

©brad  
w.  
foster.  
2002

This fanzine would never have happened without Brad Foster. (And to a lesser extent Tony Keen and Gary Wilkinson. And, let's not forget it (we never will), last year's Nova!) Every time I think I can't be bothered, there isn't time, or I can't afford it – I dig out Brad's cover and change my mind. What a guy! I believe it's his best yet.

Two things happened in 2002 that considerably reduced my fan activity. (I'll leave Doug to make his own excuses; though I think the words Cornwall, surfing and Legion of Super Heroes might appear there somewhere. But back to me!) After dabbling with a couple of short science courses last year, I decided to go for broke and do the 60 point Open University Introducing Science course (that's about the equivalent of a half year of a standard university course). And in a feat of appalling synchronicity, just as my course was about to begin, I was offered an exciting temporary post on the Environment Agency's intranet with a team that tends to both work and play hard. So I found myself juggling quantum physics, enthalpy changes and plate tectonics with JavaScript functions, ASP, usability issues and nights out doing LaserQuest, bowling and murder mysteries. Something had to go and it's been writing. Not short one-night stands for apas and my much neglected LiveJournal, but longer projects like further chapters to the novel (now approaching its 10<sup>th</sup> brilliant year. Will it never end?) and fanzines (of course!)

It's been odd for a person like me who has always defined myself as creative to not be writing. Where does that part of my brain go when I'm not using it? Am I only ordinary after all? A half-life dominated by work does not have much room for wild speculations and weird trips. The world might be ending, but I'm too busy keeping up with my email in-box to notice. And what am I learning science for anyway? If I die tomorrow my brain will just be a use-

less piece of sponge whereas what I write is my legacy. It's the proof that I once lived and thought and felt. I don't care if no-one reads it. I still want to have worked it out and put it on paper.

I suppose I've felt ignorant about science for years. I never understood it at school where I preferred ideas and books to smelly Bunsen burners. I never understood it at home when my ex-husband Peter-Fred used to try and explain physics to me. And I never understood it at conventions when people made little scientific jokes and laughed a lot. But I did understand it a bit at work where I helped people access scientific literature to improve the water, track chemicals and save fish. I did enjoy what I read in Julian Headlong's favourite comic (New Scientist). And I did want to make my strange surreal so-called science fiction stories just a little less irritating for those with a scientific education. I'm still not sure that I will ever understand physics, but I do want to understand more about the world around me, how it works, why chemicals affect my body, how sheep think, why human beings exist and other minor questions. And I want to get inspiration for more strange short stories (or maybe even a longer, honest-to-goodness science fiction novel that won't take me 10 years to write, please!)

So that's why we took the Nova and ran, the HeadWest web-site still doesn't exist and I never get around to e-mailing my friends (or locking their fanzines; not that I ever do that!) But the course is finished and I only have Intranet training in Peterborough, a two-day MediaSurface workshop and a working breakfast to keep me away from helping Doug to complete the fanzine for Novacon. This might even be it. But without spontaneous contributions from Brad, Tony and Gary it would never have happened. What more can I say? Doug's written about non-leather Basques. Nick's met Paul McGann. I fell off my bike. Read about it here!

Christina

*Former Matrix editor Gary Wilkinson starts off this issue with a tale of what exactly modern art means to him and why he started drawing again. Illustrated by the author...*

## **Medicine Men**

Sunday 14 April 2002, 10:30 am. I'm standing in Hoxton Square, ground zero of the Young British Artist movement. I know the time because there is a digital clock inset above the door of the trendy White Cube 2 gallery. It's a sunny morning and I can smell rubbish – bags and bags of it spill over the pavements in front of the nearby kebab shops.

Later that day, after briefly watching the London marathon, I cross the now non-wobbly bridge, heading for Tate Modern. The wind's picking up, it's cloudy and it looks like rain. Later in the day still I visit Tate Britain.

Friday 26 April 2002 11:50 am. I check my watch. I'm standing in front of an Andy Warhol self-portrait. I'm in Nottingham Castle and it's hammering down with rain outside. I can hear Debbie Harry singing Rip Her To Shreds. There is a strange streak of green paint on the huge red and black canvas. Andy is cool, I think.

Damien Hirst got grade E in Art A level. I never even took A level. Persuaded by my art teacher at six-form college before I took my O level exam that I wasn't good enough for an artistic career I went the science route. Perhaps he was right – I did fail O level art first time around but I did pass the next year. And I think I have improved over the subsequent years, having gained the confidence and character to apply myself – to observe and master technique. I've done bits and pieces over the years, off and on, but now I'm back – back for good.

I've seen a lot of art recently. Modern Art. Occasionally, like the majority of the population I suspect, to me it's just a con-job. Some artists I've never 'got' – like Basquiat. However for most of the time I'm enlightened and amused by it. And sometimes, just sometimes, it is incredibly glorious.

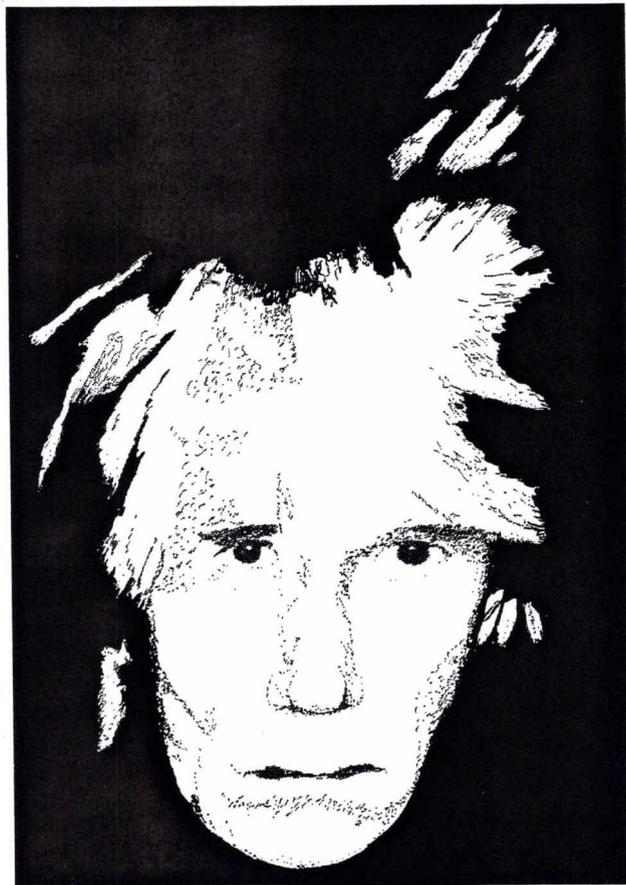
It all started many years ago when I went to university in Sheffield – an engineering course I slowly grew to loathe (Ha! But just wait for work!). On the spur of the moment, when I had a spare afternoon, on the way home from the department I stepped into the local museum and art gallery. I wandered past the glass cases of stuffed animals and china figures and on into the art gallery part and then something happened... it hit me on a primal level. All I can now remember of the exhibition was a painting whose narrow horizontal stripes of bright contrasting colours made your eyes go funny and a sculpture with two life-sized abstract figures, made from stuffed pale purple fabric, pushing against each other. From then on the gallery was a frequent destination whenever I had any free time. Once I left Sheffield and was in the first of several jobs from hell, the near daily showing of the Late Show on BBC2 went some way to keeping me sane and added some intellectual understanding to my developing love of art. It's something that has stayed with me over the years and now every time I hit a new town, and I've got some time spare, inevitably I'll head for the art gallery.

A relatively local exhibition of Andy Warhol in Nottingham was too good an opportunity to miss. I did however make a small diversion first. I had a mirror to look into. Anish Kapoor's 'Sky Mirror' is a recent addition to the outside of the Nottingham Playhouse theatre. A huge circular mirror – convex on one side, concave the other, it really is a stunning piece of urban sculpture – one of the best I know of that really adds to its location. One of those things that make you wonder why it has not been added before. And the locals like it – getting an 80%+ approval rating. Best statue in Nottingham in fact – poor old Robin Hood is always having his arrow nicked and

the stump thing in front of M&S ('leaf stem' sculpture, apparently) is just hideous. Pity it was so cloudy. I will definitely return the next clear day I'm in Nottingham. And no, it does not act as a 'death ray', zapping pigeons or passers-by, when the sun is out as was once rumoured!

Warhol's a bit of a conundrum. On the surface it is all about surface. He is what he is and his art is what it is and that's it. American icons – products (Coke, Campbells' Soup), people (Marilyn and Jackie) – simplified and repeated. Art that is ironically the product of a 'Factory'. Warhol himself is a symbol reduced to black and white: wig, glasses et al. Interestingly the disguise of wig covered up his baldness and the glasses, and the fact his self-portraits are always straight on, are to disguise his big nose - something he was completely paranoid about (interestingly a trait he shared with Turner). He once said in an interview: "The interviewer should just tell me the words he wants me to say and I'll repeat them after him."

Although frustratingly and deliberately opaque, Andy is much more than that. He's possibly the true artistic genius of the twentieth century – about twenty artists rolled into one. For a start (or rather at the end of his career) he's the great death artist. In his later self-portraits, post-shooting, he looks like he is already half-dead. The studies of the electric chair and car-crashes are truly disturbing – death screen-printed, mechanically duplicated as the subject-matter mechanically duplicates its killing, either frazzling and mangling its victims over and over again. The dollar symbols, the Mao portraits, the map of Russia showing suspected nuclear missile mega-tonnage are a clear statement on the cold war. The Monroe and Kennedy paintings are the first and last word on celebrity – an icon produced, a copy, a new surface, of the 'real' person, then endlessly copied and faded as the icon and then the real person fades. He turned the kitsch to art to kitsch to art and on and on – it's all as gay



as a window of course but even a rough tough hetro like myself can see it goes way beyond the queer ghetto of much 'gay' art.

At the exhibition Andy-influenced music played in the background – the Velvet Underground and Blondie - which certainly added to the atmosphere. A great pity the exhibition was so small, only four small rooms – although everything was from the Warhol museum in Pittsburgh USA so a rare opportunity to see it over here. But none of the early arty films like 'Kiss' and 'Blow Job' were there – although they are hardly something you would sit through for fun, better in concept and to glimpse as excerpts on the recent documentaries. The later trashy ones like Warhol's Frankenstein ironically received little of Warhol's input. And I've still not seen 'Fifteen Minutes Of Andy Warhol' – his nearly legendary contribution to television.

Until very recently I've loathed those 'living sculptures' Gilbert and George – ten-foot turds and arseholes I can do without. How-



ever a video 'Gordon's Makes us Drunk' I saw at Tate Britain has partially turned that around. The two are shown deadpan throughout. First preparing to drink – washing glasses, then pouring from a bottle that has had their names added on either side of the royal crest of the label. Then drinking glass after glass in their bare apartment, as their voice-over intones "Gordon's Gin gets us very drunk" against the ultra-patriotic music of Elgar and Greig. It's completely hilarious – simultaneously a piss-take and celebration of both Britishness and high manners and also a point where habitual drinking becomes, as they put it, "not a pleasure, but a duty to perform".

Elsewhere in Britain we have the antithesis of Warhol, Bacon – all emotion. The shipping-out of a lot of the art from the old Tate to Tate Modern gives more space in the new Britain and now Bacon (like Gilbert and George) has a room of his own. No Screaming Popes but plenty else including the still stunning triptych 'Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion', from 1944 – mutant figures against a harsh red background – a true depiction of the almost undepictable true horror of war.

However better even in the War and Memory gallery are a series of pastel portraits, on loan from the Royal College of Surgeons, by Henry Tonks of ex-servicemen undergoing pioneering plastic surgery. Ironically colourful, and strangely beautiful and they convey the dignity and bravery of their subjects. Possibly some of the most moving portraits I have ever seen. Gilbert and George drank gin, and most of the Young British Artists have been fond of the sauce from 'Mad' Tracy Emin to Damien Hirst who seems to have spent most of the nineties bombed out of his mind. However it was the shark at the Sensations (or the Saatchi Showing Off) exhibition that convinced me that Hirst was not just some overrated corpse-fixated drunkard. 'The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living', to give it its full title, seems to leap at you as you approach the tank – a trick of the formaldehyde having a different refractive index to

water. Its dark nasty solidity was a reflection of the whole exhibition. I loved it.

Hirst again in Tate Modern. His installation 'Pharmacy' has been added since I last visited our cathedral of art. Another stunning reflection on life and death – the shelves of medicine surround an Insect-O-Cuter below which are bowls of honey to lure flies to their death. The room itself is bright and airy, the work an insight into how hard we try to fend off the inevitability of death. The medicine in the cabinets is carefully arranged – though only a pharmacist would know it – those for treating ailments of the head at the top down to those for the feet at the bottom. And as it 'ages', the medicines slowly decaying to poison, it will become a museum piece, a snapshot of medical care at the end of the millennium.

'Art is like medicine – it can heal. Yet many people who believe in medicine don't believe in art,' Hirst says.

So where's this heading?

I have fond memories, from many years ago, of the Little Nose stories on Jackanory. Little Nose is a young caveman (er caveboy), actually I think a Neanderthal, getting up to scrapes, as all boys do, with his pet baby mammoth and exasperating his mother and father. The tribe he lived in was rigidly divided, with the men going out hunting and the women staying home looking after the cave and the young children – a fair reflection on all primate tribal organisation, from Native Americans to Polynesian islanders.

However there was an exception to this rigid harmony in Little Nose's tribe: the mysterious masked tribal 'medicine man' who acted as healer, mystic, but above all entertainer – story teller, artist and magician.

I think I could have managed 'hunter' or even better some sort of samurai warrior

where artistic and intellectual skills were as highly prized as martial prowess but it's been a hard lesson to learn I'm not exactly suited to the modern equivalent: sitting in an office all day – so the path of 'medicine man'...?

I once thought that I could have been a YBA, done what Hirst has done, if only I had gone to art school. Now I'm not so sure. There has been great art produced but like the spilling bags that surrounded Hoxton Square there is an awful lot of rubbish produced by artists struggling on the periphery of the hard-core favoured by Saatchi.

However 'art' – even if non-cutting edge drawings, watercolours, pen and ink illustrations or you stretch it to include such activities as writing - is just such an incredibly satisfying thing to do... it really is medicine.

There's a photograph, called 'Leap into the Void' showing the artist Klein in an impossible position, in a leap of faith, flying out from the front of a building – like the true magician he was, he never revealed how he did it.

Yeah, it's not the obvious or easiest path but I think it's time to make that leap of faith.



*Christina has a close encounter with a tram track in...*

### **It's not quite straight, is it?**

I thought that bowling might be a problem. After all, the main advice for bowling is that you keep your arm straight. But my right arm doesn't do straight. Not any more. Not since falling off my bike.

At work I have a bike gang. As soon as the evenings begin to get light in May or June we go off on bike rides after work, normally out into the narrow and rather hilly lanes of South Gloucestershire, cycling past farmland and converted cottages, heading ultimately for one of the many country pubs dotted around the area. In July we set out on my favourite ride of the season, the one that goes along the track by the river and ends up in the centre of Bristol (leaving me with only

a short ride home after the pub, instead of the bastard of a climb up to the A38 from Tockington.)

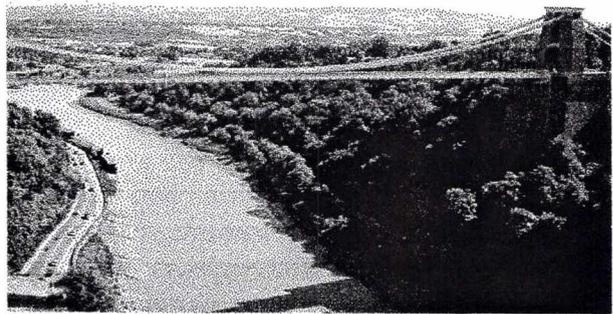
But this year it didn't seem to be going as well as usual. First there was the weather. It wasn't actually raining, but the skies were grey and gloomy. Then we decided to do a detour to get off the busier roads and ended up cycling through some estates on the edge of Bristol that looked so grim that we all subconsciously picked up speed and bunched together for safety. Inevitably we got lost. Stoppages to consult the map got more frequent, and even once over the motorway bridge, and on familiar territory heading down to the river our normally reliable navigators seemed to lose their grip. Still, we made it to

the first pub and sat outside lamenting the lack of sun.

Once on the river track the weather didn't seem to matter so much. Unlike the previous year where foot and mouth had led to the track getting overgrown with grass and brambles, the path was reasonably clear. The river was up, and Ron kept stopping to point out birds skimming across the water. Further along some mad Frenchman had built a bridge across the gorge way up above us. The Clifton Suspension bridge from below always looks more improbable than from on the bridge itself.

And finally we came down into the edge of Bristol. This year we had decided not to go to the Cottage pub, which gets very busy in the summer, but thought we would try out the Nova Scotia. Big mistake. It was heaving inside. We had to fight our way to the bar and press food orders on an already overstretched staff. We went to sit outside, even though it looked like it might rain at any minute. Shortly afterwards it did start to rain. But only a slight drizzle, which seemed a fitting accompaniment to Neil's tale of having his car broken into and stereo stolen (the usual urban irritation - who *buys* all these stereos?). Back in the pub for more drinks, we sussed that there was a table free providing we didn't mind sharing it with a guy eating a huge plate of ham, egg and chips (boy, was I getting hungry!) Later, much later, our food arrived, along with apologies from the bar staff. They hadn't been expecting a crowd that night either.

The final leg of the ride before we all disperse in the centre of Bristol goes along the dockside. It's slightly dodgy due to pedestrians, water and tram tracks, but I was keen to do it rather than skirt via back streets. So we sped along past old industrial buildings and new post-modern statuary till we came to the tram tracks from the old dockside railway. When I crossed the first set I accidentally cut in front of Louise. I felt bad about this, so the second time, convinced that she was just behind me again, I left it too late. My bike



wheel went down into the tram track. Even then I thought I was going to save myself, and it was a bit of shock to find myself in freefall. The next thing I knew I had landed on the concrete on both hands and knees.

The bike gang clustered around me. For some reason I started to apologise. "I'm sorry," I kept saying. And "I'm all right." The latter proved premature. My knees were smarting and my arm hurt, but nothing seemed to be broken. However, I didn't really feel like getting up, just crawling off somewhere to lie down. But the others, keen to get home, took me at my word and so I picked myself off the ground, listening to Neil explain how he'd thought I was going to hit my jaw on the concrete, and someone else telling him that I'd lifted it up at the last minute. Thank god! It could have been much worse. I tried to wheel my bike but I felt faint and shaky, and had to keep stopping to sit down and clear my head. By the time we reached the end of the docks, I knew I wasn't going to be able to ride my bike back. My arm hurt too much. Neil who had the shortest bike ride ahead of him, volunteered to stay with me while the others went on. At this point I remembered my mobile phone and called Doug. I knew he'd come down and meet me, and wheel my bike back. But mostly I just wanted the comfort of his presence.

Neil sat with me at one of the tables outside the Arnolfini, and we talked inconsequentially about festivals and other accidents until I began to feel less faint. When I felt confident enough to walk, we made our way back through town, Neil wheeling his bike and mine. We agreed that my arm

didn't hurt enough to be broken, but I found it was only comfortable to walk if I held it against my chest as if in an invisible sling. Just before the underpass, we met up with Doug. He looked worried, so while Neil handed over the bike, I tried to reassure him that I was all right. I don't think he was convinced till I cracked a few jokes. I was feeling slightly euphoric now that the faintness had worn off. Relieved that I could walk around without wanting to pass out. Relieved that Doug was there.

Back home, I dismissed any ideas of getting my arm checked out at casualty. It would probably be better in the morning. I cleaned up my knees and began on the slow process of getting in to bed. Doing everything one-handed took some time. Getting into bed, my injured arm felt weird. Like a torn fingernail. It only hurt when I moved, unlike my left knee which ached all the time. But at least I knew what that was. It hurt because I'd scraped a load of skin off. My arm just felt wrong.

Between the knee and the arm I got very poor quality, fitful sleep. When the alarm went off I felt awful. But I was on autopilot and just got out of bed like I did every morning and went off for a shower. Everything ached and once again I couldn't use my right arm. I couldn't lift it enough to wash my hair and it wasn't strong enough to use to clean my teeth. I wondered if I'd be able to dress. Remembering my struggles with getting out of a t-shirt the night before, I chose one of the shirts that buttoned down the front. Much to my relief I *was* able to dress myself. I didn't fancy making poor Doug do everything for me. But once dressed I was a bit at a loss. I didn't really feel like going to work, but having succeeded in getting that far through my normal regime, I couldn't think of an excuse not to (apart from not being able to comb my hair properly!) Besides going back to bed might mean taking my clothes off again, and that seemed like even more effort than going to work!

The next step was to see if I could drive. Luckily the left hand does all the work in a British car. My right hand just has to hold onto the steering wheel. Or so I thought. I hadn't realised that it also – normally – closes the door for me and puts the key into the ignition. Negotiating these left-handed was slow, but do-able.

Once in work, the next interesting discovery was that I couldn't write. I also had to move my phone over to the other side of my desk so that I could use it left-handed. Sadly I could still use the keyboard and mouse on my computer, so on the surface at least it looked like I could do my job. In fact, no-one even noticed anything was wrong until I told them the story. I rang the doctor's for an appointment, hoping I would at least need to take the afternoon off, but they found me one for 5.30.

Unusually for me I'd been to the doctor's the week before and seen a very good locum. This time it was still a locum, but a different one, a white-headed Indian man, who immediately told me off for bothering him. "What can I do? I don't have an X-ray," he said crossly. After some more unhelpful comments, including an unsuccessful attempt at making me straighten out my arm, he told me I should go to Casualty and kept me waiting while he wrote a polite note to the Chief Registrar.

Casualty was quite quiet, so I only had to wait half an hour to be assessed, another hour to get my X-ray done and a further half hour to hear the verdict. And the verdict was that the doctor was baffled. There was definitely something wrong, he told me, and he thought it might be a fracture. So, he issued me with a sling, some strong painkillers and an appointment at the fracture clinic the next day.

Out in the car park I felt really scared. If I did have a fracture I would have to have my arm in plaster, which would mean I wouldn't be able to drive, use a computer or do all sorts of other stuff. I realised then, that although I had half-wanted the recognition and attention of a definite injury, in fact I didn't want to lug a

huge plastercast around with me for weeks. I mentally listed all the problems, rearranged my diary and found myself close to tears. We were going camping tomorrow, dammit, at the Trowbridge Folk Festival. What if I couldn't go? No, I told myself, we could go on the train or get a lift with our friend Tina. But part of me knew it wouldn't be easy to cope with crawling in and out of our tent with a fractured arm.

The next day I turned up - without car - for the fracture clinic, only to find that the doctor had failed to mention that it was on a completely different site, several miles and a large taxi fare away. The taxi driver seemed gleeful about my chances of a couple of months off work, but I just felt despondent. There were shooting pains running up and down my arm. It felt like fragile links holding the bones together were just about to come apart. My doom seemed certain.

This time it only took 45 minutes for someone to see me. The woman didn't take any more x-rays, just did a few checks on the mobility of my arm and asked me where it hurt. Then satisfied by what she saw, told me not to lift any heavy objects, and that I could try some light swimming exercises in a couple of weeks. *And she let me go.* No plaster. No drama. Just a follow-up appointment in three weeks, with talk of physiotherapy if I needed it. I felt relieved and annoyed at the same time. Why couldn't any of the other doctors I'd seen earlier have worked this out?

By the time I got back to work my arm was feeling much better. I could actually eat right handed, and make a feeble attempt at writing. It must be the positive psychological effect of being told that I didn't have a fracture, I concluded. Until I was reminded by one of my colleagues that I'd taken a number of powerful painkillers that morning. The effects lasted till about midway through the next day when lying in the sun in a field at the Trowbridge Festival my arm went back to feeling like it might fall apart if I didn't hold on to it very tightly.

Come my second appointment at the fracture clinic, I almost didn't think it was worth the effort of going. I had regained most of the use of my right arm, apart from an alarming propensity for it to buckle when I tried to do anything strenuous like garden or clean out the bath. It still felt strange, a dull ache first thing in the morning before I used it and last thing at night when I tried to make myself comfortable. I felt a fraud compared to the genuine injuries at the clinic, but still needed some answers. This time the man who saw me was less interested than the first woman. He made me bend my arm up, then stretch it out. I did bending so well, that he didn't want to know about my problems with stretching. "How often do you need your arm fully stretched out?" he asked dismissively, before telling me I would probably never get it back to normal again. I was too taken aback to argue, and before I knew it, he had discharged me.

The man was right. Most of the time I don't need my arm fully extended. A lot of the strength has come back. I can't boost my whole body out of the swimming pool, but I did pretty well travelling round Europe with a heavy rucksack. Ironically the one activity where I still notice my injury is cycling. It took me a month to get back on my bike again, not because I was scared but because my arm wasn't strong enough to take my weight on the handlebars or steer and brake effectively. Now I cycle to work about once a week, but my arm still cramps up after a few minutes.

As for bowling; the first few tries hurt a bit until I started using the extra light ball. At the end of the session my arm was aching, but my bowling had improved. Maybe I should take it up on a regular basis as my physiotherapy? No-one but me might notice, but I hate having one crooked arm that won't straighten the way the other does.

I think it's time to see another doctor.

*Tony Keen also discovers the transience of it all in:*

### **Intimations of Mortality**

(Produced according to the Lake-Edwards Law of Fanzines: "There is no experience so bad that you can't get an article out of it".)

It's the morning of December 27<sup>th</sup>. I'm up in Stockport, visiting my mother for Christmas, and I'm having a bit of a lie-in, attempting to recharge my batteries after a good few months of intense activity. At about 10:30 am the phone rings. And rings and rings. Normally one of the other occupants of the house, my mother or my grandmother, would have answered it by now. After about nine or ten rings, I start to stir myself out of bed to answer it, but am beaten by my gran, who was evidently also having a lie-in. It's my aunt, calling to speak to my mum. Gran knocks on mum's door, gets no answer, and then tells her other daughter that Ann (my mum) must be out. I roll over and decide to laze about a bit longer.

Gran goes downstairs and sets the alarm off. Hang on, this is a bit odd. Last person to go to bed turns the alarm on for the bottom half of the house. First person up turns it off. So if my mum's got up and gone out, why is the alarm still on? I suppose she could have turned it on again when she went out, since everyone else in the house was still asleep. But it seems a bit out of character. I decide to get up.

Downstairs I find that not only has the alarm not been turned off, but also the curtains in the front room haven't been drawn, and the dogs haven't been put out. It's very odd that these things shouldn't have been done. A nasty thought starts to form itself in my mind. While my gran talks on the phone again to my aunt, I go upstairs and knock on my mother's door. "Mum?" Still no reply.

There's one last thing to check. If my mum's gone out, she'll have taken the car with her. So I find the garage key. I already know what I'm going to see before I lift the garage door. Sure enough, the car is still sat there.

So my mum must still be in the house. But she doesn't have lie-ins like this – for a start there's the dogs to put out and feed, and I can't imagine her leaving that this late. And we've knocked on her door and got no reply. Though we don't say anything, it's obvious that my gran and I are thinking the same thing.

We now have no choice. One of us has to go into my mum's bedroom. And given the options are 37-year old me and my 88-year old grandmother, it's pretty obvious who that has to be. I'm dreading what I'm going to find in there. Yet at the same time my mind is racing ahead to what has to be done if my worst fears turn out to be true. My brother will have to be called first, of course. And all my plans will have to be shelved; I shan't be going to any of the New Year parties I've been invited to, or going back to work on January 2<sup>nd</sup>.

I knock again. Still no answer, so in I go. The room is in semi-darkness, but I can see that my mother is in her bed. I walk up to the head of the bed.

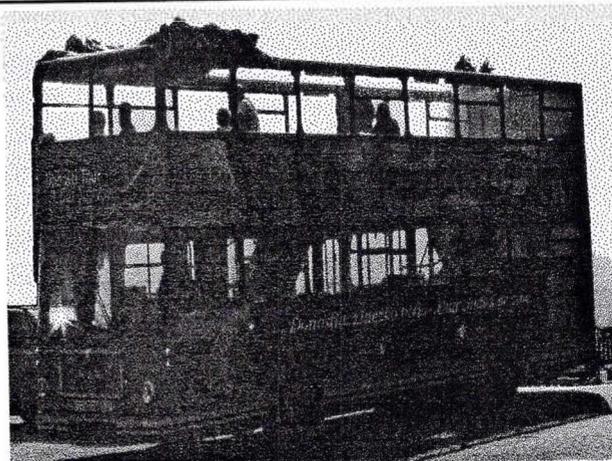
"Mum?"

Her eyes open, and she says, "Yes?"

All at once my fears turn into great relief and a sense of being somewhat ridiculous. "It's 11o'clock," I explain. She's as surprised as we are that she's slept in so late, and managed to sleep through all the knocking on doors. My gran tells her off for giving us such a fright.

I tell the story in the pub that night, with those members of the old FONT crowd able to turn out between Christmas and New Year. "So," says Cal. "Your mum was having a lie-in, and you woke her up?" Well, yes, I suppose you *could* see it that way, but at the time I was pretty shaken up about the whole experience, because a lie-in like that was so out of character.

It's four weeks later, and I hardly think about this incident, and its implications, at all. I don't like thinking about mortality. I've done too much of it in the past – between the ages of 27 and 35 I used to have regular panic attacks about dying, and vastly envied the peace of mind of those who either believed in an afterlife, or weren't bothered by its absence. I've calmed down a bit since then. I know eventually I will have to face the reality of my mother's death. I'm hoping it won't be for a long time, though – she looks young for a 64-year old, and comes from a family with long-lived tendencies; I've mentioned my



**Basque Convertible Bus  
[for Tony K]**

grandmother already, and my grandfather's sister is still going, if a little frail and forgetful, at 93. So for the time being I won't think about such things. But I reckon the next time I get a fright like this, it'll be for real.

*Doug records his impressions about going on holiday to the Basque Region...*

### **Pil Pil, I Love You Still**

Our plan was simple, fly to Bilbao for a couple of days of city life, check out San Sebastian (or Donostia as it's called in Euskera the native Basque language), spend a week relaxing in Biarritz just across the border in France before returning to Bilbao again via San Sebastian.

Bilbao is an old industrial city, like the Catalonian city of Barcelona at the other end of the Pyrenees. For a long while Spain relied on both these cities for its wealth. Unlike Barcelona, which managed to re-invent itself as a chic happening Euro-city, Bilbao has lagged behind somewhat. The once-toxic river Nervión still occasionally turns green and smelly in the height of summer, the outskirts of the town are still

full of big unpleasant looking warehouses and factories and the Basque terrorist group ETA still occasionally blows buildings or cars up. Despite all this Christina and I thought Bilbao would make a decent start and end point to our Basque holiday.

My first evening in Bilbao was tinged with a slight smattering of culture shock. As all good tourists do we made for the old town, Casco Viejo. Here you can loose yourself in the tiny warren of back streets for an hour or two, passing the same *bacalao* (salt cod) shop several times in a row. An attractive feature of the Casco and in fact most of the Spanish Basque provinces is the abundance of small bars with counters groaning under the weight of platefuls of



**Giant spider attacks museum  
designed by Frank Gehry**

pintxos (the local variant of tapas). Pintxos vary in type and size. While some are much-loved standards available almost anywhere, some are the signature dishes of that particular tavern. Each bar prides itself on providing a good variety and quality for almost any taste, except possibly vegetarian. An evening out usually entails spending no more than about fifteen minutes in a bar with a glass of Rioja and a quick snack before moving on to the next one. On our first evening we noticed some bars that looked just too scary to go into. They were usually empty with a couple of locals standing at the bar eating their pintxos and sipping beer. The floors were usually strewn with all sorts of rubbish and looked quite frankly a bit intimidating, as well as unclean. It took us quite a while to pluck up courage before entering these, whereupon we discovered that empty just meant that the bar was between waves of parties; lots of napkins on the floor meant the pintxos were very good.

The next day we decided to visit the Guggenheim. At first impression you wonder what sort of head-fit overtook Frank Gehry when he was hunched over the architectural blueprints, technical pen in hand. After the initial shock has passed you by, you start to warm to the sheer audacity of the building. Then when you enter inside the true nature of the design really wins you over.

The first space usually visited by most visitors is the huge hanger-like gallery for large-scale installations. From Richard Serra's squiggly *Snake* that you can actually walk through to the exhibition we saw on Kadinsky there is not one piece of art filler here. Every piece is given sympathetic surroundings, which just makes your appreciation of the art even more enjoyable.

The true beauty of the museum though is in the way it highlights Bilbao. Bilbao, you see, sits in a mountainous bowl, almost like it exists in a volcanic caldera. Along any of the wide avenues of the city centre you'll find a large looming hill staring at you not that far in the distance. Through this the Nervión bisects the city. The Guggenheim is designed in such a way that you get some astonishing views of the parts of Bilbao that the museum overlooks, just like the Tate Modern does in London. However the Guggenheim is a lot subtler. You catch a glimpse of the hills as you're leaving a smaller gallery room through one of the odd shaped window, just like you do when walking down Bilbao's streets. There's a platform where you can watch people promenade beside the Nervión that's designed in such a way that it looks like the strollers are walking over the river. From the inside looking out the whole building makes sense.

After you've been in Bilbao a while, the Guggenheim's place in the city begins to make sense too. It dominates your view of the city as you enter it from the airport. With its monstrous futuristic shape you don't notice much else until the airport bus has whisked you past the museum into the city centre. Then there are the strange sci-fi

looking entrances to Bilbao's brand-spanking new underground city and the aeronautical modernism of the new airport. Take a walk along the Nervión and you'll see enormous modern art sculptures as well as a new streamlined trendy footbridge. Bilbao is changing, re-inventing itself too. The river is getting cleaner, even fish are returning to it. There's hardly any graffiti, and some of the cleanest streets I've ever seen. On top of this everywhere there's building work going on as the city cleans up its old industrial image. There's a real sense of civic pride here and it all started with the Guggenheim.

It's a little known fact that when the Guggenheim wanted to open a new museum elsewhere in the world Bilbao was so anxious that it be there that the building was actually financed by Basque taxpayers. First reactions to the new art gallery amongst Basques were mixed, but when visitors from overseas started coming pride took over. Bars, restaurants and hotels all started renaming themselves to get in on the Guggenheim name while there was uproar amongst Bilbao residents when Jeff Koon's giant floral kitsch *Puppy* sculpture which guards the museum's entrance was threatened with being sent off on a worldwide tour. *Puppy* has really been taken to heart by the Basques, it is now the un-official symbol of Bilbao and brands all sorts of tourist tat.

San Sebastian just up the coast is quite different. With lovely beaches and misty mountains nearby, Donostia has always been a natural holiday destination. It is the Spanish equivalent of Biarritz just across the border. With its famous annual Film Festival San Sebastian seems to have remained contemporary while Biarritz despite its stunning coastline and good surfing beaches still feels like it's striving to overcome the loss of its status as a fifties and sixties jet-set celebrity holiday destination. Being a smaller city than Bilbao and not having to try as hard to attract foreign visitors Donostia has very much its own character. It feels more Basque and beneath its gentle seaside resort feel there's a palpable edge to the city.



**Sandwich designed  
by Frank Gehry**

It was in Donostia that I first saw pro-ETA graffiti. On our first day in San Sebastian we visited the bar-lined square of Plaza de la Constitution, deep in the old city. As we sat drinking beer and eating lunch that afternoon in the former bullfighting square, my eyes were drawn hypnotically to a large makeshift display at nearest end. Four faces stared out from the display, mounted on the background of the red, green and white ikurriña flag of the Basques. My knowledge of written Euskera isn't good but the dates underneath each face and the large floral display in front of the pictures translated the strange language for me all too well. These people had died for their belief in Basque independence.

ETA started in the 1952 as initially an underground intellectual organisation for middle class university students. Back then cultural activities in the Basque Provinces were violently suppressed by General Franco. Franco had a deep hatred for this region, partly due to the concentration of Spain's industrial wealth within it and also for the Basques resistance to his forces in the Spanish Civil war. The Basques were oppressed more than any other people in Franco's reign and arguably lost the most regional power when Franco eventually won. There had been an independent Basque state created in 1936. The Basques took their chance at independence very seriously indeed, immediately creating police forces, banks, government depart-



**Puppy (Jeff Koons)**

ments etc. Franco had other plans though. With the aid of the Germans he fought a bitter war throughout Spain, culminating in the savage bombing of Gernika, the spiritual home of all Basques. Nine months later the reality of an independent Basque state was dead and Franco set to work oppressing those who opposed him. Euskera speakers disappeared mysteriously in the night. Fearing that the Basque language would soon be extinct the underground organisation of *Aberri Ta Askatasuna* or *ATA* was formed to keep it. The founders not being fluent in Euskera eventually changed the abbreviation to *ETA* (for *Euskadi Ta Askatasuna*) when they discovered that *ata* meant *a duck* in Euskera. As more and more people vanished for demonstrating against Franco, *ETA* gradually became more violent, eventually slipping into murder in 1968.

It was also in Donostia that I noticed the dual language road-signs with the Spanish names spray-painted out, another method of promoting the Euskera language. More jarring to me personally was the existence of pro-Falange graffiti. While I had been prepared for signs of Basque nationalism and

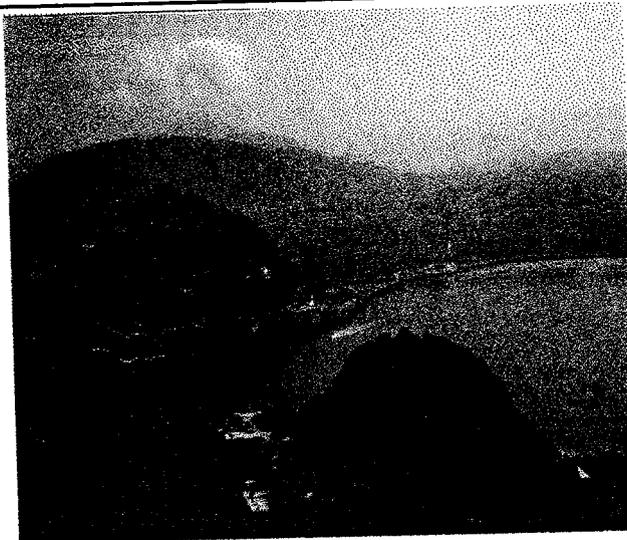
pro-ETA graffiti, I didn't expect to see any pro-Fascist wall-scribblings given the hardships suffered by this region under Franco since the Spanish Civil War. It just goes to show how dangerously close nationalism is to fascism.

Despite this San Sebastian didn't feel dangerous at all; the Basques have learnt one thing: carrying out attacks on your own tourists is not good for your economy. Although the film festival was in full swing and we were lucky to get somewhere to stay, the beaches and restaurants weren't too busy. The daytime felt relaxed and lazy, ideal for sitting on the sand watching the beach pelota players. However San Sebastian's character flipped completely come the evening. Everyone came out to promenade, everyone. Donostia on a Saturday night has an almost frenetic edge to it that Bilbao didn't have. With a high number of surfers in town I expected San Sebastian to be lively. However almost everyone of all ages was out drinking into the very early hours. The bars were crammed and the streets full of crowds you had to fight your way through. It was a fun evening moving from bar to bar, trying strange hams, gorgeous tasting bite-sized seafood snacks and high quality Riojas, but it was also very draining trying to keep up. Even if we could speak fluent Euskera and Spanish the locals would have still picked us out as foreigners; we weren't moving around as fast as everyone else. When we found a bar we liked we stayed in it for an hour.

French Basqueland was an odd experience after the intensity of Donostia. The houses were still built in traditional Basque style, facing east towards the sunrise with the same red, white and occasional green colours. Most of the towns we passed through had their own pelota fronton, but everything else felt more familiar, more French. Biarritz with its high volume of holidaymakers and surfers could have been anywhere. Everyone, myself included, was wearing multinational surf clothing labels

such as Quicksilver and Animal. The food mostly strayed away from salt cod dishes such as pil pil back to the more familiar French style *fruits de mer* while Rioja's predominance in the wine list dwindled. The local's frantic evening *pintxos* and promenade disappeared to be replaced by the more relaxed stroll to collect fresh bread before your evening meals. Everyone knows a French bread tastes better after it's been taken out for a walk.

Only in St-Jean-de-Luz, did the Basqueness start creeping back in. You saw a lot more *ikurriña*, businesses delighted in using the almost ubiquitous Basque fonts in their signage, and while St-Jean-de-Luz is famed for its high quality and numerous seafood restaurants, non-marine dishes on the menus drifted back towards the more spicy and earthy Basque fare. Bayonne, linked to Biarritz by the out of town shopping and residential sprawl of Anglet, was a different story. Despite its Museum of Basque Life the town felt like it could have existed in almost any region of France. Gone was any form of written or spoken Basque. The Museum even with its extensive sections on traditional agriculture and pelota felt like it had little in common with the indigenous culture of the area. The gallery of modern paintings of traditional festivals held in the French provinces had a revisionist self-congratulatory air about it. Virtually all aspects of this part of Basque life disappeared in France in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It wasn't until the traditional culture re-emerged from the underground in Spain after Franco's death that the French Basques felt the need to restart their own festivals. Unfortunately there were few alive in France that could remember them from their youth and even fewer written accounts, so watchers were sent to the Spanish villages to borrow theirs. Bayonne also prospers with "traditional Basque product" shops. The meats, wines and herbs all looked of excellent quality but they all had that rough rustic feel removed from them and had been re-packaged for a more gentle French tourist market. The only sign of Basque nationalism in Bayonne I discovered was a rather small portrait of Sabino Arana, founder of the pro-



### San Sebastian or Donostia?

independence BNV political party, buried in amongst a whole host of other paintings virtually hidden away...

So there we have it modern Bilbao gearing itself up for its place in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, frantic edgy party town San Sebastian, faded but beautiful Biarritz living on former glories and gentle Bayonne a.k.a. Basqueland for the timid tourist. Although part of me wants the three French provinces and the four Spanish ones to merge to become the first independent Basque nation since 1936, I also felt that in some ways it already has. With EU borders down, a common currency, Euskera being taught in schools and the growing awareness of their own traditional culture and language amongst the French Basques is it really necessary? To be truthful I don't really know...but this part of the world deserves the chance to shine brighter.

We took a number of photos of Bilbao out there. Not all of them were of pretty views of floral dogs or strange metal buildings. A couple were of enormous building sites. Our plan is to go back some time in the future to see how much Bilbao and the Basques have changed.

Where the neo-fans graze

by Christina Lake

Cat Coast and I went to the fans of the future panel at Context and discovered that the future of fandom is filk. The panel consisted of one student of the upper class British variety, two sisters who had been taken to a con once by their father and become adopted by the filkers, and two second generation fans (one of whom was too young to count as an independent entity yet.) The student commented on how few students there were around. Once the life blood of fandom. It's pretty ironic that Unicon, the convention run for students didn't seem to have any, except courtesy the sister filking convention that has taken to cohabiting with Unicons. (And this led to a whole extra degree of strangeness: a small convention where half the people there you know very well, and the other half you don't recognise at all.)

But back to the ever unresolved question of the future of fandom. Does fandom as we know it offer enough for the new fan (or let's face it, the old and cynical fan)? We can't entice people in to a room and invite them to sing. Outside of Las Vegas it's rare to see fanzine fans in action actually producing their fanzine. In filk, once you've opened your mouth and joined in, you're caught, part of the community. What would give the same level of initiation in SF fandom? Going to the bar and buying a huge round of drinks? Bidding at a fan fund auction? For years I've explained it to the non-initiated as a weekend of drinking and talking to friends. But isn't it an awfully expensive way of having a party? If I think so, and these are actually MY friends (well, some of you are. Friendship and fandom is a concept that deserves a piece in its own right), what's to draw the new person in? SF, as Doug keeps pointing out, is now mainstream. We're not here because we're strange (like filkers. Don't tell them I said this!) Yes, there are still some pretty odd misfits around at conventions, but I don't go seeking them out.

Oh no, I gravitate towards the fun-loving, the cool-looking, the easy-to-talk to. Increasingly the more fan-like fans annoy me anyway; I'm not obsessive enough to match their conversation about old sci-fi TV programmes or the latest new technology and I don't seem to find the same things funny. At times like these, I stop wandering about the fans of the future, and wonder why the hell I'm still here!

In the Bristol SF group we seem to have no trouble attracting new fans. But, ahem, they're all Dr Who fans, who have found their way to our pub through the electronic portals of the Dr Who community, where our very own in-house writer Nick is active. We have Clarrie, not yet 20, student drop-out, but into weird music, Buffy (of course) and her paramour — long-standing group member Ken! We have Phil who besides being self-confessedly one of the few straight male Dr Who fans, can talk endlessly about comics, and is that rarity among fans a sports fan (consequently he is now Doug's new best friend!). And John who does music mixes and is a DJ. Despite talking incessantly about the sex life of Paul Cornell, they have made an immense improvement to the liveliness and viability of our group.

Fans are active electronically — no-one more so, but fannish groups like Trufen and Neurofen are rarely breeding grounds for new fans. But let's not lose hope. Fanzine fandom did gain one new fan this year. It gained Max whose latest fanzine shows as clearly as can be what it is like to be in love with our community. It gives me a warm glow, and takes me back to how I felt in the '80s when I first found fandom.

Max like the new Bristol fans arrived via the online route — Red Dwarf fandom, RASSF then Trufen. But she seems to have arrived for the same reason I did all those years ago; because she wants to write, and fandom offers an audience. Two issues of *Cosmic Hairdryer* showed an innovative and confident writer and

designer. A4 landscape format. A letter column with comments running down the side, and headings on each of the letters. Amusing piss-takes of junk mail, interspersed with personal writing, telling us enough to be interested in Max. I wanted to see more by this person, even if she was threatening us with theme issues (well, I've never done one, unless you count fandom or travel. But perhaps newcomers go for themes precisely because as I was saying above, fandom isn't about anything in and of itself).

But then Max went mythical and the *Cosmic Hairdryer* got put away in the bathroom cupboard while Max played with her LiveJournal, became widely published in top fanzines, and produced an understated perzine with an annoying title (*They made me do it* sounds either like Max's mind has been taken over by aliens (or the legendary Croydon group mind), or else she's just too unbearably popular to live). The good writing was still there, but the flourishes have gone, the sense that Max might do anything, because she's reinventing the format as she goes along. I felt somehow let down, as if fandom really had assimilated Max, even though the zine promises that the Hairdryer will be back. But will it be in the same format? After all, I'm sure somebody's told her by now that an A4 landscape zine has never won the Nova!

But conversely, I'm also scared that Max has assimilated fandom, and that the cult of LiveJournal has changed everything so much that I no longer understand it all any more (and of course, what's really bothering me is I feel left out.) I freely admit that despite having a LiveJournal myself, I don't really get it. I like having an online journal, and wish I had time to write more, format it, and play around. But I'm just writing it for the hell of writing; because occasionally something happens that I want to write down before I forget about it. I'm not part of the community. I don't go to LiveJournal parties, hyperlink to other LiveJournals, pay my dues by commenting (often) or tell everyone what music I'm listening to. And I have completely failed to link to a quiz to help my readers find out which cast

member of *Six Feet Under* they might be (though aren't Brenda and Nate, Sherry Coldsmith and Mike Christie?).

And then there's the effort of getting to know who everyone is all over again. At first sight the made-up names seem either absurd or cliquey (though Lilian assured me it wasn't cliquey; full of in-jokes, yes, but no-one is being excluded, you just have to join in.) But I was damn pleased my journal didn't have my name on it when I foolishly admitted to having a "blog" at work, as what I write that touches on work definitely isn't for my colleagues' consumption! All the same, the effort of trying to decode party reports full of assumed names just makes me stop reading after a while.

The other thing I've been doing wrong, I suspect, is randomly assigning people to my Friends list on the basis of a) having discovered they're there and b) wanting to keep up with them. Yes, I am that passive consumer. Time was that I had to ring up my friends to find out how they were; then came e-mail and I could just send them a message and hope they'd reply. Now all I have to do is log on to their journal and get it all for free. Whereas that's not the idea at all, apparently. In my attempts to establish that I really was incognito, I came across another Christina on LiveJournal. Here's what she has to say:

**So you've noticed this journal is mainly friends only? To bad hey? There are to many people in LJ Land who believe they have a right to read what ever they want. Reading someone else's thought's, feelings, entries is not a right. It's a god damn privilege. So respect it. I in return will do the same for you. I require maintenance. I do not want to be just another name on your list. If that's what you think I am or will be I'm telling you now I'm not the kind of LJ friend you want to make.**

Yes, it's true, I *am* the anti-Christina.

So I guess I'm going to have to shape up, especially if as according to Lilian Edwards LiveJournal is the new fandom, that interconnected community we've always aspired to through our apas, fanzines, email lists and conventions.

But maybe new readers to fanzines feel much the same as I do about those LiveJournal parties? People's convention names are often as silly as LiveJournal names (or indeed used as LJ names). How do they ever decode the convention reports in our fanzines? What do they make of the crucifixion of Tobes or fan funds explained by the medium of interpretive dance? I can't really decide if con reports are for the people who were there or for those who missed out. If you were there you can egoscan for your name and relive common experiences; if you weren't you can at least keep up with the in-jokes but at the expense of knowing what you have missed out on. All the same, con reports are the staple fare of any good fanzine (just look at the latest *Floss*; it runs five of them no less, thus cornering the market in this valuable commodity). Fanzine reviews may sometimes be described as the on-going conversation that link fanzine fandom together, but con reports are more inclusive. They really do define who is part of fandom; not just the people who pub their ish, but those who are always around at conventions, those in the bar late at night when things get weird, those who run room parties, those who talk on panels. Perhaps this is the equivalent of walking into that filkroom after all. If people talk about you in fanzines then you know you belong.

What I should have done at the end of the fans of the future panel was give each of the brats (sorry, young people) a fanzine (okay, so I didn't have a fanzine at ConteXXt. Minor detail.). How else can we woo the fans of the future? They won't know what we're about unless we tell them. This is what's so good about *Plokta*: it's not just the jokes, the tabloid journalism, the full colour printing, it's that it goes out to a lot of the fan base of the UK (and elsewhere). It goes to the people I

see around at conventions, but can't afford (or don't think) to hand my fanzine to. And I know this because they write letters to *Plokta*. It really does work. And the same inclusiveness is the reason why *Ansible* keeps winning Hugos. If you want to define who is in fandom you need look no further than the people who read *Ansible*. Which means the filk fans, the writers, some of the Dr Who fans (though not all, they have their own first Thursday meeting in London), and those people around you in the bar at Novacon who don't care about SF any more, but still need to know what's going on.

Of course this is all facilitated by the electronic medium. Printed fanzines are expensive. *Plokta* has the Plokta News Network to help people join in. *Ansible* appears in e-mail boxes worldwide. I would like to make Head! available electronically, but know from my own experience that people rarely read whole fanzines on screen, and probably wouldn't get around to printing it out as a download. But I still think return on investment (time and money) in the fanzine publishing world sucks. What we write is good (try Randy Byer's article in *Chunga*). We undersell ourselves by not encouraging all of fandom (even filkers) to read the best and brightest of what is written in fanzines. And maybe that way more people would want to join in?

\*\*\*\*Advertising Feature\*\*\*\*

*A Bright Particular Star* contains some of the finest, punchiest fan writing of Lucy Huntzinger. Find out the truth about the Chicken Brothers and the Order of the Sisters of the Saint Bronte Sisters! Relive Lucy's relationship with shoes, nail polish and romance novels. Take off on safari to Kenya with Lucy (I wish I could!) and discover whether there's more to Pam Wells than chocolate. Kim Huett who put together this collection will send out a copy in exchange for the equivalent of a couple of dollars to cover postage : US/ UK money always appreciated! Contact Kim at [atoxenwurm@hotmail.com](mailto:atoxenwurm@hotmail.com).



Resident Bristol Dr Who novelist **Nick Walters** had just completed his latest book when he got to meet one of his all-time idols...

## McGann

Last Friday, Ken, Clarrie and I went to the Arnolfini to a "Poetry Slam" event - Paul McGann, Annie McGann and Angus Brown reading "Poetry of War and Peace." This had been planned for months but was quite timely in the light of the current world situation. Anyway, I was feeling totally knackered, having just finished *Reckless Engineering*, and been to see The Fall in Gloucester the night before, and drinking infinity pints [for once, I was more pissed than Mark E. Smith]. I was not particularly looking forward to two hours of poetry, but I was looking forward to seeing Paul McGann, planning on taking notes to make the Doctor in *Reckless Engineering* more McGann-like. But I was caught off-guard - some of it was extremely moving, Annie McGann's reading of Sylvia Plath's "Daddy" in particular. Some of it was utterly predictable ("Dulce Et Decorum Est" - but that's such a great poem that its inclusion in an event about war poetry is utterly inevitable). They'd also dug up some harrowing Korean poetry, and Pablo Neruda's "To A Ship's Figurehead" was stunning. McGann even managed to inject a bit of humour into the proceedings, but the overall atmosphere was very serious.

Of course, Ken, Clarrie and I - as far as we could make out the only Who fans in the audience - were there to see McGann. We tried to suppress our fannishness out of respect for the theme of the event - but it was never far below the surface, threatening to burst Kroll-like above the mental horizon. "He's a lot shorter than I thought he would be." "Look at his Scary Old Man Ears!" "Is his wife pregnant?" "His forehead's quite bony" "He's got a giant neck, like a turtle's!" Such were the comments bandied between us [you'll have to work out who said what.] For me, seeing him there in front of me, hearing the voice I'd

been imagining speaking the Doctor's dialogue in *Reckless Engineering*, was spine-tinglingly exciting.

During the ten-minute interval, Ken and I somehow managed to sink a pint each of the fizziest Stella Artois I have ever drunk. Like lemonade, you could feel the bubbles bursting against your face as you sipped. We surreptitiously tried to find fellow fans by coughing the word "Zagreus" but there were no bites. Back in for the second half, belches forcefully welled up inside Ken and I, just as irrepressible as our fannishness, and just as out of place. I could at several points have belched the word "bollocks" but managed to swallow down my roiling internal vapours. The event wrapped up at ten o'clock, at which point Annie McGann invited anyone interested back to the McGann house "where the poetry reading will continue to midnight and beyond!" There was rather a stunned silence at this, and the look on Mr McGann's face spoke volumes - seemingly this was the first he'd heard of this! "Shall we?" I said to Ken and Clarrie. Clarrie baulked - "Have to work tomorrow" - [as did we all] - but I was thinking, a chance like this cannot be missed!

But things then took an interesting turn. On the way out, Ken approached Angus Brown and congratulated him on his performance, and did the same to McGann. Everyone else was filing out. It seemed we three were the only people with balls enough to approach the performers. Suddenly, I found myself face to face with Paul McGann, who was busily shoving sheaths of poetry into a rucksack. I can't remember what I first said. I think I congratulated him on his performance, but I can remember him saying, "Who are you?" and all I could think of was his purported fear of

Doctor Who fans. So I said, "I'm Nick Walters, and this should give you a clue" [revealing the silver Doctor Who badge on the lapel of my biker jacket]. McGann grinned evilly. "Ahh - y'bastad! I saw you in the audience!" I told him that I was "more than a fan" and was a Doctor Who author. He seemed pre-occupied, but interested, and said, "Look, are you gonna be in the bar?" When I said "Yes", he said, "Right - I'll join you for a drink!" and then vanished back-stage. By this time Ken's and my bladders were near to bursting with that pint of evil fizzy Stella. So to the toilets, where I told Ken what McGann had said and we panicked utterly, flapping around like deranged geese with no shred of dignity. "We're gonna have a pint with McGann!" I yelled. "Two pints of cider - ice in the cider!" bellowed Ken. "For fuck's sake, NO!" I implored. "We MUST be normal!" "Normal?" Ken pointed at the mirror. 'LOOK at us!' I looked - and saw two thirty-something star-struck Who fans clinging on to each other like a pair of teenage girls.

I sighed. "You know what's happened - McGann's said to his wife, 'There's fans in the building - leggit!'" So we re-joined Clarrie at the bar, and there was nothing for it but more of the evil gassy Stella. We hovered at the junction of bar, corridor and entrance to the theatre. "Oh well, if he doesn't turn up, at least we've spoken to him", I commented, quite happy to leave it at that. But then Paul McGann emerged, and wandered into the bar, looking aimlessly around. I expected him to be immediately besieged by a horde of shrieking females, because Every Woman I Know Fancies Paul McGann. It's one of the facts of life. But he remained unbothered, so I approached him and asked him if I could buy him a drink. Then he held up his glass of wine and ACTUALLY SAID, "Thanks - but I'm already drinking the finest wines available to humanity!" I said, "WE'RE supposed to say that to YOU, y'bastad!" The ice thus broken, we sat down at a table, and remained there until the bar staff chucked us out.



My impression of McGann was very favourable indeed - not one jot the stand-offish, fan-fearing agoraphobic of lore. I found him to be friendly, enthusiastic about what he does, and passionate in a very Doctor-ish way. He spoke at length about *Withnail and I*, he clearly loves the film, and agreed with the view held by us fans that it's great NOT because of the comedy. Of course we spoke about Doctor Who, he waxed passionate about the Doctor, though bless, he seemed to think that the "half-human" thing was part of the series mythos. When he vanished to the loo, Clarrie, who was sitting opposite him, commented, "This is so scary, the number of times I've imagined that man naked..." No such problem for me (and I assume, Ken!)

He seemed not to know anything about the recent Dr Who books, so I filled him in: "You wouldn't believe the things your Doctor has gone through. First of all, he's destroyed Gallifrey, lost his memory, had his heart ripped out..." He seemed interested in *Reckless Engineering* [I'm toying with the idea of dedicating the book to him, would that seem too wanky?] and gave me some good advice on writing ["Be passionate, make the words come alive..."] and gave me a hug [don't ask me why!!! Perhaps he was a little bit pissed]. The most freakish thing, for me, was finding out that he is a fan of The Fall and Half Man

Half Biscuit. We bonded on this - he didn't know about HMHB's new album, and I sang "Vatican Broadside" to him.\* The evening ended when the Arnolfini chucked us out at 11.20, and McGann gave me and Ken a handshake and Clarrie a kiss. And then he was gone, in the direction of Temple Meads.

Then it was a group hug and the three of us gambolling around like mad squirrels, totally freaked out and overjoyed and NOT CARING what people thought. Clarrie had just the previous weekend moved down to Bristol, and I was so pleased that her first week in my city had brought her such an experience! I staggered home text-messaging everyone I could think of.

I knew that, living in Bristol, I would encounter Paul McGann eventually, but never dreamed it would be like this!

So there you have it - Paul McGann, Fall Fan, and top bloke!

\*Vatican Broadside is only 30 seconds long, and goes:

The singer out of Slipknot went to Rome to see the Pope  
 The singer out of Slipknot went to Rome to see the Pope  
 The singer out of Slipknot went to Rome to see the Pope  
 And the pope said to his aide:  
 "Who the fucking hell are Slipknot?  
 Who the fucking hell are Slipknot?  
 Who the fucking hell are Slipknot?  
 In relation to me getting out of bed."

---

*It's time for a round-up of the LOCs received since Head! #4 and Doug is in the editing chair this ish in...*

### **Head Letter Office**

*First off I'd like to thank all those who wrote to us congratulating us on last years Nova. Cheers guys! Our first LOC comes from Tim Jones who adds to his article Mordor Ballads...*

**Tim Jones (Timothy.Jones@vuw.ac.nz)**

I've now seen "The Fellowship of the Ring", the film that so much fuss has been about. I did catch a few glimpses of the tracks on the hill above our house, if not of the quarry itself, but for most of the time I was too caught up in the story to scenery-spot. I enjoyed the film, but I wouldn't put it quite up there with my favourite film of the past couple of years, "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon". It certainly is head and shoulders above any other (English-language) fantasy film I've seen, though, and with a couple of exceptions I thought they managed the difficult job of adapting Tolkien for the screen very well.

The postscript to the article is that, when Kay, Gareth and I were visiting a friend who lives in the country near Otaki, about an hour's drive north of Wellington, she pointed to a horse in the field next to her house and said "That's Shadowfax".

Gandalf's horse didn't look very likely to race off across the fields to Wellington at its master's whistle; it was eating from its stall and flicking its tail to ward off the flies. But it did look very, very white.

*Tim's life was not the only one to be impacted on by LOTR:*

**Pauline Nicholson, PO Box 90,  
 Manapouri, New Zealand**

I do know Tim Jones, so I had a good read of what he had to say about "The Lord of the Rings" filming up his way. I live in a part of the country where a lot of filming was done too. Our local hall suffered a scorched floor from some presumably

exciting scene. My husband and I went along to the cattle call audition. We were both called back but I had to decline due to motherhood getting in the way. I could just see a short creature in the background having to pause to breast feed during a battle scene... Aaron had problems with halloween masks used for the auditions. They were too small and cut off his breathing. He was having to take the mask off during the sword waving audition to catch a breath before squeezing back into it. I believe they probably would have assumed that he was claustrophobic and wouldn't be able to cope with whatever headwear he would have needed, so he didn't get a third call back. It was a shame because he had been an extra on the filming of "The Willow", so "Lord of the Rings" would have looked excellent on his resume too.

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

I quite enjoyed Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring, but because the book was so full and detailed, the whole of the first book couldn't possibly have fit into a three-hour movie. The cuts were large, but necessary. I just couldn't see Tom Bombadil, singing and prancing about in green tights, playing a major part of the action in this movie. The stay at the home of Farmer Maggot, other details...I think the cuts were the right ones. However, I think I did myself a favour by re-reading the first book to remind me of characters and place names, many of which were present but not named in the movie. I do have one question of Tim Jones...Viggo Mortensen played Aragorn/Strider in the movie, but if he was the replacement, who was the original actor hired to play that role?

*Maybe some kind film fan will let us know. Speaking of films...Jerry continues the debate on favourite film directors*

**Jerry Kaufman, 3522 NE 123rd St,  
Seattle, WA 98125**

As I expected, your full list of ten favorite directors is quite interesting and not much

like mine. Of course, I don't have such a list, as I have trouble selecting just ten. Hmmm.

In no order, just as they've been coming to mind over the last few days: Buster Keaton, John Ford, Howard Hawks, Akira Kurasawa, Alfred Hitchcock, Martin Scorsese, Federico Fellini, Preston Sturges, Vincente Minnelli, Inagaki (can't remember his first name - did a lot of samurai pictures). I'd put Woody Allen, Francois Truffaut and Sergio Leone in my second ten, at least, along with Chaplin, Lubitsch, Wilder, Welles, etc. (Citizen Kane is my favorite US movie, along with The Searchers, but Welles did a lot of very interesting but minor stuff. However, ask me in another couple of weeks, and I could move Welles up and kick Inagaki down.) If ever we're in the same room again, we'll have to discuss this further.

*I'd like that too Jerry. Hopefully I'll get out to America again sometime real soon!*

*The artwork in last issue drew quite a few responses. Back to Tim and D West's four page masterpiece...*

**Tim Jones**

Full of good stuff, this issue was, and the highlight for me was "The Horror, The Horror", as it brought back memories of my single visit to a UK convention, Prefab Trout in 1989: the fans (some of whom I recognised, such as the couple to the right in panel 5) and the behaviours seemed remarkably familiar. There is a comfortable hobbitness about fandom.

**Eric Lindsey, [fiawol@ericlindsay.com](mailto:fiawol@ericlindsay.com)**

Travelling to the UK and attending Paragon had one startling and totally unexpected effect. I could recognise and name many of the characters in D West's drawings. You can't say these GUFF trips don't have an effect on cultural interchange.

**Jerry Kaufman**

I recognized many of the people in D's cartoons from Eastercon (he does a wonderful Victor Gonzalez, and Victor is always chuffed to be featured in a D. West cartoon). How-

ever, in number 5, I don't recognize the bloke carrying the drinks, and am not sure if he is the fellow D. refers to as "our greatest living fanwriter," as the fellow is carrying drinks to (or near) Greg Pickersgill, whom some might refer to by the "greatest living fanwriter" line. (And besides, judging from recent FAAN Award polls, Christina has a claim to that title, and you (Christina and Doug) are standing behind D. in the drawing, not doing anything useful at all.)

**Steve Jeffery (peverel@aol.com)**

Highlight of this issue has to be Nova runner-up (we presume - haven't seen the full results yet) D. West's excellent four-page illustrated Eastercon conrep, displaying startling accuracy as a caricaturist. D's Victor Gonzales and Dave Hicks, in particular, are wonderful, and an especially nice touch of Alison in black in the background of frame 7. I also have a horrible feeling that the slightly disintegrating figure slightly behind D (importuning Maureen and Paul) on the left of frame 4 is meant to be me. Or possibly Catweazle. (But is the figure in the basque and stockings in the background of the last frame Teddy, or did I miss something spending too much time in the bookroom?)

**Alan Sullivan, 26 Thornford Road, Lewisham, London. SE13 6SG**

In a word, hilarious. Why, I showed no. 5 to Robert Newman recently and he hasn't stopped laughing yet. I think Mark Plummer has thought. Trufans are of course very useful, as I hope to show in my forthcoming *magnum opus* entitled *101 Uses for a Trufan*. They don't even have to be dead. Anyway, brilliantly observed and rendered.

*Not to be outdone, Brad Foster supplied us with another superlative cover last ish. Head! just wouldn't be the same without Brad. Christina and I have come to think of him as one of the Head! family.*

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

Fantastic cover. You realise, of course, that there's a face on the very back row, deliber-

ately, I'm certain, partially obscured by others in front of him, that has three eyes?

*We do now, Ron. Eric also commented on our one-eyed friend...*

**Eric Lindsay**

Many thanks for Head #4, with the fine evocative heavily headed cover by Brad Foster. Not sure why there is a one eyed purple people eater in the group getting their heads together, however it must either be set in the far future, where head hair has headed off, or else it is a sf con and we have all aged a bit more.

*Simon Ounsley's chance meeting with Tony Blair received a lot of comment.*

**Jerry Kaufman**

D. West makes Tony Blair come alive - why has he not attempted to become a political cartoonist? His cool, detached style and tone would have made him unique in that field (not that he isn't already unique).

I am not surprised that Simon didn't know what to say when cornered by Famous Person T. Blair. Especially when he has strong feelings about the man, but didn't expect to meet him. Too bad. And he couldn't have had the time to go into complexities. But isn't it a shame he didn't have enough presence of mind to ask for a meeting at a later date?

**Steve Jeffery**

Ah for missed opportunities. Simon's story of meeting the grinning goblin (Blair), and not an egg or tomato readily to hand, raises one of those "What would \*you\* do?" questions. And probably Blair was really really sorry. For the microsecond between doubt and calculating that it probably wouldn't make any difference to the next election.

*Ooh you cynic Steve. Personally I think everyone should carry rotten tomatoes and eggs with them at all times just in case they accidentally bump into any politician, but*

*hey, that's just me. From one cynic to another...*

**Ron Bennett**

I liked Simon Ounsley's opinion of Tony Blair and what he's doing and has done with and to the Labour Party. I don't think that Simon is being unfair at all. Other fans to whom I've spoken recently on the same topic, Pat Milnes and Jenny Campbell have echoed Simon's remarks virtually word for word. But I wouldn't go so far as comparing him with Thatcher. Pity we'll never have the opportunity of knowing what Tony Blair would do if he'd had available to him the North Sea oil revenue so utterly devastatingly wasted by Thatcher. And one can't get annoyed with William Hague. When did we ever have such an hilarious time with Prime Minister's Questions?

I must be getting cynical in my old age. When Simon came to describing Tony Blair's arrival at the Leeds Playhouse, getting out of his car to applause, my first thought was that the affair was being stage managed, The applause, never mind the staff handshakes. And it did occur to me, as it did later to Simon, that criticising Blair for the fact that the car park being roped off was causing problems for the ME patients was firing shots at the wrong person.

But what a fantastic, analytical article. Best article in a fanzine for this year without a doubt. Not because of the topic but for the depth of thought, unrolled centimetre by centimetre, or, if you like, as time was involved rather than distance, micro second by micro second. I wonder how much time actually elapsed while Tony Blair had his hand held out to Simon?

*Meanwhile, Spencer J Ostraczi's Letter from New Britain drew an altogether different response.*

**Pam Boal (Pamela.Boal@tesco.net)**

I'm afraid Spencer Ostraczi rather lost me,

satirical alternative worlds are great but I think his needed more common reference points. I'm not sure that I agree with him regarding Tomorrow's World. At least when it was first broadcast and Raymond Baxter was the presenter they really did bring new technological developments to our notice and not all their predictions as to possible developments were that absurd. Even before Baxter quit it was developing into a trivial show with gimmicky presentation (which I understood was why he quit) so we stopped watching. Spencer's memory obviously differs from mine the plug in wall covering was not paint but a wall paper. As far as I know it never did develop to be used in buildings but did become the car rear window defroster that is pretty standard now.

**Steve Jeffery**

Spencer J Ostraczi II's 'Letter from New Britain' is ...weird. Even by fanzine standards — though perhaps not for the odder fringes of the small press. Equally strange and disconcerting is a discovering a picture of Bonnie Langford in a fanzine.

**Alan Sullivan**

Good old socio-political satire, so beloved of the people. Wonderful stuff. Carry on, that man...

*Alan will no doubt be pleased that Spencer has already promised us another article sometime about the show trials of Kenny Lynch.*

*With space running out it's time to wrap up the letter column with some random comments...*

**Ron Bennett**

Pete Crump wanted to be a science fiction writer if he'd failed the medical for fast jet pilot? Heavens, I've known people fail the medical for science fiction writer. Ah, thinks. I bet that John Berry could work wonders with that one.

I thought the entire article unusual and

fascinating. Loved it. I particularly liked the description of what Pete was feeling when the plane began to taxi and the cockpit began to pressurise, with his ears popping and different coloured lights, which I imagine were inside his head, beginning to flash. Ah, there are some superb articles in fanzines, aren't there? This is excellent.

### Steve Jeffery

Greatly enjoyed Pete's account of going up in a jet fighter, but can only comment that if it had been me, I wouldn't have been handling the sick bag back empty.

### Jerry Kaufman

I enjoyed the Seccon report, too, and laughed several times. For instance, the details about the bar and the upstairs lounge (that room where they put those of you who wouldn't go to sleep) got me, and the reference to New Scientist. I read a few issues last year, and found it a lot less stuffy than the ones I read a decade or two ago. It also seemed more sensational than before, with theme issues about sex.

### Pamela Boal

One has to congratulate Doug and Pete on almost realising their dreams but the real heroine of this ish is Christina. Any one who can negotiate that town and emerge from it sane is some one to be reckoned with. As Swindon has the most varied and largest wheel chair friendly pedestrianised shopping area within our ken and reach we go there whenever our needs are greater than our local shops and supermarkets can meet. Despite years of experience we can still find ourselves heading in ever decreasing circles or emerging on a one way road, with no exit slip roads for miles, which carries us in completely the wrong direction.

### Steve Jeffery

What was Michael Ashley doing masturbating in old copies of This Never Happens (Second conrep)? What sort of articles (or pictures) were you putting in there?

*We'll leave that one to your imagination.*

**WAHF William Bains, Kim Huett, John Hertz, Gary Wilkinson, Kate Yule, Dale Speirs, Spencer Ostraczi, Brad Foster** (once again thanks for the amazing covers) and **Pete Crump**.

*Sorry guys we've run out of space! Pete notes that the last time he wrote for a fanzine it was "Attitude" which won a Nova that year. How about writing something for us next-ish mate?*

## Credits

**Head! 5** was mostly produced by **Doug Bell** while his co-editor **Christina Lake** drove around the country, failing to visit fans in Peterborough and avoiding getting squished by trees in Sunday's gales.

Head! is available on whim, or for letters of comment, artwork, contributions, other fanzines and, of course, alcoholic beverages for llamas.

To contact us, write to:

12 Hatherley Road  
Bishopston  
Bristol  
BS7 8QA  
UK

E-mail: [head@headwest.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:head@headwest.fsnet.co.uk)

Art credits: Cover: the incomparable Brad Foster; p.4 & p. 6 Gary Wilkinson.

Next issue: will be out sooner than next Novacon (we hope!), and might even be supporting Doug Bell for GUFF (as should you all!)

**October 2002**

