

ETA



Well, hmmm, there you go. At the end of the last issue of this zine I wrote: "THIS HAS BEEN ETA 1, the first issue of a doubtless-irregularly published fanzine...". That was shortly before ALBACON II, five years ago, and while I expected the intervals between issues to be irregular I never thought that any of them would be five years long. Not that I've been fannishly idle in the interim, of course, what with four EPSILONs, five CRANKS, and a THEN, not to mention my involvement with CHUCH, PULP, and sundry other projects. Then there were the personal upheavals, not least of which were getting married and moving into a crumbling Victorian manse. The repairs necessary caused more trauma than either Avedon or I would've believed possible. So it goes.

One of the many joys of moving into 144 is that I now have an office of my own, one that houses my (not very extensive) SF collection, desk, duplicator, comics, and fanzines. It's a small (approx 6 x 8) room, which suits me fine, but the only way to get everything in was to sort it out, a process that included - horrors! - getting my fanzine collection in order. I took three days off work (all of which it needed), to sort them, and was inordinately pleased with myself when the task was completed. For days afterwards I bored everyone by telling them over and over how wonderful it was to be able to find any fanzine I wanted in seconds. (It is, too - you really ought to try it sometime.) It was, of course, totally impossible to sort them without taking time out to re-read a few, some of them my own. With horrible inevitability this got me thinking how neat it would be to do something of that sort again, and I found myself re-reading that first ETA with particular interest. Chewing my moustache thoughtfully, I placed ETA next to a sketch of me that Stu Shiffman had done at the 1986 CORFLU....

Although I must have written around 50 000 words in the last 12 months (most of them for THEN#1 and the forthcoming THEN#2), I still feel rusty, as though I'm flexing long-unused muscles again

ETA#2 (October 1988) is edited by Rob Hansen of 144 Plashet Grove, East Ham, London E6 1AB. Artwork (c) 1986 by Stu Shiffman (and how strangely more fashionable that mid-70s vintage jacket I'm wearing looks now than it did then). ETA is available for trade, letter of comment, and by editorial whim.

and I'll probably have to ease myself back into personalzines again. Still, what's life without a challenge, eh?

CONSPIRACY In FILE 770:75, the June issue, editor Mike Glycer reports that: "Despite being the largest WorldCon ever held in Europe, CONSPIRACY '87 has been pressed into bankruptcy by its creditors, primarily the Metropole Hotel". Close, Mike, but no cigar. In actual fact, as most of my UK readers should already know, CONSPIRACY negotiated a deal with the Metropole Hotel in June whereby they have until the end of 1988 to clear their debts. In July, Linda Pickersgill issued a flyer appealing for funds for both a CONSPIRACY bail-out and in order to pay for mailing out the Programme Books owed to all non-attending members. Having followed the debate that raged when the 1983 Worldcon, CONSTELLATION, went bust, I know there are people ideologically opposed to such bail-outs, but I hope that even these people might be prepared to make a donation to get programme books out to fellow fans who, through no fault of their own, have yet to receive them. As of the July flyer some £7000 was needed for the bail-out and mailing. Addresses for both are given below. Do what you can:

Mike Christie
Ty Llyn
Llangorse
Powys
WALES
LD3 7UD.

Linda Pickersgill
7A Lawrence Rd.
South Ealing
London
W5 4XJ

Payable to: 'CONSPIRACY PROGRAMME . Payable to: 'CONSPIRACY'
BOOK FUND'

I may have received a personal postscript to CONSPIRACY a while back. It was shortly before the mail strike when an envelope bearing the insignia of the Metropole Hotel Group and addressed to me dropped into my in-tray. Inside was a glossy brochure proclaiming on its cover that: "Metropole Hotels cordially invite you and your guest to a supersonic Champagne Lunch on Concorde". Sounded good to me, so I read on. Inside the brochure was a postpaid reply card with a form on the back that began: "Yes, I would like to enter for the Concorde prize and the runner-up free weekend for two at a Metropole hotel. The next residential event I am responsible for organising and booking is (type of function)...". It also asked you to list whether this 'residential event' would be Annual, Biennial, Twice per year, or Quarterly. I was greatly puzzled to be receiving this for a number of reasons. Firstly, I was only a member of a sub-committee at CONSPIRACY and so can hardly be considered likely to be a major-league organiser of such conventions, and secondly...how did they get my work-address? I only ever put that in a hotel register on the (very) rare occasions I stay overnight in one while on company business...and on company business I've never stayed in a Metropole Group hotel. Weird.

Actually, wonderful though a trip for two in Concorde would be, even more wonderful would be the Brighton Metropole's loathsome manager being sent across the Atlantic in a rather less beautiful aircraft...one with only enough fuel to get halfway.

BIGGER THAN THE WORLDCON In mid-August a number of fans received copies of a form-letter for something called *The Tyneside International Science-Faction Festival*, an event a local group called MARPHI intends to hold in Newcastle from 9 - 15 August 1989. According to the letter:

"It will be a week long Festival with planned events being: Book Signings, Film Premieres, Marathon Film Showings, Marathon Role Playing (hopefully to break the world record), visits by Major Celebrities, T.V. series showing at local cinemas, exhibitions of film/t.v. props, stunt displays, massive game of 'Lasertag', workshops, delegation of American Astronauts and Russian Cosmonauts. Plus as many more as we can come up with!

As you can imagine this is going to be a major event. There has NEVER been an event of its kind in this country, it is going to be even bigger than the World S-F Conventions! It is going to be the major event in the calender of S-F. It will bring together people from all over the world."

One of those lucky enough to receive the letter was Vinç Clarke, who wrote back:

"I must confess that your leaflet on the Tyneside festival gave me a giggle - which at my age is a considerable achievement. In sheer gratitude I'll give you my immediate impressions:

- (a) It's a hoax.
- (b) It's a con (in the sense of confidence trick).
- (c) It's a Star Trek fan do.
- (d) It's an effort by the Scientologists.
- (e) It's an incredibly naive and innocent burst of youthful enthusiasm."

Back came a letter from Festival director Amamda Cable, obviously hurt by such skepticism, saying: "I must confess your letter saddened and offended me. I always thought S-F enthusiasts were open minded and forward thinking..." Wherever did she get that idea! "Just think," she continues, "of how the person who dreamt up the first Worldcon felt to be confronted by such sceptics who couldn't handle the idea of such a large event." Hmm. Since the first Worldcon, held in New York in July 1939, was only given that name to tie-in with the World's Fair then being held in the city, and since attendance was probably in the 100--150 range, I doubt they had too much problem. No, rather than a Worldcon what this Festival most reminds me of is SPACE-EX 1984, the mega-event first announced in the late-70s that ended up a small and embarrassing shambles. Looking again at its two-page ad in the 1979 Worldcon Programme Book I see that it promised celebrities from various TV series, NASA space craft, laser light shows, and "Russian space material".

I'm all for people dreaming big dreams, as long as they don't become uncontrollable nightmares, and can only endorse what Vinç says in his second letter to Ms Cable:

"If you're for real I admire your flaming enthusiasm, and would hate to quench it, but a little dampening might be beneficial to you: I'd be reluctant to see that energy go to waste."

BACK IN THE USA When the recent mail strike finally broke I began receiving a series of numbered postcards from *Spike Parsons*, sent from various locations as she and fellow Madison fan Hope Kiefer made the daunting journey from Wisconsin to the New Orleans Worldcon in Spike's recently acquired Honda Accord Hatchback. I kinda liked the blow-by-blow immediacy of the postcards, and of running a travel piece by the editor of *I-94*, so here - with postcard descriptions by me - is that report (most of the cards, by the way, had 'She-Ra - Princess of Power' stickers on them):

#1: *This carries a photo of a mythological Wisconsin beastie, the Mammoth Northwoods Mosquito and, no, I don't believe it either.*

"Right this very moment Hope and I are en route to Worldcon, via auto, via St. Louis, Graceland, and parts unknown. We left the a.m., real early, and are traversing the flatlands of Illinois as quickly as possible. It's overcast and cool and a treat. First stop: the Kitch-Inn in Mendota, Illinois. We brought 60+ music tapes, a modest stack of zines, Wisconsin beer, and the tent. We're ready!" 27 August 1988.

#2: *The photo of the St. Louis Gateway Arch wreathed in fog on this one is almost surreal. She-Ra seems stumped by it, too...*

"We took the interstate highway for the first leg of our trip, passing quickly over the flatlands of Illinois. Of course, we stopped a couple of times for coffee and pie and chili, but without much other complication. We've arrived here at the 'Gateway to the West', a soft rain falling, glad to get out of the car and stretch our limbs. Hope will ride the tram up to the arch shortly; I've already done that, and so will view the movie about its construction. Then we'll head over to the Mississippi River (a short walk), and take in the Riverboat MacDonald's.

Hope has pointed out the irony (rightly) that we voted for New Orleans over St. Louis for the Worldcon, only to arrive in St. Louis anyway. We'll camp south of the city tonight." 27 August 1988.

#3: *'The Legend of the Razorback Hog' graces this card. This apparently fearsome creature is "...an Arkansas symbol much like the British Unicorn..." and seems strangely unmoved by the sword-wielding She-Ra facing him....*

"Well, rural Missouri and Arkansas are similar: pretty, green, lots of junk cars and little gas station/grocery stores (where they sell Bar-B-Q sauce by the gallon). The driving yesterday was fun, because the roads were smooth, deserted, and curved through pretty rural areas. Actually, Hope managed to find us a route that took us through National Forest lands. We paused for a walk in a small empty park surrounding a pretty pond with lots of wild flowers, frogs, and lily pads.

Last night we camped too near the Interstate, so the roar of big diesel engines made getting to sleep a challenge. There was a light rain, which Thank God the tent withstood. Our other triumph was outsmarting the mosquitos, our first encounter with the ravenous hordes thus far. We had a late-night meal at the nearby T&A truckstop, where I was offered a ride east (the trucker saw my backpack). This area, 30 miles west of Memphis, near Earle, Arkansas, is very flat; huge fields flank the highway. We're heading into Memphis for a visit to Graceland, after breakfast." 29 August 1988.

#4: *What else but Elvis? On the news tonight they reported on the increasing number of sightings of the supposedly dead rocker lately. Can the King still be with us...?*

"Finally a sunny day! We've been driving the scenic route, a straight, deserted highway cutting through acres of cotton fields. To our right (the west) we can usually see the levee, a continuous raised earthen barrier, which separates us from the Mississippi and its floodplain. There are frequent small towns, and lots of weathered, ramshackle homes, lawns overgrown, with junk vehicles in the sideyard.

Last night we camped in the deserted campground at a state park. It was peaceful and pretty, and had a very nice showerhouse, all for \$4.50. I went for a jog this morning along the one trail, and spotted a large painted turtle and a couple of wild turkeys. I'm happy to report I saw no snakes. Oh yes! And the park was also home for armadillos! Not mississippi natives, they came in as a by-product of a pipeline project from Texas.

Earlier yesterday we toured Graceland, the house and grounds, and picked up some matches at the Heartbreak Hotel Restaurant. We scoured the six souvenir shops for Kitsch, and found the selection too tasteful. I bought an audio cassette, so we've been listening to Elvis' greatest hits. Also bought a large placemat/picture of Elvis in the shower; it now resides in the backseat." *30 August 1988.*

#5: *A steamboat, the 'Natchez', makes its stately way along the Mississippi*

"Yesterday we finally got into countryside truly unfamiliar to me. Hope selected another beautiful (Louisiana) country back-road that roamed through sugar cane and cotton fields, bayous, tiny villages of clustered shacks and trailers, over and alongside levees. Occasionally we glimpsed far-flung channels of the Mississippi, but never the main river channel. The wildflowers are gorgeous, the trees huge and hung with moss, with dense thickets everywhere, giving new meaning to words like 'undergrowth' and 'lush'.

We got caught in heavy rain near Baton Rouge, and decided to drive late and hope to catch a campsite in Slidell, on the east side of Lake Pontchartrain: (New Orleans is on the west side). The campground was damp and further rain threatened. Hope slept in the tent, but I tried out my new front bucket seat for comfort - it was great! No bugs, quiet, and less confining than the sleeping bag. Of course, the seat folds down almost flat.

Today we head for an historic battlefield, then into New Orleans." *31 August 1988.*

#6: *Now this one is really interesting! It shows Chalmette Battlefield in the Chalmette National Historical Park (She-Ra is saluting the Union Jack with her sword) and the caption on the back of the card reads: "British troops crossed this field on the morning of 8 January 1815 during the Battle of New Orleans. Their objective was the American army entrenched some 500 yards away. Today, the American position is marked by the 100 foot high Chalmette Monument, built between 1840 and 1907, and symbolic of the victory won here by the United States."*

"Hope thought I ought to send this memento of this victory of America over Britain. It's an interesting site. The battle was immortalised in song by Johnny Horton when I was a kid. I've been playing it for Hope, but she just can't get the words - and now she's

taken to howling when I try to play it for the twentieth time. 'In 1814 we took a little trip, along with Col. Jackson down the mighty Mississippi./We fought the bloody British in the town of New Orleans' etc.

Hope is crashing at the Marriott tonight, but I'm staying in suburban luxury with a friend's (Spearhawk's) folks. Actually, I'm doing a bit more nature watching in a National Park today (without Hope), and checking into my room at the Sheraton (currently full of a black Baptist convention!) late this afternoon.

Simba Blood, Lucy Huntzinger, et al., (Phil Palmer!) had a party last night, which I attended. At one point there were more Brits in the room than Americans! The twins, Martin Hoare, Greg P., Phil, Jarrold, Julian Headlong, Dave Hodson. Didn't get to Moshe Feder/Lise Eisenberg party in the other hotel. I wasn't quite ready for the hordes of fans and Baptists I'd need to traverse. One must approach this gradually. Looks like NOLACON is going to have plenty of cock-ups, making CONSPIRACY look good. More soon!" *1 September 1988.*

#7: *An American Alligator (Alligator mississippiensis). Wot, no She-Ra?*

"Well, the con is up and running, though I'd say not too well. Everyone is managing to have fun in spite of cock-ups. The good news is the excellent service provided by the hotels, which obviously know how to deal with conventions. The really good news is the cuisine and colour of New Orleans, which you, you fool, are missing. Of course you'd be just another Brit in a sea of Brits (well a hotel bar-full, anyhow). Patrick and Teresa have decided to come at the last minute, and Jerry Kaufman is here.

I've been recruited by Ross Pavlac to work for Program Ops (he was recruited to head it two weeks ago), and to help keep Mike Glycer among the living. It's tough being a lackey, but I'm sure I'll adjust. It looks like not a single program item will go unchanged at this con; people have been advised to ignore the pocket program schedule (the descriptions are OK) and go with the schedule printed in the daily newszine. It (DOMINO THEORY) is being done by Steve Jackson - what's the world coming to?

Patrick is stuck at the TOR party - must go cheer him up. Yesterday's roam in the swamp was just what I needed to prepare for a Worldcon. Spiders as big as my fist, water mocassins, gators, water mocassins...all help in the appreciation of fans. Stu and his darling are being so cute. Bill Wagner is single again and 'loose' according to Stu. Of course the debonair Alun Harries is also on the prowl, along with Jarrold, Martin Hoare and, one supposes, Julian Headlong. Out of room and gossip...." *2 September 1988.*

And postcards, it seems - or, at least, the time to write them - since the seventh was the last. Nevertheless, other news of NOLACON has been trickling into 144 from various sources. Repeating a stunt he pulled on his last trip to the UK, Joe Siclari visited a used bookstore and found a couple of copies of SLANT on sale...at \$1 a piece! Meanwhile, Pete Weston bought himself a trombone and Julian Headlong was reported by a New Orleans newspaper as saying of US fans: "Most of the guys weigh 700 pounds and have beards. Leave out the beard and you have the women". How did this man get out of America alive? The Steve Jackson referred to above, incidentally, is one of the people whose power plays caused Pat Mueller to give up on TEXAS SF ENQUIRER. That same fanzine won this year's Hugo (so much for them), its inscription referring to the TEXAS SS ENQUIRER. So it goes.

LIGHTS IN THE SKY Joseph Nicholas, Judith Hanna, Avedon Carol, and I were returning to 144 from TIPU, our local Indian restaurant, when we saw the lights in the sky and heard the low rumble of distant organs. We hurried back, of course, went into my office - which offered the best view - and threw open the window to better hear the music. We listened for a short while. It was Saturday 6th October and Jean Michel Jarre was giving the first of two concerts to be held in London's Docklands on consecutive nights. The last time Jarre had put on one of these extravaganzas it had been staged in the business district of downtown Houston, an area where no-one actually lives - which was not the case here. Despite Plashet Grove being some 5 miles or so from Docklands we could hear the music quite clearly, and since London is a very densely populated city I shuddered to think how deafening it must be to those living anywhere near the docks. The light show was something else.

We were too far away to make out any details but the lasers spearing the sky, the shapes circling around in the clouds and the way those clouds themselves seemed to be made of glowing mist, all reminded me of nothing so much as the opening of the Ark in RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK, a touch of BLADE RUNNER being added by the flashing lights beneath the helicopters overflying the concert. The whole thing was very sense-of-wonderish, as if we were bystanders on the edge of the action in a sci-fi movie with a conflict occurring just over the horizon that would decide the fate of the world. Stirring stuff.

Something else that seems to be stirring is the fanzine scene. Though this is hardly a thing on which the fate of the world depends it is something on which that of British fandom just might. Fanzines have never gone away, of course, and the scene has never entirely died. The post-CONSPIRACY period has seen titles such as LIP and A FREE LUNCH that recall the glories of an era that sentiment insists lies just over the horizon of memory, but there hasn't been the numbers of fanzines that a healthy scene demands and the connectivity that Eve Harvey spoke of in PULP & that Lilian Edwards dismissed in THE CAPRICIAN (a much better zine than the twins' THIS NEVER HAPPENS) has been noticeably absent. Yet something is happening. In my own little corner of fandom Avedon has done another BLATANT (some copies of which may be mailed out with ETA - which is my own first personalzine in a few years, incidentally), Owen Whiteoak has come out with four fanzines in as many months, Nigel Rowe is finishing off the 98-page long THE INK MACHINE (which only the printing cost is preventing him from publishing), and Martin Smith produced the first issue of his long-threatened OCCAM'S CHAINSAW after we invited him over one weekend and chained him to the word processor (the chains seemed to excite him strangely). And the reason Joe and Judith travelled over to scenic East Ham on the 6th, apart from the excellent food at TIPU and the scintillating company of course, was to run off FUCK THE TORIES #5, the first issue in almost two years.

Now, all this activity is easily explained by the enthusiasm that an enjoyable and often exciting social scene can generate (in this case we're all members of the Hatton group and egg each other on), a phenomenon I've noticed in the past. But what of the other activity I see? For instance Martin Tudor, despite co-editing the bi-monthly newszine CRITICAL WAVE, still found time to put out two large and substantial issues of EMPTIES in as many weeks recently. Is this down to an active social scene as well, or is it something else? Fanzines also seem to be talking about each other more (and not just slagging each other off), creating connectivity that could help form the

gestalt that all the most active periods of fanzine fandom have had; fans new to the scene are starting to publish their own zines, and there's the beginnings of a feeling of spring in the air. It reminds me somewhat of the 'fannish spring' of '81 that Chris Priest celebrated in DEADLOSS #3, but since that turned out to be a false dawn my current optimism is tempered by caution. I see the lights in the sky and hear the low rumble of distant duplicators, but there is a danger of seeing more than is actually there....

Shortly after the Docklands concerts, the newspapers reported that the crowds had started drifting away before half-time. Despite all the hype, Jarre apparently failed to deliver and the shows were a commercial and artistic failure. Yet, viewed from East Ham the lights in the sky were impressive and it was easy to visualise how exciting the whole show must be. Maybe sometimes imagination is all it takes.

A PHANTOM LIMB, they say, is to blame for the sensations amputees sometimes feel from an arm or leg that is no longer there. Such limbs are usually lost to injury or disease. In 1984 a limb of fanzine fandom turned gangrenous. When, despite the best efforts of those who had prized that particular limb, it became clear that it could not be saved and that its continued presence was threatening to pollute the rest of the body of fanzine fandom we decided, reluctantly, that we had no choice but to amputate. It was unpleasant and recovery was long and hard, but eventually the pain began to fade. Then, a few months ago, came strange pricklings from distant, almost forgotten, nerve-endings. That fan in Puerto Rico has joined FAPA, they murmured to me, and I shrugged, not caring to dredge up past agonies. A few weeks later came stronger sensations, ones not so casually ignored. He has published a fanzine, they whispered to me, one designed to get the poison flowing again. It apparently covers all the old ground of the TAFF Wars. I marvelled at his obsession, his desire to breathe new fire into the cold ashes of a feud four years dead, before turning my attention to more pleasurable pursuits. Now, however, the limb is no longer phantom but physical. Shortly before the recent mail strike it manifested itself as an envelope clearly containing the fanzine whose existence I had been alerted to. There was only one thing to do, of course. Sitting at my desk, turning the envelope in my hands, the words that Dave Langford spoke at the height of the madness of 1984 came back to me:

"I usually find that my general mental well-being is greatly enhanced by not opening mail from Puerto Rico."

And Jophan found that it was so.

Final stencil typed 19 October 1988.

"The relationship between beans and cultural renaissance is crucial" - *Umberto Eco*.....

TAFF Candidates in the next race are Robert Lichtman and Luke McGuff. I've met both of these gentlemen and would be happy to see either of them over here next year, so ETA will not be lending its support to any candidate. However, I encourage all good fan and true to vote or otherwise contribute to TAFF and, if I haven't screwed up, there should be ballots going out with UK copies of this zine.