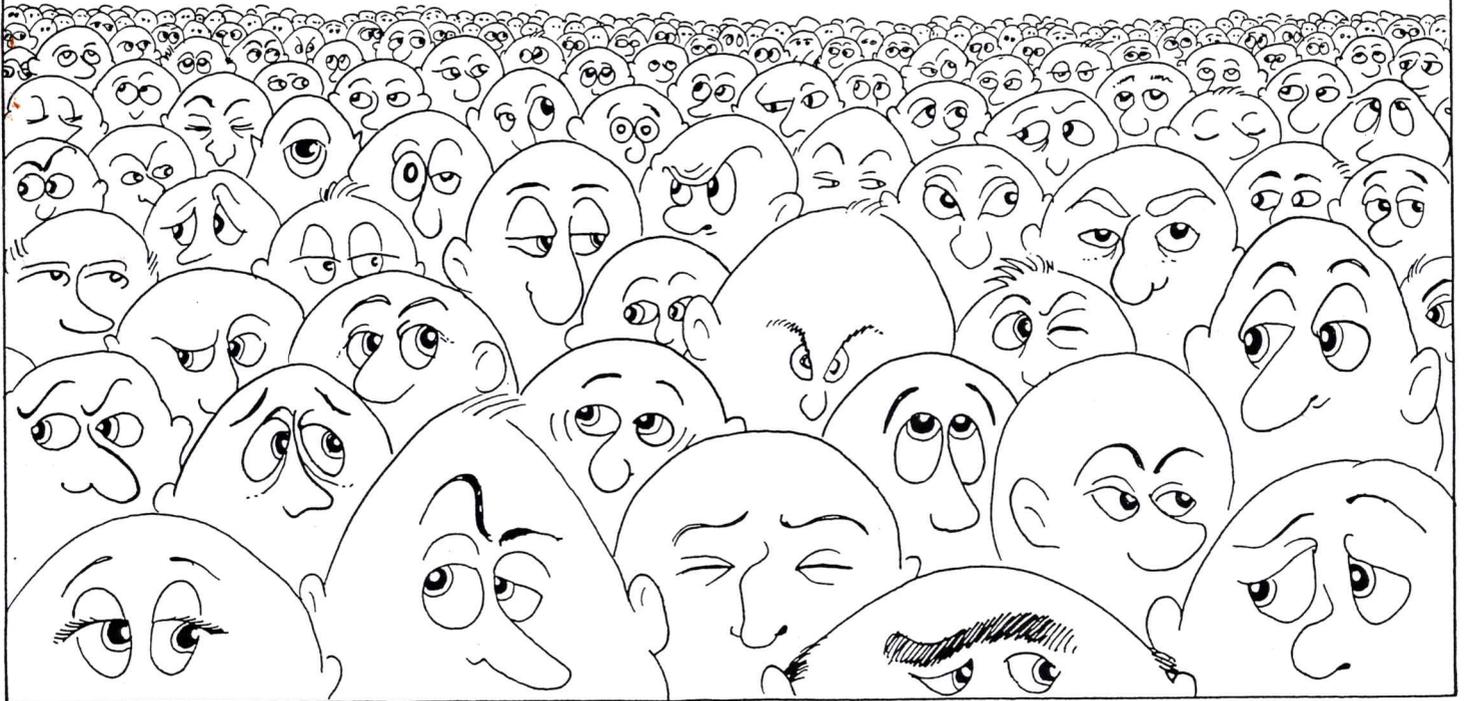


FEAR



©brad w. foster • 2001

Welcome to yet another late fanzine, known round these parts as Head! #4. It's a bit different looking and slightly fatter than the last time you saw it - (a bit like all your old friends if you're attending a con for the first time in years).

First up, the brand new layout. The old one was far too complicated and unwieldy, and left Christina wanting to hit the computer rather a lot. We think this one is better, easier to use and hopefully easier to read. We're still experimenting, so it may change in the near future but anything we now change will be mere tweaking. The revamp was prompted by the timely arrival of Pagemaker in our home. The previous DTP (Greenstreet Publisher), we got free off a PC mag, and let's just say it had the sort of usability you'd expect, well, from something that you'd got free off the front of a PC mag. Now that we've made the changeover, we should be able to pub our ish a bit more frequently, and who knows, maybe it'll have the added benefit of getting Victor to shut the fuck up about Head's layout?

Out of necessity we've gone for the bumper summer fun size issue. Alright, it's now nearly November but we did intend to get this out in the summer, honest. Once again fate, or more accurately work and laziness, got in the way. (Novacon has provided that much needed deadline to spark some energy into our lifeless fannish corpses). Consequently, all those folks who've said they'd like to contribute to the evolving Head gestalt (or even just the fanzine) got their acts together long before we did. Hence the scary realisation that we're rapidly approaching Banana Wings size. To compensate, we've dropped the fanzine reviews this issue - partly due to lack of space and partly due to a drought of zines over the past six months. That was until last week when a *Plokta*, *Tortoise* and the latest Yvonne Rowse zine fell through our postbox almost together. Is it late October by any chance?

So what have we got in this ish then? Not

one but three convention reports. D West returned from the Eastercon in Hinckley - his first in years - shellshocked by the reality of modern fandom and with a whole host of new faces to add to his wicked cartoons on fannish life.

We also welcome back Bristol's very own Nick Walters. Nick last appeared in Head with the stomach-churning account of bungee jumping. This time he's returns with a less dangerous report from the front lines - conventioning in LA. Christina relives scenic Seccon for those who were too drunk to remember it or were too afraid go on the offchance their friends might hear that they'd *paid* to spend a weekend in Swindon.

How do you carefully craft a link between Swindon and Middle Earth? The answer, with difficulty! I've been staring at the screen for the last 15 minutes trying to work one out. Somehow I don't really think that the roundabouts of Swindon compare to the White Mountains or Rivendell, although I'm sure they fitted into some deranged town planners vision of a fantastic landscape. Anyway I digress, we have great pleasure in bringing you a frontline report from New Zealand on the filming of Lord of the Rings. contributed by Tim Jones, long time fan and now published author (Tim's first collection of short stories *Extreme Weather Events* is available to order online from Horizon Bookshop.)

The names Ounsley, Crump and West should be familiar to most of our readers. They really need little or no introduction from a youngster like me. Although I will say the thought of Pete flying a jet fighter after seeing him captain a pedallo in Amsterdam is...frightening.

About Toilet Hats I know not what to say. Arriving out of the blue into our inbox, I'll leave it up to you to work out what Spencer J Ostraczki II is on about.

Oh yes and then there's the small matter of a sports column in an SF fanzine, hmmm.

That's about it, enjoy.

Doug.

We kick off this issue with Simon Ounsley's election time close encounter with the man currently known to the world at large as George W's right hand man in the battle against the forces of evil, and to the AA as "Saddam Hussein - Twat" (according to those savvy guys at Have I Got News for You!)

Face to Face
by Simon Ounsley

I met Tony Blair and I don't think I can handle it. I'm in some sort of post-traumatic state in which I keep running it over again and again in my mind. If only I'd said this, if only I'd said that. If only I'd had a custard pie in my hand...

OK, so I don't like Tony Blair. I really resent the fact that he took over the Labour party and turned it into the Tory party Mark 2. I'm annoyed that he refused to raise the taxes needed to halt the decline in the National Health Service and other public services, and I'm sick at heart that he has turned the screw of financial pressure on the sick and disabled even more than the Tories did. When he comes on the TV, I like to turn it off. I used to feel the same about Margaret Thatcher.

When I say things like that, people often tell me I'm being unfair. And it's certainly true that "Blair's Mother" (as an idiosyncratic doctor whom Chris and I see likes to term the "Iron Lady") was guilty of far worse atrocities than the present government, but I think you have to compare performance with expectation. It is, after all, the role of the Tory party to be right wing and horrible. That's what they're there for. I don't expect anything else. Even when William Hague allows the Tories to drift into outright racism, I find it difficult to get as annoyed about him as I do about Tony Blair. You've got to remember it is the job of the Tories to be more right wing than Labour – and these days that's not an easy thing to do.

The Labour party, on the other hand, are supposed to be compassionate. They're supposed to be nice and warm and fluffy. They're supposed to act like Tony Blair looks. And that's why what has happened is such a betrayal.

Not that I had any of this seething about in my brain that Tuesday lunchtime – a mere two days ago as I write this – as we made our way to the West Yorkshire Playhouse for the regular monthly meeting of the Leeds & District ME Group. This is the patient support group which I help to run for people who have ME

(also known as CFS or CFIDS in the States) and we always meet at the Playhouse café in the centre of Leeds on the third Tuesday of the month. We usually give a lift to one of our members who has a blue badge, which entitles her, and therefore us, to free parking in the designated disabled places. These are closer to the Playhouse than the main car park so there isn't as far to walk. On this occasion, though, we arrived to find that the disabled parking area had been barricaded off and the place was swarming with police. Either there'd been a murder here or a politician was coming.

As we were in the middle of the general election campaign, the "politician" theory seemed the most likely, and the relaxed expressions on the policemen's faces seemed to confirm this.

"I bet it's Tony Blair," I said, and Chris, who is less shy and much more nosy than I am, went to ask the police if it was him. They seemed to be taken aback at her question and said that they weren't allowed to tell us, but one of them gave a theatrical wink.

"It isn't Tony Blair," he said. "Oh no, it isn't Tony Blair."

So now we knew...

"Go across to the market and get some tomatoes, Simon," said Chris, whose view on our prime minister is similar to my own. The police seemed to find this very amusing. They were here to stop people throwing eggs, they told us, but tomatoes weren't any problem. They, of course, have their own reasons for not liking Tony Blair.

Inside the Playhouse, there were lots of guys with red badges flapping about but the far end of the café, where we usually sit, seemed quiet enough. So we sat down and waited for people to come. Our monthly meetings are advertised as "a chance for an informal chat in relaxed surroundings" but those of us on the committee tend to find them

anything but relaxed. There are usually some new people who come along wanting help and reassurance. Often they've been ignored by doctors for months or years as their health has declined. Now they've at last found out that they have (or might have) ME and they're wondering what the future holds. They're needy, and it isn't enough for us just to grunt and talk about the weather.

Today there's a guy who's been struggling for months to get incapacity benefit. He's made the mistake of taking the application form at face value. The form asks questions like "Can you walk a hundred yards?" and "Can you pick up a sack of potatoes?" Most people with ME can do these things once. The problem comes when we try to do them repeatedly. We don't have stamina. We get very, very tired very easily. If there was a job which only required us to pick up a sack of potatoes once a day, we could manage it. But in the real world repeated tasks are required, which is why so many of us are not able to work.

To be perfectly fair, the Department of Social Security recognise that stamina is the problem with ME and they instruct their examining doctors to take this into account. Even so, if a person fills in the form and declares in all innocence that yes, they can do these various tasks on the form (even though they know they can only do them once or twice before they become exhausted) it is very likely that they will be denied benefit. That is what has happened to the guy at the meeting today. And, having once been denied benefit, he has had to go before a tribunal to try to get it back. He has been subjected to months of unremitting stress, worrying about his financial situation, and this has made his condition worse.

Tribunals are forbidding affairs. Many of the people who attend them are daunted when they go and see their own doctor, let alone being forced to appear before three strange doctors who have between them the power to make or break their financial future. Those who are knowledgeable enough to realise that there are places such as the Citizens Advice Bureau where they can go for

advice usually manage to get a welfare rights worker to help them at the tribunal but shortage of funds means that this is not always possible. In the case of the guy today – Bill, I shall call him – he took a representative along with him, but for no very good reason the chairman of the tribunal refused to allow the representative to speak, so Bill had to put his case for himself after all – which is a bit like appearing in court without a barrister.

This is all too often the way of the system. With ME, as with various other conditions, the extent of incapacity cannot be determined by medical examination, so sick, vulnerable, and often inarticulate people have to convince people in authority by the power of their own argument that they are ill. This is a test not of incapacity for work but of sharpness of wits. The system is supposed to root out scroungers but such people are much more likely to be articulate and wily enough to say what is needed to get themselves the money than someone who is weary, bewildered, and too ill to be able to express themselves clearly.

Doctors are paid handsomely for examining patients and appearing at tribunals on behalf of the DSS. The system is costing a great deal of money and failing to root out the scroungers. All it is doing is causing distress to people like Bill.

"I want to work," he tells me. "I really need to get back to work. But the illness is just getting worse – all the stress from the DSS is making me sicker than ever."

Tony Blair's government came to power with a pledge to improve the welfare system. During the consultation process, I wrote to the DSS on behalf of our group to say, in part, what I have said above. I received acknowledgement of receipt but that is all. I also wrote to the twelve MPs in our area, all of them Labour, and most of them did not even bother to acknowledge my letter. And the outcome of it all is that rather than improve the system, the government have simply added an additional interview with the DSS that sick people have to attend, reduced entitlement so that many of those who try to struggle on by working part time for several years will now be denied benefit altogether, and reduced the amount of benefit for those who have

some other source of income. The impact which these measures will have on the total cost of the welfare state is relatively minor but the impact on the lives of sick and vulnerable people can be devastating.

Would Tony Blair's visit to Leeds give me an opportunity to try to bring these problems to his attention? Nick, who runs our web site, went across to the men in red badges and made them aware of our presence. He was told that Blair might come across and see us. What would I do if he did, I wondered? I decided I could do a lot worse than point him at Bill and hope that this would make him realise that the government was spending a lot of money on a system whose main effect was to make people even more ill than they were already.

And yet Blair did not appear. Bill left by and by and the time eventually came for the end of our meeting. I was partly disappointed and partly relieved. Talking to Blair would have been nerve-shattering. It was much easier just to go home and leave the battle unfought. What the hell chance did I have of changing anything anyway? And, in retrospect, it was very unlikely that Blair would have deliberately sought out such a potential political banana skin as an ME support group in any case – certainly not in the middle of a general election campaign.

So we packed up our stuff and left. I would normally have been totally shattered by this time, but the possibility of being confronted with Blair had kept the adrenaline flowing and my brain was still in relative working order by the time we left the front door of the Playhouse.

All we should have had to do now was to walk across to the car park and go home. But the police had other ideas. Extra barricades had now been erected, which meant that we weren't able to get across to the car park until Blair had arrived and entered the building. Apparently, what we should have done was to go out of the back door of the Playhouse and round to the car park that way – only no one had bothered to tell us. And now that we were out here, the police said, we wouldn't even be allowed to go back into the building - so our only choice was to go right round the back of the Playhouse, which would involve a walk of some five to ten minutes. The person with the blue badge told the

police that she would have a great deal of difficulty in walking that far but they only seemed to find the situation amusing. Well, we could always wait until Blair had arrived, they told us. And how long would that be, we asked? They didn't know, but he was an hour late already. All in all, it was just tough shit on us...

All we could do was to walk round the building.

I was fuming now. Bloody Blair! Injustice piled upon injustice – and the attitude of the police had been despicable. To barricade off the disabled parking area so that disabled people had to use the main car park and so have further to go had been bad enough, but to make them go all this way was appalling. I sounded off loudly about it all as we walked round the building, not even sure of the way, walking very slowly because of our friend. Eventually, when we managed to find our way through the maze and ended up back at the front of the building, we were just in time to see a brace of Jags pulling up at the main doors.

Blair had arrived at last.

Curiosity drew us to the barricades and we saw Blair getting out of his car to cheers and applause, walking towards the Playhouse door, shaking hands with the staff.

"That'll be it," I said to Chris. "The whole thing will be stage-managed. None of the staff will dare to say anything negative and he won't come across to the barricades to meet any real people."

But it turned out that I was wrong. Perhaps encouraged by the applause, Blair suddenly turned and came across the forecourt, making his way almost directly to where we were standing. The guy beside us had been cheering and was now leaning across the barricades, eager to meet his hero. Chris drew back, proclaiming in a rather loud voice that she didn't want to shake hands with Tony Blair, thank you very much. I could have done the same but the idea that I might be able to speak to him and voice dissent in some way kept me in place.

It all happened so fast. The guy beside me called out "Welcome to Leeds, Mr Blair!"

and told Tony to keep up the good work, and a moment later, Blair had moved on and was standing in front of me with his hand stretched out in greeting. Time seemed to slow down. It seemed to me that I stood there an age, trying to work out whether to take the offered hand or not. I wanted to voice my annoyance, but this was an option which no longer seemed to exist. Words seemed to have fled and only feelings remained. All I could do was to either shake Blair's hand or turn away.

All this time, what was happening? Was I staring in disbelief or glaring in fury? I could have been doing either, and my expression was probably somewhere between the two. But disbelief was certainly in there somewhere. You see, it wasn't the same for you as it is for me. You're reading an article about someone else meeting Tony Blair, and you've known from the start that it's going to happen. From my point of view, it was me, Simon, meeting Tony Blair – me myself I, the person whose body I live in – and that is something which is altogether more unlikely. I felt as though I'd been sitting in the cinema and had walked into the screen. And yet all along I'd been part of the plot. The man who was standing in front of me now was able to make decisions about the concerns I'd been discussing just a short while before. In a way, it seemed the most natural thing in the world that I should go from that meeting into this one, from hearing about the problem into confronting the man who had the solution within his grasp. And yet, for some reason or other, this seemed to be a silent movie. There weren't any words. There was only whether to shake the offered hand or turn away. And the question was there in Blair's eyes as he held out his hand, waiting for me to decide.

If it had been Margaret Thatcher standing there in front of me, it would have been so much easier. I could have happily given a sneer and turned away. But, when push came to shove, it was clear that I didn't hate Blair as much as I'd hated Thatcher. After all, his government had done some good things along with the bad, hadn't it? I can't for the life of me think what they are right now but I'm sure he's done them. Surely I owed him

common courtesy at the very least, the same as I might extend to a stranger I met in the street...

So I did it. I reached out my arm and shook the offered hand.

I suppose, all in all, it had been quite brave of him to hang on in there, especially since, in my doubt and confusion, I must have been looking very much like a crazed axe murderer. But I suppose they teach you at political school that if you hold your hand out long enough, even a crazy will take it (as long as he's left his axe at home) and I don't suppose it looks too good if you're the one to take your hand away, in case you do it at the wrong moment and it looks like you, the politician, are being rude.

And sure enough, his persistence paid off and there he was shaking my hand and smiling. It was a smile which came from his eyes as well as his face. "There you are," those eyes seemed to be saying, "I'm a nice guy really, aren't I? You love me really don't you? I really, really want to be liked and you're not going to let me down now, are you?"

I've often wondered how a guy who, as far as I can tell, doesn't seem to be much damned use in an argument, got to be prime minister – and now I know. Who could ever let down old Tony? It would be like biting the head off your favourite Teddy Bear.

And yet, as he moved away, I remember thinking how hard and rubbery that hand had been, as though it had been the skin of a lizard instead of flesh. For a moment, I found myself wondering if David Icke was right after all. But then I realised that Blair's skin had probably just got hard from all the handshakes...

Then I heard a loud voice behind me. "My God!" cried Chris. "Simon shook Blair's hand. I won't be able to touch him ever again!"

And I realised in that moment what had happened. I had been duped by a politician. All my anger had been swept aside and the only gesture I had been able to make was to shake the hand of a man I detested.

I wasn't going to let him get away with it. I found my voice at last. I allowed the anger to speak. Blair was already too far away for any kind of proper discussion, so there was only one thing I could think of to say...

"Because of your visit," I announced in a loud voice, "they closed off the disabled parking



spaces. People have had to walk all the way round!"

He was walking away from me as I spoke, but he turned to reply.

"I'm sorry about that," he said, and then a slight pause: "I'm really sorry about that!"

I have no doubt he was. It made for a very embarrassing moment. For all I know he was really, really sorry, but there and then I couldn't have cared less. There was too much other anger inside me. All I could do was to stand and glare. Then I glared at the minders, who glared back at me. They probably thought I'd been sent by Tory Party Central Office.

We watched the news that night but I didn't appear. I don't think Blair had been scheduled to come across to us crazies at the barricades (no doubt he was scolded for it later) and because of that the TV cameras weren't in place. I'd created the kind of awkward moment that the Labour party election machine exists to avoid, but it didn't make the TV news so it didn't really happen. The next day a woman in a hospital that Blair visited had a go at him about the NHS

and the news covered it. She succeeded where I failed. All well and good. I can't decide whether I'm proud of my outburst or ashamed of it. It would have been much more tasteful and sophisticated just to back away from the barricades the way that Chris did. But, having shaken the bugger's hand, I think I would have been even more annoyed with myself if I'd said nothing.

On the other hand, it was hardly Blair's fault that the police behaved like insensitive bastards. So much crap in the country is his responsibility but not the particular crap I rubbed his nose in.

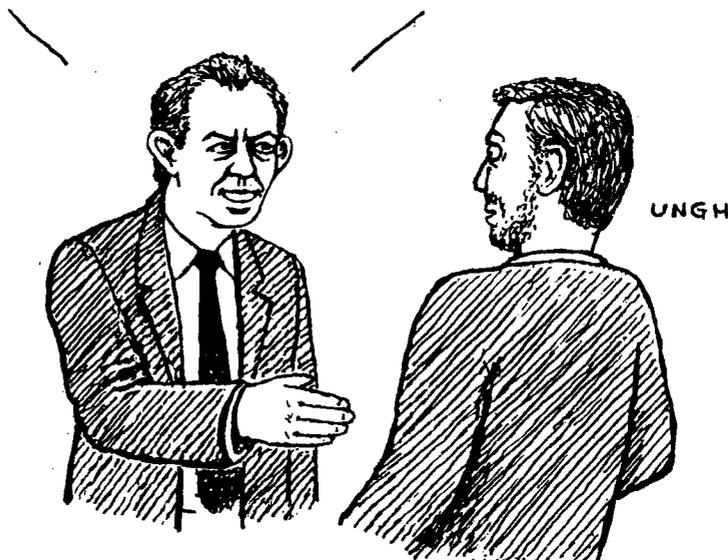
All I can hope, I suppose, is that he and his minders might take an interest in what the police do in future: "Give us tight security but don't annoy any cripples!"

Tight security though – what a laugh! In spite of sending us round to the car park via John O'Groats, there were no police anywhere near us when I shook Blair's hand. I could have knifed the poor bugger in the chest if I'd felt so inclined. In fact it occurs to me

SIMON! I THOUGHT
YOUR LAST ISSUE WAS
REALLY TERRIFIC!

MOST
SINCERELY

AND I DO HOPE
YOU'LL BE VOTING
NEW LABOUR!



how easy it would have been to end up in jail. As annoyed and confused as I was when he suddenly loomed up in front of me, there was an outside chance (about one in a hundred) that I might have punched him on the nose before I realised what I was doing.

I suppose what I'm left with, more than anything, is a feeling of inadequacy. I had my chance and all I could do was rant. I might as well have been complaining that my cat had got run over or that the dustbins hadn't been emptied last week. I was just another of those Mr Angrys who are strewn like banana skins across the campaign trail.

People have said to me that I did very well to manage to say anything at all: that I hardly had chance, there at the barricades, to start talking about the complexities of incapacity benefit. And yet I keep playing the

meeting over and over again in my mind. The memory torments me. It's partly just natural English embarrassment at having created "a scene", but there's also a feeling of an opportunity missed. I know it's bloody ridiculous and that a politician on the campaign trail has no more connection with real life than candy floss castles in the sky, but I guess it's the idealist in me, or the perfectionist – or maybe just the idiot – that believes that it may after all have been possible to make some kind of difference in the space of a handshake. That if I had managed to somehow communicate to Tony Blair what a damaging waste of money the DSS system of medical examinations really is, he would have tried to do something about it. That I had my chance the other day and I blew it. That I came face to face with a miracle, and failed to do my bit to bring it into being.

Tolkein's classic 'Lord of the Rings' begins with the sleepy backwater, The Shire is disrupted by forces beyond the Hobbits control. Head's New Zealand correspondent Tim Jones empathises with our furry-footed friends...

Twas in the Depths of Mordor
by Tim Jones

Twas in the darkest depths of Mordor
I met a girl so fair
But Gollum and the Evil One
Crept up and slipped away with her-er
Her-er
Her, yeah

(Led Zeppelin, "Ramble On")

It wasn't in the depths of Mordor that I first beheld Arwen Undómiel, but the weather would have done justice to the dead marshes at Sauron's gates. A thin cold air was blowing across the Basin Reserve, which (lest the name itself not make this obvious) is Wellington's international cricket ground. New Zealand were playing Australia, and as usual in men's cricket, New Zealand were in trouble. I took my seat at the northern end, well rugged up and prepared for disappointment, and settled back to watch the play. After a few minutes, I noticed that a steady stream

of young girls were making their way to a cloaked figure seated a few rows below me and asking her for autographs. "Do you know who that is?" I asked the man sitting nearest to me. "We've been wondering the same thing ourselves," he replied. "We think it might be Anna Paquin."

But I wasn't convinced. Anna Paquin, Wellington-born star of "The Piano", "X-Men" etc. was living in the US if my mental showbiz map was up to date. "I think it might be Liv Tyler," I whispered back. And it was. Accompanied by Bernard Hill (Theoden) and her boyfriend, bass player in a British band playing in Wellington that weekend [can't remember which band — not Radiohead, Portishead, or Medicine Head, anyway], the woman who would give up her immortality to marry Aragorn was spending an afternoon at the cricket. She picked a good day for it, too, despite the weather — after the usual clatter of New Zealand wickets, Chris Cairns, he of the flowing locks and mighty

thews, smote the Australian bowling hither and yon on his way to a rapid century. It made no difference to the result, but even in bitter defeat the memories were glorious. By the time I left the ground, Arwen Evenstar and her party had already departed, leaving behind only empty chip pottles, Coke cans, and blessed memories of Elvenhome.

I live five minutes' walk from the Basin Reserve, so I probably have more opportunities to watch cricket than Liv Tyler does. When you've seen enough of the play, or stumps have been pulled, walk out the northern gates, turn right, and go straight uphill towards the Mt Victoria ridge. Just as your legs start to give out, you'll reach our place. We live about fifty yards from the top of the street, and we walk up there quite often, because where the street ends begins the Town Belt, a narrow but quite convincing strip of forest clinging to either side of the long ridge that slopes down from Mt Victoria to the north, and runs all the way to the southern coast at Island Bay. Some of the forest is regenerating native bush, some is introduced pine forest planted in the mid-20th century. It is gloomy beneath the pines, and when the wind blows the treetops whisper together of ancient wrongs. Something has made tracks, but they start and stop unexpectedly, and it takes a steady head and a stout heart to follow their many twists and turns without becoming hopelessly lost.

Even better, there's a quarry above the top of Ellice St. Not a "Blake's 7"-style gravel pit, but a real hard rock quarry, abandoned about the same time the trees were planted, with towering walls clad here in twisted bramble, there in flowering creeper, and twisted trees overhanging the top and sides. What with the forest, the quarry, and some judicious post-production, you could film a movie there, and Peter Jackson was faced with filming three movies back to back.

As noted by Doug in *Head #3*, Jackson, who first came to fame with the low budget (NZ \$30,000) splatter-comedy film *Bad Taste*, was the director chosen by Harvey Weinstein of Miramax to take on the daunting task of directing a film adaptation of *Lord of the Rings*. Unlike Ralph Bakshi's abortive 1978 version, which used rotoscoping over live actors to produce a crude form of animation, the Jackson produc-

tion combines live action with the state-of-the-art effects and post-production developed over the years by Peter Jackson and his cohorts.

And, with the whole of the country to chose from, filming started in the forest near our quarry and ended a year later, in December 2000, in the quarry itself. In between, sets were built and filming done all over New Zealand — inland Canterbury for Edoras, the rolling hills of the Waikato for Hobbiton, the North Island volcanic plateau for Mordor, another quarry in Lower Hutt for Helm's Deep.

In contrast to the saturation coverage which attended the announcement of the project and the arrivals of its stars in Wellington, the actual filming was characterised by a secrecy bordering on paranoia. The first we knew that filming had started was when my son Gareth and I went for a walk to the top of the ridge above the quarry and discovered that tracks normally reserved for walkers had been scoured by ATVs (all-terrain vehicles — take a motorbike and give it four wheels, and you've got the general idea). Three portaloos had been installed next to Alexandra Road, which runs along the ridgeline. The game was afoot. The *Evening Post* newspaper — for whom the Arts reporter is Tom Cardy, which name may still ring a bell with some readers of this fanzine — told us a few days later what had been happening, but by then we'd also seen the horse-droppings, and were not surprised to learn that a small party of hobbits had been picking their way on horseback through the twisted forest, take after take after take. Peter Jackson likes to get things right.

In the next twelve months, *Lord of the Rings* was everywhere. Stars buying houses for the duration of the shoot pushed up house prices in the eastern suburbs, handy to Jackson's studios, to ridiculous levels; Gandalf (Sir Ian McKellen) was a judge for Mr Gay Wellington; a couple of the hobbits were refused entry to a nightclub because they were underage; the original Aragorn was sacked and a replacement had to be found. The *Evening Post* turned its banning from the sets into a long sequence of stories about its efforts, with the aid of various unofficial LoTR

websites, to ferret out unauthorised information. The quarry was briefly used for some second-unit shots of horses picking their way over uneven ground, but there wasn't much to see that time.

So, when we got a notice in our mailbox to say that the Three Foot Six Limited film company would be filming in the quarry for three days in late December 2000, and that our cooperation as affected residents would be appreciated, I didn't think this would lead to great viewing opportunities. Gareth was attending morning kindergarten, and on the Monday, apart from asking a truck to move so I could get the car out, filming had little impact on us. On the Tuesday, when we got home from the kindy, Gareth said he wanted to go and look at the filming. "I'm sure they won't let us see anything," I said, but we walked to the top of the street anyway.

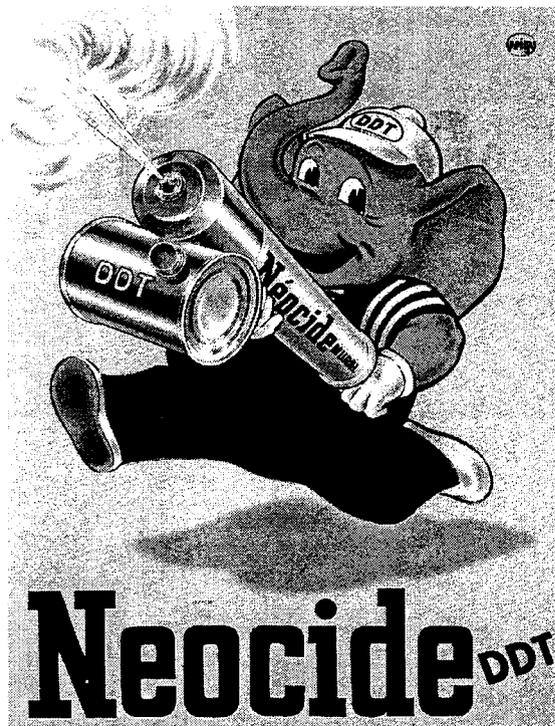
To be met by a guard. I was all ready to turn away when he said "Would you and the little boy like to see the filming?" We said we would, and he led us up to the quarry floor. A trench had been cut in it, and the riders of Rohan were riding their horses down the trench, around a tent, and then back up onto the quarry floor. They did it once. They did it again. We watched them do it, then we went home, happy and surprised.

On Wednesday, the last scheduled day of filming, it rained all day. Thursday dawned fine, and Gareth and I decided that we'd walk home together from his kindy — a half-hour walk up the Hataitai side of the ridge and down the Mt Victoria side. Quite a walk for a four-year-old, but he has strong legs. Walking over to the kindy to get him, I saw activity at the quarry, but thought this was preparations to dismantle the set. Forty-five minutes later, however, as Gareth and I climbed down the path to the side of the quarry, it was plain that filming was continuing. Still, we needed to get home, and I didn't intend to take the long way round. I said as much to the first security guard we saw, and he assured me we wouldn't have to. "Just walk quietly, please." So we did, and stopped when the action started, and saw a bearded gentleman — I won't be sure who till I see the

films — stare straight at us and say "Six thousand spear — it's not enough." "It'll do fine," I wanted to tell him, but I kept my mouth shut.

That was almost it. They did pack up the next day, and dismantled the artificial forest they'd made under the quarry walls, and eventually filled in the trench and reseeded the grass so that the quarry floor could resume its former role as a dog exercise area and occasional venue for family cricket games. (Easy, though, to lose the ball beneath the brambles.) Filming was over, and the stars went home. The films are in post-production now, and "The Fellowship of the Ring" is scheduled to open on December 19. I probably won't be invited to the premiere, but Kay and I will be there as soon as we can. We think Gareth might be a bit young for it yet; he might have to wait till the video comes out.

Gareth and I still walk in the Town Belt. The horseshit has been trampled underfoot by now, and the paths have mostly resumed their former shape, but there are still one or two places where the scouring of the land is obvious. One day, I expect, we'll see the glint of gold and bend down to find a little ring, the least of rings, lying forsaken by the path. We'll drive out to Seatoun and drop it off at Peter Jackson's studios, if the guard will let us through the gate.

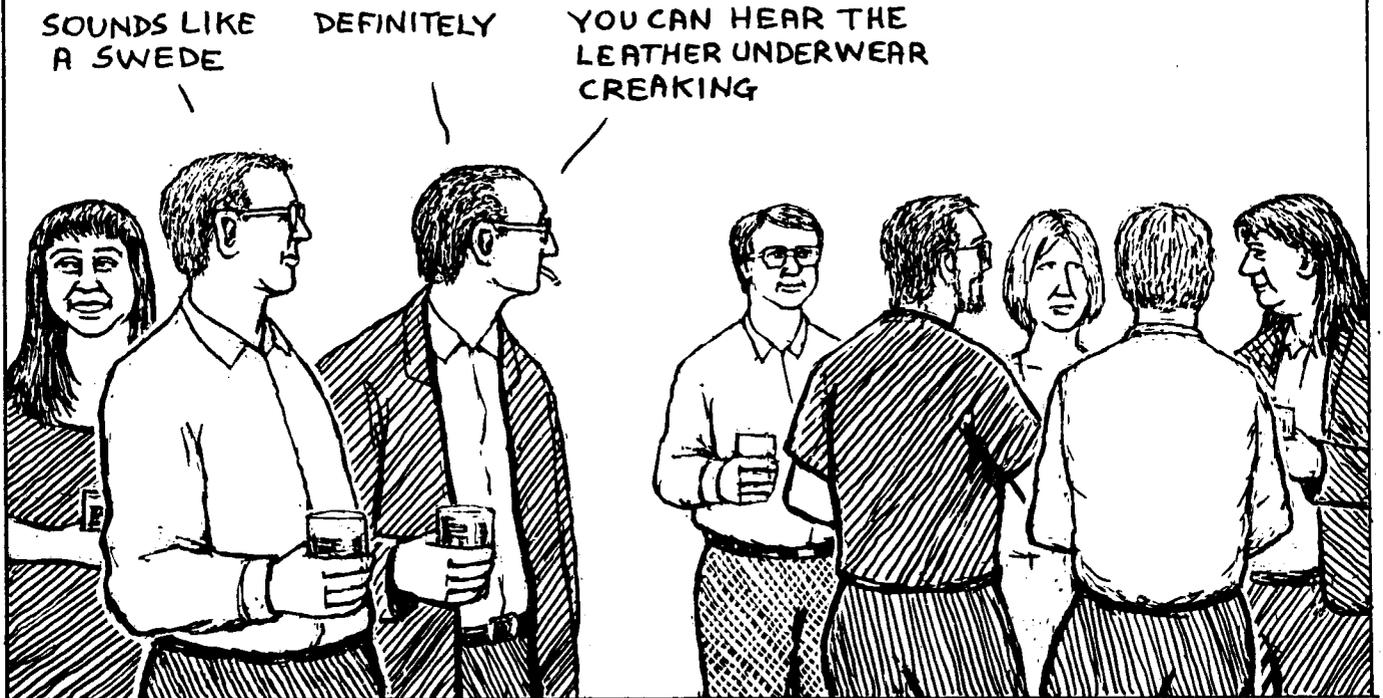


THE HORROR, THE HORROR

SELECTED SCENES
FROM THE EASTERCON
HEART OF DARKNESS

BY
D West

1 NEW BLOOD FROM OVERSEAS



2 MORE COMIC CAPERS FROM SIDDALL & HICKS



3 DEPRESSING REMINDER OF THE MARCH OF TIME

OF COURSE,
YOU'RE GETTING
QUITE ANCIENT,
AREN'T YOU?

YES, I'VE BEEN AROUND
SO LONG I CAN
REMEMBER WHEN
MARTIN SMITH WAS
ALMOST A VIRGIN



4 VARYING FORTUNES OF APPLICANTS FOR TAFF MONEY

SPARE THE
PRICE OF A
HOTEL ROOM,
LADY?

I WAS A TAFF
CANDIDATE
MYSELF ONCE

TOO LATE, VICTOR'S
GOT THE LOT

THIS SHOULD
KEEP ME GOING
TILL MONDAY



5 SHOCKING INSUBORDINATION IN THE FAN ROOM



6 BRILLIANT BADINAGE BETWEEN FAN ARTISTS



7 TAFF WINNER STRUGGLES FOR WORDS

WELL, VICTOR, HOW
WOULD YOU SUM UP
YOUR IMPRESSIONS OF
BRITISH FANDOM?

ER STAGGERING?



8 FANDOM - ARE MIRRORS ON THE CEILING REALLY NECESSARY?

SPOILED FOR
CHOICE, EH?



On the way to Seccon, Christina discovers that...**Life's a trip. And then you get to Swindon**

"I can't believe it," said Doug, "there's a sign for Swindon already!"

We were just leaving Bristol via the M4.

"Not much chance of writing up the journey for my conreport then," I said, noting that there were only 4 junctions to go.

"You know you're not meant to do that," said Doug, severely.

"That's true. Andy Hooper would only accuse me of writing another trip report."

Doesn't Andy know, I wondered, that all of life is a trip. But, of course he does.

In fact, we didn't get as far as Swindon before we found the hotel, lurking behind one of the roundabouts, opposite a giant refrigeration plant.

"That's the ice rink," Doug said, pointing it out proudly. "They're doing junior hockey playoffs this weekend."

Doug was to tell people this at intervals over the weekend but no-one paid any attention till Sunday morning when the breakfast buffet was unexpectedly demolished by a crowd of hockey mums and their stick-wielding offspring.

In the car park we met up with Caroline & Brian in the throes of taking their baby out for Chinese food. "Do you want to come?" said Caroline. "Everyone's watching *Buffy*," she complained. "There were only 8 people in the Paul J. McAuley interview."

We declined politely. As my work colleagues in Worthing used to say – eating is cheating – and we'd cheated big time by slobbering out in the garden and having our tea before setting out for Swindon.

True to Caroline's description, the hotel did seem quite empty till someone told us that the convention, and more importantly, the real ale were downstairs in the basement!

John Bray was sitting at the registration desk selling beer tickets. "You buy 4 at once," he explained. "There's enough for 3 pints each, but I don't expect everyone will be drinking it." This seemed to be true as even sterling beer

drinker Dave Hicks was on orange juice. "I'm drunk already," he said in his defence. "I've been here since six and I've had enough to keep me going till 2 in the morning."

This seemed far too perceptive for a drunken man, even though Cat backed him up, much more drunkenly. "He is, you know!"

Doug, Richard and I settled at a table by the door. Further into the room, Greg, Catherine and Sandra Bond were staging the Eastercon fanroom reunion. "This feels just like a Corflu," I said, momentarily imagining that Corflu had a monopoly on large round tables and rooms with no bars in them. Then I remembered that if this were Corflu I wouldn't be drinking beer, but collating my fanzine or persuading an artist to draw my convention badge, while Lenny Bailes sat opposite quietly filming everyone.

Our table gathered people. Yvonne Rowse turned it into her fanzine distribution base. We were all impressed that she had done another fanzine so soon, until the truth came out: all Yvonne's fanzines are really written by Dave Hicks. You might feel that such flimsy evidence as an envelope bearing Dave's name should not count as proof positive, but everyone liked the idea so much that reason flew out the window, coincidentally just as more beers arrived at our table.

Alison Scott turned up with an envelope full of Ploktas but refused to hand them out to anyone unless they could prove they weren't on her mailing list, alleging that all the rest were in a sorting office somewhere in Watford. This bizarre behaviour resulted in Richard's copy changing hands so rapidly that it flirted with half of British fandom before going to bed with Lilian Edwards.

I was on my third or maybe fourth beer when Amanda Baker joined us at the table. "That beer's too good to last the convention," she said.

"Yeah, I wouldn't be surprised if it ran out tonight."

"Shall we bet on it? I think it'll go at the end of tomorrow afternoon."

"Okay, I'll say tonight." In beer, bravado! Amanda meanwhile was taking the scientific approach and worked her way through the membership list, estimating the capacity of various fans. Then two facts emerged that made me feel slightly silly. There were eight more beer boxes to go, and only an hour before the bar shut. Since Tony Berry wasn't there, I didn't stand a chance!

When the bar shut, we were all herded upstairs to the residents bar where you could only order a drink if you produced your key card and allowed the hotel to charge large quantities of money to your room bill. Luckily Richard didn't seem to mind when Lilian and I ordered tequila sunrises! No sooner had we all taken delivery of our drinks than the barman came round. He would be closing up in a few minutes, would we like to order anything else? Key cards appeared as if by magic. Having soaked the last ounce of blood from our bank accounts, the man callously turned down the lights and booted us out of our new corner, into what they probably refer to as the "all night annexe for annoying residents that refuse to go to bed."

As it became clear that the only prospect for more drinks was room service, people began to drift off to bed. Where was the Swedish room party when we needed it? Even a Norwegian one would do, we agreed. But our Scandinavian pals were obviously too busy preparing for the midnight sun back at home, and there was not even a token Tobes to be seen. Since Doug had refrained from imbibing whisky through straws in the manner made famous by him at the Seattle Corflu, we had the sense not to invite everyone back to our room to drink spirits and throw up.

The courtyard looked sunny and inviting the next morning. Yvonne was wearing a short denim dress. I was wearing shorts. Ian Sorensen was wearing a pleased smile. But the weather was toying with us. In the shade it was too cool, so we moved out into the sun. In the sun, 4 out of 5 of us started to

believe we would get instant skin cancer, sun burn or die of over-exposure to Ian's foot and mouth jokes. Then a party vacated the table in the corner with the big sunshade. We picked up our possessions and ran to claim our prize like a Panzer division of German Fraulein intent on annexing the last sunbeds in Prussia. Five minutes later the sun went in.

Lilian, remarkably, making her first morning appearance at a convention since 1989, insisted that the sun would burn through. Ian told her all the meteorological reasons why this would not happen. She then insisted that Ian fetch down his bottle of Bucks Fizz. Ian told her somewhat less meteorologically why this would not happen either.

"But you could just scamper upstairs – like a gazelle!" Lilian suggested.

"Or a rhinoceros," said Yvonne.

"Look your window's up there," Lilian added. "Why don't you serenade Julia, and get her to bring it down!"

On hearing this suggestion, Dave and Cat decided unaccountably that they had urgent business in Swindon.

Ian was getting so much enjoyment out of taunting Lilian with his bucks fizz that he accidentally bought a large round of drinks. The sun of course waited till everyone had gone in for Julian Headlong's panel on New Scientist to reappear.

After attending enough of the panel to discover that the only people who enjoyed New Scientist these days were those who knew no science, or those who, like Julian, enjoyed a nice bit of unsubstantiated speculation, the word went round that it was time to go swimming. On the way down, Doug noticed that our room door was the only one without the numbers in Braille on it. He began to worry about how we would get back to our room if a Triffids like universal blindness struck us down. In the pool I discovered that it already had.

"Can you see people on the other side of the pool without squinting?" Amanda asked.

"Yes" I said.

"Well, you're the only one of us that can." Without their glasses the rest were as good as blind. "Who's that over there?" asked Amanda



at one point. "That guy, coming towards us. Do we know him?" Unfortunately although I could see, without *their* glasses I found fans quite unrecognisable. Luckily it was only Noel Collyer. After my swim and several stints in the Jacuzzi, I went back to the changing rooms to find Amanda stomping around stark naked except for her purple Doc Martens. "I wonder what would happen if I went out like this!" she said

"You'd be very popular," I guessed.

"I suppose I better not!" said Amanda wistfully, maybe already imagining the new Plokta series – Naked Goddesses of Academia.

By the time I returned to the programme room the Buffy panel was in full swing. I sat down next to Yvonne. Seeing as Yvonne a) doesn't watch Buffy (which presumably is how she has time to write all those fanzines now credited to Dave Hicks) and b) had been talking to Doug, it came as little surprise to hear her repeat Doug's mantra: "It's just a TV series!" In between times, Lilian would avert any danger of the panel complying with its brief of finding something *more* scary than Buffy and launch into another of her theories from the Buffy news group. The panel went so well that it really did continue in the bar afterwards meaning that for a good half hour a rather jaded-looking Paul J. McAuley had to make biology compete with the laughter from the bar whilst trying not to be distracted by Caro in a strappy top leaning across for the microphone. (Alison Scott later revealed that a top of this nature for a big girl like Caro required the use of some very interesting engineering principles; but unfortunately this was outside the remit of the panel.)

Back in the "Corflu" room Sandra Bond was presiding over a couple of tables full of fanzines from the '80s. Doug tried to raid the table, but every time Sandra pointed out something good, I would spoil things by telling him that we already had it. Meanwhile Lilian had discovered a stash of old copies of *This Never Happens* and was determined that Alison Freebairn should read them all. "Look, this one's really good!" she enthused. "It's got Michael Ashley masturbating in it!"

I'd never eaten in TGI Friday before, but it came as no surprise to find the staff dressed in stripy tops and silly hats. Our waitress had the kind of fake friendliness that guarantees that at least one order per course will be lost; though she turned very hard cooky on us when we refused to order Ultimate Cocktails. "Are you sure?" she interrogated each of us in turn like a female Chris Tarrant. At each refusal she pronounced: "You'll want one later."

The technique was so intimidating that even Richard didn't buy an ultimate cocktail.

Having imagined TGI as a fast food joint, my expectations were dashed by the menu – there were pages of it. It soon became clear that, on this Saturday night at least, TGI was slow-food central. Doug was on a panel at 9.00, but had taken the precaution of enlisting fellow panellist Cal to our party. The fact that we could see Sue Dawson, panel moderator, in another party way behind us in the slow-food stakes, gave that extra comfort factor. Not that Doug anticipated being over-used on the panel. "Farah's on it," he explained. "She talks a lot. It'll be just like being on that panel with Peter Weston at Novacon." Luckily for Doug & Cal's digestion, neither of them knew that Farah had gone home!

Even more luckily, we didn't know that the panel had been postponed till 9.30 giving us an excuse to escape while the waitress tried to work out how to smuggle some Ultimate Cocktails on to Tony Keen's credit card.

Yellow spandex was the subject in question. Alison Scott optimistically hoped that it would be the equivalent of the Plokta cleavage panel. But Doug being of the wrong phenotype plunged, instead, into the question of superhero costume choices, while Cal, despite having no such excuse bemoaned the impracticalities of superhero footwear, and speculated on the movie Catwoman's missed career as a seamstress. In the absence of Farah the audience did a sterling job of keeping the discourse going, despite official plant in the audience Tony Keen missing his cue yet again ("Hot pants or ra-ra skirts, Doug?").

Finally after a diversion into psychology and an interruption from Caroline Mullan about women in the Middle East, the panel were asked to speculate on fannish fashions in the future.

"Snoods!" said Doug with incomprehensible glee.

The next item was the auction so we ran away to the bar, then the fan room, where Michael Abbott was trying to put together a list of songs featuring mutilation. In an uncanny feat of synchronicity it was at this exact point that Alison Scott arrived in the room threatening mutilation for anyone who didn't come next door and join in the auction. We all ignored her, apart from Steve Lawson who seemed strangely interested.

Anne Wilson had her Palm Pilot out and was showing off her booklist, and bemoaning the strange rules governing the filing order of Mc and Mac. This led to me throwing work talk into the conversation and mentioning AACR2 and other cataloguing conventions. After a while, Steve and Anne became so engrossed in the Palm that Michael lost patience. "Tell me more about cataloguing, Christina," he begged. Since this was the first (and no doubt the last) time anyone has made that request, I was not surprised when a short while later Anne and Michael opted to go to bed.

At this point, Cat told me that she and Dave were drunk again. "We had 2 bottles of red wine with Lilian before the food even arrived!"

This also seemed to account for the fact that no further sightings were recorded of Lilian at the convention that evening.

"I wafted sparkling wine under her nose," said room-mate Naomi, "but she didn't even stir!"

The convention beer teetered on the edge of extinction, but was saved by the bar staff sportingly closing the bar. The second of the Second nightly migration upstairs was accompanied by much moanings and buyings of spare drinks, but once settled into a suite of sofas most people admitted that – yes – actually they were more comfortable.

Alison Scott convinced me that I could fit in a small space on the 2-seater sofa between her and Claire Brialey. This worked well until Claire returned to claim her third of the sofa. We tried to make our threesome work, but eventually Claire was forced to move to a cosy pied-a-terre next to Mark Plummer. But not before Alison passed round the digital camera containing incriminating pictures from the Clarke Awards : Noel in the pub holding baby Jonathan.

"I can't remember a thing about it," Alison admitted.

"Yes, you actually did give the baby to Noel," Claire confirmed. "You'd just better not let his mother see the picture!"

"Marianne had to take us home," said Alison. "Oh, I'm such a bad mother!"

"I want to go to the Clarke awards next year," I announced. If the wine was so legendary that not just Alison, but Steve too could forget parental responsibility, then it sounded like the night out for me.

But would it mean talking about SF? Greg pronounced that he had read one page from the middle of a Paul J Mcauley book and knew immediately it was good SF. I still regret not asking him which. Claire tried to convince me that life was NOT too short to read *Perdido Street Station*. "It gets you involved straight away," she promised, "and it doesn't take that long to read." She then quoted me some reading speed that might have sounded fantastical if I'd ever thought to measure my speed in pages per hour. "*Ash* on balance, wasn't worth it," reported Alison. Claire looked like she didn't agree. I wondered if I should request the break-even reading speed that would make *Ash* a viable proposition. Maybe some fan should write a guide for the Palm Pilot along the lines of if your reading speed is X and your disposable time Y, and you want to convince Greg Pickersgill that you're still an SF fan, then read the following.

I might have gone to bed at this point, but Claire and Alison started talking about fanzines. Does a fanzine have to be perfect before you put it out, or just good enough? Claire, of course, steered towards perfectionism. Alison pointed out the logistical parameters of Plokta production weekends, and admitted that the competing demands of food, drink and entertainment



occasionally meant that an article did not get sent back for another edit, or even that the team might be enjoying their own jokes so much that they forget to put in anything serious. But despite these shortcomings she reckoned that if she could receive two or three fanzines like *Plokta* every week, she would be happy.

"But I only do it so I don't have to write locs," she added, "don't you?"

No, I thought, I do it to inflict my writing on everyone else.

Alison – or was it Greg - tried to get Claire to admit that occasionally pragmatism must win out over perfectionism. Like when she needed to get an issue out for a convention.

Claire looked thoughtful. "No, I just start earlier."

No wonder Claire and Mark are Britain's greatest living fannish treasure.

The next morning made no false attempts at sunshine. Even so I felt this great urge to go

home and sit in my garden, or maybe go home and go back to bed.

People seemed to take it personally.

"Don't you want to talk to your friends?" asked Caroline.

"What can we do to make you stay?" asked Amanda.

Give me another five hours of uninterrupted sleep, followed by a cash infusion, plenty of beer and some good food, I thought, and I'd be conventioning with the best of them.

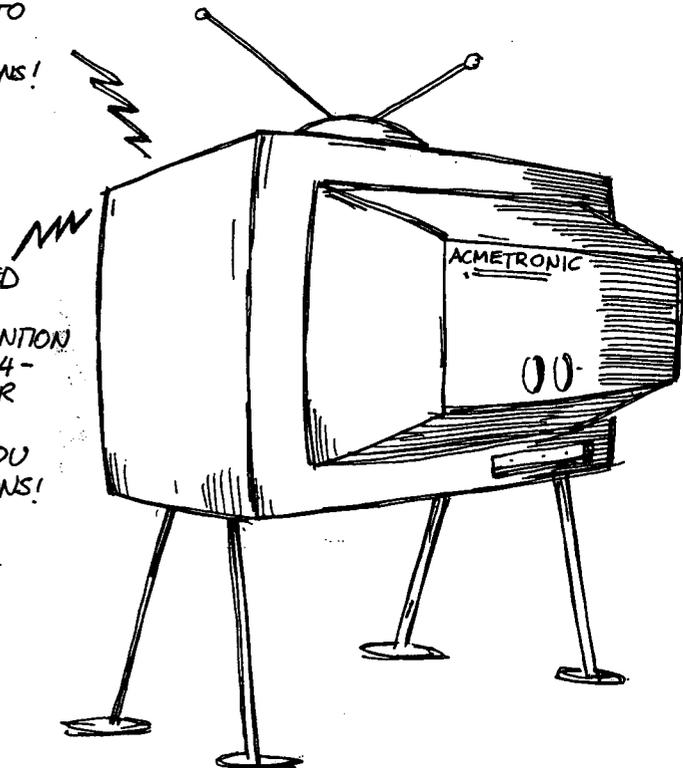
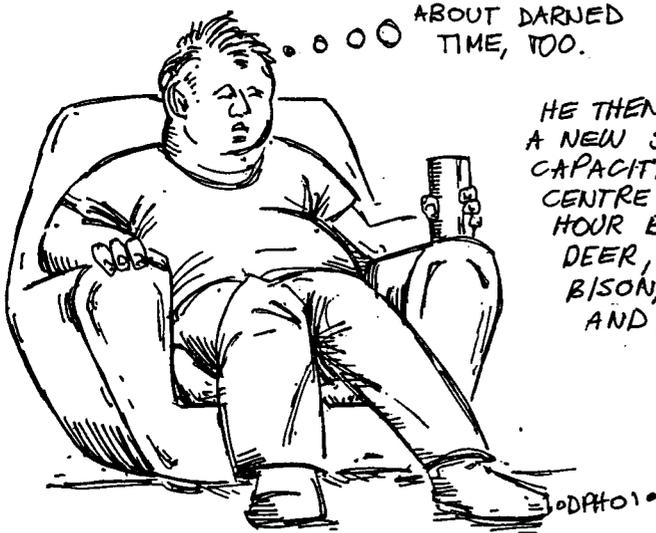
Then in the car, I remembered my other reason for rushing back to Bristol. There was a comics convention on down by the docks. If I hurried, I could get there in time to see the Edinburgh Fringe hit *Till Darth us do part*, or an exciting new stage adaptation of *Halo Jones* by John Moore's University!

It's all just one big trip, I thought.

HAVING FULLY RECOVERED FROM THE BLOW TO HIS HEAD, THE PRESIDENT ANNOUNCED PERMITS WOULD BE ISSUED TO ALLOW HUNTERS TO SHOOT, SKIN, GUT, STUFF AND MOUNT SCIENCE FICTION FANS!

ABOUT DARNED TIME, TOO.

HE THEN OPENED A NEW 5,000 CAPACITY CONVENTION CENTRE WITH 24-HOUR BAR FOR DEER, MOOSE, BISON, CARIBOU AND RACCOONS!



Hemmingway Award winner Pete Crump tests his machismo to the limits in...

Pigs Might
by Pete Crump

When a bored Careers Officer reasoned that because my 'O' level marks for maths were marginally superior to those acquired for woodwork, and that the only thing I ought to be carving out was a career in computer programming, I felt condemned to a thrill-free life of project milestones, vending-machine coffee and colleagues who neglect to wash properly.

But all I ever really wanted to be was a *fast jet pilot*.

Or a science fiction writer if I failed the medical.

I passed the medical with flying colours, as well as a battery of aptitude tests at RAF Biggin Hill. But I failed miserably on the required social scale by admitting that my father was a tanker driver and my mother a cleaner at the local Comprehensive. Alas, I now fly planes about as well as I write science fiction. Which is not at all, and most of my since that fateful interview has been spent as a civil servant for the RAF, working with bits and pieces of aircraft, and eventually I settled down and became a computer programmer after all. My Careers Officer would have been proud.

But one cold January afternoon a few years ago, I took control of a Hawker-Siddely Hawk jet fighter at 21,000 feet above Leicestershire, at 0.75 Mach, and I experienced for several wonderful minutes an electrifying sense of what might have been.

How this came about is not really relevant. Suffice to say many sorties in twin-seat trainer aircraft, such as a Hawk, are exercises for experienced pilots and Air Traffic Control - and so the second seat is often empty. Filling it with a RAF civil servant or a

minor visiting dignitary is relatively commonplace. I put my name down for a flight, and about a week later the response came back in the form of a question: What are you doing next Friday?

It did not require much of an answer.

Friday came. First, a medical. Stare at this, piss into that, flex this bit here. Every orifice gently probed (strangely enjoyable) and every dimension precisely measured. Why? Well, if I had to eject: too tall, and the canopy would slice my knees off (I'm 5'7", with no inside leg to speak of, so no problem there). Too heavy or too light and the ejection seat's centre of gravity would be too low or too high, making it tumble in the air and snarl up the parachute (I'm 180 pounds, right in the centre of the weight range).

Then a surreal video about the Hawker-Siddeley Hawk aircraft ("Congratulations on buying the Hawk jet fighter and we hope that this product will offer many years of trouble-free airspace-denial and interdiction missions...") which was mostly about how to eject safely, i.e. when the bloke in front yells "Eject, eject, eject!" just pull the black-and-yellow thing between your legs and wake up in the North Sea. The video made ejecting seem like a surprisingly pleasant experience if you were lucky enough to get to try it. I was quite looking forward to it until I reached the instructions on what to do if the ejection seat *fails* to eject. Disconnect this, pull on that, check the other, and then request the pilot to *fly the plane inverted* and, with luck, you will fall out.

Call me naïve, but two things did occur to me. One was: *What pilot?* Having called for an ejection, let's assume he ejected. The other was: *Fly the plane inverted?* Since we're abandoning the aircraft let's assume that it's likely to remain airworthy for a few seconds, at most. I thus felt perfectly justified in completely ignoring the



hypothetical sequence of operations that would enable me to fall out of a carefully inverted aircraft. Mind you, even if I survived having several pounds of high explosive detonate under my arse I'd never remember how to steer the parachute, detach the thing underwater, bale out the emergency dinghy, or even find the bloody whistle. By the time I'd practised (and immediately forgotten) all the bugging about that I needed to know, I was largely resigned to plummeting from the sky in a ball of flame, still securely strapped to my seat.

Now, your normal everyday Y-fronts are no good for flying fast jet aircraft. Apparently it's something to do with absorbency. So I donned fetching green RAF-issue cotton underpants, a green vest and green socks. Over went a thick, green woollen babygro followed by the excitingly-named G-suit (in green). This is designed to prevent blood pooling in the lower extremities during high-G manoeuvres by squeezing you very, very hard. It's essentially a pair of inflatable leggings with a hole thoughtfully located over the testicles with a steel-sheathed compressed air hose dangling from the pants like a secondary prosthetic penis. Which is one of the things you have to remember to connect up to the ejection seat.

Because our particular sortie would be over sea, a full immersion suit was a legal requirement. No snazzy leather flying jacket here but a thick, inflexible rubber jumpsuit (green) with watertight neoprene cuffs at wrist, neck and ankles, a fetishist's dream garment. Finally, the life jacket (also green) and we're almost ready to go.

The helmet and mask required an unfeasible amount of pulling, tugging and adjusting until it was agonisingly and almost literally bolted to my head. Oh, and I mustn't forget to plug the intercom lead *here* into the correct socket on the ejection seat over *there*, and this here is your breathing air which must clip to this bit, otherwise you will asphyxiate and die.

Righto.

The flight crew briefing was incomprehensible

but mercifully, well, brief. Lots of OHP slides of tables, flight paths and frequencies in rapid succession. Lots of serious sounding three-letter acronyms delivered in a bored drawl and a tatty photocopy of the flight plan for me to wear on my thigh if I wanted to pretend I understood it. I did, however, pick up on the fact that our call-sign would be Jasper Two, and my pilot for the day was Flight Lieutenant Dan Dare, Pilot of the Present, whose name I must disguise. I guess that makes me Digby.

Then it was time for the swagger.

I'd been practising my swagger.

So, after reviewing the relevant bits of *Top Gun* in my mind (Tom Cruise is about my height, you know), I head for the aircraft, not too fast. Large, important strides, helmet held loosely in one hand, dangling straps, hoses and assorted gubbins looking carefree but purposeful, swinging rhythmically as I walk. Make it look as if I do this every day. Up the access ladder, toss my helmet casually into the cockpit, follow on with a gymnastic vault into the seat. Strap myself in, don helmet, give thumbs up to the ground crew. All planned well in advance.

But...

The immersion suit transformed my carefully planned swagger into an arthritic lumber, like a bad Doctor Who monster in green rubber. I could only take the access ladder one step at a time with a pause between each. Then I couldn't lift my leg high enough to clear the lip of the cockpit and I had to be helped in by the ground crew. Once in, it was impossible to move more than a couple of inches either way, so the ground crew had to strap me in too. How ignominious.

"Are you comfortable?"

I didn't know. No, not comfortable in the traditional sense (is this spike digging into the small of my back normal?) but, I guessed,

relatively comfortable considering I'm encased in an inch-thick layer of rubber, immobilised by half-a-dozen belts and connections with sweat beginning to pool in all my hollows. How comfortable is it supposed to be? I just didn't know.

"Yes?" I suggested, and this seemed adequate.



A member of the ground crew leaned into the cockpit and ensured that I got the hoses for the G-suit and my breathing air connected the right way around. Mixing those up doesn't bear thinking about. He helpfully pointed out the sick bags located in my thigh pockets. Where real pilots keep their flight plans, checklists, chewing gum, survival gear and emergency prophylactics, I had sick bags. Lots of them.

"Everyone throws up," he tells me, confidentially. "Don't be embarrassed about it, just use the bags. Don't, *whatever you do*, vomit in the cockpit."

This is yet another of those things that I have been told to not, *whatever I do*, do.

Like, for instance, toy idly with the black-and-yellow handle between my legs, or jerk the joystick suddenly in a fit of pique. Or drop the MDC and seat-arming pins in the

cockpit. This is the one job that the pilot or ground crew can't do for me: arm the ejection seat and the canopy detonation cord. This can only be done with the canopy closed and I'm alone, whereupon I remove the pins and stow them. If I drop the pins then I'm in big trouble. The canopy can't be opened while armed, so I'd be stuck there with the pins out of reach. I can't unstrap because if I snag the ejection seat handle then, well, it would take more than a bucket and spade to clean up the mess. Pisser. Best, all round, not to drop the pins. It did occur to me, though, that it might be a Pretty Neat Idea to have a spare set in the cockpit, somewhere within easy reach, just in case.

After the pins were safely, via apprehensively, nervously, fearfully and clumsily, stowed, we began to taxi. The cockpit pressurised, and my ears popped continually for about a minute. Oh, and half a dozen red and amber lights began to flash and a violent alarm sound in my earphones. My nerve endings went so rigid they pierced my skin in several places, like stubble.

"Don't worry about that," Dan said over the intercom. "It'll go away in a minute."

I was, at this point, trying not to worry about at least a dozen things, so one more made little difference. And the alarms did eventually dwindle away. We pulled alongside Jasper One and stopped, the runway straight as an arrow ahead of us, bordered with lights.

"You all right back there?" I guess Dan could hear me hyperventilating.

"No, I'm really scared, I've shat my pants, I'm breathing kerosene, and I'd really like to go home now," I said.

I didn't really. I just made that bit up.

Jasper One gave the signal to wind up the throttle, and the whine of Jasper Two's little engine behind me began to increase in pitch and intensity. We sat there for 20 seconds, engines ablaze, and then Dan released the brakes. The Hawk surged forward, pressing me gently but insist-



ently back into my seat as the aircraft built up a decent hurtle. Alongside, Jasper One was keeping up. This is it, I thought, no going back, no screaming like a girly to let me out; I'm committed. Might as well enjoy it.

"The acceleration's shite on these," Dan informed me as my vision became tunnel-like and my breathing more difficult. "Nothing like a Tomado."

Then, without much fuss, we were airborne. About twenty feet to our left, Jasper One was airborne too, and already peeling off, its undercarriage neatly tucking itself away. We pitched nose-up, almost vertical. The altimeter in front of me whirled like a clock in a movie flash-forward. At 2,000 feet we entered the low January cloud and passed into a dim grey tube. At 4,000 feet we burst into bright sunshine and a clear cerulean sky. We were pointed almost straight up. I was enjoying this. Even if I was sick as a dog later, I was determined to remember that I enjoyed this bit. Secretly, I pretended that we were headed for orbit.

We continued to climb. At about 18,000 feet there was a definite change in the oxygen supply - I needed to suck really hard in order to breathe.

"The pressure-breathing cuts in about now," Dan explained before I really got into worrying about suffocating to death.

We levelled off at 21,000 feet and throttled back. We'd lost sight of Jasper One, now some five miles to the east of us. There was purple sky above and a gentle quilt of clouds below, punctuated only by the cooling towers of Ferrybridge power station sliding by the starboard wingtip. There were fifteen minutes to go before our first waypoint over the Wash.

I was settling in, familiarising myself with the instruments, checking my camera, playing with my visor settings. Lots to do, and not even remotely nauseous. Before me, my own joystick moved gently back and forth mimicking Dan Dare's slight course corrections. This is it. I am here. Alone in the void, with almost 360 degree

vision, the pilot silent and invisible beyond the cockpit instrumentation. This is a moment I have imagined for a long, long time.

"How would you like to do a barrel roll?"

"Er —"

"You can't fly in a fast jet aircraft and not do a barrel roll. I'm afraid it's the law."

Oh shit. Wanting to, but not wanting to.

"I don't think I'm, er, ready for it yet. Maybe, er, later?"

"Look, I'll just bank it over to the right, like this... see? Now it's just like that only we go all the way over. Want to try it?"

"Er —"

"Righto, here we go then, nice & gentle —"

The horizon started to tilt, then became vertical. There was nothing to hold on to. And then the whole world turned slowly and completely upside down.

Cool, actually.

We flew inverted for a few seconds before completing the roll.

"Enjoy that?"

During, yes. But a few seconds later my inner ears telephoned my visual cortex, angrily demanding to know why they'd been sold a whole load of centrifugal force instead of high-quality gravity, but then settled the dispute by performing a sort of internal barrel roll of their own.

"Um, I'm disoriented, but I'm all right," I confirmed.

As long as you don't do another one, I added mentally.

"Uh huh. I'm a bit disoriented, too," said Dan, "I was celebrating my promotion last night. I threw up four times between the pub and the pizza place. I still feel totally fucking wrecked."

Oh great. My life is in the hands of a hungover beer monster demonstrating aerobatics.

"We can roll it a lot faster than that," he said, as if to confirm my worst fears. "Let's try —"

Before I could protest, the aircraft corkscrewed over once, twice, in as many seconds. This time my vestibular system had had enough of being fucked around and put the shock troops of my stomach contents on yellow alert. They stayed where they were, but they were definitely on emergency call-out. How could I make it clear to Dan that I would toss my cookies all over his nice clean cockpit if he did another one of those, without sounding like a complete girly wuss?

I was spared the indignity because we had just reached the Wash and Dan had work to do.

This was a regular sortie and, by all accounts, quite a boring one. Jaspers One and Two were to practise intercepting one another, alternating hunter and prey for the next hour or so, under instruction from trainee RAF air traffic controllers. What this meant for me was sitting quietly in the back for twenty minutes while Dan made increasingly violent course corrections under ATC control. We banked, dived, climbed and banked again, all the while trying to keep Jasper One in our sights while he rolled, dived and climbed too. And then it was our turn to be hunted. The Wash and the sky flashed by, rarely in their usual orientation.

I'd experienced G-force before - everyone who's rode a roller coaster has - for about two seconds at a time. But as we entered serious evasive manoeuvres I watched the G-force instrument register ever higher values for longer periods. At about 2G, the G-pants cut in. I'd imagined something sophis-

ticated like a seductive build-up of pressure directly proportional to the amount of G being pulled. But no, this just goes completely full-on at 2G. Imagine having your blood pressure taken on your legs and across your stomach by a particularly sadistic district nurse. I know some people would pay good money for that, but hell, this hurt. And the pressure was relentless. As Jasper One closed for the kill, John flung the Hawk into ever-tighter circles, the horizon rarely straying from the vertical.

4G for more than twenty seconds is quite literally breathtaking.

I did have the sense to conduct a few medical experiments, though. For example, trying to raise my arms at a full 4G felt exactly like my arms were secured to my thighs by industrial strength elastic. Not impossible, but not easy either. Conversely, a few precious moments of zero and negative G allowed me to float my camera unsupported over my lap before another unexpected Immelmann sent it hurtling into my groin.

After an hour of this I'd seen Jasper One appear and disappear half a dozen times, sometimes ahead, sometimes creeping up on us from behind despite Dan's best efforts to evade interception by diving dementedly towards the North Sea in between keeping me informed as to what was happening, and pointing out photo opportunities as they flashed by. By this time the G-pants, switching on and off as we passed through the 2G threshold, were having a distressing effect on my digestive system. Something, somewhere, was begging for release.

But it was to be another twenty minutes before such succour.

Time to fly home.

And it was during this leg of the adventure that Dan handed control over to me.

Me. With not a single flying hour at the controls of anything more complex than a Peugeot 106. Dan was blatantly contravening Rule 1 in the Pilot's Handbook: Never let the passengers fly the plane.

So, at three-quarters of the speed of sound, somewhere over Lincolnshire, with my guts churning and my face the same colour as my jumpsuit, I took the controls of a jet fighter of the RAF.

...and immediately sent into an uncontrollable flat spin, plummeting towards the earth in an irretrievable death dive!

Well no, not really. But it did occur to me that any sudden movement was probably a bad idea, so I sat there (as if I had a choice), a death-grip on the joystick, gingerly coaxing it to and fro, the horizon dipping and swaying at my whim.

"Do you want to fly the plane, or what?" urged Dan, knowing that whatever went wrong he'd have 20,000 feet to recover it in. That's about twenty seconds at our speed. Plenty of time. So I pushed the joystick a little more forcefully this way and that, having the most fun ever with a wrist movement that short. I regret now not being a little more adventurous. How difficult could a barrel roll be? But I quietly surrendered control after ten minutes, having failed to complete any manoeuvre more elaborate than drifting ten miles off course.

Dan was back in charge and we were descending from brilliant evening sunshine into another long, grey tunnel of cloud, and then into the

gloom of a wintry Yorkshire dusk. The runway lights ahead seemed welcoming. By this time I had had enough. Two hours of immobility meant I couldn't think of anything more needful than being able to scratch the back of my head. It had been exhilarating in a way that's impossible to describe. It's easy for a cynical adult to dwell on the uncomfortable bits, the nauseating bits, but these were in the minority and most of the time I had been filled with simple, unembarrassed boyhood wonder. It's not something I could ever hope to do again.

I hardly noticed the touchdown. The station was bleak, practically deserted. I decided not to claim for overtime, just this once. As we taxied to a standstill I had one more job to do - remove the seat and MDC pins from stowage and disarm the ejection seat and canopy detonators. The canopy swung open without me blasting myself 100 feet into the air. I disconnected and unstrapped and climbed out a little more gracefully than I'd climbed in. I took off my helmet and gave the back of my head a particularly thorough and auto-erotic scratch before descending the access ladder on wobbly legs, pausing only to hand my empty sick bags to the disbelieving ground crew as I swaggered past, helmet held loosely in one hand, straps and other purposeful gubbins swinging rhythmically.



All his life Doug's dreamt of riding the wild surf with the best of them. Was it what he was expecting, when an SF Fan, 8 foot waves and a surfboard collide in...

On Some Faraway Beach by Doug Bell

I'm not quite sure how it started, but as far back as I can remember I've always had this deep, fascination with surfing.

Something about hanging around beaches all day, catching a few waves and wearing wetsuits really appealed to me. Growing up in an area where the coal industry staggered terminally from one crisis to another like the stooped bronchial old men it produced ("It's nae the sixty fags a smoke a day that've given me this cough laddie, it's awe that dust doon the pit, ye ker!") there was a complete lack of beaches, sun, waves or transport to that Mecca for British surfers - Newquay.

Ah, Newquay! The infamous juvenile drinking den of far flung Cornwall, populated by wild stag/hen parties, roving gangs of drunken Inger-land skinheads, families seeking a cheap bit of sun and fun and most importantly the ever-present surfers waiting with zen-like patience for the perfect wave on Britain's best surfing beach - Fistral Bay.

I'd been there with my parents, when I was sixteen. That was the last time I went on holiday with them, right before I left home to improve myself at Aberdeen University. My time spent in Cornwall on that trip consisted of reading too much Judge Dredd, listening to Roger Water's Radio KAOS and being too grumpy because my parents wouldn't sign the consent forms to let me go surfing.

Still that trip left me with a deep longing to return south with the specific aim of learning to surf. As I phoned my parents to tell of my holiday plans one Sunday evening, I could hear the disapproval in my father's voice, deep unseen and as deadly as a strong rip current, *you can never go back*. Despite this warning, I knew instinctively that this was the right thing to do. The sound of the surf

breaking on Fistral was still ringing in my ears after all these years.

During the first 24 hours in town I got scared real bad. Not about the power of the sea or even the fear of failure, (I had no illusions about my ability to stand up on a thin board speeding over a highly unstable liquid surface). I just hoped that this experience I'd wished for all my life would live up to the wait. Thankfully I had Christina there, ready to prod me in the right direction, or at least into the BSA surf school beach hut. Monday morning 10am booked, twenty quid gone, no turning back now.

The beach was quiet when I arrived, and the surf good - 6-8ft clean and pretty much constant. The guys in the hut were friendly. After the preliminary emergency contact forms, getting my wetsuit and board, I had a good half hour of sitting on the beach ahead of me. Thankfully two other eager students had arrived before me. As we chatted my nervousness seeped out of me. After the rest of the class and our tutor Darren arrived, we set off down the beach towards the safe surfing area that the lifeguards had thoughtfully marked out.

Darren ran us through some warm-up exercises, the usual stretching to get our muscles and heart rate going. He then explained where safe surfing areas are likely to be found before inducting us in the arcane mysteries of the surfboard. Despite his Hollywood stereotype surf bum looks, our instructor spoke with an educated and authoritative air that filled me with confidence; I knew no harm would come to me, today. After a brief demonstration on how to catch a wave while lying face down on the deck, it was time for us to play in the surf.

The waves at Fistral have the full force of the Atlantic behind them. Getting out to waist height was not as easy as it had at first looked. By the



time I reached the correct depth I'd been flattened a couple of times and my arms and shoulders were aching. I manipulated the board around and waited for the first wave to come my way. Pushing the board in front of me I jumped perfectly along its length...the wave caught me, I scooted three or four feet ahead at a reasonable speed before coming to a complete standstill. "Good Doug, but you have to push off harder to match the wave's speed". My joy faded, I hadn't caught the wave after all. Still the only way to master this was to try again.

The next wave I attempted to ride caught me by surprise. I pushed off, harder and faster. The wave broke around me, Suddenly I was speeding towards the shallows...ten metres passed, twenty, I could see the startled look of my fellow classmates fighting to get back out into the sea after their runs as I came hurtling towards them at high velocity. Thirty metres and into the shallows with all momentum lost. "Much better" encouraged Darren.

If I was quick to take to the first part of the lesson, the second was the exact opposite. Darren explained how we were to then go from lying prone to standing up in one easy jumping motion. There were quite a few nervous laughs around my class, including myself. We all new instinctively that this was the hard part.

It took me a couple of nervous moments and a bit of procrastination before I attempted the whole standing up thing. I can see it all now in slow motion. The wave behind me fast, white and furious, the board in front of me, I leap onto the board. The wave catches me, and suddenly I'm away with that tremendous rush of speed. I push my chest up off the deck in preparation for the leap of faith, one, two, three...I get a foot up onto the board, and for a split second the board takes on the properties of a very large silent movie banana-skin placed dangerously on a frictionless icy surface. I can feel the board and my foot slip away in different directions. My body is flying through air in some impossible Matrix-like twisted leap. I feel the



leash snap taut at my ankle as the wave's unstoppable progress drags the board away from me. Suddenly I'm underwater, lost, confused and fighting to find the correct way up for air. I emerge from the foam baptised with adrenalin and saltwater, feeling so...alive.

And so the lesson continued in much the same vein. I could see some of my fellow students get to grips with this standing up lark quite easily; others, like me, were having great difficulties. Darren eventually showed us a method where you could get to a kneeling position as a half-way-house before moving on to standing up. This was supposedly easier.

Trying this I could easily get to the kneeling position, but standing up was just too far beyond my meagre abilities. I was rapidly running out of time on this lesson. Darren blew the whistle to inform us to wrap up. One last try, go for broke again. Again, I'm quickly underwater, gasping for air, fighting to find my footing in the wet sand. So close but not quite there yet. Damn.

Emerging from the depths, board in hand I could feel my skin tingle. The combination of the sun, the warm water and the adrenalin made every cell in my body feel exhilarated. As I struggled up the beach with my over-large teaching board, exhaustion set in, draining these pleasant sensation with fatigue and unexpected pain. During the lesson I'd given myself a bad case of chinburn by diving along the length of the foamy board in another desperate bid to catch a wave. I'd been warned about sunburn, knocking yourself unconscious on the fin of your board after falling off and about the dangerous rips but not about chinburn. That said it was the best twenty quid I've ever spent...possibly.

Four days later I came back to Fistral and rented my own board and suit. Spending another three hours in the water I managed to achieve the impossible, standing up. I lasted

about two seconds in the vertical position before losing my balance, but both feet were firmly placed on the board while I wobbled about unsteadily.

It's late in the summer during my job's busiest time and I think more than ever I don't want to be at my desk, forecasting future higher education trends. It's a baking hot day, one of the hottest of the year. My shirt's stuck to my back, and even with all the windows open and both fans rotating at maximum speed I feel that I'm going to pass out at any possible moment. My mouse twitches nervously in my hand, and I furtively scan the Internet for up-to-the-minute photos of Croyde Bay, Devon and it's beautiful cool sea. Waves 4 1/2 - 5 ft and clear surf. Even more than a moment ago, I don't want to be here.

Yeah, the best twenty quid I've ever spent.

In February this year Nick Walters went to Gallifrey One, a Dr Who convention held annually in Los Angeles and renowned for its adulation of Doctor Who authors. He had a great time, and is going back next year, if he can afford it. The following extracts from his journal provide a revealing insight into his mind, or what's left of it :

WHAT THE HELL AM I DOING DRINKING IN L.A.?

by Nick Walters

Friday

Am slumped dazed in poolside sunshine at the Airtel Plaza Hotel, Van Nuys, L.A. Flight OK – Virgin Atlantic, our plane was called 'Tubular Belle.' Quite a sweet name for a fucking great 747. Could have been worse, could have been called 'Omma Dawn.' Very nervous, hadn't flown for 10 years, but plane guaranteed not to crash, as Justin Richards aboard and he's In Charge Of The Who Book Line.

Dave Stone caused huge ruckus at US Customs – just the place you DON'T want to cause a huge ruckus. He'd neglected to fill in his 'I'm not a Communist/Drug Trafficker/Se-

rial Killer, honest' form. He broke from the queue and started ranting at customs officers, who all ignored him (thank God!) He was quite pissed (in the UK sense of the word – and, I suppose, the US) which is some excuse.

In car on the way to the hotel Jon de Burgh Miller proved illuminating on state of UK Fandom, but thought Exeter was in Cornwall. Hope he does more thorough research for his forthcoming Who novel.

This really could be any hotel room, anywhere. Hard to believe I've zoomed halfway across world. Could be the Marriott Hotel, Bristol.



There's no sign that this is America, unless you get down on your knees and examine the plug sockets. Feel spaced – hello culture-shock! (The jet-lag will presumably kick in later). Decide need beer.

Have just been thrust onstage with fellow authors for opening ceremony. A sea of faces... bright lights... I dried up. Decide REALLY need beer.

Dave Stone hauled up by LAPD. They quizzed him for 20 minutes in hotel lobby. Afterwards, the poor bloke giggled maniacally. Found out his 'crime' was popping outside to talk to Keith Topping – not in itself illegal, but he had a beer with him.

Reminds me of Sweden where alfresco drinking is similarly verboten. Despite the unnerving similarities to the UK, the USA is more alien than it seems. As I found out when I forgot, due to tiredness, to tip barman and received murderous looks along with my beer.

Craig Hinton kept me up until ten, insisting only way to beat jet-lag is to stay up until you collapse. Said to Justin Richards, 'So we meet at last.' He looked scared until I told him who I was. Then he looked absolutely terrified.

Saturday

Had (vast) breakfast with Justin, Craig, Steve Cole, Peter Anghelides and others. My Space Invaders T-Shirt went well with Dave Owen's Atari attire. Afterwards, met some fans who actually liked my books. A lot. This was a strange and wonderful experience. Still buzzing. Have signed loads of copies of 'Missing Pieces' (My Skagra story is therein). I've got my guest badge and people keep staring to see who I am. Feel like a star!

Bugger! Decided not to go to Universal Studios with the others, for fear of missing my first panel ('Rad vs. Trad' – huh!) Needn't have bothered – could hardly get word in edgeways past Lance Parkin and Craig Hinton. Felt complete panel virgin. Began to have first doubts – what the hell

am I doing here?

Had great 'one-to-one' session with Paul Cornell and Craig Hinton in which we spoke to group of fans about the joys and terrors of writing. Was almost a love-in. Then I was on 'Gallifrey is Dead' panel, this time I was able to get my shout in. Then, weirdest of all, autographs in the Dealers' Room. Sitting at long table next to Lance Parkin and Mark Strickson as people queued up with copies of my books, felt oddly like I wasn't myself. 'Nick Walters, Doctor Who author' – who is this chap? Can he be the same Nick Walters who lives in Bristol and goes to the George every Saturday night? Beginning to get inkling of how 'fame' can warp mind.

My need for beer has never been greater...

(Several MGDs later) That's better. Met up in bar with other authors. Started tab – which will surely regret later. At least I can write it off against tax. Tipped barman well, he's all smiles now. Must say, the service everywhere I've been is great – people REALLY DO seem pleased to serve you. None of this dullard 'Have a nice day' rote-stuff. They ARE pleased. Or if not, are damn good actors. But hey, this IS L.A...

Chatted with Craig, Justin, Keith Topping (who shares my colour hair and taste in music) and Dave Stone, who expounded interesting theory of the Doctor being Siddharta Buddha. Then we authors rehearsed our number for the evening's cabaret (*a cappella* version of 'Go West') in Steve Cole's luxury suite (open-air jacuzzi...!)

Cabaret great. Entered into spirit of thing by donning shades and Rassilon medallion for 'Go West.' That put paid to hopes of scoring with American fan-totty. Dave Stone did cicada routine again and was hauled off-stage in a pre-planned coup. Simon Bucher-Jones performed various Flanders & Swann material. Whoever said variety's dead? Mark Strickson's act involved making American fans sample cider and pickled eggs, whilst cajoling them in a

W.COUNTRY accent. Apparently cider tastes like 'ass'. Speaking to him in bar afterwards, turns out he lives in Pensford just down road from me! Authors agreed that next year we should do 'I'm A Cider Drinker'.

Hit bar in big way. Got that sort of pissed you get when you are really revved up – delirious, head-spinning anything-can-happen. Disco after cabaret, at which British music was played. James, Chumbawamba, Suede – felt like I was in the Kandi Klub. Ended up in room party with Paul Cornell, Keith Topping and loads of booze. Retired, sloshed, at 3 o'clock in the morning. Bit early, I know – blame the jetlag.

Sunday

Woke suddenly with stupendous hangover, which I had to cope with because I was due to do the Guest of Honour breakfast at 9 am. This involved me and Craig and 'real stars' Bonnie Langford and Mark Strickson being circulated around tables of fans and answering their questions. For TWO HOURS. Survived thanks to coffee, and Craig for doing most of the talking. Then, at 11, it was my last panel, 'Alternate Realities in Doctor Who' during which I managed to get conception of infinity across (not by describing the GoH brekkie, sadly).

There is always one event which crystallises an experience, and it happened at the signing session after the panel. We had to make room for Bonnie and her entourage, and she ended up sitting next to yours truly. I was wearing my leather jacket, as usual, and as she was wearing a similar garment we took the opportunity for a quick photo-call. There I was, in Los Angeles, getting my picture taken with Bonnie Langford... reality seemed to warp around me. And strange though it may seem, that was when things crystallised for me. Before you laugh, Bonnie is a great person and she can't half sing.

After that, wandered around dazed for a bit and ended up at Simon Bucher-Jones' one-



Nick and Bonny compare jackets!

to-one panel. Like me, Mr B-J is a Civil Servant (though he is several million grades higher up) and immensely erudite (which is where similarity ends). Got drawn into general discussion about science in Doctor Who, which drifted onto the (many) scientific implausibilities of Space 1999.

It's pissing down outside and has been continually all weekend. That half-hour by the pool was a cruel trick. Paul Cornell's cricket match therefore no-go – secretly pleased, as can't bowl, bat, or field.

Sat in on panel of fans discussing the Who books. Other authors in audience, so was Justin. Invaluable feedback – market research! Bottom line is, the books are popular – but each book has its fans and detractors. (Same with authors I suppose – and other aspects of Who: stories, directors, Doctors, companions, eras...). Who fandom paradoxically full of factions, yet as a whole friendly and relaxed. US fans more 'forward' than Brit fans – certainly enjoying the attention I am getting!

But - fading fast. Been on go for 6 hours, on hellish hangover fuelled only by coffee. Went back to room to crash, shower, and inject yet more coffee. Have to admit, wasn't prepared for the amount of 'work' (for want of better word) I'd be called upon for. Been to cons before, yes, but not as guest. Have had no time to go any-

where either – wanted to see Universal Studios and Getty Museum. Oh well, there's always next year.

Refreshed, went back to con. Attended closing ceremony. As with opening ceremony, all authors herded on stage and mic passed down the line. By now I'd gone 180 degrees and all traces of nervousness, shyness etc. completely vanquished. Managed to say coherently what a great time I'd had, how good everyone was, and sorry for bringing the weather over from England. To be clapped and cheered by a packed-out audience is an exhilaration everyone should experience at least once.

Indeed yes, this con has been a massive boost to my ego, and I say that without shame, I needed it, after the tumults of self-doubt I'd experienced whilst writing 'Superior Beings.'

After closing ceremony (which did go on, as all 61 guests had to say their bit) it was back to the bar. Turned into another beery evening, but much less hectic than last night.

Justin divulged his Secret Plan for ending the 8th Doctor range should a new TV series or film arise. His secret is safe, I think – depends on how much I drink.

Felt sorry for Dave Stone, all the other authors tended to avoid him and snigger behind his back – v. childish. But then, when I was talking to a small group of fans he suddenly blurted out 'Oblivion!' (title of one of his books, and the state towards which he was heading) and began a massive rant about how misunderstood Jason Kane (character he created, ended up marrying Bernice) was and how subsequent authors misunderstood him. Went and talked to Craig and Keith Topping who almost gave away the end of Preacher. Crashed at criminally early hour of 1 o'clock.

Monday

I am on the plane home, watching 'Pay It Forward' on the tiny screen. It's dreadful. Had

lie-in until 10 am, and then went to Denny's with Mark Phippen. The sun put in a late appearance. Bought an American jazzmag from the newspaper vending machines, total disappointment – all the bits covered up by black rectangles (not unlike the Time Scoop out of 'The Five Doctors'). Denny's amazing – laminated menu size of door and 40 pages long. Had evil platter of fried beef, potatoes, melted cheese and peppers topped off with TWO fried eggs. If I had grown up in America, I would now be 25 stone. After that, a muted end to the convention. Everyone hungover and knackered. Allowed self to be treated like luggage – bus to airport, then long wait for plane. As we boarded we could see it through the windows – the Tubular Belle! Oddly comforting – at least we know it 'works.'



The latest doctor finds
Bonny Langford much im-
proved as a companion after
several glasses of absinthe

And, finally if you thought the world was getting weird, are you ready for the Toilet Hat?

Letter from New Britain
by **Spencer J Ostraczci II**

It was a year ago last week that Britain finally re-opened itself to the world. Twenty five years of an isolation rivalled only by the relatively recent establishment of the Tarantulist Compound in Antarctica came to an end. For all his shiny-suited posturing, the legacy of the self-styled 'Great Entertainer' lasted barely a fag end beyond his wretched, piss-soaked demise.

Your correspondent has been living in Britain for the past six months. It was a return of sorts as I had spent two months here as a State Department Liaison before the calamitous events of 1974 curtailed a promising diplomatic career. The Britain I had known in those days was a troubled, uncertain country but nobody had realised just how troubled. The coup that autumn was as unexpected as it was calamitous.

The past year has been a fascinating one for unravelling and deciphering the events of the preceding two and a half decades. Secret bunkers stuffed full of secrets have been opened with hatchets and crow bars, with a couple even requiring the force of an armoured tank to access. There's a humanistic satisfaction to be gained by all at the rush to education which the British public has subsequently embarked upon. Academic practices long assumed forgotten have been reinvented with vigour and passion.

A number of texts have now been identified as being highly influential in the dramatic and tragic direction that Britain was to find itself steered from the mid 70s. Perhaps the most fascinating is the BBC's (the old British Broadcasting Corporation so associated with the old regime that it's landmark HQ now finds itself stuffed full of effects from that time and en-

cased in concrete) 'Tomorrows World', first published in 1970. The authors were no less persons than Raymond Baxter and James Burke – the original Ministers of, respectively, Science and Thought in the early years of what was known, even within that most petrified of societies, as the 'Light Entertainment' Cabinet.

The book seeks to prophesise on the scientific and technological advances that the world could look forward to over the next fifty years or so. It reads today like the 'Mein Kampf' of Greene Britain.

Much is hogwash. 'Hotpaint,' for example, was presented as being "a graphite based paint which is electrically conductive." The authors continued: "This means that, once a wall has been painted, the whole surface can literally be plugged in to a power source, switched on and the wall itself becomes a central-heating element."

Some concepts in the book were actually attempted by the Ministries for which the authors found themselves responsible. Super speed pneumatic trains are an obvious example. Of course, the concept is an old one. Every department store more than fifty years of age has such a system to propel bills and money from counter to cash desk along a tube by compressed air. 'Tomorrows World' goes further with the authors proclaiming: "already with only a few *minor details* to be ironed out, people could be sent by tubed flight from London to Glasgow in 12 minutes." The records have yet to be uncovered as to what happened to the 'minor details' but Baxter started his tube. It got as far as Watford, a conurbation only slightly north of London, before an even more boring (sic) obstacle was struck upon

– the total lack of funds available to a society totally closed to the outside world. Not that Glasgow would have proved a particularly attractive destination after the events of 1992.

All this, however, is the mere scum on the sewage. 'Tomorrows World' saves up for its epitaph. Stretching their vision further the authors envisage how the generation after next may live and, the thing that scares your correspondent more than anything else, is the emerging evidence that it formed the basis of government policy until the very end. How predictive the authors were to write that "benevolent dictatorship will be the basis of government." How fortunate that they were to become amongst the primary beneficiaries of it. Why, there wasn't an issue which couldn't be solved by government department.

Eight per cent of gross national revenue (not that you can have a % of zero!) was to be spent, by a Minister naturally, on leisure activities such as "Anti-gravity clubs and specialist organizations where women can gossip under controlled conditions". The reporting of all venereal diseases was to become compulsory. Municipal death camps would be commonplace and, well why not, mass tranquilisation of the populace an accepted government practice. The authors identify the most pressing social problem to face the child of the future as being 'the superabundance of leisure time'. Not much chance of that in the society they helped ruin.

As events have mercifully proved the rather over-reaching ambitions of Britain's scientific elite were unreachable given the pitiful resources available. Endeavour and creativity had to be focused instead on the ridiculous and cheap. One such oddity is the Toilet Hat. It truly is a unique invention, a tribute to the British aristocratic capacity for finding new methods of division even when morally and materially bankrupt.

Popular legend has it that the odious Dave Lee Travis, a spokesman for His Tackiness in his early years of corruption, invented the Toilet Hat as a remedy for his obesity, and the flatulence it en-

sured. Travis, an avowed vegetarian with a serious penchant for pork and pork-related produce – it was rumoured he bathed in offal – had the influence at court to guarantee his device a Hughie Honour. With such a seal of approval, soaring popularity inevitably followed.

Before long every 'Act' in the land had a Toilet Hat outside the lavatory. As its use spread so too did its variety. I say 'spread' but for many the Toilet hat was a symbol of unattainable luxury. They dreamed and they schemed but somehow, for the majority of Brits, the Toilet Hat was to be a garment only worn in the realms of fantastic imagination. Hysteria gripped in 85 when a national 'lottery' was launched with the sole prize of a purple and white furred Toilet Hat. Whoever won is keeping pretty quiet about it now. If that is, there was a winner?

It's silly, pointless, oppressive and certainly unhygienic but, you know, I like it. Wide availability these days is a sign that Britain is ready to put the bad old days behind it and start out afresh on a crusade based on equality of all. The world can learn from this.

For the first time in a quarter of a century Opportunity genuinely does knock for Britain and its affable, if peculiar, population.



Christina dons her safety gear and takes a look through the letters piling up in the...

Head Letter Office

As usual plague, famine and death dominate the headlines. But first, let's talk about fanrooms.

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

I wanted to pick up on Mark Plummer's slightly dispirited letter in reply to your earlier comments on fanrooms. I thought the Paragon fanroom was excellent, and congratulations and thanks to all those involved in setting it up. It was outstanding, and the setting had a lot to do with that as well, turning it into a small con within a con. Given its proximity to the overcrowded main bar (the fan room nominally had its own bar, but I don't think I ever saw it open), I spent a fair amount of time just hanging around in there chatting. Nice idea to have a small secluded smoking area as well. In fact it became the default to arrange to meet people after and in between programme items, or just to hang out and browse around when there wasn't much on. But it was more than just that. Greg and his crew had organised a sterling set of panel, displays and fanzine tables. What was really good was to see not just the Paragon fan GsoH, but the pro guests like Steve Baxter and Lianne Norman involved in the fan panels.

I agree that it was an excellent fan room. I wish the organisers could have been more convinced of this; the one aspect that saddened me was Greg's evident conviction that it wasn't worth the effort. Fans need to get on and celebrate their culture rather than forever deconstructing it. Look how enthusiastic Steve can get about comics (below). Let's try being like that for fanzines where they merit it!

I thought the Brusel article last issue interesting. I've taken a long time to catch up to

comics, apart from obvious exceptions like *Sandman* (and even then didn't complete my collection of the anthologies until last year when I decided it really could be put off no longer). I've only really discovered Jeff Smith's wonderful *Bone* in the last year. I'd heard about it, and read two of the first series on a wet and cold Saturday morning in Whitley Bay library. (i.e. Whitley Bay was wet and cold, the library wasn't, which is why I ended up spending the morning there, reading graphic novels and children's books - including a Philip Pullman - *The Tin Princess* - that at that time I didn't know existed). It was enough to be addicted. *Bone* is sassy, sharp and cute, and well worth looking out for.

And then there's Dave Sim's *Cerebus*. I picked up a handful of early issues in an indoor market in Philadelphia years ago (also a really strange thing called The Maxx, which was briefly turned into an MTV series). Again, I kept meaning to buy these ever since, but kept looking at the (UK import) price and wincing. I'm still well behind, only up to Church and State, but this (and High Society) really do deserve the tag 'graphic novel'. It's also the first time I've read a 500 page book in a single sitting.

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

Many thanks indeed for Head 3. I loved the Brad Foster cover. Aw, gee, how can you whet our appetites with the revelation that you've been on jury service and then not give us the low down? A little exaggeration here and there and it could have been passed off as fiction. Heavens, I know that you're not John Berry, but.

Great piece by Christina on the Belgian comic shops, especially interesting to me as thirty years ago I was living in Belgium, and you may know, dealing in comics. It was a little galling, however, to realise that last April I was over in Antwerp and made a point of visiting The Rolmops café just off the Astridplatz by the station and until I read this piece hadn't appreciated that I



was within spitting distance of a comic shop. I did, however, visit De Slegte's second hand booksop next to the Reubenshuis. When I lived over there the only comic shops in the country were both in Brussels, The House of Curiosities and The Skull, run by Georges Coune, a regular until recently at British sf cons and who now lives in Brighton.

No, you're right, Christina. The Watchmen was somewhat more adult and intelligent than many of the titles around at the time and no, sadly, it didn't start a trend. Instead, the industry went down the marketing road with glitzy covers and gimmicks.

Next time you're in Brussels make a point of looking up the iguanadons in the Natural History Museum.

Here's where I hand the letter column over - briefly - to Doug to deal with the responses to his film articles, as Ron continues:

Guerrillas in the Mist is a superb title and it's not a bad article either, though I could have done without the erudite prose suddenly giving way to "this is the real shit." I must watch out for *Cecil B Demented*. Definitely sounds worth a look. On your recommendation, Doug. I see that you rate John Waters in your top ten directors alongside Sam Raimi and Alex Cox (you do have strange tastes). So, who are the other seven? And if there's little coming out of Hollywood, these days to interest you, is there any reason why you can't dig out a few classics from the past? Films don't necessarily have to be modern to be either watchable or worthwhile. Or both.

Doug writes: In no particular order David Lynch, Woody Allen, François Truffaut, Pedro Almodovar, Sergio Leone, Kevin Smith and Edgar G Ulmer. There are others who I would like to include like Jacques Demy and Bertolt Brecht, but in both cases I've only seen one film by them, but what a film!

Oh, come on now! You can't say that Ed Wood didn't make the worst films of all time and then, to back up your argument, simply give the names of two of his films and say, "How about these?"

So, how about them? Why are they worthwhile films? Why, in your opinion, did Ed Wood fight "against all the odds" to produce what, presumably, are masterpieces? I take it that Ed Wood is included, then, in that list of all-time ten best directors? And, if not, why not? You really have me intrigued. I'd love to see you expand - no, be more intensive - on this line of thought.

Doug (again) : Ed Wood churned out entertaining but badly produced, badly directed, badly written and badly acted films for next to no money. There is no pretence about what you're getting if you sit through an Ed Wood film. I've watched four of his "masterpieces" at the last count and have been entertained to some degree by all of them. The flipside of this is there are films by established directors who have turned out IMHO un-watchable celluloid with enormous budgets. I can forgive a film made under a tight budget with little/no resources its failings, especially when things like bad SFX and bad continuity become part of the entertainment. However when a major studio puts out a huge summer blockbuster film populated by "real" actors, with two years of pre-production work and scriptwriting tweaking, a year of post-production and followed up by six months of intensive pre-release marketing and it still fails to entertain on any level, you really have to worry about the studio system. The worrying thing is would, say, Waterworld have been a lot better film if it was made for less and the sets wobbled more? Maybe, maybe not, who can tell, but half the budget Kevin Costner's masterpiece would still have financed at least two medium cost studio dramas. That's without even entering the no-budget world of Robert Rodriguez who made a very watchable El Mariachi for \$7000.

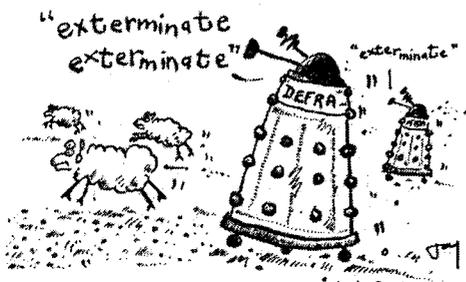
Jerry Kaufman, 3522 NE 123rd Street, Seattle, WA 98125, USA

Since I'm something of a hit-or-miss movie buff myself, Doug, you've given me lots of comment hooks. I'm going to bypass most of them because I haven't seen enough of your favorite directors to discuss them prop-

erly: no Russ Meyers, very little Sam Raimi, not enough John Waters. Your list of faves puts you squarely in the "outsiders" club. You don't appear to include any of the mainstream directors, the canonical auteurs, non-U.S. (except, by implications in your remarks on Ang Lee, Hong Kong filmmakers). I'm a little more to the middle of the road, and some of my favorites haven't made a movie in decades (being rather dead). However, *Repo Man* is wonderful (never have seen any other Cox movies) as are the first three Jim Jarmusch (he MUST be on your list somewhere) - haven't gotten around to renting *Ghost Dog*, which looks quite intriguing in the clips I've seen.

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

I rarely go to movies any more...there's so little that attracts me. The last movie I saw was *A.I.*, which was ripped to shreds online. I found it entertaining, but not a movie I'd go see again. Haley Joel Osment is a fine young actor, and I think he has a future if he doesn't screw it up with drugs, alcohol and ego. It's obvious where the Kubrick and Spielberg parts begin and end, and sometimes overlap. The effects were great to see, especially where someone might pop their face off to reveal the circuitry and mechanics underneath. Yet, I was detached from it, and simply enjoyed it. A good movie for me has to engage me emotionally, which means *Bicentennial Man* and *What Dreams May Come* were great, IMHO.



Private Eye reveal the truth about DEFRA

Joseph Nicholas, 15 Jansons Road, Tottenham, London N15 4JU

I should of course thank you and Doug for *Head!*, although I have but two brief remarks. Corrections, really. Firstly, we couldn't have spent the eighties casting our friends in a fannish version of *Twin Peaks*, because the series didn't appear until 1990. Secondly, the line about staying on the boat is misquoted; as any *Apocalypse Now* obsessive can tell you, the line is "Never get out of the boat" — repeated several times, before the voice-over (you'd think it was Martin Sheen's voice, but it was actually Michael Herr's) cuts in with the trademark "Absolutely goddamn right!", followed by a comment that Kurtz had got all the way out of the boat. (Do I sound obsessive about the film? Well, it did cause me to publish my first fanzine, over twenty years ago, then subsequently stand for and win GUFF — so it if hadn't been for those helicopter gunships I'd almost certainly never have met, Judith....)

Talking of helicopter gunships, we return to the halcyon days of early summer when only the livestock population of Britain was at risk.

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

Most interesting to read of the various panics and protests afflicting England. Your petrol blockade didn't get much news play here, Alberta being afloat on oil and quite smug about it. However the F&M epidemic was front page news, as our other major export is cattle. British troops coming to train in southern Alberta had to disinfect everything. Even Prince Charles had to walk through disinfectant when he visited Canada.

Quite right too! Until a couple of weeks ago I had to ride my bike over a disinfected mat every day to get on to site for work (or drive my car over the straw at the far gate). Totally token and futile to my mind, but since the site is run by DEFRA (formerly MAFF), what can you expect?

Araya, Roan, Roweltown, Carlisle, CA6 6LX

Next door's animals are dead, the Men from MAFF came this morning. Compared with that... Where I live, geography isn't about cities, factories, rivers, films or TV. Geography is about draw-

ing 3-kilometer circles round affected farms. It's like some ghastly game of join-the-dots. Nick, Dick? We've seen a lot of our local NFU people on television recently. One of them is called Nick Utting. Except that Sky – I think it was Sky – renamed him Mick the other day. And yesterday they were digging a mass grave at Great Norton when it was really being dug at Great Orton.

It's what passes for humour amongst normal men. Unfortunately Araya isn't too sure about other aspects of Sky humour either.

I don't watch the Sky comedy to which you referred. [*Time Gentlemen Please*] I don't watch any Sky comedies. Come to that, I didn't even know they had them. I don't watch terrestrial comedies – or, in the case of, for example, *Blackadder* – so called comedies either. At least not when *Red Dwarf* and *Drop the Dead Donkey* aren't on.

*Then I guess you've missed out on *League of Gentlemen*, *The Office*, *Spaced* and *Black Books* too!*

Gary Wilkinson, gary_wilkinson@yahoo.com

Not managed to see *Time Gentlemen Please* (being wholly 'Terrestrial') but I remember listening to Al Murray on the radio whilst queuing to buy something to eat in a late-night bakers in London a while ago and not being able to avoid bursting into spontaneous laughter – bloody surreal night that was. I go through periodic afflictions of ennui where I can't be bothered to go see films as well (never happens to books – but then my relationship to books is the same as an alcoholic to booze) And now my 'local', well as local as it gets round here, has closed, which makes it difficult. If you want to see a 'real' film hunt out 'American Movie' if you have not already seen it – my film of last year – they don't get any realer than that. And re guerilla a film-making don't forget Shaun Meadows – local boy done good – and the rather excellent 24:7. Top filming tip? Use a stolen supermarket trolley as a camera dolly. How to save money so you can spend all your dole money on video tapes? Live off cut-price 'sate' – that's

noodles, a can of pineapple chunks and a tablespoon of peanut butter – all the vitamins you need!

Back to Ron Bennett for some response to Jae Leslie Adams' Novacon report

Ron Bennett

Re Jae Leslie Adams' article, Leeds city centre is built on the grid system. New Street Station in Birmingham is typical of much of the city. It's well signposted for people who already know the way. You don't believe me? Take someone with you in a car and follow their directions for getting out of the city and going south east to London. You'll end up on the M5 driving towards Bristol. I kid you not. Try it.

American irony is never letting on and keeping a straight face? And all these years I've been thinking that that was British irony. It's certainly served me well enough. Here in Harrogate there is a massive building programme being undertaken in the town centre. The area looks like a bomb site. This morning I passed two old ladies regarding the place in some degree of wonder and/or amazement (I didn't ask). "Look what you've done, now," I said. Their expressions changed to those of alarm. "It wasn't us," one said, seriously. Altogether a nice, gently paced readable con report. A little sketchy in parts, but what the hell. Enjoyable, just the same.

Steve Green, 33 Scott Road, Olton, Solihull B92 7LQ

I adore Jae for her description of Birmingham's "downtown area ... being rebuilt", when in fact she's referring to the city *centre*. Just reminds us that Brum remains tiny when compared to, say, New York or Los Angeles, even if we at least have a larger population than San Francisco. Anyway, this year's Novacon has relocated, to Walsall's Quality Hotel (presumably the nearby Shite Lodge was fully booked).

Lloyd Penney

Jae Leslie Adams' Novacon report is another

temptation to go to Britain for a convention. Virgin Airways now flies Toronto to London direct, but Branson hasn't gotten rich by handing out cheap tickets. Air Canada flies the same route, so the prices may go down with a little competition. So who knows, you might see me in the Novacon hotel bar one day, sucking back Diet Coke...so, my trip report would not contain the usual phrase, "The convention was good until the bar ran out of real ale..." My reason for going would be the same as Jae's, to meet the people, and finally attach faces to names. I did a little of that at Chicon, meeting some of the Plokta cabal, but only for a few moments.

It is possible to be a fan and thrive on coke and no alcohol. Well, Michael Abbott manages it.

A good list of fanzines, and I wish I received more British zines. (Hint to Simon and Dave.) I agree with your opinion of *Idea*; another reason why I'd also give it five out of five is that issues are far apart on the calendar. Its writing has a concentrated quality to it, and it makes you want more to read. Yet, I also like *Vanamonde* as a thin slice of what's happening in LA fandom. Seeing the apa is weekly, and seeing that John Hertz is a university professor with a heavy classload, I can see why each issue of *Vanamonde* is only two pages in size.

Jerry Kaufman

The fanzine reviews were long enough to say something useful without beating the subjects to bloody pulp. You've pinpointed why I don't actually read much of *Vanamonde*, though John surprised me during a fanzine panel at Westercon by stating that he thought everything in it would be accessible to the non-apan readers if they paid attention.

Clearly I don't! But here's the man himself to explain it all:

John Hertz, 236 S. Coronado St., No. 409, Los Angeles, CA 90057, U.S.A
No doubt about it, Van is a strange adven-

ture. A tail that wags the dog. It first appears in APA-L (and thus also MINNEAPA), but also it goes, as you say, far and wide. I certainly don't mean it to be an imposition. Like other fan publishers, I send my zine to people I think it might amuse.

Horace said "When I labor to be brief, I become obscure". Here is my occupational hazard in two pages a week. About half of Van is APA-L and MINNEAPA comments; the rest, remarks upon one thing and another, quotations of my current reading as a conversation piece and memorandum, verse now and then, letters and drawings people send. The comments are hardest to write, and I sometimes think the most important; some people say they're my best. I try to maintain the quickness of good apa writing, and at the same time contrive that it won't matter whether one has seen the other side of the conversation. If this succeeds – some say it does – perhaps it's like the Japanese style of painting in which one brushstroke shows where the mountain isn't. Their poetry does that too. This may be why Mike Glyer has called Van the haiku fanzine.

I also try to heed criticism. Earlier I jested with you, unhappily as I'm sure was plain, not about what Christina now confesses a cheap joke, but that she pursued it without sending me a copy. I had thought fannish manners was "I've mocked you. Here, see for yourself." But that's done with. She says in reviewing Claire Brialey in Quasiquote 3 (incidentally I'm a big fan of Claire Brialey) that a zine she reviews at all is worth the trouble. I am thankful she discusses Van. She rebukes, "I don't care how much fun you think you're having, I can't tell what the %@&\$ you're talking about." This (at last, if I may) I take seriously. Transparency is a virtue. I hope I can improve.

Clearly Vanamonde is more ambitious than I have given it credit for. I am the last person to object to a fanzine sent out at the author's whim in order to amuse. I'm sorry I don't appreciate Vanamonde more. Perhaps it would become more transparent if you sent new readers an introduction to who you are and what the fanzine involves. Or maybe that would spoil the fun for you – like explaining poetry.



John, meanwhile does a fine job at appreciating Head!

Brad Foster is surely one of our very best fanartists. His plump juicy line – I don't refer only to his erotica of course – and cartoonist's sense of selection make him the master of fantastic detail when he falls into that mood. His cover recalls a college roommate whom Dymo label-making guns intoxicated with self-reference jokes; he stuck labels everywhere, "lamp", "key-hole", at last motionless on the floor with a pen looking at his left hand unsure whether to write "hand" or "ink".

Jae Leslie Adams in her Novacon report gives neat appreciations of fans whose zines I enjoy, and events that sound just enough like and unlike cons I know. She has a way of walking on afterwards leaving the silver gleaming.

Ron Bennett has probably heard by now that Verguz reappeared last fall at Chicon VI. I used to think this ferocious beverage named for the Martian bartender Guzub's crucial ingredient in Boucher's fin "Q.U.R." (1943), but I was wrong.

Okay, what was it named for? (I know I'm going to regret asking this.)

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

Christina, you had a comment in the opening pages about spending time on jury service and listening to all sorts of, well, let's say "interesting" people, but not being allowed to write about it. I've heard about government-secrets types of laws in England, where it seems you are never allowed to reveal information, but are you saying you can never write about a trial, even after it is over? What a waste of good fanzine material!

I could write about the trial now it is over, but not about my experiences as juror in the trial, in particular the reactions of different members of the jury (which was precisely the aspect of would have liked to write up at the time). This, presumably, is to protect members of the jury from any post-trial reprisals. As for government se-

crecy, it is now de rigeur for government departments to embrace the principles of "Open Government" and release all kinds of information they were too disorganised to make available before. In spite of the high IT investments this will entail, I daresay pockets of government secrecy will remain where it really matters.

And having just gotten home from a week long trip to Baltimore to show my work at a festival there, I don't think Doug is too much off the mark having a "skewed view" of Baltimore. This was our third trip there, and it is still, as more than one native of the city pointed out to us, the only place where you usually cannot come *back* from a destination by the same route you got *to* it. If that isn't truly skewed reality, I don't know what is.

I loved that graphic on page 12 from the **Brusel** comic! I'm a sucker for comics with great architectural design. I've gotten several fine graphic novels illustrated by Schuiten with grand and inventive future architecture visions, and I love those.

And finally, it seemed like all the locs were of the "not me" variety in regards to bungee jumping. Any positive thoughts, or is the fannish crowd more interested in keeping its neck intact?

Well, without an intact neck fans would not be able to a) drink beer, b) keep their beards from reaching their chests and c) support their heads at a good angle to read books. So obviously they need to keep those necks intact. But Doug thinks dangerous sports are cool so long as they involve waves or mountains instead of thick pieces of elastic.

And finally back to fan rooms:

Pam Boal, 4 Westfield Way, Charlton Heights, Wantage, Oxon OX12 7EW

Like many, how shall I put it, less young fans, I read more mysteries than SF books now days. I am told that genre has a fandom but it is not the type of fandom we know and love. While it is natural that fandom should evolve it would be sad to lose every aspect

of what has gone before, that is why I heartily agree with you that fan programming is or should be an essential part of conventions. Perhaps older fans (not in terms of age but of experience in fandom) should be asked to give time as hosts to neos, to take them to fan programme events, introduce them to fanzines. Now days I gather there is a welcome package at most Cons it should contain a publication such as Trash Barrel, a list with addresses of current fanzines and some explanation about availability. I do feel that it is only through zines that young fans can be shown the wider aspects of fandom and learn that there is so much more than media events and Conventions.

Love the cover, yet again demonstrates the talent of Brad Foster, making a simple notion work so well.

I hope you'll like the current cover just as much - another simple but effective idea from the amazingly talented Brad Foster who seems unaccountably attracted to the idea of Head! (he says it's the exclamation mark that does it).

WAHF: Eric Lindsay, Mark Plummer, Alan Sullivan, Sue Thomason, Kate Yule.

Credits

Head! 4 comes to you from the house of too many sofas (at least until we can get the old one deported to the tip), which is also sometimes known as :

*12 Hatherley Road, Bishopston, Bristol, BS7 8QA
(email: head@headwest.fsnet.co.uk)*

It is edited as usual by Doug Bell (he's lounging on the new sofa) and Christina Lake (trying to make the futon back into a sofa before Lilian returns it through a vortex to the '70s). (Or a vortal to the invisible web where we're planning to make it earn its keep as a sex toy).

Head! is available to all fans old and true (so, that's the Leeds group and Tony Berry), the Bristol SF crowd (because we love them and they buy us drinks!), Americans (because Tony Blair insisted), Australians (in case Doug does ever decide to run for GUFF), Swedes ('cause we miss them when they're not here), Kiwis and Canadians as we want to visit their countries lots and get plenty of free accomodation.

Art credits: Cover: Brad Foster. Interior illos D West (p.7), Dave Hicks (p.15, p.40)

