



((Once more the great satanic mills of the BSFA belch forth a Matrix. For some explanation of the contents and the raison d'etre herein, please examine the section on the questionnaire results. All will be fully revealed in M51 (we hope), many requests granted and a damn sight better job done....))

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This will ensure you further information on the BSFA and its activities. Sample mailings can be obtained for £1-50, the sum being deductible from the price of a full membership when you quite naturally take one out - DON'T YOU ?!

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This issue dedicated to struggling typists and Lemsip, and to all those who sent in their opinions, harsh, soft, constructive and vitriolic.

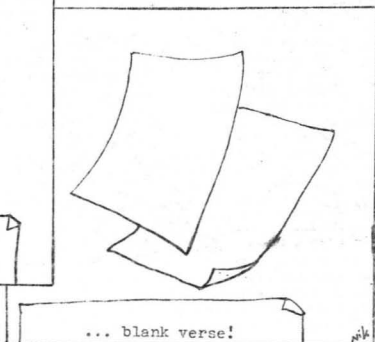
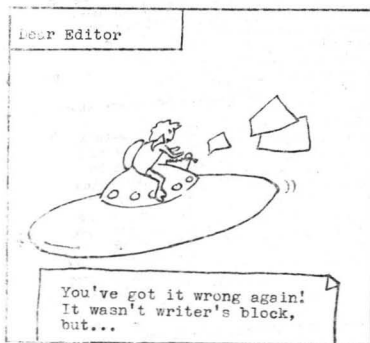
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'Printer's Note: I want to apologise for the poor quality of printing on some pages of this Matrix, BUT I received the copy so very late it was all I could do to get the whole thing printed. In fact, on some days the weather was so cold the ink was solidifying in the machine! So, many apologies - next time both Simon and I will try harder.

Eve Harvey)

((Fanzine reviews and clubs are held over until the new year, when the new layout and article range will be 'launched'. Laugh not, unbelievers. 1984 will be a jolly year, one way or another.))



EDITORIAL



My Life in a Forest of Nettles (or How I Grew Up?)

A cold night, and under the pressure of three days' intermittent rains, the sewers belch forth their dubious contents, drivelling down the streets hour after hour. I wake up, throat parched, and stare at the half-curtained windows. Something wrong - I walk over to the window nearest the bed, and manhandle the drapes. A ghastly orange mist has absorbed the world around me - this street, the next, and the next. All vision is a blotched, unhealthy orange-red, pulsing, flowing. Arterial gush, slow venous drain, washing the street while the whole mass reverberates to an unfailing heartbeat - "Hell itself breathes out." I am only just in the conscious phase of life, and it takes a while to adjust to this vision. Hmm, colour due to a low cloudbank reflecting the motorway lights and diffusing their glare, sound due to the University Union generators and movement caused by temperature changes and a light breeze. Check, confirm all this, then turn the answer back upon myself. Why should I think anything else? The hellish vision which hit me before I could rationalise it all had no basis in fact or experience, and all the practical stuff, the dull product of everyday existence, was ready at the tip of my lobes. Yet, in this, and in many other situations, the obvious explanation was the last to hit home. Then I dragged myself back to a rich and fantasy-laden childhood....

I stumble through the broken remains of some unimaginable structure. It has taken me fifteen minutes to hack and push my way through a great thicket of stinging nettles, beating back clouds of those silver moths who frequent the Lord Urticus, smarting occasionally as a leaf whips back and delivers its load, startled once as a frog twists under my ill-placed heel and shoots into the green depths. I am six, and I am small. The crumbling ruin of an old chalk cottage is to me the wasteland of an alien civilisation - I have no idea what this pit, these walls, could ever be for a previous cycle of existence which my parents dare not mention? At this stage, it might be argued that I have not enough raw knowledge to outguess the world and thus categorise it. But twenty years later?

Fantasy is the word which links all the episodes of my life. The best were at least enhanced by it, the worst were softened and muffled by it. Not the epic high fantasy beloved of some writers, but those far more subtle elements which can be nearly there, shifting vision from the mundane to the marvellous. The heroic epics are fantasy, sure, but so far removed from your everyday life - there's a built-in safety factor which prevents the fantasy from ever feeding back to you, and in the end it doesn't change your life, it doesn't teach. The Gandalf Factor. The next man who comes to my door with a long white beard and a sense of hidden power around him will be from the DHSS, not from an ancient order of wizards. There are fantasy books which are so high that all they do is provide some relief from those occasional grey patches that the Cosmic Repairman slaps on leaky bits of the world. They don't seem to help with the regular, grubby universe we inhabit on a regular, grubby basis. I look to the few writers who hand me back part of my childhood, but with a new slant. Those who can make tangled malevolence out of broken gutters and backstreets, who

give me that old favourite, the 'sense of wonder', without making me feel sub- or super-human.

I'm really writing this because I've just read a series of odd fantasy novels over the last week, a clutch of books suffering from Gil-galad's Syndrome. You know, everyone's a High King, or a lost princess, or the rightful heir to a majestic empire. It's fun, but it doesn't quite gel. And so, I turned back to writers like Susan Cooper, Patricia Wrightson, John Gordon and Alan Garner, writers who make me see bricks, drainpipes, fences and televisions in a new light.

Perhaps it's not strange when you think that some of the most effective fantasy stories are those written deliberately for children or for adolescents, for people that are still touched by wonder when rummaging through a tumbled-down cottage or an overgrown tangle of weeds. For kids, who aren't cynical enough yet to be sure whether that is a rock looming over there, or a nargun waiting to pounce swiftly on some unsuspecting creature and crush it to the marrow. The kagoul-clad ramblers on the hillside become agents of the Morthbrood and the great stones become ward-places and ancient gateways. In John Gordon's work, a damp old log wrapped in a carpet becomes a symbol and a focus of vengeance and malevolence which has survived the centuries, brooding. The television seems to have far too much interference on it tonight, and the sounds and shadows of the full-world slip into the half-world. Eventually, you put down the book and step out into a world which is still partly fantasy, ewhere the same everyday objects are evident - but have they any hidden power or significance? The fantasy allows you to apply yourself to reality, not necessarily to escape it, and makes the ordinary become tinged with the extraordinary.

I remember a piece of stone I found by the beach four or five years ago, a stone which glowed and cut into my daydreaming. Is it the Eldest Nargun, crying its defiance at the ocean waves, or the lost keystone from an ancient magic? Probably neither, but it's nice to ponder, sometimes.

Part of fantasy in this garb is the ability to see the hopes, joys and possibilities that are not immediately evident in the humdrum of everyday existence. A way of seeing the nearly-impossible in the all-too-likely. Such a gift should not be cast aside likely, because it's this which keeps us going through the gloomiest, most desperate times.

PKD SOCIETY

You are invited to join THE PKD SOCIETY,

an informal, international association of people interested in the writing of PHILIP K. DICK.

British Membership is £7.00 for one year, Airmail, £3.50 Surface Mail, and includes at least four issues of a newsletter edited by Paul Williams, literary executor of the estate of Philip K. Dick.

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P.K. DICK SOCIETY

and send to:-

V.C. Buckle & K.G. Bowden

47 Park Avenue

Barking, Essex IG11 8QU.



NEWS and views

The main news this issue is really the internal examination of the questionnaires entrails, as this will help in determining what sort of news and information the next few issues carry. Still, all this will be dealt with a little later....

I walked round the Leeds bookshops which carry SF to any degree, and I must admit that I wasn't very impressed by the general effort put into the Venture into Science Fiction promotion this October. There were a few attempts at window displays, but inside the shops, the main areas where there could have been some real effort were still devoted to Jane Fonda books and books on the royals. No real leads as to where to find the SF sections, and in the actual sections just the same old stuff, often not even enticingly displayed. Why did so many retailers miss out on an obvious chance to plug the SF field? It will be interesting to see the responses from the bookshops as to how the promotion affected their SF sales.

For those who follow comic art and strip work, the Eagle Awards have been given; quite reasonably, Warrior, the relatively new British black and white magazine, won nine of the ten awards. A comic which produces high quality strips with sometimes an incisive scripting, both witty and blackly humorous, it has received virtually unanimous acclaim, both from the UK and from markets abroad. It is the only British comic apart from 2000AD which presents quality work on the main markets, and the awards were as follows -

Best Writer -	Alan Moore in <u>W</u>
Best Character-	Marvelman in <u>W</u>
Best Villain-	Kid Marvelman in <u>W</u>
Best Story-	"Marvelman" in <u>W</u> 1-6
Best Cover-	W7 by Austin
Best Artist-	Bolland, for "Zirk" strip in <u>W</u>
Best New Mag-	<u>Warrior</u>
Best Magazine-	<u>Warrior</u>
Best Supp.Char.-	Zirk in <u>W</u>
Best Supp.Character most deserving of own strip-	Judge Anderson in <u>2000AD</u>

Warrior has also helped to give credibility to mainstream British comic art, and to show the Americans how much talent there is to be tapped in the UK, with artists like Brian Bolland being busy for DC Comics and Alan Moore probably doing some work for both Marvel and DC. Both Warrior and 2000AD have a growing American support as the word spreads.

One of the most interesting fantasy lists around now seems to be the expanding Unicorn list from Allen & Unwin. Not only have they reprinted some fantasy classics, such as The Silver Stallion and The King of Elfland's Daughter, but there are some excellent books forthcoming. In 1984 we should expect Beyond the Lands of Never, a collection by Maxim Jakubowski following on the traces of Lands of Never, an anthology out this year which included Horwood, Silverberg, Ballard, Carter and Aldiss amongst its contributors. Gwyneth Jones has written Divine Endurance which comes out in a hardback from Allen & Unwin next year, along with The Soul Master by Graham Dunstan Martin. Later in the year we should see Colin Greenland's Daybreak on a Different Mountain, The Summer Tree by Guy Gavriel Kay and Greensight by Angela Shackleton Hill. More news will follow as these near publication date, along with an in-depth exhaustive report as to why so many writers have the urge to flaunt three names at once. I suppose when your middle name's Gavriel or Shackleton it sounds a bit better then when you're just plain Simon John Polley. My father had no imagination.

Some of you will remember a mention of Auguries a few issues ago - a new fan fiction magazine - and Nik Morton has sent us a note to the effect that Auguries 2 will be out soon. It will feature stories by Sue Thomason, Hilary Robinson, Dorothy Davies, Chris Naylor, Nick Daws and Nik Morton, and is available from Nik at 235 West St., Fareham, Hants. PO16 0HZ (50p + 18p p&p). If you missed No.1 there are still a few left; send £1-18 for issues 1 and 2 together.

CONVENTIONS

SEACON comes up on 20th-23rd April 1984 - held at the Metropole Hotel, Brighton. An Eastercon and a Eurocon together, it should be a pretty big affair - details from Pauline Morgan, 321 Sarehole Road, Hall Green, Birmingham B28 0AL.

TYNECON 2 -THE MEXICON will be held at the Royal Station Hotel, Newcastle from 25th-28th May 1984, concentrating on being an SF orientated con with a good film programme, friendly atmosphere and lots of fannish items to sample. Registrations are handled by Sue Williams, 19 Jesmond Dene Road, Jesmond, Newcastle-upon-Tyne NE2 3QT (attending reg. a mere £5!)

OXCON 84 is over the August Bank Holiday. Membership is £8 from M.S.Porter, 28 Asquith Road, Rose Hill, Oxford.

Should anyone have a lot of ready cash, the 1984 Worldcon is LA CON II held in California 30th August- 3rd September. Attending fee is \$40, and details come from PO Box 8442, Van Nuys, CA 91409, USA.

For anyone who's interested in the Australian scene, the 1985 Worldcon will be held in that southern fan hemisphere; details are available from the UK Agent - Joseph Nicholas, 22 Denbigh Street, Pimlico, London SW1V 2ER. We have also been sent news of a new one-off Fan Fund, the Shaw Fund, which is designed to get Bob Shaw to the 1985 Worldcon mentioned above. As a renowned SF author and a notable speaker at conventions, he has been in demand for many conventions but has never been to an Australian con, despite having been to cons in the UK, USA and Europe. This would really be of most interest to fans who are actually in Australia already, but anyone planning to attend the Melbourne convention might be keen to encourage this venture. Organised by Marc Ortlieb and Justin Ackroyd, the Fund asks for donations to be sent to:

THE SHAW FUND,
c/o G.P.O. Box 2708X,
Melbourne,
Victoria 3001
Australia



Interzone

THE MAGAZINE OF IMAGINATIVE FICTION

is now Britain's only periodical devoted to high-quality science fiction and fantasy. It is edited and produced by an independent team of six people. All proceeds from the magazine go to pay the contributors.

INTERZONE 5, Autumn 1983, contains:

- "The Flash! Kid" by Scott Bradfield
- "The Tithonian Factor" by Richard Cowper
- "Novelty" by John Crowley
- "What Cindy Saw" by John Shirley
- "Strange Great Sins" by M. John Harrison

INTERZONE 6, Winter 1983/84, contains:

- "Something Coming Through" by Cherry Wilder
- "The Monroe Doctrine" by Neil Ferguson
- "The Views of Mohammed el Hassif" by John Hendry
- "Angela's Father" by L. Hluchan Sintetos
- "Kitecadet" by Keith Roberts
- plus original graphics by Roger Dean

INTERZONE 7, Spring 1984, will contain a long story of devastating impact, "The Unconquered Country" by Geoff Ryman, plus new work by Bruce Sterling and others.

For a four-issue subscription in the UK send £5, payable to INTERZONE, to 124 Osborne Road, Brighton BN1 6LU. Overseas subscribers please send £6 by International Money Order—we regret Eurocheques cannot be accepted.

American subscribers send \$10, payable to INTERZONE, to our US agent, 322 Ximeno Avenue, Long Beach, California 90814.

Please specify which issue you wish your subscription to commence with. Single copies of the magazine are £1.50 (£1.75 overseas), or \$3, each.

REVIEWS

SOMEWHERE ELSE

Review by Philip Nichols

Radio 4 Play

"Somewhere Else" is not plasteel-and-fluorescent-lighting SF - it's barely SF at all. It is set in the not too distant future, and uses the frame of a (not too distant) future world to comment on this world.

The central character, Jo , is a 12½ year old girl who, with her younger male friend Max, is running away from the oppression of the city to find the sea, boats, and a means of escape to SomewhereElse. On the way she and Max find Alma, a kindly old woman in the company of a mongol girl, Poppy. They are living in a dis-used railway station, past which runs the nuclear waste train on its way to the power station. Alma takes Jo to the sea, but it is not the sea of Jo's dreams - no boats, no sparkling colours; instead the beach is fenced off by barbed wire. For Jo (for us all), there is no escape to Somewhere Else, for there is Nowhere Else.

Grace, part of an underground movement, uses her somewhat antique viddy-camera to record events which could never be shown on the official viddy channels; the last event, Alma's death.

Jo undergoes a double transformation: she learns to face life, not to run away from it; and she turns escape to revolt. The rural setting contrasts with the urban and social decay from which Jo seeks escape. The railway station serves as a waiting place, waiting for the sole train making use of the line.. Kindly Alma steps in the line of the inexorable train of 'progress', the train that stokes the nuclear furnace which has already created a massive 'accident' but nevertheless continues to power the cities and provide fuel for massive weapon systems. Inevitably, the woman is squashed uncaringly by that 'progress'; but her death can in turn stoke the furnace of revolt.

But the revolt here is not against technology itself - after all, the underground is sustained by the endless replaying of Grace's viddy; instead the revolt is against the oppression for which technology is used (or, perhaps, the oppression of which technology is a symptom). The government officially controls all news and information systems; the net result of individual apathy, unthinking racism and unquestioning acceptance of force-fed but empty viddy images is an uncaring society, naturally oppressive to caring individuals, who naturally become the minority, the outcasts. When Alme steps before the train, it is no coincidence that she is dressed as lollipop lady and carrying a sign: 'STOP - CHILDREN! The revolt here is cleary of the female against the male, the (traditionally) femine against the (traditonally) masculine. Curfew prevents women walking the streets at night - but if they chose to do so, well, they deserve all they get. Significantly, the only males in the play are two characters (reffered to in the cast list simply as Man and Boy) who, with dogs, are chasing after Grace for purposes sexual, and Max - who is a snivelling, whining I-want-my-mummy-type seven year old who becomes equated, dramatically speaking , with the mongol Poppy. The major characters - the truly sympathetic characters - are female.

Gilly Fraser's play is forceful and quietly stated, and certainly dramatically valid. However, I personally find her political solution ultimately questionable. By emphasis of the female over the male, the 'feminine' over the 'masculine', is she not re-affirming the stereotypes of male and female ? She seeks not to overthrow the dominant world-view, founded in the paradigm of exclusive male/female possession of amsculine/feminine attributes, but rather to reverse superficial elements of it.

What makes "Somewhere Else" unique is that it is an original radio drama with a futuristic (albeit rural) setting that is convincing enough to allow such a discussion.

In action, the play is not visual - a play of talk rather than tightly - plotted events (climactic martyrdom of Alma happens off-stage) - but director Kay Patrick's use of geography provides a clear mental image of spatial relationships. Though most of the drama is confined to the single 'set' of the station waiting room, one has a detailed feel of where everything is; no maps are needed here. Reverentially-toned references to the 'Accident' and the like lead to a few groans, but any faults are really minor. A most engrossing production.

MALEVIL

Review by Simon Ings

Directed by Christian de Chalonge

C.4 opened their new season of World Cinema with the British premiere of the French post-holocaust fantasy, "Malevil".

The holocaust occurs when the leading citizens of the small farming community of Malevil are holding a meeting in the wine cellar of the Mayor's castle. Staggering to the surface after the blast, they find the land overcast, barren, and desolate. Their attempts at rebuilding something of their former pastoral life go well until other survivors, notably a mini-totalitarian state run by the fanatic Fulbert (Jean-Louis Trintignant), make their presence felt.

These later attack Malevil, are defeated, and finally reconciled to work on Malevil fields. It is now late summer, and we are presented with an idealised pastoral scene, shattered suddenly by a terrifying thundering, and the incongruous and disorientating appearance of a fleet of helicopters, come to 'rescue' the survivors form their new paradise and thus leave these 'devasted' and 'uninhabitable' lands open to scientific and military experimentation. The film sounds promising, no? But there was one little problem with "Malevil". It was despairingly, crushingly DULL.

Come on, admit it, all you hardened SF fans, how many of you put yourselves out of your misery, and watched the Charles Bronson movie instead? I don't blame you. Malevil failed to satisfy on almost every level. The film initially presented a vividly, terrifyingly realistic picture of apocalyptic destruction. The depiction of the high winds, the unbearable heat, and the desolation left behind was beautifully crafted. Dead leaves swirl through the air. Soot engrimes everything. A melted motorbike leans, half-congealed, against a wall. Hideously mutilated corpses of men and horses are scattered indiscriminately across the castle courtyard. But the realism is incomplete. There is no fallout, no radiation sickness, no cancer. Fair enough -- "Malevil" is a fantasy, after all. But when you mix realism with neo-pastoral fantasy, the film has to be sufficiently engagin to fuse these two seemingly contradictory approaches, otherwise you are left with an incoherent mess.

There are ways that you can fuse fact and fantasy, and some of the best SF films, from "Solaris" to "E.T.", rely on this fusion. They do so by presenting a crazy premise sympathetically so as to put so-called 'reality' in a new perspective.

This is, no doubt, what director Christian de Chalonge hoped for when reality, (in the shape of the rescue team) suddenly destroys pastoral fantasy at the end of film. The sorry fact, though, is that the ending makes us all feel merely cheated. Clearly something has gone wrong, somewhere. The truth is, the development of the fantasy has never been particularly interesting from the start. The protagonists who keep a stunned silence in the first few days after the holocaust, never seem to get these voices back again, and merely mooch around, looking disconsolate and miserable. Except for the Mayor's idiot son, MOMO callously portrayed by Jacques Villeret, there is no differentiation of character among the "Malevil" survivors.

Indeed, the film suffers much from Blade Runner's Disease, its baddies are more engaging than its goodies. There is only one real baddie - Jean-Louis Trintignant as the 'Director' of the terrorist regime. Full of clichés about the survival of the fittest, flickering his gaze this way and that with paranoid relish, he is the sole ray of interest and individuality in the whole turkey. Until the Mayor shoots him. Party-poop.

Perhaps this refusal to characterise was part of de Chalonge's attempt at objective 'realism'. But because there are no characters, there is no conflict, no tension, and without these, there is no drama. De Chalonge seems slightly, but only slightly, more adept at setting, and visual symbolism. The petrified forest, complete with overcooked wild cat, is one of the most visually stunning sequences. The girl, Evelyn's ability to warble bird-song is a neat touch of overt symbolism. Further, the reappearance of wasps, lizards, birds, and then field-mice on the farm is a well-outlined progression of re-birth and renewal.

There are many other examples. The fact that they are easily identified on a first showing, however, illustrated how miserably shallow the whole exercise was. The premise behind "Malevil" was so hackneyed and the characters so tedious, what excellent scenery and what symbolic touches there were, were the film's only interesting features, and they could hardly be expected to keep your attention for the two hours and ten minutes farrago stretched to.

What then were we given? The usual bad French film - threadbare ideas, and an actionless, dreamless script of monosyllables and clichés, played out in a detailed, well-crafted, original setting it did not deserve.

This was a very disappointing film.

BLUE THUNDER

Review by Philip Collins

Directed by John Badham

The film is set in the very near future. In facta caption at the beginning of the film states: that all the machinery and weaponry shown already exists and are in use today. The police force are using helicopters for nighttime surveillance of crime and a bit of peeking in peoples' windows if the officers feel like it.

Roy Scheider plays Frank Murphy, a pilot assigned to test a new armour-plated super-helicopter packed to the rotor-blades with radar, computers and high powered weaponry. In a demonstration of its power the helicopter, nicknamed "The Blue Thunder"; hovers over a mocked-up street scene blasting away at cardboard cut-outs which represent terrorists and innocent passers-by. The terrorists are all blown away, but so are a number of the passers-by. "Only one innocent for every ten terrorists," comments one official. "An acceptable ratio."

Whilst out on a testflight Scheider discovers a plot by the authorities to use the Blue Thunder to impose martial law. The chase is then on as the authorities try to stop Scheider before he can make his knowledge public.

Although the first part of the film is slow it is never dull, thanks to the fine acting of the principals particularly Scheider himself and Daniel Stern as his partner and Cany Clark as Scheider's wife. Although the technology and gadgets in the film are very important, the characters are also memorable - a rare accomplishment in SF films.

The final chase sequences in the air and on the ground are amongst the most exciting I have ever seen. Indeed the only sour note in the film is hit by Malcolm McDowell who adopts a cut-glass accent and oozes a pantomime baddiness which is almost laughable at times. But, bar this one flaw, director John Badham, a long way from "Saturday Night Fever" has constructed here a really good excitnig movie.

REVIEW :: REVIEW :: REVIEW :: REVIEW :: REVIEW

FANZINES IN THEORY AND IN PRACTICE: Collected Articles 1976-82 by D.WEST
(180pp A4 duplicated. To be published February 1984. Prepublication price £3/\$10, rising to £4/\$15 on 1 February 1984, £5/\$20 on 1 May 1984, £6/\$25 on 1 August 1984. Cash or (sterling only) cheques to D.West, 48 Norman St, Bingley, West Yorks, BD16 4JT.)

Never in the history of human civilization.... um. Not since the death of Queen Victoria... er, try again. Unaccustomed as I am to public speaking... reduce prices at a stroke... the pound in your pocket... please adjust your dress before leaving... It's difficult to know just how to start a review of the collected fanzine writing of D.West, especially when the thing hasn't yet been published (ever-impecunious D. is trying to drum up advance support so he can buy paper and print the thing). The man himself has put out a publicity flyer containing such useful quotes as famous author Chris Priest's "So fucking good I feel like going up to Bingley and killing him," and not-so-famous author and editor Ted White's "An asshole." (The West attitude to many Americans, but especially Ted White, may be detected in the price structure above, which has caused some scratching of heads in international banking circles.)

To *Matrix* readers D.West was only visible as an artist/cartoonist responsible for deviously manipulative drawings scattered like pearls in the trough of the letter column, and for the awesome (but now defunct) *Death Star Ship Revengeance* serial. What he's best at is writing, though, as evidenced by the fact that his most recent super-colossal extravaganza 'Performance'—which appeared in Malcolm Edwards's *Tappen* in 1982—received five times as many votes as the runners-up in the 1982-3 *Anisble* poll, which is of course frighteningly authoritative. 'Performance' is a tour-de-force running to 36 closely typed pages, which in one extraordinary package offers the D.West Theory of fandom, fanzines, conventions, life, the universe and D.West, intertwined with the least expurgated convention report ever. As a final seal of approval, erstwhile *Matrix* fanzine reviewer Martyn Taylor didn't like it: what greater accolade could you ask? Oh, certainly bits of 'Performance' are slightly substandard, and some of the conclusions are what in the esoteric terminology of literary criticism one might venture to term 'wrong', but if you missed *Tappen* 5 this collection will be worth it for 'Performance' alone.

Also included are two more triffic convention reports, four miscellaneous pieces on books, writing and the urge to wear funny SF costumes, and six of the blockbuster West fanzine-review articles, at least two of which have also picked up a near-classic status. Don't be misled: these things bear about the same resemblance to the mini-listings in *Matrix* as does a major article in *Foundation* or *Vector* to the fifty-two reviews sometimes found in the *Sun*. At bottom, writing is writing whether in John Fowles or in *Paperback Inferno*, and West's opinions on writing are among the most closely-reasoned and entertaining stuff to be found in the SF microcosm, whether inside or outside fanzines. I say this with reluctance, mind you, since one of the people severely treated in some of the review essays is myself. (See how I repay good for evil, West? See how I restrain myself from saying things like "Occasional longwindedness is one of the flaws in West's writing?")

Despite being practically an international expert on D.West (why, I first insulted him back in 1976), I haven't read *all* the material in this anthology. All the previously printed stuff, yes: but D's publicity leaflet promises an 8-page introduction and a 5-page postscript—while since the promise is to produce 180 A4 pages and the great man has belatedly realized that some of the articles were printed on paper smaller than A4, he has been issuing vague threats of a *really long* introduction/PS summarizing all knowledge of fandom, just to make up the stated pagecount. Rush the man your three quid now. (Dave Langford)

((Before giving an idea of the responses to the questionnaire, I'd like to start by printing a LoC/article sent in by Tom Jones of 39 Ripplesmere, Bracknell, Berks. Tom was in at the start of Matrix and thought that the origins may be of interest to present-day members who are unaware of the murky past.....))

I was interested to see your questionnaire and thought you, and other BSFA members, might like to know the background to MATRIX as I believe you weren't a member at its foundation. This is not to say MATRIX now must be a reflection of MATRIX then, circumstances change and consequently needs change but reflecting on the past should not be sneered at.

Back in the early 70s the BSFA was resurrected by a small committee one of whom was Chris Fowler who became editor of VECTOR. He produced a couple of issues of "BSFA News" containing material he thought unsuitable for VECTOR. but. worthy. of publication. Although Chris was addicted to producing VECTOR there was no way he could find enough time to edit both magazines so I became editor of "BSFA News" and changed its name to MATRIX (in line with the mathematical terminology of VECTOR and TANGENT - the BSFA'S fiction magazine)

MATRIX had a specific role, defined by the committee of that time. Its first task was to encourage membership participation (VECTOR tends to have a restricted letter column both in size and content), thus I published letters on any topic.. Initially I published every letter but as the number increased I had to publish only parts of each letter. This ideal has been continued by subsequent MATRIX editors. Thus any suggestion that MATRIX should restrict itself to SF or that some topic is not suitable should be resisted, I remember the outcry about unemployment.

MATRIX was also meant to be a news letter, at that time, and I would guess the situation is still the same, most members receive no other source of news (and probably no other fanzine). Thus we included news about any related SF item, this required considerable work, little of it by myself, and the BSFA was fortunate to have people willing to put in that effort.

Related to this role MATRIX printed reviews on any non-literary SF, ie films, plays, TV, radio and music. For some reason written SF is considered superior to other forms and thus VECTOR is virtually exclusively dedicated to written SF. Perhaps this is the true but I'm starting to doubt it when I see the books currently on sale. During my editorship this was a very popular feature, I remember one article on SF in music creating a phenomenal response.

We also wanted to introduce the membership to fandom so we had a fanzine review column (by Keith Freeman) and we printed information about conventions and other fannish news. It was because I criticised cliques and elitism in fandom that I received a lot of stick from the fannish establishment, this ranged from condescension to virtual hate (I remember some one/fanzine calling me the anti-fan, presumably a relation of the anti-Christ). At that time I had considered myself a fan and I had been very active in the mid 60s, before going to university. Nevertheless I felt it had its faults and I wrote about them, apparently against the fannish code. The interesting thing was the number of letters MATRIX received supporting my views (or accusing me of being too soft on fandom) - surely this was evidence of some problems with fandom at that time.

In retrospect I probably let the debate go on too long and perhaps I went over the top a little as it was "good copy". Undoubtedly it contributed to the BSFA's supposedly anti-fannish stance (though the BSFA had been accused of this long before as MATRIX editor and then Chairman). I used to think this was a bad thing and regret it, but since fandom "took over" the BSFA (to the relief of those of us desperate to get off the committee) nothing seems to have changed. In fact fandom seems to have lost some of its vitality, there being no recognised target. One could draw parallel with the US peace/youth movement after the end of the Vietnam war.

Enough of this, MATRIX was meant to be a two way communication medium so not only did it carry letters from the members, it also printed information on what the committee were doing. Initially this was done in an informal fashion, but later, following criticism from members (and non-members), we had a Chairman's Report which provided a precis of the topics being discussed. Although Alan Dorey initially followed this, recently it has not appeared. I believe this is a serious omission for the majority of the members who do not get other fanzines and thus have no other source of information. Or, perhaps, I should assume the committee is happy with all aspects of the BSFA, and intends to let it tick over as it stands - and thus there is nothing to report.

Those were our primary aims. As editor I allowed myself one personal aim: I printed as much humour as I could, either original or reprinted from fanzines (these reprints introduced members to some of the better writing in fanzines). Other editors have printed their "personal favourites", this is only right as it gives MATRIX character.

((Many thanks to Tom for that brief run-down of M's early days. I would now like to go on to the results of the questionnaire and its implications for the future..))

A NEARLY IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS

SJP

The response to last issue's questionnaire was greater than I had expected, and as they kept coming in until the very last minute before even a revised deadline, I should say immediately that there was no way we could act upon the results for this issue. Therefore the suggestions below will be taken up for M51, when I will be changing somewhat the layout and content of M to accommodate the various views expressed to me over the last year or so. No doubt this will not satisfy everyone, and the overall zine will still be open to quite a lot of criticism, but it may just be an improvement. I am afraid to say that a number of the critics of M and other BSFA zines appears to have virtually no sense of humour at all. The impression is given that they are not involved with the BSFA for pleasure but for some obscure gratification of the need to express their bile in written form. This puzzles me, but then it is only apparently a small minority. Generally, the questionnaires were thoroughly filled in, and I must apologise to some for the lack of space. Enterprising people carried on overleaf and into LoCs.

So, who are you? If I based my understanding of the membership upon the sheets returned, it would seem that the average member is male, and in his early to mid-twenties. He has been with the BSFA for one or two years, and found out about

the BSFA through an advertisement in the back of an SF novel. He is unaware of having a local SF Group, or else he knows there is one but doesn't bother to attend. He goes to some conventions, mainly those in his area. He has some problems with fannish terminology and would like to see a fannish guide. He has not written any pro SF or criticism, but has written the odd letter or article for a fanzine or BSFA publication.

Is this typical of the membership, or only of those who responded? From the figures, only 12% of the membership are female. 25% have been in the BSFA for more than a couple of years, but some of these have managed apparently 5,6 or more years, which is encouraging. The vast majority are still young men with a year or so as members. By far the most requested feature was a full range of media news and information, but so many things were asked for that I'd like to break down some of these issues below.....

NEWS- Information on forthcoming films and films being worked on at this moment. Reviews of recent films, including the work of specific directors in the SF/Fantasy genres. Reviews of videos and their quality or success in translation to small screen. Details of TV and radio productions forthcoming, plus reviews of recent productions.

Activities of major authors and works in progress, plus coverage of recent awards and details of the nominations for forthcoming awards. Forthcoming anthologies, selected lists of particular authors' recently published novels, articles and criticisms.

News of decent articles or striking pieces in fanzines, and where to obtain them. Details of new and folded fanzines.

Coverage of overseas news, especially American fan activities, and American authors and magazines.

More regular details of group and club activities, and how to find them, plus reports from individual groups on their goings-on.

ARTICLES- Articles on SF 'Greats', both in fandom and in the professional world, giving a full run-down of their work and their attitudes to SF and life.

Reprinted features from good fanzines, either because of their individual merit or to introduce people to fan-writing.

Article on how to produce a fanzine - pitfalls, financial problems, availability of contributors, paper, equipment. How and where to distribute material to receive best coverage or material exchange.

What to expect at a convention - how to attend, meet people, make sense of what's going on and the programme pitfalls.

The History of Fandom, especially in the UK, and its development over the past decades, plus its interrelationship with foreign fandom and the contacts to be made. Most major figures who have been interwoven with fandom's development.

Computers and SF, including fiction, programming details, those programmes available and all that jazz.

A compilation of the 100 best SF novels, with precis, criticism and linked bibliography.

SF and other media forms - visual art and music especially, including psychedelic/ rock music usage of SF.

Who's who of publishers and magazines which might accept stories, novels and articles.

More illustrations and better quality ones.

Coloured paper!

A fannish ' soapbox ' to allow people to discuss particular issues in fandom and the world at large. An increase in the amount of humour and humorous pieces by fans.

An SF Queries / Q & A column each month.

Return of ' Day in the life of..' to the zine.

Details of reliable book dealers and comic shops.

More games and competitions with an SF flavour.

More libellous gossip on matters which pertain to the hidden side of authors' and fans' activities!

On the negative side, a lot of people asked for a stop to the feuding between some members on political issues, less fannish information as opposed to SF information, less details of conventions on the grounds that those who were going knew it all quite well anyway, and so on and so on. Out of all this I have to decide what we can actually deliver. Some of the articles are difficult to produce due to lack of contributors, but I will try and chase out some poor innocents to have a go at some of these topics; if you fancy covering any of these subjects, or an idea you've had yourself, I'd be more than happy to see the results! Once again, I send out a plea to all groups to contact us with details of their activities and future meetings - we haven't the facilities to follow through on all the active groups, and must rely on incoming shots on the whole. What we will be doing immediately is as follows:

- 1) Opening a competition in M51 for the best artwork, cover and interior, which members can provide. There is a terrific shortage of art on file here at HQ, and very little suitable work is sent in. If you feel you can produce good cover art, or fillers and logos for the interior, please start thinking now and see the full details next issue.
- 2) Including a listing of good sources of SF literature - mail-order and direct retail trade, including books, comics and magazines. If you deal in these items, or if you have come across a reliable source, please get in contact as soon as possible for inclusion in the next issue.
- 3) Producing a video review column, the first of which will appear in M51. Again, if you have seen a good, bad or indifferent video recently, send in your review - be concise and reasonably objective about its failings or its virtues.
- 4) Asking BSFA officials and editors to contribute comments on their activities in the BSFA, their problems and their role in the association - how they feel about its progress or lack of it, and its value in the dissemination of knowledge about SF.
- 5) Changing the layout to give a more unified approach to the magazine and to increase the number of features - although you may not like some of each issue, there should be more that you do want to read.

Well, that's the initial appraisal, brief though it seems. I apologise for the slightly interrim nature of this M, and hope that you'll all start writing in for the next issue to make the New Year a new one for M as well.

:: COMPETITION :: COMPETITION :: COMPETITION ::

M48: *Desirable Skiffy Residences*

Dave Langford shops around

The massed intellect of *Matrix* readers, surely the most titanic agglomeration of naked brainpower seen in this Universe since *Children of the Lens*, came up with no less than 14 entries to the *Matrix* 48 (sorry, but these things have to be said) competition. The challenge: write an estate-agent's ad for some noted SF/fantasy property. Of course this was all a security cover for a secret investigation of your *real* SF preferences, which appear to consist of Mervyn Peake and Dr Who...

For reasons which will appear, I'll list the entrants alphabetically this time. Bear in mind that the final judgement has nothing to do with objective literary merit but a great deal to do with what makes jaded Langford chuckle. (Not quite true, actually: by that criterion the prize would have gone to Sue Thomason, who rushed in a hilarious ad for a new Dr Who's Companion—not by any stretch of the imagination an eligible entry for this competition, but maybe when I get round to the SF Situations Vacant comp...) Here they are. Some of them, the mathematicians among you will deduce, sent more than one entry.

PHILIP COLLINS... JOAN DANIELS... MARK GREENER... CHRIS MORGAN:

Medium-sized semi-detached planet with cool, dry climate. Has mines, fisheries and agriculture, all relatively undeveloped. Some infrastructural amenities such as railways, ports, primitive spaceport with unusual double-sided perimeter wall, etc. Present population (under 10,000) have no legal rights to the land and could easily be removed or put to useful work by a brigade-strength force. Planet has great potential for production and export of foodstuffs and several useful minerals, or as penal settlement. For more details apply to sole agents and arms suppliers J.Pournelle Inc. (CJKM)

Onward with ANN MORRIS (a certain Carpathian castle—Price reduction for quick sale. Owner going abroad)... VIC NORRIS... ANDY SAWYER:

This week's bargain! (Owner wishes quick sale due to illness of twin sister.) Spacious and well appointed detached residence situated in quiet neighbourhood. Gothic hall, four bedrooms, reception room, study, kitchen, bathroom/wc, usual tombs and vaults. Well-kept garden to front and rear, with trees and pool. Included in sale are various interior fittings: carpet, tapestries, suits of armour, coffins, pits, pendulums. Council-approved grant work has been carried out, including new damp-course, roof, 100% guarantee against subsidence. Many improvements have been carried out by the present owner: early inspection essential for this nevermore-to-be-repeated offer. First-time buyers or necrophiliacs need look no further. (AS)

And KATHY SHIEL (Unpretentious 97th Floor Conapt... shared grazing area would suit goat or sheep)... JOHN SPENCER (the House on the Borderland—ideal investment for a pig breeder with a sense of adventure)... SUE THOMASON (tut, tut, Sue, you wretched nonconformist)... DAVE WOOD:

Overseas. Quaint bijou property in elevated position available on long lease. Open plan, sunny position facing south. No neighbours. Plumbing needs some attention but includes shower. Suit young couple with sense of adventure and desire for self-sufficiency. Must be animal lovers. Present titled owners on safari. Apply in first instance to The Secretary, Greystoke Estates. (DW)

There were some excellent one-liners this time—I particularly liked C.Morgan's 'semi-detached' and the other bits quoted above—but brevity is the soul of *Matrix* competitions and Dave Wood gets the coveted fiver for concision and timing. Sue Thomason will get something or other of a bizarre nature, the editorship of *Focus* or some such Greek gift, and the rest of you will have to be content with the ineffable knowledge of your own brilliance and/or the judge's ineptitude. Thanks to all.

M50: *Who Was That Monolith I Saw You With Last Night?*

The challenge remains as stated last issue: devise a brilliant cartoon suggestion to be included in a book called *2001 Uses for a Dead Monolith*. The best entry will be drawn up by Jim Barker (and lots of triffic entries may lead to the book's actually appearing!); the usual £5 book token will also be awarded by ever-biased DAVE LANGFORD, to whom entries should be rushed, at 94 LONDON ROAD, READING, BERKS, RG1 5AU, in time for *Matrix* 51. (How about a copydate this time, Simon?)

LETTERS

((Without a doubt, our biggest mail response was connected with Michael King's letter in M49 on the topic of Russo-american relationships and the attitudes behind the present deplorable arms situation. However, there are obviously some members who would like to see more SF or fannish topics under discussion in the lettercol, and in deference to these I will start with letters on other matters, leaving the political issues until later in the magazine. Straight in now, with two letters from fairly recent BSFA members.....))

DAVID R. SMITH,
7 LABURNUM ROAD,
CUMBERNAULD,
GLASGOW,
G67 3AA

You ask what people want from the BSFA. I know what I want - information! You see, in a way I'm a prisoner - a prisoner of my own shyness and introversion. This means I mostly find out what's going on, and what other people are thinking, by reading. Although I have been reading

SF for about ten years, and seriously looking at it for about five, I've only been a BSFA member for 1½ years. So far, Matrix and Vector have together met my expectations. There are some things that I don't like, but I'm happy to accept them for variety - I'm not looking for perfection and don't think it's possible to get a magazine everyone likes all the time. Certainly the zines have made me feel more comfortable at the cons I've been to: knowing folks' names etc makes a big difference to me (shy, as I've said before).

Concerning possible confusing terminology, a new guide to fannish terms is a good idea. However, in M49 you say you'll try to "explain terminology and give a reason why someone should be referred to." This will have to be done carefully if you are to avoid annoying or distracting those who understand it all. M is not, after all, a technical journal. I have never found any real problems with unfamiliar words - it only took me four months to work out what gafiante meant. I am also not bothered by the repetition of some names - makes me feel as though I know them before we've even met. I suspect that without a core of such people, the BSFA might just fade away.

((I must admit that the rest of David's letter followed in the same pleasant and open vein without resorting to the embittered sniping so beloved of some writers. One of the major features of the response to M49 was a large number of letters from members who were constructive and moderate in their criticism, many of whom had never responded or corresponded before, both new and long-term members. I hope that their suggestions and ideas will keep flowing, and that M51 will contain elements drawn from their preferences. An even more recent member sent in the following comments....))

STEVE EALEY,
9 GLASVEN ROAD,
NORTHWOOD,
KIRKBY,
MERSEYSIDE,
L33 6UA

I have been a member of the BSFA for six months, and so far I'm pleased I joined. I didn't know what to expect at first, but like other new members who have written in, I find it's great to see that there are other people who have heard of The Left Hand of Darkness etc. I enjoy reading Vector, PI, and Focus, but Matrix.... I have yet to attend an SF con, and at the moment I'm not into fanzines, so large portions

of M are lost on me. Nevertheless I recognise that they play a major part in fandom and that M should devote space to Life on Mars etc. I like the humour and irreverence of the news section and wish there was more of it. So, where does M fail? I'm not really sure, but it isn't what I expected from the introductory material. Ansible or Locus probably supply what I want, but I'm reluctant to fork out for another subscription at the moment. The most interesting part of M49, I think, was Christina Lake's Basildon con report, which shows that writing about SF fans can be as interesting as writing about SF (though it failed to convince me that attending a convention would be a worthwhile investment).

((Conventions and con reports seem to be equally liked and disliked if letters and questionnaires are to be believed. They are a valuable meeting place, in my eyes, but there is always the question of economics. See questionnaire analysis for more comments on this matter. Policy next issue will be to make M bigger in order that there will be at least something for everyone to read - actually dropping features can in the end only lead to more dissatisfaction, it seems.))

((Sue Thomason, with a bit more time on the BSFA chain gang, writes in to say more on incomprehensibility (superb word)))

SUE THOMASON,
9 FRIARS LANE,
BARROW-IN-FURNESS,
CUMBRIA LA13 9NP

I guess I understand a fair part of what goes on in Matrix now. For comparison, I went back and looked at M39 - the first issue I received - and I still don't understand a word of it. The letter column is completely incomprehensible because I

don't know the preceding arguments on which most of it is based; I have now heard of three (but only seen one) of the fanzines reviewed, and Finagle alone knows what the ' Life on Mars ' column is on about. I sympathise immensely with all the people who don't have a clue what's going on in the current Matrix....

I think that the BSFA should work out whether it wishes to serve SF readers or fans. At the moment, Matrix is for fans, and a non-fan, or even a new fan, will not have any idea what it's about. Do we want to encourage people to join our gang or don't we? If we do, then the BSFA should definitely provide an introductory package explaining what cons are, what local groups do, what fanzines are, how to get them, and possibly a free copy of Shallow End, the Fanzine that's Nice to Neos.

Also, somewhere in M should be an impassioned plea to write in to people who don't understand what the hell's going on. You have to make contact with the people behind the fanac before it all starts making sense.... People who write in for reading lists: yes, why not? Tell them about Inferno and Vector, tell them about the BSFA bibliographies, tell them about that Aardvark paperback thing, tell them about the SF shops that do mail-order lists, tell them to ask their local library; some public libraries produce subject reading lists.. tell them to look at British Books In Print (again, libraries should have a copy) to find out what's in print by the authors they know and like, tell them about publishers and their catalogues, and who are the major publishers of SF in Britain, but for goodness' sake be nice to them and respond. Oh, yeah, tell them about the mag chain too. And don't be snobbish about media fans.

((Gasp. Well, I agree! We will try, honest. On to more comments....))

ALLAN LLOYD,
QUEBB COTTAGE,
EARDISLEY,
HEREFORD,
HR3 6LP

Could I suggest that the average member of the BSFA is baffled and bored by much of the news for the more fannish fans, which could explain the high turnover of members. It has been said in the past that one of the functions of the BSFA was as a recruiting agency for fandom. If this is really

true, then fandom has to be seen as interesting and exciting. Speaking as someone who has never been to a convention, or one of the BSFA meetings, I find it very frustrating reading various reports on these events. It may be fascinating for the in-clique to read about who got drunk, who fell over, how many people got stuck in the lift, and how many times the car broke down on the way home, but all of our reporters seem ashamed to admit that they have attended any of the programme items. This is where I think you are missing out on a whole realm of opportunity. Why not reprint talks by guests of honour, discussion panels, debates etc. While this would not give anyone's personal insights into a con, I think it would be of much more interest to the members. I am sure that the transcription of talks by Shaw, Holdstock, Kilworth, Priest et al would be of immense interest to people who find it difficult to get to cons or London BSFA meetings.

((Fair enough, but it has been said that talks given in a meeting atmosphere don't lend themselves to literal transcription, unless we could get the speakers to rewrite and edit their own material for publication by the BSFA. Would other members like to read this sort of thing? Now, to the political sphere. Far too many letters to print arrived here full of indignation at Michael King's letter last issue. For those who waited for the backlash, I print Joe Nicholas' letter in full....))

JOSEPH NICHOLAS
22 DENBIGH STREET
PIMLICO
LONDON SW1V 2ER

It's impossible to take Michael King seriously, of course - rhetoric by the yard, the gospel according to Thatcher and Hesselstine (and THE DAILY MAIL), slogans instead of thought, not a fact to be seen anywhere. But then remarks like that are as prejudicial as his, so let's take his points in the order in which he makes them:

1. "The USSR is not surrounded by enemies," he says, and goes on to name countries like Poland, East Germany and Finland as proof this (thus indicating an imperfect grasp of geography, since East Germany has no common borders with the Soviet Union). Didn't he read what I said about the Kremlin's having provided itself with a buffer zone against the perceived threat from the West, or even understand what's meant by the word "perceived"? In any case, Iran IS a serious threat to the USSR because its holy revolution could quite easily spark a similar fundamentalist fervour in the Kazakh and Uzbek "republics", the population of which amounts to no less than one-sixth of the USSR's total population; and China is not exactly a friend of the Soviet Union. (As I said in my previous letter, the frontier "is lined with states that if not overtly hostile AREN'T EXACTLY FRIENDLY EITHER"-emphasis added) Rapprochement with China, even if it comes off, won't change the picture much for the simple fact that the two countries have quite a different ideological priorities, political systems and social goals-meaning that they will continue to regard each other with extreme caution.

As for his last sentence.....it gets complicated. The Penguin Dictionary Of Economics (to pick one of many easily available sources) defines the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as a "measure of the total flow of goods and services produced by the economy over a particular time period, usually a year.... it is obtained by valuing all goods and services at market prices, and then aggregating....."all intermediate products are excluded, and only goods used for final consumption or investment goods are included", whereas the Gross National Product (GNP) is defined as "GDP at market prices plus the income accruing to domestic residents arising from investment abroad less income earned in the domestic economy from foreigners abroad"- from which it should be obvious that in King's statement "the Soviets spend 13 per cent of GDP on weapons compared with 4 per cent of GNP spent by the UK" he is using two different indices, and the comparison is therefore meaningless. Moreover, even if he were to discuss weapons expenditure in terms of either GDP or GNP, the two economies are of different sizes so any one-for-one percentage comparisons would be meaningless anyway. And is the UK the only nation in the Western Alliance? Apart from which, where did he get his figure of 13 per cent from? Well, it's complicated (again), but since the USSR doesn't release economic statistics for general consumption (even by its own people), they have to be estimated, usually by CIA analysts, who calculate the rouble-equivalent cost for similar western products and then add on a bit for alleged Soviet inefficiencies - a system which worked reasonably well until George Bush, The present US Vice-President, was appointed Head of the CIA in 1976 and, under pressure from right-wing lobby group called "The Committee on the Present Danger", brought in a group of hard-liners (known in the jargon as "Team B") to reinterpret and revise upwards as necessary the previous estimates.....which they duly did, and no one was unduly surprised by their results (manufactured to fit a pre-existing theory as they were), Said results have ever since been derided by informed (and even halfway informed) opinion, and no one now sets any store by them bar Ronnie Reagan and his Reaganauts. And Margaret Winston Thatcher, of course.....(Readers interested in further details about Team B may care to consult the relevant chapter of Robert Scheer's "WITH ENOUGH SHOVELS: REAGAN, BUSH AND NUCLEAR WAR).

2. "The reason the Soviets have not initiated a nuclear strike (yet) is because the West could reply (at present)" claims King, implying that it's the USSR which has always had nuclear superiority and the West which has always been struggling to catch up. The reverse is in fact the case: the USA was the first to invent the atomic bomb, the H-bomb, the transistor (all owing for lighter

payloads and hence smaller ICBMs), the Submarine-launched Ballistic Missile, the MIRV, the cruise missile....the whole history of the nuclear arms race, in fact, has been one of Soviet struggle to stay abreast of American achievements and of American desire to maintain technological supremacy. (See the relevant sections of Gwyn Prins's "DEFENDED TO DEATH" for further details). "human consequences of nuclear war concern the USSR ONLY in terms of whether it could wage such a war and still have enough civilians left alive...." And in proposing to fight a "limited" nuclear war in Europe that will (they hope) annihilate the USSR but leave the USA untouched Reagan and Weinberger are supposed to be demonstrating their concern for our lives?

3. "The current SLAUGHTER of peasants in Afghanistan may be a 'myth' to Joseph but is DEADLY serious to those involved". This was no relation at all to what I said - and is, indeed, completely invented. What I said was that "the fear of Soviet expansionism is greatly exaggerated, and in some respects based upon entirely mythical premises": a quite different remark in both content and implication from that King seeks to attribute to me. Such ludicrous and deliberate misquotation is really rather repellent - but while we're at it we might as well point out that Afghanistan was allowed to slip out of the circle of Western client states in 1956, and remained ignored by both Superpowers until the upheavals of the late 70s when it became clear that the Marxist guerillas were about to win; belatedly the West sent arms, but not enough to prevent a pro-Moscow coup in 1977, the arms supplies ceased, the first regime was temporarily replaced by a less pro-Moscow one, and FOR THE FIRST time Soviet troops entered the country to reinstate the first - a course of action no different from that pursued in Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968. Not that I do not condemn any of these actions - but any other explanations of Soviet involvement in Afghanistan simply flies in the face of the established facts. (readers interested in the background to all this may find it in Fred Halliday's "THE MAKING OF THE SECOND COLD WAR")

4. "The 'explicit refusal' of the Soviets to help Nicaragua overthrow the government of Central America....." Oh, Jesus Christ. Do you mean to tell me, Mr King, that the revolution in Nicaragua and the ongoing guerilla activity in El Salvador and Guatemala has everything to do with orders given out by the Kremlin and nothing to do with corrupt and repressive military dictatorships, right-wing death squads, grinding poverty, mass illiteracy, grossly inadequate health care, lack of housing and sanitation, and staggeringly inequitable distribution of land and wealth? Bullshit, Mr King, total bullshit. "Or does Joseph really think Cuba's invasion in the early 70s of Angola and Zimbabwe wasn't ordered by Moscow?" Drivel - the established facts indicate that the Cuban forces entered Angola to assist the MPLA government to consolidate its hold on the country AFTER the CIA had begun to fund the UNITA forces and the South Africans had commenced their attacks from Namibia on its southern borders. (Again, see Fred Halliday's "THE MAKING OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR for background details)."

But the implications of this whole paragraph is really quite extraordinary since it suggests nothing less than that the Soviet Union has dozens of proxies all around the world who are forever stirring up trouble for the West while all the West can do is rush around trying to put out the fires. Apart from ignoring the straightforward statistical fact that, between the years 1945 and 1976 the Soviet Union intervened militarily on 6 times to the USA's 64 times, it will.... a quote from Theodore Draper's article "Falling Dominoes" in the recent anniversary issue of THE NEW YORK REVIEW OF BOOKS seems appropriate here. "Various American leaders have devoutly believed that they were fighting the Soviet Union in Korea and Communist China in Vietnam, and now believe they are fighting Cuba and the Soviet Union in El Salvador," he states in his concluding paragraphs, and continues: "Even if they are right, this also means that the Soviet Union was also able to make the United States fight in Korea and El Salvador, and China was able to make (the USA) fight in Vietnam.. While the United States was spending itself on alleged surrogates, the Soviet Union stood by and, in effect, said: 'Let's you and him fight'. The Soviet Union thus chooses the place and time for

American wars." Is this what you really believe, Mr.King? In which case, would you care to explain why the USA did not crash to overwhelming defeat before you and I were even born?

5. I refuse to respond to Mr.King's para. 5 - it consists of nothing more than hysterical, paranoid frothings, as disgraceful, rabid and unconsidered as they are ignorant and pitiable.

If all this is indicative of Michael King's knowledge of international affairs, then I can only say that he knows nothing about them at all and would be advised best to learn something about them before trying to pass comment again. The sources mentioned above would be a good place to start, and would certainly provide him with some of the balance absent from the Daily Mail. A "decent newspaper" is it? I don't consider as decent a newspaper that during the election campaign printed, on its front page, a totally fictitious story about the Japanese car manufacturer Nissan's threat to cancel its plans to build a factory in the UK if Labour won and fulfilled its manifesto pledge to withdraw from the EEC, and whose own journalists complained to the editor about his penchant for printing propaganda rather than news. No thank you, Mr.King, I prefer truth to cheap Fleet Street lies.

((I think Joe has made his point there, er, fairly clearly. I refuse to take any sides in this debate, but I will say that we heard from JEREMY CRAMPTON on the same subject, at great length and with figures and maps to support his arguments against Michael King's letter. I wish I could print some of this, but time does not permit. NIK MORTON wrote to say that it was " a pity that Michael J.King's arguments had been soured by his choice of words.. I believe that many of his points are valid, but his method of conveying his conviction is unbalanced too." TERRY BROOKE doubts the "evidence" cited by Mr.King, in a LoC matching the original points one by one, as does MARK GREENER. ANTHONY BLOOMFIELD sent in a detailed argument against all of Michael King's comments, and DAVE SWINDEN accuses him of " shallow, sloppy reasoning " and goes on to say even less complimentary things. So it did continue.....

I'm afraid I will have to go into We Also Heard From time now. Next issue I'll pick up one or two of the points from some of these letters, and I'm hoping to make it nearly a 40 page issue to make up for the slightly slender item in your hands now. Members' Noticeboard will be back as well...

WAHF....STEPHEN HAWLEY - saying that he thought M48's cover was mildly funny and wondering why everyone was so humourless; JEF BRYANT - improve the art, bring back D.West's cartoon; LINDSAY WAKEMAN - objecting to the infamous cover on the grounds I had no right to try and stir anything up with such an implement; KEN MANN - who sweetly pointed out that "you have certain responsibilities"; NICK CHEESEMAN - writing in with a little bit about everything in the last M ; GRAHAM SMITH - with a few gentle comments on aspects of balance and what should or shouldn't be printed; ANTHONY SOLOMON - pleased with the varied number of issues discussed in M, both on the political and SF fronts; PHILIP COLLINS - on fanzine reviewing, back pages dropping off (my problem as well - we do need longer staples!) and listing SF Theanthologies (Thanks!); DOROTHY DAVIES - comments, and another Orbiter ad which I'll run next issue, Dorothy, ok? ; SIMONINGS on the subject of trash SF and the relevance of labelling fiction as SF or not; PETER PINTO - concerning the Lancaster SF Group (details in M51); MARGARET WELBANK - on art and alternative covers (I've since seen your sketches in the fanzine, and I thought they were really good, but the letter arrived too late for me to contact you. Would you still like to do something for Matrix?); KEN LAKE - a pleasant letter on BSFA meetings and the importance of SF to the BSFA ; JOANNE OTHICK - on problems of contacting fans etc in her area (I'll put details in the next Members' Noticeboard), and finally ANDY SAWYER - on virtually everything, but with some comments on SF, computers and technology which I'd like to quote in M51. Phew!! Next deadline is mid-January. Have a good year's-turning and so on.....))

