

STOP
BREAKING

DOWN



3

HARRY BELL '76

Number 3

June 1976

S T O P B R E A K I N G D O W N
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edited and produced by

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with

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CONTENTS

WE'VE GOTTA GET OUT OF THIS PLACE	Malcolm Edwards
MOANING AT MIDNIGHT	Greg Pickersgill
BURNING HELL	Greg Pickersgill
ALTERNATE TITLE	Simone Walsh
ALL RIGHT NOW	The Audience
ENDLESS BOOGIE	The Band

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STOP BREAKING DOWN 4 ; material for this issue should be in hand by

20th July 1976

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The cover this issue is an original illustration by Harry Bell.

WE ! VE . GOT TA . GET . OUT . OF . THIS . PLACE .

a convention report

completely surrounded by mongs

with

MALCOLM EDWARDS

THURSDAY AFTERNOON

Driving up the motorway with Roy Kettle and Chris Atkinson. Cruising along doing a comfortable 50 mph in the inside lane. Suddenly Christine indicates a familiar yellow Simca racing past in a blurr of speed, keeping a safe 18 inches from the car in front of it. From the front passenger window Rob Holdstock waves maniacally. In the back we can just make out Greg and Simone.

Later we stop at a service station for some imitation tea. Just as we are about to leave in walks Chris Priest, Pauline Jones, and both Charnox.

Proof enough if such were needed; we really must be on our way to a convention, we thought. And we were right. Well, nearly.

THURSDAY EVENING

A lot of paranoia about. We arrived later than originally intended, and checked into the hotel close to Owens Park in which most of Ratfandom and many others were staying (either a betrayal of the con spirit or a minor gesture towards gurranteed comfort, depending on the degree to which your fannish idealism outweighs your good sense), and all assembled in the bar; Charnox, Edwardses, Holdstocks, Greg and Simone, Roy and Chris. Greg had copies of certain pages of the latest issue of CYNIC, which no-one else had yet recieved. These were passed around with much muttering, particularly the section realating to the despicable 'award' which Boak had sent Pat Charnock after the Blackpool 'faan' convention. Nobody wanted any aggrevation to spoil the weekend, but we were all keen to know exactly what had been said.

On the brighter side Charnox handed out copies of the Programme Book they had prepared for the Rats v. Gannets football match. An authentically-Charnockian piece of idiocy, it purported to give us the incentive of playing for the 'Vector MacGroon Memorial Trophy'. Grah swears blind that Vector MacGroon is an actual author's name from the Scion Books stable that gave the world Volstead Gridban and Vargo Statten; I remain unconvinced, even in the face of his expression of blank sincerity (not so very different from blank insincerity, after all).

Eventually we set off for Owens Park, stopping off at an Indian Restaurant en route. Inevitably the only other customers were fans. One group consisted of concon members Presdorf, John Mottershead, and Kevin Hall. They were eating prior to setting off in a hired car to drive through the night to London in order to collect the Silverbergs from Heathrow airport early next morning. If this seemed a strange way of arranging things we kept our thoughts to ourselves.

More to the immediate point, the three Mancon concon members, like all other concon members we saw that evening, were wearing 'Greg Pickersgill Fan Club' badges, based on a childish~~ly~~ insulting cartoon that appeared in MALFUNCTION a couple of years ago. Greg became, understandably, more than a little pissed off at this, especially since some of the wearers were people he had had no contact of any kind with before. Later in the evening he encountered Roy Sharpe in the toilet and demanded that fellow introduce himself to him since he was wearing a badge with his (Greg's) name on it. Sharpe looked baffled (an expression he wore throughout the convention, it turned out) until he realised who Greg was and slunk away. The badges did not reappear the next day.

It does make you wonder, though, about the level of intelligence of a convention committee who adopt something like that as a semi-official emblem...

During the Indian meal Graham Charnock regaled Christine and I with his secret cat fantasies. No, not that kind of fantasy. In his fantasy the Charnox' cat Tiga in no mere moggy but a Notting Hill greengrocer with a wife and two kids who holidays on the Costa Brava and drinks Watneys Red. Graham Charnock was once Associate Editor of NEW WORLDS.

We eventually reached Owens Park and first impressions were not favourable. Entering the main con area we saw registration set up on the right; to the immediate left was the staircase leading to the con hall. Beyond the staircase the area to the right opened out into the lounge. There were a lot of people milling around. I felt immediately, irrationally edgy; I had always been aware that a campus con would seem spartan and unwelcoming, but it was still unsettling to be confronted with the actuality.

We registered, then found a corner of the lounge to peruse the convention literature. A better produced Programme Book that one might have expected from the Progress Reports, but still sparse compared to those of the past three years. And the less said about the 'Chairmans Address' the better. No, on second thoughts I take that back. Look, I've nothing against Peter Presford; all my contact with him suggests he is a perfectly aimiable, pleasant fan. But he can't write. That's been said before often enough, but just identifying the malady goes nowhere towards curing it. Punctuation, in particular, seems a complete mystery to him. Nothing wrong in that, of course, but surely one of the other concon people could have taken it upon him/herself to make coherent sense out of Pete's Address before committing it to print. After all, without wishing to get too pretentious about it, the Eastercon Programme Book is

the nearest thing British Fandom has to a collective advertisement for itself. It needn't be serious, but it shouldn't be embarrassing. In Pete's case he makes matters worse (in my view) by his consistent, unrelenting use of the fannish device which makes me squirm more than any other - the silent 'h' as in 'ghod', 'bheer', or (Pete's unique speciality) 'fhan'. If I wasn't a pacifist I'd say that anyone promoting such a vile neologism deserved a fhist in the fhace.

Thursday evening the bar, as usual, closed comparatively early. By the time we had said hello to familiar faces and adopted Joseph Nicholas (who we enlisted into the Ratfan Dynamo football team since he is young and looks deceptively athletic) closing time had been called. We realised that all was not normally what one expects when the barmaid first of all took away Pat Charnock's glass before she had finished her drink, and then turned off the lights in the part of the lounge we were sitting in. Most of us had been ready for an early night, but after this unsubtle hint that our presence was less than welcome we sat tight for another hour and a half. The disadvantage was that we had to listen to some disgustingly incompetent guitar-playing and singing from an adjacent table. People ought to be searched for musical instruments before entering conventions, and have them confiscated for the duration.

Finally we sickened of it all and went back to the hotel. Bed at 1.30. An average start.

FRIDAY MORNING

Quiet stroll up to Owens Park and assembly in the bar, where we waited for something to happen. Nothing much did. Waiting for things to happen was one of the major ways in which we occupied our time.

Peter Roberts, the Fan Guest of Honour, came over and sat with us. As he approached we tried to give proper respect for his eminence with a round of applause, which we repeated (when we remembered) throughout the weekend. It turned out that this was virtually the only recognition Peter received for occupying the niche of Fan Guest of Honour from anyone, including the concom, who seemed to require nothing of him other than his existence. On this occasion he responded with one of his more arcane anecdotes, concerning Michelangelo's socks. Did you know that Michelangelo had a pair of dogskin socks which he wore all the time for thirteen years? And that they eventually they had to be surgically removed because his own skin had grown into the dogskin? Truly, all knowledge is in fanzines.

At lunchtime the usual amorphous mass assembled to go restaurant hunting. Someday I'll take a stopwatch to a con and work out exactly how much time is lost waiting to go and eat. Someone always goes missing from the group by the time you can get outside; by the time they've been fetched someone else has gone into the toilet, someone else has been trapped in a corner by Brian Hampton, and the rest have taken advantage of the stalling to start arguing about which direction to go in. On this occasion Graham Charnock and I tired of the prevarication and strode off in the opposite direction from the one in which we knew there would be plenty of restaurants. Eventually

the other began to straggle after us, falling steadily behind as they stopped every hundred yards for a conference. Our resolve began to weaken after we'd walked for five minutes with no sign of any shops, let alone restaurants; we considered trying to cross the road and sneak back past the oncoming group (who would undoubtedly blame us if we failed to find something). But we persevered and eventually found a very reasonable greasy caff. When we went in we found several of our group already there; as soon as they'd realised they'd have to walk more than two hundred yards they'd dashed back to Owens Park and jumped in a car.

On the way back we had a fine view of the forbidding bulk of Owens Prk towering above the surrounding buildings. It looked remarkably like a modern prison - "The first maximum-security convention hotel", said Greg.

Back at the con events were in disarray. Owing to the concom's failure to inform people of when they were scheduled to appear (presumably the fault of programme-organiser Chuck Partington) the participants in the con's first 'live' event (a fannish panel) were not to be found. It was postponed. Great start. Something else was rearranged (I suppose) in its place, but I didn't really notice what it was as I was preoccupied listening to Peter Weston telling Graham Charnock all about masturbation. "You can do wonderful things with a vacuum cleaner," said the Chairman of the British Worldcon Bid.

Later on Peter introduced me to Robert Silverberg, who had arrived around lunchtime looking tired and bemused. I spoke to him for a few minutes, finding him pleasant and entirely without affectation, but apparently unshakeable in his determination never to write again. I also met Michael Coney, with whom I'd corresponded in VECTOR days; he too was aimiable and likeable. Who could fail to feel sorry for them, having come all the way from the West Coast of America to Owens Park? Silverberg, though his expression was often one of sad resignation, conducted himself admirably throughout the con. I wished I had had more opportunity to talk to him.

Soon it was time for the Football Match, which we had arranged as a rival attraction to the Delta Films. Bob Shaw had been persuaded to act as referee, despite protestations that he knew nothing of the rules of football. "Doesn't matter," we assured him, "neither do we". We made it clear that the main rule was that if any Gannet got within shooting distance of the Ratfan goal he was offside. Bob nodded thoughtfully and went for another pint.

As we headed for the nearby park it became apparent that what had been planned as a minor time-passer mainly for the enjoyment of the actual players had - in the absence of anything else - turned into the major fannish event of the day. Virtually all the fannish fans seemed to come along to watch. The possibility of Ratfan humiliation loomed larger than ever (we were worried by the immense size and weight advantage the Gannets had over us). A pitch of reasonable size for unfit people (about 50 yards) was marked out and the teams posed for pre-match photos. There were eight each side; Pickersgill, Kettle, Maule, Roberts, Edwards, Nicholas, Holdstock and Charnock for Ratfan Dynamo, and Rob Jackson, Ian Williams, Ritchie Smith, Kev Williams, Harry Bell,

Alan Isaacson, Brian Rouse, and Dave Cockfield for the Gannet Flyers.

Well, it was a walkover. On this small pitch the nippy Dynamo ran rings around the hulking, brutish Gannets and in no time had a 4 - 0 lead, with goals by Edwards (2), Kettle, and Charnock. The ball had hardly entered the Ratfan half and catlike goalkeeper Holdstock had not even touched it. Peter Roberts flew down the left wing, his purple knee-length boots twinkling around baffled Northern defenders; Roy Kettle astonished everyone with his ball control, and the few Gannet excursions upfield were quickly stopped by rhinoceros-like charges by Pickersgill in the centre of our defence.

What could stop us? The police could. Suddenly we were called to a halt by a stern officer. "You students are all the same," he said, "You know you're not allowed to play here but every week we have to come and throw you off. Get off." Eventually we convinced him we were innocent conventioneers, whereupon he became quite friendly and directed us to another part of the park where we could play. We wandered over to find a full-size pitch. We decided to use the whole pitch, and the Ratfan Dynamo team generously and over-confidently agreed to start again from no-score. Those were two big mistakes.

On the full pitch stamina cancelled out agility. Most of the players on either side were incapable of running from one end of the pitch to the other, so attacks tended to peter out as exhausted forwards gave the ball away near goal. The defences dominated, with only Kev Williams for the Flyers and Kettle for the Dynamo posing real threats, though once again most of the play took place in the Gannets' half. On one foolish occasion I was helping out in defence and went for a loose ball which one of the Gannets was homing on to. I saw, out of the corner of my eye, that Greg was also going to the ball, but I reckoned I was a good half-stride ahead of him so I kept going and cleared upfield. The next thing I knew there was an impact like being struck by an express train and I was flying through the air in one direction, my glasses in the other. When I recovered sufficiently to get up, find my glasses, and straighten the frames, I saw Greg. "Why didn't you get out of the way?" he demanded. Much the same thing happened to Alan Isaacson later when he decided to go through Greg's oncoming defensive tackle rather than around it. He didn't get up for two minutes.

Final score was a two-all draw, a fair result for a big pitch (though it was really a 6 - 2 win for the Dynamo, of course). We walked back with Bryn Fortey and Mike Collins. "You were pathetic," said Bryn. "Mike and I could have beaten the lot of you, no trouble." We might take him up on that, except that I have a suspicion he could be right. The game was a great success, though, and facilities willing could become a convention regular.

As usual we ended up in the bar, where the table football machine was a main attraction. Roy and I played Greg and Peter Roberts, who was still recovering from being introduced to Walt Willis, who was attending his first con for many years. "Peter who?" said the legendary Irish BNF. Peter was playing forward for his team and also feeding in the balls. Roy and I soon took a three-goal lead. Peter then fed in the next ball with infinite care, squeezing it out to the feet of his forward line. A twirl of the handle and the ball shot straight into our

goal like a rocket. "That was all right, wasn't it?" said Peter. Assured it was perfectly legal a smile of immense cunning spread slowly across his face. He crouched intently over the table and delicately fed the ball in again. Again it slipped right to the feet of his forwards. He spun the handle...and watched in horror as the ball shot past Greg's unprepared defence into his own goal. He had spun the handle the wrong way. With a groan he sank to the ground as Greg raised his eyes despairingly to heaven.

Not long after that Rob Holdstock spotted Bryn Fortey apparently sitting by himself. He bounded over. "Where's Lisa?" he asked. "Not in bed with that 70-year-old cripple?" Before Bryn could answer Harry Turner leaned forward from the seat next to him, where Bryn's bulk had shielded him from Rob's view, and looked enquiringly up at Holdstock.

The evening proceeded. I was introduced to the shambling figure of D. West, of whom it will be said. Peter Weston leaped to his feet. "Things are getting desperate," he said, "I must find Anne Webb".

Ian Maule volunteered to have a room party, and Christine and I went part way with him until we discovered that most of the people he'd invited were from the Kitten group. Brian Hampton was with us, and Christine harangued him for about five minutes about what dull people fans like the Kitten group were - dull, balding, and overweight. Eventually Brian went away. Can't think why. We returned to the bar.

There we clustered around the electronic tennis machine. Seeing me easily defeated by Simone Walsh Rog Peyton took his chance and challenged me. He fed in his 10p and the machine delivered eleven consecutive serves along the top edge of the screen just out of reach of his bat. Determined not to be deprived of an easy win Rog switched sides and challenged an unwary passer-by. He confidently slipped in another 10p...and the machine delivered eleven consecutive serves the other way along the top edge of the screen out of range of his bat. Rog swore and attacked the machine, maiming it and 'accidentally' making it deposit a shower of 10p pieces into his outstretched hands.

Rob Holdstock was overheard in conversation; "I put it in the wrong place and it went all over the floor. Next time I'll take a running jump at it..."

The night began to peter out. I went with Greg, Simone, and Rog to an alleged room party which turned out to be just Alan Isaacson, Brian Rouse, and one or two other Gannets. We stayed for a while, chatting amiably. I discovered I was bleeding from a wound on the back of my hand, which I showed to Simone, seeking womanly sympathy and wondering what might have caused it. She suggested it might have been a vampire. Observing that there was only one puncture I said "Oh yes, a vampire with a wooden tooth." Strangely, this caused Simone to collapse in hysterical laughter, and she later went around repeating it to anyone she could find. Funny thing, humour.

Still puzzled by the origin of the wound I turned to Rog Peyton. "It wasn't you was it?" I demanded. "I don't owe you money, do I?" Rog looked deeply hurt. "You lot all seem to think I'm only interested

in money," he said, nervously shifting a roll of \$5 notes from one pocket to another.

Then the four of us strolled back to our hotel, where we shared a civilized pot of tea in the lounge, reminding each other constantly that university campuses didn't provide that sort of essential late night service. Then it was 5am and time for bed. I quite enjoyed Friday. The convention proper didn't seem to have started, but I expected things would get together on Saturday. The football match had been a great success. The bar/lounge area at Owens Park had proven to be hardly conducive to having a good time, but that might be less important when room parties got going Saturday night. Overall feeling; cautiously optimistic.

SATURDAY MORNING

One thing I should mention about Friday is that I drank a great deal - at one stage a half-pint of whiskey and dry ginger as though it were lager - without really getting drunk. At least, not in the common way. There are two main forms of drunkenness; the usual loss-of-motor-function followed by hangover type, and the less common but more disturbing state in which you are not really conscious of being drunk (so that you swear that you aren't) but your perception of reality is disturbingly altered. This state should be familiar to habitual drinkers of Carlsberg Special. Friday night this state overtook me, and as I went to bed late and got up about four hours later it continued through most of Saturday, even though I drank little that day. I was convinced I was completely sober, but all day people kept telling me how oddly I was behaving. In retrospect they may well have been right. Bloody hell.

The first manifestation of oddness came at breakfast. Christine and I were up at 9-30, and found a number of people in the restaurant getting irritated by the inevitable incompetent foreign waiter imported for the holiday weekend. We saw what they meant when we asked for tea and the waiter picked up Chris Atkinson's teapot and asked her if she had finished with it. Later he made Harry Harrison wait for 20 minutes, then tried to refuse him breakfast because it was too late. Bloody hell.

What should have been concerning me, though, was that I was supposed to be appearing on the 'Mastermind' quiz scheduled to start at 10.00. Now, I like quizzes; I enjoy appearing on them. Even the fact I had foolishly chosen 'The Works of Robert Silverberg' as my special subject didn't bother me, despite the high embarrassment-potential. Yet that Saturday morning I felt so unconcerned about the whole thing I ignored peoples' suggestions that I get a move on over to Owens Park. I could say, of course, that 10.00 is far too early to put such an item on; 10.30 should be absolutely the earliest time to expect people to perform at a convention. Still, I could and should have gone, and I didn't. The only explanation I can find is the peculiar reality-state I was in. Whatever the reason I owe an apology to the Mancon committee. Bloody hell.

Even so I might have got there in time but for Kettle. After breakfast he persuaded Greg and I to wait for him whilst he fetched something from his room. We waited..and waited...and waited.... Event-

ually he reappeared and we left the hotel. At that moment Andrew Stephenson drove out of the car-park, stopped, and shouted that he had room for one passenger. Roy immediately ran over and jumped in the car leaving us to curse and mutter as we trudged to Owens Park. I went straight up to the hall and discovered they had persuaded Robert Silverberg to take my place, and he was just starting off answering questions on himself. Bloody fool got one wrong. As I watched the tail end of the quiz I was quite glad I'd missed it, because the whole basis of a 'Mastermind'-type quiz - the fast flow of questions - was completely undermined by the funereal slowness of question-master Kevin Hall. Astonishingly my arch-rival Pete Weston came nowhere, the first result being a draw between Mike Meara and Ian Williams. A play-off showed their ignorance to be indivisible, but eventually Williams emerged as the winner. Bloody hell.

Greg, Roy and I then toured the book room, drooling over items we couldn't afford, mostly scorning those we could. Greg and Roy discovered a large box of cheap magazines brought by Dave Gibson of Fantasy Centre. I'm not a great magazine collector (at least not of the sixties magazines these mostly were) but was happy to pick up from Greg's discards a copy of the issue of FANTASY BOOK with 'Scanners Live In Vain'. Roy saw it and cursed Greg for not pointing it out to him. "Thought you'd got a copy," said Greg casually, obviously amazed that anyone should be without such a common item. Bloody hell.

At lunchtime we discovered the Canadian Charcoal Pit. A cheap and astonishingly efficient takeaway place, it offered really excellent hamburgers, hotdogs, and kebabs. It was almost opposite Owens Prk, so that your food was still hot by the time you'd found somewhere to eat it. It seemed strange taking packages of food into the convention bar to eat; hotels, of course, usually insist that any food you eat on the premises should be bought from them. By eating at the Pit it could actually have been cheaper to stay at an outside hotel and eat takeaway meals rather than have full board in Owens Park, where, according to various reports, the food ranged from merely adequate to execrable. Bloody hall.

I went to the SF Book Review Panel, which had Don Malcolm, Ian Watson, and Peter Nicholls discussing various books published in the last year. This is a panel format which ought to work well, since it is inherently structured; but though it was successful at Tynecon it didn't go so well at Seacon, or at Mancon. Everyone spoke too long on their chosen books, so there was no discussion as such. And the choice of books was a little eccentric, notably Don Malcolm talking about a H.G. Wells book. He droned on interminably, telling to plot of The Space Machine in detail. Ian Watson said a few words about the book and was horribly patronising as usual. Later, pontificating on about Catchworld Watson mentioned that it included intelligent beings who were actually 'artificially-enhanced cretins'. This drew a chuckle from some sections of the audience (Kettle and me anyway), and a little smile from Peter Nicholls, particularly since Watson had just given a singularly cretinous commentary on The Forever War.. Bloody hell.

Afterwards Rob Jackson came up to me in the bar. The previous evening he'd given Walt Willis copies of MAYA. When he saw

the Great Man again on Saturday Willis' first comment was "That fellow Edwards writes excellent fanzine reviews". That comment made my day, as well as making my company quite unbearable for several hours afterwards, especially to other well-known fanzine reviewers. Take that Linwood. Bloody hell.

An actual fannish item had been arranged in a distant corner of the campus, which we searched for and eventually found quite near the Fandom Room, which was almost open. We had all hoped that the egregious Boak, we had by then arrived at the convention; would come along to give us all the benefit of his wisdom and integrity, but no, though he was spotted in the corridor outside it seemed his enthusiasm for fannish items at conventions didn't extend to actually attending them. The discussion itself was rather desultory; in the absence of an 'official' chairman Fan Guest of Honour Peter Roberts took proceedings into his somewhat limp grasp and tried to elicit opinions and comment on several different topics. He'd pretty much exhausted himself to no avail when Peter Presford came to actually take charge of the proceedings. Nothing much was said or opined, though TAFF-winner Roy Tackett's remarks confirmed my suspicions that fannish fanzines, currently alive and well over here, are an endangered species in the USA. Hence, presumably, the increasing interest of the Glicksohns and Hugheses in British fandom. Bloody hell.

Later in the evening Rob Jackson introduced me to Willis, and the three of us had a pleasant few minutes' talk, though without ever really piercing the barrier of mutual unfamiliarity between the fandom he knows and the one we know. I wondered if he would ever get involved again, though his attending the con at all seemed to indicate he would abandon complete withdrawal. Since the con, of course, it has been revealed that Willis has an article being published in the next MAYA, and has been requesting current fanzines. Bloody hell.

We adjourned from the bar for Bob Shaw's talk. The Shaw talk is now well on the way to being an Eastercon tradition, and a good thing too. The hall was packed, the audience highly receptive, and though I don't think it was one of his best performances as regards content, the delivery was impeccable and it went down a storm. It was exactly the injection of life the convention needed at that point, because by then the discomfort and disorganisation were beginning to become depressing; slowly it was becoming apparent to all the people milling around waiting for something to happen that the milling around was the happening. Bloody hell.

Sometime around here Pat Charnock decided to go over for a little chat with Graham Boak about the 'Fan Editors Award'. She came back even more furious than she went. Boak had apparently stonewalled everything and wasn't opening up in any way. "Like talking to a stone of haddock," Ms Charnock described the encounter. For lack of anything better to do a small gang of Ratfans decided a mass attack might be more effective, but when they reached the objective they were brusquely brushed aside by Boak who was already deep in argument with Peter Presford. Peter was not at all happy with what Boak had written about him as regards the Boakon in Blackpool. In fact, according to Presford, reports of him sitting in a wastebasket in his hotel room and then slinking off in the grey light of

dawn leaving behind only the filled basket, a pair of equally soiled underpants, money for his hotel bill, and a bad smell are all more than a little untrue. Certainly, if Boak's report was less than 100% accurate I can understand the reason for Peter's annoyance. Bloody hell.

We stayed in the vicinity for a while, overhearing snatches of irate argument. If we strayed too close Meg Boak started to give us fearful glances, apparently terrified that someone might come and beat up hubby. There was obviously little point in starting a conversation with Boak in the wake of this argument, so instead we sent little Andy Ellsmore over to talk with him instead. Andy - who used to work at Compendium Books until he was sacked - is quite a decent little bloke, as bi-sexual dope-fiends go, anyway. But close contact with Graham Boak did not have a good effect on him. When he abruptly broke off his conversation with Boak we all went outside to cross over to the main tower block to find a party; on the way he suddenly drained his glass and then hurled it high into the air, to shatter on the ground some distance away. "It was either that or him," he snarled dramatically (probably through gritted teeth if the truth be known). Bloody hell.

There were room parties on Saturday night, although they weren't bedroom parties. Each floor of the tower block (where most people had rooms) had a sort of common-room next to the lifts and stairs, and the parties were held in these. There were two going, one on the Gannet-occupied 8th floor, and another very crowded one further up. I was at both, mostly upstairs to begin with. Not a lot happened though. Bloody hell.

Andy Ellsmore was well into his disgusting little poof act, deeply enjoying being fondled and fondling Charles Partington. Peter Nicholls and Colin Lester, the two Big Men of the S.F. Foundation, were heavily intent on lechery, with typical lack of success in Lester's case. Graham Charnock hectored Todd Harrison with heavy sarcasm about what it must be like to be a famous author's son, without ever realising it was more than a coincidence of names and nationalities and that he actually was Harry's son. People kept telling me how terrible I looked. As time went by the other Rats got bored and drifted off to bed. I was determined to stay and not miss anything, so I hung on, ignoring the singing in the corner and the outbreak of paper-dart throwing. Eventually a group of Swedish fans stood up and began singing their national anthem. Too much. I went downstairs and found Bryn Fortey and Mike Collins, to whom an abandoned common-room was home for that weekend. Unable to afford rooms they attempted to get through the weekend without sleeping, at best snatching a few hours nap in a chair. It would be ludicrous if they didn't end up on Monday morning looking more alert than anyone else. They took turns telling me how terrible I looked. At about 5.00 I took the hint and lurched my lonely way back to the hotel and bed. Just as I was about to get into bed Christine pointed out that every sentence I had spoken all day had included the phrase 'bloody hell'. I denied it with all the vehemence I could muster. "It's not true," I said, "Bloody hell...."

SUNDAY MORNING

I was incapable of even thinking about getting up for breakfast, and didn't manage to get to Owens Park until after midday. I felt tired, but normal. Being late I missed my second chance of a big public appearance, during the convention bidding session. Firstly, the Leicester bid for '77 was approved. This, in the hands of the Birmingham Group, virtually guarantees a well-run, comfortable con for next year. After that Peter Weston called the newly-augmented Worldcon committee up to the platform for the usual publicity routine. I was the one who wasn't there. At one point Peter made a half-joking reference to the fact that we shouldn't publicise the Worldcon too much, so that it would get huge and out of hand as some recent US Worldcons have done, with far more attendees than could be coped with or desired. This apparently sensible point proved an affront to the fannish integrity of Graham Boak, who was later at pains to point out to Peter how unworthy his motives were. Another fan cast into the outer darkness.

I contrived to miss Sam Moskowitz' talk on 'Misplaced Landmarks in Science Fiction', but Roy said he saw a few minutes of it and found Moskowitz droning on deafeningly (if you can imagine such a thing) about the cover of AMAZING STORIES which showed the Woolworth Building being towed into space by a bunch of aliens. Some misplaced landmark!

I actually saw most of the authors' panel chaired by Robert Silverberg, with Mike Coney, Harry Harrison, Chris Priest, James White, and Brian Aldiss. It was interesting to watch Silverberg actually run the panel, continually drawing the threads of discussion together (quite unlike the traditional British convention panel which just rambles from noplac to nowhere). All went well until it was thrown open to questions from the floor. The first hand up was Gerry Webb's. He got up and proceeded to start making a speech. That in itself wouldn't have been so bad if it hadn't been bumbling, incoherent, and incomprehensible. Poor Gerry is a nice fellow, but a public speaker he isn't, and is cursed with the inability to know when to stop. He lectures people until their eyes glaze and they fall over. He even reduced Harlan Ellison to quivering hysteria on one occasion. Silverberg allowed him to meander for a few minutes, then started to prod him gently to come to the point. Gerry continued inexorably; every few sentences he would say "Let me give you an example," and his line of argument (if there was one) descended surrealistically through level upon level of example, none of which ever resolved themselves. Silverberg's promptings became mildly sarcastic, then openly mocking, and eventually he had to put Gerry down very heavily. Even at the end Gerry had not got around to formulating a question.

The fanzine auction was due to follow this panel, and I spent some time rushing around trying to warn various BSFA Officials that the remnants of the Fanzine Foundation which hadn't been sold at the previous Manchester-run convention were about to be put up again. No-one seemed too interested, and in the event the auction was postponed anyway.

Rather than go to the convention banquet, a large group of us adjourned to a restaurant in Didsbury. Discussing the disaster the

convention had become, Peter Weston began to expound his 4-year cyclic theory of fandom (an approximation, because the most recent deep troughs were the 1970 and 1976 conventions). Roughly t ice a decade fandom lapses into barbarism, followed by a period of interregnum and a slow climb back to civilization. To prevent any further collapses Pete is considering establishing a Secret Second Foundation at the other end of fandom. A Master Plan will be evolved, and Peter will appear on film (out of focus and synch, naturally) at forthcoming conventions, explaining the progress of Weston's Plan.

After the banquet was the Fancy Dress. This was a bit of late programme-shuffling, because there wasn't originally a fancy dress parade scheduled. That was a move I, for one, quite approved of, because although some masochistic streak always draws me to watch I really think fancy dress parades are dreadful. Unfortunately the Mancon concom hadn't actually said they weren't going to have one. Admittedly their Progress Reports said nothing about one, but since their Progress Reports hardly said anything about anything, a number of people reasonably assumed there would be one and prepared their costumes accordingly. To me it seems that if you decide to discontinue something that is a long-established Eastercon tradition it seems elementary sense to tell people.

We'd been talking to Peter Weston about fancy dress parades, and he compared the parade at the Washington Worldcon he'd attended as TAFF delegate with the feeble apologies for costumes which many people (with honourably exceptions) get away with over here. Roy Kettle summed it up ; "American women coming naked and our fucking idiots coming with cardboard boxes on their heads". When Vernon Brown came into the hall with a cardboard box on his head it all came home to me. Though he was in fact part of a quite reasonable presentation based on Creatures of Light and Darkness. The only other entrant I recall was Brian Ameringen as Count Dracula ("Vampire with a wooden brain," said Kettle). Afterwards there was a special presentation featuring two young ladies from Birmingham who had better remain nameless as I can only remember Pauline Dungate's name. They danced on-stage waving immense bosoms in a way that made the first three rows duck on every downswing. Several people were enthralled.

Returning to the bar afterwards for a nerve tonic I found that in my absence a very special fannish event had occurred. The AUSTRAL LEAUGE had come into being. The inspiration of D. West, aided by Greg Pickersgill and Brian Parker, the Austral Leauge could well be to the Seventies what the Cosmic Circle was to the Forties, if not less. You'll doubtless learn more of its inspiration and aims elsewhere, so I'll confine myself to how I became its third recruit. It was D. himself who converted me. Ever since Mancon I have been searching for adequate adjectives to describe the unnatural figure of D. West, without success. Tall, gaunt, and misshapen, he stands very close to you in conversation, fixing you with a pale stare, defying you to disagree with him. The way he inclines his head at you makes me think he's got a Third Eye in his left nostril. Words like 'eldritch' and 'batrachian' spring inadequately to mind. H.P. Lovecraft fans, at least, will get the picture if I say he would be right at home in Innsmouth. On this

occasion, when I showed momentary doubt about paying my fifty pence to join the League, he grasped me by the (sparse) hairs on my chest and twisting them visiously forced me to the ground. This must be one of the most painful experiences possible, short of having vital organs ripped off without anaesthetic, and my resistance swiftly crumbled. D. rules OK.

Having missed the banquet, I also missed the speeches and awards. I still don't know who won the Fan of the Year Award (if indeed there was one); but the truly astounding news of the evening was that the Doc Weir Award - for 'services to fandom' - had gone to Ina Shorrocks. Now, I've got nothing against the Shorrocks, and I realize that the Doc Weir Award is nearly always fixed, but still, this is stretching credibility a bit too far. One would expect the winner of such an award to have more connection with fandom at large rather than just the social scene revolving around a comparatively small local group. Anyway, next year I'm voting for Christine Edwards, and I expect all you lot to do the same.

The convention, socially, became rather fragmented by the extremely late showing of 'The Man Who Fell To Earth', originally scheduled for 9.45 but put back because of the addition of the Fancy Dress parade. It didn't finish 'until around 1.00 (like 'Zardoz' the previous day), which is probably the best way of destroying the party atmosphere at a con (and no way to enjoy a film either; much too late to fully appreciate a movie requiring a degree of concentration). All credit, though, to the concom for getting the very new MWFTE for the con. A pity they didn't do their coup justice by showing it at a decent time and with better projection and sound. Well, a gang of us wandered over to the tower block, and as there seemed to be no parties going decided to start our own. We went up to the topmost floor - hoping to get onto the roof but finding the doors locked - and arranged ourselves to wait for the fun to come to us. We had some drink and settled back, relying on the Fannish Theory of Sheep. This states that a group of fans of great personal magnetism can go to the most remote corner of a convention site and in some short time draw to them the majority of other fans. The 18th floor of the Owens Park tower block was just about the remotest corner there ever has been at any convention, yet within an hour it was so tightly packed that many of us had to leave to get some fresh air. This was not before D. West had tried, less successfully, to establish dominance over Rob Holdstock by the use of his Old Yorkshire Chest-Hair Hold. "It doesn't hurt," said Rob nonchalantly, as D. gripped and twisted. D. twisted harder. Rob's eyes bulged; sweat dripped from his brow. "It...doesn't...hurt!" he repeated.

Somehow tedium began to break out, and a move developed amongst the hotel-staying fen to go back and have a tea-party there. As we were assembling to leave Greg and I looked at each other and simultaneously realised that once we left the convention was effectively over almost before it had begun. We detached ourselves from the crowd, picking up Graham Charnock, and later Simone, who had got lost earlier. The others went back for their tea-party which it turned out was a non-starter due to a stropky night porter who refused them service. We went back to the bar and played a few games of table football. At 3.30

we were the only people left, and were more or less unceremoniously thrown out. We returned to the 18th floor. Deserted. (We later learned everyone had been ejected by campus Security guards; very hospitable place, Owens Park). We went up and down the tower, but there only seemed to be one party going, and from this we salvaged Joseph Nicholas (and Todd Harrison, who tagged along) with the promise that we were going to find where all the fun was going on. We just knew that there's always a good party on Sunday night at the con. If only we could find it.

Of course there was nothing. We toured every courtyard, stopping in silence to listen for the sounds of jolly fen. Nothing. The convention had packed up and gone to bed. We figured that as fans in distress and deprived of a party we had the right to call on the Fan Guest of Honour, who would be obliged to provide something for us. We found Peter's room; the door was ajar and the light was on. We stumbled in and found him lying on his bed, fully dressed and very dishevelled. He woke and stared in bemused astonishment as six fans wandered around his room, interrupting the drunken stupor into which he had fallen. "This isn't really happening," he kept saying, shaking his head in the hope we'd disappear. The best he could give us, though, was a half bottle of milk and confirmation that everyone else had got bored and long gone to bed. Finally we took pity on him and left. We roamed the corridors for a while, looking for familiar name-tags on doors and scrawling messages on them. Greg was about to write something in bad taste about Dave Rowe on Janice Wiles' door when a female voice asked him what he was doing. He turned to see Janice standing behind him, and retreated in disarray, remonstrating bitterly with the rest of us who had run away without warning him of her approach.

Then we ran out of ways of passing the time. There was nothing to do except go back to the hotel and go to bed. This was the Sunday night of the con, when conventions are supposed to reach a climax of socialising and parties. Undoubtedly the inhospitable and uncomfortable surroundings contributed greatly to its failure, as well as the thoughtless programming. I think I can safely mention the Sunday night dance at Seacon - as I had nothing directly to do with organising it - and the parties that followed it, as well as the tremendous party at Tynecon in '74 as truly great endings to conventions. Mancon merely petered out. An appropriate end.

Then it was Monday and it was over.

We left Manchester in the early afternoon. It was a bad journey; a crowded motorway and a hot, stuffy day. Chris Atkinson had to stop at Watford Gap as she was dangerously near falling asleep as the rest of us already had. We'd been there for five minutes when a yellow Simca hurtled into the car-park. Rob and Shiela and Greg and Simone joined us. Within minutes Andrew Stephenson, Colin Lester, and Hartley Patterson arrived. Even away from the convention the Fannish Theory of Sheep still operated.

I've become accustomed to reading convention reports in which the writer criticised every aspect of the event, but finished up by saying that he/she had a great time and it was a really good con. This is what is known as a cop-out. If you have been in fandom any reasonable length of time you will almost certainly have accumulated a circle of friends with whom you will spend much of your time at a con. Since you are with friends you are certain to have an almost guaranteed amount of enjoyment from the weekend. But if a convention is to be more than this - as, say, Boak's 'faan' convention was never intended to be, but Eastercons certainly are meant to be - the 'success' or 'failure' of the convention must be measured in terms of two major factors; the setting of the convention and the atmosphere it creates, and the organising efforts of the convention committee. On both counts the Mancon was a disaster.

There's no point trying to talk about the atmosphere of Owens Prk; it simply didn't have any. It was unwelcoming and not very comfortable. The chairs and tables in the 'lounge' were small and uncomfortable, and the battered lino floor - many-holed - gave it more the appearance of a shabby public bar than anything else. As Simone had said beforehand, this was a place made to be cleaned easily, rather than to take one's ease in. The actual rooms were miserable; bare and soulless, more like cells, with hard beds, one chair, and no washbasin. Just a wastebin. The convention was badly dislocated by being spread out all over the campus - something not mentioned beforehand; in fact Mancon publicity gave every impression that all convention facilities, including accomodation, was housed in the central tower block. As Peter Weston pointed out, once he had had to go out into the open air and walk across two large courtyards to get from his room to the bar he might as well have stayed in an outside hotel. The essential point of an integrated convention is that you should never have to step outside the building if you don't want to; once you have to walk outside to your room or anywhere else it makes little difference whether it is two minutes walk or ten.

I fully admit to having been prejudiced against the idea of a campus con from the beginning, but I would have been happy to have been proved wrong. In actual fact it was much worse than I had thought it would be. I didn't speak to anyone who disagreed about this.

Was there anything good about Owens Park? Yes. The main convention hall was light, airy, and certainly large enough, and it was equipped with a magnificently clear sound system. That's about it.

Mancon organisation was mostly conspicuous by its absence. Programme items were being continually rearranged and nobody seemed to know what was happening. The Fan Room was only open when no-one was about - not that it can have been particularly good, as only three weeks before the convention the concom were sending letters to fans like Rob Jackson and Peter Roberts asking for information on how a Fan Room and Fan Programme should be arranged. Too many of the committee seemed to be hanging around the registration desk doing very little, whilst the convention crumbled around their ears. I could forgive a lot if they had been seen rushing around trying to put things right; but they just stood around talking amongst themselves. Peter Presford, though, did

seem to be making an effort to keep the thing going for most of the time. Andrew Stephenson tells me that John Mottershead was helpful and hard-working in organising the art-show, and I'll take his word for it. In contrast there was the attitude of Chuck Partington, who whenever he took time off from boasting to his friends about how much money he expected to make from the convention (pure bluster...I hope) answered anyone who ventured even the mildest criticism of the weekend with the words "If you don't like it, fuck off." I suppose I could draw all kinds of morals from such an expression of attitude by one of the most experienced members of the convention committee - a man who has been on at least two convention committees in the past - but I guess it really speaks for itself.

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Malcolm Edwards

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M O A N I N G A T M I D N I G H T
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SOMEBODY SOMEWHERE HELP ME

Don't no-one out there go running around with the idea that producing a successful fanzine like STOP BREAKING DOWN is just egoboo egoboo all the way. There's a lot of heartbreak mixed in with the fun, you know. Like what's it all for, where's it all going, all that sort of self-indulgent old crap. Especially when on the third issue, the one which, in the Great Plan, had been earmarked as the one in which the Great Divergence between Shitting and Busting was to take place, one suddenly finds oneself saying things like "Awwwww fuck, can't get it together man, the hell with it" and not doing anything for weeks on end. I have not felt entirely enthusiastic about this issue. The main reason for this is that it's such a long time since the last one. This may sound crazy to people content to publish once a year or less, but my ideal frequency would be about fortnightly. I thrive on crifanac; and when we decided, against instinct, not to rush out SBD 3 right after the con for financial considerations I immediately began to lose a bit of heat. Then when we were 'ready' to start I found I was faced with a mass of copy-typing - soulless work that really lacks any sort of personal involvement, especially when you're feeling less than mad keen to start with. Difficult times. So we're late. I dunno.

It's all bloody Edwards' fault anyway; if his damned conrep hadn't been so huge I'd have had it in the mail in no time at all. As it is he's wrecked the schedule, ruined the layout (what the fuck am I doing back here??) and generally got up my nose. Still, once you've given a man a notebook and pencil you can't really reject the results.

Greg Pickersgill

fanzine reviews

by

Greg Pickersgill

Whatever you say about British Fandom these days you can't claim it to be inactive. Since the last SBD, some seven weeks ago, I've reviewed at least 21 issues of some 18 different fanzines. I'm a bit vague on the exact figures here as I loaned a bundle of recent stuff to one-time American fan Jonh Ingham a while back without taking much note of them. Ingham himself has since avoided me by the simple expedient of going on tour with up-and-coming popular singing groups like the Patti Smith Band, the Rolling Stones, and the Sex Pistols in his capacity as resident Boy Racer with SOUNDS. Anyway, to deal with this mighty wad of effort and energy I must depart from my usual in-depth spade-edge-and-hand-grenade methods and just give a couple of short paragraphs on as many as I can get into four sides. Every good fanzine deserves a mention, after all, even the bad ones. This one's for you, Dave.

DAISNAID 1 from D. West, 48 Norman Street, Bingley, Yorks.

Is this the new fannish trend? A fanzine entirely devoted to reviewing fanzines, well written and full of real thoughts. Duplication, done on D.'s homemade machine built out of old Churchill tanks and parts of a cat, is not fantastic but who cares eh? D. comments masterfully, being truly penetrating, meaningful, and allusive, where others - like myself on a bad day - are superficial and blustery. Excellent analyses in this issue include an ingenious dissection of the appeal of semi-pro-fanzine MAYA. General conclusion is that it is neither a good fanzone or prozine, and is dichotomized almost beyond recall.

Maybe a proliferation of this concentration on fanzines would be an unfortunate thing - leading in time to a fanzine devoted to reviewing the reviews of reviews of a fanzine devoted to ~~reviews~~ - though not, in my view, an uninteresting prospect. At the very least you're likely to have someone - like D. - saying something interesting about real things.

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GHAS 1 from John Harvey, 64 Elthorne Avenue, Hanwell, London W7

This one loses me from the start by being A4 printed longways and stapled at the short end. Simply, physically, this is the wrong way to read a fanzine, and the editors seem to have never bothered to wonder why newspapers, for instance, break up material into columns of short lines. Obviously, the eye does not want to follow a column of type for eight inches or more; it tends to fall off about half way and the reader then gets pissed off and reads ONE-OFF or something sensible. This is why good old quarto is such a perfect fanzine size. Despite that its nicely produced.

The content suffers from being a little too earnest and serious, the usual pitfall of serconism. Subjects in themselves -an interview with Harry Harrison, reviews of a 'Priest anthology and Aldiss' 'Frankenstein Unbound', a personal appreciation of Heinlein, and a tract entitled 'Science Fiction as an American Popular Art' - are not uninteresting, though hardly imaginative sercon stuff. Trouble is they're all written with determined seriousness and the absence of a bit of enthusiasm; reminding me of the 'school essay' style of fan-writing prevalent in the late sixties. The whole thing turns out to be vaguely dull. The review of REAL TIME WORLD is the most obvious culprit; long, rambling, deadly serious, and not saying anything much original. I've said myself there's a superb place in the sun for a good enthusiastic SF fanzine-- and John Harvey agrees with me - but GHAS 1 isn't it, unfortunately. Loosen yourself up, Hanwell fandom.

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TWLL-DDU 1 & 2 from Dave Langford, 22 Northumberland Avenue,
Reading, Berks RG2 7PW

Remarkably enjoyable little personalzine from the man behind Britain's anti-missile-missile project. Well written with a distinctive style, sensible and fun. Issue 2 notable for a long and funny Mancon conreport which actually makes the whole hideous mess sound rather fun.

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THIS DAY NEXT DAY SOMETIME NEVER 1 from Jean & David Staves,
23 Redwood Avenue, Killamarsh,
Sheffield.

Good example of a fanzine put out by people possessed by the driving desire to pub their ish without the slightest notion of what to put in it, and with no-one available to give them worthwhile assistance. The only good thing is that assuming they have any sense at all they'll never issue anything so crummy again. Notable only for being the first time I'd read mention of something called 'Freakcon', a crazy notion involving holding a convention in tents in some field somewhere. When John Hall tried to get me interested in this sort of idea some five years ago I thought he was off his nut. I do not think these people are being especially realistic. Jesus Christ, Mancon was bad enough, you want to get worse?

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ONE-OFF 1 & 2 from David Bridges, 51 Crawshaw Grove, Sheffield
South Yorkshire S8 7EA

Number 1 was a real cracker, easily the best individual fanzine I've seen in the last year, and got my vote in the CP Fan Poll. Not remarkably well produced, with blank pages, typing errors, the whole works, but the writing was something else again. Genuinely witty, funny putting across useful information about an individual-sounding new fan

in a positively entertaining manner. The humourous guide to UFO spotting was the best thing, closely followed by the sequence about Bridges breaking his spectacles. Sounds feeble, I know, but I thought it was the best thing since my first letter from Leroy Kettle. The second issue, which shows Bridges well into fandom (the first had few directly fannish references) is pale by comparison. The first issue had a new and unique personality radiating itself for all it was worth; the trappings of fandom in the second issue - locs, fanzine reviews, etc - just seem too routine and constricting. No doubt this is exactly what he wanted to get into, though, but to me ONE-OFF has begun to look dangerously just like everything else. Still, he writes well when he gives himself a chance. He's just about the only new fan I can think of that I'd really like to see writing more autobiographical material. Get issue 1 if you can.

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SUPER CRUD '69 from Bryn Fortey, 90 Caerleon Road, Newport, Gwent
NPT 7BY

A simultaneous parody and sentimental look back to the sort of fanzines published in the middle-to-late Sixties that were the first ones encountered by people like myself, Roberts, Fortey, Holdstock, Kettle, and many more comparatively well known names of today. There's not much can be said about it, really, except that the real thing was never as good as this. They were often genuinely and totally rubbish; endless articles culled directly from encyclopaedias, interminable unedited lettercolumns, hideously chatty editorials that said and meant nothing, and appalling awful fiction. Just like a number of fanzines around today, in fact, so I reckon even people who don't remember this era of fandom with mixed feelings will enjoy this fanzine. Though of course those who know what he's up to will enjoy it more (I myself failed to realise one thing I read as a straight piece of fan-fiction about the Mancon was in fact also a parody of Mancon concom member Charles Partington's fiction in NWISF. Subtle stuff this).

Anyway, he captures the atmosphere fairly well - though is far too spacious with his layout, those fanzines were always crammed top to bottom and margins were minimal; real close-packed grey printed drivel - and includes a fucking good parody of my fanzine reviewing style which don't half show up my stylistic weaknesses something horrid. Fucker. The reviews - of sixties fanzines as they would be if alive today - are an accurate epitaph to a vanished era. Nice one Brynley.

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LOGO 3 from Kevin Easthope, 6 Ipsley Grove, Erdington,
Birmingham B23 7SY

New issue of the fanzine edited by the fan hailed as most likely to be the Peter Roberts of the 1980's by people who are not Peter Roberts (though LOGO was the only fanzine Roberts mentioned as good in his Mancon Programme Book review of fanzines). Myself, I remain unimpressed. Perhaps the reason lies in the fact that Easthope is right behind this 'Freakcon' tent-con idea; he seems to have a rushing, gushing, everywhere and everything air about him. Certainly his writing is fast and punchy, though to me it seems like so much froth. LOGO is really well

duplicated and produced - superficially. I found reading it and following the train of thought from one paragraph to another confused by abrupt changes of subject, clumsily handled interlineations, and Easthope's breathless style. This is especially noticeable in the lettercolumn, where he just does not set his remarks sufficiently apart from those of the loccers.

Still, LOGO has all the right things for a successful fanzine, even including a reprint from HYPHEN. It all seems a bit facile to me though, as though Easthope were a sort of Identikit fan, a 'Malcolm Edwards'-type construct operated by Peter Weston from his potting shed. If I hadn't actually seen the individual in question in person I'd be strongly tempted to believe this. Still, how else can one explain the rather silly things I heard ~~ix~~ him saying?

Oh dear, I fear I have been irrationally nasty.

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No space, no space, he cried in pain.....even shorter reviews.
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OUR FAIR CITY 4 from Martin Easterbrook, Physics Dept, Royal Holloway College, Egham Hill, Egham, Surrey.

Real sixties stuff this, but interesting. Blend of SF book reviews, fiction, articles on curious things, even a few locs. Very good cartoon strip by Hugh Herdon & Charles Goodwin. I haven't been able to read this properly yet, but despite people like Malcolm Edwards and Holdstock saying how tedious OFC is it looks quite fun.

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MOTA 15 & 16 from Terry Hughes, 4739 Washington Blvd, Arlington, Virginia 22205 USA

Neither quite the knockout stuff one might expect, but MOTA still the major fannish fanzine these days. If you're not getting this you should really give it a go.

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MERE MENTIONS

Curse that bloody Edwards and his interminable conreport; everything else has had to put shortened to keep this issue down to a reasonable size. I really dislike just listing fanzines like this. Take heart though; a Mere Mention this issue does not preclude a Harder Look in the next (necessarily).

SCRIBE 3 (Brian Tawn) ; AFTER THE FLOOD 3 (Griffin) ; NESFIG NEWSLETTER 11 (Isaacson & Rouse) ; FANZINE FANATIQUE 17/18 (Walker) ; SPACES 1 (Poole) ; SPI 5 (Poole) ; WARK 6 (Pardoe) ; INFERNO 11 (Skelton) ; THE SOUTHERN VOLE (Hoare) ; ERG 54 (Jeeves) ; NEBULA 7 (Taylor) ; KNOCKERS FROM NEPTUNE 4 (Meara) ; and probably some others.

Well, there's a bloody lot of them, at the very least.

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A L T E R N A T E T I T L E
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move around

by

Simone Walsh

Recently, at a local fannish gathering, the conversation turned to convention programming. Malcolm Edwards was reflecting on the criticism he, as chairman of the Seacon in 1975, recieved from various sources - including the Mancon concom - for the sercon content of their programme. As events proved, in spite of the Mancon committee's protests, they too felt the need to attempt to programme for a more serious type of SF enthusiast; one who would not be altogether happy at having to sit through a more fannish type of programme.

The influx of such large numbers of this type of fan into conventions (mainly through S.F. MONTHLY) has resulted in a radical re-think for recent convention organisers. There are now so many convention attendees who are not 'fans' in the fannish sense, and who have not the remotest intention of becoming such, even if they knew what it entailed, that con programming has to be aimed mainly at them. Committees recently have tried to keep away from the slap-happy, all-amatuer, 'fan' programming of yesteryear, and in recent years have even shunted the fandom element off the main programme in the con hall into a siding called a 'Fandom Room'.

This has both ad- and dis- advantages. The obvious benefit is that fandom has always been a cosy, intimate world, and has recently found it difficult to manifest its presence in the increasingly large modern hotels. The Fandom Womb should encourage a more intimate fannish atmosphere for those that find it lacking in the ever-expanding conventions. It can also be a good platform where fandom can present itself to the neo who wants to find out about the mysteries of fanac, or about local SF groups, or individual fans that may be in his part of the country.

One great disadvantage is that the main convention programme, **without** the relief of occasional fannish items, could become very heavy going. Another is that if the Fandom Room is treated as an unimportant afterthought by the committee the whole atmosphere of a convention will change. The fannish presence at a con is felt in the socialising/relaxing level and if fans are not given an adequate platform to demonstrate their way of life and enthusiasms fannish continuity could be lost, and the socialising aspect of cons will be the poorer for it. Awareness of fandom gives a feeling of belonging and actually being a part of the science fiction world, not just an onlooker. Of course there will always be those who will strive to remain onlookers, but anyone should have the opportunity of showing an interest in fandom.

I can't help feeling that in an Eastercon context the animal 'Fandom' is threatened with extinction unless a conscientious effort is made to preserve it. The Birmingham Group running the Leicester convention in 1977 are very aware of this, and will be making a determined effort to carry on, in an elaborated and improved form, the concept of a 'Fandom Room' and alternative Fan Programme begun by Peter Roberts at the Seacon in 1975.

I wonder how the fannish element survives in the huge American conventions. Perhaps Terry Hughes, Rich Coad, or Mike Glicksohn (our entire American readership) can enlighten me.

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You may recall my piece in SBD¹ in which I apologetically explained why I and some others were staying off-site at Mancon. Now that the con is over I'd like to add a few comments in case our overseas readers and non-attending Brits wonder if we felt we had a better or worse time for doing it. As you may have already noticed from our letter column and Malcolm's con-report Mancon was not one of the most enjoyable cons; in fact it was probably the worst for a very long time. No con I have attended has so lacked atmosphere, and never has a con got off to such a slow start (some are still waiting).

Before the con I didn't like the idea of staying off-site at all, and when we arrived at our hotel, a good eight or ten minutes walk from Owens Park I felt we had definitely done the wrong thing. I changed my mind after seeing an Owens Park bedroom; what a meagre little hovel it was - lino-covered floor, a hard, unyielding bed, and spartan furniture. From that point on everything I saw at O.P. made me happy we had opted out. The washing facilities were awful. Several bedrooms shared a bathroom, which contained a row of wash-basins and a row of showers, the showers in a line behind simple plastic shower curtains. Don't students want privacy? They certainly don't get much of it anyway. To have booked into O.P. and had to pay for such 'facilities' would have grieved me deeply, and likely left me very dirty. No, I was comforted by the fact that I had a clean, comfortable, carpeted bedroom with bathroom attached to retreat to just a little way down the road. The hotel-heart of the con was alive and beating close by for me.

But really it's no joke. Eastercons are a year apart, and to balls up one means enjoyable Eastercons are two years apart. They are too precious to be entrusted to people so lacking in perception that they could have envisaged a good con on a site like Owens Park.

If future concommittees need any guidelines I suggest that convention sites should always be hotels; facilities like the hall, display rooms, and bedrooms should all be under one roof. The social continuity of the convention is broken if people have to get a map, compass and overcoat to go and search out room parties. The main socializing areas like bars and lounges should be carpeted, well-furnished, and not too harshly lit. The lack of these three elementary refinements gave Owens Park as much comfort and finesse

as a Salvation Army hostel.

Also, as I told Graham Boak (who has been self-rightously expressing his disapproval of tipping the bar staff out of convention funds in his fanzine CYNIC) you have to be prepared to pay bar staff over the odds in extra tips from the concom in order to keep them happy and willing to go on serving long after they feel like they'd like to pack up and go to bed. I don't think it is reasonable to expect anyone to work an overlong shift, as con bar staffs have to, for simple time and a half or even double time. I feel the onus is on the concom to arrange arrange a good bonus (or bribe - call it what you will) for good, willing, and long service.

It appeared to me that the bar staff at Mancon were totally unprepared for an SF convention - they seemed to expect to close down at about 2.00 am every day, and resorted to switching off the lights in the 'lounge' as an unsubtle hint, and actually cheered at the end of one session. Perhaps if they had been suitably primed beforehand this might not have occurred, and the standard of service - erratic and often unwilling - would have been improved.

If these few points are borne in mind perhaps the attendees at future cons won't have such an uphill task in generating a good atmosphere as they had at Mancon this year.

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This section was to have been taken up by me commenting on locs recieved thish. But I really fell the need to write something light-hearted, and not get bogged down by answering Pate Weston, who claims to know which buttons to push. I'm glad, Peter, that you realise that if you kick me I yell. The trouble with having access to fanzine pages is that one can climb on so many soapboxes. You may have noticed I haven't got used to the novelty and can't seem to get off one.

I finally decided to devote this section to me. I was always under the illusion that I was incredibly well-known in fannish circles - it comes as an awful shock to find that people don't gasp and say "So you are Simone Walsh!" in a very amazed fashion. So I've decided to publicise myself; this is a featurette on Simone Walsh - Simon with an 'e', pronounced 'sea monster' without the 'ster', as Mervyn Barrett said before he left for Australia, the coward.

I'm a secretary (very well equipped for running a con, I was taught all about that sort of stuff at Birkenhead Tech where I did my training) and work for a company managing an oil rig project. When you see on your TV news in, hopefully, one month's time, the float-out of the jacket for the Thistle Field platform think of me lying in a state of shock and nervous exhaustion, thankful that the big day has arrived at last. I'm so engrossed in my job I become an awful bore about it; ask Greg, he has to listen to me every night.

We've decided to go to the Silicon at August; now that we've got a car the travel costs have been reduced. Or rather the costs of petrol are now less than the cost of railfares; I don't care to think in terms of the depreciation of the car, tax, insurance, etc. And mentio-

ning that con reminds me that Brian Aldiss was on Capitol Radio this evening, on a phone in about SF. He conducted himself very well, with an interested and sympathetic interviewer, despite some of the silly questions; 'Is the Bible the first SF book?', 'Did mankind as we know it stem from spacemen?' etc. I was amazed at one question though; 'Are there any SF conventions in this country like those in the USA?'. Aldiss did his duty and told all about the Easter and Nova cons. So book early for both; a million or so extra Londoners now know all about them!

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Coincidences are strange but sometimes seem so right that one isn't as surprised as one ought to be. After all when I met Lang Jones (one-time fan and NEW WORLDS writer) at a con years ago it didn't seem as coincidental as it should have that I'd known him as a kid; at 13 years old he'd been a friend of a boy in my street and I'd got to know him quite well. We lost touch after a year or two, and then there he was at a con.

Somewhat the same thing applies with David Griffin, who pubbed his ish (AFTER THE FLOOD) from Bristol until a few weeks ago. He then moved to London, got a job at Taylor Woodrow in the Southall offices (my employers; I work at the Hounslow branch, but was at Southall) and actually works in the same department as a person I met whilst at Southall (a bod called Henry Hatfield) who I ran into, after I'd left Southall, at a Malcolm Edwards party - he being a nonfan friend of the Edwards'. Even more coincidentally David Griffin used to go to the junior shhool in Bristol in which I ran the library for a couple of years (though not at the same time). More astonishing still the road he lives in in Ealing now is the one I lived in when I first left home at 17. Don't ask me what all this means!

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I would welcome a few more evenings like that after this month's One Tun meeting. Greg and I met up with visiting Gannets Rob Jackson and Ian Williams together with John Piggott, Ian Maule and David Griffin and after an Indian meal ended up very merry in the garden of a local pub. It was there that Piggy recited in his loud, nasal public school voice a long tract from the Bible, we all sat waiting for the punchline thinking it was a rather poorly told joke but managed to shut him up after Genesis and no joke. Then the Ians got into a heated debate on who was the real "Little Ian", both of them claimed the honour. I would have thought Ian Williams had more claim, when he put on his slippers later he practically vanished from view!

Later at Ian and John's place we had a drunken game of darts with Ian Maule lying on the floor under the dartboard with darts dropping perilously close to his tranquil upturned face. Piggy busied himself demonstrating how he flicked his flat-mate with wet towels (?) and Rob Jackson was looking at some anatomical pictures, female, from a purely medical viewpoint of course. I was busy winning the game of darts, but I don't think anybody really noticed.

Funny people these Gannets.....

Simone Walsh

. A L L R I G H T N O W

letter column

- ((())) - Simone Walsh
- ((())) - Greg Pickersgill

: : : : :
: : : :

GRAHAM BOAK, *
 2 Cecil Court, *
 Cecil Street, *
 Lytham, *
 Lancs. FY8 5NN *
 * * * * *

To the Nova Award etc. My attitude is pretty well covered in C9. Doubtless much more will be said. In a way it is rather a shame - I've just about worked it out of my system and it will all blow up again - but I'm not taking anything back.

My only regret is that Pat should be stuck in the middle, as I've nothing against her at all. I'm not really surprised that she got upset though; can't blame her for it. Maybe that might give her some idea of what Rob must have felt after you shits had kicked him in the balls before presenting him with the Nova. I hadn't noticed much sympathy coming from that direction before the 'Fan Editors Award'. A full list of those who laughed like drains at the idea is printed in C9. (No doubt some of them will now try to fade out of it, but they were all enthusiastic at the time).

Incidentally, Rob seems to have forgiven you all. Maybe this is because he's more tolerant than I am, maybe because he's hypocritical when it suits him, more likely because he didn't have such high expectations from you beforehand. He expected you to give the Award to SHREW; I couldn't really believe that you could - though I feared mightily. I believed that you could be honest detached and objective - I was nearly right. I certainly would never have believed beforehand the rotten way it was presented. (Well, maybe of Malcolm...).

A large part of my anger was disillusion; now that I've lowered my expectations of your corner of fandom no doubt I'll treat future events in comparative equanimity.

Incidentally, I quite agree with Pat's comments on the current panel and trust that the fourth member (or, preferably, fourth and fifth) will be of completely different interests. Maybe if someone took their doubts to Hazel rather than merely mumbling in the pages of Ratzines?

((This letter does not seem sensible to me. It seems the product of someone not entirely unlike a complete

TERRY HUGHES,
4739 Washington Blvd,
Arlington,
Virginia 22205,
United States.

* * * * *

Reading Pat Charnock's article brought to mind that I just got a copy of C9. I've always thought Gray Boak to be a rather rather okay guy but in this current issue he seems to go to great lengths to make a stupid ass of himself. He gives his side of the background to the sending of the Award to Pat. I don't blame her one bit for her reaction. What a boneheaded move to send her that with a note like that. What possible good could that do. All it could possibly accomplish was to give Pat a feeling much like being punched in the tit. Even if Gray felt it was his duty to avenge the way the last Nova Award went off he should never have directed any anger towards Pat. She is just an innocent bystander, for heaven's sake. That award was lacking in humor, wit, and good taste. Gray Boak's obvious pleasure in having devised it is most disappointing.

His whole editorial in C9 was full of thrusts at the fans who are grouped together under the name of Ratfandom, and was as full of ill-concealed envy as it was faulty logic. The Nova Award matter has been generating almost as many cries of conspiracy as the Kennedy assassination. From this side of the puddle it all seems overblown and morbid since it has already been done. Discussion should now centre on what to do about future awards rather than rehashing what took place. Particularly when the controversy seems to be a handy vehicle for some fans to release pent-up emotions. Most of the cries of a Ratfandom conspiracy seem to have as solid a foundation as a pool of quicksand. The affront to Pat in the form of the 'British Fan Editors Award' only serves to top this teapot tempest off with a dunces cap.

Simone's column left me feeling disappointed in Pete Weston in much the same manner as Pat's made me feel about Gray Boak. If Pete had rejected Simone as an individual, saying "No, I don't want you on the committee because we won't get along" or something like that he would have been in the right. I mean, the committee should have the right to accept or reject anyone as a member in terms of individuals. The members of the committee must be able to depend on each other, and be able to get along without frequent personality clashes. When he rejected you, Greg, it seemed to be his rejection of you as an individual. I don't know any of you personally, but I don't think of you as unreliable. You've certainly been a dynamic force in British fandom for some time. But such a choice is up to the committee, as long as it is kept on personal terms. With Simone it seems to be a case of rejection due to her sex. I can't believe the committee is really practising sexual discrimination. Or perhaps this is Peter Weston alone rather than the committee as a whole. If he was joking when he told Simone that was his reason, it was a very poor joke. If he was serious the committee may be in real trouble.

Women have been and continue to be of major importance in putting on American cons. Fandom is supposed to be an area in which people are looked on as themselves not as members of a group (be it old, young, male, female, white, black, etc). Everyone works together. If this is a true sexual bias on Pete Weston's part then the Britain in '79 bid could hit trouble. If he alienates the women in fandom he could lose

crucial votes. I intend to support the British bid because I think Britain deserves to hold the Worldcon. British fandom is very active and holds successful cons of its own as well as producing an ever-increasing number of top-quality fanzines. I hope that this matter turns out to be a misunderstanding. I think Pete owes Simone an apology if he really said he didn't want her on the committee because she was a woman. In fact he owes women throughout fandom an apology for saying that. I was of the opinion that male chauvinism was a dying beast; it's disappointing to see that I may have been wrong.

PETER WESTON, *
72 Beeches Drive, * After seeing my mild, jesting remarks at
Erdington, * the Globe blown up into banner headlines
Birmingham B24 ODT * of 'PETE WESTON IS FASCIST PIG' I shall be
* * * * * ** much more guarded about what I say to you
* * * * * * in future.

Having covered me in sticky brown substance (((What?))) in SBD2 I hope you'll give me right of reply. Simone, hasn't it ever occurred to you that because you react so strongly to certain stimuli (how does he know? mutters Greg) I can't resist pushing certain buttons. I might not actually mean what I say...in fact I usually don't. My best defence lies in that we already have a female woman on the Worldcon committee. That's Marsha Jones. The fact that she's a woman is incidental (to me, not to Eddie); what matters is that she is the best person to do a certain job, i.e. the art show, and I value her for that.

Err, Simone, "I have no need of your contribution to the committee" - at the moment that is. If you are seriously interested in joining us we may very well have a place for you, when and if we get the bid, and I hope you'll still be keen to help then because we'll need all the competent people we can get. Of either sex.

As regards Greg, there you go again, taking a mild remark actually meant as the sort of back-handed compliment I usually pay to Greg because I'm awed by his greatness (((Gee, makes me knees turn to jelly))) and turning it into another apparent insult.

Look, for me to say that I wanted either Greg or Roy on the committee means that I consider either/both of them above 95% of fandom so far as ability is concerned. The fact is I'd already made my mind up on Roy, mainly because he's had previous concom experience with Seacon, and also because I never dreamed for a minute Greg would want to take part. Well, does he? Do you? I doubt it. (((Well, actually, I wouldn't have said 'no' if someone had mentioned it to me, but just about the last thing I want to do now is join that particular concom.)))

Then, Simone, you said "Greg would be no good, he's too unreliable". You said it, not I!

I'm only bothering to answer because that sticky brown stuff sticks, and I've got enough troubles, thank you!

Oh, one more refutation. I've written about the Nova business at length elsewhere, but Dave Rowe and others please

understand; I read that statement about SHREW v. MAYA on behalf of the chicken-livered Award committee. I have no public opinion on the matter.

((What Peter actually means is no-one on the Nova panel last year actually felt capable of getting up and putting across the judges' viewpoint without totally collapsing with stage-fright. Not that we were then, or now, afraid to stand by our findings publicly.))

DAVID BRIDGES,
51 Crawshaw Grove,
Sheffield,
South Yorkshire,
S8 7EA

*
* It's okay, this nostalgia kick, but what about,
* for example, little me? What was I doing in
* 1967? I hear you ask. Well, don't I? Actually,
* considering I was only 12 at the time I didn't
* do much - I didn't even read sf. I do, however,
* * * * * remember that I used to put out a sort of a
zine every now and again about a guy called My Friend, who had a thing about dustbins (needless to say I had a thing about dustbins at that time). I would do just one copy and then pass it around in my class at school. Presumably they all ended up in the bin. At least I hope they did- I'd hate to suddenly find one amongst all old school rubbish I kept.

The thing I hate about the '60s is the fact that I was alive and all that, but was unaware of all the sf that was going on all around me. I think "Christ, you dumbshit 10-year-old, why didn't you subscribe to 'NEW WORLDS' and the like, and save me the trouble collecting them now?". But I shouldn't really complain. After all he is a sort of younger brother and he did go through all hell for me.

You said in your letter that you tried to find me at the Mancon. Actually, statistically, you had no chance of finding me. I had a hell of a job locating folk I knew by sight, let alone trying to find people by their con badges (which half the wearers hadn't put their names on anyway - good grief, I thought the concom were supposed to do that, but then with all the problems involved with sticking red patches onto blue badges, and blue patches onto red badges, they must have just forgot about putting people's names on them). The floor area of Owens Park was out of this world, and you could have wandered about all day and not covered the same ground twice. In fact I sobered up twice when wandering around the courtyards looking for parties.

I think it's a safe bet that there won't be another con held on campus in Britain for a long while - when you've suffered one Owens Park you've suffered them all. Once things got going (i.e. when everyone was pissed) it didn't seem so bad, but I dread to think how a neo would have taken it - probably been bored out of his mind. I mean, I, who normally attends religiously the whole programme only bothered with four items and then only enjoyed Bob Shaw. If I hadn't been with a group of equally bored persons I'd probably have had to sit through it all. God, the mind boggles.

I can imagine there'll be a lot of comment devoted to Things That Went Wrong With Mancon appearing soon. I feel a bit low for

complaining, after all, the concom are all BNFs or at least NFs, and I'm only just this side of neo, but for chrissakes one expects a bit more organization. In fact considering that the whole affair was a new departure for British fandom one would have expected them to have gone all-out for 100% success. I, for one, was a bit disappointed. However, I must say that despite the serve-it-yourself breakfast, the bring-it-yourself coffee making kit (we were provided with, on two separate occasions, 1 pint UHT, 4 teaspoons coffee, 4 teaspoons sugar, and umpteen teabags), the music-to-the-ears bright-and-early-in-the-morning cries of "Elsie, Elsie! Are you on this floor Elsie?" BANG BANG RATTLE (door opens) "Not distrubing you am I? I've only come to do the beds. ELSIE! Has Elsie been here? This is supposed to be her floor." Exit followed by further sounds of the ineveitable, and the con bar award winning flat warm beer, I still had a hell of a good con.

RICH COAD, * Joseph Nicholas' letter in SBD2 following
 291 Jayne Avenue, * Grah's article in SBD1 really bring back
 Oakland, * 1967. I was in my last days as a young
 California 94610, * Nazi then. My mother and I were in London
 United States * getting visas at the American Embassy when
 * * * * * we ran into an anti-Vietnam march. "Well,
 * * * * * they don't want the Communists to win, do
 they?" I asked. Scott Mackenzie had just had his only hit and I
 expected to arrive in San Francisco and see everyone with flowers in
 their hair. Though floral arrangements were scarce within a year I
 was smoking dope, dropping acid, and demonstrating against the war
 with the best of them. Just goes to show what a bad influence
 California sun is.

MIKE GLICKSOHN, *
 141 High Prk Avenue, * According to Mauler's CHECKPOINT
 Toronto, Ontario, M6P 2S3, * Mancon unfortunately lived up to
 Canada. * your expectations. It's too bad
 * * * * * if you didn't enjoy yourselves;
 * * * * * that same weekend was a very
 fannish and fun minicon in Minneapolis, one of the best cons I've
 attended in the last couple of years. On the Saturday I picked up a
 pack of imported Guinness and spent a couple of jolly hours mystifying
 the others by standing up at parties and saying "Let's have a toast
 to Greg Pickersgill/Leroy Kettle/Peter Roberts etc etc". They all
 probably thought I was stoned, senile, or sercon, but it gave me a
 specious sense of being somehow with you all in spirits and I felt good
 doing it.

It seems you're all having a great deal of fun with the Nova and the structure behind it, much as we're going through with the FAAN Award (which are still a good idea, and I still wish you parochial poofs would support it. I nominated Kettle, SHREW and

MAYA, but I've been told that all of active English fandom sent in only four ballots. Is this any way for Kettle's buddies to immortalize him within the pages of Harry Warner's fan history?) I'm not sure I agree with the Nova setup as it is, or as you suggest it should be, but since I'm not affected I'm not going to grotch too loudly. I prefer the idea of a true peer group award, and I also think it should be for the best single issue, not a years' output. (A separate award for 'Best Editor' should dispose nicely of the conflict) I'd rather honour a single outstanding piece of creative effort than a merely competent fanzine that plods along in an uninspired way but averages out better than a zine that fluctuates in quality. Of course, what will probably happen is that a uniformly good fanzine would win, and I expect that's what the proponents of this idea have in mind.

I think Pat showed admirable restraint in her response to the 'British Fan Editors Award'. I suspect that if I'd recieved an 'award' worded in such a gratuitously insulting manner I'd have mailed it back with explicit instructions as to where they could stick it. I suppose it was intended as a joke, but it strikes me as in extremely poor taste indeed, needlessly reminding Pat of something that can hardly be a very enjoyable memory for her.

Good zine reviews as usual, but my heart palpitates at the apparent onset of creeping serconism; can Twonk's Disease be more than an issue or two away? Will future SBDs contain articles evaluating the important contributions of the fiction in SFM to the growth of British SF? (((Well, yeah, atch, assuming I remind Kettle to write them))) Or in-depth analyses of parallel trends in the unpublished works of Ian Williams and Rob Holdstock? The mind boggles. Naturaly I share your enthusiasm for Kettle's creative talents; if anything I'm less critical than you are. Simply, he's the best fanwriter currently active in fandom and it's a damn shame he's not better known to a wider audience. Dick Geis, Best Fanwriter? Rubbish!

Oh dear. Darn. Shit. I really hoped I'd like your poem, Simone. Honest I did. But I think it's terrible. I shudder to think of what Greg might say about a poem like this if it appeared in someone else's fanzine. The thought behind it may be exemplary, but the poem itself is an amateurish piece of doggerel, exemplifying all the bad things they say about poetry in fanzines. Sorry.

Gee, you got a shit-load of letters on SBD1. And the reviews I've seen of it in other British fanzine seem to indicate it's generally considered the most important event on the British fan-scene this year.

Geoff Rippington seems a rather illiterate sort from his letter. His LoC is almost impossible to understand without your previous issue close to hand and I lack the dedication to hunt for it so I can figure out if he's saying anything worth reading. And I can't get too excited about your having driven him into the sercon camp; someone who can't even spell 'fanish'...er, 'fannish' doesn't look like someone who's going to produce another MOTA.

You had a couple of really imaginative letters too. I'm thinking of the LoCs from West and Nicholas, both of which contain some excellent writing and ideas.

Greg, if you had the perceptivity of a bowl of blanc-mange you'd have realized that my comments about the relative lack of quality of early ENERGUMENs wasn't intended to justify the existence of neofan crudzines. What I was saying was that without standards aginst which to judge oneself it's hard for a newcomer to know just how well he's done, and it's understandably human to be rather thrilled with your own efforts. Those who do have such standards, then, ought to remember what it was like not to have them and be a little gentle in their criticisms. I'm not saying one should refrain from telling neos their work is dull, insipid, or derivative; I'm suggesting that it's going to be better for us all if we do it with a hint of kindness. Understand, you cretinous shithead?

I'd like to compliment Simone .on an excellent piece of subtle wordplay; "chauvinism is an aspect of the male that today's woman does not accept lying down!" At least, I hope it was deliberate. If it was accidental I'll be disappointed indeed.

Incidentally, is Simone 'Overseas Editor' because she oversees production of the fanzine?

((((Jeez, you're really steady on the case there, ain't you? Picking up these little subtleties left and right.)))

(((When are you coming to Britain again? I'd like to smack you in the mouth for not liking my poem. Actually, you're not alone in disliking it, but adverse comment doesn't bother me. I still like my pome. It is amateurish, is doggerel, but it was fun to write. I regret nothing.

What really struck a raw nerve was your wondering whether my 'subtle' wordplay was deliberate. Really, would you question such a thing in Greg's writing? Chauvinism is lurking everywhere!))))

HARRY TURNER,
10 Carlton Avenue,
Romiley, Near Stockport,
Cheshire SK6 4EG

* * * * *

* I read SBD1 and enjoyed it, finding
* little to argue about - apart from
* that cover. It seemed so at variance
* with the rest of the mag. Why, I
* asked myself, does he let Graham
* Charnock hack out that travesty of

Burt Goldblatt's painting from the Robert Johnson record sleeve?
It makes nonsense of Goldblatt's painting and says nowt about Johnson.
Obviously if you want to pay some sort of visual homage to RJ you've
got problems because there don't appear to be any surviving photos
of him. I see on SBD2 you're borrowing from another painting on the
other RJ album. What are you going to do on SDB3 - the outline of
the recording engineers? And on SBD4 when you've run our of record
sleeves?

OK, so there are no photographs. So you want to do a

drawing. And the only link we have now with Robert Johnson is his music; so you listen to the two lps, soak it all up. Think about a youngster in his early twenties, reared and working on a Robinsville plantation - a medium height, skinny, brownskin youngster, with a bad eye (Honeyboy Edwards said it looked like a cataract). But which eye? A shy youngster according to Don Law, the A&R man who recorded him for A.R.C., who had stage fright and never faced his small audience when asked to play at the San Antonio hotel where his 1936 recordings were made - a country boy who spent his spare time and cash playing and gambling and wenching. Think about all that as you play the records. All his surviving output squeezed onto two lps; what sort of a man is haunted by the hellhound? Listen, really listen..to the lyrics, to the playing, to the philosophy, to the fears...let a mental picture slowly form, a young-old face, skin stretched tight, stubbled chin, damaged teeth gleaming in a smile, a desperate smile...a gaunt figure picking at his Sears-Roebuck Stella guitar...

Of course at this point the phone rings. A mundane wrong number. A guy mutters "Porlock". Or is it "Bollocks".

But the mood is gone. So you're not likely to get an offer of a future cover yet. But don't give up hope. I'll try the experiment again.

((Ah, yes. Indeed.))

JOSEPH NICHOLAS,
2 Wilmot Way,
Camberley,
Surrey GU15 1JA

* * * * *

* While I agree with you about the need for a
* fannishly oriented SF fanzine and the gap that
* exists just crying out for it to fill it, I can't
* help thinking that the kind of personality
* needed to make it work just isn't available to
* fandom, or to anyone else for that matter.

While, Kettle, Edwards, and Jackson may well possess the kind of qualities and interests, not to mention sheer damned enthusiasm and stubbornness to make the whole thing work, the real problem will be with the writers. No one fanzine can be written by one person alone, I feel, and not fall into the maw of the personalzine format. There really aren't many writers who can write fannishly about SF, never mind editors with the skill and wit to pick out what's needed and put their hearts into pubbing the thing.

I really think the whole thing has changed since Mike Ashley's day; academia has moved in on SF and is rapidly inflating it out of all proportion to its real worth. The fannish reaction to this, it appears to me, is the rise of cliques and in-groupishness, which tends to perpetuate the ghetto-like image the world outside has of us all. The situation has polarised - fannish on one side, academic on the other - and I don't think the climate is yet right for such a zine as you propose.

Not that I wouldn't welcome it. It's the kind of thing I'd love to see, read, enjoy, and participate in. And I'm quite sure a

lot of fen would welcome it, particularly the neos, who may be wondering just what the hell fandom really is and feel like gaffiating before they get a chance to properly test the water. But the 'huge numbers of enthusiasts' that you mention are, properly speaking, only enthusiasts, not fans at all - they don't want to get involved. They just want to read SF, give some sort of filip to their flagging imaginations, liven up the tedium of the everyday world. They don't want to get into any discussion about the comparative worths of Newcastle Brown v. Guinness, or even whether Ed Earl Repp was a cruddier writer than M.P. Shiel; they're wholly passive. But for the fact that the books are there on the bookstalls they probably wouldn't care less.

That sounds unnecessarily gloomy. But how many of us - and by 'us' I mean all of fandom at the moment - have interests as far-flung as would be necessary for this type of zine? Not many, obviously. How long would those capable of doing so be prepared to keep at it without some sort of continuous, positive feedback?

You were so right about the Owens Park campus. It was too decentralised for fen to make proper use of. Fine for students to walk and talk, but not for fen used to having everything under one one roof and easily accessible by lifts or stairs. Compared to the De Vere of Seacon the place looked like a slum.

And was, as far as I was concerned. Although I met a great many people I hadn't come face to face with before I never felt any real atmosphere developing, and it was the stark and functional appearance of the place that kept any such atmosphere developing. For a cosy, intimate atmosphere you need cosy, intimate surroundings, and Owens Park had nothing of the kind. While a superb con could take place in an abandoned Civil Service office block it would be a bloody great help if they left the carpets in place, had a full complement of bar staff, enough glasses to go round (at one point on Sunday they were serving drinks only to those carrying glasses), soft lighting...you name it. In a phrase, Owens Park lacked any amenities conducive to all-out socialising.

Geoff Rippington's letter was easily the most illiterate thing in the zine. And you telling me at Mancon that you had to tidy it up a bit to make it worth pubbing at all. My god, it makes one wonder...if TITAN is anything like that how the hell can it be in any way readable? How can anyone put up with his style (what there is of it)? It makes one wonder about the general standard of literacy in the UK today - especially as this impenetrable crud is coming from an SF fan when SF fen are supposed to be notorious for the vast quantities of books they get through, for their voracious reading appetites,...you'd think people would learn some of the rudiments of syntax and grammar and just plain verbal expression from their reading alone, if nothing else.

((Look at it this way kid; you're a young, strong, literate, intelligent bright spark. You know your sci-fi, you're opinionated,

and you probably know what bloody syntax actually is as well as how to spell it - and I bet you wouldn't habitually mistype 'supercilious!' as 'superscilious' so you wouldn't have some fucking drone attempting to 'subtly' take the piss out of you by behind-the-hand methods. In short I reckon you're the very man to run this science-fiction fanzine. Obviously you wouldn't expect to have both a wide circulation and an active readership; the obvious recipients would be BSFA members, who continue to be as torpid and unresponsive as ever, even in these dynamic BSFA days when more things are being talked about than ever before. But even amongst more apparently fannish fans I'm sure there's much keenness to talk informedly and informally about sf in print. Get them interested, especially the active collectors (more specifically the collectors who actually read the stuff) and you could end up with a viable little fanzine. Get it together, J.N.

Perhaps I have been a touch extravagant in printing excerpts from two letters putting the sharp edge of the boot against Geof Rippington, but hell, what can a poor boy do in way of slight return when he hears that some person with the name Rippington (probably the same and only) has made some kind of effort to organise a boycott of him by neofanzines due to the fact that his fanzine reviews are occasionally a little less than out and out adulation. I dunno.)))

JOHN HALL,
101 Lakeside Road,
London W.14

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* I think Pat Charnock is paranoid in the
* extreme, but then, what's new? Certainly, as
* you might expect, I have no regard for the
* present system of fannish awards. Who the
* hell wants their efforts sat in judgement upon by the likes of micro-
balls Boak and Boobs of Birmingham? Simply, let one of the market
leaders like MAYA run a poll with free entry for fanzines with more
than two issues to their credit and a free vote amongst its readership.
To make an award on that basis would not only reflect what fans at
large really do regard as the best fanzine, but also have the un-
doubted advantage of being entirely DEMOCRATICK and so free fanzine
editors from undue strain on the weaker blood vessels. And there's
no reason why the fanzine running the poll should disqualify itself;
I think fans aren't likely to be sycophantic enough to vote for the
mag they read most often or whatever.

((Well, yes indeed, Mr Reed. In recent weeks, almost since reading your letter, in fact, I have begun to think along very much the same lines. Even a hitherto staunch NOVA -supporter like myself has begun to look on that institution with some disfavour. Especially since Boak has churned up so much shit and made the

whole thing look more unconvincing than ever. I dunno about you lot out there but I am going to have difficulty accepting the impartiality of the two judges who claimed so vociferously that MAYA was such an obvious runaway winner in '75 that to even consider any other fanzine in any way comparable was tantamount to claiming all Walt Willis' stuff was ghostwritten by Steve Carrigan.

And I must admit I'm not sure I can automatically disbelieve the rumour that Rob Jackson (one of fandom's few Real People) declined a Nova Judge position because he wanted MAYA eligible to win again in '76. Anyway, all this horrible boogaloo, your letter, and the recent annual appearance of the CHECKPOINT Fan Poll lead me to suspect the answer might be in something like you suggest.

I've always believed in the idea of popular fannish polls, and I'd be happy to see the CP Poll, with its present categories and results system, expanded and encouraged. See it cover the whole of fandom, voting blanks in all fanzines, the whole business. Thus a true popular result would be ensured. The possibility of fringe fans 'accidentally' loading the result by voting for a single fanzine and it's writers could be lessened by an explanation of the purpose of the poll including a warning against such narrow voting. It should work.

Fundamentally though I still believe the best people to decide on the 'Best Fanzine' are fanzine editors. Obviously a select panel isn't acceptable any more, so a neat compromise would be a postal ballot of actual active fanzine editors. This needn't be difficult or expensive to run (no costs at all if voters make an admin donation) and would certainly produce a realistic and less arguable result than a panel.

But for general purposes an expanded CP Fan Poll sounds straight to me. STOP BREAKING DOWN Fan Poll?

'ere, Glicksohn, as you ought to be reading this I'll mention the reason that I'm not too fussed about the FAAN Awards is that all the nominees are foreign and I know nothing about them, so can't conscionably vote. Obviously this is just one arc of a vicious circle, but I'd prefer to see the British backyard cleansed of crap before I worry about what's going on across the water. Anyway all that stuff's Simone's responsibility.)))

IAN MAULE,
8 Hillcroft Crescent,
Ealing, London W5

* The main problem with the Nova Award as it
* now stands, apart from the unclear rules,
* lies with the judging panel and the timing
* of their appointment. Wouldn't it be more

suitable to arrange the judges after the fanzines have been
nominated? All it would require is for the nomination forms to be

distributed a few months earlier to give sufficient time for suitable judges to be approached. This should alleviate most of the problems inherent in the present system, but only if the person actually running the award has sufficient knowledge of fandom to select judges who have little or no connection with each other or the fanzines nominated. I'll stick my neck out here and say that Hazel Reynolds is not the person for this task. Who is? Well, that's another question, and one I don't intend answering.

I also think the award should be for a year's production rather than a single issue. It seems more of a leveller. Anyone with a bit of effort can produce a single outstanding issue, but it takes something more to continue a high standard over a year or more.

((Clever, but not quite clever enough, on reflection. If you think about it you'll see that nine times out of ten pretty well all the most suitable judges are likely to be either the editors of- or contributors to, the nominated fanzines. Substantially what you'd have to do is get people to choose between the chance of winning the Nova or being a judge. Also, by putting out the form earlier you make it more difficult for the average fan to remember what's eligible. A straight Novacon to Novacon period is fairly easy. Admittedly though this won't matter so much if the award is to be given for year's runs, as in fact it will be at the upcoming Novacon '76.

Well, despite the fact she's done well with dealing with something she doesn't appear to have much actual interest in, I substantially agree that Hazel Reynolds is not the ideal person to run the Nova, especially in the scenario you outline. I mean, an impartial chairman is all very well, but one who hasn't even looked at the fanzines in question is something else again. Maybe someone a bit more directly into fanzine fandom would be a better Nova administrator.

Still and all, I'm at the moment more convinced a poll is the best solution.))

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KEEP ON PUSHING

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we also heard from

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* MERF ADAMSON; I didn't really like Owens Park. It was too much like being back at university. As a site for a con I don't think it works. I doubt there will be any more cons in universities, despite the economy. The rooms are too small, stark, and unfriendly.

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JOHN HARVEY; I must agree with your ideas on what a fannish 'SF oriented' fanzine should be - why not send SBD in that direction? Although I enjoy fannish fanzines the more sf-oriented a fanzine is the more

likely I am to read it. Really fannish zines do get too incestuous and a little more concentration on sf could improve many of them. The excess of 'personalzines' in the LITTLE GEM GUIDE cannot be a good thing.

Mancon's amenities were far from palatial and not really ideal for an Eastercon. Even so Eve and I enjoyed it far more than previous cons because we made an effort to. I know some people view the con as a holiday to be spent in luxurious surroundings, but we found the cheaper rooms meant more money for books and booze. We feel a range of accomodation might be good and this is one thing we are looking for in potential hotels for 1978.

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PAUL RYAN; I must agree with Simone that the majority of males treat females as the less intelligent part of humanity. Most of my friends do anyway (none of them are in fandom). They just think of girls as a 'fuck' and no more. I also know two girls at college who confirm everything Simone says about girls being brainwashed into the moronic womanhood most men seem to want. We finally decided it was all the woman's fault, and only the woman can get herself out of the situation.

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DAVE STAVES; Thanks for your zine. Very enjoyable at times.

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JONH INGHAM; I found myself cringing at the complete disregard for the editor's feeling displayed in the reviews in SBD1, then in 2 I find everyone chiding you for being polite, as if this is British fandom's norm. I have a lot to learn in the ways of the natives.

I liked Simone's columns, even the poem, which as a confirmed poem hater is saying something. I especially like 'eatzer' and the last two lines.

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ANDREW DUNLOP; I liked the Ratview of the Nova Awards. It seems that fandom in general is very cliquish and from time to time certain individuals get shat on by all and sundry for no apparent reason. Even in my brief experience of fandom I have seen this happen, especially at Mancon.

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DAVID GRIFFIN; Even TITAN has its interesting parts.

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KEVIN SMITH; You were spot-on about 'The Rubberised Man'. It does rely on absurdity, exaggeration, and incongruity, intentionally so. Subtlety would be totally misplaced in a parody of a Hook book. I realised, also, that using the same style would give no more value to the story than possessed by the original. Value, schmalue! I got more jokes in. Can I help it if it bypassed your funnybone?

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also ERIC BENTCLIFFE and DARROLL PARDOE, whose letter was foolishly misplaced. Thank you all.

GIVEN LIFE; people who have moved around recently include currently almost-famous writer Robert P Holdstock, who, in an attempt to not lose touch with his roots, requests that lots of interesting fanzines be directed to him at FLAT 4, SELE HOUSE, NORTH ROAD, HERTFORD, HERTS. This, we assume, is nothing to do with the draughts in his new flat he complains of needing blocking up.....WANTED, WITH SOME URGENCY; a copy of that mysterious fanzine of the early seventies, 4M. Issue 2 to be exact. I will pay up to 50p for this curious item, but will be content to part with much less if you are kind of heart.....HNF BLOWS COOL; giant name fan Pater Weston got a bit upset at several point during the Mancon of infamous memory. They included the times when Graham Boak castigated him for jokingly suggesting the Worldcon should be closed to casual attendees, and when Ron Bennett (a one time fan) got hysterically annoyed when Peter presented him with a TAFF-winners certificate Peter had had printed up for TAFF-winners past present and future. The reason for Bennett's fury is unclear. Weston was so irate by all this he went around saying "I'll write a really nasty article about all this, I will, I will, if I can think of someone that would publish it." He carried on in this vein for some time, with me interjecting "I'll publish it Peter" periodically; the interjections got louder the longer he ignored them, until I finally shouted "Oh get fucked then" and walked off in a huff. Seconds later Pete rushes up. "What are you so annoyed for; if I'd known you'd publish it I'll send it to you." Later on, of course, he decided to write no such thing, "I have my image to consider," he said. "Anyway if I did I'd send it to MAYA, it's such a posh fanzine, gets me so much egoboo." Sometimes I wonder why I like Weston as much as I do.....BRITISH SCIENCE FICTION GETS SECOND CHANCE??: SF DIGEST, the SFM leftovers-mag, has appeared much sooner than anyone expected. A decent pulp-sized mag, with benefit of staples, it's a much neater easily readable production than its predecessor. Emphasis is on wordage too, with three stories of substantial length, and several other surprisingly interesting features. Labelled as being a quarterly, ther's no guarantee it will continue without good sales and (I imagine) very favourable reaction. Myself, I think it is not at all bad. Most mind boggling feature was a quiz which really sorted the posers from the knowalls; SF knowledge masters Pickersgill and Kettle failed pitifully to answer every question correctly in seconds, whereas smartass bastards like Malcolm Edwards, Ian Williams (showing the form he failed to display at the Mancon quiz) and John Piggott, Knew All.....REALLY FAMOUS PUBLISHER; news from Harrow is that fancy is succeeded by fact and Malcolm Edwards is due, within the next few weeks, to take over an editorial post at Gollancz where he will be fitted up as probable successor to John Bush as SF editor. Under the pseudonym of John Shrub, one expects.....REALLY REALLY FAMOUS PUBLISHERS; news from the real world of ish-pubbing is that John Piggott is giving up Games Fandom (again) to issue a fanzine sometime this summer - and John Hall, who has failed to gafiote completely, is limbering up his typing finger preparatory to putting out a fanzine later this year. Gonna use the title MOTORWAY STRANGLER at last?.....Oh shit, run out of both space and info just as it was getting interesting. Getittogetherfans.

