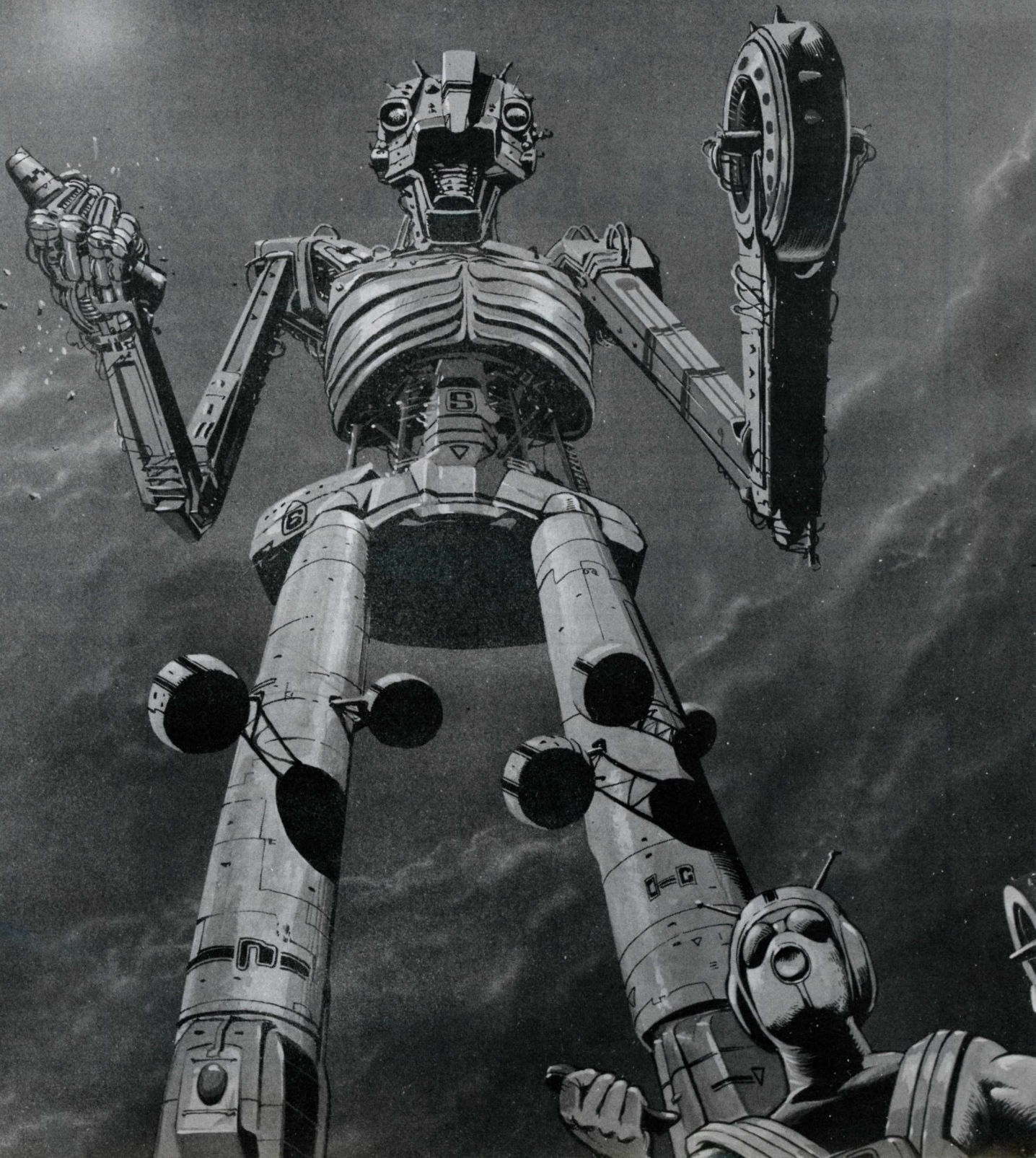


MAYA

fourteen





MAYA 14 ~ Britain in '79 Issue

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Overseas agents: USA: Sam Long, 425 W. Lawrence Ave., Apt. 7, Springfield, Ill. 62704, Australia: Robin Johnson, GPO Box 4039, Melbourne, Vic. 3001. Cheques, PO's payable to the editor or the agents themselves, please. Enclosed with this issue is a slip of paper telling why you received a copy. If you have an X on it, or a BLODGE in these brackets, you won't get Maya 15 unless you respond or subscribe: (()) Collating last issue: Once again, my thanks to Gannetfandom and the other enthusiastic helpers who did their stuff for Maya 12/13: Ian Williams, Harry Bell, Mike Hamilton, Ritchie Smith, Annie Mullins, Alan Isaacson, Rosie Johnson, Bob & Lynn Carter, Dave & Lucille Hutchinson.

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Apologies for absence: I was hoping and expecting to have pieces by Pete Weston and Robert Sheckley in this issue. They're not here because Pete and I decided to defer his piece — which was to have been a four-page TAFF report, with photos — until our Suncon trip and compare the two conventions, and because Bob Sheckley suddenly found himself very involved in a new novel and couldn't stop. But never mind. It's still a pretty good issue, I think, and I hope you agree. Enjoy!

Next issue: Should be out in November. Various goodies lined up in the way of articles (I'm not going to be so foolish as to make any definite promises, though), plus a longer lettercolumn and possibly a portfolio. See you then.





THE REAL ILLUSION

Rob
Jackson

in which the Editor
looks back in pleasure
on his early years as
a science fiction fan

A surprisingly long time ago — October 1969, actually — an overweight ex-schoolboy, newly arrived at Oxford University to study medicine, wandered into the Freshmen's Fair where university societies try to snare unsuspecting suckers into swelling their membership lists and thus their funds.

Me, in case you hadn't guessed.

I was interested in Real Science Fiction in those days. Asimov and Clarke were the greatest, and Heinlein wasn't bad either. Anything without spaceships in, or about silly stuff like telepathy, was fantasy and thus not worth reading, I reckoned.

So when I came to the Oxford University Speculative Fiction Group stall and found prominent displays of Moorcock and (ugh!) Tolkien polluting their display of books by my heroes, I said it wasn't all my kind of stuff and passed on.

But I kept reading, and two years later I was reading so much I couldn't afford all the books I wanted. So after I'd drunkenly described this mind-blowing story, *The Nine Billion Names of God*, at a party only to have two of my audience chant with me in unison "one by one, without any fuss, the stars were going out," and turn out to be officers of OUSFG, I thought — hell, at least they've got a library, it'll be cheaper; and I went along.

At first I was mousey quiet, staring silently and fixedly at the bookshelves even as my ears were straining to catch the latest Group gossip and chat about plans for the next issue of the Group's fictionzine *Sfinx*. By then, being at Oxford had taught me to be more tolerant of other people's opinions, so if people said *Lord of the Rings* and *Dune* and *Dragonflight* were good I gave them credit for possibly being right.

So I took my blinkers off, and read, and enjoyed. I also wrote a short-short which people enjoyed, then some other stories, and started going with the Group's nucleus to the pub after meetings, and finished up helping with the first litho issue of *Sfinx* which Al Scott and Di Reed typed on a huge IBM. (A bit like this one.) Kev Smith and I helped lay the camera copy out... and so on. (Kev is now chairing an Eastercon, You never know what you're letting yourself in for, do you?) In short, I had more fun than I'd had in three years at Oxford, even though I'd always had plenty to do during those years.

One other little thing happened. Chris Morgan encouraged me to join the BSFA. Now, in the OUSFG's library, in a sort of pariah box, was a collection of fanzines, including some fannish ones which OUSFG members mentioned, if at all, in whispers. But when I joined the BSFA, out of devilment I ticked the box which said I was interested in fanzines. And I got some. (*)

I received efforts by the youthful Greg Pickersgill and Roy Kettle — *Foulers* 2 and 3 — and John Piggott's *Turning Worm* 2, as well as some older ones such as the Roger Peyton-edited *Tangent* with, I remember, some *serious* Dicky Howett illustrations.

(*) Those must have been some sort of Good Old Days — people actually thought enough of the BSFA to hand over their spare fanzines for distribution to neos. Think what might have happened had I not seen those fanzines...

Most odd, I thought. It's not much to do with science fiction, though they do seem to be having fun; but you need to know them to get what they're on about. (A typical newcomer's reaction, I know now.) Greg and Roy seemed to be trying to shake somebody out of some sort of torpor and using lots of naughty words as if it were the most important thing in the world.

By the time I'd got these fanzines, and scratched my head over them (taking care to blow the dandruff off) it was time for me to leave Oxford and continue my medical education at home in Newcastle.

After six months' happy boozy sf and club talk at Oxford, I felt all lonely, sitting there at my grotty little portable typing more stories for *Sfinx*. I missed them at the OUSFG, and god-dammit, they were 250 miles away! And I didn't know any sf folk up here... but wait a minute... With little hope I glanced through *Turning Worm* 2. Associate Editor and Slave, one Ian Maule, at an address nearby in Gosforth. They're not really sf folk, I thought — they don't talk about sf at all; but at least they seem fairly pleasant in print, if a little odd; not all grouches like that *Fouler* lot. And they probably do know *something* about sf.

So I decided to try ringing Ian Maule up.

Directory Enquiries.

"Sorry, sir, not under that initial."

"It might be his father."

"There aren't any Maules at that address... wait a minute. Did you say 59 Windsor Terrace? Is this lad's father an ex-police-man?"

I didn't know.

"Because there's a Doug Maule, a friend of mine, recently moved from Windsor Terrace to Forest Hall. Wait a minute; let me look up the recent numbers. 662622. Give my best wishes to Mr. Maule."

Forest Hall — all of half a mile from me!

Nervously I rang. There was indeed an Ian Maule there, and I could speak to him.

So if the Directory Enquiries man hadn't happened to know Ian's father, I might have just shrugged my shoulders and gone on typing stories, but later found a girlfriend or something and never thought of other sf fans again. Such are twists of fate...

Thus I met Gannetfandom. I went round to see Ian, and was awed to find that despite the fannish image of an uncaring attitude to sf, he was far better read than I was. (Still is.) As I discovered more and more about Gannetfandom and fannish fandom in general I found that it would be nearer the truth to say that sf is a *fact of life* for many; not ignored, it was just *there*. One didn't need to discuss it unless one felt like it. This contrasted markedly with the intense discussions at OUSFG meetings.

So there I was, a Gannetfan. The rest isn't history yet; but if I feel like it I may write about it sometime.

This all-too-brief summary of the twists of fortune which brought me to the path of Gannetfannish enthusiasm that has led me first to help organise Tynecon then to take over editing *Maya*, has a moral both for me personally and, I think, for fans in general.

For me, it points up my genesis. I'm a bit of an oddity — I have two sets of fannish roots, in Oxford and Newcastle. This has helped me to keep my breadth of interest — very important, I think: it shows in the way I try to reflect all aspects of sf fandom in *Maya*, from critical overviews of the sf scene such as Chris Priest's article last time and Brian Aldiss's this issue, to thoroughly *Alcoholic* fannish and fascinating stuff such as Bob Shaw's two pieces and Mike Glicksohn's article this issue.

Lest you think I'm blowing my own trumpet too hard, I think there are disadvantages to a broad interest too — it reduces the intensity of vision and the degree of conviction one can *some-*times bring to an argument. (See the last two issues' editorials about experience and differing points of view.) That's why people sometimes call me bland!

I'm getting very introspective here. Let's look outwards.

The other good thing a series of differing perspectives has

given me: continued stimulation and interest. By God, there's always something new in fandom, and it's interesting as hell.

If you stick to one single outlook you become stale (staring out of the same old window at the same old view?). That's the moral for fandom as a whole — indeed it can apply very well to outside interests too. Keep moving, keep finding new contacts, and you'll stay interested.

So if your little bit of fandom is stale, do something new.

For example (ahem): despite the resurgence in British fandom and transatlantic contact, I think British and American fans still don't know each other nearly well enough, and yet have an enormous amount of discovery and stimulation to give to, and get from, each other.

One good reason (ah, among many) to vote for, and then come across to, Brighton in '79!

* * *

Fandom Over There — Here if you're There, There if you're Here

North American fandom's plethora of conventions makes it quite possible for many people to lead perfectly fulfilling fannish existences organising and attending cons without even thinking about such a thing as a fanzine. These are the folk who are least aware of the international nature of fandom, and of the fact that the most important continuing transatlantic contact is via fanzines. Sure, fans can visit each other across the Atlantic, but it doesn't happen nearly often enough or for long enough.

Both UK and US/Canadian fandom know far too little about the other's greats and fools, virtues and foibles. Whichever side of the Atlantic you're on, there's interest, talent and general all-round Good People you know nothing about Over There!

Many people in the States may be unaware of the resurgence British fandom's gone through since 1963, and especially since 1970. The fanzine scene is better now than it has ever been, with the highest quality writing and the most enthusiastic and talented editors and artists ever. There's a bit more blowing-my-own-trumpet there, but it's true, and it's not *only* me, honest. Greg Pickersgill, who was to have given an overview of the British fanzine scene here, was responsible as much as anybody for its revitalisation from 1970 onwards.

Conventions too have mushroomed, not out of control but still comfortable in size, simply because they've been generally so well-organised that attendees have both spread the word to new people and come back for more themselves.

Despite Britain's lack of improvement in standard of living since 1970, the number of cons annually has risen from one to four, and a fifth is planned. Britain is small enough that people can reach all of these if they want to, so the relative lack of spare money among British fans means that in general, as Mike Glicksohn says, people can't afford to go to as many cons per year as Americans can.

Conventions are thus something more special to British fans than to Americans. Witness the endless inquests in fanzines when Mancon was disappointing. Of course time, talent, ingenuity, and effort go into American conventions too, but an American con organiser doesn't have the whole of a national fandom breathing down his neck to make sure he gets it right in quite the same way. (That doesn't apply to Worldcon organisers, naturally — people scrutinise their actions in microscopic detail.) This specialness, the importance of conventions because of their rarity, means that the most talented and enthusiastic people available put all they've got into organising them. Visiting Americans find our cons as well-run and enjoyable as the very best North American ones.

There's always next month's con in America. Or week's. Not so here. Any con is something special.

There's usually next year's Worldcon in America. Not so here in Europe. Few Europeans can afford to fly to the States regularly for Worldcons. How much more special, then, will the first European Worldcon for nine years and the first British worldcon for fourteen years be, to the thousand British fans and the thousand-plus Europeans who for once will be able to make it to the Worldcon? And how much more special to the North Americans who make the trip across, both to enjoy meeting their British counterparts and to see the country that gave birth to the United States?

How special to the Season '79 organising committee?
Very special indeed, let me tell you.

Rob Jackson, May 1977.

THE BRITISH CONTRIBUTION TO SCIENCE FICTION

We are accustomed to looking towards the future, but to assess the contribution Britain has made to an imaginative genre like science fiction, we have to glance backward to periods long before sf existed.

The English language has been growing like a great forest for over a thousand years. The first fragments we have of it survive from the sixth century and are written in runes. Among some of those early fragments are such poems as Widsith, Beowulf and The Wanderer, which carry a sort of awe in them for the world and its strangeness which we can recognise as the spirit which, at least in part, informs contemporary science fiction.

As the language has changed in response to changing conditions, so has the response to the wonderful, but it is always present in some of our greatest writers. The Langland of Piers Plowman, Chaucer, Marlowe, Shakespeare, Bunyan, Milton, Thomas Browne, Johnson, Pope, the great Romantics such as Shelley and Byron, and the novelists and poets of last century — all in this long and illustrious line preserve a vision that escapes from the dull appearances of everyday. I do not know enough about other literatures to make useful comparisons; but a glance at Racine and Moliere as compared with, say, Shakespeare and Congreve is revealing. The unities of drama were certainly not invented in this country; here, joy is never at home.

This tremendous bank balance of the imagination is something on which British science fiction writers draw, often without realising it. Our language is so much one of metaphor and metonym that we have only to say 'the dew is on the rose' to flood our minds with a host of associations about early mornings and English summers and so on — associations vague but nevertheless powerful. The opening sentence of John Wyndham's The Chrysalids is this: "When I was quite small I would sometimes dream of a city." So powerful are the associations here that we are immediately prepared for a novel of visionary intensity. Yet, its simplicity apart, there is nothing in the sentence that can be labelled as particularly Wyndham's — apart from the way in which the grand and fruitful traditions of the English language were at Wyndham's (and his reader's) disposal.

If we turn to the first novel in our language which is unmistakably science fiction, Mary Shelley's Frankenstein (1818), we can see the imaginative tradition behind it, in particular Milton's Paradise Lost, and Mary's father's novels, like Caleb Williams. The text makes specific reference to Paradise Lost, just as Kingsley Amis's The Alteration scrupulously makes reference to Philip Dick's The Man in the High Castle. After Frankenstein, it is easy to trace the tradition forward. H.G. Wells, although he is an innovator of thematic material, clearly belongs to the tradition which includes Defoe, Swift, and Mary Shelley. Stapledon apart, all British sf writers write within this tradition, however debased or mutilated it may become in their particular case. Writers who show loving care for the language, like Ballard, Cowper, Masson and Moorcock, revive the tradition without rebelling against it. In some of his most recent and best books, Moorcock exhibits remarkable synoptic grasp of the English past, its language, its tropes; I'm thinking in particular of the Dancers at the End of Time series.

In Shelley's time, technology had just begun to advance with steadier tread. As C.S. Lewis put it, "The sciences long remained like a lion cub whose gambols delighted its master in private; it had not yet tasted man's blood." The Frankenstein

Brian W. Aldiss

theme of man's creation out of control is probably sf's major theme; it is a British coinage.

If one characteristic of our science fiction is to be singled out, it must be continuing scepticism; above all, scepticism about the role of science and the benefits of technology. We have no writer of the standard of even, say, Larry Niven, who celebrates the extension of technological power into the far future in a series of action-fantasies; true, there is always Arthur C. Clarke, but in Clarke's technological futures the human beings are generally rather passive or else are observers (as in *Rendezvous with Rama*), and not supermen of the van Vogtian mould.

We have bred no thorough-going technocrats such as Gernsback, E.E. Smith, Campbell, Asimov, or Heinlein. Ours is, on the whole, a technophobe culture — which may help to account for our poor productivity record at present. Technology means power, and the great bulk of magazine and paperback sf is power-fantasy, escapism with strong action heroes. Most fantasy can be written very fast — hence the productivity of sf's most characteristic exponents, like the authors who lend their hand to the Perry Rhodan series. It's the plot that matters, not refinements of character or reflections on life, which are the mainstay of real novels.

Preoccupations with power tend to exclude tender relationships between the sexes; so that any relationships tend to be formulaic (boy gets girl in final paragraph) or censored out entirely. Away on alien planets or zooming in their spaceships, the tough guys are safe from female complications.

British sf, not having this preoccupation with power, is

generally more liberal with sexual encounters. Incidentally, the New Wave of the sixties — another British revolution — was anti-technological and anti-power oriented, with a resulting powerful release of libido. Significantly, while the New Wavers paid due tribute to their more illustrious hard sf predecessors, the technocrats could find no good in what was new: it had dirty words, words, guys did dirty things to girls, guys went to bed instead of to Mars. The technocrats felt themselves threatened. Their virility was of the Ian Fleming kind, too self-conscious to be entirely convincing. British sf, I believe, clings closer to reality.

Perhaps the greatest American sf writer is Philip Dick — an unclassifiable creature but plainly not a technocrat; which may explain in part why he won due recognition in the U.K. before finding it in the U.S.

Our best writers use sf to explore that paradox formulated by Shelley long ago when he claimed that man, having enslaved the elements, remains himself a slave. This disturbing premise is also used by Wells, Aldous Huxley, George Orwell, C.S. Lewis, and J.R.R. Tolkien. Those names rank among the most honoured of science fiction writers anywhere in the world.

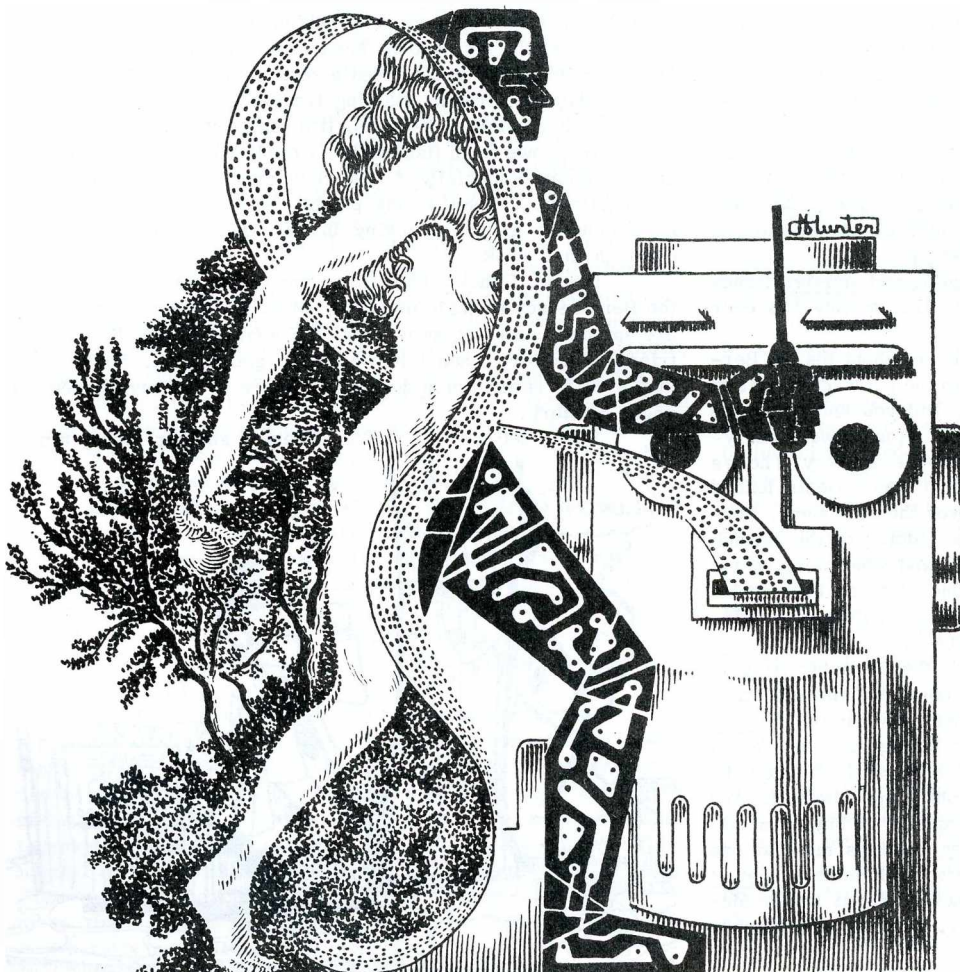
This suggests, I think, that British sf is simply, or not so simply, a special branch of literature, and concerns itself with perennial questions of the good and evil within us, adapting this concern to the surrealist environments of change. Characteristically, landscape plays a large role in the genre; disaster novels — an English speciality — are often exercises in landscape. And characteristically, the alien is absent from British sf. (I am not speaking here of British writers such as E.F. Russell or John Brunner, who detribalise themselves in order to compete in the demanding international market.)

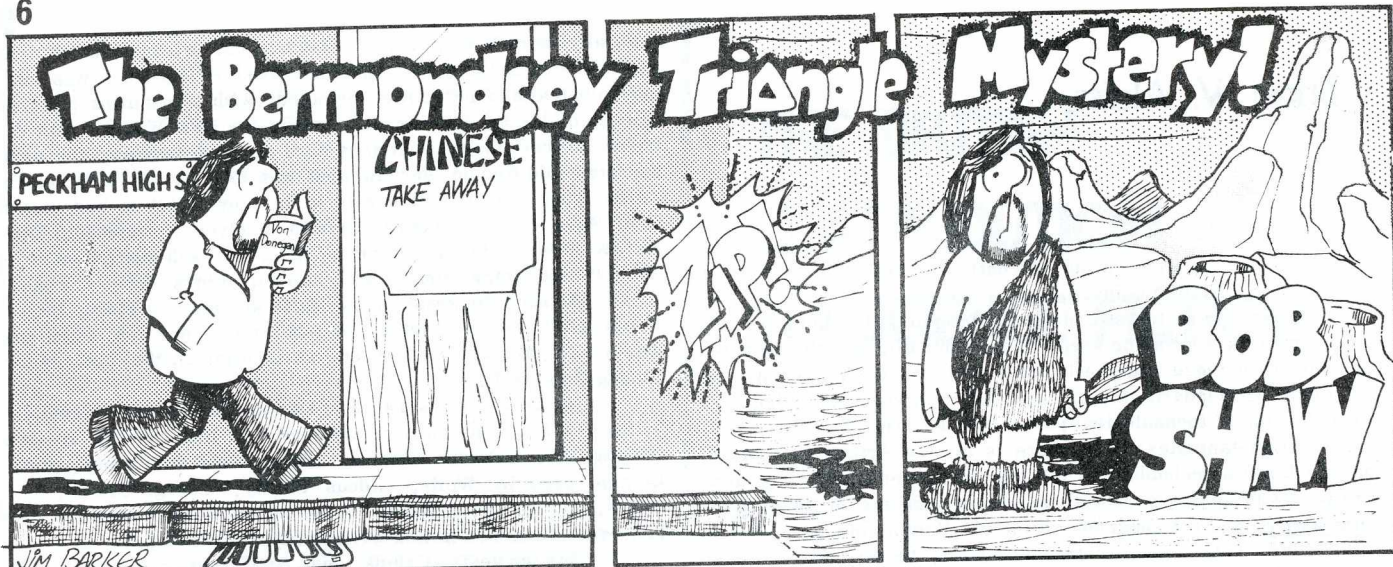
It is American sf which confronts us with the alien person-alised. There are probably historical reasons for this — black and white Americans being themselves aliens in a red land — but, whatever the reasons, the effect is generally to make us (the Earthmen) goodies and the intruders baddies. Drama can be had from such confrontations, but it is surely more sophisticated, as well as being better theology, to see evil within ourselves rather than as an external phenomenon. To think otherwise leads to the foolishness of *Star Trek*, where half a dozen characterless sexless saints go forth and impose American diplomacy on a naughty galaxy.

The matter-of-fact acknowledgement of evil and corruption, implicit alike from Wells's Dr. Moreau to Ballard's Dr. Nathan, leads to the often heard charge that British sf is 'too pessimistic'. It is an idle remark, even if true; but in our present phase, we are scarcely in a world-position to be optimistic. If one wants optimism, one must turn, not to the States, but to the Soviet Union, where optimism is official, and you are required to be 'positive' about the soviet future or they take away your typewriter and give you a had instead.

Perhaps British science fiction is not ambitious enough. Yet I have read five novels published this year which are enjoyable, well-written, and generally enhance life. They are Christopher Priest's *The Space Machine*, Bob Shaw's *A Wreath of Stars*, Michael Moorcock's *The Hollow Lands*, and Michael Coney's *Brontemek!* One must include Kingsley Amis's alternative world, *The Alteration*. All have that modest British virtue of modesty, together with an enormous competence which stems in part, like a Harris tweed coat, from the traditions behind them. I cannot imagine that any other country will produce five such pleasing novels this year, though they may make more noise about fifty inferior ones.

Brian W. Aldiss, November 1976.





Pardon me if I don't seem my usual robust self today. I went round a few room parties last night, living it up — now I'm trying to live it down. Actually, the night started to go a bit wrong when I found myself at a temperance room party, which wasn't quite what I had planned on. I'm not saying the host was unfannish — but that was the first convention party I'd ever been to where I was expected to buy Tupperware.

I got out of there in a hurry, because we've got all the Tupperware we need at home. Our fridge, the pantry, all the cupboards, are filled with Tupperware. There's no room for food — just these heaps and heaps of plastic boxes which break your nails when you try to open the lids. When I die I'm going to be put away in a Tupperware coffin — I think I ordered it last night — and the worms just won't be able to get near me. When alien super-beings land on the deserted Earth in a few thousand years from now and start looking around for a human being to resurrect, I'll probably be fresh as a daisy in there. The only trouble is, the alien super-beings probably won't be able to get my lid off...

Anyway, by the time I got to a proper room-party I hadn't had a drink for about half an hour, and you know how it is with booze — a long period of abstinence like that really whets your appetite for it. I think I may possibly have imbibed a little too much, because this morning I had a bad headache, and there was no Alka-Seltzer or aspirin. Luckily, one of the committee was kind enough to nip out and get me some pain-killer they make in a little shop just around the corner from here — it's a local anaesthetic — and that enabled me to come here as planned to tell you all about the Bermondsey triangle mystery.

Now, to me, one of the most intriguing and sinister things about the Bermondsey triangle mystery is that nobody has ever heard of it!

I mean, practically everybody has heard about the old Bermuda triangle mystery, and it's even got to the point of popularity where the mystery is self-perpetuating. Did you know that the last three ships to disappear in the Bermuda triangle were carrying cargoes of books about the Bermuda triangle mystery? There's so much demand for them in that area that whole fleets loaded up with the books are charging about all over the Caribbean, running into each other, getting sunk, and adding to the legend. They're littered about all over the seabed, and what worries me is that pulp paper is terribly absorbent. One of these days we're going to hear a loud slurping noise — and the Caribbean will disappear! And Castro will blame it on the CIA...

There's even a new TV series about the Bermuda triangle — called The Fantastic Journey — which combines the scientific authenticity of Space: 1999 with the gripping story quality of Look at Life on a visit to Bootle. I mustn't start being sarcastic about Space: 1999 again, though — last time I did that I offended the show's regular viewers, and they both wrote to me about it. And I think one of them had even gone to the expense of buying a new crayon! Mention of The Fantastic Journey reminds me that one of my problems with the show is that, after all those Planet of the Apes programmes, I can't bear to look directly at Roddy McDowall any more. All I see is Galen... skinned! It's hard to think of anything more revolting.

But I was talking about the self-perpetuating nature of the

Bermuda triangle mystery, a process which I find interesting. A vaguely parallel case has occurred up in the Lake District, where I live. There's a local confectionery called Kendal mint cake which, for some reason, is always brought along by climbers who are tackling Everest. The manufacturers set great store by this, and on the waxy wrappers always list the numerous mountaineering expeditions of the last fifty years which sustained themselves on difficult climbs by eating Kendal mint cake. What they carefully don't mention is the fate of the Peruvian Everest expedition of 1949, which was swept away on the south face, not by snow... but by an avalanche of discarded Kendal mint cake wrappers.

This shows the dangers of being a litter lout. It really is antisocial to go around throwing down old bus tickets and chocolate wrappers — except, of course, on the Continent, where they have a much better class of litter. One of the things that appealed to my snob instinct on my first trip across the Channel — it was on a day trip to Calais — was that even the garbage was in French.

But this is getting away from the Bermondsey triangle mystery, which is my main subject today. "What is the Bermondsey triangle mystery?" you must be asking yourselves. If you aren't, I've been wasting my time up here throwing out these tantalising hints, planting fish-hooks. That's something that authors do, you know. They go around planting fish-hooks. Other people plant seeds; authors plant fish-hooks. It's really stupid — because nothing ever grows from fish-hooks. I think the worms come along and eat them. Especially if they're worms like the ones I've got in my garden. The soil in my garden is so poor that the worms go around in gangs attacking birds. One of them savaged the postman last week!

I know, I know! This is getting away from the subject of the Bermondsey triangle mystery, as well. In fact, some of you are saying I can't get away from the subject of the Bermondsey triangle mystery when I haven't even got near it. Some of you may even be entertaining doubts that there is a Bermondsey triangle mystery.

Well, let me tell you... There's another funny thing —



that business about entertaining doubts. Why do we always entertain doubts, while the best that can happen to more deserving cases such as beliefs and convictions is that they'll be firmly held? It hardly seems fair.

Now... what was I talking about? Oh, yes — the Bermondsey triangle mystery. This first came to my attention about twenty years ago, and I want to emphasise that I'm talking about direct, first-hand experience here — unlike these literary charlatans who write sensational books based on old newspaper clippings which were probably all wrong to start off with.

My first tiny and apparently insignificant clue was... You know, I love the way all tales of scientific discovery start off with a tiny and apparently insignificant clue — though I suppose it has to be that way. When James Watt was getting ready to invent the steam engine the only thing he had to inspire him was the bobbing up and down of the lid of a hot kettle, and his genius lay in seeing its potential. I mean, if he had been watching the kettle boil and suddenly it had gone toot-toot and shot off in the direction of London, picking up passengers and collecting mailbags, anybody could have got the idea of the steam locomotive from it. Though James Watt, being a true genius, might have jumped up and said, "If only we could harness this energy to make tea!"

(Come to think of it, perhaps that's what actually happens — the tea I get on British Rail tastes like it came out of the engine, though only a tea connoisseur like Ethel Lindsay could be absolutely certain. In view of that fact, I feel no guilt about telling you the method I have devised for getting free tea on train journeys. They operate a two-man system when they're bringing the tea around — the first bloke comes along asking who wants tea, and if anybody does he takes his money and gives him a plastic cup, which acts both as a tea container and a receipt. A few minutes later the second bloke works his way along the train, filling all the cups. So all you have to do, before leaving home, is to make sure you pack a few plastic cups, and set one out in front of you at the appropriate moment...)

But all this is straying away from the subject of the Bermondsey triangle mystery. I don't know why it keeps happening — must be something I wrote. This tiny and apparently insignificant clue I started to tell you about was a strange aberration in the otherwise fairly unremarkable behaviour of James White. Jim, of course, is a writer whose name is well-known to all readers of journals such as Analog, New Worlds, and Stubb's Gazette.

He is also, as everybody knows, a very steady, respectable and sober person — compared to many other science fiction writers, that is. Admittedly, he has done a few odd things in his life. There was that time when he worked for a tailoring concern, and an encyclopaedia salesman called at his home one evening... Jim brought him in and sold him a suit!

But occasional lapses like that apart, he lives a very even sort of life — which is why my curiosity was aroused when Jim abruptly disappeared for four days. I remember the occasion very well, because it happened one Easter — a time when you would expect a man like him to be at home with his wife and family, helping the children roll eggs down hillsides, and spoiling the whole thing for them by lecturing about the mechanics of inclined planes, and about how it was all just another way of demonstrating Newton's ideas about inertia and gravitation. All authors who have sold to Analog tend to go on like that.

Unlike a ship or a plane which disappears in the Bermuda triangle, however, Jim reappeared in his old haunts a few days later — but he was a changed man! He was tired and shaken, his eyes were glazed over, there was a strange spirituous smell from his breath, and he was incoherent about what had happened to him. He had obviously been through some traumatic, mind-warping experience which was too awful to talk about, perhaps too awful to comprehend.

I have to admit that I didn't investigate the matter fully at that time, because I was busy with other important scientific researches — namely work on my perpetual motion machine. I slaved away over that machine for many years before reluctantly giving up. In the end I was forced to admit that — no matter what ingenious mechanisms I invented, no matter what clever refinements I tried — there was just no way to stop the blasted thing. This was a big disappointment to me, but at least it gave me more time to study Jim White's behaviour, which had steadily grown more mysterious and intriguing.

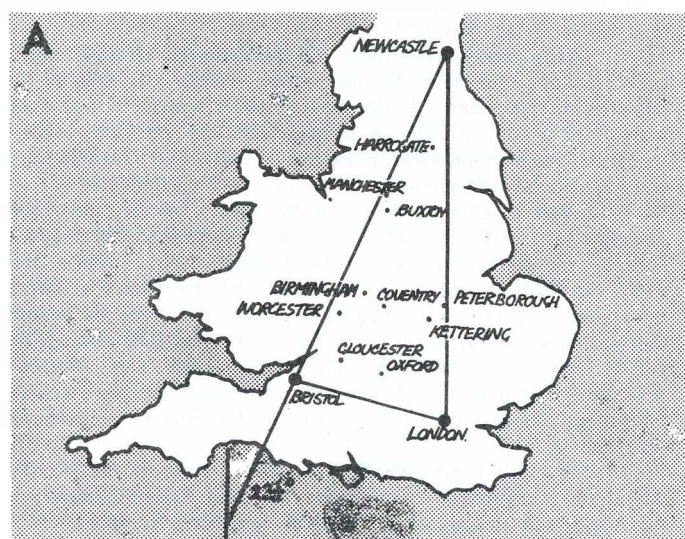
He kept on vanishing every Easter — always returning in

the same comatose condition — and then, to my horror, it began to happen in November as well! His condition was obviously deteriorating. I began following him on these strange excursions, regardless of any physical danger involved — us dedicated researchers are like that, you see — and found that the same thing was happening to hundreds of other apparently normal men and women. Twice a year they were drawn, lemming-like, to some mysteriously prearranged point, where they milled around for several days — often having no rest throughout the entire period — before disbanding and returning to their normal lives.

What, I wondered, was it all about? What occult power was influencing these people to make them behave in this fashion?

Well, the first thing a scientist does when investigating a widespread phenomenon like this is to organise the data and impose some kind of order on it. Actually, that's not quite true. The very first thing a scientist does in a case like this is to apply for a Government grant, to keep him in beer and smokes during his labours, but I knew I wouldn't get any money from the Establishment. There had been ill will between me and the authorities ever since I reported a smuggling gang, run by a chap named Leacock, to the Customs and Excise and they had failed to do anything about it. It turned out that this gang were being fiendishly clever — they only smuggled stuff there was no duty on! The authorities are powerless against men like that... so naturally they resented me for exposing their incompetence. They covered up their embarrassment by threatening to prosecute me for wasting their time, so I knew there was no point in applying for Government money.

Instead I drew a map of the country and plotted out all the locations where I knew the strange mass hysteria had occurred. And it came out like this:



Note the significant shape of the plot! A triangle! Can this be a coincidence? I ask you, CAN THIS BE A COINCIDENCE? Of course not!

Because this is just a rough diagram I can't show the precise trigonometries I calculated, but suffice it to say that the bottom right-hand corner of the triangle is positioned in the London borough of Bermondsey — hence the name I have given to the entire area involved. (In actual fact, the corner of the triangle proved to be located a little further south... To be totally precise, it is in the back room of a Chinese take-away in Peckham High Street... but who in his right mind would want to hear a talk about the Peckham triangle mystery?)

Now, as soon as I got an inkling of what I might be on to, I realised I needed expert help in unravelling the mystery involved, and I began looking around for somebody with the necessary intellectual qualities. My first choice was L. Ron Hubbard, but I had lost touch with him soon after he invented Scientology and... I have to be careful about how I say this... made a cult of himself. I then contacted a friend who shall be nameless, because he is on the Seacon in '79 committee. He had the right sort of mental attributes, but he was too busy getting Brighton ready for its first convention. In fact, when he heard I would be addressing this convention he asked me to pass on a message to all of you who have asked questions about Brighton in general, and in particular about the famous Brighton peer.

Talking about the Brighton peer, he said, "This criminal



lunatic, who operates from the rooftops of tall buildings in central Brighton — thus forcing people to carry umbrellas at all times of the year — has not been apprehended at the time of writing, but the local police are confident he will be behind bars by 1879. There is some doubt about which bars he will actually be behind, but a clone which is being kept on all licensed premises in the area. A new clue about his identity has come from a tip-off that he is an East German who defected over the Berlin Wall. That is a superhuman feat, considering the height of the wall," said a spokesman for the Brighton police, "and shows the calibre of the man we're up against."

That's getting away from the Bermondsey triangle again, but I thought you deserved the break — after all, none of you has done me any harm. I was saying that I was at a loss about who to turn to for help in sorting out this mystery, then I thought of the perfect man for the job... that great German-Irish writer, scholar and scientific researcher — Von Donegan!

I had trouble finding Von Donegan, because he moves around a lot — with the sort of books he writes he finds it advisable. I tried his various clubs — the Playboy Club, Foyle's Book Club, the Shillelagh (that's an Irish club) but he wasn't at any of those places. I was getting desperate when I remembered reading that you have only to stand in Piccadilly Circus long enough and you will eventually meet everybody in the world. This seemed a good logical approach, so I went and stood there and, sure enough, I did meet people from all parts of the globe, and some from the One Tun as well.

Piccadilly Circus really lived up to its reputation, because one of the first people I met was a genuine Bolivian Indian. He told me he was in England to research a science fiction novel he was writing about Ian Watson. Then I was approached and propositioned by a lady of the town, but when she noticed my BSFA badge she made an excuse and left. I have often since wondered what she thought BSFA meant. She possibly figured out that the BS stood for Bob Shaw, but the mind boggles at what she might have made of the rest. The next person to come along was Ian Watson, who told me he was a bit worried by a new delusion he had about being followed everywhere by a Bolivian Indian...

And finally, just as the immutable laws of probability said he would, along came Von Donegan. To those of you who don't understand the mathematics of chance this might seem an unlikely coincidence, but probability math is a wonderful thing. For instance, if two people lose each other in a large department store the laws of probability say there's no guarantee they'll ever meet up again unless one of them stands still. When you think of it, this is not a very helpful statement. In fact, it makes the poor lost person's dilemma even worse — because now he doesn't even know if he should start searching around or just stand there. And if you stand around too long some sales assistant will come along and start undressing you. This could be quite good fun, except that they always start by detaching your arms and head.

Anyway, I was talking about my meeting with Von Donegan. Strangely enough, he didn't seem all that pleased to see me. He was hurrying past with a furtive expression on his face when I stepped out of a shop doorway and grabbed him by the lapels of his raincoat. He stared at me... and we danced for a while... then he said, "Are you following me?"

"Certainly not," I said.

"Thank God for that," he said. "I must be losing my mind — I keep thinking I'm being followed by another science fiction writer and a bloody Red Indian."

"Bolivian," I said.

"No, it's true," he said.

I took him into a nearby pub to steady his nerves and ordered two large gin-and-tonics. He grabbed both bottles of tonic and poured them into his own gin.

"What are you doing?" I said.

"Diluting my gin," he replied. "I always use two bottles because I'm part German — this is typical two-tonic efficiency."

"That's a good one," I said, trying to humour him. "What squirts out of a siphon into your whisky glass and makes sarcastic remarks?"

"I don't know," he said.

"Caustic soda," I said. "Do you get it? Caustic soda!"

"My God," he said nervously, "and I thought I was going mad — I knew I should never have ventured inside the Bermondsey triangle."

"That's what I wanted to talk to you about," I said, seizing the opportunity. I ordered two more gins, and three tonics, and over the next hour or so got the scientific explanation for the Bermondsey triangle mystery out of him.

The story goes back some two million years, or it might be ten million years — Von Donegan didn't want to be pinned down too much on precise dates — and it turned out that my Bermondsey triangle was, in fact, the cradle of civilisation on Earth. Forget all that stuff about Lake Victoria and Lake Rudolph and Mesopotamia and the Valley of the Nile — this is where it all happened. Right here!

And not only did the human race start off here, but the area was inhabited by no less than four non-human civilisations, as well! There's one thing you can say for Von Donegan — he certainly gives value for money.

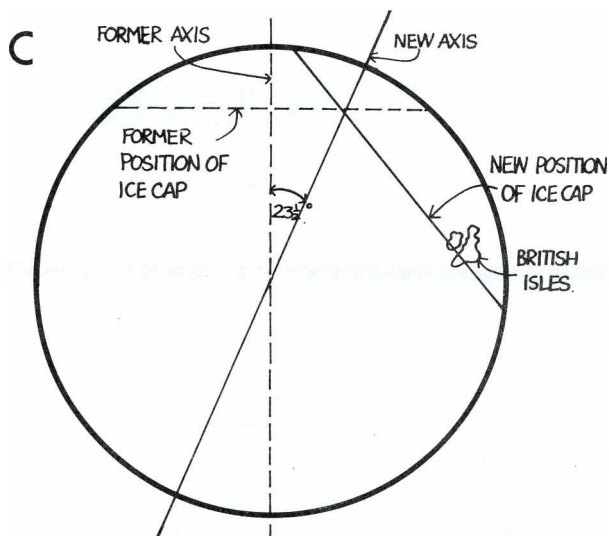
This diagram (Diagram B) shows the British Isles as they were two million or ten million years ago. There was Ireland to the west, looking pretty much the way it looks today. Then there was the high ground of Scotland and Wales close by. The reason they are so close is something to do with the science of plate tectonics. At one time — it sounds ridiculous, I know — all the continents were whizzing about all over the place on plates.

And at one stage, America and Canada came shooting across the Atlantic and crashed into Ireland — which must have played hell with their no-claims bonus. As well as pushing Ireland closer to England, that same collision formed the mountains of Wales, the Lake District and the Scottish Highlands — that's what I call typical tectonic efficiency. America and Canada, having done all that damage, then sneaked back to where they had come from, without even leaving a note with their names and addresses.

At the time I'm speaking of, the whole east and lower side of England was covered by a shallow sea, the waters of which were warm and clear — and which provided an ideal breeding ground for a very large and intelligent species of cod. The civilisation of the Cod People flourished apace for many centuries. They were a happy, contented sort of race, whose only vice was that they liked to get a bit high every Saturday night on their native drink, which was known as codswallop.

The only thorn in their sides was that a short distance to





the west, in the fertile plains of prehistoric Ireland and Wales, another intelligent race had sprung up. They had quite literally sprung up, because this was a species of giant tubers, known as Taters. I have spoken on a previous occasion about the ability of vegetables to develop intelligence, and this new research vindicates everything I said. The civilisation of the Taters flourished apace for many centuries, as well... (This is just like a bit from *Last and First Men*, isn't it? Olaf Stapledon, move over!) ...and their culture reached some degree of sophistication, with a well-developed caste system. The evidence indicates that the ruling caste of aristocrats were known as King Edwards, and there is even a legend that a young, high-born female Tater dashed up to her mother one day, her eyes shining... all of them... and said, "Mum, I'm engaged!"

Her mother said, "Who to? Remember you're a King Edward, and you can't just marry anybody who comes along."

And the girl Tater said, "It's Dickie Davies, of 'The World of Sport'."

And her mother said, "You can't marry that common-tater!"

Anyway, sad to relate, enmity developed between the Cod People and the Taters. It was mainly on account of the Cod People's noisy booze-ups every Saturday night — and if you've ever been near a cod when it has got a bit high you'll have some sympathy with the Taters' point of view. They started attacking the Cod People, who responded by building a huge wire mesh fence running north-to-south along the western edge of their domain to shut out the Taters. This restored the status quo, and the two races might have eventually learned to co-exist in peace — but at this point Nature played a grim jest. (I don't know if it was as grim as some of my jests, but it was pretty nasty.)

At this crucial point in time — the Earth tilted on its axis! It flopped over by $23\frac{1}{2}$ degrees.

Those of you who have logical, trained, scientific minds will — as well as quietly vomiting into your convention booklet envelopes — have leaped ahead of me at this point, and realised the significance of the $23\frac{1}{2}$ degree angle I marked on Diagram A.

The effect was cataclysmic! Even bigger, would you believe, than the upheaval caused by the recent reorganisation of the BSFA!

All the water that had been covering eastern England swilled away into the North Sea, leaving the poor Cod People flopping about in puddles dying horrible and protracted deaths. And, to add insult to injury, all the Taters were thrown with great force against the wire mesh fence... were sliced up by it... and showered down on top of the dying Cod People in the form of long rectangular prisms.

The vision is almost too horrible to contemplate — two noble and once-proud races wiped out in the twinkling of an eye, their pitiful remains inextricably mixed up together.

At that stage, Nature — as though shamed by the mute reproaches of her own gory handiwork — drew a shroud of ice and snow over the scene of carnage. (What a pity that *Stirring Science Stories* had to cease publication — I could have sold this stuff to them for a fortune!) The workings of Nature's cover-up job are explained in Diagram C. The Earth had tilted by $23\frac{1}{2}$ degrees, but it was done with such a jolt that the polar ice cap skidded on a bit further — rather like a fried egg in a new non-stick

frying pan — and ended up with its bottom edge across the southern part of England. The line marking the lower limit of the ice cap — as can best be shown on Diagram E — passes, not without significance, exactly through Bermondsey. (Actually, it passes through the back room of a Chinese take-away in Peckham High Street, but we've already decided not to go into that. I got into enough trouble through going into the back room of the Bangla-Desh in Newcastle.)

What, you must be asking, is the next startling revelation in this tale of Earth in the throes of cosmic upheaval?

Well, I'll tell you — otherwise there wouldn't be much point in me sitting up here like a berk when I could be in the bar enjoying myself. The next thing that happened was that a race of alien beings descended from the stars and, because they came from a very chilly planet, settled around the North Pole. Von Donegan has already dealt extensively with these invaders, whom he dubbed Ickimoes, in his book *The Skateboards of the Gods* — but that is a slightly misleading title, because the Ickimoes actually went around in huge salt-powered sleds.

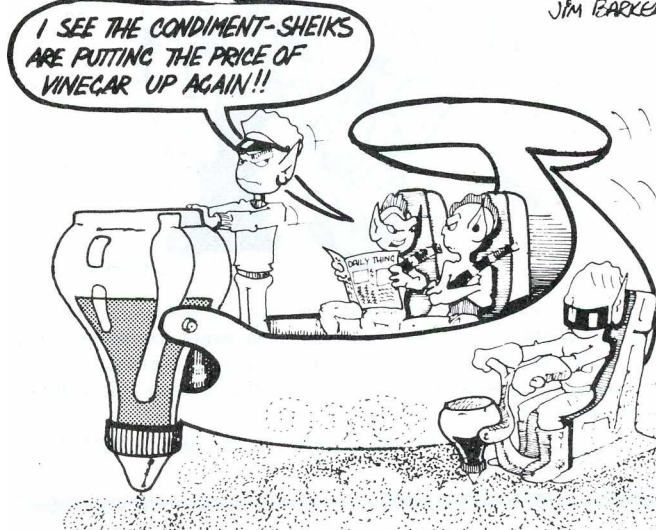
These bizarre vehicles, which could only have been the product of an alien mind, operated on an ingenious principle. Each one had a large salt shaker mounted in front of it. The salt was shaken down on to the ice, which promptly melted, creating a small hill which the sled slid down — and the process was continuously repeated. Ah, I can see that the technically-minded people in the audience are objecting to this notion on sound engineering principles — and I know what your objection is. You're saying the sleds would never be able to carry enough salt to go any distance. Well, the Ickimoes thought of that, naturally, and they positioned salt dumps, for refuelling, all over their territories which extended to the southern extremities of the ice cap.

However, the millennia rolled onwards inexorably, the ice cap retreated from England and reformed in its proper place, and the enigmatic Ickimoes withdrew from the stage of world history to be lost forever in the swirling Arctic snows. (You know, this stuff is too good for *Stirring Science Stories* — if I polished it up a bit I bet I could flog it to *Readers' Digest*. It would look well in there beside all those articles about how getting cancer is actually quite enjoyable. My favourite article from *Readers' Digest* was the one entitled "New Hope for the Dead".)

As I was saying, the Ickimoes gradually disappeared, leaving no traces of their existence except for numerous mounds of salt all over the place — but then a new lot of alien invaders came up from the south. Little is known about this second wave of invaders, partly because Von Donegan hasn't had time to cook up much archaeological evidence about them, partly because their empire was confined to areas of the world where the top layer was composed of limestone or chalk. The reason for this seemingly arbitrary limit to their movements is that they used vehicles which were even more ingenious than salt-powered sleds — they used vinegar-powered hovercraft!

Ancient hieroglyphs on the walls of caves near Dover — which Von Donegan is hoping to finish carving before he goes on his holidays next month — clearly show these beings sitting on their little hovercraft, which worked by spraying acetic acid on the chalky ground and floating on the clouds of carbon dioxide which were given off as a result. He gave them the name of Sar-

JIM BARKER.



sons — not to be confused with Saracens — because their fuel was remarkably similar to a well-known brand of vinegar.

For a brief period the Sarsons ranged over that part of Britain which has a top stratum of chalk or limestone, an area whose eastern edge is a fairly straight line running downwards from Newcastle through... you've guessed it! ...the back room of the Chinese take-away in Peckham High Street.

And there you have it! The Bermondsey triangle clearly defined, for all to see.

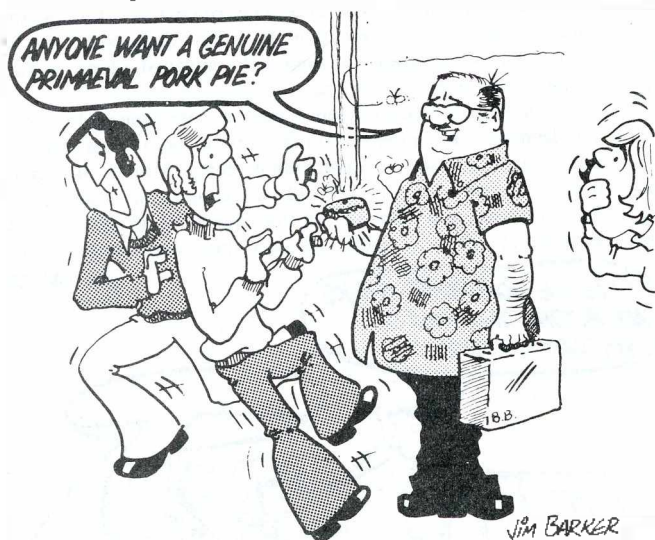
In case you haven't already worked it out, I should explain that the Sarsons stayed in Britain for only a short time, because a general Ice Age was coming and their technology wasn't sufficiently advanced to enable them to invent a satisfactory anti-freeze for their vinegar. They retreated to the south, the Ice Age held sway for thousands of years, and when the glaciers finally retreated Homo Sapiens had at last appeared on the scene. Who said "Bloody near time!" down at the back there?

Anyway, life was very difficult at first for this puny hairless creature with his ineffectual teeth — this was long before the National Health Service provided him with wigs and stainless steel dentures for next to nothing. It was even before the Biblical scribes had started to write screenplays for Charlton Heston, and early man would have died away in short order had he not found the one place on Earth where survival was easy. Preserved in the permafrost of the Bermondsey triangle was a tectonic plate of fish and chips, ready-sprinkled with salt and vinegar.

When conditions were too harsh for intelligent life throughout the rest of the world, the fish-and-chip mines of the Bermondsey triangle were supporting thriving communities of well-nourished human beings, who — once or twice a year — gathered at the largest diggings to replenish their supplies and to give thanks to their deities.

Small wonder, then, that deep-rooted racial memories cause some of their descendants to flock to the same places and go through half-understood rituals. Large numbers of them cram themselves into small rooms at night and drink vast amounts of alcoholic liquor, much to the annoyance of those in neighbouring rooms — thus acting out the role of the Cod People getting tanked up on codswallop and enraging the Taters.

Many small blocks of duplicated paper are thrown around, an obvious re-enactment of the original showering of the area with sliced up Taters. And a tall, priestly, imposing figure, ceremonially robed, or sometimes ceremonially disrobed, passes among the pilgrims, distributing pork pies which are symbolic of — and nearly as old as — the primeval fish and chips.



Von Donegan believes that the large amounts of alcohol drunk during the day at these strange congresses represents the acetic acid which the Sarsons sprinkled over everything from their hovercraft — which reminds me that I have left a large vinegar-and- tonic out in the bar...

Bob Shaw, April 1977.

First heard as a talk at Eastercon '77.

Mike Glicksohn

For several weeks now I've had a letter taped to the wall above my desk with a request from ever-salivating-after-glory Rob Jackson. He wants an article. He's in good company: I tape up all the requests I fully intend to get around to Real Soon Now. Rob is right up there beside articles I've promised to The Dallascon Bulletin, Trumpet and Psychotic. But Rob's letter is different from all the rest.

He specifically informs me that "It's quite possible to start an article talking about the actual subject the article is going to be about!" I'd never thought of that! It's amazing what insight editing Maya has given Rob. It's strikingly simple when you think about it: start right in and tell the readers what you're going to be talking about. What directness, what honesty, what clarity of exposition! Waa/ Loo! No more beating around the Bushyager, no more witty Glicksohnian unappreciated introductions, no more padding for that extra few cents and a quarter a word. Okay, Rob, you're the boss: I'll start right in and say what this article is about.

This article is about four pages.

Now that Rob's demanding editorial sense has been satisfied, I can get down to the matter at hand. Happily for me the matter at hand has coalesced into a forty ounce bottle of Glenfiddich! Forty ounce bottles of Glenfiddich make me think of Duty Free Shops located at strategic points along the world's longest undefended (except for surly unimaginative customs men) border, and Duty Free Shops make me think of conventions, and, say, didn't Rob Jackson want an article about North American conventions for some magazine or other he wants to publish? What a coincidence! Out of nowhere has materialised a topic for this article. You see the advantages of these rambling introductions, Rob?

Actually, though, Rob asked me some time ago for an article about our cons and possibly about the differences between Ours and Theirs (or Ours and Yours if, as you're reading this, draught Guinness is available anywhere within a radius of a couple of hundred miles) but I wasn't about to let any snotty doctor publishing a Hugo-worthy fanzine talk me out of my standard way of writing for fanzines. Next thing you know people will be telling me how to write locs! (And the churl who muttered "About time" can go read an entire run of Malfunction as punishment.)

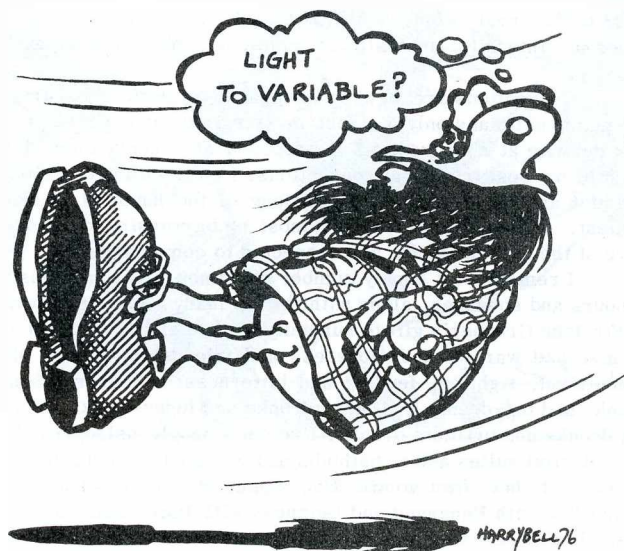
I've been thinking about the differences between North American and English conventions for some time, and I almost started this piece in a motel in Chatham, Ontario on the way to Ann Arbor, Michigan for the third Confusion (named Confusion 14 but don't ask!) An important difference between the two types of cons was made rather clear to me that day: I doubt any English convention has ever almost been called off because a major blizzard literally paralysed an area many times larger than the British Isles.

Along with a great many people who'd been planning for weeks and even months to attend Confusion, I couldn't make it. The weather wouldn't let me. So I spent a dry night in a motel nine hours and a hundred and eighty miles from home and ninety miles from a convention hotel filled with free scotch after trying to dig a wiped-out Volkswagen out of a snow drift in temperature of seventy degrees below zero. Most English fans probably haven't had such a delightful experience. I should be so lucky!

The incident points out two of the major differences between conventions on the west side of the Atlantic and those on the east side. Namely: frequency and distance. I attended fifteen cons last year, and only a state of impoverishment induced by excessive consumption of eleven-dollar-a-bottle Chivas prevented me from attending twice that many. There are probably well over a hundred conventions a year in North America (almost all of them in the United States), ranging from cons with more than fifteen hundred attendees (the worldcon, Westercon, and occasionally some of the major east coast gatherings) to little one-day affairs attracting a few dozen local fans.

WINDS LIGHT TO VARIABLE

An Examination of the Culturally Induced Disparities Between Gatherings of Scientifiction Enthusiasts in Varying Socio-Economic and Geographic Environments.
Hic!



The most fanatical English convention fan can attend maybe four cons a year (and that's double what it has been for years) with the possibility of some European weekends tossed in. Obviously this plethora of opportunities to see fellow fans in a convention setting must create a different attitude towards cons in American fen. No-one enjoys a bumper con, but over here a poor con is only that: one less-than-successful weekend. I truly sympathised with English fen who found Mancon a disaster. Imagine anticipating one frantic fannish gathering a year and having it bomb! And possibly a full year to elapse before the bad taste can be removed. North America's 'Con-of-the-Week' club may be financially draining but it's a hell of a lot easier on the psyche!

Another difference in the convention scene is tied to the different attitudes that the English and Americans (I'm going to use that word to mean 'North Americans' and Canadian nationalists will have to forgive me) have towards distance. I was shocked to learn from Peter Roberts that he'd never made the short hop from London to Newcastle till there was a con up there, and equally surprised by the near-reverence which English fans brought to a trip of a hundred and fifty miles to a con. (Happily this situation seems to be changing for the current generation.) Here, a round trip of twelve hundred miles for perhaps thirty-six hours at a con is considered quite standard, and epic journeys of considerably more than that aren't all that unusual. The geographic (and social) reasons behind these differing attitudes will be obvious to anyone with even a smattering of education. Most fans, of course, will be baffled by them.

Once one of my fellow energumen has driven several hundred miles every third day to attend a con, other differences between Us and Them will become apparent. Size, of course, is one of the most striking. Several thousand people show up for a worldcon and for many of the (hopefully deflating) *Star Trek* cons. (Although whether the attendees at a STrekcon are "people" or not is still a matter for debate.) The larger regionals will be attended by more than a thousand drunken and often foolish and boring people. And even the really successful fannish relaxacons expect upwards of three hundred pleasure-seeking members.

The sheer magnitude of these conventions has obvious pros and cons. (If you'll pardon a pun worthy of Sam Long.) Since Sturgeon's Law applies to fandom just as it does to important things, a large majority of the people you meet at cons are people

you wouldn't bother crossing a room to puke on. On the other hand, ten per cent of a couple of thousand people is still a healthy two hundred truly enjoyable folks, which is enough to make any con a pleasure, assuming you can find the good needles in the dross of the haystack. And when all else fails, there are always the pros!

The great majority of the writers of the stories we are all, theoretically, interested in happen to live in the United States. They often turn up at conventions. So it's an unusual fan gathering Stateside that doesn't have three or four, at a minimum, professional writers or artists present, and they aren't always the same three or four, as tends to happen in England. As a result, I've noticed a very different attitude among American fans towards pros than I saw at my one English con. There are American pros who aren't all that well respected by 'trufen' at conventions, much like John Brunner in England, but because there are so many writers at our cons, there isn't the sort of concerted attack against any one of them that I seemed to see in England. (*) And it often isn't self-aggrandisement and name-dropping when an American mentions a 'Famous Pro' in a personal context, because the frequency of cons and the number of pros who attend them makes the chance of actually becoming friends with an Ellison, a Haldeman or a Le Guin that much larger than it is for fans in underprivileged England.

Apart from the differences in the physical aspects of cons (Americans accept, although not happily, room rates of twenty-four dollars — about fourteen pounds — per night for single rooms because their average per capita income is that much greater than their English peers) there are basic differences between the style of cons Here and There. And possibly the quintessential difference centres around that most fundamental of (public) fannish pursuits, drinking.

While the bar at American conventions does exceptionally well and goes a long way towards making sf cons financially worth seeking for the large hotel chains, it lacks the central role that it plays in English cons. There is a simple reason for this: economics. A full-sized pint of damned good English ale or beer runs about twenty-five pence, or less. (**) A niggardly twelve ounce bottle of crappy, tasteless and almost non-alcoholic American panther piss can set a US con goer back a buck and a quarter, a whopping seventy p in real money! Is it surprising that most US fen bring their own booze and beer into the con hotel and concentrate on room parties instead of congregating in the bar? The emphasis on parties and the decentralisation of the hotel bar makes for a major difference in the tone of conventions on opposite sides of the Big Pond. And personally, I envy all of you your opportunities to drink Real Ale at real prices!

The sheer size of most American cons and the emphasis on parties naturally introduces a problem that I've seen aired in English fanzines so I know it exists there too, but I don't know how serious it is. I refer to the difficulty newcomers to conventions have in 'crashing' the so-called Inner Circle of fandom. With a thousand people wandering the halls of a big hotel eagerly sniffing out free drinks and the chance to put the make on an attractive fan of the opposite sex (and if you have to ask which gender is usually the maker and which the makee then you've never been to a convention anywhere!) it's a foolish American host who throws his party open to the madding crowds. The result is a few snubbed noses owned by people who think that merely having read a Heinlein juvenile ought to be passport into any and all gatherings of close friends who happen to share an interest in sf. It doesn't work that way, friends. Closed parties have become the norm of

(*) Ed's footnote: This has become less lurid recently, and I'm glad, for one.

(**) Ed's footnote: Starts at thirty now, Mike. A while since you were over here, isn't it?

American conventions, and one has to put in an apprenticeship before getting 'in'. Personally I don't find that reprehensible: there is little amusement value in watching a natural introvert overindulging in the joy of being an extrovert among like-minded people and throwing up into the chip dip before passing out on the bed you've paid twenty-five bucks to sleep in for four hours. Newer fans may think it cliquish, elitist, or whathaveyou, but the nature of American conventions practically demands it.

Since sexism has inadvertently raised its ugly head in the last paragraph, a word on the changing nature of American cons in light of the growth of women's lib might be in order. When I first became a fan, over ten years ago, the ratio of men to women in fandom was still of the order of ten to one, and that was quite an improvement over early days. *Star Trek* and the changing times brought increasing numbers of females into fandom, and shook it up considerably! North American fandom was shown to be essentially male chauvinistic, and it probably still is. Hundreds of socially maladjusted young men embraced fandom enthusiastically as a place to chase women, because fannish morality has traditionally been freer than that of 'mundane' society. But the times they are a-changin'...

Of late the voices of women have been raised to protest the sexist attitudes revealed by many convention committees. Going on the evidence I've seen through my contacts with English fandom, personal and through fanzines, I'd venture to say this hasn't yet happened at English cons. With increasing frequency cons are scheduling special programming for women sf fans, and reconsidering 'traditional' MCP type con activities. Possibly fandom, that society of slans with their broad mental horizons, is actually seeing the shape of things to come! Experience indicates that England will face the same sort of quiet revolution in a year or so. It's a serious matter I'd very strongly urge the Britain in '79 committee to consider.

Still, when you really get down to it, a con is a con. And fans are fans, whether they be English, American or Japanese, male, female or gay, sercon, fannish or alcoholics, or even all of the above. I've been to ten Worldcons in three countries, and probably a hundred conventions in all in four different countries and I've found the similarities have far outweighed the differences. Fans everywhere like to talk, drink, feud, feed and fuck, not necessarily in that order.

So while American cons may be more frequent, more distant, larger, much more expensive in terms of total cost and denser in pros who write our favourite dense prose, in basic character they differ little from their British counterparts. Fans like to get together with their friends; they like to drink together, eat together, neck together and even talk together; they don't mind sitting through the same old often-dull panels about science fiction and fandom because their friends are on them; they love

to skip the program and boast about it afterwards in their con-reports; some of them like to watch movies all night long while others prefer to drink all night long and some end up throwing up all night long; some are even serious about science fiction and attend the con primarily to hear their favourite authors speak and later collect autographs (such people are known as 'neofans' or Darrell Schweitzer).

Conventions are frenetic periods during which time seems to collapse in on itself and enough crazy events to last a month get compressed into a weekend. They are times when our minds tell our bodies we can survive on three or four hours' sleep a night and a hamburger once a day and excitement, alcohol, dope and adrenalin even prove us right. They can be manic highs or depressive lows, but seldom do they bear much resemblance to the normal pattern of our lives, a fact which can make the readjustment to the 'real' world a difficult one! And primarily they are times of intensity: intensity of emotional, mental and physical activity.

Conventions are an area integral to my life. (Obscure pun for mathematicians only.) I lost my virginity at a convention. I met my wife at a convention. I proposed at a convention. I met most of my best friends at conventions. I split with one girlfriend and met another at conventions. Many of the happiest, saddest, zaniest, silliest, proudest and most embarrassing memories I have of the past ten years are connected to conventions.

I remember a goodly number of daises and platforms and honours and speeches, along with far too many close-up interiors of Sir John Crapper's gift to humanity. I remember a great deal of love and warmth and closeness and friendship, plus a bit of resentment, fighting, feuding and bitterness. I remember good drunks and bad drunks and mean drunks and funny drunks and boring drunks and brilliant drunks. I've seen people asleep in Vice-Presidential suites and in bathtubs and wrapped around toilets and in pools of their own vomit. I've sipped Beam with Tucker and Rough Red with Bangsund and Guinness with Pickersgill and thirty year old Scotch with Susan Wood. I've staggered the streets of a score of different cities at ungodly hours of the morning with dear drunken friends searching for coffee to sober up with, food to fill a belly with or a wall to piss against. I've talked about love and life and death and astrology and art and science and fanzines and fandom and sex and Peanuts and scotch and education and television and football and a thousand other topics from Melbourne to Paris to London to Toronto to New York to Los Angeles. And by and large I've enjoyed almost every minute of it for a decade!

If this were a slightly different article and I could write like Leroy Kettle, I could tell you stories! A lot of weird and wonderful things can happen in a hundred conventions! I could tell you about "Six Fans In Search Of Philadelphia" or "My Friend The Pro Who Slept In The Wrong Room With The Wrong Woman And Didn't Find Out It Wasn't His Wife Until He'd Left The Next Morning" or "My Friends Who Couldn't Tell There Was No Water In The Hotel Pool But Dived In Anyway." I could even tell you the real Lime Jello story. But this is Maya and I'm not Leroy, so you may breathe easy once again!

Conventions are fun, regardless of what continent they may be held on. And conventions are fun because a large enough percentage of fans are decent, interesting, intelligent and worthwhile people to make them so. In two years' time a large contingent of North American fans are going to discover what I already know: that England, despite economic and political difficulties, is still one of the greatest countries in the world; that English food and drink is splendidly good and ridiculously cheap; and that English fans are among the friendliest, cleverest and most sociable and fannish in the world. And hopefully English fandom will find that there are a hell of a lot of really fine people (and Bill Bowers in America. I'm looking forward to seeing the two groups meet and interrelate in Brighton; although fandom may never be the same again!

This article has been about four pages. (*) When Rob gets through reducing it, it may be about a third of a page. Rob is coming over to an American convention shortly.

If he spoils my punchline, when I get through with reducing him in Florida he can kiss Mayas goodbye!

(**)

Mike Glicksohn, February 1977



(*) Ed's footnote: Manuscript.

(**) Ed's footnote: It didn't need spoiling, Mike; it was quite bad enough already.

BRITISH IN BLOOMINGTON



★ GENE WOLFE ★

Gene's response to my request for an article on the British people he has known

Dear Rob,

I thank you for your invitation. If I possibly could,

I would like to do something for you before your deadline, but my background, or lifestyle (possibly both my background and my lifestyle), pretty well disqualify me. I have spent the last twenty-one minutes thinking hard enough to bust. (You ought to see the big red mark my knuckle has made on my forehead.) But I can only come up with two English people I have ever known in my entire life.

One is my sister-in-law Joyce. Joyce is not just British like everybody, she is English from Stoke-on-Trent, which I think ought to count for double. When she married my wife's brother Rob she was (as she has often given me to understand) perfectly smashing; but the years have rolled over us all (Rob was taking apart German bombs to find out how they worked — though anyone could have told him without all the fuss — and I expect Joyce married in dread of a romantic blowup, poor thing) and she has borne eight children, and now she is merely a very beautiful woman.

Joyce makes Real English Trifle that we have to pronounce with all the capitals or we don't get any. To do it she buys boxes of ladyfingers and ages them on top of the kitchen cabinets. When she thinks they might be ripe, she takes one down and throws it on the floor. If the box crumbles to dust and the ladyfingers clatter out unharmed, it's time for Real English Trifle.

None of Joyce's kids have ever been more than a mile and a half from Bloomington, Illinois; but they all talk like they just left a Monty Python film festival. It would involve them in all sorts of compromising situations if it were not that there is no one in Bloomington capable of recognising a British accent. Once there was a special on television about how we won World War II, and right at the beginning they had a voiceover by Winston Churchill. It was a mystery to everybody in Bloomington, and most people thought it was one of Joyce's kids talking way down deep; but when they'd had a chance to think about it, they decided it sounded too old, so they sent a delegation around to ask Joyce if it had been an uncle or something, with her hereditary mouth disease, or if not whether she knew who it was. Naturally that put Joyce on the spot, because if she had admitted her foreign origins nobody would be able to understand her at the supermarket. I have always felt she covered herself magnificently when she

looked them in the eyes and said, "Who knows? Some pommy bastard."

The only other Briton I have met was an engineer with whom I shared an office for several years. In a minute I mean to say some pretty harsh things about him (if I can think of them) but he was really one of my closest friends, and since I know that he will take everything in good part if he sees it and not sue either of us, I intend to call him by his real name, which is "X".

"X" looked exactly (how else?) like Terry-Thomas until he had to get all his teeth pulled out and got dentures. Then he looked like Terry-Thomas with false teeth. It did not really improve his appearance, and it raised hell with his whistling. "X" had long fingernails so he could scratch better, and he let the hair grow out of his nose and ears because he used it to clean his glasses. When he was sober he claimed to be English like Joyce; but when he was drunk he said he was Welsh and proud of it. (He also said that the *Welsh* are the best singers in the world; that is not true.)

"X" and I were set apart from our co-workers because we both had a thing for rain. Where "X" had grown up it rained all the time, and sunshine depressed him — he felt that it was unnatural and would lead to unhealthy growth in vegetables and children. I come from Texas, where rain is regarded as a tangible manifestation of the divinity and photographed for display to unbelieving friends. Thus for opposite reasons we two became unwontedly (and by the company, unwantedly) cheerful whenever it rained. Because the windows of our office were boarded up (that is another story, and it was neither my fault nor "X"'s, no matter what people say) the only way we could tell that precipitation was in progress was by watching the concrete windowsill through the crack at the bottom of the plywood. When the sill turned dark, we knew it was raining, and hurried over to the side door to see the water come down, saying things like "This is a fair shower, this is," and "My ghawd, ain't it beautiful," as sections of the parking lot slid into the gully. "X", whose hands were always cold and damp anyway, used to poke them beneath the downspout and make ecstatic (what else?) washing motions; I didn't mind that, but I did object to the sidelong looks he gave me when I wet my own hands and passed them repeatedly through my thinning hair and over my balding scalp, a perfectly normal gesture all Texas people make when it rains. (If you've read my story *Forlesen*, you may already have recognised this place. Both this account and the story are quite factual, and as far as I know "X" still works there.)

"X"'s wife had a terrific U accent, and on the strength of it she got a job as an Avon Lady, selling cosmetics door-to-door. Since Avon makes men's cosmetics as well as women's, her job made "X" smell different and better. Nevertheless, he was subject to long spells of severe depression during sunny weather, no doubt ultimately traceable to his being one of the very few even marginally sane people in our building. When he hit the very bottom, he began to have doubts about the verse of Edgar A. Guest. Since our desks had been purposely arranged by management so that neither of us could see the other, he would come around to the entrance of my cubicle and wait there, sighing, until I heard him or smelled Russian Leather and turned around to talk to him. Then he would ask in tones of blackest despair, "Edgar A. Guest wasn't really a very good poet, was he? I mean, just between you and I, don't you consider him a bit *de trop*?"

I knew that he wanted me to confirm his judgement; but at the same time I was afraid that if I took Edgar A. Guest away he would come to doubt something else — like the worthwhileness of *Life* and *All Its Pain* — and so I always answered, "There's more to his stuff than meets the eye, actually; I understand he's quite well thought of."

For a long, long minute "X" would stare at me while I struggled to maintain an expression of innocence. He knew that I was sound on Shakespeare and Housman (we were the only people there who had so much as heard of Housman) but he kept having those doubts about my evaluation of Guest. When he was depressed he was too polite to argue with me although we used to argue a great deal at other times, and eventually he would sigh again and creep away. He has crept out of my life now — or rather I have run out of him; but I miss him and still think of him whenever I smell a pair of new shoes in the rain. "With rue my heart is laden/For golden friends I had..."

Faithfully,

Gene Wolfe, December 1976.

Recently there's been quite a lot said in a few influential American fanzines about how good and enjoyable British fanzines are at the moment; in particular that axis of Canadian fannish power, Susan Wood and Mike Glicksohn, have both been saying nice things.

Very kind of them, and they're right, of course; but nobody seems quite to have put their finger on the elements that make British fanzines special, if indeed anything simple can be singled out.

Recently I asked Greg Pickersgill, perhaps the most influential recent British fanzine commentator, if he'd like to try to write about this for *Maya* 14, so North American readers could know what goodies to look out for in British fanzines (other than *Maya* itself, which, as the widest distributed and hence probably the first British fanzine a new North American reader will come across, has to point the way). Greg responded eagerly, in particular saying he'd like to amplify and qualify some of Susan Wood's comments in *Algoi* 27; but, perfectionist that he is, he hasn't managed to come up with the right form of words in which to express what he wanted to say yet, despite much agonising; so it's my job to try to put over his thoughts (we've talked for hours about it on the phone, and we agree on most things) with a few thoughts of my own thrown in. So this isn't Greg's article — no one could express himself as forthrightly as Greg — but it says much of what he would have.

You can always tell a British (or Australian) fanzine from a North American one by the shape, for a start. European quarto is 9 by 10 inches, a little smaller all round than US quarto: *Wrinkled Shrew* is the widest-known British fanzine in this shape at the moment. A4 is *Maya*'s size; longer and thinner than US quarto, its chief virtue is the mathematical one that when you fold it in two the resultant rectangle is an exactly scaled down version of what you started with. Aesthetically, though, I would prefer to work with US quarto, as it's a better balanced, more pleasant shape — but you can't get it easily over here. Which is just tuff luck, isn't it?

The shape is trivial, though. What really matters is the contents and the production. I don't really want to say very much about production except that there's the same mad variation on both sides of the Atlantic. Over There, fanzines vary from illegible series of splooges on the backs of old work-bills to obsessively perfectionistic productions ~~like fanzine~~ they do here, too. There's no difference in the overall level of quality, though: most faneditors anywhere at least take the trouble to make their fanzine reasonably neat.

Artwork, too, varies from the terrible to the marvellous; there are differences in details (individual artists' styles, amount of serious science-fictional stuff as opposed to fannish work in individual fanzines, amount of article-related as opposed to filler work, and so on) about which I could write a long boring article sometime, but not here.

So taken as a whole, British zines show no overall difference in quality of production and artwork from North American ones (if you see a bad US zine, remember there are better: if you see a good British zine, remember there are worse).

I've noticed one tendency, though, and I think it's significant. Quite a few of the best and most interestingly written British fannish zines being published now have very little artwork at all. Greg Pickersgill and Simone Walsh's *Stop Breaking Down* has never had any interior illustrations; nor has Dave Langford's personalzine *Twll-Ddu*. The most recent *Wrinkled Shrew* (edited by Pat and Graham Charnock, by the way) boldly used no interior illustration except handcut letterguide headings in seventy pages of varied articles!

Why?

Perhaps it's because they feel the writing they're publishing is strong enough to stand on its own!

And they're good editors; they're right. The writing they're publishing is mature enough, visualised completely enough, that for its intended audience it stands on its own. Let's see if I can tell you why.

First, what do they choose to write about?

Science fiction?

Well-U-I... in a way, yes. There is writing about sf in British fanzines, but it's to be found mainly in the institutionalised magazines like *Foundation* and *Vector* and in relatively peripheral, less intensely enjoyable (to me, anyway) fanzines like *Titan* (now *SF Arena*), edited by Geoff Rippington, and the serious bits of

WRITE ON!

Rob Jackson

A quickie guide to the Editor's favourite British fanzines



Drilkjig, Dave Langford and Kev Smith's genzine. *Foundation*, edited by Peter Nicholls of the Science Fiction Foundation at the North-East London Polytechnic, has a really uncommonly clear-headed and all-encompassing approach to the current state of sf — more than any other magazine, fan or pro, it makes me agree with it and wish I'd thought of that; and it makes me very conscious of how much there is to know about sf, and how little I, and an incredible number of fan critics, know about sf by comparison. *Vector*, despite its lack of variety and the foolish attempt it makes to be all-encompassing in its reviews which Malcolm Edwards mentioned in his column last issue (and which Chris Fowler is now doing something to rectify) comes a reasonably close second in the breadth of its vision of sf itself; but many other fan critics, both here in England and in the States and Canada, seem somehow to me all to have rather similar sets of blinkers on and to spend so much time arguing about the shape of particular trees in the science-fictional wood that they don't think of the position of the tree in the forest, or the health of the forest as a whole. (This has been a Sweeping Generalisation, with Exceptions.)

I don't blame people for writing about specifics too much in their comments on sf; writing really well about sf is supremely difficult. I know this, and so do many other fannish fans both here and in the States. (It's why I don't publish much sf criticism here in *Maya*.)

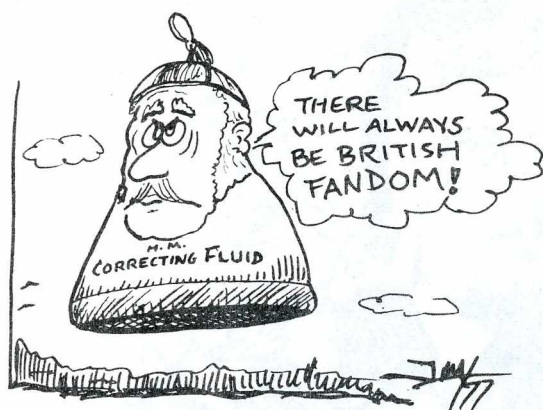
So what do we put in our fanzines, if not Serious Stuff About Science Fiction? Well, we revert to what we do best and are most practised at, and write about ourselves, our fan lives, and our other lives, as well as the things we do for sf. (The things we do for love...)

For example, *Stop Breaking Down* and *Wrinkled Shrew*, supposedly thoroughly fannish fanzines, have both published superb articles by Rob Holdstock on things he's done as an sf writer. The most recent *SBD* had Rob on a hectic week deadline-chasing on a pseudonymous hack novel, and *Shrew* had his report on the World Science Fiction Writers' Conference, organised by Harry Harrison in Dublin last September. He describes Kyril Bonfiglioli, who used to edit *Science Fantasy*, as "great fun", which I can well believe:

"It was during this lecture that Kyril Bonfiglioli made himself known to me, when he slipped into the row in front and seated himself next to Maggie Noach, who hustles me all over the world. In a loud and incredibly cultured voice, at a very quiet moment in the lecture, Bon cried 'MAGGERS! What a JOLLY treat to see you!' Later I heard him cry, 'BOBBERS! So nice, so nice.' Whenever I saw him I listened carefully, longing for him to recognise Nick Webb or someone. It would have been a treat, but it never occurred."

Fun indeed. A less mature writer would have hammered the point home by saying "I kept hoping he would greet someone called Nick with 'NICKERS!'", but Rob lets you draw your own scurriulous conclusion.

Then there's Dave Langford, who like Rob Holdstock is making his way as a professional sf writer yet prefers to write fannish material rather than criticism. I often think Dave suffers from terminal articulacy — he chooses his words superbly but, especially in the early stages of his fannish career, overdid it a bit. Now he's just plain superb, as in this weird little piece



in a report of a week he and some Oxford writer friends spent mooching around Cornwall and criticising each others' stories:

"We were sent off with a shopping list for Deb. Blue string for string pudding? Hard-boiled eggplant? Yoodle? Yoodle, said Deb, is a rare spice which, when added to a dish, expands its volume immensely at the expense of the other ingredients, which it eats. Dishes involving yoodle taste, mostly, of yoodle. Dazed by this imaginative load of cobbles, we bought her an aubergine which filled her with dismay. The repellent fruit sat rotting in the kitchen all week; at any moment we expected the local police to break in and confiscate it under the Obscene Foods Act."

That was from the fifth issue of his personalzine, Twll-Ddu. (Welsh for black hole, by the way.) In the next issue he reported on Greg Pickersgill and Simone Walsh's house-warming party:

"It was all very sultry. Bryn Fortey danced without grace and Pat Charnock without Graham, he being about his vile business far away. The tone of stark disbelief with which Pat can say 'Dave Langford's dancing!' will haunt me through the years to come. ... Exhausted by all this, I crawled back towards the drinks and encountered a latecomer, a male Charnock who burst out with an old grudge: 'I saw you at Seacon talk-ing when you could have been dancing. Why weren't you bloody dancing? Why won't you ever dance?'"

"There's no justice."

You'll note that the same names keep on cropping up again and again — Charnock, Pickersgill, Langford, Holdstock — because they're all writing about each other and about their interactions. Naturally, a small society all writing about each other tend to get preoccupied with themselves as well as other things, and they refer and cross-refer to each other in ever more complicated ways. Susan Wood and Malcolm Edwards both mentioned this in their last but one fanzine review columns, but one point neither made is that the result is like a soap opera or a cartoon strip, each with well-established characters whose distinct individualities need to be known to the reader before he/she can fully grasp the niceties involved. Somebody seeing Peanuts for the first time would be puzzled indeed by a joke about Lucy's crabbiness or Snoopy behind the German lines; in the same way, you need to know what Graham Charnock said about listening to Dave Langford in his Novacon report before you can properly grasp what Dave's reply in Twll-Ddu was about. It may all be puzzling to the uninitiated outsider, but an informed outsider can understand perfectly if they've been following it; for example, Mike Glicksohn hasn't met any of us for two years, but he knows what's going on very well indeed, simply because he keeps up with it all.

The net result of all this is an absolutely fascinating cumulative multilayered picture, seen from lots of different but very articulate points of view, of all the personalities in current London fandom.

Fascinating stuff. I could go on quoting for ages, for example Dave Langford's "exciting discovery of Sour and Sour Sauce, a culinary delight denied to the Chinese for millennia owing to their boring habit of remembering to put in the sugar," but I mustn't. It happens to be Dave Langford I've quoted from most, but I should really have quoted more Roy Kettle — "until I met

Rob Jackson I thought that justifying margins meant acknowledging that the staples had to go somewhere" — oops, sorry, I've quoted again — or Peter Roberts or Graham Charnock or Simone Walsh or Pat Charnock or Mike Meara, or else people I'm trying to avoid praising because they write a lot in Maya, like Bob Shaw and Pete Weston and Malcolm Edwards — all excellent writers. (Even those who live in London write about many things other than London fandom, though!)

Those I've quoted from, especially Dave Langford and Roy Kettle, are easiest to quote from simply because they specialise in quips and one-liners (Throwaway One-Liners Our Speciality); the others are less quotable because they tend to explain a situation gradually, giving their articles a cumulative structure. Naturally the quotes I've given can't give more than a slight taste of a complete article; I can't give you more than a hint of the way people structure their articles, of the evident care and skill put into them. I think this points out a simple truth about current British fanwriters that Susan Wood perhaps wasn't able to make in her column simply because she didn't know about it: that the folk I've listed above are experienced enough, have been around long enough, to know thoroughly well what they're doing. The youngest is Dave Langford, who's twenty-three or four (I don't know); others are older. I won't give any secrets away, but I doubt Pete Weston could have written his Slice of Life columns ten years ago, and Simone Walsh, who is a newcomer to the art of fanwriting but writes with uncommon maturity, is past her teens too.

Which brings me to another point Susan Wood made when she commented on the lack of women fanwriters in Britain and the way in which Pat Charnock seemed to be a lone voice expressing feminist views. Truth is, there aren't enough women active in British fandom — Pat and Simone are rare birds (if you'll pardon the expression). Even those who know and like fandom seem reluctant to write: the Mearas and the Skeltons produce very good diaryzines, supposedly as couples, but both Mike and Paul grumble about how little writing their respective wives do. So it's up to the women to get off their asses, sit down and ... oops, I'd better rephrase that ... get working on writing for fanzines. Only that way will the top-heavy male domination of British zines be broken into.

Although Susan overemphasised the "fabulously fannishly crazy" nature of what's being written in Britain at the moment, which I'd describe (probably a bit too soberly) as attempts to write entertainingly for one's friends and other readers in ways which would be impossible outside the fanzine field, I thoroughly agree with her comment on the enthusiasm it generates: "It still carries a tremendous sense of excitement and involvement."

Right. All human life is there, as the saying goes. I've talked a lot about what I consider to be the best British fanzines and how I think they succeed, but haven't really said yet how they differ from other British ones and fanzines from other parts of the world. Naturally, all fanwriters except the serious science fiction critic are trying to do what I find certain British writers do well — reflect human life and their own feelings within the context of sf fandom, and there are many, many other writers in the States, Canada and elsewhere who can do that extremely well and thoughtfully and present their thoughts coherently. It's just that we've got a particular knot of them over here at the moment.

So what it all boils down to is that at the moment there are British fanwriters with a characteristic maturity, clarity and thoughtfulness to their writing which is found less commonly elsewhere, and that if and when you come to know enough to pick up all the cross-references you'll find there are few more involving and entertaining forms of reading. Few more incestuous, maybe, but few more rewarding.

Unfortunately it's a bit difficult to get one of the fanzines mentioned above (Greg Pickersgill prefers, ideally, to publish very frequently with a quick response, so sends very few copies outside the UK); but Wrinkled Shrew and Twll-Ddu's editors usually trade or send a free sample copy for a pleasant letter. Hopeful faneditors might ask to reprint some of the articles — they'd be well worth it. For further details see Peter Roberts's Little Gem Guide to sf fanzines — available from Peter at: 38 Oakland Dr., Dawlish, Devon for 30p, or in the US from: Linda Bushyager, 1614 Evans Ave., Prospect Park, Pa. 19076, for 50¢. Or from Peter at Suncon; other details in past issues of Maya.

Rob Jackson, June 11 1977.



It has happened again!

Practically every fanzine popping in through the letterbox these days carries references which — sometimes quite deliberately, I'm sure — give people the impression that I'm a boozier. These stories began to be widely circulated some years ago, I believe as a result of a quite trivial incident. I had walked into the bar at a convention solely to look for somebody who wanted to discuss the sf writings of Captain S.P. Meek, and found John Steward eating a ham sandwich decorated with a sprig of parsley. Thinking he looked rather silly that way, I took the parsley out from behind his ears, put it in its proper place on the bread, and said, "That sandwich is soup-herbly garnished."

A nauseated expression appeared on his face — probably something to do with those strong cigars he's always puffing — and he dashed out to the toilet. While I was minding his beer for him, other people came into the bar, saw me with the glass in my hand and jumped to the conclusion that I was a semi-alcoholic. Admittedly, I might have tasted John's beer a couple of times, just to make sure it wasn't going flat, but the whole thing is a perfect example of how rumours can get started.

And now I find that Chris Priest, in the *Maya* 12/13 lettercol, is adding to and embellishing the myth by saying that the first time we met, which happened to be in the toilets of the Bull Hotel in Peterborough, I had taken so much drink that I peed on his right shoe. Very cunningly, he sidesteps a direct libel by writing, "I'm not sure how the accident happened, perhaps one of us had been drinking." This could be taken as meaning that he was so tiddly that he was standing with his foot in my stall, but as he was the injured party — and as we are all familiar with the devious way in which his mind works — there is no doubt about his real meaning. And as if that wasn't enough, he then goes on to say that I have no recollection of the event, obviously implying that I suffer from alcoholic memory erasures!

In point of fact, I remember the evening very well and, for the benefit of fan historians who may want to make an accurate chronicle of such a momentous occasion, can testify that the accident had little to do with drinking beer. To be sociable at conventions I sometimes buy a pint and let it sort of dangle from my hand while I'm chatting to people, usually about the sf writings of Captain S.P. Meek. On that night in 1964 I think I had dangled about seven or eight pints, and suddenly became aware of a fierce internal pressure which necessitated a quick visit to the toilets. This must sound as if I'm contradicting myself and confessing that Chris's story was correct — but tarry

a while, dear reader, as I unfold a strange story, a tale which will lead us into the dark byways of Pavlovian psychology, a drama which numbers among its cast the most powerful barons of English commerce and no less a person than the archangel Michael himself.

You see, for many years I was accustomed to wearing Y-fronts.

It is a measure of the unfairness of our society that the inventor of the Y-front is not accorded the same honours as Whittle with his jet engine, Marconi with his radio, and Eccles with his cake. The Y-front is a beautifully designed garment which provides snug warmth for the male wearer, while in no way hampering his bodily functions. Unfortunately, however, Y-fronts have become very pricey in recent years and even their most enthusiastic devotees have been tempted to try other and inferior products. An example in my own experience came in the closing months of 1963, when I went into Marks and Spencers, saw some St. Michael underpants which looked very much like Y-fronts and made the mistake of buying them. The ingenious authentic Y-front design must be protected by copyright, because the vital opening in the St. Michael product is a complicated, treacherous affair — bordering on fourth-dimensional topography — which, for want of a better name, I have christened the Penis Fly Trap.

Convoluting and dangerous though the PFT is, it would represent a very minor problem to someone like me — who has sold a story to *Vision of Tomorrow* — were it not for the Pavlovian psychology mentioned above. A lifetime of wearing Y-fronts, with their excellent functional design, has conditioned my body to expect a very short interval — maximum of three seconds — between mounting the urinal plinth and beginning the designated business, and conditioning like that is hard to shake off. There are few experiences more alarming than to receive the correct visual stimulus — (view of white porcelain curvatures) and to feel the inexorable opening of various organic faucets in the abdomen while one's fingers are still frantically searching for a way *into* a fiendish arrangement of seams, folds and blind alleys.

On the fateful night when I met Chris Priest the conditions were at their very worst. The beer pressure was very great and, sensing this, the PFT had — with a capricious malevolence rarely equalled — twisted itself into hyperspatial knots. All the cursed internal valves kept opening in progression, but just when it seemed I was about to suffer the indignity of wetting myself I

managed to get a finger and thumb through into the inner sanctum, grasped the relevant organ at a very inconvenient place near the base, and — ashen-faced with agony — dragged it out by the scruff of the neck, concurrently spraying everything in the vicinity in a manner reminiscent of Cagney at his Tommy gun-toting best.

And that's how Chris Priest's right shoe got splashed.

All I can say — apart from stating that Marks, Spencer, St. Michael and Ivan P. Pavlov are the main culprits — is that he was lucky to get off as lightly as he did.

Looking back over the above account I'm forcibly struck by one thing (unhappy choice of words), namely that it is in rather poor taste. In an odd way, though, the fact that Chris and I are good friends in spite of getting off on a bad footing (I keep doing it), that he was able to go into print with his story and I'm able to go into print with my response — regardless of the indelicacies involved — illustrates one of the things I like about fandom. There's a freedom of expression which most of the macrocosm would envy, and when there is really good communication, as with close friends, it's possible to talk about anything without causing offence or embarrassment. It's just as well, really, because some of my longest standing friendships in British fandom began with first encounters which were hardly propitious and which many non-fans would have found embarrassing.

There was, for instance, the time I moved to London in the early 1950s, began attending the meetings at the old White Horse tavern in Fetter Lane, met author Sydney J. Bounds, and was invited to his home for dinner. Nothing embarrassing about that, you might say, and I would agree — except that at the time he issued the invitation Syd was under the impression I was Walt Willis. Unaware of the mistake, I turned up at his home at the appointed hour. As soon as I began to suspect what had happened I made a point of talking a lot about Walt, and Syd — possibly aware that talking about oneself in the third person is a symptom of megalomania — grew quieter and more perplexed with every minute. Finally he set down his knife and fork (an indication of his state of mind — we were eating oxtail soup) and said, "If you're not Walt Willis, who are you?"

My answer didn't seem to strike any responsive chords — this was before I had sold a story to Vision of Tomorrow — but Syd, being a very gentlemanly bloke, allowed me to stay on for the rest of the meal, and a quarter of a century later we are still friends.

Another memorable first encounter also involved a meal, but in vastly different circumstances. I was passing through Lancaster, en route from Belfast to London, and had taken the opportunity to arrange to meet Ken and Irene Potter, who lived in the duchy at that time. Even in those early days the rumour-mongers were at work, though the emphasis was on food rather than booze, and I was preceded in Lancaster by a totally unjustified reputation for being a voracious eater, a reputation which stimulated Ken's warped sense of humour.

The Potters met me early in the morning at Lancaster railway station, which I thought was extremely nice of them. But when I naively extended my hand in greeting Ken shoved into it an enamelled plate of a type commonly used in Salvation Army hostels. While I was studying this object, Irene produced a box of breakfast cereal from behind her back and poured me a generous serving, while Ken — cackling like a madman — took a bottle of milk from his pocket and splashed it over the cereal. Watched by a group of intrigued spectators, Irene then took a spoon from her handbag, stirred the cereal up a bit and bade me enjoy my breakfast.

There was nothing for it but to try to look unconcerned, as though this sort of thing happened all the time in my circles, so I began eating as we strolled through Lancaster, and was actually on my second helping by the time we reached the Potters' home. There's no way of knowing what all the mundane observers thought of that peripatetic breakfast, but I managed to enjoy it fairly well.

If there is any lesson to be drawn from the above incidents it is most likely to benefit overseas fans who are planning to attend a British convention for the first time: Be prepared for anything, from getting wet feet to fed wheat, but most of all be prepared to meet a bunch of interesting people.

Bob Shaw, February 1977.



Circulation

Brian Aldiss,
Heath House,
Southmoor,
Nr. Abingdon,
Oxon. OX13 5BG.

Congratulations and condolences on Maya 12/13. In its mad fannishness, it demonstrates brilliantly that, while science fiction may be about the future, science fiction fandom is decidedly about the past. It

thrills me to think that somewhere there is a parallel world in which chaps like Margaret Drabble, D.J. Enright, Ted Hughes, Angus Wilson, and John Fowles are still talking about what Gilbert Frankeau said about A.J. Cronin in his fanzine Smokey 2 in August 1925, or how that mad Irish fan James Joyce flung a meat pie at A.P. Herbert during the Tower-londoncon in 1911, just because A.P. Herbert ('Bertie' to all) was having it off with Clemence Dane.

((I didn't know Margaret Drabble was a chap!))

Don't you blokes agree that it is precisely this binocular vision — 'crosseyedness', as some say — that gives a life wasted on science fiction its particular putrescent beauty? Of course you don't; no one ever agrees on anything. But take what Chris Priest was saying about Dave Kyle's book on SF Art. Chris is entirely right in exposing the dreadfulness, the parochialism, of the product; though he might have added that it was nowhere near as shitty as Rottensteiner's The SF Book. And yet... I might be supposed to have a certain animus, not to mention certain animals, against Dave Kyle's book, since I am used more than once as a Dreadful Example. Yet the truth is (a phrase which inevitably signals a dreadful confession) that I did enjoy Dave's book. That litany of dear departed names, that Walk down the Slums of one's Childhood... Wrapped within the sentimentality and the fascist overtones of this First Fandom approach is something admirable: a loyalty to one's origins. Koestler's pointed out all the dangers of loyalty, and certainly it does not rank very high in the intellectual pecking order; for myself, I almost prefer this approach to the permanent snobbery shown towards science fiction by John Clute, J.G. Ballard, and even by Mike Moorcock on occasions (see his Intro to Before Armageddon).

Of course, it's very easy to laugh at Fandom; your correspondence might be summed up as Happiness is Pissing Over Each Other's Shoes. But who are we not to take it seriously if Pete Weston does?

It is a delight to see Walt Willis about again. Walt, as someone once said of Tower Bridge, is funny without being vulgar. No, perhaps Tower Bridge is vulgar without being funny. Anyhow, Walt is a shy and pleasant man. I recall with gratitude his kindness to me when I was over in Belfast. But his return to the fold is an odd time for Pete to rake up his old quarrel with Charles Platt.

No doubt that Charles was — is — a terrible chap to some. I met him once in a rather soignée environment in New York and he was the only chap, white or black (I forget which), to go about with bare feet. However, what chiefly irritated Platt in the exter-

nal world (his interior afflictions were his own business) was precisely the sort of mumbo-jumbo ritual of Fandom which Dave Kyle epitomises; he was a bit bumptious, and obviously he mistook Willis, as one might do at a pimply seventeen, for a typical representative of this ancient fandom, enemy of all that was new and promising. It's a pity that Willis was hurt, agreed.



However, Charles could apologise for his malice. Pete mentions his attack on Earthworks. It's true that it was a savage onslaught. 'Do not buy this book, do not open it, do not look at a single sentence', etc. However, when Charles saw the review in print, he was conscience-stricken. He wrote me a long letter, which I received the day before the review reached me, apologising handsomely and fully. He stuck to his principles: he still thought that Earthworks was an empty book, but he recognised that his remarks were offensive and stupid and typically Cambridge, and he asked me to forgive him if I could. I suppose the letter's in the Bodleian now. It was a bloody good letter, and I was of course immediately able to say that he was forgiven. We became friends. No one worked harder for something he believed in. He used to come to Heath House and was always pleasant and intelligent.

Also, he had things to forgive me for, besides my lousy novels. The convention at Great Yarmouth was very untypical in that some attendees had a little too much to drink. My wife and I slept in a room in the hotel used by Charles Dickens when he was writing Great Expectations, I remember. Anyhow, Platt and Moorcock came up from London by train. I met them at the station with my car, The Hooded Terror. Harry Harrison was with me. We developed a fear of starvation, went into a supermarket or whatever they had posing as supermarkets in Yarmouth in those remote days, and bought up all their meat pies. Twenty-four of them, I believe. Tom Boardman was with us, and Tom agreed to keep them in his room. Harry and I had developed the meat pie idea in Harrogate, after finding that a plate of hunt-the-chicken sandwiches cost twelve bob (60p or £1.80 as it would be nowadays); ours were pork pies and I believe it was a year or two later that Brian Burgess started his own line in pterodactyl pies. Anyhow, the pies were stashed away in Tom's room and Mike, Harry and I went out for a few drinks. We found a bar full of Mods and Rockers; they were lined up in opposed ranks and about to hit each other with camshafts and things. It was how one passed Easter in those more religious times. We three middle-aged drunks wandered into the middle of things and mucked up their devotions. In with the pints, we ordered three steaks and chips. They were awful. They were steaks and crisps. The steaks were done to a crisp and the crisps were rare. Also, the ketchup bottle didn't work. It was one of those fake plastic tomatoes and a hard nugget of something like aurocks turd had clogged the spout. I squeezed, and suddenly it was free. Mike was covered from head to foot with tomato ketchup. With a bit over for the Mods — or it could have been the Rockers.

We staggered out laughing, and crowds more ton-up boys fell away fainting like Victorian heroines at the sight of that ghastly figure, something midway between Jesus Christ and Dr Hyde, swaggering along the front plastered in what appeared to be gore. Mike wore it proudly all convention. You see, Mike was very forgiving.

But Charles Platt was also forgiving. At that same con, Harrison and Aldiss, having sobered up with a midnight dip in the North Sea (and if that can't sober you, tell me where you get your liquor from), shut Charles in the wardrobe in Mike's room. By accident, because some fool pushed it, it fell forward on its face. Very terrible were the cries of alarm as Charles gallantly tried to fight his way through the back of the wardrobe to freedom. The wardrobe won, and he was released two hours later. By then, we had forgotten all about the meat pies, and it was only on the last evening of the con that we thought to raid Tom Boardman's room — and find only one left. He had eaten the other thirty-seven (or whatever the number was). By then, Charles had recovered, though it was significant that he left shortly after for New York. There, his magnanimity was such that he actually tried to educate an evening class full of the displaced lumpenproletariat in the beauties of Barefoot in the Head. These virtues in the man I point out as slight counter-balance to the portrait painted by Pete Weston. Charles Platt was not all warts. For a while, he was bruises as well.

Mike Moorcock,
Notting Hill area,
London.

There's a gulf between me and Pete Weston
(Maya 12/13) which can never be bridged.
Indeed if it ever were I'd be inclined to
dynamite the foundations. His sanctimon-

ious stuff about C. Platt was amusing and illustrated why poor old Weston was such a tempting target. The only memorable quote I recall from Speculation was in the issue that came out when the Tories won the election ('Now at last we should see an improvement...' — words to that effect. Poor Speculation). But, like Pete, that's all in the past and Charles Platt, who could have been a great BNF if he'd worked at it, is reduced to writing books for a living and working as an editor in America, ashamed to appear at conventions and showing pathetic gratitude when Leroy Kettle asks him to contribute something nasty to his fanzine, making him, of course, a Kettle hanger on. Charles still has a few friends, of course — Brian Aldiss, Harlan Ellison, Jimmy Ballard and others who cluster together regretting the chances they missed, too, because somehow they never quite saw the light and, in adult life, were unable to read the work of Robert Heinlein or John Russell Fearn (or tell the difference). But there you go. As a footnote to Weston's footnote — Charles played innumerable practical jokes on me, attacked me in print and so on, even sabotaged NW to make a point or two. However, he joined NW as a designer and editor because he was good, I employed him because he had talent and vitality and I like him because, in contrast to most Fans (BNF or otherwise), he has courage and a kind of honesty Weston and those like him — cocksuckers all — could never appreciate.

P.S. Chris Priest writes as well as ever. That syntax!

Graham Hall,
695 Cordova #4,
Pasadena,
Ca. 91101, USA.

I waded through Pete Weston's piece in your latest Maya, largely as a favour to Charles Platt (who is not a 'former buddy', as Pee-Ca. 91101, USA. Wee alleged, but my oldest friend. One up-

on whom I would never turn my back; the space between my fourth and fifth ribs is too tempting. But nevertheless, my oldest friend.) but also to see how history is viewed through Weston's glasses.

It was interesting to see that what was simply a small fan-nish feud has swollen to the dimensions of 'wars' in Pete's mind. There was no 'warfare' — Twisher Platt was simply an expert in a particular kind of malicious mischief that people as humourless as Weston — and a surprisingly great number of self-serious fans — never understood. I was the target of his pranks — as were many others who remained his friends — and, even at my angriest, had to admire the skill and panache with which he pulled them off. The way Platt's mind works is ill-appreciated by many among us — but I rank that ~~very~~ fun-loving mind among the five greatest I have encountered.

In the matter of Doreen Parker's stencils at the infamous Bumcon, Charles was (for once) innocent. The culprit was another long-gatified Brummie fan (not me, I hasten to add) who had a feud with Doreen Parker because Daphne Sewell was... er... very 'friendly' with Chris Priest. (Don't ask me to explain the logic of that; he was only a friend of mine.)

And Charles has often been the butt of fannish practical humour. At the self-same Bumcon, Brian Aldiss stuffed him into a wardrobe, which he then laid on its face. A good way of keeping the ebullient Charles quiet; but they did leave him there for three days.

((And rose again on the fourth?....

Any student of fanhistory will know that fannish distances are the reverse of ordinary ones — the farther away an event is, the larger it seems.))

But PeeWee's basic fallacy is that a mature person would want to become a BNF, be accepted by fandom, be cosy in its neurotic ranks. The difference between Weston and Platt was that Weston found in fandom a niche for his maladjusted psyche; Charles — as have many notable others — found in it a growing process, used fandom's unique and valuable milieu to develop from the shoplifting drunken driver he used to be to the shoplifting sober driver

he is today...

I, Too, Was A Fan. I, Too, became a full-time professional writer. I, Too, moved to sciencefictionland from poor old Yesterworld England. Charles is still my buddy *sob* The few intelligent, adjusted



and humorous friends I made in fandom remain friends — gaffiated (except for Charnock, who has a previous history of recidivism). I don't begrudge Pete his happiness in fandom at all; we were never friends, but never serious enemies either. I'm glad that he is as happy as anyone living in Birmingham can be. But at his age he should realise that there is a whole real world out there. Some fans move on and find it.

((Some, without leaving fandom.))

Of course, if you really want the dirt on The Night Charles Platt Slept With Rog Peyton, it'll cost. In a few years I may be able to sell that to the News of the World.

Peter Weston, 72 Beeches Drive, Erdington, Birmingham, B24 0DT. I owe Charles Platt an apology. Evidently he didn't steal my stencils, though Graham Hall told me he did, all those years ago. Funny how truth has a way of coming out, isn't it?

That, incidentally, was my biggest grievance and to find the stencils were destroyed not through plain enmity but by a nonentity for no good reason is even more hurtful, somehow; anyone who thinks that kind of vandalism is funny just isn't my kind of fan.

Charles Platt, Box 556, Old Chelsea Station, New York, NY 10011, USA. I'm glad you sent me Maya. It's always a pleasure to read something by my old friend Pete Weston. But I'm wondering, how old is he now? Surely not so old that he can be serious about his retired-colonel role; and yet, these are clearly his memoirs, and

his perspectives have narrowed in a fashion that I normally associate with senility. Of course, he never did have a sense of humour; I remember lugubrious letters he sent me in the 1960s arguing with rather tedious sincerity as if there had to be some kind of ultimate "fair play" in the world, and he felt he could appeal to the basic human decency and reasonableness that must lie within me somewhere. In a way I admired his dumb persistence and liked him for it. He showed how doggedness can triumph over fundamental stupidity. He started out from humble origins, worked hard, enjoyed few luxuries, dedicated himself to Robert A. Heinlein and three-colour stencil duplicating, and just kept plugging away. Ten years later, he was a BNF. I still remember his first advice to me: "You should have chosen a fanzine title with letters that have all straight lines in them," he said. "It's easier to draw." He showed me Zenith and Alien, the logos of which featured not a single curved letter, and he added, "Do you see what I mean?" as if he doubted I could have caught on so quickly to what he was explaining. They all had this kind of naive charm, all the Birmingham fans (if you could put up with their horrifying verbal and written distortions of the English language) and I was even friendly with Roger Peyton for a while — I even shared his own bed with him once, which is an experience best forgotten. Happy, innocent days... but actually they were miserable, I was suicidally depressed, and desperate attempts to have a good time (such as the Bumcon that Pete remembers so clearly) just made things worse in the end. (I wonder if Pete remembers his remark to Peter White at that convention, "Your head's a nicer shape than mine, mate," displaying uncharacteristic drunken clarity of perception? Probably not.)

Trivial gossip, I know, but I threw all my fannish reference materials out in 1969 (including my own fanzines) so I can't match Pete's documented facts — many of which are inaccurate anyway. For instance, I never jumped on Ella Parker's couch (wish I had) and knew nothing about Doreen Parker's stencils. But the inaccuracy that annoys me most is where Pete refers to a "custard pie" thrown at Ted White. The fact is, there were two pies, thrown on separate days. One was chocolate, one was banana, and they were both topped with whipped cream. If Pete is writing his memoirs, he should at least get his facts straight.

Did I ever feel rejected by fandom, as he suggests? No, because I never met a fan who actually rejected me. Fans always try to be tolerant, decent human beings at heart, in effect inviting further abuse. (Pete's own article here is a case in point.) I gave up fandom more or less at the same time I gave up shoplifting, drunken driving, celibacy, and being manic-depressed; it was all part of the same neurotic pattern.

Meanwhile poor old Pete is still "enjoying himself" in

there, producing his tedious, pedestrian memoirs in some kind of hopeless, thickheaded attempt to "understand" pieces of irrelevant trivia of ten years ago, when all that he ever needed was some kind of rudimentary sense of humour in order to make better sense of the world. It's sad and ironic that the one time I tried to be nice to the clod was the one time he thought he had cunningly "seen through me" and realised he was being hoaxed. But there was no hoax: I meant everything I wrote in my reviews for his fanzine. I have always sincerely enjoyed reading John Russell Fearn. And I have always considered Philip Harbottle a good friend: it was he who turned me on to Fearn in the first place.

Oh well. I find it hard to take much of this seriously myself — with one exception. Without anyone asking permission, you have quoted in your fanzine personal letters that I wrote when a teenager. I am naturally embarrassed, and irritated. What recourse do I have? Legal action is too expensive and unpredictable. So, I suppose, once again, I am driven to use other forms of retaliation, of the kind which Pete Weston (among others) has already experienced. From 3000 miles away, such rough justice is the only option. I suppose I'd better get in touch with my friends in Newcastle.

Meanwhile, good luck with your next issue.

((Chocolate, please, Charles...))

I'm very pleased at the moderate and lighthearted tone of your letter, for which my thanks. I'm glad that you find it hard to take much of this seriously; so do I. I agree that Pete takes his fandom rather seriously, and it's one of my own faults too. But it's one I'm trying to eradicate.

I'm managing not to take seriously that rubbish about printing personal letters you spoilt it with at the end. Pete checked his files rigorously, and was careful not to quote anything except letters of comment intended for publication; anything of a personal nature or marked DNQ he missed out. He's got that much honour!))

((From Charles' later letter:))

Pete Weston's story in Maya 11 is quite fascinating to me, because of all the Birmingham fans, Cliff Teague was the one whose company I enjoyed the most, and yet he was the hardest person to get to know. It is good to learn that he is "still around" as Pete puts it. He is one of the most generous, genuinely good-natured people I have ever met. The first time I saw him was, appropriately enough, on some hideous Birmingham ring road, in the rain, when I was driving a car full of Birmingham fans somewhere, and there was a pathetic figure in a raincoat by the road, hopelessly trying to hitchhike through the rain. Yes, that was Cliff. Wherever he is now, I wish him well.

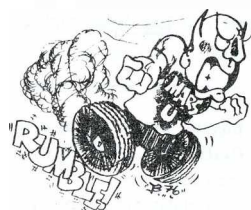
Malcolm Edwards, 14 Henrietta St., London WC2E 8QJ. Uncle Peter's article presents difficulties. In the technical sense it is certainly up to standard — fluent, expressive, interesting.

But as I went on I found I wasn't really enjoying it. I think it started off as a fairly mellow retrospective, but along the way a vengeful note began to creep in, and by the end it had taken over. This is a pity, because it isn't going to do any one any good at all to have this feud dragged up again so many years further on — 6 years, in fact, since Peter's last indirect contact with Charles (over the Eastercon Programme Booklet).

So what is this supposed to achieve? The impression it gives (rightly or wrongly) is of an attempt to irrevocably blacken Charles' name in front of a new generation of fans who have never met him, and no doubt you'll get lots of letters saying what an awful person he must be. (I may be wrong, but I suspect your own reaction is along these lines.) Charles, meanwhile, will gleefully sharpen his invective and leap into the fray. I don't expect the result to be particularly edifying.

((Well, you're wrong on two counts there. My job teaches me not to prejudge people too irrevocably on others' evidence, at least not to classify them as 'awful' full stop; and Charles' two letters to me since Maya 12/13 have both been notable for their generally reasonable tone.))

Well, for what it's worth, I've met Charles a few times, exchanged a few letters with him, and never found him other than friendly and helpful. He will doubtless be appalled to know that when I'm in



New York in the summer I fully intend to look him up. (True, there are things he has said in print which have pissed me off — but that's equally the case with many people.) My general philosophy is that you must take people as you find them (if my disagreements with John Brosnan have taught me nothing else, they taught me that it is foolish to expect mutual friends to take sides in personal squabbles), and the Charles Platt I've met doesn't bear much resemblance to the individual Peter describes.

(Finally, I must say it seems absurd to blame Walt Willis' departure from fandom on the abrasiveness of a single new, teenage fan. That shows unbelievably little resilience on WW's part. I can believe that it could have been the last straw at a time when disenchantment was already strong, perhaps accelerating the process slightly... anything more than that seems incomprehensible.)

What's more, The Gas is a bloody good book.

John Brosnan,
23 Lushington Rd.,
London N.W. 10.

I thought Weston was over-reacting somewhat to the whole Charles Platt affair. Despite Weston's attempts, Plattie comes across in the article as quite a stimulating and amusing personality, the sort of person the stodgy British fandom of the period needed to shake it up a bit. As for that list of naughty Plattie deeds that Weston concluded his piece with — I found them all rather amusing. I particularly liked the one where Platt visited a fan pretending to be someone else and spent the whole time running himself down. I was so inspired by this stunt I put on a fake nose and went round to the home of the arch-shit himself, Little Mal, and pretended to be Peter Roberts. We spent a couple of happy hours attacking Brosnan but things came adrift at dinner — my fake nose fell in the soup. Malcolm immediately hit me over the head with his bound volumes of Big Scab and his girlfriend bit me in the ankle so I ran away.

Harry Warner Jr.,
423 Summit Ave.,
Hagerstown,
Md. 21740, USA.

I don't remember having much if any contact with Charles Platt. So I certainly can't take sides in the controversies reviewed here. But I do feel strongly that anyone who gets his kicks out of argument for the sake of argument, disparagement and violent criticism should pick some field where the participants are being paid to do well, like professional sports or rock concerts. Most fans get into the field while they're very young, before they've developed the shell which years of adventures as mature adults usually create, and there's too much danger that the fellow who delights in saying nasty things will inadvertently change the course of a youthful fan's life for the worse or warp his personality permanently. The game isn't worth the candle.

Ted White,
1014 N. Rockshoe St.,
Falls Church,
Va. 22046, USA.

My own awareness of Charles Platt was less than acute in the 1960s, but I do recall the unpleasantness in Zenith. In fact I recall a sort of sense of shock when I read his attack on Willis. Weston covers much of Platt's subsequent activities but left out one forum I recall: the last incarnation of Donaho's Habakkuk, the letter column of which was an interesting alternative to that running contemporaneously in Psychotic/SFR. Platt was an active voice there.

As I recall we crossed swords in those days — but perhaps "crossed swords" is an inappropriate phrase. I suspect we each held the other in deep contempt; I know I did.

The thing is, I'm a person who has been known as "contentious" myself, and I've rarely shied away from a good battle. Platt's published opinions were so, well, so fuggheaded (to use a word I'm sure he dislikes, since its connotations are so fannish) — so extreme and untempered by apparent consideration of fact — that I regarded him as "fair game" on one level, but at the same time it was hard to take him seriously enough to regard him as a worthy opponent in the fannish tourneys. I mean, a worthy opponent is someone who gives you an argumentative run for your money. Platt usually wasted little time in descending to ad hominem argument; as Weston quotes Willis observing, Willis criticised "a piece of writing" while Platt criticised Willis as a person. There is no use in trying to "out argue" someone who operates on that level: he observes no rules of conduct.

The 1976 Lunacon was another story — and one which has

already been told. It had me "pie-killed" twice — once on Friday night and once on Sunday afternoon.

I regard the pie attacks as the least offensive thing Platt has done to me. They are, at heart, harmless and even funny if you're not the object. They didn't make me mad although the amount of subsequent cleaning up was annoying (sticky stuff all over hair and clothes...). They were essentially fannish, in that they made use of a humorous expression of hostility. And they even had a certain degree of class: Rex Weiner, the actual pie-killer, was identified by High Times (on their contributors' page) as "the chief agent for Pie-Kill!" — no mere flunky, he — and he had admirable technique.

I'd like to think those two pies cost Charles a bundle, but I suspect Weiner is a friend of his and did it for free.

((I've heard rumours — vague and unattributable — that payments were in fact made.))

In any case, it was a tactical mistake on Charles' part. With no help from me the Lunacon officials quickly established Platt's role in the affair and publicised it. Platt lost points. I, on the other hand, playing the role of victim, drew a lot of sympathy and a standing ovation. I won points. If I'd set it up myself, it couldn't have gone better, in terms of the outcome.

((You make it sound like a boxing match.))



I haven't heard anything more of Platt since then, but I have no doubt that sooner or later I will.

The question, of course, is why? Why has Platt gone to such lengths in such schemes? Why me?

I think Weston has him accurately pegged. Jealousy seems to be a strong motivation. Peter mentions, peripherally, a Platt piece in SFR which Geis contrasted with Platt's letter in the same issue. Platt's piece, concerning a day in his life as an editor and written with some wit, was presented as a rebuttal to a column of mine in an earlier SFR: Platt was showing me what a real editor's day was like. Jealousy.

The ad he placed in the program book of the 1971 Easter convention is another example. A jigsaw puzzle, the ad's picture when assembled shows a fan wiping his ass with Amazing while sitting on a toilet. Since this was unlikely to come to my attention in the natural order of things, he pseudonymously mailed me a Xerox copy of both the ad and the assembled drawing. A mischief-maker.

There is much meat for thought in Weston's piece beyond his devastation of Platt (the thoroughness of which I suspect Platt will enjoy: all that attention!). I'm referring to the conflict between generations in fandom and the problems ensuing when communications break down. Weston describes one such situation in England in the early sixties. I think there is another here in this country in the seventies.

Fandom here has exploded in size and splintered into many vaguely overlapping fandoms — and I'm not even considering parallel fandoms (comics, rock, Star — *ptui!* — Trek, movies, et al). We now have the spectacle of a raw neofan (Phil Foglio) actively campaigning for a Hugo (best fan artist) and coming close to getting it. The awful imitation prozine approach to fanzines is the rule rather than the exception here, and these fanzines are

often defended heatedly by their proprietors as Truer To The Faith (sf). Fannish fandom survives mostly in private low-circulation apas and in a very few genzines like Mota. I feel as Willis did: as if I and my friends, who were once movers and groovers in the mainstream of fandom, have become an isolated, all but forgotten backwater eddy. The noise of fanac is loud all about us, but it is fanac on the level of the reinvention, every three years, of the wheel. Few traditions survive, and older fanzines which set standards and older fanzines which set standards and demonstrated solutions to problems are unknown to presentday US fandom. Void is known as an Australian prozine; the 29 issues Greg Benford and I published are no longer remembered. Terry Carr and I are known only as pros.

Strangest of all (to me) is the way in which I unwittingly nurtured all this in Amazing. The youthful letters I published in Amazing's lettercolumn were signed by today's movers and groovers in fandom. The revival of The Clubhouse in 1969 has undoubtedly ushered many newcomers into fandom.

I think the situation calls for rapprochement. It calls for the sort of diplomacy Willis was indulging in with his Zenith columns. (I recall those columns as brilliant essays, myself. The one on Link was the best essay on humour I've ever read — and at one point in my life I was pretty keen on Thurber, Benchley, and the whole New Yorker set, whose standards I honestly think Willis has bettered.) What a shame Willis was responded to so poorly — by at least a few, anyway.

((Most thought-provoking, Ted. Over here, the fanzines I receive seem to contain at least a reasonable amount of fannish material, expressing fans' interests in a wider field than just sf; but perhaps I'm thinking mainly of the goodies like Mota and Spanish Inquisition and Simulacrum, skimming quickly through all the fanzines full of thirdrate criticism and fifthrate stories (what's the point, when the prozines do it better and I don't even have the time to read them?) and not even getting all the imitation-prozines which consider giving free copies in trade to be beneath their dignity.

So perhaps what we're receiving in Britain is still the best, most wide-ranging and most fannish of American fandom, and your pessimism is more justified than we over here can see. There's still time for them to learn if they see us enjoying ourselves more, and learning more, over here in fannish fandom, than they are with their earnest lists of book reviews, though. We can show them...))

Brett Cox, Christopher Priest's review was very good. While Box 542, I can well understand his hostility towards the Kyle Tabor City, book and agree with what he says about sf in general, N.C. 28463, I can't quite grasp his ill feelings towards "pictorial history"-type books on sf. James Gunn U.S.A. proved with his excellent Alternate Worlds that, in the right hands, this sort of thing can be done very successfully. And I'm equally puzzled by his seeming criticism of Kyle's tracing the history of sf ("... bleeding Plato and Homer..."). Of course all fans know it by heart, but nobody (or almost nobody) writes books strictly for knowledgeable fans. (Of course, I would hope that any newcomer to the field who read Kyle's book would also make an effort to read other books with differing opinions, such as Billion Year Spree or the aforementioned Gunn book.)

Most of your American readers (and most of your British readers, for that matter) probably read Greg Benford's article when it appeared in Amazing, but since prozine distribution is nonexistent in the area in which I live and the only zine to which I subscribe is F&SF, I didn't, so I was pleased that you reprinted it. Not only is it a good article, but it also makes an excellent counterpoint to Chris Priest's deprecating remarks concerning sf art in his preceding piece.

Peter Weston's Slice of Life column was absolutely fascinating. I realise that's an overworked word, but I can think of no other which adequately describes my reaction to it. Since it was divided into two parts, let me take them one at a time:

First, neos and early fanzines. As a former faneditor who jumped into the game with almost as little idea of what he was doing as Peter had, I greatly enjoyed everything he had to say on the subject. I can't help thinking that Peter was a bit hard on himself, though — any first-time fanpubber will more than likely turn out an undistinguished product, and considering the dearth of exam-

les he had to follow, he should be pleased he was as successful as he evidently was. This section also pointed out to me how much the world of fanzines has changed since Peter and Charles were at it. These days you have any number of people who, although they might start on a pretty mediocre level, rapidly turn their zines into first-rate products (Mike Bracken and Carl Bennett come immediately to mind in this regard), and a few people like Victoria Vayne who turn out top-flight material from issue 1. Why this is probably can't be attributed to any one single fact, but I would tend to cite increased technological sophistication (and monetary freedom) combined with a tremendous number of other zines to use as models, influences and goals as the primary reasons.

Then we have the case of Charles Platt. I've never had anything but kind thoughts for Platt because four or five years ago when I had been reading sf for only a short while and was just beginning to try my hand at writing it (while simultaneously making my first tentative entry into fandom), I submitted a couple of my first fledgling fictional efforts to Platt, who was then editing the U.S. edition of New Worlds. He bounced them, of course (considering the fact that they were (a) totally inept, (b) submitted two and three at a time and (c) at least once submitted without return postage, I'm surprised he even bothered to read them), but he did so with an exceptionally kind letter telling me exactly why he was rejecting them, giving me some idea of what I was doing wrong, and providing me with mild encouragement. To a naive 14-year-old whose only other contact with the professional sf marketplace had been through unsigned rejection slips, such a letter was no less than manna from heaven. I appreciated it then, and I still do. With that in mind, you can imagine how surprised I was when, after I became more deeply involved in fandom, I read about that swine Platt who did all those rotten things to all those people. And now we have Peter's article. Well, he was there and I wasn't, so I'll have to take his word for it.

Dave Kyle, In less than four days I fly away to the States for now resident four weeks so I thought I ought to phrase a short reply in response to that "review" by Christopher Priest. Don't worry about me having second thoughts; print this as it stands.

It was bound to happen. After so many satisfying words in so many places about how good A Pictorial History of Science Fiction is, I wondered when I would get a brickbat and who would throw it.

Now I know — and I regret that it should be Maya in which I get one of the bloodiest hatchet jobs imaginable.

Chris Priest's ranting "review" of my book is, after the initial shock and disappointment and upon reflection, also satisfying to me. Such a ranting "review" can only mean that I have presented much provocative and significant material. His heavy emotion and superciliousness belies his charge that there is absolutely nothing good worth saying about the book except the technical information — and the price. Such ranting can only mean that I have must have struck Chris in a psychological sensitive spot. Most anyone who reads my book and reads his reaction to it should be able to figure out what makes him rave. Behind his stereotyped complaints and awkward sneers must be insecurity, a feeling that his beliefs, if not his whole self, is threatened by what I have to say. I wonder why? Perhaps he is not writing a "review" at all, perhaps he is instead writing a reply to my Guest of Honour Speech at the Novacon as he seems to hint. I could be as simplistic as Chris Priest by saying that in that speech I frankly was preaching for morality and respectability in science fiction and that he frankly is against what I preach.

You are damned right, Chris, when you suspect that what you say I might take "personally." That's the way you wrote it.

In the literary world there are few things more despicable to me than a "reviewer" who thunders his righteousness while spraying venom generated out of his own prejudices.

I'm happy to have for myself and for my book the accolades of Asimov and Clarke and Heinlein (as I do). But then maybe it's because they were mentioned in the book.

Maybe now that you know my feelings about you, Chris, you can "detest" me as well as my lousy bourgeois book.

((The technical information Chris found good was the price.

In a way I dislike prejudiced reviewers, too: but though there may be "few things more despicable", there

are few things commoner, too. This may be unfortunate, but it's unavoidable. If a reviewer doesn't have standards against which to judge a book, he'll write a pretty insipid review; and his standards (prejudices) must have been formed somehow. In book reviewing, as in all forms of artistic commentary, innocence doesn't get you very far.

Perhaps the most valid criticism you could have against Chris, Dave, is his dislike for sf art books in general. This is his genuinely held opinion, though, and not one drummed up to put your book down; it wasn't expressed out of personal animosity, strongly though Chris worded his review. Chris isn't in favour of sex-for-sex's sake in sf, simply in favour of admitting that it exists. What the liberationists often forget is that sex is still a difficult subject for many people; and what the moralists often forget is that sex is still there, hard though they try to sweep it under the carpet.

I don't think Chris is petty enough to badmouth a book simply because he wasn't mentioned in it.

Despite your anguished reaction, Dave, I really believe Chris wasn't aiming at you personally, simply at the opinions you have spoken out for; and he has pointed out an element of self-criticism in his comment about "social climbers of Weybridge and Harrow" — you may have lived in Weybridge, Dave, but he lives in Harrow!))

Roy Tackett,
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NM 87107, USA.

I am rather disappointed with Chris Priest's comments on Dave Kyle's book. There have been three of these "illustrated histories" printed recently: Gunn's, Kyle's, and Rot-

tensteiner's. And that's the way I'd rate them. It seems to me that Priest is badmouthing Kyle's book simply because they have different points of view of science fiction. Kyle reflects the older, more or less standard, view of what sf is and/or should be while Priest seems to reflect the more modern (?) view that sf should be boring stories about boring people in boring situations. Or unintelligible stories about unintelligible people in unintelligible situations. Or... ah, well, why drag it out?

About the only part of Priest's review with which I agree is his definition of science: knowledge. And he loses sight of that later on by saying that science does not exist in an ideological vacuum: it exists in a context of morality, philosophy, humanity. Indeed? Knowledge does, eh? Knowledge/science, it always seemed to me, has nothing whatsoever to do with ideology or philosophy or humanity. It is an accumulation of fact.

(That isn't at all how I interpret Chris's review. I agree Chris's review was harsher than I might have written myself, but I think you thoroughly misinterpret Chris's view of what sf should be. Chris is a communicator not an obscurantist. His comment that sf should be "about real people in real situations, wanking and swearing and cheating", was a simple and powerful plea for depth and realism of characterisation, which is a quality I find helpful if a story is to avoid being boring and unintelligible. This does not imply that I think sf characters should be snivelling twits, either: realism implies the portrayal of positive as well as negative qualities.

The above simple critical truisms justify Chris's point of view, I hope.

You and Chris are both right about science and knowledge, but you misunderstand him when he says that "science does not exist in an ideological vacuum: it exists in a context of... humanity." Naturally knowledge is hard fact, and by itself has (or should have) no moral content. (Though for sciences such as sociology and psychiatry even that is doubtful.) The way we put it to use is the context of knowledge: and that's where morality, philosophy and humanity come into play.))

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Somewhere you wrote that generally you didn't find book reviews very interesting, with which I would agree. I think this may be in part because of the way our interests lie, and partly because we are subjected to so many bad reviews. It is not just that many people who have

nothing else to write about can review books, but that fans who are interesting writers in general don't know how to write a good review. And it seems most bad reviews are merely synopses of the plot, which are useful only in avoiding plots you dislike, or if you have strong views similar to or against the reviewer's. Better reviews seem either to be Literary or Essay. Literary reviews spend a lot of time analysing style, comparing it with other works and criticising the writing, appear mainly in the 'serious' fanzines and are written for other serious literary critics. The Essay style of review may devote more space to the reviewer's opinion of the author, politics, drinking habits of Indians, dog training or moral habits than to the book under review. The writer is usually more interested in having his say and being entertaining, than really writing about the book; as a result it is the only kind of review that one can read with interest, and get into an argument about, without knowing about the book. I thus found Christopher Priest's review of Dave Kyle's book very stimulating (and despite the following, I really enjoyed the review, and think he is a good, if wrong-headed, reviewer).

He charges Dave with being boring and rehashing the same old history. Well, that Dave is ponderous and dull, I can well imagine. Even in the historic days of 1958, it was hard not to get a dozen words out of him when two would have done as well. He also tends to be a wee mite pompous, but that is apparently a failing brought on by age — or that is my excuse... Only Warner seems to be able to avoid it. But, as for its being a rehash, as the book is supposedly for the chic coffee-table and not for the collector's shelf, going back to basics seems in line. My own experiences with this sort of book in fields I know something about bear out the opinion that they are all dully written, with only the most general coverage of their subject. Any detail would detract from the pictures, and the book buyer isn't that interested...

But when Priest goes at Kyle for his views on Gernsback versus Aldiss type science fiction, he not only reveals his own prejudices (and there is no arguing on taste) but blows the credibility of much of his review by his own ignorance. In quoting Dave in defence of Gernsback he says that in 1952 Claude Degler, head of the Cosmic Circle, drove Don Rogers out of fandom for good. I thought that was a pretty funny remark, but when I read on and found Chris treating this as a statement of fact, I rolled around and laughed and chuckled more than at any joke I'd read in weeks. As you have doubtlessly been told by now, this was a very funny inside joke on Dave's part. Degler was the laughing stock of fandom in the 1940s, for his ideas that Fans were Slans, and Don Rogers was a pen-name he used to approach people already aware of Degler's reputation. By 1950 he was a pathetic has-been, obviously not doing anything in 1952. I'm amazed that after a couple of recent articles in fanzines (one English) about Degler and the Cosmic Circle, that Priest would fall for this. And, of course, if this is a brief example of what Dave was writing, then there might be other jokes and inside references in the book for those old-timers who might read it.

It appears that Angus Taylor is one of those "greatly disillusioned young men" who, finding that Fandom is not what they think it should be, or what they thought it was, now wants to tell the rest of us that we are wasting our time being fans. His views are hardly different than ones I was reading 30 years ago.

((Or ones you are reading this Maya, from such as Graham Hall.))

That there was some truth in what he says has never been denied, just that it was important. I'm in fandom because I enjoy it, and as it's at least 20 times the size it was when it started, I'm not worried about being in a ghetto. Kincaid makes some good points... I feel that only the personally insecure needs feel that what he does or reads is important in itself, i.e. needs justify what he reads on other grounds than that he enjoys it.

P.S. Just after I finished this the Moffatts dropped by to leave a copy of Dave Kyle's book. It looks much better than the review made it sound.

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Canada M6P 2S3.

Because Leroy's article is closer to straight reporting than most of what he does for True Rat and the other London fanzines it isn't what I'd call really typical of his style. But it's a damn good bit of writing and because it's appearing in Maya he'll start getting a little of the exposure he's so long deserved. Leroy writes in a

witty and entertaining manner, with insight, humour and skill. You undoubtedly know I'm one of his greatest fans (after Pickersgill, Brosnan and Pete Presford, of course) and hence my views are totally biased. But if Kettle has ever published a mediocre piece of writing I've never seen it, and this piece is a good introduction for the until-now-deprived fanzine readers in North America.

I'd appreciate it if you'd mention that The View from Titan first appeared, in a shorter version, in Energumen, something Amazing failed to note when it published the expanded version (which contains all but one paragraph of the fanzine version along with perhaps a third new material.) I'm a little surprised that neither Ted White nor Greg noted this when they printed the piece in the 50th Anniversary Amazing.

((Greg didn't mention it to me, and I didn't know anything about it. Sorry!))

Malcolm's fanzine reviews were enjoyable, although I wish his scholarship were of a more exacting kind. I've appeared in far more than half the revived Motas, for example, and getting an agent doesn't necessarily show one has good business sense, nor does it allow one to ignore one's own interests. Joan Hunter Holly



had an agent who as little as a year ago was still getting her advances of nine hundred dollars a book. When she mentioned that at the 1976 Confusion the other professional writers in attendance dropped their jaws so far and in such unison that the University of Michigan reported a local earth tremor! An agent can take a lot of business worries off a client's hands, if he or she is a good agent, but any writer of Dick's importance and reputation who has the financial problems he has, either has a poor agent or is seriously mismanaging his own career. Philip K. Dick ought not to be living at the poverty line (or below it) unless he chooses to do so. If he wanted to be moderately well off, the machinery exists nowadays for him to be so.

Once again Peter Weston has contributed a fascinating piece of fan history, although of a slightly more generally provocative nature than his last, more personal reminiscences. I'm hard pressed to imagine what Charles Platt could possibly say to put himself in a better light after the devastating job Peter has done on him. It might be easier for Platt to get out from under the weight of evidence against him if Peter had resorted to more personal opinion, but the telling evidence against Platt is mostly in his own words and the attitudes they show, and there's no more damning witness against any man than his own earlier self.

There is, of course, a hell of a lot more to Pete's article than the recounting of the asinine activities of an atavistic arse-hole (whoops, the alliteration sub-program got stuck in a loop). There's an entire history lesson on the interaction of old and new fans and some of the almost disastrous consequences that can occur. Peter has written not only an interesting personal slice of fan history, but also a pretty useful sociological account of reactions to fandom. I can't say I actually enjoyed this piece but like several other examinations of some of the seamier aspects of our history, it holds a definite fascination. Not unlike moving a rock and watching all the nasty little grubs squirming around as the light hits them.

The name Angus Taylor may not be familiar to many Maya readers so I'll start off by saying that there is no one in fandom whose intellect or ability I admire more than I admire Angus's. I've known him personally and through his fanzine contributions for at least nine years, and I consider him possibly one of the three most intelligent and perceptive people I've ever known. And yet I think he errs somewhat in his remarks about fandom, in two main areas.

First, when I think of "my" fandom — admittedly a skewed sampling — I just don't buy the old "fans are social misfits" line. I'm a little surprised to see Angus offering it, but I guess if I were honest enough to look at all fans, I'd be hard-pressed to refute his claims. But, dammit, I don't have to like it! And if I can convince myself otherwise by narrowing the focus of my vision, I'll do so!

((You mean that your fandom, your friends, aren't social misfits. Well, naturally — you like them! There are some "social misfits" in fandom, but we don't have to like them

just because they're fans, nor do we have to buy the line that all fans are social misfits. Fandom would be an absolutely unique social institution if it didn't have its misfits, though. By their nature, all special interest groups like fandom contain people with faddishness, single-minded enthusiasm and a strong need for group identity in their make-up; but that doesn't mean that all of them have enough trouble getting on with the world to be described as "social misfits". Some of them do, though, and we can't just ignore them in the hope that they'll go away.))

The prime point, though, and it's a pretty heavy philosophical one, is who should decide whether or not we are making the most of our "talents and our intelligence"? Surely that's a personal decision? I happen to teach high school and dabble in fanac; maybe I could teach college and dabble in writing sf. If I don't choose to do so, is it for Angus Taylor to say I'm not living up to my potential? Or is it for me to have selected a mode of existence that I enjoy and that satisfies me? In essence, are we on this earth to satisfy ourselves or to satisfy humanity? That may seem like a pretty heavy interpretation of what Angus said, but to me that's what he's talking about. I happen to believe I'm here to satisfy myself, and other people's expectations of me have to be secondary to my own needs and desires. There are at least a couple of pretty well-known North American fans who work as dishwashers, despite their obvious ability to do "more" than that. Have either Angus or I the right to suggest they are wrong in adopting a lifestyle they are happy with? I don't think so, and knowing Angus I think he'd agree. Perhaps excessive participation in the unimportant and ephemeral world of fandom is a wasteful dissipation of creative energy and ability; and then again, maybe being director of a large corporation is equally unimportant in the long run. If one's existence brings personal happiness and happiness to others, and doesn't hurt anyone, who is to say that isn't making the most of one's talents and intelligence? Let everyone march to the drummer that he or she hears, Angus; but don't tell me I'm listening to the wrong beat; that's for me to decide.

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How Not to be a Writer by Leroy
Kettle kept me laughing constantly.
It is surprising that someone can
fill six Maya-sized pages with writing
about himself and his unsuccessful

literary efforts without having the piece drag at some point, but Leroy accomplished this difficult feat. At no point did I find myself skipping ahead out of boredom or to peek at the outcome of his adventure. I just read at the pace he gave the piece and enjoyed every moment. Kettle is too good to turn pro — we need his skill too much in fandom. I'm glad that he chose to remain an impoverished fanwriter rather than to become a wealthy word-merchant.

((I thought the point of his piece was that in trying to become a wealthy word-merchant he became an impoverished one instead, and went back to being a civil servant and wealthy spare-time fanwriter!))

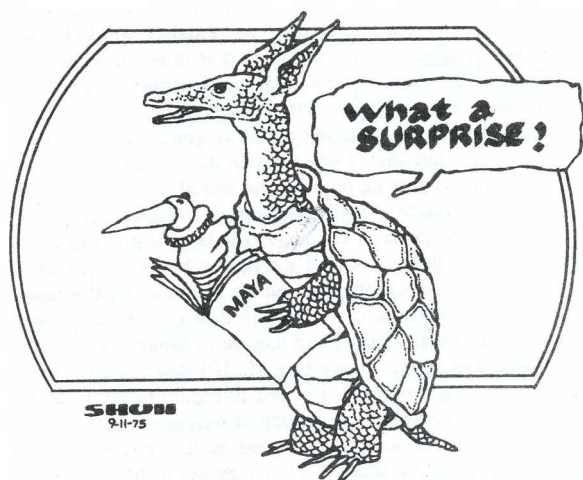
Kettle's true-life story was properly enhanced by Jim Barker's illustrations. You were wise to select him as the artist for this piece because his art worked very well. Jim's talent continues to grow. One of the marks of a good editor is the ability to know which artist will best complement a particular written piece.

Marion Zimmer Bradley,
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CA 94701, USA.

A few things to react to in Maya this time. First of all, I don't know who Roy Kettle is, but I sympathise with him — to a certain extent — in his

trials about trying to become a writer. There is, however, a saying which he should have studied first; an amateur wants to Be a Writer; a professional wants to write. Nobody should ever try to earn their living writing unless they simply can't endure the idea of not writing. I have to be a writer — I mean I have to sell what I write — because I would write constantly whether I sell it or not.

I would never advise anyone to go into writing for the joy of being a writer, or for profit, either. Almost anyone could make more money walking dogs, or clipping poodles, typing bills, or cleaning apartments. I chose writing as a profession (aside from the above emotional predisposition, that I would rather write than anything else) because it was the only job I could think of



which would let me stay home with my kid instead of giving virtually all my salary to a babysitter. Over my typewriter is a large signboard which I look at whenever I wish I had a nice quiet office and few hassles — and more money: it says Who asked you not to be a plumber? In short, I chose this profession, so I prefer to put up with its problems.

I should take Roy to task for a couple of things he says. I do not agree with whoever it was who said "Don't hack in a field where you want to be respected." Your early work is going to be hackwork whatever you do with it.

I also feel, quite strongly, that he should define his terms. "Hack" work, I suppose he means, is work done for money without conviction. I don't think, by those terms, that anyone should ever do hack work. If all you need is money, learn plumbing; you will make more money and have more self-respect. It's true that I earned some quick cash to pay for my typewriter ribbons by writing fatally risqué novels, confession stories, etc., before I was competent enough to do a lot of selling. But even there, I tried to study and respect my audience, to deliver them honest entertainment for their money plunked down for the magazine. I drew the line at writing porn — I have the wrong set of hormones to be turned on by it, and I have a very firm conviction that one cannot, and should not, write anything which he/she does not like reading. If you try, you will sicken yourself and probably have very little success anyhow. This is why I do not write the average women's novels — I can't stand reading them — and why I write science fiction instead of mainstream.

He also mentions drinking as a problem. I have always wondered why writers seem so much more vulnerable to drinking as an occupational hazard, than an equivalent number of accountants or typists. Maybe it's because writers spend a lot of time alone at a typewriter, and tend to cheer up their solitude with the bottle? Or is it because we are solitary people, loners, and when we do mix, need a little alcohol to lubricate the wheels of social intercourse? I myself am a very moderate drinker — I claim no credit for this; my father was a post-graduate dipso, and every time I take a drink I see the horrid spectre of becoming abusive, drunken, unproductive, and loathed by everyone including my own children. Randall Garrett once said that every writer he knew either had a drinking problem or thought he did. I slosh down countless cups of tea while at the typewriter, but I suppose that doesn't count. I am regarded as queer and unsocial by most locals because I dislike both coffee and Coca-Cola, the great American beverages. But I don't drink while I am working, and this is a problem which makes me unsympathetic to my fellow writers. In fact, I don't even drink a lot at parties, because if I do, I fall asleep and miss out on the party and all the fun.

I greatly enjoyed the interview with Chesley Bonestell; I would echo his sentiment about drawing, for writing. Writing doesn't demand fluency with words, though obviously a writer must feel at home with them. A writer must know how he feels and reacts to an emotional situation or crisis and have enough emotional honesty to be able to say exactly how he feels... to make others feel it too. No amount of style or poetic language will make a writer out of anyone if he cannot be open and honest about emotions.

Coral Clarke,
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Dahling Rob,
If only you knew the pleasure and excitement you have given me by sending Maya! How my heart raced, pounding loudly in my bosom when I saw that plain brown envelope

fall through the letterbox. I looked closely at the cover and saw your name — Oh Joy, what honour! The famous Rob Jackson has sent me — a virtual nobody — a copy of his award-winning fanzine!

Then, I saw that you had put an 'X' by my name — Oh Dahling, I never knew you cared — such an open declaration — for all the world to see. My fondest hopes, my most cherished dreams came true when I looked inside and saw the tell-tale pink slip. I felt my heart miss a beat — you had put a tick beside 'I like you', and not only that, you had also written the most romantic raspberry I have ever read!

I was so excited, almost in a frenzy — what mad, foolish impulse made you send me Maya, to bring such joy and happiness into my dull routine? I rushed to my room, flung myself onto the bed and began to read — I was overcome with admiration. Truly, Maya lives up to its reputation, such brilliant, witty articles, such erudite letters, and long words, fantastic artwork — all giving me hours of endless pleasure!

I was so deeply moved, that I felt I had to write to you expressing my feelings. I have even broken my self-imposed rule not to write a loc! You see, whenever I see a fanzine, I immediately get writers' cramp, but with Maya, this did not happen. Instead I was filled with a sense of urgency — I had to let you know how I felt, and so I have poured out my feelings, letting my emotions run riot.

Oh My Beloved! — spare a thought for me at Faancon, when you are surrounded by all your admirers and wellwishers. I am too shy to throw myself at your feet — I can only worship you from afar.

Until then, Yours devotedly. Coral Clarke
(Oooh, that pink and purple paisley patterned paper!
Mmmm *smack* ... Thought you'd written something I'd never possibly dare print, did you?...
Who says romance is dead, anyway?)

That was the most agonising lettercolumn I've yet edited for Maya, not because the subjects dealt with were difficult, but simply because choosing goodies for a 7 page lettercolumn from 130 letters means leaving out lots of good stuff even from the letters I've used. I think the lettercolumn flows pretty well, though, and it's been enormous fun and very worthwhile. I particularly thought of publishing things from those folk asterisked below. Some of them will be in next issue's lettercolumn, including some superb uneditable ones; I'm fed up with leaving goodies out, so next issue's loccol will be at least 10 pages. See you in October or November! My thanks to all of you: Alyson L. Abramowitz, Simon Agree, Paul Anderson, Michael Banks, *Doug Barbour, Jim Barker, *R. I. Barycz, Eric Bentcliffe, John (UK) Berry, Sheryl Birkhead, Dainis Bisenieks, Alan Bostick, Richard Brandt, John Brunner, F. M. Busby, Allyn Cadogan, Derek Carter, Ken Cheslin (2), Ian Covell, *Ar Cruttenden, *Chester Cuthbert, Don D'Amassa, Andrew Darlington, Jim Darroch, Robert Day, *Gary Deindorfer, George Flynn, Bryn Fortey, Jean Frost, Ian Garbutt, Mike Gilbert, *Stuart Gilson, Paula Gold, Brian Griffin, Dave Griffin, John Hall, David Higgins, Lynne Holdom, Ron Holmes, Ben Indick, Fred Jakobsic, *Maxim Jakubowski, Terry Jeeves, Robin Johnson, Tom Jones, **Paul Kincaid, Bill Kuinkel, Dave Langford, Boris Lawrence, *Colin Lester, Dave Lewis, Eric Lindsay, Richard Litwinczuk, Mary Long, Sam Long, *Alison Lowe, Don Malcolm, Eric Mayer, *Steve Macdonald (2) (all about Steve, but fun!), *Tara Wayne MacDonald (2), Patrick McGuire, Jim Meadows III, Steve Miller, Randy Mohr, Joseph Nicholas, Marc A. Ortlieb, Pauline Palmer, *Darroll Pardoe, C. Parke, Dave Patterson, *Tom Perry, Greg Pickersgill, Dave Piper, *Andy Porter, Chris Priest, David Pringle, Martin Ricketts, Mic Rogers (2), *Anna Schoppenhorst, Joyce Scrivner, *Mark Sharpe, Bob Shaw, Robert Sheckley, Stu Shiffman, Cyril Simsa, Nigel Smith, Paula Smith, *Steve Særd, Brian Stableford, Sam Stafford, *Phil Stephensen-Payne, *Andrew Stephenson, *Milt Stevens, Mae Strelkov, Peter Swanson, **Dave Szurek, Brian Tawn, *Ira Thornhill, Bruce Townley, Harry Turner, *Victoria Vayne, Dr. A.D. Wallace, Harry Warner (again), David Wingrove, *Dave Wixon, *Jim Young, Roger Zelazny, and Ben Zuhl.