

TimeBytes

TRINIC



Timebytes

Part 1

The Fanhistory Fanthology

For Intersection, August 1995

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and

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Contents

- 3. Introduction
- 4. Conspiracy And After Theories
- 13. Going Nova
- 19. Let's All Go On A Summer Holiday
- 22. It's The End Of Our Fandom As We Know It (And I Feel Fine)
- 24. The Never-ending Fan Fund Debate
- 26. The Death Of Dr Eastercon And Other Stories

Credits

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Cover by **Dave Mooring**.

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Introduction

Lilian Edwards

Christina Lake

When we were asked if we would produce a collection of fan history related material for *Intersection* some eighteen months ago, it wasn't quite the proposal of our dreams. What we'd first wanted to do was a standard fanthology, featuring the best material produced by British fandom since *Conspiracy*, but someone else was supposed to be doing that. There was much talk of the right way to "do" fanhistory at the time, none of it very clear or meaningful, sparked by the ambivalent response to Rob Hansen's *Then* project. On the one hand there was a clear consensus that over-arching fanhistories which can both record and reconsider fannish culture in its totality are a Good Thing. On the other hand there was a strong if not unanimous feeling that the patented Hansen methodology of faithfully tracking the events of each year did not capture the essence of fandom, the anecdotal quality, the general trends that transcended strict chronological order. Some said that no simple amassing of material was worthwhile without a universal theory of fandom and all its works, which the texts discovered should support. Others said any theoretical framework would distort both the selection of material and the conclusions drawn, that fandom like other fields of human endeavour is too complex and widespread to be sorted through and explained in one-dimensional fashion. Out of this ideological warren we had to find a way of producing something that was interesting, of value, commercial and yes, fun to read.

Eventually we came up with the idea, not of perfected history *per se*, Rob Hansen style, but of a collection of texts that would illuminate the feel of the period — the zeitgeist if you like (still one of Lilian's favourite words) — along with a bare minimum of frankly self-opinionated commentary, which could be either believed or discarded by the readership. Time-binding materials, rather than history itself, as Vicki Rosenzweig put it in a letter to *Attitude* 3. Soundbites of the times. Out of this came the title (spelling supplied by Jenny Glover) and some of the attitude. Our fanthology would be a kind of *Rock and Roll Years* of fandom, though sadly without the musical background.

This still left the problem of deciding what to include. The years since *Conspiracy* had not exactly been shining years of fannish achievement. Indeed they had seen a decline in the prestige and quantity of fanzine production that on the face of it, back in January 1994 when we took this on, was going to be depressing to chronicle. Given that we were not dealing with the most vibrant period of fandom's cycles, we decided to widen our brief to include fans' view of life outside the convention circuit. The fanthology would have two halves, one dealing with the traditional fannish staples of conventions, fanzines, awards et al, the other spreading its wings far wider and looking at every aspect of fannish lifestyle in the period, covering everything from politics and feminism to new technology and body-piercing. It was tempting to believe that we could come up with some detailed connections between the economic and

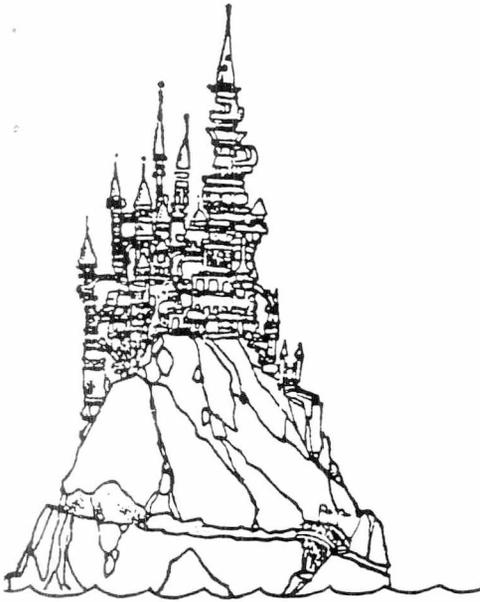
social climate of the time — profit-oriented, self-seeking, materialistic — and the development of fandom, but in the end, it never seemed that simple.

Besides, during 1994 and on into 1995, the activity level and morale of British fandom continued to pick up. Fanzine writing stopped seeming to be the antiquated backwater that the preceding years of the decade had made it. We both began publishing fanzines again — in Lilian's case, her first for five years. Work on the historical fanthology was intermittent, relaxed, deferred both by the knowledge of a relatively distant deadline and a feeling of incompleteness — that we were still living the times we were meant to be chronicling, and until we reached close to their completion, we could not make any definitive selection of what was significant. Come Easter this year, though, and we both knew we were up against a deadline. Finding material was both planned and haphazard. More fanzines than one could have dreamed of which were dutifully ploughed through seemed to consist solely of car breakdown stories and letter columns without a timebinding article in sight. Inevitably, our sources are what we had readily to hand. The mainstream fannish fanzines of the time, not the various fanzines relating to comics, gamings, filk and other activities which might have better illustrated our themes; *TWP* (The Women's Periodical), the apa that we are both in, but not the many other apas that were around at the time; and the publications of the British Science Fiction Association (*Matrix*, *Vector*), but not, by and large, the professional media magazines or *Interzone* or *Foundation*. Occasionally, where their content has seemed apposite and their style fannish, we have used cuttings from the press and excerpts from the Internet to flesh out otherwise unsubstantiated assertions and memories. Also, some writers and artists have been used more than others. Dave Langford, of course, for his sheer quotability on a number of subjects, Abi Frost, for her knack of grasping and expounding on barely perceived trends, Nigel Richardson for his world-weary but trenchant observations of the mores within and without the fannish ghetto, D. West because he was virtually the only "editorial" cartoonist of the period, and has the Novas to prove it.

Inevitably too, this is only a partial picture of British fandom in the late 80s and early 90s. How could it be otherwise? Daily life in our multimedia world generates far greater quantities of materials than we can cover in a mere two volumes. What we have done — we hope — is picked out some of the main trends of the period, illustrated by some of the good writing of the period, and produced a collection which we hope will be both readable and a true to life vignette of the past years. Where controversial material has been reprinted, it is not with the aim of reanimating old arguments, but to set them into their context, and, perhaps, elucidate factors that weren't obvious at the time. In any case, read and judge for yourself!

— Lilian Edwards & Christina Lake

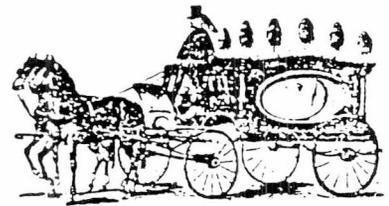
WHAT TO EXPECT AT Conspiracy



THE METROPOLE



QUAINT ACCENTS



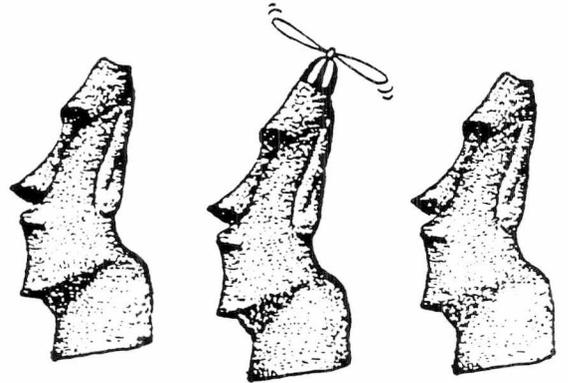
MODERN TRANSPORTATION



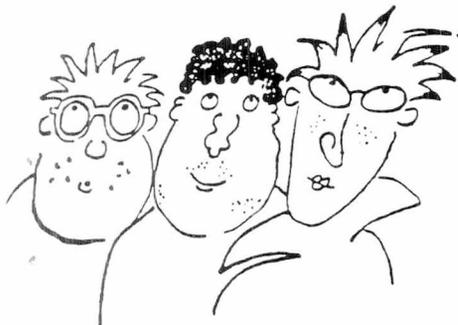
FOUR O'CLOCK TEA



EXCELLENT PEOPLE



FANNISH ICONS



LOTS OF NEW FRIENDS

NO MEXICAN FOOD



GREAT ROOM PARTIES

Conspiracy And After Theories

Ask anyone what they remember of Conspiracy, the 1987 Worldcon at Brighton, and they will talk about scientologists and hotel manager jokes, prefaced with a comment or two on their absence of sleep or over-indulgence in beer to emphasise their complete lack of responsibility in producing more coherent memories.

One or two did manage to write it down. We start with impressions from a couple of people working on the convention. **Linda Krawecke**, who was in charge of the fan area, then **Simon Polley** who organised the games room.

Q Funny term, rush. It usually means to hurry, go fast, move quickly. It can also mean a thrill, as in "getting a rush" out of something. For me getting a rush has usually been a drug or sexual experience or occasionally one of those all embracing feelings-of-oneness you get standing on the ocean shore or on a mountain ridge. Now I can add a new experience: Conspiracy was a rush in both senses of the word. I don't think I ever worked so hard for so long at such a fast pace ever in my life but the real kicker was that amid the chaos, confusion and exhaustion, I got a real rush out of it.

I was in Brighton from the Monday before the con until the following Wednesday which means rather than merely 'attending' the con or even 'working' the con I actually lived it for ten days. The pace started with the usual anxious anticipation and bright-eyed enthusiasm on the Monday evening. On Tuesday I got a good look at the mess that was still taking place in my fan area of the hotel. That's when the real fun started. I spent that day organizing a fan programme room to be built for us in Hall 6 and convincing the hotel management that we, the committee, were not going to pay for this. On Tuesday I still naively believed that the workmen would be out of the NorthEnd/Repro room by Wednesday.

By Wednesday I was going full peak; my crew / team had arrived, the furniture and tables had arrived, all the technical bits were being set up and con attendees were trickling in. I had to get all movement co-ordinated into one smooth operation but wait, where are the round tables? And whose tables are these? Where are Peter-Fred's and Christina's display boards? Where's the Gestetner equipment? Why are the workmen still in the Repro room and why are there no lights in the corridor? I felt like an ant in an anthill; at one moment I'm in Hall 5 loading bay directing stuff to the Clarence Suite, next I'm in Ops charging my wally-phone batteries, then to my room to get some bits for the fan room, back to the Clarence Suite and on and on. I meet with hotel management again and finalize the building of our programme room. When are the workmen leaving the Repro room? The management tell me that they'll be out by four, the workmen themselves believe that they'll be there until eight every evening through Saturday. Argh . . . I can't stand it. In the midst of all this I'm fielding every kind of question imaginable from "Where's the loo?" to "Where am I meant to set up this costume display?", "Which programme item am I on?", "Where can I find Joe Blow from Kentucky?", "Can I buy a fanzine now?". No no no no no . . . we're not set up yet, I tell them. We're not really open as a con until tomorrow. Please go look at Brighton, play on the pier (I refrain from saying "Go jump off of it").

In the midst of all this chaos, jumble and confusion one Robert Sacks enters the scene. Someone grabs my attention, "Talk to him" they say placing me in front of Mr. Sacks. He's here to do WOOF he says. Ah yes, I remember, a Worldcon apa of some mysterious configuration. He wants to use the Repro room. What Repro room? We have a decorators' room, full of wallpaper, paint buckets, drop cloths and scaffolding with a few duplicators and a photocopier sitting in the middle of it, but no Repro room as such. Sorry, I tell him, we're not set up please come back tomorrow and we'll discuss it. He doesn't seem to comprehend and proceeds to tell me his rights as WOOF administrator. I try to put it in simple terms for him; "No. Not today." This doesn't work either and I can see by the looks from the rest of my crew as they scurry between boxes that he's already tried this on the rest of them. I get more of the same from him along with a history of WOOF. I try again, "Once we're set up you'll have to speak to Greg or Maureen. They're in charge down here and can tell you when the equipment is available and how much it'll cost . . ." This doesn't satisfy the fella and while my wally-phone blares in my ear, the telephone rings and I see boxes being delivered where they shouldn't he tells me again about the rights of WOOF. Well, believe it or not even my patience wears thin; "GO AWAY." Greg recognises that I must be peeved if I have to shout at someone and comes to my rescue, telling Robert in his own Greg-like way that he is not welcome at the moment. Maureen and I exchange shrugs and roll our eyes heavenwards in a brief prayer for strength from a higher source. Saint Brönte Sisters don't fail us now. We whip back into action.

By the end of Wednesday sometime, I've lost track of time, I at least have the programme room built and the repro equipment set up ready to roll for the first edition tomorrow. The workmen are still to be there until Saturday but we've reached a peaceful co-existence with them: they have one corner and the walls, we have the rest of the room. It continued like this all weekend. The fan room was set up with only a few round tables left to find and the displays are up in a dark corridor.

(PLEASE NOTE: I'm saying 'I' in many cases when I mean the many who worked damned hard getting all this done.)

Thursday was the real day. We were functioning as a con on Thursday; yesterday was just practice. People are pouring into our fan room, into the hotel. They come and come and come . . . I feel swamped, almost drowned. Somewhere I describe it to someone as being like a tidal wave of fans and activities crashing down on top of us and we hang on to order and sanity by our fingernails to keep from being washed up and away by a

surge of people, each with a dozen queries, complaints or opinions to air. I go through my anthill routine: upstairs, through corridors, downstairs, more up, more down, around the workmen and scaffolding, past security guards with my high level security photo-pass . . . hey, I'm just so important with my pass, my beeper, my wally-phone, my "committee" badge. Where can I hide, ma? I look down at the no-longer-white sneakers on my feet, wishing that they had some kind of paint on the soles so that I could track how many miles of hotel and Brighton seafront I had walked so far. I start to see more and more familiar faces, "Linda, how are you?" I hold my fingers to my head like antenna and make ant noises as I pass; "Diddle deddle deep, deddle deep . . ." Either they understand or they don't. I never stand still long enough to find out.

Back in the fan room the P.A. is being fiddled with by some tech-ops looking people and round tables are being rolled out though with no covers. Great. Maureen is whipping her gang into shape for the first Plot and Peter-Fred and Christina are struggling along in a still dark corridor. Lights! I've got to find out how to get lights. Our friend Mr Sacks is back. "Can we talk?" I know what he wants. "I honestly can't right now. Please talk to Greg or Maureen. They're in charge down here." He follows me around awhile and I get more on the rights of WOOF. I snap again, "If this is such a world con tradition how comes the rest of the world doesn't know about it . . ." Later I hear that Greg is credited with this line. Damn. I never get to be the heavy. Beyond Robert I move ant-like to the ops room in search of lights.

I make it to the opening ceremony, my one event of the evening then back to the hotel again to arrange for the fan room party. The less said about that the better except that it was hot, confused and a mess after the trouble caused by the fire alarm being set off by the disco smoke bomb. The disco DJs tried later to claim that it wasn't their smoke bomb but a fire exit door being opened that set off the alarms but the committee knew for a fact that the doors they mentioned had been opened several times already without the effect of having five fire engines rush onto the scene. Sorry guys, it was a SMOKE BOMB. The party suffered greatly for having the inspectors close down our area due to overcrowding. Still, it was a good try.

And so it went; Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday. I woke at 7:30 each morning in order to get a bit of breakfast before our 8:00am committee meetings. I was in bed by 3:00 each night. The pace eased only somewhat from a tidal wave to mere raging tides and I managed to ease in some socializing between the responsibilities. We finally got lights for the corridor, not through the hotel but through the kindness and courtesy of the workmen who loaned us a string of their work lights to drape over the display boards. Maureen did an ace job of keeping the newsletter flowing with a good routine set up but by this time Mr Sacks had already written us off as uncooperative meanies and his WOOF thingy only appeared as an item dropped in the newsletter info box. The fanroom itself had a good feel to it and a very international air. With the exception of a few paper-plane throwing assholes who made things miserable for too many, the atmosphere remained social, lively and interesting to watch. Watch was all I got to do, too, as I whizzed in and out of the room on my various rounds. The fanzine sales went very well and the fan-funds profited well out of both sales and auctions. The fan programme items were well attended and seemed to meet Martin's original idea of 'contention'. Within my little world of responsibility, everything seemed to go well despite the many setbacks the hotel provided for us.

And the rest of the con? I don't know . . . you tell me. I spent five minutes in the art show looking for someone, ten minutes in the dealers' room going from point A to B, missed the Bedford Hotel altogether, ditto Hall 4 and Winter Garden programme. I managed all the major events and missed everything else.

Tuesday was the take down day. Everything had to be dismantled, packed up and out of the hotel by noon. Most of the con attendees who had helped during the event had left so helpers were few and far between. Everyone around me was exhausted yet in the face of such pressure as the hotel gave us we summomed our last bits of energy from somewhere and got the job done. Not the last bit of energy. We did manage to have a few drops left for the dead dog party that night. I managed to help an old Southern buddy clean out his suite 'fridge of beer ("They'll only charge me for it anyway.") then one last double brandy in the lounge before I passed out.

— Linda Krawecka
"Rush!"
TWP 39, 1987

 On Conspiracy . . . "Did you enjoy it, then?" people ask. Stupid question. "Did you enjoy it then?" I ask other people, proving to myself that I really am as bad as everyone else (I'm not sure about the 'then's. They creep in, like 'basically's and 'actually's, special Euro-offers — one FREE useless word with every sentence you buy). Neither I nor they know how to answer the question. "Well, there were good bits, and . . . um . . . not so good bits, you know?" I suppose I enjoyed it, overall, notwithstanding, on consideration, given the circumstances . . .

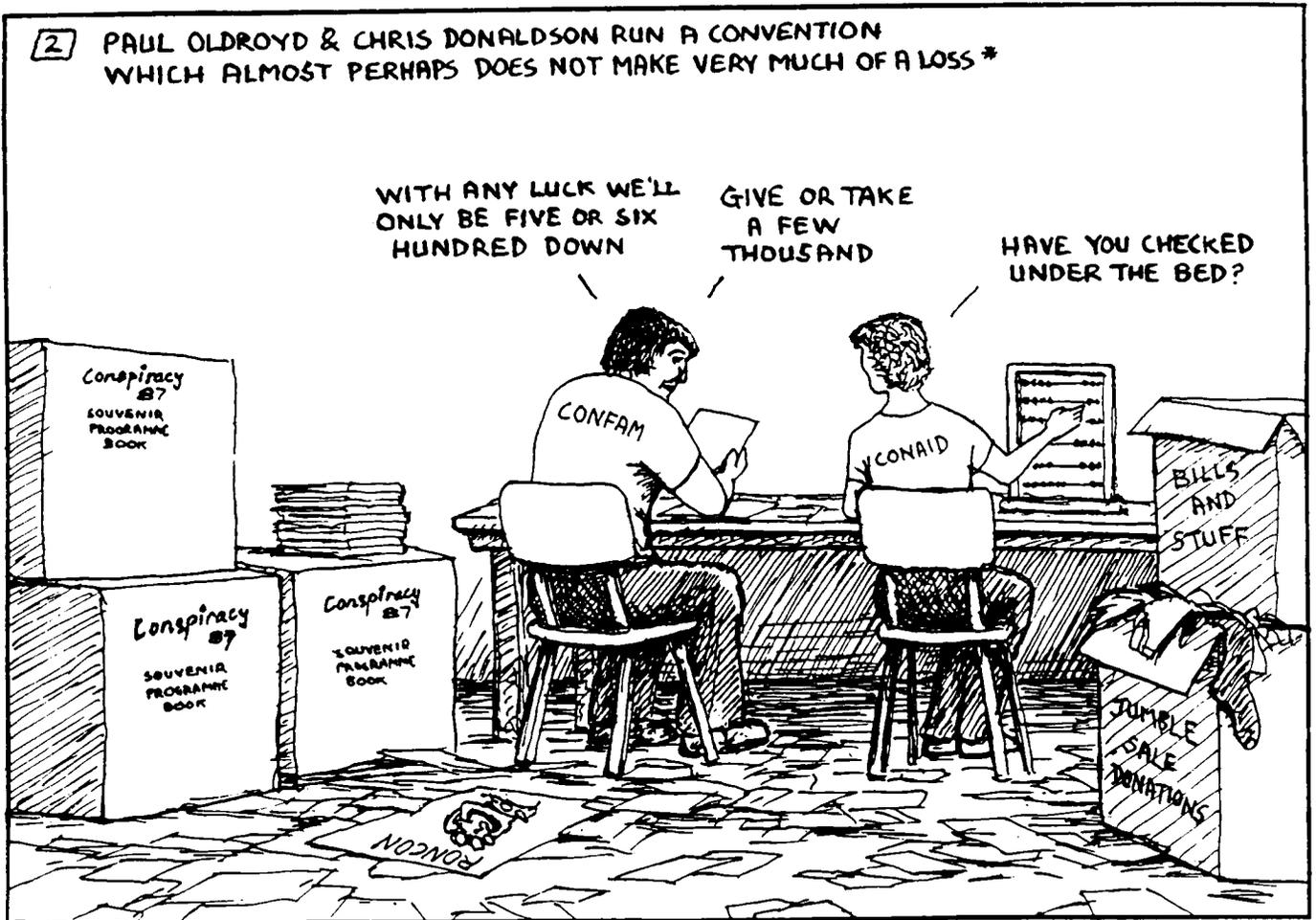
I remember coming back, last Wednesday, after ten days of toil which was only occasionally alleviated by too much alcohol, and wondering why it seemed so much like all the other conventions I've been to. Dubious panels, good fan room, films I always just missed, and the same familiar faces, just diluted by a different crowd. God knows where the five thousand were — I certainly never looked for them. I admit it — I met some nice people. Unfortunately, as the Games Programme proved more popular than we'd expected, I met them in the Games Suite. We lived and breathed games for almost all the con. It could have been worse really.

Ten days drinking mostly Webster's Yorkshire bitter, flat and twice the price, exhausted me. Going down South is like being trapped in the one bar for two hundred miles. They jack the prices up just to aggravate you and then smile at you, suggesting you can always go elsewhere. You can't. My only strike against the Metropole's extortionism was to eat at least four people's worth of breakfasts (and I do not lie), and then survive off my not-inconsiderable fat for the rest of each day. Arguments with the management were dull and frequent, and my only further comment on this is that if anyone plans to use the Met as a con hotel in the next five years, they should seek psychiatric advice first (I offer very competitive rates . . .). The committee did their best, given the circumstances, which were sometimes the worst.

A microcosm in which every second person tells you about their 32nd level magic user character is frightening. The first day slid inexorably into this horror, and then inexplicably away from it. I had anxious indigestion (no cabbage) until someone reminded me to relax and told me that I wasn't exactly indispensable. Annoying, but quite true. We formed our own self-contained unit, staff and gofers loyal to our own crisply-flapping flag. I pretended to be El Presidente, but abdicated frequently whenever my authority was questioned. Life went on.

We worked until eleven at night, then went down to the bar and went through the late night pattern: 55 minutes utter slump, during which conversation rose occasionally to "Urgh . . ." or "Pint . . .". Then 5 minutes where everyone looked at each other with suspicious squints. "Well, I suppose . . ." "Just one more . . ." "Still early, really . . ." The dreaded, dreadful Second Wind arose. Too dim to retire at the right moment, we then went on to laugh hysterically and get terribly drunk until four in the morning at which point we realised that we'd blown it and were going to be completely knackered for another day until it came round to "Urgh . . ." and "Pint . . ." again.

Simon Polley
"On Conspiracy"
Vile Anchors 1, 1987



* FINAL FIGURES AVAILABLE 1992 GIVE OR TAKE A FEW YEARS

D. West

The convention received some television coverage, which predictably concentrated on the more photogenic elements of the spectacle. Hazel Ashworth watched it in company with the Leeds group round at Simon Ounsley's house:

We are zoom-lensed into the front room of a home economics teacher, who is sitting at her sewing machine. She is talking about her life in a tight-faced, earnest monotone. We hear how thin and confident she is after being horribly fat in adolescence; after uttering pious thanks for her own liberation to the God of skiffy, she makes a few withering comments about "straights". I blush. There are gurgling noises all round Simon's lounge as the rest of them (Mal, D., Michael) take refuge in cans of Webster's best. Simon has the triumphant air of someone who has produced all and more that could be asked of him. Fascinated against our will, we follow this lady's progress during the weeks before the con: there's a specially solemn moment as we watch her in school, filling jam tarts. I glance cautiously round the room. Ashley's face has taken on a kind of numb, inscrutable expression, but that could be the beer.

Her final outfit is indeed very beautiful, and I think she gets to win something; at the least, she gets photographed a lot. Well goodo. It's nice to see someone enjoying a fulfilling hobby . . . but wait, this is not all. Soaring on the wings of her now unbridled imagination, this woman tells us that as she has just reached her 30th? 40th? birthday she feels she shouldn't make more display of her withered flesh — even if decently veiled in feet of tulle and lace — and she will retire from the catwalk. How wacky! Another first for skiffy! Brings tears to your eyes, doesn't it, this brave divergence! Personally, I would like to spit, but Simon's got a good carpet on the floor.

We don't, mercifully, get to hear what this zany, no-holds-barred creature intends to do with the rest of her life. Instead there's a short respite as we see Paul Kincaid succeed in talking sense to the inane interviewer; then Kate Solomon talks about

the clothes she's made for the Masquerade, and the effect science fiction has had on her life. This is considerably better than Ms Domestic Science, and much easier on the eye: it's also fun to see people you know on the TV ("Aargh! There's the back of Pickersgill's head! Oooh! Aah! There's Don and Michael in the fan room! Don't they look poorly!" etc.).

Three-quarters of the programme has gone by, though and still no mention of the Russian GoHs, Arkady and Boris Strugatsky, after all the trouble they had getting to Britain. Who? Neither sight nor sound of Ray Harryhausen and his striking 3D Gorgons and dragons. What? The Masquerade continues to mesmerise: next we have far too many shots of some group called 7up or 8 1/2 or something, who not only like dressing up, they like to pretend to shoot each other and fall over with their legs in the air.

Then, with stomach-lurching suddenness, we are up in the sky somewhere above the Metropole, looking at Brian Aldiss's face. It almost fills the screen. A pier down in the left-hand corner is a tiny, lego-sized structure far below. I'm afraid that he's going to say, "May the Force be with you" but he waits with professional calmness for whatever the interviewer has got up his sleeve.

It comes, with breathtaking impertinence:

"Where does GOD come in?"

Unhesitatingly, without so much as a moue or a raised eye-brow, Mr Aldiss does his stuff. I mouth protestingly at Simon, who makes soothing gestures like handing me a can of beer and asking which nasty-flavoured crisps would I like?

The video comes to an unlamented full-stop.

— Hazel Ashworth
"Brighton Burble"
Lip 3, March 1988

Which mention of God brings us back, of course, to
 Scientists and the infamous incident of **Dave Langford**,
 Fred Harris and the pint of beer . . .

Strange Vibrations

The most controversial item on the Conspiracy '87 fan programme was a tendentiously titled panel: "Why Have The Americans Hijacked The Worldcon?" Several spoof versions of the panel name were soon going the rounds, the most durable and most productive of glum nods being, "Why Has L. RON HUBBARD Hijacked The Worldcon?"

How was it that a World SF Convention held in Britain, where Hubbard has never been taken seriously, became so saturated with hype for this essentially minor author? And how, conversely, did the biggest publicity operation ever seen in British SF fall so flat on its face?

Let's go back a few years. I have a rather peculiar relationship with Hubbard's later works: reporting on or reviewing them is somehow never simple. *Battlefield Earth* has a tortuous publishing history, with St Martin's Press (USA) dropping it despite alleged huge sales, and New English Library (UK) taking the very unusual step of cancelling publication after they'd circulated proofs to reviewers. Mildly interesting items for an SF newsletter? When I reported NEL's change of mind in *Ansible*, there were surprisingly strong reactions from people who went on about evil, prejudiced Langford running down a fine book just because he hated Scientology. [1]

"But," I protested, "I carefully didn't say anything about the book's content, because I haven't yet read it . . ."

"Aha! He admits it!" was the approximate response from one source. "He doesn't even read books before attacking them!"

In due course *Battlefield Earth* crashed through the letter box, and I made a point of reading every word — expecting a fast-moving piece of trashy fun, along the lines of Hubbard's early stuff. I was deeply disappointed by the glacial pace, the windy vacuity, the bone-rattling clichés, the scientific codswallop, the self-congratulatory "this is real SF" introduction, etc. I said as much in a partly humorous, knockabout review: and again there were complaints that this was all a display of wicked anti-Scientological prejudice.

Other negative reviews I've written have provoked people to tell me that I'm too "mainstream" to enjoy escapism, too fond of fun to appreciate total humourlessness, or too lowbrow to swing with post-structuralism. Only with Hubbard was my critical integrity at once challenged. (It could be cattily suggested that to some at least of his supporters, Hubbard's wonderfulness is such an article of faith that no other reaction is possible. [2]) I developed what you might call a mild, informed prejudice: that Hubbard meant trouble.

This was slightly reinforced at the 1984 British Easter SF Convention, when Fred Harris of Author Services Inc. (an organization with seemingly limitless funds for the promotion of L. RON HUBBARD) took me very seriously aside and asked searching questions about the depth of my supposed Scientology prejudice . . . a strangely off-key thing for a publicist to do. Later, having presumably discovered that that unfavourable Hubbard review was one of the several from which I'd cobbled together my talk for that very convention, [3] he actually rang from Los Angeles and insisted on knowing why I hadn't liked the book. Again, off-key. Trouble?

I didn't feel worried. *Battlefield Earth* had been such a let-down that (as with a few other authors) I'd already decided I wouldn't bother reading any future works by Hubbard. No reviews; no trouble.

Until Conspiracy '87, the 45th World SF Convention . . .

"Oh God!" I kept hearing fans say as they discovered the pocket programme book — L. RON HUBBARD's Pocket Programme of the Future, as many insisted on calling it. The sponsored cover picture came from *The Invaders Plan*, first of a posthumous, ten-book Hubbard series. "Image of fascism," was frequently muttered (a big green fist with a spiked bracelet, clenched around the Earth); but what irritated was that it looked so cheap, so unstylish, a symbol of all that's old and hackneyed and bad about SF — as opposed to Jim Burns's lovely and very 1980s Souvenir Book cover. And one couldn't get away from this naff thing for the five days of the Worldcon.

A minor irritation, perhaps, but a constant one . . .

Then there was *L. RON HUBBARD'S* (in very big letters) *Writers of the Future Contest*: a flyer riding with Conspiracy Progress Report 4, five full pages in the infamous pocket programme, an enclosure full of "name" authors poised to dispense wisdom from the best spot in the Dealers' Room (next to the bar entrance), and posters without number.

Here one's reactions are more confused, since at first glance it surely must be a good idea to encourage new authors. Yet the young authors were such a tiny part of the scene. We had the omni-dominant banners of HUBBARD and HUBBARD and HUBBARD again, and beneath this holy name the archangels and angels, the thrones and dominions and powers — established living authors who for one reason or another had lent their names and images, and who were endlessly touted as endorsing it all, and somehow through a shimmer of publicity the chief though never stated message seemed to be that they're endorsing L. RON HUBBARD, good old L. RON HUBBARD himself, grand master of everything, rehabilitated at last! While as for the aspiring writers of the future, the ostensible *raison d'être* of the whole circus . . . amidst all the self-congratulatory glitter and hype they faded to invisibility.

Ah, Langford, you're just prejudiced. But it's an ambiguous business. Will the patronage and the established luminaries add lustre to the name of Hubbard; or will that name (hardly in the past an entrée to the topmost ranks of SF, or anywhere else) ultimately diminish those who march under it as well-meaning mercenaries?

Meanwhile, the constant repetition of L. RON HUBBARD all over the convention did somehow chafe. It was a question of taste. Wall-to-wall publicity on this scale (especially for someone we cannot take seriously as a writer) is alien to the frugal British. Perhaps one should grit one's teeth. It is just the American Way.

After what the fans called L. RON HUBBARD'S Masquerade (at which, I was told by anguished watchers, endless costumes were announced as competing in the category sponsored by New Era and Bridge, [4] thanks to L. RON HUBBARD), I met Ross Pavlac. He had chaired the 1982 Chicago Worldcon and had felt pretty bad about the Hubbard crew's attempts to buy the whole event for *Battlefield Earth* publicity. He also passed disparaging remarks about similar mega-publicity efforts by Lucasfilms. He had, he said, never seen anything like the Author Services / New Era / L. RON HUBBARD "takeover" (his word) of a convention's image. He was surprised and dismayed that the British had accepted an operation so much more blatant than the equivalent Author Services performances in America.

Many of the British had also been surprised and dismayed. The irritation level went up another degree or so, but by and large I stayed out of the way: in the fan suite, doing my bonhomous duty as a fan guest. This included listening to an awful lot of rude jokes and bitchy remarks about Writers of the Future and L. RON HUBBARD. The relentless over-publicization had so far succeeded in converting Hubbard from a minor curiosity into a fair-sized annoyance. Great work, Author Services Inc.

Came the Hugo ceremony . . . and here my viewpoint is very much more personal. I was nominated for a couple of Hugos, and sat in the front row telling myself I was going to be very cool and calm about it. One shouldn't take awards *that* seriously. So there I was coated in clammy sweat, twitching a little as spurts of adrenalin hit the bloodstream, forcing myself to breathe from time to time: and suddenly everything halted.

Why was famous SF person Algis Budrys standing up there, droning on about how wonderful it was that that fine fellow Ramsey Campbell had signed up for the next wave of expansion of L. RON HUBBARD'S bloody Writers of the Future? Was he never going to stop? Why had the committee let him up there at all?

(A good question; clearly the convention committee had to some extent lost control. [5] It was later asserted that Mr Budrys did promise beforehand *not* to drag in the name of L. RON HUBBARD, nor that of New Era, nor to go on for more than a few sentences. But I believe he has a different version of events.)

It having thus been established that this was L. RON HUBBARD'S Hugo Ceremony, the presentations went on much as usual: except that Algis Budrys's words of hype had been the last straw for many fans who already felt — with what justice I do not know, since I have no intention of reading it [6] — that the Hugos' credibility had been damaged by the debated presence of Hubbard's *Black Genesis* on the novel shortlist. When Gene Wolfe read out the name of that nominee, large sections of the audience booed. ("Shame on you," said Wolfe; with some observers insisted, a twinkle in his eye.)

From a name that fans merely made bitchy jokes about, Author Services Inc. had now promoted L. RON HUBBARD to the point where he was openly booed at the Worldcon's major event. There's publicity for you.

I suppose I should have smelt a rat when after posing with the other Hugo winners for innumerable photographs right there in the main hall, the word went round about an "official" photo call. Up, up, up; and it was the Skyline Restaurant, with a beaming Fred Harris welcoming us to the New Era party and saying — to me, personally — something about how glad he was that I'd "come in out of the fog at last". This nearly drove me straight back out again, but I am a fairly polite little fan and tagged along after Brian Aldiss . . .

Looking round at the saturation level of L. RON HUBBARD publicity in this inner sanctum, Brian said something like, "My God, we've just won the L. RON HUBBARD Awards, formerly the Hugos!"

Possibly as an after-effect of the recent adrenalin rush, I thought this excruciatingly funny. So, later, when I'd had a camera pointed at me by some extremely clean-cut young men, I plagiarised the line as a wry parting joke which (I dimly thought) couldn't possibly give offence, even here. The effect was curiously disturbing. The former smiles became fixed and glassy, the local temperature seemed to drop several degrees, and I was told in very level tones to "Take it easy . . . take it easy . . . have a nice party."

After I'd left, it occurred to me that I couldn't imagine getting anything like that reaction by making a joke (even a much ruder one) about any other author at a party run by any other publisher I know. Again: there *is* something different about the L. RON HUBBARD crowd. The tiniest sn---- at any of their doings merely indicates that the person responsible is suspect — a troublemaker.

Of course I may be exaggerating minutiae observed in the feverish aftermath of the Hugo presentations. But the little ratchet of tension and irritation had clicked up another notch . . . especially when the world came back into clear focus and I started to feel I'd been manipulated. The "official photo call" ruse had sucked up my own small moment of glory into that omnipresent publicity machine.

By the final day, Monday, it seemed that a large number of fans had become similarly, cumulatively bothered by the grotesque scale of the L. RON HUBBARD promotions. They were still joking, but with much nastier overtones. Algis Budrys had helped tip the balance, with his tedious remarks usurping prime time at the Convention's "central event". Yes, I actually heard the phrases "central event" and "major event" in this context, from fans whose normal reaction to the Hugos is a giggle. Annoyance has reached a remarkable level when it overcomes the British pose of Total Cool about such things. American fans and professionals were likewise muttering in corners. Appalling anecdotes were swapped ("Did you know that when X was President of SFWA he got a call from Author Services Inc. asking how much it would cost to buy L. RON HUBBARD a SFWA Grand Master award?"): however exaggerated or fictitious, they revealed the temper of the convention by the readiness with which they were believed.

I don't think Author Services ever quite comprehended the Brits' snobbish preference for understatement, subtlety and humour in advertising. Certainly their Conspiracy '87 splurge was utterly devoid of all three. Perhaps, in the end, Fred Harris did begin to see what went wrong.

This brings us to the infamous SFWA party on Monday night — with apologies again to mine host, Ian Watson. I have nothing to be proud of. My only excuses for becoming extremely off-sober were release of tension (I'd finally got through my last and most worrying programme item) and trying to keep up with Bob Shaw. It is not my normal practice, however provoked by people droning on about him, to pronounce distinctly and publicly the words "Oh, fuck L. RON HUBBARD!"

This led to a brief and mutually rewarding exchange of hurled drinks with Fred Harris (he had first go, but my glass was *much* fuller), and rather embarrassingly to fulsome congratulations from innumerable fans, authors, editors and agents throughout the rest of the week. Their response might indicate Author Services' popularity, but I think they all missed the point.

That night, smiling Fred Harris finally lost his own cool. (Interested bystanders tell me that amongst the phrases he gabbled and I didn't quite catch were, "You're all washed up, Langford!" and "You'll never work in this field again!") At the risk of repeating myself, I note that it's an unexpected reaction from a professional publicist who must once or twice before have heard some unflattering words about his late client. Again, things are *different* in Hubbard country. But consider . . .

For five days his organization, fuelled by the limitless coffers of wherever, had hurled vast gobs of money at British fandom to glorify L. RON HUBBARD; and by the end of it all, Hubbard's name was just a bad joke.

Even the vaguely charitable, "public service" flavour of the basic Writers of the Future idea seemed at the time to go sour — thrown into a new light, by relentless over-exposure of THAT NAME, as another though subtler aspect of this attempt to buy posthumous SF acceptance at any price.

I think that at the close of Conspiracy, picking up the vibrations from all around him, Fred Harris realized this . . . and almost, one can sympathize.

Meanwhile, I rather suspect that I've blown my last chance to become a Writer of the Future. To be honest, each contact with Author Services and its doings has left me feeling increasingly negative about them and the things they promote: without being a particularly sensitive person, I kept running into these alien reactions, the false notes mentioned above. [7]

Why? Fandom, ever ready to leap to conclusions, offers an easy answer: "Ah, they're all Scientologists, so any criticism of Hubbard sets them off because it's blasphemy." I wouldn't

know. (Though paranoid defensiveness does certainly seem characteristic of the Scientology organization.) There are other possibilities. The Author Services Inc. people might have a huge chip on their collective shoulder because they know their efforts are liable to attract just this dismissal — or because they chafe at the repressed knowledge that their promotion of L. RON HUBBARD as a great writer is in the last analysis absurd.

Without needing to pick and choose between these or other causes for the organization's ways, I know I want nothing to do with Writers of the Future. As an author and critic, I value my independent judgement: with my sincerely held opinion of *Battlefield Earth* and my general inability to keep my big mouth shut, I cannot get involved with people who go icy-cold at the merest hint that this trash is not an SF masterpiece. Meanwhile, as a science fiction fan, I value my independent sense of humour. I refuse to accept that (as implied in certain Author Services reactions noted above) there are secrets of the universe, such as L. RON HUBBARD, about which one may not make jokes.

Prejudice? Yes indeed. In all these little ways, Author Services Inc. has resolutely managed to prejudice me. Further misgivings arise from my quite honest efforts to research L. RON HUBBARD himself and find whether he's as black as he's painted. These researches consistently imply that the final line of Hubbard's *Times* obituary was a delicate understatement: "He was not a nice man."

If I were a beginning writer, I'd think more than twice before associating myself with that name.

1. Concerning prejudice . . . There's plenty of weird and worrying reportage of Scientology to be had, the bitterest diatribes usually coming from ex-Scientologists. It's hard for laymen to decide how much has changed since the bad old days. Is Hubbard's dismayingly paranoid and misogynistic *Dianetics* (1950) still a central text, or have things — as one hopes — moved on a bit? This isn't relevant to a critique of *Battlefield Earth*, but assumes some importance if you take the not uncommon view that Hubbard's name smells and the sole purpose of Author Services Inc. is to sanitise it.

2. "It is in the uncompromisingness with which dogma is held and not in the dogma or want of dogma that the danger lies." Samuel Butler, 1902.

3. "The Dragonhiker's Guide to Battlefield Covenant at Dune's Edge: Odyssey Two", published in Dave Wood's fanzine *Xyster* (1984) and most recently reprinted in the Langford booklets *Platen Stories*, a collection of articles published by Conspiracy '87, and *Let's Hear It For The Deaf Man* (NESFA Press, 1992).

4. New Era Publications UK Ltd is the publishing house responsible for the Hubbard "dekalogy" (the term "vanity press" is being strenuously resisted in this article) and the Writers of the Future anthologies. The Bridge imprint is the American equivalent.

By a funny coincidence, New Era also publishes such works as Hubbard's *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health*, for which I have just received a new stack of sales literature. The historically-minded may remember that *Dianetics* was the early name for what become Scientology.

By another funny coincidence, many fans reported being approached on the Brighton seafront by people with clipboards, who asked questions about whether one was satisfied with one's present self, and whether one had heard of *Dianetics*. . . .

A note on scale: it is not unknown for Masquerade categories to be sponsored, or for flyers to go out with progress reports, or for multi-page ads to appear in convention publications, or for shiny four-colour pocket programme covers to be paid for, or for Dealers' Room stands to be hired, or for SF events to be papered with glossy promotional literature, or for lavish parties to be thrown. But doing all these things and more does smack of excess.

5. Thanks to the combination of a lack of sponsorship co-ordination, the usual deadly fear of making a loss, and at least one disaster late in the day (previous arrangements for the Pocket Programme cover had fallen through), even the Conspiracy '87 committee found itself dismayed by the huge preponderance of L. RON HUBBARD advertising. Presumably it's difficult to say No when the representative of an outfit which has pumped large sums of money into the Worldcon asks for permission to make a "harmless" announcement.

The convention, I gather, just about broke even.

The committee did manage to resist a pre-convention attempt to arrange for the paid circularization of all members with flyers urging them to vote *Black Genesis* a Hugo. . . but obviously it's possible to point the finger of censure at them for accepting (by some accounts, canvassing for) the overpublicization. Since everyone seems to agree that the publicity splurge went beyond excess into counter-productive overkill, one wonders how and why Author Services professionals allowed themselves to be lured on to their doom.

6. What I've been reading is Russell Miller's *Bare-Faced Messiah: The True Story of L. Ron Hubbard* — a fascinating book which incidentally reveals that I'm not the only one to find Hubbard's latest works daunting. "A.E. van Vogt, whose endorsement of [*Battlefield Earth*] appeared prominently on the cover, later confessed that he had been daunted by its size and had not actually bothered to read it."

7. I've omitted a minor encounter or two, in which politesses prevailed and that odd characteristic sense of strain (though present) less tersely describable.

— Dave Langford
"Strange Vibrations"
Conspiracy Theories November 1987

| Alternatively . . .

I polled 200 people at my place of work with the question, "What, if anything, do the following mean to you: dianetics, scientology, L. Ron Hubbard?" The replies were: 196 don't know, 1 isn't dianetics like aerobics, 1 aren't scientologists a christian science group, and 2 it's all to do with another bleeding nut cult — no-one takes it seriously do they. I personally find it highly amusing that fandom is so worked up about it when, let's face it, they couldn't give a toss about, say, Moonies. The "keep fandom pure" faction have soup for brains and it's about time they grew up and joined the real world.

— Tony Chester
Letter to *A Free Lunch* 3

Amazingly enough, the Brighton Worldcon was not the only event of 1987. Business as usual on the Eastercon front meant that the Becon team ran a low key Eastercon in a hotel in the hinterland to the echoing concrete voids of the Birmingham NEC. Of more long term significance to the landscape of fannish life was the abandonment by London fandom of its old home at the One Tun in Farringdon.

LONDON FANDOM MEETS ITS WATERLOO reported *Ansible* in one of the last issues before its post-Conspiracy sabbatical.

The inertia of fandom is a strange and wondrous thing. For years, on the first Thursday of each month, fannish pilgrims have travelled from the remote boundaries of known space to their ritual London meeting-place the One Tun pub . . . there to spend an merry social evening complaining about the bloody awful crowd and the emetic beer, in terms suggesting that by comparison the Black Hole of Calcutta was an oasis of airy tranquillity. A select few pros (screened for ideological correctness by Malcolm Edwards) withdrew to the nearby Sir Christopher Hatton. A select many simply stayed home rather than face the Tun.

This steady decline was arrested by the decisive action of no less a 100% macho man than the One Tun's manager, who in January blew his top at scenes of sick depravity (reportedly, Oscar Dalgleish with an arm round his boyfriend) and banned the offenders. Suddenly it was solidarity time; outraged petitions were circulated; and February's meeting was definitely rescheduled for the Cittie of York in Holborn. Or the Wellington near Waterloo, depending whose definite information you listened to. If I'd known it was that easy to trigger the long-overdue move, I'd have kissed Greg Pickersgill years ago.

The February Tun (as people kept calling it, followed by "YOU know what I mean.") was thus a bit scattered. The Wellington sounded most promising, but I made the mistake of following detailed route directions from Avedon Carol: "Right opposite Waterloo station." In the darkness of a winter evening it's remarkable how many hundreds of square miles of London turn out to be opposite Waterloo

Situation reports and fans trickled into the vastness of the Wellington. The Cittie of York contingent was suffering severe and familiar overcrowding. *Hitch-Hiker* fandom had apparently cried with one voice "Good riddance," and adopted the Tun for its own. A few stakhanovites like Martin Easterbrook touched base at all three locations, spreading pro-Wellington propaganda with a will. Your editor had already allowed himself to be swayed, as it were, by the beer — not to mention the luxury of being able to breathe in without a prior written request to surrounding fans. Everyone seemed happy: the Wellington it is, henceforth. (From the Tube, aim for the WATERLOO ROAD station exit, following OLD VIC signs. Verb. sap.) This has been a Public Service Announcement, couched in Lofty Moral Tones. Pass it on.

— *Dave Langford*
Ansible 48, February 1987

The move certainly set the fannish grapevine buzzing, though most agreed that the move smacked more of opportunism than a principled stand. **Mike Christie** went one step further and used the incident to question the whole basis of the concept of fandom being more tolerant and liberal than the mundane world.

Where did the myth that fandom is a tolerant place come from? It's been strengthened recently by the removal of the Tun to the Wellington, on the grounds that no right-thinking liberal would carry on drinking in a pub that barred a gay fan. However, it doesn't need much cynicism to make it look less of an act of solidarity, and more one of opportunism. Innumerable people had wanted to move the Tun for years, on the grounds of size and bad beer; fannish inertia had prevented them, and now fannish liberality would give them the lever they needed.

Well, good for them. I'm glad the Tun moved on all counts, but I wonder how many of those at the Wellington in February noticed that the gay fan in question didn't turn up.

Another demonstration of liberality often cited is that fandom is a haven for social misfits. Convention bars are full of weirdos who would be quite unable to gain any measure of social acceptance outside fandom, hence fandom is a tolerant place.

This is crap. Graham James, in a masterly thirty seconds in *Performance* at Conception, demonstrated the reality, trying angrily to calm down a new fan he'd just reduced to tears. "Oh all right it was a fucking brilliant question and I'm glad you asked me that. Now go away and stop bothering me!" Visions of situations where you wished you'd said the same thing rose unbidden to everyone's mind, mine included.

So are fans intolerant and just mealy-mouthed about admitting it? Well, if they are, why do Mike Ashley and a few other

people on the fannish spectrum get castigated for what must then be purely a crime of honesty? There are fans who make no secret of their lack of empathy with Follycon fandom; Mike Ashley displays his poor opinion of most fanwriting with equal forthrightness; and yet people mumble "élitist" at one and "shithead" at the other although they're not necessarily viciously intolerant — they just aren't being hypocritical.

I accept there are fans who are not hypocrites in the way I'm describing. There are also fans who are actually genuinely tolerant — though very few. What bothers me is the widespread conviction that fans are broadminded and fair, when at the average convention I see more rudeness and snubbing than I do the rest of the year.

— *Mike Christie*
A Frecc Lunch 1, April 1987

The world of post-Conspiracy fandom seemed suddenly to be full of fresh-faced newcomers who put out A5-sized fanzines. Existing fans looked on in bemusement, like **Simon Ounsley**, who first encountered them at one of new series of conventions, run, apparently, by Steve and Jenny Glover.

LUCON

There wasn't really a convention in Leeds. How could there be? I hadn't been worrying for eighteen months. There hadn't been frantic committee huddles in the corner of Leeds group meetings. But we went along to LUCON and there was *something* there.

But there wasn't that familiar feeling that you usually get at a convention: that continuous SF con experience whose elements merge into each other so that when you leave one of them you know that you will pick up where you left off a few months later in a different part of the country as though it was only tomorrow and in the next bar along the corridor. This was something different. This was twenty people in a room like a school-room and an icy calm Jenny Glover trying to coax the occasional sentence out of a panel of Joy Hibbert, Sean Wilcock, a girl who did a gay / lesbian media fanzine, and a guy in a *Thomas The Tank Engine* jacket who drew comic strips about a cyberpunk teddy-bear. This had Glover kids climbing up the walls trying to jump out of the windows, Jenny frequently pausing in mid-sentence to snatch them from the jaws of death: "And would you say" (she snatches at a child's leg as it disappears out of the window) "that every six weeks is frequent enough for a fanzine?"

This is weird. This is the sercon backlash they talked about after SeaCon '79 but it's happening now, after Conspiracy. These are people who put fiction in their fanzines and would be surprised to be told that anyone thought this a bad idea. These are people who listen to Joy Hibbert saying she has now "finished her sabbatical" and is "accepting fanzines again" and don't think this is a strange way to carry on. These are people who are producing fanzines in the same way as the people I know but actually have a different concept of the whole process. Only I'm not really sure what this concept is. Where do they come from, I wonder? "Peterborough," says Lilian, as though this explains it all. I have this sudden surreal alternative explanation that they've all crept out of the bottom of Joy Hibbert's skirt. But Lilian is probably right.

Later on, we decide we've become a previous generation of fandom. "We're past it," I say, "The age of Peterborough is upon us. We've become the older gods, shadowy, semi-mythical figures like Pat and Graham Charnock." "But I'm only twenty-six," says Lilian miserably.

But I am right. And one day, the fandom that I think of as fanzine fandom will finally decide to do the right thing and fix the Nova award for *me*. It will be whispered along the

grapevine and I will hear and know that my moment of glory is at last upon me. I will calm myself and write my acceptance speech and sit in the audience at the closing ceremony, waiting anxiously for the announcement.

And the Nova award will be won by a fictionzine from Peterborough.

It was a good panel: at least 50% of the Glover kids were still alive at the end of it; Michael Ashley sat on the front row of the audience and remained silent, perhaps stunned, throughout; and Jenny was genuinely surprised to learn that Lilian and Christina were not really twins.

— *Simon Ounsley*
 "LUCON"
The Caprician 2, March 1988

appearance and personality, or *ii* already has a partner. Further, we all possess an Eighties awareness which restricts straying from our defined relationship. We still retain an interest in the gossipy side of fandom, however, if only because there isn't much else to it.

We were not picked up at Worldcon. As previously stated, we are either highly unattractive (and thus never get picked up), or we already come with boy / girlfriends (with whom we stick monogamously). The majority of recent neos became aware of fandom in the time leading up to Worldcon, though Conspiracy may well have been the first convention for many of us.

We already believe in FIAWOL. It's instinctive to us. Not having had a chance to really establish our own personal lives and careers, it is not difficult for us to fall into fandom. Indeed, we feel no embarrassment about any of it. But again we can be subdivided into: *i* those who believe in learning about everything fannish and getting to know as many fans as possible (eg Harry Bond . . .), and *ii* those who believe that as long as it's fun it's fine; those who have never seen a *Hyphen* and wouldn't recognise it if they did; those who only know Greg Pickersgill as that 'big cuddly man'; and those who couldn't care less about anything, really.

We don't produce zines. Nothing of note, anyway, and part of this can be blamed on the casual attitude of strain *ii* above. Some of us don't even read them. We are, as you point out, far more active in conventions and fanmeets and parties. Many neos even took the initiative of working on Conspiracy to be 'more fannish' — am I right in thinking that in previous times you would have worked at producing a zine to distribute at the con? But who knows — perhaps one day soon a whole host of zines will burst forth like butterflies in Spring, bringing colour and beauty to that increasingly overgrown patch of wasteground called Fandom.

We all claim to speak on behalf of the others. Every neo will talk as if he or she is the archetypal neofan, when in fact he or she is merely using it as an excuse to perform. Indeed, he or she hasn't got an idea what he or she is talking about and can't even decide on his or her gender.

— *Zy Nicholson*
The Caprician 3, August 1988

Naturally there were screams of disagreement from the remaining new fans, but by this time Zy had left fandom to go to university whilst Peterborough fandom put its energies into producing a short-lived sf magazine (*The Gate*). The concept of the new fan was quietly dropped when it became clear that in reality the new fan liked to work on con committees and sing filk songs.

Zy Nicholson, one of the new fans in question (although not from Peterborough), even wrote a sketch of his fannish generation, proving his sercon origins by parodying the title of an article in *Vector* ("Futuristic Gloveleather Blouson: SF and the new man" by Gwyneth Jones)

ATAVISTIC DOVE-FEATHER MOUFFLON:
Sf and the new fan
 — a special report by Zy Nicholson

"But where are they?" you cry. Here is a word or two about all us dynamic (ha!) sparkling (ho!) young (gagagoogoo) people that fandom was supposed to have picked up at the Worldcon.

We are neo in every sense of the word. We are not just new fen, but young people. It has been pointed out that Greg Pickersgill has been in fandom for longer than I've been in this *world*, and I'm a rather old neo at n-n-n-nineteen (OK, I know I write like a fifteen-year-old). This does not stop us picking up the disgusting habits of older fans. (Even Harry Bond, a mere youth of 17, occasionally turns up to the Wellington, a *tabern*, where they sell *alcohol* I might point out.)

We don't read SF. Unlike previous strains of neofan, we have already given up SF and do not suffer any surprises about older fen. Some of us never even started, but were won over by Russell Hoban and Martin Amis at the age of seven. (N.B. Some of us may experience mild shock upon discovering the devoted fannish readership for all that children's SF we had to suffer, but for many of us it merely confirms a suspicion that it was never meant for us anyway.)

We are, if possible, already attached, thus avoiding romantic fannish intrigue. Lecherous older fen will be disappointed to hear that the new breed of neo is either: *i* extremely unattractive in

Going Nova

Over the next year, the myth of fannish tolerance was not so much exploded as turned about to show an underside of deep dissatisfaction with the assumptions that fans make about themselves. Michael Ashley's misanthropic brand of writing, featuring sneers, impotence and underage sex and a value system that ran directly counter to the fandom of jolly beards and hearty filk singing that seemed to be emerging in the wake of Follycon, was seen by some as a breath of fresh air and realism, and by others as mindless cruelty.

In this extract from the controversial "What I Did In My Holidays" **Michael Ashley** describes a visit to the Wellington:

Indeed as I walk in I can see Pickersgill at one end of the bar and — right down the other end — his good buddy "Rob" Hansen. And skulking in the corner, dressed in black and perpetually sneering — yeah, it's Richardson and Harries. Real people, you know? These two do not, I'm afraid, follow the Marty Cantor Theory of Fannish Solidarity. If someone looks like a jerk then they treat them like a jerk. This may or may not be cruel. What it is, though, is at least token recognition that fandom is actually part of the real world and not some goody goody haven for halfwits. The three of us make no attempt whatsoever to socialise. This is because there is no-one present we wish to socialise with. Curiously, people seek us out, though they usually go away again when we don't respond to their every *bon mot*. Langford comes over and I shout in his ear. Avedon comes over and shouts in my ear. Vince doesn't come over; he doesn't come over to anyone. He stands in his own corner, flicking through his *Pulp* file card.

Clarke's hang-dog expression is seemingly unalterable but not long after I arrive it does drop considerably further. Harry Bond is talking to him because no-one else will talk to Harry Bond. For once I am at a loss for words. I mean, I can handle alienation and masturbation and suchlike, but Harry Bond is beyond me. I was to some extent prepared beforehand. This is what Richardson had said in a letter to me just before I left Bradford. Listen.

"Alun misjudges Harry Bond. 'Wanker' does not do our HB justice. Wood sez he's the spit of Michael Moorcock before he grew a beard and took half the country's quota of drugs. I'd imagine that the pre-Oxbridge Langford was a Harry Bond clone. He's the fan archetype — bright, unlovely and completely out of touch with the real world. I haven't seen his fanzine as I'd rather he didn't have my address — he'd probably turn up uninvited wanting to see my skiffy collection and Walt Willis nudie pix. He is pure Home Counties, Middle England — Patrick Moore at 18. Somehow one cannot imagine him getting down to Napalm Death and Extreme Noise Terror as he skateboards around Bagshot terrorising grannies (as a young fellow of his tender years should)."

— **Michael Ashley**
 "What I Did On My Holidays"
Lip 4, September 1988

When Michael Ashley won a Nova, largely (allegedly) on the strength of this piece which aside from lambasting his fellow fans, featured an elegaic description of lost love for his rubber-skirted nymphette girl-friend, **Avedon Carol** felt impelled to write the following:

It's like one of those dreams where you find yourself at a convention discussing the plight of the Cypriots with Ray Davies and Flo Kennedy — only in dreams it all seems perfectly normal and you don't realize until you wake up what an absurd situation it would have been. So maybe it's more like an acid trip where everything weird just seems to be happening to you and you keep having to check with other people and say, "Is it just the acid, or is this really strange?" And you know it's really happening, even though it doesn't make any sense. And every time you turn a corner or open a door, the entire world changes and a new weird scene comes up to replace completely the old weird scene you were goggling at only seconds ago. Even opening the door to the fridge is like entering a whole new planet, right?

So here I am, talking to D. West, or maybe he's talking to me. The thing is, I always seem to like D. West when we're talking, I think he's really a pretty nice guy, even if he seems a bit off the wall. He never actually talks like he's off the wall, it's just that when I try to put what he's saying together, it's like you've got pieces from seven different incomplete jigsaw puzzles all heaped in a box, and you can't figure out how to make all of these bits impressionist art and medieval portraiture and Karsh and what-have-you add up to a picture of Marilyn Monroe.

Anyway, it's the greenhouse effect in the Angus, I guess, sort of like looking at that big blue building in the middle of St Mark's Place and wondering, "Can this really be here?" West has decided to explain the facts of life to me, I think. He is telling me that, here in Britain, people worry about what other people think.

Back in memory, my sister and I are giggling, shouting: "What will the neighbours think?!"

But I don't tell my helpful Uncle Don this — I know that somewhere in there, despite what he's saying, there is a kindred spirit, a guy who'd really be more in his element clutching his gut with Sally and me while falling over laughing and screaming about the neighbours, the bloody neighbours, because the neighbours always think all sorts of things, but they know fuck all (and they aren't even smart enough to ask). Look at Harries over there, he's got to be the loneliest guy in the world, but he thinks he knows what he'd do in my place — and the pathetic thing is, the poor guy will never be lucky enough to have the chance to find out how wrong he is. And Richardson and Ashley — it's really sad, y'know? I mean, these guys are so afraid that people won't like them that they go out of their way to ensure it. If they could just bloody relax they might be okay, but they sit there looking like, well, like if he ever wakes up

Ashley will break out into a chorus of "Tomorrow Belongs to Me", and Richardson can't tell the difference between being out of his coffin or in it. And these, my friend, are the neighbours. Hours go by during which only Warming gives any evidence of life, and it really shows when he is sitting bracketed by these textbook cases of rigor mortis.

"I'm not saying it's right," West is saying, and what a relief it is to hear that. I try to explain. "If what you're doing is wrong, stop doing it. If it's not, then stop acting like it's shameful." He doesn't disagree, but reiterates that here, in Britain, people really do worry about what other people think. (It's 24 hours before I cop to the truth — all over America, people worry about nothing else but what the neighbours think. They also vote for people like Reagan and Bush, and they think that women who like to fuck are devils from hell.)

To make it all even weirder, West starts telling me that it's not nice to say mean things in print to people, and even more not nice to say rude things in print about things which people did other than in print. I stare at him to make sure it really is West speaking to me. I think this is a scene from *The Magus*, maybe. It's got to be a put-on. He will go back to Leeds and say, "You'll never guess what she fell for."

Nova Award Winners 1987-1994

	Fanzine	Fanwriter	FanArtist
1987	Hazel Ashworth <i>Lip</i>	D. West	D. West
1988	Hazel Ashworth <i>Lip</i>	Michael Ashley	D. West
1989	Jan Orys <i>VSOP</i>	Simon Polley	Dave Mooring
1990	Judith Hanna & Joseph Nicholas <i>FTT</i>	Dave Langford	Dave Mooring
1991	Michael Ashley <i>Saliromania</i>	Michael Ashley	D. West
1992	Ian Sorensen <i>Bob!</i>	Michael Ashley	Dave Mooring
1993	Simon Ounsley <i>Lagoon</i>	Simon Ounsley	Dave Mooring
1994	Greg Pickersgill <i>Rastus Johnson's Cakewalk</i>	Greg Pickersgill	D. West

And, as if I'd opened the refrigerator door, perspective shifts completely when Bloody Martin Smith from Croydon comes crawling up to us demanding to know why West scares him. "Why does this guy terrify me? That's what I want to know." I told him he was taking his life in his hands coming up to him and talking like that when West could do devastating things to him in print — "He can ridicule you brilliantly, that's why." "I could crush him in a fight! Why am I so afraid of him?" he continued. He has had too much of the real ale, you understand. "I know what it is!" he says (eureka). "It's because he doesn't give a shit. He just. Doesn't. Give a shit! He doesn't care what the rest of us think. West doesn't give a shit about me. He doesn't even notice!" I thought it was all deliciously ironic and stuff like that.

I have moved about six feet, and it's all completely different. Keith Mitchell had the hiccups. He kept trying to drink from the wrong side of his mug to cure them, but it didn't work. I fed him a spoonful of sugar, which seemed to be working until Hansen made a joke about it and had Keith nearly rolling on the floor again — and hiccupping once more. So finally I went over to D. and explained the situation. "What do you want me to do?" he asked eagerly, as if he knew just what I had in mind. "Kiss him." West obliged — at length. Keith didn't seem to mind, and it cured his hiccups. I decide once again that Keith is immensely cool and sexy. "Well," he said, "I figured if something like that was happening, the only thing I could do was enjoy it." Each gave the other a recommendation as a good kisser. This was more like it!

Well, maybe not. In another grand triumph of real ale over nearly everything, they are all drunk, too far gone. Smith gets sick and disappears. Owen is bitchy about the heat being turned off (and I'm pretty worried, myself, about being so cold that I might start to look like Nigel Richardson soon). Pam says she voted for Ashley in the Novas because of his article in *Lip 4*. Is this true? The same Pam Wells who said Polley should win it for *Vile Anchors*? Is this a sick joke? It's too much for Whiteoak, who takes this opportunity to call it a night. Morning. Whatever. I must confess, I am aghast. After all that crap Ashley wrote about Harry Bond, you'd think Pam, who takes offence herself at far less, would have considered it all a bit much. Oh, yeah, it's good stuff, just fine. "What's wrong with it?"

Oh, aside from the cruelty, insensitivity, and garden variety sexism, you mean? Well, hey, we are all sufficiently vain that we sometimes take a certain juvenile delight in our ability to be clever at the expense of other people, you know? It's the first kind of humor we learn as children, because it is so damned easy. Making fun of someone who is different or just blushes easily, laughing at cripples — we learn how to do it, and then, growing up, we learn *not* to do it in public. No wonder even Marty Cantor is bright enough to be surprised when Ashley makes rude remarks about his hair.

And I'm surprised at anyone who has such a pathetic love life that writing about it leads to thoughts of Harry Bond. Well, not being into water sports, it's just hard to relate to Ashley anyway, especially when I've always thought good sex is worth staying sober for and bad sex is to be avoided at all costs. But even his occasional references to something like a sex life don't alleviate the overriding impression of Ashley as an over-large eight-year-old boy who has never been anywhere or done anything. He's got an outstanding ability to make a dull and uninteresting life seem dull and uninteresting.

Even before Novacon, life was getting to be like a waking dream. For example, before I saw *Lip 4*, I had an exchange in the mail with Hazel Ashworth in which she berated me for being mean and cruel to Jimmy Robertson and Christina Lake in *Pulp 9*, and in response to which I said something less than appreciative about young Michael's earlier performance. Hazel then warned that I might not like things in the upcoming *Lip* in which "dumb animals" were tortured. Under the circumstances, this turned out to be a frighteningly apt metaphor — Ashley clearly regards Harry Bond as no better than a dumb animal and set about to show us how he can pull the legs off frogs. This is a behaviour which we barely tolerate in eight-year-olds and expect them to outgrow by the time they reach 13. (All of which lends a particular note of irony to Hazel's response in the letter column when Marty Cantor, not unexpectedly, wrote in with a bleat of pain regarding Ashley's earlier remarks about Marty's hair: "... something that wouldn't be out of place if it had come from the mouth of a severely neurotic adolescent," says Hazel of Marty's letter. Funny, that's just the description a lot of us gave to Ashley himself.)

("Maybe," I think, "they actually don't *know*.")

As if to underline the point, Ashley carried on by making light of people who had been so crass, so uncool, as to treat him like a human being. Even Harry Bond tried to be friendly to Ashley, and got his legs pulled off for his pains. Oh, good show, Michael! I will resist the temptation to dissect the unassailable hipness of a guy who regards Nigel Richardson and Alun Harries as the coolest people at a Wellington meeting. I simply could not begin to detail the manifest sophistication, social grace and general sleekness of Messrs. Harries & Richardson for the benefit of the uninitiated.

"You really do have to grow up sooner or later and the later you leave it the harder it is," says Michael to Harry. Strange... he can recite the words, but he still doesn't know the tune.

I am informed, by someone who is usually smarter than this, that Michael's piece is the best bit of fanwriting all year and that it's all apparently OK because in real life people don't all like each other and we say nasty things about each other all the time. I am having a lot of trouble with this logic — after all, in real life there is also rape and murder, but that doesn't mean it would be great to have more of it in fandom. People form civilizations and communities in an attempt to improve co-operative effort and minimize the amount of damage they have to take from others; you don't build the wall and then invite the wolves in anyway. You sure as shit don't give them an award for coming in and eating the babies. But if Hazel Ashworth thought this demonstration of juvenile sadism* was worth publishing, I suppose it was inevitable that someone else would consider it worth praising.

But why? What in the world is so admirable about a sociopath displaying his sickness in a public forum? And if Ashley is such an exhibitionist that he has to do it in front of everyone, we would hope others would have the taste and sense not to put it in their fanzines. It's hard to fathom what must have possessed Hazel to decide we should all have to watch. What is the woman thinking?

The suggestion that Ashley's pathological whining and sneering could be the best piece of fanwriting to appear all year sits particularly badly in the context of so much fine work which has appeared from others in the course of these last 12 months. Simon Polley has produced three excellent issues of *Vile Anchors*, any one of which should stand out in memory as a solid example of what good personal writing really looks like. Christina Lake, Lilian Edwards, Jan Dawes, Sherry Coldsmith and no doubt numerous others who didn't just spring to mind (including Hazel Ashworth herself) have all written worthy pieces both in and out of their various fanzines. Dave Langford

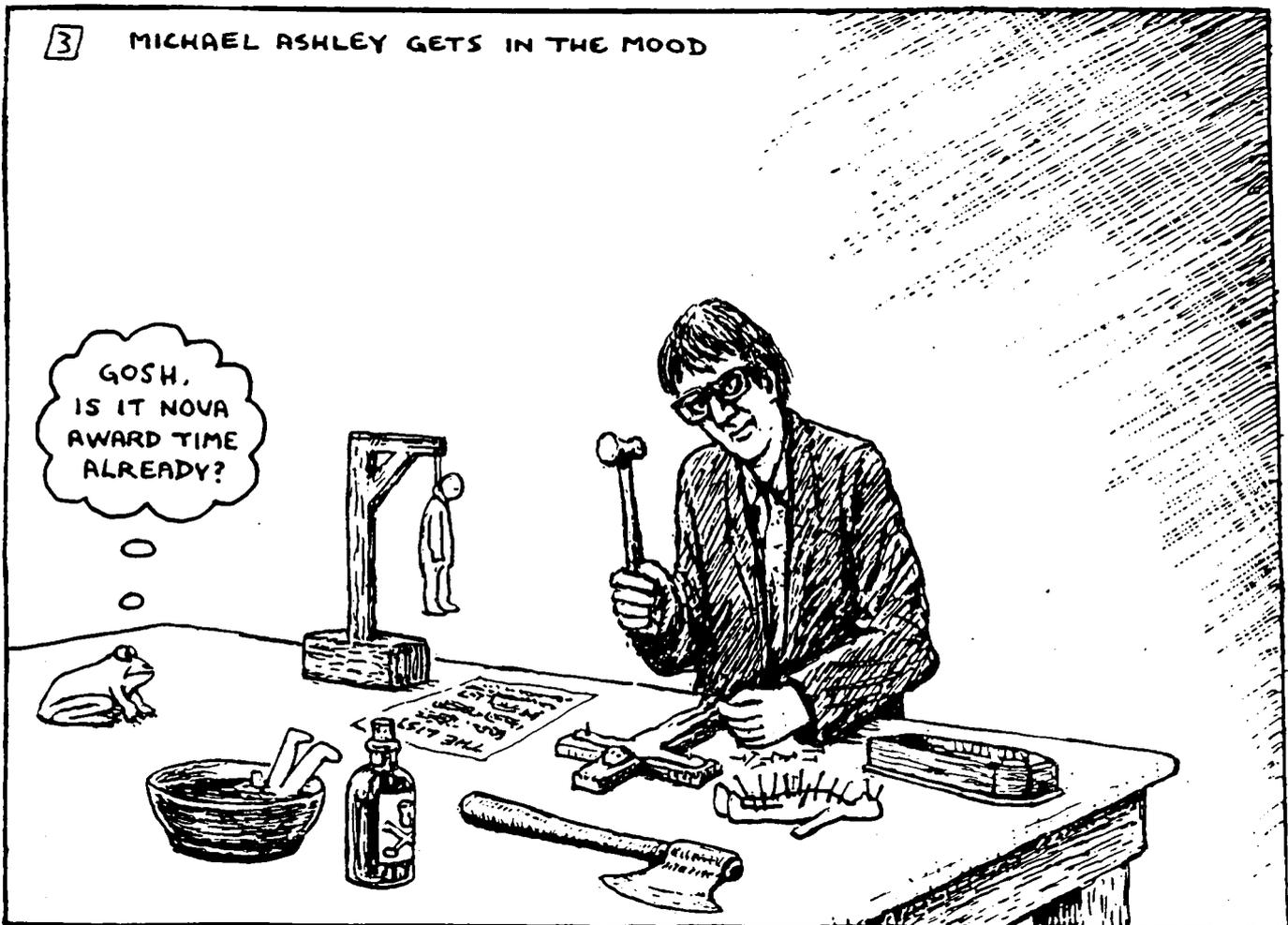
* The word is used in the sense of deliberate cruelty for fun, rather than in the sense of sexual sadism as practised by leather & lace freaks.

and Chuck Harris both have provided us with laughs and the occasional food for thought. The last two issues of Martin Tudor's *Empties* contain quite a number of entertaining contributions. Even Simon Ounsley has managed to inscribe the occasional amusing piece or thoughtful letter from his deathbed. And all done painlessly, without stomping all over people to do it.

If I had to choose any single piece of fanwriting which has stayed in my mind for months as a stellar performance, I'd have to say that Owen Whiteoak's *tour de force* in *Good Taste Is Timeless (or Good Times Are Tasteless)* 11 is one of the most creative and inventive works I've seen in a good long time. In a single narrative, Whiteoak reported a year of convention-going and encounters in London fandom, all skilfully injected into a clever framing device of fanfictional adventure. (Moreover, several succeeding issues of *Kamera Obskura* have made Whiteoak one of the most reliable and engaging writers of the year.)

I would not be quick to overlook writing of a more practical or serious nature, either, and I have a high regard for the kind of work Mike Christie and Sherry Coldsmith have been presenting in *A Free Lunch*. Sherry has always had a firm handle on the art of personal writing but in recent years fandom has been malnourished when it come to the meatier issues, and it was high time someone rushed in to put something into the pot that had vitamins and minerals (instead of just the empty calories we get from Ashley). And while Rob Hansen tends to few stylistic flourishes, his fanhistorical investigation of British Fandom in the '30s for *Then 1* is certainly a ground-breaking work in a field where no one else has ever tackled the task before. "What is past is prologue," as the saying goes, and anyway, it's pretty interesting reading.

All of which tells me that you've got to have both a bad memory and some pretty strange values to insult all of these people and all of their work by pretending someone like Ashley can hold a candle to them, let alone outshine them - especially with this tawdry load of rubbish he's got in *Lip 4*.





D. West

I mean, what's the scam, anyway? Is it that no one remembers that boys have been writing about their love lives since time immemorial, or what? Is this new? Have you read any books?

And this feeble excuse about how it's all just friendly taking the piss is pretty unconvincing when you notice that this "friendliness" always seems to be aimed in a direction other than those people you *know* Ashley is a friend to — if this stuff was written about Jimmy Robertson, or D. West, or the Ashworths, I'd say, well, I guess it's all just friendly joking, huh? But no, it's good sport to make fun of Harry Bond — it's unsporting to give Jimmy Robertson even the mildest ribbing. There's something grossly dishonest going on here. This isn't just ordinary cliqueishness, this is something else. To me, ribbing Jimmy Robertson is OK because Jimmy knows damn well I have nothing against him. But Michael Ashley always sounds like some sort of redneck who can't resist making a few n----- jokes about the lone black kid in the crowd. This is not joking — it's bloodsport.

And me, I don't like being put in the position of having to give silent approval and nervous laughter to the oppressor pig bullshit or else be thought some kind of bad sport or killjoy (or, you know, "girls are no fun"), just because I happen to find ugly repulsive behaviour ugly and repulsive. I don't guess you've heard of Stanley Milgrom, either, huh? (Have you at least heard of Kitty Genovese? How about New Bedford?)

Of course, I didn't say any of *that* to Pam. I didn't even ask what made Michael Ashley more worthy of a Nova than Polley or Whiteoak or the Twins or a half-dozen better people. Maybe I'd find some way to articulate it in a couple of sentences by morning.

(But Christ, doesn't she *know*?)

Well, it's not like there's much morning left by the time I get up, to be honest, and aside from Alan Sullivan turning out to

be a pretty good dancer, and another chat with West, I don't really remember much before I sat down with Simon Polley and had a bang-up time carrying on with him about the outrages of the medical profession. I don't get to do this very often anymore, and it's always been one of my favorite sports, so of course I enjoy every minute. He even has a brand new issue of *Vile Anchors* to give out, for which he'd lovingly calligraphed the name of the recipient on each copy. And Debbie Kerr is wearing a very nifty ~~bell~~ dress over a pretty nifty body and smiling a lot and giving the whole thing a wonderful ambience, until Ray Thompson comes over in his wig and starts trying to lick people's thighs. Oh, well. And despite having a terrific time, I feel even worse on Sunday, which just proves you don't need alcohol to get a hangover (but I already knew that).

On Sunday, West decides to be helpful to Martin, too, and offers to take care of his virginity for him. Actually, I thought it was a pretty good idea (much less likely to be ridiculed in print, that way), but Martin doesn't go for it.

Abi Frost has some big news, though. Harry Bond, of all people, is a good dancer, she says. I find this hard to imagine, but I rather like the idea of Harry Bond turning out to be a good dancer. It's almost as good as finding out that Robert Blake came out of the closet, you know? Unexpected and ironic, like. "But," says Abi, "Harry needs to lose weight, and that other chap — the one in the black clothes — is also a good dancer, so he gets to be toy boy of the month." The one in the black clothes is, of course, Alan Sullivan, and hearing this, I think maybe Abi is telling the truth about Harry after all and maybe he really is a good dancer. Fortunately, there are no means to test it.

I know when I get back to the world I will have to face the results of the first Tuesday in November, and I know Bush will win because he is running against the Republican record (even though he is calling it "Dukakis" or "Democrats"), and

everyone hates everything the Republicans do, even though they don't realize it. "Furlough program!" says Bush, not bothering to mention that it was a Republican program. "Murder committed on furlough program!" he screams, knowing that none remember that the same happened twice in California when Reagan was Governor. "Gas lines!" he shrieks, as if the gas lines hadn't started in 1973, when Nixon was still President. And — my favourite — "Big spending liberals!" — like liberals, or Democrats, have ever found a way to spend as much money as this administration has.

It could be a neat parallel, with Leeds fandom wondering why all these strange people seem to say such rude things about Jimmy Robertson and Christina Lake, or even how anyone could possibly take offense at that nice polite Michael Ashley.

(I mean, you just have to come to the conclusion that they really don't fucking *know*, don't you?)

"It's all so *boring!*" Lilian wails, after Ashley & Lip & West sweep the awards. We are not exactly bored. We are struggling to avoid the dry heaves, actually. Langford leans over Whiteoak and asks, "What does this mean? Do we all have to gafiate?"

— *Avedon Carol*
"Going Nova"
Pulp 11, December 1988

Sadly, this whole incident led Owen himself to gafiate.

Of course, it was not just *who* won the Novas that upset fans, it was *how* they were seen to be voted on. **Bridget Wilkinson** thought it was all a big con . . .

For as long as I have been in fandom (since 1982) it has been a running joke that the Nova ballot is stuffed. God knows whether it is true, but enough new fans believe / half believe that it is. In that case why in the name of heaven should they vote? The rumour itself makes the supposed democracy a farce regardless of the truth of it.

Conception hardly calmed my feelings on this front. Word went out that the ballot was to be stuffed, those whom the committee thought should win would win. D. West turns up with a large bag marked 'awards' and an even larger smirk.

He duly wins most of them.

OK, from the one side, those used to fandom, this looks like a good joke, just a bit of fun. To a neo it could look all too easily like corruption.

— *Bridget Wilkinson*
Letter to *Caprician* 3

D. West, naturally, disagreed:

Bridget appears to have got the Nova Awards (Novacon, every year) and the Ova Awards (Conception, one time only) somewhat mixed up together. Since Conception was a small local convention, and since many of the drunks filling in voting forms on Saturday night were old acquaintances, and since the awards were being given in no less than twenty categories (at least half of which were uncomplimentary) it didn't require any exceptional degree of conceit to anticipate that I would probably win something and to come duly prepared (*with the much-mentioned bag and smirk*). As it turned out, I got three plastic eggs out of twenty. I forget the official titles, but they were for Most Imitated Fan, Most Inebriated Fan, and Fan You Would Most Like To See Have A Sex Change. Does Bridget really feel that some more deserving person was wickedly robbed of these honours? If so, I'm sure everyone would love to know the name of her preferred candidate.

As for the conspiracy theory about the Nova itself . . . one doesn't really need to dream up paranoid fantasies of vote rigging and committee fixes to explain why Martin Easterbrook's *Small Mammal* fails to win a Nova. The quite straightforward reason it doesn't win is that not a lot of people vote for it, and not a lot of people vote for it for the equally straightforward reason that

(whatever its other merits) it is not seen as being substantial enough to deserve to win. (After all, despite Dave Langford's immense fame and charisma, even *Ansible* has never won a Nova. So why expect more from something with a much lower profile?) Personally, I would regard victory for something like *Small Mammal* as distinctly an aberration — but quite a few past Nova Awards have seemed just as daft and improbable. There's no telling what the voters will do, and there's no telling the voters what to do.

— *D. West*
Letter to *Caprician*

Ova Awards (silly awards, Conception 1987)

Bad Egg — for the worst fannish thing
Simon Ounsley

Good Egg — for the best fannish thing
Linda James (now Strickler)

Poached Egg — for the most imitated fan
D. West

Pickled Egg — for the most inebriated fan
D. West

Hard-Boiled Egg — for the longest lasting fan
Ken Slater

Free Range Egg — for the most health conscious fan
Graham James

Egg Flip — for the most sarcastic fan
Greg Pickersgill

Green Egg — for the best up and coming fan
Mike Christie

Egghead — for the brightest fan
Dave Langford

Egg and Cress — for the best fannish couple
The Elings

Scrambled Egg — for the fan you most think should have a sex change
D. West

Easter Egg — for the best all time Eastercon
Yorcon III

Golden Egg — for the best all time fanzine
Hyphen

The reputation of the Novas appeared to reach a nadir in 1992, when **Pam Wells** made the following complaint in *TWP*:

Question: Why oh why did Ian Sorensen's *BOB?* win the Nova Award for best fanzine?
Answer: Because it got more votes than anything else.

Question: Why did it get more votes than anything else?
Answer: Because people couldn't remember all the really great fanzines that had been published throughout the year of eligibility (Simon Ounsley's *Black Lagoon*) or voted for one of the three really great fanzines (Ann Green's *Ormolu*) that was published after the eligibility deadline.

Question: Why do the Novas continue despite being so marginal in interest?

Answer: Because any award celebrating fanzines is better than none. Anyway Novacon is daft enough to pay for the awards, and there's always someone mug enough to administer them: heck, even I did it for three years a while back.

— *Pam Wells*
TWP 78, 1992

Meanwhile, an anonymous *Matrix* reviewer (probably **Jenny Glover**), questioned the validity of the whole voter base for the award:

Because the Nova Award is the only British award for fanzines and fanzine writing, it is easy to forget that it is voted on by a very small number of people who attend an annual, though long-running, convention in Birmingham. Fanzine editors who do not attend that, or any convention are therefore ineligible to vote, no matter how informed their judgements are, although, of course, other people can vote for them. The weakness of the Nova system can be shown by the fact that *Blackbird's Egg* from Richard Hewison came fourth in the Best Fanzine listing. If it exists at all, the circulation is confined to the Bristol Group, who used a block vote to demonstrate just how few votes were needed to win.

— *Jenny Glover*
 "Fire and Hemlock: Mexiconia"
Matrix 107, August-September 1993

It is interesting to correlate the years when the Nova caused controversy — 1991 with Michael Ashley and to a lesser extent, 1992 with Ian Sorensen — with **Robert Lichtman's** figures for how many UK zines he received in these years, which are the best available indication of the state of fanzines at that time. When the number of zines around improved, the Novas began again to represent consensus not just block voting. Simon Ounsley's award for best fanzine and writer in 1993 was generally regarded as a return to form for the Novas.

Fanzines Received by Robert Lichtman, 1987 - 1994

	1994	1993	1992	1991	1990	1989	1988	1987
Australia	13	16	18	16	16	12	15	32
Canada	14	12	17	1	2	2	1	4
UK	60	51	50	44	30	61	51	33
USA	109	91	104	85	66	55	67	58
Others	2	2	2	1	5	0	4	3
Totals	<u>199</u>	<u>171</u>	<u>191</u>	<u>147</u>	<u>115</u>	<u>130</u>	<u>138</u>	<u>130</u>

Let's All Go On A Summer Holiday

In 1989, the Eastercon went abroad for the first time — well, sort of — to Jersey to be precise, after a possibly statistically flawed poll of fandom conclusively preferred it to competitors Brighton and Birmingham. In 1990, the Worldcon came to Holland. Coming at the same time as the gradual collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, this heralded a slightly unlikely Britfan passion for Euro-integration.

William Bains, a near outsider to fandom, begins with an extract from an unconventional Contrivance report which mentions (gasp!) the programme.

After my stint in the creche I went to a discussion panel called "Citizens of the Future", which turned out to be a rambling and generally ill-informed talk about how people might alter their bodies to better suit what they wanted to look like. It was what I will call a Type I panel. Take a careful look — you are anthropologists in a strange land here. On the platform sit half a dozen apparently ill-assorted people, but surely they actually have some uniting feature? No, they are actually ill-assorted. There is the chairman or woman, The Chair. Their role is apparently to dither about what to do next, and to say "When we were discussing this before coming on . . ." in order to convince the audience that i despit all evidence, there had been some preparation for this. There is Opinion. He will say "Well, I totally disagree with that . . ." to any statement, and indeed that is why he is there. "Good morning ladies and gentleman . . ." "No, I must disagree with you there, Mike . . ." There is The Expert. Not to be confused with someone who knows a lot about the subject of the panel, this is someone who knows a lot about something vaguely related and is going tell us all about it. There is Joe Phan, the fannish equivalent of John Doe, a fan of irreproachable fannish credentials who will say occasionally "Er, yuh, well I think so," then fall back into a confused daze. So the panel limps along, the chair sending up some conversational ducks for his or her panel to blast away at. After a while desperation sets in and the discussion is thrown open to the floor, which is peopled by an even stranger mix. There is Crap. "That's crap!" he will cry, and sit down looking smug. Sometimes it is difficult to determine exactly what is crap, let alone why. There is Bon Mot, who will try, usually unsuccessfully, to say something very witty that he has been rehearsing for the last hour and is damned if he is going to be cheated out of saying, no matter how irrelevant.

Occasionally a Type I panel will develop into an interesting discussion with or on the floor. Usually this happens ten minutes before we are due to be turned out of the room for the next item.

Afterwards came a Type II panel, entitled "Alien Languages." It was a panel on which there were two Experts, in this case aggravated by the fact that the Experts were also Authors. That they did not know a lot about the subject was irrelevant — it is self-perception that counts here. The Authors were Ian Watson (who turned out to look like a 1950s schoolmaster), and one of the GoHs, M. John Harrison. Oh, there was also a Chair and a Joe Phan, but they were soon disposed of. The Experts hijacked the talk from Alien Languages to what they knew about, which was, obviously, writing science fiction. They wandered off into the realms of post-structural analysis, symbolism and meaning in written language, and M. John Harrison became ever more agitated about how all language was a lie, how he despised himself for lying, how there was no true experience unfiltered by the screens of fantasy that language imposes between us and the

world, and eventually leapt into the realm of the fantastic by stating that first thing he does in the morning before getting out of bed was to worry about how he was going to escape the signifier. As nearly everyone in the hall had by now not the slightest idea what he was talking about, this met with tentative giggles. Was he joking? Was he off his head? Was this deep or dull? Occasionally the chair would attempt to drag the discussion back into the realms of the normal by asking Joe Phan something. "Er . . ." she would say, and M. John Harrison would be off again "You can say that, but the fact remains that all language is deceit and to pretend otherwise is just the delusion that has reduced all our literature to total escapist crap!" The panel ended — one cannot really say that it concluded — with a few tentative contributions from the floor, which were shot down with the contempt they deserved by M.J.H.. Ian Watson clearly knew what M.J.H. was talking about most of the time, but declined to enter the fray except to chip in with a few "Well, yes, that's so. And of course Wittgenstein says . . ." and soon for a few moments until M.J.H. had got his breath back. I would have quite liked to go to a talk on alien languages, but was not too enthralled by a talk in an alien language. Especially as, when they got off the niceties of post-structuralism (or was it pre-structuralism?), the panel was amazingly ignorant of the only information on the subject that we have — on attempts to program computers to talk in English and the attempts to understand how children learn a language. So much for Type II.

Then around teatime I wandered along to the Fan Room. Most of the convention was arranged, at least nominally, around SF: the Fan Room is arranged around fans and their concerns. Who should run conventions? Is the fanzine a dying art form? These are the questions, so often on the lips of the man waiting for the Clapham Omnibus, that are discussed in front of audiences that could sometimes be numbered on the fingers of two hands, but more usually of one. At 4 pm there was a panel on the future of fandom which turned into a Type III panel. Guess how many types there are altogether? I don't know — I am making these up as I go along. A type III panel is one which re-orientates itself halfway through and becomes a Type I or Type II panel, but with completely different members, including quite a few from the floor and excluding the Joe Phans, and quite often the chairman. It was followed at 6pm by one on "Whose fandom is it anyway?", which was essentially about how you define fans and fandom and which, due to a desperate shortage of people willing to do this, I was on. I am not a fan, I said, and was followed by everyone else there saying that they were not either, which was odd to say the least. This was a definite Type I, with a sustained outburst from Crap on the floor. After that I retired exhausted to have dinner.

— *William Bains*
"An Ingenious Contrivance"
Bainalabs Bulletin 5.6, May 1989

Contrivance was also the point at which your editors belatedly cottoned on to quite how much fandom had changed since Conspiracy. We ran what might be considered a traditional fan programme and apart from attracting hordes of fans to the 'Sex in Fandom' panel, we discovered that quite simply there no longer seemed to be an audience for fannish items. **Lilian Edwards** said it all in what might be described as her sermon on the balcony (disciples played by Martin Smith and Nigel Rowe)

“When we put the End of Fandom As We Know It on the programme,” I try to explain, “it was all a joke of course. But maybe we had a point. Who needs the fanroom at an Eastercon anymore? Not you lot. You know how to have fun at a convention anyhow, you could just as well have pitched your stake in the Minstrel bar (and mostly did). And not the new fans. They’re all happily integrating into gophering for the Green Room or signing on as Tech Ops Guild apprentices or joining in the filksinging and holding people’s swords for the masquerade. How can fanzine fandom compete with that? What glamour has discussing boring old fanzines got compared with vibrant cultural endeavours like putting *Star Trek* words to acoustic guitar versions of ‘All You Need is Love?’”

“I’m off to get my cape and sword,” says Nigel, gloomily.

Out of the corner of my eye, Mike Harrison is out-doing Iain Banks by scaling the hotel wall with the grace and technique of a practiced mountaineer.

“Even authors are best known for doing stunts not writing books at conventions nowadays. If *professional* writing isn’t sufficiently glamorous *per se*, what’s the attraction of amateur stuff?”

Mike Abbott assails the almost-full balcony, crawling past the insuperable barrier of Robert Lichtman’s leg. Ignoring the disruption, I keep on declaiming.

“If you thought this fanroom was bad enough, it’s going to take on a whole new meaning at Eastcon next year. They keep saying that Ian Sorensen is running their fanroom and he keeps saying he isn’t. Their fan guest is Anne Page, who never came into this fanroom once in the whole convention — which isn’t to say that she doesn’t deserve to be fan guest but that she has no interest in keeping alive the traditional fannish fanroom. The only event scheduled for the Eastcon fanroom so far is — guess what — the children’s masquerade. And Speculation aren’t even going to *have* a fanroom. They’re going to have a ‘forum’ instead, which sounds to me like a small size programme stream that might mention fans if it can occasionally fit them in between films and filk. After that, the whole concept should be pretty dead. Face it kids. This is the Last Fanroom.”

— **Lilian Edwards**

“Sex, Book Auctions and the Last Fanroom”
The Caprician 4, May 1989

The total lack of interest in fanrooms presaged by Contrivance turned into a trend. Nobody could even find the fanroom at Confiction, and by Speculation nobody wanted to find it. From a vital organ of the convention, the fanroom had turned into a vestigial appendix, characterised in legend as the place where endless fanzine fans insulted Pat Silver.

Rhodri James summed up some of this disquiet in a letter to *Rastus Johnson’s Cakewalk*.

My feelings on Fanrooms are rather mixed. I’m against them in general because I don’t believe in creating ghettos. I have this vision of the Trufen defending barricades against the hordes of neos who might want to talk to them, or (gasp!) gaze upon the sacred fanzines. Reality isn’t that bad, of course, but in the days before I pubbed my own ish walking into a fan room felt much like walking into a mosque; I knew that something deep and mysterious had been going on,

Eastercons 1987-1995

Becon 1987, Birmingham
Follycon 1988, Liverpool
Contrivance 1989, Jersey
Eastcon 1990, Liverpool
Speculation 1991, Glasgow
Illumination 1992, Blackpool
Helicon 1993, Jersey
Sou’Wester 1994, Liverpool
Confabulation 1995, London Docklands

and would start up again after I left, but nothing would happen while the infidel was present. I got the polite treatment too; other friends have been told flaily to go away. The only fanroom of those days in which I felt remotely comfortable was the one at Contrivance, and that just seemed to be the light entertainment program with attached bar.

On the other hand the idea of having a ‘safe’ place for fanzine fans is a very seductive one. You are only going to meet other fanzine fans and their ‘zines, friends and enemies that you already know to some extent, and no unpredictable outside influences will mess up your time. If you do venture out and the rest of the con proves too much, those barricades are always there to hide behind until you have recuperated.

— **Rhodri James**

Letter to *Rastus Johnson’s Cakewalk* 6, June 1994

Needless to say, **Greg Pickersgill** did not let this go by without laying down some of his own thoughts on the role of the fanroom:

I’m really fascinated by this whole business of the inhospitable fanrooms. The only thing more baffling than the fact they are claimed to exist is that no-one ever identifies when and where they had these awful cold-shoulders applied so dispassionately to them. I mean, has this really happened to you, or is it just an idea that is Believed, because it, or something assumed to be it, happened to someone else (in some other Galaxy, far away in space and time . . . Joel Townsley Rogers where are you when we need you?). As the person who more or less cut the pattern for the traditional British fanroom at the 1977 Eastercon I can say that more than half the point is to provide a Gateway through which the neofan can pass and pick up fanzines, knowledge about fandom and conventions, and anything else necessary to enable a person to involve themselves in fanactivity if it seem to their liking. Of course a lot of what might go on in a fanroom is directed to the established fan — there’s usually fuck-all aimed right at fannish fans in the rest of the convention after all — but it ought to be carried out in a way that makes it accessible to any interested observer. For some bloody reason there’s a pressure on the fannish fans to be all-welcoming and all-encompassing that would be thought of as immediately idiotic if applied to any other area of fandom. I honestly can’t imagine what you’re describing, unless it is something gone completely wrong; which I might be inclined to believe, as I get the feeling very few genuine Fanrooms have been run in recent years.

And this idea of the Fanroom as a ‘safe’ place away from the rest of the con is bizarre; it’s supposed to be an open venue, accessible to anyone. Obviously if you want to go in there and play charades or sing songs it won’t go down well as these activities are not appropriate in the context, but apart from that there’s no problem. (Wonder if the difficulty results from people wanting fanrooms to be something they aren’t intended to be?) And the idea that fannish fans can’t cope with conventions is plain outlandish.

— **Greg Pickersgill**

Rastus Johnson’s Cakewalk 6, June 1994

The offshore Eastercon at least proved to be a good dry (or wet) run for British fans to practice their ferry survival skills prior to setting off to Holland (or more realistically, after experiencing marooned catamarans en route to Jersey, to save up for a flight). There was a lot of talk of learning Dutch for the Worldcon, which mainly resulted in sore throats. One of the few to make it past the pronunciation guide (if no further) was *Matrix* correspondent for this occasion, **Dave Barrett**, who mastered:

 "Mag ik een Orangeboom, Alstublieft"

Last summer I started going to Amsterdam every couple of months to see a Dutch friend. I always felt embarrassed that she and her friends has to speak in English for my benefit, in their own country. I bought a few "Teach Yourself" books and tapes and thought: by the time I go to Den Haag for the Worldcon, I'll be able to amaze everybody with my fluency.

Alas, alack. In twelve months I learnt to say *alstublieft* (please) and *dank u wel* (thank you) *Goeie morgen* (good morning) and *Hoe gat het* (how are you? literally how goes it? — and to talk to my friend's dogs and cats in a language they seemed to understand. The consonants I could manage; it was the diphthongs, the vocab and grammar that did for me.

It didn't matter; the Dutch do (almost) all speak English, and (unlike the French) are perfectly happy to do so. They are also delighted when you make an effort at the bar and say, *Mag ik een Orangeboom, alstublieft*.

I spent a lot of my time at the bar. You could guarantee at any time of the day or night to find an assortment of British writers and critics in the main bar — which had all the charm, half the comfort and none of the size of a multi-storey car park. Full marks to the bar staff (usually only two) who coped with a constant rush of weird foreigners.

Foreigners: there were a lot of these. I've heard ConFiction described as the first true Worldcon. For, I believe, the first time ever outside the UK, Brits outnumbered Yanks: 709 to 556. Then came the Dutch at 360. There were 106 from Eastern Europe, including 41 Poles and 33 East Germans — *glasnost* rules. Total of full attending members: 2,339.

All this made for some fascinating conversations. Did you know that in Slovenia, a republic within Yugoslavia, authors get a month's salary for every sixteen pages written? The only problem is, it has to be in Slovenic — a language and culture being heavily promoted by the government. Population of two million, and it has a book club with 400,000 members. Now, that's the place to be an author.

Being British, and knowing a fair number of Brits in the SF world, it was very rare for me to look around the main floor area (near the bar) and not see people I know. On the other hand, having gone by myself and not being specifically with anyone while I was there, I did spend quite a lot of time wandering from one conversation to another, and going to programme items alone. I saw several people who'd obviously come alone and who didn't know lots of other people, and they looked pretty lost.

With a programme having up to sixteen simultaneous parallel streams it can get fairly complicated to decide where you want to be and for what. The speakers and panels found it just as difficult, often arriving half an hour late, or not at all. A lot of them weren't even in Den Haag at the time — yet they were still listed in the programme update sheets right up to the end

of the Con. No matter; the principle, previously thought unscientific, of spontaneous generation was proved repeatedly; ad hoc panels appeared out of the audiences, lived out their brief lives, dissolved, and vanished into some strange and echoing place — probably the bar.

Highlights for me:

The fact that the Dutch Minister for Culture found the Con a significant enough event that she spoke at the opening ceremony.

Meeting lost of old friends and making some new. Just as I was about to leave for Amsterdam, already two hours late, a friend said "Isn't that Norman Spinrad behind you?" It was, and the next hour or so's conversation was a great way to end the Con — and congratulations, Norman on finally getting *The Iron Dream* unbanned in West Germany.

Dank u well, de Nederlanders. Tot ziens.

— **Dave Barrett**
"Mag ik een Orangeboom, Alstublieft"
Matrix 90, October 1990

Jaine Weddell also encountered the international community when she took part in the ConFiction masquerade:

 The Inflatable Pink Pterydactyl Goes Shopping or Another ?@#* Worldcon Review

The day before we left for Holland I phoned Anne Page with some last minute queries about the Masquerade. I found her somewhat distraught, having had only about a dozen entries in total at that time. I said I'd phone round any possible mugs, I mean potential entrants, and I'd bring a spare costume. Now, I don't want to enter into discussions as to whether the Masquerade should have been cancelled because of the lack of massive and ornate Master costumes which typify a Worldcon Masquerade. As far as I was concerned, it was the most enjoyable Masquerade I have ever entered. There was the same friendly atmosphere as an Eastercon masquerade, but far better technical help and facilities. There were some really good costumes, and some really funny set-pieces (from what little we could see backstage). Everyone who watched it that I spoke to said that they enjoyed it immensely.

I suppose some of my enthusiasm about the event could be due to having won a prize (Best Journeyman — or rather woman), and I admit, after the effort I put in, I would probably have felt a bit peeved if we hadn't got something. But the real joy was seeing other people win. Firstly my partner, Liz, who had to enter as a journeyman because of me even though she'd never done anything like this before. But the best moment for me was when Elizabetta won.

Elizabetta was Polish, and spoke very little English. Anne introduced me to her on Friday, saying that she had found someone willing to wear my spare costume. The costume in question was the Black Queen, from the X-Men. Elizabetta hadn't read the comics, and I don't think she realised what she was letting herself in for. I felt rather worried that she might be somewhat 'freaked out' at appearing in front of that many people dressed like that. But with the aid of her friend, who translated for us, and a bit of overacting from me, she got the general idea. "Mean," I exhorted her, "be mean!" She won Best Vamp (thanks, Kate), although she didn't have any idea that she'd won until I propelled her onstage with a shriek. The look on her face made everything worthwhile.

— **Jaine Weddell**
"Inflatable Pink Pterydactyl . . ."
TWP 60, September 1990

It's The End Of Our Fandom As We Know It (And I Feel Fine)

By the start of the 90s the death of fanzine fandom had become an accepted thing, and all that was left for fanzine writers to do was either discuss it, deny it, or vote with their lack of activity. These were the years when the only fans left alive seemed to live in Leeds. **Michael Ashley** was one of the few to dispute the trend:

THE DEATH OF FANZINE FANDOM AND OTHER MYTHS

There have been a number of parrot cries while I've been an sf fan. What I mean by that is some catchphrase which a number of people latch on to and then use at every available opportunity so that it takes on the appearance of a self-evident truth, despite being nothing of the sort. For example, I can remember one of "sercon backlash!" from around about 1979. Although now of historical interest only, this was all to do with hordes of serious science fictional types supposedly discovering fandom at the 1979 Worldcon in Brighton and subsequently flooding fanzines and fandom with serious science fictional material. Oddly enough, it never happened. What this "sercon backlash" business was, of course, was *atheory*. Sort of interesting, if you like that sort of thing, but with strictly no relevance to what actually went on in the real world.

There is another such parrot cry going round at the moment. This is one along the lines of "Fanzine fandom is dying!" Chief proponent of this theory is Joseph Nicholas. (Curiously enough, also the chief squawker of "sercon backlash".) He's written about this in a number of places. To get right up to date though, I have a letter from Joseph dated 29 August of this year (1991) in which he raises the subject again. As follows: "... fanzine fandom is slowly dying out, locked in a long downward spiral that will eventually end in its complete oblivion". He cites a number of reasons for this. In particular, the rise of other activities such as "filking", masquerades and, especially, conrunning and convention fandom. These have lured away younger newcomers. As for the older fans, these have too many other time-consuming concerns these days: "... marriages, mortgages, professional careers, children and their schooling". So, says Joseph, they are "too busy with other things to have the time to write more".

Personally, I think this is all a load of old bollocks.

Joseph is very much an *either / or* adherent. You're either a conrunner *or* a fanzine fan. You're into filking and dressing up and partying *or* you're sat in your room scribbling your next issue. In reality, the one activity does not disbar you from the other, i.e. there is no reason why you can't do both. Yes, conventions *do* take up a lot of time and energy, as can doing a fanzine, but you'd have to be pretty much of a wimp that you were left so effete that you could not take part in any other activity whatsoever.

Much the same applies to his argument about older fans. According to Joseph, you're either bringing up kids *or* doing a

fanzine; you're either all caught up in your job *or* writing articles. But there's no reason why you can't do *both*. After all, by the extension of Joseph's logic people with kids would never do anything that took up time — such as paint pictures, write books or compose music. Funnily enough, they go right on doing those things. (Some of them even do all three. Surprising they don't spontaneously combust, really.)

... Fanzine fandom is dying. Fanzines are well on the road to extinction. Right. So why have I got a pile of about twenty-odd titles that Jenny Glover wants me to review for *Matrix*? Ah — but why let reality get in the way of a good theory Joseph seems to be an absolutist. If a week goes by without a fanzine then this is the end; there will never be another fanzine ever. Certainly I would agree that there are periods in which nothing much seems to be happening (like last year) but I see no reason why that should be regarded as a permanent state of affairs. As for why these fallow periods occur, well, not being particularly adept at handling theoretical concepts and constructs (my original plan of doing philosophy at university was dealt a blow by the fact that I was no damn good at it), I tend to go for the simplest answer possible. So: my *own* reason for those periods in my life when I do not write anything is: *I can't be bothered or, simpler still, laziness*.

I don't know if that fits in with the Hegelian dialectic or not but it's the way things are. I could make excuses and say I'm too busy feeding the cats, Hoovering the baby, etc. but it would not be true. I *could* write more but I simply don't bother. That's it. I imagine the same might apply to one or two others. The thing is, it does tend to spiral and affect everyone. After all, if no one else is doing anything then why should I?

— *Michael Ashley*
"The Death of Fanzine Fandom and Other Myths"
Saliromania 5, c.late '91

This uncharacteristic attempt by Michael Ashley to not only display enthusiasm but convey it to others did not make much impact on the cynicism of fellow chicken brother **Nigel Richardson**, who did not have many tears to shed over the decline in traditional fannish fandom's output.

THE END OF "OUR" FANDOM AS WE KNOW IT (AND I FEEL FINE)

Essentially, the subject of ("our") fandom is ("our") fandom, a self-referential state that requires more than the average suspension of disbelief. Once you stop believing wholeheartedly in fandom, once you start thinking that it's all a bit silly and

adds about as much to the sum of human achievement as, say, a motor mechanic called Reg absently picking his nose in a carpet warehouse just outside Croydon, it all starts to teeter on the edge of collapse. You have to really *believe* in fandom, believe that everything about it is special, convince yourself that paper sizes and indentations have some sort of supramundane significance. You have to really work at it. . . and I'm afraid that I just can no longer be bothered. The rewards are too limited, it's all too ingrown. . . .

But here's D. West, in this decade's *Daisnoid*, to put me straight. ". . . fanzine fans are devoted to 'inbred concerns'. So what? Being devoted to inbred concerns is *the whole fucking point*," he writes. Well, it may have been the point back when fans were doing things worth recording, but the "concerns" of "fannish fans" these days have "inbred" to the point of total sterility (to put it nicely) and are of interest to no one with anything resembling a life. If "fans" lived lives that were rich and resonant and enriched us all by the telling, I could go along with the notion of "fandom" as some sort of self-referential soap opera, but we're talking about people who generally live their lives through books . . . and not very good books at that. We're talking about people who think they're living on the edge if they travel on the top deck of the bus. When Keighley's resident Charles Bukowski (bonk-free version, alas) is reduced to recycling jokes about Ian Sorenson's wallet, you know it's time to put the lid down and walk away.

"Fandom" passed the point of optimum in-group clannishness years ago (probably round the time when John Brosnan and Leroy Kettle were "pubbing their ishes" and is now lodged so far up its own hairy arse that you'd need to be a proctologist to think of an appropriate metaphor for its condition. Whatever may once have been worth saying about "fandom" has been said, and said again a million times. "Our" fandom is all used up, exhausted, drained of life. All that remains is to say this —

but you can't go on saying it, even if your word processor has a built-in thesaurus (which mine hasn't). There's nothing left to argue about. Look at TAFF — once people got all het up and crazy about this as a matter of course; now someone wins just by getting a couple of old fanzine articles reprinted and no one gives a damn. Who can be bothered? I can't think of anything to say about "fandom" that doesn't sound pissy and sneering.

— *Nigel E. Richardson*

"The End of 'Our' Fandom as we Know it (and I feel fine)"
Slubberdegullion 3, February 1992

By the time of *Mexicon* 5 in 1993, the death of fanzines had become not so much a myth as a tired cliché that kept people away from fanzine panels in their droves, as Christina Lake observed:

Dragging a rather reluctant Lilian behind me, we made it into the infamously darkened hall of the *Mexicon* programme room about half way through the panel, to find a handful of fans, notably Ian Sorenson and Simon Ounsley, interacting with the distant chat show circle of Eve Harvey, Pam Wells and Simon Polley. The debate as usual seemed to centre on the demise of the fanzine, though escaped some of the usual platitudes by the revelation that there was a — gasp — *NEW* fanzine editor in the audience. Also Simon Polley would keep refusing to play the doom and gloom game and kept saying things like he just did his fanzines to please himself and had received plenty of positive response. Lilian prodded me a few times till I stood up and said my piece about the vibrancy of the American fanzine scene as evidenced by *Corflu*. No one seemed very excited. British fandom looked at its watch and decided it had done its duty by the fanzine, and could it go back to the bar now?

— *Christina Lake*

Extract from *Never Quite Arriving*, October 1993

The Never-ending Fan Fund Debate

Along with the demise of fan rooms, fanzines, fandom as a way of life, came some inevitable questioning of the purpose of the fan funds. Here's **Geogre Bondar**:

 I wonder why there are fan funds.

 Not the how and wherefore of TAFF, DUFF, etc, but what purpose they serve NOW.

A few years ago, Greg Pickersgill caused a stir by doubting the need for Fan Funds now that air fares are relatively cheap. Okay, I grant that not every fan earns enough money to afford to fly to Oz as I have just done, but there are still *several* who can and do. TAFF, in particular, seems redundant when the winner is regularly outnumbered ten to one by self-finance fans making the same trip.

Shortly after his stirring, Greg stood for and won TAFF. The Greeks probably had a word for this sort of thing.

How about GUFF?* The latest Oz person to be honoured is Terry Dowling. He won a glorious victory over a laundry door, the entry of which really caused the shit to fly at the time. Regardless, Terry is a pro author and has made little secret of his plan to use the trip solely to advance his writing career. Fandom figures hardly at all in the scheme. In this case, it seems that the receiving country isn't getting much from the deal either, except maybe one speech at one con. I need say nothing of the rumoured scandal of a ditched girlfriend left behind.

And the TAFF Wars? I'm sure there are many readers who know far more about it than I. The fact that Marty Cantor is calling for peace in "Holier than Thou" *four years* after the event shows that tempers are still running high. It doesn't seem that TAFF is doing much to promote friendship therefore.

They say that fanzine fandom is dying, that it is just another fringe group. Nowadays, it appears *performance* at cons is the main thing. If it is so, are the punters getting what they want? The candidates give *written* platforms, their reputations in the receiving country are based on their fanzines. If not, if they are personally known to many of the overseas fans already, what is the point of sending them across? Again? Now, the fact that a person puts out good fanzines, proves nothing but that s/he can make good zines (or is extraordinarily lucky in the contributors). I'm not saying that all fanzine fans are socially inept, merely that their zines guarantee naught else. The fans in the sending country will know the person, but the receiving country can go only by the written words. This seems a strange state of affairs, if indeed fandom is now centred on convention activities rather than zines. It would seem that fans active in any area but zines are automatically excluded from even competing in the fan funds. Why are fanzine fans allowed to dominate like

* Shouldn't this be "DUFF"? - eds.

this? Even if this bias is acceptable for fandom at large, the receiving country is still voting for a pig in a poke. Given the poor chances of a trip report, their surest gain is going to be from the performance of the winner at a con.

We can solve these two problems with modern technology: candidates should submit a video recording of themselves in action at a con. This can be shown at cons in both countries prior to voting.

For a bunch of people theoretically brought together by SF, we have been remarkably lacking in innovation, and become hidebound ever so quickly. Thirty years ago, a Fan Fund started and we are still trying to do it the same old way. It seems not to be going so well these days. Cannot we find something newer and better upon which to spend our money? I can toss around the ball-park and see how they feel; or invent your own: finance a TV link between simultaneous cons in both countries; set up one of those computer mailboards with a network of micros; produce and distribute videos of the highlights of the cons; start up a video apa In short, anything longer lasting and more frequent than an annual trip of just a few weeks.

— **Geogre Bondar**
"Where the fan funds"
Maverick 10, February 1990

The debate about the validity of fan funds was to run and run throughout the early '90s, culminating in a huge discussion in the pages of Andy Hooper's then weekly fanzine, *Apparatchik*. Despite the seeming lack of either progress or consensus, one direction that met with most people's approval was the potential Europeanisation of the funds. After Bruno Ogorolec's defeat in the 1991 Europe to US TAFF race, **Christina Lake** paused to consider some of the implications of this new Euro-centric ethos:

 Bruno stood, and instead of drawing in hordes of Yugoslavs to cause consternation to the administrator, attracted the same low level of European attention as ever. (At an early stage, after receiving a vote from Mathias Hoffman, Robert Lichtman and I fantasised about the German vote swinging it for Bruno, but instead all that ever materialised was the Birmingham vote, swinging it — slightly — for Pam.) Meanwhile Abigail proclaimed that if she won, she would make TAFF more European, and with 1992 turning from a watchword into an imminent date in our diaries, and Bridget Wilkinson selling Eastern European fans like hot cakes, who could argue with that?

TAFF & GUFF Winners 1987-1995

TAFF

1987 Jeanne Gommoll
 1988 Lilian Edwards and Christina Lake
 1989 Robert Lichtman
 1991 Pam Wells
 1992 Jeanne Bowman
 1993 Abigail Frost
 1995 Dan Steffan

GUFF

1987 Irwin Hirsh
 1989 Roelof Goudriaan
 1990 Roman Orzanski
 1992 Eva Hauser
 1995 Ian and Karen Pender Gunn

Well, it may look wonderful on the surface, but I'm not sure about the reality of it all. Consider, what if Bruno Ogorolec had won TAFF? What if he had rushed to victory on a surge of votes from middle Europe and pro-European British fans sold on the concept that somehow TAFF would be more meaningful if it was seen to be being European? What would that have actually done for our connections with European fandom? Absolutely nothing. Bruno would have gone to America, Lilian and I would have had a fun time with currency transactions and the rest of you would have had to wait for a trip report that told you all about America. But, hell, all the TAFF trip reports tell you about America. What we want to hear about is Yugoslavia. We know far less about fandom in Yugoslavia, Eastern Europe, Germany and even Sweden, than we do about fandom in America. What we should be spending our money on is bringing these people over here, not sending them off to America before we've even met them.

To my mind it's a fiction that TAFF represents the whole of Europe. TAFF could only pretend to represent Europe when there was no European fandom to speak of. Now there is, and most of it extremely different from ours, it is crazy to pretend that we can send one delegate to represent the whole of it. The single European fan market will not magically arise in 1992, it might never arise at all, because we all still speak different languages, and though some of us travel to each other's conventions, there is no real joint community. This may all

come in time, but not, I feel through TAFF. Nor should TAFF attempt to improve its image by jumping on the European bandwagon. Either its current role of interpreting the Americans to the British and vice versa is valid, or else we might as well wind it up right now and send the money to Bangladesh.

— *Christina Lake*
Two-Times TAFF 5, May 1991

Despite Christina's doubts, TAFF's Australian counterpart, GUFF, proved that European delegates could work, sending successively a Dutch candidate, then a Czech to the Antipodes, to no apparent difficulties. As usual, **Bridget Wilkinson** had her finger on the pulse of European fandom, and gave the following commentary on voting patterns:

□ The GUFF results for this year's race appear to negate most of the arguments about European fans not winning TAFF. I think the real reasons [for their lack of success in TAFF] lie elsewhere. Firstly, in order to win a Fan Fund, ANY voting fan fund, you need to be a good candidate — and a good candidate is one that is known. Eva [Hauser, the current GUFF winner] had been writing to fanzines in the West, and sending out her own fanzine, for some while before she was nominated for GUFF. Bruno [Ogorolec] was not known, or able to contribute to his campaign, in the same way. So he lost. Secondly, I think it will be interesting to compare the two lists of voters. As far as I can make out, Pascal Thomas was the only non-British European voter [for TAFF]. The GUFF list contained several nationalities including several Czechs and Poles. This WOULD rather imply a European fandom of sorts. Both Eva and I are known across Europe, from what I know of the voting list most of the voters in Europe knew both of us. This was not true before Confiction — let alone way back in 1989 when Robert Lichtman came on his TAFF trip. The only other possible factor would be the countries at the other end of the two races — what ARE the differences between the US and Australia which might impact on the two races — or perhaps it would be better not to ask.

— *Bridget Wilkinson*
Letter to Tafferescent 5, June 1992

Indeed. The main difference between the two seeming to be that far more paper is devoured debating TAFF than GUFF. Fortunately, the candidacy and subsequent victory of Dan Steffan in the latest TAFF race seems to have silenced most of the doubters. Europe, meanwhile, has been tacitly forgotten.

The Death Of Dr Eastercon And Other Stories

If fanzine fandom really was dying, was it because conventions, in true 50s' horror movie style, had stolen their life-force? If there was one thing everyone agreed on in this period, it was that convention fandom had well and truly achieved ascendance over fanzine fandom. Conrunners got to fly to America, smof on exotic islands (well, Jersey) and go to parties every weekend thinly disguised as committee meetings, by comparison with whom fanzine fans were redundant relics fit only for editing the odd newsletter or programme book. However, this didn't mean everything was roses for conventions either. In particular, as fandom dissipated throughout the Eighties into multiple special interest groups, one thorny problem was to see what the function of the Eastercon, the historic plenary gathering, was to be. Opposed to the fading ideal of the Eastercon as the meeting point for one big happy family of fandom was the still controversial Mexican concept of a convention catering for written sf and fanzine fans only with no concessions made for media fans *et al*. For a while, the 'Death of the Eastercon' was almost as trendy a topic as the death of fanzines. **Abi Frost** succinctly explains the background:

But the convention explosion of the late 80s did pose some problems. First, the idea of the Eastercon, especially, as the meeting point of the whole community went out the window long ago. You simply can't assume that nearly everyone you want to see will be there any more. Then — closely related — there's been the replacement of the idea of fandom as a community which does various things and gets together once in a while at conventions with that of fandom as the community which goes to conventions. If, like me, you're a two-cons-a-year person (at least in theory: TAFF has rather upped the average recently), you are a fringe-fan in these terms. It becomes increasingly harder to keep up the great conversation. People seem to define themselves in terms of ritual jokes about chocolate and jacuzzis.

— **Abigail Frost**
"Print the Legend"
Mexicon 6 Programme Book, May 1994

D. West probably made at least the longest attack on the Eastercon concept in his brief 29 page exposé of 1990, "The Main Event" from which comes this extract:

Conrunners also tend to promote the Eastercon as the convention with a place for every kind of fan and every kind of fandom and the one occasion on which fans of all sorts are encouraged to come together and share an event (Helen McCarthy, *Conrunner 12*). Underlying this idea of fandom as a group-minded collective (rather than a collection of bloody-minded individuals) there is a quasi-evangelical tone: the Eastercon must save souls by bringing the unenlightened into the Blessed Church of Fandom. No one ever seems to look beyond this semi-religious reason to explain why it is such a wonderful thing to have a convention which includes not only friends, acquaintances and people you might reasonably want to meet, but also six or seven hundred complete strangers.

In *Conrunner 11* McCarthy (perhaps worried in case she is falling in her moral duty to fandom) takes several pages to reject Bob (fake) Shaw's idea that conventions should make a special effort to recruit from ethnic minorities. As she indicates, this is a daft idea and also somewhat condescending (since it assumes that the said minorities can't manage for themselves) but the irony is that Shaw is really doing no more than push McCarthy's own line of thought to its absurd but logical conclusion. If Fandom is Salvation then *everybody* should have a crack at it. Get out there and drag those sinners in off the streets! Spread the Divine Light and Mercy! Let them all be washed in the blood of the Eastercon Lamb! Glory, Glory!

Perhaps the notion that fandom is a kind of moral crusade is perfectly sincere. Perhaps it's just more muddled thinking. Either way, it certainly fits very nicely with the conrunners' urge to go empire-building, since it positively affirms both that bigger is better and that Eastercons have an obligation to include absolutely everybody. Myself, I didn't join fandom as either a social worker or a missionary. I'm quite prepared to agree that I'm in it strictly for myself. So why should I care whether or not the masses are saved? By all means turn no one away, but why go out looking for all these unnecessary extra bodies?

Because fandom is all about *sharing*, and that includes even media fans? Well, I see no reason at all why I should be expected to feel any bond of kinship with such people, or why the Eastercon should be expected to make concessions to their narrow, limited and fundamentally low-grade tastes. What have I in common with these aliens, or they with me?

— **D. West**
"The Main Event"
Conrunner 13, April 1990

Conrunners were unimpressed:

It's true that, like any sphere of human endeavour, con-running has problems, problems that could be exposed by analytical, funny and occasionally nasty pieces of writing. D.'s article is not such a piece of writing. It's an incoherent howl of anger from a drunk in a pub who wants to justify himself by picking a fight with someone and doesn't particularly care who it is or what the fight is about. That D. used to be an excellent writer just makes the spectacle more pathetic.

— **Martin Easterbrook**
Letter to Conrunner 14, November 1990

Abi Frost (in another article) also found the Eastercon flawed but was prepared to consider ways of improving it, at the same time equally defending the Mexican single programme alternative:

AJF SPEAKS UP FOR THE SINGLE-STREAM CONVENTION.

Our text today comes from Ian Sorenson, writing in *Conrunner 8* on the Eastcon and Contravention bids.

"The reality of Eastercons these days is that they are very big, do not have a homogeneous membership, and will require a committee to supply a wide range of entertainments. Maybe not

bread and circuses, but a multi-stream, wide-ranging programme." . . . I'm concerned {here} with the conventional defence of multi-streaming; the idea that a single, integrated programme cannot offer "something for everyone" and will inevitably exclude some people's interests, catering only for an "élite".

At a single-programme convention everything is for everyone; which doesn't mean that everyone has to attend everything. At a multi-programme convention, some bits are "for" some people and other bits are "for" others. The convention itself institutionalises divisions between groups of fans, instead of emphasising the common ground. And it is in such a divided community that "élitism" — and the paranoia about it which causes the withdrawal of certain groups which is sometimes read as élitism itself — can grow and flourish. When we were all fans, we had each our own mental pecking-order, no doubt, but we all felt part of the same community. Now that we are seen as members of special interest groups, whose special interests must be catered for, we grow further apart from each other by the day.

A simple example: the Follycon film programme. Having been away from Eastercons for so long, I was impressed and delighted by the number of feature films on offer — and the quality of the selection. Here were films I'd seen many times before and always like to see again (*Performance*); films I wanted to see but had missed first time round (*The Wall* and *Brazil*); and films I'd never even heard of but some of which sounded worth a look. How many did I catch?

Not one. In the event, every film I fancied clashed with a programme item (or more often, two — feature films being rather longer than fan panels, usually), or a party, or a trip to the art gallery, or a meal, or a long bar-rap with friends; the other things I go to a convention for. Tucked away in a "film room", the film programme hardly had a chance to catch me. Eight or ten films, repeated throughout the con, would have been plenty, and would have ensured that everyone had a chance to see what a substantial proportion of their membership money must have gone on. Four really good films, shown in the con hall and perhaps followed by discussions of their place in the sf pantheon, would have been real highlights, providing perhaps some of the common ground of the convention and a real talking-point.

And common ground is what we need. Emphasising the gaps between (say) fanzine fans and media fans merely creates problems and unnecessary distress. More emphasis on the common ground might discourage a few infantile souls who insist on the con being distorted to accommodate them, personally, but who needs such people? The rest of us could start to communicate and find out what each other has to offer: each other person, not each "fandom".

The common ground is, ultimately, science fiction. I say that as a hard-core fanzine fan, one whose presence here has little to do with any strong personal commitment to sf. Instead of merely celebrating (say) Gerry Anderson, why don't his fans try to show the rest of us his place in the genre's history; why don't they make the case for Anderson as science fiction? It's true they would risk being laughed out of court, but why not try to examine his shows' appeal? Or let them listen to the writers, artists and others whose work has something in common with Anderson's and make the connection for themselves.

Every side-show at a convention diminishes its wholeness. A convention which stresses side-shows at the expense of core material might even cease to be a convention — which means a coming-together. It becomes instead, at the extreme, a muddlesome gallimaufry of eccentricity and self-indulgence. It diminishes understanding, both of the genre and between the people in it, where integrated programming can serve to increase it.

Mexicon II had something called the "thirds principle"; the theory was that things are going all right if at any one time, one-third of the convention is watching the programme, one-third in the bar, and one-third doing god knows what somewhere else. This didn't mean that the same third might do each thing throughout the con — though some individuals may have spent their whole weekend in the bar or the con hall — but that a programme item had to look as if it would attract about that number of people before it was commissioned. This means looking at your programming in a new way: not as a way of placating vociferous interest-groups, but as a selection of items each capable of attracting interest from the non-aligned.

While, obviously, it is useful to provide a choice at a large convention, it needn't be done in a divisive fashion. Let programming reflect the interest-value and potential audience of the programme items themselves, not a hackneyed idea of "something for everyone". "Something for everyone" means most things "not for me". I like Mozart opera, and I like Clint Eastwood: but I shan't feel cheated if Clint isn't playing Papageno at the ENO this season.

— *Abi Frost*
"Division Street"
Chicken Bones, May 1989

Strangely enough, **Ian Sorensen**, cited by Abi as the defender of large multi-stream conventions, and at this time, something of a patron saint of conrunning in his guise as *Conrunner* editor, also had serious misgivings about conrunning culture:

For over fifty years the cultural values of fandom have been modified and passed on through the medium of fanzines. They are all there in print for anyone to look at should they wish, but how is anyone to become aware of them today? Fanzine fans used to also run the conventions and imbued the con with their cultural values. But few active conrunners have much contact with the broader culture of the fanzines and so conventions are becoming increasingly remote from fandom's cultural heritage. Conrunners don't even have a mechanism for passing on traditions to future conventions.

Sorry if I seem a bit down on conrunners but I'm still trying to recover from *Conscription*, the conrunners' con in 1988, where, instead of discussing new ideas, there was an overwhelming rush to reach consensus on all aspects of conrunning. Since then I've seen precious little attempt to innovate or even discuss the basic axioms of convention organising. Editing *Conrunner* I'd expect to hear if anyone had any radical ideas on the subject and I haven't. Nobody seems to be examining topics like: Why do we have conventions? What are the motivations of the people attending and the people organising it? What form should the programme take? Do we need a programme? Most effort seems to be going into refining the organisational techniques already in use rather than examining the structure of the organisation. There's nothing actually wrong with this, it's just a little discouraging, in the context of a quest to find ways of continuing the cultural progression of fandom, to discover that more effort is going into staying where we are than moving on. When I attempted to stir conrunners up by publishing D. West's deliberately contentious thoughts on conrunning it did provoke a huge reaction from the readers of *Conrunner* (huge meaning a dozen letters from a {1} distribution list of 300+). Unfortunately their letters were mostly about the manner in which he had delivered his attack rather than on the substance of his article, and very few of the respondents showed any sign of having re-examined their preconceptions about convention running as a result of reading the piece. Conrunners seem to want to keep things the way they are and not question what they are doing too much.

I realise there is a certain paradox in claiming to want fannish cultural values preserved then complaining that conrunners seem to want to keep things the way they are. But the best way to preserve something is to keep it alive so that, like all living things, it will be able to adapt to change and conrunners don't seem to like that. It would seem that convention organisers are the ideal candidates for keeping things going: they are organised, have control of the major lines of communication (cons and con publications), and seem to be deeply conservative. But they ain't got no culture. Anyone becoming involved in conrunning may make lots of friends, learn some useful skills, become well known — but they won't, as a direct consequence of conrunning, learn much about fannish culture. It's very similar to the arguments about science subjects versus arts subjects: should education be training for a job or something to equip the the student for life in general?

Fannish culture provides us with lots of things: an identity, shared values, worldwide contacts and a lot of fun. Being part of fandom should make a positive contribution to your life. Without the binding force of a common culture the disparate groups of sf fans will lose contact with one another, diminishing the whole. I feel sure that, given enough exposure, more fans would opt for a career in fandom simply because of the huge enjoyment that can be derived from being involved.

— *Ian Sorensen*
Bob! 1, May 1991

Abi Frost (yes, her again) had also noticed the subtle cultural changes associated with convention fandom:

My early-80s fantasies of fanzine fandom as a great underground people's communication system seem increasingly beside the point (even when I see Joseph Nicholas apparently reviving them in the 90s). But at least they had a point to be beside. There was always the complaint that fannish fandom ignored Real Science Fiction in favour of in-jokes, and crates-full of Old Gold duplicating paper have been wasted in attempts to justify this. But at least Ratfandom and its bastard offspring created written narratives. This new fandom of mild sexual naughtiness, foodieism and strokes likes to be referred to, but can't stop giggling long enough to preserve its own mythology and let others share the fun. The bane of my life over the last few years as a convention newsletter person has been the little scraps of paper: 'SIX people have now had THE MESSAGE!!! Some of them had it IN A RESTAURANT! Alison Scott got COVERED in chocolate!!!! Signed, ONE WHO KNOWS!'

Ah, well, I suppose you had to be there. This piece of hermetic hysteria (which, as you realise, I made up, the originals having long since found their proper home in a hotel bin) is, it seems, all that remains of the great tradition of fannish anecdote. Print the legend, by all means, but why, in this case, bother?

— *Abigail Frost*
"Print the Legend"
Mexicon 6 Programme Book, May 1994

Kate Solomon had a new wrinkle on what ailed convention culture. The problem was consumerism, which had snuck into fandom along with a joblot of Thatcherite values when no-one was looking.

Can I make an appeal to any of you involved in running conventions to put an end to the creeping habit of 'blacking-out' the audience during programme items involving speakers and panels? Both Mexican and Helicon allowed this to happen, no doubt due to the misguided desires of their techie crews. It seems, now that Conventions have the budgets to buy in expensive lighting rigs, that those operating them — not unnaturally — have become carried away in their desire to try out all the possible permutations of their new toys. A case of "WE-Have-the-technology-so-we-can-transform-you" I fear. The 'stars' of the fannish 'show' are now to be bathed in aesthetically soft-focus mauve and peach, whilst the rest of us sit passive and anonymous in the darkness, invisible to both the 'performers' and to each other. I must not, it seems, read my

neighbour's face for response to what is being said, nor she mine. Our attention must be riveted, like it or not, face-front to the pool of soft lighting and the 'performance' I am to be privileged to witness.

Isn't this the heart of the problem with the style of current conventions? That fans are being seen by committees as consumers, save on those occasions when we are asked to sit briefly on the stage and perform? It's been almost 17 years now since I first slipped into fandom (a personally somewhat depressing fact, but an inescapable one . . .). It was already quite an extensive network, and conventions of around 500 were common enough at Easter, but it was still anarchic and participatory in its structure and tone. In those halcyon days there were arguments and choices — competing bids for Eastercon even! Nobody sat in hushed and darkened silence during programme items: there were no sophisticated lighting rigs to stop me seeing the faces and responses of other fans, no theatrical conventions to prevent us interrupting speakers or commenting on their ideas with my visible neighbours.

But in wider society, of course, those 17 years have seen a revolution in our self-image. We have been invited to discard an image of ourselves as citizen in favour of that of consumer. Hell, even the words gave changed their meaning: today we have a 'citizen's charter' that claims to guarantee, not civil rights, but value-for-money. I teach students, but today we are being encourage to refer to them as 'customers'. Students study, customers consume. The difference is obvious: beneath the reassuring rhetoric a malign revolution in thought is taking place. Citizenship was always hard work; it involved sharing in something: one had to participate. As consumers, of course, we are invited to live in splendid isolation in our starter studio-flats, our rights safely guarded by the company's guarantee.

What has this to do with the lighting games of techie crews, you may justifiably ask? Not a reactionary conspiracy, I hasten to add, lest I be struck by a falling arc-light . . . It's just that fans seem to have been as affected by the philosophical sea-change of the last 15 years as everyone else. Fans too have given up citizenship and become consumers. We prefer efficiency to anarchy in conventions. We pay good money and won't accept messiness; value-for-money means items run on time, don't get held up by inconvenient discussion, and above all, it seems, they look good. We expect slick presentation, guest-of-honour speeches run on chat-show lines with scripted questions, a good-looking host and nice lighting. God forbid that we should have to participate in order to gain from the experience.

This must, it seems, be what we are demanding. It is increasingly what con committees (sorry, producers) are going to give us. We want good performers to listen to, in our warm, dark seats, interesting people who can think about the big issues on our behalf. They, or course, are not permitted deviation any more than their consumers are: in *Cactus Times* the techie crew complained that Tom Shippey had walked out of his oh-so-carefully-lit soft-focus circle during his speech — crime! Rather than turn the lights back on, let's nail the performer's feet to the floor . . .

I attended the first Mexican, itself a reaction against the obsession with business-like efficiency and presentation already creeping into Eastercons. Items didn't always run to time. The audience could intervene, take over and change the nature of scheduled events. The lighting rig was used only for the play. The lights stayed on, the rooms looked boringly normal. We could see and talk to each other. It was a vibrant, exciting and demanding event. This Mexican was quietly fun in the bar. It had some good speakers. We heard them. It was slick and very pretty. It was not demanding.

It's a hell of a process to roll back, but please, please, can we try? Can we start by putting the lights back on?

— *Kate Solomon*
"Summer Time"
TWP 82, July 1993

Ian Sorensen (yes, him again) also had misgivings about the rise of (as they became known) Tech Ops:

It became most evident at Contrivance (Easter 1989) that the Tech Ops crew were, how shall I put this delicately?, getting a bit full of themselves. In an attempt to keep to the published programme there were occasions when items were unceremoniously stopped by having the plug pulled on them by the tech crew, as distinct from the programme controller. While I'm in favour of programme items running to time, there has to be some leeway for discretion in allowing over-runs of items that are going well . . . The impression came across to many people that what we were seeing was the start of the Guild Of Tech Ops and that only the chosen would be inducted into their mysteries in the future — indeed, there were many gags throughout the convention about the need for a Guild of Repro Room Collators, a Guild of Fan Room Organisers, a Guild of Panellists' Drinks Purchasers and so on. In a drunken conversation on the Monday night in Jersey Martin Hoare confided to me that there were aspects of Speculation that would have to be changed because he'd heard that tech ops didn't like them. God knows what they are, but I feel sure that, come the day, Speculation will manage to run smoothly even if it's only got Martin and his toolkit to rely on.

— Ian Sorensen
"Guiding the Lily"
Conrunner 11, May 1989

Kate and Ian both identify an obvious trend in conrunning: a concentration on how the con is organised, the mechanics and tools, in preference to thinking about new ideas or programme items. The complement of Kate's consumer fandom is a need for a professional cadre of conrunners, whose main concern is running conventions not attending them (or enjoying them). What kind of cons does this produce for the rest of us? **D. West** also addressed this issue in "The Main Event":

Conrunners in action, running round in a sweat of excited self-importance, are a disheartening sight. There is something deeply distasteful about people who want to be cast in the role of petty officials in an authoritarian hierarchy, ordering around those below and deferring to those above. Least attractive of all are the 'security' persons, whose main aim in life seems to be the acting out of some peculiar fantasy involving much meaningless use of walkie-talkies and the repeated harassment of all persons not wearing their badges pinned between their eyes. The nadir was 1984, when the 'security' goons were completely useless for everything except hassling the attendees. (The only consolation was that they even did it to a couple of committee members.) My attitude to security at conventions is similar to my attitude to bouncers in bars: if they're really necessary I don't want to know the customers, and if they're not necessary at all then I certainly don't want to know the management.

Then there's the dark mysteries of Tech Ops. "Yes we ARE professional in our approach" sternly declares Pat Brown in *Conrunner 12*, but rather spoils the effect by ending:

"Finally it has just occurred to me that whilst the tech crew is there to serve the con, the con is also there to serve the tech crew as much as it serves the other special interest groups. We get as much fun out of being techies and having the opportunity to play with all sorts of interesting kit as e.g. costume fans get out of their particular interest."

Anything less like a 'professional' approach than this would be hard to imagine. Fancy telling a customer that only jobs involving 'interesting kit' could be considered, because anything else would be an infringement of the 'professional's' right to be served by the customer. A tech crew is a 'special interest group' like costume fans? Well, one must point out that costume fans provide their own costumes. In my innocence I always supposed that microphones and such stuff were there

for the limited purpose of making panelists audible to the audience, not as a programme item in their own right. But apparently technical gear must be provided for techies to play with — just as walkie-talkies must be provided for 'security' people to play with, and whole conventions must be provided for conrunners to play with.

Some pages later:

Some years ago, in conversation with one of the Glasgow conrunners, I asked why Glasgow cons always seemed to have such a heavy media element. "Ah well, that's to attract the local walk-ins who won't come unless we have media stuff." But why were the walk-ins so necessary? "Well, if we didn't get the walk-ins we wouldn't be able to afford the media stuff."

There, in a couple of sentences, is the whole pointless, circular vacuity of the conrunners' philosophy. Running conventions is an end in itself, therefore the only real consideration is what will maintain or expand the conrunning process. Satisfying the attendees (often revealingly referred to as 'punters') is necessary only to raise the numbers and ensure repeat business. Conrunners prefer to present themselves as public servants, but it would be much more accurate to describe them as public parasites: like tapeworms their one desire and function is through-put.

— D. West
"The Main Event"
Conrunner 14, November 1990

D., of course, over-states. Large cons may indeed have become three ring circuses for the training of baby conrunners, but elsewhere, interesting things were still happening, like the rise of theatrical performances at cons:

Geoff Ryman is just back from New York, where author readings are proper events, people pay to come and listen. He was very taken with this idea, as is Simon Ings, who's frustrated by the dull predictability of convention panel discussions. He says we should reclaim the *authority* of the author, take the stage and turn it into an alien territory, 'create an atmosphere as aesthetically rewarding as the act of reading.' Mike Harrison leans on the mantelpiece, smiling an obscurely satisfied trout-like smile. 'Make the buggers sit up and take notice!' he barks. 'Hah!'

I grew up nestling by the BBC Home Service. *Morning Story*, *Listen With Mother*; so I have the conviction a story's not a proper story unless you do all the different voices. Ambitious, challenging, I'm not; but I turned out to be as bad as everyone else. We sort of egged each other on until we were in dead trouble.

We have become performers.

Exploded in the lap of an unsuspecting sf fandom at Mexican, in Harrogate, the Unauthorised Sex Company is sf cabaret, or scratch sf, or speculative erotica, or something along those lines, depending when you ask. At one point it was called Orgone Quibbles. All sorts of texts, our own and other people's, cut up and glued together. Music and slides by Dave McKean; costumes, set and lacerated heart by Sylvia Starshine, from Dave's brief.

It's fragmentary, so there aren't continuous characters, though some of the fragments are fragments of drama. But we do have roles within the troupe.

Simon is the daring one, the one who insisted on stripping and rolling around the stage reciting Iain Banks. Geoff is the inventive one, who went into overdrive while we put the script together in two hours flat on a malfunctioning Amstrad PCW out of our accumulated shreds, or the three-quarters of them that was actually there once Mike Harrison had pulled out, pleading deadlines and dentistry. Simon and I stood at Geoff's shoulders like archangels on the Day of Creation, saying

"What about . . ." and "We could put this there." Geoff zooms along, creating, determining, beautifully, helplessly, far past the point when anyone else might have thought things had become, well, scripted.

Me, I'm the pessimist, the official wet blanket. I shake my head with doleful sagacity and talk like Marvin the robot. "Oh yes, it's brilliant, guys, I just don't think we can actually *do* it. I mean, we don't know if the Cairn Hotel will let us screw flying harnesses into the ballroom ceiling. Maybe they will. Maybe they won't mind. Maybe Nic Farey won't need to rewire the entire building for the volcano scene. Anyway, look, let's just rehearse what we've got so far and see if we can actually remember any of our lines, shall we? And can we finish by nine o'clock, because it's *Twin Peaks* tonight?"

— Colin Greenland
 "Packing Jellyfish In Hampers"
Nexus 2, Spring 1992

▮ Sad to say even this did not meet with D.'s approval:

□ Then it was time for the Geoff Ryman drama. Shame about that, I thought it was fucking awful.

And who was at fault there? I suppose you could argue that the deficiency was mine, since I didn't stay to watch the whole but gave up and left after fifteen or twenty minutes. However, I don't think I'm either stupid or entirely devoid of sensibility, so I'm prepared to stand by my judgement that something which was muddled, arty-farty nonsense at the beginning was not likely to improve significantly later on. I have no sympathy at all with the view that aspiring artists have the right to demand total indulgence from their public — it's his job to make the audience take an interest in what's on offer.

Not a lot seemed to be on offer here. Mannered acting in red overalls and peaked caps, speeches which sounded like especially bad teenage poetry, pacing which always seemed about three beats off the mark causing much internal muttering of "Get on with it") and a general atmosphere of heavy symbolism and all the precious pieties of 'alternative' Art. Not so much avant garde as *derriere* garde. In short: pretentious crap. The only redeeming features were Colin Greenland's miniaturised impression of Vincent Price and cute Simon Ings's strip down to his padded jockstrap. (Now if I could get him to deny it was padded that would liven up the letter column.) Later, Mike Ford resignedly remarked that he'd stayed all the way through waiting for the naughty bits, but it turned out there weren't any. Not a lot for anybody, any way at all.

These remarks may seem more than a little ungracious, considering that Geoff Ryman was responsible for a dramatised version of my own *Performance* which by all accounts was well-received on two occasions in 1987. (I wasn't there, having no liking for listening to my own words.) I certainly admired his staging of *The Transmigration of Timothy Archer* at the first Mexican.

But perhaps this indicates where I feel the recent production went wrong. Never mind the interpretation — the material itself was dud. I don't mean to claim any tremendous merit for my own work, but it was at least solid — it had form, the language was readily understandable and the images were accessible. *Transmigration* was more recondite, but that too had a firm structure — even if one did not always understand every part of what was going on one wanted to stay with the flow and continue the experience. The Usexco effort was just a mess, and it failed to compel attention from one minute to the next.

So was it a complete waste of time and effort? Yes and no. Despite my low opinion of this particular item I think the Mexican committee were quite right to include it. A work that might have been called 'ambitious' and ends up being called pretentious is simply one that didn't quite make it and fell of the tightrope. Any production attempting to go beyond the safe

and ordinary runs the risk of being damned as 'arty-farty nonsense'. Maybe the verdict is justified — maybe not. Nobody is ever in a position to say for sure until the thing is tried. With writing and drawing one can fiddle around in private and the subject the result to every possible test of coldblooded scrutiny and evaluation before releasing it on the world, but with performing arts which depend on the verdict of a live audience there's no alternative but to climb on stage and just do the damn thing. Win some, lose some.

So I hope Geoff (with or without Usexco associates) tries again — but I hope that next time the material is better. Much better.
 — D. West
Daisnaid 7, June 1991

▮ And even if the actual convention was boring, there was always the newsletter. This was something of a golden age for these one-page ephemera, as fanzine stars like Dave Langford, Abi Frost, Maureen Speller and Caroline Mullan mysteriously decided to start spending their conventions slaving over a hot duplicator. Langford's 1993 Helicon newsletter, possibly the highpoint of the genre and the one that gave us *Whog the Flighty*, gives some flavour of the European tinge to that convention:

□ Trying to make every item at least a bit amusing was a continuing policy. One slight hitch was noted . . . Helicon had an influx of 52 Romanians, who all arrived in suits and strange tall pointy hats, like a delegation of heavily politicized garden gnomes. My idle fingers recorded the figure and on impulse (the line looked as if it could do with a bit more text) made it '52.02'. Well, at least I didn't add 'plus or minus 0.06', but the newsroom had a procession of puzzled visitors. "We have bad trouble with newsletter. Here it says [etc, etc]. Is special meaning or" (in tones of deepening menace) "your Western sense of humour?"

Strange longues were heard everywhere at Helicon, and to aid translation a complex system of colour-coded ribbons and little spots on con badges was supposed to indicate who could interpret between what. Fandom soon reduced the system to chaos. The 'I speak Romanian' ribbons ran out within 52.02 nanoseconds, and others lasted only a trifle longer; soon the committee was running round trying to clip bits from the over-long and generous ribbons issued on the first day. Meanwhile one heard explanations like: "And that one-quarter of a tartan spot on my badge stands for how much Gaelic I know . . ." Your reporter confirmed himself to be deaf in seventeen languages.

My biggest linguistic mistake on *Heliograph* was in allowing my eyes to glaze over each time I tried to read a contribution from Colin Fine which appeared to be an essay on the artificial language Lojban. "Too long," I kept saying. "Maybe next issue." Colin had neglected to hint in his headline that, just after the point at which I invariably fell asleep, this piece announced a new and imminent programme item in which Lojban would be discussed. Oops.

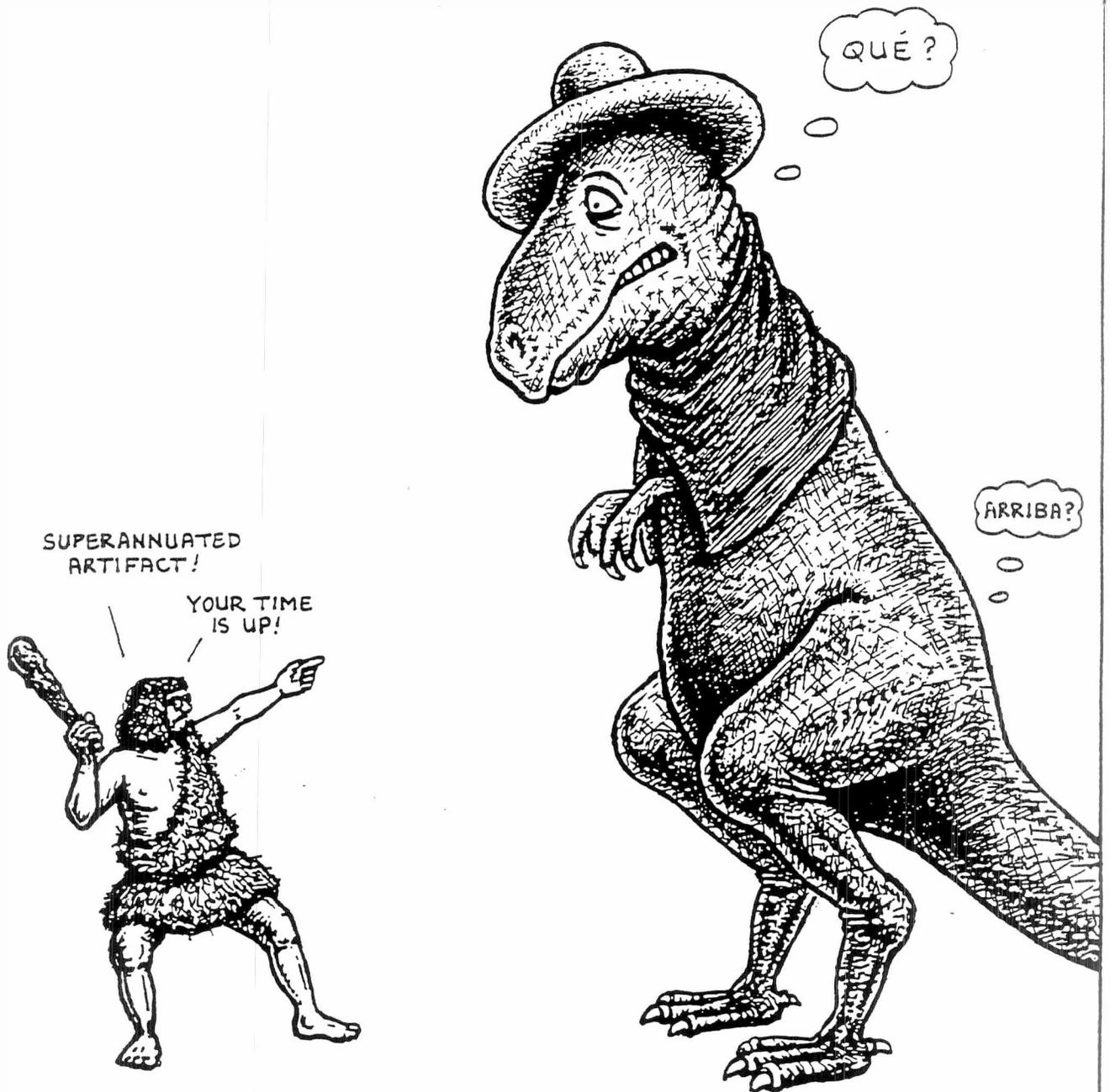
Besides Romanians there were Russians, who were doing a roaring trade in obsolete KGB credentials at their dealers' room table . . .

Dave Langford
 "You Do It With Mirrors"
Matrix 112, Dec 1994 (originally appeared in *Mimosa*)

▮ Away from the big convention circuit, attempts were being made to escape the something-for-everyone Eastercon philosophy and (in Thatcherite terms) meet niche market demands instead. Conscription, the con for conrunners who try harder, has been mentioned above. The first UK filk convention, Contabile, was held in February 1989, following on from Follycon's heavy filk presence, and spawned an ongoing series. Inconsequential (May 1992), spawned by a

Attitude 2

TYRANNOSAURUS MEX
FACING EXTINCTION



Terry Pratchett appreciation society, became the first of a successful chain of humour-oriented conventions, largely drawing an audience of non-traditional (ie young) fans. Costumers got in on the act with Masque, the first UK costuming con (if you don't count *Rocky Horror!*) in February 92. Most unlikely of all, Claire Brialey ran Eroticon 6 (October 1991), a convention devoted to erotica in sf and fantasy, limited to couples over 18 but attended by **Martin Hoare**:

Where else could a convention about eroticism be held but in the Tollgate Motel near Gravesend? We arrived at 11pm to find the fetish party well underway. Jean wondered about its dress (or undress) code: investigating, I met Judith Looker in a fetching leather dress whose skimpiness was an obvious effort towards animal friendliness. "Everyone is trying to outweird each other," she explained.

I ran back and donned a propeller beanie while Jean chose her slinky PVC frock in case of water pistol fights. The party was great fun with a wild array of costumes: naughty nurses, vicars, gladiators, Nic Fary in a sequined dress . . . The beanie was a popular fannish fetish — everyone wanted to spin my propeller.

— **Martin Hoare**
Ansible 52, November 1991

Ian Sorensen's 10 Favourite Cons

Ian Sorensen, Esteemed Editor of *Conrummer*, the fanzine for people who like to read about running cons, presents his personal list of the top ten conventions 1980-95.

Most enjoyable convention

Inconsequential

Humour and SF, great combo!

Best organised

Clonespiracy

Committee of one (me)

Most relaxing

Fifteencon

The Royal Angus at its best

Best room parties

Channelcon

Lots of fun behind the curtains

My first (ah!)

Hitchercon

I met Douglas Adams!

Most satisfying

Albacon III

Fun to organise, good to attend

Best programme

Speculation

Best because of the guest

Albacon 85

Harlan Ellison

Most original concept

Dangercon

The Dangermouse convention, very silly

Most unexpectedly enjoyable

Sou'Wester

In fact, just when it seemed splinter fandom conventions were becoming quite the thing, literary/fanzine fandom decided to kill theirs . . .

Mexicon 6 wasn't a Mexican, and there aren't any Mexicons any more.

Mexicon is dead, Viva Mexicon! It is no more, it is an ex-convention, it has not ceased to be, bereft of life it does not rest in peace but roams around the land pulling up the daisies — Let a hundred flowers bloom! — Mexicon the Undead, the Con they could not kill but transmuted into self-perpetuating bureaucracy along the lines of the PRI, what was Stevenage last week but the Day of the Dead, the Last Dangerous Mexicon . . .

Mexicon 6 was brilliant. I enjoyed myself immensely.

Mexicon 6 was not a Mexican, it was the tenth anniversary party for Mexicon, itself the tenth anniversary party for Tynescon.

Mexicon 6 was a retro event, a looking backwards event, it was perfect for my purposes, a re-entry into congoing after 5 years without attending any events you can't get to by London Transport bus. Almost everyone I wanted to see was there (although some of them didn't particularly want to see me). Good Stuff.

Mexicon 6 is, in retrospect, entirely dominated by the Saturday afternoon debate on the future, or lack of it, of Mexicon. Almost everyone attended, at least for part of the two hour marathon. First we listened to Greg Pickersgill telling us that Mexicon had achieved its purpose and become a mockery of itself. Then Colin Harris told us that the Mexicon idea still had worth in it.

With a little help from Chris Evans lobbing mortar bombs into the crowd from the back, Greg established an intellectual hegemony over the meeting in the first five minutes, and after an hour of arguing (mostly a rerun of that traditional form of fannish discourse, the censure of the current committee by the previous committee, mingled with yells of "but why are we only arguing about names" and "of course this discussion *is* only about names") when Eve Harvey asked for a show of hands to see if anyone actually wanted to run another Mexicon (as opposed to attending it if someone else ran it) no-one responded. Not one. Mexicon was dead.

After reassuring Messrs. Langford, Priest & Platt that this did *not* mean that they could get out of their Harlan Ellison programme item, but like a ham actor in a melodrama (or indeed like an anthology by a ham writer) the death scene of Mexicon was to be played to the bitter end, Eve then came to what became the real point of the meeting.

What were we to do with the 1400 pounds still in the kitty which in other circumstances might have been passed on to a future Mexicon?

After a moral pre-emptive strike by Abi Frost who said that she *didn't* want the money for TAFF, hoping thereby to prevent anyone else standing up & saying that they wanted it for themselves, or their con, someone proposed a "Mexicon Foundation", to look after the money & use it for fannish Good Works.

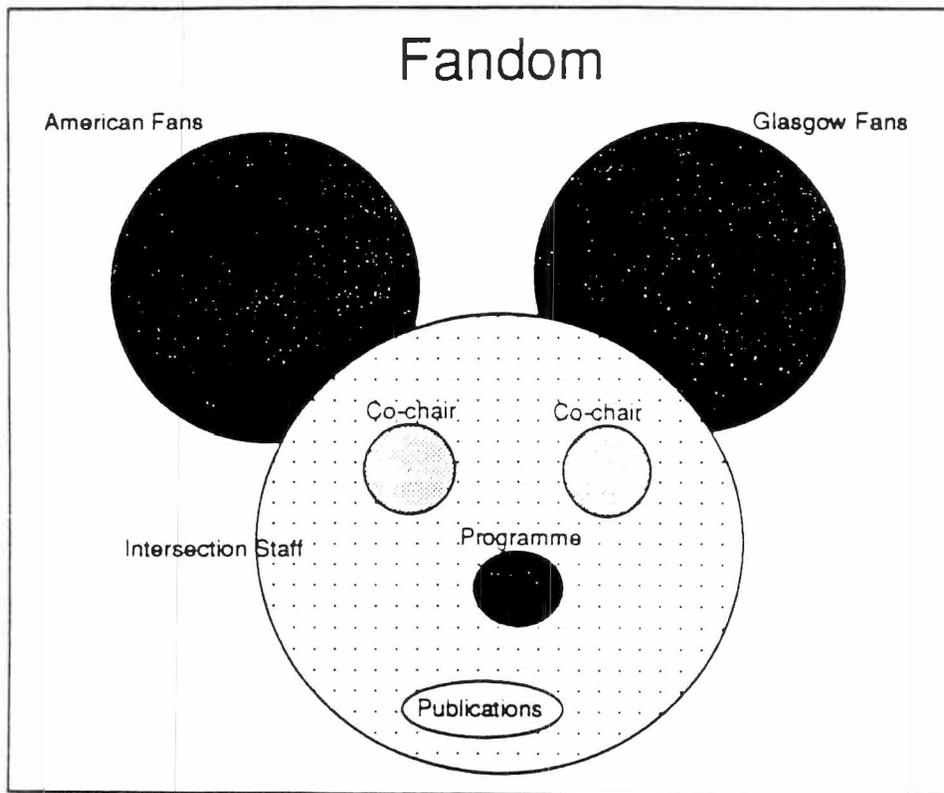
This ball was tossed over the net a few times, committees, trust funds, charitable status & so on were discussed, & in the way of Tory party leadership contests of old a committee emerged. It was only after the meeting that those few who were not in favour of the Foundation wandered back into the bar (where I had been for the previous two pints, being disinterested in the disposal of the money & having left just after the first vote) that it began to dawn on them that the whole thing was planned . . .

The clue that got through to them was that Rhodri {James} (hiya Rhodri!) had been elected to the committee when he wasn't even *at* Mexicon.

The whole thing was a work of Art. If Greg, Abi, Pam, Christina & Rhodri ever want to join our local Labour Party they'll find themselves quite at home . . .

— **Ken Brown**

"A brief account of Mexicon 6 (the Party)"
 E-mail transcript, also reprinted with footnotes by Greg Pickersgill in *Rastus Johnson's Cakewalk* 6, June 1994



A Venn Diagram Representing the Organisational Status of Intersection

From 'Conrunner'



Most people, agreeing that the later Mexicons had neither the vision nor the fun content of the first few, were relieved to see Mexican the Party become Mexican the Wake, although some had misgivings about both the purpose and the execution of the 'Mexicon Foundation' plan (shortly thereafter renamed Mexican Hat to avoid confusion with the SF Foundation.)

Having got bored with Mexicon, exchanged email addresses with most of East European fandom and honed their conrunning skills to a peak of perfection, what did British fandom have left to do except plunge into the hellhole, sorry, unmissable opportunity of another Worldcon bid?

Caroline Mullan describes being there when the bid was won:

Vince sat back in his chair and crossed his hands in his lap. He was straightforward. About 2,500 people had voted. Atlanta had about 1,160. He paused: not long enough for anyone to do the sum — after Saturday midnight at a Worldcon no-one thinks that fast — but long enough for people's faces to show the effort of working it out. Glasgow had about 1,310 votes. Glasgow had won the bid.

There were eighteen people in the room. The co-chairs, Tim and Vince, already knew. Fifteen of them said "Oh shit". Hugh said "Jesus Christ". Then there was instant babble, cut through with someone saying, "You mean we've got to run the bloody thing now?" and everyone laughed.

"I didn't want us to lose," I said, "but I'm not at all sure I wanted us to win." It was the first time I had ever said 'us': to

me the bid had always been 'you'. There was more laughter but also agreement. Nobody had wanted to lose but everyone was aware of how much it would have cost them to have won.

For half an hour we discussed the result. Glasgow had won, albeit by a narrow margin, for every voting period: pre-con, Thursday, Friday and Saturday of Magicon, though a regional breakdown was not yet available. Some people had been sure we would win, others that we would lose. Some had spent the whole con wavering from one position to the other. The whisky had won it, the ceilidh, Nessie, the Glasgow Glossy, Oliver's kilt. Nothing had won it. Atlanta had lost it, the SMOFs had been on our side. Some of the Atlanta committee had been seen in tears. Some were cheerful. God, we were going to be poor with half our membership at ultra-cheap voting rates.

"This could have been a good one to lose," said Tim, and he was right, but it made no difference. The 1995 Worldcon would be in Glasgow and we were running it.

(Fade out theme from *Chariots of Fire* . . .)

Martin Hoare, as ever *Ansible's* man at the scene, had less existential worries:

"The most horrible part of Magicon" quavered Martin "was having to wear kilts to push the Glasgow bid — I said 'You won't have one in my waist size' and bloody Tim Illingworth just went 'Ho ho.' And the sporran was artificial fur pasted onto this wooden board so when you walked it kept thumping into your groin . . ." The impression gained by US con-goers was that authentically killed Scots always walk very, *very* slowly.

Ansible 63, October 1992

Ansible was also responsible — or reprehensible — for a rhyming report on ~~The Scottish Conbention~~ progress which circulated with considerably more speed than the official publications and concluded thus:

Now 'tis the end of the year Nineteen Hundred and Ninety-four, and ~~The Scottish Conbention~~ has survived ev'ry crisis
 Except the trifling issue of publishing its hotel prices.
 Many gallant fans had perished of old age or of worms,
 Awaiting the arrival of their hotel booking forms,
 And 'twas feared that when at last the renegotiated bargain room-rates were verified,
 Most of the survivors would opt to sleep on the banks of the silv'ry Clyde.
 But those who talk of exorbitant charges will be unable to scoff,
 If ace negotiators Sorensen and Meenan clinch their canny deal of 'no breakfast and £5 off!' . . .
 Meanwhile David V. Barrett loudly sings the committee's praise,
 For his membership confirmation has just arrived after only two years, one month and nine days.

To all convention staff who enjoy the beauty of this Ode, and also to those who read it,
 The Poet McGonagall wishes seasonal fun and the best of Scottish luck (not hinting that they'll need it).
 May Yuletide cheer also make the Laird of Easterbrook serene,
 And end his recurrent nightmare about featuring in SHOCK HORROR editorials by Steve Green.
 In conclusion, here is Intersection's merry Christmas summing-up of the story so far:
 'For God's sake send all your money to us at Admail 336, Glasgow, G2 1BR.'

— "Ode to ~~The Scottish Conbention~~ by William McGonagall"
Ansible 89½, Christmas 1994

Which brings us pretty much up to date. Strangely enough after the doom and gloom of most of the early Nineties, life actually seems to be looking up. A mini-fanzine revival got underway somewhere around late 1993, instigated by the arrival back on the scene of Greg Pickersgill with his heavyweight *Rastus Johnson's Cakewalk* and the simultaneous though not necessarily connected re-emergence of the genzine in the shape of challenging meaty zines like Simon Ounsley's *Lagoon*, *Attitude*, and from the US, Steffan and White's *Blat!*. Conventions too seem to have started getting a good press again. MiSdemeanour and MiSconstrued seem to have successfully revived the idea of a small 'n' cosy undemanding fannish convention, last seen when the Silicons and Siliclones sputtered out somewhere around the mid-Eighties. The Inconventions still aspire to be the future alternative to the greying of fandom. *Attitude* itself in a clever crossover marketing technique stolen from Marvel Comics plans to spin itself off as a convention. SouWester, 93's Eastercon even got unqualifiedly good reports, the first Eastercon to do so since Follycon.

But is there Life After Intersection? Only time will tell . . .

<hollow Vincent Price laughter>

<fade out>

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Saliromania
Michael Ashley

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Nigel E. Richardson

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Two-Times Taff
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Vile Anchors
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HANSEN

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Re-Assessing Secondary Sources and the Value of Primary Evidence
An Alternative View of the Fifties (Pamela Buckmaster)

The Crisis of Legitimacy
Apas, Ennui, and the Retreat into Fan History in Post-1979 British Fandom (Lilian Edwards)

Alternative Modes of Fannish Endeavour in the 1980s
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Serconism, Fannishness, and the Alleged Swing of the Pendulum
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Gannets, Rats and Other Groupings
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Paranoid Perceptions and Bourgeois Social Formations in the Surrey Limpwrist, 1979-1982
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