

GROSS ENCOUNTERS



*You know it
makes sense!*

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- 6) Discovery catalogues which fall out of Sunday Colour supplements.
- 7) Sunday Colour supplements which fall out of Discovery Catalogues.
- 8) Vacuum Cleaner Bag Fresheners.
- 9) £9.99 pre-recorded videos of films that were on TV last week.
- 10) Fanzines which still print lists five years after they went out of fashion.

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BLOOD ON THE ROOFTOPS

A DIP INTO THE OLD SCANDAL AND GOSSIP BAG produces much which is unsavoury and tedious, so we'll skip over that for the moment - but, please behave, or I might be forced into a corner and then, who knows what might happen! (It's okay Graham, your Peculiar Habit is safe with me).

Ace denizen of the South Hants Sf Group, Ric Cooper, turned up on our doorstep recently. Most cunningly he had chosen a Bank holiday when I was at work and thus had my family to himself. Who knows what debauched behaviour they got up to, but suffice it so say that when I joined them later in a tasty St.Albans pub, Amanda & Justin were out in the garden listening to the St.Albans First XV going through their repertoire of Rugby songs, whilst our man Ric had shaven off his beard in a desperate bid to pass unrecognised. Unfortunately he forgot to shave off his voice and evil laugh, so I spotted him immediatley and claimed my free drink of Boddingtons.

Also in St.Albans, centre of the skiffy universe so I'm reliably informed, I spotted erstwhile G.James victim, Arthur Cruttenden at a Fairport Convention gig. As usual at these events, I'd imbibed sveral pints of some rather good ale, and upon spotting said Arthur at the far side of the bar, I waved at him and spent ten minutes fighting my way across to shout my greetings. Finally got there to find the bounder having yet another T-Shirt being signed by members of the band. What a poser. Was half-inclined to spill beer over him, but it would be a waste - Kate Jeary, who accompanied me, concurred - but couldn't remember Arthur's name anyway, so that was a pretty even matching.

Dropped in on Greg Pickersgill recently, probably for the first time in quite a few months. Nothing had changed, same friendly welcome, same hatred of children, same pile of videos stacked up by the TV, same chair he was sitting in, wearing the same pair of jeans with the same hole in the knee. It was all so comforting. Mind you, that hole had definitely got bigger since the last time.

Spied that old alcoholic Gamma at the Atkinson and Donaldson 40th birthday bash. He was clearly back to his old spirits again, a bottle of vodka, a splash of lime topped off with a bottle of Southern Comfort. So much more approachable than at Concpiracy where one got the impression that, every so often, he was trying to Behave. I wasn't driving that night, for a change, so provided I sat upwind of him, I could consume by beer and red wine at leisure, and avoid mixing drinks with his interesting exhalation of breath.

The quiet man of fandom, John Brosnan, now a star writer as opposed to a Star writer (remember the Fungus, that unforgettable work co-authored with Roy Kettle?) was also there arguing the toss as usual with Rochelle. I don't think either of them knew what the origins of the original argument was and besides, Rochelle quite likes things Australian these days, and there's no doubt about

it, Brosnan is an Australian thing. Speaking of which, at an earlier party before Peter Nicholls' Return to OZ (there's a movie in there somewhere), Brosnan was doing his brilliant impression of a J.G. Ballard short story. You will all know the superb little piece "Mr. F is Mr. F", in which our protagonist is born as an old man and lives his life backwards and ends up being sucked up into the womb to expire - well, Brosnan arrived at the party sober, drank lots of black coffee, was pissed, slumped into a chair and as the evening wore on, gradually became more and more intelligible. I was pretty pissed at the end, but Brosnan corked his bottle of Australian Wine and, it being Christmas, walked backwards to his home.

Returning to that Denizen of West Yorks, D. West, he is now firmly settled in his new Keighley home. After some extensive interior un-decoration, it soon resembled his former Bingley abode - even to the extent of being at the top of a steep hill. Ostensibly this is because he is not a fan of the internal combustion engine, but this new hill is so steep that when he's been to the pub for a few jars of un-real ale, he actually looks vertical as he climbs back up the incline. He was lucky to get the place in the first instance, such is the pace of the quality property market in uptown Keighley. The vendor, of East Asian extraction, was all set to exchange contracts with another interested party when along came our hero, and put in his bid. "Well, Mr. West, why should I be accepting your bid when I've already had some very good offers?" D. looked him up and down and sternly muttered "Cash?" and paid over several thousand pounds in unmarked notes.

Well, okay, he paid by banker's draft, but that wasn't such a good ending. By the way, he's strapped for cash again now, so do make sure you buy him plenty of drinks at Mexican.

Spent an "interesting" week or two in Leeds last summer and wandered along to the Griffin Hotel one Friday night where the regular "West Riding" meetings now happen. G. James and I arrived at about eight - hoping that the joint would be jumping. Deathly silence. Not a thing moved. Nobody in sight. Graham had obviously upset them again or something.

Two pints later, Mike Ford showed up and the Interest Quotient shot up to 0.5 on a scale of 1-500. Something seriously amiss here folks - where are the mounds of heaving humanity, the flaggons of ale being quickly consumed, the scandal, the gossip, the revolting Pork Scratchings? Two more scintillating people turned up, but I was having such a good time I couldn't remember who they were. Graham disappeared and started chatting up a couple of unsuspecting women in the main bar, but since his separation from Linda, even this isn't exactly scandalous anymore. Ho hum.

Mike Dickinson seen in suit! Yes it's true - for the first time since Yorcon I in 1979, the Tall Football Supporter wore not only a suit, but also a tie which almost matched. The other event, the latest in a trilogy of weddings starring Malcolm Edwards paled into insignificance (which house is it this weekend?).

Paul & Chris Oldroyd/Donaldson have spare weekend coming up. It's the third weekend in July - 1994.

David "Vector" Barrett, recently moved on from his BSFA role, has been writing the occasional SF review for the Independent - regurgitating in a no doubt cogent fashion many of his previous editorials. Hopefully, some new individual will be taking over the Vector helm - four candidates at the last count; what is the world coming to? Thatcher will stand down at this rate.

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FOOTBALL SUPPORTER IDENTITY CARDS - A VIEW
FROM THE TRENCHES
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Hands up all those who can't stand football?

Okay, skip this bit if you want to - but be warned, since although soccer isn't your fave rave, this impending legislation could affect you too.

I really don't expect too many of you to get desparately excited about this subject. The stereotypical view of a soccer fan is a drunk, teenaged man-mountain of an individual, covered in tattoos, wears a scarf around his wrist (thus to be nearer his brain) and most definitely couldn't give a toss about football. Even if you're being charitable, an all too easy view is of someone who blindly follows one team (usually Liverpool/Everton/Manchester United/Arsenal/Spurs) to the exclusion of all else, a person who will do anything to get to all their home games, grumble that the current side is crap and a person who, if able to produce children after all that Beer, names their off-spring after the 1979 Cup Final winning team.

Actually, it's not like that. I know, because I go to quite a few games a season, up and down the country and I get to see the real fans. Those who will quite happily talk passionately and constructively about their team, even to you, at best a neutral, at worst an "away" fan. These people populate large parts of our soccer grounds; families, older people, well-off folk, less-well-off folk, but it's a great leveller - you have a common talking point and thus a chance to air your opinions. It's actually all very enjoyable.

Colin Moynihan, the diminutive Sports Minister, is determined that Thatcher's Way will prevail and that by 1990, Identity cards will be In. To our overseas readers, this may not seem to be a big deal, but in the UK we have the diversification of 92 League soccer clubs, and all the interest that that creates. Regrettably the initial thoughts on restrictions of movement (for that is what it is - banning fans from grounds but their own, unless they are a bona-fide member of their own Club Membership scheme) will simply centre on soccer itself. This move is ill-judged to say the least, and I hope to be able to illustrate why - if you like, you can take this as a plea from the heart since it is almost certainly going to badly affect ME, quite apart from the sheer principle of the thing.

Firstly, it discriminates against the neutral supporter, the person who perhaps has a preference for one main team (or teams), but really wants to be able to travel anywhere to see good soccer - whether or not his team is involved. It means that I won't be able to go anywhere other than a nominated Home Team (which happens to be Spurs, but I'd normally only see them two or three times a season!), or to the Away enclosure at a ground where that Nominated team happens to be playing. Bigger that for a game of football. It pre-judges the case against violence. It assumes that soccer violence is mainly in the ground, whereas most soccer fans will readily tell you, it's outside the ground before and after a game that you've got to be careful. It restricts my movements, but doesn't stop the problem, that there are people who go to football grounds (not neccessarilly seeking to gain entry to them) simply to create havoc. It is not good enough to have at one end of the spectrum politicians legislating what we

are allowed or not allowed to do, and at the other end, other politicians who are equally culpable in their own way by blaming soccer violence on "society" as if it's something new that's sprung up over the last ten years. It's always been there, but now, is "properly" organised - often stemming from the ridiculous racist attacks by the National Front outside Leeds United and Chelsea in the 1970s.

Identity cards will destroy soccer - here are the facts as I perceive them.

Let's look at our 92 League clubs. Their only common aim is to play soccer and provide entertainment, but you compare the Business set-up at Spurs (where soccer on occasions almost appears incidental) to the shoe-string existence of say Halifax, a super little team who will forever be struggling in the lower reaches of the fourth division, surviving on crowds of less than 1500 which will merely pay the weekly laundry bill, let alone wages, staff, light, heat, rent and rates. There is also the feeder League, the Vauxhall Conference, which is now treated almost as an unofficial "Fifth" division. As I understand it, the ID card scheme will only apply to the League proper - so the reward for a conference team winning promotion to Division Four will be to install expensive computer equipment and probably slash their crowds by half as the casual supporter and the neutral supporter see it as too much hassle to turn up "on spec" without becoming a member. Lower crowds means lower income, which in turn affects the resources of the club, the wages and the cash available to buy new players and to develop their own youngsters by running a reserve team.

This is how the rot sets in, how soccer will be destroyed, from the roots upwards. Cut off the roots, and the plant will surely die. If I signed up with say, Spurs, the team I support, I can go to their Home games. But, they're not my nearest side - I'm more likely to pop down to Watford, which means that (presumably) I'll have to fork out a further membership fee for that club. What about Liverpool supporters who live in Leeds? Or Manchester United Supporters who live in London; what do they do? Get a membership just in case they want to go to a couple of games? And then Away matches, who wants to be cooped up in the small, awkward "Away supporters" area, often behind a goal with strips of empty terracing on either side to prevent a spill-over of agro? No atmosphere, and besides, to get to and from the ground you'll have to travel by Special Train or coach and be subject to police escort at all times once in the city. Me? I like to go on the half-way line amongst a mixture of fans and talk about the game and get involved in noting new players and so forth; I like to get to the city/town early to do the bookshops, have a wander round, get a bite to eat and even, heaven forbid, partake of an occasional alcoholic drink! All this will set soccer back years and cut attendances at a stroke, just when they're beginning to creep up again. Soccer is for the fans, it's for the local community, it's for all of us - good or bad.

The net result so far is that I, along with fellow fans such as Mike Dickinson, are branded a "minority" by the government because we dare to buck the perceived view - and as we all know, this government doesn't like minorities. We floating supporters will be cast out into the wilderness - I'll endeavour to get to games, but it ain't gonna be easy - also a sort of covert blackmail will start, forged tickets, passes, ID cards etc. This already happens at Luton, my nearest team who I can't go and see because they already have a membership scheme, but go even further by banning Away supporters altogether. And yet, Away supporters can actually get in quite easily, provided they have a contact in the town who is a member - you see, members are allowed to buy tickets for their "guests", and so I forecast a massive web of inter-town contacts, often through football fanzines, geared up to getting people into grounds. But when this happens, the

smooth operators will enter the arena, the entrepreneurs so beloved of Tebbo and Thatcher, the likes of Stan Flashman who will stop at nothing, charging ten times or more the face value of a ticket to get you into a ground - whatever the market will bear, they'll be there.

The other individual who will get in easily are those who get taken along on some corporate company junket, wined and dined in the Executive Box with instant video-replay for those awkward decisions and optional volume controls to drown out the sounds of the plebs on the terraces below. No doubt they'll be "excused ID".

How will the government target fans as supporters of certain clubs anyway? Quite clearly some large teams will have more potential members than they can cope with; how will the "tribal" instincts of supporters be dealt with? By targetting someone as, say, a Leeds supporter because it's convenient to them location-wise is almost tantamount to daubing a blob of paint across the face in the appropriate team colours. Sure, the "tribal" fans display their team colours in the ritual showing-off before a match, but the average fan, like me, well, that's all really a bit naff - we just want to see good soccer; we're not really interested in chanting and pointing our index fingers or making pathetic baboon noises when coloured players take to the field. We just want to be entertained, to absorb the atmosphere, to be part of the pain or the passion and to be able to talk about the game in the pub or cafe afterwards and then look forward to the next one.

Economics, of course, cannot be ignored. Under Thatcher, how could we?

Most fans would accept that a membership scheme will cause attendances to fall, even if it is only the casual supporter, or those drawn when the team has a good cup run. Some teams might actually gain in attracting those who have already been turned off by their perceived view of violence. But on the whole, attendances will be lower. To counteract this, teams will upgrade facilities, perhaps do away with standing areas altogether, cram in fewer folk, but make just as much out of them by charging them higher admission for the "better" facilities. Liverpool, after Hillsborough, are already talking about becoming an all-seater stadium of some 35,000 capacity. Quite where the other 7,000 of their current average home gate of 42,000 are going to go is anybody's guess. To the streets, for make no mistake, it costs enough for an impoverished fan to get to a game, buy a programme and stand as it is - soccer will simply price itself out of the lower end of the market, where in very many cases (especially in the north) the impetus originally came to create the club.

Take Luton Town again; their membership scheme reduced attendances by some 20%; and this was at a time when the team was riding high in the first division, nearly winning the F A Cup and getting to three other Wembley Finals in two seasons. If they're successful on the field, and attendances fell to under 9,000, how on Earth are the big sides going to cope if they hit a poor patch - like relegation? What about wages? Team building? Money will come to the big teams, but only from Big Business. I've already mentioned the "Business set-up" at Spurs in North London - less than half their profits now come from soccer activities - what's next? Time-share apartments on the North Terrace?

The other expense is the computer equipment; not just a simple installation that suits the needs of each particular ground, but a nationwide network capable of "talking" to each other in order to exclude trouble-makers. The government are quite happy to pass the legislation, but are they going to foot the computer bill? No chance - take third division Reading; they installed their own computer

same address, still using the same typewriter, even still the same ribbon from all appearances. However, I have grown somewhat older since the 12th GE, despite criticism from some fans that this is overdoing it.

And I'm glad to learn that there have been generally good reasons for your moves and that your mundane career has been going well. It's such a relief to know that at least one UK fan has a job and can get another job if necessary, at a time when practically everyone else in fandom on the eastern edge of the Atlantic seems to be out of work most, or all, of the time.

You didn't mention the motive for writing that I think is the main one in my case: a hatred of waste. I don't have any illusions about the merits of my thinking processes or my ability to put them on paper, but I do have faith that some of the things I think can hardly be thought by anyone else because I'm the only who has had certain experiences or has encountered a certain combination of other people's experiences. So I hate to know that these unique elements in my thinking will be lost at my death, not that they are valuable but rather because some of them are different.

Since I don't attend conventions, I can't estimate how my reactions would have been to Beccon ((the 1987 Eastercon)). I suppose the disappointments you encountered were shared by others, since I seem to detect a growing amount of unhappiness in con-reps these days. Some of the trouble undoubtedly results from the growing splits in fandom: some of those who attend cons just wouldn't understand what difference it makes if the fan room is in a convenient place, for instance, because the fan room is meant for those with other fannish interests than simply going to cons. You will hate me for admitting that the lack of a disco would have made this a memorable con for me, no matter what its other failings - ah well, I hope you enjoyed the worldcon more!

((Keeping records of things said or done are fascinating, even if bordering on the trivial and dull - it's very often the minutiae of life in times past that keeps the archaeologist happy, although Kate Jeary would no doubt argue about that one. As for the worldcon, well - I wrote reams afterwards, trying to be very objective for a change - but it didn't work. It was just all too horrifying to contemplate in the final analysis. It wasn't until the infamous "Bail-out" party last December that I actually remembered some good times I'd had, and that was only prompted by pints of fine ale and the company of other assorted convention reprobrates.))

IAN WATSON, Bay House, Moreton Pinkney, Near DAVENTRY, Northants, NN11 6SQ

Thanks for the zine reminding us of sizzling moments of passion at Beccon. I think my biggest boost there, though, was when I said hullo to Gene Wolfe and he replied, "But Ian, you're a writer of such giant stature. How can you be so small?"

Compare and contrast with Conspiracy the Hotcon, where at one of the Corn Exchange parties Bob Shaw confided worry about underarm perspiration. I swiftly hoisted his arm and sniffed. "No problem, Bob," I assured him. But this gave me an idea, an inspiration, that in fact deoderants consist of tiny molecules of concentrated B.O which are cunningly encapsulated in a thin shell of perfume. You roll the stuff on and smell great. Fifteen minutes later, the shell breaks down, releasing the condensed B.O within. In panic you rush to apply more roll-on. Soon you resemble the reeking thing from the swamp. I explained this

theory to Bob Silverberg, who was looking cool. He listened then murmured, "Ian, you are very opposed to capitalism."

((This thrilling letter arrived in a pre-printed envelope smothered in thumb-prints and clearly marked "Filth & Smut Monthly". I thought it was Ian's latest novel at first - still, we had to laugh though.))

HARRY BOND, 6 Elizabeth Avenue, BAGSHOT, Surrey

First several apologies:

- 1) No typewriter - it's broken down.
- 2) No legible pages in NWF 2; the copier's broken down.
- 3) Dicy staples; the offrefx has broken down.
- 4) Going up to Mike Christie at the Wellington and saying "Oh hello, you're Alan Dorey aren't you". My mind's broken down.
- 5) Not much of a Loc. (Just too busy, nothing broken there).

Thanks for GE #13, not one but two copies (one by mail, one in person) - both equally good. Are you really trying to outdo Ansible with Blood On the Rooftops, or is it the angle I'm holding it? And that was a wicked Ian Watson story.

((Okay several replies:

- 1) Okay, but just make sure you send me one next time.
- 2) Give him a kick, that always works.
- 3) Makes a change from Dicy carrots.
- 4) My daughter has done this too.
- 5) Agreed.))

ANDY SAWYER, 1 The Flaxyard, Woodfall Lane, Little Neston, South Wirrall, L64

Good to see GE again, sporting a lettercol deep in discussion on matters I'd completeley forgotten about: I think I know where the last issue of GE is lurking (I never throw fanzines away), but I couldn't swear to it, and in any case it'll take me ages to find it. Makes me feel like I've been through a timewarp, though: I mean here we are after a Worldcon. In Brighton. But not the worldcon in Brighton, the last one! Could this be a trend that'll catch on? Who cares about the last convention - let's remember the last-but-one!

Let's move away from the lettercol before I get confused ((actually, if my memory serves me well, I was wittering on about Seacon '84, the Eurocon)).

I don't know whether I envy you moving south. We're probably here for the duration - we couldn't afford to live anywhere like where we do live if we moved south: when we visit friends who tell us how much their houses cost we go white at the thought of it: when we tell them how much their house would cost round here, they fall about laughing.

Typical to find out about your company going down the tubes in the press - the worst thing about such a situation is the number of rumours it generates, and then it turns out that some of the rumours are almost true and the true ones are those which were denied the other day.

((Andy goes on to say that he never throws fanzines away 'cos when when we're all Rich & Famous Big Name Authors, he'll be able to blackmail them, or sell off their early scribblings for vast sums. Me? I never throw LoCs away - at least they have original signatures on them.))

WALT WILLIS, 32 Warren Road, DONAGHADEE, N.Ireland, BT21 OPD

Many thanks for GE #13. Actually you gave me one at Brighton, so here's one of them back again ((Thanks - a trufan!)).

I was going to write to you anyway to say how intersting I found your article about your job. It seems very similar to the one I used to have, ie; problem-solving. I used to think of writing a book about types of problems and their solutions. I'm sure you've noticed too that they tend to fall into categories. I always thought that the most satisfactory type of solution was one which used all the elements of the problem itself and nothing else. The classic example is the story of the Arab who left his money to whichever of his camel-racing sons had the slower camel: they race for it, on each other's mount. I once had the rare pleasure of solving a complex and bitter dispute between the Law Society and the Law Centre lobby in exactly this way.

I was in the Civil Service of course, but I was going to say that your description of the traumatic take-over of your firm rang a lot of bells, because it has happened to me twice. Once when the NI government was taken over by Ted Heath, and once when the power-sharing executive was overthrown by the Ulster Workers Council strike. I can't complain that my career in the Civil Service was dull compared with private industry. But then the smaller the country, the more interesting the work of the individual Civil Servant: having seen something of the English Civil Service, I wouldn't like it at all.

((The takeover of my former employer is now three years behind me; in fact, I rarely think back to those "old" times. Matters have progressed so much since then that you have to survive for the here and now; besides, I have too many work and home responsibilities now - hence the slow-down in production rates for GROSS ENCOUNTERS!))

JENNIFER GLOVER, 16 Aviary Place, LEEDS, LS12 2NP

I had the impression that you had stopped doing fanzines for the time being, so was extra pleased to get Gross Encounters back from Conspiracy.

Your criticisms of Beccon seem reasonable now. Then I was just a neo who took everything for granted and just got on with enjoying myself. I really didn't care what was on so long as there was a creche. It seems though, as if every big convention is followed by intensive analysis of just what exactly went wrong, and Conspiracy does not appear to be an exception, since I hear that the Repro Room was mostly populated by workmen decorating. The Hotel Manager(s) don't seem to have been too popular either. My main objection to the NEC was the price of the food. It was cheaper to go to the airport to buy milk for the baby (luckily I had taken the precaution of bringing baby-food with me - pre-empted by baby who decided he was a true fan's child and demanded hamburger and chips), and Tara was found feeding a sausage roll to the birds. To which I said, I've paid 70p for that, you can jolly well eat it. Even if it is a continual grouse, I still object to two people having one key - this seems to be the only advantage of Contrivance, which we shall not be attending. Not really through principle, as I should have liked to have gone, but through money, lack of.

I found Blood On The Rooftops a little interesting, but must have missed most of the humour through not knowing the people involved. However, I certainly know OF them. It raises questions whether a fanzine is meant for a small select group of friends, shutting out the outside world because they are presumed to be hostile, when in fact they are merely curious. Or interested. At the moment, I am having no trouble getting articles from my regulars for my fanzine and considerable trouble attracting new authors. Is it worth persevering?

((Yes, it most definitely is - even if the end-product is a genre fanzine I personally don't like, the more the merrier. People can hone their skills and create something dynamic and memorable - or they can create a record of events, even if seen through the hazy bottom of a pint-glass. Why do I do fanzines? No real idea other than I want to and the feeling upon seeing my first SF fanzine in the mid-1970s that not only could I Do That, but I could do it better! That fanzine I saw I later went on to edit and it's still going now, 14 years later, although I only edited six issues in 1977/8. Yes, I like to write for an audience, but it is always a changing audience - the mailing list for GE #1 bears very little relationship with my current list; indeed, I would say that less than 30% of the folk are still on the list, and if I were to be really ruthless, that could be cut back even further - I'm a generous sort though, so I'll keep my list as it is for the moment. This brings me to a thought, that it's not so much the individuals that I write for, but the type of people, the group of people; sure, BOTR ain't exactly going to thrill the pants off a bunch of neo fans new to fandom; but my general pontifications, articles and so on - I hope - will occasionally strike a chord with new folk. I don't go out of my way to attract new folk, but they're always coming around, always producing fanzines and I'll try sending them GE to see what happens.

One day my audience will have crumbled away to dust, and my fanzines with them, so does it really all matter? Yes it does, an emphatic yes - and you should keep writing and producing.))

MIKE GLICKSOHN, 508 Wiindermere Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, M65 3L6, Canada

I feel a strong obligation to write and thank you for GE #13. After all, it took you so damn long to get around to it again and I know what happens when you hand out a fanzine at a Worldcon: the mysterious disappearing fanzine and the less-than-tumultuous sound of no hands locking. So thanks for the issue, and please don't wait so long before you publish again...((Thanks Mike - only 20 months this time - incidentally, that last issue was completely written, typed, printed and collated inside two working days - it just takes me so long to think about doing it, and it's only the deadline of a con that can force my hand!))

I was pleased to see you admitting that you enjoyed reading your earlier fanwriting. I'm always a bit embarrassed by how pleased I can be at re-reading an old issue of a fanzine I've done (I'm a better publisher than I am a writer) so it's nice to know others can admit to the same sort of enthusiasm. Periodically I look at an old fanzine of mine, remember all the neat stuff I put together to produce it and get momentarily enthused with the idea of doing it again. At that point I usually call up a fellow Faneds Anonymous who brings over a bottle of whisky which we drink until the idea is forgotten. ((How true.. how so very true; this is what I do!))

Blood On the Rooftops was fun, especially after Brighton and all the marvellous dirt I picked up concerning leading British fans, many of whom...con-incidentally, no doubt...are featured in your column. One can't help but wonder, though, what Avedon has over you to escape mention?

((Ahhh, Avedon - truth is, I didn't have a spare 17 pages))

JOY HIBBERT, 11 Rutland Street, Hanley, STOKE-ON-TRENT, Staffs, ST1 5JG

What a disappointment. Oh well, the sooner I reply to it, the sooner I can put it in the "take to NiCon and give away" pile.

It is unreasonable to criticise a convention for something they never tried to hide. BecCon made it obvious from the start that they would be miles from anywhere, and if you can't cope with that, you shouldn't have bothered coming.

Well, I expect that the BecCon committee being what they are had the wrong ideas about the fan room. Caroline in particular, having come into fandom at Seacon '79, probably had that fan room burned on her memory. That was a fan room for fans, for everyone to come in, attend panels on how fandom works, maybe buy a fanzine or sign up for a convention. Perhaps they hadn't realised that fan rooms generally are for a cliquey bored special interest group to sit around and moan because they're not being treated as the centre of the convention. Perhaps they'd thought that someone who had been in fandom a long time, and experienced a lot of it, and who can organise, would be a good person to run it, not realising that the clique would moan for ever if one of their group wasn't given the job.

Perhaps the problem with fanzines these days is that you are seeing them as part "of the collective fannish entity" when many of them don't actually come from people in your special interest group. Many of them never did, but with the numerical decline of fannish clique fanzines and the growing number of others, it becomes more obvious than it ever was before. Most fanzines are no longer produced simply to appeal to you. Face it.

Not another pathetic moan about Contrivance, getting most of it wrong. I've just read a nearly identical piece from Maureen Porter. So similar in fact, that my marvellous new word processor can just insert a couple of paragraphs from my letter to her.

Contrivance didn't go to Jersey because there was nowhere else, but because a straw poll showed that given the choice of returning to Brighton (aargh)/Leeds (blech)/Glasgow(yawn) or going to Jersey, the majority wanted change.

I find cons most enjoyable when your clique aren't there trying to destroy the atmosphere. If they all decide to stay away from Jersey and go to Mexican instead, it's fine by me.

I'm sorry you think the concept of people organising conventions for the love of fandom is crap. That may be your attitude, but it isn't mine. Or that of any other conrunners I know.

If you don't enjoy fandom, why stay in it?

((Oh, but fandom is such fun - especially with embittered folk such as yourself! Why don't you go back and read what I actually said - oh, but you can't - you've given your copy of GE #13 away. Never mind. I like cons, but I don't like lack of planning, lack of comprehension as to what's really going on around the committee. I violently dislike a lot of fanzines, not because they're not to my taste, but frequently because they're so poorly produced and dreadfully written. You express yourself well, so why shouldn't others - if a fanzine is sent to me for me to spend my time reading, shouldn't the quality of writing at least be of

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THE BACK OF BEYOND - OR WHY THERE
AREN'T ANY FANZINE REVIEWS
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Look, I was going to write another episode of The Mortician's Gallery; I even had people begging me to review their fanzines "even if you do slag it off as you have utterly no taste at all". I'd even sorted out the last year's worth of fanzines, two huge mounds of paper tottering across my desk as I type these words, each bash of the key-board sending shock-waves through the whole lot. If I get angry enough, no doubt the whole caboodle will avalanche across my notes and entomb me for ever more beneath a prison of inky paper.

But I changed my mind - just for a while. It's jolly hard work reviewing fazines; I do actually read all of them. I then sort them out into types, either by genre, or number or date-received, whatever takes my fancy. I then cross-refer items within those fanzines to comment on, discard those which don't fit in with the greater scheme of things, and then start taking notes. These will form the basis of any comments I come to committ to paper. The final process is to try and be smart-assed about the whole deal, throw in a few gags and generally grumble about the current state of fanzines. As you will know, this has its drawbacks - comparing a recent column from 1987 with one from 1978, and I was saying pretty much the same things except for the fanzine titles. I mean, is it me? Am I totally out of step? (Don't all rush to answer that one).

So, you can all rest easy for the while!

Looking at fanzines, though, there have been huge numbers of them recently, quite a few winging their way from Australia and the USA. Very few actually make me stop everything and read all the way through (unless of course there's the chance of a namecheck, in which case you scan rapidly, searching for your monicker in lights and then curse the wretched editor for missing you out again. It is at this point that you feel you'd better write the Wayne Kerr a loc, pointing out the error of his ways and correcting the historical perspective. You simply can't let the bounders get the fannish history wrong! Greg Pickersgill will tell you this - and it's not so that Rob Hansen has got yet more source material to write his version of fannish history. (Where are we currently? Something like 27th fandom twice-removed I should guess).

But back to fanzines. I enjoy them and am always discovering new things about them, even if it's only a new variation on how to spell "definitely"; as you know, the fannish version is usually spelt "definatly". But, recently, there has been yet another attempt to hi-jack the fanzine away from the sf genre. Indeed, it was only the advent of do-it-yourself punk fanzines in the middle-seventies that brought the word "fanzine" to a wider public. Nowadays in the UK, the big thing is soccer fanzines, such as "When Saturday Comes" or "The Owl" or "Brian Moore's Head". These fanzines, generally sold outside grounds on match days (much to the chagrin of the clubs who try to flog generally un-appealing glossy, sychophantic Official Programmes), have a style of anger, humour and wit all of their own. Much of the toilet-area fun and games is on a par with VIZ COMIC, but there are large chunks which wouldn't be seen out of place in skiffy fanzines. We, of course, give ours away and they sell theirs, but if ever you happen to pick one up, a knowledge of footy isn't totally essential.

