

Avast! Ye lubbers! She blows, she blows...

Excelsior 3

"Ashes to ashes, and clay to clay, if the enemy doesn't get you, your own folks may."

-James Thurber

Published for the
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June 1, 1957.



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Ted White



Cover symbol: "Many banners bear strange devices."

Cover by Ted White

Backover by LeeH

Staff:

Brainwork - Larry T Shaw
Dirtywork - LeeH Shaw

Artist - Arthur Thomson*
Scientists - J & A Young & Co.

*see editorial

Associate Editor Emeritus - Walter A. Willis

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L. Shaw

545 Manor Road

Staten Island 14, NY

EDITORIAL

I am living in a world of ghastly unpredictability. I noticed it first under the shower, but I thought nothing of it at the time. There is nothing unusual in turning up the hot water, and getting instead a blast of cold water. But then the guitar started acting peculiar I got suspicious. When a guitar string is flat, and you tighten it, it certainly shouldn't get flatter. And just now, tonight, I discovered that the same law of unpredictability has struck the mimeograph. I adjusted the feed, and started duping sheets of the zine, and they were coming out too low on the page, so I raised the stencil (on a SOP-L you do this by moving the paper back a bit on the feed tray) and I started it feeding again. This time it fed way too low. So I pushed the stack of paper forward again, and the sheets started coming out with the bottom half of the sheet printed. Not the top, but the bottom.

The worst of all this is that these things vary. Sometimes the hot water faucet gives hot water. Sometimes tightening a guitar string raises its tone. Sometimes adjusting the paper forward in the feed tray raises the image on it. Sometimes it doesn't...

It's frightening.

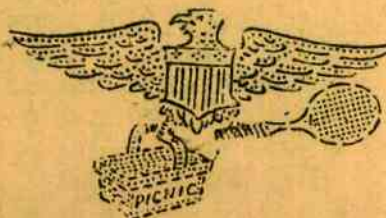
Note: The fact that in Celsy #2, ATom was listed on the masthead as a member of the staff, but not represented by contributions within the zine, confused a number of people. Be it observed that ATom is a staff member of the staff, and while not represented in this either, he will be represented well in the next issue, with the cover, and interiors.

Also note: the next issue of this zine will probably be real irregular, since we may or may not be moving soon. So don't look for it until you see it, please.

Anybody out there interested in folkmisuc (or Oscar Brand)? We have a few extra copies of an issue of our FAPAZine which we devoted to the subject. They're coverless but otherwise intact, and we'll send them to the interested, if any.

Remember: nextish, John Berry, Arthur Thomson, CAL, and others! Don't let it miss you...

L Shaw Ltd.



up to now

TED WHITE

In 1939 Jack Speer wrote a "Full Length Article" for the FAPA stating his theory of "fandoms"--eras of fannish thought and action. At his time he could only state the first two, but he laid down a solid theory which has never been displaced, and has become accepted among fans. 1952, Bob Silverberg brought the history up to date, and stated that the period 1950-- was Sixth Fandom, and among its leaders, the fanzines QUANDRY and OPUS (nee FANVARIETY). Sixth Fandom was, at best, marked by some of fandom's most erudite humorists; at worst by a flock of juvenile imitators who succeeded only in producing some of fandom's most illegible crud. But any 'fandom' has its stars and its fuggheads. Sixth was known for the marked increase of humor, and much of it of high quality. It was a more mature fandom; one which took itself and science fiction less seriously than had past fandoms.

In his article, Silverberg prophesied the fall of Sixth Fandom, and the rise of a new, Seventh, fandom. All too soon after, both Q and OPUS died, and certain young fans, at first as a gag, decided to start Seventh Fandom. The following dispute over this was further confused by the fact that the same fans started a new amateur press association called 7APA. Too often this was referred to as "Seventh Fandom" and disappointed neos cried that they weren't allowed to enter "Seventh Fandom". What they meant was that they weren't allowed in the 7APA.

The period of "Seventh Fandom's" rise was followed by one of debunking. The last I heard, the experts (some of whom had never been in Sixth Fandom) had decided that we are still in Sixth Fandom. *

In my opinion, this is not true.

When Q and OPUS both folded, new leaders for Sixth Fandom were needed. A 'fandom' always needs a rallying point, a common clearing house which best expresses the traits of the 'fandom'. During any given 'fandom' there is a majority characteristic--perhaps serious, perhaps witty and carefree. It is this manifestation of the fandom which really defines a fandom.

One of the prime requisites for a 'leader' fanzine is promptness and regularity. No matter what the quality, a quarterly fanzine will never become the focal point of a fandom.

((Editor's footnote: Some experts say that, according to Speer's definition of a 'fandom' we're still in Fourth Fandom.))

Sixth Fandom turned to one of the other good and frequent zines, Gregg Calkins' OOPSLA! but he had chosen that time to publish an annish, and gafiate. Second chance went to Joel Nydahl's VEGA, which looked like the one. In only a few issues, Joel had built up an excellent zine. But Joel was young, and had other responsibilities preying on him heavily, and in the process of rubbing the first twelve VEGA's, he ran up a rather large bill at his local stationers'. The final blow was his first annish, a 100-page affair of high quality. Outside of an article in PSYCHOTIC announcing his retirement, Joel was never heard of again.

But in the same month that VEGA died, a new fanzine was born, Dick Geis' PSYCHOTIC. Here, too, was a fanzine born for leadership. Within the first six or seven issues, PSY was in actuality a leader. PSY sustained monthly publication until the tenth or eleventh issue, whereupon Geis announced irregular publication. This was the death knell. PSY bumbled along for eight or nine more issues, as an irregular dittoed, then offset, then mimeoed magazine. The last three issues appeared as a different zine, SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW. This did not last either. Fandom had clung to PSY as a leader only because no other zine was available to take its place.

The saga of OOPSLA! (which later reappeared on an extremely irregular basis), VEGA, and PSY covered the period 1952-1955. There were other zines of real quality published during this time; GRUE, HYPHEN, etc., but none made any pretense of monthly publication or leadership. One other zine, Pete Vorzimer's ABSTRACT tried to beat PSY out of its position during PSY's period of real leadership, but ABby folded before PSY did. With PSY's death, no American fanzine had attempted with any effort of success to become a new leader. English fandom went through a brief spurt of frantic activity which has already leveled off, and the reason for that leveling is the same as the reason for America's lack of fannish leadership.

For in 1955-56 true Seventh Fandom was born. True Seventh Fandom does not consist of a group of fans proclaiming themselves leaders of a new fandom, but rather the state of fandom as a whole.

Seventh Fandom is Apa Fandom. In 1954 and to an even greater extent in 1955 and 1956 there has been a mass migration into the apas, most notable in FAPA. FAPA's waiting list rose to over forty fans--more than the entire membership of SAPS! Newer up and coming fans formed their own apas, WAPA and the Cult, of which the Cult has survived. British fans formed the OMPA, a really international organization. For the first time, the apas have formed the center of interest in fandom. Of these, FAPA might be said to be the "leader", but only in a loose sense.

But, some will say, what of such zines as Gould's OBLIQUE. Is it not a fannish leader? No. True, a number of BNFs are featured within its pages, but the same applies to GRUE. And OBLIQUE appears as seldom as GRUE: once or twice a year now.

White (3)

The stage is set for a new leader. Already the rush on the apas has subsided, and I doubt that Seventh Fandom can prevail much longer. I think the appearance of a new leader would create Eighth Fandom.

What American fanzines are there now which might become that leader? Well, ten years from now this might be embarrassing, but I doubt any will become leaders. There just isn't the potential among today's young fans. There have been no new Willises or Grennells discovered recently, tho there are several new fans on the west coast with considerable talent, such as Courval, Rossman and Brandon, but they don't seem the type to submit to the rigours of steady publication.

There is, tho, the possibility of several current fans colaborating on the production of a monthly, and in fact, one is in the offing. But I can't say much about that now.

In summary, it is my belief that Sixth Fandom did die with QUANTRY and OPUS. Fandom split into segments, with only fractional leadership, and the period 1952-55 was an interregum. We are currently in Seventh Fandom which will date from 1955 through the discovery of a new, relatively stable leader. Because there may be abortive attempts at leadership in the near future, I doubt we'll be able to establish the death of Seventh Fandom and the firm establishment of Eighth Fandom until we look back, some five years from now. By then, we should be in an argument over the establishment of Ninth or Tenth Fandom...

---Ted White
March 1957

LeeH here:

Some of you EXCELSIOR readers may not have been around fandom when the SOUTH GATE IN '58 campaign began. I know I wasn't. I came into fandom in mid-1950 and Sneary knows how long the campaign had been going on then. Certainly, there never was a ConCom that started preparing for its convention as far in advance as this one had. And while it isn't official yet, they're working hard to make it a good con. Due to some very intelligent handling, the Convention-district for 1958 will be such that South Gate is a natural consite. So, if someone doesn't goof off and fail to get the vote for South Gate, the '58 convention should be one whingdoozy.

Start making your plans now (and I mean NOW) for

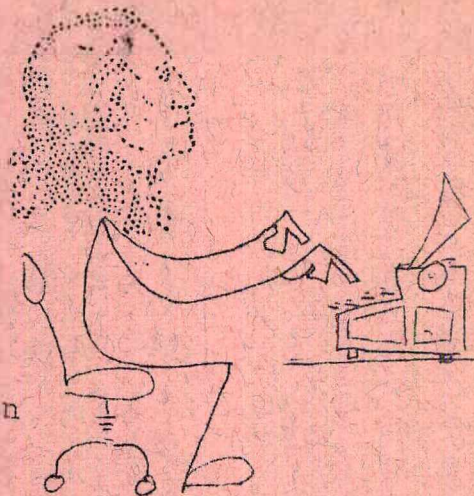
SOUTH GATE IN '58!

and all the attendant joviality.....

Shortly after the publication of "Harlan Ellison: A Profile" we received an envelope bearing the return address, "Zambesi Head-Shrinking Conservatory,...contents: thirteen thousand pygmy heads". The envelope actually contained the following manuscript, which purports to be a true expose of Harlan Ellison by the man most qualified to do such an expose: Harlan Ellison.

Harlan Ellison

This is a harlan ellison. See how the harlan ellison hits the typewriter! Oh! The typewriter hits back! See how the harlan ellison forces the typewriter to make stories. Now we know...oh, what fun! The harlan ellison does not write the stories, it is the captive typewriter. See the harlan ellison!



I was born on a duck farm in Georgia--no, not the Georgia that's in YooAwl Territory, but the Georgia that's behind the Iron Curtain--where at a tender age I learned the mystical secrets that enabled me to cloud ducks' minds. I was a gun-runner on a Chinese junk till the age of seven, when I decided to throw aside this life of evil and follow the ways of the true God: debauchery.

As a result of this, I wended my way across the globe, touching many ports of strange call: Zambesi, Zanzibar, Zamboanga, Zhdanov, Zurich (with two little periods over the umlaut), Zaporozhye, Zagreb, Zanesville. In each of them I held a weird and wonderful job, picking up much of the vast and worldly store of knowledge so useful in writing my famous "soft-pink-and-blue bunny rabbit stories".*

Then in 1938, while conducting a guided tour through the heart of Mt. Vesuvius, I met her. Her name was Charlotte, and she was at that time engaged as a cloakless dagger operator in the service of an Un-named Cartel. Very suspicious. But she was beautiful beyond my dreams, and so I took her as my wife. When her husband found out I'd taken her I was forced to leave the area most quickly. Finally, in 1955, I came to New York, where I devised a petty scheme for avoiding honest labor.

Once having established myself in that colony of sloth, as a full-time writer, I began to live high, fat and melodramatic, I sold over 120 stories in a year and a half, including two pirated novels, neither of which has any literary merit whatsoever.

Then the US Army found out about my miraculous talents, my experience with the guerrillas of Saipan, the Apache of Paris, the Boxers of China, the Boxers of Jersey City, the Boxers of the SPCA. They hurried to me but recently, begging me in groups of not more than six, to join them, nay, save them in this cold war. So, much as I despise the public limelight, I am off to save my country in its hour of trial. What ever happened to Captain Marvel and Dr. Sivana?

--Harlan Ellison

Over The Chunkly Bore



(still a lightweight column)

by Archie Mercer

BETWEEN LITTLE
RICHARD AND THE
DEEP BLUE SEA

Easter in Kettering has now become such an ingrained habit with anglofans that not even the prospect of the Worldcon in September can keep some of us away. I accordingly staggered into the George at about my usual time on Good Friday afternoon and looked about me. The place was deserted. Not a fan in sight, when it's usually crowded with 'em. Come to think of it, there hadn't been any other heavily-laden fans in sight all the way from the station, either. Hell, I thought, could it all have been a hoax? My booking seemed to be in order though, and the good lady handed me the register to sign. And there I saw it, in the space right above where I was expected to put mine: "R.M. Bennett."

Right, I thought, that settles it. It MUST be a hoax.

However, I was committed. And if it was to be a hoax, it'd be infinitely crueller if nobody else fell for it. So I took my key and ascended aloft. A couple of doors away from my room I could hear the sound of voices so I promptly plugged in my gramophone and put on a Kid Ory record - loud. There, I thought. If they're fans they'll declare themselves. They didn't so I presumed they weren't and left it at that. Though it has since become apparent that they were probably Ken Slater and Ken McIntyre. Squares, the pair of them.

Anyway, I wandered out into the town to search out all the likely spots for fannish rendezvous - namely outside the second-hand bookshop (shut, of course) and the road between there and the George. I drew a blank. I returned to the George, wandered aimlessly about looking for even the least sign of fannish occupation apart from myself. I might have still been at it three days later for all I could see. Then a car turned into the yard, a familiar face peering out of the window. Fans! I was saved. The weekend was a success - already.

The occupants of the car were two Spalding fen, Jack Wilson and Cyril Whittaker - accompanied as usual by Jill Micklethwaite, voted the girl Spaulding fandom would like most to twist their tongues around. So I let them book themselves in and like that and waited in the bar-lounge for more signs of life. And there it found me. Already on hand at the time of my arrival had been the two Kéns and Ron Bennett, and it seemed that they'd been hunting fruitlessly all over town for ME. Then, in an instant the hall was crowded with newly-arrived fen, Liverpool and Cheltenham jostling hard on each other's heels. Liverpool was right well represented by eight of its stalwarts - Norman and Ina Shorrocks, John Roles, Dave Newman, Norman Weedall, John Owen, Bill Harry and Eddie Jones. Cheltenham, unable to muster an eight, contented itself with a sextet - which was still a hitherto unheard of happenstance, their maximum representation in the past being a twosome only. Said twosome (Eric and Margaret Jones) was included among those present, of course, the sextet being completed by Les, Bob, Humph, and Audrey. These had surnames too I understand, all

Mercer (2)

different, what's more, but I didn't get to know them well enough in the time at my disposal.

I might as well complete the catalogue whilst I'm at it - Sheffield contributed five bodies, that of Terry Jeeves being the biggest fannish name ably assisted by the three-piece Shaddock (or Shattock or something) family of Jeff, Eunice and little Sandra (or was it Susan?). Jeff was something of a mystery-nobody ever seemed clear as to whether he was a fan pretending to be a fake-fan, or a fake-fan pretending to be a fan, or an outright fannish forgery. Eunice was worth bringing with him. Sheffield has also to answer for the presence of Pete Reaney.

Liverpool eight - Chelte ham six - eastern counties five including me - let's see - Ron Bennett from Yorkshire, Eric Bentcliffe from the outer suburbs of Manchester, London. Yes, London sent a sextet. Apart from Ken McIntyre, Londoners present included Ted and Iris Tubb, Jim and Dorothy Ratigan, and Sandy Sandfield. I make that slightly in advance of thirty, depending on more exact categorisation of the Sheffield quintet.

And, being duly assembled, we thereupon proceeded to have ourselves a little Con.

Attendance at a normal British convention is numbered in the lower hundreds. The occasion partook therefore of the nature of a large fannish houseparty. And incidentally, any attempt at chronology herein has already ceased absolutely, so it's no use looking for it.

The days were simply spent. Saturday morning we more or less took over the second-hand shop en masse, the rest of the day time one talked, drank, ate, played Brag, listened to gramophone records, or did anything else that seemed appropriate to the hour. Some people even went to sleep on occasion. The evenings were spent in preparing for the nights, just generally getting in the mood. And the nights-all three of them-were spent in parties.

I suppose you could generalize by saying the daytime was dominated by the camera, night time by the tape-recorder. Fandom seems to have gone mad on cameras and tape-recorders. Everybody except me seemed to have a camera and used it frequently and often on every conceivable or inconceivable occasion.

No doubt plenty of good fannish photography resulted-also, I am sure, vast and valueless quantities of backs of fannish heads, blank walls and the like. That's a comparatively harmless (if expensive) mania. Tape-recorders are another question entirely. There were at least four of them in action at one time or another, three of them identical, and two belonging to the same person. Now a certain amount of judicious tape-recording helps a party along, everybody's agreed on that, I think. But nobody who indulges in it seems to know when to stop. The result is that wherever one goes one trips metaphorically over a tangle of recording-tape. A machine is turned on at a party and left to record the proceedings, in hour-long reels. Then it's turned round and played back at the company then assembled. The result-noise, literally and illiterally. Party-sounds-mostly indistinguishable to the ear-interspersed with monologues from fen who've captured the mike and think they're being funny.

They are-at the time. But it doesn't usually sound that way when it's played back. I should know-I've wasted other people's tape with the best of them. The only time when party taping regains its appearance of wit and/or wisdom is when played back at another (or even the same) party, in which case it's automatically supererogatory anyway.

Another facet of fannish tape recording that gets mixed in is the private correspondence-tape being readier to send to a friend of the sponsor. The result is that one keeps getting mikes thrust into one's hand (the one that isn't holding the glass) with the injunction, "Here, say a few words to Sid Sausage-lives in New South Oklafornia". For all one knows, Sid Sausage may be a latent soul-mate. But one's never even heard of him before in one's life, so all one can very well say is something of the order of "Oh, hellow, Sid - Bill Banger speaking. Having wonderful time. Wish you were here. Blah blah blah. (Thinks - who the hell is he anyway? but if he's anything like the Americans we've had already at Kettering, he'd be welcome.)

Which reminds me-I haven't said a thing about Dave and Rusty Jenrette. Which is pure carelessness on my part. Said Jenrettes being America's contribution to the week-end, he being an American serviceman stationed in England, she his ever lovin'. When Walt wrote that bit about there being more Americans in America than in Britain "and nicer ones, too", the Jenrettes were still in the States of course. If they hadn't been, your Editor Emeritus would have stood sadly in need of correction, I fear.

Right: back to the tape recorder. Which I was busily proving to be very largely a waste of time. I certainly hope Sidcup Sausage enjoys the tape he gets-it'd bore me stiff. And in particular, I find it infuriating when these played-back tapes go running on and on and on and on thereby preventing one from listening to jazz on the gramophone.

Which brings me to the musical aspect of the affair. Music at the convention (or whatever you call a convention that isn't exactly) was of two kinds-recorded and live. They overlapped-I'll come to that in a minute. The recorded part was divided between taped music (which has to be taken or leaven with no selectivity) and phonographic. I brought my gramophone together with six LPs and a dozen 45s-mostly traditonal jazz or thereabouts. Ron Bennett and John Owne also brought a few records-likewise mainly trad. But they were-it transpired-strictly for daytime use. By night we got Little Richard. The Con can truthfully be said to have lost its head over Little Richard. There were available five tracks of said Little Richard, being a 45 "EP" and an ordinary 78 that duplicated one track between them. To these add one Elvis disc (Hound Dog/ Don't Be Cruel) and one disc by the famous BBC "Gooners" (Major Bloodnok's Rock 'n' Roll Call/the Ying-Tong Song) (I stand convicted guilty in both these latter instances) and you have a complete night's musical entertainment. Of the nine tracks represented, I should be prepared to accept having heard them during those three nights anything up to fifty times apiece. At all three speeds too. Little Richard has, as the saying goes, burst upon Britain like a bombshell-and didn't we know it. Roscoe or Phtalo or any of the other fannish ghods may patronize cons till their eyelashes drop out, but the patron ghod of Kettering Easter '57 is indisputably Little Richard.

Mid-morning on Easter Monday, when we were reduced to a round dozen who were waiting for afternoon trains, I was privileged to attend a session of the Little Richard Research Group. Imagine the scene-the basket-lounge. On a table stands my gramophone, plzying Little Richard numbers over and over again. Round the table sit three fen with pencil and paper furiously scribbling-John Roles, John Owen and Eddie Jones. The two Johns are taking down the words. Eddie is drawing a portzait of the singer. I can't quite visualize myself adding Little Richard discs to the Mercatorial collection. But-crazy man!

Personally, my own choice for the musical success of the Convent-ion would be Sandy Sandfield.

Sandy (not to be confused with Sandy SandERSON, who's another Sandy altogether-he's quite emphatic about this, and besides I've met them both) is a London Circleite who digs trad jazz and plays guitar in espresso bars and places. Sings, too. Eric Jones recorded an hour-long concert of his playing one of the three nights-I forget which-and when it was played back later I stood glued to the tape-recorder until it was finished-although I'd heard the original. Sandy specialises in blues and folk-songs generally, usually with a Transatlantic bias-a style of playing that is very popular in this country these days, and for which we have borrowed the term "skiffle" to describe it. Sandy, being an sf fan, has attempted to adapt the medium to sf-based themes, such as space-men's songs of home and the like, with varying success depending on how starry the listener's eyes can get. Personally, I prefer his "London Circle Woman" with a bright twelve-bar chorus for virtually every one of the Globe Tavern's regular female denizens of a Thursday evening-and I can think of a dozen or so more off hand, so he's plenty of material to choose from. But even more than that, I fell under the spell of the Deep Blue Sea. This he brought with him from the skiffle-clubs of London and knows no more about it than that it's a folk-song-not even whose. But it's a lovely tune-all thirty-three (sic) bars of it-and ideally suited to the guitar. "It goes right through you" is maybe a somewhat hackneyed expression-but it DOES. The guitar plays CHUNK-a chunk-a CHUNK-a chunk-a and the tune flows above it and the words are simple and folksy and it I hadn't had a thing to drink all evening I'd still have been drunk in the Deep Blue Sea. I can play it on my concertina now-but it doesn't sound the same without the guitar. One thing-thus far, I've only given "skiffle" music a cursory attention, but from now on I'm going to be all ears.

I have already made mention of Pete Reaney from Sheffield (if I may be premitted to change the subject in such an entirely arbitrary manner) and I would like to enlarge on him for a minute. His name is now a byword throughout anglofandom, and I shouldn't be surprised if his fame isn't now spreading amongst the unenlightened savages of North American continent, particularly as the Kettering tapes go out on their travels. He is complete master of the non-sequitur remark, also having the intriguing habit of coming in about two subjects later. I can't unfortunately remember any specific instances-I'm a good example of the inveterate non-taker-of-notes - but if you keep your eye out you may meet some good examples in other reports of the weekend. But one example of a Reaneyism I do happen to remember-mainly because it occurred in day-time. Four of us were having a meal in one of Kettering's eating places

- Ron Bennett, Bill Harry, Pete and myself-and Pete started talking about a fannish item he wanted to write and submit to Ron. He had, he said, discovered how to travel free by rail-pass oneself off as a train-spotter (a hobby of small boys, who collect engine-numbers and things-not literally, just not them down in a book.) Then, while spotting, simply board a suitable train, get off at your destination, tell them you've simply been train-spotting, and you're there. So Ron patiently explained about the platform-ticket system-and that a person attempting to leave Kettering station by surrendering a Sheffield platform-ticket, for instance, would not get very far. "Oh well," said Pete. "We're all science-fiction fans, add all sorts of strange things happen in science-fiction."

But if the days were simply pleasant, the nights were very much more so. One of them even started with a formal "programme" -the initiation by the Cheltenham group of all Liverpudlians present (including Ron Bennett who used to work there) into the mysterious Order of the Knights of St Fanthony. This was by way of a return engagement to last Whitsun when Eric Jones had been invested with the honorary rank of Ex-Chairman of the Liverpool Science-Fiction Association. Otherwise, it was simply noised abroad that at such-and-such a time the drinks would be in room so-and-so. And there in room so-and-so the party would proceed to whoop it up, among all the paraphernalia of guitar, gramophone and massed tape-recorders. Mundane guests at the hotel who couldn't sleep were simply absorbed into the proceedings, as were several of the hotel-staff. There were a couple of Germans for instance, spending a few weeks at the steel-works in the nearby town of Corby, who were moved to investigate, and after a spot of semantic trouble they were soon boozing happily with the rest of us. (No, clot - they couldn't HEAR us in Corby - it's just that they were residing at the George. Though the Tubb bellow is quite something, and he had several strong rivals). By the way, while I think of it, I'm glad to say that the habit is growing of calling the night porter by his proper name of Bill rather than by his (admittedly obvious) nickname of Boris. I hope it stays that way. Consensus of fannish opinion is that he's one of the nicest people any of us have ever met. And he's no mean hand at beating the tin tray in time with the guitar either, as any of you who get to hear that tape will agree.

So we'd merry merry be, and the night would wear on, and eventually the survivors would drift away to reassemble elsewhere. And there, I think, lies the real heart of conventioning. You've whooped it up and drunk your fill, now you're pleasantly lethargic with a supercharged mind and as you sit around in small groups in bedrooms and lounges and places, conversation -real meaningful conversation- comes into its own. Now a tape-recorder would have something really worth recording, except of course that the very presence of such a guest would inhibit the free flow of ideas and altogether destroy the atmosphere that makes these dawn-sessions what they are. The last four survivors on Easter Sunday morning were Ron Bennett, the two Shorrocks and myself, and when the Shorrocks decided it was time to at least go through the motions of going to bed (by which time it was broad daylight I finished up in Ron's room discussing what we would. It is there that I found myself reading ~~the~~ Bible. This is a very rare event and is due in part to the presence of such a volume in every bedroom, otherwise to the burn of conversation leading to the well-known mystery of how the sequence of the Creation as recorded by the early Jews ties in so closely with 20th century scientific thought. After diligently perusing the beginning of Genesis for a while, I asked Ron how we came to be talking about the Bible anyway. "Oh," said Ron, "we were discussing Peter Reaney." And for all I know, that may have been the direct cause of it all. Which is what I like about conventions.

Critic

At Large

THE MASTER, by T. H. White (G. P. Putnam's Sons, \$3.50).

LeeH has passed on to me a letter from Gary Deindorfer, which says in part: "Critic at Large spends too much time on $\frac{1}{2}$ rate books. Its easy to criticize books that have their flaws and this critic sure does bring em out."

Mr Deindorfer is, of course, absolutely right. I do spend too much time on $\frac{1}{2}$ rate books; so does everybody who reads books at all. I have never found an infallible method of judging books before reading them, so I can't be positive I'm going to read only first-rate books. Believe me, if I could, I would.

As for flaws, it is not the duty of a critic to find fault, per se, but it is his duty to be able to find whatever flaws a book contains and to point them out to the potential reader if he thinks they're important enough.

Now, it is my opinion that Mr T. H. White is one of the greatest living writers. Period. No qualifications. I have enjoyed to the hilt everything of his that I have ever read, which includes all of his published novels. I can't predict what a White book will be like in any particular detail before reading it, because every one is delightfully different in one or more significant ways--as if White felt that a thing worth doing is worth doing only once and second thoughts are silly. (This applies to his "King Arthur" trilogy as well as to the others; each one is entirely different in tone from the others.)

So I usually approach a new White book anticipating pleasure. In this case, though, if I had taken the word of other critics, I might never have read The Master at all. The New York Times and Mr Anthony Boucher both pasted it heavily; only The New Yorker liked it. The New Yorker and me, that is. After reading The Master, I am pleased to report that, for my money, Mr White's record is still spotless; the man can simply do no wrong.

The Master is science fiction of the purest sort. It concerns, as you may have heard, a Mad Scientist who wants to conquer the world; but it is perfectly obvious that Mr White chose this tired old idea with his eyes wide open and all his senses in gear, took a number of tired old examples of it apart to see what made them tick, and then wrote his own book to show that any old plot can be used to make a masterpiece when properly handled.

Critic at Large (2)

It is even possible that one of the books Mr White examined before writing his own was Frank M. Robinson's The Power. To me, at least, the contrast was inescapable. The Master is a man with a power similar to Adam Hart's, but much more precisely defined; he can control other people's minds, and while Mr White can't say exactly how he does it, he never slips in describing how the power is used. There are a couple of places where he uses expert sleight-of-hand to fool the protagonists--hence the reader--for a time, which adds a touch of mystery. But the power is always exactly what he says it is, never less and never more.

The protagonists, not surprisingly, are two children (one of the things that can be predicted about Mr White's books is that the major people in them are always either children or essentially child-like)--the 12-year-old twins, Judy and Nicky. The twins deserve to take their place alongside such perfectly realized literary youngsters as Huck Finn and Holden Caulfield, although they are much better brought up and very very English. They are children, and they see and think like children; a 12-year-old reading this book might well be shocked to learn that Mr White knows so many things that only children are supposed to know. And while he was about it, Mr White added a dog named Jokey, who is not only dog through and through but absolutely essential to the plot.

The Master makes his headquarters on Rockall, an island (which actually exists) about 250 miles off the Northern coast of Scotland. He has transformed this inaccessible rock into a fortress worthy of any oldtime pulp hero up to and including Captain Future; there he lives and plots. There he is found, albeit unintentionally, by the twins; there he imprisons them to keep them out of the way (and because he can't control Nicky's mind, which makes the boy valuable) while he gets his world-conquering business operating. There the twins stay, half enjoying themselves and half fretting about the injustice of it all (teaching themselves--and possibly the reader--a good deal about justice in the meantime). There they meet and learn to know intimately the Master's strange assortment of servants--each of whom is an ancient cliché on the surface, but each of whom is a startlingly real, unique and important individual when you get to know him intimately. There, no one will be surprised to learn, the Master's plans are eventually foiled; and while you may see in a general way (as I did) what the climax is going to be like about a chapter before it arrives, even that should not spoil your enjoyment of the utter perfection of it.

Mr Boucher makes much of the fact that Mr White seems to think that rockets (actually bottles of compressed air, in this case) need air to push against. It's true that a sentence in the book gives this impression, and it startled me when I read it, too. But I'm sure Mr White really knows better; and the sentence can be construed as a misunderstanding on the part of the twins or of Life magazine. But it's not fair to judge the science in the book by this, as Mr Boucher does; the science may be pseudo-science, but it's pseudo-science on purpose, and sounds wonderfully convincing.

Critic at Large (3)

Besides children, by the way, Mr White knows an awful lot about such things as birds and helicopters. A lot of his knowledge gets into the book, in some of its most beautifully-written passages. They are among the most delightful parts of a delightful novel.

And before I quit, I'd like to nominate the end of chapter one as one of the best cliff-hangers ever constructed.

I don't necessarily advise you to rush out and buy The Master; \$3.50 is still a lot of money, especially for a book that will almost inevitably wind up on the remainder counters. But I do urge you to read it, somehow, and as soon as possible. It's a classic.

COLONIAL SURVEY, by Murray Leinster (Gnome Press, \$3.00).

This is a very good book which could have been an excellent one. The main trouble with it is that Mr Leinster succumbed to the old (and often criticized) temptation to make a "novel" out of a series of magazine stories by sewing them together like a patchwork quilt.

To be perfectly fair, I must admitted that nowhere in the jacket copy or book itself does anybody actually say that this is a novel. However, the intention is obvious. For, originally, this was four novelets published in Astounding in 1955 and 1956, all about the Colonial Survey but all having different heroes; and what Mr Leinster has done is change the name of the heroes in three of them so that they now look on casual examination like four episodes in the life of one man.

The device is a failure. Bordman (his first name is never given) is a different person entirely in each of these stories, in spite of the fact that the name's the same. The little inserts explaining what happened to him between episodes don't help; they are dull and unconvincing, and look sloppy typographically. And to top it off, the book contains several examples of one of the most common sins of the novelized series: explanations of the background are repeated in each episode, though it would have been remarkably easy to cut these from the original magazine versions when assembling the book.

All this to one side, COLONIAL SURVEY is lovely stuff. The stories are based on genuine scientific problems reminiscent of Astounding's "Golden Age"; even the sense-of-wonder boys should be entirely satisfied on that score. At the same time, the characters are completely convincing and mostly likeable human beings who have to solve those problems or perish; there's nothing dull about them in any sense. And Leinster is perhaps the one old-timer whose writing skill has kept pace with, and often outshines, the best that any of the more literary newcomers can offer; his style does not rely on fireworks and fripperies, but is neatly unobtrusive, as it should be.

In each episode, the "villain" of the piece is some natural aspect of the planet being colonized. In "Combat Team", the only one of the four that struck me as at all weak, it is the sphexes,

Critic at Large (4)

the thoroughly vicious animals native to the planet. This one doesn't come off as well as the others for a couple of reasons. The first seems to be pure carelessness: Leinster waits until much too late in the story to give us a clear idea of what the sphexes are like, and particularly of how big they are. The second is peculiar: for reasons best known to himself, Mr Leinster chooses to turn the story into an anti-robot diatribe. The attack never seems justified in any way. It comes as a shock here because in the two stories that precede "Combat Team", no indication is given that the human economy has come to depend as heavily on robots as Leinster abruptly says it does; and the whole thing becomes pretty ridiculous when no robot ever comes onstage in this story either. The mutated Kodiak bears which the sole proponent of the anti-robot party to appear uses instead of robots are a lovely notion, but never really seem to come to life.

Still, it isn't a bad story, and the other three are fine. In "Solar Constant" Bordman has to lick a serious temperature drop that threatens to freeze everyone on the planet to death (the solution is a dilly); in "Sand Doom" the vital (and fascinating) landing grid has been buried by--surprise!--sand; and in "The Swamp Was Upside Down" the island which is the only habitable land on the planet is sliding slowly and inexorably into the ocean. Bordman solves these problems quietly and in believable but surprising ways. The book as a whole is science fiction at damned near its best--although a long way from its most pretentious.

THE DAWNING LIGHT, by Robert Randall (serialized in Astounding Science Fiction; March, April, May, 1957).

At this point, we say goodbye to the sweetness-and-light stuff for this issue. And come to an interesting incidental observation, which has probably occurred to many other regular readers of Astounding as well as to me. To wit: John W. Campbell, for months and months now, has been printing short stories that are, for the most part, absolutely hideous; serials that have good stuff in them but can be unreservedly recommended only if you value length above all else; and novelets that are, by and large, all that a faithful fan could ask for.

The Dawning Light is the fourth story in a series. The first three were novelets; they were repetitive, but fairly entertaining. The serial compounds the repetition, and is hardly entertaining at all.

The planet Nidor was a pretty peaceful place until the Earthmen came along. In fact, it was stagnant. The stagnancy is thrown in the reader's face again and again, even though the story is told from the viewpoint of various Nidorians. The Nidorians are not supposed to realize that the Earthmen are there to stir them up and get them started on the road to space; the reader realizes it virtually from the word go. About the only thing that could keep the reader going until the end is curiosity about the full details of the Earthmen's motives--and curiosity can stretch only so far.

Critic at Large (5)

The Nidorians plot to get rid of the Earthmen, sometimes working together, sometimes not. Their plots, on the whole, sound like the ways and means a neofan might use to take over the dictatorship of the H3P; they're just about as imaginative, they make just about as much sense--and of course they fail. Much of the wordage is taken up with the financial machinations of one Kris McKym Yorgen, the more-or-less hero of this bedraggled tale; these machinations are inconsistent and unconvincing, and would be laughable if they weren't so dull.

Only once--when one of the elder Nidorians is made to realize that he has been betraying his people all his life--does the story approach giving the reader any idea of how the people involved might feel about all these shennanigans; this scene occupies a mere couple of pages of the third installment, after which the story goes its muddy and maddening way again. Eventually, all the secrets are revealed--not through interesting action but through a stagy speech. And the whole thing dies a richly deserved death. Or does it?--there are rumors of yet another sequel.

Mr Campbell is still playing coy about the identity of Robert Randall, which has been revealed in at least two other places to be a collaboration between Robert Silverberg and Randall Garrett. It is intriguing to note that, separately, Silverberg and Garrett are competent and imaginative writers. It's a shame that, in collaboration, their weaknesses rather than their strengths come to the fore, and they produce such miserably dull monologues.

TRI-INFINITY, by Barry P. Miller (Other Worlds Science Stories, March, 1957).

I read this out of curiosity, just to see what Mr Palmer was making all the fuss ("...brilliant new writer...a giant ahead of all the writers of his time...") about. That is, I tried to read it. Actually, I waded religiously through the first half, then started to skim.

Mr Miller may be the greatest thing since Weinbaum--but his greatness, if so, rests on some quality that escapes me completely. His writing is crude. He has no new ideas: this is an alternate-universe story, and the only remotely original thought is the suggestion that the hero may have gotten split into two different people while getting tossed into his alternate universe, which turns out to be misleading. As fast-paced adventure stuff, Tri-Infinity can be judged by its climax: the evil villain has kidnapped the heroine and carried her off to his impregnable castle; the hero, who is worried sick about what may be happening to his girlfriend, takes a couple of months off to make some dynamite before going to the rescue.

I kind of hope Mr Palmer succeeds in making a living out of flying saucers and chili powder. He obviously can't do it out of science fiction any more; he's forgotten what the stuff is.

--CAL (May, 1957)

lazarette

Andy Young

no address on letter

Dear Shaws,

I enjoyed Jean's article--I hadn't seen it for so long that I'd forgotten about it--and I'd like to point out that certain parts of astronomy resemble geology in this way. There are planets that we know very little about; even the nature of the surface of the Moon is uncertain (some people claim that the dust is only a fraction of an inch thick, and others say it's miles thick, and that you'd have a terrible time trying to land a spaceship there without getting buried). Here again is a case in which there are real conditions of some sort which are capable of being experienced in the ordinary way, but which no one knows for sure about. But the great difference is, of course, that we can someday travel to remote points in space, but we cannot travel to the distant past. Hence the astronomical problem is immediately soluble, in principle, at least. But the geological predicament is hopeless.

You have a remarkable letter section this time. I found the letters from neofans fascinating, particularly the first one. Gads, I can remember when I was a neofan...choke...snif...

I'm sort of glad Keith Nelson was "vastly more confused than formerly" about the Q. Mech. and Relativity. One of the points I wanted to make was that these subjects are considerably deeper and less easy to understand than the slick articles you read in magazines like LIFE and POPULAR SCIENCE would lead you to believe. Most people do not realize how different the microcosm and the macrocosm really are from common experience, and if I've left one person a bit shaken in his faith in popularizations, I think I've done some good. It isn't that relativistic mechanics and quantum mechanics are inherently esoterically obscure and difficult to understand--for they are really rather simple in principle, once you have the necessary mathematical background--it's just that they deal with events which cannot be observed in the realm of ordinary experience, but must be observed through scientific instruments, in the form of meter readings and dial settings. Hence you cannot understand such things correctly in terms of everyday concepts and "artists' conceptions" and the like, but only through the formal medium of the mathematical theories. Relativistic mechanics (special relativity, that is) can be perfectly well understood by anyone who has had high-school algebra and I urge people who are curious about the subject to read a book on it, since it is so easy to comprehend. Quantum mechanics, unfortunately, requires a good deal more mathematics; I'm afraid all the average layman can do is accept the fact that the pictures of atoms in LIFE are somewhat informative illustrations, but are basically incorrect. At least let him not be kidded into thinking he understands what atoms are like; he doesn't. Better he should know of his ignorance, than remain ignorant and not know it.

Gads, Jerry Greene sounds like a 14-year-old neofan! A cliché come true. This allows me to deliver a lecture on adolescents.

It seems to me, both from my personal experience and from what I see of others, that adolescence is the time when people are driven

furthest toward conformity in thought and action. It is the time when people are most strongly patriotic and think pure, noble thoughts about The American Way (instead of perverse, irreverent thoughts). Adolescents strive more strongly to please their peers and conform to their standards than dogs try to please their masters. I tend to think of adolescence as the time just before the Great Disillusion--the disillusion with religion, politics, and society in general.

Now, with all this conventional thinking that goes on during adolescence, it is not surprising that strange concepts--such as those encountered in special relativity--may be hard to swallow. On the one hand, perhaps this is why one of your neofans found my article confusing; on the other hand, this may account for the popularity of a great deal of science fiction, in which strange places and ideas are reduced to the commonplace.

I hope no one takes this as an "attack" on adolescents. It's merely an interesting train of thought, and not necessarily a valid one.

I boggle at George Spencer thinking "Would you let YOUR Negro marry a daughter?" might be an error. What sort of environment does he live in, to think such a thing?

I'm glad, of course, that he liked my article. His remark about space limitations is quite true, of course; but it was not my purpose to inform the reader about the details of the theories covered--there are plenty of books available for that purpose--but merely to call attention to these matters, which fans are apt to talk glibly about without much understanding. There are topics that often come up in conversations among fans--especially fans of the more serious type--and it is their relation to fandom and stuff that makes them suitable subjects for a fanzine article. It seems a pity that such subjects, which are far from incomprehensible to the average fan, or even the average human, are so widely misunderstood.

Andy

((The right to be confused is the right to be free.))

Ron Parker

714 West 4th Street

Tulsa 7, Oklahoma

Dear Lee and/or Larry:

First thing to comment on, naturally, is my story. Hmmm. Somewhere in a letter of mine I believe I said you could edit at your discretion. Boy, did you ever edit. Actually, I detect occasional additional touches, some slight bits of re-writing, etc. I could check the carbon and probably discover many other slightly rearranged sentences, but who cares. I don't. Not that much. For the most parts the additions made added greatly to the story. I laffed aloud at your little injected line, "He stared back." Other inserts and changes were a bit less laff provoking, but nonetheless humorous. As a whole, I think you added something more to the story and I appreciate the touches that were made. My only complaint are the innumerable typos throughout the story. ((I counted 6 in the 7 pages of text.)) But then, I make a lot of typos too, particularly in letters. But I usually manage to eliminate most in my zines, and my ms are usually typed very carefully the second and final time. But typos DO slip in, so... But you should watch this a mite closer. I'm in a good humor tonight, so I don't feel like criticizing much. Last night I tried to tear some poor zine apart. Tonight... eh.

Ron

((The right to edit is the right to be free.))

Lazarette (3)

Larry Stark III

c/o Youngs 10 Sumner Rd Cambridge 38, Mass

Dear LeeH & Cohort,

THE CRINGING MAN is probably a whacking good satire, because it's funny to me even though I haven't read the book; needless to say I'm glad to see that Ted has achieved a legendary stature of his own...even though I worry sometimes that people like Ron write about him without knowing him well enough.

Glad also to see the cover by Ted White...a signature I frankly would never have recognized; it's amazingly more adaptable than style Ted had hammered out a year ago. This, and the art-experiments he was doing last FAPAcon leave me thrilled and excited.

Sorry to see George Spencer so over-eager in the letter-column; from personal contact I can sww ar he's not as Holier-than-LeeH normally. Maybe he was rushed.

Was THE FROZEN YEAR marketed as science-fiction? I had thought that recently publishers had been labelling even Obviously science-fiction-material as anything BUT science-fiction, in order to take the curse of Juvenilia out of it. What happened with this apparently border-line case? Or did Ballantine think Blish's name would sell more if s-f fans thought the new book was sheer s-f? Or did CAL review a book not labelled s-f because it was REALLY s-fish, good, and by a science-fiction writer? Or isn't it great, except judged beside inferior s-f?

The Youngstuff pleases, of course...most of it does, no matter what the particulat given-name involved.

Oh, if hyperfannish George Spencer has given you any inferiority feelings, I'd like to say that all your VISIBLE goofs so far have been easily reconstructed, and never worried me. No one nobices, really; you've kept content too omnipresent to let a typo or two obscure the view.

Larry,

((The right to make typos is the right to be free.))

Arthur Thomson

17 Brockham House, Brockham Drive, London SW2

Dear LeeH and Larry,

Thish see's a clearer picture of the policy and etc of Celsy showing up. Critic At Large has in two issues become the prozine review column in fanCom, and I still plump for it being Larry, and don't give Geis a second thought. It has bite, bit it doesn't leave blood or a nasty taste in the mouth. Haven't read The Frozen Year, over here, but that is a wowser revoo--it would be a wowser revoo of any book. Agree the whole way with the bit about dust jacket blurbs. They are wore than useless as an appraisal of the contents of a book.

That was a nice illo of Tucker on Bloch's story, but why have the Grennell home illoed too? The story itself? Well, Bloch is superb, but I disagree with his statement that soon, or should I say, one day, fandom will consist of lovable ol' codgers, no, look at the way Tucker and Grennell and leaping into the fray and producing neofen babies by the dozen, and Willis and White have added to the "We Want Fandom Young" league. ((And remember the Young Young!))

Again, why the illo of GM Carr on the Ellison exposure? I thought T S Elliott only wrote for the Backwoods journal? What position is

Lazarette (4)
Thomson (2)

Harlan contemplating taking in the armed services? Chief of Staff or just NATO Commander in Chief? I'm sure he will do the army a lot of Good, I'm sure.

((At last report Harlan was marching through Georgia...ed))

T'was a nice follow up to Andy, by Jean--who do we get next? The young Young on Diapers I Have Known?

Lazarette was nice, but only two pages--we want more!

Arthur

((The right to be Young is the right to be Free.))

The Rev. John R. Harness Founding Church of Scientology of New York

Dear Lees and Larry,

Come to think of it, that was a devastating analysis of Gertrude Khar in #1. The first thing you've ever run, Lees, that could be called libelous. But it was so thorough a job my heart goes out to you. Nobody, but nobody, could do such a job of razzing.

As for Andy's article -- a good piece of writing on a technical subject and opaque-- a very lucid article. The whole premise smacks of Charlatanry, tho. If Occum's razor be supplied, the whole edifice of Relativity and Quantum Mechanics does look weird. That diffraction pattern behavior....

In fact, I wonder....Just to be silly, let's try omitting the electron (photon, I mean). You switch on a lamp, and the bulb glows: photons stream from bulb to wall and reflect. The ceiling reflects light.

Omitting photons, we get the following: the bulb glows; the ceiling or wall is supposed to reflect light when the bulb is on, therefore it does. No photons necessary. Horribly simple--irritatingly so.

Going on to more pleasant things, we come to Critic At Large. I too with that Stars My Destination weren't a parody of the Demolished Man. It makes me bristle my unbristled. If Bester had cut out some characters and solidified the Jaunting, TSMD would have been comparable, though of less impact, to DM. It was a riot of color -- but a riot.

I liked it.

Jack Harness

((The right to be a photon is the right to be free.))

Ted White 704 West Broad Street Falls Church, Va.

Howdy...

Surprisingly enough, I didn't think much of Bloch's piece. I'm sure I'd have thought more of it if he had sent it to me, but even so, it is a rather empty thing, as in fact all his recent stuff seems to be. I enjoy the serious Bloch who Has Something To Say, and Says It (as in Hyphen on Joyce & Ulysses) far more than the 'funny' Bloch who apparently writes off the top of his head. (His column in MADGE, however, usually straddles things and comes off well until he begins to review fanzines...)

Lazarette (5)
White (2)

I am fairly certain that Larry wrote the profile on Ellison--the "It was pure luck" bit seemed a fair tip-off. Was this to commemorate his departure, with that of Elvis Presley, into the Army?

The Cringing Man might better have been retitled "...Fan", I think. Still, this is powerfully egoboosting. Jeeze, you know that Parker guy thinks I am a BNF? As to the story itself, it seems loose. The bit about Bloch is never properly explained, and other parts will be meaningless to those who aren't up on DC fandom. Still, I am glad that you are running what you like, rather than what you think some of your readers might like. If everyone printed only what everyone could understand things would get pretty dull and static. The plot is a good one, with a genuine point, and justifies the buildup. But who do you think you are, continuing a story? Richard Geis will GROUCH! I liked it...

Jean's article was interesting, informative and inspires no comments.

CAL was quite good as usual. I discussed the possibility of his being Geis, and Eney agreed with me that it was a good possibility. I favor that to the theory that you and Larry write the reviews alternately.

The letters bolster my opinion that this was a Make White A BNF issue. Here I did the cover, you mention me on page 6, a story is written around me, and two letters refer to me. Where will this end? Pretty soon you'll have me thinking I'm a BNF up there in the clouds with the rest of you, and I'll become insufferable.

I was gabberflasted to see Spencer, Sober, Industrious, Good Fellow, Spencer compare the format of OUTRE with that of CELSY and then suggest that I was the reason for both. I'll take some credit for OUTRE's--ZIP was the first or one of the first fmz George ever saw, and made an impression on him--but I recognize CELSY's as a variation on QUANDRY's--and hardly a variation. Perhaps it is the paper--that and the pica type are the only similarities in format apparant to me. Oh well, I should complain at such flattery. Gads.

Ted

((The right to complain is the right to be free.))

Yeditorial apologies to all of those of you who sent in interesting letters, but who got crowded out of the letter column. There's only so...much room in a zine this size, alas. And we have principles against publishing a larger zine (namely, the added work entailed).

Newsy note: L. Shaw hopes to be moving its editorial, publishing, and art offices as well as its living quarters, sometime in the near future. So if you're sending cash or other highly valuable items, you might better send them to Larry T. Shaw, Royal Publications, 47 E. 44th St. New York 17, N.Y. until further notice. Please send regular letter-type mail, and so forth, to Manor Road, tho. At least until the end of June. Not only would it be a shame for Larry to have to lug all that mail home from the office, but I'd be sad, without something in the morning post (only post) to brighten my day.

-LeeH for
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