



time, I got lots of interesting letters, and other people sent me their fanzines in trade. I sure had more to read, and of course I got lots of mail.

The fact is, once I started doing fanzines, it became irresistible to me. I reached the point where I couldn't figure out why some fans were not interested in fanzines.

Nevertheless, some fans are not interested in fanzines. But there are also fans that could be interested, and perhaps would be interested, if there was a more interesting fanzine scene to take part in, I am convinced. So where are they?

A while back I noticed an interesting graffito on the wall of the women's loo at the Wellington Tavern. It said, "Fannish fans are assholes. They don't own fandom." I resisted the urge to take this personally, even though I think of myself as a pretty hard-core fannish fan. The thing is, I knew what she meant. I'd gotten pretty sick of the contemptuous attitudes one or two fannish types seemed to be expressing towards other fans. I often had the feeling that those people were creating an atmosphere that was getting me tarred with the same brush, and consequently building walls between me and other parts of fandom that just might contain perfectly likeable people - some of whom, in other circumstances, might very well find they liked fanzines and fannish fans after all.

Underneath the original graffito, someone else asked who exactly the writer meant, and the response was the surname of one fan. One fan who hasn't produced a fanzine in ages. A single individual who, without even communicating his attitudes in print, had managed to exemplify for some the whole of fannish fandom. And I'll tell you, it really steamed me to think I had to take the rap with the rest of British fandom for the nasty-minded attitudes of one guy - and a guy who can't even be bothered with fanzines anymore, at that.

Well hell, that's not my fannish fandom! My fannish fandom is full of people genuinely interested in SF, the world around them, and each other. It is a fandom where you can write about what is interesting to you without always having to hear people make rude remarks about the fact that you are interested in it at all. We write about surface politics, social/sexual politics, SF, the place of art in the world (whether it can influence the world or only reflect it, whether "realism" is better than traditional fictional styles, etc.). There is room for real personal writing - the kind that doesn't have to be detached and non-analytical. You don't have to be so cool and above it all that you never get to express a true emotion.

No, my fannish fandom is not a group polluted with old hostilities, settled prejudices, retrograde social attitudes, and a phony iconoclasm in which people with little to say score points by putting each other down. That is hardly what I would consider a stimulating intellectual environment, and if that's what the author of the graffito in the Wellington sees when she looks at fannish fandom, I can't blame her for wanting nothing to do with it.

But, I promise you, that is not all that fannish fandom is or can be.

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"Those who do not know history are condemned never to repeat it." - Terry Carr

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## AN EGO THE SIZE OF A HOUSE

On a few occasions when I've been on the programme at a convention, the committee or a representative thereof has asked me to provide some sort of PR about myself to put in the program book or their own PR for the con - in the third person, of course. I know that most people respond to this by writing lists of their accomplishments and trying to make themselves sound as classy as possible, but I've always had a problem with this. Usually, I slap together some silly stuff about how I'm a dangerous woman who eats men for breakfast and writes articles about stopwatches or something. I always figure the people who actually read these things must know they are written by the subjects themselves, but I guess not. For example, a thing I wrote about myself for Noreascon II elicited the question, "Who on this committee has it in for you?"

Slightly more recently, I was asked to provide such a piece of self-promotion for Wiscon 11, and I included with it a list of articles I was pretending to be writing, such as the one about how Ronald Reagan is actually a communist dupe. Spike Parsons printed this up in CUBE, the newsletter she does for the Wisconsin group, and Mike Glycer later remarked on it in FILE 770, saying something about Spike's great sense of humour and wondering if I'd become even more left-wing now that I live in Britain. I'm not sure if I should be irritated at someone else getting credit for my jokes, but I keep wondering what it was about those titles that made him think I was any more radical than I had been before. For that matter, I'm not sure I could be any more radical than I was before.

But the idea of Reagan as a communist dupe - I thought this was simple and straightforward enough, eh? I mean, there he was, bankrupting the economy by sinking a fortune into expensive military fantasies that no one even believes will work, and I thought, wouldn't it be funny if this was what the Evil Empire'd had in mind all along? Actually, I've always thought it was perfectly obvious that Gorby recognized the damage military profligacy had done to his own nation, which is the real reason he's sick of the arms race - but since Reagan has such an obsession with the way the peace movement in the west is a communist plot, I thought there was room for one of those great twisted scenarios here. You know, the one where the commies are only saying they want arms reductions because they know it will just give Ron one more excuse to keep sinking even more money into the Pentagon and thereby completely destroy the US economy.

Well. Once upon a time, I used to be a true believer - I mean, I thought that if you could just get a good candidate with some PR savvy into the presidential race, you might be able to fix up some of the mess. I try hard to fight cynicism - it doesn't get you anywhere, it's just a self-fulfilling prophecy - but it's hard, these days, to believe anything can be done. Back home, Washington DC - which never had a mob problem before at all - now has one of the highest murder rates in the US because of drug wars generated by the CIA coke-line, thank you George Bush.

What would happen if you actually had a candidate who wanted to control the military-industrial complex, who wanted to rein-in the CIA, and who wasn't interested in shoring-up dictatorships with US money while also trying to topple far more democratic governments? Well, we don't let good democratic leaders survive in other countries, so why should the powers-that-be let it happen inside the country? It no longer strikes me as paranoid to believe that a credible,

truly liberal presidential candidate, would be murdered before reaching the White House. Orwell's 1984 doesn't really strike me as SF at all anymore.

But while I'm on the subject of politics, I do have this fascinating letter from Taral, who got himself in an uproar a few thousand years ago while reading a fanzine. It didn't happen to be one of my fanzines, but since the fanzine he was writing to shows no signs of ever having another issue, he sent me some excerpts from his letter of comment about it. The background to this is that a guy who was the Fan Guest of Honour at a major convention a few years ago has been the subject of various rumours saying that he was in the CIA and, according to the programme book, was in a position to call in airstrikes in Viet Nam. The particular fanzine Taral was writing to came out a couple of years ago. It featured an article which contained the interesting statement that this fan had been involved in Operation Phoenix, which was a programme of terrorism carried out by the US in Southeast Asia.

Taral was shocked. Here, with a little editing, is what he quoted to me from that loc:

\$\$\$I've left the most serious matter to last. I was dimly aware that he was likely involved in terrorist activity. The program book is clear on that much, even though it doesn't specify his involvement. But not everything done in Viet Nam, even in the name of the CIA, was necessarily harmful. Operation Phoenix is quite another matter.

It was important enough that I wanted to talk to the author before saying anything. How did he know the guy was involved in Operation Phoenix? Could it be proved? Or could we at least be morally certain even if nothing could be documented? To my surprise, however, the author denied saying anything about Operation Phoenix specifically. He claims he wrote only that the guy was involved in covert action for the CIA. Back to square one. Obviously the words "Operation Phoenix" didn't appear magically on the stencil while the editors were looking the other way. Does the manuscript say "Operation Phoenix", or did you make that change?

Why it's important is because if he, fan guest of honour at a major convention, was in any way whatsoever working for Operation Phoenix, he is a murderer. He is a mass murderer who even if he never laid a hand on man, woman, or child, knowingly consigned them to torture and death by the hundreds or perhaps thousands. It would be likely he supervised torture, ordered it, covered it up, and/or planned it. An excuse such as working at a desk in Saigon and not knowing what the papers meant is unacceptable. It could not be possible to not know what was happening and why, and it's highly unlikely that the duties of anyone purported to have the power to call airstrikes would be confined entirely to a desk.

The best description of Operation Phoenix I've read is found in Vietnam: the Ten Thousand Day War (Michael Maclear, Thames Methuen), in the chapter "The Village War", pages 347 to 361. Assuming that this book can be found in the United States, which is far from certain (it is both an import book and a target for increasing political censorship in the US), a fairly vivid picture of the guy's probable duties can be formed.



Phoenix was conceived as a program of Night and Fog. Anonymous denunciations of communists and sympathizers (no evidence asked) were followed by goon squads in the middle of the night. The victims would be carried off and simply never seen again. The majority were tortured to death by NVA under direct American supervision. No total was given, but partial numbers in the neighbourhood of 20,000 give some idea of the scale of operations. An estimated 360,000 were targeted by planners. A few quotes from the book:

" 'Two percent of the population is a lot of folks - and when you grab that many bodies, you grab a lot of the wrong bodies,' says Barton Osborne who helped direct counter-terror operations at Da Nang... 'by late 1968 the Phoenix program was not serving any legitimate function that I know of, but rather had gone so wrong that it was the vehicle by which we were getting into a bad genocide program.' ((GETTING INTO?))

Colby says he told the Phoenix operatives: 'If you want to get good information, you'd better get good methods. Torture and so forth - and I saw the Nazis do this in World War II - gives you bad information because the people will either give you something to make you go away and stop and satisfy you with what you want to hear, rather than really what is true, or they will very courageously die.' The American pacification chief says he stressed that, 'as a practical, as well as a moral reason.'

((Yet...)) Osborne and Stein say an American advisor was assigned to each Phoenix sector, and that extreme torture was routine. Stein says he learned of 'the insertion of a six-inch dowel into the circular canal of one of my detainees' ears and the tapping through to the brain until the person died.'

A senior CIA agent, Frank Snepp, insists that there was 'never a firm definition' of a Communist operative, and that mostly the innocent died... the CIA was the principal mover. We funded most of the Phoenix operations: we put together some of the hit teams, which were called the PRU teams, and we also commanded in effect a detached (US) special force of officers who were running these various hit teams.

This was Osborne's sworn testimony in answering Congressman Reid: 'I never knew in the course of all those operations any detainee to live through interrogation. They all died.' Reid: 'They all died?' Osborne: 'They all died. There was never any reasonable fact that any one of those individuals was in fact co-operating with the Viet Cong. But they all died.'

'I would send in a report which would say, one person who was suspected of being Viet Cong, unconfirmed, uncorroborated, should be at this point, co-ordinate, at this time, on this day, and I would find out later that a B-52 strike had hit that spot at that time and wiped out the whole village.' "

Were these the kind of air-strikes that our guy could call in?

While involvement with Operation Phoenix is so cloaked with secrecy that certainty about anyone's part in it is hazardous, it's a mistake to compare the case with that of an accused found innocent because there was reasonable doubt of his guilt. The case is much more like proving beyond a shadow of a doubt that the accused is a member of the Mafia, and the only uncertainty is just which heists

and murders he performed. I think the onus is on our guy to clear himself if he can. But of course, how could he be believed? The Official Secrets Act or whatever it's called in the US is his Catch-22.

What, then, if it can be shown that he was a partner in KGB-like terrorism in Viet Nam? Whatever one's beliefs about American involvement in East Asia, no decent person believes torture and mass executions are ever blameless. Imagine this guy watching over the torturers as wooden dowels are hammered into the heads of innocent victims by the thousands, and square it with your conscience if you can. If you can, you may as well absolve Heinrich Himmler of his guilt. He never personally bloodied his hands, either. If this picture of him is an accurate one, he is not a man who deserved one of fandom's top honours - he is not a man who deserves to be spoken with civilly or extended any courtesy whatsoever by any decent person. If this seems like fanaticism to anyone, I can only wonder what in their opinion reasonable behaviour in regard to a monster is. If murder and torture is less important than creating a little social friction, your priorities are fucked up. Period.

Now the \$64,000 question; Can anyone definitely link him to Phoenix? If not, the indictment fails, and this has been a purely educational discussion of something everyone should know anyway. \$(1812-415 Willowdale Avenue, Willowdale, Ontario M2N 5B4 CANADA)

Me again - I couldn't figure out how to pause the printer for a change of type-face and I hate millions of quotes-inside-quotes, so I hope that was readable. Anyway, I didn't use the names of the guilty from Taral's letter mainly because it's hard to figure out what's true and what's not - the original suggestion that the guy in question was involved in Phoenix in the first place having mysteriously been denied by its apparent author, for one thing, makes it tricky printing all this discussion of the guy's immortal soul when we not only can't establish that he did it, but now we can't even establish that someone said he did it. It would take a few very expensive phone calls to try to establish all of that, and I wish I could afford to do that, but I don't want to lose all that interesting discussion of Phoenix or what the proper response should be to the idea of a person who did this sort of thing being highly honoured in fandom. I mean, personally, I feel that people involved with Phoenix (and, for that matter, most CIA activities over the last 20 years) are scum, and I can't imagine what they could do to mitigate that to the extent that I could stomach the idea of these people being honoured by us at all.

**THE PRICE YOU PAY** For those who came in late, this fanzine is ordinarily available by editorial whim, which means you can encourage me to send it to you by writing in or making me love you or something like that (trades help, of course), but all the letters and contributions and trades in the world won't help if you bore me to death or piss me off. It used to be available for "the usual", which meant letters and trades, but I kept getting really awful fanzines from one or two people I couldn't stand and I needed an excuse to lop them off the mailing list.

In the last issue of BLATANT, I talked about SF, diminished numbers of fanzines, a fan/pro split, and disgusting feminist fiction. Some of the responses to this were fairly substantial - for example, Alexis Gilliland (Arlington, VA) got the editors of FOSFAX (which Brian Earl Brown of Detroit also recommended) to add me

to their mailing list, and it ain't bad. **Alina Chu** (NY) sent me a book called Haunting Women, edited by Alan Ryan, full of women's horror stories - including the classic, "The Yellow Wallpaper". **Tony Chester** (Kent) offered to help me complete my Warren Zevon collection. **Steve Bieler** (Seattle, WA) sent me a copy of FACTSHEET FIVE - which lists an astonishing number of fanzines (most of which are not SF fanzines, but the descriptions are often pricelessly bizarre), and wrote a prescription for an improved fanzines scene:

\$\$I suspect that, for fanzines to thrive, let alone survive, we must have a situation in which many zines are published and in which a multitude of topics are discussed and attitudes/political stances displayed. A small press smorgasbord, offering something for as many people as possible - without scrapping standards of good, entertaining writing - is my ideal.\$\$

**Teresa Milambres** (NY) recommended The Gate to the Women's Country by Sherri S. Tepper (Bantam), which I still haven't picked up. She also said:

\$\$I for one am not surprised about this fan/pro split, since today's fan does not read. Thus there is no dialogue to be had between the pro & the fan. Fans today, for the most part (always remembering there are exceptions), buy the books and ask for autographs (like collectors do), and once the book is signed, it goes on a shelf and that is the end of it.

The new fan also buys posters, tee-shirts, & buttons. The only time they communicate with each other is to discuss where to buy something or when they want to complain or gossip. I feel that what I have been seeing can be summed up as: Fandom goes Rodeo Drive.\$\$

Although I didn't hear from Spike Parsons (Madison, WI) directly, it seems she's been letting local people play with her incoming fanzines, thus generating two locs from people I never heard of - **Bill Bodden**, who sent a fanzine, and **Peter Larson**, who said:

\$\$I read your comments on Wild Cards with some misgivings. I mean, yes, it deals very well with a number of topics that regular comics blather on about without ever making a very deep statement. The HUAC sequences in #1 gave me some sense of the helplessness and rage that must have been felt, but that I had never appreciated (as a historian) until that book. After the second and third volumes (and a number of long talks with various people), I began to see a deep and abiding misogyny in the books. What do we have - helpless or hopelessly antisocial women, rapes, rape/murders, super-pimps, sexually obsessed women, etc. Even George R.R. Martin, who often writes interesting and powerful female characters, treats the woman in The Turtle's life not as a character, but as a cipher to be sighed over. On a pedestal or in the gutter, we see.\$\$

Yes, but I wasn't talking about it as a novel, I was talking about it as a comic, and if you read comics at all, you know that it gets pretty silly to talk about this sort of sexism. I mean, one of the leading artists in comics is incapable of drawing more than one female face, all of the women have big tits and when we learn what they weigh it is always a good 20 lbs. less than is humanly possible, Wonder Woman has no hair on her legs - let's get real! I thought that, for a comic book, Wild Cards wasn't bad. I'm trying to remember who the sexually obsessed women are, though...

Taral agreed with my comments to him - in the objective case:

\$\$Yes, that's telling the bloody fool a thing or two. But you must give him credit for achieving just the sort of excitement he was looking for in fanzines. ... As I enjoy a certain confidence with your antagonist, I can say that he agrees with you wholeheartedly about appropriate targets for criticism - D. West and Greg Pickersgill are just the sort of British sacred cow, unassailable in their self-centred opinions - that he was thinking of. If they didn't appear in his letter by name, it was only negligence. I do believe that I've - (oops, my third party impartiality is slipping) - he's made his feelings known about this before. (Check the footnotes of his review column in the last MAINSTREAM.)

... But where in my CAPRICIAN letter did I equate controversial or ground-breaking writing with the vicious ad hominem attacks? I've been on record as speaking against such attacks - they may be entertaining (as long as you're not the target), but they're capricious, unproductive, and outright harmful, as you well know. Hastily written and badly organized as my hand-written note to THE CAPRICIAN was, I know I never advocated a KTF solution to the current fannish doldrums. As you point out, the Freddie's Nightmare approach to fanac may have led to the present state of affairs.

But I think if we broke down the articles in an average fanzine, what we'd get is something like this:

A report of a con; an overheard conversation at a con; some humorous incidents while moving; some problems at work; a band the author liked; then letters, which recapitulate much the same subject matter. Now and again there's something different. But it's like looking for a needle in a haystack. If I come across the rare exception in fanwriting it'll stick in my...er, mind. But the odds are against my finding it at all.

What I've liked about your writing is that it has more often needled my memory than a lot of other people's. Even if I find something to nag you about, the writing creates a vivid picture. But you also use a lot of paper in typical ways - as I do, but I stick this sort of thing in apazines or editorials, and don't make a virtue of the hum-drum. So far as I can tell, British fandom is obsessed with the hum-drum and has been for years. It's our hum-drum, and cleverer hum-drum than other people's hum-drum, because we are cleverer at being hum-drum than Americans. Oh, hum. Of course, this sort of thing is actually the social cement that holds fandom together, but there needs to be bricks, a blue-print, and foundation.

Why is PULP bland? There I think you may have scored a point. Actually, there's been a much better than average amount of memorable material in PULP. To call it bland is a snap judgment, based on material that was not so memorable; on the lack of editorial presence as such, and on the uniformity of appearance from issue to issue. It was a hasty comment which was not deserved. If PULP is not highly regarded by the British, more the fool they, because I can't think of a better zine from there at the moment.

I just wish it would do something a little out of character now and again.\$\$



On the other hand, **Harry Bond** (London/Bagshot) disagreed with me, claiming that he, personally, has been greatly improved by being hacked apart in print. Funny - at the time, Harry complained that someone might just have mentioned to him that he talked too fast, rather than having to ridicule him in print. But if that's what you think works, Harry, then please, let me be the first to tell you in print to stop being such a bloody ass-kisser.

**Simon Gansley** (Leeds) wrote recommending Interzone (which I do read from time to time, and which I think has actually become a pretty good prozine) and complaining about Matrix:

§§I recently re-joined the BSFA and was impressed with the standard of their publications. But why, when we have a fanzine fan like Maureen Porter doing such an efficient job on Matrix, does she place so little emphasis on fanzine reviews? What we read in Matrix and what we're not getting - and haven't, I believe, for some time now, which is maybe why things are in the state they are - is a long, lively, well-informed review column, introducing potential recruits to the astonishing world of fanzines.

What really bugs me is that Maureen herself is doing a review column for that auspicious journal of which you make mention in BLATANT - CRITICAL WAVE - and surely that is read predominantly by well-established fans. She would be better off doing a column for Matrix. Better still, she could get you to do it!

Now there's a mission in life: Avedon Carol, saviour of British Fandom. I'd take out two BSFA subscriptions.

Think about it - I'm serious - it's a good idea.

And don't throw it back at me. I'm ill and I'm writing a novel and anyway I've done my stint as Matrix reviewer back in '81-'82.

I dunno, you produce a welcome and overdue issue of BLATANT and all you get is hassle. §§

Simon, have you ever tried selling encyclopaedias, replacement windows, or insurance? But seriously, Simon, I would write a lot more fanzines reviews if I could motivate myself to do so - I would write them here, or for PULP, for starters. The "saviour of British Fandom" part was a good laugh, though.

Also in the last issue, I printed a loc from a complete stranger named **Jonathan Waite**. Caroline Mullan pointed out to me that in fact Jonathan does come to the Wellington, and she introduced me to him, at which point I realized I had seen him before, but without knowing who he was. He wrote again, advising me that this was all due to the fact that he was always a bit too shy to hang out at the bar with the fannish fans, but the people who sit at the tables were a lot more friendly and drew him in.

**Terry Jeeves** sent his sympathies about moving into a Victorian Manse, and **Ethel Lindsay** wondered how big it was, how many rooms, how high the ceilings, and how hard it is to heat. Don't worry, Ethel, the ceilings aren't that high as these things go, and since we had the central heating put in (and the winters have been

relatively mild during the time we've lived here), it hasn't been that big a problem. It's a three-bedroom with two receptions, a dining room, a minuscule kitchen, and a cellar.

I seem to have mislaid a loc from **Jerry Kaufman**, and one from **Mike Glicksohn**, who seemed to be astonished that things had changed in British fandom since the last time he'd looked. Problem is I had set these letters aside, intending to write back, and they seem to have disappeared. Hmmm. I really need a carefully divided in-tray on my desk. (I even have a desk that's big enough to put an in-tray on now, thanks to Rob Hansen, Zy Nicholson, and Owen Whiteoak facing the great furniture-moving challenge of 1989 a few weeks ago. I wish I had a funny story to go with this, but I think you had to be there.)

I also heard from **Jean Weber** ("Keep writing about stuff some of 'the boys' find inappropriate, or don't understand."); **Robert Lichtman** ("Is being tolerant, even amiable, a trait of fandom that's dying out? I sure hope not because it will make it difficult for me to continue in fandom if that becomes prevalent."); **Roger Weddall** ("Avedon, have you forgotten that it's a 'proud and lonely thing' etc. etc.?"); and **Mark Ortlieb** ("Any fanzine that mentions After Bathing at Baxter's, Eric Frank Russell and Warren Zevon deserves a longer letter than this...").

I suppose I should say that when the mail strike ended I stopped feeling depressed about fanzines, even though I still think there aren't enough interactive fanzines coming through the mail slot these days.

Damn, I was going to talk about science fiction, but I can't think of that much to say. Well, let me recommend Rob Holdstock's Lavondyss, which I found very easy to get into and very hard to put down. If you haven't read it yet, you really ought to.

(28 February 1989)

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**CREDITS:** Cover logo - Arthur Thomson (send him a get-well card - he isn't well enough to write back, but he appreciates hearing from his friends); Additional incentives & economic wherewithal - Six Year Old Twins & the Contrivance Committee; E-stencils - Vincent Clarke; Mimeography - Rob Hansen; Trivial Pursuit, backgammon & staying up all night like a bunch of hippies All-Star team - Owen Whiteoak, Martin Smith, Zy Nicholson & Rob Hansen (except for the staying up all night, which he isn't any good at); and special thanks once again to Taral for the reality trip and Zy, Owen & Rob for the grown-up sized desk.

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