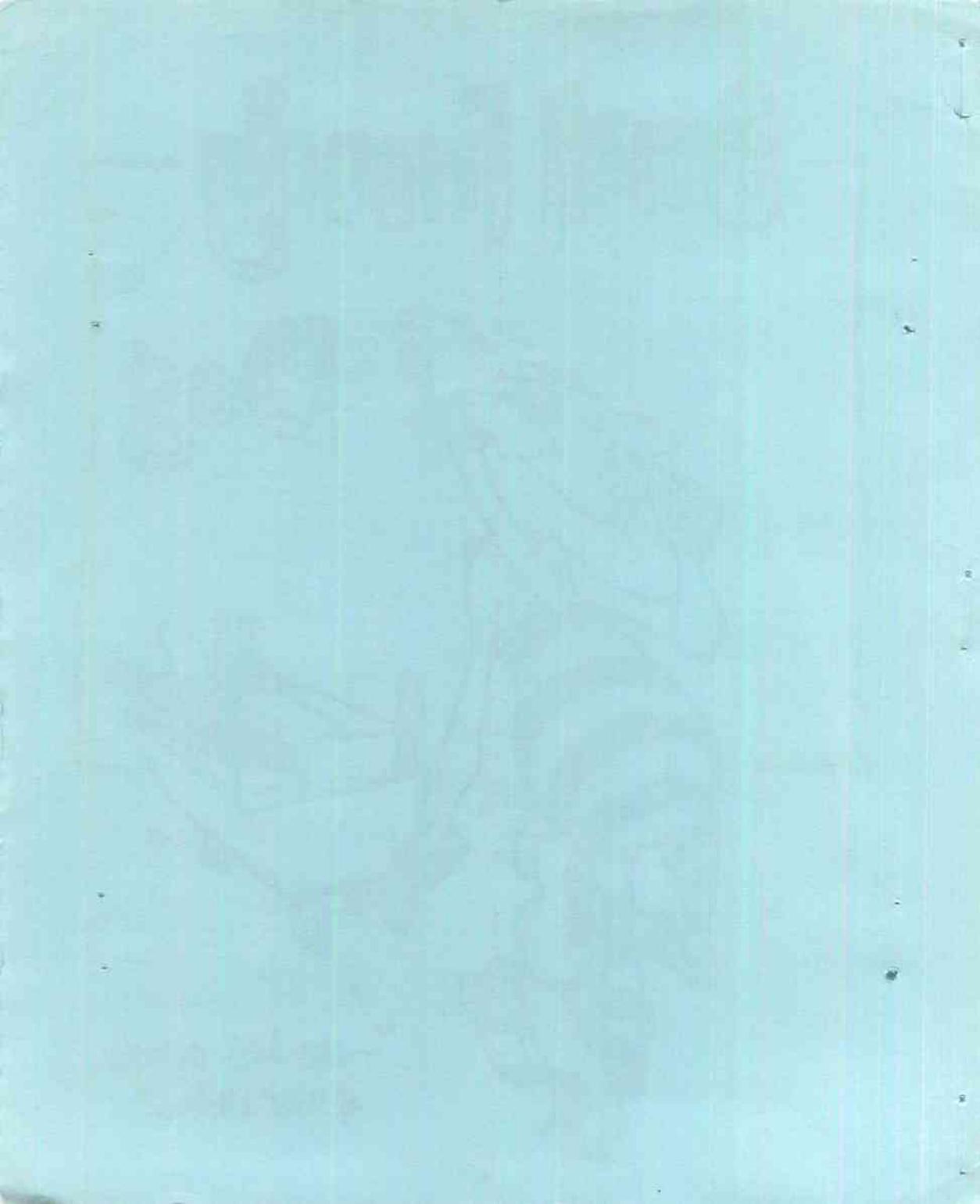


Small Friendly

Dog



"...the best example
of 'nice' fandom."



'Twas brillig, and the slithy faned
did gyre and gimble (and pub his ish),
all mimsey were the lines that scanned
and the momerath...was no longer in residence.

Now from the above (Pay attention now, class) we can all clearly see why Skelton decided not to devote his life to the immortal muse, but instead chose to ac fannishly (Quiet there, Langford minor). Even in the above piece though we can see the underlying pain in the subtle reference to his dropping Eli Cohen from his mailing list, for lactivity, after TZTHNN 3. We can see too the general allusion that so many american fans do not stay in one place long enough for the zines he sends out to actually catch up with them. The ink on his file cards has barely had chance to dry before they're up and away again to pastures and addresses new. Let us see what kernels of truth can be gleaned from what is generally considered to be his masterpiece. Let us look closely at the first verse (Langford minor, I won't tell you again):-

The boy stood by the burning duper
whence all but he had fled
and cranked on in his drunken stupor
to put his ish to bed.

Now then class, what hidden layers of meaning has he artfully concealed within that verse. Come on, who's going to get us started...yes, young Ashley, you first.

"Duh, like, on account of the duper was on fire, uh-sir, don't that mean, like, that his fanzine was, uh, Hot Stuff?"

Brilliant, young Ashley. What a clever little sod you are. See, the zine in question was SFD 22, the epitome of the fanzine art, which Skel and Cas published from that hotbed of fannish activity, 25 Bowland Close, Offerton, Stockport, Cheshire, SK2 5NW, England. Right, anyone else got anything to add here...yes Goodall...pardon...speak up boy!

"The third line sir, isn't this a reference to his trying

to dull the raw pain of real communication with the blessed anodyne of the grape?"

No, clever dick, it means he was a lush. No, no, you're all missing it. You're missing the crux. Look, look at line two, "...whence all but he had fled." He is crying out in the wilderness. He is alone. He can no longer get his wife to write anything for their fanzine. Even she has deserted him. Distraught and destroyed he turns his back on the outside world, on his friends, his job, even on his marriage. No more nights of sexual ecstasy with his wife and her leather accoutrements. Now, symbolically, it is their fanzine which he takes into his marriage bed. Now can you see it? What now does this tell us about this poor, tortured soul? What deep and bitter truths does this reveal?

"Er, he was a Pillock, sir."

Yes, yes, but what else? Come one Glicksohn, boy, finish it off. What else, what else.

"Was he, er...was he stuck for a way to start SFD 22, uh, sir? Was he?"

At last! Honestly, I think you boys get more stupid every year. Here it is, nearly ten months since he last typed a stencil for SFD. He was out of practice. He had to work his way back into it. The evidence is all there. Look, nearly two pages and still nothing but waffle (*BRRRNG-BRRRNNG*).

Right, there's the bell - class is over. Sit down Langford, I haven't dismissed you yet. Now, for homework...

"AWWW, SIR..."

"Silence! Now homework. I want you all to read the rest of this fanzine very carefully. Pardon? Oh, all right Akien, get your mother to read it to you then. Then I want you all to write an enormously long LoC. What's that Smith? No, you can't do a trip report instead. Do the set work first - you can swank off about your colonial adventures later. Dismiss!

23 NOVEMBER 1982 (SKEL)

Ahhhh, 'Return Of The Two-Page Colophon Creatures From Outer Space' -- makes me feel better already. The contributors' copies of T'ZTHNN 3 went into the mail a week ago and here I sit tippy-typing away -- and I haven't even collated all the other copies. A novel approach to fanac, one might say, swimming strongly against the Real-soon-now Current. But then there are those who take me to task regarding my flouting of the conventional niceties. David Palter is one such, quoth he: "This is the only fanzine I have ever seen (and, as Carl Sagan is wont to say, I've seen billions and billions of them) in which the editors are identified only by a single monosyllable (which I would guess to be your first names in an abbreviated form). Who are you really? Are you trying to conceal the true source of SFD? Are you funded by the Kremlin, in an effort to further their subversion of Britain? You can't fool me, Ronald Reagan has told me all about your type." This Earth-creature is getting too close to the truth, Cas, we shall have to cloud its mind. Quick, the Zorg Ray.

There's no sneaking these things past Patrick Nielsen Hayden either, who says: "By the way, was it by design or accident that your full name appears nowhere in this issue of SFD, not even in the colophon? /**Yes, Patrick, it was by design or accident**/ Either way, it's something of an achievement in the annals of fannish informality. Not that there's anything wrong -- I knew what the zine was and who published it before I'd even managed to wrestle it out of our convoluted mail drop box and lay eyes on it. SFD has character, I'll give it that." How terribly un-British of me. Here I am sending SFD out to all these chums...and we've never been formally introduced. I don't think our formal names have seen print in aye these many yonks, but then I'm not in fandom for formality -- I'm in it for friendship, and to my friends I'm 'Skel'. Cas is 'Cas' period, even to the bureaucratic minions of Her Majesty's Government. Was that all, Patrick, or is there something else bothering you?

'Mind a small quibble? I think the term 'Sixth Fandom' is getting a bit overused. In the original Silverberg schema

its meaning was limited to the period from 1950 to about 1953; that is, the lifetime of QUANDRY. It's not a generic term for The Glorious Past, whenever that was.

I only bring it up because you refer to WARHOON as a fanzine "linked to that... era of sixth fandom." It isn't, really. The first issue of Wrhn came out in 1952, but it and the following five issues weren't really the fanzine we know today by that name. In fact, they were pretty terrible ditto'd crudzines for SAPS. The "real" Wrhn started in 1959, with Bergeron's re-entrance into fandom after a long gafia, and is much more strongly linked with the early '60s period of HABBAKUK, VOID, LIGHTHOUSE etc. I suppose a case could be made for linking Wrhn with 6th Fandom through Bergeron's obvious present interest in the period, but in that case BOONFARK is a 6th Fandom fanzine as well, and this could get ridiculous. In fact, it may be already; I remember rich brown's suggestion for a Society for Creative Fanachronism in which members could zip up and down the fannish time-line at will, arguing with Ackerman in VoM one minute and getting reviewed in FOULER the next; fanhistory as smorgasbord. I'm not quite sure what brings this to mind; something about Fandom Today... Anyway, end of quibble: just my way of contributing to your estimable journal of Subtle Fanhistorical Ditherings."

Mea Culpa. Of course, I could always claim to have been misled by the dates, but it would be a lie. I was, in effect, guilty of using '6th Fandom' as a generic term for a bygone Golden Age. It's my egocentricity showing. I started to get into fanzine fandom at the beginning of the seventies and I sort of lumped everything before that into a 'Pre-Skel' era of fandom and blithely considered everything within that category to be contemporaneous.

Of course one of my problems is my relative isolation -- my not having access to all these old zines leaves me ignorant of so much of fandoms heritage and at the same time prevents me from getting a proper 'feel' for these historical periods. Mind you, Vinç Clarke was muttering about lending some of his collection out in NOT SCIENCE FANTASY NEWS 2. Just send along the first assorted cwt, Vinç, we'll narrow it down from there.

Ten days after getting Patrick's comments rich brown hauled me over the same set of coals, covering all the same points in such a similar way that I won't bother quoting from his letter. It'll save space if you go back and reread Patrick's comments but pretend it's rich this time. Others too commented on my 'Ace Fnz' piece.

Terry Jeeves said he "Was saddened to see that ERG wasn't listed among the basic fanzine list." But it wasn't a basic list, Terry. It was a list of what I consider to be the cream and even when it was at what I considered to have been its best ERG was not one of the very top fanzines. Quite some time back it seems to me that ERG started taking itself too seriously and lost much of its sense of fun, a change I identify as starting when you got on the publishers' review lists and started filling more and more pages with book reviews. Again, it was purely a personal reaction. The bits of ERG which I enjoyed the most were being replaced by items of very little personal interest. Of late however, it seems to me that ERG is beginning to feel its way back to its strengths.

John Owen wrote "Hope that CRYSTAL SHIP 5 pushes my own efforts up a little in the 'Skel Fanzine Rating Table' - I'm determined to break into that top echelon, if only to get another British zine in there (Whatsamatter, you getting ready to emigrate or something?)." And it was very impressive, particularly Martin Helsdon's artwork. In fact on this topic I think I will let Gary Deindorfer display his apparent precognitive powers in his comment, "Good to see a letter from John Owen. His fanzine, CRYSTAL SHIP, is a novelty for me in that it is one of the few English fanzines I have ever seen that emphasizes the sercon side of things, and I must say that the Martin Helsdon art in CS5 is unbelievably good, much better than most prozine art/Just a cotton-picking minute -- whose fanzine are we LoCing here? OK, Deindorfer, now concentrate, and let's get it right this time./ Of your list of the magic seven zines, the only one I don't get is Q36. In fact, I've never heard of it before. I agree about the others being top grade, except that sometimes I think GROGGY has an off issue, when Eric allows his writing to dwell too much on slice-of-life stuff. BOONFARK is a special favorite of mine, because

of Dan Steffan's very offbeat, droll personality; TELOS 3 was fantastically good, likewise WARHOON 29; PONG is a gas and TWLL DDU is inimitable. And now Ted White's GAMBIT is just about up there with them. TAPPEN is no slouch either. Things are looking up lately with faanish fanzines."

"Your comments on fanzines were interesting, especially since I got my Hugo ballot today and had to think about artists, writers and fanzines worth nominating." This from Mike Glicksohn, who continues, "Writers were no problem, even if most of them were English and I had to leave out some of my favorite North Americans. Artists were a little harder since several of my perennial nominees weren't all that active last year. Still, I found five who deserve the recognition of a nomination. But fanzines were a much trickier problem (and that's even considering the fact I only had to find four!). I haven't seen a BOONFARK, there was only one WARHOON, I'm not even sure TELOS qualifies, I can't remember the last issue of TWLL DDU, GROGGY isn't a Hugo-nominee to me.....and so on and so on. PONG got the nod and I eventually decided WARHOON merited one as well but it certainly reinforced the idea that it had been a lean year. I nominated TAPPEN as well, although you didn't seem to rate it highly...or at least I'll nominate it as soon as I see if it's published often enough! HMMMMM."

Well, it's not that I didn't rate it highly -- I simply didn't rate it at all. I'd not seen a copy when I wrote that piece. I got onto Malcolm's mailing list with TAPPEN 4 (and have also since seen issue 5) and it's an OK fanzine, but the cream it isn't. I thought the quality must have dropped coincidentally with me getting it, especially after all the fantastic praise it's had, but that's not the case (at least not according to Ted White in, I think, GAMBIT 56). Anyway Mike, you may not remember the last TWLL DDU, but someone's memory is made of sterner stuff. Dave Langford writes, "I do this thing called TWLL-DDU once in a while. Ah yes. Nice to know someone likes it, with millions of people (collective term: an ashley of iconoclasts) writing in to assure me that it's all tired and boring and aged and weary and bloody hell, I'm only 29. (Until April. The chill breath of time on the back of my neck, etc.)"

Still on the topic of 'The Fanzine Hall Of Fame - 1982's Branch', Michael Hall writes, "I've been in fandom since 1976, and while I still mourn the passing of KARASS, we have FILE 770 (yes, I know, but still...), and great fanzines like TAPPEN, GAMBIT, TELOS, MAINSTREAM, RUNE and quite a few others." I wouldn't have an opinion on RUNE, the editors apparently having lost interest in me. Then again, there is a conflicting view from John Purcell who says, "Like you, I enjoy every zine I get, but for the most part I could do without them. The ones I would definitely miss are SMALL FRIENDLY DOG, TELOS, Q36, PONG, BOONFARK, GAMBIT, MAINSTREAM, WARHOON, and HOLIER THAN THOU. Once RUNE would have been up among that crowd, but no longer. RUNE currently exhibits the same "Youthful enthusiasm" as RAGNAROK and OVERDROWNED (p23), most of it misdirected. I have been receiving a fair number of zines that display this same characteristic. Mind you, we were like that once, too, you know. (*ghasp* Fannish old age! I need another beer...) Our enthusiasm has been tempered with the wisdom ageing and experience imparts. What we have to do with these young farts is to be patient and understanding until the sods grow up. I think, though, that the fanzine scene is fairly healthy again. Some old-timers are pubbing again and a few of the new zines show a helluva lot of promise."

I agree. I feel pretty good about the fanzine scene just at the moment. Mind you, I am on my third pint of strong homebrew. It also helps that I am currently undergoing an upswing in my personal fanac and feel enthusiastic in this regard. It is noticeable how many people say what a drag the whole thing is -- and then gafiate, whilst those whose fanac is on the upswing tend to be much more optimistic. Fandom definitely displays fanic-depressive tendencies.

A STATEMENT OF (TEMPORARY) POLICY

You'll have noticed that so far I've only been using short quotes from LoCs rather than publishing them at greater length as is my wont. There is a reason for this. There are 75 letters in my LoC-file and, because I published an issue of TZTHNN in between, most are as topical as the Dead Sea Scrolls.

So, I will be culling snippets. Doubtless some will see this as a bold evolutionary step. A radical new species of SFD now going forth to vie and strive in a whole new evolutionary niche. Others, reading this paragraph, will doubtless realise that I'm pissed as a rat again. Methinks 'tis time I brought you all up to date on happenings skelish, so herewith a review of that famous Harlan Skellison story:-

A BOY AND HIS (SMALL FRIENDLY) DOG

When last we left our doughty hero his wife's grip on reality could only be compared with Keith Walker's grasp of the technique of mimeography. Now she is so improved that this year, two years on from her Novacon disintegration, we were able to return to the scene of the crime. Yes, the Skeltons have attended another convention. Only in fandom twelve years and already they've been to eleven conventions. Whatever is the youth of today coming to? (Notice the subtle distortion in the skelish self-view).

I enjoyed Novacon 12, though only on my terms. I still find that too much face-to-face fanac overloads me. There were times when Cas really had to nag at me to get me to go back downstairs to where things were happening. "But Cas, there are all those people down there, and I've nothing to say to them." There are times when all I want to do is hide away in my bedroom (or to be strictly accurate, in Gerald Lawrence's bedroom as we were freeloading again). New folks I met were Colin Fine and Judith Hanna. I did not scintillate. I think the sum total of my remarks were "Hi" (to Colin) and "Er, er, hello." (to Judith -- I tend to be more hesitant and formal with female fans, especially Australian female fans who I understand eat English fans. That is not only during mating but also after mating, before mating, instead of mating, and at Novacons). I also sat quietly in the background whilst Cas got on famously with Kevin Smith (whose talent and intellect completely overawes me) and Rochelle Dorey (whose baby and left breast were equally overbearing -- in regard to breast feeding I am a child of the times. Whilst intellectually I accept it as perfectly natural, in practice I keep feeling that I shouldn't be looking and end up with a cricked neck

through trying not to stare whilst at the same time trying not to not stare. There were so many women breast-feeding babies at Novacon that I must have looked like a refugee from from a tennis tournament.

Also, it might have been Mike Hamilton rather than Colin Fine, that I nearly talked to. Like I said, on the ball I wasn't. Oh, the hell with it, let's actually print a letter rather than just some snippets. Take it away Bruce....

BRUCE D. ARTHURS 3421 W. Poinsettia; Phoenix, AZ 85029; U.S.A.

I'm not certain what, if anything, I should say about Cas' problems. It sounds much like what Hilde goes through whenever she gets back on her 800-calorie-a-day diet, such as the last couple of days. She tends to become irritated at even the smallest evidences of Murphy's law in effect, and wails and complains about them. I, of course, remain calm, reasonable and soothing /*sounds familiar*/...which naturally drives Hilde from a state of irritation into one of outright fury /*sounds very familiar*/. This is one of those instances where Hilde's arthritis is an asset, as it keeps her from throwing the crockery or the cat or anything else handy at me. (After we go to bed though, I sometimes have to spend hours weaving and dodging and wrestling to try and keep her fingers out of my damnably ticklish armpits.)

Didja know that Niven has an outline for a novel he never intends to write, called 'Down In Flames'? It was thought of expressly to put an end to the 'Known Space' series, and reveals that everything you know about 'Known Space' is wrong. The galactic core isn't really exploding, therefore the Puppeteer worlds aren't really fleeing from it. The Slaver race never really existed, so the tnuclipun aren't really extinct. And so on. S'truth, I've seen a copy of the outline.

Thrilling Vibrator stories - a few months ago Hilde and I were invited to a "Paraphenalia Party". We got the impression that this was some sort of 'bring your own vibrator' affair. But no, the lady organizing this said she'd have available a variety of different types and sizes of *ahem* "Love aids",

with demonstrations, and we could even buy some of the stuff for our own use if we were impressed. All this sounded an awful lot as if Tupperware was getting into a new line of plastics, and everyone knows what a crashing bore a Tupperware party is (Tupperware?!? Oh my god, I just realized.....), so we ended up declining the invitation.

A while ago in FLAP I was commenting on one of Dave Locke's zines, which for some reason brought forth from me a couple of Tim Kyger stories. I mentioned the occasional urge I had to tell people how Tim Kyger came out of the closet at Suncon, but that wouldn't have been a true story because Tim actually came in the closet; it was the only spot of privacy he could find to share with the young lady he'd met. Then I mentioned the New Year's Eve party in Tucson where Tim fell asleep on the bed where everyone was tossing their coats and jackets, eventually becoming completely covered by coats as more people arrived and laid them on the bed, and also on Tim. Later, the mundane fellow whose room it actually was arrived home with girlfriend in tow, took her to his room, locked the door, disrobed, and, uhh, laid said girlfriend on the bed next to this large pile of coats.

Now, Skel, those two anecdotes are bizarre enough, but listen to this: Having typed those two Tim Kyger stories in response to Dave Locke's FLAPzine, I moved on to the next page of Dave's zine.....and found myself reading how Dave Locke, as a young whippersnapper, had once, at a New Year's Eve party(!), made love to a young woman(!!), in a closet(!!!), on top of a pile of coats(!!!!!).

Which only goes to show, I guess, that Tim Kyger still hasn't done anything original.

GOD, I HATE IT WHEN THAT HAPPENS, BRUCE.....

.....no, I don't mean people using you as a coat rack, I mean when you write something and then discover almost immediately that it's old hat. This seems to happen to me a lot. Just the other week I was writing a letter to Dick Bergeron in response to WARHOON 30 and in the middle of it I got into this

rap about my lousy memory, likening the concept of memory to a psi power and explaining that, to me, the concepts of 'memory' and 'telepathy' were equally fantastic. Here, I thought, I was making an original connection. The very next day I received another parcel from Dick - three back issues of WARHOON, and in one of them there was John W. Campbell himself saying that, for all anybody new different, memory might be a psi-power. Hotdamn!

At least it makes a change, to be re-tracing the literary footsteps of JWC. At one time I thought I had been predestined to rewrite old Willis material. A long time ago I made some startlingly unoriginal observations (as it later proved) about why toast always seemed to land butter-side down. Terry Jeeves sent me a copy of an old article of his on the same topic and pointed out that Willis had been there first. Way back in INFERNO/SFD 1 I did this Pythonesque bit using what I thought was a whole new concept, 'Interfauna'. Recently I've discovered 'Willis was here' graffitti in those self same workings. Thank god I never came up with the idea of 'Proxy-boo'. Fortunately, Walt, you are so famous that, if you'd ever published a zine called SMALL FRIENDLY DOG, I'd have heard of it.....wouldn't I?

19 DECEMBER 1982 (SKEL)

Only six more days before Father Christmas comes. Oook, I can hardly wait. Whilst I am waiting though I suppose I'd better appologise and explain certain things to my overseas readers. Doubtless you wondered, muttering darkly the while, why it took so fucking long for you to get your copies of TZTHNN 3. Ah, yes, well.....

Already I have a couple of responses to the UK copies and as yet not a single zine has gone into the 'surface mail' box. The thing is, we managed to send a lot of UK copies out with our Christmas cards, killing two birds with one postage stamp. However, we don't send many cards abroad (What? At 40p a time? You think we're made of money, or something?) so this saving was denied us. The problem is something called 'cash-flow' which I'm sure Kevin Smith, ace fan accountant, can explain to

to you, for a not-unreasonable fee. The root cause is this thing called 'Christmas' which acts in some quasi-thiotimolinish manner to absorb 100% of the skelfinances before I even get to see them. At least a week before I've earned the money Cas has, by muttering the magic words "Credit Card", rushed out and spent it such essentials as 'Cheek-a-Boos', 'Pierrot Dolls', and '16k memory extensions'.

"But," I mutter, "What about all these copies of TZTHNN? I need about £20.00 for postage."

"Later dear," she mutters, kissing me distractedly and heading straight back out again. As she disappears into the distance I vaguely hear, borne on vagrant breezes, cries of "Turkey," and "Christmas tree - wrapping paper - minced meat - trifle-sponges, etc." until it fades into a background noise that sounds just like the word 'bankruptcy' being endlessly repeated.

Sorry guys. I did try, honest.

Actually, this is today's third stencil. It would have been about the twenty-third except that I idly picked up N. J. Crisp's 'The Gotland Deal' this morning and started to read it. According to the cover blurb this is "The international spy thriller of the year." The year was 1976 and I'll go along with that description, though admittedly ignorant of just which thrillers were written in which years. It's certainly a credible contender. N. J. Crisp has done a lot of scripts for BBC television series and this shows in his ability to create credible characters. I picked this up for fivepence from the charity stall in Stockport market. I'd have been happy to have bought it as a new hardback. Should you come across it, grab it. It won't disappoint you. N. J. Crisp is now an author I shall seek out at every opportunity.

Another author I've been reading a lot of recently is Robert Ludlum. More thrillers. I've now read almost everything he's written up-to-and-including 'The Bourne Identity' which is definitely the best so far. Unfortunately this was the first Ludlum I read and only 'The Matarese Circle' even

issues 15, 16, 17, 18, and 21, then you only count from number 21. This is a bit more arbitrary. My only excuse for this is that you wouldn't believe how many people on my mailing list have missed the odd issue now and then. Even I don't believe it, and I know what an impetuous, unforgiving, chop-the-ungrateful-sods-from-my-mailing-list-and-it-serves-the-ungrateful-fuckers-right bastard I am. So, up to and including SFD 21, here are the facts:-

Only 4 readers have been with us since the first issue. That's less than 2.7% of my current mailing list. This is not too surprising as back then INFERNO/SFD was an OMPazine, with a print run of less than thirty copies (I know, I know, but it seemed perfectly logical at the time). Even at issue number 4 there's still just the same four readers. With issue number five we pulled INFERNO/SFD out of OMPA and a further 12 of you have been around since then. Altogether then, 10.5% of my current mailing list have been around since issue 5. Swooping nearer to the present, 31 of you (20.7%) of you have been on the list since issue 10. Another giant step reveals that 49 readers (32.7%) have been getting SFD since issue 15.

In fact, the vast majority of SFD readers have been receiving it for five issues or less - 100 of you to be precise (66.7%) and in fact 70 of you joined the SFD-is-triffic club within the last three issues. To put that another way, nearly 54% of the people who got SFD 18 are no longer on the mailing list. I can't speak for other faneds among you but it seems to me that this is an incredibly high turnover.

Now why all this should come as a surprise to me I don't know. The fact is that, since SFD 21 the number of people I have underlined/dropped has increased each issue. I need to find about twenty new readers each issue to replace readers who no longer consider SFD worth making a significant response every-third-issue for (and no, Gil, I don't consider a fart-arseing postcard marked DNQ every few issues to be an adequate response).

As to what all this means -- that's something else again. I guess it explains why you folks just don't have the brand

so many advantages that they make Superman and Kimball Kinneson look insecure. The hero, who wouldn't even agree to incarnate in human form until the gods gave him invincible armour, an unbeatable weapon, a wonder horse, a swimming pool, a house in the suburbs, and a coupon good at the nearest McDonald's for all the fried camel chips he can eat, is trooping through a mountain pass with his army of soldiers, demi-gods, bodhisatvas and the like, when everyone (including the reader) is terrified to find the way blocked by "...an enormous dong..." Freudianism rears its unsightly head, only to be made limp again by a footnote which explains that a dong is a kind of Tibetan wild yak. We are not told if it was somewhat furry or not.

COLIN FINE 7 Gifford's Close; Girton; Cambridge; CB3 0PF.

How long have you been ringing changes on the title? The reason I ask is that the Cambridge University SF Society's groupzine TITLE TO BE ANNOUNCED (aka TTBA) has had a different title (with the same initials) since sometime in its fourth year. It gives the University Library some fun: for a time they tried manfully cataloguing it thus:-

TREADING ON TRUFFLES IS BAD FOR THE ARCHES, 4iv, continuation of TITLE TO BE ANNOUNCED 1974-7...but then they saw the light and now list TELEPATHIC TORMENT FROM A BOG IN ALDRESHOT, THIAZOLE TWO BUTANOIC ACID and the rest as cross references to a main entry. On one occasion the editor at the time took along a copy of his first issue to the library, and mistakenly went to the accession department. They told him it should go to Periodicals, and somebody offered to show him where to go. On the way his guide said, "I hope you keep up this business with the titles: we like to see that lot in Periodicals buggered about a bit."

26 DECEMBER 1982 (SKEL)

I dunno about the title-changes in respect of SFD ('cos I can't be bothered looking it up) but the concept certainly goes back to FART 1 (FICKLE ANTS READ TIT-BITS) though FANS AGAINST RONEO TROUBLES 2 still hasn't appeared, which means

that I've been doing it with one zine or another since the back end of 1974.

GOSH! SANTA'S BEEN, SANTA'S BEEN.

I think Santa must have got his addresses muxed ip this year, completely muxed ip. Instead of the usual left-handed framis blomper, assorted boxes of milk (yechh!) chocolates and thirteen gross of what appears to be, from judicious sniffing, yak's urine in aftershave bottles, this year he's gone and left me some pretty ace presents.

The kids clubbed together to get Cas and I the new Linda Ronstadt LP and my brother bought 'us' another LP, Willie Nelson's 'Always On My Mind'. Whilst these were 'our' presents, I got to pick them as part of a reciprocal arrangement involving my prezzy from Cas's parents.

Jackie (which is spelled 'm-a-b-e-l' on her birth certificate, but then her daughter's, Cas's, name is spelled 'c-a-r-o-l' so I'm not too surprised) anyway, Jackie rang up to ask what I wanted for Christmas...so I told her. "I'm sorry," she said. "I'm afraid you'll have to repeat that. It must be a bad line - it sounded to me as if you said 'a toilet seat'."

Well, the problem was that our upstairs toilet seat had self-destructed. First off, it had split in two and whilst this might have been serviceable in a pinch (ho-ho), the fixings then snapped leaving the various fragments completely detached. Well, it had only been a flimsy plastic thing anyway. The trouble was that the state of the skelfinances meant that its replacement would have been even cheaper and shoddier. Now I've always wanted a bespoke bog seat, something solid and firm, and a pleasure to sit on. Something that was comfortable enough for, say, 'Dune' rather than just a couple of Keith Walker's fanzine reviews. So, by getting it as a christmas present I was able to satisfy my longstanding ambition. The one we got is so solid it will last forever. Successive generations of Skeltons will pass it down to their heirs. Eventually it will become so old that american tourists will come across to photograph it. If they forget their cameras I will be able to rent them my super new Kodak instant job at an exhorbitant fee.

The whole of the skelfamily trops around to my parents on Christmas Day for the traditional meal, which gives Cas a nice break. I took my new camera around this year and really enjoyed seeing the results there and then. Another benefit I found was knowing just which shots hadn't worked and why.

Of course another benefit will be that I can take some glamour pictures of Cas. Towards this end another of my presents was a special accessory for the amateur pornographer. Cas bought me a set of very sexy lingerie. She will wear them but she is perfectly correct in saying that they are my present.

My other brother bought me a coffee-table cookbook, as did Cas. I like these sort of cook-books. I am a very visual person. I hate cookery books that don't have lots of coloured pictures of the dishes they describe. I am not a cook. Cas will often say, looking at a recipe, "How do you fancy trying this?". Then she'll reel off a string of ingredients and instructions, of which I manage to retain at the most a couple, and there's no way I can imagine the finished dish. I am a culinary illiterate - I need the pictures.

My mother bought be a new leather briefcase as my old one, also a present from my mother and bought when I started my second job, was on its last legs. I'd been looking around lately at some executive cases to replace my old briefcase but even at £25+ all I saw were some nice looking but not very solid plastic covered things which wouldn't have lasted more than a year or two.

I also got a box of plain chocolates.

All in all I've done bloody well, but Christmas is a time of giving, of thinking of others. Somehow I can't help thinking about that poor sod somewhere who's got my 1,872 bottles of yak's piss -- and laughing myself silly.

ON YOUR BIKE

I got quite a bit of response to my bike pieces. Keith A. Williams wrote, "Interesting theory about the bike-spanner. Sounds like it would make a great weapon for a professional assassin. It could look like an accident. Of course he would have to plant a

I shouldn't have been on his side of the road, I suppose. Actually I shouldn't have been riding at all, I was so drunk I couldn't see most of what was in front of me. I have two lovely long scars on my shoulder where my T-shirt was friction-burnt into it, when I slid along the curb after my close encounter. Didn't feel a thing.

1982 has been very quiet for me really. It's very difficult to see where I had two stitches behind my ear recently. The scar on my thumb where I broke a whisky glass is fairly small and the palms of my hands have healed perfectly since I did an impersonation of Superman without his innate ability. Yes, it's been almost two weeks since I've had an accident."

Fresh from his inertia about council-house sales Harry Bell brings his awesome enthusiasm to bear on the subject of cycles:- "I can understand the attraction of a bike. As a kid I had a red Raleigh (rod-brakes though, and no drops) and I rode it into the ground. I've considered buying another in the last few years but this area simply isn't suited to bikes - all hills and river valleys. I never found it much fun pushing bikes up fucking great hills...bad enough having to walk up them. This summer I went to France with Kev and Sue Williams, Greg and Linda Pickersgill, Andy Firth and Henry Pijohn, and to try to give us an independence from the two cars Henry and I hired two bikes, but now I can't be bothered to tell you about them." Sometimes Harry, I think it's a fucking good job that breathing is 'automatic'.

Mike Glicksohn also told of his daring exploits in actually riding a bike... "I can never remember wanting a bike. In fact, when my Dad got me a bike, when I was about twelve, I can remember being paralysed with fear at the thought of having to ride it. That I was four feet five and the bike was five feet four may have had something to do with it, but I've always been reluctant to drive things. Dad forced me to ride the thing though, and I'm very glad he did. I own a three-speed Raleigh now (never could see the need for ten speeds and racing handlebars in the city) and putter around on it in the warmer months. It's certainly good exercise and a hell of a lot cheaper (and frequently faster for even medium-length trips) than the busses and subways."

You must be fitter than me, Mike. I can't even put my bike-

clips on unless I'm in bottom gear. "I recall that I did it much like you, except more frequently and regularly." So boasts the now retired Frank Denton on a completely unrelated topic (I think). On the subject of bikes he had this to say: "'The Bright Red Dream Machine' was a good piece, worth the price of the entire magazine. Bikes are the same the world over. They give a great deal of freedom and expand the geography of a youngster twenty-fold. You ought to expand this piece and see about selling it to one of those other kinds of magazines, the kind that pay." Whow, that's really wierd. I am fond of giving Eric Mayer just such advice after reading one or another of his tremendous articles, and here is someone saying the same thing to me about an article in which I deliberately set out to capture some of the 'feel' of an Eric Mayer piece.

You said that bikes are the same the world over. That's what I figured. When I read my piece I thought I had to have stumbled onto a winner, the perfect fan article. Virtually every kid had a bike, right? 150 fans would read SFD 21 and would fondly recall their own bicycle experiences. Filled with the warm glow of nostalgia they would rush pen to paper and I would receive 150 ten-page letters filled with cycling reminiscences. I still can't figure out what went wrong, but something did, very much after the fashion of those films about the perfect crime where some unplanned and freakishly unlikely event invariably ensured that crime would not be seen to pay. Somewhere out there, out in the cosmic and spiritual infinities, there does indeed exist an omnipotent entity and an overriding purpose. That entity must have reached toward you all in some psychic fashion and clouded your minds just as you were heading for the typewriter for the ultimate cosmic purpose is to ensure that Skel never gets anything right.

I suspect that The Son Of God is about due for a second coming. Obviously he will have to be born into a persecuted minority and what minority is more persecuted than trufandom, than fanzine fandom which is even now being spurned by a fandom which owes it its very existence.

The tribes of fandom are bowing down before false gods and espousing false doctrines (WARHOON 28, they decreed, is not a fnz). But the Son of God will soon come amongst us again, to save us from

our selves. He will walk through the convention, casting out the hucksters. The trekkies will not confound him. "Render unto Spock that which is Spock's." he will tell them when they seek to trap him. Doubtless, when the roomparties run out of booze he will perform some kind of miracle and turn the Watneys into something drinkable. When the entire convention membership is hungry he will feed them all on two cartons of milk and five pork pies from Brian Burgess's suitcase. He will found an apa and invite twelve relative neos in to join him/ but then nobody is perfect/

But how shall we recognise him?

Well, obviously, it must be in such a way that we trufans see instantly who he is whilst all the other cretins fail to recognise the signs and continue to persecute him as one of us.

He will publish the perfect fanzine.

Right here God has got his big problem. If we are to recognise the Son of God from the fact that he publishes The Perfect Fanzine, then it follows that God has to make sure that no bugger else publishes The Perfect Fanzine before the Messiah gets around to it. Bloody Hell, think of the possible repercussions. If Marty Cantor published The Perfect Fanzine Ted White would die of apoplexy and then none of us would ever know what to think about anything. But no, that's too silly to contemplate. God has obviously taken a look around fanzine fandom to see just who he has to concentrate his efforts on, in order to prevent someone publishing The Perfect Fanzine before its time.

And who is he concentrating his efforts against?

Coff-coff. Nuff said.

However, some of you did manage to cast off the mental shackles and actually made it to the typewriter. One such was Eric Mayer who took time out from his attempt to repopulate the world.

ERIC MAYER 1771 Ridge Road East; Rochester; NY 14622; U.S.A.

I very much liked the bike story. Again I was struck by the

I'd never considered. Arghh shit! I've gone and done it. I've gotten into a topic I was determined I wouldn't broach until next issue.

A lot of people are saying their say about fandom and fanzines and one of them is Ted White. Now I was intending to keep all responses to TZTHNN 3 for SFD 23 — and that included my own responses to various articles, including my responses to Ted's. Now my overall stand on this topic can be deduced from the fact that I not only published Ted's article, but actively sought his contribution on just such a topic. I have a great deal of respect for both Ted's opinions and for his credentials. Ted has been around a long time and has based his opinions on a considerable body of experience. D. West, conversely, is someone whose opinions I have no respect for whatever. It seems to me that Don is doing what everyone else is accusing Ted of doing, merely parading personal prejudices as universal law. Don's opinions are based upon such a narrow base of experience that if he turned around twice he'd fall right off.

This is not the case with Ted. One does not have to agree with him, but one should at least listen. Take HOLIER THAN THOU as an example. Now Ted has had some pretty scathing things to say about Marty's fanzine and, whilst he has been restricting himself to statements of fact I've pretty much agreed with him. Where Ted and I have tended to part company is in the value judgements he's made based upon those statements of fact. Despite it being everything Ted has said, I like HOLIER THAN THOU. It must have something going for it. It's an OK fanzine. The only thing Marty is guilty off, from where I'm standing, is in thinking that it is better than it is.

The same is true of Arthur Hlavaty's zines. Is it Arthur's fault that a load of cretins nominated him for a hugo? In this case Ted is right in so much that the very act of nominating something for a hugo is in effect holding it up as a standard of excellence. Arthur's work isn't an example of excellence, but it is above average. There are a lot of us, journeymen in the fields of fandom, producing above average fanzines and fanwriting. We can't all be excellent. All we can do is perform to the best of our abilities and to be willing to learn and improve at whatever rate is

~~commensurate~~ with our awareness that the single paramount factor in fandom is that we are in it for our own enjoyment.

Fanzines are only partly the words on the paper. Fanzines are an interactive medium. Any value judgement of a fanzine that fails to take this into account, that judges only the words on the paper, is in danger of missing some of the point of fandom. Here I think HOLIER THAN THOU is a perfect example. If one was to judge it by the quality of the words on the paper it wouldn't come out too well at all, but taking into account the way it creates a sense of involvement with its readership, the interaction it generates, it succeeds admirably on its own terms. But enough - sufficient unto next-issue are the topics thereof.

14 FEBRUARY 1983 (SKEL)

This section, subtitled 'Five Lost Weeks In The Life Of A Compulsive Faned' is a cautionary tale.

It all started with a phone-call. Cas's parents wanting to know if we'd like a new three-piece suite. Our old one was thoroughly knackered. It wasn't so much a case of 'liking' a new one, rather of having to get one or get used to relaxing whilst standing up. They knew this, hence the phone-call.

"It's in very good condition." they told us, as if they felt we needed some encouragement. "We'll buy it for you as a present." Gift-horses epiglottii began to dance before my eyes. There had to be a catch in it somewhere. I mean, this lucky I just do not get. "Ask them what's wrong with it." I shouted to Cas whilst typing the previous page. "They say it's got great castors." she called back, and my expectations nosedived. "They were going to get it for themselves but it clashed with their colour scheme." Their colour scheme, if memory served, was as bland as possible. What could possibly clash with it? Whatever it was it had to be pretty dire.

"Ask them what colour it is." I called, fearing the worst. "It's sorta black." they replied. "Well, not really black, more purple-and-black really. In fact, I'd say it's purple

really.....with black stripes." It was the worst. God but I hate purple. As beggars though our freedom of choice was proverbial. We accepted, gratefully. Now all we had to do was get it the hundred or so miles from their house in Stamford, to Stockport. We persuaded my father that, the next time one of his drivers was delivering in that general direction, he could accidentally call round on Cas's parents, accidentally load up the three-piece suite, and accidentally drop it off at our house on his way back to the works. And so it duly arrived.

And so did the first problem.

Our old suite was black. Just black, with nary a hint of any other colour, and especially not purple. To compensate for this and to add a splash of colour we had decorated the wall behind the suite with a bright orange floral wallpaper. When we wheeled out the old, sober suite and replaced it with the new one we immediately started getting violent headaches and feelings of nausea.

So we rearranged all the furniture and managed to get all but one of the chairs against plain walls.....plain orange walls. It was better. Why, one could sometimes sit there nearly an hour before rushing out to throw up. Also, Zaphod (historical note: an ex-guinea pig which used to be let out to stretch its little legs in the living room whilst its cage was being cleaned out) had, whilst skulking behind one of the chairs, eaten a strip of wallpaper off the wall, a strip no longer hidden from view by the chair. There was no help for it. We were going to have to re-decorate the living-room.

I hate decorating. I can't stand the upheaval, the on-going inconvenience. I can't relax in a house that's got half its furniture covered in dust sheets and where you can't actually get at anything because it's hidden behind piles of things which have been taken out of cupboards so that all the furniture could cower under its sheets in the middle of rooms without causing a hernia or two in the process. I also can't stand all the prattling around involved in actually doing the decorating. I've nothing against doing household jobs myself,

nothing that is other than a natural laziness and the certain knowledge that one shelf that goes up is the equivalent of two stencils that don't go down. But, other than that, basic D-I-Y ain't so bad. I mean, half the time you don't even have to get changed into your scruff. Pour drink, drill holes in wall, put rawlplugs in, pour drink, fix brackets on wall, put shelf on brackets, pour drink, put things on shelf, put tools away...and it's done. Then you can sit down and pour yourself a drink. The whole operation goes with a well oiled imprecision. If it weren't for the type of wood I use for the shelves there wouldn't be any hassles at all.

I use lemming-wood.

Lemming-wood is the kind that, as soon as you've put the things upon the shelf and turned your back, leaps off the wall and hurtles to the floor. The local timber yards seem to sell nothing but lemming-wood. I put this down to simple economics. Lemming-wood has the advantage that it doesn't have to be felled. Lemming trees grow on vertical cliff faces until they reach maturity whereupon they snurp in their roots and plummet to their doom in the sawmills below. Despite this problem though, simple household tasks still have decorating beat all to hell-and-back.

Decorating is so damned messy. First of all you have to get changed into your scruff. Then you have to cover every item of furniture in the room with dust-sheets. Also the furniture in every other room in the house. Also all the other houses in the street. Paint gets everywhere! By the time you've done all this you're left with about thirty-five seconds in which to do some painting before you've got to stop and clean up. Providing you start cleaning up in July you should be nearly finished by about October. The brushes and things only take about a week. The rest of the time is spent trying to get the grot off of you. Paint gets everywhere! You'll be shitting green turds for weeks (This will be particularly baffling as you were using orange paint). God, I hate decorating. It puts me in a very non-fannish mood. When you weigh up how much actual decorating has gotten done over the last few weeks it's really very little, but the activity

itself casts a pall over other activities. I think it's a chemical in the paint fumes which has a damping effect on the lobes of the brain which control fanac. I think that susceptibility to this chemical is gene-linked. My mother did lots of decorating and never produced a fanzine in her life. Some people though are not affected by the fumes. Heredity has granted them some form of immunity. I know one such person. So do you. I think you should sit down and prepare yourselves for a shock.

15 FEBRUARY 1983 (CAS)

"Cas Skelton, you are charged with the heinous crime of Yeasticide. How do you plead?"

"GUILTY."

Dramatic pause whilst black cap is placed on the Judge's head.....

"Cas Skelton, you will be taken from this court to a place of confinement from which, at the appropriate time, you will be taken to a place of execution and there you shall be hanged by the neck until dead."

"But, but, your judgeship, it was only yeast, and it was an accident. I didn't mean to have the water at too high a temperature."

"Silence woman, or your punishment will be even worse!!!!"

"That's not fair."

"Right Skelton, you were warned. Your sentence is changed to.....TYPING A THINGY FOR SFD."

Another dramatic pause whilst Cas falls to the floor, whimpering pitifully.....

"Please hang me sir. Anything is better than typing a thingy for SFD."

-o-o-o-

Right you lot out there. Who has sussed out that cretin-

-head here has fucked up the starter kit for the next brew? It's just lying there lolloping instead of being all bright and bubbly. I wouldn't mind but this is the second time I've managed to do it. When The Great One arrives home from work he will be dischuffed to t'knickers. I don't care I tell you, should brew his own beer anyway, serves him right doesn't it.

By the way, this is Cas this is and can't you tell that I'm still cracked, not as bad though as I was. Mind you now that my mental bits are improving the rest of me is falling apart, I've just found out that the stretched ligament in my knee isn't, it's arthritis and you can stop laughing or I'll run you over with my wheelchair and hit you with me stick. Hey has anyone out there been watching 'The Boys From The Blackstuff'? Bloody fantastic isn't it? I can just imagine Bernard Hill (who plays Yosser in that series) in his part as the Duke of York in Shakespeare's Henry VI, standing next to Henry's throne and saying "I can do that....Giz a crown."

Did you all have a good Chrimble? What did Father Christmas bring you? I got a Magimix food processor, a writing case, the latest Jean Plaidy, 'The Complete Cookery Course' by Delia Smith (or, as it is known in this household, 'The Bible According to St. Delia'), a beautiful covered vase (that's a vase with a lid on, for the philistines who didn't know), a big chunky sweater, some of my favourite perfume, and some sexy lingerie (and don't believe a word of what he's written about photographs, nudge nudge, know what I mean, people will be getting entirely the wrong idea about me, I'm pure, innocent and tell lies lots...who said that?). If my hustab (Christ the arthritis has got to my fingers already) husband doesn't stop refering to me as Hazel (as in Langford) I'm going to ram my knitting needles right up his nostrils (as in nose), you see we have an addition to the family, her name is Victoria and she arrived on Bethany's birthday and I haven't stopped knitting baby clothes since. My mum bought Beth one of those large soft-bodied baby dolls for her birthday and it needed clothes. Scuse a minute, must get a cup of coffee and put some more music on, Barbra Streisand has just finished, think I'll put Dr. Hook on next. Come to think of it I really must go and get the washing done. Watching Breakfast Television really does shorten your day.

6 MARCH 1983 (SKEL)

The beat goes on -- and so does the decorating, which can be measured not so much by how much actual decorating we get done (which is very little really), but rather by how much of anything else we fail to get done (can it really be nearly three weeks since I last sat at this typewriter?). Not to worry. Let's wrap up the bike responses before moving onto the topic of 'nice' fandom, which drew a fair amount of response. First though:-

WHEELS MEET AGAIN.....

Someone whose name was taken in vain earlier, Colin Fine, wrote: "Bicycles are inventions of the devil. Unfortunately they're almost essential in Cambridge. I work in the centre of town and there is no way to bring a car within fifty yards of our office building, let alone park one. At least it's fairly flat here, but the demoniac machines still go wrong. I bought mine last year for £30 and I'm gradually discovering it's a graveyard for dead bikes. The wheels are different widths, and bent to boot. I've just discovered that the pedals are not the same design. Still, at least no one in their right minds would steal the thing, and that's an important consideration here." Yes, that last is a worry. I am beginning to at least understand Mark Bennett's paranoia about having his cycle stolen, even if there is more unruined metal on the four bike-locks and chains he uses than on his bike itself. Next, from one university town to another -- from his secret den somewhere in the USA (Hope I haven't given too much away there, Dave), Dave Rowe writes: "Cycling here seems to be confined to kids, blacks and university towns. Lights on bikes are practically non-existent. You can guarantee that once-every-so-often you'll be driving in pitch-darkness and suddenly find yourself bearing down on some shadow-like solitary cyclist. Added to which american roads are badly maintained. Especially during winter spring there is a beach of dirt and grit where the gutter ought to be. As it stretches out some six inches to a foot it forces cyclists to travel in what motorists euphemistically refer to as 'the middle of the road'. One often sees splattered racoons, possums and dogs on the road. It's a wonder there aren't more cyclists among their number."

Darrell Schweitzer wrote a letter that made me feel so incompetent I'm not going to print it. Basically it was about how armageddon happened to his bike halfway through a sixty light-year jaunt to his 'local' book shop, and how he prised the mangled wreckage apart and reassembled it using nothing but a toothpick, a paperclip, a passing ferret, and good old Yankee ingenuity. His closing comment, "I felt like an ANALOG character who has just jerryrigged a frammis through the fungusworp generator, using only 3 bobbypins and an old Dewey button, and now plans to fly off and show those pointy-headed alien bureaucrats a thing or two!", not only made me feel incompetent, but also pointy-headed. Me, I live in perpetual fear that I'll get a puncture whilst more than fifty yards from home and have to throw the bike away and come home on the bus. I'm not terribly 'mechanical'.

John D. Owen, like one or two others, made a connection between two hopefully unrelated topics and wrote, "A thought just occurred to me (a rare event worthy of immediate recording for posterity) while skimming through the rest of SFD -- the juxtaposition of your complaints about the trials and tribulations of piles (nasty embarrassing things, aren't they?) and you buying a super-flash bicycle. Those particular contraptions nearly always have a long, narrow, and very hard saddle, with no springing of any kind. Isn't it asking for trouble putting the two together? Further developments are awaited!"

Bloody hell, I hope not!

Gary Deindorfer WROTE (and Skel forgot to get out of 'upper-case' after underlining his name), "Your story about wanting a bike is the kind of slice-of-life tale out of one's sense memories that Eric Mayer does so well. In fact, my joke about Eric Mayer rewriting Harry Warner anecdotes is basically, I think, meant as a compliment. Harry Warner and Eric Mayer are two people who can write interestingly about mundane things that might seem unpromising as material to be written up. Anyone (almost) can be interesting about something interesting. It takes real literary talent to be interesting about the uninteresting."

Gary works the opposite side of the same street in his comments printed in GROGGY 19, which I suppose goes to prove the old adage that you can't ~~fuck~~ please all the people all of the time, and that everyone gets up on the wrong side of the bed someday. Me? I'd just nip out and cull a few of the neighbourhood kids if I wasn't so shagged out from hanging strips of wallpaper (how the hell can one small house have so many fucking walls?).

John Purcell wraps this topic up with, "I also once had a Bright Red Dream Machine, but the wheels fell off. As a matter of fact it's still out in the garage. Hopefully this spring I will take the bike up to the shop and have two brand-spanking new tyres put on. I believe I have had this 3-speed Schwinn for onto 15 years, and the sucker only needs tyres. Maybe this summer I will bike around the old stomping grounds like in those days of yore when I biked hither and yon in St. Louis Park. They say it's good exercise, but I could care less about that. I have been getting tired of taking my car for stupid short trips to the store. Hell, I have a basket on the bike, might as well use it. Shit, I can even pile up a load of fanzines in the basket and zip on up to the P.C. to mail them. All sorts of good, fannish stuff you can do on a bicycle. Except maybe sex. I haven't tried that one yet."

I always thought cycling was an alternative to sex, then again, maybe I've been making a terrible mistake. Perhaps when Cas said "How'd you feel about getting your leg over?" I wasn't supposed to rush out and sit on my bike. Maybe that's why she always looked so grumpy when she finally came out to join me.

John has also been sending us photos of the 'Cas-Skelton-Feel-Good-Bright-Red-Tomato-Patch' in his back yard, along with the comment, "The marigolds surrounding them are designed to ward off rabbits and are working just fine." One has visions of bunches of punk-type marigolds mugging unwary rabbits. Flower-power indeed.

"I notice," said Cas, "He never sends us any of the tomatoes." Thus spake the Stomach of Stockport.

11 APRIL 1983 (SKEL)

I was thinking the other day about the second-best argument for not including fiction in fanzines. This goes something to the effect that:- There's a market for any SF that's even half-way decent - a paying market. Ergo, if it's good enough, that's where it should be...where the vast majority of it is in fact. If it isn't half-way decent it should be entombed in concrete and dropped into the deepest part of the Pacific ocean. In neither case should it appear in a fanzine. Alas, burials at sea in concrete overcoats have never caught on for fanfic so what you tend to get is commercially available SF where the average-to-good stuff appears, and SF in fanzines where the crud appears. The folks advancing the above point of view usually allow for the existence of the occasional exception to prove the rule. In the case of a decent SF story appearing in a fanzine this is always a hypothetical exception as nobody has ever been able to prove that this mythical creature has any more real substance than the fairies at the bottom of the garden. Exceptions in the other direction, to the rule that SF that's been paid for must be at least adequately written, are of course legion.

The argument then goes on to say that:- Instead of filling fanzines with umpteenth-rate amateur SF stories, what we ought to be doing is filling them instead with brilliant fanwriting in the form of personal essays, critiques, philosophical dissertations, humorous anecdotal writings, historical re-appraisals, and serious and constructive discussions of science fiction. In short, material for which there is no commercial market.

Now no one is saying that all material in the above categories is, ipso facto, worth publishing. No, what they are saying is that, because there is no commercial market for this writing, then the good stuff, the cream, has not already been skimmed off. The nuggets are, speaking mixed metaphorically, still in there. This vein is worth mining. Editors must still do that mining however, but at least these workings aren't played out...unlike this analogy. Look, if all you've got to start with is dross, then no amount of selection is going to

come up with anything else. Oh, you might end up with grade-A, top-notch dross, but grading dross is not what fandom is about.

Whoops, sorry! I'm telling people how to run their fanac, trying to impress my view of fandom upon them. Different strokes and all that. OK, if you like grading dross - fine - go grade it. Goodbye.

(Has he gone? Jeez, what were you thinking of, letting a mong-brain like that read your copy of SFD?)

O-O-O-O-O

Yeah well, it's a point of view, and one that seems to make a remarkable amount of sense. It's one that I pretty much cleave to, but it does contain one premise that may not be all it's cracked up to be. We gotta be careful here. If we're building a sound, logical argument we need a firm basis. The last thing we need is a shaky premise. We aren't just talking logic here, we're talking reality. I'm put in mind of those cartoon sequences where the bad crittur is chasing the good crittur. Wile E. Coyote is quite likely to dash over the edge of a precipice in his pursuit of the Road Runner. He's OK as long as he thinks he's on firm ground but as soon as he looks down he is made aware of the gravity of his situation. Reality brings him down to earth (far, far down usually) with a hell of a bump. Reality tends to an empirical outlook.

Like I said, I still think it's a pretty reasonable point of view, but whenever I say that I find myself glancing down nervously to check my footing. The person who played Road Runner to my Wile E. Coyote was James Thurber. I suppose I'd better back up a piece and explain how this came about.

I recently picked up a two-volume book-club collection titled 'Vintage Thurber'. Over 1300 pages of what I assume to be prime Thurber, for just 80 pence. Now I'd never actually read anything by James Thurber but I'd bumped into his name from time to time and, in the process of these nomenclative knockings, had formed the impression that here was a guy who I ought to get around to reading one of these days, if not real

soon now. Well, here was a chance too good to miss. I bought the books and have been dipping into them ever since. Now, whilst I know that there are differences in both content and intent, do you know what this two-volume collection reminds me of more than anything else?

The Wash.

0-0-0-0-0

It seemed to me that the material in 'Vintage Thurber' was fanwriting and that Thurber was ergo a fanwriter. The fact that the fanzines he wrote for were such as THE NEW YORKER and had paid circulations almost rivalling that of Dick Geis's SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW (and which doubtless paid their contributors almost as well) should not be allowed to cloud our thinking on this point. Thurber was a fanwriter who was fortunate enough to be able to sell his fanwriting.

This blinding and doubtless highly unoriginal insight was still on my mind when I wrote a letter to Eric Mayer and so naturally I shared it with him. I went further. I offered my opinion that, whilst some of Mr. Thurber's pieces were very good indeed, the majority of them were no better than the material to be found in some of the better fanzines...and in fact would probably not be the best item if found in an issue of such a fanzine. Being temporarily without any daipers in need of changing and thus in a generally agreeable mood, he replied as follows:-

"Indeed, Thurber did a lot of fanzine material. Like you, I've found some of his stuff fine and some rather boring. Another mundane fanwriter is E. B. White whose personal essays have sometimes served me as models. I have a funny way of evaluating writing. To my mind the gaps between what is generally considered 'good' and 'not so good' are not as great as most people would like to have us believe and are often little more than matters of taste. Critical opinions, whether of fanwriting or of anything else are skewed. Weight of opinion counts for as much as absolute value. Work that is somewhat better tends to be overvalued and work that is somewhat less good is undervalued,

creating a gap where one really does not exist. The weighing is also affected by whether the work sold for money, even by whether the author has sold other work for money. I agree, Thurber is often not that much better than fanwriters, sometimes not even as good. Try to convince many people of that though."

0-0-0-0-0

Note please that I'm not trying to run James Thurber down here. The overall quality of his work is high. What I am saying is that, if you simply look at the individual pieces:-

- (a) : They are objectively indistinguishable from fanwriting.
- (b) : Every last one of them was published for money.
- (c) : There are better examples than most being published in fanzines.

Isaac Asimov too sells fanwriting. Personal pieces and introductions to his stories in his collections. The readers lap them up. Now the question is, 'Was Thurber selling fanwriting, or was he selling Thurber?' (There is little doubt that Asimov is selling Asimov).

Of course, times have changed, but people still read Thurber's work. Like me, not because it's by Thurber per se, but rather because they've picked up the impression that he wrote the sort of material they'd enjoy. Why, in the 'Daily Express' there's a guy called Michael Leapman who writes a regular weekly column and who does other irregular pieces, all of it fanwriting. Not particularly brilliant fanwriting at that, C+ say. Still, he's selling it.

So I got to thinking about the old saw that there is no market for fanwriting. The fact is that people do buy fanwriting, even if they don't buy it under the fanwriting label. And, as usual, my thinking got a bit wishful around the edges.

With all the contacts that some fans have with publishers these days, and with all the wierd and wonderful concepts that they seem capable of selling the publishers on, mightn't it be

time to examine the concept of selling an anthology of fanwriting to some publisher? A fanthology that will be on sale in bookshops, available in libraries, in a book-club edition... and why not? Have you seen some of the 'special interest' stuff that book clubs think there is a market for?

Of course, right away you come across a problem. Most fanwriting is aimed at fandom, at an audience comprised solely of fans, fanzine fans in particular. Assumptions are made by the author as to who his readers are and what background they will bring to an appreciation of his work. Much fine material appearing in fanzines is specifically aimed at a very limited audience, assumes an awareness of fandom in that audience, uses this awareness to increase its effect upon that audience. By doing this it disqualifies itself from reaching a wider readership. OK, tough, but that's the nature of the beast. All this means is that one would have to use different criteria in selecting material for an anthology of fanwriting aimed at a more general, SF-reading audience, than the criteria one would use for a fanthology aimed at fanzine fans. That shouldn't pose an insurmountable problem. Material does exist that would satisfy the two main requirements, namely that it be well-written and of interest to the average science fiction reader. Some come immediately to mind; Teresa Nielsen Hayden's 'Apocalypse Now And Then' from WING WINDOW 3 or, closer to home, Eric Mayer's 'King Cotton' from THE ZINE THAT HAS NO NAME 3, and.....but why go on? I'm sure you can all fill in the names of suitable pieces, pieces which have impressed you. In fact, I'd be very interested in hearing which pieces you'd choose for such an anthology. I mentioned all this too in that same letter to Eric, eliciting this response:-

"It is interesting to speculate on how one might sell a fanthology. Interesting and frustrating. The bestseller lists are filled with witless crap. Preppies and Real Men and endless cats. This stuff just isn't funny to my mind. What's more, alleged personal essays turn up from time to time in women's mags, baby magazines etc and they are not only less thoughtful than similar things in fanzines, they are technically inferior as well. But there's the problem.

Pablum seems to be what is wanted. Stereotypes etc etc. How could you present a fanthology? Who would go for a collection of stuff by average folks who are decent writers without gimmicks to offer? I think it'd be impossible unless you could pawn Fandom off as a new sort of diet or a psychoanalytical tool. Fan Therapy. I'm sure a worthy collection could be made up that would be interesting to readers if you could get them to read it, but there's no category for such an animal to live in. Although I'd love to be proven wrong."

Actually, the 'How to sell it?' question is partly covered earlier in this very piece. It is also partly covered in Bob Shaw's article in TZTHNN 3, and partly in another quote from Eric's letter (on a completely unrelated topic):-

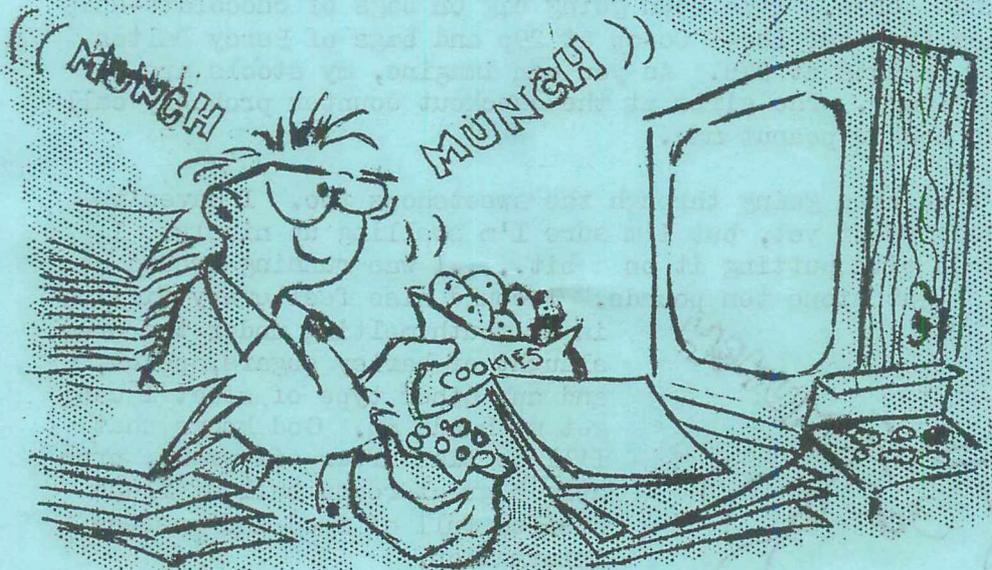
".....recently I looked at the NY Times bestseller list and saw that 7 of the top 10 books were either outright sf and fantasy or borderline."

It would have to be sold to the everyday science fiction reader. The folks who are buying all that sf and fantasy in the bookshops. It would have to be sold on its sf-related content. One loses track of all the books which are sold in this category: SF quiz books, SF movie books, coffee table art books, SF encyclopedias, SF yearbooks, books on SF writers, on SF creatures and races, books on SF immortals, an SF holiday brochure, famous SF wrecked spaceships, unwrecked spaceships, Handbooks for space colonists.....the list is long. ~~ditto~~

Are you seriously trying to tell me that, with all this crap finding a market, a book which speaks directly to the sf-reader, which talks to him of science fiction and of shared experiences, a book which opens to him a world of potential involvement, entry into a community of the spirit, which opens doors of awareness.....that there's no market for such a book?

And, just think of all the potential recruits to fandom who might be reached in this way. That vast reservoir of potential talent just waiting to be tapped.

Bags I the idea.



I'm devouring mail, fanzines, paperbacks, library books, TV programmes...and food. All in tremendous quantities since I came out of hospital and the quack told me I had to have another five-to-six weeks off work...and to stop smoking!

Bob Shaw sent me a letter:- "Dear Arthur, when I heard you'd been rushed to hospital I nearly had a heart attack."

Two more weeks at home before I return to work. My head is absolutely chock-a-block with fans and fandom (Ving brought over a whole heap of fmz from the 81/82 era and I've been re-reading all the stuff I had from the late seventies that I skipped over when I wasn't so into it all. I feel as if I'm having a cram course in 'British Fandom - late seventies and early eighties', for a go at Mastermind, with my second subject being 'TV Programmes - between eight am and five pm'. I am now considered a local authority on how steel is made, ostriches, Boulougne, sardines and how they get into flat tin cans, and the Amazon delta. I have a ten minute lecture I can give on Crown Court and the workings of the British (TV) legal system.

I'm also, because of stopping smoking, trying to eat my way through every supermarket within walking distance of Brockham House. I've been going big on bags of chocolate-chip cookies from our local Co-op at 29p and bags of Percy Dalton salted peanuts at 27p. As you can imagine, my stools are a trifle lumpy. The girls at the checkout counter probably call me the cookie peanut man.

I've been going through the sweetshops too. I haven't weighed myself yet, but I'm sure I'm swelling up nicely. I could do with putting it on a bit.....I was running around at about eight stone ten pounds. I could also feel every filling in my mouth melting under the onslaught of barley sugars, polos, and any other type of sweet I can get my hands on. God knows what I'll be like after six weeks, probably a great round ball of flesh stuffed full of food and useless information.

I tell you, these heart attacks aren't all they are cracked up to be.

Now isn't that interesting. They've just had an item on TV about Chinese landscape painting. Did you know that on every Chinese painting there are always some

Chinese hieroglyphics up in one of the corners that tell you the story about the scene in the painting. There, that is now locked away in your memory banks forever, just like it is in mine....along with another fact that's just been on.... Did you know that, out of every three marriages in Russia during 1981, every third one ended in divorce? I never knew that.

Short stop whilst I go and make myself some lunch -- cup-o-soup, crusty cheese roll with pickle, jam sponge cake...and two pills. Oh, and I've been munching my way through a large bag of salted peanuts whilst I've been typing this.

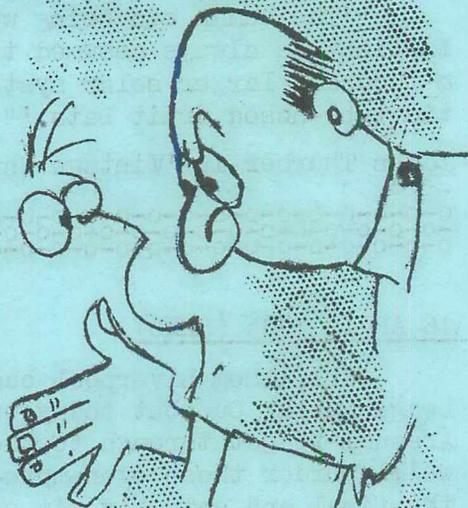
What's this? On TV - the Kalahari desert bushmen never put their heads on the ground when they sleep. They balance on one elbow and put their heads on their shoulders to sleep. I don't know why the stupid sods do this. Maybe they're frightened of elephants treading on their heads.

I finally had to go to the dentist about my fillings. The continual sweet-eating had got to most of them. The dentist tut-tutted as he went around with his goddam probe. When he'd finished sticking his hook into every nook and cranny he could find in my mouth he suggested he cap all my front teeth for a mere £90. He said that filling them again might not last all that long. I refrained from pointing out that they might last as long as I was going to - and that, at only £13, this seemed a better bet to a Scotsman. The girl assistant poked her head around the instrument tray and said that, if I was out of work, the DHSS would pay for it all. I told her I was one of those mugs who still had a job.

Keerist! I can hardly believe it. On the TV again - a schoolmaster in Glasgow, talking to some of his pupils about urban decay. He's just said:-

"...we are entering a post-industrial society..."

I am trying to believe I haven't heard it. 'A post-industrial society' - that is, a country that has no industry! As an engineer, living in a country that exists only by its industry and exports, it makes me mad that a supposedly sane and intelligent person can say, or be allowed to say, things like that. Visions of us all roaming round clad in animal skins and herding flocks of sheep flash before my eyes. I suppose fandom could still exist, with fanzines being written on pieces of tree bark. It would be quite interesting to see a 'post-



17 APRIL 1983 (SKEL)

In a recent WEBERWOMAN'S WREVENGE Jean printed some comments of mine which I need to reprint here before moving on to the next letter. Here's some of what I said:-

"I've always been a little wary of people who throw themselves so whole-heartedly into creating a single, consistent fantasy environment, an environment which seems to become an obsession as time goes by, to the extent that some people even start to 'write' themselves into their own fantasy, even in their day-to-day existence. The prime example of this is of course Taral (what was his original name?)..... To be so concerned with a fantasy, sometimes at the expense of reality, seems, to put it bluntly, a bit sick. I suppose the reason I'm wary of such people is simply that I don't understand them. Maybe this would make a good subject for an article for WWW, especially by Taral who is much further down one of these roads than anyone else."

Taral however chose to write me direct. Sorry about that Jean. Without further ado then.....

TARAL 1812 - 415 Willowdale Avenue, Willowdale, Ontario, Can.

Watch who you're calling a Trekkie, or lumping together with Trekkies. If I happen to appear in a silver tu-tu at a con, I'm not involved in the same lack-of-mental-process as someone play-acting a Wookiee, and I have nothing in common with blowsy middle-aged fairy queens. So don't turn to me as an expert for an article on role-playing or costumes, eh?

For one thing, I'm not playing a role. I don't happen to be imitating a character in a popular movie that was cynically calculated to appeal to some low common denominator. I don't want to share a pretend world with anyone. What I do is a product of my imagination and isn't meant to be anything like anyone else does.

I don't believe I have blue fur. I don't even pretend I

have blue fur. This is because I'm not striving to imitate what I've invented in the way of an imaginary universe -- I invented the imaginary universe to appeal to my sense of rightness. I suppose that's the principal difference between myself and a loyal fan of Darkover. I am a source of images, the robe is a blank slate for them. Perhaps that's not obvious; you have to think about it to see the difference. But it must make some fans, particularly British fans, uneasy to do that, since they show a dichotomy toward me that is entirely their making. On the one hand they see a fan who's written sensible things in zines and has obvious talent as an artist. They also persist in seeing a kind of unclassifiable Trekkie on the other hand, and the two can't be reconciled. On the whole fans ignore the latter preconception out of mistaken courtesy. Occasionally I see "what was his original name?" in some out of the way corner like WEBBERWOMAN'S WREWENG-E and know that the other image is uppermost in someone's mind. The dichotomy is artificial, of course -- I can't be two people.

And it arises because of the values people attach to the roles they alternately project upon me. The fan like us is intelligent, sensible, and well-adjusted -- the fan dressed up from his private fantasy must be poorly adjusted. If not, why does he dress up and have private fantasies? The issue, in other words, is Conformity. Why don't I act like you?

The issue ought to be originality, wit, subtlety, insight -- qualities that such things as Elfquest and Zeor generally lack. The hell with whether I'm obsessed with furry white girls in chrome coats -- do I draw them skillfully...interestingly...memorably? I succeed or fail on that basis and should be judged on no other.

But the suspicion that as deep an involvement as mine in any fantasy landscape is unwholesome is bound to persist. Why not, it's true? I've extended facets of my personality so far beyond the boundary of normal social development that I'm far from a balanced person. I'm purposefully overspecialized, as are many artists, writers, mathematicians, poets, physicists, performers, and other kinds of creative people. Northrop Frye says of them:-

"For the poet, the particular literary conventions he adopts are likely to become, for him, facts of life. If he finds that the kind of writing he's best at has a good deal to do with fairies, like Yeats, or a white goddess, like Graves, or a life-force, like Bernard Shaw, or episcopal sermons, like T.S. Elliot, or bullfights, like Hemingway, or exasperation at social hypocrisies, as with the so-called angry school, these things are apt to take on a reality for him that seems badly out of proportion to his contemporaries. His life may imitate literature in a way that may warp or even destroy his social personality, as Byron wore himself out at thirty-four with the strain of being Byronic." (Pg. 80 of 'The Keys To Dreamland' from 'The Creative Imagination').

Colin Wilson also has something interesting to say:-

"Now a real artist is a man who must devote his life to individual creation whether he likes it or not. No matter what problems and disappointments it seems to offer, no other way of life is possible. An artist may feel slightly ashamed of his youthful sturm und drang period later, but this is because it has become so completely a part of his inner nature that he no longer has to verbalize it. The fact remains that to decide to devote one's life to the cause of mind, of imagination, is as radical a step as entering a monastery, and gives one a feeling of being set apart from the rest of the world." Pg. 299 of 'American Music' from 'Colin Wilson On Music').

I'm a little ashamed of the sturm und drang of this letter but how else does one say, "Excuse me, but I have an artistic license to be strange."?

Gaaltlaa... (oops!) Yours sincerely, Taral.

YES, IT'S SACKCLOTH AND ASHES TIME AGAIN FOLKS

Sometimes I display such small-mindedness it's a wonder my self-esteem didn't starve to death long ago. You may consider me suitably reprimanded, Taral. Damn! These ashes get everywhere.

24 APRIL 1983 (SKEL)

Well, it's tidying up time again. Mike and Pat Meara are staying with us again this weekend, as is Gerald Lawrence. One of the local breweries, we discovered last night, is running this competition in which the locals get to write poems and the brewery prints the better ones on its beer mats. Well, if they are the better ones we are Dutchmen. The Van Mearas decided that we should enter into the spirit of things and compose our own rhymes. However, as it was too late to get them printed we decided to opt for the 'dirty limerick' form, as it was the only one we had any real experience of. As we were on a pub-crawl we decided to write a limerick about each of the local brews we sampled. We were in a Frederick Robinson's pub at the time and so Mike contributed the following:-

This lad drank two gallons of Robbie's
then made sexual advances to bobbies.

So in the cells at the nick
they hung wieghts on his prick
and altered the shape that his nob is.

Later on we managed:-

A drinker, well sozzled on Holts
said Ruddles is strictly for dolts.

My budgie drinks that all the time
and whilst hardly in his prime,
whenever he swallows it, he moults.

Finally, the George & Dragon in Heaton Chapel gave us:-

A Boddingtons drinker named Sandy
claimed it made him exceedingly randy,
but watched carefully one night
he got remarkably tight
on a couple of glasses of shandy.

Your own contributions are welcome.

Which about brings us to the end of SFD 22. All that remains is to wrap up the final page and we're away. Can ya dig it?

