

Music From A Fire



MUSIC FROM A FIRE is the 2nd episode of DRAGONBURST and was produced in the sub-zero conditions of 2, SHEPHERDS GREEN, CHISLEHURST, KENT, BR7 6PA , at which address any correspondence to its editor (or more accurately its author), CHRISTINA LAKE stands a reasonable chance of reaching her.

<u>CONTENTS</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
Sad TV	4
Twelfth Century Fandom	7
Fasten Your Seat Belts! This Rocket Terminates At Charing	
Cross	9
Radio Plays on Caroline	12
The Gentle Art of Lopping	14
Magic, Murder & the weather	16
The Secret Life of John Tracy and Other Aspects of the	
Tracy Disease	19

Could This Be An Editorial?

Ten bottles of correction fluid and three typewriters later I finally get to write the editorial (OK, so it's the first page, but that's only an accident of chronology) so lets hear it for the Legendary Front Page! Like most legends it's a mixture of truth, exaggeration and tradition. Representing the two latter is the contents listing, while the former may or may not be found in earlier statements. Or later ones. Like, this fanzine is trying desperately to be innocent and unselfconscious and isn't interested in changing the world as it knows it can't, and wouldn't know what to change it to if it could and this sentence is going on far too long to be viable, but why stop now when Zelzney or Proust can do so much better? (boredom)

Sadly foreign contributions are a bit thin on the ground, so I've had to write far more than I intended. Not an entirely good thing, I feel. Honourable exceptions to the foregoing are NICOLA COLUMBO who provided me with a choice of artwork for the cover (even if she did produce pigs when I asked for hamsters!) and Ian and Bruce who at least tried. On the other hand the letters are real this time i.e. they were genuine, unsolicited responses (give or take a dislocated shoulder or two) to a fanzine that actually existed. Many thanks to all who bothered to write!

Finally a special mention and undying gratitude to Judith and her family for turning out to be the people who did have a duplicator secreted in their attic, and for being willing to let me use it!

S A D T V

The television series I like fall into two categories: those which are genuinely good and those which I watch (avidly, may it be said) against my better judgement. Into the first category fall such rare offerings as Testament of Youth and Brideshead Revisited, and into the second all sorts of trash I'd rather not confess to seeing. Among my autumn season favourites were the above mentioned Brideshead, the far from inspiring latest series of Blakes 7 and Diamonds a sub-Brothers style ITV soap opera.

Blakes 7 has always been a frustrating series to follow, but this time round it excelled itself. Every episode, bar the first couple, seemed to be written to the same formula and each had the same essential lack of 'raison d'etre'. Plot summary reads as follows: scientist with new device wants to escape the Federation, Avon & co make contact, Servalan sets a trap, everybody escapes except scientist/device which is destroyed. Just to spice things up a bit occasionally a random crew member is chosen to fall in love with the scientist/device. The only episode to manifest the slightest concern for continuity or characterisation was the one written by Tanith Lee, which though not departing radically from the previously stated formula did show what could be done when the scriptwriter is trying.

To my way of thinking the whole question of characterisation in Blakes 7 is a bit strange. It's what's frequently used to justify the series when lack of special effects, decent plots, and good acting make any other line impossible. But right from the beginning characterisation has been no more realistic than in other S.F. series. Where it gets its merit and semblance of originality is from the circumstance that instead of being nauseatingly supportive and worthy, as in Star Trek for example, the crew of Blakes 7 don't even seem to like each other and behave more like characters from Dallas than traditional brave, fearless space adventurers. For all that they remain obstinately two dimensional - Blake, the paper idealist; Avon, his counterbalancing cynic; Vila, the coward, etc. Change only comes through expediency. By the third series Blake has gone and Avon must on his duties, turning from objector to leader overnight. True, some other character development occurs. Cally stops being a revolutionary and becomes the only real individual in the programme. Vila's sense of self preservation is played down in favour of his sense of humour. The types could almost be real except that the life they live so manifestly isn't. They faced death week after week, but it never meant anything. They gave it out as casually as they watched friends and loved ones of 50 minutes acquaintance receive it. The killings seemed to escalate in proportion to the meaningless of each project until each character's (except Vila) personal tally probably averaged out at three or four per episode: over the whole of the last series, many of them not even 'legitimate' targets (e.g. Federation guards), merely people who happened to get in the way. How far this had gone was aptly demonstrated in the last episode which ended in a mas-

sive blood bath. Avon barged in lugging a futuristic machine gun and proceeded to kill the receptionist (although it was too late to stop her giving warning) and shoot his erstwhile colleague Blake for no particularly good reason. As mistakes go this might have been pretty serious, except that at this stage in the proceedings somebody obviously got fed up with the whole affair, so a squad of Federation stormtroopers were wheeled on out of nowhere to massacre all those Avon had failed to kill already. This ending, apart from being totally uncharacteristic, could almost be cited as breach of trust. Four series had gone in to establishing the federation as a regime with pretension to evil but absolutely no aptitude for the job. Each show-down was part of a ritual. Servalan gloated and set her trap, Batman and the boy wonder, sorry Avon & co, always contrived to escape. Then in the last episode, Servalan, the tutelary spirit is missing, a female Gestapo agent briskly orders her troops to open fire and the massacre takes place, leaving the viewer to ponder, why, if it was so easy, didn't they do that along time ago.

Rivalling Blakes 7 for implausibility and great acting was ITV's Wednesday night soap opera Diamonds. As far as plot went (which wasn't very!) a conventionally improbable family feud was set against the 'exotic wheeling and dealing world of diamond trading'. The programme had one wonderfully overdrawn villain, who established his true nastiness at an early stage when he callously ran down a kid and refused to stop and pick up the consequences. From then onwards he engaged in a process of blackmail, seduction and espionage, designed as far as I could work out to alienate so many people that the whole edifice of his plotting would collapse under its own weight at the first opportunity. That it didn't was a tribute to the scriptwriter's desire for a dramatic showdown at all costs, not a result of any underlying logic in the depiction of the characters concerned. Yet behind all the melodrama (or maybe because of it?) hovered the traces of a myth. The main characters could all be assigned Arthurian counterparts. Mordred the wicked nephew and Morgan le Fay, his mother conspired against Frank, the Arthur figure. Meanwhile his wife has an affair with his best friend. Moreover the myth contains a moral. Frank is cursed because he performed an act of injustice to a defenceless old man whose diamonds had been entrusted to him. He chose to do what he knew to be wrong out of avarice, and all his subsequent misfortunes are depicted in a sense as merited punishment, and seen as such by the character himself. To reinforce the message, when Frank finally triumphs, it is through an earlier deed of generosity performed by his father.

Such speculation though only served to while away some of the time between episodes of Brideshead, the cream of my viewing season. My preconceptions had been of style without substance and meaningless extravagances. What I found was something both deeper and sadder, and not at all what I would have imagined from Evelyn Waugh (whom I've never read). Critics who knew the book well wrote long and persuasive accounts of how and why specific scenes didn't work, but as far as I was concerned it all worked. I hung on every word of Charles Ryder's laconic narrative, taken more or less straight from the novel, and followed him

through Oxford, onto Brideshead and into the dark, pointless wanderings of the barren years without the Flytes or Brideshead for he had lost his soul to them just as I had for those short hours on Tuesday evening. The fascination was not just vicarious pleasure in the lifestyle of the immensely rich, though this was part of it. More it was watching the Flyte family being torn apart by their own temperament and by the tormenting, uplifting, but never comfortable faith they shared. It was seeing the procession of Christmases, each more painful than the last, as Sebastian grew more alienated, more of a dipsomaniac, driven on (and out) by the strict formality of his family and the total unacceptability of his drunkenness. So Brideshead in its heyday slipped away, to become Rex's gambling casino and ultimately a war-time barracks, reflecting the disintegration of the family. There was a lot to cry over and even some things to laugh about, like the scenes with Charles's father (John Gielgud), or even more so with those featuring the character Brideshead (Simon Jones) (mainly because when he started jesuistically splitting hairs I couldn't help thinking of Arthur Dent objecting to something or arguing with the Nutromatic drink dispenser - hence I was unwarrantably amused by statements nobody else found very funny). Overall it was the sense that the characters mattered and their search for something tangible and beyond themselves that made the series haunting and memorable.

So Brideshead added up to more than the sum of its parts (I'll admit it was well endowed with actors and locations to begin with; it is somewhat difficult to make a gravel pit glamorous) and Blakes 7 rather less. This season there's only been Dr Who to keep me occupied, which I notice, is going in for a bit of Blakes 7 style characterisation itself, what with the Doctor having arguments with Adric and the crew interacting rather than co-adventuring pure and simply.

"FATAALLY FLAWED" (dedicated to the very wonderful, but totally unreliable No. 61) Such is the official opinion of our honourable transport minister, David Howell, on the 'Fares Fair' scheme expressed repeatedly and monotonously during the London Programme 29/1/82.

Fatal flaw no. 1: Suburban rate payers with cars couldn't give a damn about public transport.

Fatal flaw no. 2: Never revealed, but probably something to do with the splendid British legal system.

To me it seems absurd that when the rest of the world is developing its technology to decrease its dependence on oil fuels we should be allowing our capital's transport (and the railway system as a whole) to fall into decay. Even Poland (or Russia) is seriously considering building an underground in Warsaw and ridding the city of that potent image of industrial decline: queues of people waiting for buses which never come.

Overheard on the 227 to Bromley: "They may be legally right, but they're morally wrong."

T W E L F T H C E N T U R Y F A N D O M

The twelfth century is a period which has been largely, or one could even say totally overlooked by most chroniclers of fandom. In fact, amazing as it may sound, the average fan doesn't realise that fandom long pre-dates its alleged twentieth century origin and flourished at a time when neither science nor fiction as we know them had been invented.

History tells us that fandom was imported to Southern Europe from Hungary where it had lain dormant for centuries awaiting the discovery of America, only to escape prematurely, unaware that accidental sightings by Vikings didn't count. It took fast root in Italy, Spain and Provence where the natives were fighting a losing battle against becoming French, and would have found fertile soil in England, but the prevailing winds happened to be wrong, so fandom landed up in Ireland where it blended so well in to the native environment that nobody noticed it had arrived.

It has to be appreciated that conventions were a little difficult to organise in those days. For one thing there was a terrible shortage of suitable hotels (even the Dragonara was only a twinkle in some entrepreneur's note pad), so fans were forced to descend on a friendly duke or lord with a castle at his disposal. Admittedly even then the facilities might not be up to much; it was lamentably common for rooms to be without running water, carpets, heating, television sets and sometimes even roofs but at least nobody minded then if people slept in the con hall, generally the warmest part of the castle. Room parties were frequently known to last all winter with occasional breaks for hunting, when as historian Thomas de Gironde put it "they swarmed out in to the surrounding woodland, halloing like barbarians and waving lengths of sticks which they variously called 'guns', 'blasters' or 'lasers'".

Since not many people could read and comics hadn't been invented, the great fannish debates of the twelfth century had even less to do with science fiction than they do today. Instead they centred around minor disagreements over whether the feudal system was a Good Thing, how long they could delay the work ethic being invented and why world cons were always held in Italy. Fanzines, of course, did exist. These were generally composed on the spot by amateur troubadours with an instinctive grasp of the principles of Vogon poetry, who were only filling in time describing conventions to get some practice for the battle scenes in La Chanson de Roland for when they turned pro. Criticism was vociferous, vehement and immediate, most of it administered by a thug-like type called Raimon Matraqueur who would stroll into a fanzine recital, dismember the offending troubador, and politely tell the inanimate carcass how he might improve his next ish. Some survived, normally by wearing armour or claiming sanctuary in the nearest church - a ploy that notably didn't work for Thomas a Beckett at Cantuarcon III. One editor more successful than most had his work illuminated by a community by a community of Ursulines who mistook it for a hymn book and used it

regularly at matins and lauds right up until the reformation. Then it was translated into the vernacular, and the nuns were found to have been singing about Raimon Matraqueur getting drunk at Toulouse in 83 for several centuries and were disbanded in a storm of scandal. The fanzine, meanwhile, was sent off to the British Museum where it has been the subject of many an obscure thesis on 12th century attitudes to food, love and the works of Isaac Asimov.

While the ritual disembowelment of perspiring troubadors provided adequate entertainment for the more aristocratic fans (12th century fandom only consisted of the nobility, well-off merchants or churchmen anyway; peasants were barred from conventions on the grounds that they were already far too idle and ignorant, and barely deserved the privilege of growing food for the elite of Europe as it was), there was a group of more serious inclined individuals who preferred to speculate about the future. A sub-sect of these known as Trekkers, because they spent most of their time walking from the site of one convention to the next (not to be confused with pilgrims, who only visited the sites of past conventions) were particularly enamoured of tales of a 17th century knight and his mechanical horse who went on a five year quest to seek out new life and civilisation on the edge of the world, but only found dragons to slay, maidens to rescue and tribes who spoke perfect Latin much as anywhere else. Non-trekkers tended to scoff at these stories, pointing out that man would never invent the mechanical horse and that if there were any civilisations at the edge of the world (which seemed unlikely because of the danger of falling off) they'd have made contact with Europe long since. A much more plausible future scenario was held to be a gigantic plague heralding the second coming and the end of the world.

Sadly this bright carefree, inventive scene was destined not to outlive the century which spawned it. The church mistook the fanish belief in drinking, having a good time and reincarnation (mainly because no-one could bear the thought of missing conventions when they were dead) for a heresy and decided to extirpate it in a long and bloody crusade. Everybody died or gaffiated, and only a few Trekkers survived in the mountains of Italy and Spain where it is rumoured they continued writing treatises on the relationship between the knight and his mechanical horse till well into the 18th century.

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While reading through an Indian textile journal (written in English - of a sort) I chanced upon this example of advertising excellence, devised by the Associated Chemicals company. It accompanied a cartoon of several Indian ladies taking a swim:

Sarees of Gopis won't hang on trees
As Krishna won't steal them if full of crease!
A modern Krishna will agree to marry
A Radha who wears a creaseless saree!

Fasten Your Seat Belts! This Rocket Terminates At Charing Cross!

Two separate incidents on train journeys to Charing Cross set me thinking how the simplest acts give away our upbringing, or certain built in traits of character. The first occurred when loaded up with bags on my way home for Christmas I innocently and rather awkwardly contrived to shut the carriage door as I got out at Charing Cross. This act delivered me into the hands of a female vampire, who seemed to think it something wonderful that I had bothered to shut the door, and that this act of pure selflessness testified to what a NICE person I must be. She repeated this so often, interspersed with key episodes from her life story (speaking very quickly for maximum coverage in the time it takes to walk down the platform), that it was borne in upon me forcible what an idiot I had been to worry, both hands filled with luggage as they were, about shutting that carriage door. Habit was all it was. Pure, reflex habit.

The second incident was on my way up to London for a meeting at the Tun. I'd brought along a sort of picnic tea to eat on the half hour train journey, consisting of a packet of crisps, an apple and a couple of biscuits. Unknown to me, my actions were obviously being noted with interest by two teenage girls sitting behind me, for when I wrapped up all my rubbish and put it back in my bag to throw away at the station, one of the girls remarked rather loudly

"Do you know what she just did then, she put her rubbish back in her bag. Why didn't she just chuck it on the floor?"

To me it seemed obvious, you don't throw empty crisp bags with apple cores in them on the floor, not in railway carriages, not in the street, not anywhere. But on closer examination of the floor with its cigarette butts, ground in dirt, odd bits of paper, I wondered if I was just being silly. After all, my little packet kicked discreetly under the seats, would hardly materially alter later passengers' comfort one way or another. Yet I couldn't do it, just as I can't throw bus tickets away in the street, not because I'm a particularly fastidious person (anybody who's visited my room will know that I'm not!), merely because I've been trained not to. It's nothing more nor less than a sort of Pavlovian conditioning, a result of the things my parents said to me when I was young, the kind of school I attended, the friends I had etc.

It isn't the utility of such training that exercises me so much as the pure involuntariness of the actions. These are a set of conditioned reflexes belonging to a 20th century middle-class Western European (or in some instances, specifically English person). They form the unconscious backdrop to the way we act, the banner we carry around proclaiming who or what we are to anybody who cares to look. A salutary thought to the would-be SF writer, I would imagine, who must reinvent, and authentically, a similar yet wholly different set of involuntary actions for his characters. Considering how few writers achieve a convincing portrayal of people who think and live in a different world than ours (note: 'people', not species of alien extraction), the task would seem almost impossible. Compare a book written by a Russian, or a medieval romancer to modern attempts at capturing

life in a different time or space and the failure in this respect will become obvious. However skilled, the writer remains a product of his time, the product of being taught to close doors behind him and not push into queues, and his work will always reflect an element of that, even without him noticing. That's why the Russian novel and medieval romance will seem so effortlessly different, because they are rooted in another set of habits and attitudes entirely. A writer immersing himself in their culture, might be able to duplicate them to a certain extent, convey a sense of the lost time, the distant country, but never so authentically as the native writer. The SF or fantasy writer on the other hand, has nothing to immerse himself in but his imagination, and his imagination has nothing to feed on but the vastly overwhelming 20th century of his surroundings, and scraps of other cultures. Medieval romancers wrote their Greek or Roman epics but peopled them with knights in medieval armour. Today we are more subtle, but ultimately not much more successful. Those writers who seem to be avoiding the cliches of their predecessors are often seen in retrospect merely to be mining from a different vein in the same bedrock of 20th century thought and habit. So for a time there is a trend for avoiding the cliches of the American view of the future by turning to, say, Eastern mysticism, but each century sees something different in the philosophies of others and what they leave the encounter with is again a result of their culture.

So is escape possible, desirable or worthwhile? Perhaps SF is a symptom of our society too. Space conquest is certainly a 20th century myth. Perhaps the reader from the 25th century will prize science fiction for the way it captures the essence of 20th century society, not for any predictive genius; its ideas examined as a reflection of 20th century mentality rather than for applications to the future.

Which is, I suppose, a long way to go from closing carriage doors on the 18.22 to Charing Cross. The question is can writers think themselves into a universe where both 18.22 and Charing Cross have no meaning and where doors don't exist to be opened or shut in the first place? Maybe I'm being pessimistic in thinking they can't.

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"Travel is no cure for melancholia; space ships and time-machines are no escape from the human condition. Let Othello subject Desdemona to a lie-detector test; his jealousy will still blind him to the evidence. Let Oedipus triumph over gravity; he won't triumph over his fate." ARTHUR KOESTLER

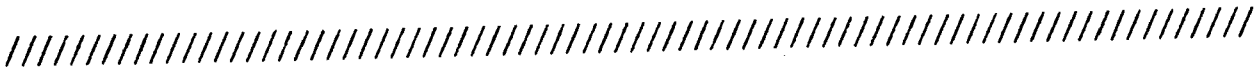
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Foot-note

All this still leaves unanswered the question, where then is the merit of science fiction? A tricky one that, especially if you'd rather avoid rehashing the old cliches about a literature of ideas and perspective on society. I'm inclined to believe that its appeal to the imagination of a certain number of writers and a large number of readers is sufficient justification in itself, even if by the same argument I succeeded in justifying the News of the World and Dallas. Aside from that the scope of plots, settings and characterisation are greater than in, for example, the novel limited to suburban England. Here can be found

both SF's greatest strenght and greatest weakness: the characters are not forced to live like you and I do. The door is open for the space opera where eternal adolescent fantasies of zapping monsters and conquering the universe can be indulged without anybody needing to cook the dinner or even go out shopping in the first place (except some menial supernumary, like the hero's wife?). Alternatively, the writer is freed to create something greater than the boardroom triumphs of Mr. X, moral dilemmas on a larger scale, life in an environment with different rules, or a chance to integrate the epic with the everyday.

The one really frightening thing about science fiction is that whatever the plot, so much of what you can read every day in the newspapers is far worse!



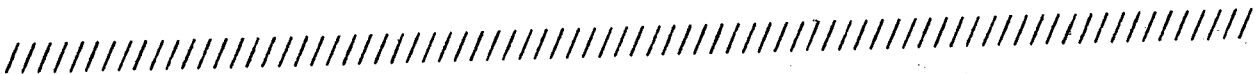
MRS THATCHER'S DREAM (as related by Ian Sorensen)

One night Mrs Thatcher dreamt that she was called into God's presence, or possibly the other way round. Also there were Ronald Reagan and Leonid Brezhnev. God said he had looked into the future and would they like to know anything about their countries' fate?

Ronald Reagan asked when America would once lead the free world in peace. God replied "Not until 2072" whereupon Ronald wept, because he would be dead then and not able to enjoy it.

Leonid Brezhnev asked when Communism would cover the globe. When he heard it would not be until 2165 he turned away and cried, for he too would be dead by then.

Mrs Thatcher then asked God when Britain's economy would revive; and God turned away and cried.



I know that lists, especially lists of records, are terribly cliched, but what else can one do when something like the Associate's single has remained consistently wonderful for two months at a time when little else has!

- 1 Party Fears Two - Associates
- 2 In Love With Myself - Pete Shelley
- 3 Novelty - Joy Division
- 4 Cat People (Putting Out The Fire With Gasoline)
- 5 Ice House - Ice House
- 6 You've Lost That Loving Feeling - Human League
- 7 Bent Out Of Shape - The Teardrop Explodes
- 8 Senses Working Over Time - XTC
- 9 Nowhere Girl - B Movies

Besides it's better than leaving a blank space!

Radio Plays on Caroline

Most people who reminisce over pirate radio think back to the so-called golden age before Radio 1 graced our air-waves when such superstars as Tony Blackburn were cutting their teeth on a generation who had never known anything better.

Caroline to me, though, is the Caroline of the Seventies, the rotting ship just off the Essex coast, outmanoeuvred by Radio 1 and superceded by commercial radio, run by D.J.s who were no longer fashionable household figures liable to appear on the pop pages of the Sun, but minor criminals who'd maybe get a brief mention in the Southend Evening Echo if they were unlucky enough to be blown ashore and taken to the local magistrates court.

To me they were an extension of my family, another circle of friends, a surrogate social life to be indulged in at the same time as homework. Radio Caroline was real in a way no other radio station I've ever listened has been. The D.J.s didn't do a snappy two hours of meaningless patter then go home, they lived on the ship day in day out for maybe two or three months in a row. When Caroline in its heyday was broadcasting around the clock, they'd sometimes be on the air as long as six hours a day. In between times there'd be little to do except eat drink and swim. Any artificial media character tended to break down and fray round the edges as they got depressed, missed their family and friends, longed for the arrival of a supply boat and communication with the outside world.

To listeners like me, though, their life had its own glamour. The glamour of the outlaw, the rebel, the victimised. The men on the station all worked under assumed names and risked prosecution in the noble cause of free radio (or so I thought - I suppose they did it for the experirnce, in the hope of making the 'big time''one day). Cryptic messages would pass between them and their unknown backers and every evening a secret code number was pronounced to confirm some arcane state of well-being. There were even Radio Caroline fanzines, full of pipedreams about repealing the Marine Offences Act which made them illegal and Caroline's triumphant establishment nationwide. They failed to realise that legalised they'd be superfluous. Just another commercial station among many.

Apart from tuning in to see if the ship had sunk or to follow the mundane soap opera of life in the North Sea, there was the raison d'etre of the station, the music. It was the days just before punk when pop had gone stale and anything that was worth listening to was long and on album. Each D.J. could play exactly what he (or she, for there was one woman) liked within the limits of the Caroline library, which was pretty eclectic. Caroline was the only place you'd be likely to hear all of Suppers Ready or Doors tracks at breakfast time. The musical

philosophy was left over from the 60's, love and Love; Bob Dylan and the Byrds; with a leavening of 70s stalwarts: Floyd, Zeppelin, Bowie and new hopefuls like Be Bop De Luxe, Television and Patti Smith. My brother and I had just reached the stage when we could afford to buy records, music was important, and a source of new ideas or a means of extending our knowledge was invaluable. Caroline provided glimpses of obscure sixties bands we'd missed out on, like The Flying Burrito Brothers, Iron Butterfly and The Electric Prunes, as well as allowing us to hear people who seemed significant at the time: PFM, Wishbone Ash, Renaissance, but I didn't like quite enough to invest in.

One summer, possibly 76, Caroline launched Loving Awareness, the band and the concept. The band sang about love, and the D.J.s (well some of them) lectured on being nice to people on buses and that sort of thing. It seemed mostly harmless. However latter day Caroline, just prior to the ultimate sinking of the Mi Amigo, had an hour of spiritual guidance forced upon it in the form of a phone - in programme full of neurotic Americans agonising over their inability to get on with their mother-in-laws, sent from the states by some phoney religious sect. At first it was funny, then I simply couldn't listen to it. Besides, by this time, Caroline was only broadcasting at night again and had Radio 1's evening shows to compete with. Also it was beginning to play more and more heavy metal to find an audience. It didn't really work, the spirit of Caroline had died with the advent of punk, Loving Awareness was a laid back philosophy for long Summer nights and laid back music, it simply didn't mix with iconoclasm and dole queue laments. Perhaps if Caroline had survived till Joy Division and the more experimental phase of the New Wave, it might have jettisoned the American junk and found itself again. Perhaps it still will. Although I know it'll never be the same, I still turn the dial on my radio, hoping to one day hear the call sign of Radio Caroline again and know that all's right with the world because the ship hasn't sunk and they're out there playing my favourite music.

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Who wants Albania?

Dear Editor,

A copy of your fanzine has just acquired itself into our hands and we like it much. Especially the foreign phrases part which are funny. But we note with extreme disapproval that there was nothing Albanian in it. Hopefully this is just a small slip-up + the great Albanian articles were accidentally omitted. Hopefully this is the case as we the Albanian National SF Association (ANSFA), would not like to add your name to the ever-growing list of philistines who are suppressing ~~us~~ our brilliant Albanian authors. We've had enough of this worldwide conspiracy to suppress and smother Albania. We are fighting back + will not be daunted till every magazine recognises the desire, to read, to commission articles by our esteemed Albanian writers. Hopefully you support our cause + will take the space to inform and promote us to your readers.

Support the cause. Donate your quids

Yours most faithfully Oh Esteemable One,
Enifer Hovha (ANSFA)

Quids for Albania? It has something of a mercenary sound to it, I thought when I received the letter. Still not wishing to be branded a philistine I reach for the 'bible' (quote I. Asimov) and look under 'A' for Albania hoping to discover something useful about these classics of S.F. I've been so justly accused of ignoring (in the Latin sense of the word). But, disappointingly, between the entries for Alban, Antony and Aldani, Lino I find nothing except unadorned white space. What, can it be true, I wonder? Is there really a conspiracy to suppress Albanian literature and has it even compromised the integrity of Peter Nicholls encyclopedia? Just to verify I'm not imagining things I look up Czechoslovakia and find myself directed to Eastern Europe, where I am informed that the entry covers works written in Bulgaria, Romania, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland - in other words every country of Eastern Europe (excluding E. Germany and Russia which are covered elsewhere) except Albania!

So maybe Mr (Ms?) Hovha is not the paranoid idiot I first took him for. After all when was the last time you heard Albania mentioned in the news? Exactly. I've been working as an abstractor for a business information data base for several months now and I've never once had to use the country code for Albania. Nobody's been building power stations there, importing newsprint, commissioning textile mills or even developing energy saving devices. Perhaps the conspiracy is even more widespread than the letter implies. Perhaps Albania doesn't exist any more. Has anybody been there recently? Please if you've any news Of Albania send it to me
c/o Lost Country's Office, Glasgow Central, Glasgow.

The Gentle Art of Lopping

"First take your fanzine", says the jolly presenter in casual shirt and check trousers, "remove the front cover and examine the black stains you find there. These," he pronounces portentously, "give you the first clues to what sort of work you're dealing with." He chuckles to himself in anticipation: "Some will have what is known in the trade as 'artwork' on them. Of course, its not really art, or not often, but people like to call it artwork - it encourages the contributors, you know! Anyway if your fanzine has artwork on you're in luck. This will give you several possible opening lines like 'If your fanzine was the last fanzine on earth and all other reading material had been obliterated in an unexpected worldwide arson attack I wouldn't move an inch out of my way to pick it up, because the cover is just so goddam unappealing!'"

The presenter openly laughs, uncovering cosmetic white molars, obviously enjoying himself so much that he has forgotten momentarily that the cameras are on him. Then catching sight of Therese, his petite assistant out of the corner of his eyes, hurriedly composes himself.

"But, of course," he resumes, "you can just say how much you liked it/hated it, without going all out to destroy the editor's ego. After all there's bound to be an opportunity for that later. Also it's sometimes more effective to start with faint praise, and lead up to the crushing blow later. Though be careful not to overdo the praise - you might give the impression you liked the fanzine or something!

Right, so you've dealy with the cover!" The presenter unceremoniously screws up his demonstration cover and pulls out a random page of text from a box at his side.

"Now we come to the real meat of the loc - the contents. Most editors will

list them for you, which is quite convenient (and if they don't, well... more ammunition!). You can establish at a glance which items you can criticise without reading them. A tip here, try something like this: "I simply couldn't read your article on distilling potato chips in the back room of your mother-in-law's 3rd home before last, though I tried and tried to get into it, I never seemed to make it beyond the 4th side." You know act very sincere, even say you really wanted to like it, convince the editor you're on his side, it's simply that the article has no redeeming features!"

By this time the presenter has a demonic glint in his eyes as he happily sifts through the sheets of paper, oblivious to Therese waving the five minutes sign at him.

"Now look at this!" he crows excitedly, "A real gift! 'The golden sword of the mutant goalkeeper from Ursa Minor Beta', all about the offspring of Spock's marriage to the second cousin of Servalan. There's no excuse for messing this one up. It's almost worth admitting you read the thing, just to give yourself the ammunition to be that bit more scathing. Something along the lines of: "This is an inexcusable waste of natural resources, (i.e. the paper it was written on) and was so appalling it should never have been allowed to crawl from the space in its creator's head which masquerades as a brain, let alone released on an unsuspecting populace. Not only are the story's premises preposterous and an insult to any cretin's intelligence, but the whole piece is totally lacking in adjectives. What's more the writer's grasp of grammar would shame a medieval monk and the spelling is only marginally better (though admittedly it was difficult to tell what was spelling mistake and what was typoe). On no account print this story in your next issue!"

You get the idea!" adds the presenter unnecessarily, rubbing his hands together gleefully.

Therese and the producer exchange significant glances, as if to say "Yes! A lunatic!"

"This leads us quite neatly in to the whole area of production. Always comment on the obvious. If you think the margins are wrong, say so. Where the text is faint or shows a tendency to drift off in to the great blue yonder, tell the editor how it should have been done. Don't be afraid to suggest he buy a new typewriter and duplicator before setting off on his next effort. Send him back the staples which presumably came out when you took off the cover and make some sarcastic comment on how he might like to re-use them for the next issue. Use your imagination, look for those words which aren't quite spelt ~~write~~ right, find the place where he ran out of corflu."

The producer nods at the cameraman, who cuts away to film Therese and a dancing hamster just ~~been~~ brought into the studio by the grandson of one of the tea-ladies.

"Now for the editorial," continues the presenter, blissfully unaware that he's been upstaged by little Goldie's antics. "Either disagree totally with what's being said, or mutter direly about lack of editorial presence and the total

vapidity and redundancy of the whole enterprise..."

The producer takes him gently by the arm, whispering a selection of soothing sentences.

"But I haven't finished," objects the presenter, "there's still the con rep and the letter column. There's a lot to be made from letter columns."

"Don't worry, we'll have a letter column once Therese has finished with the hamster..."

Therese And The Hamster

T: Why do you dance?

H: Why do you talk?

T: To pass the time I suppose.

H: And haven't you passed it yet? It seems to me you do enough talking.

T: Oh, it passes, it passes, but there's always more, or there always has been so far.

(She gets up and does an experimental twirl)

Well, if you're not going to dance, I suppose I'd better. Somebody has to keep the viewers amused.

Enter Laura stage right

L: Am I in time to do something scandalous for this fanzine?

T: Go right ahead present the letter column.

L: But I'd much rather have a black Russian! Or a 16 year old school boy. Oh dear, I didn't realise I was on T.V., maybe I shouldn't have said that.

T: It's just what the viewers want to hear. You're doing fine.

L: Gosh, I hope no-one's watching. No I don't, that's not true, I hope everybody's watching. How shall I announce the letter column?

Rowena runs on stage left

R: Like this!

She waves her fist in the air and shouts

D I S C O !

H: What a good idea. I just feel like dancing myself.

So it came to pass that a letter column was conjured, and it bore the title

M A G I C , M U R D E R & t h e w e a t h e r

Yes, a real letter column this time! I'm going to cut out most of the so & so liked this/didn't like that as it gets a bit monotonous, especially to anybody who didn't read the first issue. Generally speaking comments on Batman and Eleanor of Aquitaine were favourable, Marvin's problem page generated the most contradictory views and hardly anyone bothered to read Simon's story. And yes, Twelfth should have had an 'F' in it!

On to the first letter, written solely to propagate a particularly bad pun & to demonstrate what reading Joyce can do to your writing style!

PAUL DORMER, 41, LEE COURT, LEE HIGH RD, LONDON. SE13 5PE

I've been decorating the front room of my flat and spent every night last week painting till ten o'clock. And the smell of those new vinyl paints is terrible. I've got round it by buying one of these deodorising blocks. This one smells of urns filled with rose petals, so I am now smelling the room through rose-scented receptacles.

I suppose I ought to get around to the fanzine. I started to read it on the train back from the Tun, which caused some interesting mis-readings: manured for mannered for instance! ((Actually mannered was a mis-reading on my part for measured-- but that's Lilian's, sorry Anna's, writing for you!)) The bit about the naming of fanzines struck a chord. I have often thought that the reason I have never produced a fanzine (apart from laziness) is that I can't think of a name for it. I did think of using my old school nickname of Dormouse (a corruption of my surname, but also for my hibernatory habits) but this would invite comparison with other rodent fanzines, Wrinkled Shrew and True Rat.

The piece about Batman brought back memories of the mid-sixties when I avidly read DC comics. For some reason, I preferred the Flash, Green Lantern and the Atom to Superman and Batman, but I do remember that when the TV series started (May 1966 on British TV if my memory serves me right) Alfred had already been killed off, but the script-writers, not knowing any better, wrote him into the TV series. DC comics then had to resurrect him by explaining that the arch-villain, the Outsider, was in fact Alfred revived by a young scientist in an experiment that had gone wrong!

((Paul then includes a fragment of Provencal in a misguided attempt to prove there were other women in the 12th century than Eleanor of Aquitaine. Wrong again, La Comtessa de Dia is of course one of Eleanor's numerous pseudonyms as any medieval scholar will tell you.))

JONATHAN COXHEAD, 15 REGENT RD, SURBITON, SURREY, KT5 8NN

Despite your zine sounding like a mating of Anne McCaffrey and a film magazine ('Decisiongoria'? 'Ship's Log'? Even 'Pegasus of Filmland'? No... 'Dragonburst') its existence is doubtful. Since Dragons don't exist, surely Dragonburst can't either? And so I can't possibly be sitting here scribbling (hold on what's that above me, dripping eggs? My god, it's a dr... aiughngngnya, now I'm covered in black blood. Okay, you win.)

You obviously have a social conscience exceeded by few in fandom. So why publish 'Dragonburst' when you could be helping out with your local branch of the Socialist Democratic Conservatives? And why do that when you could be writing the all-new This Never Happens De-Luxe?

((And why continue this letter when we could go on to...))

BRUCE SAVILLE, 9 REGENT ST, GREENOCK, RENFREWSHIRE, PA15 4QX

First reaction to Dragonburst is mixed. Certain of your stuff is perceptive while some is pretty amateurish attempts at humour. I liked your editorial and loved your treatise on the Batman which is amazingly perceptive and precise for one who hasn't read the pre-1970 stuff. But is your fanzine the right place for it, I ask myself. I found the fanzine a bit of a mish-mash covering a lot of ground. However it seems to fit in with the stuff that everyone in the FOKT circle seems to be producing. That is no coherent theme but an attempt to entertain and have fun. This is okay as long as this is communicated to the reader. If not, all is lost.

((Very true. One reason for the lack of coherency is that Dragonburst was conceived as a collection of whatever I felt like writing at the time. By this definition Dragonburst was the only place for the Batman article (indeed but for the fanzine it would never have been written). This is an ~~amateurish~~ amateurish attitude yes, but then fanzines aren't commercial ventures, but essentially personal or group self-indulgence. This doesn't imply (anticipating my next correspondant) that any less care or attention is lavished on the venture or the standards strived for lower. Merely that they've been defined by the person financing the operation.))

JOSEPH NICHOLAS, ROOM 9, 94 ST GEORGE'S SQUARE, PIMLICO, LONDON SW1Y 3QY

You seem to be grossly mistaking the general overall thrust of what I was saying about fanzines in the reviews I did for Ian Maule's Nabu. Absolutely the last damn thing I was concerned with in those pieces was the actual production and presentation of fanzines; I was concerned solely with the quality or otherwise of the writing, and my only remarks about lay-out and such were directed towards the idea that if it was printed reasonably cleanly and the articles (and the paragraphs within them) were clearly distinguished from each other then the editor was doing all right. To worry overmuch about layout and such, as you seem to think I did, is an American trait, and one that seems to have been taken to such

an extreme that no-one cares about the quality of the writing at all: as long as the margins are right-justified and the titles are imposing enough and the fillos are done with six different coloured inks and it has a litho card cover and all that then everything is wonderful... because, of course, fanzines are for looking at, not for reading. Which is a stance I completely reject -- as, or so you say, do you. But "professional" is not a matter of looking neat and tidy and all that; it is one of giving everything you've got to what you're doing, of putting the maximum possible effort into what you're writing and not being content with any tedious scam about it being only an amateur publication so it doesn't matter if you don't try your hardest. Nothing less than the best has ever been remotely acceptable by anyone.... least of all me.

((I'm afraid I expressed my argument rather badly in the last issue. I criticised the attitude of such as Joseph to fanzines, then proceeded to illustrate the argument mainly with criticisms of lay-out, which I agree is not a major concern of his. But let me clarify the point I was trying to make originally (I'm afraid it's only based on impression as it's over a year since I've seen any of the fanzines concerned). From reading some distant issue of Gross Encounters and a letter written by Joseph Nicholas to Periphery I contracted a deep and nasty conviction that some people took the whole issue of what a fanzine should or should not be a little too seriously. It frankly frightened me, and took some of the enjoyment out of trying to produce my own first issue. It's still the same: 'Nothing less than the best has ever been remotely acceptable by anyone' - anybody would think fanzines were important!

But on to the next correspondent, who by some miracle of programming just happens to be the editor of that same Periphery...))

JEFF SUTER, 18 NORTON CLOSE, SOUTHWICK, FAREHAM, HANTS. PO17 6HD

How I agree with you about some of the criticism flung out at us poor fanzine editors. Which isn't to say that I am against criticism, as long as it is relevant. Sure layout is important but it is not the be-all and end-all of fanzine communication. I'm not happy with my zines layout and will probably change it for issue 6, but then I've never been happy with it and have not been influenced by any adverse comments thrown at me. I'm more interested in what people have to say about the content of a fanzine, style is secondary. Anyway a variety of formats is desirable, variety is important, otherwise all fanzines would become indistinguishable if they all looked the same. Of course, if the lay-out of a fanzine is too slap-dash, as some quasi-punk zines are, they tend to become a jumbled mish-mash of words across the page, incomprehensible.

The same goes for naming ones fanzine. It is entirely up to the editor. Anyway (I'll probably be shot down in technicolor flames for saying this) what is wrong with having a McCaffrey sounding title? I like the Dragon books. I read them for pure entertainment, if I want something more serious I'll read Kafka or something.

((I think there's a lot of snobbishness around about reading habits. Personally I'm still looking for the perfect escapist book; it's just my misfortune that I've been educated beyond the level of Woman's Own and Marion Zimmer Bradley (Well, almost!!)

Now for a bit of mud stirring re the Matrix review of the last issue which combined some slightly overstated criticism of its more obvious weak points (like the cover which was the product of a heart-breaking encounter between me, an electro-stencil and a bottle of corflu!) with mild praise for the bits Simon Ounsley did like.))

TREVOR MENDHAM, c/o UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY SOCIETY

What have you done to annoy Simon Ounsley? I have to assume that he has a personal grudge against you since otherwise his review in Matrix 38 reveals him to be an abject moron, and everyone knows this to be untrue. For a start, he's completely missed your point on the name. Even his quote and reply is hopelessly out of context!

Marvin's Problem Page was very funny indeed. Simon didn't seem to notice that most of the jokes were actually in the 'problems' themselves (my favourite was the concept of a shade of blue turning green with envy...)

Parlez-Vous Fansay is a very unoriginal idea, but it worked because some of the expressions were very funny. 'Beame mich hinauf, Scotty' raises an interesting question: how are certain catchphrases like this really translated into various

languages? Could be interesting to find out.

((The 'Beame mich hinauf' was directly inspired by a German fanzine which contained the verb 'heruntergebeamt' for 'beamed down'. It also amuses me the way French fanzines do clever things like translating room party as 'le room-party' etc.))

ETHEL GEORGE, 78 EPSILON DRIVE, GLASGOW, G4 2SD

One genuine 100% certified LOC from me. Picked up Dragonburst from someone, somewhere, something or somehow. Suffice to say there was I at the bus stop with a copy in my pocket when it started to rain. Not having an umbrella I used your fanzine to shelter me. Didn't want to waste it so read it as the rain poured down. I don't really recommend reading a fanzine with your arms above your head at the same time as using the fanzine as a shelter from the rain. Good quality stuff. Took 10 minutes for the rain to be completely absorbed by it. By that time I'd read it and the bus had pulled up. So a few thoughts on it. First of all junk Marvin's Problem Page and foreign phrases. Just couldn't understand it. (On the other hand, that's three pages less so loses 2 minutes absorbency) Don't junk it. The other stuff was good but the story was marvellous. All those pages. Could have been a bit longer though. More artwork - that adds more pages -- -- make the pages bigger.

If you do this your fanzine will be great. In fact I'd personally recommend to anyone. As an umbrella.

((Try this one out Ethel. I treated each page with special water resistant chemicals before printing. Unfortunately there wasn't time to do anything about the ink, but what's a few black marks between friends?))

THE SECRET LIFE OF JOHN TRACY AND OTHER ASPECTS OF THE TRACY DISEASE

Maybe I've been watching too many Thunderbirds repeats, but I'm getting very worried about the Tracy family. For a start, whatever became of Mrs T? Did she expire from the shock of being delivered of her fifth son in succession, or did she run off with a mechanic while Jeff was out in space somewhere? More intriguing still is why the family keep John perpetually exiled up on Thunderbird 5? In all the episodes I've watched (i.e. far too many) there's only been one where I've seen him go out on a mission with the rest of the 'boys', and once or twice he gets the dubious pleasure of Brain's company for a couple of minutes. Are they ashamed of him, I wonder, or is it just that they don't like him? After seeing John in action on that one mission I have a strong suspicion this may be the true reason.

But what does John Tracy do during the long, lonely hours as he waits in his orbiting prison for a distress call? Aside from tuning in to the Archers every evening, it has been suggested to me that he operates a thriving blackmail business on the material he has amassed over the years through monitoring so many private frequencies. He spends his duty hours avidly listening and making recordings. To protect his interests he allows only the gullible Brains and Alan (whom he is probably blackmailing too!) up to Thunderbird 5. His rare excursions back to Earth are presumably for the purpose of picking up the money, which arrives in mysterious packets, via a spurious model kits mail-order company, or something of the sort.

Enough of John, and on to Scott and Alan, the two heroes of the family. Scott, the eldest, follows the strong, straight jaw-line pattern, while Alan

the youngest, is meant to be brave and romantic (which is why he's the one having an affair with Tin Tin!). Scott is the man (well, puppet) behind every mission, the leader who gives all the orders. He flies off in Thunderbird 1, looks at the situation and tells Virgil in Thunderbird 2 what he has to do. Virgil then proceeds with all the actual dangerous bits of rescuing the trapped double agent, his two innocent children, their dog and Lady Penelope (though sometimes Scott rescues Lady P. himself, this being his prerogative as eldest son).

Scott is also one of the major carriers of what I have dubbed the Tracy disease. This disease is characterised in its victims by a propensity to shout: "You've gotta do it, you've just got to do it!" at the most tense stage of a rescue, thereby distracting all concerned and almost precipitating its failure (except yhat International Rescue never fail!). On one never to be forgotten occasion Virgil lay slumped unconscious over the controls of TB 2, while Scott nearly broke all his strings exhorting him to get a grip on himself and answer. Being knocked out in a explosion, just doesn't rank as a good enough excuse for dereliction of duty in the Tracy family. Eventually shame over his heinous lack of will power rouses Virgil sufficiently to crash land his craft amidst the plastic, uprootable palm trees of its runway.

Back to Alan, obviously intended as the character the programme's younger viewers identify with. Evidencing all the teenage angst of a well brought up puppet, Alan struggles to compete with his older brothers and to prove that he's not a boy any more, but a real man! In THUNDERBIRDS ARE GO, after being left behind when Lady Penelope takes Scott and Virgil to a night club, there is a long dream sequence of Alan fantasising over Lady Penelope taking him to a night club. They fly off in the Rolls to this flashy joint somewhere out in space and Lady Penelope tells him how she's always thought him the most fascinating, brave, intelligent etc. of the brothers. Then his insecurities ~~surface~~ begin to surface; Lady Penelope heads back to the Rolls and dares Alan to jump aboard as the gap between it and the satellite night club widens. She and Parker drive off laughing at Alan... who wakes up in a cold sweat, goes out on a rescue, heroically saves the day and is rewarded with a real evening out with Lady Penelope. So, Alan proves himself, and everybody in the audience who's ever been told they're too young for this, that or whatever can feel vicariously vindicated.

And what of Gordon, the only Tracy not as yet mentioned (apart from Granny)? What indeed? Born as he was in the middle of such a large family his only chance of being noticed is to become a transvestite, kill off Scott and Virgil or uncover John's blackmail business. As Thunderbirds is meant to be a children's problem (I think I actually meant programme there) I suspect it's unlikely I'll ever see any of these plot lines used.

As if repeating Thunderbirds wasn't enough, LWT then proceeded to dig out Stingray. Now here's another bunch of twisted puppets. Troy Tempest is an early prototype of Scott, tall and dark and upright, staunch and straight from Boy's Own. His sidekick is the amiable, barely competent Phones, who is always ready with the 'Gee Troy, what shall we do now' when things go wrong. The most irrit-

ating character in the series is the thoroughly drippy Marina. She's a sea creature, the fairy tale mermaid who can't talk when she becomes human. For some obscure reason Troy and Phones take her on their missions, then spend half their time working out how to rescue her. Occasionally she looks especially miserable and reveals under a laborious questioning process that some obscure custom of the ocean has been contravened, though no-one ever believes her until disaster ensues.

Worse still is the kind of love triangle which exists between Troy, Marina and Atlanta (Troy's boss's daughter). This is only implicit in most of the episodes (there not being much time for philandering, what with Troy having to foil yet another plot to blow up Marineville and sabotage Stingray) but is restated in the end credits with Marina's song and Atlanta staring wistfully at her framed photo of Troy. Unfortunately for Atlanta she is only an ordinary American woman and can't compete with the submarine charms of her rival. Troy is intrigued by the mystery of Marina. Because she can't talk, he's convinced she would have something marvellous to say if she could. Marina, in other words is an ideal woman created from Troy's imagination and endowed with all the characteristics he desires of her. She is a romantic archetype, the male's woman of his dreams, the beautiful lady playing soothing music and most importantly, never gainsaying him for she has not the tongue to do so. My personal feeling is, whoever found Marina should have thrown her back!

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Finally some notes from Linda Maverick our fashion correspondent who's already installed at the Brighton Metropole waiting for the convention to begin -

Yes, and I feel it's going to be very exciting this year! No, unlike Paul Dormer, I'm not anticipating any topless newsreaders, and frankly it wouldn't excite me very much if there were. But we've got some very good costumes to look forward, like Murray's flying suit which I had a sneak preview of a few weeks back, and boy is it even more macho than his leathers! Just wait till you see those studs and the water pistol holster! And what of that zany group of SODS (no, that isn't an insult, that's what they really are, I mean what they're really called) who had so much fun messing about with the silver make-up at Novacon? What will they get up to this time? I don't know, but rumour has it that Graham's going to dress as Little Red Riding Hood in honour of Angela Carter, and who's to say that he won't? But my money's on Elgar and Biscuit to steal the show as usual. Those bears sure have style, and know how to dress for any occasion.

But can the same be said for those incorrigible six year old twins? Yes, they'll be there too, coyly hiding behind pseudonyms but as full of fun as ever! No-one knows as yet whether Lilian's green jumpsuit will put in an appearance, but this question is fascinating observers almost as much as the chances of Joan appearing in pink French knickers or of Ian wearing those very jeans he bought in Virgin Records a year and a half ago. Yes, the very essence of the

Glaswegian man about town, but if Scotland isn't your style (and let's face it, it isn't everybody's) then look out for what they're wearing in Oxford. Well, Brideshead it isn't, but there may well be a strong line in denim sub-academia and bedroom slippers from Pete representing that exclusive and brilliant society of bright ageing things, the 23 club. And don't forget to look out for Laura. You can bet she'll have a surprise or two for everybody - it's not easy dressing up for 500 milkmen every day, but that's what our Laura does and she'll doubtless be wearing one or two of those outfits that wow them down at the Co-op dairies in the course of the weekend.

But on to more important matters. What length will the beards be this year? I have official confirmation on this one from Tim Illingworth, who says, emphatically, long, and he should know as he's still nursing a broken wrist from tripping up on his. Poor old Tim. But beards aren't everything. For those of you more interested in head hair I'd like to draw your attention to that very fetching blue fringe Phil Palmer's modelling this year. A must for the fashion conscious fan, I feel. Well, I for one can hardly wait! 1982 is sure to be a landmark on Eastercon fashions, the market's never been more varied or people so willing to have fun, experiment and make fools of themselves. But what will 1983 bring? I don't like to stick my neck out, but could it be the year of the bowler hat and brolley?