



April 1981

"It's all very depressing," I said. "British fandom, I mean. There's almost nothing of interest being produced by anyone. What's happened to all the great fanwriters and fan-eds? What's happened to the moderately good ones, even?"

"Old and tired," said Ian. "Burned out. Can't be bothered. I mean, look at you -- you haven't done anything in ages."

"That's true," I said. "That's what Eve Harvey says, which proves it. My last ish was number 9, back in June '80."

"Mind you," said Ian, "you are secretary of the BoSFA."

"Yes," I said. "I was forgetting that."

"And you've edited lots of issues of Vector, with more on the way."

"These things tend to slip my mind," I said.

"And organised Faancon 6."

"Hardly anything at all, when you come to look at it," I said.

"Of course, Langford did most of the work."

"What?"

"Faancon 6. Langford did most of the work, while you were in Belgium."

"Ah, Belgium! There's another who hasn't done anything in fandom lately."

"Belgium?"

"Langford. Does nothing these days except run TAFF and publish Ansible and the odd Twll-Ddu. Look how long it is since we did a Drilkjis. People are always coming up and asking when the next one is."

"Next one what?" said a third voice.

"Drilkjis, Dave. We'll have to do one soon, you know."

"Oh, I suppose so," said Dave. "At any rate, it'll shut Harry Harrison up; keeps pestering me to know when we're going to print his condemnation of Peter Nicholls."

"Peter Nicholls?" said Ian. "Didn't he used to be somebody?"

"Probably," I said. "No-one today will have heard of him, all these new fans. Higgins probably wasn't born when Nicholls first got drunk and threw up. Oh God!"

Ian topped up the glasses with scotch, the dull amber liquid dropping miserably from the half-empty bottle. There was a profound silence in the room, barely penetrated by the patter of tiny rain

drops on the window as the drizzle turned slowly into a downpour. It was midsummer. I picked up my glass and sipped dispiritedly at the scotch.

"Oh God!" I said again.

"Why don't we do a fanzine?" said Ian. "Three of the greatest fan writers and editors of the seventies. He could print it for us." He indicated a fourth figure, slumped in a corner clutching a ream of paper as well as a glass of scotch. "John! You'll print it for us, won't you?"

"Wha..? Oh, yeah. Print it. Three hours notice; at least three hours notice. Or two and a half."

"That's it, then. We'll do a fanzine."

"Done one," said Dave.

"Me too," I said.

"Done lots," said Dave. "Done it all. Personalzines, genzines, apazines, newszines, sercon, fannish, the lot." He lapsed into silence and applied himself to his scotch.

"We could try some new things," said Ian.

"Name one," I said.

"We could try some old things, but do them better," said Ian.

"Oh we could. We could hardly fail to do them better," I agreed. "But would they care? 'Langford slick humour, Smith clever word-trick parodies, Maule wishy-washiness -- same old stuff,' they'd say; I can hear them now. It's a well-known fact that that's all we can do. A new fanzine? Why bother to try?"

"We could pretend Dorey and Nicholas did it," said Ian.

"It was fun the first time," I said. "A fannish high-spot. Wish I knew who did it, really. But it wouldn't work again; you can't repeat things in this game."

"Wouldn't do any good, anyway," muttered Dave. "The sentences would magically develop four semi-colons, become twice as long, and lose all their grammar. You mark my words."

"Wouldn't do any good," I concurred. "Oh God!"

We drank more scotch, and the rain fell even harder. Glorious English summertime, and the Aussies already one up in the test series.

"The paper feed's gone mad!" shrieked John. "A ream of paper's gone in and none of it's come out, none of it!"

We leaped up -- pinning his arms and forcing some scotch between his lips, whereat he calmed down and slumped back into the corner, staring listlessly at the ceiling.

"We could write articles for other fanzines," said Ian.

"Janus, SF Horizons, Black Hole, Erg..." I intoned.

"More scotch," muttered Dave threateningly. "More scotch!" I pushed the bottle closer to him; he seized it as if it would otherwise escape and, with a struggle, poured more scotch into his glass. "Only way. Drink until insensible and forget the bastards. Get another bottle."

"There must be new writers about, people who can put two words together without violating all the rules of grammar, style and good sense," I said.

"Of course there are," said Ian. "Jeff Suter does a nice fanzine, for one."

"Tries hard," I said. "Nice chap. But not what you'd call a great writer, not with his opinions of Chaucer and Dickens."

"Doesn't he like them, then?"

"Can't tell them apart."

"Mike Ashley, then," said Ian. "He writes pretty well."

"Oh, I grant you he puts words together in a manner not entirely devoid of grammar and style, but as for what they mean..." I shook my head.

"Self-contradictory gibberish," growled Dave, consuming more scotch. "Man knows nothing."

"Ken Mann," said Ian, obviously before he could stop himself.

"Brains of a gnat!" said Dave.

"Oh, that's not fair," I protested.

"Have it your own way," said Dave. "Hasn't the brains of a gnat."

"That still leaves the great white hopes of fandom, the dynamic duo of Higgins and Collick," said Ian.

"Now there's the great myth of fandom," I said, "that those two form some sort of 'youth movement'. They have nothing in common except they're both young and both first appeared at Silicon 3. Higgins is a nice guy, even if he can't hold his drink, but he couldn't write his fannish way out of a paper bag."

"Collick's different," said Ian.

"He is," I said, "but don't let him hear you say so. He's very sensitive about that kind of thing, is young Mulligrubs. Actually, there you have a young fan who might do great things, even if he hasn't done much except the Yorcon II fanroom lately."

"Bloody awful fanroom!" said Dave. "No-one could hear my talk."

"Not Collick's fault," said Ian. "The committee gave him that area."

"No doubt besotted by the idea of a bar in the fanroom, they gave him a fanroom in a bar; which might have worked if that bar hadn't been the only one open a lot of the time."

"Cocked up the bar times as well," said Dave. "The committee, not Collick. Collick's a good guy, got good ideas."

"There are others, though," persisted Ian. "Briggs and Ferguson, for example, and those Cretinfans from Edinburgh."

"Pretty fair fanzines they do, too. Voted for 'em in the Ansible poll. But they're not great. Nor from Edinburgh."

"And all these university groups..."

"We're back to Collick again," I said. "He's got a weird imagination, which is highly commendable, but he's shown a disturbing tendency to do things in words and pictures. Comic strip fanzines."

"There are things man was not meant to know," said Dave ominously, and slumped forward on the table.

"Collick," I said. "Just Collick."

"Can't think of anyone else, offhand," said Ian.

"Hope he's got a lot of stamina," I said. "Oh God!"

A long silence ensued. Time passed. Scotch vanished.

"There was a young guy at the BoSFA meeting in April," I said. "Only fourteen, and already he doesn't like Asimov, Clarke and Heinlein. Name of Paul Turner."

"Any relation to Nicholas?" asked Ian. "To hold such opinions so young?"

"I doubt it," I said. "They didn't seem to know each other. Anyway, it's a good start."

"Not being related to Nicholas," said Dave, in a slurred, sleepy manner, "is about the best start anyone can have in fandom. Could get you into a lot of trouble, being related to Nicholas. All that chiffon. Rots the brain."

"Be worth encouraging this young Turner," said Ian.

"Undoubtedly. He doesn't know much about fandom yet, but he's interested in printing -- does it at school, apparently -- and wants to help the BoSFA. What do you think of that, John?"

"Can't do it before Friday. Thursday absolute earliest, if you give me the copy Wednesday night. Forty pages, thousand copies, yeah."

"Man needs more scotch," said Dave. "Cures everything, scotch. I need more scotch."

"Does this mean," said Ian, "that the BoSFA is fulfilling its original object of introducing people to fandom?"

"Might be," I allowed. "Might be."

"Oh glory!" said Ian. "The Millenium is come!"

THE FLATULENT SF AUTHORS' SONG by N J Lowe

(To the tune of Monty Python's 'Drunken Philosophers' Song')

Oh H G Wells made some fearful smells
And Verne was a champion farter.
Fred Pohl, Fred Pohl shoots flames through his hole
But he can't out-fart Lin Carter.
Arthur C Clarke in a single bark
Could demolish half the Gents
And L Ron Hubbard had to do it in a cupboard
Or he'd overload the vents.

Harlan Ellison does smellies on half a can of beans
Asimov himself has a valve let in his jeans...

John Brunner, John Brunner, what a drippy old runner,
It doesn't sound much, but the stench is a stunner.
When Fredric Brown took his trousers down
He could shatter all the windows for nine miles round.
Jack Vance, Jack Vance blows holes in his pants
And Disch makes a first class stink
And Eric Frank Russell had a rectal muscle
That could toot through 'Lily The Pink'.

Oh Asimov himself is a man of many parts:
A stinker of a writer and a stinker when he farts.

"For God's sake, Maule, put a sock in it!"

"Sorry. Are you having a letter column this time?"

"I suppose so. I've got enough -- more than for any previous issue. Mind you, I'll have to WAHF most of them; I couldn't understand what they were going on about without looking up the last ish, and who but me will want to bother doing that. They'll have chucked it away, or something."

"Very likely," said Ian, sympathetically. "Are you having your usual cunning arrangement of themes?"

"Not likely," I said. "I'm going to steal Langford's method, and do them alphabetical."

"Someone mention my name?" said Dave.

"Doesn't matter. Just stealing a good idea of yours."

"Nothing unusual in that," Dave mumbled, and chucked the empty scotch bottle at the immense randy ginger tom cat sleeping on a rug by the fire.

"Here's where we start," I said...

ARNOLD AKIEN, RICKARD ANDERSSON, ANDY ANDRUSHAK, MICHAEL ASHLEY (in his pre-tinned milk phase), PAMELA BOAL, BRIAN EARL BROWN --

During my stint as Fan GoH at Marcon my hardest duty was to talk pleasantly to one of the con committee who had enthusiastically asked for my advice about a fanzine she was about to begin editing. The fanzine was Ambor Zeor, the real JLAS rag!

"Burn the damned thing! Burn every copy with the editor securely roped down in the middle!" said Dave.

"They sent him a copy," I explained to Ian. "Now, who's next?"

MARTY CANTOR -- It seems so obvious that all North American fanzines are not like one another, just as all British fanzines are not like one another, etc, etc, that it has always struck those of us who had our heads in places other than up our asses that only some sort of extreme myopia could produce the view that all American fanzines are alike.

"I think he needs a bit more random abuse," I said. "Otherwise that's a very creditable attempt to write like Nicholas."

AVEDON CAROL -- I'm always fascinated when I go to an overprogrammed convention and then hear the con staff complaining about all the media freaks who have come. Well, why not, that's who they programmed for. I'm waiting for someone to finally get the idea and send out flyers for a con that announce, 'NO GUEST OF HONOUR! NO FILMS! NO PROGRAMMING! NO MASQUERADE! NO WEAPONS WILL BE PERMITTED IN THE HOTEL!'

"Even that seems excessive," said Ian. "Some British cons don't send out flyers at all -- Silicon and Faancon."

"And Albacon," said Dave, wrenching the top off another bottle of scotch.

RICH COAD, MIKE DICKINSON -- Stomping T Blackburn is a bit like treading on a really plump slug, it's a sitting target and it don't half mess up your boots.

"Talking of Blackburn, I've a quote here from the Radio Times in June 1980. That COLIN FINE chappie sent it to me instead of a loc."

--There is less speech content in the Top 40 than in any other Radio 1 programme.

MIKE GLICKSOHN, WILLIAM T GOODALL ("The cretin can't tell sarcasm from a hole in the road!" said Dave.), PETER HOLDSWORTH, PHIL JAMES, JERRY KAUFMAN & SUZIE TOMPKINS, DAVID V LEWIS, ALLAN LLOYD -- When I meet someone who reads science fiction and is generally an interesting person, they seem to want to talk all about my job (which is farming) when I would prefer to be talking about SF and the great big world outside. Are there no farmers in SF?

"Well," said Ian, "there's Philip Jose."

"Simpleton!" I said. "I'm not a farmer myself, but my father is, and my uncle, and my brother, so I know a bit about it. Now, my stories about walking knee deep through shit, and castrating piglets, and the fist-sized lumps of flesh two boars can gouge out of each other when they're fighting --"

"All right, all right," said Ian, turning a little green.

JILL LYON, ERIC MAYER -- I see you insist on a leavening of humour in faanish writing. Why? Humour is fine. Your own piece on Joseph Nicholas is very clever and amusing. Also it is superficial. I really think Brian Earl Brown's attempts to look into his own psyche are at least as worthy of interest as your attempts to parody someone's fan writing style. Of course since Brian has selected a vastly more difficult task he will probably not succeed as fully as you. I think this recognition should play a part in criticism of fan writing. It seems to me that British fans have become vastly overrated by doing the easiest possible kind of writing with extreme facility. Caricature is much easier to do than characterisation.

"Eric didn't seem to like the way you called his own fanwriting second rate, did he?" said Ian.

"Over-sensitive fool! Did he not also read, in the same review, how second rate is better than average? I quite liked Groggy, but first rate it is not, and what stops it being first rate is lack of structure. The best writers say what they want to say, and structure it as well. There are very few of them."

"And even fewer are actually writing things in fanzines," said Dave. "And all that crap about worthiness -- bah!"

"Damn right! No writing is inherently worthy of interest. Interest has to be captured. The most worthy subject can be incredibly dull to read, the most lightweight incredibly captivating. I know which I'd sooner read, and which I'd sooner have written."

"It's also a load of old cobblers that it is more difficult to write about oneself than, say, produce an accurate and telling parody," said Dave, seeming to shrug off the cumulative effect of much scotch. "If you can't write about yourself, you can't write about anything. The only difficult thing is deciding what to keep hidden. Bloody hell! Even Ian Williams can do it. Doing it well, now -- that's another matter."

"Couldn't have put it better myself," I said.

BARNEY NEUFELD, PAUL OLDROYD, THE JOHN PEEL SHOW, ALEX S PILLAI, MICKEY POLAND, PETER PRESFORD, CHRIS PRIEST ("He wrote a postcard specifically for the WAHFs?" "He did, Ian, he did."), DAVID REDD, RON SALOMON -- Don't forget, no starching the undies unless you want to sit at attention.

"What provoked that, then?"

"Look, Ian, if I understood these Americans I could make a fortune over there as an analyst."

BOB SHAW -- The cover artwork (on the last ish) is as good as ever, except that the second asterisk from the bottom on the right hand side is slightly out of alignment. I won't kick up a fuss about this, though, because in the centre of the same panel you have already made a bit of a rhombus.

I'm glad to see that you have joined the ranks of us property owners. Now you'll be able to have hours of fun learning to be a competent do-it-yourselfer, and you'll probably find you can't be bothered with fanac any more. Last night I fitted a new lock to my back door and among all the bits and pieces that came with the lock were two little paper templates designed to show me where to drill the fixing holes. These templates look almost identical, but one of them says 'USE THIS SIDE OF TEMPLATE FOR CLOCKWISE CLOSING OPEN IN, OR ANTI-CLOCKWISE CLOSING OPEN OUT DOORS', while the other says 'USE THIS SIDE OF TEMPLATE FOR ANTI-CLOCKWISE CLOSING OPEN IN, OR CLOCKWISE CLOSING OPEN OUT DOORS'. Don't you agree that even Langford at his drunken worst couldn't offer an intellectual challenge like that?

"Oh, that's what he thinks, is it?" said Dave. "Let me have another bottle, then I'll show him. I'll... I'll... I'll show him, that's what I'll do."

CYRIL SIMSA, PETER SINGLETON, STEVE SNEYD -- What will the Irish air-force drop on Moscow in WW3? H-blocks... JOHN STEWARD, FCA, HARRY WARNER, JR, D WEST -- When it comes to parody and pastiche you are just naturally a regular curly wolf. However, I wish that you (and others) would stop exercising your cleverness on things I'm supposed to have said but never did say. My remarks in One Off on writing about subjects other than fandom were limited to pointing out that moving outside the usual fannish range was unlikely to be very successful without much more effort, skill and application. Your own efforts seem to prove the accuracy of this observation.

PRINTED PAPER REDUCED RATE

"Well, that's it..." I said.
"You don't mean you're going to let D get away with that?"

"Damn right!" There was a short silence.

"Does that mean you agree or disagree?" said Ian.

"Why aren't there any good fanzines any more?" said John. "I never see any. All I see is Matrix, pages and pages of Matrix, thousands of the things -- tens of thousands, millions, all wanted by Saturday, and the printer's bugged again, how am I going to manage..."

The scotch bottle came in handy again; Dave hit him on the head with it.

"Be a shame to waste good scotch," he said. "A sad case."

"There's another case in the kitchen," I said.

"I'd be sad to leave it there," said Dave.

Outside, dawn was breaking, and the rain was beginning to ease off.

This fanzine dedicated to John Collick, for reasons which are incredibly obscure, and thus nothing to do with anything written in it so far. Spaghetti westerns rule, boss!

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