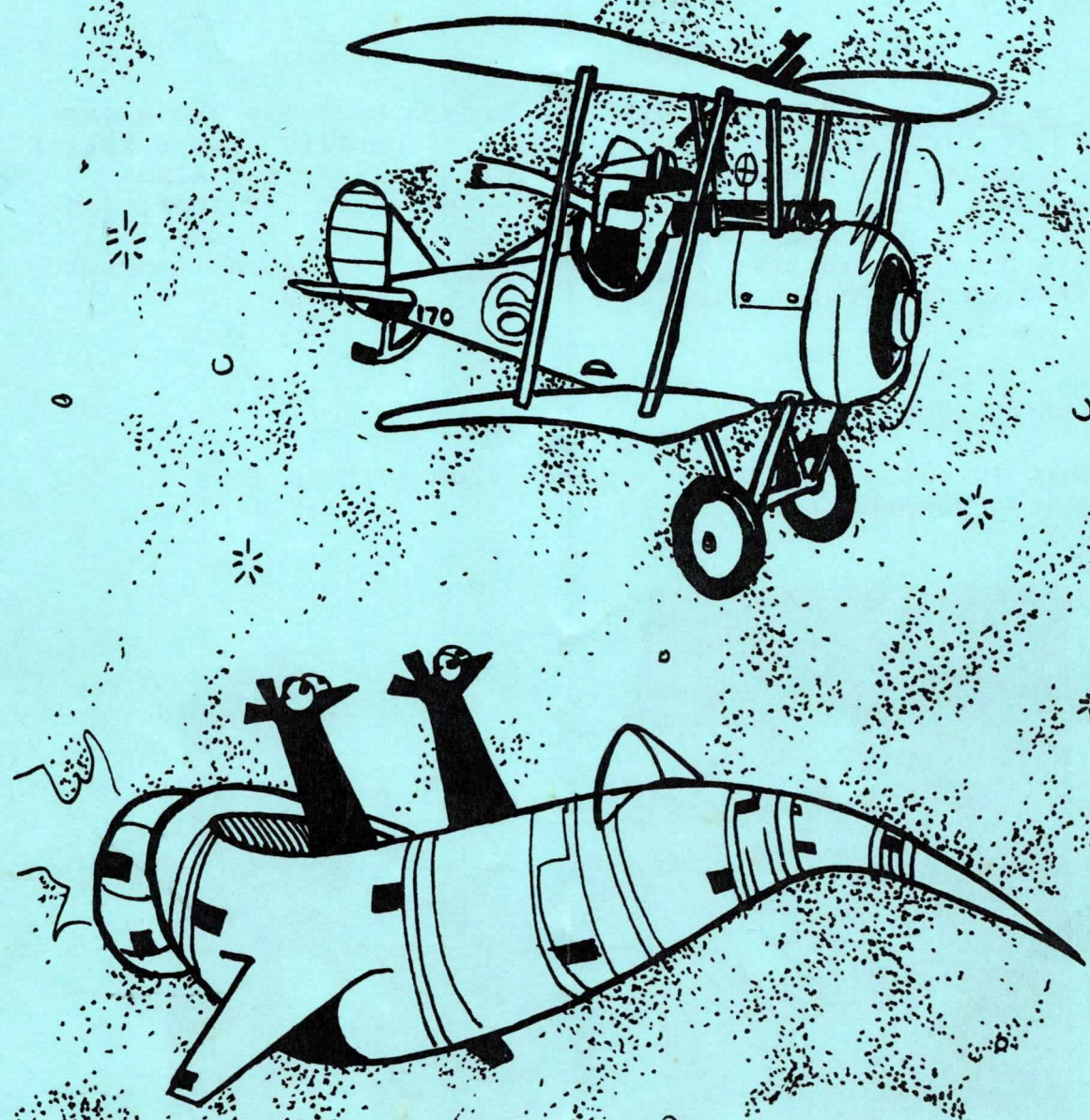


WHEN
VYSTER
WAS ONE



'THESE
BAFFS!'

ANNISH

ALDISS : CLARKE : BRUNNER

This is the first annish of XYSTER: number six in a series...

It comes to YOU from:-

DAVE WOOD
1 FRIARY CLOSE
MARINE HILL
CLEVEDON
AVON
BS21 7QA
ENGLAND

It is dedicated to Terry Hill and Joseph Nicholas who along with Le Corbusier, Paul Rand, Massimo Vignelli, Joseph Müller-Brockmann, Otl Aicher, Edwin Taylor, Frank Ariss, Alan Fletcher, Willy Fleckhaus, Will Hopkins, Karl Gerstner, Jan Tschichold, Bradbury Thompson, Walter Bernard, Ed Day, and Louis Silverstein have failed utterly in having any tangible effect on design and layout.

Cover by ATom.

Thanks to all contributors without whom nothing would be possible.



ASHWORTH and CLARKE demonstrate
the lost art of showing a true
SENSE OF WONDER.

but right now its so quiet you could hear a pin drop.

Quote from Pamela Boal:-

....the weight of malevolent thoughts will be emanating from certain quarters. Happily those hysterical days seem to have passed now but I can recall a time when even highly intelligent well balanced people were afraid to speak out against Scientology let alone its leader. People honestly believed that the cult had a sufficiency of powerfully placed members to ruin careers, create financial ruin, affect children's academic results etc etc...

NOW I know why things have been going so awfully wrong!
It all started the week I mailed out XYSER 5 with the infamous Langford article. Brenda was struck down by some twentieth cent. manifestation of the Black Plague or similar, and I contracted to refurbish the kitchen. What I actually agreed to do was replace a few tiles but like Topsy it just grew and grew until I was faced with a complete redesigning of the whole room.

Sunday morning found me up to my armpits in formica, pine doors, lengths of two-by-one (as we say in the trade) and a representative cross sample of the entire range of Black and Decker electrical DIY equipment.

Things were not going too well. If you ever feel inclined to upgrade your kitchen from the old 500mm standard to the with-it 1980's 600mm units consult me first! What essentially happens is that the extra 100mm all round has a closing in effect and you suddenly find that the old bits and pieces which you were of course going to use again (such minor items as solid pine doors) will no longer fit as they did before. I made this remarkable scientific discovery after I had reached the point of no return. (Of such things are Slans made.)

I had blithely ripped away all the old narrow surfaces, unscrewed the framework from the walls and reset them in a forward position to take the shiny new tops I had bought at an incredibly bargain price. Quietly admiring my skill and dexterity I screwed the tops into position. Then I picked up the first door.

Lo! I aint got the space. Only too obvious if you think about it.

So I wsa faced with resiting the odd upright and sawing the ends off alternate doors.

The Curse of Elron was winning.....

Still, every cloud has a silver lining as they say and Monday's post included a letter from Joseph about his lack of comments on the prevoius two issues of XYSER. Worth quoting, I feel.

'I didn't say anything about the contents of XYSER because I didn't have the time.....Yours is not the only fanzine that suffers in this fashion and many others never responded to at all....other things strike me of greater importance; and in any case my life does not revolve entirely around fandom. So - arrogant though this might sound - I suggest you should perhaps look on the bright side, in that you were lucky to get a letter from me at all.....Be in London on 9 June 1984.'

I was somewhat puzzled by the cryptic reference to June 9.

I thought about it a lot.

The only celebration I could bring to mind was that it was on or around that date in 1925 that Louis Armstrong went to New York and recorded 'Shipwrecked Blues' with vocalist Clara Smith and Fletcher Henderson on piano. Not that I could see Joseph being such a rabid Clara Smith fan.

Now if he'd said June 16 I'd have understood.

As indeed would Joy.

I came across something she penned to 'Wing Window' which set me thinking.

JOY HIBBERT: I got a better insight into the literary quality vs. entertainment argument after talking to Terry Hill at the September Fun. And I suspect, without wishing to sound snobbish, that it's a question of how much and what sort of education you had. Older fans, from the time when the science was first and the fiction was second, would either have had a more scientific education, or at least a less literary one. Younger fans tend to a wider range of education, but with a leaning towards English Lit as one of the subjects. Older fans (and those younger fans with little education or a scientific one) read only for very shallow entertainment, what you could call trainjourney novels. I realised this talking to Terry Hill and trying to explain the satisfaction that some fans, including myself, get from discussing a book, taking its plot, etc., apart and interpreting unclear bits of it. They can't see the satisfaction that I get, for example, in reading a book that is slightly heavy going, but makes me feel as if I've learned something, or gained something to think about, at the end. I suspect these less literary fans enjoy things that are little more than action-adventure novels, or the form of sf where the invention is the protagonist, instead of the novel being about the effects the invention (or whatever) has on society. Since they cannot understand why anyone would want to read anything heavier, I suppose they feel threatened by this apparent greater intelligence, and thus want to make it clear that they believe real fans aren't interested in this sort of thing.

Um, well..... anyway that is how I know she wouldn't have let the sixteenth drift by unmarked by at least some small display of emotion in the market place of Stoke.....

It did bite home about how these actual littry now-time fans can talk so learnedly about the deeper meanings in McCaffrey, Tolkien, Wolfe (and Barry Longyear I don't doubt); leaves us iggerent folk wallowing in the slips, kinda.

I suppose in my case it was only to be expected, as I had a deprived start to my life anyway. Anyone who grew up in an area with the evocative district name of The Marsh could expect no truck on the Deb circuit, I can tell you! Not that I didn't get an education. I was by the age of nine what they now call in trendy quarters 'street wise'. The Marsh as the name implies was a bit of a tough backwater. My most vivid memories are of the Sunday walk to church - an event which I dreaded. It wasn't the attending of church that upset me but the fact that I had to pass the end of Chestnut Grove. Ah, what a name, redolent of Arcadia and all that was good when it was built in the mid-thirties. By nineteen forty five it was a place even Hitler was glad he had never had to invade.

For it was there I would be confronted by the local chapter of the Mafia. They would watch me; in fear and loathing, bedecked in Sunday finery, hair slicked down, face scrubbed pink. It followed the same pattern every Sunday. As I drew level the leader would grunt an obcenity and call me over. Like the mongoose facing the snake I would be drawn towards this Little Caesar. He would then demand money. I mean they knew I had money. I always had money on a Sunday. For the church collection. It may have been only a penny. But it was the principle - they had to take what was available. But I learned fast. Before setting off I would hide a penny in my shoe. It made me limp a little but the gang were not the sort to be put off by a cripple. Not even on a Sunday. In my jacket pocket I would carry two half pennies. This was an example of animal cunning on my part. I had found that if I carried a penny when I handed it over the leader would take it for himself leaving the rest of the gang in a sullen mood; this they took out on me by a little roughing up. Two halfpennies split the group up nicely. The leader would take one and the gang would squabble about the other. At this point I would silently slide away. It was an interesting fact that on my return from church I would pass unhindered and indeed if the day were a particularly sunny one I might even get a cheerful wave.

Despite it all I did manage to read learn to read and write. One day I stumbled across and fell in love with SF. One small claim to fame must be that I was the first person to take out the 'Lord of the Rings' from the town library. I was also the last for many a month. It was that popular. Until I persuaded two of my friends to read it. Then they languished again unread and unwanted....

How I ever managed to convince those two to read the damn thing I can't for the life of me remember. I'm sure it wasn't because I was able to elaborate on the subtle underlying depths of meaning beyond the storyline. And I never acquired a good grasp of Elvish or whatever. Come to think

of it, like Joseph, I had other things on my mind. Like reading all I could get of Steinbeck, Hemmingway, Faulkner, Elliott, Thurber, Snow, Hardy, Zola, Dunsany, O'Hara, Bennett, Mailer, Lewis, Schulberg, Huxley, Poe, Pasternak, Shaw, Wolfe (Thomas), Thomas, Saroyan, Camus, Becket, Kantor, Kersh, Dos Passos, Himes, Balchin, Sansom, Donleavy, Mykle, O'Flaherty, Hughes, Munthe, Williams, Nabokov, Gaskell, Wodehouse, O'Connor, O. Henry, Durrell, Greene, Balzac, Conrad and so on and so forth. By god but those chaps could knock out a ripping yarn when they put their minds to it! It didn't improve my Elvish, but I had a hell of a good time. Oh, and of course I discovered June 16.

As coincidence will, my thoughts were barely fading with regard to the sixteenth when I had a letter from the Harp himself.

..... invite your readers to suggest titles for fanzine articles they would find irresistably enticing. This thought was put into my mind by the realisation that of any one thousand fanzine article titles, one billed as Dave and Brenda Wood in Torremolinos would be seductive in the extreme. That I was not disappointed is the highest compliment I can pay. I think there should be a fund established among your readers to send you and Brénda to other places at the most possible frequent intervals.

Madeleine and I haven't actually been to Torremolinos but we went once to Palma Nova in Majorca, and even in October it was intolerably crowded and noisy, presumably like Torremolinos; a nice enough place if it weren't for the people and buildings. It was so awful that we shut up our apartment and went on a local package tour to Ibiza. We landed in a freezing rainstorm, about the same time as our luggage was landing in Barcelona, and our hotel was scruffy to a degree unimaginable to anyone whose experience of Spanish hotels is confined to those approved by British tour operators. However next day the sun came out and we walked for miles along a deserted shore, shedding clothes as it steadily grew warmer, until we bathed in our underclothes. It was lovely, and our sense of remoteness was soon heightened by a Spanish airline strike, leaving us marooned in Ibiza while no doubt the tour operator representative was battering the door of our apartment in Majorca. Eventually we got the inter-island boat back, a delightful little minicruise in a ship which left the Irish Sea ferry in the Charon-Styx class. Altogether this little holiday within a holiday was the nicest we ever had. Subsequently though the operators seem to have got their horrible act together, to the extent that all Balearic Island resorts are either full up or closed down. So in recent years we've taken to going to the Canaries in mid-Winter, and I would like to nominate for your next holiday destination to be written up, Puerto de la Cruz in Tenerife. I should explain that we never go away in the summer because there is nowhere nicer than Donaghadee in fine weather.

Maybe, just maybe one day we will try there Walt. But for the moment we seem to be favouring the wonderful country of Yugoslavia.

This year we will be going there for the third year in a row. It is a wonderful place with fine scenery, honest people and an inflation rate that makes the pound go a long way. They also have a fine National Health service.

I know because I had a close encounter with the system when we were over there last year.....

Sunday 07.30 a.m. I awake to find I have gone deaf overnight.

My wife smiles smugly. She has often voiced the opinion that I need some form of hearing aid. (She's wrong - I have very good hearing; it's just that sometimes I "switch off" and become completely absorbed in what I am doing - it's on those occasions that the accusations arise!)

But in this instance it is SERIOUS. A dull pain in the head, the faint sound of the ringing of bells and, when moving, a feeling of walking on egg shells.

"You'd better see the doctor", my wife yells into my left ear. We are standing on the terrace of our hotel room. Her loud statement causes heads to turn. Fortunately 75% of the guests are German and if they understand English they are hiding the fact behind passive faces. However the four likely lads from Oxford nod wisely; doubtless I am proof of the fact that 46 is over the hill for that form of activity. Especially in 98° of heat.

"But we're in Yugoslavia", I yell back. It is an interesting phenomenon - speaking when you can't clearly hear. You tend to raise the decibel level to alarming limits.

09.20 Nevertheless her advice is sound and I find myself outside Orebič hospital clutching a note in Serbo-Croat and a British passport. Imagine, if you will, a large white walled room. Down one side windows with the sun streaming in. On the opposite wall a series of six doors all inscrutably marked. On the window side a row of chairs, all empty. In the centre of the room a milling throng of Dalmatians, Germans, and Italians all talking at the tops of their voices. (Mercifully I can't hear this babble. It is like watching a foreign film on TV with the sound turned down. All that is missing is that stream of sub-titles flashing on and off.) Every so often the throng splits, as does an amoeba answering the mating call; a small group hurl themselves across the room and throw open one of the doors. Gesticulations occur and brief glimpses of the interiors of small rooms are allowed. These include examination couches with (sometimes) naked patients under medical scrutiny. A nurse ushers the group out of the room and I notice they are thrusting pieces of paper into her hand. Something significant is happening but I feel like a stranger in a strange land.

09.50 Door Two bursts open and an imposing figure, clad in a white smock and shod in white wooden clogs, emerges. The stethoscope around his neck gives a suggestion of his calling. He is immediately surrounded by the sick, lame and lazy. Imperiously thrusting them aside he strides towards Room One. The crowd mills again but no-one follows. Seizing my chance I leap after him and tug his gown. He turns and speaks. My blank face and outstretched hand unnerves him and he dives into Room One. I am not to be deterred and follow. The lady suffering an exceedingly pregnant condition and standing naked on a weighing machine doesn't seem at all pleased and gives me a withering stare. "English", I mutter hoarsely, face reddening under my tan. Still determined I thrust my Serbo-Croat missive under his nose. He actually reads it while I ponder a poster detailing the most intimate details of a Dalmatian giving birth. "Sit", he sternly tells me in best Woodhouse manner and propels me out of the door. I do walkies back across the waiting room. The embarrassed face now has a faint flush of triumph. I have surmounted one obstacle.

10.30 Door One opens, my pregnant friend emerges and, surprise, the doctor indicates I should enter. The crowd mills again and looks at me ominously. The doctor probes and pokes in my ears with apparent expertise. "Blocked", he shouts. "Wax. Sand. Syringe." And he ushers me back out to my seat. "Stay. See doctor Room Two." I am alone again.

11.15 By now I am examining my fellow patients in detail. Here stands a man with a deep gash on the inside of his thigh. There is a young girl sporting a large gauze bandage on her head. On the floor, an infant with nappy rash. An old lady, foot in plaster, mutters to herself. Faces reflect the dull feelings of waiting and hurting in their individual ways. I sigh. I am becoming quite maudlin.

11.25 Door Two opens. A nurse emerges. "Wod!" Even I can hear her cry. Nobody moves. "Wod!" she screams again. I realise she is grappling with the intricacies of my name. I raise my arm. "Doctor. See you" she shouts. I enter Room Two. There is an examination couch and a desk as the only furniture. Behind the desk all attentive sits the doctor. The same doctor I saw in Room One. He smiles. "Sit." I sit in silence as he fills in a large form glancing first at my passport then at me, then at the note I had given him. Finally. "Good. Sit. See doctor, Room Three." I am in the waiting room again.

11.45 The crowd is diminishing. Those in the know are disappearing through inexplicable means. Others continue to bang on doors, intrude into rooms and shout at each other.

11.55 The nurse is shouting again. I am being invited to enter Room Three. Amazing! My friendly neighbourhood doctor is standing, feet apart, a large primitive syringe in his hand. "Sit", he indicates with his free hand. Heavy pressure in my ear. "POP," and the world is returning to normal. "POP". I sigh in satisfaction. "Good. Good" - the nurse is examining two large waxy plugs floating in a surgical tray. The doctor smiles and pats me on the back. "Sit. Wait. Room 4."

12.15 The place is empty except for a studious German in black leather shorts painfully holding a surgical wad against some unseen laceration on his right nostril. Room 4 opens and my favourite medic is standing there. He beckons me in. "Infection" he says and pulls out a prescription pad. I am to go to the pharmacy. He ushers me out and waves a cheery goodbye.

This then is the Yugoslavian Health Service. One hospital, one nurse, five doors, one doctor. What lies behind the fifth door I ponder as I trudge away?

One final note. The total cost of the whole affair? Eight dinars, roughly five pence. Now that's what I call a National Health Service!

Um, OK some of you probably saw that bit in 'Shallow End' some time ago.

One final thought Walt, this walking along the beach casting off your Irish woolies - who went back and picked 'em up afterwards? It reminded me of the time many years ago when the two kids were about three or four years old. We were then driving a triumph herald convertible. The kids had two little mothercare bucket seats in the back and we used to strap them in, throw back the hood and bowl merrily through the countryside, wind in face, hair blowing in abandon, sun beating down. One day we were rudely interrupted in our method of communicating with nature by the incessant blaring of a car horn. The road hog behind obviously wanted to pass. I determined he wouldn't and for the next mile or so kept a steady speed just enough to thwart him. Eventually I tired of this childish passion and drew to one side waving him on with two fingers. Imagine my horror when he pulled in front of me and flagged me down. I leapt out of the herald, shouting to the wife, "Watch the kids!" fearing this troublemaker might do anything.

It was then that I saw the kids....stark naked. But happy.

"Where are your clothes?" I screamed.

"That's what I've been trying to attract your attention for," murmured the vicar as he approached. "They've been casting them over the back of the car for the last two or three miles.

We spent a long time retrieving them all.....

Meanwhile back in the kitchen.....I ran out of grouting gunge. The nearest stockist was fifteen miles away (what comes of living in the outback) swift car journey down the M5 gets me to the door of the best superstore and I quickly conclude a deal on a couple of buckets of the stuff. Back home when I prised the lid off I found to my horror that the makers had packet the wrong colour or ... put the wrong label on the tin or whatever....another dash down the M5 brought me up against a very helpful store assistant. "What's wrong with this then?" "It's the wrong colour." "What colour did you want then?" "Sun King." "This is Sun King." "No it isn't." "Yes, if it says Sun King on the label then it is Sun King." "Wrong." "Now look sir..." He's beginning to look threatening. But I won't backpedal. "Look I bought a tin of Sun King last week. I've done half my kitchen with it. I want to finish that kitchen. In Sun King. The Sun King I got here last week!" "You must have got a wrongly packed tin last week sir. This is definately Sun King." "How do you know." "I t s a y s s o o n t h e l a b e l." "It said so on the label last week." "Ah, then that must have been a mistake in the labeling department." "Not like this tin then?" "No sir..."

JB

Side Spring Corsets

The Corsets of Distinction.



I was desperate. And snatched a tin labeled Sun King off the shelf and started to prise the lid off. "Just one moment sir, you can't do that unless you are purchasing the item." "PPFWHAFF" and off came the lid. I let out a little yelp of triumph. "That's Sun King." I screamed. "I will get the manager." "Why." "Tampering with store goods. Very serious." And away he trotted. I prised the lid off another tin. MY Sun King again. I WAS RIGHT, I WAS RIGHT.

I realised of course that it was ELRON again and felt obliged to maintain my cool when the manager arrived. "Ah, sir," he beamed, "I see you got caught out on our faulty stock of Sun King. Never mind take your pick. Tell you the truth we are not entirely sure ourselves as to which is the REAL Sun King anyway."

Enough to make one turn to drink. Except I received a copy of 'Intermediate Vector Bosons 4' from Harry Andruschak.

Harry says: "On March 17 I left St Luke's Hospital. I went to my car and started it up, still trying to remember that this was the first day of the rest of my life. "My life as a recovering alcoholic."

What follows is the story of his descent into this state and his recent attempts at rehabilitation.

It is a depressing catalogue of events stretching over a twenty year period with a consumption of a bottle of whisky a night, and

several at weekends.

"This is not what I anticipated 20 years ago, when at the age of 19 I had my first beer in the Enlisted Men's Club at the Great Lakes Naval Training Centre. Now I was age 39 and thinking of suicide."

He was admitted to SHARE (St Luke's Hospital Alcoholism Rehabilitation and Education Unit.) Here he was detoxified. Injected with magnesium disulfide, to prevent convulsions and seizures, he took the Cold Turkey cure.

I can only wish him well in his future fight and perhaps some of you out there will write to him in friendship; he's going to need all he can get. He might not write back but at least we can show him we care.

But enough of this editorial mumblings lets get to the meaty stuff.....What? The Kitchen? Oh, that is finished EXCEPT for a tiny - well two inch diameter-hole which I have kinda left skulking behind the taps. Seems the template provided with the sink unit and the taps wasn't for the ones I had bought. I carefully cut out the shapes in the positions indicated, fit the sink nice and snug like and then found the taps couldn't be turned on because the tap tops fouled the wall.....so I had to cut another hole about three inches forward. It all works a treat now but somehow the two inch hole tends to offend Brenda's aesthetic sensibilities. I've told her I'll think of something but as yet the solution escapes me. I'm open to sensible suggestions.....

Best Dave



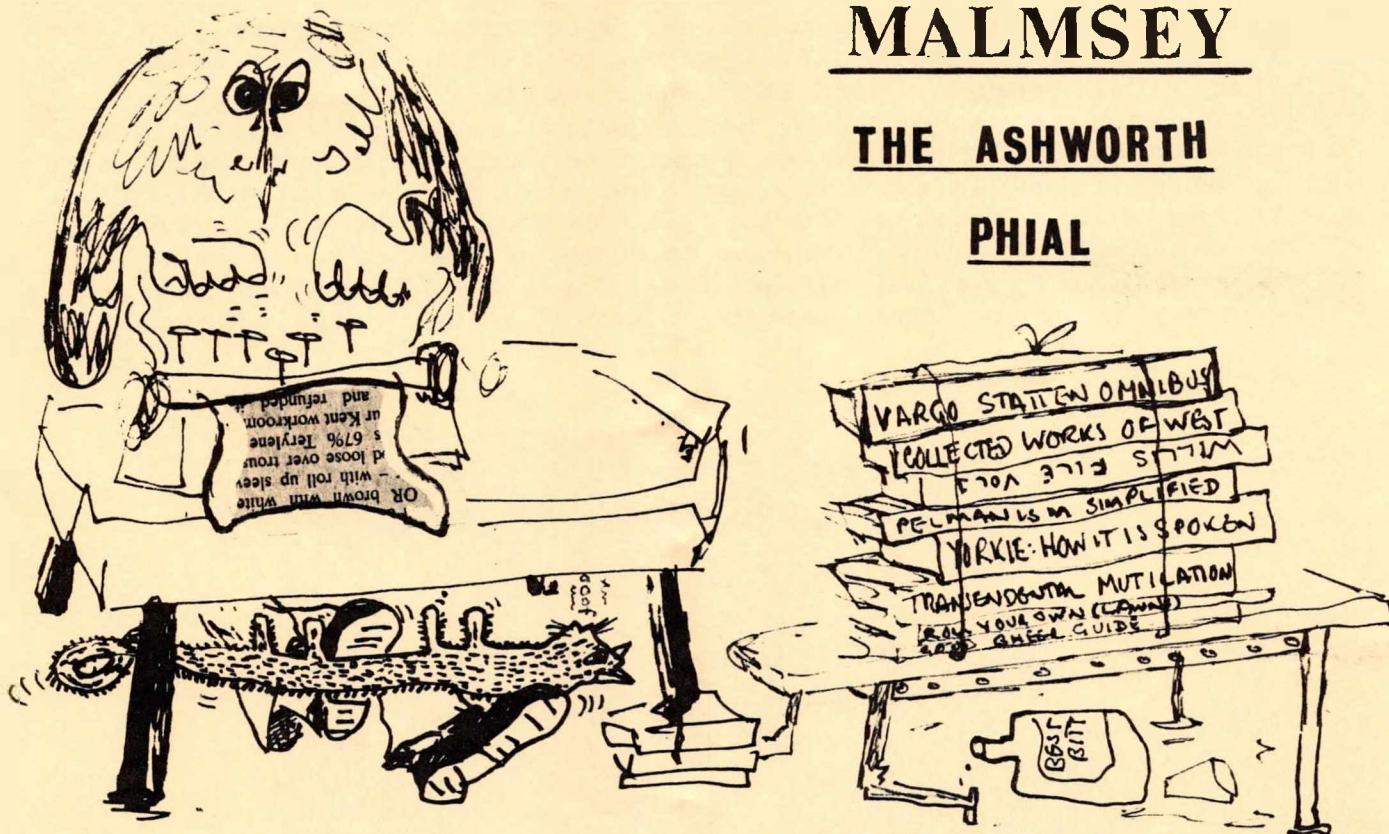
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MALMSEY

THE ASHWORTH

PHIAL



I reckon my ambition to be a Bingo Caller formed when I used to overhear this activity taking place on Sunday nights when Hazel did a stint as barmaid at the local Working Men's Club. If you've ever come across Bingo being played in earnest you will know that the terrifying old biddies who 'play' (ha!) it put into it considerably more gravity and ferocity than the SAS put into storming a hijacked nuclear submarine. And they never listen to the actual numbers called! Each number has attached to it a catch phrase which is all they need; like, for instance, - 'Kelly's Eye - Number One', 'Legs - eleven', 'All the sixes - sixty six', 'Unlucky for some - number thirteen', not quite ad infinitum, but very nearly. Thus it was that I conceived a burning desire to have a go at this job and introduce a little novelty and variety - yes, a little mystery even - into the whole procedure. Thus and thus goes my harmless little fantasy: "All right, ladies, hold onto your hats, here we go. And the first one out is all the sixes - number fourteen. And here we go again now, and it's those legs - thirty-three. Keep your eyes down, ladies, here comes Kelly's Eye - number nine, and following that it's unlucky for some - number twenty-eight", and so weiter.

Yup, if life ever gets too much for me - like maybe when the subscriptions fail to come pouring in after a murderous review of the fabled Rot No.6 in one of those Empire-shaking BSFA thingumties - that's what I'm going to do. A lot more efficient than putting your head in the gas oven - even if you severed it first. And it would save on funeral costs, too. I reckon all you'd ever find would be a thin red line extending all the way round to the British Legion.

I think the point which interests me most about the assaults on residents of the Brighton 'Metropole' (not all of them Seacon attendees) by the grubby little juveniles who had decided to play out their 'Security Guard' fantasies, is the damage it does to the hotel - and the much greater damage it could so very easily have done. For starters, I think a lot of us are going to want some cast-iron assurances

of better management to ensure that these kind of assaults will not take place again, before the 'Metropole' lands another SF convention. But it could all too easily have been much worse than that, and the hotel could have found it difficult to land lots of other conferences as a result of some untoward incident. Imagine, for example, a situation where some unwashed, semi-unclad, leather-decorated youth had grabbed hold of Hazel as we walked through the lobby. Before either of us realised anything was happening he would have had his arm broken or his shoulder dislocated. Difficult not to imagine one of the other officious goons then calling in the police - at which point I would have called in the press, and made sure they got a very lurid story to print. Even better, perhaps, imagine one of these ill-



mannered youngsters grabbing a hold of Horror-author (take the description how you will) six-foot, crop-haired, ex-Squaddie-sergeant Brian Lumley. I leave you to do your own visuals for that one. Neither happened, but that was just good luck; and while, if they had happened, some of us might have been inconvenienced, the 'Metropole' would have been the real loser.

On to more interesting things. I just happened to break off to read a little of the newly-arrived Wing Window. And that got me to thinking about D. West. And Terry Hill. You know, despite their little differences, I can't help thinking of them as brothers under the skin. I mean, for one thing they both look back to Walt Willis as a Fannish Father Figure. Terry, like any good son, tries to emulate his father's achievements; Don, the Prodigal, the rebel son, feels the need to attack and denigrate his father. But this is just the individual paths taken by their youthful high spirits. Clearly they both feel the same filial fascination. Oedipus, I'm sure, would have understood.

Dave's correspondents are quite right, of course, about editorial deficiencies too little and too much editing in the middle, near the beginning and, sometimes, at the end. What is

needed is more and less comments at the conclusion, round about the centre and, sometimes, at the start. That should take care of it. (Note, though, that this should all be in words, except to use anything else such as illustrations, chewing gum, Rorshach blots, Elastoplast or indigo-coloured haemorrhoid cream.) In actual fact it occurs to me that editorial practice in general these days is pretty plodding and old-fashioned and has not kept pace with New Wave after New Wave which has splattered its jotsam and fletsam over the terminal beach of the actual writing scenario. Or seraglio. I mean, it was a goddamn lifetime and a half ago, was it not (write your rhetorical answer to this rhetorical question on a rotary piece of off-white silicon chip paper and flush it down the loo) - it was a fairish while ago, weren't it, when benevolent Uncle William Tell (it to the coroner) Burroughs devised his tear-up, throw-up, paste-up and f -up random method of novel writing ? But do we see any evidence of this in the wild and wacky world of editing? NO. (At least I think that's the right answer.)

You don't need me to tell you (as people always say when they intend to tell you anyway) that the next stage is to cut up every contribution to Xyster into its individual words, put them all in a big bucket, pull them out at random, one at a time, paste them up (not forgetting to double them up every once in a while for added piquancy; we wouldn't want the magazine to lose its own special je ne sais quoi. Oh dearie me, no) and run off 500 copies. The next stage after that, of course, is to sell them to a Papier Mache Merchant (you'll find plenty of them in Papier Machu Pichu) and use the proceeds to take out a subscription to Epsilon.

Quite apart from all the staggeringly good advice it contains the foregoing paragraph has one other inestimable quality which may have escaped your notice. That is - it should get a letter from Ted White, and maybe others, telling how all these words come pouring out of me in such a turbulent torrent, such a non-stop Niagara (which is to say, in something slightly more complex than a Waltz of the Wombats, 1 - 2 - 3, 1 - 2 - 3 rhythm) because I never spoke to anyone or wrote anything down during my 20 year trial separation from fandom. So all these words were bottled up inside me all that time just waiting to go VATOOM, like some great Cosmic Fart (thus lighting our way to Fartster Than Light transports. Of rapture. Or, in my case, rupture) the minute I got within SPLATTING distance of another fan. There I was, like an over-ripe puffball (keep your cracks to yourself, smartass!), swollen to bursting not, as I thought, with beer, but with sperm (remember the vasectomy) and spellings, like a sausage-skin overstuffed with tadpoles and alphabet-spaghetti. The moment I was prodded with the bare bodkin of fanac I sold my quietus (never could play the damn thing anyway) for a mass of verbiage and went off like a firework display in a Ray Bradbury story. The fallout (or, as some would have it, 'shit') is still coming down, which is why you are being inundated in the pitter-patter of petite prepositions. (However, not all of the letters got out when this Balloon of Babel went DAD! ('POP!' sounds so dated now, don't you think ?). The French ones were the first to go, of course, but at least the tadpoles are still in there minding their 'p's and 'q's (and, if Skel's vision is to be believed, biding their time). NOTE TO THE CONFUSED: Try reading it all just a leetle bit slower than your Laundry List.

John Brunner's 'Tellurium' riddle was a delight, monstrously sticky so that it won't leave the mind and slinks back into consciousness ever and anon. My own mind seems not to work in such devious and clever ways so I offer you, instead, two all-too-simple riddles of the traditional, question-first, type:

- 1) Who lives in an aquarium and robs stagecoaches ?
- 2) Who lives in Lothlorien and sings Rock-and-Roll ?

Onward, ever onward. I can't tell you how remorseful I am to have mystified Joseph Nicholas with that line in my last Xyster- letter - "I can't wait to hear whether Joseph tells you you can't put 'Classic' together with 'neo-Romantic' ", and, of course, I'll do my best to clarify it for him. Really, it was only a superficial little passing thought, but I think it went something like this:

If what we are faced with in certain non-homogeneous conceptual dichotomies is a true synchronic bi-polarisation, to what extent are we justified in maintaining the concretisation of the original connotative implications of the proto-definitional core-features, considered in their primary diachronic location within the linguistic nexus ? Furthermore, by what psycho-linguistic mechanism can we transcend our endemic, teleologically-oriented predictive assumptions, and to what extent may we hope to circumvent the nascent, yet predominantly automotive (some might even wish to say neuro-physiological) projective apparatus in its functional aspect vis-a-vis the ding-an-sich considered as ontological representative of an essentialist symbology ?

I won't go on. As I say, it was just one of those silly, simplistic little passing thoughts which flit through all our heads from time to time, and about which we feel rather shamefaced almost immediately afterwards.

By the way, he asided with never so much as a shadow of a sinister snigger, I thought you might like the following observation on critics and criticism from the PADJASAMGRAHA, a classical Indian text:

"To be only spying out faults in the finest poem, in which connoisseurs find ever fresh delight, is the hobby of the envious. In a pond covered over with the blooming lotus and where flamingoes are cradled, the curlew only hunts for fish."

Another insight into the sophisticated world of the literary critic, which you may like, was provided by one of my erstwhile students in an essay on C. S. Lewis: "In many of the books Lewis does bring in the concept of God either directly or indirectly. His talents did not stop here though, because he also wrote some literary criticism as well".

And while I remember - I suppose the truth is that by now I probably owe Joseph one, and since Fair Play and Upright Decency are veritable watchwords, doncha know, with us Fifties Fans, maybe I should take this opportunity to throw into the air a double handful of ping-pong balls and plastic ducks. Ready and loaded, JN ? I am just now in the middle of a moderately massive sf reading phase (I don't control these phases, they come and go like the weather); currently it ranges good and wide (with several books on the go simultaneously) from Capek to Aldiss via Clarke (Artie, not A.V.), Christopher, Shaw, Priest, Roshwald, etc.,etc. And it includes re-reads. One such gave me renewed respect for John Christopher's THE DEATH OF GRASS as a very competent post-disaster novel. But what I really started out to say - see the pretty ducky-wuckies and the ducky ballsy-wallies ? - was: I am re-confirmed yet again in my view that Simak's CITY is one of the all-time great sf novels to originate from within the genre. DUCK!

Alongside of all that I've been re-sorting my supernatural/horror section, during which operation THE CASE OF CHARLES DEXTER WARD leapt out and - as my young niece would say - grabbed me by the

throat. So I read it. Delightful stuff - and it confirmed me in another opinion from many years ago (senile ossification, here I come) when I completely failed to read Lovecraft, that as a horror author he was a world-class steamroller driver. I mean, where else would you find.

"To call it a dull wail, a doom-dragged whine or a hopeless howl of chorused anguish and stricken flesh without mind would be to miss its most quintessential loathsomeness and soul-sickening overtones" ?

And yet, wouldn't you say, Doctor, that perhaps there was in it also the merest soupcon of abominable angst along with, perhaps, just the slightest snifter of nauseous fungoid degradation ?

Oh, I think you're rather letting your imagination run away with you there, old chap. No, no, I'd have said it was rather more the faintest suggestion of a monstrous psychic agony from beyond the bounds of the known Universe.

(I wonder why I keep getting these images of Albacon breakfasts flitting before my mind's eye ?)

Yes, I get a lot of pleasure out of old HPL. Such a wealth of goodies. For instance, how about the opening lines of 'From Beyond' as a general slogan for us BAFFs - "Horrible beyond conception was the change which had taken place in my best friend, Crawford Tillinghast" ?

Then there's the invitation on the back-cover of the Panther edition of DAGON AND OTHER MACABRE TALES: "Step into a nightmare world of hellish horror". The only appropriate response I can come up with is the response one invariably gets from my brother Clive when offering him anything more adventurous to eat than a chip butty: "Er - not just at the moment, thank you".

I suppose you hardly need me to tell you that one of the books



which the naughty man in THE CASE OF CHARLES DEXTER WOMBAT had been reading was 'THE N.....' ? Now how did you guess ? Well, yes, THE NECRONOMICON of the mad arab, Abdul Alhazred. And that led me to reflect that for all one may take the piss out of old Howard Phillips Loveverbosity he had actually hit upon a very efficient system of fiction-writing. I mean, he only had to start out a story: "One foggy November night an unbelievably ancient Professor of Miskatonic University crouched in a hidden, darkened room in doom-haunted Dunwich poring over that forbidden tome, the abominable NECRONOMICON of the mad arab, Abdul Alhazred" and his whole readership, presumably, would be cowering under the anti-macassar with their hands over their eyes, leaving him free to fill out the rest of the story with recipes for Strawberry Flan.

Anyway, being nothing if not conscientious of my enormous responsibilities as Xyster peripatetic correspondent, I decided that this Arabic gentleman had received all too little appreciation of his efforts. Fandom had been grievously at fault and missed many fine opportunities here. Not only had Al never been featured in a searching interview in either Matrix or Interzone, nor yet been the subject of an 'Abdul Alhazred, This Is Your Life' feature in the Novacon Fanroom, he had not even been invited to take part in an Eastercon Writers & Critics Panel during which certain critics who shall, appropriately, be Nameless would explain to him certain fine points of style and punctuation to be observed without fail in the composition of forbidden and abominable volumes. Worse yet, he had never even been the subject of a Convention Special Video programme entitled 'The Mad Arab Abdul Alhazred meets Joseph Nicholas'. All of which, I concluded, added up to my Great Opportunity. I would give him a tinkle and obtain an exclusive interview for Xyster. The initial contact, I know, is, in such cases, crucial, and I had my patter all neatly worked out. D-R-R-I-N-G, D-R-R-I-N-G, D-R-... "allo ? Yog Sothoth takeaway. Can I 'elp you ?" - "Oh, good morning. Mr Alhazred ? You are the mad arab who wrote the forbidden and abominable NECRONOMICON, aren't you ? Yes ? Jolly good. Well, look here, my name's Mal Ashworth and I wonder if I could just nip round and interview you for the next issue of Xyster ? Our readers would be most interested to know how you came to write the NECRONOMICON, whether writing forbidden and abominable books is a paying business at the present time, what plans you have for a sequel, whether you intend to make it into a trilogy and lots of interesting little things like that. Might even try some of your Abomination-and-chips with curry sauce while I'm there, ha ha"

But the life of a Daring Boy Reporter is not easy these days and the life of a Timid Geriatric Reporter isn't much better; and British Telecom are no help. Despite a moment of rare excitement I drew a complete blank with the Telephone Directory. 'Ahmeds' and 'Alis' there were in plenty, but devil an 'Alhazred' in the whole shebang. Could he possibly be hiding under some plume de guerre ? Or even a nom d'un nom ? 'The Alhambra Restaurant' maybe ? 'Alf's Candles' ? 'Alfresco Garage' ? No, no - alfresco was surely the last thing old Abby would ever be. Perhaps under 'Abdul' then ? 'Abdul Fashions, Ladies' ? No, I think not. My God - it's there ! 'Abdul Take-Away, 24, Tong Street, Bradford.4.' ! He would choose a place with a name of suitably fiendish international connotations like 'Tong' - but how come I never spotted it before; I used to live at 'Tong Cemetery' for 23 years. Number 24 can't be more than a quarter of a mile away. Must have moved in only recently. Jeepers the mind boggles ! Imagine all those devilish dungeons and crypts of monstrous horror even now being excavated under 'Taskers Bakery', 'Hodgson's Fish and Chips' and Fred's bike shop where I used to buy second-hand inner tubes !! What a break ! Here goes. 6-8-1-...." 'allo ?" - "Oh - er - may I speak to Mr

Alhazred please" - " 'oo ?" - "Er - Mr - er - Alhazred ?" -
"Sorry, ducks, you've got the wrong number. Nobody uv that name 'ere"
- "Well - er - Abdul - you know - the - er - proprietor" - "OH!
Abdul! Haw-haw-haw! Sorry about that, luv. Naw, I'm afraid we 'aven't
got an Abdul either. Just me an' me dad, Percy - Percy Throup, 'e's
what you'd call the proprietor" - "But - but - it's called 'Abdul's
Take-Away' isn't it ?" - "Oh, yes, luv, but that's just to capture
the Eff-nic trade around 'ere; make 'em feel at 'ome like when they
come in for their Fish-and Chips twice and bottle o' Pepsi. Gives 'em
a whiff of Karachi along with the salt and vinegar, me dad says" -
"Oh - oh - er - right - thank you" God, what a setback! Could be a
cover-up, I suppose; but somehow it didn't sound like a cover-up.

Oh well, back to the drawing-board; the Yellow Pages, maybe ?
'Let your tentacles do the walking'. Seems appropriate somehow -
'There, hidden amidst the decayed yellow pages.....' But under what ?
Mad Arabs ? Not a chance - nothing between 'Machinery Repairs and
Reconditioning' and 'Magistrates Clerks'. Forbidden Books, authors of ?
Nope, it's either 'Forage Merchants' or 'Fork Lift Trucks'. Getting a
bit desperate now. Abominations, suppliers of ? Sod all betwixt
'Abattoirs' and 'Abrasive Materials'.

And that's as far as I've got, I'm afraid. It rather looks as
though we may have to hold it over for a future issue and fill in
this time with my 48 page feature on D. West (not a bad substitute
for Abdul Alhazred when all said and done) - 'The Secret Life Of The
Yorkshire Ripoff'.

(Incidentally, that was quite genuine back there. After inventing
the 'Yog Sothoth Takeaway' I did actually come across 'Abdul's Take
Away', just like that, in the Bradford Directory.)

I'll tell you this for nothing (but please enclose £50 to cover
postage) - 16, Rockville Drive is rapidly becoming nothing more than
a Wod Sweatshop. Upstairs Hazel's typewriter is clattering away,
masked only by the clattering of my ballpoint pen down here (yes,
another of those nights) - even the cat has got his paws over his
ears - and all churning out stuff for Xyster at a rate to make the
manager of a Taiwanese plastics factory go green-eyed. (An irresistible
combination - green eyes and yellow skin. Well, I've got a reputation
to keep up you know.)

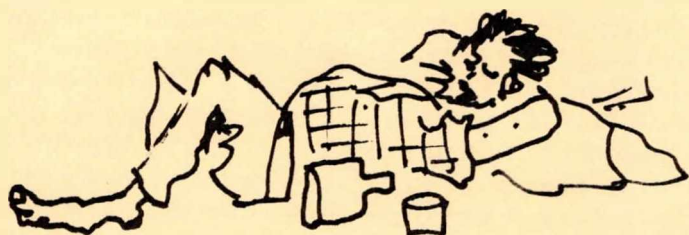
I thought you might also like to know that I happened to bump
into one of your popular female contributors, with the initials H.A.,
over breakfast this morning. "It's all right for you doing all this
fan-writing", she greeted me, "I've got to fit mine in between doing
the washing-up and being screwed." Looks like you've got Union problems
brewing, Boss.

I didn't get chance, while we were all at Vince's the day after
the recent 'Tun' visit, to tell you why I gave you that copy of that
odd-looking U.S. paperback, BLOOD SPORT by Robert F. Jones. Truth to
tell, there isn't much to tell, except that it is maybe my best liter-
ary find in years and, oddly, one about which I've been able to disc-
over nothing at all. (Soon after I discovered Robertson Davies (whose
delightful FIFTH BUSINESS, along with its sequels THE MANTICORE and
WORLD OF WONDERS, was - like BLOOD SPORT - remaindered in its (Star)
paperback edition) he started turning up, accompanied by loud acclaim,
in various critics, and his more recent THE REBEL ANGELS has been
lauded considerably, apparently without reference to its distressing
multi-level sell-out of an ending.) BLOOD SPORT, it seems, was
published in the States, in Dell paperback version, in 1975. There is
no mention of earlier hardback publication, but the paperback does
include quite a lot of very enthusiastic critical notices from such as
'Time', 'The Washington Post', 'The National Observer', etc. Neverthe-
less, large stocks of it seem to have been shipped over here and

remained in Woolworths for peanuts, which is where I found it and what I paid for it. I suppose I was hooked by the opening sentence - "The Hassayampa River, a burly stream with its share of trout, rises in Northern China, meanders through an Indian reservation in central Wisconsin, and empties into Croton Lake not a mile from where I live in southern New York state" - and went on to read it immediately, something I do rarely. I then instantly passed it on to Hazel, who was as knocked out by it as I was, and went back to buy some more copies to give away (something I do very rarely). I have been doing this ever since (it long since left the Wonder of Woolies, of course, but, fortunately, turns up fairly often secondhand, sometimes at even less than the remainder price). My brother, who teaches Eng. Lit. (to judge by his 'O' and 'A' level results, possibly better than anyone else in the country) but rarely reads for pleasure (we argue about 'Hamlet' and Wordsworth, not about B.S. Johnson or Borges) was bowled over by it (and added, I'm happy to say, that he'd hate to have to 'teach' it); Ken Potter, who has a mental block about enthusing over anything I recommend (except possibly THE MOUSE AND HIS CHILD, which I think he now probably overrates) got so carried away as to say it was pretty good (though not, of course, in his inevitable and ubiquitous league-table hierarchies, so good as Tom Robbins' ANOTHER ROADSIDE ATTRACTION, which he had recommended to me.) At College, needless to say, I was sparing as to who I aimed it at, on the theory that if you can't cope happily with John Fowles, you can't cope with BLOOD SPORT (though, had it been in print, I would probably have kicked and screamed if they hadn't let me have it on our 'post-Modernist' syllabus; I settled for the Robbins instead). I did, however, turn on our Dean of Students with it, though perhaps rather less than I had hoped, she being a young and dishy re dhead; mayhap I just planned it badly and was away at some thrilling committee meeting when she came to the passage describing Runner and Twigan's daemonic, mud-spattered coupling. It is immediately after this episode, by the way, that there occurs what I consider to be one of the great lines in modern literature. The young lad, Runner (short for 'Runaway') has finally met up with the monstrous, terrifying Ratnose and his grisly band, and Ratnose gleefully spells out his plans to turn Runner into what he calls 'Head Cheese', his favourite delicacy. Whether because of, or despite, this unpromising-looking future, Runner disappears into the bushes with Ratnose's special girl, Twigan and they screw each other spineless, then lie there, covered in earth and unable to move - "Oh Runner," she said, toward dawn, "You in deep shit" '.

Good medicine, BLOOD SPORT, for those who like to moan that the novel is dead - the finest, gutsy, mind-blowing blend of fantasy and realism; if you loved THE HISTORY MAN, you'll hate BLOOD SPORT - can one say more ? (PS: I forgot to mention - it isn't science-fiction.)

My apologies are mountainous, my regrets virtually infinite; yet even these pale into insignificance beside the cosmic vastness of my remorse, which in turn fails to reflect even a pale shadow of the extent of my chagrin (who's been reading Olaf Stapledon then ?), but it looks as though that dribblish and attenuated effusion may be all you are going to get this time. Rough luck, wrangler.



Mal



NEURALGIA IN NEWCASTLE from PETER CRUMP

Newcastle is a bloody long way from North Wales. My wife Karen and I were driven up there by Peter and Anita Presford. We set off at nine in the morning and arrived at three in the afternoon on the Saturday. I don't know why it took us so long, but I did notice some signs which directed us to nearby Londonderry and Washington. A brief glance at the map did confirm we were in the right country, though.

So this was Mexican, complete with papiér-maché cacti.

After a brief, but intense, argument with the female Hitler at reception (who insisted I'd booked the room for the Friday night) we deposited our luggage in our room and went downstairs to join in the fun, collecting a few fanzines and an invitation to the Misfits room-party on the way. The bar was stuffed full of people who all seemed to know each other, and so not wishing to butt in Karen and I adjourned to the con hall to listen to a panel. It turned out to be a dull affair, with an ill-prepared chairman asking inane questions of inarticulate, bored-looking panel members. We stuck it out for ten minutes or so (until we were asked to put it back) and then returned to the bar. Here we met a few people I knew from Novacon who immediately ran away and hid themselves; so I bought myself a pint of Scotch bitter to compensate. Now this bitter has an unusual and not altogether welcome effect. You don't get drunk, or even slightly unsteady, you just go straight into the hangover within minutes of drinking it. All the time we stood talking in the bar, someone was tightening a vice across my skull. By six o'clock I could hardly see through pain - total tunnel vision. People kept telling me how shattered I looked and how it must have been a good room-party!

After a brief lie down, and a vow to touch no more Scotch bitter, we returned downstairs in time to see 'Atomic Café', a funny, but disturbing, film using footage of atomic tests, civil defense films and newsreels. Soon after I felt obliged to attend the PAPA (men's APA) meeting, where they tried (unsuccessfully) to evict Karen, and where a lot of meaningless voting and pre-tentious waffling went on. Jeremy Crampton and I showed our disapproval by voting with the minority. Most times we were the minority.

Back in the bar, my headache reasserted itself with vigour and demanded the right to be called Migraine. I tried talking coherently with Nigel Richardson and Glen Warming, but it was a little difficult when every hard consonant spoken drove daggers into my brain. Mind you, speaking with Ian Sorensen made more sense when I was so unintelligible.

Pete Presford introduced me to Dave Hicks, insisting that we must have something in common as we both draw illos from time to time. Pete then left, explaining that he was only going for a pee and would be right back and we were not to move. Minutes passed. Dave and I soon exhausted our conversation (mostly about drawing pens and whether he had or had not done any illos for 'Microwave'), and my head hurt. There was no sign of Pete returning.

By midnight I felt my brain was about to burst so, perfectly miserable, I admitted defeat and we slunk away to bed. I was awakened about 4a.m. by a room-party in the room below us, and the sexual energy of the couple in the room above. A tentative attempt to move my head confirmed that the pain was abating and that I might be in some sort of condition to actually enjoy today, Sunday.

At breakfast, I felt wonderful. The vestiges of agony had gone away with the last traces of alcohol - but I took a few aspirin to be on the safe side. Anita Presford joined us and explained that Pete had gone straight to bed after leaving us the previous evening. Apparently, he'd been very ill in the night and couldn't make it down for breakfast. That Scotch bitter hasn't got a lot going for it.

Once again, Karen and I tried to watch a panel discussion, and once again it was awful. "I'll ignore that question and say what I was going to say anyway" said one panel member. Good grief.

We wandered around the bookroom for a while and I spent a good proportion of our money on books I didn't want, after which we sat on the conveniently placed sofa in the first floor foyer swapping lift stories with Oscar Dalgleish and David Rowley (like Oscar's tale of wrestling with a cadaver in a hospital lift, and the truth about the Unicon lift-party from Dave). Joy Hibbert joined us, sporting a badge which read something like: 'International Castrator Hit Squad'. I edged away, keeping the books strategically placed. I needn't have worried, because Joy turned her attention to Karen and spent the next half-hour sweetly cajoling my wife into joining the wait-list for TWP. I understand this is an occupational hazard for female fans.

Switching to the program again, we sat in on the Russell Hoban interview which was well attended. Mr. Hoban proved to be an articulate and amusing speaker - he even brought along his own props, such as a wind-up dancing toy and a Mr. Punch puppet. I never saw much of him before or after the interview, but the other 'guest' mainstream writer, Alisdair Gray, seemed to be all over the place and enjoying himself chatting with SF authors and fans alike. We had arrived too late on Saturday to hear his reading from '1982, Janine' (which in fact turned out to be a reading from 'Lanark' according to one source), which by all accounts was very popular. He was overheard asking for a Chris Priest book in the bookroom, so who knows - we may see Alisdair Gray at some future convention.

After the finals of the Ultra-Quiz (won, if I remember rightly, by Julian Headlong) we queued (yes, queued) up for the play 'The Transmigration of Timothy Archer', based on you-know-who's book of the same name. The play was very professional, and few liberties were taken with the original work - although I don't think...

KIRSTEN: Mexicans, for example. You don't call them Greasers any more. They're known as Science-Fiction Fans.

ANGEL: Ugh! That's sick!

...was in the copy of the book I read. It had some wonderfully amusing moments - a few shocks, too. Like when Geoff Ryman (Bill) violently smashed a fully-working radio-controlled model car and showered the first two rows of the audience with plastic debris. I can't help wondering how much it cost. Jeremy Crampton kept the wrecked electronic heart of the thing as a souvenir.

Not a few shocks in the Pro vs. Fan Family Fortunes either, where the teams had to guess the most popular answers to questions which had previously been asked of 100 fans. Did you know, that when meeting an alien 40% of fans would shamefully run away? Or that only 8% would offer him a drink?

It was midnight and everyone was invited to the Mexican party in the fanzine room (still six foot deep in old fanzines that nobody seemed to want) with free punch. Up until this point I had avoided alcohol, but after tasting the punch I was quite definitely avoiding alcohol. Karen was beginning to feel tired by now, so in deference to her condition (she is over six months pregnant, I'm happy to inform you) we made our excuses and went to bed.

Monday morning, and Jeremy offers Pete and I first refusal on the books he has for auction. Pete selected two books, while I screamed and tore my hair out as I recognised at least five books I had spent money on the previous day. In my misery, I went back to the bookroom and spent even more.

Then came the book auction, and we were treated to a fine display of Rog Peyton's talents as he pitted fan against fan in a bid (sorry) to auction a three feet high papier-maché cactus. It eventually sold for £15. I kid you not.

I treated myself to a few more books and then it was time to go. We bundled ourselves into Pete's car and, after a half-hour tour around Newcastle trying to find our way out, headed for North Wales. Once home, I counted the spoils. Innumerable fanzines and pieces of paper, a cassette of 'Elmer T. Hack, the Musical', and three carrier bags full of skiffy books (64 at the last count, which means my reading list is into triple figures again and I have to put up at least two more shelves). I'm still a little ambivalent about the con - although an empty wallet and the number of friendships re-affirmed argues convincingly that I had a good time. But I must agree with Pam Wells, who told me: "Your first con is always the best."

Mexicon was my second.

MEXICON AWARDS

MOST WORRYING COMMENT BY ALEX STEWART IN A WHISPERED VOICE: "There's some people looking for you..."

MOST EMBARRASSING MOMENT: After just buying a Chris Priest book, I asked him whether he would sign it for me. "Sure," he said and flicked through to the title page. "It's already signed, you wally!" he exclaimed.

BIGGEST WALLY: Whoever bought that bloody cactus.

...»«...

YOU'LL NEVER PLEASE EVERYONE.... KEN LAKE

Nobody at a con ever finds time to read the Programme Book - let's mail it out in advance! A fine idea which I appreciated: I heard at least six complaints from fen who had gone direct from vacationland to the con and so missed seeing the mail sitting at home awaiting them.

Let's have a Continuation Room so that whenever people want a meeting or panel or discussion to go on longer than the time allocated, they can all move in there and keep talking! I don't think the room was used at all for that purpose, because the panellists got thirsty and nobody had the cheek to ask them to carry on.

We're a "literary" con - let's have some authors the fen haven't met a dozen times already! So they invited Alasdair Gray who certainly hasn't written a word of what most people would call SF in any of his books, Russell Hoban whose strange books are at best tangential to SF, and Richard Cowper (Colin Murry) who told us "I haven't written a word of SF for the past six years, and I don't expect ever to do so again."

We'll do something really organised and fine: we'll make sure all the programmes start to time! Well, most of them did, to be fair - but a few weren't actually in the Programme Book anyway, like the raffle draw where, if you weren't there, they gave your prize to someone else ("But I wandered round the bar shouting out that the draw was about to begin!") and the delightful auction which was ushered on unbeknownst to all except those who

turned up for the advertised panel discussion which was unilaterally called off after the usual "show of hands" where nobody wanted to vote in case they were rocking a remarkably steady boat. The one movie I had specially wanted to see, and for which I had arranged my seat reservation on the ultra-crowded train from Newcastle to London, was either shown early without notice or put on too late for me to see it - my query about this at the One Tun led to heated argument among the committee members, so who can tell which was the truth ?

O.K. so I came away with a personally autographed sketch of Alasdair Gray (any offers ?), a plastic miniature cactus (symbol of The Mexican, in case you missed the allusion) and other goodies, thoroughly pleased with myself and wondering whether I could in fact find anything serious enough to complain about in a conrep. I took up one point with Greg Pickersgill at the One Tun: he agreed with half of my comment but wouldn't accept the other half: what do you think ?

I made the point that I'd missed several movies, not because they overlapped other things, for they did not - the "One Programme" system has a lot going for it, no doubt about that - but because I was eating, drinking or otherwise engaged at the relevant times. Why, said I, could not all movies be shown at least twice so that we could more easily choose when to see them ?

Greg felt this was a very good idea except that this would eat into Programme slots and there might be problems setting up and dismantling the projector and stuff. Then, sez I, why not - while keeping a single programme for all other things - have the movies in a separate room and on a separate schedule ? At that, he didn't quite explode but he did indicate choler in various unmistakable ways: "The principle of the Single Programme is one on which we cannot accept any modifications!" he thundered. Shades of the Socialist Party and its manifesto, thought I. Comments ?

Having gotten those peeves out of the way, let me say that after the sheer hell of Seacon my faith in SF nature was restored: the con was happy, laid back, friendly, welcoming, small enough for one to participate meaningfully in most things including the open discussions/arguments in the bar which were almost perpetual and fascinating. The Committee was available, helpful, thoughtful, dedicated and above all a lot of basically nice people.

The fanroom was a positive WOW! I mean, literally thousands of fanzines from the fifties onward, most for free (I had to beg a 4cu/ft box to shlep my own acquisitions home) with even a small beersodden table available so that D West could ignore fandom and play dominoes while all about him were frenetic fen scrabbling though instantly disarranged piles of zines. And all this accompanied by a screen loaded with snaps of fen of olden (and relatively modern) times in a variety of ha-ha poses with coy captions, a table whereat Linda Pickersgill presided over the mayhem and blew Bubbles (who Bubbles ?), and right next to that - THE BAR, the official con centre with friendly staff and (once you get used to ordering a Scotch and being given a beer - crazy people, Novocastrians) cheap prices.

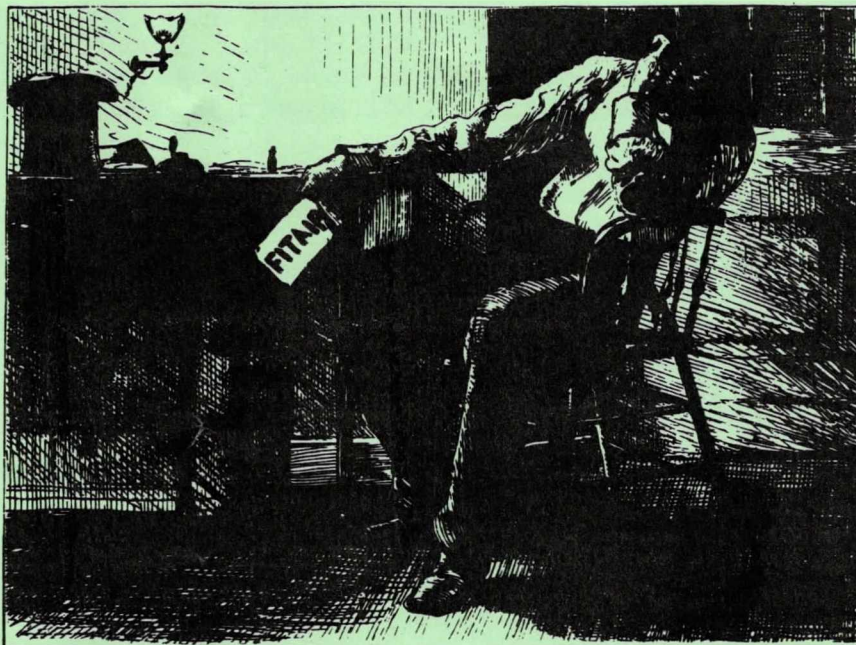
The con was well laid out in a restricted area but fen were not dissuaded from stacking out in all directions to chat and eat; the talks and panels were to my experience interesting and lively, the party was (I understand - I was asleep at the time) worth going to, the ambiance was pleasant and the situation of the hotel central, there was a sufficiency of eating places within staggering distance, the weather was lousy enough to keep most of us at the con most of the time, the rooms were fine (but no coffeemaking facilities, a pity), and there appeared to be only one lunatic juvenile drunk among the assembled populace - a good thing too.

Finally, everyone who actually attended the professional performance of Philip K Dick's "The Transmigration of Timothy Archer" as a play was suitably mindblown, shattered and ready to head (as they did - I know, I got in the way) straight for the bar.

Look folks, next time how about giving me something more substantial to bitch about, huh ?

VINÇ CLARKE

DECLINE OF D. WEST



It was like the Isle of Skulls.

You remember the Isle of Skulls, don't you? The explorers - Bruce Cabot, Robert Armstrong, Fay Wray - hearing of monsters in the jungle? The natives nervously worshipping the most flea-bitten god of all time by dancing in Kong costumes?

British fandom was like that in the recent past. Returning after a 20-year absence - incidentally, I'm casting myself in the Bruce Cabot role, not the Fay Wray - I've been interested in finding out how the usually cheerful, happy-go-lucky sub-culture I knew in the '50's had been transformed. Everyone writing in fanzines seemed so serious. Even the would-be funny people, writing so glibly of sex and shit and sickness in the best Higher Education manner, seemed to be glancing nervously over their shoulders.

As it happens, the scene has become more relaxed over the last 3/4 years and looks set to continue that way. But I've always been interested in fandom's past - and have the fanzines to prove it - so...what happened?

A character named 'D. West' seemed to be one of the scene-shapers of '70's fandom. His literary powers were much admired, his imitators tore innocent little fanzines to pieces. I set myself to the task of reading D. West. His latest manifestations were in a US fanzine, where he was engaged in a wordy battle with various US fans. Unfortunately, I kept falling asleep. D. West ('83/'84) hasn't been advertised as a powerful soporific but his pieces, powdered and encapsulated, might do wonders for insomniacs.

I cast around for younger, fresher slices of the West genius and, just as if I'd donned a hairy costume and offered up a few prayers, my wishes were answered. First distributed at SeaCon April '84, FANZINES IN THEORY AND PRACTICE, Collected Articles 1976-1982 (from D. West, 48 Norman Street, Bingley, W. Yorks, BD16 4JT, £3.00) was a hefty slice of manna from on high. At 178 well stencilled and duplicated A4 pages, no illos., it must rank as one of the biggest fan publications ever issued on this side of the Atlantic, and is probably packed with more words than any other.

Words - words - words. You plunge into an ocean of words when you read D. West. I know I'm prejudiced. In the '50's, sheer economics dictated that style was sacrificed to conciseness. The cost of stencils and paper kept British fanzines thin. Now, a better standard of living and better standards of education are reflected in fanzine wordage. D. West rolls on like the ocean, over-powering, little caring what it carries and what it drowns. Here and there are sparkles of brilliance, here and

there a sharks-fin of malicious amusement pokes out, here and there floating rubbish looms up, dark and menacing until lit up. I won't carry the comparison to the point of saying he's all wet. He can write, always forcefully, sometimes very well. It's just that he needs a lot more self-discipline and desperately needs a good editor. Once upon a time there was a (mundane) book set in Russia, called And Quiet Flows The Don. This is not a sequel.

In a short 3000-word introduction, West states that his "primary concern here is with the ideology of fanzines." Actually, his primary concern is with the ideology of D. West. Therefore, there is virtually nothing on fanzine ideology of the 40 years prior to West's arrival on the scene. His concern is with the Here-and-Now (c. late '70's) and D. West as a moulder of that era. As a genuine seeker after knowledge of the period I couldn't have asked for more, and dived into this ocean of brilliant invective, clever qualifying clauses, arrogantly-expressed opinions, sharp criticism. I emerged with some very small fry indeed in the shape of hard facts, but lots and lots of Westian opinions.

Take an example. In the 170+ pages it's very difficult to find fanzines mentioned which meet with his approval - his speciality is disapproval - but what sort of fanzine might he like?

The fanzine would have to meet Standards. This is the sort of semantic blank which one would expect an intelligent man to attempt to define - at length - and he duly does. Mostly, I regret to say, in the sort of manner which made Keith Waterhouse remark of Mrs. Thatcher that she addresses you as though you've just lost your dog.

"Whatever works is right..." (pp.5). "This does not mean that there can be no standards....." (pp.5). "If you want to be part of the fanzine game, then you must be expected to be rated by the game's standards....(pp.6). "Fanzines are reader-directed - their aim is not to provide an object of passive consumption but to elicit response...."(pp.9). "The direct response...to any particular fanzine is rarely very high - 20% is probably average, but this is not of vital importance...." (pp.10). "...it sounds rather as though I have some notion of a fannish ideal, a set of standards by which all fanzines should be measured. Not so. Naturally, I have my own ideas of the perfect fanzine, but this is purely a matter of personal preference...." (pp.15).

Note the easy assumption in the third quote that fanzine publishing is a sort of competition. "Whatever works.." remains completely undefined, even in terms of reader response, though D. does point out that standing a fan editor a drink at a Convention bar is a response (pp 10.) We seem here to be skirting the notion that a fanzine is published to get the editor noticed/known, but why then isn't a LoC of importance? "One of the great disadvantages (~~no~~ others specified) of locating a fanzine is that the editor....can simply bin your letter and put you down in the WAHF....Review the bastards and they have no escape...even if they maintain a dignified silence the fact that the criticism has been made in public is bound to have some effect." (pp.14) One gets the impression that the only reason that D. West can see for a fanzine to exist is that it will come to his notice and be reviewed against a set of standards which he makes up as he goes along....he'll be judge, he'll be jury.....

A rather funny result of this attitude - in a not very funny collection - is West's treatment of the fanzines of Keith Walker, who cheerfully refuses to mend his ways. Totally taken aback at the two fingers waving at him, West can only come to one conclusion....Walker deliberately produces poor fanzines to get himself noticed by West!

The contradiction above over 'standards' - and in this mass of writing you can find, as in the Bible, numerous inconsistencies - is further confounded by "...all that is demanded of a faned is that he does the best he can..."(pp.34). Demanded? Who is D. West that he can 'demand'? Unfortunately, he appears to have dazzled a number of fans by eloquent writing, positively-voiced opinions and the ability to fall down and bite the carpet when annoyed - metaphorically speaking - to the extent

that he influenced the course of fanzine publishing in Britain for a few dismal years. To that extent, the ideology of D. West was the ideology of a great deal of publishing

It tempts one to resort to a historical analogue - the rise of Hitler in the '30's - and D. West also had his disciples which he treated with contempt, and his hate-objects.

"The one principle Corey and Nicholas have understood and absorbed is that of showing no mercy: kick hell out of fanzines and fans (← my u/l) you don't like... (their) unspoken rationale is: if we don't like something and can think of six colourful ways of saying how bad it is, then that makes us critics..... They are not critics but critical psychopaths..." (pp105)

"Either fandom is a process of continual change and revolution or it is nothing more than what some would have it be: a retreat for aging hobbyists, a refuge for cheap status seekers and for inadequate personalities craving the comfort of approved mediocrity." (pp52). Your reviewer was reflecting that he fitted neatly into all three of these categories - a veritable Jew to West's Adolf - when it occurred to him that the very opposite of all these detestable qualities is what West is seeking in fandom. A retreat for young hobbyists? A refuge for adequate personalities? Who crave the comfort of non-approved mediocrity? Deserving status seekers?

It's easy to mock D. West, as he presents so many targets. But - is it just? Am I being too cynical in thinking that if someone spends all of his time in trying to blast everyone and everything around him, it's probably because he fancies himself as a giant amongst the ruins, an Ozymandias of fandom? Could it be that he's bleeding inside at having to shout at all of us dolts and nincompoops? ("a fairly substantial part of fandom is composed of people (who are) dolts and nincompoops." (pp58)) Maybe he's being the rough but just father of his people, the velvet hand in the iron glove? When he remarks "...should one accept that Rowe is really the complete halfwit he appears, or is it possible that for some strange reason of his own he is slightly exaggerating his own mental deficiencies..." (pp23) is it really for Rowe's own good?

Two other quotes are relevant here: "...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 fans very seriously - but sometimes I enjoy it. I may satirise fannish role-playing - but sometimes I do it..." (pp159). "There is, first of all, the pure and simple joy of trouble making. Stirring up the animals with the sharp end of a stick is fun....." (pp112).

So this complex personality appeared on the fannish scene, and apparently decided to play games and stir up the animals. "All this violent imagery should be conveying the impression that I do not view fandom as a haven of rest and ease, an elysium of sweetness and light. Too true. Where real differences of opinion exist they should not be sneaked around on tiptoe...." (pp39). "The whole scene should be less like a prayer meeting in a Tea Shoppe...and more of an impromptu cannibal feast - blood, guts and not a few casualties...." (pp 14).

Fascinated by this forceful approach, where you could excuse any nastiness on the grounds of honesty, a number of fans seem to have gone along with it. Others, thinking that being a 'bastard' reviewed by West took some of the pleasure out of fanning, quietly dropped out. A number of 'zines had copycat reviewers; West, with what some might think of as a show of hypocrisy, tut-tutted over the excesses over these mostly inadequate followers.

West has little to say about the effect on neofans of this dog-eat-dog atmosphere, except a casual remark that experienced fans tended not to bother with neos because the communication gap was too wide. I'm not surprised; for the neo it must have been like being invited into a wolves den. This aspect of the '70's is probably what marks it off most emphatically from other eras of fandom; in the '50's, for instance, experienced fans did all that they could to encourage newcomers. But then, most of us had a sense of the continuing thread of fandom,

from the past through the present into the future. West and his cohorts were strictly here-and-now people. They put one in mind of kids running up and down a 'bus, shouting out rude remarks to the passengers. A lot of people got off and not many came on.

The bowver-boy approach soon palled. In early '80, West wonders what a 'generation reared to combativeness' does when there's no one left to fight. British fandom might have sunk to a new low, but fortunately the World Con. of '79 not only brought in many new faces, but exhausted many of the active fans of the time. New fanzines sprang up which found that there was a simple joy in communicating with other fans, and no one was demanding that you met 'standards'.

Presumably as part of the 'practice' in the title, West includes in these reprinted articles a couple of Con. reports and some book reviews. The Con. reports paint an interesting picture of a misanthrope taking his pleasures sadly, getting drunk for want of anything better to do...except meet new faces and fresh ideas. One hopes that this is just a role playing paper personality.

The book reviews seem to be competent; as I haven't read the titles I pass no opinion. There is, however, a curiosity, a review of a hack story from GALAXY April '51, Kornbluth's Marching Morons. D. reprints a review from a February '81 fanzine, and therein gives MM the full treatment. Have I mentioned that D. over-writes? You've heard of the old punishment of hanging, drawing and quartering - the condemned criminal is half-hanged, eviscerated whilst still alive and then beheaded and cut into quarters? This 10,000 word story receives a 5000 word hanging, drawing and quartering from D. The review starts out by being entertaining - let's face it, there's a little bit of literary sadism in all of us - but then approval starts faltering, a sort of horrified boredom sets in, and one eventually ends up wondering what psychological triggers were pulled when D. first read the story. I mean - why this particular story? Can it be that he approves of all 10,000-word stories published prior to April '51? Is he going to go through '52, '53, '54, etc.? Like much of this writing, an interesting field for a psychologist.

D. also delves back to the '50's in condemning (pp.47) Walt Willis, a leader of that era's fandom. Willis's brilliance is all a sham, says West, thus neatly disposing of the opinions of those fans who twice subscribed to send Willis to US Conventions when the comparative cost of the trip was far more than it is now. Also, Willis was guilty of a crime little short of child-molesting - false modesty. I have 15 years of letters from Willis to show otherwise, but -why bother? This is the sharp stick stirring the animals again.

And that, ultimately, is the major fault with West's writing. It's almost impossible to determine when he's sincere and when he's revelling in causing trouble. The tumbling words - there seems to be no such thing as a short West article - cover straight and crooked thinking, logic and illogic. I found myself agreeing with him for a half-page, then he gives an opinion which contradicts what went before...it's fascinating. West sets you reviewing your own opinions, rather than his.

I'd heartily recommend this collection to anyone wanting to see forceful writing and an agile mind amusing itself, with the proviso that you believe it at your peril. Maybe FITAIP should be classified as fan fiction, but it's definitely worth while getting a copy; D. covers many more subjects than those mentioned here - the BSFA, fan fiction, elitism, etc. etc. But read the thing in small doses, or you'll get mental indigestion.

West's fame in fandom is mostly as a would-be destroyer. He'd probably like to take the credit for the introduction of 'honesty' in reviews, but who knows what is 'honesty' and what is stirring the animals? Probably not even West himself. He has one positive achievement to his name, and it's one by which he may be remembered after his writing's forgotten - the 'Astral Pole', a gymnastic feat with a broom stick which oddly mirrors West's preferences in fandom. That is, it's something

that can only be performed by the young, it leads to a lot of laughter from onlookers, and West himself, a past master of contortionism, is good at it. It differs from West's writings in that the voluntary 'victim' is also in there, laughing with the rest. It really is a shame that someone of West's talents couldn't have played a more constructive role in fandom - even if it's inventing variants on the Astral Pole.

He is also - I presume - trying to gain some minor recognition by 'authoritatively' defining a few words in his Introduction, differentiating various types of fanzine and prozine. One of the words is 'Subzine'..."my own invention" says D., strangely proudly, "used here for the first time." I think he means "in this sense", as the word itself receives 18 lines of definition in Eney's FANCYLOPAEDIA 2. But that probably doesn't count. It was published in the '50's.

A.VINCENT CLARKE



ASTRAL OLYMPIC SELECTION NIGHT

EDITORS BIT.....Perhaps I should point out at this stage that Vin~~ce~~ Clarke's "Decline of D.West" was never destined for the pages of XYSTER. The fact that it did end up here is due to a series of chance remarks and circumstances. The piece was originally written partially because Vin~~ce~~ had something he wanted to get of his chest and partially at the instigation of Terry Hill who wanted the result to appear in Microwave.

Vin~~ce~~ having finished the piece felt in need of a second, and shall we say, less passionately felt, opinion before passing it on to Terry. He sent it to Mal Ashworth.

Now I had been sounding Mal for a review of the West Opus. Mal read the Clarke piece and felt that if it were to see print then it should be as quickly as possible. At this stage rumours were about that Hill due to personal circumstances had shelved Microwave until soonest. Sufficient time in fact for the whole thing to go off the boil. Words passed between Mal and myself to the effect that the whole matter would soon be another piece of fannish history and history wasn't what West was all about.

At that stage I hadn't even seen the Clarke work but Mal's word was good enough for me to decide to step in. Anyway the upshot was that through ATom, Vin~~ce~~ and Mal an approach was made to Terry and it came down the grapevine that I could go ahead with the printing.

Of course I couldn't leave it at that. Perverse as ever I sent the whole thing to D.West asking him if he would like the right to an immediate response.

But not before I had enlisted the help of the Ashworths who, loaded with loot, descended on the pleasure houses of Bingley to soften him up. D., without a murmur coughed up in record time. So here we have:-

West

A REPLY



Vince Clarke's review of my FANZINES IN THEORY AND IN PRACTICE (currently £6 to UK readers, \$25 USA and anywhere else, approximately 30 copies left out of 150) is naturally of interest to me as the writer concerned, but I can think of little else to say in its favour. True, I am paid a few rather backhanded compliments -- and there is even a recommendation to buy the book -- but an endorsement from a source like this is no great prize, given the fact that the article as a whole is more akin to a piece of gossip than a piece of criticism: inaccurate, ill-informed, ill-considered, and solidly based only in

its determination to overlook anything and everything which does not fit its own bizarre version of reality. I feel rather like someone being attacked by a sun-struck tortoise: not so much embattled as mildly embarrassed by the ridiculousness of the whole business.

A point which amply illustrates the general calibre of Clarke's insight is his comment (after various remarks about my "ocean" of words) that "there seems to be no such thing as a short West article". Well, I suppose it all depends on what you mean by short.... Setting aside the Introduction (8 pages), Postscript (2 pages), and a couple of sample FOUNDATION book reviews (3 pages and 2 pages), FITAIP contains fourteen articles. Of these, six are more than ten pages long and can reasonably be described as not-short (at least by the usual fanzine measure). Of the other eight, three are between 7 and 9 pages, one is exactly the same length ($4\frac{1}{2}$ pages) as Clarke's own review, and four are actually shorter ($3\frac{1}{2}$, $2\frac{1}{2}$, 2 , $2\frac{1}{2}$ pages respectively). So it seems that a short article has to be no longer than one page, and that Clarke's devotion to economy of wordage does not necessarily extend to his own work.

Perhaps I should be flattered at being given such a very very long review, but I'd feel somewhat happier if I thought Clarke really and truly believed that anything at all over one page couldn't possibly be short. Unfortunately, I suspect that the truth is that he just didn't notice. Having picked up a vague impression that I write long articles he assumed that all my articles must be long. And if he's as unobservant as this about the most basic and patently obvious details of fact, then what sort of mangling is he going to give to anything slightly more complicated?

In itself the above example is not particularly important, but it does demonstrate how extraordinarily sloppy Clarke is in his approach to criticism. ("Believe it at your peril", as the man himself says.) He keeps reality at bay with an armourplated shell of preconceived notions, and mere facts are totally ignored. The way he operates can only be summed up as 'Attack by inaccurate paraphrase and wholesale omission'. Every time he summarises my views he distorts them; every time he triumphantly discovers some 'contradiction' he conveniently overlooks the pages and pages devoted to explaining the arguments I was putting forward. This makes point-by-point refutation an infinitely tedious prospect. After all, I've already covered the whole of this territory not once but several times. The articles in FITAIP were written separately at intervals of a year or two for different fanzines, so in the interests of clarity my major points were often repeated. And the whole business — the definition of 'fanzine', the meaning of 'standards' — is summed up (yet again) in the eight pages of the Introduction. As far as Clarke is concerned something like half the book seems to be printed in invisible ink.

Actually, I suspect that what we have here is not so much the usual quote-out-of-context unscrupulousness as a genuine inability on Clarke's part to come to terms with the ways in which the fandom of today differs from his own idealised vision of the Fifties. (Whether Fifties fandom ever was quite such a utopia as he maintains is itself rather doubtful.) Unfortunately, like it or not, the world has changed in his twenty years of absence, and imitating an ostrich is not really very effective as a method of dealing with this altered state.

Clarke deplores the "dog-eat-dog atmosphere" of the Seventies, comparing it unfavourably with the Fifties, when "experienced fans did all they could to encourage newcomers" and concluding that "West and his cohorts were strictly here-and-now people. They put one in mind of kids running up and down a bus, shouting out rude remarks to the passengers. A lot of people got off and not many got on." Trouble is, while perhaps this ought to be true (in keeping with the fantasy of Fifties fandom as unequalled ideal and Seventies fandom as a savage Dark Age) it's not very like what actually happened. In the second half of the Seventies fandom as a whole doubled in size, conventions grew and multiplied, and something like half the current strength of fanzine fans came on the scene. Far from being stomped into the ground or totally ignored neofans were often given a particular share of attention — as in all the Fan Rooms run by those evil KTF types. A lot of people got on, and no more than usual got off. There are even some — such as Rob Hansen — who will tell you that the Seventies period was a Golden Age. After all, the reality is that people drop out of fandom not because of slightly bruised egos but because they get bored. Many fans rather enjoy a bit of liveliness. Not everyone wishes to spend their time locked into a kind of permanent adolescence, endlessly replaying saccharine daydreams of being Best Friends with the whole Gang. The objection to Clarke's preferred forms of fandom and fanzines "which found that there was a simple joy in communicating with other fans, and no one was demanding you met standards" is that "simple" is very much the appropriate adjective. There's nothing positively wrong with such an approach, but on its own it does seem so self-limiting as to constitute a sort of voluntary prefrontal lobotomy. Making a virtue out of it is like boasting that you have a library of fifty thousand volumes but never read anything except the works of Enid Blyton. Struggling up to this level may be all that Noddy-fans like Terry Hill can realistically hope for, but it shouldn't be surprising that people with more than half a dead poodle's brain-power usually aim somewhat higher.

The big problem for Clarke, I think, is the novel idea that as far as fanzines are concerned there are no limits and no rules. (Or, as I put it in the Introduction (page 5) "whatever works is right" and "there is no magic formula"). Despite his jibes on the subject of 'standards' Clarke himself obviously has strong ideas on what is right and wrong in fanzines. Indeed, he's really in something of a tight spot, since he's attempting the rather tricky feat of jeering at 'standards' in general whilst simultaneously promoting his own 'standards' in particular. ("Contortionism", anybody?)

However, Clarke's 'standards' look less like standards and more like rules — not so much comparative measures of degrees of success as absolute decrees of what is or is not permissible. In other words, his view of fandom and fanzines is dogmatic rather than pragmatic, prescriptive rather than descriptive. Never mind what fandom is — he knows what it ought to be. I, on the other hand, know only what I would like it to be — which as a whole is nothing more specific than interesting — and I'm prepared to consider anything at all which comes along. This is alien to Clarke because it means there is no given firm ground: opinions have to stand or fall on the merits of their supporting arguments rather than be settled out of hand by appeal to some Sacred Law of Fanzines which incontrovertibly lays down what can or can not be said or done.

I have standards and Clarke has rules. The distinction between the two -- between the comparative measure and the absolute dogma -- is crucial, and Clarke's failure to grasp it means that his criticisms are mostly at cross-purposes. I say what I think is true, and he attempts to refute me by saying what he thinks ought to be true (by his rules), thus hopelessly confusing a question of fact with a question of the ideal. For example, when I say that fans compete with each other I do not mean that they ought to compete with each other but merely that in practice they do compete with each other. Since this statement doesn't fit his own vision of fandom Clarke is apt to deny it -- not because it isn't a fact but because it ought not to be a fact.

Perhaps this difficulty in separating wishes from realities accounts for Clarke's uncertainty as to whether or not I am being "sincere". From his point of view I say things which probably ought not be said, and certainly ought not to be meant. How terrible, then, if I really do mean what I say... which is indeed the case. I assume that my readers have enough common sense not to take my more lurid metaphors absolutely literally -- and that they can recognise sarcasm, satire, and plain old jokes -- but otherwise I speak the truth as I see it. As for the fun of troublemaking -- well, it's hardly necessary to invent material to "stir up the animals". All that one needs to do is to be a little more candid than is customary. This may violate Clarke's own theories of what ought to be in fanzines, but in practice other people seem to like it well enough.

As I said: whatever works is right. Given the definition of 'fanzine' as essentially oriented towards reader response/involvement rather than passive consumption -- see the Introduction for fullest nitpicking details -- "whatever works" self-evidently means whatever promotes this end (i.e. whatever is interesting enough to make the readers want to contribute something of their own, either directly or indirectly). All fanzines 'work' in this sense to some extent (since otherwise by definition they would not be fanzines but something else) but it is plain that some work better than others, simply because they use the means and pursue the ends which are particularly suited both to the fanzine medium and to the talents and circumstances of the producers.

You can do anything you like with a fanzine -- but some things are easier to do than others, and some things are so difficult to do well (or have so little point) that you might as well forget them. For instance: fan fiction ought to be interesting, but for various reasons in practice it scarcely ever is interesting. The people who become mightily aggrieved by the lack of enthusiasm for such stuff are confusing ought with is, the wish with the deed. Judgement goes by results -- not by good intentions. The mere fact of publication is neither an automatic guarantee of excellence nor deserving of praise in itself, and there isn't a sort of moral obligation for readers to approve and applaud whatever they're given regardless of its quality. You can do anything you like -- but the onus is on you to make it good enough to interest the audience.

Having 'standards' simply means taking the measure of what has been done and judging whether it is better or worse than either the average model or some ideal model. Both 'average' and 'ideal' in this context are not fixed but fluid: at most representing an elastic and provisional consensus open to revision at any time.

Fandom and taste are not set and eternal -- they change as the world changes, and hence both the subjects and approaches which interest and/or entertain fans are likely to change from one period to another. Those whose tastes are frozen in the patterns of the Good Old Days may well dislike and deplore what has overtaken them, but it is futile to refuse to recognise that these alterations have happened, and it is also futile to expect the new generation to be bound by the tastes and principles of the old.

Whatever works is right. Clarke's problem is that in today's fandom there are too many things which he feels ought not to work, but which do work. Maybe one day he will get the difference between facts and ideals sufficiently sorted out to permit him to read what I wrote -- as distinct from peering at an occasional isolated sentence through his Fabulous Fifties Rose-Tinted Spectacles. At least there's one small glimmer of hope, in his remark that "West sets you reviewing your own opinions, rather than his".

Yes. That's the whole idea. I just wish he'd done a better job of it.



-- D. West
25th July 1984

Don let drive with both
feet

ONE TUN

TWENTY HUNDRED WAIT
(or at least that is what it seemed like)



GRANNY loves to tell, with a smile, how the folks in the old village sighed and shook their heads. "The Belle of the Village," they said, "could never make a good fan." But she did.

HAZEL ASHWORTH

At the time there seemed to be so many good reasons for going to the One Tun: it coincided with a holiday; we had missed Mexico and were feeling deprived; Vince had offered us a place to sleep, and it was in the South (which is of course, a thunderous good thing, especially in June). And even D. West, after telling us how grisly it would be, conceded that, nevertheless, everyone ought to go through the experience once. So Thursday morning found us, at the crack of half past nine, on the road that headed for all the industrial Murk that forms a barrier to the Southern reaches,

equipped with four settee cushions one blow-up bed, one sleeping bag, six earplugs, several bottles of water, maps, address book, two old envelopes with instructions scrawled over the flaps that Vince had given over the phone on how to get there, more earplugs, and several things we couldn't eat for breakfast so decided to give to him as they would be sure to be off before we returned. (It's polite to take people a little Something when you go to stay with them).

The journey became increasingly uncomfortable as we approached junction 7 of the M1 and the traffic built up along with my nervous wonderings as to whether the turn-off to the M10 would be complicated, and whether we could keep ourselves free of London's sticky tentacles as we swept dangerously close to its northern borders. On and on we

went. God, the heat. God, the flies. And we'd only reached Cheshunt. Too late we wished we'd brought our pith helmets, mosquito nets, snake serum and the like, but you know how it is, you never remember everything.

After a glutinous meal of 'Pllice 'n' Chips' at a Cheshunt pub festooned to the gun-whales with green-and-yellow balloons advertising 'Hartsman' beer and lager in an urgent, though honest, manner ('Drink Hartsmans for that Sinking Feeling'), we continued our way South past a sign: 'Dartford Tunnel (TOLL)'. Toll? Great panic as I root through earplugs, cushions etc. for some cash, and dig out a pound note. 600 yards further on is another sign: 'Cars 60p NO CHANGE GIVEN'. So there's another frantic unearthing for the right coins, a nifty hand-over to the driver's outstretched palm just as we approach the toll booths. Malcolm holds the money up towards a uniform: the uniform sneers and waves us on. Oh goody, we're getting through for nowt. Short-lived joy - a large yellow rubbish bin gapes at us, 'THROW COINS IN HERE. NO $\frac{1}{2}$ ps.' - too stunned to reprogramme his reactions, my gobsmacked driver throws his money into the air. For a Yorkshireman this is humiliation on a par with being seen drinking lager in public, and he doesn't recover from it till we get back home. The bin, however, is quite satisfied with his performance and the barrier goes up.

We miss the A2 and belt down towards France in a daze, doing a U-turn before we reach the coast, and somehow find Welling, where Viné resides, before we hit London. We chug cautiously along Wendover Way while I pore over the envelope-scrrawl. "It says...overgrown garden at top of hill" I mutter. We peer round: yes, an overgrown garden looms greenly to our left, but no sign of any hill. We check the number and it tallies, so Malcolm reverses smartly into the roses as Viné had directed. He falls out of the car and flops into the foliage with a grean, making a large and flattened hollow in the lush grass. "DON'T DO THAT". The lack of hill is bothering me. "What if this isn't the right house?" He smiles in a superior way and directs my gaze to the left, where after several moments of incomprehension, I perceive a gentle incline rising towards us so imperceptibly I need to stick a spirit-level to the bridge of my nose to be really certain of its hillishness. "But that's not a hill", say I. "These Londoners allus talk about hills when there aren't any" responds old know-all. "I remember Ken Bulmer saying just the same about his house being on a hill, years ago. Me 'n Sheila had a hell of a time finding it".

My mind is put to rest for a brief moment. Then Worry Number 2 surfaces. "Do you realise we've got to get out of this place again? I'll never be able to reverse all those instructions...hang about though, there'll be loads of signs for The Tunnel, won't there? They do seem to be rather proud of it". "I'd be proud of having a bin that people throw money into..." growls M.

I drop the subject - it's obviously too painful a topic to be brought out into the open so soon - and we stroll up to the phone box to tell Viné of our arrival, waiting for a while in the sunshine as the box is already occupied. The inmate is sitting on three phone directories, and has his feet sticking out of a convenient hole where a glass pane should be. He looks exceedingly comfortable. I am impressed by this first sight of big city nonchalance, but Mal grinds his teeth. He presses his best gimlet-eyed expression to one of the sides where the glass still operates, and the occupant puts the phone down quite quickly really.

And so we prepare for The Big Night. We eat, we collect spare containers in-case-the-beer-is-lousy-and-we-have-to-go-round-the-corner-and-fetch-some-from-elsewhere, and walk towards the station clutching the envelope of directions: Viné has taken enormous care over detail: "you will come across an artificial barrier of hedges" it says. "Walk through these". Hum. Rather unlikely. Does "artificial" mean "unreal"? Does he have a regular date with a hallucination hereabouts? But no, the hedges are there: leastways, we see 'em too. They close behind us with much leaf rustling as we scramble through.

We make the station and a train arrives immediately. No time to be surprised, we get on and stare out of the window, like Well-Trained Passengers: a fairly standard urban sprawl with a reasonably generous quota of greenery streams past for the first half of the journey. Then as we approach London Bridge the view rapidly fills up with jumbles of concrete heaving themselves up into the sky, glass summits of the strongest-growing ones catching the rays of the retreating sun, throwing the smaller structures into deep shadow. And there it is:

Metropolis. Mad inventor Rotwang's pad is wedged amongst the high-rise nasties, curlicued, gothic and alone, an aged DOUBLE DIAMOND sign waving hopelessly from its topmost point like a flag of truce.

Now for the Underground: we are met by warm dead blasts of air and the frantic clatter of heels on the steps, galloping businessmen thump down the escalator two strides at a time. I'd forgotten all this. It comes back with the queasy familiarity of a nightmare that's never been left behind. I'd forgotten there's nowhere to rest your eyes because there are so many other eyes; I'd forgotten the decrepit Irishman, pie-eyed at opening-time, buttonholing the world if it looks at him. I avert my gaze and glance out of the window, but there's nothing to see except my pale, pissed-off reflection surrounded by the black dark of the tunnel walls. I try a neutral area above the heads of those sitting opposite ...and read those adverts again. Sneaking a look round I notice that everyone else's eyes - bar the roving Irishman's - are either completely unfocussed or buried behind the pages of the Daily Horror. Some have given up altogether and appear to be asleep. My eyeballs must remain peeled for Farringdon Station so I practice unfocussing them every now and then, making the coloured lines on the underground map above my head go all wavy and fuzzy. (It's a cheering thought that with any luck, on the way back I'll be able to do this without even trying, after a few pints of Watney's Old Thunderguts or whatever they sell at the Tun).

We get there. We seem to be close to the Hatten Gardens area, and Malcolm points out how almost everything we walk past is involved in diamonds, gold or silver. "It's the centre of the diamond business" he tells me grandly. Yup, there's a distinct smell of money about. I look about me and am deeply impressed (again). On the way to the pub I am even more impressed to note that someone has spelled 'JEWELLERY' in fancy engraved silver lettering. I have the urge to correct it in red biro. Somehow this makes the whole place less super-duper and threatening, and we plunge gaily through the famous portals of The One Tun and come to a halt about 2 inches inside.

What's all this? We have arrived particularly early because we heard terrible tales about how busy it gets, and it's nice not to have to fight for a drink and a seat when you've travelled 300 miles to get here, and the place is already bursting, a mere half-hour after opening time. We can't hear anything,



Languid Langford looms
over nonchalant Nicholas

Your editor, Mal and Hazel
Ashworth. ATom plugs
leak in Yorkshire reservoir



Photos: Vind Clarke

or see that much, but still, what a Fannish Atmosphere! Gollywhizzle, it almost feels like a con! I can see the top of Dave Langford's head from here, and there are people with fanzine-shaped carrier-bags who look like Christina Lake! Someone is bounding through the din towards us, waving a BAFFS notice over his head. He comes to a halt on Malcolm's feet. Malcolm looks amazed and pleased, and the two of them rear animatedly at one another. "WHO HE?" I mouth when I can get a sign in. "IT'S ATOM!" Actual, real Atom? I gawp. I half expect him to have that three-fingered black alien perched on his shoulder peering beadily through the smoke at us, tugging at his shirt collar and saying "Let's get outta here" in some language with lots of XXXs in it... The excitement suddenly gets to me and I have to search for the toilet, which takes some effort with all these bodies about. When I get there I find the door of the LADIES has been ripped off. Gesh. I am well and truly following in the footsteps of those Fierce Apa Femmes; or has one of the Editors had a little centretemps with the handle? Was she trying to make a point with her nom de plume and got it stuck in the keyhole? Would the door have had more of a chance of remaining in situ if PERSONS rather than LADIES had been emblazoned on its front?

I return to the fray in a haze of conjecture, making pretty slow time again, not just because of the crush, but because I'm wearing a 'Doris Pardoes Home Brew' T-shirt and get congratulated on my Impeccable Taste, by Birmingham fans particularly, as the brewery's in the West Midlands. Glunk. Wish I were in the West Midlands...it's hot and smoky and my hearing hasn't improved. Dave Wood shows us a pile of photos he took at the Brighton con, which breaks the tedium; this visual communication is highly satisfactory, and makes me wish I'd brought pictures of what I wanted to talk about too; I must remember to bring a stack of flashboards from school next time. (For those of you unfamiliar with primary school education, these are not as fascinating as they sound, but they could prove quite useful as long as there were no attempts at anything too ambitious, and you kept your conversation to the 'COME HERE KATHY' or 'COME HERE MARK' - depending on your preferences - type of thing).

The isolating wall of sound closes in again, but before the miseries can really take hold, Greg and Linda arrive; being old hands at this sort of whoop-up they raise their voices to an effortless volume a Lancashire mill-girl would not be ashamed of. "At least it's fine" bellows Greg comfortingly "you should be here when it's raining. Everyone has to stay inside."

Mr Pickersgill
demonstrates how
to blend into
a grimy brick
wall with all his
usual panache...



Man about Town Jarrold
demonstrates how to pick one's
nose in public.....

Photos: Vin & Clarke

It's only then I remember the Great Outdoors, and we make an exit towards the comfort of the pavement, which is already pretty full of people who had the sense to come out earlier. All that high-flying intellectual stuff I've been missing now bursts upon the eardrums: "STALK on Trent?" John Jarrold asks of softly-accented Lancastrian Dave Wood. "You lot don't 'alf talk funny!" I quiz Linda P. about what it's been like in the U.S. during her recent visit. It sounds pretty terrifying. Check-out machines in supermarkets have voices. Adverts speak to you, just in case you miss the visual impact. She mentions suffering from a 'sensory overload'. I nod wisely, not daring to admit I felt the same during the trip here from Vinç's garden.

Plenty of visual entertainment's been laid on: a large French wagon squeezes itself the wrong way up the one-way street which is now doubling up as the visitors' lounge, and comes to rest in front of a mini outside the pub entrance. The extraordinarily accommodating mini-owner (well, I suppose it's the owner) gets into it and reverses out of the melee. The wagon continues, bethumped and bestickered, with driver beaming blandly out at all the drunken hordes. Gad, they must be tough to get their HGV licences on the continent: he seems not to realise how a sort of Gestalt of grievances against the French wells up in the hearts of his beholders. He appears deaf to the shouts of "Rotten standardised Golden Delicious!" "Miserable existentialist lettuces!" that erupt from the Frogogynist throats of the surrounding crowd, and disappears down a dark alley to a final shout of "Agincourt!"

Next, a couple of fuzz come along - walking fuzz, yet - who seem as amiable as the wagon driver. I remark on the amazingness of this uniformed affability to Malcolm, who appears out of the darkness looking rather out of breath after an energetic bout of Frenchwagon harrying. "Humph. Probably got half a dozen cop cars not far behind: they'll get round that corner, swift chat on their radios, and Zenk." "Oh stop being so jaundiced. They were alright!" I protest.

All of a sudden it's time to go. For some incomprehensible reason Saint Atom has taken it into his head to drive Vinç and us out-of-towners back to Welling. Just as we are about to leave the first of the cop cars arrive... The euphoria consequent on not having to drive or go Underground is almost enough to restore Mal's spirits after the Dartford Tunnel Business, also he's right about the fuzz, curse him. Atom has cunningly parked right behind a skip - no doubt chonk-full of diamond debris - which some of us try and beard, not being au fait with the lines of Atom's motor, but it all gets sorted out quite quickly. Atom seems to enjoy driving, knows where he's going, and doesn't mind the men in blue. We zoom off in high fettle.

We get back to Vinç's in what seems like ten minutes, cutting swathes across the traffic with all the juggernaut assurance of a London taxi. We'm pleasantly surprised to see our own vehicle still nestling in the undergrowth where we left it, and that it is indeed the right undergrowth, and are shepherded into the house. With an air of imperturbable hospitality, as of one long used to the after-hours idiecies of the drinking half of the human race, Vinç disembowels a duplicator for something Italianate and sparkling; we sip contentedly from elegant glasses. "Straight from the vineyards of Cerflu." someone murmurs with relish. Then everyone goes into high gear about first editions of this and that, details of which escape me...it's late and the strains of navigation are beginning to tell. Eventually people go and we sink to the fan room floor: I have the air-bed, Malcolm the settee cushions in four separate bits (we let Dave have the bed in the room at the end of the corridor, him 'abeing a Editor). We sleep surprisingly soundly. Well, it seems surprising in the morning when we find that my bed has got a slow puncture and gone down ever-so slowly during the night, leaving me with all the luxury of a thin rubber sheet. Malcolm's cushions have eased apart from one another for such a considerable distance he looks like a corrugated suspensien bridge. But there's no time for self-examination; Vinç and Dave have both got up fiendishly early, and we can hear Vinç racing around with coffee and breakfast things. Amazing. He still sounds as though he's quite happy having his house filled with folk who keep leaping at his bookshelves with loud cries of recognition or envy (mostly envy). I look around me in the

early morning sunshine. What a plethora of duplicators! I can see at least two under the table, and I'm sure I saw one in the hallway as we came in last night...we find out over breakfast that the full total is four, so far. (Obviously these BNFs have devised some arcane method of reproducing duplicators in captivity).

As we aren't due back till the following day, it seems a reasonable plan to go book-hunting: Vinó is free, and seems prepared to guide us to all the bookshops worth a look that we can reach in one day. It shows how hungover I am that I agree to all this without realising what I am in for, accompanying the most single-minded Big Book Hunters this side of the Equator, in brilliant sunshine that's properly meant for flopping about in. We hot-foot it to Charing Cross Road, ignoring the sparkling Thames, and get round the first couple of bookshops fairly quickly before making a bee-line for Cecil Court, which is made more interesting than usual by the presence of a bucket of tar, which is being yanked rather unsteadily over a pulley and up on to one of the roofs a good four floors up, and then whizzed down again, the whole process inevitably leaving loads of sticky black yuk bespattered all over everywhere. It makes browsing through the remaindered books set outside the shop windows particularly exciting.

Midday approaches and Dave gets ready to split for Bristol - having to make an appearance at work that afternoon - and he looks thoughtfully at me. "You might have been better sunbathing in Vinó's garden today" he announces as he leaves. Too late. As the hours go by in some nameless dusty basement (we're back in Charing Cross road now, though it's hard to tell), I have ample time to rue my rash enthusiasm. I comfort myself with the thought that even book-crazed fiends have to eat/drink/go to the loo sometime, but at the moment these mundane pursuits seem far from uppermost in their minds. The intensity of concentration is almost audible: a singing silence occasionally punctuated with a 'HAH! scrabble scrabble scrabble' envelopes my head. I think wistfully of the evening, when Atom is supposed to be around, and the pubs will be open and the bookshops shut...though I do have a teeny moment of glory when I discover a Russian translation of a couple of famous science-fiction stories; the alien-ness of the print is compounded by the bizarre style of tabling the contents at the back of the book, and I have fun showing Vinó what 'Clifford Simak' and 'Arthur Clarke' look like in cyrillic.

Two hours later (this was a really good bookshop) we stumble out into the light. I take noisy lungfuls of air, close my eyes and walk with my nose turned towards the sun: these subtle hints go unnoticed and when I open my eyes once again Mal and Vinó have both disappeared, the buggers, leaving me face-to-face with a large West Indian who wants to know where Trafalgar Square is. I direct him with great aplomb, much to the amusement of my erstwhile escort, who is standing in the shade of a pub entrance, having taken pity at last, and I am allowed to sit down for at least ten minutes before we're on the move once more.

Four hours and ever-so-many really good bookshops later, we reach the last one on the itinerary, The Fantasy Book Centre in Holloway. I am quite hysterical with joy about this, but am prevented from expressing my state because my throat is parched and it's about 100 degrees. There is a slight delay as we hunt for the place, and while Mal and Vinó wonder, with a sweaty vagueness brought on by hours of tropical book-hunting, about finding a telephone box for the use of the directory therein, I decide that the dehydration process that's been raging through my system has gone on long enough. 'Go buy oranges' directs my numbed brain. I see two piles almost immediately in front of me: gretty and liverish on the one hand, golden and resplendent on the other. The fruit lad serving has the good sense to let me have the resplendent ones without argument, and I start peeling one with shaking fingers, getting into my fifth segment as Vinó suddenly lurches forward. For a moment I think he's going for my orange, but no, it's a bus he's after, and we are swept in after him. I hold my orange carefully over the aisle with my free hand so it won't drip over my skirt, and the juice trickles down my sleeve. We miss our step, leap from our seats, race down the bus. I grab the hand-rail as we alight and

leave a sticky orange patch for the other passengers to clutch as they get off in my wake.

Before Mal and Vinç vanish utterly into this last and best of bookshops, I announce that I'm going to catch up on my vitamin C that's been blasted to kingdom come by the smoke and what-net of the big city, and finishing the remains of the original bus-travelled orange, start on another even goofier than the first. The juice rains down on the pavement forming a puddle around my sandals: I suspect that people may be looking at me a little eddily by now so I squelch towards the kerb to stand there as though I'm waiting for something...I look down at my hands: the grime of a 1000 second-hand books has congealed with the goo now. I hold my hands out in the wind and walk up and down like someone in a fog until they have dried - this takes longer than you might have thought - and it's not until a good 15 minutes have passed that I feel I can tackle the shop. I still have qualms about actually touching the door-handle as there's a sort of tacky residue that won't shift, so I use my elbow, and the door shuts with a great echoing crash behind me. Vinç and Malcolm, the only customers in the place, favour me with a beetling glare of the sort you get when you burp in the library, and then return to their Amazings, Astoundings and Bloody Marvellouses. I resign myself to an hour or two of reading the titles on the dust jackets with my head craned sideways, as my hands are in no fit state to handle books - not even Lionel Fanthorpes - but there's an unexpected turn in my fortunes: Vinç is great mates with the owner, I am introduced (I won't shake hands, you see...Yes, I did, through the window) he smiles and offers me the use of a sink with real water, and soap, then hands me a cup of coffee. He is gracious enough not to scrutinise me as he resumes his seat at the typewriter, and tears of gratitude come to my eyes... the exquisite miseries of the day fade away, I feel mellowed by the minute, and the Book Collectors of my acquaintance appear once more to be a part of the necessary scheme of things, instead of Number One on the Hit-Bite-Strangle List.

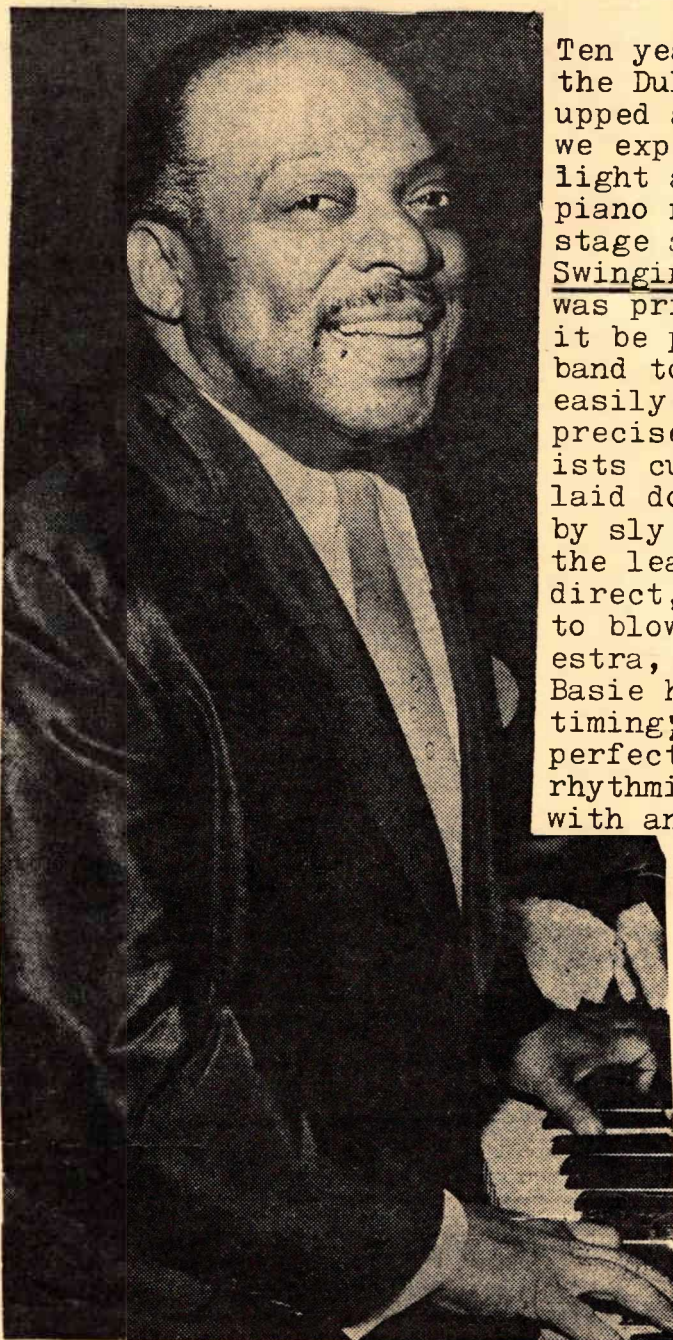
The Prince of booksellers stops typing for a moment to go and wipe his Arkham House First Editions that Malcolm has been drooling over, and I nod off to the gentle susurrus of turning pages, not to wake until the magic whisper "It's opening time!" - an incantation more potent than sal volatile - reaches my ears. And we are off to the Oval, to meet Atom. The rest of the evening passes in a haze of comfort, not looking at books, eating and drinking, and being taken round horrendously famous parts of London, to which us offworlders wouldn't dream of going alone. To my enormous delight Atom takes us to view some of the lovely bits of the city that only Americans, with their vitamin-pill induced stamina and unwearying appetite for sightseeing, ever visit. We go past Big Ben, the Houses of Parliament, bang opposite we see the GLC's 'HANDS OFF' poster flapping merrily in the breeze, Tower Bridge, Cleopatra's Needle and finally The Cutty Sark and Chichester's Gypsy Moth, moored forever in the concrete beside a pleasant open stretch of silver river.

As we drive back to Welling, Atom confesses he likes taking visiting American fans on huge sightseeing trips round the city. Mal looks at him incredulously, and I have a Good Idea. "Next time," I say, "when these two go book-hunting, will you treat me like an American?" "Course!" says Atom briskly.

I beam happily out of the window at elegant Thames-side London; beside me I can hear the rustling of mint-new Atomillos that we've wheedled out of our driver...all in all, I decide, these 'ere trips to the Tun are distinctly worthwhile.



The Count



Ten years down the line from when the Duke departed the Count has upped and left us. No more will we experience the tingle of delight as those sparse economical piano notes waft down from some stage and introduce the most Swinging big band the jazz world was privileged to hear. For let it be plain; Bill Basie led the band to beat 'em all. It swung easily, elliptically, bluesy and precise; a world of great soloists cushioned on superlative laid down unison riffs punctuated by sly little interjections from the leader's piano. This simple direct, desisive piano was made to blow up a storm, fire the orchestra, poison the opposition. Basie had an acute sense of timing; played every note perfectly in relationship to the rhythmic pattern. He was a master with an infinite sense of taste.

Henry Miller wrote in "THE COLOSSUS OF NAROUSSI":-

"One was a Count and another a Duke. They carried little white rats on their finger-tips and when they couldn't stand it any longer, the sad, white gut-bucket of the world they bit with the ends of their fingers.....The Count was a two-finger specialist, built small and round like a rotunda, with a little moustache. He always began - bink -bink! Bink for poison, Bink for arson."

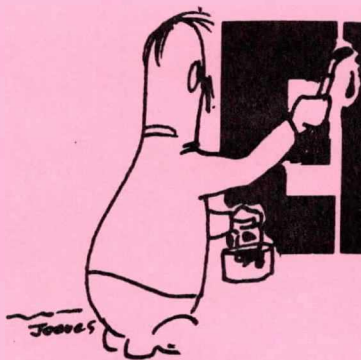
Bink - Bink and he's gone.

It is hard to believe this is the first annish of XYSTER. It only seems like yesterday that the first scruffy badly printed eight page edition appeared. Yet here we are one year later... at least the page count has increased.

This is of course a one-man band. None of this Fannish Collective nonsense we see these days with people printing, collating, stapling. and mailing as a gestalt.

It is all down to me:- Time** money** effort**

will I ever achieve the magic mean of 14/15 words to a line, neat layout, consistent print quality, tight graphics and a good type face? Watch this space....



ENCORE.

I see that all that good advice you asked me for at the con went in one ear and out the other, and Xyster is still a scruffy, 'layout, what layout?', mess. I appreciate that using the original manuscripts and letters enables you to publish with indecent frequency, but it sure don't help the look of the thing. The places where you've re text to fit the page better; you're left with either HUGE margins or those ghastly tall skinny fillos you shove in. Now, you know your style as a cartoonist, so you'll believe me when I tell you it's not the artwork itself that I object to, but I do feel that your stuff 'tightens up' a lot when reduced by about 50%, and benefits from having work in a completely different style in fairly close proximity (which is why I think your stuff works so well in M, it is so different from ATom's) - in other words: Get Some Outside Artwork!

In case you're wondering, the two lines running all the way across up there are supposed to be a deterrent to you using bits of this in the lettercol without retyping - reduce this typeface and you will get complaints!

reduced to
that I LIK



Let's stop talking generalities: look at your last issue. For a start, where's the contents page/LINK? I know they're not something that can be considered compulsory, but they do give your readers the feeling that they can find their way around zine. I take it that you are responsible for the first six pages? I'm guessing, 'cos you don't credit them to anybody... alright, so they're boring, so are most of my editorials, but I do at least make it known to the readers that I'm responsible - stand up and take it on the chin, Wood! I'll confess just I ignored the Eric Benscliffe piece, once I realised it was about the Knights - nothing wrong with it, just not a subject that interests me. Hazel and Dave Langford's stuff though, was very good and I, for one, wouldn't expect anything else from either of them. BUT, Hazel's was done on Mal's piece type, which never looks quite right, and Dave's piece was submitted, as before a professional author, double-spaced to facilitate editing, correction, additions etc. You see what I'm getting at, don't you? THEY SHOULD HAVE BEEN RE-TYPED!

On to the Loccol: and, yes, I'm still going to be going on about layout and presentation. Look at the feeble fillo on the first page - see how much neater it looks than the original! That's what I was talking about when I said your artwork looks 'tighter' when reduced. I do note, by the way, that you re-typed Terry's letter - moving the small ones of his back, I don't blame you. Let's skip through to Shel's letter; either you reduced this from a normal size original or he's found a reduction copier that doesn't produce 'dark grey or light grey' copies. No problem, it's legible, but after six pages of non-reduced material, it looks like an editorial insertion. And, of course, you've had to stuff in some tall, skinny fillos to make up the page.

Look, Dave, I hope you're taking all this as friendly advice. In XYSYTER, you have the makings of just what the British, Nay Anglo-American fan scene needs: a frequent, coherently-written zine that can attract the best fanzine writers, and you certainly have the energy and enthusiasm to go out and get the bangers to write for you. You have it within your power make it the focal point fanzine for fanzine fans, but not, I suspect, if you keep chopping and changing from one type style and another a from one type size and another, whether you (and those brain-damaged rat-fart'ers, it is a sad fact of life that PRESENTATION DOES COUNT - why else would manufacturers spend millions every year on packaging? Think about it.

«Thanks Terry, and I know you mean well, but truth is I put out XYSYTER for the sheer hell of it and my readers must take it or leave it. If anyone feels so strongly, and wishes to say that they don't want to see another issue unless I change my ways then for Ghod's sake say it and I'll save myself at least the postage. Actually I spend a large part of my working day producing an in-house magazine which involves the most meticulous care in lay-out, design and writing. This is done on design grids and modular systems. Quite honestly it is a relief to escape all that precision.....

I have dedicated this issue to you and certain others.....»

MARC ORTLIEB GPO BOX 2700X MELBOURNE VICT 3001 AUSTRALIA

Thanks for the copy of XYSYTER no 4 that found its way to me t'other day. One of these days I will work out why fanzines and bills have little difficulty in finding their way to me, whereas cheques for large sums of money almost never find their way to me.

XYSYTER is clearly going to be one of those fanzines that I'm going to have trouble responding to. (I've made two typos in this letter already.) It's not the sort of zine that leads to impassioned attacks on the articles contained therein - e.g. As a paid up member of the Doctors' Support League, I take violent exception to the implication that some nurses don't have nipples like bing cherries. - What is a bing cherry anyway, and does it have anything to do with the way that nipples go "Spung!" in Heinlein novels? It's not the sort of zine that inspires one to dash off a quick ten page on the use of apostrophes in your editorials - "I was rather disappointed by the inconsistent use of capital letters in Dave Wood's editorial. When he refers to "His Majesty's Armed forces", why does he deprive the word 'forces' of a capital, while capitalizing on 'Armed'? What are the freudian implications of this?"

I guess what it does do is tempt one to add a couple of one's own anecdotes - thus your piece on neighbours might lead me to talk about the lack of contact that I have with neighbours, perhaps because, since leaving the family home, I've averaged better than one move every year. I might also

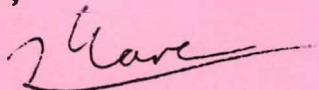
mention those infrequent encounters with my neighbours, such as the time when I lived in the top of a house, and my downstairs neighbour decided to burn the place down in response to his eviction for lack of rent paying. Or the time when my neighbour berated me for the fact that the rats which were raiding the free food offered in his chicken coop lived in my unkempt garden (It was the only time I ever spoke to him in the year and a half that I lived there.)

Ah. The joys of visiting fans. Now that's something I can relate to, having run a fan hotel at my various houses since 1977 - I know that that's a short period by most standards, but it's been fun none the less, and has led to assorted eating, drinking, and bookshop expeditions. Mind you, I've never gone to the extremes that you mention in preparing for the visits. The most I've done is to grudgingly wash the spare sheets, and lay our extra straw in the guest room.

I don't think that Vinç has gone far enough in his making sf reading a spectator sport. What it lacks is the visual impact of a skiing contest. Thus the readings would need some sort of accompaniment. For instance, the reading from the Gor books could be accompanied by scantily clad girl guides tying each other into the positions described in the book. The performance would be rated by the steadiness of voice in the reader of the passage. Naturally this would require some firm policing. Much in the way that female athletes are given sex tests, the male readers would have to produce proof of their heterosexual proclivities. The potential for such events increases when one thinks of what might be done to add visual impact to readings from Philip Jose Farmer. Sadly though I doubt that anything could be done to liven up anything that Jerry Pournelle has written, short of placing him in such a position that he has to use his military skills to protect him from the onslaught of a hundred blood-crazed anarchists.

Having failed to come up with a cutting comment to Mal Ashworth, I'll move on to Hazel Ashworth's piece, to which I can relate, having started my motorcycling career on a fifty cc Honda stepthrough - not a moped, but there were times I wished that it had been. I pushed it home far too often. I think that my worst moment though was when I'd borrowed a much larger machine - a Honda 90 stepthrough, and was sitting next to it acting as a checkpoint for a car rally. As I sat there, I heard a monstrous roar, and a BSA 650, complete with large blonde frauline in black leathers slid into the parking bay. Said frauline dismounted, walked over to me, and said "Is there anything wrong?" Had I had my wits with me, I would have quickly smashed the sparkplug and said "Yes, it won't start. Could you give me a lift to wherever you're going?" but I was young at the time, and didn't think that quickly.

Yours antipodeanly,



*** Nice to hear from our token antipodean...Not that I personally can help him much in his hunt for the perfect bing-cherry. There could, I suppose, if we accept the obsolete scottish definition of bing:- v.i. to go, find something in common there with Grand Master Robert's spung variety. Then again perhaps the bing refers to a species only seen during a cold snap, say a White Christmas. In which case all antepodean research would be negated as I understand their idea of Christmas involves having the sun at its highest and a cold can of Fosters.... Perhaps they are only found on northern hemispheres ? Research is needed - any volunteers?

On visiting fans, I got my own back on the Ashworths recently. I arranged a short visit and then turned up an hour early. Caught the Master of the house on his hands and knees in the hallway wrestling with a Hoover. He had promised Hazel he would vacuum the hall before we arrived. He had managed to make the thing blow rather than suck and the hall was covered in a fine layer of lint like dust. I promised not to tell Hazel.

I'm not very up on sport, so tell me do they only give female athletes the sex test? I mean, if some female who superficially, I mean clothed, looked like a male and entered as a male, think of the havoc she could wreak in the locker room; tire the opposition before the events got under way.....

BRIAN W. ALDISS

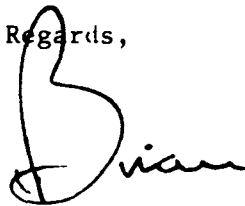
enjoyed XYSTER, starring Dave Langford, the Philip Larkin of the sf scene. But it was the modernised proverbs which really grabbed my imagination, and I offer the following:

When chefs prove supernumerary
They bugger up the ratatouille

The pseudopod that fibrillates the midget,
Cot-confined, the one that builds a rigid
Gobal oligarchy: self-same digit.

The giants of the genus Quercus
Begin their lives as little ferkers.

Regards,



KEN LAKE 115 MARKHOUSE AVE LONDON E17 8AY

The great JB's "here's the answer - what's the question ?" offering was so excruciating that I could not hold this one back:

ANSWER: $C_6H_4CO \cdot SO_2NH$

QUESTION: What did the Black Hole do to Doris Pischeria ?

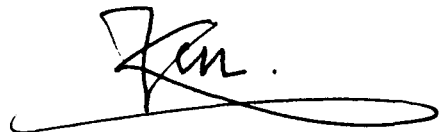
And here's another cleriheh by courtesy of Peter Nicholls' Encyclopaedia (where'd we be without it ?):

Luis Philip Senarens, alias Noname

Is almost a SF figure of no fame:

"The Jules Verne of America" they called him

For scribbling 180 skiffy dime novels before Fate and Asimov overhauled him.



16, Rockville Drive, Embsay, Skipton, North Yorks

Has it ever been borne in upon you, with whatever force, how lamentably lacking in all semblance of fannish sense of humour are the Guardians of our Physical Welfare (or 'Doctors', as you probably call them in Clevedon) ? It lacks but seven days that mine own such Guardian grilled me interrogatively, thus - "What's your occupation?" - he interrogated me, grillishly.

"I'm officially retired", I gleed back at him, grinnishly..

Hard, like unto tungsten-carbide chewing gum, was the look he gave me, suspecting a Doctor-deriding put-on.

Guileless was the friendly face which off-fended his darkling doubts.

"Aren't you a bit young for that ?" he hoped, seeking amplification.

"Oh yes, I had to fight for it", I gaily expanded.

"Well - what do you do now ?" he searched, desperately.

"Well currently," I enumerated, pleasantly, "try to sort my way through about 8,000 books; and then I've got a Ph.D. to possibly complete.", I added, silver-linishly.

"But...it's all...for fun ?", he increduled.

"Oh, yes" I burred back, blithely, "Everything's for fun now."

About then was when the bastard told me to stop drinking.

I often feel, as you, too, no doubt often feel (is it not ?) that the major factor in all human communication is interpretation. Thus it was that I felt it would be churlishly unfair to this man, charged as he was, with the guardianship of my welfare (to the physical side of which I now - ever so suddenly - realised should be added the mental. Of course.) to accept his imperative at face value. Obviously, although what he said was "Stop drinking", what he actually intended was that I should interpret this intelligently, utilising to the full all those inestimable talents for which I daily give thanks to God, Alfred Korzybski, Leeds University and Harold the local Gasmeter-reader (who is better at interpreting what people say - especially on the subject of drinking - than anyone I've ever met). It was equally obvious, also, that no merely superficial interpretation was called for. I suppose it would have hardly taxed an 'F' stream fourth-former to realise that, when this Good Doctor said "Stop drinking", what he clearly meant, on one very simplistic level, was "I'll see my Great Grandmother

a blue-tailed kangaroo before I let you go on doing things for fun if I've got anything to do with it". Yes, of course, we can all see that.

But way below that level one must, in justice to his Hippocratic Oath, assume that a more subtle and profound reality of interpretation can be extracted from his ostensibly sour-grapeish prescription. Thus it was that I concluded that by saying "Stop Drinking" what this Doyen of Dyspepsia, this Eminence of the Enema, this Pharaoh of Pharyngitis wished me to understand was "Try to cut down from around six or seven pints a night to about three or so".

It's things like this that give one great respect for the British National Health Service.

Mal

JOY HIBBERT 11 RUTLAND ST HANLEY STOKE- ON-TRENT STAFFS ST1 5JG

****heavily cut and in parts censored...Dave.****

It does interest me to read how much synchronicity (good word that, don't tell me you don't learn things in fanzines, I learn't that from RASTUS 2) there seems to be in fanzines these days. So many similar things but not quite. WAM writing about being chatted up by a man in his fabzine, Philip (Collins) writing about being chatted up by a man in Buicuit. RA McAvoy writing about a trip to Ireland in Izzard, Chris Hughes writing about a trip to Ireland in Fantasmagoria. Steve Green writing about going abroad in his fanzine, you doing the same in yours. Ian Sorenson printing something from his father in his fanzine, Oscar Dalgleish printing something to his father in his. I wonder why?

Liked Hazel's comments. Another person who doesn't read their programme sheets. The ballerinas name was Paul Covington, a darkhaired, square faced young man who would probably have been quite nice if he'd been able to talk about something other than his dancing. And if he'd put a chair under the door handle of his 'changing room' so that people (ie me) couldn't get embarrassed by walking in on him.

Two points about security. Everyone at the business meeting agreed that it was better for the convention to run its own security than borrow the hotels, and if you think security is unnecessary: well, do you want the con overrun by people like those on what-ever-night-it-was who came in looking for a fight?

**** ah, and I thought they were looking for DWest to demand their money back - Dave****

Secondly, Hazel gives a mention of an attitude towards security that really p****s me off: the implication that certain people should be above suspicion. The badge is the basic security system of a convention, and if certain people don't think they are above such things there would have been considerably less trouble. Of course the security was bad, the basic rule that any "anyone who wants to do security has a power complex and shouldn't be allowed to" wasn't adhered to. And things would have been better if there hadn't been this trouble with forged badges in the first place.

I don't really think anyone objected to wearing a badge...it was the fact that we were subjected to security demanding they were worn in a regulation-above-left-breast spot; failure to do so meaning a threatening attitude. May I however say that I personally feel I should be 'above suspicion' in fact I take it as an insult that I should be suspected of anything. I wear a con badge to show I am a member of the con not as a means by which I can provide a character reference - Dave

...re Dave Langford's piece...

Gelid, according to my dictionary, does actually mean 'cold', but the problem is that it doesn't sound right, sounding too much as if it comes from the same root as gelatine. Ah, the benefits of a scientific education. Preterite is the same name of a past tense in one of the languages I studied but I can't remember which (and I've forgotten them not anyway), The dictionary meaning is "past (of tense, expression past state or action)". However, even having determined that it isn't that odd a word, and that Dave Langford is being unreasonable in saying it is, this leaves us with the problem of what Donaldson thinks it means, particularly with reference to the first quote. Likewise 'argute' means sharp or shrill, but neither meaning seems to fit the quote given. 'Refulgence' means splendour or brilliance, see above comment. I hate to say this, in view of Donaldson's prize, but I found half the words in a Collins Pocket Dictionary, 1965.....

Dave's comments on "Moreta" would have been more convincing if he hadn't left holes in the criticism just for effect. Let's face it, if the book is as bad as he says, he doesn't need to make things up. For example, hepatitis is passed from person to person: the chance of getting it from a plant on an alien planet are not large, and this is why a hollow thorn can be used only once. Why bother with making metal/glass needles when the natural version is just waiting to be picked? How sad that Dave wants a world full of purely logical people. How lucky that he has never been so tired that he does stupid things merely from tiredness. How convenient to forget that 'being in the same time twice' is exhausting and unlikely to enable her to awake refreshed. How interesting to speculate on how he would have praised this novel had it been written by someone he liked. Surely he is not so innocent to believe that any history is accurate, so why should Pernese history be so different?

** gosh oboy oh wow. Lit crit in an old BAF rag!!!! I guess it is over to you as I haven't read any of Pernese history.... but Langford 'innocent'? Further comments welcome but please not too argute in your refulgent remarks.-Dave**

I haven't actually read 'Habitation One' nor do I intend to. My stomach isn't really strong enough.

**interesting that remark. After the way DL went over the top, in your view, over his remarks on "Moreta" shouldn't you perhaps consider he treated this book equally badly? - Dave **
However, he's at it again, getting at something for no very good purpose reason. My limited knowledge (and my Dave) informs me that in all probability 'filamentary stanchions' are thin strong supports, probably holding the building up. From what I've heard of this book from others Dave's criticism doesn't need this sort of weak support. ((sic)) But the real question I have to ask is this: assuming Dave hasn't made up this bit about Dunstan being 8 years old, what sort of child would know things like this? Admittedly children are very into goryness, but the bits about necrophilia and shooting pregnant women seems a bit less likely.....

Joe



Eric Mayer, 1771 Ridge Road E, Rochester, NY 14622, May 5

Dear Dave,

Many thanks for XYSTER 4, definitely one of the most enjoyable zines I've read this year. Its nice to see that fans can still find something to write about except Fandom. The way things are going, in another ten years Fandom will consist of one fan writing a three page fanzine in January and everyone else analyzing it for the rest of the year. I continue to be amazed by the Ashworth's writing. Not so much that its excellent - excellent fanwriters do continue to come along - but that, as you demonstrate with your reprint Mal, at least, was doing this stuff back in the fifties and I'd never even heard of him let alone had a chance to read a reprint. History is selective-fan history even more so. The picture we get of the past depends solely on who sticks around to paint it decades later and sometimes the fans who stick around are not the most creative or original.

Neighbors and characters are strongly featured in this issue. I have to admit that I consider neighbors one of the bane of existence and, like the Ashworths, Kathy and I have defended ourselves by reducing them to caricatures, thought not quite so entertainingly. When I was going through law school (rather akin to going through torture) we lived in a sixth floor walkup in Brooklyn. People in New York City keep to themselves, as much as possible - which isn't much considering the thickness of the plasterboard between apartments. Our relations with our neighboring tenants were strictly acoustic. We knew the flute people in the groundfloor apartment, for instance, because in the summers they kept their windows open and the sound of flutes, which is like dandy lion fluff or maybe pigeons pin feathers, drifted up through our screens. Opera man was also well known to us, despite his apartment being several floors below, because on Sunday mornings, like clockwork, the yelling was transmitted up through the piping and into our bathroom. (At first we'd thought someone was being mugged in the hallway). We were best acquainted with the people in the apartment below. The first tenant, Boob boy, so called because he was young and lived among cinderblocks and a mattress and threw his shoes across the room, and against the opposite wall the moment he got in from work every night. Later he was replaced by the Boob, a larger older version. After we got a dispute with him concerning whether it was healthy for Kathy and I to have Billy Joel chomping at our feet through the floorboards every night he became known as SF, which stood for a number of things, none of which were science fiction. There was also Party Girl, a few floors down (self explanatory) and WhoWho. WhoWho was an interesting case, if a hopeless one. He was an Artist, or perhaps even an Artiste. He moved in with Business Girl on the second floor and was occasionally seen hauling large blank canvases in and out. At 7 AM every morning he would put on the Who song - "Who Are You" - full volume. So every morning we heard, "Who are you? Who who, who who."!! (This typewriter lacks an exclamation mark. First I have to make a "." then hit the backspace key and add a " ! ". Really takes all the excitement out of it.) Well, maybe it was his equivalent of a cup of coffee. The worst character of all was our landlord, the Bozo (if I'd known I'd be writing about this to a faned I'd have figured out more amusing names) who had the peculiar idea that we were supposed to pay him for living among such riffraff. We could always tell his kick against the door. (His wife wore high heels)!!!! (Nope. Still no good.) But be this or that as it may or might be...the real question is whether, just because strangers stick their noises into our business, is it right for us to denigrate them, to deprive them of their dignity as human beings by refusing to honor them with their proper names? I think we know that the answer is yes. (I won't even try the exclamation again)

WE ALSO HEARD FROM:-

MARJORIE BRUNNER: DAVE LANGFORD: MAUREEN PORTER: DAVE ROWLEY (who complained about being left out of the WAHF's last time...)
PHILIP COLLINS: ETHEL LINDSAY: PAMELA BOAL: PETER CRUMP: HAZEL ASHWORTH: ALISON HASTON: ANN GREEN (...you'll be pleased to know that on the train home from Seacon we had a ceremonial 'hurling from the window' of the badges to cries of "We noo want your feelthee badgees."): TERRY JEEVES: MIKE SHERWOOD: KEN LAKE (...I can do no more than (a) stare in wonder at your virtuosity (b) admire the undulating paper on which it is presented (five hours under the massive two-volume Compact Oxford (boxed with built in magnifying glass) failed to flatten it)): ERIC BENTCLIFFE: ROBERT COULSON (...our new address doesn't have the old world charm of Friary Close. I have been assured that the general area we live in is known as FROG ALLEY, if that helps...): MICHAEL ASHLEY: MARTYN TAYLOR: JOSEPH NICHOLAS (Confusion...lack of discrimination and thought...some way to go yet, therefore. ('E' for effort, but must try harder, what)): MAL (THE PLAGUE) ASHWORTH: HARRY ANDRUSCHAK (....Freas in '75 slipped a superb joke over Don Wollheim.....cover for MARAUDERS OF GOR...came up with a classic piece of satire. Big bear-like alien with clawed foot over the breast of a lady on the ground in a sheer nightie. A stern jawed hero was present with a battle-axe.... chain round the lady's neck. The whole cover just yells THIS IS TRASH...it actually went on the market...then pulled from the shelves and a new edition came out with a more normal cover. It too was labeled first printing. Thus we have two first prints of this book..I have a hunch my edition with the Freas cover is a collectors item...): and

FROM THE OFFICE OF:

*****WELLRUN HOWBORED *****

Cleared for immediate despatch

16th May 1984

Lookit smartass,

One of the ~~delivered~~ ~~delivered~~ highly-trained personnel in my Vast Organisation has just brought to my attention that article about Dragonhikers and similar everyday banalities in your piffling publication.

I didn't understand it but all I can say is that you and this here boy Rave Longfart want to think twice before messing with us Mighty Minds that control the Known Universe (and bits of the Unknown as well on Tuesdays and Thursdays). You don't know what you're taking on, sunshine, I warn you; we were 'clear' twenty years ago so by now we're positively sparkling. If you don't wanna wake up at the bottom of the Bristol Channel with your feet cosily wrapped in a block of Enturbulated Theta I'd advise you to run a further, totally objective, unbiassed, non-partisan, utterly impartial review of BATTLEFIELD WHATSISNAME, duplicated copies of which can be obtained from this office on receipt of a stamped addressed ten pound note.

Hop to it, underdog, unless you want to end up with your tail between teeth. (Yes, I know it's usually 'tail between your legs'. Don't worry - that's where your teeth will be too.)

PERSONALLY SIGNED BY

Wellrun / Howbored

(That'll be another fifty big ones for the autograph, Bozo)

Which is about it.

Many thanks to Mal, Hazel, Vinç, D., Pete, Ken for the nitty-gritty of this issue. Also to the art department: ATOM for his cover and Terry Jeeves and D.West for interiors along with the artists from COLOUR MAGAZINE 1918 and CHUMS for 1924. Odds and ends by me. Then the magnificent snooping camera of the Lensman Vinç Clarke.

Mention must also be made to all those editors who send me their publications and never ever get locced. This is by way of a peace offering. In particular I must mention JOHN BERRY (with a middle'D') 525 19th Avenue East, Seattle, Washington 98112 from whose WING WINDOW I quoted Joy H. Similarly HARRY ANDRUSCHAK of P.O. Box 606, LA CANADA-FLINTRIDGE CALIFORNIA 91011 USA with INTERMEDIATE VECTOR BOSONS 4.

FHOI :-
 dave wood
 1 friary close
 marine hill
 cleveland
 avon
 england
 BS21 7QA

.....

TO :-

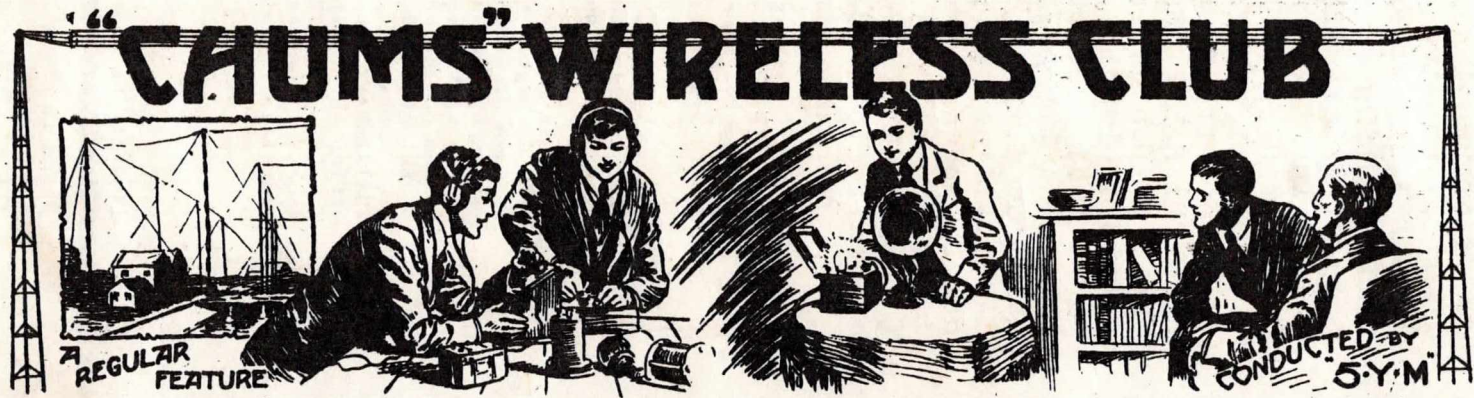
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