
MAYA 10

MAYA 10

David Hardy's fine cover notwithstanding, this is not a Von Däniken fanzine. It is Maya 10, dated March 1976. It is edited and published by: Robert Jackson, 21 Lyndhurst Rd., Benton, Newcastle upon Tyne NE12 9NT, U.K. Art Editor is: Harry Bell, 9 Lincoln St., Gateshead NE3 4EE, U.K. Maya's U.S. Agents are: Sam Long and Mary Reed, PO Box 4946, Patrick AFB, Fla. 32925, U.S.A; soon to become Sam and Mary Long. Congratulations, people.

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MAYA IS NOT A TYPESET FANZINE!

Some U.S. fan reviewers have looked at the typeface this is printed in, and the right-justified columns of some of the articles, and concluded that the only way I could possibly obtain such a result is with access to a typesetter, or enormous amounts of money to get the typesetting done commercially.

Such a conclusion might be logical.

But little in fandom is ever logical.

This is ME, personally hitting the little square keys on this typewriter. (And there's a deliberate typo to prove it!)

As there are some Odd Things about the way Maya is produced, which don't seem to be obvious to everyone, I'll explain some of them.

First, this typewriter.

Back in the Good Old Days, Gannetfandom organised Tynecon. (We won't let you forget it! It's sobering to realise that I've only been around fandom four and a half years, but can talk about Good Old Days already ... but it would be more truthful for me to say that these are the Good Old Days.) I was then a medical student at Newcastle University. We were looking for a good typewriter to produce Progress Reports and the Programme Booklet on, when I remembered that the Students' Representative Council (i.e. union) had a Publications Room open to all students. In here was this battered but quite serviceable IBM Executive C with variable spacing and carbon ribbon; I spent a few happy evenings typing Progress Reports and Programme Book articles. I was half way through PR3 when one of the other guys in the room said:

"You know they're getting rid of that thing?"

Dread filled me. "Eh? WHY, for God's sake?"

"It's difficult to manage."

"Well, I can manage it all right, and I'm no expert," I said.

"A lot of people can't handle the variable spacing!" Well, they must be thickies, I thought.

Flat panic at the impending loss of our lovely typeface.

I found out that it was going back to IBM in part-exchange for one without variable spacing. They were getting £39.80 for it. Hurried phone calls to Ian Maule and Harry Bell at work; yes, Tynecon could probably afford it. "We'll give you £40 for it."

"OK," or words to that effect.

The letter confirming the sale finished: "Glad to be of help." You were, folks, you were!

After the con, three of us intended to buy it in partnership. My parents didn't like this idea — it surely led to arguments, they said.

Instead, they said they'd been impressed with the work put into the con and the way it had come off, and they would support my buying it outright. So I now have this nice typewriter, see?

It's only gone badly wrong once, in the summer of 1974. I rang for an IBM rep to call and fix it, which he promptly did, saying the bill would be £20. I called at the IBM office a week later to pay — and was told I should wait for the bill to be processed by the computer and sent to me.

I'm still waiting — 21 months after it was mended. And I'm still using the thing for Maya.

Next, the right-justification. This may be an Odd Thing to do, but it doesn't take much longer than simply typing the article out twice. In front of the platen are a couple of guards; the right-hand one has a scale to mark the approaching right-hand edge of the paper, which enables me to count the number of single spaces (i.e. half an "i", or one-fifth of an "m") I am short of the margin, or into it. I cut my paper to 7" wide, and with 1" margins on each side I then type an article out using a consistent space-bar width, and make a pencil note at the end of each line how many spaces short or extra there are. Then I type the article out again, with different space-bar widths as needed.

Then I have Fun With Sticky Goo and Scissors layouting it (I do virtually all the layout myself; I should really get Harry Bell's advice more often than I do) and pack the lot off to the printer's.

Then when it's come back from the printer's we have a collating party. This makes collating uncommonly quick. 400 or more copies in one night! I declare a night — March 20th for Maya 10 — and Gannetfandom happily troops round with beer and ready-calloused fingers, to collate/fold/staple/paper-bag-stuff/paper-bag-staple/address-strip-cut/address-stick/stamp/drink/drink/drink. The routine is fairly well sorted out now, touch wood — especially the last three mentioned above — and the help I have is beyond price. Last issue's heroes were: Alan Isaacson, Brian Rouse, Ian Williams, Peter Boyd, Harry and Irene Bell,

GHUCEPHALUS

and Henry Pijohn. Good cheer and post facto moral support was provided by Dave Cockfield, who turned up, very elated and very drunk, after midnight.

Some time after the collating party, then, I get the BILL.

The bill for Maya 9 was just over £80.

This, together with postage and other costs is many times the advertising rates below — I'd have to send out 16 flyers each issue to break even on adverts: and both this issue's flyers are going out free. At the moment I get back only about 15% of the money I throw down the bottomless pit that is Maya, and I wouldn't mind a little bit more, simply to keep the thing going for the hundreds of you who respond in more creative ways than simply sending money: so I definitely encourage subscriptions. Please note I now have a U.S. Agent, Sam Long. And as I have this slightly Odd belief that more people than receive it now might find Maya worth reading, I'm going to advertise it a bit more in both the States and the U.K. I hope nobody is offended by the slight whiff of commercialism in my decision to advertise Maya: this is merely to support and assist my main reason for publishing the zine — the response. Maya might not be that easy to afford were I not living at home [illegible] a Carefree Bachelor Existence yet earning a fairish amount of money trying to make sick children better and worried parents less anxious.

Children become ill more suddenly than adults, and turn up at all hours of the day and night, filling all your on-duty hours with worry and work. Either you're trying to get some investigation essential to the diagnosis done on a bawling wriggling toddler, or you're explaining things to parents who are often needlessly (although naturally) anxious. Although my present paediatric job involves fewer on-duty nights than the general medical job I described in my column in Goblin's Grotto 2, it is far more exhausting when you are there. You are up during the night an average of an hour and a half — some nights, very little sleep indeed — and there's rarely any free time in the evenings.

So my pay, fair though it is as a total, is for 87 hours a week.

The remaining 81 have to contain sleeping on off-duty nights, eating, finding out how Newcastle United and the Liberal Party are doing and what rubbish the papers are spouting about them at the moment, watching (very occasional) TV programmes, and...

fanac.

Editing Maya.

Writing begging letters for articles for it. (Despite what Mike Glicksohn says later on in his column, I don't do nearly enough of this.)

Boozing two nights a week with Gannetfandom.

Chairing the North-East SF Group. (This is virtually a sinecure now.)

Writing fanarticles and doing artwork if I get the urge.

.... and still I take on new responsibilities:

In the last two months I've rewritten nearly half of Ian Williams's novel Rider on a Stone Horse — it is now our novel; I'm expecting to get it done by Mancon.

When we decided to start Silicon, the new North-East con described to U.K. readers in the accompanying flyer, I made the first contact with the hotels.

And Pete Weston rang and asked me to be on the Britain in '79 Committee. Me, refuse a new job? Of course not — what do you think I am?

And in return for Sam Long being U.S. agent for Maya, I will be U.K. agent for Gunputty, his fanzine.

I'm a glutton for punishment, I really am. I get some sleep sometimes, though.

So I'm afraid I felt a little bit self-righteous when I read Bernie Peek complaining in K, the fanzine he co-edits with Dave Rowe, that he hasn't got the time to edit it on his own because his student work takes up nearly fifty hours a week including travelling time! Bernie, consider yourself very lucky indeed to have so much free time, you're lucky you don't have to devote more time to your work.

Most of us — Bernie included — devote more time to our work than anything else, so we spend a lot of our time thinking about it, and often becoming frustrated and bored with it. So it is natural that writers in fanzines — who, it is well known, will write about anything under the sun — will write about work, and often they blow off steam in a healthy way when doing so. This is known in fandom as the Work Purge. I blew off a little bit myself, above; and so have Mike Glicksohn and Bob Shaw, in two different ways, this issue. It might not look as if it's Got Much To Do With Science Fiction, but it's about people, so it's all grist to the fanzine mill, especially if it's well written. If you enjoy Mike's column this time, when he thinks he's writing about nothing, wait till next time, when he's back from his Himalayan deep-sea diving expedition...

Mike's and Bob's pieces are two-thirds of the reason why this is a Special Canadian Issue; the other third is Doug Barbour (another Canadian, of course) writing about James Tiptree. Good stuff. There are other goodies as well, though, such as Malcolm Edwards's thought-provoking fanzine revews. (I hope everybody realises Grant Canfield's portrait of Malcolm is not photographic!) There is also my collation of the response to my editorial last issue into a sort of symposium on the way everyone else looks at us "science fiction nuts". That is the title I have given it, suggested almost automatically by Jim Shull's illo.

There is very little editorial comment in this symposium: I read the letters as they came in and found myself agreeing with almost every one, although they very often disagree with my editorial, which I paradoxically (illogically?) still stand by — the letters were spoken from different yet sympathetic points of view. My editorial drew a lot of response and enabled me to construct this piece largely because it was written from a deliberately single, rather idiosyncratic viewpoint, thus seeming to the reader interesting but incomplete and giving plenty of room for comment, and something constructive to add to the original article. In any walk of life — not just SF — the problems are more complex than a single viewpoint may make them seem, otherwise no one would ever have anything to discuss. (See Dave Langford's letter in the symposium.) I know for a fact that I wouldn't have enjoyed being as one-sided as I was in Maya 9's editorial were it not for the fact that I knew everybody would get their chance to come back at me this issue. And now, somebody with some sympathy for the much-maligned media will get their chance in Maya 11.

Response. Of all the reasons why people publish fanzines, that is the main one, the one that keeps an editor going on and on wanting to publish. I could list some of the other reasons (Creation: a pretty object. Communication: I get the chance to say something. Response: you say something back. Subheading of "response": Egoboo: you say something nice back.) Of these four, the last two are the most important. I'm not really sure why I — and all the rest of you — are so addicted to this form of communication. It just isn't logical.

But then little in fandom is ever logical.

Logical it may not be, but I like it and want more.

We all need to communicate. And we all need to ignore logic at times.

Otherwise, wouldn't life be boring?

Rob Jackson, March 1976.

A heritage of truth

In which your editor confesses, for once,
to being totally won over by a book —
Marion Zimmer Bradley's
The Heritage of Hastur

Marion Zimmer Bradley has been producing novels about her cold afforested world, Darkover, for ten years or so.

Most people would not expect a series which began life in the generally undistinguished company of Ace Doubles and similar books to produce, all of a sudden, one of the finest and most uplifting pieces of human writing SF has yet seen.

Or would they?

Perhaps it is possible for a writer to come to know her favourite world so well that she can decide suddenly to concentrate almost exclusively on the development of the characters within it, while around them still managing, apparently almost without conscious effort, to describe her world completely enough for a reader, new like me to Darkovan affairs, to shiver with every snowflake and glance with the protagonists down every fork in the road.

Let's see.

Let's take a theme close to the hearts of the average (20-year-old!) SF reader: coming of age, and examine it in three young men, one a few years older than the other two, whose lives are entwined. Let one face destruction, one face delight, and one face his expected future with resigned acceptance.

Look first at the cover, by Jack Gaughan. (You will anyway, so there's not much point in me telling you to.) Cover the top half or two-thirds up with your hand, and you will see a bright blue rocket in the middle of the painting. Now take your hand away, and see how Jack gave up drawing a rocket and did the top half of a woman instead. (Never mind, Jack: the other figures aren't so static. In fact, even the castle is less static.)

The book is 380 pages long, yet with a constancy of narrative drive and lack of longueurs in the action which indicates well the complexity of the plot. The chapters are alternately third person and first. The third person chapters are built around Regis Hastur, the heir to the Hastur domain, who is fifteen as the novel opens and lamenting his lack of laran, the telepathic gift of the Darkovan aristocracy. The first person chapters are told by Lew Alton, the oldest of the three chief protagonists.

Regis is returning from a cristoforo monastery where he has undergone three years of spartan education. On his return his grandfather pushes him into another three years of training, for the Guards, the elite officer cadets. Here he befriends a subject of his dead father's, a boy his own age called Danilo Syrtis, of poor family circumstances but with noble blood present somewhere in the family line.

Lew is by now a Guard officer, and objects to his father's choice of an unmarried Lord, Dyan Ardais, as cadet-master — but unsuccessfully. Dyan is an ombredin, a lover of men. This is not frowned upon, but his sadistic streak is; Ms. Bradley deals fully yet sensitively with this and particularly with its consequences, which are far-reaching both politically and emotionally.

Lew is eventually sent to Aldaran, a rebel part of Darkover, on a negotiating mission, but becomes involved in an Aldaran attempt to use the dangerous telepathic jewel, the Sharra matrix. Lew mentions a telepathic talent of Danilo's to his hosts — and unknown to Lew they have him kidnapped. Hearing of this, Regis sets out on a dangerous wintry journey to rescue him. His journey, his further relationship with Danilo, the further attempts to use the Sharra matrix, the touchy dealings with the Terran offworlders, and the stresses in the ruling Comyn Council caused by Dyan's actions: these are the plot strands Ms. Bradley weaves to a fine and satisfying conclusion.

To me, the most important and involving aspect of an involving novel is Regis's arrival at self-knowledge. His cristoforo education, though he doesn't share its beliefs, has coloured his attitudes to an extent where rather than admit affection for Danilo he twists himself into knots.

The climactic scene in this relationship is during an overnight stop on a long journey. They are both physically and emotionally exhausted, especially Regis, who is suffering from the disorientation of threshold sickness. Rather than admit his feelings for Dani, Regis snaps angrily at him, then goes into threshold crisis..

At this point I come up against the perpetual dilemma of one who has enjoyed a book — namely, the itch to tell everything about it, and thus risk spoiling others' enjoyment. I'm going to take an easy way out, and quote another reviewer who says what I want to say very well without giving away any of the details which are best left for the book itself to tell. Dave Wixon says this in Rune 45:

"Bradley has developed an imaginative feel for the nuances of laran — ESP talents of various kinds. Where most authors have portrayed ESP as a tool, to be used or abused, won or lost, turned on or off — Bradley sensitively links it to the mind, to the psyche, to the soul. In her hands, laran is an immediacy before the possessor. Most impressive of all is her conception of and able detailing of the link of the power to physical-sexual maturity: the youth who first feels the stir of laran is as possessed by it as an adolescent by his/her growing awareness of sexuality. It can be depressing or exhilarating: it can kill or, like a case of acne, cause psychic agony with minimal damage.

"Even while she so superbly portrays these powers and what they must mean and do to the life possessing and being possessed by them, Bradley also displays a great ability to make her characters live, grow, and change. Even die. She sees these people, and can paint them for us."

Quite. Yet it says volumes for Ms. Bradley's writing that she can write of such emotional and sexual scenes while often (but not always) avoiding physical description. The physical things don't matter as much as the mental turmoil.

I am deeply envious of her ability to write with such emotional purity. She speaks of longing, of thirst, of loneliness; all analogues of love: not of desire, which is an analogue of lust.

Some of the finest human needs are portrayed in this novel. I found that it filled me with longing for emotional honesty, and reminded me of many gaps in my own life. If we don't admit things to ourselves we deny ourselves the truth, and thereby belittle ourselves. This is Ms. Bradley's message, and if you don't accept it then truly there may be things you aren't admitting to yourself, and your life may be the poorer. The Heritage of Hastur reminded me of this, and thus it enriched me. What more can one ask of a book?

If Ms. Bradley has written a better book, let me at it!

After the review above — more of an admiring description — I need hardly tell you that The Heritage of Hastur is almost purely a novel of character; but I would just emphasise that those who damn the "SF ghetto" (whatever that is) for being a literature of ideas without any characterisation worth speaking of would do well to consider why Heritage has been so well received by those within that ghetto.

I hope it becomes even better received. Read it if you haven't, and think about your Hugo nominations, people. I also hope there is a British publisher with the imagination and good sense to buy the book.

Rob Jackson, February 1976.

Marion Zimmer Bradley, The Heritage of Hastur, DAW Books, New York, 1975: UW1189, $1.50.

SCIENCE FICTION NUTS?

There was a tremendous response to my editorial last issue on SF's public relations. I have sorted the comments into some sort of coherent order. If the result seems to be a "slant" of similar nature (but leaning in the opposite direction, of course) to those some of my correspondents see in the work of the media, well.... it just goes to show that I'm learning too..... Rob Jackson, March 1976.

Pete Weston: I have an illuminating story to tell of the way in which SF is regarded by the great world outside. As you know I occasionally give lectures on science fiction and somehow or other I was asked to talk to Birmingham Writers' Group last week.

Embarrassing to admit, I completely forgot the appointment and not until the lady secretary rang me at home at 7.30 and told me that the Group had been waiting for half-an-hour did I give any thought to what I was going to say.

In the mad drive into town I collected my wits and decided to aim for some immediate response, to see what they thought of SF.

Oh my!

When I arrived a kindly lady gave me a cup of tea and a biscuit and while I was drinking a jovial man wandered over from the crowd of middle-aged arty types and said in a friendly way, "We thought you'd got kept by one of your little green men."

I gulped tea and considered. Normally a weak smile is in order on these occasions but hell, I was tired and feeling a little belligerent and they had invited me as an expert to talk on a speciality subject. What would Harlan Ellison have said?

I transfixed him with a steely glare and said, "Is that what you think science fiction is all about?"

Oh no, he assured me, I love science fiction, I read all the important authors like Arthur C. Clarke and Isaac Asimov and Luan Ranzetta and...

He didn't exactly say "Luan Ranzetta" but the implication was there. No taste, discrimination, no understanding of what SF was about. And he was on my side. Most of the others weren't.

I began my talk by asking how many of them had tried to write a science fiction story. About twenty hands went up, out of thirty or so people in the room. How many of you have read much SF, I then queried. Only two hands remained.

"Well, how can you write it, if you don't read it?"

"I don't like science fiction," said an earnest lady in front row position.

"But if you don't read it," I repeated, "how do you know that the bright idea you've just had hasn't been done twenty times before?"

I then asked them what they thought of the following plot. Two people escape from atomic doom and climb aboard a spaceship. Fighting every sort of peril they finally arrive at a new world where they can begin anew. As they get out of the spaceship she turns and says, "A new world, Adam." To which he replies, "Yes, Eve." Ring down the curtain on this crashing finale!

My audience thought that was pretty good stuff.

They are the sort of people who have been sending me all those manuscripts for Andromeda.

A lady in the back row asked a question. She looked the local femme fatale; hard, aggressive, smoking a cigarette, capturing the limelight.

"What do you think of Dennis Wheatley?"

Not much, I said. He isn't what I'd normally class as a science fiction writer.

Acrimonious argument for five minutes.

In the end I gave a pretty straight talk about how SF had evolved from the scientific romances of Verne and so on, had been through a bad patch in the thirties and forties, but was now a mature, intelligent and stimulating literature. But they didn't believe me; they had seen so much Star Trek and Space:1999 that it was impossible for them to appreciate how these were a pretty much debased form of SF, a preoccupation with glitter and gadgets.

An earnest man in glasses and beard stood up at the back and launched a diatribe in a foreign accent.

"You are so serious about science fiction when it is so much juvenile nonsense," he claimed. And went on to tell me what he thought of SF in general.

My steely gaze came forth again.

"How much science fiction have you actually read?" I snapped.

"Well, er, Verne, and Wells," he said.

"Nothing else?"

"Well, er, no."

"Then with the greatest respect you don't know what you are talking about."

Then I relented and told him to go away and read some of the really important writers in the field. Not Asimov, Heinlein and Clarke (which I'd recommended to the others as a way of starting with authors who were at least accomplished craftsmen). No. I told him: start with some of our real writers; go and read some Aldiss, and Ursula Le Guin's The Dispossessed. And as for TV and films, to watch Charly (on that week), or The Survivors.

He didn't even jot down the titles. He had made up his mind already.

It wasn't a bad evening, really. I learned quite a lot, and there were one or two in the audience who might actually follow some of my advice. But as for general public knowledge of SF — it's Little Green Men and Star Trek all the way!

Robert Hansen: Your editorial on SF public relations seemed to be stating the obvious, though the general public image of SF is probably influenced by TV and films to the extent that they think anything that hasn't got the three R's in it (rockets, robots, ray-guns) can't be SF. This was amply illustrated the other night when I was watching the film Charly (based on Flowers for Algernon, of course). My mother was also in the room, doing the ironing, and she refused to believe the film was SF.

Chris Morgan: I'll never forget the first time I did a piece on SF for Oxford Hospitals Radio and the programme presenter said: "Sitting opposite me now is Chris Morgan. He has three eyes, four long green arms, and — ha ha — he's going

to talk to us about science fiction."

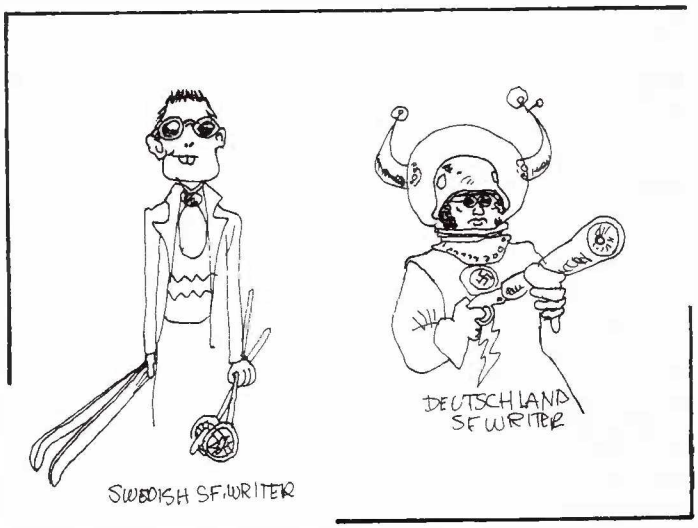
I felt like zapping him with my ray-gun.

It's sad, but I believe that most new readers of SF are teenagers who are attracted by cover art depicting tentacled aliens groping naked girls, or Christmas crackers in outer space.

As for fans (or convention attendees) being labelled 'cranks and crackpots", I approve of your campaign to alter this image, Rob, but just stop and think for a minute and you'll see that the label is justified. One doesn't need to read a novel a night — to the majority of people in this country anyone who reads a novel a week (rather than watching tele or popping out to the pub) is a bit peculiar. But when the novel is about things which can't happen, and when one admits to corresponding or meeting up with other people who read similar books, and especially when one attempts to write such books oneself, one is very soon accused of being stupid, totally mad, gay, irresponsible, a threat to the continued existence of the British Empire, etc. Having worked in industry for twelve years I am now inured to such a response, and having discovered that there is no possibility of reversing majority opinion through counter-propaganda I make a point of never mentioning SF at work.

Paul Kincaid: I went along for a job interview at Granada T.V. a few weeks ago. The time of the interview was about two weeks after Space:1999 had been launched on Granada (and so about four weeks after it had been launched in the rest of the country). Inevitably the conversation got around to sf and the aforementioned space opera in particular, and they asked my opinion of it. I told them it bore little resemblance to what was going on in most sf literature, and I tried to tell them about some of the things currently being written in sf. They weren't interested. It seemed the only external referent they were willing to consider was Star Trek, despite its being nearly a decade old. "You must admit," one of them said, "the effects are better, more dramatic, in Space:1999." So they should be, they have ten more years of technology to call on: but shouldn't the stories be better also?

I didn't get the job.



Chris Priest: The trouble with your remarks about sf writers on the radio is that you're criticising what happens from seeing one end only, the receiving end. Yes, sf writers might sound eccentric and intellectual on the radio, but then so does almost anyone invited to talk seriously about what they're doing. But sf does present especial problems.

For one thing, there's the mediaman (or woman) who does the interview. The mediaman is invariably one of two types. (1) He declares himself to be totally ignorant of all matters concerning sf. In this he is generally truthful, but nevertheless is able to ask questions like: "But you don't take all this nonsense seriously, do you?" or "How do you really predict the future?" etc etc. (2) He declares himself to be a lifelong fan and avid reader of sf. In this he is generally untruthful, because it will soon become clear that his reading has been confined to John Wyndham, Erich von Däniken and Brinsley le Poer Trench.

In both instances, the sf writer has to fight back to establish, for the sake of his own pride in front of a radio audience — most of whom will have more knowledge of sf than the mediaman — that sf isn't like that to start with. By the time he has established that sf (a) doesn't predict the future (b) doesn't have any new information on what happened to Atlantis (c) isn't about flying saucers (d) wasn't about landing men on the moon before 1969 anyway (e) can't explain how Uri Geller does his tricks (f) is actually a serious and well-written form of literature, then his time is up and never mind getting around to answering questions about interesting stuff.

Then, more seriously, there's the matter of context. Radio interviews are generally taped in advance. The mediaman is almost invariably a young and personable individual, who has the agreeable manner of being avidly interested in everything you say. (Who, at Novacon 4, could fail to respond to the reporter from The Observer, who not only seemed genuinely interested in sf, fandom, conventions, etc, but who also wrote down everything you said??? Never mind how distorted the final version was; anyone who knows anything knows that Malcolm Edwards hasn't even got a budgerigar.) That's a sidetrack, by the way; but the personable nature of the mediaman is a part of the context. One opens up to him or her, trusting to what appears to be their good nature and intent. What one cannot anticipate is what happens later. Newspaper reports (of the type about Novacon 4) are given "funny" headlines, and are written in a joky style; radio interviews are invariably prefaced with either the theme music from 2001 or electronic warblings.

Two examples. One was a programme I did for the local commercial radio station, with Peter Nicholls, Bob Shaw and George Hay. This was an hour and a half discussion of sf, taped on the afternoon of the same day of broadcast. We were confronted with a Canadian lady interviewer who had read the first chapter of Billion Year Spree, and an American Hollywood scriptwriter, and a scientist (to keep the sf writers in check). As near as I can recall it, the subjects we touched on included: Atlantis, is-there-life-in-space, von Däniken, does sf predict, etc. The Hollywood scriptwriter got pissed out of his mind, and kept muttering that all literature, sf included, only had five basic plots, the scientist had read Arthur C. Clarke's article about communications satellites, and the lady interviewer introduced Bob Shaw as a construction engineer. After every commercial break, the programme was reintroduced with the theme music from 2001.

Electronic warblings were used for a series on Radio 4 last summer. These programmes were pre-recorded, then edited in the studio before broadcast, and the interviewer was a young lady who declared herself an avid fan. (It turned out she had read some Asimov.) In spite of some fairly interesting questions, when the programme was put on the air, the context had changed radically. The tone adopted was: well of course no one takes sf seriously, but here are some sf writers who think it is serious. Then, the individual interviews were broadcast in jigsaw pattern, with various voices all apparently debating the same point. Consequently, the form of the programme was dictated by the presenter, who had no real understanding of the literature.

I cannot think of any sf writer who would not readily say that sf is an entertainment literature, on the whole, and be prepared to say this on the radio. The trouble is that the people one comes up against in the media are so preoccupied with the trivial, vulgar and irrelevant aspects of sf that one simply cannot say this, except by appearing to agree that, say, von Däniken is the leading sf writer in the world and that Atlantis is the clue to the Bermuda Triangle Mystery.

Sorry to go on about this at such length, but you did bring up the subject....

Incidentally, although I haven't read Imperial Earth, you make some telling points about it. But try to imagine yourself saying what you did on the radio, then try to explain to Henry Pi- john why you didn't get round to saying that sf is actually meant to be entertaining.

George S. Laskowski Jr: In one of the weekly news magazines here in the States, Newsweek, appeared an article called "Science Fiction: The Great Escape", which did not in any way do justice to SF, fandom and the fringe fields. I wrote a letter to them complaining about it. I really am not sure how to take their reply, but I thought you and the rest of the Maya readership might find it amusing.

((George kindly sent Xeroxes of the article and his letter to them, which was long, articulate and made some telling points. The article indeed didn't do justice to SF and fan-

[illegible] — fanzine masochists can view the Xerox at my home if they care to.

Newsweek's form telegram in reply to George is reprinted in full below.))

Newsweek, 444 Madison Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10022.
1.13.76.
TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:
YOU MAY BE INTERESTED TO KNOW THAT AS OF 2300 GMT 1/12/76, IN CONSEQUENCE OF CERTAIN IRRESPONSIBLE STATEMENTS PUBLISHED IN THE 12/22/75 ISSUE OF NEWSWEEK, TERRAN MORTAL PETER PRESCOTT HAS BEEN PLACED ON PROBATION BY THE INTERGALACTIC COUNCIL. SHOULT THE SUBJECT PROVE RESISTANT TO STANDARD REHABILITATION AND RECONDITIONING TECHNIQUES, THE COUNCIL WILL SUBMIT A REFERENDUM ON LIQUIDATION AND RECYCLING. IN THAT EVENT, YOUR LETTER WILL BE TALLIED AMONG THE AFFIRMATIVE VOTES.

MEANWHILE, WE HAVE BEEN ASKED TO EXTEND THE COUNCIL'S APOLOGIES AND BEST WISHES.

SINCERELY,
(signed) MADELEINE EDMONDSON
FOR THE EDITORS

((I find it difficult to see anything amusing in that, George. I'm just nauseated. Anyone who tries to maintain that the news media are consistently unbiased would have trouble defending that extrordinarily patronising telegram.))

Harry Turner: Whatever your special interest you will find that when it catches the attention of the media they will successfully trivialise it by leaning over to talk down to their audience. With very rare exceptions. Audience ratings and circulation are the two preoccupations of the media, not their role in disseminating information.

Harry Warner, Jr: I'm not sure there's any way to avoid the bad publicity which you blame certain fans for. The whole approach of journalism today is to belittle, to debunk, to make the idiots who represent 99 per cent of the newspaper readers and the television viewers imagine that they are superior to presidents and movie stars and science fiction fans, because of the way those people are described and pictured. It isn't even enough to win the reporter over to one's side by treating the reporter over to one's side by treating him decently and convincing him that worthwhile, unnutty things are being done in the vicinity. An editor back at the office can ruin an unbiased and fair account or the man in the cutting room can take a film clip out of context, and just as much harm has been done to our image.

Dave Langford: ((Dave was one of the people I perhaps unjustly accused last issue of making fools of themselves by saying all sorts of things to the Observer reporter who covered Novacon 4.))

They found me clutching my vitals (he politely euphemised) and muttering "Jackson — it was that bastard Jackson — got me with a long range fanzine, all the way from Newcastle —"

In fact I rose to the bait of your editorial in Maya 9 like a foolish trout... talking of which, you might have allowed me to rise thusly to the bait of 0.5pints Imperial Central Beer rather than the supposed lure of an interview — some interview, with about six people standing around and the accursed reporter lurching from one to another like a wounded bull. Though I can't speak for Dermot, my reading speed is high and at that time I did read a novel a night, generally in the hiatus between closing time and sleep: so might you if you were out of work.

For the record, I now read a novel or the equivalent, approximately every other night: around 50% of this reading is SF. The thought of losing touch with reality by reading for a couple of hours on alternate nights does not worry me.

Too late: the doom has been pronounced, and I am branded crackpot. Ruined just as I was starting out! Haha, you have seen nothing yet — and peals of daemonic laughter purst from his writhing lips — already the Plan is under way. The next reporter to attend a con will be accosted by a hulking figure who (having claimed to be Rob Jackson) will offer such comments as "I don't know much about SF but I know what I like," and "I don't read intellectual authors like Wyndham, Asimov, Clarke, Heinlein. Give me Tully Zetford any day." And even "It's deplorable, the publicity they give to writers — the lunatic fringe of SF fandom, you know..." Eventually the reporter will be given a photostat of the editorial in Maya 8 and allowed to write a derisive piece beginning "Crackpot editor R. Jackson aims to lose £40 on every issue of his magazine... obviously he is so immersed.. (etc etc)..."

((Dave, you have picked out the worst excesses of my editorial in Maya 9 superbly there. Anybody who hasn't worked out what Dave is referring to is urged to go back and reread my editorial. I owe Dave an apology for picking him out unfairly, when reading for an hour a night is the height of normality compared with nutters like me who spend all their waking spare-time hours either boozing with science fiction fans or beating hell out of a typewriter simply to be able to send the result to a printer and spend enormous quantities of money on making it into a fanzine.))

Five minutes of conversation or a page or prose (if not wholly devoid of content) will always provide some handle for reporters to whom the idea of reading SF is hilarious in itself: given which premise, those who read quite a lot, or spend real money on it, are laughter-copy before they say a word. Moving from the symptoms to the disease, your remarks about SF writers' public images are uncomfortably accurate. There does seem to be too much significance, importance, relevance: Bob Shaw reading one of his pieces would be vastly improved PR, to which the converted could also listen without that inward cringe so often felt when "Sci-Fi" hits the media.

However, author exposure is a minimal part of the image, since few but the converted take any notice. Noncerebral SF is found in newspaper strips and umpteen TV shows (I name no names) — it's here that Bert Figgis, Man in the Street, gets his first impressions.

Again, children are notoriously omnivorous: thus SF/fantasy sells well on the juvenile market, with the paradoxical result that (barring violent addiction) a teenager diversifying his reading via Tolstoy or Harold Robbins is likely to drop SF, along with school-stories and Biggles, as something childish. (See C.S. Lewis — "youth's characteristic chronological snobbery.") Should we blacklist juvenile SF?

Yet again, on the other side of this coin: "What's this science-fiction you're always reading?" my mother asked once. "Let's try some." We were on holiday, and the only spare book was Wyndham's Consider Her Ways. She read the title story, looked somewhat ill, and has avoided all SF since that time — nearly ten years ago. Dystopia is not necessarily a gateway to SF enthusiasm! We push 1984 and Brave New World as mainstream SF: how many have recoiled from the former's vision of the greyly grim, or the manner in which the latter's decadence extends even to the narrative structure? They might ensnare the teenager I mentioned in the last paragraph, only to repel the simple fun-loving reader you posited in Ghucephalus.

"There are no easy answers, Carruthers," gasped the Professor. "Likewise, there are things with which man should not meddle." While agreeing with much of That Editorial, I feel you're oversimplifying matters.

Divide non-readers of SF All Into Three Parts (having first ruled out people who just don't read anything). The first lot say SF is childish/escapist (my attitude toward, say, Noddy in Toyland or Barbara in Cartland) — looking at TV or cartoon SF, they are vindicated in this belief.

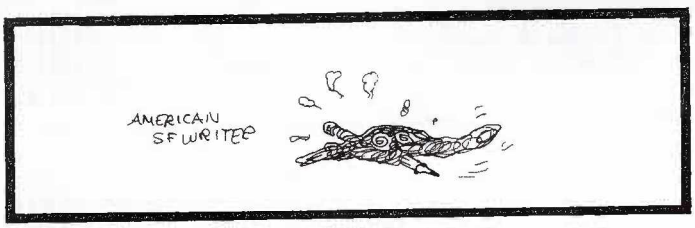
The second lot think: too eccentric and intellectual, too

depressing (my lamentable view of Finnegan's Wake or the older Russian novelists) — they listen to an SF writer on the radio, yes, or read 1984, and believe the more.

The third lot are inarticulate, but regard SF as completely alien, remote, ludicrous (my attitude toward Were We Visited By Intelligent Plants Who Built Stonehenge? etc.) — and they seem to be in the majority. Press reporters, alas, slant their copy to appeal to the majority.

This too is oversimplistic: for example Group Two might just as well recoil from noncerebral-SF jargon (e.g. "The hypercontinuum lurched as Jaxon burst sickeningly through the overspace/infraspace interface... He swigged brwnl from a hpflsk and reached for his Mark VII molecular-dematerialiser...") as from intellectualism, whether genuine or pretended. And there are groups committed to SF who don't necessarily read it — Trekkies and comic fans probably fit in here. And there's a man I know who reads the Foundation set over and over... but nothing else. I offer no answers — hell, I'm merely a reader and aspiring writer of the stuff — I just want to point out that the problems, in SF, are always a lot more complex than a single viewpoint may make them seem.

Jerry Kaufman: Your comments in your editorial about the response of British critics to sf excited sense of wonder, deja vu and open-mouthed surprise. You say that your critics cold-shoulder the stuff, while here in the States, our critics are coming more and more to accept sf. I can remember reading, over and over, until it was a critical cliche of the American sf scene, that it was the British who accepted sf and treated it as Literature (or at least as Good Books) while our critics treated sf as slime mold. Hearing the cliche turned head over heels was certainly refreshing; it means that sf is likely not treated well by any "literary establishment" and we can wake from our pleasant dreams of the paradise across the waters.



Pamela Boal: Fandom is only a small portion of the SF readership but it is the portion that can be identified and tracked down by the media. One contribution to SF's poor PR might be fandom's tendency to look back, to talk about the history and origin of SF, and to dwell on the pulp age — an age that might have hooked the speaker, but about which the majority of present-day SF readers know little or nothing. Is it any wonder that some authors given the chance, emphasise the difference between their work today and the writings that the media present as SF, and in that emphasis give a wrong impression? An individual author who has written a book with a wide appeal gets a good press as long as the publisher is on the ball. Public relations is a skill; why should you demand that authors take time and energy away from their work to develop that skill? I do not feel that you can demand more from an author than his best work in his own field.

Jim Meadows III: Poor Ursula: she probably didn't realise the type of audience she was reaching. Maybe she's been watching Masterpiece Theatre too much and thinks that everything on the BBC is aimed at college professors. It's rather a pity, because anyone who picked up her juvenile-oriented fantasy, or just something good and solid and undeified like The Lathe of Heaven would realise how really well she does communicate in her own medium.

Jim Barker: The idea that SF authors should write for a mean age of fifteen horrifies me. (Perhaps because today's fifteen-year-olds horrify me!)

Mike Glicksohn: I can't help thinking you're being a mite simplistic in expecting SF writers to eliminate the element of art in what they do and present their work simply as entertainment for the masses. (I agree that this is what the masses expect and need, but any artist has inner needs that we cannot expect them to subjugate completely to commercial expediency.) As it happens, I'm probably one of the more entertainment-oriented SF readers around, but I can sympathise with and understand the desire of a Le Guin or a Silverberg to make apparent the deeper significance of the creative works they're doing. Possibly what we need here is a compromise, with both aspects of the genre being publicised. But let's not have the SF community pull in its head and refuse to acknowledge the aspects of science fiction that make it a little better in quality than the gothics! If our own writers don't talk about the important aspects of SF that raise it above mere pulp literature (when indeed it is so raised) then you can be damn sure few others are going to do it for us.

((I agree with that as well as with my editorial. Perhaps all I was asking was that our media representatives tailor their words to their audience. For sure, let's not forget that we are supposed to believe SF is quality reading!))

Martin Ricketts: Who the hell wants to write to appeal to a typical fifteen-year-old Radio 1 listener anyway? Think for a moment not about SF but about the mainstream of literature. How many of the "great" authors of literature both past and present appeal to the average fifteen-year-old Radio 1 listener, do you think? I'm not saying that SF should be highbrow, and I do believe that it should be exciting, entertaining, and enjoyable — but I think it should also have some sort of value, be thought provoking if you like — and not just in the scientific and/or speculative sense, but in the way that the best of any literature is thought-provoking. That is (at the risk of sounding corny) in the great universals: love, death, courage, despair — anything from which the reader can derive hope or encouragement or understanding, thus enriching his own life and in consequence perhaps the lives of others. Anything else can be got from a textbook.

Here, I think, is the essence of a delusion that many SF fans (and writers) live under. They think SF itself is somehow superior to any other genre, but there is I think only one instance in which this can be true: that is, in being the social conscience of the near future. Apart from this, as long as any literature has the "value" mentioned above, the fact that it is an SF story, a western, a thriller is neither here nor there — it is merely the coating on the pill, the hook on which to catch the initial interest of the reader. The best SF, for me, is that which combines this value with good storytelling, and perhaps with "hard" — what I prefer to call "text-book" science, or with social extrapolation, or with any other stimulus for the imagination. This is where the real interest of SF lies (the attraction of this particular pill-coating): in the almost boundless possibilities it offers to the imagination.

doug barbour: i think you have a number of good things to say in yr editorial, and i like the way you don't quite contradict yrself but walk a tightrope high above contradiction and never quite slip off. after all, you are attacking Clarke for not writing a book of as high a literary quality as you want, yet earlier you are attacking the sf establishment of quality writers for being too obsessed with quality, and you're right, you're right, but...

well, let's try to come at this sideways. in one of the issues of Quark — a quarterly i, perverse that i am, found entertaining more often than not — Delany and Hacker talked about "entertainment". their basic point was — and i paraphrase — that the best entertainment was also the profoundest literature or art, because it "entertained" the whole person, not just the escapist adventure-story seeker. i think you're right that sf writers forget sometimes to tell their audience "out there" that they write to entertain them, but then writers like Le Guin probably feel pressured to respond the way they do precisely by the kind of asinine response they get from people like your Godfrey Smith. why do academics — of which i'm one, and not ashamed of it — not talk more about the "entertainment value" of sf books? maybe because they assume it, and move on from there.

not only should a novel ring true, however it's written (and i think it's an important point to note that the narrative impulse remains important to everyone, and when it seemed to be pushed out of much higher literature it found a home in various subgenres like sf. as a result we have today, within sf, some very fine (and entertaining) writers who, unlike the equally fine art-writers, can still tell a good story while doing any number of other things.

Edited February 1976.

It's at times like this that I regret I never went into plumbing. For some months now, there has nibbled at the back of my otherwise empty mind a perfectly reasonable request from Rob Jackson to write him a column. During that time I've engineered any number of devious schemes to rationalise my failure to do anything about that query, but Rob is not the sort to be easily put off. He is, in a word, persistent.

When Rob first broached this matter — some half a year ago if I recall correctly, which I probably don't as I appear to be in the middle of one of Bob Shaw's Scotch-induced time travel junkets and it's playing havoc with my temporal sense — I dashed him off a witty postcard, expecting that to end the matter. But I had underestimated Rob's editorial acumen and high fair & Happy and perseverance. In no more time than it takes for a turtle to swim the Atlantic twice I received a witty postcard back from Rob waxing eloquent over his enthusiasm for the column I hadn't promised to write him. And far from being discouraged by my obvious reluctance to commit myself, the fiend even went so far as to add specifications to the required piece: each article (ha!) was to contain at least one awful pun. Naturally I forwarded the card to Sam Long and went back to my single-minded pursuit of the perfect malt.

Mike Glicksohn

Winds Light to Variable

However, the fannish mind, once unchained, is a cagey thing, and deep within the sodden synapses I hide beneath my floppy felt fannish gestalt, relays were slowly clicking over. Enter Maya 8, from the very man himself. And therein lies a fabulous fannish column by that wondrous wizard of words, Peter Weston, who may well be, speculation to the contrary, the father of his two children, author, raconteur, and man voted "Most Likely to Secede" by the League for Alcoholic and Sexual Abstinence.

I was immediately struck by the fact that I've never been injured by a concrete coal bunker. I was floored to realise I've never replaced that bathroom lino. It dawned upon me that I've never stayed up until sunrise watching the stars. In fact, I hadn't done any of the things that Pete was so effortlessly able to turn into a brilliant first installment of a column.

It was right about then that I wished I'd gone into plumbing. I might have had something to write about.

Undaunted, however, by this revelation of the inhibiting nature of my rather dull and ordinary existence, I settled down with Maya, a pitcher of chilled martinis, and a stack of paper and when I went to work the next day I found I had a letter to mail to someone named Jackson. I did so, and put the whole thing out of my mind. It didn't take much. But Rob is not so easily dissuaded.

At the beginning of November there arrived yet another communication from The Indefatigable Optimist in which he fulsomely praised the letter I'd mailed to him (without ever letting me know who'd written it, I might add) and then went into further raptures concerning the column he was expecting from me for his All-Canadian Issue due out in the New Year. Good grief, I thought, does he never cease? Rob Jackson could give erosion lessons to the Atlantic Ocean! In desperate haste I searched around for some legitimate reason not to produce the article I'd never said I'd do but Rob had seemingly assigned space and commissioned Harry Bell illos for. In desperation I arranged for a six week Canadian postal strike, and sat back to contemplate my unfortunate position.

It's too bad I'm not a plumber. Or maybe an electrician. Or even a civil servant. Interesting things are always happening to plumbers. And electricians. Why, if I'd gone into taxidermy, I'd probably have had a Fan Writer Hugo by now; but when they offered me the job I foolishly told them to stuff it.

I never get to visit lonely farm houses where sultry oversexed women pantingly await my arrival. I'm never called in to check the plumbing and end up buying an entire run of Weird Tales for ten bob. No unexploded German bombs enliven my day-to-day existence, nor do I work with a fascinating collection of sub-human creatures each one capable of filling a dozen fanzine columns. No, I made a big mistake when I went into teaching. I just didn't plan ahead.

Look at your current crop of top-notch fan-writers and ask yourself how many of them write witty or insightful articles about their experiences as teachers. A big fat zero, that's how many! Grant Canfield writes about drafting and Terry Hughes writes about washing dishes and Donn Brazier writes about searching out hot spots in lonely ladies' beds, and Ted White writes about editing and Pete Weston writes about dropping concrete coal bunkers on his foot and Greg Pickersgill mumbles inarticulately about the lack of sexual success of those who lack pointed ears but no one, on either side of the Atlantic or Pacific, fills fanzine articles with amusing incidents from the life of a teacher. It just isn't a compatible combination.

I've been a high school math teacher for almost four and a half years now and what do I have to show for it? A summer in England, a summer in Australia, a summer in San Francisco, and not a damn thing worth writing about during the whole time. The life of a math teacher is just not conducive to side-splitting anecdotes, pithy slices of life, or much of anything else worth putting into print. We never get marched on by angry mothers protesting the immorality of fractions; no religious groups ever accuse us of corruption caused by calculus, and not even the fervent Ukrainian Nationalism League can object to our support of commutativity. No, the prime time-consuming aspect of my existence is a wipe-out as far as fannish fame and glory are concerned. Better to have been a plumber.

Harry Warner is never at a loss for some story out of his experiences as a journalist to relate to even the most obscure statement in a fanzine. Don D'Ammassa can come up with an hilarious anecdote from his days in the US Army at the drop of a hat. The things that have happened to Loren MacGregor while he's worked as an orderly in a big Seattle hospital have filled numerous brilliant issues of Talking Stock and Quota. In the meantime, I've never written a single word about my job. Never passed on a single funny experience. Never related as much as one droll incident. My career has been a totally barren source of inspiration. Even Eric Lindsay has had more fun than I have!

(This seems to have been true of my entire working career. I have an uncanny knack of selecting employment guaranteed to be totally uninteresting in the re-telling. I've been a short-order cook, a pipe-fitter, a transformer laminator, a door-to-door salesman — which might have had potential were I not sixteen years old and spotty — and a locker-room attendant at a swimming pool. Somehow the story of a boy checking in a tortoise while he went swimming fails to reduce even me to tears of hysterical laughter. Probably the only interesting employment-oriented story I could relate would involve the letters of commendation I got after working for a while on the off-shore drilling rigs of the Eastern Standard Oil Company. But I doubt that readers of Maya would understand such ESSO derrick references...)

No, I'm afraid the teaching profession has proven to be a rather staid and ordinary one as far as I'm concerned. In fact, I even remarked upon this very matter to one of our Vice Principals as we sat together in the stands at a recent football game enjoying our school team in action and a flask of excellent imported French brandy I carry with me to such occasions in case of snake bite. "Bob," I said, for such is his name, "amusing anecdotes just don't happen to high school teachers."

He contemplated that for a moment, beating off several students trying to reach my hip flask and nodded sagely. "I was saying as much to Mel Greif this morning," he agreed, "when I called him in because a student complained Mel had called him a shithead."

After I'd broken up a confrontation between the local black pusher and some drunken Italians from the technical school down the street, I sat down again and questioned Bob as to Mel's response. "What was Mel's response, Bob?" was the subtle way I phrased it.

Well, Bob was a little while returning from straightening out the mess caused by the glue-sniffer turning on the fire alarms, but he eventually staggered back and explained that Mel had admitted freely that he had indeed called the student in question a shithead. "But," said Bob, "he had a very good reason."

"What was that?" I asked upon my return from convincing the senior boys to give the poor girl back her clothes. By then we were through with the brandy so I had to confiscate some whisky from a student. Drinking in the stands, tsk, tsk!

"Well, when I asked Mel why he'd called the boy a shithead, he explained that the boy was a shithead." We both pondered that for a moment.

"Then what happened?" I asked, after taking the rifle away from one of my more psychotic charges.

"I called in the student who'd made the original complaint," Bob explained, picking the confetti out of his hair, and told him Mel had called him a shithead because he was a shithead. He thought about that for a moment, nodded, and said, 'Well, I guess that's okay then.' Then he went away."

"That's exactly what I was getting at," I said, dusting myself off and checking that no one was still trapped in the wreckage of the stands, "nothing worth reporting ever happens to a high school teacher."

My whole career has been like that.

It struck me as grossly unfair that both Rob and I should be denied a Hugo just because nothing of interest ever happens for me to write about. So I decided to strike out in another direction, and I took my colleagues with me. For the last month all Toronto highschool teachers have been out on strike, just so I can clear up a few fannish obligations and try my hand at plumbing.

In the meantime three teachers have died while picketing, the Federal Government has imposed wage and price controls which threaten to tear the entire country apart, and the provincial government is locked in a power struggle with the teachers that may well bring down the minority government and force an election.

If anything interesting ever happens, Rob, I'll try to write you a column, honest I will.

Mike Glicksohn, December 1975

INCOME TAXI

A case study of the fannish mind at bay

by **Bob Shaw**

"Take me to the nearest brothel."

This request — issuing from the lips of a thin, beer-flushed, slightly disreputable-looking Canadian — shattered the easy confidence with which I had been regarding the world from the driving seat of my taxi.

It was the summer of 1957, I was working in Calgary, Alberta, on the design of steel-framed buildings, and there was a recession in the construction industry that year. Although my job was secure, there was no overtime being worked in the office and I had been counting on the extra money to help with saving the deposit for a house. These circumstances had prompted me to take a job driving taxis.

The choice of job had been influenced by memories of an old BBC radio series about the adventures of a London cabbie. Something strange or romantic or exciting happened to the hero of the series every night and, as I was trying to broaden my experience of the world to help with my writing, I decided the life of a taxi driver in a Canadian city was just the sort of thing I needed.

A man who decides to become a cabbie finds his path less strewn with obstacles than, say, an aspiring architect or surgeon, but in the event it turned out to be far from easy to get myself established behind the wheel. For a start, there was the PSV examination, which is a really stiff driving test. I went along for it, saw that my examiner was a crabby individual, and decided to be ultra careful in everything I did. His first instruction was to pull out into the traffic stream. I knew they were very hot on good hand signals during this manoeuvre, so I rolled down the window, gave the proper signal, then — to show how safe a driver I was — also put on the off-side flashers. The examiner made a little note on his pad and I thought: Ah, I've really impressed him with that one.

Encouraged by this good start, I took him round the city centre a few times, dutifully obeying all his orders. A few minutes later I was slowly trundling around the corner of 4th and 7th behind a bus when the bus's trolley came off the overhead wire, bringing the vehicle to a halt right on the pedestrian crossing, and other cars were jammed up behind me, so I had to sit there while the lights changed. I looked at the examiner and shrugged philosophically. He made another note on his pad, and I thought: No doubt I've impressed him with my calmness under pressure.

Presently we got back to the testing centre, parked the car and got out. I looked at the examiner questioningly.

He stared at me for a moment, getting ready to sign his name at the bottom of a sheet, then said, "I'm going to pass you — but you did a couple of things wrong."

"Oh?" I put on the expression of someone who is eager to pick up a few wrinkles from an older and more experienced hand.

"Yeah. When I told you to pull out into the traffic you only signalled with your flashers and you should have used your hand."

"But..." I choked off my protest, reminding myself he had said he was passing me. His pen was still hovering over the paper, but as yet no signature had appeared.

"Well?" he said coldly.

"Nothing." I tried to smile. "What was the other thing I did wrong?"

He looked me straight in the eye. "At the corner of 4th and 7th you stopped on the pedestrian crossing." His gaze hunted over my face, eager for a reaction. "You got in everybody's way."

"I..." It was strangely difficult to speak. "I'm sorry about that," I eventually ground out.

Unexpectedly, the examiner gave a brief smile and signed his name, leaving me with a feeling that the hardest part of the PSV test had begun only after we got out of the car. I paid a small fee and was issued with an engraved elliptical badge which told the world I was licensed to drive a taxi in Calgary. Next came the weird experience of actually getting myself accepted into the profession.

I went to the headquarters garage of the taxi company which had a virtual monopoly in Calgary and was interviewed by an elderly man who was intensely proud of his position as foreman driver. He looked at my brand-new badge without much enthusiasm and asked me how long I had lived in Calgary.

"Year and a half," I said.

"Know the city well, do you, Pat?" I noted the doubt implied by his reference to my "foreign" extraction. Several drivers standing nearby moved a little closer to hear what was going on.

"Oh, yes — I've been all over Calgary," I said.

He nodded. "Where's Elbow Crescent?"

I gaped at him, thunderstruck. This wasn't fair. Calgary was mostly laid out on a very simple grid and the numbering system was such that as soon as you heard somebody's address you could tell the exact location of his house. There were, however, several districts in which — as a kind of reaction to uniformity — the streets had been put down in a crazy series of curls and squiggles, and had been given names instead of numbers. Only one passenger in ten would want to go into those areas and I was certain those passengers wouldn't mind giving me a few directions.

The foreman driver had a different point of view. After asking me about several more named streets, none of which I could place, he told me I wasn't up to the job. The listening

drivers snickered their amusement as I hurried out of the garage, humbled and rejected.

At that stage in the venture it would have been in character for me to give up — I'm inclined to quit things easily unless I'm an immediate success — but the treatment had uncovered a layer of obstinacy somewhere. I brooded over the matter for the rest of the evening, drinking Molson's Ale at a ferocious rate while studying a street map of the city. Next morning in work I traced all the squiggly areas, leaving out the street names, and ran off a couple of dozen copies on the firm's dyeline printer. I then practised filling in the street names from memory. This was a technique I had discovered years earlier when cramming for geography examinations, and it works well because it clearly pinpoints your areas of ignorance and lets you wipe them out. Within 24 hours I could identify all the difficult areas of Calgary immediately, just by glancing at the street patterns, and could fill in the names as quickly as I could write. I had also taken a special delight in spotting all the extra-difficult out-of-the-way nooks which a Smart Alec examiner would be likely to try tripping me up with. The knowledge was of a transient and superficial nature, of course, but for the time being it was there, right behind my eyes, as clear and sharp as the maps themselves.

The foreman driver looked surprised to see me again and he seemed sceptical about my explanation that I hadn't been feeling too well when I had spoken to him a couple of days earlier. He had spent thirty years or so perfecting his knowledge of Calgary; he was a professional, and he knew that I was unfit for the job. What he didn't know was that this was a confrontation between the mundane and the fannish modes of thought, just like in a null-A story, and that I was ready for him.

He started asking me about tricky streets, and each time I rattled off precise details of how to get there, sometimes saying how to do it from a couple of different directions, just for good measure. This went on for quite a long time, during which he became more and more uneasy and suspicious. Finally, however, he checked out my driving, issued me with a peaked cap on which to pin my badge, installed me in a current model Dodge, and sent me off to join a taxi rank. He was still shaking his head as I drove away. (This whole episode was used later in one of my novels, The Ground Zero Man, which you should dash out and order from your nearest bookseller.)

My first customer on that summer evening wanted to be taken to the Canadian Pacific rail station. I whisked him round to it, collected the sum shown on the meter — there was no wage for the job; you got a third of your take — received a small tip, and took up my position in the taxi rank. I was feeling cool, mature, worldly, and confident that my fannish/van Vogt extra brain could cope with just about any situation which could arise. That was the precise moment at which the character came along and demanded to be taken to a brothel.

I stared at him, reproachfully, shaking my head — I had no idea where to find such an amenity.

He spoke more slowly this time, obviously thinking he had encountered the village idiot. "Take me to the nearest brothel."

"Sorry," I managed to say, "I don't know any."

He looked startled, then gave a knowing smile and tapped a pocket which I presumed to contain his wallet. "Don't worry," he throated, "there's something in it for you."

I called in desperation upon my extra brain, but the cursed thing seemed to have shrivelled up inside my skull. I considered taking the stranger to a street I had noticed, where several of the houses looked just like the brothel where James Dean discovered his mother in East of Eden, dumping him outside one of them, collecting my money and getting the hell out of there as fast as I could. But my nerve failed when I thought of the weird scenes which might ensue, and the possible repercussions.

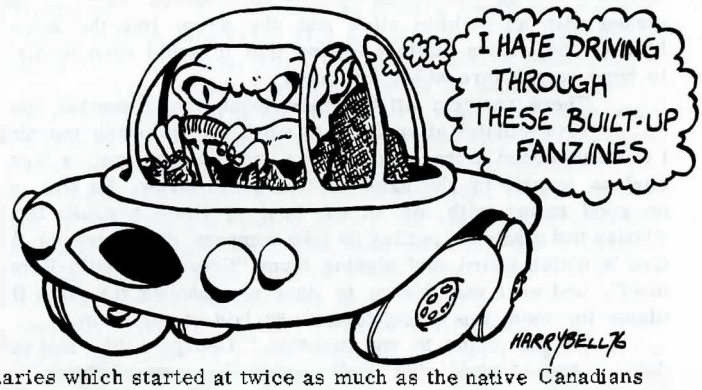
"Honest to God," I assured him. "I don't know any brothels."

"Call yourself a taxi driver!" he snarled, and stumped off to the car behind. There was a brief conversation with its driver, during which both men kept glancing in my direction, and I wondered if I would be reported and drummed out of my new profession on the first night. A moment later the second taxi roared off and as soon as it had gone I went back to the third car and obtained from its driver the addresses of three brothels, which I committed to memory. One of them had the marvellous name of Japanese Mary's, and another — strangely enough — was in the actual street where I had considered dropping my client.

Somewhat shaken by the experience, I returned to my car and sat in it, glumly wondering if I would be able to stand the pace of this new career. I needn't have worried. What followed was three months of utter boredom in which not one incident of note took place. Nobody else wanted taken to a brothel, and the nearest I ever came to Calgary's underworld was when I took people to an illegal liquor store which was open on Sundays.

There was an occasional verbal skirmish with Norman, the foreman driver, who — after the shaky start to our relationship — had begun to take me under his wing, partly because I was more neatly dressed than the other drivers and this made him feel I was trying to live up to his high standards in the profession. Every night when I handed in my fare sheet he brought it back, explained that I didn't know how to write numerals properly, and — with great patience and a stubby pencil — showed me his "correct" way to write a 2 and a 4 and a 9. My protestations that I was a qualified engineer, a professional writer-downer of accurate clear figures, made no impression on Norman. The weeks dragged by and I learned that the life of a taxi driver is very, very dull.

The only thing which relieved the boredom was that every now and again I would see somebody who worked in the same engineering firm as I did, and this meant I had to keep out of sight to avoid being reported. The management had a strict rule against moonlighting and I, being on the design staff, was particularly vulnerable. It was a peculiarity of the Albertan educational system that it simply did not turn out young men who were qualified, or even suitable, to learn engineering design. The apprenticeship system seemed to be unknown there. This left a yawning gap for people like me who had begun work in a drawing office at 16 for the sum of 15 shillings a week and had progressed to a princely six quid a week at 21, but who had received a hard and superbly thorough grounding in the trade. Canada drew us like a magnet, and on arrival we were thrilled to find ourselves regarded as key employees and paid



salaries which started at twice as much as the native Canadians were getting for general office work.

Every member of the drawing office I was in had been recruited from the United Kingdom or Europe, and we were fiercely resented by the firm's clerical staff, especially when overtime work at enhanced rates used to send our salaries up to four and five times a clerk's take-home pay. On payday, when the cheques were brought round, the atmosphere was charged with antagonism, mostly directed at a Scot called Dave Rhodes, the only bachelor among us, who worked prodigious hours and was so keen on saving that he went around in a clapped-out old car he had bought for about 100 dollars. This really rankled with the car-conscious young Albertans who were putting as much as half their pay in some cases into late-model vehicles. I remember one occasion when the salaries clerk — who was normally as quiet and mild-mannered as they come — had a kind of a brainstorm when he saw Dave's latest giant cheque, came running into the drawing office, threw the cheque into Dave's face and shouted, "Why the fuck don't you get yourself a decent car?"

That was all great fun, but it meant I had to be careful that none of the underpaid general office people saw me in my taxi at nights. One evening, late on, I got a call to pick up a passenger at the Copper Kettle restaurant. It was one of those

places with a floor-to-ceiling window in front and on pulling up outside it I noticed a girl from the office and her soldier husband at one of the tables. Beryl was a skinny blonde who always wore tight-fitting dresses of flowery material which made her look like a roll of wallpaper. Her main pastime in the office was moaning loudly about how little money a good Canadian soldier boy was paid in comparison to the amounts heaped on worthless foreigners who slept over drawing boards all day. It wasn't hard to work out who she was getting at, so when I sounded the horn outside the restaurant I prayed my passengers wouldn't be Beryl and her husband.

They got up immediately and came out to the car.

Normally, if you want to get a tip, you jump out and open the door for your passengers as they approach, but on this occasion I sank down into the seat, hunched up my shoulders and pulled my cap (which was a little large) down to meet my collar. Beryl and her hubby got in, gave me the destination and I drove them there as unobtrusively as possible, hoping to remain unrecognised in the darkness. The fare came to 90 cents on the clock. Hubby handed me a dollar bill and said grandly, "There you are, cabbie — keep the change."

I remained slumped in the front seat and signalled my gratitude by raising one finger to the back of my neck in what I hoped would be an acceptable salute. We sat there and the seconds ticked past, and nobody moved. Finally the horrible truth dawned on me. Having handed out the magnificent gift of ten cents from his soldier's pittance, Hubby was not going to get out until I opened the door for him.

I left my seat, shambled round the back of the taxi, opened the door and stood there, cap resting on my humped-up shoulders. Beryl peered up at me curiously as she got out and, just at that moment, some fool in her house switched on the porch light. Beryl and I stared into each other's faces, aghast, and her jaw sagged. I think she was more aghast than I was. Here, suddenly illuminated by her own porch light, was one of those foreigners who was now revealed as not being content with lying over a drawing board all day and receiving multiples of a good Canadian soldier boy's pay, but who was actually moonlighting as well, and who had just conned her husband into handing over part of the miserable wage for which he might someday be called upon to give up his life. Her jaw closed with an audible click and she swept into the house, leaving me with a distinct feeling that it would soon be time to hang up my fare sheet for good.

There was very little finesse about what happened next.

Five minutes after I got to work the following morning I was summoned to the office of the general manager, a humourless toughie by the name of George Pillbrow. He was not on good terms with me at the best of times because Dave Rhodes had a habit of putting up fake company directives on the firm's notice board and signing them "George Capsule-Forehead", and as I was known to have a weakness for puns the blame for them was being tentatively laid at my door.

"It has come to my attention," George said, "that you drive a taxi at night. We don't permit that sort of thing."

"Why not?" I asked reasonably.

"Because you couldn't do your work for us properly and hold down another job at the same time."

"It doesn't take anything out of me," I said. "Tootling around in a car for a few hours in the evening." This was an outright lie, because I wasn't getting home until about one o'clock every morning and I felt exhausted most of the time.

"Bob..." George paused to give me one of his rare smiles, "make up your mind which you prefer to be — a taxi driver or a draughtsman."

Even in my exhausted condition I had no trouble getting his drift — my days as a taxi driver were over. Beryl and I exchanged thin-lipped smiles as I went out through the general office, and I vowed hideous revenge on her. In the event, all animosity faded before I had dreamed up a suitable retribution. The taxi business had been a deathly grind and it was a relief to be out of it.

When I went back to the garage a few days later to pick up my final money, I told old Norman I was quitting and was surprised to note that he seemed genuinely sorry.

"That's a pity," he said, shaking my hand. "Just as you were learning to write, too!"

Bob Shaw, September 1975.

At the last One Tun meeting Ian Maule was there, handing out copies of the latest Checkpoint. Peter Roberts was there, handing out copies of the latest Egg. Graham Charnock was there, handing out copies of the latest Vibrator and the latest Wrinkled Shrew. Anyone who didn't know better might have thought that London fandom was alive and well and pubbing its ish. Come to think of it, they might well be right. Assuming he isn't overcome by another attack of stencil-ripping, Greg Pickersgill's new fanzine should be seeing the light of day very soon. True Rat is alive and well, if not quite as regular as in its editor's carefree bachelor days. Robert Holdstock and I are the only Ratfans failing to pull our weight. Robert, of course, has the excuse of being a busy full-time writer: his first novel, Eyes Among The Blind (which draws its inspiration from that well-known proverb, "In the country of the deaf, the one-legged man is Queen") will be out Real Soon Now, and he's currently working on a series of historical novels concerning the violent adventures of a barbaric order of nuns. And I'm just lazy. So let us have a look at this latest batch and generalise wildly about them in the approved critical fashion.

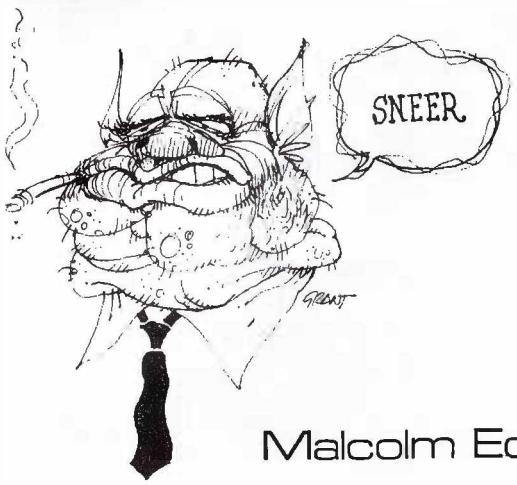
When I entered fandom Peter Roberts had already published two or three issues of Egg, I believe. Five years later and he's already up to number ten. This is some going for the man who, since he took up residence in London, has been revealed as a master of applied lethargy. This may seem a strange description of our most internationally-renowned fannish fan, but the truth must be told. His many activities — agent for scores of obscure overseas conventions, member of an array of unknown APAs, perpetrator of myriad Cornish Nationalist outrages, connoisseur of numerous different methods of cooking chip curry — must give the impression that here is a human dynamo, his every spare moment efficiently devoted to one branch or another of fan or fad activity. Not so! Peter Roberts probably devotes more time to doing nothing than anyone else I know. He is very conscientious about this, ever ready with a new excuse for staying at home in the evening and staring at the ceiling rather than coming out and getting drunk. ("But it's dark!" he was once reported to have said.) Thus are we generally deprived of his company and his seemingly inexhaustible store of absurdly improbable anecdotes. Peter is actually fandom's master raconteur, though he doesn't often let on, frequently preferring to cultivate the vague persona which Rob Holdstock caught so beautifully in a letter to Vibrator:

> "At one point he rose to his feet and the room fell silent, all eyes turned upon him. He stared at the floor for a moment and put one foot in front of the other, held the stance for a few seconds and then quickly reversed the position of his feet. The room was tense with expectation, but he shook his head and sat down again. It was a most disconcerting moment."

So, what does this paradoxical and enigmatic figure produce during those many evenings when he stays in his shoebox of a room (where three really is a crowd) to pub his ish. Well Egg is a fanzine which I find increasingly paradoxical and enigmatic, although on the face of it no two adjectives could be less appropriate. Egg in many ways epitomises the positive qualities of fannishness: it is friendly, tolerant, witty and literate. It has a timeless quality which will doubtless ensure its longevity. It is a question of atmosphere, always a hard thing to pin down (those molecules keep dodging), although it is clearly a product of editorial presence rather than of formal content, because Egg's articles always tend to the mediocre, oddly enough. In this issue for example, there are three outside contributions, two of their regular features. James Parkhill-Rathbone contributes a very short piece on why he likes Lovecraft (who is a secret Peter Roberts obsession — or was until just now), which I found strangely hard to read, despite its brevity. John Brosnan's "North Sea Nog" is fairly feeble stuff. Of course I may not be the best person to judge these days, since John and I aren't exactly bosom pals, but it does seem to me that what I've seen of his recent fanwriting (i.e. the last two installments of this column) show an almost complete loss of touch. He just fails to be funny (although he can be in other fields — such as his recent SF Monthly piece on Space: 1999), because of the sour edge which he seems unable to suppress. Lastly, there is Eric Bentcliffe's fanzine review column, about which it might be too incestuous to say much. (I could comment on his review of Maya; then whe

The Dissecting Table

A few fanzines taken apart to see what makes them tick — by...



Malcolm Edwards

he reviews this issue, he could comment on my comments: then, when I review the next Egg...) Let me just say that Eric's comments are considered and informed, and worth reading.

This leaves the letter column and the editorial natter. The letters come from a diverse lot of fans, old and new, British and American, European and South American. They show the range of Egg's appeal. Yet it isn't actually a particularly interesting letter column, despite the presence of people like Terry Hughes, John Bangsund, Mike Glicksohn and Rick Sneary. The reason for this is not hard to find: because of the anonymity of Egg's written contents, people responding to it seem to be straining to find comment-hooks. Many of the letters are eminently sensible, but the only really good one (and this through inadvertence) is from an official of the NFFF, who responded to the material Peter printed in Egg 9 about Claude Degler with a request to be put in touch with the Cosmic Circle!

Peter's own writing is, as usual, the best part of the magazine although, as usual, there is too little of it. He writes with real style, intelligence and wit when he puts his mind to it, even if he still occasionally has trouble with big words like 'berserk' and 'aficionado'. There is one paragraph in his piece on a 1950's crudzine which is simply brilliant, and the rest of it is full of good things, even though the line of argument is rather slack (he tends to follow down sidetracks and interrupt himself to bring himself back to the point, a sure sign of first-draft writing. Now, where was I...).

Ultimately, then, I feel this is a fanzine which is saved from mediocrity by its editorial presence, but one in which that presence is not strong enough to make it memorable. I find myself wondering exactly what Peter gets out of publishing it, in the positive sense. (That is, excluding the fringe benefits which come from publishing any fanzine: other fanzines in trade, letters of comment, interminable reviews in Maya.) He appears to have made a conscious decision to tolerate a level of mediocrity in fandom which he would mock in science fiction, which is understandable in that it is the whole area of his hobbyism — his interest in old crudzines equates with mine in old sf pulps. But I don't quite understand why he seems content to coast along in a low gear in his fan publishing, the active expression of his interest. He is quite capable of publishing an absolute killer fanzine, so I wonder why he seems happy with something which, despite its overall pleasantness, is merely average.

Meanwhile — and about time too — there are the Charnox and their fanzines. Graham's Vibrator started off with distressing regularity, but has lately slipped into traditional fannish irregularity. It's a small personalzine which, in this latest issue has hit the problem of what to do with the letter-response it has engendered without losing its characteristic flavour. I'm not sure it will succeed in this. It has the appearance of an insoluble problem. The essence of Vibrator's first three issues was varied comment by Graham, always pithy (sometimes to the point of incomprehensibility) and entertaining, filtered through an alcoholic haze. (One correspondent in this Vibrator doubts that Graham is the drunkard he claims to be. He obviously never phones the Charnox in the evenings, or meets them much. Graham used to have the most famous stare in fandom — even the Melody Maker commented on it. Nowadays he finds it hard to focus for long enough.) Vibrator hit an absolutely right balance for a personalzine — it was frequent; it was topical; it had personality. In such a case, what do you do with the letters which come in? If you don't print them, they'll stop coming; if you do print them, you lose the fanzine's distinctive ambience. I think the only answer is to be very selective: to print maybe two of the nine letters included here (Rob Holdstock's — which I quoted earlier — and Don West's, to be precise). This time Graham mostly confines himself to chronicling his disastrous Novacon, and reprinting a letter he had published in the New Musical Express, about Bruce Springsteen. (He doesn't actually confess to this, but he knows he has friends who will rat on him.)

Wrinkled Shrew, on the other hand, gets a great boost this time from the substantial and interesting letter column. Peter Nicholls' epic convention report in the previous issue attracted a lot of response, much of which shows an uneasily ambivalent attitude towards our Antipodean friend. Praise is given, but rather grudgingly. Strange. (My very favourite comment is Merf Adamson's, although I'm not entirely sure if it is meant as a joke or not — "His command of foreign words and phrases isn't equalled in the whole issue.") There is a real contrast between this and the Egg letter column: the letters are more abrasive, admittedly (including Charles Platt making an utter fool of himself and being spectacularly put down by Graham), but full of evidence that the previous issue really stimulated people into responding. The main items otherwise are: an amusing Dick Howett column, albeit not one of his best: a genuine, original fannish game that I've not been able to persuade any of the other Rats to try out: another fine installment of Roy Kettle's fannish memoirs — genuinely good stuff, which finds all sorts of resonances with my own experiences, and no doubt with yours as well; and a good editorial by Pat, which is actually assembled by Graham from various unfinished bits and pieces. That's indicative of Shrew's main problem: Pat's continuing lack of confidence in her own writing, which sometimes tends to manifest itself in touchy defensiveness. It is irrational, as a reading of these fragments shows: but it's typical that Pat should only get a proper showcase for her own writing in her own fanzine through Graham's scissors-and-paste job. The consequence of this in past issues is that the personality Shrew has mainly projected has been Graham's, even while it has been primarily Pat's fanzine. Let's hope that this is the start of a new trend, and that henceforth Pat will assert herself even more strongly. Pull your finger out, Ms Charnock! We know you can do it, even if you don't. As it is, this issue is a good example of what I regard at the moment as the British fanzine with most vitality and style. It seems to be labelled outside London as a rather in-group Ratfan zine, which is a vast injustice that I hope will evaporate in short order.

Last, and by all means least, we have Ian Maule's Checkpoint. Oh dear, I hate to say anything discouraging to anyone rash enough to want to go into the newszine business, but the issues which Ian has so far produced have contained precious little news, and have furthermore presented what there was in a disastrously terse and impersonal way. There's no editorial personality whatever, no decent gossip, and he doesn't even mention our New Year's party! Must try harder, Ian.

Egg 10, from Peter Roberts, 6 Westbourne Park Villas, London W.2 (not available for cash).

Vibrator 4, from Graham Charnock, 70 Ledbury Rd, London W.11 (no price quoted).

Wrinkled Shrew 5, from Pat and Graham Charnock, as above (no price quoted).

Checkpoint 63 and 64, from Ian Maule, 8 Hillcroft Cres, Ealing, London W.5 (5/40p or 10/70p).

All the above are available for the usual fannish reasons.

Fanzines for review to: Malcolm Edwards, 19 Ranmoor Gdns, Harrow, Middlesex HA1 1UQ, U.K. March 1976.

A Real Taste of Being

~ Doug Barbour examines some recent work by James Tiptree Jr.

Some of the praises heaped on James Tiptree Jr: professional, perfectionist, good ideas, a pleasure to read. Robert Silverberg, in a fine Introduction to Tiptree's second collection of stories, Warm Worlds and Otherwise, quotes Tiptree on his abhorrence to being bored, or boring, and adds: "Tiptree's stories don't bore. They are lean, muscular, supple, relying heavily on dialog broken by bursts of stripped-down exposition." Tiptree has only been on the scene since 1968; he has already won both the Hugo and Nebula Awards — for different stories. And he continues to extend his range, to grow in profundity, to become a Writer.

His early stories are fun, are good standard magazine sf. But look back even as far as 1969 to "The Last Flight of Doctor Ain" and you find a story which kicks, even if it still has too many flaws. Only two years later, he begins hitting home. I think the first Tiptree story I stumbled across (I don't tend to read the magazines) was that stunning shocker, "And I Awoke and Found Me Here on the Cold Hill's Side." Jesus, I said to myself, who is this guy? It's still one of my favourite Tiptree stories, and it is a precursor of the novella which is, at this point, his longest and, possibly, best fiction: "A Momentary Taste of Being," in The New Atlantis.

"And I Awoke" is a chillingly believable reading of the dark human soul, of the kind of desires which can make an unbearable life bearable. The title reveals something most of the stories point up: Tiptree may be a professional in any number of fields but, unlike many younger folk, he is also well read. I would say his work further proves just how strong the Romantic spirit remains in these Post Modern times.

(Time for a slight digression: "Post Modern" is the term used to designate the literature of the post-WWII period. The Modern period is over; Pound, Eliot, and Joyce are among the masters of Modernism. In poetry, which most interests me, such writers as Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, Gary Snyder, bp Nichol in Canada, and Ian Hamilton Finlay in Britain — to name just a few — are Post Modern. I further believe that the sf which has emerged with, or concomitant to, the "New Wave" of the 60s is Post Modern in a way the earlier sf could not be. For the writers who emerged then, as well as the best of those of the 70s, have studied the Modern masters of literature and applied their techniques to sf themes. It is because they utilise both the literary paradigms of Modernism plus the extrapolative paradigms of sf that their works can be labelled Post Modern, I think, for the result of this happy miscegenation is a new and different sf. What is so good about this sf — leading me to say the Golden Age is now and the years to come — is that it has kept the raw energy of earlier sf while adding depth after depth of literary "presence" to it. Therefore, for me the Old Wave is usually a slight swell compared to the billowing breakers of the New Wave, which just knock me out. Tiptree's style, his sense of literary antecedents and his almost terrifying energy — the electric surfaces of his stories flashing across felt profundities — reveal him as definitely a writer of Post Modern sf. Now the Victorian, fin-de-siecle, Georgian, Modern and Post Modern periods are all Post Romantic periods as well, thus leading back to my citation of the Romantic spirit above. End of academic digression.)

Robert Silverberg quotes Tiptree's description of his "basic narrative instinct" from Phantasmicom 9: "Start from the end and preferably 5,000 feet underground on a dark day and then DON'T TELL THEM." The result of such an approach? A feeling of being there, in the midst of inchoate human desires and dreams and rationalisations, there where life happens, right now, chaotically, and just possibly (if we're lucky) barely under control. Tiptree tells exciting stories, but he does not concentrate on nifty plots: the excitement arises because he reveals, in action, the emotional chaos that is a human life being lived.

In "And I Awoke" he presents us with a rationally understood emotional and moral breakdown that — and here is the horror — keeps happening, keeps on happening, and provides a man with his reason for living. The kicker, of course, is that it is the man suffering this life-long breakdown who rationally understands it. The further kicker is that his explanation argues utter despair in its implications:

> "Man is exogamous — all our history is one long drive to find and impregnate the stranger. Or get impregnated by him, it works for women too. Anything different-colored, different nose, ass, anything, man has to fuck it or die trying. That's a drive, y'know, it's built in. Because it works fine as long as the stranger is human. For millions of years that kept the genes circulating. But now we've met aliens we can't screw, and we're about to die trying..."

I think this story is terrifying because it strikes home: well, I can believe that explanation, anyway. But Tiptree often gives even as he takes away. It is the man who is utterly debased by his alien desires who also understands what is going on. He is heroic precisely because he is still able to analyse the situation and give a warning to the world. Of course, the final kicker is that the warning comes too late, as the last paragraph of the story demonstrates.

"A Momentary Taste of Being" presents another such heroic individual, and offers another terrifying 'explanation' of man's place in the cosmic scheme of things. But here Tiptree has taken the space — 93 pages of text — to develop the vast array of character-relationships which fulfil the process that is an exploration-starship. The story is definitely not boring: it moves, inexorably and with utter emotional intensity, always moves towards its dark conclusion. From the vary first paragraph, a highly sexual dream-sequence, words and images occur and recur which subtly evoke the revelation towards which the narrative drives.

Dr. Aaron Kaye is the unlikely 'hero' of this story, a rather weak, apparently uncourageous, highly thoughtful ship's doctor, and the man who both figures out what is happening and, for painfully personal reasons, withstands the deeply ingrained urge which completely overwhelms all the humans on the ship when, finally, the alien life-form from an apparently 'safe' planet is exposed to them. He is only one of many fascinating character studies in the story, however; Tiptree makes his United Nations ship work as a social process, a happening situation in which a myriad cultural traditions collide and adapt to one another within the people who bear them. The story takes so long to reach its necessary climax because Tiptree is making all these different people real to us. It gets there so quickly because he never tells but continually shows this social process through the often tense interactions of the crew, especially as they attempt to discover the truth about what has happened on the planet from which only Aaron's sister (out of a crew of 4) has returned, with an alien thing welded into the cargo hold o

the scout.

Tiptree has a sure sense of dialogue coupled with an ability to suggest the manner of the thinking process in truly thoughtful people, like Dr. Aaron Kaye. Furthermore, his writing is tremendously kinetic: articulate motion, the inchoate mingled perceptions of mass movement. There are too many interesting and exciting aspects of his craft in "A Momentary Taste of Being" for me to even mention them all. Besides I have not reread the story enough to grasp all the facets of its craft. All I can do is suggest a few of the truly good things in it, and to further argue that it is Tiptree's very real artfulness which makes his stories so damned exciting to read. He obviously feels what Samuel R. Delany once argued, that

> the problems of entertainment are aesthetic problems. If the definition of "entertainment" is allowed to include the emotions, the intellect, and the pure pleasure we take in form, then all aesthetic problems are problems of entertainment. Aesthetic discipline is that which makes most accessible all the substance of a given work. The writer who declines to make use of the full range of aesthetic discipline in deference to entertainment is cheating the reader of the very entertainment he claims to be concerned with.

Well, Tiptree doesn't cheat his readers. He is a writer who cares about the act of writing well. That care emerges in the very motions of his prose, adding to the reader's enjoyment of his fictions (mine, anyway).

Tiptree writes well all the time as far as I can see, as his letters and articles show. In the article in Phantasmicom 9, he talks about the mystery and incredibility of existence, the sense of which underlies all his best stories, most certainly "And I Awoke" and "A Momentary Taste of Being:" "Life plunks you amid strangers making strange gestures, inexplicable caresses, threats, unmarked buttons you press with unforeseen results, important-sounding gabble in code... and you keep sorting it out, understanding five years later why she said or did whatever, why they screamed when you —" Aaron Kaye is a specifically Tiptree character precisely because he is always "sorting it out." Because his mind is curious, sensitive and always alive to what is happening in the context of what has happened before, we are both entertained and held spellbound by its devious and integrative speculations. He is one of the glories of this story — not because he is a superstud/hero who performs adventurous acts but because he has the mental and emotional courage to think everything through to the (bitter) end.

If you have read this story you will know that the climactic revelation gives mankind a reason for existence while simultaneously stripping all glory, all transcendental or existential validity, from humanity's strivings — the invention of fire, say, to the leap to the stars (and including all philosophy and art). Oh, Tiptree knows only too well the taste of ashes; what is so exciting is his ability to project such a feeling onto a racial plane rather than simply the personal one.

During the long, almost phantasmagoric, scene in which the whole crew of the starship become an instinct-driven, mindless mass of sperm, Tiptree's control of description, his sensitive and sensual articulation of what Aaron, held back by wires and his own trapped desires, chaotically perceives, is a superb example of aesthetic discipline yielding high-factor entertainment: art. Every word counts, because every word contributes not only to a description of an action but to the fulfilment of a multiplex intellectual quest which the whole story has enacted. Such tightly welded prose is, literally, gripping.

Once again, however, Tiptree fools us, eludes categorisation as simply a philosophical nihilist. The metaphysical underpinnings of the story clearly argue despair. But Aaron survives, however half-heartedly. He carries on the weary business of being human in what is now, for him, an outmoded sense. It is a useless act, and he doesn't even feel that good about it — in fact, he feels lousy. Nevertheless, its very uselessness — like that of a work of art — argues its profoundly human quality. Aaron's acts argue, however tentatively, that the spirit of man can transcend humanity's instinctual drives. I believe that the implications I have inferred here mean a lot to Tiptree: at any rate they give his best stories an emotional depth and resonance I, for one, respond to.

Many of Tiptree's stories are depressing, even despairing, in theme, yet I am not depressed, neither do I despair, when I read his work. This is a difficult thing to talk about in any useful fashion, but I shall make a small attempt. Why is Tiptree such an exhilarating writer, even in his bleakest stories? Because the intensity of his vision, the extraordinary tensions he gets into his stories and the incredible energy he evokes through his prose, the emotional and mental activity which his stories demand of the committed reader, all these processes and more are dynamic. We are changed by the charged experience of reading him (as we are by all good writers — and I can name a number in sf as well as out; Tiptree is not alone, though he is an original). I am happy James Tiptree Jr. is among us, to provoke and excite us with his profoundly entertaining fictions.

Doug Barbour, August 1975.

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Circulation

Ted Tubb,
67 Houston Road,
London SE 23.

As I studied the cover I did a time-jump into the past — temporal displacement about twenty-five years and the duration long enough to wander in imagination through those years called by some the Golden Age of fandom. Golden they were in one sense for then we were young, and brave in another because everyone seemed to be having a go at producing the perfect fanzine. Memories! Memories! Maybe they play false at times and I know those years were no more golden in reality than any other time, but fandom does seem to have changed. Maybe it's because, as Ken Bulmer mentioned, then it was the product of readers of SF who had been deprived and who had found in the mags a means of escape from some pretty grim conditions. So, when things eased a little, it was like taking the cork out of a bottle and releasing the pent up energies. Certainly they seemed to be channeled more than they are now and there was far less diversity. Could anyone now write The Enchanted Duplicator and make the impact that beautiful work did?

And so on to the Editorial which can only be commented on by a deep and heartfelt Amen!

Then on to Pete Weston who has put into print what no one would ever believe if they hadn't had actual experience of being a professional editor. The man isn't exaggerating in any way — be warned all aspiring pro-authors!

And so to the letters which are a nice mixed bag but again we hit the trouble which seems inherent in all present-day fanmags. With wildly erratic publishing schedules what's the point of making comments on letters when by the time those comments are published the original letters will have been forgotten?

But one small voice I must raise in comment on the statement made and endorsed to the effect that SF is not the core of fandom and that SF becomes less relevant as time goes by.

It's a point of view I've heard before and it seems to me to hold within itself the seeds of destruction. Fandom, it has been claimed, can exist without any other reason for being other than that people like to be fans. Logically the contention seems to hold sense but in fact without the cement of a unifying interest any club or assembly will tend to disintegrate. Way, way back in time — twenty-odd years ago now, fen were having such a good time at conventions that it was felt the programme got in the way. So the programme was kicked out and cons turned into parties. When the attendance had fallen so low that you couldn't make a couple of teams from all present it was realised that something had to be done — and the BSFA did it. The point I'm making was that the programme was essential even though it wasn't realised or appreciated. It was there and without it there was nothing. Kick out SF and what kind of fandom is left? You can't replace it with records or photographs, poetry or painting, nudism or beer-swilling sessions because all you're doing is joining a different kind of fandom.

Look at it like this. There is a good chess club going so you join it, not because you're interested in chess but because you like the company, the girls, the friendship etc. As far as you're concerned chess gets in the way so you ignore it and persuade others that it isn't really important or necessary or even desirable. Well, if you get away with it and make your point things will change but whatever you wind up with it won't be a chess club anymore. And once that happens those who joined because they liked the game won't bother to attend and so the whole thing will fall apart with no gain to anyone. So if you want a fandom which has nothing to do with SF or which takes a pride in denigrating it or diminishing its importance to the point where it is considered a little odd to even admit reading the stuff — well, maybe you should think of starting a new fandom all of your own.

((I agree entirely. Nobody around here — either this issue or last — is trying to denigrate or deny SF, or say it is not desirable or important. Why would I spend £80 per issue of Maya and fill half the thing with discussion of SF, otherwise?

Perhaps we should modify the statement made last issue that sf is "not the core" of fandom, and say instead that it is not by any means the only legitimate topic of discussion. SF is a large part of fandom for me, just as SF and fandom together are a large part of my life — but they mustn't become all of my life. Perhaps we can find a happy medium and say, along similar lines, that SF should be a large part, but not necessarily all, of fandom. Fans, like any group of people, vary, and so will the importance they attach to SF. There will be some who enjoy the social cohesion of fandom more than the interest which brought them in in the first place, which provided the cohesive force; but the interest will still be there.))

Me, I like fandom the way it used to be.

As I liked the mags the way they used to be. I don't know why but nothing can beat the duplicated fanzine for sheer enchantment. Going offset seems to take all the sweat and blood out of it and we are left with nothing but cold, hard words. The intimacy is gone, the personal editor/publisher/reader relationship. The thing is too good to deride with loving attention to minute detail, too cold to fully embrace, too professional, too distant, too remote. Like the old pulp mags themselves which nothing can ever replace, the old fanzines had something unique about them. They and what they contained were the essence of fandom. They were a hobby and a way of life, hand produced, stained with toil, offered with pride and received with love. And each mag was a personal friend.

Ah, well — it's that cover, I suppose. Time-jumps can be unsettling.

((A fine statement of nostalgia, Ted. I know what you mean. I also know what you mean about the impersonality of a well-produced zine, and I try my best to infuse warmth despite it by talking personally to my correspondents on the page. I hope I manage it.))

Mike Glicksohn,
141 High Park Ave,
Toronto,
Ont. M6P 2S3,
Canada.

The Bell cover is splendiferous, superb, a feast for one's artistic sensibilities and rather good too. With the possible exception of switching the areas delineating "wife" and "kids" for the BNF and replacing them with "divorce" and "alimony" one can't quibble with an exceptionally accurate summary of the three stages of one's fannish development. A lot of remarkably insightful little touches scattered throughout this cover: Bell for a Hugo

nomination in 76, say I and thousands like me.

Once again Peter Weston stunnes me with the ease with which he writes a fine example of a fannish column. (Peter writes entertainingly about something which is galling in the extreme to writers like me.) What can one add to his fine contribution? I've just returned from my Christmas holiday, part of which was spent with US science fiction writers like Jay and Joe Haldeman, and Gardner Dozois. Gardner regaled us for some time with his absolutely unbelievable collection of slushpile letters collected when he read for, I think, Galaxy. They reveal the same sort of total ignorance of the world of publishing that Peter describes so well with relation to his editorial duties. I'm hoping that Gardner will write them up into an article for me, but he might not want to risk a lawsuit! (My own favourite quotable letter, accompanying a manuscript you understand, read simply "Ooh, ooh, publish me please!" — a sentiment I can understand but would never commit to paper.) I wish I could write like Peter Weston — so does Rob Jackson, I suspect!

((Yes. I wish I could write like Ursula Le Guin, too. I certainly wish I could be as relaxed as Pete when speaking in public.))

One gets tired of trying to explain to people the reasons for one's participation in fandom. I'm not sure if Alan Stewart was feeling depressed when he wrote that letter or merely trying to suggest how fandom might appear to someone who lacked any knowledge of its workings. Either way, though, it doesn't merit the time it would take to answer, not only because a proper explanation of what fandom is and can be and how it comes to be that way would require numerous pages but because we've all done it countless times before in letters and in personal conversations. I'm proud to be a part of what I consider fandom, and I don't feel the need to justify it to any outsider who's too impatient to serve an apprenticeship and discover the pleasures of fandom for himself. I'm an old fan and tired, I guess, but what the hell.

As to the degree of interaction between British and American fanzines, there are good reasons for its sparsity. (I happen to consinder a loc a "contribution" but that is because that's mostly what I write.) Nor do I think it's as slight as Alan indicates. The sheer number of fanzines being produced in the US makes it impossible for a good writer (and there are damn few of them) to appear everywhere that he might want to or be asked to. So he (or she) has to be selective. I think it's only natural that a writer will feel a stronger obligation to a faned who happens to be a close friend than to someone they've never met, and I suspect this tends to encourage US writers to write for US zines and English writers to write for English zines.

Jackie Franke,
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Beecher,
Il. 60401,
U.S.A.

I can't help noting all the complaints about Maya 8 wanting to rewind itself into a neat cylinder. I didn't have all that much trouble with it: simply used the old reverse-roll technique to get the majority of the spring out of the pages. Weighting down a curled-up zine doesn't help much at all: you have to exert contrary pressure to make those stubborn cellulose fibers "forget" the training they had ingrained in them during their lengthy journey to the reader's mailbox. Reverse curling, and maybe a couple of swipes on the edge of a table will make the little bugger mind its manners well enough.

Methinks Mike Glicksohn has been getting too many letters from Sam Long in recent months. He didn't use to pun so outrageously. Did you Britishers turn Sam into some sort of Secret Weapon during his stay in your country? He seems to be spreading this insidious disease everywhere...

((No! I trust none of us would be sadistic or fiendish enough to invent Sam Long! He just happened that way, and none of us could do anything about it!))

Paul Skelton inadvertently indicates the main problem that one encounters when comparing British and US/Canadian fandoms and fanzines: the discrepancy in numbers is ignored. To be totally analogous, one must take the zines and fans of just one area of North America — say Toronto, or LA — and then the common ties among us are more apparent. Toronto fanzine fandom appeared almost to die when Energumen was put to rest, but there's been a fantastic resurgence of late. Should there come a period when one or another of the new titles coming from that area is late, or purposely killed off, many people will most likely wonder what's been making Toronto fandom ill lately. They don't pause to consider whether the social life of Toronto fans is continuing or not: they base their entire estimation of fanac on the production of zines. Fans follow cycles where at one time more emphasis is placed on publishing and at another time it is the in-person activity that is stressed. I think everyone concerned would be better off if they didn't compare the relatively small pool of British fen to the entirety of the North American continent. Measure your actions instead against those of a comparable area fandom — it would set everyone's mind at ease.

Darroll Pardoe,
24 Othello Close,
Hartford,
Hunts. PE18 7SU.

I don't know sometimes what Fandom did to deserve John Hall, but there we are. Nice chap really, you know. His letter, though, I completely agree with, which is more than I can say for the two which follow it.

Alan Stewart just does not understand fandom, as far as I can see. It's no good examining "U.K. fanzines and conventions" and drawing conclusions from them that there's no contact. The visible parts are just the surface: underneath there's a lot of communicating going on. There aren't enough British fans writing locs to American fanzines, but at least there are enough to be quite visible to anyone scanning the loccolumns of the American fanzines for evidence of their existence. My own (now low circulation I admit, but deliberately so) fanzine goes to about 85 people, of whom 22 are British. Isn't that international enough for Alan Stewart?

Paul Skelton understands. He says the same thing I was trying to get over, a little better perhaps, when he comments about the smallness of the British fanzine pool. U.K. fandom can't stand by itself, it is too small, even with its growth over the last few years. It can only be meaningful as a communications medium linked in with the fans in the rest of the world, which of course means above all the USA. Yes, Paul understands. And you do too, Rob. Maya is rapidly ceasing to be a British fanzine, and becoming what I might term an all-fandom fanzine with a British bias. And Merf Adamson seems to be leaning in the right direction too, judging from his letter, for all that he's been in fandom so short a time. I have to admit I'd never heard of him till I met him at Novacon.

Neohood is a state of mind, to answer Merf. You cease to be a neo when everyone accepts you as an adult member of the fan community. Some people never achieve such a status, and remain perpetual neofans.

Paul Skelton,
25 Bowland Close,
Offerton,
Stockport,
Cheshire SK2 5NW.

Yes, it's International Make Skel Look a Right Tit Year. There I am saying that future Mayas are going to have to go some to be as good as number 8, and there you go and produce Maya 9 which is even better. Rob, you are a sod, but thanks all the same.

I'm not sure whether I am all that impressed with the idea of the letter column as a gestalt entity, something that proceeds naturally and inexorably from point A to point B. Seventeen people do not move like that. 90% of them are likely to end up, given their druthers, at point "gronff". Or points east. Your lettercol hangs together exceptionally well, but that's unlike people.

((Maybe; but I like playing with Maya to make it as readable as possible. And there were all sorts of things which did get said in last issue's lettercolumn.))

A case in point is the fact that I agree with Alan Stewart completely while disagreeing with him completely. The people who read SF are above average intelligence. They also tend, in my opinion, to be immature and insecure. They read nothing else. They do nothing else. (Portrait of the writer as a young man.) For them SF is a retreat from the real world. It is SF that is the retreat — not fandom. Fandom is merely the finding out that other people have the same retreat, the same failings, the same needs. Fandom is in fact a first step in overcoming the problems that Alan mentions. Let's face it, fandom is all things to all people. If you want to run away, then fandom is where you can run to. If you want to face things, then fandom is an ideal place to face them. Fandom does not demand more from you than you are prepared to give. Give it your guts and it will take them. But it will not take them unless they are freely given.

((Hooray. I think we're getting close to the truth in this debate, despite the wild generalisations at the beginning of the last paragraph!))

Harry Warner Jr.,
423 Summit Ave.,
Hagerstown,
Maryland 21740,
U.S.A.

Goblin Towers was remarkably evocative of a time and place, even though I don't remember having met any of the people Ian Williams writes about this time and I definitely haven't been in Gannetfandom's neighbourhood. By a lucky accident, you ran it in an issue which has some letter writers wrestling with the question of fandom and its nature; Ian's column strikes me as the best possible account of what fandom is like. I've experienced fandom mostly through the mails, but the general atmosphere is the same. These pages should be indispensable for whichever four or five year old child of today is destined to be weak enough during the 1990's to agree when someone asks him to write a history of fandom in the 1970's.

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doug barbour,
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i'm going to begin with Ian Williams's Goblin Towers column. possibly because i've been reading his other stuff, i didn't expect such wry sentimentality. i mean the man's a regular bastid; or at least he tries hard to be.

((WOT? Soft sloppy Ian a bastid?? Perhaps you didn't see the mush he put out in Siddhartha.))

(true, i recently received a copy of Scabby Tales and i now know who is number one.)

((That's more like it.))

"Today We Are Five" is a very moving piece, and i says it as shouldn't in some ways because i suspect i'm one of those who has continued to dip my toes for personal reasons — i like to talk about sf, i mean whatever other reason could there be for contributing to fanzines? — but has not yet decided to get in the swim, and may never do so. anway, i liked it and i liked the man writing it, and he made me like the people he liked in it, not a half-bad achievement. that's pretty neat, and part of the piece's charm is the awkwardness of many of its parts. Ian is not an over-subtle writer, but i think he has striven for honesty of perception and articulation and as well has used the note form well. and his last entry works too, takes us back to the earlier notations on a changing scene and hauls us in, asking, quite rightly, that we do some of the empathetic work. i do, i liked it, i'm glad he wrote it; it takes a lovely and appropriate place in this annish.

Jerry Kaufman,
880 W. 181st St.,
New York,
NY 10033, USA.

British fans seem to go much farther out on limbs than American fans do, and when Ian quoted Greg Pickersgill on Ian's putative pissing in the ink, or Maule's weekend in bed with Julia Stone, or Judith Ahl's big tits, I realised that almost any American fan would have thought twice, and then left them out or not said them (Well, one or two might have made the remark about piss, like Mike Glicksohn, who drinks a remarkably pisslike substance known as IPA so as to impede his digestive processes the least, and so is constantly full of piss.) Did I just say that about my good friend Mike? This British foulmouthedness is catching.

((It's Williams foulmouthedness, actually.))

But seriously, most of us American fans are just too aware that we might offend someone, and seldom mention when two people are seeing or sleeping with each other (in print, I mean; we seem to gossip interminably otherwise) and we very seldom use the serious and steady invective that John Brosnan or Greg Pickersgill use. How can I meet Malcolm Edwards with a straight face and an unbiased mind? How can I listen to what he says, when Brosnan has conditioned me to listen for Mal's "lisp"?

Though British and American fandom have had a good deal of commerce recently there are definite differences, as I have pointed out, and as every British fanzine letter column, with its obligatory comments on the British fanzine scene, BSFA, or the British conventions show. (In fact, the fact that British fans have cons put on by fanzine publishers shows just how unified and self-contained British fandom is.) And that is just what I find of interest in British fandom. If British fandom was just another part of American fandom like Minneapolis or Los Angeles fandom (both of which are individual and slightly bizarre) it would be novel, certainly. But novelty wears off.

British fandom, then, is more than novel to American fans. It goes right up to Alien, without quite reaching that. (Japanese fandom is truly Alien, so much so that there is no intercourse.) I can not find precisely the word I want, but intercourse suggests a metaphor. One person can find different parts of his body interesting but he can only enact masturbation. It takes two to have intercourse, and only intercourse can bear fruit. Mentally, one may elaborate the metaphor, allow for whatever other aspects one wishes, since most of our cross-Atlantic intercourse is mental. (I for one wouldn't be surprised if Britain in '79 changed that.)

Alan Hunter,
4 Cranleigh Gdns.,
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Bournemouth,
BH6 5LE.

When Eric Bentcliffe asked me to write an article on comics for Triode, I thought this would be an ideal opportunity of voicing the unease I felt over the comic strip ousting the written word. The form of the article was deliberately chosen to gain maximum reader response. Unfortunately, I seem to have uncovered a hornets' nest and some of my remarks have revealed even more than I realised at the time.

It was my hope that the article might do some good in sf circles, and even bring about some conciliation between comics and sf fandom. SF is a growing interest in comics fandom, and it is creeping into their fanzines, but they feel alienated from the main sf body. If my article is to have any effect, then it must be read at face value and not misinterpreted and distorted by stalwarts of the "ego-zine".

In an earlier letter, I agreed that Maya was better than many fanzines I had seen, being well written and more concerned with sf. If you wish to turn it into a genzine (the first step towards an ego-zine) that is your concern, and good luck to you. But please be sure it is your own choice.

((I reintroduced sf discussion to Maya after Ian Maule had operated a fannish-only policy. I'm not reversing that decision by any means. See the two reviews in this issue.))

And the next time you write an article on tea-planting in Ceylon, for heaven's sake do not imagine you are furthering the cause of sf.

((No. Just human understanding among sf fans, which is a much broader subject. Or something.))

Your major objection to my loc as printed in Maya 9 seems to be to my rejection of Malcolm Edwards's "ghetto characteristics" sentence, and you spend considerable time on attempting to prove that I have been both mistaken and inaccurate in my reply. Unfortunately, you have instead proved that my reply is even more accurate than I realised at the time.

Every fandom is an "in-group". In the case of sf fandom, the in-group consists of people interested in sf. When Malcolm stated that the "ghetto characteristics" had been "shrugged off", I assumed him to mean that the sf restrictions had been lifted, a viewpoint which you have now endorsed. This means that sf is no longer the one and only reason for membership of the fandom to which Malcolm is referring. When I attempt to characterise the in-group that reads the type of fanzine Malcolm is advocating in his column, then I am forced to the conclusion that it must be the in-group of the worst kind — the mutual admiration society. Your reply does nothing to dispel this uneasy feeling.

You call my remark that the number of sf fans is dwindling "snide and inaccurate". In fact, I am only repeating what I am reading constantly in personal correspondence, fanzines and magazines. Perhaps you are too firmly in the in-group to notice, or we may be talking about different fandoms.

It is true that I receive only a small proportion of the fanzines published under the general heading of sf. However, I do read reviews of most that are around. Amongst those that I do receive regularly are Erg, Triode, Sfinx and Maya, and one or

two comics fanzines with sf coverage. I think that represents a high proportion of the true sf fanzines still around.

((What? I receive over a hundred science fiction fanzine titles, around three-quarters from the States and most of the rest are English. Of these, there are very few indeed that never run sf reviews or discussion, and at least half devote a major part of each zine to book reviews or articles about sf.))

Since you appear to want it that way, I promise this will be my last word on the subject whatever the provocation.

((The above letter was a reply to a letter I wrote to Alan before Maya 9 was published. This correspondence is now thankfully closed. Below is Alan's letter on Maya 9.))

Many thanks for the excellent issue 9 of Maya. What can I say about it, other than that it is just about the best issue ever? Replete with all the fan humour, intellectualism and soul-searching characteristic of all the best fanzines, it presents the most thorough dissection of fandom I have ever seen. All aspects and points of view were presented — you just take your choice. To underline the strength and impartiality of this introspection, there was even an issue by issue evaluation of Maya itself. It must have been a mammoth task preparing all this material (it is surprising how much reading can be condensed onto a page) and you have made a very good job of it. I would venture to suggest that this could become the definitive issue of the modern British fanzine.

((Thanks, Alan. There's nothing I can say after that!))

Chris Morgan,
81, Knightsdale Rd.,
Westham,
Weymouth,
Dorset DT4 0HU.

Ian Williams is an able writer, deep-thinking and with a sense of style. I find it difficult to believe that this rambling, maudlin and self-indulgent account of the growth of Gannetfandom and Maya (which must be very old hat to the dozen or so people really interested in it) was written by the Goblin we all know and love to envy for his writing talent. Could it be a fifth-anniversary send-up, I wondered, with all those references to the Gannet-father? But no. here's Williams being sickeningly sincere right to the end. I suppose it's a relief to know that he's capable of writing badly. Less competition, you know.

((Your ideas of the number of people likely to be interested in Ian's column show how little you know of the way fans round the world are interested in finding out about each other. Fannish fans are more inquisitive, and also more sloppily sentimental, than you might suspect. See some of the other reactions to Ian's article.))

Pete Weston's piece suffers from aimlessness, and from saying things which I thought were pretty well known. One thing I am glad about, though, is Pete's reference to the long conversation he and I had about SF at a Brum Group meeting thus proving my long-standing claim not to be a fan (because fans never actually talk about SF, do they?) Instead of just complaining bitterly about wrongly submitted manuscripts, why doesn't Pete do something constructive about it, such as give over a paragraph of his article to the rules for submissions? I'm sure you know how to submit properly, Rob, but can you say the same for all recipients of Maya?

((That comment that fans never talk about SF is one that I find snide, unnecessary, and in the case of Gannetfandom just plain lies. Up here, we certainly haven't forgotten that we like SF. And I think Pete Weston would be very displeased by the inference that because he was talking about SF he wasn't a fan. What are we fans of?

The things Pete says are pretty well known to you, because you've put a lot of thought already into the business of selling SF stories: but all the same there were Maya readers who were surprised by the fact that editors have such problems. I'd have thought that it was obvious to anyone reading between the lines of Pete's article how he would like to receive submissions, but for your benefit, Chris, I'll summarise my own rules for submitting story manuscripts below.

** Typed double-spaced on one side of the paper only with one-inch margins (1") at left) and numbered pages.
** Separate front sheet with story title, author's name and address, and wordage (nearest 250 words).
** Bound in a manner appropriate to the number of sheets (paper-clip for short wordages).
** Short accompanying letter stating rights offered.
** Stamped self-addressed return envelope. (No spiders on the front.)... There. That suit you, Chris?))

Paul Walker,
128 Montgomery St.,
Bloomfield,
N.J.07003, U.S.A.

Pete Weston's experiences are not unique. Even Campbell complained of them. He said he probably read more bad sf than anyone else in the field. He also complained that what he had left to print was not always what he would have liked to print, simply the best of a bad lot. But it proves what I've believed of slush piles, that they may work to the advantage of a novice. The average submission is so poor that any respectable one will be made more conspicuous by comparison And the best way of achieving respectability, of making an immediate impact on the editor's eye is by making the manuscript look as neat as possible.

But the final quality of the anthology depends on the amount of time the editor has, or is willing to take, to work on the few respectable submissions. The editor who is a mere receptacle for submissions, who takes what he can get and leaves it at that, will never produce anything of real worth. At best he will get lucky and get a good story or two. But the editor who develops a relationship with his writers — who demonstrates to them that he has standards, expectations of them, however eccentric — the editor who has an editorial "personality" — will attract writers and stimulate their enthusiasm. An anthology, magazine, etc. is like a zine. If the editor creates a literary environment which suggests unusual activity, he will make writers want to "get in" on what is going on there. Writers will come to look on his anthology as not simply a dumping ground for material, but as a gathering place in which their stories participate in a productive enterprise for the betterment of sf.

((Pete Weston knows this. He talked to our local SF group recently about Andromeda and he has apparently improved some promising stories out of all recognition by applying just the above philosophy.))

Merf Adamson.
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Hedon,
Hull HU12 8BH.

Your review of Imperial Earth. At last I have read it for myself (luckily long after I had read and forgotten this review), and can at least speak from experience. OK, I agree it isn't one of his best; it's really a very average sf story. The best bits, which are Clarke's trade mark, are the engineering details, and the descriptions of the colony and the technology which supports the civilisation of burbleburble years in the future. I think a lot of people have decided for themselves, some time ago, that Clarke can't write about people too well. So, for those of us who have, it's easier to discount his characters and concentrate on the bits he does do well. So, when I read it, I enjoyed it for the "prophecy" part, and though I did notice the lack of characterisation, it didn't really spoil my reading. Maybe this wasn't very critical of me; I'm one of those who reads for fun, and I prefer not to dissect (though I can if I'm pushed). Anyway, the way I read it meant, among other things, that I didn't notice the "fumbling" which you accuse him of when dealing with homosexuality. I simply read through it, and it seemed to me to be a part of the background. As I recall, there weren't any explicit scenes; the two or three mentions seemed to be of the "they fall onto bed, camera pans to window, loses focus, music up" type — eminently suitable for closing a scene and changing to another. Clarke probably realises that he couldn't describe it convincingly, so he avoids it. And anyway, a full description of the homosexual act wouldn't have advanced the story any, or filled in background — it would merely have held up the story while the pair wrestled; unless, of course, some crucial revelation occurred in the heat of the moment, which doesn't seem likely.

((I didn't expect or want graphic details. The fumbling was in the bits that were described, not the bits that Clarke — correctly — left unfocussed. I certainly agree with you about Clarke's strengths; it's been bugging me ever since I published Maya 9 that in my editorial I showed a strong tendency to examine one side of a question and leave the other untouched, and I should have mentioned the good things in Imperial Earth as well as the bad.))

Arthur C. Clarke,
25, Barnes Place,
Colombo 7,
Sri Lanka.

I'm happy to report that Imperial Earth hit the U.S. bestseller list in the first week, and 15 of the first 20 thousand were sold in advance. The reviews are also coming in and are already separating the men from the boys. Many reviewers have already realised that it's my best book, and have said so — others don't seem even to have read it. (One normally first-class reviewer referred to 'limited stylistic resources and a general paucity of invention'. Even the critical reviews have usually contradicted this.)

Some quotes, not exactly at random:

"sets the genre back by perhaps two decades... almost quaint in summoning remembrance of those old stories in Astounding..."

"better dust off the Hugo, Nebula and Jupiter Awards because it looks like another clean sweep."

"a very cool pansexuality... a nice contrast to some of the more strident, newly sexually liberated sf authors..."

and so it goes...

One criticism, made by a scientist friend in UK, does worry me. He suggests that my biology is wrong, and that the genetic accident that made it impossible for Makenzie I to have normal children would not be passed on to his clone, M II, who could reproduce normally. I deliberately fuzzed this, referring vaguely to 'the fault lying in his genes' — though I did not mean this to be taken literally. I assumed it would be in the gene-producing mechanism. Anyway, I'd appreciate any attempt to make an honest biologist of me!

David Hardy,
99 Southam Rd.,
Hall Green,
Birmingham B28 0AB.

A good issue, on the whole (I suppose one can excuse the sentimentality of Ian Williams over "his" group), though not as much variety as Maya 8. While agreeing in the main with your comments on Imperial Earth — sorry, Arthur, but I can't praise it unreservedly, even though you did send me a signed copy (name-dropper!) — I can't see how you can state that "the entire action takes place within Saturn's orbit (Titan's, to be precise)..." To be precise, only about a quarter of the action takes place around Titan — the rest is on Earth.

((I can say that because Earth's orbit is within Titan's.))

Pete Weston's Slices are welcome reading, and an interesting and often amusing insight into the life of a "new" editor. But, readers — BE WARNED! Don't believe all you read, for Peter does have a tendency to exaggerate for comic effect. For instance, take the Doc Weir Award episode described on page 9 of Maya 9: if there was a chorus of "The what?" it was purely for the benefit of the winner, who was, as mentioned, present. I was a member of the team in question — the spokesman, even — and remember answering the question thus: "Er — wasn't it someone called — Weston —?"

Pete Weston,
72 Beeches Drive,
Erdington,
Birmingham,
B24 0DT.

I've just read through Maya 9 for the second time in three days; yes, it was that good. It reminds me in flavour of Ted White's Void, back in the early 1960's, complete with "instant, built-in nostalgia", as they used to say. The same impression of frantic involvement but in a mature rather than "Gosh-wow" sense: crammed pages of reduced type: a slightly incestuous air in which contributors refer and cross-refer to each other. In fact a genuine Focal Point, for real, but for me with the extra bonus that I read Void some 5 or 6 years after the fact, as an outsider, while this is our fandom, here and now.

There is a belief among faneds that it takes years to build up to Top Fanzine status. You've proved that it isn't necessarily true and in three issues have reached a level most others never attain.

((*blush*))

THE MARATHON WAHF: We also heard from: Paul Anderson, Jim Barker (2), Greg Benford, Sheryl Birkhead, Pam Boal, Syd Bounds, Richard Brandt, John Brunner, Ian R. Butterworth, Grant Canfield, Bob Carter, John G. Collick, Don D'Ammassa, Jim Darroch, Julie Davis, Robert Day, Malcolm Edwards, Graham England (who addressed me as "Dear Peter" and didn't send his new address), Moshe Feder, Phil Foglio, Jan Howard Finder (2), Chris Fowler, Gil Gaier (2), Mike Gilbert, Brian Griffin, David Griffin, John Hall, Robert Hansen, Ray Harrison (2), Chris Harvey, Jeff Hecht, Ben Indick, Terry Jeeves, Tom Jones, Paul Kincaid, Pete Knifton, Dave Langford (2), George S. Laskowski Jr., David Lewis, Jim Linwood, Sam Long (2), Eric Mayer, Shayne McCormack, Patrick McGuire, Barry Kent Mackay, Jim Meadows III (2), Steve Miller, Joseph M. Nicholas (2), Joe Pearson, Dave Piper, Graham Poole, Sonya Porter, Chris Priest, Mary Reed (2), Martin Ricketts, Bill Rotsler, Paul A. Ryan, Mark Sharpe (2), Steve Sneyd, Phil Stephensen-Payne (2), Brian Tawn, Suzie Tompkins, Bruce Townley, Harry Turner (2), Dave Upton, Roger Waddington, Ian Watson, Janice Wiles, and Dave Wixon.

HELP!! That's ninety-eight letters of comment or appreciation of one kind or another since Maya 9 was published. How can I possibly get you all in? Would you all like ten words each? I am really embarrassed to be unable to print at least something from the excellent letters in the above list, some of them running to as much as seven pages of very worthwhile comment, much of it very deserving of seeing the light of day somewhere. If anybody is a bit short of something to publish in their fanzine, write to me and ask to see one or two of these locs, and I'll write to the author of the loc for you and ask if it's OK to publish it in your fanzine as an article. I'm serious about this; there are at least ten locs above that would make worthwhile fanzine articles.

See you in July or thereabouts, everybody.