

PAMPHREY

No. 6, January 1958. E.M.P. Mailing
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A PUBLIC APOLOGY TO MRS G.M. Carr In the last issue of this magazine I said that Mrs Carr had suggested that non-Papans shouldn't be allowed to have contributions in E.M.P. I have since checked the reference in Gemzine and find that my memory must have been

at fault. Mrs Carr made no such suggestion, and I apologise for my mistake. I shall be more careful in future.

Dean Grennell My thanks to you and McCain & Eney for the information about the situation in Japan at the time of the atom bombing, much of which was new to me. //Shelby Vick can still be reached at his old address which however is Box 493, not alas the number you "had by heart and after all these years", but you might have difficulty getting a reply. After I hadn't heard from him for a long time I sent him a postcard reading "was it something I said" and nearly a year later I got a letter back saying he'd been too busy even to send a reply reading, simply, "No". He's been trying to crash the px market with detective stories and running a duplicating business and courting a girl. Is in good health and happy, and may come back into fandom one of these days. I sent him a copy of The Harp Stateside (match!) and got one of those "Thank You" cards---no signature, just a little puffin in the corner, blushing. I treasure it more than some four page letters of comment.

I have seen a man plunge his hand into molten lead: apparently it's safe enough if the natural oil of the skin has not recently been washed off. I remember once when Carol was a baby and Madeleine was worried about her not gaining weight fast enough, I made lead weights so we could weigh her on the kitchen scales. I melted down some old gas-piping I'd taken out when wiring the house for electricity, melted it down in a cocoa tin and poured it into old radio screening cans. Then I drilled holes in it to bring it down to the correct weight. Once I drilled too deep and had to pour some more lead into the hole. Unfortunately I had forgotten to empty out the water which had entered the hole when I put the weight in the sink to cool it; there was an explosion and boiling lead sprayed all over me. It didn't hurt, even the stuff that hit me in the eyes.

"4711" is an Eau de Cologne. Don't you read the Ladies Home Journal? You won't get this information there, but "sod" was originally short for "sodomite". It's since been euphemised to a less indelicate term of abuse, like faggot. //YHOS is Your Humble & Obedient Servant. // Loved that about the "trove of credulity".

RAY SCHAFER Your suggestion about giving away people as prizes has already been adopted by the Daily Sketch here, probably the lowest of all the British papers. As a competition prize recently they offered the services of an ex-soldier who was willing to do anything legal for the winner. //I note that "materialism has been scientifically disproven". I missed this--when did it happen? I'm assuming you mean philosophical materialism of course, the doctrine that matter rather than ideas is the prime reality. Last I heard, this wing of philosophy was in quite a thriving condition. It was certainly not disturbed by Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle, Planck's Quantum Theory or any discoveries in atomic physics. No information about the constitution or behaviour of matter could possibly cast any doubt on its reality; quite the reverse.

Egobouquets Appreciation registered for: Warner's Son of South Gate & Where Old Fans Go...and how interesting he makes his life and job sound...The account by Jean Young of her brush with the salesman...Andy's sputnik coverage...All of SF BOY; how lucky we are to have Blach & Tucker...Phyllis's fellow-travellers...Janke's wit and caustic comments...Boyd Raeburn's explanation about jazz to Our Unfair Lady.

RIGHT FOR GAO
RIGHT FOR AMERICA!

well, it looks as if I got fed again, doesn't it? This poor foolish foreigner thinking that The Reporter was a fine liberal magazine representing qualities like generosity, honesty, freedom, brotherly love and democracy which we admire in America, and generally having far more in common with the signatories of the Declaration of Independence than with George III or his soulmate in Seattle---and all the time it was unAmerican! I don't know whether all you people have realised the full horror of that damning revelation in Gemzine, but boiling them down the facts now disclosed amount to this: no more, no less.

The Reporter was founded by one Max Ascoli, who is A REFUGEE FROM ITALY!

His wife's maiden name was Rosenwald. (A JEWISH NAME)

A mere 20 years ago she divorced a man called Alfred Stern. (ANOTHER JEWISH NAME)

Barely 8 years after she divorced him this fellow Stern led a march on Albany during some housing emergency and occupied the legislative chambers. (I beg your pardon---correction, he didn't actually lead a march, he led a 'march', and the occupation had quotes round it too so maybe he didn't really march or occupy the chambers, he just pretended to do so in some sneaky Commy sort of way.)

Mr & Mrs Ascoli are LOADED WITH DOUGH and contribute to political FRONTS which are OPERATED by one Arthur Goldsmith (ANOTHER JEWISH NAME!) who actually has the nerve to live in the Waldorf (ANOTHER JEWISH NAME!). Admittedly he doesn't seem to have a room at the Waldorf, just a LAIR, but I'm not quite sure what the difference is, having led a sheltered life. The next time I check into a hotel I must try asking for a double lair, with bath. Maybe it's cheaper.

I know this sort of high class logic is pretty difficult for some of you to follow, but if you were a disciple of our great leader the late Senator McCarthy, you would see at once that the above indictment which Mrs Carr has quoted for our edification from the Seattle Post Intelligence is CONCLUSIVE PROOF that The Reporter and everyone connected with it directly or indirectly by marriage or former marriage is not only a COMMIE but probably a JEW and a REFUGEE FROM ITALY and lives in a LAIR paid for by MOSCOW GOLD, and is probably a dero as well. Well sir, I think we must all be humbly grateful to Mrs Carr for this fine example of anti-UnAmerican thought, especially us ignorant foreigners who are sometimes stupid enough to judge magazines by what they say instead of finding out first who the editor's wife might have divorced 26 years ago and what he's been doing since. What a fine representative Mrs Carr is to us of all that is best in America! How nobly she illustrates the finer aspects of American thought! So grateful are we benighted foreigners for Mrs Carr's kindly instruction that I'd like to suggest we take back that horrid female in New York harbour, who is associated with RADICALS and REFUGEES, and substitute a gigantic statue of our beloved teacher Mrs G.M. Carr.

And now I have a confession to make. So inspired was I by the example of the keen minds of the Seattle Post Intelligence that I dashed down to the Western Union Office and sent the following cable to Mr Hoover:

Suggest you investigate woman currently calling herself Gertrude Carr and OPERATING from a LAIR at 5329 Ballard, Seattle. Relatives were REFUGEES from a country bordering on RUSOIA. She is LOADED WITH DOUGH and contributes to amateur journalist FRONT founded by COMMIES and known by code name EAPL. Corresponds with known RADICALS, JEWS, REFUGEES, EGGERMANS, NIGGER-LOVERS and FOREIGNERS. Distributes secretly printed propaganda sheets containing code messages, communications from FOREIGN RADICALS, indecent material and propaganda for ideology of foreign quasi-religious/OPERATING from a LAIR in Rome, Italy, claiming to be founded by JEWISH RADICAL in Middle East. Seen recently in Ohio gambling and driving in foreign cars. Observed by infomer in disguise in Chicago in 1952. Suggest immediate arrest and interrogation of all relatives and suspension of husband from employment. Be firm Mr Hoover; beat up as you sweep as you clean.

I was a little worried at first in case my enthusiasm might involve some embarrassment for Mrs Carr, but then I remembered she assured us that the innocent had nothing to fear from this type of thing. God bless Mrs Carr! God save America!

I CHOSE FANDOM

or

"I WAS A FUGGHEAD FOR THE NZF"

THE WILLIS MEMOIRS

PART III 1949-1950

As I would be very surprised if any of you remember, we left our heroes working like eager and inky beavers on the third issue of Slant. They were toiling in the shadow of a December 19th deadline, which had been given to them in the summer by Ted Tubb as the date of a bumper SFS mailing for Christmas. It was a deadline which as time went on seemed to exercise a hypnotic fascination on the whole of British fandom: like a hen hypnotised by a chalked line on the ground, they seemed unable to think of anything else. By the end of November there hadn't been an SEN for five months. Ken Bulmer wrote:

The idea was to have an ish out by now and a bumper Christmas number in the mails for the blokes to digest with their Christmas pud. I hope that still works out, but everything seems to have turned against us....

Vince has big plans to get out an SEN every month commencing with the New Year...

Vince himself explained:

The duplicator which Ken Slater loaned the SFS has turned out rather a disappointment (instead of reams of SENews). We've had a lot of bother with it, scrapping finished stencils right and left, and in desperation Ken has gorn and done it. Bought a Gestetner with automatic feed, automatic counter, and all one needs do (we hope) is turn a little handle like mad. If it works, the job of turning out a monthly News, which I was contemplating doing on Slater's cursed contraption, will be no bother at all.

...This is The Epicentre (point around which things occur) signing off.

To my knowledge this was the first recorded use of The Epicentre as a name for 84 Drayton Park, one of the most famous fan addresses. It was neither the first nor the last mention of its Holy Grail, a monthly SEN.

On 9th December I replied to Vince, in a letter which turned out to be prophetic in more ways than one...

I really am more pleased about the new duplicator than you would think--it's quite important for isolated fans like us to feel that there really is a live central organisation in being, and I've always been worried that it might fold and leave us high and dry. However there seems no danger of that with you people in charge...

...Why not a World Convention in London during the Festival of Britain? I've been thinking of starting a campaign for it, like Snarey's South Gate In 58 (but it's hard to think of a rhyme for London or 51). There has been some desultory talk among American fans about a World Convention in London, and there'll never be another opportunity like the Festival....

Meanwhile we'd been toiling away three nights a week on Slant, cheered up towards the end by a laudatory review of Slant 2 in Amazing which Fred Ballard kindly typed out and airmailed over. The Heinlein novel 'Culf' had just appeared in Astounding and some things in it so annoyed me that my editorial boiled over; so I chopped the lot off and sent it along to Ted Tubb, who had just asked me for material for the Great Christmas SFN. This was the first time I'd ever submitted anything to another fanzine, for reasons which I'd earlier told Ken Bulmer when he asked me to do something for Nirvana...

...I'm a bit diffident about my own stuff; as long as it's only in Slant it's OK but I should hate to think it was cluttering up some other fanzine because the editor was too kindhearted.

I did make an offer later to write a regular column for SFN, but Vince ignored it.

The item in Slant 3 we were most proud of---justifiably, as it turned out---was Jackson's 'Swordsmen of Varnis', but in our innocence we thought it was mostly pretty good. Apart from the stories by Ackeman and Evans, which I've already mentioned...we didn't think a lot of them but we were impressed by the Big Names and their generosity in sending them...there was the retitled story by Ken Bulmer, illustrated by James's first attempt at delineating--or delinotating---a human figure. (Though what he regarded as a grievous error on the part of the editorial department, the story contained no spaceships.) Since we now had enough material from outside I had thankfully given up trying to write fiction, but I'd used one of my plot ideas for a competition, giving the readers a situation and asking them to figure how it could have come about. (We got one entry.) It seemed to me at the time that it was far too corny and old-fashioned an idea to make a real story out of it, but five years later Fritz Leiber wrote the identical plot up in Galaxy and made a polished sophisticated job of it; which just shows that a good enough craftsman can make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. I also had an editorial and a short column and some readers' letters (the real ones didn't seem lively enough)---and I had actually dreamed up a cartoon. I mean that literally---it came to me in a dream. It may not have been a very good cartoon but it was the first one we'd ever had. Besides I thought it was sort of interesting; you know the way you often write whole wonderful novels or direct film masterpieces in your mind while you're asleep, or solve the riddle of the Universe or something, but you never get any of it written down before you forget it. Well, this time I did get up and write it down. It wasn't the work of sheer genius I thought in my sleep, but it was all right for a filler and easy to cut in line...a picture of a coffin with the caption, "The Case For Shaverism." The whole issue ran to 26 pages this time...most of them closely printed, since I'd now bought another half font of type...and represented several months of our spare time.

The 26th page, the outside backcover, we had left until the very last because it was all news items and lists of the Astoundings we wanted or had for exchange. By Sunday 11th December, well on schedule, we had it provisionally set up and were running off a few advance copies for cash subscribers and other exceptional people---when disaster struck.

The press we were using, the one I had smuggled out of the chemist's attic, was basically just a metal box. The type stood in the box itself and the paper was tucked inside the lid. To print you simply closed the box and applied pressure with a crude lever consisting of a handle with a sort of cam at the end. There had also been an arrangement whereby a roller was pulled back and forth from an inking plate on to the type, but we never used it because it didn't seem to ink properly. Instead we took it off and I inked the type while James worked the press: this division of labour was because James was bigger and I was nimbler. As I was rolling the roller on the type he was putting in the paper: as I was rolling the roller on the inking plate (we used a piece of glass on newspaper) he was bearing down on the

lever: and as he was picking up another piece of paper I was plucking out the finished sheet. The degree of synchronisation required was nerve-wrecking but we used to work up to some remarkable--and dangerous--speeds. The reason the press's own inking system didn't work was one we didn't find out for a long time...that a printing press is not supposed to print a type area of much more than half the size of the area of the bed. Ours, on the other hand, was so full of type that we didn't even have room in the bed for the wedges (technically, quoins) that are used to tighten up the type so it all stands straight. Instead we used to hammer in little strips of metal until we couldn't force in any more. The power we had to use to print all this stuff--all bold type, too--was so colossal that the solid steel of the bed and platen had assumed a visibly curved shape.

However as I was saying we were running off a few advance copies of the last page. It was another closely printed one, and James was bearing down with all his weight and strength, his 6'3" off the ground, when there was a sharp explosion, James collapsed on the floor and pieces of steel flew across the room like shrapnel. Madeline came dashing up stairs to see what had happened. The lever had disintegrated. Haplessly we tried putting the press on the floor and standing on it, then jumping up and down on it, but all we got was a vague smudge. The pressure that lever exerted must have been almost inconceivable. No, we were finished; and the Great Deadline only a week away. That evening I wrote to Alana for a replacement lever and, knowing it wouldn't arrive in time if at all, to Ken Dalmer, special delivery, asking him to run off a substitute last page on his new Gestetner. We were downhearted. All that work, spoiled at the last moment...

My cry for help was just another complication in the already hectic situation at The Epicentre. I was by this time practically a part of the SFS directorate, the regional bureaucracy set up by Ken Slater having disintegrated, and in fact Slant was being subsidised by a couple of donations of £1 from the SFS funds by way of a bulk subscription...and I'd volunteered to send out the whole Christmas mailing from Belfast. God knows why; partly out of innocent helpfulness I suppose and probably partly so I could make sure that the good copies of Slant went to the right people. Anyhow, it was a mistake. Vince and Ken were running around in circles wrapping up parcels for Belfast and consigning them to the bottomless pit of the Christmas mails wreathed in "Express" labels and following them with desperate notes of corrections, explanations of surpluses and deficiencies, detailed instructions, special instructions and amended special instructions all of which arrived before any of the parcels. In the middle of it all their stapler broke and they had to mail half the SFNs as loose sheets. Meanwhile I was scratching my head over the instructions, clearing the decks for action and worrying the already harassed officials at the GPO about the missing parcels. When they had all come it was quite impressive, like a football pool office on a Saturday morning. There were copies of the Gestetnered backcover of Slant, address labels, lists, alambics, SFNs stapled and loose, Nirvanas, SFS Christmas Cards and BTL Newsletters. And of course Slants. The last consignment from the Epicentre arrived at 10.45am on the morning of Wednesday the 21st. I had taken a day's leave and had most of the mailing in the 2.45 collection the same afternoon. That included stapling SFNs, assembling the mailing, wrapping up and gumming down 100 copies, sticking on sticky labels and then taking them off again and sticking them again with gum because they weren't sticky enough, amending addresses, putting on stamps and posting the lot in several different mail boxes.

I was quietly proud of this achievement, so different I thought smugly to myself from the slipshod ineffectiveness of The Epicentre's organisation, and it was unfortunate that the first reaction from Vince was an indignant outcry:

What the blank blank was the idea of not sending Slant out? You've got all the trouble of doing labels and stamping another hundred

packets, as well as invalidating any good sending the stuff to you might have done in the first place! As it happens I'm darned glad I didn't put much about Slant in SFN....

(In fact he had put nothing.) This was an unfortunate misunderstanding, but the injustice rankled with me deeply for a long time. What had happened was that Vince had given me the wrong address for one Trevor Wilson, and his mailing had been returned to Vince, whose address was on it. It so happened that Trevor was one of that selfless dedicated group of suckers who had voluntarily subscribed to Slant, even though they would have got free copies as SFS members, and I had sent him one of the advance copies run off before the press broke. (Come to think of it, this must have been the reason I offered to send off the SFS mailing, so I could do things like this.) Vince didn't know Wilson's special status of course, and assumed I hadn't sent Slant to any of the SFS members.

Meanwhile Adama had replied to my appeal: the model hadn't been in production since 1932 and they offered no help... typically. I took the remains of the old lever along to neighbourhood blacksmith and the mighty man made a replacement out of iron. It kept bending under the strain and was never as efficient as the old one, but we were able to make a reasonable job of finishing up the Slants left over after the SFS mailing.

Reaction to the 100 or so already sent out to British fandom had been very disappointing. Up to 2nd January 1950 we had had only 3 letters. As I wrote to Ken Bulmer: "Perhaps when a fanzine gets established no one bothers to write to the editor any more. If so, can't see Slant lasting much longer." At this I was better off than Ken Bulmer, who never received one single solitary letter of comment on the first issue of Nirvana. (Except, that is, from me, and one from Bob Shaw many years later, who wrote gravely that he had seen a copy soon after he came into fandom but that it had taken him all this time to understand the prose poem.) In the circumstances it was surprising that the reference to Nirvana in Slant 3 ("A fan-mag with a future") should have proved so prophetic.

Ken however wasn't discouraged, and sent me one of those wonderful long revitalising letters of his (four pages, one paragraph), so heartening that I immediately sent him a nine page interim (!) reply. It ended casually: "Have discovered through letter in Fantasy Review unknown fan in Northern Ireland. Not on his track. Will probably start my own organisation!" The unknown fan was George Charters. He came up in response to my invitation, but for a long time his visits were very infrequent and he would just sit quietly in the corner while James and I worked on Slant. We didn't like to ask him to help and he was too diffident to volunteer.

Other encouraging things that happened about this time included a letter from Ackerman reporting he had sold 'Swordsmen of Varnis' to a prozine, one from Cammell suggesting that Slant authors might like to submit to New Worlds, and a story from Ted Tubb. (I asked him for more like it but he said "the other efforts of mine to become an author are of a totally different type---adventurous, space stuff. To be truthful, they are all corny.") As Ken said "It really begins to look as though Slant is becoming a forcing medium for fan authors into pro although, rather naturally, I'm not thinking that way myself."

A more discouraging development was a letter from a reader pointing out that the Evans story in Slant 3 had already been printed in Peon. I wrote and apologised to Lee Riddle, who was very nice about it and said he'd guessed I hadn't known. He also thought the Ackerman story had already appeared in Shangri-La. I realised Ackerman had figured Slant's circulation would be almost all in England so it wouldn't matter about the stories already having appeared in America, but I was annoyed all the same and acquired a dislike for Ackerman which I didn't lose until I met him in 1951.

I had now been fanning for two years with a ball point pen and I was getting tired of it. I wasn't the only one. Ken said: "I am thinking of inaugurating a fund entitled "Great Project for Humanity and the National Health Eye Scheme. Fighting Fund. - typewriter for the Willis. Buy shares etc." One day I saw in the office an old typewriter belonging to the head of the Registry, an eccentric old boy who liked to tinker with junk. It was in fact the same man on the same typer who had typed out for me the material for the original unpublished Slant of 1947. The typer was a three-bank Oliver, the same model as the dreaded Shaw-Berry typer frequently maligned but still used by John Berry, but in fact quite a decent machine in the hands of anyone who isn't a mechanical moron. It's only real fault is slowness---the letters are mounted on concentric half hoops which loom above the paper like a couple of amphitheatres, and it takes a while for them to make the descent and resume their places---but it's plenty quick enough for two fingers. However it definitely looked quaint and primitive, and it was the only typewriter I'd ever seen that looked as if I could afford to buy it. I borrowed it with the intention of holding on to it if I could (I later bought it for £3) and one dark February night James and I carried it home from the man's garage slung between us on a broomstick. The first thing I did on it was a letter to Ken Bulmer. I don't have a copy of this: I have the original...

Let not this startling development weaken the effort of the Fighting Fund. This extraordinary contraption is one James and I dragged through a driving rainstorm last night and we shall probably have to return it before I learn to use it, though I hope to put another finger to work when I find where all the letters are. You are getting the carbon because the top copy is rapidly being completely covered with the paraffin that was poured over the works. However this is one letter from me that you will be able to read.

After two double-spaced pages of comment quotes on Ken's story in the last Slant and general gossip, it ended...

Well, this is about killing me, so I'll close now. The things I do for fandom! Cute the way they do exclamation oh dear exclamation marks on these machines. It's all very interesting, but maybe it would have been quicker to set the letter up and print it. That would have shaken you!

Reaction to this was highly satisfactory--a $4\frac{1}{2}$ page letter including a three-act play about fans dying from shock at getting legible letters from me. I debated for some time about publishing this, but decided against it because of its limited interest. I've just held exactly the same debate with exactly the same result, but instead of throwing this letter in the wastebasket with the rest I'll pass it on to Ken so he can incorporate it in his memoirs.

As you'll probably have noticed, I was gravitating towards Ken rather than the other inmate of the Epicentre, Vince Clarke. Partly because I was a little irritated with Vince over all the past delays and confusion about SFN, partly because of the way he had assumed my stupidity over the affair of the Christmas mailing and partly because he seemed to be studiously ignoring Slant. This sounds very vain, I know. The only excuse I can put up for my former self is that Slant represented an enormous investment of our time and energy, and recognition was the only return we had to expect: subconsciously we suspected we were being mugs and we wanted reassurance, I suppose. Besides, or probably because of these prejudices, I got the impression from Vince's letters of the time that he was a snooty type. Ken's letters were enthusiastic, friendly and sincere, while Vince's were much less frequent and seemed offhand and patronising. I visualised him as a conceited sneering pseudo-intellectual, who, probably visualised me as an eager-beaver provincial nuisance

and upstart.

Five months went by amid mutterings of discontent among the provincial fans with no sign of the projected monthly SFN. When it did come, towards the end of June, I looked eagerly for my promised bouquet. But instead of editorial comment on Slant there was a fulsome advertisement, which didn't seem to me to be the same thing at all. I was bitterly disappointed, but wrote fairly calmly to Ken...

Three hours ago I returned bronzed and fit from four days hostelling in the Antrim glens. Ready for anything, I thought I was, even a Shaver story in ASF. But not for SFN5! THAT AD! Don't you realise, PEOPLE WILL THINK I WROTE IT. Woe woe woe. I'll never live it down. And what will Slater think. Seriously, it was very nice of you, but would you mind mentioning to the other bods that it wasn't my idea to make those extravagant claims for Slant. Dignified restraint, that's my racket. It was a kind thought to say a few kind words about S but if it had looked like editorial comment rather than a paid advertisement I should have been even more grateful. However thanks all the same, and no hard feelings.

And later, in the course of a page of comments on SFN...

Quotes, Notes & Reviews. Let us be honest. I am no less subject to the sins of the spirit than those of the flesh so I am a bit disappointed that there is no mention of us here. I had expected you might mention our coming reprints in prozines or Cedric's successes. I should have thought they would have been newsworthy enough. British fan authors crash prozines. However I can see you are short of space and I suppose in a way since everyone in the SFS gets S anyway there is no point in mentioning it, as if it were a proper subscription fanzine.

Note the implied accusation of ingratitude. I must have felt slightly ashamed.

The above sounds terrible now I look at it in cold blood. Pay no attention. Me, behaving like a prima donna.

After about a month's silence from the Epicentre, I got a reply to this letter from Vince:

Am standing in for Ken for the time being as he is trying to throw off the effects of reading 'Seven Days In New Crete' with a stiff dose of 'World Below' (the benighted ignoramus aint read it!). In any case I have a bone or three to pick with thee.

Firstly (logical minded we sf fans--always putting first things first), I must plead guilty to dashing off the copy for that ad. of yours. Seeing that you were printing Ken's stories, I was unaware that 'dignified restraint' was your racket. As the SFS members already receive Slant, the only people it would or could impress would be the humble neophyte, and the h.n. takes everything thats printed or mimeoed in a fanzine as gospel truth. Natch. He hasn't had a chance to learn better. And you wanted the dum thing advertised didn't you? Even the 'Times' would be pretty expansive if it went in for advertising.

How about this for the next ish? Right on our back cover.

SLANT

can't

shock your maiden aunt

Each story

is terrific

Also scientific

Each article

is a particle

of wit from a higher sphere
Yet SLANT supernal
can be your journal
For a mere two bob a year.

He apologised for missing out the news about prozine reprints and then, after a page of news and gossip...

Let us chant
In praise of 'Slant'.
Closely printed in solid black
Picture on the front cover
Adverts on the back.

This letter got me mad. That bit about "closely printed in solid black" struck home specially deep, because I knew I'd bought the wrong kind of type, but apart from that I thought the letter was sarcastic and superior and clever-clever. So I flew off the handle and told Vince just what I thought of him. I haven't got a copy of this letter because I dashed it off at work with a pen, and I haven't got Vince's reply either, I think because I was so ashamed of myself afterwards that I destroyed it and tried to forget the whole incident. But of course I didn't. I remember it vividly. I always remember, Ghod help me, occasions when I make a fool of myself. Vince had got my letter the following evening, Thursday, on his return from work and had stayed home from the White Horse answering it. It was a sincere and friendly answer, without the slightest trace of superiority or sarcasm, and it hit me like a bomb. It impressed me deeply that Vince should stay away from the White Horse... making what seemed to me the supreme fannish sacrifice... just to straighten out a confused neofan like me: even more, that he should think my friendship worth keeping, or making, when he could so easily have torn me apart or just ignored me. Anyway, I was grateful, and have been grateful ever since. It may not seem a very important incident to describe in such detail, but it was important to me. It was the first real lesson I learned from fandom and I've never forgotten it. I've learned a lot from fandom since but I think that was the most important and perhaps if it had been someone other than Vince Clarke I'd never have learned it until it was too late.

Vince said I seemed to have a chip on my shoulder. My first reaction was shocked incredulity, but then I looked at my mental shoulder---and there it was. A chip, if there ever was one. All of a sudden I realised what had been happening to me. All my life I have thought of myself as a mild and inoffensive person---too mild and inoffensive. When I came into fandom and started as it were a new life in this new world, I automatically tried to correct this defect in my mundane character. I was over-compensating, overlooking the fact that these new people didn't know I was actually a mild and inoffensive person. To them I just looked to have a chip on my shoulder. It was a startling thought. As I've said half seriously before, fandom is a wonderful school of character training and, as you'll probably see from other evidence in these memoirs, the understanding and frankness of other fans has changed me a lot through the years, and is still changing me. I still do stupid things in fandom, but thank ghod the intervals between them seem to be getting appreciably greater.

That momentous letter of Vince's was in the latter half of July, and we've jumped ahead six months. But we're now in 1950, which was the start of my really becoming active in fandom and so many things were happening---a visit to England and the Epicentre, contacting Eric Frank Russell, Manly Benister and Lee Hoffman, the entry of Bob Shaw, etc---that it would be impossible to follow strict chronological order.

So back to March 1950, when I got another momentous letter... though I must admit it didn't look much at the time. It was in pale blue ink in an almost supine backhand

handwriting from someone in Dagenham....

Dear Mr Ellis, (sic)

Many thanks for the Spring 1950 issue of Slant. I hope that the enclosed magazine is suitable for a 'subscription'. If the prozine offer is only open to US fen and/or you have a good supply of English reprints, you can have the 2/- postal order instead.

...Can you give me any information about the British Science Fantasy Society? I've heard of it before, but don't know anything definite.

It's rumoured that 'Fantasy Review' is folding and that Gillings will start a prozine. If this happens to be true, your mag. should jump into F.R.'s place as the leading British fanzine.

Cordially,

Chuck Harris

PS. How did you get my address? It must have come from the States because I only know one other Anglofan. I suspect Ron Friedman.

I was a bit annoyed about that BRE Weird Tales...I could flog a US edition of a promag for 2/- any time, but any BRE was worth just nothing...but I was polite. I was learning....

Thanks for your letter, and the magazine. The latter is quite OK. After all I did say any prozine, and I didn't happen to have bought that one yet.

It was indeed Ron Friedman that I got your address from, or at least from his fanzine. Funny you shouldn't have been in touch with the SFS. You can get the gen from Ken Bulmer, 84 Drayton Park, Highbury, London N.5. Sub is 5/- a year and it entitles you to Norman Ashfield's ALLEMBIC as well as SLANT.* Also the club organ, THE SCIENCE FANTASY NEWS, which was announced in the last issue dated Christmas as about to go monthly. You will draw your own conclusions. Though they're not unlikely to be erroneous. The London Circle has periods of inactivity, but it never quite dies.

It seems to be quite definite, or as definite as these things ever be, that Gillings is going to revive FANTASY as a sister to NEW WORLDS, incorporating some of the features of FR. Thank you for the flattering remarks about SLANT's status in that contingency, but I should imagine that Ken Slater would have something to say about that.

*No refunds!

I never got a reply to this letter. I passed on Chuck's name to Ken Bulmer, along with that of one Dave Cohen of Manchester who had sent me a weird letter purporting to be a communication from an inhabitant of a planet called Botturor in the Milky Way, and forgot about it.

Until next month, that is, when a copy of the ISFCC zine THE EXPLORER arrived with a little story by C.R.Harris which I liked. I turned up the previous correspondence and made with the orchids and blandishments:

I was going to quote the letter here but I've been wondering about something and I think I'll just stop here until I see what you think about it. Do you like reading other people's correspondence? I do. I'm one of those who believe that there's no such thing as an uninteresting letter...at least when it's written to someone else. It's sort of like an unscripted live television interview---anything can happen, or at least you can get all sorts of fascinating sidelights and insights into personalities, things which you weren't meant to see. But maybe some of you just find other people's letters dull unless they affect you personally or have literary merit? If so let me know, because I've got an awful lot of old letters here I'm not quite sure how to deal with.