



.....THE WEEKEND BEGINS HERE.....OR: THE USUAL EXCUSES.....IN...

INTRO

INTRO.....of marriage and handymannery.

INTRO

Well, it's happened again. All my good intentions have come to nothing and it's been nine months since the last issue. How did I allow such a thing to happen? True, I did tempt the fates by calling the last issue "the once-again quarterly fanzine", so I suppose I should've expected to be punished for such hubris, but in actual fact there has been a whole slew of Reasons why this EPSILON is so late. I suffered a major burn-out following the Great Unpleasantness that blighted transatlantic fanactivity in the second half of last year and the thought of fanac, any fanac, was just too much. That whole thing acted as powerful aversion therapy and it's only now that I'm finally shaking off its effects and beginning to flex my fanzine-producing muscles again. Not only am I putting out this EPSILON but in less than two weeks I should also have published the very first issue of a new fanzine called CRANK - about which more later.

Then there's London's fannish social scene. While at the One Tun earlier this month Mike Glicksohn told me that it attracted more people than LASFS meetings did (it was one of the more poorly attended One Tun nights) and so probably the largest monthly meeting of SF fans in the world, while Ted White recently expressed the opinion that London almost certainly contained more active fans than any other city anywhere. This may well be so, but whatever the truth of the matter there's an awful lot of socialising goes on - what with one or more regularly scheduled meetings of some group or other most weeks, not to mention parties and more informal visits - and this all cuts into the time available for doing fanzine work. It's funny, I've done less for fanzines in the last few months than in the previous four years yet in many ways I've been more fannishly active than ever.

Something else that kept me away from my typer was the necessity of transforming the vast halls here at Greenleaf Road's plushiest mansion from the swinging pad of my bachelor days into a habitation more suited to this curiously married state I was soon to find myself in. This involved a lot of fairly enjoyable but time-consuming handymannery and seemed to sap those reserves of energy that would normally be used to get this deathless prose published and in the mail. Then there's being married....

Avedon Carol and I were married on June 21st, and though we didn't plan it that way we were delighted to discover that this was Summer Solstice. Neither of us are religious and the fact that in Britain the civil ceremony is untainted by the Christianity we both hold in such low esteem was a relief, but nevertheless holding the ceremony on that day added a certain extra dimension to the proceedings. As usual the British weather showed a blithe disregard for such things and it rained steadily for most of the day.

Ted White came over over for the wedding - a report on his trip commences a few pages hence - and while he was here he and I firmed up our plans for CRANK, the new fanzine mentioned earlier. This will be produced by Ted and me and will be published monthly. Among other things the first issue will carry the concluding part of Ted's trip report and will doubtless be spiff, triff, and diff. I look forward very much to working on it.

.....ROB HANSEN.....

.....COMICS.....HIBBERTISM.....YORCON III.....HOTELS.....AND MUCH MORE...IN...

NOTIONS

NOTIONS.....more conventional wisdom.

NOTIONS

I enjoyed this year's Eastercon. I had a thoroughly good time and came away convinced it was the best Eastercon the 1980s have thus far produced. Knowing my views this probably won't come as a surprise to most of you since such judgements are usually based on subjective criteria, and while opinions about a convention are as many and varied as those who experience it they tend to be coloured by what part of the fannish spectrum you occupy. YORCON III was, after all, a convention organised by a fan group whose sympathies are generally perceived as lying with fannish fandom and those now termed 'fanzine fans' rather than with media fandom or any of the various other groups who crowd our microcosm. They took the radical step of relegating most media programming to the overflow hotel. So from my point of view this might seem to be, at least on paper, an almost perfect Eastercon. However, as the song says, "It ain't necessarily so". Certainly there were quite a few of my compeers sufficiently convinced it wouldn't be that they didn't even bother attending. So what went wrong? Or right?

As British conventions continue to grow in size it's inevitable that they will develop in many of the same ways that American cons did. As a case in point, one of the first consequences of burgeoning attendances at the Eastercon was the need for an overflow hotel. Provision of such a hotel has become a well established part of Eastercons over the last fifteen years or so (and of Novacons, come to that), and the Leeds Group's decision to split the programming between the two hotels, while an innovation over here, is fairly common practice in the US. While one might argue against the way in which programming and other facilities were split between the hotels - as I'm sure the bookdealers would - to protest against the idea itself is to rail against the future. Like it or not, we're going to see this sort of thing happening more and more as the years roll by, particularly since British hotels are generally smaller than their American counterparts. In the US there are still some hotels/convention centres capable of hosting a complete Worldcon but we're fast reaching the point over here where only the Brighton Metropole and Birmingham Exhibition Centre could house an entire Eastercon.

Fans have argued about this problem for a long time and many have proposed a ceiling on memberships or advocated cutting any part of the programme not aimed specifically at those whose prime concern is with written Science Fiction - the Eastercon's original constituency, after all - in order to encourage those interested only in the non-literary manifestations of SF to stay away, but neither of these ideas ever really offered a sensible solution. Like it or not the Eastercon, like the Worldcon, now encompasses many disparate groups and provides what is probably the only setting where cross-fertilisation between these groups has any chance of occurring. That such cross-fertilisation rarely actually occurs even at Eastercons is regrettable, but when it does it can be quite enriching for those concerned (cf. Kate Davies). So as long as my own interest-group is catered for, and we have other conventions available that are tailored to our specific needs, I for one am content to have the Eastercon serve as a sort of County Fair attracting people from the villages for miles around to peddle their wares and enjoy themselves at the communal dance.

As an aside, it occurs to me that those who follow that humourless and carping creed recently christened 'Hibbertism' might be a little surprised at the sentiments expressed in the preceding paragraph seeming, as they do, to contradict the label on the box they've consigned me to. With their pious talk of 'holistic fans' and the pictures they paint of tunnel-visioned elitists it probably seems inconceivable to them that one of that 'elite' they so disparage might actually be interested in such cross-fertilisation or that he might have any involvement in another section of fandom, particularly one where he's not a BNF and has never tried to be. Nevertheless I am, and I have. For the best part of five years now I've had some involvement with comics fandom - writing LoCs, trading fanzines, corresponding with fanzine editors and, recently, doing my first cover for a major comics fanzine (in full colour, too; the fanzine is FANTASY ADVERTISER #91 and copies may still be available from an SF/comics store near you). So fie on these mean-spirited Hibbertites and may they continue to stew in their own juices while the rest of us get on with the serious business of having fun.

So anyway, to return to the matter at hand, while there are problems still to iron out it seems inevitable that more and more British conventions will be distributing programming and facilities between the main and overflow hotels. Nevertheless, it was this aspect of YORCON III more than any other that appeared to dismay those who listened to the committee's presentation in the bidding session at last year's Eastercon. In fact had there been another bid the YORCON III bid would undoubtedly have lost. Which would have been a pity.

I enjoyed YORCON III greatly, as I've said. It had an impressive fan room, run by Jimmy Robertson, with excellent programming and the level of discourse was high. It had Patrick and Teresa Nielsen Hayden as TAFF delegates and Linda Pickersgill as Fan Guest of Honour. It had many of the usual crowd of Good People and valued friends who show up at these things and it had others, like Chuck Harris and Walt and Madeleine Willis, who hadn't attended a convention in far too long and who I was delighted to see. It also had Greg Benford as Pro Guest of Honour, but then no convention is perfect. Yet even without all this, and without knowing how other factors would conspire to increase my enjoyment of it, I knew YORCON III was going to be a good convention from the moment I heard it was to be the 1985 Eastercon. Partly this was because of the committee - and yes, I know Graham James' abrasiveness in that bidding session turned a few people off but the committee was full of people with experience at running conventions so I was confident they wouldn't screw up the organisation - but a good committee is no guarantee against a duff convention. No, having attended both previous YORCONs I knew this one would be a good convention because of the hotel. So am I talking about the attitude of the management? No, because while that has to be right it's no more guarantee against a duff convention than a good committee is. Then am I talking about good room rates, No - though they certainly help - what I'm talking about is hotel geography.

What I mean by 'hotel geography' isn't the hotel's proximity to cheap eating places and good road and rail links - though again, they help - but the physical layout of the building and how the bars, main corridors, and function rooms are arranged in relation to each other. The thing is, you see, that in my 10+ years of attending them I've been to conventions in hotels whose facilities were on a par and whose committees have put together programmes of equal worth, and yet one has been a success where the other was a failure. I always wondered about the reason for this, usually assuming that some mysterious 'chemistry' was responsible, and it took me

quite a while to figure out just how important the layout of the hotel is. YORCON III was held at the Leeds Dragonara, a hotel that's hosted conventions before before and one we know from experience to be - to use computerese - 'user-friendly'. The lifts open into the reception/main bar area and alongside these runs a short corridor off which is the main con hall, and since you have to pass through the bar to get anywhere this has the effect of making this area a sort of lens that focusses the energy of the convention and allows the necessary critical mass to develop. To be sure there are function rooms on other floors but these are located directly above the main area and are easily reached by the lifts or a convenient back staircase so they too are part of a compact whole.

By contrast SEACON '84, last year's all-singing all-dancing abortion of an Eastercon, was hampered from the start by the hotel it was held in. Quite apart from the other factors that combined to make it such a dismal failure the choice of the Brighton Metropole as a venue for the convention was a mistake since the hotel is actually too big for the type of con that was held in it. Rather than acting as a lens in focussing the energies of a convention the Metropole acts instead as a sort of centrifuge, flinging those same energies to all corners of the hotel, and so dissipating any sense of community and feeling of shared experience that might have had a chance of developing in more intimate surroundings. Things weren't helped by the committee's decision to use the most far-flung of the Metropole's extensive conference facilities, and at times you were made to feel like a pea in a bucket as you rattled around its vast interior. To be sure the Metropole appears to be a fine venue for the five-ring circus the modern Eastercon has become - presumably because having thousands of people jammed into it renders the issues under discussion here irrelevant (not to mention the metaphors) - and I intend to enjoy myself at the 1987 Worldcon there (assuming we win) as much as I did at the 1979 Worldcon it also hosted, but for anything smaller than a Worldcon the Metropole just doesn't work. And it's not as if those responsible for SEACON '84 shouldn't have had some inkling of this. CHANNELCON, the 1982 Eastercon, was also held at the Brighton Metropole and although it was far better organised than SEACON '84 the problems resulting from its size were apparent even then. So either those organising last year's Eastercon chose to ignore what had been learned, or they genuinely believed that they would fill the hotel. If the former then such wilful ignorance would amount to an act of negligence. However, this isn't the only time SF conventions have returned to hotels that have proven unsuitable and on the assumption that not all such ignorance is wilful it might perhaps be useful to pool our shared experience in this area and come up with a list both of those hotels which have proven particularly user-friendly, and a list of those which have proven particularly user-unfriendly. In the course of discussing this with other fans it has seemed to me that there's a fair consensus of opinion on this subject. What follows is a list, with comments, of those hotels which from my own experience I consider to be 'particularly user-friendly':

The Dragonara, Leeds - for the reasons already listed. Possibly my favourite convention hotel.

The Royal Angus, Birmingham - site of most NOVACONS and a hotel sharing many good layout points with the Leeds Dragonara.

(Though it must be conceded that many longtime veterans of NOVACON have complained that they have difficulty separating one from another as the use of the same hotel year after year has made them all blur together in memory, so perhaps using the same hotel every year isn't such a hot idea.)

The De Vere, Coventry - venue for the 1975 & 1977 Eastercons, and of this year's NOVACON. Since the 1975 Eastercon was my first ever con, it's possible that time has cast a rosy glow over my memories of the hotel.

The Pembroke, Blackpool - a hotel that's never actually hosted an SF convention but one I got to check out while part of the abortive 1984CON bid. Everything I saw of the hotel convinced me that it would be perfect for a convention and I'm including it here because it's a venue I think anyone contemplating bidding for a future Eastercon ought to give serious consideration.

This brief list is given as an example and is by no means complete. I'm sure you could all come up with your own lists of user-friendly (and unfriendly) hotels, and such knowledge can be useful. For instance, past experience enabled those responsible for last year's MEXICON to select Newcastle's Royal Station Hotel as the perfect venue for the convention. Not everyone is likely to call on such accumulated wisdom, however.

Over the last five years or so our traditional position with regard to most major British cons has been weakened by the influx of new, and predominantly non-literary, con-goers and the rise of a breed of fan new to Britain - those who limit their fanaticism to organising and running conventions. Owing little or no allegiance to our notions of what fandom is all about they don't share our ideas about what the Eastercon is and should be, and in this they clearly have the support of the mass of con-goers. As the events of recent years have shown, a 'fannish' bid has little chance of succeeding against the multimedia bids these people put together. That such bids haven't usually produced terribly successful cons is sad. That those responsible often ignore the knowledge and experience that could be available to them is sadder still. The divisiveness generated by Hibbertites is partly responsible for this state of affairs, as are the problems caused by newcomers always perceiving those of us already here as some sort of monolithic 'establishment' that needs to be opposed, but we can't escape blame either. To criticise the Eastercon for what it has become, and to attempt to turn the clock back and make it again what once it was, is as futile as opposing the splitting of con programming between hotels, and also unnecessarily antagonistic. Obviously we yearn for that idealised image we hold of what the Eastercon used to be and in MEXICON we've taken the step of forming a convention around that ideal tailored to our needs. However, though MEXICON is a Good Thing let us be sure that the step we've taken isn't the first on a path that ultimately takes us somewhere we don't want to be. In many ways we are now at the same crossroads the Americans found themselves at years ago and what's at stake is the future of our national convention. The choices seem clear:

We can continue to come up with 'fannish' bids that have little appeal to the great mass of con-goers, which allows the flashier and more superficial multimedia bids to win by default and more often than not come to grief on the rocks of their overreaching ambition and inexperience. This course would inevitably lead us to turn increasingly to specialist conventions of our own devising and to become as small a part of the Eastercon as our American counterparts are of the Worldcon.

Or we can accept and embrace the multimedia extravaganza the Eastercon is becoming and use the decades-worth of knowledge and experience at our disposal to make sure that it works. This course would allow us to retain conventions of our own while remaining a vital part of Eastercon.

So the question remains. Should we care about our national convention and strive to retain some influence over it, or should we go our own way?

What do you think?

.....NOT A TAFF REPORT.....NOT A PLANE...NOT A SPEEDING BULLET EITHER...IT'S...

FIVE DAYS

FIVE DAYS.....a trip report by TED WHITE.

FIVE DAYS

"Oh God," Rob, "This thing's cutting into my hand!" He dropped the grey wooden box to the sidewalk and massaged his fingers.

I took a heavy paper tag and wrapped it around the carrying handle. The box, made of plywood and painted battleship grey, measured five feet in length, two feet in width, and about half a foot in thickness. It held, as if in protection against atomic attack, Avedon's guitar. Avedon's brother, Rick, had made the box, and her father had given it into my keeping at Dulles airport. He was amazed that he didn't have to pay extra for it. So was I. It weighed a ton.

I hadn't really handled it at Dulles, and at Heathrow I'd plucked it off a moving baggage carousel and put it on a cart. The cart was fine, so long as I remained within the general airport area, but apparently it was frowned upon to take a cart into the London Underground. Pity.

I met Rob at the Meeting Place. He'd telephoned me only five minutes before I'd left my house to tell me that he'd meet me at the Meeting Place.

"The Meeting Place?" I asked. "Where's that?"

"Look for the signs," Rob said. "There's this great big yellow sign hanging from the ceiling. It says 'Meeting Place'."

He was absolutely right. It was impossible to become lost in Heathrow if one bothered to read the signs - and I noticed upon my return home that Heathrow has much better signs and directions than Dulles does - and I found the Meeting Place with no problem whatsoever.

Our problems began when I surrendered the cart.

I had only two small bags of my own, thank god, but that wooden box was a real struggle. Rick had made a handle for the box, so it could be carried like an oversize suitcase, but the handle was strands of woven plastic - several ropes of plastic, in fact - and these cut inexorably into (and given time - which we avoided - through) one's fingers.

We had taken the tube train to the Pickersgills' flat, rather than the much longer trip to East Ham, since Rob and Avedon had stayed overnight and Avedon, who wasn't feeling well, was still there. Did I mention that, as we struggled the short blocks from the tube station to Lawrence Road, it was about seven o'clock in the morning? I'd left Dulles in the early evening and now, six hours later, it was a new day. Since I'm oriented to late hours it was, in fact, not yet my bedtime.

We'd been switching off every half-block. While Rob carried my bags I'd stagger along with the Great Box, leaning far left while carrying it in my right hand, then swapping hands and leaning far right. When both my hands had deep red indentations cut into them I'd drop the box and Rob would take over. No doubt we were a comic sight as we made our erratic progress. The paper tag didn't help much, either.

A few hours later, after a slightly groggy Greg Pickersgill (up hours before he'd otherwise be) had welcomed us and indeed cooked us breakfast, we tackled the Great Box.

"I'm not taking it any further," Rob stated. I fully concurred.

We tried taking the screws out, but they acted as if permanently bonded to the box, so finally we attacked it with a hammer and a pry bar. There were entirely too many screws to deal with anyway - about one every six inches.

"You want this lumber, Greg?" Rob asked.

Greg shrugged. "I've got all I need," he said. A wicked gleam, the sort celebrated in Ratfandom myth, lit in his eyes. He handed me the hammer. "Have at it!" he said.

So we tore the box apart. Inside, nestled among thousands of polystyrene nuggets - plastic popcorn - was a sturdy guitar-case, inside of which was Avedon's guitar.

"I don't see why they bothered with the box," Avedon said. "The case is custom-fitted to the guitar and designed for rough handling." (But later Rick told me that after what had happened to Avedon's sister's guitar - which was demolished by an airline - they were taking no chances. I told him he should have put castors, or wheels of some sort, on the box, "like they do on big suitcases." He told me that would have been too expensive.)

While Avedon happily tuned and strummed her Guild Classic* Rob and I returned the plastic popcorn to the box and closed it up again. Rob hefted the now-empty box and exclaimed, "Christ! This thing's still just as heavy!" We abandoned it with Greg.

Thus began my five-day visit to London and environs, ostensibly for Rob and Avedon's wedding but in fact because I'd been kicking myself since 1979 (when I went to Brighton) for not having met any of the fans whose work I'd subsequently enjoyed, and whom I now looked forward to meeting at last.

Greg Pickersgill was the first. I'd been primed with lots of photos, as well as the stories of Avedon and the Nielsen Haydens, and I'd read a set of STOP BREAKING DOWNs. Greg was one of the fans I was most looking forward to meeting, not least because I had developed a considerable admiration for his writing. Early in the morning is probably very close to the worst time to meet anyone, but Greg, despite the hour, was affable and a good host. I hadn't expected him to cook breakfast, for example; I'm not sure I'd have been up to it had our positions been reversed.

I was in a strange state - hell, I was in a strange country! - since the slippage of time had effectively denied me a normal sleep period (I didn't sleep on the plane; instead I read Thomas Perry's Butcher's Boy, an excellent book). I smoked a little, maintaining a sercon state which I was confident would see me through this period of transition. It did, but the combination of factors left me lethargic and quite comfortable lazing about the Pickersgill flat until early afternoon when the local pub opened and we could laze about there.

I found myself noticing all the minor differences between the U.S. and Britain: the thickness of interior walls (very thin, compared with what I'm used to), the size and placement of doors (directly in corners), the general absence of doorknobs (both on ex-erior and interior doors; the former seem to lack anything but a keyhole, while the latter have handles more often than knobs, and often use friction latches that I am more familiar with on cupboard doors), etc. Rob, Greg and I discussed the differ-

* I did not tune and strum happily. The strings were dead and it sounded sour. And anyway, I had an enduring case of the sniffles. - ac.

ences in house-wiring and electrical systems - the philosophies of house-wiring are quite different in the two countries, and I was astonished to hear that British house-circuits are limited to thirteen amps but rated at twice our voltage - and it became more and more obvious to me that it was in these small, subtle differences that I most sensed the alien, and felt myself an alien.

This topic came up over and over again during my stay, in conversation with various different people. I was fascinated by everything that diverged from the familiar. Walking down the street to the pub we passed a new car showroom. The cars sitting in it had prices on their windshields ranging from £2,000 to £3,000. Quickly translating these figures into dollars I exclaimed, "Wow! Those cars are cheap!"

Greg emitted a pitying chuckle and I was reminded that in Britain the pound is dearer than the dollar is in the U.S. Here in London, I was, to my sheer amazement, a Rich American. (Most of my life my income has been below the official poverty level, so the concept of being thought "rich" quite amazes me.)

We arranged to meet Phil Palmer at a more central pub, the Royal George, at six, and did so despite arriving late. At some point not long thereafter Avedon left for a regular meeting of London's women fans, and the four of us - Rob, Greg, Phil and myself - went around the corner to a Greek restaurant called Jimmy's for dinner. It was cheap and quite good. It was also only my second meal of the day, but I found that I had less appetite than usual throughout my visit, and that I could easily get by on one or maybe two meals a day. I didn't finish the vegetables that came with my dinner, but Rob and Greg quickly polished them off.

We returned to the pub, Rob carrying Avedon's guitar and me with my two small bags, and hung out there for another hour or two, during which Greg and I argued fandom a bit. By that time we were comfortable enough with each other that the argument was relatively uninhibited, but it seems to me that we argued in circles since there was little real disagreement between us, only a differing emphasis and some semantic quibbles. It was fun, though.

What struck me most in what Greg had to say was this: "We made a choice, you know. We chose fandom. We chose fandom as our lives." At that point I realized that we had no real disagreement, only misunderstandings.

The Lebanon hostage crisis was going on then - while the Air India flight was to crash into the Irish Sea only a few days later - and this too was a topic of conversation, Greg believing that Reagan would do something heavy-handed and forceful, and me insisting that the president was just a windbag and would do nothing - the only thing he could do in the face of reality - until the situation settled itself. (Score one for me.)

Score one for Greg, though, as he successfully resisted my blandishments to Turn Pro and sell me a piece for STARDATE. I told him I wanted him to write me a piece "about whatever turns you on in the media - in comics, whatever..." but he just shrugged and said something about not being able to meet his own high standards. "I can't even write anything for a fanzine - and you want me to write a pro piece!" Oh, well.

Eventually it was time to leave. I was staying with Phil, so we caught a tube train to Manor House and took a bus the mile or so that remained, getting off a block from his house. On the way, Phil pointed into the night and rattled off the names of

the various fans who lived a block to the right or left of our route - a fairly densely fannish section of London.

Phil has his own house, rather than a flat. Located midway down a block of similar houses, it's small and split-level, front to rear. Roughly a hundred years old (the outer walls are solid brick), it was relatively cheap to buy and required a lot of fixing up, a process Phil attends to in his spare time. At the moment the new bathroom fixtures - pastel-colored tub, washbasin, and toilet-- were taking up the rear half of the livingroom while more primitive fixtures occupied the bathroom. (The toilet had neatly-posted instructions for flushing, which, Phil assured me, were best followed to the letter.) We set up a cot in the upstairs front room (nominally Phil's office, I gathered) and there I finally crashed for the night. Somehow I'd merged Tuesday into Wednesday, and stayed up for more than thirty hours, but everyone has a limit and I'd reached mine.

When I rose the next morning Phil had already left for his office. I was to meet Rob and Avedon at Forbidden Planet, and I had directions so I smoked a little to become suitably fantisted, and set out into London alone and unaided.

Everything looked entirely different in the daytime, but somehow I not only found my way back to the bus stop (albeit not the closest one), but managed to recognize the stop for the tube station in the daylight and get off there. When I had boarded the bus I'd given the motorman 20p, because Phil had insisted firmly that I pay no more, "no matter what he may tell you."

The motorman fixed me with a stern gaze and waited. It was obvious 20p was Not Enough, and I surrendered an additional 5p. I saw no reason to make a point of haggling over five pence - not much more than five cents US - and that's just as well, since I subsequently learned that Phil's information was outdated.

At the tube station I bought a 2-pound pass, good for the day on London Transport, buses and trains, and a money-saver. Then I took a train to the part of London where Forbidden Planet is located - which I discovered to be around the corner from the pub and restaurant where I'd been the night before.

London's streets observe no rational pattern, and the instructions I'd gotten for finding Forbidden Planet did not suffice, but I wandered the vicinity, exploring - noticing and marking for later exploration the Virgin Megastore - and eventually found Forbidden Planet.

It's not a big store - by no means as extensive as sf & comic shops here, and probably no better stocked than Falls Church's Hole In The Wall Books - but I had time to kill while I waited for Avedon and Rob, and I discovered tucked away in one corner two copies of a 1974 issue of AMAZING. I picked it up and read the editorial and the letters column. Pretty good, actually - better than I remembered. I was reading Susan Wood's column when Avedon came in.

After Rob had done his comics buying (I'd bought a couple of recent issues of METAL HURLANT) we went on a pub tour in central London that occupied the next several hours. During the course of this I not only saw and enjoyed several pubs of distinction, I consumed a variety of Cokes, all of which were served with a twist of lemon. The lemon, I think, made the Cokes almost decent as a drink.

Avedon was still not feeling very well, so after coercing Rob into buying a new suit for the wedding, she went home and left us to our own devices.

While Rob was buying his suit, I went into the Virgin Megastore. It's not that "mega." I've seen larger record stores in New York, and I suspect the Tower Records store in D.C. (which has separate large rooms for each category of music, every one of them as large as most record stores) is both larger and better-stocked. But I was looking for different rather than bigger, and in that department Virgin did not disappoint me.

I headed first for the jazz records and the Charles Mingus section - where I found two Italian quasi-bootlegs I'd never seen before - but I had no intention of buying any 12" lps. They wouldn't fit in my luggage. Once I'd gnashed my teeth a couple of times over the Mingus albums, and then consoled myself with the fact that they were in fact Red Norvo Trio albums and not prime Mingus, I headed for the compact discs.

CDs are merchandised in the US in "blister packs" - plastic packages that are twice as tall as a CD box itself - or, increasingly, in cardboard boxes of the same dimensions. Why? Apparently this is done in order to thwart shoplifting, since a normal CD box slips easily into one's pocket.

Virgin takes a different tack: The CDs, or rather the CD boxes, are displayed as-is. But if you open one, you find it's empty. Once you've selected the boxes of the CDs you want, you take them to a counter where they are filled with their respective discs.

The prices were quite competitive, from an American standpoint: typically from £8.99 to £10.99 - or from a bit over ten dollars to thirteen dollars, which is a typical US price - and the selection was startlingly similar to that available here. There were perhaps less Japanese imports (more CDs have been made in Japan than anywhere else, and if you want any Beatles CDs, the only one worth having is the Japanese Abbey Road...) and more European CDs. Sting's new solo album was out in CD there, as was the new Eurythmics, neither of which I'd seen here before I left. I bought a small bag full of CDs.

I was still browsing the CDs when Rob came in and found me. It hadn't been more than fifteen minutes since we'd gone our separate ways, but he'd already bought his suit. "I'm a perfect size," he said. "All I had to do was to go in, pick out one I liked, and have them pack it up. I hate shopping for clothes." I knew what he meant.

We spent several pleasant hours in the nearby Soho Park. I smoked a funny cigarette and we talked fandom. Rob showed me copies of some recent letters from Puerto Rico, which gave us both a few mordent chuckles, interspersed with exclamations of incredulity. We talked about our plans for CRANK, The Trufanzine, and we discussed the little differences in life in our respective countries.

Hungry, we went back to Jimmy's for an early dinner. Dinner at Jimmy's runs between two and three pounds; the four of us had dined the night before for seventeen pounds, including tip. Since at that point the dollar was running about \$1.25 to the pound, this struck me as Incredibly Cheap. Apparently even by British standards this was cheap food, since Rob mentioned that fans prized Jimmy's for both the cheapness and the good quality of the food.

We split up again at the tube station; I headed back to Phil's.

That evening Phil and I visited Jimmy Robertson and Anne Warren, with a brief stop on the way to see Malcolm Edwards and Chris Atkinson. (At 28 Duckett Road there is indeed a doorknob on the front door - in the middle of the door. "It doesn't do anything," Malcolm said. "I put it on," Chris added.)

Anne was out much of the early evening, but Phil and I spent an enjoyable evening with Jimmy, talking music, talking TV, and getting sercon. It was at Anne and Jimmy's that I had my first chance to check out British television. Jimmy has a VCR and likes to make tapes of amusing snippets - music videos, "Spitting Image," and associated odd bits - which made a good background to our conversation, since we could pause and watch something without getting sucked into permanent silence.

I've always had ambivalent feelings about television in social settings. Some local fans always have the TV on, and I find it distracting to normal social intercourse, especially if one is being shushed because of what's on the TV at that moment. Conversely, I hate people who talk over TV shows that I'm trying to watch. (These days I tape everything and watch it later, fast-forwarding over the parts I don't care about, which leaves me free during normal broadcast hours to do other things, like socializing.)

Jimmy's use of a VCR and taped bits meant that if we saw something that grabbed our attention he could back it up to the beginning of that bit and we could watch it through and then return to our conversation, while on other occasions it didn't matter if we talked over stuff since it was always there for later viewing anyway. That struck me as an excellent solution. (Recently I've watched how others handle such a situation: while visiting Jerry Jacks in San Francisco I was introduced to his newest toy, a LaserVision video-disc player. Jerry likes to put on old Disney animated cartoons for a background to socializing. This works well because Disney's cartoons were technically well done, but low on interesting content - bland and silly, in fact, in decided contrast to the Chuck Jones/Warner Bros. cartoons of the same period. Yet more recently I discovered that Brian Eno - of course! - has come up with his own solution: a video-disc of what I term "ambient video," which makes the perfect non-obtrusive backdrop for socializing....)

I was also interested in watching British television for the technical aspects: the much-vaunted "superior line resolution" of the British system (which makes video-cassettes incompatible between our two countries). I was less impressed than I expected to be. The difference in line resolution is real, but not very important unless you sit quite close to a set - at normal viewing distances the difference is minor. However, something I've not seen remarked upon elsewhere is the difference caused by the different electrical systems. While U.S. current alternates at 60 cycles a second, the British use 50 cycles. It's not hard to see the difference in the flicker rate - in fluorescent lights as well as TV sets. I can see 60-cycle flicker, but only when I look for it. 50-cycle flicker is much more visible, and I found myself noticing it against my will, every time the TV screen was brightly lit. While I wouldn't object to better line resolution on American TV (and it appears it's on the way, via Japan), I'd be real unhappy with 50-cycle flicker I think.

Jimmy pointed out that Britain was the first nation to get heavily into VCRs and that the per capita ownership of VCRs is higher in Britain than anywhere else. I find that a curious fact, in light of the general standard of living in Britain - a VCR is a more expensive purchase in terms of earnings and buying-power - but I noticed that far more Britfans had VCRs than had CD players (which are roughly comparable in price). I also observed that British VCRs don't offer nearly the playing time that is available from American/Japanese VCRs. It's a matter of the speeds available - which are not the same speeds used here. In the U.S. all VHS machines - the dominant type - now offer three speeds, the fastest of which (used for movies and commercial releases) allows for two hours of recording on a standard cassette. The middle speed allows four hours and the slow speed - the one most people use for

home recording - allows six hours. Special long-play cassettes with thinner tape an more of it offer up to eight hours. Perhaps the additional information required by the greater line resolution of the British system limits the speeds and thus the usable time available - since the physical cassettes themselves are identical.

It was fun talking video with Jimmy. He definitely turned me on to several things, including "Spitting Image," which I shall watch for when it shows up here (which it will, I've discovered, despite its extremely British nature). He also turned me on to The Blue Nile, a Scots rock group whose CD I found here after my return home. But we didn't talk fandom much.

When we got back to Phil's that night Phil pulled out a file of Cretin fanzines and Jimmy's own TWENTYTHIRD for me to browse through. I wish I'd had a chance to read them first - I'd have had a lot more to talk with Jimmy about - but I was quite impressed with them and read them straight through. Here was much of the vigor and quality I'd been missing in British fanzines (that I'd received at the time) in the past several years - and another sign of how little an outside really glimpses of British fandom - since these zines were limited in circulation.

It was fascinating to follow the evolution of these Scottish fans' thinking about fandom as they got deeper into it: first the usual complaints about cliquishness (from what appears to have been itself a very tight clique) and BNFs, followed by a gradual enlightenment and realization of the anarchal principles of fandom - that fandom is pretty much what you make of it - and a steady maturing of talent.

Friday I made my first trip out to East Ham, which took longer than I'd expected it to, due to both my own ignorance of the distances involved and my choices in transfer points between different tube lines.

I arrived at 9A Greenleaf Rd just as Rob's father and brother were carrying things in from their car, and I followed them in. Greenleaf is a very short street - about half a block long, and ending in a culdesac - tucked a block behind the main road on which the tube station is located, and convenient to a local post office and numbers of ethnic restaurants (the best kind, in my opinion). The area has a vaguely grotty air to it, working-class neighborhood backed up against large anonymous housing projects, reminding me of parts of New York City's Queens. Rob apologized for the neighborhood, pointing out that its virtue was its affordability, but he needn't have apologized; many American fans live in similar neighborhoods, for similar reasons.

9A is an upstairs flat, and although - like most London flats I saw - it's small, it's not nearly as small as I'd expected from Avedon's description. Rob had spent some time tidying it up for the occasion, but my impression was that he had little to apologize for under any circumstances: it was quite attractive.

Rob's family was already there and I met his father, brother, sister (and boyfriend), and mother. Rob's father is a distinguished-looking man, silver-haired and looking (to me) like a banker. His mother was lively and attractive and I found myself reflecting on the way I sit between the generations: at 47 I'm not much younger than Rob's parents, although I identify far more with Rob's generation....

"Ted," Avedon said, "come meet my father!"

That threw me for a moment - I'd seen Avedon's father at the airport before I'd left and knew he wasn't coming over - until we went up the half-flight of steps to the front room where Chuck Harris and Pam Wells were sitting. Chuck bounded to his feet to greet me and we renewed acquaintances - having last met face to face in 1965.

In 1965 Chuck said I was one of the easiest people to lip-read he'd ever met, which croggled me - I was under the impression that my lips remained almost immobile when I spoke, a holdover of my attempts to become a ventriloquist as a boy - but I suspect he'd not say that about me today. I felt uneasy about my inability to get into the kind of full-fledged "conversation" I wanted to have with Chuck - and the wretched deterioration of my handwriting (which has atrophied over the years I've used a typer) didn't help. But for the most part we found ourselves among large groups in which there were too many distractions. One on one would have been better. Another time, eh, Chuck? It was in any event a pleasure to see him again, and one of the more ironic twists of last year's Unpleasantness is the way Harris has become more active again in fandom.

This was my first meeting with Pam Wells, with whom I instantly felt at ease. The hubbub of the wedding party was such that we didn't talk about anything consequential then, but the next day Pam and I rode to Reading with Phil and had more opportunity to chat and I was impressed by her grasp of things fannish. New fans like Pam and Anne Warren are valuable additions to any country's fandom.

Rob looked quite spiffy in his new suit. Avedon was wearing the same outfit she'd worn to the Dune premier - a semi-formal pantsuit - a fact I pointed out not too much later to Dave Langford, who had printed a report by Martin Morse Wooster which had claimed Avedon had attended the Dune premier in a dress (and made much of the "fact"). ("We may have to let Mr. Wooster go," Dave said, shaking his head.) At pretty much the last minute Avedon's brother, Rick, and his wife Maryanne, arrived, fresh from Paris, where Maryanne had given her ankle a nasty twist.

There were enough cars to transport the actual families, but Chuck, Rick, Pam and I took the train one station back and a taxi to Newham Registry Office. As the Rich American in the group, I paid the taxi fare, which was a very small amount in any case. We could have walked, but the day had been vaguely wet - it rained heavily when we were indoors and occasionally drizzled when we were outside - and time was short.

At the registry office we joined a growing throng of fans, most - but not all - of whom I recognized. I won't try to list them all here- suffice to say that the cream of London fandom was there...and most of them were heavily armed with cameras and flash-devices.

We milled about in the outer room, lacking only drinks in our hands, and socialized while Rob and Avedon were taken privately into the inner sanctum. There was some ribald speculation over what was transpiring behind the closed door, and I want to make it clear that Chuck Harris was not the only author of those speculations.

In due time the door opened again and the rest of us were invited into the inner chamber, a nice room with just enough chairs to hold us all. There a middle-aged man with a pageboy hairstyle - giving rise to jokes about Marty Cantor conducting the ceremony - asked Rob and Avedon if there was any legal impediment to their marriage. They said there was none. He then asked the rest of us if we knew of any legal impediment. There was a pregnant silence. I entertained the fantasy of a horde of Puerto Rican terrorists breakin into the room at that point, but nothing like that occurred and moments later - without exchanging any of the traditional vows about loving, honoring or obeying - the deed was done: Rob Hansen and Avedon Carol were husband and wife.

Moments later flashbulbs and strobes were going off right and left, like a sudden fireworks display. The happy couple assumed many (clothed) poses; alone, with members of their family, with members of their "family" (Chuck and me), and with most of the rest of the members of the wedding party. Soon everyone with a camera was taking pictures of everyone else. Someone thrust a camera into my hands (I was one of the few who had not brought one) and asked me to take a picture of them. Then Pam gave me a handful of confetti and we moved out to the entrance of the building to strategically position ourselves. Debris on the floor of the entranceway attested to earlier weddings. (The last wedding I'd attended had substituted birdseed for confetti - so the birds would have something to clean up, I guess - but this was an old-fashioned wedding and not only did we have confetti but Malcolm Edwards brought along those little poppers that go off like firecrackers and shoot multi-coloured streamers into the air. He had the look of a pleased schoolboy as he fired them.)

The wedding party returned to 9A Greenleaf Road and became an actual party. The front room filled with people, most of whom positioned themselves near the cheeses, bread, and potables. It was at this point that I realised what trenchermen British fans are. I had thought to gnosh a little on some of the cheese and bread, but totally missed out on the several loaves of bread - which had been sitting there one moment and were but crumbs the next - and managed to scarf up only a couple of bites of cheese. (Good cheese. The British understand good cheese.) As it turned out, this was - mostly by accident - my only exposure to food that day, so I could have done with a little more. Perhaps everyone else had the same premonition and acted on it more rapidly.

Suddenly - and several rain showers glimpsed through the window later - the afternoon was gone and we were moving out to the road, now momentarily dry. Rob and Avedon were off for their honeymoon night in a Reading hotel. The rest of us split into two groups. One was to follow Greg to a local (and untried) pub; the other was headed for the BSFA meeting. I decided to join the latter group, which consisted of Malcolm Edwards and Alexis Gilliland, since I was to meet Phil there, and I hoped to meet various others I'd not yet met.

I recognised the BSFA meeting for what it was almost instantly when we entered the room above the pub: first cousin to the New Jersey ESFA, New York's lunarians, and other SF - rather than fandom - oriented groups. There was the evening's guest speaker (Maxim Jakubowski), and there was the usual tiny audience of half a dozen people, the absurdity of which was ignored by the meeting's chairman, who seriously interviewed Jakubowski with all the dignity one might muster for an audience in the thousands. And in the back of the room some fans (Malcolm) kept up running conversations throughout the evening's presentation. I'll bet LASFS meetings in the forties were like that.

On the other hand, here one could go downstairs at any point for a drink, which had a civilising influence, and if both Jakubowski and his interviewer were too often inaudible (they spoke directly to each other, rather than addressing the increasing audience, and spoke in conversational tones which didn't carry much past their closest listeners), I did in fact have the opportunity to meet several people whom I'd looked forward to meeting.

The first, when we entered the room, was Eve Harvey, who was handing out copies of WALLBANGER. John was also there, but we didn't get a chance to talk until the next day at the Langfords', and it was also at the Langfords' that Eve and I did most of our talking.

While the "programme" was going on more and more people arrived. Chris Priest and Lisa Tuttle slipped in at one point. Then Judith Hanna, who was very animated. And then...

"Ted," Malcolm hissed from behind me. (Yes, I know: there are no sibilants in my name, but somehow Malcolm imparted a hissing sound to it nonetheless.) I had been trying to hear the interview, but gave it up to turn around in my seat and gaze into the face of...Joseph nicholas! Half rising, I reached out my hand and Joseph shook it.

"I could see the flashes of electricity between your outstretched hands!" Malcolm insisted afterwards. "An epochal moment! And I was there!"

As it happened, I'd received a three page letter from Joseph shortly before I'd left. In it he described his reactions upon receiving (that day) HOLIER THAN THOU #21 and quoted a short note he'd written Cantor. He offered several good suggestions for future treatment of Cantor. We were, it seemed, in total agreement for once.

When the meeting was over and people could stand and mingle, I told Joseph that I'd gotten his letter, and, "I agree with just about everything in it."

"Which parts do you disagree with, then?" he asked.

I laughed and dodged the trap.

It was good to see Lisa again and to talk with Chris. I also met Margaret Welbank, who astonished me by telling me she'd yet to attempt any professional work as an artist. Her style is so accomplished and complete that I'd assumed it was the product of years of professional work. I was told after we'd left that Nick Lowe was there, but since people weren't wearing name-badges and I hadn't thought to inquire about him, I missed him. That's too bad, since I admire Nick's fanwriting and had just read his brilliant letter about tractors in a Cretin fanzine the night before.

Time suddenly leapt forward again, and it was after 11.00 and time to leave in order to get the train. Malcolm, Alexis, Phil, and I left together, since we were all taking the train to Manor House. As we walked back to the tube station this Friday night I noticed that the streets were full of pedestrians, most of them young couples and groups, all heading for the tube after the evening's fun. In the tube station I noticed that virtually every couple spent their time waiting for the train locked in an embrace (at the least). Later, when mentioned this, someone suggested that they had no privacy at their homes and were using their time 'alone' together to best advantage. Perhaps so. I certainly wasn't offended; I'd rather see couples making out in a train station than angry gangs of kids. (Another advantage London has over New York City.)

Phil started kidding Malcolm about a food-product that Malcolm was wont to get at a shop across the street from the Manor House tube station. My memory no longer supplies a name for this substance, nor even a list of ingredients, but the description proffered at the time certainly didn't sound appetizing.

"I only eat them when I'm drunk," Malcolm explained, "then I don't remember how awful they are."

Having failed to connect with any food since leaving Greenleaf Road earlier in the evening, I was almost tempted by the thought of this food-product thing. Perhaps if Malcolm had gotten one, I might have been tempted, but even as Phil taunted him to cross the street from the bus stop where we were waiting, and Alexis read the list of specials advertised in the shop window, the lights went out in the shop window and it closed. Oh well.

Saturday was to be the Big Day: the day of the Wedding Reception at the Langfords'. After rising I packed my bags and rolled up the sleeping bag I'd been using as a blanket. Phil had another sleeping bag as well, and we loaded everything into the boot of his car.

Phil's was not the first British car I'd ridden in - my experiences as a passenger in British traffic go back to 1965 - but it still took a certain mental adjustment to climb into what ought to have been the driver's seat, only to find the steering wheel and controls over on the other side. (No doubt Phil experienced a similar frisson every time he climbed into the right side of my car as a passenger...) I've never tried to drive in Britain, and rather hope I never have to, since although I'm confident I could do it I'm also afraid my reflexes would betray me the moment I relaxed. I think very little as a driver, having honed it all to instinct, and given any situation that requires choices, I simply and automatically react correctly. The basics wouldn't change, but the mirror-reversal of traffic might trip me up: my instinct is to dodge to the right and pass on the left.

Actually, this acute difference between our countries points up something else I noticed: the correct thing here is always to step to the right to avoid someone walking towards you; along sidewalks, in subway corridors, and virtually everywhere else pedestrian traffic as well as wheeled traffic keeps to the right. When I enter a local Metro station the down escalator is on the right; the up escalator, bringing people up from below, is on the left. Those who stand still on the escalator steps keep to the right; those who walk up (or down) the steps as they move, do so to the left. It's a universal rule throughout all parts of our country.

I expected this to be reversed in Britain, since in several basic ways - automobile traffic, trains, up and down sides of stairs, etc. - it is. But in London those standing still on the escalator also stand to the right, while those who are climbing do so on the left, and the general trend for pedestrian traffic (on sidewalks etc.) seems to be to keep to the right. I find this confusing, and I wonder if locals find it equally so. It's all vaguely ambidextrous, and disconcerting. Then too, with a British car, one must shift with one's left hand. What does that do for right-handed drivers?

We found Malcolm and the Small Edwards waiting in their car out front while Chris scouted the situation and ascertained that she could bring the child in - Hazel Langford apparently having an allergy, or an aversion, to both small children and smoke of any kind.

Inside at about 3.30 in the afternoon, we found a full-fledged party in swing. As I wandered from room to room, meeting and remeeting people, I suddenly realised that I felt as if I was at a convention. This, the wedding reception, was indeed a small convention, skimming the cream of British (or London, anyway) fandom. It was here that I met, for the first time, Vinç Clarke, Abi Frost, Dave Bridges, Alun Harries, Maureen Porter, and many more, while renewing acquaintances with Arthur Thomson, Harry Bell, John Jarrold, Dave and Hazel Langford, and yet others. There were lots of people there, and I found I could wander from group to group and enjoy the conversation at each of them. From time to time various of us went out into the back garden to smoke a variety of substances, tobacco among them - except when it was raining too heavily.

On one such occasion I found myself jammed into the small corridor between the langfords' kitchen door and their back garden door, with Abi, Joseph, Dave Bridges, and Arthur Thomson, while a funny cigarette was passed around. "You don't smoke this stuff, Arthur," someone remarked. "No," Arthur agreed, "but I like to be around people who do." It was on that occasion that Abi deftly removed a safety pin from her bra-strap to use as a roach-holder, with Arthur's assistance.

On another occasion a group of us were standing in the garden, passing around another cigarette, when mordant commentary on, and footnotes to, our conversation began issuing from a nearby bathroom window. When I blew smoke in through the window Greg's laugh came back in reply.

The house is a large one - although I never explored its upper storeys - and Dave is still in the process of remodeling it, room by room. I was impressed by the library, which is in a large room lined with shelves; it isn't the largest collection I've seen (I'm not sure it's bigger than mine, although it's significantly different), but it's neatly ordered and has considerable impact upon one in that setting. I noticed that Dave doesn't segregate his books by type: SF books sit cheek-by-jowl with 'mainstream' and mystery novels, all alphabetically ordered by author. At one point Dave asked me to sign copies of several of my books. I was gratified he had any, since none of my books have ever been published in Britain (he said, bitterly). I signed my name with a flourish in each. "Ah," Dave said with his disarming smile, "that will increase their value nicely."

It was sometime around then that Greg told me he'd admired a story of mine, 'Wednesday, Noon,' which had appeared in F&SF in the sixties. Since that is one of my own favourites, I immediately discerned in Greg hitherto unglorified heights of taste.

Simply by wandering out to the kitchen to chat with Rob and Avedon at one point, I found myself part of the inner circle who had first chance at the food. They had ordered curries from a local restaurant, and these were arranged in big serving bowls on a table. It was an excellent choice, and very enjoyable. It also disappeared quickly. So, in due time, did all the extra cheeses, bread, and other gnoshes laid out. British fans are a lot more serious about eating than American fans, I think - and there's a lot less in the way of leftovers after a party.

At one point that night Harry Bell - whom I'd got to know when he visited Virginia with Jim Barker after the 1980 Worldcon - came up to me, put his hand on my shoulder, and said, "Ted, don't leave. Stay here." It was an emotional moment, and one in which the very last thing I wanted to do was to leave the company of these fine people.

It was then that I decided I'd have to return next year. MEXICON would be a good convention, I decided: just one week before CORFLU. In a fit of something or other, I joined on the spot.

(TO BE CONTINUED.....)

....TED WHITE..

As mentioned in the INTRO this report concludes in the first issue of CRANK. Ted will be responsible for the American mailing list and I'll control the British. The economics of postage being what they are on a monthly fanzine not everyone getting this will be seeing CRANK. Therefore it might be worth you doing something to keep your name in view as I compile the CRANK mailing list. Something called a LoC.....

.....EPSILON...THE FANZINE FOR THE FULLER-FIGURED FANED?...COULD BE.....

LETTERS

LETTERS....., news from home and abroad.....

LETTERS

DEBBIE NOTKIN

680 66th Street, Oakland, CA 94609, USA.

I hate to start this LoC with contentiousness, but you started by annoying me. The list of programme items in "What You (&I) Missed at the Worldcon" is, of course, supposed to be slanted, non-representative and funny. It is also true that LA had really garbage programming compared to recent Worldcons, although I'd cite the lack of interesting panels rather than the appearance of silly ones. It's also true that I organised the panel on Fat, Feminism and Fandom and I don't think it's funny. I understand that "fat American" jokes are the rage in British fandom - frankly it's the one thing that makes me afraid to introduce myself to you all when we come to London. I don't feel like going into the whole argument again here - I'm sure the neilsen Haydens would send you a copy of ZED#5 if you didn't get it and you're interested in what I had to say. Meanwhile, I only ask that you don't make fun of a serious concerns affecting a significant number of your readers, unless you're doing it affectionately, and that you don't lump philosophical/political issues with "Jedi Knights of Orange County". On the whole, if that list of panels is the most awful one you can construct from your programme book I'd say the concom probably did a bad job of programming for as wide a variety of people as were there.

By the way, the Fat, Feminism and Fandom panel (despite no description in the programme book) had well over 50 attendees, about 75% women, of all shapes and sizes, went on for two hours, inspired a particularly interesting room party and got talked about all convention by a lot of people. We'll be doing it again at other conventions - no-one cares whether you come or not, or whether you approve or not, but I'd seriously appreciate your not ridiculing something that's so important to so many people.

Coming in late on the discussion of fanart - I like the broken-up layout that fillos generate, as long as the art itself is relatively pleasing. On the other hand, all text layouts are fun too (and easier, she said, thinking about the next issue of KITH). I tend to agree with Jackie Causgrove that most fanartists probably find their work welcomed by editors - I know I'm always delighted to receive art in the mail (sometimes more than letters or articles, since art is something I can't do, so it awes me a little more).

STU SHIFFMAN

19 Broadway Terrace #1D, New York, NY 10040, USA.

I see that Jackie Causgrove took an opportunity to trounce Taral again - someone should take her club away from her so that the only person she can continue to harm is herself. I, at least, can put myself in Taral's position - see what he's seeing and what he means. to say even if I wouldn't agree or say it the same way if I did. Jackie seems to have little empathy for people outside her immediate circle. What a grinch! Taral knows that doing fanart isn't some contest, but personal fulfilment - it's frustrating for a fanartist to confront so many print-orientated faneditors. One wants to contribute, to be part of the dialogue - but many zines just can't accomodate non-referential illustrations in their formats. Poor Taral - a damn talented fellow.

DAVE WOOD

1 Friary Close, Marine Hill, Clevedon, Avon BS21 70A.

Art can and should complement typography. If none of us are perfect, if none of us achieve a coherent whole, page after page in our fanzines, it's not necessarily because we are philistines (though many would like to believe it so) it's mainly because of the medium and the strictures on what can be done at a price we can afford. I would hate to see art in fanzines go down the drain in the same way as I would hate to see fanzines themselves go down the drain. And there's the danger of it all happening because people will insist on trying to bring professionalism in as the only criteria. Sterility will kill enthusiasm - ideas and innovation cannot thrive if the potential fanzine editor is told at the christening that unless he does this or that he will not succeed. The fact that A doesn't want fanart or that B doesn't want humorous pieces or that C thinks fanfiction is useless is alright with me as long as they keep it as a personal observation. But to try to rid the land of it - then I get a little annoyed.

Even if EPSILON 17 wasn't the fanzine I was supposed to be reading, I must admit I admire your style; the complete aplomb with which, in one breath, you announce the birth and death of a monthly fanzine. Ah, necrology where is thy sting. Having been publishing more or less bi-monthly for the last year I can fully support your sentiments re keeping the necessary momentum up. And also your reasons for wanting to do the the thing in the first place. The two biggest disappointments I have suffered since my return to British fandom are 1) the lack of regular fanzines, and 2) the lack of real interest shown in those that do try to make the effort. Now while it is probably an inescapable fact that the APAs are getting their members putting pen back to paper they also become the breeding ground of insularity. And those on the outside, like myself, only hear about the so-called good things that are taking place within their arcane walls. Now what's the use of all this splendour if it's confined to this elitism like some rare pearl encased in a light-tight velvet box? Sod all, in the long run, as I think is now becoming apparent. Trouble is, everybody keeps churning out the hoary old myth about fandom being more of a face-to-face thing these days; making writing and producing fanzines a sort of dinosaurian activity fit only for fools and hermits. As the myth makers stand around in the Tun and the pubs of Leeds and Birmingham et al you can almost see the fear of appearing less than super-cool about getting in there and doing something. But then from what I gather they did rather take all the fun out of the object with the search for perfection.

Vestigia nulla retrorsum.

CHUCK HARRIS

32 Lake Crescent, Daventry, Northants, NN11 5EB.

That's right! Typical EPSILON misrepresentation. Lickspittle running dog lackey of the Thatcherite junta (and thank you Joseph.) "Hoary old reprobate" indeed. I have never taken money. Last Sunday morning at the NOVACON, give or take a couple of weeks, I reckon I looked a damn sight younger than you did. And (just a minute while I look it up) 'reprobate' - whatever gave you the idea that I am "a morally depraved rogue condemned by God"? Gracious! Are you confusing me with D.Langford again? Try to remember - I am the courtly sophisticate who says "Pardon?"; he is the peasant huckster who says "Wot?".

It was nice to see Pimlico Joe taking notice of Mal Ashworth at last, but what

really worries me is that letter from Walt Willis. I quite see that 'fuck' could be the macho equivalent of feminine underlining, but where does that leave me?? I say Fuck, add exclamation points, inverted commas and underlining. "Fucking Hell, Walt!" Am I AC, DC, switched on, turned off, fluorescent, incandescent, or just a burned out case?

Hurray for D. His statement is undoubtedly the finest piece of pure prose since HYPHEN went irregular. As usual fandom has dithered away for months instead of making an unequivocal condemnation right at the very beginning. It always clusters carefully in the grey area rather than find the moral stature to decide on black or white. Pusillanimity rules OK.

I was pleased to see your own comments on this. I know that it's easier for people on the sidelines like me to make with the fearless criticism bit whilst you, TAFF administrator and very close to my little girl, have to try to appear totally impartial and a lot less vehement. I think you struck a nice balance.

WALT WILLIS

32 Warren Rd., Donaghadee, Northern Ireland BT21 OPD.

I'm glad you're pulling the plug on the Bergeron stuff. Quite right. However, for your own information I might say that you are correct in your interpretation of the words "details of voting will be kept secret", and I know because I wrote them. When I came back to fandom I was pleasantly astonished to find that not only was TAFF still going strong after thirty years but the rules were much the same as I wrote them in 1953, and even some of the wording was identical. I gave the rules a great deal of thought at the time and I remember concluding that it was undesirable that the individual preferences of voters should be divulged. I also considered the possibility of administrators trying to influence the result by leaking the progress of balloting, but concluded that not doing this was part of the honesty with which the administrator was expected to act, so there was no need to refer specifically to the possibility. So the words mean exactly what you thought, as far as my opinion goes: I know the expressed intention of the legislators cannot under current law override the apparent intention of the statute, but in practice it is taken into account and there is a growing opinion in legal circles that evidence of the legislator's intentions (in this case mine) should be accepted in matters of interpretation.

I liked the piece about the ((Kettle/Mitchell)) wedding, and it was a bonus to learn also the interesting gossip about Ballard and his film rights. Takes me back to the time I was on the International Fantasy Award panel (because they were desperate for foreigners) and felt I was right in the thick of it all. Vinç Clarke pretended to be furious because I was billed as "Fandom's Leading Expert and Critic". However, while we were still all laughing I was whipped off the panel, before you could say Georges Gallet. Nevertheless I still feel some sense of identity with the Booker Award panellists, just as I enjoy Wimbledon the more for my triumphs and disasters as second singles in the Belfast and District League.

The first installment of your trip report was the best thing you've written so far, that I've seen. Liked the "neon quilt" - yes, that's it. I was going to comment on how much better it was than Peter Roberts' account but the latter redeemed itself by the drowning episode, which seemed honest and sincere.

MARTYN TAYLOR

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Re EPSILON 17 - now that's more like it, boyo. Not a clearing the decks exercise but a "must publish this if it's the last thing I do" extravaganza, and bloody good read from beginning to end. That's the stuff to give the sufferers from APAsstarvation.

I liked the report, very much. While the transatlantic trip is a fairly well trodden path in reportage terms you gave us a very personal view of it all, what you made of what you saw, how it impinged on you, and still managed to keep the pace and the interest up. That was a skilful piece of writing, and if the remainder matches up I'll look forward to seeing it wherever it appears.

The contrast between your style and Peter Roberts' was marked. While he was more 'entertaining' - and there is no doubt he covered a lot of ground very smartly (by TAFF report standards) - it seemed strangely impersonal a piece of writing, despite the conversational style. Of course his is a more overtly stylised 'fannish' style than that adopted by yourself, which probably accounts for the feeling that here was someone consciously creating something within a fixed genre whereas you were simply sitting down and talking to your friends. Mind you, seeing as Peter is one of the original masters of the style who am I to say him nay?

ALLYN CADOGAN

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I enjoy reading (or hearing) other people's perceptions of Amerika, so got a kick out of both your and Peter's articles. It's fun to read your impressions and interpretations of things I take for granted. I had the same reaction as you when I first travelled to Minneapolis, though I made the trip in reverse, in a Volkswagen Beetle with two other people and five cats. I was born and raised on the West Coast, and had only read or been told about the deserts and praries, which was no preparation at all for the real thing. Someday I'd like to make a thorough tour by car of the United States; if we had flown east, I'd never have seen the boxcar village outside of Salt Lake City, nor would I have discovered the town of Wall, South Dakota, or camped under the watchful eyes of Mount Rushmore, or picknicked using a bale of hay for a table in Wyoming, or rescued a runaway cat in the Badlands... Like you, I had to marvel at how indescribably big this country really is.

When I moved back to the States after spending the first ten years of my adult life in Canada, I experienced some culture shock - this is what Peter's report reminded me of. During that time all my experience of America was filtered through print and broadcast media, and I was not at all ready to return to a plethora of MacDonald's and screw-top beer bottles and the overwhelming tackiness of much of US culture. When I first moved back to the States I was also a wide-eyed neo, and Peter Roberts was (so far as I was concerned) a close relation of God. I spent my first week here phoning Rich Coad's apartment in order to arrange a meeting with Rich and thus with Peter. Of course, neither of them apparently went near Rich's apartment that week, at least not long enough to hear the phone ring, so I didn't get to meet Peter and even had to wait several months to meet Rich at one of Jerry Jacks' Chanukkah parties, where he plied me with nitrous and giggled a lot. Oh well. I think I enjoyed Peter's article more now than I would have in 1979 - historical perspective can add a lot.

HARRY WARNER JR.

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The 17th EPSILON startled me. It made me realise with a jolt something I'd forgotten about TAFF: the fact that the organisation has a minor, subsidiary function of sending fans across the Atlantic. Old fans with faulty memories like mine and young fans who have been active only a short time might be pardoned for overlooking that obscure subpurpose of the organisation now that it's so active as the storm centre for fusses and feuds.

It's a time-binding sensation to find a SunCon account in a new fanzine. It would have seemed more remarkable to me if it hadn't been topped by something in the festive 150th SAPS mailing last month: a fanzine which had been in the first SAPS mailing almost forty years ago. (Walt Coslet, its publisher, had run off a lot of extra copies of his contribution to the first mailing, saved them all these years, and sent them to the current SAPS official editor for use in the 150th mailing.) I had a curious sense of reading about things I'd personally seen and heard and experienced when I read this part of Peter Roberts' TAFF report. So much had been written years ago about the Fontainbleu's cockroaches, Ed Wood's HYPHEN abuse, and other phases of that convention that they seem almost as vivid as if I'd been there.

MAL ASHWORTH

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A fair and auspicious launch for your trip report, and you put across well your feeling of awe at the vastness and alienness of that first sight of the new continent. Bear up bravely - only another 45,000 words to go.

Super trip report from Peter Roberts too. Such goodies. Is this to be the theme of all future EPSILONS? Though I found his confirmation of the general sobriety of US fans and the almost total absence of drinkable beer on the face of that vast land-mass quite awesome. And scary. (The Good Lord above knows - Torquay is bad enough and Birmingham is like Saudi Arabia.) Hell, if we can get along OK with aliens from a culture like that, 900-foot methane-breathing armadilloes from Rigel IV will be no problem.

I'm pleased to see that Joseph has discovered that "our brains are interpreting the 'raw data' that flows in through our senses every second of the day". (I was going to say that really, though, one sometimes wonders if some people's brains aren't fouling up on even that basic job, but, after having just read Avedon's savaging of you for scoring cheap points off sitting ducks I decided not to.) This discovery that right from the initial stage of perception what we are getting is a limited, censored (and hence, in a sense, distorted) view of the universe usually provides the basis for a sounder, more 'reality-grounded' orientation in most people. Joseph's reaction is fascinatingly original. He, apparently, concludes that, since we are already saddled with this basically incomplete and limited view of our world we might just as well add a further level of distortion of a conceptual/ideological kind. A bit like driving in fog and deciding that because visibility is rather poor you might as well close your eyes. Highly entertaining stuff.

BRIAN EARL BROWN

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Avedon's comments about the use of 'sic' warm this old fannish heart of mine. One of the things that really pissed me off about Ted White was his gratuitous use of 'sic' in arguments with people he didn't like. Pointing out people's lapses in grammar in the middle of arguments they're trying to construct is nothing more than a dirty trick like coughing just as a golfer is trying to sink a 20' putt. And the vicious use of 'sic' can get one into trouble, as Leah Zeldes found out last year when she tried to feud with another member of MISHAP, a local APA. After writing about crazed women chasing another woman's man, she printed six letters in her next apazine supposedly from six different people who thought she was talking about them. One had 'sic's strung through it. The other five didn't, even though they had a number of grammatical errors too. Conclusion - that Leah had faked the other five for her own purposes.*Sigh*

Leroy Kettle married - how orthodox fandom is getting. At least he didn't marry an American. As I've mentioned elsewhere, we've got to stop this femmefan drain while there are still any female fans left in the US/ (Pardon me while I get my tongue out of my cheek.) I'm not surprised to discover that everybody at Kettle's wedding worked in the publishing biz - that's been my general impression of British fandom for quite some time. Or at least of the London crowd that still sends me fanzines. Everybody either writes Science Fiction or edits it. Or both.

L.A.Con II's stipulations for releasing the monies they've allocated to TAFF strikes me as awfully chintzy for a concom that raked in over \$100,000 from the Worldcon. Sure, it's one way to get fan fund delegates to actually write their reports, but do we really need threats to make fandom work?

I suspect you're right about THE NEO FAN'S GUIDE TO SCIENCE FICTION FANDOM not having been revised since Bob Tucker wrote it 30 years ago. While I have heard people talk about 'blog' it's not as a special British drink but as any foul and potent alcoholic concoction produced by and for fans. As for 'crottled greeps', maybe that's kin to the 'Hardened Creamy Stuff' Greg Benford was served in Russia for breakfast one day. Certainly I think the editors of FANCYCLOPEDIA III ought to ask a British fan to re-write the section on British fandom.

MARTY CANTOR

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I manifested my fascination with putridity in person? Not that I remember - I seem to recall being too busy working the con to be doing much of anything except said work and going to bed early each night in lieu of collapsing from the strain. So refresh my memory - just what putrid things did I do? I certainly do not like not remembering choice items like that.

My apologies to all Britfen (and others) for errors in THE NEO FAN'S GUIDE TO SCIENCE FICTION FANDOM. Part of the problem was the lack of precise knowledge of many aspects of Britfandom, while part was the concentration by both editors on their work on FANCY III (with the consequent result of the Guide being put out in a rush almost at the last minute, it being finished only two weeks before L.A.Con II). We put out the guide in such a rush that some of the material (including the Britfandom stuff) was merely transferred whole from the fifth edition. We did include some new material, eliminate some old material, and update/change some other entries, but I will be the

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East Ham
London E6 1DX.

and is available for letter of comment,
trade, or by editorial whim. Letters
received will be considered to be for
publication unless marked otherwise.

*

Final stencil typed 20th August 1985.
(Hey, Avedon, it's our quarterversary
tomorrow.....)

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*

Thanks are due this time to Vinç Clarke
for the electrostencil, and to Avedon for
the typing assist.

*

"Come the revolution anyone who isn't tolerant enough will be lined up against a wall
and shot." - Greg Pickersgill.

"That's carrying extremism too far." - Mike Glicksohn.

(Cantor continued...) first to admit that our editing, despite producing a literate
and graphically interesting zine, was not absolutely first-rate
on some of the contents even though said contents are not all bad.

Britfen(and others) should be reassured that FANCY III's editorial board is
endeavouring to make FANCY III as accurate as possible - when we get back to working on
it one of our first orders of business will be the sending out of information requests
to other fans. Your pointing out the errors in The Guide points out errors that will
be corrected, or at least not perpetuated, in FANCY.

*

WAHF: A resident of Puerto Rico, Rob Gregg, Leigh Edmunds, I.M.Barrington, Michael
Ashley, Jim Darroch, Lucy Huntzinger - whose LoC was inexplicably DNQ'd, Mike
Lewis, Tim Bateman, Jean Weber, Jez Keen, Frank Plowright, and Jane Hawkins: "I read
a friend's copy of EPSILON at LA and wanted to comment on your letter column. I can't
remember seeing such a beautiful job of editing before. You made a batch of letters
seem like a cohesive piece. I was impressed." - Aww shucks. All these American folks
praising my editing skills over the last few issues is like as not to turn a young
boy's head. *blush*

TAFF TALK: Having gone the traditional route of parcelling out various chapters of
my trip-report to different faneds for them to publish I've decided that
I'm not terribly happy with it. Two bits have seen print thus far, though another is
done, and as soon as that has appeared I think I'll ixnay the whole process and get on
with writing the rest with a view to getting a single volume complete report out RSN.
Projected publication date is mid-February to co-incide with the trip to CORFLU that
Avedon and I are seriously considering making. Of course, the pressures of putting out
a monthly zine may well screw up this schedule. We shall see.
