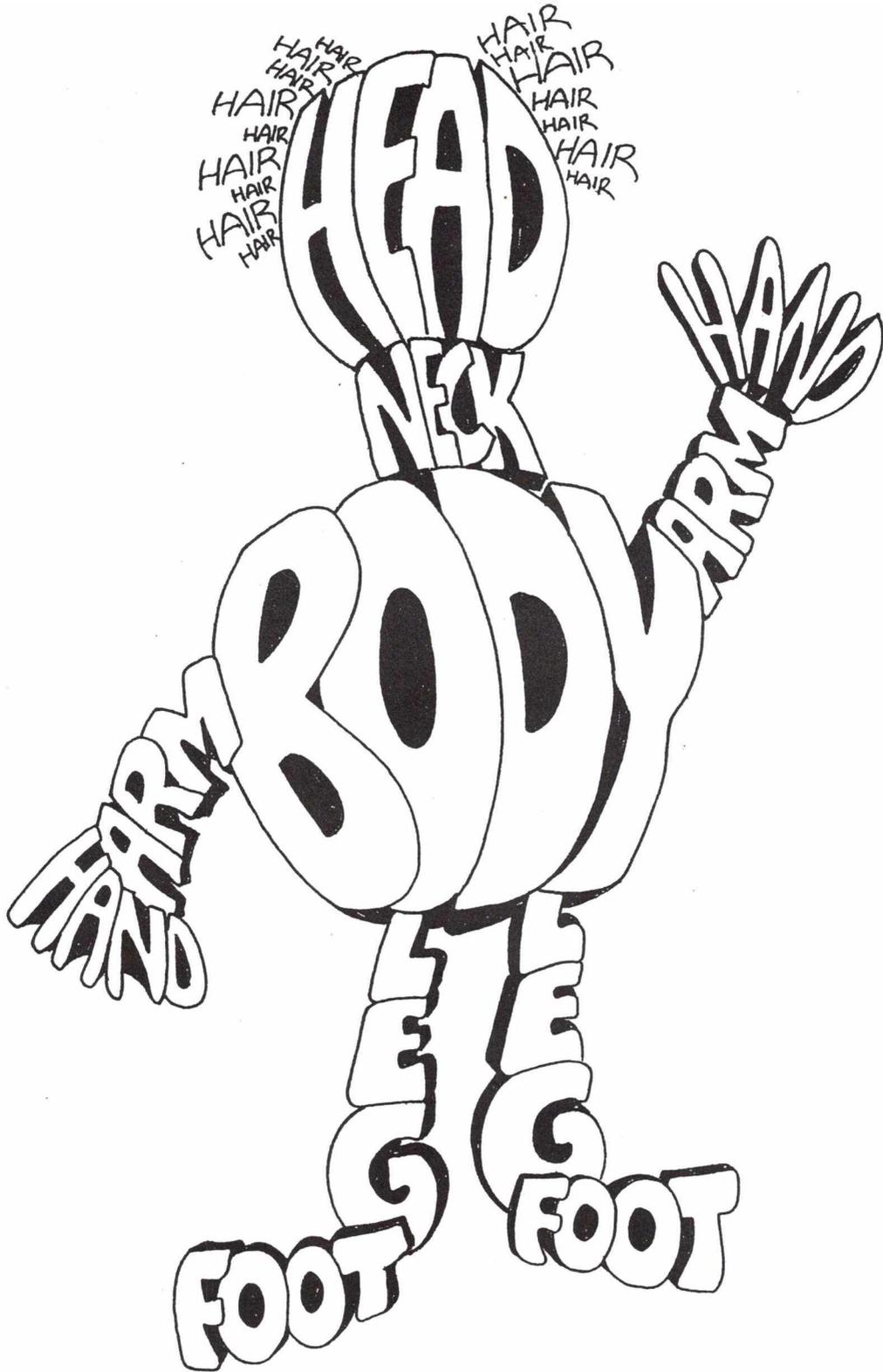


HEAD!



"A MAN of FEW WORDS"

©brad w. foster. 2001

Doing Time

EDITORIAL

Where did January go?

It seems to me that I have been working hard throughout January, but when I look back there is very little to show for it. My website is still not finished, the last (or is it the one from last?) chapter of my novel unwritten, Head! not completed and my attempt at a Tom Springer for TAFF campaign too little too late (though being given less than 3 months for this in a time period that included Christmas but not the February 'Ton was tough!)

If it doesn't kill you...

Lilian (Edwards) and I have always had a theory that whatever happens in life, however shitty, at least you should be able to get a good fanzine article out of it. But I've spent most of January on jury service, sitting there listening to Customs Officers, drugs experts, smugglers and the like, and I'm not allowed to write about it! In particular I would like to write about the decision making process of our jury and that is expressly forbidden on pain of contempt of court. I daresay judges don't read fanzines, but I don't really want to risk it in our current joined-up world!

Not being allowed to discuss my case was only one of the conversational frustrations of January. The other was becoming addicted to a comedy show that no-one else was watching. Sky don't have a great track record for making their own programmes, but we decided to give *Time Gentleman Please* a go because it had Julia Sawahlia in it (I've been a big fan of hers since the little known children's TV series *Pressgang* in which she played the psychotic editor, and of course *Ab Fab*) and Doug knew lead-character Al Murray from the Edinburgh fringe.

Time Gentleman is now on it's 20th episode which is quite extraordinary for a British comedy series (6 being the average Channel 4 season). Julia is great as the foul-mouthed Australian barmaid (so much better than in those wet costume dramas or doing voices for plastecine chickens. Al

Murray as the reactionary pub landlord lays into everything - people who like jazz, Catholics, the French, bar menus, gays, women. There's nothing PC about this character, yet he's still sympathetic (not least because at times Al can't keep a straight face during his rants) Also, the plot developments and interplay of the show's ensemble cast tends to deliver a different message from the overtly offensive one on the surface

It is part of the programme's charm too that the comedy relies on a plethora of catch-phrases (mixed and matched, and pulled out at the right moment) Favourite lines include "Back off Brussels!" "Instinct!" (pronounced in a long drawn out way Eeeeensteenct whilst beating upon the breast) "It's been a year" and the big denial line "I was never confused". And it's just so difficult not to use them in public, especially when people unwittingly feed you the lines - and then, of course, no-one gets it, and they all think you're a lunatic! What am I to do? Doug, Nick and I are doomed to make no sense to anybody (what's new there you may say?) unless the show gets a terrestrial TV slot on Channel 4.

Will the real Dick Walters stand up?

When Andy Hooper called our good friend and contributor Nick Walters by the name of Dick in his fanzine reviews, I thought it was a willful misreading prompted by Victor Gonzalez' not so secret dislike of our use of fonts. Other Americans mentioning Dick were just in on the joke! But then we received letters from people who could not possibly be members of the Seattle e-mind, still referring to Nick as Dick, there were only 2 options, get Nick to change his name or abandon Gismonda for a more legible typeface. Well, Nick is just making a name for himself as a Dr Who author, and is proud of it (I know, it takes all sorts...) He is even going to be a guest at an American convention! So seeing as "Nick, please be a Dick" is a non-starter, it looks like the Gismonda will have to go!



On a mad journey up-river to the source of his recent film ennui, Doug finds salvation from an un-likely source. Remember, always stay on the boat...

Guerrillas in the Mist

There's an epistemological approach to human geography that deals solely with perceptions of places. It's how we think about cities, factories or rivers that's important; it shapes our descriptions, our theories, our understanding of them. Having been educated in the get-your-hands-dirty opposing physical side of the discipline, I'm not sure if I particularly agree with this philosophy, however in the case of Baltimore I have to concede defeat. My total knowledge of this city has been shaped by film and TV; notably the films of John Waters and *Homicide, Life on The Streets*. I am quite aware that these sources may have led to me having a skewed view of Baltimore life.

Like many latecomers, *Hairspray* was my earliest introduction to John Waters' movies. Thankfully over the years I managed to catch up with most of his back catalogue, although no scratch and sniff card was included when I eventually saw *Polyester*. The later slick, black comedies contain barbed-wire wrapped dialogue that as a wannabe scriptwriter I would die for, while the earlier rough-edged films a la *Pink Flamingos* knocked me for six with their eager amateur street-trash energy. I would quite happily rank John Waters up near the top of my all too Nick Hornsby-like Top Ten Film Directors, alongside fellow inductees such as Sam Raimi and Alex Cox, (and if you know me that is a big compliment).

Water's latest movie, *Cecil B Demented*, really knocked me out. In case you've missed it, *Cecil B Demented* is about guerrilla filmmaking. It's centred around a young director, Cecil, who is disgusted at the superficiality of modern Hollywood movies. With his band of misfit cinema-ophile terrorists he kidnaps an on-the-slide Hollywood starlet. Forcing her at gunpoint to shoot an underground movie, she eventually get's a huge dose of Stockholm Syndrome and comes around Patty Hearst-

style to their way of thinking. (Patty has a cameo role, something which is becoming a bit of a habit down Waters way - white shoes after Labor Day anyone?)

The reason I love this movie is summed up by not just Cecil's anti-studio agenda, but also John Waters' entire body of work. Films can and should be different. They should be able to be made by anyone. In both Waters' films and Cecil's warped violent world of underground movie making we get a unique world view, something we will never see out of a Joel Schumaker blockbuster. In his early years Waters took to the streets with his handheld, filming movies with the misfits on the streets in the same manner as Cecil. These early movies, filled with characters like the late lamented Divine, although rough, show a glimmer of talent through the lack of technical expertise or resources. And that is the heart of a good movie for me...You can keep your big name stars, your THX-Surround System and just don't get me started on Tom Hanks. This is the real shit.

Through the last couple of years I've been drifting away from my love of cinema. It had lost its edge, its sense of excitement. Our own house was warm, I had a TV, and besides the multiplexes were full of ignorant twats who talked through the opening titles (something which really bugs me), and to be quite frank there just wasn't anything that good coming out. Sure I got off my arse long enough to gape at a computer generated Oliver Reed, and sure I marvelled at Kitty Pride's X-Men cameo and yes my stomach churned at American Psycho's Patrick Bateman and his pro-Phil Collins propaganda but my thirst for the new, the old, the obscure, the foreign, the cult and the big summer blockbuster with no plot and too many explosions was gone.

I was treading water at 24 frames per second.

FILMS

Cecil B Demented was that wake-up call I needed. I've always loved the idea of guerilla filmmaking. I would like to think it's the Andy Warhol anyone can be a film star credo that I love, but it's jealousy more than anything. Here's a film about making shocking, disturbing films - I want to do that. Somehow filmmaking on this level seems more real to me. There are real people in front and behind the lens, there are real stories and a real sense of achievement when something works. It's a great pity no-one makes these sort of films, do they?

Well there's obviously Kevin Smith. Okay Kevin Smith and maybe the women that directed *Go Fish*. Oh yes, I suppose there's the Blair Witch gang, Doug Liman, the Scandinavian Dogme directors and Robert Rodriguez of course... well maybe things haven't been that bad after all. And guerilla filmmaking isn't really a recent phenomenon either. How about the art house films of Andy Warhol (and the more plot-driven Paul Morrissey "Andy Warhol" films), Russ Meyer who keeps rolls of film in his fridge just in case he has an idea for shooting a film urgently, and Ed Wood who fought against all odds to produce films wrongly classified as the worst ever made. (You disagree? How about *Waterworld*, *The Postman*, *Sleepless in Seattle*? Do you want me to continue?).

The horror genre has its fair share of low-budget auteurs working outside the studio system. Most of the seminal gore movies of the seventies, Sam Raimi with his shakey-cam, Romero with the early *Living Dead* movies and most of all Peter Jackson. If you get the chance to see the documentary on the making of *Bad Taste*, you'll understand why he got landed with the job of directing the potentially studio-crippling *Lord of the Rings*.

The work of all these people and other means much more to me than any amount of sfx laden-blockbusters put out by the big studios or each finely-crafted period piece churned out by the British Film Industry.

True for every *Clerks* you run the risk of watching a plodding three hour Warhol snoozefest, true some aren't filmed too well, or the action is a bit dodgy here and there but if the talent is there, the rewards are worth it.

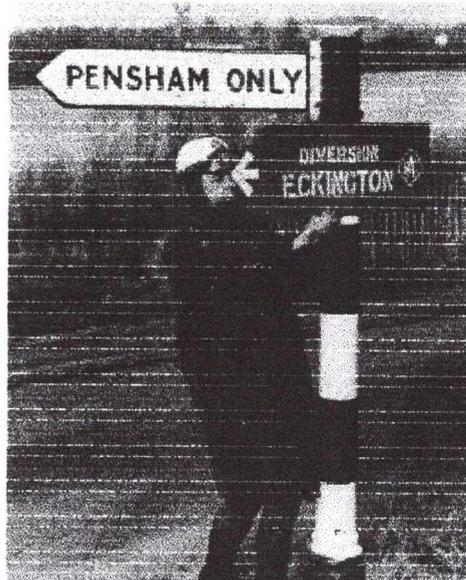
What would the world be like without radicals like John Waters then? TV provides the answer to that one in the shape of *Dawson's Creek*. For those not in the know the main character Dawson Leary is an over-analytical conservative teenage know-it-all with pretensions of being the next Steven Spielberg. You just know that Dawson will end up making the most unsatisfying movies out there. They'd be well made, 90 mins long and ultimately unsatisfying. There'd be no real emotional content, no unsavoury drug-taking, swearing and little violence or sex, no touch of realism and definitely no touch of sur-realism. Gone would be the remotest chance of having such a downer ending as *The Wild Bunch*; no chance for either *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* or *Go Fish* to get made, and definitely no mad Russ Meyer-like big-busted action movies. That's a thought too scary to think of..

It took John Waters and Cecil B Demented to bring me back to my senses and restore that appetite I have for film. More importantly I have my critical faculties back, and I am not afraid to use them. Let's face it *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* was all very pretty, but actually quite dull and plodding compared to just about any real martial arts movies recently. Intelligent and thoughtful - no, Ang Lee just slowed everything down to the level that the average western cinema-goers brain could cope with. *Hannibal*? Haven't seen it yet but let's face it if Hopkins performance is as hammy as his last one, then Dino de Laurentis should be considering remaking *Silence of the Lambs* with the truly sinister Brian Cox and not touching the near-perfect *Manhunter* with that Welsh twit's supposed fine character acting. Thanks John, it's good to be back.

Novacon may be a convention living in the 1970s, but it still pulls in the odd transatlantic visitor (and of course our friends from Sweden!). While jaded Brits murmur about the greying of Novacon or bemoan the lack of new blood, one of Madison's finest fanwriters reminds us why we keep going back to Novacon regard less.

Diversions

by Jae Leslie Adams



At Coventry I had glimpses of the cathedral as the coach drove through the refurbished city center, and a pack of teenagers got on to sit in the back, talking loudly in a broad accent unfamiliar to me. After a stop at Birmingham airport, we arrived at Digbeth Coach Station, and I reviewed the instructions I had received in the convention Progress Report for how to find my way to the hotel. Still after the whole night on the plane, I was a bit disoriented. Outside the station it was raining lightly and I took out my umbrella while I got my bearings. No grid really applies to any streets in Britain. And the entire downtown area of Birmingham is being rebuilt, to make incredible difficulties for drivers during construction at least.

The walk was uphill, but not hard, and the wheels on my luggage are sturdy. There was a roundabout, at the usual St. Martin's church that crops up all over Britain, covered with green moss. Then I just followed the Diversions. That is what the Brits call a wide, well-marked, paved pedestrian walkway through the maze of a massive construction site. Later I found out there are Diversions for drivers too, which in the U.S would be called detours.

I got lost again in the railway station, until I consulted the map and recalled that there was an up escalator involved in getting out through the mall to the hotel on New Street. Finally I found my way out the vaguely-remembered exit, and wandered

around a bit, knowing the hotel was around there somewhere from the last time I'd been to Novacon two years ago. And there it was.

Checked into the room and had a little sit-down, reading the U.S. election news in the paper ("like a box of chocolates, you never know what you're going to get"). Outside on the main street in a shopping district, a raucous marimba band. Hot shower and change, and consider dinner, putting off any consideration of exactly how long it had been since I'd actually had a lie down. It was early on Thursday evening, and the plan was to stay more or less on Wisconsin time (where it was only noon) for the entire convention. So I went down to the bar above the lobby, ordered a pint of bitter, and sat contemplating the odd way the decorator had placed the decorations on the walls, wishing for another newspaper, although I was all too dazed. Finally a face from a photograph on the front of a fanzine showed up.

"Are you Nic? I'm Jae."

And the convention began.

I had not previously met Nic Farey, although he has apparently been going to Novacon (and must have been at the one I was at previously, two years ago) to work as a techie. He had been active on Victor Gonzalez' online fannish discussion lists, asked to publish a fanzine review piece I had written there after the Worldcon, and

had been trading me his fanzine for some months, where I had seen his photo on the cover from his wedding last summer looking rather like a gunslinger. On meeting him I found a cockney gunslinger, and he and his American wife Bobbie and I hit it off right away. Eventually that Thursday evening we went off to a Chinese restaurant and ordered the set menu, taking along with us the only other early con attendee who had turned up in the hotel bar, Erhard, a German with impenetrable accent. We took a taxi around the many impediments of the city center construction, and on our return stayed up much later than one might expect of people who should have been thoroughly exhausted from travel. But two in the morning was still only eight in the evening in Wisconsin. My plan was working well.

Most of Friday before the convention I spent quietly sleeping late. In the afternoon I walked to the Brum Art Museum [this should be hyperlinked to report of the Japanese prints and ceramics I saw there, but ah me]. Back to the hotel about the time the museum closed, at dusk, I found a fresh sandwich and coffee on the way at Pret-A-Manger. Already I was missing the programme. Instead I sat in the bar, meeting and greeting people as they arrived, giving out zines. Received zines, snagging a Barmaid 10 as we collated them round a table with Yvonne Rowse. Nichevo, Plokta, Gloss, Head, Bob, Ansible, ABV, Thought Police Gazette. Chatted with Rob Hansen... but I might check over a very long list of people I saw at that point and still leave out plenty of them. I did attempt to attend some programming, I did, but adjourned from the programme room to the ninth floor bar behind it, where Lilian Edwards joined us and pumped up the volume of our conversation so much that Simon Bradshaw invited us to move it to the downstairs bar so that the panelists for the 9:15 item could hear themselves.

That evening was when Anders Holmstrom got me to agree what a fine thing his TAFF

candidacy would be, hedgehogs and all. He and Lennart Uhlin are both Swedes who frequently come to British conventions, and have excellent parties. But Lennart is a smoker, and while that is not problematic in Britain they thought that would be unacceptable to Americans. Anders is the non-smoking Swede, besides being a party animal in black vinyl. He kissed my hand and told me gallantly that Novacon welcomes nice American women, and I replied that I'd see if I could bring some along next time.

Then I was floating my theory to Cat Coast, and to Lennart, that American irony is something different from the British kind, that American irony is based on never letting on, keeping a straight face.

Friday evening was even later than the night before, ending in a hallparty outside the second floor bar. Photographs were taken of me holding Alison Scott's baby, as Madonna of the Pint. Alison Freebairn played with Marianne and held the baby, broody all weekend. At five a.m. Steve Glover and Martin Smith and I were still sitting there when Alison Scott trundled off with baby Jonathan. I think it was that night I asked her if Plokta had covered Sue Mason's exploits with the butter penis at the worldcon Minneapolis party.

It had been at the Mpls in 73 party, or at least it was the Mpls party suite at the worldcon in Chicago, where one of the featured activities was sculpting in butter just like at the Minnesota State Fair (and for that matter the Wisconsin State Fair) only on a somewhat smaller scale, using the quarter-pound sticks in which butter is customarily packaged in the States. Sometime in the wee hours, Sue as the TAFF winner and for the sake of the fan fund had her picture taken giving head to a lifesize butter penis sculpture. The artist Ctein had modeled it very carefully and realistically, and when the butter began to soften up it drooped over in a touchingly lifelike fashion. Then we put it in the ice bath behind the bar which (somewhat counter-intui-

tively) restored its rigid condition. But I have not seen any published account of the event, which seems to rather miss the point of a publicity stunt.

In our discussion at Novacon Alison said I was just shocked by it and was incapable of using the word *fellatio* in a fanzine. I thought about it and decided I am tolerant of being shocked and amused at one and the same time, as I find the cognitive dissonance both fierce and stimulating. I should have been at the Novacon program item on Saturday afternoon, when Sue told about the worldcon event and showed the photographs around, but I was sleeping. I talked to her about it in the downstairs bar later that afternoon, asked her if it was okay if I wrote about it, and saw the photos there. I had to agree with Ylva Spangborn, that the thought of putting that much butter in your mouth is simply revolting

The plan of staying on Wisconsin time was still working well. I got up in time to see the end of the "Is there still a role for the SF convention?" item, which was the usual British discussion about how to get an Eastercon committee assembled, narrowly avoiding the dread British Worldcon topic which always tends to plunge the room into warfare. I gave some better quality of attention to the panel on "The Myths that Shape Us/Myths We Shape" moderated by Mike Abbott. Panelists Cherith Baldry and Lianne Norman discussed how the imagery of goblins and angels might be seen as the roots of the alien in modern SF and American UFOlogy, and continue the changeling theme of abduction. Ken MacLeod remarked how leftist ideologies are generally based on Judeo-Christian apocalyptic vision, and that the book of Revelation can be read as revolutionary fantasy against the Roman Empire. From the back row I asked whether scientific rationalism might be considered an ideology and he answered, briefly, No, but discussion of the question continued thoughtfully. The British programme audience is generally intelligent and articulate in its remarks, like a Potlatch audience.

Then there was the quiz show put on by Siddall & Hicks, which is nearly inexplicable to anyone who hasn't seen one and unnecessary to explain to anyone who has. After a spectacular entrance by Mike Siddall, caged in one of the hotel's rolling luggage carts, two teams went at a mixture of trivia quiz, charades, and improvisational comedy. You could put an eye out, I thought, as Mike Siddall threw hard candies (okay, what the brits call "sweeties") into crowd. Alison Freebairn answered music questions expertly, but her team did not do so well against Mike Abbott's team (with Lilian Edwards and Mike Scott), because as Ian Sorensen explained to her, "We're in show biz, not the music biz." Points went to clever repartee more than to getting right answers, and Mr. Siddall took off points arbitrarily from time to time anyhow, but it didn't particularly matter in the end as the prizes were all given out.

Then we danced. The band played excellent country rock, a group (that included John Harvey) called Jack of Herts, which Americans would need to have explained as that is not a misspelling but a joke on the postal abbreviation for Hertfordshire. Their selection of covers was aimed squarely at my personal demographic for dance music. The Twist. The Swim. The Frug. The Watusi... In the bar next to the dance floor I interviewed Dave Hicks who suggested that blues rock might have been more agreeable to the people who weren't dancing, you know, the famous British blues. The band went on for a couple of hours and we jumped up and down. Eventually they gave up. In discussion in the bar we put together a fanboy TAFF slate for those who vote to the promptings of gonads: Mike Siddall (who refused, bad boy), Tommy Ferguson (nice Catholic boy), and Anders Holmstrom (party animal). Eventually the bar staff gave up too and sent us to the downstairs bar.

In the downstairs bar, the fanboys attending Lilian were dispensing footrubs. Chocolate oranges passed around, in considera-

tion by inquiring minds of the question, Is sex better? Nic Farey remarked that if he were my husband, he'd never let me out like this, but I took the compliment in the spirit it was offered, reflecting that is certainly one good reason he is not my husband.

There is not much point in trying to explain to Americans the selection of real ale that was available in the hotel bars, both upstairs and down, the lager, and the hard cider, all of which was fine by me, but why all of that is such a fraught issue for British convention committees? And there is no point in repeating the whole thing for the Brits.

After so much desperate fun I got very little sleep, and when I got up had to take a look at the art show and peruse the book room while they were still open. I was nursing a cola in the downstairs bar with Christina & Doug & Nick Walters & Pete Crump when the "Yesterday's Tomorrows" panel that was supposed to be upstairs convened. The fan fund auction was still proceeding in the programming space upstairs, and Maureen Speller was supposed to be at the same time moderating the panel. It was fighting for auditory space in the large meeting room adjacent to the bar, and I tried to listen in a bit. I was not in on the debacle of the auction but I heard quite a bit about it later. Paul Kincaid found me there in the bar to explain why he and Maureen were leaving a bit early, and how I could find my way to Folkestone after the convention for our previously arranged visit.

Then I went to sit with Rob & Avedon, and met Farah Mendelson, and Ken MacLeod who was very sweet about my troublemaking question at the panel the evening before. This is where it all gets very confused in my memory, even with the help of notes, with the other conversations that occurred at the same table at different times during the weekend. Pete Weston came by to make trouble and he is an old hand at it, and at midafternoon on a

Sunday we were none of us able very well to resist. He was plotting a Worldcon for 2022 in Azerbaijan, but it was immediately shot down by the Armenian faction. He snapped back with a proposal for an Isle of Man Con for Eastercon, and delegated the entire table for various concom duties. He appointed Rob Hansen to chair, and directed him to check the facilities for a start, and persisted in his suggestions despite Rob's repeated refusals. Cat Coast is the vice chair, and Mike Abbott the treasurer. Yvonne Rowse is Fan GoH, and Ken MacLeod the Pro GoH. I, of course, would be the American liaison. It's all quite simple. We had suspicions that this all had something to do with the Isle of Man being some kind of tax haven, but in our universally befuddled states it was hard to make any further sense of it.

When was the fire alarm? Was that Sunday afternoon? Everyone trooped down the stairs and outdoors into the cold until the building cleared.

Sunday evening, a large party walked with stroller a roundabout way to a nearby Thai-Korean-Chinese banquet place. The Plokta group was celebrating their Nova and sat at the next table, with Mike Abbott. At ours, Nick Mills who I had met in Seattle, and Mike Scott (Dr. Plokta) ordered Korean barbecue. Lilian Edwards and Kev McVeigh and I ate Thai, coconut chicken and aubergine. Again we ordered from the set menu, and I confessed that I had never before that weekend been with a group of fans who ordered in such a rational fashion. They seemed to think me quite mad to even comment on it. I needed the food badly by that time, and the peppers were amply medicinal. We gossiped about TAFF and Trufen, but energy subsided to digestion, and we eventually left it to Kev & Lilian to discuss Brit popculture gossip and the Where Are They Now of Britfandom.

We had the room to ourselves and were able to move around from our seats as the dinner broke up. Lilian began playing with

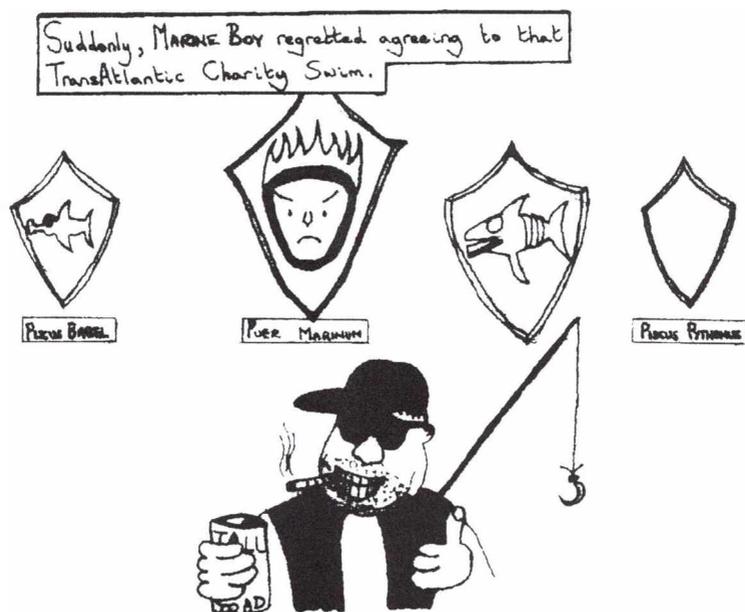
the barbecue set in the middle of the table, and seizing on some fondue forks that had been left in the room. Marianne promptly turned the forks against Lilian, poking her in the tummy, so I took the pointy sticks away. Lilian promptly complained to Alison but I revealed in Marianne's defense that Lilian had started it. Then we rearranged ourselves, some of us staying for coffee and desserts. Marianne had ice cream, and I was fascinated to watch her charm the waitstaff, following her mother Alison's instructions on how to do it nicely in order to obtain afterdinner chocs.

Finally Sunday I was happy to observe one of the fabled Swedish room parties. Just after coming in from dinner to the scheduled beer tasting, I was reassuring Tobes that his black laced trousers were not at all unmanly but rather swashbuckling, when word went around that it was time, and we trooped off. It was held in Tony Berry's suite, and in the course of the evening we questioned Tony closely on the matter of foreign eligibility for the Novas. It was of course a question of interest to Nic Farey, a British national residing in the U.S. who publishes *This Here*, to Claire Brialey and Mark Plummer who publish *Banana Wings*, to Lennart and Ylva who had received some apparently disqualified Nova votes

for their English-language fanzine *A New Kind of Neighborhood*, to Lilian as co-editor of *Gloss* which has published both Ylva and various American fanwriters, and I suppose to me just as another kind of troublemaker. That was after the entire room crowded full of standing people had begun to seek the floor, which had something to do with the influence of the Cloudberry liqueur that Anders and Lennart had brought.

When I first came in, I had sought the comfy chair, thought myself very clever to have sat in it first, and as a result rather missed any conversation except with people's knees. I was beginning to arrive at the Greenwich Mean Time zone. Considering the exhaustion most were approaching, though, before long I was presiding over all, until most liquid refreshment short of paint thinner had been consumed.

Breakfast Monday, I actually got up early enough to enjoy the hotel breakfast. It is one of the great features of British hotels, along with kettles in the rooms, that I wish American hotels would emulate. Yvonne Rowse laughed a lot. She is like a British Jeannie Bowman. I packed up and was off on the Silverlink to London Euston and Folkestone, to inspect Maureen's 1900 house.



BRUSSEL

COMICS

We'd visited a few comics shops on our trip through Belgium and the Netherlands - the one in Breda in the strange arcade with the leaking roof, the one near the station in Antwerp in the penumbral zone between diamond district and the tourist cafes and the one in Bruges offering a bohemian alternative to all those shops selling lace and chocolate. I'd been impressed by the number of titles available in Flemish - pity I can't read the language! (especially as they're published in paperback, so are much cheaper than the French albums.) Nonetheless, these shops had a certain feel to them that reminded me of the comic shops of, say, Edinburgh, Bristol or Vancouver, down to their racks of imported Marvel comics, the SF/ TV paraphernalia, and that all too familiar smell of unwashed teenage comics fan.

Then at the end of our trip, we wandered into Brüssel, Brussel's main comics shop. Well, we'd already been to the Tin Tin shop which no doubt features on most tourists' itinerary, but I still wanted to have a browse through a wider selection of French-language titles. Here I found a treasure trove of bandes dessinées, some titles familiar from when I was living in France at the end of the 70s and reading *Metal Hurlant*, others completely new. What should I choose I wondered? I considered picking up the latest issue of the space opera *Vagabonde des Limbes* which I have been buying intermittently for the last couple of decades, but it looked like little had changed in the last 6 or so books, so what would be the point? Or I could check out some of the other writers or artists I knew. But after a week of exploring new Belgium beers from menus that on occasions stretched into the 100s, I felt like

being more adventurous. Doug despite his lack of more than basic French had already picked out a couple of titles to collect: a comedy adventure series called *Double M* (because he liked the look of its mountain setting) and a detective series *Jessica Blandy* (with cute heroine who didn't wear too many clothes, need I say more?). I too wanted to find something new.

It was while browsing that it occurred to me that the place didn't feel much like a comics shop. Well, there was the characteristic lack of space due to the over-abundance of stock - but none of it was in plastic bags. The books all looked shiny and new, even those that I knew had first seen print several decades ago; the non-mainstream sections of underground comics and books about comics looked more like they were aimed at people with a degree in existential philosophy than some undiscerning 12 year old. Upstairs was the kind of comics art section you could imagine being run by the Samuel L. Jackson character from *Unbreakable*. Okay, there was something missing - trash appeal. But this to my mind was amply compensated for by the totally cool selection of material. And by the fact that you could browse round the shop without the other customers making you feel like you were turning into a nerd just by sharing their space. This being the centre of Brussels, the clientele were mainly tourists, and maybe the odd Eurocrat or two, looking for more gifts to take home to bribe their constituents into loving the Euro. But at least they weren't obnoxious British tourists, but chic, intellectual French ones (or am I just projecting here?)

So, comics are mainstream in Belgium, but they're by no means bland. The book I lingered over the longest was the very

Brüsel from which the shop had taken its name. It looked beautiful and intriguing with its mix of futuristic cityscapes and old-fashioned Belgium street scenes. A perfect souvenir of Brussels, except that at over twice the page count of the average bande dessinée, it was a bit heavy to carry home (especially when your bag is full of Belgium beer and Leffe glasses). Eventually I left it in favour of one of the shop's special recommendations, an unusual looking book called *Le Capitaine Ecarlate* with crayon scenes in sepia tones that changed later in the book to frames strikingly awash with a single colour.

The next day we went to the comics museum - though this being Belgium it was actually called Centre Belge de la Bande Dessinée and approached via an art nouveau atrium designed by Victor Horta. I soon realised that we had seriously underestimated the scope of the place. It was our last day in Brussels, and I thought we would have time to look round the museum, take a leisurely lunch and catch the Eurostar. But this was before I saw how much material there was to read in the museum. There were a few artefacts like the Tin Tin rockets and Smurfs, but mostly it was a pictorial history of the Belgium comic, its major writers, the Flemish offshoots and French-language bandes dessinées in general. Even sampling only a fraction of the comic strips on display, there was enough reading matter to keep me going till my feet began to ache and Doug - as fascinated, but less liable to get bogged down in text - suggested we leave a little time to look round the shop and indulge in a final drink of Kwak and un toast cannibal before we left. The full extent to which comics are serious cultural heritage in Belgium had never been clearer.

Back home from the trip with our souvenirs, I was well pleased by my bande dessinée purchase. *Le Capitaine Ecarlate* (yes, that does translate as Captain Scarlet!), turned out to be a very strange but



COMICS

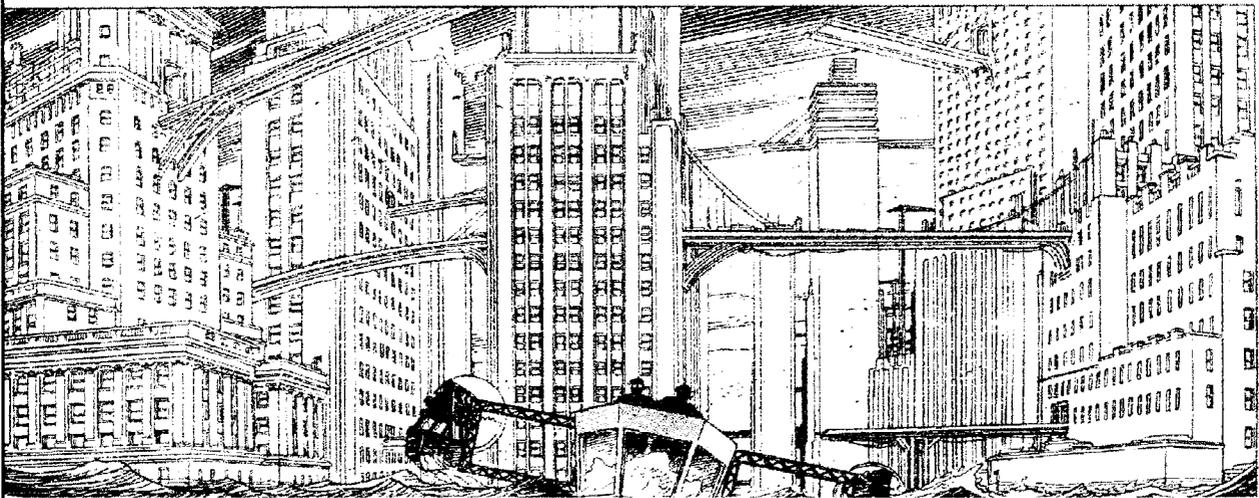
compelling adventure about urban pirates with detachable heads, and featured a number of memorable characters, including a writer, a prostitute and a pair of respectable (but corrupt) police men - not to mention the eponymous captain himself. (Someone always has to say eponymous in articles like this.) The door to the world of the pirates is through a library, so obviously it gets full marks from me! It wasn't till I reached the end that I discovered that it was based on the life and works of the unknown to me (and I've studied a lot of French literature) French writer Marcel Schwob.

But still I regretted not having bought *Brüsel*. So, it was a pleasant surprise when I opened one of my Christmas presents from Doug, to find that he had ordered it for me online from the French language Amazon site (a risky business, he later explained, as until it arrived, he wasn't entirely sure whether or what he had ordered!). *Brüsel*, like *Le Capitaine Ecarlate*, has an off-centre strangeness to it, but is more thoroughly grounded in its alternative reality. It's a detailed world; an alternative (or maybe not so alternative) early 20th century Brussels where a consortium of builders is demolishing the city to build a network of high rise buildings connected by futuristic

elevated roadways, whilst mad scientists open clinics to cure all illnesses by electricity. The hero, a weedy looking everyman with an irritatingly bad cough finds himself caught up with the architects of this new world, and also the opponents to it through his improbably liaison with the sexy civil servant Tina. There seems to be a certain technophobic message to the book. Monsieur Constant (the man with the tubercular cough) starts out a big fan of the new science, even converting his own florist business from real plants to plastic ("le plastique c'est beau"), but by the end, following his adventures in the clinic and the inundation of the city by a huge tidal wave he agrees with Tina that they have all been made ill with progress. Just to underline the transition, as soon as he escapes from the city of Brüssel, he finds that at last his cough is gone.

It is obvious that these books are rooted in a very different tradition to the American model. It's the sort of thing that I could imagine Alan Moore doing, but not many others. Both books are set in the past rather than the future, and play with historical figures (I'm told that another volume of the *Brüssel* series features the

Belgium architect Horta whom I mentioned earlier, and *Brüssel* itself has numerous real-world references - not least to the destruction of much of Brussels heritage by 20th century builders). At the same time, they are imaginative and surreal. The European picture book seems to have kept closer to the mainstream of literature than its American counterpart, and even where it is genre based, it has never needed exclusively to be science fiction (Tin Tin may have gone to the moon, but predominantly he was an explorer!) So, perhaps that's why you don't have to be a geek with no sex life to get into comics in Belgium. Or perhaps I'm kidding myself and what the comics shops of the provinces rely on is their Marvel imports and X-Men tie-ins. Don't get me wrong, I'm a big fan of superhero comics (well, I was in the 80s) but I continue to regret that for all the talk of comics coming of age with *Watchmen* and all those Neil Gaiman dark fantasies, there is nothing like the range and cultural confidence of the continental books. Or maybe I'm just biased and think that dialogue sounds better in French?



Back off Brussels!

her as her "net-mommy" to Dave Langford's description of the Pez-infested interior of her home, Toad Hall, and partner Jeff Schalles' evocative road trip to the Baltimore Worldcon. I am now also considerably better informed about the project to prune Minicons, the origins of Ulrika's TAFF candidacy (so it's all Andy Hooper's fault!) and the fate of Dave Langford's more famous brother Jon. I'll try not to rant excessively on how mad Rob Hansen must be to imagine that a train scheduled to arrive a mere 5 minutes before the total eclipse would get him there on time - but that was back in 1999 when we still had a rail service, and it did! The production is a reminder of how much you can do with mimeo - particularly in conjunction with modern technology - and it's amazing what a warm and fuzzy feel it gives to familiar artists like Sue Mason. Geri's comments in the letter column encapsulate the humanity of her approach to fandom; she prints letters by James White, Chuch Harris and Vincent Clarke, all very much still alive in these pages. [CJL]

Geri Sullivan, Toad Hall, 344 Blaisdell Ave S, Minneapolis, MN 55408-4315, USA

nichevo #1

Well this zine gets my Nova art vote for starters as there's a great big sinister badass clown on the front cover! Anyone remember the film Killer Clowns from Outer Space? It had a stompin' Dickies intro and way too many sinister clown monsters? Anyway, that's what the cover of nichevo reminds me of, and since I have and immense liking for both the film, the band and the song it's no bad thing in my book.

On to the zine itself. nichevo is the latest title from that one man Maryland zine factory known as Nic Farey. Breaking away from the successful formula that makes This here... such an enjoyable read, nichevo is a multi-contributor fandomcentric publication. Nic sets his stall out immediately - contemporary, opinionated but not whiney, almost reads like it's too good to be true. Looking down the list of fellow travellers

made me break out in sweats - Jim Trash, Jae Leslie, Dale Speirs and the man Nic Farey himself...tasty, tasty, very very tasty.

Fanzines are the first order of the day. Jim Trash's review of New Kind of Neighbourhood is top-notch stuff, unpretentious to the core but as refreshing as the zine itself. It's just what I like in a review, clever impressions and lots of emotional connection with the subject matter. Jae Leslie's roundup or worldcon fanzines follows directly in position and content. Together they make a fine pair.

Dale Speirs weighs in with the heftiest article in this zine "What, If Anything, is a Fanzine?" completing the trio of fanzine related material. As the title suggest Dale defines zines as well as discussing their relative merits in security, portability and survivability over electronic-based media. While this article covers nothing new in terms of subject matter (nearly every fanzine convention panel I've attended over the past ten years has chewed around this topic), it's great to see these arguments captured down on paper forever instead of being lost to the void in the post-panel bar rush. Dale's the natural choice of writer for this sort of article. Every word is carefully chosen, every sentence clear and concise and every argument worked well through. Hopefully this article will get some great debates going...that's about the only thing missing here - well it is the first ish.

The Secret History of TAFF War 3 (or Six Days that Shook, Rattled and Rolled) and The Derailing of "Old 815" both relate to hi-jinks on the internet. The first details the briefly controversial beginnings of the recently completed America to Europe TAFF race. It illustrates how poor communication and a failure to think through your actions could potentially lead to such things as fan feuds. Nic handles the topic with maturity and careful restraint. While only a few egos were bruised in this instance, it provides an interesting anthropological case study into the nature of fan politics. Similarly the last article details the trufen

list's reactions to the downright rude postings of Gene Stewart. Ah the dangers of the internet...Dale was right.To sum up great first issue...can't wait for the second!
[DB]

Nic Farey, PO Box 178, St. Leonard, Maryland, 20685, USA

Opuntia 46.5D and 47 

I look forward to Dale Speirs' zines with relish. I like the way Dale sticks to his rigid taxonomy and compartmentalisation of his zines. I like the size, weight and feel of Opuntia, and of course his writing is clear, intelligent, well paced and unpretentious. Most of all, even though I have never met him, I like the guy.

Opuntia 46.5D details Dales' experiences voting in the last Canadian elections and gives a detailed description of his work as a Park's Department District foreman one particularly wet and stormy weekend. Having worked as a countryside ranger I find the day-to-day details of Dales' work fascinating. I would quite freely have given up the confines of Holyrood Park and its vandalism patrols, tourist guide duties and occasional manual repair work for reducing storm damage and reporting broken sprinkler problems in Calgary, but then again I am a bit of a Canada-phile.

Whole numbered Opuntia's are of course sercon and this ish Dale puts together, as usual, an interesting mix. There's the continual publishing of Garth Spencer's round up of convention running material. Garth's taken on a thankless but worthy task which I admit doesn't make great reading but is a useful resource. I hope that people use this; we may be able to avoid another 2Kon in future. My favourite though in this ish is Dales' article is about people testing the limits of the postal service. As kids, my brother and I joked of being sent on holiday by mail with stamps stuck on our heads, but I didn't realised people actually tried this? What was I thinking, it must be true, the Velvet did a song about it. [DB]

Dale Speirs, Box 6830, Calgary, Alberta, Canada T2P 2E7

Quasiquote 3 

When Tommy Ferguson mentioned to me that he was thinking of voting for Quasiquote in the Novas, I was slightly surprised. Not that I didn't enjoy Sandra's first two issues, particularly her own contributions - but as a genzine I found the quality a bit mixed. However QQ3 which I hadn't read before Novacon has a strong line-up of contributors, including Avedon Carol, Claire Brialey and Maureen Kincaid Speller. There's also a heart-warming tale from 2Kon at last (Gail Courtney's one woman feat of leather promotion), a lively editorial from Sandra and a healthy letter column (not *all* of it bitching about Cheryl Morgan). I don't see nearly enough writing from Avedon these days , so I'm glad that Sandra plucked this account of Avedon's early days in London from rec.arts.sf.fandom. Claire's article about the art and consequences of reviewing has helped me clarify what I want to do with this column (review those fanzines that I feel are worth talking about; making it clear that any criticism does not mean lack of merit.). I also enjoyed Maureen's tale of builder woes. On-form there is no one better at domestic description than MKS. The only article that didn't work for me this time round was the David Locke ponderings on science fiction. The different narrative streams didn't seem to meld together. The ¾ wrap-around fanzine cover was a good idea aesthetically, though could suffer a bit in the hands or workbags of careless fans (let's say that my copy will never be auctioned off for mint prices in years to come!) Overall I think there's a good fannish spirit to this fanzine, and with its enlargement to A4, QQ's has become a definite presence on the fannish scene. Who knows, maybe I'll be joining with Tommy to vote for this title in the Novas next year! [CJL]

Sandra Bond, 46 Stirling Road, London N225BP

Vanamonde 378-382 

For 2 issues we have been making a cheap joke at the expense of Vanamonde with the

1 star rating category. Does it deserve it? Not within the context of Apa-L, I'm sure. But John mails it out far and wide to people who have not seen the many Apazines commented on. Some of it is comprehensible. "Hurrah for your chauffering DUFF winner Cathy Cuppitt..." speaks for itself, but wouldn't it be more interesting if we had some prospect of hearing about this trip? And we will miss out too on the hotbed of controversy sparked by such questions as: "Am I misinformed that petroleum is a safer fuel than hydrogen?" or "What good has fluoridating L.A. water done?" Apazines can be completely accessible, and certainly the apa I belong to (TWP) regularly produces good pieces of writing in their own right, but John tends to confine his own input to short (albeit often very learned) introductory paragraphs or even just a quote. I don't doubt his erudition or ability to write, it's just that in this format everything is too brief and out of context to mean a lot to the casual reader. Hence the single star rating. [CJL]

John Hertz, 236 S. Coronado St. No. 409, Los Angeles, CA 90057, USA

Wabe 2

Whilst not as impressive as the debut issue, Wabe 2 still offers a healthy supply of that Madison energy that brought us Wiscon, Turbo-apa and Andy Hooper. The focus of this issue is in fact the text of a Jeanne Gomoll GoH speech for Wiscon, telling of her involvement in the Madison SF group, fanzines and the early days of Wiscon. It's an uplifting piece that makes you wish you'd been there or done something half as meaningful. Surrounding Jeanne are pieces by editors Bill and Tracy, talking about Madison mores, and Jae enticing us for a river ride on the Wisconsin ducks (another reason to go back to Madison!) This apart from the letter column is the substance of the issue, but Wabe is one of those fanzines that is greater than the sum of its parts thanks to the care taken on its layout and the little touches like capsule fanzine reviews scattered round the pages and Jae's calligraphy. Rumours that this fanzine has

no sense of identity are grossly untrue. [CJL]

Bill Bodden, Tracy Benton & Jae Leslie Adams, c/o P.O. Box 762, Madison, WI 53701-0762

Xyster

Xyster is a strange beast. To me Xyster appears an odd collection of stuff which logic dictates shouldn't hang together, but Dave Wood's personality and humour runs through every word binding the patchwork collection of writings together in a strong and long-lasting whole. And it's old, nostalgic feel works in its favour...

Dave, based in Clevedon, not more than an empty scrumpy bottle throw from HeadHQ writes of such West-country facets of life as the chequered history of Clevedon's Royal Hotel and the last public hangings in Bristol. The hangings article warns of the dangers of excessive cider-drinking, something certain members of Bristol SF better beware of. However Dave's biggest piece Emperor Superbus made my day. Not only well written, and laugh-out-loud funny it struck an oddly timely chord with me. As Emperor Superbus stands watching a 1995 FA Cup Replay slip through Bristol Rovers hands, I can only think that my own excursions to The Mem have likewise been less than happy this season. At the time of writing you see Rover are deep in the relegation zone. All-in-all Xyster get's the thumbs up from me. [DB]

Dave Wood, 1 Friary Close, Marine Hill, Clevedon, N Somerset, BS21 7QA

*Finally Bristol's own Hooper (Brian, that is) encounters **Gloss** over a glass or two of Belgium beer:*

The colour's deplorable - no help for people with red green colour blindness. The font's too small for drunkards, and who'd want to read it sober? As for that review of the fine Bristol publication Head, it's a disgrace to the family name of Hooper.

Brian has subsequently denied all responsibility for this outburst and may be unavoidably out of the country when Victor Gonzalez visits Bristol in April!

As the country suppurates in disinfected straw and rotting carcasses litter our fields, Christina looks back in amusement to the last crisis

Panic on the Streets of Bristol

I'd been away on holiday, so wasn't expecting the petrol blockades. But neither was anyone else, judging by my colleagues' reactions. I first heard about it on Radio 4's early morning news bulletin. Wow! I thought, a bit of excitement to make the return to work more bearable. I had no personal worries as I cycle to work most days and only use my car for long distance journeys.

That evening, despite still being tired, I went out cycling with some of my colleagues. Immediately I sensed a strangeness on the roads. The cars seemed angry, and as we approached the old Severn bridge (for a scenic trip to Wales), we encountered the huge queues leading into Aust Services, waiting for petrol. In the pub, the mood of our group was smug. As cyclists we felt virtuous and in control, able to mock the folly of our fellow men. But underneath, concerns were beginning to brew. What would happen to Ron & Louise's holiday in Scotland? What about Sue & Graham's long-awaited house move?

Back at work the next day I found that I had been given the credit for the panic-buying. Margaret, my garrulous Australian colleague kept telling everyone on the phone that I had predicted it. So I tried to stay one step ahead by telling them that money would run out next. (I had heard that on the news too.) This was fun. I was beginning to feel millennial again - that frisson of expectation that society might collapse and chaos ensue - so disappointingly underachieved on Jan 1 Y2K. But now it was doing nicely. The only down-side was that no-one was abandoning their cars. There were just as many of the damn things on the road as ever. And it's such a fantasy of mine to see a car-free Bristol.

The next day, Doug was off work with a fluey bug, so I suggested that he go out and do some panic-buying. He obliged, though it's quite likely that he was the only person in Bristol panic-buying chilli peppers.

The roads were still not short of cars, but they were getting bunged up with cyclists. Where do these people think they are, I snarled? Cambridge? Amsterdam? It was no longer possible to amble along minding my own business without some pillock overtaking me. Consequently, I was forced, in the cause of self-respect, to cycle at twice my normal speed. I began to realise that these people were less trouble in their cars. Besides, it was getting difficult to park my bike in the work bike compound.

Doug and I did have some areas of disagreement about the dispute. We were both enjoying it, but Doug was in it to see the government fall flat on their face, while I was more interested in the thought-experiment aspect. What will people do without petrol? How long does it take for one piece of disequilibrium to destabilise the rest? Once chaos spreads can it be stopped? But I was still reluctant to see the tabloid press being given the excuse to lay into a Labour government - even this Labour government. Some habits die hard. But even Doug agreed that he didn't want to see an upsurge in the popularity of William Hague.

By this stage, people were using the crisis as an excuse to stay off work. I wondered if people would reconsider the sustainability of their commuting habits if the dispute went on long enough, or if the government would reconsider its poor excuse for a transport policy. It was becoming increasingly obvious that fuel taxes would never price people off the road. They would rather steal, kill, maim than give up their right to drive. Well, I hadn't heard of any killing and maiming, but the rumours about looting petrol from cars were growing stronger.

For some reason I was relieved when my early morning shower revealed that the blockaders were beginning to give up voluntarily. Maybe I'm not as keen on chaos as I thought.

POLITICS

Meanwhile, **William Bains**, in an extract from a letter, draws some contrasts between the blockaders and the anti-capitalist anarchists.

The piece in Head 1 on the Mayday 'anarchists' was interesting, although I suspect I may have a rather different view than many of your readers. I believe the Mayday 'anarchists' are part of the establishment political process, not a 'grass roots' political movement at all, any more than the major parliamentary parties are. Touted as a popular rebellion against global capitalism, they were, in reality, less anarchic than Maggie and her handbag.

Some of the people there were genuine grass roots activists, but the process was not initiated or controlled by them. They had leaders, a sophisticated coordination structure, and sponsorship from big business and political lobbyist groups. The demonstrations are coordinated across continents by media that is itself controlled by the likes of Ted Turner and Rupert Murdoch, which then report their antics for their immediate profit. They were really opposed by only a few government departments and Monsanto. Why did Blair react so wildly to an inoffensive and insignificant piece of petty vandalism? Because this is the opposition he expects, from professional political lobbyists who are sanctioned by recognition. It is his job to react, playing a part in the toothless media circus that our political system has become.

But as to having a real effect ... well, I have been in London when these events have been staged, and was not affected one iota. And I was the target. As a venture capitalist specializing in biotechnology, I am naturally on the side of darkness and evil. I rape developing countries of their natural resources, I exploit the ill with over-priced and unjustified high tech medical 'fixes', and I do it all for minute-to-minute, opportunistic profit. (No, of course I don't really. I have not been corrupted that much since the days I was an innocent academic in Bath - but we are in MediaLand here.)

The 'Petrol crisis' of September was a different kind of beast. This was opposed by the establishment: unions, government,

media (who consistently warned of crises in everything from heart surgery to the supply of pet food, all with minimal justification). Yet the police did nothing, sensing that here was a genuine popular movement, and they interfered at their peril. ("Isn't it amazing how these simple animals seem to sense your mood. It is almost as if they understood what people were saying around them.") In 24 hours the country was brought to panic, in under a week the roads were clearing and people were enjoying an unexpected holiday.

But this was not organised political protest. There was no organisation at all. It was triggered when Ron Wood, local haulier company owner in Essex decided he was pissed-off with the cost of diesel and went to the Coryton oil refinery to tell them so. He telephoned his mates, who telephoned their mates, who e-mailed their mates. The tanker drivers agreed with them. Most of the private car drivers agreed with them. They wanted cheaper petrol more than they wanted to drive at 90mph down the M1, and so it came to pass.

The newspapers tried to find leaders. They elevated Ron to 'leader' status (Standard), or Brynie Williams (Times) at Stanlow, or David Hanley (Sunday Times), and a few others. But this was not part of the 'normal' political process, and did not have 'leaders' with Instant Whip opinions like a proper political movement. Political parties tried to abrogate the process: both the British National Party and the Socialist Workers Party " were told to f* * * off pretty clearly when they turned up at the refinery gates. The Tories were simply ignored by the protestors. This was a genuinely anti-capitalist, anti-establishment, popular movement.

And it worked! The whole panoply of the Western economy was against them - Unions, Government, the Oil companies - and the truckers just said 'fuck you, I want cheaper fuel'.

Head Letter Office

(mail sorted by **Doug**)

Robert Lichtman's loc arrived an hour after we dumped the last ish at the printers so who better to kick off...

Robert Lichtman, robertlichtman@yahoo.com

A focal point fanzine would be nice, I agree, but with so much fannish energy devoted these days to either conventions or wittering away on the e-lists like Trufen and Memory Hole it seems like there's hardly any left over for the kind of sustained attention it takes to produce a fanzine on a frequent enough schedule and with enough latitude and space to become one. Also, as always has been the case you can't just start up a zine with the intention of *being* a focal point. It's something that either happens or it doesn't. The last focal point fanzine we had was Andy Hooper's APPARATCHIK, and I'm quite sure he didn't really have focal pointdom in mind when he began it as a weekly single-sheet perzine.

It's a valid point you make that "if fanzines become something we do on the web... what differentiates this activity...from the hobby of a growing number of the general public." We're starting to have a few strictly (or largely) electronic fanzines, such as John Foyster's eFNAC and Arnie Katz's JACKPOT (although the latter is still being produced on paper for FAPA mailings), and so far I'd say the difference is the audience at which they're aimed, which is us fans, and the retention of a fannish outlook and addressing of fannish interests and concerns.

Steve Green continues, with further thoughts on the nature of focal point fanzines....

Steve Green, ghost.words@virgin.net

To my view, there are intrinsically two forms of "focal point fanzine", although it is possible on rare occasions for one title to inhabit both spheres simultaneously.

The first achieves its status by topicality,

touching a raw nerve in fandom's collective stream of consciousness. It's often achieved by sheer luck, and is usually shortlived. (I have seen Railings described as "focal point"; if it was, I doubt it could have remained so into a third issue.)

The second acts as a touchstone for a specific cultural group, in our case fanzine fandom. Skilled editors, with a proactive commissioning policy, can even mould the community around their fanzine rather than the other way around: Hyphen certainly succeeded in this respect, with Apparatchik as a more recent example. On a smaller scale, Empties and Abdump provide microcosmic snapshots of the MiSFiT's mafia in the mid-80s.

Personally, I think I prefer Steve's accidental short-lived focal point fanzine theory, although I believe that it is possible to shape the community around your zine - Plokta and Banana Wings seem to be doing that very well.

Lloyd Penney, 1706-24 Eva Rd, Etobicoke, ON Canada M9C 2B2

I may not have been in fanzine fandom long enough to benefit from a focal point fanzine. Canadian fandom has enjoyed several of this kind of zine (Canadian Fandom, New Canadian Fandom, Maple Leaf Rag, and its successor, MLR), but then, it seems to be an easy feat to produce such a zine for a small group. For all fanzine fans everywhere, I'm not sure a focal point fanzine is possible. Cover a small area or small group particularly well, and I think that's all you can hope for. I think the sense of community can still exist in fanzines. Trufen and other listservs allow us to converse at length at any time, but as you say, the conversations are usually fairly personal, without much to interest most people. I have subscribed to Trufen, Memoryhole and SMOFS more for any news that may be relayed than any regular conversation...I just don't have time for that. Besides, fanzines have much more of

LETTERS



substance and thought than an impulse-response listserv. (Most people look at a computer screen all day...I don't want to stare at one all evening. Just another reason why I prefer paper fanzines).

Music and festivals provided the backdrop for most of #2, from Wurzels to revivalist punk...

Gary Wilkinson, gary_wilkinson@yahoo.com

Reading a good gig report makes me wish I was there. I've got mixed feelings about tribute bands – siphoning off talent and support for original bands – but I can see why people go see them. Though I decided to pass on the "East Midland's greasiest Robby Williams tribute" – I mean he didn't even have a tribute name, he could have called himself Bobby Williams or something. Then again Robby himself, seems to want to become a tribute to Freddy Mercury!

Steve Stiles, 8631 Lucerne Road, Randallstown, Maryland, 21133, USA

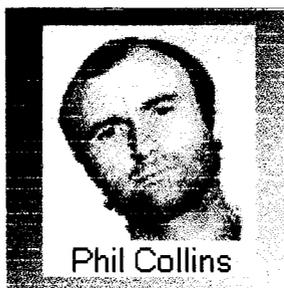
I envy Christina that concert. I missed out or passed on a lot of punk - maybe my art roc snob sensibilities still belong to Pink Floyd, Genesis, and Yes - but the Stranglers really got me from the first time I ever heard "No More Heroes" on Ted White's old station, the much missed WGTB-FM: "Whatever happened to Leon Trotsky/He got an ice pick/ That made his ears burn!...Whatever happened to those heroes"! And Cornwell dared to rhyme "Shakespeare-os" with "heroes"! What a riot! It's amazing to me that The Stranglers never caught on in the States, but other than enlightened college stations, The Stranglers, a great mutation of punk/Doors/Kinks and one of Britain's finest, never got much airplay here. Jeff Schalles and I saw them on their first US tour in DC, bravely leaving all my paisley & tie-dyed stuff at home; they had been welcomed to our nation by having all their instruments stolen in New York. Typical!

Gary Deindorfer returns to the pages of Head with musical comments...

Gary Deindorfer, Trent Center West, 465 Greenwood Ave, #1104, Trenton, NJ 08609-2131, USA

Doug, sounds like you people have some fun musical events there in what I see you call "the west country". The Wurzels sound like they were possessed of an avid local following - kind of like Devo and Pere Ubu in Ohio, or the Embarrassment (greatly underrated band) in Kansas. Of course Devo and Pere Ubu went on to national fame - but the Embarrassment never quite caught on. Sounds like Ad Rice and band really caught the spirit of this heavily nostalgic group for you.

Christina, as to your "Punks in the Sun", I am amused by your "Tattooed men (punks) in their 70s punk gear, now balding, with wife and kids." Life goes on. Someday there will be 55 year old Britney Spear fans.



Phil Collins



Gary goes on to rate, (quite correctly IMHO) Stiff Little Fingers over the Stranglers before putting forward a theory which his namesake on this side of the Atlantic uncannily agrees with...

Gary Deindorfer

I think Phil Collins looks like Napoleon. But then I think as he gets older, Ted White is coming to resemble Lenin more and more. Me, a girl I used to work with said she thought I looked like Fred Flintstone.

Gary Wilkinson (again)

I'm not too keen on either incarnation of Genesis I'm afraid. However I always thought it significant that the hero of American Psycho loved Phil 'Corporation' Collins (good grief, can't rock stars look like rock stars).

Another reader muses on tribute bands...

Steve Jeffrey, 44 White Way Kidlington, Oxon, OX5 2XA

How can I resist a fanzine that mentions an early Genesis tribute band?

I will take your word that there is a punk tribute band to the Wurzels, though. Some things are just much better not thought about (and I always thought the Wurzels were actually an agricultural tribute band for hippy-folk singer Melanie).

Actually, this tribute band thing is getting out of hand. Apparently you don't have to be dead (or disbanded) to get a tribute band nowadays - just too expensive or exclusive for normal folk to afford tickets for (or maybe a refusal to play any of your old songs, which is what half the audience want to hear).

Probably Steps have a trib band of their own already; I'm pretty sure there's a Spice Girls one. Personally I blame Matthew Kelly and "Stars in their Eyes". (The thought that anyone else would want to be Chris Rea or Michael Bolton (with or without the risible barnet) is, I have to say, deeply worrying.)

Personally the only tribute band I would ever consider joining/forming would do covers of the Bonzo Dog Band songs. What's worrying is I have thought about this too much - they would be called Trouser Press.

Jackie Duckhawk, jackie.duckhawk@ntlworld.com

Thanks for sending me Head. I really enjoyed the article about the bungee jump but found a lot of the rest passed over me as I'm so out of the music scene! However it did lead me to make the following totally irrelevant observation:

Completely naff music gets worse the more you listen to it.

Mostly naff music gets better the more you listen to it.

My evidence is that having my 7 year old daughter's and 4 year old son's music inflicted on me over and over again I have decided that the Spice Girls are pretty

awful, Britney Spears mostly awful, Teddy Bears Picnic excruciating but S Club 7 really quite jolly. However I am pleased to say that Katherine has asked for a U2 album for Christmas so things are definitely improving!

The last word on the music front goes to Sue Thomasson...

Sue Thomasson, 190 Coach Road, Sleights, Whitby, North Yorks, YO22

You know, I have NEVER been clubbing, and can't imagine wanting to. (Come on - I play in a ceilidh band). Pop music is for doing aerobics to.

Not sure if I agree with Sue, precisely. I do like a good ceilidh just as much as the next man but there is decent music out there if you look for it. However, one thing we do agree on...

Interesting that you think Scotland = conventions. I think Scotland = hillwalking trips, with the (very occasional) side excursion to Edinburgh Zoo. In fact, Rory & me had a week in NW Scotland recently, bagged 15 Corbetts (like Munros, only smaller) between us, including a couple of toughies (Foinaven = over-rated; Quiag = superb!).

Uh, wow - you can name 20 good Scottish beers without trying? I can't name 20 beers, even after quite a lot of head-scratching. but as I do know one real nice Scottish beer - Golden Pomise.

I would have thought a keen walker would have known such Scottish beers as Red Cuillin or Harviestoun's Schiehallion. Someday I'll have to move nearer home to finish off the rest of the Munro's - 17 down, only 260 (?) mountains to go.

Nick Water's bungee jump piece attracted a number of responses, mostly of a very similar nature...

Brad W Foster, POB 165246, Irving, TX 75016, USA

As far as stepping out into space to bounce on the end of a rope, no, I think I can get along fine without inflicting a near-death experience on myself.



Dale Speirs, Box 6930, Calgary, Alberta, Canada, TP2 2E7

Nick Walters' vertigo is more extreme than mine, which is why I can compliment him on his bungee jump, something I won't do. Being a flatlander born and raised on the Canadian prairies, I get nervous walking out in the mountains along some canyon trail but not so that I'm paralyzed. In my day job with the Calgary Parks Dept. I've done a lot of tree pruning on a double-boom aerial bucket truck (we would be looking down on a 10-story building roof). As long as the buckets are in the trees I was okay, but when we swung over the open road, I would keep my eyes fixed firmly on the distant horizon. I came to the conclusion that what I feared was not the heights but edges. I can climb a tall tree to any height with no problem as long as I have my safety lanyard on the trunk, but would never lean out over a highrise balcony. I often sit on mountaintops in the Rockies and admire the view, but to walk along the rim of a rill canyon not 10 metres deep gives me the shakes. I watch the bungee jumpers from the ground but refuse to think myself any less a man because I won't pay good money to step out into space. So a tip of the cowboy hat to Nick for his courage.

Gary Wilkinson

Bungee Jumping: Very, very evocative – gave me vertigo just reading it. Well I've watched it and after a near death experience many years ago I think that's the way it's going to remain for the foreseeable future. The story goes like this: Safety bar pops on very rickety British seaside roller-coaster at the top of the first downhill – I spend the rest of the ride, half out of seat, hanging on for grim death. General avoidance of all fairground rides ever since.

Steve Jeffery

I share Nick's nervousness about being on anything higher than my own shoulders, and definitely anything, like ladders, scaffolding or that wire mesh platform decking that allows you to look down through it to the ground.

Some time last year the big chimney at the place I was working on Tyneside needed one of its periodic checks to make sure bits of it didn't fall off and brain anyone 200 ft below. (I don't know the exact height, but I do know the Anzon works chimney is a landmark that can be seen from the Metro railway line a good couple of miles away.) So for a few days they got in some steeplejacks and started to put ladders up one side. Occasionally I would come out and watch in horror as some lunatic perched just below the top on a wobbly plank supported by a couple of bits of rope while seagulls were playing tag below him in 20 or 30 mph winds along the Tyne.

Lloyd Penney

No heights for me. No bungee, either. And, I live on the 17th floor of my building. Go figure. At least, I'm standing still, and I can stand behind the brick facing of our balcony. Many years ago at the Worldcon in Atlanta in 1986, the main con hotel was an atrium hotel, forty-odd stories from bottom to lofty top. After scaling several elevators, we arrived on the top floor...and I couldn't get near the edge to peer over. Just couldn't do it. Yes, Yvonne, we're waaaaay up, I'll take your word for it...

Ron Bennett, 36 Harlow Park Crescent, Harrogate, North Yorkshire, HG2 0AW

An excellent report on bungee jumping by Nick Walters that filled me with increasing terror as I read line by line. I'm far from being a height person myself. Two rungs up the kitchen step-ladder are quite enough, thank you, and the only time I can think of a high place with pleasure is the Eiffel Tower (from where my daughter at one time launched a tomato sauce bottle, as family legend has it) from which I once watched a soccer match take place on the far side of the Seine. It was impossible to see the ball and only diminutive blue and red dots were discernible. It was, however, possible to tell when a goal kick was being taken. Doesn't it make your day to know all that?



A very good PloktaCon report by Tony Berry who has a nice line in cold sarcasm. Wish I'd known about the affair. This is the second report I've read, and with the first I was half-thinking this might have been a fannish ploy and the event hadn't actually taken place.

All that changes department. I'm fascinated by this Swedish Death Wish concoction. Back in the early sixties, at the '63 Peterborough Convention I seem to remember, German fandom introduced a pale-green blow-your-head-off drink called Verguz that they'd made themselves and were actually marketing in tall conical bottles. There's nothing new under the bar counter.

From fanhistory it's an easy hop, skip and jump segue to Mark Plummer.

Mark Plummer, 14 Northway Rd, Croydon, Surrey, CR0 6JE

It started with me feeling vaguely upbeat as I began reading Christina on "The Myth of the British Fanzine Convention", and I was all ready to leap in and confirm that the expectation of fan programming at Paragon was not unwarranted. And then I got to the final paragraph and "It was not till 2Kon that I realised the futility of it all".

Oh.

So, shall we all pack up and go home now, before we've even left home and unpacked? And then you mention the fan room at the 1989 Jersey Eastercon which "forced us [you and Lilian] to the conclusion that Eastercon fan programmes are a waste of time".

Oh.

Well, if it's any consolation at this late stage, I rather liked the 1989 fan programme. I seem to recall watching a fair few items there over the course of the weekend, and for me it somehow became the default programme stream. Of course, things being what they are, I can't remember that many specific items at this remove: the late night fannish sex panel you mention (inevitably); a fanzine review panel; a

fanhistorical item...OK, probably only the first filled the room but most other items had at least a respectable audience.

And while I think of it - working on the principle of that it's never too late to show your appreciation - I thought it was a good idea having copies of contemporary fanzines with a specific connection to the convention (your and Lilian's *Caprician* #3(?) and Avedon and Rob's back-to-back double) freely available, especially for people like me who never quite believed this idea you could actually just send a polite enquiry and a few stamps to get the things in the mail.

There you go. At least one punter didn't think it was a waste of time. Probably should have told you before.

Yes, anyway, we intend to soldier on with a fan programme and a fan room for Paragon.

Mark's letter provides me with one of the first moments of disquiet about co-editing a zine. On receiving it I had to rush back to Christina's original article and re-read what she'd written. True, it does end in a rather downbeat fashion, and this somehow escaped me during the previous readings. The idea was to write up a conversation held between the two of us trying to figure out if Britain could support a regular fanzine convention a la Corflu. Our discussion remained un-resolved although we seemed to decide that if there was no support for a regular UK Corflu-like gathering in the immediate future then a regular fannish stream at Eastercon or a heavily fandom-orientated Novacon would do, which while not ideal would keep the both of us happy. Then 2Kon happened. Christina admits that the pessimistic tone of her piece was probably brought about by last year's Eastercon. The Glasgow Eastercon disappointed me quite badly too, everything from the hotel, the lack of programming, just about everything. However I felt it proved more than ever there is a definitive need for a fan programming on a regular basis.

To me the fan-room means more than a stream of alternative programming. It provides the arena for having serious discussion about fandom (TAFF, fanzines, whatever) and for laughing at ourselves. But more importantly, it provides a base of operations for my convention weekend. Nearly everyone I know will pass through thereat some point, and it provides a great place to hang out between items if you're bored of the bar. Good conventions, big or small (like Plokta.con) work 'cause they make the whole place feel like the fan room.

If we caused any offence to yourself or the rest of the Paragon fan-room team, I am deeply sorry. That is not the intention that we had publishing it. Maybe we'll talk about this more over a couple of malts at Hinkley.

Speaking of Hinkley, the last word goes to Eric Lindsey...

Eric Lindsey, eric@wrevenge.com.au

I wish someone would explain to me the difference between Blackpool (which I've heard of) and Hinkley (which I haven't), and why this is important. I guess after attending it will become clear.

Other Business

Thanks to all who wrote...lack of space means this column was severely edited down. Sorry guys but that's the way the page count goes sometimes.

Wahf **Pamela Boal** (thanks for the Suffering Bastard recipe), **Araya, Jenny Steele, Damien Warman** and big Buffy fan **Joseph Nicholas**. I can reveal just for **Lloyd Penney** that I did find my trousers eventually (or Christina did rather).

Brad W Foster also confirms that the League of Gentlemen has finally made it over the Atlantic. Maybe it's time for me to do another issue of **The Roundabout Zoo** then?

- Doug

Credits

Head! No. 3 comes to you from the Spaced minds of Doug Bell and Christina Lake. It is available in exchange for letters of comment, fanzines, artwork, cool e-mails, software for Palm Pilot clones, cycling underpants, cocktails and obscure Belgium beers.

To contact us, write to:

12 Hatherley Road
Bishopston
Bristol
BS7 8QA

E-mail: head@headwest.fsnet.co.uk.

Art credits, this issue go to Brad Foster for his completely spontaneous cover submission (thanks Brad!) and Ken Shinn (p.9) for more products of his misspent youth in front of a TV set.

Next issue:

All the news from Paragon, New Zealand's Tim Jones talks music and the return of Dick - sorry I mean Nick - Walters!

March 2001

