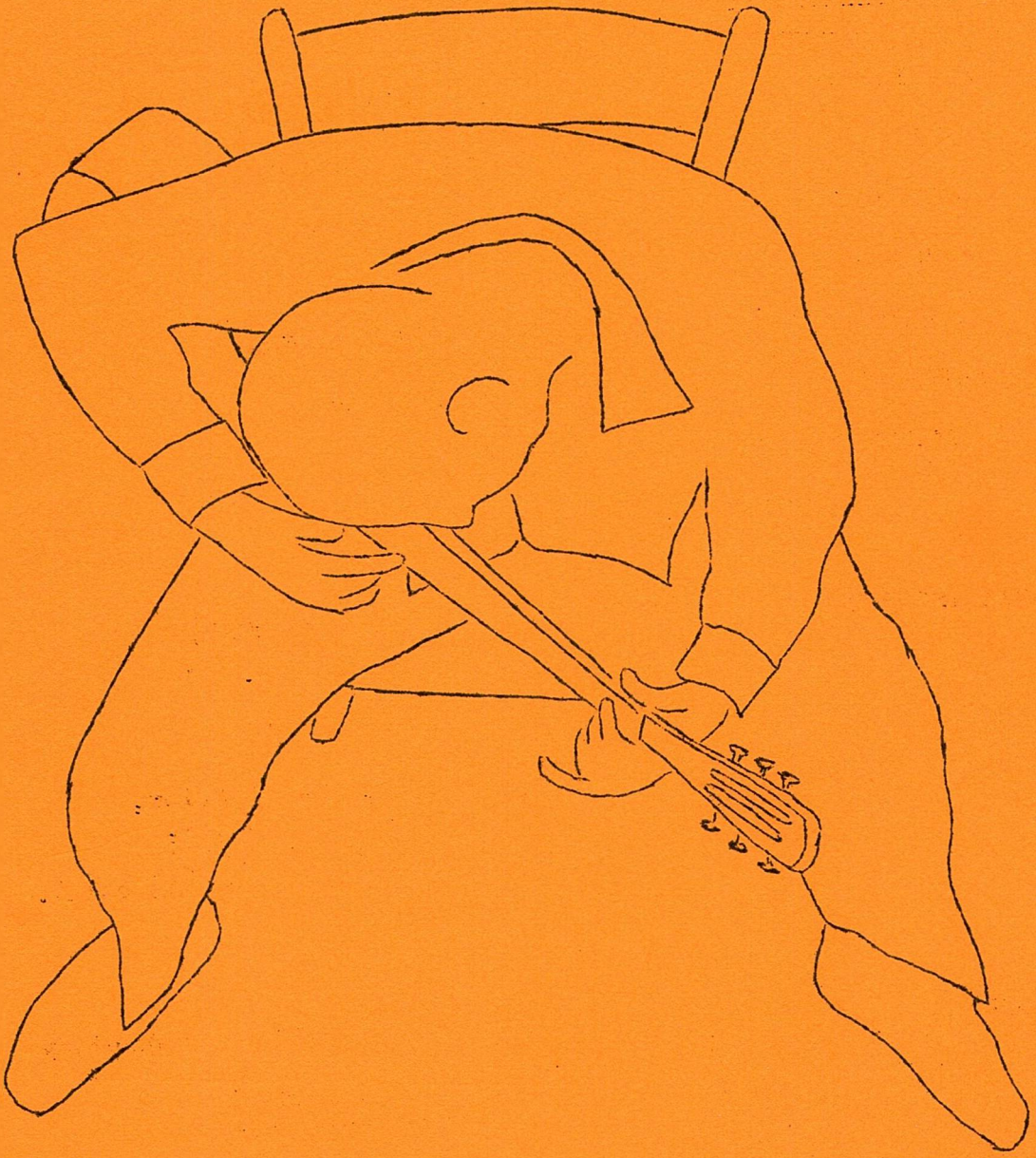


# STOP BREAKING DOWN



Number 1  
March 1976

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edited and produced by  
Greg Pickersgill  
with  
Simone Walsh (Overseas Editor)

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STOP BREAKING DOWN 2 ; material for this issue should be in hand by  
20th April 1976

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The cover of this issue is by Graham Charnock, after an original illustration by Burt Goldblatt for the album 'Robert Johnson, King of the Delta Blues'.

M O A N I N G . A T . M I D N I G H T .  
.....

mumble

by

Greg Pickersgill

FEELING ALRIGHT? I'M NOT FEELING TOO GOOD MYSELF

Actually I feel a little deranged doing this, leaving aside pleasant and undemanding pursuits like listening to records, reading old ROLLING STONES and idling about, just to expend myself on something that will cost me dear in both money and pain. I mean, like, what is it that drives me to issue another of these peculiarly stereotyped fanzines a scant two years after the last? Old habits not dying at all, for one thing, a strange phenomenon I have come to see as 'fanzine junk', a compulsion in many people who've ever produced a fanzine to continually contemplate, if not actually issue, another. Particularly when the response to earlier efforts has, how shall I put it, been something less than totally derogatory. Hooked at the first shot indeed, pubbing your own ish is a powerful dope, strung out on corflu fumes, entranced by the need to cover clean white stencils with grey typescript. The only way out is to get right away, leave fandom completely, cold turkey on John Norman novels, take up professional writing. And there's no cheap substitute for a sure shot either. Letterhacking and contributing are both too dodgy, too riddled with dependance on other peoples' whims and judgements to suit those who've once ruled their own editorial world. I mean, if I write something I think worth showing the world I'd prefer to publish it myself, see it appear, not let it be shunted into the 'WAHF' file or returned 'Thanks but no thanks'. Anyway as a contributor you lost the little thrill of manipulating a bit of reality (no matter how false) for yourself; choosing, editing, fitting together, duplicating. Hard grind, sometimes agony, always expensive. But damn good fun (to look back on) and ultimately satisfying.

Apart from the fact that anyone hanging around fandom, as I am, always wants to participate in the best action around (producing a fanzine) there's a personal factor here. Simply, I need something to do. Something definite and positive, producing a tangible result. That's the sort of thing lacking in my life. I have the kind of tedious Civil Service job that induces a sigh of 'Christ, only four days seven and a half hours to go' every Monday morning without fail. It's that bad, a succession of eight hour gaps in the day that even continual skiving, reading, deep thoughts and fantasizing can take the edge off. No sense of achievement there at all. And I don't really do anything with the rest of my time. Sure, I'm quite happy enough, in fact apart from the times I feel this hysterical need to manifestly produce something I am feelin' alright indeed. If only I still had delusions - or even pretentions - towards being a 'real writer' things would be easier; I could go away and scribble away at pan-galactic extravaganzas of sex and violence, kidding myself I'm actually doing something worthwhile, but true to say, I shed any such

aspirations a long time gone, and although they sometimes recur (in fact with aggravating regularity) they are vigorously suppressed by an overkill of apathy.

Anyway, my only real interests are records and books, and fandom I suppose, and the first two are far too passive involvements for these itchy times when the need to construct is upon me, when instead of accepting (no matter how 'actively') other people's feelings and concepts, I need to fling out a few of my own. In the essentially ludicrous form of a fanzine. Sounds crazy to me when I put it like that.

Not that I particularly enjoy producing fanzines. It's fucking hard work as I'm not a natural writer and can't express myself in even an approximation of the way I want to without multiple agonies of rewriting and dry-mouthed panic - and much tearing-up of fully-typed stencils too, if the truth be known. It's kind of like knocking one's head against a wall, really; it's wonderful to stop, and even better to settle back and contemplate the dent in the brickwork.

So, to escape from a sort of overwhelming happy indolence, and unconstructive receptivity, I shackle myself to the sometimes benevolent Triple Alliance of Typewriter, Stencil and Duplicator. All because, after all, I'm fascinated by fandom, and because I've nothing better to do. Fandom's the game I love to hate.

Another reason I'm publishing again is because I rather fancy the idea of getting a bit of mail once in a while too. Though I'm not gonna hold my breath.

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#### LAST FAIR DEAL GONE DOWN (1)

Just about the most aggravating thing possible must be to be happily distributing your fanzine at the Globe only to encounter a stranger doing the same thing. Naturally, like a good fan should, you offer him your latest ish in trade. Then you have to suffer through him standing there flicking through it dubiously, obviously evaluating it, weighing up whether it is roughly equivalent in effort, readability, ambition, production, and sheer damned presence as his own brainchild. In short, deciding whether it is a good trade.

Needless to say this didn't happen to me, but to Peter James Roberts, whose illusions about what a Huge-Name-Fan, Definate-Next-TAFF-Winner, and Fannish-Legend-In-His-Own-Time he is took a bit of a hammering. In fact even I, bitter and cynical as I often am, was surprised the guy didn't fall right down on the floor with pleasure at being offered a genuine Restormel Press Publication in trade.

"It wouldn't have been so bad," said Peter later after a quiet time alone in the toilet, "but all I got in exchange was a bloody fiction fanzine." Collapse of epicene party.

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Greg Pickersgill

1967.

long time gone

by

GRAHAM CHARNOCK

1967 was the last of the truly great years before everything collapsed and we grew old. Some of us died; most of us stopped living. This is written for Greg Pickersgill. It is endless but not interminable.

In 1967 I was living in Fulham in a place called Walsingham Mansions, with three people who were later to achieve varying degrees of wealth, power, glory, and true happiness.

In 1967 I was 21. It was the year of sex, drugs, psychedelia, a gentle mayhem and a metamorphosing morality. It was the year of endless summer, as Auntie Nostalgia insists on telling us often and pointedly, although perhaps we didn't realise it at the time. Sunset over Lots Road power station, although a radiant and resplendent sight, was followed by a grim walk through grimy backstreets. Even the main artery of Kings Road was low and anaemic at this point.

Walsingham Mansions was redbrick Victorian. The kitchen was huge and cold and the hallway long and slippery. Fanshawe the cat, a feline precursor of Evel Knievel, attempted to break his neck many times on this linoleum Bonneville Flats. From our basement window we could look up girls' miniskirts at their flowered knickers, or else watch the shiny feet of policemen off to raid sex-dope orgies. In our basement rooms Chris Priest ineptly strummed his way through Beatles songbook after Beatles songbook; we heard Sergeant Pepper for the first time, on a real live Dansette portable; John Leaver, later to become a director of TIME OUT and very rich, sang Sloop John B into my taperecorder, stole our money when we weren't looking, and cooked eggs and made coffee simultaneously in the same saucepan; Felix Dennis, later to become a famous OZ defendant, director of Bunch Associates, and also very rich, rehearsed with an incompetent pop-group, free-lance-designed in a generally talentless way, was sucked-off by a succession of women, and also stole our money when we weren't looking.

I had a Harmony Sovereign guitar with a curved fingerboard, a sweet action, and a nice fat tone. I sold it one day to pay my rent. Now, it seems fantastic that I could have ever done such a thing. Then, necessity bred contempt. Besides, I was carving a new life for myself. Let my friends go to university, form rock groups, screw women and achieve some kind of fulfillment. I was going to be an advertising executive. That didn't last long. I sold a story to TITBITS, read all about Scott Fitzgerald and Hemingway, how they screwed women and found some kind of fulfillment. That was the life for me.

Besides, Chris was hacking at a novel as if it were a peculiarly dense block of stone, and I was jealous. Jealousy is one of my major vices. All my life I have been jealous of one thing or another. It was sheer jealousy of my brother and his possessions that led me to take up guitar in the first place. He had one and I didn't. He could play it (badly) and I couldn't (at all). I hated him. I hated Chris Priest for his ability to chip novels out of stone and so I resolved to show him,

to show them, to show all the bastards who had fucked me into the insignificant little creep I was. Teaching people a lesson has always been another of my vices. I guess you know what happened. Slowly, painfully, against the odds and perhaps not as successfully as I might have wished, I grew up. But not in 1967.

I was a virgin in 1967. When Terry met Julie, Waterloo Station, every Friday night, it was for no more than a kiss and a cuddle. Julie wore a white dress and spent a lot of time moving in slow motion. I knew what love was all about in those days.

Occasionally I woke up sticky from a fevered dream that involved me doing something degrading yet **satisfyingly pleasurable** to a woman. I didn't know what masturbation was. You have no idea how absurd and possibly dangerous to one's spiritual wellbeing it is to open sex-manual after sex-manual and be told that masturbation doesn't **make you** deaf or blind, does not make hairs grow on the palms of your hands, does not lead to cancer of the cock, does no harm whatsoever physiologically or mentally, should not be a source of guilt, and that everybody does it, when you not only don't do it, but don't even know **how to. It can make you feel really inadequate.** "Doctor, I don't masturbate. What's wrong with me? I can't be queer because I like looking at naked women. See, I've kept this scrapbook since I was a school-boy - see the corsetry and lingerie advertisements, the half-tones of bathing beauties, even Olympic swimmers. Sometimes I can get a hard-on just thinking of a mound of Venus bulging beneath a Nelbarden swimsuit. But when it's up I don't know what to do until it goes down again, of it's own accord. What's wrong?"

Friends would tell me scornfully, when I enquired, that the term 'wanking' was in itself fairly descriptive of the act. I tried in vain to puzzle out on what level it could be descriptive. Friends like that never go into fuller detail. I suspected I was not alone in not doing it, but there you are, the overwhelming body of popular, scientific, and academic opinion was against me. Everybody did it. Later, you'll be pleased to hear, I finally learnt how to masturbate and thus saved my sanity. But not in 1967.

We slept two to a room in Walsingham Mansions. I shared with Chris Priest who was bigger, older, possessed a car and a neurotic intelligence. He had convictions and a fine orderly way of presenting them. He was a pragmatist, and remains one I think, a person for whom the end result is everything and any means acceptable as long as it gives the right answer. Perhaps it has something to do with long columns of figures. As an accountant Chris must have hated the columns and loved the precise summation at the end. I reacted against this, I guess. Let's hear it for answers which are 'wrong', 'unacceptable', 'patently absurd', I cried. Let's hear it for the one true way of reaching a result, any result. Let's not care what the answer is at all. I became contrary in 1967.

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Graham Charnock

B A C K T O  
T H E R O O T S

grubbing about

by

PETER ROBERTS

Eight years ago, just before Easter, I painfully and laboriously cranked out copies of MOR-FARCH ready to be distributed at the Buxton Thirdmancon - my first fanzine, my first convention. It seems a hell of a long time ago now. Damn it, it is a long time ago. There's a nostalgic haze hanging over those days and I must confess my memory is muddled and vague. No matter; don't dispute the facts - I'll just tell it like it probably was.

First things first. I joined the BSFA back in 1966 and did little for a year or so, except organise a school sf society which might well hold some record for least-known sf group. We didn't do much; for a fee, members borrowed my books and read my copies of VECTOR. I didn't realize it then, but with a couple of dozen paid-up members the Clifton College Science Fiction Society was probably the largest fan group in Britain at the time. Hoo. Anyway, a year later I contacted the much smaller Bristol and District Group and started going to meetings. I remember I used to go straight from school during the first few months; a withdrawn figure, keeping to the corners, as silent as the grave, and wearing a nice grey suit - every inch the young businessman. Hardly anyone noticed me - just like at school. Then came the long-awaited release from the institution, and I decided I'd had enough of my drab, conservative existence. The first BaD Group meeting afterwards I went dressed in salmon-pink jeans, orange pajama jacket (embellished with dragons), fake rabbit-fur waistcoat, and a Yugoslav fez. Beryl Mercer called me an exhibitionist. It was a good meeting.

But back to fanzines. The Bristol Group occupied itself at that time with gossip, fannish visitors, the local chippie, and BADINAGE. I was given a copy of the second issue of this group fanzine when I first arrived, and watched in mixed awe and amazement as the third issue took form and finally appeared. With equal fascination I watched the incoming reaction. I still carry a clear picture of Gray Boak arriving at a meeting, seizing upon a copy of HAVERINGS, tearing it open, and fearfully announcing "Let's see what Ethel has to say!" Fanediting seemed a grim and impressive job. There were lots too which were passed around, and fanzines in exchange. Fascinating. I read my way through Archie Mercer's vast fanzine collection, even bought (by weight) stacks of old OMPazines from him, and thus gradually became immersed in the culture.

Meanwhile I was trying to get out of my shell and was writing to various people mentioned in the BSFA Bulletin's 'Correspon-

dents Wanted' column. Among them was Anne Gill who was already writing to a Welsh youth and neofan called Gregory Pickersgill. Ah, unkind fate, how strange....Somehow Anne must have become confused about BADINAGE, because one day out of the blue a packet of manuscripts arrived from Pembrokeshire - articles, poems, fiction, even artwork - with a note saying "I understand you're intending to start a fanzine..."

Well, nobody told me.

I don't know what happened next. Really, I can't remember. The next thing I recall was buying a duplicator and soliciting contributions from members of the BaD Group and mundane friends. It's strange; an odd thing to forget. How did this mistaken idea that I was going to produce a fanzine turn itself into reality. God only knows. It's missing links like this that confirm my solipsist fear that the past is all faked, just a set of fictional memories planted on me yesterday - by an unimaginative hack-writer, at that. .

The duplicator is real enough, though. I've still got it. £15 worth of ink-stained machinery lovingly known as a Gestetner 120 and formerly the property of Chippenham Dogs' Home. I watched it at work, brought it home, and then tried to operate it myself on the monkey-see, monkey-do principle. Yeah, well - clever little sods, monkeys.

It worked eventually, after a fashion. Keith Walker would have approved of the results - several lines were legible.

Surprisingly I was undeterred, and the fanzine began to take shape. Being utterly and unusually methodical we started with the cover. Who's we? Well, at that time I was working as a wages clerk and with me was an art student, Roger Woods. We talked a lot about The Fanzine, mostly out of boredom, and did a lot of ambitious planning. The cover was going to be pretty damn good - a Victorian illustration of walrus, cherubs, and fancy scrollwork, with a Gothic title in white, all on grey art paper. Roger did the drawing, I bought the paper and white ink. Right, you guessed. I've still got that expensive paper and dried-up tube of ink somewhere; musty mementoes of past dreams. We gave it a try, of course, but each page took about an hour's work and the result was dismally indifferent. So perish all grand ideas.

I think the title came from the cover. That's my excuse anyway. I certainly remember spending lunch-hours in Bristol Public Library looking up 'walrus' in various languages. I finally chose the Welsh version, more out of sentiment than sense, since no-one could pronounce the wretched thing. MOR-FARCH - I suppose it was distinctive, in a clumsy sort of way.

Anyway, as to the contents of that first issue; they were an odd mixture of items - a few things I'd planned beforehand, a few pieces I'd solicited, a selection from the Pickersgill manuscript bank (I'll print the rest of them someday if he ever gets uppity), plus a number of reviews and fillers. Don't worry, I won't go into every grubby detail - after all this time it's a bit unsavoury to



recall, for example, goshwow reviews of Eric Frank Russell space opera. Let's leave some of the shabbier aspects of the past in peace and just unearth the worthier material. Yes, there was some. A piece called 'The Unnatural Numbers', for example, a strange fantasy of mathematics by Rob Johnson. Now there's a fine writer lost to fandom, and an exuberant character too - the famous mad gibberer of Bristol fandom and sometime editor of BADINAGE. Gone. Gafiated. Whisked away by his five sisters (or was it six, he could never remember himself). And whatever happened to Greg Pickersgill? The original 1968 Welsh version, not your modern London fan of latterday wit and myth. Greg wrote fiction then, along with most British fanwriters - not as sercon as Gray Boak's, not as abrasive as Bryn Fortey's, not as promising as Chris Priest's, but strange, lunatic stuff like 'Smiths Burst', a bizarre mixture of J.G. Ballard and Ronald Searle. And what else? A shrill editorial on censorship, Gray Boak's 'The Delazny Intersection', a checklist of IMPULSE, a short story by Tony Cottrell, best forgotten (though I hear he's an up and coming theatre director nowadays - remember, you heard of him first in MOR-FARCH, and 'The Lurker In The Loo', a Lovecraft parody of mine which I'm still quite fond of. As far as illustrations went, Roger Woods did the cover and a rather grand illo for 'The Lurker', and I did the rest. Yes, me. Actually I started in fandom as an illustrator, though I've hardly advertised the fact, and my first fanac was a blotchy set of hand-cut drawings specially duplicated in a limited edition of three. I took them along proudly to a BaD Group meeting where they were completely ignored. Not at all put out by this I cut a few more for the first MOR-FARCH and had some other drawings electrostencilled for later use. These were also ignored. The message got through to me; sic transit Peter Roberts, fanartist.

The reaction to all this? Pretty good, as I recall; Ethel Lindsay liked the fanzine, as did Charles Platt. That's what you call broad spectrum appeal - in fact I could've been everybody's new protege if I'd played my cards right. So it goes. Others liked it too; "Much better than the majority of fanzines available at the same time, eg RUFFCUT, SON OF NEW FUTURIAN, and even FREEWHEELIN." (Credit to Graham Boak for that all-time back-handed compliment, which I've only just noticed. I hope the mongs get you, Boak.)

Of course, you've got to remember that MOR-FARCH appeared at a time of utter depression in British fanzines. After several years the Printing and Distributing Service was on its last legs and only the worst of the PaDszines were still kicking feebly. SPECULATION and PHILE were the British fanzines at that time, easily the ones that most impressed me. Others? Well, the review column in MOR-FARCH 1 lists OZ, RUFFCUT, BADINAGE, and a German fanzine, Tom Schluck's SOL (worth a mention since it was the earliest fanzine in which my name appeared - Peter's first egoboo...). Beyond that there must have been ERG and SCOTTISHE, and a handful and PaDszines and OMPazines (XERON, CRABAPPLE, RELATIVITY?). Well, anyway, quite honestly there wasn't much competition, even for a newcomer. Pity the neofans of today putting out their first issues - in 1968 a new British fanzine was an event in itself. Mind you, there weren't many readers then either - and most of them were sercons of the first order or PaDsziners doing their own incestuous thing. For nostalgia's sake let's look at the

letter column of MOR-FARCH 2 to see who read that first issue; Gray Boak, Graham Charnock, Bryn Fortey, Anne Gill, Graham Hall, Brian Hampton, Phil Harbottle, Poj Hough, Richard Labonte (Christ, did I send any abroad?), Barbara Mace, Jack Marsh, Archie Mercer, Hartley Patterson, Greg Pickersgill, Charles Platt, Mary Reed, and Mike Scantlebury. Surprisingly, nearly all are still around, even if some are at the furthest edges of contact. Only Anne Gill, Poj Hough, and Barbara Mace seem to have disappeared, and even they may be lurking somewhere, like Mike Scantlebury who recently turned up in Manchester. Perhaps fans stay active for longer than we give them credit for; two years is supposed to be the average fannish 'life', though come to think of it I don't know where that oft-repeated observation ever came from.

Eight years ago, eh? Look, this nostalgia could go on for ever. MOR-FARCH 1 cost 1/- plus 4d postage. Jesus. Greg Pickersgill was writing poetry. Christ. And I was seventeen.....

Enough.

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Peter Roberts

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### I CAN'T STAND IT '68

As that lovely boy Roberts didn't quite write enough to finish off the page, and as, after all, MF 1 was my own first fanac, I not only have reason but also opportunity to add to Peter's reminiscences. Even a few factual challenges; like for example I'm sure it was Beryl Mercer that told me Peter was going to publish a fanzine, and suggested I (who had been talking about doing one myself) cooperate with him. As it turned out he easily contrived to ignore all suggestions I should co-edit with him and I ended up as a mere contributor - even if I contributed almost half that issue. Though really it's all so long ago in fannish terms it might just as well be all lies anyway, and it's true that it isn't always a wise thing to rake up one's fannish youth. You might find yourself cringing to contemplate things like the review I wrote (and Peter published!) of NEW WRITINGS IN SF 11 which consisted entirely of plot-summaries of each story. Gak. Though I must admit I still like 'Smiths Burst' and an untitled pseudonymous poem in the same issue which quite impresses me for what it was; i.e. the creation of a sixteen-year-old provincial kid who thought he was going to be a big-deal writer.

In fact, looked back on objectively as possible MF 1 was a exceptionally good first issue, well laid-out and produced, with a pretty high standard of writing and thinking involved. As one might expect from someone who'd made an effort to study the best of recent fanzines before trying himself. In fact as a copy of PHILE, which was in turn an imitation of BEYOND, it was damned good.

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Greg Pickersgill

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Y E A R S  
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autobiography

by

ROB HOLDSTOCK

My first novel was written in handwriting that today looks like an electroencephalogram trace, and not a very lively one at that. At the time it was a great breakthrough since my writing during the years previous had tended to slope inward at both ends of the line, and around the middle of the line to get microscopically small. Myopia had a lot to do with it. I am very short sighted, a fact I discovered when I was ten years old and my teacher shouted "look at the blackboard" and I replied something that must have sounded very witty at the time, "What's a blackboard?" Anyway, I can remember everyone laughing raucously (high pitched rauc, as we were all very young). A smashing girl who sat across the room seemed to be looking sympathetically towards me. I was in love with her. Her name was Patricia Booker, and I'd have done anything for her, if I hadn't stumbled in the effort. I discovered I was short sighted, got some little round glasses that made my long, thin, very thin, horribly thin, grotesquely thin features look...stupid. I discovered a whole new world. Pat Booker was fat and horrible, the bloke sitting opposite me in class had a perpetual piece of black mucus in his nose, and I discovered it was possible to cheat when one could see as far as one's neighbour's paper. Thus I achieved my 11+, went to Grammar school, and cheated my way through French and Maths (which I couldn't do). I was a superb cheat.

Before the exams I gained access to the examination room and equipped my desk and my neighbours' with paper so we could pass answers around. I cheated in French and got an A. I cheated in Maths and got A. I didn't cheat in Biology and got B. C'est la vie. I cheated in my finals at University because they were stupid questions anyway. In fact I only cheated in the practical exams in Zoology. The night before the Vertebrate Dissection exam (we'll get back to my first novel in a minute) me and Martin Goad and the young Welsh poof Dick Jones played football until ten in the evening. We'd just watched the World Cup and were inspired by Pele's play on the wing. So we played five-a-side with the Chemistry lot and by ten o'clock were ill with exhaustion. We all drank a lot of beer and threw up violently. The next day the three of us were grotesque wrecks, green, streaked with vomit, red and dead around the eyes.

Arm in arm we walked to the Zoology Lab and found eighteen stupid swotting assholes all talking about what we'd get to dissect. A cat? No, too touchy. A rabbit? Highly probable. A pigeon? "Fuck No!" I shouted, "Had a pigeon last year. No chance AT ALL of getting a pigeon, no sir!" I shouted, confident that the dissection would be a rat or a rabbit. I had learned the veins, arteries and nervous system of every vertebrate in the known world, except, of course, the pigeon, which had come up last year, so wouldn't come up again.

The doors opened. We lurched forward into the empty, formalin smelling lab and found the backmost corner of the backmost bench. The three of us went into a huddle and waited, trembling, for the dead creature that would be deposited in front of us with instructions to cut.

A fucking pigeon!

Three pigeons, all fat with eggs, and soggy with water; mine had its eyes open. It watched me, deadly, as I slashed at it morosely, crying softly. "They had pigeon last year, it can't be pigeon, they had it last year," I whimpered.

Worse was to come. On opening the belly of the big fat female pigeon, on plunging my fingers nervously into its viscera, I shattered the five eggs that were in there. A great jet of yellow goo hit me in the face, covered the bird completely, clogged the feathers together, mixed with the blood that was beginning to flow.

I was sick all over the floor. My action precipitated similar action in Martin and Dick and we were moved, retching and wretched, into a quiet room with a doctor in attendance in case we passed out. There we continued. We cheated like fuck and got thirteen percent average. I still passed.

This all happened eleven years after my first novel was written. That novel lives in my memory today. Called THE PHANTOM PLANET, it took a year to write and was about a ghost planet existing at the other edge of the Universe to Earth, and which was first detected through the Mount Palomar telescope.

I was not as sensible then as I am now.

A first novel, though, is always a momentous occasion; as that stiff-backed exercise book sat before me, and wherever I opened it there was WRITING, so for the first time I experienced the after-glow of creation; there are many afterglows, of which the nicest are those following Pink Floyd, beef casserole, orgasm, and an evening with Greg Pickersgill. And of course, CREATION. This is why writers write, not for the money, for fame, for free publishers lunches, but to experience the sensation of laying the last sheet of closely typed paper on a pile of similar papers and saying "I am finished; I am concluded; my ego is satiated; I have expressed myself; I have concluded a statement concerning the human condition; I can now return to masturbation with a free hand and a clear conscience."

Charged with the voltage of creative energy I dived headlong into SF, swiftly read 'War Of The Worlds' and even more swiftly rewrote it as INVASION OF THE SATURNIAN SLIME-BEASTS. It wasn't as good as the original, didn't have the same panache, but was just as exciting! I followed it with another 'WotW' rewrite entitled HORRORS FROM JUPITER. I soon realised I was losing my grip, but fortunately discovered an anthology called 'Possible Worlds of Science Fiction' edited by Groff Conklin. I was saved; true SF had reached me. Periodically, over the next few years, I would rewrite 'War Of The Worlds' by accident, but the incidences grew less and less as I discovered Asimov, Aldiss, Silverberg, and Richard Cowper (which name all of us in the know pronounce 'Cooper') and absorbed such a multiplicity of influences that now even my best friends can't tell what I'm rewriting.

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Robert P. Holdstock

fanzine reviews

by

Greg Pickersgill

I was going to begin this sequence of fanzine reviews with some kind of statement of intent, a sort of declaration of the main principles that run through my head when I consider fanzines. Whichever way I cut it, however, it came out pompous, pretentious, and generally a bit deranged, so anyone who's seriously concerned about such things will just have to make out as best they can by reading between the lines.

However, that being said I must say that as usual British fanzines seem just as bad today as ever was, and I expect I will continue to deserve a reputation for being a vicious cretin ready to demolish a friendly, aspiring little neozine just because it is damned badly written, lacking in imagination, and generally shows no sign that the editor has made an effort to think about what he is doing.

You all might just as well see from the outset that I intend to spend more than a short paragraph on each fanzine, my opinions will probably be stated as universally accepted laws (because I refuse to prefix every remark with 'I think' or 'I believe') and such opinions will not necessarily be qualified or justified. I will, however, strive to keep them as consistent from review to review - even from issue to issue - as is mortally possible. These reviews will also, I hope, be quite entertaining.

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EGG 10 from Peter Roberts, 6 Westbourne Park Villas, London W2

Well, what can you say about a legend in its own time? Which is what EGG and its editor have become. How can one contemplate anything that might slight a man like Peter Roberts, whose determined immersion in fannish lore and legendry, fanatical dedication to time-binding, and general air of One Who Has Seen Everything At Least Once has lifted him beyond the ordinary Mongish ruck of fans and placed him somewhere up there, glowing softly in the light of a thousand fannish suns. Such is the air of aged knowledge and wisdom that surrounds Roberts that neofans quake in their boots at the mere mention of his name, and those likely to meet the man in person look on it as an audience with the Secret Master of Reality Himself. All this and he is no sagacious patriarchal Old Time Fan confined to his bed and sipping a discrete

'medicinal' Guinness, but a svelte, bright-eyed youth of 26, a jolly enough fellow, fortunately of a sufficiently staid and stolid temperament to dispense wit, wisdom, and just a fraction of condescension at the least opportunity.

I mean, with all this Personality going for him how could he fail to produce the Ultimate mellow fannish fanzine. A damn nice fanzine, actually, well duplicated with very pleasing advantage taken of the multiplicity of typefaces available with expensive electric typefaces bought out of money saved from convention funds by not sending out the programme books. Mostly though, the excellence is due to Roberts himself ; he is one of the few actual writers working in British fandom today, with an innately fluent use of language - not just wellknown phrases and sayings, but bright and original wordplay - that makes almost all others seem mere babblers at a loss for subject matter, jokey where wit is a prerequisite, and always ignorant of the quality of brevity. It must be this rare quality that inspires EGG's very strong lettercolumn, probably the best-edited in the UK, that is inevitably composed of fairly sensible people saying genuinely interesting things.

The most interesting item in this issue, which I can't resist dwelling upon, lies within the editorial. It's a discussion and review of the genus crudzine that takes off with what seems to be the archetypal crudzine, a fanzine called STAR ROCKETS, a US production edited by the strangely-named Raleigh Evans Multog, a sort of Dave Womack of the early fifties. The article goes on to raise some good points. In years past it seems, crudzines were the product of naive adolescents determined against all odds to communicate their passions and fanaticisms to those they believed like-minded. The fact that the resulting publication was bad, a hopelessly duplicated collection of short ill-written pieces gleaned from popular texts, abysmally hackneyed fiction, or reports of absolutely parochial events was entirely accidental. There's an innocent aspiration about such things that must strike a sympathetic cord in all of us whose first 'ideal' fanzine would have been just like that. Awful, yeah, but real. Now, of course, neofans are too clever by half. They're often aware that their material might be no good and may deliberately present it as 'crud' as a forestalling of potential criticism. A bland awareness of the probable faults in their material which deeply aggravates me ; those who produce fanzines they claim to have little confidence in and would almost certainly deride if they came from other people are the bloody bane of fandom. Everyone must start somewhere, yeah, but let's not revel in inefficiency, illiteracy, and lack of inspiration.

It's also true as Roberts points out that the worst crudzines of today are almost the opposite of those spotty adolescent fanaticisms of yore, but are instead smart, polished, printed, illustrated, arty-farty, pretentious and empty 'amateur magazines' which have emanated from newer fan-groups over the last one or two years. Particularly from University SF Groups, as one might expect, perhaps. Placed beside them the least, most committedly cruddy genuine fanzine is a fucking triumph of individual aspiration and communication.

Roberts does not, though, seem to note that quite recently there does indeed seem to have been a resurgence of the classic crudzine, mention of which will be found elsewhere in this column.

Anyway, EGG also contains a column of fanzine reviews and chatter by Eric Bentcliffe, who is deeply revered by some but who tends to give me a case of terminal itch; it must be my phobia against Old Time Fans and their superscilious ways. And last but certainly not least, a rather remarkable essay on H.P. Lovecraft by the shadowy figure of James Parkhill-Rathbone, a piece which is almost Borgesian in its brevity and obliquity, and which is very likely one of the most distinctive items to be published in a fanzine in this or any other year.

Oh yeah, almost forgot the EGG BOOK REVIEWS, a throwaway sheet included to impress publishers into sending Peter Roberts free books. Brief and to the point, the reviews are pertinent and meaningful, and generally show up most fanzine book-reviewing for the half-witted nonsense it almost invariably is.

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TITAN 2 from Geoff Rippington, 15 Queens Avenue, Canterbury  
Kent, CT2 8AY

Now here's one to really take you back. I don't know where it's likely to take you, but it sure as shit takes me back some eight or nine years to a time when I was even less sensible than I am now. Back, in fact, to a time when I'd just about heard of fanzine fandom and was busily preparing to issue my first fanzine. Called, if I recall correctly NEW PEMBROKESHIRE REVIEW (or was that another, later project?) it was going to be really good. Going to have fiction, book reviews, poetry, articles about really fascinating things I'd been reading about in the 'quality' Sundays or in the back shelves of the local library, and was going to be an all-round sensible and mind-improving little magazine. The general tone of it could, I suppose, be summed up by the tone of hurt and regretful (at others' folly) chiding at the established fans of the day for their sneering attitude towards fiction published in fanzines. The artwork was going to be pretty good too; I was pretty sure that I could get that rather pleasant-sounding Mr Jeeves to do me a cover and a few interior illustrations.

Well, lets not go too far into that sort of thing - and anyway I want to write it up for a main article one day - 'cause I'm sure most of you can remember your first proposed fanzine. Usually the one you planned hard on for months but never actually came out, and anyway by then you'd sort of figured this might not quite be what it's all for anyway. What I'm laboriously underlining here is that TITAN, for all its good intentions falls irrevocably into the trap of being the archetypal crudzine as defined by Peter Roberts and paraphrased by myself in the review of EGG: Jam-packed with silliness and almost entirely lacking in any sense of editorial presence at all; whilst it is easy to comprehend why it was produced it is hard to see exactly what the editor gets out of it.

The contents are, in a word, tedious. An abysmally bad piece of ~~fiction~~ that sacrifices meaning for mood and achieves nothing; some poetry which will be an acute embarrassment to its writers when they grow up; a p. ce on self-contained living under the heading of 'Controversy' which provides the only laugh of the issue by stating,

without any apparent sense of self-satire, after a pointlessly brief resume of facts in not much more than 200 words that "it is , of course, much more complicated than this..". Well, astonishing, and real news to those totally out of touch with popular science. Actually this is a very funny article. He claims, straight-faced, that if you keep goats, sheep or cattle, then you've got the clothing problem solved, just like that. Of course, it's more complicated than that. Of course. I goggle.

Onwards. Fanzine reviews are short, and seem determined to operate on the principle of 'I'll scratch your back in the hope that you'll scratch mine. Not much discrimination exercised here. There's an interminably long resume of the novels of a science fiction writer called A.E. Van Vogt, who seems a rather dull fellow determined to invent impossible characters in incredible situations doing unbelievable things. The level of criticism here does not go much beyond plot-summary, and whilst the writer may claim this is all he intended to do I would want to press the inquiry further and ask 'Why?'. I would also like to know why this fanzine publishes long lists of forthcoming books complete with the original publishers blurbs. Not that a forthcoming books list is in itself daft, but.... I dunno.

Well. Obviously I can see why this fanzine is like it is. It's pretty much the sort of thing most new fans think is exactly IT when they contemplate pubbing their first ish (as we say in the vernacular). And in its own way it's the sort of sf oriented fanzine I'd have liked to see when I first entered fandom. There is a definite need for such a thing in this day and age, though TITAN, with a generally unenthusiastic, thoughtless, unimaginative aura to it is hardly likely to fill this gap.

Myself, I was lucky. When I was planning this sort of fanzine there were things like SPECULATION about, and I soon realised that enthusiasm was not enough.

And Mr Rippington, please discover soon that Terry Jeeves' awful illustrations are not better than nothing.

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ATROPOS 2 from David Cockfield, 31 Durham Court, Hebburn,  
Tyne & Wear, NE31 1JX

This is a new fanzine from a recent attachment to the Gannet group, and like many new fannish fanzine editors David C. has a rather irritatingly familiar way of identifying himself with fandom. Still, we all did it once and it's nasty of me to carp, and no doubt it'll wear off soon, though Peter Presford is still doing it after four years or so and it narks me just as much. Oh well.

Anyway, its a sturdy damned thing, quite well into fannish fandom, and certainly a lot more promising than uninventive fare like TITAN, though just as bad in its own little ways. The worst thing by several halves is Cockfield's alarming lack of faith and confidence in his own material. So little does he have that he seems to insert an apology for bad/boring writing or subject matter every couple of paras. Insecurity is one thing, but I'd like to think Cockfield possessed of the same self-critical faculty as the rest of us and so I'm tempted to say that if he thought it was as fucking boring as all that why does he plague



us with it. See the remarks on crudzines in the EGG review yet again.

Beneath this heavy lack of faith merely average material becomes mediocre and tedious. Some trip reports stagger and fall under a welter of 'Got up, got out of bed, dragged a comb across my head' trivial detail. A propagandist article on Rosicrucianism could as well be a fourth-form essay for all the command of language and thinking it manifests. And Christ, haven't we all been reading fanzines for years just waiting for an article like this to tell us all about Rosicrucianism? Much nicer than going to an encyclopaedia to look it up for yourself. It is an essential folly to assume that the generally hyper-intelligent individuals that make up sci-fi fandom need to obtain this sort of information from fanzines; anyone with any interest at all can discover what they want to know much better elsewhere.

ATROPOS has its ration of fiction, though as it's a fannish fanzine it's not serious and pretentious but humourous. At least that is the contention of the two (count 'em, two!) individuals who laboured, no doubt with sweat rivering from their brows, to produce the example herein. More likely though it was devised around a bottle of Newcastle Brown and reads like it. It's a continual wonder to me how an editor can stencil such unfunny material without an apparent qualm.

One redeeming quality is the news section. Dave Cockfield seems to have a knack for assembling diverse information on sf related topics into an interesting and readable column which might not be out of place in a better fanzine.

He does not, though, have a knack for book reviews. The eight or so pages herein are pretty awful as all fanzine book reviewing usually is. These are straightforward reviews - little more than plot-summaries - of pretty uninteresting junk-sf books that make no worthwhile points at all, and are in fact as shallow and worthless as most of the books reviewed. Now, I see why these things are included. I realise that they are supposedly of interest to all sf fans. But for Christ's sake if people must put book reviews into fanzines can't they choose material they have a particular fascination with, or concern for, or at least something they can make an interesting comment on. And not just sf either; the bulk of sf is dull as ditchwater at the best of times and the comments of the average reviewer make them seem perilously close to terminal cretinacy.

I dunno. Virtually every fanzine starts crummy; some drop solid dead, some have it in them to continue in one form or another and gain an interested audience. What qualities those survivors possess are not easy to grasp. Is it merely persistence, dogged effort that brings improvement; or is it subtle flashes of personality, innate brilliance that soon captures the very essence of what a good, readable surviving fanzine is all about and presents it with strong definition and boldness? Huhm? Are merely average writers, saying average things, ever going to get anywhere no matter how long, how long Oh Lord, they try? What is it with these quite reasonable people who really like the whole notion of 'pubbing their own ish' and displaying their personalities and enthusiasms to their associates but who really can't do it particularly well? God, it's sort of frightening really. Just how much fannish effort is expended on that level? How little of it is genuinely worthwhile? Or is it all worthwhile because it's in a fanzine and it's whoever just doing what he does do best?

No. it seems obvious to me that there is, available for all to see, good fanzine material that sets a certain standard in writing and creativity. Is it too much to expect that prospective fanzine editors should pay heed to this and try to meet it? Whenever I contemplate publishing a fanzine I spend a long time agonizing over whether in fact I have anything worthwhile to put across, and even if I have am I capable of purring it across in any kind of sensible or entertaining manner. Not just go blindly ahead and produce a fanzine just for the sheer hell of it, which is what so many new fans seem to do. And it isn't just David Cockfield (who is probably doing his best with limited experience and in difficult circumstances - a 'famous' fanzine-producing group) or Geoff Rippington (who displays such naivete he's almost admirable) that I'm pointing at here, but all those, old and new fans alike - Howard Rosenblum, as old a fan as you can get is virtually the archetype - who consistently produce fanzines on this low level of achievement. Christ, I should know, I've done it myself at least once, though hopefully never again.

Well, hell, this sort of thinking, bringing as it does the whole idea of fanzine publishing into question, makes me feel sick and close to panic. Let's have a bit of reader-reaction on this problem; what's YOUR motivation, why do YOU put out a fanzine? And think, is it by any stretch of your imagination the sort of thing you'd say was crap if Little Jimmy Fan sent it to you?

Ahhhh, ATROPOS will make it okay I expect, it won't be just inconsequential, grey, and uncommitted forever. Likely as not Dave Cockfield will become the Peter Roberts of the 1980's, and will very likely piss on me from a very great height even before then.

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INVERTED EAR TRUMPET 3 from Richard McMahon, 287 South  
Lane, New Malden,  
Surrey KT3 5RR

Now then, if TITAN is almost the archetypal gosh-wow crudzine, and ATROPOS, although determinedly fannish, is a bit of a non-event, this fanzine with the extravagant and self-consciously bizarre name is the one most likely to succeed, the fast and punchy one with the aura of potential greatness. It's not impossible that this could become one of the most looked-forward to fanzines on the British scene. This may seem far-fetched, but the reasoning is fairly clear if one looks back to fanzines that have had that said about them before, like FOULER, or more recently, MALFUNCTION.

The most obvious similarity between the three is a sort of irredeemable shoddiness of production, manifested here by abysmally awful typing, spotty, almost unreadable duplicating, and a general disinterest in layout. But that's no big deal; if seediness and illegibility were the main criteria for a successful fanzine we'd all be eagerly watching the mailman for VIRIDIANA 42 right about now. The vital interlocking point of these fanzines is that each had (has) a definite and obtrusive editorial presence, a driving force that by virtue of sheer self-righteousness, monomania, and contentiousness

gives the whole fanzine a vitality without which it would just be so much crudnuffin.

Anyway, before we consider what qualities Richard McMahon has that could make him the fastest rising star in British fanwriting since Gregory Pickersgill we must glance casually over the rest of the fanzine. In fact the **only non-editorial piece** (other than a few locs) is another Graham Poole news and comment column. He do what he do do best, mainly on sf films, and only in an aside on 'sf music' sounds a little foolish. There seems to me something classically inane about even considering whether music is 'sf' oriented or not, a sort of maniacal determination to lump all things into the sf fold that hints at a horrible monomania. These crazy notions could kill your credibility Pooley, even before the over-exposure you're coming close to does. Myself, I'll stick with Gary Glitter, anyway.

The rest of the fanzine belongs to McMahon, who certainly stamps it with his personality. Indeed, not since Peter Presford have I seen such a potential wild irreverence, such a possibly capability for tilting at fannish windmills - irrespective of the rights, wrongs, facts or fictions of the issues concerned - and, damnitall, genuine evidence of a true interest in fandom and some concern for its future. All this coupled to what seems a strong personality which will not let its wearer hesitate to make a fool of himself over what he assumes are his principles.

And he's not gonna do anything by halves either. Like for example his decision to publish small-ads. Not that any are published, mind you, their place being taken by a long rambling announcement (a whole side of A4, in fact) to the effect that he intends to publish small-ads in the next issue. The whole thing is phrased with such a myriad of hedges and conditions it sounds more like he's offering cultural aid to the Soviet Union than **publish noticed from people like Malcolm Edwards** anxious to complete their set of ARDEES or whatever. If the whole thing wasn't so damned funny and obviously meant to be a piss-take (though of what I'm unsure) I'd say the kid was off his nut.

This sort of endearing monomania extends to the editorial proper, the bulk of which is a tirade against obscenity in fanzines, with particular refernce to Graham Charnock's VIBRATOR, about which McMahon says "is the basest, most worthless I have recieved...Graham has obviously gone to a lot of trouble to pick the most vulgar language wher it is least needed." Well, speaking as someone who caused a bit of an uproar some years back by saying 'fuck' in a fanzine, I'd say Richard is here showing a somewhat naive and juvenile preoccupation with superficiality, his rather conservative and pompous attitude leading him to believe 'obscenity' is either clear evidence of mental deficiency or a subversive attempt to demean fannish standards and credibility. Quite how he can justify pitting either of these assumptions aginst the producer of one of the best-written and most alive fanzines today I don't know, but I'd say that as soon as he realises Charnock is not being disgusting for its own sake but writing in a direct, colorful, and idiomatic manner that is quite beyond most other fanwriters Richard McMahon will be able to gain a great deal of pleasure from material which his constricting sense of propriety has thus far denied him.

Perhaps, though, I'm being unduly hard. Maybe Richard has ideas about the elevated status and possibilities of fanzine writing and doesn't like to see it contaminated by the jargon of the streets. Though if that is his notion I'd prefer to see him go about it in some better way than a witch-hunt against harmless - and in the case of VIBRATOR, almost undetectable - 'obscenities'.

Probably it's just because it's a third issue, but this fanzine certainly brims with fannish involvement; the fanzine reviews display some sense, and the letters are actually about something, though McMahon has yet to learn how to dialog with Loccers in an unobtrusive and distinct manner.

This one could make it.

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K 2 from Dave Rowe & Berie Peek, 8 Park Drive, Wickford,  
Essex, SS12 9DH

Now this one gives me the puking shits, it's so good. Not only is it good, but it's effectively almost beaten me at my own game even before I entered the field, being mostly a collection of (editorially at least) good material from good writers and presenting it in a clear format. In fact this fanzine is amazingly good, considering it emanates from whom it does, and that the first issue (barely a month ago) was rather undistinguished apart from Jim Linwood's fanzine reviews.

In this issue Bernie Peek, responsible for some tedious editorialism in K 1 is reduced to a single back page, and the gormless meanderings of such as Coral Clarke are replaced by a startlingly varied selection of material from an immigration of foreign fans and Dave Langford, who could well be foreign as far as I'm concerned. Still star of the issue though is Jim Linwood, whose fanzine reviews get ever more caustic with each appearance. These reviews, much longer than one short paragraph, are interesting, witty, literate, have depth of perception and are almost invariably dead accurate. I say 'almost' because of what seem like a couple of snideries aimed in my direction, which I'm quite sure Uncle Jim, Master Fanzine Reviewer and doyen of such as I, would not have included had he thought more than twice. And if that sounds like buttering-up bullshit you're dead right, because J.L. is the person I would chose as hitman should I want my fanzine assassinated. With one fell swoop, indeed. Yassuh boss.

I've rarely had good to say about David Rowe, so it pains me somewhat to say he's actually writing like a human being here, and rather well too. Gone is the sincere, well-meaning, convoluted incompetence of yore, replaced by a certain clarity of expression and readiness to be nasty that as yet looks strange on the Mr Clean of fandom. Quite a lot of what he says, on fannish subjects, is fairly reasonable, though I can't lose my image of him as an incorrigible bright-eyed and brainless leaper-to-conclusions. Anyway, quite a lot of the things he says about the rules and principles of the NOVA Award carry weight, but his slights to last year's Award Committee (carried over here from a more determined onslaught last issue) irritate me deeply and make me wish I could be on this year's panel to lock horns with this ambitious

young stud. I must say now that I completely fail to agree with his implied approval of a 'No Award' vote. Even in a year of general mediocrity - like the first year of the Award when SPECULATION won - one fanzine is bound to stand out from the rest, and I believe in giving the award to something, anything (almost) for the sake of continuity, pour encourager les autres, and as a simple jog to the memory of the con-going non-fans that there are people who take this fandom business a bit seriously. And there're no self-contradictions in that statement; to prevent vicious cretins like Dave Rowe from misinterpreting me I'll state plainly that all fanzines which won the award whilst I was on the judging committee were eminently worthy winners, though not necessarily ones I personally approve of. On another point, despite Rowe's assertions to the contrary, the last panel of which I was a member did not recieve at any time during a long and tortuous argument, any indication that the rules would accept the award being given for a year's run rather than a single issue. Believe me, I was working hard to give the Nova to SHREW, which I see as a real fanzine, rather than to MAYA, which strikes me often as barely removed from Sunday Supplement slickness, and if I could've seen a way to give the Award to a run (making SHREW the winner) I would have done.

I trust that when Rowe serves on the committee this year all will be more clear cut, and he will not be party to a conclusion that gives people reason to call him 'despicable' or 'hypocritical' and thus engender in him a desire to smash his accusers squarely in the groin with a large club.

At least David, you do incite comment, which is the task of a good fanwriter/editor, and I only wish I could overcome apathy to reply to you at even more tedious length.

The rest of the fanzine; Mike Glycer's 'funny' article on fanzine pagination is contrived and silly, and at any rate redundant compared to THE DENUMERABLE FANZINE a Rob Johnson article on the same subject in an age-old Bristolian fanzine. Ben Indick writes a damned fine article on the part fantasy (in particular L. Frank Baum) has played in his life. Jodie Offutt writes like a Swinging Sixties refugee about various American convention-going fans, and makes them sound like the sort of ostentatious extroverts that always embarrass me at conventions. Dave Locke writes well but inconsequentially about his cat. Dave Langford, the British invasion, contributes an amusing and illuminating article about that most curious of British fannish institutions the PIERIA Writers' Circle, a gang of aspiring pros whose sole purpose in life often seems to be persuading Rob Holdstock to edit an original anthology of their otherwise unsaleable science fiction stories. Mae Strelkov writes the sort of article which is doubtless loved a great deal by other people than I

All these articles are interspaced by related comments from Dave Rowe, something he does well enough to make me feel glad I'd forgotten my intention to do the same thing in this fanzine. In one of these lies a remarkably vicious attack on John Hall (an old-time fan) who dared suggest that fandom is not the sweetness and light wonderland Rowe seems to believe it to be. As I'm inclined to agree with Mr Hall I must say that in executing his demolition of Mr Hall Rowe makes himself sound even more of a head-in-the-clouds daydreamer than ever. His notion,

(expressed in K 1) that all save incorrigible misanthropes will be compatible simply by sharing an interest in science fiction or fandom is rather short sighted; in my experience more points of similarity are needed before anything other than superficial acquaintanceship (with all its attendant reliance on snap-judgements of character and action - so prevalent in fandom) has even a chance to develop. A shared interest does not necessarily mean one has anything in common on anything but the most superficial level.

Anyway, a damned good and mature fanzine, one that I'll look forward to. You have no idea how much saying that hurts me.

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NOTA 13 from Terry Hughes, 866 N. Frederick,  
Arlington, VA 22205, USA

This is a real departure for me; never before have I reviewed an American fanzine, and truthfully I don't know whether I'm actually doing so now as NOTA is so good I wish it was British. And it has a British feel to it to. In fact it's the fannish fanzine par excellence, and it's easy to see how Terry and Peter Roberts have formed a mutual admiration society.

Quite apart from this being a good fanzine, Terry Hughes deserves a mention here for an almost unbelievable reason. What it is is that this man, this virtual saint amongst fen, has been faithfully sending me his fanzine, issue after issue from no. 1, for almost five years, and never once have I so much as acknowledged receipt of it, much less written a LoC, sent a contribution, even a fanzine in trade. This, in a world where the Skeltons, Rowes, and even Pickersgills give the Finger to non-responsive individuals at the least opportunity, is truly wonderful. Such faith the man has, what have I done to deserve it? Well, at least he's getting this fanzine airmail, and a bundle of other old fanzines of mine will reach him by boat one day, and I'm even working on a contrib.

The fanzine itself looks perfect, airy, open, consummately fannish in layout and illustrations in a way communicable only by itself. It's also short, only 10pp, but such is the quality of the material that it reads long. Hughes writes excellently, as his phone-call tale here testifies, and he generally extracts fine material and locs from his readers. This issue, though, has a weak inclusion, a contrived and unfunny 'humourous' essay on 'sleazy humour' by Paul di Filippo which doesn't succeed on any level. Eric Bentcliffe has a good piece on the 'tapesponding' and 'tape-drama' that flourished briefly in British fandom in the fifties, and the letter-column is excellent, containing much praise for the SUPERB James White evocation of long-gone Irish Fandom that appeared in the previous issue.

If any fanzine, anywhere, could ever assume the treasured mantle of I.F. and HYPHEN, I reckon Terry Hughes (perhaps in cooperation with Peter Roberts) will be behind it. Get this one.

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Greg Pickersgill

A L T E R N A T E T I T L E  
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consternation

by

SIMONE WALSH

This is the moment I can't put off any longer. I just have to sit and write my column for the fanzine that died several times before it was born! The fanzine that seemed like a false pregnancy to people like Kettle and Malcolm who had ceased to believe in its very conception. But somehow, suddenly, I feel an overwhelming desire surging through me (but that's another story) no, really, Greg has the ed-bug eating at him again and it's contagious. I feel right in the mood for creation.

It must be Spring inspiring me, or the forthcoming con. I must admit, the Mancon fills me with a sense of wonder - I wonder if it will be a success. Not in terms of programming or organisation, but can a suitable 'con-atmosphere' be generated in such a place as a university hall of residence?

There was a time when cons were always held in older hotels where rooms were rooms, not cupboards, and staircases were integral parts of the building, not just afterthoughts for use in case of the lifts breaking down. There was none of this magic-doormat business where the front entrance doors slide open allowing easy access providing your forward momentum wasn't greater than the timing of the trigger mechanism. No, the old comfy hotels always had a special atmosphere that sat snugly on a convention's shoulders. So what about these monsters cons have been housed in just lately, the De Vere, the Royal Angus? They were designed by computers for personnel units, not people, especially not fans, and more especially not fans attending conventions.

These formica and glass palaces were designed for easy maintenance and to get the government subsidies that were in vogue a few years ago. They were meant for your 'in-out' merchants (I mean business men. No, that doesn't sound right either, I mean men on a job... oh forget it!). Short-stay travellers, in fact. While the older hotels sometimes weren't even built as hotels, but were large houses converted, or a whole row strung together, as was the case of The Hawthornes, site of the 1967 Bristol con. That was such a rambling place there are probably still fans wandering around trying to find room-parties there! The old hotels may have had creaky floors and dirty patches but they also had dark corners, socialising crannies, and a fantastic con-atmosphere. You could just go in the front-door of such a place and con-waves would hit you. Now we seem to enter dazzling neon caverns with as much atmosphere as Euston Station.

Although the reception area in the De Vere (Seacon) is what I imagine the reception area in Heaven might be like the hotel didn't lend itself to the con at all. It wasn't all bad, though. It had one of the best and most inexpensive hotel restaurants of any con, and though

modern the bedrooms weren't the smallest ever; you could have swung quite a large cat.

In the De Vere all the areas that should have been light and airy were dark and vice versa. The corridors and stairs were claustrophobic, the lounge bar lacked any kind of intimacy. But that hotel was quite homey compared to the last Novacon hotel, the Royal Angus. I really can't think of any redeeming feature of this place at all. The rooms were tiny, and cold - particularly after the heating was shut off on the Sunday afternoon. The lounge was just a wide corridor leading to the restaurant, which no-one could really afford to eat in unless they were book-dealers or something. Their most barbaric act was the frequent closing of the only part of the place with any real character - the circular bar, which was also quite well stocked, forcing fans to fall back on the very makeshift affair they'd put up in the corridor-lounge which had a choice of about four different things. Unless of course you had the charm and persistence of Christine Edwards who managed to get a Pernod fetched from the closed circular bar after much fluttering of eyelashes.

And what can one say about a purpose-built hotel that has a huge pillar just off-center in it's hall? What architect could sit and design such a thing? It wasn't as if it was so huge an expanse of ceiling that the whole lot would have collapsed without it. Perhaps he went to tech. long ago before better ways of holding up ceilings were invented. Certainly as someone who sneaks into the back of the hall late it proved a most unwelcome landmark.

And the breakfast. I must throw that in, though out would be a more appropriate term. I'm sure they could be prosecuted under the Trade Descriptions Act because in my book 'Continental Breakfast' isn't cold toast and jam or nothing.

The Angus didn't have any stairs for socialising on, just a cold concrete afterthought on the side of the building put there just to stop you burning; very kind of them, but it does tend to cut the hotel up into a stack of horizontal strips which obstruct the free flow of people from room-party to room-party and bar. The De Vere also had this problem; the bar was separate from the hall with no area of blending between the two. In fact wherever you were in the hotel there was little indication of anything beyond the four walls that immediately surrounded you. The bedroom corridors were neatly cut off from the stairways by fire-doors, and landing space was very mean. In the old hotels we often had vast vistas from stairs, or large landings in convenient places, like near a bar. Good places for socialising, the most perfect example recently being the Royal Station Hotel (Tynecon).

So back to the Mancon. It is being held in what I am told is a modern complex of university buildings. I expect it will have all the disadvantages of a modern hotel (thought maybe not a pillar in the middle of the hall) and maybe more if the general run of comments from ex-students on university facilities are to be believed.

Over the con-going years I've become accustomed to a variety of standards of comfort. Time was when I couldn't afford the little extras like a private bathroom, but since the advent of larger conventions



requiring larger hotels there were times when one had to have a room with bathroom attached, no question. Well, I have become so accustomed to the private bathroom now that I would elect to pay for one now if there were ever a choice again. How I ever survived the second and third days at cons without a first thing in the morning bath or shower I don't know. Most con-attendees know that incredibly awful feeling you have when you wake up in the cold light of dawn wondering why you don't sleep until lunchtime considering you've only been in bed three and a half hours. The knowledge that if you get up right away you'll at least be able to have breakfast and may feel better after that is all that keeps you awake. Well, the only thing nowadays that makes my getting down to breakfast possible is immersing myself in water. I also consider the possibility that if I drink too much where shall I nurse my woes. The private bathroom is so civilized a place for the uncivilized person who has allowed themselves to get drunk to sit, lie, or die.

What is offered at Mancon? Apparently not even a washbasin in the room, not so much as a bucket, and only a wickerwork waste-basket I shouldn't wonder. I appreciate that the ratio of bedrooms to each shared bathroom is low, but the remotest possibility that I shall be thwarted as I race to the toilet to be sick fills me with panic and horror. And to have to get dressed to go to the bathroom for my dawn bath, with the possibility there may already be someone in there who's equally as inconsiderate as I am and takes ages to do anything of an ablutor nature is something I don't want to face.

Mancon also offers inclusive tarriff, which means if I chose to stay on the campus I'd feel obliged to eat in, presumably at specified times from a comparatively limited menu. For me part of the fun of a con is the wandering around an alien town in search of somewhere cheap and good to eat. Communal restaurant-going has a special magic a cons. I love the agonising hang-about that occurs whenever the pre-feeding round-up starts, and the disappearing act that people take turns to perform usually prefaced by a shout of "Don't go without me, shan't be a minute!"

This year I and many others have taken an unprecedented step, alien to a true fan, of electing to stay at a hotel other than the actual con-site. A hotel that will be an unwelcome walk from the con proper. In my case the reason for this strange behaviour is based on a feeling that some of the main things that make my cons pleasant will be missing from Owen Park. It isn't because of a deep mistrust of the Mancon committee, I see no reason why they can't put on as good a con as anyone else. I'm also aware that a lot of fans will welcome a campus-con, especially those who put keeping down the cost high on their list of priorities. Further I feel that it is time a campus was actually tried, as has been suggested for many years, to demonstrate once and for all whether it's a worthwhile proposition, or whether a good old-fashioned hotel, comfortable and rambling, with sweeping stairs, is a better choice after all.

I only hope that the advantages of retreating to comfort are not outweighed by being removed from the vortex of cosmic happenings!

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If I'd realised before I set out on this fanzine project just what it entailed I don't think I would have bothered. Is it really worth all the pain and anguish, the tears of frustration, the ulcerating fury?

Surprising as it may seem to some I always did well at English in school, and effortlessly gained O-level in Lit and Lang. I therefore assumed that I was perhaps a more than adequate writer, and that my first serious attempt to write something good and considered for a fanzine would be a piece of cake. My troubles began when I wrote the first draft of my column, which I thought was the last draft. The editor, on reading it, announced it was promising and after two or three rewrites may even be fairly good. My God! With that sort of enthusiasm I may as well chuck it in now, I thought.

"What do you mean 'rewrites'? That's it, finished!" I announced wounded. Somehow I was conned into a rewrite - the editor was very helpful and suggested where I should expand, contract etc.

The second draft was done grudgingly, amidst much muttering and dark looks. Some it seemed better, some worse. When the editor announced 'one more time' I really lost my cool.

"You can stuff your bloody fanzine," was the gist of my argument. "You're not having any of my work!"

When the third draft was completed the editor read and approved it, but at the same time told me I wasn't as good a writer as Pat Charnock (who the editor had just asked to rewrite her submission to the fanzine) and in any case her rejected piece was better than my third draft.

Once more I told the editor how bloody pathetic and stupid it all was - I ran out of expletives describing fanzines, editors, and Gregory Pickersgill in particular.

Later I looked over his shoulder as he was stencilling my column. "I don't recognise that sentence. I didn't say that!" I said.

"I know," said the editor. "I've just made it a bit clearer. You didn't put that point across too well."

"I didn't even want to make that bloody point!" I blazed, "You're changing it all!" By now I was quite hysterical. "What's the point of me writing anything at all if you're going to change it?"

The editor replied by ripping the stencil from the typewriter, crushing it into a ball, and hurling it across the room.

It took me three boring hours to put my article onto stencil. Every letter was an effort. At work I have an electric machine; I'm just not used to cramped little manual semi-portables with keyboards the size of a sixpence. I couldn't hit the 'a' hard enough and had to go back over hundreds of them.

Days later I re-read my stencils and decided it wasn't good enough after all. I rewrote a lot of it, and gave it to the editor to type (time was running out!). I looked over his shoulder as he was typing it. It still didn't look too good, and I'm sure I didn't recognise some of it, but.....I'll try harder next time, honest.

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Simone Walsh

ENDLESS BOOGIE  
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news, mistakes, and the  
world. Info too!

Intelligent readers will have noticed that it wasn't MOTA 13 I reviewed in BURNING HELL, but MOTA 14. Good grief.....Surprising news of the success of the BoakCon reach this incredulous typist. I wouldn't have believed a bunch of diverse fans trapped together in a small hotel in Blackpool without the necessary distraction of a programme could have had a good time. I used to be a staunch supporter of a small fannish con (but with a programme of films and semi-organised discussion) some years back, though as I've come to expect no-one wanted to know about the idea at the time. I declined the opportunity to go to the Boakcon because I didn't really believe that merely having a clutch of fans together is per se a recipe for a good time. Apart from that there weren't many people I wanted to meet going there (at a larger con - or even a slightly organised one perhaps - more people would turn up with a greater likelihood of meeting a long-time-no-sec friend) and there's the money problem too. I can't really afford more than two cons a year, which is why I won't be likely to attend the Gannetfandom Silicon, which sounds not too bad at all. Actually, I don't reckon the August Bank Holiday weekend is a good time for a con at all, as most people will have that already earmarked for other things..... titles and section headings this issue are courtesy of, in order of appearance, Chester Burnett, Dave Mason, Robert Johnson, 'Anon', 'Andn', James Brown, David Bowie, John Lee Hooker, Mickey Dolenz, and John Lee Hooker again. The title of this fanzine comes to you down the years from that giant of a man whom popular music owes so much to, the great Robert Johnson.....I was recently not asked to be part of the 1979 Worldcon bid. Peter Weston, a man who continually tells me to my face what a great feller I am, said he was thinking of asking me or Leroy Kettle (a famous fanzine publisher with whom my name is inextricably linked in the mind of Peter Weston) to join the committee, and that he (Weston) had already decided Kettle was the choice as I was 'too unreliable'. If this means I like getting my own way at least 75% of the time he is correct, and all I can say is I hope Mr Kettle, should he be asked, brings as much to the Worldcon bid as he did to the Seacon. 'Yes, I said Seacon.....speaking of Leroy Kettle, Britain's number-one funny fan, the recent demise of S.F. MONTHLY easily makes him the most-sold unpublished author in the Western Hemisphere. Only fifteen years ago he sold several stories to VISION OF TOMORROW to see it founder before he was published, now the same thing happened with S.F.M. At least they can't ask for the money back.....it's about this time I feverishly leaf through stencil making sure I've given everyone a namecheck one way or another; you never get any response out of these Huge Name Fans without a namecheck.....I'd even give a namecheck to Alan and Elke Stewart if I could think of the sort of thing they'd like to read, but I suppose the implication they're Huge Name Fans will gratify them in itself. Good grief again.....Okay, until next issue, which will be right after the Mancon, and should contain a superb Malcolm Edwards con-report (providing I can stay on the right side of him), a well-rewritten piece by Pat Charnock, Holdstock on A Fool, interminable fanzine reviews, Simone on male-chauvinist turds like Peter Weston, and Graham Charnock on the death of the novel, goodbye.

