

STOP BREAKING DOWN L



Number 4
March 1977

S T O P B R E A K I N G D O W N
* * * * *
.....

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

CONTENTS

MOANING AT MIDNIGHT	Greg Pickersgill
EIGHT DAYS A WEEK	Rob Holdstock
SNAKEHIP'S DREAM	Graham Charnock
BURNING HELL	Greg Pickersgill
ALTERNATE TITLE	Simone Walsh
ALL RIGHT NOW	The Audience
ENDLESS BOOGIE	The Band

: : : :

STOP BREAKING DOWN is available from

32 WOODHURST ROAD,
ACTON,
LONDON W 3
(Until March 8th 1977)

PLEASE NOTE CHANGE OF ADDRESS

(AS FROM MARCH 8TH 1977)
7A LAWRENCE ROAD,
SOUTH EALING,
LONDON W 5

STOP BREAKING DOWN is available for

Trade, Contribution,
Letter of Comment,
Show of Interest,
2Op (Postage Stamps Only).

: : : :

The cover is an original illustration by John Ingham.

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

off the hook

with

Greg Pickersgill

UP FOR THE DOWNSTROKE

Yeah, well, been a while, hasn't it? Eight months if not more, long enough anyway to put paid to any crazy notions that STOP BREAKING DOWN is a fortnightly fanzine or anything like it. Well, what can I say? I'm sure there are any number of excuses, mostly inconsequential things like finding somewhere to live, disillusion, apathy, and general lassitude. Of course the latter three take precedence over all else, but the first is of some importance as will be explained later. You might as well take as read all the usual bit about the longer you leave it the less inclination there is to do it at all etc.

Actually if it hadn't been for Robert Holdstock (Britain's Second Most Promising scientifiction author) phoning me up almost every day complaining about his masterpiece herein not seeing the dark of duper ink I might just have let things slide for another year or so. (I'm really well ahead of schedule putting out this fanzine now, as those who track my fannish progress with due care will have realised.) In fact several people (other than those featured herein!) seem to have been quite keen to see this ish pubbed, and their interest has done a lot towards keeping the idea somewhere in my head. I only hope they're bloody grateful. As well as constant badgering the fact that the whole lettercolumn and Rob's article were actually completely duplicated and collated way back in July or August or something has been a sharp prod to me from time to time; there's nothing like a big stack of dupered paper looming at you to bring home the feeling of human failure. Of course the trouble with having a half-finished fanzine is that things get a bit, well, obsolete is the only word. Rob's article, though still excellent, is well out of date as regards his writing schedule; most of the work mentioned as future projects has in fact been done. The lettercolumn seems like a document from a vanished age (I was going to say 'civilization' but that sounds a bit out of place) with all those peculiar references to unknown figures from the past like 'Dave Rowe' (isn't Rowe a Jewish name?), 'Graham Boak' (I thought he was quite a nice fellow meself, once), and 'Doc Weir' (I always though the feller's name was Jackson). And even allowing for obsolescence the letters are not fantastic, certainly not the classic stuff one might expect from the picked men and women who recieve SBD. If you want to know what I think of as a good letter column flip back to that in SBD 2 and read superb contributions from many fine fans.

Another totallyobsolete item - which does, however, appear in a somewhat abbreviated form - is Simone's Silicon Report, probably the first written after the event in a deranged plan to rush out the

already overdue SIL 4 as soon as we got home. Alas that plan went the way of the equally ingenious one of slipping the issue out just before the damned Silicon. The number of false starts we've had in the last eight months defies belief.

++++++

CAN'T GET STARTED

In one of my replies in ALL RIGHT NOW you'll read me being rather suspicious of the motives of some people called Harvey who seemed to be planning a convention bid. Well since that moment of doubt several things have happened. I actually met the people and found they were Right indeed, a fact they soon proved by inviting myself, Simone, Leroy Kettle (who?) and John Piggott ('I am back in fandom now') onto their convention committee which was preparing to make a formal bid for the 1978 Eastercon at the 1977 Eastercon. Now at this point in time the less said about our bid (Channelcon it was called) the better because it's all gone right down the river. After protracted negotiations with a major Brighton hotel which seemed to be going in our favour the hotelier suddenly turned difficult and gave us a last offer on room rates which was, to put it mildly, unrealistic. So rather than mess around finding another hotel we decided to let it all go for the time being and come back again some time later.

That's not the interesting part about Channelcon though. The real value of it (apart from giving us an opportunity to run a con the way we wanted to) was that for the first time in at least ten years (probably much longer) there would have been two distinctly worthwhile bids for the Easter convention. For you see there was this little gang of johnny-come-latelies headed by deaf old Dave Langford and that crooked accountant Kev Smith, and including deranged mad bomber Dermot Thing, wishywashy Ian Maule and several others too inconsequential to mention. They may well have arisen well after the Channelcon bid was first announced but they were looking good. Very good, despite their intrinsic faults. In fact the worst thing about them was their choice of hotel; a smart modernistic pile just on the outside edge of Heathrow airport with a great view of Jumbo jets roaring in to land and a nice line in five-mile stroll to the nearest open restauraunt. Those are just details however; the rest of the bid was quite straight.

Anyway, back to the point. In recent years it's been remarkable enough for there to be two bids for an Eastercon; the only ones since 1968 have been Bram Stokes' Loncon versus Tynecon in 1973 (which was lost partially by Stokes blatantly hostile attitude to the voters at the convention and partly by simple misreading of the true nature of an sf con by attempting to hugify the whole thing by dragging in films, comics, and God knows what else); and the Mancon versus Seacon bids of 1973, of which all I really want to say is that the Seacon bid was put together overnight with the express intention of stopping Manchester seize power. As you may recall Mancon won the bid unopposed the next year with the predicted result. When you look at it like that it becomes clear there hasn't been any real contest for a convention within recent fannish memory. And now there won't be this year either. Shame.

There's no real point to all this, it's just an anecdote.

I GET SO EXCITED

Sometimes you truck on downstairs in the morning and there's a big envelope by the door and you think "Hot shit, fanzines!" and rush forward to pick it up. Now the only thing more disappointing than discovering the tasty-looking package is not addressed to you is the shock of finding something like TRIODE inside it when what you really wanted was a healthy dose of ORYAN or ONEOFF. Sometimes life is not all you'd like it to be.

Imagine my surprise then, when I picked up what had every feel, touch, aura and emanation of being a very dull Australian fanzine ('Australian' in the generic sense; even I recognised the American stamps) and wrenched it open to reveal a completely new joy. No plain old ordinary sf-type fanzine either, but a Good God honest-to-Gibson rock fanzine. And not merely a rock fanzine emanating from the lively and rapidly expanding rock fandom, but one from someone who seems more or less an orthodox sf fan as well, so it somehow managed to hold within it some of the best features of each disparate fandom. COWABUNGA, the 8th issue being the one I recieved, is edited by one John Koenig, who seems a good vigorous type of fan just like there aren't enough around no more, and his fanzine, which has every appearance of a conventional sf-fandom fanzine, seems to be very much the sort of fannish/enthusiastic fanzine I advocated in sf-fandom terms in SBD 2.

This emphasis on subjectivity and enthusiasm seems a bit out of style for rock fanzines, in my limited experience of them. Too many seem fastened onto either very narrow fields of interest or are too sercon in outlook, determined nothing is of value unless it is the product of years of research, sycophantic interviews, or analytic to a level that would make even Andrew Tidmarsh look like a superficial blindman. The writing in COW. is no great shakes; too much of it is a sort of rock equivalent of 'Goshwowboyoboyism', a gushing pseudo-hysterical style bordering on the incoherent; presumably this is the only way the writers can attempt to express the spine-tingling, limb-jerking, brain-busting rush of of their favorite bands and records. Disconcerting as these stylistic weaknesses are they're easily overlooked in the knowledge that despite the large body of rock writing there is as yet little 'language' to express essentially emotional/physical thrills. Still the enthusiasm gets accross and is communicable. Which is why I like COW, because it's fannish in 'our' sense, lacking the distant posture or heavy-handed bonhomie of other rock fanzines like ZIGZAG, DARK STAR, LICORICE, or the rest of that tedious ilk. Actually the new wave of rock fanzines that have sprung up around the 'punk' bands (who actually produce a lot of fucking good records, you should note) are apparently very fannish in style, especially SNIFFIN' GLUE from what I've seen of it. Although they do rather shit their nest by seeming to deliberately work towards crude production and an unnaturally aggressive attitude towards their readers that seems to me to be as much of an unpleasant pose as those rock-snobs to whom everything has to be 'art' and 'cerebral' before it is of any consequence. I'm reluctant to say too much about these mags because (shame shame) I haven't actually seen much of them, but it's a fault I intend to remedy Real Soon Now.

Now all this really springs from the fact that for some time

now my interest in records has been rapidly overrunning my interest in science fiction for a good few years now, and even overwhelming my interest in fandom more than somewhat. I've often felt like trying to break into true rock-fandom, but that is if anything even more difficult than cracking sf-fandom. The element of cliquishness evident at a specialist record-shop makes fandom look like an open-armed welcome. Rock fanzines are not especially easy to get, and few of them are precisely in the sort of fannishly-enthusiastic vein I'm after; either posturing and sercon to a ludicrous degree or quite simply obsessed with styles of music that don't particularly interest me at all, so I've never been able to build up a great deal of enthusiasm for them. COWABUNGA, though, shows that this style is in fact a viable one in rock fanzine terms and my enthusiasm has taken a big lift upwards. In fact I'd like to feature more music oriented stuff (apart from the titles and section-heads!) in STOP BREAKING DOWN in the future. I realise this will be greeted with total indifference and even some hostility by some readers, but as far as I'm concerned rock, blues, soul, country, pop and all the other little bits and sections have had a profound influence on the lives of a great many young fans of today (by 'young' I virtually mean anyone under 40) so one way or another I think I'll reach some kind of interested audience.

Somebody somewhere help me.

++++++

GONE AT LAST

Something all you lot out there ought to know if you don't know it already is that Simone, I, and the duper are moving. After longer than I'd have ever believed possible the paperwork involved with buying our own little home has been completed and we move in on March 8th 1977. The new address is featured strongly on the contents page so you'd better get your notebooks out now and jot it down, otherwise all your fascinating Locs, fanzines and free gifts will be sadly astray. However if you're very quick you'll be able to slip us a LoC before we move so I'll have something to read as I sit amidst heaps of boxes packed up and ready to be shipped off down the road. Typically for a fannish move we're only going about two miles down the road, but it's a nice little 8-room maisonette which only cost half a fortune. The great advantage is that I'll then have a fan-room of me own to nip off to and jot down the odd Good Line and Smart Notion once in a while, so all those people I've promised to write articles and columns and that for over the last couple of years may well find themselves getting more than they know what to do with.

Another great advantage is that I now feel sure STOP BREAKING DOWN will actually make its claimed six-week/two month publication cycle regularly. I hope anyway. In any event the next issue, with a superb lead article by Jim Linwood on his role in the making of IT HAPPENED HERE will be out before the Eastercon. Deadline for that issue is 25th MARCH 1977 so get it together!

Almost forgot. Duplicating credit for two-thirds of this issue goes to PAT & GRAHAM CHARNOCK and the Shrew Press. OK? CK.

Greg Pickersgill

EIGHT DAYS A WEEK

steady on the case

with

ROB HADSTOCK

(Robin Hadstock has just finished his first two months of hacking for money and here gives us an account of the penultimate week. Hadstock's first novel, EYES AMING THE BINDLY, was published by Fabres in April and was greeted by a rave review in the 'East Norfolk Telegraph'. His second sf novel has also been sold to Frabes; it is called EARTHWIND and the author is looking forward to an interesting and challenging series of misprints. He is the only sf author whose name and book titles have never been spelt correctly.)

.....

TUESDAY: Delivery day for Shadow of the Wolf, first of a great historical fantasy hack series. Awake at seven-thirty with the sun, the birds, and the fire alarm in the Flour Mill accross the road. Ah, this country life. Lie peacefully and happily staring at the ceiling, then remember with a great surge of sickness that I haven't yet finished the bloody book. Leap out of bed and begin typing in considerable panic; the book has gone on ten days over my private schedule already. Ten pages still to do and a full three hours to do them in. Ought to be a cinch. I promise myself that I shall never again be so lazy as to leave the completion of a book until the morning of Delivery Day. Sheila slams the bedroom door pointedly. Feel guilty about typing so early, but the thought of being dragged through the courts in front of my buddies adds life to the fingers. The book is finished at eleven o'clock, and a two minute dash to the station gets me to London on time. Deliver book to Rosemary Daughton at Sphere, feeling proud, wanting everybody to know that this is my first hack novel. Deflated as manuscript is bunged on big pile of commissioned mss. Aren't you even going to glance at it, I wheedle. Once started, I know, she'll be hooked, she won't be able to put it down. She picks it up and leafs quickly through it, and manages to find the one dirty bit. The page looks greyer than the rest and I realize that repeated reading of my own pornography has marked the manuscript forever as being the work of a mental juvenile.

Lunch with Rosemary. Have looked forward to this for weeks. Squid in garlic, fillet steak and greek wine. The waiter hustles us through the meal while we talk of faux pas and embarrassing moments, which seem to plague us both so we have lots of examples to throw around. The intellectual conversation finished we talk of dull things like writing and publishing. At the end of the meal I could eat it all again, but haven't the courage to ask for seconds. Bill is mind-boggling. Why

do I still feel hungry? We go to pub. More discussion of embarrassing moments. Then we both begin to make faux pas. Mine is less critical than usual, but sets me up well for the One Tun on Thursday when no doubt I shall get through several; Rosemary is telling me about an embarrassing incident last year when she kept bending forwards in a loose blouse and wondering why Angus Wells, then editor at Sphere, was going glazed around the eye region. He finally told her that everything was visible when she leaned forward, and she was highly embarrassed. As I listen I think of loose blouses and how the navel can often be seen by a sharp pair of eyes on top of a very tall man, and since there's nothing wrong with navels I feel confused and say "Why so embarrassed..there's nothing down there to see, is there?" Rosemary thumps me on the chest very hard and I realise HOW open the blouse must have been, and that I've unwittingly insulted her. Later she gets her own back. "With all the money you're going to pay me," I say, "I'm going to buy clothes. I'm going to smarten up." She snickers loudly. That snicker really sinks in deep. Hours later I can still hear it, echoing in my brain.

WEDNESDAY; Beginning of new book. Clear away all the crap involved with Wolf and look contentedly at empty desk. Check diary casually, and feel horrendous surge of nausea as I notice that the great new work has to be delivered in eight days time. Surely this is a mistake! Count the days, over and over, lips moving as I frantically flip the diary pages, but sure enough it has to be in one week tomorrow. I can't believe it, but extra time on Wolf has fucked my schedule all to hell. Do sums. 180 pages in eight days means 23 pages a day. Ought to be a cinch. Heartened I draw film script from pile and read it through. The book is The Satanists, a novelization of the film of the same name from Tyburn Films, the group who gave us such memorable classics of cinema like 'The Ghoul', starring Peter Cushing, 'The Werewolf', starring Peter Cushing, 'Persecution', starring Peter Cushing....who's the star of 'The Satanists' I wonder. Good grief, what a surprise, Peter Cushing. Baddy to be played by Telly Savalas. Must remember to ask Kojak fans for a few Kojak jokes. I sketch the characters quickly. Lesley Anne Down is playing the girl. Who the hell's she? No matter. Auburn hair, big tits, and slim legs with ginger pubic hair that will be revealed in the last chapter. That's the characterisation over, now to work, reading the script. By midday I feel queasy. I have to write a novel on this? I rant around the flat thinking "How the hell am I going to make 180 pages out of this shit??" I throw the script around. It is AWFUL. I cannot possibly soil my hands with such mundanity - my artistic integrity is threatened, my intellectual powers are threatened with stagnation...then I remember eight days and run whimpering to the typewriter and start to churn.

Peter Cushing is sitting on a bank by the river. His daughter Felicity is making a salad picnic. He opens a letter and finds a terrifying message for help. Hmmm. I read through the pages of script again, realising that I have to make five thousand words out of that. Panic stricken I read it again and again, looking for hidden depth, but nothing! Five thousand words! Brain ticks for five minutes.

Okay, here we go. Cushing is thinking about his wife who he watched being sacrificed at a Black Mass twenty years ago, and did nothing to help. He looks at the clouds and sees her white limbs stretched, and the black shaft of the Devil tearing into her belly, and the knife cutting out her heart. Great stuff. I write until I can't jerk any more nausea out of the scene, and discover I've done twelve pages. I'm still on the first line of the script. Hmm. Next bit some dialogue. Cushing dips his finger into the salad dressing and asks what it is, and she says its avocado pear, and he says isn't that expensive, and she says be quiet and eat it, and he says okay you win, and eats it. Four pages of the script! That means...Christ! Two thousand words! The brain ticks! He tastes the dressing and remembers that his dead wife used to make it, glances upwards, sees the clouds, remembers the Mass again...replay a condensed form of pages 2 - 14, limbs, shaft, blood...good, two thousand words roll off easy as pie. Lunchtime. Carlsberg Special, two bottles. As usual I slump heavily over the typewriter and wake up in the late afternoon. I finish on time, however, first thirty pages done.

THURSDAY; Start at eight and the pages shoot out of the typewriter. Have found the knack now; take five pages of the script, which typed out make about half a page of print, waffle about weakness, fear, Christianity, memories of the past, until all pages done, then copy out the script almost as per original. It's very easy.

Phone doesn't stop ringing. A good day. Doubleday have bought great first sf work for US publication. They want a little change. Defenses go up. How little? More explanation at the end of chapter one. I agree. I walk around the flat feeling important, then scurry back to the typewriter and keep on hacking. Phone again. Thick Brummy accent could be either Peter Weston or Rog Peyton. It's Weston. Want to use a story in ANDROMEDA, but there are one or two little things. Feeling confident now I say "Sure, send it back and I'll deal with it right away." Walk around the flat feeling important. Then scamper back to the typewriter and kill Geoffrey; a good scene, very enjoyable to write. In the same burst of speed I have his corpse reanimated and bend close to the sleeping Felicity, dribbling maggotty ichor over her face. Lovecraft looketh over my shoulder. I make myself sick with the description and have to go into the garden for air. I take my air-pistol and a hundred potshots at tin cans and water-rats later I feel recovered. Phone is ringing when I get back in. The Film Studio, the Big Boss. "How's the book?" he asks. "Putting the finishing touches," I say, coldness creeping though me. Two bad days could fuck me. He's already told me he spends three-quarters of his time suing people. I leap back to the desk and am typing before I hit the seat. I begin to feel bored and fed up with the book. It's so tedious.

In the evening we go to the One Tun; a splendid evening. Everyone is friendly and happy, and though my paranoia increases to the end of the evening I enjoy myself. Chris Evans tells me how much he liked my book. I buy him a drink. Diana Reed avoids the topic - she has obviously hated it. I can't believe it, but it's true. I rush back to Chris Evans and get him to repeat what he said earlier. Buy him another drink and feel better again. Ratfandom corner is apparently in intense

discussion and I stand nearby trying to get involved, but after an hour I wander off. I never know what's going on. Rosemary Daughton arrives and I smile at her as she goes past. "You're always standing there grinning at me," she says, and I look around wondering if she's addressing someone else. Andrew Stephenson comes over and introduces himself and I back away as a faux pas flies through the air from Rosemary's lips, narrowly missing me and landing squarely on Andrew's chin. Garry Kilworth stands next to me muttering "I feel like a dwarf, I really do..." He repeats this over and over, but later Ian Williams comes in and Garry's worries cease for ever. "Introduce me to that guy," he says, "I want to tower over him for a while."

Dave Langford is passing out party invitations. I grab two, reasoning that if it's a good party I can go away and come back again. I engage him in conversation. He tells me how many stories he's sold and I feel a cold hand clasp my heart. "How many have you sold recently," he asks. "Fuck off," I respond wittily, thinking that one sounds very small no matter how much you emphasize it. I ask him about his work and he changes the subject. I rant about later, furious, crying "It's not right! My fucking taxpayers money is going to pay buggers like him to work on secret missiles and they might be discovering things I have a RIGHT to know about! How dare he not tell me!" An Oxford yobbo takes sympathy on me and mutters about Dave actually working on Neutron Flux, although that could be just his cover story. More fury! I hate not knowing what's going on! He prattles on about sinusoidal motion and neutron flow and I stare at him blankly. I don't know what the hell it all means, but I have a right to know. Curses. That is the only bad spot of the evening, but it resolves me to get my own back. Henceforth I shall write one story a year in top secret and tell everyone except Langford. The fiend. Paranoia rules OK!

FRIDAY; Hangover. Walk around the flat bumping into things, and finally discover my desk by pure random motion. Grab it and sit down. Midday comes and goes and I haven't written a thing. My head splits, my stomach heaves. I shall never drink again. That's it, no more. Coke and the odd half of bitter for the rest of my life. My heart hurts. I ring up Pickersgill and tell him I've just had a heart attack. He laughs and I hang up in pique. My left hand isn't moving very fast and I panic when I think that the control mechanism in my brain has been wiped out. My heart hurts some more. I hit it, gasping for breath and clutching my desk, muttering help me help me, and think ahead to Sheila arriving home from work and discovering my blue-lipped body wrapped around the filing cabinet, a scrawled last message in the dust..."I love you still....." The wind blows as I am buried, and all the Ratfans are there weeping, casting fanzines and handfuls of apologetic notes onto the coffin. Notes that contain their apologies for all the nasty things they've done and said to me in the last few years, especially from that fucker Edwards, for what he said about me in STOP BREAKING DOWN 3. All the publishers are there, crying softly, and then they go away and seek out all my unpublished novels and half written stories and I become the new Sylvia Plath, recognised in death

as I was ignored in life. My heart still hurts, but after a while I realise it's indigestion and I get up and sigh, staring at The Satanists and wondering if it's all worth it.

I do two pages and the phone rings. It's Angus Wells, who is now hacking for a living and lives just across town. "How're you," he says. "I've given up drinking," I say, "It's destroying my brain." "Oh," he says, "that's a shame, I've got a bottle of red wine here..." "I'll be right round," I say.

I enjoy myself. Angus' new western looks very good, and he reads a chunk of The Satanists and grunts his vague appreciation. We talk about hack writing and money. We shoot a few bottles with his Winchester-replica air-gun. We toy with the notion of writing a spoof film-script like Trog and trying to sell it to Hammer Films. It sounds like a good idea and we earmark a week in October to write it. I cycle home, to spend the rest of the day hitting the desk, bitterly regretting ever leaving Medical Research, because there at least I was taxed intellectually. I keep looking at the script and thinking of what's to come; The Bull Chief - more historical bullshit in September, The Secret of the Craggs - fantasy crap in October, The Memory Stone - horror nausea in November....the list takes me to March, and I feel panic when I visualise the zombie that will arise from this desk at the end of that time, murmuring incoherently "Now is dah time fer me ter write a intel.. intrel..lactua...a brainy book..." Hack writing is like a wasting disease, with one good side effect visible in the back account. Sheila arrives home and I haven't written a word. A bad day.

SATURDAY: I get ten pages done whilst Sheila potters about enjoying her day off. I keep muttering though the weekend "Must get some work done" and she keeps saying "Well, I'm not stopping you," and I say "Right, good, well, let's have a drink shall we, then I'll do some work." And then I fall asleep. The story arrives from Weston and I unwrap it wondering what the 'one or two little things' are. My cry of anguish brings Sheila running. He had obviously meant there were one or two little things that could stay as they were; his list of changes runs into two pages. I have another crisis of confidence so I go down to the river at the bottom of the garden to shoot water-rats.

Andrew Stephenson arrives later to spend the evening with us and by that time I'm calm again. Sheila cooks the evening meal and we chat about sf, and he refers to a TV programme and I say "Oh, our TV is bust, been bust for a year." He's on his feet in a flash, running about the room, looking behind pictures and chairs and yelling "Where is it? Where is it?" I drag it out and he greets it like he even knows the man who put it together. The back is off in a flash (I have never been able to get the back off) and I peer over his shoulder at the printed circuits and say "Wot, no valves?" which shows how long it is since I've seen the inside of a TV. He identifies the cause of the malfunction in about five seconds of probing with screwdriver and pliers, and all the parts he's taken out quickly build up again and go back with none left over. I see that his eyes are closed, as if he's trying to prove something. He asks if we have a soldering iron. I laugh. The pliers he's holding is the most

sophisticated tool in the house. We need some heat, he mutters. . . Facetiously I say that we have a gas stove. That'll do he says and we carry the TV into the kitchen, push Sheila aside, and he repairs the TV over a low flame. It works too. Thankyou Andrew. Any good at water closets?

After the meal we idle around throwing names at each other, pinning down a writing philosophy; any such discussion is bound to end in frayed nerves because Andrew and I are at opposite sides of the fence regarding sf priorities. But the discussion is aimiable and interesting, until by accident we bring up Solzhenitsyn. Somehow, whenever I talk about writing Solzhenitsyn gets mentioned, and at that moment Sheila, who is enthusiastic about Russian writers, leans forward with an evil glint in her eye, watching me, waiting. I know what she's waiting for, but I can never stop myself, it's like being on an icy slope, once started you can't stop. I talk on about Solzhenitsyn, getting nearer and nearer to the Moment, and Sheila's grin grows. Eventually I say it: "I've read some Solzhenitsyn. I read A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovitch. Actually, I read about a quarter of it....well, to tell the truth I saw the film..." Collapse of Irish contingent in laughter. I feel furious with myself, of course. Andrew doesn't seem to notice, or is to diplomatic to mention it. One day I really AM going to read some Solzhenitsyn. One day.

SUNDAY; I work like the clappers and page ninety comes and goes. Half way though and three days to go. It's still possible, assuming no disasters occur. I make my usual mistake in the evening; two bottles of Carlsberg Special and a chicken chow-mein takeaway. Feel nauseated and pissed and spend the evening watching Arabesque on TV, unable to understand why my body won't move when I tell it to. In the last month I've eaten chinese food almost every night. It's always the same thing, chicken chow-mein. The order is half-prepared in the kitchen whilst I'm still pretending to read the menu, aware of the embarrassing repetitiveness of my taste. The chinese waiter, no doubt as sick of my face as I am of his, engages me in conversation for the first time; "You live loud here?" he snaps. I jump, look at him, and see his grinning teeth (teeth can grin). "Yes," I say, "I live just on the outskirts of town." His face drops. "Skirts?" he says. It goes on from there. I can't go back. I'm always so embarrassed. I shall feel the need to talk, and so shall he, and one day I'm going to break down and cry.

MONDAY; Up at the crack of dawn...well, eight-thirty. I bring Sheila coffee in bed and she stares at me with a stunned expression, as if she's just seen a miracle. I hit the typewriter an hour before the post and get a lot done. The post is huge. Another letter from the Medical Research Council which I throw away without opening; they want my vivisection licence back, but if they get it I can't shoot water-rats and claim I'm doing it in the cause of science. From Fabers I get the contract for my second sf novel, which is densely typed and which I sign without really reading. I notice with pleasure that I've moved from

the 50-50 paperback split with Fabers to 60-40 on everything over 2¹/₂ million copies sold. "Power!" I cry. I'm very gullible. The contract is all wrong, as it happens, but to me the important fact is its existence. I phone Chris Priest later and he says the first two or three books are safe, and then they drop you if you're not selling. He also casually mentions that he's heard my first book is a doubtful seller. The rest of the mail includes a fanzine - SCRIBE 3, which I put aside for later enjoyment - some advertising, a couple of letters, and a copy of Ian Watson's 'Oxford Mail' review of my book. I feel very chuffed when I read what he says. "The emotion works as a language" says the review. Damn right, I scream, beating an imaginary Martin Amis about the head. Take that you little fucker. Later I sneak off and look again at Fuckers Amis' four line mention in the 'Observer'. "A shy promise" is all he condescended to say. I sulk again, brooding about obscurity, failure, and that fucker Sheckley who got a column and a half about something he wrote years ago. I hate the world for an hour then get back to work.

TUESDAY; Two days left and sixty pages to go. I read from the script; Felicity is dressed in a simple white shift and kneeling in some sort of trance; the Duchess sensuously strokes the girl's creamy white neck...

I perk up immediately. Strong possibilities here. Ditch the shift; stark naked, full breasts, rounded buttocks, a hungry look in her eyes like she wants head or something equally repulsive. The Duchess dressed like a belly-dancer. Touch of lesbianism. Rubbing magic oils into their bodies. By mid-morning my hands are shaking. Phone Pickersgill, who is into this sort of thing and read him several steamy scenes. The heavy breathing from his end is taken as approval and I carry on. By midday I reach a crisis. I can't decide whether to have her raped or not. Decide not to. Story flags a bit as Black Mass proceeds, so flip to priest slumped in a corner and have Satanist come over and kick him a few times. 'Vomit rose to his lips as the foot thudded into his groin, then smashed into his mouth'. This sounds familiar so I check back and find I've used exactly the same expression twice in the same chapter. How many times can one be kicked in the mouth and lose the same teeth? I am reminded, and I laugh at the thought, that last year in three consecutive sf stories I wrote 'The screams of the time travellers were terrible to behold'. Just for the hell of it I write 'Simon's screams were terrible to behold'. I imagine that'll be edited out, unlike my joke in Legend of the Werewolf in which I called a hospital in Paris the Sacre Bleu Hospital. It's still in there.

By five o'clock I've finished page 142, with lots of mistakes as energy and interest wanes, but I'm now close enough to finishing to remove the terror from the situation. With Wednesday's output I'll be up to page 172, and that means just eight pages early Thursday morning to round off the book before delivery at noon. Is this what they call obtuseness?

*

Robert P. Holdstock

*
*
* :G:E:T: :O:N: :U:P:!: (and do the Attacking Budgie)
*
*

* It might seem obvious that the first choice
* should be Bryn Forrey, Grand Old Man of Fandom. Or failing him,
* Mike Collins, friendly, perceptive, and capable of getting through
* the day without a fit of paranoid melancholy. Or even the
* Cardiff Arms Park Kid himself, Rob Hansen, who is at least mad keen.
* Of course there's always Greg Pickersgill, but then he'd only want
* to see Terry Hughes, Mike Glicksohn, and Rich Coad, and hang about
* record shops. So what happens? If you can't find a Welsh Fan to win
* TAFF (which is how it ought to be after all) you get the next best
* thing. A Cornish Nationalist.

* Enter 'Big Veg'. Peter James Roberts, a Corn by
* persuasion even though he did recently quit London to live in Devon.
* There're so many reasons why he should win TAFF it's hard to see
* where to start. Aside from being a standout fanzine editor and
* writer he has brought several new dimensions to British fandom,
* proving that one doesn't have to have a crewcut and wear a dark suit
* to be a realistic TAFF-nominee. Indeed he's the main man to prove
* that people wearing orange jeans and peach jackets can cross the
* Atlantic fruitfully to represent us in the land of the Burger. All
* TVP heart, Peter humanely destroys beetroot before cooking them, has
* a pet lettuce he housetrained singlehanded, and has a lot to offer
* the Americans by way of recipe exchange.

* As far as fanac achievement goes Peter is editor of
* EGG, one of the top British fanzines ('a legend in its own time' said
* STOP BREAKING DOWN), and one of the wittiest, most erudite and
* inventive writers ever to grace British fandom (innately fluent use
* of language' - STOP BREAKING DOWN). As well as that he is a Superb
* Person in real life; many fanwriters mask personality flaws in their
* writing, but Peter's only flaw is that he doesn't allow himself to
* blossom fully in print as the master raconteur, astonishing wit, and
* all-round droll fellow he is. He's been solidly (well, occasionally.
* Well, ok, once in a while, then) active in British fandom since 1968,
* producing well over 100 fanzines, including MORFARCH (the best copy
* of a copy of BEYOND ever), CHECKPOINT (the newszine he founded and
* recently took over again, raising it back to new heights), EGG, (the
* fannish fanzine such as MOTA and SBD are modelled on), and the annual
* fanzine directory THE LITTLE GEM GUIDE. He's also had time to be a
* distinct figure at every major British convention since 1968, as well
* as many European ones, being Guest of Honour on several occasions.
* Peter is in touch not only with the traditions and forms of the past
* in fandom (of which he is an avid student) but is also right in the
* front line of the fandom of today, familiar and friendly with everyone
* in contemporary British fandom.

* So though even virtually all of BSD's readers will be on
* the sending rather than receiving side of helping Peter Roberts win
* TAFF they should consider it might be a good idea to send someone able
* to tell Americans about real contemporary British fandom from first-
* hand knowledge, actually able to add a personal edge to their enjoy-
* ment of British fandom and fanzines, to tell them what is really
* going on around here. And tell them well.

S N A K E H I P ' S . . . D R E A M .

do the congo
with

GRAHAM CHARNOCK

I was talking to Tom Perry and he was really looking forward to the Novacon. "American cons are far out," he said. "All they wanna do is sleep around, freak out, smoke dope and stuff like that. You English have an entirely different style. It should be interesting to experience. Besides, your policemen are wunnerful."

Tom Perry is a Good American, not entirely because he voted for Jimmy Carter and has a campaign button to prove it (envy), but because he is possessed of that distinctly UnAmerican quality: the ability to converse interestingly and listen sympathetically. The antithesis of this is called boorishness. Boorishness may not be a uniquely American predeliction, but they do seem to take rather an unreasonable delight in it.

Take Greg Benford, for instance. He managed to distract me from an absorbing and truly wonderful conversation with Dave Staves at Novacon by the simple expedient of coming up behind me and talking at the back of my head. I can't remember much of what he said except that there were lots of words like 'gollygosh' and 'yessireebob' and 'lemmetellya'. When I turned around and he realized I was actually someone he had previously talked at he seemed to lose interest and only spoke to me for another half-hour or so.

When he was through and I turned back to Dave Staves the sparkle seemed to have gone out of Dave's conversation. He was no longer using stimulating words like 'bitch', 'kill' and 'maim' but was slumped over his beer making grunting sounds. Swivelling in my bar-stool I caught the eye of affable Dave Griffiths and switching the magnetic charisma of my personality into overdrive sent out a silent summons from mind to mind directing him to come and rescue me from bad-scene fandom. He must have seen my lip tremble for he came. Dave Griffiths is an even more sympathetic listener than Tom Perry. I guess he'd make a Good American. We talked about how hard it was to maintain one's integrity in the face of commercial pressures, but how we were both managing to enjoy ourselves (more or less) despite it all. Trouble is, we didn't half sound like miserable fuckers. Dave is one of those fang of my own generation (i.e. several generations ago) whose awesome politeness has always deterred me from asking those intimate probing questions that the Charnox (especially Pat) are always renowned for in their conversation. He is largely an enigma to me after all these years. Everytime I meet him a little more of the enigma is slowly clarified. For my own part I must admit that I probably appear a little dense and stupid (and probably am) when I have to ask him, as on this occasion, "Who is that woman you're with?" But nobody had ever told me

he'd married Moy Read. And somehow, as I've indicated, it's not the kind of question I normally feel encouraged to ask him. Ooops

It was about eight-thirty on Friday night and the con was warming up nicely. At least they'd turned the central heating on this year. I wandered into the con hall to catch the dregs of Dave Kyle's introductions. Greg was just being introduced as a representative of Ratfandom. Greg looked suitably sickened, gritted his teeth (which managed to make him look manic and demented) and rose to his feet. I waited for the torrent and obscenity and derision that Kyle's introduction surely warranted. I waited tfor the Master to put the boot in. Nothing. Greg quickly sat down again. He must be in a good mood, I thought,

Gerald Bishop started up the film projector and the sepia-tinted credits of SOYLENT GREEN started rolling. "Christ," groaned Rog Peyton, obviously more used to papier-mache rockets zooming across cardboard galaxies, "They've got the wrong film!"

Unfortunately they had the right film. I squatted down beside Peter Roberts. "That's Edward G. Robinson," I said. "He died shortly after they completed the film. He had taste. And that's Charlton Heston."

Peter turned to me. "Gee Graham, you're just the kind of person everybody likes to sit next to in the cinema."

I was flattered. I told him how the film ended and left.

Back in the real world Chris Priest and the glamorous Pauline Jones had yet to arrive and rivet us with their colossal lethargy, so I let Brian Parker talk to me. I grunted and nodded in what I hoped were the right places, figuring he must be at least as drunk and tired as I was, so that he might not realise just how drunk and tired I was. I remember John Lowe sitting with us but not really with us, his gaze unfocussed most of the time or else locked somewhere secret. Perhaps he was drunk and tired too. I asked him if he wouldn't like to get married and he rounded on me; "What the hell kind of a question is that?" I realised that it was the kind of question I should have asked Brian Parker and not John Lowe. John Lowe was not nearly drunk and tired enough. It turned out that John had nearly married but had suffered some deep and dark hurt. "But all that was years ago," he said, "I've nearly got over it now." Ooops. John spent most of the rest of the con taking Pat's mind off the fact that I was elsewhere having a good time. They even managed to do a passable imitation of rock 'n' roll together. But that was on Saturday.

On Saturday morning D. West was conspicuous by his absence. On Friday evening D. West had done something very unusual. He had passed out. The full enormity of this is only comprehended if one has any knowledge of D. West's background. For a start D. West of good solid hard-drinking Yorkshire stock. D. West lives in Bingley where traditionally the Yorkshireman drinks until he can barely discern a double-six from a blank tile, then he wends his way home past the Damart factory (90p an hour and all the rubber slimming garments you can wear), kicks down his door, rapes the hamster, counts his winnings and, by this time, almost magically sober once more, has

a final fag and goes to bed. A few hours later he may be up again to double-check his winnings or build a laser out of cornflakes packets. In the morning, as regular as pigeon-crap, the Yorkshireman in Bingley is recalled from this shallowest of slumbers by the sound of his lungs blowing reveille. His fingers grope for the cigarratte-rolling machine. This is life as she is lived and loved in Bingley, Yorks. This scenario does not make allowance for D. West flaking out, dead to the world and the vicious finger-jabs of Brian Parker, in a hotel armchair at two o'clock on a Saturday morning. Put it down to train-lag. Apparently D. woke up at four to see a member of the hotel staff bearing down upon him, whereupon he figured he had better remove himself to the toilet for a safe period. Unfortunately the comforts of the toilet must have proved too seductive for he promptly lost consciousness again until Roy Kettle showed up in the morning to offer him the use of an un-made bed.

I overslept on Saturday morning, foregoing the delights of the traditional continental breakfast (how quaint to see how these customs linger even in today's most modern hotels) and foregoing the even more traditional lectures by Jack Cohen and Tom Shippey. Can you remember when con programmes were interesting and stimulating? No, I can't remember either.

After lunch in Debenham's self-service I lay on my bed in my hotel room wondering why I felt so tired. I tried to forget about my imminent thirtieth birthday. I went into the bathroom and peered at myself in the mirror. Don't worry kid, I told myself, you don't look a day over seventeen. And anyway it's how you feel that's important and not how you look. I felt awful. I should have gone back to bed but I decided to run my body down some more and went in search of young blood. Joseph Nicholas was no good. He had deserted the ranks of long-in-the-toothdom for the nubile delights of Graham Poole. I invited him up to my room but he demurred. "Honest I'd like to," he said. "But Graham Poole's offered me a drink if I manage to enrol 500 subscribers to SPI."

"Ar goober wodgit," said Poole in some damned dialect and strode off, Nicholas capering behind him. Wish I knew the punk's appeal.

Back in unreal life I checked out John Brunner's headlining speech before the blaze and glory of what we were led to believe was a BBC camera team. Brunner's demeanour was as condescending as I'd anticipated and so, nipping my irritation in the bud, I opted for fun elsewhere. Oh, but Brunner does irritate me. I can understand the views of recluses like Moorcock or Ballard who dislike the attentions of fans and are unable to handle the social unreality of conventions and who thus usually give both a wide berth. Brunner seems every bit as scornfully detached from the ranks from which he rose and yet he is always there, ready to be noticed by the press and the public, ready to recieve adulation and screen out the enmity, ready to indulge himself and yet unable, it seems, to give very much in return. I certainly sense very little affection in the man. Bob Shaw, Chris Priest, and Ken Bulmer, to name but a handful of more worthy talents, seem to enjoy life more, perhaps because they don't take themselves so portentiously.

I wasn't feeling too good myself. I found the auction, a little later, as depressing in its own way as Brunner's speech. I'm an sf purist. I've never developed a taste for fantasy, sword and sorcery, superhero fiction, horror, or Gothic. It was disturbing to see material of just this nature dominate the auction at what, in my parochial way, I continue to regard as a science fiction convention. It was disturbing too to see the avidity with which this junk was snapped up by an audience indiscriminating enough to huffaw one minute at the atrocious blurb of a ONE-EYE novel and yet clutch yearningly the next at a job-lot of Robert E. Howard paperbacks. At times like that I start asking myself in a still small voice of panic what my relationship to this business is. I dunno.

I wandered off trying to figure it all out. In the lounge Judy Watson and Another Woman were trying to sit on each others' laps with an exuberance which seemed mild and almost pleasurable beside some of my own worst excesses. Ian Watson stood by with his jaw thrust pugnaciously, his eyes limpidly a gleam. I was still mentally scratching my head (my lower lip adroop) about where all this sword and sorcery was taking us when Ian's jaw thrust pugnaciously in my direction. "Don't take that attitude with me, Charnock," he snarled. "Eh?" I said wittily. "I know just what you're thinking," Ian said. "You're thinking what on earth the Watsons are up to this time."

One day Watson and I are going to have to take the cure together.

Pat had bought a new dress for the banquet. She looked radiant and broke. Peter Weston was miffed that the remaining seat on the table his party was sharing with Tom and Alix Perry had been taken by Eric Bentcliffe. "Why does he do it," Pete muttered, bemused as only Pete can be. "We're life-long enemies."

Pat and I had only entered our names on the seating-plan at the last minute. David Griffin hadn't bothered to put his name down at all so someone had pencilled him in at our table. There were enough objectionable people in evidence in the banquet that night for us to feel relieved that we didn't have to eat with any of them. David seemed to feel the same way. "I couldn't think of anyone I'd rather share a table with," he said, looking around and adding slightly too sotto voce for my taste, "of those that are here."

The best words to describe David Griffin are 'charming' and 'nice'. He appears incorrupt but by virtue of his tender years and unlike Andrew Stephenson, possibly not incorruptible. There seems to be a slight potential for decadence in him, although he gives the impression of being one who will go about it in his own sweet way in his own sweet time (the Simone Walsh in me tempts me to say 'awfully sweet way').

In an attempt to loosen his tongue we offered to share some wine. "No," he said, "I never drink anything alcoholic." Now as Greg has said, there seems something unnatural about a fan who doesn't drink. It is hard to rationalize such hideous knowledge but one tries. "Against your principles, eh," I tried. "No," he said. "I just hate the taste." He gave the word 'hate' just the right spirited edge, so

you knew he wasn't joking. I refrained from pointing out that that's where most principles seem to start and end and began to revise my initial opinions about this boy's incorruptibility.

It was David's first convention, his first banquet, and furthermore (he told us) the first time he had ever eaten out. I dropped my roll on the floor and while rescuing it considered this awesome fact. This boy had apparently reached the age of being a fan without experiencing anything other than home- or own-cooking. Not for him the whole cultural milieu of Wimpey bars, Chinese and Indian restaurants, Pizza Huts, or God help us, presumably railway station buffets. Here was someone who had obviously learnt not to eat peas with his knife from reading books. A strong seam of reserve in the lad mitigated against any really embarrassing questions on our part such as "How?", "Why?", "When?" and "You don't say?", so we didn't learn very much more about him, except that before discovering the heady ennui of science fiction he had been reduced to getting his kicks by learning Swedish to the extent where he was now competent to produce a Swedish-language fanzine with a circulation in excess of 50 copies. Anyone who can manage that with no more apparent motive than "it was something to do" has enough application and bizarre dedication to do some very weird things in fandom. He might even get married one day.

All too soon the meal was over and definitely too soon it was time for Dave Kyle's address. He told us we really hadn't come to the banquet to eat so it didn't matter if the food was crap. I'm sure the waiters drifting around really appreciated this point. He went on to say that we had in fact come to honour the committee and to honour him. This seemed to me to be a rather high-handed and over-serious view of things, but I refrained from heckling. What would David Griffin have thought? Kyle went on to say that the presentation of a tankard with a gnome on it would remind him in the future that he had once been presented with a tankard with a gnome on it. Then he sat down and we breathed again. After witnessing Kyle speak for three minutes I began to understand why, ever since his hour-long Guest of Honour speech earlier that day, people like Chris Priest and Rob Holdstock had been going around exhibiting all the signs of bozoid brain-rot and glazing of the credibility centres.

Still there was the disco to look forward to. I loaded up my camera and went in search of compromising shots, even going so far as to stretch out on the floor risking Rog Peyton's stomping boots so that I could shoot up the skirt of Helen Eling as she yo-yoed across the floor. In the morning I discovered I hadn't loaded the camera properly and all had been in vain. A shame. It would have been nice to have had photographic corroboration of some of the less credible moments; Malcolm Edwards and Andy Ellesmore clutched in each others' fevered embrace as they smooched around the floor; Elaine Miller dancing with Brian Parker (Brian: "You're not putting much into it." Elaine: "If I were to let myself go I'd beat myself to death."). Yes, the disco was okay. It was one of those occasions which once more brought Greg to his feet with an impassioned cry of "I wish I could do that!" The object of his envy and adulation in this case was Rog Peyton in full steam. What impressed me about Rog was not so much the technique and expertise of his dancing but the look of total bland

boredom he wore while he was about it. That man has real style.

The first fan to turn up at our party after the disco was a pigeon. He sat on the windowsill all through the night, quietly crapping and thoroughly enjoying the wit and repartee on the other side of the glass. Occasionally when he was in danger of falling asleep someone would open the window and poke him awake or offer him crisps and peanuts. He had a really good time.

Things were quite jolly on the other side of the glass. Roy Kettle and Bater Roberts were vying for the comfy chair. Roy won. Dave Langford kept cupping his ear at me and thus forcing me to say things into it. I've noticed that when Dave is talking to his regular pals and cronies he doesn't do this nearly so often. I suspect they bore him and he keeps his mind elsewhere. I shall only feel really comfortable with Dave when I know him well enough to talk to him without him listening to me.

After a couple of hours Simone told me: "Greg's very drunk, you know." "How can you tell?" "He keeps going into his butch machismo pose," she said. I looked across at Greg and it was true. He was talking quite affably to someone quite innocuous, and yet his teeth were clenched in a gritty glittering sneer, his hands were clenched at his sides, every overweight inch of him seemed to be straining to dominate. Later I saw him talking to Rob about Eve Harvey. She was sitting down on the floor beside them and every so often they would glance down at her and snigger, while their hands gestured as if they were fishermen measuring the length of their catch. I don't think Eve knows too much about fishing because when Greg finally squatted down beside her and mumbled "Six inches, sweetheart," she seemed rather impressed. Hardly worth catching I'd have thought.

After a while Greg tired of fishing stories and Rob and I followed his strutting figure down to the lounge, sure something was in the wind. It was quiet but there were a few lost souls still about, Harry Bell was by the bar talking to Dave Rowe. Greg went up and tapped Dave on the shoulder. Suddenly people started leaving the lounge, most of them looking in the air and whistling. Harry started to sidle away from a conversation between Greg and Dave that was becoming increasingly animated. Rob and I sat down to watch. I was merely curious as to what was going to happen but Rob began acting like a character from one of his own hack sagas of Viking violence. "There's gonna be blood," he chortled. His face twisted into a vicious grin, I could detect drool gathering in the corner of his mouth. His hands pumped against the seat. Then: "Hit him! Hit him!" Rob shouted at the top of his voice. "You'll regret it forever if you don't!" His voice dropped to a low crooning note: "Oh, hit him. Hit him...."

Of course Greg didn't hit him. All that happened was that Rob and I got told off later by Simone for encouraging him.

Back at the party Andy Ellesmore, Chuck Partington and Dave Griffiths were picking on a guy who thought wogs ought to be deported. After a little while the guy went outside and started telling Irene Bell what a prick John Piggott was (don't ask me why). Irene started ducking and weaving like Charlie Chaplin in the ring with a

heavyweight bruiser; her hands kept clutching and reaching out for imaginary bottles to break on an imaginary bar and thrust into his face. Finally the guy fled with Irene screaming after him, something on the lines of "You're not fit to wash John Piggott's shoelaces!" I wouldn't like to meet Irene Bell in a dark alley, and I understand they have no other kind in Newcastle.

Next morning all that remained of the party was a considerable amount of booze and a little pile of raisins on the floor under Roy Kettle's chair.

It was Sunday. I lay awake trying to figure out the subtle changes being rung on the Church bells across the road. I got up wondering how I could possibly feel so good this early in the morning. Then the bells started chiming midday.

In the con hall Brunner was chairing a panel on the future of sf, which appeared to be in the hands of Andrew Stephenson, Chris Priest and Rob Holdstock. Nothing these able bodies said seemed to cut through Brunner's air of chilling superiority and icy arrogance, although at times he would wince whenever Rob or Andrew made blanket statements that began "Of course we writers...."

In the bar Greg was looking worried. "You're not gonna like this, Graham," he said. "What's that, Greg?" I asked. "Guess who forgot to withdraw STOP BREAKING DOWN from the Nova Award." "Oh," I said. "Yeah," he said, "There's no way I can get out of this with good grace. If I win I'm gonna be in the shit with my buddies..." "And if you don't win then there's no justice, right?" "Right!"

Of course there was no justice.

Of course the other major award, presented for the first time at the 1976 Novacon, was the BEST Award. Few people seemed to grasp the full significance of the BEST Award, especially when they were asked to contribute a few pence towards it. "It's simply for the BEST" said Malcolm, jingling the coins in a pint-mug. Once this point was clarified most people saw the wisdom of the BEST Award and gave generously. A total of \$2.66½ was collected by popular subscription and awarded to D. West by a unanimous vote of the BEST Award Committee. The BEST Award was later redistributed to worthy causes by D.

John Brunner got fivepence.

Around about this time the convention ended. After a slap-up meal during which Christine Edwards amazed even hardened gluttons by consuming a piece of cheesecake and a plate of profiteroles, assorted friends of the Astral League returned to Greg and Simone's room to finish off the Charnox booze. D. West amused us all by removing his dentures several times and then declared we must all be raised to the rank of Leauge Master by performing a simple feat of physical agility and endurance involving a broomstick. Unfortunately nobody had a broomstick so D. prowled around the room shaking bits of furniture in the hope that something resembling a broomstick would fall out. When he started dismantling the lamp-standard Simone ordered him out and told him not to return without a broomstick or something like it. Within minutes

he was back triumphantly clutching a common or garden cane. Out in the corridor we queued to perform. It goes thus; The hands are extended palm upwards. The broomstick (or cane) is then grasped in this position. Throughout the performance the hands must not move from this configuration. The broomstick is then lowered and one steps over it with both feet. It is then brought up over the head until it is once more held in front of the body. The right leg is then passed around the right arm and over the top of the broom. The broom is then taken up over the head once more and if all has gone well you should be back where you started from. If this sounds impossible that's because it very nearly is, unless you're into yoga or are double-jointed. Rob Holdstock is neither. At one point it was obvious that either his spine or the cane had to break. Unfortunately it was the cane. Almost before we could appreciate the impact of the tragedy D. had disappeared and returned with yet another cane. We marvelled at his resourcefulness and Rob resumed his attempts to defy gravity. While he was struggling Peter Roberts arrived rolling a cigarette and looking bemused. "I've just come through the lounge," he said. "You know that big rubber plant down there...it's all over the floor. The manager's down there trying to scoop it up. He looks very confused." Then he saw Rob bent double around the cane and staggered back. "You..." he gasped. Then there was a familiar snapping sound and Rob straightened up triumphantly grasping two pieces of cane.

"I did it," he beamed. "I'm a Master!"

*

Graham Charnock

.....
+++++

FANZINES MENTIONED IN 'BURNING HELL'.

- ATROFUS; Dave Cockfield, 31 Durham Court, Hebburn, Tyne & Wear NE31 1JX
 AFTER THE FLOOD; David Griffin, 8 Woodville Road, London W5.
 CITY; Helen McCarthy, 96A Fonthill Road, London N4.
 TRIODE; Eric Bentcliffe, 17 Riverside Crescent, Holmes Chapel, Cheshire
 NEBULA; Dave Taylor, 15 Alwyn Gardens, Upton-by-Chester, Cheshire. CW4 7NR
 RELATIVITY; Bryn Fortey, 90 Caerleon Road, Newport, Gwent, NPT 7BY
 MAYA; Robert Jackson, 71 King John Street, Heaton, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, NE6 5XR
 TRUE RAT; 43 Chesholm Road, London N16
 TITAN; Geoff Rippington, 15 Queens Avenue, Canterbury, Kent.
 INVERTED EAR TRUMPET; Richard McMahon, 287 South Lane, New Malden, Surrey, KT3 5RR
 GLIMPSE; Paul Hudson, 102 Valley Road, Rickmansworth, Herts.

BURNING HELL

fanzine reviews

by

Greg Pickersgil

Everybody got to have some good times, everybody got to have some bad times. In the last eight or nine months most of my bad times have been spent at a table staring hopelessly at a heap of fanzines and a blank page in the typewriter. Actually that's a lie. often the page was filled; but filled alas! with little of true worth. Far from producing anything meaningful and profound, liable to shift the whole axis of fanzine fandom in one fell shudder or even finding it in me to savage some poor ignorant cretinous neofan with no possible idea of how to produce a fanzine in any competent fashion, I found I was doing nothing other than fill sheets with humdrem repetition, third hand revelations, and even more superficial than usual analyses. Bad scene man. No wonder that on several occasions - even on the three or four times when all that was required to complete this fanzine for final publication was the review column - the main thought in my head was simply 'Fuck this shit'.

Now that sound like a right lot of wank, really. Why should I worry about whether my fanzine reviews actually say anything either new or penetrating? Well, for a start because other people seem to expect it of me. I find it gratifying that in the past my fanzine reviews have been praise by people whose commendations are valuable to me. Apart from that I think there could be some truth in the idea that fanzine reviewing is the only way of establishing some standard of achievement in fandom. And apart from that I think that if you're going to bother to do anything in fandom you'd bloody better get it done to your own satisfaction first because if you don't what you're issueing is substantially as insulting to your readers as a fart in the face. So taking all that into account its not quite such a pose as it might at first seem. But even though I've more or less stated those 'facts' just how much truth, or use, is contained within them. Of course once I started fretting along those lines it turned into weeks of sleepless nights and crazy notions began to pile up in my head like so much shit in a blocked drain.

For a start I began to consider my own attitude towards fanzines. Was I really interested in them? Did all these tedious little pamphlets really have any bearing on the world as I lived in it? Could it have been that once I had re-established myself in fandom and fanzines were pouring in at a greater rate per week than they had previously per sixmonth that I was becoming rapidly disenchanted with the whole business? Were the days when I would read even a piece of arrant nonsense like MADCAP with pleasure and interest a dozen times between breakfast and bedtime gone forever? Well, **partially** at least. Whilst

on reflection I found I had no doubt of my basic fascination with fandom, I soon realised that although I'd rather read a good fanzine than almost anything else I was becoming more and more choosy about what constituted a good fanzine. Too many fanzines on my pile were the sort that I really wasn't too fussed about reading again, even for the purposes of review. Not that there was anything particularly bad about them, God knows if there had been I'd have been glad to put myself up to the task of pointing it out to anyone who wanted to know, but they were just, well, dull is a word that springs to mind. Tedious, mediocre, and inconsequential are others that could equally fit. By the time I'd figured all this out (lightning-flash revelations come slow around this locale sometimes) I felt more than a little pissed off with these scrappy efforts that had had me scratching my head struggling to find some snappy comment to make about them. Now I realise that makes me sound a bit of a cunt who treats fanzines with disdain, but it ain't necessarily so. I still enjoy reading a new fanzine. No better pleasure outside a woman's arms etc. But sometimes they don't get you right by the brain and pull, do they. I know it's naughty of me but sometimes I feel that those editors who are spending their time and energy putting out fanzines with such a low stimulation index really ought to be taken out the back to have their faces rubbed down the drains for a few minutes. Trying is not always sufficient. Merely putting out a fanzine is not enough. Shoot your shot and give it all you got, not fuck around.

So by the time I'd sorted that lot out and walked around the room a couple of times effing and blinding I started to get even more perverse notions. I began to wonder if John Hall was right after all when he said fanzine reviews are a load of shit. Or if Dave Rowe had not been entirely out of touch with reality when he claimed that fanzine reviewers use their platforms to expend their own personalities at the expense of fanzine editors. I began to wonder whether all this heart-break was going to pay off in the long run. Maybe I should push out the issue with a set of record reviews or a chunk of my porn novel in place of the reviews. I mean, you know and I know that no matter what is said, or how it is said, no-one is going to pay a blind bit of attention, especially the people who should be those with the biggest eyes and ears, the neofans. I began to wonder if there was such a thing as a fanzine editor who paid the slightest bit of attention to what was said about him in a fanzine review. It suddenly became clear to me that progression and improvement amongst faneds is a long and painful business that comes with long years of experience and cannot - or often will not - be absorbed overnight from whatever quantity or quality of reviews, articles, guides, or whatever the hell. Now that fact just can't be wrong; how else can a man explain the pathetically awful first, second, third, and even fourth issues of dull, illconcieved fanzines that hit the mail with dread regularity. The good ones? Blind chance, of course.

So then, like, what's it all for?

Well, no doubt fanzines as subject-matter provide for some of the best and most fascinating of all fannish writing. Recently this has been superbly exemplified by D West's major article in TRUE RAT 8 (an otherwise undistinguished fanzine by a minor member of the BRITAIN IS FINE IN '79 Committee). This was a well-wrought piece of a quality

rarely found in fanzines on any subject down to and including science fiction. Here we see a man with definite ideas and thoughts and the ability to express them well, with cutting incisiveness where needed, with pungent humour when necessary. By virtue of its subject matter it is intensely fannish, with the super-value of being almost essential reading for each and every one of the fanzine's readers. No doubt, any worthwhile article on fanzines in a fanzine creates simply by virtue of its existence one of the rare occasions when a fanzine item is of importance and interest to every one of the readers. Of course there still exists the notion that no-one will have their attitudes improved or altered one jot by what is said, though that's no fault of either the writer's or the article's. Therefore if you subscribe to the idea that criticism (of whatever kind or level) must have a practical purpose, must be essentially instructional no matter what, fanzine reviewing is a waste of time.

OK. So let's pause a moment in this nosing motion towards trying to elevate fanzine reviewing to some sort of critical level and examine the other side of the coin. Fanzine reviews as merely incestuous comments on our own small world and its media. Everyone likes to read about themselves, as virtually everyone likely to read fanzine reviews will do regularly, occasionally, or eventually, depending on their degree of involvement in fanzine work. And most people share an interest in picking up on what others thought about something they've read (the justification, so I'm told, for the mass of halfwitted book-reviewing found in a certain class of fanzine). Of course to do even that with any realistic hope of entertaining it has to be done with some style, flair, and a reasonable level of perception throughout. Some sort of contents-listing type short reviews with 'liked A/hated B' type crap ladled over it is really neither use nor entertainment. So no matter what you get back to having to consider the beast before slaying it. The trouble, still, with most fanzines is that they are such unappealing prey that often enough the hunter loses interest in the game. Still and all, even the shortest, least considered review fills up a page or so, puts another item on the contents page, strikes off the obligation of a letter-of-comment, and gratifies whoever sent you the fanzine with the thought that at least you took it out of the envelope. Big deal huh?

So where have I got to with all of this? Frankly, I'm unsure. I, myself, personally, believe that good writing on fanzines is the highest art in all fanzine writing and I aspire to some sort of pinnacle within the field myself. I rarely achieve self-set goals, but I'll keep on keeping on. I'm still not entirely convinced that fanzine reviewing has any practical value; how much is there to be said anyway? Once you've panned one crudzine you've panned them all, really. And if people can't recognise material of worth without having their noses rubbed in it then maybe they don't deserve to see it at all.

Maybe all of this muddled head-searching is consequent to the fact that nothing especially remarkable has happened in fanzine publishing in Britain recently. Maybe worthwhile reviewing is too closely tied to the material under consideration. I mean, silk purses and sow's ear and all that. Anyway, the hell with it, even if I had developed some entirely new ethic or critical code of fanzine reviewing no-one'd give a damn anyway. So let's go to the crossroads and

see what's been going on wrong.

.....

I suppose a damned near perfect example of the sort of worthily-dull fanzine that is the bane of fanzine reviewers everywhere is Dave Cockfield's ATROPOS, the third issue of which came out some time ago. That, really, is all I should say about it, for although I grabbed it eagerly enough when it arrived I only let it slip from my grasp in favour of re-reading Bill Millar's excellent book on the Coasters and, shock-horror, hardly looked at it again, even for the purposes of review. I'm told that my negligence has not been to my detriment, but that's neither here nor there because I'm vaguely ashamed not to have read Dave's fanzine with anything like interest. However I find it easy enough to rationalize away any presumed failure on my part by claiming that any fanzine must above all attract and involve its readers ('a fanzine without involvement is a failure' once said a very wise man) because even though it drops unsolicited though tacitly invited onto one's doormat it really has no intrinsic appeal greater than that held by any newstand magazine which one must be in one of a million ways cajoled and coerced into buying on the promise of goodies within. A promise rarely fulfilled as I have discovered on many forays into Soho porn-shops. What I'm getting at is that even though the damned thing is a fanzine and all fanzine fans are presumed to be interested in it per se, that presumption is something that can lead the aspiring faned well awry. Really, if a fanzine gives every appearance, even on inspection, of being uninteresting, there's no reason why it should get any more of a fair shake.

Too many faneds seem to believe that merely pubbing their ish and cramming it with things they like is sufficient. Well, it may be if you just want to do it for the sake of it, but if you look on a fanzine as something which will grow and improve with every issue this ain't good enough. Someone like David Griffin, for instance, who publishes a remarkably nondescript fanzine like AFTER THE FLOOD which is notable only for his persistent use of binary for issue-numbering, can wonder in all naievety why he only gets two or three letters. After all he's putting in the sort of thing he's interested in isn't he? Yeah, but maybe no-one else is. You got to play to the audience no matter what. And not just rubbish either, not just amazing bin-lining like articles on Rosicruciansm (ATROPOS 2) even though they draw actual fucking letters of comment (ATROPOS 3). Which is something else that never fails to amaze me; would any one of the people who wrote anything to ATROPOS about Rosicrucianism ever have thought spontaneously about the cult without the stimulus of the article? No, they probably wouldn't, and contrary to expectations I am not going to say that is a good thing. I don't for one moment believe that anyone needs articles like that in fanzines and it's a testament to the dimness of many letterwriters that they often say things like 'Coo, if not for Jimmy Phan's article on Pig-fucking I'd never ever have thought about it. What a fascinating etc.' And of course they'll have forgotten about it in a weeks time. Makes no impression, lasting, and is thus worthless from the beginning. The only sort of fanzine writing that ever makes an indelible impression is the sort of stright from the heart personalised stuff and don't let anyone kid you

otherwise.

Where was I? Yeah, I wonder why faneds never seem to think in terms of drawing the reader into their fanzine, making it deliberately attractive as a reading proposition. Why does anyone embark on the expensive and time consuming task of pubbing the fucking ish and then just sling in any old crap lying around? Who knows. Not me said the little brown hen, or whatever the bloody creature was.

All of which makes Dave Cockfield sound cretinous, which is a pity 'cause he isn't. In ATROPOS 3 he has at least conquered the dreadful mock-humility of his previous editorials, and in articles published elsewhere has shown himself an interesting and readable commentator on fannish characters and events. But he has, completely and totally, failed to build his own fanzine around an interesting central core. In it he says he thinks this was his best issue so far. No wonder, then, that the fourth issue has been so long in appearing.

By contrast we have Leroy Kettle. For the nonce reconciled to the fact that his way to everlasting fame may not lie along the path trodden by such auspicious fans-into-pros as Christopher M. Priest and G. Peyton Wertenbaker, Kettle plunges onward ever onward in his ambition to become the Hugest Name Fan since Peter Wilson. His most recent step in this direction (marathon articles in MAYA and favourable reviews of appalling stories in the TIMES LIT. SUPP. notwithstanding) was to make over his one-time personalzine TRUE RAT into what is known by the cognoscenti as a 'genzine', which doesn't mean 'genuine fanzine' as one might expect, but that it contains material by several diverse hands other than the editor/publisher. (STOP BREAKING DOWN - the Neofan's Oracle.)

And some tasty diverse hands appear here too, proof indeed that they who ask shall receive. Would that more fanzine editors take the trouble to request material from worthwhile writers instead of snatching wholesale at the efforts of brothers, cousins, and old school magazines. Graham Charnock, Peter Roberts and D. West are all tuff men with a bunch of syllables at the best of times and most anything by them is worth a moment's bated breath. Unfortunately although a grand maxim oft expressed in several great blues lyrics is 'Everything's gotta change' change is not always for the best, and sad to say this 'new' TRUE RAT is an experiment which does not quite come off. For me at least. (Well, I bet ya thought I was stating some kind of fucking universal law again then didn't ya?)

Let's put it this way; the shift from personalzine to genzine is a shift in idea only, not in style. The fanzine itself, despite the addition of a few headings and some good cartoons by D. West, looks just like the old TRUE RAT, the essential appearance and flavour of it remaining unchanged, giving the curious feeling that here we have Kettle carrying off a substantial coup in pastiche of his best buddies' styles but having forgotten the comic punchlines at the end. What I mean is that for all his legendary ability to pick up and correct the most unobtrusive typo Kettle has yet to extend such meticulousness to such gross items as layout. The slipshod approach that virtually worked in favour of TRUE RAT(personalzine) here seems untidy and uninteresting. The worst example of this occurs in Peter Roberts' article,

which could well be a fascinating bit of fanhistory, but is laid out so badly - for instance several lengthy quotes are hardly distinguishable from the main text - that it looks quite unreadable. Casual layout is one thing, careless layout is another. And apart from that I'm far from sure articles on fanhistory should be in TRUE RAT anyway. I tend to think that each fanzine has a specific characters and their editors would be well advised to select material that is in keeping with the overall image.

Other pieces don't suffer so badly as regards layout; Charnock writes well, if like a nutter, and West provides one of the best pieces of fanzine criticism I've ever seen.

This could be a damned fine fanzine, properly produced, but no matter what Kettle ~~doesn't~~ really need it. His own material is lost and wasted amongst the rest, and despite a great ability to draw excellent material from ace fanwriters he seems reluctant to work sufficiently hard to do it justice. And why bother, he's one of the great fanwriters, there's enough genzines, only one Kettle, he should do what he do do best.

And talking of genzines the surprise of the century is that young Geof (sic) Rippington's TITAN is really coming up roses after all. The fourth issue is interesting, varied, literate, and even witty on occasion. Nicely produced, open and neat, with lots of Terry Jeeves illos ('JEEVES FOR TAFF' says TITAN, surprise surprise). Good compilation of fanzine reviews, fan history, book reviewing and letters. The whole thing probably succeeds because Rippington is no great shakes as Mr Personality and the onus is entirely on the fanzine to be interesting and readable, and it succeeds. In fact the only noisome patch is that occupied by Andrew Tidmarsh, the fan who is taking old notions of criticism as self-aggrandisement to all-new heights. No one on earth sounds as portentous and pompous as Tidmarsh in full flight and I rather tend to dismiss him as a sort of jejeune John Brunner, especially when he opens an article branding fans as 'childish' in . . . thinking and expressions. This sort of opening invariably lead me to wonder why if he thinks we're such shit he's allowing his work to be published in a fanzine at all - though I grant he may have the notion of bringing eyesight to the blind (but I don't want to see things his way) - and when I read later some sort of crazy idea that the western world is causing over-population by forcing the Third World to overproduce raw materials I really do lose all patience. The trouble with Tidmarsh is that he isn't merely iconoclastic and aggrevating but is fucking dull as well. In fact I'd swear that the Andrew Tidmarsh I once had a perfectly fascinating conversation with about Gary Glitter singles is a completely different person.

At the last Globe I went to a curious thing happened; this funny little woman came up and sold me a fanzine. 30p. Lots of money especially for a STAR TREK fanzine. Now I'm not so crazy as I sound because it so happens the producer of that fanzine is one Helen McCarthy who works in the same building as I do and who walks right past me in the corridor occasionally. So altogether it was as good an opportunity as any to check out this curious sub-fandom. And curious is just about the right word too. Similar enough to a 'real' fanzine to lull one into

a sense of false familiarity some huge culture-gaps soon open up. Not so much the mere fascination with STAR TREK, which as far as I'm concerned is not much crazier than any fascination with sf anyway, or even the ST fiction, crosswords, and all the rest. No, what rocked me back was the peculiar glittery innocence of it all, a sort of Rowesque community bathed in light and friendship where everyone helps everyone else off and on with their Fancy-Dress and oohs and ahhs at the appropriate times at the Fashion Shows at ST cons, and gives an ovation for the hard-working organisers at the end, and generally all is sweetness and light. No-one gets drunk, falls over, feels anyone else up, or feels shitty. It's the Fashion Shows that really knock me out though. The descriptions of them herein are quite lyrical, exuding an almost perverse girlish fascination that almost but not quite slips over the line into the tastefully erotic. Ok, so I'm exaggerating a bit but the thought is there. Actually CITY 3 (which is what I'm talking about) is not too bad, considering. Considering what, though, I'm not saying.

From the ridiculous to the sublime, great joy fell my way when the unexpected bounty of Bryn Fortey's RELATIVITY 7 hit the door mat. The first REL. written entirely by Fortey (bar a few letters) it hits a new high for a generally enjoyable fanzine. Fortey's article on his days as a boxing man is a pure delight, vivid, punchy (pun!), and damned funny. Exactly the kind of article I'd dearly love to publish in STOP BREAKING DOWN. And amazement on amazement, poetry in a fanzine that is not merely slightly readable but fucking Good! Mr Fortey is often a god amongst men. There's not a lot can be said of a fanzine like this and not a lot that needs to be. Let us enjoy it while we can.

Another fanzine somewhat similar in that it has formed a distinct personality that does not need to be matched against any sort of criteria of fannish excellence is Richard McMahon's INVERTED EAR TRUMPET, of which no. 4 was the last issue, McMahon having gafiated temporarily though due to return some day soon with another fanzine with an equally cretinous name. Editorial personality is the name of the game and McMahon wins through with a genuinely funny article about going to the dentist which may well be all lies but bloody'ell made me laff. Nice cartoons too, by the Howard Hughes of fandom, Paul E. Thompson. There are signs too that Richard is giving up his pointless crusade against 'obscenity' in fanzines and concentrating more on producing worthwhile fanwriting.

GLIMPSE And NEBULA were two new wave type fanzines that always struck me as similar in their 'professional' approach, with an emphasis on fiction, layout, subscription rates and all that. Even so I soon found them worth looking forward to. GLIMPSE 4 is, according to editor Paul Hudson, the last. Obviously he held to his ideas of getting his fanzine to grow gradually to full professional status somewhat too strongly, whereas David Taylor and his gang over at NEBULA has become more and more conventionally fannish in style and format in the last few issues. Artwork is NEBULA's strong suite, with Tony Schofield and J. Mike Barr (Jim Barker) producing the best illustrative art I've seen in British fanzines ever, a pure delight. All the fiction is crap, of course, and I didn't read any of it, but the columnists, particularly Brian Tawn (publisher of the rather good fanzine SCRIBE), are both

readable and interesting . If these boys can keep up their standard of artwork and columists - and maybe produce more of the humorous pastiches like their marvellously funny one-off DAWN PATROL BLASTER ACES - the world will be a better place. Don't be put off NEBULA because you think of it as a fiction fanzine, there's too much good in it to miss.

What can one say about TRIODE that hasn't bee said before? About ten or twelve years before, more or less. A peculiar dinosaur existing in a sheltered corner of the north-west where scant sign of the 1970's has penetrated, whenever contemporary fans (I can't quite bring myself to call editors Terry Jeeves and Eric Bentcliffe 'contemporary fans') write for it they always seem to adopt a slightly peculiar style that reeks of the most jocular affectations of British fandom of the late fifties, the school brought up on the Goon Show and copies of 'Punch'. Thus Robert Jackson in witing about a rock-band causing alarm in the countryside by practising at night rather makes the whole thing sound like something taking place in a different century to this one, and worse, makes it sound as though he is totally unfamiliar with the whole thing. I dunno. And Tom Perry's affection for puns is, to say the least, over-indulged. It somehow pains me to think that people like Mike Glicksohn and Terry Hughes think this fanzine is fannish fandom incarnate.

And here we are at last with the big one. MAYA. My initial reaction to MAYA is ineveitably that it is too cold, too professional, without even the glaring fault of publishing awful fiction perpetrated by other quasi-professional fanzines such as NEBULA. But when it is filled, as this issue is, with what are manifestly excellent articles laid out and illustrated in fine style, I begin to reconsider. Could it be, I wonder, that my reaction is merely a subconscious cover for my actual realisation that MAYA is really just another fanzine essentially, something within the field to which I myself contribute, but at the same time so far above my abilities in its appearance, the quality of its contributor, its drawing power for same, and its depressingly healthy and clearminded intellectual attitude. Do I recognise this and recoil from it in awe. Is this fanzine just too good and to save my eyes I search for some trace of flaw, some evidence that it is not a fanzine at all and I need not judge my own efforts aginst it any more than I would aginst LET IT ROCK, WHITEHOUSE, or F&SF. Maybe, maybe. I can never quite make up my mind.

Having said that MAYA 12/13 probably seems so supernaturally good because of its material; superb examples of fanwriting by Peter Weston (making it clear once and for all what a destructive influ ence Charles Platt was on fandom in the '60s), Larry Chortle on how to be a failed pornographer, and Malcolm Edwards writing fanzine reviews just like as though he'd read the fanzines concerned. Remarkable stuff. Two years ago MAYA was merely a promising fanzine; nowadays if only Robert Jackson could insert a bit of genuine editorial personality I'd give it the Goddamned NOVA Award with my own two hands.

Greg Pickersgill

A L T E R N A T E T I T L E
.....

back again

with

SIMONE WALSH

It is amazing how the months have sped by since we last published STOP BREAKING DOWN. No doubt Greg will justify why we have been so idle and unproductive. I expect he will blame everyone else for being so dull and not inspiring him to produce his usual literary gems. For my part, instead of writing my usual in-depth article on the ailments of fandom, like what I'm so good at, I have decided to fill you in on some of the exciting things we have done in the last few months.

One major milestone in fannish history was the departure of Peter Roberts from London for the quiet life of a country squire. I can see him now, sitting back in his armchair wearing his dog-tooth check hacking-jacket, cigarette in long elegant hand, contemplating whether to partake of a glass of port now or in half an hours time. Perhaps he has found that the pressureless life has meant his most difficult decision has been whether or not to get up in the morning, or afternoon for that matter. Maybe he has a beard down to his feet now, and his fingernails are long and twisted and his hair is matted - the effort of finding his hairbrush under all the dust and cobwebs surrounding him being too much for his wasted, unfed body. Perhaps his mother got fed up posting onion and cheese quiches through the letter-box, especially when she peered through it and saw a mildewed heap of rotting quiches seeping along the hall floor. My God, perhaps we ought to send a rescue party to Dawlish and save Peter from all that dreadful emptiness! It all began with such promise.....

The day dawned wet and grey when we drove the hired van to Peter's place to transport him, his, and Pat Charnock to Dawlish. Graham Charnock was playing with the Burlingtons that Saturday night so he locked Pat's chastity belt on - the one Pat had given him for Christmas - and promised to be good all weekend. Peter had actually thought it was his idea, going to live in Dawlish, but in fact we had bribed his aunt to let him live in her cottage on the moor so that we could remove the evil force from our midst. So with the wind howling through the empty streets of London we scuttled to and fro from Peter's room to the van with all his unworldly belongings. This accomplished, Graham pressed something into Pat's hand, and whispered to her, "As I won't be seeing you for some time take this. I won't be needing it. Well, not with this chastity belt on anyway." He handed her his prized possession, his knife, Elbowiebar. "You never know when you might need it with the evil one jogging around in the back of the van with you." Pat took it from Graham with tears in here eyes, because he had accidentally stuck the point of it into her hand.

We bid Graham farewell and drove off into the beating rain and ever-increasing gale that was driving in from the Thames.

As we approached the West Country a dreadful silence descended over the countryside, birds stopped singing and turned silently to watch us as we passed. People cowered against walls and mothers drew their children to their skirts as the vehicle of evil swirled past. The rain by now had ceased but the wind was raging as if trying to purge us from the face of the earth. I battled on driving the van, I had to overcome the elements...

I must stop reading so much bad fantasy....

Once in Dawlish we were all suitably impressed by the new home of our vegetable friend. It was a detached house on an exquisitely planned and landscaped development. All raised walkways, arches, and houses discreetly walled so that no-one had the chance to stare into anyone else's castle. Peter now lives on the top of a windy hill with a view from the upstairs rooms over the sea. A source of inspiration to my subconscious because that night I dreamed of sea crocodiles swimming offshore - the sea-level having risen until it was level with the hilltop - and lots of people swimming out to look at them. Meanwhile Pat's Astral Powers would not sleep and were busy tearing off the roof; by morning they had succeeded and had playfully allowed rain to drip in onto their mistress. That day Peter met many new good-neighbours who came to tell him there was a huge hole in his roof.

Dawlish is geared to the summer holiday trade and in winter was not exactly bustling. The main street is split down the middle by an ornamental garden which is in turn split by a large stream running down from the hills to the seashore, therefore to cross the street you have to walk through a bandstand in the gardens, kick aside the ducks and geese, and cross a little bridge festooned with colored lights. The evening of our arrival we decided to sample the restaurants, there being three, each with a choice of everything with chips. All were open but empty, and everytime we stopped to read the menus displayed outside the look of hope that flooded over the faces of the proprietors made us feel real mean as we trotted off to try and find something cheaper/different. We eventually decided on the Kensington Grill because it reminded us of London. 'Soup', the menu said; "What kind of soup?" I sweetly enquired. "Minestrone," the Italian waiter replied in heavily accented English as if I was the most stupid person on earth for ever considering he would have served anything else. The highlight of the evening - apart from feeding the ducks and geese with bread stolen from the Kensington Grill - was Greg falling over going up some steps into a bar. A passing local quipped that he could understand someone falling over on his way out.... Greg rolled over onto his back and rocked gently to and fro; the reason being that he'd had his hands firmly wedged in his pockets and couldn't get them out when he tripped and thus fell on his elbow. He wasn't hurt very much.

We really enjoyed that weekend. Pat has lots of photos of Peter's house, few of which altogether impressed Graham. I mean he found it difficult to understand why she had taken a picture of the loo. "Well it was a nice green one," said Pat, as if that made it all clear. She also had photos of the touching reunion of Peter and his

bicycle, also of Greg on said bike looking like a bearded schoolboy as he whizzed around the genteel landscaping of the estate.

I'm sure Peter is really contented with his lot, even if he has discovered that beetroot won't grow in a quarter on an inch of topsoil laid on concrete.

The week after we moved Peter came the Novacon. We saw Peter again and all had real difficulty in remembering just who he was. We all knew we had seen him somewhere before. He came over and introduced himself. Then most of us remembered him. I shan't go on about the Novacon because I'm sure everyone will have read Charnock's conreport first just to see if their name has been dropped, and if so, in what.

Close on the heels of the Novacon was the wedding of Ian Maule and Janice Wiles. This took place in a remote part of Dorset to which we were superbly navigated by Piggy. John Piggott that it, not a friendly Dorset country pig who hates to see strangers lost. We got to the reception hall before most everyone else and decided to wait in a nearby pub for the Bride and Groom to arrive from a private family gathering. Of course the pub was full of Gannetfandom.

The reception was a sit-down buffet, with small tables grouped around the food and presided over by the table where the new husband and wife sat with their families and best man. They looked remarkably poised for a couple who had just done the ~~silly/silly~~ bravest thing they are likely to do for some time. At this point I should add a few fashion notes. The bride wore a long red dress and a white shawl and the groom looked very dapper (a good descriptive word for Ian) in a blue suit. Piggy looked very swish in a grey striped suit, but then he does have the male-model look about him. Greg wore his normal, not usual, normal trousers that I guarantee that no-one has ever seen before. Gone the tight jeans. I could have really fancied him like that, sigh. I wore clothes and so did lots of other people. Well, I'm not really that interested in clothes.

The whole atmosphere was one of informality - no dull speeches where the Father of the Bride had to tell the untruth that he was sad that his little girl had grown up etc. when in reality he was only too glad that Ian had made a good woman of his daughter. I mean what had they been getting up to? Ask John Piggott, he used to live next door.

A mass of fans crowded onto a table meant for six. The company included Hazel and Dave Langford, Ian Williams, Rob Jackson, Coral Clarke and brother Bruce, Martin and Liese Hoare, John, Greg and myself. It wasn't long before we were all feeling very kindly disposed to one another on the lavish amount of drink available. Greg, who is a greedy pig, coerced people into getting him seconds and thirds of everything especially the trifle. He wouldn't go himself for fear of being recognised (as a greedy pig) by the catering staff. Later we made out way to Janice's parents' house for a party. On the way we ground to a halt with a flat tyre. Greg and John, both well away, staggered around the car several times before finding the tools in the boot. Much sooner than one would have expected they had the flat wheel off and the spare on. Then the real trouble started. John swore they

had taken five nuts off the retaining bolts and Greg could only find four. Whilst they were crawling around on their hands and knees in the dark Dave Langford drove up and stopped in astonishment at the sight. His headlights revealed that there actually were only four nuts required on the wheel. As Greg belaboured him with the jack-handle John had to admit that the car he'd been taught to repair at public school had been a bit old. Apparently there haven't been five retaining bolts on British car wheels since about 1930. It turned out that the flat tyre was a blessing in disguise, as Dave Langford told us we had been merrily speeding away in completely the wrong direction.

We eventually got to the party, enjoyed it, and then all the fans (except the Bride and Groom) adjourned to the pub all the Gannets were staying at and persuaded the landlord to let us drink after hours with the residents. There we played skittles in the alley adjoining the bar, London v. Newcastle. First game we overran them completely, second game we lost, a bit. Can't understand why, as every time Irene Bell threw the ball (I know, and you know, that you're not supposed to throw the ball like it is one of Whittle's bouncing bombs) it leaped out of the alley and attacked Bruce Clark who was down the other end reassembling the pins after each break.

Eventually we began to feel more than a little 'tired' and John, Greg and I trailed away into the countryside to the only hotel in the area we'd been able to find that wasn't already fully booked by 'a wedding party'.

I shan't tell you what happened in bed that night, except that all those stories about quantity consumed v. capability are true. The one notable thing, however, was that Greg became very sick indeed. If you have ever been in bed beside someone vomiting whilst they are asleep and you awake with the sound of the Niagara Falls in close proximity to your ear you will appreciate the confusion that was in my mind when I was so rudely awakened. I leaped out of bed with a speed I have since equalled when a light-fitting crashed down onto my desk at work, and turned on the light to reveal the most awful scene of destruction I have ever slept with.

Greg was fast asleep and still vomiting over the bed; I grabbed his arm and said "Get your ass off that bed!" When you live with someone you tend to pick up their speech patterns in moments of stress. He wouldn't wake up so I grabbed his leg and pulled him off the bed onto the floor. By this time he had stopped throwing up and was snoring loudly - no doubt subconsciously feeling very much better. I looked at the pool of almost pure Guinness sinking slowly into the mattress and could have cried. I had to wash all the sheets in the hand-basin (Guinness leaves a very pretty purple stain in linen), and as I sponged down the mattress I kicked Greg every time I passed his sleeping body which was still lying corpse-like where I had dropped him. I then washed the vomit off him. He woke momentarily. "I'm cold," he said. "Why is my arm all wet?" "Sick," I snapped. "What, have you been sick on me?" he whimpered indignantly. "Why am I on the floor?" "Shut up and go to sleep," I said, dropping the continental quilt on his

face hoping ne'd suffocate.

I spent most of the night worrying about what I would say to the owner of the establishment. I ran through lots of possibilities from buying the sheets to buying the mattress or even buying the whole house. Finally I decided that the only course of action was to burr the place down, and then she would never find out what had happened. I then fell asleep on the hard floor next to the cause of all my anguish.

As it turned out all my worry was in vain, the lady of the house took the shamefully admitted news very calmly. She was quite unperturbed by the whole affair and dismissed it saying that she was accustomed to children being sick all over beds. I don't think she meant anything other than that she had lots of young children. I think.

We shall remember Janice and Ian's wedding with affection.

The least recent milestone in fannish history was the Silicon. Even though it was a long time ago, and several reports of it have appeared since, we enjoyed it so much I think it still deserves a few mentions. So here are a few edited highlights of what was probably the first Silicon report written and the last published.....

....really know why we went to Silicon. Could it have been that I said to Greg that I wanted to go and that if he didn't I'd go on my own? Anyway, we experienced rather mixed feelings about the whole venture. Three hundred miles is a long way to go fo a non-event, Who the hell else was going anyway? Supposing we were thrown together with all the people we carefully avoided at normal conventions.....

....journey across the most tedious countryside in the UK was brightened by a small red light perpetually glowing from the dashboard. When we first noticed it I remembered being told that when a certain light appears on the instrument panel you should slam on the brakes and leap out as it indicates the wiring is on fire and the car could be engulfed in flames in seconds. By the time I'd remembered the story and told Greg we judged that if it was true we'd have been crisps by then. By a slow process of elimination we decided it was the ignition light. I cleverly found a way to make it go out. Unfortunately it involved stopping the car and switching off the engine. After much technical discussion we decided to completely ignore it.....

....first person we saw at the Imperial Hotel was clad in a crumpled black cloak and carrying a mock ray-rifle. Greg and I looked at each other and both had the same thought; Oh God please don't let that be David Bridges! Since recieving ONE OFF we'd been looking forward to meeting the man behind it, and this was the first occasion where we each knew the toher was in attendance. Fortunately this cloacked creature turned out to be another Sheffield fan, Paul Thompson.....

....trip to an Indian restaurant that was, according to the natives, only ten minutes walk away. After walking miles led by Irene Bell and Rob Jackson was argued constantly about which was the quickest way, we were faced with a decision - who do we follow? They each headed off in a different direction calling on crowd to follow them because their way was quicker. Most followed Irene, when Irene knows something by God you'd better believe it, her determination is unshakeable. I

bet Rob ran like stink to get there before us. All ate Indian, except Welshfan Rob Hansen, who on learning curried leek was off settled for everything and chips. That mealtime I learned from Harry Bell that a Bombay Duck is not a bird but a rather wizzened looking sardine-like fish, and observed that Malayan food looks like fruit salad with gravy. I found my paratha a bit disconcerting because instead of being a solid pancake it was a long strip wound round like a catherine wheel and everytime I tried to tear a piece off it unravelled.....

....during the Chaos game in the hotel pool the water frothed as if a shoal of piranha had just been tossed a very small piece of meat. And talking of small pieces of meat, the way Ian Williams hurled himself from the poolside onto the frolicking water-nymphs was a sight to behold.....

....star event was the TV Football Tournament. David Bridges (we knew he'd turn out OK) organised this Sunday night. I survived until round three when I was defeated by Bridges himself. My first game against Dave Hutchinson was easy, so was the second against Ritchie Smith (tho' he beat me in every other game we played that weekend). Then defeat under Bridges. I'm sure there's a joke in there somewhere. I wish I was Leroy Kettle.....

....the Final between Greg and David Bridges was won by David. By this time another tournament was arranged with a stake pot of 50p per person. Only four entered - Rog Peyton, Greg, David, and Stan Eling. Rog is an aggressive player and with his face set with determination and feet wide apart in an almost indecent stance positioned himself at the machine. He squirmed and wriggled his hips in an attempt to achieve the most perfect stance. Unfortunately this didn't help him as Greg defeated him and ended up £1-70 richer.....

....talking about the ignition light Brian Hampton became very concerned about it. He was convinced we wouldn't make it home. He offered to take a look at the car and see if there was anything obviously wrong with it.....

....Brian's head disappeared into the depths of the engine and a muffled voice was heard asking for a hammer. Then a penknife. Damn, was the next comment, it has just come off in my hand. He came out of the engine and some really fiddly bit of engineering was done on the floor with the bit that had come off the dynamo. Eventually he got it back on. Well, he said, it's nothing simple.....

....this type of con represents an ideal opportunity to get to know people you might easily miss meeting in a 500+ person Eastercon. Paul Ryan, for instance, has been at every con since 1975, and yet I'd never met him before. Yet he's a really nice person I shall look forward to meeting, again. Socialising was far easier here than at any other convention I'd been to for years. A very good little con.....

Finally I must say that the disjointed article above is a result of writing at least four separate columns during the long period this fanzine has not appeared. Now that we're finally moving to a home of our own and I can shut Greg in his fan-pen and tell him to get on with it a rather more regular schedule should result. I hope.

Simone Walsh

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

letter column

(((.))) - Greg Pickersgill

%%/%% %%/%% - Simone Walsh

:::~::~

: : :

JIM LINWOOD, *
125 Twickenham Road, * SBD 3's main topic, the Novafued, involves
Isleworth, Middx. * fen I have no quarrel with and whom I usually
* hold in high esteem, so I have no wish to add
* * * * * anything else to the whole boring mess -
* except to say that I'm amazed at Gray's
conspiracy theory (the film rights have already been sold, with Redford
in the Boak role), that it's unfortunate that Pat took an apparently
well meaning joke the wrong way, and that it was annoying to see Ian
Williams ratfinking out and stabbing an old friend in the back.

WE'VE GOTTA GET OUT OF THIS PLACE shows a re-emergence of
the excellent writing Little Mal commenced in MAGIC PUDDING before he
strayed into the NEL egotripmill and dilettante fanzine reviewing (well,
MAYA is the only current fanzine W.A.W. has seen) - even the sideswipes
are forgiveable. Bloody hell. This, with Peter Nicholls' and Dave
Langford's recent con-reports, shows the art of fannish reportage is
not lost - these are the people who ought to be standing for TAFF rather
than certain fen who think they are under no obligation to write about
their sponsored free holidays.

The Master is in low key in this ish's review column - not
a rub-out job in sight - and something I d never expect to see; a three
line review from Greg Pickersgill. The essence of SBD seems to have
shifted from the reviews to the punchy comments on LoCs.

Pete Weston isn't the only recipient of "Bennett's Fury".
At the Tynecon I bumped into Ron, who I hadn't seen for ages, and as a
conversational gambit mentioned that I had recently read that a copy of
the first issue of 'Action Comics' had sold for £700. I had hoped for
a natter about old comics, but this innocuous remark provoked Bennett
into put-down remarks that amounted to; "How dare you talk about a
subject on which I am the undisputed expert?" Enough of him - the Fred
Hemmings of yesteryear.

Simone on coincidence reminds me of the following which I
recently read;

"An ever increasing band of enthusiasts also collect science-
fiction magazines, which usually have names **that** are suitably out of this
world. Some examples are Bweek, Zot, Erk!, Reverb Howl, Kangaroo Feathers,
Egg, The Hog On Ice, Son Of Fat Albert."

The book? ... The Guinness Book of Names! And the publisher's address is given as 2 Cecil Court!

GRAHAM CHARNOCK; *
70 Ledbury Road, *
London W 11 *
* * * * * * * * * * *
Terrible Bell cover. I'm surprised at you. Bell doesn't even know how many strings a guitar has. Unless I'm betraying my naievety and missing some esoteric point such as Robert Johnson played a rare ten-string guitar. Ah, but thanks to Harry Turner we know it was a rare Sears-Roebuck Stella ten-string guitar, and that Johnson played it with a pick carved from the shell of his pet turtle Eloise, who stuck to him through thick and thin, even during the six week Johnson spent in Boxville Sanatorium (Harry seems to have missed that) when he was on the lam from the operators of a heavy numbers racket.

Okay, so Turner digs Johnson and has read and absorbed the right books about the man's short life, but the exhibitionism of that letter does both of them a disservice. If Johnson had played the same intense, deliberate, ponderous creative game that Turner seems to advocate we wouldn't even have two albums of his music to enjoy.

Just noticed that Bell has transposed bridge and sound-hole on his guitar. Also Johnson had the hole in the sole of his right boot, not left. Yaaaah.

BRYN FORTEY, *
90 Caerleon Road, *
Newport, Gwent, *
NPT 7BY *
* * * * * * * * * * *
While I freely admit your cover is as technically good as is usual from the Gateshead Boozer, who is probably the supreme British fanartist, I was rather surprised to see it as the cover of a Pickersgill fanzine - from a content point of view.

Is this "Ahm jus' a po' li'l' black boy boss, but ah shore luv to pick mah gitarr" cartoon really gracing the front cover of a fanzine edited by the same Greg Pickersgill who last year sat listening to a Howlin' Wolf record with me and spoke so feelingly of the way the singer's whole life and experience was reflected in his vocal performance?

Am I making too much - and reading too much into - something as relatively unimportant as a fanzine cover? Maybe, but a feeling of subdued disappointment remains.

HARRY TURNER, *
10 Carlton Avenue, *
Romiley, near Stockport, *
Cheshire SK6 4EG *
* * * * * * * * * * *
I approve your sophisticated cover. Though to drag things down to a mundane level it bothers me that the guy has only three fingers on each hand. Okay, I know Django Reinhardt managed quite well, thank you. Truth to tell I found myself converted to your stark cover representations. The long series we discussed briefly at Mancon, based on the Tom Wilson record sleeve painting - the recording engineers, the plump upholstered chair (complete with ash tray), the

chocolate-box pictures on the wall, the window with the blind drawn - seemed to have great potential. So much so that I really expected to see those engineers gracing the front cover of SBD3. Harry's design was a surprise. But pleasantly so.

((Whaddya do, whaddya say? Can't please everyone etc. Actually I think Charnock definately got out of his pram on the wrong side the morning he wrote his letter. I'm sure he knows as well as the rest of us that a touch of carefully premeditated spontaneity always produces the best result. Think of how carefully Leroy Kettle rehearses his quips, how Bob Shaw practises his 'off the cuff' bon-mots, how many times I rewrite my fanzine reviews. Calm down Charnock, you're only pissed off because Harry said your cover looked like something a ruptured vole would have drawn with a stylus taped to it's back leg.

As far as you go, Fortey, you don't go very far at all. Far from being at all demeaning or 'disrespectful' my feeling towards Bell's cover was that it summed up a lot of the good qualities of some of my favourite blues lines. There's Heavy Character in that little figure, Brynley, an almost unstoppable off-the-corner tuff-enuff-ness that brings a lot of good records (many of them by the late great Wolf himself) to mind every time I look at it. Yes indeed, you do make too much. Right on as usual, Mr Turner. I definately like that little series of curious excerpts; all I need is a good way of transferring them to stencil. Anyone with any sensible ideas? Don't hang up your walkin' shoes.)))

JOHN HALL,
101 Lakeside Road,
London W 14

* * * * *

* Malcolm Edward's conrep was long and boring to
* the point of tears. As wretched a con as Mancon
* apparently was surely did not require 50% of the
* available space for an epitaph. When I last saw
* Uncle Peter (Roberts) he gave me a succinct
one word report that spoke volumes. "Grubby," he said. Malcolm Edwards
will never be able to own such sagacity.

RITCHIE SMITH,
88 Olive Street,
South Shields,
Tyne & Wear NE33 4RJ

* * * * *

* SBD 3 is the low point so far. Not only is
* Malcolm Edwards not in the same writing league
* as Charnock, Roberts, or you, but pages upon
* pages recording what was a pretty unpleasant
* experience for Mr E. does not make for much
* insight, warmth, or humour. And stuff of a low
entertainment value making up so much of an issue...hey, wait a minute!
Do people really enjoy reading all this "What a bad time we had/wasn't
it horrible/and here's a list of people I don't like.." ? The mind
boggles.

Simone made some excellent points in paras 2 & 3 of her bit.

If I ever write that fanzine I'm threatening people with I intend to say that convention fandom is not, no way, 'a cosy intimate world'. That having been said, someone ought to hold an open forum on what, if anything, we can do about it.

BRIAN R. TAWN, * I liked Malcolm Edward's con report very much.
29 Cordon Street, * I didn't attend the con and Malcolm's report
Wisbech, Cambs. * did much to fill in details of it which I hadn't
PE13 2LW * heard from other folks. It was made even more
* * * * * * * * * * interesting by the relaxed style it was written in.
* * * * * * * * * * Yes, it was a great report, but...I wonder why it
is that con reports look for faults in the cons. Some of the folks I know
who have attended a large number of cons came away happy with Mancon,
yet the reports slam it. Most of them trample over the con, but they say
that the people were nice, but Malcolm Edwards seems to want to grind a
large number of people into the ground too.

I'm not really bothered as to whether the con was as bad as Malcolm says it was or not, nor do I care that he broadcasts it as being a piece of bad planning and poor amenities etc. The impression which he puts over, and which I don't like, is that half the fans are at the throats of the other half...or at least wish they were. That's okay for anyone who's attended a con, or gets reports which counteract the moans, but any new fan who came by a copy of Malcolm's report would get a swift impression that fans are a very unfriendly bunch who don't welcome outsiders and don't even like themselves very much.

((You're a little unfair; the only individuals 'attacked' in any real sense in Malcolm's report were con members, who you must surely admit deserve a little stick for such an evil mess. Anyone else whose character, reputation, or whatever was besmirched in passing did it to themselves out of their own mouths, so to speak. True reporting is fair reporting.

Trouble is, though, that there are a fair number of fans who don't like each other very much. It's a bit unrealistic to expect diverse people with only tenuous links and common activities to be entirely sweetness and light with each other, no matter what Dave Rowe may say to the contrary. There are definately fans I don't like, and have no time for, and I'm sure you'd easily find some to say the same' about me.)))

BOB SHAW, * Malcolm's report of Mancon was, to my mind,
31 Birchwood Drive, * exactly the way a con report ought to be
Ulverston, Cumbria, * handled. One of the things I really liked
LA12 9PN * about it was that it was long. A convention
* * * * * * * * * * is a lengthy experience - Mancon seemed
* * * * * * * * * * interminable at times - and to do it justice
the report has to be long, detailed, and in strict chronological order.
A good report enables one to live the con over again from a different
angle, and I love getting hold of one such as Malcolm's and reading it

slowly and every now and then saying to myself , "So that's what was happening at ----- while I was at -----". Quite apart from its luxurious length, I thought the writing in Malcolm's piece was fine as well. It was evocative, funny, perceptive, cheeky. Having written a few con-reports myself I could tell that he had put a hell of a lot of work into it - the taking of notes during a con itself is one of the most difficult things - and I'm personally glad he did.

D. WEST, *
48 Norman Street, *
Bingley, West Yorks. *
* * * * * * * * * * *
* I enjoyed Mancon. Met a surprising number of
* people for the first time. Also didn't meet
* a surprising number of people for the first
* time. Maybe they were hiding. Anyway, good time.
* General shabbiness of Owens Park didn't bother
me at all, decrepitude being the ambience in which I feel most at home.
In fact, after the first shock at seeing so many living, breathing fans
all in one spot I had a good look around and then told myself; stop
jittering, this is just like going into some unfamiliar crummy pub in
Bradford. With the great advantage that the regulars - being mostly
civilized and/or cowardly - are less likely to beat you up. So while
admitting justice of various adverse criticisms of the Mancon site I
can't say I have any personal complaint. Plenty of booze, something to
sit on, a place to sleep, a dartboard even, what more do you want?
Bloody sybarites, the lot of you. All the same it would be interesting
to know the suicide rate among resident students.

I did make various spastic and serious-minded attempts to ingratiate myself with Persons Who Mattered, or the nearest available approximations thereof. I spoke to Peter Weston. He looked surprised and went away. I was polite to Malcolm Edwards. I even showed him a handy little dodge for putting curses on people. Never know when something like that will come in useful. See how he repays me, the ungrateful wretch. I was kind to Graham Charnock, despite the fact that he's made rude remarks about me in virtually every issue of his obscene publication. Likewise I smiled benevolently on Dave Langford,, despite the fact that he too has made rude remarks about me in every issue. (Well, come to think of it he hadn't actually made them at the time). I spent ages - and ages - talking to this girl with glasses who said she worked for some firm who were just starting a science fiction list. Unfortunately I'd never heard of the publishers before, and don't remember it now. I can't remeber what I said either, but I'm sure I put a lot of effort into it. I fawned on Rob Jackson. And when Ian Maule, with a determined effort at Brutal Honesty, asked to be introduced, stared me up and down, then remarked he'd seen quite enough, thankyou, I let him depart unmolested.

So I had a great time Making Friends and Influencing People. Which, as everyone knows, is what it's all about and never mind this foolishness about science fiction.

Your fanzine reviews suffer from compression. The Pickersgill style needs space - three times as much - the effect being cumulative rather than lightning flash sudden death. The more items crammed in the less the cohesion and unity of theme and purpose. Do real short reviews and they'll be just like anyone else's. Rather more intelligent, but not distinctive.

JOHN PIGGOTT,
8 Hillcroft Crescent,
Ealing, London W 5

* * * * *

* Gregory, you're taking all this awards
* business too seriously. Is the Nova
* Award really worth all the hassle it's
* stirred up, and all the further hassle
* it's going to create before we're through?

Damn right it's not. Fandom is too ephemeral, too trivial an occupation for a formal 'award' of any description to be anything but a mockery. If your readers continue to find SBD gives them what they want (as the letter column attests they do) why bother what the mongs think?

Now you seem to want to balloon the Checkpoint Fan Poll up to absurd heights of Significance. Leave it alone, will you - the poll is quite ok the way it is now, as a bit of innocent fun for those who bother to participate.

In any case, as you know perfectly well (and failed to point out) the idea of a single best fanzine or indeed best anything in a body as diverse as fandom is moronic. My favourite zine probably isn't anything like John Harvey's; but both our viewpoints are valid and there's room in fandom for both of us to get what we want out of it. Which is why any sort of popularity poll must always remain pretty meaningless, except as a frivolous diversion.

The reason I didn't support the FAAN Awards, Mike Glicksohn, is that while I'm prepared to expend a 6¹/₂p stamp on the triflingly insignificant CHECKPOINT Fan Poll I don't see how writing a cheque for 50p on an equally insignificant poll will gain me anything extra. Especially when it'll get swamped by the Yanks anyway. And I'll bet that reason holds good for 90% of British fandom that gives a damn, even if they won't admit it for fear of appearing tight-fisted.

Finally, Gregory, for you to have expended two pages of valuable SBD space on such a subject as nothing short of tragic, when you could have put the space to good use; a two-page vitriolic demolition of the latest TITAN, for instance. I appeal to your Overseas Editor to keep you under control.

What about the Doc Weir then?

((Well, much as it pains me to say so, I am forced to admit most of your points are well on target. The Nova - or any other fannish institution - is not worth the kind of bitter recrimination that has arisen. By all means we should have fannish standards, loyalties (particularly to worthwhile fannish traditions) and something that involves all of fandom in either a participatory or involved-audience way, but not bicker about it to the point of death. As you can probably realise, though, it was not so much the fact that Boak and his little henchman disputed the Award that infuriated me, but the idiotic manner in which they formed their arguments, and the personal attacks implicit in them. Anyway, the Great D. West has satisfact-

orily done up Mr Boak in his column in TRUE RAT 8, so as far as I'm concerned the whole matter need go no further. Unfortunate, though, to see the Nova lose all credibility; I certainly won't support it in the future, and despite your grim forebodings I'd still like to see the CHECKPOINT Poll expanded. After all, some measure of public approval is a great inspiration (to me, anyway) and I'm sure that despite their disdainful posturings the majority of fans are as competitively minded as anyone else. Well, what about the Doc Weir then, eh?)))

DARROLL PARDOE,
24 Othello Close,
Hartford, Hunts.
PE18 7SU

* * * * *

* It seems the decision by Ro and I not to go to
* the Eastercon this year was a wise one. Malcolm's
* conrep fully supports the impression I have got
* from other sources. And he has awakened a
* festering sore that has been sleeping in my
* subconscious for many years, namely the Doc Weir

award. At one time I used to make quite a lot of noise about what I considered to be the misapplication of the award, but since apparently nobody listened to me, or even appeared to care in the slightest, I stopped saying anything. But this latest is really too much. The Doc Weir award was intended for two things; (1) to keep Doc's memory green; and (2) in the process to honour some person who in the previous year had rendered notable services to fandom. It was voted on by the members of that year's convention. I have no love of awards on the whole, but I have two reasons for feeling concern about the Doc Weir in particular. Doc was a really unusual person, who you had to feel great respect for, but who was always willing to be friendly no matter who you were. He was a true scholar, a rare breed nowadays (notice I say scholar, not academic; there's an enormous difference). He should be remembered; perhaps the Doc Weir award could be argued as not the most appropriate way, but it is the only one around. I haven't seen much evidence of the Doc Weir administration making the Doc Weir remembrance idea very prominent in their handling of the award.

My second reason for feeling concern is that I was a contributor to the initial collection to buy the award, so that to see the way it has sunk over the last decade worries me somewhat.

The real crisis point was when it was decided, arbitrarily and under no obvious authority, to widen the voting roll from con members to all members of the BSFA. This immediately cut out the whole reason for the existence of the award in the first place. The BSFA nowadays is a pathetic wreck of an organisation, with no real connection with fandom, and most BSFA members presented with a Doc Weir voting form won't have the slightest idea of what sort of person to vote for. Most of them will ignore it, but those who do vote will vote for someone visible to them, namely a BSFA official. Thus the Doc Weir award is in danger of becoming not an award for services to fandom, but a BSFA Officers Appreciation Award.

I'm afraid I despair of the Doc Weir award. Two possible avenues

of escape occur to me though. First, couldn't a sufficient number of fans stuff the ballot? If several dozen active fans all voted for some worthy person it might tip the scales. Provided the votes were allowed; I suspect (though of course I cannot prove) that the voting is all rigged nowadays anyway. The other possibility is one I've toyed with one an& off, which is a rival Doc Weir award, run on the basis that the old one started with.

((I imagine that a lot of people might think all this is a lot of fuss about nothing, but as far as I'm concerned the whole way the D.W. award has gone in recent times is symbolic of a certain vast decline in fandom; a tip of the iceberg which may yet plunge us all into some hideous hell. God knows.

Myself, I like awards; I like the idea of a notable individual being remembered via one, especially if it is given for a good reason, as the D.W. was intended to be. Many individuals have done great labour in the cause of fandom and I'm sure that popular recognition in the form of such an award is pleasing at the very least.

The Doc Weir has long been the root of much controversy and misunderstanding. It's still widely believed, for example, that Charles Platt, enfant terrible of fandom as he was known at the time, 'won' it on number of votes at the 1968 Thirddancon, but as he was 'disliked' by the convention and award authorities he was shunted aside in favour of Mary Reed, doyenne of an evil school of sickly sweet fanwriting and just about the apple of every right-thinking fan of the day's eye. Also it's generally thought that the award is not given 'to honour some person who in the previous year has rendered notable services to fandom'; Simone, for example, who has been in fandom since the early Sixties, is quite convinced that it simply a vote of popularity, the winner having needed to do nothing other than be Mr Nice Guy 19whatever. This could well be a common misconception. And just about the only possible rationale for Ina Shorrocks having won the award this last Eastercon. If anyone at all can prove to me what notable service Ina Shorrocks has performed in fandom within the last ten years I'll be adequately amazed. A blatant misuse of the award, engineered, if Keith Walker is to be believed, by Ethel Lindsay, who one might have imagined to know better, but then she never did take fandom seriously.

Of course the award certainly has been rigged up; definitely in the last few years. The only reason Malcolm Edwards got it at the Tynecon was that Simone and I stuck ourselves next to the ballot box passing out already filled-in forms for people to sign and post. At least, though, we had good reason to champion Malcolm; his inspired editing of VECTOR had been about the only notable thing in fandom that period. And certainly everyone who did accept our choice and vote volubly agreed with it, it just didn't seem to have occurred to most people to vote at all.

Wherein lies the rub; most people can't be bothered with it.

Of course at the Seacon we were back to the old boogaloo. I was appalled to hear two members of the concom 'decide' that Peter Weston was to be the winner that year, on the familiar 'good guy' basis. Bullshit, of course, Weston had been about as active as a dead toad.

Trouble is, though, that most people aren't that concerned, which is likely why the vast bulk of the BSFA probably issues forth a handful of votes at best - likely all for BSFA Officials, as you suspect. I share your distaste for the BSFA as presently manifest, and nothing would horrify me more than to see, say, Dave Kyle or Tom Jones (Jesus, which would be the worst?) win the award.

Really, to be viable the whole thing needs republic-ising on a fandomwide scale - apart from anything else the whole notion of it being a 'remembrance' has slipped from reality, along with any knowledge of Arthur Weir as regards the fandom of today. You write it, I'll publish it, kid.

Hey, listen, this'll make yer laff; I think I've discovered why Ina Shorrocks got the award (votes courtesy of her large family and the rest of the Liverpool group, most of whom are completely unknown to the fandom of today). It was her birthday.)))

KEVIN SMITH,
26 Hawks Road,
Kingston-upon-Thames,
Surrey KT1 3EG

* The opening section of Simone's column
* intrigued me. I got the impression of a
* dwindling fandom driven ruthlessly from all
* main con events by the growing herds of
* serious sf (or should it be 'sci-fi' here?)
* enthusiasts; their only refuge from the 'sci-
fiers' lying in secluded Fandom Rooms, away from all else. You have only
to extrapolate a little way to conjure up even more horrific visions;
all real fans forced to ring little bells should anyone else approach;
sci-fans banding together brandishing rolled up copies of S.F.M. to
beat to a pulp anyone discussing the Nova award (they might have a point
there), fanzines, drink, sex, Graham Boak (with any luck they'd get Boak
himself) or anything else fannish. And all without a trace of humour.

But need it be true?

Concoms (Mancon specifically), it was said 'felt the need to attempt to programme for a more serious type of sf enthusiast'. How magnanimous! I wonder a little at the motives in such a feeling. If a programme is designed with the 'serious types' in mind there is no cause at all to be surprised or alarmed if they do attend. And why should fans comprising a committee desire the additional attendance of non-fans, aside from pure generosity of soul? More registrations, possibly? (See also Malcolm's last paragraph.)

Despite all this I see no evidence of fandom decaying.

%%%People who have come into fandom in the last six

or seven years may mock my concern for the continued fannish presence at conventions, but in years previous the whole con was managed by fans for fans; not by science fiction readers for the neo who will expect sf all the way at a con. Con attendees had to fit in with fandom and were presented with panels on fanzines etc as part of the normal programme. I don't see why the sercon sf fanatic should be accomodated to such a great extent at conventions. Let those sercon types arrange their own conferences (for that's what they ought to be called) rather than subvert the good old fannish ways. Waste of time saying anything, really, it's too late already.%%%

MIKE GLICKSOHN,
141 High Park Avenue,
Toronto, Ontario,
M6P 2S3

* * * * *

* Damn good cover and interesting material
* in this issue. ~~The/absence/of/ Greg~~ The
* diversity of contributors makes for an
* enjoyable read, and I was delighted with
* Malcolm's detailed report on Mancon.
* Despite its length it reads very quickly,
and I'm pleased you ran it in its entirety.

It's a truism that con reports are to be enjoyed, not commented on, and it's true once again with Malcolm's epic. I was really interested in reading about the faults of the committee, the location, the highlights of entertainment created by the fannish fans present, and Malcolm's personal reactions to the con. It's a damn shame your major con should have turned out such a bummer, but it seems to have been a case of everyone's worst fears materializing. I told you to come to Minneapolis instead!

One can put up with a little (or a lot of) literary ineptitude in a con chairman who's a good administrator and organiser, as we did with John Millard at Torcon. John's a fine fellow, but he couldn't write his way into a paper bag, much less out of it, and he can't make a decent speech to save his convention. But John's a damn good man to run a con, because he works hard, plans ahead, and really cares about doing a good job. Pete doesn't seem to be either a writer or a planner/worker which makes one wonder why he was the chairman, nice guy or not. Maybe he was also Programme Book editor which would explain the lack of proofreading; perhaps he answered one of those ads which offer you the power to ACHIEVE ANYTHING YOU WANT!!! through the hypnotizing power of the Ancients. Did he have lots of pretty girls clinging to him throughout the con? That's a sure sign of a horny Rosicrucian.

I was surprised that Roy Tackett appears only once in Malcolm's report. I guess Roy's contacts would have been with the older generation of British fans, and his path crossed Malcolm's infrequently. Next time get someone young and fresh like Terry Hughes or ~~Mike/Glicksohn~~ or Bill Bowers or ~~Mike/Glicksohn~~ or Dan Steffan, just to add an international flavour.

Roy is right that there aren't many fannish fanzines around in North America, though the recent revival of RATS and SWOON may indicate a new trend back in that direction. My interest in British fandom isn't tied to a lack of fannish zines though. There more than enough fanzines arriving to keep me busy as far as fanzine fanac goes if I cared to let it be that way. Essentially I'm interested in British fanzine fandom because (a) it's British and so am I and I like to keep up the ties, (b) it's fanzines, which I have an addiction to regardless of origin as long as the quality is high, (c) it's fandom, which I love and am interested in for the people in contains, and there are many fine and fascinating people in British fanzine fandom. The fact that many of the best fanzines being produced right now, and several of the best writers and artists are British does have something to do with it too.

The survival of the fannish element in American cons depends very much on the con itself, and also depends on the very nature of American fannish fandom. Certain smaller cons, like Midwestcon or Autoclave, are deliberately set up to attract fannish fans. They're advertised in the fan press, stress fannish style programming, or no programming at all, and lack the accoutrements that bring in the fringers.

Larger cons, such as Worldcons, tend to aim themselves at the slightly sercon set, at the newcomers who have nothing to do because they don't know anyone yet, and also expect a science fiction con to be about science fiction. (A narrow minded view unworthy of a fan with broad mental horizons, of course, but many of our best fans began in that way. Or so I'm told. I was born a trufan.) These cons usually have some degree of fannish programming, depending on the nature of the committee. LACON in '72 had a three-ring-circus approach and tended to put fannish items on opposite keynote speeches and major items on the sercon programme. The result was that fannish panellists found themselves often addressing an audience no larger than the panel they were on. TORCON in '73 was very lightly programmed, with separate areas of the hotel set up as permanent fannish displays where fannish fans were encouraged to gather for conversation. There may well have been fannish programming as well, but it wasn't run in competition with major programme items, thus allowing newcomers to get a taste of the other side of conventions.

Different committees set things up differently, but the essential truth is that we don't really need any fannish programming to make a con successful for fannish fans. American fannish fandom is so socially oriented, and gets the chance to intermingle so often, that most conventions become merely places to pick up friendships and conversations where you left them off at the last con, last month. It's almost mandatory for someone writing a con-report to state they never attend the programme but just go to be with friends, and this is a slight exaggeration but has some truth in it. If there's a panel on fanzines most fanzine people will go to it, but if there isn't the fanzine freaks will spontaneously start discussion groups amongst themselves. There is never any lack of opportunity for any fans, old or new, to join in discussion on just about any aspect of fandom.

So basically we take care of our own interests at most cons, and enjoy it all the more when the concom sets up something aimed at our subculture.

Your 'reason' for not supporting the FAAN awards is as fatuous as you recognize it to be. When the nomination ballots were sent out they asked for three nominations in each category that you considered worthy of awards. You didn't need to know a damn thing about American fanzines, writers, or artists. If enough British fans had nominated SHREW, Kettle and Bell as I did then maybe there would have been more British final nominees than just Harry, though I'm delighted he made it. I can understand what you say as a reaction to the final ballot, and feeling that way you needn't vote, but the structure of that ballot is determined by the active participation of people who care about fanzines. Since few fans I know of care more than you do, Greg, you should not only have nominated yourself (((????))) but also encouraged every fanzine fan to nominate as widely and honestly as they could. This is the only way that final ballot is going to be truly representative of the best fanzine fandom has to offer. Understand? Now don't fuck up again next year! (Oh yes, in one category, 'Best Letterhack', I can assure you that you already know enough about the American fanzine scene to nominate wisely and well!)

You can smack me in the mouth anytime Simone, and I'm probably coming to Britain again next summer. I'd love to make another Eastercon, but my Easter holidays aren't going to be long enough for that for the next five or so years. As to my questioning your wordplay, yes, I might well have done the same if Greg had written that because in the little grey box of file cards that I keep as a memory neither of the cards for you or Greg has the 'subtle punster' box checked off. Had Leroy done it I'd have figured it was deliberate, but with people who aren't known for playing with words there's always the chance that it might have been a happy accident. And now that I think of it, while many of the best writers in fandom are women very few fannish humorists are, and I can't think of a single well-known punster of the female persuasion. Do you suppose such clever subtlety is beyond their capabilities?

%%You have convinced me, Mike. Who cares if we trufans are ignored by con organisers, why should I get so hysterical about being booted off the main programme. We can still have fun - just give me a bedroom full of fans, a crate of wine, and the rest of the con can go to hell. Perhaps at the next room-party I go to we should all drink a toast to Glicksohn - and all trufen - rather than be dragged through some grotesque ritual by Pete Weston which involves slurping from a communal bottle and saying 'smooth' in a curious fashion. Greg tells me it is all something to do with Bob Tucker (who?).

Glad we have a date (even if it is only to assault you). Have you considered going to the next Silicon, held over the last weekend of August in Newcastle? If you can't make the Easter or Nova cons it would be a worthwhile third best. Chairman Rob Jackson hopes to make it bigger next time (and I don't mean he intends to extend his 'tweed elephant' image) and even if it was no better it would still be fun.

If you look back through my writing you will notice that I have more than once 'played with words' even though I'm a woman. So update your index file junior.%%%

((I dunno; when I went to my first con in '68 I wanted sf all the way and no messing, even though I was substantially involved with fandom via fanzines at the same time. I was rather disappointed at the shortcomings of that aspect of the con (another Manchester-run effort, actually, though not the same gang as Mancon, of course, though I believe Partington is common) and if not for my fannish contacts I might never have bothered with another. Gradually fandom gained ascendancy over sf in my mind, though. However in the other world sf became more and more popular, and we now have lots of totally sf-oriented people flocking to cons, getting bitter and twisted when the event is less than their conception of it, sf-wise. Now these things, especially the Eastercon, are after all nominally science fiction conventions, so in all conscience the sci-fan must be catered for. The obvious way to avoid being swamped with non-fannish types is to go to the more in-group fannish cons like Silicon, but this doesn't really work as these cons just aren't a strong enough draw for everyone. The only place you're really likely to meet virtually every British fan is at the Eastercon, the main event of the year.

I wonder to how recruiting into fandom would suffer from a more or less complete withdrawal from the Eastercon. Obviously most people come in through the chance or design acquisition of fanzines and so forth, but the cons are such a great place for making personal contact, and remember each and every one of us (with some exceptions like Simone, who was drawn into fandom on a purely social level) was a sci-fan to begin with.

I'm not at all keen on the idea of Eastercons being taken over by strictly hard-line sercon sf fans (the Harvey and Nottingham bids for '78 foreshadow this) as I don't think it's completely inconceivable that they would be possessed of little inclination to deal charitably with the fannish element. What they don't know they don't care about. Collapse all round. So Mike's scenario could be fatal complacency in a British context.

What really worries me though is that all the damned clever wordplays I dot my writing with have been missed and wasted because various gormless individuals just can't accept the fact of their existence. No fucking wonder I can't shake Kettle off the top of the CHECKPOINT Fan Poll tree. What's goin' on.)))

ROB HANSEN, * I have a confession to make. I was involved in
51 Bryn-y-Nant, * that badge affair at Mancon. I'd rather hoped
Llanedeyrn, * the damn things would be forgotten and all
Cardiff CF3 7PA * indications were that they would be, but then
* * * * * * * * * * I read Malcolm's conrep (which wasn't as good
as Rob Jackson's in GG 3) and the Mancon
concom comes in for a slagging over them so I can't in all conscience
remain silent.

Some weeks before Mancon I re-read the fanzines (two MALFUNCTIONS, one MAYA) that then comprised my fanzine collection and my eyes fell on the cover of MAL 7. Now that was the first fanzine I'd ever recieved and that cover had always intrigued me, so much so that I had it photoreduced and had the photoreductions made into half a dozen or so badges. It was purely an impulse thing and I didn't know what I was going to do with them. In the event I took them to Mancon and showed them to Pete Presford who thought it would be a good laugh to give them to concom members. Obviously it wasn't.

The things were produced on whim with no malice, the product of ignorance and stupidity, a classic case of a neo with little experience of fandom putting his foot in it. I had no knowledge of you other than what I'd read in MALFUNCTION and I was more than half convinced you were a Peter Presford construct.

((Well, you get off 'cos you're Welsh and a nice bloke too, but nothing will ever convince me that MaD Group are capable of acting without malice aforethought. One thing any neo ought to learn about fandom pretty quick is that it's better not to be a forceful, opinionated, easily identifiable personality, because if you do you get every asshole in creation personally on your case causing all kinds of aggravation. Bland, wishy-washy attentisme is by far the best policy, viz. the great success of such as Ian Maule and Peter Roberts. (Is that an attacking budgie I hear before me?)))

RAY HARRISON, * I'm a bit pissed-off with fandom at the moment.
18 The Witham, * Let me explain; (1) I wrote to you some time
Grange Estate, * ago and heard nothing back, so I wrote again,
Daventry, * whereupon you did respond, sending SBD. (2) I
Northants NN11 4QW * wrote to either Dave Rowe or Bernie Peek
* * * * * * * * * * requesting K1. I had no reply and recently
wrote to Rowe requesting K3. (3) Not too long
ago I wrote to Paul Skelton requesting INFERNO 10. Now issue 11 is out
and I've had no response at all. (4). I wrote to Ian Williams asking
for SIDDHARTHA 7. I know this fanzine isn't generally available but I
thought if Ian recieved a request he would certainly not ignore it. I've
had no reply yet. (So far all these cases have been before I have
actually seen the fanzines in question, however it seems that even
when I thought I was safely on a person's mailing list I still can't
take things for granted); (5) I recieved issue 7 of ZIMRI for which

I had paid, and which I looded. After this show of response I thought I would get future issues until I stopped responding. Not so. I did not recieve ZIMRI 8, and when I wrote to Lisa asking for a copy I recieved no reply. (6) I asked for, and recieved (!) issues 2 & 3 of OUR FAIR CITY, which I looded. I fully expected to get issue 4, but did I? Not a chance. I have yet to write to Martin to ask why.

Now I'm the sort who normally gives and takes a bit, and if there had only been one or two people who didn't bother with my letters I wouldn't feel the way I do now, however as it is I am becoming disillusioned. Am I overreacting to this or is this what I can expect from fandom in general and these people in particular?

((Well, unfortunately it has always been very hard for the unknown newcomer to get hold of fanzines. I had a hell of a time myself when I was starting out. The main reason, I think, (certainly the one foremost in my thinking) is that the average fanned is reluctant to part with a copy of a maybe short printrun to someone who's only passingly interested and who may not respond in any useful manner. Obviously this doesn't apply to you, but I hope you see what I mean. Also fans are generally either incredibly idle or are doing so much that 'casual' correspondence (no matter how important it may appear to you, reasonably enough) is casually 'mislaid'. John Piggott tells me you were/are involved in Diplomacy fandom; I'm afraid you'll just have to get used to what is an incredibly lethargic pace after what you're used to. Nevertheless those cited in your letter really ought to get their fingers out; it's very annoying for a fairly new fan to be casually disregarded in this manner, and I must once again apologise for not doing better by you myself.)))

KEEP ON PUSHING

+++++

we also heard from

* * * * *

GEOFF RIPPINGTON: I have taken a look at TITAN and I agree that what you said was on the whole true, but I still don't agree with the way you said it.

ROB JACKSON: I've never been asked to be on this year's Nova committee.

ELKE STEWART: Malcolm's report was very like the con; disappointing, boring, lacking any kind of enthusiasm and far too drawn out. You won't find me reading anything else by Malcolm for a long while.

JOSEPH NICHOLAS: My brain is not in very good condition.

DAVE COCKFIELD: Gray Boak's letter seemed quite sensible to me, but perhaps we operate on different wavelengths. For some reason I've been lumped on the side of those gleefully taking digs at the Rats and I'm trying my damndest to stay neutral.

TOM PERRY: Are those people serious about FREAKCON? When I read about it in LOGO I assumed it was a devastating **satire** on the Mancon notion of a campus con, and that the list of supporters that followed was a sort of in-joke that was too deep for me.

PAUL RYAN: How about a Boxing Championship at the next con to relieve frustrations and anger by beating the hell out of 'pet-hated' fans?

RICH COAD: I was a bit disappointed with the fanzine reviews this time. Too short. Still, they're better than most; Little Mal is the only one I've seen approach you, though I look forward to D. West's reviews if what you say is true.

JOHN COLLUCK: I prefer articles or rambles relevant to modern fandom. Nostalgia in a sub-community only 40 years old is ridiculous to me and there's too much of it going about. Fen should be concentrating on the future of fandom, not on its rather patchy past, which is the main reason why I didn't like SBD 1. SBD 3 was a different matter. This I really liked. The Mancon report was enjoyable and witty and although the layout still needs patching up I enjoyed reading it.

AND; JEAN STAVES; MARTIN EASTERBROOK; MIKE COLLINS; KEVIN WILLIAMS; RICHARD BARYCZ; DAVID LEWIS; and TERRY HUGHES. Thank you, all.

AN OFFER YOU CAN'T REFUSE

Intrepid archivists labouring in the musty confines of my cupboard have discovered several copies of each of the following fanzines issued by me in times near and far;

- STOP BREAKING DOWN nos 1,2,& 3 - RITBLAT/GRIM NEWS nos 1 & 2
- FCULER nos 2,3, & 6.

Each item will cost you a mere 20p (in postage stamps only, please) and will provide you with a true memento of the Great Days of 1970's Fandom to show your friends.

Rush your order to the Editorial Address Now! !

ENDLESS BOOGIE

the world, the flesh,
and the devil

CAN YOU GET YOUR FANZINE INTO SMITHS?; Keith Seddon can, with a bit of assistance from such heavies as Michael Moorcock and the Arts Council. Seddon, whose only extant description places him as a sort of mutant progeny of Peter Weston and Brian Hampton, has achieved a long-standing aim in getting VORTEX onto the newsstands, even if almost a year late. Aided by Moorcock donating free publication of the serialization of his latest 'Dancers At The End Of Time' epic - a coup ruined by the magazine being held up so that the paperback had come out before it did - VORTEX hit the stands early this year, looking more like a rich man's first fanzine than anything else, with unimaginative layout, nondescript illustrations, and a complete lack of personality other than a seeming unquenchable fascination with the worst aspects of NEW WORLDS. Still it is Britain's latest try at an indigenous sf magazine so get down and buy it. The second issue has just come out.....LAWDY MAMMA LIGHT MY FUSE; Graham Charnock had a moment of epiphany over a copy of SNIFFIN' GLUE the other day and is now devoting his energies towards producing a rock fanzine within the sf fanzine field. Despite his early complaint of "Ooooh, it's hard innit? (Or was that Mrs Charnock?) boogie maniacs such as I look forward eagerly to the result. Offer him encouragement, record reviews, and advice.....WHO WAS THAT MASKED MAN?: Robert Holdstock, very likely, who since hearing Foyles had by accident ordered fifty copies of his first novel EYE AMONG THE BUNDLE has been sneaking in and out periodically causing a one man run on the market. At last count only three remained. Whilst resting from this heavy expenditure Holdstock cleverly altered a type on P.2 of his article to read 'clothes' instead of 'slothes'. "It ruined the joke," he said, outraged at its discovery. Myself I thought 'slothes' substantially funnier. Still now each and every one of you has what is in effect an autographed manuscript.....TALKIN' BOU'T YOU; CHECKPOINT readers and old American fans will be delighted to discover that John Ingham, SBD cover-artist, recent glue victim (adhesion of the alveoli or somesuch), CHECKPOINT punk-rock correspondent and fanzine thief recently quit a safe staff job at SOUNDS to become the Commonwealth's answer to Greg Shaw by becoming manager of up-and-coming band GENERATION X. SBD readers might hope to read on-the-spot revelations of rockdom, but knowing Ingham's shy nature I rather doubt it. Still, we'll try.....ROBERTS RULES OK!; elsewhere you will read an announcement supporting Peter Roberts for TAFF; most of you (except that I know to have voted already) will find a TAFF form riding with this fanzine; please do use it, and use it right, otherwise we'll send someone round to aggravate ya.....GONE AT LAST: pay some heed to the addresses on the credit page, and note the change? The new address will apply for the far foreseeable future.....WHAT I SAY?; Kev Smith, Skycon concomm member recently did an accounting job near the hotel site. Which of the many nearby eating places did he patronise? Surprise, surprise, he took sandwiches. Jesus I've got nothing against them, but I wish they'd admit they're not telling the whole truth about eating-places near the hotel.....BYE BYE BABY; By God I'm glad I've got this fucker out at last! Until next time fans, stay tight.....

