

**FUCK THE TORIES**  
 THE ANTI-IMPERIALIST FRONTIER  
 OF THE 21st CENTURY STRUGGLE  
 PEOPLE'S REVOLUTIONARY COLLECTIVE

**COMRADES!  
 THE BALTIMORE  
 COMRADES  
 SEND YOU  
 FRATERNAL  
 GREETINGS!**



**THE BIRTH OF  
 THE COLLECTIVE  
 PUBLICATION SIGNALS  
 THE WELL DESERVED  
 END OF REACTIONARY  
 ELEMENTS WITHIN  
 PROGRESSIVE CIRCLES!**



**FORWARD THEN,  
 FANZINE WORKERS!  
 FORWARD IN SOLIDARITY,  
 AND SEE HOW THE  
 CORRUPT CAPITALIST  
 TYRANTS TREMBLE  
 BEFORE THE TYPERS  
 OF THE PEOPLE!**



**...JUST ONE  
 THING, THOUGH:  
 "FUCK THE  
 TORIES"  
 ?**



**...SHOULDN'T  
 SOME OF  
 THEM BE  
 HOSED DOWN  
 FIRST?**



**ARTWORKER COMRADE STILES**

# FUCK THE TORIES

## THE ANTI-IMPERIALIST NEWSLETTER OF THE 22 DENBIGH STREET PEOPLE'S REVOLUTIONARY COLLECTIVE

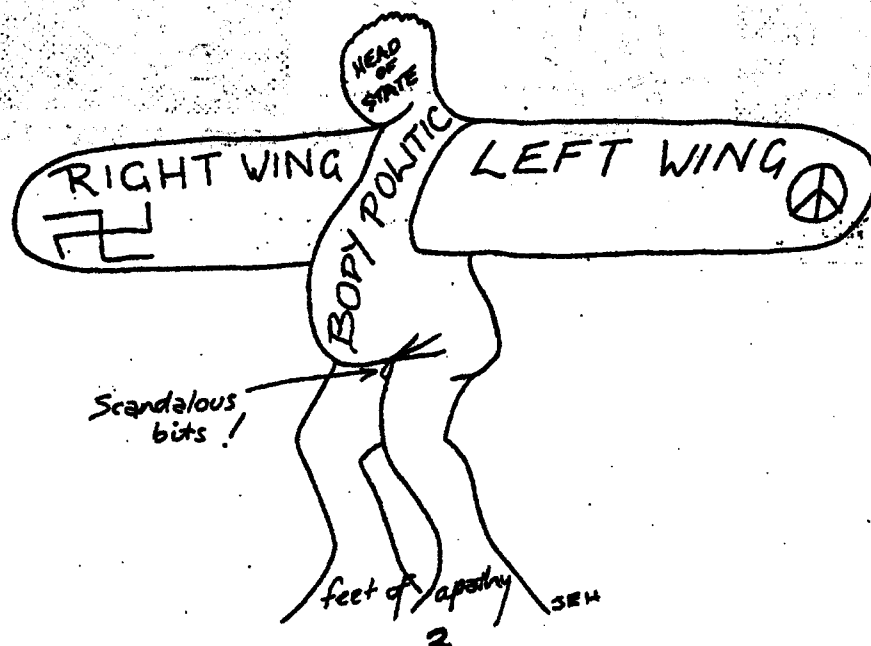
Unbelievable but true: the long-unawaited — and certainly long-unexpected — fifth issue of the formerly tricontinental but now solely British-based fanzine, edited and published by Judith Hanna and Joseph Nicholas. (For further sketchy details, see the first two paragraphs of Joseph's "Apologies From The Deep End" immediately following this contents listing.)

Editorial address: 22 Denbigh Street, Pimlico, London SW1V 2ER, United Kingdom. Available for all the usual reasons (please note that if trading with us we do not each require one copy of your fanzine!). This is the October 1988 edition. The contents are as follows:

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Cover by Steve Stiles; illustrations on pages 2 and 14 by Judith Hanna; all others pirated from a variety of sources (mostly *The Guardian* and *The Independent*; the provenance of that on page 22 is totally unknown).

Next issue due when you least expect it.



# APOLOGIES FROM THE DEEP END

Joseph Nicholas

Been a long, long, long time, as I think some R. A. Lafferty story has it. (A reference which probably dates me more than anything else.) But now, a mere eighteen months since the fourth issue, here we are again, and promising to do much better this time — although the "we" in this case has now shrunk from the original five to a mere two: Judith and me. Thus ends the tricontinental collective; thus is reborn as an independent entity the 22 Denbigh Street People's Revolutionary Collective.

The circumstances of the shrinkage are of course fascinating to those involved, but probably tedious to everyone else. So no lengthy historical dissertations from us, and those absolutely desperate to know will just have to go to their graves with their lust unrequited. (Australian readers more than most, since we understand that distribution of the fourth issue *Down Under* was patchy at best — which means that many there won't even know that our number had by then shrunk from five to four.) Nor do we propose to print lengthy summations of what we've been doing over the past twelve to fifteen months; the single word "politics" will probably convey all you actually need to know. Or, perhaps, even want to know.

Indeed, the political nature of this fanzine seems, in the past, to have caused no little confusion. Most if not all of you should be aware by now that we're on the left; but some of you seem to have had difficulty distinguishing that stance from being *of the left*, which is not the same thing at all. Or, to phrase it more simply and directly: a large number of our readers seem unable to differentiate between a *political fanzine* and a *politically aware fanzine*.

It's invidious to single out any one person; but somewhere along the line we here to supply some evidence of what we're talking about. Thus the following quote from Mike Glycer in *File:770 71*, commenting on the picture on the postcard I'd sent him:

"I admired the clever postcard showing Constable's pastoral *Haywain* (from an 1821 painting) laden with cruise missiles, captioned 'The Cruise missile is small enough to be carted round country lanes on transporters from which it can also be fired. Solely under United States control, it will turn huge areas of Britain into a military target'. If *Fuck The Tories* took a comparable approach, I'd probably be won over despite holding none of the political views involved."

The meaning seems clear enough: namely, he doesn't like the way we convey our message, and thinks we should change to something more subtle and thus more effective. Or: our preaching is too overt, and we should make it less so.

Such comments have come as a surprise to us, because it was never our intention to preach in the first place. Our aim, instead, has been to try to incorporate political perspectives into an everyday discourse; to demonstrate awareness of the issues and (where appropriate) voice our opinions of them rather than to explicitly publicise causes and urge everyone to act on them. Were we to adopt that as our motivating principle — and to have adopted it from the outset — then Mike Glycer's criticism might be justified: but by confusing the political perspectives from which we write with the political actions that we might in consequence take it simply misses its target altogether.

But then a surprising number of people have exhibited an identical confusion, and have devoted large parts of their responses to discussion of politics *per se* rather than the stuff we've actually published. A prime culprit is probably Richard Faulder, who seemed to start from the premise that because we were on the left we must *ipso facto* be interested in the dialectic between capitalism and socialism and whose letters in the third and fourth issues accordingly spent more time discussing his perception of our political positions than what we'd actually said. No one else has

gone quite that far; but, as stated in the letter column of the previous issue, many people have spent a lot of time looking for "the frame" — the ideological parameters within which it's felt our discourse must be contained — and complaining either that we don't fit it very well or that, if we do, then we shouldn't. (Confused? So are these readers!) And remarking, on more than one occasion, that although they enjoyed the individual contributions they were troubled by their packaging; by the mould into which it was alleged they were being forced.

In other words: what we publish is being interpreted according to how well it matches an assumed left-wing position: and if such a match doesn't exist then it ought to. After all, we're on the left. Therefore we must parrot left-wing clichés and talk in left-wing jargon. And if we didn't then we should have done. This just proves things.

Those who were present at the "Politics In Fanzines" panel at Corflu 5 in Seattle this April have probably been suffering from severe *déjà vu* since at least the third paragraph. To which one adds: well, this explanation wasn't aimed at them anyway. But this immediately raises a crucial question which I've been avoiding until now: why, if the difference between *political* and *politically aware* is that obvious, this explanation should be necessary in the first place.

Part of it may be because, as Judith remarked in her editorial in the previous issue, politics is seen as the Great Unmentionable in polite society — not because politics is of no importance, but because it is seen as somehow nasty, devious, unprincipled and ruthless. Well, part of it *is* nasty, devious, unprincipled and ruthless; but to ~~dismiss~~ all politics on that basis is to effectively obscure what it's all about — to confuse the meaning with the process by which that meaning is occasionally transmitted.

Political parties are electoral machines for securing a share of government; politicians are mostly intellectual lightweights who want a share of the power that comes with it; and conference resolutions, manifestos and policies are there to be ignored, dumped and reversed if they show any signs of getting in the way of the quest for or the retention of government and power. But while this carry-on may be fairly venal and tedious, politics *per se* is not, and should not be. At root, it is about choice: about assigning relative priorities to competing and often overlapping aims, values and causes. It is about relating what you do to the world at large, and recognising the effect of your actions and choices on everyone else. And, if appropriate, about restructuring what you do and how you do it in order to reduce your impact on the rest of the world or ensure that it is more beneficial than hitherto.

"The personal is political", as the famous feminist maxim has it, — and in ways lots of us have probably never guessed, either. For instance, the decision to buy a hamburger at a fast-food restaurant is a decision to participate in a chain of economic relations that includes, among other things, the destruction of tropical rain forests to create cattle ranches and the venting of CFCs into the atmosphere during the production of foam packaging materials. Or (another example) the decision to drink a cup of coffee while listening to a Youseou N'Dour tape is a decision to participate in the re-orientation of the economies of developing nations away from domestic self-sufficiency and towards supposedly export-led growth, and the exploitation of Third World artists by transnational capital to feed the demand for novel types of entertainment by the developed West. Or: you are plugged into the global network, whoever you are and whatever you do, and attempts to deny it are pointless.

That much is obvious, you say; and you're right. But these examples are perhaps extreme ones — or at least extremely obvious. Perhaps I should point to ones that aren't, using some of the articles published in previous issues of this fanzine. Judith's "Working Late", for example, had much to say about the dangers faced by women travelling alone on public transport in the evenings, but did so by integrating its remarks on the subject with the story of just such a journey; viewing the issue from the inside, through experience gained in and of the moment, in the style of a

personal anecdote rather than addressing it directly in the style of an academic dissertation or campaigning tract. Or, again, there was her earlier "The Politics Of Textile Conservation", in the second issue, which was all about domestic waste, materials recycling and energy budgets — but viewed through a knitting pattern and a conversation with me. Or Jimmy Robertson's "What We Don't Learn About The Past" in the fourth issue, which discussed the mutability of historical interpretation via his family's involvement in some of the political events of the twentieth century. Or even my "Collaborating With The Enemy", recounting a telephone conversation with a *Sunday Times* journalist about the Pacific. And so on.

I should perhaps point out that, despite the distinctions I was drawing earlier between *political* and *politically aware*, this fanzine does have some political purpose: to make you aware too, so that if you feel your impact on the world is not beneficial then you can, if you like, change it. Leading by example, as it were. But this still doesn't make Mike Glycer's criticism accurate, for the simple fact that we don't go in for the preaching to which he's objecting. The messages, as in the above articles, emerge naturally from what we have to say rather than being trowelled on over the top. (Except, perhaps, in the letter column, where space restrictions usually require everyone to be as direct as possible.) Thus, perhaps, people's confusion about *Fuck The Tories* — they have a suspicion they're being asked to do something, but they can't work out what; and, into the bargain, don't like the perspective from which we approach our material. A position which is not objectionable because of its politics, but simply because it is political to start with — because it takes the feminist slogan literally, and attempts to apply to it to everything we do and say.

Thus my tentative hypothesis, which people will no doubt write in to refute (and perhaps elaborate on what they do find confusing about *Fuck The Tories*). There will probably be as many different refutations as there are people, but we might as well pick off one of them right now: the supposition that politics and fanzines don't mix, advanced by TAFF co-winner Lillian Edwards, who has asserted it on several occasions in *This Never Happens* but without ever defining precisely why. Still less has she defined the nature of the "problems" that she claims are inherent in any attempt to make the two gel, beyond stating in *This Never Happens* 10 that, in the fourth issue, they have now been overcome. (Through, I swear, I'm not making this up, I'm going to quote her directly: "its emphasis on feminist-oriented articles". Those with access to copies of the fourth issue are invited to consider how the one sixth of its pages devoted to feminist concerns can possibly count as an emphasis.) Which means that anyone who wants to back Lillian's supposition had better come armed with a detailed explanation, or pick another supposition entirely.

Meanwhile, we propose to remain where we are now: riding the interface between the political and the fannish, exploring the possible contradictions between the two modes of writing and attempting to provide a synthesis of them — and sometimes trying to be amusing. Or at least to have fun — because ideas themselves can be entertaining, and it's ideas in which we're primarily interested. Ideas about why Trotskyism is funny, why anti-nuclear campaigners are obsessed with the details of weapons systems, why fan history lacks anything resembling a theory, why it is necessary to write articles explaining the difference between a political fanzine and a politically aware fanzine. And hopefully publish the results more frequently than hitherto!

**MARLON**

by Nomad



# THE JOY OF FOOTNOTES<sup>1</sup>

Lionel Trippett

<sup>1</sup>cf *The Joy of Sex* etc..

"Your great Maybe, Rabelais:  
The grand potato." Vladimir Nabokov: *Pale Fire*.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup>*Pale Fire* is the ultimate footnote book. The whole story is carried in footnotes which are presented as a commentary on the text of an epic poem.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> I use the term "epic" of course in its popular rather than its strict classical sense.

Consider: "King, 1910-36, changed name of royal family from Saxe-Coburg to Windsor 1917. His trousers were creased at the sides, not back and front." A. J. P. Taylor: *English History 1914-1945*<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> A fine example of the footnote as safety valve. The text proper is careful, scholarly, judicious. The footnotes are used to let off steam and allow the author to introduce the personal, the teasing. The King is dismissed in a couple of lines. A. J. P. Taylor specialises in this technique.

Consider further: "He is a Scotchman with alternate intervals of second sight (during which he does not see anything but is suffused with afflatus) and common incapacity." George Bernard Shaw, of Keir Hardie, quoted in Margaret Cole: *The Story of Fabian Socialism*.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> The footnote used to enliven the text. It was from another such footnote<sup>6</sup> that I discovered that the first Lord Avebury, as well as inventing the Bank Holiday, had a tame wasp which used to accompany him to meetings of the Royal Society where it was provided with its own chair. It is, I believe, the only wasp to be so honoured.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> I've completely forgotten the source.

<sup>6</sup> But cf the late Sir Malcolm Sargent's late budgerigar which would sit on his shoulder and share his midmorning sherry.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> It subsequently died of cirrhosis of the liver.

And some more consideration: Dorothy Whitlock posits the bar-tailed godwit.

Can't quite remember where this one comes from but it was an Old English text, probably the *Seafarer*, in which the meaning of the bird described as the "anfloga" was under protracted discussion. Consensus was in favour of the curlew but Professor Whitlock dissented.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> This is the funny-by-accident footnote.<sup>9</sup> A true scholarly edition usually consists of some half dozen lines of text per page with all the rest of the space taken up with footnotes, replete with *viz*, *cfs*, *op cit*, *ibid* and *etc* etc..<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> And ornithologically dubious since the bar-tailed godwit is not a lone flyer but generally flocks about the place.

<sup>9</sup> cf particularly with a scholarly edition of almost any Jacobean play where all the words that need glossing seem to be synonyms for genitalia or farting.<sup>10</sup>

" A Jacobean obsession following the introduction of the baked bean into Europe by Sir Walter Raleigh and probably the real reason that he was executed by James 1st.

Consider finally, p217 of *Rambo: First Blood*: David Morrell, based on a screenplay by Sylvester Stallone for a typical page without footnotes.<sup>6</sup>

\* See also Beatrix Potter: *The Collected Works* for another example of an author who never uses footnotes.<sup>7</sup>

\* A variorum edition of Ms Potter's works is long overdue. Much in the text remains obscure and awaits critical elucidation.<sup>8,9</sup>

<sup>10</sup> eg What sake were the lettuces in Mr McGregor's garden; Iceberg<sup>11</sup>, round, cos<sup>12</sup> or Webb's Wonder?

\* Iceberg is improbable since they were not introduced into Britain at the time *Peter Rabbit* was written, although there is anecdotal evidence to the effect that Beatrix Potter made it her business to be well informed on European horticultural developments. (Private information.)

\* The cos is not widely grown in the Lake District. An aerial view of, for instance, the Scawfell range reveals an almost total lack of intensive cos cultivation.

The other great *Joy of Footnotes* is the chase: reference leads to reference and whole new areas of discovery open up.<sup>7</sup> The only problem here is that you want to follow up that interesting lead at once and the poor old public library system can't cope. Fill in a card,<sup>13</sup> wait six weeks and by then you can't remember why you ordered the thing in the first place.

Two quick examples: it was from footnotes in Keith Thomas: *Religion And The Decline Of Magic* that I discovered the world of John Dee and the Elizabethan occultists and from Andrew Tyler: *Street Drugs* that I discovered that Folkestone -- where I have connections but had never before thought of as Kent's answer to Las Vegas -- was the scene of major cocaine and prostitution scandals involving Canadian troops in World War One.

\* It is axiomatic that the book you want is never on the shelves.

So, long live the footnote.<sup>14</sup>

\* And in particular, the footnote at the proper place, at the foot of the page rather than bundled together at the end of the book.

Other examples of memorable footnotes would be gratefully received.

\* "Lionel, you've missed a vital footnote."

"Oh, I forgot that not everyone knows Rabelais by heart. His dying words were: 'Je vais chercher le grand Peut-être'."



# THE LAST DAYS OF THE PERMANENT FLOATING WORLDCON

A Chunk Of Travelogue, by  
John D. Berry

London claimed us for a week. We set up in a bed-and-breakfast near Victoria Station, which was central and cheap. It was also just a few blocks from Judith Hanna and Joseph Nicholas in Pimlico, so we got to be temporary neighbours. We spent a lot of time in their flat, or at the Indo-Pak restaurant across the street. (Strange neologism, "Indo-Pak". Sounds like a racial slur, but in fact it's what a lot of restaurants put on their signs to identify their food.) One evening we even accompany Joseph and Judith to "the IRA pub", one of their locals, which looks pretty English to us.

The walls of Judith's and Joseph's flat are lined with posters advocating all the Right Causes, maps of the nuclear-free Pacific, and funny stuff of many kinds. The bookshelves are lined with books on Northern European mythology, among other things. A fine place to browse. Judith places a book back down out of order, in the "to be read" pile, and notes that Joseph will be quite put out at this disorderliness. They have a wonderful approach to household maintenance, which seems to amuse them as much as it does us: Joseph rants at every sign of disorder; Judith shrugs and says "Yes, dear" and goes on with what she's doing. Eileen seems to find great parallels here; she and Judith agree that men who want the bed made Just So should be left to do it themselves. Joseph and I make common front against unreasonableness, and explain the importance of every item in the kitchen being put back Exactly In Its Place.)

Judith saves us much sightseeing by pulling out her photo album and demonstrating the tourist attractions of the Southwest and Wales. ("She's seen more of Britain than I have," says Joseph, shaking his head.) "Now you won't have to go and see them yourselves," explains Judith. This gives us that much more time to stay in London.

No tourism there. Well, when you're in a world capital it's hard to separate out "tourism" from everything else. I mean, is going to the British Museum just a tourist exercise, or is it making use of one of the city's finest resources? (It's not much of either for me, as my body picks that day to run straight through the post-con cold. About all I do in the museum is look queasily at a display of banknote designs of the past 300 years, drink some tea in the cafeteria, and make my way blunderingly home. But I get the cold out of the way in that one day, so except for after-effects like the odd cough or snuffle now and then, I'm not bothered by it again during the trip.) We follow a tip of Bill Gibson's and visit the Camden Lock Market on Saturday, where designer clothes are sold at designer flea market prices; Eileen finds the green boots she's been looking for ever since she saw them in France two years ago, and reluctantly passes up the spiky rubber purse that it hurts to touch. Back in the heart of the city, I search out the Design Council bookshop to find some Russian film-poster postcards for a Hungarian typographer I know; they don't have the postcards any longer, but the place is multiple levels of pure design, and I do find a wonderful book of "Buy Empire" posters from the 1920s and 1930s. (The designer chairs in the designer cafeteria are designed so that you whack your designer heels if you try to tuck them under your seat. Win a few, lose a few, some get rained out.)

The bookshops along Charing Cross Road are everything you've heard they are. Some have tiny basements, thick with dust; in many of them there's no apparent order, which makes them a browser's dream but frustrating for a ferreting foreigner with only a few days in town. Gigantic Foyle's is a disappointment. It's got a lot of books, but it's by no means exhaustive, despite its pretensions. It is, however, exhausting, since it's arranged mostly by publisher, and the clerks are not much more likely to know who published a book than you. ("Try that shelf." "I just looked there.") This organisation-by-publisher does have the sobering effect of presenting



an entire swatch of shelving labelled "New Era", filled to brimming with bright-coloured volumes of the Hubbard dekalogy.

Our favourite bookstore is Collet's, with its vast selection of Soviet and Russian-language books and its basement full of the best postcards in the city and a wide range of Stalinist underwear. (Alas, all the best T-shirts are out of stock. The socks with "right" and "left" on them in Russian aren't my size.) Eileen finds there a viciously witty guide to the Soviet Union, called *The USSR: From An Idea By Karl Marx*, whose authors, we suspect, will never be allowed near a socialist republic again. I hope they do a guide to the USA next.

There are details you won't see in Seattle. One afternoon after the pubs open, Eileen and I are quenching our thirst outside a pub in Soho. A sharply-dressed young man is sitting on a low step next to the pub door, drinking his pint and talking to his friend. But then his friend is gone and he's still talking. I look and he's speaking into a radio phone. Sips his pint, concludes his phone call, puts the empty glass down on the step, and disappears with the radio phone into the building next door.

The convention scene swirls through London for the whole of the week following Conspiracy. Judith and Eileen and I ride the tube out to South Ealing for dinner at the Indian restaurant round the corner from the Pickersgills'. Their house, which we see only briefly, is stacked high with boxes of fanzines: "Has Gary Farber been here too?" Eileen says when she sees them. Jeanne Gomoll and Scott Custis are staying with Greg and Linda, and we all mill our way down the street to the restaurant. Patrick and Teresa Nielsen Hayden are also staying with the Pickersgills, but have wandered off; they turn up halfway through the meal, to join the rather disjointed conversation. Greg shakes his head and in his usual rueful way explains that every time he's been in the restaurant for the past month it's had different staff, and sometimes a different menu. (The food is excellent nonetheless. We have perfect luck with everybody's neighbourhood Indian restaurants.) When the meal's over, everyone else piles back into Hotel Pickersgill, while we and Judith catch one of the last trains back to Victoria.

The Tun is no longer at the Tun; it's at the Wellington, a pub near Waterloo Station, and no one's quite figured out yet what to call the gathering or how to get from the station to the pub. (Except the intrepid Judith, armed with her ever-present *London A to Z*, and Joseph, armed with righteousness and a sense of direction.) The Wellington is a huge pub, much bigger than the abandoned One Tun of legendary rowding, but the signs are bad as we emerge from the underpass across the street. People are already spilling out onto the sidewalk. The convention's high tide has not yet receded (we're there, aren't we?) and the place is full — even though David Brin was scheduled a party of his own for tonight, which has drawn off a few unsuspecting American pros. But you can get through the crush — most of the time — and it is possible to reach the bar. (I take up a position against the bar, just in case. Next to me a regular is shaking his head and wondering what hit his local pub.) Every time I turn around I discover another room, and it's always full — though the farther reaches of the pub do seem to be somewhat cooler climes, compared to the sweaty, noisy main room. I meet people I never met at Conspiracy, and hand out still more copies of *Wing Window*. (John Jarrold gives me what I assume is his latest. It's only after I get home that I discover it was published in 1986.) This is a superb gathering where the crowds all seem to be people I want to talk to (as I have a few more pints this gets easier and easier), and I determine that the ideal situation would be to be able to come back every month. Plans are made for further parties through the weekend.

The pub's regulars may not have figured out yet what happens every first Thursday, but the men behind the bar appreciate it. I am standing out near the door when a bell rings. "That's last call," says Joseph, or at any rate that's the way I hear it. So I make a beeline for the bar and order a last pint, which I get. Joseph is right behind me. "Bloody hell," he exclaims, "they served you!" They serve him too. He stares with happy wonderment at the full pint in his hand. "They're not supposed to serve anyone after that bell rings," he says. The barmen don't seem to be in any

hurry to clear the place out. When finally the pub is emptying and we're about to head out the door, I pause at the bar and compliment them: "This is a good place to drink." The older barman smiles. "It's the customers that make the house," he says. "Why, we don't even water the beer, and still it has no effect on you." It takes me a minute to work out that this is not a reference to my own clearly unsteady state but to a general lack of fisticuffs and projectile vomiting among the SF clientele.)

We fail to make it to the Alun Harries party the following night — it's way out in southwest London somewhere and we're so late by the time we've eaten dinner and started thinking party thoughts that we realise we'd only have an hour there before we'd have to catch the last train home — but we do venture with Joseph and Judith even farther out into the outer wilds, this time by suburban train, for Eve and John Harvey's party on Saturday. Judith leads us unerringly through the hilly streets to the little house stuffed full of fans. Eve is turning out wave after wave of varied foodstuffs from the kitchen, and impassionedely defending her bottle of Southern Comfort ("No, that's *my* Southern Comfort! You drink beer!"); John blends into the crowd. Everybody is there. There isn't enough room for all the legs that occupy the floor, but nobody falls down. There's a VCR in the front room showing videotapes of the convention; I get to see Ted White making his famous introduction to the fanwriter Hugo, which I missed at the time. I exchange yet more smiles and nods with Owen Whiteoak, but I seem destined never to engage him in conversation. This is the only party of the week that seems like the kind of social gathering I'm used to in Seattle, where the SF community meets in people's houses. By the time to leave, I am befuddled; Eileen leads me out the door and Judith leads us unerringly once again to the station. Large chunks of the party also end up at the station, for what is probably the last or next-to-last train. The platform is full of fans, none of them too sober. A photograph is taken of the human totem pole: me standing behind Judith Hanna with Andrew Brown standing behind me, our heads roughly stacked if you view us from the front. I'm not used to being of middle height. (Andrew is a very *long* person. When he stopped in Seattle just in time for Kate Schaeffer's and Glenn Hickney's wedding a couple of weeks earlier, he got down on his knees to talk more comfortably to Tami Vining, and was still as tall as she.) I am very glad, when we reach Victoria Station, that all we have to do is walk a few blocks home, rather than having to change and take the tube to some further destination, as many do.

The post-con story culminates, at least for us, with the Sunday-morning boat trip up the Thames to Hampton Court, for a day of what really ought to be tourism but doesn't seem like it with so many fans. The boat trip is in many ways my favourite part of the day. We sit or stand bravely on the deck as spray turns to rain and the umbrellas come out, until finally the better part of valour and the certain knowledge that there is a bar belowdecks forces us out of the weather. Joseph points out the pub where the ESFA used to meet, along the shore somewhere. I am surprised to discover that the bridges in London are all *labelled* from the water side. Greg is amazed and pleased to discover that one of the bridges is decorated with stone pineapples, and the tour guide whose loudspeaker commentary blights the first twenty minutes of the trip explains that this commemorates the first successful growing of pineapples in Britain. "That makes the whole trip worthwhile," says a happy Greg. The commentary by Joseph and Greg is more interesting and much more illuminating than the drivel that comes over the loudspeaker. Luckily, the sights peter out after the first few loops of the river, and the guide gets down to silently collecting tips.

Hampton Court itself is, well, a tourist attraction. I have fond memories of visiting the palace in 1971, but part of the building has been burned since then, thanks to the dotty old pensioner whose "grace and favour" apartment was lit by candles rather than electricity because she thought the current leaked out of the sockets. (She died in her own fire.) What I remember best from the earlier visit is the real Tudor rooms — small, ornately panelled, intimate — but what we get stuck in, in some sort of one-way track of relentless tour groups, is the seventeenth century parts with their high ceilings and monumental proportions and generally un-lived-in feel. It reminds me unpleasantly of Versailles. Christopher Wren has never looked worse than in comparison with Wolsey's palace. Anyway, the tour is conducted, the group reassembles (it is Greg who has had the presence of mind to bellow a meeting time and place to everyone after they get off the boat and before they scatter into the

palace), and we all take the train back into town. The notes that Jeanne Gomoll takes on her pocket tape recorder during the train ride home are based on snatches of conversation from the fans in the next group of seats; it will be interesting to see how she incorporates them into her trip report.

When we get back to Waterloo, almost everyone goes off to an American-style hamburger joint for a mass dinner, but I end up listening to the siren voices of Moshe Feder and Lise Eisenberg and Judith and Joseph, who decry burgers and lead me off on a hike across the river (paying due respect to the hulk of the building that used to house the Greater London Council, a prime victim of the Thatcherite junta) and up toward Charing Cross, until hunger forces us into yet another Indian restaurant. And *that* is the end of the post-con, for me.

(Funny, the only places I drank lager were Indian restaurants. It's all that's served. It tastes okay in context, but my first association with Indian food was Ballantine's very bitter India Pale Ale, and I've never lost the taste for it. There's no need to drink insipid beer with spicy food. Funny, too, how in Britain all the Indian restaurants have predictable dishes with specific sauces and methods of preparation, each one of which corresponds to a particular degree of hotness, but each one of which can be made with any meat or seafood you specify. In the USA, you'd get a given dish, which contains a particular meat or seafood or whatever, and in most cases you are expected to specify the hotness by asking for "one star", "two stars", and so on. I remember a system like that from my last visit to Britain in 1971, but it wasn't like that this time. You could certainly get hot food, but it was by asking for a Vindaloo sauce; no other was highly spiced. Madras was the second-spiciest sauce, and in a few restaurants it actually had some bite. Funny.)

The next day we stashed some of our luggage with Joseph and Judith (thus assuring, they said, that they'd see us when we came back to claim the bags) and caught a train north, leaving London behind.

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## IS RICHARD BERGERON A SECRET TROTSKYIST?

Trotskyists are driven by dogma — by the certainty that they alone know what is right and proper, and that their mission in life is to bring enlightenment to the proletariat: a proletariat which has been misled by bourgeois tricks and which, because it thereby suffers from false consciousness, does not realise the nature and extent of its oppression. If, however, the facts of its deception, and of the society it is possible to create once the bourgeoisie's hegemony has been eliminated, can be placed before it then it will shake its chains from slumber, rise in unvanquishable number and (because it is many while they are few) overthrow capitalist tyranny and usher in the brave new dawn of utopian socialism.

Richard Buggeron would appear to be possessed of a vision of a similar order — a conviction that he's right, that everyone bar those who implacably oppose him has been misled, and that if they can only be made aware of the true facts of the case (as retailed by him, naturally) they will instantly see the light. The scales will fall from their eyes, the wrath of their righteous justice will smite down the deceivers and the ballot-stuffers, and the sacred waters of TAFF will again flow quietly home to the sea.

Yet in forty years of political agitation Trotskyists have got absolutely nowhere: the proletariat forever unroused, the revolution forever postponed. They remain as they always have on the margins of political life; hectoring, obsessive, more amusing than pitiable. One laughs at Trotskyists as one ought to laugh at Richard Buggeron — although, amazingly, he has taken only four years to emulate their singular achievement.

Unless, of course, his antics have been just a trick to divide the proletariat against itself....

*Next Issue:* Was Percy Bysshe Shelley a secret Leninist? Was Mikhail Sholokhov a secret counter-revolutionary? And does anyone understand these political jokes anyway?

# AIRFIXATION

Judith Hanna

I.

We were in Joseph's father's train room at Lyme Regis, and war had broken out again.

"Milk-giving egg-laying wool-growing sow," snarls Joseph. He was not calling Vati names. They were not arguing about EEC agricultural policy; they agreed on the illogic of that. It was the EFA (European Fighter Aircraft) they were scrapping over. "Centre of gravity too far back...aerodynamically unstable...fly-by-wire baroque technology..."

"Total weapons systems...strategic demands...defence in depth...advanced avionics," Vati fires back.

"EMP..." (which even I know stands for electromagnetic pulse) "fly through BBC World Service beacon...fall out of sky...£5 billion kaput...fucking ridiculous..." string of technicalese....

While Vati counters with more technicalese, I gaze around his lovingly created model railway layout (I have already been told off for calling it a "train-set"): tunnels, sidings, signal lights that work, rolling stock delicately spattered with authentic mud to take the newness off their paintwork. On shelves around the walls above are model aircraft: plastic Airfix kits, carefully painted, with their marking transfers on. Not all the kits were necessarily manufactured by the Airfix firm, but the name has become generic for that obsessive small boy's hobby.

I had first learned of Joseph's fascination by such model aircraft kits during the Pieria writers' workshop week we spent in Cornwall in 1982, mere weeks after I arrived in this country. We invented combat collaboration during the workshop parts of the week. And on the excursion to the cream teas of Wadebridge, while the rest of the Pierian druids were taking silly photos in front of the local Conservative Club all tarted up in patriotic red, white and blue, Joseph had fallen into the local toy shop. Where he insisted on buying an kit of a Huey helicopter gunship. About which he told me at length, but I forget the details. He told me about his whole collection of World War II aircraft models as well, until I begged for mercy. I'd almost forgotten about this aberration in his past.

Joseph's father used to be a test pilot; then he settled down to building military planes like the nuclear-capable Tornado bomber. He is, he's told me, a "total weapons systems" man, and he believes in nuclear deterrence. Now that he's retired from the Ministry of Defence, he is retained as a consultant by some firm bidding for a contract to supply avionics for the EFA. So Joseph grew up around air bases like Boscombe Down, Farnborough, Munich. Joseph wanted to be a pilot too when he grew up, but his eyesight let him down.

Joseph is continuing to explain in incomprehensible detail just what is wrong with the EFA's design concept. Neither he nor Vati shows any sign of running out of technicalese. I make an excuse and leave.

II.

Back at the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament where I then worked, I bump into Dan Plesch. As we hang about on the landing waiting for the tea urn to boil, I ask him an idle question about Cruise missiles, then featuring in the headlines.

"First use not first strike...flexible response...SACEUR...Deep Strike...AirLand Battle plan...GLCMs...TERCOM guidance system can't cope with snow...test flights over Canadian

*terrain...low-level flight to avoid radar detection...300 kph slow speed...ignores fact vulnerable to lo-tech visual detection...ALCMs, SLCMs...dual-capable destabilising... technicalese...jargon...more intimate domestic details than I ever wished to know about nasty nuclear devices...*

The naivety of the peace movement is entirely undermined by squads of these war-gamers manqué, who refuse to leave us idealistic innocents in ignorance, however little interested we may be in the intricacies of the hardware. There's something almost indecent about the way these weapons bores memorise kilotons and lethality rates, know each missile by name, and insist on reeling off where they're deployed, how many there are of them, their equivalent devices on the other side, how the hawks plan to use them, and in the glee with which they insist on telling you their counter-scenario which proves why nuclear war-planning is all MAD or NUTS. They may not approve of nuclear weapons, but they are certainly fascinated by them. A thought strikes me:

*"Did you used to make Airfix models when you were a kid, Dan?"* I ask.

Dan starts to tell me in detail about his collection. He too was an Airfix Kid. QED.

### III.

Jane had come to wine and dine and reminisce about how she and I and various others had sweated blood organising interpretation at the European Nuclear Disarmament Convention at Coventry last year. That was just before Conspiracy, and by comparison Conspiracy was a model of smooth running efficiency. We agree that leaving Martin Butcher, the militant vegetarian terror of the cruise convoys and a known anarchist, to do the work without support or supervision had been unwise. *"It's because I'm not a very good anarchist,"* he had explained to me, *"If I'd been a good anarchist the disorganisation would have worked better."* We wine some more, and got stuck into the important stuff, the personal gossip about absent friends. Which led to me explaining my theory about the Airfix Mentality. Jane recognised the symptoms immediately, and giggled quite a lot. And I was reminded of a new development I hadn't yet told Joseph.

*"Dear,"* I said, *"I saw Phil the other day, dear. He's been working with Dan on all this battlefield nukes stuff that was in The Observer the other day."*

*"Ah,"* said Joseph, *"Montebello decision to modernise...lying to Parliament... Lance missiles...W79 mortar..."*

*"Whatever you say, dear. Anyhow, Phil says while Dan was doing all the research, he made a little plastic model of the mortar or whatever it was all about, and had it blu-tacked to the top of his Amstrad."*

*"What scale was it?"* asked Joseph.

Jane giggled so much she almost fell off her chair.

*"What scale did he use? It couldn't have been one-seventy-second or it would have been only this big."*

Jane and I are now rolling on the floor. Joseph notices us, and starts to giggle too.

### IV.

Down at Lyme Regis again, I was telling Mutti about the Airfix Kids, and she seemed to recognise the species. Vati came in to hear the closing lines.

*"A perfectly sensible question,"* he said. *"What scale was it?"*

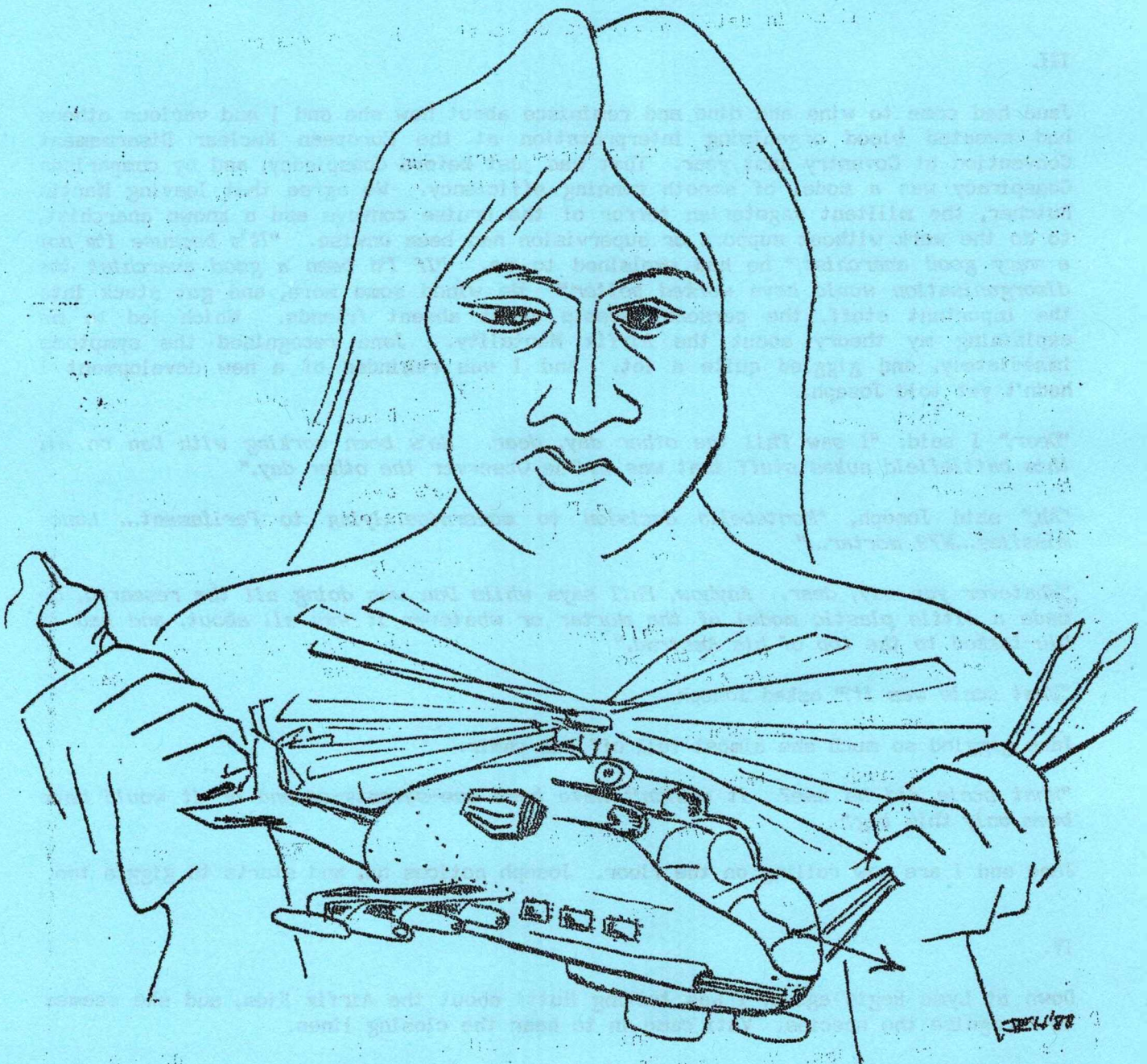
PS.

Which should have been the punchline to the joke. Only, Joseph was sent to Birmingham on a week-long course in July. He rang home on Tuesday, to check that I hadn't picked up any toy-boys, and to tell me the course was boring, he'd been to see the movie *Saigon* in order to keep his collection of Vietnam war-movie viewing up to date, he'd had dinner at a handy Greek restaurant in the shopping centre near his hotel, and ummm, there was this model shop...

"What have you gone and bought?"

"Ummm... only three helicopter kits, dear."

He arrived home on Friday with six helicopter kits. Now he's happily occupying himself painting the pieces and gluing them together. I suppose it makes a relaxing change from saving the world.



# FEAR OF FALLING

Joseph Nicholas

We arrived at Seattle-Tacoma Airport at noon on Wednesday 27 April 1988, after a fairly tedious flight from JFK in New York, our 747-SP dropping through the cloud that covered the Cascades to fly south over Seattle, Puget Sound invisible to our right and Lake Washington spread on our left. As usual when we fly, we had window seats; and thus a good view of our approach to the airport, which took us right over the Aviation Museum at Boeing Field and allowed us a glimpse of what looked like a B-49 on the hard standing by the main hangar. And an even better view of the ground after that, which seemed to keep sloping gradually up to meet us without the perimeter fence ever coming into sight -- trees, trees and more trees, and damn me if I couldn't see every leaf and twig of them. Fuck me, I thought, are we about to undershoot? Plough in just short of the runway in a welter of crumpling metal and exploding fuel tanks?

Then the ground dropped sharply away from us, the airport perimeter passed beneath, and it became clear that our final approach had taken us across a wooded ridge a few hundred yards short of the runway. Which meant we'd never been in danger of crashing at all. Poot. Another routine, unexciting landing, courtesy of United Airlines. (On a flight that was continuing to Hong Kong and which was half-full of Chinese, Singaporeans and Filipinos, but for whom the cabin staff made no concessions whatever -- all the announcements were in English, and if you couldn't understand that then too bad. The seat next to us was occupied by the wife of an official at the Chinese consulate in New York, returning to Peking to visit the children she hadn't seen for some years; she was fluent in English, but had never flown before and so hadn't a clue what was going on. "The friendly skies," indeed!)

Arriving at Sea-Tac at roughly the same time, on a quite different flight, was Spike Parsons. Eileen Gunn collected the three of us, and drove us up into Seattle itself -- there to visit banks, buy film for cameras, and ride the monorail out to the Space Needle at the Seattle Center, site of the 1961 World's Fair. About a thousand feet of track had recently been lopped off the downtown end as part of the general redevelopment of the business district -- not so much new buildings as new streets -- but the train itself looked exactly as expected: something out of a late 1950s' SF illustration, someone's thirty-year old conception of what "the future" would look like, a copy of a copy of the monorail at Disneyland. "Century 21!" quipped Eileen as we gazed up at the faintly Gernsbackian outlines of the Space Needle. "In the future," I riposted, "we will all have atomic-powered refrigerators!"

We took the glass-fronted elevator up to the observation deck, Judith with her nose pressed to the window and I with my back pressed firmly against the rear of the car. I couldn't avoid looking out, but at least I didn't have to look down -- and particularly not down from so close to the edge. Judith explained my distaste for heights to Eileen and Spike as we stepped out at the top: about how she'd dragged me around various historic Belgian clock towers and church steeples five years before, unconcernedly leaning over the parapets and inviting me to peer down on the insect life below, only to be hauled back by nervous me, staying several firm paces away and making sure only to look straight out at the horizon. Vertigo, in other words.

The phrase "letting your vertigo out for a run" entered our holiday vocabulary soon afterwards -- especially when I felt I had to let it out for a run by ascending as many towers as possible in the towns we visited, regardless of how afraid it might make me, in pursuit of the theory that if I did it often enough I'd sooner or later conquer the fear altogether. (Needless to say, it hasn't worked -- yet.) The worst was undoubtedly the Rathaus in Rothenburg ob der Tauber in 1986: a platform no more than a foot wide some one-hundred-and-twenty feet above the ground, around which one shuffled from tiny egress to tiny ingress, only to find that they were one and the same and that even as you tried to get back in other people were still clambering out. Still, I got some great photographs of the town from that vantage point.

As I got some good photographs of downtown Seattle and Capitol Hill from the observation deck of the Space Needle, albeit that it was a bit overcast. But I didn't press myself right against the edge, and I tried not to look down for any longer than absolutely necessary. Spike thought this was really rather amusing, so to distract her attention and regain some street credibility I started telling her about our landing at Sea-Tac: about the hill rising to meet us, then suddenly falling away again just when the flight seemed as though it was about to get interesting. But she seemed to slightly mistake my meaning. "You're not a nervous air passenger, I hope," she said. "No," I said. "I love flying. It's just tall buildings that I can't stand."

Place me on the top floor of a tall building -- such as, let's say, the World Trade Center in New York -- and have my travelling companions exclaim excitedly over what's happening in the streets far below and I stay well back from the windows. While they press themselves against the glass, the better to examine the roofs below, I remain resolutely behind the railings, attempting to neutralise the height by placing, as often as possible, my camera lens between myself and the world. But place me in the window seat on (say) the left-hand side of an aircraft which banks sharply left shortly after take-off, so that I'm looking down at the ground from the same height as the World Trade Center...and I haven't a quail. Perhaps it's because there's no longer any direct connection between me and the ground -- and the thought that, if I do fall, it will be due to a complex technological fault rather than a straightforwardly physical one. After all, falling off a building seems somehow *ordinary*. By comparison, having an aircraft start to break up around you must be positively enthralling....

Readers with long memories may recall an article entitled "Fear Of Flying" I wrote some years ago for Leigh Edmonds's *Rataplan*, about a near accident that befell me on my way back from Australia in 1981. The title was of course a misnomer; but the incident it described was undoubtedly the closest I've ever come to actually *having* an accident in an aircraft. But then I daresay that part of the thrill or air travel is the thought that *it might just happen after all*, which means you tend to spend part of the flight manufacturing possible scenarios out of the things you can see and hear around you. Such as, for example, the singing in and out of the pitch of the engines of a Trans-Australia Airlines 727 on its final approach to Sydney's Mascot Airport while strong cross-winds and down-drafts attempted to throw it off course. And I was sitting at the back of the aircraft, close to the engines. And it was night....

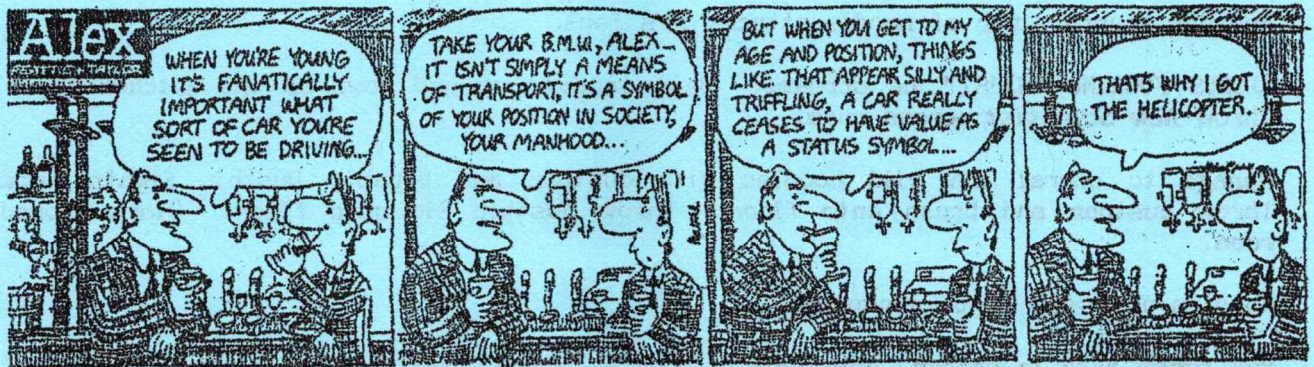
Is this nervousness? Of course not -- it's fun. But a more exciting landing -- and one more interesting than the approach to Sea-Tac -- was the run in to San Francisco International a week later. Our flight path took us in across the city from west to east, giving us magnificent aerial views of the Golden Gate Bridge, the downtown area, Golden Gate Park, and much more besides, before curving us out across the southern part of the Bay to approach the runway from the south-east. Dropping slowly towards the water, the trim tabs and landing flaps sliding from their housings in the wings, the engine note rising and falling....I had my personal stereo on, a Jesus & Mary Chain track playing, and the lower we dropped the higher I turned the volume, ramming it to its limit, the world contracting into a single tight sphere of sound and speed and pumping adrenalin: eyes and ears and feral grin....if I'd had time, if I'd known what the approach was like, I'd have rewound to play The Primitives' "Crash" instead, a song that was suddenly more apposite: waiting for the moment when an unexpected gust might catch the 737, shove it sideways and down, the tip of a wing catching the sun-burnished surface of the Bay and yanking us from the sky, smashing the fuselage open against a concrete wall of water and sending the broken bodies of the passengers cartwheeling in an expanding spray of metal fragments and hot aviation fuel....

Well, maybe not. Maybe that sort of thing only happens in bad war movies and patches of prose as purple as the foregoing. Arguably the greatest danger in air travel now is not that the ever-present possibility of mechanical failure and/or the weather might do you in but that, totally unforeseen, you might wander into hostilities somewhere -- get shot down by accident or a faulty targeting computer,



mistaken for a fighter or an electronic intruder over the Gulf or in the Far East, attacked simply because you happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. (That sounds horribly platitudinous, but analysis of the relevant incidents indicates that it is precisely what has happened.) The rest is routine: everyday journeys from point A to point B that happen to be by air rather than rail, sea or road. No matter that air crashes look spectacular, and that if several occur in a relatively short period the death toll seems dreadful; more people die on the roads every week, and what do we care about them? No more the distant thrill that it might happen but the dull expectation that if you're lucky you'll get some edible food and that if the flight is long enough you'll get a mildly diverting movie. So much for the supposed excitement of flying; the statistics have reduced it to the rather less interesting "air travel".

The Golden Age of Aviation is over, in other words; now we live in the Golden Age of Package Holidays, where ground staff ask if you want smoking or non-smoking seats as they check your baggage and look surprised when you say you want to look out. Perhaps they all suffer from vertigo, or something. Perhaps I should go back to thinking about tall buildings and vertigo myself. Going not only as high as possible but as close to the edge as possible, always and every time. Looking over and looking down. Looking down for long periods. Trying not to interpose a camera between myself and the ground. Trying not to feel nervous. Trying to pretend that, really, I'm in no danger whatever of falling....



## GREAT MOMENTS IN LETTER-WRITING

"There is so much feminism in fanzines today....all about rapes and downtrodden women which one can peruse in newspapers *ad nauseam*....I don't want to read such items in fanzines, quite frankly....neither do I wish to be guided politically in a left wing direction, which is not unusual. For me, *Starship Troopers* was a superbly exciting novel which jangled my nerve endings and the only time I wasn't biting my nails was when I was turning the pages over in great excitement. Now I read in *The Space Wastrel* that it is extremely revealing, if read by a Marxist, and crikey, what do I read....'Women are seen as sex objects'. Women are sex objects. The whole basis of the design by Nature for the continuation of the species is that women should be impregnated....now, if every time a man had sexual intercourse he had a blinding headache or his nose bled, he wouldn't do it....but create women as extremely sexually desirable, a sex object, and make intercourse physically and emotionally exciting for both parties (excuse me for a second whilst I have a glass of ice-cold water) and except for someone pushing the button, the continuation of homo sapiens will be manifested. Women can choose their sexual partners, except for rape....and please don't let's have a frenzied feminist saying I don't know about rape, I do....I have investigated rape cases from a fingerprint aspect, many successfully. Do you see what you've done....you've got me writing about these subjects now?"

From a letter by the Irish John Berry in *The Space Wastrel* 6, and transcribed verbatim for the benefit of those who may have been hitherto denied the opportunity to sample his rapier wit and all-encompassing wisdom. In future issues, he will doubtless be offering us his views on why magazines like *Mayfair* and *Rustler* do not exploit women, and the role of senility in science fiction fandom.

# TIDYING-UP THE JOSEPH NICHOLAS WAY

Judith Hanna

Step on inch-long piece of raw Chinese noodle on kitchen floor.

"JEE-SUS CHRIST!"

Seize broom and attack noodle. Attack chair, which is in the way. Fling chair across room. Broom-head flies off across room too.

"FUCKING CHRIST!"

Throw stool across room. Throw other stool across room. Put broom back together. Step on more pieces of noodle. Attack them with broom. Chase them all over floor. Throw the bag full of plastic bags across room. It breaks, spilling bags all over floor. Throw the bag full of vacuum cleaner attachments across floor.

I finish my plateful of stir-fried noodles with clams, and start to loot Joseph's salad.

Another crunchy inch of noodle attacks JN's foot.

"JESUS FUCKING CHRIST!" he screams. Beat sandals up and down on the kitchen table. Throw *New Scientist* across room.

Manage to corral the wild noodles with dustpan and brush. Dustbin fights back. Throw dustpan and brush onto floor. Throw dustbin lid onto floor. Glare around room.

Noodles now seem to be vanquished.

Put broom back in corner. Put dustbin back together. Put chair and stools back. Put plastic bags and vacuum cleaner bits back. Tidy up kitchen. Sit down to eat cold stir-fried noodles with clams.

It's a tough life at the frontiers of entropy.

(Coming soon: "Breakfast the Joseph Nicholas Way, or, The Taming of the Soft-Boiled Egg" — another episode in the continuing saga: INANIMATE OBJECTS MUST DIE. Current score: Inanimate Objects 358<sup>45</sup>; Joseph 23 lbw.)

That Old Chestnut by Sally Ann Larson



# LETTERS

Most of the letters we received on the fourth issue are now horribly dated; but a few are still relevant. They concern Judith's "Working Late"; the choice of extracts and the replies are therefore hers. Let's start with two Australians:

Maureen Gell  
6/381 Barker Road  
Subiaco 9008  
Western Australia

"I'm doing an Art History class which ends 6.30 at night, then there's a fifteen minute walk to the station for the 7.00 train home. So generally I get there fifteen minutes before anyone else except the odd stray man. The first time I settled down comfortably and started reading a book; noticed a woman arrive who settled down on my seat, thought nothing of it. The second and third female arrivals also settled down on my seat. Ah ha! An interesting social phenomenon, I thought. You don't notice it on buses because you tend to collect around a single point rather than an extended platform. I realised that it's something I didn't normally do -- checking for the presence of other women -- although I do now that I've discovered they check for my presence. It's a source of protection I simply hadn't realised.

"The other point you mentioned was monitoring approaching males and relaxing if there's a woman with him. If not, then one does watch him closely to determine whether he is a threat, judging by the way he holds himself, the way he walks and at the same time trying to analyse precisely what it is one looks for that sets off the warning bells of *threat threat threat...* realising that he, if he is predatory, is analysing me in the same manner -- does she hold herself like a victim or does she look as if she might shout or kick. A woman alone at night is breaking a curfew; I should be hiding behind a locked door, not wandering around enjoying freedom. Thoughts of the latest media reports of disappearing Perth women run through my head; doesn't worry me, I'm not going to be a victim. Possibly they thought the same thing. If the papers didn't report I could feel quite safe and happy in this moonlight muting everything to grey tones and subtle textures."

Lucy Sussex  
42 Wolseley Parade  
Kensington  
Victoria 3001  
Australia

"I was reminded of some odd stratagems adopted by women under threat. I knew one middle-aged woman who refused to go out at night (she lived alone) for fear of finding an intruder when she came back. An otherwise normal Catholic housewife (if you consider using the Billings method and ascribing all nastiness to "Old Sooty" as normal) had the same fear, but of finding an intruder when she returned by day laden with the shopping. So she would take the baby shopping but leave the older pre-schoolers locked inside the house to get up to heaven knows what mischief. Presumably she thought these toddlers would give the warning. I always thought it more likely that any intruder would suborn the little dears with sweeties. Another girl I knew who had to walk home in the dark always did it with a full bladder, to be something like a bombardier beetle if attacked. Sorry, wrong simile -- skunk is probably more what I had in mind. A book could be written on the defensive strategies of the human female and one probably will."

*From Belfast, the situation takes on a new twist:*

Tommy Ferguson  
60 Melrose Street  
Lisburn Road  
Belfast BT9 7ND

"I found myself reacting "is this really what it's like to walk home on your own?", and saying to myself, of course it is, you silly pratt. It's strange but in Northern Ireland there can be a similar feeling, for both sexes. For instance, recently I was hit as a by-product of a failed political kidnapping and for the merest second my eyes met those of the gunman. Since then every time a car draws up behind me, or someone steps out behind me, I jump and become very nervous. When walking down the street, you're sizing people up for their terrorist potential. It's a different thing to the fear of a female being attacked but it still scares the shit out of you...a partly healthy paranoia, which may save your life some day (through heightened adrenalin levels, quicker reactions and muscle readiness)."

*Sounds a very similar fear to me: yes, it's not only women who are in danger of*

violence on the streets. Bernard Leak mentions the same point, among others, in an astonishingly long and confused letter without benefit of margins:

Bernard Leak  
K1 Whewell's Court  
Trinity College  
Cambridge CB2 1TQ

"I feel as if my brain is coming apart....it feels more like a Phil Dick paranoid fantasy than reality, and I am one of the most paranoid people I know....and yet — I think of all the people I know, including some I know who are prone to domestic violence (squeakycleanspeak for wife-beating) —

and still it doesn't seem like my world. How is it that men feel less afraid than women, given that they are overwhelmingly more likely to be victims of violent attacks in the street? I don't trust figures for domestic violence, but I have no doubt that those for attacks on women by men are very heavily under-reported."

*Are those two last sentences contradictory, or merely non sequiturs? To respond to the first: the reasons normally suggested for men being more often victims of random street violence are that men go out more at night, don't use the exaggerated caution all women learn, and that much street violence comprises fights which erupt in pubs. The response to the second of the two sentences is of course: yes.*

"The darkest note is in the words on Pimlico: 'it's a neighbourhood....where nice people live, people cushioned by money'. This has the air of a stiletto being thrust at random into a squirming body behind the arras. Where is it meant to hit? How much damage does it do? The suggestion is that somehow these Pimlico yuppies are protected from the harsh realities of life; that the experience of assault, of rape, is central and vital and that they are enervatingly missing out on it. Uh? If this is 'being cushioned by money', I think we could all do with it; if it leads to fewer knives being pointed at fewer women, then perhaps there's a better case for it than has usually been recognised."

*An interesting exercise in practical criticism: what a lot Bernard has managed to read into his colourfully inappropriate metaphor! (Although there are unfortunately no squirming bodies behind Gothic arrases in Edwardian stucco wonderland). He does seem to have got the point, just doesn't credit me with having made it. Let's run over the obvious once again. Yes indeed, money does enable people to live in "nice" neighbourhoods, where part of the niceness is less danger of street violence. Yes indeed, we could all do with being cushioned from nasty experiences like violence and poverty. This is generally recognised as a major reason for people mortgaging most of their weekdays in order to earn money. The basis of capitalist theory is that people should compete to earn lots more money, for fear of falling into the nasty world of poverty and insecurity. The basis of socialist theory is that a government should provide a basic sort of cushion, or safety net, so that the struggle for money is not starkly a struggle to survive.*

*The suggestion that "the experience of assault, of rape, is central and vital" is all Bernard's, not mine. It's a common enough fantasy, which sells The Sun, Playboy, Hustler, Rambo, Gor and the rest of that pornography (some of it the pornography of violence). Also Genet, de Sade, West Side Story, Carmen and James Bond. A bowdlerised version is exploited by Mills & Boon; however, "a woman's rape fantasy is Robert Redford refusing to take no for an answer; it has nothing to do with having your teeth knocked out." (Can anyone tell me the origin of this quote?) But this is a letter column, not a thesis; let's move on.*

Michael Cobley  
18 Athole Gardens  
Hillhead  
Glasgow G12 9BA

"Sherry Coldsmith's counter-argument to David Brin's Neo-Renaissance/Myth Mosaic idea goes thus: since he (Brin) thinks the export of American socio-myths will reform other brutal myth-systems, the whole idea of myth-systems is wrong because, for Sherry, American socio-myths are bad

per se. This is what is known as a fallacy. While detailing the bare bones of Brin's ideas, she conveniently omitted his explanations and clarifications.

"Personally I find Brin's faith in advanced communications technology as the vanguard of beneficial socio-myths to be almost quaint. Making predictions like that is just as shamanistic as the Marxist ideologies he accused of same; maybe he realises this. After all he is a trained scientist and he does believe that new theories are born out of the destruction of old ones, like the Dance of Shiva as he

put it. Such an attitude is, I suspect, in marked contrast to that of Sherry. Her wholesale detraction, couched in terms of traditional left-wing dualism, presented a distorted version of Brin's ideas filtered through her far-reaching delusions. In terms of information-theoretic content, Brin's ideas engage my thoughts and interest, whereas Sherry told me nothing new. In short, her whole approach was about as radically analytical as a Tory party election broadcast."

Sherry Goldsmith  
 Ty Llyn  
 Llangorse  
 Brecon  
 Powys LD3 7TR

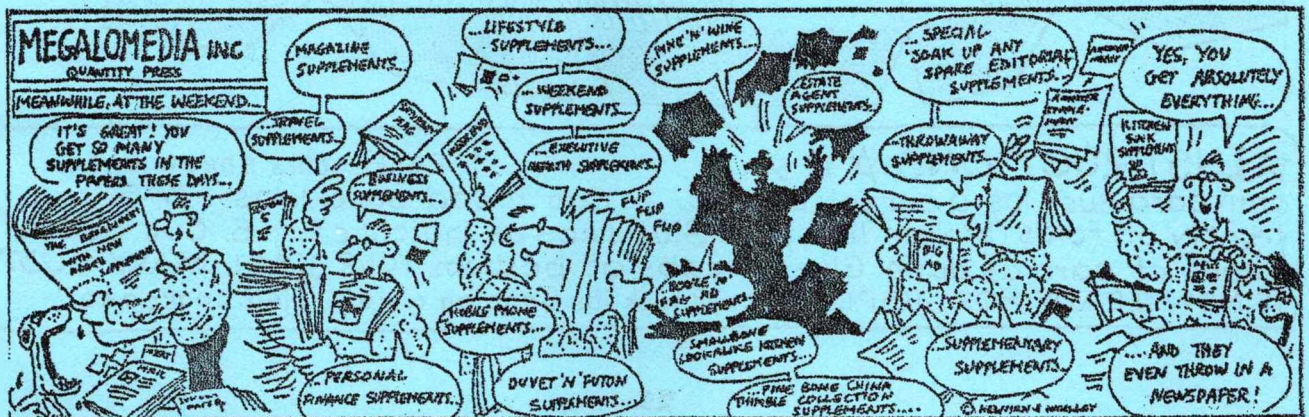
"I doubt that David Brin's 'clarifications and explanations', unavailable at the City Lit lecture I attended, would have broadened his theory sufficiently to place it outside the category of ideological determinism. It was this form of determinism I objected to, not to his theory of myth-systems. In any case, his use of the term 'myth-system' was hardly rigorous -- at times the term implied folk-tales, at others values expressed in contemporary popular media.

"Cobley may care to note that I did not quarrel with Brin's judgement that American values, as expressed in the media, are tolerant. Nor did I, as Brin repeatedly did, imply that one myth-system has more merit than another. As I explained in the article, the tolerance expressed in American cultural media is not socially transformative because human society is not primarily determined by beliefs, ideas or even myth-systems. Not only is the theoretical presumption 'the new Renaissance' inadequate, it is reactionary and preposterous when applied to practical examples. I can't see how apartheid will crumble if only blacks in South Africa would listen to the same folk-tales as the Afrikaners.

"So did Mr Cobley simply miss the point or are his real reasons for supporting Brin just the result of his loyalty towards 'trained scientists'? He might ponder another physicist, himself a socialist, who would have laughed Brin out of court: Albert Einstein."

The term "trained scientist" is pretty damn suspect anyway. I doubt the average physicist knows his mitochondria from his ribosome, let alone has more than a pop acquaintance with the complexities of social theory; for instance, just what specific mythic beliefs the term 'shamanism' refers to. Michael should also note that had Sherry attempted to recapitulate the whole of Brin's lecture with its half-hour of "explanations and clarifications" we wouldn't have had space for the article, and most readers wouldn't have bothered to plough through it if we had. Concentrating on the points you intend to take issue with is an entirely legitimate form of argument. Finally, the notion that "new theories are born out of old ones" has less to do with the Dance of Shiva than the teachings of Hegel, which were taken up by Karl Marx as the basis for his socio-historical works. Michael seems to have got things backwards: Sherry's article was not 'couched....in left wing dualism', but he seems to be implying that Brin's lecture borrowed 'traditional left-wing dualism', all unaware of its source.

WE ALSO HEARD FROM: Sheryl Birkhead, Paul Brazier, Cy Chauvin, Tony Chester, Mike Glicksohn, Steve Green, Chuck Harris, Robert Lichtman, Roman Orszanski, Andy Sawyer. Our thanks to them all.



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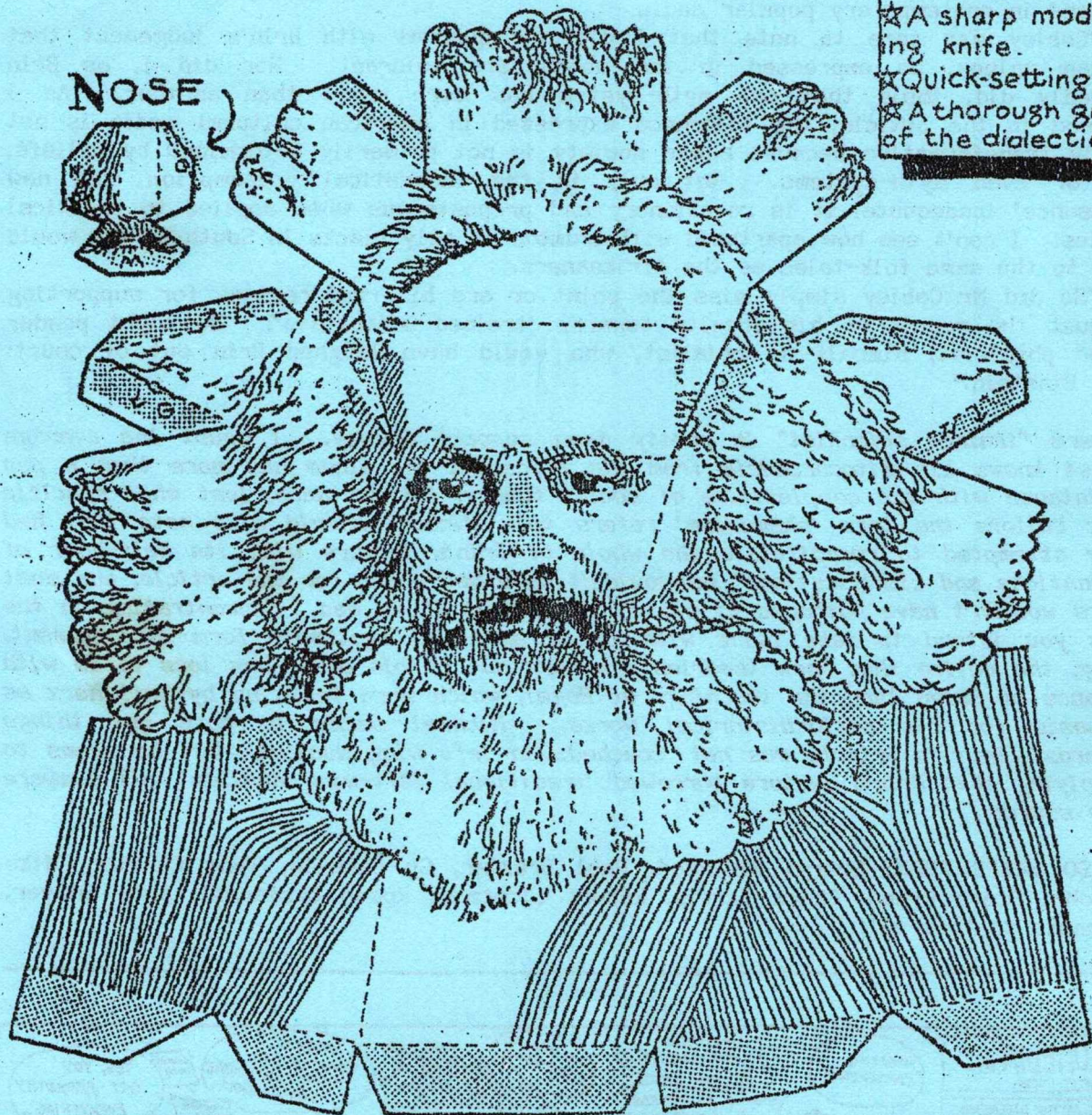
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### ★ INSTRUCTIONS ★ ★ ★

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