

"...hope this finds you well, and that the labor and excitement of bringing out a special anniversary hasn't resulted in a slump. In the past, that has often happened; too many times a big special issue proved to be, if not the end, the beginning of the end of a good fanzine."

---Robert A.W. Lowndes; 3/29

"...well, it wasn't totally 'annish burn-out'; almost simultaneously with the publication of OW43 I got/achieved a big promotion at work...and have spent the past 4+ months working slightly too much overtime...and doing very little else...

"...but all the excuses will be in the next issue of Outworlds, which hopefully will be out by month's end....

"Not to fear, I've been 'doing' fanzines for almost 24 years now, and although I do tend to get distracted/sidetracked from time to time, I keep coming back...which says I'm either slightly silly, or firmly addicted...

"Anyways, this is to reassure you that, erratic schedule & all, OW continues, and that I hope that despite my tardiness in responding to your late March letter doesn't mean that I've blown having you be a part of it...

"(And besides, most of the letters I received in response to the anniversary urged I do 'whatever it takes' to keep you contributing!)"

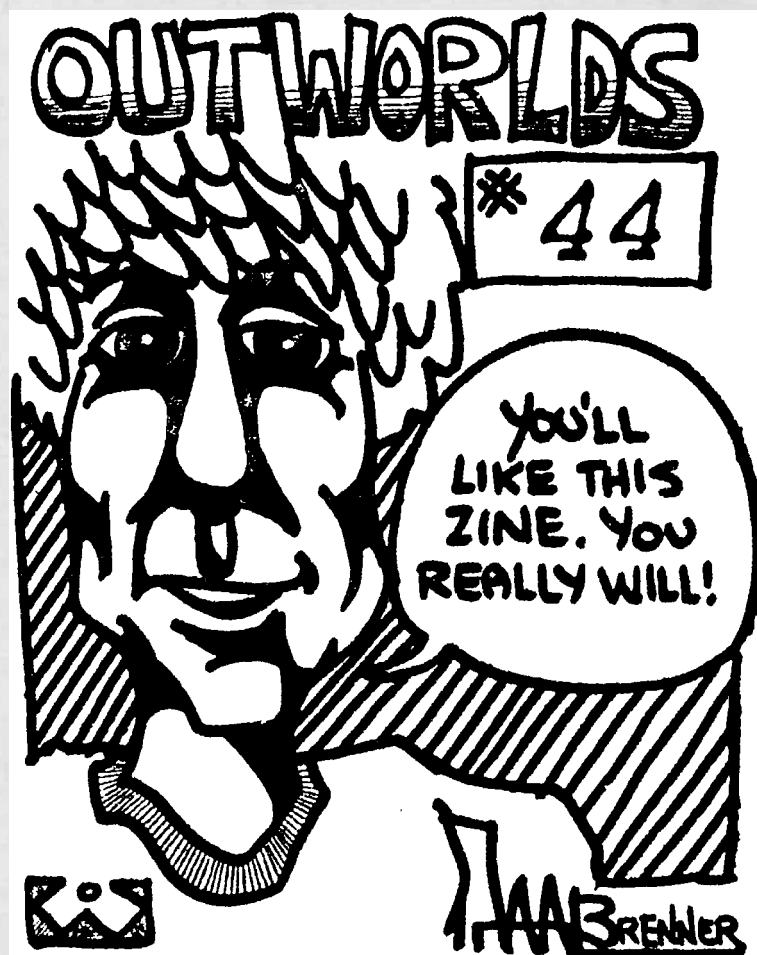
---Bowers, to Lowndes; 7 June 85

10 June 1985

The last mimeographed date you will have seen from this source is 1/24/85. Time is fleeting; fanaticism is morose.

I managed to persuade the mimeo to cough out the final 6 pages late that night, and the following morning--thanks in large measure to Dave Locke, who had risen from his sick bed to collate almost all of the previously run-off pages--assembled a hundred copies of OW43, before Jackie and I started the more than slightly incredible journey to Confusion.

...it was afternoon but, from Dayton to Wapakoneta it was total white-out: as if to in one fell swoop obliterate my lifetime of typos. There wasn't that much snow, but every bit of it (that hadn't metamorphosed to ice, beneath my tires) was in the air. Horizontally. And not quiescent about it, either.



We survived, although I am less than thrilled demonstrating my expertise--because I am an excellent winter driver. After all, I have the Dave-upstate-new-york-Locke Seal of Approval. (...either that, or it's simply that despite my somewhat suicidal tilting at Life...I'm not ready to die quite yet.) I latched onto an 18-wheeler doing a reasonable 25mph...and cringed for some fifty miles as an endless series of like vehicles passed with reckless abandon on my immediate left...their trailers canted by the wind some 10-15 degrees *towards* the historic Tabakow-Causgrove/Locke-Bowers-mobile.

I'm reasonably sure of the acuteness of the angle; I'm a checker now, you know.

...when we pulled off for a Wendy's in Vanakoneta, I informed Jackie that our options were now two: either 1) we would go on, or; 2) we'd spend the night at the Spacecon Holiday Inn. *We weren't going back!*

...eventually the shakes subsided, the coffee restored a sense of warmth, and we emerged to find that the weather had cleared dramatically... The remainder of the trip, and the convention itself, were in truth anticlimactic. But I enjoyed myself, even handling with aplomb my elevation to Biff-hood.

Still, I suddenly remembered why it was that I *used* to travel to ConFusions on Thursday night...

The Monday immediately following ConFusion I started my new job.

"BILL BOWERS of Cincinnati has been promoted from draftsman to checker at Kenner, the people who bring you Care BearsTM. Bowers says, 'I used to draw things, and people would tell me, 'you screwed up'; now I get to tell other people, 'you screwed up.'"
--Uncle Dick's, #10

It was a R*I*G Step 'Up. Status-wise. And a mere 22 1/2 percent raise.

...which has been cheerfully utilized towards my Degree in Fiscal Responsibility.

...and it has its moments as, when someone expresses some amazement that I'm actually *doing* the job:

"What," I say, "you mean I didn't get the job simply because I'm a spiffy dresser?"

...and it has its moments...but that's okay; I don't threaten to quit more than once every two weeks.

Still, not everything is Big Bucks and green check marks:

Naomi, my friend and former protégé, seems to be one of the biggest 'screw-ups'. ...and she seems somewhat reluctant to accept the proven fact that I am always right, and she is less so.

Strange, isn't it, how--perversely--one's former equals turn on you once you achieve a small measure of well-deserved success.

Somehow I suspect that Julia Ecklar would sympathize with my plight.

The Wednesday immediately following ConFusion I left for California.

...and Corflu 2.

...but more on that after a bit. As is rapidly becoming traditional with the after-the-Annish edition, this will undoubtedly be primarily a letterzine, and simplistic as far as graphics. ...this, also, is known as Editorial 'Win.

I just received a belated letter on issues 32 & 39 from Joy Hibbert, and I also have a retrospective look at several earlier issues from Eric Mayer. But even I have limits as to how far I'll reach back for mere egohoo, so we'll start off the Catch-'n section with comments on *Outworlds* 40, 41, and 42:

Walt Willis About this discussion on the allusive/elusive nature of your style, I thought maybe I should say that I don't mind it a bit. I've always concluded it just means your mind works differently from mine; and a good thing too.

On the other hand I think Ian Covell's letters are interesting too, because of the range of his thought and the fact that you can so clearly see how his mind is working.

It is honest, so you don't mind if he doesn't agree with you: one should never be cross, as some people are, with people who are really trying to get at the truth. It so happens I can help in one tiny way by reassuring him about British law, because law reform used to be my job. It is not, fortunately, a fact that in Britain "few if any laws are repealed". Every year hundreds of old laws are repealed. The only reason people don't notice this happening is that neither the repealed laws nor the repealing provisions appear in the bound volumes of *The Statutes Revised*: the repealed laws because they have been repealed and the repeals because they are "spent". Unfortunately Parliament keeps thinking of new things to make laws about so the total volume of statutes may increase, but if Ian ever checks on *The Statutes Revised* in a good library he will find that legislation more than fifty years old occupies very little space indeed. There are only two reasons for the continued existence of old laws: either they belong to a field on which there has been no movement for ages to provide an opportunity for reform, or there are enough people who think the old laws are just great (eg Sunday observance) to make changing them seem like a can of worms.

I can think of only one other example, and I was responsible for it myself. I hope Ian will forgive me, but what happened was that one day the Parliamentary Draughtsman brought me the draft repeal schedule for a Bill we were doing on the enforcement of court judgements. The first item was *The Great Charter, 1215*. "My God, Barney," I said, "do you want us to repeal *Magna Carta*?" "Why sure," he explained, "King John promised not to send out his soldiers to collect money, and our crown proceedings provisions give what amounts to the same protection." Lawyers are like that, you know! I notice someone in the States said the other day that the AMA had decided to use lawyers instead of white mice for experiments, because there are more of them and you're not so inclined to get fond of them. "I believe you, Barney," I said, "but I'm not going to be the one to repeal *Magna Carta*." So I crossed it off the death warrant, and that's why *Magna Carta* is still on the statute book. Now, isn't it true that all knowledge is to be found in fanzines?

While I am at it I might mention that Ian is to my mind too dismissive of the common law. This is simply the customary law of the land as it existed before Parliament, covering things generally accepted to be crimes, like murder. Or conspiracy to commit crime, to take Ian's example. It seems obvious to me that should be a crime, though the mafia mightn't like it.

(received: 2/22/85)

I think Ian's letters are interesting also; otherwise I wouldn't spend half my life stencilling them! (...and the other half typing the responses to them.) ¶ And one of the small rewards from my procrastination is that I have received more than one missive from you, Walt. See you a bit latter on in the issue...

Debbie Notkin Thanks for sending *Outworlds*. Legendary, of course, but interesting as well (which I have the feeling is somewhat more difficult).

Enjoyed the chat with Buck Coulson. I think "Either it's fun, or it's nothing" ought to be inscribed in bronze over a lot of fannish typers.

Now, to the reason for writing a loc(ke). Dave Locke's letter is one of the best things I've read in a fanzine. As I've said to some friends, I found actually doing *Kith* absolutely terrifying--and what was terrifying was this business of sending unsolicited prose out into the world--what if people didn't want it? What if I'd guessed wrong about who to send it to? Which, although I hadn't realized it, is simply another aspect of the whole question of audience. Dave Locke is clearer and more comprehensive about all the gamut of questions surrounding audience than I dreamed possible. He makes me think of long conversations I've had with Teresa Nielsen-Hayden about writing about things far from your readers' experience. Obviously, the further you get from familiarity, the better you have to be to really convey anything to the reader. Also obviously (to me at any rate), if we don't believe that a range of experience can be conveyed by writing, we might as well kiss the whole thing good-bye. And "the whole thing" can be interpreted to mean fanzines, fandom, or civilization. As soon as an individual or a group says, "But you can't understand that," an extremely important avenue is closed off. Obviously, I'll never really know what it's like to be poor and

black in Harlem, or to climb Annapurna, but I'm interested in getting as close to that knowledge as possible. And the best personal journalism, for me, is the stuff that gets me closer to some human experience or vision that would otherwise be closed to me.

(10/10/84)

(...well, hell: the *Courier Italic* just went the way of all elements--damn pushy of it, too; it wasn't much more than 15 years old--and so I seem to have to make a choice of which 'face' to present to you next...) ¶ The above is the partially-completed loc Debbie told me she had, when attempting to acquire a copy of OW43 from me, at Corflu. (Either that, or it's a clever typewritten imitation.) And since, unlike most of those who cajoled copies of the *Annish* from me at Corflu--the Convention for fanzine fans--Debbie wrote me on that issue also, she too will be along again, latter this issue...

David Stever I suppose if I had paid more attention to the label when I received the 40th issue of *Outworlds*, rather than to the fanzine itself, I might have noticed that there was an 'X' on my label. I know about the 'X' on a mailing label. I know that it means that the reason I've not gotten any *Outworlds* since half past September isn't because of gaps in your publishing schedule, but gaps in my loccing schedule.

Reading about Al Sirois' problems with the Grace Ferguson Stormdoor and Software Company and their ilk, I can only smile that the joys of working with computers have been given to all, with the rise of the personal computer, so you don't have to be the operator of a multimillion buck system to know these simple pleasures. Me, I enjoy that shit so much that when I come home from working for Uncle Sperry [we understand how important it is to listen. Uh huh.], I love to sit down at my Sperry PC, and find out how much of the software that I've copied from other PCs at work, doesn't work. I don't like anything that I've found that IBM has written, and in fact, I'm not too crazy about this word processor either (Cliff Wind's experience to the contrary).

Well, if you won't mind, could you see fit to take that 'X' off my mailing label? I could run some off for you, if you'd like, but it's something I haven't tried yet...

(2/16/85)

...almost twenty years ago, I ran the baby Burroughs on the night shift, at Dickie-Garbage AFB: it was something of a relief when I went overseas, and "graduated" to an IBM 407 Accounting Machine, which required a seperate wired peg-board for each function. More-recently-to-home, I spent 18 months on a CAD/CAM system...that only Eric Lindsay had heard of. It was more than something of a relief when I returned to the real world: a drafting board where, when I put a line down...it stayed there...until I erased it. ¶ More recently, and more-to-the-point--like the culmination was today: Instead of their normally provided computer-generated layout (wherein they have only to pluck out the individual parts, and dimension them) our illustrious CAD/CAM group was recently given a project from a board layout. Furthermore, the engineer not only spun-out each individual part onto its own sheet of paper and gave the requisite views...he also dimensioned it. In essence all they had to do was copy... Somewhere the essence got lost in the system: It took them fully twice as long to do as it would have our current not noticably proficient group of board drafters...and the endproduct was noticably inferior. (This is not opinion; I had to placate the engineer.) ¶ However not all is lost: current word is that the 'system' will be replaced next year. The unbelievable word is that the new system will be from the same company as the old... Yet another prototype. *sigh* One would have thought that they'd have learned to stick to baby food by now... ¶ Gee, that was fun...and, yes, I feel a lot better now. Of course, I'll be hearing from Naomi shortly--she was, after all, my direct replacement in the CAD/CAM group (even though the above wasn't her project). ¶ When I say I'll be "hearing" from Naomi, I mean that literally: not to worry, she won't write it down, so you won't have to listen... ¶ ...but I do enjoy "hearing" from people--which is why (even tho he is otherwise a Fine Individual), Mr. Stever has not seen an issue since #40...and therefore will NOT be along again later in this issue...tho hopefully in future print-outs... ¶ Disclaimer: I wouldn't want any of the pceeding, or the fact Chris has yet to "convince" me, to indicate I'm "anti-technology": I'm on record that the most valuable invention of the 20th Century is the Post-it Note...

Eric Lindsay I must admit that the Dave Locke/Buck Coulson chat struck me as rather flat, and I can't really understand it, since the two are among my favourite fannish writers. Perhaps I've simply become too familiar with Buck's history over the years of exchanged magazines and letters.

I can see why no-one asks Al Sirois about making sense of software documentation. For one thing, it is clearly impossible to make sense of such stuff. I have found the easiest method is to only steal software. This way you don't have to contend with confusing documentation, and unless the software is exceptionally easy to run, you never actually get it to work, thereby eliminating any great desire to find or read the said unintelligible documentation. On the rare types of software that actually work, and are useful enough that you actually want to use them, you will spend enough energy and effort before you get round to buying a legitimate copy that any documentation that accompanies your new version will now seem pelucidly clear. This method has always worked exceptionally well for me, and I recommend it wholeheartedly. Mind you, I don't actually own very much software, because the company (Ohio Scientific Instruments) who made the computer that my home brew OZI Rabble is compatible with seems to have gone out of business in 1982. I would like to own some software, so if anyone can tell me where I can buy a copy of Dwo Quong Fok Lok Sow's WP6502 version 1.3 word processor running under OS65D, I'd be most grateful... Incidentally, Al shouldn't give up all hope. The documentation for the above word processor (which really does exist, I hope) was written by Charles Platt. (received: 2/7/85)

I, on the other hand (the one holding the fanzine, not the one holding the pen), found the Coulson/Locke dialog very interesting as I don't know either well at all. Buck writes me amusing letters with comments about how elitist and difficult he is, but I had never had the background into which to fit those snippets of his personality. Thanks! --- Jean Weber

...I hope Al Sirois is resting easy...after starting all this computer-shit in MY fanzine! (It does seem to have replaced 'Standards', and whatever it was that Ian and Avedon were 'discussing'...) ¶ But that's okay, Al--as long as you don't use the mere fact that you've started your own fanzine to stop contributing to this one...

Norman Hollyn The way that I have all of my letters named on my computer is by name, with a little "extension" (as the computer folks call it) listing the issue number that I'm commenting on. This letter is stored in a file called OW.40 (for, you guessed it, *Outworlds* 40). Next to it in the list of all files is one called OW.34, which means that its been quite a long while since I've last written to you, and I've got issues 38, 39, and 40 lined up here just waiting for locs.

I liked OW38 much more than the preceding several issues. I found most of the discussion abnormally accessible and mostly interesting. Your comment on cycles, for instance, struck me in a special place. It's not quite a sense of *deja vu*, of course, but I often get the strong feeling that I am reliving certain emotional moments. I may be saying or doing different things, but the emotions seem terribly familiar. In some cases, this is something to avoid; such as when I seem to be repeating reactions that have caused me pain in the past. In fact, when I first started dating Janet I found myself ready to break up with her in much the same way that I was breaking up with my past women friends. When I lined up relationship after relationship, I found that they were ending in some remarkably similar ways. It, therefore, couldn't *always* be their fault.

That was when I started seeing a therapist. Who has helped me tremendously to see the patterns that I recreate in my life. Some of them are good responses, some of them are not. The trick is to conquer the ones that don't work for me.

So ... cycles. These patterns would come as a result of certain stimuli. Cycles, if you will.

Now, I know that this isn't exactly what you were referring to when you were referring to cycles, but it keyed off all of these thoughts in my head and I had to let you know them. That's what I mean about liking these issues more. They kicked

off memories more.

This may or may not have also been reinforced by Don D'Amassa's comment that "an awful lot of real males I know are pretty poorly realized themselves."

Ted White's old letter actually had more comment traps for me than his more recent one. For instance--"The problem is that while no one wants to seem eager for a Hugo, damned few fans (or pros) would turn one down." How times change. I suspect that with the emergence of a more "professional fandom" (yes, there is a heavy amount of sarcasm in there; I somehow can't get my computer printer to print out in sarcastic type) we inevitably have left the "aw shucks" aspect of fandom behind. No one wants to be seen actively pushing for an Oscar, but the prevailing wisdom out in Olde Hollywood is that anyone who doesn't help their own cause with ads and handshaking at parties is One Olde Asshole. I think that in a day and age where blocs of voters can swing Hugos, Nebulas, fan funds, etc. we're going to see more and more of the self-hype, and the self-push disguised as self-hype.

Boy, I'm glad that I've gaffiated. No one is going to push me for a Hugo. Of course, I wouldn't turn it down but ... no, no, no

Larry Downes' problems on 1984 mirrored some of mine with one exception--they didn't mar the book for me. But I do have to agree that, seeing how most governments work, the idea that any government could ever come close to the efficiency of the one in Orwell's book just strains my credibility. My general impression of business in general is that the more people involved in running a business the less efficient it tends to be, and since government is the biggest business of them all, it tends to be the biggest in inefficiently as well. Just today, in *The New York Times* there was a piece on the results of New York State's latest effort to join the 1980s--the picture drivers' license. Unlike sensible states, however, New York devised this system where, after getting your picture snapped at the Motor Vehicle Bureau, they give you a temporary driver's license WHILE THEY SEND YOUR PHOTO TO ALBANY FOR PROCESSING. That's right, kiddos. In a world where the average schlumph can get his or her photos done the same day down the street, New York State has gone Eastman Kodak one better and developed 45 day processing. Most states process the film and give you the finished license all in one setting. Not New York though. This also makes for a few interesting problems. The *Times* article mentioned that some counties had malfunctioning cameras which either took half-pictures or none at all. In any normal state, they would have discovered this as soon as the first photo came up. In Nueva York, however, these counties get to find out some four weeks later when the film is processed!! Then, they get to retake all of the photos again ("Hey, guys, come on back down to your friendly neighborhood wait-on-a-three-hour-line Motor Vehicle Bureau office; it's on our dime.").

As Westinghouse would say, "Progress is our most important fiction."

So, you're allergic to Cincinnati, eh? I remember when I was about seven I started developing allergies. So, ever protective of me, my mother bundled me up and we traipsed out to our local health clinic where I was "scratch-tested" to determine just what I was allergic to. This procedure involved going to the allergist once a week for about three weeks and have little bits of pollen, ragweed, cat, dog, canary, etc., injected a tiny bit under my upper arm skin. I would then sit around for about thirty or forty very long minutes while the little allergens would percolate inside my body. Then the doctor would see which of the little beasties I was allergic to. All told there must have been about fifty or sixty items they tested me to.

Well...it turned out that I was allergic to all of the normal stuff, like ragweed, pollen, large aunts with smelly perfume, and the like. I was also allergic to cats, dogs, canaries, and a ferocious number of other potential pets. In fact, the only animal that I was not allergic to was an elephant. I swear to God about this Bill, this is not something that I could have made up in a hundred million years. The plain fact of the matter was that if I wanted to have a pet, it was going to have to be an elephant. Fortunately for my parents, I wasn't a very strong-willed kid and, basically, liked reading books a lot more than playing with elephants, so the issue didn't go much further than a plaintive, "Mom?"

"With the exception of two weekends," you say on page 1349, "I've been on the

wagon for over three months." I appreciate you letting me in on your own difficulties and struggles. These I can sympathize with on a direct level. Getting screwed or not getting screwed at a con isn't as interesting a topic for me.

Let me put in a vote against Joel Zakem's suggestion for less frequent but larger issues of *Outworlds*. Damn, this letter already has taken me nearly three tightly printed pages (*okay, okay...so I've cut just a wee bit! -Bill*)) and several days to do. Keep up the good work Bill, but don't keep it up too well!

Al Curry makes many fine points in his loc, in particular the one about the United States being fifty separate countries. I always like to describe it as fifty individual countries connected by a series of tax laws and political payoffs. This may be cynical, but you know what they say about cynics--a cynic is just a realist who can't disguise his feelings with politics. In travelling to other countries (in Europe), I find that I share more with people in foreign large cities than I do with people from my own country who live in more sane climates. Connections are made on levels of interest, life experience and personal trust. The same works for people in the United States as well, of course. But I am talking about relationships on a people-to-people level, and that always seems to work better than country-to-country relationships.

For a minute, I almost agreed with Ian Covell about his statement that "a complete human is a partnership of a man and a woman" until I figured out what he meant. I had originally thought that he meant that inside every person, man or woman, exists elements of both sexes. That is something that I could agree with. But, on closer examination I find that he really means that the best state for a human being to be in is in a relationship with a member of the opposite sex. I tend to disagree because I know too many people who are either not in a relationship or in a homosexual one, and that ratio of fulfillment there seems to be about the same as for people who are in heterosexual relationships. Biology doesn't favor those people (in terms of future generations coming from them), but homosexuals have been around for too many years for me to believe that Darwin has the last word on the subject.

One other note on Ian's letter. Your answer to him that "Mike Resnick is MOST well-known in the US for having been a prime part of the movement that denied me my best shot at a Hugo. But that was long ago, and far away for both of us ... and fortunately I have an excellent dose of short term memory loss." Frankly, I don't believe that you have a short term memory loss in regards to this issue, otherwise you wouldn't have brought it up in such a way. And then, on the very next page, in discussing Andy Porter's dunning you for a subscription to his *Chronicle* you say that "I may not hold a grudge, but I have a very, very long memory." That I believe a little more. Just a little, though, since I'm not so sure that you don't hold a grudge--a little one, deep down somewhere.

And, with that said, I'll now leap forward in time--all the way to OW40. I'll never finish this letter if I don't skip something! So, sorry everybody in OW39.

Dave Locke's introduction to the Buck Coulson interview hit me in a rather sad way, and it has nothing to do with his writing. Perhaps because my interaction with Buck came about at the same time that I got involved with Donn Brazier and his whole *Title* circle, one line of Dave's really hit me. "...I know for a fact that he's [Buck's] never killed anyone worth knowing." struck me as something that Ed Cagle would've said as well. True, false, and funny all at the same time. It's a shame that he's no longer with us.

Buck Coulson's words to Dave Locke should be framed and put on the first page of the new FANCYCLOPEDIA. "Fandom is never going to put any bread in your mouth so quit taking it so Goddamned seriously. Either it's fun or it's nothing." Once Brain Control Machines are invented someone in fandom should buy one and ingrain Buck's words into every fan who comes to the Worldcon.

I can't wait until I'm big and famous. Then I can have an interviewer ask me, "If you had to do it all over again, what would you change?" (much as Dave asked Buck). I know what I'd answer -- "I wouldn't have drunk that eleventh beer that night at The Dugout Bar."

Don's story about getting mail years late reminds me of the time that I worked for the Post Awful (I know that I've told this story before but it is so horrifically

typical that it bears repeating at regular intervals). We had a stamp that read "Found In Supposedly Empty Mailbag At Far Rockaway Post Office." Now, I know that these things happen. But the thought that they happen often enough to warrent Uncle Sam ordering a rubber stamp for the occasions is just too much for me.

But Mr. Glicksohn. Don't you understand that Don D'Amassa is saying that people who are too lazy to shave every morning (like you and I) and who grow beards as a result are misfits. Truly responsible human beings do things like shave every day, make their bed every day, and raise their hand before answering in class. Don't make no sense to me, of course, but I guess I ended up in fandom for a reason.

Software documentation is, as Al Sirois suggests, written by refugees from the torture dungeons of the Dark Ages. Ever worse, however, is hardware documentation. The booklet that came with my printer looked like it was barely translated from its original Japanese. Arcane things like grammar and syntax were, apparently, not necessary. Instead, I found a series of charts, badly written sentences, and indecipherable equations. I spent a day looking for a mention of how the on/off switch worked. No wonder Al loves the Macintosh.

Well, that about wraps it up (finally) for the three OWs I've got lying around here. Unfortunately, most of the feedback is on the oldest issue (why do things always work out that way? There must be someone out there who's written a Murphy's Law of Fanediting with this law in it) but I trust that you'll be able to appreciate it anyway. (3/7/85)

...and I do. Despite my somewhat flippant reasoning (a few pages back) for not running Joy's & Eric's letters, I DO appreciate a) loong letters, and b) "summation" letters on several issues. In fact, maybe I'll run an excerpt, after all, from:

Eric Mayer ...I said the issues Skel raised were past history, but it occurs to me I want to make some mention of them. As I've said before, a zine about nothing but conventions wouldn't interest me--for obvious reasons. But I wouldn't consider such a zine cliquish. Likewise, writing with too many ingroup references might bore me because it wouldn't mean anything to me, but I wouldn't consider that, in itself, to be cliquish, or feel that, heh, Bill is excluding me--because if you send somebody a free zine you're not doing so to exclude them...unless...here's the big unless, and you are not guilty of this at all, from my point of view...unless you imply that the fact that you and your friends understand the jokes makes you and your friends superior--more fannish--etc. To me, what makes a clique is not who is invited in, but who is excluded. The sort of ingroup references Skel pointed to didn't strike me as designed to be exclusionary--it was more like you just forgot that some of your readers wouldn't get them, or maybe presumed too much understanding on their parts. So I can see how you were a bit surprised...here you are giving a party for your good friends and graciously inviting in people you don't know as well, hoping they will get in the spirit..and it is seen as somehow not quite right. But Skel's point is well taken because I get plenty of zines filled with similar ingroup references that do not strike me as *Outworlds* does, but strike me rather as having been sent out to me just to show me that I don't belong in whatever group is doing the sending. (5/8/85)

...actually, the "truth" of the matter (at least as regards my "intentions" vs. my "execution") probably falls somewhere in between your conception...and that as expressed by Skel in that long-ago letter. I doubt that I will ever "answer" to everyone's satisfaction why I "do" things--including fanzines & fanwriting--the way I "do" them...and yet I hope that the same "everyone's" understand that when I say that the fact that not all who I WANT to 'like' what I do...do...is of some concern to me, it isn't something I lose vast amounts of sleep over...it isn't a statement that should be taken as being more snide than it is meant to be. I DO often write with one, or two ...maybe three...in mind, to the virtual exclusion of everyone else. Just as often I write simply to hear the sound of my own typer. And sometimes I am trying to say whatever it is I have to say...to ALL of you at the same time. But most of the time I'm just having fun (my way)...and hope that you are too. ¶ Stick around, Eric! Skel has:



Alas, she is right. I *am* obsessed with ferrets. What's more, I can't for the life of me figure out from whence the obsession came.

For some reason the word 'ferret' *has* become an obsession. I tend to substitute it in any aphorism that I repeat. 'A nod's as good as a wink to a blind horse' becomes (you guessed!) 'A nod's as good as a wink to a blind ferret'. 'A ferret in time saves nine' is baffling in its ambiguity, and 'Too many ferrets spoil the broth' is not only abstruse, it is demonstrably untrue if the broth in question happens to be ferret broth.

It isn't even as if ferrets have a bad press.

(A ferret-press? Is that what you use to make a ferret whine? A ferret wine? I don't wish to know that, kindly leave the article. But first, pass me a glass of that Chateau Vole over there.)

The fact is that ferrets don't so much have a bad press, as no press at all. Take for instance your average Western film. What the irascible prospector has to say, before being filled full of lead, is "You durn polecats, get off of muh land." He does *not* say, "You durn ferrets..." This is odd because a ferret, according to *my* dictionary, is a half-tame polecat, and most of the outlaws we see described as polecats on TV are at least half-tame, if not completely so.

"get off muh claim, you dagnabbed ferrets," just does not have the required pizzazz.

Mind you, you can't believe all you read in a dictionary. After all, *my* dictionary reveals that a 'ferret' is, apart from being a half-tame polecat, a stout cotton or silk tape. How ridiculous! It also reveals that 'dimity' is 'a stout cotton fabric'. Whoever heard of a fabric made from taped ferrets? No, one should take one's dictionary, like one's tequila, with a pinch of salt. Fout on them! (Can you 'fout' on things? A hasty check of my Concise Oxford reveals that a 'facer' is a great and sudden difficulty, that 'farcy' is a disease "...esp. of horses", yet of 'fout' there is nary a mention. The Concise Oxford does not utter a mutter on this subject. Mind you, another subject upon which no utter is muttered, is 'twee', although I am now aware that 'tutty' is impure zinc oxide. 'Twee' is my basic test of a dictionary. Whenever I come across a dictionary going cheap I paint it yellow, put it in a cage, and sell it as a canary. No, that's a cheep shot. What I really do is pick the fucker up and search for the word "twee". This is my basic test of a dictionary, though I have yet to find one which does contain the word. However, I suppose I had better define my terms here. I had also better get out of these bleeding brackets whilst we both know where we are.)

To me a 'dictionary' is a single volume that you can pick up and look through. It is *not* a set of n-million volumes that sit around the floor in cartons, mocking your inability to build thirteen miles of shelving with a load-bearing capacity of two tons per linear-foot. That isn't a 'dictionary', that is a 'reference library', and even if I was a zillionaire I wouldn't buy one for reasons which I think are self-evident. I mean, not only is there the problem of building the sodding shelves, but look at all those opportunities for getting lost in newly discovered esoterica that such a 'library' would offer. Why, if you got caught up in the difference between 'spitchcock' and 'spatchcock' it could be months before you finally emerged from the pages containing your ultimate blind alley.

Take for instance my attempt to look up the word 'ferret'. Are you aware that 'frowst' is 'fusty heat in a room' or to stay in and enjoy the same? Do you frowst with Proust? Were you aware that there is no such thing as 'a cold and frowsty morning'? If not you are probably unable to gasconade that a 'bubbly-jock' is a Turkey cock.

Perhaps that last paragraph will give you some inkling as to why I try not to look up a word in a dictionary unless I can possibly help it. I get sidetracked. Hell, I was once three days in knocking out a brief note to my milkman, before screaming "FUCK IT! WHO NEEDS PASTEURIZED MILK ANYWAY?" Like I said, sidetracked ...as in 'away from ferrets. It can happen, even to the best of us.

Why then do I find ferrets incredibly ludicrous? I mean, they aren't cuddly, and they certainly aren't funny as far as animals go. Now your wombat is funny. Your wombat is also ludicrous, but then anything Australian is ludicrous--from your duck-billed platypuss, through your koala bear, to your Fosters lager. All guaranteed

instant mirth at the touch of a concept. Mind you, animals don't have to be Australian to be ludicrous *but it helps*. Sloths are ludicrous, aardvarks are ludicrous, voles haven't a lot going for them, and to see a real live roadrunner is to giggle uncontrollably. But why ferrets? Let's face it, the basic ferret is a nasty, vicious brute, that would bite your fingers off sooner than look at you. If you doubt that, try putting your bare hand into a bag of blind ferrets. No, in and of itself, the ferret isn't particularly funny, and this fact is mirrored in the lack of jokes about them. Any attempt to produce an article entitled 'Three Great Jokes About Ferrets' would be stillborn.

Speaking of 'stillborn', did you hear the one about the Irish backstreet abortionist? Not only did the judge send him to jail, he confiscated his ferret. *That's* the only ferret joke I know.

No, it isn't the ferret itself which is silly, it is the overall gestalt of the ferret concept in working class british life which leads to total gobsmackment of the sobriety centres. The thing is, a ferret has only two purposes. It is either for killing rabbits with, or for sticking down your trousers. Even the first of these *raison d'être* is a bit shaky on the credibility foundations. The concept of breeding a species of half-tame polecat just to kill some long-eared floppy thing that eats your carrots and craps on your lawn isn't something I would want to enter in my defence at a sanity hearing. As for the second, the only reason my mind doesn't boggle is that it's already out to lunch. I can only conclude that it was some form of Rite of Passage, which ensured that morons daft enough to do it didn't inflict their genes on future generations. No wonder it seems to have died out.

But, having said all that, it isn't really the ferret obsession that bothers me. No, it's The Cleethorpes Connection (eat your heart out, Gene Hackman). *Vot izz eet mit dis 'Kleethorpes'?* Well, uh, that's hard to say.

Cleethorpes is, to my mind at least, a hick town. It is a seaside (you should pardon the expression) resort just to the south of the Humberside fishing port of Grimsby. Somehow, in my mind, it has become the quintessential English hick town, although doubtless the 70,000 inhabitants take a somewhat different view. I cannot think what, if anything, Cleethorpes ever did to me, but the fact remains that the very name of the place is an object of scorn to me. Can ya dig it? Look, I'll try and relate it to something that you might find more familiar. It is Dullsville. I have a recording by John Denver in which he expresses, about Toledo, Ohio, precisely the sentiments that I feel about Cleethorpes, though of course I've never been there. It just sounds like a Wally place to live, very much the same way that Toledo does. Not only Toledo. There are other US cities that sound the same way to me. Akron for instance, or Sandusky. Hang on, aren't they all in...? Why is it that the entire state of Ohio sounds to me like Wimpville, Arizona? Why do all the Wallys live in Ohio?

Do my perceptions have anything to do with the recent article that appeared in one of the more respectable national daily newspapers over here? It was in the regular 'Letter from America' column, in which 'Our New York Correspondent' revealed that they've misplaced the Midwest. This,



A legend goes West

MILLIONS of Americans have just been told that they aren't who they thought they were. There they were, happily getting on with life in Ohio, Indiana and Illinois, comfortable in the belief that they were friendly and dependable Mid-Westerners when, just like that, they've been informed that the Mid-West has moved away. And not only that: the Mid-West may be missing.

The bearer of this alarming news is James Shortridge, professor of geography at the University of Kansas, who reveals in the *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* that nobody knows where the Mid-West really is any more.

The trouble is that for most Americans the Mid-West, like other regional identities, is less a place on the map than a state of mind. It is the agricultural heartland, a reassuring place of farms, small towns and friendly people that was the traditional source of the nation's food and values.

Now, Professor Shortridge's research shows, the idea of the Mid-West is moving progressively West to the Great Plains because it better fits the traditional image as industry encroaches from the East.

Industrial centres like Detroit and Cleveland no longer fit the old perception and in one of Shortridge's surveys, Chicago, once considered the capital of the Mid-West, was no longer even included in the region by more than half those interviewed. The capital now, he says, is probably Omaha, Nebraska, 480 miles away towards the Pacific.

Regional slippage problems may become a whole new field of psychiatry. Aside from how Great Plainsers feel about having the responsibilities of the Mid-West thrust upon them. The notion of the Mid-West as a shifting ideal has left millions of Americans with the crisis of having no cultural identity at all. East of the Mississippi, says Professor Shortridge, the industrial states of the old Mid-West are now 'a region in need of a name.'

... COLUMN PROVIDED BY
ROGER WADDINGTON

