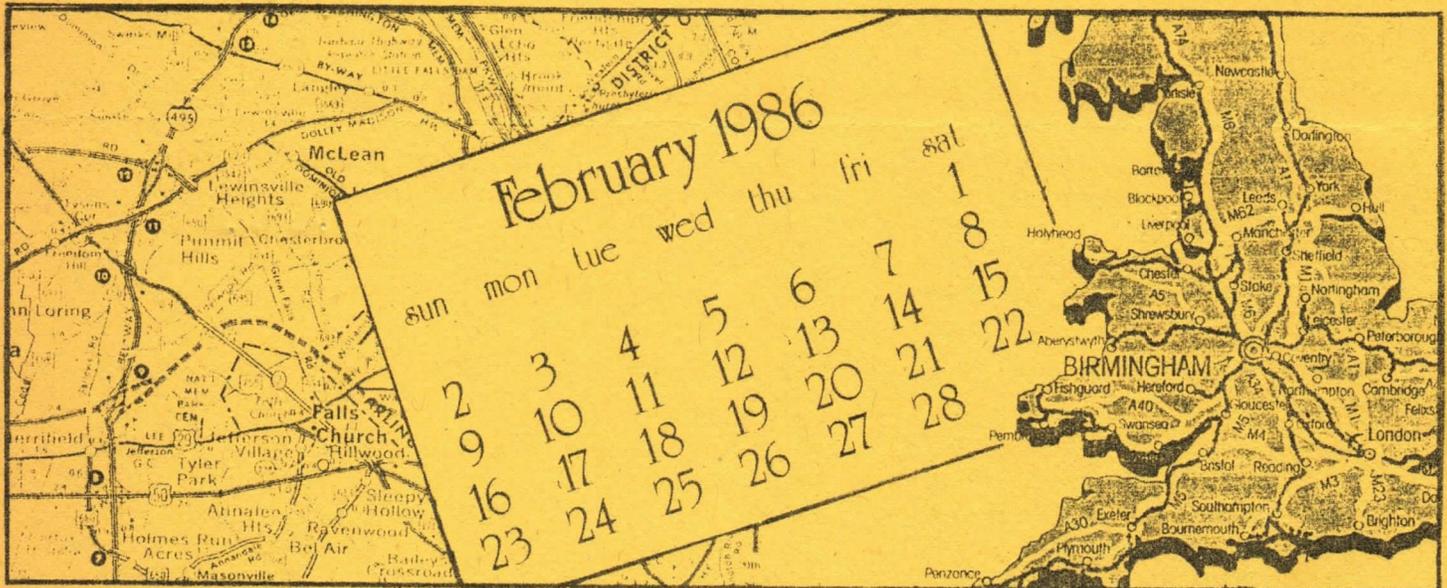


CRANK

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TRAVELLING GIANTS Due to its production schedule and the means by which it's produced and distributed there is usually a spread of some weeks in the receipt of CRANK between the first and last readers to get their copies. A nuisance I know, particularly when this time out I know some of you probably won't read these words until after CORFLU, and one made all the more aggravating by the fact that this bit is written by someone more than a little excited by the two conventions looming on his horizon, someone who is about to tell you a little of what they mean to CRANK's crack editorial team....

Summit meetings will occur at MEXICON and CORFLU when the editors of CRANK will joyfully cement east-west (ie. UK-US) relations, get real heavy about the state of fandom, party, and have desperate fun. Since the conventions are being held on consecutive weekends - MEXICON in Birmingham, UK over the weekend of 7th-9th Feb, and CORFLU in McLean, Virginia, USA (see map) over the weekend of 14th-17th Feb - attending both seemed a neat, if expensive, idea. Avedon and I had been talking vaguely of going to CORFLU ever since she arrived on these shores, while Ted made the decision to attend MEXICON when over here for our wedding last summer. Next issue will doubtless carry reports on both cons but in the meantime here are our schedules for the next few weeks...

Ted flies in from DC on Thursday 6th Feb and out again the following Tuesday (far too brief a visit, if you ask me), while Avedon and I will be flying out the next day. Current plans call for us to travel down to Washington from New York with the Nielsen Haydens on Friday 17th Feb, and stay at Avedon's parents' place 'til the following Friday. This of course means that we won't be staying at the con hotel during CORFLU, but then

with our travel costs being so high we can't afford the hotel as well. The final part of our trip involves then returning to New York and staying there until we fly out on Wednesday 26th Feb, arriving back in the UK during the early morning hours of the 27th. Quite how all this globe-trotting by its editors will affect CRANK's production schedule we shall all soon discover.r'h.

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A FANZINE FAN "Has anyone out there thought through, I mean really thought through this CORFLU business?" asks Patrick Nielsen Hayden in FLASH POINT #7. He objects to the notion of a "convention for fanzine fans". The trouble is that this notion...

"...takes for granted that 'fanzine fan' means anything, which it doesn't. OK, so there are a bunch of people scattered across the continent who do fanzines. Do they have that much in common, to the exclusion of all sorts of other fans we hang out with, really? I doubt this. There are 'fanzine fans' more tedious than any 'con fan'...; conversely there are 'con fans' whom we'd all recognise as members of the trufannish tribe."

I was amazed to read that, since it is so self-evidently wrong. The commonality of the fanzine experience surely has nothing whatsoever to do with either how tedious some among us (but not thee, and not me, surely) may be, or how well we may get along with those benighted heathens who aren't Into Fanzines. I mean, after all, even the most dedicated to fanzines among us must surely have a few friends who fail to share this obsession. I know I do. So what?

What Patrick is so semi-coherently bridling against is what he sees as ghettoisation of a sort:

"As a category, the concept of 'fanzine fandom' grew up in reaction to the invention of 'con fandom'; before that people like us who went to cons and threw parties and participated in local groups and wrote fanzines were simply known as 'fans'. Now by virtue of categorization (and I don't just mean CORFLU), we're 'fanzine fans', our involvement in all those other areas subtly downgraded in others' eyes (goddamn fanzine fans, always trying to tell us what to do), our fanac generally felt to somehow revolve around arcane rites of the duplicator. ...I want fandom back, not some half-life of 'fanzine fandom: a gestalt of in-person and in-print interaction in which one can wholeheartedly participate without wincing in embarrassment."

Ah, Patrick, Patrick, Patrick... What a shame he has allowed others to define for him his participation in fandom. What a shame he has chosen the label instead of the substance.

He is absolutely right, of course, that we 'fanzine fans' are the true omnifans: the ones who partake of all the opportunities fandom offers, rather than defining ourselves narrowly around one activity alone. But we know this. I mean, who reads Patrick's fanzine -- or this one -- after all? And we all know, equally well, that no label applied to us is going to alter our participation in every aspect of fandom that we wish to enjoy. Call me a 'fanzine fan' if you like; I will continue to attend as many conventions as ever. It causes me no problems.

But lots of people attend conventions, and relatively few of them either put out or get fanzines. The fact that I do makes me a fanzine fan, and makes other fanzine fans whom I may meet at cons of particular interest to me. We -- and I include everyone reading this -- share a special language, a vocabulary based on fanzines. When we meet we may pick up conversations which had been conducted in print -- and we may continue them later.

What Patrick is reacting to is an attitude held by some non-fanzine fans, an attitude which does indeed look down upon us, regarding us as queer ducks of some sort, whose

pleasures are incomprehensible. This bothers Patrick somewhat more than it does me. I regard that attitude as prejudiced, based in ignorance, and worthy of little more than contempt. So what if some con fan thinks fanzines are stupid? What makes that person's opinion worthy of my - or Patrick's - consideration? Why should I, or any fanzine fan, care?

I can't speak for the rest of you, but I do fanzines because I enjoy it. The first time I saw a fanzine, the idea appealed to me (despite the rough-hewn execution of that particular fanzine), and thirty five years later it still does. I feel no need, nor urge, to justify fanzines to someone who doesn't like or understand them; I'd rather spend my time and energies with those who feel as I do.

Patrick goes on to contrast COREFLU (which he has never attended) with the British MEXICON (which he has also never attended). This is dangerous ground indeed, and Patrick slips early on when he says:

"COREFLU doesn't smell like fandom to me. It smells like reaction: a festival of all those odds and ends rejected by everyone else in fandom, mimeo workshops and apa panels and who-the-hell-cares. I don't know about the rest of you, but personally I find mimeography to be of less than consuming interest."

Thud. As someone who attended the first two COREFLUs (and is programming the third), I am here to tell you that Patrick has no idea what those conventions were like, and his speculations fall far wide of the mark. Nonetheless, Patrick condemned COREFLU, contrasting it unfavourably with MEXICON:

"On the whole, though, I prefer the MEXICON approach... Simply put, the idea is to put on a science fiction convention, you know, about books, the kind you read. Programme items were deliberately sophisticated: serious critical discussions by fans (not boring academics), a film programme of avant-garde and stfnally borderline works, Guests of Honour of the half-stfnal, half-mundane sort bound to be of interest only to those who sometimes read books without spaceships on the cover... Most 'fanzine fans' in Britain attended. So did all the other intelligent, stimulating people we hang around fandom for: the literate, articulate folks who simply haven't time to get involved with fanzines, the pro writers and editors who enjoy fandom on its own terms..., the dealers with real books and magazines to sell..."

Shortly after I write this (and before most of you will read it) I'll be attending the second MEXICON. The week immediately following that I'll be working on COREFLU III. But right now I have no more experience of MEXICON than Patrick does, and I think it downright silly of him to make unfavourable comparisons between the two conventions, neither of which he has attended. Was the first MEXICON truly marvellous, with nary a "tedious" person to be seen? Well, I've heard good things about it, and I look forward to MEXICON II, but that in no way diminishes the fine time I had at the first two COREFLUs. Each con exists in a separate context, and I'm prepared to accept each as a success on its own terms.

But Patrick does not stop at unfairly slugging COREFLU, nor at disowning 'fanzine fandom'. He goes on to make the incredibly sweeping judgement that Americans as a whole, and American fandom with them, are anti-intellectual, and that this contrasts with British attitudes. With this notion I think Patrick has well and truly shot himself in the foot.

"It's worth noting that their greatest fanwriter, Walt Willis, took the title of his most famous column from Joyce and scattered joking references to Proust and 19th-century German literature throughout his work, while the postcard we received the other day from Dave Langford ended with a joke referring to an obscure controversy between 19th-century poets. In American fannish fandom, on the other

hand, the primal image - (note that Patrick is contrasting apples with oranges - no 'primal images' are offered from Britfandom) - is either of Bob Tucker deflating the pompositives of sercon intellectuals with Twainesque crackerbarrel folk-wisdom, or Burbee and Laney, two Normal guys (yeah sure you betcha) hooting uproariously at the antics of such overintense, overintellectual fruitcakes as Ackerman or E. Everett Evans. Fundamental to our fannish creation-myth is the identification of 'sercon' and 'fannish' with 'hyper' and 'mellow'."

I figure Patrick had a bad day when he wrote that, since it makes mincemeat of the historical facts as well as being so exaggerated as to be absurd. Yeah, American fans all spend their time watching TV while drinking beer, while intensely intellectual British fans never set foot inside a pub. Sure. And we all know that Patfandom was intellectual and humourless, devoted solely to researches into obscure continental SF writers of the late eighteenth century. Right.

Let us ignore mundane 'national characteristics', since fans have never been known for being normal, average sorts, and 'national characteristics' are almost always false, anyway. Let's just consider fandom.

Historically, fandom has always been more intellectual than not. Fandom was, after all, formed entirely of people who could read and write, who were literate, and who - as SF readers - tended to look beyond the immediate horizons in their thinking. And it is within this context that people like Bob Tucker, or Charles Burbee and F. Towner Laney (all of whom were admired by Willis) functioned. Nor should it be forgotten what 'sercon' means, and why the word was coined. (But Patrick is referring to the activities of the thirties and forties in Tucker's case, and the late-forties in the case of Burbee and Laney, while 'sercon' was coined in the mid-fifties by that arch-anti-intellectual, Boyd Raeburn...who once used a de Chirico painting as the cover for his fanzine*.)

Never before have I seen Forry Ackerman (or EEEvans, for that matter) described as "overintellectual", and I seriously doubt either Burbee or Laney ever charged him with that.) The very idea would, I suspect, provoke laughter.) And while Bob Tucker certainly laughed at pomposity, never before have I heard his targets described as "sercon intellectuals". What is Patrick trying to say, That the fuggheads were the intellectuals, and the BNFs of legend were all anti-intellectuals? Does anyone take that notion seriously?

There are a lot of things wrong with contemporary US fandom, and there is much that I admire about British fandom, but, speaking as one fanzine fan to the rest of you fanzine fans, I think Patrick has overreached himself in finding contrasts between the two fandoms. But then, I'm just an American; what do I know?tw.

HERE IN THE UK I reacted to Patrick's piece rather differently than Ted did, particularly in how I interpreted his comments on labelling. Personally I use the term 'fanzine fan' as a convenient piece of shorthand, as a way of differentiating between those fans who do fanzines and those who don't, but I've never considered it a term to be applied to those whose fanac is limited solely to fanzines. If it were then the only people it could apply to would be certain residents of Rochester NY and Puerto Rico, and I usually refer to them in terms that are both anatomically improbable and question their parentage. However, I take Patrick's point and I think Ted may have misread him. It seems to me that far from allowing others "...to define for him his participation in fandom..." Patrick's complaining that this is what those responsible for CORFLU have done. Given the way a fair number of people do indeed "...look down on us, regarding us as queer ducks of some sort..." then to advertise CORFLU as "...a convention for fanzine fans..."

* A BAS #6, April 1955: "Cover illo by George de Chirico", and in full colour, too.

and to be so apparently gung-ho about fanzines as to put together a main programme centred around them is in Patrick's eyes to have capitulated to these people; to have not only conceded to their view of our type of fan but to have apparently relished doing so. Whether this is in fact what's happened I don't know but if I'm reading what he wrote correctly then Patrick clearly feels that it has and is concerned about it. He sees a problem of which CORFLU is a part where MEXICOM is, perhaps, a solution. I don't know if he's correct or not and I feel less qualified to speculate on these matters than Patrick. This is due less to the fact that I haven't, at the time of writing, attended a CORFLU than to how the situation has yet to reach the point over here that it has in the US and how my experience of such problems is a lot more limited.

Concerning anti-intellectualism and whether or not it's more prevalent in the US, I couldn't help but recall a comment Patrick made when over here on his TAFF trip to the effect that "...literacy has more street-credibility in the UK..." and contrasting this with my own experience. Like a lot of fans I was a bit of a bookworm as a kid but unlike most of them, who appear to have had relatively comfortable middle-class upbringings, I spent my childhood on a council housing estate (US equivalent: housing projects) and so got exposed to the whole working-class/blue-collar mentality over such things. We were all working-class but needless to say the kids on my street thought I was weird for wanting to read books rather than kick a ball against a wall or brawl with my fellows, and it was apparent to me that their parents felt much the same way. However, when I reached high school and got to mix with the children of middle-class families for the first time I was amazed to discover that it didn't have to be that way, that there were others who didn't think it weird to want to read books for pleasure and who had parents who didn't think it was weird either. It was a shock of joy much like that you feel on encountering fandom for the first time and discovering that, yes, there are other people who share your interests and obsessions, your values and your outlook on life. This is only my experience, of course, but it proves that anti-intellectualism is hardly unknown over here, and that literacy certainly had no credibility on the streets of my childhood.

With regard to the US, I read a report in a recent issue of THE COMICS JOURNAL, of all places, concerning declining standards of literacy and the disquiet this was causing in various circles, and while I'm unsure of the situation with regard to the UK I recall reading a while back that there are more book stores per head of population in the US than there are in the UK, so maybe things are worse over here. Quite how all this relates to the intellectualism of US and UK fans, though, I'm not sure, but whenever I try to see those of us on this side of the pond as more intellectual the terrible image of Joy Hibbert looms up before me. (By the way, I realise I've been equating literacy with intellectualism but given that you can't really have the latter without the former I think it's valid to do so for the purposes of this piece.) I note, incidentally, that Ted uses Ratfandom as an example in his reply to Patrick's article, and while I've no intention of getting into an argument over how seriously intellectual or otherwise the Rats were I'd like to follow up on something Ted said concerning them last issue.

In CRANK #4, having discussed the way in which particularly dynamic fannish scenes evolve, Ted commented that...

"...individual talents remain, for the most part, separated and apart, and fail to reinforce each other the way, say, Burbee, Lanay, and Co. did in Los Angeles in the forties; Willis Shaw, White, and Harris did in Belfast & London in the fifties; and Kettle, Pickersgill, and Co. (Ratfandom) did in London in the seventies. Britain enjoys a considerable geographic advantage in this regard."

I actually think that, while Britain's size is an advantage in many ways, it isn't particularly so in this regard. I agree with Ted that the three examples he cites were

instances where it all came together in a big way and we were treated to large volumes of delightful and exciting fanwriting, but I also think that these were, essentially, flukes. In each case we are talking about a small handful of people, all of them highly talented, who came together in the same place at the same time and interacted in a way that produced wonderful fanwriting but such conjunctions are always going to be rare. I mean how likely is it that fanwriters of the calibre of Pickersgill, Kettle, Edwards, Brosnan, Holdstock, and the Charcocks - to choose Ratfandom; the most recent example - are going to be active in the same time and place and interact like that, so achieving the gestalt or critical mass or whatever-you-want-to-call-it that's necessary? Nonetheless, it does happen and, as Ted's examples at least indicate, the small number of people it takes suggests that it could happen in any city. It could happen next in Britain, but it could equally well happen in the US or Australia or Canada, and in that regard at least it seems to me that Britain's size is irrelevant.

I bring all this up mainly because I realised on rereading my 'Autumn Harvest' in CRANK #4 that when I expressed the opinion that "...for fanwriting to flourish it has to do so within the context of a non-fragmented fandom, one not overrun by mediafans..." this could be taken to mean that I don't think there's a hope in hell of fanwriting flourishing in the US in the future, which is not the case. Fanwriting as referred to in that piece being a product of fannish gestalt, conditions are certainly more favourable over here, but that's as far as it goes. And if I'm around to see fanwriting of the quality of that produced by the Insurgents, the Wheels of IE, and Ratfandom when next such a group emerges then I'll be happy to read it wherever it comes fromrh.

THE SPACE SHUTTLE CHALLENGER: As a science fiction writer I have considered, speculated about, and in fact written about the things which can go wrong with space travel. This in no way prepared me for the emotionally stunning news about the Challenger.

The night before the launch I was talking with my daughter about the marvellous photos of Uranus' moons being sent back by Voyager 2.

"When you think about the incredible distances involved, the astrophysics involved in computing the orbits, the fact that an error of only a fraction of a degree would result in missing a target by millions of miles, and the technology that has gathered up this data and sent it back to us - why, that's incredible! When I was your age," I said to my fifteen year old daughter, who now reads more science fiction than I do, "not only was this stuff technically impossible, people laughed at those of us who thought it might ever be possible."

I awoke to stunning news. I dressed to radio reports of the disaster and then began searching through the two video cassettes I had recorded routinely of the morning's television broadcasts on NBC and ABC. For hours after the event the television channels had preempted normal programming to cover the disaster, but I had to see for myself how it was first reported.

Hindsight lends bitter ironies to the cheers of the crowd at the Cape as the Shuttle initially had a successful takeoff. The camera catches the parents of the schoolteacher selected to be the civilian member of the Shuttle mission. Later we see the faces of her students as celebration collapses into despair.

The odds have always favoured a disaster of some sort. The Shuttle is an incredibly complex machine with vast potential for component failure, sitting on the cutting edge of technology. Yet, there were the many backup systems, the computers that were capable of shutting down a launch literally at the last second if a component failed to test perfectly, and most of all the previous twenty-four successful launches.

But there were often glitches, usually in subsidiary equipment, dealt with resourcefully in mid-mission by the crew. The odds were that sooner or later a more serious glitch would occur.

Finally it has happened.

I am still shocked.tw (28 Jan 86).

THE FIRST I KNEW OF THE TRAGEDY was when Avedon came rushing into the kitchen (where I was preparing baked potatoes) and said there had been a newsflash about an explosion aboard the Shuttle. It was around 3.45pm, and on his own side of the Atlantic Ted must have been learning of the disaster at just about the same time that we did. Like Ted, Avedon and I had been following the news from Uranus over the previous few days, and we'd been non-plussed by the way that everyone - reporter and astronomer, British and American - was suddenly pronouncing the planet's name as *you-ran-oss* rather than *you-rain-us*, as it had always previously been known. There was much amused speculation at SA Greenleaf as to the possible reasons for this sudden coyness, but the fate of the Challenger brought a sudden end to the laughter.

We watched film of the tragedy on the nine o'clock news in stunned silence, a silence broken only by the end of the report and our puzzlement over why only one crew-member, teacher Christa McAuliffe, had been named and just what that parachute seen dropping into the sea in the aftermath of the explosion had signified. (We later learned it had been attached to the nose-cone of one of the booster rockets.) From the pictures broadcast Avedon was convinced that the other woman on the Shuttle had been Sally Ride, and despite my protests that they would hardly have failed to report the death of the first American woman in space she insisted on phoning the BBC to find out who the other astronauts had been. She had little luck.

As I write, more than a week has passed since that terrible day. The post-mortems have started and the first memorial services have been held, but the shock remains. I suppose we all knew that the odds were in favour of something like this happening one day, but even so that final image of the immense Y-shape caused by the rocket boosters as they arced away from the fireball that consumed the Challenger and its precious human cargo will probably remain with us for the rest of our lives.rh.

"Through the pain our hearts have been opened to a profound truth. The future is not free; the story of all human progress is one of a struggle against all odds. We learned again that this America was built on heroism and noble sacrifice. It was built by men and women like our seven star voyagers, who answered a call beyond duty."

.....Ronald Reagan, 31st January 1986.

ONE HUMP, OR TWO? From Bill Burns come several photos and this: *"Your 'Act Decisively' brought back fond memories of the (Australian) tour and the good times we had. I've enclosed pictures of you having a relentlessly good time, highlighted by the green slime on Green Island, or possibly the camel ride with Ken. Hard to distinguish between the two experiences, somehow, but I thought you'd like the camel shot as a reminder of the awesome power of Acting Decisively."*

The 'green slime' was some sort of cell-colony that lives on the coral reef of Green Island and was exposed to our enquiring eyes (and cameras) at low tide. It looked like a three-inch long gob of mucus, with the power of movement.

Ken also had the power of movement, and the personality of a gob of mucus (he missed the beginning of the tour because he'd packed his passport in his luggage and

checked it through with the airline) making him an on-and-off member of the tour. Unfortunately he was with us in Alice Springs, and was mounted behind me on the camel ride. The photo Bill sent shows Bill and Mary happily astride their camel, with Ken and me on the camel next in line. I am leaning far forward.

The photo shows the camels with their big saddles, furs and blankets tossed over them. It does not show whether these were one-hump or two-hump camels: no humps are visible.

I had not thought about the number of humps on those camels until I was in Los Angeles, the evening of 'the same day' I'd left Melbourne. I'd taken a plane from Melbourne to Auckland, and thence to Tahiti, and finally Los Angeles, and I arrived there about three hours after I'd left Melbourne - local time. But it had been an exhausting flight (boy, were my arms tired!) and when Sandy Cohen picked me up at the airport I was barely functioning.

I should thank Sandy, here and now, for his hospitality while I was in LA. On the trip out I had a full day to kill in Los Angeles between planes, and Sandy made himself available for the day, driving me around record stores, book stores, and good restaurants, and showing me the city. We walked out on the Santa Monica Pier, we drove through the back streets of Venice, we cruised Beverly Hills, and Sandy, who has been a civil engineer for the City of Los Angeles, pointed out lots of Neat Things like the streets of Venice that had once been canals, and told me many fascinating stories of Local Lore. It was an excellent day, dampened only slightly by the fact that Sherry Gotlieb was ill and could not join us for dinner.

So, back in Los Angeles after some thirty hours in the air, I found myself sitting in Sherry's livingroom, getting sercon, and babbling incoherently about my trip. I mentioned the camel ride.

"It was better than I expected," I said. "More comfortable than a horse. I hadn't expected that."

"Which kind of camel was it," Sherry asked.

"Was it a one-hump, or a two-hump camel?" Sandy asked.

I stared at them bewildered.

"Um...," I said, "I don't really know."

"You rode on a camel, and you don't know whether it had one or two humps?" Sherry asked, incredulous.

"Well," I said, feeling more and more foolish, "I guess I just didn't notice."

"You didn't notice?" Sherry said.

I hung my head in shame.

So I have scanned the photograph Bill Burns sent with a magnifying glass and the closest scrutiny. And I still have no idea how many humps those camels had.*tw*.

"FWUK" said ATom triumphantly, and I knew that he had it. We were at January's Kent TruFandom - we being ATom, Vinç Clarke, John Jarrold, the Harveys, the entire Hill family, Avedon, and me - held, as always, at Vinç's place in the wilds of Welling, and ATom had, as usual, been pontificating about something. On this occasion it was fwa (the Fanzine Writers of America) and he felt that there should be a 'British response'.

"But Arfer," I protested, "it isn't necessary. Fwa is only a gag anyway and there's nothing to stop someone British putting it in their colophon."

Then he came up with Fanzine Writers of the United Kingdom. I still don't think it's necessary...but who could resist an acronym like that?