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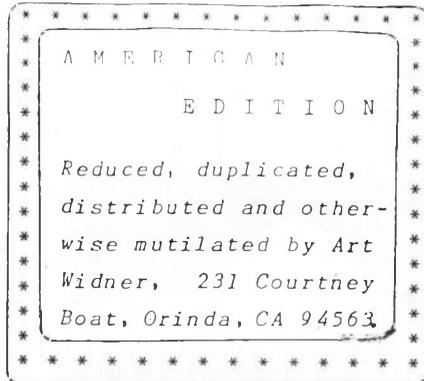
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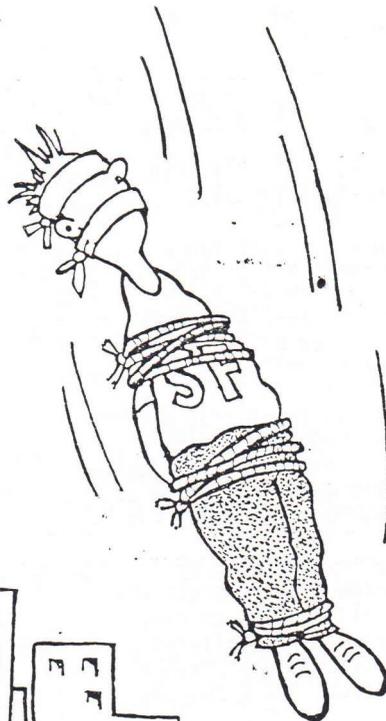
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PULP



"HE'S EITHER A KNEW MUTANT, A HUBBARD PUBLISHER, OR A MEMBER OF THE CONSPIRACY FINANCE COMMITTEE"

SPINTERS

Avedon Carol

ABSENTEE THOUGHTLORDS "Increasingly," says Christina Lake in THE CAPRICIAN 1, "the only authentic focus to fanzine fandom seems to be the Fifties fans - Clarke, Harris, Willis et al and their support group of the Neilsen-Haydens [sic] on one side of the Atlantic and Rob Hansen and Avedon Carol on the other."

"Increasingly," I think to myself, "people get things backwards when they try to analyse fandom."

When I got into fandom, I'd never heard of Clarke, Harris, Willis et al. I had the feeling, though, that any fannish ancestors I had - particularly from as far back as the '50s - would probably not approve of me and my particular fandom. Even when Gary Farber and Jeff Schalles assured me that I really would like Willis if only I would read his stuff, I couldn't imagine what these people could possibly have to say to me.

With publication of WARHOON 28, however, I succumbed, and had a few of my preconceptions shattered. Way back in antiquity, it seems, Willis was taking shots at Heinlein's libertarian idiocy just the way I had decades later. And Willis was refusing to abandon the values of community in the face of cynicism, just the way I was.

More immediately, my first direct contact with those boring old farts in a foreign country began when Chuck Harris leaped to defend me against one of his own old fannish cronies, who was then in the process of castigating me for various moral failures - principally, a lack of chastity* and an even more horrific lack of hypocrisy about it (and yes, he really did, literally, deride the fact that I just wasn't enough of a hypocrite).

Now, when you're a woman who runs around defending gay rights, criticizing the sex dualism, and having as much fun as only boys are supposed to have while you do it, you expect to take a few shots now and then, and I had grown used to it from certain retrograde quarters.

What you don't expect is some guy you don't know who is old enough to be your father - and hasn't even been around getting involved in all of this frenzied

* There's always a sexist asshole somewhere who talks like being a slut is something to be ashamed of. "What's the ugliest part of your body?"

feminist activity among youthful modern-day hyper-fast-talking fans - suddenly jumping up and saying words to the effect of, "So what if she is, and I wish I was too!" Harris seemed not the least bothered by my utter lack of lady-like behaviour. And despite the generously salacious nature of his writings, I found this strange ancient foreigner was at least as willing to treat me with respect as a human being as my feminist friends in fandom were, and was as unwilling to accept sexist judgments of me as if he'd been born reading Shulamith Firestone and Robin Morgan.

So it turned out that I had been a part of their fandom all along, and they were now making it clear that they were a part of mine. Maybe fandom had had room for me precisely because they had made that room back in the dark ages, or maybe we had just independently come to fandom with the same values. But they were the values of the only fandom I really knew, despite the presence in fandom of individuals who didn't necessarily share those values.

Now, to me, those individuals are just that - individuals - and fandom has room for them, but they do not define fandom. I get the impression that to Christina, those individuals are themselves Fandom, and it's people like Willis & Harris & Hansen & Clarke & the Nielsen Haydens who are the strangers, the weird individuals who exemplify values which are separate from Fandom.

I guess Walt Willis is a legend. I can guess this not only from the fact that people talk about him like he's a legend and someone printed a 600-page hard-bound edition of his collected works, but because I often hear Willis talked about in terms which have nothing to do with him, hear him invented almost daily by people who have not read much of his work, and yet who speak authoritatively about him as if they knew. Sort of like the way people talk about George Washington as if they were personally familiar with his intimate thoughts. If '50s fans try to suggest that there is a middle ground between mindless praise and heartless trashing (say, something called "incisive analysis", or even "constructive criticism"), we suddenly hear the myth that Willis never criticized anyone and has always opposed all criticism. That's not the Walt Willis I've read, but never mind. This is all made ever more ludicrous by the fact that they first invent and then criticize this Willis who never existed, and then they criticize him again when he fails to look like their invention.

Well, I like fanzine reviews (obviously, or I wouldn't have insisted on making them a regular feature in PULP - I had been feeling the lack of them for a while, and considered their absence a contributing factor to a dead sort of feeling in the fanzine publishing scene at that time), and I believe that analysis (and yes, criticism) are important, but if Willis happens to say that there is a limit to just how much crap you ought to dump on fanwriters and faneds, I can only concur - I have seen evidence enough that when the advocates of Sharp Criticism (Killer Reviews) find the pen aimed in their own direction, they do not take it in good humour. Suddenly it's not fun anymore, eh?

Nevertheless, I have heard a defense of brutally harsh criticism in which the suggestion was made that artists have to suffer to produce great art. This sounds good on a superficial and not terribly analytical level, if you just think about van Gogh and figure it was his lack of critical acclaim that made

his paintings so terrific, and never mind the possibility that maybe he'd already paid some other kind of dues to get that genius into his work. If you carry this line of argument far enough, you have to conclude that it's a real pity poor old Shakespeare was so successful - I mean, think of the great stuff he could have written if he'd never even been able to get a play produced!

The fact is, positive input is often necessary to help you keep going, and can be crucial in a communication art form. What the fuck good is writing if no one understands what you're saying? Negative input didn't do much for Kate Chopin - she was so soundly trounced for having dared to write THE AWAKENING that she never wrote another word. Annie Royal, having barely escaped a probably terminal public dunking as a Common Scold, was unwilling to risk the consequences by continuing her criticisms of America's treatment of the poor. A lot of fanwriters lose their nerve, too.

Which is not to say that every negative review or critique destroys an artist. Sometimes the people who understand your stuff the least give you insights into what you're doing. Janis Joplin read insults from reviewers and upped the voltage on the very things they disparaged, recognizing that they were threatened most by what was best about her (frequently the case with women in the arts). She even added more beads and bangles to enhance the "gypsy" image one critic had sneered at. Note that success as an artist, however, never hurt Janis as an artist. Janis wasn't singing about her lack of fame and fortune, and the kind of personal dues she was paying to sing the blues never went into the black to the extent that she no longer needed to sing them. In fact, success didn't make a dent in them, and that suffering itself ultimately destroyed her.

I have to wonder how easy your life must be if you think critics have some obligation to supply artists with bad reviews so that they can suffer sufficiently to create. "White boys," I think to myself, "you think the rest of us haven't found other sources of pain? You think the worst thing we've ever had to worry about is critical journalists?"

Aside from which, life is full of critics, whether they ever sit down to the typer or not. Your neighbours are scandalized, your workmates are aggravated, your friends laugh at you. It's hardly as if we suffer a lack of it.

But in contrast to commercial artists, who at least have advances and gigs and the occasional showing (maybe even royalties, contracts, etc.) to let them know that someone likes their work (and who sometimes even benefit economically from a bad review that brings their work to the attention of others), we aren't getting paid for this. Egoboo is the only currency we really have in fandom, and people like to get some return on their investments.

Okay, it looks like PULP is talking to itself again - first Vince says he doesn't like reviews, and then I say I value reviews, but with certain reservations (with which certain of our correspondents may disagree, but we'll get to that later). And now, well, you didn't really expect me to ignore that other paragraph of Vince's, did you?

Right. Feminism. A nice thing for the girls to do on an occasional Wednesday evening, eh? Just as long as you don't trot it out in public. Like anti-

racism and anti-fascism, an issue which has been left on the back burner far too often, with disastrous results. When Vince dismisses it as unfannish, mere preaching to the converted, I get a very nervous feeling. And I wonder, "Who are these converted?" I see sexism in fandom all the time, some of it pretty blatant, pretty ugly, and pretty painful to the victims. I see startlingly overt demonstrations of your basic red-neck double-standard all around me. I hear men talking for all the world like women have no right to be treated as more than mere sexual property, and with a straight face, too. I don't think fandom would be hurt by a good solid dose of radical feminism. (And I can't say enough about how much I appreciate seeing a fanzine like A FREE LUNCH, which treats these issues seriously and intelligently.)

Moreover, in the depths of my dimming memory, I recall a time when this was called "Science Fiction fandom," and as shocking as it may seem, that did have something to do with why I got into fandom in the first place. I wanted to meet other people who read the stuff and who had ideas about it, and who wanted to discuss those ideas. And to me, speculative fiction dealing with the way people behave is crucial to that complex - including, of course, how we do, and will, and might someday comport ourselves in terms of gender roles.

In fact, I don't think much else can be relevant without examining that question. I have no respect for any political analysis that isn't grounded in feminism, to be honest. I think any attempt at anti-capitalism - or indeed, any attempt to root out the foundations of oppression - is laughable without a firm basis in feminism.

And I also think it's laughable for, say, a science fiction convention to announce a "feminist policy" without establishing well thought-out ground rules and taking positive action to make that policy meaningful*. You don't just say, "We're not going to do anything sexist," and honour it only in the breach. How much does a feminist policy mean if you have no feminist programming, no feminist material in the publications, and allow the cover for your pocket programme book to be chosen, virtually sight-unseen, by representatives of an institution which was founded by a man who had no time for women to begin with?

There is also something more than a little unsettling in the realization that few people seem able to recognize just how dangerous the subject of nudes, erotica, and pornography can be - dangerous in that, with only a shallow analysis, attempts to prevent the sexual objectification of women can quickly become anti-sexual, and thus anti-woman. In a society in which women are defined as sexual, and sex is perceived as something essentially meaning "women", the temptation becomes too great to de-sexualize women altogether. Which lands us right back in the Victorian soup, divided into the Harlots and the Ladies - Ladies being the sexless accessories which may be prized possessions, but never biologically functional, and never human. It is not Frank Frazetta who poses the greatest danger to me.

* Bearing in mind, of course, that it is still always important to have a feminist policy.

I have heard it said that any female nude cover is (or, in the case of the worldcon programme book, would have been) sexist. And there is simply no way I can agree with this. One of the primary oppressions of women has had to do with making our sexuality the property of others, the denial that our own desire is, and should be, more important than any obligations to family, convention, church, society, or husbands (men), as the deciding factor in who we sleep with. If an artist can portray a woman in ownership of her own body, or of her own sexuality, that artist has painted a feminist picture (and no, I am not for a minute suggesting that Frazetta did this).

This, of course, is a radical analysis, going far deeper than simpler questions of equal pay for equal work, childcare, and whether to burn down the gay centre - although it also speaks to those questions, and treats each of them as important. However, I submit that this level of analysis is crucial before we decide that the fascist message of a mailed fist is somehow innocuous when compared to the so-ubiquitous-as-to-be-invisible Frazetta nude. Fascism is not a question to be treated separately from sexism - rather, they are cut from the same fabric, and they are equally anathema to radical feminists.

A few years ago, a new edition of Delany's BABEL-17 was released, with a cover depicting a pretty blond woman in a pink evening gown. Some people might have objected to the sexy dress - some did, in fact - but they could have dispensed with the dress altogether, for all I cared, if only they'd ditched the blond hair and Aryan features along with it. The only female character of note in BABEL-17, the protagonist, is a Chinese woman named Rydra Wong. A portrayal of a nude oriental woman fiddling with a computer could never have offended me the way this grotesque intertwining of racism and sexism did.

I have a poster of the cover for the first paperback edition of Elizabeth Lynn's THE NORTHERN GIRL in my home. I am a radical feminist, and I am not offended by the picture. Lizzy Lynn is a feminist (and a lesbian), and she was happy with the cover. Where, pray tell, is the offense? The subject of the painting is a nude woman. The picture itself is not erotic in the sense of suggesting sex - rather, it is erotic in the sense of unashamed comfort within one's own body. To me, she looks a lot like freedom.

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I recently had my own rude encounter with Michael Moorcock, champion of feminism as seen from the paternalistic eyes of a man who thinks women incapable of thinking for themselves and therefore necessarily receiving all of their ideas from men. "You read that in Playboy," he said, when I suggested that perhaps attempts to censor pornography for "feminist" reasons would have no more value and be of no more use to women than any previous such attempts have been - seeing as how they generally end up quashing open discussions of sexuality without making a dent in the porn trade, let alone eliminating other insulting and dangerous media depictions of women. I am also familiar with both the enormous charm of Harlan Ellison and some of his less attractive qualities, which I first encountered in 1974 when he announced that THE LAST DANGEROUS VISIONS was completed and would be released the following January, and then entertained us with stories of how he had gotten revenge against people who had displeased him. So none of the following surprises me...

What it's like to receive a death-threat from Harlan Ellison

Christopher Priest

No one had ever threatened to kill me before, not even as a joke.

It began at a party given in London by Victor Gollancz Ltd to celebrate the publication of J.G. Ballard's novel *The Day of Creation*. Like every publisher's party I've ever been to there were many people I didn't recognize, and some that I did. One of the people I knew was Mike Moorcock.

It's not much of a secret that relations between me and Mike are, to say the least, a bit strained ... although it wasn't always so. When I began writing in the 1960s, Mike was a great friend to and influence on a lot of new writers, and I was one of them. All that's long in the past, though. These days Mike and I get irritated and write snotty things about each other in newspapers, based on mutual dislike. But because of what we both do for a living we're sometimes thrown into each other's company. In general this is no problem: we just stay out of each other's way.

I was therefore surprised, at the Gollancz party, when I saw Mike heading deliberately towards me. I was also pleasantly surprised, because he looked glad to see me and was grinning happily. (One of the pleasures of being middle-aged, I discover, is that it's a time for patching up old enmities. For a few seconds I actually thought this might be the end to all the snottiness.)

"Hello, Chris," he said, breaking in on the conversation I was having. "Good to see you."

"It's good to see you, too."

"Well, it's not going to last much longer." Mike was looking happier than ever. "A few days from now you'll be dead."

"What?" I said.

"You've finally done it, mate! Harlan's going to have you killed. He called me last night and told me. He wanted me to be the first to hear the good news."

It sounded ridiculous to me, and I grinned happily back at him. The person I'd been talking to, a journalist from The Bookseller called Maggie Pringle, was listening attentively, and she too was smiling.

"Are you kidding, Mike?" I said.

"No ... this is dead serious. He's taken out a contract on you."

It sounded mad and unlikely to me, especially given Mike's ebullient good nature.

"OK," I said. "Anyway, I'm glad to see you again. How are you?"

This was obviously the wrong thing to say, because Mike started ranting. Here is what he said, as closely as I can remember it:

"Don't come the old 'how are you' with me, mate! You're a dead man, a goner! Harlan's not fucking around with lawsuits this time. You've gone too far. He's actually going to do it! He's hired a hitman, and your number's up! If I were you, chum, I'd find somewhere safe to hide, because this time next week you're going to be dead."

At this he backed away, still wreathed in happy smiles. I finally thought of a retort, and I called after him, "Ellison's not that much of a coward is he?" But Mike was on his way, and presumably didn't hear.

All through this short conversation, Mike was swaying to and fro excitedly, crashing into the people around him. Maggie Pringle's drink was slopped by one of his expansive gestures, and Leigh Kennedy and John Sladek, who had been standing next to me, had been jostled and backed into while he lurched around.

"What was all that about?" Maggie Pringle said, trying to wipe the drink off her dress.

"I'm not sure."

"That was Michael Moorcock, wasn't it? What was all this about someone having you killed?"

"I've annoyed an American writer called Harlan Ellison."

"Who?"

"It's a long story," I said. "I'll send you a copy of what I wrote. When I've been bumped off, you can write the inside story for The Bookseller."

What I had written was a long essay called "The Last Deadloss Visions", published as the fifth issue of my fanzine Deadloss. This was widely circulated in fandom, but for anyone who missed it the essay was written as a factual account, deliberately free of unnecessary hyperbole and drawn from published sources, of the extraordinary history of broken promises, missed

deadlines, bullying, prevarication and boasting that has since 1971 surrounded Ellison's unpublished anthology, **The Last Dangerous Visions**.*

Having crossed Ellison in the early 1970s, when I withdrew the story I had written for the anthology, I knew all too well what it was like to be on the receiving end of his bad temper. I have letters from him in my files, remarkable for their abusive and vicious verbal violence. (At the time I received them I found them particularly hurtful and distressing. It was hard to believe that one writer could say such terrible things to another, particularly one who was supposed to be so famous and popular, and such a proclaimed benefactor of younger or less experienced writers.) I also knew of several other people who had received similar treatment, some of whom are mentioned in **Deadloss**.

Ellison has also been known to resort to violence. On 4 May 1985 he physically assaulted Charles Platt at a Nebula Awards Banquet. Platt's offence? He had drawn attention to Ellison's tasteless and premature obituary of a writer at a convention. The writer was dying of cancer, and was there to hear Ellison's "memorial".

To be able to write the essay at all I therefore had to reach a state of mind where I was free to write what I felt was necessary, whatever the likely reprisals. What this meant was not hyping myself up into bravado, but feeling detached, indifferent to his response. I reached this state of mind three or four years ago, which was when I wrote (without publishing) the first version of the essay. This detachment was not in any sense a pose; it was (and is) completely sincere. I felt immune from him because I had ceased to worry about him. The interest I had in his wretched anthology was journalistic.

Several people warned me of Ellison's likely reprisals, these warnings themselves being a terrible indictment of Ellison's known behaviour. I felt able to deal with them all.

For instance, if he were to write me more of those abominable letters, how would I react?

This was the simplest of all to anticipate. If I received any letter from Ellison I planned to throw it away unread. I was, and still am, genuinely uninterested in anything he now has to say on the subject: his failure with the anthology is a matter for public discussion, and in an odd sort of way is no longer any business of his. If I happened to open a letter before realizing it was from him, and if it was similar to the earlier ones, then I planned not to reply. Depending on what it said, I had contingency plans to forward

* **The Last Deadloss Visions** (including the original essay and the diary of events that followed) is still available. U.S. price \$5.00 surface, \$10.00 air. U.K. price £5.00. From:

Christopher Priest
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Pewsey
Wiltshire SN9 5AQ
England

it to The Bookseller (the trade magazine circulated to every British publisher), in case they'd like to explain the background to their readership.

In the event no letter arrived. One of the most interesting results of Deadloss appears to be that Harlan Ellison saw my point of view on this. The way I put it in Deadloss is that he is probably as uninterested in my views as I am in his.

But then there was the possibility of violence ... from my point of view, a much more serious worry. I have about as much physical aggression as a dandelion seed, and greatly dislike pain and injury. How then to deal with this problem? I had four combat strategies.

(1) Being tall, and using this to look alarming. (2) Shouting "Help!" in a high-pitched shriek. (3). Running away. (4). Lying on the ground clutching my gut, and spitting out teeth.

Then I'd call the police. I would gladly do what Charles Platt did not: I'd lodge a charge of criminal assault against Ellison, and let him find out what Wandsworth Prison looks like from the inside.

Other possible reprisals of which I'd been warned--lawsuits, threats to my publishers, etc--I considered to be unlikely (for all sorts of different reasons).

But I didn't expect, and no one ever suggested, that Ellison would issue a death-threat.

Was it real? And if it was real, was it serious?

One of the things I learnt about Ellison, when I first fell out with him, was that he has a knack of surrounding his dealings with "white noise". Nothing is ever clear-cut. Side issues get dragged in, other people's names are called, facts get clouded.

So it was in this case. I never received a direct threat from Ellison; it came through a third party.

The third party this time was Mike Moorcock, a famous and respected author with a reputation to maintain. Setting aside the personal antagonism between us, it seems to me totally unlikely that Mike would have invented it. It certainly gave him a great deal of pleasure to pass it on: his happy smile, his excited gesticulations, his dramatic lurching backwards and forwards ... but I can't think of a single reason why Mike would make this up. Anyway, he told me himself that the threat came directly from Ellison, and I've no reason to disbelieve him.

I have no actual proof, but the evidence is that the threat did come from Ellison, and that it was "real" ... in the sense that it was actually uttered.

But was it serious? Ellison himself claimed it was not (and thus inadvertently admitted it had happened). A few weeks after my encounter with Moorcock he told Mike Glicksohn he had not meant it. In a letter to me,

Glicksohn said, "Harlan says [the 'death threat'] was typical spur-of-the-moment hyperbole and was never meant seriously". Yet again, a third party is involved. With hindsight it's revealed that it was some kind of bizarre impulse. I had no way of knowing this, so did I take it seriously?

Actually, no. The whole idea seemed too preposterous to be treated seriously. Mike Moorcock's sunny malice cast it into a ridiculous light. Maggie Pringle's incredulity made it seem surreal. My own instant reaction that a death-threat was self-evident cowardice was very reassuring. When I drove back to peaceful Wiltshire later that night it did not cross my mind for a moment that some hired assassin might be on my trail.

Life went on, and nothing changed.

The subject interested me, though, and over the next few weeks I gave it a lot of thought.

For instance, supposing it was a real and serious threat, how would anyone go about hiring a hitman to kill someone in a foreign country? Do you hire a local thug, then pay his air-fare, etc? How much would it all cost? Do thugs insist on first-class tickets, or will they fly economy class? How do you even find a local thug? Failing this, how do you go about hiring a thug in the target country? (And so on.)

Then I became very interested in the state of mind of someone whose instant reaction (albeit non-serious, as later claimed) was a "spur-of-the-moment" threat? What kind of mind leaps straight to this? Isn't this a terrible, shameful thing to think of, even as a joke?

People were writing me letters about this (I published news of the threat in the on-going "diary" that followed Deadloss), and some of them seemed to take the threat more seriously than I did. This led me to another train of thought.

Suppose, just suppose, that the threat was real. One day some stranger would come into town, spurs jingling and holster bulging ... what would I actually do? More to the point, what could I do in advance to prepare for this?

I couldn't, for instance, issue a counter-threat against Ellison. The one I had received from him was far too tenuous and indirect. Anyway, I wouldn't know what kind of retaliatory threat to issue (goes against the grain), and in my heart of hearts I couldn't take any of this seriously. The whole idea seemed ludicrous.

Neither was I prepared to go into hiding (as Mike Moorcock had recommended). I was far too busy, and in any event couldn't think of anywhere I wanted to go and hide. This too was ludicrous.

Finally, I wasn't able to defend myself. If I knew where to buy a gun (which I didn't), I wasn't prepared to. Even if I'd been prepared to possess one, I wouldn't be willing or able to use it, having a lifetime dislike of things that go bang. Anyway, I have profound moral objections to the whole idea of an armed populace.

At this point I realized that if Ellison's hitman really was on his way, then Mike Moorcock's prediction was correct: I was a goner.

It's almost impossible to convey what a relief this was! All of a sudden I felt extremely cheerful. Whichever way I looked at it the thing looked silly ... and if there was the remotest chance there might be something in it, I was resigned to my fate. Any minuscule fears that it might have been a real threat evaporated, and I felt vindicated in the belief that one should only write such things as my essay from a position of detachment and disinterest.

So that's what it's like to receive a death-threat. I don't exactly recommend it, and I certainly don't wish to have it repeated, but I can say with complete honesty that I found it an interesting and stimulating experience.

I disliked only one thing about it: the discovery that there are among us people who see no wrong in uttering vile threats on the spur of the moment, and others who will happily transmit them. I find this depressing and thoroughly disgusting.

- Christopher Priest

* * * * *

The best part is that, in the way of most devotees of Petty Vengeance, Harlan tends to brag publicly about these little episodes, usually to large audiences of adoring fans at conventions. I'm sorry I won't have a chance to hear Harlan's version of this story - I keep trying to imagine how he's going to tell it and try to make himself sound good. The hell of it is, guys like this are always so charismatic and charming - and always seem to have a long string of former friends and associates who wish they'd never had anything to do with them.

As an interesting footnote, Michael Moorcock has recently had a letter in TIME OUT seeking to inspire a Dworkin-McKinney type censorship law here in the UK. This would permit both feminists and people who are indistinguishable from Mary Whitehouse to demand the removal from the shelves of publications which they say promote violence against women (or something like that). Mr. Moorcock insists that this is not censorship and should not be seen as such. Andrea Dworkin made an alliance with the pro-censorship "Moral Majority" elements to get this bill passed in the United States, and frankly I think this says more about such legislation and what it can be expected to do than any attending "feminist" analysis will.

Due to a glitch in the system (i.e., Hazel Ashworth, who decided to use material from the same letter that we were going to use, and beat us to the punch in LIP), there is no Creative Random Harris for this issue. We will resume our regular programming as soon as possible.

Meanwhile, nearly everyone felt moved to take a crack at Vince's editorial in PULP 8, defending reviewing and/or criticism (although not a lot of people actually went so far as to point out the difference between reviewing and criticism), including our beloved, mild-mannered Dave Langford.

JETBUFF LP

Dave Langford

THE FANZINE THAT TALKS TO ITSELF I dreamed I was walking through that particularly unpleasant hell devised by the late Robert Heinlein for the vilest dregs of erstwhile humanity, i.e. literary critics. This hell is said to be inescapable because based on the principle of a Klein bottle: RAH probably meant to write "hypersphere", the great thing about a Klein bottle being that it's incurably leaky.... Nevertheless, the place looked more chilling than any number of circles of punishment surrounding an eternal sea of ice; it hideously resembled an open-plan office. Here I found ace dead critic Edmund Wilson laboriously sealing up a thick pile of envelopes, and groaning.

"I am repenting my sins," he explained. "I have just read this editorial by Vincent Clarke, in the literary review Pulp 8 provided for our instruction and torment. The essay in question points out the vainglory of writing criticism for publication, and gently notes that the pure in soul would merely send the author a constructive letter."

He groaned again, long and loud.

"I was convinced. After years of astral toil I've managed to arrange for the burning, pulping, remaindering or transference to the BSFA Fanzine Library of every single copy ever printed of The Wound and the Bow: Seven Studies in Literature, nineteen forty-one. And here instead are the Letters I should have written in the first place, to Dickens, Kipling, Casanova, Edith Wharton, Hemingway, Joyce and--" a sob racked him--"Sophocles."

"Gosh, I hope they all publish them," I said brightly. "I really enjoy reading a good critic in any field, seriously tackling the problem of how and why some piece of writing works. Or, of course, doesn't."

It would have been nice to cheer him up with the anodyne words, Well, You've Finished Now, but of course he still had ever so many more pieces of literary journalism to unpublish and recast as letters. All of a sudden, this didn't seem a good time to mention flatteringly that I had two and a half feet of his works, with a hundred-odd litcrit essays in The Shores of Light alone. Sternly I told myself that it would be wicked to regret losing the deplorable pleasure of Wilson laying into H.P.Lovecraft ("The only real horror in most of these fictions is the horror of bad taste and bad art") or, even though I didn't entirely agree, J.R.R.Tolkien: "The answer is, I believe, that certain people--especially, perhaps, in Britain--have a lifelong appetite for juvenile

trash." Would he have specified the same country in his parenthesis today? What lavish praise would he have heaped on Piers Anthony? It seemed indelicate to ask.

"There is one small consolation for all this weary effort," he muttered, and told me what it was.

As I passed through the ranks of the damned whose works lay on my treasured shelves, all convicted perpetrators of published criticism, all conscientiously working at the task of recantation, I kept hearing his words again. James Agate (who like the other theatrical critics was having to copy out each review up to forty times, so that every actor and extra could receive a properly personal comment), W.H.Auden, Max Beerbohm, Cyril Connolly, T.S.Eliot, William Empson, Bernard Shaw, Kenneth Tynan, Virginia Woolf, D.West and many more shared the same feeble solace:

"At least this way, there won't be any essays evaluating our published critical oeuvre and written by bloody Clive James."

At length, in the "Fairly New Arrivals" section of literary hell, I found one large-bodied writer who seemed to be working furiously at something different. In front of him was a peculiar keyboard with extra function keys having labels like THE and AND and TAKE THAT ALIEN SCUM and WITH ONE BOUND HE WAS FREE. His face was oddly familiar. I made polite enquiries and, chain-smoking, he replied....

"Now I'm free of my Body Thetan, I can get down to some serious writing. At last. The Org is ready to publish it worldwide. They've got a word processor, E-meter and ouija board all wired together. Ready for dictation. My idea, of course. My first new non-fiction best-seller will be a critical commentary. In twenty volumes. Placed free of charge in every hotel room. An examination of the most significant work of world literature to emerge since 10,000,000 BC. The Mission Earth dekalogy."

After an instinctive cringe, I thought quick as greased treacle. "Er, well, before you start, or rather before you go on," (he had written some six and a half thousand words during our conversation so far), "I think you should read this very wise and significant editorial in Pulp 8."

The famous ex-author scanned it, frowning and then beginning to nod very slowly; and I thought I could detect the murmured words, "Personal letter? Of course it would be over the head of anyone else...."

Such was the happy ending. This has been the story of how our own Vinç Clarke saved the world from a terrible fate. But, although not madly keen on chainsaw massacres in print, I still like reading criticism.

- Dave Langford

* * * * *

And, having permitted so many people space to defend reviews and criticism, we find ourselves with barely enough room to squeeze in an actual (brief) review column...

chalk



cheese

Bridget Wilkinson

I have recently moved. Since my previous home was with my parents, and they still live in the house, I have been somewhat tardy about informing people of my change of address, preferring to let it spread through fandom by capillary action. My work is about two hundred yards from my parent's house. I drop over there a couple of times a week for letters and lunch. The mail gets opened, classified (bills and non-bills), and thrown into my bag while I gulp down the last of my tea in preparation for the sprint back to work.

"Oh, no!" I thought. "Junk mail." Shook the thing hard so as to dislodge the inevitable invoice. When it hadn't appeared ten seconds later I gave up, baffled, threw the offending item into my bag and ran, deciding to solve this minor puzzle later.

I had mistaken CRYSTAL SHIP 14 for an unsolicited prozine.

It was the best part of a week later when, delving into the bottom of my bag for something to read on the tube, I re-encountered the brown envelope. I had made it most of the way through the editorial before it finally sank in that this was a fanzine.

As a 'Designer Zine' it is superb. I see enough lousy work produced by idiots who think that a DTP package will solve all of life's problems to sink a battleship, and that's just the professionals (I work on the interface between computing, libraries and education). The use of the Apple Mac - at least that's what I presume it is - is both imaginative and restrained, no mad jumble of fonts here. The artwork is taken very seriously, apart from discussions of fanart in the letter column. The layout sets the artwork off to best effect, above all in the commissioned areas (i.e. the articles by Mary Gentle and Andy Sawyer, illustrated respectively by Shep Kirkbride and Iain Byers).

Here the unity of purpose and style works with a vengeance, the whole is definitely more than the sum of its parts. The illustration that forms the centre spread, by Martin Helsdon, is both well drawn and beautifully reproduced, although it is of the type of fanart I could never bring myself to comment upon in TWP because I could not make out whether the sexual imagery in the drawing was in the artist's conscious mind, the artist's subconscious mind, or my dirty one.

But I found that that drawing formed a watershed in the fanzine. This is not to say that I found the first half of the zine flawless. The fact that I have little interest in Dunsany is my fault, and Andy Sawyer's article on Dunsany was well researched and scholarly. And the Mary Gentle article on Hunchbacks, Sadists, and Shop-soiled heroes? Well, I guess you can't send something back to Mary Gentle for a re-write*, but it wasn't long enough. I felt she had barely scratched the surface of what she was trying to say. It seemed I was reading a resume - a well written resume, but still only that. I never felt she got to the bottom of why people root for the villains rather than heroes (i.e., because they lose). I did a quick survey of various friends to ask them who they had really sympathized with in Watchmen - the answer was nearly always Rorschach. But he wins! Pyrrhic victory, maybe, but I think the answer is more complex than a simple rooting for a machiavellian loser.

These comments are merely nit-picking, quibbles over minor points that are probably flaws only in my imagination, but I did not feel quite the same way about the other half of the zine. Page by page, half of the zine was locs. Word by word, a lot more was. The locs were in small print on two column pages. This made them look cramped, so some artwork was put in to create a feeling of space.

In contrast to the main part of the zine there was no attempt to link the theme of letters and artwork, and although many of the letters were quite good (and as Ving has in a previous issue of PULP, people who write locs do like to see them in print), still, a little cropping might have helped. The zine felt top-heavy. The feeling of assured, effortless editing had gone.

This was the first time I had seen this zine, and perhaps the visual beauty of it may have caused me to be hypercritical about the written contents. But the editor, John D. Owen, asked in a comment to CAPRICIAN 2, "Not really pandering to the minimalist school of fanzine production, are you (i.e. minimal thought, art, layout, range, readership)? Shame on you." This made me wonder about his priorities. When it came to the crunch, would he put the written word or the artwork first? Do you have to have artwork in all zines? Anyway, surely layout and artwork are two different issues. Is it vital for all zines to have as wide a readership as possible? And what is range?

The article in CRYSTAL SHIP 14 that I have not mentioned up until now is "An Appreciation of Douglas F. Mayer, Founder of SF Fandom in the UK" by George A. Airey and Bert Warnes, Founder Members. This dignified memorial to a founder of fandom was stylistically quite unlike any writing I have seen in any modern (i.e., post 1953) fanzine, although it was the best form for its purpose. It also made me realize quite how little I knew about northern fandom; my fanzine scanning for CONSEQUENCES** had been mainly of southern zines, those in Ving's collection.

A fanzine whose range can only be described as being vanishingly narrow, and whose readership will surely be specialized, is THEN. (Will "the new fans

*Oh yes you can - ed.

**Bridget's own publication - ed.

breathlessly dashing off to this week's multi-media convention extravaganza" mentioned in TNH11 really be interested in fannish history?)

THEN - and I blow my own arguments sky-high here - could have done with something to break up the sections of text. Now, I know that thirties and forties fandom was not a great source of cartoons, such as those from the fifties we mined for CONSEQUENCES. But the layout of the cover, a collage of club stationery and newspaper clippings of the time, is effective, and gives flesh to the factual bones in the text. Could we not have had a picture of a FUTURIAN WAR DIGEST cover somewhere within the text?

I'm quibbling again. This zine is excellent. My copy, originally read in one sitting, is battered already and, having been bagged up like a collector's comic, will end up on my bookshelves rather than in my fanzine collection - I am far too likely to want to refer to it far too often. It'll crumble in no time. It is very readable, although you might miss the illustrations as you read it.

The story of the early fannish groups, the flat in London and the Science Fiction League were fascinating. The account of the war years was chilling. I have read copies of the FUTURIAN WAR DIGEST, but even with Rosenblum's writing and what Vinç has told me about forties fandom, I had never realized that, "The authorities, having decided that he was publishing seditious material, put him under police observation, and Rosenblum feared that FWD, by now the only remaining cohesive force in British fandom, might be forced to close down."

Much of thirties fandom was fashionably pacifist, and they carried their pacifism into the war, which was more than those who "would not fight for King and Country" did. Pacifism was no longer fashionable, and several fans had a rather difficult time in the forties. Fandom only just weathered both the war and its ending.

Perhaps the next places for Rob Hansen to search are government files released under the thirty-year rule.

While there is no great explicit theory (see Joe Nicholas, THE CAPRICIAN 2), there is plenty of implicit theory. Rob comes over as being much in sympathy with the fans publishing "subversive" zines under the eye of the police during the Second World War. Think of this material in the hands of some fans - or on second thought, don't.

I look forward to the next installment, and only wish that this one could have been laser printed onto heavy, acid free rag paper so I could keep it. Forever.

CRYSTAL SHIP 14

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THEN Rob Hansen, 144 Plashet Grove, East Ham, London E6 1AB

- Bridget Wilkinson

LETTERS

Mike Gould
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The trouble with Harry is that he's missed the whole point on Knew Mutants, which was that there is no movement. True, the initial six people he mentioned were dubbed New Mutants by Christina & Lilian because they formed the impression we were some sort of new group, though our initial connection was very

tenuous. It could have died at Lucon, but me and Pete Cox decided to perpetuate it as a joke until such time as too many people caught on, at which time we would terminate it. The last thing we want is to be a clique or movement. By blowing the gaff, Harry has ensured that Knew Mutants is now stone cold dead.

I don't know if any of the others are trying to combat a lack of 'good fanzines', but all I'm doing is producing a zine because I like doing it. At present I suspect none of us are in a position to compete with some of the better zines on the market.

Michael Ashley was not made a Mutant, though I think his Lucon conrep caused a number of the 'mutants' to suggest he should be mutilated (only joking, Mike). Oh well, there goes the mutants merchandising I was banking on for my old age. As for Harry, we may have to court martial him, even Demute him in the ranks.

((AC: Ah, so it was the Twins, was it? Last time, they named The Chicken Brothers, and look where that led. They haven't been able to get rid of it, either. I wouldn't complain too much, though - look what being a group has done for Bruce Sterling, eh?))

Ethel Lindsay
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It really is a pleasure to see the ATom cover appear here and to know that the laddie is still full of bright cartoon ideas.

Harry Bond's encounter with the two chaps asking, "Are you the sci-fi people?" reminded me of so many times being button-holed in this way and how fruitless my answers usually were. People have pre-conceived ideas which are difficult to change. At any rate, it is years since anyone asked me when I was going to the moon.

Chuck's column - brilliant as always. I have a friend who is a pin machine addict. I'd really like to show her Chuck's piece about how they are chosen but I can't figure out how to do this without showing her the piece about his bum. I don't think she would find it as funny as I do.

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PULP 8 was well up to our usual high standard, and I enjoyed it very much, with the exception of just one piece. "Flesh and Hunger" was one of the most off-putting articles I have ever read. Unless he was writing with his tongue in his cheek, where he may well have been having a surreptitious snack off it, I think Tony Chester should have a serious talk with someone.

There was a time when I had the idea of benefitting humanity by donating my body to medical science - after I had no further use for it, of course. But a friend who knew someone who worked in the medical research department at Queen's told me that they had this small swimming pool which had become redundant when the new university sports complex was built, in which cadavers with various bits missing floated in a chilled, pungent-smelling preservative solution until more bits were needed for someone's work when a body would be fished out for further dismantling. Altruism is all very well, but somehow that put me right off the idea.

Speaking of people who nearly benefitted humanity reminds me of that legendary occurrence in the old Epicentre when Ken Bulmer and Vince Clarke, watched by a vastly impressed Walter Willis, re-invented the steam engine (such a great pity it was that, uh, What's-his-name got in first) and of a similarly Earth-shaking event which occurred with Peggy and I last night.

We were getting ready for an evening's viewing and Peggy, as is her wont, was preparing for me a large bowl - "More like a small bucket!" she has just interjected - of popcorn, and I had gone into the kitchen to tell her that the programme would be on in a few minutes. It was the first time I'd seen her make the stuff, and could not help noticing the crackling and banging sounds emanating from inside the saucepan and the way the lid twitched under the impact as the corns popped. When natural scientific curiosity caused me to lift the lid to see what was happening, I was startled by the way that pieces of vegetable explosive whistled past my face on their way to the ceiling. At once my sense of wonder was aroused and, like my distinguished fannish predecessors of the Epicentre I thought, "There must be some way that this power can be harnessed for the good of humanity."

Just suppose, I thought, that there was a probability world in which Bulmer, Clarke and Watt's-his-name had not invented the steam engine, and the industrial revolution was based on the taming of vast power released by exploding corn kernels. It would be a green and pleasant probability world, with no dangerous and unsightly coal mines, no filthy soot, no pulmonary silicosis and no starving poor even, because the waste products of each and every engine would be edible, and if necessary flavored to taste by the use of a little honey or savory oil during combustion. And when the advances in technology reached the stage where space vehicles could be placed in Earth orbit, just imagine the scene at the launch pad; the crackle of billions of separate explosions as first-stage ignition takes place, the blast of intense heat and the gorgeous smell as the vehicle rises on a great, conical mountain of freshly-cooked popcorn. It should even be possible to adjust the orbit insertion flightpath when required to overfly one of the world's distressed areas, so that the fallout could be utilised for famine relief. And there

must be many other advantages to mass-grown edible fuel that you will no doubt be able to work out for yourselves.

There could well be the plot for a nice, fat book here, written to convey the stirring message that consuming popcorn is better than eating parts of people. Or maybe not a book, the fashion these days is to do trilogies.

Harry Warner, Jr.
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What can I say about the cover? It's a magnificent idea, brilliantly executed, and the only bad thing about it is the fact that only a few hundred individuals in the world can appreciate it properly.

To explain the scarcity of science fiction in fanzines, Harry Bond might have had recourse to an analogy. Schools that are large enough to have student magazines or newspapers don't fill them with articles about the curriculum, the results of the last geometry test, and other material relating to the school's basic purpose. Instead those publications contain news and gossip about students, their non-academic interests, their extra-curricular activities and so on. The schools' equivalent of fandom's cons are class reunions. At class reunions, nobody tries to remember the academic knowledge the school strove to impart in students; instead, everyone talks about one another, both face-to-face and behind-the-back. Just so, fanzines don't restrict themselves to the original cause of fandom, professional science fiction.

I hope Chuch's medical troubles are all ~~behind/hid~~ a thing of the past by now. But it's comforting to know how far medical science has advanced. If his hemorrhoids continue to give him trouble, I'm sure his surgeon will arrange a hemorrhoid transplant operation so he can have a non-defective set.

Paul Skelton
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So, you don't like fanzine reviews. Fine. I, on the other hand, do. That's fine too. Today everything's fine. I've been poorly. Not your Russell-Harty-now-he's-dying-now-he's-not-yes-he-is poorly. Not a death's door job. Just some gastric virus. I can't be more specific. The doctor was a bit vague - he knew it was viral and I knew it was gastric. "Sounds like some sort of viral problem," were his exact words, and I was in and out of his surgery almost like I was on a conveyor belt, emerging clutching a prescription that "should clear it up in a few days." Fills you full of confidence, doesn't it? But that's fine too.

So, I'm celebrating with a bottle of bitter, and everything's fine, even your bizarre approach to fanzine reviews. I would like to discuss it, though.

I guess it's the term 'review' that causes the problem. Use it and you can make statements like yours that reviews are value-for-money guides, and hence when fanzines aren't basically available for money, reviews lose their function, become exercises in ego-flexing. The simple fact is that even when fnz were available for cash, the very act of reviewing them was an ego-flexing exercise, a statement that the writer felt his or her view had some intrinsic worth and was important enough to circulate.

Fanzine reviews, fanzine criticism, fanzine discussion. Terms aren't all that relevant in this area, because what we're all doing is talking about fanzines. Talking about a subject that interests us all. The bulk of the readers of any particular fanzine are interested in other fanzines, in fanzines themselves. The medium is the message, or at least a more important message than might be contained in and constrained by any specific issue of any specific fanzine. When you talk about fanzines I learn something about you through your insight into your fanzine-worldview, which in turn enables me to better understand and even formulate my own fanzine philosophy. The more different fanzine philosophies I am exposed to, the richer will be my own. The greater my understanding, the more threads I can weave into my own tapestry, for only in understanding others can I really understand myself.

Points of view. I've only got one. To get a fuller picture you need to be able to see things from alternative viewpoints, which means somebody else's. Then comes synthesis. Do I agree with her? Why don't I agree with her? You only get answers by asking questions, and you can't ask yourself questions because all you get are answers you already know. Somebody else must ask the questions. The more people who ask, the more you learn - about yourself from your answers, and about them from the questions they ask.

Oh, it's true there are excesses, as you point out (and as I have pointed out in the past), but I enjoy even those pieces - I enjoy them despite the excesses - because their positive aspects, talking about fanzines, are greater than their negative ones.

You say, "So write a loc," instead. You don't say the 'instead', but it's implied. It isn't as simple as that, though, because locs aren't instead of reviews/criticism. They aren't alternatives, they are complementary, a point missed in your editorial and interestingly also in a not-so-recent issue of WHIMSEY. Jeanne was passing through the same general area (though on a different vector) and was bemoaning the excesses for dwelling and concentrating on the bad in fanzines, on the material that was not worthy of the effort applied to criticising it. Better, she suggested, to concentrate on the worthwhile content, and to discuss and develop that - to in effect write a loc and publish it yourself (and thereby neatly getting round your point that "there's always the chance, laughable tho' it is, that the faned won't find your views of sufficient interest to publish"). Another advantage of Jeanne's suggestion is that it is better for disseminating ideas, by taking ideas that have surfaced in one particular fanzine and presenting them, and their initial development, to a different subset of the fanzine fraternity. Fine, but it still misses the point. It's still a loc, irrespective of whose fanzine it's published in, and locs don't perform the same function as fanzine criticism.

Locs concentrate on, respond to and develop the ideas and issues raised in specific pieces of specific issues of specific fanzines. It's the content that concerns them, and they discuss the content. In fanzine criticism, though, it is not the content that is of prime concern, but the medium itself that is discussed, using specific issues of fanzines as examples, and indeed, exemplars, presenting heady distillates of the writer's philosophy of fanzines and fandom.

Well, that's the way I see it, guv'nor.

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I don't agree with Ving's comments about fnz reviews.

When a lot of fanzines are doing reviews, the fanzine scene "feels healthy" - there's a level of interaction which just isn't there at other times.

Although it's possible to refer to other publications when loccking a fanzine, it's more usual to restrict the comments to the editor's (or editors') own output, which leaves even the liveliest fnz loccol as an individual operating without reference to the rest of the fanworld.

Good fnz reviews, on the other hand, provide context. They can make generic statements about the state of fandom-as-a-whole, with specific examples from a number of the current crop. They can illustrate the outlook of the reviewer, again with generalizations or particular items. Lots of reviews in many fanzines give an overall feeling that these really do form part of a cohesive whole.

Because reviews are written as articles rather than as (mere?) letters, the writer tends to put more effort into producing a polished, entertaining entity, rather than just cobbling together a few ill-thought-out remarks just in order to stay on the mailing list (Liked this. Didn't like that. Can I have the next issue, please please please?).

This is not to denigrate the loc as an important item of fannish currency. Locs are vital egoboo to feed the faned's continuing inclination to publish. And some loc writers are masters of the art (I think of Willis' poctsarcds; I think of Gary Deindorfer; I think I'm running out of room to list all the good loccers).

Where does this leave a determined individualist such as myself? I hardly ever loc, partly because I'm lazy, and partly seldom sparked with "must loc" fever - and even then I hardly ever get round to it (mea maxima culpa), and I am insufficiently analytical to make a good reviewer/critic, or to feel the urge to review. I'm very much in the "enjoy it while you can because tomorrow you find out why, and then you'll never enjoy it again" camp.

I remember an English teacher at school who moaned that he'd never enjoyed reading a book since he studied English Literature at University (and, obviously, a love of literature was his original motive for studying), because he was too busy scribbling mental notes in the margins of his grey matter.

I remember a good friend of mine who's a freelance rock journalist going to see the Grateful Dead back in 1981. He'd loved the early Dead, been uninterested in their 70's material, and heard nothing they'd done recently. He'd never experienced a Dead concert, or heard a full concert bootleg. He went along expecting to deride aging hippies, and because he was reviewing, he was determined to remain "objective," so he deliberately stayed straight.

Now, this is not the way most people go to rock concerts, so is farthest removed from a truly representative (and, I would argue, meaningful) viewpoint. Sobriety is an abnormal state of mind for a rock concert.

He wrote a scathing review, sneering at the hippies who had crawled out of the woodwork, because they were obviously all thoroughly enjoying the show. He sneered at the music because it wasn't up-to-the-minute, hadn't moved with the times. Now, I thought that show was one of the best concerts the Dead played in London that year (out of eight), and I also think the Dead have absorbed new influences and evolved more than, say, Dave Brubeck, B.B. King or Chuck Berry (none of whom I wish to malign by saying that).

A couple of days later, his review having already gone to press, Johnny felt like going back to see the Dead again. Not having a review deadline hanging over him, he did just what he would normally do when going to a concert: he had a little drink, had a little smoke, and he relaxed. And he didn't worry about what he was going to write. He loved the show.

I thought it was one of the weaker performances of the tour, and far inferior to the one Johnny had royally slagged of in print.

Little illustrations like this emphasise why I tend not to trust too much in criticism or analysis. The very act of observation alters the experimental subject (Heisenberg probably rules, OK).

So I prefer just to enjoy fanzines (and I do, most of 'em) and not worry too much about "why?" or "what?" It's like analyzing humour - when a joke is explained, it's unlikely to raise a chuckle.

However, despite not being given to opinionating myself, I do like finding out about other people's opinions of fanzines, and fnz reviews almost always make worthwhile reading.

Fanzine reviews are invaluable in giving information on what's being published - both for long-established fans who aren't yet on the neo's mailing list but would like to get a copy of a well-received fanzine, and for the neo to find good addresses to send her fanzine to. Ving's fanzine listing here serves this purpose, but would be even more useful if he didn't feel obliged to restrict his comments so severely.

I agree that more people should loc (and I include myself in that), especially to support a fanzine as enjoyable as PULP, but I also feel that there is room for both the "in-depth" and the "capsule" review.

Re Ken Lake's comment in PULP 7 - I only know of one Hansen currently active in fandom. Who are these "Hansens" he's talking about?

((AC: Clearly, Mr Lake attended that same irredeemable school attended by Mr Ashley and Mr Leak.

I always thought Brian Earl Brown's WHOLE FANZINE CATALOGUE served a useful purpose, and was sorry to see its appearance curtailed in recent years. Although longer analytical pieces are more interesting to read overall, things like WoFan are helpful in terms of getting a general picture.))

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I have to disagree with Vincent about locs and reviews. I have nothing against either, both can be bad or good, but they should be very different beasts indeed. Reviews have an entirely different purpose from locs, in my opinion. When I write locs I write to the editor(s) and do not expect to be printed - in fact, I usually hope not. I used to DNQ locs on principle but this attitude was argued out of me by eds with better arguments. A loc from me is a "thank you," with thoughts which arise from reading the zine in question. The fanzine being locced is only implicitly situated in the fannish oneness with references outside of it being germane only to the discussion in hand. Reviews, on the other hand, talk about fanzines in the abstract, more explicitly determining the qualities of a reviewed zine in its context.

Contrary to Vg's reading I find that the size of fandom and the high number of fanzines calls for the need to review. The fanzine scene can become disparate and diverse and a review can outline trends and interests available. That reviews are seen as slag-off exercises is a naive representation of most that I've seen. I really can't take the argument that people get offended by reviews and cease pubbing. This is quite probably true in some cases but fanzines are as good an example of free speech as you'll come across and if some people can't handle it then that's just tough. I'm as irritated by gratuitous bile, and flattery masquerading as praise, as the next fan, but these are prices you pay in any interaction between people. Sycophancy and cliquishness have been part of fandom all the time I've been in it and lettercols, being in the hands of editors, have often been guilty of selecting spurious debate to fill pages while criticism languishes in the WAHFs. This dichotomy between professional and fannish is completely untenable, too. Fannish writing by definition is amateur, but what's that got to do with anything? Bad criticism does not invalidate criticism per se, and as someone who values criticism as an art form, I am heartened by the relatively high quality of fannish criticism.

I am very sorry that you have dumped a regular review column, as it was consistently the first thing I read in PULP. It was hardly ever any good, but it was allowing different people to air their views, and while it was bound to be patchy it was also a platform for individuals to gather their thoughts about fanzines in general, and I feel we benefit from this exercise in that it explodes the myth that there is one 'party-line' on what fanzines are about. It has been my experience that fandom is not only 'fun', it is also pain and fear and love and contempt and distaste and occasional joy and all the other little qualities that human foibles generate and if other fans find it such a narrow 'hobby' I wonder at why they hang around. Fijagh and fiawol has always been a nonsense to me. The opposition of these notions shows a lack of any depth of understanding of the processes in fandom and is a cheap debating trick.

I find it insulting as a fan to be told that sexual politics is not fannish, considering the attempts in the last 10 years to test the notion that fandom is or is not sexist. This notion of 'purely fannish interests' needs to be explained to me, especially in a context which is arguing that fanzines in the abstract is not one of these interests. My activities as a fan are affected by many things. If I was a Roman Catholic I might consider a nearby church

essential for attending an Eastercon, or as is the case with some, political commitments might preclude involvement in events. Should such fans not mention these things? Should unemployed fans not talk about government policy as it affects their fannish participation?

Fandom is what it is and not what any of us would like it to be and it is changing all the time. I take my cue from Bob Shaw's "When Fandoms Collide" and try to deal with those doing things rather than those trying to constrain potential in a narrow conception of a fannish reality. I inhabit my own little fandom where we play our own version of ghoodminton, but I don't try to pretend that it is more valid than others.

As for the idea that the topics and attitudes you mention are 'preaching to the converted', surely you are not so blind. If you think fandom is full of liberal free-thinkers you really are wearing blinkers.

PULP's regular appearance is its second most important contribution to the current fannish culture but Chuch Harris is its first. His exploration of fannish interests like nookie, chalfonts and gambling are fine by me. I was reminded of a similar experience when I had my bits shaved and a finger inserted but the finger belonged to a young gorgeous student nurse - talk about conflicting emotions. I ended up with chalfonts after that operation cos I was full of opiate painkillers and when I did go to the loo it was a mighty thrusting and heaving and pain. Never been the same since. A friend once told me he always smiled when he saw a convention PR cos he was a nurse and PR on a patient's sheet meant per rectum and he often thought that that was where many such publications should go.

((AC: The regular fanzine review column has not been dumped - although if the deadline rolls around without a review column turning up, there won't be one. Up until the last issue, we had various ~~SUCKETS~~ volunteers turning them in, no matter who the editor was. Last time out, Vince found he hadn't been handed such a column, and clearly he was of no mind to write one himself - so we had the listing you saw.

I must say, though, your libertarian/social Darwinist approach to the effect reviews may have on budding/sensitive writers and editors surprises me. One of the privileges of being in A Woman's Apa has always been the opportunity to see the sometimes very good (sometimes brilliant!) and illuminating writings of women who are too shy and insecure about their work to face the 'open-market' and the unkind critics in it, and who wouldn't write at all if they didn't feel they had a safe place to do so. Some of those women have something important to say that none of the rest of us have ever been able to crystallize or articulate, and as far as I'm concerned it would have been "tough" on me, the reader, if those women had never felt they had a safe place to express themselves at all.

Women, of course, working under the particular stress of knowing that what we say will not be taken as seriously as what men say (added to the still prevailing philosophy that those things which are important to women are not important to "people"), are prone to this sort of literary shyness. A similar parallel might be made with working-class thinkers, who feel that because they don't have the skills in traditional styles of scholarly expression, they

aren't really intellectual, or "can't write" enough to have anything to say worth hearing - and thus, there are few authentic voices for their particular concerns. There are long-standing myths, as a result, that women cannot reason logically in the abstract, or that the working-class and poor are stupid (or, in more liberal/lefty circles, that the business of living prevents them from thinking) - because both harsh reviewers and, ultimately, the potential writers themselves, didn't think they were "good enough." In fact, they have been discouraged at every turn from giving expression to their thoughts, which explains in part why we find that the largest body of work available which presumes to depict the real lives and concerns of women, the poor or blacks, is written by men, the moneyed and whites. (Lack of funds, of course, is the other reason - without access to the press, it is unlikely that you will have an opportunity to express your insights and experience in view of the general public.)

So, Jimmy, I can't say I remember seeing you on the march against The Clause, eh? I can't say I remember seeing a lot of fans, which was rather a disappointment to me, given it was both a free speech issue and an issue of sexual politics.))

Simon Ounsley
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I like to see fanzines talking about each other for a change. I think this is a sign of health, it puts a buzz in the air (or in the ink or somewhere), it gives the idea that the fanzine medium is alive and

kicking. And that's an idea whose time might have come round again, here in mid-'88.

I don't like to see negative reviews of the "X has no talent" variety which seemed to discredit fanzine reviews altogether for a while a couple of years ago. But just recently, we've seen several thoughtful columns which have tried to offer constructive criticism, an example being Eve Harvey's column in PULP 7. I didn't agree with a lot of what Eve had to say, but that's not the point. When it's obvious that a reviewer has put thought and care into what they've written, I as fanzine editor am able to think about the comments and either act upon them or, if I disagree, reaffirm my own position. The review pays me the compliment that what I have produced is worth the thought and care the reviewer has exercised, and it gives me an opportunity to think more carefully about what I'm trying to do.

Take Eve's comments on TNH10 as an example. Lilian was so outraged by them that she was inspired to write her editorial for TNH11 in reply. But this wasn't a negative response - it was simply carrying the discussion a stage further, allowing Lilian to build on Eve's comments by stating her own ideas about what fanzine writers could be trying to achieve. Meanwhile, Lilian and Christina acted on Eve's other comments, about structure, by improving the continuity of TNH in issue 11. And they seem to have produced, in TNH11, a fanzine which has been better received than TNH10.

This seems to me to have been an example of a review working in a positive way. And note that only part of it is due to the editors agreeing with what the reviewers had to say. Disagreement can often be more stimulating than agreement. My own STILL LIFE 4, for instance, was "inspired" by negative responses from Steve Higgins in STOMACH PUMP and Damien Razorbill in PULP 1.

All this could have occurred via a loc, I suppose, but would Eve really have got round to Toccing all the fanzines she reviewed?

((AC: I think this issue of PULP is a good illustration of the way "disagreement can often be more stimulating than agreement." (We got you, Whiteoak and Robertson all out of the woodwork at the same time!) The best comment hooks are the remarks that make you say, "Wait a minute! I see something else altogether," or at least, "You know, it's possible to look at this in another way." I thought A FREE LUNCH was one of the most interesting zines I'd seen in a long time, but I wrote a lengthy loc in which much of what I said was in disagreement. What I never got around to saying in that loc was that it was the superior quality of the zine, the fact that it was operating on a high enough level to generate that level of argument, that made it possible for me to comment in such depth at all.))

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Thank you for PULP. I loved every word of it - even those pages (8 of them, this time) that didn't mention my name once.

I didn't agree with the editorial, though. I think fanzine reviews are not only entertaining, worthwhile and interesting, but are helpful and constructive, too... "to see ourselves as others see us," and all that. First, the gentle encouraging Clarke type reviews spur on new hesitant writers into having another go, or help tyro editors improve their layout and editorial skills. The harsher reviews are usually aimed at people who have been around long enough to know better - Bergeron, Cantor, Harris, Mayer, West, White etc. You don't have to agree with the comments, but the reviewer invariably offers specific criticisms and deserves space and consideration.

To illustrate this, when the reviewers get around to PULP 8 they will undoubtedly point out that my lower bowel is probably the most well-documented piece of internal plumbing in the history of world fandom. Christina and Lilian, D and Hazel, will all throw up their tiny hands in horror - and I can't really say that I blame them. Amateur psychologists will mumble about anal fixations and faecal foci in the old and servile and resurrect the old Bloch joke about every page has a bottom... a fact well known in Ancient Rome as well as latterday Welling.

I shall complain bitterly that it is a bum rap and that there is a ten year interval between featured incidents, but it is still fair comment and I shall decide to keep away from the Harris bottom casework for a while. I shall tell you about my varicose veins instead.

I thought you extremely fortunate to get D Langford on a regular basis - a privilege shared only with Hazel and the White Dwarf. Who else amongst us had to run for the OED to discover that a bartizan is merely a tiny turret and not just another of those regal titles held by the fair Thuvia. Pity.

I loved these cervisial ravings, though, and will set the alarm clock for 3.am. tonight so that Sue can wake me so that I can try for the perfect sentence myself.

Chester was, er, different, and Avedon on Mayer was beautifully charientic

(but she would be, wouldn't she?). Sadly, Bernard Leak has me bang to rights. He has sussed me right out with the "after dinner stories for cultivated decadents... the carefully lightened morsels of literary puff pastry." You see, all this stuff is just letter excerpts, and there's nothing else I can write nowadays. The last time I tried a werewolf story I was laughed to scorn. I have always been an advocate of frothy fanzines - light, slight and vulgar rubbish rather than Thoughts.

Mind you, I do have Thoughts, but if I try weighty bits D, all the Ashworths, Joseph and Judith, Patrick, blessed St Michael and all the angels, and even my daughter and soulmate Avedon deride and buffet me, and make hurtful remarks about my founder membership of DENSA. Believe me, it's a lot easier to feed in another white sheet and start off, "Today I saw Dr John Justice for the ninety-umnth time about the spung in my left nipple."

WAHF: Pamela Boal; David Bell ("Tony Chester's piece reads a little like an outline for 'Tales of the Unexpected' - I'll accept 5% and all I can say about the ending is that it serves the protagonist right."); Gary Deindorfer (sent a hilarious tape of Jello Biafra doing comedy routines like Vietnam Never Happened and Names For Bands, along with Henry Rollins doing a couple of great bits about beer commercials and constructions workers); Bridget Wilkinson (who saw something called a Rizograph that looked like "a duplicator had had it off with a photocopier," and in fact is an e-stenciller wedded to a duplicator, with buttons on it that resemble those used in photocopiers); Joseph Nicholas (a letter stamped "This came directly from a computer & is not to be doubted or disbelieved," in which, not surprisingly, he disagreed with Vince on the subject of reviews); Sid Birchby; Jan Dawes ("Fanzines can be costly to produce, and I feel that if someone's taken the trouble to send me one, a loc is simple good manners"); Ken Lake (who flattered us anyway); Steve Bieler (who sent Baltimore Orioles baseball cards); Kev McVeigh; Chuck Conner (wondering why people took the Door's candidacy so seriously); Cardinal Cox (who suspects Harry's article of really being just a smoke-screen to plot the overthrow of the BSFA); Ron Holmes; Ken Cheslin ("Strength thru' Chaos, as Pablo would have said, I wonder if anyone but Darroll Pardoe will recall that old Singe war cry?" and, "Oh ghod, are we still being equated with saucer fans?"); Syd Bounds ("Why doesn't someone put out a folio of Arthur's work?");

And finally, a flimsy slip of paper (in an envelope postmarked in Peterborough) reading as follows:

"From the hidden headquarters.

It is not tru. This Harry Bond is no Mutant. We the obedient followers of Proffesor Double X and Charismo say that he must be some poor deluded fan who wishes to emulate us. He must have heard of us at Follycon where our mighty subterranean mimeo's could be felt rumbling durring varrious pannles. His article suggests some sort of pleasant after dinner club. BELIEVE HIM NOT. We will eat old Faneds alive,(if they still are). Their days are numbered.

MUTATE
ACTIVATE
DEVIATE

Get Mad."



S
If undeliverable, return to:
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Dick & Nicki Lynch
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