

HANSEN '81...

****IN DEFENCE OF CRITICISM.....AND ALL THE USUAL PAINFUL PREAMBLE...****

EDITORIAL
EDITORIAL....and suddenly it's business as usual.
EDITORIAL

Well, well, well! All of a sudden things are popping again in British fandom. New fanzines are appearing on my doormat with a frequency not seen in many a long month, and most of them pretty good as well. I'm particularly gratified to see that in the latest issue of GROSS ENCOUNTERS, and the best for some time, Alan Dorey has written an intelligent and incisive column of fanzine criticism, the first significant piece of criticism in Britain since Joseph Nicholas last column in NABU 10, though Nicholas had, unfortunately, descended into self-parody by that stage. GROSS ENCOUNTERS is proof that things are definitely getting better and as someone who has long maintained the desirability of fanzines being produced in an atmosphere of informed criticism I was particularly interested some months back to note what San Franciscan fan Rich Coad had to say on the subject in issue 5 of his own fanzine SPACE JUNK:

"Dare I say that the timidity of American fanzines is a by-product of the timidity of American reviewers? That the predeliction to find something to praise at any cost gives the editor a feeling of complacency that would otherwise be missing? No, obviously I daren't."

Some weeks ago I borrowed a copy of WARHOON 28 and read almost all of it. With 600-plus pages of input it was inevitable there would be some output which is why the NOTIONS column this issue is a reflection on fanhistory in general and on the perceptions of Walter A. Willis in particular. Now while I'm aware that most of you know who Willis is there are a fair number of people on my mailing list who don't and so the column has been written bearing them in mind and in it's statement of facts that most of you already know it may annoy a few of you. I crave your indulgence on this matter and hope that the column is not without interest anyway.

On the cover of EPSILON 6, among other things, was a self-portrait. Now this had the disadvantage for a self-portrait of looking nothing like me so I've decided that I will probably present on the cover of EPSILON 9, for your edification, another self-portrait only this time one which I hope will show the true good-looks so admired by my legions of fans. We shall see.

Finally, I apologise to certain people who should have got EPSILON 7 in trade but didn't. This is because I miscalculated how many copies I would need, didn't print enough, and ran out. This shouldn't happen again.

This is EPSILON 8 and comes to you from:

9A Greenleaf Road,
East Ham
London
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Thanks are due this issue to John Harvey for printing the cover.

ROB HANSEN 14/10/81.

NOTIONS

NOTIONS.....reflections on fanhistory and a recurring nuisance.

NOTIONS

Just recently I have been defending the fannish (or faanish if you must) position in BEM, a comics fanzine strangely enough and no relation to the SF zine of the same name put out in the fifties. These attacks on fannish fandom are fairly frequent, of course, and every fresh wave of newcomers feel the need to raise a hue and cry about fanzines that talk about certain groups of fans and their activities rather than SF. I know why this happens since I too was fairly outraged at this state of affairs when I saw my first fanzines some six years ago. Wondering just how long this conflict has been going on I referred to Harry Warner Jr's excellent history of fandom in the forties, ALL OUR YESTERDAYS (published by Advent Publishers, Chicago:1969), and came across the following which I herewith quote:

"...primordial instinct has caused occasional people in and out of fandom to feel a duty to stamp out heresy, when a fan acts as if Science Fiction is not the only thing in the world worthy of thought or comment.

Curiously, those who have complained about the dilution of science fiction in fanzines always get alarmed because they believe this phenomenon has just begun. Those who lament for the good old days when fanzines were devoted to science fiction could find in the January 1934 Fantasy Magazine that already the battle was launched. Julius Schwartz and Milton Kaletsky were answering critics who wanted to know what articles about hoaxes they were publishing had to do with science fiction."

And in the same book we find that famous SF author and long time fan Wilson Bob Tucker had this to say on the subject in 1941:

"The time is coming when fans and fanzines will no longer revolve about the professional magazines. We shall revolve strictly about ourselves; an unorganised society that has cast aside the core it began on and moulded a much better substitute. We are outgrowing professional magazines."

Those who revile the work of fans who are "...occupied with writing about their own and their friends activities" probably imagine the more serious and constructive, or sercon, writing to be the type that would survive the passage of time and be reprinted reasoning, no doubt, that within a few short years the fans being written about have faded from the scene and that their writings and activities would be of no further interest. This, however, is not the case because a mammoth 600-plus page hardcover collection of the writings of Walter Willis, writings of the type described above, has recently been put out by American fan Richard Bergeron and the material contained within, ranging from the late forties to the mid seventies is fascinating.

WARHOON 28, ostensibly an issue of Bergeron's fanzine though obviously so much more, amount to an incredible example of, and testament to, just what fandom can become. As Ted White put it in his review of this tome in issue 4 of Dan Steffan's BOONFARK:

"He is perhaps not the most talented writer ever to concentrate his prose almost entirely on fandom, but no fannish writer who was his equal ever so perfectly embodied the ideals of fandom, nor applied them better. Willis looked at fandom as it then existed and did what Burbee, Laney, and Tucker had never done: he saw it not as something in the process of becoming but as something complete and ideal."

Reading this material in 1981 you realise just how much truth lies behind the oft-stated contention that fandom is cyclic. The tedious but inevitable clash between fannish fandom and the sercon newcomers features as does the equally inevitable charges of elitism levelled against those perceived of as being a clique of BNF's dwelling in ivory towers.

Also within these pages is an evocation of that time which the Americans, with their strange custom of numbering periods of fannish activity, call Sixth Fandom. It was one of those rare times when it all comes together and fandom enjoys a golden age. One such golden age has, I believe, just passed in this country. I came into it in 1975/6 when it was at its height, but since it was the only form of fandom I'd ever known I didn't recognise it for what it was. I knew it was pretty wonderful but until I began to delve into the fanzines of a few years earlier I didn't realise how wonderful. However, it now seems that when things reach a certain level they have to collapse because there's nowhere else for them to go. My comments in this column in EPSILON 5 show that I'd reached this conclusion back in 1978; interregnum as Harry Bell was later to call it, and from the ashes a new spirit will, one day, eventually arise.

Mind you, it's not just the parrallels with present day fandom that make this volume so engrossing but also those events that were unique to the period. As well as glimpses of people like Silverberg, Ellison, Bloch and White during their time in fandom it's fascinating to read the reaction of a fan of the time to the launching of the Russian Sputnik and the beginning of the Space Age in those faraway days of 1957. Also the reaction of a prominent fan of the day to the formation of the BSFA in October 1958 is not without interest:

"You know how British fandom has been for years...anarchic, individualistic, mature. Well, last weekend some fifty of them got together in the George Hotel in Kettering and in cold blood set up a national fan organisation! I tell you, we are in the grip of strange forces. None of us is safe. The news from Kettering was frightening..."

Willis' disquiet at this turn of events was to prove justified because, writing in Tom Perry's QUARK (issue 8, June 1964) about the 1964 Eastercon at Peterborough, he was to report:

"Next morning at the annual general meeting of the BSFA it was clear what we had done. British fandom had been worried by the complete absence of channels of recruitment. Deliberately and in cold blood they had started a sercon organisation, sacrificing valuable fanning time to publish a sercon official organ, full of reviews of science fiction; in this bait was embedded a hook consisting of reviews and reprints from fanzines.

The policy had been spectacularly successful, because the membership of the BSFA was now in the hundreds and scores of them were at

Peterborough. The only trouble was that while they seemed to have eaten the bait and grown fat on it, they had ignored the hook.

This situation was starkly illustrated at that BSFA meeting after one of the founder members remarked casually and unguardedly that the purpose of the BSFA was to recruit new members to fandom. A storm of protest made it clear that this was not the purpose of the BSFA at all. Fandom as we knew it was to them a useless excrescence, our fanzines incomprehensible and irrelevant. They were fandom."

Contained in this quote is the reason the BSFA was formed in the first place, a reason some present day members refuse to believe because they don't want to believe it. The BSFA has never had any great significance for me, probably because when I came into fandom it had ceased to exist. It had collapsed totally, indeed fanzines of the time carried obituaries such as this one, for instance, from Peter Roberts' EGG (issue 9, Feb 1975):

"The BSFA was a tedious organisation which rarely generated any great interest or excitement. It hung around British fandom for sixteen years and its history can be summed up as a series of trivial disasters. At times individual fans wasted their talents in heroic efforts to bring the thing to life; but it was moribund from birth."

For whatever reason, however, there were some fans of the time who felt that it was in some way their duty to resurrect the BSFA and so it rose again and in the period that followed it once again turned Frankenstein monster-like on its creators and this was, I'm sure, the reason why fannish fans such as Dorey Smith, and Nicholas plotted, and eventually succeeded, in seizing control of the thing. I can't help feeling though that if the BSFA had any intrinsic worth it would be able to survive on its own without the fairly frequent, and in my opinion effort-wasting, help its received from fandom in the past. If the fannish fans now running the BSFA decided to leave en masse I wonder if those people generated by the organisation would be able to keep it going. Somehow I think not.

I'd always known of Willis by repute but until WARHOON 28 the only piece of writing of his that I'd read was an article in MAYA (issue 11, July 1976) entitled THE REVENANT, a brief account of his visit to MANCON 5, the 1976 Eastercon. In a letter of comment in MAYA 12 Christopher Priest recounted his meeting with Willis at the convention and I think it shows, just a little, how highly regarded Walt was:

"When at MANCON I was introduced to a distinguished-looking and shy-mannered man, and told that this was Walt Willis, I almost fell through the floor. When, while I was still in this state of not knowing whether to run or hide or simply wait to be carried out on a stretcher, Walt said that Inverted World was part of the reason he had gone to MANCON, I experienced for the first time that feeling you sometimes read about in novels, where characters are convinced their ears aren't working properly. Walt's far too modest to realise that his own writing had more influence on my life and ideas and ambitions (and those of countless other people) than any SF novel is ever likely to have on his."

In that article Willis commented that: "it was even stranger and more poignant

that I had to go to Manchester to meet for the first time two young Belfast fans from opposite sides of the barricades" and indeed he now employs the same skills that delighted so many people so long ago in the attempt to unite peaceful Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland against those on both sides who prefer violence, a task that's more immediate and of greater importance than writing for fanzines could ever be.

Willis, as you may have gathered, is Irish and was the brightest star of that trio of fans, Bob Shaw and James White being the other two, who became known as the Belfast Triangle. There were those in the late seventies who voiced the opinion that while Willis was great stuff back in the fifties and early sixties he would be unable to hold his own against the then current crop of fanwriters. I beg to differ, because the fanwriting found between the covers of WARHOON 28 is of a very high calibre, some of the best I've seen. The copy of WARHOON I saw was borrowed but I will no doubt soon take steps towards acquiring a copy of my own because after reading this volume, and finding myself feeling the sense of wonder I thought had long gone the way of belief in Santa Claus and virginity, I realised that here was why I produced these mimeographed pamphlets, here was the essence of the fanzine experience. Great stuff!

In 1952 American fandom organised a fund to bring Willis across to the USA to attend the Worldcon being held in Chicago that year. The success of that venture led to the formation of TAFF, the Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund, now fandom's oldest and most venerated charity. Next year is the thirtieth anniversary of that historic trip and once again the Worldcon is being held in Chicago. On this occasion it is Britain's turn to send a representative across the Atlantic but all is not well, as I shall shortly discuss in what could only be called.....

TAFF TALK

One day early in August, in the middle of writing a letter to Rich Coad, I got a phone call from Harry Bell.

"Have you thought about standing for TAFF?" he asked.

"Huh?!" was my reply, having been caught completely unawares.

"Jim Barker and I are prepared to nominate you."

"Well...uh...I don't know, Harry."

"You'd be a good candidate, a good ambassador for British fandom."

"Well yeah, maybe, but..."

"And," he continued, pulling out his ace, "you certainly can't afford to go to the states at the moment, can you?"

"No," I admitted, "that's true. Look, I'm not sure about this. Give me a while and I'll call you back."

I duly considered the proposition, phoned Harry back, and declined. The thing is, you see, I have a great deal of respect for fannish traditions and TAFF is one of the oldest and most respected. Thinking about all those fans who had made the coveted trip in the past I felt I just didn't have the necessary credentials. Sure, I may have put in my time, having got involved in fandom at the same time as Jim Barker and been involved as long as Langford was when he won, but I'm not well enough known across the big water to be deserving of the honour. For that matter I don't think anyone over here is now

that Greg has dropped out so I'll be voting for Hold Over Funds because while both Kev Smith and Rog Peyton are stout fellows and true to be sure, they don't have the necessary credentials either. Going back to Willis in '52 - probably the only TAFF-winner in recent years who won on the original principle of an overwhelming vote from the host-country was Terry Hughes in 1979.

The problem as I see it is that the web of links between our two fandoms have been weakened since the Brighton Worldcon by the number of previously active fans who became inactive, though many are now stirring from their slumbers, and the natural progression by which a number of people emerge who are obviously worthy TAFF candidates has been broken. This weakening of the transatlantic connection is a bad thing in my view and is the reason that, while agreeing with Greg that there is no-one with the necessary credentials this time out, I don't agree that TAFF should be abolished. As the most visible and tangible symbol of that connection TAFF is still important, but things have changed since 1952 and as it now stands I don't believe it fits in with fandom as it exists in 1981.

Accepting, for now, the proposition that the primary reason for TAFF winners being sent across the Atlantic is to meet and get to know those people who have previously been only names on the pages of a fanzine why send them to the biggest convention that each country puts on? This may have been reasonable back in the days when fandom on both sides of the ocean was a lot smaller than it is now but surely it would make better sense today for them to attend smaller conventions, such as SILICON in this country, where the more informal and relaxed atmosphere would help promote the very links TAFF should ideally exist to forge. Also, wouldn't it be a good idea to make more use of the TAFF-winner (or of any fan GoH for that matter) than has been the case in recent years? You know, panels, speeches, that sort of thing, to at least provide some semblance of purpose. Any way, the result of the preceding deliberations is that...

EPSILON SUPPORTS HOLD OVER FUNDS IN '82

...and urges you to do the same.

While musing on the links between UK and US fandom it occurs to me that these could be strengthened, perhaps, if some of the more prominent US zines ran regular columns by some of the better UK fanwriters, and vice versa. Willis regularly wrote for American zines after all, indeed the bulk of WARHOON 28 consists of reprints of these columns, and there's no reason why an idea which worked so well thirty years ago shouldn't work equally well today.

ERRATUM-(corrections to the text of EPSILON 7)

Due to a variety of reasons too tedious to go into here, a number of errors crept into the text of the last issue. Corrections are printed below and can be cut out and pasted over the relevant sections if so desired (tho' I think anyone who'd do such a thing must be mad). The corrections are....

p6.-REDUNDANCY, RE-LOCATION, AND A TALE OF TWO CONVENTIONS should read:
REDUNDANCY, RE-LOCATION, AND URINARY RETENTION.

p15.Line 3 should read: "...strapped to a trestle, moaning with pleasure as she brought the riding crop down across his quivering buttocks", while the name on the line below should read: "Holdstock".

PUBS & CONVENTIONS.....WHAT MORE COULD YOU ASK OF A FANZINE?.....

ODZUNSODZ

ODZUNSODZ.....poignant fragments of one fan's life.

ODZUNSODZ

At the end of March I moved out of Lawrence Rd and into my own place but the bulk of my belongings remained there for a few more days until my father was able to drive up from Wales and help me move them. However living in a flat for even that short interim period required more equipment than was easily carried by one person alone so Linda Pickersgill kindly offered to act as native bearer for the day.

The journey from Ealing to East Ham takes more than an hour and is fairly tedious but even after her suffering at the hands of London Transport Linda still seemed reasonably interested in looking around the flat (hardly a major task) and even went so far as to say she thought the wallpaper in the main room looked fucking awful. After sharing a pot of tea with me she had to hurry back to Ealing to creosote the outside stairs or fix the roof or whatever the task was that Greg had set for her to complete on pain of death before he got home that night so, ever the gentleman I offered to walk her to the tube station. Trouble is, no sooner had I slammed the front door behind me than I realised that I'd left my keys inside. I know few other people who could lock themselves out of a property within less than an hour of moving in and having to fork out £6 for a locksmith to let me in wasn't a whole barrel of laughs either. Greg's derisory laughter on being told of this by his lovely wife must, I'm sure, have been equalled by his laughter on witnessing the embarrassing events at a recent Friends In Space meeting.

It was Sunday 2nd August 1981 and the place, as usual, was the Queen Victoria in Ealing. Sat in that corner of the back bar that we've come to think of as our own were the core members of Friends In Space and a representative sample of the rest, most of them sat on the long seat that runs along the wall. Well, it doesn't exactly run along the wall. Y'see the back of the seat is some six inches (or 150mm for the younger members of my readership who have never used Imperial measurement) proud of the wall in order for radiators to be run along the wall and the gap between seat and wall is bridged by a strip of polished wood ventilated by means of two tufnol grills positioned over holes in it. Well, the tufnol strips were not actually positioned over the holes as in them, having fallen through many months earlier. People, however, had long been in the habit of putting coats and jackets up on this wooden strip and people, being people, continued putting them up there in spite of the absence of the aforementioned grills. Therein lay my downfall.

I'd just bought a round of drinks, which is not as unusual an occurrence as some people would have you believe, when Chris Priest and Lisa Tuttle walked in. After buying drinks for them I threw my jacket up onto the wooden strip and was rewarded with the sound of metal tinkling against metal somewhere down behind the seat.

"My keys!" I gasped, smiting my brow, "I can't get in without them!"

"Not to worry", said Chris, "we'll get them for you!", whereupon he removed the end panel, which fortunately was not screwed on, struck a match and gazed down that long dark hole. There was no sign of my keys.

"The underside of these seats are made of a highly inflammable plastic that gives off poisonous fumes", observed Malcolm Edwards as he watched Chris strike another match. Struck with the thought that a torch might be a useful tool in his endeavours Chris rushed out to get one while Malcolm, always full of clever-dick ideas, suggested that the keys must in some fashion be lodged behind the radiator and that a longer pole of some sort was needed. As Robert Holdstock had left by this time I offered him my umbrella, my new umbrella, and he proceeded to push this down behind the radiator in a series of vicious thrusts.

"My new umbrella!", I whimpered.

"No good", said Malcolm, casually handing me my umbrella, the fabric of the handle in tatters, "that wooden panel is restricting our access and the broolly's not long enough."

"A pool cue would be, though", reasoned Lisa, and hurried off to get one. Greg's Swiss Army knife (a wondrous device with every conceivable type of blade, except one for removing stones from horses' hooves) was borrowed and it's screwdriver attachment, together with a table-knife someone just happened to have about their person, were used to undo the screws holding down that top panel. Our own barman Bernard, a sort of Friends In Space semi-official mascot (whose closing time call of "empty yer glasses and shift yer arses" is now often chorused), was down the far end of the bar pretending he didn't know us but the other barman was casting dark looks in our direction. Eventually the panel was completely unscrewed save for one final, totally immovable screw. There's always one. Interposing his lean frame between the panel and the eyes of the watching bar staff Chris examined the problem. A loud crack was heard and Chris turned, the panel in his hand.

"How did that happen?" he asked, innocently.

Lisa now began to ram the pool cue up and down furiously while Chris shone his torch into the stygian darkness and I was left to observe two of SF's more literate writers (and there are precious few of them) engaged on my behalf in a way that would have seemed inconceivable to the humble neofan of a few short years ago. There was no sign of the keys. This activity had been going on for about an hour by this stage and stern gazes were turned in my direction.

"You are sure the keys aren't in another pocket?" I was asked, in a cold voice. I checked. Fortunately they weren't.

In spite of an unnatural lack of mass that can make him seem almost ethereal at times Malcolm Edwards is of fairly normal proportions so I was astonished to see him worm his way into the small space below the seat in a manner that would have been impressive in an Indian Rubber Man. I had tried the same feat earlier without success. Sure enough, within a couple of minutes Malcolm emerged triumphant, the keys tightly gripped in his fist.

After we'd reassembled the rear section of the seat in something approximating it's original form I pocketed the keys. I tell you, it's a man's life in the Friends In Space.

A TALE OF TWO CONVENTIONS (this time it really is, honest!)

Financial considerations had led me to make the journey to Newcastle and SILICON 5 by coach but, surprisingly, the seven hours seemed to pass remarkably quickly. This may well have been due to the fact that I spent a sizeable part of the trip asleep, but I'm sure the time spent deep in reflection also helped. When the trip to a convention is a seven hour haul up the M1 you have plenty of time to think about earlier conventions, to compare what has gone before with your expectations of what lies ahead. YORCON 2, the 1981 Eastercon held in Leeds, had been an enjoyable convention but it was curiously unmemorable leaving only a mess of incoherent impressions amid the background hum of snatches of earlier conventions that can't be formed into any meaningful whole. It was as if the convention had somehow been made of Teflon. However the convention that preceded it, the 1980 NOVACON, was something else.

The experience of sharing a hotel room over three nights with Robert Holdstock and Greg Pickersgill provided a number of bizarre anecdotes that have acquired an almost mythic quality among the Friends In Space. At the start of the con Greg stated his avowed intention to stay pissed the whole weekend, an aim he largely achieved. Unfortunately the consequence of this was that Greg stayed late in bed every morning feeling a Very Sick Boy Indeed, past the time that the hotel staff would come in and tidy things up with the result that the room was almost unfit for human habitation by Monday. The waste bin containing an unsavoury mix of empty baked bean cans and slowly maturing vomit was one thing, the overpowering smell of organic decay quite another, though I'm sure it was nothing a squad in suits sealed against biological contamination and armed with DDT sprays couldn't handle.

For undoubtedly arcane reasons that had little to do with the stars but much to do with spirits, those times I chose to hit the sack each night seemed to coincide with some new piece of lunacy. Like the night when drunken revellers Holdstock and Pickersgill fell into the room as I sat in bed picking my toenails prior to what I hoped would be a good night's sleep. Greg lurched over me menacingly, accused me of homosexuality, turned on his heel and collapsed face first on the floor between the beds. Holdstock hopped back and forth, a worried expression on his face, and we both jumped at the slurred but suitably Germanic version of 'Falling In Love Again' that abruptly emanated from the prone figure before us, though it did provide proof that Greg was still alive.

The next morning we all awoke within a few minutes of each other and Greg listened aghast as he was told the things he'd been up to the previous night by Holdstock. Apparently they had been at a room party where Greg had been chatting up a certain young woman oblivious of the fact that her husband was sat almost next to him. Greg asked just what he had been saying.

"Well", said Holdstock, "you suggested that the two of you should go off somewhere where you could stick your tongue in her honeypot."

"Honeypot!!", yelled Greg, "Surely even in that state I'd have more class than to use a term like Honeypot?"

Rob confirmed that Greg had indeed used the offending term whereupon Greg, his hands clasped over his face, sank, groaning, beneath his bedclothes. Greg's memories of this incident have since returned and he now maintains that

'honeypot' is a figment of Holdstock's imagination, one Rob used because he knew Greg would be mortified. He has now revealed what he actually said and it really is too gross to appear in the pages of a well-brought up fanzine like EPSILON. Linda Pickersgill looked appalled when she heard.

Then there was the night I returned to the room to find Kath Mitchell and Chris Atkinson waiting for me within. Now, this is not the kind of thing that usually happens at conventions, at least not to me it doesn't, and I backed away from them suspicious as to just what they had been up to. They laughed, and it would be fair to say that they had been far from teetotal in the few hours since I'd seen them last.

"We're going to show you something that few other people have seen", said Kath, solemnly.

I raised my eyebrows at this, but since their menfolk were slumped against the wall of the corridor outside, guzzling beer, I didn't expect too much. To my surprise there ensued a dance of a quite remarkable nature that fascinated me even though it didn't stop me from noticing that the beds had been tampered with. Instead of the mass of jumbled bedding I had grown accustomed to over the past few days the room now contained two fully made up beds. I walked over to examine my bed, Chris tried to stop me, and a half-pint of pale ale that had been on the bedside table was suddenly to be found soaking into my bedding. When I pulled back the sheets to dry them out I saw that the beds had been made up in a way that made them impossible to get into and which I later learned had led to a less than sober Greg Pickersgill spending the night on the floor after a valiant but frustrated attempt to slide between the sheets. Since sleep would be impossible until the sheets had at least partially dried out I decided to stay up and went in search of fun. I found it, too.

Such thoughts were packed away as the coach pulled into Newcastle because I was here now and a new con awaited, a blank sheet yet to be written on. As someone with no accent to speak of, or with, I've always been fascinated by the curious distortions and abbreviations of the English language to be found in various parts of the country, and as the Geordie accent is one of the more pleasant ones I found myself listening intently to the conversations going on around me as I travelled by local bus to the Grosvenor Hotel.

Not many people had arrived by the time I got to the hotel But Little Ian Williams was there together with Not-So-Little Ian Maule and some kid who turned out to be Paul Turner, a 14-year old who tried too hard to impress at this con but who may well turn out to be an ace fan when he's got a few more years, and probably inches, under his belt. The subject of Maule's alleged wishy-washiness came up and I made the comment that if he was a sadist he'd be into inflicting mild discomfort. This feeble attempt at wit amused him so much that I got embarrassed and went and had a game of pool.

Since the Grosvenor Hotel is equipped with a games room that is dominated by a coin operated pool table (it's a small games room) pool figures large as one of the more significant pastimes of a SILICON but due to the general lack of talent of most con attendees the games often degenerate into what Greg once termed 'duels of ineptitude'. The worst of the these that I encountered was actually between Greg and myself. We had reached the stage where only the

black ball and the cue ball were left on the table and what might reasonably have been expected to be a swift end to the game turned into a long drawn out conflict with neither of us able to pot the black. As time wore on I imagined the onlookers to be smirking and Greg was obviously getting embarrassed as well since at one point, as he stalked past me, he hissed: "For Christ's sake pot the fucking thing!" to me under his breath. By now the crowd were turning ugly; soon they would be revolting. As far as I recall it was I who eventually put the black away but my only clear memory is of the embarrassment. It was at this same table that Chris Atkinson later bemoaned her inability to pot long shots. At this point, unfortunately, my mouth decided to operate before I'd put my brain in gear and I listened in horror as the words: "It's because you're a woman" emerged from my lips. I clamped my hands over my mouth, but it was too late. The words were out and I was being attacked with a pool cue by a woman whose thoughts had turned from pool to billiards.

Some games, though, are not a matter of fun to me and there is one in particular I regard with almost pathological loathing. Soccer is that game and according to the programme a fannish football match was to be played at 11-Oam on Sunday and so, having been cajoled into playing in previous years, at 10-Oam I went for a walk along Jesmond Dene, which turned out to be a remarkably pleasant park, and learned some facts about the behaviour of water rats that I'd not earlier known. I've always found an hour or so of solitude to be essential at a convention and this one also had the useful purpose, I hoped, of removing the possibility of me being coerced into playing that dreaded game. Predictably those playing were late leaving and were still at the hotel when I returned so that I had to creep in, trying desperately not to be noticed. I hid out with Dave Bridges in what the committee laughingly referred to as the con hall, engaging in interesting conversation on matters fannish and watching the window for signs of the expected exodus. The biggest surprise on coming out of hiding was seeing Greg supping Guinness in the bar since he is usually one of the most energetic and enthusiastic of fannish footballers, even if he is one of the least graceful.

There is one final tale to be told before I finish this report and this too features Greg. Ritchie Smith and Dave Pringle were stood in the lounge talking while Greg, Chris, D. West, myself, and a few others were over by the reception desk, Greg making less than complimentary remarks about Smith. Ritchie was ignoring Greg, though there was little doubt that he could hear him. Chris suggested that we should go and sit in one of the alcoves, which we did. However while we all sat around a table at one end of the alcove Greg decided to sit at a table at the other end containing a plate of apparently abandoned ham sandwiches. Looking around to make sure that no one was about to come back and claim them he picked one up and stuffed it into his mouth. Smith and Pringle came and sat opposite Greg.

"Would you like a sandwich, Dave?" Ritchie asked.

I stifled a laugh, though Greg seemed blissfully unaware that anything was wrong and it was at this point that Chris went over to him and picked up his drink and the sandwiches.

"Stop being so anti-social and come and sit with us." she said.

Greg did as she ordered and proceeded to finish off the sandwiches watched by Ritchie who glowered but remained silent. Barely able to contain myself I left the room and when I later told Greg the 'abandoned' sandwiches he'd eaten had been Smith's he almost fell off his chair.

An ace convention.

AS TO WHAT I'VE BEEN READING LATELY...

...oh, this and that, this and that. Having been told by Linda Pickersgill, Chris Evans and, in the pages of TAPPEN, Malcolm Edwards what a good book John Kennedy Toole's CONFEDERACY OF DUNCES was it finally dawned on me that this could well be a book worth reading. Very good it was too, though I hardly think it was Pulitzer Prize material, but still enjoyable and I add my recommendation to those above.

Back in the days when I still lived with my parents the first page I would turn to on getting the OBSERVER was the back page as this contained Clive James' entertaining weekly column of TV reviews. James has had two collections of these columns published in the last few years and the first of these, VISIONS BEFORE MIDNIGHT, has recently been brought out in paperback by Picador Books (with THE CRYSTAL BUCKET soon to follow). This collection covers the period 1972-6, from the Munich Olympics to Montreal, and is full of witty and perceptive on the medium that show up the histrionic posturings of such as Harlan Ellison when he attempted to come to terms with TV in the GLASS TEAT, and also demonstrates a style of reviewing I personally would like to see applied to fanzines. Also from Picador and James comes UNRELIABLE MEMOIRS, James' account of his life in Australia up to and including his eventual voyage to these sceptred shores. Now the interesting thing about this tome is that it's written in the same style as much humorous anecdotal fannish writing and with the same topics receiving much emphasis (the James penis, for instance, looms large in these pages if not in life), but is less well done than it has been by some fanwriters. Of late, for a variety of reasons, I've been re-reading the fannish writings of Leroy Kettle, John Brosnan, and Robert Holdstock and they are better at this sort of thing than James is. Those of you who became involved in fandom in the last two or three years will be largely unfamiliar with the work of this trio and no doubt regard Dave Langford as fandom's premier humourist but, believe me, these boys were better. When talking about all this with Brosnan at the September Tun he made the observation that there were probably many writers better at this type of thing than James but that few had a name with such selling power.

Those of you who still believe that fanzines should concern themselves with Science Fiction are no doubt wondering what SF I've read in recent months and up until about a fortnight ago I would have had to have said none. But SF is part of my roots and in my blood, as it were, so naturally I occasionally get the urge to read some. Trouble is, most of it is unadulterated crap, particularly that written by the latest "new Robert Heinlein" if you never happened to care too much for the work of the original. Not knowing the current scene as well as I once would have I was at something of a loss to know what to read when I remembered a lot of people had been raving about Tom Disch's ON WINGS OF SONG months earlier. This is one of those novels you show mainstream readers to prove not all SF is juvenile rubbish. There is no higher praise.

POLITICS AND PR PREDOMINATERESPONSE RATE REDUCED...MORE LoCS...

LETTERS

LETTERS..... is there anybody out there?

LETTERS

MIKE TAYLOR

35 Fernhill Rd., Olton, Solihull, W.Midlands.

EPSILON 7 was a very interesting read for one as ignorant of the workings of SF fandom as me - although it was hardly the first SF 'zine I've read.

The differences between comics fandom and SF fandom have, however, become more and more pronounced in my peanut-sized brain in the past few months, resulting in my increasing interest in 'the other side'. Working in 'Nostalgia & Comics', one gets to meet quite a few tedious mentalities on a regular basis (comics attract the dips more than SF books do - down to the fact no doubt that you have to have some sort of inherent intelligence to appreciate the majority of SF, whereas any old turd can gurgle at the latest X-MEN), and when I've reached the stage of being thoroughly pissed off with many of same, it's interesting to see a fandom where the majority of the participants actually seem almost intelligent, adult and fellow piss-artists. For instance I could envisage the stupefied stares that would meet your ramblings on bodily functions had they been presented in BEM...

I hope that STARFAN 2 will be out soon - I thoroughly enjoyed No.1, a very well done project. Your story flowed along nicely, with style and humour, and was put across with maximum effectiveness by your highly functional art style.

((STARFAN 2 is about 60% finished, and has been for almost a year. I put it to one side for a while because I was more interested in re-establishing EPSILON but I'll probably resume working on it concurrently with EPSILON 9 though, since it's a somewhat more expensive undertaking than this 'zine, I don't know which will be out first yet. Interestingly, STARFAN got more LoCs from the US than from the UK, the only fanzine I've ever put out where this happened. I have yet to figure out why.))

J.D. OWEN

4 Highfield Close, Newport Pagnell, Bucks, MK16 9AZ.

It's a long time since that last issue but the mix seems to be much the same as before - it's still full of excruciating puns like "intercourse with the land of apple pie could be fruitful." (whimper.) Still, it is a good read, puns excepted.

((Actually, I never put puns in deliberately, though I'll leave any that arise naturally. I've always had an aversion to puns in fanzines because, like fiction, they're usually so badly done, however having recently been reading Willis and seeing how they can be handled by a master I'm coming around.))

Odzunsodz brought back happy memories of our move into our very own residence in NEWPORT, two and a half years ago - ah, the sweat and toil of lugging furniture, cookers, fridges, and thousands of irrelaceable bits of

paper (not to mention a thousand records); of the unrelenting toil of re-decorating in an attempt to hide the previous owner's rather twee decorations. Ah, I'd not move again for a decade or so! After thirty months there are still things I haven't found.

((Me too, me too.))

AVEDON CAROL

4409 Woodfield Rd., Kensington, Maryland, 20895, USA.

You're right to take Linda Pickersgill's words to heart. I confess to having been quite hesitant about the expense of mailing anything to complete strangers across the water when I only have Taral's word for it that they exist at all half the time, and no idea at all whether we will have anything to say to each other. There are some good US zines, and some worthwhile US fans who can at least come off with a good LoC or two from time to time, as infrequent as production may sometimes be...but sitting around saying "There are no US fans or fanzines worth the trouble" is not likely to inspire them to produce anything, let alone send it to anyone.

On the other hand I disagree entirely with your comments about politics in fandom and Harlan's ERA promo. Whether or not Harlan's promotion of the ERA at Phoenix was done well is another question entirely (and perhaps if he'd been less tacky and insulting about it, it wouldn't have raised these questions about politics in fandom in the first place)...no, I tell a lie, it isn't another question. Harlan phrased his challenge in terms of, "You stupid fans don't care about politics but you can't stop me from caring", which naturally caused a lot of people, in reaction, to say, "So what? Why should we?" instead of saying "Well, Harlan, that just doesn't happen to be true. As a matter of fact, fandom has a long tradition of political concern on both the left and the right." Or are we going to pretend that Donald Wollheim & Co. never existed? Maybe that there was never a suggestion of politics in the works of any science fiction author (like, say, Robert A. Heinlein? or Theodore Sturgeon? or Cordwainer Smith?) and thus any talk of politics now is something totally new and unprecedented? Oh, come now. Willis talked about politics back in the 50's. Why is something brand-new and unfannish when someone else does the same thing in the 70's and 80's? Your whole "Notions" column is a political statement, kid.

((Naturally. I was careful when writing that last column to refer to "the British body fannish" because I'm fully aware that this sort of thing is common in the US but during the time I've been in fandom it has not been common over here, until fairly recently. If you re-read the column you'll see that I concluded that a political dimension to fanzines is inevitable but that I thought party political arguments to be "Divisive and futile", which I still maintain. By the way, what has anything written in an SF novel got to do with fandom?))

Bodily functions...I spend more time thinking/talking about bodily malfunctions, I think. Be that as it may, I've never been terribly interested in things like puking off the last party and how many trips per beer I have to make to the bathroom and like that. I could, I suppose, relate the delightful story of how the food at the Westercon in San Francisco didn't quite agree

with me , thus causing me to wake up at 5:00 in the morning to have what is unquestionably one of the most disgusting experiences of my life...but do you really want to hear this? I thought not... And I guess having to sit down to take a piss does take some of the fascination out of it (you never know how to aim into one of those specimen cups, of course. No matter where you hold the cup, the stream shoots at your hand instead). You don't hear many jokes about lactation, but then, not many of us have had the experience, and there seem to be an unhealthy number of people who would rather not be reminded that the human breast has certain biological functions which might tend to imply that maybe they weren't invented just so men could get all worked up over them.

((Linda once told me of an occasion when she taught class back in New Orleans. For whatever reason the subject of breasts came up and she asked the class what they thought breasts were for. This produced blushes among the girls and sniggers among the boys so she then explained breast feeding whereupon one of the boys put his hand up and said: "Don't you think any woman who'd do that must be a whore?". Incredible.

Unlike the average American male I don't find breasts to be the most sexually attractive part of a woman's body, which leads me, strangely enough, to the Royal Wedding. A gang of us had been invited round to the Priest/Tuttle London residence to watch the big event and generally have a good time. During the course of the day the subject of sexual attraction came up and someone mentioned a survey they'd seen about those parts of a man's body women find most attractive and top of the list was the bum (US translation: ass). Robert Holdstock didn't believe this at first until a quick poll of the women present revealed that, yes, bums were top of the hit parade."What about arms and shoulders?", asked Rob. He was told these polled near the bottom of the list, a fact confirmed by a female show of hands. "You mean", he said, somewhat plaintively, "that all these years I've been concentrating on the wrong part of my physique?" He was told that this was so.))

A footnote to Chris Priest's letter: One of the reporters for the Baltimore Sun is Dave Ettlin, a long-time fan who is frequently assigned to cover conventions when he goes to them. Ettlin's articles are exactly like the one's everyone else writes, wretched interviews with Trekkies and descriptions of the costumed wierdos. He says it's because it's what the paper wants and what the readers want to see... but once in a while the Washington Post has been known to print the article we'd rather see, to no apparent ill-effect on the writer or the post.

ABI FROST

69 Robin Hood Gdns., Cotton St., London E14.

I do think you have represented me a little unfairly in Notions. Yes, I said all those things; but out of context they make me sound like a robotic member of Militant. To put the record straight, what I think is revolutionary about fanzines is not their content (or what their content might be), but the fanzine medium itself. The point is that anyone producing their own magazine, and distributing it according to an agreed method which doesn't rely on sales,

shops, .etc., has actually made themselves free of the system. The New Statesman, for example, obviously contains far more 'party political' stuff than any fanzine ever would, but it is produced and distributed inside the capitalist system, and in theory at least, any (very) right-wing government could stop it overnight by attacking it through that system, such as putting pressures on distributors. Moreover it only prints what the editor agrees with, (or at least thinks will spark off a good argument in the letters page), and only people who are in touch with the editor and can write to his specifications get anything published in it. Whereas, out here in fandom, anyone who thinks they have anything to say can just let it loose on the 'marketplace'.

On the subject of the conventional press, Mike Glicksohn's letter deserves some rejoinder, being typical of a sort of blindness which has alas not been swept away in the post-Seacon holocaust. This concern about the image of fandom...personally, working as I do on the fringes of the public relations industry, I'm quite glad that an 'official' organisation (in this case the con committee) can't always control what the press says about it by 'channeling...reporters and news teams through...capable personnel...preparing press kits...directing cameramen and reporters to intelligent and mature individuals...'

He objects to the headline '3000 Sci-fi fans in town'. For the life of me I can't see what's wrong with that, except that inside fandom the expression sci-fi is regarded as uncool. The other headline 'They're weird, just weird' is obviously a little more likely to touch a nerve; but I can see why it was put there - as a 'teaser' to get people reading the story. Let's face it, you'd be more likely to read a feature with that heading than one which said '300 people discuss sf' or '3000 have a jolly weekend', if you didn't know what the story was about. The sheer snobbery of Glicksohn's scream 'The quotation was from one of the maids...although we'd made sure the reporter talked to... Bob Tucker and Isaac Asimov' is beyond belief. Listen, the maid was quoted in the headline because she came up with a good line for the purposes mentioned above; and she was interviewed in the first place as an 'ordinary person' who'd had a good look at the fans. (And I'm afraid that even if we purged all the costume fans and obvious-to-us loonies, most people would still think typical fannish behaviour weird. The answer is to choose between one's sensibilities and one's preferred way of enjoying oneself.)

I must say, that if I didn't know you to be an honest sort of chap, I would simply not believe that the selection of letters was made in 1979; some are just too ironic in the light of later events.

((Which is precisely why I ran it, though you were actually the only one to cotton on. Everyone else who commented on the matter could see no point in running a two-year old column and thought it should have been scrapped. Sometimes I think what seems obvious to me is in fact subtlety of some measure. For another viewpoint on Glicksohn's LoC I refer you to...))

STEVEN.J.GREEN

11 Fox Green Cres., Acocks Green, Birmingham, B27 7SD.

Mike Glicksohn is justifiably suspicious of media treatment of science fiction fandom, but it's something we're just going to have to live with; journalists are prone to trivialising or just plain sending up subjects they don't understand (I've even been guilty of similar behaviour myself), and few newspapers or television stations have resident fans...my own paper's an exception. Unfortunately, this also means I get lumbered with the town's lunatic fringe (including the senile delinquent who claimed an alien caterpillar had landed in her back garden, but that's a story for another time, or the nutter I wrote of in the last Napalm In the Morning and has just returned with even wilder threatening behaviour or...), but c'est le vie...The best response to a silly article is to write a brief, polite letter explaining where the reporter may have misunderstood (never accuse the press of making mistakes..it gets our backs up) , and maybe even offering yourself as a contact for SF-orientated stories in the future. During the three-and-a-half years I've spent on the Solihull News and sister papers in the West Midlands, I've had no difficulties getting decent coverage for local SF groups, authors, artists, events, etc., - all it requires is a little patience and a willingness to accept that terms like "sci-fi" will probably be around for quite some time to come.

I received the politicking at Yorcon 2 with mixed feelings...as a CND supporter, the vote Ian Watson and John Brunner forced on the convention members present was greeted with some sympathy; as someone in favour of an increased social democracy (no, that doesn't mean I'm an SDP member too...that's more a cocktail party conversation piece than a true political innovation), I had considerable reservations about the way the vote was handled, especially the way in which Graham James bulldozed through the justified calls for the vote to be delayed until the entire con membership could be warned about the decision they were missing out on, say until the next day, simply to get the debate and hand-raising done as quickly as possible. I've no doubt the decision would have gone the way it did however the vote was organised, but a little more visible democracy would have done a lot to ease my conscience.

JIMMY ROBERTSON

64 Hamilton Rd., Bellshill, Lanarkshire, Scotland, ML4 1AG.

I have great difficulty keeping politics out of anything I write. My political convictions are as much a part of me as any other aspect of my personality. It would be dishonest of me not to allow my views to be open to scrutiny. I do agree wholeheartedly that for an SF con to reach a half-assed decision on any subject and present it as a common voice is ludicrous. Though if political discussion does arise from stances taken and views expressed it is vital that they be argued. That Ian Watson 'abused' his position as GoH is perhaps true but he certainly seemed more thought provoking than most. Surely you don't really believe that someone presenting their political opinion demands you agree or even that you take any notice? Because they tend to beat you over the head with their arguments doesn't mean they have to be taken seriously but what they say might. That politics may cause division is also true but that's not my problem. Party politics is so full of hypocritical

verbiage that it amazes me it is not discussed more often and its shallowness dragged into the light.

((And now the thoughts of struggling young would-be SF author and general fan about town.....))

CHRIS EVANS

32 Balfern Grove, Chiswick, London W4 2JX.

Everything may be political, as Abi Frost says (though that depends on definitions), but I have to agree with you that politics is just one aspect of a person's life. I see no reason why I should be forced to submit to political pressures at a gathering which I have attended for other reasons entirely. If someone wants to discuss politics with me over a drink in the bar, fine - I have the option of pursuing the discussion or simply walking away. If I attend a panel discussion on an SF topic with some political content, I would likewise expect some discussion of politics; however I would not expect the discussion to lead to a vote on an exclusively political issue.

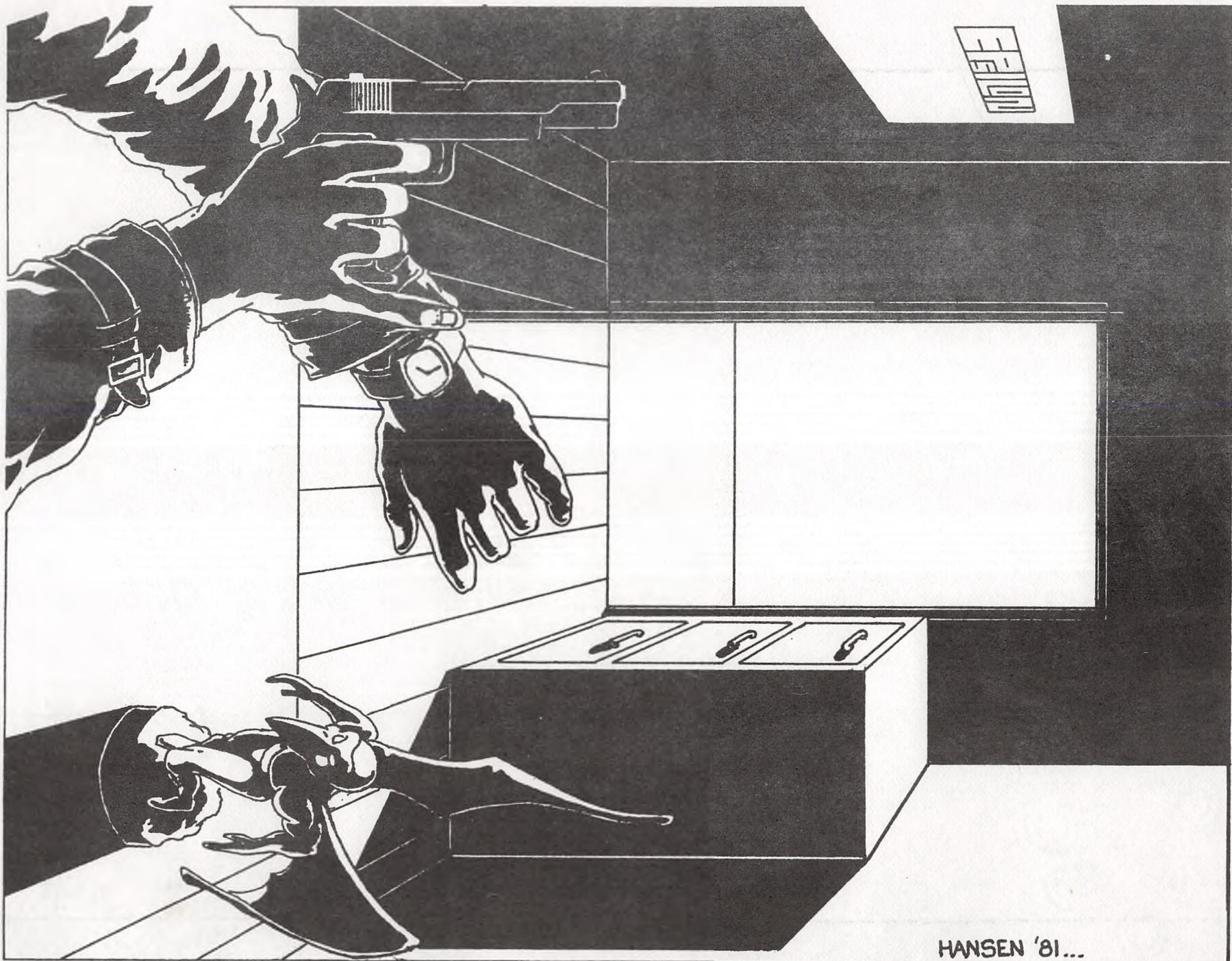
I must confess that I wasn't actually present at the Yorcon panel discussion which lead to a vote on nuclear disarmament, so my following comments are based only on reports of what happened. What annoyed me most was not the actual politics being espoused (I'm in sympathy with most of the left-wing views) but rather the way in which a debate on an SF related topic was transformed by a small number of people with vested political interests into what seems to have resembled a party political vote. Just as I get irritated with Jehovah's Witnesses who interrupt my lunch on a Saturday afternoon by preaching at me on my doorstep, so I object when I find myself at an SF convention with no advertised political element required to give a public statement of my position on a controversial political subject. I regard this as an invasion of my privacy.

The trouble with people of strong political convictions is that they are so convinced of the righteousness of their views that (just like the Jehovah's Witnesses) they seem to want to force their opinions down other people's throats at every opportunity. The vociferous Left in particular are always talking loudly and continuously about democracy and freedom of speech and so on; they talk so loudly and continuously that the suspicion takes root that they are doing so in the hope of drowning out dissenting views.

Political activism is a dangerous profession since it frequently subverts the very freedoms which it is espousing in its constant striving to assert the superiority of its position. Some of SF's left-wingers worry me in this respect since their tactics for promoting their views frequently resemble steamrolling. And lest I sound like a reactionary fuddy-duddy, I would repeat that my sympathies are all left-wing; however I do respect other people's rights to hold differing views and feel that the place to attempt to convert them to mine is in private conversation or at a gathering I've attended in the foreknowledge that my political views will be canvassed or challenged.

WAHF: Lilian Edwards, Graham Ashley, Harry Andruschak, and Jay Kinney.

See y'all next ish**



HANSEN '81...