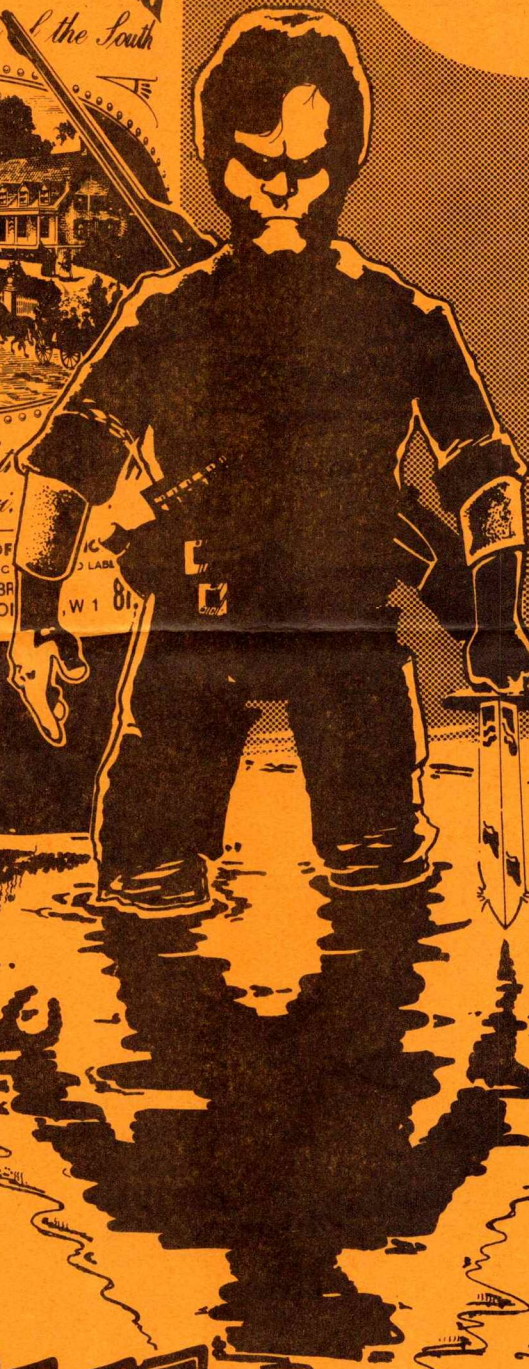


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SAMUEL BARBER Esq.

Wallbanger

WALLBANGER 7

Yet another Special - this time it's the SOUTHERN COMFORT SPECIAL.

November 1982

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Available for the usual, or 20p in stamps.

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INTERLUDES

We have one excerpt from the 'Men and Matters' column from the Financial Times and the Thought for a Day come courtesy of Ohshu Express, the travel agent I use for work - they've given me this day-by-day tear off calendar with stupid little legends at the bottom; no doubt they'll be popping up in further issues.

Can't wait to see what I get for 1983. My apologies to all the Sagitarians - I missed off your horoscope last time and unfortunately can't find the card now - if I see a copy in a shop, I'll include it in a future issue.

ART CREDITS

Many thanks to Jim Barker for the cover and to Paul Williams for the internal illustrations.

That's enough of the introductions, hope you enjoy this issue - see you again in the New Year.

Cuckoo Waltz

Eve Harvey

Some of you may remember that back in the annals (I'm glad I checked that spelling) of history a film was released entitled Southern Comfort (last year to be precise). Given my own penchant for a certain liquor of not dissimilar name, and fandom's predisposition towards alcoholic beverages in general, it's not surprising that I not only intended to see said cinematic presentation, but decided to use it as a theme for the next issue of Wallbanger.

All started well, I commissioned a front cover from J Barker Esq plus a short SC-related anecdote. I planned to include a review of the film and several features loosely based around the central theme, together with my own 'desert island discs' chosen from songs released by Matthews Southern Comfort. I could round the whole thing off with an account of a trip to that great continent which gave birth to this elixir of my life. All would link so well with Brian Smith's article in W5 and I would have produced an interesting (well, to me at least) variation on a tone poem.

Ah, the innocence of youth!

As I had realised by my February deadline, this fledgling Wallbanger was evolving into a right little cuckoo. The cover had arrived - a marvellous adaptation of the film's poster - together with anecdote. The trip report had flopped through the letterbox at an early stage. But later, something else had materialised on the doormat; this little article by a certain Chris Bailey. As in Raiders, by opening it I unleashed awesome powers, and released my cuckoo from its bonds. It instantaneously took over all editorial prerogatives, relegating me to 'staff'. And I never did get to see the film!

It demanded that all submissions so far received be held in abeyance; plans were adapted, finalised, scrapped, re-drawn, adapted. Deadlines passed, were extended, passed. Wallbanger 6 eventually materialised and whilst the cuckoo lay sated I stole the editor's seat in an attempt to regain control.

Ah, the optimism of youth!

You see, as time passes things happen. Things that cry out to be printed. Things that people offer you that don't easily fit into your well thought-out strategy. You stretch your imagination and say, OK, I can link it in by.... the theme will remain, perhaps artificially held together with bobby pins, but still there.

If you have any sense, however, you'll surrender immediately. You're fighting a losing battle. So, although I've regained the driver's seat, and you're sitting next to me doing your best impersonation of a driving test examiner (have you taken the plunge yet Ian?) to judge the tenuous links I can draw between SC and the contents of this issue, I realise I have little chance of success. Some of the original constituents still survive, but the rest is linked to the central theme only by the fact that either I've drunk SC in the company of the authors, or during the anecdotes being related. But that's not difficult given the frequency with which I can be found with a glass in my hand.

Now next time, I've this great idea for a theme on.... what's that? The cuckoo has stopped snoring!... Christ, I hope the noise of the typewriter hasn't woken it up.... I had W7 all planned.....

It seems only logical that I should start with the first article I received for the 'Southern Comfort Special' last December. At least being almost a year late the subject matter has regained its topicality, since Novacon is only two weeks away now.

Many strange things happen at cons - we all know that - but Jim Barker just has to go one better! Who else would find themselves invited back to a hotel by someone of the opposite sex? Wonder if he'll be as lucky this year?

West Midlands Comfort

Jim Barker

During the course of nearly every convention, there comes a time when I get tired of all the hubub and want to escape for a bit of peace and quiet. Usually I go for a wander around the shopping area of whatever city the con happens to be in. At Novacon 11 this occurred on Saturday afternoon, so I went out to walk off my depression. I did Nostalgia and Comics but didn't find anything; tried the city centre bookshops but didn't find anything; examined the durfed paperbacks in Woolies, but didn't find anything. So, still feeling a bit down I was making my way back to the Royal Angus when I found this lady with a clipboard blocking my path. I usually go out of my way to avoid being stopped in the street; more often than not they're from some religious sect who want to impart Cosmic Wisdom for 20p and having worked beside a Jehova's Witness for 5 years I've had quite enough of that. However this one didn't look the religious type, and she was quite pretty, so....

"Excuse me. We're conducting a survey and I wondered if you could help me. Could you tell me which of these you regularly drink?" And she handed me a card with WHISKEY, RUM, VODKA etc printed on it. Near the bottom I spotted a familiar name.

"Southern Comfort. That's about the only alcoholic stuff I drink these days."

"GREAT! This survey is on behalf of Southern Comfort. Look, we've got a room in a hotel just up the street. Would you mind coming and answering a few more questions?"

Well, I wasn't due back at the Royal Angus until 4 p.m., and she was quite pretty.... and there might be free samples.... Suddenly I was beginning to cheer up. We went into this seedy-looking hotel and into a room which had been decked out with trestle tables and plastic chairs. There were already a few people present being grilled about their drinking habits. No sign of free samples, though.

My lady collected a thick questionnaire from a top table and we sat down. I was nearly disqualified when she discovered I worked in advertising since they weren't supposed to interrogate anyone in that line, but we swiftly amended my occupation to "Cartoonist" and commenced.

"Now then, on average, how much Southern Comfort do you drink in a month?"

"Well, I had fourteen glasses last night..."

She let out a strangled sound and picked her jaw up from the table. I started explaining about the convention and that the previous night had been a special occasion. She still looked dubious but continued the questioning. I think she'd been taking lessons from Paul Turner.

"Do you know where Southern Comfort is made?"

"Oh... America somewhere, isn't it?"

"Uh, uh. Do you know the alcohol content?"

"Somewhere around 80% proof. About three hangovers' worth."

"Which of these two identical labels do you prefer?"

"The one that says 87.7% rather than the one that says 47.7%."

"Would you still drink the same amount of Southern Comfort if you knew it was being made in Ireland?"

"Pardon?"

"And if you knew the alcohol level had been dropped?"

"As long as they didn't affect the taste, I suppose I'd still drink it, no matter where it was made."

"Would you spend more or less on Southern Comfort if you knew the alcohol level had been dropped?"

"I suppose I'd spend more, because I could drink more before passing out..."

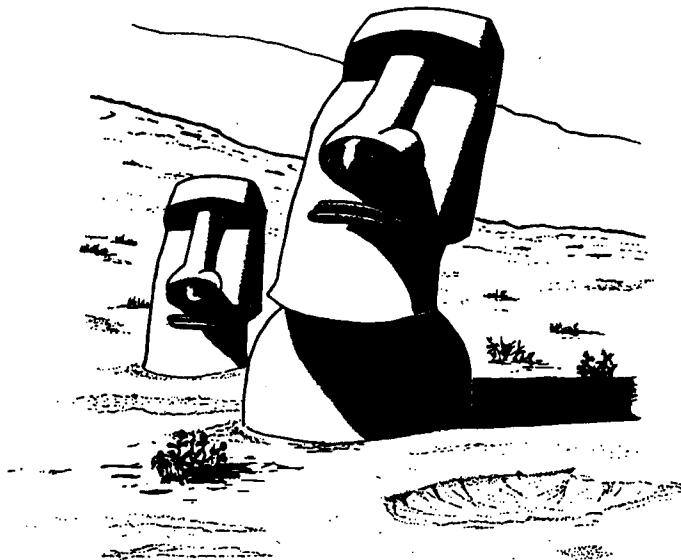
"Did you really drink fourteen glasses last night?"

I allowed that this might be an exaggeration since I'd lost count after the first ten. She rolled her eyes skyward with a 'Why did I pick this cretin' expression. I was feeling cheered up at this point so I started telling her about Kev Smith's Death Wish cocktail (Southern Comfort/Pineapple Juice/Double Vodka/Alka-Seltzer) and she held her head in her hands. That about completed the questionnaire, so I told her that if she wanted to meet a really triffic bunch of Southern Comfort drinkers, she should come over to the Royal Angus.

What was she doing that night anyway...? If they were all loonies like me, however, she wasn't interested and she wouldn't let me have a copy of the questionnaire for the auction. And still no sign of free samples.....

Eventually I left and made my way back to the Angus, wondering if I'd managed to buggur up their statistics.

From the questions, I assume they're planning to make a weaker version of Southern Comfort in Ireland. I don't know if that'll make it cheaper, but as long as they don't colour it black and give it a white frothy head, I suppose I'll still drink the stuff. You meet the most interesting people that way.



There was no problem linking Jim's piece with the overall theme of this issue, but now I have problems; there is no reference to Southern Comfort at all in Pam's piece, but a large amount of that liquid was consumed at the weekend-long party held to commemorate Roy's quarter century and Paul's anniversary in the house, so I suppose I can be forgiven.

Back in May Pam had only been in fandom for a few months and had never written anything for a fanzine when I pounced on her for a party report. She came up with an idea that I really liked and, I must admit, I continuously bullied her until it was finished. When she got bogged down in the execution of her basic idea I nagged and nagged to prevent her giving up, and I'd like to take this opportunity to apologise for that, it must have strained our friendship.

But I'm sure you'll agree that I was right - it was worth completing and I hope she's proud of it.

Folkestone Frolics

pam wells

(With a little help from her friends)

A play loosely based on the events of the weekend 29 - 31 May 1982.

Dramatis Personae

Judith Hanna	Janice Maule
Eve Harvey	Joseph Nicholas
John Harvey	Geoff Rippington
Phil James	Liz Rippington
Paul Kincaid	Kev Smith
Roy Macinski	Jeff Suter
Ian Maule	Pam Wells

A Doctor

All playing themselves, or very nearly lifelike replicas of same.

ACT I : SCENE 1

A house in Folkestone. Throughout front room and kitchen are scattered all actors with the exception of Kev Smith, Jeff Suter, Pam Wells and A Doctor. Music plays; alcohol flows; the party is in full swing. It is 9 p.m., Saturday.

Enter stage left, Pam & Jeff.

Company: What time do you call this? (Murmours of "9 o'clock, what time do you call it?" in the background.) Thought you were coming this afternoon?

Jeff: Yeah, sorry we're late. It's her fault. She wouldn't get up this morning.

Pam: Mumble, mumble.

Jeff: Well, maybe it's not all her fault. British Rail helped a bit. 'Cos we had to catch a later train through somebody not getting out of bed, it's just taken us 7 bloody hours to get here from Portsmouth!

Company: How?

Jeff (counting off on his fingers): The train to Victoria was 20 minutes late; then it took us 30 minutes to discover we should have been at Waterloo (the ever-helpful BR staff didn't bother to tell us); then we found the next train to Ashford wasn't for another hour; then that train was half an hour late leaving Victoria; then our connection at Ashford was cancelled because there wasn't a guard (maybe he was at Waterloo because nobody told him - perhaps BR staff don't even talk to each other, let alone to the passengers?); so we had to wait another 20 minutes for the next connection. Good enough excuse?

Everyone: Aaah.

Anyone: Have a drink.

The evening continues in the same vein: music, alcohol, conversation, dancing, alcohol, friendship, food and alcohol. Kitchen degenerates into a replica of a brewery.

SCENE 2

Midnight, same evening.

Ian: I fancy going for a swim.

Eve: OK, if you actually go in up to your neck, I'll follow you.

Ian: You're on.

All: What a really terrific idea, let's go!

Janice: We are not amused.

The party walks (stagger?) to the nearest piece of beach. On arrival Eve and Ian exchange worried glances, but eventually paddle gingerly; the desire to submerge to the neck appears to have miraculously disappeared in the cool night air.

Suddenly, a white phantom, suitably attired in swimming trunks and determination, dashes past the assembled company and submerges itself in the sea. The group look on in disbelief as the figure, now discernible as a certain Phil James, swims for at least 30 seconds before retracing his steps - perhaps slightly quicker this time.

Phil (to Eve and Ian): You cowards! it's not that cold!

Eve & Ian: Oh yeah????

The company murmur doubts as to Phil's sanity whilst he re-attires himself and commence their homeward journey. Paul decides to take everyone via the scenic route (past his old flat) which feels like a hike from Folkestone to London and back again.

SCENE 3

Front room, 114 Guildhall Street - reminiscent of Hiroshima devastation.

Paul: Ah, a nice long walk, just what I needed. I'm wide awake now. Let's get the party started.

Everyone else: We're shattered! You and your bloody bright ideas. How about some sleep.

ACT II : SCENE 1

Sunday morning, the same front room in the guise of a Salvation Army Doss House. Ian, Janice, Jeff, Pam, Joseph, Judith and Phil are sleeping in varying degrees of discomfort on sundry pieces of furniture or floor. The whole scene is reminiscent of the end of a game of 'Statues'.

Bright sunlight streams through curtained windows. Various grunts & groans emit from otherwise docile-looking bundles of sleeping bags. Gradually life returns to the undead. Coffee appears and newspapers are passed around to anyone whose eyes are functioning.

Jeff: Isn't the News of the Screws triffic? It says here that Maggie Thatcher is "A lone light shining in these dark times"

Janice: Somebody must have set fire to her!

All: Convulsive laughter.

Enter Eve, John, Paul & Roy (the lucky ones who grabbed the beds) who demand a re-enactment of the joke.

Paul: It's such a lovely day, how about a game of Pitch & Putt. There's a good course not far away.

All: Sounds like a great idea.

After a suitable interval for the performance of ablutions, the party sets off for the golf course, via every pub in the area - but none come up to their high standards and are passed by (even The Harvey Hotel, although not without a barrage of photographs being taken of certain people under the sign). Eventually the course is sighted, but in the way stands another pub.

John: Why don't we stop for a drink before the game to build up our strength?

Roy: Good idea.

Ian: It's a bit crowded in there. Why don't we go straight to the pitch & putt?

Joe: Good idea.

Eve: Why not form two groups? You lot can start your game and we'll join you after a quick drink.

Jeff: Good idea.

Exeunt Joe, Judith, Paul, Ian & Janice in the direction of the course, to be joined later by Kev, for whom a note had been left at the house giving instructions of how to find the company.

SCENE 2

Several hours later, the second group are staggering round the course - being held up somewhat by Eve's par 15 for each hole. Group 1 join them at 14th hole having become bored at waiting as Eve misses the putt yet again.

Joe: You hit that a bit hard.

Group 1: Raucous laughter.

Eve: I don't think it's that funny.

Ian: Well, you see, Joe had a slight accident with his club at this hole. He was in the rough and hit the ball so hard not only did it hit the Martello Tower and bounce off, but the head of the club followed rapidly in hot pursuit.

Joe: There must have been a fault with the club.

All: Raucous laughter - Joe looks slightly hurt.

SCENE 3

Company assembled on park benches in a concrete square in the centre of town, munching plastic and cardboard hamburgers from the local fast 'food' shop, ignoring all Government Health Warnings on the plastic containers. John starts eating the container as well, not realising it wasn't his hamburger. A lone policeman watches from the safety of his ~~bank~~ car as everyone studiously avoids clowning or litterbugging.

SCENE 4

The group returns to the house to partake of real food and video watching.

Roy (pallid): I don't feel well.

Eve: Oh, come on you hypochondriac! A bit of sunshine & exercise won't kill you! Sit down, have a couple of aspirins and you'll soon be okay.

Pause

Roy (flushed): I feel really terrible!

Paul (concerned): Why not call my doctor?

After much difficulty, the doctor is coerced into visiting the ailing Roy. The healthy contingent remain as quiet as possible in the front room as the doctor pronounces his diagnosis in the bedroom.

Roy: Will I live, doctor?

Doctor: I think so. You've contracted some sort of respiratory infection. Take this prescription to a chemist tomorrow, you should be in the land of the living in a couple of days. Goodbye.

Exit Doctor

Roy (panic stricken): What, no medicine until tomorrow! Help!

Meanwhile, in the front room downstairs, the video is showing a badly acted, badly scripted, badly filmed, pale blue movie "The David Galaxy Affair".

Janice (knitting): This doesn't look very good.

Pam (watching Janice knitting): No, it isn't.

John: Shh, it might get better.

It doesn't.

Ian: Just fast forward to the rude bits.

There aren't any so everyone watches "Love at First Bite" followed by The Cambridge Footlights TV programme. Eating & drinking continue.

ACT III : SCENE 1

Monday morning looms, and dismay is not in the air since it's a bank holiday. The sleepy artists rouse themselves in a re-run of Saturday morning - without the joke, but with a trip to the chemists so that Roy can happily down his medicine all day. Phil leaves at the crack of dawn (something to do with his midnight swim?) and Ian & Janice take up their beds and walk.

The remaining actors stagger to the nearest public house until they are forcibly ejected, then invade a 'fish & chip' restaurant for lunch. The day proceeds in a languid fashion, encompassing innocent pastimes such as Connect 4, drinking, reading sections of Paul's book collection, drinking, listening to the latest bulletin on Roy's chest, drinking....

Judith has the brilliant idea that all remaining actors should play 'Botticelli', but this requires thinking and so is abandoned after a few rounds.

Exeunt Eve, John, Pam & Roy Londonwards.

SCENE 2

In Eve & John's car, travelling at 70 mph along the motorway.

Eve: I don't like the way the car's tipping from side to side, it's making me sea sick. It doesn't feel safe either.

Backstage - loud hammering noise and car swerves slightly.

John; Shit, I've got a flat.

Car is steered very quickly across the three lanes onto the hard shoulder. John & Eve get out to survey the damage. John curses & swears, Eve shakes at the thought of what would have happened if she'd been driving. Pam & Roy look bemused.

SCENE 3

Collapsed in 43 Harrow Road, Eve, John, Pam & Roy summon the energy to lift a glass to their lips. Normality is restored.

Roy: I feel much better now!

Lower fire curtain.

From Pam, Folkestone & golf, let's move onto Paul, Ascot & horseracing... but first I have a few thoughts...

Reading the latest edition of Quartz on the journey into work started off a train of thought about what it is that makes writing good. So many pieces of amateur fiction fail because the writers seem to think that it's the amount of description that conveys the atmosphere; every noun must have at least one companion adjective, every paragraph its simile or analogy. Comparing the submissions in Quartz with those from more experienced writers highlights the error. Take the M John Harrison story in the first issue of Interzone since that's the last thing I read before sitting down to type this (yes, I know it's a bit late, but I'm not what you might call organised in my reading habits). I didn't like it very much, but he succeeded in communicating with me on many fronts; I was able to deduce something about the characters of the main protagonists, I could visualise the London he depicted, the hotel and the clinic. And all of this was achieved without the prose appearing anything other than ordinary - in the sense of not obviously different from the spoken word, not unnecessarily polysyllabic merely because it's prose. What I consider 'quality' writing is often the simplest, and this appears to be the most difficult aspect of the art to learn, to be able to communicate with the minimum of paraphernalia.

John (my one, not the millions of sub-standard counterfeits that abound today) has this ability if only he'd get his finger out and do something with it. One day, several years ago when we were in Leeds, I found a short story which I thought he'd copied from somewhere. It was good and I was amazed to discover that he'd written it himself from an idea jotted down on the back of a bus ticket. It wasn't excellent in the sense that if published it would make people sit up and take notice; but in the simplest terms he'd taken his idea and managed to evoke an atmosphere which went much further than the actual prose. It was successful communication with no waste and the end result was far greater than the constituent parts.

Yes, that's it! That's why most amateur fiction fails - it's the quantity of description that so many believe makes for good fiction; the elaboration is so detailed it leaves nothing to the reader's imagination, and therefore can never achieve this pinnacle of communicating more than is printed on the page. During the psychology course in my teacher training, we learnt that if the human brain is presented with an incomplete picture it will automatically fill in the gaps (something computers are unable to do as well, the tolerance line for 'insufficient data' is much lower for electronic than biological brains). If the missing parts are too large, the end result as perceived by the student may vary significantly from that intended, which from a teaching point of view constitutes poor communication, but the Plimsoll Line for literature is far lower. The really interesting point is that students tend not only to understand more quickly, but more deeply, when 'completion' is used as a teaching method. So with reading, a much deeper appreciation and understanding is engendered if everything is not laid out on a plate.

Anyway, to get to the main point of this diversion, I have long wondered why of all the reviews I type for Vector, those that have been most successful (i.e. actually make me part with money) have been Paul Kincaid's. I had promised Kev Smith a loc on what it was about Paul's reviews that succeeded where others failed, but I could never quite work out what it was. Now I know; it wasn't a similarity in taste, it was his style of writing. He successfully communicated with me in his unpretentious, down-to-earth, way, and in the piece that follows he's succeeded again.

Admittedly he has the added advantage of practicing his art in order to earn a crust each day - he has to evoke the ambiance of far-flung places for OAP's from Bolton in the space left between the glossy pics in travel brochures, but I now see why Saga jumped at the chance of getting him, it wasn't just that he'd work his balls off for a pittance!

This piece is the first in a series on Paul's sporting career (and if you've seen him in silhouette, you'll know why I couldn't resist his offer), so watch for future episodes in the continuing saga (no pun intended).....

My Sporting Life - 1

A Day At The Races

Paul Kincaid

Of all the bookies scattered around this little oblong in front of the grandstand, his pitch was probably the nearest to the course. He was short, so that although standing precariously upon two wooden boxes piled upon a stool, he was barely raised above normal height. His clothes hung loosely about his scrawny body; the stained grey trousers were baggy at knees, groin and waist. A creased white shirt billowed over his belt. The jacket, just possibly part of a suit with the trousers, had been ill treated over the years. His narrow, pinched face, dark shadow about the jaw, was framed by an untamed shock of white hair. The board gave his name as Charles something. Someone called out 'Charlie' and he turned quickly, the eyes behind his thick glasses eager and suspicious. There was a brief exchange and he pulled thick lips back from uneven teeth in a sudden, hurried smile.

We had decided to risk £5 each on this race; thrusting the two notes at him we said '£10 on Celestial Dancer'. He hardly looked at us, seizing the money and putting it in a tray in front of the board. Then he dealt us a card from the deck he held. It carried his name and the number 732. '732,' he said, '25 for 10, 9' and someone behind the board scribbled this vital information into a huge ledger. The odds on horse number 9, Celestial Dancer, were 5 to 2, giving us £25 for our £10 stake. If the horse won. As we left he was dusting figures off the board and chalking more in, each bet adjusted the delicate balance of the odds just a little.

We made our way back through the jostling, pushing crowds, past the other bookies all balanced on their mountains of boxes and stools. All were assiduously rubbing out figures on their boards, chalking in new ones, taking money in exchange for cards, calling out odds. You had to shove at people, squeeze between them just to move. Someone appeared momentarily before me: vivid impression of a bulbous nose marbled with broken red blood vessels. Then we were climbing the concrete steps of the grandstand. It was even more crowded here. We climbed until we could go no further, then turned to get the best vantage.

The horses were already out on the course, somewhere behind the starting stalls. It was a mile-and-a-half race, so these were situated some way around from where we stood. I could just about make out some movement, but no detail. Everyone else had binoculars, without them I felt naked. Chris was explaining once more that Celestial Dancer could not lose. It had been second in its last race. Very reassuring. Ah, but it had run on well, and that had only been a mile-and-a-quarter, and the opposition this time wasn't so strong. Simple, eh? I wasn't really listening, too busy watching the scene. Bookies and punters and, at either side of the oblong, tic-tac men with arms spinning in some crazy semaphore. They seemed to be signalling to nobody in particular, but odds changed on the bookies' boards with surprising consistency.

'They're off!' All at once the tic-tac men stepped down from their precarious eminences, and the bookies seemed marooned upon their islands of stools and boxes as the paved oblong miraculously cleared. Across the far side of the field I could make out nothing but a dark movement. A horse race over a mile and a half takes little more than three minutes, but I was impatient for it to be over. I just wanted to know whether or not I had lost my money. As the horses rounded the last bend and hit the straight in front of the Grandstand I could at last make out the vivid colours of the jockeys' shirts. Lester Piggott on Celestial Dancer was distinguished by a red cap. At this moment the horse stretched itself a fraction ahead of the bunch. I was a still, small speck of silence in the midst of a massive roar, watching with weary resignation as some other horse gradually overtook Celestial Dancer and £5 disappeared.

This was Ascot Heath, the Saturday after Royal Ascot, when the top hats and best dresses take a holiday. Chris, a friend from work and horse racing fanatic, had persuaded me to come along for the experience. In the spirit of the occasion I broke the habit of a lifetime and put money on the horses he recommended. During the course of the afternoon I watched one after another come in second.

Ah, but the experience made up for it, almost.

We went along to watch horses parade before one race, ignoring the 'Owners and Trainers Only' sign to find a good place at the rails. They were fillies. 'We won't bet on this race,' confided Chris, 'fillies are just like women, too unpredictable.' They were handsome creatures I suppose, if that sort of thing turns you on. They were a lot smaller than I'd expected. Chris was making comments about how they looked, how they held themselves, how they moved, weighing up winners and losers. I paid no attention. I was far too concerned with another parade in the centre of the ring where owners and trainers were gathering. They were in a uniform of brown suits, brown leather binocular cases slung from the shoulder, brown trilbys at a jaunty angle. Trilbys! I haven't seen any for years, and all of a sudden it's as if nobody dare be caught without one. And yes, I do believe, on one or two of the brown figures, belted trenchcoats against the inclement weather. Bogie, where are you now?

A stir, and like a circus entry in come the jockeys. The horses were small, these were smaller. Waist high, miniatures perfect in every detail, just like the real thing. Their wrinkled silks are a rainbow of every garish colour imaginable. In a thick fog you could still tell who was who. Each attached himself to a brown figure, and craned the neck to hear some last minute instruction. I got the impression the owners were showing off their latest toy, a neat little thing they could stick on the mantelpiece. A klaxon sounded, the horses were brought to the centre of the ring, the jockeys went to their respective mounts, and all of a sudden the fillies that had been patiently wandering round and round began jumping and kicking and having a whale of a time. We left as horses and jockeys circled each other in an elegant pavane, leg constantly raised, stirrup constantly moved away.

We circled the Members Enclosure on our way back to the Grandstand. Oh what a study in types this is. Within the Members Enclosure everything is smoothness and wealth. They are svelte, slender, tailored figures with expensive suits and polite laughs. They are toffs who look like they've stepped straight from some Wodehouse novel, and debs showing off their summer frocks and floppy hats and acting like it's a Buck House garden party. Stone faced old men in bowler hats guard the divide, keeping out the real world. On this side of the fence it is all beer guts and jeans, fag ends and no women at all. On that side the faces are all smooth and powdered, sculpted, unblemished. On this side they are gaunt or bulbous, rough chinned, red nosed. You see them pouring over the form books, tearing up their betting slips, putting one more bet to make up for the loses so far.

And along that divide, hiding any physical barrier, a wall of people. Bookies on one side, tofts on the other, leaning towards each other like conspirators. This is where all the big money goes down. This is where the tic-tac men stand, dispatching coded messages from the front. We see Mel Smith arguing some fine point of form. The Queen Mother is supposedly there also, but we don't see her. She probably has her own bookie's runner.

A pint in a plastic glass in the bar, with crowds who probably see nothing of the races at all but just waylay passers by to ask who won the last. A stroll out behind the grandstand where guardsmen in their red uniforms perform stirring martial music on a bandstand. Then back for the last race.

We've just seen one more horse come second. Okay, let's get something out of the day, put the last few quid on Cat O' Nine Tails. It can't lose, every tipster in the Sporting Life says it has to win. Of course that makes it odds on favourite so it's not worth going to any of the bookies, best try the Tote. Here apparently what they do is divide all the money bet among those who backed the winner, so you don't know what odds you'll get until after the race. Chris tried explaining it to me, something to do with the number of ten-pences everybody puts down. I couldn't make much sense of it, anyway I was anxious for the off. This was about as short a race as you can get, only five furlongs, over in a matter of seconds, much more how I liked things.

Cat O' Nine Tails comes second.

Time to go home.

On the train we share a carriage with the little bookmaker with the baggy clothes. He is smiling.



Question Time ~

THE FAIRCON PUZZLE

Eve Harvey

Phil Palmer: (with great surprise) "What, you're coming to Faircon?"

Bill Carlin: "I'm not a 'fanzine fan', I just like reading them."

Jimmy Robertson; "I wouldn't go to Silicon - I don't like those fannish things."

Phil Palmer: "Yes, Ian Sorensen's great, but nobody's going to notice him because he's Scottish."

Where's Bob Shaw?

Am I enjoying myself?

Is there anybody there?

Where's Bob Shaw?

Will I go to another Faircon?

I don't know; I wasn't sure whilst I was there and time hasn't made things any clearer. What I'm left with is just a series of unanswered questions and mixed feelings of confusion, anger and disappointment.

Why was Phil so surprised that John & I should decide to go to Faircon? Were we crossing over the boundaries he'd set for our fannish activities? Surely it's obvious if you know us that it's only financial restrictions that prevent us from attending all fannish gatherings.

But maybe that's it, Faircon is not perceived as a fannish gathering; after all, we all know about this great divide between the 'Scottish' fans and English 'fannish' fans. Perhaps the confusion is my fault rather than Faircon's? I went up to Glasgow like a missionary venturing into darkest Africa, believing the natives only needed to be shown the light for us all to live harmoniously as one bit happy fannish family.

What an idealistic, simplistic, condescending idiot!

What if the natives don't want to be saved?

I had at first cast Bob Shaw as the perpetrator of the Scottish/English fandom split with his constant inference that 'fannishness' was inferior. Faircon changed my mind. I don't know whether it's brainwashing, but many of the Scottish fans seemed to take a similar pride in denouncing any links with 'fannishness'. Take Jimmy Robertson's comment; how can someone who is a founder member of Cretinfandom - a reborn Ratfandom in both cause and style if ever there was - and the producer of one of the best personalzines to appear since Seacon, say he doesn't like fannish things? He is fannish (by my definition), but perhaps that's the problem, we are all labelled and packaged neatly into little boxes, but nobody has agreed what the labels mean and how large the boxes are, least of all those inside.

As someone who takes an obvious pride in his open-mindedness in mixing freely with both protagonists in this fannish duel, I thought Phil Palmer would, of all people, be helping me rip off the labels. But what do I find? He's actually going over them with indellible ink. He's reinforcing the division by making it so obvious that he is crossing a massive chasm when he goes up north.

Thought for a Day

This is for you Joe Nicholas, or anyone like Ted White who should know better.

**** The best way of answering a bad argument is to let it go on ****

With this positive reinforcement from both sides of the border I gave up. To hell with it, if people want to separate themselves off, let them. But I won't be limited by the labels they try to put on me. I don't care how uncomfortable it is when I don't elicit the anticipated Pavlovian responses, I'm going to be me and nobody else.

But am I falling into the same labelling trap? Is my disappointment caused by people not acting in accordance with my own typecasting for them?

Of course. But at least my boxes have open sides to allow free access to all the others, and my disappointment stems from the fact that the rats are staying cowed in the corner, not venturing into anyone else's territory. They'll never know if they'd like it because they will not give it a try.

Now, what about Faircon the convention. Did I enjoy it?

On balance, no. There were high spots, but with two exceptions (the Fan Room and the Vagon Poetry) they were due to the people I was talking to, not the convention. I spent what felt like days wandering down corridors past the programme room, alternate/fan room, video room, war gaming room, Star Trek room, computer games room, art room... trying to find someone to talk with. They tell me there were 400 people present, but only 10 of them were in the bar when I got bored with the programme item. Most neos complain of the difficulty in breaking into the groups of fans scattered around a convention; I was having difficulty finding the people, let alone starting a discussion with them. I feel very sorry for any neos at that con, they had to overcome two rather than one seemingly insurmountable problem - but there again, since the social side of a convention was not in evidence, perhaps they didn't miss what they didn't know exists. That makes me feel sad, and implies that Faircon failed in one of its important areas - conventions should be a showcase for all aspects of fannish activity, so that people can make a considered judgment on what's for them.

Did Faircon bode well for Albacon II?

You tell me. Obviously the hotel won't feel so empty and the committee have had the opportunity to discover many of the merits/demerits of the hotel in good time (isn't that what I said about the Metropole? I wish them better luck than I had). I know I will enjoy it, give me good company, food and alcohol and I'll always enjoy myself. As for the committee, they were prevented from showing their own merits as organisers because of a certain problem somewhat outside of their control. And talking of Bob Shaw.....

..... No, I've changed my mind - I was going to talk about Bob's ridiculous so-called fanzine 'revealing all' about Albacon II, but he's such a boring fart (excuse the terminology, but it's so apt) I don't see why I should boost his ego and add credibility by discussing him.

Suffice to say that I think it's despicable to attempt a demolition job on a con committee, it's a hard enough job anyway, without personal grudges being dragged out. John and I will be going to Albacon, and have every confidence in the committee - we may not agree with their ideas of what an Eastercon should be, but they have their right to try out their ideas like any other group that has won the bid.

So, onto more interesting matters.....

Thought for a Day

Dedicated to anyone who, like me, has to run the gauntlet of jangling collecting tins and vampires sporting little flags on lethal pins, each day at the railway station.

After much thought, it is my considered opinion that it is impossible to introduce the next article, so I won't attempt to, except to say that it's got nothing to do with Southern Comfort.

I will, however, say something about Judith. I think it would be true to say that of all the people in fandom I admire, she comes top of the list. Forgetting the obvious quips about her ability to survive life with Joe Nicholas, she has a very rare talent in that, whilst being very literate, she never makes me feel inferior. Even when she is in the middle of a demolition job on your views, you can't help agree since she can cut through the verbosity to the heart of what you are really saying (not what you think you're saying) faster than a warm knife through butter. I must admit to being a little jealous of her for that, I would love to be able to really see things, and then to be able to say what it is I can see. Ignorance is not always bliss.

Cartland, Heinlein, McCaffrey: Cliche, Counterliche & Aliens

Judith Hanna

One Christmas, I was stuck in Auckland, New Zealand, staying in the YWCA. When Auckland, biggest city in the North Island, closes for Christmas, everything closes. There were just two cars, both parked, down all the length of its main street. There was nothing to read, nothing except someone's collection of Mills and Boon romances. What could we do? I'm an addict, I'll read anything - I got through thirty of them that day, before I threw up. Would anyone want to claim more expertise on the subject? The heroines all have green or violet eyes, are never really beautiful - you can't trust glamorous women, they're always vain and treacherous - but heroines have simles which animate their whole face lending it such adjectives as piquancy and charm; heroines tend to be nurses or secretaries - higher intellectual attainments are right out - and are given to answering ads for work on isolated outback stations/mining camps/other adventurous locations for embittered widowers - usually rugged hunks dripping arrogance - with or without children who (the widowers) sweep them of their feet into a happy ending. That's the mass-produced pulp end of the market. The works of that self-proclaimed High Priestess of Love, the ever-so-sweet lolly-pop-pink Barbara Cartland, are of course, different: she sets her novels back in the good old days when women were cossetted and corsetted chattels of their men, her heroines are ethereal, with clustering curls, enormous violet-blue or green eyes and little pointed chins; they either get kidnapped by or get married off to rugged arrogant hunks with striking profiles with whom they eventually fall into bed, melting into each others' arms in a flame of passion they knew would last for ever - this I dub the candle-wax theory of love. (Lewd aside - if only other candle-shaped appendages had such lasting power....)

Reading junk may be fine as a cure for insomnia: my mother swears by fifteen pages of E. E. (Doc) Smith; my aunt, a truly formidable "little Aussie battle-axe" whose favourite excursion now they've retired is to head off for a few weeks' prospecting in the trackless desert, prefers slushy romances. But some people read the stuff while they're fully conscious. What more than temporary distraction from boredom can anyone possibly get from that sort of "muzak with a plot"?

Is the lure of romances in the freedom from responsibility their heroine enjoys - swept along irresistibly by events and masterful men, she may find herself forced into sex, but never into making a decision. Rape's not so bad, as long as he's good-looking (or, according to Heinlein's Friday, doesn't have bad breath), but the real fate worse than death is responsibility. Is "femininity" thus defined, for and by women themselves, as dependency, passivity and submissiveness - pampered slavery as bliss? Can this really be what women want?

Why don't women read rousing, adventurous action-packed stuff instead, all about winning out over competition, about exploitation and subjugation, and that sort of heroic achievement? But of course women do read that sort of stuff - Biggles, The Saint, Heinlein and his ilk. And as they read it, mixed in with the action comes the message "This is men's stuff; women just hang about in the background as plot hindrances". To read about action, she has to accept being told that, as a woman, she's doomed to inaction and unimportance. If she wants to be reassured that as a woman she's not relegated to insignificance, she finds that stories featuring women reinforce the message: yes, women are important, but only because of the passions they provoke in men. Women aren't expected to actually do anything.

Leave aside all the literary waffle about bad writing; it's those creatures with pneumatic tits Heinlein casts as women that make me want to hurl him across the room. No! no! they're alien; no woman was ever like those "she" things in Heinlein; an ambulatory utterance-generating inflatable plastic doll might be, a sort of Stepford-wife android, but not us real women. Heinlein doesn't even do us the compliment of treating us as enemy aliens, as Russ does her men; his "women" are a slave race, as thoroughly domesticated as so many pet puppy-dogs fawning upon their masters. The spectacle's sickening. For all the all-round competence Heinlein attributes to his fake women (Ph.D., leading authority on X abstruse subject, black belt, leader of underground revolutionary movement) (though what have huge norks to do with competence?), there's never any sign of it in their actions; they spend the rest of the plot going no more than follow around the meat-headed jock who think's he's marvellous who's being cast as hero, murmuring at intervals "Oooh, darling, you are marvellous!". I doubt even Barbara Cartland would be such a drip.

It's no compensation that Heinlein's idea of men bears no greater resemblance to real human beings, that his heroes, too, are aliens or perhaps androids, wound up at the start of the novel, programmed as so many mouth-pieces for their author. It's frightening to realize that for all his awfulness, Heinlein is a human being, one of us, not an alien (just as Cartland is a human being, one of us, however much we want to disown her) and if his heroes are, indeed, just so many wish-fulfilling projections of himself, then the way they are is the way he thinks he and other men should be; and the way his women are is the way he thinks women ought to be; and since his hero-worship of his characters so dominates his plots, one can only assume that his readers are able to agree with him.

It's a neat cliché to explore, the opposite sex seen as an alien species brought up in an alien though overlapping world. It's a cliché one could support with such real anthropological examples of what might be dubbed "the culture of gender" as the tribe where men and women each speak a different language and are supposed to neither speak nor understand that of the others - once little boys leave the care of the women they must forget women's talk. (Unfortunately I can't remember either the name and location of the tribe or how they got around intersex-communication in the home.) That's an extreme case, but in many cultures sex-based division of labour ensures that men and women spend their time in very different social environments.

Explore the cliché more deeply and, as clichés examined are apt to do, it dissolves beneath your feet, dumps you floundering in existential ambiguities: not only are the sexes alien to each other, so is every different culture alien, explicable only in its own terms, never fully comprehensible to any outsider; so also every individual within any culture differs in life experience, in the

fine-tuning of personality, perception and response to events so that any inter-personal encounter may be dissected (a la Erving Goffman) as a fraught negotiation of mutual testing and reaffirmation of the expectations that make up each individual's internalized "ordinary world" outside which everything is alien - oh, ain't living as a human being just so complicated? That none of the complication, none of life's frightening capacity to dissolve into uncertainty and ambiguity, ever peeps out of the mechanical posturings of Heinlein's robot characters is what makes them seem so non-human. No doubt it's also what makes his plots such comfortable escapism - stereotypes provide such a nice, predictable read, don't they?

But that's just the stereotypes of popular fiction which are, of course, quite unrealistic and not-at-all true to life. Pernicious they may be but who could possibly take them seriously? Nobody really thinks like that any more, do they? So why would anyone buy or read that sort of book?

After all, we're all real people out here, aren't we; intelligent beings of discernment and taste, fully alive to the subtleties and intricacies of life, enlightened, true connoisseurs of the best in literature. We don't read that sort of thing; we see through cheap cliches; thinking may hurt the head, but we like the pain. But how many of us real people are there?

What about the others, who read that sort of book? We see them in trains and on buses, clutching their Cartlands, their Lensmen of Gor, their Harold Robbinses and Playboys. Are they all aliens, programmed by junk reading or, even worse, TV?

How can humanity be saved? Not by reading Ballard. It hasn't a plot, it doesn't mean anything and besides, it hurts the head. That's for masochistic intellectuals.

Perhaps if they all read stuff by McCaffrey... It's the same nice, simple storytelling they're used to, but the message has changed. Not too drastically; there's enough of the old, comfortable cliches of both space opera and romance to make the addicts of both feel at home - there's action in the stars and idealized sentiment - there's the same old sexist setup everyone's at home with. But who's the important character - why, look, it's a woman! Who's making the action - why, look, it's Lessa proving that women can, too, fly; it's Helva showing that crippled women, too, can fly; it's Menolly showing that women can have careers just as much as men. Then what about the men - must they become zombie aliens pushed off into the background? No, they're alright, they're included as good guys. Action stories girls and boys can read. Something for everyone.

Except maybe us aliens, masochistically addicted to the perversion of thinking, insisting on kicking at the comforting support of every decadent stereotype we detect until it crumbles to dump us in the existential mire of alienation.

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* HOT MONEY
* As if international banks involved with Mexico have not got enough to worry about, a large
* part of the Mexico City headquarters of Pemex, the state oil company, was gutted by fire
* earlier this week.
*
* Given that Pemex owes more than one-third of Mexico's $60bn public sector debt fears were
* aroused that Pemex's records of its bank borrowings might have gone up in smoke. One British
* bank telexed its man in Mexico City to check whether the six floors damaged included Pemex's
* treasury department.
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* To save further telexes my information is that the treasury remains unscathed.
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Since I started with one of the original articles for the Southern Comfort special due out last January, it seemed only right that I should end with the other. In the last month or so, however, my plans have once again been foiled and yet more has been added to the issue than at first projected. Ah, me... My apologies to Alan for delaying publication of his piece for so long, he admitted last night in fact that he's completely forgotten what he said... I hope he enjoys it. No problem with the southern comfort connection here, at least we've got to the right side of the Atlantic. Of course, Jim might have been unsuccessful in his attempts to throw their market research into disarray, and it could be produced in Ireland now.

Letters From America

Alan Ferguson

SF

So here we are, anticlimaxed by the freeways, cars and roadsigns as we head into San Francisco; strange yet familiar. Offered a strange variety of beers and an even stranger variety of teas by the friends we planned to stay with. "National Baseball Players Strike - No Progress" filled much of the front page of the SF Chronicle, the bemused smile wiped from my face by a small snippet in a 'mild appetiser' typeface as I dash off to page 23 to find out more about "Israelis Bomb Iraq Nuclear Power

station!"

Getting a little wound up about making a successful culinary autopsy of a lobster dinner and finding step-by-step instructions, with diagrams, at the table. California works very hard at being the land of drams, rainbows, trendy art, stained-glass windows, pottery, unicorns - even Pegasus! Fantasy.

The famous bridge was impersonating its favourite Floyd album on our first sighting - Obscured by Clouds, of mist that is. Tee-shirts with nothing on them but a large gun, cleverly printed to make it look as if it's stuck under your belt - belly scratching is punishable by death.

Chinatown was a whole other world; we were last to leave the oriental greasy-spoon, eating slowly to watch the staff themselves dine. Feasting on delights unknown to the menu - no fortune cookies for them.

Show windows full of craftsmen at work, visits to Grant Canfield, the too-much-to-choose-from feel of the hypermarkets, trucks parked at horrific angles on the 'Bullitt-Chase' hills, the wonder of street theatre - "Well can you juggle a raw egg and two 16 pound bowling balls?" he did.

LA

Driving down from Santa Barbera to Malibu, thinking back on the breathtaking grandeur of Yosemite National Park, all trees, mountains and waterfalls and how much it contrasted with the mosaic welcome given by the roadside advertising hoardings on our approach to Fresno. Messages turned to patterns, the overkill of modern living cancelling itself out.

We reached LA, talked some business to US counterparts, talked of life in far-off UK, crashed out

on various floors. Pacific on the doorstep, burning on the beach, bikini-clad blondes floating back and forth on rollerskates - the luxury of it all gradually becoming commonplace.

A small airplane flies overhead, towing a banner that tells of a shirt sale. Didn't read properly as it flew back down the beach. "They're selling to the yachts now." - they were too!

Beautiful people, cool from the beach, sparkle in the dimly lit bars; we sink lots of Kamakazis, eventually to sink ourselves. The night ends with the slow talkers hurriedly picking up bed-warmers before chucking-out time.

Having played the irresponsible tourists, we mended our ways for a while and took in Hollywood, Disneyland, wax museums, alligator farms, Universal Studios and Knotts Berry Farm, where they have a giant-loop rollercoaster called Montezoomas Revenge; to 60 in 5 seconds, hits the loop at 85 - never again - sweaty-palmed nervous before, terrified-numb driving, in-need-of-a-stiff-drink shaking afterwards. Excited tiny kids run round for another go!

Played a small part in Airport 77 (the remake) with Jack Lemmon. "But I didn't volunteer." I protested to the director at Universal, trying to make my argument sound reasonable. "Ya busy or something?" he argued more reasonably. The rest is, of course, history.

LA was once described as the orgasm of the Great American wet dream, this is something of an overstatement, but I doubt if I'll come again.

Luncheon Vouchers? 'Hell, why ruin the initial theme for the sake of a place like Las Vegas? I didn't know you had to cross the Mojave Desert to get there. 110°. Straying once from the long and winding 'Helicopter Patrolled' road to visit the ghost town of Calico, a wild west slum clearance now nationalised to be crass and commercialised and thus acceptable, prepared us for Vegas like a spot of rain prepares you for a monsoon.

Free Steak Breakfast.... Free dice as used.... Free deck of cards as used.... Half-price rooms.... and so on. Stayed at the Stardust, hookers in Vegas are quite evident, even have papers to advertise 'em, so we weren't too taken aback when the porter asked if we'd like a couple of girls sent up, just a little culture-shocked.

The continual jingle of silver dollar at all hours reminds you of a factory floor, little old ladies hug buckets of money, orientals at poker tables get neck massages as they play, customised transit vans and vintage cars can be won for a dollar and champagne flows from a fountain, help yourself. The bartop is covered in gambling video games, the Lido De Paris was voted the best show in town so we saw it and it was in the high 90's at midnight as we practically crawled from casino to casino.

We left the vulgarity of Vegas to visit the Grand Canyon taking photographs of everything until the Canyon, I just didn't bother - stupendous!

Stayed with a pal who shared a six-bedroomed house with another guy. No need for guide books, "Let's hit the bars". Come the following morning they must have hit back. Vague memories of drinking lots of nice names like Alabahma Shammer and Melon Ball. Not being able to get Kamakazis I order Iced Tea, only to find it a bizarre mixture of rum, gin, vodka and a dash of coke - looks just like tea. Breakfast on the porch on Bucks Fizz, Twinings Tea, Fortnums Marmalade, fresh bread and

gloriously gooey brie. I like Washington.

The fourth of July is celebrated in the shadow of the Washington Monument at the free (naturally) Beach Boys concert - our senses numbed with Strawberry Dackery (take a blender and fill it with fresh strawberry, pink lemonade, ice and lots of dark rum until you have sufficient quantity to kill an elephant), we 'ooh' and 'ah' at some spectacular fireworks.

'What? You've never been to a Crab-feast?' - we join the other 15 or so in a backgarden to demolish some 30-dozen condemned crabs. Shown by the resident expert "once, and once only" what to do, we watch as one is smashed to pieces with a large wooden mallet.

TV

I soon got over laughing with astonishment at the frequency with which the programmes interrupt the commercials and station identifiers. M*A*S*H can be seen about 3 times a night (different seasons of course), the canned laughter being a bit off-putting since when a really clever joke came up, it didn't.

The advertisers hold the purse strings, and don't forget it. The game shows tell you who pays - company's current sales slogan - who supplied the prizes - who made the prizes - what stores sell the same goods at discount prices - and so it goes. Even the games are: How many of these leading brands of gunk can you buy for \$25? Each brand is introduced by its respective known slogan. During the break, "This Preview of the News (they book audiences for the news??) was sponsored by the VW cardealers of California." Even the brandnames are made to fit the advertisers' slogan instead of vice versa. "Whatever you forget, remember the Alamo!" Alamo is a dog food. "Wanna get around fast? Take your Passport." Passport is the name of a moped - there's no end to it. With cable TV giving access to over 30 stations the TV guide just gives the hour followed by a long list of laternative viewing. All sports have additional breaks or longer breaks to accommodate the advertisers; it's a mess.

NY

Stayed with Stu Shiffman. Climbed to the top of some very high buildings, rode on the Staten Island ferry, took in a stage show, went to a Disney art show, tried Pastrami on Rye with Kniches, and all that kinda stuff. Subway really creepy, "How do you survive, Stu?" - "Look tough." Everything, but everything, is graffitti-strewn, even the outside of the trains; apparently "they" break into the yards at night to achieve this.

Cops, devoid of discipline, lean against walls (weight of the gun, no doubt) twirling cap in hand, chatting up girls in the dark subway corridors - all very eerie.

On our last day we decided to climax the 5-week stay with a helicopter trip round Manhattan Island and the Statue of Liberty. After swivelling round the sights and drinking a Manhattan in Manhattan, we set off for Kennedy and home.

BB

A pal picks us up at the airport, we are told of wedding-mania (which got heavy coverage stateside) and of rioting in the streets of 17 major cities, fires, looting and blood on the pavements. (This must have been on page 23, 'cos I didn't know.) Trev is told that his new company car had been delivered. I was told that my department had been disbanded. We were home.

LETTERS

There's a major benefit in getting behind schedule for your fanzine, it gives more time for the locs to build up; in the last month I've doubled the number of letters received, which can't be bad. Unfortunately since I already had this section finished it meant I've had to retype the whole thing! Still, it serves me right. Enough of me, let's see what you have to say....

ANDREW ROSE, 19 Cathcart Place, Edinburgh

It is slowly dawning on me why I always have to borrow my fanzines from other people - it's my inability to write letters to anybody. I have just had this clarified in my mind by your Wallbanger 6 falling through the letterbox. This has never happened to me before (apart from the BSFA mailings that is) although I can't survive without reading fanzines. The trouble is that I can read, enjoy, enthuse to others about the brilliance of the writing contained in it, but just cannot get it expressed on paper in the way it should be.

**** You're not alone in that, why do you think so many people do fanzines? Believe it or not I find it easier than writing locs. This difficulty in overcoming the initial hurdle, really believing that the editor and all those brilliant people who write so wittily will be interested in anything little ol' you have to say, is a widespread one. Because of this five of us have got together to produce a genzine, Shallow End, aimed at (though not exclusively) helping to alleviate the problem. Anyone interested in a copy write to 5 Beaconsfield Road, New Malden Surrey. End of plug.

ALAN MORRIS, 58 Westfield Road, Bletchley, Milton Keynes

Chris Bailey's 'On The Beaten Track' was superb, I chuckled for ages afterwards. There are, though, many anecdotes that can be told from the other side of the cab, as it were. For instance, I was working a late night service from Euston (the 01.35 to Bletchley actually), and had just got into the cab when I heard somebody enter behind me. When I turned round, there was a drunk swaying in the doorway. "'Scuse me, does this train stop at Kings Langley, mate?" he asked. "No, we're not booked to stop there", I replied. "Well, I've got a ticket for there." To avoid any trouble (I've got an aversion to being thumped) I agreed to stop at that station; it stops at a lot of places unofficially for staff, so Kings Langley wouldn't make the train too late. Muttering his thanks, he staggered up the platform and got into the train.

At the end of the journey, I was talking to the Station Inspector, and who should stagger out of the train but the drunk and his mate! They'd obviously dropped off to sleep and missed the stop at Kings Langley. Needless to say, I didn't hang around to face them, and took empty coaches to the sidings post haste!

**** The major response on W6 was to my rather self-indulgent 'Meanderings' article and, interestingly the majority of those commenting were men. I don't want Wallbanger to get a reputation fore being a 'feminist' zine (sorry to all those I offended by using what I'm told is the old-fashioned term 'women's lib' - I can't keep up with all these important name changes) but some interesting points were raised.

JIM DARROCH, 21 Corslet Road, Currie, Midlothian, Scotland

Your article, 'Meanderings of a Sick Mind' was interesting. One particular form of prejudice which most people seem oblivious to is that of correct forms of dress for the office. For some strange reason, females can basically wear what they like (i.e. T-shirts, etc), whereas males MUST wear shirt and tie with a jacket, and so on. Why?

Thought for a Day

I'm not sure if this is a compliment, but I think so.

**** Women are wiser than men because they know less and understand more ****

**** That's a little of an over-simplification. Not all men have those sort of restrictions, the type of organisation that imposes them does the same to women; why can't I wear trousers to the office? T-shirts are fine - the skimpier the better for most male bosses - but if they tried walking across London Bridge on a cold, wet, windy winter's day in a skirt they might change their mind. I used to wear trousers and get changed in the office, but why should I have to? OK, jeans can look slovenly, but smart trousers should be no problem.

JOHN D OWEN, 4 Highfield Close, Newport Pagnell, Bucks

As always, you speak such clearly outlined commonsense in your 'Meanderings of a Sick Mind', that it becomes a non-controversial subject. Few avid feminists do acknowledge the two-way nature of the trap that a married couple fall into more often than not - it's not just the wife being 'trapped' into a life of domesticity, staying at home and bringing up the kids. All too often, the husband is obliged to be the breadwinner, he has to bring home the bacon every week, a long and often very frustrating life of toil which he has to do in order to fulfil the obligations he takes on. And most blokes are going to be in jobs that bore them, that are simply money coming in, as opposed to being interested and satisfying in themselves. There's little satisfaction to be gained as a feed mechanism for a piece of industrial machinery (which a lot of factory workers are), or as a paper pusher for an office selling left-handed thingumebobs - you have to be a bit queer to like or even get enthusiastic about thingumebobs, even if they are important components in the fabric of the nation's defences - if you're umpteen stages removed from the end product, they're just pointless objects.

**** I think I'll let Joy Hibbert answer that one.

JOY HIBBERT, 11 Rutland Street, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffs

I think you're wrong in feeling that a man is trapped by being the breadwinner. Remember he had the option of not getting married in the first place and it is always easier for him to leave his wife when he decides he's had enough. Wives are often forced into jobs such as cleaning when their husband will not or cannot work. This is because of their nurturing brainwashing, their wish to look after their family no matter what the effect on themselves. Fortunately, as you say, you are ambitious.

Obviously equality has to be two-way, but it's easier to do the female side of it first. Men must be liberated into being people too. They must be able to define themselves as other than earning and screwing machines. As to your comments about nurses, I do feel you should ask men how they feel about women nurses before you decide what's good for them. Of course, this is academic, until men are brought up to feel that they can be nurses.

As to your comment about secretarial work, you are failing to realise that most women in lowly office jobs do not care about equality, and think it's only natural that men should have the late shift. If it was accompanied by an increase in female executives, and if jobs were not automatically given to men as they so frequently are now, I would welcome an increase in the number of male typists. An office full of unliberated-and-don't-want-to-be-women can be sheer hell to anyone with half a brain.

I do find it difficult to understand women who object to Ms. I cannot understand why women feel that their marital status is the most important thing about them. I would have preferred a neuter title rather than one which exaggerates one's gender, but Ms is the best we've got so it will have to do. To a certain extent you didn't change your name, between you, you and John chose one to both be called by. As you say, few men offer to change their names, so it's unusual to have the luxury of choice. I kept my name for many reasons, the most important of which is that Joy Hibbert is me and I cannot imagine being me with any other name. You apparently had the same reasoning - after marriage you didn't feel you any more, so you became someone else in name as well as feeling. Just as a matter of interest, no offence intended, since you have the same speech defect as me only more so, what would you have done if your husband's name had a prominent 'R' in it, as my husband's has. Would you have accepted a name that you cannot pronounce? That was one of my lesser reasons for keeping my name. It's also a reason for wanting to move house. Phoning for application forms, and asking for them to be sent to Rutland Street it not a pleasant experience.

Thought for a Day

This, I'm sure, is the secret not only of happy marriages, but also successful friendships.

**** Diplomacy is the art of letting someone have your own way ****

**** On Joy's last point, I do have problems at the moment since I live in Harrow Road, but I just get into the habit of spelling it out even before people have a chance to play with the alternatives. If John's surname was difficult for me, I think we'd have done what a friend of mine did some years ago. His name was Smith, and she refused to become Mrs Smith but her maiden name was something atrocious (I can't remember now exactly what, but definitely polysyllabic and German-Jewish sounding) and she couldn't wait to get rid of it, so they decided on her mother's maiden name. After all, marriage is a joint venture, and you might as well start on a democratic note.

JEAN WEBER, 13 Myall St, O'Connor, ACT 2601, Australia

You mention that "Mrs Eve Harvey is a completely different, and in my view better, animal than Miss Evelyn Simmons ever was, and this metamorphosis ought to be marked." What troubles me about this statement is the implication that you derive part of your identity from your married state. There is nothing terribly wrong with that, but what if the marriage should break down. Would your identity break down too? This seems to happen to many women, who find the change in a relationship to be a personal 'failure', where an observer might see a very different situation. From what little I've read of your writings, it doesn't sound like this would happen to you, but as a generality it's all too true. You've grown, changed, improved through your relationship to this man; fair enough. You could have also grown, changed, improved through other events in your life, other friendships; would you mark a dramatic change (not involving marriage) with a name change? (Many people do, of course.) I consider that I am a very different person from the one who went to San Francisco in 1970 (or even the one who came to Australia in 1974), but yet I'm also the same person - just a new improved version. But I keep my name. I have made the changes; they may be in reaction to a person or event in my life, but that person or event is just the catalyst which allowed me to change, not the operative agent.

**** I don't usually like splitting letters with editorial comment, but in this case I think it is necessary. Jean certainly made me think, but unfortunately I am not very good at expressing my own philosophy on paper, face-to-face discussion is far better. What I would do about my name should John and I split up I just don't know; I may be putting my head in the sand like an ostrich, but after the first 3 or 4 years together (it's been 10 years now) I haven't seriously considered this possibility - what I would do if he died, yes, over the last 18 months I've thought of very little else. So any comment I make at the moment is going to be completely invalid, I'd have to see how I felt at the time. As for Jean's other comments about the other changes in my life, I have tried to mark them. When I was 18 and frantically trying to fit into the mould of 'sophisticated secretary' I was Evelyn to everyone; then I went to University and, as corny as it may sound, 'found' the real me, i.e. decided that this image-building was childish since people were bound to see right through it, I became Eve. I know it sounds silly, but it is very significant to me. The crux of the matter is that, I suppose, I don't believe I would have developed and improved my character without John - I would have changed, but in a different direction.

One thing I really don't like is the requirement by some 'feminists' that one must conform to their idea of what women should be like - this to me is just as bad as being expected to conform to anyone else's idea of what women should be. To me the essence of feminism is allowing women to choose their own lifestyle, and helping to make the choice viable. Providing child care to allow women to choose to use it is laudable; expecting all women to instantly do so is laughable. Campaigning for the opportunity to have equal access to jobs (and equal pay for work of comparable value), is great - sneering at women who don't choose to seek paid employment is not. And so on.

**** Right on there - couldn't have said it better myself. That was the whole reason for the article - I'm sick and tired of having to excuse myself for not conforming to what other 'feminists' think is the right attitude. Why should other people automatically assume I want to be called Ms; why should I have to justify the fact that I'm happily married and want to be called Mrs; why should it be assumed I should want to become involved in 'women only' activities; why do I have to be on the look-out for male chauvinism all the time? And most of all, if I am quite happy with my present degree of liberation, why do others have to try to show me how blinkered I am. Life is so short we should enjoy as much as we can, and so long as I'm happy, does it really matter that I'm not as liberated as I could be? I'll fight hard if I'm dissatisfied, and will fight for others who feel restricted, but have we the right to force 'liberation' on people who are quite content without it? It reminds me of the 'civilisation' problem - the natives might be quite happy living in their mud huts but we have to show them the so-called delights civilisation can bring; so

they become dissatisfied because they now know what they're missing. I'm not advocating we shouldn't help improve the lot of those less fortunate than ourselves, so please don't get at me for that, it's just that I think we should think more about the morality. I can hear the pens scratching across the paper already! Yes, I know half the problem is that male domination is so pervasive that we don't even realise what is being done to us, the question is merely one of degree.

Leigh Edmonds understands what I mean...

LEIGH EDMONDS, PO Box 433, Civic Square, ACT 2608, Australia

Now far be it from me to preach on this subject, not being female and so not really able to get a first hand grip on the sorts of forces that women are subject to. So the way your piece came over to me was that you are happy with what you've got out of life and therefore would all those nasty women's libbers go away and liberate somebody else. Have I got it right? Leaving out a lot of background, in your small article I detect that you have taken up and hold a great number of the assumptions about society which that society approved. More to the point, since you have reached a state where you are happy with your lot, you are not going to make waves. Just because you are happy with the roles which you are allowed to play in society does not mean that you have ceased to be exploited by that society, though, and by the men in it.

**** Oh Leigh, why did you have to go and spoil it? Yes, you have me taped exactly, but then you go on and suggest that I am in some way 'inferior' for this choice ; maybe I am misinterpreting you, but phrases like 'roles which you are allowed to play' just grate on me. I am playing the role I want to play in my social life, work is another matter but I'm gradually making headway there though I'll admit it's a slow process. Why do I always feel I have to excuse myself?

Richard Faulder can have the last word, since he expresses succinctly just what I feel.

RICHARD FAULDER, c/o Department of Agriculture, Yanco, NSW 2703, Australia

Like you, I see myself as holding moderate views very strongly. It occurs to me that there's nothing wishy-washy about holding a moderate, or centrist position, since what one is standing against is slipping into indulging in the easy enthusiasms of the extremes.

**** I suppose that's my problem, I've never been an extremist in anything - I abhor extremes. Well, I think that's enough of the philosophising, it's not the best subject to discuss in print and I'm getting bored with it. I think I'll just get on and enjoy what little life is left to us all and I'll continue battling in the areas that seem important to me - the international banking system. (Amazingly enough, the least chauvinist employers seem to be the Japanese - I work for a Japanese bank at the moment - yet they're the most chauvinist in their own culture and with respect to the Japanese female staff. Seems they can make allowances for western women being a different class of animal, I just wish the other nationalities would do the same.)

Now onto something far more interesting...

PASCAL J THOMAS, 11bis rue Vasco de Gama, 75015 Paris, France

Your remark on comics started me thinking. For a long time, my parents did not want me or my brothers to read comics (with the notable exception of Tintin) and I went through a hefty number of Famous Five and Jules Verne novels (almost at the same time as far as I can remember) before I really started reading comics in a systematic way. I was certainly not too old (11-13) to get interested in comics, but had clearly been a bit too young for the first few albums of Asterix (the Gaul) which I had read before when I was, say, 8 or 9. All of that, of course, pointing not to a radical difference in our mental structures, but rather to the higher status (and, be it said without chauvinism, quality) enjoyed by comics in France & Benelux. (Let's clear myself from any charge of chauvinism; in a sense it all came out of Belgium with Tintin in the '20s and Spirou in 1938 while the French publishers found nothing better to do than publish Le Journal de Mickey...) It's interesting to see how what was at the start American pulp art for the masses was taken up and substantially transformed by European artists, to the point that completely adult masterpieces can get published and gain a wide audience in France/Benelux, while all the Americans have is Doonesbury (political & social satire, interesting for its text only) and some of what's come out of the underground. Admittedly that's a simplified view of things, but I certainly don't enjoy any of the stuff turned out by Marvel, DC, et al.

By the way, Brian Smith (in issue 5) left out one notable contribution of the men of God to the wonderful world of drink: the best beers in Belgium (to my mind), called "Trappiste" - a generic name, there are several types according to the monastery they come from. One word of warning for British fans making the trip to Ghent this September, they have a rather high alcohol content, and those of us subject to fits of drowsiness may well once again become the victims of fandom's felt-tip tattoo artists.

**** I bet you were wondering when we'd get back onto the booze kick. Now, would I disappoint you all? And here's a blast from the past...

GRAHAM ENGLAND, August-Bebel-Allee 26, 2800 Bremen 41, West Germany

In Dr Grässes book Bierstunden published in 1872 is the story of the Bierschankkommission. Following the Münchener Brauordnung of 1420 (Munich Brewing regulation) the Beerpouring commission had to visit the breweries twice in winter and three times in summer to test the beer as described by John Burnner et al. The testers were called Bierkieser, they had to wear Hirsch-Lederhosen and sit for one hour on a bench where two mugs of beer had been poured. They should stick to the bench if it was good beer.

PATRICK NIELSEN HAYDEN, 4337 15th Avenue NE No. 411, Seattle, WA 98105, USA

Thank you for Wallbanger, which made me want to go out immediately and get drunk on board a train. No easy, though, in this land of freeways and strange liquor laws.

Harry Andruschak is right in saying that bourbon is whiskey distilled from a mash of at least 51% corn, but dead wrong in asserting that "straight" bourbon is made from 100% corn. First, the only whiskey made from 100% corn is raw, illegal moonshine. Second, if it's over 80% corn it's legally corn whiskey, not bourbon - so, in fact, bourbon is whiskey with between 51% and 80% corn in the mash. As to Harry's assertion that rye whiskey is the Real Stuff of which bourbon is but a modern, effete corruption, poot. Bourbon goes back at least as far as 1789, when the Rev. Elijah Craig, of Bourbon County, Kentucky (now legally dry: that's America for you), invented it as a cheaper way to ship his corn crop back East over the Appalachians. For the next hundred years it and rye co-existed in rough equality, with the hairy men who Andruschak credits with building this country drinking whatever happened to be lying around without giving mash content much thought one way or another.

**** And now, at long last, an answer to my query about the pub name 'The Crooked Billet'... (or at least one, you'd be surprised how many variations there appear to be, but I have the feeling Ro is right.

RO PARDOE, 11B Cote Lea Square, Southgate, Runcorn, Cheshire

I don't like to disappoint you, but "The Crooked Billet" is just another heraldic pub name. A billet is a piece of wood, which is shown heraldically as a small upright rectangle. Thus the Arms of William III included an inner shield with a golden lion on a blue background scattered with golden billets. The armorists, who are nothing if not logical, call this "billetty". A crooked billet is one which appears slantwise on a shield, and it isn't all that uncommon. I don't know exactly whose arms gave rise to the pub name though.

Incidentally, when we lived at Huntingdon we were not far from a pub called the "Mad Cat". I'd guess that it must have once been a "Red Lion" with a rather badly painted sign! In much the same way as the "Dirty Duck" at Stratford used to be the "Black Swan".

**** And yet more pub names....

PETER COLLEY, 20 Harefield Road, Brockley, London

Interesting to note that in the same issue that you mention our meeting following your train's unscheduled stop at Brockley, Chris Bailey also gives this thriving backwater a mention. It's almost in danger of becoming well-known, though I have my doubts.

One good thing about being down this part of London is you can wonder at some of the pubs that abound. Travelling on the bus up Greenwich High Road you would very soon reach the North Pole. Should the lager be too chilled you could crawl your way west along the seedy Old Kent Road where all would become clear on reaching the World Turned Upside Down close to the Frog and Nightgown. Or, should things not become anything like clear one last half down at The Artichoke in Camberwell Road would round off a fine evening.

Thought for a Day

I often wish I could be more forgetful, especially at conventions when I've had too much to drink. It's awful to wake up next morning remembering everything you did and said.

**** Blessed are the forgetful, for they get the better even of their blunders ****

**** And now for something completely different (well, almost).....

NICK SHEARS, 9 Kestrel Close, Downley, High Wycombe, Bucks

I enjoyed your account of the Ultravox concert. Growing up in South Africa, there was no hope of attending rock concerts, no matter how deeply into the music you were. I think The Batchelors were about as close to rock music as a touring group ever came. My friends and I would buy Melody Maker every week (five weeks out of date!) and drool over the wonderful opportunities anyone living in the UK had. So when I came back 5½ years ago, I was determined to make up for what I'd missed. Unfortunately music had and has moved on, and my tastes were left behind. But I managed to see Dylan, Baez, Cohen and others and this weekend I finally got to see the Stones. It was like the end of a long pilgrimage. (Through space as well as time. They've been playing for 20 years and this is my first and probably last opportunity to see them. So who cares if I had to make a 580-mile round trip to do it!)

Favourite image of the trip comes before the actual concert. Thousands of denim-clad people walking through Leeds to Roundhay Park, watched by a matching number of bemused residents, peeking through the lace curtains or just standing in doorways, agape and aghast. No hassles, mind you. A couple of pubs had shut up for the day, terrified, no doubt, of Hells Angels running amok. The more rational businessmen had signs such as the one on the Kentucky Fried Chicken window: "Open 24 hours for Stones fans". A comment on the quality of their cuisine, or an optimistic view of the manager's retirement plans?

**** Funny Nick should mention the Stones' concert; only a week before receiving his letter I had managed to persuade my favourite contributor to write an article on that very subject.

ROLLING ALONG

John Harvey

Eve phoned me at work one day. "Fancy going to see the Stones on Saturday?" "Bloody silly question," I replied, "but how the hell have you got tickets?"

Eve then proceeded to explain that one of her work colleagues had two tickets, but was now having second thoughts! Why? Well, he is of the Jewish persuasion and, of course, Saturday is the Sabbath. Now, on the Sabbath travelling on public transport is OUT because you're making someone else work, but walking is OK. So he'd planned to trek the 7 or so miles from his home to Wembley (this isn't work?) but now he was having doubts.

This is how Eve and I found ourselves on the way to Wembley on Saturday, June 26th, to see the Rolling Stones on their 1982 European Tour as they celebrated 20 years in the music business.

I was celebrating 17 years since I first saw them. As a spotty-faced teenager I queued with 'me mates from school' for 4 hours to buy a 7/6d ticket. We'd got up about 7 a.m. on a Sunday morning to cycle all the way into Manchester (about 7 miles, curiously enough) in order to get a good place in the queue; of course the sleeping bag manics had been there all night, but we still managed to get our tickets.

In these far off days, pop tours were massive affairs with six or seven groups in a 3-hour show. Besides the Stones, the programme on this occasion featured Unit 4 + 2 (remember 'Concrete and Clay'?), The Spencer Davis Group (very 'in' with the trend setters at school), Peter Jay and the Jaywalkers (who?), plus many more. The groups would come on, do two or three numbers and then go off. Roadies rushed around and the next lot came on. Just like 'Thank Your Lucky Stars'! The only way that the turn round could be so fast was that the equipment was so light. Amplifiers were Vox AC30's - a small box on wheels with two loudspeakers and a 30-watt amplifier; every group shared the same drum kit (except the Stones of course) and nobody thought of having sound checks, mixers or monitors. Compared with the mountains of speakers and megawatt outputs of only a few years later it was laughable that anybody could be thought professional with such equipment.

These were the days of the screamers. All the girls in the audience seemed to be there for was to get sore throats. On came the Stones and off went the screams... Added to the limited sound coming from the stage, this meant that you couldn't hear anything of your 'pop idols'. One technique helped, though - by putting your fingers in your ears and resing elbows on the arms of the seats, you could just about detect vibrations from the stage. Since you'd heard the songs a hundred times before, it just required a little imagination to turn the vibrations into music. Fab days!

Times were a changin' though. A mere 12 months later the Stones did another tour. No queuing this time - I casually wandered along to the box office and bought 4 tickets; two went to friends, one for myself, but could I find anyone interested in the fourth? "Seen them lotsa times", "saving up to see Bob Dylan"

(the latest 'in' thing), etc. In the end I offered it to my sister, who was only too pleased to go, but couldn't pay me for the ticket!

The theatre was half empty; the front six rows filled with hard-core fans, the back six with the impoverished ones and inbetween was a sea of emptiness. Support bands that night were Ike & Tina Turner and the Yardbirds (eat your heart out sixties fans). During these two acts we all religiously stayed in our allotted seats, but as soon as the Stones came on the 'poor kids' at the back leapt up en masse, jumped over the seats and stood on the expensive ones at the front. Everybody in the theatre was standing and cheering (no screaming this year), so what we lacked in numbers we made up in enthusiasm.

The lull in the Rolling Stones' popularity didn't last very long, mainly due to increasing popularity in the USA. It was the seventies before I went to a Stones concert again. Queuing for tickets was back in fashion, as were full houses - no standing on seats either. Surplus tickets were rapidly snapped up and disposal of any odd spare ones I might have had was easy.

Neither did Eve's work colleague have any trouble getting rid of his tickets; Eve didn't give him the chance for second thoughts. Inflation has certainly bitten hard, the tickets cost £10.50 and that was their face value. In case you didn't know, the concert was one of those huge open-air affairs at Wembley Stadium - not the best of venues but far superior to Wembley Pool. It was one of those typically British weather days - wet one minute and sunny the next, so we chose to sit in the stands rather than with the mob on the grass. We'd taken enough food and booze to feed the proverbial army, despite warnings that bottles and cans would be confiscated (well, I guess those rules are for the uncivilized football fans) and spent the afternoon eating and drinking.

No AC30 amps these days - just the usual cliff-face of speakers that no self-respecting rock band could possibly exist without. So, although there were only three groups on that day, it took at least an hour for the roadies to set up each band. The stage was huge, draped with stylised pictures of a saxophone and a guitar. We'd set ourselves well back to avoid the rain, so the performers appeared as tiny figures in the distance. Black Ohuru started, and thankfully gave up about 3/4 hour later - they appeared to have one song which consisted of one line repeated for the whole time (or is that my uneducated ear? Please do not try to educate it). The audience, particularly those at the front, seemed to love it so Eve and I got on with our eating and drinking until, a mere hour later, the J Geils Band came on. I've always enjoyed them and on that day they were excellent - just good fun rock music. I particularly liked it when they were signing off, they said "As Americans, we'd like to apologise to you for Ronald Reagan" - great sentiment that. The audience loved them and they were an inspired choice as warm-up for the Stones, if only we hadn't had a 1½ hour wait in which to cool off before the stars appeared.

The Stones, of course, did the usual Rolling Stones things: Jagger ran about like a demented jogger and the rest bashed away at the standard numbers. After one song the huge TV screen above the stage was switched on and our places at the back were no longer such a disadvantage. There was one curious effect however; the disparity between the speed of light & sound came into play causing a loss of synchronisation between picture and sound. It took me quite some time to persuade Eve that this was the cause (possibly because I wasn't all that convinced at first); still, as long as the camera wasn't on a face either speaking or singing it was OK.

There's not much point in me trying to describe the Rolling Stones on stage, those interested will already have read about the tour in the rock press, and those not won't want to hear. Eve & I enjoyed it, the crowd enjoyed it and the Stones made money. Although I had felt the tickets were a little expensive, it wasn't until Eve commented that she wasn't sure whether it was worth £2 per hour for the time we were there (and that's per person), or £3 per hour for the actual playing time, that it dawned on me how much times had changed.

If getting there had been easy, leaving was virtually impossible. With the tubes and trains on strike, it took us 2 hours to get out of the Wembley complex! We spent the time listening to the '20 years of the Stones' tape we'd taken from the radio on the way over, then a Beach Boys tape, then the radio. I burst out of the jam like a cork out of a bottle and we scorched off home.

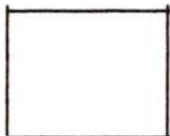
The fifth and last time I'll go to a Rolling Stones concert? Maybe, who knows.

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*****
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* THE REEL THING
*
* Quite a catch for a little company in Cumbria - a 12ft computer-controlled pike.
*
* Ulvertech of Ulverston, which manufactures underwater survey equipment, landed a £250,000
* contract yesterday to build the monster model fish for a film company planning a home-grown
* version of America's "Jaws".
*
* "The Pike" - man-eater, of course - will be filmed on Lake Windermere next April and May.
* The film is being jointly produced by City Major of Manchester and Entertainment Investments
* of London. About a quarter of the film's budget will be spent on the model fish. "It is
* the star of the film", says Howard Rolands of City Major. "A model could be made for £50
* but it would not be realistic - which is where Jaws fell apart. For us realism is the thing."
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Well, that's it for Wallbanger ?. I'd like to thank all the people who wrote, including:

Mike Hamilton, Nick Shears (another letter), Chuck Connors, Jack R Herman, Tom Taylor, Marc Ortlieb, Philip Collins, Harry Andruschak, Phil James, Nigel Richardson and David Piper.

See you all in the New Year unless you have a dirty smudge in the box below (not those provided courtesy of the Post Office) which means I haven't heard from you for some time, and unless you let me know otherwise, I'm assuming you don't want to receive further copies.



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NY 12110
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