
APPARATCHIK

The forty-first issue of a bi-weekly fanzine, published by Andy Hooper, member fwa, supporter afal, at The Starliter Building, 4228 Francis Ave. N. # 103, Seattle, WA 98103, also available at APHooper@aol.com. This is Drag Bunt Press Production # 231. *Apparatchiki*: Victor Gonzalez, carl juarez, A.P. McQuiddy & Martin Tudor (British Address: 845 Alum Rock Rd., Ward End, Birmingham B8 2AG UK). In that low, earth-smelling tunnel under the highway.

Issue # 41, August 24th, 1995

HERE'S THE PROBLEM: I want to have a fanzine to handout when I arrive in Glasgow, or at least very shortly thereafter, and as it happens, the next APAK is scheduled to be completed the first day of Intersection. But the likelihood that I will be able lay my hands on a word-processor, or even a typewriter, with which I can produce an artifact recognizable as *Apparatchik* seems quite slim. On the other hand, there is a certain dishonesty to preparing a fanzine that is supposed to come out every two weeks in advance, and a definite unhinged quality to the idea of putting out three fanzines in two weeks, as we seem hell-bent on doing. It will actually be nice to have two weeks in which I simply can't spend any time at the computer, even if I want to.

Alas, there's not all that much to report at the moment. We're actually marking time until our flight on Thursday, compulsively reconfiguring our car rental plans every two or three hours. I find myself frequently staring at nothing, thinking of all the things I experienced on two previous trips to the U.K., and wondering which of them will be repeated, what will have changed, who will buy me my first beer, and who will try to rush me into draining it ahead of my normal pace by offering to buy another round, and who will be the first British fan to comment on the laggard pace of American drinkers, and who will be the first in all the vast Worldcon throng to vomit on their own shoes.

When I feel this hypnotic, sleepy pull in my imagination, one of the things I always remember first is the train ride down from London to Brighton for Conspiracy in 1987. I had been burning my candle down short the past few nights, thinking pompous thoughts in front of the Elgin marbles and the Rosetta stone by day, and reading big, stupid techno-thrillers by night. As soon as we sat on the train the motion was enough to send me into a dream-like state. As it happened, there was actually quite a lot to see in our car as we ran southward. The first person I recognized was Michael Whelan, looking tall and airbrushed, wearing the sort of scarf that people frequently attribute to Joseph Nicholas, and with a big, black portfolio that looked like it was made from the skin of some supple little frog from the Orinoco basin at his side. He and a companion settled into seats at the far end of the car, facing away from us.

A little while later, when an especially violent sway around a curve woke me again, I noticed two other familiar-looking people talking in the open compartment diagonally opposite ours. One was an older, well-dressed woman, who seemed grateful for the chance to stave off boredom when her compartment-mate engaged her in conversation. He was even more familiar to me, I felt sure I had seen his face in some one's picture album or in the pages of some fanzine. He was dressed in clean, well-worn denim, rapidly balding, but with a neatly-trimmed gray beard. He introduced himself to his seat-mate, they shook hands, and began talking. Since Carrie had fallen asleep next to me, I strained to hear what the two could be talking about. I could hear that she had an English accent, while he had what might be called an eastern drawl, but it was difficult to hear what they were talking about.

By the time we were halfway to Brighton, I decided I had remembered who the aging hipster was. I turned to Carrie and whispered "That's Ted White, isn't it? I'm sure that's Ted White." At the time I didn't know very many fans outside of the Madison area; I had been corresponding with other fans for several years, yet hadn't had much luck making face-to-face meetings. But I had seen Ted's picture somewhere recently, and I was quite sure it was him. I was tempted to approach him and tell him how much I liked his fan-writing, but by the time I summoned the nerve to do this, he and the other passenger seemed quite engrossed in their conversation, and besides, my lids were getting very heavy again . . .

We found out who the other person was at the opening ceremonies.

A few days later, while coming out of the worst (and only) Mexican restaurant in Brighton, we ran into Ted again, this time in the company of TAFF delegate Jeanne Gomoll, who is of course one of our fellow Madison fans. She made sure we were properly introduced. The rest, as they say, is history. I'm glad to say I expect Ted will be around this weekend, too.

Anyway that's how Carrie and I rode in the same car as Michael Whelan, Ted White and Doris Lessing.

Turns out there were a number of other SF people on the train, writers, fans, artists. You should have seen the queue at the taxi stand after we got off the train.

Naturally, Whelan got the first cab.

Who is Kyser Söze?

My So-Called Fan Life

By Victor M. Gonzalez
Staff Writer

Because my re-entry into fandom has caused a diverse, often critical and sometimes seemingly uncomprehending response,

I've decided to step away from the usual column and say something about my history in fandom, and a little about what my goals are.

I got involved with fandom through Tom Weber. When I was going to college the first time, in 1983, he called me up and we reactivated a friendship that had been dormant for a year or so, since we had hung out as Rocky Horror freaks.

My first activities were meeting fans at Vanguard and other parties (my memory of Seattle fandom in those days is filled with an endless string of parties), and then I got involved in the Amateur Long Playing Society, a music apa, to which both Tom and Donald Keller belonged.

Stu Shiffman called Vanguard from New York one evening, and demanded to talk to me. Many New York fans were convinced, he explained, that Victor Gonzalez was actually a hoax fan created to parody Cesar Ignacio Ramos, then believed by many to be a product of Richard Bergeron's mind.

I published my first fanzine -- as I recall -- in February 1984. Following that, I did three issues of Instant Gratification with Jerry Kaufman.

So, when I arrived at the Los Angeles Worldcon in 1984, with Topic A in full bloom, I was quickly enfolded. I met Ted White and Jerry Jacks and many other fans important to the discourse I had been following. Numerous hours were spent in smoke-filled rooms studying reams of letters, most marked ``DNP'' or ``DNQ.''

Shortly after, Mom died. I had already dropped out of school and moved in with Heather.

I don't recall writing LACon up, but Tom and I later produced a fanzine called Parasite that reviewed in fantastic terms a Sacramento Westercon. That is probably the best fanzine I've been involved with before APAK. And as a single-issue fanzine, it still stands alone.

As I slowly gafiated, my name seemed to appear in fanzines more and more. I had reached some kind of recognition, but my life was descending into the lower realms of experience, and after a 1986 fanzine called Sans Serif, I had little written contact with fandom until I started writing for Andy.

Often I would consider doing something, but the drug use made everything too much of a drag. And, when I went back to school in 1989, I was so unsure

about my ability to succeed that I was unwilling to commit myself to anything else.

It is only since returning to the Northwest and starting up my career that I've felt I could spare the energy. It isn't that fandom wasn't worth it, but that other things, like creating a life I could live with, were much more important.

And since coming back, I've been very careful not to overextend myself. I spend all day at work writing or thinking about it. I know I can write a page every two weeks without killing myself most of the time. I like it when I can enjoy the pressure instead of being punished by it.

And I'm happy to be able to fulfill the commitments I've made, a revocation of guilt from my fannish past that I don't want to relive.

Thus, I haven't committed to doing a fanzine, or writing LoCs. But I am interested in communication, and I hope that eventually my column will be one way to facilitate that.

Some of the general criticism has been to the content of my columns. Putting the various asinine personal comments aside, a number of people have said that the column doesn't fit into APAK; that it doesn't have a fannish tone because it isn't about fandom.

Well, I partly reject that argument. In the few fanzines I've received since re-entry, personal essays, not about fandom, still seem to play a large role in the number of fannish column inches. Other people write about their jobs, their experiences, their opinions, even when they are entirely unrelated to fanzines, fans or science fiction.

But, content aside, I seem to do it without the proper fannish resonance.

I must plead guilty. I know I am a fan inside, but I'm not sure if it penetrates to my writing, and that is something that is certainly not the readers' fault.

I can only ask the readers to bear with me, and try to enjoy what entertainment I am able to supply. I believe that as I go to more conventions and get more fanzines, I'll rediscover what it means to write like a fan.

So, I encourage all who can see my problem to send me stuff. I may review interesting fanzines, I may do con reports -- but mainly, I need to be a part of the stream again.

And, even if the zines come thick and fast, I'm sure I return to personal essays about whatever's come up in the land of disgusting journalists, or I'll write a never-ending series about how one should properly drive Interstate 5 from Seattle to Tacoma, including all lane changes and speed traps.

But this time, Tom Springer will be behind the radar gun, passing radio signals on to JoHn Hardin, who'll swing the Kawasaki into action, revving to 70 and merging into fast-lane traffic.

Send fanzines to: Victor Gonzalez
403 1/2 Garfield Street S. Apt #11
Tacoma, WA 98444
X ☒ X

AND NOW, YOUR LETTERS:

[APH: Here's a letter on #38 that somehow escaped last issue's dragnet, from STEVE JEFFERY (coming from JEFFERY_STEVE@ctc-cookson.cmail.compuserve.com):]

"Cheers and gratitude for a plethora of APAKs via hero UK distributor Martin Tudor.

"On Victor's article about cars, there was a much discussed TV program here a few weeks back called 'Road Rage'. Normal, everyday (even mundane) people turning into sociopaths and psychopaths once five minutes behind a wheel. And with UK urban driving conditions, all too easy to imagine. But, oddly, not in Virginia - where I was last week, and where driving manoeuvres that would elsewhere cause angry horn tooting and much abuse and waving of white-knuckled fists seem to be taken in stride. Is it the lower speed limits in the US? If you have to keep to a fairly leisurely 65 mph, rather than thrashing up the motorway at 85-90, then perhaps everything is more relaxed. If so, it's a good argument for lowering our own speed limit (especially as much of road rage seems to be about people jumping traffic or daring to overtake in 'the wrong sort of car')

"Victor, in APAK 38: pot *is* a narcotic, not just "considered". Just like alcohol, and with very much the same effects on judgment. Particularly peoples illusion that they are still fully in control - as they slur and giggle and bump into things. So even if possession wasn't illegal, being stoned in certain circumstances (like at work, behind a wheel, operating machinery etc.) should be an offence - in the same way that being drunk is. And I'd support tighter and stricter laws on both. But in the UK, because of its ambivalent position, being stoned can be seen as mitigating a serious (even fatal) driving offence on the grounds of 'not being responsible for your actions'. If you tried to claim the same thing for a fifth of Wild Turkey, they would (rightly) throw away the key.

"So yeah, if you loosen the laws on possession, then accept that you should tighten them right down on the consequences."

[APH: I don't think that anyone who has written for APAK on this subject is in favor of allowing people to alter their brain chemistry in any way they see fit, then run amuck without any consideration of the results of their actions. To be honest, I'm not sure I want to conduct a long debate on the relative benefits and dangers of legalizing marijuana and other controlled substances. I think the "Apparatchik position" on this issue is that it is hypocritical and unworkable for the state to prohibit the consumption of some substances with psychoactive and/or narcotic properties, while protecting and even subsidizing others of similar or even more debilitating effects. The entire cycle of escalating violence around "drugs" grows out of their illegal status, not from any innate degradation of human behavior associated with drug use. But the industrial complex around the enforcement of

draconian drug laws is at least as profitable as any legal regulation of those drugs might be, and it contributes to government's image as a benevolent protector to keep throwing degenerate pot-heads in jail.

I would think that the primary difference which lower American speed limits have on "raging" drivers is simply to give them more reaction time in the face of a sudden change in traffic, which may have the collateral effect of reducing the amount of stress which the same event would cause at higher speed. But I'm sure someone out there that can quote a study which proves I'm wrong.

Now, a quick note from the man himself, TOMMY FERGUSON (16 Ava Drive, Belfast BT7 3DW Northern Ireland) who has taken a brief break from wading through acres of fanzine to set a few things straight:]

"Just a quick note-type thing in response to APAK #39 which I received today and thoroughly enjoyed. First off, my commiserations on your recent hospital visit, this from someone who is still recuperating (12 days and counting) after an operation on my nose. It isn't all pleasant and I hope everything goes well for you.

"Right, the reason I'm writing so quickly is in response to Simon Ounsley's letter which you printed. This is going to seem very petty but it is important. The fans running the fan programme at Intersection do not include a Northern Irish fan (me . . .) as I resigned from the position at the start of the year.

"Now before you go running off this had absolutely nothing to do with the con as I will be engaged in academic research in Dublin during the week of the con. I still would love to be involved in the fan programme - I had originally been scheduled for running the afternoon stream - but unfortunately studies and timing have conspired to force my hand. If you could possibly mention this in passing?

"Also Glasgow is not far from Belfast, I won't be about for the Worldcon week, but will be available for the week before or after if you, or anyone you could personally recommend, are interested in visiting our Emerald Isle I have a new home and crash space. The offer is there.

"I also have the Walt Willis fanzine collection stored in my house which, along with my own collection, is up to 4,000 zines.

"There are no '/'s or '-'s but plenty of interesting stuff nonetheless. At the moment I'm making arrangements to have it catalogued and will then be in a position to loan and/or photocopy material for those interested. I can be contacted at the above address for more info."

[APH: I'm very impressed here by the notation that you will "arrange to have it catalogued." Having done this for a few friend's collections, I know that this is quite an undertaking, and if the person doing the work is given anything approaching appropriate compensation, hardly cheap. I am somehow reminded of the fact that Bergeron had a secretary to type all those pages and pages of stencils for Warhoon 28

I think you can rest assured that whatever happens in regard to the "afternoon" track of fan programming this weekend, no one will seek to attribute it to you. Having been the author of a fan program stream that became a hopeless shambles, I am happy to say that most people regarded it in the same category as an earthquake or hurricane, a natural disaster beyond human control.

Now, KATE SCHAFER (4012 Interlake Avenue North , Seattle, WA 98103, e-mail at kate@scn.org) writes:

"The account of your recent indisposition would get my vote for inclusion in a Fanthology '95, should such an item

write your letters in the sand for the day I take your hand in the land that our grandchildren knew

ever exist. It was one of the liveliest bits of writing about an injury I've read. I have noticed that writing about injuries, especially grave ones, tends to be more lively than writing about, oh, scraping and painting the clapboard siding. Reminders of mortality sharpen the wit or make the writer maudlin, and you'll never be among the maudlin ones.

"And you follow this with the monster issue #40. As I read this looking for loc cues, I realize with a shock that it's your birthday even as I write. (Brief interlude: Kate calls Andy and sings 'Happy Birthday to You.')

"I cannot send you 5,000 copies of the lyrics of 'Will ye no come back again.' No doubt they will be available in Scotland at every pub and bookstore. The lyrics sheet on Jean Redpath's "Lady Nairne" goes like this:

Bonnie Charlie's now awa'
Safely owre the friendly main
Mony a heart will break in twa
Should he ne'er come back again
Will ye no come back again?
Will ye no come back again?
Better lo'ed ye canna be
Will ye no come back again?

Ye trusted in your Hieland men
They trusted you, dear Charile
They kent you hiding in the glen
Your cleadin was but barely

English bribes were a' in vain
An e'en tho' puirer we may be
Siller canna buy the heart
That beats aye for thine and thee

We watched thee in the gloamin' hour
We watched thee in the mornin' grey
Tho' thirty thousand pounds they'd gi'e
Oh there was nane that wad betray

Sweet the laverock's note and lon
Lilting wildly up the glen
But aye to me he sings ae sang
Will ye no come back again?

When I was a right-wing lunatic in college, I learned a version of this song which had only the first and last verses in common with the version Redpath sings. The other verses (you don't really want to know all this, do you?) went:

Mony a gallant chieftain fought
Mony a gallant soldier fell
Death itself were dearly bought
All for Scotland's king and law

Mony a traitor 'mang the isles
Broke the bond of nature's laws
Mony a traitor wi' his wiles
Sought to wear his life awa'

Whene'er I hear the blackbird sing
Unto the evening sinkin' doon
Or merles that makes the woods to ring
To me they hae nae other soond

"Lady Nairne may well have written all these verses, and many more besides, or they may have accreted to the song as the years went by. It should be easy to find out, but I haven't.

"Just because you're receiving this loc via e-mail is no excuse not to edit it severely. I am spare in writing fiction, but tend toward prolixity in letters.

"Have a wonderful time in England and Scotland (and Wales, Cornwall, the Isle of Man, or any other portion of the British Isles and other related geographical entities you might happen to visit).

[APH: Well, thank you Kate, I certainly plan to try! Readers may wonder what prompted all this interest in the foregoing. It all started with a D. West cartoon in the most recent issue of Ian Sorensen's Bob, which suggested it as the theme song for Intersection. I think this is actually a pretty fine idea, since it can be interpreted in several ways. And in the event that some percentage of fandom is actually drunk enough to sing it to the committee during the closing ceremonies, I thought it might be nice if some sub-segment of them actually had a lyric sheet to hand. Which is why I did not follow Kate's exhortation to cut her letter; who knows how many verses we may be called upon to sing before they set the attack dogs on us.

✕ ✕ ✕

Alas, given that there has hardly been time for anyone to read APAK #40, let alone comment on it, this is where the mail ends this time.

I wish I had some sort of snapshot of Seacon to parallel my memories of Conspiracy, but unfortunately, I wasn't there. The summer of 1979 was my first out of high school, and full of adventures, but a trip back to Brighton wasn't among them. I say "a trip back," because I was actually in the vicinity during the summer of 1978 - just a few days more than exactly one year before the convention.

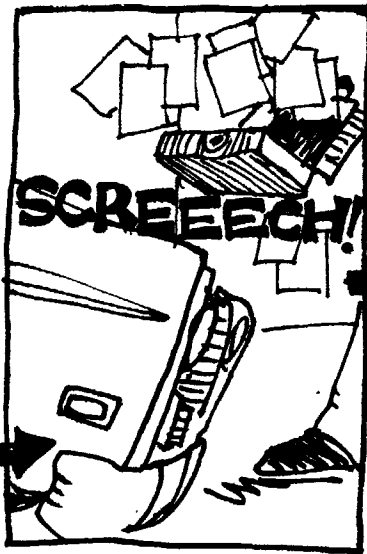
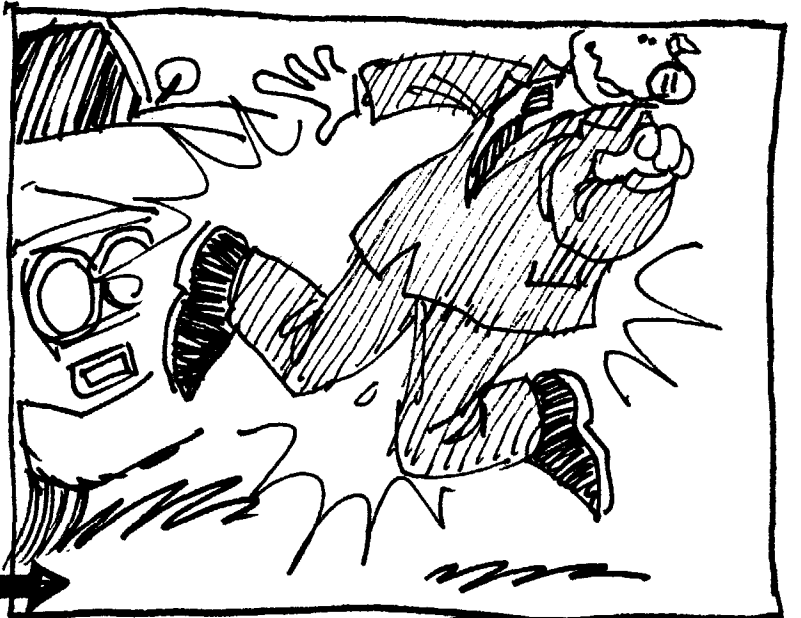
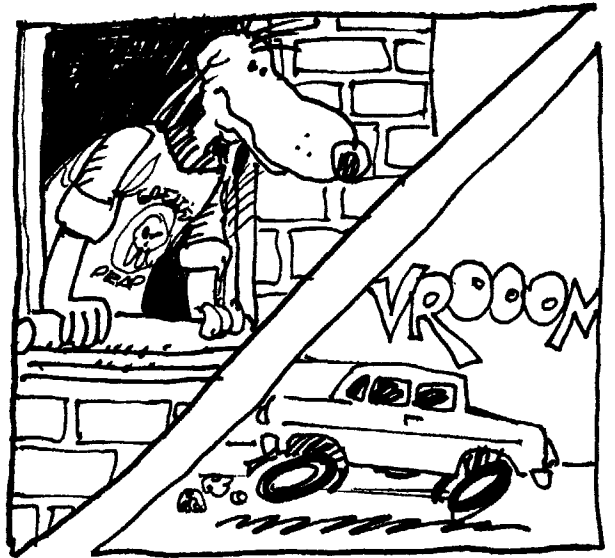
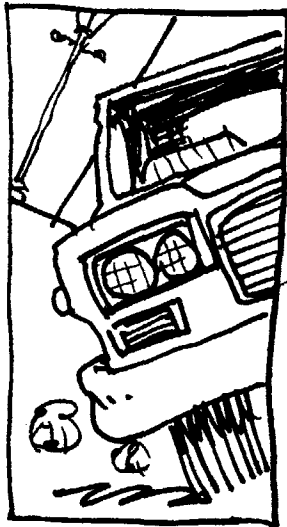
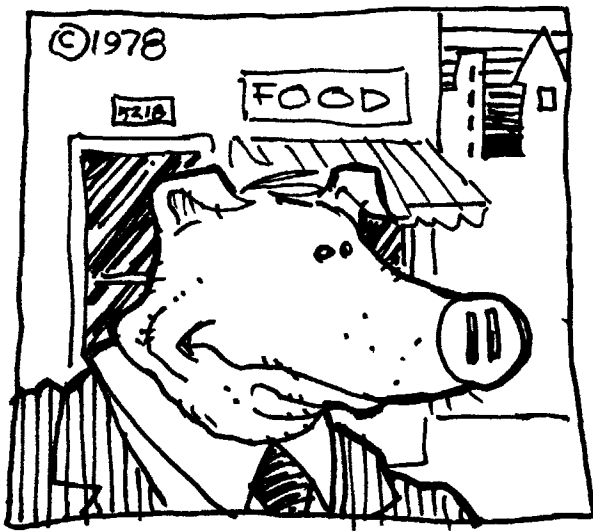
I could have used a nice, brawling Worldcon at the time. My family's trip around Britain was highly educational, and caught my imagination on many occasions, but was also shot through with long boring hours, wishing there was someone to talk to who had something approaching the same interests I had. Fandom had made contact with me by then, and I had certainly read my first fanzine, but the idea that there was a vibrant, vital fandom in Britain, about to host the Worldcon, was beyond my ken.

I'd have a certain sense of loss about this, and many other fannish events that I wasn't around for, if it weren't for the work of fan writers and artists who have left a record -- a highly subjective one, but a record nonetheless -- of fannish events for more than fifty years. Without their work, our understanding of fandom would be limited to oral history - a dicey proposition in the days of 5,000+ person Worldcons.

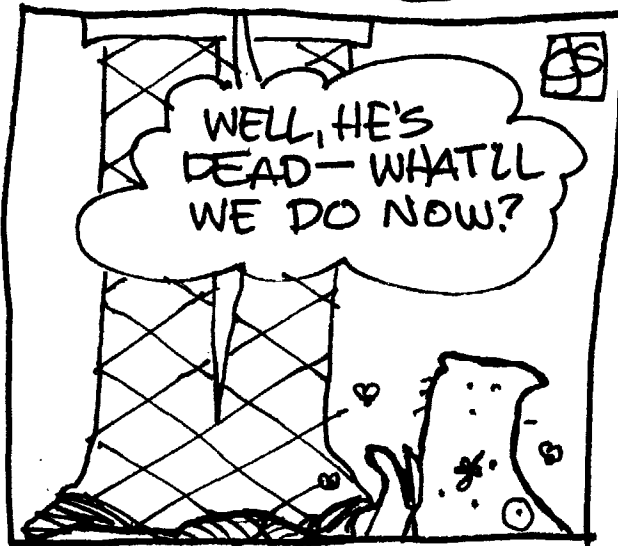
Maybe that's why fanzine fans have always dominated the TAFF race so thoroughly through the history of the fund. Fanzine fans have a natural advantage when it comes to trying to find the points of commonality between fandoms separated by an ocean and a common language, because we have historically had the best chance of knowing the characters in the local stories, the local customs, what to say and sometimes even what not to say.

And while we may not have a good record of publishing trip reports in the past decade, how many hundreds of fan articles and stories have TAFF delegates found their way into? I know I've written about a few

So, in case you don't know him, the next page is intended to introduce my friend and this year's TAFF delegate, Dan Steffan. The art dates from around the time I was in Brighton for the first time. You'll have to ask him what he was doing at the time



BREAKING OF BONIES



FANZINE COUNTDOWN, August 10th to 18th

#1) Wild Heirs #8, edited by the Chicago Science Fiction League, and available for the usual at 330 S. Decatur, Suite 152, Las Vegas, NV 89107: I don't know if anyone has been paying attention to this, but the Vegas people have begun bringing out an issue of *Wild Heirs* about as often as *Apparatchik* appears. A new envelope with two or more fanzines from Las Vegas plops into the mailbox every month now, leaving me scratching my head and looking over my shoulder, muttering "Who are those guys?" And as much I try to dismiss a given issue as going through the motions, chock full of boilerplate or breathless con reports, I have to admit that each issue has something really good in it too. For every throw-away piece, such as rich brown's delight at solving incompatibility problems between two word processors (whoopee) there is an unexpected gem, like Tom Springer's account of how his life intertwined fannishly with Tupperware. Or Marcy Waldie's lovely, unaffected, teenage memoir "A rite of passage." It's great seeing all these different personalities and styles emerging from the swirling Vegas mob. I just wish I could get it together and send a LoC before another issue comes out . . .

#2) Attitude #5, edited by Michael Abbott, John Dallman and Pam Wells, available for the usual (trades to all three) at 102 William Smith Close, Cambridge CB1 3QF U.K.: I actually got this over three weeks ago, but somehow slipped it into the wrong pile of fanzines and neglected to place it in the countdown. Now they'll all be thinking I intentionally ignored them for some reason . . . This is a big, juicy well-marbled fanzine, but not the unremittingly serious tome that some reviewers think it is. Ann Green's fanzine reviews are nice and crisp, Colin Greenland's discussion of outlining is clever and fun to read, and John Dallman's meditations on cricket were written so well that people who don't like sport will probably still find it entertaining. And here's a very rare and special commodity, an article from Mae Strelkov, the biggest-name-fan in Jujuy, Argentina. The rest of the material is fine as well, although at 27 pages, the lettercol might go on a diet. And what is it in fandom, that absolutely everyone seems to be leading off with an editorial on what e-mail means to them? I guess a lot of people have gone on-line in the past few months.

#3) Thyme #104, edited by Alan Stewart, available for the usual, or \$12.00 Australian for a 6-issue subscription, from P.O. Box 222, World Trade Centre, Melbourne, Victoria 3005, Australia: I think this may be the finest club-zine being published anywhere in the world; it's just that the editor and sundry contributors see that club as being the whole of Australian fandom. Thyme speaks to the lizard-level of my brain that still enjoys sercon fanzines and news about fandom and new books and bad TV shows and weird stfnal phenomena from Japan and all that great stuff, only it lacks the usual ineluctable grottness which characterizes such zines, it's all light and airy and clever, and I think Ian Gunn's

cartoons are getting better all the time. Heartily recommended, not least for its frequent appearance.

#4) Heirlooms, (aka Wild Heirs #8.5), edited by Those People, and available for the usual at 330 S. Decatur, Suite 152, Las Vegas, NV 89107: One thing you can say about Las Vegas Fandom; enough is never enough. Not content to publish a large, frequent genzine with a hefty lettercol and 23 editorials in every issue, they also offer Heirlooms, a supplement full of reprinted material of fannish import. Superb material by Robert Lichtman, F.T. Laney, Bob Shaw and Walt Willis make this a fine offering, especially for people struggling to understand some of the fannish legends regularly bandied about in other Vegas publications. Look, don't ask me to explain these people, they mystify me too.

#5) The Galacto-Celtic Newsflash #12, edited by Franz H. Miklis, available for the usual from A-5151 Nussdorf 64 Austria - Europe: This is purportedly the spring volume, but the publishing process is drawn out for some of us. While this is no great triumph in fanzine design and execution, Franz has an unflinchingly positive attitude toward things, and features writers and reviews unlikely to be found in many other fanzines that are sent to the English-speaking world. It feels like talking about classic pulp sf in a room full of Deadheads.

#6) Opuntia #24.1, edited by Dale Speirs, available from the usual at P.O. Box 6830, Calgary, Alberta, Canada T2P 2E7: I just have to make a little more room to praise this latest issue of Dale's ever-frequent fanzine with the succulent name. This issue is full of fanzine reviews, letters, an overview of the latest Canadian separatist novel and a look at a new biography of one of my very favorite North American revolutionaries, Louis Riel, and even more. He crams a lot into a small package; trading with Dale is a sure way to make yourself feel profligate and wasteful in your publishing habits!

ALSO RECEIVED: *De Profundis* #280, Tim Merrigan for the LASFS. Thanks as ever for sending something to review.

APPARATCHIK is the Unseen Girl of fandom, never on stage for the actual gig, but always there in the form of a new cassette whenever the need arises. It's still available for the usual, or you can get APPARATCHIK for \$3.00 for a three month supply, or a year's worth for \$12.00 or a life-time subscription for \$19.73, or in exchange for a copy of that rare Bulldaggers/Wall of Voodoo hypnodisc-patterned bootleg. If you live in The United Kingdom, ask Martin Tudor how much you should pay, according to complicated and experimental schedules which we have only just finished working through. The beer with the world's first great taste of fish. Lifetime subscribers include Tom Becker, Judy Bemis, Richard Brandt, Scott Custis, Don Fitch, Lucy Huntzinger, Robert Lichtman, Michelle Lyons, Luke McGuff, Janice Murray, Tony Parker, Greg Pickersgill, Barnaby Rapoport, Alan Rosenthal, Anita Rowland, Karen Schaffer, Leslie Smith, Geri Sullivan, Steve Swartz, Michael Waite, Art Widner and one anonymous donor. I love the smell of your brain. It's so spiky!

The Triumphal Hour of the Muncie Mutant (A dispatch from a fandom in process)

Four days of heat and \$3.65 lemonades . . . The smell of Starbuck . . . my initial recee . . . Rob Hansen, first fan . . . waiting for TAFF-Boy . . . L'eminence grise . . . Peter Roberts, man from an iceberg . . . What is HE doing here? . . . Mohan Tandoori a go go . . . I don't think I would know him if he bit me . . . the hell of the tiny balls . . . what is this two strikes and you're out stuff? . . . Martin Smith, softball player . . . the scene recedes into the distance like an oil painting carried away on the back of a sullen art student . . . can we have your autograph? . . . write their names in the book of ghod works . . . I'm still dying here, okay?

First of all, this has been the hottest summer in Britain since the year 1600. As we banked abruptly over the English countryside on our final approach to Heathrow on Friday morning, the terrain below looked as golden and sere as Marin County in July. And Britain is so seldom this hot for any sustained period that there is virtually no air-conditioning in the whole country, except for very modern buildings of which we have found very few. Precursor began with a series of punishing sprints up the stairs to Kings X station, breaking out of the freeze-dried coma which the 9-hour flight had induced in Carrie and myself. As we entered the main terminal, Carrie noted that a train was leaving on the farthest track in the station in 8 minutes, so we continued the mad dash, purchasing a one-way ticket to Stevenage and sweating into our seats for the whole trip. And while a dizzying array of interactions followed, some of them undertaken at much cooler temperatures, I never really stopped sweating for the rest of the

weekend. And I am in fact sweating now. Thank ghu for these pint glasses of lemonade with a few fading ice cubes, at £1.90 (about \$3.00) per throw

We got to the hotel after a brisk march from the station in a state of sodden collapse and repaired directly to our room. While it too was stiflingly hot, it did have cold water available, and while I was standing in the tub, luke-warm spray drizzling over my body, I looked out the bathroom window and could see white-clad cricketers playing on a suspiciously green-looking pitch, and knew at last that I was in England. Then while trying to find some clean clothes among all the fanzines in my bag, I noticed the powerful odour of some coffee from Starbuck's, a chain of roasters based in Seattle, and felt like I had a little bastion of the U.S. right there in those beans.

The first fan of the weekend was Rob Hansen. We came out of the elevator and there he was, shaking hands and welcoming us to wonderful Stevenage. Nothing was happening, but we were welcome to help it happen. By the time we walked into the 1st. floor lobby, a group had gathered that never broke up; we just sat down in a circle and started talking, and the bar orders came right to us where we had been transfixed.

Much of those first few hours felt like we were waiting for the entry of Taff-boy, the slimmed down and newly-tattooed Dan Steffan, accompanied by his charming, courageous and blue-haired wife Lynn. I think most of us at Precursor felt that the convention actually began when the two of them

arrived, fresh from a visit with Greg Pickersgill, at home in Haverford West. When they arrived, sidebars were scheduled, proper rounds of beers were bought, tales of recent adventure told ("Rob, I found out from Greg what your middle name is . . . time and again he invoked the name of 'Rob-Fucking-Hansen'"), and the convention was clearly happening.

Ted and Lynda White showed up. He has a short summer haircut, and an even slimmer silhouette, gone to drinking diet Pepsi in the face of diabetes. But he seemed strong as he shook my hand, and the tremor I felt from him at Corflu was gone. It was as if he had simply gotten on top of the disease as well as everything else happening in his life. Throughout the weekend, he was often there with the perfect historical aside, the slyest retort, the most eloquent opinion. His fan-game is still top hole.

Most every American of any duration in fandom was amazed to see Peter Roberts, one-time editor of CHECKPOINT and EGG, in attendance at Precursor. He had not been seen by many since his TAFF trip in . . . 1979? 77? Someone will enlighten me. Anyway, he had been a very busy ad-man for many years, and finally decided to chuck it all and go into mycological toxicology, which leaves him more time to do fanac, as well as jetting around Europe to track down mysterious mushrooms. He had some of the happy bewilderment of the classic fan-frozen-in-an-iceberg, but generally seemed to be very interested in getting caught up and starting to publish again. keep watching the skies! Address to follow next issue.

And yet, even in this small a fan group, there were some people around whom

you looked at and simply asked, "What is HE doing here?"

We ate awfully well. The full English breakfast was complimentary, and I enjoyed the unfamiliar pleasures of fried bread and English sausages. I did decide to forgo the black pudding. In the evening, we tended toward tandoori; the first two nights, we ate the Mohan Tandoori Palace, and enjoyed the meal immensely, although it was annoying to have to listen to the same Boyz II Men tape over and over again. But the butter chicken was to die for (and you might, if you ate it all), and I loved the brusque tomato insolence of their Rogan Joush. I wish we had eaten there a third night; instead we had Chinese, and suffered bad tummies. Stay away from Chinese food all over the British Isles, is my advice.

There was no program on FRIDAY, but we had some fun on Saturday afternoon. A few Classics of fan writing were read to start things off, then we had a bar break, then a weird trivia game, and then a panel based on attendees questions moderated by Joseph Nicholas (!). I'm proud to say my team in the trivia game, the Muncie Mutants, were triumphant over the Cosmic Circle by a very narrow margin. I think we got most of our points for making smart remarks. Some of the game involved identifying British fans whom I wouldn't recognize if they bit me, from photos taken no less than 15 years ago. The charades section was fun, although Patrick Nielsen-Hayden was slow to start with his clues since he didn't know the game. I was quite proud that we managed to get "Why I want to fuck Ronald Reagan."

The rest of Saturday was spent in conversation and the convention pool

competition. I tried playing once, but the table was so small and warped that I found it impossible to shoot accurately, and dubbed it "The hell of the tiny balls."

Now we move to the issue of Martin Smith. By Sunday morning, he was in a fine state. He had much to do with the organization (or lack thereof) of the convention, and had been deeply obsessed with the various inadequacies of the bar throughout the weekend. He had turned up suffering from a virus, and had cancelled his Saturday evening chat show program because his voice was going. Now it was Sunday morning and time for the softball game, and his last chance to do something great to make someone notice him for something other than Rob Hansen's scurrilous stories about him. I met him with my three gloves and a reasonably round ball in the lobby around 11, and said "I'm amazed anyone showed up at all."

The game was played with some amount of grace, if little skill, and at least no one got hurt, save for Jim Young's skinned knee. We played by American Softball Association rules, as best as I could remember them, and the umpire, the ubiquitous Taff-boy, called the balls and strikes as if we could actually play the game. Some players - especially the oft-frustrated Mr. Young - disliked striking out on two pitches, but it helped speed up the game and got us off the field without tearing any cartilage.

Amazingly enough, my team came roaring back from a five-run deficit in the top of the seventh inning, and took a 9 to 7 lead going into the final frame. The final run was scored on a hard line drive by Martin Smith, who drove the ball past left-fielder Rob Hansen and

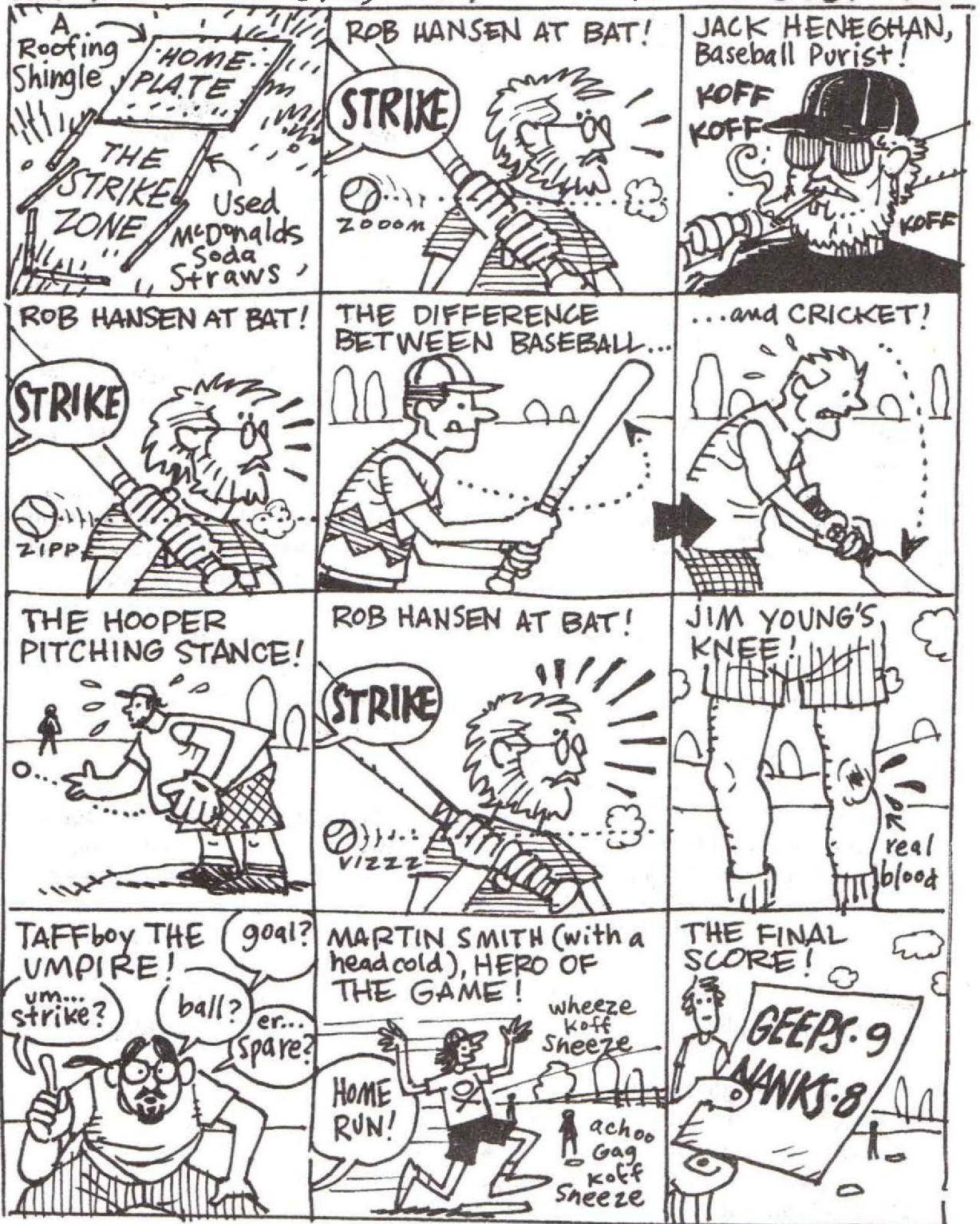
managed to come all the way around to score. He was almost drowning in his own phlegm by the time he came home, but he kept on and let out a joyous yell as he crossed the plate. Then died. We held on to win 9 to 8, and Mr. Rob Hansen struck out to end the game, on a pitch which I threw two feet over his head. Martin will never have such a day again, and would do well to top himself off now.

After that, the air went out of the weekend like a slowly leaking balloon, and the convention receded into the distance like a painting carried on the back of a sullen art student. People said their goodbyes and some promised to meet again in Glasgow. a few days later. Jack Heneghan is a hero of the Revolution for helping ferry luggage down to London for us. And we went out for that chinese meal with Tom Whitmore and the TAFF team-up. On the way back, some kids who had watched the game and heard me exclaim that it was my first victory in seven years of fannish softball, came by us on their bikes and asked if they could have our autographs. "Look!", they cried, "The Americans! The Americans!"

Thanks honest and true to John and Eve Harvey, Rob Hansen and especially young, phlegm-caked, French-looking Martin Smith, who endured all with good humor and braved genuine lung-rot to help make Precursor work. Buy him a drink now. And while you're up, mine's a lager and lime . . .

THE BOYZ OF STEVENAGE...

drawn in route to Glasgow by *LAM* 'TAFFBOY' STEFFAN



... two strikes & you're out!