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BY ROB HANSEN

INTRO
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The really nice thing about getting your fanzine collection in proper order, the first time it's been in anything approaching that condition, is how virtuous you feel when the task is done. Being able to put your hands on any particular zine in seconds is also not to be sniffed at, of course, but it's the virtuous feeling it gives you that's most satisfying. Another nice thing is that you turn up lots of unexpected goodies such as a sketch Stu Shiffman did of you at the 1986 CORFLU that you intend to use on a fanzine RSN (no kidding!), some original D.West strips c.1985 that have never seen print, and a lot of duplicate fanzines - many of them your own. Into this latter category fall my various APAzines, unto the very first itself.....

The first mailing of Simon Bostock's APA-SF&F (an amazingly cumbersome name) appeared in June 1981 and carried zines by, among others, both Pickersgills, Martyn Taylor, Dave Langford, and me. My contribution was called TWO OTHERWISE BLANK PAGES. It was the only contribution I ever made to the APA, which fell apart after only a small handful of mailings. The next APA I got involved with, the only other one I've been in to date, was FRANK'S APA. I was there when it was launched on a wave of enthusiasm at the 1983 SILICON and my FISH HELMET was one of 16 zines from a who's who of early eighties British fandom that appeared in the first mailing. Unfortunately the enthusiasm with which FRANK'S was launched didn't hold up and a slow attrition of its members led to its demise a few years later. Myself, I managed to get eight issues of FISH HELMET out in the 13 mailings that went out while I was a member of the APA, the final one carrying an episode of my TAFF report (sort of). Naturally, I printed more copies of FISH HELMET than were needed for the APA and, just as naturally, these turned up while I was sorting my fanzine my collection. Which is where we came into this paragraph....

With the FISH HELMET overruns to hand it was but the work of few seconds and fewer brain cells to realise that I could staple these up into a limited edition ersatz fanzine for those who weren't in the APAs and who haven't seen this material before. All it needed was this intro, a bacover featuring a single sheet biog of Harry Adam Knight (aka Kettle and Brosnan) that Graham Charnock wrote and casually left lying around at the launch party for HAK's first book a few years back, and a tasteful front cover. This will be limited to a couple of dozen copies, some containing the original pages and some xeroxes of them. Not generally available so please don't review, but if anyone feels moved to write letters are always welcome.

....ROB HANSEN 10th July 1988.

- 144 Plashet Grove, East Ham, London E6 1AB, UNITED KINGDOM -

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Welcome to the initial issue of FISH HELMET, produced for the first mailing of FRANK'S APA. Those of you familiar with my non-APA zine EPSILON - the majority, I imagine - may well expect me to go into one of my heavy numbers here, explaining what I feel this projects aims should be and going on to analyse the basic concept, concentrating on its weakpoints, its likely development, and like that. If so you will be disappointed. No, I'll let others do the agonising about that this time out (hi, Greg) and apart from

expressing the hope that we won't see too many people singing them 'sheet-o'-paper-in-the-typewriter-and-no-idea-what-to-write-blues' will proceed directly to 'GO', which on this occasion takes the following form.....

'Dear Rob Hansen,

BAD LUCK!.....You have been invited to the SLIMER LAUNCH PARTY! On Friday the 9th of September! It starts at 8pm in the H₂O CLUB, First Floor (above the restaurant) 50 Greek Street (just off Soho Square).

The SLIMER LAUNCH PARTY promises to be the publishing event of the year, surpassing even the publication of the Hitler Diaries!

Free drinks!
(well, a glass or two of wine) Free food! (well, a bit). And the chance to meet a great new writing talent: HARRY ADAM KNIGHT!

Be There!

Harry.

How could I refuse such an invitation?

I'd never been to a launch party before. Nor, for that matter, had I ever walked the streets of London's famous 'red-light' district after dark. Even in the daytime Soho is...ah...colourful, and having been approached by hookers a number of times while browsing in the area I was half expecting to be accosted again. As it happens my privacy remained unmolested on this occasion but what with the hookers and the surprising array of religious loonies who make a beeline for me when they're recruiting I clearly look like someone whose body and soul are in dire need of the proper ministrations. Fortunately no-one has yet suggested that my mind needs seeing to.

The H₂O Club was indeed located above a restaurant in Greek Street and seemed to consist of little more than a room with a bar at one end, and was not much larger than the current venue for the London BSFA meetings. The usual people were present - ie. Rob Holdstock, Chris Evans, Chris Priest, Lisa Tuttle, Faith Brooker, John Jarrold, Peter Nicholls etc. - and, of course, Harry Adam Knight himself, a man who will be better known to most of you as Leroy Kettle and John Brosnan. Suitably underdressed by such an array of scientific talent I drifted over to the food table.

There were rather more trays of sandwiches available than the invitation had suggested but not being particularly hungry I managed to nibble my way through no more than a token dozen or so during the evening. Rob Holdstock - famous SF author, gourmand, and aging lothario (semi-retired) - showed no such restraint however, and attacked the food with great gusto. As I watched him doing a creditable impression of a swarm of locusts stripping a cornfield I smiled, fond memories of another occasion concerning Rob and food coming to mind.

It would have been early in September 1982, or maybe late in August, when the 1984 CON bidding group travelled up to Blackpool to assess the hotel we hoped would host next year's Eastercon. The nice thing about such 'hotel assessing' is the free room and free meals, the evening meal in particular being excellent, quite possibly the best I ate last year. Most everyone seemed to agree with this assessment and we said as much to the hotel manager when he

asked about it during our meeting with him. Rob, however, not being content with the standard polite responses proceeded to describe with great relish just how it was that the girl cutting the joint of beef for us had gone in, heedless of the hotplate and the risk of getting hot fat over her hands, and cut off great steaming slabs of meat for us, vast acreages of cow-flesh oozing with their natural fluids. By the time Rob finished the manager had gone quite pale, a look of astonishment on his face, and the rest of the bidding group had slid off their seats and under the table.

There are a number of attractive women at the party and one in particular seems to catch Rob's eye. With well practiced ease he sidles over and is soon deep in animated conversation with her (until you've watched Holdstock you haven't seen just how 'animated' conversation can get), his cable glands swelling visibly.

I raise an eyebrow.

Rob sees this proceeds to tell me what a fascinating person she is and how he's only interested in her mind and why am I looking at him like that anyway?

I raise my eyebrow still further.

"Look, can't I even talk to an attractive, intelligent, liberated, and sexually devastating young woman without everyone leaping to conclusions?"

If I wore a toupee my eyebrow would have pushed it off the back of my head. Ah, Holdstock! So much larger than life (and no, that's not another cheap cock joke - they come later) that if Reader's Digest ever asked me who my most unforgettable character was there'd be no other contender.

Among others giving the aforementioned young woman more than passing attention was a young guy who, from a snatch of conversation overheard in passing, was obviously associated with the excellent WARRIOR magazine. Curiosity piqued I asked Brosnan who he was.

"I'm John Brosnan", he said.

"No, not you. That guy over there."

"Oh that's Steve Dillon. Shall I introduce you?"

"Uh, no. I wouldn't know what to say to him."

Isn't it always the way? What do you say? Just because you've read a book by someone or like their artwork doesn't mean that you have anything to say to them or tell you what to expect of any conversation. I well remember my very first meeting with Harry Bell at MANCON 5, the 1976 Eastercon. I was still the wide-eyed young neo with MANCON only my second ever convention, and my first ever words to Harry were:

"Are you really Harry Bell?"

The great man smiled benignly and admitted that, yes, he was indeed Harry Bell. I was suitably impressed.

Now here we are, a mere seven-and-a-half years later, and that selfsame Henry Horatio Bell tells me that you should always start the first issue of any fanzine, even an APazine such as this, by telling the readers all about yourself and just who you are.

"But Harry" I protested, "most of those in the APA will know who I am anyway. And", I would have added had he been here now, "there's not enough room left anyway" whereupon Harry would have fixed me with that baleful eye of his and I would have felt the full weight of his disapproval. So, alright, I'll just run quickly through the vital statistics in the space remaining: 28, male, 164 lbs, size 10½, white, 1954, 1975, one of each, 8", Wednesday afternoon, two, yes, and soggy Hovis. That OK, Harry?

This has been FISH HELMET I from Rob Hansen of 9A Greenleaf Rd., East Ham, London E6 1DX, and if lack of sleep and too much alcohol hadn't removed my memory of just why this zine is called FISH HELMET I'd explain it to you. 2/10/83.

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...and here, greatly to my surprise, is the second issue. I had thought I'd be unable to make this mailing due to the time and effort needed to get an issue of EPSILON out for NOVACON but the inability of my 'star attraction' to come up with the goods in time has pretty well put paid to that little fantasy. With the fanning time thus liberated I of course jus' natcherly diverted my efforts to FISH HELMET my head full, as usual, with all manner of interesting and amusing

things with which to fill these pages. Or so it seemed. As always actually getting them out through my fingers and down on paper involved much beating of fevered brow and filling of waste paper baskets. Why ag writing so fucking hard? Anyway, I think I'm starting to sound like our fuhrer, so enough of such preambulatory procrastination and on with the show.....

FOUR GO MAD AT THE MART...

When Woody Allen lookalike Alun Harries walked into the Westminster Arms Greg and Linda Pickersgill and I almost choked on our drinks. Having heard of the extensive facial remodelling Alun had undergone at the feet of a local thug back in Newport we expected to see some changes, perhaps radical, in his appearance but nothing could have prepared us for the terrible reality. We were appalled to see that despite all the thug had done he looked as gruesome as ever!!

After a few more drinks had calmed us down we went into the comic mart being held next door in Westminster Central Hall and gasped in amazement at the outrageous prices being asked for old issues of X-MEN. Alun seemed attracted to one table in particular and I found him flicking, eyes agog, through the pages of something called TRULY AMAZING LOVE STORIES and muttering:

"God, this stuff is appallingly adolescent!"

Indeed it was. Attracted by the number of improbably large breasts and penises on display I gazed at its pages over Alun's shoulder and could only agree with him, while being somewhat bemused by the 'splik splik, splek splek' sound effect used to denote various sexual squelchings. It was so appalling adolescent in fact that Alun felt duty-bound to buy a copy of this disgusting comic book for closer examination under the privacy of his own bedclothes. Splik splik, splek splek. (Inconsiderate little fucker bought the last copy as well.)

Elsewhere in the hall a distraught Greg Pickersgill was wrestling with his conscience. Could he really justify squandering £40-worth of perfectly good credit on one of the Russ Cochran boxed reprint editions of EC's FRONTLINE COMBAT, or should he save it for next week's groceries?

"What the hell; we need to diet anyway." he said and, credit card in hand, went over to the dealers tables. Seconds later, credit card in hand, he returned.

"Their credit card machine is broken," he told Linda, "Give me my cheque book." Seconds later he was back.

"This is fucking ridiculous! I'm out of cheques!"

So it was that the now rather passe method of paying by cash had to be used to secure those precious volumes of FRONTLINE COMBAT (and, as a consequence of something therein, was able to explain to me at the October meeting of FRIENDS IN SPACE the following evening just why it was he'd have no hesitation in bayonetting me to death Come The Revolution). Me, I spent the horrendous sum of 40 pence at the mart and fretted about it for ages afterwards. Then again, I suppose you have to pay for your pleasures.....

AUTUMN DAYS...

On Saturday 22nd October I was one of the more than a quarter of a million people who marched through London to the CND protest rally in Hyde Park, something which would have seemed almost inconceivable not so very long ago. I'd always accepted, as Lord Mountbatten put it in his speech at Strasbourg a few short months before his murder, that....

"The nuclear arms race has no military purpose; wars cannot be fought with nuclear weapons."

but I also believed that this proposition only held if both sides possessed nuclear weapons, and that unilateral disarmament could only make the situation more dangerous. Over the course of the last few years, however, I've given a lot of thought to the subject (and argued it with a variety of people - by far the best way of clarifying your views and having any flaws shown up) and come to realise that while this is possibly true when applied to the Superpower Equation it is almost certainly ^{not} when applied to a nation like ours. Such a balance would not be upset by us scrapping our nuclear weapons and since they can't realistically be used in any situation short of Armageddon they are, to all intents and purposes, pointless. If one accepts the need for us to have a credible defence force then our needs and commitments are far better served if the enormous chunk of our defence budget being spent in the near future on Trident is instead spent on conventional forces, and by our Polaris force being scrapped. Even Enoch Powell, who although suspect on some matters is usually fairly sound on defence, has come out against our possessing these weapons, and for much the same reasons as those outlined above.

And yet this doesn't fully explain why I was on the march since I'd more or less arrived at this position a year ago yet was not on last year's march. What clinched it this time was my increasing unease at actions of the cowboy in the White House. Anti-Americanism is a knee-jerk reaction in the Left and so usually dismissed without a second thought but when even someone of solidly Right-wing views such as the Daily Mail's political correspondent, Andrew Alexander, can say in the October 26th edition of that paper that he now considers the USA...

"...a power which is now a serious threat to global security. After many visits to the States over the years I find myself, reluctantly and against all my instincts, concluding that if a World War happens it is more likely to be the United States that starts it than the Russians..."

you know that things are getting bad. So that's what finally decided me this time. I still have deep reservations about the various fringe groups who leech onto events like this, no doubt seeing them as what Trotsky called 'useful idiots', but the current situation transcends such considerations.

I very much doubt that my being part of a protest rally will make much difference but if for no other reason than self-respect it had become necessary to be there. As a way of influencing those in power on this issue it may well prove ineffectual, but it's all we've got.....

And so onto the Mailing comments. Having never done these before I'm uncertain as to whether or not you're supposed to comment on every zine in a given mailing, so I'll just start typing and see where it leads.....

WHEELS ON FIRE (Jarrold): I was deeply wounded by this, by the vicious and totally unwarranted attack on my integrity, the aspersions cast on my credibility. John, John - ol' buddy, ol' pal, ol' chum - how could you possibly do it? What I'm referring to, of course, is your account of a visit to the One Tun...

I was having to shout to be understood over childish shouts for halves of lager-and-lime. Then Rob Hansen left.

Lager-and-lime? Yecch! '...childish shouts for halves of best bitter' maybe, but I think I'd have to be thirsty almost to the point of imminent death before I'd drink that stuff. I mean, it tastes as if it's already been through someone's digestive system...and exited through the appropriate orifice.

ARMouredPILLOWS IN THE SKIRTING BOARD (Bell): What is this? First I get it from the Weremitchum of West Wickam and then from Joe Vile (as Joyce Scrivener read the 'jovial' badge Harry was wearing at SILICON). How much of this can I reasonably be expected to put up with? First my drinking habits are called into question and then underwear with Harry complaining about...

...having to post Rob Hansen's underpants back to him (it was the way they stood up in the envelope which irritated most).

No Harry, it's my socks which stand up (in fact I stand them in the hall next to my shoes to make choosing which pair to wear easier); my underpants are usually anything but stiff and in fact I test whether or not they need changing by throwing them against the wall. If they stick they need changing.

It's unfortunate that you chose to use excerpts from your diary last time since I had planned on using excerpts from my diary this time. I haven't been quite as conscientious as you in keeping it up to date (in fact there's a two-month gap in the summer months) but dipping into it might perhaps give you a glimpse of what my life is like outside of fandom. Now let me see....

Monday 21st February: In work today someone phoned for MJW ((my immediate superior)) and we got talking. He recognised that my accent was not that of a native-born Londoner and hazarded a guess that I was from the North-East. Damned cheek! Harry Bell may be a good friend and all but to confuse my educated tones with the crude and guttural sounds that issue forth from the Geordie throat really is too much.

Attended the J.Sainsbury Executive Club meeting at 5.05 pm this evening where famous Concorde pilot gave a talk on famous Concorde aircraft. My main reason for attending was that I'd forgotten to lay in food for my evening meal and there is always free booze and food after these things, but famous Concorde pilot was amusing and witty and meeting was thus very entertaining. Next speaker is, apparently, Peter Walker, the Minister for Agriculture. Not a big fan of politicians - tho' did go to see Dr.David Owen when SDP were still big media thing - so will probably only attend if I forget to lay in food again and am in need of free meal.

My true nature revealed at last! The 'famous Concorde pilot', whose name I really should have made a note of, piloted Concorde on its first flight into JFK and he described the press conference that followed:

"Some of the milder questions they asked were 'how long will it be before it deafens us?' and 'how long does it take the pollution it produces to blind our kids?' The press were, as you may have gathered, rather hostile towards the aircraft."

There followed an interview on 'Good Morning America' where, before the show, the host took him aside and said:

"Before we go on the air I've got three things to say to you: one, I used to be a pilot; two, I'm a great admirer of Concorde; three, what questions do you want me to ask you?"

Even though my employers are never less than generous in the amount of food they provide for these meetings, and even though the amount of food I eat at the meetings is also never less than generous, I must nevertheless have been

peckish by the time I got home that evening since I see that I took the top off a can of beans and spooned them all down. It really is the only way to eat baked beans.

Wednesday 23rd February: Overheard Ted Germann telling Jim Kydd ((these being two of the people I work with)) of the latest letter he'd written to his MP in his attempt to get LSD legalised. There's something kind of sad about middle-aged, overweight, and totally ineffectual Ted keeping up his campaign. Although I know the rough outline of the story I quizzed Jim about Ted who, so Jim says, had his mental problems treated with LSD in Canada before the drug was made illegal and is convinced it's the only treatment that really works. Jim reckoned that much of Ted's problem dated from the death of his mother.

"He just moped around his flat", said Jim

"And", he added, to demonstrate just how bad Ted's mental decay was, "he couldn't even be bothered to cook food but used to exist on baked beans eaten straight from the can. Can you imagine that?"

I really didn't know how to reply.

Anyway, enough with the Samuel Pepys impressions already, and on with the show...

Since I wasn't able to start on this zine until the last day or two before the convention this whole issue, with the exception of the first page, has been composed directly on stencil. I've heard the theory that writing this way creates a greater spontaneity but I can't say it's something I plan on doing again any too often. I'm not at all sure, for instance, that I've expressed myself as well in Autumn Days as I would have if the piece had gone through a couple of drafts before being committed to stencil. Oh well... And so on with the mailing comments, whose necessary brevity, given the space remaining, might make some of them seem a little..ah..cryptic...

BRAND NEW ATTITUDE (Greg P.): Ace stuff! As I've doubtless mentioned to you on more than one occasion I always find anything you write extremely readable regardless of whether or not what you're writing about is anything I have a particular interest in - "...all the old ungrammatical tricks of my fanwriting style.." as you put it.

You have my sympathy over your difficulties in spending lotsa good credit on records that later turn out not to be quite the shit-hot items you might have hoped - but then you never could resist temptation. Since, as you say, you have tastes in music so tangential to those of most of your buddies there really doesn't seem to be any easier way for you get a line on new stuff than the method you're already using, however.

HELLO FRANK! (Frost): So although "...fandom as a whole..." acclaimed LIFE WITH THE LOONIES and voted it Best Fan Article of its year you're one of the few people who didn't misread it, eh? **Amazing.**

OUTSIDE NOW/TINSELTOWN REBELLION (Bridges): Great, Dave, just great! Were these first draft or not? If not how did you manage to get so much good stuff down in such a short time? And are you going to do it every mailing? Questions, questions.

No more space, no more time. I must say that I was pretty impressed with the overall standard of contributions to the first mailing and will be delighted if this is maintained or even improved in future mailings. Ciao. 2/11/83.

This has been FISH HELMET 2 from Rob Hansen of 9A Greenleaf Rd., East Ham, London E6 1DX.

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Jesus, there's no lazing about picking your nose and flicking snotballs at the window with this APA lark, is there? No sooner have you finished doing your bit for one mailing than you've got to start Thinking Seriously about what you're going to do for the next. I know we have the 'right' to miss every other mailing and like that, but so far this is all still new to me and quite a challenge in it's way so I'll hang on in there for now and see how it goes. This time out

will feature mailing comments only on account of the time I have to devote to a number of other things before month's end, not least of which is the second MEXICON PR. But then, most of what I want to say is probably best expressed via mailing comments anyway, so let's get on with it.....

OUTSIDE NOW (Bridges): Since you spent so many pages on the topic, Dave, this seems the appropriate place to cast my vote against the various zines that constitute a mailing being bound together. I'm not quite as dogmatic about this as you seem to be, but as someone renowned for being reasonable and level-headed (this latter the result of an I-beam that once landed on my nut) I think this is the best solution. That way those who actually want to bind them together can provide their own slip-binders and do so if they want, but those opposed to it can take them as they come. As it happens I did put a slip binder on the first mailing, but only after I'd read all the contributions. It just seemed a reasonably easy way to store them and not have to worry about any parts going missing.

*

Given your personal involvement, Dave, I can understand you reacting as you did to Lisa Tuttle's piece in THE WOMEN'S PERIODICAL, but don't you think there's something a little..ah..'unethical' about replying to something written for one APA in the pages of another? After all, most of us won't have read the full text of the piece you are responding to and, regardless of the intrinsic merits your case may or may not have, no-one should be expected to respond to an argument unless they've heard both sides in full. Apart from that, however, this zine was well up to your usual standards even if it was lacking in the uniquely Bridgesian slice-of-life anecdotalism we all know and love you for.

NOT JUMPING BUT FALLING (Greg P.): As someone who also gets tunes he doesn't like lodged in his head and has great difficulty in getting rid of them, you have my sympathy. At NOVACON a song I heard at the MEXICON party that sounded as if it was by John Hall and Daryl Oates and may have been called 'Maneater' kept playing inside my head and I often gave voice to it, as is my wont, particularly the line that goes "Whoa-oh here comes; she's a maneater, yeah!". I have this problem when it comes to such songs, you see, and will often burst into song without actually paying much attention to just what it is I'm singing, which can sometimes be embarrassing. A recent example concerns an occasion, a few days ago, when I arrived home from work just as the guy who lives downstairs was opening our shared front door to a friend of his. I passed them both in the hall, entered my own flat, and began belting out - in best Al Jolson fashion - "Swanee, how ah love yah, how ah love yah, mah dear ol' swanee", stopping abruptly when it dawned on me just what it was I was singing. I have no doubt they heard my soulful rendition, given the great gusto with which it poured forth, but since both the guy downstairs and his friend are black this may not have been the most tactful number to have been singing.

This ability to embarrass myself through song, for reasons other than merely my godawful singing voice, seems to have its prescient aspect as well, as was demonstrated on another occasion a few months back... I had just

returned from lunch in the company restaurant (its central fountain and general ambiance make it far too grand to be merely 'a canteen') and was working at my drawing board when the staccato machine-gun sound produced by keeping an electric typewriter key depressed punctured the silence. Again and again. Wondering just what Brenda, the typist whose desk was situated in front of my board, was playing at I composed a wittily sarcastic riposte and leapt to my feet.

"Oi!" I shouted...into the face of someone I'd never seen before. She stared in wide-eyed astonishment at this strange person who'd suddenly appeared and the strange person, all thought of sarcastically witty ripostes fled from his mind, collapsed back onto his seat. To cover my embarrassment I began singing, over and over, the line "Oh, I come from a land down under" from the Men At Work single of the same name. A few minutes later she answered the phone...in a broad Australian accent! I couldn't bring myself to speak to her for weeks.

I wonder if all Rob H's are doomed to commit faux pas?

MENTAL FLOSS (Linda P.): No, it was Bob Dylan I thought sounded like a nanny goat (still do, for that matter). My view of the Grateful Dead is that listening to one of their albums is not all that different in its effects to dosing up on Mogadon. And I agree with you that one shouldn't criticise others tastes in music.

CREEMCHEESE CREEMCHEESE (Whiteoak): Your explanation of group-structure at conventions and how it contributes to the well-known 'Neofan Delusion' of fandom being run by an elite who are in some way keeping them out or oppressing them, had the ring of truth about it. Now that we're well past this phase with those who came in in '79-'80 things seem hunky-dorey, but about a year or so from now, when the inevitable influx of new people sure to result from SEACON '84 begin to find their feet, we'll probably be in for another round of all this 'elitism' jive. You do, I hope, realise that this time around it'll be your turn to disabuse them of their notions and get them to see things as they actually are? It shouldn't be so protracted and difficult this time anyway, since there won't be the wholesale devastation of existing fandom that happened after the Worldcon. If we get the Worldcon in 1987 we'll probably be going through this whole routine again sometime in '88, however.....

THIS IS NOT A LOVE SONG (Harries): A very harrowing tale which you had, of course, filled me in about during a telephone call. However, you left something out. You forgot to tell everyone about how, for quite a while after the attack, your nose would start bleeding whenever you..ah..got aroused. How well I remember it starting when you leafed through that copy of TRULY AMAZING LOVE STORIES at the last Westminster Comic Mart and how...what's that? You didn't want anyone to know about this physiological aberration? Oh. Sorry, Alun.

HAND JIVE 1 + 2 (Williams, I.): Nice to see you like Howard Chaykin's AMERICAN FLAGG, which is the best new comic to come out of America in years. Great artwork, intriguing plot-line and concept, nice character inter-action, and lotsa sex and violence. What more could you reasonably ask for? With the creative bankruptcy of Marvel and DC and the insipid nature of most of the independents I had thought that Britain's very own WARRIOR was the only thing in comics to get excited about these days. Nice to be proved wrong.

This has been FISH HELMET 3, a Direct On Stencil Production (which I said I wasn't gonna do again) from Rob Hansen of 9A Greenleaf Rd., East Ham, London E6 1DX, in these dark days when Billy Joel is at No.1. 20/11/83.

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When FRANK unilaterally abolished January and made this February mailing of the APA compulsory grand visions appeared before my eyes. This issue of FH, I decided, would be heavy on the graphics. I would produce a series of ironic and biting satirical cartoons and present them in a new and daringly experimental format that would both contrast with the civilised prose contained within and complement those parts of the mailing comments where I decide to kick ass. Ah! Sweet Idiocy!

What **actually** happened, of course, was that Sloth and Indolence, that Tweedledee and Tweedledum of bone-idleness, struck me down and before I knew it there were only a few days left to the deadline for this mailing. Sound familiar? If so you've probably read something very similar in the opening paragraphs of previous FISH HELMETS. Rather less of this issue is composed direct on stencil than has been the case in the past two mailings (this bit has, of course, which you doubtless figured out for yourself unless you think my admittedly casual prose style is always as close to total disintegration as it is here) due to the midnight oil being burned after many a hard day at the office in the last week. Speaking of which, this is a perfect place for....

TALES FROM THE OFFICE - No.1 in a series of many,

" 'Ere's always lotsa dirty pitchers innee engineerin' section", observed Sandra, my manager's secretary, as she dropped a disheartening number of papers into my in-tray. Momentarily confused I peered into the tea-stained darkness of my mug before realising what she meant. Well yes, I suppose to some people the photographs of various lovelies, mammaries akimbo, featured on the many calenders adorning the office walls could fit the description 'dirty pitchers'. But not to me. After all we were only talking about secondary sexual characteristics and you can see them displayed on the pages of national newspapers any day of the week. Calenders with rather more anatomically explicit pitchers had been removed in earlier years however, and quite rightly so, when female staff had found them offensive.

I glanced over at the drawing board where Liz, the only draughtswoman in the section, worked and...Good Lord! Could it be?! It could, and it was. There, taped to the wall beside her board, was a calender whose January treat was a full-colour photo of a naked male posterior. Intrigued, I checked February. It was another full-colour photo of a naked male posterior. I checked March. Same again. I checked April. By now you get the pitcher. I called over Brenda, our section typist, who found the calender highly amusing. She decided then and there to get xeroxes of the whole thing to hang next to her typewriter. She also decided to show it to Sandra.

To me, the interesting thing about this calender was that no shot showed any part of the body not found between mid-back and mid-thigh. This had the effect, particularly in view of the complete absence of faces, of reducing the people in the photographs to objects far more effectively than any of the many girlie calenders hung about the office did. Also interesting, of course, was that while Liz had had to find this calender herself those possessed by the male draughtsmen were all supplied as promotional material by various manufacturers.

Later, Brenda came by again. I asked her what Sandra had thought of the calender.

"I told 'er abowrit", she replied, "but she wern inrested. Tha' girl ain't got no blood inner."

Wrong time of the month, I suppose.

What I Did On My Holidays - by Robert Hansen (age 29).

I suppose the gathering that set the whole show on the road this time round was the Lillian Edwards birthday celebration. Here it was that I was able to explain to everyone how you can tell there's an American in the room when they start talking about 'interpersonal relationships', because Linda Pickersgill began talking about that very thing.

"You can tell there's an American in the room when they start talking about 'interpersonal relationships' ", was the way I put it.

"Is that a problem?", asked Linda (only the way she said it it came out more like: "Is thart ah prollm?". Linda is from N'Orleans).

Well no, it wasn't, but what was a prollm was the cretin throwing pieces of pomelo at me, pomelo being a green fruit resembling a large orange (or "orange", as Linda would say). I began to give serious thought to initiating a close interpersonal relationship between his teeth and my fist. Only humanitarian considerations, and the possibility he might hit me back, prevented this.

There was a Friends In Space meeting over in Ealing the following evening, Sunday 18th December. Greg and Linda Pickersgill were there also, but I didn't feel the full force of the festive blitzkrieg until I arrived at the Hansen family manse in darkest Wales. I put up a valiant fight but the barrage of food and drink, the bombardment of TV images and seasonal cheer, were too much for me. Total capitulation soon followed and my brain remained in a state resembling clinical death for many days. Mesmerised by the merciless phosphor dot assault, with my hands stuffing unimaginable quantities of protein and alcohol into the nearest convenient orifice on spastic muscle reflex alone, only the occasional game of Scrabble caused my higher functions to stir from their seasonal sloth. (Though not enough to prevent me from letting 'efete' pass unchallenged.) The bizarre insistence of our mother and my sister-in-law that my brother resembles Burt Reynolds (they both have two legs, two arms, and a moustache, but Burt is able to afford a toupee) also caused a synapse or two to flicker feebly into life. Things were looking grim. Drastic shock treatment was needed and drastic indeed was the shock that awaited me down at the Hollybush Inn.

It's not everyday you discover that your father is both sexist and a warmonger. There we were, quaffing tankards of foaming ale (actually pints of Brains' Dark Mild Ale, the beer I was weaned on), and the next thing you know we're going at it hammer and tongs. When my father stated his belief that men were more intelligent and creative than women, and that we didn't have enough nuclear weapons - and I in turn said that I believed women were as intelligent and creative as men, and revealed I'd been on the CND march through London last October - the conversation, as they say, grew heated and Voices Were Raised. At first I thought he was winding me up but no, he actually believes this nonsense. Which once again illustrates one of the problems of fandom. Namely, that you get so used to hanging around with people of relatively liberal views you sometimes forget that your view of what is just and correct is not always shared by others. Still, the adrenal surge produced by this exchange helped kick-start my brain into some semblance of normal working order and soon it was time to leave. As I said my goodbyes I noticed that my brother's nose was unnaturally shiny. Hell, I could see my face in it!

"I tried powdering it", said his wife, "but he wouldn't let me."

When you're a policeman and a member of the South Wales Rugby Football Club maintaining your machismo becomes all important (and anyway, Burt never powders his nose). I wondered if this weird affliction could be caused by a dietary deficiency. Maybe he's not drinking enough orange juice.

Back in London I spent a day in work, detoxifying, before leaving civilisation for Newcastle-upon-Tyne and a New Year's holiday spent in the frozen north. First stop was Harry Bell's crumbling abode where (having tried everything short of a tactical thermonuclear device to get one of the stone-deaf

cretins inside to answer the door) I encountered Greg and Linda Pickersgill. Who are these people and why do they keep following me about?

The next day was New Year's Eve. Being traditionalists Kev and Sue Williams, who live across town from Harry and who were hosting the evening's festivities, decided that a tall, dark, stranger was needed to knock on the door at midnight. For this they need a tall, dark, stranger. Being the tallest, darkest, and strangest I was chosen. So it was that I found myself in the elements, my back lashed by gale-force winds and driving rain as I crouched down by the letter-box, one hand cupping an ear to this opening while the other poised over the doorbell. My watch was wrong, you see, and only by positioning myself thus did I have any chance of hearing the cheer that went up at the stroke of twelve in order to press the bell at the right moment. It felt like I was out there for hours.

"Why am I doing this?!", I thought, feeling foolish and hoping that a patrolling policeman wasn't going to pull up and ask me what I thought I was doing. Apart from this, however, I had a really good time.

.....which is where this tale abruptly terminates since the details of most of what happened thereafter have fled from a brain enfeebled by too much alcohol and a lack of sleep in the period that followed (and anyway, you can fill in much of what occurred from your own experience of such events). My thanks again to Kev and Sue, however, for putting on such an enjoyable party and to Harry Bell putting up (and putting up with) the Pickersgills and myself.

Before getting on to the mailing comments I have an apology for Linda Pickersgill. Yeah Linda, I know your accent isn't as bad as I made out - well, not quite that bad, anyway - but look on the bright side. I could have had you talking about Leicester Square and pronouncing it "Lysayster Skwayer, y'all". This totally spineless and grovelling retraction is prompted by an awful feeling I had that, after reading the preceeding, (Jackson,) you might pull yourself up to your full five-foot-nothing and nut me in the kneecaps.

Now the mailing comments....

PLEDGET (John Barfoot): I can't escape the feeling that you're actually a figment of Harry Bell's fevered imagination, and that while the good stuff he writes appears in his own zine the even better stuff appears here. Whatever the truth of the matter I enjoyed this. A lot.

Not having seen Channel 4's production of the Oresteia a lot of what you wrote was lost on me, but I'm much taken with the idea of actors wearing masks and can think of many TV performers who would be immeasurably improved by adopting the same device. Game-show hosts spring immediately to mind. While I may have been ill-equipped to appreciate all the undoubted subtleties of your main piece I thought your introduction to it was priceless. From what Harry tells me you reversed the roles of your good selves and the regulars of the Innisfree Catholic Working Men's Social Club. I can well imagine their reaction as you and he ponder the mysteries of iambic pentameter: "Yon pooftahs is tokkin' aboot poet-ree agenn." Great stuff!

LAND OF LAUGHS (Roger Peyton): "How", you ask, "can any reasonably intelligent SF fan claiming to want to improve the quality of SF and condemning the SF 'crap' like Perry Rhodan, etc., admit to reading the garbage put out by comic publishers?" To which I would have to reply that I haven't admitted to "reading the garbage put out by comic publishers", only to reading comics. As with the SF field most of what appears in comics is 'crap', but not all of it. If you're prepared to look for it, and you're not shackled by irrational prejudice against the whole medium, it is possible to find material sufficiently stimulating to satisfy "any reasonably intelligent SF fan". I'm not saying that you're going to find those serious investigations into the nature of the human condition that are at the heart of true literature, anymore than you will in most SF books, but what can be found in the very best comics is

imagination, humour, wit, and an artistic vision that can represent a unique way of looking at the world.

In Japan, China, and much of Europe comics are regarded as perfectly acceptable reading material for adults. This is not the case in Britain and the majority of comics are aimed solely at children but even in some of these (most notably 2000 AD) you can sometimes find material worthy of your attention. After all these are written by adults and if only to preserve their sanity they sometimes write stories that work on level beyond those the average child would pick up on. But then not all comics in Britain and the US are published for children and certain of them, such as Howard Chaykin's AMERICAN FLAGG, would be incomprehensible to most children. In fact those SF readers used to nothing more demanding than the machine-hacking of Piers Anthony probably wouldn't be able to follow AMERICAN FLAGG either.

What I'm trying to say here in my own stumbling way, Rog, is that your sneering at comics as you do betrays exactly the same attitude as those who dismiss SF as worthless junk without having read any of those works most of us would hold up as examples of the genre at its best. There's nothing wrong with comics per se, anymore than there is with SF, but unfortunately the mediocrities labouring in both fields have given them a bad name. If you maintain that you "want to improve the quality of SF and condemn the SF 'crap' like Perry Rhodan, etc.," you really do have to concede the possibility of others desiring the same for comics. As a medium the comicbook may require different storytelling techniques to those employed in films but it is in no way intrinsically inferior and as such should be regarded as subordinate to books only to the same degree that films are. That the potential of the comics medium is being fully realised by only a handful of creators is tragic, but looked at in the same light the current state of SF gives those of us who still profess an interest in the genre all too little to crow about.

While on this subject there's something very uncomical happening in the world of comics at the moment, something that will affect all of us. Over the course of the last eighteen months police have hit booksellers and distributors and siezed around 20 000 copies of some 250 titles containing 'drugs-related literature'. Among these are books written and published by such as Aldous Huxley, Tom Wolfe, Hunter S. Thompson, William Burroughs, and The Harvard University Press. Strangely enough all charges against these books have been brought under the Obscene Publications Act and some titles have already come before magistrates' courts under section 3 of the Act, with varying results. How this ties in with comics, however, is that the real showpiece events occur later this year when the case against AIRLIFT BOOKS and KNOCKABOUT COMICS, the main UK publisher and importer of 'Adults Only' underground comix (UGs, as they're known), come to trial at the Old Bailey. How this affects you, and me, and anyone else who reads books of any sort, is that the Director of Public Prosecutions has said that he considers this a test-case and is using these charges to open up the scope of the Act (which was originally written to clarify the various laws on pornography) to cover more than purely sexual matters. Now I'm not a drug-user and rarely read UGs but I'm deeply worried by this development. As an SF reader I could in future find it impossible to buy copies of books such as Philip K. Dick's THE THREE STIGMATA OF PALMER ELDRITCH and A SCANNER DARKLY if this case succeeds and establishes a precedent. Books containing anything that could be construed as 'drugs-related literature' would become open to prosecution and as a bookseller, Rog, you could end up having stock confiscated. And once the scope of the Obscene Publications Act has been widened to cover 'drugs-related literature' who can guarantee that it won't be widened still further in future? This is why I've given money to the KNOCKABOUT COMICS defence fund (Acc.no. 7337635 at Lloyds Bank, 32 Oxford St. London W1. , for anyone who might be interested) and why this battle must be fought here and it must be fought now. However, bearing in mind the events of a few years ago when SAVOY BOOKS went to the wall and publisher Dave Britton went to prison I'm deeply pessimistic about the outcome.

RITE OF REPLY (Anne Warren): "Why does music matter more to men?" you ask. I don't know; does it? Although you more or less dismiss her piece in the second mailing it seems clear from that zine that it is important to Linda - or at least, has been at the time she describes - and while her taste in music may appear to some of us to leave much to be desired you can't really argue with what she said. What has always appeared to me to matter more to men than to women is their hobbies. Whatever purely sociological reasons one may attempt to use to explain this away it's always seemed to me that the degree of obsession that the degree of obsession that many men bring to their hobbies derives more from something unique and peculiar to the male psyche. For this reason I was much taken with your notion that the collecting urge in many men might be "the modern equivalent of the hunter's instinct", by which I assume you mean the hunter-gatherer instinct. Could be, just could be. One has to be a bit careful in speculating on such matters when one of the members of the APA is a psychiatrist, but a lot of those now atavistic instincts and compulsions developed over millions of years of evolution must still be lurking around down there somewhere. Since they have little or no use in their original form in the present day it doesn't seem too unreasonable to suppose they might find expression in some transmuted form more appropriate to our current civilisation.

Going back to music I certainly can't deny it's importance in my own life. In fact I sometimes think it's vital to my continued mental well-being. When I lived in Newport TV reception was so lousy that I went without a set for two years and it didn't bother me at all, but when my music system was out of commission for a few weeks last year I almost went up the fucking wall while waiting for it to be repaired. In saying this I'm not attempting to do TV down - as Greg, somewhat erroneously, seems convinced I'm determined to do - but merely pointing out how much more important music is to me.

SPLEK, SPLIK (Woody Alun): As a fearless splitter of infinitives I realise I'm not really in any position to criticise someone else's writing style, but have you ever considered using a few more contractions? You know, "haven't" instead of "have not", "I don't" instead of "I do not", and like that. At the moment this makes your work sound much like a formal report and this works against the informal atmosphere we're trying to generate here. Loosen up a little, Alun, you'll feel much better for it.

MENTAL FLOSS (Linda P.): I still maintain that I was the one who came up with the WereMitchum gag (the guy who turns into Robert Mitchum when the moon is full) but I don't suppose it really matters, particularly as you did your little spoof so well. I look forward to your piece on that strange affliction we call Woody Allen with interest. By the way, have you ever read page 10 of EPSILON 7? I hadn't read this for ages but remembered it the other day. Look it up...I think you'll appreciate it.

ARMADILDOS IN THE SKIRTING BOARD (Joe Vile): Now look, Bell, this has got to stop. Unlike California, where the sun always shines and the clear surf crashes into spume on golden beaches, Newcastle-upon-Tyne is cold, wet, cold, windy, and cold. So what's with this casual and laid-back Californian manner of yours? I mean, this reads as if you wrote it while enjoying a Slow Comfortable Screw and listening to mysterious musical monologues by Swedish solo saxophonists. If you were any more relaxed and laid back about this you would be unconscious. Shape up and let's have more of the slavering, snapping, and vicious prose we've come to expect from you and...hang on a minute! I'm thinking of someone else here. Sorry about that Harry, and ignore what you've just read, OK?

Here endeth the mailing comments. Yes, I know that there are thirty-five people in this APA and that I've only commented on about half-a-dozen contributions,

but while I realise that APazines are supposed to score over ordinary fanzines in the amount of feedback they generate I found, when typing the preceeding, that the single paragraph responses were degenerating into extended one-line gags. So I stopped. I'll try to get my act more together on this next issue. In the meantime I seem to recall hearing somewhere that one of the other functions of an APA is as a place for the exchange of information and the sharing of current concerns and enthusiasms. This being so it seems worthwhile mentioning what I've been reading lately.....

What I've Been Reading Lately. (Snappy little title, eh?)

Back when I still lived with my parents Sunday mornings meant a long lie-in. Here was a chance to luxuriate in the sheer pleasure that comes from not having to leap out of bed at 7.30 am. Here also was a welcome opportunity to sleep off the excesses of the night before, or to examine peculiar bruises and contusions, the scratches and unusually-placed tooth-marks **picked up that same night**, in a vain attempt at reconstructing the events that led to their acquisition. All in all then, a scene of domestic bliss and harmony. Until the Sunday papers arrived, that is.

As soon as we heard the papers drop through the letter box my brother and I would race to the front door, pushing and jostling each other in our attempt to reach them first. We weren't, as you might imagine, struggling to get at those whose salacious stock-in-trade tends to be stories headlined **SEX-CHANGE VICAR IN LESBIAN LOVE-NEST WITH QUEEN'S COUSIN**, oh no, not us. What we were after was The Observer's Weekly Review section. Whoever got to it first would turn immediately to the TV review column and soon be lost in laughter while his less-fortunate sibling sat and fumed, disinterestedly flicking through the other papers in search of the sex-change vicar's identity. That **reviewer was Clive James**, of course, and the columns from his ten years as The Observer's TV critic have now been collected in three volumes. The most recent of these, **GLUED TO THE BOX**, has just been issued by Picador.

Those of you who've never read any of James' columns will have realised by now that they're very funny (either that or you figure my brother and I are a pair of prize Looney-tunes), but that's not all they are. These volumes contain a lot of trenchant comment and though there's a tendency to play to the gallery in some of the later columns, when James succumbs to the temptation of the easy laugh, the humour in most of his work serves the points he is trying to make, and serves them well. James demonstrates a refreshing willingness both to find merit in supposedly 'lesser' productions and to prick the pretensions of 'worthy' projects that don't measure up, managing in the process to entertain with writing that is both stylish and witty.

As you may have gathered I like Clive James' work, and I like it a lot. He is, or rather was, a gifted TV critic and since I'd only known of him as a writer in that capacity **FROM THE LAND OF SHADOWS**, his recent volume of literary-critical essays (also available from Picador) came as something of a revelation. Though shorter on humour than his TV reviews the essays in this volume are also deeper, as befits their subject matter, and it's plain that here is an area much dearer to James' heart. The true test of material like this lies in its ability to entertain and enlighten those who may not have read the work under review and in this it succeeds. I'm totally unfamiliar with Russian literature and have a blind spot when it comes to poetry, but the long sections devoted to these were easily as absorbing as those that cover more familiar ground. Before this turns into a total paean of praise I should point out that James has, to use a phrase of his, "toe-nails of clay". There's a streak of puritanism running through these books that those in the APA will find jarring - but then there's a streak in the populace we find jarring! Also, those who've complained of his smugness when presenting **CLIVE JAMES ON TV** will, unfortunately, find occasional evidence of that here. Still, these are mere cavils and certainly shouldn't prevent you from doing yourself a favour and checking these books out. Ciao. 30/1/84....

This has been **FISH HELMET 4** and it was brought to you by Rob Hansen of 9A Greenleaf Rd., East Ham, London E6 1DX. Don't forget...it's 1984...the year of the Eurocon...and...**BIG BRUNNER IS WATCHING YOU**...and you, and you, and you, and

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R. HANSEN
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PORTRAIT OF THE EDITOR AS A YOUNG FAN.....

For some reason or or other whenever I find myself in the Socialist Republic of Sheffield I feel an irresistable urge to whistle the tune from the Hovis ads. It's not that the road leading up to David Bridges' place is cobbled you understand, or even because of the uniformly terrible pubs in the vicinity, but more a reaction to the whole..ah..ambiance of the place. On this particular occasion I'd travelled up to Sheffield in the company of Kate Davies, Pam Wells, and Lillian Edwards, and a fairly uneventful journey it would have been too if not for the bus trip from the station to Valley Road. Since I didn't have any change it was decided that I would pay the fares with some folding green and the others would pay me back later. Being Londoners we expected these to be in the order of thirty or forty pence and were staggered when told we only had to pay six pence a head. The total fare for all of us came to 24p. Feeling expansive I generously told the others that I'd treat them to the ride and they needn't pay me back. Feeling equally expansive they would have none of this and insisted on re-imbursing me.

Beyond taking this opportunity to once again thank Dave and Cath for throwing the party I don't intend to say much about the weekend or about the soft-toy APA (for soft-brain people) established on the train journey home (which I responded to with my best sneer when I wasn't sunk down in my seat and hoping the others in the carriage didn't think I was with these people) since others in FRANK'S will doubtless have much of their own to say on this. However, while on the subject of David E.Bridges I should mention that at one point during the weekend a group of us came across a shop, just around the corner from Dave's house, which had in its window such delights as Krapalot ("the laxative tea-bag"), Fart Powder ("will make you fart like thunder"), and a bucketful of false noses. This seemed strangely appropriate somehow.

CLIPPING # 1....

Larry's flying high
 From PAUL CONNEW
 In New York

.. in a chair

UNLUCKY Larry Walters is to be prosecuted for flying at 16,000ft — in a deckchair.

Larry, 32, soared into the sky after tying 42 gas-filled weather balloons to his chair.

He expected to climb only a few hundred feet above his take-off point near Long Beach airport outside Los Angeles.

But up, up and away he went — three miles high and still climbing.

Astonished airline pilots radioed the airport's control tower to report passing "a guy in a lawachair."

Larry, who got down by bursting some of the balloons with an air pistol, now faces a £2,500 fine for flying without a licence.

He said yesterday: "I'm innocent on the grounds that I never expected to get so high."

That this FISH HELMET is being typed the night before deadline is not, strangely enough, the reason why it's only the bare minac requirement of two sides. The actual reason is that I think my duper is fucked. If there are creases in the bottom of this page then I'm right. My lack of confidence in the thing and my feeling that even these two sides are going to take ages to get right is the explanation of this FH's length. If anyone out there has any idea what's causing this defect and, more importantly, how to fix it I'd appreciate being told. Otherwise I may have to put the damn thing in for an overhaul. All this also explains the electrostencils, which were originally done for an abortive

project I don't much feel like going into here.

Oh shit!! I just attempted to run off the stencil of the previous page and every single sheet came through with a large crease up through the bottom third of the page. Apart from looking pretty naff the type over the crease doesn't print, of course, and when you come to do the second side you just add more creases. That being so this side is being typed straight onto paper (and minus the electrostencilled bits and pieces it would otherwise have carried) on the assumption I'll be able to surreptitiously run off the necessary number of illicit copies in work tomorrow. For the other side I've taken the best (or rather, least worst) ^{copy} of the stencilled page I ran off and touched it up. Damn, this is a nuisance! Looks like there might not be any duplicated fanzines from this address for some time.

MAILING COMMENTS (such as they are):

LIONS AFTER SLUMBER (Williams, K.): "I don't think", you say in your MC on Alun Harries' contribution, "that I've ever been hit in the face in my life". This is amazing. Having been hit in the face more often than I care to recall - and having been the one doing the hitting on more than a few occasions - I'd always assumed this was something everybody must have experienced, but clearly not. John Jarrold alluded to my 'violent past' in an issue of PREVERT a few months back and it was, in fact, the way he and the others stared at me (after an early MEXICON meeting down here, when conversation turned to such matters) when I began casually reminiscing on my own experiences in this area that I began to realise they might not be quite as common as I'd imagined. It's not that I do, or did, find violence enjoyable but rather that I had no choice in the matter. Peer-pressure is a powerful force and I'm no more immune to it than anyone is. On the council housing estate where I spent my childhood pecking order was decided by fighting and there really was no opting out. Passive resistance wasn't an option either since those threatening you would not so much pause to ponder its philosophical implications as proceed to kick your head in. I know we're only talking childhood brawls here but nevertheless things did sometimes get pretty ugly and people did sometimes require hospital treatment. There's not room enough here to go into this to any great extent but it's something I fully intend to write a full piece about in the future.

I find smoking as unpleasant as every other non-smoker but I wouldn't dream of insisting that those few of my friends who do smoke were forbidden to do so in my flat. Since the only times I really find it totally intolerable are first thing in the morning (for about a half-hour or so after waking I feel as yecchie as most people) and when I'm eating (nothing puts me off my food faster), I get by. I take issue, by the way, with your claim that smokers "...are inured to the residue of their presence exuding from the walls and furniture like a poltergeist for days after they've left", though I do agree that this is the most nauseating aspect of the whole thing. Thing is, you see, the guy who was until recently the only smoker in the office where I work once admitted: "When I come down in the morning and go into the lounge where me and the missus have been smoking the previous evening the stench almost knocks me over, and I'm a smoker! So yeah, I got a lot of sympathy with you non-smokers over that one."

Hmmn. When I put this sheet in the typer and started tapping away I thought I'd get in comments on four or five zines. Funny how the page fills up almost before you realise it, isn't it?

This has been a special Everything-Coming-Apart-At-The-Seams production of FISH HELMET for the fifth mailing of FRANK'S APA and it was brought to you by Rob Hansen of 9A Greenleaf Rd., East Ham, London E6 1DX. It's now 11.20pm 29/2/84.

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...and here we are again after a leave of absence from FRANK'S occasioned by Other Projects. Since some of those Other Projects have yet to be fully resolved this issue of FISH HELMET is, I'm afraid, the bare minimum necessary to keep me from being cast into the outer darkness and could be subtitled, I suppose, as 'The Fanzine of Inconsequential Natter'. This particular sentence should take me nicely up to the end of my opening colophon which ends, as you'll see, just about here....

WHEN I GET HOME FROM A HARD DAY AT THE OFFICE...all I want to do is lie about the place scratching my bum and vegetating in front of the telly, and I'd kinda like my trusty old hound to bring my my slippers...if I had a trusty old hound, that is. Or slippers. This, however, is not what happens, oh no. As you may or may not have heard I currently have a female American fan staying with me and every evening this week she's started nagging me as soon as I've finished my tea. Being a fan this nagging takes the form of urging me to get on with my fanac

"Whenya gonna fan yer ac?", is about the way she puts it.

Have you noticed, by the way, that Americans are Not Like Us? I mean, they speak with these odd accents. Not that this is always a bad thing. Sometimes our conversations proceed thus:

Avedon: -(says something unintelligible)-

Rob (wittily): "Huh?" (makes comment of his own)

Avedon (puzzled): "What?"

So it is that domestic harmony is generated by mutual incomprehensibility.

**

You may recall that when the last FISH HELMET appeared, many moons ago, it was a xeroxed edition due to a technical fault in the mighty Greenleaf Road presses. You do? Good. Well anyway, what with MEXICON an' all I've not had time to give the problem the attention it deserved and for long months my Gestetner has lain in a state of disrepair. Recently, however, I noticed a nut and washer lying in a depression under the paper feed tray and I wondered if this might be the source of the problem (not for nothing do I have an HNC in Mechanical Engineering - it cost plenty). I discovered where these went, replaced them, did a test run, and found that all appears to be hunky-dory once more. Which is why this is once again a mimeoed production. (If it isn't, and if I have to photocopy this from one of the few good copies to come through as happened last time, I'm going to look a right wally.)

**

WHILE WE WERE AT MEXICON...the case against Knockabout Comics and Airlift Books (who, as you doubtless recall, were facing prosecution under the Obscene Publications Act for publishing 'drugs related literature') reached its conclusion at the Old Bailey. The defendants were acquitted on all charges. Great news you say, and you're right but the story isn't over yet. Most reasonable people would assume that, having been found innocent the defendants would now have their stock (worth more than £6000 and impounded by the police over two years ago) returned to them. Not so. They have to go to the courts again and satisfy a magistrate that the police should never have confiscated this material and that it should be returned to them. Since a single magistrate hardly constitutes the 'twelve good men and true' who formed the jury at the Old Bailey trial, and since magistrates routinely take the police side in disputes this is by no means a formality. So much for the British sense of 'fair play', eh?

RETURN TO SENDER.....

Well, on June the 9th I did it again.(No, not that). Once again I found myself on a CND march, this time in the company of Avedon Carol and Martin Tudor. We started off by meeting outside FORBIDDEN PLANET and originally there were supposed to be four of us...only Lucy "I'll march by myself if no-one else turns up" Huntzinger didn't show. Had some wimpy excuse about having ate too much meat, smoked too much dope, drunk too much (about two pints), and over-slept.

The march set off from Hyde Park and as usual there was the problem of which banner to march behind. Last time the Pickersgills and I had marched behind Scottish CND (Lord knows why...) but this time we were looking for something more appropriate. So naturally enough we ended up in the Welsh CND section only for some inexplicable reason or other Avedon and Martin didn't seem terribly enthralled by this choice. After a while of having to put up with Avedon's cracks about "...lousy Welsh cooks..." (don't ask) I was about to ask her just-who-she-wanted-to-march-behind-and-it-didn't-matter-to-me-anyway-as-all-I-wanted-was-a-bit-of-peace-and-quiet when the answer presented itself. Marching up through the column of groups waiting to leave the park came a small banner-carrying group who were being applauded by most everyone when they saw the name on their banner: EMBARRASSED AMERICANS AGAINST REAGAN.

"Them", said Avedon, "I wanna march with them".

This was fine with Martin and me (it was a cool banner after all) so we wormed our way up to they were starting from and fell-in with the banner carriers. As if to prove the theory that there really are only a few thousand people in the world (the rest being cardboard cut-outs) one of the them turned out to have been a student at the same Washington DC college where Avedon had learned sign language (not that Avedon is deaf, y'understand, but she wanted to learn how to easily communicate with them) and in no time at all their hands were flashing about, making the sort of arcane gestures not usually seen outside the pages of a DR.STRANGE comicbook. Since the only two signs I know are used to tell someone to 'fuck off' or to indicate that the person next to me is a wanker I didn't play too large a part in the conversation.

The really neat thing about marching under EMBARRASSED AMERICANS AGAINST REAGAN was watching the reactions of the bystanders. For the most part they seemed delighted by the banner and either burst into applause or cheered or both, but some didn't. Certain elderly people, who looked like American tourists, watched stone-faced as we marched on by. This aside the response of the spectators was heady wine and the Americans around us, as well as those marching under AMERICANS AGAINST AMERICAN NUCLEAR IMPERIALISM, were all in favour of splitting off from the main body and marching on the American Embassy until it was pointed out to them that this sort of thing could result in them being deported.

In spite of her multiple nameless ailments Avedon held up pretty well through most of the march but by the time we all assembled in Trafalgar Square she was beginning to flag and was in dire need of Coke. There was only one thing for it: MacDonalds. While Coke was enough for Avedon Martin and myself partook of their famous fare- he had a fishburger while I feasted on an Egg McMuffin ("The perfect food" - M.Edwards).

"Jeez, I just can't believe you guys are actually eating that stuff!", said Avedon, nose wrinkling in disgust. Since Egg McMuffins are not usually taken nasally or intravenously this seemed a pretty strange observation; but there y'go.

An evening around at the Pickersgills spent mocking Lucy, sitting drinking beer on the balcony, watching Concorde fly over and saying Things about Dick Buggeron seemed the perfect end to the day. Although travelling home on the tube and not encountering Nazis (as we had the night before) seemed pretty good as well. That's it. End of stencil, end of zine, time for bed.

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It's Thursday 23rd August and before the night is out I have to both type and run off this issue's two pages; run off the final five pages of EPSILON 16 and collate around 30 copies for SILICON tomorrow; pack for the con; take a bath. This being so I suppose I'd better get on with it....

(I've just realised...one week from today I'll be in the closing stages of a fifteen hour flight. Fifteen hours? That's far too many...) Mailing comments...

CLOUD CHAMBER (Langford): I assume the collection of Gore Vidal essays you picked up at SEACON was the recent PINK TRIANGLE & YELLOW STAR which covers the period 1976 - 1982 ? I agree that it's excellent and would also recommend his earlier collections ON OUR OWN NOW (US: HOMAGE TO DANIEL SHAYS, Collected Essays 1952 - 1972) and MATTERS OF FACT AND OF FICTION, Essays 1973 - 1976, always assuming you haven't read them already (and even if you have, come to that). Vidal on lit.crit (or 'bookchat') is eerily reminiscent of West at times while his disparaging comment on the appreciation of writing in America ("the land of the literal, the home of the dull") could almost have been written by Joseph Nicholas. This is not fannish writing but if you appreciate fannish writing then these books won't disappoint you.

I'd been looking for a copy of ON OUR OWN NOW for some time before finally coming across one in Lear's Bookshop during a recent visit to Cardiff, Lear's being a shop I'm sure you're familiar with, Dave. For some reason they keep books on their shelves longer than most shops (the copy of OOOON I in 1976) and on many occasions while still living in the Old Country I was able to buy up the complete works of a newly discovered favourite, something which greatly accelerated my consumption of SF during my formative years. Also in Cardiff, just off the Hayes, is another branch of Lear's that many, including Kev Williams and myself, regard as the best remainder bookshop they've encountered. Bringing this mc full circle, it was in this very shop that I acquired CONVERSTATIONS WITH GORE VIDAL (a book cobbled together from various interviews Vidal has given over the years) and both this and the shop itself are also recommended. Next time you're in Wales visiting your parents, Dave, a trip down to Cardiff could prove well worth your while.

No, I can't do it. I can't leave this bit without quoting from that last book. Here's Vidal in an interview given to AMERICAN FILM in 1977:

'Gregory Peck and I were talking about Ronald Reagan, and I said, "I wouldn't want a professional screen actor to be President of the United States, no matter how nice or bright he is because he's spent his entire life being moved about like a piece of furniture. He's used to being used."I couldn't imagine an actor as president. I could imagine a director. After all, he's a hustler, a liar, a cheat - plainly presidential.'

LITTLE BOXES (Warren): Like you I have a Catholic father and Protestant mother, but unlike you I was raised a Protestant. This was due to what was, I suppose, a prejudice against Catholicism on the part of my mother who made it perfectly plain to my father before their marriage that under no circumstances would she allow their children to be brought up Catholic. This is something for which I've always been profoundly grateful to her since Catholic conditioning is a lot harder to throw off than the conditioning of the relatively mild strains of Protestantism that hold sway in South Wales. Unfortunately, however, her

stand was not without cost - mostly to my father. While he accepted her demand neither his priest nor his parents would and this led, ultimately, to him splitting with both his church and his family. He hasn't practised his faith since that time, over 30 years ago, yet still maintains that he's a Catholic, and I was 8 or 9 years old before I even knew I had any paternal grandparents. Though a reconciliation was achieved then, largely due to my mother's efforts, I was never able to regard them with the same warmth and affection I felt towards my maternal grandmother, who had been there all my young life after all. This was my loss and theirs too, and I still find it incredible that so much bad blood was generated by something as stupid as religion. I won't go into one of my anti-Christianity riffs here, though I can get really worked about about that particular blight on the human spirit when roused, but move on instead to something that rises out of all this.

You say, Anne, "I do have a sense of religion, but I don't believe" and I think I feel something similar, but not quite the same. I suppose I could best express it as "I am an Atheist but I accept that there's a spiritual dimension to the human experience". The more I've thought about this over the course of many years I've realised that it all comes together as a form of nature-worship (ie. paganism) which seems to make more sense to me on every level (intellectual, emotional, intuitive) than any of the many organised religions I've looked into. I'll go into all this further when I've got the time and space to do so and I'll try to explain why I think Christianity lies at the root of most things that are wrong with life in the West today. Bet you can't wait, eh?

If I try and come up with any more words to fill out the rest of the page I'm not going to get everything done for SILICON so I present for your edification the last remaining bit of electrostencil from that mysterious 'aborted project' referred to in FISH HELMET 5 - blatant filler.....

CLIPPING # 2....

ARCHAEO-SCATOLOGY — studying the contents of ancient sewers, cesspits and latrines — has only been a serious business for 10 years and James Grieg, a DoE botanist from Birmingham University, can't understand why the penny took so long to drop. In *Current Archaeology*, he writes that in terms of human relevance to our forebears, it is richer than any other area of archaeology, uncovering the most obscure aspects of past life.

"You get very close to someone by studying the meal of a particular person on a particular day, in a particular year," he told *People*. "Eating a meal is a very

Opening up a rich vein

personal thing. It's easy for archaeologists to get divorced from that aspect."

Grieg, 36, is one of 10 university specialists who are studying plant remains from the DoE's rescue excavations but only three or four British botanists share his fascination with latrines.

His enthusiasm is infectious. "If you find a coprolite — a turd, actually — mixed up with a lot of

rubbish you can see what was actually eaten. It needs a lot of luck. My most rewarding discovery was some black peppercorn which came from the tropics. There is evidence that imports like that were made in the 17th or 18th centuries. They were probably eaten whole, in a stew. I made one myself: it wasn't bad, if a little sharp."

Archaeo-scatology actually came of age last year, during the Queen of Denmark's visit to the Jorvik dig at York. An object was placed reverently in her hands. She enquired what it was. "Madam," she was told, "that is a turd from the 9th century." Her Majesty was not unamused.

THE GUARDIAN Saturday March 12 1983.

This has been FISH HELMET 7 from Rob Hansen of 9A Greenleaf Rd., East Ham, London E6 1DX, and is being produced to meet minac requirements for FRANK'S APA and so prevent its author from being cast into the outer dark. 23/8/84.

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Yes, Alyson, I did survive my fifteen hour flight and also my subsequent three-week stay in your wunnerful country and flight back - but the couple of weeks immediately after damn near killed me. Everyone who's ever been to a con knows all about post-convention blues but can you imagine the horror this implies when your con has lasted, to all intents and puposes, three weeks? If not, read on.....

TAFFMAN'S RETURN

When I took off from Washington DC it was a warm summer's day but by the time I reached Gatwick winter had arrived. It was a good 20° colder than it had been in Washington and whereas DC had been sunny and pleasant London was experiencing torrential rain and was thoroughly miserable. What made it even more miserable was that it was 7am in the morning, I'd had no sleep, and I had only two hours to get to work. I made it, though not without dropping my Donald Duck hat in a puddle, and spent the next few hours concentrating on fairly mindless tasks like filing (just about all I could manage). When I left work, shortly before 1pm, the rain hadn't let up at all and neither had the general unpleasantness the day was subjecting me to. As I struggled over Blackfriars Bridge, pulling my suitcase along on its trolley with one hand and holding my umbrella into the wind with the other, I failed to notice when the flat document case wedged in between the case and the trolley straps slipped out. When I did notice I retraced my steps, getting totally soaked to the skin in the process (wringing the water out of my socks when I got home was a whole barrel of laughs) but there was no sign of it. Fortunately the notes on my trip (the one wholly irreplaceable item on me) was in my jacket pocket, as were my house-keys which I'd removed from the bag shortly before leaving the office and without which I'd've been in real trouble. However there were things in there I was really pissed off at having lost, things like my Friends In Space badge, fanzines, photos given to me by Avedon, various high-priced comics, and like that. Back home I fell asleep at 4pm, awoke 3am, had a lie-in till 4am, bathed, wrote a letter, had breakfast, and set off for work at 8.20.

Actually I was unwise in the way I handled jet lag on my return and I suffered for it. That same evening, a Friday, I hit the sack at 11pm and woke at 1.25pm. I woke exactly the same time the next day - having retired at midnight - and that 27 hours sleep in two night totally fucked me up the rest of the week.

Had a pleasant surprise the Wednesday after my return when I received a call from the local police station. My last bag had been handed in and they wanted me to call round and collect it. I whooped with joy, collected the bag, and was surprised at how many of the item within I hadn't even realised I was missing. These included my LACon II Programme Book, postcards of San Francisco, two copies of a 'Journal of Do-It-Yourself Mental Health', a copy of the invitation Rich Coad and Stacy Scott printed up for the party they threw for me in San Francisco, and a weirdly wonderful postcard given to me by Stu Shiffman that showed the Brooklyn Bridge as it is now and as it looked while being built a century ago depending on which angle you looked at it. Getting all this stuff back cheered me up no end and by that point I needed cheering up having come down with a bug then doing the rounds whose symptoms included diarrhoea and strange pains in the stomach and groin. And no sooner had I shaken this off than I came down with a real bastard of a cold that led to me having a few days off work that were spent in no more productive activity than lying in bed feeling ill and which is still persisting to some degree even now.

So that was my return from my vacation - how was yours?

EXCUSES seem to be all I've been offering lately for both the length of the last few issues of this zine and for the straight-on-stencil contents but in actual fact I've only ever once done more than minimum page count. Oh, I always had grand plans for FISH HELMET, but dreams have a habit of crumbling in the face of reality, even a fannish reality of other commitments, and though I made all the early mailings I soon fell into a pattern of last minute key-bashing and the minimum of activity needed to keep from being cast into the outer dark. The road to minac, in my case at least, was paved with good intentions that came to naught. In such a situation it's perhaps not too surprising that I haven't exactly been one of the stars of FRANK'S APA, but then it's the very real 'stars' of this apa who have kept me writing for it for so long....and then I'll miss most when I leave.

I joined FRANK'S when it started so as not to miss out on anything but, as the paragraph above indicates, I don't think apas are a form of fannish activity that my heart is really in. Having railed against the way apas were responsible for the decline of American fandom in the late-70s I feared that they might have an adverse affect on British fandom and, to some extent, they have. 1984 has not exactly been the most bountiful year on record for fanzines and this must be in part due to the way the apas are acting as fannish black holes that suck in much of the available talent, allowing little or no light to escape the event horizons of their closed memberships. The stated preference of the two Franks to date for no material originally produced for the apa being seen beyond it only makes matters worse.

The apas came at a time when they were needed in British fandom and for a while they generated a lot of excitement and got many writing again who hadn't put pen to paper in far too long. For some they probably still do but for me, alas, no longer. No, I'd prefer to direct all my future efforts to fandom at large, maybe try to get EPSILON back on a quarterly schedule, provide some sort of example of regularity that might, with luck, help get the currently rather sluggish fanzine fandom over here moving again. All of which is my way of saying that this is probably my last contribution to FRANK'S APA (you'll know for sure if I fail to make the mailing after next). It's been fun, and I'm going to miss reading some of you, but it's time for me to move on.

Most of you will have read in Dave Lahgford's last CLOUD CHAMBER about the accusations of mismanagement laid against American TAFF administrator Avedon Carol by Richard Bergeron. Below is a statement on the affair by D. West which he's asked me to circulate and which will also appear in the next EPSILON.....

"As the losing candidate I wish to make it absolutely clear that I have no complaints whatsoever about either the result or the administration of the 1983/84 TAFF election. I consider that the attacks made upon the integrity of Avedon Carol as North American TAFF administrator are wholly unjustified and unjustifiable and represent nothing more solid than slurs and innuendos arising from personal animosity and malice. To date no evidence at all has been produced to show that Avedon Carol is guilty of any wrongdoing, and I therefore call upon those concerned either to produce their proofs without further delay and equivocation or to make a full public withdrawal of all their allegations. In the event that this is not speedily done I urge fans everywhere to join me in publicly condemning with the utmost severity the behaviour of Avedon Carol's attackers."

D West, 26th October 1984.

This has been probably the final issue of FISH HELMET, a straight-on-stencil production from Rob Hansen, 9A Greenleaf Rd., East Ham, London E6 1DX.
28/10/84.....

HARRY ADAM KNIGHT: The Interview

"The New Stephen King" - Starburst Magazine

"THE FUNGUS is the only book they should have put V.A.T. on" - Martin Amis.

I met Harry Adam Knight in a bar off Greek Street. Harry drinks a lot. To forget? To remember? To remember to forget? Perhaps both. Or all three. He certainly forgets a lot. When I met him I had to remind him who he was: Harry Adam Knight, best-selling author of CARNOSAUR, SLIMER and now, THE FUNGUS. People have called him the new Stephen King. I was talking to his wife recently and she called him the new Stephen King. Then some time ago I was browsing among the racks at W.H. Smiths, Kings Cross Station, when someone beside me picked up a copy of SLIMER and asked me if I had read it. "They say he's the new Stephen King," said the tall blond nordic schoolboy as we exchanged addresses.

There, that's at least two people who have called him the new Stephen King.

Was it simply a co-incidence, I asked him, or an inspired piece of marketing, that he, Stephen King, Ellery Queen and the Bishop of Durham were all named after chess pieces. He remained enigmatically silent. "My game is Badminton, actually," he confided. "I like the cut and thrust, the interplay of tensions, the savage unremitting pressures, the foreplay, the afterplay, and especially the shuttlecocks. It's a bit like writing really. I heard that every time Jeffrey Archer finishes a chapter he likes a nice shower and a rub-down. Well, me too. The only difference is that he has a Malaysian masseuse on call but I have to go down the public baths."

He laughed, with just the slightest hint of self-deprecation. I was to hear that laugh many times as we spoke. It was one of the most attractive things about him. In fact, it was the only attractive thing about him, unless you counted his apparent ability to order endless rounds of drinks at £6.00 a time.

Across the street the discreet flashing red and purple sign of the Cosmopolitan Cinema Club reminded me of Harry's keen interest in the cinema and films, especially of the continental variety. I asked him which director he thought might do justice to his own work.

"I've always admired the sub-Hitchcockian genre," he said. "So it would have to be Bill Forsyth. I like the cut and thrust, the interplay of tensions, the savage unremitting pressures, and those cute Scottish accents. I think THE FUNGUS would benefit from a really moody sound-track by someone like Madonna, don't you? You don't have her phone number I suppose...?"

I asked Harry about his plans for the future.

"Drink a bit more I suppose. Oh, the next book? I dunno. I suppose there's a book to come out of all this anxiety about AIDS, but I don't fancy doing the research. I may be going to Australia soon. At least that's what a gypsy told me. I think if I survive that I should have enough horrific experiences to last for quite a while. What do they call that massive Australian spider, ten-feet across, that lurks under toilet-bowls then jumps out and garrottes yer knob...?"

"Funnel-Web?"

"something like that. Anyway that reminds me - must take a leak. Get 'em in while I'm gone, eh?"

CARNOSAUR, SLIMER, and THE FUNGUS are all available from Star Books, at slightly less than the latest novel by Jeffrey Archer. In case of difficulty your local bookseller will be pleased to order them ~~for you~~, although he will probably have to order from a large wholesaler such as Bookwise, as Star don't like sending their reps round to small, pokey, unprofitable places such as your local bookseller. And who can blame them.