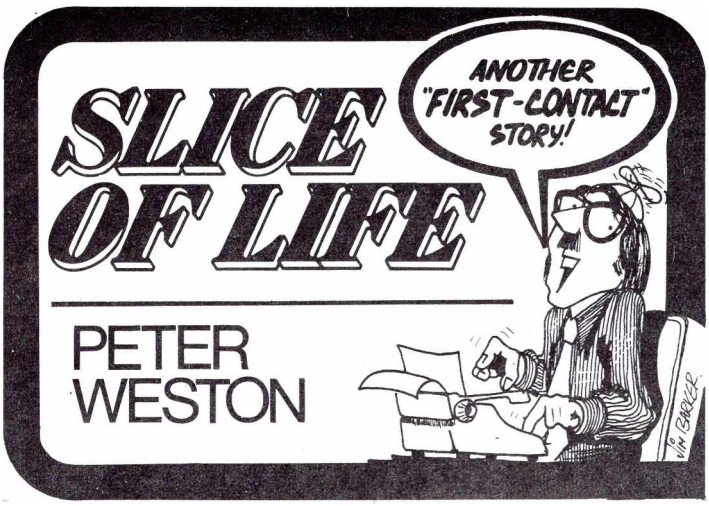
MAYA 11



What would it be like, I wondered, to talk to other people about science fiction?

I was cold. It was a wet Tuesday evening in January and I'd been travelling for over an hour on draughty Corporation buses from Northfield right across to the other side of the city. Now I walked down Hunters Road in a mood of slight apprehension. Two weeks ago I'd found a little slip of pink paper in an old paperback at the Birmingham Rag Market: "Are you interested in SF?" it asked. "Join the Erdington Science Fiction Circle."

After six years of solitary reading it was the first indication that others like me existed. And I needed something like this. Since moving out to the council estate I'd lost my old pals; and at 19 you don't easily make new friendships, particularly when you're a shy introvert who'd rather spend Saturday afternoons hunting for old Galaxy and Astounding magazines than going to football matches. I knew too that I'd gone about as far as I could on my own. Six years hanging around the market twice per week and I'd nearly given up hope of finding Galaxy numbers 5, 6, 7, 36, and 52, issues I desperately needed to complete my index of authors and story-titles.*

The houses were tall, redbrick Victorian, set back from the road behind protective privet and overgrown front gardens. In the dark I stumbled up several paths until I found the right number. My finger hovered for a moment before I pushed the bell-button; this was the turning-point.

The door opened to reveal a shadowy figure. "I'm Cliff Teague. Quick, come in before the landlady catches us!"

I followed him inside.

A dismal hall. Cold floor-tiles in intricate little diamond patterns of red, buff and ochre that had been all the rage seventy years earlier. Smells of clothes washing and cabbage cooking.

"In here," said my host furtively.

I went into his room.

Books! More books than I'd ever seen in my life outside the public libraries. Shelves of them, all along one long wall, round the corner and up and over the fireplace, down the other side. And all science fiction!

My hold on reality blurred for a moment. Cliff said something to me and no doubt I said something to him. But my fingers itched to get at all those books. Vaguely I noticed we were in a large, bare room which contained two unmade beds, some dirty crockery and a few sticks of broken-down furniture. And two other people.

"This is Rog," said Cliff. "And this is Dave Casey."

Roger was fair-haired, stocky, and in his business suit seemed aggressive and several years older than me. Dave looked younger: big and lolloping in a thick sweater. I noticed he had a huge blackhead on the end of his nose and I wondered why he didn't squeeze it.

"What do you think of the Foundation series?" said Rog. "What have you got to swap? I'll trade two paperback books for your SFBC hardcovers. Here's my want-list. Now..."

So those little blue-and-red ones were Ace Doubles! I marvelled; for years I'd read about them in Schuyler Miller's column but had never seen them before. Cliff had things I'd never even heard of. So many magazines! Not just the cherished Galaxy and Astounding (with a start I realised he had those missing five issues) but others, with names like Startling, Super Science, and lots more. Paperbacks, too. Hundreds of them. And hardcovers. Where had he got them all from?

Cliff was talking to me again.

"Oh yes," he said proudly. "I want to get four copies of everything. The American paperback and hardcover, and the British PB and hardback. The covers are all different."

Strange chap. I didn't give a damn about the covers. I wanted to read the things.

I looked at him more closely.

Cliff was lean and thin and seemed to be dressed in old clothes. His face was pinched and pale with a dusting of freckles around the bridge of his nose and upper cheekbones. A mop of untidy, curly hair and deep brown eyes which seemed to shine with excitement when he talked about His Collection.

He and Roger had formed the circle about two years earlier, in 1961, and had managed to contact about a dozen others of varying degrees of interest. Every Tuesday they met in Cliff's room, occasions enlivened by an unpredictable landlady forever likely to rage and rant about "strangers in her house", or by the International Socialist who shared the room and who would sometimes come in and lie on his bed or cook a rough supper of beans and dripping.

Dimly I realised this wasn't exactly what I'd expected.

"Care for a game of chess?" said Dave shyly, taking a miniature set out of his pocket.

But I'd spotted a copy of Damon Knight's In Search Of Wonder on the mantelpiece and was reverently turning its pages.

A Whole Book About Science Fiction! I started to read the chapter on James Blish, "The Jagged Blade". I'd found what I was looking for. I'd been deprived too long.

Of course that was a long time ago. Few of the Erdington Circle remain active; Rog Peyton, of course, and Darroll Pardoe although he has long since left the area. Dave Casey, last time we heard, had really cracked up and become a real-life recluse, afraid to leave his room. As for Cliff himself, he's still around, selling comics to kids from a stall in the market. But he wants no part of SF fandom these days.

That first encounter is still etched deep in my memory. Strangely though, the following two years have dissolved into a timeless jumble. It was a happy existence for a while, though in many ways an odd and unnatural one. Cliff was thrown out of his lodgings within a few months but fortunately Charlie Winstone had joined the group so we moved a half-mile down the hill and began to meet in his front room, which was even stranger in some ways.

Charlie was much older than the rest of us and was -- is -- a hunchbacked dwarf. At first I had some trouble adjusting to this but soon we didn't give it a thought. What a welcome tonic this must have provided to Charlie's poor, bruised ego! He lived with his widowed mother in a gloomy Victorian villa, perched high up above George Road. I remember how, should we want to use the toilet, we had to get a torch, stumble down the twenty or so treacherous steps, out of the gate and along and under the house through a dank, cobwebbed entry that was really Lovecraftian. At the back of the house we'd climb back up stone steps and

* Footnote: I didn't discover until years later that while I was rummaging through the stalls on Easter Saturday, 1959, an SF Convention was taking place around the corner in the old Imperial Hotel. Great lost opportunities, or something!

gingerly edge past an enormous mad dog, leaping and snarling, which they kept chained in the yard. Usually we tried to hold our liquid.

The front room itself was jammed with a broken-down sofa and armchairs to match, together with a respectable collection of books. Not as many as Cliff had, of course — nobody had as much as Cliff — but many thousands of volumes nonetheless.

We developed a routine. We'd crowd into the parlour and after displaying our latest acquisitions would commence our regular game. Usually we played Risk but sometimes there were variants; Charlie had almost every board game you could imagine. Sixpence in "dues"; and a collection to pay for the little cakes and tea which his mother brought around.

Life was good. We got up to as many as three meetings per week. We started to visit Rog's house, a much more respectable semi in a "good" area. When Cliff's mother was let out of the mental institution she was given a reconditioned slum house by the authorities, at the back of Winson Green Prison. Cliff moved in with her, and on Sunday afternoons we used to meet there for our traditional fare of pineapple and melted ice-cream.

What's that? "Institution"? Well, yes. You see Cliff hadn't had much of a life. His mother was — to be brutal — simple-minded. He'd never had a father. He'd spent his childhood in a variety of homes, uncared-for, getting only a rudimentary education. He had nothing in the world. Nothing at all except for his books. Did it matter that he hadn't read more than a few of them?

I said I'd been deprived (of science fiction). Meeting Cliff was my first close-hand experience of someone who'd been really deprived. Of a home, a family, everything we take for granted. Oh, I'd lived in slum areas most of my life, but infinitely better-off than poor old Cliff. He was a classic case of anomie, to use psychological jargon. A stranger in his own land. And what about Charlie, physically forever apart? What dark shadow hovered over Dave Casey that later made him withdraw so totally from reality? What was wrong with Rog and I?

Although at least Rog and I were co-existing with life. Rog was a trainee at a firm of quantity surveyors. I'd just left school and was doing industrial chemistry, and discovering I hated it. Dave and Charlie had office jobs somewhere. Not Cliff!

Roger Zelazny need write about his protagonist living outside the web of the "system". Cliff had completely opted out. He didn't work, pay tax, or National Insurance. That meant he couldn't draw benefits — but that didn't seem to worry him. He had the most amazing talent for getting by, and he could smell SF at a half-mile radius. He used to patrol every junkshop in the city, and found some incredible bargains; U.S. hardcover books, a Scribner's Heinlein juvenile (at a time when they were completely unavailable in the U.K.).

He would buy books and sell books, scrounge what else he needed — Roger's mother gave him Rog's cast-off clothes — and always somehow manage to get by. He never borrowed money from us; but every week had bought a few dozen more books. He told incredible stories about rummaging in London dustbins, finding a sack of rotten potatoes in a vegetable market and frying them up for hippies. I suspect we never heard more than a fraction of what he did do.

Look, here's one example. One weekend Cliff thought he'd drop in on one of Ella Parker's meetings in London. This was right at the end of the period when she held dominance over the SF Club of London. Somehow he'd found her address in a magazine — but it was out of date.

He hitched down and found only an empty, derelict property. Ella had been rehoused in a tower block of flats. Undeterred, he broke in. Inside he found several fanzines which had arrived after Ella's departure; they were Inside (Jon White), and New Frontiers (Norm Metcalfe). Both were half-size sercon zines which, when he gave them to me back in Birmingham were to have a tremendous influence on my own fanac and were prime factors shaping my early Zenith. I promptly subscribed to both — 10/- to each (a lot of money in those days), but never heard another word from either. Ah well, that's the risk you take. Small price to pay to enter fandom.

Cliff admired the wall of a room which, so he told us, had been inscribed with signatures of visiting fans. Then he pre-prepared to sleep rough in an upstairs bedroom.

In the small hours he heard heavy footsteps coming up the stairs. Panic-stricken, he hid behind a door as a tramp came into the room. Cliff darted out and away. He wandered around Kilburn and spent the night in a public lavatory where he washed his aching feet in a hand-basin. Early next morning he slipped into a cafeteria and went around eating the left-over toast from the tables of people who'd finished their breakfast.

Ugh! Did someone say "The Second Coming of Degler"?

Yet Cliff was a lot of fun. I remember one Sunday we called and found him looking dazed, his room in a shambles. The house was so small that the room wasn't big enough to hold all his books. He'd put up shelves around the walls, had even taken down his bed and rolled up the mattress, only letting it down at night on a heap of books. Early that morning, it seemed, his shelves had collapsed while he was still asleep. What a way to go, buried alive in science fiction!

Good old Cliff was courageous in his way, generous with his friends, and not bitter and soured as you might have expected. It it hadn't been for his little pink slip I might never have found the local group; if it hadn't been for his enterprise we might never have learned of the bigger world of fandom outside our little circle.

For the group contained the seeds of its own destruction. Shortly after I joined, Cliff announced details of a "convention", to be held in Peterborough. It all sounded very far-away and forbidding and we took no notice, except for Cliff himself who hitch-hiked there, freeloaded for the weekend and came back with a rucksack of books — including an autographed copy of Stormbringer from Mike Moorcock.

Not long afterwards the wheels must have started to turn in my mind. I'd read a grand total of three fanzines — the two from London, and a copy of Ken Cheslin's Les Spinge.

Ken was our local BNF. He lived with relatives at Stourbridge, about 12 miles out, and had contacts all over the place. He had lots of books — not as many as Cliff, of course, but he'd been more selective — but he also had piles of fanzines and published Spinge, on one occasion passing out copies to us.

Quite honestly it made little impression in itself. It was too thoroughly alien, with green paper, erratic lines of type and weird, in-group humour. Now, I suspect Ken's peculiar blend of chatter and insane layout would have bewildered a far more experienced fan than I was. But it did make me realise that quite ordinary-looking people could aspire to bring out a magazine, while Inside and New Frontiers gave me a target to aim for. They, and Damon Knight's In Search of Wonder (which I re-read over and over and eventually begged from Cliff when he was going to commit suicide. But that's another story).

Through the summer I planned my first issue, nagging at the others and getting them to provide material. Charlie Winstone wrote poems, Rog did a checklist of Digit Books, and I wrote a rave review of Jack Vance's Big Planet. Cliff, of course, did nothing. The written word wasn't his scene. By turning the ingrown little Erdington Circle towards fanzines I cut loose from his apron strings, launched us into the infinitely bigger world of fandom, and destroyed his hegemony.

My first issue appeared in October 1963. It was half-sized, spirit-duplicated in purple ink and ran to 25 copies. That same week another neofan called Charles Platt produced his first issue — by a weird coincidence also half-sized and equally purple. Henceforth our names were to be uneasily linked.

Pete Weston, April '76.

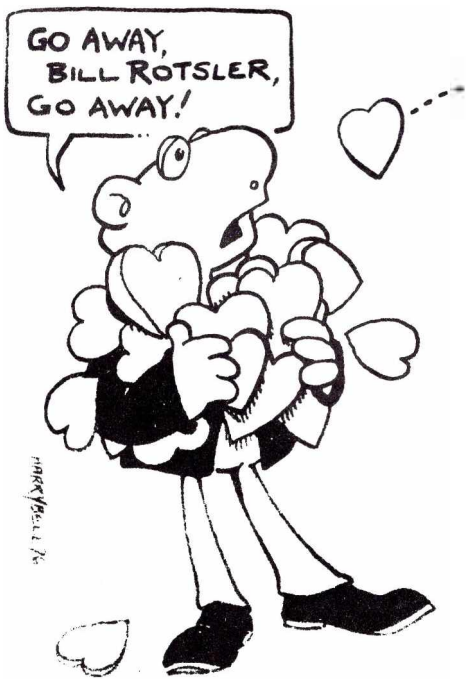
Walt Willis

THE REVENANT

People kept asking me, with tactful assurances that the question implied no dismay, how did I happen to be at Mancon 5 after 11 years' absence from such scenes. The only answer I could give was that two other people were to blame: James White, who had, after every convention I missed, made me feel like a bowman who had overslept for Agincourt: and Chris Priest, whose Inverted World told my wrinkled nose that the true spirit of science fiction was again being distilled.

However as I arrived at Manchester I was still fervently wishing I had stayed at home, playing golf and painting the house. (I have this very long-shafted driver with a hairy head.) It was obvious I would know nobody there, for the few I remembered I would not recognise: I would have nothing to talk about and nobody would want to talk to me: I would seem staid and feel bored, and spend the whole wet Manchester weekend brewing coffee in my lonely room and contemplating the folly of trying to bathe twice in the same ship canal.

Well, it wasn't like that. Within minutes of our touching down at Manchester the Convention reached out for me with friendly warmth, in the form of a message that Dave Kyle was coming to meet us. The name and then the familiar face unlocked, like Terry Carr's skate-key, year after year of half-forgotten happy memories, beginning with the picture of Dave with his head caught in the baggage rack in Lee Hoffman's room at Chicon II in 1952. It was exactly the same face now, except of course for the baggage rack, and from that point I never looked back. At Owens Park the process of absorption continued and accelerated. My mundane life, all-important a few minutes ago, receded into insignificance. I was a fan again.



One perpetual question was, what sort of a fan? To one person I was just an old friend. To the next, some sort of unknown celebrity. To most, just another new face, another neofan. But the abrupt role-switching required was itself stimulatingly evocative, involving the recapitulation in minutes of the 20 years of my previous incarnation. I was all three, alternatively and at once, and each with equal pleasure. I enjoyed meeting old friends and finding we recognised each other at once, and just carried on where we left off. I enjoyed listening to incredible stories about de luxe editions of The Enchanted Duplicator and the prices old Hyphens fetched. And I enjoyed, with a more subtle and partly vicarious delight, tagging respectfully behind James White and Bob Shaw as they held court and made speeches, and generally bore the load that had oppressed me for so long. I tell you, friends, it's soft at the bottom.

In fact the only flaw was the realisation that I had left behind a small but vital baggage called Madeleine. She was missed.

Apart from that everything was just right, instantly and comfortingly familiar, even down to the traditional complaints about the programme and the accommodation. Both seemed to me reassuringly normal.

The programme for instance was in every respect, foreseen and otherwise, exactly the sort of thing I was accustomed to. There were of course a few developments, as was only to be expected. The print of Metropolis had apparently finally worn out completely, to be replaced by a variety of highly coloured modern plastic substitutes. And in my day professionals did not dare to read extracts from their works instead of making a speech, not even John Russell Fearn. I assured Harry Turner that the title of Silverberg's turn was just one of Bob's gags, and told the author himself that I was looking forward to his readings from selected editorials of Spaceship. But lo, Bob actually did hold the audience transfixed with readings from his own pro works, just like Charles Dickens used to wow the Victorians. (You understand I don't actually remember that.) All except me, that is. I cannot bear to be read to, finding it rather like walking with one's shoelaces tied together, and left the hall as inconspicuously as possible while Bob was pausing for breath.

As for the accommodation, it was quite adequate for us simple Irish peasant folk, and there was the additional and unparalleled luxury of having one's own coffee-making arrangements to hand. The fact that everything was actually there as promised impressed me with its awesome efficiency. Had fandom changed that much? However the presence of unmistakeable crottled greeps in the dining hall fare reassured me, as did the traditional complaint from an American about the lack of showers. (It seems they have finally given up asking for iced water.) The fondness of Americans for washing in running water is one of the characteristics they share with the Russians (though the absence of washbasin plugs in Russia was invariably ascribed to technological ineptitude), and one which I acquired myself in 1952. However I ran down a shower in my own building, using my patent Howard finder, and thereafter had no complaint to make about the residential accommodation.

It did seem to me however that the concourse was too

small and there were too few seats. If I stand for a long time in one place it sometimes happens that I fall down unconscious, causing consternation in the vicinity and interrupting in most cases the conversational flow of the person I was talking to, and it is one of the few characteristics I have in common with Guardsmen. Several times I had to leave interesting groups to find a seat, hoping someone would follow me.

It also seemed to me that the rooms were too small for the sort of room party which most people like, and that they led accordingly either to the formation of a Black Hole or to an uncontrollable expansion of the space-time continuum. It's interesting how the nature of a convention is determined by the physical configuration of the environment, as the layout of housing developments affect community spirit and vandalism, and the way things are nowadays it's only a matter of time before some lucky post-graduate gets a research grant to study the phenomenon.

As for the fans themselves, it was clear that they were more prosperous nowadays. It also seemed to me that in general they were more literate, more congenial, more courteous and more homogeneous. I noticed no signs of the old polarisations of North/South or fan/pro or any of the other cleavages which used to be so noticeable. It also seemed to me that there was more contact with US fandom, which was something I had always tried to bring about, and I was delighted to see TAFF still going strong. I was pleased to see that they had got such a fine delegate as Roy Tackett and thought how strange it was that I had never met him before.

It was even stranger and more poignant that I had to go to Manchester to meet for the first time two young Belfast fans from opposite sides of the barricades.

Finally, I was struck by the fact that Convention bidding had become so polished and sophisticated, like a Presidential nomination convention, and more so than I had seen in America itself. I wondered if, once again, British fandom had unwittingly outstripped the Americans. This happened once before, the first time British fandom ran a convention in a hotel, with room parties and everything. On that occasion British fandom tried to imitate American fandom, but what they imitated was a convention as idealised in fanzine convention reports, with the result that they had a convention better than anything ever seen in America.

To sum up, it was like being home again. I met a lot of old friends, I made what I hope will be new ones, and I'm glad I came. Thank you, James and Chris.

Walt Willis, April '76.

((Thank you, Walt. People were at least as pleased to see you back in contact with fans as you apparently were to be back.

((Of course, the Americans (especially the Worldcons, which aren't always American, naturally) are still light years ahead of us. The amount of time and effort a hopeful Worldcon committee needs to exert to persuade the voters to one's side is colossal — leaflets, adverts, parties, free booze, booster clubs (presupporting memberships) — all for up to five years before the bid is voted for. But we're catching up over here, Walt — remember...

((Vote for Britain in '79 at Suncon in '77!

((As for Mancon itself, I remember you saying that you found it an improvement overall over the cons of the Fifties. Well, Walt: we must have come on tremendously during the Sixties, because I found Ompacon and Seacon (not to mention the Novacons and Tynecon) (I wasn't mentioning Tynecon, I wasn't, honest!) better situated and organised than Mancon. Take the Progress Reports, with so little information that one of them was even lacking a mailing address. People were largely in the dark about the con till they arrived. We didn't know what the area surrounding the campus was like; we got a map where a motorway which actually runs westward is drawn as heading northeasterly... and rare indeed is the con where the best food on sale inside the con building is Brian Burgess meat pies.

((Before Bob Shaw continues the Mancon 5 theme with the speech he gave there, I'd like to draw everybody's attention to the other fannish institution you will have noticed returning with this issue of Maya, namely Pete Weston's Speculation. Pete has a few words to say about it; here he is.))

Just before Mancon I decided to release the Monster in my attic. A thousand copies of Speculation 33 have been lurking there, undistributed, for the last 3 years, mainly because I was ashamed of the issue. Originally I had intended to send it out as a sort of supplement with my next real issue: but then we moved house, my wife had a new baby, and no. 34 never left the ground.

Spec 33 should never have been started. It contains an excellent long article by John J. Pierce, so good that I asked to reprint it back in 1971. Then committed, I realised Spec should not be a reprint magazine, but I compounded my folly by choosing to "go litho", and in the end the issue took 9 months to produce; during which time I completely lost any sense of involvement with the thing. A complete botch; and my apologies to John Pierce, Andy Stephenson, Tom Shippey and other people who contributed so kindly at the time.

I expect to get a fair amount of stick for my decision to send it out via Maya. This way I can make sure just about everyone in fandom gets a copy, including all my old trades: for my own address files are sadly out of date. I've given Rob 500 copies to post at my expense, so I shall lose a lot of money on the deal and several hundred people will receive an unexpected bonus.

"Such magnanimity!" you cry. But what about my subscribers? All I can do is offer to send a copy to anyone who feels entitled to one — just write to me on a postcard. My records are out of date and a shambles, and in any case I feel that after ten years — 32 value-for-money numbers — I've done enough: sadly, Speculation goes out of this incarnation with a whimper rather than a bang. It may, I hope, return, but not for a few more years yet!

Pete Weston, April '76.
72 Beeches Drive, Erdington, Birmingham B24 0DT, U.K.

((There. I think the extraordinarily fine article about Cordwainer Smith in Spec 33 more than makes up for the paucity of discussion of SF itself in this issue of Maya. (More next time, I promise, including an article by Greg Benford.) And now for the nearest thing to a science-fictional article in this issue... it's all yours, Bob.))

I expect you're all wondering why I brought you here tonight... Heh! Heh! Heh!

Well, you must admit this is a bit like one of those old movies where an assorted bunch of people find themselves invited to spend a weekend at some really creepy, out-of-the-way spot. I got a couple of mysterious, anonymous notes telling me to come here, and a strange map — just like in the movies. The main difference is that in a film the weekend guests always find themselves incarcerated in a huge, gloomy, draughty, creaky place, miles from anywhere, with no means of escape. And nobody could say those things about Owens Park. Could they? They're fake fans if they do. But, come to think of it... the hall porter does look a bit like Boris Karloff.

This has got me wondering what crimes we all committed in the past. Who did we mortally offend and wants to take revenge on us? Hands up anybody who has ever kept a magazine belonging to the BSFA chain library. Hands up anybody who has ever used Science Fiction Monthly to wrap up fish and chips. Hands up anybody who has ever sent a fan letter to Space: 1999. I thought so. quite a few of you. That means you'll all start disappearing, one by one. If I'm not mistaken, some people have started vanishing from the back of the hall already! It's funny, but that happened during my last talk, as well...

This talk is going to be about alternative technology, but the subject of Space: 1999 has cropped up... and, in a way, it features alternative technology, too. I mean, the technology in it is impossible, and that's a genuine alternative to all this plausible stuff that people like Niven and Asimov and Clarke keep churning out. I missed the first two episodes of Space £19.99p — for some reason, that's how I think of that show — because I pay 10p a week for the TV Times, to get extra programme information, and it kept saying that it began at 7.30, whereas it really began at 6.30, and I kept switching on too late. "Just another readers service from Independent Television Publications ..." Mind you, it sometimes takes me about an hour to find the programme pages in the TV Times anyway, so I might have missed those episodes regardless.

I do know, for example. that in Space: £19.99p they are journeying around the galaxy on the Moon, but I never found out what propelled the Moon out of the Solar System. All I know is it must have been one hell of a powerful explosion, because they reach a different planet every week; and if you grant a high density of stars — say they're about four light years apart — that means the Moon is belting along at 200 times the speed of light! Luckily for Commander Koenig and company, the retro rockets on those Eagle craft seem to be pretty effective — even though they only emit little puffs of smoke, more in keeping with somebody having a crafty drag down in the toilets — and they can always land and chat to the local inhabitants. The residents of these planets all speak English — which is a very lucky thing, too — because I run into language difficulties if I go abroad as far as Italy or Holland or Macclesfield.

Other things I'd like to know about Space: £19.99p are: When are they going to show us the vast underground factory which builds the Eagle spacecraft? (A minimum of four of these explode or suffer spontaneous combustion every week. so there has to be a big production facility.) When are we going to be told that Barbara Bain is really a robot? Why does everybody in the Moonbase whisper all the time? Why have they got Moon gravity outside the Moonbase and normal gravity inside it? (Maybe that's why everybody whispers and looks gloomy — they're introducing extra gravity into the situation.)

Thinking it over, the key to some of these mysteries could lie in something I've already mentioned — the fact that the Moon is travelling at 200 times the speed of light. This means that time in the Moonbase is running backwards, and all the characters in it are heading into their own pasts instead of their futures. Martin Landau is contemplating Missions that are even more Impossible; and Barry Morse is extending the hunt for The Fugitive into interstellar space. "That was no one-armed man, Jansen — that was an inhabitant of Rigel IV waving his proboscis, and you can't touch them for it."

Back to the main subject of the talk — "Lunar Rock: Will It Ever Be As Popular As Martian Country And Western?" No, that can't be right — that's Graham Charnock's talk. Mine is about alternative technology space drives. As you know, space flight is the most common theme in science fiction, and the fact that Moon landings have been accomplished in reality has wiped out whole areas of speculation which many a writer relied upon to earn his living. NASA is taking the bread and butter out of the mouths of science fiction authors, which is not only an immoral thing to do — it's downright unhygienic! Driven out of what used to be their own private territory, SF writers are becoming poorer and poorer. Things have reached the stage at which some of them have to use their Access cards to weigh themselves. Every time I have to take some money out of the bank I feel ill for a couple of hours afterwards — I think it's called a withdrawal symptom.

There is, however, a ray of hope for the future in that present day space technology is not really adequate or suitable for the tasks it has to accomplish, partly because of the fantastic expense involved, and partly because of inherent weaknesses in our whole concept of the space rocket. All the big space powers are looking around for other more efficient, more reliable and more economic ways of getting hardware into the sky, and it is quite possible they will turn to science fiction for fresh, original ideas — for which, I hope, they will pay an appropriate fee. This notion isn't as far-fetched as it might sound, because many leading space technologists have acknowledged the stimulus they get from science fiction. Only the other day I read an article by a big man in the communications satellite business who said he had lost millions of pounds because in 1947 he had thought of, but failed to patent, Arthur C. Clarke. People even come to me and ask technical questions. Questions like: "If you put a hole in the middle of a Gemini spacecraft would that make it Apollo?" Or, "Up there, in the emptiness of space, what would Isaac Asimov push against?"

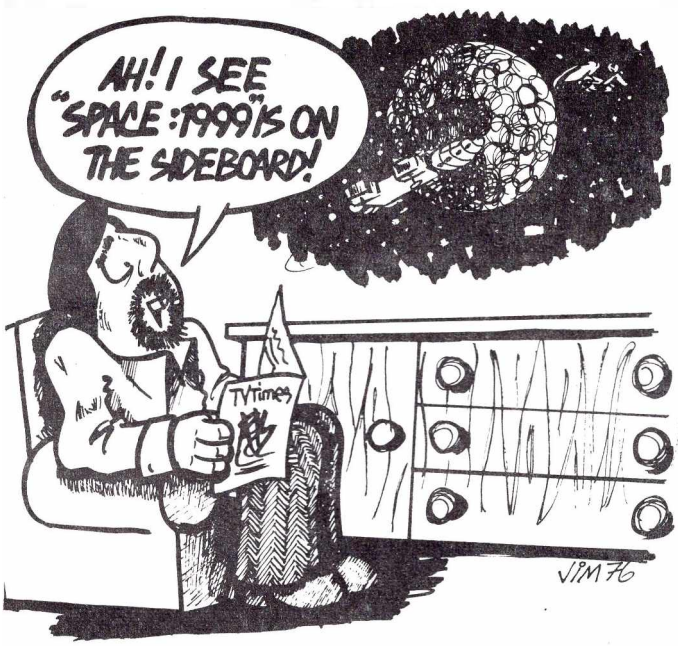
Of course, not all the ideas that science fiction has put forward for space ship propulsion are worth following up. A giant gun about a mile high which fires people into space in a bullet is obviously not feasible — partly because of the tremendous accelerations involved, but mainly because you'd never get enough leather to make a holster for it. And it's no good talking about building it underground, with the muzzle at ground level, because

it's against the law to have a concealed weapon. You see, it's practical little details like these that trip up some of our most visionary thinkers, but which us hard SF writers have built our reputations on.

A compatriot of mine, who has an equally down-to-earth approach, has pointed out on TV the difficulties that Bell got into when he invented the telephone — it was absolutely no use to him until he had invented another telephone that he could ring up. Then he got carried away and invented a third telephone, and when he rang up the second one it was engaged. That's what's called technological redundancy.

In contrast to some of the quaint old ideas in science fiction, the proposal for a new type of space ship propulsion unit which I'm going to outline to you has all the advantages of being inexpensive and totally practicable. The inspiration came to me one evening when I was sitting at home in an armchair... (have you noticed that chairs are good for sitting on? I keep half a dozen of them round the house for no other reason) ...idly toying with a half-pint whisky shandy. My intellect was wrestling with some of the great imponderables of our time, questions like, "Why was the book The Man Who Folded Himself written by David Gerrold and not John Creasey?"

Actually, the inspiration came in two parts — just the way Arthur Koestler said it should. That's the way you do creative thinking, by taking two imaginative elements out of your mental stock and synthesising them into something entirely new. I was sitting there watching my television set... (have you noticed that TVs are good for watching? I experimented with watching fridges for a while, and then sideboards, but after this period of trial and error I settled on television sets.) ...and a commercial about saving energy came on. It explained, the way they



always do, that a big percentage of the heat loss in a house occurs through the windows. That's where your heat goes — right out through the glass of the windows. This information wasn't new to me, but — under the benign influence of the whisky shandies — my intellect was in a highly receptive state, and the stuff about the behaviour of window glass seemed to hang in the forefront of my mind, reverberating in a cryogenic chill. (I copied that last bit out of an Analog editorial.)

It's amazing the things which reverberate in the mind after you've had a few drinks — that's why you have such interesting conversations in pubs. The part I like best is when non-SF pub customers start talking about things which we — as science fiction fans, usually with some awareness of science — tend to regard as our own conversational stamping ground. I remember sitting in a little country pub once having a pint with the landlord. Although this was in the Spring, it was a bitterly cold day outside — a fact which seemed to have a depressing effect on mine host. Quite out of the blue, in the middle of a conversation about the price of lettuce, he announced that he had worked out exactly why it was that the weather had become so unseasonal in recent years. My interest perked up at once because I had been speculating about the same thing ever since I saw that Horizon programme on BBC which told us that a new Ice Age was going to start the following Tuesday afternoon.

"It's these leap years that's doing it," the landlord explained. "They keep sticking in this extra day every fourth year, and they're all adding up and putting the calendar out of step with the seasons."

Although he didn't realise it, this man was a living proof of Weston's Theorem — invented by Pete Weston(*) — which postulates that interest in science fiction usually springs from an underlying appreciation of astronomy. I spent a good thirty minutes with this man trying to make him understand what is actually meant by the terms "year" and "day" and why there's no cosmic linkage between the two, but I simply failed to get through to him. However, this is straying from the point.

The second part of the discovery I was talking about came later on that same evening, when my gaze fell on the second inspirational element, the vital catalyst — which in this case happened to be the inside back cover of the Radio Times. You've noticed the way in which certain publications are associated with different types of advertising — the Daily Telegraph for jobs; Penthouse for saucy French undies; the old Astounding for surgical trusses. Not that there's all that much difference between the latter two... between saucy undies and trusses, I mean... in the little illustrations they look equally complicated and disconcerting. Well, the back cover of the Radio Times used to be devoted entirely to ads for garages and greenhouses. Nowadays it tends to be given over to glossy adverts for Peter Stuyvesant — the cigarette the tobacconist refuses to sell you unless you produce your passport; and dry Martini — the drink the wine merchant refuses to sell you unless you can produce a licence to fly a seaplane.

At the time I'm speaking of, however, it was still garages and greenhouses, and I got to wondering about the famous Greenhouse Effect. For the benefit of anybody who hasn't read the science column in Tiger Tim's Weekly, I should explain that the Greenhouse Effect is a scientific phenomenon, all to do with changing the wavelengths of radiation, by which greenhouse glass refuses to allow heat to pass out through it, thus keeping the greenhouse nice and warm. This was the point at which the two halves of the inspiration began to come together, reaching critical mass.

There's something funny here, I thought, taking a diminutive sip from my whisky. In an ordinary house the glass in the windows lets all the heat out — but in a greenhouse the glass keeps all the heat in!

Suddenly the inspiration was complete.

It dawned on me, there and then, that we could solve all our home heating problems... and save the countries of the West billions of pounds in home heating bills... simply by taking the ordinary glass out of our windows and replacing it with greenhouse glass!

The idea was so devastatingly simple that for a moment I thought there had to be a flaw in my scientific reasoning. But, no! There was no denying the facts... window glass lets heat out, greenhouse glass keeps heat in. Q.E.D. I celebrated my discovery by finishing off the Scotch — reflecting that I could probably afford it now that the Government was likely to vote me an honorarium of a million or two. Then I toddled off to bed, too excited even to bother with my nightly digestive biscuit and cup of Slippery Elm Food.

The big let-down came on the following morning while I was having my usual breakfast of two lightly poached aspirins. There was a flaw in my scientific logic, and I cursed myself for not having spotted it immediately. I had done a lot of research into glass while writing my "slow glass" stories, and I knew for a fact that the glass factories did not manufacture two different types — one for ordinary buildings, and one for greenhouses. My gleaming inspiration of the previous night had been the tawdry glitter of fool's gold. (That last sentence was a little literary bit I put in as writing practice in case they ever revive Planet Stories.) The realisation that I had been wrong lay heavily in me for a while — just like a Brian Burgess meat pie — but then I began to rally as the day wore on. I asked myself, "Would Einstein have given up so easily? Just when things were getting tough, would he have abandoned all his sculptures?"

I think I have pointed out before that it wasn't a huge I.Q. which made Einstein a great scientist; it was his simple and

(*) See "Slice of Life" in Maya 8.

childlike approach — and, for all I know, I might be even more simple and childlike than Einstein.

Returning to the problem, I decided that my basic premise about greenhouses had been right, but that I had not been in possession of sufficient facts to construct a viable theory. Some vital clue was missing, but what could it be? (This is just like an episode from Microbes and Men, isn't it?) By this time I was hot on the intellectual trail and I consulted my library of science reference works, spending hours going through abstruse works such as The Penguin Dictionary of Shells; The Shell Dictionary of Penguins; Teach Yourself Embalming; Stand and Deliver — A Treatise on Overcrowding in Maternity Homes; Bionic Men — Would You Let Your Transistor Marry One?; Black Holes — A Successful Treatment Without Surgery. I even glanced through a manual on dog handling, hoping it might give me a strong lead, but to no avail. This is a weird thing about reference works — I never seem to get anything out of them. I've had a Roget's Thesaurus for years, and so far I haven't managed to get a single word out of it. So, it was up to my unaided powers of scientific deduction.

The basic problem was that the manufacturers produced only one grade of glass for normal domestic and commercial use — and yet when sheets of this glass were put into a greenhouse their physical properties mysteriously changed. Why? Well, it was Sherlock Holmes who said to Doctor Watson, "When you have eliminated all other possibilities the one which remains, no matter how unlikely, is the best that Conan Doyle could think up on the spur of the moment." With this truism in mind, I suddenly remembered the reports which have been in science journals lately and which state that vegetables are intelligent. Could it be, I wondered, that vegetables are even smarter than we think they are? Could they be changing the properties of greenhouse glass by mental control, so that they would be kept warm and healthy?

Some of you might think that this idea is a little far-fetched — this notion that vegetables have thoughts and feelings — but is it any more fantastic than some of the things which Einstein asked us to accept in his various theories of relativity? Do you really believe that two men can stand at each end of a moving train, and flash signals to an observer on the bank without getting thrown off by the ticket collector?

These reports that vegetables have nervous systems and are telepathically aware of their surroundings are perfectly correct, and I even foresee the day when — perhaps by hormone treatment — we'll be able to give them mobility. There might come a day when vegetables will be accepted as domestic pets, and there's no doubt that in some ways they are more suitable for this role than animals. For example, vegetables like to feed on manure. So you could have this situation in which the average citizen goes out for a stroll in the evening with his pet cabbage on a lead. It would be trotting along behind him — on its little roots — unfouling the footpath!

You might even find keen gardeners writing to the newspapers and complaining about how every time they put dung on their roses some thoughtless vegetable-lover allows his pet turnip to stray in and clean the place up. Obviously, there's a whole new field of research here, in deciding which vegetables are the most efficient at modifying glass. I myself suspect the tomatoes, because every time I stare into a greenhouse at them I see them turning a little red.

The more I thought about all this, the more certain I became that I had hit on the only logical answer. Therefore, to save all those billions of pounds on heating bills, all we had to do was put all our glass into greenhouse frames, wait until the tomato plants, etc, inside had altered its transmission properties by mental control at the sub-atomic level, then take it away and install it as windows in our houses. Once that was done, all the heat would be kept in, the country would be rescued from the clutched of the oil sheiks, and the national debt would be wiped out in a couple of years.

The only thing which prevented me from immediately phoning the Prime Minister and giving my idea to the nation was the sobering realisation that all the big, powerful combines would seize on it and make even more money than they have now. In particular, the giant glass manufacturers would make vast fortunes overnight and I didn't like the idea of that — mainly because when I was in junior school I was once spat on by a boy called Pilkington. This deeply philosophical consideration decided me to keep my discovery to myself, but I give it freely to everybody at this convention.

Some of you — the ones who remember the title of this talk — are saying to yourselves, "What has all this got to do with space ship propulsion?" Actually, most of you are saying, "What a load of old cobblers!", but some of you are saying, "What has all this got to do with spaceship propulsion?" Gerry Webb is, anyway, if he's here.

The answer lies in a straightforward, logical development of the basic idea. To make a really efficient drive unit, all you have to do is take a piece of greenhouse glass and fashion it into a tubular shape and attach it to the back end of your space ship. Up in space the unshielded heat of the sun will pour into this tube and, as we have established that the heat will not be able to escape out through the glass again — the temperature inside will quickly build up and up to a tremendous level. If you feed water into one end of the pipe it will explode into steam and be exhausted through the opposite end at great speed, producing the thrust needed to propel your spaceship.

Now, if there are any members of the British Interplanetary Society in the audience, they'll no doubt be thinking to themselves that they can see a major objection to the Hot Water Bottle Drive I have just outlined. Those of you who aren't technically minded might think it is something to do with the glass of the drive pipes perhaps losing its properties and cooling down. This could indeed lead to a sort of story situation in which Dan Dare is up front piloting the ship when he notices a loss of

power and sends the engineer, Scotty, back to investigate. Scotty immediately realises what is happening, so he picks up the intercom and goes, "Oh, Danny boy, the pipes, the pipes are cooling."

But that's comicbook stuff — the real drawback to the Hot Water Bottle Drive which will be troubling all the propulsion engineers in the audience is the old one about reaction mass. They'll be saying you could never carry enough water to give the ship interstellar, or even interplanetary, range. This is a perfectly valid objection — I've read The Cold Equations and I know all about this sort of thing — but I'm sure you'll be both pleased and relieved to hear that, through my researches in another scientific field altogether, I've come up with the answer to that one as well.

The inspiration came when I was considering a problem in nutrition. In general, researchers in this field are concerned with lack of nutrition, but in my case the problem seems to be an excess of it. And I've noticed that other members of the beer-drinking fraternity have the same affliction, the scientific name for which is Brewer's Goitre, or, in really severe cases, Drayman's Dropsy. The really intriguing thing about Brewer's Goitre is that it is most prominent in people who don't drink very much beer at all.

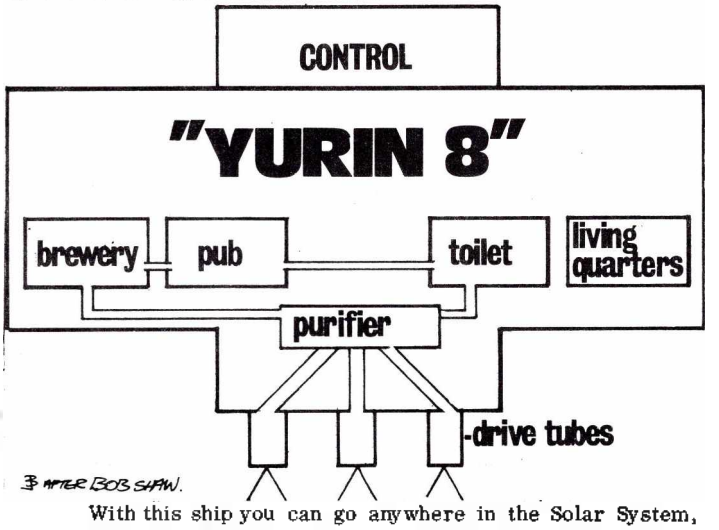
When I come to a convention I find a lot of people congregated in the bar and, as I like to socialise with them, I sometimes buy a glass of beer and just sort of toy with it for a while to keep the others company. The trouble is that when I occasionally do drink the pint of beer I immediately gain about two pounds in weight. I've checked with other beer-drinkers and they confirm the same thing — every time they have a pint of beer they gain a couple of pounds in weight as well. Now, the really intriguing scientific aspect of all this is that a pint of beer weighs only one-and-a-quarter pounds!

This means that three-quarters of a pound of mass appears from nowhere!

Incredible though it might seem, this process of matter creation within the human body is well authenticated — and it doesn't only happen with booze. Anybody who is a bit fat will tell you that eating just one measly little two-ounce cream bun makes them a pound or two heavier the next day. It's even possible that the entire mass of the universe was created by people eating cream buns and drinking beer, but I'm not interested in cosmology — it's much too airy-fairy and theoretical for me. I prefer to stick to solid, provable facts — such as my discovery about beer.

What, you must be saying to yourselves, does this new discovery of Shaw's do to the Second Law of Thermodynamics? Where, you must be wondering, does this extra fluid come from? Well, I don't know where it comes from, but I know where it goes. And this knowledge is the final building block needed for the design of the perfect spaceship.

You start off by installing a small but highly efficient brewery. Next to it goes a well-designed pub with an atmosphere that is conducive to sustained drinking; and beside the pub you, of course, have a toilet. The outlet from the toilet leads into a purifying plant, which receives roughly one-and-a-half pints of liquid for every pint that has been drunk in the bar. Out of every pint-and-a-half of fluid that gets purified, one pint is recirculated back to the brewery — as part of a self-sustaining closed ecology — and the extra half-pint is fed through control valves into a cluster of our greenhouse glass pipes which provide the motive force. Living quarters and a control deck make up the other major compartments.



With this ship you can go anywhere in the Solar System, provided you have a crew of dedicated people who are willing to sit in the bar, for day after day, drinking free beer, with no thought in mind other than getting mankind to the stars. Oddly enough, I think we could round up quite a good space ship crew right here in this hall.

Before you rush away and start building a ship, I should perhaps warn you that life on board won't be all beer and skittles. The beer-drinking complement would be a vital part of the ship, and heavy demands might be made on them occasionally. For instance, if the ship got into a dangerous situation the Captain, up in the control room, would pick up his microphone and say, "Increase speed to Booze Factor Eight," and all the topers down in the bar would have to start drinking twice as fast, whether they wanted to or not. It could be hellish.

Nevertheless, just in case my services are ever called upon to get us to the moons of Jupiter, I think I'll go out to the bar and put in a little practice...

Bob Shaw, April 1976.

Ed's note: When Harry Bell finally cried off doing the illos for Bob's piece because of pressure of other fanac and an imminent holiday, Jim "Instant Illo" Barker filled the gap superbly... one week from receiving my panicky letter to my receiving his illos, all seven of them! My heartfelt thanks.

Science fiction is an insult. At least that's how the term is used among the National Union of Journalists. The Guardian for 1 May 1976 reports a journalist named Jim Dumsday as saying that a Daily Telegraph story about the journalists' conference in Buxton was "more like a piece of science fiction than objective journalism."

And to show that Dumsday is not alone among his colleagues in his use of the name of the stuff that we are fans of, the union's general secretary is quoted as reacting to Dumsday's comment by warning that the union should not fall into "hysterical hyperbole."

So science fiction is not only an insult. It's a pretty bad insult. So bad indeed that one journalist will caution another against using it indiscriminately. Now that's something. It's as if there were a weapon so horrible that General Curtis LeMay would have urged Barry Goldwater not to use it on the Vietnamese.

As a final affirmation of the damning properties of the term, the Guardian uses it without explanation in the headline over its story. "'Science Fiction' in Telegraph" is how that headline reads. These four words are supposed to be packed with enough information to help your typical Guardian reader decide whether to focus his gaze on the smaller print below. In my case it caused me to read about a dispute that would ordinarily have held little interest for me, but then as an SF fan I am not a typical Guardian reader. Presumably the Guardian copy editor who created that headline expected the typical reader of the paper to translate it mentally into a statement that the Telegraph had somehow managed to print something even crappier than usual. The typical reader would then plunge into the details to see how this was possible.

With this in mind, the tone of the Observer's recent Novacon report is a little easier to understand.

And it all reflects one fact. Fandom needs a press agent.

In an age when every politician and every pressure group, every minor political party and every group of war veterans yearning for the good old days — and probably even the Mafia and the Ku Klux Klan — worry about their images and hire experts to get them portrayed properly by the media — in such an age, fandom has no PR man.

This is like strolling into Dodge City without a six-shooter.

A reporter is allowed to walk into the Novacon, talk to fans, take notes, and generally form his own impressions. Not surprisingly, fandom finds itself shat upon when the edition hits the streets. "Nut reads a book a night!" scream the flyers, and the job-bound commuter buys a copy so he can chuckle and feel superior, before facing his superior.

What happens when a mundane group holds a convention? Quite the opposite.

First of all, the group has press releases sent to the papers. "Do not print before April 31st" it says solemnly at the top. "The International Association of Certified Sex Maniacs will convene at the White Horse Inn over the weekend of June 31st. Attending will be some of the most renowned personages in this interesting and important field, including..."

On it goes, begging for the editor's attention and urging him to print something about them. Into the wastebasket it goes. The editor makes a mental note not to mess with this lot. He and he alone knows what is interesting and important to his readers, and it certainly isn't some dull convention. He won't print anything about them if he can help it. If he does, he will print what they want, since they have engaged a press agent. The press agent, probably an ex-journalist himself, knows how to retaliate if the editor doesn't follow the line the press agent handed out — briefly, the same way the journalists' union reacted to the Telegraph story about them. The sex maniacs can now bugger bellboys in the lobby without worrying about unfair media coverage. You might almost think that the initials PR stood not for Public Relations but for Protection Racket.

But of course this kind of protection comes high. Fans spend all their money on postage to mail out fanzines and letters, and on substances to lubricate the brain so it will produce more fanzines and letters. We can hardly afford to put a public relations firm on retainer. Fortunately we don't have to. All we really want is the image of having an image-maker.

We can produce our own press releases. Fandom is full of capable writers who can easily turn out as boring a press release as any fallen journalist. The only hitch will be avoiding fannish neologisms, since fannish writers have difficulty expressing themselves without words like fiawol, gafia, ish, etc., which your ordinary bloke can't grok.

No problem really. We'll just have a neofan scan the copy. Every time he asks, "Uh, exactly what does does this word mean?" we get Peter Roberts to translate the term into mundane.

The next problem is a little tougher. We've got to find some way to produce enough copies of the press releases to send to all the papers that might conceivably be interested in covering a science fiction convention. Does anyone in fandom own a typewriter, a mimeograph, and know how to cut stencils? If you do, or if you know someone who does, please contact the editor.

Finally there's the question of what to do if the con should fall on a really dull weekend, when no bombs have gone off in London, the peace of the Middle East is disturbed by neither Israeli commandos nor Arab terrorists, John Stonehouse has remained in the same place and the same party, and the American presidential candidates have nothing to say. Maybe Dr. Kissinger has even decided to spend some time at home. The editor will be in pain; that cavity at the bottom of page 1 has to be filled. He can't drop STOP PRESS into a hole that big. So he sends a reporter to the SF con with orders to file twelve and a half inches of funny stuff about those nuts, and before deadline please.

Now comes the true test of fannish devotion. Someone must make the supreme sacrifice. Yes, that's right — some fan must forgo attending the programme and stay down in the bar with this journalist. I need one volunteer...

CON PRESS

TOM PERRY

sees a way to make fandom respectable

A free drink and a copy of a press handout detailing the official doings should suffice to keep our unwanted observer away from the real action. The handout has been written weeks in advance by a top fanwriter. It's in the form of a news story, so the reporter can just turn it in when he gets back to the office, and of course it bears no discernible relation to reality. Instead it portrays the image that we fans want the outside world to have of us. (Being fans, and thus more intelligent and rational than the average, we will of course have no difficulty in agreeing unanimously upon what that image is.)

Upstairs in the con hall, Brian Burgess is peddling porkpies; Peter Roberts is rolling a cigarette with makings from a suspicious looking little pouch, while simultaneously not buying a porkpie; Harry Bell is moving with the measured dignity of a man who spent the afternoon playing Fannish Football (Peter Roberts played too, but you can't tell because he is not moving): Pete Weston is playing down his professional editing and talking wistfully about a next issue of Speculation; puns are flashing between Eric Bentcliffe and Terry Jeeves; fanzines are being given away and memberships in clubs and future cons are being sold. In the front of the room a panel of pros ponder the gripping question: "Is Harlan Ellison the Reincarnation of H.P. Lovecraft?" No one is listening, but everyone is there, because in a few minutes Bob Shaw will deliver a speech describing his latest discovery — a spaceship powered by the output of bheer drinkers — and while he's at it, take a few swipes at Space: 1919, oops, sorry, I mean Space: 1999.

Let a reporter loose in that room and he'd be able to write whatever he pleased. His freedom would derive from the

variety of people in fandom and the freedom that they have to be whatever they are to the fullest — the pressures on fans to conform are minimal compared to those on members of lodges, service clubs, veterans' groups, unions, political parties, and other organisations having dues and a roster of officers. No one participates in fandom in order to impress the boss or the neighbours. The result of this situation is that the story a journalist files about fandom will serve as a pretty fair reflection of the journalist's own personality. And considering the pressures that mould newspapermen (I spent six years as a reporter and editor before turning to honest toil, so I've got some background here), the result is not likely to be flattering to the subject.

The typical reporter knows that he and a few of his fellows are the true lords of the earth. Yet all the day long, by some unjust quirk of fate, he has to listen to politicians, union officials, businessmen, leaders of righteous crusades, and all the other pompous phonies who make news, and what's more he has to keep a straight face. After he has done his best to turn their nonsense into deathless prose, the copy editors hack it to pieces, the printers riddle it with typos and then transpose lines of it, a misleading summary is placed over the top, and the whole works winds up on page 25.

Allow such a person to report a science fiction convention, and likely as not he'll release his bile on us and bend all his talents to make us sound silly. I imagine that a skilled journalist,

warped by his miserable job, could even manage to make Shaw's spaceship sound ridiculous.

But fortunately the reporter is down in the bar, working on his third double scotch and trying to read the pages of his handout, which have unaccountably turned rather blurry. "I see here that Dr. Shaw is lecturing on rocket propellants," he says without too much slurring. "Maybe I should go up and just get the flavour of the man —"

"Great idea!" responds the well trained fannish publicity agent. "Let's go. His talk won't last more than two or three hours, and you can interview him afterwards. You'll have a scoop. I'll ask him not to be too technical, and I'll be glad to help you with the formulae. How much space can you give it? Can we get it on page one?"

"Well, uh, actually I do have a deadline very soon, and space is rather tight tonight — I mean, I'm afraid I'll just have to stick with what's here," he says, rattling the press handout. "Well, I'd better be going —"

"How about a refill? One for the road."

"Well, just one."

After handling a couple of conventions successfully, our fannish publicity agents may want to attempt something more positive. Rather than just preventing the newspapers from foisting their views of fandom on the public, we may want to use them to foist our own view of ourselves on it. Now, newspapers are very high-minded institutions, with lots of principles; they cannot be bought like politicians. After all, they have a duty to titillate their public. Nothing can deter them from their noble calling.

Nothing, that is, except — fear!

Not just fear of losing readers, or — worse yet — fear of losing advertisers. These are strong motivations for the journalist, but not the strongest.

The strongest is personal, physical fear.

Think about it. When was the last time you read about an editor being horsewhipped? That long ago. And now — do you really think the actions of the kind of people who settle questions of honour by physical violence have changed that much?

Peter Weston settled this question for me at Mancon while we were talking about the situation in Northern Ireland. "The press has to take a certain amount of the blame, Tom," he said. "I don't mean for reporting the violence, but for how they report it. Why do they call it the Irish Republican Army? It's not an army — it's a gang of killers. And how can they seriously refer to some nobody who pushes a broom for a living as a battalion commander? Just because he goes home at night and puts on a phony uniform and sneaks around with a bunch of his pals planting bombs and shooting at people under cover of darkness?"

I thought of how the papers in America had willingly referred to Huey Newton as the "minister of defence" of the Black Panther Party; or quoted "Field Marshal Cinque" of the "Symbionese Liberation Army"; or used the verb "execute" to describe the murders of hostages. What else but fear could lead to such corruption of the English language?

This is not a pretty state of affairs, but we science fiction fans didn't create it. Why shouldn't we use it to our own advantage? We could even work in a little time-binding.

Picture a con a couple of years from now. This time the fannish publicity agent is accompanying the reporter upstairs to the con hall, having already bought him a drink and handed him his handout. The reporter is scanning the press release as they mount the stairs.

"What's this here?" he asks. "An ultimatum that no one watch Space:1999 except qualified science fiction fans... a demand for lower postage rates for SF magazines and related fannish publications... a requirement that SF books approved by a fannish panel be distributed free to the armed services...'" The reporter grins. "Rather grand, what? And all this in the name of — 'Field Marshal Moskowitz of First Fandom'?"

The press agent doesn't return the smile. They enter the con hall.

At once shots ring out. "Down!" shouts the press agent. They take cover under chairs. The gunfire goes on. "What's this all about?" asks the white-faced journalist.

"Staple war," says the press agent grimly. "One group thinks that staples should be forbidden in SF magazines — the other holds that they should be mandatory. The full names of the two groups are there in your handout."

"'Staple war'?" says the journalist. He grins sheepishly and starts to get up. "I see. It's a put-on. For a moment there —"

A burst of machine-gun fire passes over his head, sending splinters flying from the backs of nearby chairs. The journalist dives for the floor and seems to be trying to burrow into it.

Eventually the shooting stops and they venture out. The con hall is empty except for two bodies. "Tucker," says the press agent, recognising one. "I guess the pro-staple forces have won. They really play for keeps."

"Who's this other poor devil?"

"Oh my ghod — Willis," murmurs the press agent. "Those TAFF contests are really rough. I guess the loser couldn't take it. He was just about to leave for the U.S., too — poor Walt. I understand he had just had a bad spell of diptheria." Looking up at the journalist, the press agent adds: "I hope you'll run the demand for public contributions to TAFF in full — it might ease the situation if there were enough money for everyone to go across each year."

"We will, we will," says the reporter. "I've got to go now... my deadline —"

"No, wait, you were saying something before we came in here. What was it? Something about a title?"

"Er, yes, just admiring the roll of it, 'Field Marshal Moskowitz.' That will look well in print, I think. And now I really have to go — yes, of course we'll print the full list of demands — okay, ten-point type throughout — yes, okay, very well, and goodbye — uh, General."

Well, isn't that what we want — respect?

Tom Perry, May '76.

Even more letters to pick from this time than last, and on a wider range of topics; but one particular subject was mentioned more often and more interestingly than any other, so it's been totally impossible this time to arrange the letters neatly enough for a linear order to be followed. Never mind; it's All Good Stuff, and I'm sure you'll be able to cope!

CIRCULATION

Brian Aldiss,
Heath House,
Southmoor,
Nr. Abingdon,
Oxon. OX13 5BG.

On a bright cold day when I knew I was going to work from nine till nine (given breaks for nourishment and a quick play with the kiddies), in comes bloody Maya 10 and cocks up the timetable. The trouble with fanzines is that they're the one sort of literature that you compulsively sit and read right through the moment they arrive. That is why I hate them.

The point that chiefly interested me was what seems to have interested a lot of your correspondents, the question about the general acceptance of SF in the big wide world. As Chris Priest says, things are different when you are on the dishing-out end rather than the receiving end of any media presentation of the subject, but I've found eager readers everywhere, and they have to be balanced against the tales we can all tell of interviewers who happen to have SF as a blind spot. I'm speaking as someone who has come up against both Robert Robinson and Melvyn Bragg on their TV book programmes. On the other hand, you get interviewers who know and enjoy a lot of SF but who give themselves over on the air to the old technique of posing as the village idiot, just to draw you out, "But of course it's really still about spaceships and telepathy and rayguns, isn't it?" There's your chance to say exactly what you want to say. And to convey enjoyment. It's no good being ratty — or starting in with learned references to Hugo Gernsback.

Another difficulty may be that you feel far too much SF is still that Buck Rogers stuff about spaceships, telepathy, and rayguns... If you are only allowed two minutes fifty seconds on the air, best to keep such qualms to yourself and point out that SF is a permanent part of the literary scene, a bit of an acquired taste perhaps, but worth acquiring. Recommend Billion Year Spree.

One of the reasons for the boom of SF in Britain is that most paperback publishers now have good keen SF editors — a thing unheardof a few years ago. They were mainly fans.

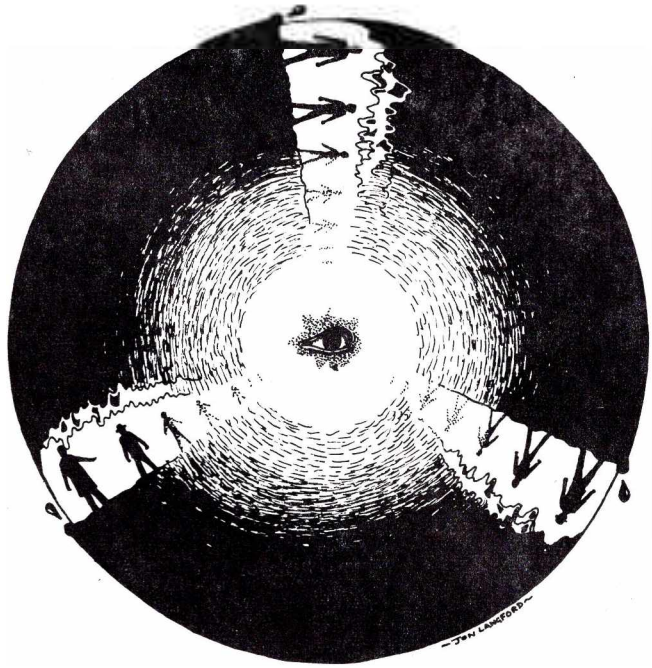
((You mean that the current editors were mainly fans, not those of a few years ago, I take it?))

Yet I believe they perpetuate cliches which reduce the field. Harry Harrison's and my Year's Best SF has just switched from Sphere to Orbit; as you may know, we range widely and don't just concentrate on space fiction — in fact #8, the last issue from Sphere, has no story set in space. Nevertheless, both #8 and #9 bear space covers, with Foss-type hardware. Once, this sort of brand image may have served to put loyal fans on; now it serves to put ordinary readers off.

Once if you were an SF buff, you could think of yourself as an early Christian elbowing off Romans, cross yourself as you bought Astounding, and whisper "Blessed are they that are persecuted for righteousness' sake..." Nowadays it's better to cool it and say, in the Roman tongue, "De gustibus non est disputandum..." Or as we blunt English say, Kissing goes by favour.

((Yes. I'm beginning to feel that one comes over better as an aficionado of something-or-other if one tries (at least at first) to tolerate those who show dislike or ignorance; better to mutter under one's breath and then grin and bear it than give the appearance of being unable to take criticism.... In fact, I placed you letter first in the lettercolumn, not because it was the first letter I got on Maya 10, but because it provides a welcome relief after some of the more paranoically self-defensive parts of Tom Perry's article. Anybody care to look through Mayas 9 and 10 and spot the paranoid bits?))

....Still, not everybody sees everything as sweetness and light....))



Darrell Schweitzer,
113 Deepdale Rd.,
Strafford,
Pa. 19087, USA.

All this talk about bad public relations in SF makes me suspect that since the SF/fandom world is an elitist, exclusive institution, it would be better off behaving like one. This means avoiding publicity if it means looking like idiots in the media. It would be better for a convention not to be covered at all, than to be covered badly. No free press passes. If a reporter buys a membership, fine, but don't invite him. I really doubt that Sunday supplement articles on fandom do anything to make new fans. How many Maya readers first found out about fandom that way?

Alan Sandercock,
London House,
Mecklenburgh Sq.,
London WC1.

Robert Hansen's comments on his mother's refusal to believe the film Charly is SF is familiar, and of course this is one of the main problems in trying to get critics to take the stuff seriously. They decide that if it is that good, it can't be SF. Brian Aldiss more or less had this one pulled on him a month or two ago on BBC1 when he was in the hot seat on a book programme where the latest Aldiss/Harrison Year's Best anthology was being reviewed. The pundits all criticised the stories because of the absence of spaceships and little green men! The stories weren't good SF because they lacked the cliched props of the genre, etc, etc.

Ursula Le Guin,
currently in U.K.

Thank you above all for printing doug barbour's review-in-general of James Tiptree's work. Barbour is absolutely first class — negative criticism is so easy but it is so hard to do what he does, to say why a work or a writer is good & by doing so to increase your appreciation and send you back to re-read, or re-re-read.

I trust that Henry P. Pijohn does not exist, but is a Convenient Fiction. If he does I wish he didn't. I wish people who say things like "When I read a science fiction book I don't want to be educated and go to sleep. I want to enjoy myself and read a story," were all named Henry P. Pijohn so that you could recognise them the instant they were introduced, and get away before they started quacking. People with watertight compartments in their heads are very boring. It never occurs to them that one can read a story, be educated, enjoy oneself, and then go to sleep, all at once except for the going to sleep part. Education of course is the trick word. Education is dull. Education is for like eggheads y'know man. Y'know like reading and writing and thinking and looking at pictures and driving so you don't kill all the pedestrians and making edible dinners and all kinds of like stupid intellectual stuff like that. I don't wanna be like educated man I wanna live in a cave and eat bats. And tell myself real good stories about the last bat I ate. Yeah.

((Hoo boy... Hold on; I think we've both been more than a little unfair to Henry (who does exist, by the way). Especially me. Henry himself is not anti-intellectual or anti-

education; if he was, he wouldn't have given up his Civil Service job 18 months ago to try to get to university to study chemistry. What comes over as anti-intellectual is what I reported him as saying; and ever since Maya 9's editorial appeared Henry has steadfastly denied saying any such things, attributing my editorial to my warped memory, and has been shocked and dismayed that I could report him as saying it — and also denigrate his forms of thought and expression the way I did. So as far as Maya 9's editorial is concerned, you might be right in saying he is a convenient fiction... and I'm sure that Henry has enjoyed at least large parts of the education he has received during his chemistry course.))

I wondered for about 10 minutes how anybody, even Henry P. Pijohn, heard me on anything called Newsbeat on the BBC. I sure never heard it. Then I realised it must have been that really ghastly experience in January of '75 when I was here for the ICA jamboree and got trapped in this room with this drip and a microphone, inbetween some rock records and a long phone-in conversation about how to dripdry socks (I think it was socks, maybe it was military underwear, I remember a Retired Major called in about it). The jock was a very hard type with beady eyes, who had never read any sf, certainly not any of mine. He asked all the typical questions; and I hope I did come across eccentric and intellectual, and annoyed, and contemptuous: at least, I sure tried. I am beginning to think that the only way to respond to the contempt and patronising manner of all PR types towards sf, is in kind, with bells on.

Chris Priest left one thing out. I tried to explain to him that in the States there is a difference between "talking to" somebody and "talking with" somebody. "Talking with" definitely has a more genial and amical connotation — a conversation is implied. "Talking to" often means exactly what it says, A is talking to B and B is listening (willingly or not). The shade is so fine that I would willingly let a copy-editor destroy it in order to save the British Ear from an unseemly noise. But, as Chris points out, copy-editing of such delicacy is very rare (though Gollancz did some on my forthcoming book, A Very Long Way from Anywhere Else, it's not sf, breathe easy, Henry P.). Anyhow, I must admit that to me those dialectical differences between British and American English are a pleasure in themselves; they only become embarrassing when one side tries to imitate the other and (inevitably) fails.

Joseph M. Nicholas,
2 Wilmot Way,
Camberley,
Surrey GU15 1JA.

Martin Ricketts, Jim Barker and the appeal to fifteen year olds: Some SF has to be tailored to appeal to them otherwise they will never, never never become hooked on the stuff at all — you start young, as with all lifelong fascinations, or else you never bother. I'd have thought that was self-evident, Martin; the fifteen-year-old who listens to Radio 1 today will be tomorrow's college professor (or adult, at least). And even at this age, SF can be thought-provoking, especially old-time, hard SF of the Asimov/Clarke/Heinlein school. The adolescent mind, immature and undeveloped as it is, has the ability to be fascinated by the shiny glitter and gadgets of the future, and can thus be provoked into thinking about the future. You are an author, Martin; what about the first stories you penned when you were younger; weren't they packed with spaceships and robots and tentacled aliens? Didn't the standard SF vision of a monolithic, dictatorial galactic empire appeal to the power-fantasy latent within you, and the ever-present wish-fulfilment provide you with the ultimate succour from the trials of growing up? Didn't a "revolutionary" figure like Hari Seldon provide you with some sort of substitute for your dreams of escape?

Perhaps I reveal too much of my own genesis there; but the old-time, hard SF of the Asimov/Clarke/Heinlein school - for all its craft, historical importance and codification of the early dreams of SF — today appears as immature, undeveloped and more likely to appeal to the adolescent mind when judged alongside what is being written today. Perhaps we don't have to do any tailoring at all; it's all been done for us by yesterday's authors.

On the face of it, this doesn't appear to have much to do with the public image of SF. But consider for a moment: if Dave Langford's comment about the omnivorous non-selectivity of junior readers is correct (as we all know it is), then those same readers who later dismiss SF as being too childish will retain the impression of the kind of SF they had then — the unforgiveable garbage of spaceships and aliens and rayguns. The image they carry forwards, unmodified, into their mundane and turgid futures, to be regurgitated amidst peals of laughter whenever anyone mentions SF. Juvenile SF, if you include in that category the kind of SF outlined above that is likely to be read by younger readers, does damage us — not because adults read it, but because the kids who read it when they were kids never read it any more and think that this is what it's all about until their dying day.

Okay, I know that sounds horribly contradictory when viewed in the light of the previous paragraph — on the one hand I'm saying that juvenile SF is necessary, and on the other saying that it should never be touched — but there seems to be nothing we can effectively do about this deplorable state of affairs; I'm just laying it out as I see it, trying not to feed too many implications into it. But blacklisting juvenile SF, Dave, isn't going to help; the publishers will continue to fill the library shelves with it and the young will continue to swallow it, having no idea what SF really is, nor even any feeling for it at all.

((There does seem to be a dilemma there, Joe. I think the best way of resolving it is to see it as follows. More people read the good old Asimov/Clarke/Heinlein (ACH) school than anything else because it's more accessible to the inexperienced reader than Zelazny or Brunner or Silverberg or... (Fall of Moondust doesn't have the hidden ramifications of Lord of Light or Dying Inside or The Shockwave Rider.) So some will be absolutely zonked by the ACH triad, and go on to immerse themselves deeper and deeper... that's us; and that's why we remember them (ACH) with affection. But others will be only mildly interested, will eventually fall by the wayside, and will remember the ACH school with derision for its apparent shallowness of characterisation. These latter are the ones who move on to their "mundane and turgid futures" (what a great phrase!) So though there are some juvenile readers who will never find out what SF is — because they don't think they want to — there will be those who will persevere. For both these sets of people, the publishers should persevere. This leads to a question I'd like answered: is the greatest value of the ACH school in leading people to the real meat, as a gateway on the road to addiction; or for the mild and incidentally educative pleasure they give to their far wider but perhaps less keenly interested audience ...? Arguably the latter. I'm sure Arthur Clarke would argue in favour of reaching a wide audience.))

It's this "lack of feeling", I think, that manifests itself when the media get their electronic claws into SF and push it as a substitute for Match of the Day. This is where the inane claptrap that gets considered as SF by those who've never read a word of SF in their lives gets dragged in.

Some publishers don't help the image much. Paperback covers are on extensive public view — to any mundane who cares to point his eyes in the right direction, and some of those covers are pretty abysmal. Even a fine, able and communicative writer like Frank Herbert gets lumbered with tentacled sea-monsters.

I dunno. Perhaps it's all got something to do with the characteristics of the ghetto, except that in this case the walls seem to be maintained from without rather than from within; as fast as we try to knock them down, They Out There beaver away like crazy to build them up again.

Doug Barbour's academic digression into the definitions of Modern and Post Modern reveals just what's wrong with the literit pseuds — the almost overwhelming need to categorise. Labelling is a pointless exercise in isolationist pigeon-holing; the attachment of an identification tag solely for the purpose of having

something to grab hold of — to say "This is Whatever", and because Whatever has already been clearly defined elsewhere, we are thus made instantly aware of which pigeon-hole "this" is intended to fall.

Bullshit. Literature is an organic whole with a number of sub-branches, all of which are related in some way. On each and every level there are any number of intersections; points of reference and cross-reference, intercourse and interchange, feedback and kickback. Litcrit categorisations fail to recognise this; in the attempt to simplify for ease of handling, they ignore dynamic relationships and thus destroy.

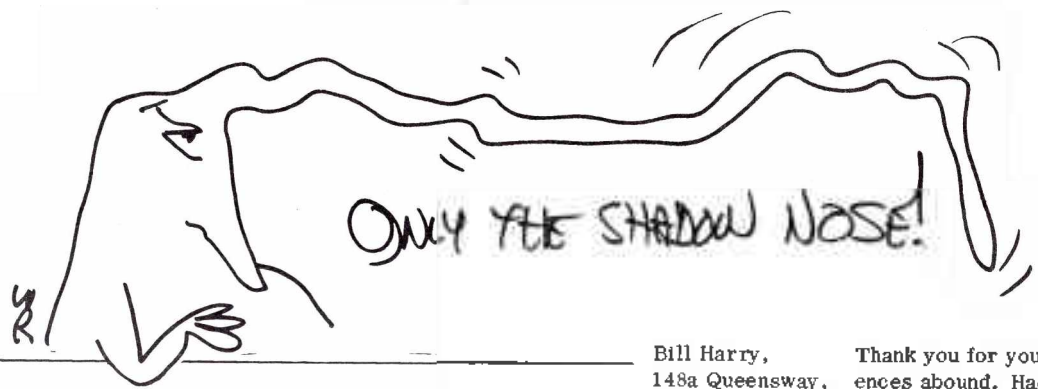
Consider the supposed "periods" of literature that Doug enumerates. Victorian, Georgian, Modern... all are periods of time, for Christ's sake, not areas of activity or of preoccupation. To me, the implications of this are to lock particular novels into particular periods, as though they should be considered in the context of that period and none other. All right, so Charles Dickens was a Victorian author. So what? That shouldn't stop anyone from reading him today.

((Go ahead, if you like two-hundred page plots enlarged to eight hundred pages for the sake of Dickens's pocket...))

ently? It's interesting to trace any work of art back to the creative source.

((Yes. I wonder if you saw the Magritte painting at some stage during your youth or childhood and subconsciously remembered it when you had the idea for the slow glass stories? Perhaps Magritte was the creative source for your stories as well as David's cover.))

As to the magazine itself, I thought all the features were fine — though, of course, I'm not referring to my own article which I found boring because I'd read it before. Oddly enough, the one I liked most was Doug Barbour's piece about James Tiptree's work. (I decline to call him James Tiptree Junior, because I don't think there's any risk at all of people thinking I'm talking about James Tiptree Senior.) I say "oddly enough" not because I wouldn't normally expect to enjoy Doug's writing, but because an article about another person's writing usually has a built-in handicap in that, by definition, it can't be too original. In this case, though, Doug's enjoyment of JT's stories came through so well that he made me decide to go out and buy them for myself — a difficult object to achieve. I think it is difficult to explain to people exactly why they ought to read a certain author.



Kev Smith,
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Kingston upon Thames,
Surrey KT1 3EG.

I found Doug Barbour's examination of James Tiptree Jr., "A Real Taste of Being", virtually unreadable. It had no proper direction; the conclusion did not derive from the preceding paragraphs, did not, in fact, provide a true conclusion. I was left groping blindly for his meaning. There was a pointless digression, which was not, despite his claim, so slight. There were long, complex and confusing sentences, leading in some cases to meaningless statements. (I get the impression that Doug was once frightened by a short sentence, so ruthlessly have they been excluded.) Finally, the attempt to analyse Tiptree was based on two stories only — not a representative enough sample. The worthwhile comments and opinions were not clarified enough. The reader is forced, without a map, to fight a way through a confused tangle of sentences, scale a mountainous digression and negotiate treacherous patches of meaninglessness. I believe in making a reader work, but slave labour is something else.

Doug Barbour is better than most, has attempted more than most and deserves credit for that. But, by the same token, more is expected of him and the criticism he attracts must consequently be harsher.

One thing about the article I do like very much is Doug's final sentence. I, too, am glad that James Tiptree Jr. is among us.

Bob Shaw,
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Ulverston,
Cumbria,
LA12 9PN.

I found Maya 10 really interesting all the way through, and that wasn't just because David Hardy's cover illo showed slow glass. The illo is close in composition and identical in conception to one of Magritte's paintings, the name of which I've been trying to recall for years. It shows a snowy mountain range viewed through a broken window, and in the glass fragments lying on the floor the peaks can still be seen. I saw a print of the painting about a year after I'd written the slow glass stories and it gave me an odd sensation to realise that Magritte had so perfectly illustrated the slow glass concept a quarter of a century before the stories were written. I wonder if David Hardy has seen the same painting and adapted/adopted the idea for his excellent cover illo, or if he arrived there independ-

Bill Harry,
148a Queensway,
London W.2.

Thank you for your copy of Maya 10. Coincidences abound. Had just finished perusing a book on Magritte and was marvelling at his visual puns, thinking that I'd even try my hand at some of the basic ideas he'd used: i.e., for a mermaid he'd use a fish's head and lady's legs. I was thinking, well, I could draw a centaur with a horse's head and gentleman's lower torso. Was particularly interested in the mirror pictures where the reflection remained in the fragments and also the space left by the broken mirror, when in comes Maya 10 using the Magritte theme on the cover. This was only the second fanzine I'd received since the 1950's and I marvelled at the sensible idea of using a paperbag as an envelope. Well, the other fanzine I'd received in the last decade and a half was Triode. I was put back in contact with Eric Bentcliffe via Pete Roberts, who lives nearby but tends to vanish into supermarkets or turn in his tracks and walk away in the manner of someone who's just remembered something he'd forgotten, whenever I approach. I'd flicked through Maya, then decided to nip out for a packet of fags before a proper reading when who should be walking towards me in Queensway but Pete Roberts. I was just about to say, "Hey, I got a copy of Maya in the post this morning" when, about three yards away from me he made an abrupt turn and vanished across the road in the direction of Whiteleys. I checked the packet of Amplex in my pocket, found that both my socks were the same colour and noted that my fly was in proper order, so presumed he hadn't seen me or had egg on his face. He no longer comes into my local boozer to see me, I think it was because he became a little frightened at the way the pints of lager seemed to disappear into my face without my hands moving.

Have read Maya 10 2wice and enjoyed it. What interests me most is personal editorials and letters. I love fannish humour but, being a victim of Gafia, tend to get lost in the newsy bits. Quite frankly, with the impression I'd got from the past few issues of Triode, I'd imagined that fanzines of the 60's and 70's were a different kettle of fish to the ones I used to read so avidly. The impression was dispelled by Maya, to me it's as interesting, personal, humorous and not at all swamped by intense material on obscure aspects of science fiction.

((Does that mean that the past few issues of Triode have been like a fanzine of the 70's, swamped by obscure stfnal discussion?? I think not, and that you mean Triode is a fanzine of the kind you remember from the 50's, but living

on in the 70's. Personally I don't see anything anachronistic in this; Triode is simply another, enjoyable, fanzine.))

Rob Hansen,
51 Bryn-y-nant,
Llanedeyrn,
Cardiff CF3 7PA.

I dunno, maybe I haven't read enough fanzines to make such a generalisation, but it seems to me that SF fandom is treating comics with the same lack of understanding that Joe Public shows towards SF. If I may quote the end of Pete Weston's tale at the beginning of "Science Fiction Nuts":

"You are so serious about science fiction when it is so much juvenile nonsense," he claimed. And went on to tell me what he thought of SF in general.

"How much SF have you actually read?" I snapped.

"Well, er, Verne, and Wells," he said.

"Nothing else?... then with the greatest respect you don't know what you are talking about."

O.K., so Pete was talking to a writers' group, but reread the above with comix being substituted for SF, and Dandy and Beano for Verne and Wells you get the impression. If you read Merf Adamson's letter in Maya 9, the section on comics, you see this disdain openly expressed, seemingly couched in reasonable tones but still sadly narrow-minded. If SF fandom accuses media and public of intolerance and then is equally intolerant, equally guilty of the same asinine generalisations and assumptions, then I find that highly disturbing... and just a little sad.

Dave Wixon,
343 E.19th St., Apt.5B,
Minneapolis,
Mn. 55404, USA.

I guess I can only make two comments about the way SF is regarded in the outside world. Firstly, it appears to me that it has always been a mistake to expect anything else. I very much fear the idea of being so totally accepted by the mundanes as some of us seem to desire: probably they would do to fandom what they do to everything else in the world — foul-and-muck it up. (Although, to tell the truth, the ability to appreciate SF would argue for more tolerance and intelligence, so maybe if they had the ability to appreciate SF they'd do a better job all round...) I guess this is leading up to some sort of elitist attitude, but I guess I am some sort of (moderate) elitist: in my view, SF is not a ghetto — it's a key club: and the key is an attitude which the world might need more of.

((Yea, but don't get too keen on that idea; remember how silly the Cosmic Circle became, back in the 1940's?))

The other point is the futility of trying to make any use of the media. Having overspecialised in the art of spooning pabulum to the masses, they are no longer able to do anything else. At Minicon 11, we had a panel on the subject of "Translating SF into the Visual Media", featuring GoH Leigh Brackett and Ben Bova, both of whom have had extensive experience with TV and the movies. Oversimplifying terribly, it comes down to an emphasis — especially in TV — on the avoidance of offending anyone — and they've learned it doesn't take much to offend some people. So the way to be safe is to stick with the tried-and-true schticks — the "family show". Ben told of a producer who looked at one of his scripts and asked: "Instead of a robot, why don't you make it a dog?"

((I can just about believe that. Recently the Sunday Times ran a long and fascinating article on "Monty Python's Flying Lawsuit", which was against ABC for bowdlerising three of their shows into a ninety-minute TV special — less time for commercials (the shows originally ran for 30 minutes each without commercials). ABC cut out all the jokes that might possibly be offensive to anyone, in the process totally ruining the continuity of each show, and making some sketches look pointless and unfunny. For example, they cut out references to "Algy the bisexual navigator", and one superb joke featuring a chap who kept bringing pets home and leaving them for his mother to look after — inconvenient, if the pets are elephants, fleas, sperm whales etc. His mother objected to the tiger's habits — "He's gone through four Jehovah's Witnesses today already."

The Pythons were granted a twenty-second showing of a statement that the show had been edited without their permission, but then ABC's lawyers woke up, applied for and got a "stay of execution pending appeal" — and when the show went out it only had "Presented for Television by ABC" to indicate any editing process. But the lawsuit goes on, and if the Pythons win they will have created an important precedent re an artist's rights not to have his work messed about with, and there will be havoc in the TV industry. Harlan will be pleased!))

It may be an open question which came first — the media attitude or the public image of SF; it makes little difference: right now, they seem to reinforce each other incestuously.

It does seem to me, on initial reaction, that the amount of US-UK interfanac is sparse. This is especially true if you don't count locs as "contributions". Mike Glicksohn of course has one good point, and hints at another: there are so few of you Britons (is that the acceptable term? I know some don't like "Englishmen") that your efforts over here get diluted in the sea of US fan publishing. There are other reasons for a real sparsity of interaction, though: the expense and time-lag of communications are deterrent factors; there are also some slight language and cultural differences, too, which make communication less comfortably easy — Jerry Kaufman hit on that: there is a definite difference in flavors.

(("Flavors"?! Surely you mean "flavours"?))

But the real problem, I think — and this applies especially in the area of locs — lies in the fact that most of us don't get to see the overseas 'zines very often. When a fan begins a zine, he sends it off to a number of people (for free) to encourage reaction. Who will he send it to overseas? To people he's heard of, which in practice means a certain group of well-known fan publishers and letterhacks. This makes for a sort of closed circle, and these people just tend to reinforce each others' images. (This may be some from of natural selection, though, with the ablest rising to the top...)(That should soothe some egos...)

((I think productivity has something to do with it as well. Mike Glicksohn is well-known, but does he sit back on his laurels? By no means! He still writes his dozen locs a night, or whatever!))

Only certain British fen show up in US zines, and only certain Americans — the more notorious — show up in UK zines. Take a look at your own lettercol in #10, Rob — a number of Americans and Canadians are there, but they're the ones who show up everywhere. They're highly visible in fandom, so they get sent zines from all over, just on the basis of their names, and because they can be depended upon for a loc. They are good people, no doubt about it.

But it's the same ones all the time. The more average US fan doesn't get sent a zine unless he trades his own, or subscribes — so he has to take the initiative, and in the case of US-UK contact, that can get expensive. Ditto for UK fen.

Take a look at Malcolm Edwards's "Dissecting Table" (in #10): all the zines he reviews are British. That makes sense, if most of Maya's readers are British and likely to be interested in the zines most accessible to them. But it gives an unfortunate appearance of ingroupness, and will tend to deter the Lesser American Fan (a common bird) from intruding. It also gives aid to the UK fan who might be interested in finding out about American zines to send or write for. Naturally, the same things occur in American zines... (I might mention that the appearance of ingroupness is reinforced when three of the four zines don't have any price quoted, and so don't seem to be meant to be available to

outsiders.)

((The impression of ingroupness is also reinforced by the fact that all the zines reviewed are from London. In fact, Egg and Wrinkled Shrew are generally available, I think; write for a free sample and you will, I hope, get one. There are, however, some zines which deliberately avoid contact with the States, or so it seems; Greg Pickersgill's Stop Breaking Down being one particular example. He only has three North Americans on his mailing list, and two of them are personal friends. My own approach has been very different — I've gone all-out to obtain U.S. and Canadian response by sending out sample copies, and latterly by taking an ad in the Midamericon Programme Book. Not many English fen do this. Pity.

Malcolm Edwards has one particular problem in choosing zines for review, in that he hasn't been active in fanzines for a year or two and doesn't get many any more. In fact, it's Classified Ads time: NEGLECTED FANZINE REVIEWER requires raw material for dissection. If review not performed, will loc. Apply: Malcolm Edwards, 19 Ranmoor Gdns., Harrow, Middlesex HA1 1UQ, U.K.))

Because you wanted to reprint a bit of my review, Rob, you and I have come into contact. So I'll begin to see Maya regularly and, through it, begin to meet some of the fen who meander through your pages. But a lot of American fen won't have the incentive/opportunity I had to make contact — ergo, no contributions. I think it's not unexpected that it would be this way. There are only a few British zines, and there's a lot of distance and expense involved. If you can think of a way to change those factors...

((It doesn't seem to be too difficult with Maya. If I keep the interval between issues at approximately four months, this is long enough for the copies to cross the pond seamail and give time for U.S. fen to loc, yet soon enough for people not to have forgotten what the previous issue was about. It's not too expensive for me, either — in fact, because of the quirky English postal rates it's cheaper for me to send one copy of Maya to the States seamail than to someone in England. So the only expense involved is yours, in buying an airmail stamp. I hope that you think it worthwhile!))

Helmut Pesch,
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5000 Köln 1,
W. Germany.

The thing I like about Maya is first of all the title, of course, since Mayan art has always been a major source of inspiration for my art, and since this is so readily adopted by many artists it seems to me that there may be — von Däniken being right or wrong, more likely the latter — that there is a certain affinity between the fantastic masks and ceremonial costumes of the Amerindian cultures and the iconography of the modern, space-age fantastic. Since there isn't such a thing as science fiction art, it does serve as a better substitute, at least, than that mixture of sewing machines and oil processing plants and 2001 gadgets in space machinery painting, or the late Renaissance revival in sword-and-sorcery art. To us middle-Europeans — either in Britain or "overseas" in Germany — the culture of the Mayans is at least as foreign as any culture on alien planets conceived by science fiction writers.

Jessica Amanda Salmonson,
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Zenith,
Wash. 98188, USA.

I'm so pleased to see such high praise for Marion's Heritage of Hastur. I finished it myself last week, and even if I find out the earlier Darkover novels aren't the same fine quality, this introduction to the series will keep me forever a Darkover fan. I also finished, a few days ago, The Shattered Chain, which is in some ways even better than Hastur (possibly because of my personal preference for strong female leads, but I think partly because it meets a better balance between characterisation and adventure. Hastur was nine-tenths characterisation, Chain is 50% characterisation, leaving more space for a complex and interesting adventure). I'm currently buying up everything I can find on Darkover. Starting Star of Danger is faintly disappointing, as the depth of characterisation is definitely missing. Still, my interest in Darkover is holding.

What impressed me about Hastur was the fine line Marion walked, successfully, in presenting the two homosexual characters. Regis couldn't accept his own gayness, and Marion managed to convey palatably that accepting himself was part of his vast heroism, and yet there is no trite pro-homosexual propaganda in this message (Gay is Good). Dyan was a villain, and Marion had to present him as a villain first and a homosexual second so that homosexuality itself did not imply villainy — and then she deepens this character further by giving him such intense and understandable motivations that he is a human being even before he is a villain (villains usually are not human beings, just men with black hats). Compare the depth of the character Dyan to the character Vladimir Harkonnen in Herbert's Dune, who slept with young boys not because he was gay but because he was a villain and therefore decadent. Regis the hero, with weaknesses. Dyan the villain, with a positive side to him. Complex, real people. And perhaps the first two gay men ever depicted in science fiction with sensitivity, compassion, and without sexploitation, sensationalism or sexual politics.

The Shattered Chain does the same thing for lesbians, only on a much lower level. The homosexuality is subtle. In the end of part one, there is a rapport between Kindra and Rohana, implied only by Kindra answering a statement Rohana had thought without speaking. Later, in part III, Rohana admits there was a time in her life when she could almost have given up everything for love. It is never stated, but anyone with an ear for subtlety will have picked up from the entire context of the book that Rohana's only intense love of her life was the Amazon Kindra. It is also interesting to note that Marion has stated in print that there was a more explicit lesbian content in the original manuscript for Chain, this between Magda and Jaelle, but Marion edited this out presumably because she had already attacked the complex theme of sexism on Darkover without dragging in lesbianism too. I might personally have preferred their affair be left in the story. But in a way, it is good I suppose to depict the intense comradeship between Magda and Jaelle as strictly nonsexual; otherwise the assumption might be that Strong Women have got to be homosexual, and heterosexual women are incapable of comradeship within their own gender.

Greg Benford,
Institute for Astronomy,
Madingley Rd.,
Cambridge CB3 0HA.

Maya arrived and is most pleasurable. The BoSh piece had me furrowing my brow to remember where I'd read his taxi story before, and then saw it'd been used in Ground Zero Man. Am I the only reader who thinks this his best work? It's a beautifully constructed novel, blending personal anguish with nuclear politics adroitly. I don't know why it didn't get a big mainstream sale, except of course it's branded SF and thus sank without trace. But I wonder why the SF audience hasn't picked up on it? I found the representation of scientific work, the plausible scientific backgrounding, and its integration with the main character's personal life, an unusually perceptive study. Perhaps the Lupoff review in Algol biased people against Ground Zero Man? — it was a most unfair reading, I thought.

Weston's snapping at the artsy writer's group was delicious. I've been through similar situations, and tend more to pointed, slyly satirical jabs when dealing with confident ignoramuses. But Peter's attack seems more lasting, somehow.

Cathy McGuire,
339 East 6th St.,
New York,
NY 10003, USA.

I have found out that most people don't want to be told that SF is a legitimate form of literature and that fandom is not for children. They have their own ideas and no facts are going to change them. In my office (which is a good example since I read a lot of SF there, and am constantly getting questions/jokes about it) there are quite a few people who read SF, but these same people smirk at the fanzines and the fact that I "am always reading SF" (which is not true, but it's all they notice). It seems to me that what is not acceptable to them is the enthusiasm that I admit for SF. It is not in fashion to be anything but blase, at least where I am. Even in young people, when I mention that there is a group of people who share a liking for SF, they shy away from joining, because they like it "but not that much" (however much that's supposed to be!). Maybe getting involved only applies to causes now.

Roy Kettle,
43 Chesholm Rd.,
London N.16.

If I had £90 and didn't care what happened to it (like if it was part of a few hundred thousand more) then Maya is as good a deal as I'd like to put out. I still hesitate to give unqualified praise though — litho, you know, and some of your layout is not up to what your efforts deserve — but your own material, your contributors' articles and your letter column(s) are as good as anyone could practically wish for. I've recently written to Greg ((Pickersgill)) and said he's a better fannish commentator and his fanzines are better fannish deals all round. However, you've got an excellent wide-spectrum approach to SF and fandom, both of which blend pretty unobtrusively in some bizarre way. I wouldn't normally expect Douglas Barbour and Mike Glicksohn to complement each other. (In fact, I wouldn't expect Mike to compliment anyone other than people from whom he had reasonable expectations of a drink.) If I stuck Ian Watson on The Role of the Indefinite Article in SF in True Rat it would stand out like a sore thumb, as would a Harry Bell con rep in Riverside Quarterly (but that would stand out more like a beer gut). This isn't to say that SF and faanish articles never mix well outside of Maya, but you certainly publish extremes of both as well as I've seen done within the confines of one fanzine. Mike Glicksohn was a very good substitute for Peter Weston, but it would have been better if he'd been a very good addition to him. Don't tell me he's too busy. After all, he's not even collaborating on a novel. Bob Shaw's article was beautifully understated and shows up all these idiots who need to write with exaggeration and asides in attempts at humour. (What? Is that a doctor's finger pointing my way? Poot!)

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doug barbour,
10808 75th ave.,
edmonton,
alberta,
canada,
t6e 1k2.

Maya is a definitely neat little magazine, a winner. i enjoyd the whole bloody thing, a lot. the collage of letters on sf nuts was marvellously handled. the neat thing was the way it rendered thru the various opinions of yr readers the vast array of outlooks on this field we think we share that can be garnered by one little zine. a lesson lies there somewhere to be expounded upon. damnd if i can tell you what it is.

& then i feel so damnd sorry for mike glicksohn, who just cannot for the life of him find anything funny to write about. i think i may step on him the next time we meet. it's tough to try to write sercon & even hope to have it read when you have to share a magazine with him. i mean who will pick themselves up off the floor (where they fell laughing too hard) to read the final few pages.

Mike Glicksohn,
141 High Park Ave.,
Toronto,
Ontario M6P 2S3,
Canada.

As someone who in the past has objected to the impersonality of certain offset fanzines, I'm slightly ambivalent to the criticism you have received on this topic, and sympathetic to your defence in the editorial. The simple fact is that while Maya may be an offset fanzine it is far from being impersonal, the way, say, Algol tends to be. Not only is your personality evident in the editorial and the lettercolumn, but the very nature of the material you publish reflects your essential fannishness, even when you feel constrained to apologise for it to potential non-fannish readers. A fanzine with a column by Bob Shaw, a set of fanzine reviews by Malcolm Edwards, and even a nothing-piece by me surely need not worry about being called impersonal! I think the people who complain about the money that goes into the production of Maya are missing the nature of fannishness completely. Maya is a fannish fanzine, and not all the national debt of England can change that fact.

I really enjoyed (and was impressed by) your turning the response on your last editorial into a symposium. This shows a degree of insight that is unusual among current editors. There's hardly anything there anyone could disagree with, although there's a lot that might resonate with similar experiences we've all encountered. This is particularly true of the mini-articles by Peter Weston and Chris Priest, both of which really stand out, both for the quality of their expression and the truth they contain. I expect that everyone has encountered the totally distorted view of SF that most of the "general public" has, mainly thanks to inferior television and a holdover nostalgia for mediocre works from their childhood, and a great many active fans have encountered the sort of media hassles that Chris so aptly describes. I've been interviewed on radio a couple of times, for the papers several times, and on television twice, and the only time I ever really got any sort of adequate coverage was when the reporter was both a personal friend and a fan. Usually I encountered the misleading pseudosincerity that Chris described, which inevitably led to both my own personal appearance as a nut and a generally denigrating representation of SF. I suppose it's reassuring in a perverse way to know that these things happen all over our world. Dave Langford's reply to your last editorial is exquisitely written! I lack the patience to dig out that previous issue, but if Dave can write this well, he can't possibly be all bad! His points are very well taken, and I suspect he was merely an innocent victim of the sort of thing that Chris Priest describes. Many fans have an in-built tendency to proselytise for either science fiction or fandom: I've usually tried to avoid both, simply because it's been my experience that it is usually both futile and embarrassing. You can lead a reader to SF, but you can't make him think. And you can lead a science fiction reader/viewer to fandom but you can't make him drink. These are my personal philosophies!

My own contribution elicits no response except to say that upon rereading it I wasn't ashamed. After reading Bob Shaw's much better similar article, I was, but that's the way it goes I guess. Bob is/was/has been/always will be one of the best writers of fannish material we've ever had, and this column is a typical example of the sheer quality of writing and insight that he brings to the most innocuous looking topic. Several other fans have been taxi drivers, and most fans have driven in the things (at least here in affluent North America they have) but Bob's article is probably the best fannish piece about taxis I've run across. Or has run across me, which might be more appropriate considering the driving habits of North American taxi drivers!

Much as I hate to disagree with Ted Tubb, I think there is a sizeable percentage of people in fandom for whom SF itself is almost completely unimportant. However, I agree that without SF the conventions that attract these folk would probably wither away and die. For myself, when I go to a con, I strongly doubt that I talk about science fiction at all. But the people I do talk to might not be there were it not for the stfnal programming and the people who come in to be a part of that aspect of the con, so possibly Ted has a valid point. I hasten to point out that I'm not in any way belittling SF! If I had the time I'd enjoy reading as much of it as I used to, but I don't so I don't. I think if all programming was dropped from so called "SF" cons I'd still be going... but I might be almost alone when I got there!

((That reflects my attitude very exactly. There is so much I want to do in fandom, yet so much SF I know (or strongly believe) to be worth reading, that life would be wonderful if there were 48 hours to every day!))

As for Ted's remarks about the nature of fanzines, I've already indicated that I don't think the actual reproductive technique has all that much to do with it. I may prefer mimeo myself, but I know that preference is irrational. Maya combines the best of both worlds: the friendliness of the fannish world and the quality of presentation of the offset kingdom.

You misinterpreted something I said in my letter that you printed and commented on. When I wrote "I wish I could write like Peter Weston — so does Rob Jackson, I suspect!" I meant that I suspected that Rob Jackson also wished that I could write like Peter Weston. This was in reference to the fact that you were faced with receiving a column from me that wasn't as well written as anything Pete Weston might have sent you. I wasn't referring

to your own writing abilities at all! Fascinating, as a certain pointy eared friend of Greg Pickersgill was wont to say.

Jackie Franke to the contrary, I resent the implication that Sammy-Come-Lately Long had anything to do with teaching me to pun! One of the very first things I ever did in fandom, 'way back in 1967, was to write a column of nothing but puns for an obscure defunct Canadian fanzine that once had a cover by John Brunner. I was publishing Feghoots when Sam long still thought "SF" meant "silly fuckers" and was an accepted reference to meteorologists. About the only thing Goodfan Long ever taught me was that one doesn't dive into the Atlantic Ocean off the east coast of Florida if one wishes to avoid an instant pre-frontal lobotomy! And it was already too late by then...

Paul's comments on the eclectic nature of fandom are right on, but his other remarks are open to doubt. I for one have never believed that "people who read SF are above average intelligence" and I've a decade of contact with SF readers in fandom to back up my doubts! And while some are insecure and immature, that's another generalisation that isn't all that accurate, as is the claim that some read nothing else and some do nothing else. The fact is that the very brightest, most creative, and most intellectually acquisitive people I've ever met have been fans. Also some of the biggest nurds, twits and idiots. You learn to take the bad with the good, and sift out the parts of fandom that are rewarding and enjoyable: when you do that, fandom can be anything you choose to make it.

((Agreed... If anyone tries to tell me that I'm insecure and immature, I'll... I'll cry... and I'll hit 'em, and I'll never be friends with them again!))

Phil Stephensen-Payne,
28 Woodfield Drive,
Charlbury,
Oxford OX7 3SE.

Obviously the combination of living, bachelorly, at home, and being a nut is a great aid to producing a fanzine. I can sympathise greatly with your feelings of joy on the IBM Executive. The firm I worked for time before last had a few in the typing pool that I occasionally played with when working overtime. (Not much of a substitute for the typists, but they weren't often around to be played with.)

A tricky subject — SF in the media. What do people want the media to do? Few people are likely to be converted to a genre by a TV program on it, nor are they likely to be diverted by one against it. To my mind one of the most important factors is that libraries do have some sound judgement. Their lists of SF (many libraries produce these selected reading lists) tend to be sensible.

The public reaction to SF might have increased the volume of books like Perry Rhodan and Hook, but it hasn't decreased the volume of books like The Dispossessed or Son of Man — so why are we worrying?

((Oh yes it has! Silverberg's stopped writing such books!))

Only Glicksohn could write an amusing article about why he could not possibly write an amusing article. Mike has such a delightfully light style when he wants to and I often wonder why it hasn't obtained him more professional success — must be all that whisky. How about persuading him to write an article on whisky, come to think of it? He's probably the only fan who has drunk (and survived) all 437 brands of Scotch in the world. (Worry not that an article on whisky might be boring. You know as well as I do that the article would hardly contain a word on the subject it was meant to be about. But the mention of the subject nearest his heart, mouth, boot and everywhere else in his house might get him moving.)

((Great! But mightn't he get just a little too involved in... er, researching his subject, to be capable of writing it?))

The difficulty (I advisedly do not say trouble) with fandom is that, effectively, it is limitless — or, rather, it is very hard to set limits. If you collect stamps it is easy to confine yourself, say, to collecting Afghanistan. Nice and simple. But it's no good just saying "I'll restrict myself to loccing British fanzines", say, if some Canadian idiot starts dropping packages through your mailbox or somebody pesters you for an article. Fandom is a very people-full hobby, but there are so many people no one can really keep up with them all. I think Skel is right in saying that "fandom does not demand more from you than you are prepared to give." Sometimes, though, it does knock on the door and sit there with a sorrowful look on its face, saying "Please".

Dave Piper,
7 Cranley Dr.,
Ruislip,
Middx. HA4 6BZ.

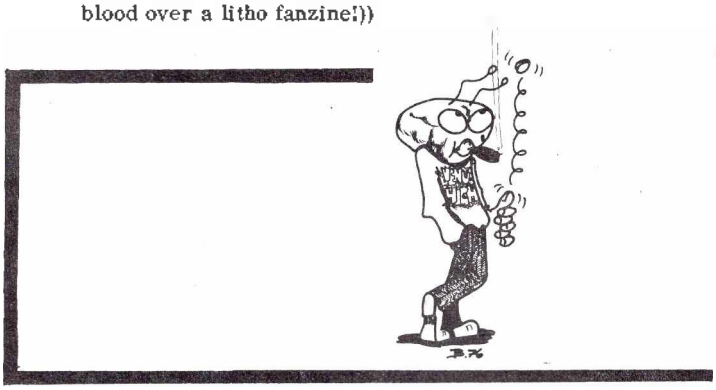
Lessee.... there's a number of alternatives:
A) When I was putting out my OMPAzine, in those dear dead days beyond the pale recall, I used to very occasionally work up a sweat bashing the foot pedal on the Banda and thumping away at the stapler. But I never actually sweated blood over the thing. Being, however, very easily led and open to suggestions I was (and, for that matter, am) always willing to accept at face value those claims by faneds that they had sweated blood over a particular issue. I would now seem to have actual, tangible proof.
B) Now we effete Southerners know that you barbarians from the North have some incredible table manners. Or, to put it another way, NO table manners; and we are well aware that you lot are always putting tomato sauce on yer porridge and/or toast and marmalade. So, possibly, my copy of Maya 10 was the one you flicked through at breakfast the day you posted them out.
C) As you appear to be involved with hospital-type activities perhaps it's the result of one of your, er, less successful operations.
D) At the outside, I suppose, they could represent some sorta different FREE GIFT for which, I suppose, I should perhaps thank you, especially as it's possible, I suppose, that my copy is the only one with them, which, I suppose, makes it (my copy) a sorta Collectors Item...

It's possible that you haven't got the faintest idea of what I'm talking about... right, what I'm talking about is them "red" splodges adorning the cover and pages 10 and 11 of Maya 10.

They have interested, intrigued, and fascinated me all day — as has the rest of the issue.

((The fifth and true alternative: While happily stapling copies of M10, Rich Loughton suddenly looked at his finger... and noticed it was bleeding, and had been for about twenty copies. We looked through the pile of Mayas and wiped off what goo we could find, but some of Rich's own personal tomato sauce must have missed our attentions.

Wow! Now let Ted Tubb say that people don't sweat blood over a litho fanzine!))



Dicky Howett,
118 Sunrise Ave.,
Chelmsford,
Essex.

I find it difficult to believe that you spend all that time and money to produce your pretty publication simply for the response it may engender. When I used to produce fanzines back in nineteen hundred and frozen to death, I did it all for my own ego. To compete with the other fanzines. A sort of battle. If there was any response it usually manifested itself as total indifference or as on one occasion when I gave Pete Weston a copy of my latest effort, he promptly threw it to the floor and jumped on it. I now no longer produce fanzines. Thanks Pete.

((Yes, I must admit that it's not just response (of whatever kind) that I'm looking for; if that were the case, I'd be equally pleased when Experts like Susan Wood and Charlie Brown say nice things about Maya in prozine review columns, and when admittedly inexperienced folk like Ian Garbutt see their first impressions printed in the BSFA Newsletter for the misguidance of five or six hundred potential Maya readers. (His conclusion was that Maya was "a shiny cover with nothing inside".) If and when Ian learns more about the social communication in fanzines, he may start to like it; I know, because when I first came across fanzines I too was puzzled by the personal chit-chat in them. This communication, or response, or whatever you want to call it, is one of the things I now enjoy so much about producing a fanzine; it's not a competitive thing, although it's certainly true that the nicest form of response is praise, and it wouldn't do my ego much good if someone stomped on a copy of Maya, especially Pete!))

Ian Maule,
8 Hillcroft Cres.,
Ealing,
London W5 2SG.

Jerry Kaufman strikes a responsive note in his letter when he points out the differences in the American and British uses of discretion. My only wish is that British faneds would use some sort of yardstick when commenting on or printing articles on other people's personal situations. I realise however that fandom, in Britain at least, is small enough that any indiscretions perpetrated by a fan, no matter how small or trivial, sooner or later reach the ears of someone who will one day use that little piece of information in an article. As I say, you have to expect this in British fandom; it's only when outsiders from other fandoms comment on these articles that we realise that taken in the wider context we British are fairly open about a large number of things others wouldn't dare touch for fear of possible reprisals.

Malcolm complains about my not mentioning his New Year's party in print. It's a pity I didn't really, because it would have contained real editorial personality, gossip and more titbits of information, all the things Malcolm complained of a lack of in Checkpoint. Just think, he could have read about the incident with the irate husband and the cowering wife. This occurred when Malcolm was in the bedroom helping to press the coats with a certain woman. He was succeeding quite well when in rushes the husband, throws Malcolm out, and proceeds to beat his wife around the head with some force, eventually throwing her out of the bedroom onto a rather large table. From there the action moved to the music room which was quickly vacated to allow the loving couple to have an undisrupted argument. Little Mal meanwhile hung around in the passage looking suitably glum and regretful.

((Yes, I agree that people write too much gossip down in fanarticles, letters, etc. What's worse, editors then fail to edit such gossip out of the letters they print!))
((Isn't it shocking, Rick?))

Rick Sneary,
2962 Santa Ana St.,
South Gate,
Cal. 90280, USA.

Being a gentleman of the old school (How old? In my day I kissed ladies' hands) I would never mention the name of a gentleman and a lady who spent the weekend in bed together. Not in print. What they do is certainly their business, and in current society one can only add, good for them... But, the printed word lasts a long time. Even fanzines. Some active fanzine collector in the year 2026 may be reading your aged zine and find mention that Grandmama spent the Con in bed with someone who didn't become Grandpapa — and under the neo-Victorian morality of the times, be profoundly shocked... We will be remembered more by what we write, than what we do.

Maya also heard from Alyson Abramowitz, Merf Adamson, John J. Alderson, Paul Anderson, Jim Barker, Eric Batard, Eric Bentcliffe, John D. Berry, Dainis Bisenieks, Pamela Boal, Syd Bounds, Richard Brandt, David Bridges, Ian R. Butterworth, Michael Carlson, Jeff Clark, Rich Coad, Brett Cox, Arthur Cruttenden (2), Don D'Ammassa, William Danner, Jim Darroch, Bob Day, Graham England, Moshe Feder, Jan Howard Finder, Chris Fowler, Mike Gilbert, D.Gary Grady (2), Brian Griffin, David Griffin, John Hall, David Hardy, Patrick Hayden, Arthur D. Hlavaty, Lynne Holdom, Gary Hubbard (with a superb letter which will be an article in Maya 12), Paul Hudson, Terry Hughes (2), Ben Indick, Jonh Ingham, Terry Jeeves, Tom Jones, Paul Kincaid, Dave Langford (2), George S. Laskowski Jr, Boris Lawrence, Colin Lester, David Lewis, Eric Lindsay (3), Sam Long (2), Don Malcolm, Jim Marshall, Ian Maule (again), Eric Mayer, Taral Wayne MacDonald, Cathy McGuire (again), Patrick McGuire, Jim Meadows III, Steve Miller, John Mottershead, Peter Nicholls, Tom Perry, Sonya Porter, Dave Rowe, Paul A. Ryan, Marc Schirmeister, Joyce Scrivener, Mark R. Sharpe, Kev Smith (again), Steve Sneyd, Mae Strelkov, David A. Symes, Paul E. Thompson (2), Paul Walker, Steve Walker, Alexander Doniphan Wallace, Fredric Wertham (2), D. West, Pete Weston (2), Laurine White, Janice Wiles, Walt Willis, and Susan Wood.

Together with those I've printed, that's 116 letters and notes. Wow! What a fix for a mail-junkie like me! All the above were greatly appreciated, but of course there were some whose letters gave Harry Bell and me (me especially!) particular warmth, and have made me feel particular remorse for not having printed them or written in thanks. In a perfect world there would be time for me to write back and get to know you better...

Write again, everybody! Next issue before Christmas.

a compressed and fragmented editorial, perhaps!

We will be remembered more by what we write than what we do, Rick Sneary says. I wonder what Maya will be remembered for (if anything special) in years to come? Is there something of Lasting Importance in it all, or am I just editing an ephemeral rag to give evanescent pleasure then be thrown away?

I don't have any definite answers, but I have a hunch, and I'll tell you what it is when I've told you my reasons for it.

A while back someone took me to task for publishing "personal-friends articles" by Ian Williams and Pete Weston in Maya 9. Possibly my critic disliked a certain closeness or friendliness of tone which fannish fanwriters tend to adopt — but this tone is no different in kind from the one which newspaper columnists, TV personalities — indeed any communicator — must adopt to get through to his audience as being possessed of some normal degree of humanity. The only difference is in emphasis, and in the occasional use of fannish jargon in fanzine articles.

More likely, my critic saw in both Ian Williams and Pete Weston an annoying tendency to write about (ugh) people.

But what other subject is there to write about? What else is more important?

I can hear the shocked answer now: "But this is a science fiction fanzine; why don't you write about science fiction?"

But what is sf itself about? People!

At least the best sf is. For years now, critics have been trying to tell us that the best sf is that in which the characters — the people — are most fully realised and described, and in which the dialogue sparkles most or is most true to life; and that the finest novels are those which tell us most about the goings-on in that extraordinary, amorphous assembly we call Humanity, People or whatever.

I couldn't agree with the critics more. (This is not to be taken as implying that All-Sf-Should-Be-Relevant; to be illuminating, sf doesn't need to be "relevant".)

You may argue, here, that another category of "best sf" is that in which the most fascinating and newest and most inspiring ideas are presented. Maybe; but how else are the ideas to be effectively presented in a story if not by the actions and failings of people?

So sf is about people. It follows that the best sf is written by those who can write best about people (in strange places and environments, granted); and the writers who can do this best are the ones who know most about people. This is echoed in the April '76 Analog in a superb introductory essay to his Reference Library column by Lester del Rey:

> "In our field, necessity demands imagining a great deal... in the long run, however, experience gives the truest colour to fiction. Reading can only supply what some other writer thought of life. Only when a man has actually had his nose smashed and his body beaten, and when he's suffered the growing, throbbing ache for hours afterwards, will he be able to judge how much repeated punishment his hero can take."

The lamp of experience (Lester's title for his column) burns most brightly in those who have burnt the oil of life themselves the hardest. Lester knows this, and I am starting to find it out for myself.

Occasionally, out of the impenetrable fog of my thoughts there condenses a possible theme to be examined in a novel, a hoop through which a few characters may someday be made to jump when I get down to writing about them.

And when is it that thse themes crop up?

When I'm reading sf? No, not usually.

When I'm reading fanzines full of critical and analytical discussion of sf? Good Ghu, no!

When I'm half (or wholly) sloshed on Gannetfandom drinking nights? Rarely.

When I read the News of the World or another lascivious newspaper full of cheap second-hand Human Interest? Rarely too.

The themes crop up when I have had to face the emotions of lives in a mess; when I'm feeling harrowed or elated or fascinated by a problem or its solution. Most often, I've been seeing the worries and anxieties around me in my work at hospital — for example when the caring of parents for their child is disturbed by illness, or I am myself disturbed when that caring is unnaturally not in evidence, or when any of a thousand incidents in hospital has presented a little moral to my grateful but forgetful brain.

Is it any wonder that one of my two best-liked fan articles has been about my life as a medical student visiting Ceylon, and the other about my experiences as a doctor? It is in them that I have burnt the lamp of my own experience, and have reflected what — little? — I know of the people around me.

And it was in their articles in Maya 9 that Ian Williams & Peter Weston reflected what they knew of the people round them.

Pete does it again, even better, this issue. My other contributors also reflect their own personal experiences — Walt Willis with characteristic warmth and gentle humour, Bob Shaw with his usual mixture of acute observation and the superb comedy his unique world-view brings, and Tom Perry with satirical bite born of his experiences as a reporter.

Fannish writers, writing about people. Notice that in sf fanzines it's the fannish writers who write about people, and the sercon writers who write about sf. (Well, by definition.)

I wonder which sort of writer, in the opinion of those who ask for their fanzines to be about sf and nothing else, is likely to become the most successful sf writer, to reflect best the agony and the glory of human existence: the one who has only tried to understand books, or the one who has tried to understand people as well? The one whose knowledge is gained second-hand, or the one who concentrates on absorbing his personal knowledge from life, making it individual and idiosyncratic and interesting?

Absorbing people second-hand, readily digested, through books (sf, mainstream fiction, or factual) is like absorbing food which has already been digested once — the nutritional value — & certainly the flavour — is much reduced. Absorbing words, or words about words, is no substitute for absorbing people; via sight, via sound, via touch if you're lucky.

When you've learnt something about people, you can then reflect it in your writing. Write about real people, or about imaginary ones; write fannish articles, or write sf. I don't mind which. (I've been misinterpreted in print recently in another fanzine as not liking people to publish fan fiction. Not so. I'm all in favour of people writing and publishing it — I just don't usually enjoy reading the work of inexperienced fanfiction writers as much as I do that of professionals. When there are Zelaznys and Vances unread on my bookshelf, I've always got something better to do than read fanfic.)

If you want to know where the value of fandom lies (whether as a school for learning about sf or about life) ask some of the people who were helped in their careers by writing or editing "personal-friends" articles such as some profess to despise. I'll name a few below so you can ask them.... Greg Benford, Ray Bradbury, Marion Zimmer Bradley, Terry Carr, Arthur Clarke, Harlan Ellison, Ray Nelson, Fred Pohl, Charles Platt, Chris Priest, Bob Shaw, Bob Silverberg, Bob Tucker, Jim White, Ted White. There are many more names... and any of them will agree that book people are no substitute for real ones.

Those are the reasons for my hunch: which is, that Maya will be remembered, if at all, for the quality of the writing it contains about people. Not, I feel, for its book reviews. I like publishing book reviews well enough, but I think that their value is of the moment rather than of the future. Think for a moment. Has anyone ever collected the best book reviews of a fan reviewer, even famous and well-read ones such as Dick Geis, Dick Lupoff, or Doug Barbour? Not to my knowledge; but people often put together collections of the best of various fannish writers. Book reviews can only be as important and lasting as the book they examine, almost always less so.

We will, indeed, be remembered more by what we write than what we do: but we must write about what we do and not what other people write, to be remembered the more.

Rob Jackson, July '76.

This has been MAYA 11, the July 1976 but a bit delayed until August issue.

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PETER ROBERTS

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FOR TAFF