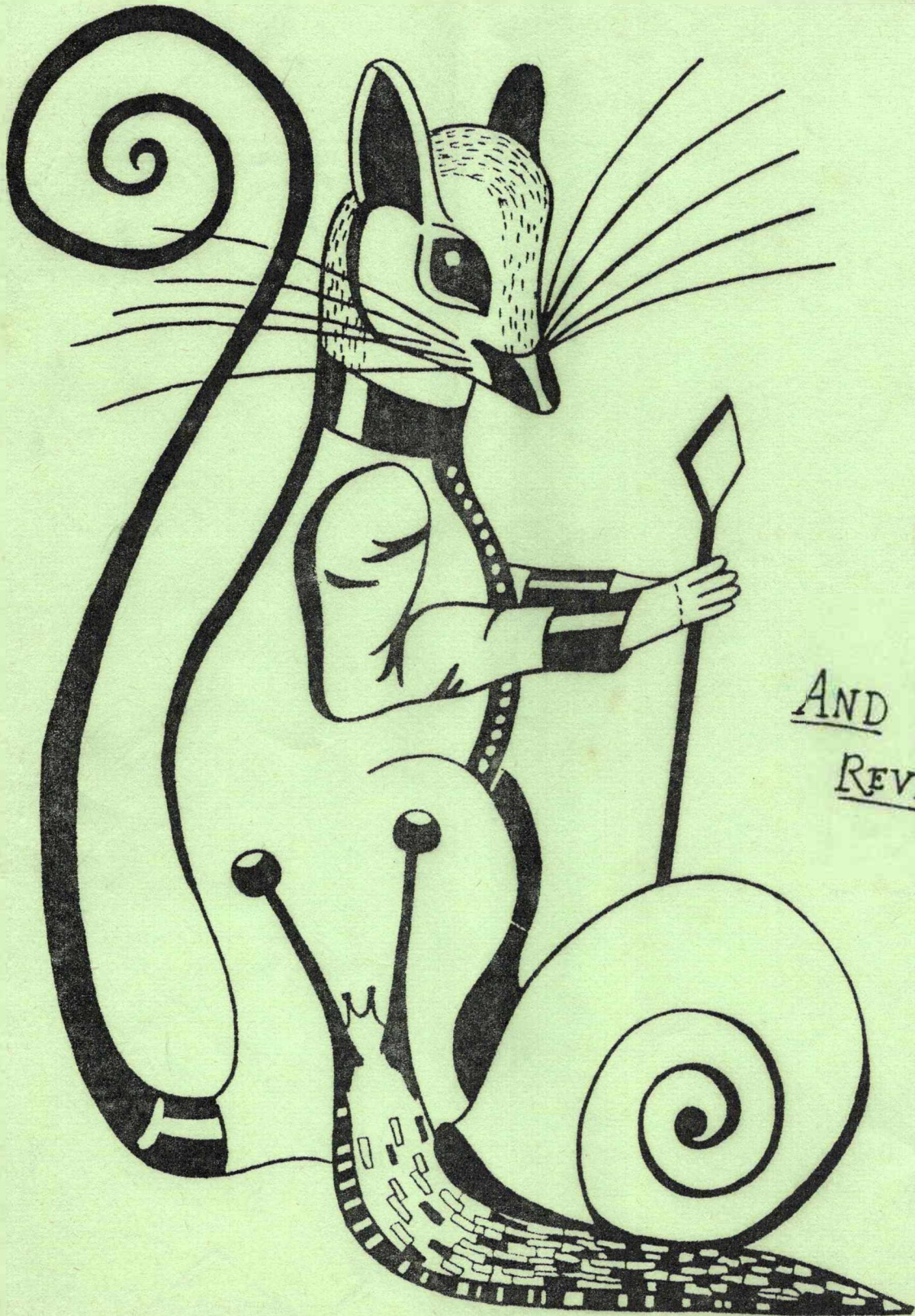


THE SNAIL'S COUNTDOWN



4

3

2

1

AND THE RAT'S
REVENGE

THE SMILE'S COUNTDOWN

- 4
- 3
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AND THE RATS
REVENGE

Introductory ramblings in which everything is justified but the margins...

I meant Sorgenkind to be my 3rd and last personal fanzine, but as everybody knows, killing fanzines is tricky, as however uninspiring your last issue was, locs seem to arrive regardless, and angry loccists stare you in the eye at cons and demand to be told when the next issue will be out! You know full well, even though most of them don't say it, what what they're interested in is not more of your trite little thoughts, padded out with jokes about 12th century philatelists, but seeing their own wonderful expose of the Racinian unities as a fannish metaphor printed in smudged and mispaginated glory in your fanzine! This time Darroll Pardoe was the main culprit, that is not to say he threatened to throw me off Pig's mailing list in the next purge if my fanzine did not appear forthwith, for of course he didn't, but because before his letter, the first loc, turned up, I could still kid myself that there wouldn't be another Dragonburst/Music/Sorgenkind, but after I'd read it, laughed and thought: "Damn, I want to print that!", I knew that there would be. So here I am, children, (she says in here best Waterland manner), writing for you with panache, brilliance and plenty of brackets.

The countdown begins with Seacon. I've finally told my friend and immediate superior, Judith Hibbins, that I'm planning to leave at the end of the month. My conscience is clear, no hate letters from the Predicast hit squad have arrived in the post and my overtime facility has not been cancelled. I can set out to Brighton with light heart and heavy bag.

Cinderella goes to the seaside

In Smiths, Victoria Station, I run into Lilian dressed in best convention purple. "I've just spent 61 quid on new clothes!" she confesses with a certain pride, before adding, and rather spoiling the effect, "but I'll probably take half of them back."

I look down at my own faded jeans, which for some reason have just won the audition to go to Seacon. "There weren't any good clothes in Orpington," I apologise feebly, "otherwise I'd have bought something too."

In this instance I'm paying lip service to the sacred cult of dressing to feel good which can be digested down to a single piece of wisdom: "A new jump suit can take you further in fandom than a good fanzine." It's a damn sight cheaper too! I begin to wish I'd just gone out shopping instead of labouring to produce the pink and white masterpiece known to the world as TNH 5.

British Rail has declared the day a Sunday for its own unfathomable reasons (though Peter-Fred's prepared to swear they declared a Saturday up in Birmingham!), so the train we've been planning to catch isn't running. We retire to the BR cafe, from the safe concealment of which we are able to spot the James clan passing by. "I'd know that stripy scarf anywhere!" remarks Lilian. "And the bald patch!" I add, for Graham is bending down to discourage one of the offspring from immolating itself in the cafe window. By the time the train finally arrives we've also discovered Darroll and Pardoe and a couple of CUSF members. The train proceeds to stop at every railway station ever opened between London and the Sussex coast, and we collectively fail to read warhoon, the NME, Typer at the Gates of Dawn and the Economist. It's a hot day.

"Do you think I should put on a T-shirt?" Lilian keeps asking.

"Go on" "Don't bother" and "Well, you could!" I variously answer in my characteristic positive fashion. Lilian takes the spirit of my advice and dithers, only to regret it when we're dragging our luggage to the hotel in the sun.

"The first thing I'll do when we get our room is put on a T-shirt," she threatens. In fact, the first thing we do when we get to our room is take lessons in amateur

lockpicking to counteract a stubborn tendency on the part of our keys not to open the door.

"This is ridiculous," mutters Lilian as she strains to turn the key, "I'm hurting my fingers!"

Before the whimperings can turn into an explosion, I hastily volunteer to go off in search of a porter.

"Are you a porter?" I ask the first man I spot coming up the stairs, who just happens to be sporting a prominent bunch of keys.

"No!" he denies, sounding insulted.

"But you are something to do with the hotel?" I persist.

"Umm, yes..." he admits reluctantly.

Perhaps he's the manager, I think, but drag him back to our door none the less. For him, needless to say, it opens first time round with not the tiniest hint of a problem. I try, unconvinced, and for me too the miracle of the opening door occurs. But he leaves before giving his blessing to Lilian's key, which naturally then refuses to work. We both have a go, mainly at threatening it, until Lilian finally forces it to turn through a well nigh unrepeatable combination of will-power and digital agony. We decide it'll have to go back to the porter anyway. Not a promising start to the convention!

Downstairs people are milling around the foyer, somewhat at a loose end. It turns out they're all afraid to go somewhere and sit down in case they never find each other again! Nobody knows where anyone will be, so they're forced to be in the only safe place available, at the confluence of stairs, lift and hotel entrance.

In a shocking breach with tradition, Caroline has decided that the women's apa meeting will be held at six.

"But we were going to watch the Tube," protests Lilian.

Caroline gives this idea short shrift, along the lines of "Well, if you don't like it, come along and arrange another meeting," totally failing to see that we can hardly turn up at six, order everyone to meet at a later hour and scamper back to the telly, at least not with the assembled might of the apa sitting around looking as if they're having the sort of conversation that only occurs once in a convention, or at the very least swapping the most intimate details of their sex life or latest artistic project. So like good little girls we show up in the 6th floor powder room, late it is true, but just in time to be turned out by the hotel constabulary (a WPC on toilet duty, I suppose!).

"I don't understand why Caroline's so fixated on holding apa meetings in the bog anyway," complains Lilian as we troop out, as if the whole farce has vindicated her position!

Everybody (well Pam and Lilian) professes to be going to 'hackle' (sic) the BSFA meeting, but when I enter the darkened hall where it is supposed to be held (foul deeds may only take place under the cover of darkness, cackle, cackle), a slide-show on how to communicate with aliens is in progress. Perhaps this is Alan Dorey's latest masterplan to cope with the society's lack of contact with its ever-shifting membership, I think. But then the lights go up and there's not a BSFA member in sight. Eventually an unpromising trio set up shop on the podium and Dorey starts to drone. There's no sign of the hacklers, no sign of foul deeds and it's not even dark enough for Peter-Fred and I to enjoy ourselves properly in the back row, so we go out in search of something more exciting... only to fall into the fan-fiction panel. Here, Graham James is dissecting a few choice specimens of the 'art' and Steve Green is bouncing up and down, looking defensive, presumably because

he's already had his say and has to rely on his Dutch second to take up the correct cudgels. But before anything can be resolved, an interfering tannoy reminds us all that Dave Langford is about to start an hour early in Hall 3.

Langford is in his element. Admittedly the aircraft hanger cum gynasium of Hall 3 is probably not quite his scene, but the subject of his tirade, the deficiencies of certain well-known authors, clearly is. Battlefield Earth gets it again, and in some detail, along with Dave's latest protege, the tasteless Frederick Dunstan. Stephen Donaldson is awarded a Collins Gem dictionary on condition he throws away the vastly inaccurate one he is presumed to be using at present, and Anne McCaffrey gets a saccharine dragon for Moreta and her compatriots of the endlessly unpronounceable names. Dave aptly describes the inevitable impression scene as a cross between first communion, first sex and initiation into the fourth form gang. The audience laps it all up, and quite rightly too.

The evening judders onwards. Martin lures us up to his room on the pretence there's a party on, but naturally there isn't. We bully Maureen Porter into keeping her engagement with Ian Sorensen to appear in his latest musical.

"You're cruel," she complains. "You only want to laugh at me!"

"Of course!" agrees Peter-Fred, grinning wickedly.

I try to get some mileage out of announcing in a very loud voice that we're off to practise for an orgy, but no-one seems very interested, or maybe they think we're just trying to show off.

Apart from the orgy, the evening feels a bit motiveless. People wander around trying to discover if anyone's holding a room party and always coming back to the same depressing conclusion that no-one is. I keep looking for foreign fans to chat up, I mean talk to, but to be honest, I heard more people speaking foreign languages while I was going through Victoria station than anywhere in the con. My best encounter is with a pair of Polish or Czech fans who nearly buy the fanzine until I'm forced to admit there's nothing about Asian or African SF in it. I feel they may not have found many British fanzines to satisfy their tastes! And, the nearest I come to using my interpreters badge is to reassure someone that the German for computer is, yes, computer!

Things have learned to walk that ought to crawl...

The next day dawns fair, far too fair, as the morning sun wakes me up an hour and a half earlier than necessary, and although my eyes feel like lead weights, the cardigan I'm using as a pillow substitute has turned into a flat lumpy piece of distraction with none of the magic sleep-inducing powers of the real thing (or even pillows). So, I lie and think, and turn over and think, and do everything but bounce up and down on the bed and think. Most of my thinking sounds remarkably like: "What a shame it's not my turn for breakfast today when I'm so awake!" and the rest of it is closely linked to the interrelated topics of sun, beach and ice-cream.

Peter-Fred and Lilian finally go off for breakfast and I'm left with the luxurious feeling of being all alone at last. You see, I usually get landed with no key as I'm more likely to be with Lilian or Peter-Fred than either is to be with the other, which is a fine arrangement for 90% of the time, but does mean I'm never alone, and there's no escape route should I wish to get away from EVERYBODY. I spend most of this precious time alone trying to work out how to drape my bikini with coloured diaphonous scarves and wishing that someone else was there to tie the knots while I held the material in place. Eventually, looking not so much alluring as eccentric, I declare

myself ready to make the perilous journey across the third floor landing to Kate Davies' boudoir for the orgy dress rehearsal. Kate, fittingly, has been allocated the Marie Antoinette suite, a rococo marvel complete with period chairs and sweeping balcony. The scene has a Zolaesque quality to it; Kate, the witty courtesan, is busy at the mirror, while we, the habitués of her salon, lounge around in various stages of decadent undress, swapping gossip and bon mots. Only Stuart, the director of our little piece is unaffected by the general languid torpor of the assembly and breaks the atmosphere by forcing us to work, first by describing how the scene should work, then making us walk through it, or in the case of the orgy participants, writhe through it! After a couple of undignified scrambles on the carpet of the 3rd floor landing in full view of the lift, I'm almost relieved when security bounds along to tell us smugly that we shouldn't be doing it.

"And where are your badges," demands the more obnoxious of the pair for good measure. Peter-Fred and I salute mockingly and head back to the room, in my case to dress.

It seems like a good idea to go and watch Roger Zelazny since the committee has taken such trouble to ship him across the Atlantic and you don't get him every convention. By the time we get there, the speech has already begun and I can't seem to concentrate properly. Zelazny's voice is very gravelly and harsh on the ear and though I'm almost interested by some of the concepts like the one about how his written universes can't be totally rationalistic as he doesn't see this one as being so, I only listen to one sentence in three and take in perhaps one in ten. The aircraft hanger is freezing which doubly annoying because I know that outside it's a lovely, sunny day. As soon as the questions prove to be the fiasco they normally are, assisted by what I unfairly come to consider John Brunner's own personal toy, the mobile mike, I drag Peter-Fred away determinedly beachwards. Among the people still populating the foyer, which has not yet quite become solely the domain of security bullies, is Pam Wells. We mistakenly stop to talk to her, only to be caught by Harry Bell with a questionnaire.

"Fill it in now!" he orders.

"But..." I demur

"Well, by tomorrow," he relents, but adds: "You've got to do it off the top of your head, you're not meant to agonise over it!"

"Sure, we won't!" I agree

So, we take the form away with us to the beach and agonise:

"How can I say who is the best science fiction author. I could tell them my favourite but not the best!"

"I can't put down Battlefield Earth, I've not read it; Langford might be having us all on!"

"Do they mean the person or his works?"

"I wouldn't take SF to a desert island anyway! Won't 10 fanzines do instead?"

"Books aren't illiterate, only the people who write them!"

Eventually an ambitious wave breaks across our feet and the strap of my bag and we beat a hasty retreat. Subsequently the questionnaire forms are completed with praiseworthy randomness and returned hastily and well-folded to Harry Bell. After that the Contravention questionnaire is a cinch!

Instead of getting cooler, the afternoon seems to warm up as it progresses, as if the sun is being sent back across the sky for a second run at the day. It feels like an afternoon from a former life. Although I know in my head that that former life was only last summer, I can't get over the wonder of it. all, the wonder of a world where you don't need coats, socks and thick woolly

jumpers just to venture outside. Long before the sun's even begun to falter, it's time to return to the Metropole and redon my bikini and precarious arrangement of diaphonous scarves. Naturally, this time round nothing works.

"No, I can't wear it like that!" I say from a contorted position, natural perhaps to hunchbacks, but not to me, "look, I'm almost bent double."

Peter-Fred undoes the knot I left in especially so I could find my way back to how the costume had worked before.

"Now I'll never find it," I castigate him, irritably disregarding the fact that said knot has not been of the slightest use so far. Peter-Fred neatly reties the costume and marvel of marvels it works and I'm left high and dry mid-shout with nothing to complain about. Peter himself is looking, well, underdressed in a ragged and precariously-placed loin cloth, and the misgivings I've been nuturing ever since I saw how little the men in the orgy would be wearing return in force. Over in Kate's boudoir I swig at Brian Ameringen's apricot brandy, and try to sink into the theatrical atmosphere. "You always wanted to be an actress," I remind myself. But orgies weren't quite what I'd had in mind. We troop over to a spare gymnasium for the photo call. For some reason our modest little group attracts a lot of attention as we huddle together on a blanket to keep warm and moderately rehearse our part. Photographers flock around us for all the world as if they can't find a better subject for their film. Still, when the masquerade begins, we participants do get a good view from the balcony of the aircraft hanger and can keep our eyes peeled for people we'd like to invite to join the orgy (my tastes in this respect diverged a bit from those expressed by the two men I was with!) The best, or perhaps I mean worst, moment of the whole affair is when the bishop, ostensibly a character from the Silmarillion, elects to sing in elvish, and what comes out is a gregorian chant to exactly match his vestments.

"See, I told you he was really meant to be the Pope!" I hiss at Peter-Fred. From then on I live in mortal fear of any of the other contestants taking it into their head to sing, though thankfully they don't. However I'm also right, to my cost, about the script. I insist that Luke Skywalker is wearing a script in his boot as he and Princess Leah parade across the hall.

"Don't be silly," says Peter-Fred. "See, they didn't say a word!" he adds as they exit harmlessly. But my instincts are right, and there is indeed a script, which is wheeled out when the judges depart to do the judging. It might even have been funny if my feet had been less cold and the jokes more audible.

The orgy, the last turn of the fancy dress, is over very quickly compared to the waiting around and rehearsing that went into it. It takes us longer to reach stage centre than anticipated, so we hardly get settled into the writhing and other decadent acts planned before the swordsmen come on stage, which is our cue to flee in panic. I find myself fortuitously at the back of the orgy blanket throughout the action and make a point of staying there. After it's all over a crowd of lascivious cameramen demand a rerun, and tired of their ogling, Kate challenges:

"Who'd like to join the orgy then!"

"Me" says one foolhardy boy

"Well, we'll have to do something about your clothes," says Kate appraisingly,

"Strip him girl!"

We set to work. His T-shirt's gone and Kate's already on his belt before the boy realises we're serious and scarpers. Another victim presents himself, obviously reckoning himself a match even for Kate Davies, but before he can get the same treatment, Anne Page intervenes to break it all up. The audience

creeps reluctantly and shamefacedly back to its seats just in time for the return of the judges. We win our category, which makes us richer by one half bottle of indifferent whisky between twenty. Big deal. Still, I feel more elated than I've been all convention. Maybe it's relief that it's all over. It can't have been excitement at winning because joining Kate, Stuart and Lisanne's entry is a bit like supporting Liverpool at Anfield - you expect your team to win anyway. But whatever it is, the evening swims by on its impetus. I feel, mistakenly perhaps, that the convention is at last moving somewhere. But, no doubt I'm wrong, for what finally drives me to bed is not weariness, but sore feet, for the convention is still hanging about on the edge of the foyer and nobody feels relaxed enough to actually sit down. I retire to bed, reflecting that I still haven't found the blonde, teutonic German of my dreams!

Headlong on the edge of boredom...

I'd really built up the Metropole breakfasts in my memory. Gosh, they have potatoes and mushrooms and hot-cross buns, I drool, and you pick it up yourself from the self-service counter so there's none of that chancy and unpleasant business of catching the waitress's eye. However, in two years all has changed, and there's no self-service, no hot-cross buns and tragedy of all tragedies, no mushrooms. Breakfast begins badly anyway because I bring down the wrong ticket and Peter-Fred's already handed in his before I notice, so has to go in without me. When I do get in I can't see him anywhere, so stand around like a wally staring hard at each table in turn, until Terry Hill takes pity on me and waves, so I go over and have breakfast with him and Moira Shearman instead. Terry's been up all night so he's much more wide awake than me.

"Do you want to hear some scandal even Langford hasn't got?" he asks. I nod blearily, intent on putting my ham roll in my bag for later consumption.

"Apparently a couple was caught copulating in public," he continues, savouring the shock value. "They got thrown out, then were found at it again in the film room. Or," he reconsiders, "maybe they were caught twice and then found in the film room. Yes, I think it was twice and they were just warned the first time."

It all sounds scarcely credible to me.

"But who were they?"

"Ah, well, I'm not sure about this..."

"That's not what you said earlier," interrupts Moira, who's obviously heard it all before, "Then you were quite positive!"

"Well," says Terry, slightly less cagily, "apparently it was someone from Birmingham, not necessarily a Brum group member, who drives a Volkswagen."

I feel this ought to mean something to me, but doesn't. It's all too much for this time of the morning at this time of the convention. Peter-Fred returns from the adjoining breakfast room where he'd been shunted by the staff and we go off to make a fresh onslaught on the programme, passing via the bookroom, which is huge, huge enough to bring out the gosh-wow instinct that's never far beneath the cynical outer veneer of my hardened fan pose. Maybe, I think, this is the black hole that's been swallowing fans since the start of the convention. Somewhere in one of the corners I'll find the stall where they're trading in BNFs or new groupies for D West. But before I can do so, the bookroom closes and we, the customers, are chivvied out in the direction of Chris Priest's speech. He's on good form, even if I've heard this plea to get out of the science fiction ghetto before. Ken Lake sits next to

me looking vaguely disapproving; I never quite establish why. All the while I've been educating my mind thus, Lilian my lazy twin's been sleeping, then watching Flashdance on the hotel video. I come back in time for the end of this gem of a movie and even catch ~~XXXX~~ the immortal line: "If you give up your dream you die!" Yes, they really do say it! Presumably the heroine's crippled, blind, invalid or maybe merely old dancing teacher gave up hers, because she's the one that does die. "What did she die of?" I ask Lilian since she's seen the film before. "Oh, she died for the plot!" replies my twin with assurance. How noble, but I hope that when it's my turn to go, I die for a better plot than that! By the end there was not a dry eye in the house, I mean bedroom (apart from Peter-Fred, the cynic! (as our heroine somersaults her way inelegantly to victory.

"Must see the beginning!" I comment. I don't quite know why the other two are laughing at me. Lilian gets her programme out:-

"Hey, we're missing a fanzine auction!"

"Fanzines! Wow! Where?"

"In the fanroom, of course!"

"What are we waiting for then!"

Peter-Fred shakes his head sadly. Sometimes it's difficult to share a room with a pair of six year olds. We dash down, across, up, along and up again to the fanroom. It's all but empty.

"Where are they?" I wail.

Flashdance and the space has gone to Lilian's head.

"I want to dance," she declares and executes a few trial steps.

"But what about the fanzines?"

Nobody knows. We go back to the cafe-like affair downstairs, which has become a de facto fanroom now that people have finally plucked up courage not to stand round the foyer. (It's funny how groups have to have their places, and how quickly fans establish these over a weekend). Lilian decides that now is the time to succumb to super-salesman D West and get his collected 'works'.

"You can't just buy one between you" he says.

"I know, I'm not buying one at all," I tell him.

"Call yourselves groupies!" he says in disgust. Then he brightens up: "How about double or quits? If you win you get it free; if you lose, it's 8 quid."

"No way!"

"Dave Ellis won," he adds enticingly.

"Forget it!"

"We're just not lucky enough!"

Seeing he's getting nowhere, D decides to give us some fatherly advice: "It's time you girls settled down and made up your mind whose groupie you want to be. You can't keep flitting around forever."

We pretend to consider the notion seriously.

"Whose groupies should we be then," I ask, "Joseph's here?"

Joseph Nicholas looks up, but doesn't seem very interested.

"Or perhaps we could be auctioned. Groupies for hire!" suggests Lilian. We decide it might be better not to pursue this line of thought, and besides it's time for the fandom vs media panel. "We'll keep your advice in mind," I promise D as we leave.

On the panel, fandom is championed by Paul Vincent and John Jarrold, while the media side is represented by the far more daunting and colourful Kate Davies and Lianne Norman. Chairing it all is Ian Sorensen, who uses his role to make jokes (with him it's the same as breathing) and try to get the two sides of the panel to disagree. This proves to be a difficult job - Paul confesses to watching Blakes 7 and playing D&D; Kate confesses to reading

and then Lisanne slags off Star Trek. Kate makes the point that books are just another medium, so in fact we're all media fans anyway, then declares that she's looking forward to Mexican, and can see no reason why fannish fandom shouldn't have its own minority interest convention, so long as it's admitting that this is just another minority interest and not the orthodox faith. The only place where rason breaks down is when Paul and John go all dewy-eyed and say that Mexican will be just like the conventions of the fifties as if they'd been around then and long to get back there.

As I try to leave after the panel I'm intercepted by the next programme item.

"Don't you want to meet Justin Ackroyd?" asks Judith Hanna. "I'm going to interview him."

I'm mildly curious, if only because he was the only one of the GUFF candidates I didn't even know by reputation, and it seemed a waste to have him over if I didn't even find who he was. I decide to stick around for a question or two. But Judith knows better. She only has an audience of four and plans on keeping us, so we're all sat round a table for an informal chat, with no chance of escape. Justin turns out to be a well-built, sandy-haired guy with a lazy, laid-back manner. He begins by drawing a rough map of Australia on the table cloth, scribbling in a few boundaries.

"That's the police state of Queensland!" he asserts. A bit of barbed wire is added for effect.

"Actually, the boundary should be there," says Judith. I wonder if this will herald an international incident as even to us neutral observers, it is obvious that the differences between Melbourne-based Justin and Sydney-aligned Judith run deep, with insults like 'British weather' and 'surfie' being bandied freely about. But eventually peace is restored when they discover a mutual interest in sheep. Australian fandom as seen by Justin Ackroyd is based on the possibly parochial view that everything happens in Melbourne, Sydney being quite marginal and Perth over the other side of the continent, and that all of Adelaide fandom is being inexorably sucked across to Melbourne in a series of individual migrations. More might have been revealed had not Justin been called away to Fan Turn challenge, thus forcing him to rapidly down the scotch and orange ordered for this item so that he'll be in time for a similar form the gopher on duty at the fan turn challenge. At least I know who he is now.

The time is now fast approaching when the children will turn up in the foyer, clutching their soft toys. I shouldn't sound so denigrating as I'm one of the children too, except that I think Raffles, my teddy, enjoyed conventions much better before it became the fashion to bring along sweet stuffed animals, all of whom, naturally, out-sweet Raffles. I loved the first issue of Get Stuffed and loved writing for it, but am slightly bored by the meeting. Every body spends a lot of time cooing over everyone else's toys and acting out the radicalism and other foibles of their own one. I'm put in mind of, simultaneously, mothers with their latest offspring and seasoned D&Ders playing to the hilt their favourite character. The truth is, I suppose, Raffles and I are getting enough attention. However the humans gradually creep out from behind their toys to engage in a most bizarre conversation about how much they'd need to be paid before they'd voluntarily have a finger cut off. Ro Pardoe's willing for £5,000.

"It'd have to be £5 million," says Cath Easthope, "but I don't think I'd do it at all!"

"Oh, I would," says Ro. "A finger doesn't make much difference."

"I wouldn't have this one off," declares Dave Bridges, solemnly examining one of his fingers. "That's my poking finger!"

We all laugh. Eventually, I drag Cath off to the rescheduled women's APA meeting as she's showing signs of nerves. In the event she's fine, and it's me who almost doesn't survive. (But that's another story, as they say.)

People's attitudes to the prospect of a Hawkwind concert have been disconcertingly like that I'd expect from my mother, with a lot of emphasis on staying as far away from the noise as possible. I get a slight dose of generation shock. Not that I'm a great Hawkwind fan myself, but I am mildly curious, so I poke my head round into the concert hall every so often. The first band, with the up-front keyboard player I quite enjoy, but the computer music display is dreadful. The presenter keeps trying to force people to clap - "For my mum, she wants to know how I'm getting on." He has no idea what he's done wrong when he tries to interest this sci-fi audience by talking about music he's done for Battlefield Earth and everyone boos. Till then, I wasn't even convinced I'm in the same room as a group of fans anymore, but obviously they've all been properly indoctrinated by Dave Langford at least. Hawkwind comes on so late I miss most of it through being elsewhere occupied elsewhere, but what I see and hear seems pretty good.

"They played stuff off their early albums," raves Peter-Fred

"If that's what they really sound like," says Laura, "I think I'd like their albums."

We wander off to the foyer, where Terry Hill tells us that the second sitting of his and Vince's room-party is underway. We let ourselves be persuaded. The room is full of 50s fans, plus Paul Vincent and John Jarrold, possibly making believe that this is it and they're back in their beloved fifties. Various old photos are passed around, featuring young, slim-line versions of Bob Shaw and a dashing looking ATOM in a leather jacket on his motor bike. Mal Ashworth climbs over us every 5 minutes. Either he's become incontinent or he's hoping to escape. This 2nd theory is supported by a subsequent meeting with him and Hazel on the 3rd floor landing after Peter-Fred and I have left too.

"We told Terry we were going for a walk," he explains.

"It got a bit crowded after all those Swedes came in," adds Hazel. "We were having difficulty not being pushed out the window!"

I generously invite them to Kate's party. This too is busy, but the room's so big nobody minds. We stand in the entrance boggling at how many people are coming in and apparently being absorbed with out trace.

"I expect they're all out on the balcony," I hazard.

"Perhaps there'll be a great balcony disaster," says Mal, letting his imagination run away with him. "Like the lift ones. You know, the overloaded balcony plummets to the ground!"

Kate is queening it over the whole scene, sat in state in her black crinoline.

"I don't think this is a party at all," I pronounce, "It's a guided tour and everyone's here to see the rooms and Kate."

Kate's doorway has obviously become the Piccadilly Circus of fandom, if you wait there long enough you will eventually meet everyone you've ever known. People, it seems, have at long last, discovered where everyone else is. It's a good party. What more can you ask of a convention?

Pack our world within a suitcase...

Much more apparently. I queue behind Margaret Wellbanks and Phil Palmer to check out.

"I'm going to write it up as the convention no-one enjoyed!" Margaret remarks.

"Yes," agrees Phil, "someone in the lift asked me if I'd enjoyed the convention and I said no, not really. Then everybody else said they hadn't either."

I feel rather sad. I know the convention wasn't well organised in many respects, that it took it's time to get started and that the security was a pain, but I hate blanket condemnations. The day is bright and enticing; I go outside to sit on the beach once more. Out here it's the beginning of a lovely bank holiday afternoon, not the end of a debauched and exhausting convention. I think it's worth any and every shortcoming of the Metropole just to have a beach across the road. If this were the middle of Leeds I'd be sweltering and cross instead of relaxed and happy. I wouldn't be able to lie in the sun and muse without acrimony on the Eurocon that wasn't a Eurocon.

"I was right," I say to Peter-Fred, "the convention swamped the European fans, not vice versa. The only resemblance it bore to the last Eurocon was the presence of John Brunner and even he was less prominent than at Moenchengladbach."

Paradoxically, Moenchengladbachcon run in an old school hall with very little programme, and most of that of very little interest, had probably more fun than this megacon, but really only because I'd met a nice group of people. It wasn't much like any con I've been to before or since. Conventions are what you make them mostly, and programme, committee efficiency and the hotel are only minor considerations. It was the adverse conditions that brought together us more seasoned fans at Moenchengladbach after all.

Back in the hotel where Peter-Fred has finally bearded Frank, Anne Warren suggests there should at least have been a Eurocon party where those who wished to meet foreign fans could have done so. Myself, I'd have liked to see an opening ceremony at a decent time on Friday (i.e. much later than it actually was), so that some spirit of the convention as a whole might have been possible instead of everyone drifting around in their own little groups, staking their own territory and rarely intermingling.

Still, for all its shortcomings I have enjoyed myself. I'd have enjoyed myself less without the involvement in the masquerade or without the fannish community around. I want everybody to be there, even if they all do insist on sitting in different rooms.

All that remains now is to discover that my bag weighs twice as much as when I started out, even though I've collected relatively few fanzines and books, and that the station is much further away walking up the road than down.

"Bye bye Brighton," I say. Brighton where the sun never sets and the conventions are unpopular. I think I love Brighton.

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 Oh great creator of being, grant us one more hour to perform our art and perfect our being!
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Excuse me rushing straight from the convention into fanzines, but you see, while I'm doing a fanzine myself, what I tend to think about a lot is fanzines. You have to be in a state of obsession to motivate yourself into doing a fanzine; otherwise you'd just watch the telly, go out to the pub or have long conversations with your flat-mates. You might even write some of those letters that have been on your conscience for months. What you wouldn't do is hide yourself away in your room every spare second in order to write, type and duplicate, or whatever activity your particular form of fanzine requires, just to produce something people will crumple up in their bags at the next convention. So no wonder you can't help leafing through other examples of the fannish art, cogitating over why they did what they did, what they are in it for and whether any of it's worthwhile. So, if I look now at fanzines to see what works, for me, and

what doesn't it's purely in the spirit of clarification, there's no dagger being sharpened for an especially tempting target; I genuinely want to know what makes a fanzine good, and whether good is enough (or merely irrelevant). Before I launch into actual fanzines I shall just make a quick detour via APAs, as in why don't I enjoy fanzines as much as APAs? I like the personal style of writing APAs call forth; more, I like specific APAs: The Women's Periodical because I'm involved and interested in most of the people there; and Frank's, because after Frank's you feel you can go out and conquer the world, there's that ~~lots~~ much ideas and enthusiasm there. As for the rest (that I have any acquaintance with), well, they're not wonderful. SLAPA I thought would be fun till I got there and noticed (or imagined I did) people looking disapprovingly at me, or at least showing little interest. The Soft Toys APA actually was fun in the way SLAPA should have been, but it's just a play APA and no substitute for the real thing. APA B fluctuates from mildly interesting to barely alive; it works as a children's playground to toughen up the new kids, but holds none of the intrinsic fascination of TWP and Franks. Still, enough about APAs; let's take a look at what I've liked and disliked from the not entirely brilliant set of fanzines I got at Seacon or since.

Outside Now 6 - Dave Bridges
130 Valley Rd., Sheffield,
S8 9GA

The word fanzine doesn't really suit Dave's work, especially not the latest volume in question. There's something kitschy and bubble-gum about the word fanzine. It goes ok with

things like TNH and Microwave, which have their fair share of trivia, or Epsilon which though not light gets heavy only about the bubble gum subject of fandom. Dave gets heavy about life, except that heavy's the wrong word as the writing may be heavy in volume, but his approach to life hardly is. No 6 is more explicit on the subject than previous works which tended to show, but not spell-out (Dave's attitude): his life isn't heavy because he accepts what comes along as it happens through as he puts it, reprogramming to enjoy whatever it is that life throws at him. I know objectively that this bit makes sense, even though I'm very bad at doing it myself, but some of what Dave says is harder to cope with, like the concept of EVERYTHING being good, right down to cruise missiles. Could Dave really reprogramme himself to enjoy dying of radiation sickness. Perhaps he could, but what about the rest of the world that can't reprogramme itself and dies in misery. From Dave's (stated) point of view that's their problem, except where it involves people he know and cares about. I don't think then Dave would enjoy it, except maybethe chaos of the last 4 minutes before the bomb! Reading Dave takes me back to the sort of things I'd think about when I was reading French lit at Uni, because similar sort of ideas came up in the books I was studying, especially the early 20th century authors who were busily throwing aside the conditioning and assumptions of their rationalistic 19th century predecessors. Maybe that's why some of it seems self-evident now.

Outside Now 6 could have been done better and the arguments made stronger by throwing out the ditherings and asides, but then it might not have been done at all, I suspect. I still find it incredible that Dave writes the kind of thing he writes in such great detail for so small an audience. Most of the thought processes behind the zine would be at best sub-conscious for another person. Perhaps they would have stayed so for Dave, or at least they wouldn't have been so fully developed if he hadn't used the process of writing them down in a fanzine to work them out. There's so much here, I can't possibly deal adequately with it all. Moreover, it's not just ideas that spring out of it, there's emotion, insight into Dave's character and thoughts on his relationship with Cath Easthope. In places I was almost crying. There's not many fanzines that do that to me.

Empties - Martin Tudor
845 Alum Rock Rd,
Ward End,
Birmingham B8 2AG

It's hard to believe there's been five issues of this fanzine. Why, it seems just yesterday that I was discarding no. 1 at a bus-stop in Cambridge as hardly worth reading. Empties has come a long way since then, though I'm still not entirely sure about it. It's obviously quite popular judging from the volume of response Martin receives, but there doesn't seem much point to it. No. 5 features a collection of articles by people comparing their favourite hobby to fandom as if they were unaware, and indeed the first ones to point out, that many subcultures have similar elements to fandom, though not all are so evolved. Maureen Porter forces the comparison far enough to produce the wonderfully absurd sentence which follows: 'So far as I can see, there are really very few differences between bellringers and SF fans, once you get over the hurdle that most ringers don't read SF and most fans don't ring bells.' How true. I think. These articles are pleasant enough, and Steve Green's fanzine reviews are vaguely interesting, though a bit patronising and rushed due to the volume of material he is handling. The only really worthwhile parts are Judith Hanna's article about sheltered Australian attitudes to world politics, especially the dangers of nuclear war, and her own gradual sensitisation to nuclear issues since living in England, and the letter column which seems to have stumbled into an argument between D West and Arthur Hlavaty and has some breathtaking vitriol from Mike Ashley. However I'm still left wondering what it's all for; what does Martin get out of it all, apart from overdrafts and mountains of mail? (Basically I find it hard to understand how editing a fanzine but writing very little for it can be as satisfying as writing substantial parts of the fanzine yourself. But this only reflects my own bias I guess.) Sometimes I get this suspicion that I've mistaken what fandom's all about and that what the fanzine-reading public really likes, or at least prefers to respond to, is not ambitious, inventive works but light-weight, agreeable collections of nothing in particular; other times though, I just feel this insidious desire creeping over me to, yes, write Martin a loc!

2400 Fulton - Owen Whiteoak
Top Flat (left),
112 Polwarth Gardens,
Edinburgh EH11 1LH

This is quite unusual: a fanzine where I enjoyed the letter column more than the rest! (I'm notorious for not reading letter columns, or rather starting them and losing interest long before the end. The reason why I liked this one was that Owen's answers were at least as long as the letters.) I was a bit disappointed with the rest, which was mainly about the ever-expanding Eastercons and the need for Mexicon. I must admit I didn't agree with it all, but to be honest, the main problem was more that I'm bored with the whole argument. I think most people do recognise the need for Mexicon, just some want it instead of Eastercon and some as well, which when it comes down to it is really a matter of personal priorities. I was disappointed to find this issue dominating the zine because I do enjoy Owen's writing and would have liked to see something a bit more original coming out of it all!

Thyme 32, 33 & 34 - Roger Weddall
po box 273, Fitzroy 3065,
Australia

After Owen's zine it was a relief read material from people who seem to be too busy having a good time to worry about how they ought to have a good time.

Roger runs 3 reports of SwanconIX, a beaut of a con by all accounts. The idea I liked the best was the custard pies for the committee, which are thrown by the highest bidder at the committee member of their choice. It'd be enough to

put Alan Dorey ever running a con again! I still find a kind of fascination in reading about a fandom I don't know; I like guessing at the legends, frictions and atagonisms behind the words; fantasise a bit, like I once did over the characters that peopled the pages of Matrix, before I discovered they all mere mortals, even Simon Ounsley. Thyme often seems to be where I read news first, even before Ansible; I still haven't got over discovering the identity of the new Dr. Who for the first time from an Australian fanzine!

Dragonbreath - Oscar Dalgleish
67 Robslee Rd., Giffnock,
Glasgow G46

I've been impressed with Dragonbreath ever since Roy started talking honestly about love and death. This issue he tackles male conditioning, again in a very personal,

most notably in an open letter to his father. Even more interesting though was the continuation of the discussion about depression from the previous issue in the letter column, I suppose all of this really meant something to me because over the last year or so I've discovered that several of my contemporaries have nervous problems (and even myself in a mild form); it's frightening and it's something people should talk about more so that the sufferer doesn't have to contend with the stigma of being odd at the same time as all their other problems. Maybe Roy will establish himself as a kind of Jean Weber of British fandom (I really think they should trade if they don't already) though Roy's fanzine is in fact more powerful than Weberwoman as he doesn't just discuss issues but throws himself into them whole-heartedly.

Fubar 1 - Ashley Watkins
Seamist, Flat 3, 2a The Leas,
Westcliff-on-Sea,
Essex, SS0 7ST

This fanzine is by no stretch of the imagination well-written, but it works because Ashley too is writing something very personal. It's a harrowing tale of harassment and misfortune as Ashley is framed for a crime

he didn't commit, only days after going through a bad car crash. To me it's all the more real because it actually happened in my home town of Southend, where the police who come so badly out of the account could even have been people I knew who joined the force. Ashley, though, doesn't just tell his story, he also sits down at the end and assesses what the affair's done to him and how it's changed his view of society and life - in what ways it's made him stronger and in what ways more cynical. This may be the only fanzine Ashley has in him, I can't say, but personally I find this and the like of Dragonbreath infinitely more worthwhile than fannish political zines or tepid collections of articles.

Song to anything that moves - William McCabe
53 Wenman St., Balsall Heath,
Birmingham, B12 9SP

I feel my reactions to this fanzine would be more interesting if I hadn't already been familiar with William's

style from APA B. Unlike the 2 previous fanzines, William's is a grasshopper. It's full of short pieces, pointed little stories odd insights into the genesis of William McCabe and the way his mind works. There's the mandatory Upside Down page - I can't honestly tell if it's a mistake or put there on purpose since either is quite plausible with William. He likes messing around with the concept of the fanzine; a lot of what he does is silly, or seems so to an experienced fanzine reader, but the idea is sound and is not a hundred miles removed from the sort of things that work for Dave Bridges (and certain people also find silly). William sounds a bit perplexed by what fanzines are all about, and stops every so often to explain or justify himself. These interludes however

tend to hold the whole together as you get the impression of William sitting there pressing the buttons, seeing what happens then going on try the next set.

Five Go Mince - Ian Sorensen
142 Busby Rd., Clarkston,
Glasgow G76 8B

Five go Mince or indeed the whole Mince series is a paradox. They don't have anything to say, I an isn't fascinated by the concept of fanzines, their highest aspir-

ation is the search for a good pun, yet in their own way they're quite enjoyable. You can trundle through another in the never ending series of the silly adventures of Mike Molloy, then marvel at how many people take the trouble of loccing the zine in a not necessarily uncomplimentary fashion. It's a fanzine for the sake of it if ever there was one, but through persistence it's almost achieved respectability.

Spaghetti Junction 3 -. Mike Dickinson
and Jackie Gresham
Via Vittorio Veneto 9 (C5),
21013 Gallarate (VA), Italy

An amusing fanzine, with a very good article from Mike Dickinson on football, of all things unfannish (except at Silicon).

Being a long time supporter of

my erstwhile home-town's 4th/3rd division heroes, Southend United, I could relate to a lot of what Mike was saying. The article combines well his thoughts on the development of the game with the history of his involvement, and is simply and appropriately entitled Love Story. Mike also wonders about self-revelation in fanzines - why do people do it and does it make for good reading. The why, I would venture, is often to get a good article. But if it's only for this, then the revelations will really be nothing more than stories about the past. In my case, an article will only become truly revealing if there's something I want to work out badly enough to need writing down in order to get it straight in my mind - if I'm not writing it this way it won't be revelatory, merely fiction parading as self-examination. I'd probably only call two of my articles at all revelatory in this sense, and one of those was for an aPA, not general consumption. A lot of what passes for revelation in fanzines, though, is really people taking a flippant and often denigratory look at their pasts, pulling them out of shape a bit, and turningg themselves into the hero (or less often, the heroine) of appalling picaresque adventures. Here I have in mind Nigel Richardson, and the author of the next fanzine on my pile, Chris Hughes.

fantasmagoria 6 - Chris Hughes
128 Whitley Wood Rd.,
Reading, Berks RG2 8jG

This fanzine is very well written, very funny, but a bit unpleasant. By unpleasant, I mean it's like watching one of those comedy shows where disaster after

disaster befalls the hero and though the studio audience may be roaring its head off, I'll be sitting in my chair shuddering. Chris graphically describes the awfulness of a rough ferry crossing where everybody's throwing up left, right and centre, and it's just far too authentic for me to find funny - I'm too worried about how Chris will get through the remaining long hours of the trip. Put me down as not quite masochistic enough for this fanzine.

Wiz Richard Bergeron,
Box 5989, San Juan,
Puerto Rico 00905

Well, Wiz was amazing. It was just so wrong! Not in any factual manner you understand, but rather in the way of a distorting mirror. This mirror shows a British fandom where Dave Langford is emperor, Ansible sacred and D West god. The Women's Periodical in

it's turn is a humourless, bourgeoisie bunch who can't see the funny side of the infamous Matrix cover. Rob Hansen comes in for a bit of stick too, partly for disliking the Matrix cover himself, but mainly it sounds for having the temerity to stand against the great D West for TAFF! What's more, Wiz seemed so dated - still talking about the Matrix cover, still talking about Nouveau Revue Bleu, and still talking, I ask you, about Joseph Nicholas' 1978 stance and wondering if Joe and Judith might conceivably, underneath it all be nice people.

Wing Window - John D. Berry
525 19th Avenue East,
Seattle, Washington 98112

The first Wing Window I ever read had a wonderful article in it about nazi laundrettes that I thought was the funniest thing I'd seen in ages, the 2nd (well actually the 6th) featured a long and detailed fanzine review section by John himself. This issue, though interesting, has nothing which stands out in the same way; apart from a fairly heavy-weight letter column full of names fit to sink a liner, some of whom appear to have nothing better to do than discuss the putative age of our own Terry Hill. John's judicious and amusing style of fanzine editing puts me in mind of Simon Ounsley - quiet and humorous insight is more the order of the day than earth-shattering brilliance, but as with Simon's zines, I always look forward to a new issue.

So much for the fanzines. I think by now some of my prejudices must be getting pretty obvious. Illumination don't always come easy, but here, look, I'll spell it out for you. My choice of the most important ingredient for a fanzine would run something like this:

- 1) enthusiasm: essential; it is, I do believe, the magic ingredient of Franks and TWP, and is the reason why I often like first fanzines, even those much less well written than the works of more experienced fans. The APAs prove that even cynical fans of many years standing (or should I say falling over?) can be enthusiastic and benefit from it. Enthusiasm in my terms does n't preclude sense, so I can safely cite Linda Pickersgill as an example of this quality without her hitting me.
- 2) something to say: also very important; the burning need to say something is the fuel of the enthusiast. Without it he would be an enthusiast about something else instead and not produce fanzines. I infinitely prefer articles written out of a need to say something than those written as an exercise in logic or because the person concerned believed this might be a good idea for a fanzine (I'm often guilty of the latter myself, but there you are). I believe that inside everybody there's this one quintessential fanzine article that'll tell you what they're all about and why, which if only they were in the right APA or met the write fanzine, they could be persuaded to write. Some people, on the other hand, can write this article every week, but then the world would be a strange place if we were all Dave Bridges! Sometimes enough of 2) will compensate for the lack of 3) which is:-
- 3) good writing: an enjoyable extra? It cuts across all I've been saying before as it requires neither 1) nor 2), is entirely self-sufficient and can be more wonderful than any number of insights. By good writing I don't mean good argument, which is undeniable a form of good writing, but is not the form I'm talking about! I think I mean something humorous and quoteable that you savour and marvel over; the best examples I can think of have been in the WP, plus probably the laundrette piece I mentioned earlier and Sue Thomason's Rubyfruit Bungle in the latest TNH. I recognise a piece of good writing in this vein by the overwhelming desire I get to have written them

myself, which suggests that this criterion is more personal than the rest.

There you are, the recipe for the kind of fanzine that Christina J. Lake, and probably no-one else in humanity, likes to read. If that sounds like your fanzine, please send it to me post-haste! If it doesn't, still send it, I might well just revise my criteria. God, and I still haven't answered the question why we do it! Does anybody know?

Actually, what I really want to know is why articles never end at the bottom of the page I planned for them, but trickle onto the next. I know it'd look silly, but couldn't I just make one page A4? The countdown continues, faster now I have so much fanzine to type up and so little time to do it in. Only nine working days left, but I don't really believe it. Perhaps I'm doing the fanzine so as not to think about it, so that everything's normal to literally the last minute, when I suddenly rush round dementedly packing. Anyway, on to the token personal part of the fanzine, a frenetic little number called

Some day I'm gonna go away, going back to France to stay...

When I was younger, for as far back as I can remember my thought processes, I didn't want to become a conventional grown-up. I couldn't understand how my father settled for being a librarian when he could have been exploring the world or inventing something really worthwhile. Fame, then, seemed a viable option, and failure to achieve it was not a matter of lack of opportunity but a result of not applying oneself to anything persistently enough. To my mind my father had copped out (and what of my mother? I don't know, perhaps I thought her position (motherhood) an automatic disqualification!) I was going to be famous by the age of 16, a deadline imposed by my ambition to open the letters left by Houdini telling the world the secret of his escape feats. I knew they weren't to be opened till 1974 because I'd read all about it in my Blue Peter annual, so that gave me a full five years to establish myself as the world's greatest escape artist. That I didn't even know how to approach unpicking the simple family padlock was no deterrent! Emulating Houdini proved to be a short-lived ambition; by the time I was 16 I neither knew nor cared who opened Houdini's secret instructions and to this day I've no idea what became of them. My ideas shifted away from fame to self-realisation and one persistent theme was that I'd become this implausibly self-sufficient gypsy type who'd wander round the world, living off the land, having adventures and discovering what life was all about. Since I didn't want to marry (I can still remember nearly making myself swear I'd never get married, but the younger me was just wise enough to realise that I couldn't bind my later selves in this way) and didn't want a boring, conventional job (this definition included jobs I would now find quite exciting and challenging) there seemed no reason why I shouldn't just go off and do exactly what I liked. However, the day I was to walk off into the sunset was always being deferred, put back by such pragmatic considerations as finishing my education and what I would say to my mother! The idea lingered on into my university incarnation, only to be pushed aside for the imperative of finishing my degree, and later for the even greater imperative of finding a job. Yes, I succumbed to conventionality in the end! Jobs were so scarce that it became an ambition in itself to get one. Besides, I reasoned with myself, until I became financially independent I would be stuck at home in Southend. Moreover, I'd just found fandom and wanted nothing more than to settle down and produce a clutch of

fanzines, and couldn't bear the thought of missing the next convention.

One day last summer, one and a half years into my first job, the idea resurfaced. I was walking home from work, a rare activity as normally I get a lift, and as I walked I thought to myself how great it would be to give up work next summer and go and explore the world as I'd always promised myself. The idea seemed quite radical at the time as I was enjoying my work relatively speaking and couldn't quite conceive of leaving of my own accord, just like that. Then too there was the whole fabric of my lifestyle to consider: fandom, APA meetings, Tuns and the rare trips in London; and Peter-Fred in Oxford - leaving him for the length of time required for a really thorough trip round the world seemed virtually unthinkable. In this vacillating state, my company decided to take a hand in the business. That summer was the turning point. The heat seemed to exacerbate all the tensions in the office - everybody knew something was going on, but it hadn't all quite come out into the open. I remember I spent all my time making snide comments about Predicasts, and Judith and Fleur, the two section heads, seemed to spend all their time putting me down. I didn't know that Fleur was on her second letter of warning and so couldn't afford to step out of line or to be seen to be sympathising with anti-company feeling. I thought she should be doing something to defend Janet, the first of our six part-timers to be dismissed, and was disappointed in her that she wasn't. Besides, the office had no air-conditioning and no blinds, so every afternoon practically I'd be forced to move away from my desk by the window before the sun became unbearable. I'd hated working the summer before, my first year without the long summer holidays I'd become used to, but I hated it even more last summer. I thought it'd get better, but it was only getting worse.

Then one day I had a blazing row with Judith Graver, my boss, an empty-headed career woman, who only got where she did by sleeping with the relevant people, so rumour has it, and I can't think for the life of me how else she might have done it as she is stunningly incompetent. Her idea of a reasonable discussion is repeating whatever notion she has in her head often enough to tire her interlocuter while totally refusing to listen to any contrary point of view. If a lie sounds better than the truth she will tell it without hesitation. At the time of the row I fell into hating her, but mostly she's so absurd, still living at home with her parents with no real life outside office politics, that I feel a mixture of amusement and pity. The row was ostensibly and pettily about a half day's holiday I wanted and she wouldn't give on political grounds as she was trying to make stick a new and unnecessary ruling that no more than two abstractors may take time off at once. The rule stands today even though the typing continues to be so behindhand that the entire abstracting staff could take a month's holiday without their running out of work. My argument with Judith Graver drifted inevitably into the rocky area of her policy towards the part-timers and Janet's pending dismissal. Needless to say I got nowhere, felt I'd made an utter and total fool of myself, never wanted to go near the office again and comforted myself with the thought that I was definitely and absolutely leaving. I set a provisional deadline for the start of the next summer.

The death blow though was the dismissal of Fleur. I came in one Monday morning, and was informed by Judith Hibbins, who'd been left to the dirty work, that Fleur had been sacked. I don't think I'd have been much more shocked or upset if she'd told me she was dead. I simply couldn't believe it: Aunty Fleur whom I sat next to, who had long discussions with me about religion, who'd been counting holiday and flexitime with the best of us; gone. I felt like walking out; I still half-wish I had. Instead I ran off to see her

in the lunch hour and came back almost reconciled because Fleur was, or seemed so calm about the whole affair. She was going to fight, sure, but she'd already started rebuilding her world. The only good thing I can say about the whole business is that it has benefitted Fleur immensely; being a single parent she felt obliged to her daughter to stick it out at Predicasts while she could and hang onto the financial security, but since leaving she's managed to pick up enough freelance jobs to keep up enough freelance work to keep up the mortgage payments and at the same time has much more spare time to spend with her daughter (who is only seven). As she put it in a letter to me: the quality of her life has improved immensely.

So I didn't walk out in the end (though seriously considered leaving after Christmas, except that I don't mind working in the winter.) I stayed on and collaborated with the new regime which in due course purged itself of the five remaining part-timers, mainly by setting them impossible productivity targets and making life generally unpleasant. Predicasts had timed its moves well; nobody wanted to speak out against them in case that jeopardised their salary review and Christmas bonus. In the event we needn't have bothered, there turned out to be very little to jeopardise as the department, they said, hadn't reached its targets for the year - hardly surprising if you consider that over 50% of the experienced staff were variously removed in the course of that year. I toyed with the idea of getting a union in, but didn't have the moral courage to do on my own, nor really knew where to begin. So come New Year 1984, everything had more or less calmed down and we'd all settled into a new rut... Actually a new and better rut, because having failed to make trouble much against my better judgement, and even swallowed praise for it, I became a trusted and consulted member of the new order. Now, instead of being told to shut up when I had a point to make, I was listened to. I was involved in the training of the four new people we were eventually allowed to employ, and given the supposedly responsible task of logging in the journals that arrived every morning (though the lunacy of having me do for an hour each day this job that can be picked up by anyone in one morning when it seems to take almost a year to properly train an abstractor never seemed to occur to anyone, and since it's a good skive I never pointed it out either.) There was even talk of teaching us to use the terminals so we could imput our own indexes, but this move seemed to wait on that mythical time when things would be 'normal' again. A time which after nearly two years of backlogs, my imminent departure and our relative failure in training the new people, I now believe to be unlikely to come in the foreseeable future. It's ironic that after going to such lengths to sack the part-timers on the grounds of inadequate productivity and performance, the abstractors brought in to replace them should be so slow and unpromising. The only one to grasp the by now very complicated rules and conventions (far more complicated than when I arrived) and give a consistent facsimile of knowing what he was doing was Martyn, an extremely pleasant guy to work with, who also saw through Predicasts pretty quickly. He was seriously looking for another job before his probation period was up, and got one in his fifth month, and has now gone. As for the other three, well Mary and Jane are exceedingly nice, but their minds don't seem to be on the job very much. Jane's been too busy getting married for the past months to give more than half her attention to the niceties of coding, and Mary who I feel could be good, isn't really interested. She just wants to get through the day's work and go home. She's forever leaving codes off her work, sometimes because it's difficult and she can't be bothered to think of one, but mostly because she's simply forgotten about it and doesn't care. (An attitude I can quite sympathise with!) Then there's Adrian, the last recruit - I don't know how he got the job at all.

Well, I suppose I do know: one of the people due to start accepted a job elsewhere at the last minute, so Judith Hibbins did a very rapid piece of interviewing to fill up the last vacancy. She obviously felt sorry for Adrian, who's inoffensive, Irish and not very bright. I used to fantasise that Adrian wasn't quite real; that the Adrian we saw who was so slow and stupid and parted his slightly greying hair straight across his head in such an unbecoming manner, must all be a front and disguise, like Lord Peter Wimsey at the advertising agency in Murder Must Advertise, and that for some obscure reason he was hiding his true wit and deliberately making his hair look ugly, perhaps, I hoped wildly, to catch out Judith Graver in some way. But as the weeks went by and Adrian continued to ask stupid questions not once but three times and began to mistranslate simple articles, I was forced to conclude that it was probably all real, and that he'd been even better at bluffing about his language qualifications at the interview than I'd been about my German when I arrived.

The real reason for the poor intake was not just that most, if not all, of Judith Hibbin's first choices dropped out; it was also related to this nebulous concept she subscribes to, called 'fitting-in'. Her idea of who will fit in with our happy little group is, I believe, someone with no strong opinions, no previous work experience and an interest in something harmlessly eccentric, like cycling or UFOs. I suspect this form of selection may also be responsible for giving us people who, indeed, won't make trouble, but also won't give much of themselves to the job. Moreover, such considerations as keeping the balance of sexes seem to outweigh little matters like who is really suitable for the job, and that, I think, is how we got Adrian.

Strangely now I no longer feel a burning need to get out of working for my company. Life there has turned back from tragedy into a slightly comic and exasperating soap opera. For a month or two it really got to me, but now I can jog along feeling only occasionally angered by absurdities. But I'm still leaving. I shan't be going to travel the world. The idea has been tamed; it's been watered down into a short trip to Europe. I considered going somewhere very different like Japan or India, but I don't feel I want to tackle a vastly strange culture by myself. I might have tried one of those overland treks you see advertised, but my friend Andy who's done it all herself told me they miss out all the best bits and the way to see Asia is to travel at your own pace. She assures me that if I set out on my own I'd meet loads of Europeans and Aussies en route and would be perfectly all right, and it's not that I doubt her, I just don't want the hassle of setting out on my own as it's the sort of trip that only becomes an adventure and fun when there's two or more of you to laugh at the setbacks. Europe on the other hand is full of places I'd like to visit and which I feel I can handle, and actually enjoy, on my own.

So, is this where my quest for fame and adventure ends or begins? I honestly can't say. I've known for a long time I'm not as adventurous or independent as I'd like to be. And my younger self wouldn't have hesitated about a world trip just for a man (the worst possible reason in my then catalogue of crimes). But, I also know that life on the edge of London was becoming increasingly pointless; that month by month my temper grew shorter, my tolerance level lower and the social activities I pursued less and less meaningful. I do want and desperately need a complete change of lifestyle. I'd like special occasions to become special again, oh and the grass to be greener, myself to be happier and any other cliché that springs to mind. I think I'm doing the right thing; life's slowly beginning to make a bit more sense and I feel quite optimistic about the future. Perhaps I've thrown my career chances away in a fit of impatience and it'll be something I'll regret in years to come, but I don't think so. If I can save my sense of joy and adventure in the world in any way what

soever I shall.

One piece of advice, if any of you out there should decide to give up your jobs, don't make up your mind a year in advance because, I can tell you, the waiting takes a hell of a long time!

See, what did I tell you, trust that article to get delusions of grandeur and muscle over onto this blank stencil I was saving especially for the letter column. Well, that'll teach me to make bits up as I go along (though I doubt it; sigh, I can't help thinking as I type - it's as natural as making mistakes!) At this point in TNH I normally dig out the old Steve Green lettercol logo, switch to single spacing and wade in arms a-flailing, but here I can't squash the text further together than it already is (I did try last time, but certain nameless people complained (oh dear, they're not going to like the supplement!)) so, it's onwards at the same pace as before with the makeshift title of:-

All Things Come To HER Who Waits

A concept supplied by Mal Ashworth, who coincidentally (what you mean it can't be a coincident? If I say it's a coincident it's a coincident, undrstand?) kicks off this letter column, or should that be ** LETTER COLUMN * for anyone scanning, in the positive fashion I (Christina Furhrer, that is) intend it to CONTINUE (though preferably not all in capital letters!)

Mal Ashworth, 16 Rockville Drive, Embsay, Skipton, N Yorks.

They do say - I am sure you will have heard them yourself - that all things come to him who waits. I haven't the slightest doubt that in this egalitarian century of ours no one would wish to deny that they probably come to her who waits also, in very similar fashion. The only thing is - if these things that are coming are coming from me, him - and indeed her too - tend to have to wait longer than human flesh and blood can endure. Which is a shame. For whom? For everybody. But there you are. Good intentions seem to have little if anything to do with it. Oh, I have good intentions right enough. And then some. And to spare. If I could just send you a bundle of good intentions, all would be well. But then, Life isn't like that, is it? In fact, come to think of it, I'm not sure what it is like. No. No. Never doubt my good intentions. So exceedingly good are they that I had nearly written you two letters of comment before you even thought of sending me your fanzine. And I can't do better than that, can I? (Apparently not)

(If I don't turn that March Playmate of the Month Centrefold to the wall there isn't much prospect of the rest of the letter being any better than that good intentions or not.)

The fact is that the arrival of Sorgenkind was timely and cheering, like. I had just spent the weekend battling with powdery plaster and spiders (no, I'm not scared of them either; now caterpiggles is another matter all - too-gather!) at this remote, mucky, marvellous old farmhouse I have bought, locking myself out of the car outside a pub very late at night (freaky), nearly running out of petrol and similar exciting things. So it was rather delightful to get back to civilisation and Sorgenknd. It would probably have been delightful to get back to civilisation and a nuclear holocaust. But Sorgenkind was nicer. (What do you use to clean up an old and jaded Nuclear Holocaust?)

Nuclear Holocaustic Soda, what else?)

While I wouldn't admit to being a soap opera addict per se, I did manage to give my brain cells a night off regularly enough to watch quite a lot of Blakes 7 (though not all - I missed the final Ragnarok bit for one thing; it'll probably be just the same when the real ragnarok happens). Though - perhaps for the best - the main attraction of the series for me was not 'Avon's macho image' but Dayna's bum. Admittedly it didn't have a lot of competition from plot, characterisation, dialogue or anything else - but even so it was a nice bum. Characterwise I thought Vila was the only one who had successfully managed to sever connections with the Cardboard Cutouts Theatrical Agency. And Avon, dare I say, was positively the worst! And then some.

(That's what comes of turning that centrefold to the wall. I start to get vicious.)

I see from these barely legible notes I was about to get embroiled in the issue of the political naivete of s-f. But now that I'm sober again I'm not that naive so I won't.

Thanks again for thatall - a fine antidote to powdery plaster and spiders. In case you ever need an advertising slogan.

((I rather thought you'd already given me one with 'Nicer than a Nuclear Holocaust!' Oh well, that's got the mandatory mention of Blakes Dead Little Crew out of the way for this issue, and just to prove this fanzine isn't biased there'll be a bit about Star Trek anon.

Still, enough of this Men Only stuff about centrefolds and bums and onto:-))

Joy Hibbert, 11 Rutland Street, Stoke-On-Trent, Staffordshire, ST1 5JG

Thanks for Sorgenkind. I prefer my fanzines to be duplicated, it feels more friendly somehow, but I'm not one of these people that demands they be duplicated (particularly on quarto, which is a waste of time and stencil space).

((This issue is duplicated and quarto partly because it seemed a good wheeze for Mexicon and partly on economic grounds. I'm planning to use the KTF dupers (through the good offices of Vinç Clarke) and want to plunder their stocks of cheap quarto paper. However, I do have a theory why fans are so keen on duplicated fanzines - it's the smell! You see, they smell exactly like old school exam papers - you open them up and the scent of summers past wafts out at you; lazy lunch hours lying on the grass pretending to revise Latin verbs while making daisy chains; scenes of triumph in the exam halls (all fans being geni-uses, you understand); untarnished dreams and ambitions. What do you mean, your exam papers were photocopied, and besides you failed them all? It still maintain it's the smell that does it and nothing will shake me from this theory.))

I rarely listen to the radio, mostly because I don't like the DJs. I would prefer it if they just put the records on one after another and not have to put up with the ramblings of idiots who get paid to condescend to their audience.

Star Trek had negative character development (the writers of 'Making of Star Trek' described it as 'hardening of the arteries') in the sense that every few episodes each character did something which prevented him or her reacting in a different way in future. The obvious example I suppose is 'Amok Time'. Having determined the mating cycle of a vulcan, and having shown that he's incapable the rest of the time, you have to produce a good reason in future episodes if you want him to fall in love. To lesser extents, the same thing applied to other major characters and their relationship with each other.

Viewers would think McCoy was ill if he stopped insulting Spock for one episode (and vice versa).

The difference between a soap opera and real life is that more happens, or more appears to happen, because you know everything. I suppose more women watch soap operas for the same reason that women read romances - when their own fantasies ran out (i.e. when they got married and realised that he wasn't a romantic hero) they turn to fantasies about other people's lives.

Roelof Goudriaan, Postbus 1189, 8200 BD Lelystad, Netherlands

I found your article on television especially fascinating. I have no telly set, nor would I want to buy one, but I must admit that I too am prone to temptations which help one to evade life: I have oftentimes thought about the acquisition of a fish bowl, a telly substitute if I ever saw one, goldfishes and accesories and all. I shudder to think of the number of hours I could spend staring at that fishbowl, dreaming up Arthurian fantasies...

((Ah Roelof, you're obviously a latent member of the faith of the fish, a sect dreamed up once long ago by Henry Balen. Or maybe Dutch television is just not very good!))

Helen McNabb, The Bower, High St., Llantwit Major, S Glamorgan, CF6 9SS

Providing it's not completely vicarious living I don't think TV harms people - the addict, as all addicts, is a different situation. I watch some soap operas - it depends on your definition. A few years ago during the 'who shot JR' bit they reran Dallas an episode every night. We'd only seen the odd episode when my sister (who was hooked) visited so we watched it. It was hilarious. All the things you don't notice when there's a week long gap became glaring - oh no, not Dallas Memorial again!! with the same stock shot every time. It was the funniest summer programme on. We gave up when it went on weekly again. But the best soap opera is undoubtedly Soap. I've been chasing it round peculiar time slots and days where ITV had a gap for years now so I'm delighted that Channel 4's repeating it all. It's brill!!

((Absolutely! It's good to see Soap settle down on a nationwide channel at last. I used to have great problems keeping up too because I was still at university when I got hooked so for 10 weeks I'd be in the ATV region and 4-5 weeks in the London region and so forth. The two were at totally different places in the series and as sodds law would have it I kept missing the same episodes in both regions. The odd thing is, that even now with it safely ensconced on Channel 4, I'm positive I still keep missing out on the episodes I didn't catch first time!))

Nigel Richardson, 9 Windsor Green, East Garforth, Leeds, LS25 2LG

But to LOC your ISH (Fannish as she is spoked, wot?) Yes, I liked it. It gave me a few ideas for what to put into my 100% self-indulgent For Parakeets Only, so thanks once again. (Plagiarist, moi?) (I never used the bracket keys on my tripewriter until I discovered fandom) I liked the stuff you wrote best - I've only just realised that Hello Again Reptiles was by you, as my benumbed brain misread More Me as something like Mary Mee. (I think I'd better start this paragraph again...)

((Yes, do, then I finally get to start a new paragraph on a new page!))

Yes, I liked Hello Again Reptiles the most, even though the subject matter was one of the most boring things in the cosmos, wunnerful radio one. I agree with just about everything you say, except I have a soft spot for Steve Wright now and again. About twenty five seconds of his show a month is perfectly adequate, as it does get a little repetitive to hear him go on and on about his girlfriend, his parking problems and so forth. His sound effects and silly noises are much better than he is, particularly when played during some loathsome record.

As for Mike Read, I am glad to read that he really was quite acceptable once upon a time; I thought that I was imagining that he was once like some junior Peel in the making. That was before he started recording poxy records under dopey pseudonyms and dressing like Cliff Richards. I've never actually heard his morning show, but when I see him on the Saturday Stupourstore, grinning inanely and strumming his acoustic guitar I start chewing the carpet. (I only watch the damned programme for Sarah Greene...) The only DJ under 30 has a show at six in the morning on Sundays, I think (You won't catch me checking up on that!). The only female DJ other than Anne Nightingale looks and speaks like Anne Nightingale.

Moving on to Soap Operas, no serious discussion of the genre can be considered complete without mentioning those gems that turn up in the afternoon, usually originating from Scotland or Australia. These include:

Airport Chaplain Now deceased, this was possibly the lowest budgeted soap opera possible. It took place on two sets (the airport lounge and the chaplain's office) and generally stared two people (the chaplain and the person with a problem).

The Sullivans Three sets in this Australian delight; the pub, the kitchen and a sandpit representing the Second World War (East).

Sons and Daughters Australian. Four sets: two identical flats, a corridor, and a field. All the characters have guilty secrets; two are ex-prostitutes, one was amurderer, another a pimp. Nothing much happens except for people shouting "get out!" at each other, smashing plates and the two younger women walking around in increasingly skimpy swimsuits.

Take the High Road People in Scotland fall in lochs, buy tins of soup, unearth clues about a decade old murder, etc.

A Country Practice Australian. Handsome vets and doctors, beautiful nurses, and a lunatic chef called Cookie.

But enough, enough, and three times enuff. As Pascal wrote 'I have made this longer only because I did not have the leisure to make it shorter.' I'm not sure what this means, but you can't beat an erudite quote to end a letter.

((Funny, I thought I hadn't had a loc from Pascal (Thomas) this time round... Well, let's get back to the subject of Britain's ritziest DJs...))

Jeff Suter, 18 Norton Close, Southwick, Fareham, Hants, PO17 6HU

My attention was mostly grabbed by Hello Again Reptiles. Perhaps because I always wanted to be a Radio DJ, but couldn't and sublimated my desire by doing

the occasional Mobile Disco in the early seventies and made an appearance at a couple of fannish affairs. My main station during my youth was Luxembourg which featured the taped shows of Jimmy Saville and one or two others. Then the Sixties brought the Pirates. The musty BBC continued to churn out the same mouldy format during the day and Luxembourg only transmitted in the evenings. But I discovered this marvellous thing called the dial and twiddled it in an attempt to find these Pirate stations that older members of the community were going on about. My favourite was Radio London, which I could receive very well in darkest Hampshire. Here I thrilled to Ed Stewart, Tony Blackburn and Kenny Everett. And these three became the backbone of Early Radio 1 after the government forced the BBC to cater for the younger audience.

How I agree with you about the ubiquitous Steve Wright. He's awful. When he first turned up in the afternoons he was mildly amusing, but after a very short time it became apparent that he couldn't do anything else and became tedious in the extreme. I always make a point of tuning in elsewhere when he's on. I still listen to Radio 1 though, although a new station has entered my radio of late ((I think he's referring to Caroline)). I listen to Simon Bates for two reasons: 1) He tends to play some of the music from years past that I like and other less fashionable music by Linda Ronstadt, The Eagles, Bob Seger etc. 2) I just have to listen to Our Tune. The whole of human life is there, the ups and downs, the happy and sad, the joyful and tragic. It is very easy to become depressed and sad about being moneyless and jobless, but between Tuesday and Thursday morning it is very hard to feel sorry for yourself if you hear some of the stories listeners send to Simes. The woman whose husband and two children are wiped out in a car crash while she escapes uninjured or the woman who marries her childhood sweetheart, gets pregnant and then he's killed by a bomb in Northern Ireland before the child is born. I tell you it is very hard not to sniffle a bit. It's not like the Little House on the Prairie - this is real life.

John Peel of course is a must. Not only because he breaks new ground but because he supplies a real force for the good in the Radio stakes. I don't like Jensen or Powell. To me Jensen is a bit unbelievable in his avowed love for radio, Britain and the music he espouses. After all he left it behind for a very lucrative job on tv in Atlanta. When he returned the BBC callously turfed out Richard Skinner who was hired to replace Jensen in the first place. Skinner was building the show into something recognisably his own, and apart from that he came from Pertsmouth. As for Powell, well I'm sorry I just can't stand him, it's one of those personality things. To me he is false pretentious and has as much credibility as a DJ as Thatcher does as a humanitarian.

((Jeff was one of several people who informed me Caroline was back on the air (after my nostalgic article on the then defunct station in Music From A Fire). Actually, I don't listen to it much, partly because receptions not very good here in Kent of an evening, partly because the approximately three ads they've got drive me crazy and partly because the music seems to be in stuck mostly in a seventies (or sixties) time warp, especially the listeners' Top 5s, which normally seem to contain at least one track from America, one from Foreigner, and Chicago's If You Leave Me Now. Admittedly I haven't listened enough to establish that there's no DJ that plays a higher proportion of modern stuff, but conversely I've not stumbled into one. (Don't mistake me, I quite like a lot of what Radio Caroline plays, but being old, I'll either have it or not want it, and it doesn't expand my music tastes any from what they were, say five to ten years ago!)) Still, I do approve of the policy of

playing two to three tracks without interruption. If only they didn't need to put in those damn ads!))

Cath Easthope, 113 Abbey Rd., Erdington, Birmingham, B23 7QQ

Gosh Christina, you must have an incredible amount of spare time if you can do such an exhaustive analysis of the DJs on Radio 1! To my everlasting shame I watch brekkie-telly in the morning before I go to work so I don't listen to Radio 1 although I come across the DJs you mention from time to time on TOTP. Most of them seem to be complete cretins, with the possible exception of John Peel, and as you said, even he's lost some credibility with his stunts on TOTP. I suppose music is of minor importance to me really - I certainly don't play it all the time like Dave does.

((I don't listen to the radio in my spare time - if I did I suppose I'd listen to Radio 4 or something a bit more stimulating than Radio 1 anyway - I listen to the radio when I'm getting up or typing my fanzine or eating biscuits to brighten up the background! Cath also reacts to my bit on spiders...))

I admit I'm not afraid of spiders either but I can't stand slugs. I hate and despise slugs. Slugs are capable of sending me into fits of absolute revulsion. Have you ever looked at a slug close up? They're covered in icky orange parasites which run all over the surface. God knows what happens to them when you tip salt on a slug. Slugs get into my kitchen somehow. No matter how carefully I block up all the little holes which lead from my kitchen to the outside world they always manage to get in somehow, and there are those horrible silvery streaks everywhere. I even found one climbing up to my food preparation surfaces once. Yeuk! One thing I'm never kind to is a slug. They always get the salt treatment. As for touching one ... one of my worst nightmares is finding one in my shoe someday - after I've put it on.

((Hmm, I've never really thought about slugs before, but now you describe them so lovingly, Cath, I can see they're not one of this world's most adorable creatures! So, let's change the subject to chivalry and medieval board games as we come to the long-promised letter from...))

Darroll Pardoe, 11B Cote Lea Square, Southgate, Runcorn, Cheshire WA7 2SA

After the Pope invented 'Crusades' it got rather complicated. The Christian players found that the other side kept beating them, and anyway after a while wouldn't let them play in Jerusalem any more, so they all came home and invented a new version called 'Albigensian Crusades'. This didn't involve hazardous sea voyages - it was played right on the doorstep and slaughtering heretics was just as much fun as killing Saracens. Too bad that most of the troubadours got caught in the crossfire. By the time most of the heretics had been killed off nobody was sure of the rules anymore, and in any case, with three (or was it four?) popes all ruling at once how could you agree which Pope's rules to play by? Eventually they had to call a big conference at Constance to sort it all out, but even then one of the popes refused to go along with it and departed in a huff to a castle in Spain to start a new game called 'who's the real pope anyway?', still going after 500 years on the beaches of Brittany.

Just a bit later a bright lad in Germany named Luther invented a new game which caught on right away called 'Reformation'. People formed themselves

into different teams and went around burning each other at the stake. This went a long way towards solving the central heating problem. As time went on more and more teams joined in the game, which was very popular as you were allowed to play by whatever rules you made up, even though the other teams were playing by their own rules. Some modern variants (like 'spot the botmod') are still very popular.

((Now to round things off I'm going to quote from the letter I was most surprised to receive this time!))

Bob Day, 154 Sandbed Lane, Belper, Derbyshire, DE5 0SN

You are probably asking yourself, "So why is this character writing to me now?" The simple answer is I'm locking Music From A Fire. I know that this loc is, therefore, very nearly two years late; but nonetheless, I have just reached your zine in my outstanding fanac pile. Consider yourself lucky - there are many illustrious names in fandom who are still waiting for a loc on their last few zines. In fact, I think a couple of them have already gafiated....

At this point in the loc, I normally trot out a whole series of lame excuses for not locking earlier; as I've not written before, I'll summarise briefly the relevant ones: excess of mundane things like work, need to get car fit for MOT, a serious bout of ill health, and workload requirements of a post-grad management course. Add to that the huge pile of fanac I've already worked my way down, and you may well appreciate that a certain delay in locking may manifest itself. Having said that you may wonder why I've bothered locking at all - after all, the reasoning could go, a loc after all this time is hardly going to meet with a rapturous response, is it? You could be excused for thinking that, at this temporal distance from your zine's publication date, the best thing I could do would be to forget all about it, and shamefully consign your offering to the fanzine collection, the while blushing with shame.

Well, the blushing with shame is there, if only as a state of mind rather than a state of face; but the reason for locking has to do with my view of fanzines as a whole. I'm a great believer in the school of fanzine thought that says that the faned should put as much of themselves into producing their magnum opus as is humanely possible. Quite obviously, it takes some sort of hefty motivation to actually get off one's behind to actually set to and produce a fanzine. A lot of effort goes into it, and the only thanks the average faned gets (apart from scathing reviews) is the response - the locs. In short, I feel that any fanzine, no matter how good or bad it may be, demands a loc in reply. It is my debt to the faned, my way of saying "Thanks - just thanks for taking the trouble to produce the zine." One might even trot out that hoary old McLuanite chestnut - 'The medium is the message'. A fanzine is important, because it is, because it exists. And hence this loc, and many other like it, I make a point of locking every fanzine I receive, sooner or later (normally later).

((It's a fine theory, but sometimes I find it hard enough to read all the fanzines I get, let alone respond! I think so long as I get some response, maybe just a few interesting letters like Bob's, the odd surprise, I'm happy. So while I'm about it I shall thank all the rest of the people who sent me friendly letters on Sorgenkind, IN THE TRADITIONAL (though not always capit- alised form) of the WAFH column, which doesn't sound nearly so euphonious as

the in my case, strictly more accurate, IAHF column. Well, whatever, I also heard from Alex Stewart, Chuck Connor, Philip Collins, Sue Thomason, George Bondar (yes, I did get your letter after all!), Pete Presford, Margaret Hall, Mary Gentle, Lynne Ann Morse, Harry Andruschak, Marc Ortlieb, Jon Wallace, Jean Weber and Jeremy Ball.

Testament of Chaos

That would have been all, except that I can't leave the area without saying a word or two about the local saint, yes, that was saint, albeit an obscure and dead one (well, they're all dead actually - it's a dangerous profession!) I doubt very much that many of you will have heard of St. Bromide of Bromley, though H.G. Wells did slip in a passing reference to her in Kipps. However it won't surprise regular readers of my fanzine to discover she was born and lived in that much chronicled century, on which I am expert nonpareille, the twelfth. Contemporary evidence suggests that Bromide's saintliness was not entirely evident from an early age. She grew up a Kent nobleman's spoilt daughter, with a great fondness for anything to do with money: spending it, stealing it or even eating it, which was no mean feat in those days when the standard currency was gold, not paper (she ate paper too, but only if it had been sufficiently and laboriously illuminated first). In short, Bromide was a spoilt young lady and Daddy's darling. But for some strange reason people still liked her, even the servants who had to clear up the mess after the unsuccessful alchemy sessions in which Bromide experimented with the notion of turning gold to cocaine. She and her friends did try to get high on the gold but somehow it was never very effective! It was not long after she gave up her abortive dabblings in alchemy that Bromide took to wearing a hair shirt. Church historians say she was influenced by her neo-paganist friend, Mathilde, who believed that the pages of the Gospel had been copied out in the wrong order by an early pagan scribe (no doubt not even a member of the appropriate print union) and had founded a sect dedicated to the correction of this error. Since her page ordering had the Ascension preceding the Crucifixion, the sect did not exactly find favour with the established Church. She was implying, so some malicious bishop put it, that Our Blessed Lord had needed to visit his father for reassurance before going through with the crucifixion, a notion so ludicrous it could only come from a heretic, and that worst, the resurrected Jesus was still alive here on earth. Mathilde answered bravely that indeed he was and cited a claim from one of her pilgrim friends to have visited his pilgrim's cave somewhere in the Sinai desert. Such talk was quite inadmissible and the hapless Mathilde was incarcerated in Carcassonne where she is said to have converted many Cathars before being consigned to a solitary cell in a disused well, which she was destined never to leave.

Bromide, it is true, had dabbled in Mathilde's heresy for a while, but only because it was a daring and fashionable thing to do before the church officially pronounced its disapproval. The true roots of her spiritual development are more obscure and can perhaps be traced back to the visions she had as a girl, which she may well have been trying to recapture in the later alchemical experiments. After a year of riotous and decadent living in France in what Jane Austen might have called her coming out season,

though would surely not have recognised the indecorous form it took!, Bromide for no apparent reason returned to Bromley, and set to sewing, the activity she hated most in the world, and sewed for herself the previously mentioned hair shirt. Everyone thought it was a great joke - our Bromide's gone holy they said. What fantastical notions the girl has they said. She ought to be married they said. But Bromide put on her shirt and there it stayed till the day she died! For a few months Bromide lived much as normal despite the hair shirt, though some remarked she was more cheerful than of old, and others that she had given up hard drugs and cutting to pieces the tapestries, which some winters her father would have to replace three times or more.

Then one day Bromide disappeared. No-one worried unduly because she often took a fancy to passing knights and would ride off pillion on their white chargers, only to return a day or so later on foot, complaining of the tedium of their conversation and their strict and stuffy insistence on sleeping in their armour. When she didn't return in over a week, her friends assumed she had found a secret way into the armour and when the week stretched into a month that she had eloped. Bromide's father who had red hair and a fair bit of illegitimate Plantagenet blood fell into a fearsome temper, rolled over in the rushes on the floor and screamed: "Will no-one rid me of this wretched priest!" (He forgot at times that he wasn't Henry II.) His men, not quite sure what he meant, went off for a week's holiday in Canterbury, ceremonially slaughtered a few clerics on the way back, and returned to find their master busy with a new infatuation: golf.

Bromide in fact had not gone far, just to Chislehurst, where, discarding all her finery, she set to living the ascetic life of a holy woman in the caves. These caves, being the only location for holiness in the district, were really not as peaceful as they might be. Lots of the tunnels had 'do not disturb' signs and 'prayer in progress' chalked onto the stone, and come the evening, a convoy of ragged, white-bearded men would trudge across the fields to the local inn, discussing that day's spiritual development or new ontological proofs for the existence of God. Bromide penetrated deep into the caves to the edge of an underground lake where she at last saw great visions and was able to write her first book of prophecies, in which was foretold the war of Jenkins ear, and that it would be a great source of amusement to schoolboys down the centuries; the coming of the railways with several versions of the Charing Cross - Orpington timetable; and the fate of Bromley High Street to be forever 'cwydede and of grete discomforte to all on a Saturdaye morn, especially near unto the feeste of Chrystemas.'

When she emerged from the cave, Bromide had thrown away the last of her foolish and extravagant ways and set to work on the Chislehurst hermits. Firstly she turned out all the silver, packets of cornflakes and TV sets they were hoarding in their caves against a hard winter or prayers' block, and secondly exhorted them to take each day as it came with trust, and if necessary, starvation. They grumbled a lot and one hermit secretly kept his telly (Bromide always wondered where everybody disappeared around Dallas-time on Tuesdays) but in the main they took well to the new regime of dancing, jumping off rocks and offering self expression and broken legs to the Lord. Hermits from all over England, and even a couple from Ireland and France, flocked to the caves to join Bromide's Little community, and an enterprising nun set up a hospital in the vicinity. All went well until a papal envoy was sent to investigate the rumours of a religious revival in distant, rain-drenched England, in the place with the appropriate name

