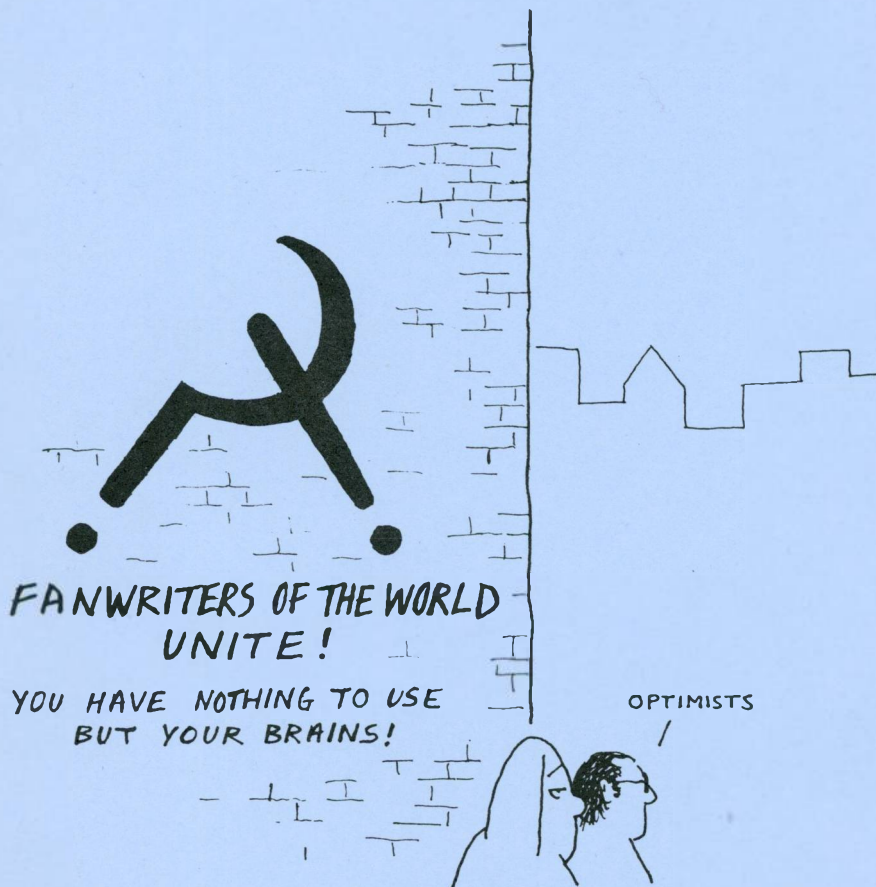


Now Read On

A COLLECTION OF RECENT BRITISH FANWRITING



conspiracy
'87

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION: D West.....	2
BIRDLAND: Kevin Smith.....	13
A TALE OF TWO PANELS: Lilian Edwards & Christina Lake.....	17
HOW WOMEN GET PREGNANT: Linda Pickersgill.....	23
B24 LIBERATOR: Greg Pickersgill.....	29
SPLENDOURS & MISERIES: Roz Kaveney.....	35
A MITCHAM MINT: Abi Frost.....	40
LUNCH AT THE SAVOY: Anne Hamill.....	46
DOPE, SEX, & CHEAP THRILLS: Owen Whiteoak.....	51
WHEN FANDOMS COLLIDE: Bob Shaw.....	62

EDITOR'S NOTE

'Lunch At The Savoy' and 'How Women Get Pregnant' originally appeared in The Women's Periodical; 'A Mitcham Mint', 'B24 Liberator' and 'Splendours & Miseries' originally appeared in Frank's Apa; 'Birdland' is from Dot; 'A Tale Of Two Panels' is from This Never Happens; 'When Fandoms Collide' is from The Zine That Has No Name; and 'Dope, Sex, & Cheap Thrills' is a combination of pieces that appeared in Expensive and Dope, Sex, & Cheap Thrills. Our thanks to Colette Kirkbride for typing out all of these articles.

This fanthology is a collection of British fanwriting since the last British Worldcon, SEACON'79, but it starts with a piece published before that convention. Kev Smith's 'Birdland' is included here with ironic intent because in it he humorously explores male fears as to what the impact of Feminism on British fandom would be, and as it turned out an increase in the numbers of active female fans and the new attitude they fostered would be one of the major influences on British fandom in the 1980s. Many of those female fans are represented in these pages. In assembling this fanthology we wanted to reflect post SEACON'79 fandom rather than put together a collection of what we would claim was the best fanwriting of the period - but then what two fans would agree on what constituted the best fanwriting anyway? Nonetheless only good quality writing was considered for inclusion and we're only sorry that space considerations forced out other material we also wanted to reprint. So what sort of writing characterises recent British fandom? Read on...

....Rob Hansen.

INTRODUCTION

D WEST

Any anthology of fanwriting is almost certain to suggest a paraphrase of those famous words of Abraham Lincoln: You can please all of the people some of the time, and some of the people all of the time, but you can't please all of the people all of the time, the cheap nitpicking sons of bitches.

Damn right. Whatever the editors (poor bastards - and don't look at me, none of this is my responsibility) put in, and whatever they leave out, someone somewhere is sure to start mumbling and whining, if not screaming and shouting. The inclusion of X is a bad joke! The exclusion of Y is a monstrous injustice and an unforgiveable insult! Holy Mother of God, the entire vile pustular stinking mess is a complete and utter travesty of the True Meaning of Fandom!

And so on and so forth. That's the way it goes, because that's the nature of the beast. Fandom is full of people who get their rocks off being bloody-minded, and fans in general are notoriously prone to work up an argument, even despite (or perhaps because of) the fact that at least half of them are still under the impression that the words "Use logic" are some sort of advertising slogan for a new brand of soap powder.

Well, as veterans of these gruesome affairs will already have realised, the only reason I myself am appearing in this damnfool publication is so that I can get in my very own pre-emptive strike against all the incredibly dumb misconceptions that the very existence of the thing seems sure to bring into being. I am already on record elsewhere as saying that I think all fanthologies (apart from such dazzlingly wonderful exceptions as collections consisting entirely of my own works) are an absolutely lousy idea both in principle and in practice, and I see no reason why I should exempt this one. It could have been a lot worse, and it does have one or two small points in its favour, but I still think it should carry some sort of Government Health Warning in very large letters: THIS COLLECTION DOES NOT CONTAIN THE BEST OF ANYTHING OR EVEN THE MOST REPRESENTATIVE SELECTION OF ANYTHING AND AS AN ILLUSTRATION OF THE NATURE OF CHARACTER OR MEANING OF ANYTHING IT IS NO MORE THAN A VERY PARTIAL AND INCOMPLETE OUTLINE AND THAT'S BEING REALLY

FUCKING DIPLOMATIC ABOUT IT.

Sigh. Graon. I suppose that now I'll have to struggle to explain myself. But don't worry, I'll keep it short. I've let this deadline run right into summer, and now it's far too hot, I've got a headache, some unnatural insect just bit me on the ankle, I think I'm developing another ulcer, my sex life appears to consist largely of an occasional hollow laugh, and I'm worried that there must be something seriously wrong with my brain, since how else could I even have thought of agreeing to write this piece? Unfortunately, people keep phoning up and nagging me a lot, so I guess I'll have to do something. Even though, to quote the immortal words (probably not reprinted here, but how should I know?) of Greg (the Abraham Lincoln of South Ealing) Pickersgill, I just wanna lie down.

Right. But meanwhile, being semi-vertical for the moment, lets run through a few basic concepts, since it seems reasonable to assume that at least some of the readers here have little or no experience of fanzines in general, while the (notionally) more knowledgeable visitors from overseas may well be labouring under a misconception or two concerning the nature of the specifically British product. (The crassest error of all, apparently widespread in some sections of US fandom, is the innocent but extremely dopy notion that British fandom is simply a sort of provincial offshoot or copy of the Great Americal Original. Not so, boys. There may have been some very small percentage of truth in this about thirty years ago (to the extent that the two fandoms then had much closer links) but British fandom always had its own separate history and identity, and by the 1970's it was very definitely the USA that seemed (from here) the distant, vaguely remembered colony: perhaps worth occasional mild casual interest, but neither central nor indeed at all essential. It doesn't greatly matter which you think is best, but it would certainly be a very good idea to get it straight that British fandom is different).

Meanwhile, back at the main point, it also seems like a very good idea to have mercy on my labouring brain by just re-running large chunks of what I said back in 1984 (in the Introduction to FANZINES IN THEORY AND IN PRACTICE). A few precise definitions of terms certainly won't come amiss, since otherwise any attempt to discuss what fanzines and fanwriting are all about is very apt to disappear in a fog of fuzzy generalities. Experienced fans (ie those who can recognise The Same Old Shit when they see it coming) may now leave the room, but all others should play close attention, on pain of being totally bemused if they don't.

Fanwriting, obviously enough, appears in fanzines, but it has to be emphasised that when I refer to 'fanzines' I have in mind a quite narrowly defined and limited category. (And just to get you really worried: not all writing which appears in fanzines is necessarily fanwriting - but more on that in due course). The term as used here does not automatically include either those publications which call themselves fanzines (such as various music-oriented titles of recent years) or even all those which are published without any intention of making a profit (and hence are labelled 'amateur' rather than 'professional'). To take the name of something is not necessarily to become that thing, and while it is certainly one of the characteristics of a fanzine that it is published for love rather than money - out of enthusiasm rather than commercial

calculation - this is by no means the whole of the definition. There are many publications which are like fanzines in one or more respects (or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that fanzines are like them in one or more respects) but the qualities distinguishing the genuine fanzine remain unique.

Magazine publications as a whole can be divided into three categories:

- (1) PROZINES ('Pro' from 'Professional')
Magazines published as business enterprises which make or aim to make a working profit sufficient to support either publisher or editor. Contributors are usually paid.
 - (1.1) Wholly self-supporting prozines (eg ANALOG)
 - (1.2) Partly self-supporting prozines (ie what are usually called 'semi-pro' publications - in effect struggling prozines).
- (2) SUBZINES ('Sub' from both 'Subscription' and 'Subsidy')
Magazines published to be sold, either directly or as part of the return for a subscription to some organised body, but which do not make a working profit and are subsidised by their publishers or by some outside agency. Contributors and/or editors may or may not be paid.
 - (2.1) 'Little' magazines eg INTERZONE, and all other non-academic publications supported by Arts Council (or equivalent) grants.
 - (2.2) Academic Journals eg FOUNDATION, SCIENCE FICTION STUDIES, and all other learned (scientific, medical, legal, etc) journals published with University or equivalent Institutional support.
 - (2.3) Club and Trade Journals eg the BSFA's VECTOR and MATRIX, and all Club, Union, or Trade Association publications produced wholly or principally for a readership consisting of the members of such bodies.
- (3) AMZINES ('Am' from 'Amateur')
Non-profitmaking publications which do not pay contributors and are published and edited by individuals wholly at their personal expense. Sometimes sold but often given away free.
 - (3.1) Non-SF subject-oriented amzines eg small Poetry, Arts or other special-interest-oriented publications not in receipt of any subsidy.
 - (3.2) SF subject-oriented amzines ie what are commonly known as 'sercon' SF fanzines:

publications devoted to the discussion of Science Fiction in any or all its aspects, but not including any strong personal element.

- (3.3) Self-oriented amzines ie 'fannish' fanzines - The Real Thing - not restricted to any particular subject area and highly self-referential and personalised.

(Of the above terms, 'Prozine' has long been in general use; 'Subzine' and 'Amzine' have occasionally been seen, though without ever being very clearly defined. 'Sercon' and 'fannish' are terms which are almost impossible to understand fully except through direct personal experience. As a crude illustration: the sercon fan will want to talk about Arthur C Clarke's latest novel, whereas the fannish fan will want to talk about Arthur C Clarke's sex life. However, bear in mind that this polarisation is scarcely ever fixed and absolute).

It will be noted that the picture here is rather like a painter's shade card, with bands of colour side by side but sometimes overlapping and merging into each other. Moving across this irregular spectrum it is obvious that there are definite differences - that the shades are by no means all the same - but it is not always easy to say where one ends and the next begins. It is also difficult to find absolutely pure primaries: everything seems to have a touch - or more than a touch - of some other colour. Thus SF REVIEW is certainly a prozine (1.1 or 1.2) but has many amzine characteristics (3.2 and even 3.3); LOCUS is also a prozine (1.1 or 1.2) but has often claimed amzine (3.2) status (particularly, until recently, at Hugo-voting time) although its real character is more that of a Trade Paper (2.3) for SF groupies; INTERZONE is a subzine (2.1) but has the ambition, appearance (and word-rates) of a prozine (1.1) although in true amzine style (3.1, 3.2, 3.3) its editors are not paid; MATRIX is certainly a subzine (2.3) but both its editors and its readers often treat it as an amzine (3.2 and 3.3).

Some publications seem to straddle two or even all three of the major categories, and within these categories the differences are often even more blurred. However, while it is often difficult to say what specific publications are within the terms of these definitions, it is usually possible to form a fairly accurate estimate of what they want to be. In other words: forget legalistic quibbles - go by the spirit rather than the letter - and take a look not at where a publication is in the scale, but which way it is pointing.

In most cases the desired direction will be up - up from amzine to subzine, from subzine to prozine, from small prozine to big prozine. A certain number of publications - Trade Papers and Learned Journals - may be fairly content with their lot, but even these probably cherish dreams of a rise in status if not in circulation. If the magazines don't have ambitions for themselves as magazines they invariably have ambitions for their subject-matter - they want to push their trade, their expertise, their special interest.

And here the fundamental strangeness of fanzines (3.3) finally stands revealed: fanzines do not want to be anything but fanzines, and they exist for their own sake and not to promote any outside end.

To the outsider this is the most baffling thing: fanzines are not about anything in particular - they are not subject-oriented and they don't make money - so what on earth are they for? Subject-oriented amzines (3.1) may be casual or eccentric in presentation, but they are still generally understandable since they are in effect imitations on a smaller scale of known forms: subzines or prozines. Even if the subject-matter is so specialised or esoteric that no equivalent subzine or prozine actually exists, the approach and purpose are recognisably the same.

Fanzines are different. Although fanzines are amzines, amzines are not necessarily fanzines. The confusion that arises between what are really two very different breeds (3.1 and 3.3) is due to the ambiguousness and ambivalence of the category (3.2) that separates them: the SF subject-oriented amzine, or, as fans invariably call it, the sercon fanzine.

The sercon fanzine is subject-oriented, certainly, but not quite in the same way as the non-SF subject-oriented amzine. Whatever the serconists may piously hope, there is always a greater or lesser tendency to wander into fannishness (ie personalities and self-oriented concerns), if only because the readership of fannish fanzines has a considerable overlap with that of sercon fanzines, and the same people are often active in both fields. (Witness the surprisingly large number of fannish fans who have, or have had, commercial involvement with SF). Also, there is the rather peculiar nature of SF-as-subject.

Fans make up a very diverse bunch of people, but the one characteristic they have in common with each other and with SF is what might be described as a belief in other possibilities. In a word, they have vision. This 'vision' is not necessarily either very admirable or even very sophisticated - in fact it may be cheap, tawdry and generally unpleasant, as in all those sex-and-power fantasies in which SF becomes the vehicle for costume dramas of the Fourth Reich - but it is unusual in being both a very recognisable distinguishing feature and at the same time completely non-specific. The SF fan wants to extend reality in some fashion - but in associating with fellow enthusiasts he is drawn to them by the instinctive recognition of the same shared desire rather than by any particular common concrete goal. As a genre, SF is unusual in its scope: it can include practically anything, whereas the other genres are restricted to a comparatively limited range of appropriate interests. (Western fans stick to cowboys, horses, guns and so on; crime fans to detectives, forensic science etc. The Mainstream (ie non-genre fiction) is too varied and diffuse to catalyse any common-interest groups except by way of an equally narrow genre-type interest in specific authors.) The interest SF fans have in Science - their supposed 'subject' - is usually more nominal than real. What the fans like about Science is not so much the nuts-and-bolts detail as the whole idea: the vision of Science as Opener of the Way to all their own (often unacknowledged) dreams and desires.

This explains both why people become SF fans and why even when they have largely ceased to bother with the SF product itself they may still remain fans. As several critics have pointed out, enthusiasm for SF is very like a kind of religious belief: the convert experiences a blinding revelation - a nebulous but tremendous moment of Cosmic insight - and thereafter he knows. This is it - the Real Thing. Then the poor sod actually reads the bloody books

and the initial fervour cools off a little. (Twenty-five years ago I would have been ecstatic at the sight of a whole shop filled with SF. These days the realisation of the dream produces nothing more than a rather queasy feeling of depression. Jesus, all those fucking hack novels - all that brainless crap about Galactic Empires...) But even if the enthusiasm for SF as SF wanes, the enthusiasm for the SF idea often remains - and in the meantime, of course, the victim has fallen into the company of likeminded individuals, if only because these are the only people who have the remotest idea what he's talking about, and don't need to have the whole business explained to them over and over again... And this is what fanzines are all about: an extension - however crude and clumsy - of the possibilities of life; a reflection of an intuitive, elusive shared belief that there can be something more than what is normally on offer.

(Sounds good, don't it? You'd never think all this high-flown talk had any connection with some of the sleazy, scurrilous, foul-mouthed and deranged gossip-sheets you may have come across. But it does, it does. Anybody who tries to tell you fanzines are respectable is a fucking liar. At least, I certainly hope so).

In essence, the fanzine idea is the SF idea - with or without the SF. Fanzines are always distinguishable from subject-oriented amzines (3.1) by the fact that they are reader-directed, not subject-directed, and their aim is not to provide an object for passive consumption but to fill a part in a dialogue. The function of a fanzine is to act as a vehicle either for response, or as response. All non-fanzines, on the other hand, are characterised by the producer-consumer relationship they have with their readers: we produce the text, and you pay the money or pay the attention - and that's all. The publisher/editor leads and the reader follows: response is either not required or is dictated in terms of the chosen subject. A Poetry amzine is about Poetry; a Stamp Collecting amzine is about Stamp Collecting. If you've got something to say about Stamp Collecting (the Subject) or Poetry (the Subject) your response is irrelevant. The rest of your life (apart from the Subject) is irrelevant...

In a fanzine, it's all relevant - if it's remotely interesting or if the writer can make it remotely interesting. (Dullness is dullness, in any context, and there is no sort of moral obligation on anyone to pretend otherwise). The Subject of a fannish fanzine, in fact, is no more or less than anything and everything contained in the consciousness of its producers and readers. Non-fanzine publications either want their readers' money (pay up and we'll entertain you) or their readers' attention (sit quiet and Teacher will improve your mind). Fanzine publishers don't care about the money, and they certainly don't want an audience that sits quiet - they want the readers to say or do something interesting in return.

That's the payoff. The direct response (ie letters of comment) to any particular fanzine is rarely very high - 20% would probably be considered good - but this is not of vital importance. Though composed of individuals who are often independant to the point of egomania (or paranoia), the fanzine world is a communal enterprise in the sense that response to a part is apt to be seen as a contribution to the whole. One way or another, everybody pays their dues by participating - even if only by turning up to an occasional convention and buying the editor a few drinks. There is

a sort of Fannish Credit System which makes elastic allowances for both past and potential performance. 'Real Soon Now' is an old joke, but it is also an acknowledgement that eventually some return contribution will be made, directly or indirectly.

There are two important points to be made about all of the above: first, that this is a description of how things are, not some idealised notion of how they ought to be, and second, that this state of affairs results not from any set of rules, principles or ideological dogmas, but from purely functional and practical considerations. To put it another way; fanzines and fanwriting are as they are simply because it would be a waste of time and effort for them to be anything else. Given certain aims - and a lack of concern for other aims - the forms they take are actually quite logical. Thus, since fanzines are not at all concerned with the profit motive, not only is it absurd to bother collecting the trivial sums that setting a price on them would provide, but it is also absurd to seek to fashion their contents as if for a paying market. This is not so much a question of quality as of kind. The commercial aim is to appeal to as wide a range of people as possible in order to get their money; the fannish aim is to appeal to the very limited number of people who are sufficiently in tune with a certain way of thinking to make some sort of direct or indirect response. Fanzines don't want to appeal to a wide range of people, and therefore the complaint that they are often unintelligible outside a small circle is essentially meaningless. Fanzines are meant for a small circle - this is the most basic part of their nature. There is no deliberate policy of exclusion or secrecy - it is simply in the whole nature of things that outsiders either have to make the effort to learn the language themselves or must stay on the outside.

This is the basic flaw in the whole concept of anthologies of fanwriting: they are attempting to repackage something highly personalised, specialised, and aimed at an informed, limited audience, in a form which is sufficiently generalised to be acceptable in a market economy geared to passive consumption. The process is self-defeating, since the whole point of fanwriting is that it provides something which is so fashioned around individual personalities that it is not available anywhere else, and not a mere object of consumerism. The most 'saleable' parts of fanwriting - those which are completely and readily understandable to a non-informed audience - in fact represent its least characteristic and least essential aspects.

This has little to do with the technical quality of the writing. From time to time one hears it said that such and such a piece of work is "good enough to be published anywhere". This is meant as praise, but in the context of fanwriting it is a somewhat ambiguous compliment. Works so described may indeed be technically accomplished - but if they are so devoid of any special content that they could be published anywhere, what is the point of publishing them in a fanzine? To do so is to turn the fanzine into nothing more than a minor imitation (or, at best, very low-level rival) of publications already available elsewhere in considerably better-produced form.

Hardly seems worth the effort, does it? Indeed, it's not worth the effort. (As the readers - if not the producers - of fanzines devoted largely or wholly to fiction usually realise quite

quickly). True, you can publish anything you like in a fanzine, but what the advocates of 'good enough to be published anywhere' fanwriting seem unable to grasp is that if such work ever came to from the major element in fanzines then the field would soon be virtually dead. The quality of the writing might go up - but the personal interest would go down. One would feel no more personal involvement - no more need to comment or respond - than one does with a Sunday paper or a book borrowed from the local library. The fanzine would become just one more (literary) consumer object - and by virtue of its inevitable production weaknesses, one at the very bottom end of the consumer market.

This is the insoluble problem which faces the fanthology editor: to choose between being incomprehensible or inauthentic, between being baffling and being misleading. On the whole, the first option is always to be preferred. It seems rather futile to entice people into fandom on a false basis - it simply postpones the moment of puzzlement.

To its credit, this collection has largely turned its back on the pursuit of any lowest common denominator of accessibility. Many of the references (and perhaps even the basic attitudes of mind) will be more or less incomprehensible (at first reading) to any newcomer. This is altogether as it should be. We will not deceive you, folks: British fans are a bunch of elitist bastards - elitist, that is, in the sense that they are concerned only with the opinions of those who are willing to participate in their particular game. This, too, is entirely as it should be: no-one is compelled to join, and no-one is excluded by force or by rule, but it would not be reasonable for anyone simultaneously to claim membership and to reject most or all of the interests and practices which bind members together. To behave in such a fashion would be rather like joining a cricket club and immediately demanding that the pitch be dug up for a golf course. Some people approach fandom in much the same way, and then when their demands are (quite reasonably) ignored or dismissed, they proceed to develop persecution mania and to elaborate immense Conspiracy Theories.

Well, to be a fan it is only necessary to take some part in the activities recognised by other fans as falling within their special sphere of interest. If this does not appeal, or if (for whatever reason) no-one seems very interested in your efforts, then the simple and sensible answer is to go and do something else. If you don't like the game - go start your own. There is nothing either unfair or oppressive about this, since fans, after all, have no powers whatsoever of either compulsion or restraint. Anyone can publish a fanzine and anyone can attend a convention. The only real test or measure is the extent to which other fans want to know you or your work. True, if you are a dull person with little talent and few social graces it is unlikely that you will be received with great enthusiasm - but this is also the case in virtually any social setting. Fandom is not some kind of charity aimed at providing group psychotherapy, and (as already remarked) there is no moral obligation on anyone to pretend to like you or your work any more than they think you deserve. It's sad, but if you can't make it in the wider world it's very unlikely that you'll do much better here. Fans are more tolerant in some areas, since fannish values have less than the usual concern with standard social measures such as wealth or occupation, but the other side of the coin is a much greater readiness to air differences of opinion with a

freedom and disregard for politeness which to newcomers is likely to seem both drastic and ruthless. This, too, is a reflection of the peculiar nature of fanzines and fanwriting. Fanzines do not improve your career, your bank balance, or your social standing (outside fandom), so there's no real reason why you shouldn't cut the crap and say exactly what you think. You may get a rough ride in return - since everyone else has the same freedom - but it's certainly a liberating experience.

All this may sound like the old, old story to the experienced, but it seems worth repeating for the (possible) benefit of new arrivals. After all, this collection is being produced for a Worldcon which will have perhaps five thousand attendees - and of these one can guarantee that about eighty per cent will never have heard of more than one or two of the writers included here, while perhaps fifty per cent will have had little or no exposure to this sort of fanwriting. For many people 'fandom' chiefly means the kind of convention circus that revolves around SF professionals and their works, and they neither know nor understand anything about writing which is neither market-oriented nor intended as a cheap imitation of commercial or academic forms.

Well, everyone to their own taste. My own view is that fandom (even in the widest sense of the word) would have about the same durability as the following of any second-rank pop star, were it not for the continuity provided by fanzines and the hardcore of those who write and publish them. God knows, fanzines are ephemeral and temporary enough, but the mark left by any convention fan is very much a case of footprints on water. It is worth noting - just to give the lie to the absurd claim that there are 'convention' fans who do all the work, and 'fanzine' fans who merely sit around and complain - that every single one of the contributors here has either been involved in convention organising or has made frequent contributions to convention programming. But will they be remembered for that, or for their writing?

(Disrespectful answers may be addressed to the individuals concerned. You know very well that was a rhetorical question).

Perhaps all this hammering-away at old points is unnecessary, and I should simply let the work speak for itself and let the reader sink or swim. I hope no-one would seriously claim that the writing here is 'the best' British fandom can offer, but it's not too bad. Many equally good (or perhaps even better) writers have been omitted - not entirely the fault of the editors, since a number of items have already been reprinted, and the intention was, in any case, to limit the selection to the period from the last British Worldcon in 1979. The past eight years have been no more or less a Golden Age than any other legendary era but much of the good material has been very firmly embedded in its context indeed: excellent in its time and place, but deprived of half its impact and meaning by being extracted. Several of the articles finally included here are good fanwriting (and all are at least competent as writing) and so I suppose some fans will consider this quite a good anthology. Being a man of iron peevishness I am not so easily mollified. The basic problem remains inescapable: considering each in isolation one could make a case for the merits of each and every item - but each and every item appears here as a section cut out of the canvas of the whole scene. And one thing I hope I have made plain is that fanwriting, perhaps more than any other form of writing, depends for its full success and meaning of the web of shared background knowledge that binds

together the author and reader.

Enough, enough. Dig too deep and too often into these critical theorisings and you end up more than a little deranged, babbling of Secret Masters and the Protocols of the Elders of Fandom. That's the kind of fate which befalls those who become so blinded by visions of Perfect Fannishness that they write Histories of Fandom in which the Second World War appears merely as a period in which postal services were somewhat disrupted, thus causing serious delays in fanzine deliveries.

There are two famous fannish acronyms: FIAWOL (Fandom Is A Way Of Life) and FIJAGH (Fandom Is Just A Goddamn Hobby), but the truth lies somewhere between them in the form of FIAPOL (Fandom Is A Part Of Life). For functional reasons fandom does have its own unique peculiarities, but at the same time the character of what it produces in any age is very largely a reflection of the much wider world outside. There is a paradox here in that fanwriting is very much about individuals and personalities, but in reality no single individual or personality has any great importance. A true historical overview would acknowledge the fact that even the dull, the incompetent and the obnoxious have had their parts to play. (After all, what sort of a soap opera is it that has no villains and no extras for the crowd scenes?) The tendency to mythologise the lives and works of particular fans, turning them into Giants without whom the field could scarcely have existed, does indeed form something of a barrier to acceptance for anyone who has retained a less narrow and blinkered perspective. (Anthologies like this one don't help, with their implicit suggestion that by virtue of being chosen the authors and works featured are somehow special and significant. Not that one could grade merit any better any other way - all fan polls are more or less ridiculous, and the Fan Hugos are a complete farce).

The truth is that fanwriting is always much more influenced by what is produced outside the field than within it. (A Great Fannish Innovator is someone who introduces into fandom some technique or approach which has been commonplace in the rest of the world for at least ten years. For people who like to think of themselves as citizens of the future fans have a rather sad tendency to be a long way behind the times). Something to bear in mind is that fanzines probably represent no more than five per cent (at the most generous estimate) of total media input for any fan, and that they form a practically invisible percentage of the total social/cultural environment. Take an example: it is readily observable that American fanzines have had no effect whatsoever on British fanwriting for the last fifteen or twenty years, but during the same period American (non-fan, non-SF) writers have had a very marked influence indeed in some quarters. Likewise, the emergence here of a markedly higher proportion of active female fans is much more a reflection of general social change than a specifically fannish development. (Well, perhaps I should qualify that by acknowledging the factor of the stimulus provided by the large group of US female fans now resident in Britain. Though quite why American women seem so keen to come over here and steal all our men is still something of a mystery. Is it that British male fans are more cultured, more depraved, or just thinner? Maybe it's our cute accents). Anyhow, it is said that History is bunk, and it should also be said that most Fan History is complete garbage.

Ah hell, who cares anyway? Sensible people probably stopped

reading this about eight pages back, knowing very well that it was going to turn out to be another of those thrilling demonstrations of how to use a sledgehammer to put a really savage dent in a defenceless peanut. You'll all just have to do the best you can. You have a sort of Zen conundrum here: for as long as you need to keep asking the questions you are not ready to understand the answers. And that's not a putdown - it's just a reflection of the fact that in the end the reasons for liking (or rejecting) fandom, fan-zines and fanwriting remain somewhat inscrutable. Perhaps the only sensible summing-up is to say that there's more to all this nonsense than may first meet the eye. Not a lot more, perhaps, but assuming you've got nothing better to do it might be worth your while to persist.

Personally, I quite like it, even though I think it's all fairly daft. But then - what isn't? And besides, I'm well known to be a notoriously perverse and irresponsible individual, erratic and unstable in behaviour, and with what many consider to be highly inappropriate ideas of which parts of life should be taken seriously. (Actually, this is all a pack of lies put about by my enemies. In reality I'm a very sweet person, famous for my charm, wisdom and thoughtful erudition, and I was recently voted Most Eligible British Fan in a secret poll. And let me tell you, kid, that's a damn sight more use than winning one of those fucking metal rocketships).

Anyhow, just don't say I didn't warn you. Now read on.

.x. .x. .x. .x. .x. .x. .x. .x. .x. .x. .x. .x. .x. .x. .x.

BIRDLAND

KEVIN SMITH

I dived through the door marked 'Gentlemen' on the first floor of the Metropole. It swung to behind me, and I hoped I hadn't been seen. I was panting hard, and leant on a sink to recover.

"God! It's hell out there," I said aloud, to no-one in particular.

"Pretty bad, eh?" came a reply. I looked round; it was Mike Dickinson. "They've gone mad, gone right off the deep end."

I nodded. "A man can't take a step out there now. Not with safety."

We both sighed, and lapsed into silence. For several minutes all that could be heard was water dripping into a cistern in one of the cubicles.

"I blame Greg, myself," said Mike. "Potting Janus after SFR in his Real Fan Hugo ballot form."

I nodded again. "He was the first to go, certainly. I'd often wondered what he looked like without his beard."

"Ghastly," said Mike.

"I wouldn't have put it that strongly... oh, I see what you mean."

We were silent again. It was a contemplative silence.

"Did you see Kettle?" said Mike at last.

"Yes," I said sadly. "I know he always comes out with his 'peanuts envy' joke at room parties these days, but he shouldn't have tried it with Jessica there."

"It wouldn't have been so bad," said Mike, "but he repeated it four times in between fallings off the corner of the bed."

Suddenly, a cubicle door opened and a very pale Steev Higgins walked very slowly out. "What day is it?" he said.

"Sunday," said Mike.

"Just gone noon," I added.

"Jesus!" said Higgins. "I've been in there fourteen hours."

"What happened?" I asked.
"Drank half a bottle of scotch and passed out," said Steev.
"Still got half left - want some?" He generously held out the miniature to me. I took a swig and passed it to Mike, who finished it off with another.

"How long have you been in here?" I said to Mike.
"Three hours," he said. "I was nearby when it started to get really nasty."
"Good job you always carry an emergency book," I said.
Mike just shook his head; he rummaged in his canvas shoulder bag and pulled out a copy of 'The Female Man'.
"Joanna Russ - Jesus Christ!"
"I was looking forward to reading it too," said Mike sadly.

Young Steev was looking puzzled. "What's been happening? What have I missed?"
"You're from Leeds, you tell him," I said quickly.
"It's... There's been a rising. The Feminists..." was all Mike could say before his voice choked off.
"We're being wiped out," I said. "They caught us while we were all pissed as rats, before we could organise. I've been on the run for hours, haven't had a wink of sleep since the night before last..."
"So what's new - at a con?" said Steev.
"You wouldn't be that flippant if you'd seen it," I snapped.
"I haven't seen a British trufan for over an hour, till now. We may be the only ones left, for all I know."

"Surely not!" said Steev. "Even the nice guys, like Andrew Stephenson?"
"One of the first to go," said Mike. "Held a door open for some woman."
"Well, what about good old Dr Rob Jackson?"
"The fool disgnosed acute paranoia. Ripped him to shreds."
"Little Ian Williams?"
"Trampled underfoot by a maddened horde pursuing Gerry Webb."
"Well, that 's not much of a loss."
"There's not much of him."
Now even the exuberant Higgins was silenced, and the three of us brooded.

"There must be someone left," said Mike. "Some of these hyper-active fans, maybe. Dave Langford would be too clever for them - talk his way out of anything with a few scotches in him. that one."
I shook my head. "They thought he was patronising them with all those big words. They sneaked up on his deaf side and got him with a feminist dictionary."
"But Langford uses big words to everyone, even David V. Lewis!"
"I know that! Anyway, Hazel took out twenty-three of them with her knitting needles before they got her as well."
It turned out that neither Mike nor I had witnessed the various demises of Graham Charnock, Mulligrubs Collick and Rog Peyton, but we'd seen the terrible results.

"Someone..." Mike was muttering. "Feminist survival characteristics - I've got it! The Chief Limpwrist. Joe Nicholas must

be okay, with his shoulder bag, chiffon scarf and lip salve."
"Not even him," I said. "They thought he was taking the piss - too exaggeratedly feminine."
"How did you manage to last this long, then?" said Steev.
I looked at him. I wasn't keen on the way he'd said that.
"I joined a group of Space 1999 fans. The feminists consider them simple-minded and harmless."
"They are simple-minded and harmless."
"You wouldn't say that if you'd been with them for a couple of hours. You can get terminal brain hurt trying to keep down to their level, knowing that one intelligent remark might be your last."
"It could have been worse," said Mike. "It could have been Battlestar Galactica fans."
I dived into a cubicle and was suddenly, violently sick.
"You shouldn't say things like that," I told Mike. "My nerves aren't what they were."

The outer door suddenly crashed open. My heart, I swear, missed half a dozen beats. The ragged figure of Rob Hansen collapsed onto the floor. Hurriedly we dragged him inside. The door swung shut. Hansen opened one eye, said, "Hello Kev Smith," and closed it again. Steev chucked a plastic cup of water on his face. The cup hit his nose and tipped the water down his shirt front, but it brought him round gasping.
"Thank God there's still someone left," he said. "I saw them get Dorey - it was horrible!"
"What happened?" said Higgins. He was saying that a lot.
"They set fire to a load of old Gross Encounters with him securely roped down in the middle of them."
"Is there anyone left at all?" groaned Mike.
"Yeah," said Hansen.

We were amazed. I was, at any rate, and the others looked it.
"Won't do us much good, though," Rob continued.
"For God's sake, tell us who!"
"There's Ian Maule - they don't seem to take much notice of him whatever he does - and Ritchie Smith..."
"Why Ritchie?"
"He's got them very confused. I think they think he's pregnant. And Harry Bell..."
"What is it about these bloody Gannetts?" said Mike.
"Harry's drunk so much whisky they reckon he's dead already. He's not, though; he recoonised me as I was passing and threw up over my foot." Rob paused, then he said, "There was someone else, too. Peter Weston."
"Peter Weston?"
"Peter Weston?"
"PETER BLOODY WESTON? There's not a bigger male chauvinist in fandom! How the hell did Peter Bloody Weston escape them?"
"He told them he was just taking an extreme position to provoke comment."
"He's bloody provoked me!" said Mike. His hands made involuntary strangling movements.

"What about all the women fans?" said Steev Higgins suddenly.
"Are you sure you're old enough?" said Rob.
"I see what he means," I said. "Simone and Pat and Chris and

Eve and the rest - are they Sisters, or have they been stomped on too? I didn't see any of them on my way here."

"Me neither," said Mike.

Rob shook his head.

"We have to fear the worst," I said.

"And that's suitably ambiguous," said Rob.

"Don't be uncharitable," I said. "They're fannish people. You can't be fannish and Feminist both; you need a sense of humour to be fannish."

"It's the end of British fandom," said Mike. "Fannish fandom, at any rate. Joe Nicholas was right, but he'd never have thought it would be like this."

"An unavoidable conclusion," I said. "No point in hanging around here, then. They'll be looking for us, and that 'Gents' sign won't hold them off for long."

We flung open the door and walked out with our heads held high. They were waiting for us, row upon row, silent and baleful. Slowly, they began to advance. We stood our ground while they surrounded us.

"Did you hear about the Feminist and the Gestetner crank handle?" I said.

Everything went suddenly black...

.x. .x. .x. .x. .x. .x. .x. .x. .x. .x. .x. .x. .x. .x.

A TALE OF TWO PANELS

LILIAN EDWARDS & CHRISTINA LAKE

Women In Fandom

C.J.L.

I've never had a horse run away with me, but it felt like it all the same. I cowered in my seat while my horse, or should I say horses, stampeded off at full speed, taking not the slightest notice of my nervous pull on the reins.

Well, that's what it felt like: my first experience of running a panel. It was at Mexican - my first experience of being on a convention committee. I suspect, in fact, I know, that the two firsts were connected. The horse started running away long before I sat on the podium in a blind panic, flanked on one side by Avedon Carol and Kate Solomon, and on the other by Andy Robertson and Dave Wood. It started, hesitantly perhaps, to break into a trot as Lilian and I discussed ideas for the fan room programme as we lazed around, holiday style, on a red barge named Spinel. It stretched its legs for a quick canter when I foolishly accepted responsibility for two fan-room panels on behalf of myself and Lilian at a sub-meeting in the Griffin, and finally started to gallop when, having naively opted out of running the fannish creativity panel, Lilian assured me that there was no alternative but to take on our other panel, soberly entitled "Women in fandom - Is there a place for men?"

So, off I went in search of panel members, only to discover that 50% of the people I really wanted (ie Linda Pickersgill) were already running the convention and wouldn't have time and the other 50% (ie Sherry Francis) excused themselves with a hasty mouthful of wine and a drawled "Oh no, I don't think so."

And so it continued. Kate wouldn't perform unless Avedon was with her (good grief, is this a panel or a nursery school outing?), Andy Robertson wanted to know if he was being cast as the token male chauvinist pig, and only Dave Wood heartened me by talking intelligently about the subject in the pub one night (thereby ensuring himself an instant offer of a place on the panel, poor man!)

It wasn't till the Friday night of Mexican that I realised

that I couldn't do it. Call it reaction from setting up the fan room, but after struggling with the displays which should have all been safely in place by the end of the afternoon, instead of being frenetically tacked on at nine in the evening thanks to the late arrival of the boards, I was in no mood to be rational. I suddenly saw with desperate clarity that I just couldn't do it. I simply didn't have the character to run panels; oh maybe in a small room at a not very well attended convention in the Outer Hebrides, but certainly not in the big hall at Mexican where every time I put my head round the door literary heavyweights were making articulate, erudite pronouncements on the state of the art, whichever art it so happened they practised.

I saw that I should have said 'no' a very long time ago, except that I hadn't really been given the option; or rather, I hadn't seen that I ought to have made myself the option. One says 'yes' because it's expected, and it feels like giving in to natural cowardice to say 'no'. It's character forming, you think to yourself, if I don't try I'll never know if I can do it, and other such misleading platitudes. So, it wasn't till that Friday night that it occurred to me that I had probably done Mexican a disservice by not refusing. Perhaps doing your duty is not always the best solution!

The panic washed over me, then went away. It was too late to drop out. A badly chaired panel would still be better than a gap in the programme. The only approach was to keep smiling and concentrate on survival. I went away with Peter-Fred to rehearse what I might say, wondering faintly, futilely, if I could make him do it for me, but knowing I couldn't. 'Women in fandom - is there a place for men?' had to be chaired by a woman or fall very flat indeed.

I hunted down my panellists on the day itself, thinking the enterprise more and more doomed:

"The panel's not what you said it'd be," complained Dave.

"They've put my wrong name in the programme book," protested Kate Solomon, ex Davies.

"I either have to be completely sober or very drunk," explained Andy, half way down his second pint.

"We need only say men are inadequate, then we can all go," advised Avedon.

I contemplated, then discarded the idea of a rehearsal. They'd only all agree that they didn't want to talk about women in fandom, disagree about everything else, and blunt the edge of any genuine antagonism. If sparks were going to fly, I wanted them to fly in public. After all, it was my main chance of entertaining the masses!

All the same, I worked out what I wanted to talk about: the phenomenon of women as an established, vocal community, no longer fandom's silent minority, and the corresponding question of whether men were therefore beginning to become aware of themselves as a distinct group within fandom, rather than the whole of fandom. I've noticed that women today seem to have an automatic support group, based around the women's apa, to help them when

they first get involved in fandom, while men have to make do as best they can, especially if they don't have a local group as a base. Leading on from that were all the ramifications of why (and if, of course) most of the good new writers of recent times have been women, why TWP is better than PAPA and why women have all the best fun at conventions.

But would they play? Would they hell! "Andy, do you think men have more difficulty getting involved in fandom today than women?" "No," he says decisively, then sits back and lets me sweat.

But it's worse still when I do get them talking. Kate Solomon goes over the top on matriarchy theories, Dave Wood throws copies of old sexist book covers into the audience and Avedon gets embroiled in a rant about publishing. "Doesn't anyone want to say anything about women in fandom," I expostulate desperately, but even my microphone isn't listening. Kate and Ted White begin talking at cross purposes about competition. I sit back and let my horses run away. Avedon charges at Andy. I wonder if the whole thing will end in a stand up fight. I keep surreptitiously looking at my watch. I might as well have organised it in absentia like Peter Weston at Novacon who set up a panel to discuss the cyclical nature of fandom, then didn't turn up! The affair was very successful as Greg Pickersgill took charge and everybody had far more interesting time discussing more viable theories of fandom. A pity I hadn't emulated his tactics. My panellists certainly didn't need me. But the audience seemed to be enjoying it.

At long last, Linda Pickersgill signals five more minutes to go. I take this as meaning I can end any time I can get a word in edgeways! So eventually when Andy and Avedon happen to pause for breath simultaneously, I plunge in muttering something incoherent which seems to have the right effect. Everyone on the podium stops talking. Everyone in the audience starts. It's over.

"Was I all right?" asks Andy anxiously. "I wasn't too over the top?"

"You were fine," I say shakily. "Just fine." Perhaps I should just emigrate to Australia straight away. "You weren't very assertive," accuses Kate. I know. I know. But it's over. I didn't burst into tears. I didn't run away half-way through the proceedings. I didn't leave a great big gap in the Mexican programme. I'd survived. But before I take on another panel, I shall first have to learn to ride.

Which could take rather a long time.

... ..

What Is Fanwriting?

L.E.

I've never liked public speaking. One of my earliest and most persistent occasions of public humiliation was being forced to stand up and recite the 'Manishtanoh' - a portion of the Torah (I think!) each Passover Seder my family held, from about the age of

eight up. I particularly resented this ghastly task - declaiming in a language I didn't understand and couldn't even read - because it was supposed to be the job of the youngest son and not the youngest daughter. If my family wasn't going to be liberal enough to let me draw on Friday nights or bring home prawn sandwiches, I didn't see why it should bend the rules just so I rather than my brother Jonathan could look a fool.

Things weren't any better at school. I remember the sheer terror of the compulsory primary six poetry recitation contest. I think I eventually faked a temperature to avoid that one. Even after I got into fandom and developed a bit more confidence in my opinions (quite a lot actually), though I'd happily go on (and on, and on) in groups and proffer my views wide and large, at the crunch, on the actual panel, you could always identify me as the one sitting whispering annoyingly to Christina in the third row back rather than slugging it out on the Big Bad Stage, while Gregory screamed "Shut UP, Lilian!"

This was why three weeks before Mexicon it was with a certain amount of wonderment that I realised I had been suckered into not only appearing on, but actually chairing a panel. Where had I gone wrong?

Previous panel appearances were, to say the least, not reassuring. There was the Novacon disaster, when everyone's microphone seemed to be turned on except mine. There was the Yorcon panel, saved from calamity by Dave Wood and the ever reliable and irascible Gregory, while Anne looked frozenly bright, Nigel just looked frozen and I hid.

There wasn't a great deal other experience to call on. One could see why.

Having got myself into this hole, I thought I'd better cast around for some reliable support. The panel, as closely and minutely defined by Linda and Christina, was to rejoice in the cognomen of "What is Fanwriting?" Very definite. Teeth clenched like a good Stephen Donaldson hero, I set out to find allies, theorist, performers, anything or anyone to aid me in my struggle with stage fright and my battle with nerves.

Simon Dunsley came first.

"No, I haven't seen on many panels either. Yes, I think I've got quite a lot to say about that, at least I'm writing an article about it so I can pinch bits out of that before I publish it. Actually I was quite good on that panel at Ra Con. I think."

Fine. I think. Next came Hazel Ashworth, who made the fatal mistake of imbibing too much alcoholic substance in my presence on the deceptively secure turf of her very own living room, and was consequently the fan-panel equivalent of an easy lay. "Yes, of course I'll be on your panel, Lilian. Sorry, what did you ask?"

In my head, I pegged Simon as the Theorist and Hazel as the Enthusiastic New Fan. The other necessary categories for a successful panel appeared to be an Iconoclast, to disagree with what everyone else said, and a Performer, to make jokes and tell witty

HOW WOMEN GET
fannish anecdotes when everyone had run out of ideas. Should be easy, I thought, knowing what awkward buggers and arrant show-offs fans tend to be. Not so. Jimmy Robertson certainly fitted the bill for the first, but the latter eluded me. Most of the bright sparks I could think of were already scheduled for panels arranged months ago by the industrious Paul and Colin, on holiday in Tanzania (Nick Lowe) or otherwise unavailable. There was nothing for it but a Token American, preferably one only arriving at the convention itself who'd be too jetlagged to realise he'd just been drafted in to entertain the natives. I ended up with Jerry Kaufman. Now I could stop worrying about who was going to be on the panel, I could relax, said Linda. Hah! Now I had time to really worry.

By the Sunday, which was when my very own little debacle was scheduled for (do you know there is no way you can avoid putting a dangling preposition at the end of that sentence?). even my nerves had nerves. Inspired by Abi Frost, I decided to hold a pre-match rally of my leading strikers, carefully not telling Jimmy lest he be swayed by the other panellists' arguments in advance and so fail to be suitably awkward. This meeting was held in my hotel room and was lent a nicely surreal air by the fact that Christina was collating a mailing of the Soft Toys' Apa at the same time.

"We all agree on what the definition of fanwriting is, don't we?" said I, after some discussion.

"Has anyone seen the armadillo's contribution?" said Christina, from behind the bed.

"Does American fanwriting really have less sense of context than British?" I asked Jerry.

"I've lost Buffin's second page" said Christina, crawling around the floor.

Simon shook his head meaningfully. Suzie perched on the bed, unspeaking and unmoved, like a Buddha. I wondered if I'd get a more or less intelligent response from the audience of the actual panel.

Six o'clock. Thirty minutes to D-Day or H-Hour or something along those lines. I've just realised (a) that I've eaten nothing all day (b) that I haven't given Anne Page any instructions about how to introduce my panellists and (c) that I'm absolutely knackered. I run around frantically, munching at (a), mouthing at (b) and consequently aggravating (c). We gather outside the main hall, waiting to be shepherded in by the ultra-professional Anne, going over our imaginary lines. Jimmy looks cool. Jerry looks natty. Simon looks ill. And Hazel, having suddenly realised what's she letting herself in for, looks absolutely terrified. Jerry, Jimmy and Hazel have respectively brought Suzie, Anne Hamill and Mal Ashworth along as their cheering sections. Me, I'm depending on the Soft Toys' Apa and God.

And they're coming out on to the field! I stare out at what isn't so much a sea as perhaps a river, or possibly a canal, of not very hostile faces. Maybe this will just be an embarrassment, not an actual disaster. We settle ourselves in our seats just as Anne gets a roar of laughter by announcing that when I was giving her the info on Jerry Kaufman, I included the fact that he was

HOW WOMEN GET PREGNANT

LINDA PICKERSGILL

Jewish. What's so funny about that? My major concern after getting my stilted introduction out the way is not so much the burning issues of fanwriting as whether anyone that wants a microphone has got one. We're one short of five, you see so the gap keeps being redistributed among the participants by passing the mike from hand to hand like a baton. I feel a bit like I'm in the Commonwealth Games. When I pay attention, things actually seem to be going all right. Gregory stands at the back and yells every time the pace looks like dropping, and in a slightly quieter manner, Judith Hanna does much the same thing from the front. They're distinctly useful people to have on, or rather at, a panel. At some point, having exhausted critical standards, transatlantic contact and whether people read articles by writers they don't know, Hazel leans over and says I should tell the one about how I chased Nigel Richardson around Mexico 1. This was an old story I had brought out at the meeting earlier. So off I go; I tell them how I got Nigel's first fanzine just before Mexico, when no-one had ever even heard of East Garforth, and how I went to Mexico asking everyone where or who Nigel Richardson was, I was so desperate to meet him. It's not a very exciting anecdote really, and as I near the end I realise I can get a good cheap laugh by adding "and when I found him, it was such a disappointment!" It works a charm. I feel like I have discovered a new super-power. I've never been the raconteur type. So this is how you make an audience laugh. How peculiar. What a weird sense of power.

Eventually, Linda gives the ten-minutes-to-go signal. With a sigh of relief, I start winding things down. Gregory wanders past nonchalantly and says "You can go on another hour if you like, the next item's cancelled." I look around at the audience, the panel. The former still seem interested, the latter fairly fresh, all except wise old Hazel, who thinks we should cut our losses and run while we're still ahead. She's almost as unable as me to believe that the damn thing's a success. We go on.

"Say 'competitiveness' and Ted White will stand up and wave his arms around," says Jimmy. I do, and he does. What have I said? I feel less like I'm on the field at Anfield now and more like I'm pulling rabbits out of hats. The men suddenly disappear to the toilet, having drunk too many free panel drinks, leaving me and Hazel to hold the field. I don't mind, I don't even need my vodka and orange any more, I'm drunk on the exhilaration, of knowing I can do this, and I've enjoyed it, and it's almost over. Eventually, after a mammoth hour and three-quarters, it is. I realise I'm shaking all over. I may not have been swept off the field in a 13:0 defeat but I certainly feel like I've at least run a marathon.

"You were very good," says Greg or Mal or someone.
"I know," I say in amazement.

Why, I might even do it again. Sometime.

.x. .x. .x. .x. .x. .x. .x. .x. .x. .x. .x. .x. .x. .x. .x.

Somewhere between the happy innocence of my childhood and the more or less wisdom of maturity lies a Dark Ages of my life ... a sort of mediaeval period where the burning question was not so much in the realm of discovering the philosopher's stone or querying the number of angels dancing on a pin's head but rather a question more basic and far more mysterious: how do women get pregnant? Thinking back to childhood it seems I was always aware that women "had" babies. Twice before the age of five I had watched my mother slowly swell, go off to the hospital and return with a wrinkled red baby sister. I stayed with neighbours during these hospital bouts of my mother's. They bought me candy and toys and generally spoiled me while telling of the wonderful surprise my mom would have for me when we all returned home. Mom having babies was OK by me.

As my sisters and I grew older playing "mommy" was a favourite pastime with a cluster of dolls and stuffed animals cast as our brood. Though we modelled our role on our own mother and other neighbourhood moms it was television that showed us how to "have" babies. Having babies always went something like this: first the mommy goes to the doctor who tells her she's going to have a baby. Then the mommy would stuff a doll or stuffed animal under her shirt. After walking around for a while with the unborn obviously poking out, mommy would clutch her belly and cry out "Oh... I'm going to have a baby" then fall to the floor, moaning and writhing. The doctor would then reappear on the scene, put mommy on the operating table, rip back the shirt, pull out the baby and announce "Congratulations. It's a bear." All this was deduced from TV films and shows we had watched. Though actual birth was never shown we always saw the mommy clutch her belly and moan and writhe while a sharp scream always punctuated the mystery event. The faces of the TV doctors and fathers always looked so grim and anxious, so we knew that whatever was happening must have been serious business. And so too it was serious business in our mommy game for all of about five seconds before we continued on with the tea party.

Almost all of my early knowledge of having babies was through such deduction. My mother, I found out years later, was of the

belief that when I wanted to know more about having babies I'd ask. Unfortunately, I grew up with the opposing idea that my parents would provide me with the information I needed to "grow up" and if they didn't tell me it was because something was secret adult knowledge that I was not supposed to know about. (Obviously this same knowledge related to the jokes grow-ups asked to leave the room for before telling). As a result I never asked and they never told me. It must have gradually dawned on me that real babies weren't stuffed under shirts but were in the mother's body and at birth it somehow came out. Now there were only so many places in a body where things came into or out of and as it surely couldn't come out of a mouth (how else would those TV mommies scream?) babies had to come from somewhere 'down there'. It didn't make much sense at the time because the only things that I knew of that came out of 'down there' were fairly foul and couldn't possibly have anything to do with cute little babies. So began the Mystery of What's Really Down There. As with so many things I shrugged it off as one of the things I'd find out about when I started to grow up.

Then I started to grow up. I was about ten or eleven years old when I discovered that I had cancer because of the lumps growing in my little flat chest. It was one of the seven early warning signs I had read about on a bookmark given to me by the school library. As I knew cancer was a killer I prepared myself as best a ten year old can: I prayed that Jesus would take me into heaven and I wrote a will so that my sisters would fairly divide my possessions. In some fashion I figured out how long I had left to live and counted down the days. My mother must have noticed my cancerous chest as well because it was during this time she chose to tell me about "flowering into womanhood" and an odd phenomenon called menstruation. I didn't die. I set another target date and it too passed without my dying. I accepted the fact that I could go at any time and rather than worrying about it I got on with school and Girl Scouts and softball.

I discovered that I was not the only one struggling for the light of knowledge during those dark ages. My girlfriends were struggling as well and we would huddle together in some corner of the school yard and exchange bits and pieces of rumoured facts of things that would happen to you when you grew up, including the having of babies. We knew that someday we'd begin a monthly bleed and have to wear sophisticated belts and pads to protect ourselves. We also knew that someday we'd produce babies from 'down there' but now was the added bit of rumour that boys were involved in the process. We weren't sure what, but there was something a boy did to you to make you pregnant. We weren't sure why but if you were alone with a boy he might try to do this something to you and in no uncertain terms were we to allow them to "do it". We had no idea of what "doing it" was but by golly, we weren't going to let any ol' boy do it to US!

During junior high school the rumours started flying. Everyone had her pet theory of what "it" was, all deduced, yet again, from things we were told not to do: A girl shouldn't sit on a boy's lap and if she must she should put a book on his lap to sit on (Was "it" osmosis? Did some bit of him seep up from his lap

into your 'down there' bits and make you pregnant?). A girl shouldn't french-kiss a boy (A repulsive idea to begin with. Was there something on his tongue that he shoved down your throat to work its way through your system to 'down there'?). Good girls don't use tampons. (Not that I fully understood how to use them anyway. Could they somehow be infected with a boy-germ that got in 'down there'?). Then there was the friend of a friend who knew someone who got pregnant by merely going swimming in a pool that some boy had 'done it' in. Oh, what horrid sneaks boys were! Always trying to do it to you even when you weren't looking!

I was in double bind during that particular phase of the Dark Ages. Not only was I unsure of what a boy was doing when he 'did it' to you, I didn't know what a boy looked like. Well, 'down there' anyway. Being the oldest of three sisters didn't give one much of a chance to glimpse a male body at home and though I had seen baby boys I could not connect their little bits with 'doing it' in any way. Again I had to rely on the world at large for clues. First of all the Ken doll was of no help whatsoever. Then there was a terrible expression for a penis among pre-teeny boppers: a weenie. A weenie is an American term for a hot dog and when I tried to couple that image with that of baby boys, then tried to relate that to the few bare parts I'd seen on animals (namely dogs... those pink shiny things they poke out)... well, it was just too horrible to think about! Not that I knew any more about what girls looked like 'down there' either. For so long that had been a "dirty" place, one to be wiped thoroughly, scrubbed regularly and kept contained in clean cotton panties.

High school days brought things into focus just a bit. Not a lot, mind you, but a bit. At that age we were all so cool. Being cool meant never admitting that you still didn't know quite what sex (for that is what we found out "it" was called) was all about. We told all sorts of raunchy "grow-up" jokes and laughed ourselves silly while wondering what we were laughing at. Whenever the rumour passed that so-and-so was a girl who had "gone all the way" I didn't so much shun and avoid her as good girls are taught to do, as I stood in awe of her because she knew. She had found out the secret to the great mystery. She was a world apart. Books helped fill in some of the gaps during those years, especially 60s science fiction and its more explicit sex scenes. It kind of bothered that they were always referring to a man's "seed". His seed was always splashing here and dribbling there. At the same time that I was trying to figure out "seed" there was a line in a Led Zeppelin number that bothered me as well, the one about "squeeze my lemon till the juice runs down my leg". From then until my first sexual experience I always pictured this pulpy, seeded lemon juice type stuff splashing, dribbling or running out of a weenie. Slowly a picture came together (though biology teachers always used the term ovaries or womb) and seed was sperm. Ah, the wonders of nature when the seed is planted in the fertile ovaries etc etc etc. But HOW HOW HOW! I still didn't know how it was done.

Then came a day in 1967. It was an occasion that caused three quarters of the Riverdale High School for Girls to swear

they would join a convent whether they were Catholic or not. It was the day we were shown the civil defence film on emergency childbirth. We had been watching a series of these films during our physical education classes. Though nuclear holocaust was never specified as the emergency to prompt this series of films, we were taught how to treat serious burns and wipe fallout from the tops of tin cans nonetheless. Emergency childbirth was one of the things we needed to know. As Louisiana is a backward state and sex education is still "banned" we had to get permission slips signed by our parents before viewing the film, all of which added to the tension and mystery of what was to be IT. At last we were going to find out how women had babies. The day arrived and a couple hundred of us crammed into the gym annex and sat on the floor before a giant white screen. The lights dimmed, a nervous hush fell and the civil defence logo appeared, accompanied by the sound of a raid siren (this is how all the films started). The logo faded and we all stared smack between the spread open thighs of a very pregnant woman. We all gasped. So this is what we look like. This is what we keep scrubbed clean and untouched and put away in cotton panties. It looked so... so... stark, so naked, exposed. Our attention on the visual was so intense that we'd phased out the commentary so that when the woman's water broke we all jumped out of our skins in surprise. A couple of girls walked out then and there as did others during the course of the film. I stuck it out, though, eyes glued to the screen in horror, wonder and awe. Something way back inside of me told me that something beautiful and wondrous was going on, but it was so hard to tell with all the cold clinical commentary and sterile conditions shown us in the film. When the lights went on and it was finally over I remember feeling like I wanted to cry. The feeling stayed with me for days. So, That was it. That was how women had babies. Why did women do it?

The later years of high school brought my first contact with boys ie dating. Despite being a shy type in an all girl setting I got a few blind dates and false starts before finally going steady with George. I met George at our neighbourhood swimming club where he swam for the club team as well as his school team. He had a gorgeous body. I used to sit enraptured by the pool side watching him swim laps for hours. On the week-ends George worked at a drive-in making pizzas in the concession stand. Our dates consisted of my sitting in his car watching the movies until he got off work at 11.00, then his returning to the car where we'd make out until closing time. By this age I'd realised that you couldn't get pregnant by just kissing, so took full advantage of the freedom. We used to make out anywhere, anytime for as long as our lips held up to the strain: at the drive-in, parked at the lake front, sitting on the sofa in the den, behind the snack bar at the club. My lord, we were a passionate duo. I realise now that George must have been just as dumb about sex as I was because he never tried to go any further than an occasional grope for a boob (which, despite my training that this was a "no go" area on young ladies, I didn't really mind). I seem to remember only one occasion when anything close to "going further" happened. We were parked along the lake front, locked in a wild embrace in the back seat grinding our lips and tongues raw. George was more or less lying on top of me, when a sudden panic gripped me. For some reason I felt I'd lost control of the

B24 LIBERATOR

situation. George was breathing fast and hard and seemed to be pushing against me with his hips in a way that I didn't quite understand. I tried to say "wait a minute" but found it a bit difficult to do with a mouth full of tongue. I knew that this had to be going "too far". This was the moment that all those Guides to Young Womanhood warned you against. If I allowed George to keep this up not only would I lose my good-girl status but I might end up pregnant and still not know how it happened! The panic grew and I began to push and shove him away. The message finally got past his hormones and into his brain and he sat up, still panting, dazed and slightly cross-eyed. "What happened?" Geez. He had no more of a clue than I did. All I felt was very confused and I asked him to take me home. We drove back in silence as I racked my brain trying to figure out what had happened. Whatever it was had to be my fault. All those guide books clearly stated that proper young ladies don't encourage boys to get worked up into the animal state that we know that they're capable of. When we reached my house he walked me to my door where I burst into tears and apologised profusely for what I had done. He looked baffled at first then grinned ear to ear. "What are you sorry for? Heck, I thought it was fun." "You did?" "Yeah. I mean, it felt really good." "It did?" "Yeah. Don't worry about it, huh?" He gave me a hug and patted my head, then trotted back to his car all carefree and happy. Of course I was more confused than ever. Why did he have fun and I panicked? Why was I tossing and turning in bed ridden with guilt, while he was probably home sleeping like a babe? And why the hell did I apologise to him? Besides learning about sex I was learning about social conditioning!

George and I continued to see each other and despite that one episode continued our making out sessions. By the summer of '68 I was 17 and preparing to enter the University of New Orleans while George was primed for a swimming scholarship. We tended to drift our separate ways.

UNO was the beginning of a whole new chapter in my life. Not only was I on the road to success and career, but for the first time in ages I was in classes with boys. By the middle of the first semester I began to date one boy in particular: Jerry. Jerry was my first True Love and I was his. It was the kind of thing where we calculated the exact moment we fell in love, then marvelled daily on how many hours, minutes and seconds it had been. We spent every available minute with each other and when class or home life separated us we wrote page after page of letters to each other. His parents allowed him and his sister, Jackie, to drive the family VW van to UNO daily from their distant suburb home in Bell Chase. As was to be expected, we spent a lot of time in the back of that van. Our making out sessions were different from those with George. Whereas George was a case of adolescent curiosity, Jerry was true love. I didn't think about shoulds and shouldn'ts or about proper or good when I was with him. We were in love and that seemed to be all that mattered.

Our times in the van grew more adventuresome, much to the displeasure of Jackie. She was a couple of years older than Jerry, making her a good 21 years old. She was studying political

B24 LIBERATOR

GREG PICKERSGILL

science and was the head of the student group campaigning for George Wallace's presidential election, just to give you an idea of her political tastes. While I was busy experimenting with mini-skirts, go-go boots and day-glo colours, she was all tweed suits, sensible shoes and colour co-ordinated bag and ear-rings. I especially remember her lips. She wore a shade of bright red lipstick that hadn't been seen since the Eisenhower days. In '68 nobody wore red lipstick unless you were an old lady, a prude and/or a Wallace supporter. I remember the times when she'd catch us in the van. As we would bolt upright and straighten our clothing at the sound of her approach the van door would slide open and I'd see those lips and nothing else: "Jerry! Well! Do remember that this is a family van!"

Shortly after we met, Jerry's folks moved back to Alabama. He stayed on in New Orleans, quitting school to get a job and an apartment. It was in the privacy of his apartment that we began our slow climb out of the dark ages. As much as I loved Jerry I had a lot of conditioned barriers to break through before I could allow myself to go all the way with him. Our attempts at love making were like creeping into a hot bath... we crawled along step by step, going a little further each time we met, never plunging too far for fear of getting burnt. Our progress was so gradual that by the time I finally consented to going the whole way I found myself vaguely disappointed. Here I had been, in the dark for years relying on clues, knowing that something very mysterious and forbidden was going on and that someday I would be initiated into the rites of sexual intercourse. I finally "did it" and...well...it was just one step further from what we had been doing. Where was the instant enlightenment? Shouldn't I somehow feel different? No-one told me that women were supposed to have orgasms, so at that stage I didn't realise that that was the important missing element. We had to go a few steps even further to discover that knowledge.

It's easy to stand back this many years from my past and laugh at all the silly notions and bumbling attempts. I remember the pain too, y'know. Ignorance may be bliss but knowing half truths is sheer agony. Sometimes I'm still not sure I've found out everything about how women get pregnant.

Linda Pickersgill

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Running For The Bunkers

Up until a few years ago I had a recurring dream of being bombed. Bombed as in 'under aerial attack', asshole. The dream would open with me and a number of other people, none of whom I knew or recognised as the shelter we were in was deep underground and in darkness, huddled together waiting and listening. The only sounds were the bomb impacts and detonations, which began as a distant thumping, and gradually got closer, changing from just a thud-and-vibration, to distinct bangs and crashes which noticeably shook the shelter and us. The bombing seemed to be coming directly at us, and it was clearly just a matter of time before the stick walked either right on to where we were sitting it out, or if we were lucky, passed over our heads. Of course it was always the former, and the final moments of the dream began with a series of earsplitting detonations and tumultuous heavings and I just knew that the next bomb would be the one to breach our shelter and obliterate the lot of us. And there was, of course, nothing I could do about it. And, of course, it happened, and I would awake stunned with horror.

Sometimes this was all so overpowering I'd actually be out of bed trying to make my escape before I realised it was, as they say, 'all a dream', and one time, for some bizarre reason (bizarre because it didn't even fit with the internal logic of the dream) I came to full consciousness bending over my father's bed shaking him awake and telling him quite clearly that "It doesn't matter, we've only got another hundred years to go."

I haven't had that dream for a good seven or eight years now, which is faintly surprising considering it is rather more likely I'd find myself in something similar to that situation now than back in the middle-to-late Sixties. I've never, as far as I can consciously recall, had a full-out Nuclear War dream, which is probably just as well as I'd likely fully wake up and find myself killing the people downstairs and stealing their food, or making spears out of curtainrods and kitchen knives.

The probable reason for this is that I spend more time than is good for me having vague daydreams about atomic annihilation anyway. At work I wonder whether I'll have enough time before the flash to actually cross the room and KILL a certain individual who's been an acute aggravation to me for some time (the Revenge dream), or there's the other one about navigating my way across the abolished city from the centre back to Ealing (Hero's Journey), or the one about forming a self-sufficient survival group and re-establishing civilization on more realistic lines, ie the way I think it ought to be (Emperor of the North Pole). All this crazy nonsense is clearly the product of an adolescence contaminated by science fiction and has no place in a world where as David Bridges has pointed out with unerring tedium THE LAST DAY or the DAY AFTER or whatever it was called bears as much relationship to the prospective reality as a TV commercial has to real life, but, shit, it whiles away the time.

Actually I think Bridges and those who perceived THE LAST DAY (or whatever it was) as a weak and spineless travesty or The Way Things Would Really Be (Man) are being a bit too clever for their own good. Obviously in general terms the film understated the nature of the catastrophe by a fearful number of points (all of which are so obvious I needn't go into them here) but I tend to think the general bad reaction to it has come about through cleverdickery rather than a reasonable appreciation of what the film was and what it set out to do.

I feel quite fortunate in that I didn't actually get to see THE DAY AFTER until a month or more after its TV showing, and by that time I'd forgotten all the publicity conditioning and the antipathetic comments of various persons I'd known who'd seen it and were significantly unimpressed. I should mention here though that almost invariably it was fans and other scifi related people who were most anti the film, and by far the majority of 'normal' people I heard speaking about it had an entirely different attitude altogether. So, by the time we eventually got around to viewing our tape of it I certainly was coming to it, with a more or less 'clean' attitude.

Frankly, I was a lot more impressed by it than I would have ever expected. Obviously it was cast in recognisable TV drama forms, OK, almost in typical American 'soap opera' forms to use a term which people like Rob Hansen freely employ and appear to understand. Okay, so it manifestly underplayed the incomprehensible carnage and disruption that would have resulted, it certainly didn't go all out for gore, mutilation and horror. And, yes, parts of it were slow and undramatic and probably not good film-making by any higher standard. Okay, it wasn't THE WAR GAME.

What's important here though, is that it wasn't MEANT to be THE fucking WAR GAME. Complaining and bitching because the film isn't what you wanted it to be in this regard is as futile as griping because DEEP THROAT isn't CANNIBAL APOCALYPSE or vice versa (if you see what I mean). It was quite obvious to everyone connected with the making of the film that since something like WAR GAME couldn't be shown on British TV there was no likelihood of anything not substantially less horrendous could ever

get onto an American national network. Quite properly, in my view, Nicholas Meyer took the line of getting the idea across rather than underlining it with great hideous scratchings and scorings and melted flesh and thousands of corpses. What is important here is that not in recent history - the period in which it has been possible - has the continental US had visited upon itself that which it has so successfully exported; the mass death and injury of its civil population and the destruction of its towns and cities. It is one of the unfortunate accidents of modern history that the average American has no 'memory' either innate or actual, of the sort of aerial bombardment that Europeans (including Russians) have been so familiar with, and this lack has allowed them far too much freedom in the way they view the world and the consequences of their actions. Of course, given this fact, the whole telefilm takes on a different image. No wonder millions of Americans were distressed and horrified. This was probably the first time they ever realised that this sort of thing could actually happen to them. People so far removed from global reality as many ordinary Americans are could not fail to have been utterly astonished to realise what to us is actually little more than a horrific commonplace.

Fans, of course, both British and American, saw it all differently. Instead of accepting the conventions imposed on the film with the same ease that they would suck in the most absurd drivel if presented by an sf name they were instead keen to parade their ability to spot those conventions for what they were and then denigrate the entire production on those same specious criticisms. Fans, of course, know it all already. They 'know' what nuclear war is like. They don't need it fed them in this watered down version. Their experience is so vast and their understanding so total. Fans are Slans.

But, to hell with it. I don't mind admitting I bought it wholesale. No matter how 'conventional' the character-groupings, or how diluted the horror, or how clichéd the situations. I felt it was an honest attempt and I gave it an honest response. It made me sad, and sick, and frightened, and I thought some of the characters were heroes and others shits. It was simple, sure, but simple in the way that people really are when they're not trying too hard, and when they're most real. I liked it, and I respect it, and I'm glad I do.

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Got Me Down On The Killing Floor

It's Saturday 31st March, and I'm mooning about aimlessly in the remainder section of Claud Gill Books in Oxford Street, trying not to look like a shoplifter while Linda rifles through the Childrens' 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 FLAGG 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 alright alright alright and wonder WHY??

Later on, at home, a telephone call from Roz Kaveney. We talk about the great MFK FISHER (buy ART OF EATING at once all of you) and why her FRANKS 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 ARRRGH 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 wota-bringdown.

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 X 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

SPLENDOURS

least a dozen copies of this supernovel (not only for myself, but for resale at purely nominal markup prices ho ho at MEXICON, 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 writeoff? 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 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 hairdressers 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 2nd 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.

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SPLENDOURS & MISERIES

ROZ KAVENEY

On Tuesday Lindsay and I went to hear the Chelsea Opera Group perform Shostakovich's opera The Lady Macbeth of the Mtensk District, in English. Most musicological accounts of Shostakovich's period of disgrace in the mid-30's talk about the general crackdown in the arts and about the unfortunate fact that at the first night of this new work by the man who had up to that moment been the bright young star of Soviet Art, Stalin had the misfortune to be placed in a box directly over the brass section - who, gospodin miy, have a lot to do to do in the score. In his memoirs - if they are his rather than an incredibly convincing fake - Shostakovich talks of the consequences of that first night - a leader in Pravda called 'Chaos instead of Music' which had the appearance stylistically (viz pompous, jargonridden and incoherent) of being by Stalin, immediate disappearance of his work from everyone's repertoire and friends sidling up to him in the street asking if they could have the china peacocks because he wasn't going to be needing them was he. But in the end nothing happened; he wrote the officially approved but also great Symphony Number 5 and was sort of back in the good books again. (In spite of the slightly smartass aspect of his retreat from modernism - the 5th's subtitle 'A Soviet Artists Answer To Just Criticism' is not if you listen to the way it differs from its predecessor more in tightness of structure than in radical musical language, a totally unambiguous one). He had some other closish shaves over the years, but whenever it seemed to come to a crunch, the jackals of the Musician's Union backed off. He believed that like Pasternak he had become for Stalin some sort of figure of holy dread.

When I read the Memoirs, I assumed that this was rationalisation. Listening to LMOITMD in English, I realised that there might have been more to it than that. Not so much because of the incredibly moving choral scene at the end when Katerina commits suicide while trekking with other convicts towards Siberia - though a chorus of the worn out and oppressed was a slightly daring thing to do in '34. More Katerina has in the first act a long arioso of aching desire for an end to the boredom of her marriage to a dolt. In the course of this she makes a particular appeal for the rights of women and talks of how women in spite of oppression have given their lives for their country or killed

themselves to express their disgust for their husband. Now it is highly - because the coverup at the time was so total and we mainly know about it from Svetlana - that Shostakovitch can have known the truth about the death of Stalin's wife, who killed herself as the one gesture of protest available to her against the massacre of the tenant farmers during the collectivisation drive, a massacre which was of course the consequence of a crisis that Stalin had engineered as an inevitable side effect of his isolation in the ongoing debate about the agricultural policy of his various opponents and rivals. The relevant lines are some of the most powerfully set in the whole opera and may have given the dictator one of the few really nasty moments of his life - because if the rumour about the death was out, then there was a possibility that the suppressed suicide note had been leaked as well. And if one suppressed document was current in Leningrad socialist artistic circles, then others might be too. Like Lenin's will.

You do all know about Lenin's will, don't you? One of the several wonderful moments in the history of the USSR when the advocates of rational scientific socialism managed to act more like a grand opera than you would believe quite possible. On his deathbed, apparently, Lenin dictated a statement in which he indicated worry that the centralised red terror he had instituted might go on forever and be used for overt personal advancement eg by Stalin, who should on no account be allowed a top job. And so presumably you had this wonderful scene of the Politburo sitting round and reading this thing, voting to suppress it and of course condemning almost all of themselves to death by so doing. (Other examples seem to be Trotsky's fear in exile that the murder of his children by Stalin was the working out of some historical necessity - good Marxists can't say curse, can they - created by his acceptance of the murder of the Tsarevitch and Tsaritsas, and Krushchev's murder of Beria in the Politburo meeting Stalin's secret police chief had expected to confirm him as Stalin's successor). People like that have large toes for composers to tread on.

Satie has for many years been one of the favourite classical composers of people who do not much like classical music. No-one could other than like - if perhaps not all that much - all those tiny little piano pieces like the Gymnopédies and the Gnossiennes, that start, fiddle gently for a bit, do it again and then stop. Some of us are even rather fond of Parade, his very silly Surrealist ballet in which the percussion section of the normal orchestra is augmented to include an automatic pistol - calibre I believe unspecified and are you feeling lucky today? - and a typewriter.* No-one except a real specialist or perhaps a philosopher could get all that much out of his operatic version of Plato's Dialogues ("Oh Glaucon, does the truly good man sing sharp?"); he also wrote - deliberately and in full consciousness of the idea he was giving the avant-garde as its capital for the rest of the century - Vexations which consists of thirty-two hours of the same few bars of music played in the same way. Phillips have for reasons best known to themselves issued an LP which contains about 50 minutes of this - they actually bothered to press both sides so you only have to play the album 50 times rather than a hundred. History does not record whether the unfortunate pianist had to play it all those times or whether they

let him off after five minutes. But his lot is not one of which to be jealous. (Concealed reference to awful old Freudian joke). It is to him that I dedicate this.

* Imagine being a percussionist in an orchestra that is performing Parade and having to confess to the conductor that you don't know how to type. Music only offers one more embarrassing position which is the awful fate which awaits basses. A not especially often performed work of late C10 Italian Opera, Boito's Mefistofele, is one of the most faithful of all operatic versions of Goethe's masterpiece, yet manages to be splendidly vulgar and oompah in a way which makes poor Gounod and that tedious waltz song look positively feeble. Boito's Shakespeare libretti for Verdi manage to be good Italian verse as well as accurate; in his libretto for his own opera he managed to be literal and slick and not much else; "Io son lo spirito che sempre ha' negar" (my LP is librettoless, so apologies for miss-spelling, resident Italian experts M & J) is somehow far less like "Ich bin der Geist der stets' verneint" than is "I am the spirit that that always denies", even though they are practically identical. Perhaps there are just some things you can't say in some languages without sounding a bit silly. Anyway to return to my original point, in the aria which starts like that Mephisto announces his endless opposition to the orderings of Providence and his intention of taking any opportunity offered him (eg God's fingering of the unfortunate Faust - should that be Fingering if we're giving Him caps.?) to reduce things to primordial chaos. Which he proceeds to summon with an ear-splitting series of whistles. Basses who cannot whistle are forever denied this starring role; basses who haven't sung it are always open to the imputation of not knowing how to whistle. Which means they don't get Lauren Bacall either.

I was discussing all this, except possibly for not getting Lauren Bacall - in fact, certainly since Lauren Bacall was never a famous tennis player - with my friend Mandy Merck, killer cinema semiologist once described by the Eye as an American harpy to her eternal delight and sense of security in her self-image. She reminded me with a snarl that cracked several of the ice cubes in her gin and tonic that she is the resident expert on things Mephistophelean. Goethe had this friend, you see, who was called Augustus von Merck, a gentleman whose sardonic locution and perverse cynicism - it says in my edition - the Sage of Weimar immortalised in his Tempter. One of Von Merck's grandsons was disowned as a result of '48 and went West; a century later we have in Amanda the result. If you've got to be descended from anyone, it's awfully chic to be descended from a fictional character...

Mandy is usually immune to embarrassment; she uttered the memorable "Kaveney, you'll never get anywhere in this world if you let people like me walk all over you". Yet her ancestry once caused her a scene which took even her, as they say, aback. I had had her to dinner with a number of people including a Civil Service colleague called Bernard Merkle, whom I praised for his chocolate cake and up whose nose she duly got by being lefty puritan about the oppression of the Third World by the sugar monopoly. Up to that point, these two had not caught each other's surnames but as ill-luck would have it, someone tried to calm the troubled waters by remarking on the assonance. "Assonance my

ass" Bernard did not in fact say as he revealed with glee that it was no coincidence, that his surname resembled hers because his family had been serfs of hers. Another perfectly good dinner party ruined; another piece of wonderful blackmail saved up against a friend.

I am usually sweetness and light at dinner parties, a regular little Pollyanna except for my habit of dropping in apposite quotations and blitzing people's line of thought. But I have been known to turn and rend. The Christmas before last I was helping some of my friends eat a very large and sticky cake in their bijou mansion in Notting Hill when a conversation I was having with a rather nice American black fag theatre director about the balance that has to be struck between the need to import elements from minority culture which mainstream culture needs and which make mainstream culture accessible to those minorities and the need while doing so not to sell out on actual artistic quality when we were interrupted by another guest who had been washing down the cake with vodka rather than fizzy stuff and entered into a covertly racist diatribe about culture's being unitary and mainstream and all these interpolations having nothing at all to do with quality. I demurred, gently; pressed for examples, I skipped away from C20 to something nice and uncontroversial like the fairly self-evident link between the colossal expansion of the vocabulary of Elizabethan English by the importation of foreign words and the sudden drastic improvement in the quality of Elizabethan literature. After ten minutes of high-pressure Kaveney bulldoze on all this, Robert tried to counter with a put down. "Tell me, is all this something you know about? Or are you just doing an impressive job of making it up?" I shrugged and sneered straight back "Oxford. Charles Oldham Shakespeare Prize. 1970. Take it or leave it."

Some people to whom I've told that story have been revolted by its demonstration of my capacity to pull rank like that; others have found it justified less by the fact he was being personally obnoxious than by the fact that I was crusading in this instance as part of the Armies of Light. People's reaction also differs according to whether I refer to Robert as I have done above or as Robert Fraser - he is a moderately well-known and distinguished gallery owner. A lot of people get sensitive about 'name dropping' and I know it to be one of my vices, but where do you draw the line? Does one avoid telling a story because one of the people featured in it is someone whom I know as a casual social connection but who is also in some circles famous? A lot of people slag off my boss Big C. for sucking up to the upperclass and the intelligentsia, but given that she is trying to run a major publishing company she'd be kind of crazy to do anything else. And what do you do when quite dear old friends become more or less famous? Not tell stories which involve them? My former flatmates include various hookers, a mad Estonian Maoist sculptress and Ritchie Smith; they also include the editor of Capital Gay, the music critic of the Times and a famous poet. (The latter is also a colleague of Abi's). The only thing of interest I'd have to contribute to a conversation about Salvador Dali are a series of more or less funny stories about him told me by an ex-flatmate of mine who used to model for the Maestro. I've not gone out of my way to be a fame groupy, but I do find it hard

to strike a balance. This paragraph could itself be seen as a sort of inverted and implied name drop - and be responded to with "We should all have such problems" - but I do find this a real moral problem, like whether and how much to talk shop at parties.

Le Pelican is more expensive than the Chandos or the Granby, but it has more comfortable seats, sells Calvados and does the best if most expensive sausage and chips in the West End. (Saucisses de Touraine avec frites et compote d'oignon £2.95). A while ago, Kate and I unfrazzled from a hard day with the dreaded C., and then went to a movie. All Kate remembers is the cartoon - which is the Bugs Bunny actually called 'What's Up, Doc' which appears in the closing moments of the Bogdanovich film - then the sausages and several glasses each of red wine and Calvados caught up with her and she started snoring gently. The same amount of alcohol had the effect of making me emotional rather than tired; and I cried a lot. The Big Chill is about a group of sold-out old 60's activists who get together for a weekend when one of the old Gang tops himself. Lots of communal salad-and-muesli-making, lots of jogging jokes, lots of slightly scratched Tamla on expensive sound systems and buckets of California Crap. But the mood of retrospect and of nostalgia caught me and dragged me into involvement. One of the characters was a zoftig red-head lawyer who had trained to be a radical public defender (St Joyce Davenport of the Stockyards?) but had found it all a bit My Dear! The Noise! The People!, and instead gone off to make a fortune in real estate. Just like my friend Mindy, I thought and tried to elbow Kate awake, except that Mindy Benedek made her pile in video. I've not seen Mindy for about a decade, just talked to her on the phone a couple of times. But her chocolate rum cake and veal sweetbreads in cream still make me salivate in memory and when actually eaten were superior to most sex I've had. The characters of the film were seeing old friends who had changed and in an odd way I was as well. I'd like to be able to say that this meant that the film was very, rather than only quite, good and that what it meant to me was an example of the way great art speaks to our common experience and inward souls. Unfortunately, when I looked at the credits, it became clear that the reason the character was so like my old friend Mindy was possibly something to do with the fact that one of the scriptwriters was one of my more tangential old acquaintances, her sister Barbara.

.x. .x. .x. .x. .x. .x. .x. .x. .x. .x. .x. .x. .x. .x.

A MITCHAM MINT

ABI FROST

Life, she said, is an emptiness, a vacuum riven by emotional tides, a total frustration from beginning to end, a blithering con-trick, nothingness I tell you, the expense of spirit in a waste of shame and bloody expensive too in the other sense while I'm about it, and what is more it's -

What are you on about now, said the cat, how can a vacuum have tides in it?

Oh, I don't know, I'll change it in the second draft or something. Put square brackets round it. What I mean is that life is just so fucking pointless. I can't get any proper work done for one thing. And my telephone - let me just tell you about my telephone - but I was talking about LIFE -

If you don't do your work in time it's your own fault. Take today for instance. You got up at - what was it, twelve? - and you went and made yourself coffee BEFORE you fed me or turned the heating on so I can sit upstairs by the airduct. Then you pottered around for a bit not doing anything that I could see any sense to. Then you went and rang Roz, and then you went out to the shops for the Observer. Then you read it. Then, Christ alone knows why, you crawled under your bed.

I was looking for On Poetry and Poets so I could quote what Eliot says about the notes to The Waste Land. It's for the Fritsch piece. The whole thing revolves round Eliot.

Who would no doubt revolve in his grave if he could see the indignities to which you subject his criticism. You can't justify every half-assed piece of polemic you choose to inflict on the world by picking a random sentence for The Idea of a Christian Society, especially since you're not a Christian and anyway all you have of it is the extract in Kermode. Leave the man alone. He has suffered enough.

No he hasn't. Did you see what he did to Mauberry in the choruses from The Rock lately? Spitting on the Cenotaph. I was

talking about my telephone.

I was talking about what you did today, and endeavouring to reach a point where I could suggest a few reasons why you never get any work done. The malfunction of your telephonic apparatus, though admittedly bizarre, is not in the final analysis interesting. All it is is Nye Bevan's revenge on you for buying those bloody shares.

Do you want me to spend my old age in the workhouse which will no doubt have been re-built on the site of Hackney College by then? I see myself as keeping those shares in the hands of the British People, I have sworn never to part with them into the hands of foreign speculators, I am acting as Nye would in the circumstances, it was going to happen no matter what I thought and-

If you aren't going to sell them, how can they keep you from the workhouse?

If I ever need to, I shall sell them to Margaret Welbank. Mind you, don't tell her I bought them.

What you going to say, then, you won them at three-card stud, maybe? TO CONTINUE.

After, admittedly, finding and putting a bit of old fag-packet into the book to mark the passage you mentioned, you read the essay entitled What is Minor Poetry? twice, the second time making underlinings in a book you have owned and even kept reasonably clean for twelve years.

Essential research.

Then you went and watched the Everly Brothers Reunion Concert on TV. I FUCKING ASK YOU! The EVERLY Brothers!

Well, yes, it was a pretty rotten concert. But it's no good saying I'd rather get drunk and play Tom Waits, I've finished the wine and my record-player's bust. I'd much rather have played Tom Waits, Tom Waits is triff, Tom Waits sings about LIFE - bloody horrible disgusting predictable LIFE, dear god is god some kind of obscure Calvinist, I ask you, LIFE -

A small brownish book shuffled with a show of nervousness to the edge of the bookshelf. Life, it said, is not a series of gig-lamps symmetrically arranged, Life is -

Shut up you over-rated dyke, said the cat. Once you start she'll go and get stuck into The Waves for a week. And then she'll have to read Ulysses so that himself doesn't get jealous in Jesuit hell.

Up yours, carnivorous eunuch, said the book, sometimes you remind me of Lytton.

Stop it, you two, she said, I could have written several sentences of resplendent grace and glittering wit but for your

A MITCHAM MINT

rowing. This is a perfect example of the way I cannot fulfil my true potential because of the ludicrous environmental interference of BLOODY LIFE! Yes, life, made up of cats and common readers -

AH, LIFE, LIFE, LIFE! Real life! Life in the raw, life in the bloody guts, life as she is lived by the REAL PEOPLE in the harsh reality of Mitcham! LIFE! I hate all women novelists, said a small pile of paper which on examination proved to consist of an anorexic fanzine and a large number of identical latters of comment. The cat, having the sense he was born with, went and sat on it, muffling its cries. Where the hell is Mitcham anyway, he said.

I know all about Mitcham she said. Mitcham is where the Gas Board is. I had a holiday job there in 1971, that's how I earned the money to buy those black boots you so like the smell of. There's also a pub called the Cricketers, but I've never been in it. In my experience, pubs called the Cricketers are always a bit not quite the thing. There was one in Battersea which was a notorious gay pub even when my mother lived there after the war. And there was one in Putney where a school-friend of mine's mother used to work and one of the train robbers used to drink there. And there was another one in -

TRIVIAL ANECDOTE! SIXTIES' NOSTALGIA, screamed the pile of paper from under the cat's arsehole. YET MORE DISPLACEMENT ACTIVITY AND REFUSAL TO FACE FACTS, said the cat. When are you going to do some work?

About five minutes after you stop ganging up on me with any piece of rubbish that gives you an opportunity, she said. A true artist is always at work, all incidents are grist to her mill, whatever an artist does is art, an artist's true work is simply to be -

You really have no principles at ALL, do you? You will happily come out with all that seventies' crap that you KNOW PERFECTLY WELL to be a lie and a disaster and the cause of the appalling state of things which only we and a few others are engaged in correcting. Call yourself a critic? The correct term, madam, is WHORE, said a copy of Art Monthly.

Oh, I say, chaps, that's a bit strong. A girl's got to earn her living.

We would perhaps not mind so much if you were saying all that stuff in the course of earning your living. We have been there too and we know what it's like. If you knew some of the things we have done and said in our time you would have to stuff a pair of socks in your gob to stop laughing. Two pairs even. No, what we find so utterly offensive is the fact that you are happy to deny us and everything we stand for in order to score a debating point off of a CAT.

Oh, christ, it's not my fault. (Sniff). You just don't KNOW - I mean I don't think you can have any idea - no, it's not money, no it's not anything like that it's just it's all so (Weepies)

please tell me what to DO!

Oh god. Oh no. Do any of us know what on earth to do when girls CRY? Here, have our hankie - no not that one it's got something unpleasant on it. One of us will go and get you some bog-roll if you like. Oh dear we're sorry but the one thing we never quite managed to shake off from our rather conventional upbringing is this appalling embarrassment at any overt physical show of emotion. What we mean is we get all upset when girls - sorry we mean women - BLUB. We didn't mean to be rude to your cat, honest. Cheer up, please.

One down to you then. I'd be delighted if someone would be rude to him in any way he'd notice. He is altogether too uppity these days. He used to bully his poor sister something chronic. It wasn't anything you said, I keep getting like this all the time. I'm sorry, I ought to go to the doctor about it but he's always closed when I remember to.

No doctor - especially not that half-witted GP of yours who wears such ridiculous shirts patterned with debased and vulgarly coloured remote descendants of the ancient symbolic patterns of the Mughals - can cure what is essentially a malaise of modern society. You feel rotten because this is a rotten world. Cruise missiles. Graffiti art. Graffiti art ON Cruise missiles. All you can do is seek consolation in the touchstones of the creative intelligence. There now, dry your eyes. Put some powder on. We say, gosh you're quite pretty really when you aren't blubbing -

HOW IN THE NAME OF GOD, BERENSON AND JOHN FECKING BERGER can she seek consolation in a touchstone? You guys ought to be locked in a small room for six months with nothing to read but the collected essays of Orwell, said the cat. This magazine is up to no good and if you don't go and do some work you will regret it in the morning. Believe me, sweetheart.

REAL LIFE! LIFE! DAVE BRIDGES! PAIN! AGONY! I LOVE IT ALL! cried the pile of paper, liberated by the cat's decision to intervene and consequent movement across the room. Except women novelists, it added crossly.

Who or what is that idiot, asked Art Monthly, why do you tolerate such intrusions into your life? No wonder you can't even finish a review for Crafts. Listen, cat, Orwell's plain man speaking plain language act was a rhetorical trope like any other. You can't bully us into giving up ridiculous dead metaphors. We would get rid of that cat if we were you, dear. He is clearly an incurable kibbitzer. And his pretensions are laughable. He is, after all, only an animal, with no sense of what it is to be mortal and therefore no creative impulse. Quite honestly, we'd rather hear your looney friend going on about REAL LIFE all night. But if we really had our druthers -

Yes, cat, you have no sense of REAL LIFE. You heard the magazine. Will you believe it if you won't believe me? Even your friend the pile of paper is nodding. What do you know of life that know not death, eh?

I could reply that one thing I don't know is where my next

tin of Whiskas is coming from if you don't stop flirting with that bunch of revisionist crypto-Leavisites and get some work done. But I won't soil myself by so doing. Because how FUCKING DARE you, of all people, lecture me about life and death, eh? What you got to say to that, madam?

EH? What are you going on about? I don't think I care. I say, chaps, did you know there is actually a magazine called Real Life? All bloody incomprehensible American structuralists. I bought a couple of copies in the sale at the Arts Council shop one time.

We know it well. A loathsome thing of evil intent. Touch pitch and ye shall be defiled. We wonder if you quite realise the dangers that lurk in wait for unspoilt young lady art critics. We think maybe we should protect you a bit. We think maybe you should take us into your bedroom and show us these copies of Real Life and we will destroy them for you. You know it makes sense, really. We can't bear to think of the peril you are in, if you but knew it.

Nobody leaves the room till I say so, said the cat. I am going to have WORDS with you, missus. And any more tricks from you and I'll tear you into little pieces and shit all over you. I've done that to better magazines than you, sunshine. I know what you're after even if she's too daft to.

Stop being boring, cat, she said. The world does not revolve around you even if you think it does. I can make up my own mind better than you can for me.

That's the spirit, lady. Let's get out of here before he gets really boring. Why don't you carry us into your bedroom, put some nice music on the radio and READ US? We could give you a very nice time, we think. We're quite versatile, though we say it ourselves. We've got P Fuller going apeshit about the Turner Prize, and a dynamite thing about the economics of the art market by R Hughes, and A Brighton jumping up and down with excitement about the British Art Now exhibition. Oh, and an article by John Roberts but we can't remember what it's about. You know him - the Joe Nicholas of art criticism.

No-one ever can. I dunno - that really would be whoring, going to bed with a John Roberts article. A great deal of work and no chance at all of enjoying it. On the other hand... well, it's the best offer I've had all week... GET YOUR CLAWS OUT OF MY STOCKING, cat, and let me go -

Shut up. Stop this nonsense at once. Do not leave the room. I am not going to let you go away and have fun. You have WORK to do - and YOU LET MY SISTER DIE.

She was ill, cat, she just sort of faded away, it happens to everyone in the end only you don't realise it because -

I am only an animal and I have no sense of what it is to be mortal, eh? Fuck that, what do you know about what I know? You could see how ill she was and you didn't even ring the vet let

alone take her. And when she did die what did you do?

I took her into the study and put her in a cardboard box with an old jumper and sat with her while it happened. I told her I was sorry and had a fainting fit.

Yes, but what about ME? Did you let me come and sit with her too, eh? No, you thought I'd annoy her. Did you let me come and sniff her dead body so I could realise what had Happened? No way. What was it, were you afraid I'd EAT her?

Actually I didn't want you to get all her parasites. I had to cover her with insecticide, once she was dead she turned out to be CRAWLING with all sorts of things. Too weak to clean them off I suppose. I'm sorry, really, but...

Let me go for WEEKS thinking she was hiding somewhere. Her smell gradually fading, and at last the realisation that she wasn't there any more. I hate you, Abigail.

THAT'S THE STUFF CAT, sock it to her, said the pile of paper, ANGER, FRUSTRATION, RAGE, let her have it good and proper! RAGE RAGE RAGE RAGE -

Oh shut up and leave them to it, said Art Monthly. Let's just have a quiet talk here. We remember Mitcham Mints - you bought them from machines on the tube. Years ago when we were a lad. What do you know about rage, anyway, kid? You ever been done out of a woman's excited caress because of an emotional appeal by a CAT? Oh, well, any port in a storm. Tell us, shy confused young fanzine critic who seeks enlightenment, did you learn anything ELSE from Don West?

To your typewriter, woman, said the cat. And if you do an apazine there'll be trouble.

Too late, said Ms Frost. I've already written it.

.x. .x. .x. .x. .x. .x. .x. .x. .x. .x. .x. .x. .x. .x. .x.

LUNCH AT THE SAVOY

ANNE HAMILL

Moments of Glamour, Moments of Joy...

Every now and then, do you find yourself turning into a film or a book? I do. Just occasionally, I'm going along, minding my own business and doing work or whatever, and I suddenly become distanced from what I'm doing and feel like I'm a character in a film. The best time for getting this feeling is when you're driving along in a car listening to music. Perhaps that's because so many films have scenes in with people driving along listening to music. Anyway, if I've just finished a day's work in London, all toggled up in high heels and pink suit, and I'm driving out along the Westway flyover in the dusk with one of Jimmy's tapes in the stereo, watching all the lights come on in the skyscrapers (which we all know really are council slums with not enough playspace for the kids who have good times riding up and down in the lifts all day and tying cans to dogs' tails - and even THAT is a scenario, though more a documentary one, of course) - all of a sudden it isn't me driving along at all, it's a character from a movie, glamorous, unknowable, with a mysterious past and an even more mysterious future (but one with dramatic integrity), and me, I'm just along for the ride, enjoying it hugely and thinking "I always WONDERED what it would actually feel like to be that sort of a person..."

I think it's the dramatic integrity that makes it feel good. I mean, in ordinary life, you know that you're just muddling along doing things wrong half the time and scrambling to make up, missing deadlines and trying to talk your way out of it, recycling knickers because you hadn't got time to go to the laundrette, or anyway you were going to wash a pair out by hand only you forgot and there wasn't time before you went to work. YOU know there's a hole in your tights and a typo on page three, and you've forgotten to water the plants AGAIN, and maybe if you pile all the books in a heap it'll look LOTS tidier, and disturb the dust some so it doesn't look so thick... YOU know, in fact, that your life is a muddle from one thing to another, with little getting done as you'd like it, and lots not getting done at all. And you're always comparing yourself to other people, not just the ones who also have holes in their tights but aren't going on

about it (and of course you don't notice because you're too busy worrying about your own. And if you thought about it, you're not inferior, because no-one has noticed YOUR hole either), but also people on TV and in films and in books. And that's really not fair, because as everybody knows people in books and films don't ever go to the loo. When you think about it, really, it must be pretty awful being a film star. Every day you'd go on set and for a few minutes at a time you put out like a beacon, trying to get everything exactly how you want it. And if you don't succeed first time, you get to have another go. After that, anyone who meets you in the flesh is BOUND to be disappointed...

As Woody Allen said, "Ah - if only real life were like this..."

Moments of glamour, when you see from the outside that you're doing things like Them, filmstars or Platonic archetypes, or the Real World of Amber, usually come when you're alone. Perhaps because it's difficult to think up good dialogue (particularly when your opposite number isn't trying to talk like a hero but is thinking about the metaphorical hole in his tights). Perhaps it's because heroes are always lonely. Noble. Aloof. Probably with some great hidden sadness, some terrible feeling of isolation which is always a shadow in the background... Can't you just see me, walking along the river bank, heroically not kicking up the leaves which have been brushed into neat piles?... "It wouldn't be any use... One must have consideration for others... even when one feels there is nothing left..." (Besides, kicking up leaves would be moments of joy. Utter unselfconscious childishness, throwing up leaves in cascades and bucket loads all over the path and running away giggling I DON'T CARE WHO'S LOOKING, HEEHEEHEE!)

Moments of glamour are very reassuring. They make me feel good. Just for a moment you feel there's a plan behind all this. That you are a really interesting figure others want to read about. That soon, maybe in the next chapter, the plot twist is going to come, the character enter, which will begin to make sense of everything that came before. All that muddle about tights will be resolved, and the reader will begin to see WHY all that apparently extraneous detail was necessary to build up the hero's character, why it fits him for what comes next... You look forward to reading on. What will be the dramatic denouement that will make sense of everything? What path have you been following? All your life you've wanted to have dramatic integrity - and now you're going to get it!

Ah - if only real life were like this...

.. .. .

Yea, I really did have lunch at the Savoy. Someone I've just started working for (I do psychological testing and counselling for his clients, who are people who have been or are going to be made redundant. I work freelance, for those who have just joined. Hi there!), anyway, this guy gets all his work by having contacts and he does all these big business things like inviting you for dinner at his Club. Every month he takes a table at the American Chamber of Commerce luncheon, which takes place

at the Savoy. So when I was invited, I was quite excited. Ah ha! I thought. A Moment of Glamour!

Oh dear. You see, all the scenarios I know have elegant young English gentlemen taking out English Roses to an unexceptionable snack at the Savoy (and very likely proposing over the roses). NOT hundreds of ageing businessmen crammed in like sardines so there's hardly room between the tables to squeeze out to go to the loo, if you are so crass as to be Taken Short. Nor canteen food, obviously prepared early and kept hot for the hundreds of empty stomachs. And PARTICULARLY not having to clap Geoffrey Howe when he congratulates the Americans on their commendable policy on introducing Pershing missiles into Europe (... "Strong policy on nuclear deterrents... no future in showing a weak front... can't trust these commies unless we can blow them up three times over AND THEY KNOW IT!"), OR having to drink to the health of President Reagan. Every feeling was lacerated. I managed to get away with drinking to the Presidency, and I clapped very softly, but STILL. I don't want to go next month.

Still, I suppose I might get some glamour out of saying "Oh God, I have to go to lunch at the Savoy AGAIN tomorrow"...

.. .. .

Overpaid, Overworked and Never There

More and more recently I've been wondering why I go in for this self-employed consultancy lark anyway. Why don't I get a nice steady job like my mummy brought me up to do? Mostly I've been wondering this since I've actually had to live off the proceeds, and not only that but someone else as well. I admit that I wonder less when I do my accounts for the month and send off demands for huge sums of money, and even less do I wonder when astronomical CHEQUES come whispering through the letterbox, rescued from the fate of hitting the cruel, hard floor by my ready hands... But I do sometimes get annoyed when friends demand to know how I justify getting paid so much for something the ordinary employee could do as well for an eighth the price. By now, this just makes me laugh. So here, for your edification, and for the last time, are the disadvantages of being a self-employed consultant.

A minor niggle is the weekly stamp. A mere £4.50, except when you leave it as long to pay it as I do, and have to go down to your local Post Office with bundles of fivers, or wait until the DHSS sends you a stern letter and send them bundles of fivers. All those depressingly empty little squares on the card they gave me, I must do something about it soon. Anyway, it's a terrific bargain, all those fabulous benefits, getting paid when you are ill, getting a stipend if you're out of work, not having to pay your stamp if you don't work - do you hell as like. In fact it's hard to see what I do get for my stamp, except the promise of a pension in some dim and dusty future, always supposing the economy doesn't go bankrupt or Maggie doesn't get us all killed in a nuclear war, or Jimmy doesn't put me up against a wall in a forgetful moment when the Revolution comes.

Then there's the jolly fun of Newsnight speculation over whether British Airways will be privatised or decide the workers are getting complacent and need a bracing new Policy Change, and boot out all the consultants hiding in the woodwork and doing the work they are paying their employees to do (not very well). Consultants are FAT and FAT gets trimmed as all ye who read newspapers know well. As a large proportion of my income derives from BA at the moment, such speculation tends to wind me up not a little. It's amazing how the prospect of suddenly having no income takes all the fun out of a healthy bank balance. You don't feel you can actually SPEND any of the money you've earned.

Except on posh clothes. It's important, you see, to look as if you're worth the money they pay you. So you can't just have a suit, you have to fork out £150 for a POSH suit that people can tell didn't come from C&A. This means you have to shop in Dull Shops Ltd., where all the assistants try frantically to help modom because they're on commission, while at the same time looking down their nose at you because you don't look as if you could afford their clothes anyway in your frayed jeans. It got to the point that I was dressing up to go into shops to buy clothes to impress The Client, which is really dumb. My big disadvantage is that I look ten years younger than I am. I mean it can be nice being taken for an undergraduate (by another undergraduate) or being asked by motherly types if you're studying for your A-levels, but this doesn't go down so well with forty year old managers who generally don't take kindly to a snip of a girl coming in at ridiculous wages to sort out their problems. This means that a large proportion of my time is spent listening very hard and very sympathetically (boy can I be sympathetic, I really work at it you know) and persuading them that you're adopting major elements of their ideas whereas in fact you just said it to them and let them say it back to you in their own words... "Now THAT'S a good idea!" Success depends on a very fine balance between blowing your own trumpet and attributing your ideas to the right sources.

But I was talking about clothes. Summer dresses with long sleeves at 90 degrees (no sleeves is common, didn't you know that upper arms and shoulders are obscene, all that soft available white flesh, have you ever seen Princess Diana's upper arms, no well then), tights which run and sag at the crotch and cling damply in hot weather and wrinkle at the knees so you have to keep visiting the ladies to haul them up again (AND they encourage the fungi that make you ITCH), and high heels that strain your instep and make you wrench your ankle and give you a blister on your little toe.

And there's SUCCESS. To be a consultant you have to be SUCCESSFUL. Not, you know, success, but SUCCESS. I mean it's only a problem that's been plaguing the organisation for the last fifteen years, and it's inextricably bound in with fourteen other problems that are not in your remit, and the unions don't like it, and we want a totally NEW approach, a specially designed test for the job, and it has to be ready at the end of next week and must be able to select better people than we have already and the pool you'll be drawing from are going to be able to write their own names Real Soon Now - of course you're going to be a SUCCESS!

DOPE, SEX & CHEAP THRILLS

OWEN WHITEOAK

Then there are the coy financial games big fish (British Airways) play with little fish (Anne Warren) who send in their pitiful demands for money. If you forget to pay the little fish, you see, you can put the money in Big Fish Commercial Banks (Incorporating Shark Enterprises) plc and get interest on it, until the little fish starts thrashing up and down and getting cross, when you authorise the accounts department to enquire of the Personnel department to enquire of all the people concerned whether the little fish really was where it said it was when it said it was, when they come back from holiday, that is.

WHERE'S MY CHEQUE?

A real funner is the games you can play with letting agencies and banks. No, you can't get a mortgage - no reliable source of income? You'll have to rent a place. What, rent a place? Certainly, may I have your employer's reference? No employer? Uh-huh. No regular source of income? I see. At home all day knocking hell out of the furniture, for the same rent as a nice quiet non-smoker, professional male only? And you'll be sharing with this gentleman? Is he your? I see. And his employer - unemployed I see all right I'll just have a look no sorry what a shame so sorry we aren't able to Take your name? Oh. Well, if you want to...

Thank goodness for friends.

Nearly the worst thing about being a self-employed consultant is the hard work. Being paid a lot means that you have to put in a minimum of seven hours of solid, top pitch, nervetwangingly dynamic energy every day that you work for them. This leaves me jittery with tension all evening and is paid for by a day of apathetic sloth during which I find it impossible to make any decisions or do anything stressful. Working at home I have to time every minute away from work, so I only charge for time spent hard at work. Ah, I remember, I remember...blissful 9 to 5 days of doodling and drinking coffee and dissecting personal lives with friends, writing photocopying and distributing the underground newsletter slagging off the office politics, reading the newspaper and hiding it in the open desk drawer when anyone happened by, ah what a graceful hand I had, no-one could flip a paper into hiding with such panache and guileless innocence as I...

But really the worst thing about being self-employed is never, ever feeling that you shouldn't be working. There's no way of shutting off, of drawing a line between work and non-work. Every minute as you watch TV you're thinking "If I was working I could be earning more money...if I retyped that page again would it make a better impression...I wonder what he meant about not being concerned about money but by VALUE FOR MONEY? Have I really got enough time to do that work tomorrow or should I be doing some more now?"

Working for yourself is a pain in the ass.

But the cheques...ah, the cheques...

The Glasgow Central Desert is the kind of place where a man can go for weeks without seeing his auntie. Wait a minute. Didn't I say that last issue? Oh. Okay. So here we are, back in the Central Hotel for ALBACON III. But this is an Eastercon, right? This time, the committee have made special efforts, pulled all the stops, not to mention their fingers out, to make sure things are just right for everyone, even including the elitist, conceited fannish minority, right? Wrong.

Things get off to a slowish start on Thursday night, supping a pint or three with John Jarrold and Phil Palmer in the Ailsa Bar before checking out the sub-basement and sub-zero main con bar. After Jarrold beats me at pool (as usual) we head off for the obligatory investigation of the Law of Pizzalands, demonstrating the trickiness of judging things by exteriors, for is not the address and the outside just the same, while inside do we not find a completely new restaurant? Ah, but the food's the same. Oh well.

Then we stroll round to the Bull & Bear, previously the Blue Chip, and wholesomely grotty as ever it is, there's quite a gathering there, expatriot keelies like Jimmy Robertson and Alan Ferguson, joining regulars like Kevin Clark, John Mooney, the Brothers Karamazov, and occasionals like Bill Carlin, Ian Black and Gerry Gillin. Lurking in a corner is the shadowy figure of Cretinfandom's lynchpin, John Welsh.

Kevin Clark spends some time trying to convince everyone that his artwork isn't really sexist at all, that he really likes women. "Women are like Jaffa Cakes, but better," he enthuses, adding, "and bigger."

"No, Kevin," I inform him, "women are like men, only female. And feminine."

Sandy Brown shows up, handing out copies of "Northfield's Mortician," full of the usual in-jokes, incomprehensible to anyone who hasn't seen "The Long Riders".

Eventually the pub closes, and as we walk over to the cars

on our way back to sample Bill's hospital, or rather his hospitality, everyone bemoans the typical Eastercon weather. Another freezing cold Easter, though by now we should be used to it.

"In Siberia," says Sandy, "we have a saying: twenty degrees below - that is not a frost!"

Friday afternoon (anyone who begins their convention day before 1.00 pm does so without me), I discover that the fannish gestalt has collected in the Fan Bar, conveniently adjacent to the Fan Room: assorted Pickersgills, Ashworths, Polleys, a Jackson, a West, an Edwards (I, that is, M having stayed at home to continue giving his lessons in ventriloquism), an Ounsley, a Robertson, a Palmer, and so on...

Simon Polley sets about educating the US contingent, Allyn Cadogan and Gay Haldeman. He explains that the Yorkshire versus Lancashire cricket matches are simply a re-enactment of the Wars of the Roses, as the noble white rose tries to piss upon the disgusting, depraved red rose; and I add that the annual Scotland versus England football game is really a blustering attempt to relieve the Battle of Bannockburn (1314, the only memorable date in Scottish history, and a Good Thing), though only too often the result seems curiously reversed, in the tragic absence of a spider to bring on as a substitute, or superior numbers of the English (who are accustomed to fighting against heavy odds), the pits, etc. America assembled looks baffled and a little amused at this display of backward-looking cultural tunnel-vision, until I mutter darkly, "Su-hm day the Sa-ath gon' ra-az agin!" and comprehension dawns.

I am surprised to see Allyn Cadogan there, since I'd read in the Neilsen Haydens' "Taffluvia" that she was planning to stand for TAFF in next year's race. This is a pretty sneaky way to run a campaign, I think, coming over a year early, meeting people and making friends to gain support. Of course, this could have worked against her if she'd turned out to be a real shit. Fortunately for her platform (and for those of us who meet her) she turns out to be a terrific person, full of fascinating gossip about US fandom, fans and conventions, both in the fannish and the behavioural sense. Good person to see at any con.

And so the day progresses, sitting idly by watching the ashtrays fill, renewing old, and forging new friendships. Science fiction? Who needs it? Eventually the bar closes, so it must be time to venture all the way down to the cold, unfeeling basement for the "Main Bar", but it seems an awful long way to go.

"In Siberia," puts in Sandy Brown, "we say, 'One hundred kilometres - that is not a journey!'"

After Friday's promising start, I spend all day Saturday sitting around in the Fan Bar, waiting for the fannish gestalt to reconvene, mostly with only one or two people, as the likes of Keith Mitchell, Chris Anderson, Andrew Rose, Jimmy Robertson, Dave Ellis and Simon Ounsley come and go. Familiar faces keep peering round the door, but before I can say, "Hi, come and join us," they disappear again. Maybe I should take the cactus skin off.

Dave Ellis voices the interesting observation: "Sausages

seem to think that hotels are things that you cook by burning down one side while leaving the other side raw..." then looks quite shocked when everyone expresses a certain amusement at the thought.

Evening crawls around and we go across the street to the "Ad-Lib" for a burger, in a fairly hysterical mood. We sit down and order our food.

"Would you like something to drink?" asks the waitress.

"What have you got?" asks Dave Ellis.

"Oh, anything," she replies, "as long as it isn't too outrageous."

"Fine," I say, "I'll have a cup of tea."

"Oh," she exclaims, in a voice which suggests I'd just requested an erotic massage at a Royal Garden Party, "we don't do TEA!"

So now it's much later, and we're standing around in the hotel corridor discussing sexual problems.

"I'm never sure whether 'clitoris' should be pronounced 'clitoris' or 'clitoris'" I admit.

"Mm, it's not an easy one to get your tongue round," says Phil Palmer.

"It's Greek, you know," Keith Mitchell informs us.

"Get away," laughs Chris Anderson, "all women have got them, haven't they?"

"Apart from certain African tribes," points out Dave Hodson, and everyone turns green and looks slightly ill at the thought.

"No," objects Keith, "I meant 'clitoris' is a Greek word."

"OK, smartarse," says Chris, "what's it Greek for?"

"It's Greek for 'clitoris'," he tells us.

"Did you learn that back in Seminary School?" says Chris.

Oral sex is never far from my lips. "'Cunnilingus' isn't too bad a word," I say, "but I always think 'fellatio' sounds like a character from a Shakespeare play."

"Oh yeah," suggests Pete Lyon, "isn't he in 'Two Cocksuckers of Verona'?"

"Uh huh," puts in Jimmy Robertson, "it's 'A Midsummer Night's Blow-Job'. The one where Titania gives the weaver some head."

"And a piece of ass," mutters Alan Ferguson.

On Sunday morning, I actually manage to get up early enough

for the breakfast room, and join the queue behind Darroll Pardoe. He picks up the last tray from the table, and I think, "Ah, no trays." I look around the room which is pretty full, thinking, "I'll just grab a tray from someone who's finished with theirs." Not a single tray to be seen. "Ah," I think intelligently, "no trays." I walk over to the middle of the room and have another good look around. "Ah," I think, "no trays." Well, I'll just collect a tray from someone who's just gone round and collected their food, once they sit down. Fine. As one couple gather their cutlery, I begin to follow them first to one table where they dither, then to another table, where they dither some more, then they walk again. This gets tiresome, and I walk back to the start of the serving tables and stare at the white tablecloth. "No trays," I think. It's at this point that I turn around and actually look at what people are eating, and what others are collecting from the serving hatches.

"Fucking hell," I think, "I don't want to eat this!" And walk out of the breakfast room.

It's moments like this that make me glad to be alive.

Alive.

From here on, the day can only improve.

So we're standing around by the Conception and Conspiracy registration desks, and Greg Pickersgill comes up with the Sponge Cake Theory of the Universe.

"The problem," he explains, "is stopping the whole thing going stale. I reckon it must be wrapped in Cling-Film."

"That must be the Big Bag Theory," suggests Jimmy Robertson.

"Ah," I murmur, "so the universe isn't infinite after all."

"Of course," Jimmy continues, "we're headed for the Fridge Death of the Universe."

"What about the little light?" I ask, "What happens when it goes out?"

"Someone must have closed the door," Greg says confidently.

"Yes," says Jimmy, "and some time soon, astronomers will detect the Sell-By Date: End of Universe: eat within three days of purchase."

"But it's when they spot the Marks and Spencers label that we know we're really in the shit!" says Greg.

"Contains colouring and preservatives," suggests Jimmy. "Someone, somewhere, is living in a Menu Master - and we're sitting in a Weetabix box!"

The state of reality satisfactorily explained, the Sponge Cake crumbles. I decide to seek the fannish gestalt in the Ailsa Bar, where apparently it had been lurking all the previous

day. I sit in desultory conversation with Keith Mitchell, at times joined by individuals such as Margaret Welbank, D West, Pete Lyon or Hazel Ashworth, but none of them stays for long.

"What's happening to this bloody fannish gestalt?" I keep asking. "I thought I had it on Friday, but it seems to have vanished now."

Eventually, Keith and I decide to take a wander up to the Fan Room, where we'd sat all day yesterday waiting vainly for the fannish gestalt to condense. As we walk in, Jimmy Robertson announces, "Oh hey, you just missed a really good Fan Group Encounter Session. It's just finished, so that the TWP meeting can start next door."

Story of my life.

Ah well, nothing left to do now but get drunk.

Mission accomplished.

Somehow the subject of age comes up, and I reveal that, in common with all the best people, like John Jarrold and Dave Ellis, I'll be 33 the following month.

"Oh," asks Allyn Cadogan, "what sign does that make you?"

"Oh, I don't believe in astrology at all," I reply, "that's a common trait amongst Geminis..."

Despite several loaded suggestions, I make the conscious decision to avoid any exploring this convention. Two Glasgow cons in a row spent wandering empty corridors, creeping around hoping I'm not spotted by inquisitive security staff is quite enough for me. However, intrepid Dave Ellis leads a party of bold sherpas back to that bizarre room full of air-conditioning pipes at the top of the hotel, and this time, after climbing the staircase, they find that the door at the top has been left unlocked. On opening it, they are faced with a ladder, which they proceed to climb. And climb. In fact, they find no fewer than five ladders, one after the other, until eventually they pop up in the round turret right at the very, very top in the corner of the hotel.

Now, these guys have got to be some kind of crazy. The thought of climbing five rickety ladders in semi-darkness makes me feel distinctly queasy, even when not half way through a convention. They discover lots of interesting graffiti in the tiny room at the top: "some name or other, say Macganahan Skelliffetti, Master plumber 1966." Obviously this guy had been daft enough to climb up there in his teens (while working in the hotel?), and then had made a pilgrimage back up there a full twelve years on (when called back on another job in the hotel?). Have they stumbled on some arcane Central Hotel-Climbing Society? The mind boggles. Even the boggles boggle.

On reaching that turret, one of the expedition exclaims, "Made it, Ma, top of the world!"

Then, when they venture back down to rejoin the convention, they discover that Jimmy Cagney had died that day. When Dave

relates his story, I suggest he should write to "Fortean Times" about it.

"I don't believe in synchronicity," says Simon Dunsley.

"That's an amazing coincidence," I tell him, "I don't believe in synchronicity either!"

Simon looks confused.

Back at the convention, this revelation, of course, leads on to an excited discussion of possible uses for discarded fore-skins. How about inner tubes for bicycle tyres? ("Oh, I'm sure it'll stretch!") or ships' lifebelts? Vol-au-vent cases, elastic support bandages are suggested; they could even be used for washers or gaskets, or solidified and used as hoola-hoops. Just think of the manufacturing costs saved!

Lilian Edwards demonstrates a particular fascination for the subject, presumably due to her religious heritage. Linda Pickersgill, too, because of her cultural background, finds a great deal of interest in the matter in hand (well, not actually in hand, you understand). "I'd never seen an uncircumcised dick 'till I came to Britain," she informs us. Could this be a major new selling point the British Tourist Boards could pick up on? ("Take a tip from me - come to Britain, land of the uncircumcised dick!") Maybe this is just the end-piece the holiday industry needs for its brochures to recover after the Libyan crisis... there must be drawbacks, I suppose.

Incidentally, a letter in "The Scotsman" pointed out that, only last year, Reagan was exhorting US citizens to holiday at home, rather than abroad, to keep the sacred dollar where it belongs, to bolster the economy, and stop leaking vital funds overseas (and, presumably, to preserve the purity of precious bodily fluids). And no-one paid the slightest attention, preferring to continue with their travel and holiday plans. Now the Libyan War has given Ronnie just what he wanted, as frightened Americans cancel all their bookings. Only the most cynical might be tempted to suggest there could be any connection (but, oh, how a good war now and again does boost the economy...).

Linda keeps us all entertained for a while with her sock puppets, cheerfully holding high-pitched conversations with their happy little faces. Everyone else is crazy to try it too, but no-one dares remove their socks (well, it's been a long week-end).

Lilian notices me making a few notes and whines, "Why do you only ever do ConReps about Glasgow conventions?"

"Because Glasgow conventions are so boring that the only way to stay awake is to keep writing things down," I tell her. "I mean, look at Mal Ashworth - he's spent six hours and filled seventeen notebooks with book and film titles containing the word 'snail'." (Examples abound, if a little sluggishly, like "A Snail of Two Cities," "When Snails Collide" and "Slime After Slime," etc.)

In all fairness, it wasn't that bad a con - much better than

Albacon 85. It wasn't a great Eastercon, like Yorcon III, but those are pretty rare, anyway. If it was pretty quiet, for my tastes, that's mainly because a lot of the people I expect (and want) to see at an Eastercon refused to make the journey north. Shame on you, friends. You know who you are.

Everyone starts discussing where they should go eat, who's located Italian restaurants, and who Chinese, and so on. Simon Dunsley says that there's a good Indian not far away.

"Simon," I tell him, "the only good Indian is a dead Indian."

"You know, Owen" he says, "you've got a lot of good lines, if only you'd update your material by about forty years."

"Yes," agrees Lilian, "you could be really funny if only you'd find some new jokes."

"The old ones are still the best," I wheeze, "the trick is to use lines that everyone recognises, but introduce them into novel situations."

"But you don't even do that!" complains Simon. "You just say what everyone else thinks but is too considerate to actually say. You're so predicatable."

"But by saying what everyone else thinks, I'm saving them the trouble and the embarrassment of making fools of themselves," I say, "it's a public service. Anyway, why break new ground when the old is still fertile? Why do you think concert audiences applaud the songs as soon as they recognise them?"

"Because they're stupid?" suggests Greg.

"Correct. The human animal en masse has a very low IQ."

As the afternoon draws to a close, a party of fans is planning to stop over to visit at Lilian Edwards' place - Hazel and Mal Ashworth, Simon Dunsley and Don West (another unlikely fan-nish couple that Steve Higgins would like to know more about). We are all enthralled at the prospect of West's introduction to Lilian's Jewish Momma.

"I can just imagine him lurching in," I say, "bouncing off the doorpost and saying, 'Wanna fuck?'"

"Ye-es," says Mal Ashworth, "but it's when she responds, 'Why, have you got fifty pence?...'"

Sadly, the fannish gestalt fragments a little more as more farewells are made. Today has been one of the most enjoyable days I've ever spent at a convention. I end up sitting in the Ailsha Bar until about 4.00 am, by which time the only others left are John Jarrold, Jimmy Robertson, Dave Ellis and Keith Mitchell (although not necessarily in that order), and we are far from coherent. Even Dave Ellis' supplies of bourbon have to run out sometime.

"We are saying in Siberia," Sandy Brown's voice echoes, "a litre of wodka - that is not a drink!"

"In Glasgow, we are saying," we counter, "'shut the fuck up about Siberia!'"

... ..

Albacon Tuesday is a quiet day in the convention, for me, as Jimmy Robertson and Keith Mitchell return with me to Edinburgh for the usual, run-of-the-mill FORTH meeting, where we also encounter, as well as assorted FROTHIES, visitors like Kevin Clark and Dave Ellis (Good god, does the man never go home? Does he never sleep? Does he never stop drinking? A prize will be awarded for the most imaginative answers). It's a fun evening, actually, but by this time I'm running on empty.

As I step out of the bath next morning, Linda Pickersgill phones to let me know when assorted fans will be arriving to continue the convention in Edinburgh.

"We're going to meet outside the Gerry Anderson exhibition," she says.

"Well, I can't say I'm going near that," I tell her, "but I'll join you for a pint."

I creep into the front room and surreptitiously make enough noise to make sure Jimmy wakes up. Peering myopically from the floor, groping for his fags (cigarettes for US readers), he looks less than wildly excited at the news. I grab some breakfast (no, I don't bruise it; I even eat it), leave instructions with Jimmy on how to find us, place a cup of tea to go cold on the floor in front of him, and I head off downtown.

Standing outside the Art Gallery in the freezing cold wind, puffing life into my first cigarette of the day (and death into my lungs), I wonder what the hell I'm doing, but that changes once I see familiar figures strolling nonchalantly along Market Street. First of all, from Dundee come Moira Shearman, Maureen Porter, Paul Kincaid and Allyn Cadogan, then from points west Lilian Edwards with Hazel and Mal Ashworth, and from other points west Anne Page and Ian Sorensen with Linda and Greg Pickersgill.

We shiver outside for a few minutes, until Maureen has the bright idea of stepping inside out of the wind.

"Uh, I've no intention of going in there," I protest, "but if anyone fancies going for a pint..." This last aimed meaningfully at Mal, who I regard as the likeliest candidate to rescue me from Gerry Anderson.

"Oh, come on, Owen," cajoles Hazel, "you don't have to stay long, and anyway it's free!" Obviously, marrying into Yorkshire high society has suitably entrenched Hazel's priorities (I'm allowed to say that, by the way, my father being Bradford born and bred).

I resign myself to having to suffer puppet strings, and drag my feet into the exhibition. "Jesus," I think, "I don't believe this. What am I doing here? I thought Gerry Anderson was boring and bloody stupid twenty-five years ago (or whenever the hell it was) - why should I be traipsing round his models today?

This is exactly the kind of thing I'd avoid at a Convention."

Greg is floating around, with a bemused and wide-eyed grin on his face. "Jesus," he says, "I don't believe this. What am I doing here?"

Every two minutes one of the party appears from among the glass cases and the hordes of other puppettes and strolls past, asking me, "Had enough yet?"

"Yes!" I scream, every time.

Eventually (well, after about ten minutes, I suppose, though it seems like days) the appeal of plaster and string and video begins to pale on the others, and groups of two or three people coagulate, muttering, "We can go any time, you know," and then disband, despite my attempts at telepathic cohesion therapy. Another ten or fifteen minutes of this, then we seem to achieve a quorum and make our way outside. "There's a nice little pub just around the corner..." I explain.

Lunch follows, and I, and I suspect several others, feel a whole lot better with two or three pints soaking it up. Linda is fascinating us with some of Greg's more bizarre theories about The Universe: The Way Things Really Are (Throughout Albacon, Greg had been insisting that the Martians had already invaded. It was the only possible explanation, he maintained for the mess the world was in). It seems that Greg has this Great Whale deity that he reckons really Runs Things.

"He'll lie in the bath," she tells us, "and slide right down under the water, offering up ((down?)) prayers to the Great Whale ((or is that some strange ethnic singular from the Principality of Wales?)), asking him to sort things out and set the world to rights."

"What do you ask him for," I enquire drily, "a snorkel?"

Then there is the incident when Greg went to the USA and spent a restless, troubled night, unable to sleep properly because of his hair conditioner, sorry, the air conditioning. Suddenly he leapt out of bed and started attacking a vase, imagining it to be an intruder. This leads on to the idea someone, somewhere came up with that, when you're asleep, all your worst horrors of what can happen while you're unconscious really do occur, and then all the demons and creepy crawlies run and hide as soon as you wake up. Greg suggests that it would be fun to set up a video camera to check this theory out, but Hazel and Mal find this thought even more terrifying. After all, what if it's true? Myself, I just think you'd never manage to get to sleep with a video camera pointing at you anyway. Might work wonders for your sex life, though, if you've any exhibitionist tendencies to bring out.

Linda goes on to tell us about the night Gregory was convinced that South Ealing was being invaded. "It was the first time I'd ever seen him really drunk," she says, "and he was lying there grunting and muttering to himself; I wasn't even sure if he was asleep and dreaming."

"I was just off in my own little fantasy," puts in Greg.

"And then suddenly," Linda continues, "he started yelling, 'They'll never get through! We've got to fight them off! I couldn't figure out who was supposed to be invading, but he was quite determined.

"'But Gregory, how can we fight them off?'" she quotes in her high-pitched, let's-all-have-a-giggle voice, her long blonde hair swinging.

"'With tanks!'" she gruffly imitates GP.

"'But Gregory, we haven't got any tanks.'"

"'With guns, then!'"

"'We haven't any guns, either.'"

"'Oh, alright, then, with knives!'"

"'But Gregory, I don't think our kitchen knives are going to be all that effective.'"

Eventually they managed to figure out that they'd be defending South Ealing with rubber bands. And paper clips.

"Fucking hell," I say to Greg, "this is really good stuff. With all these amazing theories, you should be writing all this up for fanzines. You haven't done any fanwriting in ages."

"Oh, I've given all that up," he quotes from his TAFF ballot, "nowadays I just like, perform."

From Greg's drunken reveries the conversation quite naturally progresses on to various symptoms of excessive inebriation, like the Whirly Pits, aka the Swirly Whirlies. You know, when you're so out of it that you have to lie down, but as soon as you're flat out the whole room seems to spin, so you close your eyes, but then, in the Stygian blackness, the spinning actually fucking speeds up, faster and faster, until ti gets so fucking fast that you feel nauseous. Arrgh. For some reason, the Ashworths seem particularly knowledgeable on this topic (not that I know what they're talking about, you understand).

But the whole idea of this convention wind-down was to do a spot of sight-seeing. The party splits up into assorted special-interest groups (just like a convention, you see), just as Jimmy Robertson shows up. Hazel and Mal wander off in the direction of the Royal Museum of Scotland and an encounter with a pair of leather trousers; several others head off for Gladstone's Land, a supposedly authentically furnished period dwelling; Greg seems perfectly happy to sit in the pub all afternoon, purely, you appreciate, in a spirit of enquiry, since pubs staying open all day long is not a phenomenon with which he is familiar. However, after a little persuasion, even Greg agrees to come up and have a stroll around Edinburgh Castle.

Fortunately, it's a bright, clear day as Linda and Greg, Allyn, Jimmy and myself walk up on to the Esplanade, and the view

is quite spectacular, even if the breeze is Edinburgh's habitual gale-force. To the north, we can see with telescopic precision right over the Forth to the hills of Fife, to the south as far as the rolling barrier of the Pentlands, and inbetween all the vicarious architectual scattering of the city itself.

Edinburgh is a structural pot-pourri, throwing together mediaeval, Georgian, Victorian, Victorian copying of classic Greek and modern concrete-and-glass, interspersed with large areas of parkland, straddling a number of hills (like most hilly cities, it claims seven, to reflect Rome's splendour; it also lays claim to the title "Athens of the North" for its Doric columnades). All this is spread out before the broad estuary (=firth) of the Forth. "Just wait till we get up to the Castle itself," I tell everyone, "there's a good view from there."

Having lived here since 1967, and for ten years before that just outside the city, I tend to take the Castle for granted (it's just this huge pile of rock and stone across the other side of Princes Street Gardens, or glimpsed briefly between buildings from almost anywhere else in the city), until I get a chance to show it off to visitors, and see how impressed they are. It really is a whole little town crammed in behind those enormous battlements, which apparently grow straight out of the volcanic rock. Allyn is excited at seeing her first castle (but by no means her last). Even Greg seems happy. "This is great," he enthuses (or is that what a pot of tea does?), "I'm really glad I came up here." After a sombre walk around the Imperial War Museum he seems less uplifted: "God, I need a Guinness after that."

And so it is that we make our way back to the Malt Shovel (aka The Mallet Sheug, The Mudlark, The Body Swerve, et al) where we meet up again with the rest of the crowd. Even Chris Anderson shows up, not, you realise, that he always goes straight to the pub at 5.00. I feel like I'm still at Albacon, but once again sad farewells are breaking up the party, as Linda and Greg leave to catch a train to London, then Moira, Maureen, Paul and Allyn head off for Dundee, Ian and Anne go west, and only the real die-hards are left. A couple of quick phone-calls, and the con is replenished with the likes of Jim Darroch, Andrew Rose, Keith Mitchell (a temporarily returned prodigal son) and Caroline Day. And the evening stumbles on. Jimmy returns to the family embrace of Glasgow, eventually even Hazel, Mal and Lilian decide they can tear themselves away from strong drink and weak puns to depart for Thorntonhall. Yes, it's been a good convention, I reflect, as I weave my way up the hill to catch my last bus hom. I wonder if I'll manage to get up for work tomorrow?

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WHEN FANDOMS COLLIDE

BOB SHAW

When I entered fandom around the beginning of the 1950's a bottle of Guinness cost 5p; portable radios looked like small suitcases and operated on glass valves; some food was still rationed; the movie-going public believed to a man that Robert Mitchum's eyelids had got that way because he had once smoked some marijuana at a Hollywood party; dirty dishes were washed with soda crystals, detergents being unheard of; gay meant cheerful; cigarettes didn't give you lung cancer and butter didn't give you arteries like pipestems; you could always recognise an engineer by the slide rule sticking out of his breast pocket; a loaf of bread placed at the bottom of a shopping bag could withstand a stone of potatoes on top of it and not get squashed...

The main reason for the above list being...er...above, is that I enjoy compiling such things, but it does illustrate how the world has changed in the last thirty years or so, and it leads to an important point.

Fandom has changed as much, or even more.

What, you might say, is so important about that? Well, I'll tell you - otherwise it would have been a waste of time to bring the matter up in the first place.

Fans act, react and interact in a manner appropriate to the fandom of their time.

The fact is worth emphasising because it's at the heart of some current widespread dissension, also because it's one which cannot be appreciated too well without a time base spanning decades. I notice a parallel in my 20-year-old son (I'm enjoying this Wise Old Fan act) who is a country-and-western fanatic. Occasionally he tells me how lucky I was to be a teenager in the 1940's when I could have bought certain records for just a few bob. What I can't get him to appreciate is that I wasn't able to raise a few bob for records, and even if I had it wouldn't have helped because I had no record player and didn't even know anybody who owned one. He has trouble absorbing that message because he

simply can't visualise my life in the 1940's.

Returning to fandom, the dissension mentioned centres around fannish tradition, especially in fan writing and fanzine publishing. The argument is familiar to most of us. One side believes that in the old days the fanzines and writers were better; BNFs were more worthy of the title; the customs and prevalent attitudes were pleasanter and more civilised; and that in general fandom was a more enjoyable place. The other side holds that most of the old fanzine output is over-praised; that the long-established BNFs who haven't totally gaffiated tremble in their shoes at the thought of youthful, vigorous and innovative competition; that old-style fandom was a boring mutual admiration society which just had to have a few hornet nests thrown into it.

To know all is to irritate all, so I'm going to admit up front that my grip of fan history isn't good enough to enable me to analyse and explain fully the two positions outlined above - but I have a personal opinion on how many of the differences arose.

Oddly enough, science fiction had a lot to do with it.

The list of quaint or nostalgic items in the first paragraph of this article is a reminder of how much things have changed in thirty years, but the really big differences are in science fiction and its relationships to society. On one occasion in about 1951, which it embarrasses me to recall, I actually said to Walt Willis, "Fanzines don't print enough about SF, which is what brought us all together in the first place." He gave a tolerant smile and handed me a plate of egg-and-onion sandwiches, knowing that my aberration would be short-lived. And he was right. My fannish sanity soon returned and I reverted to my comfortable insular belief that fandom, although engendered by SF, is a thing apart - in much the same way that alcoholic drinks contain no yeast although it is yeast which makes them what they are.

That idea is partially correct. It springs from a well-known phenomenon. A bunch of fans can have a long get-together with lots of conversation in which SF isn't mentioned at all, but one leaves it feeling that any hunger to discuss SF has been satisfied. Communication has taken place on a second level, because everything that was said was filtered through minds whose attitudes have been shaped by a liking for and a knowledge of SF. I'm claiming that the SF element is still there, still vital - so let's compare what the term "SF element" meant at the beginning of the 1950's with what it means today.

Destination Moon appeared on movie screens in 1950 to initiate the SF film boom of the ensuing decade and to give us a tantalising hint of the comparative respectability that SF would one day achieve, but for the average fan it was very much a false dawn. I remember sitting in the Classic cinema in Belfast, with four pints of XX Guinness in my stomach, as the credits for Destination Moon appeared. When Robert Heinlein's name came up I glanced around in the darkness, smug as hell because it was almost certain that not one other person in the cinema had any inkling of what it stood for. In the case of Chesley Bonestell

it was definite - nobody else in that large, crowded picture house could feel the magic of the name, could appreciate the sheer wonder of that unique set of letters being miraculously transposed from the pages of ASTOUNDING to an ordinary movie screen on which for years crowds of mundanes had been content to gawp at the likes of Nelson Eddy and Joan Crawford.

I was one of the star-begotten, you see. A slan. One of the secret elite who had to keep their superiority hidden lest they be overwhelmed by outraged, uncomprehending masses. I was a fan - one of the five known to exist in the whole of Ireland, one of the few tens known to exist in the whole of the UK.

Does the above paragraph seem overwritten? Exaggerated for literary effect?

Not to an old-time fan, it doesn't. We had grown up in an era in which professing a liking for science fiction brought automatic derision, even hostility, from all around. We had had magazines torn up by parents because some had Bergey covers which were sure to inflame unhealthy yearnings. We had gone through World War 2 on one BRE ASTOUNDING (64pp) every second month - an exquisite form of drip torture which in some ways was worse than having no SF at all. We were universally scorned because we believed that men would one day fly to the moon, that radios would one day be small enough to be worn on the wrist, that computers would one day be able to play chess.

I, personally, had been forced by a physics teacher to stand up in front of the class and explain just how I thought a rocket could get to the moon, and the class had gone into hysterics while the teacher had sarcastically and "scientifically" demolished every one of my half-articulated notions. I had been victimised by school bullies for having been seen carrying SF magazines. In the first place I worked there was an illiterate, innumerate moron called Bertie, employed as a charity to a friend of a director, who was the butt of a lot of unfeeling humour. Bertie resented that a lot, but there was one bright spot in his life, he was able to poke fun at me because my liking for SF demonstrated that my mental deficiencies were greater than his!

Are you getting the general picture? I know I'm going on and on about this, but it's important to an understanding of what fandom was like in those days and what it meant to people. If, after a few years of the treatment described above, a lone prot-fan was lucky enough to meet others of like persuasion it was a near-religious experience. Actually to meet somebody who knew who John W Campbell was! Who had read all the stories you had and was prepared to spend hours discussing them! Who was willing to put hard-earned money into buying a duplicator and learn how to use it and publish a magazine of sorts!

An encounter like that gave rise to powerful emotions - joy, relief, security and... let's make no bones about it... love. When you met somebody who had been through what you had been through, somebody who was committed to standing by you and wearing the label "SF FAN", you felt a surge of brotherly affection of an intensity which fully justifies the use of the word love.

When I entered Irish Fandom as it was in those days I looked on all its members with love. When I began to venture into England and meet other fans - Vince Clarke, Ken Bulmer, Chuck Harris, Ted Tubb, Ken Slater, Eric Bentcliffe, Alan Hunter, Terry Jeeves, Bob Foster, Sid Birchby, Ron Bennett, etc - my feelings were the same, and they persist to this day although time and the inevitable ablation of ideals have taken their effect.

This brings us to the comments about old-time fandom being a mutual admiration society, far too cosy and stiflingly polite. I can see why new-generation fans react that way, but old habits die hard. When it has taken you years to find your soul mates, and there are no other likely prospects in the whole wide world, you tend to cherish and nurture the relationship, and to work at keeping it going. Oscar Wilde, trying to be clever, said each man kills the thing he loves. What crap! Most of us have too much sense for that. It is a sad fact that at some time everybody has to forgive each of his friends for causing him pain, but there is an overriding gladness in the realisation that friendship is worth it.

Bearing all the above in mind, one can see why there was little in the way of feuding and needling - jokey or otherwise - in the old fanzines. When a new fan editor showed up on the scene and began publishing he was something to be treasured. He was one of us, one of the beleaguered few, and he had to do something really drastic before we would consider pushing him out through the airlock of Spaceship Fandom. Defects like having no eye for page layout, being unable to spell properly, having a poor literary style, or even being a fugghead were regarded with tolerance and often with indulgent affection as indicators of a quirky fan-nish personality. We made the mumpsimus an art form.

Fanac was less wearing in those days. For the new fan publisher, it was enough to have wrought the miracle of bringing a fanzine into existence in a universe where such things had been unknown since the beginning of time. Fan writers, with no tradition to uphold, wrote unselfconsciously in any vein on any subject in fanzines like Vince Clarke's SCIENCE FANTASY NEWS, Walt Willis's SLANT and HYPHEN, and Ken Bulmer's NIRVANA. The emphasis was on SF-related topics, but there was room for general commentary and whimsy.

A very common, very popular type of article was one in which a fan gave a blow-by-blow account of a skirmish with the inhabitants and/or machinery of the mundane world. Sometimes the fan would triumph by virtue of his null-A thinking but more often than not he would go down with a humorous bleat of despair beneath the Juggernaut of the Ordinary. Either way we were in there rooting for him, laughing at all his in-jokes, cringing at the unimaginative crassness of his enemies, bonded by the warm realisation that we were brothers, the only few people in the cosmos who could understand terms like BEM, gafiate, egoboo and annish.

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The years, as is their habit, went by. So did the decades. The galactic wheel turned through a tiny fraction of a degree, a

fraction so small that no astronomer could have detected it, but events on Earth were moving faster...

Science fiction experienced a series of booms, building on the near-respectability which began with the advent of the sputniks. The number of readers and actifans increased. Major and minor SF films were produced, and SF series appeared on radio and television. Kingsley Amis gave the field the Good Intellectual's Seal of Approval and brought it to the attention of academics. The number of readers and actifans increased faster. Flying saucers decanted a new mythology. Universities - yes, universities!, dear Jophan - began to have SF clubs. Conventions proliferated, bringing in new kinds of fans. Neil Armstrong made his giant leap for fandom. Science fiction became so trendy that public figures, who probably didn't know Orson from H.G., claimed to be devotees of sci-fi. SF publishing trebled, then tribbled. The man in the street learned to declaim the names of the BACH Quartet - Bradbury, Asimov, Clarke, Heinlein. The number of readers and actifans increased faster and faster. CE3K was chosen for the Royal Film Premier; half the commercials on TV became micro SF movies. The word fanzine was accepted in larger dictionaries...

The old UK fandom didn't pass away, but discerning it became a somewhat tricky job. These were new times with new attitudes and new ways of doing things.

And three important changes had occurred: (i) SF was now plentiful, not only easy to obtain but almost unavoidable; (ii) SF was now acceptable in the eyes of society; (iii) fandom was large, easy to find, easy to get into.

(Everything I have written thus far refers to UK fandom, but in the old days we were aware of US fandom. To us it was a strange, exotic place because, from the start, there had been quite large numbers of fans - probably due to the fact America was a younger and more informal and flexible society. In America fan groups were so large that if a disagreement arose the chief contenders could split off and take their supporters with them, and the result was two viable clubs in place of one. Members of a typical four-strong UK group would have felt themselves to be right berks for splitting into two pairs gazing glumly over lonely pints.)

Harking back to my opening statements, the changes in the times produced inevitable changes in fandom and its inhabitants.

There is nothing wrong with this - it's part of a natural process. Nowadays if I'm meeting a new fan I will probably like him, I will possibly get to like him a lot, but I'm not predisposed to love him - and that's because I know he didn't go through what I went through to get into fandom, didn't pay the same dues. To my eyes he has come into fandom as easily and casually as someone popping into Boots to buy a toothbrush, which is his right, and he is liable to leave at any time in the same fashion, which is also his right. Therefore, whether I like it or not, my relationship with him is not going to be the same as if we had met thirty years earlier. But that's fair enough. Something has been lost, something has been gained.

I have changed, and intend to go on changing, so I was

saddened recently by a remark made by a prominent senior fan. We were discussing one of the most likeable, intelligent, humorous, talented and energetic fans to appear in the last five years or so. (I'm not going to quote his name - feel free to treat the description like one of those life-sized fairground paintings of a human figure and smile coyly through the hole where the face ought to be.) I was busy extolling this BNF's virtues when my friend abruptly shook his head and said, "I'm sorry - he hasn't proved himself to me." And I was saddened. I felt my friend was reinforcing the very barriers that I strive to tear down, that he was not accepting the new ground rules.

The newish BNF had done all that was necessary to earn his laurel wreath but the proving that my older friend demanded of him would have involved building a time machine and going back three decades. Mission impossible. The message is that we have all got to be shock wave riders, skimming along on the crest of the present, letting the past drop cleanly away behind us. Fans are the same kind of people they always were - they simply react in a manner appropriate to the changes in fandom itself. And understanding that has to be a two-way thing. New fans should appreciate that there is nothing alien about another fan because he was around before the Brighton world con, or the demise of NEW WORLDS, or the adoption of the A4 sheet, or any other temporal landmark.

A thing I hate to see - and I've witnessed it many times over the years - is gafiation through fixation. It happens simultaneously in every branch of fanac, but perhaps it is most visible in the context of conventions.

Typical case history: A fan becomes a BNF, swimming strongly and joyfully in the river that is the fandom of the day. He/she becomes a key figure at conventions, working purposefully, on the platform a lot, always in the centre of the action, surrounded by friends, having a good time. And then because, as the Chinese sage observed, you can't step twice into the same river, things begin to change. Our BNF ceases to be a key figure at conventions, and tends to react by gathering together as many as possible of the "old gang" and spending a lot of time with them at closed room parties, re-creating and reliving his or her heyday.

That phase may last quite a few years, and in an odd way become more enjoyable than the original golden era. But eventually there comes a time when there aren't enough members of the old gang about or, even worse, the few that are available have changed in such a way that they are no longer eligible. Next, our BNF can be seen putting in shorter and shorter appearances at conventions, complaining that he/she no longer knows anybody, refusing to accept new faces in place of the old. Finally, our BNF lapses into permanent gafiation - and I really hate that. We have lost too many that way.

We've all got to adapt to each other and make room for each other - the old for the new, and the new for the old.

Fandom is big nowadays, easy to find, easy to enter - but that doesn't mean that it's easier to exist in it. A fanzine is

no longer a kind of revered immaculate conception. There is now a long tradition of fanzine publishing, and new faneds are aware of it and some are genuinely nervous about how their first efforts will be received. They are justified in being nervous, because fandom being big means that fans are expendable, and anybody who doesn't like a fanzine may have no compunction about giving its editor a scrotum-enlarging kick. And if the editor is a sensitive type he may drop out of fandom as quickly as he came in and take up hang-gliding or video games. The Glades of Gafia are full of wondrous diversions these days - which is another factor in the change of attitude.

Writers are in the same position as faneds - nobody is unduly worried about hurting their feelings. The same applies to convention organisers, artists, society officers, you name it... It's all part of the new game, and in many ways the new game is faster, more dangerous and more exciting than the old one.

Fandom used to be a village.

Now it's a city, with all the attendant advantages and disadvantages.

I reckon it's still a good place to live.

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