

What was the first convention you went to?

1968, Thirdmancon. A completely wasted trip in retrospect. It got me into fandom to some degree, but I was too young and stupid to appreciate the chance to meet people like TAFF-winner Steve Stiles, GOH Ken Bulmer, Peter Weston, Harry Bell, and many more people whose work both pro and fan I came to respect. I was sixteen and the highlight of it all seemed to be necking with Howard Rosenblum's sister; no big deal as everyone from Arthur Crut to Graham Boak did as well.

Which fanzine do you most wish you had produced?

Hyphen in the Fifties, *Speculation* in the Sixties, *Stop Breaking Down* (better than it was) in the Seventies, anything decent in the Eighties, and *Blat* now.

What is your most treasured material possession?

All my books and magazines are vital – a sort of add-on memory-bank of my brain. I'd be desolated to lose them. The one item I took by hand when we moved was the *MIT SF Magazine Index 1951-65*. It's been a pal for 25 years.

Who was the last person you slept with?

Catherine. The only one now since 1990. I don't seem to meet other women I find attractive any more. Maybe I don't get out enough.

What are the last three books you read?

Red Mars, K S Robinson. *Science Fiction Lists*, Mike Ashley. *The Heart Of Rock And Soul – 1001 Great Singles*, by Dave Marsh.

What are the last three records you played?

Blues Train, Lightnin Hopkins. *Before And After Science*, Brian Eno. *Dance Crasher*, a ska/rock-steady compilation.

When did you last cry and why?

When I was a bit drunk after a recent family funeral and told my father how much I loved and appreciated him despite our lack of contact over most of my adult life. Also just now, just a little bit, thinking about the last few lines of *The Enchanted Duplicator*.

What characteristics do you think you've inherited from your parents?

My mother's temper and love of books, my father's common sense and love of machines.

What's the biggest myth about fandom?

That all fans are brothers.

What are you like when you're drunk?

In the right company high and happy, but too often get bogged down in serious conversations. These days drinking sometimes makes me too tired to interact properly with anyone unless something really outstanding is happening. I miss parties full of friends fooling around carelessly.

Who would you have play you in a film?

Harvey Keitel.

Pick five words to describe yourself.

Short, broad, out-of-place, quiet, daydreamer.

Is there one piece of criticism that sticks in your mind?

I remember in 1970 Buck Coulson called my fanzine *Fouler* 'crap' for all the wrong reasons. It gave me the erroneous impression – lasting for years – that all American fans were stupid.

What's your most unpleasant characteristic?

Having pretensions I can't live up to, anger, not trying hard enough to accept others' failings.

What is your greatest fear?

That eventually I will be old, alone, and penniless. I only hope I'll have had enough sense to get a gun and at least one bullet by then. I'm also afraid that Catherine will be killed in a road accident as she does a lot of driving, and of the day that little Rastus dies, which being a cat is bound to be sooner than later.

What ambitions do you have still to fulfil?

I really lack serious ambitions, which is why I've ended up like I am. I'd still like to run a bookshop – I have all the plans in my head – but I accept it's impossible. If I could afford to get it going I wouldn't need to bother doing it; it would be just a hobby, probably a tiresome one at that. I would like to direct porno movies – that's just as absurd a concept. I'd like to just do things that some people will think make life a bit more pleasant. Trite or what?

Are you afraid of failure?

Yes, that's why I attempt virtually nothing. I hate it when I get part-way through something and realise I can't finish it properly.

What do you never leave home without?

Indigestion tablets, file-cards, pen, keys, handkerchief, toilet paper (I spent fourteen years in the Civil Service where they only had hard paper and never lost the habit of always carrying my own).

Who is your best male and female friend?

It's honestly hard to say. I'm too suspicious these days. Maybe Don West, Vince Clarke, Chris Evans, Tony Berry, Martin Tudor, Roger Peyton, maybe all of them. Maybe none. What a situation. I used to think I had a lot of women friends but that all changed a few years back. Now it's Catherine, no doubt. I'd like to think there are a few more, but there again...

Who would you most like to meet?

Never meet your heroes, that's for sure. I've always embarrassed myself when I have done, and sometimes been disappointed by them. There are dozens of people I hold in very high regard, both dead and alive, that I'd like to give thanks to. Maybe I'll do a list!

What music would be played at your funeral?

Depends. If there's a big party, lots of Muddy Waters numbers, and at the right moment the Showstoppers 'Ain't Nothing But a Houseparty'. If it's the dismal end I expect, then something appropriately gloomy like Blind Willie Johnson's 'Dark Was The Night, Cold Was The Ground'. See, there's always something to look forward to!

When you look in the mirror, what do you see?

Someone who resembles the person I think is me.

Out of the Attic, Number 2

from *Rastus Johnson's Cakewalk* #5, April 1994

For most of the last twenty-five years, whenever I've encountered someone born any time between 1920 and 1960, I've usually got around to asking them: Do you remember *Billy Bean and his Funny Machine*? The looks that I've had after that harmless enquiry, ranging from the plain blank to the dangerously uncomprehending, would fill a gallery. I've begun, over the years, to wonder if, as I suspected, it's All True; I really have fallen into an alternate world where everything is worse. How else, after all, to explain my persistent poverty and powerlessness when I have all the instincts and impulses of a fabulously wealthy dictator?

I have seriously begun to wonder that I have at some point in my early life merely dreamed – unless the fracture of time and space really did take place and I have been flung Van Vogt-like into this malformed and depressing world – of a strange little piece of television history from the very early Fifties. The short puppet films I think I recall were broadcast on the BBC and involved a strangely structured being with a head like a kidney bean dressed in a striped American railroadman's overall and cap. He inhabited, as near as I remember, the right-hand side of the screen; the left was the preserve of, believe it or not, a combative Cuckoo in a cuckoo clock. Between the two of them stretched the Funny Machine of the title. Each short episode detailed the latest skirmish in a never-ending duel between Bean and Cuckoo, invariably involving the Machine. But over what? What was the cause of the contention? What was the machine for; what did it process? Was it itself a weapon over which these two tiny titans endlessly squabbled? Eggs, I somehow believe, were involved somewhere.

Years pass, as they do, and I resign myself to the consolation that it's all a dream. I am not after all Autarch of Eternity, and Billy Bean, nor his Machine, nor even the Cuckoo, have had even the most fleeting existence outside the dreamscape of my own mind. What was I doing all that time when I thought I was watching television... Little Weed, Rag Tag and Bobtail, Muffin the Mule, are you all too just happy dreams?

Then Vince Clarke, the best Fan Guest of Honour any Worldcon could ever have, sent me some photocopies of *Hyphen* to complete my file. And in

issue number 13, March 1955, we find Walt Willis writing in his editorial:

‘I’m getting worried about 13th Fandom. It all started when I began to follow the serial *Journey into Space* on children’s television. Now I wouldn’t like you to think that I habitually watch children’s programmes: actually I never bother to look at them except when they have *Sooty* or *Muffin the Mule* or *Whirligig*, or *Jack in the Box*, or *The Bumblebees* or *Billy Bean and his Funny Machine* or something like that.’

Arga warga. It’s the One Big One!

Truly, all knowledge is in fanzines... but there are those who would say, and I would not dispute them, that such a man as Walter A Willis might not be of this world either.

But at least I’m no longer the only one. Now surely someone else, other than WAW and I, remembers for instance, *Whirligig*, you know, Humphrey Lestocq, Mister Turnip... or *The Bumblebees*, Michael Bentine and giant bees (from outer space?) living in the corner of his living room ceiling... but wait a minute, hold the phone, *Jack in the Box*, what’s that?

Science Fiction Book Club, scary or wot

posted to Wegenheim elist, 7 February 2005

On Monday 7 February 2005, 10:25:59, Peter Weston wrote:

If you'd traced this mystery person earlier, you could have expanded the HSFHS from its present three (or maybe four) members to four (or maybe five), at which stage you might have got a clubhouse and started to produce a combozine, and then – who knows – put in a bid for an Eastercon! The whole of fandom could have been turned upside down, the dominance of Leeds/Glasgow/London challenged by a new, hyper-active West Wales fandom.

There's something both deeply alluring and hideously frightening about this image, like that of the *second* bottle of brandy when one has already had rather more than is good for one's heart and mind.

Pembrokeshire, as I have doubtless pointed out many times before, is a strange island devoid for the most part of literary sensibilities, or interest in science fiction. Bookshops do not flourish here, those that do exist sputtering along dependent on the custom of tourists, immigrants, or those who have been off the island and come home with broader mental horizons (how fannish).

Why only just the other day I was discussing this with Andrew Jazz, who runs the tiny jazz CD shop in town. He was moaning as usual about the lack of custom, and pointing out that well over fifty percent of his meagre turnover was to people from Away who were visiting Pembrokeshire (who invariably said Oh wow what a great shop wish we had one of these where I come from etc. etc.). And the other portion is mostly composed of people like me who had actually lived outside of Pembrokeshire for quite a while at one point.

He then started trying to convince me to open a second-hand bookshop in part of his premises. Hah. The man's obviously lonely in that shop on his own most of the time, not even snotty noses pressed against the window

marvelling at the riches within. I was even tempted as usual, and all the way home worked on my plan to persuade Andy to let me run a real Cold Tonnage West. Then by circular reasoning I rediscovered the fatal flaw in that plan.

However, your note does remind me of a time many years ago now – well, about 1966 or so, after I had read *New Maps of Hell* and realised fandom really existed – when I tried to start a Science Fiction Society at the Grammar School. What a hideous shambles that was; I mean I know that most people thought SF was rubbish back then, but I wasn't really prepared for the enormous hostility from the rest of the kids. And from the teaching staff too – there was one teacher who quite deliberately went around taking down and destroying my handcrafted notices from the boards they had every right to be on. He was a nasty aggressive bastard at the best of times so I never actually asked him what the hell was up, but I did discover that he had a particular hatred of science fiction. Wonder why? Well, I don't really; he was a turd and by all accounts a terrible teacher so who cares, what's unusual there then?

Actually the worst part was that there were a few other pupils who actually *did* seem interested in an SF society. Sadly and embarrassingly they were all much younger than me, and in one or two cases kids I had a vague dislike for anyway, so the whole thing really came to nothing.

Instead we have the loosely-knit (and I am being overly kind there) situation as pertains today, with Peter's old pal from the BSFG ur-years Geoff Winterman out in the distant wilds of Spittal from where you can't get a bus hardly and a taxi requires financial intervention, and David Redd (Wales's Great SF Writer Living in Wales) virtually round the corner, who we do see slightly more frequently since his early retirement but who is far too involved in his peculiar Other Fandom about which we forbear to speak for the most part. The situation not helped at all by Geoff's wife thinking that any involvement he may have with the SF world is a hideous aberration that should not be encouraged, and by David's wife being, well, unseen.

No, the best we can manage is me and Catherine discussing Christopher Anvil and Stephen R Baxter on the way to the pub.

We're not going to be bidding for a Worldcon, then.

Reviews: Fanzines and a Big Book

Things That I Used To Do

Once upon a time, longer ago than seems at all possible, I used to put out fanzines. I even used to do fanzine reviews, and you can tell how long ago this was because at the time fanzine reviewing was still a respectable occupation and had not yet been tainted with the cutting edge of thinly veiled hysteria that so many people now seem to expect. For some reason people like Eric Bentcliffe who had read very few of my reviews came to the conclusion that my style was uniformly aggressive and anti-everything, and that all I wanted was to criticise poor snivelling first-time faneds just for the pure pleasure of watching them die. I even went so far as to count and classify all the reviews I'd ever done to see exactly how they lay, and even I was surprised to find something like eighty percent of them were pretty well unalloyed praise and the tiny minority were the harsh criticisms Bentcliffe and his like fixated upon. Okay, so blood is generally more fun than butter to a jaded audience, and more attractive as critical copy in itself if you want to prove a point, and the real trouble with all this is that it seemed to make nasty reviewing kind of cool and in the last analysis produced Joseph Nicholas for which I am very very sorry. But, the point of all this is, I liked a lot more fanzines than I hated. I did a list of my top fanzines one time, which was hard enough, but not so hard at all as trying to distinguish the truly dreadful.

Excellent fanzines are easy: *Wrinkled Shrew*, *Stop Breaking Down*, *One-Off*, *Deadloss*, *Out Of The Blue*, *Epsilon*; names come readily. The merely mediocre or uninteresting take more effort: *Atropos*, *Titan*, *Ardees*, or *K*. But the really dreadful... *Viridiana*... *Secondhand Wave*... God Almighty, there must be others that were just too hideous to even bother unwrapping if you could guess the contents. Never mind the top end of things; let's do a *Frank's APA* poll of the worst fanzine of all time. I wonder how many people will find as I did that very little of such junk has actually stayed in your memory.

from *Not Jumping but Falling*, *Frank's APA*, November
1983

Scoria

from *Fouler* #3, October 1970

Fouler's 'Heap' [the letter column] this issue doesn't contain any LOCs from the US or Canada, as you'll have noticed. This isn't evidence of anti-NorMerican sentiment, but is merely because this issue has followed so hard on the heels of the last that people in the States and Canada will not have had time to respond yet. Assuming they're going/want to, that is.

Anyway, *Fouler* will appear on a roughly bi-monthly schedule in the future, and the publication date will be brought forward whenever the stock of worthy material is enough to make an issue worthwhile. However, the kind of material we get is more or less up to You (ghod help us), and let it be known now that nothing will be rejected unless it is either crudly written or has evidence of out-and-out fugghead thot. This means that no matter how repellent the subject matter may be – whether it's an inevitably useless attempt to convince me of the existence of a blues band better than Canned Heat, or a paean of praise for the skinhead faction – as long as it is well-written and intelligently presented, it has a very high chance of seeing genuine duper ink.

Whilst still on the subject of future issues, I'd like to mention two departments we have a mind to run. A fanzine review column, of a depth unheard of in the annals of fandom since the demise of Pete Roberts's *Checkpoint* and only previously encountered in that greatest fanzine of them all, *Amazing Stories*. We consider it vital that there should be a viable well-known column of in-depth fanzine reviews. It should not only help to weed the crud out of British fanzines (all three of them) but give praise wherever it's due to individual writers, especially of poetry and fiction, areas ignored by many LOCers, as evidenced by the comments on the last issue of *Fouler*. Anyway, we'd like to receive all new fanzines for potential review, well within deadline time whenever possible.

The other project is 'Backspace', a reprint section of small items from the fabulous fanzines of days past, such as *Hyphen* (which ran a singularly successful column of this type itself, upon which 'Backspace' is unashamedly modelled), *Bastion* and many others. This unit will be wide open to guest editing, so if you know of any Golden Oldie which will show the modern fan

what he's missing, then by all means send it in.

Fouler on Maya

**Maya 1 – from Ian Williams, 6 Greta Terrace, Chester Road,
Sunderland, Co. Durham SR4 7RJ**

For trade, 2/- (6/- for 3), LOC; 34pp quarto

from 'Eyeball', *Fouler* #4, December 1970

My, I thought to myself, huddled in the sweaty sheets at 8.20 in the morning, peering at *Maya* in the guttering light of a brace of clapped out Ever-Readies: this is a damn good fanzine. So I fell back into the arms of Morpheus; and in the fullness of time, at 1 PM and in the blinding reality of sunlight, I looked again, and stap me if I hadn't been reasonably right first time.

This is a bloody good first issue, is what I'm trying to say in that last pseudo-lyrical paragraph. The best since *Morfarch* #1, in fact, and you all remember that one don't you? (?) This is without a doubt the most interesting fanzine I've seen for a long time; it's packed with the most incredible things, good, bad, and plain lousy, but all very, very interesting. It's a weird kind of cross between the 'normal' type of first issue – in that it has a lot of 'unknowns' and a lot of material by Ian himself – but it's also got a very mature feel to it, probably due to A Graham Boak's column, and the fact that Ian has been around the fan thing for a while before and knows where it's at.

Still, to more detailed comments. It's a fairly smart magazine, marred only by an excess of faintness of repro and a little cramping here and there. Too many of the shorter items are seemingly carelessly bunged together, and it's too easy to get them confused. There're a number of reasonable illos, mostly Harry Bell reprints, but one absolutely superb one of an arm flushing itself down a bog, which I shall doubtless steal for Ratfandom badges if I can.

Anyway.

The actual contents, wordwise, are a little odd. I mean, a review of *Dangerous Visions* was all very well eighteen months ago, but now it's a bit of an anachronism. Still, Brian Stableford manages to say absolutely nothing new very well indeed. Similarly, Mailer's *American Dream* wasn't exactly published yesterday, but I found this a rather pleasing inclusion in a fanzine, particularly as the review was quite exceptionally well done, although some of Ritchie Smith's conclusions seemed a bit flip and suspect to me.

Ian gets in everywhere, projecting a very reasonable image of himself as

professional intellectual and part-time dwarf, and it's a bet that he's going to be a major fanwriter in a very short time. Here he's mostly concerned with 'science fiction' itself, and has some impossibly individual opinions to pass on. Myself, I disagree with him almost entirely, especially where he flipily puts down Philip Dick as 'an introspective, irrelevant, bore' and dismisses the Jerry Cornelius stories without so much as a wasted sneer. This is nothing but crass oafishness to me, and I had difficulty in not setting fire to the damn fanzine at those points. Still, it's all good controversial stuff (tho' I'm not suggesting deliberately so – not in so many words, anyway) and he has got a damn good article on R A Lafferty, a much under-exposed author, and he has realised the true worthlessness of Harlan Ellison as Fictionaliser, so there's hope yet.

And by god there's more. Boak's column, as you'd expect, is nauseatingly good, if typical Boak. A severe change from normal fan-politics here as the man says just what he thinks, not what he ought to, about fandom. I don't entirely agree, obviously, when he says that a fanzine with typed heads, no artwork, etc., is a cop-out, but that's a purely personal approach. *Fouler* was planned in that way, the outcome of the toss-up between a very flash fanzine appearing twice a year, or a neatly produced plain one once every month or so. If we at *Fouler* had the money to do it, we'd make it prettier, but we haven't so we don't. And I'm not saying we save any cash the way things run now, it's just that we produce more per penny than otherwise. Anyway, suffice to say that Boak's column is the best of its kind I've yet seen in a modern fanzine. He's got a fine sense of fandom, coupled with a tough intelligence, and provided he doesn't sell out he'll be well worth reading. The only complaint I've got about him here is that he doesn't give the good British fanzines enough boost, and gives too much to a piece of generally worthless ephemera like *Seagull* by mentioning it at all.

What's left is mostly smallness, both in size and significance. Newcomer Thom Penman contributes nothing much that fills some 4pp, including one of those terrible school-magazine type 'news reports' – 'The new DEW-line designer is called Heimdall.' Wow. This is plain packing, and it's a pity Ian had to use it. (Oddly, I've got a quite good thing by Thom Penman upcoming in *Fouler* #5.)

Then there's the characteristic vaguely interesting trivia from Mary Reed-Legg, which always seems to me to be manufactured rather than written; and a remarkably trite comic strip by Jim Marshall and Ian Penman:

‘I do not eat children, said the stone monster, I love them’ – no, it’s not paedophilia in Comicsland, unfortunately; the infant screams, ‘Don’t love me,’ and the spurned granite-face stomps off into the ocean ‘...crying for those who reject love.’ O god. It’s not even particularly well drawn, and has absolutely no merit whatsoever.

Which leaves, more or less, the poetry. Hmm. I was somewhat amazed to find that the one I liked best, by David Barry, was meant to be a hype. I thought it was bloody excellent, a lament in the vein of the Liverpool Poets, and it all illustrates that what, in the field of art, is hype to one is dead straight to another. (See comments on last issue’s ‘Unicorn’ story in this ‘Heap’, for more illustration of that.) Anyway, Ritchie Smith’s offering here shows him to be a far better critic than poet, probably because he seems, to me, too selfconsciously lyrical – especially in his verbalisations of a Third Ear Band album, which vein of achievement isn’t exactly the most successful at the best of times. Still, it’s pretty good stuff, even if I don’t particularly care for it myself. I’d just like to see more before committing myself. Ian himself shows commendable restraint (or maybe cowardice, or plain good sense) in including only one of his own poems. Called ‘The Running Man’, it’s vaguely in the same idiom as ‘London Poem’ in this magazine, and as I’m particularly susceptible to what someone (Merfyn Roberts, if I remember) called ‘maudlin introverted selfpitying bullshit’ I personally found it terrific.

And that, fundamentally, is about all. That’s a reasonable précis of the actual contents, but it can’t communicate the real and particular atmosphere of *Maya*, an undefinable presence which marks out the truly interesting and potentially successful fanzines out from the crap. There’s an amazing proportion of crud to good in this issue, so the excellent overall effect can’t really be analysed. Maybe it’s just the sheer burning potential for the future steaming through.

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***Maya 2* – from Ian Williams, 6 Greta Terrace, Chester Road,
Sunderland, Co. Durham SR4 7RJ**

For trade, 10p, LOC, contribution; 46pp quarto

from ‘Eyeball’, *Fouler* #6, June 1971

Behind a somewhat grotesque but eye-catching cover lurks a travesty of duplication. Honest to Christ, Mite, if you *had* to dilute the ink why not use simple ordinary water and not piss? I know it means getting off your arse and finding a tap but it works out better in the end. It’s a real waste of time

pushing illegible pages, no matter how good the material. And good material it is too, even though Mite's obviously determined to fuck it up with typos and even spacing errors (is this the magazine which is going to replace *Fouler*?). Rambling vaguely within, we light upon:

A G 'Superfan' Boak's column which has one paragraph on p.6 which makes the whole magazine worthwhile. Otherwise he continues to comment literately and sensibly on fandom. The fact I can't say any more isn't a denigration, or even in this case my own stupidity, just that all he says there is so bloody right. Though I might quarrel over the fact that it's at all possible to improve *OMPA* without wholesale expulsions.

Mary Legg with personal impressions of fandom that come through from the mid-Sixties and the heyday of 'new wave' fandom. Fine fannish history, ten Ratpoints to Mite for securing this and promises of more. More of this might well serve to give fandom a greater sense of identity and, gosh wow, bring about a revival of hardcore faaaandom.

The lettercolumn – best I've seen for a long time. A rather depressing fixation on 'science fiction', though, from which Holdstock stands out. An addition to his tirade against serconism is the fact that whatever Mite and his henchmen intend to do with *Maya* they'd be well advised to forget about SF entirely, leave it to *Quicksilver* and *Speculation*, where it can be handled properly. *Maya* isn't going to say anything new, interesting, or at all influential to the course of SF, whereas it could contribute all three to fandom. They're fans, part of the scene which they can build, chronicle, make the difference to that they sure as shit won't make to the SF world. SF will go on and on and on ad bloody nauseam without them, and whilst fandom probably would too they're at least in a position to make some kind of impression on it – achieve immortality, in fact, to be remembered. Thank Christ *Maya* seems to be tending towards the right direction, though, with Boak and Legg, and fine fanzine reviews by the Mite (which include a damn good Cornelius story, by the way); and the pointless, illiterate, turgid sercon crud by people like Gilbert is in a small minor part of the mag (though I must admit, shamefaced, that David Pringle's 'Racedeath in SF' is a rather good article on annihilation of self and race in SF, which I'm glad to have read. Though it shouldn't have been here!). Like, it's meaningful enough to have a regular platform for general discussion of SF (after all, lots of fans haven't grown out of it yet) and have it operating on a lighter level than *Quick*, or *Spec*; but I think the new *4M* would fill that space adequately enough, leaving *Maya* to

realise its full potential as a straightahead fanzine absolutely preoccupied with fandom. (Is *Maya* the fanzine to replace *Fouler*?)

Other gems... Thom Penman, being as boring, unreadable, affected, contrived, and wasteful of valuable duper-paper as only he can be when he's trying. How charming it is to see these children eagerly seizing great truths and laying them down for us to marvel at, all dressed around with their masterful grasp of Thesaurus in one hand and dictionary in the other. The prose poem itself (and aren't they *always* prose poems?) aptly committed to paper by cock dipped in ink. There's a strange egoboo chain in Gannet fandom, which Mite contributes to but does not suffer from. It entails Penman & Mite telling Smith what a terrific *imagiste* he is, Smith telling Penman what a terrific prose-stylist he is, and everyone telling Mite what an AAA Ace feller he is. Ends up with Smith convinced that pretty images and no sense doth indeed a poet make, Penman confirmed in his suspicion he's the Zelazny of the '70s, and Mite knowing he's got these two callow kids wrapped round his little finger. The whole scene does tend to break down when verbal effluent like this is revealed to the world, though.

What else... excellent section headings and titles by diverse hands, good Bell cartoons, and a strong taint of the Mite himself overall. What more, what more? Ace fanzine, no doubt.

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***Maya* 4 – from Ian Maule, 59 Windsor Terrace, South Gosforth,
Newcastle-upon-Tyne NE3 IYL
For trade, LOC, contribution, 20p**

from 'Eyeball', *Fouler* #7, September 1972

Along with *Turning Worm* the best current British fanzine – sharing all the qualities of *Worm*, but not quite so consistently, or, sometimes, intelligently, but then it's altogether a lighter piece of stuff. This issue isn't necessarily the best – though I doubt Maule will ever produce a totally superb issue; he seems to have the same editorial block as many editors, a nagging need to put in something for everyone (a 'quality' exemplified by the defunct *Les Spinge* under the editorship of one Pardoe). There's little common ground between the articles herein, and I have the feeling they could all have been published anywhere without any loss at all. A good, really individual fanzine should publish only material which could only appear in it and nowhere else, and *Maya* fails by seeming to include anything that's spelled right and vaguely literate. Edit, Maule you fucker, edit! Still and all, he's refined the focus

down from the days when Supermite Williams used to include all kinds of shit – even SF-oriented – in *Maya*, down to a nice fannish basis.

No doubt, *Maya*'s the prettiest fanzine. Stone perfect duplication and clean layout and nice heads etc. Made me so damn jealous I tried the same thing here, but didn't allow for the fucking duper. Anyway, that aside, the best thing here is – and how it stirs me to say so:

An article by John Dennis Neilsen Hall. His best piece of work yet – maybe he's picked up something else since he moved in with the Brunners besides clap and the crabs. Apart from the second para, which is a brief flash of his old excess, it's exceptionally well-written, Hall having realised the true path of fannish documentary: pick the more extreme events, get the details and characteristics right, and then exaggerate only slightly. If Hall only moved in fannish circles he might well, on this showing, become a fine chronicler of events. This bit really brings it all back; it all actually happened just like that, and yes, we did used to talk like the second para on p.10. Wow.

Ex-editor Williams intrudes with a typically well-written piece, typically about nothing. If he only wrote about fandom he'd be superb, but then fandom might not be large enough to contain his huge talents. However, it's a deal more memorable than anything in *Hell*. Unlike Darrell Schweitzer's thing which I can't recall at all and looks far too tedious to re-read. Anyway, what's a damn Yankee here for? *Maya* would be better advised to chronicle British fandom exclusively (except for letters) as no one does this with any capability. Same for Piggott's reviews of US zines, which although well done are irrelevant to me. Piggott also likely to burn himself out with these reviews, or at least appear too often for comfort. A pity Ian Williams's excellent fanzine reviewing wasn't kept on in *Maya*. Change is as good as.

Lettercolumn filled with flak aimed at me. A somewhat jarring experience (*I don't claim to be unpanicked by adverse comment*) which makes me wish I'd been more explicit and detailed in my original letter, and not produced a typical printed scream. Naturally, I stand by whatever I said, and the whole thing was worthwhile to see the bits of comment on me and *Fouler* that appeared between the lines. Noted, buddies, noted. Most points made against me are wrong, incidentally, as I'll prove one day in an article or something.

This fanzine really does excite me to participate in it (tho' idly as usual I haven't), because it's meaningful in a way *Hell* isn't. I sense that people care what goes on in it. Maule, for all his faults, is a good taking-care-of-business

editor who has melded the good parts of *Fouler* and *Egg*, I believe, and created something that will in time become better than either of them – if indeed it hasn't already. Or, I suppose, if Maule doesn't pay heed, the whole thing could go right down the drain, and what a total shitty pity that would be.

Eyeball – Fanzine Reviews

from *Ritblat/Grim News* #1, March 1974

OK. Old readers start here. It's the old 'Eyeball' again. Richly applauded during its life, not especially missed during its demise (where oh where was that letter from Peter Weston saying 'where oh where is that column written intelligently and perceptively by master fanzine reviewer Greg Pickersgill?').

Anyway, back simply because I rather like doing fanzine reviews and don't especially want to do them full-time for another fanzine even if no one asked me to. Not that there's a lot of need for another fanzine column these days, what with every other fan doing a review section. And not just manky old *Haverings* either, but often class stuff. Piggott, Williams and Edwards have recently added their names to master fanzine reviewer rolls alongside oldtimers like Boak and Roberts, so there's not a lot of need for me. Maybe I ought to slip casually aside, content to be one of the precursors of the current school of hard-faced reviewing, and not issue new material to be judged unfavourably alongside current reviewers. Maybe I would if I had any sense, but as usual ego wins in the end as it does in the best of all fanning. 'Eyeball' rolls.

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***True Rat* 1 – from Leroy Kettle, 74 Eleanor Road, London E8**

***Scab* 1-5 – from John Brosnan, Flat 1, 62 Elsham Road, London W14**

God, it's a funny sensation looking at these two manifestations of Ratfan egocentricity and trying to figure something of any depth to say about them. In fact saying anything like that about either of these Ace fanzines is not only impossible but pernicious.

Actually, there's not a lot of point in discussing *Scab* as so few copies actually reach fandom at large, but it does have a lot of relevance to what has become known in local circles as The Real Idiot Debacle – the almost total and entire failure of *True Rat* in the usual fannish terms. What happened, you see, to this Kettle fanzine, the one he's been trying to get out ever since those weird days of Coventry in '69 and oddly titled fanzines like *Pottage* and *Gollywog – A Magazine of Leroy Kettle*, is that of about sixty copies sent out only five letters came back. Bad scene, as we say round here. Not exactly

fannish success, especially considering he's had virtually no response in any other accepted way, such as trades, reviews, or anything. Quite a lot of personal spoken comment, OK, (that's the big disadvantage of living close to your key readership) but that's not a lot of good in the files, is it?

Well, fuckit, it's easy to see why the response wasn't exactly weighting down the mailman on his drear route through the Eleanor Gardens tenements. Simply there was nothing to comment on. It was all fall-about comedy, right through, unremitting as a machinegun but not as effective, no way. In fact, it's true what Malcolm Edwards has been known to say: too much Kettle is definitely too much Kettle. There's a time when all the histrionics ought to stop and unfortunately, although he knows it well enuff himself, Mr Kettle never quite finds himself in a position to pull the plug. Naturally and all, I find Kettle without a doubt the most entertaining fanwriter *over the whole field of fannish writing there is*. There are those better at specific things, but his is a multiplicity of little talents rather than one large one. I found this fanzine totally readable, the events realistically depicted (Kettle being one of the few fans with the Touch of fanwriting: the ability to describe actual events with a realistic tinge of fantasy that makes them and the characters both genuine and larger than life) and the whole thing a general delite to the world. The fragment-of-the-longest-con-report-ever-written was Just Like It Really Happened (to all intents and purposes), as was the Ratfandom party report. The satire on fannish poetic endeavour quite staggering in its accuracy of style and intent, and needle-sharp in its characterization of fannish poets from Ritchie Smith to Charles Platt. The 'Truconfessions' of Lisa Conesa showed the results of many hours spent trying to set up a hackwork factory in emulation of such literary giants as Christopher M Priest and Graham Charnock. And so and so and so on and on and on.

Which brings us to the problem of what you can say about a fanzine like this, other than 'far out, innit funny'. Perceptive readers will have noticed this problem already has the present master reviewer in its grip, and will also be the first to loudly shout 'Fuck all'. And more or less they're right, and honestly, who's gonna bring out a sixteen page fanzine for five LOCs?

Which is *Scab's* big deal, as it's a crummy (though in fact not usually as crummy as *True Rat* in production) four-pager entirely obsessed with Ratfandom and other London phenomenons as seen by John Brosnan. Funny as hell, and most of it true. Its advantage is it can be knocked out with no effort and little money, and get one exactly the same level of praise as that

accorded a larger, similar, device. Which isn't to say Brosnan is generally as funny a writer as Kettle; over the short haul maybe, but in the longer material he tends to get a little loose, and has something of a tendency towards irrelevant nastiness.

However, more or less factual. *Scab* clocks out roughly monthly, and since the last *True Rat* in September '73 there's been little hope of a new one. Pity, really. And what more can you say?

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***Magic Pudding 1* – from Malcolm Edwards, 19 Ranmoor Gardens, Harrow, Middlesex HA1 1UQ**

Now, this is Class, kids. This is Class. A fine and near perfect example of the almost lost art of the personalzine from someone who many people thought was nothing more than a SF creep hanging round with big name pros in order to get himself big-deal assignments writing asshole blurbs for Gollancz SF potboilers and £40 cheques for scurrying up fanzine reviews for the execrable *Science Fiction Monthly*. But be big, brothers; put all that aside and see that this man's a real fan – as if we didn't know from his superbly fannish-tinged editorials in *Vector* and (wayback) *Good Old Quicksilver*.

Produced as a means to egoboo this works splendidly, bringing in virtually every facet of Mal's life: home, fannish, SF fan, convention committee member. Beautifully written, very fluid, conversational without being colloquial, almost the written manifestation of a pseudy little sanctimonious bourgeois with a house in the country, a dog and a wife (loving). But, honest kids, he's a real Buddy and a great writer to boot.

Simply, I find it incredible that someone can range over such a varied collection of subjects and treat them all with respect (or, more to the point, with such a finely judged apportioning of respect) and endow them with such interest as Malcolm does. Musings on records, fanning, conventions, sloshing boiling water on heaps of festering maggots, and Peter Presford are all made to spring alive and vibrant by Mal's scintillating Olivetti 32. Having seen many examples of the 'art' of the personalzine I can assure you this is head and shoulders above the bulk of them, and is substantially better than virtually all fanwriting in this country at present. Nothing more than limitation of subject stands between Malcolm and the highest accolades of fanwriting. No shit, this is a fluency of expression rarely seen in these subliterate days. This is an incisiveness – amply demonstrated here in Malcolm's fanzine criticism which has all the depth of consideration he accords to his

‘real writing’ about ‘literature’ – that puts most fannish work to shame as cack-handed muddle-headed drivel. It’s a testament to my own inability that I can’t – as Malcolm would be able to – extract samples or otherwise demonstrate the truth of my claims. All there is to say is try to get hold of a copy of this, though there aren’t many about. If you do you’re a lucky man, and if you don’t you’ve missed some of the best fanwriting of 1973.

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Cynic 6 – from Graham Boak, 6 Hawks Road, Kingston-upon-Thames, Surrey KT1 3EG

Kids, I’d lately begun to worry about Mr Boak. I’d begun to see him take on the mantle of an old and tired man, rapidly receding into premature middle age with all the stultification of thought, word and deed that that portends for the average fan. Indeed, in personal confrontations I’d been more than a little impatient with him, tending more and more to discard him without thinking; reacting, like, without any original action other than suspicion of decay. But I were wrong indeed, and was proven so by the old Superfan himself who quietly and without fuss produced this, easily and breathtakingly the best all-round fanzine of 1973.

Actually, I’d been so put off by Boak I greeted this with no enthusiasm after its year-long non-appearance, and only a hint by Peter Roberts that I was talked of inside brought me to cracking its pages; inside was a fine fanzine, entirely to the point, totally readable from cover to cover as a unit, free from the superfluous and superficial bullshit saddling down the only two other fanzines with any claims to excellence in ’73 – *Blunt* and *Zimri*.

The only bad thing is the cover, a Dave Rowe atrocity. As usual he seems to be consciously striving after an original and distinctive style and, almost as usual, succeeding in nothing more than hard-edged drawings almost robotic in execution as well as aspect. A terrible cover for such a fine fanzine, and a regrettable lapse of taste by Boak who seemed to let such trivia as Silly Animal Fandom cloud his otherwise sound editorial taste.

The only real article within is Jim Linwood’s piece on the Nova Award, and indeed *Fouler* arch-enemy Linwood does a fine résumé of the meaning and mechanism of the award, as well as doing a fine question and answer piece on the more contentious aspects of it. More or less he convinces me that the award as it stands is valid and workable, and I was previously one of its greatest opponents in its present form. I’d still like to see it expanded to cover individual facets of fannish achievement, such as Best Writer, Artist, etc., but

I'm not unwilling to concede that that may be somewhat unwieldy. Though something like the *Checkpoint* Fan Poll should be conducted on a larger and more exhaustive scale.

The bulk of the fanzine is Boak's own writing. Whilst he hasn't quite got the actual Creative Spark of Malcolm Edwards he's without a doubt the best writer when talking about fans, fanning, and fandom itself. Maybe it's because fandom seems to be something more than a transient phase with Boak (as it appears to be with Ian Williams) or merely an interesting adjunct to his main sphere of interest (as it seems with Edwards); to Boak it's the Real Thing. Something more than rubbish, definitely. I've lost count of the number of telling and practical points made by Boak in these pages; all of them about fans and fandom, no wandering or irrelevance. Level, controlled, literate, no great excess of style or emotion or lunacy, all solid taking care of business. It's a great thing to see a man take his fanning seriously.

And the remainder, of course, is the letter column. Oddly controlled by fringe fans, but easy and interesting for all that. Like Boak's writing there's no excess of anything, but it somehow doesn't demean this fanzine into bland tedium the way it would *Egg*, for instance. There are some fanzines which by simple virtue of their total commitment can make off with the laurels without any spectacle or flourishing. All this fanzine lacks is frequency.

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***Siddhartha* 3 – from Ian Williams, 6 Greta Terrace, Chester Road, Sunderland, Co. Durham SR4 7RD**

There's something bloody repellent about this fanzine. Maybe it's because the little cunt had the gall to write 'This is the last ish you'll get unless you do something that impinges on my fan life' on the copy he finally got round to sending me, or whether the format of this magazine (*this one*, dolts!) has set me up in unwanted competition with *Siddhartha*, but there's something I don't entirely like going on here.

No doubt, Williams is a good writer. I mean, he's won the *Checkpoint* Fan Poll and all that. Fluent, he expresses himself well and precisely. He's sincere, meaningful, soul-searching, introspective, outgoing, even kind of fannish sometimes. But fuck it, I think this is a lot of conceited bullshit and in all truth it pisses me off more than somewhat. It's like watching someone flashing his cock in a sort of 'looka me I can show everybody something' spate; and shit, so what if it is longer than everyone else's, the whole thing has been a bit ludicrous and probably embarrassing also.

All this is too sincere, meaningful, honest, and all that. It's like some kind of intellectual game, some crummy fucking mental purge trip. A little game of playing fannish and being John the Revelator and being honest (man) and all that shit and I begin to wonder.

OK. I'm fully aware that once you start to look askance at the 'personal' style of fanning all kinds of doubts and shames are going to be dragged out. How should anyone be expected to take what I'm writing in this fanzine seriously if they can't also be reasonably expected to accord much the same open eyes to *Siddhartha*? Why should they care? This is a line of thinking which, if taken too far, would throw the whole concept of fanning right away, so I'll not pursue too closely, but instead try to see what it is about this particular aspect of fanwriting that turns me off.

And, of course, in my simple little fashion all I can contribute is what I've already said. That Williams is too blatant about everything. Not necessarily over-emotional, more to the point cold and clinical about his formal over-emotionality. This writing isn't rubbish; it's got all the components of good fannish work – personality, involvement, references to well-known people and events and things, everything you need – but it's all kind of mechanical. Which is the absolute kiss of death for anything like a personalzine, which is what this aspires to be.

Christ, I dunno. This is all perfectly readable when you shut your brain off, but I always come away with the feeling that I've somehow been trapped into watching someone masturbating. All I can say is that I hope this feeling isn't envy. I really do.

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***Malfunction 4/Madcap 3* – both from Peter Presford, 10 Dalkeith Road, South Reddish, Stockport SK5 7EY**

Ya know kids, it's a hard thing to admit that there might be an up and coming fanzine which can take over the essential mantle of *Fouler* and maybe even become a kind of focal point of fandom – but it's an even harder thing to do when the editor of this likely fanzine must be revealed as one Peter B Presford, hitherto known only as the True Illiterate of Fandom (since the departure of Ken Eadie and Audrey Walton at least) and also the publisher of the fanzine with the most misplaced sense of literature and culture this side of *Viridiana*. However, much as PEP may be sneered at for his sad lack of the fundamentals of written English and his pitiable faith in 'poetry' that lacks even the risible qualities of the output of William McGonagall, he is to all

intents and purposes producing a fanzine which just about could become a major fannish force. Despite the fact he claims it to be a repository for all the 'crud' *Madcap* is too good to print, *Malfunction* is in fact one of the more entertaining and alive British fanzines. Not at all the best, as Presford's total lack of critical faculties allows far too many sillinesses, patently outplayed jests, flat quips and outright cretinacy to creep in unstopped. But, and this is it, moving through the shit you'll find a real irreverence, a wild capability for tilting at various fannish windmills – irrespective of the rights, wrongs, facts or fictions of whatever the issue is – and, dammitall, genuine evidence of true interest in fandom and some concern as to its future.

Seriously, fokes. I read this fanzine eight or ten times right through when I first got it. I admit it was a pretty boring afternoon at work, but shit, I've gone through it many times since and it's still a nice one. I haven't seen such potential in years, and I can hardly wait to see how Presford goes about wasting it. Either he'll sink all his time and energy into the miserable *Madcap*, or he'll get the wrong end of reality and carry on with his present 'crud for crud's sake' tack.

The hell of it is that the rest of fandom isn't quite in the mood to take up this interesting challenge. People are too ready to dismiss Presford as a harmless dolt and his fanzine as irrelevant bin-lining. LOCs are a rare event in *Malfunction*, and actual articles by anyone other than the prime perpetrator are as rare as free cunts at a con. Pity.

Anyway, maybe he doesn't want to be the editor of the *Fouler* of the mid-Seventies – and I for one wouldn't blame him if he declined that doubtful privilege. Maybe there isn't a need for one – though it seems to me that in a remarkably short time this 'new revived refurbished and revolutionary' fandom of ours has erected a startling number of its own idols, which to my mind have more or less the same proportion of clay as any that recent attempts were made to remove. Most fanzines these days seem to have a place in them where fandom is looked at askance, and people today seem to have greater readiness to be nasty in just cause than in previous times. So, all that taken for granted, there might not be any reason for a solitary stonefisted attempt to crack whatever facades fandom erects. In all truth I'd love to see one, though, but for warped and twisted reasons (permutations of things in this paragraph) most fans don't seem to want to get behind it in the way they did those many years ago with *Fouler*. Not that that'll stop Presford if he wants to do it, as any man who'll carry on *Madcap* in the face of such

overwhelming scorn can do anything.

Ah, *Madcap*. A horrific fanzine. All the stupid pretensions of *Iseult*, *Wadezine*, *Free Orbit*, *Viridiana*, *Macrocosm*, and every other ‘literary’ fanzine you’ve ever seen all bodedged into one icky mass, presided over by a pair of lackwits, at least one of whom is old enough not to be so idealistic.

I find it hard to believe that Presford and Peter Colley (co-editor of this rubbish) believe they have the right to continue publishing this shit. Damn it, it’s one thing to think you’re a poet – every sensitive little punk thinks that sometime – but at least try to get some sense of quality or self-criticism before smearing your work all over the fanzine. Jesus Christ, how many fans give a good goddam about poetry anyway, and how many of them want to see it in fanzines?

Not that this is totally a poetry mag; just that Presford’s staunch defence of his rights to publish it – he almost makes it sound as though he’s providing a public service by printing the stuff, whilst in fact the service would be best provided by rejecting it – colours the whole thing. Fiction fanzines are good when handled right; *Macrocosm* was more or less excellent (*Madcap* does share in some measure *Mac*’s good appearance) for being edited like a prozine. But it seems that for *Madcap* the only criterion is naive faith and conviction and starry-eyed aspiration, and silly old things like sense, good writing, perception and originality play no part at all.

Put it this way: all the poetry is derivative, shallow, simple in treatment, the language obvious, the effect odious; all the fiction is short, pointless, unfunny, unoriginal. The same fanzine stories you’ve read a hundred times before. The articles and book reviews and record reviews are as boring and monotonous as all articles which aren’t based on personal experience and offer something other than that which can be readily found in any printed text always are. Aw fuck it, Presford. Pack it in.

Burning Hell – Fanzine Reviews

from *Stop Breaking Down* #2, April 1976

In 'All Right Now' [*the SBD letter-column*] reader G Rippington raises in a roundabout way the question of SF-oriented fanzines v. the fannish sort. Whilst in the past I have been notorious for my wholehearted support of fannish fanzines to the exclusion of all others I have recently found in my heart a long-dormant fascination for SF, and can now see the sense, purpose and, currently, need for a genuine honest to god science fiction fanzine based in Britain. By that I don't necessarily mean a 'critical journal' of the sort typified by *Speculation* (a fairly serious strongly SF-oriented fanzine produced in the Sixties by a Birmingham fan named Peter Weston, who became very friendly with a number of professional people as a result) or, more recently, *Vector*, the BSFA journal, which is more 'serious' than the sort of fanzine I have in mind, and is also fairly difficult to obtain. What I'm thinking about is a solidly 'fannish' fanzine aimed entirely at SF, written by and for the science fiction enthusiast rather the posturing critic or dilettante intellectual. It should carry good book reviews, biographies, interviews, checklists, bibliographies, information on buying and selling for collectors, general news and scandal on or about the SF scene, and, importantly, be a place for people to talk and enthuse about science fiction, showing what they like and why they like it, making it clear how SF affects them and how it impinges on their lives. The people behind this sort of fanzine would have to know fandom well, know how to produce a good fanzine, and be intimately involved in SF – the sort of character who could (would, habitually) carry on whole conversations in SF terms, make esoteric jokes on SF subjects.

Older fans will doubtless remember the fanzines Mike Ashley used to produce, before he became a Jehovah's Witness and in a moment of epiphany realised all he had to do was wait a few years until a hack publisher like NEL would come along and pay him lots of money for doing what he'd previously done for love. His fanzines were not totally unlike the ideal I've described above. The small flaw with doing a fanzine like this is that there are few people capable of it. One would need a very strong knowledge of SF, equal critical ability, genuine enthusiasm about SF, wit, humour, and a generally light touch, and if at all possible contacts in the professional world that would

yield up the sort of background material that brings the whole business alive. These requirements cut down the possible applicants no end. Geoff Rippington, like most other neofans whose first fanzine is SF-oriented, has shown that enthusiasm is not enough, and in all truth all Ashley had going for him was a powerful memory and a lot of spare time in which to compile interminable checklists. Kevin Williams, a Newcastle fan, once put out a fanzine called *Durfed* in which, beneath a deep layer of fifth-hand sub-sub-sub-*True Rat* humour, a remarkable knowledge of SF lay. Robert Jackson and Malcolm Edwards both have strong knowledge, good critical ability, and excellent writing capabilities. Leroy Kettle, perhaps unknown to many people, has a truly phenomenal depth of knowledge of the SF field (matched only, perhaps, by my own, ho ho), a fantastic knack for communicating his enthusiasm for it, and a critical sense rarely communicated to fandom at large. It's people like this, who not only like SF but know it intimately, can write well, and, above all, know how to produce good fanzines, that could make a great success of a fanzine like this in Britain right now; with the huge numbers of science fiction enthusiasts about at the moment it could, done right, be a Very Big Thing Indeed.

Burning Hell – Fanzine Reviews (2)

from *Stop Breaking Down* #4, March 1977

Everybody got to have some good times, everybody got to have some bad times. In the last eight or nine months most of my bad times have been spent at a table staring hopelessly at a heap of fanzines and a blank page in the typewriter. Actually, that's a lie; often the page was filled, but filled alas! with little of true worth. Far from producing anything meaningful and profound, liable to shift the whole axis of fanzine fandom in one fell shudder or even finding it in me to savage some poor ignorant cretinous neofan with no possible idea of how to produce a fanzine in any competent fashion, I found I was doing nothing other than fill sheets with humdrum repetition, third hand revelations, and even more superficial than usual analyses. Bad scene man. No wonder that on several occasions – even on the three or four times when all that was required to complete this fanzine for final publication was the review column – the main thought in my head was simply 'Fuck this shit'.

Now that sounds like a right lot of wank, really. Why should I worry about whether my fanzine reviews actually say anything either new or penetrating? Well, for a start because other people seem to expect it of me. I find it gratifying that in the past my fanzine reviews have been praised by people whose commendations are valuable to me. Apart from that, I think there could be some truth in the idea that fanzine reviewing is the only way of establishing some standard of achievement in fandom. And apart from *that* I think that if you're going to bother to do anything in fandom you'd bloody better get it done to your own satisfaction first, because if you don't what you're issuing is substantially as insulting to your readers as a fart in the face. So, taking all that into account, it's not quite such a pose as it might at first seem. But even though I've more or less stated those 'facts', just how much truth, or use, is contained within them? Of course, once I started fretting along those lines it turned into weeks of sleepless nights, and crazy notions began to pile up in my head like so much shit in a blocked drain.

For a start I began to consider my own attitude towards fanzines. Was I

really interested in them? Did all these tedious little pamphlets really have any bearing on the world as I lived in it? Could it have been that, once I had re-established myself in fandom and fanzines were pouring in at a greater rate per week than they had previously per sixmonth, I was becoming rapidly disenchanted with the whole business? Were the days when I would read even a piece of arrant nonsense like *Madcap* with pleasure and interest a dozen times between breakfast and bedtime gone forever? Well, partially at least. Whilst on reflection I found I had no doubt of my basic fascination with fandom, I soon realised that although I'd rather read a good fanzine than almost anything else I was becoming more and more choosy about what constituted a good fanzine. Too many fanzines on my pile were the sort that I really wasn't too fussed about reading again, even for the purposes of review. Not that there was anything particularly *bad* about them – God knows if there had been I'd have been glad to put myself up to the task of pointing it out to anyone who wanted to know – but they were just, well, dull is a word that springs to mind. Tedious, mediocre, and inconsequential are others that could equally fit. By the time I'd figured all this out (lightning-flash revelations come slow around this locale sometimes), I felt more than a little pissed off with these scrappy efforts that had had me scratching my head struggling to find some snappy comment to make about them. Now I realise that makes me sound a bit of a cunt who treats fanzines with disdain, but it ain't necessarily so. I *still* enjoy reading a new fanzine. No better pleasure outside a woman's arms etc. But sometimes they don't get you right by the brain and *pull*, do they? I know it's naughty of me but sometimes I feel that those editors who are spending their time and energy putting out fanzines with such a low stimulation index really ought to be taken out the back to have their faces rubbed down the drains for a few minutes. Trying is not always sufficient. Merely putting out a fanzine is not enough. Shoot your shot and give it all you got, not fuck around.

So by the time I'd sorted that lot out and walked around the room a couple of times effing and blinding, I started to get even more perverse notions. I began to wonder if John Hall was right after all when he said fanzine reviews are a load of shit. Or if Dave Rowe had not been entirely out of touch with reality when he claimed that fanzine reviewers use their platforms to expend their own personalities at the expense of fanzine editors. I began to wonder whether all this heartbreak was going to pay off in the long run. Maybe I should push out the issue with a set of record reviews or a

chunk of my porn novel in place of the reviews. I mean, you know and I know that no matter what is said, or how it is said, no one is going to pay a blind bit of attention, especially the people who should be those with the biggest eyes and ears, the neofans. I began to wonder if there was such a thing as a fanzine editor who paid the slightest bit of attention to what was said about him in a fanzine review. It suddenly became clear to me that progression and improvement amongst faneds is a long and painful business that comes with long years of experience and cannot – or often *will not* – be absorbed overnight from whatever quantity or quality of reviews, articles, guides, or whatever the hell. Now that fact just can't be wrong; how else can a man explain the pathetically awful first, second, third, and even fourth issues of dull, ill-conceived fanzines that hit the mail with dread regularity. The good ones? Blind chance, of course.

So then, like, what's it all for?

Well, no doubt fanzines as subject-matter provide for some of the best and most fascinating of all fannish writing. Recently this has been superbly exemplified by D West's major article in *True Rat 8* (an otherwise undistinguished fanzine by a minor member of the 'Britain is Fine in '79' Committee). This was a well-wrought piece of a quality rarely found in fanzines on any subject down to and including science fiction. Here we see a man with definite ideas and thoughts and the ability to express them well, with cutting incisiveness where needed, with pungent humour when necessary. By virtue of its subject matter it is intensely fannish, with the super-value of being almost essential reading for each and every one of the fanzine's readers. No doubt, any worthwhile article on fanzines in a fanzine creates, simply by virtue of its existence, one of the rare occasions when a fanzine item is of importance and interest to every one of the readers. Of course, there still exists the notion that no one will have their attitudes improved or altered one jot by what is said, though that's no fault of either the writer's or the article's. Therefore if you subscribe to the idea that criticism (of whatever kind or level) must have a practical purpose, must be essentially instructional no matter what, fanzine reviewing is a waste of time.

OK. So let's pause a moment in this nosing motion towards trying to elevate fanzine reviewing to some sort of critical level and examine the other side of the coin: fanzine reviews as merely incestuous comments on our own small world and its media. Everyone likes to read about themselves, as virtually everyone likely to read fanzine reviews will do regularly,

occasionally, or eventually, depending on their degree of involvement in fanzine work. And most people share an interest in picking up on what others thought about something they've read (the justification, so I'm told, for the mass of halfwitted book-reviewing found in a certain class of fanzine). Of course, to do even that with any realistic hope of entertaining it has to be done with some style, flair, and a reasonable level of perception throughout. Some sort of contents-listing type short reviews with 'liked A/hated B' type crap ladled over it is really neither use nor entertainment. So no matter what, you get back to having to consider the beast before slaying it. The trouble, still, with most fanzines is that they are such unappealing prey that often enough the hunter loses interest in the game. Still and all, even the shortest, least considered review fills up a page or so, puts another item on the contents page, strikes off the obligation of a letter-of-comment, and gratifies whoever sent you the fanzine with the thought that at least you took it out of the envelope. Big deal huh?

So where have I got to with all of this? Frankly, I'm unsure. I, myself, personally, believe that good writing on fanzines is the highest art in all fanzine writing and I aspire to some sort of pinnacle within the field myself. I rarely achieve self-set goals, but I'll keep on keeping on. I'm still not entirely convinced that fanzine reviewing has any practical value; how much is there to be said anyway? Once you've panned one crudzine you've panned them all, really. And if people can't recognise material of worth without having their noses rubbed in it then maybe they don't deserve to see it at all.

Maybe all of this muddled head-searching is consequent to the fact that nothing especially remarkable has happened in fanzine publishing in Britain recently. Maybe worthwhile reviewing is too closely tied to the material under consideration. I mean, silk purses and sow's ear and all that. Anyway, the hell with it, even if I had developed some entirely new ethic or critical code of fanzine reviewing no one'd give a damn anyway. So let's go to the crossroads and see what's been going on wrong.

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I suppose a damned near perfect example of the sort of worthily dull fanzine that is the bane of fanzine reviewers everywhere is Dave Cockfield's *Atropos*, the third issue of which came out some time ago. That, really, is all I should say about it, for although I grabbed it eagerly enough when it arrived I only let it slip from my grasp in favour of re-reading Bill Millar's excellent book on the Coasters and, shock-horror, hardly looked at it again, even for the

purposes of review. I'm told that my negligence has not been to my detriment, but that's neither here nor there because I'm vaguely ashamed not to have read Dave's fanzine with anything like interest. However, I find it easy enough to rationalise away any presumed failure on my part by claiming that any fanzine must above all attract and involve its readers ('a fanzine without involvement is a failure' once said a very wise man) because – even though it drops unsolicited, though tacitly invited, onto one's doormat – it really has no intrinsic appeal greater than that held by any newsstand magazine, which one must be in one of a million ways cajoled and coerced into buying on the promise of goodies within. A promise rarely fulfilled as I have discovered on many forays into Soho porn-shops. What I'm getting at is that even though the damned thing is a *fanzine* and all fanzine fans are presumed to be interested in it *per se*, that presumption is something that can lead the aspiring faned well awry. Really, if a fanzine gives every appearance, even on inspection, of being uninteresting, there's no reason why it should get any more of a fair shake.

Too many faneds seem to believe that merely pubbing their ish and cramming it with things they like is sufficient. Well, it may be if you just want to do it for the sake of it, but if you look on a fanzine as something which will grow and improve with every issue this ain't good enough. Someone like David Griffin, for instance, who publishes a remarkably nondescript fanzine like *After the Flood* which is notable only for his persistent use of binary for issue-numbering, can wonder in all naivety why he only gets two or three letters. After all, he's putting in the sort of thing he's interested in, isn't he? Yeah, but maybe no one else is. You got to play to the audience no matter what. And not just rubbish either, not just amazing bin-lining like articles on Rosicrucianism (*Atropos* #2) even though they draw actual fucking letters of comment (*Atropos* #3). Which is something else that never fails to amaze me; would any one of the people who wrote anything to *Atropos* about Rosicrucianism ever have thought spontaneously about the cult without the stimulus of the article? No, they probably wouldn't, and contrary to expectations I am not going to say that is a good thing. I don't for one moment believe that anyone needs articles like that in fanzines, and it's a testament to the dimness of many letterwriters that they often say things like 'Coo, if not for Jimmy Phan's article on pig-fucking I'd never ever have thought about it. What a fascinating etc.' And of course they'll have forgotten about it in a week's time. Makes no impression,

lasting, and is thus worthless from the beginning. The only sort of fanzine writing that ever makes an indelible impression is the sort of straight from the heart personalised stuff, and don't let anyone kid you otherwise.

Where was I? Yeah, I wonder why faneds never seem to think in terms of drawing the reader into their fanzine, making it deliberately attractive as a reading proposition. Why does anyone embark on the expensive and time-consuming task of pubbing the fucking ish and then just sling in any old crap lying around? Who knows? Not me, said the little brown hen, or whatever the bloody creature was.

All of which makes Dave Cockfield sound cretinous, which is a pity 'cause he isn't. In *Atropos* #3 he has at least conquered the dreadful mock-humility of his previous editorials, and in articles published elsewhere has shown himself an interesting and readable commentator on fannish characters and events. But he has, completely and totally, failed to build his own fanzine around an interesting central core. In it he says he thinks this was his best issue so far. No wonder, then, that the fourth issue has been so long in appearing.

By contrast we have Leroy Kettle. For the nonce reconciled to the fact that his way to everlasting fame may not lie along the path trodden by such auspicious fans-into-pros as Christopher M Priest and G Peyton Wertenbaker, Kettle plunges onward ever onward in his ambition to become the Hugest Name Fan since Peter Weston. His most recent step in this direction (marathon articles in *Maya* and favourable reviews of appalling stories in the *Times Lit Supp* notwithstanding) was to make over his one-time personalzine *True Rat* into what is known by the cognoscenti as a 'genzine', which doesn't mean 'genuine fanzine' as one might expect, but that it contains material by several diverse hands other than the editor/publisher. (*Stop Breaking Down – the Neofan's Oracle*.)

And some tasty diverse hands appear here too, proof indeed that they who ask shall receive. Would that more fanzine editors take the trouble to request material from worthwhile writers instead of snatching wholesale at the efforts of brothers, cousins, and old school magazines. Graham Charnock, Peter Roberts and D West are all tuff men with a bunch of syllables at the best of times and most anything by them is worth a moment's bated breath. Unfortunately, although a grand maxim oft expressed in several great blues lyrics is 'Everything's gotta change', change is not always for the best, and sad to say this 'new' *True Rat* is an experiment which does not quite come

off. For me at least. (Well, I bet ya thought I was stating some kind of fucking universal law again then, didn't ya?)

Let's put it this way; the shift from personalzine to genzine is a shift in idea only, not in style. The fanzine itself, despite the addition of a few headings and some good cartoons by D West, looks just like the old *True Rat*, the essential appearance and flavour of it remaining unchanged, giving the curious feeling that here we have Kettle carrying off a substantial coup in pastiche of his best buddies' styles but having forgotten the comic punchlines at the end. What I mean is that for all his legendary ability to pick up and correct the most unobtrusive typo, Kettle has yet to extend such meticulousness to such gross items as layout. The slipshod approach that virtually worked in favour of *True Rat* (personalzine) here seems untidy and uninteresting. The worst example of this occurs in Peter Roberts's article, which could well be a fascinating bit of fan history, but is laid out so badly – for instance several lengthy quotes are hardly distinguishable from the main text – that it looks quite unreadable. Casual layout is one thing, careless layout is another. And apart from that I'm far from sure articles on fanhistory should be in *True Rat* anyway. I tend to think that each fanzine has a specific character and their editors would be well advised to select material that is in keeping with the overall image.

Other pieces don't suffer so badly as regards layout; Charnock writes well, if like a nutter, and West provides one of the best pieces of fanzine criticism I've ever seen.

This could be a damned fine fanzine, properly produced; but no matter what Kettle doesn't really need it. His own material is lost and wasted amongst the rest and despite a great ability to draw excellent material from ace fanwriters he seems reluctant to work sufficiently hard to do it justice. And why bother? He's one of the great fanwriters. There's enough genzines, only one Kettle; he should do what he do do best.

And, talking of genzines, the surprise of the century is that young Geof (sic) Ripington's *Titan* is really coming up roses after all. The fourth issue is interesting, varied, literate, and even witty on occasion. Nicely produced, open and neat, with lots of Terry Jeeves illos ('Jeeves for TAFF' says *Titan*, surprise surprise). Good compilation of fanzine reviews, fan history, book reviewing and letters. The whole thing probably succeeds because Ripington is no great shakes as Mr Personality and the onus is entirely on the fanzine to be interesting and readable, and it succeeds. In fact the only

noisome patch is that occupied by Andrew Tidmarsh, the fan who is taking old notions of criticism as self-aggrandisement to all new heights. No one on earth sounds as portentous and pompous as Tidmarsh in full flight and I rather tend to dismiss him as a sort of *jejune* John Brunner, especially when he opens an article branding fans as ‘childish’ in thinking and expressions. This sort of opening invariably leads me to wonder why, if he thinks we’re such shit, he’s allowing his work to be published in a fanzine at all – though I grant he may have the notion of bringing eyesight to the blind (but I don’t want to see things his way) – and when I read later some sort of crazy idea that the western world is causing over-population by forcing the Third World to overproduce raw materials I really do lose all patience. The trouble with Tidmarsh is that he isn’t merely iconoclastic and aggravating but is fucking dull as well. In fact I’d swear that the Andrew Tidmarsh I once had a perfectly fascinating conversation with about Gary Glitter singles is a completely different person.

At the last Globe I went to a curious thing happened; this funny little woman came up and sold me a fanzine. 30p. Lots of money especially for a *Star Trek* fanzine. Now I’m not so crazy as I sound because it so happens the producer of that fanzine is one Helen McCarthy who works in the same building as I do and who walks right past me in the corridor occasionally. So altogether it was as good an opportunity as any to check out this curious sub-fandom. And curious is just about the right word too. Similar enough to a ‘real’ fanzine to lull one into a sense of false familiarity, some huge culture-gaps soon open up. Not so much the mere fascination with *Star Trek* – which as far as I’m concerned is not much crazier than any fascination with SF anyway – or even the *ST* fiction, crosswords, and all the rest. No, what rocked me back was the peculiar glittery innocence of it all, a sort of Rowesque community bathed in light and friendship where everyone helps everyone else off and on with their Fancy-Dress and oohs and ahhs at the appropriate times at the Fashion Shows at *ST* cons, and gives an ovation for the hard-working organisers at the end, and generally all is sweetness and light. No one gets drunk, falls over, feels anyone else up, or feels shitty. It’s the Fashion Shows that really knock me out, though. The descriptions of them herein are quite lyrical, exuding an almost perverse girlish fascination that almost but not quite slips over the line into the tastefully erotic. OK, so I’m exaggerating a bit but the thought is there. Actually *City #3* (which is what I’m talking about) is not too bad, considering. Considering what,

though, I'm not saying.

From the ridiculous to the sublime, great joy fell my way when the unexpected bounty of Bryn Fortey's *Relativity* #7 hit the door-mat. The first *Rel* written entirely by Fortey (bar a few letters) it hits a new high for a generally enjoyable fanzine. Fortey's article on his days as a boxing man is a pure delight: vivid, punchy (pun!), and damned funny. Exactly the kind of article I'd dearly love to publish in *Stop Breaking Down*. And amazement on amazement, poetry in a fanzine that is not merely slightly readable but fucking Good! Mr Fortey is often a god amongst men. There's not a lot can be said of a fanzine like this and not a lot that needs to be. Let us enjoy it while we can.

Another fanzine somewhat similar – in that it has formed a distinct personality that does not need to be matched against any sort of criteria of fannish excellence – is Richard McMahon's *Inverted Ear Trumpet*, of which #4 was the last issue, McMahon having gafiated temporarily though due to return some day soon with another fanzine with an equally cretinous name. Editorial personality is the name of the game and McMahon wins through with a genuinely funny article about going to the dentist which may well be all lies but bloody 'ell made me laff. Nice cartoons too, by the Howard Hughes of fandom, Paul E Thompson. There are signs too that Richard is giving up his pointless crusade against 'obscenity' in fanzines and concentrating more on producing worthwhile fanwriting.

Glimpse and *Nebula* were two new wave-type fanzines that always struck me as similar in their 'professional' approach, with an emphasis on fiction, layout, subscription rates and all that. Even so, I soon found them worth looking forward to. *Glimpse* #4 is, according to editor Paul Hudson, the last. Obviously he held to his ideas of getting his fanzine to grow gradually to full professional status somewhat too strongly, whereas David Taylor and his gang over at *Nebula* have become more and more conventionally fannish in style and format in the last few issues. Artwork is *Nebula*'s strong suite, with Tony Schofield and J Mike Barr (Jim Barker) producing the best illustrative art I've seen in British fanzines ever, a pure delight. All the fiction is crap, of course, and I didn't read any of it; but the columnists, particularly Brian Tawn (publisher of the rather good fanzine *Scribe*), are both readable and interesting. If these boys can keep up their standard of artwork and columnists – and maybe produce more of the humorous pastiches like their marvellously funny one-off 'Dawn Patrol

Blaster Aces' – the world will be a better place. Don't be put off *Nebula* because you think of it as a fiction fanzine; there's too much good in it to miss.

What can one say about *Triode* that hasn't been said before? About ten or twelve years before, more or less. A peculiar dinosaur existing in a sheltered corner of the North-West where scant sign of the 1970s has penetrated, whenever contemporary fans (I can't quite bring myself to call editors Terry Jeeves and Eric Bentcliffe 'contemporary fans') write for it they always seem to adopt a slightly peculiar style that reeks of the most jocular affectations of British fandom of the late Fifties, the school brought up on *The Goon Show* and copies of *Punch*. Thus Robert Jackson, in writing about a rock-band causing alarm in the countryside by practising at night, rather makes the whole thing sound like something taking place in a different century to this one and, worse, makes it sound as though he is totally unfamiliar with the whole thing. I dunno. And Tom Perry's affection for puns is, to say the least, over-indulged. It somehow pains me to think that people like Mike Glicksohn and Terry Hughes think this fanzine is fannish fandom incarnate.

And here we are at last with the big one. *Maya*. My initial reaction to *Maya* is inevitably that it is too cold, too professional, without even the glaring fault of publishing awful fiction perpetrated by other quasi-professional fanzines such as *Nebula*. But when it is filled, as this issue is, with what are manifestly excellent articles laid out and illustrated in fine style, I begin to reconsider. Could it be, I wonder, that my reaction is merely a subconscious cover for my actual realisation that *Maya* is really just another fanzine essentially, something within the field to which I myself contribute, but at the same time so far above my abilities in its appearance, the quality of its contributors, its drawing power for same, and its depressingly healthy and clearminded intellectual attitude? Do I recognise this and recoil from it in awe? Is this fanzine just too good and to save my eyes I search for some trace of flaw, some evidence that it is not a fanzine at all and I need not judge my own efforts against it any more than I would against *Let It Rock*, *Whitehouse*, or *F&SF*? Maybe, maybe. I can never quite make up my mind.

Having said that, *Maya* #12/13 probably seems so supernaturally good because of its material: superb examples of fanwriting by Peter Weston (making it clear once and for all what a destructive influence Charles Platt was on fandom in the '60s), Larry Chortle on how to be a failed

pornographer, and Malcolm Edwards writing fanzine reviews just like as though he'd read the fanzines concerned. Remarkable stuff. Two years ago *Maya* was merely a promising fanzine; nowadays if only Robert Jackson could insert a bit of genuine editorial personality I'd give it the Goddamned Nova Award with my own two hands.

Big Fat Book

from *Rastus Johnson's Cakewalk* #1, September 1993

Got the new edition of the *SF Encyclopaedia* a couple of months back. Mad keen as usual. On the phone to Peyton at Andromeda, credit cards flying in all directions. Despite much snuffling of dissatisfaction from the other end ('Bloody Edward Mackin still not in,' says Roger) eagerly await package and tear it open with carving knife as usual – Andromeda mailroom may be slow but they put together a package sturdier than an Anderson shelter.

What a big book: Ian Williams must be loving it; it's as heavy as half a dozen pelicans. Despite that, my first impressions are poor. In a blatant effort to make the thing academic-friendly they have dumped all the illustrations, making it look stark indeed compared to 1979. This seems a shame when one considers just how much of SF is involved with images, and how many of the entries concern artists. If this is the price to be paid for 'respectability' it is doubly too high, as not only are the illustrations necessary but there's been little sign this sop has paid off in serious reviews. (The only one I encountered was on the terrible Radio 4 'arts' programme *Kaleidoscope* and it was frankly embarrassing.) The page layout isn't especially welcoming either; the columns are wide, leading between lines narrow, and the typeface unattractive. I found it hard to adjust to and unpleasant to read. It put me off so much it wasn't for some time that I realised that a well-used tome around here – the *Guinness Encyclopaedia of Popular Music* – has almost the same characteristics, having slightly wider columns but a smaller, neater typeface and wider leading. The effect is totally different, and as I had found the *Guinness* readable from the first, it took over a week to realise the comparative similarity.

However, what gems of knowledge lurk within. Well, bloody hell, no Vance Aandahl for a start. Probably only got into the 1979 because then-assistant Malcolm Edwards still had a few vestiges of fannish humour left in him. Still, Aandahl deserved an entry anyway and it is signal that he is not here now. You will also search in vain for Joel Townsley Rogers, David Redd, T P Caravan, Will Mohler, Holley Cantine, Robert Presslie, Lee Brown Coye, Bert Tanner, Mel Hunter, George Salter and any one of a score or more that I have paged in vain so far. You will find out, though

remarkably little in some cases, about some extremely minor characters who are present by virtue of their one foray in the realms of scientifiction being stuck for a brief guttering moment between wood or pasteboard. Never mind, editorial theory says, that Soandso was the one bright spark that justified the existence of any number of issues of *Average Imagination Stories*, he didn't get a book reprint so that's him out for a start then. Oh, the injustice of it all.

I doubt whether it would do much good complaining either; the editors' enthusiasm for the magazines is such that they have had all the entries re-written in a more compact form, doing away with all that 'Collectors Should Note' biblio finickiness from 1979. The justification for this is Astounding, if not Amazing. There are, apparently, now so many other publications where detailed information on the SF magazines can be had that it isn't necessary to be so meticulous in the *SFE*. Well, lordy lordy, another secret of the universe revealed. Is it the Austral Leueg at work again, or just a load of evasion about space problems? Or am I the only SF magazine collector who thinks that there is only one word and that is the wonderful Tymn/Ashley *Science Fiction, Fantasy And Weird Magazines* which not only costs a fortune (£85 in 1987!) but is also startlingly difficult to get, as Greenwood Press publish primarily for sale to institutions and can't really grasp the idea that individuals might want to buy their books. Perfect in every detail as in this case they certainly are. But then again, maybe Grafton put out an A-format paperback that I haven't noticed. Maybe not.

But then I guess the editors assume that the average SF reader of today knows nothing about the magazines and cares less. After all, would an *Interzone* reader (and we're really desperately narrowing down the focus here) even recognize a 1951 *Other Worlds* as being, essentially, the same thing? Never mind the sort of literary farts who enthuse over, say, Terry Pratchett or Robert Holdstock. Isn't it, though, the responsibility of reference works to ensure that the magazines and the writers they fostered are not covertly shunted off to the shredder of history?

As it happened, the day after getting my copy the movie *Phase IV* showed on TV... somehow Peter Nicholls's write-up in the *SFE* doesn't seem like it was of the same film. If there's one positive thing to be said for the film – among several, actually; it was better than I expected – it is that it is about science, scientific method, and investigation, the same sort of 'what's going on?' viewpoint of, say, *Quatermass*. Nicholls makes a specific point of saying that it is *not* any of these things. Crikey, I thought, looking up a few

more. Now, it appears that since 1979 the majority of film entries have been done by Peter Nicholls, and he appears to have laid editorial hands on the residual 1979 entries by John Brosnan too. It also appears to me that he might not have, well, actually seen some of them. Now this is intuition, I know, but often the write-up reads like a distillation of others' commentaries. A consequence of 'encyclopaedia style'? Perhaps not. It just seems to me that there are too many instances where the general tone of the film as perceived by Nicholls is quite different from my own memories. Mind you, that being said there are many quite spot-on bits where it all rings true and there are genuine flashes of illumination. I dunno. Is there anything wrong with cribbing it anyway? Has John Clute really read all those terrible books by dreary nonentities? One rather hopes not; life is too short.

Well, gosh wow anyhow. Despite the lack of pictures there's lots of knowledge and a genuine quantitative increase in information over the first edition (even allowing for those who have been dumped by the wayside). Pretty much all the 'new' writers are in and written up in adequate detail; it's definitely up to date to the end of 1992 and it is said there is some 1993 detail in there as well. Good lordy, computer typesetting, what a miracle.

So I can now tell you all about Harry Turtledove without having read one tedious word of his overblown prose. Or is it Ian McDonald I'm thinking about? Actually, I couldn't care less. Reference books, I love 'em. Novels are a fucking bore.

Now, Then

from *Rastus Johnson's Cakewalk #2*, November 1993

This is not a review of Rob Hansen's latest issue of *Then*, his history of fandom covering, this time, the 1970s. I'm saying that to keep things in perspective, as I'm going to make comments about it that I think are valid but certainly don't constitute a real piece of reasoned criticism of the sort that this work deserves. I hope someone else will be doing that, but I can tell you here it won't be Don West repeating his work on earlier volumes, as published in *Critical Wave* a couple of years ago. That's because Don, as well as thinking he said pretty much all he needed to on that occasion, has the same problem with *Then – The Seventies* as I do. He can't read it.

There's hardly anything more interesting to your average actifan than mentions of his own name, and *Then* is studded with mine, but I've tried and tried and my eyes are just glazing over at the approach of Hansen's steppe-like prose. It just stretches off into infinity on all sides, littered like some World War Two battlefield with the relics of past conflicts and daring pushes, signs here and there to mark the passing of full-strength combat teams of great initiative and élan, but all seen through a sort of grey mist that renders everything colourless and drab. The writing has no drive or intrinsic interest. His misconceived use of 'scene-settings' from the real world at chapter-openings gives something like the Yom Kippur War the same emotional weight as Ian Maule moving to London.

Using those links to 'reality' is a dodgy process in itself. The real world, I think, is in fact irrelevant except for its impact on fans themselves. That might be profitably explored perhaps in the forthcoming Eighties volume where Hansen might examine the upsurge of comparatively wealthy fans leading to a convention boom and decline of interest in publishing fanactivity.

Obviously I've read bits and pieces of it, enough to see where he's wrong in detail and emphasis, and I've tried to distinguish whether he this time follows through the story any better than he did in the original *The Story So Far* which continually had me asking, with mounting frustration, 'And what bloody happened next?' This is near impossible to do because there's no index; and the whole thing is so badly produced anyway, the conceit of the

quarto format lending nothing to readability. An index is absolutely essential and easy to achieve using any sensible word-processing package – easy but time-consuming to achieve using paper and pencil, come to that – and the sort of work that ought to have been done for this assumed serious effort. Another reason that following lines of thought through *Then* is hard is the continual chaff and clutter of detail larded into it. Does anyone really need to be reminded here about Ben Burr and *Benzine* for example? I don't mean that we shouldn't know about his/its brief flicker, but not in this way. This is incidental detail in every sense. It's the sort of thing that should be presented in a chronology of people, fanzines, and small events done separately but cross-referenced to the main thrust of the narrative.

I recall, from the discussions that Robert Hansen and I had years ago, even before he did the basic work on *The Story So Far*, that we theorised that what might be needed was a primary basic outline history that would be elaborated on later with proper detail and analysis. Well, I thought that's what *The Story So Far* was. What we have here is more of the same writ larger. There's no analysis or evaluation at all, and many of the same faults in the primary work still exist – questions unanswered, no index and so on.

Hansen may yet insist that this is groundbreaking work and the True History is yet to come. This seems to me unlikely. The very way that he has done it discourages further in-depth work. It seems like the full story – and, judging from the letters included here about previous issues, is being taken as that. The form he's chosen – the straightforward narrative – has changed what he wanted to do. If it had been a heavily annotated indexed chronology, for example, that would have genuinely served as a skeleton around which to build, with many diverse hands if appropriate, something more investigative and interpretative. This flat story, though, is a closed question. This looks like the Standard Reference, and who else other than Hansen has the working notes to go over the job again? And the more time passes the more stories and memories will fade, the events will become legends, the people gods or demons, or just dead. Nothing will be added. It reminds me, prosaically, of *Halliwell's Television Companion*, a terrible piece of junk issued in the Seventies purporting to be an Encyclopaedia of TV. It was completely useless to either the enthusiast or the common browser, didn't sell a damn despite a later updating, and the whole idea has been wiped out of possibility because well, Halliwell did one, didn't he, so there's no need for another, and it didn't sell anyway so nobody wants it, and anyway it's Been Done. Which is what

people will think about *Then*. Fanhistory? Been Done.

The Best Fanzines

i) All Our Sixties

posted to Memoryhole elist, 6 February 1999

On Friday, 05 Feb 1999 17:02:11, Bill Bowers wrote:

If you were to be stranded on a Fannish Desert Island, which ten titles from each fannish decade would you chose to take with you? Naturally, since it was My Entry Decade, I'd like to start with the 1960s.

Bloody Hell – I *love* lists! I can't resist this *at all* so I flung an enquiry into the Memory Hole and came up with 517 individual titles published in the Sixties, with 1,909 issues between them. While I'm pretty sure MH has at least 90% of the British fanzines published in the Sixties I know I don't have half of what was published in Europe and Australia, and less than that of American material. Anyway, there were a lot of fanzines in them days.

But the list provided a fine *aide-memoire*, particularly useful to me as I didn't really become aware as a fan until 1967, and even after that until at least the end of the decade I saw few US fanzines.

Given that, a fair amount of the calculation used in my assessment of them for Desert Island (or Time Capsule) qualification is based on reading them after the fact. So, in alphabetical order:

Badinage – 5 issues 1967-68, produced by the Bristol and District SF group, usually edited by Graham Boak (and whatever happened to etc. etc.). The first 'real' fanzine I saw from beginning to end, parts of it still enchant me, parts now seem appallingly ill-written and well deserving of the negative criticism such as T E White heaped upon it at the time. But still, in a way it's one of the things that pops into my mind when I hear the word 'fanzine'.

Bete Noir / Cockatrice / Discord / Newhom Review / Retrograde / Spirochaete – lots of issues, all the time, Redd Boggs. Cheating, I know, to put these all together, but I doubt even Boggs would claim they weren't all of a piece. It's a well-informed, literate, adult mind talking to us. Just endlessly interesting. What more do you want?

Habakkuk – 8 issues, five in 1960, 3 in '66/'67 – Bill Donaho. There

were two issues of the second series put though *OMPA* in 1966, and I was given copies by Beryl Mercer soon after I became fannish. It was a revelation in every sense of the word. I've often cited getting copies of *Hyphen* as the time that I became convinced that fanzines would be worthwhile, and normally I believe it myself, but I now realise that these issues of *Habakkuk*, exceptionally well produced, incredibly varied in content, all as cosmopolitan and intellectual as hell, were what really turned the switch. The earlier series is almost as good (the recent third series, good as it is, is a third placer) but the second series is really brilliant. Wish I'd done that.

Hyphen – 12 issues, 1960-65. Well, it has of course been said. Funnily enough I didn't see these issues actually *in* the Sixties, not for years – decades – later, in fact. My epiphanitic contact was with issues of '-' from the Fifties, when it was at its best. But there was no bad period for this fanzine.

Les Spinge – the Dave Hale issues, numbers 7-14, 1961-65. Again, something I read after the fact. *LS* had an extremely varied profile, with this as the top of its curve (and the ends of that line being pretty low down before and after). Hale produced big (up to 100 pages) well-produced, intelligently edited fanzines – sort of British *Habakkuks* to my mind. Some brilliant writing – I well remember a Charlie Smith conreport that somehow makes every convention I have ever actually attended seem pale by comparison – and excellent layout.

Quip – 10 issues (?), 1965-68(?). Arnie Katz, Lenny Bailes, and lots of other guys. We're still in big substantial genzine country here, with high production values, careful editing, attention to detail, but with a load of determined fannishness folded in at every opportunity. Of course I didn't read these at the time – not until the late Eighties in fact – but bloody hell it must have been *great* to get this come through your letterbox in 1967!

Smoke – 4 issues, 1960-63, edited by George Locke. Incredibly British, crammed pages, small type, top-of-the-head layout, but full of fascinating things that should appeal to any genuine science fiction fan: books, magazines, fanzines, fanfiction, gossip, letters. What else is there that makes up a good fanzine? It's a real shame that Locke went completely off fandom to become a rare-book dealer – but if you can get hold of a copy of his annotated library list *Spectrum of Fantasy* (Ferret, 1980) it will entrance you.

Speculation (also *Zenith*) – 24 issues, 1963-69 – edited by Peter Weston. Quite simply one of the best fanzines about science fiction ever, and one that I find bears endless rereading. It's all just endlessly interesting in a sort of po-

faced way, full of useful knowledge and commentary. A very British version of Geis's magazines, without the strange professional fannishness that flourished in them, but much more orderly and readable than anything Geis ever did.

Warhoon – 16 issues, 1961-69, edited by Richard Bergeron. Just brilliant stuff, like Redd Boggs's fanzines at greater length (though Boggs is always my preference) and full of informed commentary of damned near everything. Even things I'm not interested in seem fascinating. And in the later issues Bergeron's graphics are *fantastic*. This man's departure from fandom was a tremendous loss in every regard.

So there's my top ten of the Sixties. It's worth remarking that some fanzines that mightily impressed me at the time are not in this list – *Phile*, *Beyond*, *Morfarch*, *Con*, for example. They're all British fanzines that really are overshadowed by the presence of Charles Platt and his associates for whom fannishness in any form (even genuine enthusiasm untempered by cynicism) was anathema. It seemed to make sense to me at the time, and I sought to emulate them in a way for a while, but in the end it was *Hyphen* and *Habakkuk* that really lit the road to travel.

ii) The Seventies

posted to Memoryhole elist, 25 February 1999

I've churned the 1970s around in the MemoryHole database and come up with 506 fanzine titles. Scanning through them was a bit of a depressing experience. Using Bill Bowers's original criteria of 'favourite' rather than best (and apologies for perhaps muddying the water by using 'best' in my roundup of the Sixties message) I found remarkably little that made my little heart lift. OK, there's lots of Good Fanzines, things I'd put forward as Excellent Examples of good fanning to anyone who wanted them, but not a hell of a whole lot that made me go all misty-eyed and long for the days of say, *The Next Best Thing to Perfect Legs* (an obscure Merf Adamson fanzine, FYI).

I came up with a shortlist of 16 titles (19 originally, but I dropped three as being only really-marginally Seventies fanzines) from which I selected the following Top Ten (in alphabetical order):

Dr Faustenstein–David Redd – 3 issues, Feb '79-Jan '80.
Haverfordwest's Greatest Living Fanwriter – honestly, the only other fan in

West Wales. He's never written enough either fannishly or professionally, and this is his only 'real' fanzine. It's just got charm, and it's genuinely interesting on a whole variety of topics.

Four Star Extra – Katzes and Kunkels – 7 issues (I have only # 3-7, all 1978). Not especially fannish except in tone, just really great fan-type writing about things that really fascinated me – I always remember the 'sex' issue with great fondness.

It Comes in the Mail – Ned Brooks – 28 issues, '72-'78. I have to be honest, I didn't really pay much attention to this at the time, but reread it some years ago after getting and really liking Ned's *It Goes On the Shelf*. Wow, it was really good! OK, I'm a list fan, I have no regrets. Especially for lists of fanzines and books and idle gossip and news, which is essentially what this is. Pleasant, in the most commendable way.

Maya – Williams, Maule, and Jackson, variously – 15 issues, '70-'78. OK, the first two Ian Williams issues are a bit crap, the next few edited by Ian Maule are a bit Ian Maule (you know what I mean...) but when Rob Jackson took over from issue 7 it was a whole new deal. I used to roundly criticise Jackson's *Maya* for having ideas above its station productionwise (too much of a Sunday Supplement, I would say facilely) but like an idiot I was ignoring the incredibly high quality of the writing therein in my criticism of the overall apparently unfannish package. Now of course any idiot with DTP software (even me) could do it, but that doesn't detract from Rob's effort and skill then, or, more importantly, his highly motivated editorial determination, getting fine material from a lot of brilliant fanwriters which is as readable and interesting today as ever.

One-Off – David Bridges – 8 issues, April '76-Easter '80. A nut or what? Bridges sprang from nowhere with a genuinely individual consciousness and fanzine style – the first two issues of *O-O* are amongst the most entertaining and enjoyable fanzines I've ever read. It became a bit more conventional after that – I'm using 'conventional' loosely here you realize – and by the end was identifiably a 'fanzine', but still excellent. Bridges went totally bonkers after that – ended up locking himself in the house with the door barricaded, making a brain out of string, marrying an American, moving to Texas. Sad. But *One-Off* was great!

SF Commentary – Bruce Gillespie – at least 46 issues between '70-'79. OK, sometimes the production and general presentation is crap (and sometimes perfect) but the content – for science fiction fans – is

indispensable. Some brilliant writing, some brilliant ideas. What can I say?

Siddhartha – Ian Williams – 8 issues, '72-'77. Williams was a bit of a dead loss as a genzine editor but as a writer – and this is a personalzine – he may be a forgotten genius of British fandom. OK, he takes himself far too seriously here and there, but he writes with wit, charm, and perception (even when he's wrong, if you see what I mean). It's a shame he isn't still active – apparently his wife thinks fandom is a waste of time.

Speculation – Peter Weston – 9 issues, '70-'73. Well, obviously *Spec* was just as good in the Seventies as it was in the Sixties. No more need be said. Steve Green's idea of a *Best of Speculation* would be well within Peter Weston's lunch-money budget, but unfortunately Weston has a peculiar view of his fanwork these days, and tends to think it of no continuing value. In fact Weston has a peculiar view of fanning all round – almost like an elderly Mike Ashley or Don West he seems to believe that if it isn't being done Here and Now it is of no value. Even great faneditors can be completely wrong sometimes.

Twll-Ddu – David Langford – 16 issues, '76-'79. Really brilliant funny stuff (with some serious commentary now and then) about almost daily events in British fandom. My favourite period of Langford writing. I was also tempted to include the sercon fanzine he did with Kevin Smith at roughly the same time (*Drilkjis*) but something's got to go. For all that, Kevin Smith's *Dot* (8 issues, '77-'79) is a pretty good contender too. Smith is really up there with Bergeron as a great loss to fandom.

Vector and other British SF Association publications – at least 50 of them during the decade. Oh, what can I say; I just like this sort of sci-fi-oriented stuff. The Malcolm Edwards period in particular was excellent. The David Wingrove period considerably less so. Wonder if those issues are sought after by whatever *Chung Kuo* fans might exist. Good grief, nothing's impossible.

Well, that's the top ten. The others on my final 16 were:

Boonfark – Dan Steffan – mostly an Eighties fanzine.

Deadloss – Chris Priest – as *Boonfark*.

Epsilon – Rob Hansen – a few '70s issues, but the best were in the Eighties.

Notes from the Chemistry Dept – Dennis Quane – at least 14 issues, '74-'75. Another sercon fanzine, full of reviews, commentary etc etc. How many of you remember it? Who the hell was Dennis Quane?

Vibrator – 6 issues, '75-'77; *Wrinkled Shrew* – 8 issues, '74-'79. I have real problems with a lot of what are perceived of as 'Ratfandom' fanzines, some of them purely personal. However, whoever it was that said (Ted White?) that other than being a social group there were vast differences in written fanac approaches was right. Anyway, these two fanzines are still readable and enjoyable. Pat and Graham Charnock probably deny all knowledge of them.

iii) Fave Fanzines of the Eighties

posted to Memoryhole elist, 12 April 1999

Somehow (and it's not just because I am reluctant to post a List...) I'm finding it hard to come up with a 'favourite' list for the Eighties. I'm sure that's at least in part because during the middle Eighties I managed to convince myself that fanzines were on the way out, and that all meaningful fanactivity could be done Live, In Person, At Conventions (and pub meetings, parties, etc etc). This all seems amazingly stupid in retrospect, but also does mean that I really didn't connect properly with fanzine fandom in the Eighties at all hardly.

Anyway, I went as usual to the MH permacoll databanks for assistance, and found I had on record details of 608 separate fanzine titles, with an amazing 2,460 issues published in the Eighties.

OK, in no particular order (even though it might appear alphabetical) here are my favourite Eighties fanzines... many of which I have become truly familiar with and enthusiastic about in the Nineties...

Boonfark – Dan Steffan – 5 issues, (#3-8, 1981-1983). A brilliant fanzine full of great fanwriting – I am ashamed to say I paid scant heed to it as it was published, but since 'finding' it years later I really love it. If I hadn't been a true fan beforehand this would have made me one. If any fannish fanzine from the Eighties deserves a reprint this is *it*.

Epsilon – Rob Hansen – 12 issues (#7-18, 1981-1985). An excellent fannish fanzine – Hansen was witty, funny, and wise. He had a particular ability to knit together various strands of argument and comment on the issues that affected British fandom of the day and come out with intelligent summaries and sometimes definitive conclusions. His covers were also often quite brilliant. A set of *Epsilon* is a wonderful thing.

Metaphysical Review (New Series) – Bruce Gillespie – 14 issues (#1-14,

1984-1989). I don't think there's anything I can add to the general high opinion we all have of this fanzine (well, all of us except Joseph Nicholas anyway...) – but I would like to add specifically that I really *love* the lists...

The Monthly Monthly – The gang of Four/Robert Runte etc – 12 issues (#1-12, 1980-1981). Really a monthly – incredible. I never saw this at the time but got a set via the MH project. I like it because it's a real sort of old-fashioned fanzine, not a personalzine, not a fiction zine, not even really fannish. It's the sort of serious-minded with humour thing that might have been published in the Thirties or Forties, when Fans Had A Mission. A sort of *Science Fiction Fan* for our times. I really recommend it.

Sikander – Irwin Hirsh – 14 issues (1980-1989). Just a really good fannish fanzine, the kind you don't see no more hardly. Actually you don't. What the hell's gone wrong?

Stomach Pump – Steve Higgins – 10 issues (#2-11, 1980-1986). I'm a bit reluctant to include this as it was one of the first venues to allow the dreadful Michael Ashley to spew biliously over us all, but that aside I always liked it. It was alive and lively, had a good well-edited letter column, and talked about fans, fanzines and records. What more?

Wing Window – John D Berry – 11 issues (#1-11, 1981-88). A real grown adult talking to us as if we were intelligent. Sometimes I think this is what fandom was invented for.

Past Present and Future – Graham Stone – 12 issues (I think) (#3-14, 1980-1989). A genuinely engrossing fanzine about SF – a sort of 'Notes and Queries' really, wherein Stone and his correspondents get into the byways of SF history and information. I'm a bit vague on the bibliography because the 'set' I'm most familiar with is a reprint of the run done for *PEAPS* by our very own Curt Phillips a few years ago. A genuine contribution to SF history (and I mean both Stone's original and Curt's reprint).

The Big Sleaze – Terry Frost – 5 issues (#1-5, 1987-88). Badly produced – terrible typeface, peculiar photocopying – but funny and interesting Australian fanzine. I have to admit I only read through a run a matter of months ago, but it entertained and informed me. Frost comes across with real character – and he included in his fanzine a number of comments and bits of history about Australia and its original inhabitants that were wholly informative. This fanzine doesn't seem to have been at all well-received at the time – there's even a letter from John Bangsund in one issue asking to be taken off the mailing list. But I like it a lot.

Pong – Ted White and Dan Steffan – 40 issues (#1-40, 1980-1982). This fanzine reads better and better as time goes on – and one becomes somewhat distanced from the various arguments and controversies. There were times when I actually avoided it at the time.

The Blue Spot Returns

posted to Memoryhole elist, 12 October 2001

Only a moment ago in cosmic time I was standing in a sea of fanzines, duplicate copies from the MH Permacollection, constituting that which is known hereabouts as the Memory Hole Recycling Section or, in darker moments, all those fucking fanzines no one wants.

Beats me why no one wants them. There's some good stuff here after all – issues of *Boonfark*, *Blat!*, *Trap Door*, *Twll-Ddu*, *Stop Breaking Down*, *Lan's Lantern*... but as you've heard me say more than once, you can't fucking Give Them Away. And this is a world where some guy in Reading is offering me literally hundreds of pounds for the MHP copies of old fanzines that contain anything, even a quote attributed to, Eric Frank Russell. But are we surprised? No, not any more. I no longer expect fans to be interested in fanzines, not when they've got dinner parties to plan.

Anyway, look here, at this issue of *Vector*, the BSFA's magazine; it's number 25, of March 1964. That's 37 years back, before some of you were born. Oh, OK, before your children were born, then. But it's a fascinating issue.

Look at the cover – headlining Eric Frank Russell (John Ingham – no, not that one – would probably give me fifty quid for this!), Harry Harrison, E C Tubb, and All The Usual Features. It's kinda exciting already, isn't it, and that's before we've even admired the classic proportions of the quarto paper and smelled the old duplicating ink. Got a cover by Eddie Jones too. This issue is listed as published by J Michael Rosenblum, but edited by Archie Mercer. No question it definitely looks more like an issue of *New Futurian* than *Archive* or *Amble*, and I wouldn't mind betting that, despite Archie Mercer's assertion to the contrary, Mike Rosenblum had more to do with the content than just stencilling or cranking the duper handle – in short it almost could be an issue of *NF*. Which was one of the best fanzines of all time.

The piece by EFR is titled 'The Author's Lot' and is a sort of precursor to the sort of 'Profession of Science Fiction' series that runs so successfully in *Foundation*. Indeed, reprinting it in *Foundation* might not be a bad idea, as so much that EFR has to say still bears repeating today (and while we're at it, reprinting a letter from Christopher Evans that featured in *Foundation* #11/12

could perhaps serve as a corrective to some of the more academically-oriented characters that show up there these days). Whatever, I'm not at all certain that EFR's final assertion that sf should have nothing intrinsically to do with 'science' really holds water (he's very much a 'speculative fiction' man on the basis of this) because once we abandon the whole core point of scientific method in SF then it turns into the same useless mush as any other made-up rubbish. But really it's an illuminating piece on how he regards SF and being a writer.

Well-written too, which is more than can be said of Harry Harrison's too conversational by half attack on the then recently published *Glory Road*. HH is a bit of an arse at the best of times, and even though I agree with him totally (he even hints that RAH had already, even in the early Sixties, become beyond editing) this isn't a great piece of work. But it probably felt like it to the readership back then – controversy, by a real writer too.

Enormous great Ted Tubb presents us with a bit of fiction, good grief, in *Vector* godhelpus, which I greet with the same enthusiasm I hold for *Dumarest Conquers Civilization* or whatever they were. I bet there was some LOCCER in the following issue complaining about *Vector* pages being wasted on fiction, and I'm inclined to say they were right. Even though it is trailed as a 'thought provoking concept'. Sure.

Who was Dr Peristyle anyway? I used to be very taken with these jokey advice columns (advice regarding scifi topics rather than, well, piles or the ingratitude of one's associates) as a young fan, but they seem more pompous and self-regarding as I age. Maybe that's just because I have an idea they were by Michael Moorcock, who of course has become startlingly more pompous and self-regarding as he has aged. (I just happened to be leafing through a few of the magazine-era *New Worlds*, which I loved with a slavish devotion waybackwhen, and wow gosh, have they changed since I last looked, what a load of self-conscious cobblers and half-witted posturing...)

There are some fascinating book reviews by such as Donald Malcolm and Ian Mcaulay, of *The Dark Light Years* and Edmund Cooper's *Transit* – both reviews notable for their palpable fear of, well, shit and sex more than anything else. SF, SF fandom, and some reviewers in particular, were still embedded in the social mores of the Thirties even on the edge of When Things Changed in 1964 – worrying, really, when we remember that these were the people we expected to be looking forwards for us, pathfinding into the new frontiers.

But it's towards the back of the book that fannish faces appear. The letter column is quite startling – look here, there's Phil Harbottle, Peter White, Vic Hallett, Charles Platt (fannish as all hell, boyish as the day is long – what a pity he too turned into such a boring fart), Mary Reed, Harry Nadler, Graham Hall (with his first letter to *Vector*, possibly his first to any fanzine – and how nice and enthusiastic he seems, how delighted to be among congenial company, how unlike his later incarnations – I wonder if Michael Moorcock can actually be blamed for all of this?), Richard Gordon, Roderick J Milner (yes, no question, this is the Rod Milner who may still own a part of Birmingham's Andromeda Bookshop, and who I would have sworn had never had a moment's interest in SF or fandom (or any aspect of literature at all, come to that) in his entire life, and here he is with a sensible and enthusiastic letter. Good grief, illusions shattered...)

Oh it all seems like so much fun... Of course *Vector* today is much better produced, and much of the content is far superior in writing quality, intellectual content and presentation of argument (fans are so much better educated now it's definitely intimidating to barely literate people like me) but there's a distinct lack of the kind of community spirit one feels from this aged ish. We shall never, I feel, see its like again. Whether that's good or bad we can leave only for the ages to decide, but I know who I am Harry.

And one more thing – listed in the New Members section at the back of the issue is one J H Holmberg, number 0-444. Takes you back a bit, don't it...?

Postscript, 23rd July 2003.

After I wrote this several people enthusiastically recommended I send it to the then current editor of the BSFA's *Matrix*. Which I duly did. To say his enthusiasm was lukewarm would be raising the temperature more than somewhat. To be honest, the tone of his response implied that he barely understood what I was going on about and doubted that the average BSFA member of 2001 would either. I fervently hope he was wrong, but anyway the piece was not accepted for publication.

Conventions

...one goes to SF conventions because of an interest in science fiction, to listen to people talk informedly about it, to meet others with similar interests and views of the world (very important, that last bit, the views of the world bit, because it is something that persists even if one is not presently an habitual SF reader). It is good, too, that one can have a jolly social time with characters who one doesn't have to explain every damned allusion, reference or joke to. One rapidly builds a kinship with such folk, that occasionally blossoms into genuine friendship. There are, in principle, very good reasons to go to SF conventions.

There are, however, some negative aspects. Think of the crowd of geeks, nutters, misfits, and halfwits that one has to associate with. Think of the dreadful misery of loneliness in a crowd, made worse because in the back of your mind you're thinking, 'These are *my* people; why can't I relate to them?' The sometimes endless wartimelike boredom interspersed with all-too-brief moments of hysterical pleasure or flashing intellectual light. The (presumably) well-meaning efforts of the bigger-and-betterists who want to turn conventions into theme-parks for scifi nuts, thus overriding and obliterating everything that made them interesting to start with. The list of negatives is, alas, longer (endlessly almost) than the reasons to be cheerful.

I dunno. I like, love even, the idea of conventions, but they're so often dissatisfying. So I find it hard to try to convince anyone who hasn't been to one, or has fallen out of the habit of going, to join up or resume. Am I just old and farty, too cynical, too bitter, narrowminded, not seeing the joy of it afresh? Only Geneva Melzack can say. Trouble is she'd probably be right.

posted to Wegenheim elist, 9 June 2005

Billy the Squid

from *Seamonsters* #2, November 1978

I dunno. Here I am in the ass-end of someone else's fanzine. I mean, I'm always keen to be a back-door man, but this is ridiculous. Still and all, it is hinted that my much-demanded presence should fulfil a function – that of resident heavy (which shows how much good my perpetual diet is doing, I suppose) – though it might surprise few who ever listen to a word I say to discover that I certainly don't intend doing much of a gangbusters act here or anywhere else. To be damned uncouth about it, I don't really give much of a fat fart for the general run of fannish controversy or ideology going around at the moment, and I wouldn't be at all surprised if this column just went on and on being just as bland and wishy-washy as the rest of this fanzine is bound to be accused of being by those with more mouth than trousers. So get fucked, all you toads who demand I conform to your image of me.

• • •

You'd think, wouldn't you, that just getting up in the morning and going to a convention would be a pretty straightforward task. I mean, like, you'd think that even if, like many fans, you've often awakened sweating in the early hours at the climax of a hideous nightmare about waking up on a *Saturday* morning to realise that The Convention has been going since *Thursday*, and however much you struggle there's *no way possible* of getting to Birmingham or Newcastle or whatever blasted last outpost of civilisation the thing is being held in until late Monday night by which time it will, naturally, be all over. My worst nightmare, almost.

Well, even I put such morbid thoughts out of my head and contented myself with phoning Joseph Nicholas on the day before the last Silicon to remind him to be at our house to get his Silicon-bound lift by nine-thirty in the morning at the latest. 'Sure thing boss,' he kept saying, 'I can be at Richmond Station by eight-thirty, at your place before nine. No problem.' OK, OK, I said, I believe ya. I'm so trusting.

Come nine-thirty there's me, Simone, and Robert Hansen – who at least had the sense to arrive the night before (Nicholas having had an unbreakable date with an insurance man or somesuch unlikely rendezvous) – and we're waiting. 'Where is the little poof?' mumbles Hansen monotonously. Myself, I

ignore him; I'm excited, off-to-a-con excited, have been since awakening at twenty-to-seven, and I don't care. 'Be here any minute,' I reply, equally repetitively, jumping up and jumping back to Hound Dog Taylor and the Houserockers, playing real loud. Simone, she's happy, she does what women always do before con-going: fusses over her clothing. Then the ring. Though not the doorbell. Phone. Nicholas. Dread grips heart. 'Hey kid, what's your problem?' 'Got a problem, boss,' he replies. Fallen down and broke his leg, I think, feeling sympathy coming on; but no, it's worse than that, and sympathy vanishes. 'Only just woke up, boss. Be with you in exactly an hour and a half; you will wait for me, won't you?' Grit teeth, say decent thing, settle down to wait. Hansen goes into shock, sits down and reads a comic the wrong way up – must be his unique artistic vision. Simone takes it all easy, goes back to playing in the wardrobe. I convince myself it could be worse – I could have fallen down and broke a leg – and settle down to pass the time making compilation tapes of R&B tunes for the Silicon PA system, which in the end turns out to have been entirely futile make-work as they are never used and anyway you bums wouldn't have appreciated them anyway. Still, it helped at the time.

Minutes feel like hours, hours feel like days.

Eleven o'clock comes but not Nicholas. By now we've abandoned all distractions and are standing at the kitchen window looking out at the main road, and whenever a 65 bus from Richmond comes by we peer at it in hope of seeing the familiar chiffon scarf and delicate pre-Raphaelite features of Nicholas. The strain is tremendous; grown men and Robert Hansen faint, shriek, rend their clothing. At midday we decide if he hasn't come by one we go without him, the little fucker. By twelve-thirty we are all out in the street, pacing up and down, ready to leap into the car and off without wasting a moment. Hansen strides menacingly up and back to the bus-stop. 'Half-brick in his face when he gets here,' he hisses Welshly. He could do it too; he got an O-level in bricking kids to death back in the old country. Time is getting tight and our hearts are hardening.

At ten minutes to one Nicholas minces into sight. He's walking. 'Shouldn't you at least be *running*?' I enquire acidly from my stance atop the gatepost. He begins long string of feeble apologies but there's no time for that shit. Into the car fast as we can; we may be three hours or more late but provided we go like hell and cut out the intended two-hour pub break halfway we'll still make it more or less to the planned arrival time. But the last straw

inevitably falls. Nicholas, with Simone assisting, can't get his bag into the boot. Admittedly it's too full already, but this final, albeit momentary, delay breaks me. I leap out of the car, wrench my own bag from the boot, stuff his in, snarl, 'Lock it!' at Simone, and fling myself back into the car with my bag jammed uncomfortably beneath my legs and think dark and deadly thoughts.

Everyone is now either pissed off or embarrassed. The first hundred and fifty miles are very quiet indeed. At Woodall service station we get out, have a pee and an ice-cream and actually speak to each other. Gradually things loosen up and as the miles roll by we're soon, just like fans ought to be, talking about the convention. Old faves like 'What do you most want out of this con' come out on cue. When Simone asks this of Nicholas, Hansen and I chorus 'Helen Eling', and he at least has the grace to blush. Slightly. Myself, all I want is enough drink to have a good time without falling down, good company, and no shit from cretins. And stap me if in the end I don't get one and three-quarters out of three, which is not so bad.

Still and all, we got there in the end and felt quite jolly about it too, even though we took one wrong turning too many and the driver got a bit more irate than necessary. Even the shock-horror of Peter Weston's face being the first we saw on pushing through the hotel doors did not the joy diminish. (Weston, incidentally, despite claiming he hadn't even known the convention was on and was only accidentally at it for one night, seemed to be strutting about as though he was running the whole proceedings: practising for Worldcon, one assumes.) Greeeeat, it was, anyway. Register, room, drink, shower of excellent (mostly) new fanzines in succession. All seems just like real life, pleasant glow of happiness suffuses all. Everyone keeps saying Silicon is the one they really look forward to most. It is too.

But who are some of these people? Who's the guy who looks like a young poof, I ask aging hippy Mike Dickinson. Giggling, he replies 'John Collick', then speeds away to tell the young man of this impromptu assessment. He is not, it turns out, amused, especially as the last thing his father said to him before he left home for this, his first convention, was 'Don't come back here if you catch any venereal diseases.' You'll be fucking lucky, I said to him later, but if you are just remember to pass the name around, OK kid? I sometimes work hard at being amusingly decadent. Or so my cover story goes anyway. Another peculiar character with hair like a dandelion puffball puzzles me, especially as he seems to know who I am. Then I notice the conspicuous lack of fingers and conclude it is none other

than Dave Cobbledick, who has not quite realised that the current fashion for curly permed hair is generally best applied to women only. Cobbledick, a good old boy, is as usual totally into fandom for the duration of the con, even to the extent of being the first person to cause Harry Bell to apologise to the manager about vomit on the toilet floor. At eight on the Friday evening. Really enthusiastic, that kid.

Actually, as you might imagine, everything goes into a blur from there on. Some sequences stand out, like Simone haranguing me at the bar around two o'clock Sunday morning about me being drunk. Somehow I convinced her I wasn't and then proved I must have been after all by ordering a double Pernod and adding it to the six or seven vodka-and-oranges I had in a pint mug. That combination leaves an aftershock like nobody's business, and when I had to get up and at it the next morning to play football I felt desperate. Everything smelt and tasted of fucking Pernod (especially after I'd drunk the inch or so I'd had left on 'retiring' as a bit of a straightener), and the first half of our game nearly killed me. Thank God the exercise took it out of my system and the rest of the game and the final – which our team won, of course, of course – was quite fun. For us if not for the poxy spectators who couldn't perceive great play if it clogged them between the legs.

Further Silicon anecdotes seem unnecessary. Suffice it to say that this year's finally convinced me that it is absolutely possible to organise a convention – or maybe weekend party is a better term – of SF-oriented people that has little or nothing to do with SF overtly and for it to be a great success. In fact, the less the impact of SF on the scene the better the whole thing goes. This may seem quite obvious once it's said, but in sort of pure ideological terms it's a massive departure from, say, Laurence Miller's crazy 'Let's make this the biggest Novacon ever!' bigger-and-betterism. Not that one would want to keep the thing small necessarily, but by maintaining it as an open secret one can assume that only those best suited to it will actually bother to get on board. And new people easily fit in, like Collick and Higgins this year, and Cobbledick the last, and they're fucking vital too, otherwise we're all doomed.

So the next time you get all in a tear about the Eastercon being full of people you don't know, don't worry. There's still something left they not only don't know about, but likely don't want to know about either. And you never know, one day we might have Silicons A, B, and C; at Easter, Bank Holiday, and Novacon times. Stranger things happen at sea.

Nice Time Come Back Again

from *Rastus Johnson's Cakewalk* 3, December 1993

And so to Novacon. On the way I stare out at the world and wonder. Wonder if Death's Tiny Hands will fasten more fiercely about me this weekend. Not that I've really got anything to worry about: just a few things like here and there, for example my whole left-side going downhill with tendonitis in my forearm and bursitis in the knee. The right side isn't much brighter; the usual hiatus hernia thing which whenever I think of it brings the spasm of panic – Did I pack the Zantac, the miracle drug that keeps my stomach acidity in order, which in turn stops me throwing up in my sleep, no light prospect when you consider eight pints of beer fountaining all over. Even bring the haemorrhoid ointment, though there's been no little visitors for nearly ten years but it was at a convention they started so you can't be too careful. And anyway as they say, there's piles of us British in Haemorrhoid fandom. Then there's my defective gall-bladder, twitching away, vaguely painful no matter how I wriggle in my seat. Wonder if they've got keyhole surgery at Withybush yet, or will I have to go to some deadly place like Swansea? And never mind the pain in my foot...

Mind you, this funny knobbly patch on the back of my right hand is back again – wonder if I'm turning into Victor Carroon? Maybe I'll just have a simple brain embolism, I think resignedly. Which would be a shame, as life is so much fun these days.

I consider other things. Who'll be there? Who will I talk to? Who'll talk to me? It's futile really, just a warming-up exercise, but I resolve to be more sensible wherever possible. Get back in touch with old friends, that was after all part of the purpose of starting *Rastus Johnson*. Some are probably beyond reach, for their own reasons as much as mine, stupid though both may be. There are a lot of people whose company I often miss – you never know, despite appearances to the contrary they might underneath feel the same way. Might as well be nice – It's nice to be nice to nice people, runs a not-so-daft Pembrokeshire saying. All I have to lose is my pride. You never know, I think to myself, fantasising madly, I might even try to get that ramrod out of Rob Hansen's arse. As he's such a fucking star of Corflu and like that he must have some of his old character left somewhere. Or is he just the Paul

Skelton of the Nineties, I wonder, staring out at a particularly hideous tract of suburban houses somewhere near Gloucester.

...and off the train and into Birmingham. Bloody Hell. More people than you'd see in Haverfordwest on cattle-market day, and all of them walking in the wrong directions, on the wrong side of the pavement, standing around talking and gawping, just generally being in our way. Swarms of people, chatter chatter push push. Fuck, I thought, if you were bloody evacuating Haverfordwest you wouldn't see this many people at the railway station. Just another new and, for us fieldmice, surprisingly frightening aspect to navigating around Birmingham, at best an accidental and haphazard procedure. Living in a small town rapidly loses one the immunity to human masses that comes from citification; in Arfat, sometimes, seeing more than a dozen people the length of the High Street is a crowd. Of course, in Birmingham it's worse; albeit the second city of England, the place is clearly too poor to put up useful streetsigns, so every intersection is a cue for orientation with map and vaguely remembered clues, hampered by the dense flocks of Brummies scurrying from Here to There, cawing like seagulls as they too ask each other whether they're going the right way. But to the hotel, and on the way we pass someone. Bloody Hell, she didn't half look like Helena Bowles; but shorter, with longer, different coloured hair, and younger, completely different really, but wasn't that Helena Bowles, who just walked by and didn't even say Hello? Catherine, redfaced with the unaccustomed walking and shoving through crowds, just says What?

Waiting at the hotel front desk is Paul Kincaid. First challenge to be more sensible. I am too old and tired to allow disagreements and arguments to trail on any longer and must regain contact with friends. Paul and Maureen (Speller/Porter/whichever) and I have dodged around each other for a couple of years after some considerable disagreements *à propos* Mexican. This all seems a bit daft considering all we've done together and how well we generally got on, and especially so that the present deterioration in the cachet of that convention has, it seems, once again united our thinking in that regard. So, Hello Paul. Hello, he says, and thanks for the fanzine. We're hardly falling into each other's arms – Maureen for a start is ruffled over the imminent death of her car, parked outside with the hood up, but give or take a few drinks we're back to where we were a few years ago. Fucking hell, it must be about that time.

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Into the bar, thank god. This is more like it. Nothing changes really. As part of our money-saving routine we haven't had a drink for months and after a couple of pints and a load of chatter with Peter Weston, Julian Headlong and John Jarrold I feel exceptionally light-headed. Early night tonight, says a little voice in the back of my brain.

Poof! At my left side appears John Brosnan, oh cheerfulness. God knows what he's doing but whenever I see him about every year or so he contrives to look older but more healthy at the same time, even when leaning limply against a doorpost with a full glass of vodka reflexively clutched in an otherwise flaccid hand. It's nice to see him again; I was pleased he had enjoyed the first issue of *RJC*. We chat briefly for a while about the enigma within a mystery that is Peter Roberts, and the unlikelihood of John ever getting anywhere with a possible suit against *Jurassic Park* for plagiarism of *Carnosaur* – apparently if he could afford to research and bring the case he'd be so rich already it wouldn't be worth the bother – and I'm casting about for a topic that would actually bring us into extended conversation when Stan Nicholls interposes his body between we two. He makes a few Oh Excuse Me, Were you Talking sort of gestures but it's quite obvious that he, Stan Nicholls, interviewer to the stars and so on, has a right to co-opt Famous Authors at will and the common herd had just better get back behind the fences where they belong. There's no point arguing about this sort of thing. Later in the convention I buy Nicholls's book of interviews, which is really rather good, alas.

I knew it was time to go to bed when I was talking to John Jarrold. No, not just because of that, though it was sort of a surprise to me in many ways. Jarrold and I used to be big mates in the old days (Before Publishing) but it had seemed to me (and, honestly, still does) that the closer he came to achieving his heart's desire of getting into Serious Publishing the more casually he was treating his old friends (me, specifically) who no longer had any influence or part to play in his New Real Life. I react badly to this sort of thing and took to reflexive pre-emptive strikes and rejected pseudo-friendly (as I perceived it) advances as being merely cosmetic or habit. Anyway, be more sensible and all that, and we had already chatted a little here and there and were actually talking seriously albeit completely drunkenly. Catherine tells me later we were anyway; my memory of the last half-hour of the evening is completely gone except for saying repetitively, 'Well, that doesn't matter any more', about our antipathies of the last few years. I remember that

with crystal clarity, even the feel of the words in my mouth, the sort of hard metallic clatter of the over-precise enunciation, the strange confusion of wondering what I was saying, and what it meant, and could he hear me. I made an excuse and left, as did Jarrold the next morning, before we got up.

Morning After

We're up early for breakfast, inclusive in the roomrates. Free food, essentially, so we have to have it. We're in such deep shit financially this year that we can either drink and buy a few books, or drink and eat. Not both, and less than we'd like of either. So up early, to avoid the crowds and waiting which we can neither of us stand, to stuff ourselves with tea and bread and funny blobs of grated potato and anything else we can stomach with surprisingly slight hangovers that early in the morning. Not forgetting the extra bacon taken from the serve-yourself tray surreptitiously converted into bacon sandwiches with extra toast begged from the pleasant and helpful weekend staff, stuffed into our pockets for lunch.

After breakfast we sit there, having a drink and gawping around. Sitting there is itself strange. It would have been unheard of a few years ago; I'd have been up and around walking about, making contact with people as they came and went. Now there doesn't seem so much point, and I just don't have the inclination. Part of this is because so few of them do it to me. It's hardly encouraging to be ignored by people you've known for years. Also it's true that we all seem to have so little in common these days – the times when we worked on mutually interesting plans, for conventions, fanzines, parties, even just little personal conspiracies, are gone. Even the people I thought I knew, who I've shared secrets and aspirations with, seem like strangers, and the strangers seem like people just off the street; without their badges they could be anybody. There used to be a sort of Kirlian aura to fans; has it guttered out or has my sight deteriorated?

I have another pint and wonder. Where is Chris Priest? Where's Arnold Akien, Barry Bayley, Gamma, Alan Dorey? And that's not even counting the Dear Departed such as Bridges, Bell, Jackson, Williams, Roberts and Fortey. Even Lilian Edwards isn't here. Or Ron Gemmell, or Bob Shaw. Or Andrew Stephenson. Actually Andrew is, but we don't make useful contact. I ask him if he wants to continue getting *RJC* and he says No. OK, I say and leave it at that, but I'm actually disappointed; he was the sort of person, at one time

interested in both SF and fandom, that I wanted to involve. He offers to send back his copy, but doesn't care to elaborate his disinterest. Obviously there are a lot of decent people at the convention but I worry vaguely about a sort of Critical Mass. If there aren't enough of the people who all know each other and who have something in common then the event just doesn't take off; it becomes desultory and uninvolving for those who are there, and by the erosion of boredom another one or two drop off every year, and the little island dwindles. I look around some more, and it's true what they say: there don't look like many new young fans here. Who am I kidding; there aren't any. How I'd recognise a new young fan, though, is a problem. I'm not convinced that NYFS are necessarily going to be attracted to 'our' fandom anyway.

Fucking hell, I consider, we may be the Last Fans after all. Funny middle-aged people whose ideas come from and go to paper. *Their* ideas come from and go to machines. Their background and myths and traditions will come from an entirely different source – from bloody William Gibson novels, like as not, instead of old copies of *Hyphen* or mocking references to Van Vogt novels (which they probably won't have read). Why should they take our history and background on anyway – not that I mean we should stop or impede them – I mean they won't want it. They'll be proud of their new creation and will give it its own history. As David Redd said, those into E-Mail and Bulletin Boards and so on must find our bits of paper terribly quaint and old-fashioned now, set against the pure technological biosphere of the now truly Neofan.

The traditional fans like me and Don West and Vince Clarke have all the common background, no matter what we might disagree about the details. We know and care about old bits of paper that don't even enter into the newcomers' world-view; they're not even consciously discarded because they're not considered in the first place.

I used to think those who foretold the death of fandom, or at least its replacement with something new and different, were mere fools more interested in flaunting their knowledge of technology and fashion than truly prescient. But looking around now, seeing less young blood than in the veins of Brian Burgess, I have the realisation they're right. Where are the new sixteen-year old fans, where's the 1993 me, where are the new fanzines? There's something going on all right, but it's not around here. It should have been obvious, of course; the Bad Kids of British fanzine fandom, god help us,

are fucking idiots like Nigel Richardson and Michael Ashley, probably well into their thirties now, still belching, farting, and angsty as if they were perpetual teenagers during the Seventies. Talk about not recognising the wall before we ran into it!

But really, so what? It's not complacent to sit back and enjoy ourselves. Balloonists don't abandon their baskets at the roar of a jet flashing past. They do, as we should, what we want to for fun and pleasure and our own satisfaction. Fanzines might become, as Dan Steffan indicates, obsolete handmade things – though they can be improved by judicious use, within the tradition, of modern technology and skills. There's nothing we can do about that. And I don't think that other than simply carrying on, providing a living example to anyone who might want to know and might indeed join in, there is anything we ought to do. Strident proselytising and barking up our own virtues will more alienate than attract. Better to sit in a corner, quietly beaver away, looking perhaps interesting, having our own good times.

Hidden Charms

Leaning vaguely against the bar is D M Sherwood, another one of life's little mysteries, and something of a legend for his general air of untidiness – he leaves bits of his clothing and belongings strewn around conventions as though they were simply very large bedrooms; none of it, incredibly, has ever been either stolen or carted off by cleaners. What he actually leaves in his hotel room one can only guess at. There's a sort of folk-belief that he regularly sends an envelope full of five-pound-notes to the Andromeda bookshop with a request for some recent interesting-looking SF books – which strikes me really as no dafter system than going by the cover illustration (which, after all, is how most barely literate oiks do it). Although he's loomed around conventions like an amiable dolphin for at least ten years I've barely ever spoken to him; I've been slightly put off by his peculiar habit of getting up in the middle of programme items, announcing loudly, 'This is Boring', and walking out – not inconspicuously, given his cetacean aspect. This public judgement is not, I hasten to add, intrinsically wrong, except when he's done it during items I'm on.

So, D M, how are you doing? We chat along quite happily, to my surprise and delight. It turns out he's picked up a mislaid copy of *RJC2* and has been reading it with some interest. Man can't be bad. The stories of the

random book-buying turn out, sadly, to be false, especially as in recent times he's been either on the dole or on subsistence-payment retraining as a computer operator or somesuch. It appears that he got so sick of his old job – some dreadful clerical task of an all-too-familiar kind – that he got himself fired. Ended up on the dole for a while trying to find something else. Something else, as so often in the shambles of the Nineties, turned out to be spending weeks wandering the streets of Port Talbot pretty much penniless. Not that it worried him too much, really, as long as he could make ends meet somehow. We rapidly discover great fellow-feelings; wasters and idlers both, what we really wanted was to be just left alone to potter about with our little activities and not have to waste our lives doing other people's makework jobs, just carry on harmlessly, out of the way, keeping ourselves to ourselves. If I win on the Premium Bonds, I told D M, I'll set you up for life. And I'll take it too, he said, and indeed I believe we both meant it. A kindly, interesting man.

Novacon is but a small event, considerably less than 300 people – but too many of them slip by. Dave Wood cruises past, just a brief hello, and I don't see him again all day. Where do they go to? Wood, apparently, to the back of the bookroom where he's running a table for Les Escott, and where I don't see him until I fall down that end by almost accident and there he is, chatty in the preoccupied manner of all table-minders, mindful of his stock and the chance of a sale to other browsers. I've worked tables at conventions a lot, and enjoy it; it gives a shape and purpose to the event that sometimes just being an attendee lacks, especially for those who've done a fair bit of convention organising and feel slightly ill at ease on the crowd side of the bar. Its drawback is you can't wholly relax, get into conversation, mess around; you just sell people things, in the nicest possible way. We buy a few books, pass a few words, leave him to it. I don't encounter Wood again that weekend; maybe I'm not trying hard enough. I like Dave Wood; he has breadth of knowledge and good perceptions, and great charm. I wouldn't mind growing up to be Dave Wood; he's even got a good record collection. Actually we do meet again, right at the end, while he's carting out stock; he sells me another book.

No More Sense than Ever

Doing the mess-around with Chris Evans and his gang. The boy Evans is

looking rough, grey and tired, ageing fast. It's that teaching job that does it, though he always looked about ten years older than everyone else anyway. It's hard in the Welsh Valleys; even living near a pit takes years off your life. Just think how much longer all those sacked miners will live now with no jobs to go to. I don't mention this to Chris at the time, for fear that his almost uncontrollable hatred of the Conservative dictatorship will erupt, bringing on a coronary in his weakened state. But we end up discussing arseholes anyway. Our man Evans had been to a Chinese restaurant the other night, and gobbled down some ferocious chillies from the pickle-dish. A bad move, he explained, writhing at the thought of it. We all moved closer, the familiar story beginning to unfold; no matter how many times told, a joy forever. Chris continued: when I woke up this morning, he said, my guts were churning and burning and I could feel the pain from one end of my lower intestine to the other. I didn't want to do it but I knew that it couldn't be put off forever or I'd just lie there in the bed and burst eventually, so I jumped up and ran off to the bog and... our little faces glowed expectantly... it was like a blast furnace roaring up my arsehole, a real ring of fire; the pain brought tears to my eyes and I grabbed the toilet roll holder and almost pulled it off the wall in a spasm of agony. I thought I was going to have a heart attack. My entire intestinal system was cramping up; it was like having your piles burned off with a blowlamp. It hurt so much, he said, that I tiptoed back to bed and lay there without moving for a good half-hour until the shocks passed. Much sympathy and head-shaking, especially from those who knew they too would have been fool enough to gobble down some unidentified phosphorous bomb out of sheer curiosity or foolhardy bravado. You should have put some butter on it, I said. What, says Julian Headlong, anticipating some perverse reference to slippery anal activity. No, honest, I continue; it turns out that capsaicin, chilli essence, is fat- not water-soluble, which explains why drinking anything doesn't get the chilli burn out of, for example, your mouth. (Or off the end of your joint when you go and pee after chopping them, interjects one – or off your clitoris if you masturbate while eating a pizza, says another. Just like home-life, conventions are sometimes.) Anyway, I continue public-spiritedly before they get carried away with more recreational ideas, if you eat butter, or cream, it dissolves away the chilli-oil and salves the heat, so really what we need is a stack of little pats of hotel breakfast butter in our bathrooms for these rather unfortunate indulgences. Evans looks askance; pat of butter, he says, hah, I'd have needed the whole

bloody cow.

I keep seeing Malcolm Edwards. This is incredible, so unbelievable in fact I keep thinking it's really David Mellor, which would be still astounding, but less like a slip back into an alternate world in which Malcolm Edwards remained a fan. Hours pass and he's still there; he's obviously not just helicoptered in to promote some money-making dynamo of a new author. In fact Malcolm seems to be inordinately pally with everyone (I mean here the writers and so on, like Holdstock and Evans etc.) and I keep wondering, bloody hell, maybe I should get on the case, be more sensible, and at least say Hello. But I excuse myself the responsibility because he's always animatedly taking with Them and I don't want to be a sort of prole Stanley Nicholls and break in on their conversation. Anyway, fucking hell, it's hard to think of what to say to someone after eight or nine years, given the fact that his life has changed so much. So of course Malcolm Edwards has to do it; late Saturday night while I'm talking to Peter Weston at the bar I see Malcolm in the middle distance sort of draw himself together and walk over and say Hi, how are you. I'm surprised and pleased (the heat's off me now, no guilt), but Weston gets the hump and surprisingly huffily goes on like Oh thank you for not speaking to me Malcolm, oh just ignore me I'm not worth speaking to at all, and so on, which amazes me. I blame the drink. Edwards mollifies him – 'Peter, it's the first time I've spoken to Greg in nearly ten years!' – but he stomps off and we begin to talk for the first time since 198godknowswhen. Divorce, music, books, the perversity of life. It's all touched on here and there and it seems normal, just like the old days – except for my suspicion that this is just an act, an indulgence of sentiment, a piece of live-action nostalgia. Though whether one or both of us are on stage I don't know. I wonder whether to hold back, just to say enough to keep the narrative flowing, but decide it's not worth it; life is too short for anything but to commit totally. I get his address, after the convention send him some fanzines. Strangely enough I feel there's less of a gap between Malcolm and myself than there is between me and John Jarrold. I have suspicion of both of them (never mind what they may feel about me), but somehow Malcolm's intention to regain contacts from his past seemed more true than John's habitual base-touching. Not for the first time I think it's probably me that's wrong.

It's the Drink Thinking

Monday morning and the regular staff are back in the restaurant. Surly and uncommunicative, they are slow and reluctant and try to close the breakfast sitting ten minutes early. What is the matter with these people? What's the matter with the fans, come to that. There is barely a handful left. Once upon a time, before the advent of conventions every other weekend (it seems) people cherished the Novacon experience so much they could hardly drag themselves away on Monday afternoon, never mind Sunday evening. Nowadays all sorts of people, Big Name Fans like Robert P Hansen and Famous Authors like Rob Holdstock, rush off home as soon as politically acceptable. What a contrast to a few years ago, when the bonhomie and sense of occasion was so intense that the drinking party on Monday afternoon was as eagerly anticipated – if not more so – as the actual advent of the convention itself. These days it's just us, Tony Berry, Martin Tudor, Helena Bowles and a couple of others. We bemoan the past, naming names, assigning blame as usual; not that it matters. Too many conventions, obviously, but also a sort of invasive tight-arsed unwillingness to just have Fun for the sake of it, and to hell with your reputation. We enjoy ourselves, of course, but are aware that this is one genuine case where more and bigger would be better.

Later I wonder about consensus fandom – or rather the lack of it. Once upon a time everyone interested in SF would have read much the same books – people at a convention certainly would have done – and would immediately have had that in common if nothing else. Now that the SF world has broadened out so enormously and become irretrievably identified with George Lucas rather than Alfred Bester, and where it's unlikely that a Storm Constantine fan would have so much as heard of Damon Knight, much less read *In Search of Wonder*, we don't have that commonalty, even at little cons like Novacon. And the fans – even the 'fannish' fans – are just as disparate. It's like we've become used to the Balkanisation of the SF world and have by association taken on its characteristics. I'm as much to blame – *Rastus Johnson* is aimed at the sort of people I want to get involved with it – but I'm not at all certain it's right. This is just vague guilt, really. There are lots of fans – just like lots of SF – that I don't care for or about at all. But am I just responding to the wider cues, accepting that because we no longer have the basics in common we have nothing else either? Did we ever, even when you could get all the fans in Britain into a Kettering boarding-house and still have room for a charabanc of day-trippers from Macclesfield? A wash of Golden-

Ageism, I feel, but I have the nagging feeling that just out of reach there is something that has been misplaced, if not yet irretrievably lost.

We have another drink, and I watch over the top of Martin Tudor's head the flocking and gathering of the Suits, another Novacon Monday ritual sight. In the corridor outside the erstwhile convention hall they're gathering for a Conference (Serious Business), doing their tribal dances. They all look the same, though their tailors could probably tell one shade of the grey of their costumes from another. Their little faces scrubbed pink and gleaming, their hair perfectly dressed, not a strand out of place, they're a robot army of Cecil Parkinsons. It fascinates me to watch them twirl around each other: do they realise how they dance, gripping upper arms for serious asides, comic-opera knee-bends to shows their clubbish jocularly, the endless jingling of coins in trouser pockets, all endlessly repeated as they circle round and round themselves, endlessly reassuring each other that Business is Business and yes, We Understand? They make me sick. *En masse* they run our lives, and they make me sick, and I watch them with genuine horror. What do they know, I wonder, about anything? What do they value, and what do they merely prize? It's a rude reminder of the reality of the world after all those fans with their fuzzy outlines and odd ideas. But what's the difference really. There are certainly quislings in both camps: Suits who rush home to crank up *Last Exit* on the CD player and honk down a line of speed; fans who are sociopathic lunatics, racists, exploiters. We're all guilty.

Happy days; we eventually leave, and are glad to be home.

Yes But

We went to the Novacon last month; everybody knows that. The trouble is I can't find the plot. I've been hunting and pecking over it for weeks now and can't see the storyline, the chain of events, the essence of what we did between 4 PM Friday and 4 PM Monday. I was there and I know I enjoyed myself, and I wasn't bored... But but me no buts. I'm looking for something that wasn't there, I think. There was nothing to Do at this convention, no point I had to make, no Plan to further; all I had to do was just Hang Around. Maybe that's what I'm not very good at.

As an event the 23rd Novacon was not seriously flawed, although looking back on the programme it seems almost absurdly thin, with a predominance of light entertainment items with only – good grief – five items

out of a listed twenty-four (counting Opening and Closing events) that weren't films, games, or other planned amusements. This is really disproportionate, and a surprising failure for what is, historically at least, Britain's second convention. Even this wouldn't be so bad if they were carried out well; unfortunately there's also been a horrible manifestation of the idea that just because someone wants to do a programme item it means they can. Performing, MCing, call it what you will, is not easy and few can do it even part-way successfully, and fewer of them were on scene at this year's Novacon than usual. Entertainment items, more so than 'sercon' ones even, need a touch of flash, confidence and at least a veneer of professionalism to carry off successfully. At the very least, presenters must speak loudly and clearly into microphones and not give the impression they're just making it up as they go along. Improvisation is fine, when it works, but scrabbling for words, mumbling, shuffling papers when the routine should have been rehearsed and slick, is not good enough any more. No, no one's perfect, but I saw too much that was messy, jumbled, off-key, slack, with no sense that there was an overriding consciousness pushing the event along. Maybe this is what happens eventually to an established, group-run convention – no, I can't believe that, that's letting it all off too lightly. 'It wasn't my responsibility' again. Doing the Novacon after 22 years of experience should be easy, just a matter of slotting in timely and consequential ideas into an established framework. It's hardly as if none of these people knows what a convention is like, for gods sake.

And yes, I did see a lot of the programme. I was even on some of it, a team quiz that was about as slickly handled as a hedgehog. And I'm not whining just because my side – including founts of all knowledge that is in skiffy as Julian Headlong, Justin Ackroyd, and Roger Robinson – were humiliatingly beaten in the final. I don't know what was more irritating: the question master's endless shuffling of papers and mumbling, or the propensity of questions to tend towards the Who Won the 1984 Hugo award for... side. Good grief, that isn't knowledge; that's statistics. I'm pretty much at a loss as to who animated Troy Tempest's left testicle in a 1966 episode of some silly fucking puppet-show too. It's at times like that, praying for a good old fashioned SF question like Which PKD book did Eric Sweetscent meet Gino Molinari in, or who was the editor of the only issue of *Vanguard SF*, that you realise that all you know is not so much wrong as no longer required on voyage.

I guess on that basis Julian Headlong is going to carve out a big career for himself at media-based conventions. This year he did an item entitled ‘Spock’s Liver’, which somehow foolishly I thought was going to be a follow-up to his genuinely entertaining and informative biophysics talks on what, for example, really happens to your body when you knock back a litre of vodka in half an hour. But no. This really was about Spock’s liver. I sat there for a good half hour until I realised this wasn’t just a jokey preamble to the real meat, but a genuine piece to audience as if Vulcan biology really existed and, given the hints supplied, how it worked. I don’t know whether I was more shocked that he was doing it at all or that he actually had absorbed enough of that *ST* rubbish to make head or tail of it in the first place. This is the man who later, in the bar, complained that *Seaquest DSV* is implausible, and not very good television. Wouldn’t be, I suppose, if old episodes of *Star Trek* are your basic parameters. Some people will do anything for a permanent booking with free room and board at *ST* cons. Though I hear, Julian, that the fringe benefits are no longer what they were.

I was very interested in the panel on ‘Why the Lack of Ethnic Minorities in SF?’ which is a real interesting point whether you look on it as ‘in SF’ or in fandom proper.

It might have had a lot more light than heat if the two proponents – Chris Baker (one of a very small number of blacks in British fandom) and Graham Joyce – had organised the discussion a bit beyond the late-night drinking session they said was its genesis. There was some indecision as to whether it was SF or fandom that was the focus – though it is, as Baker several times pointed out, very much a hen and egg situation.

It could be simply true that as there are few Ethnic (for want of a better word) protagonists in SF there’s little to draw blacks and Asians in anyway. There is a reasonable parallel for this in the lack until recently of women in major roles in SF, and the comparatively small numbers of genuine women SF fans. But from my own experience that isn’t entirely the whole story; I’ve met a lot of blacks and Asians who were really media fans, who were strongly interested in most film or TV or comic manifestations of SF. They were very, very rarely interested in SF books, even those directly related to the media material they enjoyed, and frequently not even curious about the various media or SF fandoms. So anyway, I asked the panel, is it the case that though there have been few, verging on almost no, ethnics in SF fandom proper there might be more in media-oriented fandoms. No response. Not

much response either to something I noticed among a lot of West Indian people I've known, which is that their basic cultural life itself is in the widest sense a form of fandom which provides so many of the things fans look for in SF fandom that they don't have the need – or time – to get involved. Which is obviously a wholesale generalisation, but is at least worth considering before we start panicking about what we fans are doing wrong that isn't attracting blacks and Asians to conventions.

But I do think Chris Baker's complaint that there's no Coon on the Moon (and that's from a Howlin' Wolf song, not some racist 'joke') is important. The target audience for SF is still young, white and male, something that's wobbled occasionally but remained unchanged for the best part of a century. There is a difference in kind in the lack of ethnics in SF, because it is at root part of the racialism commonplace especially in the USA until very recently – and no, I'm not claiming for a minute it has gone anywhere but underground. At least, as far as we now know, stories are not routinely sub-edited to make all the sympathetic characters white Protestants and all the rest whatever was the displeasure of the day. But it's just as notable to me that there's a lack of Welsh, French, Lithuanians or Luxemburgers; which is to say that it's quite outlandish that a form that strives to delineate the manifold wonders of the Universe still persists in doing it in terms of High School Boy, USA, circa 1954 at that.

But I was left at the end wondering whether there was a problem anyway, as far as fandom is concerned. Fandom is not a social service; it's not our duty or responsibility to reach out and pull in people of whatever background. It is our responsibility to be open and welcoming to anyone who cares to enter, though, and as far as I can see that works as well as can be humanly expected. There's no barrier except a person's own inclination to join in or not. You're either on the bus or not, and I can tell you that as long as I'm around there'll be no restriction as to where you can sit.

Actually the most perversely amusing part of that panel came when some fellow started going on and on about middle-class people like You Lot and how it's all our fault, and where's the outreach programme and so on, even unto how it didn't matter anyway because no one with an ounce of cool was going to want to associate with a lot of Anorak-wearing Trainspotters with Sad Lives like the sort of people who go to SF conventions anyway. There was a brief but angry exchange between this fellow and myself, mostly over his typical street-cred asshole viewpoint that anyone who can actually

read is automatically middle class because they've obviously been to a university. Or somesuch.

For the sake of our few US readers I'll elucidate a few things. 'Anorak' means any kind of casual clothing worn by someone other than the speaker which does neither make a fashion statement nor betoken membership of some street-credible group. 'Trainspotters' are people enthusiastic about something the observer knows nothing about and has less interest in. 'A Sad Life' is one led by someone whose interests do not include going out to clubs eight nights a week.

I hardly need add that this proponent of really stultifying conformity was dressed in head-to-foot Gothic black, and turned out to be Storm Constantine's PR consultant and general image maker, who had among other things advised her to change her name from something like Olive Crabtree in favour of one with more appeal to the youth market. Funnily enough this Goth manifestation turned out to be just his duty uniform, and smart casuals were affected for leaving the hotel *après* convention.

You hear a lot of crap talked at conventions and I've put out my fair share, but this fucking idiot really took the biscuit. I guess it really rubs me up the wrong way because of the blatant tyranny of the thinking; Be Like Us, or you're not really human. How like Mr Major and his friends. Or any other racist, come to that.

And there I was and...

posted to Memoryhole elist, 28 April 2003

... I kept seeing the guy with the back end of a goat sticking out of his arse. Once you noticed him he seemed to be everywhere. And it wasn't just me; other people saw him as well. After a while there was even some conversation about whether or not it really was the back end of a goat after all. There was a theory that the poor fellow had a startlingly serious case of piles and these leg-like structures about his nether regions were simply decorative haemorrhoid socks. We could have asked, of course, but who wants to approach a grown man who has foot-long rabbit ears strapped to his head?

It seems like a dream now, but it was of course a science fiction convention. The 2003 Eastercon, as a matter of fact.

During the convention Catherine and I were employees of employees, working Andy Richards's booktables. The Banana Twins work the tables for Andy at many conventions, thereby freeing up his time to spend the profits on family holidays to such exotic locations as the West Indies and Dartmoor. The only problem they have is that putting all the time in makes them miss out on programming, so this year they took on some help – us. I was glad to do this. Apart from anything else it gives some kind of structure to the whole convention experience; up early, breakfast, bookroom at 10.00 AM, then hours of standing around waiting for someone to buy something. It's so different from the normal just standing around waiting for something to happen that we all usually experience at conventions.

Actually it's fun. As most bookdealers know, you get more interesting conversation with more people in the bookroom than you do anywhere else in the convention. And, weirdly, a lot of it is about books and stuff, the very things that are supposed to have brought us together at the event. It's always intriguing to see who is talkative and who is not; some people talk readily and interestingly about what they are buying or looking for, others pointedly ignore overtures at conversation. It's also fascinating to see who comes into the bookroom, and for this reason Mark Plummer – who is usually bookroom boss as well – tries to put Andy's tables near the door. It's illuminating to see that so many of the hardcore 'fans' rarely if ever come to the bookroom.

This time around the Cold Tonnage squad (that's us) had a spare table which we used to display a load of fanzines either brought with us or donated at the convention. How strange to see that so few 'fanzine fans' were aware of this, and how they were conspicuous in not flocking there to check things out. And there were some quite unusual items on there too. Pity they all had to be thrown away at the end of the convention.

It's odd what people don't buy in the bookroom. The Science Fiction Foundation people had lots of very cheap magazines that were essentially ignored, but the star classic knockout item was pretty much right in front of me on the Cold Tonnage table. A copy of the first edition (1960) of *In Search of Wonder*, the first best book of SF criticism and still to my mind the most readable, entertaining, and inspiring. I've had copies (at least two – I'm that sort of person) of the second edition since the time it appeared, but I'd never had a first. I kept looking at it throughout the con, thinking, 'I want this book,' but determinedly not buying it because, well, someone else could get it and be as enthralled by it as I was.

And I kept looking at it; incredible as it seemed no one was buying the damned thing, and it was only £10 too, barely more than the price of a drink, or a current B-format paperback. And I kept checking and it was always there, unmoved, uninspected, apparently unwanted. Late in the con, Monday morning, just hours before final closing, I leafed through it again, and with a genuine shock I noticed for the first time the bookplate on the inside front cover. 'John Carnell,' it said. Bloody hell, this was Ted Carnell's personal copy! This thing was radiating great huge yobba-rays of scientific historicality in all directions – first edition, great book, damon knight, Ted Carnell, personal copy – and no one was picking it up! Incredible. Well, fuck them, I thought, as I put it into my to-be-paid-for box behind the tables; if they haven't bought it by now they don't deserve to. It's a treasure and I count myself lucky; but at the same time I wish someone else had bought it with the same joy of discovery I felt.

It was, of course, a science fiction convention, with a programme and everything. I'd have liked to have seen more of the programme, and I'm sure I would have done if I had been able to properly follow the grid in the pocket guide. Maybe I'm just getting past it, or there are too many programme streams, or Julian Headlong was trying for the non-linear in his design, or I was suddenly afflicted by Alien Geometries (I had just bought a book on H P Lovecraft; was it somehow infectious...?) or something, but I couldn't make

any sense of it. And anyway parts of it were being rescheduled on the fly so as to take up the slack caused by the last-minute cancellation – for no good or acceptable reason – by one of the Guests of Honour. Who we won't mention here, thereby hopefully setting a trend by which she is never mentioned in the SF community again.

I would have very much liked to see Chris Evans's Guest of Honour spot. Indeed, it was very much the fact that he was a GOH that encouraged Catherine and I to make the effort to get to the convention in the first place, and it was a genuine pleasure to see him again, and even more to find that we inter-related easily and well; a rare example of the truth of the old fannish myth that people meet after years apart and carry on the same conversation without missing a beat. Maybe the secret is that we can make each other laugh.

I'd been to a small group discussion of Chris's novel *Aztec Century* (arguably his best, except maybe *Insider*, and both of them highly recommended books around here) earlier in the convention and was delighted by it. Directed by Garry Kilworth (who looks about ten years younger now than he did when I last saw him about fifteen years ago – what's going on here?) and with barely a dozen people there, it gave Chris an excellent opportunity to talk conversationally about the book specifically, and by allusion his general creative process. It was absorbing, enlightening, and truly entertaining in the best way – exactly the sort of thing I've spent years going to conventions hoping for and see so rarely. (The bookdealers panel item in the fanroom at Paragon was the only other in recent years that I feel succeeded as much.) The bad thing is that it would be difficult, almost impossible, to do the same thing as a main programme item; the actual physical proximity and close relationship of the 'panel' and 'audience' was one of the things that enabled it to work so well.

So I'd been keen to see his Big Item. But somehow it vanished. It was only later I realised that at the time I'd been doing a panel on 'Science Fiction Magazines of the 20th Century' and hadn't realised it clashed with Evans. No wonder there were so few people at that panel... Which was a strange mishmash of ideas really, ranging from coming up with a convincing proof (that became more convincing as time went on) that SF magazines were being ruined by the generally downbeat tone of the fiction, that Michael Moorcock had almost succeeded in his not-so-covert plan to destroy SF, and that, god help us, what SF magazines really needed was a good dose of old-fashioned

Campbellism, reminding us of the innate superiority of the human race and the all-conquering power of the White Heat of Applied Technology. Yeah! I think we might have been going a bit far somehow, but even now in the cold light of day I see parts of that as very convincing, especially if you think of it in terms of why ‘ordinary people’ don’t want to read SF. I mean, most people live lives of not so quiet desperation anyway, so why do they want to be reminded of the fact that it could all get very much worse in the blink of an eye?

And we won’t even get on to Gerry Webb and the surreal exploration of his early SF magazine-reading days which began with two boys riding bicycles along a deserted road, travelled the universe with Dan Dare and ended with him groping around in a London fog, trying to find a bus by touch alone.

Anyway, I missed Evans. And everyone who was there said he was good. Oh.

It is of course always a joy to see one’s old pals at conventions. I genuinely look forward to seeing Peter Weston and Rog Peyton, and we spent hours together talking books, fandom, and fans. Peter is doing a fannish autobiography for NESFA and on the basis of the chapters I’ve read – and the anecdotes I’ve heard – it’s going to be fantastic. (Please keep the Cliff Teague suicide story in, Peter!) And I’m genuinely glad to see Roger getting himself back together after the fall of Andromeda, and working a big booktable at the convention. He took good money, I believe, and everyone I spoke to was most definite in the hope that he’d be back up there soon. It’s a pleasure too to see the old stagers like Ken Slater looking so ruff and tuff; OK, he may not be staying up all night knocking back the bottles of rum like he used to, but in his mid-eighties he can do a full day’s work in the bookroom and carry his own damned stock out at the end of the convention. Personally I’ll be glad to live to his age, and certainly don’t expect to be so fit, mentally and physically, as he is. Ken donated a load of fanzines recently found in his attic to our impromptu fanzine table, including some extraordinary old convention material from Way Back that immediately vanished into the gaping maw of Pat McMurray.

Ron Bennett and David Redd also showed up for a day, separately but together, having arranged to meet there on the Saturday. Ron is in dodgy health, I know, but looks amazingly well and fit, in fact healthier and more dapperly dressed than virtually anyone else at the convention. It was a

pleasure to see him and I wish he'd had a bit more time there. It was good to see David too; even though he lives barely a mile from us in Haverfordwest he works away from home and has so many domestic responsibilities that even when he is in Haverfordwest we barely see him from one year to another. But he's a great guy, with a lot more going on in there about SF and writing than many people realise (one of the great unused programme participants), with an over-thirty-year writing career. And it's certainly time he had a bundle of his best short fiction published in book form.

There were others; I was rooting around on Andy's table when I heard someone say, 'Hello Greg.' I looked up and there was Michael Eavis. What the hell is the organiser of the Glastonbury festival doing here, I thought wildly, and how in the name of god does he know *me*! Aeons of incomprehension passed before I realised it was in fact Graham Charnock. Someone I haven't seen for over fifteen years. You know that business referred to above about fans being able to take up where they left off decades earlier? Well, it doesn't always happen, and sometimes it's peculiarly uncomfortable. I have no idea why Charnock and I ceased to know each other way back when, or even whether it was a choice or 'fault' thing. I'm not even sure now whether we were actually friends or just fannish acquaintances, even though we spent a lot of fun time together socially. So this was, well, oddly awkward. We chatted a bit, and to be honest I couldn't make my mind up whether he was trying to be funny, deliberately provocative or just drunk. Probably the latter as he several times referred to having drunk half a bottle of vodka before coming into the hotel. That's stage fright for you, and I understand that; I always wonder what is the real reason many British fans – including myself – become alcoholics the moment we enter a convention hotel when we go for months without a drink on the outside. Anyway, I was a bit baffled. Later that evening, when both of us were pretty well over the edge, we almost had an argument about something. I have no idea what it was. I blame the drink; it's a sword that's all edges and no handles.

But Graham did provide a highlight moment of the convention. At his Astral League comeback tour spot (really, I'm not making this up...) he got Chris Evans out of the audience to do an unrehearsed reading of Pat Charnock's piece 'Descent of Women from the Trees' which originally appeared in the *Astral League Yearbook 1977* (I'm really not making this up!). It was wonderful – grappling with a deliberately misspelled text photocopied from the original fanzine, Evans did a terrific dramatic reading

with gestures in all directions that was funny and peculiarly touching at the same time. We old stahlhelms love to wallow in sentiment – as Chris said later ‘there were moments during Graham’s Astral League slot when I felt that that ridiculous and disreputable sense of fun had been recovered for a few instants. I must admit I miss it, but you can’t plan for these things or indeed appreciate them properly except in some fuzzy afterglow, when they’ve already passed.’ And he was, as so often, quite right.

And then there was that bloody woman in the way. We were at Andy’s table and Catherine said, Look, there’s David Redd! Where, I said, staring shortsightedly around as usual. There, look, right in front of you! Where, I was thinking, I can’t see anything. Look, right there, wearing the Welsh flag shirt, Catherine said again, as if pointing out the obvious to a child. I still can’t see anything; this bloody woman is standing right in front of me, in the way, blocking my view. As I tried to peer around the person she spoke to me. And I realised that my view was obscured by not just some run-of-the-mill fans but Jeanne Gomoll and Scott Custis. Unbelievable, even more incredible than seeing Rich Coad and Stacy Scott the night before. Surprised reunion, assurance to meet later, never saw them again for the entire duration of the convention. What is it sometimes – is it just me?

Off to one end of the excellent (if you discount the occasionally varying-upwards bar-prices) rambling hotel (just big enough to lose people – where did all those individuals I saw for a fleeting instant actually go to... was Jeanne Gomoll really there...?) was the Lakeside, scene of the infamous fanroom of Paragon 2001. Even though it was being used for programming (no fanroom at this con, if nothing else the committee had learned that lesson...) I felt reluctant to go into it. It just had a bad feeling for me. I didn’t want to return to the site of past failures.

But of course you have to go and look at even the most grisly accident, so one evening when I was feeling alienated already and thus had nothing to lose I wandered pointedly casually in there, hoping no one else would be about. (I’d tried earlier in the day, to tell the truth, and met Simon Bradshaw there, waiting alone for the start of a programme item – we chatted briefly and I made my excuses and left; it wasn’t right.) The place was empty, but all the chairs and staging and PA and everything was in place. No bloody tables full of fanzines, though, thankfully. I walked every inch of the room, rewriting everything I knew about being there, but I still felt a vague feeling of loss, that sense of something not having worked. I was standing there

drinking a glass of water from the watercooler when the door to the toilets opposite me opened and a fan who I had not seen – and frankly did not want to see – for many years came out. He looked at me, I looked at him, he reflexively said, ‘Hi,’ I said nothing, and he walked away, both of us slightly embarrassed and possibly slightly angry about being alone in this room together. And suddenly it was all over: the Lakeside was now just another bit of a hotel, nothing important to me had ever happened there, it was just a place where people did things and individuals you didn’t want to know went to the toilets. Great.

So later I went to the ‘Lost Classics of SF’ panel there and it was good. Well, the potential content was good, though it was hampered by no microphones in a room where sound easily vanished into the cavernous roof-dome. And not helped either by slack moderation which failed to keep things moving and allowed lapses and *longueurs* and failures of momentum into which more material could have been fitted. But, predictably, Rog Peyton, Julian Headlong and Pete Weston – excellent and experienced panellists and talkers on books – excavated a number of titles, many of which I’ll actively seek out. Maybe not anything by Dean McLaughlin, Peter, but I do have a copy of Don Bensen’s book *...And Having Writ*, and bloody hell, it doesn’t half remind me of *Hard Landing*. That’s spooky to the point of plagiarism. And Rog’s praise of Jerry Yulsman’s *Elleander Morning* was more than enough to get me to re-read this excellent book. I must email all three and get copies of their notes, as many books were not discussed through lack of time.

Of course many more things happened. I skate over the long discussions in the bar about how peculiarly sexless so many fan women become the more overtly ‘sexy’ their clothing becomes. Of course it’s just ‘dressing up’ and to a very large extent there’s no intention of sexuality in their costuming (and I use that word specifically), but it is unsettling how successful they are in this. Suddenly perfectly ordinary non-fan women, hotel staff or barmaids or whatever, seem to personify a level of true eroticism that seem entirely absent within the fan community. And yes, I know, I and we have no room to talk.

Oh, there was lots of other stuff; properly meeting Dave Lally for the first time was big fun. We’ve been acquainted for years but this is the first time we’ve actually talked together properly, and it was amazing how many things we had in common, even leaving aside vexillology. He’s someone I’ll look forward to seeing again, if we can motivate ourselves to another convention.

And then there we were, at the end of the convention, sitting watching what has been variously described as an Albanian bread queue or an asylum seekers' waiting line: a shuffling ribbon of fans checking out of the hotel. All of them looking, frankly, rough. Tired, hungover some of them, laden with odd assortments of baggage including supermarket carrier-bags bulging with paper. All of them still trying to be 'fans', trying to be animated, talking, witty, but on the cusp of being returned to mundania. Where their clothes, their speech patterns, even their exaggerated gestures – all the things that they adopt to bond, to be together – would all change and become 'normal' again; it's like watching a butterfly return to its chrysalis.

Some Notes Towards an Incomplete Version of Events

posted to Wegenheim elist, 15 April 2004

An editor-added foreword: So the perpetrators of the notoriously unsuccessful Thirdmancon are giving us Blackpool next year. I wasn't at the meeting that decided that, so I can't comment on the devious means used to warp the minds of fandom to such an unprecedented degree, but I'll say that the choice of Blackpool as a con-venue is just a little more than comic. Mind you, not to be hasty, Blackpool may yet disclose attractions missed from such as Buxton or Worcester (or maybe not Worcs if certain tales were true). Anyway, my suspicion of this concom seems to be supported by the fact their hotel has an indoor pool. Nothing's more likely to wreck fan-management relations than a pool that's three-parts piss with its bottom littered with bottles and glasses, its top obscured by inches of refuse, and with the rotting bodies of various drowned fans drifting with the tide.

That apart, it seems a bit ludicrous to hold a con in a seaside resort that will be eyeball-deep in trippers from one end of Easter to the other. That won't affect the con site, but it's going to make it fucking difficult to get cheap and decent food outside the hotel as most people do. Another thing that pisses me off is that Blackpool is nearer Ian fucking Williams in Sunderland than even London, much less Pembrokeshire.

Still, not to prejudge, tho' the fuse is well and truly lit; all I hope is that these boys have come on a bit since those shambolic days of '68.

from *Fouler* #6, June 1971

For once it wasn't the fans that made the place look like a refugee camp.

As we approached the Winter Gardens we were honestly appalled by its surroundings. It's like Baxter's description of Hadrian's Wall in *Coalescent*, I said to Catherine: a relic of empire, still imposing and impressive, surrounded

by an accretion of horrible shacks and shanties built up by people who have sunk into a fading and futile existence, destined not for the stars but the gutter.

The Winter Gardens, a fabulous Victorian People's Palace, stood there like a great old ship mired in a cesspool of crummy little late twentieth century shopping centre 'development', a collection of buildings that grew increasingly ugly and misshapen the more one compared them to the glowing joy of the Winter Gardens itself.

And this ramshackle assortment of relative sheds was inhabited by herds of creatures that one would hesitate to call Morlocks – even without knowledge of Baxter's Nebogipfel. These people were, frankly, rough. Ill-dressed, sullen-faced, slumped tiredly in corners clutching cans of lager or shuffling aimlessly from noplac to nowhere, this was the underclass on holiday. They may have been there to have fun – manifested frequently by shouting matches and bottle-throwing fights in the early hours – but the only expressions we saw were resentment, outright anger, or blank exhaustion. It was not inspiring. And it made the fans – usually apparent by their ill-chosen, unkempt clothing, poor posture, and detached expressions – look like, well, ordinary people by comparison.

But inside the Winter Gardens was wonderful – OK, the building had a lot to do with it, a quirky wonder or genuine architectural marvel everywhere you turned, a true pleasure palace mothership that I soon realised I would love to live in and never want to leave, my perfect space-station life – but it was great to see people, real people, real fans again, and get a friendly greeting.

Into registration, and close behind us Peter and Eileen Weston, then Claire Brialey bounces cheerily up, lots of chitter and some chatter, more characters come on-scene, we gather up free stuff including for once things we want (a free new Paul McAuley hardback; wow, that's a change from a crummy Forbidden Planet catalogue, oh, there's one of those as well is there...) and before we know it things are going well and we're in the bookroom and starting to settle into our convention role as Cold Tonnage ratings third class, employees of employees, working for the Bananas who work for Andy Richards, and all of us, I believe, enjoying it a great deal.

Except sometimes Catherine, who worries about not being able to discuss books she's never heard of by writers who are totally unknown to her with the customers. Oh, get over it, I advise her; just tell them, 'It's not really

my part of the field,' and they think you know what you're talking about. SF is too big to know everything any more. You ought to read more reviews, I say; you can bluff your way so much more convincingly! The Cold Tonnage stand is cleverly situated near the entrance to the bookroom – itself a wonderful horseshoe-shaped room with huge amounts of natural light that is itself a pleasure to be in, so everyone who enters passes us, and some stop.

Like John Jarrold, who I sort of expect to give his usual brief but intense greeting and then vanish for the duration of the convention, but this time he suggests a drink. The Bananas are happy two-handed at the table, so Catherine and I go to a bar (a fabulous place like the inside of a galleon) with John where we discuss his new career path as a book doctor – a sort of twenty-first century H P Lovecraft, I find myself thinking – and the elements of good pop music, and Airfix kits. I am surprised, strangely, to discover that John is an Airfix collector. Why am I surprised; he's such a 1950s guy, it should have been obvious. Anyway, for a while it's just like being back in the Golden Age of fandom like it used to be and it's kind of Big Fun; but three or four pints later he has to be somewhere and of course we never see him again at all hardly.

Unless you count a strange manifestation in the large bar later that night, when Peter Weston and I are boggled to see JJ apparently at the epicentre of some one hundred fans, sitting around him as if he is imparting, calmly and almost reverently, the secret of the universe. Peter is amazed. I wonder whether I should mention the Fannish Theory of Sheep, by which fans automatically collect around the most charismatic Maximum Leader available, but decide not to as Peter Weston his own self is the author of that theory and possibly considers himself its primary exponent. I suppress thoughts of how are the mighty fallen, being only too well aware that the trick no longer works for me either, something confirmed many times before the convention ends.

Chris Priest shows up, walks up, offers a hand and says hello, bright and friendly. I'm instantly charmed, of course, but then I like Chris anyway, despite the fact that we hardly actually meet at conventions, and haven't really been in the same conversations since, oh, some time in the 1980s, good grief. But he is someone I like and respect; he's a favourite writer, both for his fannish and serious work, and someone whose commentary on SF in print or at conventions has been valuable to me, sometimes giving me genuine mind-changing moments. And his website is excellent too. But, apart from a

brief moment later when we cross paths in the bar and he introduces me to Philip Pullman – who is affable and apparently friendly in the instant of our meeting (and to whom I can think of nothing whatever to say, having read not one word of his work) – we do not meet again until he leaves, again with a cheerful handshake and goodbye and a vague agreement with my observation that we don't talk any more.

Priest's Guest of Honour piece is odd; actually it was well-constructed, with a couple of really nice embedded running gags about H G Wells and Charles Platt (and what strange bedfellows they be) and switching purposes midway from a history of his fannish involvement to a more serious discussion of *The Separation*, neatly reflecting the background hum of dual or divided personalities evident in many of his books. But overall it was unexpectedly bland, lacking the Big Ideas about SF, writing, the Priest View of the World, that I had been expecting and hoping for. It was, however, well received by an attentive audience that got all the gags – even to my great surprise those about Charles Platt, whose every mention seemed to evoke gales of laughter. A mystery, really – do so many people know exactly why Charles Platt is funny? – and an even bigger one: why do not so many people know why Charles Platt is a Bad Thing, and how he did so much harm to the British SF community, both fan and pro? A mystery indeed; but the very mention of his name brings laughter rather than admiration, so perhaps the world still spins upright on its axis.

Surprisingly, there were no questions at all at the end of Chris's piece – save one inexplicable query from some woman who asked whether the belly-dancing would be on next. A secret joke? Not shared by those of us who exchanged 'Did she really say that?' looks of astonishment. I'd have liked to ask two questions – one rather bland, about why if Chris clearly has affection for the SF community he is so persistent about having his professional work set aside from it, and another about his reactions to David Brin's contentious *NYRSF* piece about *The Separation*. I wish I had now, but not only did the questions seem slightly out of sync with the preceding address but the first seemed too hackneyed (though the answer may not have been to me) and the second something I couldn't follow up on properly at the time, having only read the Brin piece once and rapidly, but enough to know that his assertions on lost-Empire wish-fulfilment were at least arguable, and that he also failed to include properly the main theme of the novel. But Chris was articulate, funny, and engaging, delivering a good Guest of Honour piece to audience,

and I was glad to give him applause.

I later met Philip Pullman again. I'd been given a box of bookplates to sign for the Worldcon souvenir book. This seemed an easy task until Colin Harris made it clear they wanted a proper signature, not my usual flamboyant big 'G'. This was a bit worrying as I usually sign my name properly only on credit card slips, cheques and legal documents, and normally don't worry too much about legibility in any case. And looking at Chris Priest's practised imprimatur, virtually identical on every one of 200 sheets, I realised I'd better at least try and be a grown-up for a minute.

By the time I'd done about 30 I was flagging and panicking – it wasn't so much the pain in a hand totally unused to handwriting as the fact that I kept stopping halfway through, totally unable to remember how to spell my surname. And when I relaxed and let it flow it turned into an abstract squiggle. It was genuinely hellish and somewhat embarrassing, seeing my vague scrawl appear on every sheet right next to Chris's firm and clear signature.

I was sitting at the end of the Cold Tonnage table, and while I was struggling Mark Plummer installed Philip Pullman next to me to sign a couple of dozen hardbacks for Andy (no doubt to be squirrelled away in one of his underground fastnesses awaiting an upturn in the market). Horrified that after what seemed like hours of agony I had got through barely half the sheets I turned to Pullman, signing away with calm aplomb, and said, 'It's so nice to see a professional at work.' He turned and looked at me, and it was not in sympathy. Oh, I thought, it's one of those embarrassing moments, isn't it, and shut up.

Later I discovered that he was not best pleased with the way he had been treated by the convention committee, and perhaps was not in the mood for jocularity from the proles. A shame; he seemed like a nice man.

There were two things I'd been having anxiety fits about before the convention. One was the poor level of anticipation; the committee just didn't seem able to provoke any sense of Something Happening, anything that made one feel there was an Event about to take place that One Should Not Miss. This taking it for granted approach just doesn't work any more, if it ever did. And it's especially dangerous in a distributed-convention situation like this one was, in which you have a hell of a lot of convincing to do just to get people to join, never mind actually show up.

Distributed conventions – where there is no individual site containing

both the events and the majority of accommodations – fare badly in the UK. Historically they have been bad conventions with worse reporting. It doesn't take much, in this day and age of a convention every couple of months, to make people decide to give one a miss. And that shows in the membership list – a lot of habitual convention-goers did not register, and even a lot of those who did stayed away on the day. Then I'd seen a draft programme on the web and was not impressed: there just didn't seem enough items that sounded right, the kind that one either makes an effort to go to or regrets being otherwise engaged during. OK, there was Chris Priest's GoH piece; there was the George Hay lecture, featuring Francis Spufford of *Backroom Boys* fame (which was excellent, and Spufford a spiffing fellow, exactly as one would have hoped), but that was it. The 'fan' oriented stuff in particular sounded like tokenism at best, as indeed did much of everything else.

But it wasn't anywhere near that bad on the day. I still run the old Mexican one-third principle in my head; I am happy if about 33 percent of the programme has the Must See factor, and the bits I did see were good. One surprise stand-out was a panel on the 1950s radio serial *Journey Into Space*, with Peter Weston, Gerry Webb, and Peter Redfarn. Redfarn was a dead loss, despite being instigator of the panel, but Weston and Webb carried it magnificently, Peter in particular wonderfully evoking the spirit of radio drama by improvising bits of the story from memory with sound effects rendered by an empty glass and his tiny little metal chairman's gavel (taken everywhere, just in case); it was wonderful. Then Gerry Webb – a genuine spacecraft entrepreneur – carried the whole thing into a different dimension, as usual, with spellbinding anecdotes about his associates with the Russian space-scientists, and determinedly introducing the concept that throwing a spacecraft off the planet should be as routine as driving a truck down the M1, if a little more labour-intensive. And made the right points to back up his assertions, as indeed did Peter Weston who in support read out from a piece he'd done for the Programme Book, a startlingly vivid description of the purposeful but unglamorous way that the Russians actually do these things. In retrospect it was a perfect item, wedding comedy, history, science and science fiction together in a way that cumulatively makes you see the world just a little differently afterwards. Bloody great stuff.

I wasn't expecting to be on any programme items, but just before the convention I had already been co-opted by Weston and Plummer for a Fannish Feuds item, one which had struck me as just about the least savoury

piece on the menu when I read the draft programme on the convention website. Together we rapidly decided that whatever we were going to do it wasn't going to be about Fannish Feuds.

And then Marcus Streets sidled – and I mean that literally – up and mumbled something to me about me being on an unspecified number of other items, if I would be so kind. It's kind of shocking to find that this sort of thing still happens – that programmes aren't totally wired together longer before the event – when we have decades of experience in how to, and how not to, do it, but there you go. I try to be helpful and say yes, OK, whatever you want provided I won't make a complete fool of myself.

Fortunately perhaps the only other thing is something about the Future of Fandom, which co-panellist Claire Brialey and myself rather hoped was being held so late at night that no one will show up, because pretty much the last thing we care about really is the future of fandom, having both decided long since that it is going its own evolutionary way and no amount of hot air from either of us will divert it from its course. To our genuine horror an audience actually arrived, much of it settled down in the third row, and fixed us with steely and sceptical gaze. It also looked quite young, even to Claire, who is but a child almost herself. Thus was born Third Row Fandom, into whose serious little faces we will look and see the future. They were back again, for the Fannish Feuds panel, which we cleverly transmuted into something entirely other – a history of the Fannish, no less – and made them laugh occasionally. And during which I realised for the first time that the issue of *New Worlds* that Chris Priest had referred to in his speech as the one in which he shared a contents list with Aldiss and Ballard and realised he was really getting somewhere, was in fact the first issue of *NW* I had seen, and where I found a small ad for the BSFA, and where all of my life thereafter had begun.

The convention petered out rather than stopped when the bar closed at 11.00 PM on the Monday night. For the first time I felt there was a problem with a distributed convention. There were flurries of panicky conversation about which hotel are you in does it have a bar will it accept non-residents. It wasn't only because no one actually approached us that we felt that it was time for time; older and more tired if not more wise, we figured the path of least resistance was back to our hotel and an earlyish night, then pack and trudge to the station, then hours and hours on the train back to West Wales, a longer journey in fact than it would take for some European fans to get home

to Germany or Sweden.

On the way back to our hotel someone I didn't know asked me what we'd done with Third Row Fandom, distinct for their lack of regard to what they clearly saw as past-it characters deserving of sidelining. We absorbed them, I said, but he didn't get it. I should have made it clear: my point was that we were them and still are sometimes, and they will probably become us.

Our hotel room was inexplicably hot, despite the heating being turned off, so we slept lightly. And found that the seagulls made cooing sounds, like large marine doves, in the night. Greeting the dawn, Catherine said romantically; they can see the light of the sun peeping over the horizon from up there. Maybe indeed; it was a peculiar lightly moaning sound, quite otherworldly at five in the morning when it woke me up every day. I looked out and there they were, coasting, almost floating just above rooftop height, flying slowly like small white clouds illuminated by the streetlights. Their calls were quite different from the normal raucous seagull shouting match, and entirely unlike the squealing quack of our local Cleddau terns. These were soft birds, having their own quiet time, but with an obvious sense of purpose. They do see things, I believe now. Blackpool was a depressing place, mostly, but not without its wonders.

We bought a lot of books, observed Catherine as I lifted the spare bag, now surprisingly full. Yeah, how did that happen; there didn't seem to be so much good stuff on Andy's table this time. But what we got was good, I said, though I wonder about some of your stuff. I mean who the hell is Ian MacLeod anyway, I said, or Steph Swainston?

They write fiction, Catherine responded, science fiction. Remember that? Yeah well, I said, I got those two Lovecraft fanzine collections and the Clark Ashton Smith letters... Shopping lists next, Catherine said scornfully. Did you actually buy any science fiction, she pointedly continued. Well, I dunno, I bought a collection of Gary Westfahl essays, and a copy of Baxter's *Deep Future* in hardback, and some recent *Foundations*...

But did you buy any fiction? Well, I got a copy of Katherine Burdekin's *Swastika Night*... And when was that written? Oh, um, about 1939. And I got a copy of that newish Baxter *Revolutions in the Earth*, I've no idea what it's about but it's by The Man, right? But did you buy any fiction, any science fiction, she persisted, annoyingly. Well, no, but I got a lot of books... About science fiction, she ended it for me, turning away and looking out of the window.

And what's wrong with that, I thought. More people should do it. Maybe it's what conventions are for.

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A postscript: There's one other thing I want to make clear here about the last Eastercon, as it looks increasingly unlikely that I will write and distribute the full version of 'Some Notes...', which would have been about twice as long as this first run. I want to make it clear that I had a thoroughly good time, and despite finding a number of things that the concom could be criticised fairly and severely for, I do praise them a great deal for providing an event that interested, entertained, amused, and stimulated me.

Which is a damned sight more than I can say for a lot of conventions I've been to over the years. And in some ways I'd be inclined to suggest that some people – those who have been most vocal in criticising this Eastercon – practise a little getting back to first principles and working out what conventions are actually for, and seeing whether or not their expectations and desires are congruent with those ideas.

Editorial

Sometimes I do *not* feel like smilin'. Like when something that should be a good time turns out bad. Like doing this. Despite a sort of vague niggling desire to pub the ish, I've felt something significantly less than enthusiasm for the whole deal. Actually, sorting the material and typing the stencils wasn't too bad, but by the time I got round to the duplicating the whole thing seems to have more of the flavour of onerous chore than jolly good time had by all. What does this mean? Is this just the usual Pickersgill whinge about the difficulties of fanzine publishing or has it any more general relevance? Actually it does, as what I'm really wondering at right this moment is whether it is really true that the active life of a fan is but a mayfly thing, a limited number of years in which to streak like a meteor across the deep dark night of fandom. I mean, have I reached the end of the line, is it time to close my last file, sell the duplicator to some deaf dumb and blind paraplegic sucker, and stuff the typer in the attic to be brought out only on the rare occasions when I need to communicate with some far-flung phoneless friend? Perhaps indeed, and maybe not before time as certain feisty New Age fans would say as they eye me as a representative of the hated fannish establishment meant only to be reviled, revolted against, and finally toppled, trampled and forgotten.

from 'Moaning at Midnight', *Stop Breaking Down* #5,
August 1977

Buddy Punch – Bad Scene Man

from *Ritblat/Grim News* #1, March 1974

Things were looking Grim. The whole operation was deeper into the shit than ever before; I was definitely getting the feeling I wasn't so much a has-been as a never-was. Then, one grubby day round at Brosnan's Shack, I read the new issue of *Siddhartha* he'd received that day:

'Shit,' I said, 'I could do up something like this easy.'

'Yes,' said the host obligingly. I burrowed once again into Williams's patent *cri-de-coeur*.

'Naturally,' I said after a few minutes, 'I wouldn't be quite as literate and intelligent as Williams is about it. Or as witty. Or urbane either, come to that. Hmmm?'

'Well, no one would expect that of you, Greg,' said Brosnan, not looking at me.

Oh, I thought. And naturally enough made a number of silly decisions that ended up causing more trouble than anything else.

Grim

The gag was, you see, that I'd finally come to terms with the fact that *Fouler* wasn't likely to come out for the next ten or twelve years at the soonest, and if I didn't want to go totally down the river I'd better pull myself together and do some sharp fanning. This giant breakthrough first took the form of some kind of group fanzine, planned back in the middle part of '73. This was more or less called *Buddy*, a reasonable concept on the lines of *Gannetscrap-book*, but tidier. Each Ratfan was allocated a certain number of pages, material to be assembled and produced by two editors. This fell right apart because of the two cretins in charge having entirely disparate ideas of what constituted a good fanzine, and what *Buddy* should be. The names of these two singleminded fanatical bigots were Pickersgill and Holdstock, and no more need be said about that. After this collapse, plans for solo, duo, group fanzines came and went with the regularity of the morning sun. Another fairly advanced idea was *Rat*, a fanzine nominally under my editorship, but

responsible to the group. This hit the shit due to no clear format, leaving behind (like *Buddy* and others) nothing more than a feeling of great irritation and about £2 worth of destroyed stencils.

A lot of this failure stems from disparity in basic fannish beliefs and simple non-co-operation; everything generally ended in a battle of wills over everything from the size of the paper to whether film reviews should be included. In no case was it ever possible to get two functioning editors whose opinions coincided sufficiently to make the enterprise workable – and what with one thing and another a solo-edited group fanzine was unworkable. Seriously, fans, in my opinion fanning is like fucking; it's good fun but you daren't lose sight of the serious objective or you're up shit creek. In this case it was pretty much like two men trying to fuck the same girl without the benefit of knowing there's more than one orifice. Stapled to our mutually incompatible fanzine ideas *Buddy* dissolved lacklustrely.

The next big deal was a blur of renewed interest in *Fouler*.

This was supposed to be some kind of 'new! improved!' *Fouler*, devised with the specific purpose of engendering the serious discussion of fandom, fans, and fanzines which was, OK, the purpose of *Fouler* all along, but that somehow got skipped over for the most part. So as soon as I'd finished tearing up the dozen or so stencils cut for *Buddy* or *Rat* or whatever it was I started on *Fouler* #8. And it came along quite well for a change, until one particular piece of material came in.

Quite reasonably, even though (as usual) it pains me much to say it, John Hall was probably the reason for *Fouler* #8. What happened was I'd commissioned a column from Rob Holdstock, who as usual took about three months to get down to it. It was a fair piece of publishable work, but the problem was it contained a wickedly accurate, funny, and – to some minds – fairly nasty put-down of John Hall. At this time I was very concerned with keeping group loyalties firm, and I knew that whilst Hall might have taken that kind of thing from anyone else with nothing more than a lot of shouting he would go absolutely berserk with fury to see it come from the typewriter of his sworn enemy. So I immediately called Hall and filled him in on things. His reply was, more or less, 'Holdstock is a cunt and if you have any sense you won't even be seen talking to him, much less using his shit in the magazine.' Pressed on whether he'd withdraw his support if the Holdstock piece was used, Hall said nothing more than 'You are the editor and you know what to do.' He said that very many times. So, for stability I got

Holdstock to do a rewrite. And, naturally, of course of course, the promised rewrite never ever did show up, Holdstock even eventually lost the original, and the issue was left with a gaping hole which couldn't be properly filled. So that was that.

Which brings things up to the time I read that fucking *Siddhartha* and decided that the only way out was for us all to produce solo fanzines. That decision caused all hell to break loose in the round-about apathetic ham-fisted way that even the most cataclysmic things happen in fandom. Kettle, having had his material returned from the *Fouler* file, broke out with the impossible: his own fanzine, produced in something less than a week. It had taken him four years – since the halcyon days of *Pottage* – but he did it in the end. That was, however, It. Young Brosnan was already 'famous' for his *Scab*, and Li'l Malcolm soon made it big with *Magic Pudding*, but the Mastermind soon found things hard going. I mean, editing fanzines is OK, re-writing I like, backing someone else's material is all good, but I'm not built to headline a fanzine myself.

But all avenues of escape failed. A fresh attempt to revive *Fouler* was ruined by Kettle (made miserable by *True Rat's* failure) becoming unreliable and tending away from fandom in favour of romantic lust in Hampstead. I set aside full-time contributing to other fanzines as a chancy and incidental art at best, and at worst a total bring-down; and, in the absence of sense or alternative, there's this. Not what I want, not what I'd like, but a fanzine nonetheless, and it's a terrible thing to be without one. I don't like it much, but I'm committed to it; it's something to stand by and look after and support for as long as reasonable, and even if it fails – well, it's not to be thrown away; better to partition and graft off the best bits and try them elsewhere anew. Keep a little continuity, like, try a bit harder next time. You know the process; what being a fan's all about, I suppose.

The secret of publishing a successful fanzine is in getting out a first issue.

Who Do These People Think They Are Anyway?

Well, that seemed a lot easier a question just after the Bristol con, in those pretty good days of '73, when I wrote this:

The Lads. Someone at the con asked me just who it was composed Ratfandom, and I didn't answer. Dumbfounded, I suppose. Later

the same day someone asked Christine Edwards if she was part of Ratfandom, and after a bit of casting about she said she was, not without a certain sense of pride, I thought. And yes, for one reason or another, she surely is. But why? Is Ratfandom composed of people who just hang around together habitually, or by general geographic location, or by a likemindedness of some especial sort, or what? Like, it might be easy to say OK, Ratfandom is a London outfit, with Hall, Kettle, Brosnan, Holdstock, Edwards, and a few female hangers-on. But what about Ratfan Buddies, like Piggott or Peter Roberts? Maybe they wouldn't want to be called Ratfandom outright but surely they're the kind of people it would be good to include? Also there're several of Gannetfandom (for the moment leaving the unsettling notion that Ratfandom is rapidly taking on the aspect of Gannetfandom's Southern Office) and several others from 'uncommitted' parts of Britain who are all good friends and associates and seem to have some mental communion. So what do ya do?

Most commentators define Ratfandom as a London thing, a local phenomenon – which isn't exactly the deal, as I'd like to see it anyway. After all, the name was originally adopted as a group banner, not as a local tag as was the Gannet label. To me Ratfandom is more accurately a religion than a nationality, unconfined by geographical considerations As far as I see Ratfandom comprises people from all over, almost irrespective of other groups they tend toward. It's a state of mind, basically. More or less, these are those I think are with it:

John Brosnan; Roy Kettle; John Hall; Rob & Sheila Holdstock; Peter Roberts; Bryn Fortey; Ian Maule; Malcolm & Christine Edwards; Thom Penman; Jack Marsh; Graham & Pat Charnock; John Piggott; Bob Rickard; and, of course, Greg Pickersgill.

Well, for post-con elation that seemed reasonable enough at the time, but looking back, around and ahead these days seem a lot different, and maybe those days weren't like that either. So what now?

The Gannet squad have increased their intensity so much any serious suggestion that any one of them would rather sit down next to Ratfandom has become rather silly. In fact, for one reason or another general Ratfandom

contact with Gannets is sparse and poor, though that's not at all to be taken as indication of Gannet lack of inclination or whatever. However, generally with all their super-success in cons and fanzines they're as remote from Ratfandom as Ken Cheslin is in the opposite direction.

Bryn Fortey, con hardman and old-time Buddy, seemed to fade away into a horrific series of trials in the South of Wales and seems to have little inclination towards fanning of any kind.

Piggott seems to have totally vanished in favour of wargaming, something of a tragedy as he was the best new fanwriter of recent years, as well as being a Good Fellow to meet with. He's currently down as definitely appearing at Tynecon, but he hasn't shown at anything like a Globe for long months.

John Hall became the subject of some controversy and to all intents and purposes estranged himself from the group as a whole.

The Edwardses, Charnox, Marsh and Rickard were all pretty peripheral people at the best of times, and whilst they haven't by any means made any renouncing gestures they've never been anything like pillars of the community. No slurs or anything, they've got their own things and problems, and in one or two cases are too far removed geographically to have much involvement (even though they all, with the exception of Rickard – who might be appalled to find his name in this company – live in the London area). Actually, whilst speaking of married people and women generally, it would appear that most of the women have tended to lose whatever interest in fandom they acquire. Indeed, most of them tend to denounce Globe-going and other fannish events as second only to menstruation in their calendar of monthly irritants. This more or less confirms my belief that fanning is nothing to do with women anyway, but there's a different story altogether.

Which to all intents and purposes, leaves the supposed 'hard core' Ratfans: myself, Brosnan, Kettle and Holdstock. Along with, I suppose, Rich Coad and Peter Roberts – both by accident more than any conscious design. As described elsewhere herein there's a lot lacking in current Ratfan activities, Roberts being seen so little as to make his continued presence in the city a matter for some conjecture. There's a lot lacking in the fabled mental communion bit too, as I hope to make clear in these pages.

Holdstock has his problems, academic and literary as well as being actually married. He tries to keep up fan-contacts with more success than the rest of us, mainly because of his fascination for the prospect of being a

professional writer. He's less than somewhat involved in the Ratfandom concept except as a vehicle for having lots of laffs. He seems to see the whole thing as something of a harmless hobby for taking your mind off the vital things in life. Like being married and selling to *Analog*. This seems a nasty dig at him, which it isn't really, as he is more the only thing which holds us together socially than not; and truthfully, for all the ways he irritates me in his attitudes to fanning and our group, he's a great man.

Kettle, though more inclined to view the group as a potentially good and viable thing, goes his own way. He's very seldom seen these days, even by Rich Coad, who lives in the same house. Kettle's problem is very much close to my heart, it being the classic one of *fafia* by female. There's nothing like women for screwing your fanning. I know, I was in the same situation for as long as a year, and I'm only just out of it now. Shit, that kind of thing is OK as long as you don't get obsessive about it. Still, he's very much a fan on the underside and it's only a matter of time.

Brosnan, of course, is virtually Ratfan *sans pareil*, with *Scab* and excellent fanzine appearances (often with Tails of Ratfandom) all over. He's also most group-oriented, inclined to join in on any social aspect, but entirely against any notion that Ratfandom might be anything more than a group of idiots hanging around together. And that of course is the point to which I've been leading up.

Lunatic it might seem to you, but I'd like to see whatever it is that passes for Ratfandom exceed the strictures of its corporate neuroses, inadequacies, and stupidities to make something greater than the sum of any of the parts. OK, I know that this has echoes of the great commune myth of the Sixties (though I admit I've never quite thrown off the attractions of that idea), but there must be some way in which we can accomplish something more than sitting around yelling at each other about the fact that we don't do anything better than nothing. And not necessarily purely in a fannish environment either, for all the fact that that's a vital part of my life.

Maybe what's required is for people to think of the group first, to ally themselves more with one another, to be less selfish and devote a little more of their consciousness towards a general improvement of our mutual way of life. Not to deny their own veins of achievement at all, merely to ensure that for every pace they might make away from the group-consciousness, they should extend themselves backwards one pace, tunnel in two directions at once.

It's better, at first, to confine this 'thinking' to a purely fannish aspect, but even there nothing functions. Probably I'll unqualifiedly stand by Roy Kettle's assertion that as a group (and 'group' meaning the four people composing hardcore Ratfandom) we can easily match or overrun any comparable group in Britain. Certainly our ideas are always viable, revolutionary, and far-seeing. The fact that they're often put into practice by other people long after we proposed them seems to confirm that. Naturally enough for all the sitting around and talking not a damn thing gets done, and after a while it just becomes something that was talked about once sometime, can't remember when, and lost. I find it hard to see why we can't do it. But it's probably not hard really; it's just that everything else gets in the way and there's no space for any trivia like fanning projects. And surely as shit, when you can't get people's heads down around a fanning project, which is by definition a trivial hobby project, then how can you get anything that has a more general bearing on the whole life of the people involved even discussed properly? It's nothing more than a general unwillingness to function as a group. It's OK to talk about it, OK to pretend for a while that it's going to be done, but god forbid that anything will be done. That might compromise everyone into ways of thought they'd quite obviously prefer not to explore.

All right. Leave that for the meantime. More next issue without a doubt. Back to the point, what's Ratfandom? A simple enough question, as most people can see.

Ratfandom is a group of people, varying in size, that appears almost spontaneously at certain social functions. At cons this group is at its largest, swelled by a lot of people who derive the most enjoyment from a con when they're with friends who lounge around disreputably fooling around, getting drunk and generally having fun. At Globes there's another Ratfandom, even though it's mostly the same people. But this time they stand around talking to each other about virtually everything. Ratfandom is entirely a public social institution, something that doesn't carry over into 'normal' life, just goes more or less dormant again until the next time you need a group of B*U*D*D*I*E*S to have fun with. Lotsa laffs. Big deal.

But fuckit anyway. Whoever they are they're the best people, whether they recognise themselves or not. They're the ones who find many fans silly people, with a trivial sense of humour, lacking in anything approaching genuine friendship as opposed to jolly camaraderie, overconcerned with the more irrelevant aspects of everything. The ones who see most fans as

prudish, flauntingly inadequate and overconcerned to be good fellows. The ones who see most fans as too much the same (despite their superficial and deliberate attempts to set themselves apart from the Ratfans) are the best ones, more or less, even though they're a bunch of no-good irresponsible, unco-operative, neurotic, selfish, ignorant, uncommunicative, alienated, estranged and useless bunch of bastards.

Great people.

Buddy Punch

from *Ritblat/Grim News* #2, April 1974

Up Against the Wall, Punks!

Well it sure has been a bit of a panic since the last issue, most of it occasioned by you bastards: you there. First of all, virtually no one responded; then when they did it was fucking ages past the deadline and everything had to be either re-done or end up looking something rather worse than the average issue of *Madcap*. Still, things weren't so bad in the end, considering the almost 25% response was almost uniformly good; but there were a lot of ungrateful punks who couldn't even see their way to say 'thanx but no thanx'. Even famous Doctored Darroll Pardoe didn't send his copy back with a note saying 'Please do not send me any further issues of your fanzine,' but someone called Mercer did, so that evens things out, I imagine.

Now, I've never been too enthusiastic about sending out fanzines to people with all the appreciation of 150lbs of wet sand, so you'd all better pay heed here.

This issue goes to three categories of people:

1. Masters, Buddies, Henchmen, and Cronies. All of whom are of sufficient personal standing to receive any Ratfanzines without question. They are also those from whom some response would be most welcome.
2. Fanzine publishers. I'm assuming we trade. If this is not so someone had better mention it to me.
3. People who are in fandom and might be interested in this fanzine. Several people here got *R/GN* #1 and didn't respond; they've been axed, and more will follow unless they respond in some fashion.

Your number appears next to your name. Pay heed.

I'm a lot happier turning out a low-circulation fanzine for active and interested people than knocking myself out for an uninterested mass.

Dolts Inc.

Maybe the most horrific event in science fiction in recent years has been the advent of *Science Fiction Monthly*. The worst beyond all competition ever, so entirely without merit it has a fascination all its own. The fiction is uniformly pedestrian, dullingly familiar of plot and devoid of characterisation. I hardly imagine the worst British fanzine would publish these abominably uninteresting and amateur stories – and the masses of artwork have considerably less appeal than the poorest Marvel or DC comic book. The three issues so far have deteriorated from bad to the astoundingly awful, and there is, I'd lay money, no possibility whatever of change. Myself, I think it's an amazing magazine – I relish it for the feeling of kinship with the early SF fans of the '30s and '40s it gives me, in the days when people were ashamed to buy SF mags and hid them under their coats or tore the covers off. It's definitely replaced *Hot Tits* as the magazine I'm most embarrassed to buy at a newstand. I also bloody hate it as a total ripoff; from being what we used to think was a clever way for SF fans to hype vast sums out of NEL it has now come to represent a divebombing devaluation of science fiction.

Now then, in case all this looks somewhat odd coming from a hardcore fan in a hardcore fanzine I'd better get down to the fax of the matter. As I hope I don't need to point out further, anyone with any intelligence can see this is a totally vile magazine, not at all worth supporting, and worthy of only searing condemnation. Or, rather, I'd have imagined myself this was obvious, but not so according to some recent BSFA handouts, and a letter in the latest issue of *SF Monthly* itself.

Now, before we go on, let's all remember that the BSFA is reputed to represent the highest ideals of science fiction, seeking to present SF in its best form to the public, promoting understanding of what SF is all about, and clearing up the various misconceptions that have arisen around it over the years. Trying to present SF as a worthwhile literary theme for intelligent people. So they claim every now and again. Why then, I'd like to understand, in a handout in the last BSFA mailing, does Keith Freeman claim (after enumerating in somewhat less than forceful terms some of the magazine's poorer features) that:

'...nevertheless, I think it well worth supporting'?

And why does Graham Poole, Company Secretary of the BSFA, someone in a responsible position who might well be expected to keep up the BSFA's reputation and ideals, appear in *SF Monthly* #3 with a letter which says in its first paragraph:

‘... was so impressed I just had to write a letter of appreciation...’

and carries on in that vein, virtually uncritically other than hinting in as inoffensive fashion as possible that the fiction wasn’t exactly ‘good’?

Now, either there’s something funny going on here or there’s not. These are either honest reactions – in which case both these people are entire cretins and ought to be flung right out of the responsible positions they hold in the BSFA before they do any more damage or betray any more principles – or this is part of some kind of idiotic plan to support anything remotely resembling a science fiction magazine being published in Britain. If that’s the fact, this is just unacceptable lunatic hypocrisy, apart from being ill-founded in the first place. As I’ve said about certain other dastardly deeds, either way they’re dead ducks.

If the BSFA has any weight at all they should be standing out decrying this crappy magazine for what it is, making a policy stand, putting out for what they believe in. As it is that task has been left to the commentators in the legitimate press, who have been uniform in their cuttingly sarcastic condemnation of this NEL atrocity. Actually, I don’t really imagine for one moment that the BSFA has any relevance at all to the publishers of *SF Monthly*, or the publishers of any other form of SF anywhere in the civilized world.

So why am I so uproarious about this? Well, being a science fiction fan is just like the backbeat – you never lose it. I still follow SF fairly enthusiastically, tho’ I refrain from commenting on it. More than that, I still see the BSFA as the tip of fandom’s iceberg, and I want it looking as good as possible. Also there is some evidence these people do meddle in trufannish affairs on occasion (Poole currently so with a ‘Guide to Fandom’ called – good grief – *Genesis*) and I like to know what’s going on.

So OK. Assuming, charitably, that both Poole and Freeman are not both doltish beyond redeem, why are they saying these things about that magazine? Is there something going on I don’t know about?

Memories, Memories

Sitting around trying to devise clever Ratfan words for Peter Roberts’ Fannish Dictionary I had the unpleasant spectre of Silly Animal Fandom cross my mind like a deformed and retarded black cat. And it occurred to me for the first time in several days that it’s not a generally known fact that I,

directly or not, have been responsible for the whole depressing thing. This isn't a happy thing to identify with, so you'd all better read close as I'm only going to type this once.

Things begin years ago in Bristol at the Mercer residence one day when I'd visited them on the wrong weekend. There are those who'll be surprised that I once moved in such weird circles; my only defence is that everyone was a neofan once, and they were the nearest, most accessible established fans to Old Haverfordwest. Anyway, also there were Peter Roberts (wearing his silly costume of orange trousers, furry waistcoat, and pillbox hat), Alan Chorley (of fleeting fame) and perhaps one or two others. Or perhaps not, as it was the wrong weekend, as I've said. During the desultory conversation (even then I had little to say to Archie Mercer in particular, and though I couldn't admit it even to myself – he was a BNF after all – found him boring and silly) I mentioned an item I'd seen in a Mensa news-sheet reporting an *aardvark* hunt in Swansea Docks organised by the Swansea Young Mensa Group (perfectly true, incidentally). This was the fatal spark to ignite a torrent of puns, clever altered song-titles, lots of vying with each other to introduce the word 'aardvark' into any well-known phrase or saying – the more out of context the better – and all that shit. This drove me absolutely up the fucking wall as this kind of thing has never been my speed, and in those days I wasn't such a tearaway as I am now, which meant I had to sit around with a smile glued to my face and pretend it was all good fun. This went on for fucking hours between the Mercers and Roberts (who did indeed seem to think it was all tremendously jolly fun) until I left. Next damn thing I knew *Egg* had come out as the Official Organ of Aardvark Fandom, and my opinion of Peter James Roberts had slid down several stages.

That, of course, started several related inanities such as Wombat Fandom, which I had only a distant connection with.

The reality of the situation finally came down during the publication of *Fouler*, when I called for something to put up as parody of all these cuddly cretinacies. Something vaguely repellent, somewhat nasty, not at all warm, friendly, or sweetness and light. My main man Roy Kettle fired back with the *rat* and there we were. First publicised in *Fouler* #3, it actually caught on as something meaningful, and has become a label worth having to some people. My own offering for this position had been axolotl, which was mercifully and luckily dispensed with.

The last thing to actually show up was to emanate from the North. I may

be exaggerating, or trying it on a bit here but as far as I recall I first used the label 'Gannet' to describe someone from the Newcastle/Sunderland/Co. Durham Group and it stuck. Amazing that they never devised it themselves – it's after the name of the pub they meet at, the Gannet (obviously) – but there ya go. They've probably forgotten themselves where they got it from.

Since those grisly days Silly Animal Fandom has declined to the Rats and the Gannets, the Wombat people disintegrating all over, and Roberts at last deciding to rid himself of the Aardvark appellation, ostensibly because his supply of aardvark cartoons has run out, but hopefully because he's got a little more sense in the last few years.

And there's no punchline; this was a certified Ratfandom Anecdote.

Government Cracks Down on Fandom

That's what it felt like to me when I first heard the results of this year's first Budget. Postage (fanzines), rail fares (going to cons and visiting), and electricity (labouring over typewriters and duplicators well into the night) all up staggering amounts.

Obviously I'm not going to discuss the general ramifications of the Government's latest financial contrivances (other than saying merely that I'm one of the most people who will in fact be worse off in the end, despite being in a supposedly favoured lower-income bracket) but just (just!) see what this could mean in terms of fanning.

And the most obvious and worst effect is going to come in fanzines, no doubt about it. And fandom is going to suffer, and maybe some fannish aspects will vanish entirely.

What I mean is that it is now almost impossible to produce, singlehanded (financially), a reasonably frequent and regular fanzine of any useful bulk at all. To take my own example, this fanzine at this moment costs to all intents and purposes £10 per issue to produce. And £10 is exactly 10% of my monthly salary, and producing a roughly monthly fanzine means this is a fair wad of cash disappearing; disappearing along with £30 rent (soon to rise), travel to work, food, various necessary things, and the usual vital stuff that makes life worth living. All of this means that I am ending up something like a lot of pounds out of pocket by the end of the third week, never mind the end of the month. And all this for a low-circulation, cheaply-produced fanzine. No wonder the more flash material like *Zimri*, *Blunt*, and *Maya* only

show up once every three or five months.

And there's the danger: the fear is that with the likely financially-caused demise of the frequent fanzine, these big guys will become the only fanzines, the only facet of fanzine fandom visible to the neofans; and in time their attitudes, their types, will become what fanzines are all about, and the essence of fandom, the call-and-response feeling such as I'm trying to engender – and can only possibly exist in a frequent fanzine – will go right by the board.

It's a true fact that people will not readily respond to the infrequent fanzines, and even when they do there is little feeling of immediacy in their response. News is no longer news six months later; any possibility of personal interaction disappears when you get comments on your material so long after you wrote it you can't even remember what it was about yourself. The vitality goes; lettercolumns are reduced to stultifying lists of likes and dislikes, there's nothing to make it worthwhile getting excited and clamming back a letter the same day you received the fanzine – what for, when it won't be published until next Christmas? It's gonna be a bad scene.

So we'll be left with the almost-professional magazines, which are OK in their place, and fannish a bit at the same time, but lacking that speed of movement.

Myself, I don't reckon it to be at all feasible to produce a regular, frequent (monthly or six-weekly) fanzine in this day and age; the money problems rule it out. A group could do it, but that's a different problem which would almost certainly make the fanzine something other than what it should be – a manifestation of one editor's attitudes to fandom. A small fanzine could make it, but would probably be so small as to be virtually useless – anything less than twenty pages doesn't offer enough material, usually (especially in Britain). So what is going to happen?

Anyone want to subscribe?

Moaning at Midnight – Off the Hook

from *Stop Breaking Down* #4, March 1977

I Get So Excited

Sometimes you truck on downstairs in the morning and there's a big envelope by the door and you think 'Hot shit, fanzines!' and rush forward to pick it up. Now the only thing more disappointing than discovering the tasty-looking package is not addressed to you is the shock of finding something like *Triode* inside it when what you really wanted was a healthy dose of *Oryan* or *One-Off*. Sometimes life is not all you'd like it to be.

Imagine my surprise then, when I picked up what had every feel, touch, aura and emanation of being a very dull Australian fanzine ('Australian' in the generic sense; even I recognised the American stamps) and wrenched it open to reveal a completely new joy. No plain old ordinary SF-type fanzine either, but a Good God honest-to-Gibson rock fanzine. And not merely a rock fanzine emanating from the lively and rapidly expanding rock fandom, but one from someone who seems more or less an orthodox SF fan as well, so it somehow managed to hold within it some of the best features of each disparate fandom. *Cowabunga*, the eighth issue being the one I received, is edited by one John Koenig, who seems a good vigorous type of fan just like there aren't enough around no more; and his fanzine, which has every appearance of a conventional SF-fandom fanzine, seems to be very much the sort of fannish/enthusiastic fanzine I advocated in SF-fandom terms in *SBD* #2.

This emphasis on subjectivity and enthusiasm seems a bit out of style for rock fanzines, in my limited experience of them. Too many seem fastened onto either very narrow fields of interest or are too sercon in outlook, determined nothing is of value unless it is the product of years of research, sycophantic interviews, or analytic to a level that would make even Andrew Tidmarsh look like a superficial blind man. The writing in *Cow* is no great shakes; too much of it is a sort of rock equivalent of 'Goshwowboyoboyism', a gushing pseudo-hysterical style bordering on the incoherent. Presumably this is the only way the writers can attempt to express the spine-tingling,

limb-jerking, brain-busting rush of their favourite bands and records. Disconcerting as these stylistic weaknesses are, they're easily overlooked in the knowledge that, despite the large body of rock writing, there is as yet little 'language' to express essentially emotional/physical thrills. Still, the enthusiasm gets across and is communicable. Which is why I like *Cow*, because it's fannish in 'our' sense, lacking the distant posture or heavy-handed bonhomie of other rock fanzines like *Zigzag*, *Dark Star*, *Licorice*, or the rest of that tedious ilk. Actually, the new wave of rock fanzines that have sprung up around the 'punk' bands (who actually produce a lot of fucking good records, you should note) are apparently very fannish in style, especially *Sniffin' Glue* from what I've seen of it. Although they do rather shit their nest by seeming to deliberately work towards crude production, and an unnaturally aggressive attitude towards their readers that seems to me to be as much of an unpleasant pose as those rock-snobs to whom everything has to be 'art' and 'cerebral' before it is of any consequence. I'm reluctant to say too much about these mags because (shame, shame) I haven't actually seen much of them, but it's a fault I intend to remedy Real Soon Now.

Now all this really springs from the fact that my interest in records has been rapidly overrunning my interest in science fiction for a good few years now, and even overwhelming my interest in fandom more than somewhat. I've often felt like trying to break into true rock fandom, but that is, if anything, even more difficult than cracking SF fandom. The elements of cliquishness evident at a specialist record-shop makes fandom look like an open-armed welcome. Rock fanzines are not especially easy to get, and few of them are precisely in the sort of fannishly-enthusiastic vein I'm after; either posturing and sercon to a ludicrous degree or quite simply obsessed with styles of music that don't particularly interest me at all, so I've never been able to build up a great deal of enthusiasm for them. *Cowabunga*, though, shows that this style is in fact a viable one in rock fanzine terms, and my enthusiasm has taken a big lift upwards. In fact I'd like to feature more music-oriented stuff (apart from the titles and section-heads!) in *Stop Breaking Down* in the future. I realise this will be greeted with total indifference and even some hostility by some readers, but as far as I'm concerned rock, blues, soul, country, pop and all the other little bits and sections have had a profound influence on the lives of a great many young fans of today (by 'young' I virtually mean anyone under 40) so one way or another I think I'll reach some kind of interested audience.

Somebody somewhere help me.

Billy the Squid (2)

from *Seamonsters* #2, November 1978

I always remember Globe (or One Tun, for the pedants) meetings vividly – up to about ten-to-nine anyway – so it seems like just yesterday that I was challenged on the pavement outside by none other than that paragon of fannish dynamism, Ian Maule. Naturally, this little face-off was about nothing so sordid and down to earth as woman or money, but – according to the Great Man – about my low profile, lack of involvement, and imminent danger of becoming as much a nonentity in fannish terms as I am in the other world. Somehow I felt more incredulous than upset. Balls to all that, I remember saying. I could not care less whether or not you think I have to get up on my back legs at regular intervals to raise a great noise about something or other. I'm happy just to take my ease in fannish company; give me a bunch of solid good old boys to drink and party with and I'm straight. There Is Nothing Left For Me To Say, I said. I've said all I had to say already. All is now mere repetition; I can't repeat myself all the time, I said repetitively. More than once, as I had had a few at the time. Let someone else get into some kind of fucking Death Or Glory chase after the Nova Award or whatever and get all fired up and wave burning crosses and so on and so forth. I went on like that for some time until a car went past and I dodged around it and (it turned out) leaped straight from the frying pan into the fire. But the thought remained.

And the thought leads inevitably to Ian Maule and his fanzine *Nabu*.

Maule is in the unenviable position of having proven beyond a shadow of a doubt that it is utterly unnecessary to emulate *Maya* and go litho to produce a beautifully laid-out, perfectly reproduced, extremely attractive, and thuddingly bland fanzine. Of course he should worry; as he's said more often than not, he's got a formula that worked back in the early Seventies when he took over *Maya* from Ian Williams, so why should he change it.

And there's no reason for him to change his format any more than I'd care to change mine. After all, fine repro impresses the Americans and you can't be a big-deal international fan without the Americans on your side, now can you? Hell, I'm not kidding; *Nabu* is lovely to look at: not such daring use of colour as in the *Observer* magazine, but a lot less advertising than in the

Sunday Times supplement. It really shows what you can do with plain old duplicating if you've got nothing better to do than arse about getting your margins straight day in, day out.

The words inside are really something else, though. The latest issue has Ian Williams contributing the sort of thing he can do so easily without thinking, the sort of archaic 'Then I did this, then I did that' sort of fanwriting that inevitably reminds me of the million bullets reputedly expended to kill one NVA soldier in Viet-Nam. Of course, if you are interested in knowing that Williams is on sufficiently good terms with Bob Shaw (the famous well-known professional fan, not the fucking idiot from Edinburgh or Glasgow or wherever) to be invited to his home and get pissed up with him, you might find this sort of thing terribly amusing. Personally I could not care less about the home habits of Mr Shaw, and Mr Williams has long since ceased to amuse me with these prolix extracts from his prematurely written *Recherche A Temps Perdu*. Bah. Humbug. That sweet boy Joseph Nicholas hits twice in the same issue, once with a partially interesting piece about the last Knebworth open-air festival; but I found my attention wandering as I wondered whether I would find anything imbued with common-sense or discrimination in anything written by a fan of Jefferson Airplane/Starship. Still, Nicholas is such a prolific little sod he was almost bound, by sheer volume, to redeem himself in his other article in this issue, which is a set of excellent fanzine reviews which apart from anything else detail (indirectly) the very faults of the fanzine he himself is appearing in. So don't try and tell me that fanzine editors pay any heed at all to fanzine reviews. Staggering.

And then there's the lettercolumn. Lotsa heavies getting down and saving fandom. Just the thing we need these days eh wot? Can't just let things go to hell and lie back and enjoy it. Still, with Ian Maule carrying the standard there's no danger anyone's going to forget that the soapbox is for standing on, not resting one's ass.

Maule, you see, has got this idea in his head that we who have been on the set for a while are rapidly being rendered obsolete by a new generation of fans. This is smart but sluggish reasoning. Most of us have seen this coming for years. Quite apart from the fact that it is an unproven point that the newer fans are forming a 'new wave' and not being absorbed to the benefit of both by those already established (something that happens much easier and with less blatant fussing and fighting now than ever before) the real point worth wondering about is whether all this idea of frantic holding-actions is

meaningful anyway. I mean, is there any future in having to actually make an effort to hold on to some position of power and influence (ludicrous as the idea of power, influence, and puppet-like domination is in fandom, in fact) just for the sake of it? Why not, if the trends are evidently moving around, rather than with you, just retire gracefully and only speak up when you have something fresh, original, and useful to say. It may be, of course, that even if that Great Thought strikes there'll be no one wants to hear it, but that's just the way horrible luck goes.

If one assumes a whole new tidal wave of new fans hell-bent on sweeping all us old guys right off the beach then one must equally assume they're not going to be especially interested in any sort of ideological lead we lay down, especially if they've got any fucking backbone at all. Almost automatically they'll reject what has gone before, though as equally automatically they will in time return to the forms and ideas of the past (i.e. our time) if they are, as we doubtless believe, the real ways of doing things. One might, indeed, pursue the same idea down into fanzine reviewing. No one learns, no one profits; essentially the whole thing is a private joke, all calls and responses well learned. Nothing is new; everything is familiar. So it seems peculiar to me that Maule is getting his knickers all twisted over this 'whither fandom' business. I suppose I could take a more charitable attitude to all this if I felt for a moment that *Nabu* was going out to, say, swarms of BSFA fans whose knowledge and attitude to fandom is both limited and negative (though whether it would be functionally enlightening is another story) but I don't believe it is. It's just the same old, same old. Christ, if all this apparently altruistic concern for our corporate fate were in fact novel I'd be more impressed, but having got my boots muddy down that road myself more times than I'd care to recall I take a rather jaded view of the whole proceedings.

What I'm getting at is that if these ideological agonies have to be gone through, let them be suffered by the newly ideological who deserve them for their ignorance: people like West and Nicholas, for example, new boys comparatively; not old Ian Maule, for Christ's sake, the fannish heavy who singlehandedly created the greatest, most memorable event in fandom this century, Tynecon 1974.

All this going on and on seems bloody self-conscious to me, like someone trying to keep in the forefront of fannish opinion-moulding by launching out into these 'new', 'vital' areas. Like someone determinedly

keeping a high profile, heavy involvement, and being a big power in the land.
And being, to me at least, utterly unconvincing about it.

Silt

from *Seamonsters* #3, March 1979

I've just spent about three hours sitting very comfortably indeed in front of the fire, listening to the radio and trying to fill in the Hugo Nominations Ballot. This occupation has been hampered considerably by the fact that I can hardly remember any science fiction story or novel published in 1978. Indeed, if it were not for the fact that I regularly buy *F&SF* in my lunchbreaks and thus spend entire afternoons at work leafing through it I'd probably be hard pressed to claim with any certainty that I'd read any SF at all published for the first time in 1978.

Which makes filling in the ballot difficult almost to impossibility for the professional categories.

However, the fan categories are another starry (or story, if you must) altogether.

Now, as I'm sure you all know the last time a British fanzine got onto an actual final Hugo ballot was with *Speculation*, more years ago than anyone would care to remember, way back when even Peter Weston was a fan and not such an obviously self-seeking glory-grabber as he now appears to be. (Cue for Dr Robert Jackson to claim *Maya* was on the ballot last year or somesuch; not interested, tho'.) And I'm sure you all know equally that in the average year (i.e. a year the Worldcon is held within continental North America) the chances of a British fanzine or fan even getting onto the final ballot are as slim as Peter Roberts. Swarms and fucking swarms of American fans vote, as a matter of course and with no thought whatsoever, for the giants, the quasi-amateur sercon magazines like *SFR*, *Algol*, and so on. Whatever small proportion of fannish-type nominations there may be is essentially (I would imagine) too diverse to make any impression at all on this uncreative mob. However, 1979 means the Worldcon is British, and deranged though that whole prospect might appear, it also means there's a faint chance of we natives of this sceptered isle at least getting our collective foot in the door for once.

What I mean is, with a certain amount of co-ordinated thinking and a little bit of positive effort, British fandom could, I believe, get at least half of the names in the Hugo fan categories on the final ballot from within its own

ranks.

I am told by someone who is reasonably sensible and has no reason to lie that the actual number of nominations for the fan categories is generally very small indeed, a tiny percentage of the total voting membership. That being so, it is therefore possible that if most of the British fans voting included more or less the same British fan and fanzine nominations, then the chances of them actually getting onto the final ballot (alongside the dreary parade of American sercon regulars like *SFR* and Geis and Susan Wood and all the other moneymaking and/or self-important dragasses) would be very fair indeed.

Mind you, the chances of them actually winning, glorious though the thought must be, is as remote as ever. Fucking millions of Americans are members of Seacon '79.

Well, OK. Assuming you actually give a flying fuck about whether any British fans are represented on the final Hugo ballot (which as a rule I certainly do not, but make an exception this year as there is a chance of *doing something about it*), and also do indeed believe there are British fans worthy of this sort of international acclaim (OK, so it's worthless and nothing of the kind anyway, but let's see some of our people's names in lights for a change, eh?), who are you going to choose? And remember, numbers count.

Well, thinking numbers first and foremost, *Maya* has got to be there. Personally I am not enthusiastic about *Maya*, because whilst at least 60% British in philosophy and content it reminds me too much of an American fanzine to really appeal. Still, it has a large circulation, and is generally well liked, and is a sure shot for a place on the ballot and, bloody hell, might even win. Myself, I'll say nothing, because I'd like to see a British fanzine win even if it is *Maya*, and I'll certainly nominate it,

Other choices are less obvious. *Twll-Ddu* by Langford is a consistently good fanzine with a large (by British standards) circulation in the US. *True Rat*, by Leroy Kettle, appeared in '78 only as a Skycon hand-out, but as far as I'm concerned as this is British fandom's one shot at the Hugo ballot we might just as well judge on overall performance and not consider only material appearing in 1978. So *True Rat* goes on my nomination form. David Bridges's *One-Off* has given me great pleasure in the time he's been publishing it, though despite my proselytising few others have caught up with it. My fifth nomination is a problem; to be entirely honest I'd put *Stop Breaking Down* if I could, but votes for oneself are often frowned upon. Still,

Maya, True Rat, Twll-Ddu, and One-Off are my personal choices.

For me, writers follow much the same lines as fanzines, as one might expect considering the fact the three ‘real’ fanzines I’ve mentioned are very personally oriented. David Bridges, Leroy Kettle, and Dave Langford are three of the very best writers in British fandom in my eyes. Almost *the* best (and he’s been Awarded for it already) is D West, whose various writings on conventions and fanzines in recent years stand as the only real body of serious, intelligent *and* very entertaining writing on the Fandom Experience ever written in a British context. To see a Hugo Final Ballot without West’s name on it would be a dreadful thing at a British Worldcon; it would mean, as much as anything else, that British fans cared naught for the excellence in their midst, and preferred to let the lowest common denominator of American voters keep all available credit for their own turgid hacks. These four people – Bridges, Kettle, Langford, and West – produce fanwriting of a vitality seemingly unknown in America, and it would be shameful to see them excluded in favour of substantially lesser talents.

So what do you have to do? Simply *vote!* Obviously no one will simply emulate my thinking, but I’m sure some names will inevitably feature and that’s good enough. Remember nominations must be in by *April 30th*.

This is British fandom’s only chance.

Fandom Stranger

from *Stop Breaking Down* #7, August 1981

I had that sickening feeling that things had finally gone too far when one evening I got up, turned off the television, put *Mirror Man* on the record player and went to sit in the bookroom and shuffle through a stack of recent fanzines and BSFA mailings for names and addresses.

I knew it was sort of serious when a couple of days later I took a new BSFA mailing to read at work – for the first time ever putting a crease down the spine of one of those nice flat *Vectors* that are so easy to file away unread – and even after drudging through more of it than I'd thought possible I was still interested in putting out a fanzine.

I knew there was absolutely no escape when Malcolm Edwards put out *Tappen*. Fanzine publishing suddenly became something more than a vague desire. It suddenly seemed *possible* again.

Of course, ever since bailing out of the secret control centre hidden in the engine room of *Seamonsters* in 1979 I've had plots, plans, ideas and fantasies for fanzines hovering around in my head. These impulses tended to vary with what I saw around me. A good convention, say, or even a good conversation at the Friends in Space would get me all churned up and thinking, and counting my money, and worrying and fretting about what I could do and what sort of audience is there and is it worth it and can I afford it and so on and on. But despite these bursts of hysteric enthusiasm nothing ever quite got done. It was as if some barrier existed between the idea and the actuality. Even the cleverly engineered discovery that five hundred duplicator stencils found lying around unguarded at work fitted neatly into a Safeway bag didn't quite kick my interest into activity. Continual aggravation from people like Linda and Roberts Hansen and Holdstock did little but inspire me to think of reasons why I shouldn't do anything.

And those reasons weren't hard to find, either. After all, it was a long time since I'd cranked my duplicator handle for anything more than a booklist, and things had far from stood still. If anything they'd gone bloody *backwards*, but that's another story entirely. Whatever, things had changed. Different faces, different names, different fanzines – and I had trouble matching them all together. A lot of the people who'd been around at the time

of my last activity had either dropped out entirely or receded so far I couldn't even see where they'd *been* (though some who I rather wish had dropped off the set unfortunately still persist) and sometimes I began to feel like Eric Bentcliffe or Terry Jeeves, and I'd start thinking, 'This ain't fucking fair, I'm not even thirty yet!'

So there I was, disconnected and confused. Serves me right, really, for being inert for so long and not even so much as sending a begging letter for new fanzines or a letter of comment to those few fanzines that came my way. It was kind of disturbing to check through lists of fanzines and have proven my suspicion that lots of stuff was passing me by entirely – indeed, the people who were sending me fanzines were either working from ancient mailing lists or were desperate to get rid of the excess copies of their fanzines, even to burnt-out old fans like me. Gloom would descend. My darkest predictions would suddenly become correct. I had been overrun by a new generation of fandom, submerged without trace by a new wave of dynamic, literate individualists whose talents were not to be constrained by the ideas and attitudes of bygone fandom, which they would now squish casually beneath their ever-onward dancing training shoes. The only slight light to all this darkness, I thought, was that at least I had the wisdom and grace to see and accept my position, instead of pretending it was either not happening or that even if it was my position was unassailable, like some dull old fans of my once acquaintance tend to do. And anyway, I could always fall back on the good old standby of 'Who cares, what's it all matter anyway, fanzines are an expensive drag, who needs it man...' and like that.

Well, all this heart-searching and self-delusion is a dangerous line to start walking, because if you're not careful you suddenly find you're spending all your time staring out of rain-streaked windows at blank brick walls whilst listening to Swedish solo saxophonists, a way of life that sounds fucking grim to me. So what you've got to do, if you've been in fandom since 1968, secretly enjoy doing fanzines, and would rather like to do it again, is get off the pot and do all your window-staring from behind a typewriter. Things may not be the same, the fanzines may not be as good as the ones you remember, the writers may not be so sharp, and your brain might well be closing down on you without sending a final demand, but, shit, it's too late to stop now.

• • •

So here we are again. I've carelessly abandoned my usual pattern of fanzine

production in two ways. Instead of the usual two-year gap between runs of a fanzine time and circumstance have stretched it out to over three, and rather than jamming a new title on the front of what is always more or less the same old fanzine inside I've pulled good old *Stop Breaking Down* up from the past. It's my favourite fanzine title ever, and it's nice to have something to feel comfortable with on this dodgy venture. The first six issues of *SBD* between March '76 and April '78 were bloody superb fanzines (and I have absolutely no shame at all in saying that) and my main hope for this new series is that they don't let the old firm down too bad. Things are different now – there was more light and fire in the fanwriting of those days, I think – but there are a few class acts around these days too, and I'm working on the case to bring them out.

I dunno, it's only a fanzine, but I like it.

On the run-up to this fanzine I was planning on continuing the tradition of publishing convention reports as main features that was such a highlight of the first series of *Stop Breaking Down*. It seems a shame that long narrative convention reports have fallen from favour in recent times, especially as when done at their best they were not only fascinating stories in their own right (there's nothing more engrossing than something in which one might figure as a surprise star) but had a lot of revelatory things to say about how people behave and conventions occur, and some of them were rather impressive pieces of journalism in any light. However, neither D West, Malcolm Edwards, Graham Charnock, or Leroy Kettle came up with anything for this issue. Principally because I didn't ask them, having some sort of inane idea of doing it myself. Never done a con report before, I reasoned. Exciting new departure. New fields to conquer. Opportunity to say lots of cogent things about fandom. Easy to do, as well. Just remember the basic outline and a few good gags, trim up with some flash and glitter, and away to the races. Ah, sweet idiocy.

Of course any fule kno it is not that simple. Inevitably at conventions I get so out of it that months later I'm hearing new stories of what happened to and around me. Most of the things I can remember are the sort of things that should be in fanzines but no one has quite the courage to set down in cold duper ink, what with having to face people afterwards and so on and so forth (but one day, maybe...). And, truthfully, I probably didn't see nearly as much of the Leeds Eastercon as I should have done to write about it – though I do wonder whether conventions have now got so big and fragmented that any

sort of all-encompassing conreport is no longer possible, and is this why no one writes them any more? – having spent virtually all my time in either the bar or the fanroom.

So no convention report as such (shame on my idleness) but there were a couple of things that came up that are worth ranting on about a little.

Like the fanroom for instance. Now John Collick is, despite the deranged gleam of his little black-button eyes, a bright and intelligent individual. So why on earth didn't he kick up more shit about the lunatic idea of actually putting the fanroom in a bar – especially a bar that was the only one open – for some time during the convention? I mean, here's a concom gone head over heels right into the darker reaches of fannish mythos. I know the party line has it that fans are incredible piss-artists, but this is ridiculous. A bar in a fanroom would have been the most popular stunt for years, but the other way round it was just a fucking nuisance. Not that I was too disturbed about not being able to hear certain fannish personalities or even that boring old radoteur Dave Langford wambling on eternally over the ostentatious prattle of a million Little Jimmy Fans demanding real ale in thin glasses, but the sort of dual purpose area Collick had to deal with gave him little opportunity to develop any true fanroom atmosphere. Up until then (or rather, since 1977, when fanrooms as a functional entity began) a fanroom was a specific place that people went to for specific purposes, and did specific things by choice. Now I'm all for conning people in by all means, but jamming them in because it's the only place they can get a drink serves nobody very well. Also, because the fanroom was more of a public place than usual, there seemed to be a lot less in the way of decoration and displays than in the past. Also there was virtually nothing on the sales table. I don't know whether Collick had neglected this facet of the fanroom, or maybe no one was being co-operative, or maybe there just weren't any fanzines about to be brought for sale or display, but it was a damn shame nevertheless. This was the worst part of the whole affair, as far as I'm concerned. Fanzines are hard enough to get when you know more or less what they are and roughly where to get them, and for someone on the 'outside' the situation is more difficult. One of the best things about the institution of fanrooms has been the availability of fanzines, not only showing a vital and alive face of fandom, but giving easy access to the uninitiated. Collick's one table covered with a thin layer of scruffy-looking flyers somehow didn't quite carry on this socially useful image. Still, it was the only real failure.

The events of the fanroom went over very well, especially the Trufan Factor, and even the panels seemed to attract good audiences that weren't entirely composed of inert and unresponsive lumps. The worst thing about fanroom panels is that you get three or four unreconstructed smartasses up there going on and on whilst the audience, trained no doubt to passive receptivity by years of reading science fiction, look on, despite constant enjoinders to intervene. Occasionally someone will lumber to their feet and offer what we might kindly call their thoughts, but the mass remains unmoved. Either this means the panellists are invariably experts who sum up the situation so conclusively no further comment is necessary, or no one really gives a fuck in the first place. In either case I think it's time there was some heavy investigating done. However, occasionally something sticks in the brain.

Like, for example, at one point when I was on the fanzine reviewers panel (close to the end, so I suppose exhaustion had something to do with it) I found myself hovering dangerously on the edge of good-old-daysism. This is a sort of hysterical attack that makes everything one says sound like an assertion that everything was better 'then'. This 'then' has a lot of similarities to 'them' (which can be quite a lot, depending) and needs to be used with care or credibility vanishes like a Harrow student when in danger of buying a drink.

What I was saying, or what I meant to say anyway – it's hard to tell what comes out halfway through a convention – was that back in the middle of the Seventies a whole bunch of people working in fanzines consciously felt, and had their feelings bolstered by the then current preoccupation with fanwriting standards, that what they were doing was not solely entertaining in its own right at the time but was in fact setting out a standard for writing and thinking in fanzines, and because their material can be looked back on with great pleasure today, the implication of the founding of new standards should also be taken as correct. The whole point of these 'standards' (which were, of course, never talked of as such, or ever named) was not to coerce fandom at large to write about any specific things, but to make it clear (as if it really wasn't obvious to anyone with half a brain in the first place) that in writing to a fanzine there was no reason whatever not to apply the same standards as one would (or should) to anything else. That is, for christ's sake make it literate, make it interesting, make the logic hold up, make the characters live, don't assume that it's just a fanzine, so it will be okay to produce some shit

you'd be outraged to see anywhere else. Some basic standards of ability and consideration, that's what it was all about; that and the essential idea that just putting out a fanzine isn't enough, it has to be good as well.

Of course, what went wrong – and the reason why all this now sounds to some of the people in that fanroom audience, and even to me a bit, like good-old-daysism – is that the unexpected happened and the continuity of it all lapsed. No one ever imagined that some great disaster might overtake our complacent little world and civilisation as we knew it might be swept away partially renewed by what might be the lower orders, straggling in the mud, groping Riddley Walker-like towards the truth about time back way back (or are they? *Was there a time back way back?*) and creating their own funny little civilisation that such as I might happen into and discover that, just like that utterly unlikely alternate world where things are different, things are not like they were. Of course the villain of all this is the Worldcon. The great divider of fandom in recent times. It's just as if everything was H-bombed flat and fandom as it was vanished without a trace, creating a gap in which there existed nothing for the new rising sons of fandom to see as good fanzines and gauge their own efforts against – across which I now point and make incoherent noises that sometimes sound embarrassingly like good-old-daysism.

The trouble with all this, though, is that everyone comes to fandom and fanzines as if they've just invented it for themselves, which is not only alarmingly solipsist but also as far as I'm concerned is totally fucking stupid. It would never occur to me to try and do something without checking on how it had been done before, and moreover not doing it at all if I felt I couldn't at least equal the people who'd come before me. Which is why I was outraged when some character at the convention said, more or less, to hell with the past, we don't need to know, man, we do it all our way etc. OK, fair enough, if you can do it *better*, by all means abandon the past (as indeed British fandom did in the early Seventies), and while you're at it kick out any obsolescent ideas and attitudes too, but do it carefully. And remember, just because it's a fanzine doesn't mean it's good or even interesting.

Fortunately I didn't spend all my time in the fanroom locked into that sort of nonsense. Although some other sequences were, essentially, just as farcical.

At the first Yorcon in 1979 there'd been a party in the fanroom that had exceeded everyone's expectations. There'd been some drink, and some

music, and a bunch of people, but for once it all came together quite spontaneously and before anyone really knew what was happening it had turned into a real party. This was as much of a surprise to Ian Williams, who was organiser for that year, as anyone else, and typically enough certain strong-arm measures had to be taken against him to prevent him turning down the music and turning on the lights, and thus fucking everything up completely.

Crazed with desire to emulate this happy accident John Collick in 1981 decides to organise it this time. And not once, but twice. Like fools or suckers looking for free action (or essentially good-hearted and helpful all star-fans – take your choice) Linda and I agree to organise them for him, and provide music and drink. The closer the convention gets the more stilted and artificial the whole idea gets, so boxing clever I get Collick not to put ‘Parties organised by...’ in the programme book. I got enough trouble already; better to do this one undercover, if at all. Of course the whole thing is doomed to failure.

I have this handy-dandy recipe for a fairly foul but strong punch for occasions like these, composed of sherry, vodka, and cider. As we (or at least I) was always late in setting up the drink table there was always a horde of desperate dipsomaniacs at the mixing bowl like dying men as soon as I poured in anything at all. I’m sure no one at all got anything remotely like the correct mixture, most of them going away with cups of neat cider or vodka or sherry or halfassed mixtures thereof. Yet they still returned for more, more desperate with every visit, and they even drank absolutely fucking gallons of Mike Dickinson’s utterly unpalatable homemade wine, which I guess proves that something for nothing is all right whatever it is. Of course everyone pissed off right after all the drink vanished, so Collick’s vision (and ours too, honestly) of happy little fans dancing the night away vanished right quick. The only people who stayed were a bunch of sort of neo-hippies or something who got awkward when we got pissed off with it and turned off the music and split. Good intentions are not enough, and I think this is another point where the essentially public nature of the fanroom this year worked against things. If we’d all been in a real room elsewhere would people have stayed and played, like before? Maybe.

The only time I went into the main programme hall – apart from the disco – was to see who won the Doc Weir Award, and I wished I hadn’t. When Bob Shaw said John Brunner had won it I felt like I’d been hit with a

brick. I wasn't so much astonished as shocked. It just didn't seem possible. There was no way at all I could see any point that could justify his winning it. OK, he certainly does attend British conventions regularly, and takes his place on panels willingly whenever invited; and yes indeed, back in the Fifties he was a fan and put out his own fanzine and so on, but this is fucking 1981, and as far as I can perceive any essentially fannish activity he may involve himself in is so slight or rarefied as to be invisible. This is, remember, a person who on being asked to lend his name to a presupposing list for an Eastercon bid, declined – saying, 'That's *fan* business, isn't it?' In fact I was so taken aback by the whole business I got on my high horse and went about asking people whether they'd voted for him or did they know anyone who had. Virtually no one I asked had voted at all, and all those who had had voted for other people. Indeed the only person who I found that had voted for John Brunner was one Ina Shorrocks, who had, fittingly, herself won the Doc Weir Award in peculiar circumstances (i.e. no one could understand *why*) back in 1976. So what's going on?

Now, to clarify things, I have nothing whatsoever personally against John Brunner, and he has made it quite clear at the time, and in letters to fanzines since, that he was as surprised as anyone else to have taken the Award. And I'm sure he was pleased to accept it in good faith. But as far as I'm concerned the very fact that he got it without a good reason – or any reason at all in a fannish context – just makes the whole affair ridiculous and is probably the sign we all needed to make clear that things like the Doc Weir Award have lived out their time and should be abandoned.

OK, so it's arguable that the Doc Weir Award has any value at all. Few people have any clear idea of what should be considered when casting a vote, and the majority of people at a convention either don't know about it anyway or don't care. According to the official notes the Award is presented to a *fan* 'whose activities have not been previously honoured'. The important bit here is *fan*, which I take to be someone whose activities (whether or not they are to be honoured in any shape or form) take place primarily in the arena of fandom proper, which means fanzines, conventions, or just generally contributing a lot by force of personality to these essentially fannish pursuits. And no matter how much I stretch my credibility I can't fit Brunner into that.

Now, we all know the Doc Weir is a rig-up anyway. The way it goes is that every year little bunches of people get the idea that so-and-so ought to win and they then go about conning and coercing all and sundry into voting

for them. I know this is true because I've done it myself, and I'm sure it was done *on my behalf* when I won in 1978. Note that, *on my behalf*. No one has ever canvassed votes for themselves, or proposed themselves for the Award – it's always done by a group or person on behalf of someone else, who is always kept as much in ignorance as possible. This, in fact, is the only way the thing can continue. Without these little pressure groups no one would ever remember to vote. Winning depends at least as much on how many people look favourably on you as much as what a hot-shit fanac artist you are. The real point is, though, that in every case since the beginning in 1963 the recipients, with the signal exceptions of Ina Shorrock and John Brunner, have actually been real live active fans who had, either during the year immediately previous, or for a substantial period of time beforehand, done notable and interesting things within the context of fandom at large, and have, in most cases, continued to do so ever since.

What I'm getting at here is that the Award isn't just another popularity poll or award for long service, or a prize for con-attendance. And it's for a *fan*. And, really, it has to be for someone who, when winning it, can actually be pleased to get it because they know, in their hearts, that they deserve it, that they have done things in and for fandom that deserve a bit of praise in public.

This year all these notions seem to have been abandoned, and as far as I'm concerned if no one any longer knows or cares about the real point of the Award (which becomes increasingly likely), rather than just let it peter out into something meaningless we ought to junk the whole damn thing completely.

Fandom has probably outgrown it all anyway.

Novelty! Excitement!! Innovation!!!

from *Brand New Attitude*, Frank's APA, October 1983

Wow, you know, this is really dramaaatic, man! Here I am just about to do my first ever fanzine (on photocopy, anyway) and the whole, like, *plasticity* of the medium is just crying out to be exploited (or do I mean abused?).

No more that good old safe quarto; we're onto *new, modern, dynamic* things here now. Just think, at any time the print could go in all kinds of different directions, be overlaid to the point of illegibility with pictures cut out of magazines, or just fade gently away into oblivion because I've run out of toner for the machine.

Actually I'm far too old and farty for that sort of stuff. Give me straight lines of print that don't take too much following and I'm OK. It's trouble enough working out what people are on about under the best possible circumstances, never mind when there's a sort of graphic guerrilla war going on at the same time. I do feel some slight compulsion towards the pictorial, though, and I even went so far as to search out the old sheets of Letraset I bought back in 1969 for my never-to-be-released super-fanzine *New Pembrokeshire Review*, which as Robert Hansen has kindly pointed out no longer needs any consideration as John Owen is doing it all OK with *Crystal Ship*. The trouble is that my creative visual imagination extends about as far as having sexual fantasies – and even they are about people I actually know – and whilst I think I know what makes for good art and graphic design I can't actually *do* it myself. Given that slight difficulty I was quite pleased to find myself writing this at the very last minute with no time at all for clever shit like picture and headings. I'm kind of sorry about that, because it does rather deny the advantages of photocopying, and I certainly will try a little harder next time, despite the heavy sarcasm of the first few paragraphs above.

It does all seem rather strange to be typing this onto paper rather than duplicator stencil though, but at the moment I'm quite happy to be typing it at all.

I have had, you see, a block. A huge lumpen monolithic obstacle between me and my typing fingers. I just couldn't get down and with doing

this at all. I even took two days off sick last week to get some serious fanning done, but all I did was lie on the floor in the living room and listen to records and play with our new Teletext receiver (which is really neat and every home should have one). I was beginning to think of *Frank* as the sort of lodger everyone could do without. The very idea of writing anything sent me into a blank paralysis, and the more Linda said useful things like ‘Just get in there and do something!’ the less I wanted to do it. I got sort of hysterical towards the end, and would leap up and rush into the bookroom and type a few lines only to rip them from the machine and drop them into the wastebasket in one practised movement. It began to get really depressing. I know it is about two-and-a-half years since the last time I wrote anything more creative than my name on a cheque, but that was ridiculous. Eventually, though, I took the Queen of the Women’s Periodical’s advice and started just typing names and addresses and all that dolesome drudgery. And it all came back. Fluency! Staccato sentences! Hanging clauses! Lost participles! All the old ungrammatical tricks of my fanwriting style. I was actually able to put words in a line once more. The only problem left now is to find some way of making them mean something. Shit.

I was There on October 22nd

from *Not Jumping But Falling, Frank's APA*, November
1983

So was Linda, because she actually belongs to CND, and so was Rob Hansen, who was sick of people telling him if he'd didn't believe in nuclear weapons why didn't he stand up and be counted, or whatever the current jargon is. I was there because Michael Heseltine really pissed me off with his patronising dismissal of the anti-nuclear movement, and because I really think nuclear weapons are astonishingly dangerous and no use at all as any kind of rational national defence not fundamentally based on a sort of 'I'll shoot the nigger' suicidal lunacy.

So there I was, emerging from Blackfriars station to trudge along with hundreds of thousands of others. Concerned suburbanites, housewife groups, students, determined trade unionists, flying squads from the more out-of-touch political fringes, they were all there. Looking like, well, concerned suburbanites, students, loonies, and so on. I found it very hard indeed to penetrate past the tangible naiveté of it all even for a moment. It was almost as if none of these people had much idea of the real implications of what they were doing other than on the simple terms of atom bombs being bad medicine to be warded off by some sort of colourful ritual. I looked around as we wandered up and down the throngs waiting at the start line for something I could realistically attach myself to, like maybe some outfit like Frank Barnaby's Just Defence, or at least something that looked as if it was serious and not play-acting. In vain. As we waited for almost two hours the only time I felt myself moved at all was when a small woman near us played the bagpipes; extraordinarily martial-sounding for that context, and maybe that's why it brought a bit of thump to my heart. You see, the whole business, from the aimless milling-around of the start to the tacky showbusiness of the speechifying at the end was just too carnival for me altogether. This was *fucking serious business* and there were all these loonies in silly costumes carrying flags and thinking in slogans and waving cardboard missiles and all this fucking *junk* and we're supposed to be making some sort of serious *point* goddammit.

Eventually we trailed off, and clearly there were a hell of a lot of people

even though at times the flow got so thin that at some points amongst the canyons of Whitehall there were more police lining the pavements than marchers passing in front of them. Nothing at all happened except for a brief encounter with some rightist headcases at the top of a building opposite the Whitehall theatre, and we eventually found ourselves in Hyde Park. When I saw all the people settling down for a picnic with their quiche and bottles of Evian water on the one hand and on the other the church groups full of knee-jerk jerks with their faces painted I knew this was too much altogether. Then we were told how wonderful we all were by Joan Ruddock and Bruce Kent, and generally reminded of all the things we should have already known and believed in anyway or we wouldn't have spent the time and money getting there in the first place. At least at rock concerts all that ego-stroking is honest in some sort or sticky showbiz way, but in this context it just seemed, well, if not *evil*, then simply *wrong*.

I don't think things like this should be taken lightly. This is a very dangerous time in world history and it may be our last. There isn't any room for fun in anti-nuclear demonstration; I believe that three thousand people walking silent and in close ranks through London would be more disconcerting and ominous to those in control than this sort of happy rabble would ever be. I don't believe it should be too passive either. When faced with a bunch of Thatcherite creeps bombarding me with taunts and sneers about being a coward or a gullible dupe of the Kremlin, or being unpatriotic (in the best sense) my initial feelings were to storm up the building and kick the shit out of them and then find out who's the defeatist or coward around town. The fact that they are clearly as dimwitted and misled from an opposite direction as those they were so joyfully abusing is no consolation. They have a sort of moral rectitude on their side that the wishy-washy liberalism of the peace-marchers just couldn't measure up to. I may not want nuclear weapons but I'm not taking any shit from anybody.

And why for christ's sake don't they just erect a line of turnstiles at the endpoint of the march so everyone can file through, make their point, and then piss off home without the tiresome obligation of listening to hackneyed exhortations and third-rate entertainment? *And* there'd be no argument about the numbers.

No Direction Home

Back to the beginning of this issue, and nuclear weapons. Obviously on the one hand we shouldn't have them, and there's a substantial case to be made for the fact they don't contribute one iota to national security, but I always have this tiny little sliver of doubt about it all. There's always that horrible Thatcherite concept of 'Nuclear Blackmail' hanging around. No matter how well tooled up or committed our conventional forces might be, how could we cope with an enemy who simply said something like If You Don't Do As We Say Right Now We Drop The Big One? Clearly, it might not make any difference in the end whether or not we could bring out our own Big One as if it came to an exchange both sides would be eating shit for the next two hundred years, but my reasoning runs more along the lines of *revenge*. Clearly it doesn't actually matter a damn if given the fact that we're blasted back to bedrock we either can or can't deal out a portion of the same to our enemy. It won't make our lot any easier to abolish, say, Leningrad or wherever. But I occasionally find myself thinking that being completely unable to retaliate in kind makes the opposition's job easier, cuts down the chances they have to figure before letting go the rockets.

What I have in mind, really, is nothing so wild and wonderful as a 'deterrent' force, because by its very virtue of being something that can match the opposition it can easily be construed as an 'aggressive' force. What appeals to me is something that by its very nature is so designed to be simply a revenge weapon. This immediately puts it all into a different class altogether. No need any more for complex, accurate, and expensive delivery systems. If all you intend doing is to provide the means to put real bad hurt onto someone it's as well to do it with a club as a rapier. All we'd need, literally, are the bombs – of which we have plenty right now, quite ample for the purpose to which they need be put, and the means to deliver them. And as far as that goes strapping them onto any aircraft that can actually make it to the target is as good a way as any. There's no need to be too complex about this, no absolute necessity for hi-tech boxes and gear to do anything other than keep on going and avoid what the pilot can see coming at him. After all what's his worry, the only reason he's up there on this one-way trip at all is because there's nothing left to come back to. Remember, we're not doing this *first*, we're doing it after all else has failed, and our asses have already been fried.

It's probably perverse of me, but I see a much higher level of nobility and sense of purpose in the vision of a scratch force of RAF and civil jets

winging it one-way from a ruined country on an admittedly futile mission of revenge than I do in all the bullshit, evasions, and lies that people like Heseltine, Thatcher and Reagan and their appalling henchmen expect us to accept unquestioningly. I'm not against defence; I'm not prepared to believe we will not be attacked (I am prepared to believe the attack could come from any direction), but I just do believe that the way these people are going about preserving what they endlessly call our liberty is incredibly fucking dangerous and ought to be stopped right now.

What I really want to know, though, is where will all these people be in the aftermath of any attack? And how do I get there, with my weapons, to see they get what they deserve?

Search the House for Dracula

from *Rastus Johnson's Cakewalk* #7, October 1994

Over the last few months I've read a lot of back issues of fanzines. This has been a wonderful thing in itself, but has also made evident a continuous background susurrations like the regular flushing of a toilet, coming to a climax of sorts on a roughly biennial round; Where is Fandom's New Blood, it goes, Fandom is Moribund, Fandom isn't as Good as it Was and so on and so forth in sepulchral tones of doom and despair that echo until the next fascinating new fan of genuine wit, warmth and talent happens as much by accident as design onto centre stage. And suddenly everyone is bathed in golden light once more, the gafiates reactivate, the fanzines flower, and everything is again wonderful, with the clouds white and the sky blue over Trufandom, Willis as ever in his heaven, guardian angels Clarke, White, Shaw, Boggs and Moomaw sturdily beside him.

It is indeed the case. I have recently read hundreds of fanzines covering the Thirties to the Sixties, great times off and on for both SF and fandom, and I kid you not, it sometimes seems like every fortnight some damn idiot has got his foot caught in a bell-rope and started tolling the knell of doom. Great lord amighty, I realised with a genuine shock, even I was doing it about this time last year after having looked vaguely around the Novacon and seen no fresh-faced neofans scurrying about clutching their cruddy firstishs and mocking their elders. Of course, that was before I looked twice and realised that talents like Bridget Hardcastle, Mike Siddall and Jackie McRobert had already sneaked onto the deck of the flying bomb and were producing all sorts of stuff fit to stand with much of the best that fandom has ever been capable of.

And what the hell is the point of worrying about the shortage of particularly young fans anyway? In a recent letter to *Attitude* Pembroke's greatest living fanwriter David Redd warns that teenagers will not be flocking in droves to either that fanzine or *RJC* – as if they did. There has always been an influx of young fans, but handfuls rather than droves, no more or less than you might ever expect to take an interest in fanzine fandom then, now or in the future. And not many of them have been teenagers anyway; I was once the youngest of my time at seventeen, but the

usual age of a ‘young fan’ has been somewhere around late teens to early twenties. It is also the case that most young – under twenty – fans in Britain (things have been dramatically different in the USA) have rarely produced anything worth a damn, and have been more notable for the noise of their passing rather than its legacy (we are all guilty). Indeed, there’s a good case to be made that the very best, the most admirable in all senses, fan activity has been the product of people who were comparatively mature in both years and tastes when they entered into their fan career. As evinced by David Redd his own self.

Anyway, as we age we automatically think of the young as being a great deal younger than ourselves; after all we’ve still got the interests and involvements we had so we’re obviously not old, and therefore the young must be a great deal younger indeed. Babies, virtually, these days. All is relative, and hallucinatory. There’s no point in fretting on about whether email or virtual reality or even virtual fandom will supersede fanzines any more than agonising over whether the helicopter will replace the bicycle; their similarity is superficial, each provides for different needs and temperaments and nourishes varying spirits. Enough potential fans will find what is for them within fanzine fandom; they will hear those little voices echo down the decades through the hektoid, mimeod, or laser-printed pages, they will experience that startling thrill of contact with the home planet, hear the beep of the beacon, know that there’s something special and specific here for the taking. They’ll be making it all right, in their own time.

So perhaps we should confine our worries to the actual numbers of incomers rather than their relative ages? Well, maybe not worth the bother after all – all we really need is a few individuals (like those named above) of talent and ability to remind the rest of us who have been around for years and are in danger of being jaded, losing our edge, and forgetting the genuine wonderfulness of fandom, just what it is really all for and about. Just a few of them every couple of years, a natural counterbalance to the inevitable contempt that familiarity brings in all cases. The more the better of course, but a few is enough.

There’s a big error here too in assuming there ever were many newcomers to fandom in any given time period. Remember, in considering active fanzine fandom we’re talking about quite small numbers of persons anyway, maybe three or four hundred worldwide. A ten percent influx worldwide would be of the order of 35 people per year; if you assume British

fanzine fandom to be around 100 people (the basic domestic mailing-list of the average fanzine) that's just ten new people a year average. Of course you can do all your finger flapping and say there's only been so-and-so and himandher since last Eastercon and that doesn't add up to ten does it so where are the rest then, but that's inconsequential as the losses are at a lower rate overall than the replacements. It's a turnover rate that certainly would not cause the collapse of morale in a frontline combat unit; it might be a Zero Population Growth scenario but bloody hell we're skiffy fans with an eye to that sort of futurian society and everything's OK, keep calm. Of course the numbers of both established fans and newcomers look pretty sick compared to the 10,000 people who've never heard of Walter Willis, never mind Rob Hansen, and are waiting at the burying ground with handfuls of dirt to throw on fanzine fandom's grave, but who cares? What we're up to is no more their concern than their activities are aimed at us. It is not our fault that they're not attracted; it is not our duty to impress them, though if they find our doings interesting then all well and good. More people would be nice, but not essential.

We're in serious danger here of hypnotising ourselves with this numbers game into thinking we're a diminishing and endangered part of the science fiction community when in fact nothing of the sort is actually happening; yes, we are obviously a smaller part of the whole than we once were but that's just because the whole has enlarged so much. Once we were 90% or more of the entire SF fan community – a fact that some people are too young, too dumb, or too politically motivated to accept – but, as small a proportion overall as we are now, we're still occupying much the same ground as ever. We ought to get right and realise that fanzine fandom – which is largely old-fashioned generalist fandom with interests in comics, films, television, books and magazines – is a definite entity within its own right and should not intellectually, emotionally or physically have to be parasitic on the body of any other element of SF fandom in the large sense as it exists today.

If all the other elements of fandom that exist now were to vanish overnight, nothing at all would change from our standpoint – except perhaps we wouldn't have to be fucking endlessly justifying ourselves and could get on with running conventions and putting out fanzines by and for ourselves without having to put up with a load of crap from people who resent us for having been here in the first place but will still condemn us for elitism and wall-building if we go off and run our own business elsewhere.

So perhaps we should worry solely then about how new personnel arrive? There absolutely have to be ways that science fiction readers can find out about fanzine fandom. Now we're on more contested terrain. It appears to be that one of the more recent gateways into active fanzine fandom, the fanroom, has let us all down more than somewhat over the last few years. Whether this is because convention committees don't care enough to ensure that the right people do the job for the right reasons (it is not a little prison to keep those irritating fannish fans out of the way) or that the right people don't want to do it, or incredibly perhaps there are no right people available, I am presently unsure. Bloody hell, it is not that hard a task, given a decent room, a small budget, and space in convention literature for announcements. There's something funny going on here, as I have said before, but I doubt that the truth will out, for there are sins to be hidden, advantages to be taken, and obfuscation is the order of the day.

There are people who might in other conditions be called quislings or fifth-columnists who suggest that the fanroom is an unnecessary and obsolete thing. To be fair they're probably right if it does not fulfil its mission requirement. But if the fanroom in its proper incarnation as an information bureau, meeting place and gateway is discarded, then the only certain development will be even more pissing and moaning from the general populace about how hard it is to find out about fannish fandom and fanzines with attendant conspiracy theories about how it is All Being Kept Hidden and on endlessly on.

Once upon a time people who joined the BSFA would write off for fanzines, but somehow that doesn't seem to happen much; virtually no one reports requests for their fanzines after BSFA reviews – mind you, in my own experience I've had damn little in the way of requests resulting from highly laudatory reviews in leading fanzines, so if persons already familiar with fandom can't be bothered to send off a SAE why should we expect anyone else to? There's a problem here; are fans who are already *au fait* somehow reluctant to ask for a fanzine that they somehow think they should have been sent already? Too cool to ask, maybe. Ask and it shall be given. That's what I had to do when I was a baby fan and it's made me the man I am today, har har. As to why more or less complete neophytes don't respond to, for example, *Matrix* write-ups is another problem altogether. I don't know. Maybe they just don't care.

Search the Sewers for Harry Lime

from *Rastus Johnson's Cakewalk* #7, October 1994

We here in fandom today have got two mutually incompatible ideas in our heads at once. One is that both science fiction and fandom, together and separately, are one-all all-one unitary wholes, with everyone interested in a part being potentially interested in the whole. The other is that there are many forms of science fiction, and as many forms of science fiction fandom, and the whole business has now got so large and diffuse that there is no reason for a devotee of one element of it to give so much as a brass damned-thing for any of the others. The first proposition is highly arguable, but the second is obviously true; even within the sector-within-the-whole of written-SF you'll find there are people who, although professing great enthusiasm for science fiction, will barely recognise a SF magazine other than *Interzone* and who would treat an enthusiasm for *Wonder Stories* with disbelief verging on outright contempt. And there are those indeed whose enthusiasm for such classics as David H Keller's *The Yeast Men* – a startling foreshadowing of Philip George Chadwick's epic novel *The Death Guard* – would lead them to see anything published since 1950 as arriviste claptrap.

We've got to get to grips with the idea that, just as there's no reason these days to assume that any two random persons' ideas of what is 'science fiction' are the same, there's equally no reason to assume that any two fans' ideas of what 'fandom' is should be any more congruent. It seems to me that in a world where all sorts of SF, sci-fi and skiffy can in the large sense be accepted as SF then we have to assume that any enthusiast of any element of these or any activity derived from them is a 'fan'. OK, that's all well and good provided we also think this is intrinsically a marvellous thing. Now, I don't think all aspects of SF are either interesting or worthwhile and I have my sphere of interest and others have theirs. I am not especially interested in convincing others that my view of SF is any more right or valuable than theirs, though I will certainly try to demonstrate that my SF follows on from a direct line of descent from ur-SF, the romances of Wells and Verne, and the SF magazines that were inspired by them. This is a problem only in as much as it

is exclusive of certain subgenres, and that in itself is a problem only in as much as adherents of those subgenres feel rejected by bastards like me who aren't especially interested in the television manifestations of SF (a particular problem for me as I am both an enthusiast of television and science fiction and I see almost all TV-SF as usually bad television and worse SF).

I can sympathise with them, coming as I do from probably the last generation of persons to whom an interest in that crazy Buck Rogers stuff was automatically stigmatising, but there's no getting away from the truth that nowadays SF imagery is common as dirt and if you use the widest catch-all possible for being a SF fan that makes absolutely fucking millions of them now. We're in danger of accepting a lowest common denominator viewpoint of science fiction caused by the extraordinary proliferation of SF imagery in every damned nook and cranny of contemporary culture; ideas and concepts that thirty years ago would have been found only in hard-to-get Ace paperbacks or badly distributed magazines are now part of the cliché vocabulary of television and literature. Once upon a time we'd have dreamed of this as a glorious day, but would never have realised that the price of that heaven on earth would be people whose sole interest would be the equivalent of Jack Gaughan's superficially attractive but endlessly repetitive artwork, or who thought the formula adventures of Captain Future the absolute acme of scientific endeavour.

I don't yearn for the good old days when it was the few of Us against the teeming Them and we had a Knowledge that they did not; in fact I still think, as I did twenty-five years ago, that it would be a wonderful thing if more people actually contacted and absorbed the true wonderment and genuinely consciousness-expanding power of good science fiction. SF imagery has become popular certainly, but, if this is not too esoteric, I would refer the reader to the back cover of many issues of *Galaxy* magazine from the early Fifties with its little Bat Durston saga.

The problem is that the trad SF fans are stuck, and it's probably our own fault, with being the umbrella organisation that covers all of these SF offshoots. The Eastercon, for example, is now compromised to a large degree into catering for them. Personally I blame the Scottish fans for this; they were the first to make an issue of bigger-and-betterism, the very scale and expense of their plans making it necessary to draw in more and more sideshows – media, gaming and so on – to get the money to pay for them, and of course the more things you put in the more money you need to raise and the more

people you've got to attract and so on and on. This is a roundabout that does not stop.

The problem for the traditional fans, and this includes fanzine fandom, is that we're shot if we run and cut if we stand. If we simply say, oh the hell with it, there's nothing for us at the big conventions any more, and go off and do our own thing – like for example Mexicon, a science fiction convention of the old school, concentrating on books, which drew much of its membership from fanzine fans because they are almost by definition more interested in the written forms of SF than the others – then we're condemned as elitist and exclusive because we deliberately run a convention which just like perhaps a *Blake's Seven* convention concentrates entirely on part of the enormous science fiction world. (What Mexicons did was state clearly what would *not* be part of the convention's remit, so as to avoid disappointing persons who came expecting something different; no person or group was ever banned or turned away from the Mexicon. Some people apparently believed that they were banned from the Mexicon simply because the convention did not offer media, games, or fantasy programming. This seems paranoid verging on the outright crazy; it wouldn't strike me I was barred from a *Babylon Five* convention because it offered nothing I'm interested in.)

Right then, leaping dramatically headlong into the past of this discourse, why should an Eastercon (or Worldcon) provide space and probably funding for fanzine fans to set up and run a fanroom? Well, for a start because the event is for better or worse the general convention of the British SF world, and a fanzine-fans facility is another special interest of the type that would be catered for without a second thought if it were *Space 1999* or *Jet-Ace Logan* fandom (to go from the ridiculous to the sublime). It should also do it because the historical foundations of science fiction fandom as a whole rest on the antecedents of today's fanzine fans. OK, lots of people don't want to know about this, and all right why should they; history began this morning, nothing before the first screening of *Star Trek* matters a damn, fanzines are just full of people writing and so on. Well, that's fine, forget all that then; but if I join an Eastercon what am I getting, and how much of my membership fee is going on some person or event I have no concern for and less interest in? Or is that the sort of question that shouldn't be asked?

The answer might well be to consciously discard the whole concept of the fanzine fans being the descendants of the generalist fans of the past, and accept that there's nothing but the most superficial commonality between us

and the members of any other special interest fangroup. This will be bad in that the links with the past, with the actual history and evolution of the SF fan microcosm, will be severed, probably terminally. This might be a tragedy, but necessary, like atom-bombing London in order to destroy both the Conservative party and that hideous Blair fellow in one fell swoop. Free of the preconceptions that ride with it, we'd simply be able to go about our own business, organise our own conventions, claim time and space at Eastercons along with all the other special interest groups. Stop acting as if we had something the others didn't. OK, I know a lot of individuals will be saying here that this is a total load, and they never thought that fanzine fans ever had any historical responsibilities in the first place. But examine the idea and yourselves: even if we, the fanzine fans, never articulated the idea ourselves, a lot of the other fandoms acted as if we had; they perceived the reality of the matter, that the fanzine fans – the generalists, the written science fiction people – stood in direct line of descent from the Beginning of the Science Fiction League and all those fans from the Thirties and Forties who by trial and error founded the ideas of fanzines and conventions. Everybody knows that, whether they admit it or not. The trouble is that it's bringing us more damned grief than it's worth these days.

Frankly, I despair; in a macro sense I have in recent years come close to the conclusion that the criminal exploitation of both the planet and all its life by mankind should be allowed to continue unhindered, indeed encouraged and unregulated, possibly spurred along by a new breed of eco-terrorist that actively encourages oil-spills, toxic waste dumps, deforestation, and uncontrolled genetic tinkering. Only that way will the inevitable holocaust be hastened and the criminals – us – swept from the planet. The innocent of all species will suffer and die too, but that's too bad and anyway it always has been so. The result, a planet that will over time return to a natural balance, different but better, would be worth the period of maximum discomfort. I feel much the same about the divisions within fandom. Not that everything should be swept away, but that we fanzine fans should simply all shut up about it, abandon any overt presence at general interest conventions, go about our own business with our own smaller conventions and meetings, and let individuals percolate in as and when they can. This solution demands that the rest of fandom equally shut up about the nasty exclusive and elitist fannish fans; I'm tired of this no-win situation where if we go about our own business we're exclusive and if we demand a place at the table (the table we built,

moreover!) we're accused of trying to get something we don't deserve. Shit on it all. I'm beginning to take an extreme view on this.

Fannish Prozines

posted to Memoryhole elist, 29 October 2001

On Sat, 27 Oct 2001, Nigel Rowe wrote:

In an effort to continue the original discussion about how Greg (and I) thought *Authentic* was a fun prozine with a variety of fan related content, I'll pose the question: What were the good prozines from the viewpoint of them interacting and documenting fannish endeavour?

On a slightly oblique line (some would say wildly tangential, and I bet I could tell you who one of them would be) has anyone else had my peculiar relationship with *Interzone*? Oh come on, *Interzone*, British SF magazine, published in Brighton, David Pringle, oh bloody hell, *you know...*

Anyway, there's been *Interzone* now for years. Longer than I can remember and I was virtually there when it was born. Well, I remember having a detailed conversation about the ins and outs of starting a new British SF magazine with David Pringle in his back room in Leeds. Which goes to show how long ago it was, Pringle in Leeds, associating with fans...!

Anyway, at the time (and we're in the turn of the Seventies here) I'd been deeply in thought about the hows and whys of starting a small publishing outfit to bring back Lost Classics of SciFi into the hearts and minds of people born since 1960. I actually can't recall a great deal about it now but it all seemed to revolve around the idea that getting the reprint rights would be fairly cheap (as indeed it has proved since then) and printing shortish runs costs hardly anything does it, the only problem being distribution. Amazingly I never solved that one no matter how many long bus rides I took to contemplate it, so nothing ever happened. As usual; and then Malcolm Edwards stole the idea.

I was also fascinated with the idea of a new British SF magazine, a cross between *Vargo Statten* and *Ambit*, no, no, I mean a bit like *F&SF* and *New Worlds* in tone, but with more departments. Kind of like *F&SF* is now, as a matter of fact (did Gordon Van Gelder ever go to any British conventions, or travel on the 65 bus through Ealing, one wonders...). It all seemed quite sensible, fairly small print-run, simple but sophisticated layout, departments

full of real information, a letter column worth a damn, and the kind of short fiction I wanted to read myself. Wouldn't have made a dime, but could have covered its costs, maybe.

Somehow I didn't entirely recognise *Interzone* when it appeared later, born in flames. (I must have been a bit dense then because I remember saying something like 'Interzone? That's a crap title...' and me a Big William Burroughs fan...). Maybe because although there were fans involved they weren't really my kind of fans. All Leeds people. There were people like John Clute along as well ('I don't need fandom, I already have a social life') which didn't charm me much. But, that being said, the first few issues were rather attractive. I particularly liked the covers – non-representational, blocks of colour, looked like something grown-ups would pick up. And some of the fiction was good too – Malcolm Edwards's short story... which I have momentarily forgotten the title of... still sticks on my list of Best Shorts of all time.

But although I kept buying it I read it less and less. And the covers, dear me... OK, it may be a damned sight cheaper to get reprint rights for crap paperback art, but it's not an attractive characteristic. Eventually I never read it at all, and if Catherine hadn't bought a Lifetime Subscription during a moment of both financial stability and solidarity with British science fiction I'd never have seen a copy since about 198-whatever.

It got so it would show up here and be lucky to get taken out of its envelope. Even then just a look at what the *Ansible* column had been edited down to for *Interzone* readers would suffice, with possibly the frequent observation of 'Fucking hell, they've *still* got that pompous showoff Nick Lowe doing film reviews!'

There were, though, brief moments of activity with regard to *Interzone*; I once had an acrimonious email correspondence with Pringy-poo (as he used to be known back in the good old days when he was a fan and having a long-term affair with Christine Atkinson) about why the hell *Interzone* invariably cut all mentions of fan affairs from the version of *Ansible* it printed – it turned out rather to my surprise that it was DRL who provided the adulterated version, but no doubt based his editorial snippage on Pringle's strongly expressed viewpoint that *Interzone* readers were *not* fans and therefore *not interested* in who Redd Boggs was and why it was a sad thing he was dead.

Well, I guess making decisions like that is what an editor is for – one should, of course, choose the party line of one's magazine and stick to it. It

just seemed to me that – given the fact that *Interzone* sprang from fans, was financed in its initial stages by fan money (one of the Yorcons; and what a *load* of ag that created too, I can remind you!), and to a certain extent owed its existence to British and hence international fandom – then at least *some* fucking nod of recognition of all this would be appropriate, even if all it were was a willingness to provide the readership with the occasional bit of information that hinted that there was such a thing as fandom and it might conceivably be interesting. However, all the evidence is that Pringle is quite clear about his determination to ensure that no evidence of either the magazine's or his own connections with fandom is in public view; and in fact he goes to some lengths to keep this particular veil drawn.

Which is sad. As not long ago I realised that *Interzone* was a fanzine. Oh, OK, its rationale is that it publishes fiction, everyone knows that, and it's published some rather outstanding stuff too (Hail Sheena, viva SRB!) but come on, look at the rest of it – I mean where do you see so much book commentary, so much stuff on films and TV, so many readers' letters talking about SF? This isn't a fucking issue of *Analog* we've got here. This is quite possibly one of the best sf-lit fanzines being published today, certainly the most frequent. And regular.

Quite apart from that its circulation is not enormously larger than some fanzines (I mean, it's never been eligible for 'Best Prozine', has it?) and it's pretty clear from the tone of the thing that it's a fanzine – quite apart from the heavy dependence on departments, just look at the art – I mean, you only get art that crappy in fanzines! Even most of the fiction is dire, the sort of stuff that any fanzine editor would reject. OK, it does publish Baxter and Barry Bayley, but then Baxter's that sort of guy and who else will publish Barry?

Anyway anyway, since I realised what it really was I've developed quite a soft spot in my head for *Interzone*. I still think Nick Lowe is a berk, and that Pringle avoids commitment to anything but himself, but say what you like *Interzone* is *fannish*.

Little Dog Gone – A Christmas Presence

posted to Wegenheim elist, 14 January 2004

It wasn't Happy Christmas. That wasn't the first thing we said to each other, but we both woke up with the same thing on our minds. Catherine said it first, because as usual she'd had the Little Voices of the World Service talking to her all night. There's been no signal from *Beagle*, she said. And that was going to have been my first question. Oh well, we decided, avoiding talking about it, we can't give up hope yet.

The Christmas period proceeded, and so did the listening watch for the *Beagle* lander, but still no response. We were enormously excited when it was announced that the Jodrell Bank radio-telescope was to be focused on it. Jodrell Bank! Massively symbolic of the white heat of British technology of the Fifties and Sixties, a truly science-fictional part of our youth. How perfect could it have been if Jodrell Bank, the real Big Dish, could have picked up the signal from *Beagle* when all else had failed?

We'd been following the efforts of the charismatic Colin Pillinger and his gang for years, as in the face of general governmental and public apathy and disinterest they'd built and finally launched, on a European Space Agency rocket, the first ever serious British space probe – to Mars, that superbly Baxterian planet. There were so many times we'd seen the rehearsals and the animations, and followed how it was going to do This and then That, it seemed almost a foregone conclusion that after the long and uneventful journey – capped with that genuinely stunning bit of video from Mars Express as the *Beagle* capsule detached for the final drop (only a million kilometres, nothing at all) – it would in fact arrive, safe, and sturdily enter into its tasks.

But it wasn't only the apparent lack of signals that boded ill; we had been given, as a genuinely surprising Christmas gift by Mark and Claire, an excellent book entitled *Backroom Boys* by Francis Spufford, a celebration of some aspects of British Big Science and engineering since the Second World War, which of course I read backwards. The final section is the *Beagle 2* story, as inspiring and sad a tale as you could imagine if you, like me, believe

that properly funded space exploration is one of the things any advanced society (and I take the slight liberty of including the United Kingdom in that small company) should be engaged in. But it was the final paragraph that was both touching and foreboding:

From here on, one of two things will happen. It may well be that something goes wrong. There are enough candidates, if you consider the flowchart of events that has to be negotiated. If any element in the logic of the descent fails, they all fail. Then, the whole investment of time and tenacity in *Beagle* will go hurling on down, unbraked or inadequately braked, to shatter on the rocks of Isidis, to end in a brief plume of dust. In that case, all that the scientists waiting with fingers crossed in Milton Keynes will ever hear is silence. Or it may be that the pilot 'chute will stream out cleanly, and impart just its calculated increment of drag before tugging free; and the main 'chute will flower out just as it should, as the explosive bolts fire to detach the heatshield and the top cover. Then, in sudden hush, *Beagle* will be hanging beneath a wide canopy, closing with the ground at only 60 kilometres per hour, so slowly compared to the first mad rush of the fall that it seems to halt altogether, and to be floating there like thistledown, in the thin high whistling of the Martian breeze, while the red lines and planes of a new world wheel by below. Down it will glide, down until the ridges on the horizon stand higher than it is, down and down onto the soil of Isidis. About two hundred metres up, a unique lightweight altimeter in the lower skin of the craft will bounce a radar pulse off the ground, and get an answer it likes. The airbags will puff up to beachball fatness, and *Beagle* will hit the cinnamon sands with an elastic bounce. A wild arc back into the air; a smaller hop; a slow roll down a gentle incline; standstill. A pause. The bags disengage. *Beagle's* shell is unharmed. Cautiously, its lid opens. A British suitcase is on Mars.

Of course the days wore on and nothing happened. Even Jodrell Bank went back to its workaday tasks, picking up pieces of the jigsaw of the Universe. We'll never know – for a while anyway – whether *Beagle* crashed, failed, fell down a hole, or whether there's really something funny going on up there. I kept thinking – where's the *Spirit* rover going to be, can it actually go and

take a look? But I guess that was expecting a bit much...

By the time the first 2004 issue of *New Scientist* came out things had gone from bad to worse – even the best and brightest hopes were gone. Mission manager Mark Sims was quoted as saying: ‘That’s the worst thing – *Beagle* could be sat quite happily working on the surface of Mars, but for some reason we don’t understand it is not talking to us. In the ideal world, if we’d got another 5 kilos, we could have put on a beacon or a blackbox recorder, but Europe didn’t have the resources.’

I know it is probably wrong in some fundamental way – that I actually don’t care about – to anthropomorphise these little machines the way I do, but I do, and happily. I am enormously thrilled at the way *Voyager* has persisted long after anyone expected it to have failed, and is even now on the very edge of the Solar System, and will soon be entering into true Interstellar Space. I defy anyone not to be exalted by that – if they’re not they’re really quite worthless, as empathic human beings and as science fiction fans. And I equally find it hard not to feel an enormous sense of loss about *Beagle*, out there on its own, maybe.

It is dangerous and bad, we are told by our self-appointed cultural superiors, to attribute what are assumed to be uniquely human emotions and reactions to non-human animals, and worse to do so to machines – mere constructs. But in a world full of ‘human beings’ who would – frequently it seems voluntarily – fail any variant of the Voight-Kampff test it is hard not to. Which is why I still, beyond hope now, wish *Beagle* well, just in case.

I hope, really, that one day – in my lifetime – one of us will trudge across that Martian landscape and find that ‘British suitcase’, or maybe a scattering of wreckage spread across a Martian plain; perhaps a battered and dusty box that never turned on right, or maybe even a machine that simply sat out of sight at the bottom of an unsuspected hole, carrying out all its tasks, telling its story with cheerful regularity, but blocked from us by a chunk of the Martian landscape it had come to investigate. It’ll be a part of the recent past, I hope, and that many of us here today will see the pictures and hear the end of the tale.

Fannish

posted to Wegenheim elist, 30 September 2004

Fannish. Yes, that's me. Fan of quite a lot of things actually, including, increasingly, indo-jazz.

Yes, we're back here in the cultural byways of MFP albums and possibly-dodgy raga-jazz fusion stuff from the 1960s.

Remember I mentioned an outfit called (unlikely as it seems) the Indo-British Ensemble and their wholly unlikely Music For Pleasure issue *Curried Jazz*? Well, I followed up a hint from Dave Wood and this week got possession of a nice nearly-mint copy of the LP. Which is actually surprisingly good. Oh OK, you could probably make a case for it being neither fish nor fowl, and maybe not a very good example of fosh either, but dammit I like it – it's tuneful, interesting, and nice to listen to. It makes me happy. And it's kinda funky too. And certainly if you like any of the John Mayer/Joe Harriott Indo-Jazz Fusions sets you would learn to love this one.

I'd be happy to provide a CD dub to anyone who wants it. But you should bear in mind that one of my favourite LPS is the London Jazz Four's *Take A New Look At The Beatles*, and we know how well that one went down among you...

And talking of favourites and old friends, I also got my hands on a copy of Ornette Coleman's *Who's Crazy?* No, not the almost impossible to find issued for twenty minutes in 1986 Japanese CD issue, but a vinyl copy on Affinity from, well, way back when. In fact it's the same issue I sold a copy of a few years ago under the impression that such an important set would be *definitely* out on CD any minute now. What a fool.

Anyway, it's even better than I remembered it, even allowing for the fact that this particular pressing seems to have grit in the mix it's so noisy. I've been listening to it with a lot of attention over the last few days while transferring it to CD, taking out as much of the noise as I can (and not doing too well as I don't actually understand the software that well, I have to admit). I am a big fan of the Coleman recordings from the Izenzon period anyway (Golden Circle 1 and 2, big fun!) but this may actually be the best. It actually *swings* (between the rather less settling violin and trumpet interjections), and it's so obvious on this set that Coleman used to play in R&B

bands when a lot younger. Oh, funky, most definitely; I'm actually thinking of trying to edit it down *Silent Way*-like to one long cut of really thrilling sax-led trio jazz.

Just thought you'd like to know that.

Of course scientifiction has been Big in my life also. Old fanzines, at least. And quite accidentally, sorta. I was trying out some new OCR software the other day and wanted something really difficult so pulled out a copy of Sam Youd's *Fantast* from 1939. (Later co-edited with the recently deceased Doug Webster – see how it all fits together...!) Of course *Fantast* for all its qualities (which are many) was duplicated in the very perfect formulation of British Grey duper ink, so frankly the OCR resembled more a Lovecraftian chant rather than witty discourse of the 1939-scifi scene. To be fair, it's actually pretty difficult to read with the old Mk 1 eyeball, so it was an unfair test.

Anyway, while leafing through *Fantast* #5, August 1939, I came across a serial titled 'Fanopolis' by 'Fantacynic' (later revealed to be Sam Youd... who we all know better as John Christopher) which is a sort of fan-fiction set in a sort of parallel universe in which fans and fandom are, well, sort of gods or something (I told you it was difficult to read). It has some of the flavour of *The Enchanted Duplicator*, bizarrely enough, with a quest for enlightenment. And somewhat influenced by a movie that fans of the day would have seen more times than they had hot dinners. (And that kept its popularity well into the Fifties in fan circles, if accounts of 1950s minicons are to be believed.)

And therein lies my question – does anyone know of this and, more importantly, was it ever finished? I have parts 1-5 in *Fantast* # 2 to 6, but part 5 ends with the fatal words 'We hope next month to conclude this serial' and thus far I haven't been able to figure out what happened, despite having all the next 8 issues of the fanzine.

Was it ever ended in some other fanzine or was it just forgotten quietly because Youd just couldn't come up with an ending? Has anyone ever heard of it? Does anyone know?

Anyway anyway – there are greater surprises, as later on in the run of *Fantast*, in issues 12, 13 and 14, there as another serial (yes, they were very big on them in those days, despite the fact we're talking of things maybe 3,000-words long, max. It was all different then) called 'A Short History of Fantocracy' by one Arthur C Clarke, which is about fans taking over the world. Or something. I really must read these things with more attention. But

that's amazing, eh? Totally forgotten as far as I can tell, no mention of it (or of 'Fanopolis') anywhere.

Oh, I tell a lie; the Clarke has a fleeting reference in Harry Warner's *All Our Yesterdays*, but that's it.

Should these be webbled, I wonder, and I wonder even harder whether I'd have the will and energy to actually copy-type them, as alas, all my experiments show that OCR is totally out of the question.

Fannish.

Even after getting the new BSFA mailing and feeling *totally* out of touch with reality. The world is yours, Geneva Melzack, don't drop it.

... A Way of Life

FIAWOL – fandom is a way of life, for the ignorant. That’s more or less my state right now, but then I haven’t anything better to do. Though the point is, once you’ve fallen in deep with fandom it’s awful difficult to throw it off again for several reasons. For one, fandom offers an almost idyllic ersatz existence for people too lazy or inadequate to take on the big world as it stands. Only in fandom is it possible to become well-known or even ‘famous’ by doing so impossibly little of worth or consequence. And I on no account exclude myself from that unhappy (?) band of refugees. Of course, fandom offers lots of things in varying degrees, and all in all I’d say that fandom is a damn sight better life than pushing peanuts up the Pennines with your penis.

letter column comment to Thom Penman, *Fouler* #5

Got Me Down on the Killing Floor

from *B24 Liberator*, *Frank's APA*, April 1984

It's Saturday 31st March, and I'm mooning about aimlessly in the remainder section of Claude Gill Books in Oxford Street, trying not to look like a shoplifter while Linda rifles through the Children's Section giggling and cooing. All I can see is the usual junk that no one would ever buy full price and hardly anyone will give remainder price for either. Why hasn't *Easy Travel to Other Planets* been remaindered, I think grumpily to myself. It came out about two years ago, was paperbacked recently, and probably didn't sell hardly at all, because despite being an excellent novel it had too many fringe-SF attitudes and concepts in it to be acceptable or interesting to the kind of fiction critic to whom the publishing of a new Roth or Heller or some other boring Jew is a major event deserving enormous areas of considered prose and therefore wasn't publicised at all hardly and so wasn't at all likely to sell was it because no one fucking *knew about it did they?*

Anyway, it isn't there, not that I expected it to be, so we trudge off to the Forbidden Planet around the corner and I make excuses about why I'm not buying the new and last-but-new issues of *American Flag* just yet and Linda goes pink with fury and says *You'd Better Buy Them Before I Go Back To America In Three Weeks Or Else*, and I say all right all right all right and wonder *why?*

Later on, at home, a telephone call from Roz Kaveney. We talk about the great M F K Fisher (buy *Art of Eating* at once all of you) and why her *Frank's* contribution is going to be late (isn't everyone's, I sigh wearily) and then she lets slip the Big One. Oh, She Says, have you seen that great big pile of copies of *Easy Travel to Other Planets* (Ted Mooney, Cape) (publishing persons really do talk like this, no shit) in Booksmith in Oxford Street? Only 99p each, what a surprise etc. etc. etc. Immediately I start going *arrrrgh* and *fuck* and *shit* and so on because Booksmith is exactly halfway between Gill and Planet and I actually stood outside it wondering whether to go in or not and didn't bother because none of these bloody remainder shops have anything worthwhile in them anyway *fuck turds* chiz wotabringdown.

Then it is Monday. Lunchtime and I am rushing like a madman with my pockets bulging with old Safeway bags down the road from Holborn to the

junction of Charing Cross Road and Oxford Street. Flinging people aside I cannon into the shop and right in front of me are piles and piles of the same old boring shit that's always there and no matter how hard I look and ferret about (even lifting things up and looking underneath in case *ETTOP* is hidden beneath *The Naughty Bits* – an anthology of all the bits you buy expensive books to read) and even *ask* the assistants, something I rarely do as it is as invariably futile as it is now, there's nothing. Null. Bloody Kaveney.

By 5 PM and quitting time I've had more ideas. Maybe Kaveney had it all wrong and it wasn't Booksmith but some other remainder joint in Oxford Street. So I trudge down the entire length from Holborn to Marble Arch and discover that even all the other remainder shops that used to be there have obviously given it up for a bad job and quit. This is a real drag, especially as I now have to travel back to Ealing on the Central Line which is noisy and cold instead of my nice comfy usual Piccadilly and by the time I'm home I feel sick, have a headache, bark at Linda, refuse to feed Rastus and tread on the teapot.

It is amazing, though, how indomitable is the human spirit. By the next day I am so obsessed with the idea of getting at least a dozen copies of this supernovel (not only for myself, but for resale at purely nominal mark-up prices ho ho at Mexican, which convention was (honestly) partially inspired by Mr Mooney's ace piece of work) that I look up other Booksmith branches in the telephone directory and come lunchtime set off to trudge around them.

Well, at least it isn't raining. I fling myself on and off buses, some of which actually get where I want to go faster than I could have walked myself. I know I shouldn't be, but I am astonished that there are so many, many copies of the same wholly uninteresting books around. Do these publishers actually have no idea of what might or might not be saleable, do they overprint deliberately, or is the whole thing done as some kind of elaborate tax write-off? Whatever, the whole effort is worthless; the dimwitted assistants I interrogate have never so much as *heard* of Ted Mooney so that shows how interested in the current state-of-the-art they are, and I stump off surrounded by a sort of Kirlian aura of anti-Kaveney imprecations.

Naturally enough I get lost on my way back to work, and finally navigate myself back by orienting on the enormous massive Ministry of Truth bulk of the High Imperial Gigantic Worldwide Masonic Lodge-to-end-all-Lodges or whatever it is down Long Acre (what *do* they do in there anyway? Have we got, despite the stern refusal in *Franks* #1, any secret

Masons in our midst? Glen, is it anything like Morris dancing?) and just as I cross the street to get back to more familiar ground I see an unfamiliar and new bookstore, with, surprise surprise, heaps and heaps and heaps of the usual boring remaindered trash stacked in the window. I go in anyway, and gosh wow it isn't just the usual but lots of interesting stuff as well, like hardbacks of Hubert Selby novels and Sladek and Truffaut and more quite useful books on the cinema and even some reasonable-looking books of jazz that I'd buy if they were a bit cheaper but probably will buy anyway next week, and hoopla hurray, a substantial and neatly laid-out secondhand and rarities section at the back. Not bad for a place that from the outside looks like a poofy hairdresser's salon or a tearoom (and you can take that whichever way you want, as they say in the British Library). Nestling right in there amongst all this is not only a copy of *The Alexander Woolcott Reader*, but a copy of *Wit's End* (lotsa pictures of Alexander) and boggle boggle a copy of the 1947 second impression biography of A W by Samuel Hopkins Adams, incredibly hard to find and I've never even seen one before. Only £4 too, bargain. I rush with these and a book about Harlem in the Twenties and Thirties (Black Renaissance is the in thing round at Lawrence Road this week) to the owner who immediately sees a good thing and drags out several other Woolcott-related items from the stockroom, all of which I have, unfortunately. Amazingly he's quite familiar with the Woolcott legend and persona, unlike almost everyone else I've ever met, and we chat about the nasty/nice little owl for a while and mention the likelihood of him getting a copy of the rare-ish Edwin Hoyt biography *The Man Who Came to Dinner*, which I'm sure I'll be grossly overcharged for if he ever finds one. It is surprising to me that a man with such evident good taste has never heard of *Easy Travel to Other Planets* but he assures me he'll try and lay hands on some for me, especially after I say I want a dozen, minimum. What a nice man. He even agrees with me when I say that my informant was probably telling nasty little fibs all along. There is obviously a lesson here that could be learned by many shopkeepers in these rude and unhelpful times.

So, it wasn't all useless. I may have ended up spending a *lot* more than I would have on even twenty copies of *ETTOP* but I found a neat store I'll be happy to patronise in the future, and a couple of books I've wanted for years. All I need now is for Kaveney to come clean and admit it was all some perverse kind of April Fool gag all along, and I really wasn't beaten to the post by some other scurvy amateur bookdealer who, unburdened by my

genuinely altruistic zeal, will resell these tasty items to you all at an even more grotesquely high profit.

That was a genuine anecdote, number 2 in a series.

More Wild Ideas

from *Rastus Johnson's Cakewalk #3*, December 1993

I don't often think of Darroll Pardoe; indeed, when I do it's a sort of accident, like pouring the hot water into your cup instead of the teapot. The other day, though, I was rooting through some old fanzines and I thought of something Pardoe told me many years ago. Apparently, and he swore this was true, he not only threw away most of the fanzines he'd been sent, as being of no more than one-time-only interest, but from the rest tore out and kept only the bits that seemed to him, at the time, worth preserving. This seemed unbelievable and weird at the time, and now, looking back on it, it seems more so, plus frightening and actually socially irresponsible.

You don't need a terrific intellect to figure out why. A big run of a fanzine is a couple of hundred – perhaps as much as five hundred copies in some cases. Probably more copies available at time of issue than there are people who want it, but that's not a situation that always pertains. Copies are lost, vanish into collections, are discarded by people who have no true interest, are junked by relatives when the receiving fan dies or even moves away from home. That initial print run rapidly becomes a number of extant copies substantially smaller than the number of people who want or ought to see them. When you have 'fans' like Pardoe, and probably dozens of others who casually discard or deliberately destroy their accumulated fanzines, it makes a bad situation worse.

I don't think there's any real qualitative difference between a good fanzine and a first edition P K Dick or W S Burroughs or an Edward Hopper painting or the last original print of *Metropolis*. All these things are precious in and of themselves, never mind any artificial commercial value, which is, unfortunately, all that most people can understand. A copy, for example, of *Eye*, *Grue*, *Speculation* or *Void* has no perceptible value at all to anyone but a fanzine fan, but to the one who wants it it is a rare treasure indeed.

So I feel anger, hurt and frustration when I think of the classic fanzines that few of us will ever get to see because there are no copies left in circulation, partly because people who should have known better tore them up or dropped them casually in the trash. I've occasionally given away, with a three-armed abandon I would later regret, fanzines I no longer wanted or of

which I had duplicate copies. I've once or twice stood by and seen – as at one of the Yorcons – large piles of old fanzines left neglected and apparently unwanted at the end of conventions, probably to be thrown away by the hotel as trash, because no one on the committee knew what to do with them. And I feel guilty about that still, ten years later. I have never, though, thrown away or otherwise destroyed fanzines. (This is a lie. Not only did I stand by at conventions knowing large bundles of fanzines were going to be abandoned, but after the 1987 Worldcon I threw away a couple of hundred Australian fanzines that I just could not get rid of any other way, and had dragged around conventions for years. Even the garbagemen hefted the sacks unwillingly. I also threw away the last two fanzines Michael Ashley sent me. I am not so ashamed of that.)

So what? Are all old fanzines good? No. Are all old fanzines virtually irreplaceable first editions? Yes. Would fans, active and aspirant, be improved by access to and the attentive reading of the work of previous generations of fandom? Certainly. My concept of fandom was radically informed by getting hold of some – too few – of the best fanzines of the fifteen years prior to my own involvement. They showed me that there was a background and culture to work within, they demonstrated that some things worked and others didn't – and even though that didn't stop me from hacking down a few trees it meant I didn't have to go to the laborious effort of sawing them up and making something that rolled, unsteadily and backwards. They showed me that continuity was important: this was more a revelation at seventeen than it would have been to someone entering fandom older. Also, by seeing the differences as much as the similarities, I readily grasped that there was no need to slavishly copy what had gone before, but to use that body of thinking, attitude and ideas to generate something that was of me and of my time. (That latter may not seem a particularly wild idea to many, but there are people who seriously propose that no heed whatever should be paid to fan-activities of the past and everything should be reinvented afresh every few years. If you argued this should apply to any other art form or science they'd be up all night contending it. I guess that's what Fandom Is Just A Goddamn Hobby really means, at the death.)

Actually, what I regret is that I didn't get more old fanzines. This is partly due to the fractured structure of British fandom in the middle-to-late Sixties; most of the 'established' fans when I came in had actually been on the scene barely five or so years themselves, a large number of them less than

that, and few had any particular interest in or access to collections of older – pre-1964 – material. There was little or no reference to or discussion of anything other than the present or the immediate past. Good lord, old time fans in 1969 meant Peter Weston, for god’s sake, who’d been active since the dim recesses of the past, 1964. Not that I helped much; when I started the situation was so weak and insipid – all those dull PADSzines, Mary Reed and Oxo fandom, happy-days-toytown fandom – that there seemed no other course than to draw a line and start again. In doing that the thread of continuity was buried if not broken.

That meant that startlingly few fans in the following decade-and-a-half were even so much as aware of, never mind sought out or actually read, anything published before, say, 1968. OK, OK. I can hear the restivity from here. Get to the point, already, before you start trying to make a case that even the Sixties fans showed no awareness of Fifties fandom (arguably true, at least from 1965 on) or that Fifties fans never saw a copy of *Novae Terrae*. You can stretch this a bit far, says the Body of Fandom.

All right, all right. Well, I was wondering, as you do, between planning my huge *Encyclopaedia Of British Fandom* (I’m up to C already. Clarke, Joy. No, not that one, the one who did the really terrible fanzine in Manchester or somewhere; anyone remember? Bloody big problem these Encyclopaedias; wait ’til I get to W), and compiling an index to my monograph *Hansen – The Married Years*; anyway, I was wondering, why not collect old unwanted fanzines? And give them away again. Like a sort of Salvation Army of the fannish mind. It all made a sort of sense. I’d make the populace in general aware that I would take their unwanted fanzines, sort them, issue simple lists on a regular basis, and anyone could have on a first-come basis anything they wanted for their own collections or whatever. So I wrote to my friend and advisor Vince Clarke who said:

‘A clearing house for old fanzines. Not many people collecting these days, and even some of those who have sizeable collections – like Keith Walker, Howard Rosenblum, or Brian Burgess – are just sitting on them. Peter Roberts has given up, so presumably has Harry Bond. Ken Bulmer has a lot, merely because he can’t get up the energy to sort them out. Current collectors are Connor, Hansen, self – damned if I know any more. So I don’t think there’d be any takers for your scheme.’

Which might be true and all that, as far as the right now goes. What I’m afraid of is that there’s not much duty now for the future going on. If it’s

hard, verging on the impossible, to get twenty-year old fanzines now, what's the situation regarding 'now' going to be like in that scifi year of 2018? I can see a lot of this stuff just sliding down some landfill somewhere between now and then.

So I'm going to give it a go anyway.

Here's my plan. If you – or anyone you know who is now or has ever been a fan – has any quantity of fanzines that you don't want, ship them to me, address as inside front cover. I will sort them, and issue a list, probably bi-annually, available on demand, giving an outline of what's in stock. All fanzines will be available free on a first-come first-served basis, though postage will be charged at cost. A portion of multiple copies will be available for fan fund-raising in the case of the more famous items, and other overstocks will be assembled as representative bundles again available on demand.

I am prepared to repay the costs of shipping fanzines to me whenever necessary. It could cost you nothing other than a little time to contribute your unwanted fanzines to this scheme, which I might as well call Memory Hole. What I'll get out of it is satisfaction that I'm doing something that, while it may seem futile today, may have some long-term benefit. Oh, OK and maybe a few fanzines for my own collection.

This is not a joke; I know it sounds a bit crazy but I think it's a worthwhile idea. I'm willing to be proved wrong but I'll at least know I tried. Memory Hole should be looked at as a supplement to Vince Clarke's Fanzine Library, and indeed a first priority would be to ensure gaps there are filled. I am able to do what Vince can't, though (I've got the time and space and he hasn't), and set up a collection and redistribution service that might – with co-operation – be of benefit to all fanzine fans, now and forever.

The King is Dead, Long Live the King

from *Rastus Johnson's Cakewalk* #5, April 1994

This is from Jim Linwood's letter in this issue. It is worth printing twice.

'I think that Arthur more than any fanwriter was responsible for the image of British fandom in the Fifties and Sixties.'

It's Arthur Thomson he's talking about, of course. The Arthur who died four years ago this February. It usually sounds mawkish and vaguely disgusting to talk of people who, after their death, are still with us, but I feel that about Arthur Thomson. Like Jim, I hardly knew Arthur as a whole man, 'just' as a fan, and then not long enough or close enough, and that's something I now know, too late, that I will forever regret. But his impact on the consciousness of fandom was simply vast.

He was, effectively, the spirit of British fandom, the true spirit of fandom, the sprite of Trufandom, have it as you will. When I think of Fans I don't see in my mind's eye the spectacled bearded lumpen stereotypes who clutter convention corridors, but wide-eyed beamers, goggling lasciviously with propeller-beanies at a rakish angle, lips curled in a psneer as they reach for their water-pistols with one hand and a beer with the other. Or more typically, perhaps, the Thomson-twins double act, trading baffled one-liners about the bizarrely incomprehensible behaviour of one of their fellows, capering madly in the background wearing a Chinese mask and frogman flippers. They're decent guys, these fans and fannes, cheerful and interested, happy with their little activities and fannish concerns. They're Trufans all right. And they are the very image of fandom for me, what comes instantly to mind when I think of fan-meetings and conventions. The true reality slips over gradually, like a cloud across the sun, like some evil empire that never ended but persists despite our best intentions; it's not real in the way that Arthur's artlessly unposed snapshots are. You can see the mechanisms in the overlay-world; Arthur's people are soft and warm.

'It's impossible to imagine fandom without Arthur Thomson...' said Dick Eney in 1963, annotating the results of a Fan Poll in which ATom got

unanimous first-place votes in the Artwork category. ‘... ATom has given us more than prolific production without lowering of standards; he’s given us humour without cruelty, satire without malice, wisdom without arrogance, and good taste without ostentation. We don’t know how lucky we are.’

In my heart and mind there is not a day goes by I don’t regret his passing; I miss him a lot, but then I think – I believe – that as long as I am a fan, as long as any of us are, he’ll always be with me, with us.

Rider on a Stone Horse

from *Rastus Johnson's Cakewalk #6*, June 1994

It must be a consensus thing; that life of quiet desperation the mass of men are supposed to lead has descended on me. What to do, what to do? I've been messing around for ages here, tidied every scrap of paper in this room, done everything but pick the cat-dandruff off the floor by hand, all because I can't get started. There's something wrong with our bloody fanzine today Rastus. You're lying there a bit too bloody torpid for my liking, settling into far too simple a routine. It's not good enough. Need to bring a few more shrews in once in a while.

The trouble is I've got myself so anxious about not getting on with *RJC #6* (which of course from your point of view I have done) that it overrides my every waking hour, vague misery and guilt about it spreading like a damp cloud over all other of life's tiny pleasures, from bacon sandwiches to old issues of *The Fanscient*. Why am I doing this, I fret in a half-hearted panic, when I ought to be speeding through Ventura, copyboy copyboy roll them presses. I can't even claim that I'm overrun because This Fanzine Has Taken Over My Life; until I started actually working on it in early June I'd looked forward to the task with happy anticipation. Mind you, a string of computer failures on all our machines at once hasn't helped. The difference between being unable to pub one's ish and not really wanting to any more is less than my patience with Colin Peter Harris.

This must be the difference between Fandom is Just a Goddamn Hobby and Fandom is A Way of Life; your true hobbyist would just say Oh the Hell With It and go off and do something more immediately achievable, like reading this month's *Interzone*. I work myself into a state of stalled guilt. Mind you, I reckon all this has come about because I'm not listening to enough music these days. As we haven't the cash to indulge our record-buying habits we've subconsciously cut down on our listening – mustn't get too enthusiastic about things – and I think it's having a bad effect on my fanning. This might be imperceptible to you as a reader but I perceive my fanwriting as a sort of improvisation, where one word fires off the next, with a definite melody and beat that drives me on through the paragraph. If I think too much of a string of words, rather than a stream of ideas and beats, I get

jammed and lose the thread, the spring, the meaning of what I am trying to convey. You might argue that I don't convey a fucking great deal withal, which is another level of failure I'd just as soon not tackle right now, thanks.

What I'm getting at is although reading fanzines is a great inspiration to want to write, if I think about words too much when I'm trying to write, I block up. Play a few sides of Miles Davis, though, or Johnny Shines, and the fingers become positively limber, the thoughts trot briskly from brain to keyboard. Is this what Ornette Coleman meant when he talked of Dancing In Your Head?

Real Life in Haverfordwest

from *Rastus Johnson's Cakewalk #6*, June 1994

It dawned on me for the first time yesterday that when we today talk about FIJAGH as opposed to FIAWOL, it is almost invariably in a positive manner, as if anyone other than a whey-faced loon should easily apprehend the idea that Fandom is *not* a Way of Life fit for fully-formed adults. Leaving aside the problem of finding any of those, I think it's useful to remind ourselves that as I understand it FIJAGH became current as a counter to those who thought, Degler-like, with antecedents in Michelism and all the other Communist-inspired notions that Wollheim and his gang propounded in the Thirties, that either a truly separate social construct could be devised around fandom, or that fans specifically held some particular understanding or ability that not only set them aside from the common herd but would in time place them in their natural position *à propos* it, i.e. in charge. (Both these ideas are at least arguable, given the current state of the world.)

But these days – certainly since the Sixties – FIJAGH has come more to mean that fandom and all its activities are not worth taking seriously, do not deserve the time and attention spent on them, and by extension do not demand to be done well, or to the full extent of the individual's abilities. An excuse for a load of slipshod rubbish. Well, realising that Fun isn't the same as Frivolous or Trivial shouldn't be beyond the star-begotten intellects who read SF in the first place. The other meaning of FIJAGH is that fandom is a temporary aberration that should be sloughed off with all speed and ruthlessness because, irrespective of how satisfying it seemed at the time, it is in fact a dangerous illusion and, well, stunts your growth, I guess, and grows hair on the palms of your hands too I shouldn't wonder.

To be honest I see nothing wrong with Fandom as a Way of Life, in the sense that it is the most important thing in life after food, shelter, and decent relationships. Why should people who would blandly accept an individual's fascination with gardening or archaeology find something incomprehensibly alien about the whole idea of FIAWOL? What's the difference? Is it merely because immersion into fandom gives less commonality with the people you associate with at work or in the supermarket? But isn't that the case with any other than the most commonplace pursuits? This is all obvious – or should

be. What perhaps isn't is why so many fans should contend that there actually is something pernicious about FIAWOL, and why so many bitterly renounce fandom when they have 'got free' of it – do they really, as some think Chris Priest does, think that it was all a waste of time, any more of a waste of time than anything else, that fandom somehow prevented them from becoming wonderful winged creatures sparkling high in the sunlight? Perhaps the fear simply is of being contented, of being quite happy to potter about with one's fan activities, rather than hard-charging towards Success.

Allied to this is the idea of fandom as Small Pond, in which one might be a Big Fish, which is of course a Bad Thing because... well, because people who aren't fans don't think it's important, that's why because. Oh right, I thought there must be a good reason. Well, yes, of course, once one leaves fandom all sorts of joyous successes and recognitions are there for the taking, aren't they... Of course not; this is drivel. Few people achieve or attain anything of any worth in any context of their life whatsoever. Virtually no one has power and influence anywhere. Leaving fandom does not guarantee success outside it, no more than staying in it does within it. A Big Fish in the Small Pond of fandom is virtually certainly an Infinitesimally Tiny Fish outside it, no matter what they subjectively think.

Success as what anyway – a telephone exchange supervisor? No, that's not what they mean at all, is it? Success as High Profile Author, International Publisher, Media Tycoon, that's what we're all supposed to get outside fandom. That's Success. Nothing dull and common and herd-like. Don't dwell on the fact that no matter what your achievements virtually no one will really know or care, except whichever other peer group you associate with. But for the love of god remember it's a peer group, not a fandom; that's really important...

The vast mass of us live small, impotent, infinitely replaceable lives within the world society; this is perhaps worth remembering when it next becomes clear that the person who is telling you to wake up and get your success outside fandom is someone who thinks of themselves as in control, someone who in reality is more likely to be your boss than working alongside you.

It's significant that it is more likely that people who believe, almost certainly wrongly, that they have limited but genuine control over their own lives and actions who will tell you that fandom is such a tiny restricted space, where they could not function to the full flower of their ability. You will

rarely hear much of the same from clericals, assembly-line workers, hired hands of all types. There's no control, no space for them in success-consensus world.

So is fanactivity an escape from the hard rigours of reality? Only if in some manner I can't quite comprehend this desk, these papers, this computer, you readers, my friends, are in some way less substantial than the electricity bill I got this morning or the people who live down the road whose names and habits I don't know and care less about as long as they don't throw their garbage into the street. Of fucking course fandom isn't an escape from the real world; it's an unbelievable conceit on the part of its detractors to claim that they have developed or matured into something better.

What's so damned great about consensus reality anyway that we should all cling to it like a lifebelt? There's something really primitive about a notion that says you've got to stay in a particular world-view no matter how stupid and tedious it might seem. Hell of a lot of self-determination there. Next stunt is probably the jam-tomorrow the Christians have been serving up for two thousand years. Yeah, great.

It's also a tacit acceptance of the classic Thatcherite con-game that tells us we can all be at the top of the heap at the same time, as well as affirming the prejudice that people who aren't like us, just aren't people.

I have the feeling everything went wrong when fans forgot that it was Other People who were supposed to think fans were malformed social inadequates fascinated by the playthings of children, deranged with impossible visions, and hopelessly out of touch with the things that matter most in life (i.e. what everybody else does). Too many fans took the wrong cues and started to have even greater contempt for fans than mundanes were believed to. They also developed the idea that the failings they perceived in fans were in some way unique to fandom and unrepresentative of the real world (which of course fans are presumed not to inhabit). A really incredible reversal of the Fans Are Slans theory; no longer better than the rest, fans are in fact worse. This became a perhaps subconscious desire to Tom it up, to be more scathing about fans than even the most unsympathetic mundane – to cleverly, perhaps, distance themselves from the worst excesses of fandom by being the first to loudly proclaim them.

The picture of fans, then, changed from a group united in interest in SF, space travel, the future, and a better world to one of ill-dressed malcontents distinguished only by their inability to dance and screw women who work in

Woolworths, wear bright make-up, and white shoes. From the chrysalis of Beanie Boy should come Essex Man, perhaps.

Much of this, in Britain at least, had its roots in the quaintly anti-establishment activities of such cutting-edge fans of the Sixties as Graham Hall, Charles Platt, and Graham Charnock, all of them contemptuous of the past, be it fandom's or anyone else's. Strutting around conventions mumbling 'Goofbitl' (Get Out Of Fandom Before It's Too Late) and 'Cwof' (Campaign for Wiping Out Fandom) seemed a revolutionary act then, I guess. There's a case to be made that this layer of fandom's utter ignorance of its own inheritance is what separated later intakes (including myself and what was later known as Ratfandom) from the manifest treasury of talent that had gone before; as it was all they handed on was a tendency to scorn fandom's simpler pomposities and beliefs without offering anything else in their place, other than perhaps an idea that fandom is not for real people, is not Real Life.

There's not a damned thing especially new in much of the foregoing; this has all been debated off and on for years with no resolution. My point is that the question is wrong to start with; not Why be a Fan, but Why Not? Just think of it as Virtual Reality – is that modish enough; does that make it OK?

Richard Geis said, more than thirty years ago, that it is not the size of the pool that matters, but its relative – to oneself – quality. I know where I am Harry. FIAWOL sounds OK to me.

Wallowing in memory and sentiment again

posted to Memoryhole elist, 12 October 2001

I was just cleaning my Shield of Umor.

No, honestly, I was. It's been in Catherine's gardening shed for a while (now how fannish is *that*, eh) because for one damn reason or another we've been short of a bit of wall to put it up on. Anyway, to cut a long story short I've found a bit of wall and now all I need is a couple of big hooks and we're away to the races.

The Shield is in pretty good condition considering it hasn't been used for a while – a bit dusty, some strange aluminium-type corrosion on the backside, but the legend and the cheerful face are A-Number-One. Looking at it brings all sorts of times and places and people back to me – maybe I ought to be using it as a meditation piece, an *aide-memoire* to put myself back into a time when fandom was, if not a nicer more interesting place, then at least one I felt at home in. As opposed to the one with too many boring shitheads in it that I seem to see whenever I open the gate. Sorry, should have been more moderate there; must go and gaze into the Shield again and see the funny side of it all.

I'd love to say that my Shield of Umor appeared by my bedside one night years ago when I was but a tiny fan reading a few pages of *All Our Yesterdays* with the commitment of a convert every night before I forced myself to sleep at three in the morning, homework undone (yes, that's why I'm a poorly paid clerical at best, instead of running the country) but many scifi magazines read. I'd love to, indeed, and I wonder sometimes if it did. But the real story – as I remember it anyway – is more prosaic, but still charged with a kind of fannish fervour.

The Shield I have – I would say 'own' but that's not strictly true – originated with that person from Porlock, Peter R Weston. I can't for the life of me remember *why* Peter had one of his skilful minions in the door-handle factory run him up a Shield of Umor – it was almost certainly his entrance into a fancy dress competition as Jophan (well, that's obvious isn't it!) but I definitely don't recall when. I was probably in the bar at the time anyway.

But it must have been before June 1983, since the cover of one of the two issues of Peter's rather good little fanzine *Prolapse* issued that year featured a cartoon of him plus shield.

Anyway, time passes and we arrive at the 1987 Worldcon in Brighton. For no doubt positive reasons Peter donates his Shield to the fan fund auction, which takes place in the Fan Programme Room towards the end of the convention. I was Bossing the whole fanroom set-up during that convention and, like many of the staff, I'd got a bit overwrought about it all – it was a peculiarly stressful convention in many ways, and far too many people got far too carried away with it all, sometimes in quite the wrong directions; we won't even go into the paper planes, for example. Or the unknown young twerp I had in a strangling deathgrip at one time. Let's just say that we had our little war, then and there, and fanrooms have never been quite so Involving ever since. Some of them have been fucking useless, it has to be said.

Anyway, there we were, wired up tight like that and the Shield of Umor comes up for auction. Immediately this great light goes on behind my eyes and I'm thinking of this as just the most Fannish Damned Thing ever to have existed on the planet – in my state I'm probably convincing myself that it actually *is* the Shield of Umor itself. It is a wonderful thing; it seems to glow with a deep internal brightness, and the murky surroundings and dulled and exhausted faces of fans who have had Too Much Fun seem illuminated by its very presence. To cap it all, the first bidder is bloody Moshe Feder. Bloody hell, the man's an American, for gods sake. OK, he's a fan, and he's a right guy as far as I can tell (hangs about with publishers a bit much for my taste though – but you have to make a living) but crikey that means that the Shield of Umor will *leave the fucking country!*

Of course this can't happen. I instantly resolve that whatever happens the Shield will be British. We need it for gods sake; we take fandom so seriously here. (Oh how I wish I'd actually thought that at the time – as it was I was just roaring away on a huge wave of fannish nationalism: this was Our Worldcon; we'd just run a pretty damn fine fanroom; we deserved a Symbol, a rallying point, something that linked us directly to the heart and soul of *The Enchanted Duplicator!*) So whatever Moshe bids I top, thinking the hell with it, I *will* win and worry about the consequences later. We rapidly charge up the scale – fifty pounds passes and the damn thing is now more valuable than a double room in the convention hotel – sixty, the price of two nights

drinking in the hotel bar – seventy, two nights drinking and a hotel meal – eighty, drink, meal, and enough cash to waste on books.... Moshe wavers; he obviously hates to let it go, but I also sense he thinks I haven't got infinite reserves (well, I haven't, but at this point I don't give a damn) so he pushes it up to 82 pounds (drink, meal, books, and the price of medication for liver failure...) in the vain hope I'll crumble. But no. My 85 pounds is too much for him, and with obvious disappointment he lets it go. (Of course he claimed later he only kept bidding to keep the price up and make sure some substantial money went to TAFF or whatever it was... yeah, sure thing...).

The Shield of Umor is mine. It's part of British Fandom now and forever; it is a wonderful moment. I'm genuinely elated and I carry the thing to my hotel room with real pride and tears in my eyes, and no doubt nonfan convention attendees passing me in the corridors and halls perceive me as a crazy man.

Later, while in the bar, I discuss the idea of the Shield being owned cooperatively by British Fandom – part of me already wondering where the hell I'm going to get 85 pounds from, but overall I genuinely want it to be an Our rather than My thing. There's a chorus of agreement to my suggestion that a group of us contribute towards the actual cost of the Shield; I certainly don't expect any cash at the end of a pretty damned expensive convention but feel, in my position as fanroom Boss, that all of these people, all of whom had been in my team, all of us flushed with Unit Pride and a job well done in the fact of almost overwhelming hostility, will make everything all right. The responsibility won't be mine alone; we will share the burden, work together.

Of course it doesn't turn out like that in real life. Within days it's all forgotten. The fans who were so behind the idea at the time appear to have no memory of it – except, oddly, one A M Berry (Master Locksmith). Tony Berry comes through with a small sum of money – ten pounds or so (or was it £12.50?) and from thenceforward owns a proportion of the Shield of Umor. It's almost unbelievable how bizarre this is; not that Tony is an especially humourless individual, but he's more known for his dour cynicism than anything else. But he has done the decent thing, and eventually even more; some months later he presents me with the Sword of Angst, a peculiarly British-fandom complement to the Shield of Umor. Made with his own hands from a sturdy wooden pick handle, its name neatly painted on and well-varnished, I have it still, and for years it rested along the top of the Shield when we had a wall to put it on.

So here we are today. I didn't consciously extract the Shield with any fannish motive – I was just cleaning out Catherine's gardening shed – but I do feel I need it more now than ever. I must try to see the joke; I don't have any problem with picking up and pointing out the fundamental foolishness of life in every other circumstance, but setbacks and disappointments and collision with unsavoury fools and unpleasant shitheads in fandom bring me down very low.

It isn't that I need to convince myself that It Doesn't Matter – I don't want to do that because it does matter and if it didn't, bloody hell, I might as well just take up gardening or collecting typewriters or steel helmets or some pointless shit like that – but I have got to be more reasonable and balanced about it all, not want to discard the whole business because of disappointment with things or people. I must be more reasonable – I will see the Joke – I will look into the Smiling Face and remind myself of what I liked about fandom, and try to find some evidence for it around me.

Maybe everything will be all right in the end.

Fandom is just a mailing group

posted to Memoryhole elist, 1 November 2001

Dave Locke wrote:

On the other hand, to me being 'currently active' means participation in the online forums. I do other fanac of various sorts, but definitely I'm a 'walking fossil' when it comes to doing any further general-distribution fanzines. I might do an online equivalent of one, but it's been three years now that I've been taking notes on a re-do of <http://www.angelfire.com/oh/slowdjin/>. I'm in Placeholder Fandom.

And the reason this has stuck in my mind is because of course I suspect I have done one hell of a whole lot more written fanac online since 1996, and particularly with regard to MHML, than I have ever actually done anywhere else, which is vaguely frightening, shaming, and peculiar.

I began written fanac (as opposed to running conventions and like that) back in 1968, when as previously mentioned I did stuff for early Peter Roberts fanzines.

Soon after that I began publishing *Fouler*, influenced by, it's true, Leroy Kettle, but the fanzine was definitely edited by myself (and it's about time Robert Lichtman grasped this!) and ran for six issues between September '70 and September '72.

Next came *Ritblat/Grim News* which was just two issues in 1974, and then *Stop Breaking Down* (my favourite fanzine title) which ran for six issues between March '76 and March '78, with a belated number 7 in 1981.

Then came *Rastus Johnson's Cakewalk* (the name most definitely loaded with hidden allusions, one of my criteria for a good title) which did seven issues between September '93 and October '94. That was the last fanzine I actually produced.

Interspersed in all this were a dozen or so one-offs and APazines, some of which do not really bear detailed examination, frankly.

One thing that's quite conspicuous in its absence is a roll-call of contributions to other fanzines. To be honest there aren't a hell of a whole lot, and I wonder how I've got away with it for so long. Apart from a few pretty

dire things in *Morfarch* and suchlike (oh, I was young and stupid, but then so must Roberts have been to publish them) there was, um, a piece about the first British *Star Trek* con in an *Egg*, a contribution to a Peter Roberts tribute one-off, a fanzine review column in *Zimri* (which didn't half piss off a lot of American fans as I remember!) and that's about the size of it. I really can't recall how many there have been – more than six and less than twenty, most definitely. Eeeek. Small anthology, that one. Not that good either.

LOCS? What're they? Honestly, if you think it's incredible that I've been able to get away with so few contributions to other fanzines then it's probably a crime against civilisation, nature and fandom generally that I've managed to produce barely a dozen LOCS in the last 33 years of fandom – that's probably about as many as some people did in a day way back when there were that many fanzines your postman needed a handcart just to deliver them all.

In truth I've always had a bit of an aversion to writing LOCS – I've always taken the view that if I was going to produce something cleverly written and full of interesting commentary and asides (this is all going on in my own head, note!) then why the hell entrust it to some nut who'll edit it down to the best part of fuck-all and maybe even make bits up themselves. (NB: I only ever did that when the LOCS weren't good enough to start with; Willis told me it was OK so that's all right then innit...).

No, seriously, I find writing such a pain a lot of the time that if I ever produce something I think is publishable then I'd just as soon run it myself rather than let some other spotty herbert fiddle about with it behind the bikesheds. And LOCS are hard anyway.

So, strangely, doing this sort of thing (MHML and like that, pay attention!) actually suits my style down to the ground. I can produce the piece, work it up a bit, find most of the typos and errors and the crap bits of style that even I don't like, and then we're away to the races, rattle rattle click click and it's off, and quite a large proportion of the people I want to read it may well do so, as well as a bunch of others who're just reading over their shoulders.

And there's no doubt that all told I have produced maybe more and maybe better stuff for MHML – particularly in the last few weeks – than I have at any time in the last three-and-a-bit decades. Ought I be admitting this? Yes. This is attempting to prove my point that I am an active fan.

Quite obviously too it is MHML that suits me best of all the online options. I don't have enough time left in my life for RASFF or whatever it's

fucking called and who are most of those people anyway (they're not active in my fandom)? Timebinders just doesn't seem to have any heart to it, and frankly you couldn't pay me to get involved in some of the others. MHML was secretly intended to be my covert fanzine right from the beginning, and while I've been appallingly delinquent in doing the leading from the front (AKA 'editing') too much of the time – witness the dire periods of the Eney controversy and suchlike – the last month has been extraordinarily successful.

So where does this leave us in terms of 'being active in fandom'?

Well, it depends on what one means by 'fandom'. It's certainly true that with MHML we don't have the permanence of print or the serendipity of discovery that print donates uptime to The Ages, but from my point of view I'm still hitting much of my intended audience (and I wish I could work out a simple way of covering the others without actually producing the damned fanzine...) and that to me counts as being 'active in fandom'. In fact whichever way you look at it that means active in fandom.

When you look at the generally crappy nature of some of the fanzines being produced by people who are perceived of as 'active fans' then without blowing my own horn too damned hard I can claim to be at the very least as active in fandom as some of them. And to a damned large extent more concerned with fandom specifically.

Of course the problem is with the conflation of active fandom in terms of fanwriting and publishing on the one hand and socialising fandom on the other. Some people – even including me sometimes; old habits learned young die hard – feel that to be an active fan means being a social fan, meeting all the Right people, being in all the Right places, generally doing the social rounds and equating relative status according to who is seen where and with who. When looked at dispassionately, of course, this is bollocks – it's got nothing to do with fanac at all and no matter how many hours of drunk or drugged jabber you add together they aren't as much use or ornament either now or in the future as a good wellcrafted bit of fanwriting. OK, there's an illusion that one might be in with the Movers and Shakers, but I'm not so certain as I once was that that's much more than a very small hill of beans. A lot of talk is usually just that. And I do not necessarily exempt convention runners from this – if conventions were as wonderful proportionate to the amount of time spent talking about and planning them we'd all want to fucking live there.

Anyway, what I think is that we're just as much active fans as anyone

else; it's simply that fandom has been so thoroughly balkanised by the variety of different special interests and with the option of creating different online communities that it is no longer possible to say that there is a core fandom to be active in. There simply isn't 'fandom' any longer, so we all have to measure our activity by our own peer yardstick – honestly, whose opinion really matters to you? Think of the number of total farts and shitheads who are 'active in fandom' and consider whether you really care what they think about any damned thing at all, much less their opinion of your own fanactivity.

So we (and I use the term loosely – see previous para) don't have to 'get back to being currently active fans' – we *are*. It just depends on whether we accept the change, the move away from true generalism, or fret endlessly about things that in fact don't matter a toss.

Yeah verily, I am an Active Fan. A legend in my own living room.
Nothing changes, eh.

Science Fiction Book Club: scary or wot (2)

posted to Wegenheim elist, 6 February 2005

It was all a dream really. There we were at Winsel recycling dump, and we've dropped off all the *really* rubbish rubbish into the appropriate pits, and I'm walking across the tarmac with a couple of things that might actually be of use to someone to put into a local charity's walk-in container.

As I slide them inside I notice there's a couple of boxes of books and can't resist hopping in for a nose. Imagine, if you can, and I am sure you will, my utter astonishment when I see that amongst some typically useless junk there are a couple of dozen first and second series (you know, the ones with the bi-colour swirly and the white ones with the tree-rings) SFBC editions, all of them in damn-near perfect condition – better than the copies I've got myself as a matter of fact. *And* a copy of the Dobson edition of *The Analog Anthology* which by incredible coincidence Catherine and I were discussing just the other day, tangential to a conversation about Christopher Anvil.

Anyway, there I am just about freaking out totally. (Well, I exaggerate for effect of course – it isn't like the fabulous fannish moment of finding for example a complete set of *Jazz Monthly* in the local charity shop at a fiver the lot, but it is the closest I have been for a long time now.) I can't decide whether I am looking for any of the eight or nine titles I have missing from my set, or whether I am looking for the possibly rare and really valuable ones (like *The Martian Chronicles*) or whether I am just going to lift the lot, or what.

Or whether I am going to Do The Right Thing and walk away. After all, Frame is a genuine local charity (local aid for local people if I might almost coin a phrase) not some faceless trans-national, and it would just be Bad – and anyway think how embarrassing if challenged by one of the attendants, all of whom know me at least by sight (wood-scavenging, don't you know).

Anyway, it's hell. To tell the truth if I hadn't had to walk twenty-five metres back to the car carrying two boxes of books I obviously wasn't holding when I went *into* the container I'd probably have been a Bad Person. As it was I just felt really sick about the whole thing all day. And that was

even before I started thinking about some poor sod who had probably kept those books for well over thirty years and now they've been dumped – like so many of our collections – like so much useless pulpwood.

Now, a sensible person would probably wait a few days until the stuff gets cycled into the charity shop; I have another plan. Maybe. You didn't read this here, right?

The End

This free ebook version of *Can't Get Off the Island* 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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