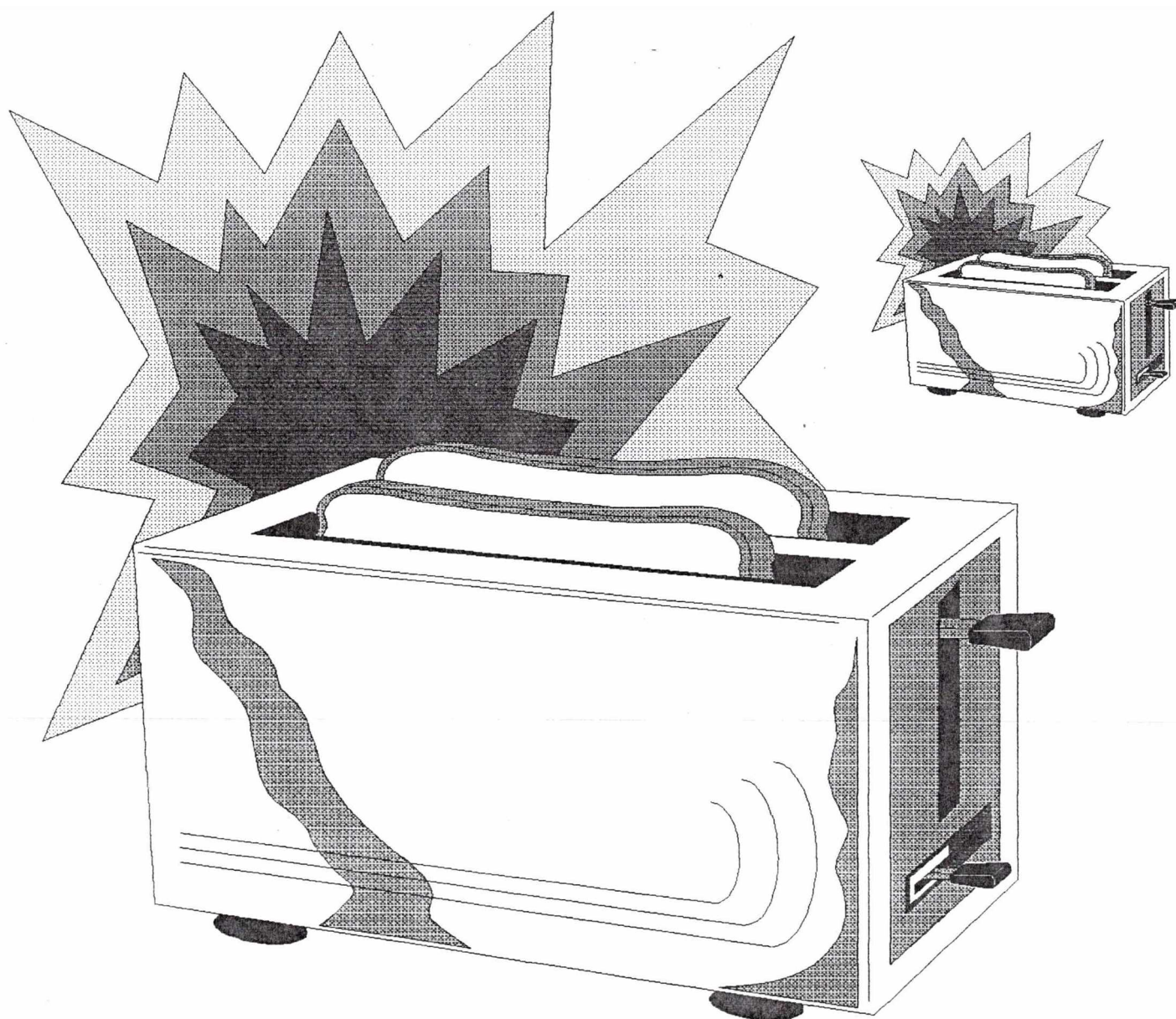


Flaming Tantric Toasters



FTT 17:

**Judith Hanna and Joseph Nicholas,
15 Jansons Road, South Tottenham, London N15 4JU, UK**

FTT 17

Late again (certainly later than we promised in the previous issue).... This is getting to be a habit, and this time we don't even have the excuse of a new house and garden to play with. Mind you, we have been using the winter months to pursue a bit of internal D-I-Y -- bookshelves in the bedroom, shelves over the radiators, shelves in the kitchen, shelves for the wardrobe....with (back on the outside) a lean-to greenhouse due to be delivered imminently and the rear path needing to be widened to accomodate it. Oh, the bourgeois joys of home ownership!

But if all goes according to (last-minute) plan -- and if it doesn't we'll rewrite this introduction so you'll be none the wiser -- the British copies of this April 1995 issue of *FTT* should be ready to distribute at this year's Eastercon, held miles from anywhere in glorious London Ducklands. (The international copies will follow later.) This issue is slightly thinner than usual -- which is actually a relief, considering the size and cost of the last two -- but is graced by the following contents:

ONCE A JOLLY GUFFMAN -- Judith Hanna	page 3
THE LETTER COLUMN -- edited by Joseph Nicholas	page 9
TWO INTERLINKED ARGUMENTS -- Joseph Nicholas	page 20

With various fillers and some illustrations from diverse sources scattered throughout.

We remind you again that this fanzine is available for the standard reasons for which fanzines are usually available, viz:

- a letter of comment on this or previous issues;
- a contribution for future issues (but please outline your ideas to us first);
- your publication in exchange (we trade all for all); or
- immense quantities of money (£1.00 will do on this occasion).

Remember, though, that we prefer an active to a passive readership, so the last of these four is to be embraced only by those unable to manage any of the previous three. Those who have failed to do any of these things for the past few issues will find a squiggly mark in the margin alongside, to warn them that their time is nearly up; others will eventually discover that they have not received this issue, and should have paid attention to last issue's squiggly mark.

The following advertisement appeared in the Winter 1994 issue of *London & South East Connection*, a directory of alternative practitioners and allied New Agers:

ACCOUNTING SYSTEMS FULL OF JOY, COLOUR AND INSPIRATION!

"If you are in business (or just like to keep your personal finances in order) and conventional accounting systems leave you cold, please come and talk to

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Is this why John Major found accountancy so exciting?

Once a Jolly GUFFman

Judith Hanna

Naturally, we Aussie fans voted for the bad guy. Joseph Nicholas's GUFF platform promised verbal assassinations, napalm in the morning, paperback infernos, KTF reviews. As it turned out, he rode into Sydney town wearing not a black hat but a modish black velvet jacket. Medium height and mid brown hair did not seem quite as advertised -- should have been tall, dark, mean and moody -- but at least he could be described as lean. The sideburns and smoking were bad taste, but everyone was wearing flares in those days. He seemed a bit quiet, but that might have been jet-lag. The first public showing of this first ever GUFF winner Down Under was at Jack Herman's and Cath McDonnell's flat in Bondi where, like any fan should, he meandered his way along the bookcases lining it. The potted put-downs he laid upon such big name standards as Asimov, Heinlein, Barry B Bongyear and Arthur C Klutz seemed to live up to the platform billing: they were dismissed as has-beens, deeply uncool purveyors of cardboard characters to the undiscerning. Asking what he did like unleashed a eulogy to the Ballardian vision of drained swimming pools, crashed B52s and abandoned Cadillacs... He was looking forward to seeing bleak, dessicated Australian landscape.

So I offered to show the visiting Pom around Taronga Zoo next day. After all, I was happily on the dole, planning to be a writer. "Catch the 9.35 ferry, take the bus to the top entrance, then wait outside and I'll take you in on my zoo pass," I told him. Taronga is hardly bleak, however, but sprawls lushly and steeply down the side of Bradley's Head, with superb views over Sydney Harbour. Besides offering conveniently packaged kangaroos, koalas and other marsupials for the tourist to see, getting there means a ferry trip out past the Opera House and the rock island known as Pinchgut, once used as a convict gaol. But the bus which should have left the GUFF-man came and went, leaving no obediently waiting Pommie visitor. I returned to my book, expecting him to be on the following bus; again, no GUFF winner. So I wandered in to check whether he might have arrived early.

Talk To The Animals

Sure enough, I found him outside the nocturnal house, which was not yet open, and firmly led him off to see the snakes. They should, I thought, appeal to such a hardened cynic. Besides, I like them. Once you find their curves against their camouflaging background litter, they show a spectacular variety of mosaic-like scale patterns. They are, I pointed out to him, almost velvet-like to handle, not cold but *chauffrée*, room temperature like a good red wine. He was quiet, nodding occasionally when I pointed out a particular beauty. I was rather disappointed that he had so little to say, but was prepared to make allowances for the effects of living somewhere like London where wildlife must be scarce. At that stage, I had no inkling of the sheer horror which the very notion of snakes and spiders causes the average Pom, who assumes that these alien creatures are all deadly poisonous and ferocious; Joseph later confessed he was speechless because twitching with horror at being surrounded by reptiles.

Outside zoos, when humans and snakes meet, both are usually keen to speed away from each other, rather than taking the chance to contemplate each other at leisure. Even my own family tended to go for a rifle when tiger snakes or dugites were spotted around the shearing shed or heading for the house, though we always rather wanted to adopt a live carpet snake to keep the rats and mice down among the sacks of livestock feed. Carpet snakes, besides having wonderfully patterned skins, are a type of python, non-poisonous but just squeezing their dinners to death; tiger snakes and dugites are poisonous.

Once we'd finished with the reptile house, which also held lizards and terrapins, the nocturnal house had opened so we could go in to be greeted by the orange and white cuscus, a sort of Niuginian possum, who patrolled the barrier rails (intended to keep inconsiderate visitors from pressing up against the open enclosures) as if he owned the whole house and were graciously welcoming you to it. There were wombats, flying foxes, and cages claiming to hold various types of marsupial mice which were clearly very good at staying hidden. Platypodes had a house of their own, where you could watch them swimming underwater,

their fur silver with trapped air bubbles. The glass of their tank also looked into the cut-away edge of their burrow, so you could see them shake themselves dry, crawl along their tunnel and curl up in their nest. I had been surprised how small they are, just little grebe size.

The way to do Taronga Zoo is to zig-zag along the hillside, turning downhill at the end of each zig and zag. Of course, the paths aren't laid out in a boringly straightforward manner to make this easy, but in clusters and curves and *culs-de-sac*. Since sponsoring an aurora finch for \$30 a year, which gained me a year's free entry for up to two adults and two children any time the zoo was open, I had been able to work out just how the zoo fitted together, and no longer got lost and exhausted by having to backtrack uphill. So I was able to plot a tour confidently from the kangaroo and emu paddock near the entrance, where all the tourist cameras click-click-clicked away at these doe-eyed, long-lashed symbols of our land, to feeding time at the koala tree. Indeed, I felt quite a sense of possessive pride in my local zoo, and my little finch, and enjoyed showing it off to friends, visitors and neighbours with kids -- and indeed, giving helpful directions to other visitors looking lost or puzzled.

Next was koala feeding time: grey bundles of fluff blink while keepers lash bunches of (reputedly) hallucinogenic gum leaves to the branches where they sit. Certainly, the koalas always look bombed out of their tiny minds, as if any vocabulary they might have would be limited to mumbling "Unreal, maa-aan. Like, far-out," and "Pass a leaf, ma-an." However, once you have seen a koala piss, you understand why the keepers go in there thoroughly waterproofed, from sou-westers to wellies. For all that koalas never drink, but survive on what moisture they can absorb from the leaves they eat -- and gum leaves are tough rather than juicy -- when they empty their bladders it comes down like upending bucketsful.

When we stopped at the cafe to share cups of fizzy drink with the European wasps then invading the Sydney area, the GUFF winner explained that his favourite writers, besides Ballard and Chris Priest (who had been out to a Melbourne convention a couple of years before and had helped set up GUFF) were Jane Austen, Thomas Hardy, John Fowles, Beryl Bainbridge, and Joseph Conrad. Austen I could agree with happily, Hardy had been a bit of a drag to get through at school, Fowles I reckoned was a wanker, hadn't heard of Bainbridge, and hadn't got beyond Chapter 1 of *Lord Jim*, so I found it easier to tell him everything he'd never wanted to know about animals and the Australian ecosystem than to engage in literary discourse.

Onward through random wandering ibis to where I'd previously taken a wonderful photo showing notably tall and sun-bleached Melbourne fan Andrew Brown looking down at a giraffe, both batting their remarkably long-lashed eyes endearingly. Onward to the Tasmanian devil enclosure, where one sunset I'd seen the male devil atop one of the rocks which furnished their enclosure, nose stretched up to sniff the air, bouncing his tight round bollocks up and down beneath his belly. Possibly to cool them? But this time, as usual, not a devil was in sight.

Further down to a rock carving, then just completed, the first of a planned series of artworks to enhance the zoo. It was an Aboriginal man's head, with flowing beard and hair, with the shapes of animals emerging from among their golden sandstone curls. Not bad, I reckoned. And so down through the aquarium with its sharks and piranha -- the latter from Customs seizures of this prohibited import -- and out the lower entrance just by the ferry wharf.

Having put the by then footsore Pommie onto his boat, I caught the uphill bus home to nearby Balmoral Beach, where I was living with my grandfather in his flat in an ugly red-brick block which had been built into a natural rock amphitheatre where, during the 1930s, the Star of the East sect had waited for Jesus Christ to come walking in between Sydney Heads. By the time the faithful expecting to be first to shake his hand realised he wasn't going to put in an appearance as predicted, those who'd been selling off tickets to seats in the amphitheatre had vanished with the money. It was a wonderful place to live: you could spit out from the flat's huge picture windows onto the sand a hundred feet or so below.

Conventionally

Advention in Adelaide was the 1981 Australian national Easter convention, where this first GUFF visitor was to be on show, along with DUFF winners Joyce Scrivner and Denny Lien from Minneapolis. It was held at a large, ugly modern hotel (as seems nearly obligatory for cons) in North Adelaide.

The first evening's dinner outing, to a favourite local Chinese eatery, featured Baltimore fan Lee Smoire embarrassing the company by loudly telling the waiter just how she wanted the sauce made up to dip her spring rolls into. Lee, of course, at the 1985 Aussiecon II worldcon, advertised for an Australian

to marry her so she could stay in the country, and managed to match up and then split up with a Perth fan. She's become, I gather, a valued figure in the Perth folk scene, both for her singing voice and because con-runner enthusiasts prepared to work on organising the annual Toodyay Folk Festival are hard to find. Lee was at that stage a kind of girlfriend of Australia's worldcon boffin, Carey Handfield -- who was later dubbed 'the real official Carey Handfield' by his fan club, for his diplomacy in smoothing over the splits and feuds that sprang up during the run-up to and in the aftermath of Aussiecon II. That, of course, was Melbourne stuff, which is a different world from Sydney.

Sydney fandom was primarily hedonistic. For an eighteen month stretch, around the time of Advention, every week had one or more parties. We were all students, or just-past-students, not particularly flush with money but not letting any shortage of it cramp our style. Getting to conventions meant whoever was driving took a car-full of others, while paying out for a whole hotel room just wasn't on the cards. Sleeping was done on floors of someone else's place, either in the hotel or a local fan. Money was for eating, at the plenitude of cheap 'bring your own bottle' ethnic eateries which are such a feature of Australian city life and the new ethos of multi-culturalism which sprang up after the abandonment in the early 70s of the bigoted 'White Australia' policy.

By contrast, Melbourne fandom seemed kind of literary and intellectual, and a few years older than the Sydney crowd. Melbourne fans like Leigh Edmonds and John Foyster, and Don, Derrick and Christine Ashby, murmured learnedly on panels, and Melbourne ran most of the conventions. They also produced things called fanzines, and had run the Aussiecon I worldcon in 1975, which had put people like Sydney's Jack Herman and Jon Noble in touch with the worldwide fandom and the global fanzine community, so that sometimes at parties they would wave around bits of coloured paper faintly printed, some of which were sort of interesting and some of which were apparently connected with a thing called ANZAPA.

Adelaide fandom seemed a suburb of Melbourne fandom, with people like Marc Ortlieb, Perry Middlemiss and Helen Swift, and Roman Orzsanski carrying on the same interest in books and fanzines. The newly born Perth fandom, on the other hand, took to the socio-hedonistic Sydney model. I put it down to climate -- the colder the weather, the more people tended to be serious-minded and inclined to sit huddled over a book. Warmer climes made them more likely to strip off, dance, dress up frivolously, and just loll about gossiping. By that rule, of course, it seemed that British fandom should take itself and its activities even more seriously than the Melbourne Adelaide axis did theirs; this indeed, I discovered, seemed the case. Sydney fandom had started up a monthly apa called Applesauce, in rivalry to ANZAPA, and which was joined by some enthusiasts from the other cities. Marc Ortlieb, in his *Q36* genzines, wrote about Special Agent Beiltro of TWAGA (Those Who Aren't Getting Any) in his quest to hunt down the immorality of a Toluzzi figure, an identity Peter immediately adopted for himself, dubbing himself an agent of TWIGI (Those Who Is Getting It).

Back then, at Easter 1981, most of Sydney fandom was sharing a room at the Advention hotel: seven of us, or maybe it was nine, so that each morning the floor was a rumbled mass of sleeping bags.

Sin City

In those days, the twin foci of Sydney fandom were the Sydney University Tolkien Society, and Dungeons & Dragons and its spawn of fantasy role-playing games. Dungeons & Dragons was played on Saturdays, from about noon until near dawn, in a room with brown carpeted floor and walls at the University of New South Wales, also dubbed 'Kenso Kinder' (for kindergarten). Most of the Australian capital cities, it seems, have an old university -- Sydney University, Adelaide University, Melbourne University, the University of Western Australia -- with dignified sandstone buildings forming arcaded cloisters around elegant green lawns. And they have a 'new' university -- Kenso Kinder, Flinders, Monash -- whose brutalist modern 60s blocks are set in windswept concrete. The new universities were strong on engineering and sociology, and bred radical unrest.

Tolkien Society, on the other hand, was very much Sydney University centred -- a happy little elitist clique which was fairly open to anyone who shared its peculiar set of interests, or could fill a part in the annual Tolkienfest performance in the University's Great Hall. Juliette Bentley would write a script for dramatising one of Tolkien's works, and illuminate a poster advertising it, and about fifty friends, relatives a few strangers would buy tickets to watch the two nights of performances. That is, until we did *The Hobbit* during a year it was on the school examination syllabus, and to our astonishment sold out both nights. Staging was medieval style minimalist, with modern stage lighting, which still seems the best treatment for

the material. But only the first dozen rows could really see and hear the performance.

Jack Herman was always the chief dwarf, whether Gimli or Thorin Strongarm. He was a career student politician, a debating society stalwart, a film buff with such command of trivia that he nearly landed himself a TV programme presenting late night old films for cognoscenti when that species of programme became the thing to show. As noted above, he was one of TolSoc's two main links to sf fandom, and its strange fanzine habit, and became Sydney's con-runner par excellence. Juliette Bentley, with knee-length platinum blonde hair and a singing voice, was our regular Galadriel and calligrapher. Mild-mannered William Good, another student politico, and lean bearded archaeologist Stephen Hart, when he wasn't digging up Jordan and Bahrain, alternated with each other as Gandalf and any king going: "*Fly, you fools, fly!*" was their catchphrase, to be answered: "*And was gone... Thud!*" Dragged down by the Balrog in the Mines of Moria, of course.

Champion swimmer Gregor Whiley looked effortlessly elfish -- that is, a typical lean, sun-blond surfer. Those who recall his Hugo winner predictions in one of Peter Toluzzi's three issues of *The Peter Principle*, or who read his Leninist commentary on *The Lord Of The Rings* in Jack Herman's relatively recent revival of the Tolkien Society's *The Eye* newsletter, will agree he could have been one of the great humorous fan-writers if only he weren't such a lazy bugger. Tony Green, given to babbling Anglo-Saxon and hitting his head with a zucchini when drunk or under influences, made a taller but more substantially built elf with added cynicism if he was not working lights and sound effects. The Whiley-Green *Shrunken Dwarf Blues* was one of those inventions impossible to recall sober, except the line about "*What's that stuff between your toes -- Oh, no, it's the squashed dwarf blues, yeah...*" Tony had broken up with me to move in with Brenda Beeby, later long-time SCA Herald in Adelaide. Brenda and I had played dwarf twins Fili and Kili in *The Hobbit*, and it seemed generally felt that Tony's move rather undermined our protestations that we were really not at all alike.

Gollum was certainly TolSoc's dramatically outstanding performer, crawling and spitting, creeping and begging -- "*What hasss it got in itsss pocketsesss... Give it to me, my preciouss!*" -- his costume mainly green paint and straggling matted hair. Of course, Smeagol would have to be an anarchist, and so our Gollum was. Blowed if I can remember his real name.

By that stage, TolSoc had lost Jon Noble, its other fanzine pioneer -- he'd been banished by the Education Department to teach at Broken Hill, a mining city in the desert interior of New South Wales, which seemed as much like Mordor as you could get in real life. Returning for occasional parties, Jon said he actually liked the place. But TolSoc had gained Jill Seaborn as Frodo, recruited from my Middle Welsh class, and the development of a real-life romance between her and her Sam gave an interesting twist to the close and faithful relationship Tolkien had described.

Between Tolkienfests, TolSoc played Dungeons and Dragons, so others in the D&D crowd had become part of its social world. Thus Grot (Dave Ramsbottom) and others were recruited as trolls having breakfast -- Troll 1: "*Have some porridge!*" Troll 2: "*What's in it?*" Troll 1: "*The cat liked it!*" Troll 3: "*The cat's in it!*" -- to be 'stoned' by the rising sun so thief Bilbo can sneak off with their treasure.

Peter Toluzzi, who won DUFF in 1982, was part of the D&D connection. When he lived with his parents up on the northern beaches he would be my lift home from the Kenso Kinder D&D nights. There was a wild surf'n'drugs culture up the northern beaches, where property values were for the seriously rich. Toluzzi was an amiable chap, wanted to be a science writer, often put his foot in it trying to oblige or impress others. Meron Clarke and Bob Kuhn, the other local Jewish fans who knew all the most sophisticated Jewish jokes, pointed out that the word 'klutz' could be defined by pointing to Tolutz. It was sad, but no real surprise, to hear of him getting seriously into messy orgies and messy drugs after he had moved to America.

At this time, too, TolSoc was organising the next Unicon -- Tolkon, a 3-day festival of the fantastic, which was to feature highlights from the Tolkienfests and live medieval jousts from Sydney's newly set-up society of the Current Middle Ages (later, in a defeat of the Herman-TolSoc tendency, absorbed by the US-based Society for Creative Anachronism bureaucracy, which seems determinedly anti-creative). Nonetheless, I gather the Small Giant-Class Liberation Army, and the Guild of Peasants and Nose-Pickers managed to continue. And a jolly good con it turned out to be.

Back To The Con

On Advention panels, Joseph retailed an elaborately developed, wholly novel and alien mythology

of Britfandom, featuring the mighty barbarian Rob Holdstock and his huge... faux pas, a bean-powered Rob Hansen, some Ratfan Pickersgill vomiting in people's shoes, a leaning D. West armed with Astral Pole, a Boy's Own Science Fiction Society publishing *Matron*, *Victor* and possibly *Tampax* and run by one Anal Dorey and some Harveys, and humorist purveyor of gossip Deaf Langford whose *Ansible* scandal sheet chronicled all this. Clearly, this world which called itself 'Britfandom' was using its 'Britfanzines' to package up and polish key figures and incidents into instant notoriety for an instant posterity. Taking fandom so seriously sounded rather fun.

Joseph's 'skiffy' lit-crit also drew on a more sophisticated world of discourse than I was used to. The Australian scene still is kind of short of published authors, let alone of real publishers, such as GUFF-loser Malcolm Edwards then just starting a career with Gollancz, and now in 1995 something directorial in the global Murdoch publishing empire. Leave aside the casual familiarities about sharing drinks at 'cons' with Brian Aldiss; Brunner -- apparently a bit of a bore though *Stand On Zanzibar* commanded respect; radical firebrand Ian Watson, and young Turks like Priest and Holdstock -- what impressed was Nicholas's fluency in a whole shorthand lingo of 'skiffy' which had clearly evolved into a self-referential world of its own. There seemed little barrier between the young Turk writers then making their mark, and the partying fans. Indeed, it was plain that the young Turks had just the other day been merely fans themselves. The Jackie Lichtenberg Appreciation Society, apparently linked to *enfants terrible* Priest and Platt, and running like wildfire through a whole British worldcon, more than equalled anything TolSoc had managed. And Priest, visiting Melbourne's Monaclave convention as an overseas writer guest of honour, had seemed so terribly grown up and serious.

It also seemed a social world which took itself far more seriously than the Australian milieu. Australians weren't talking about ourselves as 'fandom', let alone distinguishing among fanzine fans, con fans, media fans and other specialities. We had 'SF mobs' in the different cities, with the traditional rivalry between Melbourne and Sydney. Within cities there was some distinction between, in Sydney, the TolSoc crowd and Tony Howe's Sydney University Doctor Who Appreciation Society. This was reflected in who gathered into the various dinner groups heading off from the weekly Thursday evening gathering at Galaxy bookshop, which was then run by Shayne MacCormack with Ron Serdiuk as sidekick.

But a large national convention was a couple of hundred people. We had loose agglomerations of people interested enough in stories set on other, future or fantasy, worlds to get together for weekly or monthly informal meetings and dining together, for partying together and role-playing games, and for running or attending the occasional convention, or producing a newsletter or similar. There weren't quite enough of us to start splitting off into distant and hostile sub-tribes.

Have A Drink

Leafing through one of Ortlieb's *Q36* zines from back then, I find a reference to Advention being a "heavily programmed convention". One thing Australian and British conventions already had in common was a strong tradition of not bothering to go to panels unless you or your friends were on them, but to sit about outside gossiping. Of course, in the smaller Australian SF community, that meant you still had to go to a much higher percentage of the programming.

The big difference in the social ambience outside the programme was that in Britain there exists a tradition of an all-day bar, so Britfans expect to lurch about downing beer from breakfast until past midnight. In Australia, booze is usually consumed evenings only, and mainly at room parties. In British hotels, all alcohol is supposed to be bought from the hotel bar. Australian hotels are relaxed about supplies for room parties being brought in from an outside bottle shop (Brit: 'off-licence') where 4 litre wine boxes sell for less than the price of a 75cl wine bottle in Britain, whereas Australian hotel bars sell booze at the same sort of inflated mark-up as in restaurants.

The result is that booze plays a pivotal part in the British convention experience, which is why throwing up in each other's shoes and leaning over are so prominent in the Britfan mythos. In Australia, getting sloshed is something boring ockers and football louts do.

The Nicholas adaptation, fusing the two traditions, was to wander the con all day carrying one of the great Australian wineboxes, gently glazing over and growing perceptibly more atilt as the day wore on and the box emptied. His appreciative wonder at the cheap abundance of Aussie wine, let alone it being such good stuff, was immensely endearing -- particularly since one of the main uses of an overseas (or even interstate) visitor to Adelaide is to give the locals an excuse for a winery tour of the Barossa valley. And

sure enough, after the convention, Perry Middlemiss organised a coach to take us around such selected wineries as Wolf Blass, where an ecstatic Justin Ackroyd bought a couple of cases to take home with him.

Naturally, Jack Herman, Roman Orszanski and I organised a Tea-Con room-party, featuring Earl Grey, Lapsang Souchong and so on. We did so at most cons in those days. Quite how the custom started I don't recall -- presumably in a connoisseurial conversation about fine teas several conventions previously. Besides, Roman was and remains a dead ringer for Carroll's March Hare, while Jack, from his habit of generally wearing some form of sporty tweedy cap, was naturally enough known as "Mad Hatter". Meanwhile, my tendency to doze off in the midst of parties made me fair game for being dubbed "Dormouse".

This Convention, when it came to discussing what masquerade entry we should put together to follow up our triumph as Vegemite Junkies at the Perth Eastercon the previous year, we decided it was time to go for the obvious: the Mad Hatter's Tea-Party. Jack put all his hats on, plus a few extras he borrowed for the evening. Roman needed no costume, simply went as himself. I curled up in a sleeping bag as tea-cosy with closed eyes, and held on tight in it as the others dragged it along while they discussed blotting paper, best butter, treacle, watches, wells, and oh my ears and whiskers...

Naturally, we won a prize. Joyce Scrivner hinted later that the GUFF judge had seemed not entirely impartial in his judgement, but I put that down to sozzlement.

One of the other main spectacles of the Advention social programme was watching Marc Ortlieb and Melburnian Cath Circosta gently leaning together. It was no surprise that Marc soon moved to Melbourne, married Cath and ceased to produce fanzines. Three kids and job demands have something to do with it, of course. But Marc produced one of the classic insights into the human condition when he wrote: "My fanzine production runs in inverse proportion to the state of my life. A good year for making fanzines means it's been a bad year for me." And *vice versa*.

The other talking point was Mike McGann kicking through the door of a room party, trying to get at and beat up Leigh Edmonds and Valma Brown. Quite why he wanted to beat them up I've forgotten, and it may not have been entirely clear at the time. Mike was a prolific Sydney artist and t-shirt producer, whose figures of orcs and so on made up in vigour what they lacked in proportion. Mike seemed to start going off the rails after his romance with Linda Smith broke up, at a previous Adelaide convention, and she took refuge with the gentler Peter Toluzzi. They eventually had to get a police injunction barring McGann from the street where they took a flat, after several attempts by him to attack them. And of course, McGann had to be dropped from the Sydney party round, since you can't invite someone who will attack other guests.

And After

Convention over, Vera Lonegan and I took the GUFF winner up to the recreation of Old Sydney Town north of the city -- a collection of shacks on sand, their arrangement and dimensions faithful to early maps and descriptions of the colony, and populated by actors given roles to play up to for the tourists. Then we showed him around The Rocks area, which was what that first settlement had become in 1981, with the old Customs Bond Stores which remain from the early days given over to tourist boutiques and quaint eateries like Pancakes on the Rocks and The Old Spaghetti Factory. Compared to European cities, Sydney as a city offers little enough by way of sights. Its strong points are the scenery of its harbour and coastline, too much of which are obscured by buildings. Like most of Australia, you need to be visiting friends who will give you the local insight into what the natives think of what purport to be the sights, so the company makes up for the thinness of what is visible.

Vera threw a farewell party for him, from which I failed to get away until next morning, and then we took him off to the airport. After nine months of long letters, during which I got myself a full-time job to finance the trip, in March 1982 I flew off on the Australian coming-of-age ritual 'piss off overseas' visit to the old world, to see the background to all those BBC shows on TV, and to the novels we were dragged through at school, and to movies and history. After all, I could start off staying with him in London until I found my feet, and could see what this 'Britfandom' lark, with its Ratfans and Surrey Limpwrist and Silicons, actually amounted to. While tidying up for my arrival, he claims, the massive and inspired quarter-million-word first draft of his trip report went missing, and it has never been seen since.

That was thirteen years ago, and somehow I've never quite escaped back to my native ecosystem. As you know, reader, I married him.

THE LETTER COLUMN

Edited by Joseph Nicholas

Even before we'd mailed it out, we were telling ourselves that FTT 16 would probably be the least read of any issue -- Judith going on about the garden again, a letter column dominated by material about LETS schemes again, me locked in some long-winded and recondite exchange about the obscurer aspects of US foreign policy....on top of which, many of the North American copies seemed to take an unconscionable time to arrive. But one or two people stirred themselves to write in -- let's begin with a nice long letter from:

Pat Silver
1 Fenswood Cottages
111 Weston Road
Long Ashton
Bristol
Avon BS18 9AE

"What a nice surprise it was to receive FTT 16. My mail at present [*i.e.*, November 1994 -- *ed.*] consists mainly of rejection letters; in other words, I am one of the Great Unwaged Masses, having been made redundant from my old job. It gets depressing after a while to be told repeatedly that you are not wanted. I must admit, however, that I am in the fortunate position of not being completely destitute. Dave still has a job that pays reasonably well, and our mortgage is considerably less than the rent on our old house used to be. There isn't a lot of money to spare, but

we can pay the bills, eat pretty well (especially with the aid of vegetables from the garden), and have enough to spare to buy enough books to prevent withdrawal symptoms and to visit the local hostelry occasionally.

"I must admit, though, that I am enjoying not going out to work on a regular basis. There are so many things I enjoy doing that boredom is not likely to be a problem. Apart from anything else, the house needs a considerable amount of work doing on it, and there is a large garden and an allotment at the end of the row, not to mention my usual needlework and strange activities like constructing a 16-string lap-harp, practising classical guitar (I'm getting to be quite good, and very satisfying it is too), and hand-sewing historical costume. I was discussing this with a friend who has brought up a daughter single-handed, and we came to the conclusion that what we were really suited to was being old-fashioned farmers' wives: the sort who run the house, do most of the business negotiations for the farm, look after the chickens, etc.. Proper house-keepers, in effect, not the 50s' idea of the 'little woman' flicking a feather duster around in between coffee mornings.

"We went ahead with the house purchase earlier in 1994 despite the fact that my job was under threat. The house is about 250 years old, but it can't be dated more precisely than that because it was originally built as an estate-worker's cottage on the Smythe Estate, so didn't have individual deeds at the time. It's the end of a row of four, 2-up/2-down, but the rooms are 17 feet by 16 feet except for the one that was chopped off to make room for a bathroom upstairs. It is in basically reasonable condition, but had been neglected for some years so is rather scruffy looking. That's nice in some ways, since when we tear the kitchen apart to remake it, there won't be the terrible feeling that we are taking out something that was perfectly serviceable.

"The bathroom presents a slightly more difficult ethical problem as it has a perfectly serviceable bathroom suite, but the colour is unbelievably nasty -- a kind of cross between tangerine and pink -- and I don't think I can do anything with the rest of the room which will tone it down. I might call one of the charity furniture places and see if they can find a good home for it -- I don't mind giving it away, but I'd hate to dump it.

"I came across some wonderful wall tiles which have leaping frogs, and I have visions of a shadowy green bathroom complete with my usual collection of plants. Have you any suggestions about flooring material? Quarry tiles or similar are very cold, vinyl is dull, cork gets badly worn in a short time, carpet is definitely impractical as we're both inclined to spread water all over the place. I like the bathrooms we encountered in Finland in 1993 -- the Finns obviously concluded that bathrooms were places that got wet, so the entire room is made to deal with that, including a drain in the floor. No tiddley little shower cubicles with horrid clinging curtains: a Finnish shower gives you a real deluge and the whole bathroom is the shower area. I think they use underfloor heating so that the tiled (often small mosaic) floor doesn't freeze

your toes. If I had the space I'd install a sauna. I was introduced to saunas in Finland, and I'm a complete convert. I've never felt so clean and refreshed. We are considering a conservatory-extension at a later date, and it is at the back of my mind to make part of it into a sauna.

"We are inhabiting the big bedroom (room for our enormous futon and some bookshelves and a couple of comfortable wicker chairs), and the smaller upstairs room will become a library-cum-office. Neither of us is a tidiness freak (rather to the contrary), and so long as there is room in the house to escape from the other, neither of us has a great need for exclusive personal space. There is good music-playing equipment in the downstairs front room and the bedroom (we're both music-lovers, and each had good kit).

"The garden is 65 feet long and hasn't been cultivated for several years, so it took a fair bit of excavation. I don't like using chemicals in the garden if I can avoid it, but there were so many brambles and other perennial nasties that I figured a single application of a systemic weedkiller was justified as a one-off clearance. From here on, a hoe will keep things in order without too much trouble. We are about to plant several trees at the end, as we are overlooked by one of the buildings of the Long Ashton Research Station. They are primarily an arable crops research place, and are doing some fascinating work on cultivation methods to minimise the need for chemical use. Our next-door neighbours are the tractor (and other agricultural vehicle) drivers for the Station, so we get to hear about what they're doing. Anyway, the trees are going in at the end, there will be a pond somewhere in the middle which I hope to populate with frogs and minnows (there is already a toad, which was living in the garden wall), and lots of scented things. I have planted several old roses and lavender bushes, and there will be a jasmine growing along the side wall. Dave wants to plant 'minaret' fruit trees along the side, and whilst they are not as efficient as 'proper' trees they are rather fun and have the advantage that you can plant a number of different fruit trees in a very small space. The back wall of the house faces south, and I intend to have hops growing there. Never mind roses around the door, the idea of hops amuses me, and of course they have an eminently practical side to them as I enjoy making -- and drinking -- my own beer. I have planted my culinary herbs in a raised bed near the back door, and things like lovage reside in the side border.

"Vegetables are growing merrily on the allotment which is part of our property, but which is located at the other end of the row of cottages. We have a right of way across the ends of the other gardens to get to it. There is a very old Bramley apple tree on the allotment which gave us about 4cwt of apples in 1994 despite having been completely neglected for some years. The rest of the plot is about the size of a normal allotment. Soil here is a fairly light, silty loam. Easy to work, but needs a lot of organic material to stop it drying out too quickly. We only moved in here in late May, so this year I just threw any old seeds at it and let them get on with it while we concentrated on repointing the side wall of the house. It was very gratifying to get excellent crops of French beans, outdoor tomatoes, spring onions (I do lots of Chinese-style cooking, so use a lot of these), courgettes, and various odds and ends. Next year should be able to plan it better, and in the meantime some of the ground has broad beans and spring cabbage plants in it.

"Long Ashton is a village on the western edge of Bristol (just north of the A370 Weston-super-Mare road if you look at a map) and has somehow managed to retain something of a rural atmosphere. I simply cannot work out why the green welly brigade have ignored it; perhaps it is a bit too close to Bristol for them? Anyway, the result is that house prices are not actually astronomical. Ours was relatively cheap mainly because of its proximity to the Research Station, but it's not much different from living in town where you are always overlooked by someone, and in any case the Station people all go home at night. I've even been asked to join the WI, but I'm not convinced about that. In one way, it would be fun as it is quite obviously a central contact point for the village women, yet when I have done talks for WIs in the past (I talk about medieval food) they are usually all in their late fifties and awfully nice."

I am seriously jealous -- as who wouldn't be when comparing their 15 feet by 35 feet patch of ecosphere with the 65 feet possessed by another. (And you have an allotment as well!) Yet the curious aspect of this is that until we bought our house I hadn't the slightest interest in gardens or gardening. I was quite happy to sit out in them and read when summer weather permitted, but as to what was in them or what could be done with them...forget it. Perhaps it's ownership which confers such a change of attitude -- or even the process of growing older, leading one to put aside the idealistic political activism which characterised one's youth and concentrate instead on those parochial matters on which one can actually have an effect (or somesuch philosophical mauling). Pat continues:

Pat Silver
(address as before) "Judith's contemplations on growing up and reaching the age of forty rang bells with me, as I am rapidly approaching that birthday. Despite the fact that I am intent on following my Dad's philosophy, which is to enter my second childhood before I leave my first, it has prompted a certain amount of soul-searching. I used to laugh at the 'mid-life crisis', but it does seem as though you reach a point where something makes you look at where you have been so far, and where you want to go from here.

"I must admit that I was horrified at detecting the first real signs of ageing in my mid-thirties. Like Judith, it is the injuries that don't heal quite so fast as they used to; the knee that I took to pieces so comprehensively a few years ago coming back to haunt me. My hair has been greying since my early twenties, so that doesn't worry me in the least. I actually rather like having mostly white hair; it's much more interesting than my original mousy brown.

"In my case, the ageing process is rather more poignant since my partner is 12 years younger than I and I am very much aware that he is going to watch me age while he is still 'young'. I make jokes about being a poor old Pig' when we go wilderness walking, but it is only half-joking as I find that I really can't go as fast as I used to, and that I don't recover as fast either. One balance, however, I can thoroughly recommend having a younger partner; it is impossible to turn into a boring old fart when you have a young, adventurous companion who won't allow you to ossify! (Our latest exploit is caving!)"

If it's any encouragement, you could always take a leaf out of my book: I long ago decided that I didn't have time to die, because there's just too much to see and do!

Neil K Henderson
46 Revoch Drive
Knightswood
Glasgow G13 4SB "I enjoyed 'On Being Grown Up at Last' -- though it reminds me that my own 'Big Four-O' is only a year and a half away, and there is absolutely *no chance* of my being grown up by then. (The best time to be grown up is five minutes after you're dead, I reckon.)

"I was drooling with envy at the description of the pond. My council house garden won't allow for one, but come the day my true identity as the Emperor of Strathclyde is revealed, and a duly obeisant nation provides me with a small-but-dignified castle to call my own, I shall make with the spade and the plastic moat-liner and get me a watery ecosystem -- I've always been aquatically inclined. (Now I come to think of it, Bingham's Pond in Glasgow is situated close to the grounds of a Victorian-built mental hospital. Maybe the nation could settle me there, once my Imperial Condition is fully recognised.)"

Walt Willis
32 Warren Road
Donaghadee
Northern Ireland
BT21 0PD "I enjoyed Judith's description of your new home and its surroundings. I'm tempted to warn you that a day will come when, for example, your nice new pond will be invaded by blanket weed and overgrown by your plants. This what happened to ours, which has been taken over by the water lilies so that we can hardly see the blanket weed for the lily leaves. I no longer have the strength to clean it out and will have to pay a man to do it next spring, removing also about half a ton of leaves fallen from the trees. I forgot to mention that our fish have long since been taken by herons. And don't pay attention to pet shop owners who tell you that herons can be deterred by the presence at your pond of a plastic model heron which convinces herons that the place is taken. In County Down at least, the herons are far too downy birds to be taken in by this stratagem.

"You are absolutely right, though, about the magic and mystery of ponds. You have already experienced this with the arrival of your frogs, and you will eventually conclude that you have no idea what is in your pond. There might be anything. It reminds me of the cartoon of Snoopy gazing into his water bowl. A little bird asks him what he is looking for, and he replies 'Would you believe the lost cities of Atlantis?'"

The blanket weed in our pond had been lurking around the roots of the water lily and the water hawthorn and was discovered by accident: I couldn't see the bottom of the pond any more, and encountered it when I stuck in my hand to find out why. But the water lily, far from overgrowing the rest of the pond, may have been outcompeted by the water hawthorn and the floating oxygenators: it had a lot of leaves during the summer, had lost the lot by late autumn, and showed no signs of life during the first few weeks of spring (while the water hawthorn, having similarly reduced its foliage, is sprouting anew). I hope this is simply

a reaction to winter; if not, we shall have to ransack our pond care books for some guidance as to what may have gone wrong (albeit that anything said in any one of them is invariably contradicted by all the others).

But we won't have to worry about herons predated our fish, because we don't intend to add any. For one thing, the pond is too small; for another, adding fish would only increase the time and effort we'd have to spend on maintaining the ecosystem. Wandering frogs are good enough for us -- and we hope that enough of them will survive the winter to favour us with some frogspawn in the spring.

Martin Gittins
22 Dunoon Road
Reddish
Stockport
Cheshire SK5 7HA

"It's great to hear you've got yourself a good house -- envy, envy. I'm still living in the land of rent, but hopefully might get around to buying somewhere in 1995. It's good to see you're not being influenced by the media fear machine in choosing to live in Tottenham. The press and TV are always trying to up the fear quotient, but it's when you live there that you find the places have a remarkable sense of community and vitality. I speak as someone who spent two years living in Handsworth, a very multi-racial area, just near Lozells, the site of riots in the early eighties and in that respect Birmingham's equivalent to Tottenham. Now I'm living in a fairly suburban part of Stockport and kind of miss the street life of Handsworth."

Alan Sullivan
30 Ash Road
Stratford
London E15 1HL

"I've never regarded home ownership as a sign of maturity. It's a vital necessity. Whatever you're doing, wherever you go, you need a base of operations. A place to come back to, for purposes of recovery. A place to store all your stuff (books, for example). Above all, a secure place of your own, when you're no longer in a position to go out and work for a living (your pension is *never* going to pay your rent). Naturally, it makes sense to put some effort into the care and upkeep of a place of your own, once you get hold of it (or it gets hold of you -- being a householder is a very intensive business).

"I nearly moved myself, recently, but the need seems to have disappeared for now. I didn't want to go, anyway (the place I'm in is pretty dire, but it's cheaper and easier to stay). Unless I really have to go, or have a real opportunity to make the move worthwhile, I plan to stay put. A self-contained flat would be nice, though, or a small house. A place of my own.... Must be all this talk of home ownership; I'm starting to sound broody, like young couples do when people start talking about kids and the joys of family life.

"Packing for a move does have its good points, though. It forces you to get ruthless over all that junk you've been hoarding, and wouldn't part with. Even my recent 'housing hiccup' made for a good solid clear-out. It's a major exercise in forward planning, which you have to start implementing six months before you actually decide to start looking for a place to move into. Then you get on to the fun and games involved with actually moving all that stuff from point A to point B. (I bet they never had logistics problems like during D-Day.) I speak as someone who's only had to move house a couple of times. What it's like for those who have a dozen or so moves behind them, I dread to think. Either they must have regular nervous breakdowns, or they are hardened to the experience.

"Most of the stress I've observed in people moving and/or buying a house is the bureaucracy involved. The Powers That Be play you about something rotten over *everything*. To add insult to injury, most of the time it seems to be for no other reason than they they *can*. It doesn't matter whether it's the people helping you to get the place, the people who are supplying your furniture, or the utilities suppliers; they don't seem to have got the hang of this 'change of address' business yet.

"But life's little complications are what makes it interesting -- in the Oriental sense, that is. For example, right now I don't know where I stand, in terms of house and home. First, the building society says the place is being repossessed; then the landlord returns from his holiday overseas, at the last minute, begs those who have not moved out to stay, and says he will sort things out. We are awaiting developments, with some trepidation."

It's been suggested that buying a house, next to getting married or divorced, is one of the most stressful things you can do. I didn't find marriage at all stressful, but in the month or two before the purchase was completed I kept waking up at around four or five o'clock in the morning and lying there, unable to get back to sleep, worrying about everything that could possibly go wrong....most of it completely imaginary!

Darroll Pardoe
36 Hamilton Street
Hoole
Chester
Cheshire CH2 3JQ

"Back in the early seventies, Ro and I lived in Tottenham for two and a half years, in a street off Bruce Grove. It was an interesting place then, all Cypriots and West Indians, and from what you say it appears to be interesting still. We were just over the wall from Broadwater Farm: literally. There was a twenty foot high wall a few feet from our bathroom window. The only trouble we ever had was when a football came sailing over the wall one day and smashed the aforesaid bathroom window.

Nobody ever came to collect the ball, which was hardly surprising when you consider that to get from one side of the wall to the other involved a journey of perhaps a mile and a half.

"I'm glad to hear that the horse trough survives beside the High Road. I used to pass it every day on my way down to Seven Sisters.

"Joseph puts his finger right on one of the biggest disadvantages of an insurance-based healthcare system, which is what happens if you get a long-term problem such as MS. They aren't going to want to know, because it is one hundred percent guaranteed to lose them money. I still can't see what is wrong with the original concept of the NHS: free to all users, and funded out of general taxation. Okay, you will want strict financial discipline to make sure that the money is being spent wisely, which is something that was often lacking in the 'old-style' NHS. But there is really no excuse for the way the NHS is being taken over by 'suits' nowadays, and the government is squarely to blame for it. Too much administration is having a demoralising effect on the people who actually do the work (at least in the tiny bit of the NHS I'm privileged to be able to see for myself, though I have no reason to suppose that the rest is any different). They are having to put in more hours with less resources and at the same time take orders from people who have no background of service to the patients."

Brian Earl Brown
11675 Beaconsfield
Detroit
Michigan 48224
USA

"The Republicans are hot to make people on welfare go to work, while conveniently ignoring that welfare pays better benefits than most minimum wage jobs and that in any case there are damn few jobs out there. And while there are lots of things that need doing, the Republicans are so opposed to any kind of government outlay that they would oppose the creation of a new Civil Conservation Corps to employ the unemployed to do that work. On the whole, it seems that the sole principle of the Republican new right is tax avoidance. They don't want to pay taxes for people who don't work, and they don't want to pay taxes to put them to work. They complain about the high cost of their health insurance, but won't vote for universal health insurance, not understanding that their current high premiums (and God, they are high for the self-employed or the small business group) are high because they fund *de facto* universal coverage. Nobody is denied emergency healthcare, but the bills for indigent patients are rolled into the overhead for paying customers. The Republican right are an incredible bunch of misers.

"Like Harry Andruschak, I'm a civil servant, and my health insurance dangles on the need to balance someone else's deficit. Many of the complaints about Clinton's proposed healthcare reforms were complaints about being forced into a Health Maintenance Organisation, but the only people I could see had grounds for complaint would be doctors not affiliated to one. The range of subjects covered by an HMO health plan does depend on the individual contract, but diabetes, high blood pressure, even alcoholism are covered by most standard contracts. The real crime about current American health insurance is the pre-existing condition dodge which lets companies blackball anyone who might actually be an expense. It would be simple enough to ban this dodge, and long past time that it was."

Vicki Rosenzweig
33 Indian Road, 6-R
New York
NY 10034, USA

"I agree with Joseph's point that the 'bottom line' questions which conservatives use to argue against any version of National Health are the wrong questions. Among other things, they don't account for the costs to everyone of not treating contagious diseases; how do you quantify the expense of one untreated tuberculosis case, which in turn leads to the infection of several more people? (Even in purely

monetary terms, refusing to treat one person without health insurance, and eventually having to treat several people who do have insurance, is a net loss.) But it also occurs to me to ask why Harry Andruschak expects me (as both a taxpayer and customer of the Post Office) to pay for him to have health insurance that is better than most other Americans get, and may be better than I'm getting (though my own coverage is fairly good, at least by US standards). At least some of the people who are helping to pay for his healthcare, through their use of the postal services, get nothing at all. I don't really see why he thinks it's

proper for me to have to pay a share of his costs, when he isn't prepared to pay a share of mine, or a share of any other random American's. But I don't mean to single out Harry; the US is full of people who take for granted the health insurance they have, while thinking that giving similar insurance to everyone is either impossible or a threat to their benefits. I seriously think the largest problem with implementing a decent, single-payer style plan here will be finding new jobs for all the displaced workers at the insurance companies, but perhaps the hospitals could put them to work cleaning up, keeping track of people's X-rays, and doing other useful things which don't require medical training."

To Britons, of course, this discussion about 'who pays' and who gets 'better care' is slightly perplexing, firstly because of the tendency of any scheme funded from general taxation to mask the fact of payment from those who use it, and secondly because under such a scheme everyone is entitled to the same standard of care. Or should be entitled -- in practice, the NHS is very bad at treating non-life-threatening ailments like ingrowing toenails or nasal polyps, for which patients are put on lengthy waiting lists, but extremely good when it comes to emergencies such as heart attacks and road traffic accidents, when patients are rushed into surgery without delay. Part of this differential, however, arises less from the fact that the demand for healthcare is unlimited, while resources are not, as from the deliberate underfunding of the NHS over the past sixteen years by a government ideologically obsessed with driving down public spending and forcing people into private care instead. Private patient schemes were once only for the well-to-do; now they pitch themselves more insistently at the middle classes, siphoning off greater numbers of patient groups and allowing the government to run the NHS down further, slowly transforming it into a second-tier (and thus second-rate) service for the indigent and other 'under-achievers'. To echo Darroll Pardoe: there is nothing wrong with the original concept of the NHS...which a change of government and/or increased funding might begin to restore.

Walt Willis (address as before) "I could not claim anything like your knowledge of economics, but it does seem to me that socialism is due to make a comeback, having been thrown away with the bathwater of the Soviet system. The example which occurs to me is the local municipal garbage collection system, where the local dustmen and their cart have been replaced by a high-tech system of wheelie bins and ambitiously expensive lorries for emptying them. All this is paid from the wages 'saved' from the redundant dustmen, who then become a charge on the state. If the municipality had to pay their unemployment the arithmetic would look very different, and this does not take account of the social costs of making redundant a number of unskilled labourers."

Or, as Ford Madox Ford said when he heard of the Bolshevik Revolution, 'This has set the cause of socialism back by seventy years'. It may take another generation for the Stalinist stigma to wear off, and for the equalitarian arguments which underpin socialism to re-emerge in their clearest form, although the current epidemic of corporate 'downsizing' and the increasing casualisation of all forms of employment (for the middle as well as the working classes) may hasten this process -- as may the 'race for the bottom' to be ushered in by GATT's ultra-free trade regime, under which anything which appears to hinder the free movement of goods and capital can be deemed protectionist and therefore disposable (so goodbye health and safety legislation, minimum wage and maximum working hours statutes, trade union rights, paid holidays, employers' social security contributions, and everything else capitalism grudgingly granted its workforce to blunt the perceived revolutionary threat from the left).

But would a GATT-induced rise in both absolute and relative poverty in the developed world promote the same arguments for socialism as a hundred years ago? I rather think not, since the cultural and economic context is sufficiently different for those arguments to now have little purchase. For one thing, they were largely won through the workplace -- whereas the manner in which work is now organised (and in which the corporate elites envisage it should in future be organised) means that the concept of a 'workplace' per se is almost redundant, which in turn means that organising to win those arguments is considerably more difficult. For another thing, the original arguments for socialism were forged at a time when politics was dominated by mass-based parties claiming to represent the interests of particular socio-economic classes, whereas the politics of the past few decades has been characterised by much more individualistic, issue-based campaigns.

My guess, therefore, is that future arguments for a more equalitarian society are likely to be based

rather more on the ideas which surround LETS schemes and other "own work" forms of employment than socialism as we've known it: something more locally responsive and more individually scaled than an argument for a minimum wage or a state retirement pension. At present, LETS schemes offer a way out of the poverty and idleness that come with unemployment; but GATT's MNC-driven agenda may well intensify a desire on the part of larger numbers of people to cut themselves as free as possible of a system which regards them as mere units of production to be manipulated and discarded at whim. Not so much that the workers have nothing to lose but their chains as nothing to regain but their economic autonomy and sense of self-worth.

Which is perhaps an overlong and overly intellectual response to one short paragraph. But it's part of an argument I want to pursue in response to several letters here; that which follows principally sought information about GUFF for display the 1996 Worldcon, but makes other relevant comments:

• Don Fitch
3908 Frijo
Covina
California 91722
USA

"I'm especially interested in fan travel funds because I'm pessimistic about the effect on fandom of the current US and world economic pattern -- the apparent trend towards the reduction of the broad (economic) middle class (from which most fans come) with the lower half of it being forced into the poverty class is bad enough, but the remaining middle class seems to be undergoing great pressure to work well over forty hours per week in order to stay there, so members of it have little time for reading, fanac, or other hobbies. Actually, even if the scenario I picture is valid, I'll probably be dead by the time the effects are overwhelming (about thirty years, most likely), but already I believe I can perceive a change for the worse in fandom as the percentage of affluent people in it increases. Talent and fannishness bear no necessary relationship to high income, and ought not to be limited by it; but what ought to be and what is are, sadly, two different things.

"One might hope that the Top Predators -- the very wealthy people who are coming to run the world -- will soon decide that it's not really to their advantage to export work and jobs to cheap labour countries and (in the process) reduce the market for their products in the more developed countries, but that can't be counted on....nor can one entirely reject the possibility that they're actually motivated by altruism, and are attempting to improve the living standards of the less developed areas of the world."

The "Top Predators" might well decide that it's not in their long-term interests to pursue the downsizing of their workforces and the transfer of production to less regulated regions of the globe, but for them to reach this conclusion would require a degree of vision which on present evidence they appear not to possess. The short term rules, and immediate profits and dividends are prized more than investment and innovation; and thus they show only that they have forgotten -- if indeed they ever learned it -- the dictum which Henry Ford internalised at the very onset of the era of Fordist mass-production: that his producers were also his consumers, and that if he didn't pay his workers enough they could never afford his cars....and that he would therefore go out of business once the luxury market had been satiated.

It probably is the case that many fans are middle class in their aspirations and socio-economic outlook, and they therefore share the same misfortunes which are befalling ever large chunks of it -- a class which was quite happy, during the Thatcher-Reagan years, to see the vicissitudes of redundancy and short-term working visited upon the lower classes in the name of "labour market flexibility" and "international competitiveness" yet which is now beginning to experience these things for itself and has discovered they're not so desirable after all. Thus does Galbraith's "Culture of Contentment" -- the manufactured consensus under which the middle classes have been convinced that their interests are identical with those of the corporate elites which exploit them -- begin to fragment; a fragmentation hastened along, at least in the UK, by the recent outburst of boardroom greed, in which already overpaid chief executives and managing directors award themselves huge bonuses and collect giant share options merely for going into work three days a week.

But is society itself, and social cohesion, fragmenting faster than the Culture of Contentment? As a growing number of social commentators are pointing out, the pursuit of wage and labour flexibility is inimical to the maintenance of the social stability offered by the compact between labour and capital which ushered in the post-World War Two economic boom. With the prospect, if not of a job for life then at least secure long term employment, and the knowledge that healthcare and social security responsibilities would be borne by the state, people had the freedom to plan ahead, to acquire what The Guardian's Will Hutton

calls the "three great prizes" of the middle classes: mortgages, marriages and families. Take away the security offered by stable employment and career patterns, however, and the ability to plan ahead is also removed. People won't risk major investments, in houses and cars, children and foreign holidays, if they aren't sure they'll still be employed in six months or a year's time. The result will be a decline in headline economic activity, which in turn will push employers to squeeze costs further; meaning more casualisation and more unemployment, leading to a further decline in headline economic activity; and so on.

In the longer-term, this flatness will show up in the most intriguing way: in the demographics. If increasing swathes of the middle classes cease to have children because they consider them unaffordable, the mean age of the population will creep upwards, requiring a growing retired population to be supported by a shrinking working population -- which, if paid less, will naturally wish to transfer the burden of care to the state, which in turn would no longer have the revenue base to undertake that care. A possible method of squaring this circle, as suggested by Martin Woollacott in The Guardian for 11 January 1995, might be to abolish the concept of retirement, and where it cannot be abolished to wage confiscatory war against the aged, "cutting state pensions, higher taxes on incomes, and extracting money for health, custodial and terminal care... For the old in the future, apart from a handful of the rich, life may increasingly be a matter either of indigence, or of a special form of terminal tax evasion, spending or passing on assets before the state seizes them to pay for healthcare".

The other method of squaring the circle would be to reconstruct society accordingly. Were we your average Trotskyist sectarians, we'd be calling for armed popular insurrection to overthrow the fascist Majorite junta and usher in workers' democracy throughout the sevagram (or whatever other old bollocks is preached in the unreadable jargon-choked so-called newspapers they sell outside the supermarkets on Saturday mornings); instead we publish refined and articulate fanzines such as this, in which the issues can be discussed over a glass of fine wine (well, I'm drinking one as I type this) with some carefully selected music playing in the background (Madder Rose and The Heartthrobs, actually).

In the meantime, let's scale back the intellect-o-meter and hear from a bona fide victim of the present system who anecdotally reflects some of the issues discussed above:

Pat Silver
(address as before) "I have just been called to the six-month interview at the unemployment office, or whatever they are calling it this week. The letter orders me to provide proof that I am 'actively seeking work'. Since about two-thirds of the jobs I apply for don't bother to answer, how is one supposed to *prove* that one has really applied? I could quite simply construct 150 letters on my computer and say I'd sent them all. I intend producing all the reject letters I have, plus a printout list of all the jobs I have applied for, and they can argue about it from there. The other thing I find ominous is the wording on the form you have to fill in, which says quite clearly that you are not permitted to limit in any way the type of job, the location or the wages you are looking for, and that if you do they may deem that you have limited your chances of obtaining work. In other words, you might be a fully qualified engineer but you are supposed to apply for things like copy typing, on the grounds that you have keyboard skills and therefore must apply for those types of jobs as well as engineering posts. I'm in an invidious position in that I don't have any professional qualifications nor yet a degree, so it is very difficult to counter the pressure to take dreary jobs at derisory pay. Having large quantities of intelligence, common sense and organisational ability doesn't apparently count for anything.

"Something I have been (fairly gently so far) pushed at is becoming self-employed. 'They' are terribly keen to send 'jobseekers' on a course to teach them how to run their own business, but then they expect them to *start* their own business, so they are very reluctant to let them sign back on as unemployed after the course. Once you've been paying a self-employed National 'Insurance' (hah hah) stamp, you can't claim unemployment benefit anyway. And most of the businesses started as a result of the course give their owners an income rather lower than basic unemployment money. If I thought there was a chance of making a go of it and could come up with a sensible idea, I would give it a go, but in the current economic situation, forget it. I'll keep growing the vegetables -- which as you are no doubt aware are actually worth a surprising amount of money if you add up what you'd otherwise spend in the greengrocer's. And they're pretty good barter goods, too."

And here's some further anecdote, from a former victim of the previous system:

Derek Pickles
44 Rooley Lane
Bankfoot
Bradford
West Yorkshire
BD5 8LX

"I was a youngster in the Depression of the Thirties and know at first-hand what it was like. My father, as did his father, worked at Ripley's Dyeworks in Bradford -- the then largest dyeworks in the world -- and coming out of his apprenticeship at 21 (after seven years full-time low pay) went immediately onto half-time working. The 'long week' was Monday, Wednesday and Friday, and the 'short week' was Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday morning. The days he didn't work he had to go down and sign on at one of the few new buildings in the city centre, the Labour

Exchange. There was a large forecourt between the building and the pavement, and one of my earliest memories as a very small child is of sitting on his shoulders in one of the huge queues that filled the forecourt. We didn't starve, and we didn't go about in rags, but we survived because my mother worked full-time as a weaver in the mill, 7.30am to 5.00pm and Saturday mornings. We even had several cheap holidays at Blackpool and Bridlington where we stayed with families, brought our own food and the lady of the house cooked it. This is where the phrase "sixpence for the cruet" comes from. I do know that whenever we visited my grandparents there was a threepenny bit (silver) slipped into my hand and a tin or a small parcel in my mother's bag for us to bring home. We also went for meals every weekend, not just for the social visit but because it meant we didn't have to buy the food and cook it."

Or, to put it another way: when modern conservatives such as Major and Portillo talk of labour market flexibility, Derek's experiences are exactly what they have in mind (their lack of first-hand knowledge of the Thirties ensuring that their theoretical pronouncements on the desirability of such an economic regime may remain untroubled by the facts). And it's exactly what GATT will deliver too, if we let it, completing capitalism's destruction of the social bond in the name of profit and greed -- as John Gray, Fellow of Jesus College, Oxford, explained in The Guardian on 8 March 1995: "Globalisation is bound to undermine communities and to endanger the cohesion of society as a whole. It fosters a small elite whose economic interests do not coincide with, and may indeed conflict with, those of the rest of society. It cuts markets off from their underlying cultures and severs them from the livelihoods of any particular locality or region. Above all, it removes markets from any form of political control or popular accountability and thereby closes off from communities any possibility of protecting their livelihoods and ways of life from the shifting fortunes of the world market. To accept the globalisation of the economy is, in effect, to make the survival of communities everywhere conditional on changes in a world market which cares nothing for the stabilities of the societies it exists to serve." Yet there are many in the Labour Party (particularly the Parliamentary Labour Party) who believe that GATT will deliver the cost-free growth necessary to implement the redistributive agenda on which the Party is founded, presumably from a failure to comprehend that under GATT's rules the mechanisms by which that agenda would be carried through would be deemed "anti-competitive" and therefore illegal. Yet to embrace free trade is ipso facto to wish to become another Mexico.

In a second letter, responding to some criticisms of the Labour Party's alienation from the younger generation, Derek expanded on his and his relatives' work experiences:

Derek Pickles
(address as before)

"I admire your optimism and hope that you are around to see the real 'revolution'. I worked and canvassed in 1945 for what we all thought was *the* revolution. My parents had struck in the General Strike, and never forgave the TUC leaders for caving in. The strike was solid in the textile mills, and my mother was proud until the day she died of the way all the women and girls walked out of the weaving shed in a body.

"My great-great-grandfather was a Chartist. My great-grandfather worked in foundries, was blacked in Manchester for union activities so walked to Bradford where he got a job in an iron and steel stockholders. The men asked him to represent them in asking for a rise, he did, and was sacked on the spot for being an 'agitator' and blacked in Bradford. He then worked in a pit along with his sons, one of whom was crippled when a young man after being hit by a runaway tub underground. Mt grandfather started work at nine years of age and walked three miles, in the dark through a wood, to work as a 'trapper' down a mine. A 'trapper' was a lad who sat all his shift in an alcove in the tunnel wall opening and clsoing a door so that the correct ventilation was maintained along the different shafts and tunnels.

"My great-uncle was a councillor and alderman on Bradford council for thirty years and was a founder-member of the Independent Labour Party and remained a member until 1946 when he and his ILP

councillor colleagues joined the Labour Party. He also founded with two brothers-in-law (one of them my grandfather) Tong Socialist Club, which is still going strong. My mother was a Labour councillor in Bradford for two terms in the 1960s although she also unsuccessfully fought several safe Tory seats. I joined the Labour Party when I was sixteen and was a founder-member of my then Ward Party and have held all the offices in it. I founded the Ward Labour League of Youth and the Bradford LLoY. I knew Betty Boothroyd when she was sixteen and in the Dewsbury LLoY; in fact, I'm sure that she was, with me, in a party of LLoY members who spent Christmas in Tong Hall (an eighteenth century building) in Bradford.

"I'm unable to help in election work now. I can't even address -- or rather stick labels on -- election addresses, and I can't walk around canvassing. I started in elections carrying the wooden 'pop' (soft drinks) box for my great-uncle to stand on in the middle of the street -- there were very few cars in 1946 -- to address the people who came to their doors when I rang the brass bell.

"The point of all this family history is that I was brought up with a background of Methodist Christian Socialism when Labour councillors had been brought up on the *Clarion* and had a clear vision of the New Jerusalem. I still retain some of the attitudes, although they are severely strained at times. The late Bob Cryer was my local MP, and although I didn't agree with all his views I respected him for believing in something and *consistently* fighting for it without trimming or prevaricating."

Whereas the only thing which at present seems to animate the Parliamentary Labour Party is the prospect of power following the next general election. Vision? Ideas? Policies? We don't want any of those, thank you very much.

The original plan at this point was to type up some extracts from the four letters we received which commented on my exchange with Taras Wolansky (all but two of those from which I've quoted so far either ignored it or said they found it too tedious to bother with), but a sudden lack of interest in the issue has thwarted this intention. (None of the four supported Wolansky -- one thought him incapable of recognising any faults in the US and a second found his reasoning "morally bankrupt and fatally flawed" -- but two had reservations about some of my arguments, which they considered were rather emotive and showed too much of a tendency to follow Wolansky down the same irrelevant side-alleys.) Similar themes may be pursued in future, however, if Wolansky ever writes in again, although spies suggest that he may now be spending his time copying the correspondence to anyone who expresses an interest. We're advised, for example, that at a Boston convention in February an extraordinary number of people seemed familiar with it -- people whose names are quite unknown to us, and who have never been on our mailing list. Should some sort of massed counter-attack be expected, one wonders....or should one just get on with the interesting things in life, and leave these strange US conservatives to themselves?

Another reason for not printing any comments about the Nicholas-Wolansky exchange is that this letter column is quite long enough. But before we swing into the WAHFs, let's hear again from:

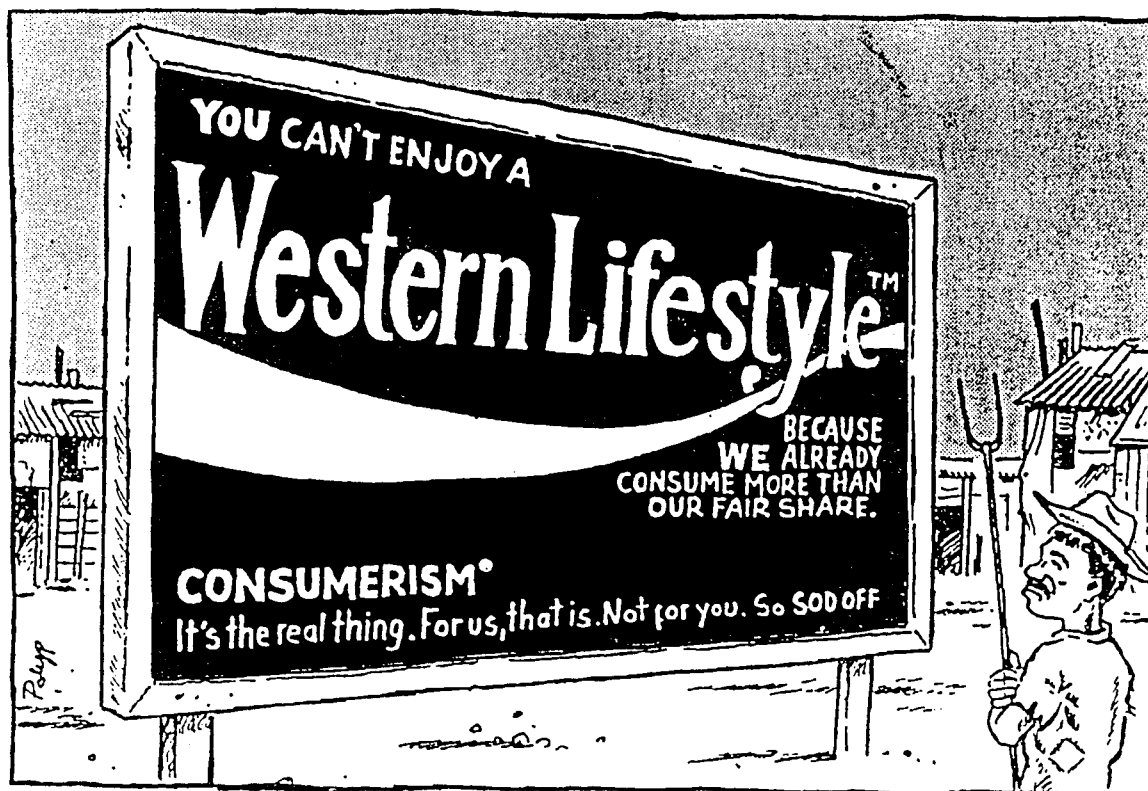
Alan Sullivan (address as before) "‘Loonywatch’ is still one of my favourite parts of *FTT*, (the bit I tend to look at first of all, unless anything really catches my eye in the contents). These politicians, they do the craziest things. In fact, the only thing I can't understand is why they don't get a TV comedy slot of their own, and earn an honest living. It would be much better than letting them continue to try to run the country, since this is a job for which they clearly have a complete and utter lack of talent."

And a complete and utter lack of talent for making interesting speeches -- Hansard is not quite as full of wit and wisdom as the bits we quote might suggest!

But let's have those WAHFs: Monika Best, Sheryl Birkhead, Pamela Boal, Chester Cuthbert ("I can assure Harry Andruschak that time spent studying economics and investments would do a great deal to enable him to quit worrying about paying his bills. The sole purpose of an economic system should be to enable people to live as comfortably as possible. Only insistence on favouring the rich prevents capitalism from doing this" -- damn right), Lilian Edwards ("I thought I'd put in a note asking if you'd had any thoughts about coming to the Worldcon" -- yes, we had: it's far too expensive, so we're staying at home), Elizabeth Garrott ("I had to read the description of your new house out loud to keep from slobbering over the fanzine"), Michael Hailstone ("I'll send my fanzines out to whomever I bloody well want and it has

utterly *nothing* to do with you and is none of your business. You don't own the people on your mailing list so who the fuck do you think you are taking it on your yourselves to apologise to those who received *Busswarble*. If people don't want my fanzine, they are quite free to choose not to respond" -- *bit of an overreaction there, we fear*), Chuck Harris, ("I already have a fecund foxglove"), and Teddy Harvia ("Republican politicians believe that in America everyone has the opportunity to become rich and if someone isn't then it's their own fault. Poor Republican voters will eventually realise they've been duped when they stay poor" -- *but a theory of "belated realisation" doesn't explain why the working classes continue to vote for parties whose economic policies aren't addressed to them, such as the skilled manual workers who've kept the Conservatives in power here since 1979*).

And Steve Jeffery ("I have to admit to Michael Hailstone's being one of the few fanzines I have never responded to. It struck me as sad and silly, and I really couldn't be bothered to argue with it. I suppose that makes me part of The Conspiracy"), Brant Kresovich, Dave Langford, Par Nilsson ("Your fanzine is always fascinating, and this issue's 'Loonywatch' was hilarious"), Lloyd Penney ("A Thomson update for Eric Mayer -- employees at *The Oshawa Times* struck for better pay and working conditions. Thomson didn't even hear their demands; they simply shut the paper down. The suddenly unemployed paper workers have now produced their own weekly paper called *The Independent*. There's Canadian labour and employer relations at their worst"), David Redd ("I think I've solved this issue's competition: the 'fleeting mention of skiffy' is at the bottom of page 14, and I claim the prize!" -- *too clever by half, these professionals!*), Yvonne Rousseau ("*FTT 16* arrived here on 4 November -- I enjoyed it immensely and immediately -- today (20 December) I prepared (by rushing about and hurling things this way and that) to write a letter of comment, and behold! -- once again the fate of fanzines addressed to me-and-John-both has overtaken an *FTT* -- it can't be found"), D M Sherwood (*a handwritten missive which took ages to decipher*), Chris Terran, Sue Thomason ("Life is currently fairly quiet here -- it feels close to the north-east edge of the world, especially in November. Dark, dank, drizzly and depressing...." -- *little different from Spring in London at the time this letter column was compiled, by the sound of it*), and Alexander Vasilkovsky ("Browsing through *FTT* I caught myself thinking how scholastic the discussions are, even those that concern the hottest problems of today's life. I think of your zine as metaphysically polemical, a *jeu d'esprit* for people who those problems will never take by the throat" -- *the inevitable consequence, perhaps, of having the leisure to publish a fanzine in the first place, although I rather like the dry, detached, slightly academic tone I've developed over the years*). Our grateful thanks to you all!



TWO INTERLINKED ARGUMENTS

Joseph Nicholas

This is the promised "second half" of the article which appeared in FTT 15, although it may not seem so. Readers who recall that article may wonder what any of the following has to do with its meditations on economy and community; but the thematic connections will I hope become obvious as they read on. (Trust me on this!)

WAITING FOR THE GREAT LEAP FORWARD

At Christmas 1993, we finally succumbed to the onward march of technology and, grudgingly aware that vinyl was becoming extinct, bought a CD player -- and then, in a fit of reaction against the onward march of technology, agreed that we would only buy old music to play on it. This means lots of choral stuff for Judith, and lots of baroque material -- with an admixture of Russian music -- for me. But no opera, because opera is utter wank. And because we have no interest in building a "representative" classical collection, but buy what we like, a lot of the stuff is on budget or mid-price labels -- so anyone thinking of telling us that we absolutely must have X's 1992 recording of Y's 33rd symphony with the Whotsit Philharmonic on the import ABC label can take their posing elsewhere.

By a perverse irony, though, vinyl has not died out after all, and may even be making something of a comeback. June Tabor's previous album, *Angel Tiger*, was released only on CD, but her latest, *Against The Streams*, is available on vinyl as well. The debut albums from Echobelly and Oasis had a vinyl release. The vinyl issue of David Bowie's *Black Tie, White Noise* had to be hurriedly re-pressed when demand unexpectedly exceeded supply. Justine Frischmann of Elastica recently enthused in *Q* about the immediacy of analogue sound reproduction. And a growing number of people who have never bought anything other than classical music have been complaining about the shrill and characterless quality of CD recordings. Thus the persistence of the old in the face of the new, the inability of the future to erase the past, the struggle of memory against forgetting, etc. etc..

As you'll probably have recognised, the last of the above three phrases is Milan Kundera's definition of history. 1994 was a marginally historical year for rock musicians in that it was the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Woodstock concert, supposedly a seminal influence on us all, and an excuse for the record companies to exhume some long-vanished groups from their vaults for the obligatory CD re-issue cash-in. For those of us untempted by this, the BBC marked the occasion with a three-part TV documentary screened over the anniversary weekend itself, featuring original footage from the event, interviews with the organisers, and reminiscences from some of the participants. (In his contribution, Richie Havens claimed to have made up "Freedom" on the spot, a claim rather difficult to reconcile with the harmonisation of his backing musicians.) To get into the mood, in the hour before the first programme was shown, I got out my copy of Jefferson Airplane's *Volunteers*, an album unplayed for at least fifteen years, and discovered that despite this gap of time I could still remember all the lyrics (and mime away on the air guitar too, of course). Ah -- nostalgia!

But the concert itself was actually rather more boring than nostalgia would like one to believe. In part this might be because, at the time, I was a couple of years too young to fully appreciate everything; in part because some of the music was rather tedious (was it just the footage chosen, or was US rock really more blues-dominated then than now?); and in part because it becomes evident with hindsight that, far from being a bittersweet reminder of all the failed hopes and dreams of the sixties, the revolutionary potential of sitting in a muddy field for three days listening to rock music is absolutely zero. Indeed, it's completely absurd -- listen to Canned Heat and Ten Years After, then go out and seize the railway stations and the telephone exchanges? Come on!

Thus, far from being a seminal influence on us all, Woodstock turned out to be a prelude to nothing. Of course, everyone felt optimistic at the time, just as many people had felt optimistic about so much of that decade -- but it could be argued that much if not all of this optimism derived from the fact that youth culture was still consolidating and celebrating itself than from political events in the real world. The apparent failure of the youth project of the sixties was perhaps responsible for the apathy which characterised so much of the seventies (in the light of which the punk rebellion of the late seventies, although an essentially nihilist movement, could be interpreted as an attempt to seize the revolutionary baton from those who had let it fall); but it should never be forgotten that the hedonism and self-gratification of the sixties were directly responsible for the greed and selfishness of the eighties. "Thatcher's children", as that generation came to be known here, are as much the children of 1967's Summer of Love as 1987's stock market crash. So Thatcher's children listen to rock music, but so what? The blunt fact is that music is not and never can be a catalyst for revolution. It may sometimes be an expression of dissent; but translating that dissent into action requires something else.

Like marching in the streets against the Vietnam War, perhaps -- but this, and the other political protests of the time, were the kind of direct challenges to the power and authority of the state which it could easily beat off. (Which it is in fact set up to beat off, since the first requirement of state power is that it perpetuate itself.) To win changes of the kind the sixties generation thought it was demanding -- although it's difficult to extract any coherent political programme at all from that era -- it has to be done not by waving placards in Hyde Park but by changing the culture over a longer period of time; in Mao's terms, by altering the direction of the stream rather than the fish which swim in it. As, invisible though it seems, it has been altered.

The media's obsession with Parliamentary politics and traditional parties might lead one to believe that no other form of political activity is possible. (*The Guardian's* Parliamentary pages are even headed "Policy And Politics", as though its editors think that what they report on other pages is somehow not political.) Yet the suggestion that political parties still represent anyone other than themselves is absurd. Real-world (as distinct from Parliamentary) politics now is not class-based but issue-based, leaving politicians floundering well behind popular opinion. (In the recent row over veal exports, for instance, politicians were notable by their absence, save for William Waldegrave's feeble explanations that under EU rules he was powerless to prevent them -- so demonstrating that he's yet another Conservative MP who hasn't read his EU treaties, since Article 36 of the Treaty of Rome permits just such opt-outs.) Such fragmentation reflects the diversity of modern culture, and thus the diversity of modern dissent -- a dissent which the government clearly doesn't understand and to which it doesn't know how to respond. The Criminal Justice Act is a near-perfect expression of this: it sees people doing something it doesn't like, and can only deal with it by passing a law against it. "Part Five of The Criminal Justice Act is widely seen as a direct attack on the young," wrote Camilla Berens, co-ordinator of the Freedom Network, in *New Statesman & Society* for 3 February 1995. "But the criminalisation of direct action, the clampdown on the pursuit of alternative lifestyles and free parties and festivals has only succeeded in bringing more and more young people together and uniting them in a common struggle." In this respect, it's darkly amusing to note how, in an attempt to club certain groups of people into silence, the government has actually made them stronger -- never mind that the deliberate repression of travellers, ravers, squatters, hunt saboteurs, and motorway protesters is scarcely likely to stop people *thinking* about alternatives to the present system (a point which probably never crossed the government's mind). The Act is an old-style response to a new-style challenge -- a challenge which, because it is indirect, cannot be blunted by direct repression -- and, more importantly, an implicit acknowledgement that the government -- that traditional, "mainstream", party-based politics as a whole -- has lost the struggle for political and cultural hegemony. But then this is hardly surprising: having never paid attention to the world beyond Parliament, party politicians now have no idea how to re-establish their authority over it.

You may recognise in some of this an echo of what I said in response to Walt Willis in the letter column, and you'd be right. The D-I-Y ethos characteristic of those aged 19-24 (and to a certain extent those aged 25-34 as well) may be invisible to politicians and the media, but is growing nevertheless. Where former generations marched in the streets *against* something, the modern generation gets on with something

constructive -- and is then called "apathetic" by politicians and the media solely *because* they don't march in the streets in their tens of thousands; an accusation which further alienates them from traditional politics and politicians. (While the consequence of Labour's failure to oppose the Criminal Justice Act, and Tony Blair's obvious indifference to environmental issues, is that most of those aged 19-24 won't vote for it -- assuming they can bring themselves to vote at all.) But then what do men in suits have to offer, other than their own pomposity and stupidity?

That's what the youth of the sixties rebelled against, of course. But whereas they wanted the revolution to happen overnight ("London, Paris, Rome, Berlin -- we shall fight and we shall win!"), today's revolutionaries are in it for the longer haul. In addition, today's revolutionaries seek not merely a quantitatively but also a qualitatively different society -- whereas the rebels of the sixties wanted to replace the certainties offered by the right with the certainties offered by the left, their contemporary equivalents have recognised that for all practical purposes "left" and "right" are identical. In their reliance on the technocratic approach, their embrace of systemisation and hierarchy, their attempt to order the world from the top down, the organised political parties of left and right share far more than divides them, and certainly far more than they realise or will admit. Harold Wilson's "white heat of the technological revolution", Newt Gingrich's promotion of "the information superhighway" -- is there really any difference?

The counter to the "mainstream" political view of the world is environmentalism: the drive to reconnect human society to the natural world from which the Industrial Revolution separated it, to restore the sense of harmony and integration which has been absent for the past two hundred years. Environmentalism poses so direct a threat to the technocratic worldview which has prevailed for this period that the only surprising thing about the "greenlash" of the environmental contrarians is that it has been so long in coming. But, like the government with its Criminal Justice Act, the contrarians have failed to connect with their target. Seizing on the more lurid predictions of the doomsayers of the sixties and seventies, and arguing that because these have not come to pass today's threats to the biosphere must also be exaggerated, the contrarians overlook the extent to which concern for the environment has penetrated everyday thinking -- ignore, in fact, the paradigm shift which is taking place across the industrialised world. People who buy CFC-free refrigerators, grow their own organic vegetables, join LETS schemes, invest in energy-saving and insulation for their homes, persuade their local councils to adopt traffic calming schemes, publish newsletters for the local peace or environment groups, boycott the products of unsavoury regimes, participate in workshops on sustainable development -- such activities are clearly indicative of something far deeper in its impact, and therefore more long-lasting, than any panicky reaction to ecological doomsaying.

In the face of this new wave of self-organisation and self-development, technocratic business-as-usual and its contrarian mouthpieces have nothing to offer but....technocratic business-as-usual. And, perhaps, increasing violence against the increasing numbers of people who refuse to see the world their way. George Monbiot, Visiting Fellow of Green College, Oxford, witnessed an example of this violence at first hand for *The Guardian* of 5 August 1994:

"When the riot police smashed down the doors of the two buildings the Oxford squatters were occupying, they did what the Malaysian army has done to the forest people blockading the Sarawakian roads. They reasserted the control of the state over a common resource. In doing so, both forces have returned the resource to the hands of the developers. The buildings will be allowed to decay further, then will be demolished. The forests will be shredded for building materials. In both cases, the environmental has been made less habitable.

"Environmental quality, in other words, is a function of control. If development is controlled by the developers, then it will take place largely for their benefit. But if local people can determine how their surroundings should be managed, their priorities will be reflected.

"Many of the M11 and Solsbury Hill protesters are of school age. These are the first political stirrings of the environmental generation, the children who, a few years ago, shamed their parents into recycling bottles. They are already beginning to show that they

are not prepared to tolerate the alienation of resources suffered by earlier generations. Increasingly, they will try to regain control of the assets seized by the state and its sponsors.

"As these people come of age, the government will need to make increasing use of force. This has a cost. When the police are sent in to defend construction projects against local people, the interests of the government and the interests of big business are seen to be one and the same. As more people identify the government as little more than a giant development consortium, environmentalism will become the motor of sweeping political change."

This is a revolution which clearly won't be fuelled by music. Rock music now has become decoupled from the political process -- for every Situationist-inspired Manic Street Preachers, there are ten or twenty Pulp or Rides, writing personal songs about personal issues. ("My finest hour/Was finding a pound/In the Underground" -- The Sundays's "My Finest Hour", from *Reading, Writing And Arithmetic*.) Footage from the annual Glastonbury concert, transmitted a few weeks prior to the Woodstock anniversary programmes, made plain the differences between then and now. Glastonbury's profits may be donated to political causes (Greenpeace, CND, Oxfam), but the music itself was devoid of any agenda beyond that of having a good time. (Especially beneath the clear skies and high temperatures of last summer.) Blur may sometimes sound like retread Kinks, and large parts of Suede's *Dog Man Star* could almost have been lifted wholesale from old David Bowie and Roxy Music albums, but that's popular music for you. Guitars, hair, three minute songs about modern life.... Overthrow the system? Don't be *silly!*

THE LITERATURE OF A FAILED TECHNOCRACY

1994 was the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Apollo 11 landing on the Moon, and the summer television schedules carried a number of programmes commemorating the event, including one fronted by James Burke, the former BBC commentator most closely associated with the original coverage. As he ruefully pointed out, what had then seemed like a prelude to the full scale colonisation of space had in fact turned out to be a dead end. Instead of the lunar cities, orbital factories, and exploratory missions to Mars, we have one Russian space station and continually deferred plans for a larger US version, which has been redesigned so many times that it seems unlikely ever to escape from the drawing board. Does anyone remember George Bush's Space Exploration Initiative, a thirty-year programme announced with a grandiloquent flourish in 1989 and dead within four years? Does anyone believe that the Japanese proposal for a cut-price Moonbase, with a suggested completion date of 2024, will ever be realised? Writing on the occasion of the shuttle mission to correct the Hubble telescope's astigmatism, Martin Woollacott put it thusly in his column in *The Guardian* for 29 December 1993:

"How far away -- doubly far away -- now seem the the surreal planetary landscapes of Chesley Bonestell, illustrator of the popular book *The Conquest Of Space* by Willy Ley, published in 1949. Man, we knew in those days with certainty, would land and even live in those strange, beautiful and dangerous places. Much later than that, the French critic Michel Butor could happily write that 'there exists for the moment no interplanetary rocket....but we all believe quite firmly that the question is no more than one of time -- a few years of development'. He meant manned spaceships capable of reaching all the other planets of the solar system, and perhaps of going beyond that. Such a statement today would provoke, not exactly laughter, but at least a wry shrug. Getting manned craft to the other planets may happen eventually, but eventually is the word. J G Ballard has even mocked the whole business by entitling one of his collections *Memories Of The Space Age*.

"For a writer like Ballard, the thing was hubris from the start, linked in its technical and spiritual origins to the illusions of total war and to civilisation's persistent over-estimate of its own capacities. The space age was undoubtedly a mental era as well as a technical era, one in which the 'high frontier', as the Princeton physicist Gerard K O'Neill christened it in an influential book in 1977, set few limits to human aspirations, ambitions or possibilities.

"The idea of the conquest of space was perhaps the ultimate expression of the principle that Western civilisation could do or achieve anything -- for its Faustian pretensions, as Spengler would have put it. In this it sat alongside such other examples of over-confidence as the optimistic theories of world economic development, suggesting the economic transformation of the Third World in a few short years, associated with names like W W Rostow, alongside the maniacally assured theories of nuclear war-fighting associated with names like Herman Kahn, and alongside the dreams of infinite cheap energy production associated with the early nuclear energy programmes. It is hard to deny the intimate connection between the space age's high ambitions and overweening nuclear militarism. Space flight was based on the military missile, and its early pioneers, like Werner von Braun, were German rocket scientists. Much of the motivation for the space race was directly military -- to place nuclear weapons in space or to throw them through it -- and the more oblique purposes were to do with superpower prestige, itself a weapon in the East-West struggle. But the truth was that, even as a Soviet space probe reached Venus, the USSR had still not solved the problem of storing potatoes; and even as the US landed men on the Moon, it was losing control of its inner cities.

"The problems went deeper even than that. The most serious was surely that the ambitions of the space age were unrealisable with existing science, and most scientists knew it. The colonisation of other planets and travel to the stars were simply not possible. What was possible, which was extending our knowledge of the universe bit by bit, was not served particularly well by manned spaceflight, and could, on the whole, be done better and more cheaply by other, terrestrial means."

(I quote Woollacott at such length for two reasons. Firstly, he brings up certain issues to which I shall return; and, secondly, this wasn't the first time he'd made extensive references to science fiction in one of his columns, having previously drawn a parallel between AIDS and the unnamed plague in George Stewart's *Earth Abides*. There are grounds, I think, for regarding him as an almost-fan.)

"Hubris clobbered by nemesis", is a definition of science fiction once offered by Brian Aldiss, but it could just as easily apply to what used to be called -- in that flush of sixties' optimism -- the Space Age. If it ever existed, however, the Space Age is now over, killed by its own huge costs, its political unrealisability, and the ebbing of public faith in the technocratic dream of a limitless future.

Not that science fiction seems to have noticed. As far as it's concerned, the Space Age is going strong, and Earth orbit will soon be crowded with factories and habitats while corporate and political visionaries gaze into the vasty deeps and wonder what might be found there. Science fiction regards the conquest of space as, not just the fulfilment of its dreams, but the literal realisation of the technocratic ideals of order and progress which have underpinned the genre from the start. John W Campbell, in creating so-called "modern" science fiction, may have expunged the lurid prose and loopy scientism characteristic of the Gernsback era, but he never challenged its faith in technocracy. Indeed, his principal achievement was to strengthen and codify science fiction's technocratic foundations -- foundations which it appropriated wholesale from the technocratic visions and ideas current in the wider society of the twenties and thirties. Examine, for instance, the ideas pursued by Campbell's stable of *Astounding* authors in the early forties -- Asimov's psychohistory, van Vogt's Nexialism, Heinlein's future history: ideas developed at a time when science and scientific endeavour -- more often than not thought of in popular terms as Science, with a capital S and a sense of directive purpose -- were still viewed as the potential and actual saviours of humanity, the means by which a more predictable and rational world could be achieved. In the USA of the thirties and forties, for example, there existed an organisation called Technocracy, which preached the virtues of reason and uniformity (and wore identical grey suits and drove around in identical grey cars in order to do so), and it is inconceivable that Campbell's writers were not influenced by this and other ideas of the time. (Some of the connections between the genre science fiction of this era and the culture of which it was part are explored in the two central chapters of Andrew Ross's *Strange Weather: Culture, Science And Technology In The Age Of Limits*.) Indeed, Asimov's psychohistory sometimes reads like a science fiction version of Marxism (the possibility that Asimov picked up and filed away for future use a few ideas on Marxist

historical theory gleaned from conversations with friend and one-time US Communist Party member Frederik Pohl is fairly compelling), and like Marxism it leans heavily on the notion that human psychology and society can be reduced to a number of basic and immutable laws as unyielding as any genuine science, which when understood will permit the prediction and thus the control of the future.

Genre science fiction has never really shaken off this worldview. Subsequent attempts at "reform" -- sixties' New Wave, seventies' feminist-ecotopianism, eighties' cyberpunk -- may have started out with the intention of dragging it onto a completely new path, but instead have had to settle for constructing new (and much more interesting) suburbs within the whole, while the core, the still dominant Campbellian "hard" SF model, presses blindly on towards its imagined destiny, unaware of its obsolescence and impotence, scarcely acknowledging the contemporary era's trend to social and cultural fragmentation and dislocation. For every *Heavy Weather* or *Virtual Light* -- that is, every attempt to reflect the present's diversity of experience and expectation -- we get a dozen *Fallen Angels*, still mystically wedded to the conquest of space as the only future for the human species. (*Fallen Angels*'s contrarian polemic against environmentalists as a threat to the space programme is particularly daft, and its pretence that campaigns to save a rare species or protect an area of wilderness are a respectable front for a conspiracy to return humanity to a pre-technological hunter-gatherer existence verges on the hysterical. But perhaps the authors -- Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle -- merely reflect US conservatives' desperate search for a new enemy to replace the old Soviet one which has so inconveniently withered away.)

Thus, perhaps, what John Clute calls "the crisis of agenda SF": a dawning recognition by some writers that carefully constructed tales of starship engineers and alien contact specialists are irrelevant, dead before they are born. If it won't come true, why write about it....but what else can you write about, when you've been so thoroughly indoctrinated with the genre's technocratic myths? -- myths which the real world long ago recognised as empty of validity. The future, increasing numbers of people have realised, will not be a linear extrapolation of the past, a brighter and bolder projection of the present: instead, we face a future which is discontinuous, which may invert customarily understood ideas of "progressive" and "primitive", which cannot be predicted or controlled, and which far from being something we'll greet on the stroke of midnight on the first day of the year 2000, actually begins next week, or perhaps began yesterday. (Indeed, the future is so discontinuous that it sometimes contains within itself pockets of instant nostalgia for its own alternatives -- just look, for instance, at how thoroughly the *Mad Max* imagery of scuzzy clothes, broken technology and worn-out vehicles has been incorporated into the current series of TV adverts for Foster's lager). Whether we can even understand the future may be in serious question....but we do understand that Moonbases, orbital factories and voyages to Mars are no longer likely.

It's perhaps in recognition of this that some writers are now producing novels which make no pretence whatever at addressing genre SF's lost technocratic future, but instead set out to playfully mock it. In Colin Greenland's *Harm's Way*, for instance, the mighty sailships of a Victorian-era British Empire rule the ether winds on which space commerce depends, while Stephen Baxter's *Anti-Ice*, although a gloomier and more Wellsian vision of the limits and dangers of imperial power, equally refuses to pretend that it has anything to do with the Campbellian model. And, in a deliberate snub to notions of a universe dominated by US capitalism, the "Culture" novels of Iain Banks have seized on a truism Campbellian SF cannot even begin to recognise: that a civilisation advanced enough to conquer the galaxy would have access to unlimited sources of energy, and thereby have transformed itself into a communist utopia in which everyone literally does produce according to their abilities (if they want to) and take according to their needs (whatever they can). (Is it any coincidence that all three writers are British and, sharing Britain's characteristic suspicion of technology, have perhaps never fully identified with the technocratic agenda?)

But Clute's "crisis of agenda SF" could be part of an emerging consensus that, whatever science fiction once did -- and however it did it -- it is no longer at the cutting edge of the contemporary world. This was a particular theme of Charles Platt's column in *SF Eye* 12, in which he argued that to find out what's happening in the worlds of nanotechnology, virtual reality and smart drugs (never mind the worlds of street fashion, classical minimalism and post-modern design) -- and, more importantly, the social and cultural impact of this "strange science" -- you'd be better off reading *Wired* or *Mondo 2000* than plodding through

this month's *Analog*. Worse: because, in his eyes, science fiction does not address these issues, it is losing its readership, which is now "an aging, soon-to-be-dying breed" because "reading a book is a passive experience; by comparison, young people...are now much more participative, acting out their fantasies in D&D, toying with Nintendo, playing with music-synthesis hardware, and shuffling video pages of interactive fiction via Hypercard stacks". Remarking that three different editors have informed him that all SF titles ("not just the old stuff") are getting harder to sell, he alights on Kim Stanley Robinson's *Red Mars* as an example of science fiction's inability to reform itself: "conscientious, accurate, engaging, predictive, and visually evocative....everything that people like me have been asking for during the past twenty years: good old science fiction, technically plausible, brought up to date, and populated with believable people", but nevertheless "a Heinleinesque vision", "stifled by its own self-conscious awareness of sci-fi precedent", "a future-vision most surprising for its lack of surprises". "Robinson's Mars mission," says Platt, "is very similar to a detailed feasibility study that Werner von Braun published in 1952."

(The comparison with Heinlein is slightly unfair -- the lunar rebellion in *The Moon Is A Harsh Mistress* was an obvious re-run of 1776, but when Robinson's Martian colonists explicitly draw the same parallel for their rebellion it is dismissed out of hand....and, unlike Heinlein's rebels, Robinson's go down to catastrophic defeat. Nevertheless, there are large parts of *Red Mars* which read very much like a "how-to" manual of Martian terraforming, a didacticism which becomes even more pronounced in *Green Mars*, the second volume of the trilogy. In the first, the question of whether and how to terraform the planet is both a scientific and a political question, and both strands of the plot are thus firmly intermeshed; but in the second, where terraforming is a given, the political and scientific plots tend to proceed semi-independently -- indeed, there are stretches in which the politics comes to a stop to make room for detailed expositions of the terraforming.)

It might be argued that what Platt is calling for is a more extreme version of the Campbellian model -- the "radical, hard SF" demanded by the editors of *Interzone* in the magazine's earliest issues. But this would be to miss a crucial point: that technocracy is more than just technology, more than an adherence to scientific theory; it is a complete programme for "the control of society or industry by technical experts; a ruling body of such experts" (Supplement to the 1987 edition of the *OED*). The technocratic worldview reached the zenith of its influence in the two decades following the Second World War, yoked to and the inspiration of political efforts to construct a more controllable and peaceful international order; but just as these efforts were brought down by the refusal of nation-states to surrender any part of their sovereignty and the historic suspicions which underlay relations between them, so the technocratic worldview ran aground on the socio-cultural intractabilities which ran counter to the reductionist principles on which it was founded. Thus, even as its disciples bestrode the globe, it was failing to deliver what it promised. Some examples of this failure, British readers may recall, were traced in *Pandora's Box: Fables From The Age Of Science*, a 1992 series of BBC documentaries which examined the beliefs vested in science and scientific theory in the middle decades of this century, and the degree to which they had penetrated popular consciousness and thereby moulded public expectations of what the world ought to look like and how it should be expected to operate. One programme concerned the failure of the nuclear dream and the promise of "energy too cheap to meter"; one dissected the pseudo-mathematics of futurology, with Herman Kahn's daughters reminiscing about an exercise he'd set them to determine the criteria for letting people into nuclear fall-out shelters and a US colonel who'd served in Vietnam recounting how, after putting in the number of soldiers and guerillas killed, he'd asked a computer to state when the US would win, only to be told that on his figures it already had; a third dwelt on the rise and fall of pesticide-based agriculture, which under the guise of expanding production and eliminating crop loss due to natural disasters gave us DDT, CFCs and super-resistant strains of the insects it set out to make extinct; and a fourth addressed the alleged certainties of economic theory, featuring a machine built in the fifties by New Zealand engineer Bill Phillips in which coloured water sloshed around tubes, through sumps and over baffles to illustrate the connections between interest rates, savings, unemployment, inflation, public spending, and so forth: the economy depicted as a set of mechanical certainties, in which manipulation of any one variable produced recognisable and measurable effects on all the others....a game which economists have been playing, with decreasing success and increasing desperation, ever since.

(Economic theory is a particularly egregious example of the technocratic worldview, and is certainly the technocratic "solution" with the most visible impact on our everyday lives. Economic theory elevates into rigidly deterministic principles some barely understood and ever-shifting relationships which it presents as profound and meaningful by a wholesale resort to scientism. As the physicist Norbert Wiener (quoted in Herman Daly's *Steady State Economics*) testily remarked in 1964, "economists have developed the habit of dressing up their rather imprecise ideas in the language of infinitesimal calculus" in direct imitation of "the use of mathematical formulae [which] had accompanied the development of the natural sciences", but "to assign what purports to be precise values to such essentially vague quantities is neither useful nor honest, and any pretence of applying precise formulae to these loosely defined quantities is a sham and a waste of time" -- although this has not stopped economists, then or now, from drawing up ever more elaborate equations with which to describe how the world ought to behave. Economists' tendency to prefer abstract theoretical assumptions to practical observation has been more recently savaged by Paul Ormerod, a former econometrician, in *The Death Of Economics*, which is especially good on on the unreality of much of their worldview. For example, economists are required by their theories to assume that each individual is a rational actor in possession of perfect economic information -- so that for the laws of supply and demand to produce predictable outcomes, and for markets to therefore function, they have to suppose that there is a point beyond which the marginal gain from some activity is cancelled out by an equivalent marginal loss, at the cusps of which we are all busy making marginal calculations to determine the points of unimprovable balance....yet the notion that you and I can reach a state of unimprovable equilibrium armed with nothing more than a table of prices is self-evidently ridiculous.)

(Ormerod is just as telling at less abstract levels. Discussing the doctrine of "economic rationality", by which individuals are supposed to maximise their gains without regard to their interaction with others, he points out that those who pursue this goal will always lose in the longer run precisely because they ignore the wider effects of their behaviour -- while those who have not been (in his term) "contaminated" with the doctrine of economic rationality will always co-operate with others, so maximising the gains of all. Given that society is based on the principle of co-operation -- and could not exist without it -- one can only wonder on which planet this doctrine was dreamed up.)

A continuing reliance on reductionism in the face of ongoing paradigm shifts towards a world dominated by theories of complexity and chaos (never mind slightly older theories of uncertainty and indeterminacy) seems not merely perverse but downright stupid. Yet for the technocratic worldview to move towards embracing these new paradigms in an attempt to remain relevant would be tantamount to acknowledging that its faith in linearity -- in a predictable, rational world inhabited by predictable, rational people behaving exactly as the "laws" of economics or sociology or psychohistory proclaim they should -- is baseless; that the concepts on which technocracy is founded are and always were without meaning. And just as technocracy is trapped in its own (obsolete) paradigm, so genre science fiction remains locked on its march to possible oblivion. It cannot abandon its core assumptions because that would be to admit that it, too, is founded on nothing.

Perhaps the (almost) last word should go to the almost-fan with whom I began: *The Guardian's* Martin Woollacott, from the same column I quoted earlier:

"The escape into space symbolised by the first manned satellites was a catharsis similar in a way to that experienced when the Berlin Wall came down, with the same feeling that something had profoundly changed the way humanity looked at itself. Every astronaut delivered his little homily in those early days, and politicians, journalists and novelists underlined it. It is hard to recall now the genuine impact of those 'one world' photographs and films. As one writer put it: 'That picture of the Earth with the Moon in the foreground should be in every classroom and home in the world. Plenty of clouds and water are visible, but very little land. No national boundaries are visible at all'.

"They *were* put into every classroom, and they *did* change consciousness and perhaps behaviour, but perhaps more by turning us in on ourselves than in any other way."

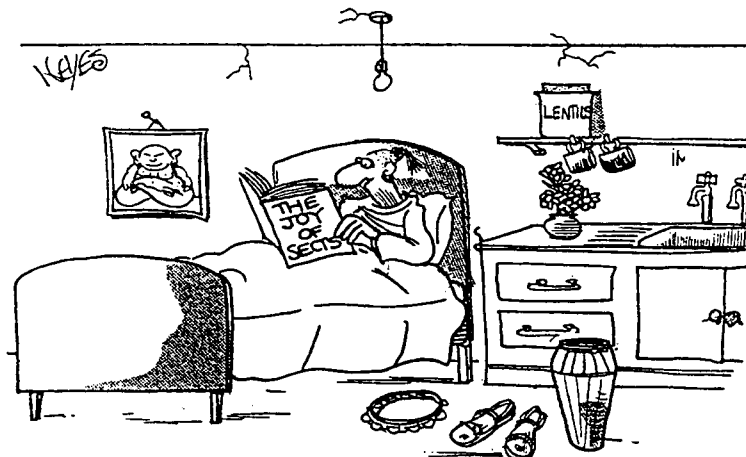
We have, simply run up against the limits -- both conceptual and actual -- beyond which no amount of theory or ambition can take us. The Moon, now, is no more than the body which controls the tides: tides which global warming demands we consider more urgently than the authors of *Fallen Angels*, with their insistence that the conquest of space is the only conceivable future for us, can ever concede. For this is the only world we have, discontinuous and incomprehensible though it may be, and whether or not we make the best of it we will have to learn to live in it.



In *Habakkuk* Chapter 3 Verse 4, Bill Donaho mentioned a summer barbecue with Poul Anderson, at which the latter reportedly denounced "the Clinton gang" as "just a bunch of fascists -- not the Berkeley swear word, but true fascists in the true National Corporate Socialism tradition".

The cause of this outburst, presumably, was Clinton's proposed reform of the US healthcare system, and the possibility that Anderson might have had to open up his wallet to make contributions to a central fund to assist those less fortunate than himself -- just as happens in most other civilised industrial countries. But then one can't expect US right-wingers, steeped in the belief that taxes are an interference with the freedom of the individual, to understand something as moderately altruistic as that.

Anderson was also reported as claiming that the Waco siege demonstrates the fascist tenor of "the Clinton gang". Presumably, in his libertarian credo, individuals must have the right to defend themselves against the possible depredations of the government by surrounding themselves with as many automatic weapons as they can afford. If the government then burns their houses down with them inside for threatening to make war against it, this would doubtless just prove things.



FASHIONSPEAK

What Fashion Journalists Say

The new black
Only for the brave
Wisps of chiffon and gossamer georgette
Charcoal, granite, pebble, pewter
Taupe, oatmeal, mushroom, sand
Chocolate, mocha, mahogany, mink, peat
Jumpers are back!
The nautical theme is strong
Buddhist purity and sparse elegance
Models tripped down the catwalk
Greeted by whoops from photographers
Skirts are short and sharp this season
To order from...
Back to school with Lolita-style gymslips
Theatrical, spectacular, swashbuckling
Attitude is paramount
A glamorous new take on Le Smoking
This season's must-have accessory
Understated style
The eternal appeal of...
A directional theme this season
Anything goes
Flowing drapes of rich satin brocade
Shoes to die for
Pique, grosgrain, plisse
Taking its inspiration from xxxx
Model's own

What They Actually Mean

White, oatmeal, navy, grey, purple, etc.
No one in their right mind would buy this
Spot the nipple under see-through shirts
Grey
Beige
We're allergic to the word brown
Where did they go?
Navy and white *again*
Karma's cool, and we fancied a trip to Nepal
Models fell over on 9-inch platforms
Lots of tit and bum on show
But overleaf they're long and languorous
We're too embarrassed to print the price
Will look ridiculous on anyone over 15
You'll look like Adam Ant on a bad day
It helps to look stupid
A man's DJ, nipped in at the waist -- *again*
One fashion editor bought this and the rest copied her
A bit boring
More of the same
There's got to be a trend somewhere
Can't think of anything to say
Scarlett O'Hara's been at the curtains again
They'll kill your feet
To hell with meaning, French sounds cool
Insert destination of designer's latest holiday
Can't remember where it's from

(From *Madame Figaro*, an occasional fashion supplement to *The Guardian*, October 1994)



"As those diligent sleuths at the Labour Research Department have revealed, between 1979 and 1992 only 6.2% of British companies gave money to the Tories; during the same period, however, 50.2% of peerages and knighthoods for 'services to industry' went to executives of firms which had donated to the party. (The chance of this being pure coincidence is 1 in 10 to the power of 133.)"

Francis Wheen, "Wheen's World", in *The Guardian*, 31 January 1995

PRINTED MATTER
REDUCED RATE

This is *FTF 17*, from:
Judith Hanna & Joseph Nicholas
15 Jansons Road
South Tottenham
London N15 4JU
United Kingdom

- A Chinese city has nearly a third more boys than girls.
(Ratio of newborn boys to girls in Zhangye city: 131:100.
Female foetuses known to be aborted for gender reasons each
year in India: 50,000-80,000.)
- Cuba is 75% better supplied with doctors than Great Britain.
(People per doctor in Cuba: 207. In Britain: 362.)
- Britons consume the equivalent of nearly 4000 Olympic swimming pools
of diluted sugar as "soft drinks" every year.
- The average British 16-year-old has tried three illegal substances.
(Cannabis convictions in 1993: 42,000. Cannabis convictions
per working day: 161.)
- British gardeners spread over £1 million-worth of pesticides a week.
(Percentage of the garden pesticide market taken by Imperial
Chemical Industries: 41. ICI's recent profits per working
minute: £253,000.)
- Pesticide-free cotton represents less than a millionth of world production.
(Tonnes of US organic cotton produced in 1993: 11,600.
Total US cotton crop: 2,600,000 tonnes. World tonnage:
18.2 billion. Miles juggernauts would queue loaded with a
year's supply of pesticides for US farms: 379.)
- The USA has lost an acre of wetlands every minute since the Revolution.
- 50 years ago, the USA had over three times as many recycling projects.
(Community recycling programmes amongst the population of
257 million: 12,000, or 1 per 21,400 people. Salvage
committees among approximately 130 million population in
World War Two: 21,000, or 1 per 6,200.)
- 131,578 residents of Florida produce 150,000 tons of rubbish in a year;
it takes 312,500 people in Tokyo or 882,352 in Cairo to match them.
- 500 juggernaut loads of consumer appliance batteries are thrown onto
the landscape every year.
(Percentage of 460 million retailed battery cells recycled
annually: 0.)
- One foreign car-maker alone spends over three times more promoting
UK motoring than the UK government spends fighting global warming.
(Volkswagen's 1995 advertising budget: £22 million.
Department of the Environment's global warming budget
1994-1995: £6 million. Number of drivers who would not
use their cars less if public transport were better: 15.3
million.)
- Officials spent £123,000 renumbering the A45 road in Cambridgeshire
and Suffolk as the A14.
- The UK spends fifty percent more on roads than on railways.
(Central capital expenditure on roads 1993-1994: £2.3 billion.
On overground and underground railways 1993-1994: £1.55
billion.)
- UK forests absorb only one tonne in every 66 of carbon given off by
Britons burning fossil fuels.
(Europes-full of trees needed to absorb up to 50 years of the
world's fossil fuel carbon dioxide: 1.)
- One gram of Northern forest soil contains up to 5,000 species, almost all
of them unknown to science.
- Russia's environmental disaster areas are 20 times bigger than England.
(Square kilometres of Russian disaster zones: 2.55 million.
Square kilometres of England: 130,000.)

(All quoted in *Guardian Weekend*, from various
sources, November 1994 to March 1995)