

CRYSTAL SHIP TEN



A TUNE OF CHANGE

CRYSTAL SHIP 10, Sept/Oct 1985. Produced at the Shipyard by a dedicated bunch of wallies led by John D. Owen, who's whim dictates the distribution of the fanzine. The editorial address is as follows: John D. Owen, 4 Highfield Close, Newport Pagnell, Bucks, MK16 9AZ, UK.

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The Captain's Decision Is Final

The Captain shook his grizzled head, and went over the figures again. There was enough there to see him through the twilight of his life, and no amount of refiguring was going to change that and get him off the decision hook. He had to make up his mind for himself. The hoarse sound of his breathing filled the office, as his beleaguered lungs fought to draw air in through defective bronchial tubes. He sat back in his chair, looked at the piles of mail awaiting an answer, at the files of material awaiting attention, then sighed. Time to go.

He rose and walked to the door, peering out into the Shipyard until he located the wiry figure of the wharf rat loafing at the other end of the shipyard. "Rastus," he shouted, somewhat weakly, "come here. I want a word with you." The wharf rat hauled himself to his feet, and shuffled along the yard towards the office.

Reaching the door, he leaned on the jamb and waited for the Captain to speak.

Puffing slightly, the Captain sat back down at his desk, took a few deep and noisy breaths, then spoke. "As you know, old mate, I've not been well lately, and it has brought a number of things to a head. I now realise that I can't go on as I have been doing, and that the strain of running this little empire of mine is getting me down. So, I've been doing some hard thinking, and making some difficult decisions, the upshot of which is that I'm getting out while I'm still healthy enough to walk out. I'm moving to the mountains, and leaving the shipyard behind."

Rastus blinked twice, taking in the news. "Uh, that's a shame, boss." A worried look crossed his face and he scratched his scrubby beard. "Uh, what you doing with the yard, boss? Closing it down?"

The Captain chuckled, then fell to coughing as the laughter caught in his throat. After a moment or two of spluttering, he managed to get his voice back together again. "No, I'm not closing the shipyard down, as there is too much tied up in it, and I'd get nothing back for it. I'm appointing a manager to run it for me, on a slightly less lavish scale, and with the frills around the edges trimmed off. The yard will be producing smaller ships, but more of them."

"Sounds like bloody 'ard work to me, boss," grunted Rastus. "Who's the lucky guy who's gotta do it all?"

The Captain grinned. "Oh, you know him well. I'm sure that you'll get on with him in all things, except

one. He'll stop you producing your own rag-tag vessels. Mainly to save time for the main event."

Rastus grunted again. "Don't like the sound of that at all. What's wrong with my little bits? Who is this bloody new man, anyway?"

"It's you, you dumb bastard. I'm passing the whole yard across to you, on the condition that you follow my instructions about future developments. Don't look so surprised: you've proved you can produce the goods, so all you need to do is combine the good points of your little 'uns with my vessels, and you're on your way. What do you reckon?"

Rastus weakly nodded. It was all too much for him to take in one go. Would life ever be the same again after this?

Real Life Intrudes

Yes folks, the Captain has hung up his editorial shield and departed for healthier climes, leaving Rastus in charge to keep you ravening readers supplied with the necessary diversions. If the change of direction is a bit of a shock, then accept my apologies: it all came rather suddenly to me, too, believe me!

Funnily enough, the whole circumstances of my first producing the Ship are mirrored in the reasons why I'm changing direction now. About nine years ago, I had a bad time with the asthma that I've suffered from since childhood. A combination of events conspired to brew up several attacks which finally put me into hospital early one morning, an event my wife remembers rather more vividly than I, since she had to cope with the whole thing while I just lay there turning blue. After that, I shook off the problem for a long time, and turned the attack into a pivotal event by resolving to pursue a number of objectives more avidly than I had been doing. I

was aware of fandom at the time, though only through the Tolkien Society, and I chose to concentrate my efforts on entering fandom in a wider way with the publication of my own fanzine, THE CRYSTAL SHIP, a labour of love that has persisted ever since, with just a minor hiccup when I moved house six years ago and had to take a couple of years out while things got straightened out.

Over the last two or three years, the asthma has been getting worse during the summer months, normally as a result of rotten congestion from hay fever, the lesser ailment fueling the worse. This year, I've been particularly bad, culminating in a period of three weeks during July when I feel I came pretty close to being hospitalised again. Ironically, this occurred just after a fortnight's holiday in North Wales, which I returned from feeling marvelously healthy, only to succumb to further attacks. It's a great place to live in, is Milton Keynes!

Fortunately, I have a wife with a will of iron, so she kicked me out of the door in the direction of the quacks and told me "Don't come back until you've got something out of them to control it!". Who could argue? Certainly not me, I didn't have the breath for it. So, touch wood, fingers crossed, etc., the dreaded wheezes and sneezes are under control again, at a cost of me becoming one of the financial mainstays of the National Health Service, but it has made me reassess what I'm up to in this daft lark we call fandom, and to realise that I don't have the time or energy left after I've finished work to do everything that I was trying to do.

So, that has led me to revamp the future plans for CRYSTAL SHIP ENTERPRISES. The first fruits you hold in your hands, namely CS10, a slim-line version of the CSs you have been used to, I know, but please bear in mind the fact that I'm intending to get at least four

of them out every year, and you'll see that I'm not really short-changing CS fans at all. Fans of lil'ol' RASTUS will note that the runt has influenced the mothership a fair amount, which is just as well, since the runt is no more as a separate entity. There will be no more issues of RASTUS.

Sadly, there will not be a QUIET SUN, either. That project I have abandoned, purely because I do not have the necessary spare energy to give it the attention it needed to achieve the aims I set for it. This decision pains me more than anything else, especially as a number of friends had put a lot of effort into producing excellent stories for the first issue, which I have had to return to them unused. I hope that they will find another outlet for those stories, as I'm sure they will, since the stories were excellent. To those people who have been patiently waiting for QS to appear, my profuse apologies.

Enough of this gloomy stuff: if I carry on in this vein I shall end up short-circuiting the computer with my tears. What, you may be asking, are the readers to expect of the CRYSTAL SHIP in the future. Well, a good deal more of me, I hope. No, more than hope: that's definite! Damn it, the major reason I started this whole business was to get me writing my bloody head off, which I haven't been doing at all this last couple of years. Oh yeah, there are reasons galore why I haven't been writing, but that's not the point. The desire to put words down on paper is as strong as ever, it's just that I've got better at finding excuses not to do the hard work involved. So, Operation Reconstruction is going on, with the aim of clearing out the clutter, and getting the Shipyard back in working order again.

I shall still be publishing work by two outside contributors in each issue, leaving me somewhere in the region of, say, 18 to 20

pages to fill, though some of those will go to the loccol, naturally, though I'm not certain of just how voluminous that is going to be with the new frequency. Do regular small zines yield less response? That I shall no doubt find out soon enough.

One thing that will remain is the artwork, and the CS trademark of Conqueror paper. That I won't give up while I can get it through the OU Repro Department at reasonable cost. So, all you artists can breathe easier, as I'll still be requiring your services in future, possibly more than ever if I've got four issues a year to fill. So keep the contributions coming!

What kind of material will I be publishing? Well, I see no reason to change the basic policy of the CRYSTAL SHIP, which has always been to publish anything that came along which took my fancy, and which I thought would interest other people. Obviously there won't be quite as wide a range in each issue as there has been in the past, but if one issue doesn't appeal to you, then maybe the next one will. Naturally, with greater frequency of publication, I would expect there to be a few more topical pieces coming up in the zine, so if there are burning issues that you want to write about, why not drop me a line? There are precious few fanzines that are publishing on a regular basis nowadays, so make the best use of the ones that are!

Right, now to get on with the proper business of the fanzine. Since this is by nature of being an 'interim' issue, there is less of me in it than will be normal, mainly because of a 'full-sized CS loccol'. I'm giving pride of place to a very 'fannish' piece of writing, by one of Britain's very best fanwriters, just to confound people's expectations about CS's 'sercon' attitudes. Rastus in in charge now, so any expectations are strictly your problem, not mine!



S. FOX 84

SKEL:

LOC ON, TOMMY

Tales Of Parafandom

Back even before numbered fandom -- way, way back, there was the very first fandom of them all. This was eofandom itself, back in the paleofannish era. The only fandom that never re-invented the wheel. Why, mention 'wheels' to a fan of that era and they'd look at you as though you'd gone out. "What's with this asshole and his obsession with wheels? We're trying to invent the fanzine."

Well, invent it they did.

Which was only the start of the problem. Then they mailed it out. Right away there's all these fans getting fanzines for the very first time, and they didn't know what to do about it. Pretty soon it got complicated. Everyone was mailing out fanzines. Fan A would ring up fan B and say: "Hey, I got your fanzine. In return I'd like to come around and put you up a washing line."

"Geez, I already got a washing line. How are you at fixing fridges?"

"Damn, no good at all. Hang on, Joe Phan said he'd come and dig my cabbage patch when I sent him my fanzine. Do you need a cabbage patch digging?"

And so it happened that Joe Phan travelled over three thousand miles to dig fan B's cabbage patch as a form of egoboo for getting fan A's fanzine. Fairly soon it became obvious, even to these primitive fans, that a labour/barter system simply wasn't going to work. So they invented subscriptions.

Thus the second great flowering of fandom. This was so successful that, even after allowing for all the time they wasted re-inventing the wheel, everybody had all the time in the world to pub their ish. Mind you, as time went by things began to get a little hectic. Well, the only way to get ahead was to take in more subscriptions than you paid out, which meant publishing more frequently than the next fan, who was at the same time trying to publish more frequently than you.

This fandom was trying to exist by taking in each other's laundry, in effect, and it wasn't until one fan read a treatise on Elementary Economics and the Dynamics of Closed Systems, **and published**, that this second fandom came to its senses and collapsed amid the debris of crumbling twice-weekly newszines.

Something was urgently needed and, came the time, came the man. A previously little-known fan, Lager o'Crementedenthe (born of somewhat inebriated Irish parents) invented the solution that still bears his name -- the LoC. His idea was that the recipients of a fanzine could obtain further issues by sending a letter to the editor. This idea took

off like a rocket (must have been the LOx). Suddenly all the Cosmic Minded Fans, who couldn't afford to subscribe to fanzines at costs which must have represented all of ten minutes overtime, could now spend an evening or two bashing out a letter to the editor and so get the next issue **FREE**. Fandom was ready to enter the modern era -- or it would be, as soon as it had re-invented the wheel.

Meanwhile, Back In Reality Prime...

...many things are different. One thing that isn't different, however, is the basic importance to fanzine fandom of the LoC. The letter of comment is probably the single greatest unifying factor in fanzine fandom. More than that, it is the foundation, the very bedrock upon which our fandom is built. Which itself is odd in a way. Well, fanzines are full of articles, thousands upon thousands of them since fanzines began, yet I don't ever recall seeing one on the topic of LoCs themselves. Why is this? No, I'm not going to tell you -- it's a test question. Get yourself a ream of paper and produce your thesis on this subject. Send it to the editor of this fanzine, whose decision is final (although probably also ludicrous). Remember, your degree in Fandom depends upon this.

So what is a LoC?

Well, at its simplest, a LoC is the basic fannish medium of exchange. The economy of Fandom is LoC-based. It is the one universal currency, the 'Open Sesame' to fandom. We can't all produce articles. We can't all produce worthwhile artwork, we can't all produce a fanzine in trade... but we can all write a LoC. It doesn't have to be a good LoC. If you send an editor some lousy artwork he will fling it back in high dudgeon (though an envelope would have been cheaper). If you send him a lousy article the result will be similar. If you try to trade him your crudzine you will hear nothing from him. At all. Ever again. But if you send him a LoC, be it ever so dull and plodding, the poor sod will be so overcome with gratitude and amazement that he will shower you with issues of his fanzine until the cows not only come home but byre retirement cottage.

Unlike mercy, the quality of LoCs is strained. The good ones see print, usually. The bad ones get wahfed. In a perfect world. Unfortunately, here in Reality Prime, things aren't always perfect. Often good LoCs are squeezed out because of space considerations, or the editor's poor publishing schedule, whilst in other fanzines sometimes the most diabolical LoCs see print. Nobody ever said that life was particularly fair, or if they did it was probably in a seven-page LoC published in a crudzine somewhere.

There are many kinds of LoCs and there is no 'right' type of LoC. No, that's not strictly true. There is one criteria for the correct LoC. It arrives. Other than that, there is no perfect formula for The Perfect LoC. Some LoCs intensively and constructively develop some single point. Some simply parade a catalogue of the issue in question with the associated value judgements. Neither extreme is right or wrong, because there isn't a single recipient of a LoC for them to be right or wrong to.

A LoC is all things to all people.

There are four different categories of person involved with most LoCs and each group has their own set of values, their own priorities. What

is more, these priorities are often in conflict. What the contributor wants to see in a LoC to the zine that ran his contribution isn't quite the same thing that the editor of that fanzine wants to see. Other readers of the fanzine, in the lettercolumn, have completely different priorities, and what the writer of the LoC gets out of it is something else again. Let us look at these four different priorities, in order of increasing importance. Which of course means that we have to look at the priorities of the contributor first. Yep, that's me. When you LoC this issue of CRYSTAL SHIP what do I, as a contributor, want to see in your LoCs?

The Contributor's Needs

Try to put yourself in my place (here, have my overdraft for starters). What do I get out of this deal? Not a lot, actually. Well, the first thing I want is for you to acknowledge my existence. Have you any idea how irritating it can be for a contributor to read a LoC or review of a fanzine in which he had a contribution, and for that LoC or review to mention every other piece in that fanzine except his? You start to question your own reality. You look at your hands. Did these hands in fact type that article? Did it really appear in that zine? Or am I only a figment of my own imagination? I have cast this article into the pool of fandom, and I at the very least need to know that it made, if not a splash, at least a ripple. So mention it. Now! We know what happens to procrastinators, don't we?

I know I am not unique in feeling this way. I recently got a letter from Eric Mayer who mentioned just such an occurrence, namely that someone discussed everything else in an issue of a fanzine **except** his bit. Now if this can bother a guy like Eric, who is at the same time one of fandom's better writers and one of its nicer guys, how much more is it going to bother a mean old asshole like me? What you have to remember is that your average contributor is a crotchety old twit with paranoid tendencies. The first rule is not to ignore him.

You see, I don't know whether you are aware of it or not, but the contributor isn't paid *enormous sums* for his article or whatever. The editor doesn't shower him with jewels or rush round bars of gold to his address. The only thing the contributor gets, apart from an exasperated note from the editor acknowledging receipt of his contribution and asking him what the hell took him so long, is the feedback from the LoCs. If he doesn't get feedback, he doesn't get anything.

Of course, there is feedback and there is feedback.

The feedback the contributor would prefer is approving feedback. A bad reaction is better than no reaction, but a good reaction is better than a bad one. A contributor is only human. He wants approval, he wants to be loved. He might want to stimulate discussion. He might have deliberately left large areas of his topic undeveloped so that readers can make a positive contribution, he might simply want to hear the readers' opinions on a subject that interested him enough to make him write the damn article in the first place. He might want any and all of this, but first and foremost he wants approval. Kudos, plaudits, that you will. He is insecure. Why the hell else would he be going to all this trouble for so little reward?

But of course it is more than just approval that the contributor yearns for. He or she also wants to have their work appreciated for what

it is, that is, valued by a knowledgeable and discerning readership. Of course, in fandom this is next to impossible, but we still hope. Nobody said that contributors aren't stupid.

You see, nobody ever comments on the 'how' of the piece, on the mechanics of the contribution. This is perfectly understandable. If you do it right it is supposed to be invisible to the reader. In Computer Software the term is 'User Transparent'. If the contributor makes you laugh, you don't stop and say, "Now how did he do that?". Do you buggery! You are caught up, entranced -- you rush on into the article. If I evoke nostalgic memories you may smile at the memories, or feel a hint of melancholy, but you don't stop and say, "How did he do that?". It goes with the territory, I'm afraid. But, compare it with other creations.

Take a piece of fine furniture, a wardrobe perhaps. How do you appreciate it? You admire the craftsmanship, or the material, or the finish, or the design. You do not say "Wow, Mr. Chippendale! That is so good it reminds me..." and then regale him with two pages-worth about how it reminds you how you used to hide in your mother's wardrobe when you were just a kid.

Or take a painting. Yes, you may tell the artist about the wonderful effect his piece has upon you, but you will also talk about the line, the bold brushwork, the imaginative use of colour, amongst other things. Do you think that people used to tell Van Gogh how a particular bowl of flowers reminded them of all their old gardening stories? Let me tell you, if they'd tried bending his ear with that sort of response he'd have cut the fucker off! No messing! Well, quite a bit of messing actually. Lots of blood and all that. Very nasty -- in fact I don't even want to talk about it. Suffice it to say that he would have very probably been pissed off. And yet, apart from serious lit-crit articles, nobody ever seems to think about how the writer did it.

The contributor needs all sorts of response -- Qualitive Response (I thought it was brilliant), Quantative Response (Lots of people thought it was brilliant), Subjective Response (...and it reminds me of...), and Analytical Response (Jeez, I liked the way you used short, punchy sentences to develop momentum...). I do not want to knock types one, two and three, they are all necessary, but the one the contributor gets least of is number four

So far, though, all these requirements can be met by the LoC itself, without that LoC ever being published.

If all the contributor gets for his efforts is the feedback from the LoCs sent in to the editor, then it follows that he ought to see that feedback. Some editors appreciate this and pass on such comments to the contributor concerned. Some don't. There is a technical term for these latter editors: that word is 'bastards'. Thus we see that given a kind and caring editor, the needs of the contributor can nearly all be satisfied without the LoCs in question being printed. This is fortunate because it removes the main area of conflict. After all, comments like "Skel's piece was so good it made me laugh all the way through" are trippic for the contributor, but don't make for scintillating letter columns. However, with his private egoboo service the contributor can bathe his ego to his heart's content without bothering the rest of us. Or is it that simple?

Alas no. There is something missing. To explain it is easiest to quote a line of Jack Trevor Story's from his "Letters To An Intimate Stranger":-

"Writing is taking your trousers down in public, and what you are depends very much on what you've got."

The fact is, when I take my trousers down in public, I expect the awed applause to be in public too. Public appreciation for a public performance (a standing ovation?). There is something curiously unsatisfying about taking all ones egoboo in private, something almost shameful. One feels like a harlot, someone who has been used to give a bit of cheap pleasure but who needn't be given open acknowledgement in return, but who can be robbed off with a few furtive photocopies. "Here you are -- same time next issue?" Yes, the contributor does too have needs in the area of published LoCs -- and if you think this last paragraph sounds a little on the personal side, you're damned right!

When you get right down to it, the contributor exists in fanzines through the medium of his contributions...or rather through the contributions and the response to them. That's his only existence in fanzine fandom. If the response to his article isn't printed then his fanzine existence is cut in half. The editor has half-killed him. Editors are like that.

So, it is this one need of the contributor -- to take some of his egoboo in public, to cling tenaciously to his fannish existence -- that brings his needs into conflict with those of the others concerned with LoCs...and because it is only this single need that causes conflict of interests, and because the contributor is outnumbered by everyone else, his needs are more easily dismissed.

Contributors? Nar, put 'em in a bucket and piss on 'em!

Vox Fanii -- What The Other Readers Want From A LoC.

Well, the fact is that the section of the fannish populace whose needs most conflict with those of the contributor is that of the readers. Now individually a reader is even less important than a contributor. If a contributor can be compared to the snout up a slug's nose (and I think he can), then the reader is the slime under its foot. A reader is the living, breathing embodiment of the square root of minus one...and is every bit as useful as a well-greased crutch.

A reader however has one thing going for him: he is not alone. What is more, there is a collective noun for a group of readers. It is a 'Mailing List'. A mailing list is very important to an editor. It must be, or else why would he go to so much trouble and expense mailing out his fanzine to the various people on it when he could get almost as much response, and save himself a fortune in postage, by sticking all the copies of his fanzine directly in the dustbin?

But when it comes to LoCs, what are the needs of this ravening horde?

Basically, they want content. They have their own views on the topics raised in the previous issue and they want to compare their views with those of others among their peer group. They want input. They are impatient with the dull and boring needs of the contributor. A lot of

the response from a contributor's point of view consists mainly of positive or negative egoboo:-

"Thought Joe's piece was rilly triff. Larf? I near to pissed in my shoes."

Not a lot of content in that, is there? OK for Joe, but strictly Zilchville (Arizona) for everyone else. No, the other readers of a fanzine see a LoC in a very unique way. To them it is simply a mini-article -- one which is guaranteed to be on a topic about which they are every bit as knowledgeable, and in which they are every bit as interested, as the LoC-writer...namely the previous issue of the fanzine in question and the topics which it brought up.

"Why Don't You Write Me?" -- The Editor's Needs

The first thing to remember is that the Editor is not the Fan, and a LoC is something more than a letter, in this context anyway. A LoC is a 'Letter of Comment'. The term 'Comment' can be interpreted pretty loosely, but if it gets so loose that it drops of completely then all you have is a 'Letter', period. Take for instance a missive that starts out like this:-

"Got your fanzine -- it wasn't bad, but that's not why I'm writing. I want to tell you about this weird-shaped lump I found in my porridge this morning. It's a long story, which all started blah,blah,blah..."

Well, you don't need to have cornered the market in braincells to realise that whatever this is (boring, probably), it certainly isn't a LoC.

The editor's first requirement is that you write about something that interests the editor. Sounds obvious, doesn't it? Do why do so many people fall at this first hurdle? I mean, from the foregoing it is obvious that when you write a LoC to editor A it will be considerably different to a LoC you might write to editor B. Not only the content of the LoC, but also its tone. For example, were you to write a LoC to John on this issue of CRYSTAL SHIP it would be nothing like a LoC you might write Rob Hansen on the latest EPSILON, or one you might write me on the latest SMALL FRIENDLY DOG. It isn't simply that the subject matter of our respective fanzines is different, though of course it is, but that our interests and approaches are different, and that these differences are reflected in our fanzines.

A LoC is supposed to reflect these differences. It isn't good enough to simply lay your own concerns upon the editor in question. If your LoC doesn't concern itself with the interests of the editor then it isn't really a LoC at all. Some fans of quite long standing still get this wrong -- well, I suppose it is far easier to write about one's own concerns. One general example is a woman whose LoCs crop up all over the place, or perhaps one should say 'Her LoC', because irrespective of where they appear, they are all virtually interchangeable. No matter which fanzine she is responding to both the tone and the bulk of the content do not vary. This is because she is not really **responding** at all, rather she is simply hitting us over the head with her own concerns, finding some flimsy and spurious connection in order to introduce them in LoC after LoC.

A more specific example concerns a LoC I received on a recent issue of my own fanzine. What I'd done was print a section made up of fatuous statements I'd found in other fanzines, of foulups in committing the thought to paper -- a sort of fannish "Colemanballs". What I wanted was a bit of light relief, with an unstated but implied moral that we should not take ourselves too seriously, nor assume that people mean precisely what they appear to be saying on the printed page. However, one of the quotes touched upon the subject of 'foreign language' TV programmes and in mocking the quote, one reader assumed I must be mocking the sentiments the writer had **intended** to express. Thus I became the lucky recipient of a one-page LoC which hectored me about the values of TV programming for minority racial and cultural groups. Arsehole! He never stopped to ask himself **why** I'd used that quote. The bottom line was that I'd mocked someone who was generally taking a favourable line on a topic dear to the heart of the LoCer. His button was pushed and he was off, salivating all the way, like a greyhound after the 'hare'. He never stopped to question whether the prize was real or how foolish he might look running around in circles.

A LoC is the issue of a unique pairing. It is fathered by a particular fanzine and it is out of you (in racing parlance -- after all, you do the bulk of the work). You and CRYSTAL SHIP produce a different issue to that which will be produced from the pairing of you and MYTHOLOGIES, of you and THIS NEVER HAPPENS, of you and ERG.

However, over and above this basic requirement, the editor needs much more from a LoC. Not only does he want you to say something which interests **him**, he wants you to talk about things which will interest the other readers, and furthermore, he wants you to talk about it with wit, style and flair. Hard to please, isn't he? The editor is a bit of a pimp. Not only is he interested in what you've got, he wants to make it available to other people. He has a habit to feed, a monkey on his back. It's called a fanzine, and when it gets you hooked there's no way back.

Just as a collection of readers is called a 'Mailing List', just so a grouping of LoCs is a 'Letter Column'. No matter how big a fix of LoCs you give to a Letter Column, it always needs more, and the editor must feed its habit, because the editor needs the LoC-col. A Letter Column is very important to a fanzine, it provides it with its unique identity. Without a LoC-col to provide response to previous issues, every issue of a fanzine would stand alone -- it is the Letter Column that gives a fanzine the dimension of enduring, that makes it more than simply a collection of single issues, and which therefore enables it to achieve an identity. Take a fanzine like XYSTER, for instance. The fanzine that is XYSTER isn't embodied in any single issue of that title, but in the ongoing gestalt of all its issues to date, the influence of earlier issues fading gradually as more recent issues move into the foreground, but never fading entirely away. The fanzine, to be successful, must achieve an identity of its own which is separate and distinct from that of its editor. QUANDRY wasn't simply LeeH, HYPHEN was not identical with Willis, and today WARHOON isn't Bergeron, SFD isn't me, ANSIBLE isn't Langford, and CRYSTAL SHIP isn't John. And, in achieving this separate identity, the dimension of endurance is vital, and it is the Letter Column that has more to do with this than any other single factor.

So, another of the editor's requirements from a LoC is that he wants raw material for his letter column. All this material is of course input for his fanzine, and the most important single area of this input, the most important single element, is ideas. The LoC-col is the door through which the largest number of new ideas can make their entrance into his

fanzine, in a manner which is at least partly out of the editor's control. The letter column is where the essential degree of unpredictability makes it's presence felt.

Finally, the letter column performs one other function for the fanned. His mailing list is his tribe, and he its chief. It doesn't matter in the slightest that all the members of his tribe are also in other tribes as well. None of them will be in exactly the same other tribes. The only single fanzine that everyone on his mailing list has in common...is his. To him therefore, they are his tribe, and it is in the pages of his LoC-col that they recognise each other.

So How Do I Get The Next Issue? -- The Loccer's Needs

Well, the tribal analogy also applies to the LoCcer. After all, how else can one get to be a member of the CRYSTAL SHIP tribe? John publishes, what...two to three times a year, with about four contributors per issue. Well, OK, about eight if you include artists (and you have to include them otherwise they tend to sulk and cry). That gives a maximum size to John's tribe of about twenty-five, which, other than a pleasing but chance similarity to his IQ, isn't really that hot a number. Fortunately the rest of us can get in too, with our LoCs. The LoC is our tribal binding mechanism. It makes us a part of something.

We can't all draw. Why, even many of the people whose work graces the pages of some fanzines seem to get in only because the editor in question can't do two things at once, like namely breathe and exercise artistic judgement. However, if you can't draw, if you don't feel confident enough to tackle a pre-planned piece for an article, and if you or your sister/brother aren't sleeping with the editor, then you still have one way of getting the editor's fanzine -- writing a LoC.

Now the means of the LoC are open to everyone. To obtain further issues by some other means either requires a specific talent or sufficient experience and longevity in fandom to produce your own fanzine by way of trade. So, when a fan first comes into fanzine fandom, he or she usually begins to contribute by means of LoCs. It is the means of contribution most available to the new young fan. This is not meant to denigrate the LoC, or the new fan producing it. Fans have only so much time to devote to fanac. If a fan produces a fanzine he tends to produce less LoCs simply because he has only enough time to do one thing or the other properly. When I get into a LoC-writing phase my fanzine languishes. When I am gung ho in pursuit of my next ish, I hardly write a LoC from one week to the next. But that's OK for me, because I can probably maintain my membership in the tribe by trading fanzines. Basically therefore, when I write a LoC, it's because it has been ripped from me -- it's because I have been so stimulated by the issue in question that I simply **had** to respond.

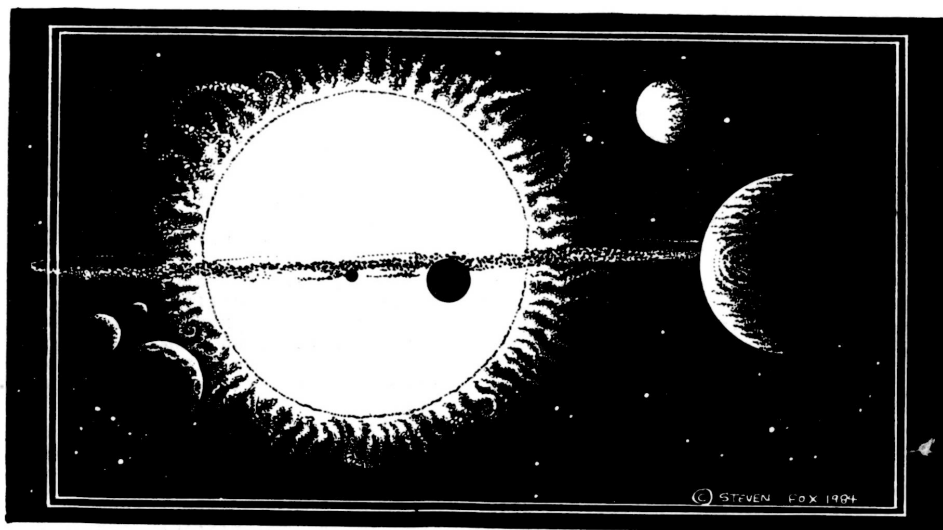
The same thing happens whether or not you have your own fanzine to trade. Sometimes the LoC is dragged from you -- it would be far harder **not** to respond. You want to be a part of this sharing of ideas and opinions. Fireworks are going off in your mind and you want to share this experience, to join in. It's great, isn't it?

But sometimes it isn't all fireworks. Sometimes the Earth doesn't move.

Sometimes you have to fake an orgasm.

Let's face it, the most basic need of the LoC-writer is to get the next issue, and there are going to be times when the Earth doesn't move, when you enjoy the issue in question in a simple, low-key manner, but aren't triggered to a spontaneous response. This is bound to happen from time to time and fortunately most editors don't demand response on an issue-by-issue basis. However, if you haven't responded for an issue or two, and yet again you've finished an issue that you quite liked in a low-key way, but which hasn't triggered enough personal connections -- you've got a problem. This is where all those dull and tedious LoCs come from, the ones that tend to get WAHFed, the ones where neither the writer or the editor is really interested in the LoC, it's just something that must be gotten through in order to keep the fanzine flowing.

Of course, if you have a fanzine to trade you get out of this problem, unless the other guy publishes more frequently than you do, and writes you interesting LoCs every issue too. Then, if you still enjoy his fanzine, but find that it isn't quite speaking directly to you -- well you could always try writing him an article instead.



Art Credits

Artwork this time was entirely from the store cupboard, which had been topped up recently by a batch of material from Steven Fox. Hence the predominance of Steven's work in this issue. Full credits as follows:

Cover - **Steven Fox**, titles by Me

Steven Fox also did pages 2, 5, 14, 21, 25 and 36

Joan Hanke-Woods did page 27

Brad Foster did pages 29 and 33

Steve Lines did page 31

All headings by Me, with some help from Letraset and Normatype

A LONG ACHE OF TIME

jdo

Last week saw the passing of my thirty-ninth birthday. Not a great milestone in anyone's life, you might say: indeed, there are those of you reading this who will snort and say "the lad's a mere stripling, barely past the first bloom of youth". To me it was nothing devastatingly important either: just another step towards the great divide of the Big Forty, the time when I have to put frivolous thoughts behind me, and "be responsible". This time next year, I feel I should be going out and getting a short-back-and-sides, shaving off the beard, throwing out the jeans and anoraks in favour of a three piece suit, possibly even taking up pipe-smoking, or something similarly middle-aged. I might even have to take up golf!

Nah, it wasn't those thoughts which made this birthday special. It was the fact that I had to make my first speech in public, actually on my birthday, a prospect that terrified me before, and still gives me the shakes thinking about it now.

I suppose I should have seen it coming. After all, with the coming of a new Dean to the Science Faculty, there were bound to be some changes, and the fact that he ordained a Faculty Conference to discuss fully a few of the more urgent problems facing us under the benign rule of Sir Keef Joseph, the Rasputin of the Thatcher Cabinet, just made it more certain that I'd be directly in the front line. I am, after all, supposed to be the 'production expert' in the faculty, so it was only natural that when a topic called 'devolution' arose, I'd be the one to find out what it all meant, and then explain it to the faculty

I am sure you are all just bursting to know what 'devolution' is. Well, briefly, it's an administrative term used to indicate a process by which responsibility for course production budgets is given to the faculties, while departments other than the faculties retain the power to spend all the resources involved in those budgets. Or, to put it another way, They spend the loot, while We merely carry the can when They screw up. Devastatingly simple, isn't it? For some reason, though, academics tend to see it as something more exciting, something which gives them Control over their Destinies. Guess who had to disabuse them of their beautiful dreams?

It wasn't as if I never had the chance to duck: I was too dumb-struck by the proposition at the time to be able to summon up any words of dissent. Even a mere "No" would have done, but the vital supply of negatives had got cut off somewhere around my knees, and not one managed to struggle up as far as my larynx for hours afterwards. My wife was later treated to the spectacle of me muttering "No,no,no,no...", as the relief column finally broke through, only to find the dastardly commitment already made.

The next few days were a blur. I had a paper to prepare on the subject, and that priority: after all, as long as I got out the paper with all the vital details, I could throw myself in the canal with a reasonably good conscience before I had to give the speech, couldn't I? Well, no. I might have had a rough summer, but it served to reinforce my grip on life rather than loosen it: I wasn't going to let a mere speech in front of my colleagues drag me down, no sirree!

But what colleagues to have to confront! I mean, these were in the main all university lecturers, for chris'sake, experienced in the black

art of standing in front of a group of people and talking with confidence, with wit, with polished perfection. Worse still, these were OU academics, experienced TV presenters, used to talks in front of the far more daunting TV cameras, talks given to THOUSANDS.

Three days before the event, I decided that there was nothing for it: I couldn't summon up the necessary courage to jump of the canal bridge with a rock around my neck. I couldn't even work up a convenient asthma attack: Pam had been through too much of that during the summer, and I couldn't put her through it all over again. There was only one way to go: I had to make the speech.

So, I sat down at the computer, thought "Right, let's really nail the bastards to their chairs", and poured all the worries and frustrations I felt about the new system into the machine. Then I went back, knocked out all the slanderous remarks, added a few jokes for the discerning (with my jokes, you have to be discerning -- I did wonder about taking a small flag with "Joke" written on it, to be held up at the appropriate moment, but my embroidery wasn't up to the task), and tried it out on a couple of victims (in written form, naturally). They were visibly depressed: I knew I'd got it pitched just right!

Came the day of the conference and my birthday. I tried to look wonderfully gay and cheerful as I unwrapped my present, and opened my cards. I even eat a hearty breakfast. It's quite amazing what you can do on autopilot. The real me was cowering in a corner of my brain screaming to be let out, preferably by the side entrance. I drove in to work perfectly safely, while the raving lunatic inside tried to grab the wheel and steer the car into a wall. I greeted everyone with my normal cheery greeting, while throttling the impulse to scream "you rotten swine, you're only here today to see me humiliate myself". I sauntered across to the meeting room, gaily conversing with colleagues, while inside a demented, drooling cretin was urging me to make the break now, run for it, you can make it across the river before the guards get you.

Then I stepped inside the conference room, and immediately knew I should have cut and run. It was HUGE. Not terribly wide, but very, very long. The only time I had been in that room before had been for a leaving party, when it was packed with people milling around with glasses of booze in their hands. Now, with formally laid out seating, it seemed to stretch away to the horizon. No way was anyone going to hear me with my low and mellifluous (spelt i-n-a-u-d-i-b-l-e) voice beyond the first ten feet. Depression settled in hard.

It got worse as the two speakers before me did their stuff. The first was a Physics lecturer, a tall, handsome American, with an easy manner, good voice, and the ability to talk and handle audiovisual displays at the same time. He was good, with a capital G. I hated him! He was giving a rundown of the history of devolution, the reasons why it was being introduced. I scribbled notes, amended a couple of passages in my speech, and knew, deep down inside where it really hurts, that I had to be measured against such a polished performer.

Fortunately the second speaker was not quite so accomplished. Another Physics lecturer, this time a Sub-Dean who was on the various University committees discussing devolution, he had the difficult task of explaining the arcane formula by which the University apportioned resources to the faculties. Being a physicist, he understood the reasoning behind the figures, but the rest of us had to take his word that we hadn't been done out of any loot by the sharpies in the other faculties, since we couldn't make any sense of the paper presented, or the morass of audiovisual mathematics that he dangled before our glazed

eyes. It was almost a relief when he sat down. Except that it meant it was my turn.

Now, the first speakers had all given their presentations while prancing about between overhead projector, and the comfort of a well-placed table, against which they propped themselves nonchalantly. I chose to sit down at the head of the table. After all, I had no visual aids to worry about, did I? Never even entered my head that such would be available to me. Nah, much better to sit down and address the meeting.

Who am I kidding? I could no more have stood up to address the conference than I could have flown around the room. My legs were like jelly, and fast getting worse: if I'd stayed upright, they'd have liquefied completely and drained out of my trousers!

My stomach was turning over with the slow rhythmic thump of an Edwardian single cylinder car. The only problem was, I had rigid emission control, not an open exhaust!

My heart had taken time out and was resting on the sidelines. I suddenly remembered I had left my voice in the glove compartment of the car.

I grinned sickly at the dean, who smiled back encouragingly. Didn't he realise I was about to come apart like a robot whose screws have suddenly disappeared?

Suddenly I realised I had one functioning set of organs: my lungs. So often fickle, they chose this time to come to my aid, by drawing in a deep breath, and exhaling it over the vocal chords.

About half a page in, I realised that the rest of the body was rallying to the cause, that I could concentrate on delivering the speech rather than simply surviving the experience. Amazed, I sat back and let my body do the work, taking time out to observe the reactions of the audience. Worried looks were beginning to spread as the import of what I was saying began to dawn on them. Flickers of amusement came and went at the appropriate moments (and one or two others, too). To my surprise, they were actually **listening** to what I had to say.

My watch afterwards said I spoken for only fifteen minutes: it seemed more like fifteen hours. My throat threatened to rebel about halfway through, but the rebellion was ruthlessly crushed by the rest of the body. I sat aside, amused by the conflict. Damn it, I never realised my autopilot was so versatile before! At the end of the speech, there was a few moments silence, then the chairmen of the session thanked me for giving the conference such a lot of problems to chew over, and asked for questions. There were only a few: people were still assimilating what I had said. The coffee trolley rattled in the corridor outside, and sustenance was at hand. We broke for coffee.

During coffee I was congratulated by many colleagues, often with the comment "You know, you didn't look at all nervous", which provoked slightly hysterical laughter from me.

Afterwards, the questions came thick and fast, but fielding them was shared between me and three or four others, so no aggravation came my way. For the rest of the conference I could sit back and revel in the sights, most glorious of which being the spectacle of the 'professional media men' from the BBC making public idiots of themselves. There's nothing more delightful than a media man extolling the virtues of Hi-Tech while failing miserably to get not one but TWO video recorders to work well enough to illustrate his speech. Ah, the bliss of being a mere spectator again!

'JAN 54'

CAN ANYONE HELP ME?

Hard to write. Physically hard to put the words on paper. I've been putting it off for months. This will have to be a first-draft, straight-from-the-heart sort of account; there's no other way I can tell it. And I need to tell **someone...**

2:30 a.m. on a Saturday morning: it's a bad time. Even so, I'm almost asleep when the telephone at my elbow rings. The first ring jerks me awake with a sickening, disorienting lurch of fear. The second ring, and I'm fumbling desperately for the light switch and my glasses. The third ring. I pick up the phone, think to whoever's on the other end "I'm listening, I'm with you", think to myself "DON'T PANIC", and say "Samaritans, can I help you?"

I'm shaking with tension, reliving that common experience. I must have done it hundreds of times. I don't do it anymore.

Nothing. Unless you count the raspclickbuzz of a bad connection. Is it what other people might think of as a hoax call, but what we call "testing calls"? Is there a man masturbating? Is there someone with slashed wrists, a gunshot wound, someone whose do-it-yourself abortion has gone wrong? Someone who's frightened she's pregnant/he's gay? Is there anyone there at all, or have they dialled the number, panicked, and walked away from the phone?

"Hello, you're through to the Samaritans. Can I help you?" I say again.

Somewhere out there tonight, someone is thinking about dying.

Sobbing. Incoherent words, almost a scream, then more sobs; "...it's ...it's..." "That's okay, take your time," I say, as gently and reassuringly as possible. "You've done the hardest bit now."

This is going to be a long one. She's drunk, her and her boyfriend have had a fight, I'm not sure who walked out on who. She wants us to come out and talk to her, take her home. Decision time. Do we play taxi service? There is only one car on call for emergencies at night. We can't leave the telephones. How bad, how genuine is her distress? Could she be talked down over the phone? Talked into coming into the Centre? Is she really suicidal? After an hour and a half's conversation, she decides she's more tired than suicidal, she'll go and make herself a cup of coffee then go to bed. A good job I managed to talk her down over the phone; twenty minutes later my partner in the Centre has to call out the emergency car to take an overdose to hospital.

Always assuming that she was telling the truth, of course. Perhaps I wasn't quite sensitive and sympathetic enough. Perhaps she felt that. People who are desperate, people on the edge, are very perceptive about other people's feelings towards them. She could have decided that I didn't really care enough, and gone off and taken the tablets.

I'll never know.

It doesn't do to be too self-aware in this job.

Dammit, I was **trying**. This isn't my regular duty. It's holiday time, the Centre is short-handed, I've done my regular day duty and an extra night duty already this week. I had a busy day in the shop, and my own nearest and dearest is complaining about the amount of time I'm not home these days. I have a headache. I'm not at my best at 2:30 a.m. anyway. I wish I was a saint, then I could have given that poor woman the care and attention she needed, but as it is I'm not and I didn't and I feel guilty about it. Perhaps I won't matter. I hope. I was **trying**.

The mottoes are: "We are not professionals"." Are you ordinary enough to be a Samaritan?" "Could you listen?"

And then there are the times when you really know you have done your best, you have given everything you have to give, and it's not enough. The young woman who came in at 7:30 p.m., desperate, who I sat with all night. We talked, I listened, there was a bond, an intimacy. I felt I knew her, I trusted her; I felt a good deal of affection for her. She left at 8:00 a.m., saying "It's helped so much to talk. I feel much better now." I went home to bed. She went home and took an overdose and died in hospital the next day.

The young man, a heroin addict with a face full of terror. "In 18 months, I'll be dead, one way or the other," he said. He was trying to get in to a community of ex-addicts, to be in a drug-free environment with people who understood. They make it tough to get in. It takes guts and determination to change your life. He phoned them from the Centre. They put him off. He phoned again. They were more encouraging. More phone calls, and finally the trial period is set; he can move in. We help him get his train fare, see him off from the station. "Nobody believes in me," he said to me in despair one day. "I believe in you," I said. And I did. I thought he could make it.

He never turned up at the drug centre.

Failure, failure, failure. A constant procession of failure.

And they are so, well, **shameless** about their distress, some of them. There are those who can't cope and never will cope, and who revel in the drama, the excitement, who make grand gestures and slash their wrists and leave home and fight and arrive destitute on other peoples' doorsteps at peculiar hours. How can they bear to be so open about it? If my life was such a mess; if my life is a mess, my chief feeling with regard to telling other people about it is shame. I'm deeply

ashamed that I've failed, that I'm not happy like I'm supposed to be. I'm ashamed to admit I'm not perfect. I'm ashamed to admit I'm not competent. I'm ashamed to admit I'm inferior. I literally cannot speak of anything that really troubles me; not to strangers, not to friends. Perhaps I joined the Samaritans in the first place to try and meet my younger self, to love that self who felt so unloved, so alone. But of course, my younger self would never have gone to the Samaritans, and for that reason, we will never meet there.

If there is altruism, there is none in me. Self, self, self. But I did genuinely want to relieve suffering...

And then there are the people who are insane. Don't get me wrong. Several of my close friends have spent time in the bin. Some lunatics are original, gentle, creative people. Some aren't. The hardest thing is spending time, long periods of time alone in a small room with someone who simply isn't there. It is impossible to talk. I try to listen. I try hard, and find myself being drawn into a world where all voices are meaningless, where nothing makes any sense. I come out of the Centre dazed; everything looks the wrong colour and I feel like smashing something. I am sick when I get home.

It's no use being an empath. The current flows the wrong way. And the empathy is not under my conscious, voluntary control; I can't always switch it on (or off) at will. In fact, I mostly travel around with it switched off, because I haven't got the time or energy or compassion to deal with most peoples' pain. Thus most of my friends outside the Centre think of me as an insensitive person. They are right.

And then there are the dossers. Most of my fellow Samaritans find it hard to like the dossers. They smell. They pee on the furniture and they are sick on the carpets and they steal anything not bolted down and they are habitual liars and they sometimes get violent, with fists, knives, bottles. I, on the other hand, like the dossers. They want something I can actually provide: free tea and biscuits and a warm place to kip for a few hours. They play the cadging game, but they stick to the rules. They tell fascinating stories. They do not get violent provided you are scrupulously honest with them, and are not frightened of them. I can actually give them something they want, be undemanding. However, they are not suicidal, and "suicide is our business".

Except that a lot of the people (most of the people?) we see at the Centre are not suicidal there and then, they are simply chronically miserable. I listen. And I feel I am propping up the system, the rotten system that lets people define themselves by their jobs, so that when they lose them, they are nobody. The system that refuses a fourteen year old girl contraception, but will give her an abortion. The system that makes a lonely old man, loved and respected in his neighbourhood, wake up crying in the middle of the night. He is crying in fear because he's homosexual, and he thinks that the nurse who comes in to see to his bad leg may have found out that he sleeps in womens' nighties. This is doubly pathetic, because he is in his seventies and wears what a respectable matron in her seventies might; flannel in winter, cotton in summer, with a nice bit of broderie anglaise around the collar... He gives them all away to a jumble sale.

And then there are all the committee meetings, the paperwork of organising the duty rotas, the support group meetings, the fund-raising meetings, the publicity meetings. The talks to schools and clubs and societies. Cutting the grass. Cleaning the loos. Buying tea and biscuits.

I wasn't a very good Samaritan. But it was a major part of my life, including my social life, for several years.

The telephone rings at home. My heart does not start beating faster. I do not think "Please, God, let it not be the Centre again..." I have resigned. There is a hole in my life, a hole I'm grateful to have. It's quiet in my hole. Nobody's crying in there.

Somewhere out there tonight, someone is thinking of dying.

I am not available. I am watching **Superman III**. I am eating supper I am having a bath I am taking the dog for a walk. Go away. I'm not at home.

Perhaps you were the one I could have helped. I'll never know.

Can you help me?



STRANGE DAYS

jdo

It would seem that there isn't much that is sacred in the world today that someone won't turn to mischievous, if not downright evil, ends. I mean, there I was, innocently leafing through the Sunday newspaper (a rare enough event in itself, since I buy such publications maybe three or four times a year), when I came across a short and shocking piece proclaiming the news that the National Front had been making a takeover bid for the intellectual possession of Middle Earth.

Imagine my surprise: all these years I've been innocently reading Tolkien without recognising that they were the works of one of the worst racists of our age, epically laying forth a blueprint for a new, racially pure order. After I'd finished heaving up my breakfast at such revolting ideas, I ripped out the offending article, and made a note to look into the matter further.

A few days later, I perused some of the relevant documents in the OU Library. Not, I hasten to add, the original NF material -- give the OU credit for having *some* sensibilities. No, these were articles in the anti-fascist magazine "Searchlight", with letters from prominent members of the Tolkien Society denouncing the attempt by the NF to misappropriate Tolkien as a member of their own peculiarly slanted pantheon of 'approved authors' (no doubt on the same racks as Robert Howard, Edgar Rice Burroughs and John Norman). The paucity of discrimination displayed by the NF's literary members no doubt explains why, thanks to a few mis-interpretable passages, they are anxious to rope in the good professor. Mind you, anyone reading Tolkien's published letters would be struck immediately by the preposterousness of the suggestion that he was some kind of closet racist, only

prevented from openly proclaiming his true allegiance by his own timidity. Of course, he was also partly brainwashed by the famous Marxist-Zionist conspiracy, that wonderful paranoid product of the lobotomised intellect that masquerades as the brains of the NF. You have to admire ol' Tolsks, don'cha -- I mean, with all that junk buzzing around in his head it's a wonder he could write at all, isn't it?

This clumsy attempt to appropriate Tolkien apparently coincides with long-term attempts to 'justify' the NF's existence by dragging in all kinds of mythical precursors to the great war for racial purity that these zomboid goons seem to see themselves as waging. In this they are doing nothing original, of course: Herr Schickelgruber was doing precisely that sixty years ago, when he adopted the myths of Germany, and the music of Wagner, for his own ends. (Wagner did, of course, provide a rich hunting ground for the Nazis, being chock full of anti-semitic nonsense.) Apparently, the NF have been trying to takeover various Arthurian bodies for a number of years, obviously seeing in the Arthurian legends an opportunity for much mischief. All of which raises interesting questions, not the least of which is the psychic power of C.S.Lewis: all of this echoes the plot of *THAT HIDEOUS STRENGTH* so much that I'm beginning to wonder if Tolkien isn't the *second* Inklings to be given NF attention!

The wonder of it is, why have they stopped there? I mean, SF and Fantasy are rampant with so many fascist dreamworlds, so why have we not seen the great swastika stamp of approval splattered all over the likes of *DUNE*, for example. I'd have thought there was enough scope in the entire *DUNE* sequence for the fevered

imagination of yer average NF intellectual (is that a tautology? I think it may be) to run truly wild, though they might draw the line at changing into worms. (Oh, I dunno though...)

Then there's good ol' Norman Spinrad's THE IRON DREAM, which is probably already standard issue to any self-respecting NF football hooligan being sent on a mission to alien territory (like Belgium?) with mayhem in mind. I mean, the front few pages of TID can be dismissed as mere camouflage to get the book past the censorious and rabidly left-wing publishers, (people like ol' Rupert Murdoch, don'cha know) before ol' Norm gets down to the real nitty gritty of what to do with left-over human trash in the cause of racial purity.

And if the NF can even consider trying to take over the likes of the Merlin Research Group (whoever they are: anyone know?), then how long before they start thinking in terms of the BSFA? If there's an organisation that's easier to take over than the BSFA I've yet to hear of it. All you need to do is get a few people enrolled who are prepared to take over the work of running the zines, etc., and you're home and dry, since the various jobs go begging with amazing regularity. Then the 'new order' could start the task of winking out the subversives from the righteous, the Ballards and Dicks from the Heinleins, and really get the society moving rightwards. Would not be at all difficult.

Mind you, when you come to think of it, the NF is more than a little sciffy in itself. I mean, here are these guys rewriting their own forebrains with beliefs like "Hitler was a nice guy really"; "the Auschwitz/Belsen photos are all faked" (apparently they were really centres for making handknitted woolly jumpers for the Fuhrer's troops on the Russian front); "Churchill was

actually a Jewish Negro whited up" and "Maggie Thatcher is a left wing puppet of Gorbachev's". It's just a great shame that these cretins have to pollute the precious bodily fluids of our beloved genres with their mucky little meanderings. It's all done in the worst possible taste, of course. Little Kenny Everett would no doubt approve immensely.

The sad thing about it is, there is a certain amount of racism in Tolkien, but its the kind we all tend to be saddled with via history and our state religion. The enemy in Tolkien comes from the South and the East, since he chose to set it in a pseudo-European setting, with the Western sea to the backs of the goodies, and the vast unknowable hinterland as the breeding places of the baddies. In LotR, the Christian bias comes out, in the form of the obviously Islamic Haradrim, since Tolkien chooses to use traditional enemies of Christendom as allies of Mordor. And, because they come out of the 'burning wastes of Southron', these gentlemen are unfortunately rather sun-tanned, ride on 'olliphants', and are all in all rather un-British. I would not fling LotR out of the library for it, though, since it was basically laziness on the good Professor's part, rather than anything deeply suspicious: he just didn't question his own prejudices enough before committing them to paper. If the NF can fasten onto these minor peccadilloes, and ignore all the other contrary evidence, then there is virtually no work of literature that is safe from them.

What puzzles me, though, is why they bother? Their appeal is to people who think that the SUN is a real newspaper. Surely the same old lies and innuendoes still perform the necessary trick without the justifications sought by the NF 'intellectuals': most NF members wouldn't be caught dead reading a book anyway! Strange days indeed.

RIPPLES

I've got a 'full-sized' loccol to cram into a smaller fanzine, so I guess I'd better keep my comments to the minimum, and get straight on with the locs.

Martyn Taylor: There I was telling myself 'fanzines are dead', and that I didn't have to worry about them, and you come out with CRYSTAL SHIP 9. You are a time wasting sod, sir. I could be writing the great English novel (I would be, were my computer not STILL being fixed) and instead I'm writing a letter of comment about some insignificant amateur goddam bloody beautiful fanzine!

To begin at the beginning, Iain Byers' illustration for 'Occam's Razor..' is incredible, marvelous. I know how he's done it, but it is witty, poignant, to the point and wonderfully illustrative of William Bains' argument. In fact it probably makes the point better than the argued piece does -- not as precisely, but far more memorably. Of course I'd take issue with William on the odd point or two, but for the most part he is dead right. I should take the argument backwards, though. Monolithic religion -- in Europe -- died when they allowed the Bible to be translated into the vernacular. After all, how can you take an infallible Pope seriously when he says 'No remarriage of divorcees' (St.Luke), when any educated man can point to St.Matthew's somewhat different rendition of the same event. A serious argument made with lightness of touch. Good stuff, but still not as pithy as the illustration.

((The piece by William Bains got quite a few people going, like:))

Richard Faulder: ...Another fascinating article by William Bains. It was very useful for the historical overview it gave of the development of Western thought. However, I would disagree that science is inherently a religion.

To me, a religion not only provides an explanation of the world, but then goes on to dictate appropriate behaviours for those people who accept the explanation. This is not to say that there is not a religion of scientism. By and large libertarianism and utilitarianism could be viewed as sects of scientism (even if they do regard economics as a science, and then mix it up with a sort of vague Darwinism). However, the liberal intellectualism of most scientists is firmly based in Christianity, even if those who practice it profess to atheism or agnosticism. As yet there is no concrete scientist philosophy to back up altruism (although the groundwork for it exists in some aspects of evolutionary theory), to the extent that there is pressure on people to feel vaguely guilty about being altruistic. (The truth, of course, is that libertarianism and utilitarianism are so useful for justifying self-indulgent behaviour that people have put more effort into building up a philosophy that enables them to rationalise away what is often anti-social behaviour.)

It is true that people are reluctant to admit that the system by which they run their lives is a religion, but this seems only to have allowed the proliferation of a multitude of new religions, none of which admit to being one: the two cited above, communism, environment-alism, feminism, and so on. Perhaps it would be true to say that such religions run the lives of their adherents as much as they ever have. There have always been those who have used religion, in the more traditional sense, to justify doing ill while doing good, or haven't let a little thing like hypocrisy stand in the way of

claiming to be a good adherent. So to with today's religions. Still, as William Bains says, even if the current system doesn't give us the best of all possible worlds, at least the world it gives is no worse than its predecessors (although nuclear winter is another matter), and cannot justify our scrapping it.

((Wouldn't it be nice if those people who constantly scream for change would propose clearly some kind of alternative.))

Mary Gentle: 'Occam's Razor and Luther's Birthday': this is an ambitious piece of work, looking, as it does, at the two meta-theories that have permeated Western civilisation... a meta-theory, in this case, being a theory that explains all other theories. I think William Bains is saying that they're basically the same, that science is a new religion -- well, in one way yes, in one way no. Yes, because the religious metatheory and the scientific metatheory are both efforts by human beings to give a meaning to the universe, and to their lives. It's difficult, in fact it's all but impossible, to live in an uncaring, random, nihilistic world; and yet, observation would tend to confirm that that's how the world is, buddy, so tough luck. We have proof positive of pain and suffering and death. We have speculations of what may come after death. We have vague ideas about what the purpose of the universe might be. We have a faint hope that, somehow, it'll turn out to have been for the good of the human race, and preferably for the individual human being as well. Into the vacuum come theories: God, the laws of physics etc. So yes, religion and science are both efforts to keep the dark away.

And, on the other hand, they're not the same at all. Because I've described them in terms of the 'science' metatheory, a religious person would take severe exception to what I say. Because I shouldn't be asking for proof, that pertains

to science; I should be relying on faith -- I should believe something, not in spite of the lack of proof, but **because** of the lack of proof. Science can allow religion to exist, but religion can't allow science to exist. The scientific world-view, that functions by logic, destroys faith, as William Bains indicates. But it doesn't wholly deny the possibility that something else may exist (albeit a **deus abscondus**). Newton was a Christian. The real 'Christian world-view', which in terms of this article one would see as the Catholic view, can't allow logic to take precedence over intuition.



... To say 'Science is... the religion of the Common Age' is a touch simplistic, but like all such generalisations, it has a kind of truth in it. Maybe precisely as many people who accept science as an article of faith now, without understanding how it functions, then accepted religion in the same way, with as little understanding? Could it be that we all operate by a metatheory that this article would refer to as 'superstition' -- in that we think, in certain restricted areas, such-and-such a

law applies; but that law may be the falling of ripe apples from tree to ground, or the throwing of salt over the shoulder when salt is accidentally spilt? That most of us don't operate by metatheories, but by rules-of-thumb? Perhaps it's just that, at certain times in history, one set of superstitions is regarded as more legitimate than another set. I'm not sure if the article implies (but I am inclined to think) that we can't know **anything** for sure: that not only is it a fallacy to think 'we know what God wants', but equally a fallacy to think 'we know that it is raining'? OK, so we're back to Bishop Berkeley -- which just proves that one can't, as in this article, dispose of him in parentheses.....

...re Iain Byers' comments on reading books twice...You rightly point out that a book is not the same book when one reads it for the second, or indeed the third or fourth time. I'd just like to add that, with reference to Iain's comment that you have to encounter a book at the right time, that this is true, but then something else follows from that. A person is a "dynamic evolving entity" (it says here). Right. It follows, then, that not only is the book not the same book, the reader is not the same person. (Heraclitus, who was pretty quick for an ancient Greek, said you can't step into the same river twice -- on account of it's not the same river. Therefore, it would seem, you really can't read any book twice ...that logical enough for you?). I also like Iain's idea that books have "characters we can dismiss if they become too disturbing". It's the genuinely disturbing characters you can't get out of your mind (and how many of us will meet in real life the originals of, say, Mistuh Kurtz, Jurgen, Dr.Strangelove, Tess D'Urberville, or Richard of Gloucester?)

((Hmm, it would seem that Mary is displaying her strange liking for hunchbacks again.))

Ted Hughes: ...I think I've rumbled you for a perfectionist. Gone the charming stammer of your typewriter which upset a few people an issue or two ago. Gone the foolish (and impossible) illustrations -- like the one which offended me in your last issue. Leaving us a polished, professional mag to enjoy.

This time I enjoyed **all** the illustrations -- some more than others of course. There was a time when I might have matched Steve Lines' line, but I'm sadly out of practice. Working in oils ruins technique. Mistake? Wrong line? Something out of proportion? Wipe it out with turps if it's still wet, paint it out if it's dry. Nobody will live long enough to spot your six-legged horses, whatever posterity may uncover. And posterity, I'm sure, won't be very interested in me!

Steve Lines is remarkably good. Iain Byers excellent...And your spread...is equally good. I prefer the Beardsley-like edge of Steve Lines work -- but Helsdon's and Byers' softer treatment is very easy to enjoy. You are lucky to have artists of such calibre drawing for you."

((And I know it, Ted, hence the published egoboo!))

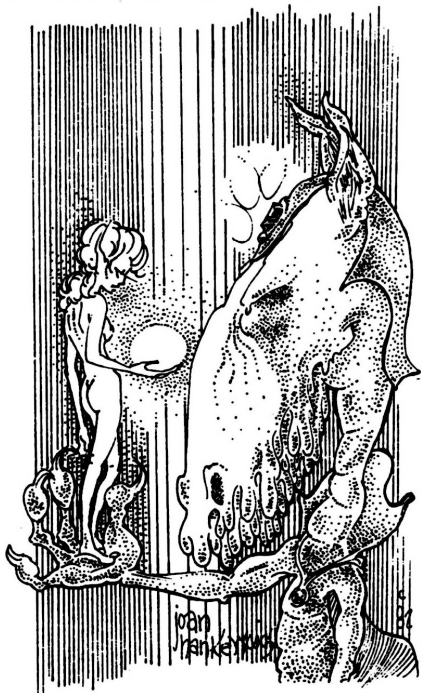
...I enjoyed Martyn Taylor and The Philosopher's Stone, mainly, I think, because he didn't try to demolish Bester's story. Not that I agree with Martyn's conclusions. I think he postulated too much craftiness to friend Bester when he imputed Freudian plots to con the reader. One of Martyn's false premises is to have considered THE DEMOLISHED MAN as literature. For my money, it's straight pulp fiction, written in response to editor Gold's prodding for the Jan, Feb and March 1952 issues of GALAXY. And don't kid me that Horace Gold would try to sell Freudian philosophy to his readers -- not on your Nelly! H.L.Gold had a good thing going in GALAXY, which

was then just over a year old, and booming. All he wanted was good stories about flesh and blood characters which weren't Bat Durstons, and didn't deal with atomic doom. Incidentally, the first words of THE DEMOLISHED MAN are not "Explosion. Concussion. Etc..." There are eight and a half pages of text in the original GALAXY version before those words come at the start of Chapter II. But that's Martyn's loss. What I think he missed -- or at least, didn't care to mention -- was Bester's treatment of a telepathic society. Until then, the definitive telepathic novel had been Van Vogt's SLAN -- which had turned the previously current telepathic superman idea on its head, and introduced us to the persecuted telepath at odds with the rest of us normals. Alf Bester turned that idea on its side, and made the telepaths normal. That was the new and startling thing he did in 1952. Remember those dazzling, cross-connecting lines of thought? That was new, and splendid!...

((Only one thing bothers me about Ted saying that TDM was pure pulp fiction (and therefore by imputation not 'literature'), and that is that the equivalent of the fifties pulp fiction back in the 19th and early 20th century were the little pamphlet books which printed chapters of works by people like Dickens, often written very quickly, and purely for the money. Does anyone contend that the likes of Dickens are not literature, despite their 'pulp' origins?))

Ian Covell: Martyn Taylor's dissection of Bester's book is quite a piece. Really, he's saying that the immense success of this book in literary terms is not understandable in ordinary terms. The same is in fact true about TIGER TIGER, whose science is sheer craziness (the rubbish which trails him through the ship, the girl who can see 'only electromagnetic radiation' yet is portrayed as truly blind) and whose fetishes are

innumerable, to say the least. It's baroque, it's almost jury-rigged, and for a great deal of the time it's almost incomprehensible except in terms of revenge, but it **works**. The early Bester had something the later Bester has lost, or only has in diminished form. It seems to include a lack of trust in both humanity at large and the SF reader in particular. Cynicism is endemic in almost all from EXTRO



through GOLEM 100. What really drags the reader through those first books, especially TDM, is the sheer bull-headed amoral **obsessiveness** of the lead males. Each book has a very simple plot bedecked with gaudy jewels of language and incident; in a way, Bester was utilising the techniques of contemporary bestsellers to his own purposes. I suspect that if he cared, he could still write a successful bestseller, but he just keeps getting bored with ideas, and

whereas the first books were part of his need to write the best SF of which he was capable, later works have degenerated into nonsensicality almost at once. The worst example would be the evolution of the excellent FOUR HOUR FUGUE into the execrable GOLEM 100...

Harry Warner Jr: I chuckled almost constantly over David Bateman's memoir. I've seen enough groups like his to be able to picture the mixture of confidence and panic during the performances that he describes. (In the United States, though, a 'fair' means the traditional sort of rural event with livestock shows, midway rides, cake baking contests and booths for gambling and contests of skill. The word is normally qualified for the events David describes at 'arts fair' or 'arts and crafts fair'.) I don't suppose there are enough shopping malls in the United Kingdom yet to support many small theatre groups like the one described here. The malls in the United States periodically hire such entertainments to attract customers to special sales events. One of them a couple of years ago consisted of three or four performers who drafted lots of little kids from among the spectators and staged quite good episodes from Tolkien to the wonderment of parents.

...One point in favour of 'fannish writing' which your editorial doesn't cover: basically it's the informal essay of old in a new home. In the United States and, I suspect, most other nations, the informal essay has been evicted from professional publications which want today the fact articles, the editorializing articles about current affairs, the sensational 'personal experience', descriptions in article form, and similar prose. So I think it's important for fanzines to continue to open their pages to 'fannish writing' to help propagate an endangered species and to give pleasure to those of us who like the beast. This doesn't mean I dislike the kind of material you

favour for **Crystal Ship**. I can't see why all fans aren't able to enjoy both types of fanzine material, neither of which threatens to drive the other out of fandom.

((Now you have me confused, Harry, since I've always rather regarded the type of article I tend to collect and publish as **being** informal essays, written from a personal viewpoint on a subject that happens to interest the author. If they were merely dry ol' sercon pieces, I'd feel disinclined to print 'em!))

Malcolm Edwards: ...The trouble with your editorial is that as far as your reference to me is concerned -- and, I think, as far as your reference to D. West is concerned, too -- you are setting up a straw man which you then proceed, naturally enough, to demolish.

If you read what I actually said in the first TAPPEN (a few remarks, by the way, which were not intended to be etched on stone tablets) you will see that I was not defining fan writing in any prescriptive way. What I said was: 'What is special about fan writing is, of course, the personal element. Articles may be written in a manner superficially resembling that of (say) PUNCH contributions, but the difference is that the author is writing for an extended circle of personal acquaintances.'

You will notice that I say nothing about what the **content** of the writing should be: I merely assert that good fan writing is that which is aware of and takes advantage of the particular intimate, interactive relationship that fanzines offer between writer and reader. This seems to me to be uncontroversial, not to say embarrassingly obvious.

And Don West, in 'Performance', has this to say: 'Clear your minds of Cant. You aren't involved with fanzines as some kind of fucking

duty -- it's purely a matter of pleasure, and as such requires no further justification whatsoever. If anyone disapproves of the way you enjoy yourself -- that's their fucking problem, not yours'.

So where's the argument?"

((Well, it's principally among those avid little fans who take a part of your statement above and twist it into something rather different. For example, Steve Higgins' article from both STOMACH PUMP and HTT, which takes off from where you finish, and pre-supposes that the only true form of fanwriting is that which is personal in tone, one of several similar pieces over the past few years (I think Rob Hansen did something similar too). Obviously I don't agree, and follow West's dictum, and get pretty miffed at being criticised for it. If people don't like the zine, then they only have to request that they be dropped from the circulation list.))

Dave Redd: Mal Ashworth's right about the difference in general outlook between Fifties and Seventies fandom when he characterises them as relatively adult and relatively adolescent, but only if you ignore embarrassing counter-evidence such as Fifties propeller beanies and seventies...um, pause to think of something 'adult' in the Seventies. Never mind. The real truth is that the whole country has suffered this cultural change, not just fandom. The Fifties were short-back-and-sides times and the Seventies were the Age of Hairy Denim. Have you noticed the change in headmasters? When I were a lad headmasters were ex-military and physically terrifying, while nowadays they're bearded little art students hoping the nice children will be good. (Some hope.)

But back to fifties fandom (not that I was personally involved of course) and Mal's feeling that a more adult ethos prevailed. Fandom then was SF fandom, and while SF

readers were still regarded as weird by mainstreamers the fans did do all their fannish things as part of the wider world -- mainly because SF magazines made space for them. The readers' letters in STARTLING STORIES, for example, or Walt Willis' columns in NEBULA. SF fandom was tied to the real world, unlike the fannish fandom of today which is introspective and self-sufficient in a way earlier fandoms never were. Fan editors still slip in an occasional mention of SF to keep the nominal frame of reference going, but otherwise the key factor of personality has taken over. And personalities being what they are these days, as British society disintegrates, fandom shows so much of the Fourth Form mentality Mal mentions.



I suppose the drift away from SF is a stronger difference than the adolescent thing. Like the drift away from, say, orthodox symphonic structure in serious music. A classical symphony was both an emotional experience and an exercise in using the format, while a modern piece is only the former.

The fannish 'classical' equivalent would be, say, Walt Willis' writing a parody of 'Journey Into Space' dialogue and amusing his readers by playing on their shared knowledge, and then the 'modern' equivalent would be...well, take David Bateman's 'Ox Tales'. It's interesting and it's well done, but it comes in from the outside and cannot work on the readers'

previous experience, other than in the brief mentions of fairs and Granada TV. Only amateur actors would have enough involvement to appreciate everything in the piece, just as only modern composers can really appreciate modern composition. Feelings on racism are more basic though, which was why Dave Thiry's article on the KKK hit most of us harder. So...with fandom, or at least fannish fandom, distancing itself from SF, the chances for fuller reader involvement and hence enthusiasm become fewer as the common ground becomes narrower. An article on Erasmus and Martin Luther has to succeed on sheer quality, not shared interests. (That's a tough job and I'm not sure William Bains succeeded: a week later everything has faded leaving only the memory of Iain Byers illustrating gadgets I can't afford.)

A P.S. to Pam Boal: the great concerned SF novel about the millions of unemployed and homeless has already been written, sort of. As that novel sees it the rich become richer and fewer and become Elois; the rest get poorer and become Morlocks. Wells knew where we're headed. But at least one SF writer thought of a solution: see Kornbluth's THE MARCHING MORONS.

Mal Ashworth: ...My understanding of 'fannish' writing has always been that it was creative writing, often humorous, arising in the 'fannish' sphere. Back in the Fifties there used to be a convention that it should also be 'fannish' in content too; i.e. the subject of the piece should be fans or fandom or something connected with them. I was one of the few who found this ridiculously restrictive and tried to engender an Anything Goes (content-wise) policy; which may have been one reason some people always found ROT slightly odd. From what you say it sounds as though I may have been right in discerning some vestiges of that old attitude in 80s fandom. D.West, for instance, has surprised me considerably (in conversation) by

avowing that he has no interest in a piece of fanwriting if it doesn't mention him. Since I'd always associated that outlook with the rawest of neofans I assumed he was kidding. But it seems not; he certainly never makes any effort to comment on anyone else's work these days.

Even more interesting, perhaps, is the fact that in the Fifties it was taken for granted that the term 'fannish' contrasted with the term 'sercon'. 'Fannish' meant something like 'Humorous creative writing generally of a pretty good standard' and 'Sercon' meant 'Serious constructive (used ironically) writing about SF, almost always of a pretty poor standard'. I'm sure I needn't add that there were exceptions; there was, for instance, good serious stuff being written by Jim Blish (as 'William Atheling Jr.') and Redd Boggs...; and conversely, there was some trivial and puerile 'fannish' writing -- but in general the distinction did seem to hold up. It was generally thought (by 'fannish' fans, at least) that perhaps really good serious writing about SF was particularly hard to do, and that if done well enough to be worth reading would find a market other than a fanzine.

CRYSTAL SHIP seems to me a very fine exemplification of the fact that, if that distinction does have any validity, then the best thing you can do is go right ahead and breach it. And it seems a sorry thing that there is not more mutuality between these two strands in fandom, and that CRYSTAL SHIP and its contributors don't seem to feature in, for instance, the ANSIBLE poll...

Lee Hoffman: ...To tell the truth, I'm pretty tired of all the squabbling in fandom about "standards", "media fans", etc. As you point out so neatly in your editorial, "the peculiar beastie known as 'fannish writing' is merely writing that is done with a particular market in mind". Your editorial with the com-

ments on fanzine reviews, William Bains' article..., Kev Rattan's 'What I hate about fandom' and the material in the LetterCol regarding the Ku Klux Klan all mesh in presenting the idea of the *True Believer*.

Not all fanzine critics or followers of religions or advocates of science are *True Believers* in the sense in which I use the term. A lot of people who are into these things recognize that their Way is not the Only Way.

The *True Believers* I'm referring to are the ones who have *Absolute Knowledge* of what is *Absolutely Right*. These people have the Very Best Intentions. They want to make the world a better place. They are people who feel that what they have is not a Truth, but the Truth, be it a set of literary standards, moral standards, Laws of Nature, or whathaveyou. (If the Laws of Nature seem out of place there, note how many times in history the existing ones have been replaced with New Improved Models.) They want to share their *Truth* with others. They want to bring others into conformity with the Ideals of their *Truth*.

True Believers kill people in the name of Destroying Evil, Preserving Racial Purity, Putting Down Satanic Heresy, Protecting the National Interests, Preventing the Perversion of Our Children, and things like that. Or they write off evidence that goes against their own scientific *Truths* on the grounds of "sloppy research", "sampling errors" or "blatantly against the Laws of Science" without checking out the possibility that the research or sampling evidence just could illuminate something not previously known. Knowledgeable Critics did not hesitate to pronounce the works of people like Van Gogh, Cezanne and Matisse as childish scrawls. (At some future time, critics will no doubt say that all over again and wonder at how childish we were to have considered such crap as *Art*.)

And there are people in fandom who define "Fandom" to suit themselves, appoint themselves and those who agree with them to the Priesthood and make Pronouncements on what is Good and Evil, Truth and Heresy.

Personally I think all the *True Believers* should be taken out and shot. It would make the world a better place for all of us who believe as I do.

((To which one can only say 'Right on, Lee' and 'Pass the ammunition'!))



Eric Mayer ..You talk about fanwriting ... I've thought a lot about that subject since its my primary form of fanac.

When I first got involved in fandom a dozen or so years ago I was, of course, enthusiastic and curious about this wonderful new toy I'd stumbled on. I read all the 'classic' fannish writing I could get my hands on. I was writing, as I always have, but I soon learned that to gain acceptance, recognition, egoboo it is much more efficient to write in some accepted

style. This must be true professionally as well as in fandom -- its easier to sell someone on something that sounds like something they've already bought. By aping a style you partake of the aura of professionalism or fannishness, as the case may be. Thus, I found, if I wrote in imitation of, say, Charles Burbee, the reviews would be much more enthusiastic than if I wrote in my own way. For one thing, it had been established that the sort of thing Burbee did was good, therefore something else of that sort would also be rated as good. Even if it wasn't carried off well, it was rated good as an attempt to adhere to the accepted norms -- an acknowledgement of those norms and an acknowledgement of the wisdom of the people who set the norms. As a matter of fact, a neofan can't lose if he clings to the style of writing being pushed by those who fancy themselves fannish arbiters of taste. The arbiters will only be too happy to encourage such acolytes, regardless of the skill with which the acolytes carry out their flattering imitations. Its not the writing that counts, really, but the thought!

I luckily outgrew this stage but still clung to some bad habits. I tended to believe, for instance, that by sticking fannish references into my writing I was taking advantage of my fannish audience to produce something special -- as West might have it. But what is special about being able to get a laugh by saying 'propellor beanie'? While it is certainly fine to sometimes write about fandom, the use of 'fannish context' can get to be a crutch. A way to get cheap laughs. I've read a lot of fannish zines lately which are supposedly funny -- but its a sort of sitcom, push button humour -- the reader is supposed to laugh as the correct fannish buttons are pushed. I mean, if I'm writing an editorial for GROGGY and at the end I say: '24 issues.. that's not too many', or stick in some other old chestnut -- is that really funny? Or if I

mention Joseph Nicholas disparagingly, or trot out some other fannish funny hat for the readers to inspect? Its not funny. Its just fannish boilerplate.

What I've had to do is ask **why** I write for fanzines. If you write to gain fannish status, to win a poll, to satisfy the fan establishment that might give you such perks, then you have reason to adhere to the fannish boilerplate. If you don't write for those reasons then why limit your creativity? I write because I enjoy it. Its a challenge. Writing is a trick I'd like to learn to do. Fandom is a place where I can indulge this game. Lately I've tried to toss out all the fannish crutches. If I write about fandom I write about fandom. When I'm not writing about fandom I forget I'm writing for fanzines. At this point for me to stop in the middle of a character study I've been struggling to put together, give my audience a little wink as if to say 'of course, we're all just fans and this is a fanzine piece', would be cheating, would allow me to get away with doing a lesser job than I might be capable of.

Well, I've got my hobby horse right up on the soap box. But it just strikes me as stupid to aspire to write 'fannishly'. What if you succeed? You've honed your writing skills to the point where you can only communicate to a few dozen people in the whole world, on the basis of a hobby you share. What a great accomplishment.

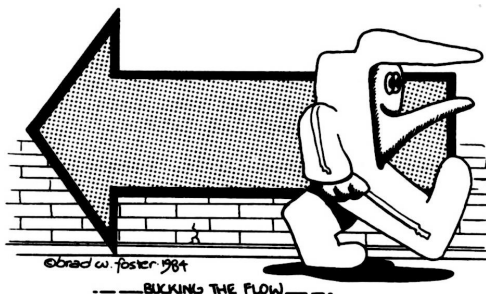
((I think you've hit that particular nail right on the head, Eric. Fannishness is too often seen as an end in itself, an accomplishment to be proud of, though quite why I've never been able to figure out: personally I find struggling with the English language quite enough of a problem without adding the further handicap of 'fannish street credibility', whatever that strange animal might be at any given time!))

Kev Rattan:...Didn't someone in the loccol comment that ecstasy was found more easily in music than books? If so, I go along with that. If ever something has happened to make me really happy, all I have to do to intensify that is to put on 'New Rose' by the Damned, for example, and blast myself away into ecstasy. Funnily enough, I had something like that happen the other night. I'd been at the disco all night (50p a drink night...) and there hadn't been much good stuff on: one Doors track, Joy Division's 'She's Lost Control' and a couple of others. Then, next to last, and immediately after the Undertones and the Clash (so I was shagged out), 'New Rose' came on. I listen to it every day, and I'd never heard it at a disco. Now that was ecstasy. Andy (a friend of mine...hmm, how to describe him? Well, imagine Tigger on heat.) and I recognised it at once, whilst the others stood around looking puzzled, and that's about all I remember of it. I just love to pogo: and headbanging six inches from the speakers has its charms... Now there's no way that anything else gives me that kind of reaction. Most people of my age go along to discos for the purpose of meeting people of the opposite sex (we call 'em cattle markets), but I go along because there's usually half an hour of punk on at the end, and I can totally forget who I am, what I'm doing there or anything else. Course, as this is at about 2 o'clock and the bar's still open, this has been aided!

Pamela Boal: ...I had no intention of starting off a party political argument: while the present scene is regarded in such terms there is surely no way out. No, rather I sought evidence of intelligent awareness of the plight the people of Britain (in particular, to some extent all of the world) are in, from what is, by and large, an intelligent, fairly broad spectrum of the public who are not, for the most part, engaged in the bitter blinkered battles that are taking place. If we are not even aware of

the growing gulf between the haves and the have nots (of a minimally decent level of employment, housing, education, health care, future prospects allowing of self-improvement) we can not be aware that we are certainly affected and endangered. When the rate of crime associated with disaffected youth starts to soar in small rural towns like Wantage (as it has) its really a little late for people to start wondering what's happening, but I hope not too late.

The largest majority of fans are in their late teens or early twenties so frankly its their world, their future. They have to come to terms with the change from a society based on heavy industry to one based on technological change



brought about by the micro chip, the new information and service industries. They have to grasp its opportunities and minimise the suffering of those unable to change through no fault of their own. The attitude of 'If I can make it so can they' just won't do, if for no other reason than enlightened self-interest. Those who can make it should be aware of the problems and barriers facing those who can't. We have to make the new industries pay well enough, to earn an income that allows all our citizens to enjoy a fair standard of living with dignity, not fighting over scraps. ...We do live in a democracy and governments do eventually respond to the will of

the people. It's a slow process and maybe much is irretrievably lost along the way. True, as individuals we feel powerless to do anything, but if we all make ourselves truly aware, particularly the young and vigorous, then the common will can steer us away from the paths that lead inevitably to frustrated violence. True, actions such as you suggest, John, in having a fund to help editors produce their zines rather than sending a fan to the USA or Australia, may seem trivial in the face of all this, but I believe they are far from trivial. Fandom itself is a very small pond (it wouldn't hurt a few of the over-inflated frogs to be aware of that fact), yet any group of people who express a will, state their preferences and standards of concern, adds to the whole. It also gives hope to people like myself who are perhaps forced more into the position of watcher rather than participant, for standards expressed in fannish life and action must surely be carried on into that greater life outside fandom.

Roger Waddington: Well, even though living on the front line of Thatcher's Britain, I can't contribute any stories of penury, of despair, of trying to strangle the Social Security officer through the safety grille. There's none of the inner city violence eagerly sought by the TV film crews, no DHSS offices built like Fort Knox. We're such a law-abiding lot here, there's not even a screen at our 'local'. Though there are some interesting graffiti in the public toilets...

In fact, apart from clocking on at the optimistically-named Department of Employment once a fortnight, there isn't much to disturb the tenor of life. I could take refuge in the traditional pattern, of spending all morning in bed, all afternoon watching TV and all evening in the pub (on dark winter mornings, the first is an ever-present temptation); but I'm still holding on to the hope that there'll be another job, that this won't last for ever. So I keep

those habits that used to discipline my day, and start as early as if I was going to work.

As to what fills those hours between waking and sleeping, where I once might have expected a full day's work; well, thanks to fandom I've got the impression (probably mistaken) I could maybe write for a living; and so I spend most of those hours at my typewriter. Where once 'pay packet' and 'Thank God it's Friday' were the magic words that spurred me on, they've now been replaced by MSS and SAE. Also 'rejection slips', my collection of which seems to have made a quantum leap. Still, when the chance of finding another regular job is just about as easy as winning the football pools, there's every point in persevering.

As a change to this routine, to see more than these four walls, I make time every day for a couple of hours outside the house; which, living here, usually means a long country walk, in any one of four directions. Which is the only drawback to small-town living, the lack of choice. In the changing scenes of the city, there's all the museums to visit, the magazines at Smiths to browse through, the reading room in the Library, a window seat in a cafe to watch the world go by; the fields and woods and country lanes are all very well in summer, but come winter, with rain and snow, there's no advantage any more.

Money problems tend to loom larger. I still have enough savings to supplement what's paid to me by a grateful government; but in this second year of unemployment, I'm beginning to realise I can't go on spending like before, there comes a point to sit down and work out what has to go. Cutting back on my stamp collecting for one, at least back to my original intent, before ambition took over (as they say, philately gets you nowhere); and no longer can I justify every SF magazine and half the books published each month, in the hope

of keeping up with the field. I'm now a more regular visitor to the local library (or rather libraries, being within reach of two), and very grateful to the English public lending system, no matter what the PLR activists have to say. (Mind you, when I'm a famous author...) And now I have to start thinking about such mundane things as clothes and shoes. Though old habits do die hard; for all that I've been cutting down, I'm still buying books. Only now they're from charity shops and jumble sales, with 10p a norm and "30p?" greeted with a whistle through the teeth. In fact, I might consider setting up as a bookdealer, with the bargains I've found.

And when those walls do close in, when I receive an answer to a job application with the words 'we regret', when a rejection slip comes in with 'thank you, but no'; why, then I bung another MS in the post, and have the day off, on a visit to the nearest metropolis, promising myself those delights I'd have every day if I lived there. The museums, the cafes, the stores, the reading rooms, seeing the world go by at the railway station, imagining their stories; what more could you ask for? (Apart from a job.) It's actually one of the small triumphs that make this life bearable, that I can make such a journey any day of the week, not limited to an often-unsuitable weekend, as would be the case if I was still working. In fact, it's going to be one of the hardest things to give up.

Mind you, disquieting thoughts do sometimes come; what happens when my savings run out, if I can't find another job, if I never manage to sell anything? That's the curse that unemployment brings; the dark thoughts, in a dark night.

And now -- the **WAHFs**: Harry Andruschak, Mike Ashley, William Bains (now back in Britain, and installed in his very own ivory tower in Bath), David Bateman (who informs me that Magic Ox are no more,

having dispersed to the four winds), Sheryl Birkhead, Sydney Bounds, Terry Broome ("...Without the ecstasy of living, we merely exist"), Judy Buffery, Iain Byers, Simon Clark, Dave Collins, Phil Collins, Chuck Connor, Buck Coulson (who suffered a heart attack in June: hope you are well on the way to recovery, Buck), Mat Coward, Benedict Cullum, Chester Cuthbert, Dorothy Davies, Stuart Falconer (in defense of New Wave: "...Critics have pigeon-hole minds and need to define something before they can talk about it. Thus they dream up fancy names like new wave, magic realism, theatre of the absurd, and even modernism. What matters to a movement is not what the critics call it, or what reactionary types say about it, but the work itself."), Diane Fox, Dominic Franklin, Ron Gemmell, William Goodson, Mark Greener ("...Critics are not intellectually inadequate, but intrinsic in the nature of criticism is the tendency to accentuate weakness and fail to point out strengths... Critics, whatever their IQ, dance the entropy tango..."), Rob Gregg, John Haines, George Hay ("...cut down on the fanzine crits in the lettercol. After I don't know how many decades of reading such, they seem so sterile. The editor of any decent zine has obviously spent good time thinking out his policy -- so why should he change it?"), Martin Helsdon, Joy Hibbert, David Hodson, Terry Jeeves, Shep Kirkbride ("CS just throws itself down on the hall carpet, arrogant in its perfection" Eh?), Ken Lake, Eric Lindsay, Peter Maslin, Jim Miller ("...what ought to be present in fanzines and fandom, as well as life in general, is a dialectical thesis-> anti-thesis-> synthesis process to prevent staleness, cliquishness, and stagnation."), Peter Muller, Marc Ortlieb (re fannish writing: "...The problem arises when people start talking about what they'd like to see in fanzines in such a way that they give the impression that (a) they know what a good fanzine is; and (b) that any fanzine that does not adhere to

their criteria is crap..."), David Palter, Duncan Richter, Mic Rogers, Andy Sawyer ("...I can experience things within fanzines that I can't within any other mode of literature, and although that sounds very like that horrible inverted snobbery of 'I only read fanzines nowadays -- can't stand all that SF rubbish', I'd rather read the thoughts and opinions of people I know through fandom than, say, those of Sunday supplement columnists..."), Nick Shears ("...When did you join the SDP? Marvellous illo of David Owen on page 17 of CS9." Denials all round, Nick, even from the Doc.), Mike Shoemaker ("...It's hard to imagine CS, with impeccable production and excellent writing, being heavily criticized. If it has been, the rest assured that the motivation must be pure envy." Hmm, I've never regarded CS as being **beyond** criti-

cism, just that I want the criticism to have some validity.), Paul Skelton, Steve Sneyd ("Wisdom is never truer than when it is double-distilled cliché."), Alan Sullivan, Sue Thomason, Mark Valentine (who is putting out a booklet called 'Arthur Machen - Apostle of Wonder', containing, among other things, Andy Sawyer's recent CS article: it's available from Mark at : 35, Grafton Way, New Doston, Northampton, NN5 6NG, at about #2.50 plus postage), Sue Walker.

And that's it for this issue. CS11 is a Willaim Morris special, and should be due out within three months, all things being equal, which we all know they are not, don't we, so your guess is as good as mine. The intention is for three months, though, so there.



