

# TAPPEN



IT WAS THE FIRST FANNISH FANZINE  
BIGGLES HAD EVER SEEN....



Winter is drawing in, the clocks have been put back (though certain of us did not discover this until late the following day), the shops are full of Christmas gifts and the last ever edition of "Jeux Sans Frontieres" starts in half an hour. Taken together these omens can only presage one thing. Yes it's

### TAPPEN

a fanzine edited and produced by Malcolm Edwards, 28 Duckett Road, London N4 1BN, U.K. It is mysteriously available, though not as frequently or widely as it might be. This issue seems likely to be much longer than I'd like, and since it's the evening of 29th October it must be touch and go whether I can get it done in time for Novacon, slightly less than a week hence.

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### FRONT-PAGE DRIVE IN NEWS

Unicon has come and gone, but this fanzine failed to make its promised appearance. I plead not guilty — I was ready to do it, but two of the three people whose contributions were central to the issue I had in mind failed to deliver, and so I went out and got drunk instead.

Autumn is becoming a busy season for the active fan. Since Unicon in mid-September I've spent a week at Milford learning to be a sci-fi writer, been to one day events at Cambridge (Fencon, held in a room where I had my first ever experience at public speaking, as best man at my brother's wedding in 1971) and Brighton, and have spent the usual evenings thrashing local fans at pool down at the pub. Now Novacon looms. It's hard to find time for normal activities like work in the midst of all this activity. In order to prepare for it, Chris and I gave Silicon a miss and instead spent a couple of weeks driving around Wales in the rain. Even there, however, one could not escape fully.

First stop had to be Hay-on-Wye, a town not dissimilar to heaven if you are a fanatical scourer of second-hand bookshops, since there's very little else in the place. At present there are between 12 and 14, including possibly the two largest in the country. One can find terrific bargains there, or very little at all. This time I spent quite a useful day loading the car with dusty old junk. Come four o'clock I stepped into the last bookshop in the place, and who should I bump into but Chris Morgan and Brian Stableford, just arrived from Birmingham for a couple of hours' frantic scouring. I was happy to see them, but they were far from overjoyed to see me, as I volunteered the information that I'd been there since ten in the morning, and all the cheap J.G. Ballard were safely stacked in our car. I've always had this nightmare that I'd go to Hay, and just as I arrived would meet one of the specialist booksellers, like John Eggeling or George Locke, staggering down the street with cartonfuls of incredible rarities. It was a pleasant surprise to find myself in something like that situation, but playing the other part.

Wales, as I say, was wet. When it's wet you drive around (or in our case Chris drives around, since I can't). As Wales is a small country you can see a lot of it in two weeks. Virtually all of it, in fact. You can't see it very clearly, as the mountaintops are obscured by cloud and everything else is obscured by falling

water, but at least you can say you've been there. I'd been there before in many cases, as my father's family is Welsh and many childhood holidays had been spent in their home town, Llanidloes, but it's always fun to revisit.

One place I hadn't been, for some reason, is Portmeirion. This is a bit odd because until he went to lecture at Leeds Polytechnic and started coming between David Fringle and a life of quiet indolence, my uncle worked for years at the Trawsfynydd nuclear power station, and he and my aunt lived in Penrhyndeudraeth, which is the town nearest to Portmeirion. (There will be a pronunciation test for American readers at the end of this.)

One afternoon the rain stopped and the sun actually appeared, and so we decided that a visit to Portmeirion would be a good idea. I must say it's both more extensive and more effective than I'd expected. Nor do the considerable numbers of tourists interfere with this; quite the reverse, in fact. Empty, Portmeirion would just be a particularly grandiose and loony folly. Full of people on a sunny afternoon it actually seems to become the bizarre Italianate village it's built to suggest. I hadn't expected so many echoes of THE PRISONER ... Mini Mokes as taxis, spotty youths walking around in white-piped black blazers trying to look suave. But this, I supposed, must be an established aspect of their tourist trade.

Then we wandered into one of the buildings and came face-to-face with a number of noticeboards bearing information concerning the PRISONER fan club, the Six of One Appreciation Society. We gradually realized that the taxis and the people in fancy dress and the funny telephone booths weren't permanent features ... we had arrived in the middle of a convention!

Naturally we had to wander towards the rooms set aside for the convention to take a look. There was nobody about in the lounge because, we realized, a PRISONER episode was being shown and everybody, but everybody, was in the con hall. The lounge was full of empty beer glasses and paper plates, and around the walls were propped rather ad-hoc looking display boards. Some of them had photos of previous conventions. (I looked carefully, but couldn't spot anyone I knew from sf cons.) Others had press cuttings, both respectful and piss-taking. There were flyers for local groups, magazines, activities.

It was clear that we found ourselves inadvertently in the midst of a bunch of cretins and loonies ... but even as the thought occurred, so did the awful familiarity of the scene become apparent. Of course, it could have been any uninspired, deserted fan room. Of course, anyone wandering into an sf convention off the street would see it as we were seeing this.

There's no moral to this, or even a punch line, but don't let anyone try to kid you that attending sf conventions isn't a very strange way to pass a weekend. I have seen it with awful clarity from another perspective, and it is not an activity one could describe as normal. Now roll on Novacon....

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The big forthcoming change in our lives is that we are due to become Mummy and Daddy in May next year. (I'm down for the part of Daddy; Chris has landed the starring role.) This is all very strange, and we now look keenly at all the couples we know who have children, dividing them into those with reasonable offspring and

those who have produced brats. What is the magic formula? What can one do to ensure one ends up with a Leo Stableford, let's say, as opposed to a (name deleted)? How can one ensure that the event enriches one's life rather than destroying it, and how does one keep from becoming a Child Bore, regaling fellow convention-goers during their breakfast with turd-by-turd accounts of little (name deleted)'s bowel movements? We have no answers, but we're working on the problem.

And will it leave me time to carry on producing fanzines? And will it leave Chris enough time to keep writing articles for them? Who knows. Luckily for the time being we can still thrill to the following.

### ASKING FOR IT

by Chris Atkinson

It was a miserable rainy Saturday in 1972. My flatmates, undaunted by the weather, were pursuing their individual pursuits: Pauline was dressmaking in the sitting room, Martin was baking a strawberry sponge cake in the kitchen, and Robin was screwing the Israeli ambassador's daughter in the back bedroom. Feeling bored and restless I wandered out into Blackheath village, hoping that one of the passing trendies would carry me off into a life of riches and smart French restaurants. Instead, my boots began to let in water as I trudged disconsolately through the streets.

A few months beforehand I had rashly joined an organization called "People not Psychiatry". The idea was that when you felt bad, you had a list of numbers you could call for a heartening chat. The snag was that your own number was on the list too, so there was always a chance that someone might call you expecting solace just when you were about to open a vein yourself. I don't know how many suicide pacts resulted from the idea. However, I was willing to try anything once and so, with hopes of being cheered up, I headed for the nearest phone box.

The first three people I telephoned did not reply. Perhaps they had found true happiness, or alternatively had already ended it all. The fourth number on the list belonged to someone named Paul. I fantasized that Paul would have long dark hair and sensitive eyes....

When Paul answered, my romantic fantasy was swiftly shattered. "Who is this?" he snapped, peevishly.

"Oh, hello. I got your name from 'People not Psychiatry'. I phoned because...."

"Oh yes," he interrupted. "Well, I might as well tell you now that my wife has just left me, the bitch, and she won't let me see my only son. I've been feeling bloody awful since she left. I've even thought of suicide. In fact, I've got this bottle of sleeping pills from the doctor, and as soon as I work up the courage I shall probably take the lot."

"Oh," I said feebly, momentarily thrown off balance. Clearly Paul was unlikely to fulfil my fantasies or even cheer me up. However, as a trainee social

worker I felt it my duty to extend a helping hand to another human being who was so obviously in distress.

"Would it help to talk?" I asked, hurriedly putting on my caring voice.

"Well, all right," he said, "but not on the phone. I'm allergic to phones. Do you have a place? I'll come round now, in the car."

I felt slightly trapped by this, but decided to chalk up the experience as my good deed for the day. I gave him the address, then left the call box to walk back to the flat. On the way I allowed myself to imagine him as victimized, but nevertheless intelligent and handsome. I would calm him and remind him that life was precious. He would remember me forever.

When I arrived back at the flat I discovered that in my absence everyone had gone out. On the whole I was quite relieved, as I was not sure what my flatmates would make of my debut as a Good Samaritan. I cleared our rather bleak sitting room of discarded pieces of material and last night's cigarette ends, while listening rather tensely for the doorbell to ring. It did, very soon. He must have left home as soon as he had put down the telephone.

I opened the door to a small, thickset man of about 30. He was blond, balding, and his skin looked sallow and unhealthy, as if he had been kept indoors for too long. He wore John Lennon glasses, which looked rather incongruous on his round, pudgy face. There was something faintly unsettling about his appearance, and I immediately regretted having asked him round. However, if he was feeling suicidal, I would have to go through with my social worker act. I let him in, and led him into the sitting room.

"Would you like a tea or coffee? A Slice of sponge cake?" I asked, hoping to make him feel welcome.

"No," he said abruptly, his eyes fixed on the carpet. I paused uncertainly, not sure what move to make next. Perhaps he needed to get it out of his system. I sat down opposite him, leaning forward in what I hoped was a concerned manner.

"You must be feeling pretty awful about things," I said in a sympathetic voice. He sat silently for a moment then, slowly, he raised his head, staring straight at me.

"I want to fuck," he said.

Now at this point I suppose I should have asked him to leave. Alternatively I could have left myself and gone to find the porter. However, his statement seemed so unlikely that I could hardly take it in. I looked down at myself: rainsoaked boots, muddy from my walk, a heavy black wool skirt with the hem coming down, a purple polo-necked sweater from a jumble sale ... No, it wasn't possible. I must have misunderstood.

"You must be missing your wife," I suggested, keeping my voice steady while shifting backwards slightly. "Have you thought of joining a club or anything."

He continued to stare at me fixedly. Behind his thick lenses his left eye twitched slightly. Then he smiled.

"I want to fuck you." To emphasize this, he lunged across, as though to embrace me. Already tensed for flight I leaped to my feet and circled around behind my chair.

"Listen, just a minute, I don't want to—" I gasped, thinking as I said it that my wishes seemed fairly irrelevant to him. He too jumped to his feet and the two of us circled the settee in a rather ludicrous parody of the hunter and his prey.

"Of course you do," he said, leering. "You're not wearing a slip under that skirt."

This puzzled me greatly. The skirt was thick and made of a bobbly, unyielding material hardly likely to cling sensuously to my curves. As far as I could see the only way he could have known about my undergarments would have been if I had done a can-can on the coffee table. In any case, I failed to see how my omission of an undergarment could signal sexual availability. But I was clearly in error about this, as here I was being chased around the sitting room by a man inflamed with passion by my daring mode of dress.

The next time my circling brought me within reach of the door, I raced out of the room into the kitchen. Hearing Paul in hot pursuit I picked up the nearest implement to hand — a cake knife. As he entered the room I waved the knife in what I hoped was a threatening gesture. It seemed to work. He backed out of the kitchen into the hall. I followed, still brandishing the knife, hoping to drive him out of the front door. However, as I approached him he suddenly grabbed me by the wrist and bent my hand round and down, so that the knife fell from my grasp. He picked it up from the floor, straightened, and leered at me again. In desperation I ran back into the sitting room and stood behind the settee.

Paul followed, still holding the knife. As I watched him approach I felt myself become very calm, perhaps as an automatic response to danger. Instead of cowering I drew myself up to my full five feet three inches, looked him straight in the eye, and in my best icy middle-class voice said, "Would you mind leaving the flat, please? Right now."

Paul stopped dead. The leer faded, and he slowly lowered his eyes. His shoulders sagged, and he began to look distinctly uncomfortable. Perhaps I had reminded him of his mother, or of some long-forgotten primary school headmistress. Whatever the reason, my tactic was successful and, defeated, he shuffled his way out of the flat, pausing only to drop the cake knife in the hall.

For the following two evenings Paul hung around outside our block of flats, presumably in the hope of catching a glimpse of my supposedly inadequately-clad body. Finally I sent Martin down to "speak" to him. Despite his liking for sponge cakes Martin was very muscular and tough looking. After their conversation we never saw Paul again, but just in case, I took to wearing slips whenever I was likely to encounter the opposite sex. After all, I wouldn't like anyone to think I was "asking for it".

Of course, this incident could not be called a sexual assault, as the offender hardly touched me, thank God. Afterwards I wondered whether perhaps I might have been guilty of "leading him on". After all, I had fantasized about him being handsome and sensitive, and I had invited him back to the flat. I forgot the crucial point — I had told him I did not want to have sex with him, and he had ignored this. Perhaps he believed that when women say "no" to sex they mean "try harder". Or perhaps it was merely in his interest to act upon such a belief. Whatever the reasons for his actions, I finally put them down to the consequences

of my own gullibility and lack of underclothing. In other words, I blamed myself.

A couple of years later I was to have another experience which in some ways echoed my encounter with Paul. As a background to the anecdote I have to make two confessions of lapse in taste: firstly, that I have been on a singles holiday, and secondly, that the aforesaid holiday was in Majorca. I had made these somewhat dubious choices in the wake of a fading love affair, at that time of year when you have little choice of venue because everyone else booked up the good places in January. The holiday was to be in late October; it was cheaper then, but the weather in Palma would still be warm. Unfortunately I had not realized that taking an "out of season" holiday meant more than slightly cooler evenings.

When we arrived in Majorca it soon became obvious that the glitter of summer was not only tarnished, but was by and large folded up and put away for the winter. The discos and bars were closed and boarded; the English Pub and Pablo's Fish and Chip Bar were locked and deserted, their characteristic odours having long since faded. Most of the locals seemed to have left the town in disgust long ago, driven out by the now-departed tourist hordes. Only two hotels seemed to be inhabited. Ours was the smaller one, fairly reasonable in its way, but hardly throbbing with Latin excitement. Maybe it would have been better in mid-season, but there were only eight of us booked in, and six of those were over 40.

The singles organization had guaranteed to match us with at least one person of our age and interests. My "partner" was a 22-year old female insurance clerk from Basingstoke, who had come equipped with a seemingly endless supply of pale blue crimplene dresses. The only thing we had in common was the hope of some excitement — not an unusual wish on a holiday abroad. On this basis we teamed up each evening to wander listlessly through the quiet town.

It soon became obvious that the only semblance of fun we were going to get was in the bar of the hotel next door. This bar was a large cavern of a place, with countless little circular tables surrounding a small dance floor, on which a bored pair of flamenco dancers would periodically perform their stylized gyrations. In between times the band would play off-key renderings of "Una Paloma Blanca" or whatever other fatuous holiday tune was in vogue at the time. In this atmosphere the only sensible place to stand was propping up the bar, as far away as possible from the "entertainment". Very soon we were joined by a couple of young men in their late twenties who lived on the island, and who were employed by day as waiters. They were courteous, polite, and generous with the cuba libres. At the end of each evening they would escort us back to our hotel and wish us good night with a chaste kiss. They were hardly the answer to our dreams, but they did add a spark of interest to an otherwise uninspiring holiday.

After a few evenings meeting in the bar, "my" waiter, Carlos, began to talk about another much more interesting night spot elsewhere on the island. Apparently, Majorca boasted a fair number of British emigres, mostly writers and poets, who then frequented a small, intimate bar only a few miles from Palma. In my imagination I saw a gathering of colourful bohemians, quietly smoking dope in dark corners. I showed interest. Carlos said that if I wanted he could drive me there in a few minutes. Unfortunately his car would only seat two, so we would have to leave my "friend" and her partner behind. However, Carlos was not unobservant, and had gained the impression that we were not very close friends ...



and perhaps I was more the sort of person who would appreciate a chance to meet the artistic community. Intrigued and flattered, I readily agreed to go.

When we reached the bar, my disappointment must have been obvious. Instead of a group of dope-smoking hippies, the bar was full of middle-aged men with tweed jackets and middle-class accents. I sat down with my drink and looked sulky. Carlos tried his best, pointing out one or two people I had never heard of. One of these was leaning on the bar and telling a seemingly interminable story about a man with a dog and a shooting-stick. From his expression I deduced that he was telling a joke. When he finally did ramble to a halt a couple of his tweed-suited companions brayed with laughter, spluttering, "Ho ho, yes, he used the shooting stick, get it?" to each other, apparently vastly amused. I wondered why Carlos had thought I might like these people. Even he was looking as though he considered the visit a rather boring mistake. When he suggested a return to the hotel bar, I agreed and finished my drink hastily. Even the flamenco dancers were better than this.

On the way back I began to notice how dark and densely wooded the countryside was. There were no houses, or at least none visible from the narrow, rough road on which we were travelling. The way back seemed more dark and deserted than the way out had been, but perhaps that was the effect of too much Bacardi. I began to worry that we might be lost. I could not remember whether or not there were likely to be wolves in the Majorcan countryside. Then, quite suddenly, and with no warning, the car came to a halt. I felt a prickle of panic.

"What's the matter?" I asked anxiously. "We haven't ... run out of petrol or something, have we?"

Carlos turned towards me. Instead of replying he leaned over, grabbed me by the arm, and kissed me.

Now I had learned from a relatively early age that some men, having bought you drinks all evening, are likely to want some kind of return for their investment. It is irrelevant that you offered to pay but were made to feel this was an affront to their masculinity. It is also irrelevant that you may have spent the evening with them because you liked their company and not because you wanted sex. However, Carlos had not previously seemed like this sort of man. His previous behaviour towards me could not be faulted. So what on earth were we doing in the depths of a wood in a parked car?

"I really think I should be getting back—" I began, but got no further. He tightened his grip on my arm and, with his other hand, pulled up my skirt. I could hardly believe this was happening. I caught hold of his arm, but he was very strong. I squirmed sideways, shouting at him to stop, but none of this had any effect. In a moment of clarity I realized that the only way to stop myself being raped would be to fight. Hard.

Have you ever tried to fight off a would-be rapist in a sports car? It has its advantages and disadvantages. The main disadvantage is that because of the limited space it's hard to get away. The main advantage is that because of the same space limitation your assailant has difficulty in positioning himself. My plan of campaign was to fight hard, then go limp while Carlos tried to untangle himself, and take advantage of his preoccupation by making a quick exit through the door. Unfortunately, each time I made a move towards the door he would grab

me by the hair and pull me back. Finally, in desperation, I gritted my teeth and withstood his hold on my hair, hurling myself through the door with all my strength. I felt something give, and then I was outside the car on my knees. I leaped to my feet and set off down the road at a run. I had no idea at all where I was going. For all I knew we might have driven miles away from Palma.

Carlos started the car and followed me down the road. "Where do you think you are going?" he shouted from the window.

"I don't care," I shouted back.

"You will get lost! You do not know the way!"

"I don't care," I repeated with emphasis, and started to run again, trying not to think about wolves. At this, Carlos got out of the car and ran after me down the road. He could run much faster than I could.

"Okay," he panted as he caught up. "I will take you back to your hotel. I will not touch you again. On my honour. I am very sorry for what I did. It is because I am masculine."

I stopped running and gave this some thought. He might not be telling the truth. On the other hand, I had no guarantee that there might not be worse terrors than Carlos waiting in the wood. I could always stay alert in the car and jump out quickly if he showed signs of stopping. In the end, I decided to chance it. I got in warily, keeping my hand on the door catch. Despite my distrust, however, Carlos drove straight back to my hotel. As we arrived I realized that the strange ball of fuzz on top of the dashboard was part of my hair. I left it there for Carlos as a memento of our relationship.

The next morning I awoke stiff, covered in bruises, and with a very sore head. I told Miss Basingstoke about my experience over breakfast, but she merely said "Oh yes" and went back to her scrambled egg. I sat and reflected on the incident in the slightly clammy light of day and decided that, once again, it had really been my own fault. I had been gullible, ungrateful, had taken risks, and could hardly complain if my behaviour had backfired on me.

I forgot about both these incidents until fairly recently, when I was required to write an essay about rape and sexual assault. As I began to read through the literature it suddenly occurred to me that I had narrowly escaped such an attack on two occasions. Only I had never thought of it in that way. I had assumed that because I had put myself into a vulnerable position I was wholly to blame, and that the man concerned had acted in an entirely reasonable way, given the circumstances. Indeed, in a way I had felt quite grateful to the men for not going through with their threats and forcing me to have sex with them. Had they done so, I still don't think I would have thought of the incidents as rape. Because I was "asking for it", it couldn't have been rape. I wonder how many incidents like this happen to women and go unreported, unremarked upon, because the woman feels responsible and guilty? I suspect that men such as those I encountered do not see themselves as potential rapists either. Passionate, maybe. Masculine and determined, perhaps. But a rapist, that most despised of perverts? Oh, surely not.

--- Chris Atkinson

## SMALL ADS

"Gentleman starting a library wishes to purchase interesting old books and large bookcase."

(from the Guardian)

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It isn't often that the announcement of a Nobel Prize is the occasion for dancing in the streets, but I should imagine that this year's literature award to Gabriel Garcia Marquez caused the odd celebration south of the border, down Mexico way, and beyond. It even raised the odd restrained cheer at 28 Duckett Road, for if Marquez isn't the author of the great postwar novel I should very much like to know who is. (The answer I've been given once or twice to this largely rhetorical question is Gunter Grass -- for THE TIN DRUM. This may be so, though I must admit that last time I tried to read this novel -- in 1969, it's true -- I didn't get on too well. One day I shall have another shot.)

The novel in question is, of course, ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF SOLITUDE, one of those rare books which brings out the proselytizing urge in almost everyone, it seems, who has read it. It's a book I discovered in 1976 while undertaking a coach journey from London to Corfu, which is a trip I'd advise against. Our particular expedition was fraught with disaster almost from start to finish -- as fellow travellers Chris Priest and the Charnox can testify -- but it wasn't so bad for me as I spent most of my waking hours in faraway Macondo, setting of the novel. I don't intend to attempt discussing it here, not least because I don't have a copy at present (Chris took it to a convention to read while sitting in the bookroom, and finished up accidentally selling it to someone), but the gist of what I would say is very simple: if you haven't read it, do so.

Marquez, oddly enough, doesn't rate it that highly among his works: he prefers the novella "No One Writes to the Colonel" or THE AUTUMN OF THE PATRIARCH. There again, I suppose it isn't that strange: authors quite often assess and rate their works differently from readers or critics. Nevertheless, SOLITUDE is such a miracle of imagination and writing (and structure too: the freewheeling complexity of structure, slightly reminiscent of CATCH-22, is a wonder to behold) that it's the sort of performance one automatically expects to be unrepeatable, and to be recognized as such, even by the performer.

This year the first new Marquez novel since AUTUMN OF THE PATRIARCH appeared -- CHRONICLE OF A DEATH FORETOLD. Marquez -- who has commented that if he wanted actually to have an effect on the Latin American world he should have been a terrorist, not a writer -- had originally vowed not to publish another novel while the Pinochet regime ruled Chile. The book (a novella really: it's only perhaps 35,000 words) has been greeted in translation with admiration and respect, but there's a serendipitous and interesting piece about it in the current BOOKS AND BOOKMEN which outlines a reception in Latin America which was really, as they say, something else.

Its first printing amounted to some 2½ million copies. 45 Boeing 727s were chartered by the publishers in Bogota (Marquez is Colombian, though Death Squad threats have forced him to move to Mexico) to distribute it. In Bogota

street sellers with copies of the book piled on barrows lined the main thoroughfares to meet the demand. This does not happen to your average John Fowles novel in London.

The story of CHRONICLE OF A DEATH FORETOLD is simply outlined. There is a wedding in a Colombian town. Then the husband discovers that his wife is not a virgin and returns her to her family. They discover from her the name of the man who defiled her. Her brothers vow to kill him. The next morning they do so. The story is pieced together years later by a friend of both victim and murderers. What is extraordinary is that virtually everybody in the town knows what is going to happen by the time the murder takes place, yet until the last minute nobody tries to warn the victim, and even when they do so the effect of the warning is to deliver him to his doom rather than divert him from it. Nobody — least of all the murderers — wants the killing to take place; yet for a whole complex of reasons nobody can or will stop it. The story unfolds like the script of a tragedy in which everybody knows their preordained role, which none can depart from. When the book appeared in Britain some reviewer commented that no more relevant book would be published concerning the Falklands dispute — which is the kind of crass, would-be too-clever-by-half remark which reviewers are prone to make. Yet there's a kernel of truth in it: the requirements of honour and machismo which carry the murderers fatalistically forward and hold others back from intervening do, if we take them as representative of the Latin American psyche, go some way towards explaining the events of this year in the South Atlantic.

The novel, like SOLITUDE, has a structure which digresses continually and apparently at random, only to reveal at the end a perfectly patterned whole, like an ice skater performing a series of seemingly random curves which suddenly cohere into a complex flower design. It isn't the best thing Marquez has done, but it's certainly further evidence of his talent.

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With the spectre of the D. West monstrosity looming in the distance I'm all too aware of the necessity to keep the rest of this fanzine comparatively short. Time, therefore, to cut the cackle and get on with another article, this time from that mainstay of odd-numbered TAPPENS, the man without any vestige of an anal obsession, Chris Evans. This time Chris gets right away from nasty topics like suppositories and farting.

#### DOG DAYS (or FANGS FOR THE MEMORY)

by Chris Evans

Right, I thought in a spare moment, I'll sit down and make a list of Ten Things The World Would Be Better Off Without. To make it interesting I'll exclude important stuff like war and V.D. and concentrate on the small, personal things that tend to get up my nose.

Top of the list had to be People Who Do Bad Imitations Of My Accent, since

these seem to be growing in number of late, like some kind of disease. Next: Poodles. Third: Alsations. Now wait a minute, that's two breeds of dog in the top three. I started thinking about what had prompted these choices, harkening back to the days when I worked as a rent collector for the local council in my home town. I never did get around to completing the list....

In general I have a pretty normal relationship with dogs. The generic term "dog" itself conjures up for me a picture of a medium-sized mongrel with a damp nose, bright eyes and a waggly-tail temperament. The trouble is that poodles and Alsations are opposite extremes of this stereotype. Poodles always look to me like a kind of ambulant synthetic rug. I used to have this revolting frizzy purple nylon carpet in my kitchen which I could never keep clean, and I'm sure that if I ever saw a purple poodle I'd have the irresistible urge to plaster it with Shake'n'Vac and run a Hoover over it. Alsations on the other hand are unquestionably a species of wolf with the good fortune to have a neat coat which fools people into thinking they're dogs. Americans actually call them German shepherd dogs in an obvious attempt to make them sound more friendly; but that adjective "German" is a dead giveaway since it clearly means "Nazi". I tend to find poodles a severe irritation rather than a threat, but Alsations frighten me. When I was a rent collector I got bitten in the bum by one.

That probably sounds like a cliché, as with the milkman who always gets laid by the voluptuous blonde in number 47, but it really happened. When I was a rentman I never got propositioned by any of the tenants, I was not feared and despised by them in general, and I never got mugged. But after several close encounters, the Alsatian in Griffiths Gardens finally got his fangs into one of my buttocks.

How did I come to be a rentman? Well, I'd recently finished a teacher training course in Swansea and having decided that I never wanted to set foot in a classroom again I had returned home to make time until I had my next Great Idea on the employment front. I spent three weeks mulling over what I could do, but having reluctantly decided that NASA was unlikely to enlist me in its Astronaut Training Programme (South Wales Branch) I realized that it was necessary to find temporary employment because my money had run out. When my friends heard that I'd started work as a rent collector they all told me that it was better than walking the streets.

The council in my home town employs four rent collectors who work four days a week on the housing estates which it owns (the fifth day is set aside for balancing the books). Each collector is given a specific district which he works for about three months, then everybody swaps around. A significant proportion of people on a given estate are old age pensioners living alone. Many of them may not get any visitors at all during the week apart from the rentman, whom they are therefore actually pleased to see. They tend to watch out for him and always have their rent books and money ready and sometimes a kettle keeping hot on the stove so that they can share a cup of tea with him. This is therapeutic not only for the pensioner but for the rentman too, making him feel that he's not just taking people's money but is in a small way performing a useful social service. It's the younger, better-off families who tend to be less diligent in paying their rent.

Contrary to popular belief, rent collectors are not (at least in my home town) empowered to force tenants to pay up; if arrears are mounting they may hint

and advise the tenant to pay them off, but their job is simply to collect the rent if the tenant wishes to pay it. Hardened debtors are left to the bailiff. People who don't want to pay in a given week usually arrange to be out when the rentman calls or simply don't answer the door. If caught napping they will seldom admit that they can't or don't wish to pay the rent this week but will come out with any old excuse. The best one I heard (from a veteran collector and probably apocryphal) concerned a man who claimed that the rent money was in a pair of trousers which had accidentally been put into a washing machine, and that he couldn't pay up because the notes hadn't dried out. I remember once going to a house whose door was opened by a young woman I'd never seen before. "Rent, please," I said brightly. "Not today, thanks," she said, as if I was selling something, then closed the door in my face.

One of the first things I learned after starting the job was to decode and adhere to the scribbled instructions in the rentman's book. Most of the houses were semi-detached, and it was normal practice to walk around to the back door where the kitchen was sited and where most tenants were likely to be found. But some houses had the letter "F" beside them in the rentman's book. This indicated that you should always knock on the front door. There could be a number of reasons for this, but it usually meant that the house had a slavering dog in the kitchen or back garden waiting to savage any unsuspecting stranger who came along. Such was the case with the house in Griffith Gardens.

It usually took me about a month to get used to a particular district, discovering walls or fences that could be hopped over or crawled through and gardens which provided useful short cuts to the next street. On a sunny day I quite enjoyed strolling from house to house, but there were a handful of houses which were never pleasant to enter. I remember two in particular which were so squalid that while inside them it was hard to believe that we were living in a 20th century welfare state. In one there seemed to be a film of grease over everything from the door handles to the money which was grudgingly handed over to me; a sweetish smell of stale urine and rancid fat hung in the air, and several small children would be wandering around in grubby skins and even grubbier vests. In another house the fetid heat of the room overwhelmed you as soon as you entered, and a cat was frequently found to be sitting on the table amid the wreckage of a meal. I always lit a cigarette before entering these two houses and let the smoke trickle up my nose, since this discomfort was preferable to their cloying reek. Leaving, you felt the fresh air on your face like a dash of cold water. I always felt that in neither case could age, infirmity or poverty be presented as an excuse for the squalor; but to this day I feel somewhat guilty about the revulsion I felt.

In general, though, the houses and the people were perfectly amenable. The rents themselves were pretty reasonable, graded to the household's income: seven years ago the maximum rent for a three-bedroomed house was £7. While most of the tenants invariably complained to the rentman about their leaky roofs or their rattling central heating, they were philosophical about the actual paying of the rent and at worst would simply see the rentman as a helpless tool of the damnable council. The people were okay; it was their pets, and in particular their dogs, that gave me trouble.

I must admit that most of the dogs presented only a mild nuisance factor, but sometimes even this could be hard to take. This was especially true on



Monday mornings, when I would be sweating alcohol and suffering hot and cold flushes from the lunatic drinking sessions I always got roped into on a Sunday night. I remember one house where an old couple lived. They were lovely people, but everything in their house seemed at least five hundred years old, not excluding their dog. He was a black spaniel, plump and somehow flattened looking, and he used to wheeze as he waddled slowly across the room towards me. He was utterly docile, but he had this unfortunate liking for sniffing my ankles. His sense of smell must have been failing him because he had to press his nose long and hard against whatever he was sniffing. I'd feel him poking around as I was trying to mark the rent card and then, dissatisfied with the aroma of my socks (and who wouldn't be), he'd stick his cold nose up my trouser leg and make direct contact with my skin. It was a very exotic form of torture.

In another street there was always a shaggy golden retriever running around like the doggy equivalent of the Mad March Hare. I never did discover who it belonged to, but it liked to make friendly charges at me, swooping around and around me like a mad Apache before finally leaping up on me at an angle perfectly calculated to bring its front paws down on my groin, with breathtaking results. After several painful encounters I managed to counteract this by developing a combination of a feint, a swivel and a kind of rapid arabesque, like Kevin Keegan and Rudolf Nureyev rolled into one.

A bigger menace was a large collie in one house which was never allowed out. This was unfortunate for the collie but even more unfortunate for me because whenever I entered the house the dog would be seized with the urge to fornicate with my leg. What made it worse was that the woman who owned the dog would simply stand there, smiling brightly as I scribbled hastily on her rent card, blissfully ignoring the fact that her pet was attempting to satisfy his lust all over my thigh.

My main enemy though (the Alsatian was a beast apart, too terrifying to be thought of as an opponent) was a white poodle in Gwent Way. Gwent Way was a favourite among the rentmen because it had a high proportion of pensioners and conscientious families who would always have their rent waiting on the kitchen table for you. This meant that you could get around the estate pretty quickly and take a three hour lunch. It was one of the newer estates, with well-kept gardens and very few of those ominous makeshift doorways to the back garden which are a sure sign that something nasty awaits you beyond it. This particular house had no such doorway; but it did have this white poodle.

The house was reached by descending a flight of about twenty concrete steps. As soon as I pushed open the front gate the poodle would come flashing out from the back of the house, going yip yip yip yip. It was a small dog, but it made up for that with its berserk energy and persistence. When it was within a few yards of me it would veer off into an arc, hoping to get behind me so that it could snap at my ankles, yip yip yipping all the while. I would descend the steps while rotating my body like a radar scanner so that I could keep it in front of me at all times. The dog would make occasional forays forward, the yips changing into something that vaguely resembled a real bark, before darting away again. If I thought nobody was looking I would favour it with a demonstration of how to kick an imaginary football to the Moon.

The poodle would follow me all the way down to the back door, which was always open, then gambol off down the back garden to sniff buttercups while I

went inside. The dog's mistress was another of those pleasant, friendly people who have no idea of how obnoxious their pets are to other people. As soon as I emerged from the house the poodle would come scurrying up the garden to renew its sorties on me and I'd rotate myself up the steps, swearing furiously at it under my breath. When I'd finally closed the gate behind me I'd have to lean against the wall for a few seconds, feeling slightly seasick, and I'd thank the stars that I didn't have to do Gwent Way on a Monday morning.

The truth is, though, that I used to get a masochistic relish out of my skirmishes with the poodle, and only in retrospect do I realize why. I've always disliked poodles for no particular reason apart from their appearance, but this specimen personified everything I thought was awful about them and finally justified my prejudice.

One day I arrived and braved the poodle's usual attentions, to find the back door was locked. I was consumed with a sinister delight and I immediately went into a crouch. "Right, you little turd," I said loudly, "this time I'm going to get you."

The poodle, sensing that something was amiss, began retreating as I advanced on it. I chased it up the steps, elaborating more loudly and with increasing venom what I was going to do with it, my language veering between the apoplectic and the obscene. I had the animal trapped in a corner of the front garden and was describing in enthusiastic detail how I was going to wrench its bobbly tail from its body and staple its jaws together when someone hailed me. It was the dog's mistress, calling from the bedroom window. Was everything all right? She'd been upstairs cleaning and had forgotten that the back door was locked. Could I come back and take the rent? Was there something wrong with the dog?

I could have given her a ten thousand word answer to this last question alone if I'd thought she might believe me. Instead I did a little jig and gave an imitation of a smile, as if to say that we had just been frolicking together on the front lawn. But she wasn't fooled: she'd obviously been watching the whole spectacle from her bedroom window, alerted by the poodle's distress calls. Had she also been able to hear me? Judging from her expression she hadn't missed a word. She was looking at me as if I'd just walked over her best carpet with a turd on my shoe.

Unlike Gwent Way, Griffiths Gardens was an old estate and had a high proportion of jerry-built doorways to the back gardens. In rentman's terms it was not quite as bad as Bevan and Laburnum Avenues, the real take-the-money-and-run areas; but it wasn't far behind. Whenever I entered the house with the Alsatian (via the front door, of course) the dog would start this terrifying woofing from beyond the kitchen door, and I knew it was an Alsatian weeks before I actually set eyes on it: no other dog barks in that "I'm gonna tear your throat out" way. The woman of the house always took great care to keep the kitchen door firmly shut. Far from reassuring me, this only made me more petrified as I anticipated the inevitable day when her security arrangements failed me and I was faced with the canine counterpart of the shark from JAWS.

Some weeks later I got my first sight of the dog through the living room window. It was out in the garden, its tail wagging merrily as it gnawed the life out of what was left of a deflated yellow plastic ball. As Alsations go, it was



only of average size, but when it caught sight of me it leapt at the window and began interspersing long passages of frenzied barking with snarls as it caught its breath. Worst of all was the scratching sound its claws made on the glass, as if it was trying to scrape its way through to me. The woman didn't even bat an eyelid.

A few weeks after that the woman appeared at the window as I approached the front door and indicated that I should go around the back. This was not an instruction I responded to with enthusiasm, but as I moved nervously past the window I saw that for once the dog was in the front room, sitting in the middle of a fluffy carpet being tugged and slapped at by a young child who must have been the woman's niece or granddaughter. The dog wasn't actually looking thrilled by this attention, but he seemed to be enduring it with no more than a glower of resentment. Yet I knew that if I so much as put a foot into the room he would be at my neck in an instant. That was one of those small moments when you realize that life is never going to make sense.

Perhaps it was that first invitation through the hitherto forbidden doorway that made me do it again, without thinking, a week or two later. Or maybe I'd had an especially drunken Sunday night and was in a particularly zomboid state when I reached the house on that fateful Monday morning. To be honest I don't remember what prompted me to trudge around to the back door after I'd got no reply at the front. I wasn't really conscious of what I was doing. The wooden gate to the back garden had one of those bar and drop-latch affairs which you push open from one side; the door then swings back and the latch drops over the bar so that you can't pull it open from the other side without lifting the latch. This requires two hands for fast, efficient opening, and I was carrying my trusty rent book in one.

As soon as the gate closed behind me the Alsatian materialized out of nowhere and came surging towards me, giving a short "woof" which seemed to combine surprise with delight. I did the only thing I could do: I panicked. Spinning around, I started fumbling with the latch. I even managed to get the gate half open before the dog bit me in the base of my right buttock. I half-fainted through the gateway, but happily the gate swung shut behind me, preventing pursuit. The dog leapt up at the gate, his paws dangling over the top, and went through his repertoire of feral noises while I stumbled down the pathway, my legs the consistency of blancmange.

As it turned out, the bite couldn't have been more minor: a slight grazing of the skin and no damage at all to the jeans I was wearing. But the people whose houses I visited immediately afterwards told me that I was looking a bit white and shaky. This was nothing compared to how I was feeling inside. Eventually I was persuaded to take an hour off work and visit the doctor for a tetanus injection. But no one seemed to feel that the dog was to blame. It was my fault for going around the back; I should have known better than that.

The following week the woman in the house didn't even mention the incident and I, to my shame, said nothing either. I just wanted to get out of there as quickly as possible. Shortly after that I was transferred to another district and I never saw the beast again. But he's probably still there to this day, having eaten a few paperboys and mutilated a postman or two. I just hope that the woman has several grandchildren young enough to make his life a misery.

There's always a good deal of wordage expended in fanzines — mostly superfluously — on the subject of What Fanzines Should Be About. Some people can never, for instance, accustom themselves to the idea that a fanzine like this one has very little direct connection with sf (though I did include Peter Nicholls's piece on Phil Dick last issue to keep such persons on their toes). My position is that this fanzine is a leisure activity — though when I'm actually typing it and running it off it doesn't always seem that way — which I do purely because I enjoy it (which enjoyment takes many forms and aspects), and since I spend most of my working time on science fiction in some shape or form I tend not to import it into these pages all that much. All science fiction and nothing but science fiction makes Malcolm a dull boy.

So I don't go on much about writing projects, triffic though they allare; I don't harangue you all into subscribing to INTERZONE (though if you haven't why not? — rush me your £5 or \$10 today, our need being greater than yours); I don't say much about the fact that I spend half my week working for Gollancz as Associate SF Editor.

The latter is particularly difficult because Professional Ethics start to get potentially awkward. It's okay for those of you who are social workers or rent collectors or civil servants to purvey jolly gossip about your work in the pages of a fanzine, because the chance of one of your clients or bosses seeing a copy (or the chance of anyone else who knows them seeing a copy) is negligible. Not so if you work in publishing. There are at least three Gollancz authors on my mailing list, for instance, and their trust in their publishers would quite properly be eroded if I started telling you odd stories about Author X or Y. Some day years from now, when I'm rich and retired, perhaps.

The responsibility gets heavier as from 1st April next year, because John Bush is stepping down as Chairman and SF Editor at Gollancz, and I'm taking over the latter post, though not unfortunately the former. I'm not sure as yet how close to a full-time job this is going to be, but it will certainly be the nearest I've approached to one since I left Gollancz last time in the direction of the SF Foundation in early 1978 (the latter was nominally full-time, of course — but any job which only requires 38 weeks' attendance a year doesn't seem that way). It's all very gratifying, of course: frustrated by ineptitude in my ambition of becoming a writer I've always wanted to be an editor instead, and Gollancz has, it's fair to say, the oldest established and most respected sf list in Britain (also virtually the only hardcover sf list still going in these dark times). Nor are my responsibilities solely limited to sf: the first two books I bought for the firm, in fact, were a novel and a collection by M. John Harrison, neither of them to be published as sf. (The novel, IN VIRICONIUM, is just published. Only £6.95. Buy it.)

But if I'm spending more time in the ultra-modern air-conditioned Gollancz offices, and if I'm newly a Daddy, and if I'm still helping with INTERZONE, and if we win our wonderful 1984 Eastercon bid (vote Blackpool in '84ooften!) and if I'm still trying to do some writing, with Holdstock and maybe even solo ... well, I can see this may prove hard to sustain. But I shall try. It doesn't make it easier, of course, if you get sent articles as monumental as what you are about to read. Not content with taking over this fanzine like some grotesque fannish cuckoo, West even insists I show proper respect by starting his article at the top of a new page. Well, I'm not changing my methods just for him, so he can take his chances like the rest.

## PERFORMANCE

by D. West

You want the truth, the whole truth, and a few lies to make it more interesting? You want -- in Rich Coad's fine phrase -- the usual mixture of pulpit preaching and gutter anecdotalism? Read on. Perhaps the connections are not as direct as you might like, but if you look carefully you should pick up the thread that will lead you through the maze. So follow this....

Silicon, August 1981: I am sitting there, peaceably enough, practising focusing my eyeballs (since you never know when a trick like that might come in useful) when Greg Pickersgill comes lurching over.

"You are totally irresponsible, West!" he screams. "Totally fucking irresponsible. Just look at you! A great long streak of total fucking irresponsibility!"

I nod my head. He stands glaring and swaying until he gets his line-of-stagger more or less straightened out and can fall forward in the general direction of the bar. I squint after him, feeling vaguely aggrieved. (Maybe the lemon peel in his next triple vodka and tonic will choke the bastard. Maybe an ice cube will jump up his nose.) What he says is doubtless all very true, but it seems rather tactless to remind everyone so publicly. After all, have I not just lost about twenty quid at cutting the cards, most of it to Pickersgill himself? A payoff like that surely entitles one to a little respect and consideration. (But perhaps he's still feeling the dent in his brow, put there when I hurled the pack at his head. The kid is obviously a poor loser.)

Channelcon, April 1982: I am sitting there, peaceably enough (having given up even thinking about focusing my eyeballs) when I notice that Greg Pickersgill -- for once again it is he -- is not wearing his convention badge. He never does. I am not wearing my convention badge. I never do. I make some remark on this amazing coincidence. (We are once more on friendly terms -- despite the way he belted me on the jaw a couple of times at the last Novacon -- since we have just shared the spoils of a lucrative gambling encounter with John Jarrold. Possibly Jarrold is a very good loser, or perhaps his lack of natural reaction is attributable to the intervention of a minor stroke.)

Pickersgill grunts that either people know who he is without any fucking badge or, if they don't, he probably doesn't want to meet the little turds anyhow.

"You are totally arrogant, Pickersgill!" I scream. "Totally fucking arrogant! Just look at you! A great hairy streak of total fucking arrogance!"

"Fuck you," he says. "You're just the same."

I nod my head. He nods his head. We sit there nodding our heads -- this being the only exercise we can safely take without risk of falling out of our chairs -- in mutual peace, harmony, and total arrogance.

Bingley, May 1982: I am sitting there, peaceably enough (and with the eyeballs

all straightened out, even, since this is not some kind of damn convention) when I open up a letter from Chris Priest. With a this-hurts-me-more-than-it-will-hurt-you holy gloom spread over its typeface, the missive austerey reproves me for failing to take my own stupendous talents as a critic seriously. Apparently I have blown the whole deal with my postscript to the Jacqueline Lichtenberg article (as printed in BLACK HOLE), said PS naughtily advising all devotees of Jackie to join the Appreciation Society run by her biggest fan, one Chris Priest.

Very stale joke, says CP — his sniff distinctly audible two hundred miles away — and furthermore do I not realize that such silly fannish frivolity gravely weakens the seriousness of my otherwise Valuable and Important article?

Well, goshwow Chris — I mumble to myself — you say the sweetest things, but ... and I commence nodding my head up, down, sideways, and in circles. Always figured CP was a little on the sober side — which you have to make allowances for, him being a Real Writer and all — but this particular outburst seems to suggest a really bad attack of Moral Meaningfulness in the Higher Criticism zone. (did his parents ever threaten that a Leavis would get him if he didn't critic good? This would explain a lot.)

On the other hand ... I have been known, myself, to suggest (once in a while) that fan writers should (perhaps) make a little (occasional) effort to (maybe) get past the first dumb joke that springs to mind and give their subject matter some er well coff coff serious attention ... So it looks like I'm slightly in the shit here, consistency-wise. But with one bound—

With one bound I fall flat on my face and start sinking.

It is the summer of 1982, and for one reason and another everything seems to be fairly comprehensively fucked-up. My personal life has reached one of those low points of undramatic depression from which not even the prospect of some liberating cataclysm is visible. I have driven myself even deeper into the mire by writing five or six drafts of a thoroughly tedious and interminable article purporting to explain the Meaning Of It All. Trouble is: my argument looks perfectly logical, but the implication of the logic is that I should just shut up and never say a word about anything ever again.

(In the beginning this was supposed to be a Silicon (1981) report for TAPPEN — the usual blend of angst, scurrility and Cosmic Truth. I was going to call it "Apocalypse Now and Then" and say oh-so-many extremely profound things about how the self-inflicted wounds of con-going served a valuable catalytic function in facilitating the recognition and assimilation of previously unadmitted cognitive dissonances and all six-syllable stuff like that. Then I got into this heavy routine with the Art and the Meaning. Fuck. Fuck fuck fuck.)

Anyway, here I am at this party at Graham and Linda James's house (in honour of Leeds locals Mike Dickinson and Jackie Gresham, who are on the verge of fleeing to the purer climes of Italy) and I am feeling really terrible. Even worse, I am telling people about it.

"What is the use of all this crap," I mutter dejectedly, feebly flapping the seventh unfinished rewrite of my shockamola magnum opus, "if you can't get to screw the people you like anyhow? I mean, who gives a shit about Art? I only do it to impress the people I want to get off with. It's all down to personal relationships in the end."



And I give a particularly dismal groan, indicating my preoccupation with one specific personal relationship which is definitely not paying more than two cents to the dollar. This is no damn fun, and no damn fake either. I feel like I would do just about anything at all to get what I want — and the knowledge that this readiness to go completely bananas is unlikely to make the slightest difference is literally giving me a pain. (In fact, I am evidently more than a little loose at the hinges, since in the normal way I am not at all prone to unleashing such miseries on the general public.)

Still, I don't throw too much of a blight on the festive occasion. My audience of Alan Dorey and Simon Ounsley merely twitches and sways sympathetically, well-insulated by alcohol against this excessive and unbecoming candour. We are jammed in a corner of the kitchen, surrounded by people who are talking, laughing, eating and drinking — all with the maximum of noise and enjoyment. In fact, everybody is having fun, with the possible exception of Graham James, who looks rather like he would prefer to usher out his guests with a pitchfork. (Maybe the drugs got tired of nonstop abuse and came back with a few snappy lines of their own.) I wonder whether to offer my assistance, but decide the effort would be too much. As it is, I have to stop talking every few minutes because my face aches so much from the strain of not bursting into tears.

"What's the use," I whimper, "when I know there's no reason why anybody should be interested in reading the sort of thing I want to write, and I know I don't want to write the sort of thing anybody would want to read?"

This certainly sounds like a tough situation, and Ounsley contrives a special compound-meaning headjerk conveying cautious overwhelming support (with reservations) for whatever it is I think I'm talking about. (After all, he's still waiting for me to write this article for his fanzine — the TAPPEN deadline being long gone — and while he obviously has to keep me sweet, he doesn't want to encourage any daft notions that might mean it never gets written at all.) The more volatile Dorey is so overcome by emotion that he offers me a crisp. I moan refusal and stagger away to take a piss.

Unfortunately, it seems that my brain is behaving like some literal-minded civil servant and has translated the ban on weepiness into a general veto on parting with any liquid whatsoever. I am still having trouble getting started when I am disturbed by much banging and thumping on the door, and demands that I make a personal appearance to prove I am still alive. Apparently a notion has taken hold among those below that I have retired from the public gaze for the sole purpose of stringing myself up with the toilet roll. This is not so, but the interruption so unsettles my already-enfeebled powers that I am stuck with an overloaded bladder for the rest of the evening.

Bloody hell, this isn't fair. If I'm going to suffer, you'd think there could at least be something romantic about it....

Silicon, August 1982: I am sitting there, peaceably enough, wondering how the fuck it happens that I'm starting to enjoy myself. What the hell, my affairs are in just as much of a mess as ever, my prospects are no better, and plainly I don't have any right at all to be feeling good, but it seems I just can't escape a sort of brutal cheerfulness.

Is this masochism? Am I getting some kind of awful taste for this low-level-

diaster lifestyle of mine? ("Damn it," I mumble to myself, "us artists are supposed to be sensitive -- get your act straightened out, can't you?") Or is it just that good old irresponsibility come thundering to the rescue?

Who cares? The reason I get cured is that when casting a lacklustre eye over my detestable manuscript I suddenly wake up to the fact that the scrawls on the back are actually records of the vast sums of money owed to me by BLACK HOLE editor Simon Polley. And my oh my -- who else has ever lost so much money to me at dominoes? Well, who else has lost so much money to me at dominoes so recently and conveniently? Because money may not be everything, but it sure as hell gets you to conventions.

In a flash I look upon Simon Polley with the fond eye of pure friendship -- particularly after he leaps to stardom in the new role of financial Get Well Man and writes me a cheque. In the generosity of my feelings I invite him to come along to the con himself, and also offer much good advice on giving up gambling while he is still (comparatively speaking) in front. (Well, I wouldn't want him to lose all his money to the wrong people. I figure I have a responsibility to keep him where I can see him.)

So here I am, having fun and even managing to behave myself at the same time. Arnold Akien has not succeeded in photographing me in positions of an indelicate or indecorous nature, and it was hardly my fault that the Manager's favourite picture happened to fling itself down the stairs just as I was passing. I haven't done anything more improper than offer Steve Lawson 50p (a not unreasonable sum) for the use of his fair white body. (He refuses, so I rather spitefully take approximately ten times the assessed value of his scabby hide out of him at dominoes. Next time, kid, get smart.) I am at peace with the universe, and the only mild source of discontent is John Jarrold, who keeps yelling "Badges? We ain't got no badges! We don't need no steenking badges!" and laughing uncontrollably.

Enthusiasts of the right sort of films (i.e. the ones I like myself) will recognize this as coming from THE TREASURE OF THE SIERRA MADRE. I am annoyed because I had planned to place this quotation at the head of my article -- had indeed already done so in various drafts -- but must now abandon it, since too many people would associate the line with Jarrold and the latest in-joke, which is Mexican Fandom.

In the best tradition of sexist racist British humour, the basic principles behind Mexican Fandom -- in honour of which Silicon has become Mexican -- ordain a regimen of lying around soaking up the booze until the worst heat of the day is past, then rolling over under your sombrero and fucking a wet tortilla.

"It's all about wearing black trousers with bits of silver down the sides," Greg Pickersgill explains helpfully. I raise my eyebrows. This is a novel variation on the usual Pickersgill fantasy, which involves wearing white trousers, being Number One Pimp in South Ealing, and riding around all day in a gold-plated Cadillac looking really cool. Still, at least it's an improvement on last year's career ambition of becoming a Menstrual Hydraulic Engineer. ("I go around offering to clean them out ... It's all sort of stringy, like squashed red spiders....") The only merit in that was its suggestion of a sub-title for my aborted "Apocalypse Now and Then" article: "The Crotch Vampire Strikes Back".

Anyway, as my contribution to the Hispanic famnish renaissance I offer the

only two words — "hombre" and "arriba" — which spring readily to mind, and these are added to the half-dozen or so which are screamed by the Mex faction in quizzes and competitions whenever one of the hombres looks like he might do something remotely useful.

It was a stupid article anyway. Jarrold can keep his rotten quotation. More to the point is the question of how and why I continue to have fun, despite the various considerations which would surely drive any rational individual into a state of (at least) crying in his beer....

Maybe I'm not so rational as I've always thought ... But surely that would imply that I was even more emotional ... and in that case ... It occurs to me that fundamentally I must be a really awful person, because apparently I'm so damned callous I don't feel sorry for myself, even. Not much sense, and not much sensibility....

Time passes. Whether it passes forwards or backwards is hard to tell. I am in that familiar convention condition of chronological confusion, prone to surface from moments of fugue uncertain whether my last mental picture was a memory of yesterday or an anticipation of tomorrow. Indeed, I have a strong general impression that I am living in reverse, and that it is only my future I am remembering. Perhaps it is this shaky relationship with time — which extends all the way into the rest of my life — which has prevented the move through the decades from ever rendering me properly staid, sober, and generally seized-up at all the joints of brain and body. I am now thirty-seven years old, but for some reason this seems like less than thirty-six, and less still than thirty-five ... Is it arrested development, late development, or just simple brain-rot? I keep wondering whether I ought to make more effort to disapprove of myself — stop being so fucking detached — try harder to embrace the appropriate senile respectability ... After all — behaving like that at your age....

I emerge from the fog of introspection to find that the curry-eating majority has gone out for a meal and I am sitting with Alan and Rochelle and Baby Whatsit. (Listen, I have trouble enough remembering the names of people, never mind their protoplasmic offspring.) We exchange desultory remarks. Baby Whatsit, as is the habit of babies, divides the time between yelling, feeding, sleeping, and staring beadily around with an expression of baffled rage. She has a way of flexing her small blobby nose which suggests she can hardly wait to grow up enough to be able to denounce us all to the Authorities for exposing an innocent child to these scenes of vice, degradation and horror. Being well accustomed to infant egotism I am not intimidated, but merely return her glare with equal venom until she dives angrily back into Rochelle's bosom. (Hah! Got your number all right, baldilocks!)

Domesticity has rather slowed down the Dorey dynamism. Things were livelier last year, when Rochelle gave an impressive display of Seated Tap Dancing with Vocal Accompaniment. Thus:

HUP two three four

(tappity tap)

WAY!

(tappity tap; rocks chair; beats out extra rhythm section on knees)

DOWN!

(tappity tappity STOMP)

UPON THE!

(Tappity tap; crashes chair backwards and forwards;  
pumps elbows; rolls eyeballs)

SWAN!

(tappity tap)

NEE RIVER!

(soft shoe shuffle; trucks chair sideways)

FAR!

(tappity tap)

FAR!

(tappity tap)

RAWAY!

(spins chair on one leg; kicks husband on shin)

SORRY!

(tappity tap)

THAT'S WHERE MY MUMMUM!

(CRASH CRASH CRASH; forgets words entirely; hurls chair  
around with particular vigour to cover

EVER!

(tappity STOMP; crosses legs; crosses eyes; raises hands to  
Heaven; Oh Lordy, dis am truly wonderful)

—But at this point we are interrupted by requests to Shut the fuck up, cantcha from the other part of the room, where the sterner element is attempting to conduct some sort of serious scientifictional quiz. Rochelle falls back exhausted, and I move to the bar (which fortunately is only a few feet away) to procure the necessary refreshment. The barmaid is looking rather pale, so I offer her a drink as well. "No no," she stammers, shrinking back against the wall, "I couldn't possibly, I couldn't possibly." It is evident that she has been given an awful warning of exactly what it is that alcohol can do to a person. (Later, she is to be traumatized still further by the spectacle of an amorous Chris Atkinson beguilingly thrusting a daffodil stem up David Pringle's nose. Have these people lost all sense of human decency?)

Meanwhile, back at Silicon 1982, not a lot is happening, except that Boss Bob Shaw has put in an appearance. Boss Bob Shaw is the machine con politician from Glasgow — not the well-known writer and fan — and he is chiefly famous for being an incompetent megalomaniac (not generally incompetent, you understand, just incompetent at being a megalomaniac). Having more ego than erudition he has never quite grasped the fact that in fandom the successful manipulation of other people depends on the manipulator being either charming or devious. Considering that he has never shown much sign of being either he has lasted a remarkably long time, but now the Scottish fans have finally rebelled against his autocratic rule and cast him forth from the Glasgow Eastercon committee. This is obviously a terrible shock, since for the last two or three years the impression (assiduously promoted by BBS himself) has been that Boss Bob is the Number One Fan in Scotland, and that all Scottish conventions are more or less his personal property.

But these are stern and savage times and — like many a good paranoid sf hero before him — poor old Bob has been driven into exile by the mindless malevolence of hysterical hordes manipulated by the conspiratorial cabal of a few evil so-called Secret Masters. (Or something like that. See the works of A.E.



Van Vogt for further details.) Unable to reconcile himself to his natural role of deposed caudillo collecting cobwebs while Waiting For The Call, he is still attempting to rally support for a counter-coup, but the prognosis is not good. For want of more solid backers he is forced to pick up support from among the ranks of innocent little Trekkies -- and, indeed, has probably come straight round from the Trek con which is being held elsewhere in town. A word processor is rumoured to be responsible for the innumerable letters which seek to prove to a sceptical world (by esoteric calculations involving taking away the number you first thought of) that the apparent numerical superiority of the anti-Shaw faction is a mere mathematical mirage. Yes, he has the technology -- but can he make it work?

Perhaps he is finally running out of people who will stand still for the we-wuz-robbed routine, for he now oozes into a nearby seat and commences giving the Doreys and myself the benefit of his low, sincere, statesmanlike tones. This is rather like being on the receiving end of a soft-sell promotion for an enema machine, and a couple of lines from William Burroughs float to the surface of my mind: "You think I am innarested in hearing about your horrible old condition? Leave me tell you, I am not innarested." Is Boss Bob not aware that this same Alan Dorey is the very "Paul Randall" who devoted so many unflattering phrases to his person in the BLACK HOLE gossip column? Either this is typical Shavian insensitivity, or the man is feeling desperate indeed.

Well, the plight of the failed fan politician is indeed pitiable, but I am not feeling desperate (and not at all innarested) so I decide to leave them both to their horrible old condition and go talk to Simon Bostock. This will qualify as my Good Deed for 1982.

The fifteen-year-old Simon Bostock is a New Fan. Not more than fifty or sixty people attend Silicon, but the event is exclusive only in the sense of being given minimal publicity, thus limiting access to those who are already reasonably well integrated into the fannish scene. The object is not particularly to restrict attendance to an elite -- though that is the effect -- but to make sure that those who do come don't arrive with expectations (of pro Gohs, serious sf speeches etc) which will not be fulfilled. Thus it is that new people are quite likely to be given more attention than they would receive at more open events, the vague feeling being that they're probably okay if they've made it this far.

However, all approaches have failed to pierce Simon Bostock's reserve. Every well-meant effort to engage him in conversation has withered and died in the face of a frozen silence. Bespectacled, long-haired, and clad in black, he rather resembles a mole in a Beatie wig, peering out from under his fringe with myopic suspicion. As I tentatively crash into a seat opposite I half expect to see him begin rapidly retreating into the bowels of the earth with a frantic scraping and twitching of little velvet paws.

No -- he just stares at me. I plunge into talk. The result is more of a monologue than a conversation, and I am soon reduced to haranguing him on the necessity of making a little effort if he wants to get anything at all out of conventions (or indeed fandom in general).

"Listen kid," I tell him. "They talk a lot of crap about fandom being elitist and exclusive and a closed circle and all the rest of it. Well, yes, it is

elitist and exclusive and a bit of a closed circle, but unless you're a complete fucking moron (or totally paranoid) it's not all that difficult to get in."

He stares at me rather as if he's wondering not how to get in, but how to get out.

"All you got to do," I say, gesturing oratorically, "is sort of hang around, take a few drinks----" (demonstration; this is making me hoarse) "fall over----" (demonstration; I seem to have had a few already) "make a fool of yourself----" (demonstration, passim) "and just generally show willing, and people will accept you in no time at all. I mean, look at some of the fucking idiots who made it already, right? But if you come on all hysterical and persecuted, and crouch under the table yelling 'Nobody loves me! It's all a fucking conspiracy!' and so on and so forth, all you're going to get is the old raised eyebrow and curled lip routine. You got to remember: we were here first. So if you want in on the scene you have to make a little effort on the local customs. If you don't like it -- go start your own bunch of elitist wankers. Just bear in mind -- nobody owes you anything, and they don't really give a shit whether you approve of them or not. It's all down to you -- join up and have fun our way, or fuck off someplace else and do it your way."

Pause, as I sag with exhaustion. This is all good sound stuff, though perhaps expressed without great finesse. After five or six drinks a certain crudity of thought and language does tend to assert itself, and after ten or twelve -- the present level -- it's rather marvellous that I can speak at all. It's sad that I can't hit him with the really clever bits, like my cunning formulations of the Sour Grapes Syllogism and the Loser's Revenge....

The things that I want are desirable;  
If I want a thing I get it;  
Therefore if I get something it is desirable;  
(Therefore if I don't get something it is not desirable).

That's the Sour Grapes Syllogism. The Loser's Revenge -- which is often run in tandem with the SGS -- has a different emphasis, and is more readily expressed less formally.

Imagine two men, A and B, who play golf together. As with the majority of games, the rules of golf are framed in such a way that the scoring provides a clear and unambiguous result. Player A has a better score than Player B, and so A is the winner and B is the loser. Since this happens every time the two meet, one might reasonably say that A is a better player than B. However, when it comes to life off the golf course positions are reversed: B is more successful than A socially, financially, and in every other way. Therefore -- B reasons to himself -- B is a better man than A. By definition, the better man cannot be a loser. Therefore B cannot really have lost to A ... and being not really a loser must be a winner ... This proves it.

A little reflection should indicate that these are not new ideas. They are in fact very old buddies indeed, and it is probable that most fans have at some time or another consoled themselves with one or other of these fractures rationalizations. In practice, the general muddiness of thought involved often makes it difficult to identify the SGS and LR as separate entities, but the usual fannish version goes something like this: My fanzine has been criticized as being

a bad fanzine -- but it's not really a fanzine at all (or it's a new sort of fanzine) -- therefore my fanzine can't be criticized by the standards of (old) fanzines -- and if it can't be criticized it's beyond criticism -- and if it's beyond criticism it must be good -- therefore my fanzine is a good fanzine. In other words: my game is not the same as your game, so you can't say that I play your game badly, therefore I play my game well, and therefore I play your game well. (My X is not an A but a B; therefore it cannot be a bad A; therefore it must be a good B; therefore it is a good A.)

Trying to unravel tangles of false logic like this is apt to do your brain an injury very quickly indeed, so perhaps it's enough to point out that the basic fallacy at work here (apart from the sliding definitions of terms) is the mistaken assumption (or dishonest claim) that there is an exact and perfect correlation between success in one area and success in every other area. (Anyone who sincerely believes this to be true is employing magical thinking: the microcosm mirroring the macrocosm, the wax doll sympathetically linked to the person.) This error is compounded when "success" is also defined in terms of the circular reasoning contained in the Sour Grapes Syllogism, since the proponent of the argument (i.e. the aggrieved party who has not received the love, admiration and respect he feels he deserves) can always retreat to a freash position every time some nasty person blows down his first flimsy structure of self-justification. (Pushed far enough this reaches levels of lunatic absurdity, as in the case of the now-departed fan who was driven to respond to certain criticisms with the devastating rejoinder that anyhow, he earned a lot more money than his tormentor.)

One possible objection here is that the "rules" of fandom and fanzines are hardly as fixed, explicit, and unambiguous as the formal rules of most games and sports. This is certainly true in the sense that fannish "rules" are neither permanent nor very well defined, but nonetheless it is the case that at any one time there will be a fairly clear consensus on what fandom is (basically) all about. This consensus may be shifted or modified by conscious or unconscious group or individual behaviour, but in any critical approach its existence always has to be recognized as a starting point. People may not agree -- and may wish to argue -- on what fandom ought to be, but all arguments will be meaningless unless they are based on a mutual recognition of what fandom actually is in terms of current practices. It is entirely futile to attempt to discuss any subject at all when the concepts involved are defined only according to individual caprice and convenience. (This, by the way, is my refutation of those who assert that because fanzine critics -- such as myself and Joseph Nicholas -- occasionally agree with each other, we are all in plot to enforce some fiendish "orthodoxy". One might as well accuse mathematicians of being in a conspiracy against freedom of thought because they agree on the proposition that two and two make four. Without accepting certain statements as axiomatic it is not possible to reason at all.)

Those of you who are still paying attention (I snarl from my pulpit -- the preaching is not all done yet) will have noticed that I do not deny that fandom is an elite. This is a question that many people (including myself) have strenuously disputed in the past, but more recently I have come to the conclusion that the denial of fannish elitism is itself the result of faulty reasoning.

The only valid objection to the existence of an elite is that the members



of such a group are using their position unfairly to secure advantages which would (and should) otherwise be more equitably distributed. This is indeed often the case when social background, race, education, or sex are used as criteria for determining how life's prizes are handed out. However, the only prizes in fandom are prestige, fame and status. Fannish success confers no material advantages, and not even any power -- except the self-reinforcing power of influencing the recognition of fame, prestige and status. The wonderful thing about fandom is that it is the Platonic Ideal Form of a system of pure snobbery: a hierarchical social structure which maintains its rank-order without any material sanctions whatsoever. There's no arguing with the real forces of financial, political and physical ascendancy, but the ascendancy of fannish fame is no more than an agreed fiction depending on voluntary submission. If some people choose to disregard the fannish elite, the most they have to lose is that elite's approval. They won't be deprived of their job, their house, or their liberty, and they won't be prevented from meeting, talking, writing or publishing exactly as they please. Thus it is plain that those who complain of fannish elitism are upset not so much by the existence of an elite as by the fact that they themselves are not members of it. No one is compelled to play, and no one loses anything by not playing -- except a chance to join that elite to which they object so very strongly....

However, the fact that objections to fannish elitism are invariably muddled and self-contradictory does not imply -- as tends to be assumed -- that the existence of a fannish elite is thereby disproved. That the grounds for objection are non-existent does not prove that the thing being objected to is also non-existent.

There is a fannish elite. I like it fine. So does anyone else who is a part of it. Everybody in fandom plays the ratings game. Fans compete, and the result of competition is inequality, since some fans do better than others. Quite naturally, the top-rankers are not at all displeased with their position. It would be a gross over-simplification to assert that vying for BNF-dom is all that fandom is about -- or to deny that there is also a fair amount of co-operative and/or altruistic behaviour -- but it would be blind or dishonest to ignore the fact that a great deal of fannish activity is directed towards gaining precisely this sort of ascendancy. (The sporting metaphor requires an extension here, since individual games have definite conclusions, whereas fannish contests are always part of something larger. Perhaps one could say that the fannish ambition is to reach and maintain a high position in the league tables. Or the League tables.)

Still, even if all the above is accepted, this does not altogether dispose of the question of how the elite acquires and maintains its status. The conventional (or Ancient) wisdom, as expressed by Ted White in his WARHOON 29 article "The Politics of Fandom" (and at large elsewhere) is that fandom is a "meritocracy" and the merit being assessed is primarily the degree of skill shown in writing, editing, or drawing for fanzines in accordance with tradition practice. The trouble with this notion is that even in his own article White displays a certain defensive awareness that this represents what ought to be the case (from his won point of view) rather than what is the case. Like, there's all these shameless characters who are good at socializing, and who somehow bypassed the obligatory developmental period of being shy, introverted, spotty teenagers reading nothing but sci-fi and fanzines and writing six locs a day while hiding

from er well girls in the attic....

Fannish stereotypes die hard. Twenty years ago -- perhaps even as late as 1965 or 1970 -- it probably was true that the high scores were awarded to those who could project the most effective fanzine image. Most fans were geographically isolated, and with only one convention a year social contact on any large scale was very limited. It hardly mattered if you were a one-legged midget with leprosy and a cleft palate so long as you could fake a lively paper personality, and perhaps for this very reason many fans do seem to have been drawn from the ranks of the socially unsuccessful. In the last ten or twelve years, however, the social element has played an increasingly large part in the fannish scene -- to such an extent, in fact, that one could now say that the social image is just as important as the fanzine image.

Quite apart from other differences, British fandom is unlike American in that it consists of a fairly cohesive body of people who mostly know each other quite well and meet quite frequently. The interesting point is that there are few British fanzine fans -- and none at all of any note -- who are only self-projected paper personalities. In terms of internal ranking (i.e. excluding US opinion) the British BNFs of the last decade are all people who have become well-known not only by virtue of their fanzine work but also by virtue of their personal social appearances and activities. The BNF persona developed from this new combination of exposures may well be just a more complex version of the old-style mythologizing fanzine hype, but the conclusion must certainly be that the "merit" in meritocracy refers to something much wider-ranging than a good prose style or an aptitude for bad puns.

What counts -- what has always counted to some extent -- in fandom is not just what an individual contributes to the pages of a fanzine directly but what his (or her) friends -- and even his enemies -- also say about him. When fans actually meet each other fan writing enters a new dimension. Inevitably, a good deal of the comment and cross-reference comes to be concerned with deeds as much as words, with physical as much as literary appearances. The paper personality complements the personality in the flesh (rather than substituting for it) and fans become -- in the eyes of others -- composites of both the unreal word and the real behaviour.

One of the reasons for the split between British and American fandoms is that the two do not meet socially. This seems ridiculously obvious, but it is probably not realized how much the social separation is reflected in the fanzines. Whether or not one recognizes the existence of anything particularly good on the US scene it is probably true that many US fanzines are no worse than many British ones. However, a US fanzine would need to be very good (or to have a strong British content or reference) before it made much of an impact here, simply because it would lack the background support of the whole web of personal allusion and knowledge on which British fannish fanzines are founded. American fandom is a fandom of strangers dealing in unreal paper mythologies -- and it's hard for British fans to see any reason why they should believe or be interested in it. The whole business is probably just a rather dull hoax by Keith Walker.... The Americans, on the other hand, seem to find it much easier to accept British fanzines, probably because they are much more used to the idea of fannish relationships which exist almost entirely on paper. This is probably also the reason why

they are so much more interested in past British fandom than the British themselves. From the British point of view what anybody did in the past is of little consequence if they're not still active (socially or in fanzines) or if they are not remembered by more than one or two of those who are still active.

British fandom is very definitely elitist (or snobbish) on this point: who you know and who knows you are important factors in determining your status. (Get the West Seal of Approval NOW!) To disapprove of this is to miss the point that fannish reputations are made and sustained only on a personal contact basis. I might be impressed by somebody as a writer, but I'm not going to be impressed by them as a fan if there is virtually no connection, direct or indirect, between their fannish world and my own. The big fish in other small ponds -- and the big fish of the Olden Days -- are of no consequence at all to the inhabitants of the particular small pond which exists now.

Fandom isn't static, and fan writing is far from eternal. Considered as fan writing the contents of fanzines live only as long as the original readers continue to be fans. After that -- when no one knows or remembers the context -- the work must be judged by other criteria. The process is gradual rather than instant, but a time does come when one can say that for today's fandom yesterday's History has become irrelevant. Continuity between one era of fandom and another consists solely of people. The elite is the elite because it exists in the present and in the flesh -- not in the past and on paper. The "traditions" of fandom are not traditions but sentimental fakes if they need to be exhumed, revived and promoted like the meretricious hokum of some Tourist Board. If traditions are useful they will need no special support -- and if they cease to be useful then they are already dead.

Fannish Social Darwinism Rules OK....

---But maybe Simon Bostock is going to prove me wrong, and demonstrate that devolution to the Olden Days really is a viable proposition. He's certainly maintaining a stout resistance to this pernicious innovation of social contact ... Apart from an occasional variation in blink-rate his response is not what you could call animated. I do manage to learn that he possesses only nine toes -- the other having fallen victim to a rather casual operation for ingrowing toenail -- but even this meagre quantum of information has to be dragged out of him by close and subtle questioning. ("Hey kid, I hear you're some kind of fucking paraplegic -- what happened, the syphilis rot your leg off?")

I stare at him in despair. New fans, indeed. What does one do with them? I've talked to him -- I've even bought him a drink. Bearing in mind that in my own case attending a convention at the age of fifteen would have brought about double incontinence -- never mind a certain shyness -- I am not entirely unsympathetic, but I figure this is one ailment the patient has to cure himself.

Maybe I'm just the wrong person for this Official Greeter routine. Or maybe I should forget the conscientious bit and just try propositioning him instead? (Well, what does one do with them?) But it's really rather difficult to seduce somebody who appears to be in an advanced state of rigid catatonia....

Nah, he's too young. And life is complicated enough already. (Afterwards I feel very moral about my self-restraint -- at least I am developing a protective veneer of common sense. Later still, I wonder if I am losing my marbles entirely.



This qualifies as common sense?) But why do these young punks have to run to such extremes. Here's Bostock, who won't say a bloody word, and last year we had Paul Turner, who never shut up at all until people threatened to hit him. Surely, with all this science lying around the place, some sort of compromise arrangement could be worked out....

SCENE: A dank, inhospitable underground chamber, very reminiscent of the Skycon Fan Room. Enter the Evil Transylvanian Mad Scientist, Herr Doktor Eva D. Fanglord (played by Roz Kaveney, who has to get a mention somewhere) and his fat, spotty, and hideous little dwarf assistant Igor Williams (played by himself, naturally).

FANGLORD: (poking at some cages in a corner) Igor! You haff been getting into der gerbils again! All is kaput! Der experiment is ruined!

IGOR: (cringing) Aw boss, it's not my fault they keep splitting on me.

FANGLORD: Gessellschaft! (Gessellschaft? Must check this with John Brunner.) Oh well, just have to try something else. Bring on the stiffes.

(IGOR wheels in the naked bodies of BOSTOCK and TURNER, their young white flesh glistening palely as the soft glow of the phosphorescent fungi picks out the highlights on ther etc etc (insert porno bit). These are followed by the usual equipment, i.e. lots of machines with knobs, dials, levers, coils and other twiddly bits, and an assortment of flasks, test tubes, glass piping, and bubbling and steaming vats and cauldrons.)

FANGLORD: Hah! (Insert favourite line about spirits from the vasty deep or other cultural bit from Prospero, Faust, Flash Gordon etc) I have rebuilt these neofans from the bottom up (or down, I forget) and by mingling their er coff coff parts I hope to have produced prototypes for a New Golden Age of Fandom! But first, let us consult certain Secret Masters? (What is this crap? A reject from RAFFLES?) Igor! Give me the instrument!

(IGOR passes him a ouija board, which FANGLORD positions carefully across the two bodies, their soft white flesh etc etc (insert second porno bit). After making a series of mystic passes over his hearing aid he then sings (tune: "Memphis Tennessee") to a disco accompaniment of lightning flashes, sparks, throbbing machinery, clouds of pink and green smoke etc)

FANGLORD: Help me Information

Using my ouija board, ..

I am trying to get in touch with some

Of those who've gone before;

Cause this is sf writing,

It's not literature at all --

Pete Weston took the message

And he wrote it on the wall.

I've heard from Larry Niven

And from someone else as well;

I couldn't read a word of it --

It must have been Pournelle;

I've heard from Isaac Astral  
And from good old Jackie too;  
They claim that they're not dead yet --  
But I'll leave that up to you.

Chorus: Baba Bar Bar Bar Bar Bar Bar  
Baba Bar Bar Bar etc etc

I've heard from Barry Bongyear,  
And from---

(There is a tremendous flash; the ouija board splits from side to side; out sprang the web and floated wide (more culture needed) -- FANGLORD and IGOR shrink back as BOSTOCK and TURNER creakily sit up.)

BOSTOCK &

TURNER: Star Trek Lives!

(They stiffly climb down from the tables and stamp out, uttering mysterious guttural cries: "Beam me up Scotty", "Yes Mr Spock", etc etc to taste. Or not.)

FANGLORD: (kicking IGOR and screaming) Crein! Imbecile! I just noticed! They both had ten toes! You have introduced a random factor and destroyed the Cosmic Balance!

IGOR: (cowering) Aw Boss, but I was sure you'd blame me if there was a piece missing...

FANGLORD: (seizing him by the throat) Vile minion! Where did you get that toe?

IGOR: Nggung -- Boss, I swear, it fell off a lorry---

FANGLORD: (kicking him under the table) Wretch! Was it ... Was it ... No! It couldn't be! No....

IGOR: (significantly) Boss, there are some things man was not meant to know.

FANGLORD: (reeling back) No! Unspeakable! This is too horrible -- too awful -- too---

---Too much. But even so, I figure there are some secrets I should keep, so you can all wait for next century's exciting installment to discover the origin of the dastardly digit which loosed nameless horrors on an unsuspecting world, cracked holes in the space-time continuum, and probably annoyed Chris Priest all over again. (This is serious? This is important?)

Anyway, back at Silicon 1982 I emerge from my reveries of subterranean sex and sadism to become aware that a strange woman is congratulating me on my DRILKJIS article on Jacqueline Lichtenberg. This is gratifying enough to make me forget Simon Bostock and pay attention, and after a moment I recognize her as Ann Locker, a Trek fan who is smart enough to turn up at sf conventions as well.

(In case you're getting confused, the Lichtenberg article -- "Closet Zeor, or, Sex in the Head" -- had the rare honour of more or less simultaneous publication in both DRILKJIS and BLACK HOLE. Smith and Langford had been sitting on the thing for so long that I got impatient and decided to liberate a piece of



BLACK HOLE's ample university funding. Such is the fate of taxpayers' money. Go on, write to your MP.)

Well, Trekkie Ann really pours on the egoboo, telling me what a great demolition job I did, and how it was about time somebody stopped the pussyfooting and hauled a few of these weirdo sex fantasies out into the open. She goes on to speak of a particularly lurid sort of something called "K.S." At first I think this is a coded reference to Kevin Smith, and I am all agog for revelations of what accountants really do in their spare time, but it turns out that K.S. is nothing more than shorthand for Kirk-Spocking, this being the specialized form of Star Trek pornography in which Captain Kirk suddenly gets the point of Mr Spock's famous ears and everybody has fun. Previously aware only vaguely that this sort of stuff existed I am fascinated to learn that it is so extensive as to form a sort of Trekkie cottage industry. Maybe these people aren't so bad after all.

Realizing that I may be starting to think that fanwriting is actually worth the effort — since people are showing signs of reading my articles all the way through — Dave Langford quickly informs me that he has received a letter (from one Joy Hibbert) on this very same piece of work which conclusively reduces me to a little pile of nasty redundant warped male hormones. Apparently non-female critics are allowed to be rude only to John Norman, and I am a deranged chauvinist know-nothing who is barely fit to be set fire to as a second-class sacrifice to the Great Mother. (Later, he sends me a copy and I see that he exaggerates slightly. I am merely "another man who thinks he knows anything about women ... another man who is terrified of feminism and homosexuality." Having thus laid down the True Facts the letter says something like "since I haven't read the two books I shall just deal with the obvious errors" -- but at this point, I swear, everything goes black, the paper slips from my nerveless fingers, and I remember nothing more.)

After Langford's little cheer-up routine the sequence grows more and more difficult to follow. At some stage I watch a video called THE BLUES BROTHERS — plenty of good raucous music, car chases, and a memorable scene in which about a dozen police cruisers somersault off the road on top of each other. The audience cheers hysterically — not out of any particular animosity to the cops, but because it's always stimulating to see so much expensive machinery being thoroughly trashed.

Afterwards, I struggle to explain what a great film it was to Greg Pickersgill.

"Lotsa car crashes," I tell him, invoking the Higher Criticism with expansive gestures. "Lotsanilotsanilotsanilotsa car crashes. Blooey. Biff. Bam."

He looks me up and down in wonderment. "Sometimes," he says, "you really are incredibly simple."

I raise no objection. After all, I'm not exactly sure how to tell him, but I think this is rather a nice thing to say. Being un-simple is such a pain, even if it does mean you occasionally get to write Valuable and Important articles....

And soon enough it is all over. I am sitting playing dominoes with Simon Polley on the train back to Leeds, and feeling not too bad at all considering my

average post-convention condition. Despite a single defeat by Polley (at two o'clock in the morning, when I am no longer able to distinguish the spots on the dominoes from the other UFOs) my gambling has been highly successful. My body has not fallen apart at the seams. I have done nothing spectacularly embarrassing. Even my brain is in reasonable shape. (A dehydrated walnut? Well, better than nothing. Certainly better than usual.)

"That kid behind the bar was really cute," says Polley, simulating a copious drool. (The advantage of dominoes rather than cards in fannish company is that they do not become wilted, obliterated or stuck together by beer, saliva, or other precious bodily fluids.)

"Nah, he was too small," I tell him. "Be like the gerbils."

"Well, you can always go back next year and check if he's grown," says Polley, leering with so much effort that it almost throws him into the aisle. The cheap son of a bitch is losing again, and this is his pitiful attempts at distracting my attention. I have to put up with this sort of lowlown gamesmanship all the time, but the poor fools never seem to appreciate that compared with gambling, sex is trivial and unimportant. Besides, I'm not always very interested in the first place. Romantic I may be, but also cold-blooded.

"I'll be back next year anyhow," I tell him. "Play."

Bingley, September 1982: home again and (as usual) regretting all the brilliant conversations I might have had. Why does a witticism always take three days rather than three seconds to fight its way into verbal form? And why was I not able to be more coherent in refuting the nonsense contained in that issue of EPSILON Rob Hansen was handing out?

I brood upon whether or not to rejoin the BSFA. The obsession with fan history and reprints is reaching lunatic levels, and EPSILON's letter column contains a particularly deranged proposal from Eve Harvey for a yearly BSFA-financed "best of" fanwriting anthology. I tell you, turn your back on the daft buggers for a moment....

This reminds me that I also ought to do something about that letter Ted White sent me last April. However, on reflection I decide to wait for the appearance of Richard Bergeron's WARHOON 30. I have committed the multiple indiscretion of a loc asserting that neither Ted White nor Walter A. Willis is particularly hot as a fan writer, that fan history is bunk, that reprint anthologies are a pain in the arse and generally bad thing, that American fandom is a wasteland of self-satisfied and witless mediocrities, and that real fannishness (as found only in Britain, of course) consists mainly of being whipped twice a year with liquorice bootlaces. (Or maybe it was three times a year. I forget the exact details.) Anyway, even the sluggish metabolism of US fandom ought to be stirred into some kind of response by these rather tactless truisms, and bearing in mind that the American version of a snappy rejoinder usually runs to at least three pages I figure I may as well save my energies for the difficult task of staying awake through the counter-attack.

Meanwhile, I have received this lengthy but not very exciting refutation from Ted White — "I think you're an asshole too" is about the most convincing line — and also a letter from Bergeron enthusiastically suggesting that I let him fix up a reprint volume of all my past fanzine articles.

This is weird. Either the guy is exceptionally devious, exceptionally crazy, or there is a communications gap of truly inter-galactic proportions between us. Surely I made myself plain? Reprinting an occasional article may be reasonable enough, but the Complete Works/Anthology idea is strictly death and petrification. Fan writing is the most context-dependent form of writing I can think of, and the context is not just the single fanzine itself but the whole fannish scene of the period in question. Without knowledge of this background a fannish article is either completely incomprehensible or loses so many resonances that it dies on its feet. The idea that something published in a fanzine which is "good enough to be published anywhere" is thereby good fan writing is self-contradictory. Good writing such a piece may be, but if it is so readily detachable from the web of personalities and cross-references which give fanzines their unique character then it is only doubtfully fan writing at all. (This is not to say that such work should not be published in fanzines, only that it is less representative of what really makes a fanzine than other work which may be of a much lower quality in terms of its prose. This article is undoubtedly fannish in character, but my last long piece of work -- the Jacqueline Lichtenberg article -- is at the opposite end of the spectrum of fanzine contents, and only marginally "special" in the sense of being unique to the fanzine form.) But "good writing" I can get anywhere. The local library has about eighty thousand books and a hundred or so magazines and newspapers, and probably ninety per cent of those items are better written than virtually all fanzine contributions. Anyone who reads fanzines for their prose style is a halfwit.

The only proper place for old fanzine articles is in old fanzines: --To reprint selectively is to falsify, both because "good writing" is not particularly what fanzines are really about, and because the resulting picture of the past is hopelessly incomplete and distorted. The bad writing is as much a part of the scene as the good -- however much it may be deplored at the time -- and the casual or inconsequential letter is as valid a part of History as the carefully considered column.

The would-be fan writing anthologist is walking straight into a Catch-22 situation: the people who would understand the material have probably read it before in any case, and the people who haven't read it probably won't understand it (because to understand it they would need to be in a position that would mean they had already read it). The only way past this problem is to cheat by using material that has such a diluted (or non-existent) fannish context that it has no dependence on knowledge of context at all -- and what on earth is the point of that? As a presentation of either the theory or the practice of fanzines this kind of selection is a complete fraud. Fanzines are about communication -- not exercises in style. If they contain only such non-personal communications that their meaning is equally accessible to fans and non-fans alike they have not necessarily failed, but there is certainly no reason to judge them on any special or separate basis.

The whole anthology/reprint idea is a retrograde step because it is virtually a tacit acknowledgement of innate inferiority: fan writing as the product of a class in Amateur Journalism, with the less retarded pupils being given lollipops to encourage their efforts. In an open critical market the cruel truth is that even the best fan prose does not rate very high -- the giants of



the field are at the level of competent journalists, and most of the rest range from terrible to barely adequate. But a fanzine is not a cheap copy of an expensive original, small -- like the "little" magazines -- only because it can't be big. Fanzines have limited circulations as an essential part of their nature, since their whole point lies in a personal relationship with (and between) their readers which would otherwise be impossible. (Anything else is Amateur Journalism, and explains why some fanzines are doomed from the start -- they are pursuing a pseudo-professional ideal which can never be adequately realized without more resources than most could ever hope to possess.)

Even assuming that the material was worth reading in the first place, reprinting a collection of fanzine articles does nothing except create a sort of anatomy specimen -- a corpse for exhibition or dissection. To present an anthology of this kind as having anything to do with fandom as it really works is ludicrous. All the connections are missing and all the life is gone. The idea that fan writing has any particular merits apart from its personal elements -- which are firmly embedded in the whole background -- is a fantasy which has only the most tenuous connection with reality. It's the Loser's Revenge all over again: this piece of fan writing is better written than other pieces of fan writing; therefore it's good writing; therefore it's good fanwriting; therefore it's very good writing as well ... The whole chain of reasoning is a complete mess, since it works only by switching criteria of judgment back and forth as convenient.

However, while I am arguing that "good fan writing" is not primarily just "good writing" I do not want to set up a false all-or-nothing separation between the two. A good conversation is not the same as a good lecture, but while fluency, clarity and completeness of explanation are essential in the latter, they are also likely to be useful in the former. The point here is that the conversation would cease to be a conversation if lecture standards were forced on it to the exclusion of its own unique qualities -- it would lose spontaneity, the possibility of an exchange of ideas, mutual stimulation, the interplay of differing personalities, the personal reference to shared experience, everything that makes dialogue more interesting than monologue. Fanzines are fundamentally extensions of conversation into the written word, and as such they are only successful when there is reciprocity of communication between speakers and audience. If it is not to become boring, a one-sided conversation demands a high degree of skill on the part of the speaker -- the sort of talent which fans very rarely possess. To reprint fanzine articles is to reprint parts of a conversation -- to turn dialogue into monologue. One might as well try to compile a book of funny stories consisting entirely of punch lines.

It would certainly be agreeable to see an improvement in the standard of writing in fanzines, but it would be a great -- not to say fatal -- mistake to attempt to gain this rise in standards at the expense of precisely those qualities which justify the existence of fanzines in the first place. Fanzines are often accused of being incestuous and inward-looking -- too concerned with the frivolous affairs of a small group of fairly obscure people rather than with larger and more important matters. This is an entirely pointless objection, since personal views and personal concerns are exactly what fanzines are for. One might as well complain that people tend to talk to each other more about themselves, their friends, their own activities and shared interests, than about World Politics, Great Works of Art, or Banning the Bomb. Conversation isn't a

sort of gramophone record, endlessly replaying the solemn themes of the news headlines and the pronouncements of the self-important pundits of Politics and Culture. In personal terms "important" matters are often of no importance at all, and this is entirely as it should be, unless one wishes to see human beings as robots all programmed to the same end. (It occurs to me that this is one reason why I like Philip K. Dick's novels so much: rather unusually for an sf writer, he creates characters who tend to be more preoccupied with their own trivial -- and even crazy -- concerns than with some silly business like Saving the Galaxy. This is both more true to life and more appealing than grandiose nonsense about Cosmic Whatnots and the Destiny of Man. It's the lunatics who ignore the insignificant and human in favour of the abstract and inhuman who cause most of the world's worst troubles.)

The impulse to keep raking over the ashes of dead fanzish activities probably arises from the same sense of insecurity and guilt many people seem to have about being fans at all. I mean -- it's such a waste of time, when one should be doing something more important ... On the other hand, if only we can fake up some kind of structure -- give it a History with full academic hoopla of footnotes, references, bibliographies, and learned arguments on points of detail and dates and eras and periods and influences ... Reprint Selected or Complete Works so people will get the idea this stuff matters ... Imitate T.S. Eliot's beautiful literary hype of bringing out a volume labelled MINOR POEMS -- thus implying that by definition there must be a few around that were Major ... Make them take us seriously ... Please, God, don't let them laugh....

Ah, Jesus, the whole cowardly routine is so pathetic that it ceases to be pitiful and becomes contemptible. Listen, if you like doing something, go ahead and do it. Don't piss around with all these frightened little excuses and self-justifications. As Doc Johnson (Winner 1775-1779 The Doc Johnson Bix Fix Award For Services To Fandom) once remarked: Clear your minds of Kant. You aren't involved with fanzines as some kind of fucking duty -- it's purely a matter of pleasure, and as such requires no further justification whatsoever. If anybody disapproves of the way you enjoy yourself -- that's their fucking problem, not yours.

Ever since 1977 (when I wrote "The State of the Art" for the Charnock-edited WRINKLED SHREW) I have been pushing the idea that Fanzines are Art. As a corrective to the self-defeating inferiority complex that so many people have about the comparative status of fanzines this is certainly useful, but it is still not entirely satisfactory in that it begs the question of what Art itself is for. Any attempt at asserting a sort of aesthetic Categorical Imperative quickly collapses into a circular argument: Art is what is Art, or Art ought to be desired because Art is what ought to be desired. (As Doc Johnson once remarked: clear your minds of Kant. Guy makes your head hurt.) In fact, the proposition that Art is an end valuable in itself devolves not to any tenable argument but to a flat assertion or statement of intuitive preference. (I don't know anything about anything, but I know I like Art.) Art as an end is contingent -- which is to say that it is an end which is to be desired only as a means to some further end.

It is not necessary to pursue this question of means and ends any further into the whole libraries of philosophy which deal with the subject. Sufficient to say: there is no reason to value one form of Art more highly than any other

form of Art -- or any activity more highly than any other activity -- except in terms of what is ultimately a moral judgment on the end or ends each is presumed to serve. In other words: to say that writing novels is better than writing fanzine articles is to imply that the end served by writing novels is better than that served by writing fanzine articles. "Better" is being used here in one sense only: as a comparative of moral value. The confusion starts when "better" is used not only as a moral comparative but also as a comparative of skill (or complexity, or effort required) and a claim within one sense of the term is taken to imply an equal claim in the other sense.

This is the Loser's Revenge all over again: I am a winner at my game; therefore I am a winner; therefore I am a winner at your game. However, even taking "better" as being only a comparative of skill, to say that one activity is "better" than another different activity is to presuppose that the skill or skills involved are precisely the same in both cases. As has already been argued, this is a very dubious claim indeed, and apt to be shown up as completely absurd when stripped of its confusions of terminology. Mending a road takes skill, and mending a wristwatch takes skill, but there is no "mending skill" (except in a sense so broad as to be meaningless) which covers both activities completely and there is no way to say that one sort of mending is "better" than the other except by making a moral judgment on the respective ends being served. (Arguing that mending the wristwatch is "better" because it is more complicated simply sets up a new criterion of judgment without answering the question of why one end should be preferred to another. Why should the complicated be preferred to the uncomplicated?)

I write fanzine articles because I like writing fanzine articles -- not because I feel I ought to write fanzine articles. This may not seem a very profound reason, but at least I can be sure that it is genuine. Anything further is merely an elaboration of unnecessary self-justification.

I even like writing fanzine articles which are long, difficult, and cost me considerable labour and effort. This fact -- that despite being very lazy I sometimes put a lot of work into what I write for fanzines -- appears to perplex many people. Unable to grasp that certain sorts of "work" can be a purely frivolous pleasure, they assume that all this labour must imply a stern moral purpose on my part and that therefore I must be somewhat crazy -- because what stern moral purpose could there possibly be in something as trivial and unimportant as a fanzine?

I find this attitude rather like Jacqueline Lichtenberg's Protestant Ethic view of sex: joyless, humourless, brainless and distinctly depressing. Sure, writing fanzine articles is unimportant in the sense that it doesn't mess the world about on any large scale, but so what? I like doing it, so what other reason is needed? People don't go in for sex as a duty to the Cosmos, or the Human Race, or some abstract principle. They do it because they like fucking each other. Any other reason is not a good reason but a damned bad one.

Writing fanzine articles is entirely unimportant, but I like doing it. Writing novels is also entirely unimportant, and recently I decided that I like doing that too. It won't get me a damn thing I don't have already -- or could get much more readily in other ways -- and there won't be the slightest merit in being successful, but I think it's worth the effort for the return in enjoyment.



For far too many years all my efforts at writing fiction have been plagued by the notion that I ought to be writing for the fulfilment of some tremendous purpose. Since I never could quite figure out the exact specification of this mighty goal the only result was a chronic state of confusion and a distinct weakening of the motivation to write at all. What was the point? The visible rewards are so trivial that a preference for writing over not-writing seems completely arbitrary. Short of success at world bestseller level the cash has no particular significance -- one can earn much more for less work in other occupations -- and the "fame" is essentially a mirage or a piece of self-delusion. I know very well that I've had more fame out of being a fan than I'll ever get out of anything large, however successful I might be. (The novelist's audience is much larger -- but quite likely to remain both silent and invisible, just a figure on a royalty statement. Fandom, on the other hand, is virtually built round the principle of maximizing audience appreciation.) So why bother?

Well, because I like writing, because I want more scope than the fanzine form provides, and because I've finally arrived at a clearer perception of all the different levels of meaning involved in fame, success, achievement and performance....

To think that one's particular tastes and obsessions are important is a common enough human delusion, but writers and artists are exceptional in the degree of success that they have had in foisting their own special brand of craziness on everyone else. Upon all those above a certain level of intelligence and education -- and even on many below -- there is a tremendous cultural pressure to pay homage to the god of Art. Even those who take a fairly functional view of the Meaning of Life are apt to succumb. The first of the Utilitarians, Jeremy Bentham, remarked that "Pushpin is as good as Poetry" (meaning that both gave pleasure, so what was the big difference?), but his successor J.S. Mill was so upset by the levelling implications of this perfectly logical statement that he got himself into a terrible mess by attempting to distinguish between "Higher" and "Lower" pleasures. After all, one could hardly accept that the 18th century equivalent of pinball was on the same level as Art ... In the end, Mill's argument boiled down to the assertion that Higher pleasures are Higher (and more to be desired) and Lower pleasures are lower (and more to be given the old raised eyebrow and curled lip routine) because Us Folks Who Know Say So. This has been the basic proposition of devotees of the Arts ever since. High Culture has never been anything but a browbeating confidence trick practiced by the articulate and egocentric upon their milder and less self-confident and assertive fellows.

(But please note -- and note very damn well, because a mistake on this particular point is apt to haul in some very tedious complications -- that I am not saying that there are no standards on which to base comparative judgments within particular Arts or Art-genres. Pushpin may be as good as Poetry, but it is evident that some Pushpin players are not as good as other Pushpin players, just as some Poets are not as good as other Poets. Similarly, some novelists are not as good as other novelists, and some fanzine writers are not as good as other fanzine writers -- and a good novelist is not necessarily a good fanzine writer, or a good fanzine writer a good novelist. These are different games, and the only way to win them all is to play them all.)

But how liberating it is not to give a damn about the value and importance

of Art! How pleasant to be able to remark without wither defiance or guilt that (for example) the novels of D.H. Lawrence are those of a prick-crazy wimp (who probably measured himself every morning to see whether it had grown in the night) or that Ursula Le Guin is sf's premier Great Boring Writer! After all, why should I feel any obligation to make respectful noises about stuff that just gets on my tits? I know plenty about Art -- but I also know what I like, and I don't really care whether or not it's Art at all.

In other areas of my life I decided years ago that if I was just naturally an evil son of a bitch I might as well be an evil son of a bitch and stop pretending -- to myself or anyone else -- that I was otherwise. (I exaggerate for effect. I am really a very nice person. Sometimes.) Life is complicated enough without these tedious and futile deceptions. Truth is apt to break out sooner or later, so one might as well save everybody a lot of trouble and make it sooner. And why make an exception for Art? If this makes me a philistine, then so be it. To conform without conviction, necessity or advantage is so very silly when life is so very short.

On the other hand....

On the other hand, I like playing games, and fandom, life and Art are all games which can be played on more than one level. I may not take fame very seriously -- but sometimes I enjoy it. I may satirize fannish role-playing -- but sometimes I do it. After all, fandom may not be all about prose style, but it is certainly about style in another sense....

Channelcon, April 1982: Saturday night, and I am standing in the shadows with Greg Pickersgill again, watching the bodies gyrate to the beat of Eric and the Maggots, led on guitar by our very own Graham (Daddy Cool) Charnock. I am doing some small-scale gyrating of my own, since after most of a bottle of rum, six or seven beers, and a few shots of whiskey, it seems like you just can't resist those evil jungle rhythms. In fact, I am feeling so good I suspect I will probably drop dead at any moment, but the anticipation is causing no pain whatsoever. Play the music!

"God," says Pickersgill. "Look at him go? Makes you sick, eh? If I could just do that -- just once. Then I could lie."

"Right," I agree, pausing between hops to shake my head and heave a sigh.

Because I know exactly what he means. It came to me once before -- in one of those moments of insight that pierce you with a kind of heartbreak, because you realize that all your carefully erected defences are just no good -- that all my mockeries of glamour and glitter and staged exhibitionism were founded on nothing purer than envy, and were merely the revenge of a frustrated desire to go and do likewise....

Nothing else gives the same zap as performance -- nothing else is gone so quickly but is so perfect while it lasts. This is the apotheosis of narcissism -- the big hit -- and something I can only catch glimpses of on the other side of my own slow, grey talent for detached analysis. Now and then -- very occasionally -- I hit the spot and ride the crest of a wave of style, but it happens so very rarely....

Well, things is tough all over, and perhaps Graham Charnock sees nothing



very tremendous in what he does himself. Talent is never satisfied -- is never more than an appetizer for an unattainable ideal. Doubtless there is a hierarchy of desires, and everyone is fretted by yearnings for what is just out of reach, and much inclined to scorn what lies to hand. Can't get no satisfaction, kid, just gets harder and harder all the time....

So everybody does the best they can -- you think I am innarested in hearing about your horrible old condition? -- but much better to be a realist -- settle for something within safe limitations -- don't go busting your head against the wall in some spectacular failure -- prudence caution rationality -- and what the hell kind of chickenshit attitude is that? -- got no class at all -- TEST TO DESTRUCTION, COCKSUCKER!

Play the music....

Unicon, September 1982: Bare weeks since the last time, and at it again. No good will come of this. (Well, no, but what sort of fucking stupid objection is that?)

Anyway, this is the University of Keele. Polley is here with me again (or I'm here with him, since he's the nominal proprietor of my floor space? and we've just ridden down in Simon Cunsley and Elaine Goswell's brand-new car. All the way, Polley and Elaine talk about D&D, and I start to have doubts about him. What kind of guy gets strung out on Level Three killer dwarfs and all like that? Little do I realize ... as they say in the novels. (I figure I ought to start practising. Gonna be a famous novelist real soon now. Well, soon as the university money runs out.)

I'm certainly glad I went to the University of Bradford. Keele is miles from anywhere at all -- let alone anywhere anyone rational would want to be -- and you can't even see the world outside. The campus is situated in what the prospectus probably calls a natural amphitheatre -- but which I call a hole in the ground -- and the result is a sort of academic prison camp hemmed in by earth fortifications. I keep trying to identify the machine gun nests, and at night I am rather surprised not to be followed round by searchlights.

Still, this is standard convention paranoia, and nothing special alongside the phobic attacks experienced in some of the less-welcoming Eastercon hotels. A couple of drinks will straighten out these warped perceptions of a doubtless quite agreeable reality. The registration desk is reassuringly normal: a jumble of files and boxes, with three or four people scrabbling through each others' papers, borrowing pens from passers-by, and dropping change on the floor. As I wait to pay my money I furtively study the committee members, trying to imprint their appearances on my memory as some sort of insurance against any little difficulties that might arise later. This works after a fashion, but my brain is unable to handle names as well, so I have five or six faces each identified only as the Committee.

"What do you want on your badge -- Dave, or just D?" asks the Committee.

"Er um D," I mumble, rather thrown off balance by Elaine having hysterics behind me.

"The famous D. West," she gasps. "Famous...."

Well, bloody hell, I never said I was famous, did I? I bare my fangs

politely and move to the bar. If I'd had my wits about me I could have told him Dave ... after all, I'm not going to wear the damn thing ... I thrust it viciously into my top pocket. The pin pricks my thumb. Badges? Badges? We don't need no steenking badges....

(This business of my name -- or initial -- is an accident rather than an affectation. It happens to be the form I've always used as a signature, and I saw no reason to change when coming into fandom. The result is that I am called Donald by my family, Don by my non-fannish friends, and D. by the fans -- apart from Pete Presford, who ruthlessly persists in calling me Dave, despite yearly corrections since 1976. If he keeps it up much longer it will qualify as a Fine Old Fannish Tradition.)

It's fortunate that Unicorn only expects a couple of hundred people, since they appear to have carried in a sort of folding pulpit from the chapel and re-erected it as the bar. Still, the drink comes out of the holy water tap just the same, and there is the bonus of a rather lumpish piece of modern sculpture a couple of feet away which is just the right height for resting an elbow. Since this is some kind of foyer, with lots of wide open floor space and the seating lurking in concealment round the edges, it's rather like setting out to get pissed in the middle of a bus station, but I figure I'll give it the old college try.

Up comes ex-Leeds fan Helen Starkey, smiling toothily, and knees me in the spine. I take this as either a gesture of affection or an act somehow connected with her equestrian garb of jodhpurs and elf-boots. (The Horse of the Year version of Princess Leia?) Other familiar faces also begin to appear. There is even Peter Roberts -- so long lost to view that it was rumoured he had been run over by a bus. I cautiously look both ways before speaking to him, having by now acquired a strong impression that this place is a bus station. (It's not that I think anyone is out to get me, but accidents do happen.)

After the initial trauma of acclimatizing myself -- about three pints -- I begin to feel that this might be an okay convention. Enough people I know are here -- plus a number of people who seem to know me, though I could swear I never met them before. This is a little unsettling -- since I prefer to set my own pace at socializing, and not have total strangers springing out at me all the time -- but I am feeling almost tough enough to cope. In fact, I am generally loose all over already, and prepared for any form of naughtiness which might be available. If I knew how to pronounce it I would invent Decadent Fandom right on the spot.

Se is it Deckadent or Deckadent? (I reject Decayelent out of hand -- wrong feel entirely.) After a brief interval of thought and another drink I settle on Deckadent. This has the advantage of a catchy contracted form: Deek Fandom (The first principle to bear in mind when inventing a new fandom is that it must have a name the significance of which is known only to an elite. The non-elite will then get that awful sinking feeling that something is going on which they are not being told about. This will (hopefully) make them very bothered and peevish. Elitism is a sort of remote-control salism: you don't actually do anything to the victims -- just make sure that they do it to themselves.)

Having fixed a brand name for my product I begin working on my first commercial. A time slot in the middle of THE MUPPET SHOW looks good:

KERMIT THE FROG: And here he is. Here he is! Yes! Yes! It's ---  
D. West! Yaaaaaaaaay!

(Falls away sideways, waving arms, gibbering, and having tadpoles with excitement. Cut to shot of ME. (That's me, not poncey little Malcolm Edwards.) I smile negligently and roll a cigarette from one side of the mouth to the other as the applause, cheers, hysterical screams etc etc continue for about ten seconds. I raise my little finger an eighth of an inch and the applause stops.)

ME: Yes folks! My name's D. West, but my friends call me Deek! Cause I'm here today to tell you about Deekadent Fandom and what it can do for you! Yes, just come up to my room and---

---But here I run into a difficult ethical problem. Am I supposed to pay them the traditional 50p, or are they supposed to pay me? Who the hell is in charge here? This is definitely a tough one, and by the time I have been thinking about it for a couple of drinks I also have the secondary problem of remembering what the question was. Obviously, Deekadent Fandom's hour has not yet come.

I decide to circulate, and immediately fall into bad company. People at university are supposed to be smart, but this lot have imported Roy Kettle as Fan Guest of Honour. Intoxicated by this triumph -- or something -- he wants to cut the cards for pound notes. Now, cutting the cards may not sound like anything much, but there is a whole Art in the way you snap the note out of your wallet, flare your nostrils, sniff, hurl the cash to the ground, give your opponent the hard eye, and sneer coldly. Unfortunately, despite my superior technique, Kettle keeps winning.

"The Good Guys will get you in the end," I snarl. The Committee raises its eyebrows. Kettle gives a statesmanlike snigger. Our Leroy is a Very Important (well, Fairly Important) Civil Servant these days, and keeps his famous nose much more clean (metaphorically speaking) than in former times. I well recall his behaviour at Yorcon, when he positioned himself outside the Ladies Toilets and accosted everyone entering and leaving. The Kettle technique of Female Fascination consisted of giving a hop and a sway from one leg to the other, taking a firm grip on the half-empty bottle of whisky, crossing his eyes, leaping six inches in the air and yelling "I lust after your bodeee!" then thumping his chest hollowly. Since at least half the victims of this alcoholic-caveman approach were attending a quite mundane and non-fannish dinner dance which the management had treacherously inserted into the convention, this display of dynamism was not universally appreciated.

I write Kettle's name on the list and move over to join a covey of BLACK HOLE editors: Tony Berry, Mike Ford and Simon Polley. (Alan Dorey is not present to make up the set. Baby Whatsit probably gave him the evil eye.) Things are looking quite lively now and excitement is taking hold.

"Arriba! Arriba!" yelps Simon Polley.

"Hombre," Tony Berry adds tentatively.

I give them the old raised eyebrow and curled lip routine. "That was last week," I sneer. They are duly abashed. Mexican Fandom has already faded into



History. We observe a three second silence as a mark of respect. (Mike Ford looks sulky. I suspect he has been consulting a Spanish phrasebook, and was all set to astonish us. Life at the top is tough.) I wonder whether to tell them about Deekadent Fandom, but decide to wait for a psychological moment (such as some time I can be sure I know what it is.) Mustn't be hasty. The whole Art of Fan Politics consists of seizing the initiative at the precise second nobody else can think of anything better to do.

I have already noticed that Simon Polley seems inclined to be noisy, and pretty soon he is confirming that this is not so much an inclination as an uncontrollable compulsion. He shouts and bawls and screams and laughs; he gives imitations of a bull elephant in distress (or occasionally what sounds like a parrot being gangbanged); he hums and moans and yodels; and he sings old Frankie Laine songs (Frankie Laine? Frankie fucking Laine?) all about dying cows, leather fetishists, and other delights of the 1950s. ("Keep them dogies moving, Rawhide!") I can see people looking at him in a way which suggests they are remembering the line about strangling being a very quiet death, and in fact it gets so bad that Pete Lyon goes round apologizing.

"He's not like this in Leeds," he asserts nervously. "Never known him to be like this before." His eyes become mildly crossed as he checks that his nose has not started to grow. "Well, not all the time. Well, not more than a few times. Well----" He sidles away, blinking rapidly and mumbling to himself. The Committee raises its eyebrows.

Simon Ounsley and Elaine Goswell seem to be moving around a lot, but every now and then (throughout the weekend) Elaine pauses to tell me something For My Own Good. I reckon of alcohol. I shamble too much. I have a vitamin deficiency. I am thoroughly degenerate. I don't eat enough carrots. I need a shave. I don't eat enough wholemeal bread. I look disgusting.

I accept these reproofs without protest, merely smiling politely. (I need to clean my teeth.) Elaine is listed in the Ounsley fanzine as "Political Advisor" and I consider asking Simon what it's like living with a Domestic Commissar. However, Elaine is a big girl, and all the Leeds women are famous for knocking you silly if you try getting clever, so I simply inscribe her name on the list. Being trampled by Chris Atkinson in high-heeled leather boots is one thing, but being smacked around the ear by Elaine would just be degrading.

After a while I think about eating. The catering arrangements at Keele are not marvellous (and Polley and I eventually subsist mainly on cold baked beans spooned out of the tin with pieces of crispbread) but one cannot keep going entirely on beer-based calories. Some sausage rolls are the main offer -- gummy-looking confections which are rather luridly yellow round the edges, as though the central ingredient has crawled into its hole to die foaming and frothing at all orifices. I am still weighing what the consumption of one of these things might do to my life expectancy when I am accosted by another complete stranger.

"So you're D. West," he says, and gives me a pitying smile which slowly fades to an expression of tense anticipation, as though he is waiting for me to throw a triple back-somersault or turn into a werewolf.

"Yes," I say. "Or maybe no. Excuse me."

I disengage myself by hurriedly purchasing and consuming two sausage rolls. Since I do not immediately need to retire and throw up I am able to congratulate myself on my new-found iron constitution. My social savoir faire, on the other hand, seems to be much the same as usual. I reflect that in these situations I often have absolutely no idea what I am supposed to do. Being a strategist rather than a tactician I am easily confused by events which I have failed to anticipate. Indeed, this is one reason why I am inclined to spend a fair amount of time lurking in the background, observing the battlefield from a place of safety. One of these days I expect to figure out exactly what is going on. In the meantime, anonymity is more relaxing.

It's for this reason that I never wear my name badge. I dislike being labelled, and somehow the name is a label. Much of the time I am embarrassed by my reputation -- not so much because it's a little lurid as because it seems rather absurd (and completely out of character) that I should have any sort of reputation at all. I am the mildest of men (as Peter Cushing once remarked before letting loose the ketchup) and my preferred approach is to sneak up on people by slow degrees, rather than overwhelm them with instant charisma. For one thing, I haven't got instant charisma, so any expectation of the extraordinary by my audience is enough to make me wish to disappear.

On the other hand, I do have my moments....

The weekend has started. So how does it go on? Well, all Unicon is divided into three parts: the daytime bar in one building, the evening bar in a second building, and the all-night room parties wherever more than three fans and a few bottles get together. (I believe there is also a Programme somewhere or other.) The geographical sprawl means that everyone gets plenty of healthy exercise. Day and night there is always someone wandering around, bouncing off walls and falling over, hoping to reach their destination by a process of persistent random motion. In the morning one hits fewer obstacles but the sunlight is more painful; in the evening one hits more obstacles but the anaesthetic is working better. Either way, this macho outdoor life is so rugged that one is apt to feel quite worn out and in need of a drink.

On Sunday I discover myself with my head under a bed and my legs entangled with a table. This is not too surprising, since I always seem to be waking up involved with pieces of furniture. (The floor is hard and one tends to roll around in an attempt to get comfortable.) However, I am a little perplexed to find that it is Linda Pickersgill in the bed, not Simon Polley. What kind of involvement is this? And what on earth is Greg going to say? (Greg has stayed at home, having discovered Zen Fannishness and the Ultimate Cool of doing nothing at all. As the real insiders know, to be famous for something is merely vulgar, since it implies that one has had to make an effort. The ideal is to be famous simply for being famous, a triumph of immanence which requires immense subtlety and a complete understanding of the Art of Masterly Inactivity.) And come to that, what on earth am I going to say? I feel vaguely alarmed but also rather peevisish. I seem to have missed something here ... If I'm going to be stomped to death by an angry Pickersgill I ought at least to be able to remember the details....

But in due course memory seeps back and I realize that I am unlikely to be gunned down for violating the Code of South Ealing. All that happened was that



Polley wanted to continue a Meaningful Discussion he'd started with a woman, so I got thrown out and had to go knocking on the Pickersgill door at three in the morning.

"Ngaah," says Linda. "Floor. Sleeping bag. Ungh." And she dives back to bed, leaving me to involve myself with the furniture.

To the bar again. What else was happening last night? Isolated incidents keep bobbing to the surface -- like beer cans in a cesspool -- but the Big Picture eludes me. Anything I remember tends to become mixed up with what is happening now ... I am viewing the present through a shattered hologram of the past -- or is it the future? -- and it all snaps in and out of focus so many times ... Convention strobe....

This will never work out. I loved the Captain in my own way, although I knew that he was insane, the poor bastard. This was only partly his fault: one must consider the conditions. The conditions were intolerable ... In the novel I plan to write of the voyage, the Captain will be a tall grim man with piercing eyes who has no fear of space. "Onward!" I hear him shout. "Fuck the bastards. Fuck control base; they're only a bunch of pimps for the politicians anyway. We'll make the green planet yet, or plunge into the sun. Venus forever! To Venus! Shut off all the receivers now! Take no messages. Listen to nothing they have to say---"

This will never work out. Forget the sequence. Forget the smartarse hotshot presentation. Just pick the pieces off the floor at random.

Room parties:

Roy Kettle has severely embarrassed himself by causing an over-emotional neofan to burst into tears. He is now making frantic efforts to convince the sobbing youth that he didn't really mean what he said.

"Look, when I told you it was a fucking stupid thing to say I didn't mean it was a fucking stupid thing to say. Well, it was a bit stupid but not fucking stupid. Well, for a stupid question it wasn't stupid at all. Not so you'd notice very much. Only a bit. (Will you stop snivelling, you little cretin?) Well, not a very big bit. A small bit. Oh all right, IT WAS A FUCKING BRILLIANT QUESTION AND I'M GLAD YOU ASKED ME THAT. (Now will you shut the fuck up?)"

The neofan stops weeping and smiles tremulously. "Oh thank you, Leroy, thank you. Do you really mean that? Oh, thank you." He beams adoringly. Kettle scowls, glares, nibbles his beard distractedly, and edges towards the door. He has acquired a slave....

I reflect that this is rather like the facet of animal behaviour known as "imprinting". When ducklings are born they will follow the first large moving object which presents itself. Usually, of course, this is the mother duck, but if (say) some dopy naturalist blunders in at the crucial moment then he is imprinted as Big Daddy Duck and the ducklings will follow him. Now, if I could only figure out some simple way of duplicating this process on all these cute little neos I could set myself up in groupies for life....

They do say that you can't make an omelette without breaking eggs, but Simon Polley's version of this appears to be that you can't make a convention without breaking furniture. In the Union bar he and Steve Green are hurling chairs and

tables at each other, bellowing inarticulately -- ever hear an articulate bellow? -- and crashing to and fro amid the wreckage. The bar staff nervously pretend that all this is taking place in some alternate universe. The Committee raises its eyebrows. Everyone else is too paralytic to pay any attention at all, (apart from the group of fans from all parts of the country who in a remarkable display of solidarity have clubbed together to offer Polley large sums of money to commit grievous bodily harm on Green). It's only furniture. And Polley and Green. All solid wood....

I am discussing sex, life, love, and who should be feeling more miserable, with Helen Starkey. (Since I persist in being cheerful she eventually gives up in disgust and transfers to the chameleon-like Polley, who has an uncanny ability to switch from being a noisy mindless cretin to a sympathetic, sensitive and concerned Person who Cares.) Or maybe this is some other night and I am playing dominoes with Malcolm Edwards. He loses. I get drunker. He still loses. I get drunker and drunker. He loses even more. "Am I doing something wrong here?" he rasps through gritted jaws. I smile foggily. "Not at all," I tell him. "You only owe two and a bit INTERZONE subscriptions." I see by his expression that he is already considering applying for an Arts Council grant. It's sad, but these sf magazines are just natural losers.

Room party time, so I stagger out into the night. I am aligning myself in the general direction indicated by the Party Finding Instinct -- and the rather crude FUN sign in my brain is just flickering into life -- when suddenly a voice from the sky bellows, "ARE YOU D. WEST?"

"Please, God, I didn't mean it," I whimper, rearing back violently and going into a three circle spin before falling over a wall. Fortunately the earth is not too far beneath, and I remain conscious enough (though at something of a disadvantage, being flat on my back with my legs propped up in the air) to conduct a sort of conversation with this fucking idiot who has hailed me from a balcony. Another complete stranger. I am a little preoccupied with the question of how I am ever going to stand up again, so my half of the dialogue consists of nothing more incisive than occasional mutters of "Fuck me" and "You don't say" as he goes into the involved details of what is either his life story or mine....

---And without noticeable interval I am sitting in a jam-packed room party. Both the clockwise and the anti-clockwise joints have reached me simultaneously, so I figure that just for once I am the centre of the Universe ... Phil Palmer produces a comics magazine called ROGUE, in which the eponymous hero demonstrates an awe-inspiring talent for reducing a wide variety of young men to slack-jawed and swooning acceptance of being raped by the fourth or fifth frame. (The sky-diving colour centrespread is definitely a tour-de-force, though I think my own tastes are more earthbound.) It's interesting to watch the reactions, and to note that those who express the most shock/horror/revulsion all seem to need to check out the disgusting details a second and third time ... The Committee raises its eyebrows.

People, people, music, music. The rooms are full, the corridors are full, there is a fog of non-lawful smoke, drinks in bottles, cans, cups and glasses. In one room there is even a little space, so I begin dancing with a short convex girl. She pummels me with her bosom, generally at stomach level, but bouncing almost to chin height at peaks of frenzy. The Committee raises its eyebrows.

I float into the corridor. "What's a nice boy like you doing in a place like this?" I demand of several nice boys in succession before my brain catches up with my tongue and I realize I am using up the whole of my best line. I am left groping for words.

"Just because I let you look at my magazine doesn't mean anything," snaps Phil Palmer. What, is there no solidarity among fanzine reviewers? (Stupid question.)

The music is still belting away, and I am still belting away at the drink, all these joints having produced a terrible thirst. Reminding myself that subtlety is wasted on most fans anyway, I try yelling, "ANYONE HERE WANT TO FUCK?" With that delightful sang froid for which the British are so famous no one takes any notice. The Committee raises its eyebrows. I am abashed by the thought that I may have violated some finer point of etiquette -- perhaps by speaking before we have been properly introduced? Anyway, there are no takers, presumably because they all realize that most parts of my body are so paralysed they would have to do all the heavy work themselves. (Somewhat later I discover that the cold numbness which grips my lower limbs is due to the fact that I am sitting in a pool of beer.)

I move on. Meeting Helen Starkey I offer to massage her chest to cure the asthma. She hits me. Apparently she does not suffer from asthma.

"I was misinformed," I say with great dignity -- but already she is deep in conversation with Pro GoH Richard Cowper. Later, overcome by jealousy, I make some remark about Big Name Writers and their groupies. She hits me again. Being a fairminded girl, she also hits Simon Polley when he says something similar. We compare war wounds and decide not to press the matter.

(One of the interesting ways to pass those long boring evenings in the privacy of your own home after a convention is to try to work out exactly where all those bruises, contusions, cuts and scratches <sup>came from</sup>. The ones that look like tooth marks are a particular source of difficulty.)

Back to the corridor. Malcolm Edwards drifts up just as I am rather laboriously embarking on the What's-a-nice-boy-like-you routine once again.

"West, what do you want to fuck that young man for anyhow?" he demands, delicately elevating his eyebrows as if to imply that this will never get an Arts Council grant.

Another stupid question, but I am momentarily confounded. (My reflexes seem to be slowing down, and I get the impression that most of my answers in conversation would arrive quicker by letter.) "Because he's cute," I finally snarl, but Edwards has already moved on. I discover I have forgotten what I was doing and move on myself.

"So you're D. West," someone says. I acknowledge that this is possibly the case, since it appears that he wants to cut the cards. This is a good idea. I have wiped out so many people at dominoes that there are crumpled pound notes in every pocket, and I feel like exercising my sneer of cold command. The cash goes back and forth and seems to break about even in the end, but I am revived by the action and begin wandering again. The Committee raises its eyebrows, but I pay no attention. (Fuck off, Committee.)



I move up to this guy who is standing on his own. After the usual social amenities ("Wanna fuck?" "Er, not at the moment?") we drift into general conversation. I have struck a cooling-off period in the night and am starting to have occasional moments of clarity.

"So you're D. West," he says suddenly. Rather wearily I look both ways and wonder whether to make a run for it. Having people spring this identity-thing all the time is making me jumpy. There's something sinister in lots of complete strangers knowing your name ... a suggestion of dossiers, secret files, and the conspiracy closing in....

"You're a lot nicer than I thought you would be," he says. "And certainly a lot nicer than Alan Dorey."

I brighten up. This is more like it. At last, somebody who recognizes my fundamentally sweet nature. (Even if he doesn't want to screw.) I am tired of being a monster, a big bad wolf. It's so silly -- and so accidental and incidental -- but it seems to be all that anyone ever notices or remembers. (Thank God that Collick's video epic was stolen before it could be shown at a convention. I'd have been a waxwork in the fannish Chamber of Horrors for ever.)

I am just settling down to enjoy a dissection of the Dorey character -- nothing like a good long listing of the failings of absent friends -- when he shoots off at a tangent again.

"You like manipulating people, don't you?" he says. "In fact, you're a devious person."

I am rather taken aback by this, and give him a long, narrow-eyed re-examination. Generally speaking, it takes one to know one, and he seemed like such a nice boy ... But I rally my forces and explain that there's no harm in deviousness, provided that you lead people gently ... and if you do it right, of course, they never notice at all. (Misdirection is the key, not concealment. Do everything in the open, but make sure that the audience is watching only the parts that don't really matter. That way you can slip anything past, and by the time they catch on--)

It's an interesting conversation, and I wish I could remember who he is.

Moving on, I wonder what has become of Polley. Eventually I recall seeing him leave with Amanda, the erstwhile companion of Steve Lawson. Polley certainly makes a lot of noise, but he also has plenty of energy and persistence ... In this case he's managed to cut out not only Lawson but Rob Holdstock too, the famed barbarian charisma having failed to work for once.

Holdstock retired to bed looking sulky. A Big Name Author deserves more consideration... (Where is the Committee?) Malcolm Edwards exhorts everyone to gather round and take turns kicking the Holdstock door and jeering. This strikes me as a form of Russian Roulette, since there is no telling when the Famous Sex-Maniac, maddened by unslaked desires, will burst out and disembowel the nearest person with his frightful weapon ... I decide to go to bed myself.

The accommodation blocks are grouped round a central quadrangle, and all four look exactly the same. Since I no longer remember which block I am in -- never mind which block I ought to be in -- there may be a few difficulties ahead.



Still, the choice is finite. ... I leave the partying and descend to the quadrangle, accelerating to a fast stagger down the stairs. After making an unsuccessful (but probably interesting) attempt to run the wrong way through a plate-glass door I rest on the grass for a while. (It's such a nice night -- all the stars are out.) My position is now slightly worse, since I no longer know which building I came out of ... I catch sight of Polley and Amanda engaged in earnest discussion and demand directions. (Better get established before I'm evicted to Linda Pickersgill's again.)

"Fuck off that way," says Polley.

Thus explicitly guided I find myself in the wrong building, then the wrong building again, the wrong building again, and finally the right one. Then I decide I need a cigarette and re-start the whole process ... I find a room with people who seem to be moving around very slowly, as though wading underwater ... I ask for a cigarette ... They pass me a joint ... Oh well....

An indeterminate length of time later I return to sleeping quarters. The room is in darkness and I become comprehensively involved with various items of furniture before resignedly falling over. Yelps of alarm from the bed indicate that Polley has imported Amanda. Well, A for effort, kid -- I think as I make myself comfortable under the table -- but in your condition I'll be it's strictly Platonic ... Sure enough, they are both snoring lustily even before I become unconscious.

The morning is some kind of judgment on us all. We seem to have had more fun of a completely disgusting sort than should be humanly possible. There is a wall-to-wall layer of discarded clothes, baked bean tins, empty cigarette packets, half-eaten sandwiches, crumpled papers, ash, tobacco, biscuit crumbs, soggy fag-ends, and the remnants of a tin of tuna Polley made a rather unsuccessful attempt to eat at three o'clock one morning. A quantity of spilt rum and orange has been partially soaked up by a couple of fanzines on the table, but the overflow seems to have distributed itself over every part of the room except the ceiling. (How come we missed that?) Twenty or thirty paper cups and several glasses lie around, each and every one of them gummy with the residue of unmentionable liquids. (What were we doing? Drinking non-stop toasts to the Queen?) The smell suggests an amateur taxidermist's unsuccessful attempt to stuff a partially decomposed elephant.

Polley lies on the bed and groans. I lie on the floor and whimper. Amanda appears to be disgustingly fit, and takes a swift departure after bringing us some coffee. I swallow pills, in the faint hope that if they don't make me feel better they will at least prevent me feeling worse. Someone has drawn all over Polley's face with a felt-tip pen. He has the likeness of a very old and very sick cannibal chieftain who has just eaten a particularly greasy missionary.

The door is unceremoniously kicked open by a cleaning woman. Hardened by long exposure to student debauchery, she is unmoved by the spectacle of this diseased-looking drunk lying on the bed in his underwear, and rips the sheets from under him before he can do more than feebly twitch and moan. I try cooling my brow against the metal table leg. This is fun?

Leeds, October 1982. "Good convention, eh" I remark.

"Ngung," says Polley. As the manager of a medical bookshop he is always

being treated to liquid lunches by book salesmen who want him to buy a fifteen volume set of DISEASES OF THE URINARY TRACT, or two dozen copies of the less-specialized 101 EASY THINGS TO DO WITH YOUR BRAIN. This probably explains why he has taken to con-going so readily, and why -- as at the moment -- he often has a certain amount of difficulty in focusing his eyeballs. (All a matter of practice, kid, all a matter of practice.)

We are sitting in the Adelphi, new home of the Leeds group, and I am brooding on the fact that they do not have dominoes here. What the hell did we move for anyway? My finances are suffering ... It's all a plot....

Graham James is reading manuscript convention reports: Polley's on Silicon and Ounsley's on Unicon.

"Too many mentions of this D. West," he grunts. "Who's he?"

Indignantly I remind him of the dozens and dozens of cartoons I have drawn for his rotten little fanzines -- particularly scabby old BSFA MATRIX -- and quickly follow up by borrowing a pound while I still have the moral advantage.

When I come back from the bar they are discussing who is to be the next MATRIX editor. The selection process involved here is rather like the old Conservative Party method of choosing a Leader: "Soundings" are taken, there are "consultations", and finally someone "emerges". In other words, the boys get together and put in the Fix. Little does he realize (hah!) but Simon Polley is the number one candidate. He isn't even a member of the BSFA, he's never edited anything but the university-shithead BLACK HOLE, and he hasn't been around all that long -- but he's reliably degenerate and known to the right people....

"Stick with me, kid," I croak. "I'll put you right there in the Big Time. Gonna give you lots of exposure in this article I'm doing."

He looks vaguely alarmed, but under the glaze of apprehension I detect a gleam of something else: fannish lusts have been awakened, and there is no turning back....

I study him and shake my head sadly. So young, so gay, so debonair -- and in a couple of years he will be a burnt-out wreck, fit for nothing except the Chairmanship of the BSFA. Being editor of MATRIX is a hard, cruel, dirty job. But -- just like Menstrual Hydraulic Engineer -- someone has to do it. It's a clear case of Manifest Destiny. (Or is it Manifest Duplicity? The distinction is becoming blurred. Maybe none of this will happen. Maybe Simon Bostock will get the job instead. He's young -- he'll have time to recover. I am not guilty. You are all guilty ... Time to go home....)

Bingley, October 1982: I am sitting here, peaceably enough, and thinking of this and that in no particular order at all. The university term has started again, and I have sprinted down to deposit my grant cheque in the bank. Unicon costs virtually nothing -- thanks to the subsidies provided by Malcolm Edwards and others -- but there are other expenses apart from conventions, and it's nice to feel even halfway solvent again. I am even reckless enough to buy a copy of Dave Langford's new novel, THE SPACE EATER.

So should I do the decent thing and give it a rave review somewhere? Or should I just do the natural thing and say that it looks like a fix-up of a

spare Joe Haldeman plot and the research left over from WAR IN 2080? This is a tough decision, and if I can't make up my mind soon I shall actually have to read the bloody book. (It's not fair -- Joy Hibbert never has this problem. Oh, the pain of being a man.)

I wonder how famous Langford feels now that he's a fulltime pro ... Probably not very. Most fans are so blase about writers that they practically send them round to the Tardesmen's Entrance. Novels? Novels? We don't need no steenking novels! What happened to that issue of TWLL BDU, eh? Get your priorities straightened out, kid.

It's curious that fame should be such a spur when the reality of it is so very small and limited. I suppose it's the idea of fame that excites everyone in the beginning -- just as it's the idea of being a writer (rather than writing) which starts off most authors. And the whole business is pure fantasy -- to such an extent that in an odd way fannish fame is not so much a substitute as the real thing. For what it's worth....

Bergeron's idea of reprinting my old fanzine pieces is certainly weird, but even weirder is the fact that he has defeated his own object simply by making the suggestion. Once I've been given the idea that someone thinks such a project is worthwhile I don't really need anything else, since I know very well that the deed itself would be simply an anti-climax.

I've had other reprint requests too -- an American Publisher wants to include my FOUNDATION article "The Right Sort of People" (on C.M. Kornbluth) in something called TWENTIETH CENTURY LITERARY CRITICISM. This makes me grin, since the thought of being solemnly read by academics tickles my sense of irony. Also, there's the money ... But again, this is fame entirely in the head, since I'll probably never see the volume in which the article is to appear, and never meet anyone else who's seen it. And I rather like it this way -- because, after all, the only non-spurious reward my work can give me is the satisfaction that I feel in achieving at least a partial domination over my subject matter. This is success. The rest is performance....

Yet how attractive it is....

And how hard to resist. I started to write this article with the rather hazy notion that -- just for once -- I would abandon all discretion and tell the truth. But what the hell is the truth? I suppose I have succeeded in being truthful in a limited way -- bearing in mind the unavoidable distortions imposed by the need to select and compress, the biases introduced by the desire to make my text interesting and/or entertaining, and the fact that a few things have been deliberately omitted as none of your damn business. But all the time I have been aware that this too is a performance, and that while I am perhaps altering perceptions I am certainly not uncovering any definitive version of reality.

Still, it's a start. I like to play the fannish games -- since I find it entertaining to be devious and manipulative, just as my friend at Unicon suggested -- but I do find it irksome to be restricted to a sort of drawing-room scenario in which there is a tacit agreement to accept the role-playing as the real thing and never to look any deeper. Very often I have the feeling that the material which appears in fanzines is nothing but a pack of lies, in that the



writers are presenting a picture of reality which is so skewed by exclusion and omission as to be completely false. Good writers can camouflage this deception more thoroughly than bad writers, for obvious reasons, and the result is that sometimes the best prose has the least value and is the most trivial. In the end, only the truth is very interesting. Lies are boring. (Advertising copy can be brilliant prose -- but who esteems this triumph of technique alone, apart from other copywriters?)

There is no straightforward alternative to this state of affairs. The American school of let-it-all-hang-out-and-flobber-about (perhaps typified to British readers by the works of Gil Gaier and Arthur Hlavaty) makes the mistake of equating truth with catalogues of personal neuroses. This is what might be called the Stamp Collecting approach: "Gosh, look at this beautiful specimen of Identity Crisis ... and here's a really fine Hang-Up...." There is probably some underlying feeling here that self-revelation either is intrinsically valuable or makes the individual concerned interesting in the eyes of others. Unfortunately, I don't choose my friends by their case-histories, and so far from solving problems, compulsive self-examination and self-revelation can often be the problem. I know a number of people who are addicted to analysing their own psyches, and I take good care to stay very well clear of them. (You think I am innarested in hearing about your horrible old condition? Leave me tell you, I am not innarested.) A bore is a bore, regardless of subject matter, and people who are forever spilling their guts are more boring than usual, simply because they are even more self-centred. (A very good reason for keeping your inmost secrets to yourself is that other people would probably find them quite uninteresting.) Personal frankness is only valuable when it offers some insight into matters of general interest. The glib psychobabble found in American fanzines reduces every human problem and emotion to the same low level of value and meaning, and is far worse than an inhibited silence in that it creates a false sense of having made progress -- rather like the habit of producing lists instead of actually doing what is listed

There is perhaps a cultural difference being reflected here in that psycho-analytical concepts are much more a part of the popular consciousness in America than in Britain. The British preference is for a greater independence of opinion, but more reticence on personal matters. British fans can be extraordinarily rude to each other, but their insults rarely touch on anything emotionally serious, and though frank in the expression of their views they are very selective in the exposure of any real feelings. (The British are not unemotional, but they tend to be very sceptical of any show of emotion except in special circumstances. Thus, friendly Americans may find themselves rebuffed simply because, in British terms, their warmth is so unusual it looks suspiciously like a confidence trick. Obviously, this is a generalization, but I've seen it happen with others and -- in retrospect -- with myself.)

The acidulous British approach is perhaps preferable to what could be called Caring California Crap (since although it conceals it does not actively distort and deceive) but this does not mean that it is any the less limited and narrow.

Fandom is a performance. That is to say that it is the acting out not so much of a reality as of an invention. There is a difference between invention which is fiction and invention which is lies. Fiction entertains and informs -- lies simply deceive. The performance which goes on in fandom and fanzines is



essentially fiction, but when it is taken as non-fiction it becomes lies.

This is not a matter of whether some incident described in a fanzine is true in the sense that it "really happened". As Chris Priest pointed out in DEADLOSS, literal reportage can be less true to the reality of events than an account which includes invented additions or substitutions. Any novel could be called a pack of lies, in the sense that it purports to describe events which never happened -- but there is also a sense in which its inventions may be entirely true. There is a literal truth which is assessed by the degree of its conformity with observed reality, and there is also a symbolic truth which expresses itself in metaphorical form. There is also a form of lying which is a misrepresentation or concealment of reality, but there is also a form of creative lying which is a new presentation or revelation of reality. Fiction is creative lying, and so is the whole fannish performance: lies which may be truth, truth which may be lies. The danger is that the performers will come to believe that their performance is reality -- that it is literally and not metaphorically true....

I am the writer of this article, but I am not the character this article describes -- though that character is part of the person I am. The "I" of this article is an actor in a performance, like every other fannish "I". As an actor I am ambitious: I want to out-perform every other actor on the stage. I want this not as something contingent -- a means to some other end -- but as an end in itself. It is not necessary -- and may be impossible -- to know why. The fact of the desire is its own explanation.

Still, I also like to see good acting by others -- and competition is no fun if you can't ever lose -- so I do what I can to encourage a general raising of ambition. Whether the performance is ultimately in pursuit of truth or of enjoyment I do not know, but I do know that to hold back -- to perform with reservations, omissions and evasions -- denies all prospect of any success at all.

Well, one can enjoy a soap opera without believing that the characters are real people -- but it does get confusing when there is no clear separation between the actor and the part, and when a substantial part of the real world is the stage... Next week I'll be at Novacon: another mighty epic shot entirely on location -- with five hundred cameras, five hundred directors, and five hundred star performers.

I wonder what the reviews will be like....

-- D. West

\* \* \* \* \*

Is that it? Are you sure you don't want to add a few thousand words? I feel as though I've been stencilling this fanzine for my whole life.... (When Don was composing the above he first told me it would run about 16 pages. Okay, I said. Then it went up to 20. I gulped a little, but I thought I could take it. Then he started typing the final draft and it became 26. By this time I was numbed at the prospect. Then he sent 26 pages. Six more to come, he assured me. Two days later another 10 pages show up. Devious bugger, this West. He knows that if he offers a 36 page article any halfway sane editor is going to say forget it.)

This issue was originally intended to include a Unicon report from Linda Pickersgill, but she has evidently been so busy following the trendy new G-Plan Diet (you consume nothing but copious quantities of Guinness) that she has failed to deliver. Probably just as well, though it means that you will have to look elsewhere for the unspeakable details of how I ruined both her dungarees and kneecaps while protecting her from all the cretins at Unicon except the most dangerous (myself). I was interested to see Mr West compare the Unicon "convention lounge" to a bus station. Perhaps he was subliminally influenced by the bus timetables displayed on one wall. I was intrigued to note that these were produced by none other than the PMT Bus Company, all of whose services appeared to terminate in Leek. I'm not sure whether any of them came more than once a month.

Readers who ~~have~~ never met D. West will be wondering if he can possibly be as suave, sophisticated, debonair and charming as the character depicted in his article. Let me hasten to assure them that in this respect, if no other, he does not exaggerate.

On with the show....

#### LOC. CIT

(the readers strike back)

---Well, actually they don't this time, because I'm so squeezed for space and time that I'm going to do the unthinkable and, in essence, scrap the letter column this time, reducing it to an extended list of We Also Heard Froms. This is not too great a loss, to be honest, because people seemed stuck for comments on the last issue -- though most said the Peter Nicholls and Chris Atkinson bits were really triffic, they did not say much more than that -- and so went on at length about the Falkland Islands. This was all interesting but not the stuff of a decent letter-column. What was especially interesting was that of everybody who mentioned the topic only one person supported the government line. The rest echoed my feelings or in many cases went much further in their denunciations. I've never thought of fandom as being noticeably politically radical -- at best there are lots of wishy-washy liberals like me -- so this almost total divergence between the reaction I received and the supposed popular rection (88% popular support for the Government) is rather surprising. Could someone have been cooking the statistical books?

So, in the order in which they come out of the file, we heard from William T. Goodall, Jean Weber (who unwisely confessed a liking for Malcolm Edwards and Linda Pickersgill lookalike John Denver), Karen Trego, Jan Howard Finder, Chris Bailey, Andrew Rose (who borrowed it from a friend), I.M. Barrington, Eric Mayer, who wrote at some length, starting off about the "disproportionate amount of criticism" this fanzine has been getting in the States, some of it in his own fanzine GROGGY. I hadn't yet received the fanzine so waited with bated breath, only to discover the criticism to be so mild as to be hardly noticeable. Personally I think this fanzine gets a disproportionate amount of praise in the States (though some of the individual articles deserve it, of course) He also talks about differences between American and British fanzines

and the false lure of "professional quality" in a way that chimes in with some of D. West's remarks:

"British fanzines strike me as leaning perilously close these days to the ethos, if that's the word, of the little literary magazine. There is too much emphasis on standards and quality of writing, with both standards and quality being viewed from a professional perspective. You have said yourself, in your review column in GAMBIT, that quality of writing alone is not enough. But it goes beyond that. You have to define what you mean by "quality". Do you mean something that would not look out of place in the NEW YORKER, something "good enough to publish", something displaying professional polish and techniques? I think, to be honest, that that is what you and Ted White and others mean. That is what you give the impression of meaning.

"When I think of quality, in a fannish context, I think of the sort of writing that makes me interested in the writer, personally, rather than primarily in his subject matter. Obviously a writer could accomplish this by sheer excellence of writing. But he could also accomplish it with considerably less technical excellence, and, conversely, a fine writer might not be able to put much of himself in his writing, or might not have much of a self to try and put into it. When I read a fanzine I do not read an article on this or that, I read Skel or Brian Earl Brown, or Ted White or Malcolm Edwards. The closest analogy I can think of professionally is reading about a series character like Travis McGee. I prefer it when the McGee books have some literary excellence to them and am a bit disappointed, as last time, when they don't, but I still enjoy spending the time with McGee.

"It frightens me a bit, seeing this trend towards emphasis on professional quality. Fandom is mainly a group of friends, it seems to me, and who would choose his friends on the basis of their writing techniques?"

Well, yes and no, Eric. I think I said at the outset that what was unique and valuable about fanwriting was the personal element, and I think hardly any fannish writing could be transported to other contexts (I don't want to get too deeply into this now; all the time I was stencilling D. West's article I was holding back the impulse to record points of disagreement, because I didn't want to pre-empt others' comments. This is similar territory.) I don't think anything that's appeared in TAPPEN is transferable to another context, though Peter Nicholls's piece will be in FOUNDATION, which is semi-academic. (I personally believe it will be out of place there, on account of the personal elements that made it fit here, but that's another matter.) I would agree that the very worst sorts of fanzines are the ones which give you little sub-READER'S DIGEST articles on some topic the writer has just found out something about.

On the other hand, writing is about successful communication, on whatever level and in whatever form, and I think even in fanzines writers should strive to do better ... anything else is just lazy. I do not insist that everyone reach the same standard ... all I have ever insisted is that people should do their best. I recently happened to see some Peter Presford fanzines for the first time in years, and while it was clear that he was quite content in what he was doing, it was depressing to note that he still wrote so badly that it was often impossible, except through a species of cryptographic analysis, to discover what he was trying to say. Presford is not stupid: he doesn't need to write



that badly. He's just crippling himself through, it seems, a wilful refusal to learn, or even to try to learn.

---And we heard from the Institute for Fundamental Studies, who have selected me as a person of many qualities, the chief and unstated one of which is obviously intended to be credulousness. If I send them \$2 a year it seems I will have an early chance to muscle in on immortality. And Bruce Gillespie (who had decided not to stand for GUFF even before I received his letter asking me to nominate him), Leigh Edmonds (who wrote about sport -- good show by the Aussies in Pakistan; eh Leigh?), Nigel Richardson ("It seems I have misjudged you people. I had this notion, y'see, that fandom consisted of illiteracy, asexual middle-aged men bemoaning the passing of the Golden Age of Something, and those hats with propellers on them." Oh it did, Nigel, it did.), Luke McGuff (whose letter gave the strong impression of being written under the influence of Drugs, but who informed me of a Rip, Rig and Panic song called "Another Tampon Up the Arse of Humanity"), Jeff Suter, Rich Coad, Tony Cvetko, John D. Owen (who liked no.4), Terry Carr (who knows how to start a letter: "TAPPEN may not be the best fanzine in the world, but if it isn't, this issue will satisfy me perfectly well until the best fanzine comes along" and has a paragraph about Dick that I'll quote once I've escaped these parentheses):

"Peter Nicholls's piece on Phil Dick is very good, but it does show how misunderstood Phil was, and is even in retrospect. The bit about Phil asking him, "Did you successfully undertake sexual intercourse last night? I need to know how it's done" sent me chortling to the floor, for instance. I knew Phil pretty well for several years, and his sense of humour was always indistinguishable from his sense of angst. They were in fact the same thing, and in that lay both his strength and weakness: he saw the ridiculousness in everything, but then again, his version of reality was always ridiculous. I've always thought it was too bad that fans were so blown away by his mindset that they usually failed to realize that as marvellous as his books were for ideas and bits of business, they were lousily written. Next to Phil's prose, Heinlein's looks positively average."

Define well-written, Terry. Dick could sometimes be appallingly clumsy, but I think that, particularly as his work developed, the idiosyncrasies of his style and his subject-matter became totally interdependent. (let's not get into a style vs. content argument, however.) You could copy-edit the individuality out of his syntax and what you would be left with is something less interesting, every time.

And there was Philip Collins, and David Stever, and Lee Hoffman (who agreed with my reply to Bob Shaw), and Bill Lindsay, and Jeff Ford, and Bill Gibson ("Here's a strange fact for you. Labor Day Saturday, when I was acutely aware of not being in Chicago, I happened to find the train I was riding pulling into the unincorporated township of Tappen, British Columbia." Probably some place in the back end of nowhere, Bill. He also asked me not to print the part of his letter saying how much he'd grown to loathe his novel, in case his editor, Terry Carr, happened to see it. Your wish is my command, Bill.), and John Shirley (who was sent a copy by person unknown, and whose letter I've mislaid), and Bill Rostler, who sent cartoons, and if anyone wants some passed on, an A5 SAE will do the trick), and Jon Wallace, and Mal Ashworth (who recommended Mark Vonnegut's THE EDEN EXPRESS -- or the latter part of it --



for its view of schizoid experience), and Joy Hibbert, and Steve Green, and Colin Greenland (who sent a list of J.C. Ballard's "Concrete Island Discs"), and David Rodd (who promised, I see, to buy me a pint at Milford --- but didn't), and Michael Ashley ("There's too much blind praise written about Dick; I'd appreciate it if someone could point out exactly why his novels are so great and good --- but without resorting to dodgy emotional appeals." I dunno. I don't think criticism can engender a response in the reader that isn't there --- or at least, can only do so very rarely. If you don't have the response no amount of criticism is going to illuminate it for you.), and Joseph Nicholas (who seems inhibited by the feeling that everyone stomps on his whenever he opens his mouth in fanzines these days), and Bob Shaw (Scots version, in the days before the great Albacon split, who made some good points about the Falklands, jingoism and the wearing of weapons at conventions --- I hope the Albacon II Mark II committee stick by their weapons policy), and Dave Garnett (who was drunk as usual, and rambled on about Love --- the group not the concept), Paul Skelton (who hardly liked any of the authors on my list of approved writers for the fannish fan --- only Gene Wolfe, in fact. Well, there was a certain ideological slant to the list, naturally. These are the authors I like; I'm a fannish fan; therefore these are the authors fannish fans like. Yes indeed, D.), Pete Lyon, Alun Harries, Owen Whiteoak (who screwed his chances of my printing part of his long letter by recycling it into a fanzine of his own first) and Bruce Townley, and Taral Wayne, and Alan Ferguson, and Brian Earl Brown, who said "I can't believe that Leroy Kettle can get away with what he writes in "Open Flie" or that you get away with publishing it. This isn't "just good fun", it borders on the vicious." Coupled with Brian's complaint to E'SILON about the appalling cruelty of Leroy's attack there on John Brosnan, this has had a salutary effect....

### BRIAN TRANSPLANT

by Leroy Kettle

Only a few moments should be spent mourning the demise of "Open Flie", drowned in the flood of criticism from fat American twerp Brian Earl Brown, who failed to find anything amusing in the column and evidently sicked up his hominy grits in disgust at the fact that "Open Flie" told the real truth about fandom. Over-sensitive editor and one-time friend Malcolm (Ed) Weeds sent the dreaded Improvement Notice to me only yesterday, apparently seeking to placate the bloated colonialist who seems to have unheard-of power over people who may shortly be seeking TAPF nominations. Who is this spot-encrusted nerd and why should his slimy testicles infiltrate the quiet backwaters of British fandom? He should stick to playing corn-pone at the five-and-dime, or whatever it is that Americans do when they're not squeezing slime out of their zits.

But talk of slime makes me think of John Brosnan, who I spoke to recently as he sobbed in his wine because they were closing down the drinking club he used to frequent (under the arches at Charing Cross). But a few quick quips about cancer soon cheered him up and he told me in all-too-lurid detail about his latest novel, a horror quickie called OOZE IN FIRST, The Life and Times of a Creature of Slime. Ever since the Problem-I-Cannot-Name first manifested itself

in John, he has been fascinated by every aspect of slime, and only the perspicacity of his editors has prevented the world from having to remainder SLIME IN THE CINEMA, THE SLIME PEOPLE, MOVIE SLIME, FUTURE SLIME, MARTIAN SLIME-TIP and SLIMESHIP. Of course, he has long been a fan of much-adored authoress Hackie Lichtenbrag because of her Slime novels. I really can't bring myself to disillusion the pathetic fool.

Mention of hacks immediately brings to mind Rob Holdstock. He confided in me recently the extremes of his financial situation. I promised not to reveal every last detail of the depths to which he has sunk, but there has been talk of renaming the National Debt the Robert Black Hole. Since then, Rob has solved his problems quite sensibly by opening his own bank. The Holdstock and Sons Spermbank is all one could ask for in such a venture, from the simple elegance of its doormat bearing the slogan "Well, Come!" to its tactful and stylishly dressed wanklerks. "No rubber cheques here," said Robert, "only rubbers. And although the customers can be a bit of a handful, they always come first." After pretending to chortle at the rather childish double entendres of one of the sexual revolution's oldest mercenaries, I left discreetly clutching my unused apparatus which was, as usual, in a state of sluglike repose.

However, that was not the case for long because of a sudden and unexpected invitation to the final dinner at the Milford Science Fiction Backbiting and Repressed Violence Group to replace Rob himself, whose shortage of orthodox currency and abundance of onrushing deadlines had caused him to withdraw. (It all helps.) Expecting an uninhibited evening I arrived early to get a good place but, contrary to my hopes, everything was sweetness and light, possibly due to the presence of many effete men and easily amused females. Nevertheless, the evening was far from unenjoyable, with an abundance of post-prandial sexual innuendo leading to rather indiscreet and physical approaches, resulting finally in what I was later told was a Heap. A Heap is a rather nice experience, though just a little heavy on the dry-cleaning bills. Later, we spilt into groups of two and three and entered into Moorcock discussions late into the night.

Awaking in the morning, tired but pleasantly swollen, I was reminded of the last Unicon (indeed, the last one ever apart from the next and subsequent ones). But those memories are privilege: I promised the moose, the avocado and the bogey that my lips would eventually remain sealed. The three memories which I can share with you, however, are firstly of D. West's extraordinary success at the only game at which I have ever seen him perform well. Visions of darts thrown into barmen, of shredded and stained baize on pool tables, of roulette wheels thrown discus-like through nearby croupiers — all were cast aside as D. played and played again, as though born to it, "Cutting Cards and Losing Pound Notes". I frequently had to leave to take stacks of pound notes to my room after D. lost them like a master in round after incredible round. Secondly, I recall Garry Wobb, aging lothario (official), lounge-lizard and one time star of "Open Flie", who broke the habits of a lifetime by remaining silent for two seconds. This was ~~is~~ mourning after the fixative on his new Deeley Bobber toupe failed. However, Garry, whose zany toupes and scintillating conversation have long been the laughing stock of fandom, claimed that his sudden baldness was only a particularly wide parting. Thirdly, the grand reopening of British Fandom's very own Mr British Fandom, Peter Roberts, took place at Unicon. Currently possessor of a mortgage and a haircut borrowed from an impoverished bankclerk, Peter was still wearing the all-day jim-jams for which he is known in places as far apart as Torquary. However, Peter's presence may only have been a temporary aberration in his attempt to reap the harvest of commercial greed as Gardening Editor for David & Charles, publishers of D. Langford and owners of G. Charnock. — Leroy Kettle

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## CONTENTS

Front Page Drive-In News/ (editor's small bit).....	1
Asking For It/ (Chris Atkinson).....	3
Dog Days/ (Chris Evans).....	10
Performance/ (D. West).....	17
Loc.Cit./ (the readers in brief).....	53
Brian Transplant/ (Leroy Kettle).....	56

Cover by Pete Lyon

\* \* \* \* \*

Thanks this issue go to Pete Lyon, for drawing a cover at very short notice and to John Harvey for printing it at even less notice; to Deek West for curbing his natural tendency towards verbosity and never using six words when 600 would do; and to Rob Hansen for letting me use his duplicator while he reads the stencils. Last stencil typed 2nd November 1982. 58 in 4½ days? That's not too many.

\* \* \* \* \*

TAPPEN supports Avedon Carol for TAFF and Blackpool for the 1984 Eastercon. Both causes eminently worthy of your support.

\* \* \* \* \*

Next issue when I've recovered from this one.

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