

SHIPYARD BLUES



Play Me Some Shipyard Blues...

What's it all about, then, this **Shipyard Blues** thing? Resisting the temptation to mutter "about twenty-eight pages" I shall tell you. It's about combating boredom, about maintaining the flow of letters into the house (a mail junkie will do anything to get his fix), about kick-starting my own writing again, about stirring up a moribund British fanzine scene with a frequent zine which isn't wholly fan-nish in content or outlook. Will that do for starters?

Having scuttled the **Crystal Ship**, I want to put out something that is fun to produce, that goes together quickly, and hits the street while the material is still warm (or maybe even hot, if I'm lucky). That's the aim of **Shipyard Blues**, to follow up what I was doing with **CS**, combine it with some elements of the newsletter **Moment's Wave**, stir in a little **Rastus**, then serve it all up rapidly. I'm looking for publication every 3-4 months at the latest, and don't rule out the possibility of greater frequency on occasions. Basically I shall fill up 24-28 pages, then get it out as fast as the **Repro Shop** can print it.

Fast production means topicality becomes far more possible than it ever

was with **CS**. I shall be looking for contributions that stir things up a little, and then keep the pot boiling with the loccol. Got something on your mind? Unload it in my direction, and we'll see about giving it an airing.

What's in a name?

"Shipyard Blues sounds very down-beat" wrote Terry Broome, on hearing of my planned title. He went on: "Blues suggest a bitterness or sadness/ disappointment at your past". Terry, you couldn't be more wrong, and plainly haven't listened widely enough to the blues to discover the joy and humour that is there, as well as the heartache. The blues are the heartbeat of my life, whether it be via jazz, the blues themselves, the American folk music of the fifties and sixties, or that bastard offspring of the blues, rock and roll. After a bad day at the office, there's nothing like a bluesy guitar to lift the spirits, set 'em free and rolling again.

For me, **Shipyard Blues**, besides retaining more than a hint of connection to **Crystal Ship**, also echoes a couple of other old favourites of mine. There was Maria Muldaur's delightfully

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raunchy 'Brickyard Blues' from the early seventies, as well as the superbly anarchic film, **Steelyard Blues**, with Jane Fonda (you remember, the one where she empties a glass full of ice cubes into a police lieutenant's Y-fronts).

If there's a hint of the true blues (no, not the Tory party) in some of the subject matter, well, life is hard and then you die, so I guess reflecting that fact every so often is not truly an aberration, is it? In fact, maybe the reverse is true: it's not reflecting real life now and then that is the aberration. Malcolm Edwards once compared fannish writing to the blues: he meant that it was often variations on a theme. If that's so, then maybe what I'm pushing for here is more rhythm and blues, something that goes beyond the formula, and sparks new ideas. At least, that's the theory: the practice is what you make of it, dear reader-cum-potential-contributor, and don't you forget it!

Reality Programming

Watching **Saturday Night Clive** the other day, I came across a new concept in American TV packaging:

Reality Programming. It seems that the latest hit programmes on the American networks are adaptations of the much loved **True Stories** or **Detective Stories** formats, where

cops recount their brushes with death for the camera (often replete with tears, choked voices and heavy emotional displays). Hosted by one of the original "French Connection" cops, the programme goes into graphic detail, like the female cop who was shot in the face ("the bullet went

through my nose, scored the roof of my mouth and lodged in the back of my neck"), and who still managed to shoot her assailant. To me, this is the biggest turn-off ever, but apparently the American public laps it up.

I guess we have to say that British TV has always had a high percentage of 'reality programming' in its makeup: everything from **Your life In Their Hands**, thru the various 'fly on the wall' documentaries, to the present stuff like **Crimewatch**, et al. I think its part and parcel of the overall package over here, in a way that perhaps it hasn't been on the major American networks, with their obsession with



ratings, etc. The major networks have tended to downplay the public information side of their output in a way that's foreign to British television (though the next decade may see much erosion of the educational aspects of TV, under commercial pressures from satellite and cable TV).

Mind you, it's not only TV that needs a little 'Reality Programming'. Maybe fandom needs some too. Reading fanzines is sometimes like entering into a fantasy world, where life is one long convention. The recounting of daring little tales of a reckless past (a la Mike Ashley), or of the latest saga of booze and despondency, all seem to exist in a fannish hinterland whose connection to real life is just a wee bit attenuated. And many fans don't like it when confronted with reality in fanzines: the reaction of fandom to the three issues of **Trip-tych** was to mutter imprecations in its sleep, then roll over and snore.

Perhaps that will be a central theme for future **Shipyard Blues**: reality programming for fans, finding ways to relate fandom to the real world, that will turn fans on, and get them writing. And make no mistake about it fans, this little baby will take some filling if I get it on a quarterly cycle, so watch out, I'll be round with the boys to collect your dues Real Soon Now!

A Terrible Fate

Oh mighod, what do I do now? My pristine Rock'n'Roll bwain has been sullied with music formerly considered strictly for the eggheads — I've

suddenly discovered that opera (Opera!!!) need not be a cause for earplugs and aspirin. And that's from someone who always believed that sopranos should be assassinated for the good of mankind! Oh well, put it down to the ageing process (ie, senility), I guess, and a long campaign waged by an old colleague of mine, who's adulation of Wagner is second only to his admiration for Mrs. Marx's boys (Karl and Groucho).

The reason for my downfall was a little channel-hopping one Sunday evening, when I lucked onto an intriguing little number in BBC2's Bartok season, called **Duke Bluebeard's Castle**. Done in true TV drama style, removing the 'staged' element that has ruined earlier attempts of mine to watch opera, the storyline grabbed me, and the music kind of sank in by osmosis along the way.

One of the reasons I liked this opera over others I've attempted to watch in the past (like Wagner's 'Ring') is that it is on a human scale, just two people on stage for the most part, and muted, more like conversation, without the full-blooded shriek of a soprano in heat.

The tale is about a woman, Judith, who falls in love with the infamous Bluebeard, follows him to his castle, and there persuades him to show her his treasures, concealed behind seven locked doors. Each portal unveils a new wonder, but with sinister undertones: the torture chamber whose wall weeps blood, the treasure chests with blood-stained jewels, the garden with blood-soaked soil, the pool of

tears. The final door reveals the Duke's first three wives, still living, but like zombies, each dressed representing a time of day: then the horror dawns on Judith, and she realises that she is the fourth quarter, Bluebeard's Queen of the Night, and is tearfully arrayed in star-spangled cloak to join the others in their limbo.

On stage, I imagine I would be disappointed by the opera, as they could not achieve the effectiveness that TV brings to such a subject. Musically, I'm currently listen-

ing to a Hungarian recording of the opera borrowed from the OU, and trying very hard to put the images from the screen into their correct places in the opera, but I'm missing the sub-titles (though there is a libretto with the record).

Discussing the opera with friends at work, I came to the conclusion that I should investigate 20th Century works further, leaving aside the more classic operas. So, I'm looking out for people like Janacek, Brittan, etc, and hoping for more TV events of the quality of **Duke Bluebeard's Castle**. And, I might add, hoping for a repeat of that programme, so I can video it to keep next time. Now there's an awful thought: I could be looking at repeat viewings of these things. Will it never end?

Muddy Waters

Water privatisation is one of the murkier subjects that Big Mag has been forcing on us all this past few months, but I think I'm beginning to see a glimmer of reasoning behind the

madness of the privatisation. The thing is, the Government, in a momentary rush of blood to the conscience, signed an agreement with the rest of the EEC to reduce water pollution. It can't do that without spending billions on new plant, to make up

for years of neglect. Now, we all know that extracting cash for public works from the Exchequer requires crack safebreakers using explosives in the megaton range to get through the solid granite protection erected round ol'Fatso's £14 billion nest egg. So, what does worried Mr Ridley and Big Mag come up with as a way to slip the cost over on someone else? Water privatisation, what else?

But, the scam may run deeper than just selling the British public an industry it already owns: after all, no self-respecting Tory voter is going to hang onto those shares for any longer than is necessary to make a quick profit. No, the con is aimed at those organisations who will buy the shares *after* the Great British Public have unloaded them. And the likelihood is



that those will be the French companies who already own a substantial part of the private water industry over here. (I leave aside for your own delectation the irony of reputedly the worst-plumbed nation in Europe having a thing about acquiring the British water industry.)

So, the scam runs this way: the water pollution control bodies will go their own sweet, innocuous way for a while, slapping a wrist here, wrapping a knuckle there, until the moment comes when the Froggies own a substantial amount of the industry. Then the watchdogs suddenly develop teeth, and start mauling the water companies for the parlous state of the H₂O in their areas, forcing them to pay excessively large amounts of mazoola, both in fines for polluting our delightful waterways, and in modifications to plant. Of course, the companies will pass the cost onto the consumer, (that's you and me, folks, remember), but the blame for the increase will fall squarely on the shoulders of the folks from across the Channel. Devilish cunning wheeze, eh what?

Hiya Sierra!

I'm fascinated by the device fitted to some new Ford models. It's an adaptation of the infra-red locking system first used by Renault, where you have a key-fob containing an infra-red signalling device that unlocks all the car doors, boot, etc, in one go. Ford have taken it one stage further, and the car now acknowledges receipt of the signal, by flashing its lights, and sound-

ing a beeper. No more broken wrists grabbing to open a door that's still firmly locked because the battery has gone flat in the fob — if the car doesn't respond, summat's wrong.

The possibilities of these devices are tremendous. I don't know what the range of the infra-red key is, but you might be able to find your car in a strange carpark at night just by pressing the button, whereupon the car does a 'here I am, Boss' routine. In future, you might be able to aim a controller out of the window at your car outside, get it to start and warm up while you're on the way down to it. What a boon for cold winter days. And what the customisers will do when they tinker with the technology boggles the mind.

Imagine a combination of the air-shockers some American customisers use (or Citroen-type pneumatic suspension), a voice chip, and an infra-red key. As you walk towards your custom car, trying to impress the girls with your ineffable coolness, you press the button, the door opens, the engine starts and revs up, strobe-lights flash, the back-end of the car jumps up and down in excitement, and the car calls out, "Hiya Boss, let's go for a spin round the block!". It'll knock 'em dead in the King's Road!

OK, enough of my drivelling for now, time to swing into a little breast-beating clairvoyancy, as Chuck Connor and Terry Broome take on the sticky task of discussing "The Future Of Fanzines". Take it away Chuck....

A Champagne Glass, Bearing Lipstick Traces

Chuck Connor

"Hey, Sam, set me up another one, will ya?"

"Don't you think you've had enough, Chuck? Don't you think it's time for you to go home? It's 6.15pm, Christmas Eve.... and you've been drinking solid since midday... Easter Sunday..."

"Hey, c'mon Sam. That guy, wassisname? Owen..."

"You don't mean that political figure, do you Chuck?"

"What? God, Sam, what do you take me for?"

"As much as I can get, Chuck."

"No, Sam, I'm talking about Johnny Owen. You remember him, Sam. Used to do all those classy little hi-tech mags."

"Semi-pro?"

"No, Sam. At least I never saw him working any of the street corners I used to.... He wants me to do a piece for him about the future of the fanzine. Remember fanzines, Sam? I tell you, Sam, they were the good days..."

"You're not going to get nostalgic again, are you Chuck?"

"Why not, Sam? Hell, there ain't nothing around today is there"

"Don't know about that, Chuck.

There's still the old Novas, and of course the Hugo"

"It don't work like that, Sam. Look at the fanzine Hugo awards over the past five to ten years... You see any fanzines, or just a bunch of glossy semi-pros that go all out for these awards?"

"C'mon, Chuck, those mags are supposed to be good, able to pull in top quality writing, good layouts, and they give the fans what they want."

"But to compete with the likes of those you have to compete with their circulation — swamp the marketplace and you win a prize. Hell, Sam, Alan Sugar's proved that fact over and over again."

"They still give the fans what they want, Chuck."

"No, Sam, they just don't allow for any alternatives or competition, and faced with that you just don't try anything. And with no competition things just stagnate and bland out — all the while people aren't prepare to knock, or criticise because that's the only mag in town."

"So what you're leading to is that most of the fans are sheep?"

"Not so fast, Sam. Don't go putting words in my mouth, just keep on filling up the glass, okay?"

“Okay, Chuck, but you better start clarifying that point otherwise I’m likely to get the wrong idea.”

“The point here is that fans have become complacent, Sam. They sit back and accept what’s going on around them and don’t do anything to alter or change or create anymore.”

“So what you’re saying is that apathy has taken over and flattened out fandom as you knew it?”

“No, Sam, I’m bemoaning the fact that everything is on tap these days. There’s no longer the need for communication by mail, conventions are no longer ‘those special occasions’ — you’re now spoilt for choice and committees squabble over who decided on which weekend first (and do so publicly as well). Eastercons are now on 2-year bidding, and most of the time you can’t get a supporting membership because it’s just too much trouble for the organisers.”

“But how does that tie in with fanzines then, Chuck? With all this activity going on how can you say that fans are apathetic?”

“That’s the point, Sam. There’s no longer anything to work at, or for. You want to say something, you go to a meeting, or you go to a convention, or you phone round and go down the pub. You don’t write letters, or put your thoughts down on paper — it’s all peripheral stuff, Sam. No hard copy, no communication outside any set group, except for the odd spin-off — something thrown out of orbit from a closed nucleus. The only time a mass of fanzines seems to be produced these days comes when there’s a con-

vention on — and even then some of the productions look like they were handled as a chore. ‘It was positively murderous, dah-ling. And when the Bambi staples ran out, well, I thought that was going to be it, I can tell you’. If you’re going to a convention you produce a fanzine and distribute it there, as opposed to doing a fanzine, then going to a convention with some copies for off-chance distribution.”

“That’s a bit strong, Chuck!”

“But it’s a fact of fandom, Sam. There’s no new blood coming into fanzines any more, because the drive that creates fanzines is no longer with us. It’s far easier to sit around with a pint than it is to mash the keys of a typewriter.”

“Ah, but isn’t that what fandom is all about?”

“Partly, Sam, but all people are doing these days is getting as far as the drinking, and no more.”

“So what about the rest of the world then, Chuck?”

“But the rest of the world is far, far bigger than the UK, Sam. We’ve maybe reached saturation point, or beyond it in fact. You can only fit so much into a glass, Sam. And at the moment the glass is overflowing, with fanzines seemingly spilled out over the top. America survives because it is larger, and can accommodate more activity. Australia is still going through a change, after a lull where fanzines were few and far between — but again, in both cases, there are very few new names coming into the arena. The rest of Europe is viewed as a bit of a joke by some, but it’s frag-

mented, Sam, so there is that flux, that change, that alteration of environment that creates things. The UK doesn't have any more room for change. We've panned out, Sam. There's no more gold in them thar hills because the hills have been leveled."

"Hey, hold on there, Chuck. Fandom's grown - it's bigger, more diversified, and more active than it's ever been before and fandom is still active. You're not going to tell me that that's a bad thing, are you, Chuck?"

"Yes, I do, Sam. We're going backwards in some respects, and the next move is fragmentation, Sam. Hell, it was going on between the SFers and the Mediaists before the last British Worldcon."

"That was Brighton in '88, Chuck."

"No, Sam, that was the final British Worldcon... I'm talking about the old Seacon '79. Fandom as one whole unit will finally decay and collapse, leaving behind a mass of splinters that will fold in on themselves. There will be a harpooning — sorry! — wailing, and a gnashing of teeth, and we'll be back to the old author-savaging, and the sacrificing of little tribes of Trekkies to the Great God, Ghu."

"But wasn't it like that in the old days, Chuck? The *good old days*?"

"The hell it was, Sam. Well, not all like that. There was a life, a zap, a pow, p'ching, voom, squirtle."

"Squirtle? I think you've had too many sound effects, Chuck. But what if you're right, how do you explain apas?"

"Bless you, Sam."

"What-"

"Sorry, Sam, I thought you sneezed."

"No, Chuck, I said 'apas'."

"Okay, Sam, look what happened to OMPA. It died of apathy, Sam. So did ROMPA. FAPA only keeps going because it's become part of an ageing institution. No, Sam, apas are just a small retreat for old fanzine producers, and people who just want to dabble in something that few people take seriously anyway. A couple of sheets of paper, knocked out a couple of days before the deadline, and there you go, an apa contribution. Oh, sure, you get the odd one or two who can put it together, produce the odd gem, but why bother when you can go out down the pub?"

"So what about TWP, or PAPA then, Chuck? They've been going for a fair few years now, and are still doing nicely. What of Get Stuffed, or your old haunt, The Organisation? And what of that spin-off of Frank's, that pirate apa Pieces Of Eight that you're hanging out with at the moments? Don't they qualify for something?"

"Hey, Sam, how the hell I can you include something like Get Stuffed in with that collection? It's a joke, as in funny ha-ha, as opposed to funny peculiar — but it exists because people are bored, or feel that they have to keep their names alive. Okay, so it's fun in some respects, but it's also so ephemeral as well. No substance has come from it."

"But it gives some people pleasure, Chuck. It exists because people want it to."

“So do coffee and cigarettes, and like Get Stuffed, I’m not condemning them either, okay Sam?”

“Okay, so what about the rest of them?”

“Well... PAPA is still a closed circuit. Sure, they’ve thrown their doors open to anyone now, but it’s still a hide-away. Nobody comes out of there into real fanzines, Sam. No one has the urge to go it alone either with an article or a full-blown fanzine. TWP is the only remaining sexist apa in the UK, and although it has produced some new writers, there’s also been more fur flying around than Joan Collins’ wardrobe of minks. Pieces Of Eight is going through a flux even as we talk, Sam, and a new administrator’s trying to get some more zip into it — but it still survives on minac and mailcoms, with only a few people coming up with the goods. As to The Organisation? No comment, Sam, mainly as I’d be automatically accused of victimisation no matter what I said about it.”

“That’s a bit of a cheapshot, Chuck.”

“See what I mean! Hell and damnit, Sam, there is no way you can call an apazine a fanzine, because it is only aimed at a fixed, small audience, and normally revolves around one person. Try bringing in outside contributions and it stops being an apazine but a fanzine posing as an apa contribution. Yeah, apazines can be distributed to people outside of the apa, but their comments won’t be of much use (if they bother to comment at all) because any replies to that comment will be integral to the other apa

members’ contributions. It’s only real two-way communications when something is generated within the apa, and taken up by the apa members — and with minac there’s little you can do in that direction.”

“So apas are not the breeding ground of fanzines?”

“Not as such, Sam. They might spark something off, or they might help as a training ground for any potential writers, but at the moment it’s fandom that’s killing off the fanzine, and with so few around there’s little incentive to write.”

“But what of the Hugo and the Nova awards?”

“Like I said at the start, Sam, the Hugo is too Americanised for any real outside competition. As to the Nova? Are you being serious? Poke out a couple of issues near the time, get yourself on peoples’ minds, shove a voting slip under their noses when you buy them a drink, and off you go. You don’t remember the fanzines that come through the door between January to August, do you Sam? It’s like the old Doc Weir Award, Sam. Ask anyone at your next convention if they know about the award, what it was for, who it was about, and why, and you’ll be met with blank faces. It’s another hill laid flat by apathy, as was the old Knights of St Fantony.”

“The who?”

“Exactly, Sam. They were a bunch of fans who went to what few conventions were around at that time, and they helped to break the ice for newcomers so that they didn’t feel left out in the cold. There was some talk

about reviving the order, but I understand it fell flatter than a cowpat.”

“But what’s this all I got to do with the future of fanzines, Chuck?”

“It’s just one more downward step, Sam. One more downward, backward step.”

“But, Chuck, look at the last batch of Nova votes —”

“No, Sam, look at the voting forms themselves. You get a multi-choice in every category, and those choices are awarded points for their placing on that particular vote form. If a person thinks that fanzine X is better than fanzine Y, then X goes in at Number 1, and Y goes in at either Number 2 or number 3. This is all fine and dandy, until you get to realise that only 55 people voted in the 1988 Nova Awards, and that the fanzine winner, **Lip**, need only have been placed second or third on everyones vote form. **Lip** came in with 112 ‘points’ — they are awarded 5 points for a first placing, 3 for a second, and only 1 for a third. That means it only needed to take just 22 people to put it in top position, and 2 people to run it in third. Or, playing statistics again, 37 voters would only have to place it in second place, plus one more in last position, and it would still win. That means that, in theory, an awful lot of the voters could’ve thought that **Lip** was really nothing special, and only slapped it down as it was a name that came to mind when they were scraping the bottom of their barrel-like minds. It wins not because it’s good, but because it sticks in peoples’ minds for one reason or another.”

“So what you’re saying is that the Nova Awards are not really worth the paper the vote forms are printed on?”

“Why not? They no longer mean anything — apart from being a little bit of ego masturbation in the form of ‘look everybody, I’ve won a prize’ — because the number of people voting is not representative. According to what has gone before, 55 people have now helped to make the statement that **Lip** was the best British Fanzine for 1988. Ah, but here’s the rub, it is fandom itself which has set the Nova Awards up as being the best of British — it says nothing of the sort in all the official literature.”

“But if fandom ‘unofficially’ recognises it as being the awards for the ‘Best of then why did only 55 people vote?”

“Another rub, Sam. The official ruling is that you must either be attending or supporting the Novacon, and also be ‘an informed fan/informed voter’ — now comes the even better part. To be informed you need to receive at least 6 fanzines over the Novacon voting year, and also ‘prove that they are active in fanzines’. And do you know what, Sam? Anyone found not living up to that required pedigree is automatically barred from voting. So you need to be well known in fanzines, and be either attending, or supporting, Novacon itself.”

“They’re pretty heavy, aren’t they Chuck?”

“Even more so when you check that you need to either attend, or support, Novacon, but that Novacon *hasn’t*

been running supporting memberships for years. I'm not saying that this is deliberate, Sam, but it could be construed as such if someone wanted to.... But it's still one more restriction that boils down to the fact that if you want to have a set of National Fan Awards, then the Nova just isn't suited for it one little bit."

"So, Chuck, you think there should be more of fandom involved.?"

"Of course there should, but we're getting back to that old devil called apathy, Sam. Look at all the screaming and caterwauling that went on and on when Ashley the Younger won the best fanwriter Nova. Shouts of 'He never should've won the bloody thing!' are ringing round the paper halls of fanzine fandom, yet it wouldn't surprise me one little iota if most of those doing the song and dance routine hadn't put down little Mikey's name in a low position just for a wizard jape, don't'cha know. Spiffing, what?! And now the gag's backfired — hell, if everyone had put him in at the bottom of their nominations, he'd've still gotten 55 points."

"Hey, calm down a little bit there, Chuck. Don't want you bursting a bloodvessel. But, okay, so the whole idea of the Novas is nothing more than a scam, but what's the alternatives? One fan one vote?"

"Why not, Sam? The only reason this isn't done is that it would actually show just how bloody pointless and futile such a thing as the Novas are. For the 1988 awards there were 24 fanzines nominated — and no, I'm not going to start playing with statistics there because both you and I know

that you can prove anything you want just by juggling with the figures. But the point is still the same, everyone could be stuck for a title, and just bung down the first one that comes into their heads at the time, and by that standard the yearly Best of British Fanzines is picked."

"So, what do you suggest?"

"Well, why not run it as a real National vote. Advertise it in the likes of **Matrix, Vector, Critical Wave, Pulp**, any fanzines going at the time. Set a deadline for the votes, and if needs be for the fanzines as well (so as to stop any mad rush for the deadline — this is the hardest bit to keep straight and unloaded). The only commitment fans will then have is to supply an envelope and a stamp — and even the stamps can be saved and given to a charity that can handle them. Hell, there's more complicated gimcracks used for TAFF than there would ever need be for the reshaped award here, and the fans aren't even being asked to donate any money with the voting forms. So, going all the way, the best time and place to have the awards would be at the Eastercon."

"But, Chuck, aren't the Nova awards part and parcel of the Novacon itself?"

"Okay, so call the damn thing something other than 'Nova' then. Damn it, if you're going to use the bloody thing as a National Standard, then why the hell isn't it being designed as a bloody National event? The Eastercon attracts more attendees and would be much more representative. The trouble there, in keeping it with just the conventioners, is that most

of them probably haven't even seen a fanzine — let alone, heavens to Betsy Ross, actually *read one* — apart from seeing it as something to stick their pints of real ale on to stop beer rings forming on the table tops. No, the best thing to do is to make it a postal vote, and just have the ceremony at the major convention of the year."

"So what about a convention that's specifically designed for 'written SF' - the **Mexicon**, for example."

"So why limit yourself, Sam? Anyway, the **Mexicon** isn't held on a regular basis, and the 1989 version was held as an alternative Eastercon anyway. And you could only get hold of the convention's written material by actually signing up to attend the thing, as opposed to running a supporting membership for those who couldn't get to the event but who wouldn't've minded reading the literature the convention generated. No, the easiest thing to do would be to keep it postal and those that want to hand their vote forms in at the designated convention can do so at the start of the convention."

"And that will start to raise an interest in fanzines, Chuck?"

"I doubt it very much, Sam.

"So, what do you think would do the trick then Chuck?"

"Well, Sam, the last time I was talking to Vinc Clarke, at his place one evening — putting the world to rights — I said that what we needed was for the fanzine to totally die out — completely cease to exist. A total blank for around five years, maybe, and then for someone, some new blood if you

will, to re-discover it from scratch. Create the medium again, without knowing what it is they're doing, and without anyone else to come along and crush the spark with the old fannish cry of 'It's all been done before, now piss off!'"

"That sounds pretty drastic, Chuck."

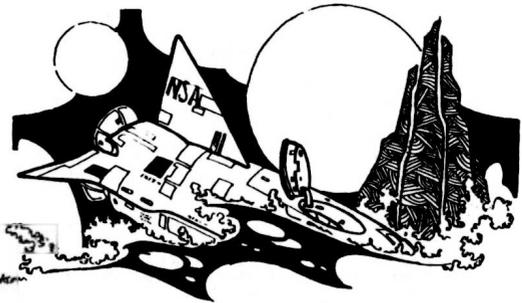
"Maybe it is, but even Vinc agreed with me...."

"So you don't hold out much hope for the future of fanzines, eh?"

"Hope is always there, Sam. But there again, there's nothing quite like championing a lost cause, is there? No, Sam, like ennui, there's no future in fanzine fandom at the moment. It's been pushed into the background of fannish events and requirements, and there it will stay until Convention Fandom becomes stale, stagnant and jaded enough to admit that there was something predating it, before it had raised its **Alienesque** little head from the chest of Fanzine Fandom. The Fanzine is dead, long live the Fanzine."

"Another drink, Chuck"

"Might as well, Sam. Don't look like there's much going to happen around here for a while at least.."





SWAMP THING

Terry Broome

The first fanzines, produced by members of American fan groups, were originally entirely concerned with sf and science. Interest grew, friendships formed and zines became increasingly diverse. Fanzines were exchanged and free copies sent to contributors and loccers, "thus they abandoned professional aspirations for informality and an active readership" states the Nicholls **Encyclopedia Of Science Fiction**¹. The Holdstock **Encyclopedia Of Science Fiction**² says that "the true fanzine remains unpretentious, unconcerned with the merits of professional presentation", and that they "are normally only sent to those who show an interest in them", that interest expressed through a contribution, letter, verbal comment, zine exchange or review, "anything which extends the complex lines of communication that are at the core of sf fandom".

Ash's **Visual Encyclopedia Of Science Fiction**³ tells us that the earliest zines were handwritten copies made using multiple layers of carbon and plain paper, that these were followed by the hektographed and mimeographed fanzine, by printing, ink-paste duplication, "Ditto" spirit duplication and offset lithography; that in the early '60s individual fanzines were uncommon and the apa became popular, though individual zines went through a revival after 1970. The Nicholls **Encyclopedia**

informs us that zines were normally duplicated or printed, anything from a single sheet to a hundred or more pages, with a circulation of from 5 to 5,000 copies, "the smaller fanzines are often written entirely by the editor and serve simply as letter substitutes sent out to friends... The larger fanzines have an average circulation of 200-500".

The Ash **Encyclopedia** asserts that "many fen are only passingly interested in science fiction. They have been labeled 'faans'... and usually they are more concerned with the comradeship of the club than were its original aims. The opposite viewpoint is identified by the adjective 'sercon'... this distinction highlights the potential schism in fandom... fannish fans (faans) refusing to recognise a sercon organisation or publication as a proper part of fandom, and a sercon body becoming very largely out of touch with fannish fandom... the dichotomy of aims frequently results in feuds."

Though all this might have been true at the time the encyclopedias were published, there have been a number of changes in fandom and fanzine fandom since then.

A percentage of fans continue to have professional aspirations. If, by 'professional', we mean that fanzines are available for money, may pay their contributors and perhaps strive for

profit, there are a whole range of ficzines, amateur small-press magazines and newszines committed to sercon material that are trying to do that (**Critical Wave**, **Works**, **Back Brain Recluse** and such oldtimers as **Riverside Quarterly** and **Locus**, which is professional in all but its declaration). If by 'professional' we mean the 'look' of the zine, the layout, presentation, method of publication, then zines like the recently defunct **Crystal Ship**, which is laser/litho-printed, or the immaculately presented **Marital Rats Of Shaolin** qualify. If by 'professional' we mean that the contents are of a professional standard, small-press zines like **Tales Of The Unanticipated** and **New Pathways**, to pick two at random, would qualify from what I've heard of them. Some amateur publications meet all these 'rules', but can they then be counted as fanzines? To qualify to be a fanzine does it have to be edited by fans for fans? Most of the above would meet that criteria, too.

The boundaries between professional magazines and fanzines have been eroded ever since modern methods of production became more widely available and zines like **Locus** stubbornly maintained their semi-pro status. The wide availability of cheap word-processing computers and photocopiers, and the growing interest in the short story form have led to a boom in ficzine and small press magazine production, even though the quality of their contents still leave a lot to be desired. There are now so many of such varying quality that it isn't easy to draw lines between where the ficzines leave off from the

amateur small press publications and where they leave off from semi-professional magazines.

More Faans are beginning to recognise sercon organisations and publications today that they used to, but both camps, Faan and Sercon, are still largely ignorant of what the other is doing. Whilst ficzine and the small press remain ignorant of trends in sf (one editor told me he didn't even read sf reviews, let alone bother with critical essays), their work is likely to continue to hold little appeal to the Faan, with the result that the schism will continue. Relatively new professional and semi-pro magazines like **Interzone** (now well-established), **The Gate** and **Fear** could prevent the schism from widening and eventually form a bridge encouraging better communication between the two camps, but their aims are basically opposed, so no substantial changes will occur. Conflicts between the two still leads to feuds and will continue to do so when individuals can use organisations like the BSFA as weapons or tools to further their own ends, whether they're in it or fighting against it. Individual personality conflicts within faandom are not unknown, though they tend to revolve around the same small group of characters. Fanfiction, poetry and sercon material is more in evidence in Britzines, though not very strongly, and I can't see this improving. Fandom is presently glutted with ficzines and amateur small press publications, these will probably thin out as the better ones slowly improve, attracting a greater share of the talent and loyalty from their contributors.

American and Canadian clubzines will continue to dilute what talent the writers for them would display if they were allowed to develop. The superficial anecdotal route is too deep-rooted to expect much from them.

The Holdstock **Encyclopedia's** comments that 'true' fanzines are unpretentious and unconcerned with professional presentation are untrue today. Many fanzines continue to over-reach themselves because the talents of the writers and editors do not match their ambition, or have been misused to follow the dictates of fashion, their work being less special or meaningful than they believe. However, without this confidence, nothing would be written, good or bad. Would-be professionals use fanzines as testing grounds and many faneds are clearly concerned with the professionalism of their presentation. The gap between professional presentation and professional printing techniques may only be there because printing costs are too high for most fans to afford. Perhaps the comment was meant to distinguish well-written fanzines from crudzines, 'true' meaning non-crud, though it goes without saying that a pretentious fanzine is flawed.

The amount of money a faned has to spend and the equipment available to him/her will dictate the quality, length and frequency of the zine, as well as the number of copies available for circulation. Computers and photocopiers have meant that the means for pubbing one's ish are now widely available, but the current depression, in Britain at least, has meant there is less money going around. The talent

and the means are there, but without the finance there are probably far fewer fanzines today that there might otherwise have been. Some American, Canadian and Australian zines are still over a hundred pages and have large print-runs, clubzines continuing to be prevalent, but in most cases the bigger they are the worse they are. What talent there is has been spread too thin. Britzines rarely go over sixty pages and the largest print-run for them would probably not break three hundred. The average circulation is more likely to be between fifty and two hundred, with between one and three issues per year (though I am only guessing). The quarterly zine is still extremely rare, despite the best intentions of several faneds. Most zines are now either duplicated or photocopied, having been initially typed up on a computer — probably an Amstrad. The cost of photocopying is exorbitant, but the newer fans can't afford duplicators. Postage costs have increased, and the sheer size of fandom now means that it is not only impossible to send out to more than a small percentage of it, but to also receive response from more than a small percentage of that small percentage.

In such a situation it is no longer true that fanzines are solely sent out to those who show interest — blind luck plays a part. Nor is it true that the majority of the readers are actively involved in the life of the fanzine. Active fans either find that their work is sought after by too many faneditors to keep up with it all, let alone write locs, or they find that they are generally ignored, so they turn to apas,

perzines or find solace with a tight core of fanfriends. You get a fanzine by whim, contribution or payment, but the response rate in terms of locs and contributions is often negligible.

I'm sure I'm not the only one to be puzzled at why I received an unsolicited fanzine. In fact, I may be initially annoyed. Why had I been sent this thing? What did they want? Why haven't they explained themselves? Explanatory notes open avenues for conversation. Without them zines abandon their initial informality and become a good deal more inaccessible. If fanzines want *involvement*, want to encourage an active readership and attract new fans, then that initial contact is very important. If I receive a fanzine glorifying fascist concerns, I want to know why the editor thought I'd be interested in it. This actually happened and I assumed I was sent it because the editor thought I shared his fascist ideology. I was later told that receiving fanzines unsolicited is a compliment. It's only a compliment if the faned concerned really cares about who received it, or simply sends out zines to whatever names impinge upon his mind. After all, none of us believe receiving junk-mail is a compliment. To a certain extent, then, faneds have lost sight of one of the chief reasons zines are produced — to establish contact on an equal footing with other fans as an active two-way process (which encourages feedback) and have taken on the role of *editors* vying for the attention of their readers.

Fans and fanzines have become more elite and insular, and conventions,

partially in reaction, more popular. At a convention you can verbally thank a faned for his or her zine and, without becoming the least bit involved, feel that you've done your bit. It's much easier and less time-consuming to meet a dozen fans at a bar than it is to write to them individually. Fans form closer relationships with the fans they meet than with those they don't, and, since they now meet regularly, they have less to say in print. What they do have to say is often an extension of their con-activity, esoteric comments about their con-friends. Nothing wrong with this exclusivity in small doses, but I've seen entire fanzines with nothing but — why send them to people who have no hope of knowing what's going on? It irritates and frustrates neofans and fanzine fans. The circumstances which prevent fanzine fans attending cons also influences their subject matter and styles — they may be introverted, less jolly and optimistic — a fact which annoys convention fans. Being unfairly labeled a “depressed young fan” by an ignorant Londoner is terribly condescending. There is a rift in understanding between fans who have the advantage of regular social contact (especially with other fans) and those who do not. The rift has been evident for some time now, confans complaining at the lack of new talent entering fandom whilst ignoring the new fanzine fans (presumably because if they don't automatically receive the new fans' zines, the zines don't exist). This condescension and dismissiveness is a side-effect of the rapid growth of fandom. Perhaps the only way of retain-

ing any sense of being special, or being part of something special and private, is to take a very small slice of fandom and make yourself a part of it, while keeping the rest of it at a safe distance.

The geographical distribution of fans is partly to blame for the rift, as is the downward turn of events since 1970, creating two or three generations of fans going through adolescence at a time of economic depression, greater hardship and declining educational standards, which all make the learning process harder and perceptions bleaker. Britfans are no longer concentrated around Glasgow, London and the South. Birmingham and the Midlands, Leeds and Yorkshire generally now contain a fair number of fanwriters and editors. This slight shift has caused a good deal of lively debate over the siting of cons, the sites for the '89 Eastercon (Jersey) and Mexicon (Nottingham) raising more than a few eyebrows, Jersey getting the stick while Nottingham has been cautiously applauded. If the only place to hold a large convention is Jersey, then it will exclude the poorer fans who already find mainland con-going tricky, if not impossible, widening the rift between con-fans and fanzine fans. The poorer fans may have to be satisfied with smaller conventions, in which case the siting of the Mexicon may help draw together the two types of fans and encourage livelier fanzines through the increased communication. However, conventions will continue to hold sway over zines as long as the relative costs of communication and available money favour conventions.

The sheer number of fanzines, the relative scarcity of fan talent, has meant that all zines have suffered. Even very talented faned/writers like Lilian Edwards and Chris Lake rarely produce anything better than competent fanzines, while many fanzines are merely promising. Small groups of zines share the same contributors time and again. Loyalty to a particular group or person, I suspect, is a strong reason for this, but while it continues, new fans still learning how to walk will never learn how to run, and established fans will find their conservatism slowing them down. The conservatism that comes with age is stifling fanzine fandom. The answer for the new faneds, of course, is to diversify, but few faneds, old or new, seem to possess the imagination to attempt something new, or — at the very least — uncommon. Apas may have traditionally provided testing grounds for would-be fanwriter/editors, but with less money and growing costs, the boom they should now be undergoing hasn't occurred. So we get a lot of smaller, mediocre genzines — obtaining contributions of a good standard has become very difficult and faneds are reluctant to try their hand at the perzine.

Holdstock's **Encyclopedia** states that fanzines "draw on the shared dreams of others", but there is little evidence of this, unless you totally debase the meaning of the statement to suggest that everything we read draws on shared dreams. What should a fanzine do? Its first priority must be to communicate by entertaining, informing and educating. After that zines act as methods by which we

can indulge our interests and selves, gain friends and keep in contact with them, flex our creative muscles. And what are the commonest faults? Well, I think too many zines: (a) are directionless, with no coherent approach to their *identity*; (b) seek to copy or emulate other zines in style, content and design, but are rarely as good; (c) lack any evidence of creativity and unique identity; (d) lack editors with critical faculties and an eye for pleasing design. Since the dreams we have reflect the extent of our imagination and thus our ability to be creative, few zines make full use of drawing on these 'shared dreams'. The chief reason for this is the inability of faneds to see beyond a specific form — the genzine. You would think that with so many fanzines and so little talent, most genzine material would be zombie-fodder, and it is. Yet faneds persist in producing them by the bucket-load, forcing readers to wade through the resultant swamp in search of the nuggets buried there.

At present there are few signs of change. Few faneds will continue to be bothered overly much with design and presentation, concentrating solely on what they're communicating than upon trying to improve every aspect of the production of their zines. Photocopied zines will eventually out-number duplicated zines, simply because of their relative availability. Computers will play a growing role in the design and presentation of the zine, though computer print-out zines, electronic fanzines and fax-machine zines will never be much in evidence — and neither will audio-cassette 'zines'. Photocopying costs

will rise, making printing relatively attractive once again, especially laser/litho-printing, but rising costs and a decrease in spending money will signify fewer and fewer fanzines, with no change in the current standards — apas being beyond the affordability of an increasing number of fans. Cons will grow larger and more popular, with the result that confan fanzines won't necessarily improve either. Fandom will become even more fragmented and this, together with the social aspect and poorer education standards, will be reflected in fanzines. The growing number of substandard sf and fantasy books and the fall of literacy levels in succeeding generations will mean a decrease in the number and the quality of sercon articles, except in professional magazines. Britfandom will become more isolated from fandom overseas with rising postage costs.

What I would like to see more of are perzines, the chatzines (as opposed to straight-forward letterzines) exemplified by *Whimsey* and *The Flying Pig* (a letter substitute) and serial-narrative zines, a form all too rare in fandom, and zines which extend or improve upon the more popular genzines by experimenting with the design, approach and style. Even rarer than the serial zine is the comic zine. The recent interest shown in comics should, rightfully, lead to a fanzine-length comic-strip or two, but I suppose there is little hope of this ever coming about, due to the woeful shortage of fanartists, artists who can illustrate to order, and the commitment by artists and writers that such a project entails.

References:

1. The Encyclopedia Of Science Fiction (General editor, Peter Nicholls, published in hardback 1979, paperback 1981 by Granada Books). The "Fanzine" entry from which the information was taken was written by Peter Roberts.

2. Encyclopedia Of Science Fiction (Consultant editor, Robert Holdstock,

published 1978 by Octopus Books). "Catalog", from which the information is taken, was compiled by Robert Holdstock, Roy Kettle, Michael Ashley and Alan Frank.

3. The Visual Encyclopedia Of Science Fiction (edited by Brian Ash, published 1977 by Pan Books).



Videodrone

One of the most enjoyable media discoveries that my wife and I have had over the past year or so is music on video, especially live recordings. Classics of the past have included the superlative U2 live at Red Rocks, Colorado (**Under A Blood Red Sky**), Queen live (and Queen are a band I don't even *like* on record!), and **The Who Rock America**. The past few months we've picked up three such video albums.

1: Meetings On Ledges

Fairport Convention must be one of the oddest bands presently playing music. Here they are, twenty years after the group first got together, after more personnel changes than there are people in a English village, with more offshoots than Rupert Murdoch, yet they are now more successful than they've ever been. They tour constantly, are still producing good records, and have the unique distinction of fronting one of the largest annual folk-rock festivals in Europe.

That's where this piece really starts, with the Cropredy festival in 1987, which celebrated 20 years of Fairport Convention, and has spawned a couple of videos. The first simply shows the current line-up in action at Cropredy (shown recently on Channel 4), but the real gem is the tape called **It All Comes Round Again**,

which combines footage from Cropredy with interviews with the current band, alongside former members like Richard Thompson, Ashley Hutchings and the incomparable Dave Swarbrick, plus snippets of the earlier line-ups in action. It's part history of the Fairports, part live music, complete with Thompson and Swarbrick joining in the action. Anyone with the slightest interest in British folk-rock should buy the video, because it is a marvelous record of a very influential band. About the only fault is the footage used to showcase the late Sandy Denny, which is very poor quality amateur video: Denny deserved much better.

Alongside the video, you might also like to try **Scarlet And Gold**, their latest album, an excellent collection of tracks, the standout being the title piece, a new song by Ralph McTell (who seems to do a lot of writing for Fairport now), which Simon Nicoll (last remaining member of the original line-up) handles with a rare sensitivity. Nicoll's voice has developed a lot since the days when Thompson, Denny and Swarbrick were the real 'singers' in the band, and Nicoll was kept in the background. Now he carries the vocal weight well, with occasional moments of pure inspiration. Wonder if they'll make thirty years in the biz? Wouldn't surprise me in the least.

2: *The Bossman Cometh*

Just as the Fairports' album **In Real Time** is complimented by the video, so the Boss's massive live album set is superbly matched by his new video collection of all his promotional videos, **Bruce Springsteen: Video Anthology 1978-88**. Running from the roar of 'Rosalita' live in 1978, to the dramatic tension of a solo acoustic version of 'Born To Run' from his 1988 tour, this video encapsulates Springsteen's whole mystique in eighteen tracks (a bumper 100 minutes).

Many of the tracks are live performances, including searing versions of 'Born In The USA' and 'War', but also included are the 'staged live' versions of 'Dancing In The Dark' and 'Glory Days', as well as pure MTV-format videos like 'I'm On Fire' and 'One Step Up' (which show that any interest Hollywood might have in Springsteen is not misplaced: he's a natural). It's in the live performances that he really shines, though, when the years of working with his E Street Band pay off, and you can see the interplay between ace musicians going to work, and enjoying themselves at the same time. A video worthy of anyone's time.

3: *Rattling And Humming*

The video of the film of the record, **Rattle And Hum** is an oddity, a video which amply illustrates the album, but which never quite works as a film. It was shot during a tour of the States, with some footage done in Dublin. Most of it is in black and white, with one colour section about three-quar-

ters of the way through lasting two songs, before returning to monochrome. The camera-work is good, the sound is always excellent in performance, but somehow it doesn't gell into a picture of U2, in the way that their **Under A Blood Red Sky** video did some years ago.

That said, there are any number of excellent highlights. Some of the intrusive polemic on the record falls into place when seen in context: 'Silver and Gold' shows Bono at his most angry, for example, with his "Hope I'm not buggin' you..." speech about apartheid. The splendid 'Bullet The Blue Sky' is part of the colour section, and is deliberately accentuated by the sudden dazzle of colour after more than an hour of monochrome.

There are another nine songs on the video that are missing from the album, most of them stuff like 'Gloria', 'Bad' and 'Sunday, Bloody Sunday' (taken from a concert on the day of the Enniskillen bombing, which Bono uses as a starting point for a scathing attack on Republicanism, crushing forever any implication that the song is in any way a 'Rebel' song), which have already appeared on various albums and videos before. Altogether over an hour and a half of U2, and for all the initial disappointment with **Rattle And Hum**, I feel sure I'm going to be coming back to it again and again in the future, if only for those moments when the emotional side of the band overpowers everything and hits hard at targets that deserve all the knocks they can get.

Walking The Educational Tightrope

Dorothy Davies

As with most things in life, my entry into the educational world came about entirely by accident. I had written a fairly lengthy poem on Humpty Dumpty's fall for my (then) small daughter. She showed it to my mother, who in turn showed it to a neighbour. As Fate would have it, the neighbour's daughter, a teacher, was there at the time, and said "I can just see that being acted out in school."

My mother took it as a large hint that she wanted the poem, and immediately put it away. But the seed was sown, I rewrote the poem into a small play, and sent it to the first educational publisher I saw in the Writers and Artists Yearbook. It seemed Fate was leaning over my shoulder at the time - they were actively seeking new work for a new Reading Scheme about to be launched into the unsuspecting world. I was in, and have continued to be in ever since. My 22nd book went under contract a few weeks ago.

There is no greater reward for any writer than to receive a fan letter, especially when the letter is in pencil, and is from an 8 year old boy! Such a letter turned up via my publishers the other day, and was a real and genuine thrill. The boy said how much he liked one of my little books, and then went

on to praise the illustrations - which unfortunately were not my work - but that didn't diminish my pleasure one bit. The fact is, this letter showed that my books are reaching the audience for which they were intended, the young pupils at school, and that far from being a task set by the teacher, they are read for pleasure.

As my books are sold direct to schools, it lays a heavy responsibility on me. There is no market consumer choice going on here, the books are given to the children, and they are told to read them. I could easily take the view that this makes writing the books easier, as children will read what they are given, if the teacher tells them to. But I take the alternative view. I believe this creates a responsibility for me to create books which are entertaining, easy to read and above all, informative. To do these things requires a great deal of work, more than the finished product shows to the average reader outside the field of education. But it is essential work, and something I do not begrudge doing.

Firstly, then, the books must be entertaining. To reach a child the information I wish to impart must be presented in a way which captures the

imagination, perhaps makes the reader laugh. Children remember things which cause laughter; it is infinitely preferable to a dry recital of facts any day. I seek ways in which I can present the information in a humorous way, if I can. Devices like a comic detective, a witch, or a scatter brained Professor have all been called into play by me to carry the information from the page into the mind.

Easy to read. This means finding language that does not talk down to the reader, or go over their heads. I try not to include words which might make a reader falter, or doubt their reading ability. I try to make sentences and therefore the whole flow smoothly from start to finish.

Informative. That means collating as much information as I can on a given subject, raiding the local library, writing away for information from large organisations, books from anywhere and everywhere. Then I read all this information, and translate it into something easily understood. During the last few years I have become an expert on such things as fossil fuels, our rivers and streams and various other seemingly unrelated subjects! Above all, accuracy, for nothing is more offputting for a teacher than finding false statements in a book!

(Whilst I know it is all a matter of opinion, I do not believe 'Ring a Ring of Roses' relates to the Plague, but to an old fertility rite from so far back no one remembers. It bothers me every time I read this in a text book. 'Wrong' information must bother teachers, if they find it. Above all, my publishers need to keep on the right side of the

teaching profession, if we are to make any money!)

But there is always the problem that technology is racing ahead faster than my books can be published - for example, when Voyager reaches the outer limits of our Solar System, who knows what 'facts' might prove wrong in my astronomy book?

When all this information is finally down on paper, the real work begins, that of scanning the manuscript for unintentional phrases which could cause offence to any ethnic group or religion. Careful attention is given to names, and also the balance of white/other races. Equally important is the balance of sexes. One of my books had 3 boys and 2 girls as main characters. After discussion with my publishers, this was changed to 3 girls and 2 boys, so that the stronger characters reflected a good balance between boys and girls. Overt sexism is very difficult to obviate, but it must be done to ensure there is no role casting! And the artwork is always designed to show a multi racial mix. I never indicate physical characteristics to my characters if I can avoid it, so that the reader can relate the characters to his own ethnic group (whatever) in his/her own mind.

There are naturally times when all this is extremely frustrating and restrictive. After all, how much easier it would be to sit at the machine and work on a story or information book without any of this in the back of my mind! Unfortunately I have never been one to choose the easy way of doing things, which is why I continue with the challenge of writing for the

educational field. The work demands a considerable amount of patience, especially when extensive rewriting is called for, but it also has considerable rewards, not all of them financial.

If I have helped just one child to discover the joy of reading, then all the work will have been worth while. My books are part of a very large Reading Scheme, and are sold in USA, Australia and New Zealand. It is very likely that more pencilled letters will arrive in the future, and give me the satisfaction of knowing my work is reach-

ing out to the right place, the young. Even without the letters, it is nice to know the books are being so widely read, and that I might possibly bring the joy of reading to many. Without books I know my life would be very dull indeed. My task is to instil that love into young people, not least so the rest of the writing world will have buyers and readers in the future.

Who knows? If I make the break into 'adult', that is 'grown up' publishing, I'll need those consumers and readers, too!

Rastus Muses

It's a life, innit? Here we are, May 1989, with the 1990s looming on the horizon (and, a mere gnat's whisker behind in cosmological terms, the millenium in sight), and what have we got? Not a lot. We've got disasters by the score (ouch!), we've got the Ayatollah determining what can be printed in our country (may Allah rot his socks), we've got Big Mag entering her second decade (may Ghod help us all), we've got a north-south feud exploding in fandom (that's original): why, it's positively boring around here! Here's a few snippets that have amused/bemused me.

Now that Maggie's taking the greenhouse effect as a personal affront, one solution being touted is 'more nuclear power'. However, given the electric generation industry is being privatised, who is going to pay for the more expensive-to-build nuclear plants, especially when you take in the long-

term costs of nuclear waste storage and decommissioning costs? Heaven forbid, you don't think that Maggie might have to resort to *subsidies*, do you? After all, if the cost goes onto the consumer's bills, inflation will start looking a wee bit bloated again, and that's such a big no-no.

In all the furore about Ashley the Younger's Nova Award, the one thing that nobody seems to have mentioned is the actual subject matter of his writing. I mean, is it truly for real, or is Mikey baby just giving a 'performance', in the best Westian tradition. It all sounds a wee bit too sleazy, a punkish dreamtime.

Isn't it heartwarming, Kenneth Baker is saying nice things about the OU: "I think that what will happen is that the Open University will grow, because it is so good. It is a world-beater." What a shame his department continues to underfund the



place so we can't get on with our jobs properly, but suffer a slow death from a thousand cuts. *Grow!* You've gotta be joking, Kenny. It's all we can do to keep our current courses updated, let alone expand!

Nice snippet from Walt Willis' loc on **CS15**: 'I've been in correspondence recently with Elinor Busby in Seattle, in the course of which I drew an analogy between the reluctance of people to accept new ideas and the inability of computers to accept programmes compiled under a different operating system. She writes back: "...what strikes me particularly is your use of the computer metaphor. People are doing this more and more all the time and I *love* it. It will gradually change the way people think. Instead of rigidly thinking in terms of 'right' and 'wrong', of 'good' and 'evil', they will think in terms of systems and programs. They will come to a new appreciation of good — the strongest program!"

While we're on the subject of computers, here's an excerpt from a Mary

Gentle letter last year: "General literacy maybe a transient phenomenon, especially if necessary knowledge can be gained from a computer visual rather than a printed word... I've a feeling they may, in the future, date mass-literacy as born with Caxton and died with the computer."

From Pat Murphy's excellent **The Falling Woman**: "...[The Mayan] felt that those people who had passed near death were changed -- they knew more than ordinary people." Is that why I look at the world with such a cynical streak nowadays, because of the close calls I've had with asthma attacks?

Credits Dept.

Credits for articles in this issue are to Chuck Connor (p.7), Terry Broome (p.15), Dorothy Davies (p.24).

Artwork is by Shep Kirkbride (cover), Brad Foster (p. 3 & 5), Krischan Holl (p.14 &21), Atom (p.13), Steven Fox (p27), Martin Helsdon (p.28)

Next issue due out August 1989, with luck! That's all, folks!



