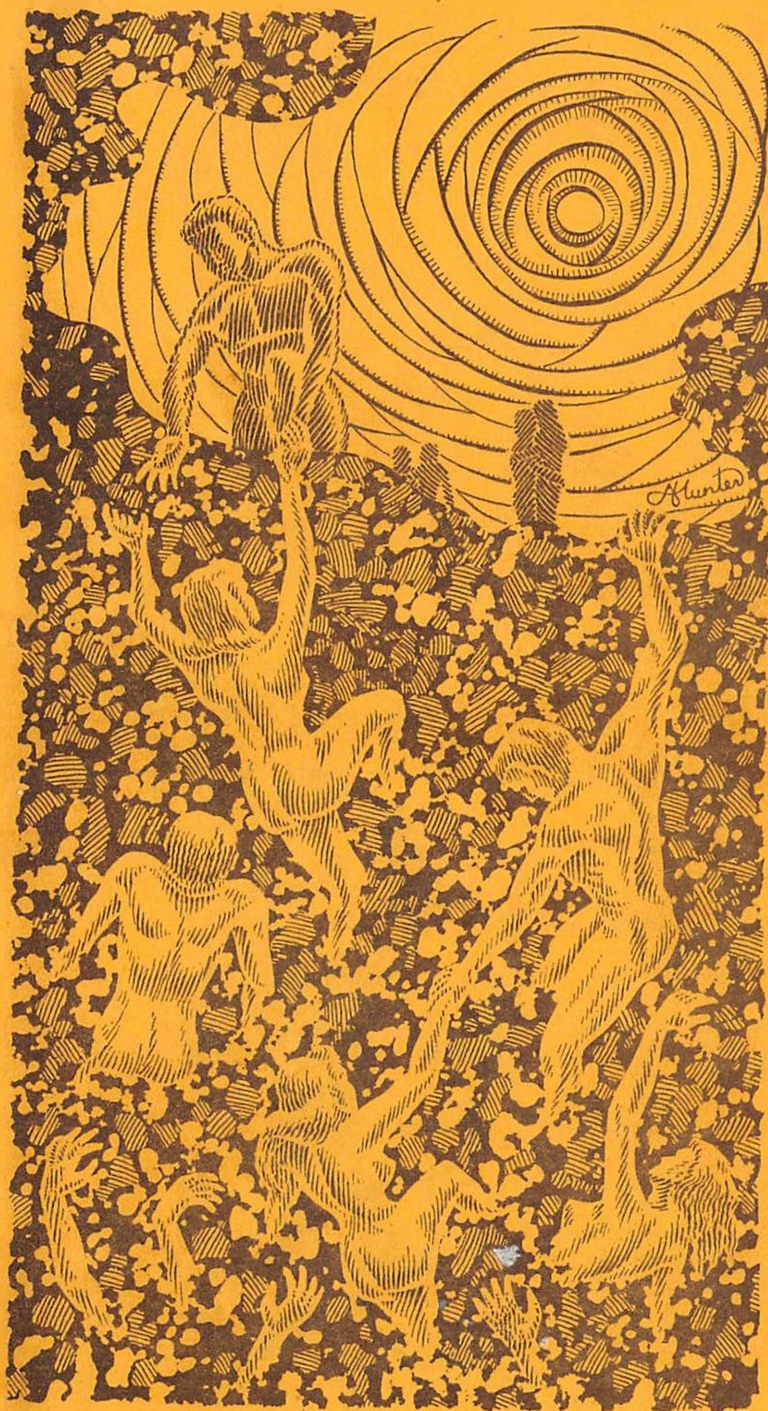


# MAYA 7



# Maya 7

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Maya is available for trade, contribution, or letter of comment; or subscription: 30p per copy, or 4/£1.00; from the U.S. or Canada \$1 per copy, or \$3.00 for 4. Samples free on request.



# Ghucephalus

wherein the Editor  
rides some  
fannish hobbyhorses

**A** long time ago Aljo Svoboda wrote a letter of comment to Ian Maule on Maya 5. It ended in a way which gives rise to a few dark thoughts on British fanzines at the moment. With his usual gentle sarcasm, he finished the letter thus: "I'm sure that by the time Maya is an old and respected fanzine, you might even be able to resurrect Ian Maule...."

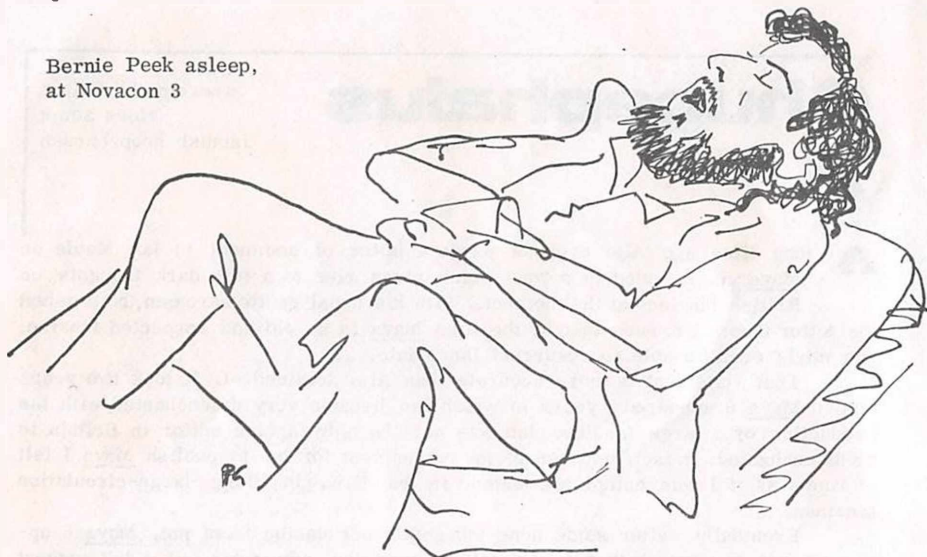
That statement is more accurate than Aljo dreamed of. It took two years before Maya 6 appeared, years in which Ian became very disenchanted with the production of a large fanzine. Ian was not the only fanzine editor in Britain to be disenchanted; in fact, because of my enthusiasm for Ian to publish Maya I felt at times as if I was completely unique in the U.K. in liking large-circulation fanzines.

Eventually, after some none-too-gentle persuasion from me, Maya 6 appeared and announced that I was taking over the editorship. (I didn't suggest that — it was Ian's idea.) This seventh issue of Maya was promised for late January; it was held back to await letters of comment from overseas which were late arriving. (Why were they late? Simply because overseas copies weren't sent until 7 weeks after the first copies were collated. Take a bow, Maule.) Those overseas letters were essential for anything like a reasonable forum in the letter-col. Torpid British fandom has provided me with the laughable total of 10 locs, only 8 of which were even marginally publishable. This means that there's a dreadful paucity of active British fanzine fans. They've all been discouraged by something, and I don't know what. (Convention committees excepted; nowadays, that excludes about half of active British fanzine fandom.)

The entire U.K. fanzine scene seems to be at a standstill just now. Very few letters are being written and very few fanzines are being published. Those that are, are fascinating in their own socialite, sophisticated (in the original sense) way in their own private, sociable, comfortably ensconced little world, but although little worlds may be nice to live in, they do have walls, which make it difficult for those within to see what's going on outside and difficult for those outside to get in. The newest breed of fannish fanzine is almost entirely a scandalsheet concerned with personalities; this is fine if you know the people in them — it's fine for me — but it is possible to write about people (i.e. write fannishly) in more generalistic terms than gossiping about them. Fannish fandom two years ago was more descriptive and analytical, and more accessible to an observer.

Of the zines which dominated British fannish fandom two years back, Cynic and Egg have since suffered from very long intervals between issues, and from a kind of directionlessness. I wrote about this in my small zine Flatulence in January 1974. I quote: "Where is this bird's-eye view of slackness or uncertainty at the duper leading us? Why are most of our major faneds falling asleep over their stencils and allowing young upstarts like Cypher and Blunt to tread on their heels?" Since then Blunt has folded because of rising costs, and Ritblat/Grim News has flowered briefly and died. (There was a suspiciously long gap between Cyphers, but thankfully issue 12 turned up at last.) Two more down the drain.

Bernie Peek asleep,  
at Novacon 3



An even worse lethargy has come over our older sercon fanzines. (At this point I start quoting and revising extensively from Flatulence, which was my contribution to the first mailing of Ian Maule's apa ROMPA; I analysed British fanzines and looked at how fanzines keep themselves interesting to potential fans.) Speculation, for ten years the mainstay of British SF discussion, has been slowly winding down at the mainspring and a recent attempt to go litho at reasonable cost may well turn out to have been the last straw for Pete; it has at the time of writing ((had then)) taken a staggering four months at the printers. Similar troubles have beset Vector. A run of superb and unprecedented quality and regularity has been halted by the same printer's inability even to do the job of printing no. 67; the camera copy was returned not immediately, but after a three-month gap. Unsurprisingly, Malcolm Edwards became cheesed off with editing it, both because of this and because of a vast hole where his BSFA letters of comment should have been. This was possibly because of Malcolm's tendency to publish such vast, earth-shaking and important articles that he foolishly allowed economics to squeeze out the lettercolumn in many recent issues, so the flow of letters dried up and the lettercol died the death. This shows up two fannish motives: that editors publish to get letters, and letterhacks write letters to get published. Round goes the Gossip, as a recent LP track title put it. Sadly this was a lesson Malcolm learned the hard way; he became lost without a lettercol, and has handed over to Chris Fowler, who is now lost without a BSFA.

Do I detect a trace of lethargy? Why has the stimulus gone out of publishing major fanzines for the above-mentioned folk? It wasn't because I came along and ambitiously put sleepy-drugs in with their copies of Gannetscrapbook, was it? Possibly it's just the natural ageing process making them decide to retire quietly to tired-old-BNFdom, but I doubt it. They are all as active as ever with minifanzines, apazines, Eastercons, TAFF trips, and Worldcon bids, and you can't get much less tired than to want to put on a Worldcon.

Possibly one might think this was an inferiority complex brought on by the resurgence of contact with the Great Fandom Over the Water, and causing the

belief that one's fanzine is not very good. This psychological defeat might be brought on by Algolitis, or Energumen's Disease, and manifest itself as a lack of drive, a feeling that one's own fanzine is not essential, that it is not part of Where It Is All At, that there are better fanzines than yours which you thought was the best you could do. There is no "must" feeling about producing one's fanzine.

Such an inferiority complex would be totally groundless.

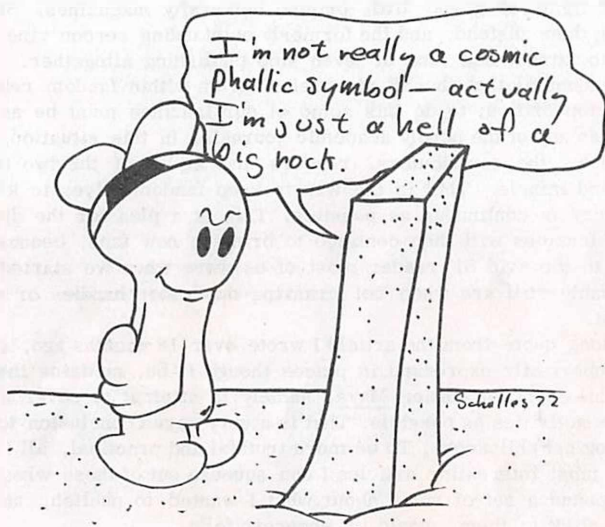
Certainly one may admit, as I do, that the top American zines are beautifully written and produced, in general better than ours. The idea that lesser zines are therefore not really worth producing is based on the false assumption that fandom is a competitive world. The only competition is for awards such as Hugos and recently the Nova; bar that, each fanzine stands on its own with its letterwriters, reviewers and trades. If you really want your fanzine to look good, all you must spend is time, and expertise which is gained in time. Given effort from both contributors and editors, British zines can stand on a par with any American zine. Now all we have to do is write as well as they do — that is what my inferiority complex is about at the moment!

That's enough about the potential dangers to the health of fanzine fandom which arise from within. What of possible threats from without?

One which has not actually manifested itself yet, but could unless we are aware of it, could be the result of an unhealthy attitude towards the academic study of science fiction.

Recently we have witnessed the rise of the university-orientated magazine and conference about science fiction. We see the Great Minds of academic science fiction criticism come together and discuss sociosexual symbolism in the works of Eando Binder, or the hyperspatial mode of travel as utilised in the later works of J.G. Ballard, often without the encumbrance of the uncouth world of fandom.

This is fine in itself, as far as I am concerned. I am in favour of any and all discussion of SF. Let no man be prevented from building the edifice of



intellect into ever taller tottery towers, however incomprehensible his words to the fan in the street. This is not the place for a discussion of the rights and wrongs of the existence of ever more exotic criticism.

My concern is the place of fandom in all this.

For more than forty years, the fanzine has been without peer as the universal medium for informed and intelligent comment on the SF of the day, and it would be right to decide what we think of the possibility of that position being usurped by media which have little or no relation to the world of fandom (which, remember, is at heart the amateur criticism of SF). If the highest level of sophistication of SF criticism becomes separated from fandom — that is, if we allow a gulf to develop between the most ambitious fanzine (ambitious intellectually, that is) and the simplest academic journal, whether it be a gulf in style, in content, in readership, or between two separate groups of contributors — then it is possible to envision a catastrophic lack of confidence among the editors and contributors of our major sercon zines. (Please don't misquote me on this. I am not saying that it will happen or that it is likely to. One can simply envision it, given a vivid enough imagination. When one reads the incomprehensible (or pre-tentious, which is only another way of saying you don't understand something anyway) articles in Riverside Quarterly and compares them with the very readable Foundation articles written largely by folk well known in fandom, you realise it's very unlikely to happen indeed.)

At this point one must consider what might have happened to fandom were it not for major serious zines like SFR, Locus, SF Commentary, or in England Speculation, which all provide an important source of new fans and an essential continuity to fandom. If these zines had not existed to draw new blood in — even arch-faan Ian Maule started with a sub to Speculation — fandom could easily withdraw into its cosy faanish shell and involute, happily dying, upon itself, as nearly happened in British fandom at the end of the fifties.

If top authors, top contributors, and the brighter fan critics were attracted away to the bright lights of glossy little printed university magazines, SF buffs would start reading them instead, and the formerly outstanding sercon zines would lose their power to attract new fans or even stop publishing altogether.

I see it as essential that the SF discussion forum within fandom retain its attraction for our top critics; to do this some of our fanzines must be as intellectually involving as any of the purely academic journals. In this situation, which thankfully holds now, the contributors, readers and styles of the two types of journals overlap and mingle. This is the way to keep fandom alive; to keep the intellectual spectrum as continuous as possible. This is a plea for the diversity of fandom. Major fanzines will then continue to bring in new fans, because they remain attractive to the avid SF reader most of us were when we started off in fandom, and probably still are when not cranking duplicator handles or writing letters of comment.

The above long quote from the article I wrote over 18 months ago, controversialistic and imperfectly expressed in places though it be, contains the basis for a consistent philosophy of editing Maya, namely to attempt to cover as wide a range of fandom's activities as possible. That is a very vague conclusion to come to as a supposed logical philosophy. To be more truthful and practical, all I expect to do is print the most interesting articles I can squeeze out of those whose writing I like; to expound a set of rules about what I wanted to publish, and then actually expect to stick to them, would be sheerest folly.



**D**oes this happen to other fans? I look forward to a convention for six months and am quite keyed up on the journey to it — but as soon as the hotel comes into view I'm gripped by an inexplicable timidity and get an urge to turn around and go home again. This effect was more apparent than ever on arriving at the Royal Station Hotel in Newcastle for the Tynecon, perhaps because I was Guest of Honour and wasn't sure how a GoH should disport himself.

Another source of concern was that I wasn't completely myself. I have never been what one would call willowy or lissome in build, and towards the end of 1973 had been progressing from being burly to being downright fat. This prompted me to go on a diet on which I lost over 40 lb. The position, therefore, was that the Tynecon committee had invited the full-scale Bob Shaw to be GoH — and only three-quarters of me was showing up!

As it transpired, my whittled-down appearance triggered off a kind of dieting chain reaction in the British SF world which — in terms of weight alone — reduced our ranks by the equivalent of one good-sized fan. It became noticeable at the Novacon six months later, an affair which reminded me of that Dick or Sheckley story in which people could equip themselves with bodies of their own choice. Peter Nicholls showed up in a late-model Tony Curtis; John Steward, formerly built like two football players, appeared wearing a natty Anthony Perkins; and the biggest transformation of all was in Jim Goddard, always invaluable as a landmark ("The bar? Yes, it's over there behind Jim Goddard."), who walked in dressed in a nifty Robert Redford. Quite literally, nobody knew who he was!

They all said they had been inspired by me, so I guess I can claim to have improved the health of U.K. fandom, but I keep thinking about our "lost" fan and the fanzines he might one day have produced. But then, perhaps he is happily at work organising a separate fandom in a limbo world inhabited by all the humanity which has vanished from the face of the earth since Calorie-counting came into vogue. You can visualise them — jolly little round hominids composed entirely of banished fat — bouncing all over the place at their own little worldcons. They would be carefree creatures except that, presumably, when a person backslides on his diet and begins putting on weight again his counterpart in Fatland would

begin to shrink. The word would soon go round — "Smithers is getting smaller, being recalled to his maker, looks like he'll never finish stencilling his second issue." So, if you have lost weight and feel tempted to go back onto apple pie and cream, just remember you could be depriving a cuddly little cherub of his chance to win a Hugo.

Another weird thing about the Novacon was that Nudist Radish Squashing Competition held in secret on the Sunday morning. I was going to give the names of the three BNFs who won it, but this is an article about the Tynecon so those revelations will have to wait.

It is almost impossible to write a con report unless you have made notes at the time, but one event, or non-event, burned into my memory is the affair of my GoH speech on the Saturday evening. I was due to speak at 8.00 and previous to that was having dinner with a publisher, with a taxi calling for us at 6.00. At first it all seemed very easy, then a panel discussion with Brian Aldiss and Peter Nicholls — who were also eating with us — overran its time, and our schedule began to slip. Then the taxi failed to show up, and we found ourselves setting out on foot at 7.00. It was a good restaurant, with a leisurely service intended to give customers maximum opportunity to savour the fine food and wine, but I was perched unhappily on the edge of the seat fretting and sweating about the time, wondering if I dared make a discreet exit after the soup.

A waiter advised me which dishes would be ready soonest, and — being a vegetarian — I chose venison. This perhaps requires some explanation. You see, I happen to believe that all these reports we hear about vegetables having emotions, and being able to feel pain, are perfectly true, and — as a creature like a lettuce has never done anybody any harm — I feel the only humanitarian thing to do is to be a meat-eater. Unfortunately, the venison took quite a long time to arrive, so I explained to the company that I would have to scoff it down and leave immediately afterwards. They nodded understandingly. I popped a piece of meat into my mouth, gnashed down on it with great force, and promptly discovered the second reason I shouldn't have ordered venison.

There was a piece of lead shot in the piece I had chosen, and it drove its way through a filling in a rear tooth like a ricochet from an Armalite rifle.

Now, there are pains and there are pains. There's the pain from a corn, which causes you to wince and manfully carry on; there's the pain of indigestion, which makes you writhe around a little; and there's the pain of a headache, which makes you look wan and thoughtful. The correct natural response to this pain would have been to emit a piercing shriek and fall to the floor with both hands clapped to the mouth.

At the moment it came, however, my host was leaning across the table telling me a joke, and there was the added complication that if I revealed what had happened he, being a very gentlemanly person, would probably have called the management on my behalf and I would have been later than ever for the speech. So I sat perfectly still, and smiled at the joke, and all the while I could feel each individual pore on my face opening and expelling a bead of cold sweat. This produced a curious secondary agony, rather like having a needle-spiked cylinder rolled across the forehead and cheeks, but I didn't mind because it helped divert my attention from the dental Hiroshima within.

When the power of controlled movement returned I swallowed the rest of the venison in whole chunks, just the way it was served, mumbled apologies and fled downstairs to the street. It was bitterly cold in Newcastle that night and the

first gust of North Sea air triggered off the damaged tooth again. Into the bargain, I then realised I wasn't too sure of my way back to the hotel. I ran off up the hill, lop-sided, nursing my jaw and moaning like a wounded wolfman, alternately praying and swearing, trying to think up a few off-the-cuff opening witticisms for my speech, and taking every wrong turning possible. If a prowler car had glimpsed me in the darkness the entire Newcastle Constabulary would have been issued with revolvers and silver bullets; but, finally, I reached the Royal Station, loped up the stairs and encountered Ian Maule, who said:

"No need to panic, Bob — we've postponed you till tomorrow night."

So far in this report there hasn't been much said about the convention programme. It was a helluva good programme, with lots of entertaining items, but knowledge of it is already in the public domain, and I'm too late for that sort of report anyway. So the next item is an account of the first room party ever given by the Shaws.

I've been attending conventions for over twenty years on and off, and love room parties, but somehow it had never before occurred to me to act as host. Sadie and I had a fair-sized room which should have been ample for the purpose, but the word must have got around that I was finally going to pay back some of the booze consumed in two decades of visiting other people's parties.

On the Sunday night our room was so crowded that if you spilt a drink capillary attraction made it go up! And there was so much smoke around that the only people who got fresh air were the ones sucking filter cigarettes. I managed to find a comfortable spot by nestling in between the embossings on the wallpaper, and spent the entire night there, trapped.

From this vantage point I didn't see a great deal of what was going on, and consequently was intrigued when — round about 3.00 am — I observed Brian Aldiss shooting up into the air, almost reaching the ceiling, and then sinking back down out of sight. He repeated this feat about a dozen times, gracefully, each time seeming to hang motionless just below the ceiling in defiance of gravity, with a look of beatific contemplation on his face. I grew quite entranced by this spectacle, and therefore felt disappointed when the initially perfect symmetry of his movements decayed into ordinary parabolas and he began colliding with other people and had to abandon his ethereal ballet.

I must admit that for a while my faith in Brian was slightly shaken, but I needn't have worried. The thing that went wrong was that two legs of my bed, which he was using as a trampoline, had proved unequal to his artistry, and the weight of about ten other people, and had gradually folded up, inclining him further and further off course. Given a perfectly horizontal launching pad he could have gone on bouncing on the one spot all night.

When the party ended, about two hours later, Sadie and I collapsed without even noticing what had happened to the bed. We had that exhausted but happy feeling you get when you know you have hosted a really successful social occasion. Our contented glow lasted until we got up next morning with splitting headaches caused by breathing an atmosphere similar to the aftermath of a fire in a used clothing dump. All around the crippled bed were heaped up drifts of cigarette ends, beer cans, bottles, glasses, biscuit crumbs, cigar wrappers, lost fanzines, peanuts and quote cards. I was still hunting for my shoes when a cleaning lady opened the door. She stopped on the threshold, looked around, and backed away shaking her head.

I waved at her. "Don't mind us — you can tidy up now if you want."

She fled down the corridor and came back with two others. All three examined the room in silence, retired to the corridor, held some kind of a union meeting, then went away and returned with the hotel manager.

"Sorry about all this," I said. "We had a few friends in last night."

He nodded. "That's all right, sir. If you would like to take your luggage down to the lobby we'll try to clear up."

"Oh, but we're not leaving," I told him. "We're staying an extra day. For a party."

The blood drained out of his face so quickly that hundreds of corpuscles must have been killed in the rush, but, to give that manager credit, when he learned the party was in Rob Jackson's house and not in his hotel he became quite affable. While we were being moved to another room he told us that four other beds had been wrecked on the same night, and thus he unwittingly solved a problem that had been perplexing me for some time. Lots of good conventions linger in the memory, so what was needed was a good objective and qualitative assessment of their excellence. Something similar to the star system the AA uses for hotels.

Now we have our rating system. And the Tynecon — probably the first "five-bed" convention — must be at the top of the charts.

((Some of you may also see this article in Mike Gorra's fanzine Random, as Bob mentioned in his covering letter:))

Dear Rob, — Enclosed is an article about Tynecon '74, though it isn't a report as such — more a few personal reminiscences. One snag, though. Mike Gorra has been at me for some time for an article I promised him, but I haven't been able to do it yet. Rather than let him down I gave him a copy of this for his fanzine Random, and explained the position. I doubt if the readerships would overlap by more than two or three people, as he is based in Connecticut and his zine is hardly circulated in the U.K. Is this all right with you?

((Certainly. Although there are over a hundred U.S. names on my mailing list, and thus the readerships may overlap in the U.S. as well as in the U.K., I am sure none of them would object to seeing an article like this twice, even if they all received Random as well.

The article is most flattering to the committee. Personally, I enjoyed everything about being Treasurer — except the convention itself, or more specifically its aftermath of utter and abject exhaustion. I was so far gone that I totally forgot about a very important dinner engagement on the Tuesday after the con, to great personal embarrassment. I can see exactly what Pete Weston meant when he described me as having "unravelling" during the course of the convention.

Bob also says nice things about the programme. I still have lots of copies of the programme timings sheet left, and it occurs to me that many people may not know who has the tapes of the various events. If you want a tape, send a blank 7" 33 i.p.s. reel to: Gerald Bishop, 1b St. Luke's Ave., London SW4 7LG. As he is a \*professional\* SF agent he will charge a fee, but only a nominal one.))

# What this world needs

# is a good

# 5¢ Villain

NORMAN GELB

**I**t's time for a showdown. It's time to put science in its place, and its shameless practitioners as well. Not necessarily a lowly place, mind you, but a niche considerably more modest than that in which scientists have been comfortably ensconced of late.

Whizz-kids they may be, but they have not kept pace with what's expected of them. We have been endlessly bombarded with reports of breathtaking scientific accomplishments. But the most way-out and dramatic achievements are chicken feed compared with what the human imagination is really capable of; and, if the current boom in science fiction is to be credited, with what the human imagination is determined to get.

With even an astronomer like Fred Hoyle writing science fiction, it's obvious that the blinkered world of hard fact is being exposed to the nasty truth that it's simply inadequate. Science fiction, not science, is the wave of the future, and we're riding its crest.

There are those who will urge clemency, consideration for the view that the science fiction explosion is really a product of the extraordinary scientific revolution of the past two decades. Hogwash! Scientific development is just an incidental factor in the science fiction boom, no more really than a hook to hang it on. The root cause lies elsewhere.

It can be traced back to a simple but memorable mushy moment in a Hollywood movie a generation ago — a bit of homely philosophy spun in a film which had nothing whatever to do with throbbing pulsars or the various dimensions of time.

The film was Boy's Town. It told of a kindly priest who superintended a flock of juvenile delinquents, pointing those wayward youngsters back towards the straight and narrow. At one point, the priest, Spencer Tracy, uttered the immortal words, "There's no such thing as a bad boy."

That was it! There and then science fiction was handed its philosophical impetus in the most democratic medium ever, until television arrived, and was off to a running start. Jules Verne, H.G. Wells and a handful of others had tinkered around with it before, but it was that public pronouncement of human charity which transformed their dribblets into the tidal wave science fiction has

since become.

It may at first seem difficult to connect the sentiments of a syrupy Hollywood character with the extraordinary goings-on in the Andromeda Nebula. Necessity is, however, the mother of invention, and there was nothing mankind needed more after Spencer Tracy had spoken his classic line than what it once had — a genuine, unadulterated villain.

If there's no such thing as a bad boy, there is, by logical extension, no such thing as a bad adult. True, psychoanalysis had by then postulated that emotional factors can distort human behaviour, but not until the silver screen brought that fact home to the masses did primeval human faith in the evilness of evil collapse, resoundingly.

We had lost something that we had always counted on, that had always been part of us. Even Dracula could no longer be trusted to be really bad. To understand is to forgive.

The human race was given no alternative. It had to turn elsewhere for maniacal rogues and ineffable cads it could rely on. In desperation, it turned to regions beyond the limits of human forgiveness. It turned to other worlds and to Earth situations in a grotesquely altered future, to places and times where the lasting impact of rigid toilet training and premature exposure to the facts of life could not explain away subsequent diabolical behaviour.

And it worked. Science fiction mercifully gave us back the unmitigated scoundrels that had been wrenched from us in the name of human understanding. It gave us unearthly monsters, fiends and blobs. It confronted us with virtually imponderable, frighteningly formidable nemeses. We could again marvel, without qualms, at the depth of villainy. We could shudder at their horrendous deeds without trying to understand the hidden grief that motivated them. We regained our innocence.

Now, however, is the time for vigilance. The human imagination is restless and unreliable. At this moment, a science fiction writer somewhere may be plotting a way to put The Creature From Outer Space onto a psychoanalyst's couch to discover what irresistible social pressures understandably make it behave unpleasantly. Anyone who again robs us of a pure villain will have a lot to answer for.




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Norman Gelb is an author and journalist, and is London correspondent of America's Mutual Broadcasting System. This article was printed in Insight-USA, a magazine published by the United States Information Service, 55 Upper Brook St., London W1; the magazine gives specific permission for non-copyright articles to be reprinted in other publications. Such as Maya.

Ron Holmes, the Forties fan with whom Gannetfandom recently made contact again, spotted this article and was so fascinated by it that he photocopied it, and kindly passed it on to me to publish if I liked. I was very pleased to do so; I cannot remember reading an article with so many comment hooks per line. I look forward with great eagerness to reading the various ways in which you all take it to pieces!



**I**t's pretty soon going to be the occasion of the fifth anniversary of my first meeting face to face with another science fiction fan, an event I described in the last episode of this column. I've spent most of my adult life in fandom, i.e. six months after my twenty-first birthday to date. Of course, thanks to a piece of government legislation kids are now considered adult at eighteen. I sometimes feel as if most of my actual life has been spent in fandom. My life before I entered fandom seems a long time ago. However, the recent interest — or rather nostalgia — for the sixties has brought back a surge of memories. I was a teenager in those days, a rather naive, shy one at that. Remember the latter half of that decade? When rock music was really getting going and (now I'm getting to it) student power raised its revolutionary head?

I was a student at Edge Hill College of Education, Ormskirk, Lancashire, training to be a teacher. Ormskirk is a little market town in the middle of the south-west corner of that county. It is a thirty minute train ride to Liverpool, one of England's ugliest cities, and a bumpy forty minute bus journey from Southport, which is an attractive place for a seaside resort, and one that specialises in old people wanting a quiet place to die and teenagers with drug problems, an unusual combination to say the least. I lived in digs in Southport for a year; from time to time I visited Liverpool, but mostly I hung around college. It was a placid college with very little social conscience and no-one wanting to stand out as different. We were cosseted and treated as children. You could be sent down for being found in a girl's room outside of normal visiting hours. Those in halls of residence had to be in by eleven o'clock; you needed parental permission to go away for the weekend. Nobody had even heard of marijuana. It encouraged neither independence nor maturity. By the beginning of my third year in October '68, things were beginning to get a little more interesting, and the outside world had started to creep in a little way.

A few guys had begun selling International Times to interested students. I happened to be one. IT was the first underground paper I'd seen and showed me a way of life I found rather bogging. I also found I sympathised with many

of the ideals pictured but felt the actual activities rather futile.

IT also made me aware in greater depth of student revolutionary activity and the marches, of which 1968 really saw the abortive culmination. I thought, now and again, of my friend Dave who was just spending his first term at that activist hotbed called the London School of Economics, one of Britain's highest ranked educational institutions. I was curious as to what he was up to, so I phoned him at his digs and got an invitation to come down for a weekend. We fixed it up for three weeks later.

Quite a lot happened during those three weeks. The L.S.E. students revolted and took over their buildings. The largest ever march to Hyde Park was planned. And by sheer coincidence it was the weekend I was supposed to go down. Oh well, I thought, Dave was hardly the type to get involved in that load of crap. It never occurred to me that I'd end up carrying a placard in the middle of about 70,000 students.

A girl I knew vaguely was going to London that weekend and suggested we hitch down together. So shortly after breakfast on Friday morning we set off. Thanks to her brashness we only waited five minutes at an M6 access road before getting a lift direct to the big city itself.

I was supposed to meet Dave at Victoria station under the clock at five. I waited an hour then phoned his digs. It took me an hour and a half to get through. I found out later that the daughter of the house was phoning her boyfriend. At last the phone was picked up at the other end.

"Oh, we weren't expecting you until tomorrow," said a female voice. David is spending the night at L.S.E. But you'd better come over."

It was then that I had the feeling that this weekend was not going to be at all like I expected. I got the train, was met at the station, and driven to a respectable middle class house. I spent the evening reading, watching TV, and making polite conversation — and also getting some details of the L.S.E. student takeover. It had been going on for at least a week. There were, apparently, barricades in corridors, a police cordon at streets that led to the entrances of the L.S.E. and lectures in revolution. They said Dave would probably be back by the following afternoon.

I wasn't prepared to hang around the house all day waiting for him to turn up, so I thought I'd go to the L.S.E. to look for him and duly received the appropriate directions.

(I've been writing all this in the first person, yet I was really a rather different person then, both physically and mentally. I was slimmer for a start; the beer paunch I have now hadn't yet begun to develop. My hair was short; you could see my ears. There were no lines under my eyes. I wore a check sports jacket, a yellow nylon turtle neck shirt, grey trousers with turnups, and a pair of brown suede shoes. A very innocuous person indeed. I was awkward, gauche, imperceptive and insensitive. I tended, without meaning to, to tread on people's toes. A well-meaning bumbler who was, at the same time, gaining some awareness. I'd begun writing poetry and trying to explore my environment through that. A mass of post-adolescent strivings and unfulfilled potential. My young eyes were wide at staring at the big city. I didn't realise quite how much I had to learn and how much growing up I had to do, dammit I was twenty! Get the picture? Looking back on the me of six years ago I feel rather patronising towards him, for he was really quite innocent. Though sometimes I feel I envy him...)

The London School of Economics is situated down a side street that one

enters from the bottom of Shaftesbury Avenue (if memory serves). I went down it, turned a corner and found myself staring at the backs of about a dozen large policemen who were looking idly down an alley at the entrance of L.S.E. some thirty yards away. Muttering polite and respectful "excuse me"'s, I squeezed by them and apprehensively approached the double glass doored entrance. I glanced up at the towering buildings that seemed to close in oppressively.

The entrance area was rather small and crowded. On my right were stairs and a lift, ditto on my left. Straight ahead was a long table with about four people sitting behind it answering questions and looking very harassed. (Had I been pre-cognitive, I'd have said they looked like a convention committee.) Milling around was a curious mixture of long-haired, popular image student-types and people wearing quite ordinary clothing with hair about as long as mine. One dark-complexioned couple sat on a stair reading the Black Dwarf and gabbling to each other in what sounded like Spanish. It was very much an amalgam of Third World students. I asked a guy sitting at the table how I could find my friend. He told me it would be pretty difficult and the best thing for me to do was either to stay in this area or pin a notice to the board behind me and have a wander round. After half an hour, I opted for the second course and started down a corridor. It was rather a tatty old place, as I remember it. Revolutionary posters alternated incongruously on the wall with official college notices. I heard a rather loud voice coming from behind a set of double doors. A notice on one of them informed me it was a lecture on revolutionary economics — "all welcome". All I knew of economics was from an abortive three months in the sixth form at grammar school, after which I gave it up in favour of Religious Education, but I was curious and went in. I found myself in a large hall, and rather crowded at that. On the podium a smart looking guy in his late twenties was talking rather fervently. I found myself a seat a couple of rows from the back and listened. It was apparent very quickly that I was way out of my depth. Whilst I thought I could understand each individual sentence he came out with, I couldn't relate them into any meaningful whole. In other words, it was just gabble to me. I stayed about twenty minutes, more to look at the listeners than anything else, then took up my travels again. I spent another hour in a futile hunt for Dave, before phoning his digs to find out that he'd arrived there an hour after I'd left.

We spent the afternoon looking around London, visiting shops and things. I knew the West End vaguely through having spent a week's holiday in London so it wasn't totally new to me. Dave talked about the student takeover and what had been going on.

"Oh yes," he said. "We're also going on the big march tomorrow."

I was stunned.

"But what about all the violence you read about in the papers, hitting and bashing and big policemen," I bumbled.

"You're quite safe as long as you stay in the middle of the crowd," he said.

"Great." Unenthusiastically.

"I'll take you round Soho tonight."

"Great?" Doubtful, but interested.

It's a fantastic place."

"Great!" Great.

Soho. Bright lights, dark shadowed doorways, crowded narrow streets, postcards in windows, bookshops with pictures of naked ladies, restaurants, old buildings with preservation orders, plaques on walls, delicatessens, people, people,

and plenty of strip clubs with pictures of naked ladies: a mixture of old and tawdry new. Dave was telling me of how some strip clubs try to cheat you by making you pay twice, or paying at one place which was just a front and the actual club being elsewhere, but we were going to one anyway, he said. So we went strip club window-shopping, staring at the photographs outside, and the prices, and comparing them. Finally we settled on one and went in. We must have struck lucky, as we weren't cheated and just paid the ten shillings.

Now young, naive and innocent as I was, the female body wasn't exactly a complete mystery to me: I'd been out with a few girls who'd permitted me to do more than hold hands. All the same a strip club was quite a new and different experience for me.

Mostly it was boring.

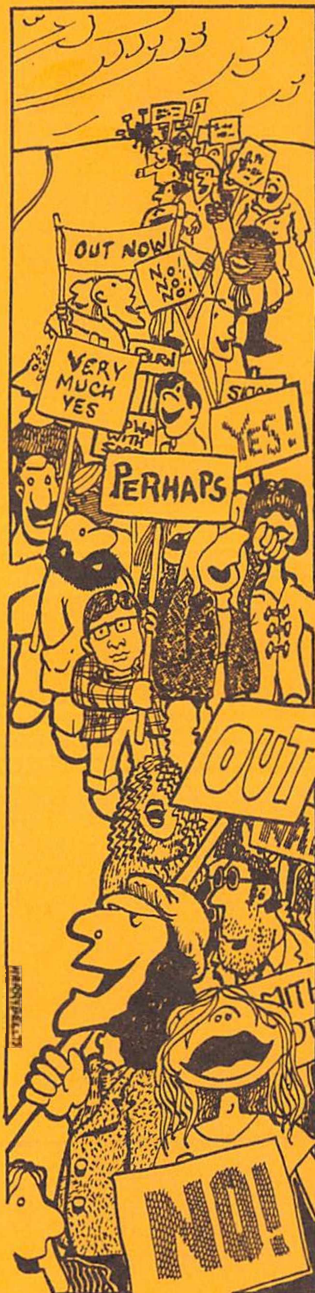
I got an erection with the first act I saw — two girls routinely pulling each other's clothing off, chewing all the time. I got a second one from an attractive, big busted girl who actually seemed to enjoy what she was doing and who sexually teased the audience. (A proper striptease, I suppose.) But they were the only two vicarious sexual kicks I got in the entire couple of hours we spent there. Not that I objected to attractive naked female bodies, mind, but that was all they were. I did get two other positive emotions while I was there: one was amusement, the other disgust. A tall blonde girl got a lot of heckling from a pissed member of the audience all through her act. At the end of it, she did an about face, bent down, presented her cheeks to the audience, stuck a hand between her legs and gave him the V-sign. The "set" of the act that turned my stomach was a prison cell with a large swastika on the wall; "Mars" from "The Planets" was playing loudly in the background. A girl clad in rags was lying on the floor of the cell. In strode a big Aryan blonde carrying a whip, a toy machine gun and smoking a cigarette. There was the expected tearing off of the prisoner's clothes and removing of her own; that was okay. It wasn't just that of course. She also appeared to whip the girl, ram the butt end of the whip up her cunt, and stub her cigarette out on the girl's nipples, all accompanied by loud screams. She finally shot the prisoner, then swaggered about the stage with the machine gun sticking from her crotch. Before stalking off, she glared at the audience (I cringed in my seat) and said, "Don't think I didn't enjoy that because I did!" A few months later, I read in the News of the World (that well-known Sunday paper which enjoys huge sales because of its detailed descriptions of "immoral" activities which it then condemns) that that particular act had been busted for obscenity.

Sunday morning came bright and sunny. Breakfast was bacon and eggs which I forced into an apprehensive stomach.

"Er Dave, are you really...."

"Nothing to worry about, man. nothing." Quite a successful womaniser was Dave (still is), but I wasn't too convinced on his judgement about other things. Still, I couldn't let a friend down, though the idea of going back to college a day early did have a certain appeal.

We threaded our way through L.S.E. corridors, wending our way upwards until we came to a room full of people busy making and putting the finishing touches to placards. There was quite a variety of them. One showed a photograph of American soldiers displaying severed Vietnamese heads and bore the words: "Whose violence? Remember what we're protesting against." There were a number of simple ones: the word "Revolution" in red against the background of a yellow star, a hand clutching a spanner underneath the words "Workers'



control", socialist posters, communist, revolutionary exhortations, Viet Nam protests. I chose one that urged support of the unions because it had a nice caricature of a greedy capitalist. I picked up the placard on its stick, put it over my shoulder, and feeling in complete solidarity with my brother students strode with Dave out of the building and down to the Thames Embankment where the massed hordes were gathering.

The filthy Thames even looked attractive glittering in the bright sunshine. Dave and I moved into the middle of the throng and stood patiently waiting to move. The magic time of two p.m. finally came round and the crowd seemed to murmur, then slowly move, one foot at a time, like a large python just beginning to feel pangs of hunger. (That's not a derogatory comparison; I like pythons.) There was a number of policemen on either side of the road watching (waiting?). There was also a bunch of fascists sporting swastikas on their shirts (the act the previous evening flickered briefly through my mind), holding their right arms in the air, fists clenched, sniggers on their faces. (Not like, I thought, feeling the back of my neck itch, not like.) I was suddenly very wary, but nothing happened.

Slowly, almost silently, the march crept to the entrance of Fleet Street. Almost instantly, the atmosphere began to change. It was as if everyone, at the same time, had suddenly thought: Well, we're here now, let's make the best of it. The chants began. One voice shouted: "American Imperialismmm!" Then the marchers together: "OUT!" This was repeated twice more, then on the last refrain a deafening "OUT! OUT! OUT!" Immediately another voice yelled (this was shortly after the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia, remember): "Russian Imperialismmm!" to receive equally loud support. The faces of the marchers had, by and large, grins on them; there was a noticeably good humoured atmosphere ("an atmosphere of freaky holiday"?). Above us and to the side were the boarded up windows of shops and newspaper offices. Small timid faces peered down. When we got up to the offices of the Daily Express, a paper noted for giving students a bad write-up, a chant arose: "Daily Express! BURN! Daily Express! BURN! Daily Express! BURN! BURN! BURN!" Followed by noticeable giggles as faces above went white. At Rhodesia House, the chant was: "Ian Smith! FUCK!" Marching slowly in the middle of a unified, laughing crowd I felt great, solid, a kind of oneness.

When we got to Trafalgar Square, I nearly wet myself.

The policemen must have been in ranks ten deep. Literally hundreds of them on either side. Ones with peaked caps riding big bastards of horses.

"Now I'm really scared, Dave," I said. "I hope nothing happens." To decrease the chances of getting hurt, I pulled my poster from its stick, dropped the latter, and rolled the former up and stuck it inside my jacket, keeping it in position with my elbow. It seemed to take an age in purgatory, moving along those corridors of policemen, to get out of Trafalgar Square. My eyes kept flickering at the rather frightening uniformed gentlemen, never letting my eyes linger in case that was used as an excuse for something. When we did turn the corner out of the sight of those damned lions, there were united sighs of relief.

At one stage the marchers thinned out, allowing a chance of a brief run, a wonderful thing after the tediously enforced slow pace up till then. I ran giggling and laughing with the rest, exhilarated, my individuality gone, only the high of being part of a mass of people with one purpose was left. (It was only hours later that the implications of what I could have done in that state really sank in.) The elation continued: Hyde Park came nearer. We passed by one guy on a traffic island who tried to pull someone's placard down. He got a few thumps for his pains and was hauled away by police. And that was all the violence I saw.

Finally, we were there, and the marchers were spreading out. We could hear the amplified voice of Tariq Ali and see his agitated form on a stand, a small dark figure some yards away. Dave and I stood quietly listening. After about ten minutes we looked at each other.

"Christ, this is boring," he said.

"Yeah."

"Let's go home." So we did.

I travelled back to Ormskirk by bus the next day. Part of the time I read a book called "Captives of the Flame" (or some such) by a guy called Samuel R. Delany. It was an American edition, a thing called an Ace Double which I'd never seen before and had picked up for a bob along with a few others from a small newsagent near Westminster. But mostly I thought of the march. The terrifying lack of individuality I'd felt and the tremendous high that had gone with it, the mindless elation. It was a sort of positive happiness, a good feeling. But what would have occurred if some nasty incident had happened to turn the mood of the marchers? What would the crowd have done? What would that tiny cell of it that had been me have done?

But it was a good march, a peaceful demonstration of opposition to a savage and unnecessary war and I was glad to have been part of it, to have stood up, even in a minor way, to be counted. It was worthwhile and I had no regrets. I had done something positive.

I got into Ormskirk around six and made straight for the college campus. Wearily I made for my room in Stanley Hall of Residence. The wooden door with my room number on it was a reassuring sight. I turned the key in the lock and pushed. The door opened half an inch. Straight away I knew what had happened. Someone had climbed along the ledge on the outside wall from the room next door, got in through my window, pushed all the furniture against the door and left the way he had come in.

I'm back, I thought, as I put my underdeveloped shoulders against the door and started to shove.

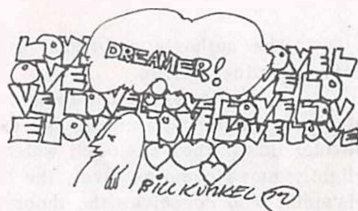
Ursula Le Guin's new novel

The Dispossessed

reviewed by

CHRISTOPHER PRIEST

# Cool Dreamer



**A**ll fiction writing is ambitious, but there are degrees of ambition and it is the one imponderable that most frequently parries the thrusts of the critics.

The middle ground of science fiction — since it is SF that I am particularly concerned with — is the most treacherous area of all, so to illustrate let me briefly cite two extremes. It would be wrong and futile to bring big literary guns to bear on, shall we say, an escapist adventure-story by an author like Keith Laumer (no gratuitous insult intended); it would be equally misleading to discuss, say, the new Kurt Vonnegut novel in terms of plot alone (no flattery intended).

It is the writer who sets his own level of ambition, and it is the reviewer's task to divine the degree of that ambition and treat the book accordingly.

My reading of Ursula Le Guin's The Dispossessed is that it is a very ambitious novel indeed, and the following paragraph should indicate why:

It takes as its central character a brilliant man (not merely a clever man, but a brilliant and slightly eccentric man) and attempts to depict him as a human being. It sets out to describe not one but two alien planets, and describe them in detail; for each planet there is a detailed account of ecology, economy, political structure, geography, climate, scenery, customs, morality, fashion. One of the societies depicted is what seems to be a wholly fresh Utopian society, and one that is the more fresh for being revealed as a flawed Utopia. The book not only suggests a plausible philosophical/cosmological/physical alternative to the Unified Field Theory, but also shows — in close up — a physicist actually working it out. The author pays considerable attention to the use of language, both in the sense of describing the images with clarity, and in the sense of language as a textured, poetic medium. And, as if all this weren't enough, the book also has a plot.

Confronted with an ambition of such awesome scale, the reviewer (or perhaps it is just the present reviewer) could be forgiven for diving into bed and pulling the blankets over his head, hoping it might go away. On the other hand, as this is quite probably the most ambitious science fiction novel so far written (and if anyone says, "What about Dune?", I'll cough politely), it becomes for that reason the sort of challenge a reviewer does not normally meet.

However, ambition alone does not make a novel. (Drilling oil in the North Sea is an ambitious project, but not very literary.) What is of interest in The Dispossessed is how well the author has succeeded in achieving what she has appeared to set out to do.

I have already seen several reviews of the novel, and I think it would be fair to say that the general response has been enthusiastic. Indeed, there is much in the book which is wholly successful; the depiction of the Utopian society on the planet Anarres, for example, is the first truly complete sociological invention I have seen in SF. What I am concerned with here, though, is the book as a whole, the book as a novel.

The author's ambitions are immense, and my demands of her novel are correspondingly large.

At its lowest denominator, the story concerns the conception of a theory of physics which will enable the construction of an instantaneous communications device: this is the "ansible", which featured in The Left Hand of Darkness. At a slightly more complex level, the book deals with the life and work of Shevek, the physicist who conceives the theory. More complex still is the story of the society from which he comes, and the society to which he travels.

Shevek was born on Anarres, which is one of two habitable planets in the Cetian system. The other planet is called Urras. Anarres and Urras are a binary system of planets; each is the other's "moon". Anarres has been settled by a group of dissidents from Urras, and in the 170-odd years since then the society has followed the principles laid down by an Urrasti anarchist philosopher called Odo. In fact, the Odonians were given Anarres as a home as part of a Settlement, by which the two worlds would thereafter maintain only the most minimal of contact... the Odonian principles being recognised by the Urrasti powers—that-be as a genuine threat to their own political stability. The Settlement has been honoured by both sides, and when the book opens the only contact between the two worlds is the occasional visit of a spaceship bringing freight and a few pieces of mail. The Anarresti people are brought up to despise the "archist" or "propertarian" Urrasti.

However, as Shevek discovers fairly soon after arriving on Urras (he believes that his work on physics can only be completed in the more concentrated atmosphere of an Urrasti university), the other world is not at all as simple as the Anarresti believe. In fact, the planet is divided into several countries, only one of which (called A-Io) is a capitalistic, exploitative state. Another country, called Thu, is a communalistic state. The comparison between the United States and Russia is ready, although there are subtle differences). In addition, there is a Third World, where the two superpowers exercise their influence, especially in a war which breaks out in a country called Benbili.

In this situation, Shevek — who at times seems not at all unlike Solzhenitsyn, another prophet without honour in his own country — discovers he and his theory have become a pawn in a cold-war chess game.

I can think of no other writer in the science fiction field I admire as much as I admire Ursula Le Guin. I further believe that in The Left Hand of Darkness we have the finest science fiction novel so far written, one which passes every critical or reading test I care to apply to it. The Dispossessed does not change that opinion of the earlier book; it is not so good a novel as Left Hand... but I will not resort to odious comparisons.

Favourable comparisons, on the other hand, can and should be made. The Odonian society and the planet on which it exists are as finely and as convincingly drawn as the people and the world of Gethen. There is the same scientific grasp, and by this I mean the scientific understanding of society, politics, ecology, and so forth. If anything, Mrs. Le Guin reveals greater understandings in The Dispossessed (she is particularly good in the scenes where Shevek is talking about or explaining his theory). Her characters are people; until I read The Dispossessed and met Shevek I was convinced that I would never meet a more subtly-described character than Left Hand's Estraven. Her co-starring characters — such as Taker, Shevek's partner (i.e. "wife"), or Sabul, his "superior" on Anarres — are all distinct individuals, and their actions derive from their personalities. Even her walk-on characters — clerks, servants, train-drivers, etc... and the book

has plenty of these — become people in their own right. (Remember, we are in two alien societies, with hardly an Earthman in sight; the Anarresti and Urrasti are not transplanted Americans, they are quite alien.) Just as in Left Hand, the physical descriptions of scenery, towns, buildings, weather, etc., are in The Dispossessed totally breathtaking. And last, and so far from least it should have come first, is an underlying symbolic structure: left hand right hand, yin and yang, darkness and light. Anarres and Urras, each circling the other, each as a planet complementing the other. On Anarres, the duality of the people — partly human individuals, partly small pieces in a huge ideological scheme — reflects the sexual duality of the Gethenians; even the computer-selected names are deliberately sexless. Equality and interchangeability of rôles are absolutes on Anarres. Both planets, in ignorance, seeing the other as the opposite of itself, just as Genly Ai in Left Hand was seen by the Gethenians as a sexual freak, a pervert, whereas Ai's mission was to consolidate the similarities; in The Dispossessed too, one feels that Shevek's journey to Urras would ultimately become an internal journey to greater understanding for both worlds.

While I am still in a positive sequence, let me add that there are two chapters in The Dispossessed which, with my hand over my heart, I can truly say are amongst the finest and most overpowering pieces of fiction I have ever encountered. Nothing would prevail upon me, in a review of this sort, to reveal what they are, nor even which two chapters I am meaning; it's all subjective anyway, and if my saying something like that persuades an otherwise-idle reader to seek out this book and read it, then so much the better. (Oh yes, I'd better say it before going any further: in spite of what follows in this review, let there be no doubt that this novel is required reading for anyone with the slightest interest in what science fiction is capable of producing. The Dispossessed is a unique book, and a unique reading experience.)

For all this, though, The Dispossessed is not a great novel. It is an extraordinarily good one in many respects, but for me there are two major failings: briefly, these could be described as narrative drive, and emotion.

The former of these is perhaps a more suspect dislike, for it can be argued convincingly that not every novel should tell a story, and yet in the case of Ursula Le Guin's books it seems to me that story and emotion are linked in some indefinable way. Her novels are journeys of exploration and discovery (in the high sense), and this is best exemplified in The Left Hand of Darkness: the story is a journey for the reader too, and as the events proceed so the reader better understands the conflicts and engagements. In Left Hand the emotional involvement of the two protagonists was set against a literally chilling background of glaciers and blizzards; in The Dispossessed, the grey anarchic Anarresti society seems to set a similar stage... but although Shevek is a sensitive and passionate man, his journey towards understanding becomes one of only academic interest to the reader. This is because of the author's writing style... her narrative method, or lack of it.

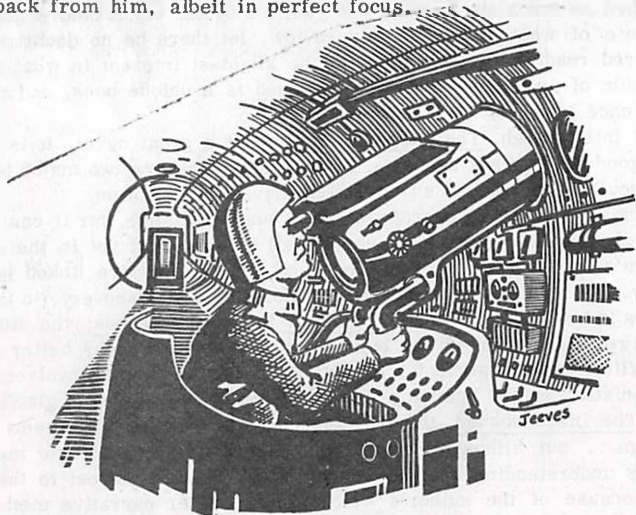
Mrs. Le Guin is a totally uncompromising author: she throws the reader into the deep end of each scene, with few concessions to explanation. Her prose is never obscure, but it is often inexplicable. I have heard it said many times that her books are "difficult" to start, and much as I would be distressed to see her resort to such artifices as the narrative "hook", and so forth, I know what is meant by this. For the first few pages of a Le Guin novel one needs to read like one needs to drive a car on a cold morning: with the choke out. For the re-

cord, I found the first 276 pages of this 319-page novel "difficult".

This discontent — which I accept could be construed as trivial — is a genuine one, for all its subjectivity, but it paves the way towards a deeper discontent, which is to say the intensity of the vision.

Narrative has the desirable quality of concentrating the mind on one specific image at a time, rather like the way in which a magnifying glass concentrates the eye when moved over a page of type; this is especially desirable in a literature as inherently complex as science fiction, where background and foreground are often at one. It is true of all SF, but it is particularly true of The Dispossessed.

Although it is a thoughtfully-written novel, in the sense that each scene is carefully described and there is little repetition of major ideas, the writing has too much depth of field; to continue this optical metaphor, it is like a landscape photographed through a wide-angle lens, so that as much detail as possible is in focus... but there is too much for the eye to see, too many images within the frame. A single image, correctly chosen, can sometimes convey more real and pertinent information about a landscape than a panoramic view... which is why a painted landscape, with details artfully heightened, is often more interesting than a photographed one. In The Dispossessed, Mrs. Le Guin has her perfectly chosen image in Shevek: an intelligent man, forced to revolt against a revolutionary society. Although the novel follows Shevek's career almost exclusively (there are a few short sections where the viewpoint changes), Mrs. Le Guin's "camera" is set too far back from him, albeit in perfect focus.



An example, from Shevek's stay on Urras:

Whenever he saw an animal, the flight of birds, the splendour of autumn trees, that sadness came into him and gave delight a cutting edge. He did not think consciously of Takver at such moments, he did not think of her absence. Rather it was as if she was there although he was not thinking about her. It was as if the beauty and strangeness of the beasts and plants of Urras had been charged

with a message for him by Takver, who would never see them, whose ancestors for seven generations had never touched an animal's warm fur, or seen the flash of wings in the shade of trees. (p. 127)

As prose, this is beautiful writing (and as such rare to the point of standing virtually alone in science fiction), but all writing must have an idea to express. This passage immediately follows Shevek's reaction to seeing an otter. What I believe Mrs. Le Guin is getting at here — the statement contained in the last sentence — is that the evidence of Urrasti fauna is associated in his mind with his partner, Takver. Well and good, but the stuff about the seven generations of ancestors, elegantly and poetically put as it is, is an adornment already well established earlier in the novel. Furthermore, the associative image with Takver has itself been dramatically established earlier.

Almost the first thing Shevek notices on Urras is a horse. Then:

They wanted to talk with him, but Shevek was not listening again. He was thinking of Takver. He wondered what that deep, dry, dark gaze out of the darkness would have meant to Takver. She had always known that all lives are in common, rejoicing in her kinship to the fish in the tanks of her laboratories, seeking the experience of existences outside the human boundary. Takver would have known how to look back at that eye in the darkness under the trees. (p. 22)

If the narrative was tighter, less frequently discursive, this kind of repetition would be avoided, simply because the author's eye would also be concentrated by the magnifying glass.

It should be said, incidentally, that one of the pleasures of this novel is its discursive detail... but it is a pleasure to be worked at, one about which the reader is forced to be selective because the author is not.

Before finishing, I have to mention a few minor irritations, mainly because this is the first of Mrs. Le Guin's books where I have been distracted by them. Of all American writers, Mrs. Le Guin is the one least prone to the use of colloquialisms or debased language. I was sorry to see, then, her say "talk with", in the second quote above, and "in back", on p. 242 and elsewhere. I detested "Shevek sat quite moveless" (p. 229), and "Yellow gleams slitted from around shuttered windows" (p. 239). The last is mentioned simply because I never expected to see such an abomination in an Ursula Le Guin book; I probably wouldn't have noticed it in a novel by anyone else, cheap imitations of English being widespread in the hands of countless hack SF writers. And is it only science fiction writers who call people from Earth "Terrans"?

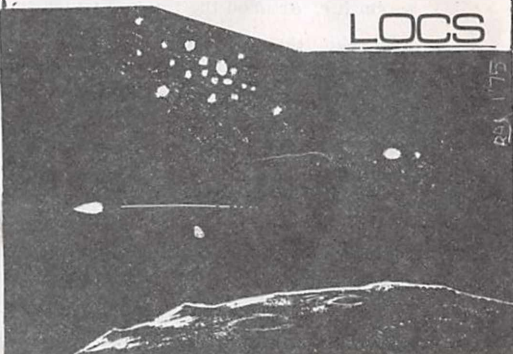
In conclusion, The Dispossessed is a brilliantly-conceived book, and it is with utmost sincerity that I say I am impressed with it. Indeed, I have not been so taken with a science fiction novel since that happy day I sat down for ten minutes to glance through The Left Hand of Darkness, and returned to the world a few hours later with a distinctly dazed expression. I wish I could say that I enjoyed The Dispossessed to the same degree that I admired it, but I cannot and I did not. Ambition exceeded execution, and although Mrs. Le Guin has failed in ways most other science fiction writers would dearly love to succeed, the novel is a failure for all that.

To put it succinctly, and here I suspect I am nearing the crux of the matter, it is a deeply imagined novel, but it is neither committed nor felt deeply enough.

# Circulation

LOCS

I here take back any disparaging remarks I made in the editorial about torpid British fans' unwillingness to write letters. I have had even fewer from the U.S.A; I rather think this says something about the intrinsic quality of issue 6 rather than about sleepy fans. I remember that at Novacon 4 Greg Pickersgill told me he thought Maya 6 was rubbish; I should have listened to the Voice Of The Master. However, the few letters I got were largely very interesting; here they are.



Graham Poole,  
23 Russet Rd.,  
Cheltenham,  
Glos. GL51 7LN.

The rock articles were a bit of a drag to read — not that they were poorly written but I just wasn't interested. I know I should be, and I know I'm missing out on things. I've often wanted to get into rock but have never made the effort, or had the time to make the effort. And besides I'm the sort of person who'll go to extremes and so if I wanted in on rock I'd go all the way and become too deeply committed. Being committed in one thing (SF) is OK but being committed in two things (SF and rock) could easily bring pressures to bear I could well do without.



John Hall,  
between  
addresses

I can remember a time when it was a joy to play the two Moody Blues albums in my collection, when the orchestral arrangements on Days of Future Passed still wowed me into the ground and the soaring synthesised and mellotroned melodies on Threshold Of A Dream moved me quite intensely. That was when they were released. Not now, simply because soaring synthesised and mellotroned melodies are very well once or even possibly twice but not umpteen times over with the worst set of interchangeable lyrics imaginable.

However, all this objective criticism and comment on your own admittedly non-objective review is beside the point really. Your non-objectivity was rendered complete when you wrote the words: "For me, Moodies songs build themselves around the words" and, to be sure, that's just how the Moodies write them. Rock and roll is tight, rhythmic and structured. You cannot rockanroll around words. Words come after tune, to achieve rhythmic fastness.

((I played the LP again tonight while typing the above out. It was the first time for four months that I'd played any Moody Blues LP. I quite enjoyed it, but it was nothing special in the way that it was two years ago when I wrote the review. Nowadays, reading their lyric sheets sends more shivers of embarrassment than of excitement down my spine. Two years ago you would have started up a tremendous argument by saying what you did; not now. I still get a kick out of soaring mellotronic melodic phrases — probably I tend to stick to the old familiar more than you do.))

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19/20 Sussex Sq.,  
Flat 11, Bristol Mansions,  
Brighton,  
Sussex BN2 5AA.

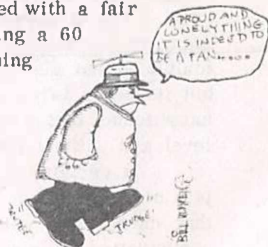
I might be a little obtuse but I couldn't understand the Bob Shaw-Vin<sup>g</sup> Clarke contraption — or why it didn't rate the contents page. How you could possibly make a working duplicating machine from a machine designed for the conveyance of persons (cycle in this case) beats me, especially when no effective inking system is utilised. Instead of using, rather naively in my view, a solution of enamel scrapings in acid, a more realistic ink should have been made from the discarded fork. To do this, merely take it to your local council furnace, shove it in, let it melt, and then take it out again. Keeping it liquid by means of the electrical generator fitted to the duplicator, an excellent ink is available in ample supply.

((Your plan sounds an excellent one; very practical. There are one or two bugs to be ironed out first, though. Firstly, the question of what happens when molten metal hits paper. I rather fancy that this would solve completely the problem of illegible duplicated pages — Fahrenheit-451-style; there wouldn't be much left. Then, provided you have solved the problem of having your fanzine disappear in a conflagration (by using asbestos paper — very expensive) there remains the difficulty that rubber inner tubes have a tendency to melt at temperatures above around 80°C. Finally, you haven't specified what container you intend to use to bring your molten bicycle fork back from the council furnace. Possibly you are thinking of running back at top speed with the stuff in your hands, so as to get home quickly before it all seeps through. Well, I've heard of working one's fingers to the bone to produce a fanzine, but that is one of the bravest sacrifices I've yet heard of.))

Dave Rowe,  
8 Park Drive,  
Wickford,  
Essex SS12 9DH.

I remember the air at Novacon 3 going blue as Gray Boak demanded I slipsheet Blunt, and I explained with a fair sprinkling of four-letter words that printing a 60 page zine with a 300 circulation whilst using the hospital duper after hours with only

a spasmodic bus service or a long, long walk to see me home after working twelve hours made slipsheeting somewhat out of the question. Fandom may well be a way of life, but fanzines are just a goddam hobby, and it depends how much pride, effort and money you put into the thing.



This is the second fanzine I've come across recently recently with an uncredited Grant Canfield illo. I don't know what the world's coming to.

((Ian was embarrassed about that, Dave. That wasn't why Grant sent this illo, though.))

Terry Jeeves,  
230 Bannerdale Rd,  
Sheffield S11 9FE.

I preferred the Hunter bacover to the front — the front was a bit too soggly mammalian. (Shouldn't it be "Alan" Hunter, not "Allan"?)

((Yes. Take another bow, Maule.))



John Piggott's piece was interesting, but for some reason, although I'm a long term atheist myself, it didn't really get me shouting in praise. As for the conversion of an atheist into a believer in an afternoon: I'd be inclined to think the atheism was either very feeble or simply a not too strong form of uncertainty or doubt. Jesus freaks as far as I know are no dafter (and a lot more open about their religion) than most other "believers". Personally, I don't care if a bloke believes that God is a little green apple... provided he doesn't try to put a ban on my eating little green apples.

The lettercol... excellent. The best thing in the issue, and never let it grow less... but please don't do an old-time-Astounding on us, wherein the letters got no editorial comment. Half the fun of a lettercol is seeing what response the editor makes.

((No comment. ...Ian meant to write a long essay at the end, but didn't.))

Roger D. Sween,  
319 Elm St.,  
Kalamazoo,  
MI. 49007, USA.

It seems that most fans are not religious; at least it's not a subject that comes up much. But this is a secular age, and I take it that the situation masks the fact that there are other believers than I. I happen to be a Christian of the Lutheran persuasion, which is a denomination that has traditionally emphasised Biblical and theological scholarship and has seen itself as being in the mainstream of Christianity.

Now it seems to me theology is a dead letter not only for the laity — many an institution calls itself a university and excludes religion from the curriculum — but also for the religious. I am not familiar with any Jesus Freaks, but it seems to me that people who pronounce, "Jesus loves you," or state, "I have found that which is beyond science fiction," are operating at an emotional level and without theology themselves.

It certainly is true that there is no rational basis for religion. The subject of religion must be revealed if it is to be valid because it deals with matters that cannot be confined to empirical means. I don't know much in the line of comparative religion, but in Christian terms we consider that God is transcend-

ent; that is, in modern parlance, He is totally other. I would not say that religion is irrational, rather that its foundation is unrational. One does not become convinced of the logic of a particular religion in order to believe. Rather one believes first; belief is the datum of a religion, and whatever tenets the religion has are worked out as a result of that belief.

Reason is possible as a dialectic only when there is agreement on the premises. Apart from that it ought to be possible for those of us who are attracted to the literature of "what if" to suspend our judgement and consider an idea for its integrity and possibilities. Believers ought to be able to see the purity of atheism; non-believers ought to be able to see the consistency of theism. Yet we seem to have failed to realise that an idea can be held without commitment. I like to believe that fans are more tolerant intellectually than other people, but perhaps this is merely my unwarranted prejudice.

Sam Long,  
Box 4946,  
Patrick AFB,  
Fla. 32925, USA.

You missed a good chance when you didn't work in the fact that John Piggott is by definition a Jesus freak, being a member of Jesus College, Cambridge. John's piece was nice and well-done, but it didn't seem to come to a conclusion; I didn't quite get the point. So John's an atheist. So what?

What gets me about the Jesus Freaks is their seemingly complete lack of understanding of the history or mythology of Christianity (and this often goes for most of your more extreme Nonconformist sects). I mean, after all, Jesus was first, last, and always a Jew and not a Christian; and Christianity spread among people of Greek or greekified culture, to whom the idea of a saviour-god come to earth to suffer and die and arise again was nothing new or strange. But many people ignore these facts and so we end up with confusion, strife, and, in the end, ignorance. We shall know the truth and the truth shall make us free; but if we do not know the truth, we remain unfree...

Leigh Edmonds brought up an interesting point. One is tempted to think of Commonwealth fanzines as "British", but this isn't really so. To Aussiefans, British fanzines are just as foreign as American fanzines. But among the English-speaking fannish world, there's really little to distinguish fanzines of one country from those of another; there is little "foreignness" in fanzines.

That statement must be read with caution; I'm speaking in generalities. American crudzines don't too often find their way to Britain, and vice versa: the uninformed fan is apt to judge his own fanzine too harshly against foreign models. On the other hand, American fandom is much larger than British fandom, and by and large more prosperous, such that the sheer numbers of American fanzines staggers the imagination. But this cuts both ways; there's more excellence, but also more crud. And our small British fandom is more intimate: we know each other better. This is where British fanzines get their reputation for quietness that Leigh mentions; a faned doesn't have to say, "HEY! LOOK! I'M A FANED AND HERE'S MY ZINE! READ!" British fandom is not yet so large that we don't know who's publishing and who's not. British fanzines meant for the British fannish scene are aimed at people whom the faned knows, not, as often happens in America, near-strangers half a continent away. (I wonder what kind of replies this will invoke. Bear in mind that I'm speaking broadly.) Hmm, I find as I read Harry Warner's letter immediately following that he and I agree.

((So do I; you find the same characteristics of in-groupishness in British fandom that I mentioned in my editorial. I have looked at it from a different aspect there — that of the puzzled outsider — and it occurs to me that while you find British fandom intimate because it is small, it is just possible to reverse cause and effect there, and say that British fandom is small because it is so intimate that it has not attracted potential fan-editors. I am referring here, of course, specifically to fanzines; conventions have gone in exactly the opposite direction recently, and they are in danger of losing what intimacy and conviviality they now possess. Personally, I'd rather see small conventions (but lots of them) and large, easily understood fanzines. That's just what we're not getting... odd.))

Mike Glicksohn,  
141 High Park Avenue,  
Toronto,  
Ontario M6P 2S3, Canada.

There's a strong sense of time-binding in this issue of Maya: here I am with a year and a half old address amidst crowds of other fan, many of whom have actually disappeared completely, discussing two year old topics as if they were actually important. It certainly

is a wonderful thing.

Maya has been one of the best looking British fanzines for the last few issues, and this one is no exception. Much of that is due to Harry Bell's brilliant headings and illustrations and Ian's care with the duplicating. One thing that is a bit of a letdown this time is the random distribution of the articles, with some pieces jumping all over the place, appearing in the middle of other articles, etc. That confuses a simple minded fan like myself, and I don't see why it need be done.

((All down, once again, to the lateness of last issue, I'm afraid. Gray Boak did a three-page conrep on Novacon 2, which Ian had all ready and duplicated, on pages 34-36; as this would have been published just in time for Novacon 4, Gray withdrew it, which left an inconvenient gap before Darrell's article. There's one piece from that conrep which I can't resist quoting from my (probably imperfect) memory. Gray was sorting fanzines on the podium prior to auctioning them for the committee, and Peter Roberts was watching from the floor of the hall (or was it Peter sorting and Gray watching?))

"Any Energumens there, Gray?"

"Nope, sorry Peter."

"Are you \*quite sure\* there are no Energumens there, Gray?"

"Nope, sorry Peter."

"What have you got on that chair behind you, Gray?"

("I's been reading my Eggs, I has.") So you see, Mike, what you have done? Producing a fanzine as superb as Energumen? You've turned honest men — sorry, hoaxes — into thieves and cheats!))

Leigh Edmonds has the best advice about fanzines. Just produce what you want to produce and don't compare it with what anybody else is doing. If you're not satisfied with what you're doing, work at changing it, but satisfy yourself first; I can admire Algol, with its glossy paper and colour covers and professionally purchased material, but I'm quite happy with Xenium's mimeoed pages with hand-

lettered titles and editor-written material. I like Leigh's image of quietly going about one's enjoyable business. That's what fandom should be about.

Most of the rest of the arguments in the letters are dead, or not worth keeping alive.

(Yes; I rather suspect that the datedness of issue 6's lettercolumn is yet another reason for the smallness of issue 7's.)



THE WISDOM  
OF THE  
ANCIENTS...

Sheryl Birkhead,  
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Saithersburg,  
Md. 20760, USA.

For me at least, it seems obvious that a zine should please the editor — but it would be nice if the readership kinda liked it too. A lot of the lettercol points up why I'd make a lousy editor — you obviously can't please all of the people (maybe not even some) all the time, and trying to determine whose (if any) criticisms to take honest-and-truly to heart would be difficult, in the extreme, for me.

Ron Holmes,  
23 Willow Court,  
Ryton NE40 3PE,  
Northumberland.

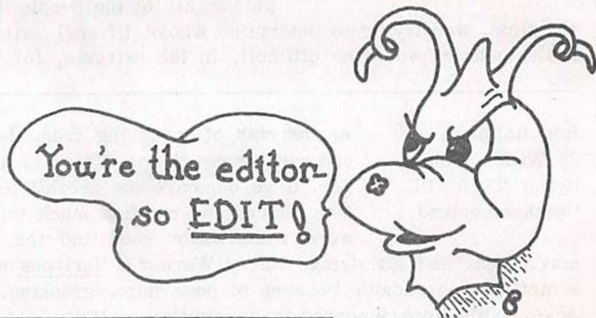
At the risk of appearing from the past like Marley's ghost and rattling my chains, I have to agree with Darrell Schweitzer. If we compare the overall finish of Maya with the pre-50's fanmags we can find much to its credit. The illustrations were remarkably good and the presentation of the whole mag. clear and satisfying. Harry Warner's Horizons was the best of its day, but sometimes unreadable because of poor mimeographing. The Mannings' Pluto and Ackerman's Vom appeared to be similar to Maya.

But this is not the main point to be considered. Fanzine editors walk in a great and long tradition — think of the Brontes and Ravel — where the important thing is the production of a journal. It is not very important if nobody ever reads it. However, the fanzine editor does produce a journal to be read by others. He puts himself in the triangle of Editor, Contributor and Reader/Critic, which is of no value at all unless all three aspects function and feed-back. The editor is limited by the material he can get, while both he and the contributor depend upon the reactions of the readers. The editor, as Harry says, is affected by "different conditions in the areas from which they originate" — and often these conditions include the contributors and the readers.

No good purpose can be served by discussing the merits of broad things such as the British-American fanzine, when the editor and the individual contributors are in need of sound criticism which will help them to produce even better contributions. This, if anything, marks the difference between the present-day

and the pre-50's fanzines; and this may account for the lower number of SF authors emerging from fandom these days.

((I agree with you that feedback from the readers is one of the most important factors helping in the development of a writer's style. Unfortunately most critiques in letters of comment are extremely short, pithy, personal reactions, of much real interest to few except the contributor who wrote it and the editor who chose it. (You will remember you made some comments on individual pieces yourself, which were a good example of what I mean — that's why I edited them out of your letter.) A lettercolumn should maintain its own intrinsic interest without the need to refer back to previous issues; hence most faneds' tendency to use comments which expand and develop the themes of previous articles rather than just criticise the articles themselves. In this way lettercolumns develop their own momentum, and subjects can reverberate around in a column for ages, until everything is said or the letterwriters (or the editor) get bored with it. Naturally the pure critical feedback element is still important. Our letterwriters certainly do not miss out on a chance to comment critically on the articles in the zine; however, this is best dealt with by sending the individual contributor some idea of what people think by means of clippings, photostat copies or simply letting him have a look at the locs next time you meet him, not by printing the whole lot in the fanzine, especially if space is at a premium.))



Bob Tucker,  
34 Greenbriar Drive,  
Jacksonville,  
Ill. 62650, USA.

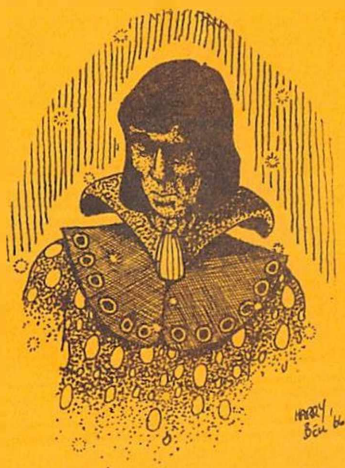
To mildly correct Darrell Schweitzer (page 24), electrostencilling was not unknown in early fanzines. I used it in 1939 to print Ted Carnell's picture on the cover of Le Zombie, and used it again to print the logo on D'Journal (1938 or 1939). The first fanzines I read between 1932 and 1934 were printed, although I don't recall them being illustrated.

I liked best the article by Anopheles Bandwagon. The man is possessed of a fine sense of humour and I wish I'd written that. Could you persuade him to write some more for future issues? I would be particularly pleased to read a study by him comparing the Jungian symbolism of Volsted Gridban to the esoteric imagery in major poems by Grego Banshuck. Mr. Banshuck's only volume of verse is likely to fetch a high price which it can be found in the convention huckster rooms.

((That's the third mention of sexual symbolism — fourth now — in this fanzine. Do you think fandom is ready for this?

It's very difficult to persuade Anopheles to write anything. He's a flighty sort of character, with a biting line in sarcasm. You have to suck up to him, or visiting him can be a bloodthirsty experience. He's a very buzzy man, as he always keeps reminding you.))

Ian&IAHF: Dárroll Pardoe, Ian R. Butterworth, Grant Canfield, Chris "That's one hell of a good cover. When I get tired of looking at it I'll turn the page and see what's inside" Morgan, Andrew Stephenson, and interestingly but just too late, Paul Anderson.



# UK 79

It is now ten years since the last Worldcon was held in Britain. A bidding committee has now been formed to hold another one. In four years' time. British fandom is very keen that this Worldcon should be held in the U.K. and I hope you are too. The bidding committee are:

Malcolm Edwards

Peter Roberts

Peter Weston

If you would like to express your support, you can do so by becoming a pre-supporting member: your fee will be deducted from the actual membership charge if (nay, when) the bid succeeds. This helps finance the bid and gauge the strength of support. Pre-supporting memberships cost:

40p. from:

Malcolm Edwards

19 Ranmoor Gdns.

Harrow HA1 1UQ

Middlesex, U.K.

\$1.00 from:

Anthony Lewis

33 Unity Ave.

Belmont

MA.02178, USA.

(about) A75¢ from:

Robin Johnson

GPO Box 4039

Melbourne

Vic. 3001, Australia.

(The first Progress Report has already been produced; it is very informative and has a superb Andrew Stephenson cover.)



RAJ.  
2 '13