

# GROSS ENCOUNTERS 15

NOW CAN I READ  
YOUR COPY OF  
GROSS ENCOUNTERS?







on - and the event has provided sufficient additional Scandal and News to make this an action-packed issue.

As a result of the last issue, and the fact that our youngest - Tristan - is now old enough to travel around more readily, I've started getting back into the routine of going to the Tun and BSFA meetings. I can't get used to calling the Tun "The Wellington", or indeed "The Welly" which makes it sound all terribly green footwear, vodka, volvos and horses and all that sort of stuff. Indeed, now I understand why G.Pickersgill always called the Tun "The Globe"; for the same reason, the Leeds Group always meet at the "West Riding", even though it's been the "Griffin" for several years now. And I thought SF fans were at the cutting edge of technology, always able to embrace science and change without the slightest hesitation. Still, never mind - the BSFA meetings have been re-generated for about a year now and are a good stop-gap between two Tun meetings. At the July gathering, I came along and became extremely inebriated, very enjoyably so I would say, and had a great time.

There was a quiz to entertain the masses, but when participants include Greg and Gamma and Dave Hodson, you know the sort of thing it was likely to degenerate into. Gamma surprised us all and won; this called for a celebration drink and eventually I found myself on the street with a pint glass in hand weaving my way to the tube station and home. Gamma and Hodson had other ideas, though. I thought I was perfectly safe and yet, they insisted that I accompany them back to North London and stay over and have a few more drinks. One small part of my brain must have been alert, though, since I valiantly attempted to dissuade them from this course of action; at one point they did fool me into walking the wrong way along Tottenham Court Road, but I knew better. Gamma hailed a cab and as it drew into the curb, he and Hodson tried to bundle me in the back so that I didn't have any choice as to where I was going to end up. Again my brain must have found some few cells still untainted by booze and I resisted and struggled away down to the tube. God knows what onlookers must have thought, but presumably they passed it off as just another failed kidnapping.

I achieved Euston station successfully and felt reasonably confident in my ability to navigate from there back to Houghton Regis.

Of course, I failed totally to count on the goodwill and support of British Rail. On my line home there had been not one, but two derailments. One was at Warrington, sufficiently far removed not to affect my local train. But this was 12:45 a.m and hundreds of Inter City passengers were stranded in long queues, wondering what to do next. To cap it all, the other "incident" had been just fifteen miles up the line at Harrow, whereby a derailed train had spread itself across all four main running lines, thus halting any further services that night. There's nothing like a mini crisis to sober you up - here was I, in London, due in at work at 08:00 that same morning and I wasn't sure how the hell I was going to get home. Maybe I should have shared that taxi after all.

Euston station at 01:00 in the morning is normally a fairly quiet affair, but on this night, queues of bemused travellers snaked their way around the concourse like a cat's cradle being woven by someone with Parkinson's disease. Enterprising sales folk wandered around flogging the morning papers (always one of the great joys in Central London is being able to

pick up early editions of the morning papers from about eight pm the night before), whilst BR Information booths did their best to tell passengers what the prognosis was. This was always going to be difficult since nobody really knew and I attempted tackling one Information Clerk, but her only suggestion was taking a cab, or walking to St.Pancras and getting a train to Luton. Normally I would have done this, but my car was in Watford where I work, and without it, I couldn't have got to work the next morning. This called for some lateral thinking!

Meanwhile, pressure on my bladder was becoming noticeable, and the facilities at Euston were becoming extremely popular. Rather than waste anymore time, I wandered out onto the forecourt - loads of taxis and the odd night-bus, and then I realised that there was a Nightbus to Watford every hour or so, and thus I struck out for Trafalgar Square, hoping to pass a Gents on the way. Nelson's Column loomed and I dashed for the bus which was on the verge of leaving, hauled myself upstairs and sat at the front, gingerly crossing my legs and hoping against hope that I could hold out. The relief of Mafeking had nothing on how my bladder was feeling.

The driver, of course, had different thoughts. Even though it was dark, he insisted on taking the scenic route and we wandered all over the place, passing such exotic locations as Stonebridge, Wembley, Sudbury, Harrow and Carpenders Park before Watford beckoned on the horizon as we descended Bushey High Street. My abdomen was now decidedly tender, and I wasn't even sure that I could stand up, let alone climb down the stairs and lurch across Watford to my car and office. The bus whirled along the inner-ring road and drew to a timely halt and I, with extreme caution, made it down to the pavement.

Quite what I looked like as I delicately walked across Watford Town Centre at gone 02:00, I've no real idea, but I'll never laugh at colostomy bags again. It really was painful now, the sort of wincing jar of agony with every step that you get when a dentist hits a nerve instead of the tooth. My office seemed further away then ever, almost as if with every step, some unseen force inserted yet another yard into the pathway. After what seemd like an hour (although in reality no more than five minutes), the office appeared and the next mini-crisis arose as I needed to find my office keys in order to avail myself of the toilet facilities. Locating them in my jeans pocket (and causing additional unwanted pressure in the process), I managed to get in, thankful that no member of The Boys in Blue had seen me at this hour (Breaking in to go the toilet? A likely story - why didn't you use the phone booth like everybody else!).

I cannot describe the sheer bliss, relief and utter orgasmic joy as I decanted the contents of my tortured bladder into the urinal. All I can say is just think of your most wild and way-out desired for fantasy, and then double the feeling of pleasure...and even then you'd only be about half-way there.

My journey from there to home was, in contrast, totally uneventful and I made it into work the next morning with few difficulties. The encounter of the night before seemed a whole world away as I knuckled down to the thrills and spills of running my office, but every morning as I arrive, I can't help but recall the events as I dispose of my first two teas of the day. And with that, dear readers, on with the show.....

**ARISE YE FEUDISTS FROM YOUR SLUMBER!**

Our attention at Feudist Control has been drawn to the fact that the dog has returned to his vomit, and the ocelot has squeezed his spots. In short, as is only to be expected, Certain Elements are spreading alarm and FALSE CONSCIOUSNESS by posing as an ideologically sound Feudist Cell, while in fact covertly working for such unspeakable ends as Peace, Love and Science Fiction. We refer of course to the Leeds and Addingham Feudist Front. (Ha!) Though experienced feudists will not be fooled for a moment by their mindless babble of "literary techniques", "Martyn Taylor" and "goldfish" (Ha!), Feudist Control has taken the policy decision to EXPOSE the soi-disant LAFF in the interests of young, impressionable cadres, whose feuding careers may be nipped in the bud by contact with such POISON DWARFS. It is time to INTERROGATE THE HISTORICAL RECORD and present the FACTS, which speak for themselves. It is a matter of ANALYTICAL PROVEN TRUTH that these people are not what they seem, or even what Avedon Carol thinks they seem. Read the SHOCKING True Facts:

**FACT ONE:** In 1983 D.West attended a Unicon. Will West deny this? We think not. We'd like to see him try.

**FACT TWO:** Simon so-called Ounsley (who did not attend Mexifeudcon) once edited a fanzine with Graham James. The fanzine was named after a cute little animal. Obscene as this is, its true horror only emerges in conjunction with:

**FACT THREE:** As recently as 1980, Graham James (another Mexifeudcon no-show) admitted to having relatives in ST ALBANS!!!!!! What price their "Northern" street-credibility now, eh?

**FACT FOUR:** Proven Mexifeudcon boycott leader John Collick, once the blue-eyed juvenile delinquent of the Leeds Group HAS NOT BEEN SEEN SINCE 1983!!!!!! Can the so-called L.A.F.F produce him? Those in the know Doubt it. There are no plans to dig up the M25!

**FACTS FIVE TO EIGHTY-NINE:** re Hazel Ashworth, Paul Oldroyd, Kate Jeary, Dylan James, Steve Higgins, Helen Starkey, Simon Polley AND OTHERS, are a SECRET.

**FACT NINETY:** In 1980 crypto-southerner "Michael" Ashley (not at Mexifeudcon) loosed a fanzine thus: "For years and years the single-decker 115 has run along the main road here, though since there are no shopping centres etc; nearby, the bus is nearly always empty. Perhaps the lack of passengers was reported to London Transport....but someone whose brain-cells could be counted on a thalidomide's fingers has made an Official Decision. The single deckers have been replaced by double-deckers. Thus we now have the pathetic situation that double-deckers have from three to five people in them, and even the other day, one person (yes, yes, the driver excepted!)"

**SUB-FACT NINETY (a):** A co-editor of the said fanzine writes for the NEW STATESMAN, and is a known SEXUAL DEVIANT. Can their pseudo-historians produce any HARD EVIDENCE that Ashley has since revised his position? Don't make us LAUGH!



**FACT NINETY-ONE:** In 1982-4 Mike Dickinson (seen doing Wrong Things at Mexifeudcon) lived in a foreign country with an active COMMUNIST Party. While he was there a Eurocon was held at the BRIGHTON METROPOLE HOTEL. Coincidence? HA! The full story of Red Dicko's malign influence on Euro-fandom resembles that of the Giant Rat of Sumatra. But we shall REVEAL ALL when the time is right.

Can these vile YUPPIE LOVE AND PEACE MERCHANTS masquerading as Feudists refute these True Facts which ar an authentic part of the HISTORICAL RECORD? No. Only London Feudism is in Possession of the TRUTH. Do not under any circumstances order their DANGEROUS gimcrack products WHICH ARE MADE IN HONG KONG. Save your money for our SUPER-FEUDING SOFTWARE SYSTEM, the BRITISH Feuding device of the CYBERPUNK age. Why write your own fanzines when you can infect the enemy's PCW with YOUR VIEWS?

Details: Feudible Information, 95 Mussolini Mansions, London E2. All viruses written by the real DAVE LANGFORD, not their cheap imitation.

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**BLOOD ON THE ROOFTOPS**  
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AS MY MANY FANS ALREADY KNOW, everything contained in this column is totally and utterly true - it's just that the words and names may not be in the correct order. A number of USA fans comment that it all seems very amusing and British, but as they don't know the folk involved, it's "kinda hard to get excited about". Well right, that's one thing we've got to put a stop to before this nasty situation becomes too rampant. Rochelle and I will have to come over to CORFLU in New York next May to redress the balance - more of this Thrilling News to follow.

Mexicon turned out - as expected - to be an enjoyable con; plenty of laid-back fun and scandal, even if the toad who penned the scandal column in CRITICAL WAVE referred to us as "Boring Old Farts". Old Farts, yes, boring - on your bike Mr or Ms Scandal Column Writer. The Hotel itself was very condusive to naughty goings-on, what with its "up and over" approach to navigating from one side of the ground floor to the other. It was easy to get stuck in one part and have a totally different fun-time than those on the other side. BARRY BAYLY was in good form, wandering around with that delightful Permanently Pissed state that he exudes; PAUL 'GAMMA' GAMBLE, Barry's erstwhile agent wanders around with that Always Alcoholic state, and proceeds to spend Barry's royalties on booze. Barry hasn't quite got the drinking-thing down to the fine art that Gamma has. One convention, they ended up sleeping in the book-room, totally smashed, but Gamma awoke at 09:00 as the smell of breakfast wafted through from the restaurant. "Ah, bacon, wonderful...". Barry supresses the desire to empty his stomach onto the floor whilst Gamma dashes off for his obligatory full English.

Actually, this whole column could be turned over to "What Gamma Did Next", rather after the style of those kids books like "My Naughty Little Sister",

"What My Naughty Little Sister Did Next" and "Getting an Abortion for My Naughty Little Sister". JULIAN HEADLONG also stars in this item, since it was he who provided a programme item on the effects of Beer on the Human Body. All very scientific and smart-arsed, as you would expect, but quite fascinating and calculated to send you straight to the bar to drown your sorrows, write your will and drink yourself stupid as you realise that you've so little time to live. GAMMA turns up half-way through and hovers at the back of the hall, swaying gently in the air-conditioned breeze, his glass never quite spilling its contents and proceeded to pass judgement at various stages. "Legalise Dope..." and "Stick with Spirits" and "Mine's a pint of lager". The added effect of a slightly slurred voice made a superb accompaniment to the lecture.

From the fun to the dumb, now folks, and that Fan about Town, HARRY BOND. How is it that a guy can write so constructively, and in a reasonably interesting manner and yet have nothing worth saying in person? Maybe it's because he can talk faster than a speeding train, but his mind can't cope with the leaping tall buildings bit, let alone leaping imagination. And to cap it all he gets shouted at by AVEDON CAROL for something like half an hour, and stands there taking it. Oh dear, how sad, never mind.

Another fascinating sight was DAVID PRINGLE, chief cook and bottle-washer for Interzone. He always gives the impression of being very cool and collected, always observing but rarely getting involved and letting go; mind you that's probably because there's less hair to let down these days, but still - why worry. Dave managed to spend most of the con being Interzone Guru to the latest coterie of IZ writers, at one point it seemed that he was sitting with these folk at his feet, hanging on every word he said and then dashing off to fill The Master's Glass whenever it became empty. Still, IZ is still good, looking better all the time and you should subscribe now.

GREG PICKERSGILL is not generally known for his generous way with words concerning other folk, especially at a con when the Guinness has been flowing, so it was totally odd seeing Greg pile plaudit upon plaudit for the talents of Jeff Hawke creator, SYDNEY JORDAN. If Jordan uttered a single word, there was Greg almost bursting out with applause, "Look, the man can talk as well as draw". Heaven knows what would have happened if Jordan farted or picked his nose, but there you go. Secretly, though, just between you and me you understand, I used to read the Jeff Hawke strip in my parents' Daily Express and can quite see how Greg got so worked up. Plus, Sydney Jordan was one of those rare people who has no real ego and was extremely interesting to listen to. And why, just look at the way he picked his nose....

When the Hotel ran out of Real Ale, most sensible fans found their way down to The Trip to Jerusalem, reputed to be the oldest licensed premise to be called The Trip to Jerusalem in Nottingham. It claimed to be have been opened in 1189, and judging by the decay and cobwebs in parts of the bar, this is almost certainly an underestimate. I ambled down there on one occasion with Child Hater TONY BERRY, in the hope that I could force him to see the error of his ways and permit one small, placid child to attend a party at his shared residence in Birmingham. Nothing worked, even though I plied him with drink. The pub itself was a revelation, most of it being carved out of a solid rock cliff and the interior bars being little more

than caves with a bar and seats. Inside one bar were MAL & HAZEL ASHWORTH, D.WEST and MICHAEL ASHLEY and thus a renegade Leeds Group gathered for an arcane meeting. D.West, of course, was quite at home with the cobwebs and decay and the bodies of fans who have crept away to die.

In an adjoining bar loud voices filtered through the several feet of rock - it could only mean one thing - American Fans, and true enough, there was MOSHE FEDER, accompanied by JOSEPH NICHOLAS and JUDITH HANNA. Mention of the Cinzano Kid (as he was known in a former incarnation), brings me to mention ROCHELLE's amazing powers of observation. On seeing a person walking away from the bar, simply from a rear view, she muttered "Who's that woman?". Suppressing a chortle I explained that, yes indeed, that woman was Joseph. "But, he's got a girly ponytail and earrings and and....nah, it's not Joseph really - who the hell is it?" It's so hard with folk sometimes, but I persisted. "No, it really is Joseph, you know the person you met before me, borrowed a hairdryer from and even stayed overnight with in Pimlico before Judith was on the scene." The potted history is simply to make this moment more poignant, you understand. Rochelle looked hard at the receding figure and only conceded her point of view when Joseph sat down next to Judith. Life's so confusing at times.

I thought that with MIKE CHRISTIE and SHERRY COLDSMITH departing for The USA, that this identity problem all you fans seem to have would have disappeared by now, but no, it's even more rife. Look, first off, I've been around since 1976, and even in those earlier times had to listen to ROY KETTLE saying that I looked like Chris Priest. Now Mike Christie is not only supposed to look like me, but must have had radical plastic surgery to ensure that he does. So, upon arriving at a recent BSFA meeting, I was challenged by DAVE BARRETT at the door..."What are you doing here?" I looked at him carefully. This is the guy I've known on and off for several, yes, several years, a guy that used to live near Leeds, a guy I got to edit Vector when I was BSFA chairman and he is asking me what I am doing here! "Going to the BSFA meeting; what are you doing here?" He pauses. "No, but aren't you supposed to be in California now?" I ponder, having twigged what his problem is. "I'd love to be in California right now, but unfortunately with Mike Christie over there, I'd never get a moment's peace". Exit Dave Barrett looking sheepish; at least he buys me a drink though. It even happened at Mexican; MC was on a panel being extremely cerebral, and I wandered in near the end. As soon as the panel ended, someone from the audience who'd been having a discussion with Mike which got cut short, then came up to me and started rambling on again; nothing I could do could dissuade him from his path until Mike also came into view. I wonder if any other readers have similar problems?

IAN WILLIAMS - now there's a name you never thought you'd see in a fanzine again. Turn to his letter in BACK & FORTH now, but listen to the following facts and then tick those which are TRUE:

- 1) He has moved out of his grandmother's house and bought his own place.
- 2) He has got promoted at work.
- 3) He has got married.
- 4) He is very happy.



5) His novel is being published imminently.

6) He has taken a course of steroids and is now six feet tall.

The answer is that they are ALL TRUE\*.

The Wellington is begining to get like the Tun with the numbers of folk now turning up; at least at the Tun you could spill happily out onto the street, but at the July meeting, the local constabulary were taking a very dim view of people standing on a very wide pavement and having a good time. ABI FROST reckoned that it was because some new Inspector had been appointed who wanted to tackle real crime, rather than worry about the odd murder, rape or drug traffickers. I reckon it's all part of Thatcher's plan to outlaw FUN, since this gives people freedom of thought and expression, clearly anathema to the Maggon.

Also at the Tun, MAUREEN PORTER turns up with a broken wrist - cynics might say that this was merely designed as a conversation piece, but we trufans know that she did it jogging. Not of the horizontal variety, as some wag exclaimed rather tactlessly at one point, but the real genuine early in the morning before the muesli sort - she was attacked, but got away fortunately. There was talk of she and Paul maybe going to the Fairport Convention Festival, but we subsequently learnt that they preferred to go posing at the Edinburgh Festival. Incidentally, Paul Kincaid can now drive, thus denting once more one of my early famous fannish theories that apart from John Harvey and myself, few male fans were capable of driving. When are GREG or D.WEST going to learn?

At the Fairport festival, apart from superlative music from the band, plus the CLIMAX BLUES BAND, RICHARD THOMPSON, ALL ABOUT EVE (Does John know?) and numerous guests such as STEVE HARLEY (cringe, but actually he was okay), MARTIN BARRE & IAN ANDERSON, plus JULIANN REGAN of All About Eve doing a sterling impression of the late, great, wonderful Sandy Denny, there were a number of fans. This time Dave Barrett did not get confused as we queued for the bog one morning; we even talked about organising a fannish gathering for later that day, but somehow it never happened. CATH EASTHOPE was there, spotting us sitting near the front on the first day as she wandered by. Then there was LINDA JAMES, who accompanied me on the Saturday night to see Fairport (and thus maintaining a peculiar record that of the last four times I've seen them since 1985, a different female has accompanied me each time - Rochelle keeps trying to get rid of me, but it just don't work.) and rumours of MARY GENTLE somewhere too. There was even ROB HANSEN. Well, some guy that was obviously his doppelganger - the resemblance was more than just passing - even AVEDON could have been fooled by the precise way this guy compared with the Welsh one.

ALYSON L.ABRAMOWITZ, who always complains when people spell her name wrong, even if it's just missing out that middle initial - but, then that's so typically American, isn't it fans? - was over recently and gave us a ring one night from the SKEL's. Well, actually, Skel rang and rambled on about a projected football fanzine (see later), and then mentioned that there was someone there who wanted to speak to me. BLAST - who could it be? Not the guy I borrowed a hubcap from once? We arranged to meet up later in the week in London, and we had a few drinks at the Sherlock Holmes on



"rejected" at all it was precisely for the reasons you identify: because her fanzines Just Weren't Very Good.

I'll close with a remark relayed to me by one of my collaborators on the spoof Hansen flyer after we'd finished handing it out on the first night of Mexican III. He'd been asked, he said, about one of the projected titles listed at the bottom of the second page. What was the point, this person wanted to know, of Hibbert? "Exactly," he said to me. Which is perhaps more vicious than anything I said in the previous paragraph.

((The silence from Hanley has been deafening. Is the message getting through, we wonder?)).

SKEL, 25 Bowland Close, Offerton, STOCKPORT, Cheshire, SK2 5NW

God but it's hot at the moment. Whenever I get home from work these days my first move is to get out of my trad duds and into just a shirt and shorts, which reminds me that I am the other side of that great divide, for the bleach-white legs are now mine ((GE #14, page 1!)). Bleach-white, spindly, knock-kneed legs, which are the worst kind. Knock-kneed as a genetic trait, and spindly because I didn't take up cycling until past the age when exercise tends to build new muscle. I swear Alan, that when 'proper' cyclists pass me on the road, they've got more muscle in one leg than I've got in my entire body.

Anyway, I know what you mean about the holidays, and remember the first time my parents went on holiday and I decided not to bother. So do they. I was a bit older than your 12 though, for as we hardly ever went for holidays they were not something to give up lightly. Apart from a few as a very young tad, I recall 3 before deciding, in my early twenties, that even so I'd rather stay at home and read my skiffy.

When my parent left for their fortnight's holiday I was a bookish young man, a virgin, in my early twenties, who spent almost all his time alone reading SF....and I was bound to die the same, or at least similar. When they returned I'd met Cas, a woman with two young kids, separated from her husband, and wise in the ways of the world. I'd moved out within a month of their return. Like some changeling I had been stolen away, though instead of faery magic Cas used the power of **RUDE THINGS** to cloud my mind. An evil temptress had stolen their firstborn from them! It was many years before they'd risk leaving another of their dear children behind when they went on holiday.

((Good grief! Does this mean that I've got all this to look forward to with our three darling offspring? Actually, I did go one holiday with my folks after age 12 - this was when I was 17, having passed my driving test, and they were going on a motoring tour round Scotland - I was going to be 'useful' in sharing the driving. It suited me quite well since I was studying A-Level Geography at the time, and being the little creep that I was, it meant I could visit a lot of field-sites, gather rocks, take pictures, do a few sketch-maps and generally become class-swot on my return. It must have worked, since I passed very easily and still retain a more than passing interest in things geographical/geological. As for holidays - I still don't like them very much....))



IAN WILLIAMS, 14 The Limes, Mowbray Road, SUNDERLAND, Tyne & Wear, SR2 7BP

((Ian asks us to please note his new address!))

You caught me just at the right time with GE, or rather I picked it up from my old address on a day when I can sit down and write a reply without distractions. I'm on a couple of days leave and Susan, my wife, is on a field trip from college for the day off to the wilds of Brampton and sundry parts of Cumbria. Picking up GE from Greta Terrace coincided with the arrival here of a hot-off-the-press advance copy of my novel and kindly sent by the senior editor at Macdonald's Children's Books.

You mention the changes in your life since attending your last con, well the previous paragraph encompasses even greater changes in mine since I last attended a con - the Novacon before last - of which you may or may not be aware.

In February '88, convinced I was getting nowhere with my writing, which had occupied most of my spare time for the previous four years, I started an OU degree foundation course in the social sciences. In early June I realised one of my fellow students was really rather nice and so, plucking up my courage, asked her out. We went out for the first time on 24th June and got married exactly two months later. Two months after that and after two partial re-writes I received a contract for my novel, **The Lies That Bind**. Hell of a year!

I originally sent the book to Jarrold at Futura as adult sf. He felt it worked better as a teenage book and passed it on to Macdonald's Children's Books Dept (since sold to Simon & Schuster) who liked it and it's being published as part of their new Frontlines imprint with Purnell on the spine. At #2.50 for 254 pages, I think it's good value and I hope you'll buy a copy! Incidentally, it isn't the my novel of countless 70s jokes but something I first started five years ago. It's the sort of book that if you hadn't read any sf before you still wouldn't think you had even though it's firmly rooted in the genre. There are also a few embedded comics/superhero jokes, specifically a dig at Marvel's interminable mutants. You'll laugh, you'll cry, you'll come away a changed person! Would I lie to you?

It's every fan's dream to sell a book but, rather ironically, I'm not around in fandom any more to enjoy the last laugh. I moved into Susan's small flat and have started saving for a mortgage as well as paying off a loan for a new car. I don't even have time for writing any more, though I've a couple of other novels which, if a publisher showed interest, I'd rewrite to order.

In ten months my life's changed for the better more than I could ever have imagined and I'm happier than I've ever been. In many ways it's a very (pun unintended) conventional life (like yours I suspect) but I don't mind abit and certainly not when I hear odd bits of fannish gossip (such as tales of the Hansen/Carol marriage and feuds with Greg). Who needs hassles like that?

The reason I think that many fannish fans drop out of fandom when they get married is because they've found something more satisfying. I don't mean to denigrate fandom by this and I don't want to lose touch with it completely

(if only hanging on by a slender thread of a sub to Critical Wave) but you've got to get your priorities right and your partner has to come before everything (unless you just want someone to screw and do the housework and this isn't even what I call a marriage or a commitment). So Susan is my main priority and both writing and fandom takes a back seat until we get settled in a larger place and our finances are on a sounder footing.

((It's good news for Ian, and I'm pleased for him. A few thoughts though; Rochelle and I don't really live a 'conventional life' - we want as much of fandom as we can, but finances and children dictate otherwise. This has been the case over the course of late '87 and most of '88, but things are back on the usual fannish course now - my God, two fanzines in the space of three months! Anyway, Ian goes on about football.....))

As a one time football supporter still with an interest in the success (or lack of it) of my local team, I agree with everything you wrote in your piece. The major problems are outside the grounds not in them. Football hooliganism has nothing to do with football itself, rather it's an example of tribalism. Throughout history there have always been violent tribes or gangs in society as if they fill a social need through which, generally, young working-class males can release their aggression. Identifying with football clubs is just an excuse. If they didn't exist the violence will just find expression another way. Identity cards won't solve the problem at all because football isn't the problem. If everyone involved (especially Margaret Thatcher) read my novel then all these problems would disappear and the world would be a much nicer place.

Enjoyed your reply to Joy Hibbert who tends to behave in just as bad or worse way than those she's always moaning about. I think she should read my novel - **The Lies That Bind**, Frontlines, #2.50 - for a lesson in how to be understanding and compassionate.

((I think Ian wants you all to read his novel, folks!))

KEV MCVEIGH, 37 Firs Road, Milnthorpe, Cumbria, LA7 7QF

Since none of the trio on the cover of GE#14 looks like Mike Chistie, I presume none is you? ((Presume correct)). I don't think we've met, but I think I met Rochelle in passing at Mexican...

As a former card-carrying supporter of Chelsea ((Ahh...so it was YOU!)) I too have an interest in membership cards. I joined the club to gain several benefits - monthly newspaper, shop discount, away tickets etc., but also to support the club.

For several years, Chelsea have only offered away tickets to Club members, although it hasn't prevented those members from having bricks thrown at them in Manchester as the police escorted them past a demolition site, nor hassle from Leeds fans or elsewhere. You don't need an identity card to hang around between the station and the football ground - where most violence seems to occur. Incidentally, recent figures show around 6,700 arrests at football grounds last season, ie; less than 1.5 per games. They also showed 17,000 arrests on racecourses in the same period. Do I need to comment?

I went to see Chelsea play at Grimsby once, sans ticket, so I stood in front of the new stand which Leeds fans trashed a few weeks later. I got into conversation with a guy of around 20, I was 18. We talked about the relative fortunes of our teams and who to watch and had a friendly bet on the result. I tipped Clive Walker and he Kevin Drinkell as the man to note; we shared the money as Walker scored three and Drinkell two in a 3-3 draw. Half-way through however, I was threatened by the supporter on the other side of me. He was abusive and aggressive - he was also a pensioner. Fortunately the youth I'd been talking to announced that I was his guest.

This is just an anecdote to demonstrate that it is impossible to judge football fans generally - which is what government and the media try to do. It may be skinheads who are seen in fights but it is frequently yuppie types who encourage it. I could go on but you know anyway or you wouldn't have written that piece..and we both know it won't change until the fans get their say. Meanwhile, see you on the Shed sometime...If we can get in.

((Further to my piece, I would honestly say that I've never felt intimidated at a soccer match. You learn to read the warning signs and how to avoid potential trouble. You get to know there are just some things you don't say in too demanding a tone, but apart from all that, it has always been a lot of fun - even when Mike Dickinson and I, one Saturday in 1978, went along to Valley Parade, Bradford to see them play in the fourth division. We got there, on a bitterly cold day, with a biting wind and noticed that it was a little bit on the quiet side - even the Italian Espresso Bar, Er Piu, was empty as we got to the ground. It turned out that we'd got our dates mixed up, and City were playing away. But, there was a game on - Bradford City 'A' versus Manchester United 'A'. This is the equivalent of the third teams playing each other, non football fans. Bradford City won 6-0, but I have promised not to mention this to Cas Skelton, who having resisted naming her children after the United first team, made sure that the rabbits were given suitable titles. I mean Jesper Rabbit....I ask you.))

PETER E. PRESFORD, "Rose Cottage", 3 Tram Lane, Buckley, Clwyd

Well, what a strange fan you are boss! A brood of three (it is still three?), a football fan, and you don't like to be a tourist and you send zines to Joy Hibbert - tut!

Anita and I are now at the other end of the brood spectrum. Mark married nearly two years ago; the thought of being classed a grandfather pleases, yet also makes me shudder. Now if Justine will just get married I can have her room for a study.

I must admit that my love of football has faded somewhat over the last 10 years. League Football and its unchanging ways really is too much to bear. Even teams like Liverpool could do much more to take care of their fans. As one local fan told me "You need wellies to go to the toilet!"

As a casual supporter it would most certainly put the khybers on me going to any more matches...

((Which of course is exactly the point Moynihan, Thatcher and company just won't see. Maybe all we deserve is a 10 team Super League- but how dull))



HARRY WARNER Jr, 423 Summit Av., Hagers Town, Maryland, 21740, USA

Your introductory philosophising over the difficulties of taking holidays with a family made me feel a trifle guilty. Here I am, able to go on a trip without any more trouble than notifying the mailman and the paper delivery boy not to make deliveries for a few more days, and I stay at home practically all the time. However, you have one advantage over me: that of having vacations and long weekends to look forward to and to savour when they arrive. One of the very few disadvantages of retirement is the disappearance of the joys of anticipating those occasional interruptions in the dreary work routine.

I couldn't find in this issue the thesis on Sky TV you mention at the outset ((In this issue folks!)), so maybe you transmitted it on a channel that my television set can't pick up. I'm not even sure what Sky TV may be or have been but I gather it has something to do with the use of satellite dishes. Those dishes carry no bad repute in the United States except for an occasional turmoil in an historic area which authorities are trying to keep as near to possible to the way it looked when it became historic. In fact, one firm has been advertising widely indoor television antennas which pick up only the Earth-based transmitters, but are built in the form of small satellite dishes.

Some of the background to your football article was missing in my case, but the reasons for that are obvious. I was able to understand most of the situation you were writing about, however. Your article and the things I've read in newspapers about the cause of the identity card plan have given me much perplexity because I can't understand why mass violence is such a serious problem at English football games and yet in the United States, where there is so much more crime and uncivilised behaviour in other respects, sports crowds almost never create any problems. There was a newspaper letter to the editor the other day written by a British couple who had been vacationing in the United States. They told about attending a major league baseball game in Baltimore where a crowd of about 35,000 was excited, partisan and agitated but there wasn't a policeman in sight, and the British couple marvelled over this particular fact.

I suppose one possible difference could be the fact that distances are so much shorter in the UK, making it easier for large delegations to follow their team to away games. But the Interstate Highway system has made it possible for American sports fans to drive en masse to contests 300 or 400 miles away without losing a couple of day's work. Another possible difference is the high prices charged for tickets to most major sports events in the US, cutting down on the percentage of poor white trash in audiences. College football and college basketball games are most favoured by people who have been to college, another factor that keeps down the rowdiest element in the population. However, I don't think these are convincing reasons why there's such a difference over there.

One thing surprised me very much: your passing reference to crowds sending catcalls to black players. I thought racial prejudice was much more serious in the US than in the UK. Over here crowds are colour blind at sports events, even in the Deep South where the tensions are worst. You might hear one isolated spectator yell a racial epithet, but no mass prejudice. In Frederick, a town 25 miles east of Hagerstown, in the Carolina League there

are teams of white and black players playing against each other every evening before a racially mixed audience and there's never any racial problem.

((Actually, I hadn't intended my brief aside to be taken as meaning English soccer is rife with racism. Unfortunately there have been some small parts of crowds who seem to think it witty to throw bananas onto the pitch or to make chimp noises. Most crowds soon 'gang-up' verbally against those who insist on doing this. Indeed, violence as a whole is very much outside the grounds and, I'm convinced, exaggerated by the media. They may not intentionally do this (although of course the Tabloids will do anything for gutter headlines), but just the mere mention in a sports report suggests that it's always happening, or that it's a new phenomenon. As long as I can recall, it's always been there: indeed, some of the worst violence actually occurred in the latter part of the nineteenth century, not long after the current football league was established.))

DAVID BELL, Church Farm, North Kelsey, Lincoln, LN7 6EQ

One of the aspects of the general street violence problem that I think is apparent from history is that the golden age the politicians look back on was pretty short, yet its end was also associated with several changes in the nature of violence. I remember a book on Victorian Murders on trains. There was a mention somewhere that in the seventy years covered by the book there had been fewer murders on trains than in the year before publication. Violence the Victorians accepted, such as corporal punishment in schools, is now seen as evil. I suspect, though it is almost uncertainly unprovable, that rape and sexual abuse of children was as prevalent then but remained unreported. When will people see that from the Battle of Cable Street to the student riots of the 60s is barely thirty years?

No, I'm sure the real problems will get blamed on all sorts of things that have almost no connection, not just football. Sure, you can always blame the current government, because they are supposed to be governing. Sometimes there is a better reason. But I think there is something awry with a system in which a murderer so often spends less time in prison than a train robber, in which money so often outweighs human life.

((I don't blame the government of the day for violence; what I do resent is the apparent belief that ID cards are a general panacea which will solve all problems, despite the weight of evidence to the contrary. Indeed, just three weeks ago, two major Dutch teams were instructed to operate an ID card scheme "to reduce violence". On the day of the game, it was abandoned - it actually appeared to be creating difficulties, quite apart from the obvious delays in getting into and out of a ground, which after the Hillsborough disaster must be of paramount concern. Anyway, we've got the rest of this season - let's enjoy it!))

WELL, there we have it - I've run low on space, so here are a few WAHFs:

Jan Orys (Super postcard), Andy Sawyer, Sandy Brown, Ian Creasey, Taral MacDonald, Linda James, Abi Frost.

Thank you all - and now - START WRITING AGAIN! Next issue, Real Soon Now.





generalisation: fanzines which have been glossily produced and laid-out with stacks of artwork, rarely live up to their promise when the written content is studied. Thus, I ususally prefer tidy, neat dupliacted/photocopied issues, rather than expensive photo-litho or, heaven forbid, offset jobbies.

First off, we come to Simon Polley and AN ELVISH ORC, which comes from the same stable as the excellent VILE ANCHORS. This fan can write, he bares his soul, he communicates passion, rage, humour and emotion in such a disarmingly simple fashion that he's an object lesson in how to communicate. There's a super piece about cowardice, the contrast between how Simon views the world, and how they might see him - six feet tall and 18 stone and worried that he might get mugged on the way home. The item conveys humour and pathos all in one and few people could have written something of this ilk so effectively. The writing is also so telling - one incident concerning a beerglass in the face, missing teeth, streams of blood and then a bus journey to the Infirmary displaying quiet humour and also Serious Thoughts all in one.

What he also achieves is an understated humour, verging on the "I'm sorry this bit might come across as being witty, I don't know why that happened". It may be an acquired taste, something that is hard to get the right balance on, but when done correctly, really does put the gloss on the finished product. Fanzine humour so often fails to appreciate the economy of expression: just because you can tell a humorous tale to a fellow fan at the bar, doesn't mean you can translate that verbatim onto the written page and achieve the same effect. Simon gets it right most of the time.

Another acquired taste is Geogre Bondar, one with which I have persevered for some time, and still can't bring myself to really like. TERRY BROOME'S UNDERWEAR #4 appeared in July, designed and cut-out in the shape of a pair of Y-Fronts. That's not bad, toilet humour and novelty all combined into one - it's the sort of thing VIZ comic would offer as a free gift, and then explain on page 16 how to make your free gift out of an old cornflakes packet. He takes a strange letter from Terry Broome as his starting point, a letter in which the author seems obsessed with the clothes he is wearing and their design, material and so forth as he bashes out the letter on the typewriter. Geogre then begins weaving an item about "intimacy" with said Broome's garments and spins it out for some time. All very clever and cerebral, but oh so very slight. It isn't very interesting and seems a very slender thread about which to construct a fanzine. Ultimately, the whole thing becomes very unrewarding, but at least it gave the postman a laugh.

Okay so what do we do? Well, for all the conspiracy theorists in the land, we return to Leeds and VSOP #4 from Jan Orys, the Jan Dawes that was. An interim issue, produced ostensibly just to showcase some locs, it actually comes across as very readable and entertaining. Jan displays a neat turn of phrase - especially in her piece on the recent Leeds Con, Iconoclasm. Held during the heatwave, the writing conveys superbly the 'feel' of the convention, it's structure and atmosphere, the never-ending humidity and the slow but sure entropic decay of the hotel's infrastructure. I've always hated the "Then it was 7.00 and time to go out for supper and I had a Bigmac and fries and it was awful and then I went back to the con" school of convention reporting, chiefly because it takes no imagination to write this sort of drivel and, is damned easy to write badly. However Jan adopts

this approach to make chronological sense of what was going on and because she writes well, it's good reading and I hardly noticed the format. She over does it somewhat with her lust for Male Bums, almost to the point whether I'm not sure that she's entirely serious and is just being slightly satirical. Hmm, still never mind.

Another piece to notice in VSOP is Simon Ounsley's "Feuding - The One True Path". This of course is totally False and Without Truth, and you should immediately turn to page 4 of this issue of GE for the total and utter refutation of these Falsehoods.

Let's stay in Leeds for the moment and for a fanzine that many of you won't come across, but one that has some "interesting" memories for me from the distant past. The fanzine? BLACK HOLE #28 - a University SF group production which has been running now since 1974, with a few hiccoughs along the way. The fanzine itself started out with globs of fan-fiction, a few book reviews and that was about it. It still contains minimal amounts fo fan fiction, some quite decent book reviews (certainly wouldn't seem out of place in Vector), but its survival is not quite so fascinating as the fans that have been involved with it in the past. John & Eve Harvey, Dave Pringle, Lee Montgomerie, Me (!), Tony Berry, Mike Dickinson, Carol Gregory, Phil Knight, Ric Cooper and so on. The current issue looks very tidy and well produced, now edited by Ian Creasey, but still has this overwhelming apologist attitude surrounding it: is it or is it not a fanzine? Is it a club-zine and should it include crummy artwork and poor fan-fiction? Well, it's kept going, issue #28 is by no means bad and the editor has the Right Attitude and some half-way decent editorial input. Heading in the right direction.

Back to London now, and CHICKEN BONES #1 from Abi frost. This first appeared at Mexican, but only just since reliable Dave Hodson (Master Printer) hadn't managed to get all the pages printed in time, and some that had been had the printing quality one normally associates with the writing quality of Keith Walker. Abi manfully managed to get the last few pages done at some Instant Copy Shop in Nottingham and the result was well worth it. It's a fine issue - an extremely good piece on football fanzines by Juimmy Robertson (read and enjoy) accompanying Abi's own views on Fandom As We Know It. Very conversational, loads of great throwaway lines and some good sense displayed - like speaking up for single stream conventions, a polite put-down of the Anti-Eastercon conspiracy and a fascinating put-down of the Hugo Awards. All good topical, fannish stuff and definitely worth your attention - and the second edition has nice clean pages with a two-page insert explaining the printing cock-up (not all D.Hodson's fault, apparently).

One thing I've often mentioned that irritates me about fandom is the use of fannish spellings and phrases by certain individuals; indeed if the word "beer" is spelt with that extra "h", then that fanzine is usually tossed across the room to fester in the "Can't Read" pile. The only tolerable phrases are "We Are All Guilty" and "Real Soon Now", the latter of which has been adopted as the title of a fanzine by David Bell. REAL SOON NOW #1 looks all very neat and tidy, justified columns, all word-processed but, produces very little empathy in me as a reader. Perhaps it's the odd lines like "Not for the first time I'm left wondering why I bother with fannish fandom"; he almost seems to delight in telling us that he doesn't want to

take part, and in which case - why the fanzine? There's a whole 13 page transcript of a discussion at Contabile (a filksinging con in the UK!) concerning, yes, filking. Filking was traditionally viewed by Uk fans prior to Seacon '79 as something pervy that Americans did instead of propping up the bar. Unfortunately, it seems to be spreading over here and should perhaps be quietly taken outside and shot. Nevertheless, there are some interesting 'bits' in the transcript, not the least the comparisons with the roots of folk music and Country and Western.

We move on.

Harry Bond hits us with quarto-sized THE CO-OPERATIVE CAULIFLOWER, a fanzine which tries to echo a Golden Age fanzine, whenever that Golden Age might have been. The cover is ominous - the old Harry Bell gannet, falling off its perch. What is this lad up to? By the sound of it we have to put up with yet more on the Feud to end all Feuds, that concerning (I hoped I wasn't going to have to mention it) Michael Ashley in the Blue Corner and Avedon Carol and Owen Whiteoak in the Red Corner. Strangely enough, his short piece is eminently sensible, and so different from the sort of stuff he spews out at 500 m.p.h at the Wellington.

The best bits are Abi Frost's "Today In Parliament" (or was that "Toady in Parliament?") and Mike Ashley's Novacon report, which reads like something from the fevered brain of D.West mixed up with Greg Pickersgill on speed. The whole thing hangs together brilliantly, even if it's full of "dunno what happened next" and "can't remember anymore" - the sort of conrep that would have appeared quite happily in the middle 70s, but is almost a revelation now. This is the sort of thing that's missing these days, the sense of danger, the risk, the insults, the 'couldn't give a fuck' attitude which many fanwriters these days seem to have forgotten all about.

Of course, this is violently against what certain elements of fandom today believe should be happening, but there has to be room for this sort of flak-attack material. It is actually bloody hard to write, and Ashley manages the witticisms, the snide put-downs and one-liners very well. I once tried this sort of thing, but always pulled back for some reason - and now, of course, time has changed my style and I strive to be much more careful. Okay, forget the past, but Ashley deserved his Nova and I ain't going to get involved in some sordid, crummy and pointless feud as a result. End of story.

Lesley Ward produces DOMBLE IN THE WORKS, a slightly scruffy and hectic production, but some interesting bits to read - a whole item on why Lesly is an athiest (which whilst not normally being a devastatingly exciting fannish subject, does at least redress in a cogent fashion some of the inconsistencies of various organised religions), accompanied by a super cartoon on "Paper Boats for Jesus" at Sunday School. There is an extremely slight and slackly written piece on the music scene in Southend, and it's an item like this which causes the total assemblage to lack that immediacy and interest generated by such as Simon Polley and Abi Frost. It needs more editorial control and direction, but it's getting there.

The bi-monthly PULP continues on its way - not quite bi-monthly, but certainly defying any cynics that a revolving editorship wouldn't work. Issue #14 is largely a letters based production. Avedon Carol normally



edits the loC column and sends it to the relevant editor, ready-typed for insertion into the issue. Vinc Clarke was editor this time around and was landed with 19 pages which left very little space for anything else. Perhaps it's the power of this fanzine to draw response that led to such a situation, but still, it does mean that this number is a little short on issues. Never mind; despite the fact that I don't often see eye-to-eye with Avedon, she's done a good job with the editing and the linking comments. A little too much defensive action in areas, but well strung together and worthy reading. Vinc mutters darkly about handing over his editorial share to someone else - this is to enable him to get on with cataloguing his vast Fanzine Library, but it'll leave a big gap if he does go. One hopes that a suitable replacement is found since part of the chemistry of this enterprise is the mixture of the different editorial personalities.

Next comes THE CAPRICIAN #4 from Lilian Edwards and Christina Lake. It's got a good reputation and both editors are excellent writers; but, somehow, this issue doesn't quite gel - nothing personal, it's not that it's poor or dull, it's just that somewhere along the line it's lost its fizz, that sense of shock or of importance. It's primarily a conrep issue, kicking off with Christina's first instalment of the TAFF report. This is representative of how I feel about the fanzine; it's well written, it tells you things about American fans and fandom - "Compare and contrast US and UK fandom" almost - and yet it is too short, and thus appears slight. It's almost as if the curse of TAFF has struck again; although at least here we do have a contribution, unlike all those "missing episodes" from previous winners - and, yes this does mean Mr. Peter Weston.

Another item which is interesting, but in a prurient manner is Mike Glicksohn's piece on Greg Pickersgill's earlier TAFF visit. It starts off promisingly enough, then alludes to various "flashpoints" between Greg and the odd US fan, which leads into a lengthy, agonising justification of why certain things happened the way they did. Okay - I found it mildly diverting, but really, not the sort of thing that's likely to generate stacks of interest amongst the average reader.

The best item is Lilian Edwards' fanzine review column, where some extremely pertinent home-truths about the current "glut" of new fanwriters are explored. She highlights the common fault of many who are driven to write, simply that unless you can write in a lively style, nobody is going to read you, no matter how wonderful and sordid the event you are describing was. There's this great Cloud of Dullness that hangs over folk, preventing them from being interesting; even people who have been known to write well suffer from this ailment. This is the sort of intelligent, insightful writing that we need more of - Lilian too comments on the large number of current fanzines: "They give us old time fans a coherent reason for believing that fanzine fandom really does have a future and isn't quite as moribund as certain external evidence might lead one to believe. All very fine. But it does leave out one little matter, one tiny point: we call them new fanwriters, but can they actually write?"

It doesn't matter that this clarion call has been made numerous times in the past (even I've caught myself saying it three times in review columns between 1978 and 1987); it's always relevant and always necessary. Fanzines are for communication, and in the shrinking world whereby it's easier than ever before to see people more often, this is a truism that more fan

writers would do well to note.

Hmmm, where next - back to Yorkshire, methinks and LIP #5 from Hazel Ashworth. Firstly, that bastard D. West, who still owes me a cover despite two visits to Keighley and huge quantities of bitter poured down his throat, has come up with some excellent artwork. The best stuff, full page cartoons, illustrate Hazel's super item "More Fascinating Things About Vikings". They're done in Don's best pen and ink style, carefully crafted and clearly a labour of love - the themes are very reminiscent of some of Ronald Searle's work for the Down With Skool Books; compare D. with two cartoons in Down With Skool headed "Gabbitas creeps round the wood one way" and "Whilst Thring creeps round the other way". All classic material. It's about time somebody seriously sat down and produced a definitive D. West portfolio - why even D. should have a go and flog it for vast sums to the Americans.

Another item to grab your attention and generally stoke your fires of interest, is Linda Pickersgill's "Hanging out in Bars", which describes her first acquaintance with such establishments and how they led to this Wicked Thing called fandom. It's a very folksy story, but laced with neat phrases and merry quips and stunningly economical in the telling. She concludes that UK pubs will do as a substitute, but that "Hanging out in Pubs" doesn't possess the same glamour. Well, maybe that's true...so much better to go on a Pub Crawl though, rather than a Bar Crawl.

A fanzine which is necessary but one I just cannot read, is Ian Sorenson's CONRUNNER. Issue #11 appeared in May, but I didn't actually look at it until after Mexican III. It is vital for the forum it provides for those involved in running cons up and down the country, and it gives advice, airs views and generally keeps you up to date with what's hip and what's not. I can't get on with it simply because, having been involved with 4 Eastercon committees (1979, 1981, 1983, 1984), I've had the good times, seen the bad times and experienced (to a lesser or greater extent) the hassle, the politics, the thanklessness and so on. I don't really want to read about it again, especially if it relates to a media con, or a filk con or, heaven forbid as is suggested, an Ops-Con.

I don't get on with Ian Sorenson - dunno why, he teaches geography after all - but I find some of his views sensible and important, and then he goes and spoils it all by being totally cretinous. He states that it seems unfair to criticise an Eastercon before the event.. "I think it's time that people disparaging conventions were firmly squashed". I can see why he wants to say this - after all, it ain't no fun for wicked rumours to circulate about your con before you've even had a chance to run it, but with the diversity now prevalent in "Fandom", Eastercons won't please everyone and I welcome fans' views before the event. Of course they should be based in some loose way on reason - it's no good moaning that Joe Fan is the last person in the universe to be trusted with The Programme, but it IS valid to grumble about the cost of travel, or out-of-town locations. I'll make the best of it if I go, but frankly I no longer see the Eastercon as an essential part of my convention calendar. If I was single, maybe I'd go for the hell of it, but economics does rear its head, and I think twice.

But, no sooner do I grumble at Sorenson, then I find I have to applaud him for some decent common sense. In a well argued piece on the increasing

power of Ops people to override the programme people (the very folk Ops are supposed to be servicing), he say we mustn't get into the position of the tail wagging the dog: "Ye Gerbish was a great one for building up the mystique of film projecting, giving the whole business an aura of a craft second only to diamond cutting in the skill and precision required." Too true, as all the committees (bar one) that I've served on came up against Gerald Bishop. A good job, reliable guy, but bloody hell - talk about building empires and defending territory.

So, there we have it - a selection of fanzines received over the recent past. What can we deduce from all this verbiage, this catalogue of Effort, this collection of good and bad? I said at the outset that it's very easy to make generalisations; one I made concerned the difficulty of finding the worthy material amongst the detritus, and this is patently true after wading through all the fanzines again. One thing is clear: there's nothing like reading a few issues to get you feeling all fannish and self-righteous, making you wish to immediately burst into print to praise or bury, to get your own gig together and show that you too are part of this great beast we call Fanzine Fandom. The trouble is, that even if you leave it a day, you know you'll never do anything about it - and this is a good test of whether the fanzine is Competent or not; if it is, you'll respond or review or write something yourself.

But, what ever thoughts I leave you with, any fanzine is welcome, even if it's just to reassure me that there are worse things in life than the Sun and Sky TV.

#### FANZINES REVIEWED

- AN ELVISH ORC #1 - Simon Polley, 152 Woodsley Road, LEEDS, LS2 9LZ
- TERRY BROOMES'S UNDERWEAR #4 - Geogre Bondar, 33 Ragstone Rd, SLOUGH, SL1
- VSOP #4 - Jan Orys, 18 Burchett Place, LEEDS, LS6 2LN
- CHICKEN BONES #1 - Abi Frost, 95 Wilmot Street, LONDON, E2 0BP
- BLACK HOLE #28 - Ian Creasey, 21 Mauldeth Road, Withington, MANCHESTER M20
- REAL SOON NOW #1 - David Bell, Church Farm, North Kelsey, Lincs, LN7 6EQ
- DOMBLE IN THE WORKS #1 - Lesley Ward, 71 Branksome Road, SOUTHEND, Essex
- PULP #14 - Vinc Clarke, 16 Wendover Way, WELLING, Kent, DA16 2BN
- CO-OPERATIVE CAULIFLOWER #1 - Harry Bond, 6 Elizabeth Av, BAGSHOT, Surrey
- THE CAPRICIAN #4 - Lilian Edwards, 1 Braehead Road, Thorntonhall, GLASGOW
- Christina Lake, 47 Wessex Av, Horfield, BRISTOL, BS7 ODB
- LIP #5 - Hazel Ashworth, 16 Rockville Drive, Embsay, SKIPTON, N.Yorks, BD23
- CONRUNNER #11 - Ian Sorenson, 7 Woodside Walk, HAMILTON, ML3 7HY

All are available for the usual, including BLACK HOLE, although this being a society fanzine does have a cover price of 50p.

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**\*\*Late Gossip\*\*** I neglected to mention earlier that we went up to Cheshire in June for the annual Warrington Group Midsummer Barbecue. This proceeded to plan and involved huge quantities of food, drink and hospitality (thanks Henry & Cherry Newton). However, I now know where regular attendee Ramsay Campbell gets the ideas for his horror novels from. At the end of Saturday night, we began to set off back to the Guest House in the local village where we were staying. Ever magnanimous Bob Shaw offered us a lift back. So



far, so good. But not for anything is the Newton Household on a road known as The Rock - it's a fairly steep, winding road down to the village - and the lighting is practically zero. Bob, fairly well tanked-up on an assortment of booze was happy enough to drive back to Warrington, but with the five of us plus him and push-chair in his little Renault 5, it was not easy. With hearts in our mouths, we made the epic journey, and he deposited us outside the hotel, whereupon I remonstrated with him about the direction home he needed to take - unusually for me, I was wrong, so perhaps he wasn't so pissed after all. Oh, the ignominy of it all.

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### SKYPIE TV

Look this piece should have appeared in the last issue of GE, and what with the comments I've made thus far in this issue, I don't want you to get the idea that this is some amazingly wonderful and insightful item which is going to say in less than two pages all that could ever be said on the subject of SKY TV. What it is though, is a plea from the heart, a cry for TV moguls and government to listen to the viewers before it moves in and deregulates the TV industry.

I've no particular axe to grind, but what I am concerned about is quality and balance. Currently we have four terrestrial channels available to each viewer for the payment of an annual licence fee. This fee goes to fund the BBC's two channels, whilst ITV and Channel 4 are funded from advertising. It is a system which has lots of faults, and produces some grim TV at times, but for all that, it works fairly well and there is the necessary controlled competition to ensure that Quality exists. Some areas of the UK have access to Cable TV, chiefly new towns and housing estates, whereby the four main channels are fed in by cable, and for the additional payment of a monthly fee, four or five cable channels are also provided. These are of a uniformly poor quality - a movie channel, with films older and less thrilling than the BBC/ITV duopoly; a Children's channel which is almost completely filled with crummy US cartoons; a news channel, mostly provided from the USA and Ted Turner's Cable National News, and a General Channel regurgitating mainly repeats of 1960s UK TV shows and 1950s US sitcoms. Cable will never catch on over here because of the cost of installation and the inherent mess involved indigging up the street outside and so on.

Satellite TV is an altogether different proposition, and my objections to it are not necessarily those of the medium (although there are some important objections that need to be aired), but of the message. Satellite TV means that the global network is almost upon us, and what this really means is twofold: Firstly, the content must be Pan-European at least (ie: lowest common denominator) and Secondly, it means that for relatively little cost in studio production (much stuff is simply bought in), a few powerful TV impressarios can control what we watch, for make no mistake, if you're broadcasting from the skies, who's to monitor the content - there are no borders in space. I don't advocate censorship - indeed, that it a major criticism against our current system - but I do object to the message simply being that of one important individual.

At the moment, the battle for the skies is shaping up. We have a two pronged attack in the UK, one from SKY TV, controlled by Media Mogul Rupert

Murdoch, and the other British Satellite Broadcasting (BSB). BSB have had major setbacks, and their sales gimmick, the square ariel ("squariel") doesn't even work yet. Their much vaunted and heavily advertised Septemeber launch has been put off until 1990. Murdoch's SKY TV got off to a poor start; so few people had the neccessary dishes to receive the satellite signals, that their opening night had a pityfully small audience. They spent millions buying up presenters and promoting their efforts, and yet few could see the results. Fair enough - it's Murdoch's own money, together with that of the advertisers. A dish, manufactured by Amstrad, costs #199,with maybe installation costing an extra #90 or so. The thing they don't tell you is, that the dish has to be very precisely aligned, and that many homes in the UK aren't suitable because they don't have a clear enough line to the satellite.

But, where we start having problems is in the manipulation of the media by the various major players. Murdoch, apart from his major TV and newspaper interests in the US (Fox TV, now almost a fourth network, and papers such as the New York Daily News), owns four national newspapers in the UK. These are being used as nothing more (in some cases) than advertising sheets for SKY TV, destroying their alleged editorial independence and distorting the facts. Why would Murdoch's TODAY newspaper be offering 20,000 dishes FREE in a competition? Why would THE SUN bitterly attack the current teen rave pop duo BROS as having lost their appeal with ticket sales for a forthcoming Wembley show being low, and then upon learning that SKY TV had bought exclusuve rights to the show, write huge puffs for the event and offer Free tickets in a draw? This is where it all begins to get worrying.

Of course, the rest of the national press aren't taking this lying down and delight at every opportunity to slag off SKY TV. That other Newspaper Biggie, in more ways than one, Cap'n Bob Maxwell has got to get his oar in; disappointedthathe couldn't get too heavily involved with BSB,he has actually been making overtures to Murdoch - this is tantamount to Celtic and Rangers in Glasgow having a weekly fireside chat. The BBC are getting worried, since they were going to be involved with BSB, but because of strictures over how much licence fee money they had spare, had to pull out. They belatedly entered into a production agreement, whereby BBC Enterprises will be flogging old BBC shows to BSB - which will then be used in competition against good ole Auntie. They even joined BSB in buying up the FA Cup in soccer, when it learnt that the Football League had contracted exclusively with ITV to show its games only on that network. And this is only the start of the cascade of quality.

What will happen is that gradually, almost by a war of attrition, the big TV events in the UK will be sold off to the highest bidder, who in turn will have to guarantee the highest audience to satisfy the advertisers. What this means is that Public Service TV ceases to have any real meaning, and the skills and training and expertise provided by the BBC and the main ITV contractors will be lost. TV AM has already demonstrated that a few managers can run the service, in league with re-runs of Batman, and that the rest of the staff can be sacked. If the BBC and ITV lose certain key events to big money, the audience for those events will be lower, or perhaps, large numbers of people will be denied access to viewing such national sports events as the FA Cup, Wimbledon, Test Cricket and so on. Withlower audiences, the popular appeal of the BBC and ITV is diminished;

advertisers will no longer be prepared to pay so much for a lower "Reach" on ITV, and the BBC will lose licence fee money as viewers begin to realise that they don't need a licence to watch SKY and BSB, and anything else that happens to be beaming in from Europe (several EEC countries are already planning English Language Services to woo our advertisers and viewers). The net result is less money spent on production and the consequent contraction of the BBC and ITV.

This is where I see the danger - we know the faults of terrestrial TV, and many of those have only been imposed by this government - but we have no idea what satellite TV will do. What about Religious TV? Political TV? Porn TV? Snuff TV? Anybody who remembers the recent BBC film, Visions (starring Lee Remick as head of a new satellite TV network opening in the UK - but financed by an evangelical religious group who had other motives - and Dirk Bogarde as a mild mannered, homely guy brought in to be anchor man and thus lend respectability) will know what could happen. Take a look at the current SKY TV schedules published in the national Press, or the weekly Satellite Times. Don't the sequences and style of programming strike you as being very familiar, like maybe rainy weekday afternoon TV from the early 1970s? It is truly mind-blowing - it's all so dull and derivative; SKY 1's idea of Good TV is "The Sale Of The Century" on at 5.30 every day! The Movie Channel's idea of "NEW" movies is stuff that's been out on video for months, and will no doubt be seen on the networks shortly - and they're going to start putting a scrambler signal on this autumn, so that you'll have to pay a monthly fee (#15?) to view the movies, most of which are shown several times a week. Your #15 would do better at your local video store and you can then watch the movie when you wish.

But this is merely the tip of the iceberg. SKY TV have already bought up the film libraries of one or two middle-league film studios, and of course with their link through Murdoch to 20th Century Fox, who can say what will happen? It reduces viewer choice, rather than increasing it.

The underlying worry behind all this though, is the attitude of the present government. Big Business is okay with them, and thus Murdoch can visit Thatcher for the frequent private lunch and ensure that his stable of papers, including the once-mighty Times, slavishly report her every move in slobbering, glowing, arse-licking terms. The deal? Well a cynic might be tempted to say that for helping to keep the Tories in Power, the deal is that SKY TV has an easy time of it as possible. Quite co-incidentally, I'm sure, all the ITV franchises come up for renewal over the next three years; this government, rather than trying to get the best for all concerned, has already intimated that they'll sell each franchise to the highest bidder, and not necessarily the one with the best quality or track record. This will force ITV even more down-market as contractors seek to win viewers to keep their shareholders happy. And who might those shareholders be in some cases? I'll leave you to work that one out.

Ultimately I fear for the future of British TV. It isn't the Best in the World, but can produce the Best in the World. I'm no TV couch potato, indeed I watch very little TV, selecting and choosing my viewing in advance, but I do care about quality, and worth, and trust that we haven't reached the crest of the hill, only to find a bloody great cliff the other side where we'll all perish on the rocks of mediocrity. Think about it, please, and let me know what YOU believe will happen.



