

Reasons For Publishing Your Belated Fanzine, No.48 (collect the set!): Greg Pickersgill tactfully intimates that sending out TAFF ballots before the deadline is on the whole less trouble than having broken bottles ground into your kidneys. Craven DAVE LANGFORD, covering as ever at 94 LONDON ROAD, READING, BERKSHIRE, RG1 5AU, UK, has decided not to argue. Indecision about life after issue 50 still prevails: you take your solvency in your hands if you send £2 and hope for 5 issues (pro-rata for fewer). Cheques/money orders to **Ansible**, Girobank transfer to account 24 475 4403. Or \$3.50 to US agents Mary & Bill Burns (23 Kensington Court, Hempstead, NY 11550); or \$4A to Aussie agent Irwin (Famous GUFF Winner) Hirsh, 2/416 Dandenong Rd, North Caulfield, Vic 3161. Phone: Reading (0734) 665804 and shout. Art: Dan Steffan (without), Alexis Gilliland (within). Print run 600. Bloody hell.

# Ansible

THE HAPPY FANZINE



## LONDON FANDOM MEETS ITS WATERLOO

The inertia of fandom is a strange and wondrous thing. For years, on the first Thursday of each month, fannish pilgrims have travelled from the remote boundaries of known space to their ritual London meeting-place the One Tun pub... there to spend an merry social evening complaining about the bloody awful crowd and the emetic beer, in terms suggesting that by comparison the Black Hole of Calcutta was an oasis of airy tranquillity. A select few pros (screened for ideological correctness by Malcolm Edwards) withdrew to the nearby Sir Christopher Hatton. A select many simply stayed home rather than face the Tun.

This steady decline was arrested by the decisive action of no less a 100% macho man than the One Tun's manager, who in January blew his top at scenes of sick depravity (reportedly, Oscar Dalglish with an arm round his boyfriend) and banned the offenders. Suddenly it was solidarity time; outraged petitions were circulated; and February's meeting was definitely rescheduled for the Citie of York in Holborn. Or the Wellington near Waterloo, depending whose definite information you listened to. If I'd known it was that easy to trigger the long-overdue move, I'd have kissed Greg Pickersgill years ago.

The February Tun (as people kept calling it, followed by "You know what I mean.") was thus a bit scattered. The Wellington sounded most promising, but I made the mistake of following detailed route directions from Avedon Carol: "Right opposite Waterloo station." In the darkness of a winter evening it's remarkable how many hundreds of square miles of London turn out to be opposite Waterloo....

Situation reports and fans trickled into the vastness of the Wellington. The Citie of York contingent was suffering severe and familiar overcrowding. Hitch-Hiker fandom had apparently cried with one voice "Good riddance," and adopted the Tun for its own. A few stakhanovites like Martin Easterbrook touched base at all three locations, spreading pro-Wellington propaganda with a will. Your editor had already allowed himself to be swayed, as it were, by the beer -- not to mention the luxury of being able to breathe in without a prior written request to surrounding fans. Everyone seemed happy: the Wellington it is, henceforth. (From the Tube, aim for the **Waterloo Road** station exit, following **Old Vic** signs. Verb. sap.) This has been a Public Service Announcement, couched in Lofty Moral Tones. Pass it on.

## Me and H.G.Wells and the Continuum

Novacon 16 Speech: Chris Evans

You may not know this, but I'm here as a stand-in for H.G. Wells. Originally the Novacon committee wanted him to be their Guest of Honour: you can imagine what a coup it would have been. But someone pointed out that he doesn't like travelling these days, in common with a few other well-known SF writers. Isaac Asimov hates planes, Ray Bradbury has a habit of missing boats, and Robert Heinlein, so I'm told, once demanded that his fare to the UK be paid in pints of blood. Wells has none of these particular problems, but he's had a long career and his old bones are a bit stiff these days. So, reluctantly, the invitation was never made, and you're stuck with me instead.

Actually Wells and I have a lot in common as writers.

Neither of us has ever won a Hugo or Nebula (or even been nominated for one), we're not members of SFWA, we don't subscribe to **Locus**, and Harlan Ellison hasn't waxed eloquent about us in any of his **Dangerous Visions** anthologies. Like me, Wells hasn't (as far as I know) ever visited Mongolia or met L.Ron Hubbard. Certainly neither of us has read **Battlefield Earth**. On the more positive side, if Wells is a household name, then so am I -- the household in my case being Flat 2, 191 Anerley Road, Penge.

Of course there are differences between us, I have to admit. Wells was a genius in his way, and became internationally known, his books read by millions. I, by contrast, am not a genius in any way I can think of -- and believe me, I've tried -- while my books are known only to a few. You wouldn't call them a select few, either, if you knew them as well as I do. I'd guess that a lot of you here have never read a word of my stuff: and fair enough. There are lots of other books jostling for your attention, and the three novels I've published under my own name since 1980 have hardly been huge successes.

The first, **Capella's Golden Eyes**, was greeted politely enough by reviewers, and the word "promising", while not actually being bandied about, certainly hung in the air... as it almost always does with first novels. The reception was sufficiently favourable to convince me that I'd done the right thing in giving up my job to write full-time. If only I'd known.

In those days I was a particularly slow and painstaking writer. I'd begun a new novel by the time **Capella** appeared, but it was taking time to write and my money was rapidly running out. With the aid of a generous sponsor, I managed to get an Arts Council grant which let me finish the book at my own luxurious pace. This was **The Insider**, which actually got some good reviews when it appeared in hardback in 1981. But a year or so later the paperback was pulped soon after publication, thanks to a warehouse move. (Though I've always had a sneaking suspicion that Rog Peyton bombarded the publishers with hate-mail about the book's lousy cover so that they withdrew it out of shame.) By then I was again embarked on a new novel, and again running out of money, and this time there was no grant to bail me out.

My third novel, **In Limbo**, took three years to write, mainly because I had to keep breaking off to do other, more commercial stuff -- things like novelizations -- in order to pay the bills. My idealistic vision of bursting on the scene in a blaze of glory had faded in the face of harsh economic facts. **In Limbo** would have been a better novel if I'd been able to write it in a shorter, more concentrated period, but even so I poured everything I had into the book, and it's me doing my best. When it appeared as a paperback original in 1985, the title proved prophetic. It promptly vanished, after a total of two reviews in the non-specialist press. (One, a short paragraph in the **Dublin Sunday Independent**, was little more than a plot précis. A slightly longer and more condescending piece in the **Yorkshire Arts Bulletin** concluded that my last few pages "contain a foreseeably eidotropic denouement". I still haven't got a clue what this means.)

So much for three years' work... or that's the way I felt. Don't get me wrong: I'm not bitter about any of this. Well,

not exactly. In *Limbo* wasn't written as a commercial book, and the audience for it was bound to be small. But there's a certain sense of anticlimax in seeing three years' work greeted by almost total lack of response. Some writers can get by without feedback; their faith in their abilities needs no support. Not me. I need to know whether my stuff is registering in any way. (I'm even prepared to accept minor criticisms, provided they're served up with lavish dollops of praise.) Of course the books survive, for readers interested in seeking them out: but how many will be, when they don't even know of their existence?

Back in 1980, things looked rosier. I had vague plans of doing a novel every couple of years and writing short stories in between. I would concentrate on high quality work, in hope of building up a loyal readership. I didn't want fame, just a fair measure of acknowledgement for my efforts, and enough money for survival.... Instead, since finishing *In Limbo* in 1983 I haven't written anything I would regard as ambitious work (bar a few shorts). I simply can't afford to.

Thus I'm in a state of quiet despair about my work -- the work I'm not doing. Formula novels and novelizations pay the bills but don't satisfy the soul. You could argue that if I was really devoted to High Art, I'd sacrifice everything in pursuit of it; and you could be right. But I've always worked best when I've had emotional and financial peace of mind, and I know plenty of other writers who feel the same.

Recently someone was talking about a "Missing Generation" of British SF writers: a kind of post-New Wave generation who should have emerged in the late 70s and early 80s. In a sense this actually existed, and I was a typical example -- at least in that I exemplify What Went Wrong with the whole generation. (I don't in fact believe in any of this generation stuff, but let's use the label for now.) Around 1980 a few people talked about a "Faber Group", meaning Rob Holdstock, Garry Kilworth and myself -- all of whom published first SF novels with Faber circa 1976-1980 -- and of course Chris Priest, who was presumably our mentor, being already established at Faber with a solid reputation.

Now this idea of groups is topical in the light of the current notion of "cyberpunk", which writers like Bruce Sterling and magazines like *Interzone* are doing their best to promote. The Faber Group theory -- a much more modest affair -- wasn't unreasonable in principle. Besides the dubious distinction of being published in what was then the only prestige hardback SF line apart from Gollancz, Chris, Rob, Garry and myself were all close friends who shared similar feelings about writing. Three of us even had the same literary agents. But we reacted to the Faber Group idea with cringing horror. None of us wanted to be lumped into any sort of group, because this implies a shared identity; and each of us was very jealous of the individuality of his writing.

Happily the notion never caught on -- partly thanks to Faber, who soon stopped publishing SF so that we went our separate ways: Chris to Jonathan Cape, Rob and Garry to Gollancz, and myself relegated to the sloughs of original paperbacks. Equally important was the fact that we did absolutely nothing to encourage the idea of such a group. And in the end it's always a writer's work which speaks louder than critical generalizations:

Chris Priest went on to novels like *The Affirmation* and *The Glamour*, which owe very little to genre SF. Rob Holdstock discovered his perfect imaginative vehicle in a distinctive brand of fantasy typified by *Mythago Wood*. Garry Kilworth has been moving steadily away from SF, his latest novel *Witch-water Country* being a kind of pastoral with macabre overtones. And me? If *Capella* was a fairly conventional SF novel, *The Insider* was borderline, and *In Limbo* not SF at all.

So there's a sense in which all four of us have "deserted" SF -- if you perceive SF as something whose traditions new writers should be committed to and should cherish and enlarge through their own work.

I can't speak for the others, but my move away from SF came about partly because of technical problems encountered in writing *Capella's Golden Eyes*, and more importantly because SF in the early 80s seemed increasingly bland and complacent -- in addition to its perennial problem that so little of it is truly adult. Every time I came up with an SF idea, it struck me as either ridiculous or impossible to do justice to in a fresh, exciting way. I felt as stale as the

stuff I was reading... and envied Wells the fact that when writing his scientific romances he'd never read *Amazing* or *Asimov's* or any of the endless streams of SF pouring from British and American presses over the last thirty years. I kept trying to clear my head of all the genre clutter in the hope of finding a completely fresh approach. However, I don't have any aptitude for "new ideas" in the science-fictional sense, and not surprisingly I failed in my aim. The result was silence.

Elsewhere I've argued against thinking in categories and seeing SF as separate from the rest of literature, so these attitudes might seem strange. Why try to work in a tradition that you don't really feel exists? Well, one of the attractions of the field is that it encourages a community spirit, very alluring to the isolated writer trying to plough his lonely furrow in the field of literature. And the fiction itself presents a constant challenge to the ambitious writer precisely because so much of it is badly done.

Thus I've been veering back towards SF just lately, though I'm not promising anything radical or dynamic, and certainly nothing that's meant to represent a rallying call for the field. Perish the thought. I'm all for diversity, for individuals writing about what obsesses them. My only provisos are vague and woolly ones about being serious and dedicated and not short-changing readers... though like many hard-pressed freelancers I haven't always lived up to these aims. Being serious, by the way, doesn't mean you can't have fun, and being dedicated doesn't mean you can't be entertaining: they simply mean that the fun and entertainment will be of a higher order.

Such wishy-washy liberal attitudes are in stark contrast to so-called cyberpunk, whose writers (to judge by public pronouncements) are keen to promote themselves as a new breed, devoted to producing a new breed of SF, and **doing so with a shared ideology**. To my mind, this is suspect. Of course the idea of a new movement suits the spirit of the times; it's a good talking point; a good polemic always provides useful publicity; and for *Interzone* it's seemingly the radical cause which the magazine has been seeking ever since it started publication. Does cyberpunk actually exist, however?

The idea finds its most fluent and persuasive advocate in Bruce Sterling, who under his own name and that of Vincent Omniaveritas has produced some stimulating critiques of the genre and what needs to be done about it. He has a prospectus for modern SF, which he wishes to be carried out not only by himself but by others who are like-minded. He doesn't call it cyberpunk in public, though he has been known to mention the word in private. He talks of SF as pop culture, and of the need to create a native literature of the post-industrial society: technologically literate, global in its world-view, and (while well-written) above all about ideas.

Actually I think most of his notions are sound, though somewhat narrow. I've never been able to agree with critics who argue that only SF can deal with the modern epoch, or even that it has a monopoly on sense of wonder. This smacks of inverted snobbery -- wanting to turn the ugly duckling of literature into a swan which can look down its beak at everything else. **All** really good writing fires the imagination, and you don't have to have SF trappings in a novel or story to show the impact of modern technology on humankind. The best novel I've read in the last six months is Martin Amis's *Money*, a determinedly unpleasant book which directly addresses the modern condition in the Western world -- though probably not in a way that SF snobs would like.

But let's not quibble. At least Sterling/Omniaveritas is stirring things up: SF has been needing a good kick in the pants for years. Yet if the cyberpunks are taking over in the USA, we seem to be lagging behind here. When Sterling recently visited Britain and attended the yearly Milford writers' conference, I gather he expressed some disappointment at the lack of exciting new British SF. Where were our cyberpunks? Nowhere to be found.

Unfortunately there's really no such thing as cyberpunk in the US either, if what's meant is a concerted movement of writers working along the same radical lines. When Omniaveritas describes the new SF he wants to see, it's unsurprising to find him wanting precisely the kind of SF that Bruce Sterling writes. Writers' polemics, as Chris Priest has



pointed out, are almost always autobiographical.

Three names commonly mentioned as cyberpunks are Rudy Rucker, William Gibson and Sterling himself. Rucker's been around since 1978 and has proved himself a very inventive writer though slapdash and throwaway in presentation. Gibson made a big impact with *Neuromancer*, it's true, and he's the writer most people think of when cyberpunk is mentioned. Sterling published his first novel in 1977, and his latest, *Schismatrix*, has been well received. But if you compare two novels like *Neuromancer* and *Schismatrix* you'll find they couldn't be more different. The first is an SF thriller, heavily influenced by the cinema; the second owes more to the visionary impetus and traditional narrative style of Arthur C. Clarke and even Olaf Stapledon. Where Gibson is deft and punchy, brilliant at bringing individual scenes alive, Sterling shows less stylistic flair but is far more radical in his ideas. *Neuromancer* is all about glittering surfaces, *Schismatrix* about awesome depths. (In fact Gibson's work, with its hi-tech gadgetry/jargon and its near future redolent of entropy and drug abuse, strikes me as rather like the old New Wave with brass knobs on.)

But now I'm being bitchy, and I don't mean to be, because I think both writers are talented: their reputations deserve to grow. The point is that marshalling them under one banner is misleading. I also think it significant that Gibson, the most prominent "cyberpunk", is said to be unhappy with the term, even if content to let it be used as a flag of convenience. John Shirley is another writer who's been attached to the "group", and in a recent *Interzone* interview we discover that "Shirley is most often associated with cyberpunk or punk SF, terms he initially despised, but has now come to accept".

This smacks to me of a bandwagon. "Hey, did you hear people have started calling us cyberpunks? I don't know what the hell it means, but it sounds good, so let's go along with it for the ride." And as a label, it's undoubtedly better than something like the Angry Young Science Fiction Men.

So again, let's not quibble. At least all these writers are passionately committed to SF; they identify themselves with it and are eager to see a new breed of it emerging. So why isn't the revolution also stirring here in Britain?

Put simply, I think it's because we have a fundamentally different attitude towards SF. It's always been more marginal here, at least in a genre sense, with writers tending to work much more as individuals and not generally feeling as if they're adding to some distinct corpus of literature with a real social position. They remain resistant to SF's community spirit, some of them writing it almost by accident and not seeing it as a special kind of literature at all. Such writers convey a strong flavour of their native country and attitudes. Richard Cowper, D.G. Compton, Keith Roberts and Chris Priest are among those who are happier closer to home. Their work is often firmly rooted in British landscapes, in internal rather than external experience, the tone meditative and restrained rather than brash and action-oriented. Almost they seem to be fastidiously declaring their uninterest in competing with the scale and swagger of American SF.

Of course there are exceptions aplenty. Some British writers make an effort to satisfy genre expectations (and the need to earn a living) by angling their material towards the American market. One could mention Bob Shaw and John Brunner here. Others, like Eric Frank Russell, became more American than the Americans themselves, while a few like Arthur C. Clarke have always been internationalists. Brian Aldiss has

long practised what he preaches when arguing for less parochialism in British SF, for it to take on the grander themes and wider horizons beloved of Americans. Even that arch-individual J.C. Ballard has claimed that SF is the most important literature of our time and implies, with and without irony, that it should possess some kind of missionary zeal. Similarly, Ian Watson has argued the case for taking SF out of literature and using it as "a tool to help us think". Many of Ian's arguments, first elaborated ten years ago, fore-shadow strongly what writers like Sterling are saying today.

One interesting thing about Aldiss, Ballard and Watson is that all three have spent significant periods living overseas in exotic places, Aldiss in the Far East, Ballard in China, Watson in Japan and East Africa. (Compare Sterling's years in India, and Clarke's in Sri Lanka.) Obviously the experience of culture shock can bring later commitment to SF as a vital medium with global rather than nationalistic perspectives.

Looking at SF in the large, it can be argued that the American product is as parochial or as nationalistic in subtle ways as anything produced here, but I'm concentrating on the more serious kinds of SF. Ambitious US writers have tended to range far more widely in setting and theme than their British counterparts, a reflection of differing national characters. We Brits are as a national more insular, lacking the frequent open-mindedness of Americans, their generosity, their sense of scale and scope. We're more obsessed with private concerns. If it was Wells who created the template for modern SF, then it's American writers and editors who created the genre and took its wide-eyed view of the universe to their hearts.

Why there and not here? Well, the USA is the most technologically advanced nation on Earth, with new ideas and lifestyles impinging most rapidly on people there. Is it any wonder that SF, custom-built to deal with the impact of social and technological change, found its ideal home there?

But there's more to it than that. A country's literature is profoundly influenced by its geography and history. Simplistically, America remains a big open place with plenty of wilderness where presumably it's still possible to feel something of the pioneer spirit. The "log cabin" syndrome still survives: a feeling that it really is possible to go out into the wilds and set up home, against all the odds. Nowadays, of course, it's easier to do this by the power of the pen or word processor rather than the six-gun. Instead of building a real log cabin, create a paper spaceship which can fly you to the other end of the universe... and there you can really show your pioneering spirit.

Here in Britain we're a bit disdainful of that sort of thing. There's no wilderness here to speak of, and certainly no pioneering spirit. If we have a particular historical syndrome dominating our present literature, it's the "End of Empire" theme. America has yet to experience this, apart from a small echo of it following the withdrawal from Viet Nam: it'll be interesting to see what happens to their SF when American political and economic power does finally begin to wane. (Though perhaps none of us will be around to see it.) It also occurs to me that the echo of Viet Nam already has begun to influence American SF: Sterling's call for a more global outlook reflects a new humility in the realization that the USA cannot really expect to dominate the planet for ever and ever.

Meanwhile, on this tight little isle, we're still churning out stuff about the British in India. SF hasn't escaped the "end of empire" syndrome, either: almost every well-known British SF writer has done a disaster novel of some description, or one whose background shows Britain invaded or slowly falling apart. Off the top of my head I can think of Wyndham -- obviously -- Aldiss, Ballard, Christopher, Cowper, Roberts, Priest.... Even Orwell and Amis have had a go. And yes, I've done one myself with *The Insider*.

Such books appeal to the masochistic side of the British character, but unless they have something else to offer, American editors tend to greet them with as much enthusiasm as if you'd dropped a long-dead kipper in their laps. I've never managed to sell *The Insider* in the US, though I did get it published in Germany, a country with a historical tradition more similar to our own.

"Too British" is the common American verdict on "British gloom", as if this were explanation enough. Many of us here

have a love-hate relationship with the American SF market, as represented by its editors. We want to write our own stuff, but we're very conscious that without American sales we're going to struggle financially.

All these factors -- historical, geographical, economic -- combine to make British SF a marginal affair, and that's why I think it's unlikely that a distinct "British movement" committed to SF will ever emerge. (The original **New Worlds** "new wave" was actually an **anti-SF** movement in many ways, and even then American writers like Disch and Sladek were always heavily involved.) What tradition exists here tends to be one of UK writers doing their own thing against the odds, or making efforts to give their material a transatlantic flavour. We haven't the market potential to support a home-grown SF industry which could exist without reference to the US product... the notion doesn't even enter heads except as a vague occasional yearning.

I don't want to sound too gloomy. (Think of our continental cousins in France, Germany, the Netherlands and so on, who have an even bigger problem: overcoming the hegemony of the English language.) New SF writers **are** emerging here and finding success on both sides of the Atlantic: Mary Gentle is a recentish example. Feminist SF also seems vigorous in Britain and America, and it's still an area with a lot of potential. Perhaps John Clute is also on to something when he writes in **Interzone** than Brian Aldiss's *Helliconia* books have "established for British SF in the 1980s an adult model for writing large-scale epic narrative".

There are certainly signs that British SF is becoming a bit more cosmopolitan, more prepared to tackle a larger canvas. Gwyneth Jones travels widely in her SF; Garry Kilworth and Ian Watson have been taking us to exotic little corners of the globe for years. And I've heard rumours that Iain Banks is writing something akin to space opera....

Overall, I still find myself unable to sort out my feelings on SF. I veer between enthusiasm and despair. In a sense, every SF writer in the world is labouring in the shadow of H.G.Wells. None has achieved his mastery of the form, his originality and invention. Of course Wells had the advantage when he was writing that practically the whole field was there for the making. And make it he did.

I don't know whether modern SF will be able to solve the problem that the longer it goes on, the harder it is to find something fresh to write about. In these moods I'm a kindred spirit with Lee Montgomerie, who muses (again in **Interzone**): "Sometimes I think time is wearing out for SF, locked in a desperate energy crisis. So much of its conceptual fuel has already been burned up, exhausted, reprocessed into advertising, comic books, claptrap movies and video games.... Sometimes I think SF is already dead, long since expired from cognitive anaemia in the early flush of youth, and that the literature we have now is just its ghost, endlessly and pointlessly revisiting its old haunts, saying nothing."

All too often I have similar feelings; but the optimism doggedly endemic to the field strikes back. Maybe we've simply yet to discover -- as Aldiss and Wingrove suggest in **Trillion Year Spree** -- new metaphors to embody the ideas of modern science in fiction. Or maybe SF has simply emerged at last from a playful childhood where everything seems new and wonderful, into a belated adulthood which entails returning to its roots to confront all its myths and dreams with a new maturity. Prognostications about SF's future have tended to be gloomy ever since I started reading SF criticism, yet still it lumbers on in its promiscuous, punch-drunk way. Even lost sheep keep coming back into the fold.

Fired by the feeling that British SF **has** been in the doldrums of late, Rob Holdstock and I recently took up an idea of David Garnett's for doing an anthology of new British short stories, published to coincide with *Conspiracy*. The result is called **Other Edens** -- out from Unwin next August.

Now if I were Harlan Ellison, I'd be telling you that this is a revolutionary, state-of-the-art anthology the like of which you've never seen, which shows British SF as vital and alive and radical and innovative and altogether incredible and unbelievable. But with typical British restraint I'll simply say that Rob and I think it's a good solid collection of stories which incidentally tends to support my view that British SF is very much a collection of individuals who, left to their own devices, write stories not quite like anyone

else's at all. And if that seems like a modest claim -- I disagree. It's the most radical thing of all.

This speech has gone on far too long in my opinion, and probably yours as well. I've been generalizing wildly in places; you can probably think of lots of examples to disprove what I've been saying. (I can think of a few myself.) All my musings and misgivings about "cyberpunk" could be regarded as jealousy that I was never part of a vigorous, thrusting new group with dynamic ideas. My complaints about American editors could be seen as sour grapes growing from the feeling that my own stuff's been neglected. Or I could just be indulging in my own bit of polemic as an aid to self-publicity. It's all part of the game, isn't it?

I'm off now to see H.G.Wells. We have a few things to talk about, though mostly he does the talking and I listen. But I've got some bad news for him: Rog Peyton thinks his covers are lousy. Still, he's in good company on that score. [CE]

#### COMPLAINTS DEPARTMENT: Letters

**Unsigned** (Glasgow postmark): "**LANGFORD!** We, the 10th of October Scottish Committee for the Furtherance of Cyberpunk (OctoberAlbaCyberpunk), are shocked and disgusted at the scumbaggish treatment meted out to Bruce Sterling within the pages of your pustulant, despicable, libellous, nose-dredging excuse for a fanzine! Sterling is an artistic writer of considerable -- nay, consummate skill, and to mention his name or any of his works in your purulent, grotty, shoddy, meretricious feuilleton indicates a staggering presumption on your part! Let it be known that our OctoberAlbaCyberpunk minions are everywhere, monitoring your every move and recording your every utterance and typed letter by the use of ultra-sophisticated hardware totally alien to the feeble mind-sets of limp flaccid Home-Counties-SF writers such as yourself! Our intent is to compile a dossier of your terrifying and nauseating pastimes and release it to Fandom worldwide. Never again will you be able to hold your head high in convention bars -- indeed, your only solace will be that found in the snore-hung darkness of post-midnight film programmes. We dare you to print this letter and thus avoid the even more horrifying retributions we have in store!

"**WIDGIE ROTUND BOLIVAR (ON BEHALF OF COMMITTEE).**"

[I wasn't so terrified as to miss the American spelling "libelous" in the original of this. H'mm.... DRL]

**Dave Collins:** "Terry Broome & I are collecting money within fandom to be donated to charity in memory of Rob Gregg. Closing date is 30 April; cheques should be made out to me." [21 Exleigh Close, Bitterne, Southampton, SO2 5FB]

**Alexis Gilliland:** "On [my novel] **Wizenbeak**, the third payment from Bluejay, due three months after publication, was not forthcoming. At the Atlanta Worldcon Jim Frenkel bought me lunch and said it would be mailed out in a week or two. The end of the month I called him three times, and when the calls weren't returned I sent a letter saying that if I wasn't paid by Oct 31, the contract was void and the rights reverted to me. October rolled by. On the 31st, I called and asked the person answering the phone to return the MS for the sequel which had been in submission since mid-May.... At WSFA's fifth Friday party that very evening, Jack Chalker told me that Bluejay was going down the tubes. It figures. I'm about 70,000 words into volume 3 of the trilogy, and should finish it up this month [November]. When I do, I can try to market all three as a package, **Wizenbeak** (rights having reverted), **The Shadow Shaia** (which Frenkel liked but never offered a contract for) and **The Lord of the Troll-Bats**. How did we ever get so far ahead of the publisher, finishing book 3 before he made the third payment on book 1?"

[Andrew Stephenson later reported that Frenkel had given up publishing and switched to packaging. DRL]

#### CONDOM

**Novacon 16** (long gone, snows of yesteryear, this is the kind of news **Ansible** prefers) definitely happened. From a smoking trail of charred synapses I reconstruct: On arrival at the De Vere Hotel, Coventry, we were personally met by Chairman Tony Berry Himself, merry as a funeral bell: "Hello. It's not very good so far. The bar's pretty nasty, I'm afraid...." To inject spontaneity, the committee had neglected to brief speakers and panellists on when the printed programme said they'd be appearing ("Bloody hell", quipped Terry Pratchett,

arriving late Friday evening to find his panel was already supposed to have happened) or, in extreme cases, that they were appearing at all (I got a letter two days beforehand, asking me to run a panel. Instantly I rang to say "No, I hate running panels, I'm lousy at it, Brian Burgess could do better than me," etc. It was too late. "Oh dear, we've printed the programme now.") But all this is traditional and I enjoyed the con a lot. Famous US author Kim Stanley Robinson and David Brin made a terrific impact in mere hours: G.Pickersgill was seen dancing around the latter at 3am, crying "This man is a fucking alien, he has got to die!" -- causing tolerant Avedon Carol to rail against anti-American bigotry and explain that David B. was a sociobiologist, so one must make allowances for this infirmity. New Era (the L.Ron Hubbard publishing outfit) confined their campaigning to a popular free-beer party with a table full of The Books, all of which were duly signed by ever-witty Malcolm Edwards ("Yours in decay, Ron", etc.) who never noticed that he was being stared at throughout by a New Era person not quite courageous enough to tick him off. The Nova award results (fanzine and fan writer both to Owen Whiteoak, for his **Pink Fluffy Bedsocks** alias practically any name you can imagine; fan artist to ATom) were popular; less so the stunning announcement by Novacon 17 boss Bernie Evans that despite Tony Berry's detailed mathematical proof in the programme book that Novacon could never be squeezed back into the Royal Angus, 1987 would see a return to the Royal Angus. Apparently this year's was the first Novacon ever to have fewer people attending than were listed as members in the program book (i.e. dropouts exceeded walk-ins), which may have had something to do with the decision.

**BFS Open Night** (3 Apr, upstairs in the Royal Connaught, High Holborn, WC1): free to all from 6pm.

**Fanderson 87** (3-5 Apr, Caister, Norfolk): a mere £12 for days of non-stop bloody Gerry Anderson, to 147 Francis Rd, Leyton, London, E10 5NT.

**Becon 87** (17-21 Apr, NEC, Birmingham): Eastercon with ever-swelling guest list, now including Ian Watson and Jane Gaskell. £6 supp £11 att to 191 The Heights, Northolt, Middlesex, UB5 4UB.

**Telly-Con** (18 Apr, New Imperial Hotel, Birmingham): TV-fantasy affair with Patrick Macnee, Joanna Lumley, Gerald Harper: £8 to 132 Cambridge Drive, Marston Green, Birmingham.

**Nat. Con of Poets & Small Presses** (25-26 April, Festival Hall, Corby): "strong SF presence" with Cassandra group and Bob Shaw (on "open day" Sat, not "poets' day" Sun). £5 to Tom Bingham, 82 Dresden Close, Corby, Northants, NN18 9EN.

**Sol III** (1-4 May, Liverpool): Trekkie fun, data from 39 Dersingham Ave, London, E12 5QF. See **Amok Time** again!!!

**Rubicon II** (29 May - 1 June, Chequers Hotel, Newbury): the substitute Silicon rides again, with a substitute date owing to Conspiracy. £5 to Bishop's Cottage, Park House Lane, Reading, Berks, RG3 2AH.

**Albacon 87** (19-23 June, Central Hotel, Glasgow): GoH Josie Saxton, Brian Stableford. £4 supp £10 att (£12 from 19 May) to "Burnawn", Stirling Rd, Dumbarton, G82 2PJ.

**Connote8** (3-5 July, New Hall, Cambridge): Unicon 8, £4 supp £8 att to Trinity College, Cambridge, CB2 1TQ.

**Conspiracy 87** (27 Aug - 1 Sept, Brighton) has considerably de-emphasized its awkward given name in recent flyers, preferring to stress the 45TH WORLD SF CONVENTION bit. (Cheques to the latter name.) £30 to 1 April, £38 to 31 July; PO Box 43, Cambridge, CB1 3JJ.

**Fantasycon XII** (4-6 Sept, Midland Hotel, Brum): GoH J.K. Potter. £3 supp £10 att, to 15 Stanley Rd, Morden, Surrey.

**Nicon II** (late Oct, Belfast): "80% positive" GoH Katherine Kurtz, Robert Anton Wilson, Jim Fitzpatrick. £2 supp £5 att (£6 after Easter, £7 after August) to 60 Melrose St, Belfast 9, N.I. Insider Thomas Ferguson quotes 1986 Nicon highlights: "Yes, Peter Morwood is a prat." (Anon). "She terrified me!" (Anne McCaffrey escort). "Who the fuck is running this bloody mess... I'll murder the bastards..." (Various voices as the con committee unanimously vanished on Saturday night).

**Congregate** (10-12 June 88, Peterborough): £5 supp £11 att, or find out more (this is all I know) from 67 Ayres Drive, Stanground, Peterborough. **Nolacon II** (Worldcon: 1-5 Sept 88, New Orleans) has persuaded Linda Pickersgill to be UK agent: she hasn't had any other information whatever, but might know £ rates real soon now: 7a Lawrence Rd, South

Ealing, W5 4XJ.

**Eurocon XIII/Hungarocon IX** (10-14 Aug 88, Budapest): an enthusiastic but vague flyer hopes this will be "the first Eurocon where there won't be travel problems on account of money restrictions, so fans from East and West can meet." Info: Hungarian SF Society, Eurocon Committee, Budapest 5, PF.514, H-1374, Hungary. (Address from flyer letterhead: in my ignorance I trust part of it isn't a phone number....)

**Somethingorothercon** (1988 or 1989, Somewhere in South Wales): "We, the Swansea group, are half thinking of putting on a con," writes, if that's the word for what he does to hapless postcards, D.M.Sherwood: "It (there's no name yet) may or may not be at the Grand, Port Talbot (a place with all the refined charm of the Central, Cardiff, provided the carpets haven't been stripped out yet). It may include items for fantasy games computer buffs, folk/filk singers and anything else on the cheap. SAE for info to my address pretty please." PO Box 23, Port Talbot, SA13 1DA.

**Contrivance 89** (Eastercon bid) plans to offer a Jersey venue, following a Novacon straw poll at which Jersey votes exceeded those for other suggestions (Birmingham, Brighton) by factors varying from approximately fifty to approximately infinity. Pre-supp £1 to Tim Illingworth, 63 Drake Rd, Chessington, Surrey, KT9 1LQ.

**Noreacon 3** (1990 Worldcon, Boston): GoH Andre Norton plus Ian & Betty Ballantine. Info: UK agent Colin Fine (see COA).

**Contravention** (1990 Eastercon bid) woos fans with dulcet, honeyed phrases: "In 1990 you'll get what you want whether you like it or not!", says the flyer, and suggests that you send £..... [sic] for pre-supp membership to Chris Donaldson, 35 Buller Rd, London, N17.

**Holland in 1990** (my preferred Worldcon bid): a savage clog sank into my groin at Novacon thanks to **Ansible's** mention of a £3.50 pre-supp fee when really it should be £4... to Colin Fine at his new address (see COA) or Ian Sorensen.

**LA in 1990** (other Worldcon bid) got missed out last time, by accident rather than cunning pro-Holland design. A recent circular announces the demise of that controversial plan to fund the bidding with \$20,000 of past LA-con profits (wise decision!). Instead, members of the bidding group SCIFI Inc are "paying an assessment of \$25 a quarter" while "name" fans/pros are being invited to contribute \$25 and become Associate Bid Committee Members with GoH voting privileges.

#### C.O.A.

DAVID BRIN (for some months yet, I think) 26a Gayton Rd, Hampstead, London, NW3 1TY :: TERRY BROOME, Ward 7, Harlow Wood Orthopaedic Hosp, Nottingham Rd, Mansfield, Notts, NG18 4TU ("for anyone wishing to send funeral cards") :: BILL BOWERS, 1874 Sunset Ave, Apt 56, Cincinnati, OH 45238, USA :: JOHN BROSNAN, 6 Lower Rd, Harrow, Middlesex, HA2 0DA ("I now reside in Chris Evans' old flat in Ortygia House -- the building that has nurtured so many other great literary talents. I expect to see an improvement in my work any day now.") :: ALLYN CADOGAN, 1324 E Cotati Ave (103), Rohnert Park, CA 94928, USA :: MIKE CHRISTIE, 38 Gloucester Rd, Acton, London, W3 8PD :: JONATHAN COLECLOUGH, c/o Digital Type Systems Ltd, Standard Wharf, 60 Wapping High St, London, SE10 9QR :: MALCOLM EDWARDS c/o Victor Gollancz Ltd, 14 Henrietta St, London, WC2E 8QJ (mark letters PERSONAL) :: DAVID ELWORTHY, 151 Victoria Rd, Cambridge :: COLIN FINE, 28 Abbey Rd, Cambridge, CB5 8HQ :: LINDA GERSTEIN & ELI COHEN, 440 West End Ave (14E), New York, NY 10024, USA :: CAREY HANFIELD, PO Box 1091, Coulton, Vic 3053, Australia :: LEE HOFFMAN, 401 Sunrise Trail NW, Port Charlotte, FL 33952, USA :: KIM HUETT, PO Box 649, Woden, ACT 2606, Australia :: SUE JONES, 89 Sutton Rd, Shrewsbury, SY2 6ED :: JON LANGFORD, 164 Harehills Rd, Leeds 8 :: BERNARD LEAK, H1 Whewell's Court, Trinity College, Cambridge, CB2 1TQ :: KEITH MITCHELL, 19 Meadowplace Rd, Edinburgh, EH12 7UJ :: MIKE & DEBBY MOIR, 27 Hampton Rd, Worcester Park, Surrey, KT4 8EU :: KIM NEWMAN, 45 Church Lane, Crouch End, London, N8 8DR :: KEVIN K.RATTAN, 150 Bow Common Lane, Bow, London, E.3 :: GRANT SINCLAIR, 2/5 Sturt Ave, Toorak Gdns, SA 5065, Australia :: BRUCE STERLING, 4525 Speedway, Austin, TX 78751, USA :: SUE THOMASON, 31 Barfield Rd, Muncaster, York, YO3 9AW :: JEAN WEBER & ERIC LINDSAY, 6 Hillcrest Avenue, Faulconbridge, NSW 2776, Australia :: OWEN WHITEOAK, temporarily c/o 24a Beech Rd, Bowes Park, London, N.11 ::

### THE INSANITY OFFENCE: Charles Platt

The case sounded ridiculous. Harlan Ellison, interviewed by Gary Groth for *The Comics Journal* in 1979, had made a few offhand comments about the work of Michael Fleisher, author of the notoriously violent DC Comics *Spectre* series. Ellison said the series was "bugfuck"; you had to be crazy like Robert E. Howard or H.P. Lovecraft to write like that. Fleisher said he was "devastated and appalled" by Ellison's remarks, and decided to sue for libel.

Late in 1986, the case reached Southern District Federal Court in Manhattan. Judge Vincent Broderick's court room was smaller and more intimate than I'd expected: I wandered in on 11 November and had to pick my way between lawyers and defendants sitting on ancient green-vinyl-upholstered chairs, ranged around three big wooden tables. As I sat down in one of four plywood pews reserved for (nonexistent) visitors, the prosecuting counsel had just started his opening statement.

Attorneys can say what they like in opening and closing statements, which are exempt from the strict procedural rules observed while interrogating witnesses. Fleisher's attorney told the jury of 5 women and 4 men that Ellison was "a controversial person. Controversial people stir up trouble, they attract attention... Not only does he not deny this, he markets it." As for *The Comics Journal*, it was an "elitist, muckraking" magazine: "every time you open it you can find some kind of hate, some kind of argument." Their transcript of Ellison's 5-hour interview was "nasty, hostile and attacking." Ellison attacked John Wayne, and he attacked John Updike, but he attacked Michael Fleisher worst of all. The libel supposedly consisted of three separate statements:

First, Ellison variously described Fleisher as crazy; certifiable; twisted; derange-o; bugfuck; and a lunatic.

Second, Ellison (mis)quoted a *Publishers Weekly* review as having said *Chasing Hairy*, a novel by Fleisher, was "the product of a sick mind". The review had said no such thing.

Third, Ellison said Fleisher's *Spectre* series had been discontinued by DC because "they realized they had turned loose a lunatic on the world." In other words, DC killed Fleisher's series because they thought he was mentally unbalanced.

As a result of these statements, Fleisher's "business reputation has been destroyed." The attorney summed up: "Freedom of speech doesn't go this far. There is no protection for lies that are knowingly published." As compensation, he was asking for total damages of \$2,000,000 from Ellison, Groth and *The Comics Journal*.

After lunch, Groth's attorney took his turn. He claimed that Fleisher's gross income had actually doubled in the years following the supposed destruction of his career; that Fleisher had described himself as "a lunatic" in an interview; and that Fleisher's work was indeed deranged. For instance, in his comic-book story "The Night of the Chicken", a farmer picked up a prostitute, forced her to dress in a chicken costume, hacked her to pieces with an axe, then fed her to his chickens. And Fleisher had stated that out of all his stories, this was one of the three he was most proud of.

As for *Chasing Hairy*, it portrayed foul-minded men acting out their hatred for women. (In a deposition under oath, Fleisher had explained that "hairy" refers to "pussy".) At the climax, after getting a female hitch-hiker to participate in "unnatural sex acts", they poured gasoline over her in the back seat of a car, set light to it, and watched the explosion scatter her parts across the landscape.

But Ellison hadn't been condemning Fleisher when he called such stuff "bugfuck". On the contrary, he was praising it. "Bugfuck", the defence claimed, was a word Ellison used to describe people he admired. he even used it on himself. At other times (the attorney said) Ellison had happily described himself as "crazy as a bedbug".

So Ellison had described himself as crazy; and Fleisher had described himself as crazy; but the trouble started when Ellison said Fleisher was crazy.

In case the jury might think there wasn't really much to choose between the behaviour of these two mature adults, Ellison's attorney tried to elevate the proceedings to a higher plane. He reminded the jury of the vital importance of writers who take a radical stance. The work of Thoreau was a powerful influence on Gandhi, who liberated a whole continent from colonial oppression. Gandhi in turn inspired Martin

Luther King, whose marches through the South ushered in liberation for American blacks. And guess who participated in those courageous marches? Why, none other than Harlan J. Ellison! (It so happened that of nine jurors listening to this homily, three were black.) Ellison, like Thoreau, was a brilliant writer, who had won every imaginable award for excellence in his field. Yes, he was outspoken sometimes -- even using hard-hitting language like "bugfuck" -- but that's the way great radicals are. He certainly shouldn't be confused with mere comic-book writers.

The implication was that from his lofty literary plane, Ellison knew little of comicdom; consequently he couldn't have known that what he said about Fleisher wasn't true; and without deliberate untruth, or reckless disregard for truth, there could be no libel.

Fleisher's lawyer didn't buy this. He didn't think Ellison was as naive about comics as he made out: next day he had him on the witness stand, admitting that he had received as much as \$3000 for being a celebrity at comics cons, had written comics scripts for both Marvel and DC, and had often allowed his stories to be adapted for comics. At this point the attorney pulled out a stack of lurid magazines whose paper had turned yellow during the years taken for the legal machinery to bring this case to trial. Wasn't it true that Ellison once planned to adapt a story he co-wrote titled "Would You Do It For A Penny?"

Imagine the confusion of a juror at this point. There you are, a retired subway token-booth clerk, perhaps, or an insurance salesman. You walk into the court to discover one writer suing another for stating he's insane. The term "writer" makes you think of poets or best-selling novelists. But no: it turns out that Fleisher used to write comic books describing motorcycle gangs, zombies and psychopaths chopping women to pieces with axes and power saws. He's the one sitting meekly at the table nearest the judge -- a shy, stooping man with glasses and thick bushy hair, like the protagonist in the movie *Eraserhead*. The other writer, Ellison, is wearing a dark blue blazer with gold buttons, like an elderly diplomat, or something out of *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous*. His grey hair is immaculately coiffed, and he has an air of grim detachment, as if he can't believe he's being forced to associate himself with such lowlives. Ellison's attorney lists Ellison's literary awards, claims he even helped to liberate the American Negro, for heaven's sake. But now Ellison's on the witness stand, and Fleisher's attorney is showing him back issues of *Heavy Metal* and a comic called *Creepy*: "Is this your story, here? Did you write this?" And Ellison is reluctantly agreeing that he did. So you, the juror, begin to wonder: How can it be that this latter-day Thoreau sold his stuff to the same kind of sleazoid publications that printed Fleisher's sicko stories about people getting hacked into a bloody pulp?

Harlan Ellison -- and most SF readers -- wouldn't agree, but to the outsider, comics, horror and SF can seem much the same, all using lurid images to give kids cheap thrills. Is Ellison's award-winning "I Have No Mouth And I Must Scream?" really that much better than "Night of the Chicken?" Maybe it's better written, and maybe it has an implicit social message, but to the outsider it looks as if we're making microscopic distinctions between two grades of trash.

This case initially promised to be a serious test of a respected writer's legal right to express trenchant literary criticism. As I sat there, however, listening to the list of absurd story titles and the asinine, inaccurate epithets that had been exchanged, the veneer of respectability began to seem totally bogus. SF people have a notorious tendency to take themselves too seriously, and here they were all dressed up in business suits, paying attorneys thousands of dollars a day to make them sound impressive, while the case really seemed little more than a namecalling competition.

I'm not questioning anyone's sincerity. During the trial I began to realize that Fleisher had been genuinely distressed by the "crazy" epithet. At first he recoiled in seeming horror when I introduced myself and said I might write something about the case. But as the days wore on, the artificial environment of fluorescent ceiling panels, acoustic tiles, scuffed plywood panelling and wrinkled brown carpet seemed to close in: like hostages who learn to love their captors, everyone developed a guarded camaraderie. I filched a copy of

Fleisher's novel from one of the defence attorneys and found, contrary to the way it had been described, it was a carefully considered, perceptive book about the inhumanity of common men -- the kind of novel, in fact, that Ellison claims to write himself, yet never seems to publish. **Publishers Weekly** did not, as Ellison stated, call it "the product of a sick mind... so twisted and nauseating, it has absolutely no redeeming social value." They said simply that it was "a very ugly book" about "hideous sexism". I found it no more ugly or hideous than the realities it rather objectively described.

So Fleisher wasn't a mere comics hack, and did feel genuinely wronged, and had genuinely suffered, despite the efforts of the defence attorneys to portray him as a venal, perverted opportunist.

However, proof of libel doesn't depend on the personalities involved, or even on emotional distress. Four circumstances must exist. A defamatory statement must have been made (one likely to subject a person to ridicule and abuse from friends or co-workers); the maker of the statement must have known it was false or must have acted with reckless disregard for the truth (that is, with awareness of probability of falsity); and actual injury must have occurred to the reputation of the victim (not just his feelings). Only after libel has been established can damages be assessed: these can then reflect any distress that may have occurred.

In this case, libel was never established. On the afternoon of 9 December, after four weeks of tiresome quibbles between lawyers, scurrilous attacks on the integrity of witnesses, half-truths delivered under oath, mountains of xeroxed documents showered on the jury, and a final summation by the judge that filled most of one morning and referred repeatedly to "Harvey" Ellison... the jury took less than 90 minutes to acquit Ellison, Groth and **The Comics Journal** on all counts.

In a sense, it was the right decision. The case seemed personally important to Fleisher, but to everyone else it seemed silly. Henry Holmes, Ellison's second attorney, who flew in from LA for some of the proceedings, said that on the West Coast no judge would have accepted the case for trial in the first place.

But consider the four circumstances for establishing libel. In my opinion (opinions based on public facts are generally exempt from libel), Ellison's statement was defamatory; it was false; and it was made with reckless disregard for the truth. He himself almost admitted as much in the interview: after describing Fleisher as "certifiable", he added, "that's a libellous thing to say." Under cross-examination he claimed the remark to have been a joke: but Fleisher's lawyer suggested that Ellison realized (at that moment in the interview) he had "gone too far", which sounded about right to me. Moreover, after the interview was published and protests were received, Ellison referred to his own "unnecessary vitriol" in a letter to Groth, and added "I am unsettled. I am remorseful. I must watch my mouth."

The fourth requirement for proving libel -- injury to Fleisher's reputation -- was harder to demonstrate. As Ellison's attorney put it, "If someone is injured in his professional reputation, it will show up on their income-tax return." Fleisher's returns showed an increase in gross writing income from about \$27,000 in 1979 to \$50,000 in 1983. In at least one instance he seemed to benefit from notoriety: after Ellison's interview compared his craziness to that of Robert E. Howard, Fleisher was commissioned to script a **Conan** comic....

But, as Fleisher put it: "I found myself having difficulties with my work that I had not experienced before... I was unable to produce the plots that I was required to do... It's intrusive to go through life dealing with people... who've been given the impression you're some sort of lunatic." There was indeed evidence that professional colleagues no longer viewed him the same way, especially after **The Comics Journal** started publicizing and ridiculing his lawsuit. "Month after month they used his name to promote their magazine and to mock him." At one point they even mailed invitations that said, "One of the reasons we're giving this party is because we're making Michael Fleisher so unhappy." Nor were they entirely fair when they gleefully described **Chasing Hairy** as "the most repulsive piece of fiction ever written in English." One could only admire their prescience,

though, when in an ad for a back issue that said, "Bet you this turns up in some legal paper." The ad itself was offered as an exhibit by the prosecution.

Personally, I don't believe in libel laws, because the only kind of printed statement that really hurts is the kind that exposes truth\*, and in the USA, truth cannot be libellous. People sue when someone offends their dignity, or when they take a statement more seriously than it was intended. If Fleisher had been able to laugh at Ellison's accusations, everyone would soon have forgotten them. By choosing to sue, Fleisher attracted the notoriety he said he sought to avoid.

So I feel Fleisher was wrong to bring the suit (and I ventured to tell him this in person); but having brought it, it seemed to me that he should have won it.

In a way, justice was still done: Fleisher refused to say how much the case had cost him, but I suspect much of his legal costs to have been on a contingency basis -- his attorney wouldn't receive the full fee unless he won damages. By contrast, Ellison, Groth and **The Comics Journal** had to pay their four attorneys at least \$150 an hour, win or lose. Insurance may have covered some of the magazine's expenses, but Ellison was telling people that the case had cost him \$85,000. Perhaps this will be an incentive for him to speak a little more circumspectly in his next interview -- or, at least, check some of the facts before publication. [CP]

[\*Editorial disagreement registered at this point.

[Though I cut Charles' report with the usual tasteless savagery, it appears at length because I'm fascinated and terrified by the thought of frames of reference switching suddenly from fannish give-and-take to courtroom analysis. "The accused, Langford, a being erect upon two legs, and bearing all the outward semblance of a man, and not of a monster, took it upon himself to state in print -- heedless of damage to my clients' reputation and finances -- that the announced organizational plans for their science fiction convention were... 'daft'. This cold-blooded accusation of mental imbalance..." etc. I have some sympathy for H.E.]

#### INFINITELY IMPROBABLE

**Cover-Up Scandal!** Long-term readers will know I've often been danced on by irate persons in spiked boots for printing some tasty little factoid. Brian Earl Brown adds a new twist: he reckons I have no journalistic integrity because of something I didn't cover in **Ansible 46**, to wit, Ted White's drug bust (see **A47**. TW, by the way, was released on 4 December). Why, asks Brian, this shameful cover-up? I will admit it. Secretly my every action is controlled by alien radio waves beamed by Ted White into my brain. Past unflattering references to Ted in these pages are of course just camouflage. It is no use to plead in pathetic mitigation that owing to 1986 reclusiveness, when **A46** appeared my only hard information about the arrest had come from Ted himself... in confidence. Brian demands higher journalistic standards: confidences should be ruthlessly violated when it comes to "major news" (his phrase) of a fan's misfortune. Must try harder, Langford.

**Grand Old Man Lashes Out!** Informed that his next paperback blurb quotes John Fowles again, Chris Priest worried that the "young" in "One of our most gifted and poetic young writers" might now violate the Trade Descriptions Act. "Go on Chris, just one more time," said Gollancz persuasively.... In future, Mr Priest will be insisting on "Dean of British SF".

**Stolen From SF Chronicle:** A new US mag **SF International** has appeared, featuring worldwide fiction: Andromeda Press, 99 Teardrop Ct, Newbury Park, CA 91320.... Nebula novel nominations dominated by Orson Scott Card's **Speaker for the Dead**.... St Martin's Press is buying Tor Books....

**Fan Funds:** CUFF was won by Irwin Hirsh (address as colophon), who therefore represents Aussie fandom here at Conspiracy and is doing his best to find a hat with corks round the brim. DUFF went to Lucy Huntzinger (2215-R Market St, San Francisco, CA 94114, USA), who will be travelling to Australia and is widely not rumoured to be devising a punk hairstyle with corks round the brim. TUFF ballots enclosed (where deadlines allow), containing all ye know on earth and all ye need to know. COFF, the Concrete Overcoat Fan Fund, was overwhelmingly won by COFF (runners-up Mal Ashworth and Graham Poole), amid titanic applause at the announcement that COFF would henceforth cease.

**Curse of Worldcon:** A particularly dismal bit of fannish

folklore is that Worldcon committee membership breaks up marriages. Note the sort-of-COA for Malcolm Edwards, who is not currently living at the 28 Duckett Rd, N4 1BN, address where Chris Atkinson is still to be found. OK?

**The Garnett Alternative:** "Having read the report in **Matrix**, which seems to be about different people at a different place, and re-read the one in **Ansible 47** which excludes two of the essential participants, I think you need  
AN ALTERNATIVE MILFORD REPORT

It was observed that at Milford 1986, Scott Baker and 14 others wore glasses. The one exception was --

David Garnett."

**1986 Hugo Fuss:** Johan-Martijn Flaton contributes a last word. "What most of the audience didn't know was the little scene afterwards with the winners and press. As Kees van Toorn and I (disguised as 'Press') entered the press-room with Harlan Ellison, the latter saw among a pile of Hugos one with a piece of paper taped to the bottom. It was Judy-Lynn's Hugo and the paper stated: 'DEAD EDITOR'. I'll spare you Harlan's profanities...."

**Nova Award Runners-Up Leak Horror:** WRITER 2 D.West; 3 L.Pickersgill & H.Ashworth. FANZINE 2 **Pulp**; 3 **Prevert**; 4 **Nutz**; 5 **TNH/Stomach Pump/Xyster**. ARTISTS 2 **Atom**; 3 D.West; 3 P.Lyon; 4 M.Molloy; 5 R.Galverley. (See also Novacon report.)

**Secrets of the Professionals Revealed.** TERRY PRATCHETT: "Signing books is better than sex." **Ansible:** "Really?" TP: "So long as the pages don't stick together...." TOM SHIPPEY had a harrowing 1986 (confides D.West): having hurt his famously non-hirsute cranium on holiday by diving into water which proved to contain rocks, he was then belted with a bottle on the same spot, by Kate Solomon, for the social gaffe of dragging her round the room by her hair.... **MALCOLM EDWARDS** protests R.I.Barycz's scepticism about the **Empire of the Sun** film: "Spielberg's already been over to London, has cast 'Jim' and starts shooting in February...."

**RIP:** Cesar Ignacio Ramos (apparently -- Alexis Gilliland's cartoon this issue was sent to CIR's **Aeon**, to be found and returned by another Puerto Rican denizen "while going through the effects of Cesar Ramos").... **Cheap Truth** exploded in November and ran its own obituary: "Node Zero, the global infonexus of the **CHEAP TRUTH** publishing empire, has been reduced to smouldering wreckage in a poorly-realized action-sequence right out of the worst tradition of macho adventure fiction. A dead Hollywood stunt dummy, with several burst squibs of chicken-blood attached to its head and torso, was discovered by hard-boiled investigators [and] identified as that of **CHEAP TRUTH** editor Vincent Omniaveritas...."

**Electronic Skiffy:** Michael Bernardi is one of those carrying on the torch cast down by an effete earlier generation (me) on the Prestel net. Enquire about "Earthlight SF&F" from him on mailbox 919994136. Contains fanish criticism [sic]!

**Barycz Strikes Some Happy Media:** "King Kong lives! Alas. American SF glossy mags pullulate with pics of a great hairy

beast, usually horizontal. Dino de Laurentiis has a hand in it, alas. Well, if they can bring back Spock why not Kong? That is not dead which can eternal lie... and talking of Lovecraft the U of Chicago offers a translation of Greek magical papyri (330BC-690AD) wherein you may make the acquaintance of the Demiurge of the Seven Laughs and the Headless Demon Who Sees With His Feet. Besides infallible methods of nobbling the chariot races and making your shadow invisible. Order your copy today! ....Something to drive Mike Moorcock into the arms of Mary Whitehouse: **Gor** is being/has been filmed. Our very own Oliver Reed in the cast and Klaus Kinski as well. **Outlaw Gor** being made back to back with it if I interpret the news items correctly.... This year our TV screens will be blessed by a new Yankee series, **ALF**, subtle acronym for Alien Life Form who crashes into the attic of your everyday American suburban family and the rest is a muppet looking like the result of mating an anteater with a shar-pei who wears his hair in a duck's-arse over his sloping forehead. Might be fun.... **Obit** Roger C.Carmel (aet.54) found dead at home in Hollywood from an apparent overdose of exotic chemicals, Columbian nose powder for one: general character actor, best known to skiffy as Harcourt Fenton (Harry) Mudd in **Star Trek**.... Mr Cyborg himself, Arnold Schwarzenegger, is busy making Stephen King's **The Running Man**. Arnold recently married into one of America's first families. Wits say this is an experiment in breeding a bullet-proof Kennedy." [RIB]

**Serious & Constructive:** Unwin's "Orion SF" imprint seems to have been mysteriously short-lived, which is why the Evans/Holdstock anthology will appear as a plain Unwin pb (cf Chris's speech).... George Hay confides that a shortlist of novels for the fabulous Clarke Award has been drawn up, but neglects to name any of them.... Games Workshop is fomenting a **Thieves' World** kind of fiction series set in the world of their **Warhammer** game, whose ethereal flavour is best conveyed by such an extract as "Your blow smashes your opponent's spine and abdomen, tearing muscle and shattering bone so that your opponent falls to the ground in two separate pieces." British authors of pacifistic bent have already fled vomiting when invited to contribute.... Colin Greenland, while gloating over having arranged a Roger Dean cover for his ripping fantasy blockbuster **The Hour Of The Thin Ox**, is bitter about **White Dwarf**'s subtle easing-out of his film column: "They cut my fee and mixed me up with Alex Stewart!" (it is not certain which is the greater insult).... Your editor, momentarily delighted to see surprisingly non-awful cover art on the **Baen Space Eater** reissue, was swiftly crushed by Patrick Nielsen Hayden's discovery that the cover had actually been recycled from **Asimov's SF Mag**.... Douglas Hofstadter's **Metamagical Themas** has a lot on self-referential sentences, to which Damon Knight contributes: "Terry Carr... sent us the riddle, 'How do you keep a turkey in suspense?', and never sent the answer. After about two weeks, we realized that was the answer." **Ansible's** new title will be "How do you...."

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# Ansible



OK to issue 99

**HAZEL'S LANGUAGE LESSONS:**  
**The Marathi Word For Fandom, Revealed**  
avlyāchī mōt

...A term for a gang of fellows united by some present and common but evanescent interest. A very loose and patched-up union based on no consolidation of interests and with an ever-present tendency to separation.

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