
the Texas SF Inquirer

ISSUE 23 — FEBRUARY 1988

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A six-issue subscription is \$6. Sample copies are \$2 each. (Some back issues are still available, as well, at \$2/copy.) If you join FACT (\$15/year), a 6-issue subscription to TSFI is included with your membership.

The **EDITORIAL ADDRESS** for the Texas SF Inquirer is 618 Westridge, Duncanville, TX 75116, (phone 214/780-7662). Please mail all subscriptions, trade zines, letters of comment, and contributions there. (And note the zip code; I got it wrong about a year ago, and it's made its way into a lot of mailing lists that way...)

The **MAIN FACT ADDRESS** is P.O. Box 9612, Austin, TX 78766. That's where you should send FACT memberships and all FACT-related mail.

About a week after each issue of the Inquirer is published, major articles and reviews from that issue are posted on the SMOF-BBS, a FACT-sponsored computer bulletin board system (300/1200 baud) based in Austin. To call the SMOF, dial (512) UFO-SMOF.

CONTENTS

Philosophical Musings on the Nature of Science Fiction Fandom

"My, What Strange Bedfellows We Have"

by Edw. A. Graham, Jr. 2

Trivia Contest Answers! 4

Review

Mechinings / Goodthings

by Dennis Virzi 5

Column

From The Recliner

by Edw. A. Graham, Jr. 6

LETTERS OF COMMENT 8

Harry Andruschak, Sheryl Birkhead, Brian Earl Brown, Allan D. Burrows, P.L. Caruthers-Montgomery, Cl. Crouch, R. Rayson Deike, Alexis Gilliland, Michael R. Gould, Jack Herman, Jerry Kaufman, Jeanne Mealy, Lloyd Penney, John Shirley, Garth Spencer, G.W. Teal, David Thayer, Edd Vick, Harry Warner, Jr., Walt Willis, and Martin Morse Wooster.

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INTERIOR ILLUSTRATIONS by Edw. A. Graham, Jr. (p.17); David Thayer/Teddy Harvia (p.8); Robert Whitaker Sirignano (p.15); and Kip Williams (p.11). Lettering page 6 by P.L. Caruthers-Montgomery.

Last page typed 19 February 1988; print run 350 copies.

Frequency: "Whenever Pat has 16-24 pages of material to print." Next issue should appear in late March.

The FACT Board of Directors consists of Fran Booth (chair), Edw. A. Graham, Jr., K. Meschke, Rembert Parker, and Willie Siros. Nina Siros is the corporate treasurer.

Computer use, desktop publishing, and laser-printing courtesy Dennis Virzi and Pat Mueller.

PHILOSOPHICAL MUSINGS ON THE NATURE OF SCIENCE FICTION FANDOM

"My, What Strange Bedfellows We Have"

Edw. A. Graham, Jr.

HMMN, with a subtitle like that, someone is bound to get the wrong impression. Concerning the subject of this little jaunt into the hideous backwaters of fandom, somebody is going to get upset. No, I'm not talking about sex, drugs, books, or even JapAnimation. However, I am going to discourse on something that, to some people, has taken the place of those time-honored means we use to get our jollies. Yes, that means *POLITICS*.

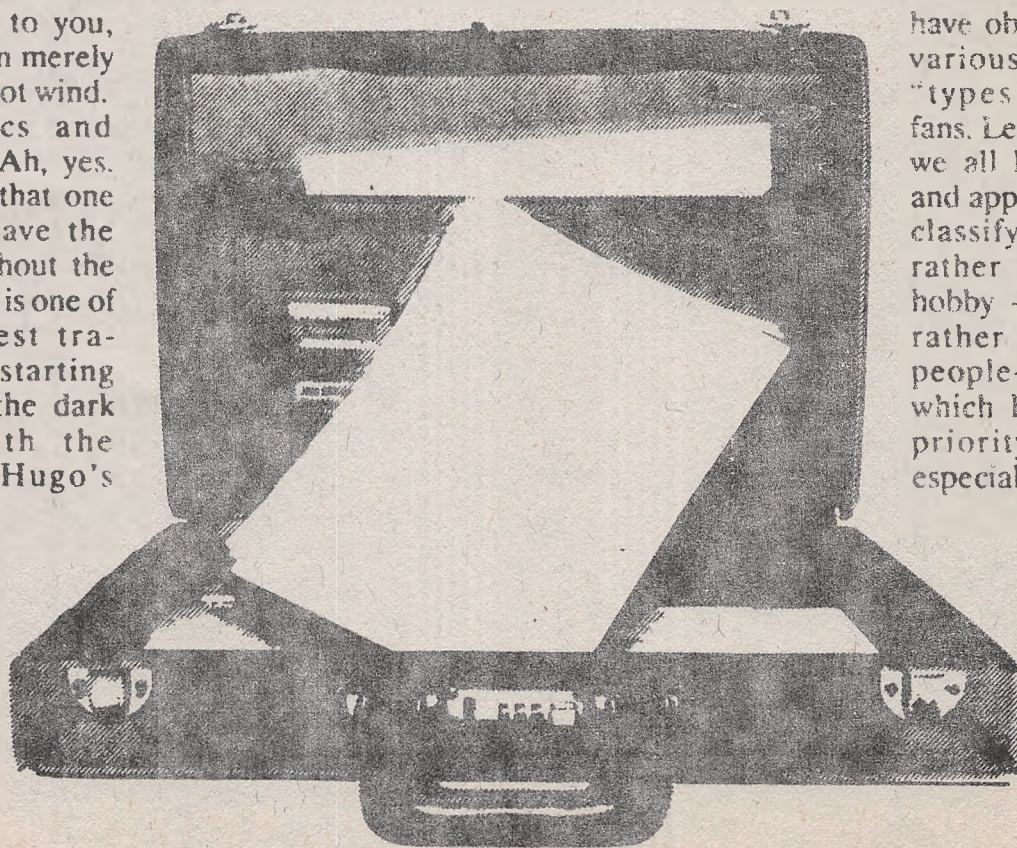
Before I get all wound up here, let me first say that I am *not* pointing fingers at anyone. If you, dear reader, are getting all hot and bothered by the contents here, it's your own guilty conscience speaking to you, not I. I am merely blowing hot wind.

Politics and fandom. Ah, yes. It seems that one cannot have the latter without the former. It is one of our oldest traditions, starting back in the dark ages with the Great Hugo's

clubs; rearing its head with the Futurians and their contemporaries. I hope everyone remembers the lockout at the first "Worldcon", as that was probably the most significant "first shot fired" in the continuing battles between fans.

It has always puzzled me why intelligent, rational beings such as ourselves would pursue such a ridiculous pastime, with backstabbing and mudslinging coming in a strong second. Personally, I try to stay away from such maneuverings because every time I get embroiled in them, I get burned. I just don't have the knack, I guess.

However, I have observed the various political "types" among fans. Let's do what we all love to do and apply labels to classify them. (I rather enjoy this hobby — it ties in rather well with people-watching, which has a high priority for me, especially at cons.)



First, there is the **SMOF**. We all can say that word with the proper amount of derision and scorn, but it really is too broad a classification. SMOF (an acronym for Secret Master of Fandom), in popular usage, generally means anyone who engages in the politics of fandom. Within a slightly skewed worldview, we're all SMOFs because we all are engaged in fan politics in one way or another. So let's just drop this particular label: it's useless. (The verb form is still functional, though.)

So, let's start again. The first type is the **Political Master** (PM), characterized by longevity in the "smoky back rooms" of the organizations to which he or she has belonged. PMs are generally ruthless in their dealings with others, but in such a nice and smooth way that it's not really noticed. Kinda like the professional politicians we vote for. They get their highs from the twists and turns of verbiage and promises alone. These are the true Secret Masters of Fandom and most of us don't really know who they are. They like it that way.

Often mistaken for the PM is a variety known as the MP, or **Motivated Politically**. This species is more readily identified as the true SMOFers in that they flock closely together, dropping names like bird... well, you get the idea. They are much more visible, mostly because of the lofty noises they generate and the loud plumage they wear.

Closely related to the PM is the **Political Hack**. The only divergence here is that the PH just isn't as well greased as the PM and leaves a definite slimy feeling on your hand when it's shaken. They are easily identified: Most people will say extremely nasty things about PM's behind their backs at the drop of a hat. The PH likes to think that he or she is really running things.

Another class is the PA (the "A" stands for Altruist), with two subdivisions: PAM and PAL. The **Political Altruist Master** has the finesse of the PM but with the broad-minded goal of actually furthering the "cause" of fandom. The unfortunate thing here is that the PAM can sometimes become immersed in the political byways, the game ceases to be and the goal becomes dim. Hey, we all know how hard it is to remain noble! The PAL (**Political Altruist Loser**) has a similar outlook except that they just don't have "the right stuff" to sur-

vive in the political arena. They remain adamant but ineffectual simply because they don't understand all of the rules. A high percentage of burnout is normal here.

Speaking of burnout, the next classification is the DA. The **Disgruntled Apathetic** is kind of a misnomer. The DA is anything but apathetic. They are so mad, pissed, etc. at being "mistreated and ignored" by fans and recognized for their brilliant contributions that they stomp around making absolute pains of themselves because of their moaning and groaning. The sour looks are easy to identify, along with the corresponding attitude.

Of course, there is also the SD, or **Sitting Duck**. Usually an honest schmuck set up in an apparent position of power, this poor person has little say in the running of an organization. Everyone else does the old "end-around" and the SD is constantly in a whirl. The call of this species is "What's going on? Hello? Is anyone out there?" or, more commonly, "Huh?"

Then, for you "control" freaks, comes the **Master Manipulator**. Often, the MMs don't occupy official positions, but wield their clubs in the wings. Some of the PMs are really MMs, but the ultimate aim of the MM is much different: Their highest desire is just to be in control. And you never can tell who an MM is, especially the best ones.

Lastly, oh patient reader, is the JP. Yep, you guessed it: **Joe/Jo Phan**. There are more "vanilla" fans out there than there are political types, although I'm sure that everyone has, at some time or another, gotten embroiled in the fight. These are the people that fandom is really for and by, to slightly paraphrase a certain document. Their battle cry is something like, "Oh, to hell with it! Have another bheer!" That kind of attitude is the only reason fandom as a cohesive structure has survived this long.

As I stated before, I ain't naming names or shaking my Flying Fickle Finger of Fate (sorry, too many *Laugh-In* reruns) at any person(s) in particular. It just seems that sometimes we take our hobby (yes, I know about FIAWOL, but fandom don't pay the rent — FIAGDH) too seriously and disaster results. Besides, if we can't sit back and laugh at ourselves every now and then, I think we would lose our humanity. And, believe it or not, we are each and every one of us a human being.

TRIVIA CONTEST ANSWERS!

Issue 21 of the *Inquirer* featured a Trivia Contest — name those editors! David Thayer (an anagram of Teddy Harvia) listed the names of all the fanzines his artwork has appeared in; I challenged you to name who edited those zines when David's art was published. The person who got the most names right would win an autographed copy of *Wingnut Soccer* — and nobody won. That's because EVERY SINGLE ONE OF YOU chickened out, and didn't even bother to enter...

Anyway, the next time we at the *Inquirer* run a contest, it's probably well worth your while to enter! Here's the answers...

Airfoil Arthur Hlavaty
The Alpha Centaura
Communicator Owen K. Laurion
Arecibo Darryll Wilkinson
Arkanfandom Margaret Middleton
Atarantes Cliff Biggers
Barroco Clementine Alain Pouffet
Bangweulu John & Lori Purcell
Brassor Marty Levine
Chat Dick & Nicki Lynch
The Cidereal Times Allen Boyd-Newton
Compound Fracture Georges Giguere
Conventional Fanzine Eva Chalker Whitney
Cullowhee Comments Richard Llewellyn
CUSFuSsing Charles Seelig
The Devil's Advocate Barry Lee Meikle
DIO Christopher Mills
The Diagonal Relationship Arthur Hlavaty
The Dillinger Relic Arthur Hlavaty
Digressions John Bartelt
Eclipse Sarah Swider
Empire Mark McGarry
Fantasy Carol Fisher & Kathy Hammel
Fever Pitch Brad Foster
File 770 Mike Glycer
Francis X. Cheep-Cheep George Paczolt
 & Sally Fink
Holier Than Thou Marty Cantor
Kenfusion Kenneth Goltz
Janus (Aurora) Jeanne Gomoll
 & Janice Bogstad
Lan's Lantern George (Lan) Laskowski
Lines of Occurrence Arthur Hlavaty
Loki Michael MacKay
The Looking Glass Ben Fulves
Love Makes the World Go Awry ... Fran Skene
Lyriphilia Bill Ware
Mad Scientist's Digest Brian Earl Brown
The Monthly Monthly Robert Runte
Multilog Arthur Hlavaty
NebulousFan David Thayer

Private Heat Lee Pelton
Protostar Tony Trull
Quahog Ed Rom
Red Dust Nigel Sellars
RUNE Carol Kennedy & Lee Pelton
SF Review Richard Geis
The SF Volary Steve Perram
Sigh Michael MacKay
SumerMorn Tom Geddie
Systems Wayne Alan Brenner
Tanjent Greg Hills
Tentativity Mike Gunderloy
The Texas SF Inquirer Pat Mueller
This House John Purcell
Thrust Douglas Fratz
Tightbeam Lynne Holdom
Uncle Oswald's Journal Dennis Virzi
Under The Influence Cathy Ball
Volta ?
Wallbanger Eve Harvey
The Whole Fanzine
Catalog Brian Earl Brown
Zosma Steve George

INSERTED BY MISTAKE

Hawaii Seth Goldberg

DELETED BY MISTAKE

Mongoose Seth Goldberg
fan'toons Edd Vick
Maybe Irwin Koch
TNFF Owen K. Laurion
GPIC Mike MacQuay
Skag Gary Mattingly
Smart-Ash Ruth Shields
Soft Pore Corn Sara Thompson
 & Marie Bartlett
Solaris Norbert Spehner
Sthondat Eddie Anderson
The Stone and the Stars Tess Kolney
 & Eric Biever

Mechthings/Goodthings

reviewed by Dennis Virzi

THE FACTS

Mechthings is a black and white comic book series written and illustrated by Brad W. Foster, and published by Renegade Press. There are three issues out so far: July, September and November. Cover price is \$2.00.

THE PREMISE

Mechthings is a series set in the 41st century and deals with young Bertram Baum's attempt to live the quite life of a junkyard caretaker. He's sensitive, you see.

Unfortunately for Bertram's peace of mind, the junkyard is populated with Wild Robots. On his first day on the job the place is raided by the police. Wild Robots are illegal and hunted down. Bertram mects up with the guardbot, Ahab, during the raid and gets the situation explained to him.

Wild Robots, who prefer to be called Mechthings, are robots that think for themselves. They're able to disobey direct orders and speak on their own initiative.

Bertram discovers that a whole underground of Mechthings exists in the massive junk yard. Ahab introduces him to some of the other Mechthings living in the junkyard and enlists his aid in protecting them.

THE REVIEW

I don't have an extensive comic book background. Up until a year and a half ago the only name I could connect with a comic was Stan Lee's. The *Dark Knight* series changed that, but not by much. I buy and read comics regularly now, but don't profess to know all major arcania connected with the entertainment form. But, as they say, I know what I like.

After reading the first two issues I decided I really liked this comic. It's well laid out, funny, interesting and incredibly illustrated.

About the latter: This comic is drawn in

black and white. The art is intended to be rendered in this medium. This isn't a "Sally Forth" style of drawing; rather, the strip "Rudy" comes closer. Color isn't necessary. In my opinion, the covers, which are in color, give the comic an undeservingly cartoonish feeling.

Those of you familiar with Brad's work know how detailed it is. *Mechthings* showcases his talent. For the most part the level of detail fits the story. The maze in issue two is overwhelming. The thing's four pages long and, best I can figure without spending an hour with a pencil and eraser, a real maze. Every panel on the maze pages has a little "in" and "out" opening, too!

The layout reminded me of Alan Moore's *Halo Jones* comic. (Possibly because that's all I've read that's similar in style.) It's creative without being confusing. Art spills over into adjacent panels, flashbacks are told from a centered panel's POV, insets break up full page illustrations, etc. One rather complicated panel has the character observe how silly it looks.

"Smasherino!" and "Onomatopoeial!" are not typical comic sound effects. Nor is a funny animal a typical comic mad scientist. Brad has a rare sense of humor. His stuff is off the far wall and also accessible.

This comic is also enjoyably interesting. The story, however gonzo, is adequately paced. It's evident that as much thought went into the story as went into the art work and layout.

Alas, finding independent comics isn't easy. Seek *Mechthings* out at speciality shops. Request that it be carried and write to the publisher at 2705 E. 7th Street, Long Beach, CA 90804. I'd hate to see Tin Drawers buy the big one.

(If you can't convince your local purveyor of comics to carry *Mechthings*, you can buy them direct from Brad; his address is Jabberwocky Graphix, PO Box 166255, Irving, TX 75016.)

From The Recliner

by Edw. A. Graham, Jr.

I know by now that everyone's heard about Cactuscon, so I won't mention it here, except that the recliner barely had time to sigh before I had parked myself back in it. However, you'll probably note from the following reviews that I haven't gotten many books from the store — mostly the SFBC this time around.

Flight of the Dragonfly Rating: 3.4
by Robert L. Forward (paper, Baen, \$3.50)

In this reprint, we are treated to Forward's unique style of hard-SF and a real unusual planet. I happen to like this hard stuff, but others will be put off. Sometimes (rarely), the novel does drag a little when Forward goes off on a tangent. I really sympathized with some of the characters, but there is a distinct blend of glory and sadness. I am eagerly awaiting his next books, just to have my mind turned on and waiting for possible overload.

Clypsis Rating: 3.7
by Jeffrey A. Carver
(paper, Bantam Spectra, \$3.50)

I don't know who thought of it first (Ace-/Asimov or Bantam/Zelazny), but this is another series set around a central cast of characters, a far-out plot, and a different author each time. This is the first book in Roger Zelazny's *Alien Speedway* and it starts off with a bang. It's obvious a lot of skull-sweat went into the creation of the environment and plot, not to mention the careful crafting of the protagonists. You can also tell that there was a love of racing that moved the action-filled plot along. I could almost smell the grease and ozone of the pits and some of the racing sequences would have been white-knuckle time if I hadn't reminded myself it was only a book. And I love the cover!

Wild Cards III: Jokers Wild Rating: 3.1
ed. by George R.R. Martin
(paper, Bantam Spectra, \$3.95)

The Astronomer is back, along with the other dark characters that this mosaic universe/series has produced. I can't quite put my finger on it, but it seems the love and care of comic-book superheroes taken into the real world is seriously lacking in this installment. A whole lot of changes occur to a lot of the major characters, including the most final change of all: Death. The intertwining of several plot-lines and authors still continues to be unshakable and the list of credits in the back is a major asset. I sure hope, however, that this collection of some of the newest crop of major authors can collect its combined breath and take off again.

Seventh Son Rating 3.3
by Orson Scott Card (hardcover, Tor, \$17.95)
Wyrms Rating 2.7
by Orson Scott Card
(hardcover, Arbor House, SFBC)

GASP! The price of hardbacks is prohibitive, but on rare occasions I will purchase one. I tried to rate *Seventh Son* on content alone, but if you add in the cost, the rating would drop precipitously. This skinny volume ain't worth the bucks. I was intrigued by the excerpt published earlier in *LASFM*, and Card's different history of our world in the early years of America. The plot and characterizations are well done, but the alternate world is what fascinates me. It does have one drawback, though: there is a sequel. I'm getting rather tired of having to buy two or more books just to get a complete story. Card's two recent Hugo-winning books can stand alone, but in order to find out what happens to seventh son Alvin and his

friends, you have to buy the next book. In this case, buy the paperback -- it won't kill you to wait.

Wyrms, on the other hand, was a disappointment. I know Card can write better than this! It contains a lot of soul-searching and depressing sections, with little to recommend it beyond the treatment of the characters. The ending seems a little flaky, too. The unique inhabitants of this polyglot planet are a real treat, though. In this respect, Card did a good job of creating something that, I think, is really different. There was no need to suspend disbelief at his use of genetic sciences, but I would like to know why there isn't any contact with the rest of the universe. Anyway, try this one if you want, but don't get your hopes up.

The Legacy of Heorot

Rating: 3.0

by Larry Niven, Jerry Pournelle, Steven Barnes (hardcover, Simon & Schuster, SFBC)

In terms of the hard-sf/action-adventure parts of this novel, it is much better than *Footfall* was. The characters were well-defined and executed well, the eco-science was thorough and masterful, and the plot moved along at a sometimes breakneck pace. Hey, it's a good book! However (you saw that coming, didn't you?) there is something definitely wrong here. It's very subtle and I can't quite point to a place in the book and say "There!", but it doesn't blend. I mean that you still can't tell who wrote what part, but the feeling of unification and smoothness that usually accompanies a good collaboration is totally lacking. To me, it was a little tapping on the back of the skull indicating that the authors just didn't get along well on this effort. I still bet you that someone is going to unjustifiably nominate it for a Hugo.

The Light Fantastic

Rating: 3.7

by Terry Pratchett

(hardcover, Colin Smythe, SFBC)

Another sequel in which we find the wizard (kind of) Rincewind and the Tourist Two-flower up to their kiesters in still more trouble and I practically giggled my way through this book. I'm going to have to use some of the blurbs from the dustjacket because they used all of the good adjectives: "madcap", "a laugh riot", etc. And it strokes its way from pure slapstick to some of the best play on words and

phrases since the early *Xanth* novels. It's light and entertaining and makes no pretense at seriousness. Besides, I kinda would like to have some Luggage like that, too. It sure would make the airlines pause, eh?

The Way of the Pilgrim

Rating: 2.5

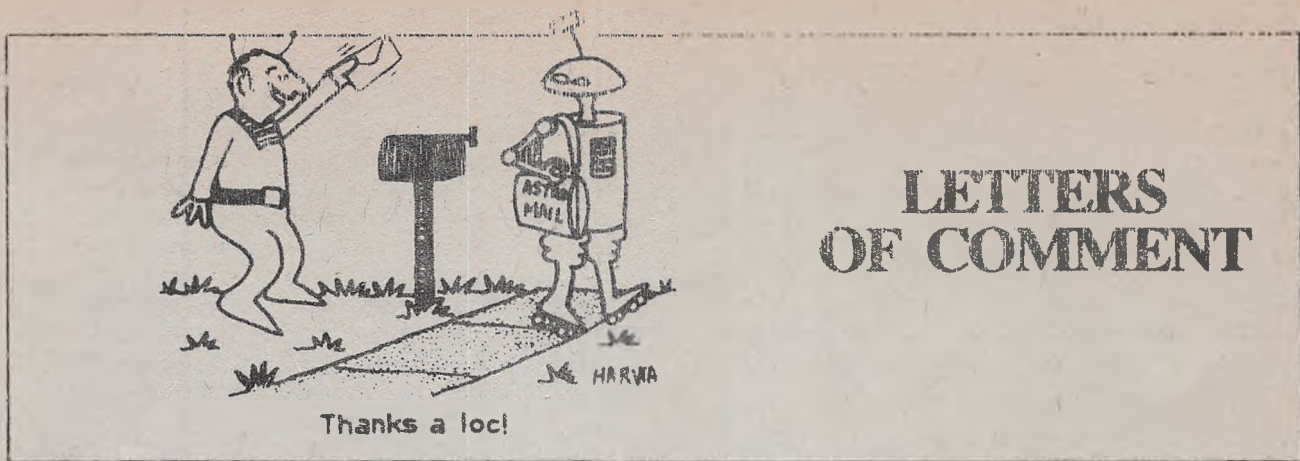
by Gordon R. Dickson (hardcover, Ace, SFBC)

The aliens have come, trounced the Earth forces, and taken over. Okay. The resistance is more or less ineffectual until Shane Evert starts the hero-type figure of the Pilgrim. That's okay, too. All in all, the whole thing is okay, even the characterizations. What's wrong with the book is its energy level. There just doesn't seem to be any zip here. I found it very hard to get worked up about anything between these covers, much less the characters. I don't know what Dickson was trying to accomplish, but nothing momentous happened. Oh, it got a good Message in about the Human Spirit (embodied in the Pilgrim), but I couldn't care less. C'mon, Gordy! I know you're better than this!

I don't know if anyone else has noticed (probably have, at that), but the newest crop of writers (Shiner, Shepard, Cadigan, etc.) have brought something different to our genre: a bleak, dark soul that, in and of itself, is rather depressing. I suppose that it was inevitable that these authors, living in our rather dreary present time, would put this kind of feeling into their works, but I find it disturbing. Maybe that's what they have intended -- you know, get our brains working on another track and jerking our heads back to reality. The Cyberpunk movement was/is part of this trend, but does not contain it all. The writing itself hasn't suffered. On the contrary! These people know how to use words and phrases to paint magnificent mental images. But, personally, I would like to see outlooks that were a little more positive.

Anyway, we shall see what happens next. My recliner is calling me for some more extended sessions, curled up with a book or six. And thanks to all those fans who have walked into my apartment for recognizing my chair as a so-called "institution". It popped another spring out of pure spite!

Ratings are from 5 (great) to 0 (a waste of paper and time).



LETTERS OF COMMENT

COMMENTS ON ISSUE 18 and before...

9 January 1987

Jack Herman
Sydney, Australia

Thanx for the continuity in the supply of *The Texas SF Inquirer*. Together with DAAPA it keeps me in touch with an area of US fandom I really love. It is good to be able to follow the fortunes of all those beaut people I met while over there: to see Fred Duarte rise in the organisation or two great people like you and Dennis get together. Congratulations to you both and I hope all is going well.

With TSFI, I really appreciate the reviews, as well. It often takes time for books and films to reach the antipodes, so any hints I can get to help me sort through all the stuff coming out is a help.

John Moore, however, might need a refresher course in Ogden Nash 101. When I first saw the poem he paraphrases, it read:

*Big fleas have little fleas
Upon their backs to bite 'em;
And little fleas have smaller fleas;
So on, ad infinitum.*

I think this makes more sense, rhythmically and content-wise, than John's fishy version.

The zine reviews and con reports are the things, tho, I most appreciate. The proper study of fankind is fan and to see the fan at work and play allows this foreigner to keep track of what is happening in your far-flung corner of the universe.

Keep up the good work, and don't try to organise too many cons. It can be debilitating, especially for old married folk like you and I.

(I trust married life is suiting you, but getting married at a con is carrying FIAWOL too far.)

(Actually, getting married at ArmadilloCon two years ago was pretty sensible. (A lot of our friends were going to be there anyway... and Dennis' mother spent a bundle in the art show...) The only real snag was discovering I'd been scheduled to be on the obligatory ArmadilloCon Fanzine Panel during the wedding ceremony... — Pat)

18 October 1986

Cl. Crouch
Austin, TX

Sigh... the media-fan/tru-fan controversy just won't die, will it? As an editor I can appreciate *your* itchy position on this, but I just wish people would get over it all and stop assigning pigeonholes in the first place. As I said, I can't really classify myself as one or the other — but I choose to support the media side (as far as reporting on it, that is) since the *Inquirer* is so heavily supported by the "literary" fen! Devil's advocate ... I always was a sucker for the underdog.

(Well, the controversy has sort of died down for a while... a strange publishing schedule does wonders for things like that... — Pat)

8 September 1986

G.W. Teal
Steppinit, TX

My friend Bill the orderly showed me the *Inquirer* number 18, and I was very impressed. Another few issues like this, and I think you should go for the big time. I don't think the *Inquirer* is eligible for a fanzine Hugo (too many readers — I know of ten or twelve, at least), but I *do* believe you've got a good shot at the semi-prozine award, if you'll only take a little advice.

The latest awards (we got 'em on cable, here at the institute) pretty well showed that all you need to win a Hugo is a big name or a hormone-deficient movie star of thirty-seven who looks fourteen. Now, your hormones are your own business, but it seems to me that there are two ways to get a big name. Either become famous (dull, takes too long, makes people think of you as a potential sex-ghod — you wouldn't like it, take my word) or *have the same name as a cartoon character!* "Opus" is probably a little too up-scale for a fan editor, but how about "Zonker"? I think "Zonker Mueller" has a nice ring to it, you know? Think about it. Some day, you, too, could be sitting up there with the hoi proloi, wishing Bob Shaw would finish his endless blathering and just announce the damn awards.

The highlight of ish 18, of course, was Allen Varney's

review of the cyberpunk classic *Thurpu*. I read the review just after I finished the book, and I think Varney's understanding of the literary issues involved bodes really excellent things for the future of sf criticism, should he decide to stick with it. And the book! Wow! Soon as my LG (legal guardian) antes a little more into the old checking account, I'm gonna get good old Bill to write me out a check to Underwood-Miller for the signed, limited edition. Won't that be something? Signed by *all* of the authors as well as by Ellen Datlow, and with a cover by H.R. Giger! (I just hope copies are legal in Texas.) I can't wait.

Well, time for my afternoon nap. They're here with the shot, and I've got to go. Keep up the good work.

(Well, G.W. [do those initials stand for "Gosh Wow"?] -- I'll take your advice under consideration...
-- Pat)

October 20, 1986

John Shirley
W. Hollywood, CA

A rare event. Crowds gather and doomsayers mutter and astronomers sit pensively at their telescopes. The stock market yaws wildly. The president asks the public to remain calm despite this apocalyptic fact: *John Shirley has written a letter to a fanzine.*

Namely, this one. The Wise Guy fanzine.

For a fanzine, it's pretty readable. Normally I don't read articles by fannish dudes with cryptic, pseudo-exotic one-word fan names, like "Alpajuri" or, in this case, "Taral" ... but somehow I read "The Huizilopochtli Effect" by Taral and dug it mightily. You know, at Clarion, I wrote a story about a guy who finds out that a ring of giant crystals in a planet-circling cavern under the Earth's crust secretly programs all behavior on the surface for the arcane purposes of its builders... Story was never published, obviously ahead of its time... But the truth is, the strange, violent behavior of Texans can be explained by another cause entirely, a chemical one. The unceasing discharge of flatulence into the atmosphere, produced by Texans snapping up enormous helpings of TexMex food. The methane thus produced poisons the nervous system.

The wise-guy satirical review of an imaginary [the C word here -- we're sick of the word, can't use it any more] anthology was pretty funny and reasonably authentic. Not that I would ever title a story anything as early-'70s-ish as "Racing the Greyhound Terminal Velocity Blues." But it was funny. "The symbolism flies thick and fast here... nobody but Shirley could have written it, but would anyone else have wanted to?"

Here's a satire of Shirley prose from the non-existent story, provided by Shirley himself:

The mike was more than a microchip, it was a connection, an incandescent link to that social database, where the cerebral sewage of society swirls and churns; where children drink in their video imprinting, sucking at happy mob executions of State

Criminals, their hands twitching as they imagine the chunks of synth-metal pipes in their hands arcing to smash skulls, to sacrifice the brain matter of the unsocialized to the sweet principle of unfettered growth... While Kurtz thrusts the knife in to its hilt and babbled, "I can feel it, the knife's metal is nerve-transmission sensitized, it's transmittin' to me, man, and I can feel you pain in the knife, feel what it feels like for you as I twist the blade through your intestines, get a bleed-over from your brain, pick up images of your childhood as I kill you, drink your life through the magnificent electronic enhancement of this fine, fine customized blade, the knife a sculpture in it self... yeah, I'm stabbing you with sculpture, tearing you open with fine art..."

And all the while the BEAT, the eternal BEAT hammered in the background as the band played on...

And all like that. But this jasper who reported the Westercon, comparing me with Velikovsky... a typical example of SF-dom's wimpy fence-straddling lack of commitment. Anybody who really gets passionate, they must be a crank like Velikovsky...

The Modernist Movement (a term preferable to the C-word at this point) is trying to breathe some life into the zombie corpus of SF. To do that, radical steps are necessary. Jolts of electricity.

And hey, *anything* that'll liven up a con is a good thing. They are *all* fucking alike. There hasn't been a new idea in con programming for twenty years. And they have a great deal of potential. They could be generating something as hot on the conceptual level as the Woodstock festival was on the sheer rocknroll-and-drug level. We could generate an artistic Woodstock, a Woodstock of the intellect replete with the conceptual mud and the conceptual bad acid.

I had a good time at the Armored Dildo Con, though, mostly because the really hip Texans were there and lots of my friends. Chairman Bruce and Madame Nancy were very hospitable to me. I had to stay at their house because it didn't occur to the convention to make me a guest... I've made up my mind not to go to any more conventions unless my way and my hotel is paid. "Don't hold your breath, Shirley," I hear someone say.

Listen, when I go to a convention, I *put out*. I'll make sure they'll get their money's worth, all right. And maybe a heart attack or two.

A lot of people at the con asked about the fate of Bluejay books, and my *Eclipse* novels published by BB. Bluejay is becoming a book packager, they claim, rather than going bankrupt, and probably will sell their backlist to other publishers. I do expect them to bring out my novel *Eclipse Penumbra*, the sequel to *Eclipse*, though. If they don't, Tor or whoever buys up the backlist will bring it out, along with the third book, *Total Eclipse*. Warner will be publishing the mass market edition.

A company fairly new to SF publishing, Franklin Watts, is going to be doing my novel *A Splendid Chaos*. Borderline paranoid schizophrenics and/or psychotics are warned not to read this novel unless under sedation and in restraints. It could easily push you over the edge.

You wonder why you're not getting a nomination for fanzine Hugo. Probably part of the reason is the name of the publication, which seems to imply the magazine is a regional — and therefore minor, in most people's minds — sort of publication. I think it deserves a Hugo as much as any fanzine does, certainly. Even if it is rather, well, fannish... I mean, there are pictures of people in helicopter beanies and references to FIAWOL and shit. Kind of embarrassing. But it's better than 97% of the others. And I'm writing for fanzines: for *Thrust*, and *Science Fiction Eye*. I've got a column in *Thrust* called "Make It Scream".

So, I guess, I'm ... I'm... oh no. Oh Christ. Someone help me.

I'm a fan writer.

(Two things. First off, your contention that "conventions are all alike" and that "there hasn't been a new idea in con programming for twenty years". If this statement were true (which I sort of doubt, based on a gut-level feeling that things can't be that bad), blame would lie equally with the convention organizers and with people like you (and me) — the program participants...

Second — the implication in your last paragraph that to be fannish ("FIAWOL and shit") is a bad thing. I realize that overuse of gung-ho acronyms and pix of fen in propellor beanies is not "serious" and "professional" — but the inherent nature of a fanzine is to be an amateur publication. We've grown up and away from the era of doing nothing but imitating the prozines; what I've always understood as the inalienable right of the fan-editor is to Publish Whatever You Want To! (or are brave enough to...) Fanzines are not a money-making proposition, with hundreds of thousands of readers and mass markets and demographics to be catered to; neither are they public-service publications, produced to educate those Inquiring Minds Who Want To Know (or, Who Want To Donate). Rather, fanzines are publications produced for the editor's (or club's) enjoyment, directed towards their peer groups (namely, other fans).

I won't carry this argument towards one of its logical conclusions, namely, that if you style yourself a fan writer, your peers wear those silly hats with the propellers on top... — Pat)

14 October 1987

Michael R. Gould
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Dear Pat,

Well I finally got round to reading issues 18 and 19 of *Texas SF Inquirer* which I got off you at Conspiracy, and I thought it was about time I got round to a LOC.

First I'll comment on issue 19 as it is mainly taken up by the Sterling/Shiner interview. Well, there was certainly a lot of interest in there, particularly as they are only just beginning to really infiltrate British reading habits. I

was particularly struck by the comments on the lack of new writers to come to prominence. The main trouble is, I think, the lack of marketplace for writers to develop their craft as short story writers. Most of the well known writers of the 30's, even into the 60's, learnt their craft by writing short fiction. Today the market wants novels, as they are easier to foist on a mass public. The problem with this is that large fantasy trilogies and the like are far more likely to sell, making it harder for the more thoughtful writers to get published. To survive, the short fiction markets which remain have had to go for a larger audience, and therefore are constrained from publishing too much thoughtful material to appeal to the largest possible audience. I was particularly interested to note Bruce Sterling's reference to *Interzone*. Of the writers who have been introduced through their pages, only Geoff Ryman has really broken through with his novels *Warrior Who Carried Life* and *Unconquered Country*. Of course, most of the non-name writers are so new that it may be a while before some of them break into other markets, but even then they will only be able to do it via the novel.

Well, enough about that. On to issue 18. I can understand your comments about the Hugo ballot. The trouble with any awards is that there can only ever be one winner, but many items, whether fanzines, novel, art or whatever are equally deserving of awards or nominations. I've always subscribed to the way Woody Allen acted over his first Oscar, when he decided it was more important for him to be playing jazz than accepting the award. OK, it's very flattering to receive an award, but does it really matter that much if you are enjoying yourself. Realising I've communicated something to someone else is reward enough for me.

I like the idea of a fanzine con, though I think the regular output in the UK is probably too small to support such an event. Of course there are the fans who do publish regularly, but so many give up too soon. Fanzine cons in Britain tend to be within SF cons rather than separate.

I found Hank Graham's piece on comics particularly interesting as I've recently begun to drift back to some comics. *The Dark Knight* probably started it, but what interests me most is the work of Brit. Alan More. His redefinition of Swamp Thing, and the Watchman story were excellent, but I think my real favourite is *Ballad of Halo Jones* with its cutting commentary on so much of modern society, from the loneliness and desolation of our inner cities to unemployment, the state of division between rich and poor in Britain and a savage indictment of war. The other comic which has helped re-kindle my interest in comics has been *Love and Rockets*. The title originally put me off, but since someone else introduced it to me I have stuck with it, not so much for the art as for the quality of the characterisation. I agree with Hank. When comics are good, they are true art.

I suppose my main reaction to the "Cheap Truth" column is that there are very few new ideas in SF or anywhere else anymore. The best we can hope for is a good reworking of something older, preferably something which had quality to begin with. I suppose I've become one of those fans for whom the quality of the writing, characterisation and atmospheric feel has become

more important than the idea. An old idea well written I can read. A new idea badly written becomes a chore.

I was glad to see *Dreamchild* get a good review, particularly as it is by one of Britain's most respected (at least among those who don't support Ma Thatcher) playwrights, Dennis Potter. It also helps to redress the hash made of his *Pennies from Heaven* when it was transferred from the TV to the cinema. Even better than any of his other work is his last TV serial, *The Singing Detective*, though it seems unlikely to me it will get on TV in the States. In fact, with the current plans by the Conservative government in Britain to introduce draconian censorship, it seems unlikely we will see it again in Britain for a very long time. So much for the free world.

("The Singing Detective" aired in Dallas a few months ago on public television; Dennis and I taped it, and it was wonderful!)



COMMENTS ON ISSUE 19

23 January 1987

Harry Andruschak
Arcadia, CA

Thanks for sending issue #19 of your the clubzine, and thanks even more for publishing my COA.

I haven't much to comment on this time around, nor much fannish or personal news. Except one item I am very proud of. On 26 thru 28 December, I played in a 6-round Swiss System Chess Tournament here in LA, the BVA-VOLVO CHRISTMAS OPEN. I played in the Amateur Section, open to those whose rating was under 1800. My current rating was 1470. I won 4 games and lost only 2, and this was good enough to tie for 2nd and 3rd place in the under-1600 section. So I won \$75! I am now a filthy Chess Pro. Maybe I should set up a simultaneous exhibition at the next con I attend?

21 August 1987

R. Haydon Delle
PO Box 1087
Fayetteville, AR 72702

The *Inquirer* may be the best six-dollar bargain I ever laid eyes on! The Shiner-Sterling interview in issue 19 was worth the wait.

My own fiction has just started to find homes (the March '87 issue of *Fantasy Book* contained my first sale; the second is awaiting publication at *Chess Life* magazine; and the Writers of the Future Contest just sent me a second place prize check.) Anyway, the opinions of the pros nearly always pique my interest — keep 'em coming, please.

National Public Radio interviewed David Gerrold the other day and asked him to compare the Star Trek tv series now under production to the old series. Says Gerrold: "There'll be the 'new' Star Trek and there'll be Star Trek 'classic'."

Talk about a foreboding analogy...

COMMENTS ON ISSUE 21

24 August 1987

Harry J.N. Andruschak
Torrance, CA

Howard Coleman's report on Sercon I echoes others I have heard. I most certainly wish I had had the money to attend, and I wish I had the money to attend the next one. It sounds like an idea whose time has come.

I feel very guilty after reading Willie Siro's list of books of 1986. Due to my job hunting, and a few health problems, I have read hardly any SF and Fantasy in 1986. Most of what I have read is OK, since I make it a regular habit to never buy a trilogy or series unless I get an overwhelming number of friends to say the book is OK. Nor do I buy anything listed as "Being in the tradition of..." followed by some big name author. However, my new place in Torrance is near two libraries, and I hope to start reading more SF. But the truth is, I mostly read Science Fact books nowadays, and in some respects they are far more interesting than the SF speculations.

And I am thrilled that David Thayer/Teddy Harvia has a book out of his cartoons. I remember when he first appeared in some NFFF zines... I thought him wonderful then, and still do. I might even try to scrape up some money and send off for the book. (Although I need to check out how much my car repair bill is coming to... anybody without a car in Los Angeles is a third class citizen.)

All in all, a very good issue.

(Well, I felt guilty and embarrassed, too — there were a lot of books on Willie's list that I hadn't read, either... fortunately, I've been able to find a lot of them in the used book stores, which makes my pocketbook a little happier about my omnivorous reading habits...)

— Pat)

5 September 1987

Sheryl Birkhead
23629 Woodfield Rd.
Gaithersburg, MD 20879

After an emergency came in Saturday evening, I had to go in today to treat, check, and dismiss the dog. While I was out, I stopped at Mickie D's to relax a bit and pulled out TSFI #21.

Whoeee — mighty good stuff there. Sercon sounded more akin to "old-fashioned" cons than what I hear of those today. I wonder if the trend will spread? Good and easy reading — one of the many treats thish!

If I recall correctly, another ArmadilloCon is coming up in the "near" future — the encapsulated versions are nicely done — concise, yet relaying enough info to be interesting and tempting!

Ah, here is where I start reading as I go — Jeanne Gomoll's report. She's right about references, but once warned, it is easy to pick out those comments and chuckle rather than scratch the head. It sounds as if AC has the atmosphere of a relaxacon, but with all the advantages of programming. Unfortunately I tend to think that size does in the warmth of such a gathering and such a glowing report is bound to draw in more takers this year!

On to Tucker — wish his writings would show up more frequently, but I'll settle for them where and when I see them. Tucker guesses at the number of cons as being somewhere around 500 — does anyone do tallies like that? I just wonder how many there really are. I hope someone does take the bait and go on to rate the cons!

Willie Siros' article — I find myself in the position of not remembering *any* '86 novels — with that probably indicating that among the few books I read, none were all that recent. I've spent the last week looking about at various stores to see what sf is currently available and find something I would like. I don't have much of a chance to hunt and so far I haven't been tempted in even the slightest to buy a book. The only one I've seen I thought about was *Seventh Son* — and at about \$17 for the hardback, no way. I haven't read a single book listed which doesn't surprise me. Each year, knowing this will inevitably be the outcome, I wait until the Hugo nominations are run and then try to read as many as I can (afford). Lately that has been a resounding zero — since I also invest in three anthologies (Carr, Dozois, and Wollheim). By the way, apparently the "Carr" this year is only going to see print as a hardback — I've put in a special order, but have no idea when it becomes available.

Wingnut Soccer — love it. It had been slowly dawning on me that Teddy and David were somehow related — am I just so dense it never occurred to me before? Thank you for pointing it out, so I don't make an even bigger idiot out of myself than I already have in the past. Only a little bit of knowledge *can* be dangerous! And I *will* send for my copy RSN. There is no way in the world I'm going to show my immense ignorance and even *try* to name the editors of the zines that have been graced by Harvia cartoons.

I also asked around to see if there was going to be much hope of finding the Foster comic (*Mechthings*, by Brad Foster) — didn't have any luck.

2 September 1987

Brian Earl Bennett
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Detroit, MI 48224

Dear Pat,

I'm glad to see you're still at the helm, and given a frequency more in keeping with the sort of fanzine you're trying to produce. I hope you'll be able to collect material enough to maintain a quarterly-to-bimonthly schedule.

Howard Coleman wrote a good review of Sercon. I'm impressed to see such an uncompromising academic program succeed. Good luck when FACT runs it next year. I would be tempted to go if we weren't already planning to go to Worldcon / New Orleans for our vacation. One big trip a year is about all we can afford.

The ArmadilloCon articles were interesting, too. There's no mention of where Jeanne's con report came from — but I doubt it laid in a shoebox from 1979 till now.

Willie's list of 1986 books mostly touched books I haven't read. Of the few he mentions that I have read, needless to say, I disagree with his rankings. *Free, Live Free* was not a weaker book than *Soldier of the Mist*. Both had very unsatisfying endings — a problem with ALL of Wolfe's books. Personally, I thought the characters in *Free* were better drawn, more vivid and more in charge of events. Nor would I list *Comet* (Benford/Brin) among the most disappointing. The MacAvoy book certainly was. Admittedly Benford covers much of the same material better in his solo, *Across the Sea of Stars*, and there are some glaring deus ex machina in *Comet*, but there were both strong passages and fascinating developments on my part: *War of the Oaks* (Emma Bull); and *Genesis Quest / Second Genesis* (Moffet), a pair of real hard SF stories.

I was put off by the amount of torment-to-women present in *Wild Cards*. Not nice stuff.

(Actually, Jeanne's ArmadilloCon report did sort of languish in a shoebox until I published it... hence the explanation at the beginning of her report, about dated references... — Pat)

August 25, 1987

Alexis Gilliland
4030 8th St. South
Arlington, VA 22204

Thanks for the *Texas SF Inquirer* #21. Considering it was laid out on a soulless computer and run off on an eval dot matrix printer, "it" looks pretty good.

(Hope that this laser-printed stuff suits you better, Alexis. And all you readers out there should keep in mind that there's a real live human being behind this soulless computer... if the computer did this stuff on its own, maybe the *Inquirer* would appear more often! — Pat)

26 October 1987

Jerry Kestelman
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The July/August *Texas SF Inq.* as interesting as ever. Mel White makes Willie Siros look sweet, an amazing accomplishment.

6 October 1987

Jeanne Mealy
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Hiya, folks,

I did indeed receive issue #21. Cute cover. Interesting statement of frequency!

Gosh, a con centered around written SF! We seem to be seeing more of this type of "limited" (specialized) programming. Great! I personally like three-ring cons, with everything from movies to panel discussions. But often the balance gets out of whack... The more-serious sercon programming is wanted by many people — and that's where I'd steer a person new to fandom/cons, not the huckster or film rooms.

Glad that Willie Siros is passing on Pinkwater raves. For a long time, I thought people were making up the titles!

I wanna see David Thayer do a book with more characters and the peopleoids he draws. (The Wingnuts are OK, just not a big personal fav.)

Nice job, folks! I find it amazing that I enjoy reading a Texas newszine!

(I kind of wish that when I was a neo, I'd been steered towards sercon-type programming, rather than being told repeatedly that "programming is dull and boring"... But then again, I might not have turned into a fanzine fan had that happened! — Pat)

16 August 1987

Lloyd Fenney
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A friend of mine here in Toronto attended Sercon... he has joined a writers' group, and has lost a lot of enthusiasm for fannish projects. He now wants to appear as a WKF, but still do all he can to promote his writing career. He was very gung-ho about Smofcon last year, but now looks like he'll want attend cons like Sercon and WFC more. His mercenary attitude seems to be "I'll party with editors and see if they'll buy my book." Howard Coleman says that people went to Sercon to attend the programming. I daresay it wasn't as simple as that... there was a lot of pro politics going on... hey, I'll buy you a drink... now about my novel... I've been told by

several people that Sercon was about dead to be a science-fiction version of the World Fantasy Convention. A lot more people have told me that WFC's usually make fans feel like outsiders while the pros and proto pros party and try to sell their work. Put these together, and I just don't feel that Sercon would be for me.

So many conventions can produce a living history of what's happened at con 1, con 2, etc., but very few can boast the friendly pro community that takes part like ArmadilloCon can, by the looks of it. I wish the local pro community here was as friendly. We're working on it, and relations are better now, but it seems the local pros, be they established (Andrew Weiner, Terence Green, Robert Charles Wilson, Judith Merril, Michael Hale, Phyllis Gotlieb, Guy Gavriel Kay) or fairly new (Steve Stirling, Shirley Meier, T.S. Huff, Marion Hughes) are still distant.

RE Rating the Cons: Instead of a stock exchange report, perhaps a Michelin Guide to the conventions would be handy. As Bob says, you would be open to harsh criticism, but with gentle criticism, a convention might work to improve what rating it would be given. Any Michelin guide-type con rating would need to be based on the opinions of a good many fans, and then, those without personal vendetta in mind. Outside of a general guide, I'd think that when a con is reviewed, a few short reviews are printed instead of one long one, to give insight from different perspectives. After all, some cons are so large now that you simply can't get to all the panels, the displays, the complete item. One at Labor Day comes to mind... So do some large regionals. We need some critique to improve the convention-hosting technique, and conventions like Smofcon and publications like *Jane's Fighting Smojs* and *Con Games (and How to Party)* help improve con skills. After all, people do expect more at these conventions, and it costs so much to get to them... if you're serious about getting all these fans to put out large bucks to come to your convention, and do it year after year, you've got to learn what the fans want and expect, and, of course, know their psychology and custom.

RE Books of 1986: I'll comment further when I can afford to buy some of these books. When the edge of the paperback says "Slightly Higher in Canada", the publishers don't kid around.

RE Teddy Harvia/David Thayer: I'd seen some Harvia cartoons here and there, marveling at the skill in the line cartooning. Soccer is more familiar to me than to most other readers, and this book could be a lot of fun. Now that you've printed Teddy/David's address, how many letters and fanzines are going to stream through his mailbox, asking for illos for an upcoming fanzine?

RE Photon and Star Laser: A Photon opened in Toronto some time ago, and the more blood-thirsty fans in the Toronto area inhabited the Photon establishment almost every weekend. It closed about a year ago because of lack of interest. Too many people felt it was teaching Canadian kids how to point guns at one another without conscience, and Canadian teens and 20ish just don't feel the need to know how to handle a gun. There doesn't seem to be any signs of Photon re-opening here, either. There is another establishment called Star Blazer, but

that has faded into obscurity. The kids seem to like participatory attractions, like The Tour of the Universe in the base of the CN Tower here. It is an excellent enactment of a starport, with laser inoculations and questionnaires, and then with the help of a cockpit simulator, a simulated shuttle ride to the rings of Jupiter is the finale. \$10 a shot, but it's a lot of fun. Better than seeing how many people you can shoot, and a lot more optimistic.

Well, it was a fun read... I'd been told that TSFI was a newzine... it seems to be more of a reviewzine than anything else. But then, I shouldn't judge after only one issue.

(I agree that a few short reviews of a convention are often more useful than a single long review -- but it's not often that you can pry a convention report out of more than one contributor...)

... and from what I can remember, convention reports used to be more anecdotal in nature, more of a lengthy "here's what happened to me" personal writing, rather than "reviews". Either I missed reading those kind of reviews ten years ago, or fanzines and fanwriting have subtly changed over the last decade.

Given the Inquirer's irregular frequency, I've stopped billing it as a "newzine". But it's not really the same thing twice, either -- sometimes it looks like a ganzine, sometimes a reviewzine, and this issue looks like a letterzine! -- Pat)

22 August, 1987

P.L. Caruthers-Montgomery
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This latest issue of *The Texas SF Inquirer* [21] was very enjoyable reading. I particularly liked Bob Tucker's article about grading cons. As he implied, I pity the poor fool who decides to take on the task!

The artwork, layout, and repro are all quite good. And even the older con reports were enjoyable reading. Your book reviewers are some of the most erudite I have yet run across; the reviews are pithy, informative without revealing too much of the plots, and to-the-point.

22 November 1987

Harry Warner, Jr.
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I believe I've surpassed all previous levels of loathsomeness in continuing such bad habits as lateness with comments on the *Inquirer* and pallidity of ribbon. Recent months have been bad ones for me in a number of ways and just now there are three large grocery sacks of fanzines and other stuff accumulated in the past six months on which I must somehow catch up.

But I did enjoy the July-August issue, no matter how silent I've been about it so far. As an old fan historian, the most exciting thing in the issue to me was the Taylor-Stephens reprint. This was exactly the sort of thing I loved when I was compiling notes for fan history books: long articles in which someone else did most of the work for

me. There are so many cons nowadays and so few of them get described in detail in fanzines that only historical articles like this one will enable future fan historians to cover comprehensively the history of this or that con. (I don't mean to insinuate that anyone will ever write books containing the general histories of fandom like those Sam Moskowitz and I did. But presumably, there will be histories written about certain aspects of fandom like Texas fandom or convention fandom.)

This article inspired one other thought. I noticed it's reprinted from a program book. That leaves me wondering how many other treasures repose undisturbed in program books and progress reports, never reprinted in general circulation fanzines. Some important material might be preserved if more reprinting were done from these sources. I know some individuals save the program books and progress reports as souvenirs but I don't think they're generally preserved in collections as often as regular fanzines.

Sercon sounds like a sound idea although I'm not sure I would be able to stand the pace of undiluted science fiction story discussion. There must be some way to create cons that don't go to the extreme of Sercon but also shy away from the tendency of some cons to avoid the written form of science fiction altogether. Compromises sometimes are better than all-out policies.

Bob Tucker's idea has possibilities, even though I'm sure he didn't mean it seriously. The trouble is, every con turns out to be about twenty different cons because it creates about twenty different effects on various attendees. Some fans think it's a bad con if there weren't enough wild parties, others think it's the best con ever because a favorite author gave a talk; the luxurious hotel was just right for those whose rooms were paid for as program participants and the rates were exorbitant for those who had a \$65.82 budget for the entire weekend.

I was glad to know that Teddy or David has a book of his cartoons in print. If I remember correctly, the Wingnuts cartoons were quite tentative and looked hastily done when they began to see print in fanzines (although some of that impression might have been caused by someone doing a bad job of stenciling them) but now they are beautifully firm of line and economical of effect. By coincidence, it was just a few weeks ago that I learned the symbiotic nature of Teddy Harvia and David Thayer. It made me feel like a neofan, that's what it did.

Your "Why see a movie when the retelling is more entertaining?" was an absolutely accurate introduction to Dennis Virzi's review. Reading about the violence in *Predator* and then finding the review of the Clive Barker novel later in the issue, I was reminded of a non-fiction book I've been reading, Marchette Chute's *Shakespeare of London*. She describes Elizabethan drama in a way that causes me to wonder if the writers and movie-makers have caught up yet with the actors of the late 16th century. They filled a bladder with sheep's blood, put it inside an outer garment, and when stabbed, "the blood spurted out in a most satisfactory manner... In *The Battle of Alcazar* there was a disemboweling scene for which the property man supplied three vials of blood and the liver, heart and lungs of a sheep. Then it was up to Edward Alleyn and his two fellow actors to use skillful sub-

stitution in such a way as to create the illusion, before a critical London audience in broad daylight, that their organs were being torn out... (*Titus Andronicus*) was a severe test of the skill of the actors in staging atrocity scenes since Titus has a hand chopped off in full view of the audience, his sons' heads are brought onstage, and his daughter Lavinia is instructed by the stage directions to enter with "her hands cut off, and her tongue cut out." Lavinia holds a basin between the stumps of her hands to catch the blood of the men who have raped her, and her father, Titus, serves them up in a pie for their mother to eat." The producer of a play for Queen Elizabeth I stocked up on "legs and arms of men ... to be let fall in numbers on the ground, as bloody as might be."

I'll probably want to read *Lincoln's Dreams*, despite my aversion to books about real wars. I try to read books which are based in whole or in part on things that happened around Hagerstown, which is only about 12 miles from Antietam and 30 miles from Gettysburg.

The Texas unicorn on the cover is a handsome beast. But it did cause me suddenly to wonder what sign the students would make if a Texas university adopted unicorns as nickname for its football team. I've seen the two-finger symbol on the raised hands of fans of the Texas Longhorns so often. But the Texas Unicorns would presumably have only a one-finger symbol and there's always the danger that it would be misunderstood.

(I think more reprinting is done from fanzines into program books, rather than vice versa. Most smaller conventions don't spend a lot of time or effort on their program books — they're just an oversized program schedule with some filler material about the convention's guests. And most attendees, who realize this on some subliminal level, never read anything but the schedule...)

As for the program books from larger conventions (like NorwesCon, Boskone, or even WorldCon) — if 1000+ people have already seen (and supposedly read) a good article, most fan editors would feel that reprinting the article would be a waste of time and space... (However, reprinting GoH speeches is another matter entirely — they're pretty ephemeral. Even though umpty-ump people heard it, umpty-ump more are still interested...)

From what I've heard, this year's SerCon in Austin will be somewhat of a compromise — there'll even be a dance, which is about the least SerCon thing I can imagine... — Pat)

14 September 1987

Martin Morse Wooster
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Silver Spring, MD 20907

Thanks for sending me *TSFI* 21. I thought it a well-balanced and interesting attempt to answer one of the central questions of fandom: what is a good convention?

I hate to disagree with Bob Tucker, but I don't think a "Standard and Poor's Guide" to sf conventions is either

DUH, I, UH, DUH, OWN, UH, SIX HUNDRED, UH
SCI-FI, UH4, EH, FILMS ON TAPE AND UH
H404, "HARUMPH"



FANS WHO SHOULD AND PROBABLY DO
SPEND ALL OF THEIR CONVENTION TIME
IN THE FILM ROOM

possible or good idea. Standard and Poor's doesn't critique corporate officers on their style, but simply grades them on their financial health. If we adopted their techniques to the sf world, then Constellation would have been rated a disaster and LACon II a roaring success; but, in my opinion, Constellation was a better convention for its large number of interesting and innovative ideas (like the Crab Feast).

What would the ratings for a Standard and Poor's Convention Guide consist of? What's the difference between a five-star and a four-star convention? Why should all conventions be held to a single standard? For example, I have attended enough cons so that I don't care about the program. I've heard the "Budding Young Geniuses" panel, and the "My Spouse: Genius or God?" becomes tiring the fourth or fifth time. Yet a neophyte might well find these items enjoyable. On the other hand, I enjoy conventions that do things outside of the convention itself: trips to exotic, fannish sights, for example, or special events out of the ordinary, such as the fireworks after this year's Hugo awards.

Convention critiques are closer to theater reviews in form and style than they are to accountants' analyses. I like reading (and writing!) convention reports, but I know that people enjoy and dislike conventions for reasons which sometimes have very little to do with the convention itself. For example, I enjoyed Conspiracy tremendously, not because of the program (which I didn't attend), but because of the dynamic international mix of fans and the fun mixture of pubs and museums in and around Brighton. Yet what I saw of the concom was a group clearly understaffed that dealt with hostile hotels. I'd hate to have my opinions be the sole basis for judging a con; each con needs three or four con reports to do the job properly.

Onwards. I liked Willie Siros' year-in-review summary, but I was puzzled by his listing Robert Vardeman in his list of "Texas area" writers. I thought Vardeman lived in New Mexico. When did Albuquerque become part of Texas?

(New Mexico is the state immediately west of Texas, which puts it in the "Texas area". Besides, we like Bob. — Pat)

Allan D. Burrows
320 Maple Grove Ave.
Mississauga, Ontario
L5A 1Y2 CANADA

Dear Mr. Mueller:

Mr. Coleman's review of Sercon I [in Issue 21] betrays the mistaken notion on his part that fan come to conventions to go to panels. Any seasoned fan knows that one comes to conventions to visit with friends at parties and/or the con suite. (It is only rank neos, of course, who go to panels.) "And this," you might say, "is because panels are not well done these days, and if panels were as well done at most conventions as they were at Sercon I then they would be popular." "No," I reply, "this is because there is only so much to say and it's all been said already." "You are wrong," you might well reply. "This might be so," I will admit, "but I don't think so. The turnout and response at Sercon II, if there is one, will tell." But then, you might not bother to say anything, and thus avoid an argument.

I would also argue with the idea which the well-honoured Mr. Tucker presents in this edition, at least on one major point. That a formal convention rating system would be useful is indisputable; that formal convention ratings should be made publicly available is impolite. A lot of money is involved in running conventions in these days, and joe fan is not that much richer; a bad rating could drive a concon into bankruptcy. That, however, is the concon's problem, if they will insist on trying again anyway. Perhaps more importantly, a lot of pride and soul sweat is involved in running conventions, as much as there ever was. As a published author, Mr. Tucker could doubtlessly attest that criticism, in order to be useful, must always be constructive; making known the faults of a convention could only cause hard feelings. I believe that it would be better to advise only the concons involved of a low rating, and to publish only well-rated conventions, if any.

As to the rating system itself, let me offer the following suggestions. Firstly, a rating should indicate the size and format of the convention. (I name these two factors together because, in my experience, format changes with size.) I suggest the following designations:

• ONE DAY:

- attendance varies with orientation
- usually a dealers room/area
- may or may not have programming

• RELAXACON:

- 10 to 50 members
- 1 to 3 days
- attendance from fans in immediate area
- no programming, just chat and "party games"

• LOCAL CON:

- 50 to 1000 members
- 3 days
- attendance from immediate area and within day's trip (about 5 car hours)

- 1 or 2 tracks of programming, usually media, con suite
- "party games" optional

• REGIONAL:

- 800 to 2000 members, sometimes more
 - some offer supporting memberships
- 3 to 4 days, usually 3
- fans from within flying distance
- 2 tracks or more of programming, including media and other tracks
 - "party games" usually arranged by members, sometimes organized

• NATIONAL:

- 800 to 5000 members (fewer in small countries)
 - supporting memberships
- 3 to 4 days, often 4
- fans from within flying distance
- multiple tracks of programming, organized "party games" and awards

• WORLD CON:

- 5000 to 8000 members (and growing)
 - supporting memberships
- 5 days long (and growing?)
- fans from long range flying distances all over the world, mostly the U.S.A.
- multiple tracks with programming for every special interest group in fandom
- traditional "party games" and awards

"Party games", incidentally, refers to anything outside the traditional activities of panels, trivia bowls, banquet/speeches and con suite goings-on. These are generally held after or between panels and so forth. They may include: filk sings, outside trips, picture displays (besides the art show), other displays, silly contests, serious contests, foosball games, skinnydipping, chocolate banquets, use your imagination. (Please remove your imagination from the gutter before using it.)

Secondly, the ratings should mention, and take into consideration, the convention's orientation. I am not familiar with every sort of convention. It may well be that a "general" orientation convention (such as Armadillo-Con), should be judged differently from a *Star Trek* convention (such as Toronto Trek Celebration), or a fanzine convention (such as Corflu), or a filk convention (such as Bayfilk), or a role-playing game convention or a panel-oriented convention (such as Sercon), or any of the other sorts available.

Thirdly, there should of course be objective criteria for judging the merits of a convention, as Mr. Tucker himself stated. Picking criteria for judgment is a serious problem, as the factors which determine whether a convention is good or not have seldom been discussed and never completely charted, to my knowledge. Some factors, such as organization within the concon or financial information, are nobody else's business; these two are irrelevant to the member's actual enjoyment of the convention anyway, although they might show the quality of the convention. Obviously, criteria for judging the merits of

a convention should be chosen with care.

While a complete discussion of the factors which influence the quality of a convention as the membership experience it are beyond the scope of this letter, let me suggest the following for discussion: cost (of specific items and/or an all-over index); elbow room available in the con suite; attitude of the hotel toward the members (as manifested in room parties raided, members harassed and so forth); convention needs left wanting (by the hotel or the concom); convenience of convention layout in the space provided; attitude displayed by concom and staff.

As to Mr. Moore's review of Photon and Star Laser, I have never heard of the latter before, although a similar game existed (and may still exist) in my own city. The problem with such games as Star Laser is that they do not encourage action on the part of the players; rather, one can more easily win by hiding effectively until the game is over. Toronto boasted a Photon game from early 1986 until spring of 1987. It folded due to lack of business. As it was fairly popular (a group of local fans went almost every weekend to play Photon and sometimes more often; I was part of that group and I can attest that it was busy whenever I was there), I blame its demise on its inconvenient location. (The stadium was located on the outskirts of the city near the airport, where bus lines ran unreliably; had it been closer to the center of town, or to a major bus route, it might have done better.)

(Well — my goodness. I certainly bit off more than I can chew, here. Comments, readers? — Pat)

31 August 1987

Edd Vick
5014-D Roosevelt Way NE
Seattle, WA 98105

[RE the Sercon I review in #21] Duck Coleman has a nice fact-filled style. Remembering how fun he could be in person, I hope he'll write more anecdotally on future reviews. Perhaps Sercon isn't the best choice for fun'n'games, though. I know what he meant when he said panels were low on many people's reasons for attending cons. I went to two of them at this year's San Diego Comic Convention. Perhaps that doesn't seem to make his point; so I'll mention that two happens to have been the number of panels I've seen in my last five cons put together (well, three, actually — but I was on one of them...) At San Diego, I watched the one on rating comics, and then Ellison's excellent two-hour, one-man show that followed. The man was worth the price of admission all by his lonesome.

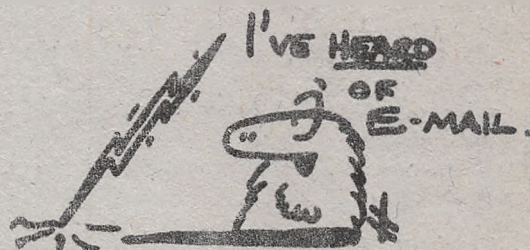
Fully endorse your positive review of *Wingnut Soccer*. Teddy's cartoons all seem to document an alternate reality of surprising depth. Offhand, only Gilliland's work seems to have approached the unified worldview of the wingnuts, et al.

Hmmn. There's a lot of comics-oriented material this time. Comic work is more and more taking my time away from SF fandom (as it has Eric Mayer's and T.K. Ather-

ton's). Andy's review of the *Wild Cards* books makes the important point that Martin and company are enjoying what they're writing. I read so much fiction that makes it clear the author couldn't care less what it is he's writing, that it's a pleasure to read "Aces High" or a Jonathan Carroll book (hint, hint). The other Shared World book I've read lately, *Heroes in Hell*, seemed so much an exercise in depravity (hey, I'm as much a fan of the perverse as the next SF fan, but too much of it gets damned boring). I remember having been so much taken with *Thieves World* early on that I wanted to put together a shared world fiction magazine.

Nice to see the General appearing in your mag. He had been going to contribute to *fan'toons*, but his work fits here well. Who's this Vick guy he writes about? Sounds like a real opinionated jackass — whoever he is. Oh well, nice to see he's corporeal. I'd hate to think he was insubstantial. What's that? "Corporal"? Well, is he a corporeal corporal or an incorporeal corporal? These things are important.

Okay. Okay, it's late. I shouldn't write locs when I'm half-asleep and listening to "Dr. Demento".



COMMENTS ON ISSUE 22

22 August 1987

Sheryl Blackhead
79

I really had to get some things said to you — after all, what good is it to merely THINK them? First — your zine "looks" professional. I've perused a few issues (you sent me a few and Richard Brandt sent a few) and seen that you've had experience along those lines. Well — m'dear — it shows. Just as "FILE" shows experience — so does your nifty little publication.

Next — I read the bit about Teddy/David just as I was finally getting around to reading *Lan's Lantern*. I immediately sent a note off asking to reserve a copy of his book — with such glowing comments it's bound to be a sellout. I lived in Geneva for a year in High School and played soccer (always got to be a goalie because of my size — kids are *always* diplomatic, right?) — so I'm looking "forward" to getting a copy.

Silly comment — I know you work with what you get but there are times I'd like to see one artist (yeah, to heck with "CONTENT") issues — like Foster, Thayer/Harvia, Taral, McLeod — and so on. Never said I was practical.

I bought the William Gibson "Chrome" and found I either couldn't read the story, or couldn't put the book down — nothing in the middle.

Uh — not that I'm asking about minutia, but ... in Howard Coleman's review [of Howard Waldrop's *All About Strange Monsters of the Recent Past*], he says all eight artists have also signed the book. Is Kirk — Tim Kirk? Ever since he went to Hallmark I've been trying to follow what's been happening. Once upon a time I thought I saw a boxed Christmas card from Hallmark that screamed KIRK — but I never found out. Just curious.

Sounds as if Mr. Ortega has had a rather bumpy ride in the hucksters' room. Just as there have been versions and re-versions of convention etiquette, I never considered that it might be necessary to include/cover the dealers.

(Yes — it's that Kirk! — Pat)

1 December 1987

Brian Earl Brown

It's always a pleasure to see another TSFI. Teddy Harvia's cover was great, as was your use of a second color to highlight titles and such. I wasn't too impressed with your use of large-print blurbs [in the Gibson interview]. They seem a tad pretentious in a fanzine. This is not like *Playboy* which has to sell each article in hopes of selling the mag. People getting TSFI will know just from the title whether something is interesting to them. Or at least, if you are going to continue to use these blurbs, don't be so generous with them. Once on a 2-page spread is plenty.

The Gibson interview was interestingly arranged. Was it a regular Q&A session edited into this series of mini-essays? Gibson's comment on the shape of SF today is particularly apt. It seems like every month brings out a new "franchised universe" anthology, or "braided meganovel" or things like "Isaac Asimov's Robot City", "Arthur C. Clarke's Venus" or "Roger Zelazny's Alien Speedway". Gack! Don't these people want to write their own stuff? Aren't Zelazny, Clarke, etc. worried that fronting from second rate hack writers is going to hurt their own marketability? This writing by committee is going to be the death of literature as we know it.

Varney's send-up of Varley was up to the standards of his previous chapter. I continue to look forward to his next chapter...

It was all downhill from there for me. Howard Coleman's review seemed much ado over nothing. I don't read horror, so skipped that column, and Neil Kaden's fanzine reviews if such they were should have been dumped in the trash instead. Disjointed, disconnected, rambling, confused, all words that aptly describe that

mess.

Graham's "From the Recliner" was enjoyable even if he did give *Circuit Breaker* a "3" instead of the "0" it deserved.

(Andy McQuiddy did indeed edit his interview with William Gibson into a "series of mini-essays", and I thought it worked rather well. — Pat)

12 December 1987

Lloyd Penney

Dear Inquirers,

On the William Gibson interview... I get the feeling that Gibson thinks the cyberpunk movement, or whatever you want to call it, is a bit of a sham... in the interview, he sounds as if he's not that enamored of cyberpunk, the tag itself, or the people who read it. Then he says the Japanese have bought it hook, line and sinker. He sounds as if he has simply created a product, with no pride in its production, a box of something off the assembly line. I just read *Neuromancer*... didn't do a thing for me. The tone of the interview reflects the dystopian society in the book. I never liked dystopian lit, and I don't like *Neuromancer*. Is *Count Zero* any better?

Brian Earl Brown

RE "21st Century Writers": This article contains an idea that I've had for

a while... what would sf be like in the future? What kind of novel would win the Hugo for Best Novel in 2026? I hope sf will still be around in that year and beyond, but as the technology of the present approaches that of the predicted future, I wonder if the genre will die out, leaving fantasy by itself. I wasn't sure how to take this article... I've got the feeling that Varley and Martin would have the same reaction I did if they ever saw it.

RE "Table Tirades": Advance information on the convention is available from the convention itself in many cities... simply pre-reg early, and look at the Progress Report that many of the cons produce. Failing that, write to the convention for more information, and for answers to your questions. Can't expect anyone on the concom to be psychic when it comes to what you want to know. I run the dealers' room for Ad Astra in Toronto... I produce a dealers' information package that contains a flyer, a sheet of information about what the room will be like, size of tables, hours of operation, table prices, who to contact if you need other information, etc., plus a rate sheet in case the dealer would like to advertise in the programme book.

RE "Life is a Rerun": In the plus offices of all three US TV networks is a large reinforced filing cabinet with all the basic TV scripts in existence. Character names can be plugged in where required. The scripts number exactly 57. It is estimated that one particular script has been used in 24 different series. Where in Canada were you pubbing, Neil?

22 December 1987

Garth Spencer
2467 Quebec St.
Vancouver, BC
CANADA V5V 3J9

Best of the season and all that. Note my COA above. I can still receive mail here for a while even though I'm moving soon (next COA will follow).

I appreciated seeing the William Gibson interview. Since he made a splash, we don't hardly ever see much of him right around here...

Usually I avoid book reviews, but I got some value out of yours. Thanks to all your reviewers.

Neil Kaden is right about Truth being Weird. I remember how much was explained when I realized there is no planet Earth; all Americans are secretly German; all countries are really planetoids; there is no conservation of mass; all the planetoids with a lot of political power/economic power/population *literally* carry the most weight; and the planetoids that get to be satellites carry the most political resentment of the ones that throw their weight around (by an equal and opposite reaction). Or maybe I'm just imagining all this.

Vancouver's next con has a hard-science theme, with a parody and pseudoscience subtheme, so maybe I should bring this up then.

2 December 1987

David Thayer
7209 DeVillie Dr.
North Richland Hills, TX 76180

Great repro on the cover of the latest *TxSFInq* and the colored titles and art on the inside — wow! But 3 pages of white space — what happened? Did you run out of (1) money, (2) patience (with the electrostenciller), (3) time, or (4) art?

(It took me a while to figure out what you meant by "three pages of white space", David. At first I thought my fearless collating crew of one was to blame ... (I keep telling him it's all part of being an assistant editor, but I think I'm going to have to come up with some added incentives...) but then I realized you meant the inside front cover, and the blank back sheet! Aha!

Actually, yes, the reason was (1). There wasn't enough in my budget to let me offset-print on any more pages... — Pat)

1 December 1987

Harry Warner, Jr.

Dear Pat:

Who said old fans become rigid and can't change their ways of doing things? Here I am, responding practically at once to an issue of *The Texas SF Inquirer*.

I did enjoy the 22nd issue, even though I've read nothing by the subject of the lead item. You deserve congratulations for getting away from the old bad habit of running the questions in the interview format. Usually the question is implicit in the answer and it's usually just a waste of space. Your use of one-line topic headings is all that's needed. I know William Gibson has won a lot of fame for building stories around computers. But I think a great deal of modern science fiction is destined to age at a record pace because authors are using current computer technology for stories set in the future. Trolley cars were the latest thing in public transportation when H.G. Wells was writing his science fiction stories but he was canny enough not to make trolley cars integral parts of his fiction and it's paid off. In a few decades, the things that are being done by computers nowadays will be done by machines that won't be called computers (any more than the modern pocket calculators are called adding machines like the device my father used in his bookkeeping work a half-century ago), they won't have keyboards (probably some sort of voice actuation, because in another generation or two there just won't be enough individuals intelligent enough to learn how to type) and they won't have viewing screens (probably they'll do their thing on something that looks and feels like paper which can cope with corrections and erasures and so on but will be easier on the eyes). Thirty or forty years from now, a fan who picks up a copy of a novel in a hucksters' mall published in the late 1980s will be hilarious over the prominence of long obsolete "computers".

Once again I found much amusement from Allen Varney's look into the future. I wonder if it's coincidence or research that caused him to place his visit in Hood River? I'm pretty sure that's where Damon Knight lived when he appeared in fandom with the first issue of *Snide*, one of the classic old fanzines that nobody ever sees or mentions today.

[re Waldrop's "Strange Monsters"]: It isn't surprising that a 122-page book has been given a price tag of \$35. This is obviously the next step in the continuing unconscious effort to price reading material out of reach of most persons so pre-recorded videotapes can have the uninterrupted attention of the general public. One local store is offering lots of old movies on videocassettes for \$4.95 just now, and *The Sound of Music*, which used to cost something like \$69.95, then dropped to \$29.95, is on sale at \$16.95 at the same store. Then when books have become objects as hard to find in the stores as opera scores or the *Literary Digest*, the price of videocassettes will begin rising again from the dirt-cheap level they reached during the campaign of book extermination, and the producers will war exceedingly rich until the day something is invented that will cause the videocassette to become a superfluous luxury which will go out of popularity.

Articles like the one by Neil Kaden make me feel uncomfortable. I never seem to experience this sort of coincidence, even though one or two other fans have recently written along similar lines. I never seen on television anyone I know, or a copy of the Hagerstown newspapers for which I used to work; and worst of all, I can never find on reruns the episodes I most want to see a second time. I spent three months watching the start of episodes of *The Waltons*, five days weekly, before I finally was rewarded with the one I wanted to videotape because it contained a favorite actress as a guest star, and I still haven't succeeded in finding the Bonanza episode which starred Kim Darby, another old flame. The best I can do is rejoice in the rare occasions when I'm reading something while listening to the radio and a name or a title comes over the radio just as my eyes encounter it on the printed page, an eerie sensation. (Occasional broadcast references to Harry Warner don't really count. There was a Harry Warner who was a coach for the Toronto Blue Jays for several years but he seems to have dropped out of the major leagues, and of course Harry Warner is sometimes mentioned in nostalgia pieces on the Warner Brothers studio in the early years of sound movies.)

I liked Teddy Harvia's cover very much. It's the sort of idea that should be capable of being sold to one of the major cartoon markets like the quality newsstand magazines.

(Unfortunately, "Strange Monsters" is now out of print. Personally, I'm waiting for the movie version... — Pat)

1 February 1988

Walter Willis
32 Warren Road
Donaghadee, N. Ireland BT21 0PD

Dear Pat,

Thanks for sending me *TSFI* 22. It's as full as nourishment and as neat as a nut.

Gibson's colloquy was interesting even though ... or do I mean because ... I've been unable to read any of his books yet. I think this may be the result of some fault on my part, rather than his, because obviously he can write well and this interview shows him to be an interesting and likable person. His remark about being a celebrity at conventions — "I don't mind a little adulation. It's good for the soul" — was engaging, and may betray his fannish origins. A columnist in the London Sunday Times last weekend was even more frank about his attitude to honest criticism... "People don't know that a little packet of flesh and blood, brains, and, sometimes, a heart, needs handling with a certain delicacy. That your overwhelming desire is to stand naked under a Niagara of unqualified praise."

Allen Varney's article was vitiated for me to some extent by lack of acquaintance with the work of the great John Varley, but I still enjoyed it hugely. It made me even consider embarking on a John Varley study course to appreciate it fully. Even now, I find it as delicious as a Mc-

Caffrey Dragonburger.

There was a time when I suspected a hoax every time I came across mention of an author unknown to me, but a long absence from the field has cured me of all that. Now I accept with childish innocence the most bizarre of authors' names, even C.J. Cherryh, so I am quite prepared to believe in the existence of this \$35 book by Howard Waldrop, and when it comes into the local public library I will certainly take it out. The subscription to the public library here is twopence a year. (It used to be one penny, but was doubled some years ago. George Charters denounced this swingeing 100% increase and declared his intention to resign in protest.)

Ortega was interestingly mysterious. I wonder what a "multigenerational" tape is. But don't bother to tell me: I am bound to come across this expression at least twice more this week.

Person's reviews seemed perceptive and useful, and I agreed with him about King's *Misery*, that the best thing in it was the description of the writer's thought processes.

It was a pleasant surprise to come across Neil Kaden again, almost as much so as meeting you both at Brighton. This article is just like him, full of life. He was in the photograph of you I was sure I had taken but which seems to have disappeared. Surely you both don't have Transylvanian ancestry?

(Just in case synchronicity hasn't yet struck, a "multigenerational" videotape is a copy of a copy of a copy of a copy of a... with picture and sound quality deteriorating with each generation. For clarity of reproduction, get as close to the original as possible. Say, just how much are copies of *Hyphen* selling for these days? only kidding... — Pat)

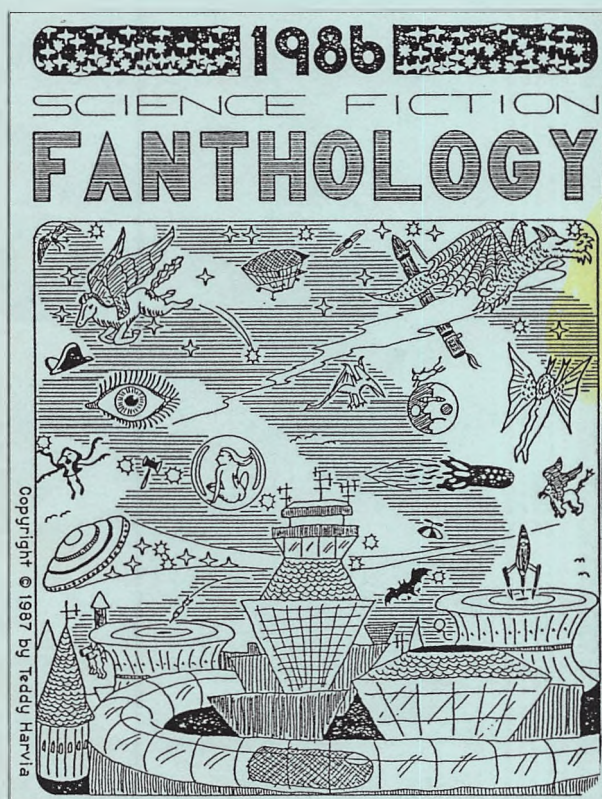
WE ALSO HEARD FROM:

Harry Andruschak, who wonders why he never received issue 22, and then tells me he's moved to Torrance, CA (new, improved COA: P.O. Box 5309, Torrance, CA 90510-5309). [Let this be a warning — keep me posted on those COA's! Andy should know better — he now works for the US Postal Service.]; Wayne Alan Brenner (who notes, "great HARVIA review!"); P.L. Caruthers-Montgomery; Cy Chauvin (who sends a newspaper photo of Lisa Tuttle [no relation] escorting penguins through a hotel lobby, which I'll print in an upcoming issue); Gary Farber; George Fhm, who sent "Not Necessarily #162", an Apa: NESFA zine, as a letter-substitute; Brad W. Foster, who shamelessly plugs *Mech-things*; Jeannie Gornoli; Alan David Laska; Luke McGuff, who's now editing *New Pathways*; Jeannie Mealy; Moir Shearman, the mimeo wizard of Edinburg; Peter Theron (who asks that I give my regards to "Mr. Pat"); Phil Torturici (who sends more artwork and his regards to the Sicilian, loved the two-color repro in issue 22, and who has given up caffeine); Leslie Turck; and Bill Ware.

Thanks for writing, and I promise I'll publish letters more regularly in the future. Hope to hear from more of you soon! — Pat Mueller

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"I'm Over Heeeeere, Gerhardt!", by Jeanne Gomoll
Close Cap Tightly to Retard Thickening, by Patrick Nielsen Hayden
Real Fen Don't Eat Greeps, by Elst Weinstein
Hell, 12 Feet, by Teresa Nielsen Hayden
Fizz! Buzz!, by David Langford
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