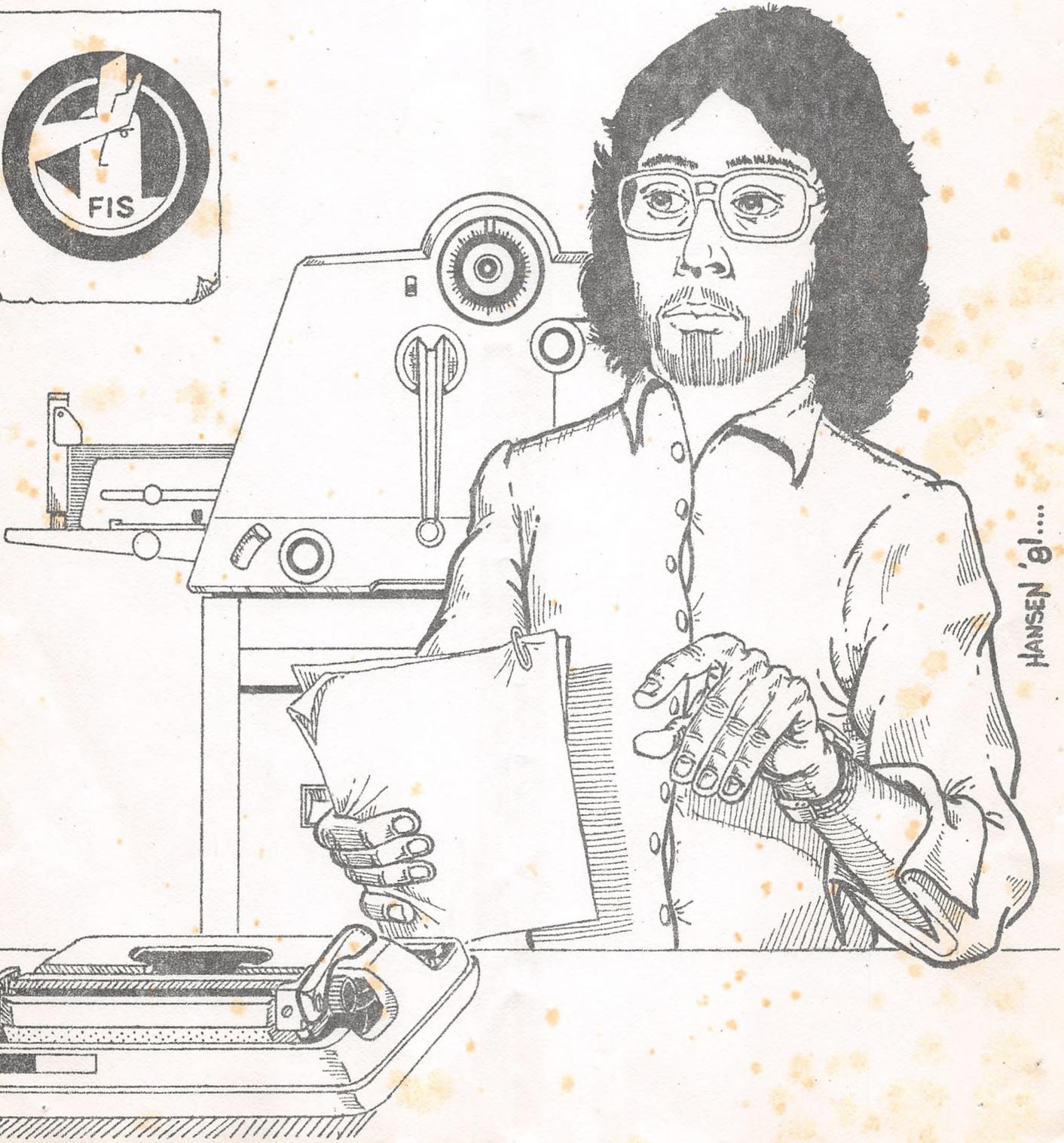


EPSILON



HANSEN '01....

THE USUAL PRODUCTION CHATTER IN THE APTLY MIS-NAMED.....

EDITORIAL

EDITORIAL.;.....the whys and wheretofores.

EDITORIAL

Probably sooner than you expected, and certainly sooner than I expected, you hold EPSILON 9 in your sweaty hands. With three months between issues 7 & 8 and now two between 8 & 9 that makes three issues since August, which is a personal record. Funnily enough as the speed of production has increased so has the size of the fanzine which suggests that if I speeded up production even more the size would increase accordingly. In other words, taking this to its logical conclusion, the closer the speed of production of EPSILON gets to, say, the speed of light the closer the fanzine will get to infinite length, which with paper at 70 g/m² would mean infinite mass. Now even with the NOTIONS column getting heavy, as it does this issue, it is plainly impossible for a fanzine to attain infinite mass and thus we can deduce that no fanzine can be produced at the speed of light, not even PONG. And all the preceeding, you will note, is argued from first principles based on observable phenomena, so maybe that Einstein feller wasn't so hot after all.

The more observat among you will have noticed in the last couple of issues, and even more so in this one, that the type has had an alarming tendency to wander across the page in a fashion that is not the dead straight line of words that most of us are accustomed to. This is not an attempt on my part at daring and innovative layout but more the result of dropping my typewriter a few months ago. In spite of hitting it with a hammer a few times (a process known to us mechanical engineers as 'Hitting It With A Hammer A Few Times') I've been unable to correct the fault so I'm afraid that it's liable to persist until I do something about it, Real Soon Now. You betcha.

It's an awful thing but having mentioned last issue that I might do a self-portrait for the cover of this issue I felt honour-bound to do so, even though I felt more like doing another of the noir-covers I did for the last two issues. As it happens my need to stick to my personal schedule for this issue meant that I only had time to rush off the cover you see, anyway. Yes, the cover (A Boy and his Duper) is me. I assume there are people in North America interested in seeing what we UK fans look like since I have to confess to a certain curiosity about the face behind the words with respect to them. I was certainly surprised when Malcolm Edwards pointed out a quite remarkable facial resemblance, on the basis of photos discovered in an old copy of PHOSPHERE, between John Collick and Jessica Amanda Salmonson. What either of them would think of this is a matter of some conjecture.

Anyway, here it is, take it as it lays.....

...ROB HANSEN

SECOND-HAND WAVE, JOSEPH NICHOLAS AND ELITISM EXAMINED.....IN.....

NOTIONS

NOTIONS.....a consideration of ethics in fanwriting.

NOTIONS

It was all Linda Pickersgill's fault.

"But it's only two pages!", she protested as I attempted to explain the difficulty I was having putting together the issue of EPSILON I was working on and that anything else was not really on since I find writing difficult enough as it is. It was June 4th 1981, the first Thursday of the month, and like all good London-based science fiction enthusiasts we were at the One Tun (the pub that had superseded the Globe, which had in turn superseded the White Hart), the monthly meeting place for London fandom. Linda was trying to talk me into joining Simon Bostock's APA-SF&F, apas being a form of fanac I've never indulged in before and towards which I have a certain amount of anti-pathology. However being easily talked into doing things, especially by women (indicating, no doubt, a desire to be dominated), I complied; though the few days to deadline meant that I only had time to produce a fairly inconsequential contribution. Due to the demands that other fanac seems to have been putting on my time since then I've had to let my membership lapse but I did receive two mailings and of particular interest among the zines therein was something called CODBALLS produced by one Chuck Connor.

I was only vaguely aware of Connor before this apa was formed so I didn't know what to expect of his zine and was quite intrigued by the following line:

"...maybe the older Second Wave of fandom doesn't like being cast irrelevantly aside by the up-and-coming Third Wave?"

Second Wave? Third Wave? What did this mean? Surely the post-SEACON influx of fans weren't already experiencing a Third Wave? All was revealed in the next mailing when the following appeared in print:

'Isn't it funny that all these people who are crying out for originality (as long as it fits their scheme of things) are the slightly sorry remains of 'The Second Wave'. These are the '67/'70s 'kids' who are maybe now starting to feel their comfy positions are in danger of being kicked out from under their chubby buttocks in much the same manner as they themselves removed the Founding Fathers, the 50s fans.'

Now as most of you will realise the above represents a quite amazing distortion of historical fact. Connor seems to think that fandom in Britain began in the fifties, which leaves me wondering who put on the seven conventions held in this country prior to 1950 and also to ponder how the first British fanzine, NOVAE TERRAE, came to be published in 1936. Even this business of waves is ill-informed (the Pete Lyon cartoon in the latest SECOND-HAND WAVE referring to the future 'fourth fandom', and indeed the title of the fanzine, indicates where he might have picked up some of his ideas) because, while I can't claim to be familiar with the full history of fandom

in Britain, I know of three clearly defined 'waves' of fans coming in prior to SEACON. In 1963, or thereabouts, there were the 'New Wave' fans led by Peter Weston and Charles Platt who chose to follow their own more sercon path rather than that followed by the fans of the fifties, while between 1967 and 1970 there was an influx of young fans who rallied behind the banner of FOULER, the iconoclastic brainchild of Greg Pickersgill and Leroy Kettle it possessed a vitality and exhuberance that this writer hasn't seen in any fanzine since. And finally, between TYNECON in 1974 and SEACON in 1975, there was that wave of fans identified at the time as "the bastard offspring of SCIENCE FICTION MONTHLY" which contained such people as Dave Langford, Kevin Smith, Joseph Nicholas, Paul Kincaid, and myself, a distinct 'wave' who felt no primordial urge to usurp the FOULER generation, insofar as the idea of usurption can be applied to something as loose-knit and anarchic as fandom, but who instead took advantage of the creative atmosphere that had been established to produce their own fanzines and to find their own voice.

Since the role of fanhistorian is held in such low esteem over here information about the fannish past is not as easy to come by as some of us might wish and no doubt it's unreasonable to expect a relative newcomer such as Connor to have such data at his disposal but surely it's not unreasonable to expect him not to take the events of the past as the jumping off points for his dissertations unless he knows what those events were? Connor also has a habit of assuming that attitudes to fandom can be used to extrapolate attitudes to such things as music and politics. For instance:

" With the advent of Punk Rock...something which seems to turn the stomachs of the more hardened Second Waver..."

...left me wondering how all those records had crept into my collection by such artists as the Sex Pistols, the Dickies, Generation X, Squeeze, the Ramones, the Jam, Stiff Little Fingers, the Stranglers, PiL, Penetration, the Clash, the...but you get the picture. I was also intrigued to discover that:

'When a 'zine folds you will always find that someone will do an article on how really wonderful the editor was, and how it is a really bad loss for fandom now that his fanzine has gone to that great duper in the sky'

Obviously Connor is reading other fanzines than those I've been reading in the last six years. From these and other things said in CODBALLS you get the impression that Connor sees himself very much as an iconoclast, a sort of fannish Don Quixote. The trouble is that this Don Quixote has decided to tilt at windmills without taking the trouble to find out what a windmill is beforehand with the result that, far from impressing the locals as he had no doubt intended, the impression he produces as he goes charging past is one of bewilderment. Still, at least the confusion that Connor spreads is the result of ignorance but there are others whose actions appear to be more the result of malice.

In the latest SECOND-HAND WAVE, in a piece on TAFF, the editors commented that:

'...now we have Langford trying to stir us all into activity over what we ordinary folk see as unattainable goodies already reserved for the closed membership of the BNF club.'

and also:

"...we now find a herd of BNF's generally avoiding the masses at conventions and wallowing in each others BNFiscence."

The gross misuse of the term BNF in the above (see Ted White in LETTERS) may confuse some of EPSILON'S transatlantic readers since while, prior to SEACON, there were only about three or four people in the UK generally regarded as BNFs the newer fans seem to use it as a catch-all term for all of us who were active in fandom before SEACON. "The term 'elitist' ", said Malcolm Edwards in TAPPEN 3, " is bandied about far too much these days for my liking", for mine also, but it's doubtful you'll see it bandied around more than in a typical issue of SHW and the above quote certainly demonstrates the attitude of the editors. The references to 'closed membership of the BNF club' and 'BNFiscence' on the one hand and 'the masses' and 'we ordinary folk' on the other seem to indicate that they see themselves as spokesmen for some sort of fannish proletariat, opposing the elitist BNFs hell bent on keeping them down. This would be quite funny if Messrs Ferguson and Briggs weren't so obviously in deadly earnest about it all, which is why I present the following little tale for their consideration:

'Once upon a time there was a young Science Fiction reader, a boy who, in the pages of a wondrous publication called SCIENCE FICTION MONTHLY, read of SEACON '75, a convention to be held that Easter in Coventry. Now this boy was fairly poor, being only a lowly trainee draughtsman, but he saved his pennies and soon he had enough to go to The Convention. The boy knew no-one in his home town who read SF and so he travelled to the convention alone, knowing no-one and not knowing what to expect. During the course of the convention he only spoke to three other people and spent most of his time attending the programme. The boy noticed groups of people who clustered together, particularly about the bar, who obviously all knew each other and who seemed to be having a good time. Though he would have liked to have joined in their conversation and shared their obvious enjoyment he didn't know any of them and his natural reserve stopped him from approaching them. Having realised by now that for these people the convention was more a social event than a Serious Science Fiction Seminar he mentally compared the groups to people he saw sat around tables in pubs, groups of friends enjoying each others company. He didn't expect them to make the first move towards him, they didn't know him after all, and it certainly didn't occur to him that groups of people hanging about together in such a social situation were being elitist in any way. The boy didn't attend another convention until MANCON the following Easter but in the year between he sent off to various fanzine editors for copies of their publications, reasoning that if he got to know a few of these people in print then he would be able to introduce himself to them at the next convention and perhaps get to know a few more people. This strategy worked and by his fourth convention he was on friendly terms with many of those people he had seen having such a good time at his first. He was, it must be said, astonished by the accusations of elitism which he saw in contemporary fanzines put out by those coming into fandom after him, and has continued to be whenever they have been made since.

This is a true story. I know....for I was that boy.'

Touching stuff, eh? To further illustrate the point lets turn to Jimmy Robertson, the most stylistically interesting of the newer fanwriters, and what he had to say on the subject in issue 5 of his own fanzine, TWENTY-THIRD:

"I used to think, like most neos, that fannish fans were a mass, who somehow controlled who got to be one or not. This is of course a load of bollocks and no matter what anyone says, if you want in enough and are of a very broadly like mind then you're in. You can of course try to be a BNF but that is a different matter. Fannishness is not something I ever aspired to but just fell into; it seemed the thing to do at the time."

and:

"To illustrate perhaps what I am trying to say - Bill Carlin and myself were standing at the bar in the Royal Angus and Kev Smith came up and offered to buy us a drink. We were dumbfounded. Kev is a BNF and why is he buying us drink when he could be standing with all the fannish types swapping fannish jokes and such. This prejudice was our fault -not his. In short, no-one was stopping us talking about, or to, anyone. This is the point where I decided that if I wanted to I could join in, at some level, and participate in fannish fandom. It didn't mean anybody would like me or agree with me or even take any notice of me but no-one else could do it for me. There really are no barriers, no conspiracy, just people. You will like some, some will maybe like you. What else could you ask for?"

Now, while the rather silly 'Conspiracy Theory of Fannish Fandom' seems to be dusted off and wheeled out with tedious regularity by each new influx of fans who feel that they are in some way being snubbed or oppressed by more established fans, it's something else in the SHW piece on TAFF that I'm not happy about. According to Ferguson and Briggs:

"...at the Tun we heard Alan Dorey, soon after his return from the States, saying, "Yeah, I wouldn't mind a free trip in '82. I'm trying to get D.West and maybe Harry Bell to run as well, see if we can't make a real race of it."

I'm very dubious about the accuracy of this quote since it comes not from the pages of a fanzine but is rather a snatch of conversation overheard in a crowded bar, but Dorey has admitted that his reasons for standing were as cynical as the above suggests. The thing is tho', that since then Dorey came to realise the basic immorality of his position and because of that, much to his credit, did the right thing and stood down. Now all of this was reported by Greg Pickersgill in STOP BREAKING DOWN 7 back in August but while both editors of SHW got SBD 7 they make no reference to this nor, in stating what they see as the position of the evil BNFs on TAFF, do they take into account what Greg had to say on the subject, no doubt because it differs substantially from what they claim is the position of BNFs and also because it might detract from their image as crusading heroes of the proletariat. To me, however, by ignoring what doesn't fit their theories and writing the piece they did knowing that it would be accepted as accurate by those not in possession of all the facts they have acted in a fashion that is shabby, to say the least. I'm sure

that Ferguson and Briggs would be the first to protest at such shameful standards of reporting in the conventional press; but then these things are so much easier to excuse when you do them yourself, eh boys? Which brings us to Joseph Nicholas.

NABU 11 contains an article by Nicholas intended as both a clarification of his piece in the previous issue and also a reply to the LoCs it prompted. The original article was a critical appraisal of American fanzine fandom and was couched in terms which most of the American fans who wrote in found offensive. However we now find that, according to Nicholas:

"...they all walked very neatly into the trap I'd laid for them. Not that I really should be crowing so loudly at my own cleverness...."

Nicholas accepts that:

"...to call it 'convoluted' is to understate the position by several orders of magnitude..."

and further claims that he...

"...was able to place even more barriers in the way of comprehension by sticking all the ruderies about them in at the start of the piece rather than incorporating them into the main body of the article, thus biasing their perceptions of it almost before they'd begun to read and facing them with a double problem: not only to overcome the complexities of the article but, before they could get down to that, to overcome the prejudices against it that it imposed upon them."

Resisting the urge to say:"Oh yeah?", I turned to Nicholas' K IS FOR KNIFE column in NABU 9 and found the following piece of criticism:

"Tom Jones managed a fourth issue of Waif, as ramshackle and as cretinous as the previous three (although he himself claimed that it was too 'normal' for his tastes), in which he revealed that his attack on me in the third issue was (goshwow, surprise) supposed to be a parody of current British fanzine reviewing as practiced by myself, West, and Alan Dorey. A parody, eh? Shame on me - and West and Dorey - for not spotting it in the first place. Shame on everyone else for not spotting it in the first place, either. Shame on us all for collapsing in paroxysms of laughter when we read Jones's explanation....ah, what's the use?"

What indeed? Though Nicholas' stuff is often long-winded it is rarely as sloppily written as his piece in NABU 11 but since, structurally at least, it bears a superficial resemblance to the original article I suspect we may be in for secondary and even tertiary replays of this "they all fell very neatly into the trap I'd laid for them" routine in future NABU columns...if editor Ian Maule allows it to continue (and it is certain to bring in lotsa LoCs).

The observant among you will have noticed that the long quotation preceeding the WAIF critique was not even a whole sentence, but rather part of one and Ted White had something to say on this in PONG 26, something expressed somewhat more concisely, perhaps, in a recent letter:

"Stencilling three pages of Nicholas almost did me in...in one sentence he managed to run nine lines of elite type...and I had a terrible urge to break up his overlong sentences, but did not."

I know the feeling. Actually, fanwriting in general is so stylistically dull that we should be thankful even for Nicholas' overblown prose (we can't all be Jimmy Robertson, after all), but it's strange that he is so ready to condemn American fanwriters for verbosity while failing to see the same flaw in his own work, a curious blind-spot in one seeing himself as Britain's top fan critic.

The NABU 11 article concludes with the statement that:

"...if they can't think straight then they can't read properly, and if they can't read properly then they can't write to save their lives..."

Interestingly enough, before he'd seen a copy of NABU 11, Malcolm Edwards had the following on stencil and duplicated in reply to a LoC from Nicholas in TAPPEN 3:

"Sorry, but this letter won't do. Go to the back of the class and write out 500 times: 'I must try to think more clearly and then perhaps I would write more clearly.' "

That letter begins with an attack on the NOTIONS column in EPSILON 7 wherein I stated my views on politics in fandom. Now I have no comment to make on his criticisms of the piece since Malcolm's reply stated the case clearly enough, but since it was expressed in a manner that Malcolm called "fucking condescending and abusive" I've no doubt that Nicholas has by now decided that the preceding was the result of me being 'peeved' at the LoC, the same motive he accused D. West of having when D. had the temerity, in NABU 10, to reply to Nicholas' criticism of him in the previous issue, though in fact I'd decided to write it before TAPPEN 3 came out; shortly after reading NABU 11 in fact. Whether or not Nicholas will choose to believe this remains to be seen.

Most of my last NOTIONS column was devoted to a pleasant stroll through the writings of Walt Willis as reprinted in WARHOON 28, and in the course of the piece I made reference to the fact that the charges of elitism and references to the Great Fannish Conspiracy made by newcomers to fanzine fandom were nothing new, and indeed I've certainly seen them made quite a few times during even my relatively short time in fandom, but they do seem to be a lot more persistent this time out than they have been in the past. I'm sure that much of this is due to the editorial attitude of SECOND-HAND WAVE, given the esteem it's held in by the newer fans, but it's not due solely to them.

During the two-year period following SEACON a certain number of fanzines from new faneditors came my way and on reading them it became clear that many of them regarded Joseph Nicholas as some sort of bogey-man and the reason seemed to lie in his fanzine criticism. Now, in the British fandom of the early seventies a certain mood evolved and the young fans of the time became convinced that standards of fanwriting needed to be improved...and as a logical concomitant of this they realised that a more stringent form of criticism than that extant was needed if this was to be achieved. One of these fans, Greg Pickersgill, established the style that was to characterise the art of

fanzine criticism throughout the seventies, only hanging up his critics hat with the emergence of D.West. Later Alan Dorey and Joseph Nicholas were to adopt Greg's style though both, to differing extents, absorbed the surface tone without absorbing the substance. They set out with the aim of improving the standard of writing in fanzines, an aim I go along with totally, but it is possible to be over-zealous. The first fanzine anyone puts out is the one they are going to be most sensitive about, since they are laying themselves on the line for the first time, and they are apt to take criticism of their brainchild personally. Most critics are fully aware of this and I'd always taken it as a largely unspoken, but nonetheless generally accepted, maxim that one 'went easy' on first issues saving the critical heavy artillery for, say, the third issue by which, if the fanzine had shown no signs of improvement, it was fair game; and for the most part first issues were treated more leniently in order not to extinguish the first signs of what might have been that next generation so necessary to the continuation of fandom. In this respect one is not cheered to read the column in NABU 7 where Nicholas says:

"I can at least claim a more positive success in respect of Robin Hughes' Canopus; the letter I sent him in response to his first issue was so vicious that apparently it caused him to abandon his plans to publish a second."

Get it right the first time or don't bother, in other words. The fact that Nicholas regards this as a "positive success", coupled with how the critical 'tone' he borrowed from Pickersgill has been exaggerated to the point where many fans find it "fucking condescending and abusive", especially in NABU 11 where his replies to his US critics comes across uncomfortably like jingoistic anti-American tub-thumping, suggests that the newer fans may have grounds for their dislike of him. Given that few of the pre-SEACON fans were as active as Nicholas in the two years after, it seems entirely possible that in his pronouncements he was seen very much as speaking for them, and if he is responsible for much of the attitude of the newer fans to those of us active before SEACON then he has done us all a great disservice.

*

(An assessment by Nicholas of his articles for NABU appears in LETTERS.)

WHAT FOLLOWS...

...is not the ODZUNSODZ column you might expect but rather a NOVACON report by that famous fannish funnyman of the seventies, that master of the acid quip and drunken slur, Leroy Kettle. Mr Kettle has been less than ubiquitous in fanzines of late, and at local fannish gatherings come to that, so in order to bring him back to public attention, and to save me the hassle of doing it, I talked him into writing a report on NOVACON. "Kid, I can make you a star again!", I told him and sure enough, after a lot of prodding and a great many reminders, an envelope bearing the words ON HER MAJESTY'S SERVICE and containing the messiest typescript I've ever seen arrived. I eventually deciphered it and discovered the following rather pungent piece which I've decided to call.....

SPHINCTERS AT DAWN

SPHINCTERS AT DAWN...a NOVACON report with a distinctive air....

SPHINCTERS AT DAWN

by LEROY KETTLE.

Here I am in Hansen's fanzine, so I might as well tell you a few things about him. It's all very well these personalzine editors producing page after fascinating page about what colour underpants they wear on Tuesdays and how Mrs Smegma next door buys her cockroach powder at Tesco's, but the poor reader never gets a glimpse at the mundane side of the editor's life that is as valid a part of the person as the stolen quip and witty grammatical error that tend to bring him to life in print. You have to live with someone, and I mean really live with them, to understand that life is not just the enviable succession of wet bus queues and spilt cups of tea you're led to believe from reading the cream of the personalzine writers. Yes, there is a boring side to Ian Williams' life, although you'd never believe it from his fanwriting.

Take Rob Hansen; I really lived with him for two days.

Kath had decided that she didn't really want to go to this Novacon and so I arranged with Rob to share a twin room. We'd done this once before but on that occasion it had ended in tears after Rob's entire drink supply leapt down my throat one evening when Rob was out cavorting and the bar was shut. I certainly didn't see the colour of his underpants that night. Things got patched up between us when he got Harry Bell and Jim Barker to sit on top of me (and that was in the days when Jim had to have rooms on the ground floor) while he helped relieve the pressure on my wallet.

Rob has two problems which don't help anyone unlucky to share a room with him. His problems are not mutually exclusive - they fall into the un fortunate pairing category; like Andy Richards' driving and his car, Rob Holdstock's lifestyle and his credibility, Malcolm Edwards' alcoholism and his drink problem. Rob, as you will know, has a diet problem. Most people have diet problems which mean either that they can't keep to one or that they can't eat certain foods for health reasons. Rob's problem is that he can only eat baked beans.

It happened like this. He was standing way back at the end of the queue when God was handing out diet sheets for life and He was beginning to run out of them. D.West had just gone out of the door clutching a bit of paper which read "Bits of old fish-skin and half-chewed chips from other people's plates, bogey pie, etc" when Rob came up and God looked at the two bits of paper He had left.

"Well", He said to Himself in an awesome voice, "it's either a diet of Puberot, an obscure dish from the Sahara that gives you perpetual boils on your groin and makes you vomit a lot, or baked beans."

He shook his head when suddenly Brian Parker danced his way into the pretty holy Presence, said "Sorry I'm late but Terri wanted a swiftie and we were out of courgettes", snatched the nearest diet sheet, and set the seal on his health forever. Rob, not knowing how lucky he'd been accepted his own fate with equanimity. But on the next queue, when personal problems were being

handed out, and D. West was just leaving carrying a sheet of paper so long that if Brian Parker hadn't been behind him he'd have set a record, Rob got given farting.

Well, a lot of us got given farting, but for most of us it's one small part of life. For Rob it's vital to his existence. Had he been given a diet of beans without the safety valve of farting he wouldn't have been at Novacon to share a room with me and lull me to sleep with rippling renditions of the Trumpet Voluntary, rearranged for anal sphincter and gas mask. No, he'd be lying somewhere, a corpse with a heavily perforated rectum and an unpleasant odour. But I get both crude and ahead of myself.

Rob unpacked quickly on our first day there, still trembling from Mad Atkinson's frenzied flight from reality down the motorway. He took from his bag the belongings of a man with a £20,000 mortgage and a £2,000 salary - a brownish toothbrush, either too old or too long next to his cleanest underpants, those same underpants, three cans of deoderant, and a combined knife, spoon, fork, and device for getting drinks out of Rob Holdstock. He farted a couple of times while I unpacked, noting how accurately the creases of my nylon bag were reproduced in my shirts, and then we wandered off to have fun in our separate ways. It was the usual sort of Novacon fun, the only differences being that Paul Turner took over from Ian Williams the mantle of fandom's most unpleasant dwarf, and Brian Parker was sick even before he started drinking or had chance to look at his groin in the mirror.

Later that day I saw Rob guzzling beer in vaster quantities than either his slim frame or slimmer bankroll seemed capable of coping with and surreptitiously lifting a buttock off his seat for a SBD or, if **unlucky**, a particularly noisy one. Not having the savoir faire of Ian Williams, who leaves the room before releasing the rectal rasp as though no-one could then hear, or the uncaring malhommie of Harry Bell whose occasional odorous offerings of anal art shift the conversation several yards, Rob **tries to** pretend he hasn't got a great personal affliction and struggles to lead a normal life.

I didn't see Rob again until I went to bed and saw his blanketed form silhouetted against the tastefully lit bed console. I immediately looked under the bed to see what had died before realising that Rob either had gangrene or was breathing out of both ends at once as usual. Unfortunately the bedroom window didn't open so, turning the air-conditioning on to overload, I tried to hold my breath all night.

The next day we got up and dressed. Rob used an entire can of deoderant and pretended to change his underpants but, I noticed very casually, merely turned them inside out, a ruse that I wondered if he thought could be tried more than once. We had breakfast with Dave and Hazel Langford, which was an unexpected treat. Dave was talking as though we needed the hearing aid so Rob and I left him lecturing his egg on particle physics while we talked to Hazel about everything except knitting and farting.

The rest of the day and evening went as they do at Novacons. Harry Bell discovered the swinging sixties thirteen years too late, Linda Pickersgill discovered that even Jan Howard Finder can be pleasant if you

cover him with fur and shut your eyes; several people (notably Chris Priest) discovered they'd trod in Paul Turner; Malcolm Edweeds discovered, yet again, that he knew more about scientifiction than anyone in the world; and I discovered I could beat John Brosnan continually, and most other people frequently, at one particular video game called Beetles From The Void, with a giant cockroach lurching across the top of the screen hurling offspring downwards, just as though I was watching TV at home. (The video game which offered a free muckpan for every thousand points unfortunately broke down before I discovered what one was.) And Rob Hansen discovered that while you might look like Jesus you don't get much of a following unless you learn to break bread instead of wind. It was all jolly fun.

Rob decided that the two of us should go out to buy some food as the hotel beans were playing hell with his guts and weren't very tasty. I swear I'll never follow Rob Hansen anywhere in Birmingham again; not for the reasons you may think, but because a sense of direction is to Rob what a smile is to Dave Pringle or a cultured accent is to Rog Peyton. His one rule about travelling through Birmingham is "Go downhill". That seemed difficult to avoid doing in Britain's most repulsive city, but it didn't help. After twice ending up in the sub-basement of Woolworth's (where I failed to persuade him to buy another pair of underpants to wear for the next month) and several times in the decayed subways that run beneath Birmingham's streets like maggot holes in an already rotted cheese, we found somewhere that sold the connoisseurs baked beans (Ol' Pooteroonies). After he'd counted out a gross of tins dusk was reaching its delicate dark tendrils into the industrial sunset, and we humped both his meals back to the hotel along a street completely full of surgical appliance shops which I noticed Rob glancing into with a mixture of astonishment, apprehension, and perhaps just a hint of excitement.

That night was a night like any other at a Novacon. Drinking, lurching, laughing, spilling, ranting on at Lisa Tuttle about the social misfits who join the SDP to find that she and Chris had joined, seeing the hotel staff gazing in bewilderment at a heap of smouldering rubbish on the pavement outside the hotel and being told later that it had been the photographer who annoyed Greg by using her camera to take photographs, seeing Gerry Webb skip the light fantastic at the disco, all the time dreading the thought of that bedroom, its floor littered with empty cans, their contents rapidly being converted by some chemical reaction that Langford could probably name loudly, into FARTS. Well, let me tell you, the thought went nowhere near the reality. That room was Hell. If you took the million monkeys after they'd written Hamlet, and put their armpits into a barrel and sat in it for a week, it would have been a holiday compared to that room. Seven hundred and thirty seven gallons of beer were consumed that weekend, reports Malcolm Edwards in LESBIAN. I think that beer was a misprint for beans. And I think they were all consumed by the editor of this fanzine. I could have died that night (although waking up in Birmingham it's difficult to tell), if I hadn't had the foresight to put his head under the blankets to create a perfect, recycling, self-contained system for he of the poisoned bowels, while I lay softly wafting myself to sleep with my own slightly more restrained and pleasantly perfumed colonic conversations.

At one point I awoke, lying on the floor, choking, my skin an unhealthy flesh-like colour. An evil brown shape hung over me, coming closer and closer. There was nowhere I could go. Was I going to be suffocated by Rob Hansen's fartoplasm? Would I ever live to continue destroying my own bodily functions at conventions? Then I really awoke. It had only been a nightmare. By this time the room merely smelled like half a million overactive monkeys' armpits (that's still a lot of armpits, though).

The next day was not at all dissimilar to others that had passed at Novacons of previous years. We went home in Crazy Atkinson's car, vying for room in a mass grave with Daft Stevenson, both trying to prove that machismo wasn't just a word sellotaped to Rob Holdstock's bathroom mirror. None of us died, but then Rob Hansen had had to travel back by train as the car was full. No wonder British Rail sandwiches curl up at the edges.

...Leroy Kettle.

*

Malcolm Edwards has got Dave Langford to do a NOVACON report for the forthcoming TAPPEN in which, apparently, he went out of his way to avoid mentioning Malcolm, even when writing about the Nova Awards. Leroy Kettle, as you will by now have realised, took the opposite approach, attempting to label me as the major source of air-pollution in the UK. Bloody uppity contributors! Kettle's piece is in fact pure fantasy, the warped outpourings of a fevered brain, since at NOVACON not a single bean passed my lips nor flatulent refrain my buttocks.

My experience of NOVACON was somewhat different to Leroy's. At the disco I bopped away to a few of the early tracks played by the DJ but it quickly became apparent that he was making no concessions to the audience, preferring to play the usual set that wows the sixteen year old crowd and, with the arrogance of his kind, ignoring all requests to adapt to the tastes of those present while insisting that he knew best. At one point, for instance, he played a string of slow smooch numbers which are guaranteed to fill the dance floor at an everyday disco, as I'm well aware, but produce just the opposite effect at a con. Somewhat disgruntled I left to change into drier clothes, discovering on my return that the music had improved immeasurably, being a lot better to dance to. In my absence, so I'm told, a group of people in the hall who also thought that the DJ was doing a poor job signed a petition and handed it to him. This said something along the lines of "If you don't start playing some decent dance music we, the undersigned, are going to tear your arms off", and it was shortly after this that the music began to improve. Not wanting to get my only other set of clothes wet as well I sat and drank, becoming increasingly morose. This mood persisted all evening until I stumpled upon a drug-crazed Harry Bell in one of the alcoves outside the con hall. His peculiar antics and uncontrollable laughter worked wonders.

The Nova Award for best fanwriter went to Chris Atkinson, indeed it would have been a travesty if it hadn't since she is producing by far and away the best writing to appear in fanzines in some time, and I would go so far as to say that if the fan Hugos bore any relation to reality she would be a certainty for best fanwriter. Malcolm Edwards winning the best fanzine Nova for TAPPEN completed a remarkable husband and wife double. Congratulations also to Pete Lyon for being voted top fanartist.....now the letters.....

....LOCS FROM FAR & NEAR.....THE QUESTION OF STANDARDS.....IN....**

LETTERS

LETTERS.....beginning with 'Verbose of Pimlico'.

LETTERS

JOSEPH NICHOLAS

Room 9, 94 St. George's Square, Pimlico, London SW1Y 3QY.

I can recall you saying to me at the Tun that you felt my later fanzine reviews for Nabu were not much more than parodies of the earlier pieces. Well, possibly; but in my eyes, the later pieces are actually better than the earlier ones because in them I at last began to develop a clear idea of what I was about. The earlier columns, it seems to me now, are but the first, undirected fumbblings trying his hand at a new medium, a new form of expression, attempting thereby to find a distinctive voice and a platform from which it could be sounded; and for that reason I'd rather disown them - the third column in particular is quite the worst by a very long margin, not least because of its thunderously overblown proportions. But in the last two, however, I at last began to home in on what I felt to be my true subject matter: an analysis of the historical forces that had shaped fanzines as we knew them back in the dying days of the seventies - and in truth, I might still be writing such columns today if it hadn't been for the fact that I also wrote "Coming From Behind" for the By British fanthology, the shape and nature of which absolved me of the need to propound specific critiques of specific fanzines and thus allowed me to concentrate on the 'pure' historical analysis...and, having done so, and effectively said what I'd come to say, there was clearly no need for me to go on picking over selected extracts from it in further installments of "K Is For Knife". So I stopped - with Nabu 9, please note, because while "Run For The Shadows" in Nabu 10 can be seen as some sort of continuation of the whole, I consider its relationship to the "K Is For Knife" columns to be only peripheral at best, and it was contrived and executed with an entirely different aim in mind. The follow-up, "Standing In The Shadows", in Nabu 11, is intended as no more than a sequel to it, and will constitute my last word on the subject of fanzines for quite some time to come.

I also, in part, ceased writing fanzine reviews out of a sense that things were changing around me, and that in continuing I would be seeking merely to impose the standards and strictures of an older, and soon-to-be-outmoded, epoch upon whatever might be arising to take its place. Which ~~xxx~~ really would have been no good at all, for it would have denied the freedom of the new generation of fanzine editors to evolve on their own, in their own time and in their own direction - and it's for this reason that I don't greet the return of Alan Dorey to fanzine reviewing with the same acclaim as you, for he too is seeking to impose the standards of the old on the still-forming hopes and desires of the new, and in that regard is judging fanzines by criteria that are in many ways completely irrelevant. As, indeed, would any other pre-Seacon fan who sat down to write a set of fanzine reviews and I therefore think that we all ought to lay off for a bit, I really do. Who cares what boring old farts like you or I or Alan or even Simon Ounsley have to say about fanzines? We can show everyone what to do, by the example

of the fanzines we publish, but there's very little point haranguing them at length in the pages of those fanzines because, as history shows, they won't listen for a moment. A successful formula, or a valid-seeming trend they might follow, if they feel inclined and if it suits them to do so; but that's about all.

((So you'd rather disown your earlier K IS FOR KNIFE columns, eh? Just like that. Actually I'm more than slightly amazed at how large a part of the response to the last issue picked up on what was a fairly casual comment welcoming Dorey back to fanzine reviewing. For instance we have...))

JOHN.D.OWEN.

4 Highfield Close, Newport Pagnell, Bucks., MK16 9AZ.

I must say that I found no.8 a good deal more contentious than the previous issue. It may be that I found it slightly distressing that the 'Old Guard' (ie. them as was around when I started in fandom 5 or 6 years ago) are reawakening with the intention of re-establishing fandom's "standards" as they were three years ago. I cannot help feeling that this is a vain, almost arrogant assumption on the part of people who, by now, should know better. The thing that struck in my throat was your re-espousal of the supposedly lost art of fanzine criticism where, by implication, 'informed criticism imposes a set of standards against which all fanzines are judged, as certainly seemed to be the case in the seventies.

((Yes, but those standards are the same standards that one would apply to any piece of writing. The main thrust of critical thought in the seventies was that because a piece of writing was "only for a fanzine" that was no reason why it shouldn't be expected to match up to the minimum standards of literacy one would expect in other fields.))

Criticism in itself is no bad thing, as it helps point out any particularly glaring problems that a new, or even not so new, fanwriter might have. It is the idea of 'standards', the concept that there is a particular way of fanwriting, or of fannish activity for that matter, that led the scene as I knew it in '77 and '78 into the cul-de-sac which had the effect of producing a great many look-alike zines with very similar contents that were, to my mind, intrinsically worthless. In any activity there are polished practitioners, and there are those that seek to emulate the polished practitioners. Only a few of the emulators succeed, most fail because copyists inevitably fall short of the originals. The people who succeed are invariably those who break the mould and try to do something a bit different. It's that activity of mould-breaking that the "informed criticism" of like-minded reviewers inhibits, either intentionally (to stop the rise of fans who might just topple their empire - a reason I don't particularly see as correct, but which is often hurled at the central 'elite') or unintentionally, as a result of not being aware of the growth of a new fan generation, or movement.

The production of a fanzine has got to be a personal thing, for it is essentially about communication, about differing opinions. The fan editor has got to balance his own personal inner judgement against the opinion of his readers, and of the criticism of the fanzine reviewers. In my opinion

the important element in that equation is the faned's own judgement - unless that is clear and whole-hearted, then the zine he produces can in no way represent him in its content and appearance. To strive for both personal satisfaction in producing an issue of which the editor can say, "that's precisely what I wanted, precisely what I meant to say", and to achieve the maximum degree of good response from the readers, must be the aim of any faned - otherwise why bother? What is the point of producing something in emulation of BNF Fred Bloggs, who is still active and able to knock spots off anyone who attempts to play him at his own game - you've got to be damned good from the word 'go' to achieve anything that way.

In my honest opinion, the faned who follows the path laid down by the Pickersgills, the Doreys, yes even the Hansens, of fandom are doing harm to their future prospects. The fanzine producer should have something to say - therefore his own personal judgements should have precedence over the 'informed critics'. It is vital that the faned retains his own voice, and his own critical values, for without them his zine ends up 'conforming' to the standards - and there lies the path to stagnation, to dullness and to dissatisfaction - the kind of dissatisfaction I feel when I read many of today's 'fannish' zines. There is a vacuousness, a forced sameness about fannish zines that comes from people emulating the best in the field, like EPSILON, like STOP BREAKING DOWN.

You go on to virtually use Walt Willis as an example to prove that fannish writing stands the test of time. I have never believed that one swallow makes a summer, or that fannish-vs-sercon arguments have a definite verdict for one side or the other. Fandom needs both sides of the coin to function, something which the fannish members seem to lose sight of on occasion.

In many ways the rest of the zine illustrates my point. Even the Hansens of fandom can come up with material that one reads, is amused by, and then forgets instantly. If the best of the field can be merely amusing, then how much greater a difficulty does a neo-fan writer have in trying the same thing?

I think I ought to add, by way of perspective, that I don't hold any particular grudge agin fanzine reviewers, never having been particularly mauled by them (though LoCs from Joseph Nicholas did annoy me more than once, primarily for their arrogance rather than what they said). The fanzine I produce may not be the greatest thing in the world, and I'm not going to put it forward as an example to follow. But it is my zine, and I know what I want to do with it. I haven't produced an issue yet that I am particularly satisfied with myself, but I am sure that I'm going down a path that I will find satisfying, and that will produce for me the results that I want to see.

((It's obviously time for a statement of my position on 'Standards', but first let me deal with the side-issue of format, something of secondary importance which has surprised me by becoming a major issue of late.

A fanzine can be produced on A5, A4, quarto, foolscap or any size paper you choose; it can be mimeographed, xeroxed, or litho; it can

have artwork on every page or carry none at all, even on the cover; the type can be single-spaced, double-spaced or some wondrous spacing of your own devising, and be arranged in columns or fill the page in such a fairly basic way as this; and whichever way you choose to put it together, however daring it may appear to you, I don't care! I have seen most of the conceivable packages that can be put together from the above many times before, and will no doubt see them many times again, but since normally sensible people like Chris Evans, in NABU 10, have recently made statements on the subject that strike me as ludicrous I'll state here and now that as far as I'm concerned it is irrelevant. No, whatever package you put together is just icing on the cake; what really counts are the words.

As far as I'm concerned there is what I call a Minimum Basic Standard (MBS) that should be applied to fanzines and which was most recently put into words by Malcolm Edwards in TAPPEN 1 and quoted, first by me in EPSILON 7, then Ted White in PONG 22, Alan Dorey in GROSS ENCOUNTERS 10, and Chris Priest in DEADLOSS 3, which must give it some sort of record in fanzine terms as most quoted over least time, especially as I'm about to quote it again:

"I believe that fanzines are a unique and very special form of communication in the form to which they have evolved in SF fandom. We are lucky to have them, and they deserve respect. I'm opposed to the view that it's okay to print any old rubbish in them because, what the hell, it's just a fanzine. On the contrary, I think that fan writing is one of the few forms of writing that are pointless unless you are doing your very best."

Adding to the above only the fairly obvious rider that the words must be legible, you have the MBS.

Reading your letter, John, there seems to be a slight confusion between the notion of standards and that of the ideology of fanzines. We all have our own ideas of what makes the perfect fanzine, our personal ideology, but surely certain standards must apply because as I see it the only alternative to a standard that calls for good writing is one that calls for bad. No doubt you would protest that no-one would ever deliberately seek to publish bad writing, but you would be wrong. In RUNE 63 a fan called Luke McGuff, talking about the reluctance of most faneds to publish fiction, said that possible future SF superstars should be given 'the chance to be bad and get published'. As Ted White put it in PONG 22: "...McGuff seems to be offering the point of view that fanzines should have no standards which would bar anyone the opportunity to 'be bad and get published' ". And in WARHOON 25 (1968) Richard Bergeron tells us that:

"...when a few years ago Charles Platt included my name in a list of people who should be writing for the science fiction prozines instead of wasting their time writing for fanzines I was flattered but not in the least inspired.

I wouldn't write for the science fiction prozines if they paid me. As a matter of fact. I wouldn't even read them if they paid me."

Which shows Charles Platt's contempt for the medium because if you see fanzines not as a means to an end but rather an end in themselves then to do less than the very best that you are capable of is pointless. And you will note that I said "best that you are capable of" because, obviously, few people are going to be capable of producing writing of the calibre of that produced by a Chris Atkinson or Walt Willis when they first begin. Which brings us to the actual practice of fanzine criticism.

What I meant by 'informed criticism' was that process by which a zine under review is measured against the MBS firstly, which is the one thing it really must measure up to; assessed in terms of how it succeeds in what it appears to be trying to achieve; and compared to, and contrasted with, other zines produced at the same time. The criticism is 'informed' in the sense that a critic with a grounding in, and knowledge of, what has gone before can draw out common threads and detect common trends in the current fanzine scene and can examine and assess them both on their own merits and as viewed against the larger historical backdrop.

You will notice that nowhere in the preceeding have I made any comment on the actual substance of the contents and this is because, really, almost anything you choose to write about is a suitable topic for discussion in a fanzine. As long as it's well written and entertaining, as long as you make it interesting, then it is good fanwriting but if the prose is dull and awkward then, regardless of how intrinsically interesting what's being written about should be or how deeply you hold the convictions it expresses, it doesn't work and is bad fanwriting.

Personally I have never written any fanzine reviews because I do not feel I have the right temperament for the task but I do, in NOTIONS, comment on what I see as the general state of the art and I'm quite prepared to hand out mild rebukes, as in this issue, to those I see as deliberately distorting the facts. While, as stated above, I'm not about to lay down the law as to what the contents of a fanzine should be, I came down against the discussion of party political arguments in zines since I feel them to be essentially divisive and thus detrimental to fandom, though this is a purely personal perception.

Phew! That's the longest reply I've ever made to a letter, almost another NOTIONS column in itself. Anyway, on with the show.....))

TED WHITE

1014 N.Tuckahoe St., Falls Church, VA22046, USA.

Well, PONG is momentarily off my back and I had time to sit down and read the package of fanzines you sent, for which thanks.

Paging through EPSILON 6, I encountered Joseph Nicholas's letter and his thoughts on "the whole concept of BNFs." It's pretty clear that Joseph doesn't know, in this instance, what he's talking about. I always thought Big Name Fan was a fairly self-mocking title, and one well suited

both to describing a situation or state and to keeping a sense of perspective about it. No one becomes a BNF because he wishes to be one - unlike, say, certain pros who enjoy lording it up among "the fans" - the title is bestowed upon a BNF by the opinions others have of him/her. When there is general agreement in fandom that a particular fan is important to fandom, that fan is a BNF. But how does that fan become "important to fandom"? Not in the way Nicholas suggests. At least within the ranks of fanzine fandom (and ignoring the Trekkies and their media-oriented offspring) it has entirely to do with merit. If I write particularly well, say things particularly worth saying, or put out a particularly good fanzine, I'm going to become a BNF, because people will appreciate the quality of what I have done. This is the true "hierarchy" of fandom. Those who fan best end up (eventually) at the top. This has nothing to do with not disturbing the status quo (many new BNFs got there by disturbing the status quo, from Walt Willis in the early fifties to Greg Pickersgill in the early seventies (or so I gather). In fact, now that I consider the point, I think it has been generally true that the biggest-name fans were the ones who shook things up and significantly changed fandom in some fashion - going back to Bob Tucker, who introduced humour into fandom in the thirties, when people tended to take this science-fiction stuff dead seriously, and continuing through Burbee and Laney, who were the first major iconoclasts of fandom, the Insurgents, kicking the shit out of the complacent Los Angeles LASFS in the forties.). The point is that fandom is full of talented people and talent is recognised and respected, but not fawned upon, nor "arse-licked".

Although I've been told for some fifteen or more years now that I'm a BNF, I've never been aware of anyone looking up to me "as some sort of elder god", nor has my "every whim" been "pandered to by a coterie of arse-licking admirers" (more's the pity). Indeed, the only groupie (in fandom) I've ever met repelled me. *Sigh*...

MIKE GLICKSOHN

137 High Park Ave., Toronto, Ontario, M6P 2S3, CANADA.

If the current inundation of British fanzines continues I may have to move into a bigger apartment just to store them all but at least I'll have interesting things to read as I'm packing. EPSILON 8 has been read and enjoyed and since I'm starting to return to the letterhacking I used to do with such frequency, I thought I'd reply to it. Undoubtedly two more issues will have been published by the time you get this (along with another six TAPPEN) but that's beyond my control.

We may well be entering into another golden age of fanzine fandom and it may be coming out of Britain. Certainly TAPPEN, STOP BREAKING DOWN, START BREAKING UP, EPSILON, and DEADLOSS are in the forefront of a new wave of articulate fannish fanzines. It's too bad there's little happening in America and Canada (outside of PONG) that can match it. But perhaps your examples will inspire the sincerest form of flattery; we could certainly do with it.

Your editorial comments are well considered (and well researched) and they cause me considerable embarrassment. I bought two copies of WARHOON 28

over a year ago and I still haven't gotten around to reading through the issue. I have these excellent intentions but all these other fanzines keep arriving and there are cons to go to and....

I doubt anyone is more aware of the cyclic nature of fandom than a dedicated letterhack such as I used to be. There's a perfect example in this very issue of EPSILON. The letter from Abi Frost rehashes arguments that were puerile the first few times I answered them, as much as eight years ago. She misses the point by as much as some people did back then which just proves that fans don't get any smarter as each new generation comes up to make the same mistakes their predecessors did. I wonder how Harry Warner can stand it.

Speaking of cycles...I'm frequently on record with regard to views of fan funds and viable candidates and the qualifications which should determine who runs. To some extent I've discarded some of the initial requirements (which history has rendered invalid) while retaining what I've always conceived as being the essence of the funds. So I no longer worry too much about financial need (anyone can afford a trans-Atlantic trip with a few sacrifices) but I agree whole-heartedly with you that the candidate should have earned the trip through services to fandom. However, I don't feel that such services must necessarily have been primarily in the fanzine field. It's more likely that a fanzine fan will win because because a fanzine fan's name will be better known overseas but someone like Rog Peyton is a deserving candidate because of his many contributions to British fandom in recent years. (In fact, even though Rog has rarely crossed my path personally in fanzines, he's mentioned so often that fanzine fans will know him as well as they know Kev Smith.) The main problem with retaining too stringent qualifications is that there just aren't any candidates who can fill them. So it's either a matter of scrap TAFF or modify (slightly) the ways of picking fans to run for it. I'd rather do the latter. If only because I eventually want to run for TAFF myself and don't want it scrapped before I do so! (That's humour, folks, but I like to think I'm at least as well qualified as some recent candidates.)

I think if there's one thing I envy active British fans for it's their frequent gatherings together in pubs to do their fannish thing. I see the local Toronto fans quite often, and frequently in a party situation, but to see anyone from out of town I have to wait for a convention. And even though cons arrive every few weeks (I dropped to just sixteen in 1981, a victim of North America's inflationary economy) there's a big difference between a con and a party. I dearly wish there was something like your Friends In Space over here but the distances (and the culture) render it impossible. It's reading zines like EPSILON that makes me wish I could hop a flight to London and just show up at the next FIS meeting. Unfortunately, fantasy rarely overlaps with the real world; thanks for letting me read about it though!

((So you had to drop to just sixteen cons in 1981, eh? Good Grief! When you consider that I can only afford three cons a year, and that the sum total of conventions I've attended since my first in 1975 is only eighteen, it's easy to see that the cultural differences go both ways.))

Another of my fannish dreams (beyond running for TAFF, that is - note that's "running", not "winning") is to attend a SILICON. I've never read a SILICON report that didn't make me wish I'd been there to be a part of it. (This is a testament to the con itself and to the way its survivors write about it.) Yours merely adds to the overall lure the con has for me. (I'm not at all sure, though, that I'd ever want to share a room with the likes of Holdstock and Pickersgill. Not even for the fanzine material they'd inevitably generate! Not to mention the infamous purple stains. There are some things money can buy, and one of them is the opportunity to rest/puke/recover/love in private. When I'm wiped out at a con the last thing I want is someone even more blitzed throwing up on my floor...or me!)

I'm not sure it's worth replying to Ms Frost's letter since she demonstrates exactly the sort of short-circuited mentality I was complaining about in my original letter. (Somehow it didn't surprise me that she works "on the fringes of the public relations industry": if she didn't have that slight spark of intelligence, she'd probably have moved from the fringes into the heart of the industry long ago.)

I wasn't suggesting that con committees attempt to give an artificial view of fandom by distorting the information presented to journalists; I was saying exactly the opposite! I feel we'll get better press if we force the reporters to talk to the more articulate and intelligent fans as well as the lunatic fringe they always concentrate on. Abi thinks it's awful that we might try to influence the press by having them talk to some positive members of fandom but with the blindness typical of those whose brains are filled with slogans rather than thoughts she's happy if a few neurotic, costumed misfits are used as representative of what fandom is all about. Bah, humbug: such stupidity isn't worth responding to.

Her comments on my finding the headline insulting are worth a reaction or two, though. Over here we have something called The Royal Winter Fair. It's one of the truly important agriculture displays/exhibitions in the country. New breeds of livestock are exhibited, new scientific developments in farming, animal husbandry, etc etc. It attracts thousands of people, most of the top agricultural minds around, and huge sums of money for the auctions. (Prize bulls have gone for over a hundred and fifty thousand dollars.) I suppose Abi would do a story on it headlined: "Place Was Full Of Shit" Says Barn Hand. That's the blinkered stupidity I was objecting to, not the use of "sci-fi" which I don't like but don't get bothered by. But I don't really expect anyone working "on the fringes of the public relations industry" to understand something that subtle.

((Whoooooeeeeee!!!! I wouldn't be surprised if a certain Ms Frost had more than a word or two to say about that; me I'm stayin out of it. The Hansen family coat of arms is a white feather on a yellow field.

I've always been a believer in letting fanzines find their own length but this one seems to be getting just a wee bit out of hand so I think it's time to begin cropping letters somewhat ruthlessly in an effort to regain control of the issue.....))

ALUN HARRIES: I agree with you that there are other people, in or out of fandom, who could do the kind of thing that James does in 'Unreliable Memoirs' letter but I don't see that it matters. The fact is that he did it reasonably well and got it published even if partly on the reputation he gained doing other activities. Actually this kind of autobiography and anecdotal reportage is a field in which I have become interested recently. I suggest you have a look at some of the works of Tom Wolfe, Hunter Thompson (particularly 'Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas'), and Graham Chapman's 'A Liar's Autobiography', all of which I think have something to offer in the way of 'fannish' reading.

((I'm familiar with the work of Wolfe and Thompson to some extent having read Thompson's 'The Great Snark Hunt' and quite a few of Wolfe's, the best of which by a long way being 'The Right Stuff', which is not one of his collections of anecdotal reportage but is the story of the early astronauts. Chapman's book I haven't read but enough people have recommended it for me to pick up a copy when I see the paperback.

I was delighted to hear from the next writer.....))

WALT WILLIS: As you'll have guessed I was fascinated by your comments on WARHOON 28 and TAFF, but there was much else to appreciate. I was for instance very taken with Peter Roberts' description of the BSFA as a "series of trivial disasters". This is a form of wit, allied I suppose with the stylistic oxymoron, which I have always thought of as peculiarly the gift of James White. I remember him once describing someone's technique as "crude but ineffective", and I have always treasured his considered judgement of a new-wave type of story which someone submitted to SLANT.

"It's not good", said James, "but it is obscene."

STU SHIFFMAN: Your comments on TAFF are quite apt - hey, I feel lost at a giant Worldcon and can barely find my friends. At Denver I knew that Taral and Victoria Vayne came but couldn't find them. Yorcon 2 seemed to be of a comfortable size - but that's only because I've gotten so damn acclimated to these huge regionals that top a thousand.

MARTYN TAYLOR: Thanks for the copy of EPSILON 8, which I took great pleasure in reading. Pleasant, relaxed, chatty, and descriptive. Not my style of writing, but what the hell I liked it.

There I was, neo that I am (despite a state of advancing decrepitude), wondering where all these fanzines were that I had heard of in legend before dipping into fandom. I could hear the occasional echo of Nicholasian 'Kill the Fuckers' distant thunder, and I could hardly lift my feet from ground made quagmire by the tears falling from the eyes of fans B.S. Then came the answers and I was surprised - shocked even - to find them for the most part literate and even interesting (although not nearly as interesting as Paul Turner finds anything fannish - Christ, was I ever THAT young?).

WAHF: Arnold Akien, who said much the same as John Owen, and Jeff Suter, who says he's my biggest fan and is eagerly awaiting STARFAN 2. Aren't we all?

This is EPSILON 9 and it comes
to you from Rob Hansen
9A Greenleaf Rd.
East Ham
London E6 1DX.
U.K.

shamelessly stealing the lack
page layout of TAPPEN.

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* * * *

EPSILON 10 will be out when you get
it, which will probably be around
Easter. To celebrate the fact that
it's reached issue ten all future
issues will be numbered with two
digits instead of one.

* * * *

Thanks are due this issue to John
Harvey for electrostencilling the
cover - twice! I managed to tear
the first one and at the time of
typing have yet to run off the new
one.

* * * *

This last stencil typed on Sunday
13th December 1981. A Merry Xmas to
those of you reading this before and
I hope those of you reading it after
had a good time. I certainly hope I did.

* * * *

FROM: Rob Hansen
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