

HEAD!



MAY 2000

#1

The Myth of the Focal Point Fanzine

EDITORIAL

It seems as people have been predicting for some time that fannish debate has moved away from fanzines to Internet newsgroups. It struck me most forcibly after Corflu when I signed on to Trufen after some weeks - well, months - of absence. No wonder the fanzines of today, while full of good writing seem lacking in some essential element. The sense of community has moved to the web, leaving behind it a cluster of titles that rely on travel tales, lit crit, personal anecdotes or jokes for their substance. How often now will we see con reports from any of the stalwarts of trufen et al? The con report writes itself post-convention on the web. The fanzine is no longer necessary to recreate the experience.

Ironically though, just at this point when it is least necessary, it seems that what the fan world wants most - judging by the collective mind of Corflu attendees - is a focal point fanzine. Leaving aside the vexed question of whether a focal point fanzine can be created, or just happens, I think what we see in action is a wilful nostalgia for a past reality that no longer pertains. Alison Scott is closer to the truth when she suggests that what we actually need is a digest of the best of the newsgroups, and there is no doubt that should this focal point fanzine ever emerge, it will see the majority of its distribution by electronic means. Already the multi-media element means that we judge such paper fanzines as Plokta and Squib almost as much by the web services that accompany them as the actual physical issues.

All of which leaves us with a serious problem as fanzine fans. The very artefact by which we define ourselves is about to be subsumed into a larger subculture. It is the Internet analogue to the dilution of true skiffy by Star Wars. If fanzines become something we do on the web, taking the form more and more of well-crafted web pages and extended e-mails, what differen-

tiates this activity - apart from a modicum of practice at writing and layout - from the hobby of a growing number of the general public? Truly the age of fanzines for the people has arrived.

Why Head? Why Now?

If that's the way I feel, you may be wondering why start another paper fanzine? Well, the paper format may be approaching obsolescence, but never before has their been so many toys around for embellishing it. DTP may not have the graft and craft of the duplicator era but its versatile and fun to be with. Well, Doug seems to like it anyway! I'm not a huge fan of the fast moving world of newsgroups; too much dross; too great an input for the reward. I'm happier writing for a more distant audience, and having time to edit, mull and reformat. I also, I admit it, like the paper artefact at the end of it all, despite the hassle and drain on my bank balance. *Head!* may well develop its own web site, but I think it'll be a while yet before it becomes anything approaching web only.

By the way, *Head!* has no pretension to being focal point or even essential reading. It's just a forum for talking about what's going on in the world whether in fandom or out on the streets, looking for a bit of debate, controversy, passion and of course a reason to laugh. It will largely reflect the type of things that Doug and I are into, jointly or separately, but we will continue to nag and cajole our friends and acquaintances into contributing - so who knows what will turn up? This issue there's a lot about fanzines and conventions : the legacy of a spring misspent in Seattle and Glasgow spending too much money on beer, food and hotel rooms. Next time - who knows? We're planning on continuing the fanzine reviews but will probably talk more about films, music or whatever has been bugging us. And there might even be a letter column. That's down to you!

No Beer. Much Loathing. Glasgow

We'd arrived in Scotland on the Thursday night, meeting up with my friends at the pub in Edinburgh. Sitting there in pre-con relaxed drinking mode I felt just like I had on the Thursday night we arrived in Seattle for Corflu, albeit a different country, a different group of people and a different convention.

I've always had a soft spot for Eastercons despite many fans telling me not to bother - big con bad, small con good. But most of my friends go, and the location really doesn't matter that much to me, as long as it's easy to get to and has a plentiful number of restaurants around to try. Glasgow though is a different matter.

My first West Coast con was Scone, a Unicon held at the Strathclyde University. It was a fun con, lots of good panels, games, drinking and socialising in just that perfect balance that makes for a great convention experience.

Intersection in 95 was an altogether different experience. I'd spent a lot of time doing a lot of pointless gophering in what seemed a rather randomly organised fashion. By the end of the second day I was ready to pack it all in and go home. The Glovers saved me at the last minute by seconding me to the fan room. Despite making the odd friend and enjoying the evening parties Worldcon left me a bit drained and I packed fandom in for nearly two years. There were other personal reasons, but Intersection didn't help.

So, I had ambiguous feelings towards 2Kon. Being in Scotland I was sure to see a lot of my friends, probably even some long lost ones. I was right; not only was there a large amount of Edinburgh fandom past and present on show, but a small contingent of friends from my early days in Aberdeen. On the downside we weren't staying in the Central Hotel and the programme wasn't particularly appealing. Having a Celtic Fantasy theme, and a sack-load of fantasy guests I'd never read anything by didn't put me off wanting to have a good time but it

didn't fire up my enthusiasm either. After all as the saying goes "Who goes to events anyway?" Flicking through the programme, what was there that took my fancy? Well, there was the Reductio Ad Absurdum version of Lord Of The Rings, the British Worldcon bid panel and the Eastercon bidding session.

Apart from those three I began to despair. With one unspecified film, the British Grand Prix, little SF content, no fannish programming and a clutch of unappealing fantasy panels I began to feel that buying a membership wasn't really worth it. Sure I could hang out with my friends drinking all weekend, but we could organize that any-time. And while my hit ratio is rather low with programme items I usually spend most of my evening watching whatever fan programming there is, and I try to make at least one daytime panel every day. Then I began to hear rumours of people who'd offered to organise panels but were ignored - surely not!

While programme was the main culprit there were plenty of other problem areas; the accommodation handling upset a lot of folk. The policy of rooms being allocated to single women in the Central to prevent any nasty incidents happening on the way back to the overflow hotels late at night seemed on the face of it sensible. But being told that our hotel was in the red light district didn't make us feel any safer wading through drunken clubbers on the way to home every night. A lot of couples go to bed at different times, and if the streets between the two hotels aren't safe enough for a lone woman to walk down at night then they're not really safe for anyone. So why use that hotel then? Insult was added to injury when the same committee tried to convince us during the UK Worldcon panel item that Glasgow was one of the safest cities in the UK to wander around in at night. So tell us guys which is it safe or unsafe?

No real ale caused dissension in the rank

and file. It's not like there aren't good beers in Scotland - I can name at least twenty without really trying. And then there was the comedy Read Me Outside. In a city, which is the Scottish equivalent of Birmingham, only one Indian restaurant was listed but no name given. Instead we get five animal hospitals, a fruit and nut stand, the Samaritans and the AA helpline telephone numbers. So if your pet alcoholic squirrel is getting you down because it's off the fresh nuts you've just bought it then you know where to go, but if you want a tasty curry with a bunch of friends then you're stuffed! Gripes aside Eastercon was as usual the meeting place for all my friends. If it had been advertised as a small fantasy relaxacon, I could have happily let most of these criticisms slide, but as an Eastercon it failed. Listening to the same committee wax lyrical about Glasgow's potential as a UK Worldcon site severely worried me.

Corflu was billed as a small fanzine relaxacon set in the mock Tudor village of the University Plaza Hotel in Seattle. The programme being loose but relevant meant there was plenty of time to make new friends, chat, sightsee, eat and play softball. I'd been intrigued to see the exact differences between British and American fan cultures and here I got to see it up real close.

I liked the mix of characters and the fact we all had something in common within fandom despite the distance and sometimes lack of knowledge of each other. Meeting people for the first time was a bit strange; seeing how well most folk knew each other coming in from the outside reminded me of attending large family gatherings.

The programme caught my eye. A fun opening ceremony, at which Mark Manning read aloud his hi-energy poem Mimeo, and where Ken Foreman was chosen as guest from the hat much to my relief. There was an extended round up of the years zines to help us in our voting for the FAAN Awards. The usual TAFF debate was the only real downer on the proceedings,

but Ken dazzled us all with his GOH speech at the Awards Ceremony brunch. I even watched Nigel Rowe and others bid for fanzines in the auction.

Having been to such a well-organised and interesting convention that gave the opportunity to relax and enjoy it at a natural pace, it's no wonder that when I came home I was looking forward to my next convention. Although after reading the 2Kon programme book I was wishing my next convention was <plokta.con> or Novacon.

I feel it's a bit of a shame about everything that happened with 2Kon; somehow I feel it was an opportunity lost. With a plethora of Scottish authors and fans available there could be any number of panels available with a bit of imagination, from "The Scottish Genre Fiction Renaissance" to "Is there a place for a devolved Scottish Eastercon", but titles like that wouldn't work with a Celtic fantasy theme...

More though I feel sorry for next years committee. Having had to move from Blackpool to Hinkley I know of quite a few friends who're now thinking of cancelling their memberships. The location change although being a part of it isn't the deciding factor - rather why risk spending all that cash after being disappointed with 2Kon? With the year after being confirmed for Jersey and the additional travel requirements for some...will they bother coming back to Eastercons? Only time will tell.

A request to the Paragon committee please put SF and Fandom back into Eastercons!



The alternative Arthur C Clarke awards

People might complain about the tiredness of the panel format at conventions, but somehow I missed it at 2Kon. What's the point of getting fans together in one place if you don't utilise their opinions, knowledge and obsessions?

Given the dearth of such items, I made a particular point of getting along to the Arthur C Clarke award discussion. Not only a panel, but one related to science fiction - another thing they didn't seem to be doing at 2Kon.

The panel was composed of various reviewer and critic types mostly related to Foundation I guessed judging by the presence of Farah Mendelsohn and her partner. Farah, sadly, was not wearing the revealing bodice that had so enlivened the house-warming party of Amanda Baker and co. But she was on fine form wielding the equivalent of bodiced breasts at the AC Clarke shortlist.

The great thing about this panel was that it mimicked what I could imagine might be the deliberations of an awarding body, but with the frankness and lack of reverence only possible among a group of people who had not been responsible for picking this particular shortlist. So the chairman of the panel was able to dismiss Vernor Vinge with a heartfelt : "Christ it was bad!" whilst the opening salvo on Kathleen Ann Goonan came out as an equally dismissive "Can't write, can she?"

In fact opinion was divided on Goonan's *Bones of Time* . Some people liked the plot, some the setting; and the words "Connie Willis" were even bandied about in a positive sense to describe characterisation. On the other hand, another female writer of some note was invoked - Anne McCaffery - and that was the kiss of death as the Goonan was consigned to the "All the science is magic" pile.

Meanwhile 2 more shortlisters bit the dust. Stephen Baxter's *Time* was greeted with a

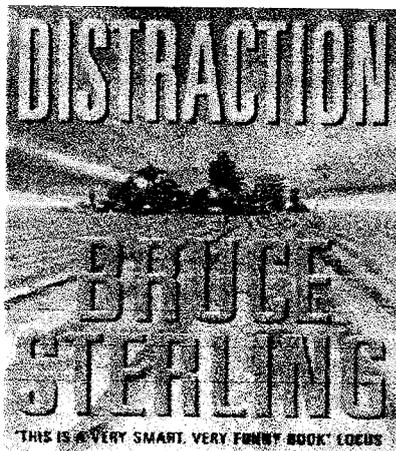
general lack of enthusiasm that eventually crystallised around what Farah described as his resurrection complex. Baxter characters might get killed in cosmic manners but somehow they always come back and it's never for real. Bruce Sterling's *Distraction* met with more interest, but everyone agreed it had no plot. "It was like a 1960s history book with illustrations," Farah opined. With that established, people felt free to say what they had enjoyed about the satire, leading to the immortal line "I thought declaring war on The Netherlands was a very good idea."

Next up was Justina Robson's *Silver Screen* and finally something the panel seemed to like. "The only person on the list who can really write," was the opinion. Plus points were an English voice, a simple plot, good world building and characters who once traumatised stayed traumatised. Also everyone seemed relieved that this book was relatively short. The panellists were already casting nervous glances over their shoulders at the one remaining shortlisted novel, Neal Stephenson's 900 page behemoth *Cryptonomicon* . Earlier in the proceedings an attempt had been made to rule this out on the grounds that it wasn't science fiction. Fiction about science maybe, but mostly just historical narrative. But eventually the panel faced up to its duty and plunged into battle. "You need a lectern to read it," complained one embittered former Neal Stephenson fan for whom the last straw seemed to have been a five page exposition on how to eat cereal. Others were more keen to treat it positively, talking about the characterisation of Turing and the treatment of the historical material. But as science fiction they agreed, it didn't shine.

So the panel took its vote, and Justina Robson came out on top as the alternative Arthur C. Clarke winner. The audience were going to get to vote too, but once it was clear how few people had read *Silver*

Screen or Cryptonomicon (though more had read the huge Stephenson than the bijou Robson) the motion was withdrawn.

I hadn't read any of the shortlisted books either, but having watched Doug enjoy *Cryptonomicon* without the aid of a lectern or notes and still maintain that it was science fiction, I did wonder whether the panel had done it justice. Silver Screen sounded interesting enough to rush out and consider buying, but so far I haven't seen it in a bookshop. As for the outcome of the real Arthur C. Clarke award, at the time of writing this still remains to be seen.



The real winner!

Doug didn't seem too impressed when I related the conclusions of the 2Kon panel to him. Here he explains what he thought about the book:

In Defence Of Cryptonomicon

Before anyone gets all emotional about my defence of *Cryptonomicon*'s right to be considered for a major science fiction award, I feel I should point out that my argument has little to do with presumed SF or lack of SF content.

My reasons for supporting Stephenson's inclusion have nothing to do with shoe-horning *Cryptonomicon* into a category that it doesn't fit. Not knowing too much about large data storage mechanisms and the computing power that runs throughout the modern strand of the book's narrative I wouldn't want to claim that Neal had produced a very, very primitive proto-cyberpunk book - he hasn't. Similarly I wouldn't want to try fitting it, as some have

suggested, into an alternate history category, because the book was never written as such.

No, while not strictly SF, there are other reasons why I wouldn't like to see the book discounted. For years we've been going to conventions where the same people sit on the same panels and discuss the nature of SF, its relationship to horror, or fantasy or mainstream writing. The only conclusion I've seen is that no-one really agrees with anyone else about what defines SF and that panels of this nature are far too common, like the ever-present TAFF panel.

I don't make any distinctions between what I read really apart from good book or bad book. While I'm not arguing that say the Jack Kerouac books sitting on my shelf should now be eligible for a Clarke or Hugo shortlisting, we are talking about a major work of fiction by a proven SF author. What's the problem?

Comments about its size or over-explaining of character traits (eg the cereal incident) seem petty. As if the Mars books, *Dune* or *Lord of the Rings* are slim pocket sized books. And if that incident constitutes too much characterisation, well it certainly didn't slow down the plot any. As for discussing whether to exclude the book for lack of SF content at a SF convention where fandom and SF weren't on offer - get real guys!

Cryptonomicon has been described by some as fiction about science rather than science fiction. Fine. But every time Arthur C's name gets mentioned on TV or Radio, as well as being billed as writer of classic SF novels like *Rama* or the man behind 2001, we're reminded that he was also a scientist - that old "the man who invented satellite technology" tag line. I really don't think the great man himself would mind *Cryptonomicon*'s inclusion.

In fact I have this great mental image of him strolling along the beach in Sri Lanka with his golf umbrella, trying to find a quiet spot away from it all, to sit down and read *Cryptonomicon*. All without the aid of a lectern you understand.

hapless Noel and Kay in tow. Doug asked me if reading about Aussiecon made me wish I had gone. It didn't - I rarely regret missed conventions after the event - but reading Claire and Mark's trip to Ayers Rock filled me with nostalgia for what was definitely one of the highlights of my own trip to Australia. Okay, so what's in this fanzine for those who have never been there? The answer is humour, anecdotes, honest reactions, running jokes - in fact all the trademark strengths of Claire and Mark's writing with a subject matter that's big enough to suit their slightly discursive style. Okay it could have been cut in places, but most of it's fun from the invention of Kangaroo Paul Kincaid, through to Mark admitting to nearly poisoning the Aussiecon party chief and Noel's famous parcel taped box of Australiana. This issue has some of the feel of the early days of Banana Wings when it was just Claire and Mark talking about life. It's more relaxed and less earnest, and all the better for it. [CJL]

Claire Brialey 26 Northampton Road, Croydon, Surrey CR0 7HA

The Crooner Takes a Solo 🐼🐼🐼

Shortly after Monster was released I managed to catch REM at Murrayfield Stadium, home of Scottish rugby. My usual trips to that neck of the woods involved cold winter nights, ice hockey and broken dreams of a win or at least entertainment. Wandering into the packed ground nestling beside the rink, I tried to keep my straight face as the security heavies checked people over for smuggled drink bottles, knowing sure well that my four bottles of Stella could quickly end up in the large bin besides the turnstiles. With three support bands and forecast of thunder later it was rock n roll heaven. REM were loud, raucous and all over the place with layered guitars gizmoed up to the eyeballs with flangers, phasers and distortion pedals. Top stadium rock - probably the best there was in the world. Fastforward to The Crooner... years later and PK opens with an extended article on another live REM gig. Reading gig reviews always proves a problem to

to me...I want to be their down the front, feeling the sway of the crowd, seeing the saliva and sweat of the vocalist fly as he/she screams into the microphone; and I long for that sticky sweat-drenched clothsticking to you, ears-ringing with painful pleasure feeling you get that only good gigs can provide. The writer has to come on like Hunter S Thompson high on a cocktail of the most dangerous chemicals known to man and adrenallined up to his eyeballs to catch my attention and make me shout "yeah! - I wanna be there". And I'm afraid Paul Kincaid doesn't do it for me. It's too long, too ponderous, we're talking Yes on a bad day rather than the Sex Pistols. Which is a pity really as the rest of the zine contains a lot of enjoyable stuff. The hot-air balloon ride was fascinating and gripping stuff, and I rather enjoyed Paul's portfolio of Civil War photos. It's great when you find out what lurks behind the fan, you get a more well rounded picture of person. Liked it all bar the rock piece, sorry Paul it's just the punk in me coming out. [DB]

Paul Kincaid, 60 Bournemouth Road, Folkestone, Kent, CT19 5AZ.

Squib #5 🐼🐼🐼🐼🐼

If fanzines were pies Victor Gonzalez Squib would be a large home-baked pastry dish filled with real meaty goodness. With contributions from such well-known writers as Ted White, Christina Lake and Lilian Edwards (not to mention the fabulous 4 page D West strip), how could anyone resist? The lead piece, Ted's account of Ardis Waters in New York City, is for me the highlight of the issue. It's personal, enjoyable, full of emotion and captures the feel of times past expertly. My only quibble with Squib, and it's a tiny wee insignificant one, is there's just not enough of Victor. I bet there's many a jealous zine editor out there who wished they could be squeezed out of their own zine by such an All-Star line-up. So dive on in, don't be afraid, there's no abattoir-floor meat contained here. [DB]

Victor Gonzalez, 905 N.E. 45th St, Apt #106, Seattle, WA 98105, USA.

This Here #1 

Nic Farey emerges from behind his long running pseudonym of S V O'Jay with a short personal zine that he admits he is doing as a respite from the intensity of Arrows of Desire. Nic, a Brit now living in Maryland, writes energetically in a very chatty style that translates all the larger than life qualities of the flesh and blood Nic. The longest item is a rattling good account of Novacon that moves too fast to worry about exactly what is going on or who he is talking about. The rest is glimpses inside the Farey head including a brief anecdote from the dark days of his wife's illness. As with Arrows of Desire, the honesty makes this a compelling if somewhat lighter read. I look forward to more issues when Nic "fucking feels like it". [CL]
 Nic Farey, PO Box 178, St Leonard, MD 20685, USA

Tortoise 7 

If you lived by yourself in a small flat in Shrewsbury, you too might resort to talking to an imaginary tortoise. Sue Jones has been using this conceit for seven issues now and you will find it either witty or annoying depending on your tolerance of cuteness. Sue's fanzines are well constructed and thought-provoking but come across just a bit like an A student handing in her latest college assignment. This may be because each issue has a theme - in this instance "How it Works - though this seems to be present more in the illustrations than the text (top marks to Steve Jeffrey. I particularly liked how Sue used the detail from one of his illos on the front cover, then reprinted it in full on the back). If you have the sort of brain that enjoys playing with strange concepts like long-distance transit systems based on cosmic laziness, giant tortoises falling from the sky and the more mundane mysteries of furniture delivery to top floor flats, then get yourself on to Sue's mailing list. [CJL]

Widening Gyre 5 

Widening Gyre turns up in attractive purple colour with a Brad Foster illo on the front, looking like it's going to be a good

read. Rumours that Ulrika slags off Ian Sorensen in the opening article only enhance this impression. But I had reckoned without Ulrika's capacity for overkill. It is not difficult to get some laughs out of Ian Sorensen bashing, but the way that Ulrika analyses and over-analyses what sounds to me like just a joke leaves her in danger of alienating her audience and diluting the original intention of the article to function as a defence of TAFF. Ulrika writes very well in terms of fluency and neat turns of phrase but she should have Hal on hand to throw cold water over her every time she feels tempted to lift up a hammer and bludgeon home her points. The rest of the zine doesn't live up to its promise either. It's a mishmash of articles that Ulrika seems to have found either meaningful or amusing. Despite enthusiastic introductions, it's hard entirely to share her conviction. Most of it is too bitty, while the long piece, the second part of the story of a sick child, leaves you rather wishing you hadn't read it. I am a soft touch when it comes to tales of true life battles against illness, but this one was too matter of fact and medical for me. I'm sure the father wrote it the only way he could given the painful circumstances, and I hope that writing this diary did him some good, but I'm not sure that Ulrika needed to share it with us. [CJL]

Ulrika O'Brien, 123 Melody Lane #C, Costa Mesa, CA 92627

Finally we have a contribution from this issue's Guest Reviewer - Bristol's very own **Nick Walters** - who tackles **The Wrong Leggings - Down Under** (Lilian Edwards, 39 (1F2) Viewforth, Bruntfield, Edinburgh EH10 4JE) and **Pogonophobia: A Postcard from the Edgy - choice clippings for Corflu 2000** (Alison Freebairn, 41 Kendal Road, East Kilbride, Scotland G75 8QT.)

Both of these are "perzines"; content 99% by one person. Both of them give exhilarating, vivid insights into the lives of two people I have never met. A life-affirming, if disorienting, experience to read sitting on the balcony of the local pub, my own life

humming away in the background. Reading about Alison Freebairn's extraordinary experiences in Alexandria, Lilian Edwards' trials and tribulations getting accommodation in Sydney, feels like being whirled around the globe without even having to move.

Lilian's 'zine details her experiences on sabbatical in Australia, written with relish and honesty. Some eye-openers, such as casual racism and Australia's strange attitude to Britain and the monarchy make this valuable reading. There's much about fandom and fannish activity which meant absolutely nowt to me, I find fandom a huge puzzle at times. At one point Lilian wonders whether a certain couple "count as fans" - probably something they've never even thought about themselves - which poses the question, what do you have to do to "count" as a fan? I am a member of the Bristol SF and Doctor Who Local Group, an active Doctor Who fan (having written a couple of the books), yet I still feel like a total outsider when I read zines like this. Being an SF fan, apparently, does not make you part of "fandom"; you have to publish fanzines, go to conventions, be part of a local group. The idea is to be an active, rather than passive, participant in SF, an organiser rather than a couch potato. This is very fine indeed, but sometimes fandom seems to me like many voices talking all at once and no-one listening.

Still, fandom is intrinsically positive; a social phenomenon, which can be (depending on your level of fannishness) fun, serious or even vital to existence - especially when travelling abroad, looking for somewhere to stay or trying to build a social life. Lilian's 'zine gives a good account of how this worldwide network of SF fans works - or sometimes doesn't work. It's going to mean a lot more to those who know her and know the people featured therein; to me, it's like a window into a world I feel only tangentially involved with.

Alison Freebairn is professional journalist, so "Pogonophobia" is well-written and

highly entertaining. Highlights are her bad-but-fair review of a Krankies show igniting a huge furore in the Scottish media, and Alison's experiences in Egypt with her unbelievably rich relations. Her account of telephone stalking is creepy, BT's response astonishing: "this isn't professional - but this guy sounds completely mad." There's a lot of pub-talk and getting pissed here, which is right up my street. Of particular note is a long article entitled "Without a trace" which goes on at length about the difference between ordinary people having it large in night-clubs and us sensitive souls who can only sit and gape and wish they would play The Smiths. "I can't even get drunk here, it's so awful." Who hasn't been in such a situation, compelled (usually by "mates") to go out clubbing when all you want to do is go home and be on your own. There's some interesting stuff on sexism here: the nightclub has a really crass cabaret act but it was a throwaway remark by one of Alison's friends which got her back up. Elsewhere in the zine there's some stuff about football I didn't bother reading, football being as interesting and relevant to life as the surface of Mel Smith's left buttock, and something about a coincidence which I had to read 5 times before I could work it out, but overall this is a top zine and I commend Alison's - and Lilian's - bravery in laying themselves bare in text like this. Hell, they've probably been doing it for years and think nothing of it, but for a relative newcomer to this sort of 'zine I found them refreshing and enormously life-affirming. There's hope for the gene-pool with people like this around.

The last words go to Alison Freebairn, on being told she'd understand betrayal, deceit and deception when she falls in love:

Okay. Never been in love. Been too busy having a life. Yeah, I get defensive at times, who doesn't? But I'm in control of my life and my future will burn as brightly as I want it to.

May Day in London saw the British establishment in disarray over a raid on McDonalds and a new punk toupe for Sir Winston Churchill. Yet in essence, before it was hijacked by vandals, it was a friendly demonstration, billed as Guerilla Gardening, a term that sounds like it could have been invented by Judithanna and Joseph Nicholas.

A couple of weeks earlier, the anti-capitalist protests in Washington DC were treated with much less tolerance by the authorities. Frank Lunney was there.

Give the anarchist a cigarette

The action in DC to protest the meetings of the IMF and World Bank was exciting and fulfilling, for me. It's great to be around a bunch of people who know enough to be against policies supported by your own government WHICH MOST PEOPLE DON'T KNOW (or care) ANYTHING ABOUT. At *Sing Out* where I work I told people I was going down to join the people protesting, and the usual question was "Protest against what?" And even though, with 450 different groups represented, the specific complaints did seem to get lost in the chorus of competing viewpoints, I guess it was like the line in THE WILD ONES, when asked what he's protesting Marlon Brando answers "Whaddya got?"

Lynn Steffan came along with me; Dan stayed home, probably agreeing with Ted White that all of us trying to keep delegates away from meetings were just a bunch of dopes. But it was a great day, perfect weather (rain was forecast, but we actually needed sunblock - which was being passed around in bottles that said "Pass Me On!")

As soon as we got off the subway we heard some sirens which turned out to be busloads of cops roaring to an intersection where 5 PEOPLE were standing with their arms locked in the middle of the street. 5 PEOPLE. About 200 others were just milling around, and it wasn't until the cops got into formation and started marching towards the protestors that I even realized what was going on. I complained, "Shit, I should have brought a camera," and Lynn said, "Look, there's a guy selling them on that street corner."

I rushed over to the vendor, checked out the expiration date on the disposable Ko-

dak and ran in front of the advancing cops while tearing the wrapper off the camera. Clicked some pictures... nobody was between me and the cops. I backed up and jumped on a barricade five feet from the protestors and took a bunch of pictures while the 200-300 cops basically picked up the five people and moved them... wherever. Arrested, maybe. It wasn't 12 Noon, yet, but that was the last real confrontation we saw.

Turns out the cops decided to just close the streets when people tried to block traffic, and they ended up closing 90 square blocks, so we wandered around the streets checking out all the different groups of protestors.... being fed communally in the middle of intersections, talking to cops across police lines, puppet shows, guys on stilts, lots of impromptu music with people banging sticks on barrels and dancing...it was just so cool!

There were many anarchists dressed head-to-toe in black, wearing black bandanas around their heads with only their eyes exposed, carrying cloth soaked in vinegar to use in case of tear gas. Got some great pics of them en masse.

I heard people like Michael Moore (of Roger and Me) and Ralph Nader and Susan Sarandon talk from a stage, but we mostly wandered around all day. Eventually, back at the Steffans' in Arlington, it turned out there were 1300 arrests (out of that 6-10,000...meaning up to 20% of the people there were arrested). And a newsletter from Alexander Cockburn revealed that the cops actually had SHOOT TO KILL orders if the protestors got "out of hand" as they weren't going to allow another Seattle to happen in the nation's capital.

One thing binds all SF fans whether down the pub, at a room part or down a convention bar - drink. We asked two likely lads to defend their favourite tippie...

The Lager/Real Ale Debate

Dick Walters presents 10 Reasons why Lager is better than Real Ale

1. Lager is a lovely, golden colour, like Kate Winslet's hair caught in a shaft of autumn sunlight. Real Ale is the colour of bathwater after it has been used by Frank Hovis, Rab C. Nesbitt, Albert Steptoe and someone with terminal diarrhoea.
2. Lager tastes the same wherever you are - you know what you're getting. Real Ale: Russian Roulette with your bowels
3. Lager is nice and cold and refreshing. Real Ale is warm and turgid like the stomach pumpings of Yog-Sothoth.
4. Lager makes you more attractive to the opposite sex.
5. Lager kills all known germs - DEAD
6. In tests, 8 out of 10 owners said their alcoholic friends preferred lager to Real Ale.
7. In space, no-one can hear you drink Real Ale - but with Lager, this time it's personal.
8. Lager can slam its bollocks in the fridge door 100 times without wincing - Real Ale cried out "Truly, Madly, Deeply."
9. "Lager lager lager lager lager" - Born Slippy by Underworld. Where is the comparable lyric about Real Ale?
10. Lager's dad is bigger than Real Ale's dad.



Brian Hooper replies with 10 Reasons Why Real Ale is Better than Lager

1. Real Ale, at its best, approximates the colour of Lucy Liu's hair as she runs it over your chest. Lager looks like you've already drunk it. Cheap shot, but true.
2. Lager tastes the same wherever you go. Variety is the spice of Life. Familiarity breeds contempt. "Nuff said." Life's nothing without the occasional surprise!
3. Lager is frigid. Like a gorgeous woman (or man if preferred) who's committedly celibate when you've bought the Durex and avocado puree special. Real Ale is warm, affectionate, embracing and passionate.
4. Lager makes you attractive to WINOS of the opposite sex. Real Ale attracts the top totty (of either sex).
5. Lager kills all individuality of booze - DEAD.
6. In tests, 8 out of 10 owners said lager refreshes the part that Real Ale justifiably doesn't give a fig about.
7. In outer space, they discovered a force more evil than mankind would have imagined...LagerForce! Real Ale - The Ultimate Trip.
8. Real Ale smokes a whole pack of Capstan Full Strength AT ONE GO and doesn't even cough the next morning. So there.
9. Underworld is an indictment. As is Chumbawamba - "I drink lager drink" indeed. Well, really. As for real ale...
"I'm dead Macca with girls, I never fail
I'm dead Macca with girls 'COS I SUP
ALE"
(The Macc Lads "He's a Failure With Girls")
10. Old Tom drinks Old Tom (probably). And he's bigger than anyone.

My brother Simon took a month-long trip out to New Zealand earlier this year: not to follow in my footsteps of course, but because New Zealand is a place he has always wanted to visit. Here he compares Auckland and Wellington in:

A Tale of Two Cities : Urban Life Down Under

by Simon Lake

Introduction

There's a great book called 'Hostage to the Beat' about the rock 'n' roll explosion in New Zealand during the 1960's. I picked it up in a cut price bookshop in Wellington for \$3 - the equivalent of about a pound. The book records the careers of a whole slew of bands that emerged during that era when all around the world pop music - and youth culture in general - were making their first big impact. Set out as an A-Z of the key bands of the time, the text is little more than an enhanced discography with a few anecdotes thrown in to spice up the entries. What really makes the book so good are the reams of accompanying photographs. From cheesy poses of guys in Hawaiian shirts to proto-prog rockers trying to look serious a whole milieu is summed up in these images far more accurately than a thousand words could ever hope to. Sure you'll never have heard of any of these bands. Track down the music and most of them turn out to be producing inferior covers of songs that had already been hits in the UK or America. But it's somehow wonderful to discover that this distant subculture existed. And it's great that someone saw fit to sit down and record it all.

Amongst all the photographs, there's one shot that really stands out. With a wide angle lens five moody looking young men are captured crossing a rain-soaked street in Auckland. Behind them there's a side street with a clutch of shops and people hurrying about their business, oblivious to the camera. It's a great urban scene and the perfect counterpoint to the relentless tourist images of New Zealand - all bold blue skies and breathtaking scenery.

When sitting down to try and write a piece about my recent trip to New Zealand I kept coming back to the same photo-

graph. I don't know why. Maybe writing about the wonders of the glaciers and mountains was too obvious. Probably it was the fact that if the photographs I'd taken barely did justice to some of those places, then writing about them would be even more futile. No, I needed to find something else to write about. So why not urban New Zealand?

A lot of fellow travellers I met during my month in NZ were making a conscious decision to avoid the cities - or pass through them briefly en route to somewhere more scenic. Fair enough, it's the wide open spaces and the scenery most people come to New Zealand for. The glaciers and the geysers. The bungy jumps and the white water rafting. There are plenty of stunning locations to experience all these things. But there's something unreal about these places too. You sit in the bars at night talking with other travellers. You meet the same people on the coach the next day. Even the drivers trekking back and forth on various routes are part of the same circuit. Often it seems like everyone's a tourist.

Don't get me wrong, I loved lots of those places. The wilder parts of the South Island have a magic and remoteness that's hard to describe. But I'm glad I spent some time in the cities too.

Auckland

After nearly 24 hours flying, arriving anywhere would be a relief, arriving somewhere as pleasant as Auckland is a bonus. Auckland airport felt relaxed and friendly after the bustle of Heathrow and the bleakness of Hong Kong. Waiting outside for the airport shuttle bus I suddenly realised how inappropriately dressed I was - it was summer and I really was on the other side of the world. I then spent the 30

minute ride into the centre of Auckland staring hungrily at the scenery. The light seemed different here, a paler yellow that gave the landscape a wonderful spectral quality. It was probably just the effect of being cooped up in a plane for so long, but I was captivated by it anyway. Fuck any worries about jet lag, I just wanted to get out and see things.

It seemed I'd arrived at a time of incredible optimism for New Zealand. A late summer heatwave was just starting to kick in. Team NZ were cruising to victory in the America's cup. The recently elected Labour government were enjoying a healthy honeymoon period (Shit, they had a Labour government that was re-nationalising things!). New Zealand - and Auckland in particular - seemed to be shedding its past as a remote part of the commonwealth and staking a claim as the capital of the emerging Pacific Rim. The optimism felt almost palpable. On my first full day in the country I sat in the tranquil, upmarket Mission Bay, overlooking golden sand and clear blue ocean while beside me two young men (both in their early twenties) studiously mapped out their plans for a new internet business. The whole conversation - business plan, financing, the lot - conducted on a sun-drenched beachfront, framed by palm trees. It seemed ridiculously exotic. Only a couple of days before I'd departed from a damp, grey Heathrow airport. A couple of days before that I'd still been stuck in the anonymous office block in the centre of Bristol where I work. The difference was so profound I couldn't fail to fall in love with the place.

Auckland - in terms of its actual area - is one of the biggest cities in the world. Viewed from Mt. Eden it stretches for miles in every direction, strung out between a series of volcanic hills, dotted with the blue of the ocean at every turn. Apart from the business quarter at its heart it doesn't feel like a city at all, more a collection of pretty suburbs. The space is what I'll remember most about Auckland.

From the central Albert Park, to the vast Auckland reserve. From the myriad bays and beaches to the rambling houses, often squat one floor affairs, but surrounded by large gardens, overflowing with greenery. It may have been approaching autumn, but walking through these wide suburbs it often felt like spring.

The big story while I was in Auckland revolved around the vexed question of republicanism. At the end of a routine council meeting, a bunch of councillors had gone off for a few drinks. Later that evening, no doubt in part fuelled by the alcohol, they had sneaked back to the council offices and removed two prominent pictures of the Queen and Prince Phillip. The story, once the media got hold of it, dominated the headlines for days. Councillors - never the most popular of people - were the subject of numerous angry letters in the local press. But behind the schoolboy prank nature of it lay a more telling truth. If they'd quietly replaced the pictures with something more relevant to the modern New Zealand - as had apparently happened in one of the cities civic buildings - none but a small band of fervent royalists would've given the matter a second thought.

I spent my last evening in Auckland at a local restaurant in Mount Eden. People sat outside eating in the sunshine. Inside a couple of arty-looking types were having a deep conversation. A sprawling, dubbed-up sitar soundtrack added to the ambience. It seemed a perfect place to eat. Unfortunately the mood of hippie peacefulness was temporarily broken when a Mediterranean-looking man stormed in off the street to hurl abuse at two guys behind the counter. For several minutes there was a heated exchange until the man was finally persuaded to leave. The waitress shrugged the whole incident off. Some falling out over a business deal three years ago. The guy was always coming over to carry on this relentless dispute. It never amounted to anything.



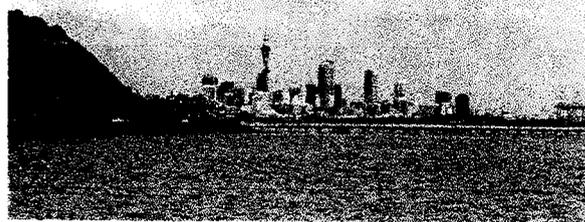
Maybe. But while half my mind was enjoying a delicious woodburned pizza, the other half kept thinking that maybe after three years this would be the night the guy finally snapped and came back to napalm the place. The relaxing eastern music continued to send calming vibes in the background, but for once I decided to skip the dessert menu and head for home.

Wellington

Where Auckland is vast, a whole series of volcanic hills to spread out across, Wellington finds itself squashed by the Cook Strait to the south and hemmed in by hills to the north. This lack of space is what gives Wellington its cohesion. The culture isn't defined by a series of suburbs spread out in various directions - everything sits on top of each other. From the business district along Lambton Quay to the counter culture hub of Cuba Street it's but a couple of minutes walk.

I spent three days in and around Wellington and at the end of it all I still couldn't make my mind up as to whether I liked the place or not. If Auckland represented some fantasy Pacific paradise, Wellington felt more like home. Areas of urban decay, awaiting redevelopment. An arts centre by the waterfront showing alternative cinema. The hills that surrounded the centre of Wellington. Yes, blot out the trams and you might think you were back in Bristol!

It was in Wellington that I finally encountered my first day of cloudy skies. Taking shelter from the weather - Wellington is accurately known as the windy city - I thought I'd made my greatest discovery when I called in at the Malthouse, a bar serving beers from every one of the growing number of microbreweries throughout NZ. It was early afternoon, the rather grand first floor setting offered views across the city and the beer was wonderful. For an hour or so I sat in peaceful surroundings and caught up with the news in the local paper. Suitably refreshed I vowed to return that evening to have some food



and sample some more of the beers. Imagine the horror a few hours later when I came back to find the place overrun with hundreds of suited stockbroker-types all engaged in loud and irritating conversations.

Elsewhere though things were looking up. After a night in an anonymous Backpacker hostel by the railway station, I'd moved on to a B+B across the city. The owner was an eccentric but cheerful guy called Mike, running the guesthouse like a sort of beneficent Basil Fawcety. At breakfast he would stride around the dining room keeping up several different conversations with his guests. I was happy to finally find someone who shared my passion for cricket (rugby being seemingly bigger than every other sport put together in NZ), although I had to concede, for all that the Australians were at that point steamrollering their way across the country, it was New Zealand who'd triumphed in England during the previous summer. I didn't mind - the guy's enthusiasm was infectious. Mike seemed to sum up the people of Wellington. Maybe it was the wilder climate, but there was an energy here that was notably lacking in Auckland.

One other thing had been troubling me throughout my travels around the country and that was the trains. There was something incongruous about the fact that the train timetable for the whole of New Zealand fitted into a tiny booklet the size of one those things you pick up for your local branch line over here. Most train services only run once a day between the

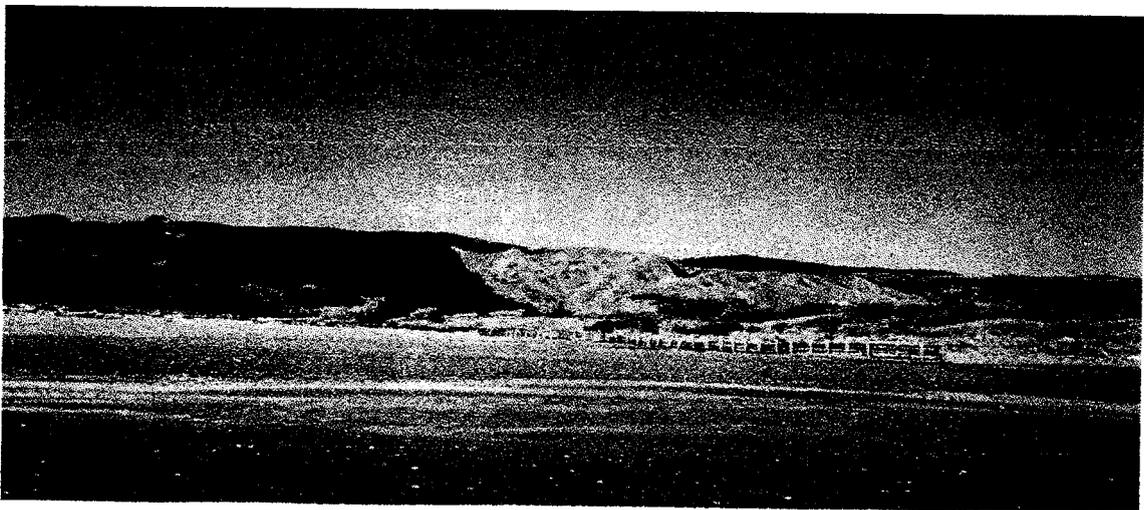
major cities. In Christchurch, capital of the South Island, if you turn up to the railway station after half eight in the morning you'll have missed the last train of the day. Of course New Zealand does offer magnificent trips to match the stunning scenery. Christchurch to Greymouth, crossing through the Southern Alps is rated as one of the best railway journeys in the world. But it's all tourist-led. Wide windows, viewing platforms, commentaries given on all the sights of interest. All done very well, worthy of the many tourist awards it's won, but surely a pain for any native New Zealander just trying to get from A to B. Obviously New Zealand did once have a much wider state run service, but there seem to have been cutbacks and privatisation that would put even Beeching to shame.

Holding out against the tide, Wellington remains the one place in NZ that still has a robust network of commuter services. It seemed too good an opportunity to miss. Suddenly I'd stepped outside the tourist bubble. I was travelling with real people. There was no one detailing the history of every local landmark or imploring me to watch another colony of seals sunbathing on the rocks.

It was on one of these suburban services that I found myself sharing a carriage with a bunch of teenagers who were on their way to see Supergrass - playing a gig as part of Wellington University's freshers week.

They were all still at school. They all had dead-end Saturday jobs at the local supermarket. Yet they had an energy and a sense of fun that was infectious. For all the wild schemes they were mapping out, they were still firmly rooted in the real world. It all seemed a million miles away from the ephemeral conversations of the backpacker set. As ridiculous a notion as it seemed, a part of me wanted to skip the mountain scenery of the South Island where I was headed next and hang out for a few days with these kids.

After three days in Wellington it was time to take the ferry and head South. On balance, despite the people I met there, I couldn't really find a place in my heart for the rough urban landscape of the windy city. But as a balance to the grey of the city, my suburban train ride had taken me on a fifty minute journey north to the Kapiti coast. Here I found another world entirely. Secluded from the main tourist route there are miles and miles of empty sandy beaches. You can walk for hours and never see another soul. The day I was there the sun shone all day and there wasn't a single cloud in the sky. Paddling through clear, warm water, listening to the beautiful ambient music of the Ash Ra Temple on my walkman and marvelling at the vast emptiness of it all. Of all the myriad memories of my time in New Zealand, that will probably outlast them all.



Doug & I watch quite a bit of sick TV, but this latest favourite of Dick's left us baffled. Dick Walters explains all in:

jam today

When dancing lost in techno trance, arms flailing gawky Bez, then find you snagged in frowns, and slowly dawns: you're jazzing to the bleep-tones of a life-support machine that marks the steady fading of your day-old baby daughter...

And when midnight sirens lead to blue-flash road-mash, stretched covered heads and slippery red macadam, and find you creeping beneath the blankets to snuggle close a mangle-bird, hoping soon you too will be freezer-drawerred...

..then welcome. Blue chemotherapy wig welcome... in jam... jam... jaaaam...

- Chris Morris, jam 1

jam slipped through the buzzing cables of the nation's tellies in Spring 2000 without fanfare. Six programmes of stunned, feral, mortuary-slab black comedy by Chris Morris. Six half-hour trips into the dark side. And I mean dark.

A thick couple with OTT wurzel accents visit their doctor. The problem is a "boil" on the woman's stomach. The female doctor is stunned; the patient is clearly at least seven months pregnant. She tries to convince the incredulous couple that the woman is going to give birth, and soon. "Sex makes babies," she explains patiently. "No it don't," cries the "father", "it just makes a bit of foam!" This continues until the doctor offers to examine the woman, at which point the couple storm out indignantly, accusing the doctor of being a pervert. As the couple move out of shot, you can just hear the woman say in her lilting yokel voice, "better be a boil, not 'nuvver one of them screamin' red rabbit things."

You're horrified, revolted, shocked, the smile frozen on your face: welcome in jam.

This jar of jam has no label. There's no title sequence, just a sepulchral monologue (as above) which always ends with Mr Morris inviting us to be welcome, mmm welcome, in jam. Then we're caught like wasps in a trap. The sketches are all slo-mo or skewed

as though the camera itself is on drugs. There is a steady backdrop of mostly ambient music - Massive Attack, Coldcut, The Irresistible Force, Third Eye Foundation, Philip Glass - streaming along beside the sketches, setting the mood, sometimes perfectly in tune with the horror, sometimes totally at odds with it, but always there. There are no end credits, merely an invitation to a website that lists all the people behind jam as if they were ashamed to have their names paraded across the tv screen.

Sometimes jam seems conventional. jam has that old chestnut of comedy, a recurring doctor sketch. But jam uses that as a starting point for surreal, disturbing sequences: the doctor deliberately blinds himself with a big power-torch so he literally can't see his difficult patient. Then he reassures a small boy prone to bed-wetting that "there's nothing wrong with wetting yourself" going on to graphically illustrate this. Then he's acting as a deadpan sex phonline to raise funds for "a little girl with head cancer." You can't make jokes about little girls with head cancer. Who says?

jam is funny. Sometimes, even, jam is gentle and quirky like the good old cosy alternative comedy we know and love. There's a recurring consultant sketch, where a nervous businessman is offered advice on the most trivial and bizarre matters (losing his wallet, suffering from a hot chin) and other quaint vignettes of English oddness (the man who decides to marry himself, the couple besieged by lizards emerging from their TV) but mostly...

jam is sick. jam is porn stars ejaculating themselves to death, an agency which sends thick people out to have arguments for you, a lonely woman who makes people have accidents so she can be friends with them, a man who wants to make love to his pet dog before she gets put down, a man

who gives his mentally retarded sister over to a dribbling pervert to secure his dream home. It doesn't care what you think or what you've been through. It takes the worst thing you can think of happening to you, or someone you love, and then makes a... joke? out of it. Birth, death, sex, even rape and abortion are toyed with as a child might toy with a squirming worm. Not really comedy, then. You can't make jokes about rape and abortion. Or can you?

Maybe you can, but it would be the darkest kind of black humour imaginable. Surely no-one would want to joke about such a subject? Wrong. For whatever reason - to shock, to horrify, to see what he can get away with - Chris Morris wants to, and in jam he does. Women may hate Morris for using their pain as a basis for his sick comedy, and with reason. Viewers are warned beforehand by C4 of jam's content, but even so, the sketch of people leaving an abortion clinic proudly bearing tiny coffins is so against what we're used to seeing on TV, so taboo, that it's breathtaking. You can't believe what you've just seen, the bloody insensitivity and cruelty of it, but you have to admire Morris's audacity. It's clearly not even meant to be "funny" in the usual sense, and no-one's laughing. To laugh at this sketch is to laugh at everyone who's ever gone through the pain of abortion - something I can't even begin to imagine.

So why is Chris Morris doing this?

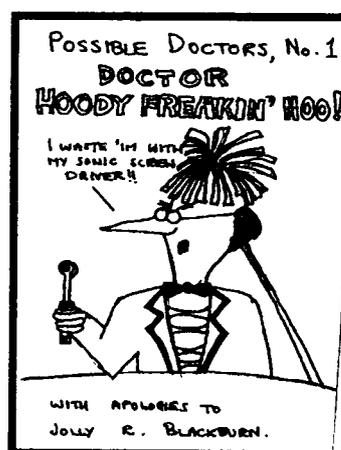
Maybe he really is just a sick bastard, a fully paid-up card carrying nihilist, misogynist and misanthrope, exploiting people's pain, laughing at us behind his deadpan exterior, through the camera fuzz and ambient music.

Or maybe he thinks that because all through life death is laughing at you, the only defence is to laugh back. But I don't think Chris Morris is laughing. I don't think he wants us to laugh at jam. I don't know what he wants. Maybe that's the point. Maybe there is no point.

Or maybe he's a concerned humanist, deeply troubled about the way the human race is going, and jam - like Brass Eye before it - is his attempt to say, "look at us, we're horrible, I feel numbed by how horrible we are, so I've made this programme to help us all wake up."

jam is sick, funny, disturbing, surreal, haunting, moving, shocking, silly, irresponsible, subtle, blatant, ugly, beautiful, smooth, sticky, often all at the same time.

jam is, whatever Chris Morris's motives, the most challenging programme I've seen on television in years.



Next up, we have **Lilian Edwards**, back from Australia and confused by the TV schedules again! Be warned, if you don't want to know what happens in Buffy at the end of season 3 and beyond do not on any account read paragraphs 4 and 5. (It's like forbidden fruit. If you're anything like me, once someone says that, you just have to read it!)

Lilian, Live and In the Buff

Well, funny old times we live in. I started the new millennium by throwing out my partner of 10 years, looking for a new flat, new cat and new garden, and fending off offers of Chairs of Law in places as far flung as Seattle, Aberdeen, and, er, Strathclyde. But nothing had prepared me for the real bombshell that was to engulf my unsuspecting existence. Yes, I've fallen in love. And guess what? This time - it's with a woman.

Oh alright, enough of the L'Oreal commercial. ("Yes, I've fallen in love - with a shampoo!" Give us a break, Jennifer. Because you're already worth several million and don't need to do shlocky adverts anymore, that's why.) What can I mean? Well, only three years after everyone else, I've discovered the purpose of life: and it is BUFFY.

Oh dear oh dear. How embarrassing. I remember Jane Carnall, Uncrowned Celtic Queen of Slash, telling me, lo, these many moons ago, that something good was going on over on Sky 1 involving vampires, high school prom queens and lots of kick-boxing. But having only recently recovered from an overdose of Tom Cruise's orthodontic grin in *Interview With a Vampire*, and fearing that any viewing Jane recommended would lead inexorably to an obsession with Villa, Avon, Bodie and Jilly Reed (and who remembers Jilly Reed eh?), I maintained a careful distance. Until, of course, I ended up in Australia (cf *The Wrong Leggings Down Under*, *passim*) where all my hopes of sharing along with the rest of the Western world the new seasons of *Ally McBeal*, *ER*, *Friends*, etc were rendered as dust. Indeed, the TV schedules in Australia were so far behind the time that they might as well have been coming from Alpha Centauri as the US of A.

Undaunted, I replaced channel surfing with the real thing on Bondi beach, and substituted Trufen for channel twiddling, until I got to Irwin Hirsch's palatial mansion in Melbourne where I sank, exhausted by a close encounter with Damien Broderick, a large Chinese meal and two extremely noisy children into what transpired to be the finale episode of the third series of *Buffy* - yes, *that* episode: the one that was banned in the aftermath of the Columbine "trenchcoat" killings, the one where Angel survives by drinking Buffy's blood, where the Sunnydale mayor turns out to be a snake of even more than Australian normal proportions, and the high school

school graduation gets a lot more interesting than any of the (sigh - what a geek) three graduations I've trotted through. It was a pretty good first episode, it has to be said. I had of course absolutely NO idea what was going on. It was fun, it was punchy, it was satisfyingly fake-violent after a few months of the sanitised Aussie media, but mostly I have to say it had one of the most erotic scenes I've ever seen on television between Buffy and Angel. As Buffy smacked her lover around until Angel was willing to snack on her neck, I had only one thought and it was this; "*How the fuck do they get away with this on American TV?*"

Well I guess they don't show *Buffy* at 6.45pm as the good ol' Beeb does; or they wouldn't get away either with Anya advancing on Xander in the back of an ice-cream van, demanding to know why they don't have sex every night any more; Buffy and Riley spending an entire episode in the sack, having invoked the ghosts of abused children with their erotic vibes; Faith seducing Riley in the body of Buffy and offering a bit of naughty girl leather action to his utter confusion; Oz being carried away by animal passion with a Goth female werewolf who doesn't seem averse to some S and M; or Tara and Willow holding, er, more than a candle for each other. And that's all just from the last series. I know the vampire genre has always been a natural home for the interfaces between sexuality and violence, pain and pleasure, but I must confess that one of the things I do love about *Buffy* is that its knowing and often self-mocking attitude to teen sexuality and relationships does not stop some of the romantic moments being steeped in an oddly untarnished, innocent intensity. I think it's this, as well as the obvious attractiveness of all the main characters (see that Angel - pphhwoar!!! sorry, I just had to say that once to get it out of my system) that lifts *Buffy* above the common or garden fantasy/soap opera cross-genre series; though of course Ian Sorensen will now scream and tell me over and over again that

what people like about *Buffy* are the JOKES.

(But what care I for the opinion of a man who still likes the Bee Gees? He will never see the true vein of tragedy that furrows David Boreanaz's oddly prominent forehead or the brooding despair that unsettles his hairstyle despite the gallons of hair gel clearly used to keep it in place. (Thanks, Spike, for that very unexpected observation over in straightlaced *Angel* !))

Right now, of course I'm still stuck in Between Series Discontinuity Hell. This is what happens when you see the end of series three in Australia, come home and watch some of Ian's videos of series 1, start watching series 4 plus *Angel* on Sky 1, while watching the start of series three on BBC 2. Confused? You won't be. But add to this Social Life Hell - which is what happens when your favourite programmes are on a night when you're ALWAYS OUT - like Friday, for example - and Work Hell - which consists of working so late you even have to give up *EastEnders* which used to get you home for 7.30pm at least - and what you end up with is piles and piles of video tapes all of which are labelled *Buffy* (B2), *Buffy* (Sky) and *Angel* and some of which even genuinely have these programmes on them. I alone of the universe am actually looking forward to the series premiere this week (and if you're looking me on the Sunday night of Plokta I'll be in my room with Sky 1, a glass of wine and a big handkerchief - sad isn't it?) so that I can catch up on the rest of my life, sorry, my video collection.

So, so much for Christina's anguished plea that she wanted me to talk about my TV watching in general and not just drool over *Angel*. Well, at least all this helped me to finally give up *EastEnders*. Otherwise you would no doubt still be listening me to drivelling on about who ever looks after Ian's children since Melanie left and why Barbara Windsor can't have a more up to date hairstyle given we all know it's a wig anyway. I *did* try to go on watching *ER*, but it not only got attacked by Evening Class

Class Hell (see Social Life Hell, *mutatis mutandum*) but also Sky 1/ Channel 4 Non-synchronicity Hell, which consists of alternately watching episodes from different stages of the same series on Channel 4 and Sky, depending on how drunk I was when I came in, whether I'd had time to watch the previous week's episode or indeed any episode on tape, and whether the video had actually decided to work that Wednesday/Thursday.

Speaking as someone with a brain the size of a planet, does anyone else find watching TV quite as tricky as I do? No, I didn't think so. Moving quickly on, what can we expect from the *next* series of *Buffy*? I personally still live in hope of *Buffy* waking up and smelling the coffee, that is, noticing that Giles isn't actually a meek retired English librarian but instead the ex-hunk from the Gold Blend advert and probably a load more experienced than that white-bread Riley. And when will Alan Moore turn the TV on up there in Northampton and notice that John Constantine is alive and well and walking around as Spike?

This has been Lilian, brain-dead person with a stake, signing off. Now where did I put that last episode... ?

More on Giles from a bemused Christina

As a librarian, I have often wanted to make Giles into a role model. After all, there aren't all that many librarian heroes around on the TV! Giles gets to fight monsters, save the day with his arcane knowledge (well, Willow seems to do that more, but like a good librarian, Giles knows the best sources) and occasionally be transformed, tortured or seduced. But how, I wonder does this man who hates computers and actively discourages any students apart from *Buffy* et al using the library function as school librarian? He also seems to get his library trashed about once a week, which must call for some special skills! Still, I was pleased to see that Season 3 had invested him with a brand new issuing system. There's hope yet!

I don't usually go to the Eastercon bidding session. What's the point? These days there's only ever one bid. What I hadn't realised was that in my absence a new form of "entertainment" had taken over the bidding session. The spoof bid has not so much evolved as proliferated.

Bid 1: the Glasgow Underground.

The pitch: no need to walk to the bar, the bar comes round to you

Best line: Will you be showing A Clockwork Orange?

Bid 2: dot.con

The pitch: you buy shares not memberships and attend via the Internet

Best line: The share price is going down already.

Bid 3: Conkercon

The Pitch: guerrilla conker players take over the next Eastercon and make it more fun while doing none of the work.

Best Line: Remember, a bid for any committees is a bid for us.

Hilarious or what? The spoof bid can get very tiresome very quickly. Three of them was definitely overkill, leaving me jaded long before the real bid came round.

The contrast between the Helicon bid and the spoof bids was extreme. Here was one person, standing up, looking apologetic and already a bit harassed. There were no props, no gimmicks, just some tentative proposals. A convention on Jersey because there was no viable alternative mainland bid and because The Hotel De France, venue for the 2 previous Jersey Eastercons was keen to host another one. They didn't yet have any GoHs, but plenty of programme ideas from the Wincon team, an ambitious theme and no intention of ruling out ideas that didn't fit that theme (this received audience applause).

Chris Bell in a recent TWP contribution claimed that British fandom was turning

into a whinge culture. The questions at the bidding session provided some support for this view. In the old days, fans only cared whether there would be mushrooms for breakfast and real ale in the bar. Now the hottest topic is disabled access. Does the hotel have disabled access? What about disabled access on the ferries? What about facilities for the disabled in the surrounding B&Bs? I know these are valid questions but they were asked with such indignation and apparent determination to censure the committee for their audacity in proposing a convention in a problematical location that they left a bitter aftertaste. I was surprised no-one asked the committee to make sure that all the restaurants were wheelchair friendly too.

Meanwhile Alison Scott in the row in front of me who had been busily tapping away at her Psion, came out with the information that it would be cheaper to go to Minicon in Minneapolis the same weekend than to Jersey. But I know which venue gives you the least jetlag.

In what could only be considered poetic justice over my blithe dismissal of the problems of the disabled, I managed to injure myself on the last day of the convention falling down some steps. Suddenly I could only walk with difficulty, lowered myself into chairs like an old lady and winced on encountering stairs.

I was sitting on a sofa in the dead dog party feeling sorry for myself (and rather sore) when a man came rushing in and deposited a waif-like woman down next to me. She, apparently, had knackered her knee and needed a quiet corner in which to rest. A few minutes later, Chris Bell turned up on the other side of the table, using two men as crutches. She too had injured herself. I began to feel like I was in a war zone. Just because I had complained earlier that fandom was turning into a society of cripples, didn't mean I had expected to see it proved quite so rapidly.

Arriving at the Carrick, the 2Kon overflow hotel, a concrete block in a street of seedy bars and shops selling sex disguised as underwear, I was impressed by the hotel staff's fan handling skills. No need to search out our bookings or look at the email we had received in lieu of confirmation; we were simply processed into the next available room. Hence their bemusement over such details as our booking dates and our preference for a non-smoking room (we couldn't get one.). The key situation was quite amusing too. Naturally they couldn't give us two keys. But why couldn't they give us 2 keycards for reclaiming our key? It's only a bit of cardboard. "Oh, it's not our policy" was the customer-focussed response. We will draw a veil over the Carrick breakfast where at any given time half the items were unavailable, fans fought for the last potato scone and you were lucky if you could find the requisite cutlery.

Sitting round in the pub back in Bristol after the convention complaining about the breakfast situation, Richard Hewison, renowned for his appetite, commented that he had never had any problem with food running out at breakfast. "I was down early," he said smugly. "So were we," I protested. "A good hour before the end of breakfast." "But you were down after Richard weren't you," said Tim. I nodded my agreement. "That'd be why then."

As Richard's hand reached out to engulf another packet of crisps I had to agree it was a possibility.

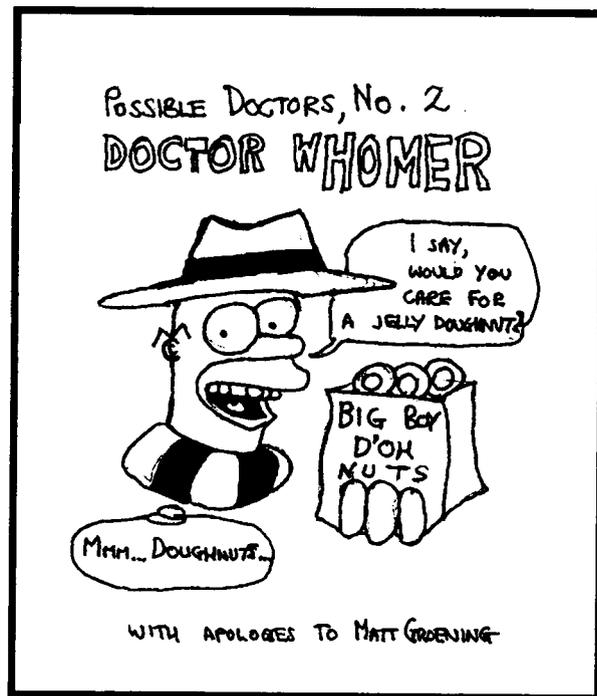
And now for a last word on the fight against capitalism:

I asked **Judith Hanna** if she and Joseph had taken part in the *MayDay* guerilla gardening. Judith replied:

"No, we weren't there – thought it would turn out as it did, ie, small bunch of troublemakers getting what they were there for, to the inconvenience of everyone else and monopolising media coverage – with the gardening stuff ripped out as soon

as the demo dispersed and the turf replaced, and merely looking a little ragged next day. Still, seems to have been, on the whole, good fun for those who did turn out even if global capitalism sails on oblivious."

As is ever the way!



Credits

Head! is the brainchild of Doug Bell and Christina Lake. It is available in exchange for letters of comment, fanzines, artwork (please!), beer (no head), chocolate cake, cool toys and general esoterica.

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Thanks to Ken Shinn for the cartoons (p.18 & 22), Simon Lake for the photos of New Zealand, and all the rest of our contributors for coming up with the goods (albeit at the last minute. But hey, that's the best way to edit a fanzine, isn't it?). Next issue: bungee jumping, Knights of the Dinner Table and all about Plokta-Con