

Stop breaking  
down



Number 5

S T O P   B R E A K I N G   D O W N

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August 1977

edited and produced by

Greg Pickersgill

with

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

my struggle

by

Greg Pickersgill

STOP BREAKING DOWN BLUES

Sometimes I do not feel like smilin'. Like when something that should be a good time turns out bad. Like doing this. Despite a sort of vague niggling desire to pub the ish I've felt something significantly less than enthusiasm for the whole deal. Actually, sorting the material and typing the stencils wasn't too bad, but by the time I got round to the duplicating the whole thing seems to have more of the flavour of onerous chore than jolly good time had by all. What does this mean? Is this just the usual Pickersgill whinge about the difficulties of fanzine publishing or has it any more general relevance. Actually it does, as what I'm really wondering at right this moment is whether it is really true that the active life of a fan is but a mayfly thing, a limited number of years in which to streak like a meteor across the deep dark night of fandom. I mean, have I reached the end of the line, is it time to close my last file, sell the duplicator to some deaf dumb and blind paraplegic sucker, and stuff the typer in the attic to be brought out only on the rare occasions when I need to communicate with some far-flung phoneless friend. Perhaps indeed, and maybe not before time as certain feisty New Age fans would say as they eye me as a representative of the hated fannish establishment meant only to be reviled, revolted against, and finally toppled, trampled and forgotten.

Maybe this running-down feeling I'm experiencing has already happened to a few fairly famous individuals. Like Peter Roberts. Remember him? He won TAFF this year. Damn near didn't win it too, even with the fist of SBD backing his campaign. He'd been keeping such a low profile people'd forgotten who he was. We almost had to live with the unfortunate prospect of British fandom being represented abroad by Terry Jeeves; a fine man in his way but hardly representative of yer typical Britfan of today (and a darn good thing too, Mr Jeeves might say, but I'm sure he gets my meaning nevertheless). Anyway, this Roberts chap, he's been in it now for nigh on ten years, pubbed a few ishs, started a few little institutions (like CHECKPOINT, and Casually Indifferent Fandom) and generally turned out Solid. Must have a good rep. though, considering how little actual fanac he gets through; the man hasn't laid an EGG for eighteen months now, CP isn't the regular shot it once was supposed to be, and the CP Fan Poll, ostensibly an Easter event, edges annually further into the summer. All a bit of a bad scene. And the recent news that Mr Roberts was beginning to forsake the pleasant tundra of sci-fi fandom for the perverse activities of Dragons&Dungeons does not set the mind at rest. Still, one mustn't be cynical or suspicious. I'm sure Peter will actually write a TAFF report on his return from the US and not fade away having achieved the

ultimate fannish recognition. He'd better or I'll want my money back. Anyway, well done that man, even if you only made it by  $1\frac{1}{2}$  votes.

Alas. That sort of digression doesn't solve the inertia problem. I mean, what sort of things cause loss of interest in fandom?

Obviously some go because they find something better to do; gardening, fishing, managing punk-rock bands. Fair enough; despite one's hopes to the contrary not all human life is in fandom, at least not in the quantities to please all of the people all of the time. Another, probably large clump, go out chasing tail. Lured away by sex and satiation. Not that fucking alone is contra-fannish (other than in the loss of energy needed to crank the duplicator) but all this scuffling takes time and you lose track of the scene and if you don't know what's happenin', man.....And then of course once having had it they want More and like as not the Young Lady (doubtless of the sort that Ian Maule once said he only came for - whatever he meant by that..) isn't a fan, isn't fannishly inclined, thinks the whole thing is a crazy waste of time and money, and why doesn't he do something useful anyway. The catalog of useful things is diverse enough to boggle even the sf fan's calcified imagination. So, under pressure our boy puts aside what have been newly revealed to him as childish things (which they may well be but so wot eh?) and picks up bills in the morning instead of fanzines. (I should sneer; most of the fucking mail we get contains more numbers than words!).

A lot of people must quit out of sheer boredom; not especially to do anything else, but because there doesn't seem to be anything left within fandom to do. The same old ideas come round again after a while, different faces, same words, same expressions, same bullshit. Is the occasional gem worth hanging on for? Who knows. Leaving fandom ain't no awful thing in itself, of course, it only becomes irritating when those who leave seem to take it as their holy duty to heap scorn on fandom in any or all of its manifestations. They take peculiar pleasure in citing all sorts of reasons why fandom is to any intelligent and liberated mind (theirs, of course, being the one by which all others should be judged) narrow, confining, cretinous, and something that should be passed though as quickly as possible by any normal person. And turned back on only to be vilified. Well, I'm the first to admit that fandom is each and every of the accusations levelled against it, but it is obviously much more. There's no point enumerating the good things, they're likely different for each of us and you must know what I mean otherwise you wouldn't be reading this now. These superior arseholes (typified by Charles Platt and Graham Hall - Sixties fanbrats whose current contempt for fandom somehow fails to dissuade them from associating with it much more often than an impartial observer might think necessary) don't seem to comprehend that a fascination with fandom doesn't preclude knowledge or involvement with what they call the 'real' world. And anyway what's the point of involving yourself with everything as a matter of principle anyway; Christ, you're only alive once, you'd better enjoy yourself whilst you got the chance, so don't throw away TRUE RAT in favour of SOCIALIST WORKER just because some prick tells you fanzines are uncool.

That was another digression. Bridges got a lot to answer for. It all helps to show how people leave town on the fast train. Add to it simple failure. I'm quite sure people quit because their first

efforts aren't met with the rapture they think they deserve and they haven't got it in them to keep on pushing. And there's a bunch more who scrabble on for years and then drop out disappointed by others' failure to recognise their genius. This could add up to a good reason for going out and shooting down mad-dog fanzine reviewers on principle, but I'm sure all right thinking people realise that if you're hot you're hot, and if you're not, well, bye-fucking-bye.

There are a thousand reasons for leaving fandom, I've only mentioned a few of them. Others include personal problems like a bad scene with a friend or wife or something that end up meaning one or other has to go. And so on. As many reasons for leaving as there are fans, perhaps. Eh?

Me, I'm in it now because I've been in it for almost ten years. All my real friends (both of them) are fans, and I'm exceptionally lucky that my Best Woman (Simone, of course, cretins) is as involved as I am, and in fact was in the way of things bloody years before I was. And virtually all my acquaintances worth a damn are fans too. I enjoy good fannish writing. Conventions are things I go to in preference to having holidays. I like to keep in touch; cons are better if you pub your ish and know who the names are and they know you. My life is bound up in fandom. I like it. Right now fandom seems a bit stagnant. It'll pass. It always does. I'll finish this issue. I'll start work on the next.

++++++

#### THINK I'M GOING BACK

A while ago I did something which was pretty much as near to a holy pilgrimage as anything I've ever done. Simone and I just so happened to be rooting about in Tooting, which is a much better name than the rather dull and almost completely uninteresting area of London it is attached to deserves. It's part of the rough, grubby, nasty, and downright bloody miserable part of London South of the Thames. We'd gone there deliberately, working on the principle that such 'quaint' little backwaters often have whole rows of secondhand shops in which one might, one day, pick up for a purely nominal fee whole runs of WIERD TALES or SCIENCE FICTION MONTHLY, or complete mint sets of Lemon Pipers singles or Troggs albums. You know, typical collector's fantasy.

Anyway there we were, rooting, finding nothing but typical outer-suburban cheap and nasty remaindered-goods shops or places selling real junk not the classy esoteric rubbish we were after. Wandering down the road we found ourselves in a place called Colliers Wood, which isn't a wood at all, but a horrid windswept plain containing one of the most farflung Underground stations and a lot of nondescript light industrial sites. Anyway, something turned over in my mind at the sight of the Colliers Wood streetsign, so at my urging we plodded on through the light drizzle and driving wind, around corners and over long-abandoned canal bridges until magically, and for the nth time proving that I'm Right at least 75% of the time about 75% of things, Colliers Wood High Street transmuted before our very eyes into Merton High Street. And sure enough, right ahead, was number 19 Merton High Street, a name and number which could well raise memories in people who first got into buying lots

of sf in the middle sixties, particularly if I add that the whole address is actually 19 Abbey Parade, Merton High Street. Yeah, right, that Leroy Kettle over there; it is in fact the home of PLUS BOOKS mail order operation, the outfit you first discovered (along with L. Walton of Liverpool, and anyone who can tell me what happened to him will receive his just reward) when you searched frantically for sf pushers in the book and magazine section of the EXCHANGE & MART.

Well out in the rain whole waves of nostalgia swept over me. Apart from being a regular mail-order customer I had actually once visited the shop, a Big Deal as I'd lived 250 miles away at the time. I can hardly remember when; '69 perhaps, maybe '68 or before. But visit it I had done and with great profit too, coming away with two big boxes of stuff including whole years of Amazing and Fantastic and generally filling lotsa gaps in my collection. Spent about £15, which was a Lot in those days. I must have been quite young too, as I remember the bloke in the shop making some sarcastic remarks about how his mother wouldn't have allowed him to waste so much money on a load of trash. I remember making some feeble rationale at the time, and feeling obscurely guilty about the whole self-indulgent transaction.

Back in the running world the shop looked just the same; same flaking yellow paint, same rundown, desolate street, same gray sky lowering over the oddly small building (South London buildings are short, hardly ever over two stories), even the same crossing that I unthinkingly ran across joyfully bearing my scifi booty on that longago day. I was almost run down by a van driven by a young black guy, who pulled up so sharply he was almost hit by three cars himself. He wasn't happy about it.

So after dithering a bit we went in. Somehow incredibly it was just the same. Racks of romances, westerns, glamour mags (as they so quaintly label them), comics, and right ahead, just where it was before, the SCIENCE FICTION & FANTASY CORNER, labelled in letters just that big. Fantastic. I was amazed. Just like I'd never been away. There's a great feeling of permanence and stability comes over you at times like that, gives you the feeling that you actually know what is going on, and that everything will work out alright after all. Knockout. And stap me if it wasn't the same feller running the shop too; bit balder, his remaining hair a bit longer, a bit paunchier (I let comparisons with Roger Peyton, purveyor of Fantastick Literatchur to the Gentry cross my mind) but himself nevertheless. Even as I rooted through the racks my mind raced through possible scenarios; "Hi, I'm the kid who came in here years ago and spent a lot and you said..." or even a line I'd seriously considered on that longago day when I almost truly believed that anyone doing such a public work as selling sf would be only too pleased to meet his customers and bandy a little repartee and reminiscence with them: "Hello, I'm G.F. Pickersgill, of The Pines, Haylett Lane, Merlins Bridge, Haverfordwest, Pembs, and I send you orders every fortnight. Naieve and foolish okay, and I never tried it either time, but maybe as Simone said when I explained the thought to her (in a voice just loud enough for the Man to hear just in case he was listening and could be entranced by my memories too)(truly, I am starryeyed to the last) just about anyone would remember a name and address like that, even decades later.

However, he wasn't listening and didn't care even if he was, and

((Continued at the end of ALL RIGHT NOW - letter column.)))

W I S H Y O U W E R E H E R E

on the nod

with

D. WEST

The 28th Easter Science Fiction Convention took place at the De Vere Hotel, Coventry, over the weekend of the 8th - 11th April 1977. Gollancz's John Bush was Guest of Honour and other SF notables present were Brian Aldiss, John Brunner, Ken Bulmer, Harry Harrison, Robert Holdstock, Anne McCaffrey, Chris Priest, Bob Shaw, Andrew Stephenson, Ian Watson, Peter Weston and James White.

Those are the facts. The rest is lies, damned lies, and statistics of who fell over, passed out, made fools of themselves, scored scandalous sexual successes, hit people with large whips, or failed to hit less-loved acquaintances with beer glasses.

And so much for the only part of the first draft of this con report worth preserving - two paragraphs from about twelve closely-typed sides. Unfortunately, the whole thing was just another Bad Trip Report, a classic case of Charnock's Syndrome; fear and loathing, folly and paranoia. Same old Psycho Think-Piece. Took me ten pages of introspective self-analysis to even arrive at bloody Coventry. Two more pages were devoted to attempts to pull my nerve together: sitting in the station buffet for an hour or so drinking cans of McEwans and chewing on a British Rail egg sandwich. Come page twelve I'd made it to the De Vere, scuttled blindly through a lobby full of menacing hotel staff and total strangers and experienced a vast surge of relief when famous author Robert P. Holdstock lurched from a lift and greeted me with a leer. (Nothing personal, you understand. Famous author Holdstock greets everyone with a leer, his guiding principle in life being Walk Softly and Carry a Big Prick. And compared to the leer of such as Graham Charnock, Secret Master of the Art of suggesting a jaded familiarity with depravities the like of which you never knew existed, the concupiscence of Holdstock is almost innocent.)

Yeah, well. So much for the character stuff. But the sight of Holdstock looming and swaying above me did bring a certain degree of reassurance; there might, after all, be people at this convention whose presence would make me feel moderately cheerful.

"They're all in the bar, somewhere," said Holdstock vaguely, and hiccupped away, still leering in the slightly glazed fashion of a Greyfriars sixth-former fresh from his first encounter with PLAYBOY.

I went to the bar. You've got all the essential information now; the rest is probably a familiar enough story to anyone who has ever attended a convention. A week or so later Brian Parker telephoned and I was able to get some details on what it was I'd been doing that weekend.

Well, no. That's an exaggeration. Certain incidents did slip my mind till several days later, but mostly it was a case of losing track of the order in which events occurred. A con hotel is a closed world, a hermetic environment in which the time scale of an ordinary and ordered routine is overwhelmed by a chaotic cycle of drinking, eating, drinking, falling down, drinking, eating, drinking, and more falling down. The outside world ceases to have any real existence; it becomes a theory, a legend, a dim ancestral memory, something totally irrelevant to the practicalities of con-going existence. If there was a convention that lasted long enough you'd probably see the veneer of mundane life sloughing off completely: there'd be a return to Man's basic primeval pattern of hunting and foraging, nomadic wanderings from floor to floor, inter-tribal warring. J.G. Ballard's HIGH-RISE tells the story of what happened at a con in the fifties (the names have been changed to protect the guilty) and things haven't changed all that much. You can take it for granted that by the second day of any convention most of the attendees are at least part-way out of their skulls.

Some of them start like that. Even before I arrived I wasn't feeling too good. The reasons for that are somewhat complicated but not really important or interesting to anyone except myself. Originally, of course, I planned to go there and come away to write the definitive con report; something so brilliantly and ruthlessly comprehensive, so overwhelming in its portrayal of Total Experience, that ever afterwards all those who attempted to write con-reports would be stricken down by envy, admiration, and despair.

Well, you got to think big. But after a dozen sheets my brain started coming together again and I decided that maybe the World was not yet Ready for my masterpiece. Not yet ready to read all the way through it, certainly. Something along the lines of a few pages of the usual guff might do better.

It was Pickersgill who'd first put the idea into my head. He rang up and demanded a convention report in his usual gracious manner ("Howsabout a con report eh, you big cunt?") I refused. After some preliminary bickering we agreed to play dominoes for it; if he won I'd write the con report. If I won he'd pay me vast sums of money. I'd still write the con report, but I'd be able to give it to him with a pitying smile and listen to the grinding of his teeth. Editors are funny people.

What with this and that the idea dropped into the limbo of some-other-time-maybe-real-soon. This is wreckage. Being intended for SBD the title is lifted from the Pink Floyd album of the same name. It seemed a good idea at the time, though the significance (or relevance) may no longer be obvious. Perhaps I should have used something more explicit, like BRAIN DAMAGE. Bossman Brian Parker (yes Master no Master pull my string Master) has already provided the background material to explain that allusion to concussion acquired in the course of duty. His A BIT OF THE OTHER ONE breaks with normal Parker fanzine practice in being so well produced you can even make out what the words say. If not what they mean. Is 'abyssian' reproduction the sort of print job you get in Ethiopia? Still, it all enriches the language.

It was a funny con for me. Looked at objectively I should have enjoyed myself. Instead I kept stopping to ask myself why I wasn't enjoying myself. Months later I'm still pondering.



But why bother? Stick the stuff I've written into a box and save it for the day when - like Leroy Kettle - I grow old and mumbly enough to want to write memoirs containing the Truth, the Whole Truth, and a few lies to make it more entertaining. The Point Of It All can wait. Anecdotes are easier. A list of encounters and conversations - with the occasional Big Think for a touch of class - spreads the misery around instead of keeping it concentrated on myself. After all, in the classic phrase of Simone Walsh: people read con reports to see if their names have been dropped, and if so, in what.

Well, I did encounter David Wingrove, rising star of BSFA fandom. Wingrove in the flesh tends to confirm the impression given by his fanzine KIPPLE. A week or two before the con I'd sent him a LoC in which - amongst other remarks of a more or less derogatory nature - I sarcastically asked why the piece of fiction that had managed to drag in the names of Sartre, Wittgenstein and Nabokov in the first half-page hadn't gone on to mention Camus, Spengler, Marcuse and Kierkegaard.

"But I haven't actually read Camus, Spengler, etc etc " said Wingrove, apparently determined to show what a conscientious chap he was.

Feeling it would be uncouth to get nasty so early in our acquaintanceship I turned to Maxim Jakubowski and complimented him on his column. After all, in KIPPLE it looked good. Jakubowski, the very model of cosmopolitan suavity, received my halfhearted tribute with the modest ease of one who knows his own worth.

Somewhat later Wingrove was observed in the main bar, singing songs about Yellow Wimpeys (this is inexplicable and unlikely, but true) in the company of various acolytes of Bob (FOKT) Shaw. Rob Jackson looked on sourly. "These intellectuals always revert," he muttered.

Bob (FOKT) Shaw is not the same as Bob (Famous Author) Shaw. Bob (FOKT) Shaw is a cheerful looking extrovert who goes around doing such cheerfully extrovert things as cracking a large whip, telling jokes about Glasgow Pakistanis (apparently inherently funny), shouting "Get FOKT!" (also apparently inherently funny) and attempting to recruit the unwary for a proposed 1978 Scottish convention. FOKT stands for Friends of Kilgore Trout. What Kilgore Trout might think of his friends can only be surmised.

Various BSFA luminaries were encountered briefly. Somewhat surprisingly David V. Lewis turned out not to wear braces, a celluloid collar, a pinstripe suit and a watch and chain. Lewis is - or was - editor of the BSFA Yearbook. At his request I'd sent him an article on fanzines. "Never again," said Lewis, probably referring to the editorship rather than articles like mine. Publications overlord and production chief Chris Fowler was also reported to be less than enthusiastic about the whole deal. The BSFA Yearbook finally appeared at the end of June. So I'm told. I don't really think it's worth paying £4 to join the BSFA just so I can read my own work again. Besides, they may be planning to send me a copy for Christmas.

The ways in which fans in the flesh differ from the images they project on paper never cease to be a source of interest, even when you've met most of the little sods before. Who'd have thought - for instance - that medical genius Rob Jackson would have shown so much doubt and uncertainty when faced by a mere slime-mould from Altair-4? Yet in the

battle of wits that followed the encounter the slime-mould won all the way. And how can one reconcile the appearance of Paul Kincaid with the erudite letters he writes to MAYA? He should look like David Wingrove. Instead he looks like a slimline Howard Rosenblum. (Come to that, how can one be persuaded to believe that the editor of SONF could possibly look quite so supernaturally short on the sort of nerve fibre that operates a dinosaur's back end?) What is there to prepare one for the sight of Famous Author Chris Priest making play with a foot-long ebony cigarette holder? What about Chris Fowler and his imitation of a hobbit suffering from anorexia nervosa? Or Harry (words fail me) Harrison?

It seems like a reversal of natural order when you discover that David Bridges is really quite sensible and doesn't giggle all the time; that Greg Pickersgill doesn't go around snarling and tearing off arms and legs (not until nightfall anyway) and that Ian Williams is so big a passing dwarf would have to stretch to pat him on the head.

Only Leroy Kettle lives up to expectations: the whiskers quiver, the nose twitches, the beady eye glitters; a jerky scuttering to and fro and a constant squeaking of jests and quips inform you that here indeed is the veritable editor of TRUE RAT.

Then there are all those people who are glimpsed but never properly met, heard of but never seen. They told me Kieth Walker himself, founder of Misere Fandom (the fanzine game which is won by the player who spots most deliberate mistakes and doesn't do anything about them) was around someplace. In the Fan Room I seized Roy Kettle by the arm and intoned "You are Keith Walker, Man of Mystery, and I claim the £5 prize."

"No, no," screamed Kettle. "Let go, let go. I'll give you anything if I don't have to be Keith Walker! Please - no - don't do it -" He began gibbering; great drops of sweat broke out on his marble brow. Even his nose grew limp with terror. Thrusting his wallet in my pocket I let him go. It was a knockdown price, but even for a sadist there are limits.

Of course while you are observing people from afar, chances are that someone else is doing the same to you. Dave Lewis apparently cast his eye over me at the last Novacon, later informing Kevin Easthope that "Don West hangs about like the aftermath of a wet dream." More confusion. Just as I've got used to one picture of Lewis along comes this new insight to create fresh doubt and uncertainty. Who'd have thought that I'd ever be acknowledged - even in these broadminded days - as figuring in Lewis' wet dreams? Amazing.

Still, not much more amazing than being described as a "Huge Name Fan" (mere BNFs take note) and "Member of the Establishment" in Kevin Easthope's LOGO 4. Such rapid promotion - all the way to the top from total obscurity in little more than a year of activity - had me luxuriating in dreams of fannish glory for all of several seconds. Then I was pulled back to earth by the sad reflection that anyone who bungles his invective quite so frequently and thoroughly as Easthope must be regarded as an unreliable judge. Despite trying too hard he doesn't seem to have got the hang of managing his insults so that they do more damage to the targets than to himself. The Easthope method consists of chopping off both your own legs then waiting for your enemy to faint at the sight of blood. Thus, Huge Name Fan West is first castigated for his destructive criticism - "It

doesn't make any sense at all to be completely destructive when you're trying to improve things" - and then scarcely a dozen lines later comes the declaration : "I've come through on the other side and I think I'm better for the experience." A more heedful writer would have taken care not to contradict himself until the bottom of the page at least.

Anyway LOGO 4 is an improvement on its predecessor if only on the grounds that a poor spirit is better than none...or using only half your loaf is better than making a complete cake...or....or something. Easthope confuses me. He seems to have perfected a method of transferring words to paper without actually reading them first. For instance, he's got an article by Tom Perry all about 'Editorship', one aspect of 'Fansmanship' or 'the Art of convincing other fans that you are a much bigger fan than they are.' Easthope put this thing onto stencil, so you might think he'd picked up some notion of what it was all about. Indeed, the basic principles of this noble science (scoring points in verbal games) are known to every fan of average low cunning. But one is forced to the conclusion that Easthope's cunning is not so much low as subterranean - every time he tries to put the boot in he loses a few more of his own front teeth - and his understanding is so defective he doesn't even recognise what his own contributors are talking about.

Still, I enjoyed LOGO. Not the least part of the enjoyment came from looking forward to the next issue. And Easthope himself has much to look forward to. We've never met, but I expect our paths will cross some time or other.

They almost crossed at this last con. I didn't meet the man himself, but I met his water pistol. There I was, sitting quietly in the bar, contemplating the blankness of my mind, when a jet of water hit me in the face. From behind one of those stupid pillars that cluttered up the floor (and got in the way of my head at least once) Simone Walsh grinned at me. Simone Walsh's hobby is pouring, throwing, or otherwise debouching quantities of liquid - beer, whiskey, water, Old Charnox Southern Catspiss - over anyone with whom she has had some small difference of opinion. Sometimes you get the glass as well, or maybe a non-returnable bottle. I stared at her coldly, and made the water evaporate by thinking about what I'd put in my next piece of fan-writing. She seemed slightly disappointed that I didn't get up and assault her. These women are all the same.

Easthope himself was out of sight. Together with "Dave Bridges, Dave Griffin, Paul Thompson, Geoff Rippington and possible Merf Adamson" he had declined to fire on grounds that "we're brave lads and true etc, but West is bigger than most of us." (What, even all together? I grew almost fond of the lad, he does me so proud. Not only am I a Huge Name Fan, but King Kong as well - six fans at one bite.) Or, as Simone described it later: "Easthope was sitting there pissing himself with fright." Every boy his own water pistol. Male supremacy rules.

That was Saturday. Or possibly Sunday. Also on Saturday (or Sunday) I met Andrew Tidmarsh, writer of intensely intellectual articles for VECTOR and TITAN. The same defence mechanism that blots out memories of the articles has blotted out memories of our conversation. If there was any. I seem to recall falling off my chair at one point. Perhaps I was surprised by something he said. Or surprised by being able to understand it.

Meanwhile up in the con hall everyone was having fun. Or perhaps

not. I didn't attend enough of the programme to pronounce on its merits as a whole. This is less due to lack of enthusiasm for the con than to a dislike of being lectured at. If I want heavy text I'll read it myself, some time when I'm sitting comfortably and ready to begin. If I want chat I'll stop in the bar. There are occasions when convention programming seems to be based on the fact that if it moves and mentions SF the audience will applaud it. And so they do, so they do.

Most thrilling item was the convention bidding. Would Skycon carry it off, or would they be overwhelmed by the late entry of Bradford? The matter was settled when, despite the encouragement of all those friends who were hoping I'd get up and make a fool of myself, I found that my mind had gone blank. I decided to hold over the bid. BRADFORD IS HEAVEN THE YEAR AFTER SEVANTY SEVAN now becomes BRADFORD IS GRATE THE YEAR AFTER SEVENTY EIGHT. Send only 50p NOW! Just as well I didn't go on with it, really; there was quite enough trouble later on about the frivolities of the Best Award. (Next year I'm going around collecting for the Nobel Prize. Anyone who afterwards wishes to complain that they thought the collection was for a Swedish version of TAFF, or a testimonial inkpot for the famous fannish illustrator Harry Nobel, should hand in the eyewitness accounts, lists of names etc before twelve noon on Monday.)

Of course one troublesome element of Eastercons is that at least half the attendees can hardly be called fans at all. They are enthusiasts; avid readers or collectors of Science Fiction, who attend for the overt science fictional content. Obviously it's hard to draw an exact dividing line (and probably not very desirable to try) but it seems clear that the active and essential part of fandom is quite a small minority, perhaps less than a fifth of the whole. Many more people may have passed through, but the hardcore of visitors to the Fan Room was never more than a couple of dozen - a subgroup not much larger than the coterie of Dungeons and Dragons players.

Even the fanzine fans might be further subdivided: there's that good old strain rooted firmly in the gutter (where they and I belong) and there's the strange mutant variety developed by the British Science Fiction Androids Ltd. If that organisation ever decided to Take Over (in best SF style) by cleansing the fair name of fandom of all impurities it would only need the assassination of three or four dozen people to give them the upper hand. Of course they'd have to repeat the process every few years - fannishness is like Original Sin and prone to breaking out whatever you do - but for a short time at least the British fan scene could be transformed into a beautifully even desert of dullness: a land fit for heroes who want no questions asked that don't have safe, sober, and serious answers.

Why is it that - initially at least - so many SF enthusiasts seem earnest, humourless, narrowminded, complacent, and even slightly stupid? Almost it seems as if these people are driven to seek SF out of a dim perception that it contains elements wholly lacking in their own characters: imagination, vision, invention, and a capacity for interest and excitement. (Not that I've ever had all of that from SF, but I do keep hoping and running the occasional spot-check.) No wonder, really, that fandom seems so alien and inaccessible. To the outsider, fandom's

values are inverted: a fan no longer needs SF. He's started to grow his own.

Outside, the midless hordes mill endlessly, clutching their paperbacks and craning to catch sight of some famous pro. Inside, are the boys who really know about time warps and such, and have made it to another dimension entirely. Yet it's curious to see how the hard core of fandom manages to impose its values even upon those who scarcely understand or sympathise. The caste system of fandom is a thing to marvel: a maze of ratings and fine distinctions complex beyond belief. Thing is, by some mysterious and esoteric process this 'inner circle' hypnotises everyone else into taking it at its own valuation. The Elite is the Elite simply by taking their own Greatness for granted. The rest just tag along like sheep.

What Easthope and those others who complain of 'cliqueishness' fail to realise is that the 'Elitism' of fandom is not something imposed from above: it's entirely dependant on the voluntary servitude of those who consider themselves less worthy. The Establishment is really wide open; the barriers to admission exist only in the eye of the beholder. All that is necessary to be accepted as a fan is to be active in fannish pursuits.

However, acceptance is not the same thing as immunity from criticism. Fannish ratings go by measures of talent and personality: if you are judged deficient in either or both you are likely to get some knocks. Even from friends. The old 'Star System' of fandom, with BNFs at the top, fans in the middle, and neos way down under, has undergone a considerable levelling in recent years. Just who are today's BNFs? There's a whole array of talented fans, and who is to be singled out above the rest? Promote one and you'll have to promote six more; in no time at all you'll have an army composed entirely of officers. And there's too much democracy about, these days; too much freedom of speech. You can't have a BNF (in the old sense, at least) who isn't treated with deferential respect. But now there's no fan at all who isn't liable to get the piss taken out of him pretty frequently. O tempora, o mores, as Walt Willis might say.

And so it goes. All those nonfans at conventions are just there to fill in the crowd scenes, to provide a background of animated noise, to create a party atmosphere, to feed the megalomania of fannish fans with the unconscious tribute they provide by their very existence. After all they do cooperate. The fans dominate the show, while the protofans - creatures with no more than the potential of real life, like embryos which may miscarry or be aborted before coming to term - go their ways only dimly conscious of the very existence of these Secret Masters.

Wierd carry on, when you think about it. Not that all this fanciful stuff passed through my brain while I was laid around getting sozzled at Easter. I just felt depressed - something along the lines of "Many are called but few are chosen, and look what a bunch of arseholes most of those are." As Mike Glicksohn so delicately puts it: there are some convention attendees you wouldn't cross the room to puke over.

Fuck me, I was paying money to get bored?

Well, no. I was paying money to get drunk. When even that began to seem tedious, I took out all my small change and amused myself by throwing it on the floor. John Piggott and Rob Hanson crawled rapidly around, snarling at each other as they grovelled for pennies. I felt like a

character in a piece of New Wave fan-fiction: oppressed by the meaninglessness of it all.

Some time later - or maybe sooner - I went and half-heartedly offered to tear Merf Adamson's head off unless he joined the Astral League. Presumably he did, since I saw him walking about in a state of completeness later on. Ian Watson (must read one of his books sometime) called me a psychopath. I was inclined to agree, but felt too listless and apathetic to break his arm.

Oh what a downer it was. And I wasn't cheered up on Saturday night, when I happened to close my eyes for a moment and slept through most of the Burlingtons' performance. Back in the bar afterwards Graham Charnock was feeling depressed himself, apparently thrown into gloom by consideration of real and imaginary deficiencies in the musical line. Since I myself play guitar in the style of John Cage - long, long silences while I figure out how to rearrange my fingers - such an excess of self-criticism seemed unreasonable. In a burst of generosity I attempted to reinflate his ego by the assurance that I'd always wanted to be a pop-star. Like what he was. Charnock's expression suggested he couldn't decide whether to be sick or to hit me in the face with a broken bottle.

Ah well, the day wore on and the night wore out, and I might have found what it was all about - except that I'd ceased to care. So naturally - following the dictates of my subconscious - what happens but I go and sign up for a couple more cons? Perhaps this SF has worked a little Scientific Spirit of Enquiry into my blood - I'll try the experiment again just to check the results. But I almost gave up for good when I found I'd forgotten how to spell my own address. (Bingely? Bingly? Bloody hell, it must be Bingley? Surely?) Many a promising young brain cell gone for ever, obviously.

On Monday morning I remembered that I ought to do some winning friends and influencing people, and I bought Peter Weston a lemon juice. Some time real soon now I shall send him another story and see if I got his price right. Perhaps I should have paid for the crisps as well.

After that I went home. And as for all the bits I've missed out - oh the amazing things I could tell you! - you'll have to read someone else's account.

But you should see me at the next con. Having a wonderful time.

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D. West

ATLANTIC CROSSING  
.....

bridging that gap

with

ERIC BENTCLIFFE

NEW FAN : "Excuse me, can you tell me what TAFF is?"

ACTIVE FAN : "Well, its full title is the Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund and it was established many years ago to bring worthy American fans to the British conventions; and send equally worthy British fans to the American worldcons. It's a sort of popularity based thing with alternate trips being made in opposite directions. Several fans will be nominated by their friends and fandom as a whole votes the winner on a secret ballot system. Matter of fact there's an election on at the moment to decide which of three British fans should go to the 1977 Worldcon in Florida."

NEW FAN : "Hey, that sounds great, but is it a secret type thing? I mean, I haven't heard any publicity for it...and no-one seems particularly excited about it all?"

That is an imaginary conversation, but I think it is entirely possible that sometime, somewhere during the '77 Eastercon such an exchange could have taken place. And personally I'm rather disturbed that it could.

TAFF, quite honestly (and un-hysterically) provided me with one of the greatest events in a not entirely uneventful life. I still feel beholden to fandom for that trip to the Pittsburgh Worldcon back in 1960, and the memories in my mind of that journey have often cheered me when I've been feeling otherwise pretty damn low! It disturbs and upsets me to see the current disinterest in what has been one of the best things Fandom, collectively, has inspired. There are, I know, quite valid arguments as to why TAFF as-it-is-now has become less important to most fans. To travel to America these days isn't the impossibility, financially, that it was for the average fan back in the days of the Fund's inception. That's one factor with fairly wide-reaching implications - although it doesn't, not for one minute, explain to me why it should be less of an honour to be voted a TAFF Delegate! And why there should be less publicity, less interest in TAFF itself.

Blame for that, in my opinion, must rest on the shoulders of several indifferent TAFF Administrators. Yes, I'm going to name them, but first let me go back to the original 'ethic' of TAFF; yes, I was in on the smoke-filled room session at London's Bonnington Hotel back in 1953 when the

concept was batted back and forth and 'decided' on. (Yes, I am that old, damn you!) The intent was to arrange an exchange of popular active-fans between the UK and the USA. After a winning candidate had made his trip he would take over as administrator from the previous winner on his side of the Atlantic. All TAFF Administrators would have a completely free hand in administering the Fund, the intent here being that if changes needed to be made in the future to allow the Fund to continue they could be. A TAFF Administrator is constrained in his conduct of the job only by the agreement of his opposite number and, obviously, popular fannish opinion.

TAFF has needed to change for quite some years, to adapt to a different fandom, but we haven't had an administrator with the nous to do anything about it.

Back in the Fifties when a fan was a fan and a pro was a pro it was almost 'beyond conceit' that one should assume that a natural development of being an active-fan was to become a professional writer, artist, or editor. That's one thing that, unforeseen then, has caused a deterioration of TAFF, and which no Administrator has done anything about. So, we had a stream of active-fans (nice people, all of them, and many of them good friends of mine who I've no wish to criticize at all as people) who used TAFF as a springboard to professionalism. Deliberately? I don't know. There was Terry Carr, and Eddie Jones, and Mario Bosnyak, and Tom Schluck, and Peter Weston. Like I say, Good People all, and they ably represented TAFF; but shortly after making their trip they got involved with fanac for financial gain and whilst they did Administer TAFF they only did what had to be done.

I don't know how much publicity TAFF has had in the USA in recent years. I know I've seen little in the fanzines I get from there (and I get a pretty representative assortment); what little I've seen has been done by one fanzine editor or another who still believes (like myself) that TAFF is still a relevant thing in fandom and that you-should-vote-for..... I do know that despite the fact that at the De Vere Hotel in Coventry this Easter there were two TAFF Candidates and one TAFF Administrator present - and that the result of the election for this year's British TAFF winner was imminent - there was no obvious publicity for the fund. I did not see one poster, slogan or badge, nor was there anything about TAFF in the Programme Book. Why? I don't know.

Oh yes, another, if unwritten, concomitant of winning TAFF was that you would afterwards write an account of your trip. I haven't seen too many TAFF Trip reports lately...have you?

"Airight Bentcliffe, stop carping and come up with what you think ought to be done. Let's have some constructive criticism!"

Right. TAFF is still a worthy and worthwhile fannish project. It may be relatively easier to take a trip to America/Britain if you save hard than it used to be; but it still isn't easy to earn this ultimate accolade of your fellow fen. There are two things I would do if I were now a TAFF Administrator. Firstly I would embark on a campaign stressing that TAFF is for fans, and that you should vote not only for someone you consider to be a worthy Delegate but for someone you consider will be continuously active in fandom. I'd go even further and



limit TAFF to active-fanzine-fans who could reasonably be expected to continue actively in the future. TAFF was originally all about fanzine fans; going back to the idea would help its image and perpetuity a great deal. I'd even go so far as to say that a fan who already has pro-aspirations is not an acceptable candidate.

I'd also - and this is again a way of refocussing TAFF towards its original intent - change the venue of future TAFF trips. Instead of a British fan going to the now huge American Worldcons where active fans are in a minority - so much so that it's even difficult to find them, I'm told - I'd strongly suggest that British winners would in future go to one of the smaller, regional, more fannishly-oriented American cons. The MidwestCon sounds like a suitable choice. And since British conventions are also getting an increasingly high attendance from those who are purely (!) science fiction readers it might not be a bad idea for an American Delegate to attend our Novacon instead of the Eastercon.

In effect I'd strive to get TAFF back to its original aims; enabling currently-active fanzine-fans to visit and meet with their counterparts in Anglo- or American-Fandom. I think my suggestions are sensible ones, but there is no way I can put them into operation, only a TAFF Administrator can do that.

At this time of writing I don't know who will be voted the honour of representing British Fandom at the SUNCON. It may be Terry Jeeves, Peter Roberts, or, even, Peter Presford. Whatever the result I'm sure we'll have a good Delegate and I hope that we'll also have a good Administrator - one who with the agreement of Roy Tackett (the last US TAFF winner and current US Administrator) won't be afraid to set a few new guidelines for TAFF; it is time for them.

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Eric Bentcliffe

### TAKE THE MONEY AND RUN ?

Okay, as some of you may know the 1977 TAFF race has been concluded and SBD's hot tip, Peter Roberts (Man of Mystery) has just managed to scrape in on a wing and a beetroot. At the moment I'm perfectly happy about this; I can't really envisage Peter failing to carry out the various duties implicit in winning, and I'm sure he will look at any suggestions for updating the TAFF system with his usually cautiously enthusiastic interest.

For my part I'm entirely in agreement with what Eric has said in the above article; a peculiar state of affairs indeed, perhaps, but maybe not considering we jointly worked out the basic notion during a period of general Discontent At The Ways Of Fandom at the last Eastercon.

It seems to me obvious that TAFF candidates must be currently

((Continued at the end of the Bryn Fortey article following.))

I G O T S T U N G

groovin'

with

BRYN FORTEY

Upon learning that they were treated to trays of sandwiches, cakes, and as much orange squash as they could drink after churning out a few hymns at local churches on Sunday evenings, I decided to become a member of the school choir. Even allowing for my natural handicap - I couldn't sing - I found it an easy ambition to realise. Being short on numbers the master in charge was more interested in quantity than quality. I was allowed in on the strict understanding that I mimed throughout. Under different circumstances I might have been less willing to ignore such a clear-cut rejection of my vocal talents, but singing wasn't the name of the game. I had gained entry into the promised land of free vestry meals, and that was the prime object of the exercise.

The fact that I wasn't allowed to sing when appearing with the choir was not a surprise to me. In spite of a growing interest in music (though not of the sombre devotional variety I mimed to on Sundays) it had been obvious that was was totally unable to sing two consecutive notes in tune. The vocal acrobatics exhibited by Frankie Laine on his many hit 78s filled me with absolute awe.

Laine, for a number of years which stretched from the late forties to the early fifties, could do no wrong for me. I can remember still, with vivid recollection, the many hours spent playing his records on an old manually-operated gramophone, the first I ever owned. I recall such big sellers as 'Ghost Riders in the Sky', and 'Cry of the Wild Goose', and remember feeling sorry for anyone not fortunate enough not to be able to appreciate such examples of musical mastery as I did. A friend who preferred Billy Cotton singing 'Big Ben' was classified as a musical incompetent. But in spite of the enjoyment I got from listening I did experience a certain disappointment at my complete inability to mimic the source of my pleasure.

My limitations in this direction were brought home even more strongly when in 1954 I first encountered jazz. British exponents such as Humphrey Lyttelton and Alex Welsh soon led me into the musical arms of Louis Armstrong, Coleman Hawkins, Ella Fitzgerald and Duke Ellington. As my knowledge increased so did my awareness that in spite of a love for music I possessed no actual talent for it at all. But at the same time I was coming to terms with this cruel reality something was happening in America, in Memphis, which was to offer me one last hope of glory as a performer. A guy called Sam Phillips was recording an unknown singer named Elvis Presley, and the big RCA company was about to buy his contract.

Now say what you like about Elvis, and I had become enough of a musical snob to say some pretty uncomplimentary things about him when he first burst upon the scene, but his contribution to popular music cannot be ignored. However, initially at least, I was quite prepared to ignore him.

A friend borrowed a couple of Presley discs from his cousin and brought them round to my house. "It's terrible," he kept telling me, "he's taken America by storm and it looks as if he's going to do the same thing here. And he has absolutely no talent at all!"

We played the records over and over again, justifying our actions by claiming disbelief at what we were hearing. "It's so bad I can't believe it," I remember saying. "Put it on again and let's try to evaluate just what it is that's making him so popular."

Well since my baby left me  
I've found a new place to dwell  
It's down at the end of Lonely Street  
It's called Heartbreak Hotel

And all the time, whilst paying lip-service to easily offended British critics brought up on the sweet niceness of Vera Lynn, we were both secretly bopping. Hunched over the speaker, feet tapping to the beat, identifying with the exaggerated emotion, we shouted "Rubbish!" until we could fool ourselves no longer. Then, laughing at our now admitted change of heart, we simply settled back and allowed ourselves to enjoy it.

It's not that he's a great vocal performer, I reasoned, it's the rough, raucous, vibrant quality that does it. Even I could sing it!

Soon the copyists followed in Presley's wake. Gene Vincent, Jerry Lee Lewis, Charlie Gracie, Eddie Cochran, and the Everlys jumped on the bandwagon Stateside, and Cliff Richard and Tommy Steele made their efforts over here. And that was when I decided I was going to become Newport's answer to Elvis Presley!

Having reached the conclusion that the vocal style was within my reach I decided I had better get first to grips with the physical embellishments. To this end I started practising in front of a full-length mirror which stood by the window looking out into our back garden. As my side-burns grew so I perfected the bump, grind, and hip-swivelling gyrations that added up to the Presley persona. Then I got down to the all-important facial expressions.

Only a chance remark made at a much later date revealed that the woman next door used to lean over the garden wall and watch me practising at every opportunity. It was amusing then, but at the time I would have been quite embarrassed to know I had had an audience - even of only one. "I used to really enjoy watching you," she said, "why did you stop so suddenly?"

Why indeed? I'm sure many readers will know the answer to that one before I say it myself. Feeling I had mastered the body and face movements I turned to the easy part, the singing. To this end I borrowed a tape-recorder and, having memorised the lyrics, warbled into



BURNING HELL

fanzine reviews

by

Greg Pickersgill

Well it's a real surprise to be doing this column, and no mistake. I had the distinct feeling after the last issue that I'd really shot the bolt as far as this fanzine reviewing business is concerned; only so much to say, and I'd already said it, and like that. And that notion compounded by the fact that nowadays we have real heavies working the fanzine review field, in the shape of D. West and...well, one D. is about good enough for any given fandom at any given time. Like, I may have been there first but he was there better. Forgive no doubt pardonable immodesty. But still, here I is again and all you can do is blame that man Robert Jackson (Editor of MAYA, a magazine for etc etc) who one faroff day before Easter flattered me into writing him a few thousand words of reviews for his inestimable fanzine.

Therein, of course, lies a story in itself; once having accepted the comission ("Gee, I'm gonna be in litho.") I decided that this was going to be my Big Shot. Not only sparkling wit, unsurvivable putdowns, glowing praise, but also a complete and definate rebuff of all the inane bullshit Susan Wood had to say about British fanzines in her review column in ALGOL. (Not, of course, that there's anything wrong with the fact she was making praiseworthy noises all round (tho' some of the praise was, I consider, seriously misdirected) but that she generally gave the impression we were all a right load of Dave Rowes, jolly back-slapping hail-fellow-well-mets skipping around some fabulously fannish fucking maypole. Susan Wood sometimes strikes me as someone who would have put the 'h' into fandom if Presford hadn't done it first. Gnash.) Of course, the strain of all this mighty creativity soon began to tell. Mainly I got that hideous feeling that I really couldn't give a toss what anyone, least of all Susan Wood, thought about fanzines, and if they were too dim to see things right (i.e. my way) then balls to the lot of them. Unfortunately Robert Jackson has a phone and so do I, so I was pretty consistently reminded of my failure to meet my commitments, and pretty damned guilty it made me feel too. Anyway, to cut a long story short by deleting all the bits Jackson read me out of the latest LoCs to MAYA, we finally got around my terminal anomie by deciding that I'd send him all my bits and pieces, notes, jottings, even the odd finished paragraph or two, and he's weld them all together in some sort of meaningful lump.

Of course they all got lost in the post. Piss.

Fortunately Robert is a fair man with a word and whipped up a rather good, essentially meaningful and pretty much right (as in..) in jig time, so MAYA didn't have to go out with embarrassing blank bits.

Anyway, after having struggled over that piece I began thinking about reviewing all over again. It didn't seem so bad as long as I kept the whole tone casual; not so much going back down crudzine alley with a sock over me head and a bike-chain round me wrist as that man Tom Perry might prefer, but just picking out a few things worth mentioning, leaving out the trash for D. to thrash. All new praise-filled section of BURNING HELL coming right up - Malcolm Edwards can stop watching his mirror.

And where better to start than with a boy I've been tipping for the top a while now - all to no avail. Of course I mean the startling David E. Bridges, whose recent OMPazine (yes, OMPA functions still; not only with such as Bridges, but also New Wave fannish greats as Dave Langford within its confines. Naturally mere grates still remain, so even if I could convince myself that APAs were a useful way to turn my time and money I wouldn't get involved in OMPA) came my way just recently. Bridges is not, as I have previously erroneously claimed, the Leroy Kettle of the 1970's. No mere shade he, instead he is gonna be the David E. Bridges of the 1970's, his unique and peculiar talents spreading mirth and facination through the land. Of course to do this he is going to have to sort his number out. At the moment he is in great danger of letting his senses slip away in a tide of what can only be called fannish recidivism. This is the tendency of a small group in any fannish period to act like a bunch of cretins. What I mean is that Bridges and a few of his less gifted cronies have wadded themselves together into something they call 'Idiot Fandom'. An apt name when one considers the fannish phenomenon they remind one of most is the whole Mary Reed-Chas Legg-Beryl Mercer 'Tribe X / Oxo Fandom' nause of the middle-to-late sixties. The words for this one are; indulgent, silly, undisciplined, childish, fake, and ridiculous. Striving vainly after a 'unique' feature in fandom is no rare thing, but when one choses to assert one's uniqueness by behaving like the halfwit one might not actually be then things are rapidly becoming too daft for words.

Bridges, of course, has a brain in his head and isn't going to be taken in by the delusory pleasures of ultra-ingroupishness for long. (Whether he is, or has been ever, is open to question itself.) He has greatability to write in all usual fannish forms; parody, anecdote, reminiscence, joke. He has a wonderfully individual fresh style, his ability to digress at what wouldfor anyone else be alarming and danger-filled tangents is little short of incredible. He can draw funny. (I phrase it that way advisedly; his 'art' is neither art nor cartooning, too crude and unformed - though this is likely exacerbated by the fact her works right onto stencil, itself a talent in some measure - to make good pitchers, but it's lively, witty, and in the case of his SUPERFAN strip (mild-mannered cretin becomes incompetent superhero and fails to save world from another menace each week, like) the most genuinely amusing pictorial stuff in fanzines these days.

His problem, really, is indiscipline. Any old idea is stuffed in, overdone, and worked to its overdue end. He has yet to figure out what is not necessary. Other than that he is a great man.

The notion of indiscipline brings us to include Leroy Kettle. Kettle's always had his problems in this way; only recently has he been

making an effort to excise mere spacefiller. Or has he? Only TRUE RAT (rumoured to be back to personalzine-style next issue) will confirm or deny this hope, though his recent material in MAYA and SHREW have shown a truly mature, deeply perceptive writer of considerable skill, wit and humour. In these pieces he no longer strives hard after every remotely funny line, flinging in quips and hon (supposedly) mots en masse in the fervent hope that the reader will be overwhelmed by quantity if not quality. He is not merely funny, but readable, memorable, identifiable. The life he's led and details, the agonies and the pleasures, have hit us all in our times. Whilst D. West writes the Book on Fanzines, Kettle writes the Book on being a Fan.

Of course Kettle has his problems too. Not the least of which is the fact that everyone has become somehow hypnotised into believing him some kind of can't-fail fannish god, right up on the left side of Bob Shaw, whose every verbal dropping is a shimmering distillation of essential humour. Whether he likes it or not I'm sure this sort of uncritical praise must allow Kettle to get away with less than he is capable of. As in the case of Shaw people are so ready to be amused that anything, whether actually amusing or not, will trip them off into gales of mirth. A shame, really, that these two individuals, highly talented as they in fact are, receive adulation and worship the like of which is usually given to most men when they are dead, gone, and in no position to take pleasure in it. I'm sure they don't consciously believe that their every fart and belch is somehow masterful, but it must be easy to be swept along in the general hysteria. Or if not that simply played out by demand. Shaw's becoming a con-programme institution, particularly, is bound to have unfortunate results for him sooner or later. Even the greatest wits can't scrape the barrel ad infinitum.

And of course such as Bridges aren't seen and recognised by those blinded by the superstars' spotlight. I mean, fair shake boss, I think he is now writing consistently better than Kettle was at a comparable stage of development, and it's merely his youth and relative lack of experience that is holding him back right now. I contend that once he learns to use his resources wisely and not scribble frantically on any subject that enters his head there'll be no stopping him, and people who one might assume to have some intelligence (like Ian Maule or Ian Williams, can't remember which) who dismiss Bridges out of hand, will have to revise their opinions more than somewhat.

Okay, Greg Pickersgill's Golden Greats in Fanzines no. 2, another lets-hear-it-for-the-little-guy. This time expatriate Englander Rich (I'm coming back real soon now) Coad, who produces the best British fanzine outside Britain in the shape of SPICY RAT TAILS. Unsung genius he isn't, just a good man putting together a nice readable witty fanzine with good illustrations, good words, good atmosphere. Apart from that there isn't much can be said about it without actually digging up the last issue, but shit, whaddya want anyway? SPICY is about the only thing other than MOTA that makes me think there might be intelligent life in American fandom after all.

One character who came in right from the outside within the last eighteen months and amazes all consistently still is Dave Langford. Previously written off as just another sci-fi aspiring-pro and Pyorrhea

hanger-on, convicted bomber, fan-fiction purveyor and general dull asshole. So what does he do but put his SFINX days behind him, and apart from putting out a couple of solid issue of a genuine sf enthusiasts fanzine with Kev Smith (DRILKJIS) turns out hideously frequent issues of the superfannish TWLL-DDU containing some of the best, most individualistic, and funniest fanwriting seen since, well, the last stuff Bridges or Kettle did. Not merely content with writing superb con and party reports he's made a solid reputaion for himself as fandom's most accomplished godssip-monger, the Hedda Hopper of Britfandom. Aided of course by the general belief that he in fact is deaf, he sticks a tiny tape-recorder disguised as a deaf-aid behind his ear and stands around looking vacant picking up all kinds of loose talk. Which wouldn't be so bad (what is fandom for, if not that?) if he didn't write it all up so well. There aren't many people putting out fanzines I really look forward to these days, but Langford is one of them. Get it together kid, it's been two months since the last one.

Well, I dunno. I was going to continue along this tack of picking out class stuff and naming it, but there's really so little of it around these days. Most people seem to be able to maintain a reasonably high standard of mediocrity (about the best I can say for such fanzines as ATROPOS, NABU, QUARK, and so on) and there is the usual run of dire reading like KIPPLE, MALFUNCTION, and like that. Very little actually interesting shows up; peculiarly I find BSFA mailings more and more readable (if not understandable) these days. I've only the vaguest idea who all these people are, and what they're talking about, but the evident vitality of that whole alien fandom scene is awfully appealing. Unfortunately I can't summon up much enthusiasm for sf these days so I'd find it hard to insert myself into their game - and their generally simple-minded ideas of excellence in fanzines are something I could never fake successfully, too earnest and secon by half, those boys - but it's a good solid wad of words anyway. Though one thing I was horrified to read in the last MATRIX was that the BSFA in now offering cheap paper and duplicating facilities to anyone capable of sending in ready-typed stencils. Does this mean a sudden deluge of crappy PaDs-type zines; a vile resurgence of the sort of easy-come easy-go anything-goes uncritical and self-indulgent bullshit that resulted in the mid-sixties the last time the BSFA did that sort of number (PaDs was the Printing and Distributing Service, by the way. Turned out lots of fanzines notable for their faint grey print covering the whole page except for a one-eighth-inch margin all round. Groooh.)

Christ. See how dismal the scene. Talking about the BSFA yet. This must indeed be proof of the old accusation that we reviewers have little to say when not actually pulling the guts out of some crappy fanzine and burning them before the editor's shocked and hurt gaze. Lordy lordy, there must be something good.....

And there is, too. Another one of the New Wave of capable fannish individualists that include Joseph Nicholas X, Paul Ryan, and ITMA Bridges; Rob Hansen. His fanzine EPSILON, issue two out just recently, contains a fine convention report from Paul Kincaid, who ingeniously works in the feelings he had at his first convention with the midified attitude he had a year later when he'd got more notion of what was going on. Perceptive stuff, should really be shows to all those BSFA cretins who contend that



that conventioning is hard to get into. It is, of course, but then so is everything you haven't got into before. Remember how difficult it was to lose your virginity? ("Shit, I know it's there, I saw it just a minute ago..."). Hansen himself writes real well, covering various fannish events and personalities, and has a good touch of dry humour. He's quite a fair artist too, something that will become more and more evident as his work gets around more fanzines. Productionwise EPSILON is odd, as it is photoprinted on one side of the sheet only, but hell that was good enough for Charnock when he brought out PHILE 1 longer ago than he cares to remember (before he was told fandom was a waste of time) and Hansen achieves great atmosphere and comfort. A shame to hear recently that three weeks after publication he's recieved only one letter. Get it together you lot. (Me too, I fear).

Peculiarly enough another fanzine I find myself really pleased to recieve is one of the least orthodoxly-fannish around at the moment, NEBULA. At one time touted by Alan Barrie Stewart as the centre of a completely new fandom (which he was doubtless going to join to see if he could make himself a Huge Name in, having failed in normal fandom) it still concentrates on being what can only be described as an amateur science fiction magazine, with stories and stuff (which I must admit I never read on the principle that I can't be bothered to read most professionally published sf these days, though they certainly appear to be consistently better than yer average fanfic) though with a gradually increasing proportion of more usual fanzine material like columns and comic-strips etc. The real standout in each issue is the art of Tony Schofield and Jim Barker, the former doing really individualsistic sf and fantasy illustration, and Barker contributing a delightfully witty and superbly drawn parody of STAR TREK, 1999, and any other tv/cinema sf that his mind opens to. NEBULA remains a very controlled item, perhaps more professional in outlook and attitude than most fans are willing to accept, but it's not as pompous or portentous as, say, KIPPLE, or even FANZINE FANATIQUE.

Well this is ludicrous. I can't think of anything more to say in this vein. I could do a sort of steal from Leroy Kettle and do a list of real good things I've read in individual fanzines recently, but I want to save that for the future (who knows how long this block will last?). So what I'll do is something completely different. I'll talk about records instead. Yeah, good idea mon.

As you've probably noticed I'm rather fascinated with most aspects of popular music and would vaguely like to increase the manifestation of my interest in SBD one way or another. I certainly wouldn't turn it into a fullblown rock fanzine; that whole scene looks more and more like the latest poseurs circus daily, and I'm neither trendy enough for the new wave fanzines or erudite and fanatical enough for the equivalent of SPECULATION, SF REVIEW, or whatever. What I really wanted (when I first considered the idea) were articles like Fortey's in this issue, people writing about music they like, and giving away some of their real-life personality between the lines. By their music ye shall know them, like. I put the Word around and Stuff arrived; lots of people sent in Top Tens (annotated lists of favorite records) and John Hall (one of fandom's few real boogie maniacs) sent a rather good column which was forced out of this issue by space considerations (sf strikes back, eh wot). Anyway all things considered some of this will turn up in the future; not in

overwhelming proportion, pace the Oversees Desk, but about enough in proportion to the assumed interested readership. If you don't like it put your fingers in your ears, okay? Right then, let's see how well this goes down:

These days I'm listening to a lot of blues and r&b, both the 'real thing' and 'imitation', one being as good as the other at their individual best as far as I'm concerned. One of my favourite albums at the moment is OPEN ALL NITE by the Nighthawks, an American four-piece from, I assume, the Virginia-Washington area. The album is on some sort of local label and was sent to me as an unsolicited gift by good ol' Terry Hughes a year or so ago. At first it just seemed dull and trite and just another white-boys-blues band, a so-what sort of item. Then suddenly it became a permanent favorite, one of the few albums playable through both sides without reservation. The bass and drums are tightasthis, really swing like mad, fine sense of blues rythm. The guitar could well be accused of being cold, mechanical and unemotional, but all the right lines come across and there's neither excessive showing off or does he keep too far back. The vocalist isn't exactly Howlin' Wolf, indeed, he does affect rather too much of the sort of throaty delivery typical of someone trying too hard to sound like a genuine coon, but the songs (mostly blues standards) get across with great enthusiasm. And there's the secret to this album I think; they're not copyists in the Jeremy Spencer/Fleetwood Mac (not including Peter Green in this criticism) of slavishly following the manner and form of the originals, carrying metaphorical cotton-bales or aping the cool of Southside spades of the Forties. The Nighthawks are simply playing music they like and really enjoying it; not breaking any new ground, not ever going to make any fortunes, and no-one's ever going to start a fanzine about them, but I bloody bet they're enjoying themselves, and that's exactly what they communicate. Great stuff, makes punk look pathetic.

And talking of punk, most of the punk bands put me in mind of nothing other than a Bryn Forzey fan-fiction brought to hideous semi-sentience. They seem so deliberately cretinous (gormlessness is always more offensive when deliberate) and so determined to deny the value of anything older than last week or known to more than a dozen people, that I can't shake a feeling that they're all just this years hippies, just as unreal but with more potential for viciousness. Having said that I must admit their records are infinitely better than I'd like them to be. The Pistols' PRETTY VACANT especially is something I'd play a lot if I had copy, and the first Damned single was bloody good too. Still, pose isn't everything as I found to my cost when I bought the first Jam album, fascinated by their neo-mod stance (some poses good, ok), evident British patriotism, and the word that their songs were about the sort of real-life someone like me with a job, a home of my own, and a casual indifference to socio-political hysteria of all stripes could get next to. Alas and alack it was more crummy than anything, all sounded the same, no variety, the lyrics mixed too far back and virtually inaudible, and very little variation in attack. They seem aimless somehow, not committed enough one way or another, neither hysteric perpetual adolescents or ready to straightforwardly give their true impressions of life as they lead it. I dunno. Very disappointing all round.

Another band I like as much for their image as anything else are the Saints, the only Australian group I've heard of worth a shit with the possible exception of Daddy Cool. Actually I liked them initially for their records, but they've got such a good couldn't-care-less stance they knock me out doubled. They seem to have recieved a great deal of flak from new wave audiences - who seem to have made the very questionable assumption that any newly-arisen band is automatically going to follow the phlegm-stained punk banner - for not being orthodox punkers. Like, they dress normal scruff casual, don't leap around like epileptic spastics (if fact guaging from a recent tv spot they're as near immobile as makes no difference), don't spit at the audience or abuse them in any other-fashionably direct way (as opposed to normal abuse of the audience like the Beach Boys recent refusal to play a public concert in Britain claiming they 'weren't ready' and instead playing, on the same night as set for the concert, a publicity show in London for record company execs). Looks good to me boss. They sound good too, being a trad four-piece playing dense, whining, heavy on the chords, light on the subtlety rock, with basic, essentially empty lyrics delivered in a superb flat monotone. I think they're fantastic and play NO TIME - a great thunderer with a superb  $1\frac{1}{2}$  note two second guitar break halfway through - all the time. The reception they've got from the new wave audiences seems to confirm my belief that always, no matter how radical or revolutionary the movement of the day is you'd better get in line you're in shit street no matter what. In fact it just about fucking nauseates me to see how all the music weeklies are pushing the punk routine as hard as they can, especially in their advertising. It really stupefies me because I can't honestly see how more than a very small proportion of the readership can actually sympathise with or otherwise get behind the idea, as much because of the fact that it is basically an inner-city number and most of the poulation just don't live like that here. Despite the assertions of various bandwaggon-jumping writers most people are pretty normal, average, and can't be affected by the new wave in any more than the most superficial fashion (literally). Balls, I say. Particularly when they make a big deal of the youth number, giving the music back to the kids where it belongs and like that. What happened to the old idea that all of us who'd grown up in the sixties were going to stick with the rock throughout our lives? Okay, that's nonsense as any young married couple could prove, but the idea is every bit as valid as any deranged punk ranting.

Fuck it, basically I don't like to be placed arbitrarily beyond the pale because I'm not unemployed and living in a bus shelter. Tho' how many of those fuckers actually are I'd like to know.

Well, this could go on forever, superficiality following superficiality, so I might as well go the whole hog and do a Top Ten, the things I'm listening to a lot right now;

GONE DEAD TRAIN by Randy Newman from the PERFORMANCE soundtrack album. Real rough nobbly music, bits sticking out all over, like the amazing slide guitar, speedy rhythm, great lyrics portraying nameless dreads, bizarre visions in the tradition of the great Robert Johnson. "You got to teach to learn.."

MYSTERY TRAIN - Junior Parker. Another train-type song, this time a smooth-rolling semi-jump blues. Calm delivery, restrained guitar solo, but the lyrics...what is that train, where's it going, who is on it? Creepy.

MARQUEE MOON by Television. Title track of album. A good lyric that has some relationship to the way I see the world gets me right away. Television have that - in a peculiarly spooky sense - as well as real individuality instrumentally. Ice cold, they sound, precise, controlled playing, layered like puff-pastry, not insubstantial but with plenty of space between. "When the cadillac came out of the graveyard.."

BABY PLEASE DON'T GO by Gary Glitter. I've got everything he cut and I think he's great. Not only one of pop's few knowing humourists but a man with a truly unique sound and vision; nothing sounded like Glitter before, and little has done as well after. This treatment of an old r&b fave is a real killer, you can tell easy that if she does go to New Orleans he's soon gonna follow her with a Saturday Night Special, dancing all the way. Glitter Band spot on jerk-funk as usual. Great bass and sax. Peter Roberts turned me on to Glitter in 1972. Best thing he ever done for me.

I GOTTA MOVE by the Kinks. B side of ALL DAY AND ALL OF THE NIGHT. Listen to this to find punk roots. Listen to this to see what a long way they got to go yet. Listen to this to see what a long way down it's been for the Kinks since.

FALSE START by Love. Melodic, good witty, optimistic lyrics, Arthur Lee's unique voice. Generally all that's best about West Coast rock. Another one of the very few albums worth playing all the way through.

DON'T YOU LIE TO ME by the Flamin' Groovies. The Groovies are a great sixties revival band doing good pastiches of everyone from the Beatles through the Kinks to the Stones. Good dense sound, tight harmonies, fine guitar. Basic but true.

SLEEPLESS NIGHTS by Wayne Cochran and the C.C.Riders. Unheard of over here but a consistent sell-out in the south and midwest States where they tour perpetually. This is a great long soul/r&b number; variable tempos linked by grumbling bass riff and overlaid with a smash-ye-ears-in horn chorus. GREAT lyrics about picking yourself off the floor when your best woman done gone, got to get yourself back together, and when she hears how good you're making out she's gonna come back in through that door.... Thunky, funky, Good God. I play it in my head all the time. You'd likely call it male chauvinist rock if you were that sort of ponce.

BOOGIE ON THE STREET and OUT FOR A LARK by the Lew Lewis Band. Lew used to be a Hotrod but left because they didn't play enough r&b. The Clapton of his generation? Still, wonderful r&b here, tight as a drum, bound to get you moving. Great lyrics about hanging around, pulling the birds, wearing trousers colored electric blue. Christ, there's more believable fantasy and wish-fulfillment in the blues than any wad of sf. Boogie on.

Reading the above I'm struck by my inability to convey much about these records, especially when I read from the viewpoint of someone not into the music. Still, if the one-third groovers on the mailing list get something out of it we'll do a bit more next time.

Still, it was more enjoyable than writing fanzine reviews. At least I played a few good records.

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Greg Pickersgill

A L T E R N A T E T I T L E  
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war and peace

and

SIMONE WALSH

I'm into my new approach to the Art of Writing. It consists of taking a lesson from Graham Charnock and Mike Glicksohn. What you do is grab a bottle on the way to the typewriter, and a glass if you have any 'class' as the mighty Pickersgill would say. Actually he would say glass and class as if they rhymed; the way I say them they don't. Glarse I'd say. Clarse I'd also say if I wasn't saying it the way the mighty Pickersgill said it. Anyway, I've had to substitute the Old Sox or whatever Glicksohn drinks for sherry. I know, frightfully British, but it's either that or Scotsmac, the most foul idea ever put into a bottle. Whiskey mixed with wine. Yuk. Bryn Fortey brought a bottle of it to our last party and here it has remained ever since. In fact some potato wine home-brew lasted almost as long, but when I went out the other weekend leaving Greg and a visiting Peter Roberts here they must have drunk it. And the parsnip wine that probably the same someone had left at our party. I know Peter likes his roots but this is ridiculous. The Charnocks were here as well, so maybe it was them. Anyway by the time I got home from having my fun I wouldn't have noticed who had drunk what. All I know is that I brought Greg back a really good present from the barbeque that I'd been to that day. Through the mists of alcohol I knew I had surpassed myself with my offering. It happened thus;

Come the Fourth of July every year I get invited to a 'do' to celebrate the Fourth with an American offshore oil company. (an industry I worked in until recently). Anyway, this year I dragged my sister and her friend Anna up from Bristol so they too could have a good time. My sister's name is Michelle, Mimi to those who know her through me, much to her great annoyance (well I can't start calling her something else now after a lifetime of Mimi (who says I can't digress as well as David Bridges?)). Greg didn't want to go as he thinks that work and work people ought to be left out of one's social life. Each to ours as they say. So, we three ladies trotted off. My sister and her friend gauge a good time on how many conquests they make. They had a good time. Me, well, when there's a bar dishing out free drinks, as much as you ask for, like large whiskey or more large whiskey, it's not long before I realise I'm having a ball, a pretty high ball at that! (Ho ho). Part of the fun and games provided included a detachment of Royal Fusiliers doing a Public Relations routine. The Fusiliers (in case our forren readers don't know) are a battalion of the British Army based in London. In fact their HQ is actually in the Tower of London. Well anyway at some stage I found myself talking to a group that included the Sergeant leading the detachment, and I started in on my pacifist tack. Actually this is an old routine that hasn't been reviewed for a long time, but it felt good on that hot summer day to get on one of my favourite old hobby-horses. Suddenly the Sergeant homed in

on me; "Oh yes," he said, "you're just the sort of person I like talking to." And sat down on the grass next to me. We got on like the proverbial house (or should I say barracks?) on fire. After a while we noticed that people were drifting off home and the bar had shut. "Don't worry," said my new soldier pal, "I've got a bottle in my caravan, come with me and I'll give you some." "I bet" would have been my reaction to that statement normally and soberly, but this time it seemed like a good idea. The assembled company looked at me a bit strangely when the Sergeant and I announced that we were going to his caravan on the other side of the field to get some whiskey.

Anyway once in the caravan we did nothing more remarkable than sit and drink whilst he told me why I was such a twit for saying that I thought that the Army was obsolete. Slowly as we were talking I kept having the recurring thought "Gosh I wish Greg were here, I wish I could get Greg to hear what this guy has to say." Greg's military philosophy is mainly based around the idea of 'The Russians are coming!'. Eventually the great idea of all time came over me; "I shall take this nice soldier home for Greg to play with." Aren't I the most kind person? He said he'd be delighted to come, but he declared me too pissed to drive so my sister had to take over. I don't think I was that bad but one doesn't argue with the Army. Not even when there's only one of them.

When we reached home the flat was full of Greg and Peter and Charnox, all quite merry. I looked round the door at the roomful (we have small rooms) and said "Hi, I've got something for you Greg, a soldier!" Into the room strode the Sergeant, in uniform so Greg knew I wasn't telling one of my stories again. Soon he and Greg were lost in Army talk for hours. It transpired my man was a Staff Sergeant, which seems to mean that he is in charge of some men; his method of disciplining them wasn't exactly Queen's Regulations but he claimed it was effective and that his men preferred it. They didn't like a fuss and a report to be made if they stepped out of line, so his method was to take whoever had sinned round the back of a convenient building and beat the hell out of them. He also had a conviction that the next European war would be won or lost on the ground, and that the British would be able to give a great deal of aggravation to any invading force, regardless of size, because they were nasty buggers and had a long tradition of 'irregular' tactics, and had learned a lot in recent campaigns like Northern Ireland (where he had been twice wounded). He was certainly a most dedicated and hard man, yet he and long-haired, unfit Greg were on the same wavelength, talking the same language.

He said he would have liked to have people like Greg in the Army though not as a private soldier (not as the platoon mascot either, but as quite what I don't recall) and genuinely seemed incredibly gratified at Greg's wholehearted interest in everything he had to say, and the fact that Greg is quite knowledgeable about things military. They even had a long discussion re-fighting World War Two; neither had actually participated despite the Sergeant's twenty years in the Army, but both seemed to know How Things Should Have Happened. Two real enthusiasts. It was quite an odd scene when the Sergeant had to leave, with he and Greg deciding on which house in the street they'd occupy to stop the Russians crossing the Thames (a vital part of the British anti-invasion plan, apparently). Aren't men peculiar?

That night I just sat back smug. I knew what a clever girl

I'd been bringing back this nice man; it sort of redeemed me for last year when all I'd been able to manage to bring back was the trombonist from the Trad jazz band that had been playing there.

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Life is rather quiet these days now that our Great Adventure is off. What Great Adventure you're all asking. Well, it's like this; we heard that lots of interesting people, like Harry and Irene Bell and Peter Roberts etc were going to the Worldcon in Miami this year. It so happened that Malcolm Edwards was staying with us for a couple of weeks after he and his wife had split up and he too was going to the Worldcon as a Bidding Committee member; you know, Britain is fine in '79 and all that. So one evening when we, with Malcolm, were at Charnox Greg and I found ourselves declaring that we too would go to the Worldcon and why didn't Pat and Graham come too? We waited for a few days to see if the mood passed off, but no, it blossomed into real enthusiasm. We rang people and told them we were going. We hatched a Master Plan; we'd go to Washington by air, drive down to Miami, drive across to New Orleans, and then fly back to Washington as time would be getting short. Fantastic on paper. The next step was setting up stopover points in the US. Well, first choice was Terry Hughes. I'd spoken to him on the phone a couple of times so I thought I'd give him a try. He actually seemed quite pleased at the idea and said yes, we could stay with him, and yes, he'd find out car and minibus hire costs. Things were taking shape. We sent off £10 registration to Marsha Jones, found out what the well-dressed fan wore at a Miami Worldcon (not much it seems) and generally fussed about whether we should allow Peter Weston in our bus or not.

During the next couple of weeks I rang Terry and we discussed who might also be coming from here (our announcement had seemed to precipitate several others into making vague plans) and goshs wow wasn't it all going to be great. Then the awful truth hit us - things were going wrong. Our cash flow situation wasn't much more than a trickle. Then the Bells said they weren't going after all. Suddenly a shoal of bills descended upon us, all sucking away our cash reserves. Slowly we accepted the awful truth that our resources wouldn't get us to Washington, Miami, and New Orleans. In fact the train fare to Heathrow Airport would have probably cleaned us out. "You'll have to ring Terry and tell him we can't go after all," said Greg after we had finally admitted to ourselves that we just couldn't afford the trip. "I can't tell him that," I howled, "not after all the research he's been doing for us. You do it, you've spoken to him." "Look, it's easier for you to do it from your work. And anyway you're so much better at that sort of thing than I am," he said in his most winning tones. And won. I agreed I'd phone Terry and tell him we'd goofed, we just couldn't afford it. "Have you done it yet?" became Greg's routine question. I made excuses and vowed I'd write to Terry instead. Much easier I thought. So I write this lovely long letter explaining just why we weren't going and how sorry we were we'd made him look up prices etc. "Have you don it Yet?" the Master enquired. "Yes, I've written to him," I replied, a little obtusely, and showed him the letter. "Bit peculiar, innit?" he said after reading it. "I know it is," I said, wondering why it was peculiar; I hate to disagree with the Arch Editor/Reviewer Extraordinaire. "OK, I'll ring him tomorrow." My gosh

what a weak person I am. Why didn't I tell him "You do it!!!"  
So I did it. Terry has a beautiful soft voice, the sort you could sink into, it just wraps itself around you. He sounded quite saddened by my news. I've read in US fanzines what a good listener he is, how he makes you feel that he really cares about what you are saying. Well I felt that he cared. That made me feel as mean and awful as I knew it would when I phoned him. I then tried to persuade him to come to Britain. I know we'd be glad to have him stay with us, and I know dozens of others who'd fight to act as host to him. Terry for TAFF soon I hope, if there's no other way to get him here.

Our next idea is to try to get to a small con somewhere near Washington or New York. It will not only be easier and cheaper to get to, but more like the sort of convention we would enjoy. After all, we find Eastercons of 500 people too impersonal, so perhaps we wouldn't have liked to get lost amongst the thousands at a US Worldcon. Would we? Please tell me that is so. Please.

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I think Greg's idea of asking people to write about their favourite records is an incredibly boring one. Perhaps my reaction is born of jealousy - I really envy people with 'enthusiasms'. When I hear people rave on (and on) about their most favourite group of all time, like David Bridges and Van Der Graaf Generator, I wonder just what is lacking in me that prevents me from climbing on that euphoric bandwagon. I mean he doesn't just like them, he does unnatural things like drive his car until the engine seizes up in an attempt to get to a concert of theirs. Perhaps my enthusiasm for Dr Feelgood redeems me a bit - I've been to see them live twice, tho' (here comes the wishy-washy bit) I wouldn't rush to another of their concerts because after the third note the entire audience leaps to its feet and I can't see a thing. Perhaps it wouldn't matter now that Wilko Johnson has left because he was all I wanted to see. The way he levelled his guitar at the audience like a crazed gangster with a machine gun was a sight to behold.

My God, I went on a bit there. Perhaps I've got an enthusiasm after all! Peter Roberts usually makes me feel better tho' - we both get quite lyrical about gardening, particularly about growing radish, spinach, and beetroot. I mean, you ought to see my garden! Unbelievable. The actual plot of earth is only about eight feet by sixteen feet, but I have wall to wall vegetables growing there. Peter is the only one in fandom who I can talk to about the blackfly on my beans and know that he cares. I'm sure Robert Holdstock would be totally unmoved if I asked him to come outside and see my tomatoes. I claim gardening as my real enthusiasm (albeit a lonely one).

I used to get totally involved in my job and babble on about it happily when I got home each evening, much to Greg's disgust. As a civil servant he can't imagine work as anything but boring and thinks its cretinous to enjoy it. However I've changed jobs recently (they refused when I asked for more pay so I left) and the babbling has stopped. At the moment I'm back to my bad old habit of 'temping' (the equivalent of being a 'Kelly girl' to you few over there, I think).

At the moment I'm in a psychiatric hospital, not as an



inmate, but filling in for an absent secretary to a psychiatrist. After the first two weeks of amusing myself in my spare time by reading case notes I got so wretched about the whole thing I decided I'd leave.

"Gosh it's great having my work up to date again," beamed my psychiatrist to me on the day I was going to give notice. He looked so boyish and happy I hadn't the heart to tell him the job was driving me mad! So I'm still there - still no enthusiasm though!

I wrote such a depressed letter to my mother about it that she decided to come and visit me. To make sure I was 'all right'. She had to come on a weekday so rather than have her hang around London all day I said she could come back to the office with me after meeting for lunch. She was all in favour of the idea. My office is at the end of a long building that houses one of the wards. The door to the ward corridor is always kept locked, I told her, you'll be okay, 'they' can't get at you. I was joking; 'they' aren't dangerous, mostly very pathetic, miserable, or simple (sometimes all three). My psychiatrist was away that day so it seemed a reasonable idea. After picking up my mother I drove her through the hospital's seventy acres of grounds to my office. She took one look at the people shambling about the place, decided she was surrounded by loonies and wasn't going to be left alone for one minute. So when the time came for me to leave my little office to do some photocopying in another building a quarter of a mile away, Mother came too. I'd offered her my keys so she could lock herself in my office, but no, she'd like to come with me, please. I offered to let her sit in the car while I photocopied "You'll be okay," I said, "though it was very odd when I was sitting here in the car calculating to see if my pay slip was correct and looked up to find a demented looking woman staring in at me through the wind-screen."

So we went photocopying together. At least in a mental hospital no one asks why your mother is with you when you photocopy.

Working in such a place makes you very aware of your actions, tho'. I hate wasps. (This is relevant, don't worry.) So when a wasp flew into the office the other day I shrieked, leaped up and grabbed a medical dictionary and having backed against the wall and located the wasp at the window I advanced on it, dictionary at the ready to smash it's little brain out. As I was bashing away at the window with my book I suddenly thought "supposing someone outside sees me, they'll think I'm mad hitting the window with a book!" The wasp escaped anyway.

My psychiatrist keeps two cats in the office. I'm allergic to cats. They make me sneeze. So the day I unlocked the office and found a dead bird on the floor (the cats get in and out through a window left permanently open for them) with feathers and minced beak everywhere I got cross with cat-keeping psychiatrists and shovelled the dead bird into a large brown envelope, labelled it "Dead Bird", sealed it, and propped it up on the filing cabinet so I would remember to reproach the good doctor when he arrived. All my man did when he arrived was to find it all most amusing and say "What a psychotic thing to do - put a dead bird in an envelope and label it 'Dead Bird'. Why didn't you file it under 'D' for 'Dead Bird' and have done with it?" He then disappeared into the ward, laughing. Hmmm.

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You may have noticed that my Overseeing Editorial presence is missing from the letter column. If you are wondering why, it is because I was in the bath when the Editor asked me if I wanted to say anything about the letters. He was actually typing up the letter column at that stage so rather than leap out of the bath at that instant and drip all over a piece of paper I ordered the presses to keep on rolling. Noble gesture, I thought. We had discussed what should go in the column previously, tho'; Greg allows me to do the donkey work of putting the letters into various heaps according to merit, labelled 'print lots of', 'print bits of', and 'wrap the chips in'. In fact most of the letter column organisation is mine; oh hell, I'm only trying to justify the lack of verbal me in it. I feel usurped. Is Greg trying to overpower me?

I was going to comment on the letters here but I shan't except to say I'm glad we have such a good Glicksohn one. Sometimes I wonder if Mike has an obsession where he must respond at great length to every scrap of paper that lands in his mailbox or whatever letters arrive in over there. Recently whenever I opened a fanzine there was invariably a rather tedious standard Glicksohn letter and I suddenly began to wonder what he and Archie Mercer had in common, other than beards. (Has Harry Warner got a beard too?)

It's OK, Mike, if you think I'm carping (I'll atone when you come over and buy you a Guinness just to prove I still love you) but it's a similar story with Joseph Nicholas X. His first letters were ravers, then they became tedious and looong. I tactfully took him aside at the One Tun and hit him about the head and screamed "Shape up Nicholas X!" at him and somehow he seemed to understand just what the Editorial Staff of STOP BREAKING DOWN wanted from their star letter-writers.

I'll now (as Overseeing Editor) let you into a secret about Greg Pickersgill as Editor. Many fanzines have 'editors' who just gather material and publish it, regardless of quality of content or writing. Greg rejects a lot, and also holds over articles that won't blend in with a particular issue, which is reasonable enough. But unforgivably (in my opinion) he alters text if he thinks a particular word or expression is either unsuitable or unclear. I think he goes too far, and with my work in particular takes too many liberties. The classic example in in the early part of this column about Mike Glicksohn drinking 'Old Sox'. I didn't say that, I wrote 'Old Grandad', but the Editor thought 'Sox' woz funnier. That's not editing to me - that's a dictatorship we have here.

I guess as long as Greg types the stencils all his cutting remarks will continue. I wonder if professional authors get so uptight at having their priceless outpourings changed, rearranged, and generally raped by heartless editors?

Or am I just being pig-headed as usual?

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Simone Walsh

A L L R I G H T N O W  
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letter column

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

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HARRY BELL,  
9 Lincoln Street,  
Gateshead,  
Tyne & Wear NE8 4EE

\* \* \* \* \*

\* I'm still reeling from Graham Charnock's furious  
 \* assault on my cover for SBD 3. Not being hidebound  
 \* by tradition I designed the guitar on that cover  
 \* on the simple basis of hoy a few strings on,  
 \* punch a sound-hole here or there, give or take a  
 \* bridge or two, and there's your guitar. Who's  
 \* this Charnock bloke to tell me it's not a guitar? It may not be an  
 \* ordinary guitar, but has he ever heard it play? Until he's built one and  
 \* listened to its mellow sound I spit on Mr Charnock's criticism. Word of  
 \* warning; if he makes one ask him to be careful how he strums it - inside  
 \* that sound hole there are a couple of loose fingers rattling about.

To my credit, I trust, this new guitarist has four fingers  
 on each hand. And a tail. On his bum. And he wouldn't recognise a cotton  
 boll if it was rammed up his (oops!) non-existent nose.

\*\*\*\*\*

ANDREW STEPHENSON,  
19 Du Pre Walk,  
Wooburn Green,  
High Wycombe,  
Bucks. HP10 0QJ

\* \* \* \* \*

\* This magazine of yours was shaping up very nicely  
 \* for the Gritty Realism Cup until you fluffed it.  
 \* Only in fanzines does life happen conveniently;  
 \* 1903 mint editions of ANALOG stacked with 1972  
 \* issues of WEIRD TALES, all for a shilling in the  
 \* local charity shop; Alan Burns winning the Doc  
 \* Weir Award; a new British SF magazine edited by

Peter Weston -- the sort of Never-Never Land J.M. Barrie would have been  
 proud of. Then we read in SBD an account of someone trogging along to his  
 letterbox in his night attire and discovering heaps of post waiting. In  
 the early morning. Oh yes? Around this neck of the woods we wait until  
 eleven if we're lucky, when the old dear who delivers letters leans her  
 Post Office issue red bike against the first streetsign of the estate and  
 trots around from house to house on foot. I, as resident writer of the  
 area, observe her progress from windows, surreptitiously twitching aside  
 the curtains, timing her disappearances behind other houses, noting  
 apprehensively as her bundle dwindles and expires one door away from mine.  
 Honest, it makes hay of the morning: concentration is impossible for  
 thinking of all those exciting bills on the way. So you'll surely forgive  
 a cynical reaction to the common rumour that post comes in the morning.

You make a good point in the fanzine reviews in saying that articles which yield no more than transitory interest are superfluous and that those which merely encourage the 'I wish I had thought of that' style of LoC are of very dubious value. What does occur to me is that nobody forgets all he's read; extending your own example, Jimmy Phan's piece on pig-fucking may well add up to a tedious ton of bullshit but somewhere in it, even if only in the causative idea, is an attitude, possibly a fact or two, that will be retained long after the details have been forgotten. Schools used to cram kids with all sorts of gibberish: Latin for road-menders; Greek for gardeners; Abyssinian History for engineers. All junk, according to the relevancy creed. Thank God I was never saved from it all, is my reaction, else these odd scraps of information wouldn't keep floating to the surface of my mind as I sit here writing. A sort of data bank of diversity. Same for fanzines, surely. Pig-fucking may not be your special kink, may never be, but one day you might be damned glad you've been exposed to the idea and have had to think about it. May I therefore restate your thesis: crudzines or thoughtful works, each demands some of your time; in the long run if that time is short a choice based on value judgements has got to be made. An article's worth is never zero, merely very low.

Warming to my idea, I'd add that conreps are supportive evidence to my case. Why should we care what Joe Exe thought about his three days in a scruffy hotel, except that we thereby see the con through his eyes? Otherwise a synopsis of the programme would suffice. Graham Charnock here writes one of the most human reports I've read, yet scarcely scratches the surface of the con-goers' common experiences; most of what he says is a word picture of his own personal reactions. We cannot say if he is right or wrong to claim the feelings he describes (albeit one might argue with certain assessments of corruptibility) but his viewpoint is of interest as expressed. I have often tried to imagine how other people see cons. There's so much gollygosh crap printed, as though every con were somehow a dress rehearsal for Valhalla: days and nights of frenzied drinking, the warriors laid low ere dawn by frenzied partygoing but reborn after only a few hours to face another round of joy. Graham puts himself into this piece. Residual attitudes dramatised by pertinent quotes prove that even the tedium of a GoH speech can be instructive, so after all Dave Kyle has done some good. Same goes for all those moments when, isolated by tiredness or boredom, one wonders what the point of being there can be. Only later does distance lend purpose or value to the experience. Ditto for all those 'worthless' fanzine articles.

((Smart. Almost, but not quite there. Not for a moment would I - someone whose brain is filled with random Jack-of-all-trades data almost to the exclusion of any useful depth of knowledge on any one subject - dispute your basic notion. Encounter and acquire such diverse data at every possible opportunity, indeed. But I can't agree that the generally half-baked thinking and meaningless precis that constitute most non-fannishly oriented material in fanzines is really of even the minimal value you seem prepared to concede it.

Basically I can't for a moment accept that I'm likely to encounter some notion in a fanzine that can't be got better outside. Remember we have a fantastic wealth of literature of all kinds to dip into should we have the wit to do so. I'd prefer to see fanzines concentrate on their true field; fandom. (And, okay okay, science fiction.)

Your analogy with the human insight brought out by the best of conreports doesn't hold tight either, for since when is it likely that yer average Jimmy Phan (who is, after all, the one most likely to determinedly diversify the content of his fanzine in the way you implicitly approve) will have the ability to talk about anything in any truly communicative manner. Con-reportage has an in-built edge as it is something we all, each and every one of us, have experienced. As you say, "I have often tried to imagine how other people see cons."

Trivia rules okay, no doubt, but not in fanzines. (There's a thin edge to tread though, I do admit.))

JIM LINWOOD,  
125 Twickenham Road,  
Isleworth, Middlesex.

\* \* \* \* \*

\* I agree with John Piggott that you, and all of  
\* us, are taking fandom's annual prize-givings  
\* far too seriously; I doubt if any fan or most  
\* pros actually 'covets' an award in the same  
\* way the cliché is applied to film Oscars,  
although the same criteria are applied. (((Well, I certainly don't believe that bit about the pros for a start!))) Sidney Poitier once got an Oscar for simply being black in a lousy movie; Asimov got a Hugo for a lousy novel simply because he'd never got one before. I once tried to get Fred Hemmings to explain how the BSFA fiction award worked because it was coming up with some rather surprising results. The impression I got was "We're giving it to Brunner because he's here at the con, and it will save money sending it to Silverberg." I don't go along with your line that a notable individual will be remembered by an award; exceptional talents in fandom are always remembered whilst the number of awards they accumulate are not. Offhand I can only recall four recipients of the Doc Weir Award. That particular award has always been 'rigged' in the nicest possible way (not nowadays, Darroll, always); "Who're we voting for this year?" everyone asks as they are handed the ballot form. Of course no-one - no matter how talented - controversial will ever get the award (tuff shit Greg); it is, as you say, a compromise that goes out to the nice guys and gals. Your revelation that Chas Platt was cheated out of the award doesn't surprise me; well, it does that anyone voted for him - he was even being pushed to stand for TAFF six months after he discovered fandom!

Potentially ENDLESS BOOGIE could be SBD's strongest point and one of fandom's best columns; it's the nearest thing to something I've always wanted to see developed in a fanzine - a PRIVATE EYE style gossip-column. Why not expand it, filling it with hard info, scurrilous half-truths and downright lies? Yes, I too was puzzled as to why Foyle's

had more copies of FLY AMONG THE RIND on the SF shelf than any other title: do they order fifty copies of every SF book?; was Rob bedding Christina?; why was the stock diminishing by exactly one copy per week? I even tried to make amends for my silly baiting of Rob over the last fifty years by slipping a copy into the best-seller rack between James Herriot and Antonia Fraser.

Simone's "Guinness leaves a very pretty purple stain in linen." was a great, cleverly delivered line that really curled me up and had me laughing out loud - usually only TRUE RAT has this effect on me - now that's what I call real sophistication.

((As a last note on the Doc Weir problem I'd like to say that at the last Eastercon I personally drummed up a lot of votes (and I mean a bloody lot) for someone who didn't win. Looks like Darroll's prophecy is right and it is going to be a congratulatory device for BSFA functionaries. And even though I am willing to be told Keith Freeman has worked long, hard and effectively for BSFA fandom I don't think that that is what the award is for. It could well mean, though, that cons are now packed with BSFA fans, a power unto themselves. Crikey.)))

\*\*\*\*\*  
IAN WILLIAMS,  
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Sunderland SR4 7RD

\* Liked Simone's piece, especially her bits  
\* on Silicon and Maule's wedding. Incidentally  
\* did you hear what happened to me at that  
\* latter event? (((No, but I bet I'm going to..)))

\* \* \* \* \* After the reception we all trooped to Janice's parents house. It was dusk and I didn't pay much attention to where we were going, being content to keep Janice in view. Once there we watched Dr Who and tried to recover from the immense quantities of booze consumed at the reception and, in my case, the shock of John Piggott kissing me. After a while we got hungry and we all (you as well, I remember) trooped back through the cold Devonian night to the chip shop just over half a mile away. As the way there went past the pub us Gannets were staying in it seemed a reasonable idea to break our journey for an hour or so there. Four or five pints later I was no longer keen on the idea of eating greasy fish and chips so I left the party to make my own way back to the party at the Wiles' house. By now the night was not only dark and cold, but definately looking blurry around the edges. However I managed to find my way to the farmyard wall which marked the beginning of the lane leading to the house. Boldly I set my feet upon the road and strode forth up the pitch black lane. I walked on. And on. Finally I stopped dead as a thought struck me.

"Ian gone wrong way!" I announced loudly to the darkness.

So, fiendishly pleased at my intelligence and perception of the situation, I turned around and walked back the way I came, all the time keeping an eye open for a blurry gap in the surrounding trees. Eventually I found one and marched right through the opening.

Right into a barbed-wire fence.

I noticed this when barbs began to dig into my stomach and legs. I came to an immediate and painful halt. Except for one of my shoes which slipped off into muddy grass. Slowly I pulled my flesh off the metal spikes and then went onto my hands and knees flailing about in the mud for my lost shoe.

After finding it I continued on my way. The next time I saw a gap I moved forward slowly, an arm outstretched in front of me. This time I found a gate into a field. I didn't remember going through a gate the first time, but to my befuddled mind this didn't seem to matter, and when I couldn't open the gate I decided to clamber over it.

I found myself in a muddy field and set off diagonally accross it. About half way I noticed a house to my left so altered course towards it. When I looked at it over the fence I couldn't remember whether I'd seen it before or not. By this time I was feeling a little low (((How strange!))) and thought maybe I'd better just go back to the pub and cry. I was just about to go when a couple of people came out of the house and confirmed it was in fact the Wiles residence, and that the party was still in full swing. At this I vaulted over the wire-mesh fence. Well, actually, I didn't. I couldn't even climb over it at my first attempt. On my second I more or less rolled over the thing to sprawl in the driveway. I got up, went inside, poured a very large whiskey whilst someone got me a pint, and sat down to regale everyone with my experiences and gain commisseration. (Well, be laughed at, then.)

After an hour of this even sitting upright became difficult so I thought I'd better go back to the pub and bed. I reassured a few people that I could make my own way there safely. Needless to say I didn't

As I was going by the farm I fell over. As I felt myself going I put an arm out to break my fall and tucked my head down preparatory to rolling forwards. Unfortunately there was a wall nearer than I thought there was and my head slammed into it.

When I finally got to the pub and asked for a half of Guinness I got a very strange look from the barmaid. I ignored it and went up to my room. When I'd finished the drink I looked in a mirror. My jacket was smeared with mud, and my left temple had turned into a large, blood-smeared bump. I stripped to see what other damage had been done. There were scratches accross my stomach, cuts on my right leg, bruises and a large bloody gash on my left thigh. I cleaned myself up, went to bed, and passed out.

Yes, like you, I really enjoyed that wedding. But I'm not going back.

\*\*\*\*\*  
JOSEPH NICHOLAS X,  
2 Wilmot Way,  
Cemberley,  
Surrey GU15 1JA  
\*\*\*\*\*

\* Charnock's conrep was good, but oh dear, when  
\* is he going to leave John Brunner alone? I'm  
\* getting a bit bored with all this constant  
\* sniping from the shadows. Granted the man is a  
\* stuck-up snob, or has pretensions of being one,  
\* but there's fuck-all we can do about it  
beyond sending him downstream in a pair of cement boots so there's really  
no point in going on and on and bloody on about it.

((No, there's nothing we can do about it, un-bloody-fortunately. But in my pathetic little way I feel terribly smug and moralistic about the fact that we can at least by our actions and what we put in fanzines register our distaste for the man and the way he conducts himself in public. Actually I probably wouldn't detest the fellow so much if he (a) was a halfway decent writer (though I wonder if I could convince myself of such quality even though it were presented to me) or (b) did not appear to treat the whole of a convention as nothing more than human muzak and extras for his own bland-faced posturings. What's the matter with ya anyway, you been reading Keith Woodcott novels again?)))

The whole Novafeud looks as though it might soon be rendered obsolete anyway. (((And a fucking good job too.))) This year's concom show signs of overhauling it so that anyone who knows anything about fanzines can vote, which is a hell of a sight more sensible than setting up a panel of 'independent' judges. Whether it will work or not remains to be seen, but I'll welcome any move that looks like a step in the right direction. God knows it needs some sort of an overhaul, and if something isn't done this year we might as well forget about the Nova altogether. Nobody will want to know about it ever again, which will be a great pity, I think, because the basic concept is quite worthwhile, even if the execution has been lousy so far.

I got various strange frissons when reading Glicksohn's letter and your reply to it. I dunno, but...could it be that the 'effective' definition of the term 'fan' is changing under our very noses, without our noticing it? I can't help feeling that the newcomers to fandom are simply being indoctrinated with a concept that they themselves subconsciously expected, which results in their leaning very heavily on SF for their fanac. And the result of this is their becoming Grand Old Men of the Establishment, handing down the Sercon Gospel from on high, their original misconceptions having been translated into a spurious kind of fact simply by their own efforts. In other words, if there are enough neos arriving in fandom at any one time then they will come to dominate fandom in the course of time. It sounds rather paranoid, it's true, but it's happening. SF has (perhaps suddenly, perhaps not) become one of the most available populists literatures extant today, with the academics on one side proclaiming its predictive and humanistic qualities, and the weenies on the other dressing in Spock costumes and nailing pointed ears to the sides of their heads. And lurching around somewhere between those extremes are the potential neos, a much larger bunch than, say, ten or fifteen years ago. And these people don't simply have the potential to become neos, they also have the potential to become a separate fandom on their own.

So why don't they? I dunno - but could it be that we're too tolerant of them? I don't want to sound exclusive, but if we're going to start worrying about "our" fandom being taken over by a horde of sercon freaks then we ought to start doing something to avoid it. And it could also be that there aren't enough sercon oriented-neos



around at the moment to survive on their own. For the meantime they have to sponge off us - which sounds like a hell of a thing to say, but I really can't think of any other way to put it. If we ejected the Trekkies and Dr Who freaks from the Eastercon we'd probably cut the attendance by at least a hundred. (Never mind giving us more room to move in the One Tun every month...)

((Looks like you and me and that man West are sharing some basic notions. Seems quite clear to me though that with the new-found expansion and increased efficiency of the BSFA there is less and less pressure on the average new member to quit the dire scene and move on to 'real' fandom (as we know it) where there is at least something going on. Things aren't what they used to be even as few as three years ago, when there was virtually fuck-nothing in the BSFA to hold people's attention. Now of course it's all go, and there's a strong and vital BSFA fandom doing its own number (mainly SF-oriented because they haven't had much exposure to anything other than hardcore scifi fandom because they haven't needed to get next to it) quite independently of us. This ain't necessarily a bad thing until they start squeaking and groaning about how isolationist and exclusive 'real' fandom is, and how hard it is to get into. Pure delusion, of course, but that is very likely the way they want to see things; though it does aggravate me the way these 'open-minded, non-conformist individuals' who blithely accept the deranged notions of science fiction balk sulkily at the slang, traditions, and attitudes of what is just another specialist interest. Personally I'd only be too glad to see off the Trekkies and others; there's quite enough of them to set up their own cons and meetings and I don't see why they've got to clog up our surroundings. Most of them don't appear to have a brain in their collective heads anyway.)))

\*\*\*\*\*

TOM PERRY,  
25 Locks Road,  
Locks Heath,  
Hampshire SO3 6NS  
\* \* \* \* \*

\* I hope it was the imminence of moving day and  
\* nothing more permanent that put Greg in the dark  
\* mood that produced all this mulling about the  
\* deep inner mysteries of fanzine reviewing. BURNING  
\* HELL used to be my favourite part of SBD. You  
\* know, when he just blasted away instead of worrying

about 'progression and improvement amongst faneds' for chrissake. And what's this? - 'I myself, personally believe that good writing on fanzines is the highest art in all fanzine writing and I aspire to some sort of pinnacle within the field myself.' Ah, come on Greg - this is a parody of something or other isn't it? That may be all right for some highbrow critic like Malcolm Edwards, but not for old sock-em-in-the-gut Greg!

(( I read back over that extract I've just typed and wonder why in hell I included it; it certainly doesn't do me any good, doesn't even say much for Tom Perry. Only man who gets out of it clean is Edwards. Jesus. Well, Terry Hughes likes Tom Perry so I guess he must be okay.)))

MIKE GLICKSOHN, ,  
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Toronto, Ontario M6P 2S3,  
Canada.

\* \* \* \* \*

\* Rob Holdstock's article reminded  
\* me of ADIOS, SCHEHERAZADE, a novel  
\* by Donald E. Westlake. It's all  
\* about a porno writer who dreams of  
\* being a Serious Artist and getting  
\* away from fifteen-page sections with

at least one sex scene. Naturally it's written in fifteen-page sections, and bears considerable resemblance to Rob's article though the writer's personal life is far more unsatisfactory and downbeat than Rob's.

Rob's contribution to the genre of "Agonizing Would-Be Writer And His Day To Day Life" is witty, clever, and should resonate with anyone who's ever tried to write, even if only for the fan press. In the Westlake book the writer has a sex novel due in just a few days yet he writes a personal diary, constantly referring to how far he's getting behind and how many pages he'll have to do the next day to keep his deadline. I think Rob would truly empathize!

When I met Graham Charnock I didn't think of him as either a paranoid or a Depressive-Depressive so I tend to react to his recent fanwriting as if it were essentially a pose, another of those quirky English writing styles that are hard to understand for us overseas types. Does he really believe Americans can't talk interestingly or listen attentively, and is the 'evidence' he presents in re Greg Benford meant to support or refute that suggestion? Or is Graham just playing woth words? Looked at as essentially satirical his conrep is delightful. His talent with words is obvious; the eleven lines on the movies at Novacon are nothing short of brilliant! I have to rate this as one of the best conreports I've read for some time. It's better than Malcolm's in SBD 3 because it manages to combine the reporting aspects with the creative aspects of good fanwriting. This chap can write, Greg; why not encourage him to start a fanzine?

Greg's reflections on the rationale behind, and significance of, fanzine reviews sums up just about all the main truths concerning this area of fannish endeavour. I think he somewhat overlooks the need for a sort of buyers guide for newcomers (which is what I write for TITLE, and the sort of thing that used to appear in LOCUS and KARASS and still does in lots of fanzines), but in as far as serious fanzine commentary is concerned Greg has said just about everything that can be said. And I'm delighted that having thought out the why of bothering with it so incisively, he still indulges his need for reviewing fanzines, much to the enjoyment of the rest of us who care about them!

It's impossible for a serious reviewer to really know whether what he's doing has any lasting effect on the field he cares so much about. But I'd like to think that it does. It may not be as obvious as a faned turning around his whole publishing philosophy to conform with critical remarks, but the mere fact that a reviewer may take time and care to write precise and reasoned reviews must influence the people who read them, whether there's any immediate evidence of it or not. It's the old ripples-in-a-pond effect; reading (say) Greg's obviously sincere thoughts on fanzines has to have an

effect on a faneditor, subconsciously as well as consciously. So their future efforts will reflect Greg's exhortation to do one's best to present an interesting and involving fanzine, even if they don't recognise the source of that influence! At least, that's the way I like to think things might happen.....

However I must disagree with a couple of things Greg says about specific fanzines! Although I've done it myself, I don't think a reviewer can honestly review a fanzine from his expectations of it, rather than from the aspirations of the editor. So while Greg may be right in expressing a belief that TRUE RAT was better as a personalzine he's wrong in suggesting Leroy shouldn't have bothered with a genzine format. Only Leroy can decide what direction he wants his fanzine to go in. However Greg's criticisms of what Leroy was trying to do are valid since they react to TRUE RAT in terms of what it wants to be, not what Greg wants it to be.

The other thing I must totally disagree with Greg on is that he implies I think TRIODE is fannish fandom incarnate. MOTA is fannish fandom incarnate. And SBD. And SHREW. But TRIODE is just possibly nostalgic fannish fandom incarnate! I appreciate what Eric is doing by lovingly re-creating a bygone era in fannish fandom. The literary and artistic styles represented in the reincarnated TRIODE are things worth remembering. They appeal to the spirit of time-binding that flows strongly in the veins of all us trufen. I'm well aware that TRIODE isn't all that relevant to what's happening in today's fandom, but I don't care. If Willis wanted to re-create HYPHEN just as it used to be it wouldn't relate to today's fandom either, but I'd be wildly enthusiastic about it just the same. Wouldn't you?

((((I'm not so sure I would be. Four or five years ago, yes no doubt, but not now, not when there's a super-strong body of British fanwriters active today. I often wonder whether the notion of Willis as a fanwriting god isn't rendered slightly false because of the general low quality of fanwriting during the period of his disappearance and the resurgence of quality fanwriting of today. Don't get me wrong, I read my HYPHENS with intense pleasure still, but perhaps all things considered they should be left as part of history; remembered, indeed, and the traditions laid down built upon and essentially preserved, but reviving the whole thing seems (sometimes) very much like raising a ghost from some dimly-remembered, no longer understood old civilization. I wonder, too, whether Willis and his people would seem so remarkable if they were jostling for fanzine space with such as Charnock, Kettle, Holdstock, Bridges, Roberts, et al? Or am I having 'wrong thoughts'??))

Ritchie Smith is perfectly correct in observing that con fandom isn't a 'cosy intimate world'; anyone who's been to a con and isn't deaf, blind and stupid will have recognized that already. What it often is though, is a whole series of small 'cosy intimate worlds'; many of which never overlap or intersect with any of the others! This is especially true in North America, where a 1000-person con is actually thirty or more smaller gatherings of compatible people enjoying each others' company within the larger context of the whole con itself.

Certainly many people belong to a variety of different sub-groups and drift from one 'mini-con' to another, but some people stick with the same small group of friends and are literally never seen by the rest of the convention. This splintering into subgroups does tend to give the impression that fandom doesn't welcome strangers and doesn't even like itself all that much, but I think it's a natural consequence of human nature and most people's inability to relate seriously to more than a few people at a time. Brian Tawn's reaction would indicate that Malcolm made the negative aspects of this fractionating clear without stressing the positive benefits that accrue from the friendship and interchange that happens within one's smaller peer-group. As a veteran of perhaps a hundred conventions I'm familiar with both aspects and in all honesty I prefer it the way it is, even if it is a little harder on the neofan at his first con. Fandom isn't a big happy family, but it can be a happy family if you practice a little selectivity!

I don't agree with Piggott that awards within fandom are a 'mockery'. Inconsequential to the larger scheme of things, perhaps, but why a 'mockery'? Does something have to have Eternal Cosmic Significance before it can be treated seriously? Compared to the activities of Idi Amin what Rob Jackson does with MAYA isn't going to affect the world much, but considering the money, time and effort he puts in (or that Greg puts into SBD, or Harry Bell into his artwork etc etc) I'm not sure 'trivial' is an apt description. It has too many negative connotations. Fanac is not Important, but I happen to think it can be significant, and I don't equate 'ephemeral' (which fanac is) with 'trivial' (which it isn't).

I think the comments about the changing nature of British conventions reflect that you're going through the growing pains we've experienced here in the last decade. Fandom simply isn't a closed group of like-minded friends anymore. It's been discovered by the general public, just as SF has. Trying to hold onto the old-style cons where everyone knew everyone and all shared the same traditions and history is both foolish and unrealistic. As SF becomes more popular so cons have to grow and inevitably the fannish fans will dwindle both in percentage of attendees and influence. British fandom is doing exactly what North American fandom had to do; the fannish fans are setting up their own cons, to preserve the atmosphere of friendly socializing that one used to associate with all cons. This doesn't mean abandoning the Eastercon, of course. As Greg points out, only the Eastercon has the pull to attract all the people you'd like at least to say "Hi!" to. In the same way I still go to the Worldcon, even though every year I complain that it's too large, crowded, frantic and debilitating. But only at Worldcons can I see people I want to meet from all over North America! So I go, to see old acquaintances for five seconds as elevator dorrs close between us, and wonder, in moments of rare lucidity, what I'm doing participating in a three-ring circus. But I also go to small fannish regionals to sit in the enjoyable company of friends old and new. I suspect the same situation is generating itself in Britain nowadays.

((((Quite, right on bro'. Exactly. Personally I look forward with cold dread to the time when a non-fan SF Group not only bids for, but actually wins an Eastercon. It's bound to happen, and I only hope I'm going to be wrong, but it sounds like something no fan is meant to know about.)))

KEEP ON PUSHING

+++++

we also heard from

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DAVID V. LEWIS: I met Harry Bell briefly at the Novacon - in the bog actually. The Great Man had trouble with his flies.

RICH COAD: Although I've given up fandom in favour of women and a life of decadence I am sad to learn that Joseph Nicholas X's brain is in poor shape. Why, it seems only yesterday he was writing me four-page LoCs on the true meaning of TRITON. I am coming back to Britain real soon now.

BRIAN TAWN : Perhaps it's because I don't know you folks and that each issue is adding a few details I enjoy each one more than the last. Perhaps I'm getting more out of them now because I'm getting more of a glimmer as to what it's all about.

MARTIN EASTERBROOK : I certainly agree with your review of CITY, tho' I'm glad you passed up the chance to talk about it "seeing the world through Rowe's-colored glasses". Trouble is I've heard various reports of the last STAR TREK con and in fact several people got drunk, some were felt up, and a surprising number felt shitty. I've spoken to a few ST fans about their preference for editing over reality and it seems that's where the culture gap lies. No way would Simone's excellent 'After The Wedding' piece have made it into a ST fanzine, yet there was more contact and involvement at least as far as this reader is concerned since Greg's experience was only too familiar - from only one occasion, but the memory sticks, as did most things, I recall.

ERIC BENTCLIFFE : I sincerely doubt that Ina Shorrocks or any of the Liverpool Group were responsible for her getting the Doc Weir Award at the Mancon. I haven't as of this moment the slightest idea of just how the Doc Weir is given, but I'm quite sure Ina did not put herself forward for it; and LiG are too inactive and too few in number anyway to effect such a fait accompli. Blame the 'Committee' (does one exist?), not the recipient.

DAVID WINGROVE : I agree with Darroll Pardoe that the Doc Weir Award should not have been pushed through the BSFA (I didn't realise that it had!) but take exception to his assertion that we are a 'pathetic wreck of an organization'. I agree with Greg's statement that the BSFA does not help fandom enough. This is mainly a case of past failings breeding present apathy. I don't blame fannish fandom for its attitude of "They don't give a fuck" but would like to help work towards a resolution of the problem; something constructive for a change....

ROB JACKSON (Editor of MAYA; A magazine of wide-ranging interest for science fiction fans.) : It's about time there was some real rock writing in fanzines. We read quite enough about strange whooshing and

squawking noises in fanzines such as SCRIBE and SPI, under the guise of criticism of science-fiction rock; and though there is real enjoyment to be had from such as Jefferson Starship, and the Pink Floyd in their less airy-fairy moments, I find the division into sf rock and the rest of rock even more artificial and ludicrous than the division between sf and the rest of literature. It's all rock and the subject matter makes very little difference; the words often do very little more than provide an emotional colouring for the rhythm, chord structure, arrangement etc. (I'm talking about the reaction to music at the gut-level and below here; I don't suppose you want people waxing intellectual about dialectical materialism as source-material for the works of Television in SBD.)

P.S. Want to take over MAYA, Greg?

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AND : TERRY HUGHES : RICHARD HAKES : ROB HANSEN : PAUL KINCAID :  
JOHN N. HALL : and JULIA STONE. Thank you, all.

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MOANING AT MIDNIGHT / Think I'm Going Back (Continued).

there wasn't even much worth buying. Good things can't last. I bought a few things; a copy of the passably rare Philip Dick collection A HANDFUL OF DARKNESS which I gave to Malcolm Edwards as a bribe for something I've long since forgotten so it can't have worked; a copy of NEW WORLDS 72 which I later discovered I'd already got, SCIENCE FANTASY 22 which I did not have and was a true find, and the latest issue of FANTASTIC which I got more for old times sake than anything else as it was as dull an issue as usual these days. No sets of WIERD TALES, not even a decent clutch of Ziff-Davis AMAZINGS. Even the porn section wasn't worth more than a quarter of an hours casual glance.

Still, it was nice, good memories are hard to find.

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LOOKING FOR A LOVE

Remote as the possibility seems some people may take note of my recommendations in BURNING HELL as regards good fanzines; here are the addresses:

DAVID BRIDGES; 51 Crawshaw Grove, Sheffield, South Yorks. S8 7EA  
DAVE LANGFORD; 22 Northumberland Avenue, Reading, Berks RG2 7PW  
ROB HANSEN; 51 Bryn-y-Nant, Llanedeyrn, Cardiff CF3 7PA  
DAVE TAYLOR (NEBULA); 15 Alwyn Gardens, Upton by Chester, Cheshire  
RICH COAD; 1645 Filbert Street (Apt 302), San Francisco, CA 94123, USA

Do try them, please.

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Greg Pickersgill

E N D L E S S B O O G I E

all facts true,  
except the lies.

WILL HE WON'T HE? Worldcon '79 Supremo and King of the Compost Heap Peter Weston strongly rumoured to be actually going to the Miami Worldcon this year. This essentially unlikely story follows hard reportage that all sorts of problems were to prevent Mr Weston doing his duty for British Fandom. Weston is, as all must know, editor of ANDROMEDA 2, the least enthusiastically recieved follow-up original anthology published so far this year.....IT AIN'T ME BABE Master Kevin Easthope (13 $\frac{1}{2}$ ) wishes it known that he does now, and always has, lived at home with his parents. He has not and does not live anywhere near Ms Jean Margaret Frost Staves. They are just good friends. This is very important to Mr Easthope.....DIM LIGHT; BUSHEL WANTED Okay, which fairly well-known fanzine editor and Worldcon secretary and fanzine reviewer doesn't like fanzines, can't be bothered to read them, and thinks the whole thing tedious beyond belief? Clue: not Jim Linwood.....CHANGE PARTNERS Neatness freaks pleased to hear that Malcolm Edwards' new woman also called Christine. Edwards believed to have avoided several embarrassing mistakes due to this tactful choice.....EH? WOT? A reliable source (a reformed STAR TREK fan) notes that ST fans somewhat miffed at the 'superior' attitude of straight sf fans. However they intend to persevere; "If we keep on trying," they say, "we'll convert them in the end. They don't know what they're missing." Oh yeah?.....IT DOESN'T MATTER Despite the fact only two or three of the British Worldcon concom are going to the Us this August Britain looks like a dead cert for the '79 affirmation. Especially since it was found that the leader of the rival Noo Orlins bid lost \$5000 on a STAR TREK con a few years ago. Actually STOP BREAKING DOWN couldn't care less whether we win or not, and here states an official policy of Active Disinterest.....LEAVING TRUNK Well it may be only a rumour that the next (and last) WRINKLED SHREW will be produced from peaceful Yorkshire retreat Hebden Bridge. More likely there won't be another SHREW at all.....AIN'T THAT PECULIAR Not to be outdone by Holdstock hand-correcting a typo in his article last issue Overseas Editor and CHECKPOINT Fan Poll non-winner Simone Walsh painstakingly scribbled in a correction in her column this issue. Next issue Gregory Pickersgill will personally place one of his very own bogies on the most inane letter printed.....HIGH LIFE, HIGH LIFE; well now we all know what non-drinker David Griffin has been preserving his vital bodily functions for; a source has revealed Mr Griffin to have pulled himself a bird. Of what description we know not.....CLOMPER RISES, CLOMPER FALLS; anyone with a big 'C' next to their name on the envelope better do something substantial quick or this is The End.....AND IF YOU DO Get our fucking address right! A lot of mail is still going to places we haven't lived in for six months or more. The Lawrence Road address is now permanent.....HALF A LOAF?; attendees of the upcoming Silicon (at which we at SBD hope to meet our greatest fans) will be pleased to note that Malcolm Edwards will be in attendance as second best after the Miami Worldcon.....Byeeeeeeeeeeee

