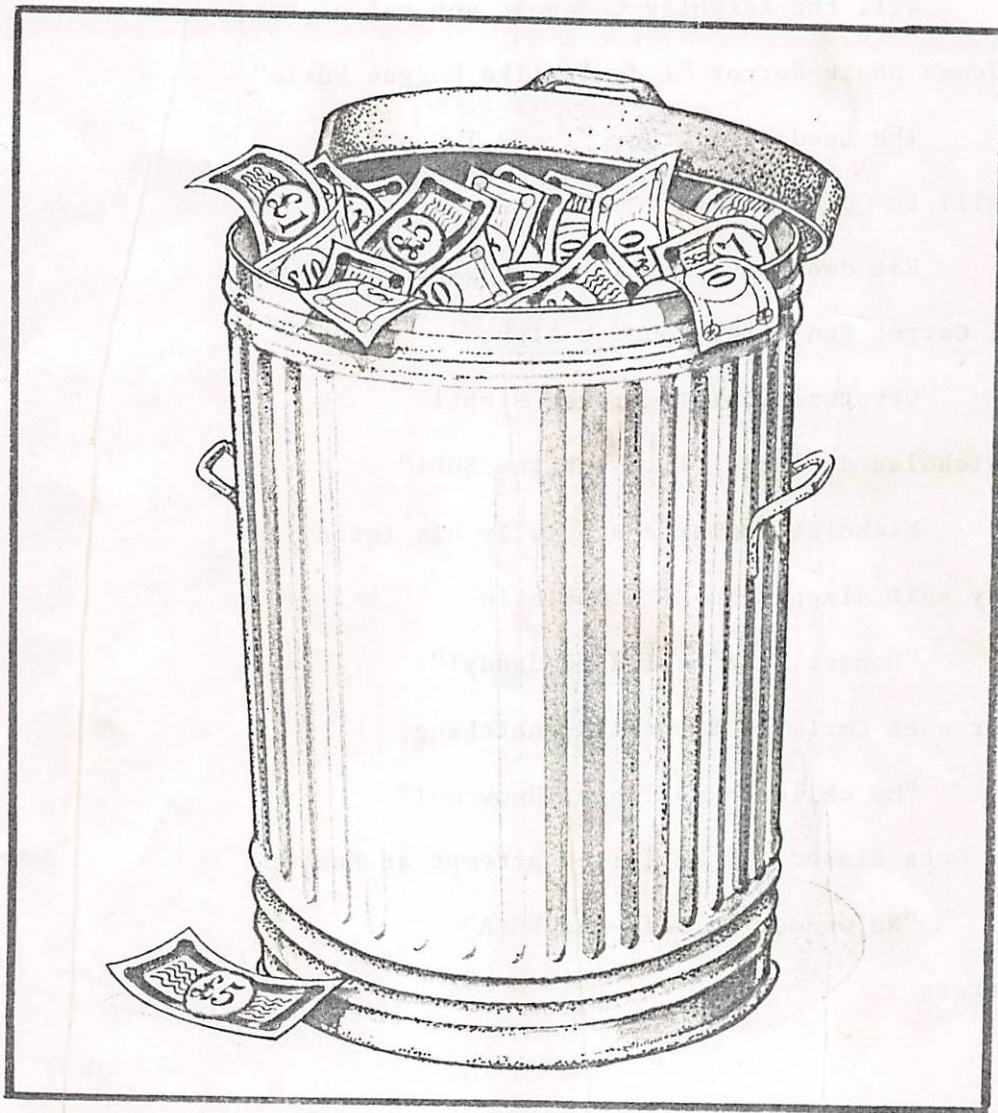


GROSS Encounters

13



FREE!
“Dustbin Of Cash!”

*SEE PAGE 2 FOR FULL DETAILS OF THIS NEVER TO BE REPEATED OFFER!!!

C O N T E N T S

G R O S S E N C O U N T E R S 1 3 - C O N S P I R A C Y I S S U E

"...it might be unlucky for you, but it certainly ain't for me"

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This issue has been brought to you by:

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***CLOSING DATE FOR "DUSTBIN OF CASH -

December 31st 1979

n

This is GROSS ENCOUNTERS 13 from: ALAN DOREY, 7 Conway Close, Houghton Regis, DUNSTABLE, Beds, LU5 5SB. Dated: August 24th, 1987. This is a special "Back to the Grind" issue, marking the return to GE after three years of non-production. Forget about the one-off bits of Vector, Matrix and assorted Frank's material - this is where it's really at, and I'm glad to be back in harness. Promises about future production are made, spleens are vent, blood is spilled and numerous fans get slagged off, ridiculed and fanzines torn to shreds. And that's only in the contents listings. Life ain't gonna be the same again. Get Gross Encounters 13 - in good Remainder Shops all over the UK now.

RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL FANZINE EDITOR

Okay, so I've been toying with the idea of producing this issue almost as long as Harlan Ellison has been talking about publishing "Last Dangerous Visions". Frequently I've gathered with fans, consumed alcohol and become fired with born-again enthusiasms - only to awaken in the morning wondering whether it was all a dream. Reality intrudes, and the ideals of the night before drift away on the tides of apathy. I'd even typed up a large number of pages on stencil on at least two occasions, only to have my mind waylaid and hi-jacked by some other idiot thing. The pages languished in the garage, slowly rotting and being returned to nature. Yes, there were excuses - but even a further addition to the family and two house moves in the last twelve months shouldn't really have stopped me in my grand mission.

Every now and then, a new urge would grab me - a fresh desire to put pen to paper and create the Ultimate Fanzine. If those enthusiasms could be bottled and gradually built up, then perhaps one day, the lid would be twisted off and the essence of enthusiasm would leap at my typewriter keyboard. So let's get some energies moving here, let's get some creative therapy moving - Let's Create.

In many ways, you've got Graham James and Greg Pickersgill to blame for this issue, two names which eight or nine years ago would not have appeared in the same sentence for fear that they'd come to blows. Prior to Conception earlier this year, Graham was trying to put together a convention fanzine to reflect the out-pourings of the fifty years of British conventions that Conception was celebrating. Naturally enough, I dug out my File copies of the Dorey Opus to see if there was anything there that I considered stood the test of time. So amazed and enamoured was I with some of my earliest writings that I thought, Bloody Hell, this was good, this is fun to read, this is saying something - and I haven't been achieving stuff like this in too long a time. I photo-copied extracts and whizzed them off to the James Commune in Leeds, ever hopeful that some part of my Genius would appear. Subsequently, after Conception, I paid a social call on the Pickersgill's and inevitably, we got to talking about why there weren't any good fanzines anymore. Alcoholic enthusiasms grew and we off on an idealistic odyssey - only this time, something stuck in my mind, something that Graham's anthology and my re-appraising of past glories took hold of, shaped and moulded and willed to exist.

This fanzine is it.

Conspiracy is incidental to my current creative energies, but let's be honest, there's nothing quite like a deadline to really make you perform. Anyhow, there's no excuses now, so armed with a beer and a pack of stencils, here we go, here we go, here we go, here we go, here we go.....

WHY I WRITE

It would be simple to make a case for Writing As Communication. But, in all honesty, I don't believe that the desire to communicate is why I often write. Occasionally it's a kind of therapy, a mad rush to commit to paper some injustice, or some stream-of-consciousness linguistic gymnastics, all designed to defuse a mood or sour temper. That writing very rarely emerges into daylight. Often, it is half-formed, a curious splurge of bits of words and sentences scribbled down with a fine-tip pentel. It may be on a virgin sheet of paper, or more likely, one I've already written notes on, and as such, usually heads straight for the old circular file at the close of day.

This therapeutic writing takes several forms. At work, I'm frequently rung up by Insurance brokers, trained professionals, men who are impartial, women who want to make it in business (and clearly would but for the restrictive way their career progressions are blocked by the older men) and those who have developed an incredibly deep knowledge of some narrowly-defined subject. These people only come though to me if they've got a problem, or a complaint or wish to announce their acute indignation about the way they've been treated by a member of my staff. Invariably, I'm on the spot, must defuse the situation, calm the caller down, find out their real grievance and then promise action. I need a way of steadying my increasing intolerance and impatience. When things become particularly delicate, I stand up and walk around the office, phone in one hand, receiver in the other. Thinking on your feet does work, but even then you're just circumnavigating the crux of the matter, you're not sufficiently attuned to what's going on, and this is where writing comes in, this writing as therapy. My inner mind drifts off into realms of fantasy and I doodle notes and half-formed sketches. When the call is over, I shade bits of the sketches in, sometimes full-blocked black, other times with a fine cross-hatching. The words I incorporate into sentences - sometimes encircling key-words so that hours later, the reason for writing those particular combination of letters is still apparent.

Diary-writing can often be lumped in as a similar reason for writing. I've always avoided diaries; I've never mastered the technique of being consistent and doing a bit each day - much more my line is trying to be clever and storing the information up for a weekend, only to discover that I've forgotten half what I should have said and wildly embellished the rest. My last diary was abandoned two weeks into 1972, distant memories of double-chemistry first thing on a Monday morning being banished to a fading page in a Letts pocket diary. I do often wonder what it would have been like to go through a decade of diaries and edit them down to a distillation of my life to date. Perhaps in a way, my fanzines serve as a substitute, only one shared with a larger audience.

If I don't always write to communicate, but do write to ease my mind, why else?

An important reason is to pour back energies into creating something new. By this I mean that I read volumes of books, magazines and newspapers and become at one influenced and incensed by what I see. Some writing is a reaction to what I read, whilst other writing is spur, a sharp jab at the flank of my brain to push me into producing something new and different from what I've read. I enjoy reading clever, witty, punchy items - so why the hell shouldn't I grab the opportunity when my mind is active and thoughts are flowing by churning out that energy, that desire, into writing of my own? Sometimes this is personal writing, on occasions it turns into an APA item, but more often than not, it becomes a piece for GROSS ENCOUNTERS - and when that's the case, then it crosses the barrier and starts becoming communication. You may see more of my communicative writing, but you sure as hell don't see all my output. Not yet, anyhow.

IT DON'T MEAN A THING IF IT AIN'T
GOT THAT SWING

"In which our hero starts writing a Beccon Report for John Harvey, and changes his mind half-way through. Boring Beccon doesn't need a Conrep, but it does need an idea why it was so dismal."

There's a truism that surfaces at parties from time to time, namely that "It don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing". Looking at Beccon, the 1987 British Easter SF Convention held in Birmingham, a little revision is called for - "It don't mean a fart if it ain't got no heart", and boy, this place had less heart than an organ swap donor.

Beccon was one of those conventions doomed to dullness from the start. In selecting their site at the National Exhibition Centre, the committee committed a fatal error - contrary to popular belief and the expectations of the typical Hotel Bars Manager, fans take unkindly to being cooped up in a hotel for the whole beanfeast. Every now and again they like to strike out into the Big City Lights, staggering crazily through one-way streets and pedestrian precincts, all in one eager, ambitious attempt to find the Ultimate Curry House. Not for them the aimless amble from bar to bog and back again; they want the challenge, the sense of adventure and unfettered freedom - they want the opportunity to fart in peace without noxious smells lingering in Hotel corridors. The NEC scuppered all those lofty ideals.

The NEC Metropole is some seven miles from the nearest pit of Midlands Civilisation (exciting Solihull) and unless a fan fancies a particularly long and heroic walk, that is it - trapped on site like a latterday Butlitz. No camp diversions here though, merely increasingly deranged members of the Beccon committee rushing around trying to look busy. It was all so unimaginative - a machine built for multitudes, an organism only alive when hordes of people are milling around glittering exhibitions. Come this way during the annual Motor Show and see Tony Berry clones fawning over the last Ford Capri, ejaculating over E-types and shitting bricks over Porsches (until the Rover Group buy up the bricks, put windows in them and call them Metros, that is). But turn up when the vast complex of Hangars and man-made arenas is empty, and the NEC becomes soulless. Nothing more than a huge, vacant mass of jumbled architecture and pylons and car-parks - a void, a deadzone with just a few Brummie fans masquerading as animated corpses, dropping bits Thriller-like over the concrete and tarmac paths.

It's almost like a trip from beyond the grave. The wind whistles through the site, adding to the emptiness and abandonment, and the hotel? Wasted in such circumstances. The committee had acted without due consideration; they simply followed the failed 1985 Contravention Bid at the same site and assumed the use of the Hotel without properly checking the facts. It may have seemed a good idea at the time, but then so thought Cecil Parkinson, and look what happened to him. (After all, his name is an anagram for Ars Lickin' Ponce).

Looked at in the cold light of day (rather than the heat and immediacy of a convention) that decision to use the Metropole is at best perverse. A committee whether they like it or not, whether they work by hard graft or intuition, have a duty to do the best by its punters. Fundamental to the whole deal is getting the site right; I know from bitter experience how utterly tough it can be when the site doesn't work. You mustn't

compromise - either it works how you want it to or you abandon it. I know that in these days of Hotel scarcity that that's a kind of luxury, but once you start going for second best, then you've started the slide into mediocrity. Alarm bells should have rung at the NEC - a simple list of the relative merits and limitations would have shown this. Normally you would need to promote the merits and find practical solutions to the problems. Unfortunately there is no rational alternative to the limitation of a hotel site miles from anywhere. By choosing this site and its major deficiency, the good points (such as the Built-in cinema, free parking and ample function-room space) pale into insignificance. So desperate are they to make the deal work that the major disadvantage is accepted fait accompli - and fans faced with this awesome prospect then start to find fault with other areas in the convention which wouldn't normally come to prominence at all. This horrifying position - the desperate acceptance of a bad situation, is becoming rife, witness the ridiculous posturing and connivance to get you to vote for Jersey in 1989. More about this elsewhere!

Ultimately, I have this sneaking feeling that the right committee could have made Beccon work better than it did. Beccons in Basildon and Beccon The Eastercon have never inspired much confidence, although I concede that a small regional con has probably more chance of appealing to its limited audience. Individually, the committee are inoffensive souls, not always totally aware of things going on around them, but likeable nonetheless. But, then so are Tory/Labour/Alliance councillors in the privacy of their homes, but put them together and what have you got? A lack of drive, fire, enthusiasm, call it what you will - that innate sense of Getting Things Right - the willingness to genuinely overcome adversity and do well for us, rather than making do and mend. Instead of a good, solid well-planned and imaginative programme, we got nowt but dull and lacklustre fill-ins; old ideas rehashed with tired faces and limp panels. Items showing promise suffered because of the layout of the halls and allocation of programme items, and thus audiences were always going to be on the thin side. Were there really over 500 people at the con? It always seemed empty - even allowing for the Conspiracy Factor.

The mix on the programme was poorly balanced; the lack of real personalities didn't help, but that is a problem that can be resolved by judicious juggling of the material that you do have. For example - there seemed to be nothing but quizzes - loads of the buggers. There's nothing wrong in a quiz; rivalry, competition, audience participation, spectacle and so on, but why so many? Surely it cannot have been to fill in, the resort of commercial afternoon TV? Surely it cannot have been designed to show off the intellectual arrogance of the committee, a thought that cynics such as I might alledge. No, all they did was to reiterate the committee's lack of charisma, their lack of projection and understanding about what a programme is, how it is structured and what an audience deserves. I'm not suggesting that they should pander to the common tastes of an audience - but they could at least have provided more, rather than burning five-pound notes during a curtailed firwork display. A certain panache, a certain style - even a certain cheek - are all necessary to make the whole enterprise work.

Let's look at the Fan Room as a prime example of the difficulties that Beccon got itself into. It might have seemed a simply wonderful idea after a crate of bubbly in the local Wine Bar to ask Arthur Cruttenden to do it, but honestly, what credentials does he have these days? A man out of time, a man out of touch with the pulse of fandom - how can he grapple with the witless decision to locate the Fan Room precisely where it was? What bright spark chose a room which was nothing more than a through-room between the Reception area and the Bar? What does this mean for the Fan Programme if there is a constant stream of aimless fans wandering back and forth without realising that, yes, this is the fan room! Let's be calm,

let's be cool, let's be reflective. Even IF in that huge hotel the committee felt that there was no other logical site, why the hell was a through room persisted with - why could not the entrance to the bars be permanently screened off (as it was on rare occasions half-way through items when Arthur's brain cranked into gear) - there was, after all, a perfectly sensible alternative route to the bar.

Okay, forget the Fan Room site, let's be charitable. Perhaps Arthur had little choice but to put up with his given location. But, where were all the Posters and side-displays? Where were all the fanzines and photograph, the warmth and welcome so vital in such an arena? Well, silly me - of course I forgot - it's our fault for not putting them together!

Oh yes, and where was the music?

And the Programme? Well - it did exist after a fashion. But pity the poor panellists and chairman, all of them doomed to perform like soap-box pundits in Hyde Park where the passing multitudes can take it or leave it. And there he is, dear old Arthur getting yet another star signature on his T-Shirt whilst Peter Nicholls tries to interview Fan Guest of Honour Chris Atkinson. He did seem to be talking to Chris about what they had for dinner the other night, but it was done with all the subtlety of a wallaby doing a mating dance. Different? Yes, with dribbles of people wandering through. Interesting? Very debatable. Lost? Damn fucking right.

So what else can we say about Beccon?

No disco.

Generally unhelpful Hotel Staff.

Okay creche.

Little sustained me during my days in the NEC.

There was a perverse interest in the two bidding sessions - one because I was fronting a bid, and by being brutally honest contributed to our failure, and the other because I wanted to see just how far the Horrible Jersey deal would go. On both counts I was displeased, but let things wash over me. It all just seemed par for the course.

Beccon was a convention that shouldn't have happened; I wouldn't have missed it since I try not to pre-judge such events, but having been there I could well have changed my mind. It's a great pity since the individuals concerned intended no malice, and worked over-time to try and put things right, but always on the basis of crawling forward one yard and sliding back two.

What lessons have been learnt? Few I suspect, since these days conventions seem to be run by people for the sake of running conventions, rather than by a group of fans who want to put something back into fandom. This is all the more apparent when you look at the folk involved with Beccon, Jersey and so on - the same names. You can't teach an old dog new tricks and thus it seems we must persist for two years at least with these ideals. Liverpool in 1988 may work; new fans, keen, eager, but advised by some Beccon/Jersey people. Jersey we shall come to later.

And where are we now, facing the prospect of Conspiracy? If Seaccon '79 was anything to go by, this will simply serve as a might catalyst that could split fandom apart like never before.

Now, that would be interesting!

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B L O O D O N T H E
R O O F T O P S
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***** Following the Hungerford Shooting, Chris Priest is interviewed by the Observer concerning a letter he'd written to Slimy Toad Alan Giles at W.H.Smug & Sons. CP had expressed his concern at the number of magazines about guns and survival being stocked by his local branch in Marlborough, just a few miles from Hungerford. He described them as "pornographic in the purest sense". Giles denied this, inciting Chris to contact Smug's Chairman Hornby (with wind-up key sticking out from his back) promised a review, but said that they'd been criticised for their censorship in the past. I bet that'll go down well with the New Worlds crew and really make Mike Moorcock's day.

***** Following various reports in Private Eye concerning Barry Bayley's unfortunate mishaps with 'publisher' Alison & Busby, a collection is being arranged for him at Conspiracy to make good the several thousand pounds that he claims they still owe him for books published but not paid for. Wise move, since our Barry's a good little writer. But, I reckon Chris Atkinson must have been trying to give her contribution a little early at this year's Eastercon. Bayley, in the belief that since he hasn't got a lot of growth to stunt, he might as well drink as much booze as possible, seemed to permanently wander round the bar in a state of alcoholic euphoria; Atkinson, no doubt wishing to uphold the honour of being EGoH without portfolio (in this case, estranged husband Malcolm Edwards), also drank copious quantities of booze and chased him round the bar for much of the time. Perhaps she likes his books too.

***** What's D.West upto in Keighley these days now that his legacy has come through? Having bought himself a house and some new clothes, he seems to be keeping a low profile. On the rare occasions he drifts over to Leeds for the West Riding, he always makes sure that he gets the last train home with the Ashworths. Why? At one time both Ann Pringle and Mike Dickinson fought for the right to put him up overnight. Even Graham James cannot persuade the former Bingley Master to stay awhile. Is it age that's sapping his stamina, or something else?

***** John Brunner didn't have a letter in the Radio Times last week.

***** Greg Pickersgill to retire? It seems unlikely, but with House Prices in the South-East threatening to make home-owners mega-capitalists, it looks like a move back to rural Wales is on the cards, releasing substantial equity from the South Ealing abode and thus permitting him to have the luxury of not having to work again. Maybe he could sell-up to D.West.

***** Mike Ashley talks sense! Giving former bitter and twisted youth Ashley a lift home from a Leeds party, he actually apologises for swearing in front of my kids. This won't do you know. Next we'll have Joseph Nicholas writing the answers for Katie Boyle's Problem Page in the TV Times.

- ***** Following the move from the One Tun to the Wellington near Waterloo earlier this year, all sorts of former London fans have crawled out of the wood-work. Ian "Iron Mule" Maule turned up, apparently unharmed by his now voracious dabbling in war-gaming. Britain's second richest fan Kevin Smith also showed up, having forsaken the cushy north for the cut and thrust of the south again. Neither seem to have changed.
- ***** Graham James forsakes Reggae Music. Current fave rave? Country & Western - although, admittedly of the Dwight Yoakam variety.
- ***** Conspiracy Bar hours curtailed - yes it's true. A change of Top Man at the Licensing Magistrates in Brighton has seen a severe restriction on extended bar licenses. No premises, apparently will be permitted to extend their hours beyond 1 am. Quite apart from the obvious chaos and embarrassment this will create for Conspiracy, it's something that needs to be borne in mind by all future convention committees.
- ***** Pity poor Mike Dickinson. Not only does he have to contend with Musical Halls at Brighton, but also he has to suffer the ignomy of Lincoln City dropping out of the football league last season. Now playing in the Alliance, they even lost their opening game of the current campaign 4-2 against Barnet who finished second last season. My money's on Lincoln to get back though.
- ***** Bob Shaw's still off the beer. Having decided some while ago that it wasn't doing his girth any good (his circumference grew dramatically in Australia last year), he's been very noble and only been drinking neat scotch. Whilst we all understand his reasons for this, you must understand the great human sacrifice that he is enduring in only being able to imbibe best Glelivet instead of Greenall Whitley Best Bitter (If there issuch an animal).
- ***** Bernie Peek leaves Watford as soon as I arrive to work there. He moves to Leeds where I have told him that the Leeds Mafia meet every Friday in the West Riding. The Leeds Mafia move to the Metropole Hotel. I am assured that there is no connection between these incidents.
- ***** Novacon 17 has adopted the novel idea of recruiting session chairman to assist them in running their programme this year. One presumes that their new strategy will at least make the programme run on time and help the Novacon committee to spend more time in the bar thus generating profits for the Angus.
- ***** Here they are, my top tips to head the Chunder Stakes at Brighton:
- | | |
|-----|---|
| 2-1 | Dave Cockfield |
| 3-1 | D. West |
| 6-1 | Greg Pickersgill (Who performed a version of Purple Rain with a bottle of Cherry Brandy many years before Prince) |
| 9-1 | Me (Although not by design). |
- ***** Will your name appear here in the next issue? Just be careful what you do down at Conspiracy!

BACK AND FORTH

((Look, I know I haven't done an issue in ages, but I felt the need to at least publish some comments from your letters to GE 12. Much water has flowed under the bridge since then, but some of the discussion is still valid. A substantial part of the issue was taken up by my "Inside" view of the problems we had as a committee running Seacon '84, also in Brighton. This generated much response and it's interesting to contrast the comments below with my thoughts on the downfall of Becon. The lead item I must admit I hesitated to use, but although Terry Carr died earlier this year, this was the last correspondence I had from him and I believe it's got some useful things to say;))

Terry Carr, Oakland, California, USA

If Seacon was as ballsed up as you say, then no doubt others than I are glad you've gotten back to producing fanzines. But in that connection, naturally the piece that interested me the most was "Seacon - The Naked Truth". I've been telling people recently that I wished more con committee members would tell us (ie; those of us who are too careful ever to get stuck on a con committee) the sorts of problems that come up behind the scenes at those cons we attend and enjoy, and your piece does that very well. Sounds like the sort of stuff that keeps me too sensible to join consoms. At least you apparently didn't have the problems a recent committee over here when three males and a female were discovered engaged in sexual activity on a stairwell; hotel security sent them away, but they returned to the stairs a bit later to continue and were discovered again. The committee heard of this only the day after the convention, and there was not only cursing of the participants, whoever they'd been, but much wonder about why they were trying repeatedly to consummate such a foursome on the stairs. Maybe fans are kinky, because that couldn't have been comfortable.

((Actually, the post-mortem approach to conventions by committee folk does seem to be in vogue at the moment. Rochelle tells me that Caroline Mullan was at it in the latest issue of The Womens' Periodical. It does serve a useful purpose provided not everybody does it and you have just a succession of not very clever pieces about nothing in particular. I much prefer it to the time-wasting and futile "Business Meetings" that cons insist on having these days. That and the witless Eastercon Charter irritate me no end!))

Mike Glicksohn, Toronto, Canada

To some extent your comments about the convention and the problems you encountered over the lengthy time you were working on it came at just the right moment for me. There's been a movement of late to draft a bid for a Toronto worldcon in the near future and the movement has also tried to convince me to be in charge of the thing. They seem to feel that a Toronto bid chaired by Mike Glicksohn would have a good chance of winning a worldcon. I tend to agree with them. (Mostly because I know how popular Toronto is with Americans but I don't admit to that too often.) And I have to admit that the idea is quite tempting, especially with the rumoured megabucks profits LACON is supposed to have made. Thankfully, though, your fanzine arrived to remind me of the reasons why I've done my best to avoid getting involved with major conventions since being on the worldcon committee for 1973. You've restored my sanity and probably saved

me from years of hard work (not to mention enough money to pay off the mortgage and buy a few other buildings besides, but so it goes) and I thank you for that. I shall stick to attending cons and having a great time rather than trying to run them and missing all the fun.

Increasingly I see the spectre of professional convention committees looming on the horizon and I don't think we can avoid going that route for too much longer. And with the sort of money involved that LACON suggests is going to become the norm, perhaps we shouldn't even try to preserve the quaint but out-dated concept of major national and world conventions being run as labours of love by fans trying to return to fandom some of the good times they've enjoyed in the past.

((You see, Gross Encounters can be a public service))

Harry Bell, 9 Lincoln Street, Gateshead, Tyne & Wear, NE8 4EE

Sorry that you should have had to put up with being involved with the Seacon disaster and then miss the Mexicon, which by all accounts has been one of the best cons in the last ten years (I'm reluctant to say so myself, but I'm certainly proud to be able to say I organised Tynecon '74 and Tynecon II)

I can well understand why you feel the way you do about the need to keep getting involved with con organisation. Having avoided any such involvement in the last ten years (apart from Silicon, of course) until Tynecon II, I'm now going through that phase of saying "Never Again" while working on artwork and programme ideas for Mexicon II.

Your overview of Seacon was pretty fair, all things being considered, and I'm thankful my involvement with it was cut when it was. I still can't understand what happened to the Fan Room. We handed over a reasonable number of ideas, but none of them seemed to turn up at the con. Gannet-father Ian Williams was stunned when we told him which room the Fan Room had been shunted into after he'd been forced to resign. I always hated that room, but with a little hindsight and effort it might not have been all that bad. What we got, though, was a table with some Swedish fanzines on it, a map of Europe and some ads for the Sixth Starsky & Hutch Convention (Sixth?). Bloody Hell, as someone once said.

Christopher Priest, 74 High Street, Pewsey, Wilts.

By the way, the whole of this letter is non-quotable.

Atom, 17 Brockham House, Brockham Drive, LONDON, SW2 3RU

I think it's a law of nature that Cons and that type of thing will go wrong somewhere. The maxim that you can't please all of the people all of the time applies - and, if it can go wrong, it will. An acceptance of these facts in the main leads to a healthy eight hours sleep at nights. Of Course I'm sure that you realise this and what in fact you are getting at is that you and a number of other fans had spent a great deal of time energy and effort before the con, to see it all go up in smoke due to the lack of effort and thought by some others was not very pleasant.

And this puzzles me. If you did spend four years of preparation, how could so much time and effort fall down so quickly? It seems to me, from what you say that if the lack of organisation was the main fault at the con then whilst that person who was responsible for it at the time was at fault, then too the main organisers were at fault too for not seeing what

was happening early enough and putting a stop to it. Heck, I'm being wise after the event, aren't I? Sorry.

On a more uplifting note - whilst from your point of view Seacon might have been heartbreaking, a whole lot of people did enjoy it. Fans being what they are will tend to make the best of things.

((Hindsight is a wonderful thing. Hindsight with a 'd' is even better. Yes, accepted that folk probably enjoyed Seacon - it's just that the ambience wasn't there, the feeling of knowing you'd done a satisfactory job as I'd felt at my previous Eastercons. Still - that's enough of raking over old news - onto other matters:))

Michael Ashley, Somewhere in Bradford

Think you're right about the pointlessness of writing about music per se in fanzines. Writing about the surrounding circumstances is usually more fruitful, like Bryn Fortey's "I Got Stung" in STOP BREAKING DOWN or "Tinseltown Rebellion", one of Dave Bridges' contributions to Frank's APA.

I don't think I've ever read a successful description of music as music. TAPPEN's "desert island discs" pieces were terrible (if anything I was put off the various records). Greg Pickersgill ebed a reasonable attempt (in SBD 5) at describing records he liked by saying: "Reading the above I'm struck by my inability to convey much about these records, especially when read from the viewpoint of someone not into the music."

It's that last point that's crucial. Appreciation of music is almost wholly subjective. That peculiar effect when you hand yourself over to a piece of music cannot be communicated in words to a non-believer. That's why Greg's comment in the first issue of TAPPEN ("I like all music as long as it's good") is essentially meaningless. "Good" music only holds for one person. It has nothing to do with technical virtuosity (God knows how many times this has been proved - in my lifetime the Sex Pistols more or less ended the argument as far as I'm concerned, though it will doubtless have to be proved again in a few years time), nothing to do with social relevance, indeed nothing to do with the relevance (I have albums where all the words are incomprehensible and frankly it doesn't matter at all). What I'm trying to say is that the basis of my enjoyment of music is not rational. Things like logic, humanity, Art, Culture (all the lit crit crowd) cease to apply. It goes in my ears, reaches my body and my brain is left justifying it all afterwards. (The problem here is that morality also ceases to apply. I can say that such-and-such a record is ethically dubious but this is only after the fact: I'm a liar if I say I wasn't turned on at the time.)

((Oddly enough, this is one of the first times I've typed up a fanzine and not been listening to juke-box hits from down the ages. You probably can't tell the difference anyway. It's all G. James' fault. He has yet to send me that Michelle Shocked tape.))

I ALSO HEARD FROM THE FOLLOWING KIND SOULS:

Paul Vincent, Darroll Pardoe, Bernard Earp, Bob Day, Martyn Taylor, Eunice Pearson, Arnold Akien, Dave Rowley, Steve Green, Joy Hibbert, Andy Sawyer, Dave Wood (Thanks for the Cricket stuff!), Alyson Abramowitz, Jeff Suter, Bob Shaw and Walt Willis "Personally I feel England will never beat the West Indies until they recall Hobbs and Sutcliffe"; SEND YOUR 10Cs to: ALAN DOREY, 7 Conway Close, Houghton Regis, DUNSTABLE, Beds, LU5 5SB. Next issue in time for Novacon. Honest.

DOREY'S ON THE ROAD AGAIN

"In which our hero reflects on his travels round the country over the past two years and wonders where it will all end."

One of the half-excuses that I've used for my non-production of fanzines over the last two years is that we've moved house twice. This in itself is perhaps no Big feat - after all, in my single days, I once moved house four times in one year. But then, it was merely a question of packing clothes, books and drink (together with records and stereo) and cadging the use of somebody's car for the day. Logistically, it was a simple exercise and actually quite fun.

Today, however, as I head towards capitalism and middleclassness, it all seems so much more of a task. Houseownership tends to change your way of living. Having a family radically changes the way you live. Put the two together and it's dynamite. We bought our first house in 1982 in Manchester and almost immediately became faced with the need to plan long term - like decorate to last, like to replace rotting window frames, like look after not one but two gardens, like get on with the neighbours always and like trying to forget that if you'd had more time, you might not have chosen that particular place.

We survived four years almost to the day at Manchester. Our move was by accident rather than design, although as it turned out, a rather nice accident. As some of you know, I work in the world of High Finance (Yes, I work on the first floor), specifically in Life Assurance as an Administration Manager. In 1986, I was working for an old-established life office, a successful one, not quite Liverpool standard, but certainly near the top of the Second Division and pushing for promotion. One Sunday, reading the financial pages of the Observer (as one does over breakfast before turning to the infinitely more interesting Sports Pages, also in the Business Section) I noticed a reference to a "Troubled Life Company". Great - one of our rivals no doubt going down the tubes! I read on and with a growing inward dread realised they were talking about my company. It looked serious. Bloody Hell. Bloody fucking Hell. The Board had certainly kept this one quiet. I dropped the paper and dashed to the phone in an effort to ring one of the other managers. He was as in the dark as I was, but we agreed to get in at 7.30 the next morning to plan our strategy and try and see if there was anything more to it.

The next day was the longest of my life. I didn't even consider that we might not have jobs by the end of the week, I simply tried to keep abreast of all the rumours which were spreading quicker than margarine from the fridge. I kept my staff as informed as I could, but without anything concrete to tell them, they not un-naturally worried. Our brokers kept leading us astray with manufactured scandal. We were merging with a bank. We were being taken over by a large Composite Insurer. We were going to continue. We were going to have to accept 50% redundancies. We were merging with one of our major competitors.

It was all so unreal, almost dreamlike, and if it hadn't been for my efforts in maintaining the moral of the branch, I guess I too would have contributed to the rumours.

The next day an announcement was made - we were indeed merging with one of our rivals; well that's what they told us. It was an "Operational Merger", which in effect meant "takeover". They could choose which branches they wanted to keep and which staff they would make job offers to.

Personally, I wasn't that bothered. I knew I was good at my job and I knew that if they couldn't offer me anything, then I could easily find a new position elsewhere, Manchester being quite a large Insurance Centre. There then followed a period of limbo which stretched out into nearly three weeks. Bits of information came through and we clutched onto them like a dog to a bone, gnawing at them and subjecting them to the most intense and searching scrutiny to see if there was something we'd missed. There never usually was. Business, not unreasonably, had dropped off to almost zero. Our brokers in the main were sympathetic to our plight, but in the main were only really interested in what was happening to the case s they'd placed with us. In the absence of job offers from the new company, I encouraged staff to go out and look for new positions and I'm pleased to say they all secured good jobs, many better than they'd had before; there's nothing like an enforced drama or crisis to remove any guilt feeling about looking for a change of company.

Rochelle took it well - she too knew that I wouldn't have problems; I guess maybe we really didn't want to consider the worst - which was redundancy, but on good terms, a not wholly unpleasing prospect. About four weeks after the balloon went up I was summoned to the new Head Office and told that they were opening a branch in Preston and would I like to go and set it up? I jumped at the chance. Not only did it mean that we could leave Manchester (the city was okay, but our house was getting a little cramped), but also that they would pay all our removal costs - and it gave me the chance of moving up a little, having been perhaps, getting into a rut prior to the merger. All in all, it worked out for me and we found a smart house with plenty of space just outside Preston and moved there in September 1986.

Setting up a new branch was tough. I didn't know any of the new company's admin procedures and computer systems, and what was worse, I had no staff yet. It was all a question of sinking or swimming; I took on two people quickly from the branch in Manchester (which by then had been closed down; the new company already had a large operation there and didn't need it duplicated) and we set to, trying to drum up business and look after the existing cases. Preston Branch covered one of the largest geographical regions in the country (excepting Scotland); we started just north of Manchester and Liverpool and went straight up the M6 to just over the Scottish border. There sure was a lot to do. To compound our problems, we were almost immediately hit with a two-week postal strike, so we weren't able to really make an impression in that first phase. But, this was doubly worse since jammed up in the GPO system was all the current files and cases transferred to us from the existing Manchester and Newcastle branches (from whom we'd nicked territory). When the strike finished, we were deluged with our backlog of mail, together with all these files and then realised that our friendly neighbourhood branches (knowing that we were opening) hadn't bothered dealing with much of the work for the two weeks or so prior to our opening. Three of us. None of us knowing the new procedures, suddenly stuck with something like five weeks of work that would normally take an experienced staff of eight to deal with.

But we coped; with overtime and Saturday working and borrowing folk from other locations. I recruited five more people and by Christmas, we were up to date and running smoothly. Now perhaps, I could rest for a while.

Barely had we got into February, 1987, however, than I was asked down to Head Office, ostensibly on a course. But when I got there, I was summoned to see the National Administration Manager. Bloody hell, what have I done wrong, was the natural reaction, guilty or not. "How have you been getting along?" he asked. "Do you feel able to get take on a bigger

branch?" He asked with that "I've arranged it all so don't fuck up and say bollocks!" look. Personally I was ready - in Manchester I'd run one of the largest branches and Preston was only half the size. I suspect that deep down, despite the need to have a quiet few months, I was really angling for this sort of thing all along. They offered me Watford, where the existing incumbent was approaching retirement and wanted to take it a little easier. I must have pondered for all of .000001 of a second before saying yes. Rochelle and I had long harboured a desire to return to the south, but in our own time. Here, again, I was being asked to go and they would pay for the move!

The only reservation was the cost of housing, but when you want something badly enough, you figure out a way of doing it. Ultimately, we settled on our current house in Dunstable, smaller and more costly than our Preston place, but already worth more now than I could possibly afford - and all that in four months.

We're reasonably settled now, - but certainly the major exercise of moving twice in the space of ten months is a mighty strain on your store of good cheer. As it turned out, our new place is better designed than Preston, so we don't really miss the additional space, and only being three years old means it ain't exactly going to fall down around our ears, and besides our ultimate move may still be to Head Office in Salisbury where housing is cheaper than here. We might be doing a Pickersgill yet.

Now's the time to announce our return and creep back into the social circle; Rochelle's already organised a Baby Sitting Circle with "The Lady Across The Street", so hopefully, we'll be able to get out and about. Hey, it's up to you people too - invite us to parties! We'll no doubt organise one here in the not too distant future, so watch out for that.

And as for moving? Well, I don't intend anything more for the rest of this year at least.

As a matter of interest (and for spacefilling) here's a list of the places I've lived in. Wonderful stuff, eh wot?

- 1) 20 Hermitage Woods Crescent, St. John's, WOKING, Surrey, GU21 1UE
- 2) 18 North Hill House, North Grange Mount, Headingley, LEEDS, LS6
- 3) 97B Hyde Park Road, Headingley, LEEDS, LS6
- 4) 21 The Village Street, Burley, LEEDS, LS4 2PR
- 5) 217 Hyde Park Road, Headingley, LEEDS, LS6
- 6) 286 Ballard's Lane, Finchley, LONDON, N12 0EP
- 7) 64 Hartford Avenue, Kenton, HARROW, Middx., HA3 8HY
- 8) 12 Fearnville Terrace, Oakwood, LEEDS, LS8 3DU
- 9) 22 Summerfield Drive, Middleton, MANCHESTER, M24 2WW
- 10) 16 Ambleside Close, Walton-Le-Dale, PRESTON, Lancs, PR4 5RS
- 11) 7 Conway Close, Houghton Regis, DUNSTABLE, Beds, LU5 5SE

See, it's not that many at all really. I'm sure there are fans out there in Readerland who've resided at a greater number of places; the only thing I would say is that this list is for my time in fandom only and thus only goes back to 1976. Prior to that, it's all shrouded in mystery.

*****COMING NEXT*****

F A N Z I N E R E V I E W S

THE MORTICIAN'S GALLERY



I have stated elsewhere in this issue that there don't seem to be any decent fanzines around these days.

Let me qualify that before I'm accused of sweeping generalisations.

There are just as many fanzines around as there have always been. Indeed, occasional issues are fun to read and sufficiently interesting so as to prod me into action with a LoC. But the problem is there is no real consistency, no real fanzine that is eagerly awaited and voraciously consumed immediately upon receipt.

Current fanzines tend to form a lumpen mass, without shape or form, almost as if there's no real direction and no real guiding light. The aims and ambitions of editors are not particularly clear; whilst the number of downright awful issues has probably decreased (or maybe I don't see them), the overall average quality has remained static.

Is this a crisis? Should we really concern ourselves with this apparent problem, or should we simply treat each fanzine as a separate entity and judge it solely on its own merits?

Personally, I have yet to be convinced that fanzines can be judged as individuals. They form part of the collective fannish entity, they are spawned by our communal interest and as such each fanzine has bearing on the Fan World at large. The influence and effect that a fanzine has, however, can be judged, and that is why I write fanzinereviews

The fanzines discussed in this column have all been produced since the turn of the year, and perhaps the lack of immediate quality is partly due the fact that large numbers of folk are involved with setting up Conspiracy and maybe haven't the time nor energy to devote to fanzine production. Equally, others have been diverted by APAs, regional cons and such like. All valid excuses for not producing, but how can this be reconciled against the fact that numbers of issues seem, if anything, to have increased?

What really brought home the lack of real quality was Graham James' Competition anthology, Embryonic Journey ("From Leeds to Leeds in 50 Years"). This contained a selection of writings, primarily, from the last ten years. Not that they were selected for their innate quality; they were selected to reflect the times in which they were written. Thus if any individual wishes to level the charge at me that I am simply reading the best 5% in isolation, and ignoring the dross that would normally have to be waded through, I don't think they can be entirely justified. I shall not dwell on the historical importance of many of the pieces in Embryonic Journey other than to say that in this anthology, James has avoided all the usual pitfalls and produced a genuinely interesting and informative social document, a volume of work that forms an immense part of what we all enjoy about fandom. A reprint has been organised for Conspiracy, so if you get the chance, do buy a copy and relive some of the more vital outpourings such as Harry Turner, Ted Tubb, ATOM, Bob Shaw, Walt Willis, Eric Bentcliffe, Jim Linwood, Malcolm Edwards, D. West, Greg Pickersgill, Me, John Collick, Kev Smith, Dave Langford, Chris Atkinson, Chris Evans, Jim Barker, Jimmy Robertson, Simon Ounsley, Rochelle Dorey and Abi Frost.

Simon Ounsley has always been a reliable fan commentator; in his early days, he did tend to hide his light under a bushel and it was only towards the end of the OCELOT production run that his real skills started coming through. Simon is a bit of a dark horse as far as fandom's concerned; at times he seems to lack the confidence to see something through, but more often than not, his writing is literate and concise and good to read. STILL LIFE 4 appeared at the very tail-end of 1986. The lead-in item is a wonderfully evocative 18 page mini-fanzine in its own right. Taking umbrage at a comment by Steve Higgins, Simon analyses why he writes like he does and brings in quotes from letters, snippets from other fanzines and then binds the entire thing together with a snappy, witty and cleverly thought-out commentary. He discusses the surrealism of some of his writings, and in doing so, adds to the body of work; the whole thing is broken up with D. West "Talking Head" cartoons and for me, this has been the most satisfying piece this year. In effect, it almost destroys my theory that there aren't any decent fanzines any more since I do like Ounsley's work and look forward to receiving them.

However, there should be more of them! This is an entirely selfish statement, of course, but there needs to be more continuity and feedback and influence. If STILL LIFE appeared more regularly, that could well be a guiding light for other fanzines, an object lesson in how it can be done. Whether Simon wishes to assume this mantle, or would wish to have it imposed upon him, I'm not certain. But from the fanzine point of view it can't be a wholly bad thing. Fanzines like this could easily provide the spark needed to lift average writers into the next division; people like Ron Gemmell for example.

Ron, better known in Warrington circles as Boiler-suit Man, started his fanzine career with Ron's Raygun. Quickly he discovered a fannish enthusiasm for such things, and having his new-found energies stoked up at fortnightly meetings, his thirst for knowledge of fandom knew no bounds. His early writings in RON'S RAYGUN and FRANK'S APA were often clumsy and uncertain, but he was learning his craft and gradually getting better. Ron will never be a major writer, but he does have a wealth of ideas and a "homely" way of transmitting them via his typewriter. His latest enterprise is EAT THAT DUCK, the first issue of which appeared in February. The bits that work best are those penned by himself where he un-self consciously talks about his life, his jobs and such like. Where it falls apart is his need to include contributions from other people; I feel that Ron is an ideal personalzine person; he has the right bearing and attitude and expression and, writing the whole thing himself will certainly hone his skills. EAT THAT DUCK is a neat production job, apart from the scrooge-like one staple in the top corner. I'm sure that Gemmell can capitalise on this sound start; he just needs the Good Examples to stimulate him.

Steve Hubbard is another editor who needs some decent stimulation, preferably with an electrode to the brain. FLOATIN' CHEESE also appeared in February (in time for Conception), but I'm not quite sure why. It's not that it's particularly bad, but any fanzine which writes favourably about Hawkwind does tend to put one off a little. The review of Fifteencon in Birmingham is of the "Then I had breakfast, then I farted then I bought a book" school fan-writing - almost a text-book example in fact. It's only really when he starts discussing how he got into fandom and how he came to produce his first fanzine, WET CHEESE, that you begin to see what he might be capable of with a little graft and inspiration. The rest can be completely ignored as it serves no useful purpose. Must try harder.

Some folk tend to be content with producing fanzines, rather than writing or editing them; their skills lay elsewhere - maybe in layout or design or in compilation. John Owen has persevered over many years now with CRYSTAL SHIP, a generally serious A5 litho fanzine, which whilst I admire his obvious production ability, has always left me a little cold. His new effort, TRIPTYCH, leaves me feeling like the Central Heating has just broken down. It's nice to look at; it has a noble aim - to introduce three writers/fans who "are in the (fannish) community but have no profile at all, who could not raise the money to get to a local convention, could not afford to produce a fanzine". Owen wishes to get these people involved and sees TRIPTYCH as his way. If I was being perfectly brutal about such things, if you cannot really get a fanzine published, or an article written, then your creative desire cannot be very strong. When I was a student with practically no money, I produced more fanzines, went to more cons and got more involved than I do now with a well-paid job, house, car and all the other trappings. I produced and persevered whatever the cost and felt the better for it; frequently it was a straight choice - do you put some money in the gas meter to keep the fire going, or do you use it to buy some more stencils to get the fanzine finished? I admire Owen's motives, but fanzines can still be produced very cheaply. This issue of GE, even allowing for the rip-off price I had to pay for paper, probably won't cost me much more than £20 for getting on for 200 copies. You don't always have to have the production standards of CRYSTAL SHIP.

Enough of such comments - I don't wish to get involved in an ideological debate right now; if I was out of work and somebody offered to print my work I'd jump at the chance. The true test of whether it works is in the content, and I'm afraid, none of TRIPTYCH did much for me. Too much of it was deadly earnest, serious in outlook and - let's be frank - dull. I have no objection to reading about a subject which doesn't interest me, but if it's soullessly presented, well I'd rather give it a miss. The moral position for this fanzine is right, but much of the content doesn't match that lofty ideal.

It became fashionable a year or two ago to produce a fanzine in a sort of collective, each member taking a turn in editing the current issue, chiefly on the basis that this provided added impetus to getting the thing out more regularly. Added to that, it gave each issue a slightly different bearing and potentially, could be a fascinating concept. Judith Hanna and Joseph Nicholas, together with Valma Brown and Leigh Edmonds came up with FUCK THE TORIES, a notion which many of us would probably go along with. Terry Hughes also weighs in as North American representative. Much of the content is interesting; I cannot abide Joseph's meanderings about politics and CND and so on, but, it is readable and he is committed. I prefer to read the newspapers and political magazines, but Joseph, intentionally or not, does inject a forced sense of humour from time to time which lightens the load. Judith has a more direct style to her writing; more economical and more effective. Her "Working Late" is good; colloquially written, almost as if she's talking into a cassette recorder on this particular journey. It's not a fanzine I await with too much anticipation, but I certainly enjoy reading it; I guess my sense of humour is slightly more warped, or sick depending upon your point of view.

LOGOS is Michael Abbott's first fanzine and looks like it. However, he has a certain enthusiastic approach, has coerced folk such as Paul Kincaid, Jimmy Robertson and Avedon Carol to write for him, so I'm sure that he'll develop his own niche in time. His own pieces are too picaresque for my taste and lie uneasily with the other contributions. He's analysed why he's doing it in the opening pages, but somehow this effort doesn't gel together. Maybe he should stick to one thing at a time - either a personalzine or a fully-fledged genzine. Jimmy Robertson

sums the situation up well in his item: "...when someone about to publish their first fanzine asks you to write for them what do you do? Here is someone who wishes to be 'of' something but who is really fairly ignorant of what it is they seek to be part of." If he persists with future issues he must give a lot of thought to what precisely he wants to do. At the moment, he obviously cannot decide - and that I put down to lack of experience.

TRAPDOOR 6 by Robert Lichtman is a fairly typical US fanzine, neither particularly bad nor stunningly good. There's a lengthy and sometimes lively letter column and passable articles by folk such as Greg Benford and Terry Carr, but, but...I couldn't really remember too much about it later. It's a competent job but needs more bite, more controversy, more debate, more LIFE! This isn't intended as a slagging-off; TRAPDOOR tries hard and there are many, many inferior fanzines around, I just feel that its potential is greater. It was fun to read, and on that level, it works. I want this fanzine to work, I want to be brilliant because it's definitely got the right feel about it. Maybe it could become a PULP, two issues of which I've got to hand. This is one of those Musical Editor Issues; all I want to know is, when the music stops, which one can't find the typewriter? PULP 4 was edited by Pam Wells whose writing has developed in leaps and bounds since her early, uncertain days with NUTZ.

Prime item in PULP 4 must have been Walt Willis's THE PRYING FAN, an interactive computer game that updates the style of the Enchanted Duplicator. This leads into Maureen Porter's fanzine reviews; too short! Articulate, analytical, researched, but I felt that there could have been more. I also got the feeling that she was restraining herself on occasion = still, essential reading. PULP 5 sees John Harvey trying his hand at reviews and what a difference; less introspective, less thoughtful, but certainly able to pass comment and make valid points along the way. John's problem is that he's too charitable (or maybe it's my problem that I'm not) and consequently, like Maureen, I'm not certain whether he's restraining himself or not. PULP has certainly the potential to haul itself up to the top of the table and become one of those fanzines to look out for. It has solid contributors, it has a track record, it appears frequently enough, it even has bloody deadlines which are adhered to. At the moment, it's too 'nice' - I can't really determine why I say this, but reflecting on fanzines I've enjoyed in the past, they do seem more concerned with what we're all doing, comment on fandom and conventions and generally add to the communal atmosphere in which we live, for better or worse. Pulp is there, knocking on the door, trying to be Great, but merely being good. If its frequency can be maintained, no doubt it'll be influential for a while - but where are the newer writers? Let's hope that Influence can be brought to bear; PULP has its part to play.

What we all need are some decent fanzines; what we're getting is Conspiracy. What will happen afterwards could go two ways - total and abject apathy, or born-again revivalism and production standards. I'll comment further in September.

EMBRYONIC JOURNEY, Ed. Graham James, 12 Fearnville Terrace, LEEDS, LS8 3DU
STILL LIFE 4, Simon Ounsley, 21 The Village Street, LEEDS, LS4 2PR
EAT THAT DUCK 1, Ron Gemmell, 79 Mansfield Close, Birchwood, WARRINGTON
FLOATIN' CHEESE, Steve Hubbard, 42 Langdale Road, Stourport, Worcs.
TRIPTYCH, Ed. John Owen, 4 Highfield Close, Newport Pagnell, Bucks.
FUCK THE TORIES 4, Judith Hanna/Joseph Nicolas (This issue), 22
Denbigh Street, Pimlico, LONDON, SW1V 2ER
LOGOS 1, Michael Abbott, "Linden", Alhampton, Shepton Mallet, Somerset.
TRAPDOOR, Robert Lichtman, PO Box 30, Glen Ellan CA 95442, USA
PULP 4/5, Vinc Clarke, 16 Wendover Way, Welling, Kent, DA16 2BN

END BIT

THINGS WE CAN DO WITHOUT - 1

You will all know by now that the 1989 Eastercon is going to be held in Jersey. You all voted for it at Birmingham, remember?

We also all know that Eastercons are not the cosy little affairs they used to be in the early 1970s.

We also know that there are fewer and fewer Hotels with whom we can do deals, either by our choice or theirs.

And, of course, we all know the efforts now involved in staging an Eastercon.

Take all these factors together and you can perhaps see why a certain group of fans took it upon themselves to choose Jersey as a potential site.

But, let us just look at what it's all going to mean:

FIRST, the Good Side:

Cheap Ale (No tax on booze)
Large Hotel
The potential for Good Weather.

NOW, the bad Side:

Expensive Rates
Two Day journey time for most fans
No real choice in mode of transport to get there - ferry or plane
No chance for people to team up and split costs of travelling
Unimaginative Committee
Splitting fandom into those Who Can Afford it and those Who Can't

The facts speak for themselves and I'm sure that anybody with the slightest scrap of a moral conscience will take the right decision and Not Go. This is a big step for some people, indeed, it is for me - I do my utmost to attend the Eastercons, whether I like the location or not. But once you start getting into therealms of off-shor cons, then there comes a time when action needs to be taken. A Mexicon is on the cards for May 1989 in Nottingham, so ther'll be at least a decent con to go to, and for those that really need to go to Jersey, at least it's not being pu on over the same weekend.

But this whole action begs a bigger question. Are Eastercons still necessary? After all, I've already outlined some of the problems now looming for concons - what alternatives are there?

Well - abandon Eastercons altogether. This probably won't gain acceptance, and let's face it, it is the one opportunity in the SF calendar when we do all get together. Perhaps the ideal way would be to accept that Eastercons are going to cost more - not in membership rates (which Graham James and I can demonstrate to you at any time are too

high already) but simply in the Hotel rates that you pay. In this way, maybe Hotels will start treating us with the respect accorded to their other major business customers. Maybe then we'll have more bargaining power and choice of site, rather than having to choose from a small market and taking everything that hotels choose to obstruct us with. Now, this may sound like a similar way out to the Jersey deal. It is, except for their one, major, fundamental flaw - getting there. If we use, say Harrogate, pay more for the Hotel, there'll always be those that can afford it. Then there'll be those who see it as a special occasion and make sure that they have the cash to pay for it. And for the rest, there's loads of cheaper accommodation nearby without the hassle of spending time and money to get there. We've seen it coming for years; we've talked about it, endlessly debated it and really, until now, not done anything about it. And now that something has happened, it is the worst possible solution.

Of course, Jersey would not normally have happened if it hadn't been without Two-year Bidding.

THINGS WE CAN DO WITHOUT - 2

Two-year bidding is worse than Jersey. The reasoning behind it is shaky; if we adopt the strategy for Eastercons outlined above, two-year bidding gets binned anyway. Two-year bidding was merely a ruse to put off the inevitable about Eastercons; we don't really need an extra year to make our plans - all it does is introduce even more uncertainty in an already volatile hotel market. Committees frequently operate under great strain as it is - why prolong it more than necessary? The architects of such bidding should know all about committee strains anyway!

Two Year Bidding strikes me as non-sensical and a hinderance; let's do away with it - let's all go to FOLLYCON in Liverpool next year and get rid of it. A bid needs to be presented at FOLLYCON for 1990 (and it will be so my spies tell me), and then we can forget about 1989 and return to proper, sensible one-year bidding in 1990. Makes sense doesn't it, go on, be honest, it does, doesn't it?

THINGS WE CAN DO WITHOUT - 3

The Eastercon Charter, a formularisation of the obvious for the witless. Come on - if we need such a written 'constitution', let's cut the crap about fans doing it for the love of fandom; let's do it professionally and get paid for it. Then we'll know where we are and who to blame when things go wrong. Perhaps we no longer deserve the right to trust groups and rely on the good-naturedness of fan groups?
