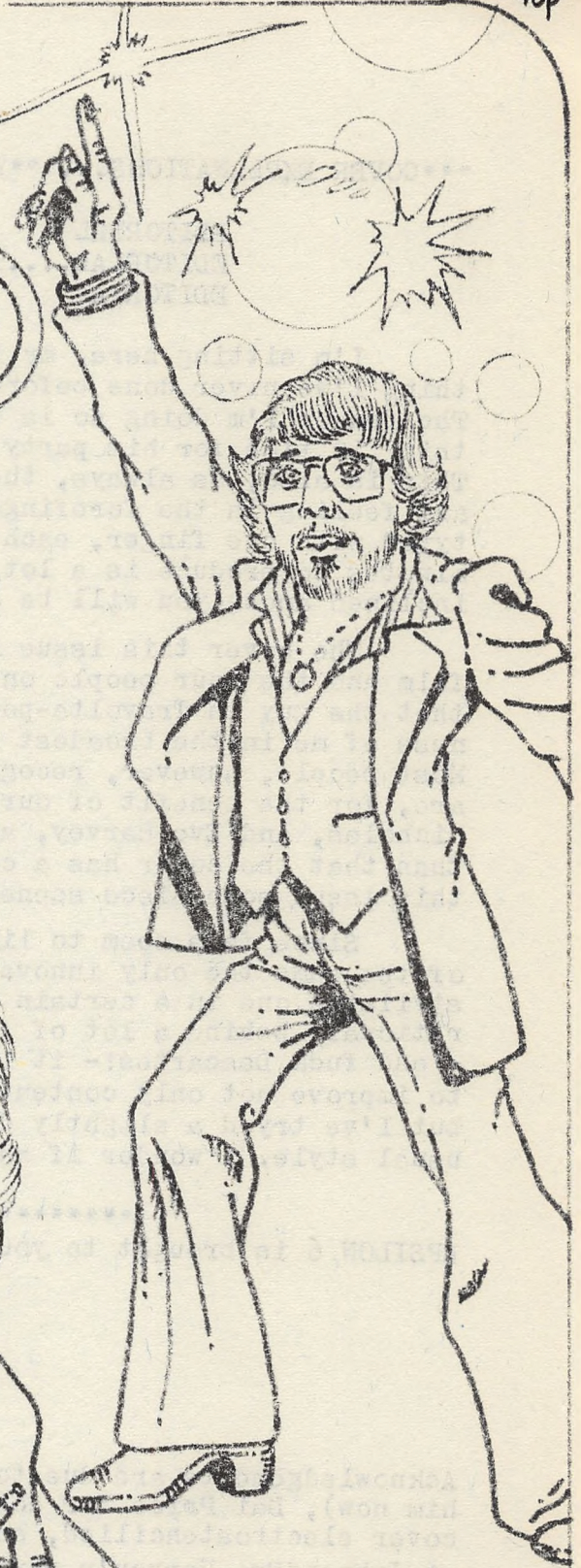
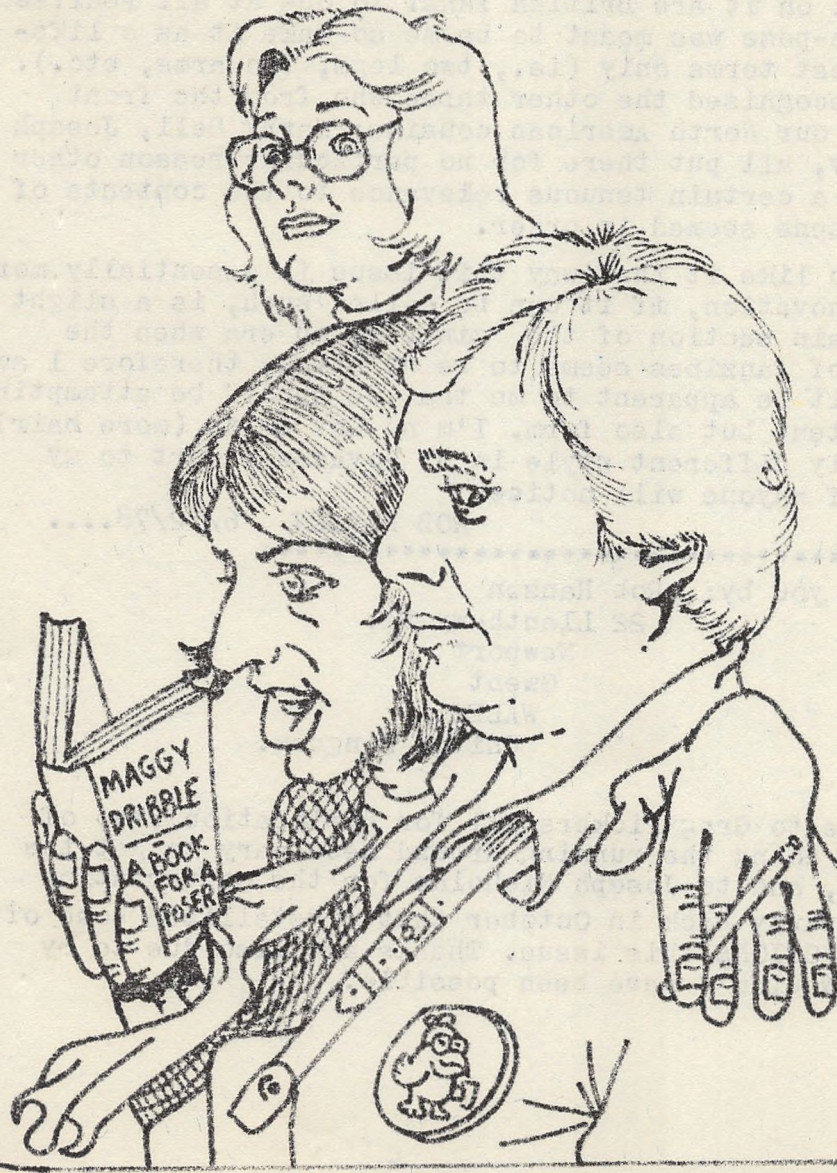


EPSILON SIX

HANSEN '78-



COVER EXPLANATIONS...WHAT I HATE ABOUT PUBBING MY ISH...***IN...***

EDITORIAL

EDITORIAL...THE FIRST THING YOU READ,THE LAST I WRITE...

EDITORIAL

I'm sitting here, my typer poised on a kitchen chair, doing something I've never done before, which is composing directly onto stencil. The reason I'm doing so is that if Greg is gonna be able to dupe this thing in time for his party then I really must get it to him posthaste. This is also, as always, the last stencil to be typed and I'm losing all feeling in the forefinger of my right hand. Seventeen or so stencils typed with one finger, each taking somewhere in the region of forty minutes to produce is a lot of work, as I'm sure the mathematically inclined among you will be able to verify with a simple calculation.

The cover this issue is based, in part, on the poster of a recent film and the four people on it are British fans. No one at all realised that the guy in Travolta-pose was meant to be me so take it as a likeness of me in the broadest terms only (ie., two legs, two arms, etc.). Most people, however, recognised the other three who from the front are, for the benefit of our North American cousins; Harry Bell, Joseph Nicholas, and Eve Harvey, all put there for no particular reason other than that the cover has a certain tenuous relevance to the contents of this issue so a disco scene seemed in order.

Since fans seem to like it that way this issue is essentially more of the same the only innovation, if it can be called such, is a slight stylistic one in a certain section of the 'zine. In an era when the rationale behind a lot of fanzines seems to be "I stink, therefore I am" - and fuck Descartes!- it is apparent to me that we should be attempting to improve not only content but also form. I'm no Kev Smith (more hair) but I've tried a slightly different style in my Novacon report to my usual style. I wonder if anyone will notice?

ROB HANSEN 6/12/78....

EPSILON 6 is brought to you by: Rob Hansen
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Newport
Gwent
WALES
United Kingdom.

Acknowledgements are due to Greg Pickersgill for duplication (two of him now), Dai Price for doing the running around necessary to get the cover electrostencilled, and to Joseph Nicholas for the conversation at JohnandEve Harvey's party back in October that crystallised some of the ideas expressed in NOTIONS this issue. Thanks are also due to my parents without whom I wouldn't have been possible.

****DOOM,GLOOM AND DESTRUCTION,NOT TO MENTION PR.....IN.....*****

NOTIONS

NOTIONS....or:"why I pub my ish:a true confession!....

NOTIONS

1979 - THE WORLDCON AND ALL THAT.

In 1979, for the first time in a decade and a half, the World Science Fiction Convention will be held in Great Britain. Now most of you will be familiar with this fact but the great unwashed British public at large is not and while I'd prefer things to stay that way it's quite possible that they won't. With the current interest in SF generated by STAR WARS and CLOSE ENCOUNTERS It's possible that the media, if they get wind of the shindig, might think it worth a bit of coverage. Whether such coverage would just be a snippet on something like Nationwide showing the nutters at play or a larger programme I don't know but if the latter it would be in our interest to have someone like Kingsley Amis, a respected literary figure sympathetic to SF, fronting such a show. We would, however, probably end up with someone like the adenoidal Melvyn Bragg, who makes no secret of his distaste of SF. In such an event we would be well advised to have an official PR man, an articulate fan able to give a good account of himself if faced with a hostile interviewer. Who would such a fan be? Good question, and a hard one to answer. In the general con context I suppose we usually see the chairman as the spokesman and/or appologist and while con chairmen are usually stout fellows and true how many have the ability to do well in this situation? In the case of the Worldcon, of course, Peter Weston is chairman, a man who though confident enough has an accent that can be both incomprehensible and irritating. Though I wasn't around then I seem to recall hearing that the Torcon committee back in '74 tackled the problem with a certain degree of success. Perhaps the con chairman, a certain Mr. Glicksohn I believe, could give a few pointers?

Which might seem a frivolous note on which to start this piece but then events have outpaced my thoughts on the Worldcon of a few short months ago, certain problems made redundant or resolved only to be replaced by darker misgivings. It seems that ever since it's inception this column hasn't contained the most optimistic observations and interpretations but if what I perceive to be current trends continue then there is indeed cause for concern.

I've been an active fan for something more than three years now and in that short time I've seen a contraction taking place, a contraction visible in the growing apathy around, the almost total lack of enthusiasm, or at least (and perhaps worse) of enthusiasm tempered by intelligence. As the older and more established fans grow tired and inactive fandom loses a lot of the experience that once gave it it's depth, and all the signs are that this trend will

indeed accelerate because, after all, most of the established fans have been around for ten years or more and after such a period it's almost inevitable that some degree of boredom or disenchantment will set in. Ten years is a long period of time; there aren't many of them in a lifetime. The old fans, having done their bit, seem content just to sit back and enjoy the social aspects of fandom. It's a valid observation, I think, that fandom in it's most active form is essentially a product of adolescence and that when the anger and energy of adolescence have gone the fire and life that were once evident are replaced by a mellow tolerance, a change reflected in the writing.

What has all this to do with the Worldcon, you may well ask? Well when you consider that most of these older fans became active shortly after the last British Worldcon the knowledge that a Worldcon could be just around the corner might seem a good reason to hang on a little longer. I think this could be the case, that in terms of fanac the Worldcon could well be the swan-song of a fannish generation. And the worrying thing is that the fannish generation I belong to (as defined in issue 4) having meshed so perfectly with that earlier generation could well be dragged along with it.

Fandom, of course, will still exist but unless a dynamic and positive direction emerges (leadership even) then it will be sercon and SF-orientated. The pressures for such a swing already exist and seem, in fact, to be growing. Bear in mind also that there will be a lot of Americans at the Worldcon, sercon Americans interested in SCIENCE FICTION who will doubtless impress the callow and impressionable young fans who are tomorrows faneditors. All of which has lent more urgency to the notion of a sercon fanzine put out by yours truly to get in on the ground floor and grab a piece of the action for myself. A cynical reaction? Maybe, but I feel I've still a fair bit of fanac in me. I'm not ready to throw the towel in just yet.

Fanac isn't only restricted to putting out fanzines since, as we all know, there's the not inconsiderable matter of organising the Eastercon, still Britain's premier SF event. Assuming my prophecies of doom and destruction come to pass, what of that? 1980 will be safe enough but can anyone say for sure that by '81 there might not be a sercon group strong enough to put it on?

The above is only one of a number of possible scenarios, no more nor less valid than any other, but in the event of it happening I would obviously have to reconsider my position on fanzines which has led me to ask myself just why it is I put out a fanzine. Initially, of course, EPSILON was produced as a trade and letter-substitute but, as is often the case, it's developed from such humble aspirations into much more of a soapbox for my own views, views which are crystallised and defined by the very act of writing them down and yet views which seem increasingly, if not unduly, pessimistic. In terms of fannish

relationships and socialising I'm Having A Good Time, no sweat, which makes it harder to rationalise my discontent with the fanzine field. This dichotomy is the same referred to earlier in respect of older fans giving up 'zines in favour of the purely social aspects of fandom, which is a seductively enticing route to follow but I still persist with 'zines so there must be some attraction.

Fanzines are for fun, of course, which still doesn't give you an excuse for foisting juvenile humour and shitty writing on fandom; you gotta put blood, sweat and tears into everything you do for it to be worthwhile, even the fun things. For my own part I get enjoyment out of putting together what I feel to be the best damn fanzine that I am capable of at the time of production, the main charge I get, but even then fanzines being what they are I must have an audience and if I grow away from that audience, or if that audience changes, then I will stop producing EPSILON. This is why I'm so apprehensive about what I see as the possibility of effective, if not actual, mass gaffiation of our more established luminaries and the impending sercon backlash. This, in a sense, is why I'm diversifying slightly with such special projects as LICKS and a sercon SF one-off I've had in mind for a while now and which will be the next thing on the agenda when the LICKS project is complete. EPSILON will still my mainstay, it's what I enjoy doing most, but the projects I have in mind will at least let me explore a few of my other concerns and to see if, in the event of EPSILON folding, there is another form of 'zine I could produce and get equal pleasure from.

All of which doesn't mean that I think the fannish fanzine field is dead yet, oh no, not I. Newcomers and fresh blood are essential to the continuity and evolution of a microcosmic sub-culture such as the one we inhabit so let's hear it for John Collick and Steev Higgins, two promising young fans the rest of us old fogeys first encountered at SILICON. The fact that we encountered them at SILICON has altered my thinking on the con as a closed-shop, invitation-only affair incidentally, though I still feel a roof of sixty attendees is essential to preserve it's character. Could we have won them over so easily at a larger con? I think not. However, while I whole-heartedly endorse the label of "new fannish generation" that has been linked with these two don't you think it a bit sad that we make such a fuss about two newcomers? We need more than that.

Ah, I dunno even a fairly optimistic welcome of new fans becomes tinged with pessimism but then perhaps doom and gloom is expected from this quarter now. Still, if you find it entertaining and-stimulating then what does it matter, eh?

MORE FUN-FILLED FROLICS ANECDOTALLY RELATED IN.....**

ODZUNSODZ

ODZUNSODZ.....A tale of two cons.....

ODZUNSODZ

SILICONREP (a title for nostalgia freaks)

It was fast approaching 9.30am on the Friday morning, the time Greg, Simone, Joseph Nicholas and myself were to set off for SILICON but as yet there was no sign of Joseph. I'd arrived from Wales on Thursday and after the usual browse through London's specialist SF shops I stayed the night at Lawrence Rd so as to be able to start early for Newcastle. I needn't have bothered because at 9.20am there was a phone call from Nicholas saying that he'd overslept and would be a little late. A little late!! Four hours later he turned up, just before the time we'd set for leaving without the little sod. We were not amused.

The trip up seemed interminable, even my usual sparkling wit at a low ebb, the only momentary relief being provided when we were strafed by an RAF training flight. We eventually arrived in Newcastle at 6.30pm which meant that what with waiting for Nicholas the whole thing had taken nine hours. Still, I reflected, the trip back would be shorter.

The chorus of welcomes that greeted us as we entered the Grosvenor Hotel lifted my spirits no end and I was beaming like an idiot as I lugged my luggage to my room. On returning to the bar with a pile of copies of EPSILON under my arm I realised that I was not the only one pubbing my ish in time for the con as fanzines were thrust at me from every direction.

Peter Weston was there that night since he was in Newcastle on business, as large as life and as arrogant as ever. Arrogant? Yeah; for someone who must have been attending cons for the best part of a decade-and-a-half to buy a meal from outside the hotel and then attempt to eat it in the bar can only be the result of supreme contempt and arrogance. But then why should he care? It wasn't his con, that's not 'til next August.

The first event on Saturday morning was the Brains Truss, billed as "a freewheeling discussion of current SF, among other topics" which quickly degenerated into a catalogue of the faults of Issac Asimov's SF Magazine which resulted, curiously enough, in Rog Peyton selling out of all copies of the magazine in record time straight after.

In the afternoon, with most everyone watching Monty Python and the Holy Grail, Greg and myself were having a quiet drink in the bar when in walks a young lad.

"Hi, I'm Steev Higgins" says he.

"I'm Harry Bell", says Greg, "and this is Dave Langford."

Dave Langford? At that point Harry strolled into the bar so, getting into the act, I introduced him as Greg Pickersgill.

In the evening were the charades, this time with the addition of a section of famous fans to be mimed. The mime indicating the sex as being male was the one you might expect; left hand on right bicep right fist thrust upwards. When Leroy Kettle had to mime Rob Holdstock this was exaggerated forcefully with Leroy leaping up and down but the classic mime had to be Rog Peyton's of Pete Weston. After his initial laughter at seeing the name on the card Rog thrust a black comb under his nose, gave a Nazi salute and began goose-stepping. It brought the house down. Probably the quickest the identity of any mime was discovered was my own of Joseph Nicholas. I gave the mime indicating a male and allowed my wrist to go limp. The response was immediate.

The first event of any consequence on Sunday was the Five-a-side football tournament. Not being a soccer fan I was not overly keen on this but Greg talked me into it and so I ended up in defence for London-Welsh, a team that consisted of Roy Kettle, Greg, Martin Easterbrook, Kev Smith and myself. The games were played on the town moor and after five minutes of frenzied activity we unfit fans were gasping and wheezing. Dave Wingrove nipped about in full soccer gear, at least we assume it was the full kit, the shirt coming down his thighs far enough to hide the shorts he may or may not have been wearing. The uncharitable suggestion was made that he was only wearing the shirt that way because it looked like a dress. Ian Williams, watching from the sidelines, was heard to scowl:

"God, I hate pretty boys!"

"That's not what I heard, sweetie!" said Roy, giving him a wink.

Deciding at least to get into the spirit of the thing I gave the ball a half-hearted kick and was rewarded by the sole of my shoe separating from the leather upper.

"I can't play" I beamed, "or I'll be shoeless the rest of the con."

"Yer playing"? growled Greg, menacingly, "so borrow some."

Easier said than done since I have size ten feet and though people will often lend you money, clothes, sugar, wives, they seem oddly reluctant to part with their footwear.. Eventually I talked John Harvey into loaning me his trainers for the match where we wouldn't be facing his side. Averting my nose I donned them and took to the field. Amazingly my side won the competition though I suspect this was not so much that we were the most skillful as that we were the least inept.

Immediately afterwards, on the moor, Andy Firth brought out some rather large home made rockets which he intended to launch. After watching the first burn away to nothing on the launch pad Simone and I decided that this was silly, dangerous, and probably illegal so we decided to walk back to the hotel. I turned as we walked and

saw the second rocket rise all of two inches before it too burnt itself out. We were then joined by Dave and Hazel Langford who were a little worried since a man working at a high-security government establishment and having a previous explosives conviction has to be careful. Dave explained to us that if, as he suspected, the fuel was a sugar and weedkiller mix then he knew why none would get off the ground that day. He was right and we watched as the third rocket followed the pattern set by the others.

In the afternoon was the quiz, complete with tape and film, the first time I've seen one of these damn things done right, and so onto evening and the disco. The music was relayed over the hotels cassette system but at first no one was dancing to it. The early cassettes had been compiled by Greg so Simone complained to him that they weren't good to dance to.

"But blacks dance really well to this", he said in a hurt voice.

"You may not have noticed but none of us are black, Gregory", said Simone.

Now though I may not be the greatest dancer you ever did see I enjoy dancing immensely (primal rhythms and all that?) and have been dancing the same way for years so imagine my surprise when John Collick says:

"C'mon Hansen, stop doing John Travolta impressions."

Travolta? But I hadn't seen any of his films and was about to say so when Eve Harvey rebuked the young whippersnapper.

"He was doing Travolta before Travolta!"

There are worse reputations to acquire. Actually I overdid it a bit and as a result I could hardly move when I woke up next morning.

Monday, of course, was time to go and so we bid farewell to those we wouldn't see until the next time and set off home. From the above conrep it might appear that not much of note happened but to say so would not do justice to a con that was a thoroughly enjoyable experience. The friendly staff and the character of the hotel contributed much to the mellow and convivial atmosphere of the con.

And yet, though this was the end of the con for most people for others it was the beginning of a bizarre journey that seemed to be almost an extension of the con. It began well enough with our car following the Harveys' at a steady pace until about twelve miles outside Newcastle when the car began to fill with fumes. Simone pulled over and a quick check revealed oil trickling steadily from the underside of the engine. Simone decided to phone the AA for assistance and so drove the car along the hard shoulder at a sedate 10mph to take us to the nearest phone. Before we could reach it, however, a police car overhauled us (hardly a difficult feat).

He advised us to phone the the AA (aren't our policemen wonderful!) but Simone turned on the charm and he phoned them for us via his car radio. While waiting for the AA to arrive we saw a car stop behind us. It was the Harveys. John examined the car but on realising there was little they could do they continued their journey.

At length an AA van turned up and shortly afterwards we were in the clutches of AA Relay. Relay is a service that ferries you and your car to your destination if you break down but until this journey none of us had realised that Relay meant just what it said. The first Relay truck carried us forty miles or so and deposited us at the first Relay station we'd ever been in. It was a fenced compound enclosing various Portakabin structures containing toilets and a waiting room. The station was in the middle of a field and though the actual name of the place escapes me I christened it Stalag-L4, which seemed rather apt. We were the only people in the station at this point and we were feeling rather hungry. It was six in the evening and though I'd only had a bar of caramel chocolate and a round of cheese sandwiches all day I'd probably eaten more than the others. Though ectomorphic to the extent of looking under-nourished Joseph Nicholas, the man with the name most people would change from rather than to, had some slimming biscuits in his case and a slice of cheese. He was...ah...persuaded to share them and we waited in orderly fashion as Joseph dished them out.

While we ate two other carloads arrived. The waiting room was looking full. After about two hours the car was loaded onto another truck and we were taken down the M1 until we reached the Woodall service station. Here we were dumped in the car park and told that another truck would be along to pick us up in about thirty minutes. This gave us time to have a proper meal, well...except for Greg that is who went off to throw up, the effects of car sickness.

After sitting in the car for some time it became apparent that the truck would be somewhat longer than we'd been told. At this stage in the proceedings everybody's resistance was so low that the most inane witticisms I came out with were being greeted by almost manic laughter. It was about here that I realised that though Joe may be a buddy there's something about him that makes me take the piss. Why this should be so I don't know but I was making a deliberate effort to curb the urge on most of the homeward journey. I was not successful. Fandom's answer to Shirley Temple was...(Damn! There I go again!)

After about two hours another truck turned up to take us on the next stage of the journey. It was now half-past-midnight. Unlike the previous trucks the passenger section of the cab in this one was partitioned off from the drivers section. As we pulled away Greg was already slumbering and I noticed that there was a heater in front of me. I turned it on. When I judged the cab warm enough I turned it

off and fell asleep. The cold woke me. I fumbled for the heater, turned it on, allowed the cab to warm again, turned it off and fell back to sleep. The cold woke me. The procedure was repeated again and, in fact, quite a few times. It took me quite a while to realise just what was going on. While the cold was waking me it appeared that the heat was waking Mr. Pickersgill who would then open the cab window until the cab cooled enough for him and fall into slumber once more.

The next Relay station we were deposited in was on an industrial estate near Northampton but this station, however, was somewhat more substantial than the first we'd visited being a newly built red-brick construction. Inside were chocolate vending and hot drinks machines which were gratefully utilised. There were two or three other car-loads of people in the place, either asleep in chairs or pacing up and down muttering angrily about the time their journey was taking. I recall listening in amazement as one guy rang the AA and fumed at them over the phone promising that they hadn't "...heard the last of this!". I suspect it was the con that did it, three nights of staying up 'til the early hours, but we fans were quite enjoying the whole experience. It was also here that I had an embarrassing experience. Y'see there was this guy on the phone, complaining to the AA, and he had his back to me so I was miming him and generally taking the piss, much to the amusement of young Gregory. It was at this point, of course, that I glanced up and saw that the guy was watching my reflection in the window.

Alas, all good things must come to an end and so must incredibly long journeys. We arrived in Lawrence Rd at 10am a full eighteen hours after we set out! London to Newcastle is about 280 miles meaning that the mean speed of our journey was 15mph. What with the time we lost going to the con a full day vanished without trace.

After a few days of hospitably at the PickersWalsh homestead it was time to go, so I went.

I HAVE NO TRUNKS AND I MUST SWIM (...or: the Novacon report.)

It's not something I can put my finger on but although I enjoyed NOVACON I didn't enjoy it as much as I normally enjoy a con. Was it the fault of the hotel; the fact that it was only a two-night con instead of the usual three; or the natural result of increasing disenchantment, a certain jadedness creeping in? Hard to say but, still, there were moments.....

One of the first things to be noticed, and remarked upon, was the proximity of the swimming pool to the bar. Like, it was on the pool-side to all intents and purposes and, as anticipated, quite a few noteworthy things occurred in conjunction with that pool. However, I'm getting ahead of myself.

I travelled up to Brum with Dai Price, both of us travelling on a single fare, courtesy of Persil soap powder. Having done the Brum run so many times the journey held no special interest other than the discovery, under the auspices of the aforementioned Mr. Price that Orkney fudge is a rather excellent confection and should be recommended to anyone.

The Holiday Inn was rather unimaginatively sited on Holliday Lane, the disparate spellings providing a few crumbs for thought. The con proper not having started Dai and I visited the Peyton emporium in Summer Row to groan over rows of imported Perry Rhodan and admire the esoteria complementing more traditional stock. Lurid posters promised thrills and sense-of-wonder fulfilment in yesterdays cinematic 'sci-fi' extravaganzas, while a window display promised the more immediate excitement of book-signing sessions from Anne McCaffrey and Christopher Priest.. An unusual tardiness had kept the paperback edition of Moorcock's Gloriana, a very tasty tale, from the bookshelves of Cardiff and Newport so along with with a sword and sorcery epic bearing a Frazetta cover it returned with me to my hotel.

Such wit as I am reputed to possess deserted me when I encountered Greg and Simone eating in the restaurant and bemoaning the cost, along with Malcolm Edwards and Chris Atkinson fresh from America, and such comments as I made were treated with just contempt. What is quite possibly the best piece of fanwriting by Greg that I have ever read was contained in the copy of SEAMONSTERS that Simone pushed across the table at me between mouthfuls, while the disapproving look the waitress gave me when I hammered the protruding staples flat with a soup spoon confirmed my belief that hotels don't truly have my health and safety at heart.

There are more pleasant ways of being woken than by the sound of Ian Williams snorting, coughing, gobbing, and generally sounding as if the greater part of his intestinal tract is about to stage a successful escape attempt (like being woken up by the kids of the Asian family next door thundering around in hobnail boots; and they've got the nerve to complain that I'm lowering property values). However, once awake I eat with Ian (yes, I know it's more hygenic to use a fork) and try to organise a trip to a shop called Nostalgia. A panel in the fanroom that is little more than praching to the converted intervenes and it is lunchtime before I can get the expedition under way. Lunch, as it happens, is one of the five pizzas I consume in the two days of the con.

A swim in the hotel pool that afternoon necessitates me borrowing John Harvey's trunks which, to my surprise, I find tight. Months of excercise have added whole fractions of an inch to my biceps and I bound from the changing room, my stomach pulled in, ready to impress my public who, it turns out, are all in the fanroom. I stay in the pool a long time awaiting the admiring horde until, my

skin beginning to wrinkle alarmingly, I trudge despondantly out. In the process of returning the trunks to Big John I am waylaid by someone I have never seen before who asks if he can borrow them. I refer him to John, who agrees, and we never see the trunks again.

Few things can quite equal the embarrassment of shouting the length of a crowded bar for your change only to be coldly informed that the drinks you purchased came to exactly a pound, but I manage to whether this and anticipate the disco with pleasure. The looks of incredulity, the slack-jaws, the cries of disbelief and the gnashing of teeth attendant on the start of the disco reflect my own feelings. I am at a loss in understanding the logic behind the decision to set up the disco equipment on the side of the swimming pool because, as I commented at the time, I may have a high opinion of myself but I wouldn't even attempt to dance on water. Still, the wartime spirit engendered during the blitz comes to the fore as in all times of adversity and dancing commences on the soaking tiles that surround the pool. The only people to fall into the pool are a couple of Trekkies but all realise the deliberate nature of the falls and snort derision at such exhibitionism.

The usual round of room parties follows and the comfortingly familiar spectacle of a paralytic Greg Pickersgill bouncing off the corridor walls in a vain attempt at forward motion gives me a warm feeling. I retire at length and am amazed to discover that Ian has laid out a bed of chair cushions for freeloading Dave Cockfield but my faith in my judgement returns when I notice that Ian has kindly donated Dave one of the pillows off my bed while keeping both his own. Collapse of Dave Cockfield when this is pointed out.

Hotel pettiness left a sour note as usual, this consists of aggravations being all the soft drinks machines having out of order notices on them which leads suspicious li'l ol' me to try one and find it working. When you consider the price of soft drinks in the bar the reason becomes apparent. Also annoying is one of the hotel staff at the self-service breakfast telling another to make sure we don't come around a second time.

Which to all intents and purposes would be the end if not for the Nova Award. The two main contenders, as anticipated, were Alan Dorey and Kev Smith. On learning that I have voted for Dorey Simone says: "But Smith is the better writer!" I have to agree Kev Smith is the better writer of the two but the Nova Award is about 'zines not writers and although I have enjoyed DOT hugely I have enjoyed GROSS ENCOUNTERS more. If the Nova Award was for best writer then Dave Langford ought to be awarded it in perpetuity even though TWLL DDU has only recently, with issue 14, returned to the level we've come to expect.

THIS IS IT..!THE COLUMN FOR 'DISGUSTED' OF TUNBRIDGE WELLS.....IT'S...

LETTERS

LETTERS.....STARTING WITH A RESUME OF LAST ISSUE'S CONCERNS...

LETTERS

MIKE GLICKSOHN.

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I'd be most interested to know why you're having bad vibes about next year's Worldcon in Brighton. Certainly the recent arrival of the hotel information caused some dismay and concern among friends of mine. Thirty pounds for a double room in the main con hotel should pretty well ensure that the big three hotels will be largely empty. And that could just cause serious contractual difficulties for the committee. I'm quite eager to read reactions to these hotel rates because they sure surprised the hell out of me.

((The reasons I'm having bad vibes about the Worldcon are set out in NOTIONS for all to see but they aren't, however, the original cause of my unease. British fandom has had some idea of those room rates you mention for a while and, as few of us can afford them, I was worried that the hard core of British fans would be diffused and lost in the larger mass. Since then Greg and Simone have got a lot of us into a small hotel near the main con hotel so that fear has passed.))

I don't think I'm in agreement with you about the significance of fanzine critics but that might simply reflect a difference between North American and English fanzine fandoms. Even by the time I'd gotten into fanzines here back in '68 fandom was too diverse for anyone critic to have that powerful an influence on the field. A couple of people thought their every word could plunge all fandom into war and certainly some critics were respected and listened to but there has never been the history of really harsh criticism that FOULER established in England. And that may well reflect an essential difference in attitude towards fanzines in our respective fandoms. I get the definite impression that English fans are seeking a new direction to fanzines far more than we are over here. And I'm not at all sure that any such innovative approach exists or that seeking it ought to be occupying anyone's time. Publishing fanzines is supposed to be an enjoyable hobby, not an occasion for agonising soul-searching and recriminations at one's failure to break new ground with every stencil. EPSILON, for example, is a most enjoyable fanzine; just because it does what has already been done before is no reason for you not to be proud of it nor for you to fail to enjoy producing it. Why not just relax and have fun?

((My thoughts on the above appear in NOTIONS and this time out I won't even try to explain the difference between

English and British; no use hitting your head against a brick wall. Tho' I will pause to mention that in the last CHECKPOINT fan poll first and second place went to fanzines produced by Welshmen and my own EPSILON scraped into the top ten making it almost a third of Britain's top 'zines produced by non-English fans. Good enough reason to call us British fandom?))

Then there are your thoughts on LoCs. It isn't surprising that I don't fully agree with you here either. It's self-evident to me that a LoC cannot possibly be given the same care and attention as an article unless the writer sends out only one a week. Anyone who makes an effort to LoC even a decent percentage of fanzines received simply hasn't time to craft each as skillfully as he or she would an article. And it's traditionally accepted that LoCs are not supposed to be as carefully thought out as an article one works on for several days.

I've always sort of thought of myself as North America's answer to Joseph Nicholas but I don't know if Joseph ever finds himself locking out of simple reflex. I know I don't. Periodically I go through a time when writing LoCs is no longer fun. So I just don't write LoCs for a while. Usually a break of a couple of weeks or so suffices to give me back my old enthusiasm and then the LoCs start to appear again. But fandom and fanac have always been my ways of having fun and whenever any aspect of my interaction with fandom ceases to be enjoyable I abandon it. I'm not in this to work at it.

One of the things I'm looking forward to doing next summer is getting into a table stakes poker game with some of the better known English card players. Piggot seems to be the man ((?)) to look for and since Brighton is already famous for it's casinos the Worldcon might well be the place to set up the game. I'm sure my friend Joe Haldeman would be happy to take part so all we'd need would be five other people with, say, twenty five pounds for a table stakes game. Perhaps you could suggest a few fans who might be interested in such a game?

((The only person who comes to mind is Peter Roberts. However, the call has gone out now so anyone who's interested should get together with others of like mind and drop a line to Michael. OK? OK.))

TERRY HUGHES

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Letters of comment will never be given the same care and attention that is given to an article, or at least the majority will not be. Who has that much time and energy? Life would be taken up with fandom in a very short time. The very thought of making every LoC the equivalent of an article is enough to drive someone like Mike Glicksohn to drink (but then so is the sun coming up in the morning....). Being fresh and

entertaining and polished is far easier to suggest than to accomplish. The efforts you call for would drastically reduce the number of LoCs written, which means a great many fanzines would find themselves with a total lack of response. Come on Rob, as a fanzine editor you have to prefer even sloppily written letters of comment to a lack of response. True, top quality letters are a joy, but if one had to depend on them for sustenance there would be a great number of starving fanzines. Enjoy the good letters when they come, but don't insist on them or you may be disappointed. You might even get an overly-long, overly-serious letter from Terry Hughes.

Thanks for no.5, which was fun to read. It has been a long time since I last laughed at STAR WARS drawings or a drawing of a faucet, but I certainly laughed at your cover combination of both.

((Actually, although a lot of people missed it, the smaller robot has also been tampered with. Bear in mind how C3PO was altered and have another look.))

I was the only US fan who responded to no.4? That is rather astonishing but it does give me the freedom to tell any lie I choose about the USA and you will have no way to learn of it. Heh heh. However, you only mention me sending you MOTA. I could have sworn that I also wrote you a letter of comment, but I was not even WAHFed. Is my mind going? Has it already gone? While I don't remember just what it was I did write I do remember writing. Don't you remember? It was that letter not given the time and attention that it should have been given. Just like this one.....

((If you did, Terry, it never reached me. Which is a shame because a Terry Hughes letter would enrich any fanzine. And while on the subject of LoCs, of course, we have to hear out.....))

JOSEPH NICHOLAS

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Well, yes, you're absolutely right about me and the letters that I write. There's no other way that I can receive fanzines, is there? And yes, it often is little more than a knee-jerk reaction, performed out of some ludicrous sense of duty. I'm able to rationalise it in my own mind by telling myself that a particular fane has seen fit to communicate with me by sending me a copy of his fanzine, and the very least I can do is communicate with him in return by sending him a letter of reasonably substantial proportions. The trouble is that when I sit down to write a letter, I know it won't be full of responses to the fanzine in question, and will have to be padded out with all sorts of other guff in which I hope the fane will have more than a merely passing interest. But even so it's still padding, and doesn't do either me or the fane any good - it doesn't advance my skills any, and he can't

print it. But then, despite all these vaguely intellectual drawbacks, it's something that I actively enjoy doing - I like sitting here at the machine just banging away with whatever thoughts happen to enter my head, but enjoyment cannot last if it becomes more of a "sense of duty" than anything else.

In my early days in fandom, it was something of a boon - it allowed me parade my own personality before the fanned, and give him some indication of my worth as a recipient of his fanzine. These days...well, yes, there is a certain degree of ennui and disinterest setting in. While I wanted to become a letterhack, and receive a copy of every fanzine going, I never wanted to be the Huge Name Fan that certain people are now taking me for. In my opinion the whole concept of BNFs is pretty groundless - just because a particular fan happens to have been around for some time, and become reasonably prominent in the microcosm of fandom, does not mean that they must be looked up to as some kind of elder-god, their every whim pandered to by a coterie of arse-licking admirers. Such attitudes perpetuate the myth of a fannish hierarchy and lead to a feeling of complacency that seeps down from the "top"; the feeling that nobody should do, or contemplate doing, anything that will disturb the status quo, which serves only to restrain evolution and sustain stagnation. And stagnation, as I'm sure I shouldn't have to point out, can only lead to ultimate extinction.

((No argument there from this quarter. Actually while typing the above it's occurred to me that my lamenting of the talent leaving the fanzine field could just be a fear that all us left behind won't be able to come up with the goods. I can recognise a dependance syndrome when I see one but, with a psychiatrist on the mailing list, no way am I gonna explore it.))

Let's face it - for most people, myself included, Fandom Is Just A Goddamn Hobby, albeit a very absorbing one, but just because it is a hobby doesn't mean that it should stagnate. Which is where, as you correctly point out, the role of the critic is one of most importance; fanzine reviewers do have a certain power to shape fandom - at the very least, their opinions do have a wide circulation amongst fans, and can be an influence on those new to the game. The problem with the critics of today is that they're labouring under the influence of Pickersgill; the "killer" instinct that he promulgated is still with us, and there isn't any alternative other than outright niceness to all and sundry. And it strikes me that, by crying out for more "killer instinct" from the new fans you're asking for more of the Pickersgill treatment, thus contradicting your call for evolution instead of imitation.

((You're missing the point a bit here. I'm not so careless that I'd write something contradicting what I'd said only two lines or so earlier. When I said that "evolution is preferable to imitation" I was referring to Alan Dorey's fanzine reviews which, while enjoyable, read almost as if he were some sort of

Grèg-clone (rather than a Chris Priest-clone) and I felt that it should be possible to retain the 'killer instinct' (which I consider essential) without losing the ability to evolve.)

And that isn't the only area where self-contradiction creeps in. You state on the very first page that you're more interested in British fandom than any other; but then later go on to say that international contact could be one way of revitalising our flagging psyches. This isn't as big a contradiction as I'm making out, it's true, but it's still there, and it does tend to undermine the validity of your point. Because I think it is valid, although whether it would actually stimulate the revitalisation that you think it would is another matter entirely, one that can only be decided upon once that 'increased international contact' has been put into practice. The danger is that British fandom would once again lose the individual characteristics that it's managed to acquire since the advent of Pickersgill; for better or worse, British fandom has set out along it's own national road since the beginning of the seventies, and any deviation from that might lead to it being once more swallowed up in the amorphous mass that is "international fandom" (international in the sense that it's primarily US-dominated, much like SF itself has been ever since the advent of Hugo Gernsback, and has only recently ceased to be). The sixties, remember, were a time of liberation for us all and, despite the fact that fandom's liberation came later, I don't think it was altogether such a bad thing.

There's not really very much I can add to what I've said above and in my last letter. We've gone too far down the fannish road, and the new recruits are ignoring us altogether and travelling the sercon route. Perhaps a revitalisation of that particular branch of fandom might eventually spread out to re-energise us....but that had better happen soon or the fandom we know and love will disappear for the foreseeable future.

I mean, talking about the of letterhacking is all very well, but it doesn't do anything about providing some explanation for the recent bout of apathy and lethargy that's overwhelmed British fandom. But then I don't think that anyone can, right at this moment; it's really only something that will become clear with the passage of time, thus allowing a future generation of fan-historians to parade their erudition for the delight of whoever's still around.

((Actually, as far as it goes, my piece on LoCs was as much a bit of mischief as anything, designed to raise a few hackles, a task it appears to've succeeded in. Now, of course, let's move on and hear from British fandom's new prodigy....))

RICH COAD

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There is no such thing as constructive criticism. If I receive even such a mild criticism as "the writing wasn't as good as usual" I feel desolated for hours at least. I may perk up after a while - realise the criticism was valid and react to it but that doesn't alter the fact I've felt shitty for a time. This is not to say that there is no need for fanzine critics, there definately (note Pickersgillian spelling) is. I'm all for the snarling "rip 'em to shreds" approach as that is only more desolating to a degree and certainly achieves a higher standard of critical acumen than sugar-coated pills, to mix a metaphor.

((Those of you who listen to John Peel's excellent radio-show will know that the great man occasionally puts the wrong record on. If it's good enough for him..etc. Those same people will realise that the 'prodigy' referred to at the bottom of the previous page is in fact...))

ALAN DOREY

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Young punkk, eh? I'll fuckin' show you (spit) wot's punk (coughs phlegm) mate...I'll bleedin' show (picks nose with thumb) you...

Well that's enough of the unsavoury stuff...it's pretty tuff typing on snot-stained paper. I quite agree that ther ought to be more 'ross - fertilisation with our American cousins, but only if it is mutually beneficial to both parties...and since there are more of them than there are of us (albeit more geographically divided), I'd tend to be sceptical of the effects such social genetic intermixing would have. It's also true, I think, that the increased internal communication in fandom up and down Britain is partly responsible for the lack of initiative in keeping fanzines going. However, I find that this increased socialising makes certain kinds of 'zine possible;I find it invaluable.

I particularly liked your point about fan-critics dictating the way in which fandom will develop...they can do this, but only if their message is hammered home again and again. If I can do my part through fanzine reviewing and getting hot under the collar about the BSFA, fine. If not, who really gives a damn.

To your LoCs...Ian Maule in typical Maule fashion (don't ask me what that is, I dunno...I'm only the punk around here) reckons the new generation of fandom has been ushered in, but there's more to being fannish than fan writing and contributing to a fanzine. If you look at the FOULER generation they're all personalities in their own way. Whether this was through their writing or their con antics. To herald a new generation a new atmosphere has to be created...an aura or 'feeling, if you like.

WAHF: Bob Day, Graham England, and Steev Higgins.