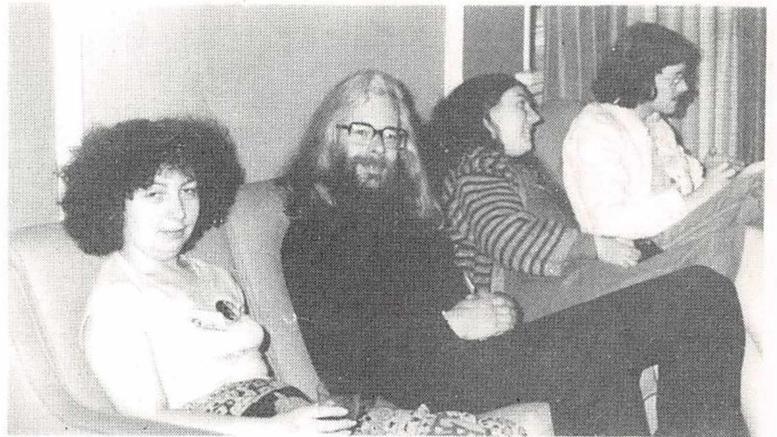




Les Spinge 36



NOVACON this year was back to the old form; I think going back to the Royal Angus was a good idea. The staff are familiar with, and tolerant of, our idiosyncrasies, whereas last year at the Holiday Inn I got the distinct impression we weren't entirely welcome. Quite apart from the weird nautical machismo in the decor. Anyway everything went smoothly this year, and Ro and I managed to avoid most of the programme and instead just talk to our friends, hold secret Lion Bar parties and relax. The usual stair party was held (only this year for lack of comfortable stairs it turned into a lobby party) by the usual group of us, and we amused ourselves by trading paper aeroplanes with the poker game opposite us, and by founding Laid-back Fandom, of which I think I'd have been elected president, if we'd ever got around to doing it.

If you are wondering why this fanzine has reverted to mimeographed form, the answer is simply cost. Our favourite printer just put up his prices by a third, and although I can't really quarrel with that, since they had stayed below average rates for a long time, it does make producing an offset fanzine rather an expensive proposition at the moment. So I've compromised to the extent of screening and printing up a photopage as the front cover, and duplicating the rest. Kevin and Jean kindly offered me facilities on their machines, which is the reason mimeo has become feasible again. Some of you may remember that the old Cringebinder Gestetner finally collapsed into ruin about five years ago, since when everything I've published has been either offset or xerox.

So, public thanks to Kevin and Jean.

Several people commented favourably on the little illo on the last but one page of the previous issue, which was coloured in felt pens. The original intention was to just do a dozen or so for specially favoured people, but we got carried away and did about three-quarters of the whole print run. Ro got carried away more than me: she did most of them. I think they came out rather well (every one is different, incidentally).

Further to my short comment on the unsuitability of the Metropole for disabled people. I'm pleased to be able to publish Pam Boal's account of her tribulations at Seacon. It really is an awful story; it's obvious that the Metropole management don't care in the slightest. But read it for yourselves. And if anyone else has horror stories in the same vein (about Seacon or elsewhere) I'd like to hear them.

The photos on the front of this issue are really the best of the Seacon pictures I took which actually came out. I had some camera trouble, in that some pictures either came out as double exposures (one was a triple) or didn't come out at all. Fortunately I had enough good high-contrast photographs to make up a page - normally about three-quarters of the ones I take are unsuitable anyway because of low contrast or other reasons, so I was lucky this time.

We misguidedly went to see a film called "Prophecy" the other week. I'd wondered why the trailer and posters gave nothing away about the story, but I realised why when I saw the film. It seemed to have been made of odd bits of scenes shot for a quite different movie, because none of it hung together in any coherent way at all. It's sort of an environmental pollution tale, in which mercury residues from a paper mill cause awful mutations in the wildlife, in particular a malformed giant bear which appeared to drop bits of itself all over the countryside. Decidedly odd, and not a film I'd recommend.

On a better note, we saw a wonderfully atmospheric Japanese film called "Empire of Passion" which is set in the Meiji era (around 1890) and is really evocative of rural Japan of the time, as well as being a powerful tale about a woman and her lover who kill the woman's husband. The most horrific thing is the husband's ghost, which returns to haunt as tired in death as he was in life (he was a rickshawman). Eternal weariness: a most unpleasant idea.

* I ALMOST ATTENDED SEACON

PAMELA BOAL *

The words trouble and travel are virtually synonymous in fandom, so much so that many a fascinating con report ends with the reportee's arrival on the scene. For me August 24th was to be an exception; a wonder drug kept me in order, and Derek's pre-trip preparation of car and route kept everything else in order.

My mood matched the weather, warmly sunny with an occasional cloud. Our first Worldcon and a family gathering to boot (saddle and horse as well if you like). A dream of many years' standing about to be realised. It is important to realise at this stage that the Boals could be considered a little peculiar. Christine, Steven and David actually appear to enjoy spending time with each other and their parents. Of course the cost for five people at the Bedford was a wicked extravagance; on the other hand I could not risk our once-in-a-lifetime adventure (members of the family will doubtless attend other Worldcons but it is unlikely that we will all attend together in future) being marred by problems with my wheelchair. Thank goodness I had anticipated problems and taken steps. Snugly in my pocket was a letter, assuring me that my special needs had been noted and catered for and of a Mr Jones's personal attention at all times. Pity we hadn't managed to get into the Metropole but the map in Progress Report 4 showed the hotels to be only one block apart, with only one road to negotiate, a smallish problem, especially if the weather held.

Warning bells should have rung as soon as we pulled up outside the Bedford, but that letter lulled me into a false sense of security. Of course I wasn't expected to negotiate those imposing steps, there was bound to be an alternative means of entry just round the corner! Derek seemed to be taking a long time to get information. The queue of cars blocked by our own was getting embarrassingly lengthy. The driver of the car directly behind us tired of demonstrating the power of his engine, got out of his car and demonstrated the fluidity of his hand signals. His meaning was quite clear when he indicated that I should move on because we were blocking the way, but his other signal was unknown to me. I decided the unknown signal was a form of local greeting and courteously returned it, then indicated my orange disc and the steps. Perhaps the signs I used indicating the problem had other interpretations as the gentleman slammed his car door rather violently.

Derek returned, having had to register in order to get a pass into the garage; apparently there lay my means of entering the hallowed interior of the Bedford. We descended into the bowels of a Hitchcock film set (believe me, if smellies ever come to the cinema they will enhance the terror of a horror film), down a slope so precipitous as to almost cause us to crash the barrier and obviate the use of the plastic key. We eventually found a space that did not have a 'reserved' sign suspended above it, nor yet was laden with lurid notices warning of the dangers and diverse dire consequences of parking in the vicinity. Wheelchair unpacked and myself safely installed, we braved the gloom and shadows seeking the lift. Foolishly, we squeezed through the only discernible door, to find beyond that another door, and beyond that door, stairs. By the time Derek had extracted me from that particular trap I was beginning to feel decidedly edgy. Further exploration, along the mouldering walls towards the stygian depth, past the lurking cars and the great plethora of forbidding notices, brought us in sight of a lift door... locked. As we discussed the impossibility of getting my chair up the entrance ramp, even if we could find it, the lift rumbled. Some

one, or some thing, I half prayed, half feared, was descending. I was vastly relieved at seeing an ordinary human being and thus too taken aback to take advantage of his advent. Derek, blocked by me and laden by our cases, couldn't get to the lift. Fortunately that thrice-blessed stranger had the presence of mind to hold the door for us. We were in.

We weren't sure when the children would arrive so decided to pop along to the Metropole to register and get our programmes. First, though, to locate Mr Jones and determine exactly how I was supposed to get in and out of the hotel for the next four days. The desk clerk seemed to be not only unsure of Mr Jones's whereabouts but also his whereabouts, and obviously thought his explanation that the ramp they used to have was being built upon was adequate. While we had been attempting to get into the place the night shift had come on. "Perhaps" suggested the clerk, "The day shift personnel could arrange for you to have a key to the garage lift." We explained that the entrance ramp was too steep to be negotiated, and he explained that there was simply no other way then, except up and down the stairs.

Here and now, I serve due warning on fandom at large. I will renounce my pacifism and use my chair, stick and any handy object to inflict bodily harm upon anyone who cheerfully assures me that 'there are always plenty of people willing and able to carry you and your chair up and down stairs.' Nor will you be safe from my wrath if the remark is addressed to or about other wheelchair jockeys. Some peoples' spines or bodies are too painful to tolerate handling, others are too embarrassed and some are too heavy to be lifted safely. There is also a principle involved; we have the moral (and believe it or not legal) right to come and go into and out of any public building unaccompanied. In my own case I am spending a great deal of money on a power chair to facilitate that right, a chair that is not only heavy but could readily be damaged by incorrect handling. While the speaker is genuinely willing, there and then, to help, it is by no means unusual to find such people rather thin on the ground when you actually need them.

The desk clerk and Derek obviously coped on that occasion. So on to the Metropole. Not one but five busy roads to cross, each with its complement of steep, spine-jarring pavements, impossible to negotiate without help. More stairs, and finally into the lobby of the Metropole. Friends to greet - I had arrived at Seacon. Or had I? Well no, not exactly, for as far as anyone in the lobby knew the only way into the Con Halls was the crowded, obviously un-negotiable stairs which I could see in front of me.

My discomfort and fatigue roused my irritation to the point of visibility. As soon as we entered the Churchill Room to register, committee members deemed it wise to summon the Chairman. Peter Weston, obviously needing to be elsewhere, did his best to arrange the first step in the right direction, that of getting us moved from the Bedford to the Metropole. When the night manager finally made his reluctant appearance, he lived up to Peter's gloomy expectation of being smoothly unhelpful. Yes, he thought there were rooms available, but nothing could be done that evening; if Derek could report at the desk at nine o'clock the following morning, something could probably be arranged. As for getting into the convention halls that evening, just not possible. Yes, there was an access point in Queen Street or Kings Road but the security guards would need to be notified in advance about the exact times I would be entering or leaving. A porter indicated his willingness to help and made vague waving motions indicating that there were other ways of getting me in and out on the morrow. Peter could obviously do no more and had more urgent matters to attend to.

Meanwhile, the family had arrived and the boys persuaded that they could not help so they might as well enjoy the disco. I took a turn on the floor myself, but disco dancing in a power chair is very hard on other people's ankles. I wasn't that angry, or at least not then. I studied the programme and discovered "Star Wars". As cinemas are as inaccessible as hotels I was probably one of the few fans who had not seen this much debated film. My streak of obstinacy asserted itself; I was going to see that film! I also had a shrewd suspicion that if I failed to make a start on the access problem before the morning I might as well go home for fear of spoiling the whole con for the entire family. The vague porter was more specifically helpful in telling us the whereabouts of a phone with a direct line to the Chief of Night Security. Christine was willing to sit through the film again, so down the steps and onward as directed. The directions were simple: just keep on right round the block, knock on the door and we would be let in. We went on and on and on, over uneven and badly canted pavements (a very particular nightmare when you have a chair over-responsive to camber), knocking at every likely looking door. One door opened, and a very suspicious head told us to try round the corner (if you think that's unlikely you have never been as tired as I was then). Just over a quarter of a mile from the main entrance we found the magic door. With obvious reluctance we were admitted and escorted through the book hall to the corridor leading to our goal, the Main Hall. My body had arrived at Seacon but it and my spirits were far too weary for me to actually watch the film I had been so determined to see. Never mind, as purveyors of cliches are wont to say, "Tomorrow was another day".

Saturday started well. The Metropole did have rooms and betime we had packed up and settled at the Bedford they would be ready. The family forestalled the first row of the day by glossing over the fact that David had found himself more comfortable accommodation. My irritation at his failure to be there to help with his luggage blinded me to the fact that £15 is somewhat pricey for an unslept-in camp bed crammed into a room smaller than the one Christine and I shared, even if it had meant that Steven and Derek were thus vouchsafed enough room to stretch their arms out fully. Five cases into three, when one of the three must needs be free to help me up and down pavements, was a problem. Fortunately Dave Rowe had come to find out why I had failed to show up at the Fan Room as arranged. Dave's unfailing good-humoured patience and experience with wheelchairs helped us to the Metropole without mishap. The rooms were not ready so it wasn't worth dragging me up the stairs - why not lock our luggage up and carry on round to the con halls? The light waterproof I had taken for those occasional one block trips proved inadequate, betime I got under cover (it had taken an hour from door to door). I was soaked to the skin. I was ready to strangle those bright sparks (obviously staying at the Metropole and able to get up the internal stairs) who could not resist the observation that it must be raining.

At least there was a lift up to the Fan Room but the people I had arranged to meet were long gone. It was essential that I get out of my wet clothes as soon as possible; it wasn't worth attending any programme event. Perhaps the exchequer could stretch to a warming cup of tea. It could, but the tea was undrinkable, even the fabled British Rail cuppa could surely not match that average in fowlness. Thus the hours passed, the family taking it in turns to share my misery and to trek down to the desk to enquire about our rooms' state of readiness.

After the umpteenth assurance that the room would be ready any time at all, we moved to the book room to be nearer the entrance. We also wanted to ask in the Gopher Room about the possibility of my getting down to the Clarence Room for programme events there. Impossible, we were told,

though some people thought there was a side entrance, but weren't sure if it was locked or unlocked. Then at three o'clock, when one of our rooms was purported to be ready, we met another wheelchair jockey, there for the day with her husband. They had discovered a side entrance that led to the Claredon Room and even more important a service lift which carried one up to the back of the art room. David went on a quick recce and reported that there were also toilets with wheelchair symbol displayed (of course they didn't actually have facilities but one could get in and out of the door), a tortuous route but one that cut that outside trip in half. It was still raining, but so lightly as to barely add to the moisture in my still damp clothes.

Dry clothes outside, food inside, by four o'clock I was ready to enter the fray once more. Too late to get into the Philip Strick Show but hanging about aimlessly meant I probably met (briefly) more old friends and acquaintances than other people and I did get in for most of the second half of that hilariously funny presentation.

Up in the service lift to get to the Hitchhiker's Guide. Rather glad that Christine decided to accompany me, as my batteries were getting sulky and might need to be saved by putting the chair on manual mode, even though they had started the day fully charged and were good for seven miles. A trouble-free entry. Well, not exactly. As I made my way to that accessible toilet a security guard informed me that I could not go through as they were about to lock up. I'm afraid I lost my temper and informed him 'I had paid to attend the Convention and was going to go in even if it meant I was locked in for the night.'

Then I discovered that I had misread the map. The Norfolk Room and thus the Hitchhiker's Guide was on the same floor as the Clarence Room, the floor I had just left. I simply couldn't face that security guard again. Oh well, at least we were on the right floor and in very good time for the Fancy Dress. Then our corridor meanderings brought us into contact with a chief security guard. A stroke of luck. The dear man was not only ready to accompany me (at times of my own choosing) through the Book Room, Art Room, down in the service lift to unlock the side door, but also gave clear directions concerning the whereabouts of phones I could use to contact him.

On the Friday I had met another wheelchair jockey in the Metropole lobby. I was pleased to see her coming in to watch the Fancy Dress Parade. I knew that she hadn't been confined to a chair for very long and that her home town (in the USA) had complete access, but it hadn't occurred to me that her bewilderment at the problems she was encountering had till then confined her to her room, with occasional forays into the lobby. Her daughter informed me that although they had arrived on the Wednesday this would be the first programme event her mother had attended. I also learned that they had been sent, as I had on the Friday, all the way round to the Book Room and had been kept waiting outside on the pavement for half an hour. At least I was able to pass on my hard-won information about routes and the helpful chief security guard.

During a lull in the proceedings Bernie Peek came and informed me about the book stall holders' complaints that I had been seen wandering around the book room with half a dozen people after lock-up. Before I had time to do more than gasp he rushed back to his duties. Later I grabbed him to tell him that they must have seen the other lady, and as far as I knew she only had her daughter and son-in-law with her. I had been angry; now I was furious. This lady's first attempt to brave the problems of attending a convention she had travelled so far and paid so much to be a part of - was cause for complaint? Bernie told me that he had seen a wheelchair with a crowd of people around and not knowing about the other

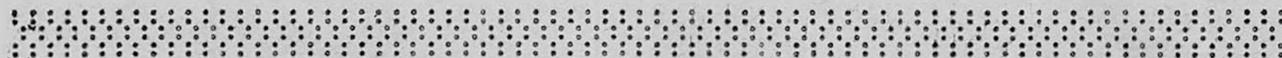
lady had assumed it was me. Well, Bernie, if you did see what you claimed to see, it was before lock-up had actually been completed and the people milling round had nothing to do with Christine or me. If it was later and the other lady then you were seeing not double but triple. Complaints directed at either of us were both unfair and unreasonable.

The surge of adrenaline caused by the incident boded ill for my much-abused system. Although I stayed for the Fancy Dress Parade and enjoyed it, I left before the results were announced, feeling more like giving up and going home than attending the room party to which we had been invited. The fact that the chief security guard was as good as his word helped, and I went to the party, the right one even. Nice people to meet and to talk to; thank you, Flo, Wendy and Keith.

Sunday. At last I knew where most things were and how to get there, and the family felt free to go off and enjoy the convention in their own different ways. The sun was shining and my spirits positively lifted. Sometime just after Bob Shaw's talk, that almost literally caused me to crack my jaw laughing, the assault course of the previous two days began to exact its toll. Things started to get a little blurred, a series of half-remembered events rolling one into the other. A lady with an unrecognisable accent explaining that the English always played cricket; Hugo awards mixed up with bright lights, Superman and an award no-one wished to claim; a decision to hold a 'secret, quite truefan and friends ready to admit the need of a haven bring your own drink because we've run out' party - pause for brbath.

A succession of pleasant people came and went; an interesting discussion on international language with Simon; a gentlemanly but definitely wavery visit from Dave Langford who may or may not have borrowed my chair for a joyride in the corridors; a revolting stomach getting me in and out of bed; a final session of mutual commiseration with Florence Russell in the lobby; meeting Fritz Leiber; Derek and Christine both winning a prize in the 'Alien' draw; Flo taking up the battle of our bill (I had forgotten VAT, it turned out); saying good-bye to the children; getting home several hours before we had originally intended to leave Brighton.

I'm not exactly in a position to write a report, but I do have a bill to prove I almost attended Seacon.



A late LoC from Mike Glicksohn came in after I'd typed up the letter column, and I'll just quote a bit of it:

"On the topic of whether or not separate space for women at conventions is a welcome addition, I completely disagree with you (I think this is the least welcome trend to hit fandom in my thirteen years as a fan) but I agree that feminist programming is a good thing (whether I wish to go to it or not) and I have to agree that Joseph seemed off-base in his comments about DREAMSNAKE which I too found to be an effective, non-sexist book. I was delighted it won the Hugo, even though I read it too late to vote in that category myself. What connection this has with the introduction of blatantly sexist activity into conventions in the form of space reserved for women only (when no such restrictive activity/locations reserved for men exist) I fail to see.

As for the other sexist comments you print, surely you can see that they reflect more about their writers than about the actual state of fandom?

(++ of course they reflect their writers' outlook, but is the 'state of fandom' anything more than the outlook of its members, added together? ++)

LETTERS OF THE WORLDWIDE

=====
Gary Farber: Seattle

I was exceptionally pleased to see your commentary on sexism in British fandom. Frankly, it is the element that bothers me most from British fans. I know that I speak for numerous other American fans, male and female, who agree on that much at least. Jerry Kaufman, Suzle Tompkins, Patrick Nielsen-Hayden, Alan Bostick and I were talking about it the other day and were basically agreeing that one of those icky, unpleasant facts about British fandom is its prevalent sexism. Although there is of course loads of sexism still present in American fandom (just as there is in parent American culture) there are a number of positive elements that have developed in recent years. In no particular order, (1) the number of females has risen greatly to at least one third of all fandom; (2) the ratio of the neos just entering may be close to 50-50; (3) there is a comparatively high general awareness of feminism in many of the larger cities, cons and clubs thanks to the efforts of people at cons and in fanzines.

There is still lots of sexism present, mostly in the form of horny, obnoxious adolescents of all ages who try to 'get laid' at cons and club meetings (or just make lots of sniggering jokes and leer a lot). This has a considerable effect on putting off many females from fandom, you can bet.

However, British fandom, at least as it is self-described in its fanzines is still...uh, primitive, at best. (It merely mimics the parent culture of GB, of course). The quotations you cite are precisely some of those that have bothered the hell out of me. Many of these people (Joe Nicholas in particular) are people whose writing on other subjects I have enjoyed and admired greatly. They are people I think I'd like a lot. But stuff like that old 'stridentfeminist' crap is so old and tired! Of course it's easy to stick a label like that on anyone trying to make their voice heard. Are women supposed to humbly and demurely (so much more feminine, y'know) whisper that er, umm, ahem, there's something wrong? Joe Nicholas in his letter you printed complained of the sexism of an Analog story -- he clearly thinks at least one aspect of sexism is dumb or wrong. Has he thought how using that 'rabid screechings' myth is playing to the tune of helping to oppress women by denying them (or just ridiculing them) their wish to be taken seriously?

But I don't want to rest the basis of what I'm saying merely on cold abstractions. Personally, I find an important datum to be that most all of the women I know and associate with are 'feminist-minded' -- it is the normal state of affairs in my circles. None of them have ever screeched or been rabid in my presence. We hold special whine tests every week. Many, even, (*gasp*) live with men. Oddly enough, not a one wants to 'enslave all males in some sort of quasi-feudal matriarchy' -- honest.

Really folks, some of you are just going to have to face that being feminist-inclined is about as controversial in most of the States (and eventually in Great Britain too, I predict) as being anti-slavery, hating Trekkies or not thinking highly of Keith Walker. Before people give up on me as a pompous, lecturing fool, let me suggest that people who are inclined to be annoyed with what I say try doing some reading on the subject before they leap to the dense. Books like SISTERHOOD IS POWERFUL (an anthology edited by Robin Morgan) or any other good book.

And for one last word: there is junk literature, stupid books, idiotic people and even occasional screechers who are feminist. Do you judge fandom by Trekkies and Dr Who?

Joe Nicholas turns up again in your lettercolumn with something I'd like to comment on. I like the man, by Jove! He gives me something to argue with and get my teeth into. And still I respect him in the morning. Of course, it is impossible for any fan (particularly the more neos) to ascertain for sure if their brand-new, shining, Model-T new fanzine title has ever been used before for sure. There is no sin involved in accidentally picking a used or even a well-known title (one bunch of neos came up with a good one recently -- Qandry) However in the fandom I grew up in, it is Strongly Frowned On to continue to use the title if one learns that it has been used before. Obviously no one will write you out of fandom for it -- but it does seem rather impolite to me. It is rude and bespeaks of an attitude of 'nothing happened important before I got here - nyaah!' This is an attitude which still leaves me rather pissed at the Seacon committee, by the way, for swiping the name of the Seattle worldcon, used in 1961. If, despite my opposition to it, the Seattle in 81 committee had won I would have been firmly of the opinion that it should have been named 'Seacon II' nice and proper. Why should we have suffered for the '79 committee's fuckups?

(++ American and British cultures in general appear to me to be very similar in relation to the oppression of women, that is to say, awful. And all is not exactly sweetness and light in American fandom either, which doesn't mean I'm defending the British situation. But sexism in British fandom tends more to be of the passive, thoughtless sort -- we have less of the arrogant anti-women brigade, I think. It was interesting to observe at Seacon that most of the obnoxious 'adolescents' who were 'trying to get laid' were Americans: the usual desire of the immature British male seems to be to get as pissed as a newt, and after that he's in no condition to do anything. ++)

Kevin Easthope: Birmingham

I could well imagine that I might at some time in the past have let slip some inadvertently sexist remark which you could seek out and print, thus showing me up to be a prime bigot. Luckily (and I'm sure it was only luck) you didn't print any quotes from me.

What I'm saying really is that although intellectually I'm in total agreement with you, the sexist conditioning imposed on us by society is so insidious and pervasive that in any more-or-less free association context (such as writing a fanzine editorial) it's very difficult to stop unconscious reflections of that conditioning rolling off the typewriter keys. It's easy to avoid sexist comments when you're specifically looking for them, but much more difficult when your focus of attention is directed elsewhere. Oh well, all you can do is your best.

I'm not (like a lot of southern fans) antagonistic toward the very idea of holding an Eastercon outside England on principle. I'm probably more sympathetic to the idea than I might be, due to the relative proximity of London to Birmingham. In Brum we're close enough to the great metrolops to hear clearly every bleat and whine when something the southerners think of as theirs is moved north of Watford. Witness the Motor Show. The first time it was held outside London it broke all previous attendance records even though it received loud prophecies of doom from the south. I'm sure the same kind of psychology is operating in those loudly condemning Albacon on geographical grounds. Okay, so it's several hundred miles for some people to travel -- in America that would be a short journey to a regional con. And even when the arguments are slightly more sophisticated (like those of Joseph Nicholas in your letter column) I'd be willing to bet that the travel distance has a lot to do with any opposition. Southerners, and Londoners in particular, often display extremely parochial attitudes.

(The sexist quotes I gave last issue were intended to display a whole attitude of

mind which pervades some peoples' writing, not the odd slip which as you say can be very hard to avoid even for people who are trying to avoid sexism in their utterances. I think you're on the side of the angels, Kev: there are a lot of easier targets about than you. ++)

Paul Ryan: Leeds

The subject of male chauvinism crops up again. It seems this controversy is an endless purge in fandom. I'm afraid that I do back up Joseph Nicholas's point on the female extremists and believe it isn't quite the myth you make it out to be. Having seen and heard that type of war-mongering by a so-called womens' movement in Leeds and knowing for a fact that this liberation army is run by lesbians. I happened to know one passive lady who was involved and who eventually left because the chauvinistic hatred of males eventually upset her.

And please, don't regard me for one minute as some kind of moralist either. I've met the other side of the scale as well - male homosexuals who equally denounce the women. This sort of eccentric senseless bickering really makes me vomit. I'd like to think that I treat people for what they are and not by discriminating sexually. Being homosexual has no issue in point for me. Call me chauvinistic if you like but I'd rather stick to women and take the consequences. Anyway, I believe basically that everyone should be equal, regardless of race, creed or colour. Utopian maybe, but I think it's that simple!

Another fact is that SF fandom has a dominant percentage of males and human nature is bound to tell us that if a new female appears on the fannish scene a lot of males are going to be interested. Christ! It's one of the oldest traits of the animal kingdom...

Why there are so many males with a liking for SF is another question. I believe the male-slant in SF was caused originally by the Golden Age and pulp power of the not-too-distant past. Things have only started to change positively in the last five years or so. Hell, women can even write under womens' names now! Coincidentally, this sudden boom in SF exploitation is getting young kids back into the scene. Like many other SF fans I was hooked on SF at a very early age, and clung ever since, maturing in my choice for books, or so I'd like to believe. At that time I was entranced by machines and technology, so Dan Dare was a godsend to me. Very few girls of 8-9 years of age had the same passion. Asimov, Heinlein, Smith and so on at a later age of 13 held me in suspense and fascination. Again very few females of the same age liked that sort of book. So it's not surprising, although supposedly adults, that fandom is dominated by male fans. It's to be blamed on the faults of the birth of SF. As an example I swiped something from Peter Nicholls's book 'Science Fiction at Large', which John W. Campbell Jr wrote about his average reader of Astounding in 1952.

"Reader surveys show the following average data. The readers are largely young men between 20 and 35, with a scattering of younger college students and older professional technical men; and nearly all the readers are technically trained and employed. The nature of the interest in the stories is not economic, not love, but technical-philosophical."

Well, since then, women are supposedly equal in stance, and more and more women are moving into industries such as mechanics and technology, and of course SF and fantasy has matured to a more accepted branch of literature. But it takes time to stamp out old ideals. I'd like to finish by saying the sooner the better.

Graham England: Didcot

There hasn't been much discussion of feminism in British fanzines yet, and I'm not sure that the attitude of British men is

going to be a major part of putting off women from fandom. The feeling that fandom is illicit and boring both at the same time is widespread among the SF readers at work; that's hardly encouraging to outsiders now, is it? As Simone has pointed out, I'm not a charismatic figure, so that people from work have not enjoyed fan society, since they expect fans to be like me. Until feminism becomes a subject of normal conversation here, then it cannot fill much space in British fanzines. A problem for me has been to sort out the significance of Salmonson and Russ, whose writing leaves me wanting to hide in a hole somewhere, from Wood and Gomoll with whom I'd like to talk sometime. Strident US women are a fact of life. Ever been told just what you've done wrong by Linda Bushyager or Joyce Scrivner? Positive discrimination is another thing that bothers me. I'd like women to have the same chance of getting a job like mine as I do. Rather than have to give up my job to a woman, as things stand it's more likely that I'll just be losing my job. 2½M unemployed by 1981 doesn't bode well for a service industry like computing.

Brian Earl Brown: Detroit

I enjoyed reading your Seacon report. So far I've seen maybe half a dozen con reports but for all that I haven't developed a complete impression of the con. A number of American reports croggled at the price of things - however, last night I heard that a hotel Autoclave wanted to use was projecting summer convention rates of \$50-60, equal to the Metropole's. Autoclave is a small regional con here in Detroit. Some have mentioned the crowded fanroom: your's was the first I recall mentioning the efforts of the hotel staff to close down parties.

'Fandom for Piggies' was an unexpected but needed criticism of British fandom. Feminism is still a hot topic over here, though with a growing segment who mutter 'enough, already' not from antipathy to feminism but from weariness of preaching. I'd long grown used to the male cliché atmosphere of British fanzines and had begun to think that no British fan took feminism seriously. I'm glad to see that a few do (at least two...). The sad part is that it wouldn't be hard to find as many and more sexist remarks in American fandom as you found in British fanzines.

There seems to be a fair amount of effort to 'mainstream' handicapped people back into society. Curbs everywhere are being knocked out and replaced with ramps at corners. Many new buildings are being designed to include ramps between levels or elevators. I don't know if this has been federally mandated in new building or reflects a growing social awareness among architects. The one big controversy is whether all buses should be equipped with lifts for wheelchairs, or a separate fleet of minibuses for the handicapped. I'm somewhat divided as to which I prefer.

I was going over photo 1 saying 'that's Ro, and Dave, and Mike, Pat, Glicksohn (I thought he was a thumb-print on the negative) etc, and -- Susan Wood?' The only time I've seen her (at Iguanacon) she had medium length very straight hair that I think was rather blondish. This fuzzy-topped woman looks more like Joan Hanke-Woods, the artist. But surely you know better than I who was present on the photo.

(++ it was indeed Susan Wood. She changed her hair shortly before we visited her in Vancouver last year, which caused problems when we were looking for her at the airport on our arrival, because she looked different from what we expected. We managed to get together in the end, though. ++)

Jessica Amanda Salmonson: Seattle

Having talked to several women who made it to Seacon, it is all the more amazing to me that you can expound with certain wisdom, because I have had the environment described to me. I'm told that

regular ol' newspapers have things like nekkid-lady fold-outs, and that advertisements and billboards sexually objectify women, in ways not seen in the U.S. in several years, and that the bulk of the attendees at Seacon were perfect examples of repressed and sometimes overt woman-haters. ("I don't hate women! I fuck them don't I?"). Your writing, Darroll, is genuinely like breathing fresh air in a polluted city. It gives me some small amount of faith in people, including men...

(++ The infamous Page Three in the 'Sun'. But as I think Ro mentioned in a letter to you recently, the reason such things don't turn up in American newspapers is perhaps not so much the less sexist nature of U.S. culture as that the papers are controlled by rather puritanical people who object to pin-up pictures for reasons quite different to ours.

Thanks for the compliment on my writing, but I wish you didn't find it sufficiently unusual that it inspires you to make it, if you see what I mean. I loved the card you wrote on, by the way.

As I mentioned in my comments a few pages back on Gary Farber's letter, my own perception of the people at Seacon who were most obnoxious to women was that a majority of them were Americans. Not being on the receiving end I can only speak for what I saw around me rather than from personal experience but it seems to me that that was so. Incidentally, one curious little male who was trying to chat up Jean Frost one night (on his knees, yet) kept using the phrase 'are you friendly?' as though it had some arcane meaning. Is this an American code for 'are you an easy lay?' or whatever? ++)

Jean Frost: Birmingham

First of all I'd like to clarify my views on FoE as stated in my last LoC. No, Friends of the Earth don't object to central heating - I myself would love to have it installed because it would help my arthritis, but I just can't afford it. All I was trying to point out was that people who can afford central heating can also afford other luxuries (which may be objectionable) which they are unwilling to give up or modify. Also, it is my opinion that FoE has no place in duplicating the activities of other organisations such as WI or RSPCA, but must concentrate on issues that are definitely the province of FoE. Yes, of course I am well versed in the subject of home food preparation, but if I wasn't I certainly wouldn't expect to be educated at FoE meetings - I'd go to cookery classes or something.

Right, who's next? Ah yes, silly idiot Joseph Nicholas doesn't like 'Dream-snake'. I bought this book last Saturday, started reading it on Sunday after you left and finished it early Monday morning. I just could not put it down. And you're completely right: it is non-sexist but it certainly doesn't push it down your throat. The central character, Snake, seemed so natural it was very easy to identify with her. Perhaps Joseph can't identify with women characters: learn, Joseph, women have had to identify with male central characters for a long time. On the subject of sexist literature, wait till Heinlein's latest comes out. Listen to this:

"Zebadiah, the mistake we made was not putting shoes on them or teaching them to read; we should never have taught them to talk!"

or this:

"...saw that my scrap of halter, like a good evening gown, made me nakeder than skin would have. My nipples popped out; I grinned and stuck out my tongue at them. They stayed up; I was happy."

I could quote from this for ever, but just one more quote and then I'll go away and quietly scream and kick the wall down.

"Let's break out the orange juice; our men will be waking any time. First secret of living with a man: feed him as soon as he wakes."

Aarrghhh! Bang! Crash! Thud! (etc). There, do I feel better? No, not really, 'cos this stuff is so bad it makes me want to vomit. It's pointless me saying any more about this, surely any fan in her/his right mind will disagree with Heinlein's philosophy? And now, just to finish off my stock of ammunition, yes, you're right, the Metropole was very bad for disabled people. I had a bit of difficulty with all those stairs, but it wasn't until I got home that a reaction set in and I had to have three days off work 'cos my knees and hips sort of seized up. I think sliding down the hotel stairs on a tray might have had something to do with it, though.

(++ Yes, Heinlein's books are terribly sexist (among other faults). One that sticks in my mind particularly is 'Farnham's Freehold' but the whole attitude displayed in his writing is one I find repellent. The quotations you give could be multiplied many times from just about any Heinlein novel. And yet Heinlein is one of the two or three names of SF authors that is familiar to most non-fans who I've talked to about SF. ++)

Joseph Nicholas: Camberley

'Fanzines' you say, 'are not designed to attract women into fandom'. Indeed not, since fanzines aren't designed to attract anybody into fandom. They're intended solely as a means of communication between like-minded individuals, individuals whose like-mindedness is taken as a precondition of their being in fandom in the first place. This is of course a pretty circular argument, but a substantially correct one, since people get into fandom mainly as a result of their interest in SF, and as I pointed out in my LoC in Gross Encounters-6, the very word 'science' is, in contemporary Western culture terms, a specifically male-oriented one. There are now a great many more female scientists than there were ten or fifteen years ago, but so far as relative numbers go they're still in the minority, and the prejudice still exists. But then all this is of course somewhat off the point; the point being that, as I said back at the beginning of this paragraph, fanzines aren't designed to attract anyone into fandom. You could perhaps point to Janus as an exception, but even so I suspect that it's really only preaching to the converted anyway, in much the same fashion as fanzines like Mota or Twll-Ddu are preaching to the converted. You either like what they're about before you even read them, or you don't (and no amount of devoted reading is likely to make you change your mind). And how could something like Janus attract women into fandom anyway? Is it sold on newsstands? Are any fanzines sold on newsstands? You get fanzines once you're in fandom, not as an inducement to join. (Yes I know there was once a BSFA service that induced people in such a fashion, but I'm talking about the present, not the past.)

You claim that 'positive discrimination is the only answer' to the repression that women are currently experiencing, and in the short term it may be. But in the long term it's likely to increase the extent of the repression by entrenching more deeply in their attitudes those who are already opposed to their 'liberation' and also send sauntering in the direction of those attitudes the essentially neutral, said neutrals being driven by a desire to silence the shouts of the 'positive discriminators' from a position of some integrity. In simple terms, the more you push for something, the more opposition you generate. Hence my dislike of 'strident feminists' - I know damn well they're only a minority but by Christ they don't half get up my nose. And in consequence their quieter and more sensible compatriots get tarred with the same brush.

Okay, so Dreamsnake isn't a homily to how wonderful the world will be when men have been removed from it. (And neither is it a novel, but a series of Analog novelettes cobbled together with some additional linking material, and hence little more than a collection of subplots in desperate search for an overall frame, said frame being Snake's quest for a replacement for Grass

so slender and forgettable a plot that at times you damn well do forget it). But it is a hymn to equality of the sexes, and the equality it depicts is so scrupulously worked out - along those well-worn Hollywood principles of not offending too many people - that it is completely implausible. Anyone who imagines that the sort of radiation-scarred post-holocaust world depicted in *Dreamsnake* would really be that much of a haven of sweetness and light is either an idiot or hopelessly naive. The modern world is vicious enough; how can McIntyre possibly imagine that a nuclear war will reduce that viciousness to the point of non-existence? It's embarrassing, and that's about the best I can say for *Dreamsnake*. It also didn't deserve a Hugo, but then neither did any of the other winners in the fiction categories. 1978 was an awful year for SF, and nobody can ever convince me otherwise.

All this however is completely off the point. My comment about the wonderfulness of a men-less world was intended as a sweeping (and tongue-in-cheek) generalisation; but you've treated it as a specific, and thus rather ruined your own argument.

You also ruin your argument by quoting those particular lines from Kev Smith's Dot 7; if nothing else, you expose yourself as completely lacking in a sense of humour. Come on, Darroll! Kev was just having a bit of fun at the expense of the feminists, not polemicising against 'womens' rooms' at Worldcons; and feminists are just as legitimate a target for a joke or two as anyone else. Yes, such jokes may well be offensive to them, but then all humour is in some way offensive to someone, and any attempt to establish 'protected areas' wherein the humourists may not tread will eventually result in the abolition of humour altogether. There are no sacred cows - only sacred cowherds, as a John W. Campbell editorial once said (about an Isaac Asimov story, I believe).

And what's so special about womens' rooms at conventions anyway? Nothing. Are they really so completely paranoid about their femininity that they need to hide themselves away in this fashion? Quite apart from the fact that the establishment of such rooms creates an automatic imbalance in the structure of the programme: if you're going to have discussion panels and such about "Women in Fandom" then why not similar for "Men in Fandom"? Why not go the whole hog and have panels devoted to "Joseph Nicholas in Fandom" or "Simone Walsh in Fandom" etc. In other words, there can be no special cases, lest the creation of one lead to the creation of ones for everything else as well.

I think that, one way or the other, you're over-reacting. This 'sexism' isn't part of some huge fandom-wide conspiracy against female fans, just part of the general kidding around that goes on in fandom, no more and no less; and to chide everyone for their bias is absurd. Have you thought, for example, of the women that go to conventions just to get laid? (Because there are some of that persuasion, and you can't realistically pretend otherwise). Are you going to claim that because they're women their view of men is completely free of bias?

(++ I think the idea of 'womens' rooms' at conventions is not as a hideaway but as a retreat, that is for women to go to when they feel oppressed by certain types of male behaviour (or maybe just by smoke) not as a place to hide away for a whole convention in. As to why women would need a retreat and not men, that goes along with your remark about women going to cons to get laid. Such a woman would have no difficulty, I think, in achieving her object without behaving obtrusively and offensively: but conventions do contain numbers of men who force their sexist behaviour on women without any regard for whether they're making themselves unpleasant - hence the need for a retreat for the women. ++)

Joy Hibbert: Matlock

Why the sudden interest in peoples' entry into fandom? Jean Frost shouldn't be ashamed - I went to the Asimov lecture in 1974 and the Trekkie con in 1975, both of which I found out about via the SFM. But it was through the SFM that I joined the Star-Trek club that introduced me to the lad who told me about Novacon 7 in time to go to it. There I was: never been the same since!

In Inca-1 Judy Mortimore puts into words something I've been trying to say since I first heard the idea: womens' programming at conventions. In effect she says that equality is 'sharing the discussions about sex, football and politics, instead of being expected to go off and talk about knitting and babies and the decor you fancy for the lounge'. Womens' programming is 'being sent into the lounge'.

I took Alan Dorey's and Rob Hansen's comments as funny. Alan's in particular, as he was laughing at himself. If the 'femmesfans' did only turn up to get laid, they wouldn't need sizing up. Graham's letter contradicts another fannish myth: that the females at Trekkie-cons would only be of interest to paedophiles.

The sort of thing I object to is in that ASTMS letter. Assumptions that a natural woman should only want to be a housewife and that married women only work for pin money. It reminds me of a conversation I had with my friend Steve. I was trying to find out the current state of his relationship with his girlfriend. The conversation went something like this:

S. "Joy, you stop asking me about Alison and I'll not tease you about not having a steady boyfriend."

J. "Why should I want a steady boyfriend?"

At the beginning of 'Hitchhiker' Arthur asks the bloke in charge of knocking his house down "Why do you have to build by-passes?" The effects on the people addressed were similar! Apparently I should want a steady boyfriend so I can get married. I should want to get married (a) so I can have children; (b) so I can leave work and let my husband keep me for the rest of my time. (I thought of lending him 'The Shattered Chain' but I decided he wouldn't understand it). This brings me to the main point of my letter: most women don't want to be equal. They are quite happy to go on as they have always done, relying first on a father, then on a husband. The story that Joe Nicholas mentioned offended me, but I can think of very few women outside fandom who don't answer to that description. This is the sort of comment you get - on one occasion at work I'd got on to the subject of a married woman I know who never wants children, and because of being on the pill has to constantly watch her weight. I said I couldn't understand why she didn't get sterilised, and my workmate was horrified. She had assumed that the woman wasn't having any children because her husband didn't want any, and when she got divorced because of this she'd want to get re-married and have children!

(++ equality surely implies that the men should share the conversation about knitting. However, conversation about sex and politics is more a kind of tribal totem than a genuine subject of interest to a lot of men. They talk about these things because it proves they're 'one of the lads'. ++)

Pamela Boal: Wantage

As you know, I feel you overstate the case as regards male chauvinism in fandom, yet I must admit Seacon provided evidence that the image is believed by outsiders. Our daughter had no complaints regarding the friendly acceptance from true fans. She was however first bored then increasingly irritated by a trio of young men who were acting on assumptions they believed to be well-known truths. The young men had not

been to a con before but they knew that females who were not the property of fans (of course in their context fans are male) were there simply because they were on the look out for men. My daughter went to Seacon because she is an SF reader and a fan. She was interested in attending various programme events and meeting and talking to true fen, as an independent person not as my daughter. As a family we had intended each to enjoy the con in our own way. First the lack of access made this impossible. When we had made some progress in getting around the access problem and Christine felt free to go off and do her own thing, she found she had the choice of creating a scene to convince the young men their attentions (and intentions) were not welcome or of keeping me company. Ironically our sons had no trouble finding the sort of young women that had come in for disco, drinks and men (in chronological order, rather than in order of what seemed to be on their minds) but certain things are available at all times and the boys had other reasons for attending the con. Eastercons are now large enough to attract sight-seers and non-fans, and inevitably there would be such people at an affair as large as the Worldcon. Even though I cannot pretend that fandom is free of chauvinism, it did seem that the young women who fostered its most offensive manifestations and the young men who most eagerly practised male chauvinism were not fans.

Take heart, Darroll, our sons are not exceptions amongst their peers in finding brainless girls undesirable, even as sexual partners. With young men expecting young women to be complete people and the battle for equal education and employment opportunities beginning to show results, the extremes on both sides will eventually fade away. Strident feminists are not a myth. Recently I contributed material and help to a woman writing a book 'Better Lives for Disabled Women', and to my horror when the book was published I discovered her extreme feminism, which does little to help the cause for women, with or without handicaps.

One does not have to love every member of a group, yes some male fans are sexist but it is a part of them, their makeup and personality. If it is so marked as to offend, there is plenty of room to avoid them. On the other hand some female fans have taken out their sexism and brandished it stridently, accosting all and sundry with their beliefs. I know that I can be a bore on the subject of 'disabled lib' but heaven forbid that I would ever corner somebody and shriek them down as half-witted traitors to their kind if they didn't happen to see the subject in the same light as I do. Yet feminists have done that to me.

(++ I often find a severe conflict between what I would like the future to develop into and what I think it is probably going to develop into in reality. Thus, while the 'fading away of extremes' you mention is very appealing, I suspect it may turn out rather like the Marxist 'withering away of the State'. I would like to see oppression of all kinds eliminated, but I have a pessimistic streak which says it probably won't be, whatever I do. That's no reason for not trying, of course. ++)

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The photographs on the front cover are all of Seacon, except the top left one which was taken at this years' Novacon.

top left- Kev Easthope and Ian Williams flipping beer mats (a merry sport)
top right - Pete Weston in the beach cricket match at Seacon.
middle left - Edgar Belka.
middle right - (L to R) Jean Frost, me, Janice Maule, Ian Maule.
bottom left - Janet Bellwether.
bottom right - (L to R) Pat Meara, Mike Meara, Jean Frost.

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LES SPINGE 36 comes from Darroll Pardoe, 38 Sandown Lane, Liverpool L15 4HU, England, and is dated December 1979. Availability: if you have to ask, it probably isn't.