

Allright me lovers?

Welcome to the latest fannish missive from the West Country. Sometimes I struggle to remember that I'm not from this part of the world. No the scrumpy hasn't gone to my head yet, although some people may accuse me of having gone native.

I've always had a strange affinity with this part of the world right back from growing up in Penicuik. There aren't many claims to fame for the former mining/paper-mill town, a couple of footballers you'll have never heard of came from there, Alan Wells the once famous Scottish sprinter lived there briefly, as did one of the Wurzels. For those not in the know, the Wurzels were a West Country based folk band started in the sixties by the great Adge Cutler. Their early stuff, all written by Adge, tended towards lewd cider-drenched drinking songs. In the seventies after his death the Wurzels took a new direction - they discovered the novelty hit. Penicuik library, because of its tenuous connection, had a huge collection of Wurzels LPs; hey kids - remember vinyl? And because of the complete lack of anything, and trust me I do mean anything else in the record section worth borrowing I did take one of their albums out once.

Wind forward many, many years and I'm living down here with the lovely Christina, not a pasty throw from Bristol Rover's Memorial Ground. I'm missing my usual fix of Scottish football so I start going to games by "The Gas" who were then challenging for promotion to the First Division. Next thing I know it's three years later and they're sitting down the bottom of the Third Division, meanwhile I know all the words to Rover's hymn "Goodnight Irene", have coughed up the cash to buy shares and have experienced some of the best and worst football the world has ever seen. Not only that I've made a couple of terrace pals who seem convinced that I've been going to games with them all their lives. A typical converstaion - "Ere Remember that friendly against Yeovil in 1985 we went to?". "No I've only been coming here the last three years." You may laugh, but I honestly

find it quite touching to be written into someone's personal history like that.

Anyway I like the relaxed pace of life down here. I don't drink a lot of cider but when I do I really enjoy it, the pasties are great, the countryside marvellous and the coastline fantastic. Nearby Cornwall and Devon remind me so much of some parts of Scotland, just with more hedges, better weather and more seafood restaurants.

Recently I managed to see the Wurzels and kind of close the circle started nearly two decades ago. They were playing in Bristol fan and Head regular Nick Walters' local pub not more than a short stagger from his house in Totterdown. To be truthful none of us could really face it. There was the "Lets go for a curry instead" discussion beforehand, which slowly changed into a "Lets stay for a couple of songs and then go for a curry".

Anyway the Bush was packed with Wurzel fans. Their following these days is predominantly drunken rowdy young West Country lads and lasses. Immediately I felt anxious about the huge number of Bristol City shirts worn. "No-one mention football tonight" I warned Nick. I'd completely forgotten that the Wurzels were City's celebrity fans; they have the Wurzels, and although no-one has ever seen him attend a match we have allegedly Geoffrey Archer...go figure. Soon though the drink put me at ease and soon the septuagenarian band were belting out their back repertoire and the crowd, myself included was singing along to the likes of "Blackbird" and "All over Mendip Tonight". (If it makes it any easier to imagine just think of the Wurzels as a Oom-pah Band from the West Country). Their recent single a cover of Ooh-arses' (i.e. Oasis) "Don't Look Back in Anger" had everyone chanting along. Despite our reservations it was a fun and drunken evening even with having to grit my teeth and bear the pain through the Wurzels own song "Morning Glory" as adopted and sung by Bristol City fans everywhere. Yeap maybe I have gone native.

- Doug.



**Fans invade Bristol house.
Two dead (tired). Many empties.**

as reported by Christina Lake

"Your house is very small," said Lennart, "compared to Swedish houses." ("And there's woodchip on the wall" he could have added. But luckily he's more in to Jonathan Richman, than Jarvis Cocker.) It did feel very small. Much smaller, somehow, than at the beer festival 2 weeks previously. But then we had just finished the most fan-packed fortnight our quiet Bristol backwater had known since the weekend when Lilian came down for the longest and hottest barbecue in the history of mankind or when Pam Wells, Tony Keen and others showed up for our Millennium party at the end of 1999.

It all started when Linda Krawecke arrived for the 3rd annual Hatherley Road beer festival in late January. "What have you done with all your junk?" she asked, shocked. "Oh, it's all been moved out of the way to make room for the beer. We've still got it," I reassured her. "Most of it's up in the room where you'll be sleeping."

But the room did look much better with its junk vortex (aka the table) moved from the middle of the room to under the window, where an assortment of bottled beers – Belgium, British and even American were lined up, waiting for the Bristol hordes to descend. It looked uncannily like a Sunday night at Novacon, except without Tony Berry to dispense drinks or Steve Lawson to point out the finer points of the latest beer badge.

Brian, local beer aficionado arrived with a hold-all containing an eclectic selection, representing the finest traditions of British brewing, some of it so dark and murky that you didn't even have to look at the alcohol content to know that it was dangerous. Meanwhile, several other people arrived. "Look what I've brought. It's called Banana Bread beer," said Nick. "Yes, I brought that one too," added Nathan, pulling a bottle from his bag. "And look, here's the one that Doug bought earlier," I pointed out.

I set up a blackboard for people to write down their top beers. Linda and I debated whether to write down Marston's strong IPA. Was it only our favourite because it was the first beer of the evening? We couldn't decide, so I wrote down Banana Bread Beer instead.

"But it's horrible," objected Nick. "Well, why did you drink so much then?" Linda diplomatically set up a Yuk factor section, and Banana Bread went down there too.

The room was no longer looking uncluttered as beer tops were fast-breeding all over the place and dark murky liquids lurked on the mantelpiece like fly traps. "Just waiting for it to settle," Jon promised when I pointed out an abandoned bottle that he was trying to ignore in favour of something light and golden instead.

The board filled up with names: Spitfire, Badger Golden Champion Ale, Young's Special London Ale, Hopback Summer Lightening. I began to worry. Would the beer last? Although there were more bottles than the mind could conceivably handle, there seemed no limit at all to beer appetites. Strange fruit beers got unwrapped and passed around. Double chocolate was deemed by some less yukky than Banana Bread. Brian made inroads into the dark chewy beers. (Ventnor Oyster Stout, Fullers London Porter and Deepshaft Stout duly appeared on the board.) Ken turned up with some lager, which we politely ignored. But the odd thing was: *no-one seemed to be getting drunk*. With the possible exception of Clarrie and Ruth who were drinking spirits. Could all these high volume alcohol be a con? Or does beer only work in the pub? There was only one way to test the theory: drink more beer!

Eventually Brian admitted to being a bit the worse for wear, while Nick discovered that he was incapable of beating *anyone* at table air hockey, thus proving he was the most drunk person in the room. At some point Nick, Ken, Clarrie, Doug, Linda and I all sang along in chorus to Half Man, Half Biscuit's "Who the fucking hell are Slipknot" while the rest of our friends edged uneasily away.

The room didn't look too bad the next morning, considering. A few crumbs on the carpet. A pile of beer glasses in the sink. And two full black boxes worth of beer bottles for recycling. What would the neighbours think? Linda, Doug and I headed out for breakfast, which Linda told us she could claim as a business expense providing we talked about festivals. We talked about festivals anyway. If only Larmer Tree didn't clash with Bristol's local homegrown practically free Ashton Court festival then Linda could get us jobs on her security team. Then we discussed what went wrong with the Essential Festival, transplanted to Bristol in 2002, and now dead, and how new licensing laws might be about to kill live music.

Later we took Linda to see the famous Clifton Suspension Bridge. Which turned out to be shrouded in a chilly mist, even though the rest of Bristol was clear and sunny. It was atmospheric but less spectacular than usual as we could barely see from one side of the gorge to the next. After comparing the density of Samaritan's hotline numbers to Linda's local suicide spot at Beachy Head, we decided that we'd scored enough fresh air for one day and headed gratefully back to slob out on the sofa and watch the cartoon channels.

That evening we set out to see the Soft Boys playing at the Fleece, Bristol's last remaining decent music venue. I like Robyn Hitchcock & the Soft Boys, but for some reason I have them classified in my head as a folk band, which is a bit bizarre considering that they take to the stage with three guitarists and a drummer. But one of the guitarists does look – and play – like a folk musician. And their

fans are dedicated and knowledgeable like Nick (who eagerly snapped up the CDs on sale at the gig), and Linda (who is practically a groupie, since not only had she come all the way to Bristol from Eastbourne to see them, but planned to see them in Oxford and Brighton too.)

Robyn Hitchcock was in playful mood. He began his set by asking us to pick one letter out of three. We did so, and they played a song beginning with that letter, but not the one that anyone was expecting. Then they played something by Syd Barrett. Then Robyn told us some strange stories, and they played more songs. Robyn explained that each time the Soft Boys reform it portended doom for the planet. Last time it was the nightmare combination of Reagan and Thatcher. This time it was Blair and Bush – and he launched into a diatribe against Bush, culminating in: "George Walker Bush, you are a fucking wanker!"

"I've never heard Robyn Hitchcock swear on stage before!" said Nick, impressed. "Things must be serious." "They are," I said. "But we didn't need Robyn to tell us that."

The next morning Linda left to go on the next stage of her Soft Boys tour, while I resumed my correspondence with Lennart. "Let's meet up on Saturday. I'll see if Dave & Cat can come over from Newport." I e-mailed to the visiting Swede, knowing little more about his visit than that he was booked in at a local hotel for the weekend to meet up with some woman called Maggie.

Doug was very excited at the prospect of Lennart's visit: "We could take him to Ikea as our native guide and make him translate all the names." "And then we could eat Swedish meatballs in the restaurant afterwards," I agreed.

Having satisfactorily arranged a programme, we could hardly wait for the weekend. Then on Friday, disaster struck, or rather snow blanketed Eastern England, people nearly died of exposure in an all-night traffic jam on the

M11, Stansted airport was shut and Lennart travelling with no difficulty in a country that regularly handles sub-zero temperatures learnt that his plane to England had been cancelled.

Meanwhile, Dave Hicks and Cat Coast were all geared up to come over from Newport for their first fun weekend since Dave's dad died over Christmas. "Come over anyway," Doug said. So they did. It soon became obvious that they really needed a drink. "We've just handed in our notice, and put the house on the market," explained Cat, adding that as far as she was concerned she couldn't leave work too soon! They were going to move up to Leicester where Cat's mother lives, and where they would be within striking distance of more fannish activity than the occasional Friday meetings of the Bristol SF group (which as Dave correctly pointed out had not occurred since May of last year anyway!).

It wasn't till later in the evening, when they had mellowed out a bit, and the Bath Ales of The Hare on the Hill had done their trick, that we heard something of the Lennart story. Lennart had asked Dave & Cat to sponsor Maggie to come and live in England. Maggie is from Kenya, and Lennart met her when she was visiting Stockholm. But under Swedish immigration law she can't stay in Sweden, so Lennart helped arrange for her to go to Britain. Now she was working in Bristol, and Lennart had been about to fly over and visit. "But it's all right," I said, "he's managed to rearrange his flights for next weekend. And it'll be a real fannish party as Debbi and Ian are visiting."

So, on Thursday night, I picked up Debbi Kerr from Bristol Parkway station. For someone who'd spent the day being trained up on some arcane survey software, she seemed remarkably chipper. Even the thought of being taken down the pub to meet the Bristol SF group, instead of staying in and watching Buffy, didn't seem to dampen her spirits unduly. "Do they serve

red wine there?" was her only question. "I think so," I said, doubtfully. After all, with a pub that sometimes runs out of beer, how can you be certain of anything? But luckily the Scotchman and his Pack was on good form. Bombadier, Brunel and Ringwood were all on tap, while the barman was willing to sell us wine by the bottle.

"What have you got then?" Debbi asked expectantly.

"Red or white?"

"Red," said Debbi, expecting a list. Sadly she had overestimated the sophistication of Bristol. But it turned out to be surprisingly drinkable.

Debbi explained her plans for putting out a fanzine called Books are the Enemy, based on her experiences helping Hazel Ashworth deal with Mal's book collection. Somewhere en route we managed to pervert the concept to Boots are the Enemy, which could have been all about a well known chain of chemists but was in fact related to our mutual problems with finding a decent pair of black boots to wear. It was a quiet night down at the pub. If I can't remember much about what went on, maybe the fact that Debbi and I drank three bottles of wine between us had something to do with it. But no doubt there were the usual conversations about Dr Who, Paul Cornell and Peri's breasts, a few songs went on the jukebox, but not necessarily Convoy, and I think Richard bought a round of pickled eggs which as usual only he, Ken and Doug were prepared to eat.

By the time I returned from work on Friday, Ian Sorensen had arrived, and was busily bonding with Doug over their past visits to Millport on the Isle of Cumbrae. A long conversation ensued which proved that Ian might or might not have known one of Doug's aunts. Or something like that.

Ian and Debbi tried out Doug's new ukulele, which represented stage one of Doug's plan for world domination through stringed instruments. "Christina wants to buy key-



boards," Debbi told Ian, revealing phase 1 of my master plan to not let Doug have it all his own way. "Why?" Ian asked. "So that you can play Genesis songs?"

I didn't like to admit he might be right, so I went off to ring Lennart and find out if he'd actually made it to Bristol this time. I tried the mobile number he had emailed me, but didn't get a connection. So I tried his hotel instead. "There's no-one of that name here," the woman on reception insisted. Doug took a look at the mobile number, and concluded that we needed to dial Sweden first to make it work. "Maybe he's still in Sweden," I suggested as the phone rang. But Doug's shouted conversation revealed that Lennart was in fact in the bar of the City Inn, within inches of the receptionist who had so recently denied his existence, waiting for Maggie to turn up. After some more shouting, Doug managed to arrange for us to meet Lennart at his hotel the next day.

We headed out to the handy Moroccan restaurant at the top of my road, to meet up with Richard and Tina, who we had drafted along to bear the brunt of Ian's jokes, while we got on with eating. Debbi, good girlfriend

that she was, did not let her eyes glaze over as Ian launched into a story that she must have heard more than once, though she did make herself comfortable in amongst the cushions on our seat, wine glass to hand. The restaurant does a couple of unusual but good Moroccan reds, and the most meltingly tender lamb tagine known to mankind. After dinner we retired the five minute distance back to the house. After all, what was the point of braving the Friday night noise and student crowds of the pubs along the Gloucester Road, when Debbi had made such a good job of buying half the wine stock of Oddbins? The evening rapidly turned into a wine tasting as each bottle divided up just nicely between the six of us. Doug took on the role of DJ, and despite Ian's complaints about lack of tunes and production values, played through his usual eclectic mixture of bands such as the Bonzos, Half Man Half Biscuit, Ramones, Tenacious D and quite possibly the Wurzels. Tina and Richard saw sense first, and staggered back off down the road around midnight. Ian and Debbi went to bed. Then Doug and I kind of forgot that we had no more guests to entertain and stayed up sipping at something strong for a good half hour or so longer. When we finally turned in, Doug's nice empty black recycling box that which he had finally cleared of beer bottles that morning was full up again. What would the neighbours think?

Dave and Cat showed up around 1.30. By this time, Ian had verified that the wine offers in our local Somerfields were not as good as those he was used to in Hamilton, had helped me ascertain that my video player was beyond repair and had discovered that the best way to access Radio 4 in my non-radio-oriented house was to use the digital channels on the TV. Debbi had bought us cakes and sausages from the local shops and Doug was still in bed.

Dave presented me with a pile of old duplicated fanzines. "Wow," I said as I leafed through them. There were copies of Foulter, True Rat, SeaMonsters, Wrinkled Shrew. Legendary fanzines that I only knew by reputation. Writing from the likes of Greg

Pickersgill, Leroy Kettle, Chris Priest, Rob Holdstock and D West. The smell of fanhistory must have woken Doug up, as he crawled downstairs just in time to quell the rumours that I had done away with him. "I'm wrecked," he confessed, unnecessarily given the hue of his face. "You're going to have to go and meet Lennart without me!"

Down in the centre of Bristol, Dave looked around him at some of the grey functional post war architecture of Bristol's shopping centre. "This reminds me of Sweden," he said. Oh well, perhaps we wouldn't have to take Lennart to Ikea after all. All rumours to the contrary, Lennart actually was staying at the City Inn, which was a short but dull walk along by the dual carriageway out from the centre. Some days I hate Bristol. Grey skies over grey buildings is a dispiriting combination. But the rest of the party seemed okay with it. Cat got excited when we passed a pub called the Printer's Devil. "That's what I am," she exclaimed. "I'm a printer's devil!" So once we'd met up with Lennart, and sent him back to his room to get his camera for the obligatory group photo (Fans in a hotel foyer. Unique!), we adjourned for a drink there. I'm not sure if I've ever drunk at the 'Devil's before, unless perhaps when I used to work down in that part of town. It looked like a local's pub. Small with nothing to recommend it except that this was where you were used to drinking, and they were used to you. Luckily, the locals had gone off shopping for the afternoon, so we had the place to ourselves.

This week, Dave and Cat were feeling slightly less euphoric about leaving their jobs. "Our house sale's off," Cat told us. "They've discovered subsidence!" Lennart, poor guy, was explaining that Maggie had to work all day Saturday and most of Sunday because she had given up her shifts the previous weekend in anticipation of his aborted trip. But he thought there might be a short window to meet up with her around five. He invited Dave and Cat to come along with him, since they had been her sponsors. (Shrewdly judging that Debbi, Ian and I might be too much excitement for one day!)

After one drink, I insisted we get outside to a less drab bit of Bristol, and dragged them back across Castle Park (which might have been picturesque if only the castle hadn't got destroyed during the Civil War), and then down to the docks, where Debbi got the chance to test out whether or not boots actually were the enemy on the foot-unfriendly cobbles. Cat, resurrecting old memories of visits to Bristol from art school days, navigated us by force of suggestion towards the Arnolfini (former warehouse, long since gentrified into arts centre cum cinema and bar), where we had coffee, and discovered from a random newspaper left on our table that local gold blend man (as they call Anthony Head in our part of the world) was going to abandon his Giles persona in order to make animal programmes with his girl-friend. This thought was so appalling that I didn't even bother to veto plans to look at the musical instruments in Hobgoblin where Doug had bought his ukulele. Hobgoblin does have a truly amazing range of stringed instruments, though sadly no keyboards. I particularly like the mandolins, while Doug prefers the banjos. (In case this sounds unbearably proto-filky, I should add that I have no idea how to play any of these instruments!) The room was so stuffed full of instruments that only Cat, Lennart and I were brave enough to venture in. Back outside in the music book section, Lennart found a book of traditional English folk songs, and began asking Cat and I whether we'd ever heard of any of them. "No," I shook my head. "Not that one." "Me neither," agreed Cat. He ran through several titles before Debbi took pity on him and said that they were all well known to Northerners. I had to take her word for it.

It was nearly five by this time, so Dave, Cat and Lennart set off to meet Maggie in the Reckless Engineer, a slightly odd choice, since apart from providing the inspiration, in more ways than one, for Nick's latest Dr Who novel, it's grungy bikers pub, though with good beer. Subsequently when we phoned to update them on our dinner plans, we discovered it had been closed (and that's

not the first time that's happened to us, either) and they'd been forced to adjourn to the bar at Lennart's hotel. Despite these mishaps they sounded like they were having a tantalisingly good time, as I could hear Cat laughing away in the background, presumably with the mysterious Maggie.

We, meanwhile, sat around back at my house, watching reruns of a Jeremy Clarkson motor show (one where he raced bizarrely shaped cars – sofa, garden shed, boat etc against each other) and reading 70s fanzines. Clarkson's commentary blended in an oddly fan-like way with the grumbling, gossiping voices of Kettle, Pickersgill et al. Fandom of the 70s felt familiar, and yet weirdly different. I recognised most of the names and places, but I was seeing back in time to scenes that took place before I joined; attitudes were different too. Not just the well-known emphasis on bodily fluids, but parts that seemed quite sexist or homophobic by today's standards, but were the norm back then (I can also see this in my own diaries from the 70s!)

It can be hard to get a table for eight on a Saturday night in Bristol, even in the restaurant mecca of the Gloucester Road, but after a couple of false starts, the upmarket Chinese next to the downmarket Co-op promised us a table. It was as well they weren't too busy, since it was a good half hour and several pots of Chinese tea after our booking before Dave, Cat and Lennart rushed in hotfoot from the taxi. Ian and Debbi ordered an extra portion of pork in cabbage leaf for two. The quantity that arrived would have fed us all (and indeed did, since Ian and Debbi shared it round). Ian chattily engaged the manager: "Just out of interest, can you tell me, was that really a portion for two, as we ordered? In which case, they were very generous portions." Of course, as Ian had surmised, they had made it as an extra course for us all, but as he had also hoped, the manager immediately offered to take the extra cost off our bill since it had been their mistake.

And so we adjourned once more to my house. By this time, with the arrival of fanzines, Dave and Cat's bags, the general mess from people sitting around, my house seemed to have shrunk to the size of a broom cupboard. But no-one else seemed to mind. Ian had generously replenished the wine stocks. We caught the much vaunted Men in Tights on the TV. Doug put Jonathan Richman on the stereo. Various people tried to play Doug's ukulele. I started to fall asleep in the corner, and decided to go to bed. Doug was half-dead too, despite having spent the morning in bed, so we left Dave to call a taxi for Lennart and wrestle with the futon.

The next morning was a slow start from all concerned. Dave and Cat groaned a lot before deciding they needed to go home. Doug seemed dazed as if he wasn't sure what all these people were doing in his house, but kind of hoped they'd leave soon. To round off Ian and Debbi's visit, I drove us all over to Clevedon to visit their friends Sue and Roo in their new house. I fell in love with it immediately. It looked big, spacious and tidy compared to my chaotic shoebox. We had lunch at the pub, then walked round Clevedon. Suddenly we spotted an address familiar to the faneds in the party : 1 Friary Close, home of Dave Wood. After some debate, we decided not to disrupt his Sunday by knocking on the door. As we walked away, down towards the seafront with its spindly elegant pier, Ian said: "If only we'd had a copy of Foulter with us, we could have posted it through Dave's letterbox, and left him to wonder how it got there."

I waxed lyrical about the possibility of starting the Clevedon SF group, and began to quiz Sue and Roo about local house prices. After all, once your house has been disparaged by a Swede, overrun with red wine bottles, infested with ukuleles, and of course, invaded by fans, what else can you do but put it on the market and move on?



*Doug's always been fascinated by the idea of going to Greenland. Christina's less sure. But **Sue Thomason** actually did it!*

Greenland for beginners

We (Rory and Sue) had previously visited mainland Norway (repeatedly), Iceland, and Svalbard for walking holidays.

"Where do you want to go next?" Rory asked me.

"Greenland," I said.

It's supposed to be fantastically beautiful, it's not too hot (I'm not very good at "hot"), it doesn't involve high-altitude acclimatisation (I'm not very good at altitude either), and there are no poisonous scuttle-y things with too many legs (snakes don't bother me, though I'm not wild about big leeches, but scorpions/tarantulas/etc. *do.*)

We booked on a "supported trek" organised by High Places, the company who took us to Svalbard. "Supported" meant that we had a leader with us, and that although we were backpacking and therefore carrying our own tents and cooking gear, ice axes and crampons, and personal stuff, we never had to carry more than 3 days' food at a time. (This is Good News — food is *heavy*, and dehydrated meals, which we used occasionally, are comparatively light but taste utterly revolting.)

The first problem with East Greenland is that you can't get there from here. Not directly, that is. We flew from Glasgow to Keflavik International airport in Iceland on Tues. 2nd July. (Watched a charming documentary about eider ducks on the flight — first time I've been on a plane with in-flight videos!). High Places had booked us bed-and-breakfast accommodation in the comfortable Hotel Öld, but we needed to find our own supper. Neither of us felt up to hitting an expensive (*everything* in Reykjavik is expensive) restaurant with everybody talking in Foreign, so we hit the supermarket to assemble a "budget" picnic supper instead. (The Icelandic for "ham" is "skink".)

We spent the next day exploring Reykjavik on foot — lovely city, very modern, really good botanical garden (bread and skink picnic lunch) with some fascinating special-interest collections including a) nearly all Iceland's native plants, b) a really excellent collection of Alpines from around the world, c) an "edible and medicinal plants" area including small-scale agricultural trials of potato, blackcurrant, and rhubarb varieties. I also found an advert for "Europe's biggest quilt fabric store" on my free tourist map, and visited it to pick up a souvenir for my sister. Decided it would be Impossible to take fabric on a fortnight's backpacking trip, so settled for quilt pattern.

On Thursday we flew out of Reykjavik (NB not Keflavik) airport in a Fokker 50 (smallish propellor plane. We were headed for East Greenland, known as Tunu, "the backside", to the majority of Greenland's population, who live on the south and west coasts. As we approached Greenland we had very impressive views down through the clouds of the iceberg-laden offshore Polar Current, also rank upon rank of pointy snowy glaciated mountains stretching along the coast in both directions as far as the eye could see. We landed at Kulusuk International Airport (a dirt airstrip) in low cloud/drizzle, and sat for a while in the chaos of the prefab warehouse that served as departure/arrival/ luggage handling/etc. area, waiting for Our Leader to arrive, which she eventually did (by motorboat, having been delayed by unexpectedly dense pack ice). After lunch (sealburgers) at a local hotel, we had a quick re-organise of our gear (we didn't need ice axes/crampons for the first half of the trip, so they were taken by boat to be dropped off for us to collect later). Then we were stuffed into immersion suits (these are basically bright orange total body lifejackets, theoretically enabling the wearer to survive for more than 20 minutes in seawater whose tem-

perature is frequently below 0° C), and set off on a 5-hour motorboat trip up a fjord system, weaving around icebergs all the way, to a landing point on some seaweed-covered rocks and a couple of hours' walking in the drizzle before setting camp.

As we were just south of the Arctic Circle, the sun did dip just below the horizon for nearly two hours every "night", but basically it was daylight all the time. We'd got up at Too Early In The Morning in Reykjavik, lost 2 hours flying west to Greenland, spent 5 hours (which felt simultaneously like 20 minutes and eternity) iceberg-dodging on a motorboat too noisy for conversation, walked for ages up a dimly-lit valley with no idea of the time, and then had a meal which could have been breakfast, supper, or just about anything. I thought, "I'll never sleep," and lay in the tent listening to the silence. I've never known such a silent place. No wind, no water-noise, no birds... nothing. A dim, silent place, smelling of ice and feeling *vast*. A feeling of hugeness, of being a tiny speck of life in a tiny tent in the middle of a very, very, very big landscape. The political division of "East Greenland", one of the smaller administrative areas of Greenland, has a land area larger than Great Britain, Germany, France, and Italy combined. It has about 3,500 inhabitants. This means that if East Greenland was shared out equally between its inhabitants, each of them would have an area three times the size of Lichtenstein to themselves.

I like that feeling. I slept easily and well. We spent the next few days walking in improving weather. We followed a deep U-shaped valley to the coastline of Sermilik fjord, then walked along it. Sermilik fjord is a long, milky-blue sea inlet absolutely STUFFED with icebergs. Icebergs are noisy. Because they are melting around the clock (24 hour daylight, remember?), bits are constantly dropping off them. Crunch. Crash. Chinkle chinkle chinkle. SPLOSH! As more and more bits drop off them, they become unbalanced and turn over. In the distance, this sounds like thunder or heavy artillery;

close too it's an amazingly disconcerting (low-frequency "scare notes"?) growl. We enjoyed TOTALLY AMAZING views of the distant icecap across the fjord, and underfoot, loads of beautiful flowers (but no vegetation higher than 6"). We saw breeding snow buntings, ptarmigan with chicks (bigger than UK ptarmigan), and later in the trip were followed for several days by a family of ravens (probably living off our leavings).

Wonderful beautiful superb, but there has to be a fly in the ointment, right? In fact, it was a mosquito. In fact, it was about 5 billion ravenous mosquitos. It was possible to out-walk them fairly easily, but as soon as we stopped moving, they settled (and bit) in hordes. Pitching tents, cooking, and other fairly stationary activities were only possible in head-nets. Rory and me had a long ongoing argument about whether it was better to apply the toxic DEET glop ("bug juice") over or under the sunblock...

This was a "supported backpack", meaning that every couple of days we were supposed to meet up with a boat for a pre-arranged food drop. Unfortunately, the year's first supply ship from Denmark had arrived in East Greenland only one day before we did (having been delayed by ice), so Kate our trip leader had to leave selecting the contents of our food drops to two (non-English-speaking) Swedes. Consequently we ran out of muesli, tea, coffee, dried milk, sugar, butter, etc., and ended up eating a lot of bricks (claiming to be rye bread, but looking like bricks, weighing like bricks, and tasting pretty much like bricks, too) salami (good with bricks), unlabelled tins of what mostly, but not always, turned out to be fish, and unidentifiable dried white vegetable (parsnip? turnip? celeriac?). We also ate several of the most revolting dehydrated meals in the world (labelled in German so we only had a vague idea what they actually were), and sweetened our coffee (before it ran out) with Nutella (chocolate hazelnut spread).

Turning inland from Sermilik fjord we waded across a glacier outflow (thigh-deep meltwater is +++cold) and down a long U-shaped valley



to a couple of days' walking along a bare slabby/rocky ridge, then down to the village of Tiniteqilaaq (population around 100). "Tinit" was a rather beautiful village of wooden frame houses painted in bright primary colours (looking like something straight out of an Ikea flatpack), with husky sled-dog teams pegged out on the village outskirts (traditionally dogs aren't allowed indoors), and bits of seals hanging out to dry (sealing is the main occupation and still a major food source, although the "carrying capacity" of the land is around 450 - 500, so non-arrival of the supply ships from Denmark would result in mass starvation). Tinit has no real streets, and no gardens — in fact there is no agriculture of any kind at all in East Greenland, and very little tradition of plant-gathering. The Inuit did (and still do) gather scurvy-grass, roseroot, mountain sorrel and bilberries for their vitamin C content, and we were offered a dandelion salad when we "ate out" at the end of the trip. The village has a pump and a communal wash-house; individual houses don't have running water (which is in any case only available in summer; in winter they melt ice). Husky puppies are GORGEOUS! (fat little wolf-cubs). However Kate our trip leader learned that her English-

speaking contact in Tinit had shot someone and disappeared for the back country a few days before we arrived, and probably because of this we were hustled out of town after a few hours' rest (originally we were due to camp here for a night). We collected our crampons and ice axes, had a 10-minute motorboat trip across the strait to Ammassalik Island, then walked over a small icecap, starting at about 9.00 p.m. and finally setting camp at about 5.30 a.m. as soon as we were off the ice. The icecap crossing was actually very beautiful — pink dawn light hitting a set of nunataks (mountains sticking up out of the ice); cloudless sky, windless silence — but I then had to work quite hard for a couple of days at not getting my circadian rhythm too messed up. This is very easy to do in "midnight sun" country; it doesn't feel bad to put in a 22-hour day, but I know from past Arctic trips that unless I keep track of when "morning" and "evening" are supposed to be, and more or less stick to that, I'll quickly end up feeling seriously terrible due to sleep deprivation.

Over the next few days we more or less followed a chain of lakes down to Tasiilaq,



Whose reality are you calling "theoretical"?

East Greenland's main (indeed, only) town (pop. about 1,700). Most of the landscape had been recently (geologically speaking) glaciated; bare slabby rock and boulder-fields with vegetation only in the comparatively sheltered valley bottoms where a little soil had started to accumulate. The lakes were an amazing deep bluegreen colour, paling to turquoise at the edges, VERY cold (I tried swimming) and full of little fish. We were picked up by motorboat from our last campsite and taken to Tasiilaq Youth Hostel (summer-only; it's normally the district secondary (boarding) school).

Our collective priorities on hitting Civilization turned out to be a) Beer! b) Hot showers! and c) most of the contents of the local Danish bakery (eight people consumed 4 trays of Danish pastry and 5 loaves of white bread between them as a light snack between lunch and supper). The next day was free for wandering around Tasiilaq; Rory & me had a walk up "Flower Valley" with beautiful lakes, a waterfall, and wonderful Alpine meadows, then looked round the town museum. ROAST CHICKEN for supper.

The next day started with a 15-minute trip in a 6-person helicopter back to Kulusuk, then our flight back to Reykjavik domestic airport. Overnight in Hotel Öld again, then up at 2.00 a.m. UK time (ahrrgh!) for flight back to Glasgow. *Slightly* exciting landing as we had to pull out of the approach fairly late and do a "go-round" because there was a plane on the runway we were supposed to be using — I was HIGHLY RELIEVED when the pilot announced this as half the opposite side of the plane had decided that he was having serious problems putting the landing wheels out (in fact he'd put them out, then taken them in again when told to do the go-round) — I was telling myself firmly that it was perfectly possible to land a plane safely without wheels on a foamed runway, and anyway I wasn't dead *yet...*

Drove wetly but uneventfully back to Sleights, had beer and pizza while being mobbed by about 3 million adoring cats, then

fell into bed about 7.00 p.m. for about 14 hours' sleep... lovely!

No blisters, a few mosquito bites (but not half as many as most of the rest of the party), a suntan that stops at the wrists/neck, six x 36 slides to develop, a huge heap of festering socks to wash (Rory wore the same pair of socks for a *fortnight* — with *stunning* results), a small rock collection, and many memories... Although this trip was very much "playing at expeditions", I guess by a lot of peoples' standards it's actually fairly adventurous — next time I start wingeing about what an unadventurous person I am, just say "East Greenland"...

REALLY NICE THINGS ABOUT GETTING HOME

1. Long hot bath. Wonderful wonderful wonderful. Ahh!
2. My own comfy bed. Total utter relaxation and security. Whoever invented the bed, in my opinion they deserve a retrospective Nobel Prize.
3. Fruit. (Over the weekend Rory & me ate a kilo of clementines and a hand of bananas between us, plus about a kilo of raspberries and rather more redcurrants from the backyard). And loads of fresh veg. Mm, the Joy of Cabbage!
4. Birdsong. Lying awake in bed in the early morning, listening to the "background conversation" of a dozen or so species, and remembering that in Greenland bird calls were startling punctuations of the silence, random events like the distant thunder of the icebergs turning over in their sleep on Sermilik Fjord. They were statements of identity and presence — "I am here. This is my place." — but they weren't conversations; they weren't answered. There was no bird to answer them. I think the only bird *conversation* I heard was the family of ravens talking to each other. I'm not surprised that human Greenlanders don't go in for recreational talking. They're living in the middle of the Great Silence; it becomes hard to break. In fact, the most supportive and friendly background noises in Greenland were made by



fresh water. The spinkle of light, fine rain on the tent flysheet. Even better, the musical murmur of the rivulet running through the "Sermilik 2" campsite. (Birdsong and small rivers are the two natural sounds that regularly get described as "musical" by Europeans.) I guess this is appropriate; fresh water, though surprisingly plentiful in that landscape (at that time of year) is necessary for life, and the water was very sweet and good.

5. Clean clothes. Don't they smell good?

6. I know this is odd, and probably completely back-to-front to most peoples' experience, but one of the most trying things for me about going off with an organised group is the *constant presence of other people* for most of the day. People I *don't know*. I found myself desperately engineering time on my own away from the pressure of strangers' presence.

7. Darkness. I know (from previous Arctic trips) that it's quite easy to kick my circadian rhythm out of kilter, and that shoving it back where it belongs involves days of feeling foully stagnant, sandpapered and stupid. I'm pleased that I managed to keep in rhythm this trip (I don't have any trouble sleeping when it's light if I'm tired), but oh, it was good to have a proper night again, in its proper time and place.

Kit List

I'm amazed how much weight some people are prepared to carry when backpacking. I thought very hard about what to take, and pruned my personal kit down to the minimum consistent with safety and personal necessary-comfort. I'm not used to carrying a heavy pack; after discussion with Rory we decided that he would carry the tent, any heavy items in our assigned daily share of food/fuel, and both sets of ice axes/crampons (Tinit to Tasiilaq). So Rory was actually carrying (by my standards) about 1.5 peoples' stuff — and out of a party of 10, three other people were carrying heavier rucksacks than him.

I took:

Rucksack; good (5-season) down sleeping bag in stuffsack, double-wrapped in plastic bag

Thermarest (air mattress) in stuffsack
 2 karrimats (foam sleeping mats) rolled and tied with spare bootlace; "Brasher" boots (very comfy walking boots); cheap lightweight pair "sports" sandals" (for river crossings/wearing around camp); 3 pairs cotton inner socks
 2 pairs wool outer socks; 3 pairs nylon-type knickers (I usually wear cotton, but nylon is lightweight, packs small, and washes/dries quickly); 2 bras ("aerobics" type with wide soft straps; comfortable when carrying pack); microfleece trousers (normal daywear); microfleece long-sleeve top (ditto); "spare" microfleece T-shirt (wore for a couple of days at end of trip when the long-sleeve top was too smelly); "emergency dry clothes" silk/cotton mix thermal long underwear top & bottom (not worn on trip but wouldn't leave them out); "woolly" (acrylic; lighter/dries quicker) hat; cotton headscarf (large enough to double as sling/belt/etc.); 2 cotton hankies (only needed one); microfleece gloves (had intended to take waterproof outer mitts as well, but couldn't find any for sale before trip); fleece zip-up light jacket (all clothes not actually in use packed in ziplock plastic "freezer bags")
 Goretex waterproof jacket; lightweight waterproof overtrousers (only worn when asked to by trip leader and didn't really need them then; I hate wearing overtrousers and would only normally use them for windproofing in really bad weather, but would always take them with me); sunglasses (double as spare glasses; needed for glacier crossing) in soft lightweight case; 1 tube factor 30 sunblock; 1 tube lip sunblock (used a lot on corners of eyes to prevent them chapping; my eyes tend to water a lot in strong sunlight/wind. Very effective); 1 bottle Jungle Formula insect repellent (only just enough; next time take 2); headnet (worth it!); small plastic ziplock bag containing piece of thin string ("washing line"), 6 paperclips ("clothes pegs"), plus a few spare tampons; 10ml bottle premixed aromatherapy oil (lavender and myrrh) for foot massage (I offered to do this for the rest of the group; 6 people tried it at least once and 2 became "regular clients"); 1 roll

toilet paper plus small box matches (you're supposed to burn shitty toilet paper but mine's usually too wet so I bury it/hide it under rocks (Don't Tell Teacher); shit decomposes faster if you leave it on the surface (provided it's not contaminating drinking water meanwhile) so I usually do); resin cutlery: 1 knife, 2 tablespoons, 2 teaspoons (our own); 2 plastic mugs (our own); 2 plastic bowls (supplied by trip); 1 pack "emergency meal" supplied by trip; 1 reporters' notebook and 2 waterproof pens (in plastic bag); watch (carried in rucksack lid); 1 lightweight trekking pole; toiletries bag containing 2 x toothbrush, 1 small tube toothpaste, 1 small bar soap (in own small plastic bag), 1 lightweight pack-towel

And Rory carried the following shared stuff: the tent; my ice axe and crampons (2nd half

of trip); tough plastic water bottle (often empty; no giardia and plenty of streams); 1 small roll Duck tape (= instant repair kit; would also consider taking small tube superglue); "encouraging treats" food (2 bars good dark chocolate, 12 Jordans muesli bars, 2 packs dried mango slices); 2 packs miniature playing cards; map & compass; camera; small pair binoculars; plastic bag with "paperwork" in it (passports, tickets, money, etc.) plus his personal stuff/clothes, plus heavy items in our daily share of food/fuel/stoves

I didn't take a book (and didn't miss reading). Or gaiters (don't usually wear them). Or shorts (ditto). Had cut my hair & nails just before trip so didn't need scissors etc. Used (eco-friendly) soap to hand-wash dirty socks & knickers — weather good enough to do this at least twice during trip.

Written in situ at Walsall and via Max's laptop (thanks Max!) we present for your entertainment Nic Farey's eagerly anticipated Novacon report...

A Plan for the Assassination of Ian Sorensen Considered As A Downhill Bicycle Race

I awake to muffled Swedish noises coming from the next bed, and remember where I am. The memory of a dream is fading, and as far as I recall I had my 4th and 5th wives lined up, and they were both Lilian. I need a pint. It's Saturday. It feels like the convention is half over but it isn't. I have a shower and wash my hair again with that nice Timotei shampoo I got from the Superdrug in Willenhall and vaguely remember that this amazingly cute woman whom I had never seen before agreed with Sue Jones the night before that my hair looked really nice. I need a pint.

I dry off a bit and walk past the Swedish noises by the drawers where my stuff is. I put stuff on. There's half a Carling sitting there, so I think I'll have a look. It's as warm as the piss I just had. I resist the temptation

to spit it over the Swedish noises and choke it down. You little punks think you own this town. Someday someone's gonna take you down.

I'm gonna play that song as soon as they get the fucking room open. It's 7-something a.m. I need a pint. In the mirror, I look good. I look fucking good! If I was a woman I'd fuck me right now. Muffled Swedish noises notwithstanding. I don't think he's waking up any time soon. First fan at breakfast, Christ, how sad is that? Almost the second one I see (apart from the one in the mirror, Christ, what a dish!) is Plummer. I've already had the sossies, bacon, eggs and all the sprack and I've managed to persuade the duty manager to pull a pint of Carling. 8am, with a pint, and smiling. Point of honor, innit?



I have Swedish noises in my head and I am about to be married to Lilian again. I need a pint. What happened to the last one? Work? It's all a blur. We sorted out everybody's shifts last night. Second year for the new crew, it's all good. Nolly and Chris know what to do, they'll make me look good. I need a pint. Where did that last one go? They let us in, I forgot to play Eels and put the Who on instead. Now there's only as many of the original Who left as there are Beatles. That's fucking depressing. I need a pint. We've told everyone where the party is and when it is, reckon it should be all right, make a bob or two. I'm off shift most of the middle of the day, like it like that. Swedish noises come to the bar. We haven't had a fight yet, I wondered whether we would, well it's a result. We do party plans, figure out when we're gonna phone Bobbie at her sister's, blissfully, Swedishly and Irishly unaware that it's all gonna go completely, thoroughly, horribly wrong.

I did the trip in reverse this year. Usually I come to the con and then go to stay at Mum's for a few days to recover. This year I arrived the weekend before, stayed at Mum's and came to Novacon to recover. This meant I got to make the Anonymous Claire LiveJournal meet at some Sam Smiths pub or other and get fucked up. Doug Spencer is remarkably similar in person. I expect we bandied clerihews and everyone warned me about James Bacon. I should have listened, but I was hearing muffled Swedish noises.

Tobes did fess up that it was at least half his fault. Fuckwit central. I need a pint, and I mean fucking now, while I'm writing this. Oh. Thanks, Doug. This would be a good place for one of those piss you off foot-notes wouldn't it? If you know about the teck parties, skip to the next para, if you don't. We do this every year, charge people money and donate the proceeds to some worthy fannish cause.

OK, welcome back, fuckwits.

This would have been the Blessed Bobbie's 5th Novacon on a roll, so do you think she was pissed about not making it or what? And it was her birthday that week. I promised to call her from the room party with as many of our friends as possible in attendance. Not like being there, but I'm a softy (as I was about to find out).

Phone call went great, but I should have had a clue earlier when some actually quite decent looking lass came to the door in her jammies and asked could we keep it down. By this point the party had been going on for 5 minutes, and the noisiest thing there (apart from me and Swedish noises) was Tony Morton. Someone who is due to present the James White award on Sunday and who has presumably read more than one book with no pictures in it, and an alleged TAFF winner conspire to consider that it's a fucking larf to put the trouser press out the window. Predictably, I get a knock on the door from a number of hotel staff who look so alarmingly like the police at this point in their uniforms that I automatically cross my hands behind my back. Reflex. I need a pint. The party has lasted almost 90 minutes, everybody except the Swedish noises, me and the Oirish eejit have sensibly buggered off.

If the mundane family next door had anything to complain about before, I exacerbate it by a violent tirade which started with "You cunt" and got more personal from there. Swedish noises and Oirish eejit claim the next day that I had to be held down to be prevented from thumping the prat. I don't remember that, to be honest, but I'd been discussing killing techniques earlier, and I might as well believe them. I need a pint.

James and I make up, and he buys me one.

And that was only Saturday.

*Its the same old story we've seen time and time again...brain globes, time travel, re-writing history, super-powered pets and a boy who can guess your weight. With all this stuff going on, **Doug** asks why anyone is bothering with the BBC's Top 100 Books as he spills all in a kiss and tell account we'll call..*

30th Century Love Story

The Brain Globes of Rambat

"In any contest of outstanding feats, you would expect Superboy to walk away with all the prizes! But don't cheer too soon for the Boy of Steel, until you see what happens when he competes with three youngsters who have gained strange super-powers of their own! The incredible will take place before your very eyes, when you see all his super-powers failing to win Superboy a membership in The Legion of Super-Heroes." – Adventure #247

My obsession with the Legion of Super-Heroes has its secret origins back in one of those childhood illnesses I suffered back in the early seventies; whether it was mumps, German measles or something else I don't remember now. My mum, god bless her, in order to get on with the housekeeping without having to constantly entertain a sick child would buy me comics - remember this was back in the days before all day TV in the UK. The only source of comics in Penicuik was from a small supermarket owned by the local entrepreneur Ian MacKay and it was somewhere in amongst all the Batman, Action and Fantastic Four comics bought for me that I fell in love with the future.

[In 1957 "Adventure Comics", one of DC Comics oldest lines, was suffering badly from declining sales; its star Superboy was no longer drawing in the readers. In order to improve circulation all kinds of new gimmicks were tried. In #247, Superboy met a trio of super-powered teenagers from the far future, who after testing the young Clark Kent's heroic ability inducted him into their super-hero club. And so

the Legion of Super-Heroes (or LSH for short) was born].

When I grew up a bit and was allowed such things as pocket money and the freedom to wander away from the street I lived in, I'd more than often make my way down the steep hill of Cuiken Terrace to MacKay's supermarket, the source of all those comics. I can still picture that faded-white plastic-coated twirly wire rack with the dog-eared Sergeant Rocks and Justice Leagues stuffed into it. Pretty early on though I managed to work out what I liked...Superman struck me as being too good, too powerful and too dull. Wonder Woman I had no interest in. I liked the Justice League especially when they teamed up with their older and altogether different counterparts the JSA from the other dimensional world of Earth 2 but it was the Legion that I was always desperate for. My previous brushes with its far-future stories had given me my first taste of sensawunda – huge space cruisers, time travel, sentient computers, people trapped in other dimensions for thousands of years, super-powers and copious amounts of dodgy pseudo-science. Fan-bloody-tastic!

It's a wonder really that I became a comics fan at all, let alone such an avid fan of one of DC Comics less well-known titles. Back then before specialist comic shops the vast majority of imported American comics came to the UK as ballast in ship's holds to be later distributed around the corner shops of Britain more as an afterthought than a valid commercial product. As a consequence you were never guaranteed that these comics were relatively current let alone being able to find the series you wanted or being able to read a complete ongoing story. Given the DC Universe's enormous back history, the then huge multi-verse and seri-





ously convoluted continuity it does surprise me that I stuck with reading these damn things long enough to understand just what the hell was going on.

[The Legion of Super-Heroes became so successful they were brought back time and time again. Eventually the world met a lot more members of the universe's first teenage super-powered team than just the founders Saturn Girl, Cosmic Boy and Lightning Lad. Other early members included TriPLICATE Girl, Star Boy, Ultra Boy, Braniac 5 and fan-favourite Matter-Eater Lad. Demand got so great that the Legion gained their own regular back-up strip before usurping Superboy from his own comic.]

Eventually though I drifted away from visiting Mackay's shop and that old comic rack. I'm not quite sure why because I was still reading science fiction and fantasy, watching RKO serials on Saturday mornings and visiting the cinema to see the latest SF films. Maybe it was down to the frustrations of finding good comics although I expect it probably had something to do with exams, girls or music ...

History Repeats Itself

[The late sixties and early seventies were a mixed time for the Legion. After the Adventure years there was a slow decline in appearances by the LSH until they fell back into occasional guest slots in other comics. DC's decision to pull the Legion was largely to protect

the sales of "Superboy" comic with which "Adventure" shared a large number of readers. However by the early seventies the circulation of "Superboy" was again in trouble and so the Legion was brought out of limbo for occasional guest appearances. Once again sales increased whenever the LSH appeared which led to the comic being eventually renamed "The Legion of Super-Heroes" from #259. With Superboy's eviction from the title at last the 30th century heroes had their own home; it had only taken them 23 years to achieve this! Part of their popularity was down to the signing of then unknown but talented artists like Dave Cockrum and Mike Grell, although the Legion's popularity reached a high point under the creative team of writer Paul Levitz (now President of DC Comics) and artist Keith Giffen. Their story "The Great Darkness Saga" was of epic proportions and to this day still stands as one of the creative peaks in the convoluted history of the LSH. In one of its most memorable and egotistical scenes, the villain Darkseid mind-controls the entire population of the super-powered planet Daxam to re-sculpt their home planet's shape to resemble Darkseid's head! The combination of Levitz's grasp of character and Giffen's modern design aesthetics lifted the team out from the strange 1950's future they were still inhabiting into a more believable science fiction setting.]

Five Years Later

The next time I crossed paths with the Legion was the summer before I went to university. My school-friend Donald introduced me to the old science fiction bookshop in West Crosscauseway in Edinburgh. I think his intentions were that I'd devour ever book they had in stock and at last he could have someone to talk to about Jerry Cornelius, Heliconia and Riverworld. Wrong! What it did was introduce me to a whole new range of comics not previously available to me with exotic names like Swamp Thing. I also re-discovered my old friends the Legion there although my timing could have been better as the then current series was ending with the retirement of Paul Levitz from writing. Of course being a poor penniless student I wouldn't be able to afford comics, would I?

[Levitz retirement wasn't the end of the LSH. Artist Keith Giffen took over the writing with fans Tom and Mark Beirbaum. They had a revolutionary new idea...and it was an idea that split Legion fandom down the middle to this day. Their premise was simple: set the Legion 5 year on from the last series after the galactic economy has collapsed and warfare has ravaged the universe. All of a sudden, the 30th century became a darker scarier place, a place without hope, especially since its heroes the Legion had disbanded years ago due to infighting and political machinations. Everyone was older and in some way affected or maimed by the collapse of the galaxy. It was a bold move especially when coupled with a rigid nine-panel art format and dense plotting that required either patience or an encyclopedic knowledge of Legion history.]

I fell in with a bad crowd at uni...well not bad really, just I could see my parents despairing of my new found friends because they spent most of their money on drink, comics, books and CDs, which was

definitely something my folks hoped I'd grow out of. Instead, they helped fuel my addictions by introducing me to all sorts of new stuff, amongst them X-Men, Savage Henry, Excalibur, Those Annoying Post Brothers, Doom Patrol, Watchman and The Dark Knight Returns. Somewhere in amongst all these great comics, I was still reading and collecting my own discovery, and it was a great time to be a Legion fan.

[The dark future of the Tom, Mary and Keith years (lovingly or loathing referred to as TMK by LSH fans), tore up the rule-book. The moon and later the Earth were blown up killing millions. Being long-time Legion fans before being writers Tom and Mary dragged in some of the more persistent ideas from Legion APA pages including the development of gay relationships alongside already existing straight relationships. Several characters sold out or sided with the enemy after the Legion's disbanding and just to help the series move along there was a fair amount of death involved. In amongst this the entire continuity of the DC Universe had to be re-written to remove Superboy's place in the history of the Legion due to internal company politics. Not surprisingly fans either couldn't get enough of this new vision of the future or sent death-threats to the creators.]

What made this incarnation of the Legion feel so right to me though? Well in amongst all the obvious criticism of brutality was lost the fact that the TMK stories were really well written, they just weren't written to everyone's taste. The dialogue sparkles re-reading it today just as it did over a decade ago. Characters that had been neglected for decades were given a real chance to shine. The plot barrels along at an alarming pace and is so densely packed with different interlocking strands it is all too easy to get lost if you don't concentrate. I love this form of story-telling regardless of the media; you may have to work hard to get your enjoyment but ultimately the pay-off is greater. Alongside Twin Peaks the Legion became my main means of escape during my



final year at university, and all to soon they both came to an abrupt end.

[At the time I was shocked that my favourite ever creative team was forced off my favourite comic. Looking back with hindsight now it was inevitable. The final straw for DC was when it was revealed that Shvaughn Erin, Element Lad's long-suffering girlfriend turned out to be a bloke; he'd been taking the miracle sex-change drug ProFem all these years just to get the attentions of his favourite Legionnaire. TMK were allowed to work out their contracts and were then replaced on writing duties by Tom McCraw. Although Tom was well know to Legion fans as he coloured the comic he'd never written a script before.]

By the time TMK left the series, I was back home living in Penicuik and saving up to move into a flat in Edinburgh. I'd taken a job at a horticultural firm which didn't pay a lot. At this point I was buying some thirty different comics a month although I'd have to admit I had stopped enjoying them by then. Grant Morrison had left Doom Patrol, the many spin-off Tick series just weren't funny, Excalibur had turned into a real drag and Legion had descended into complete farce obviously written by someone who had no idea of character development or plotting. Seeing no way out The Powers That Be decided it was time to do a bit of housekeeping. With Zero Hour. During this massive and badly written cross-over the entire Legion continuity was wiped out, characters reset, and history began again.

The whole thing shocked me beyond belief. To get some idea of how I felt, imagine that your favourite TV show...say Buffy, Sopranos, West Wing or whatever had run for that 30-odd years. You've spent your spare time watching your favourite characters grow up, marry, have kids, die. In your spare time you track down old episodes you've missed gradually piecing together stories from the past. Sure not all of its been top quality story-telling but you enjoy it nonetheless. And then, all of a sudden, when you've invested all that emo-

tional energy, the producers decide it was all rubbish anyway and we'll start again from scratch, midway through a long and involved story arc. All those characters wiped out, all those stories gone, they just never happened.

By this point my collection reached back to the late seventies/early eighties and I'd come to expect a regular fix of LSH each month. The thought of starting again though was just too much. Lester Spiffany hadn't existed, no more Blok, no more Legion of Substitute Heroes, the death of Karate Kid never happened and even the bloody Legion of Super-Pets were gone - okay they weren't much of a loss, but the rest just made me sick. It suddenly seemed like a real good time to stop collecting comics and in particular Legion.

Reboot

[The post-Zero Hour Legion started well with a competent re-telling of the Legion's origin story. After that, new versions of old characters gradually re-appeared and new versions of classic stories were re-told. The art, writing and characterisation were simplistic and reflected a return to an early sixties style of writing and drawing comics. The reaction was mixed. Those that hated the grim and nasty TMK years preferred the new direction, while those who loved the dark future stories hated the return to the past. As time passed, there was a growing sense of dissatisfaction from both sides of Legion fandom as the series settled down into mediocrity.]

I stayed away from comics for a good five years. In the meantime I passed the time Munro bagging, watching and playing football, going to gigs and generally living a good life. Occasionally I'd dig the 5 Years Later stories out or re-read Watchmen but that was about it. I didn't really miss Legion or comics much it had to be said. Things happened...I changed jobs into the Forestry Commission and then on into Edinburgh's

financial industry. I'd moved out to Edinburgh, lost my job, had girlfriends and moved back home. Somewhere towards the end of this I met Christina and moved to Bristol. Even then, despite living five minutes from a comic shop I still felt no reason to start reading or collecting comics again...until last year that was.

At uni one of my best friends Mike McLean was a big comics fan. He introduced me to a wide range of stuff I'd never have discovered on my own. Some I liked, some I didn't. A couple of years ago he set up his own shop Asylum Comics in Aberdeen. Word reached me that Mike was coming down to Bristol for the national comics convention so I decided to buy a membership to catch up with him and have a few drinks together.

It was a hot day, de-hydratingly hot. Christina and I spent a lot of the day either wandering aimlessly around the dealers tables or nipping off to The Ostrich for a drink. As I drifted through the hall I noticed a hardback DC Legion Archive book reprinting old Legion stories from the Silver Age. Throughout the day, I resisted all attempts at purchasing it, but I could feel my resistance crumbling every time I passed by it. Somewhere around 4pm I cracked. This volume, the first, reprinted all the early stuff I'd never seen before including that first story in Adventure #247 (#247 now retails for around £1700 in mint condition). I'd pretty much blown my entire budget for the whole weekend on that book but it was worth it.

The next week was spent reading it. When I got to the end I started again, twice. Afterwards I found all those boxes of Legion comics and from my earliest one in the late seventies I just started reading...and I found it amazing. Sometimes those things you love in your childhood don't stand up when you re-turn to them in adult life but to me Legion did. That sensawunda was still there. Once more I thrilled at the battles against the Fatal Five, laughed at the Legion of

Substitute Heroes and almost cried at the destruction of the Earth. In short I fell in love with the Legion all over again.

[In the past couple of years a new creative team came to the Legion – Dan Abnett and Andy Lanning or DnA as they're known to the fans. Abnett has written loads of stories for 2000AD amongst others while Lanning is a great inker who can write a pretty mean story too. With hot new artist Olivier Coipel they once again dragged the Legion back into the modern world from the retro-ghetto hell it was languishing in. Gone was the dull cartoon-ish art to be replaced with a more expressive and hard SF style. The story telling moved towards complex multi-thread issues where everything wasn't neatly tidied up after two or three issues. Just like before characters were killed off, worlds ravaged and gradually fun and excitement came back to the 30th century. DnA's "Legion Lost" mini-series gained critical acclaim and sales of the regular series slowly increased.]

Once I'd exhausted re-reading my comic collection the next stop was the comic shop. I started collecting the current DnA series, which has proven over the past couple of years to be one of the best regular comics on the market today. What a time to get back into Legion! With the present series being well written and illustrated I've kind of regretted giving up on Legion all those years ago, even if most of the intervening years were just plain dull.

From the comic shop I moved onto the internet, originally to find some sort of episode guide to what exactly I'd missed during my absence. I knew from the letter pages of old that Legion fandom existed but I never knew how large or committed it was until I stumbled across the many Legion message boards. I started posting, somewhat infrequently to the official DC Board under the pseudonym Estimate Lad, based on one of the most obscure Legion related characters



ever. Although I still post I've made the move to Klordny one of the four or five Legion APAs in existence. I've been a member of APAs in SF fandom before but not found one that I really felt I belonged to. Klordny seems different, somehow more on my level, more fun and more light-hearted. I must admit part of the reason I really dig this particular APA is that I'm the only Brit in town, which gives me a bit of a curiosity value.

Comics 2003 started in a rather low-key way. I was expecting to meet up with some of my online UK Legion friends over the weekend but child-care and family commitments meant that I was the only one of the regular UK Yahoo Group – the Legion Message Board Posters in attendance. Christina cheered me up by pointing out that Bristol regulars Ken and Clarrie would be around as would my friends Gary Wilkinson, Amanda Kear and Mike. A couple of days beforehand the conventions website announced DnA had been added to the guest list – so my spirits lifted a bit.

After spending most of the day spending cash on early Legion comics I tracked down Dan and Andy hidden behind the queue for "Bone" creator Jeff Smith. I don't know why but I've always felt a bit embarrassed about asking writers to sign things. You'd think over ten years of bumping into authors at SF cons would prepare you for this sort of thing, but it doesn't. I think my reluctance must be due to what I've labelled the "Grant Morrison Incident". Without going into specifics let's just say I did use those infamous fan boy words "I'm your biggest fan" around that particular legendary post-modern surrealist comics writer. Dan and Andy though were surprisingly approachable...not only signing a couple of comics for me but patiently answering my questions in a very friendly manner. I supposed it must have helped that I tried my best not to drool everywhere but restrained myself and asked only well balanced and intelligent questions. I must have impressed the guys as they even let me see some of the rough artwork by former Legion great Steve Lightle for his upcoming guest issue, about three months ahead of its publication. I staggered away from



the table content, with my dignity intact and grinning...and I desperately wanted to post my gossip online.

That evening as I sat in the Llandogger Trow drinking with Christina, Mike, Amanda and Gary, I couldn't help think it was great to be back home in the 30th century after my self-enforced exile. I think my time away from the Legion has made me appreciate what I love about the series and those characters even more. Now I can't ever imagine giving up on the future...so if you want me I'll be at the Nine Planets Ice-Cream Parlor celebrating Klordny with Pluberry pie and silverale ...and if you see that sprocking squaj Darkseid around tell him to nass off!

ILUPTD ILIVP
YLP ILFODITP!

We visited Spain again, but all Christina wanted to talk about was those cheap air fare offers, and .:

The high cost of flying

"Easyjet regret to announce that there will be a delay to flight 0343 to Barcelona, due to operational difficulties. Your next information will be at 10.30"

It was 9.40 and we'd been hoping to board in 20 minutes. There's not much to do at Bristol Airport. There's a duty-free shop that concentrates on perfumes, a small branch of W H Smith's that's not much good for anything except chocolate and a bar selling drinks and sandwiches. But then it is only a small regional airport.

At 10.15 the slightly rowdy crowd heading off for Alicante trooped away to board their plane. Five minutes later they were back in the lounge again. "Easyjet regret to announce that there will be a delay to flight 874 to Alicante. This is due to operational difficulties. Your next information will be at ten past eleven."

I was beginning to see why Easyjet give away so many flights for free. We wouldn't put up with this if it were full price, would we? Good grief, if this were a train station, passenger power would have required the lynching and ritual disembowelment of the train manager by now for such poor passenger service. But here we all were, accepting the inevitable, knowing we couldn't just trade in our tickets, and go by car.

Not that these flights are quite so free as the newspaper ads make out. A couple of weeks after we'd booked our extremely economical flight to Barcelona, Easyjet announced their spring sale. Flights from £1! said the press advertisements in big letters. Plus airport tax, they added in somewhat smaller type. Unlike Go, Easyjet's cheap airline predecessor in Bristol, the price you see on the website excludes taxes. This meant that when I first started checking the new Easynet prices

online, I thought they were much cheaper than Go. Until I reached the end of the transaction, when the price suddenly doubled (for the cheap flights). But by then you're so excited at the prospect of getting to Prague for twelve quid that you don't really care.

Even so, I still can't understand how airlines can offer flights so cheaply. Clearly there's a marketing ruse behind it all. You log on for your £1 flight, find one for a tenner or whatever, but discover that that's only available on a Wednesday. You eventually settle for flying Thursday evening (£26.50), returning Sunday (£58.00). You slap on the tax and the whole deal's come to £120. A far cry from one pound (but still a bargain! No trekking up to Heathrow, no exorbitant parking fees (providing you leave the car at home. Even small local airports aren't cheap.) And then, just consider what you'd pay on a Virgin Saver return to Manchester, and wouldn't you rather be in Prague/ Barcelona/ Nice/ Venice – delete as appropriate? But some of the flights really do come to ridiculously cheap sums that can't be matched by the train, e.g. a £30 return to Edinburgh. I can't believe this is fair competition. (In fact, I know it isn't. There's no tax on air fuel for a start, despite planes being more polluting than cars.) But there's also the fact that the budget airlines operate on a shoestring and cut every corner - except (I hope) safety.

Our 10.30 Easyjet announcement brought the unhelpful news that there would be another announcement at eleven o'clock. Still the only information we had was that our flight was affected by unspecified operational difficulties. At this point I became convinced that they were going to cancel the flight. I didn't read all the small print when I booked, but I imagine that cheap price airlines have no obligation to get you anywhere. We might get a refund if we were lucky, but that wouldn't go far towards

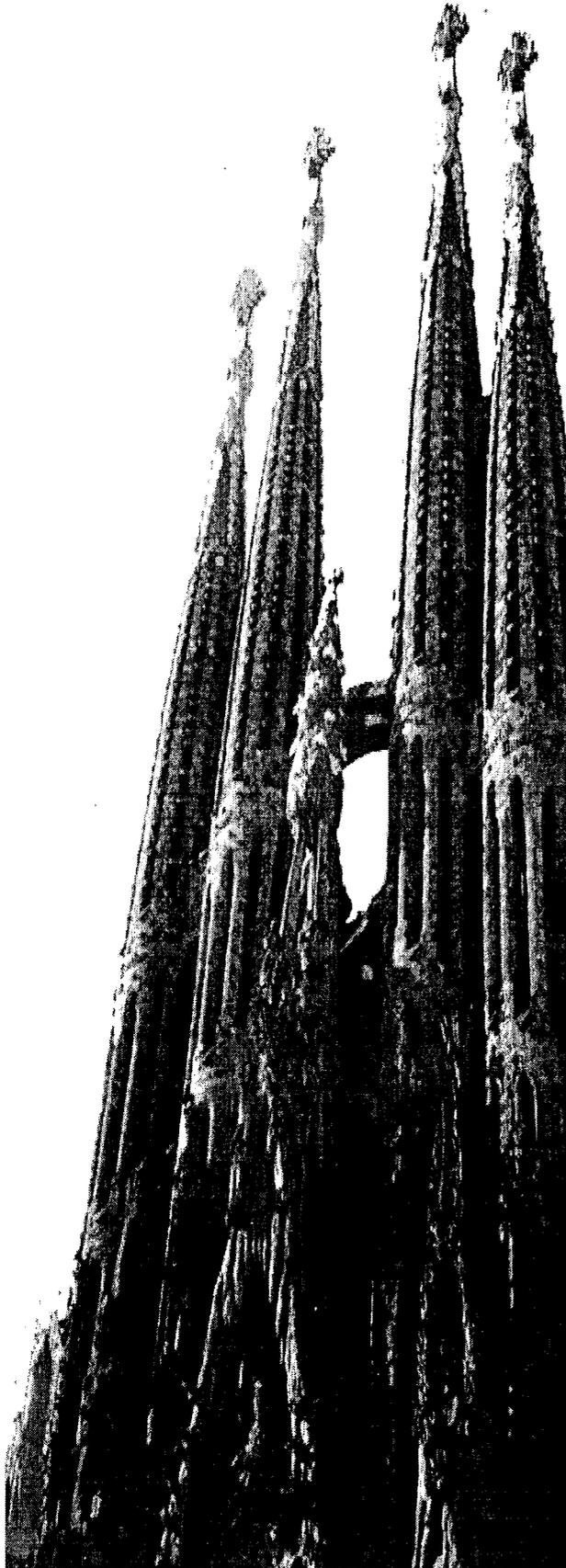


the three nights of hotel accommodation I'd already paid for in Barcelona. I managed to drive Doug nuts by sharing my pessimism with him.

Despite my misgivings about the economics of it all, I can't say I'm not pleased to have access to a cut-price airport, even if it is stuck out in the countryside on the wrong side of town. Bristol Airport must have the worst transport links of any airport in the country. No rail. No metro. No motorway. Just a meandering stretch of the A38 that pootles around South Bristol, taking in the sights of Totterdown, Knowle, Bedminster Down and Chew Magna reservoir before delivering you to the airport on the half-hourly bus. Most people seem to drive. Allegedly the airport was sited where it was for covert operations during the war as it's actually the foggiest part of the countryside surrounding Bristol. When we first started using it, we had several flights diverted due to bad weather. Now the airport has all weather navigation equipment to keep the planes flying in and out. But I don't think it will ever be a candidate site for one of the new major airports on the government's agenda. Despite stiff opposition to all the suggested sites, more air capacity is essential for our future prosperity, we're told. Which is odd when all it seems to be is a way of enticing people out of the country for cheap holidays in foreign cities. (I suppose a few foreigners come for cheap breaks in ours, but judging by the passengers I've flown with, not that many.) Also, no-one seems to challenge the assumption that air travel is bound to keep on rising. Yet, the only sector of the air transport market that is actually growing at the moment, is the economy flights offered by the new no-frills airlines. Cheap air fare offers have created an artificial boom, that is unlikely to be maintained judging by the bankruptcies and mergers of the past few months. In any case, the government insists that it has to meet this demand – even though improving the rail network to make better connections between our own cities and the Channel Tunnel doesn't seem to be on the agenda.

Our eleven o'clock Easijet announcement finally brought good news. Our flight was on its way at last and we might even be boarding at 12.15. Having run through all the options for ways of spending our weekend if we couldn't get to Barcelona, I was more than relieved. Late flights I can deal with. We went upstairs to the bar, only to find that all the Alicante travellers were pushing the envelope on that warning that drinking too much before the flight could result in your not being allowed to board. But I could see the Alicantians point of view. Last time they tried, they didn't get to board anyway. Eventually some real information came through for them too. Their plane's altimeter was bust, and they've going to have to wait for someone to fly one down from Stansted.

Each time I take off in a plane, I seriously consider the possibility that I might be about to die. Once we're off the ground, I'm fine. But those moments taxi-ing around the airport, the final sprint down the runway and the inertial drag as gravity fights against metal all remind me of my mortality. So, perhaps flying is good for the soul. Up in the air, sipping the not-free-anymore wine that I purchased out of habit, the clouds looked like a pure snow-capped kingdom below, and the sky was achingly blue. I love train travel, but I know I'll never get this experience on a Virgin Train. But are we paying too high a price? Whatever the gain in transcendence, cosmopolitanism or just plain business, maybe it's true that we are buying something we can't afford. The £1 fare that becomes £100 by the time you complete the booking form, how much does that rise to when you consider the political and environmental costs? As I waited to fly to Barcelona on a weekend when the leaders of the US, Britain and Spain were meeting to decide on the most politically correct way of ignoring the UN and declaring war on Iraq, I wondered whether this was really what they were fighting for. My right to travel cheaply wherever I like, in whatever way I like, at whatever expense. I need that cheap oil to do this; so does that mean that I'm supporting Bush after all? I don't like to think so,



but is the tacit support of my lifestyle more significant than my anti-war sentiments?

Sometimes I think we are living in a parody of that optimistic science fiction future of the mid-20th century after all. We do jet around everywhere – it's just we use Easyjet not jet packs. But we haven't yet found that miracle fuel that will give us all this for free. The nuclear power that was going to solve all our problems has turned out to be a worldwide con. It's a neat, efficient technology if you ignore the unfortunate radioactive side-effects, but it's not cheap, and its dark twin brother, the nuclear weapons industry has come back to haunt our lives with the spectre of dirty bombs, leaking submarines, smuggled plutonium (not to mention the ready-made target that nuclear reprocessing plant represent). Science didn't make this mess, politicians did.

When we eventually arrived in Barcelona, it was late afternoon and raining. Our hotel was not far away from Gaudi's unfinished cathedral of the Sagrada Familia, a work of superb and sublime ambition. We took the metro into the centre of Barcelona. As we came out on Plaza Catalunya, we heard the beat of drums, and reverberating speakers. Doug thought it was some avant-garde performance art. But as we got nearer, we realised that it was a big anti-war rally. Everyone was shouting "No, a la Guerra", wearing t-shirts with slogans on them or dressed as skeletons, waving placards, and barely listening to the speeches. If you didn't understand any Spanish it sounded like they were shouting No to Armageddon. I stood and watched for a while, moved by the strength of their opposition. Air travel can take you to stand next to people worlds away, and show you what you have in common. Even on a cheap weekend city break.

I don't want to stop the travelling, the exchange of ideas, or a return to travel for a wealthy and exclusive elite, but I don't see how we can continue to give it away, subsidise it, and favour it unfairly above other transport options. With Concorde going out

of service, we seem to be at a dead-end in developing this technology. More and cheaper, translates to longer waits at the airport, more near-misses in the air, traffic controller strikes and a culture where people think it makes sense to buy property in a country a thousand miles away, just so they have somewhere to go for the weekend three or four times a year.

I want that bright shiny 21st century future we've built up for ourselves on the cheap, but not until it's properly resourced, doesn't wreck the health of our countryside and people and doesn't apply to one small segment of the world at the expense of the rest. But I know I'll still be out there with the next special offer, looking for that cheap flight to Venice or Prague!

Just for Randy Byers, as promised at Eastercon, its the return of...

The Head Guide To Good Fanzines

Chunga #4

It takes a pretty special fanzine to make me read on after telling me I'm eating custard, even if it is purely metaphorical custard. Chunga has not yet become the essential reading for me that Apak once was, but it does have a stable of excellent writers and such good design standards that I wonder it doesn't break Carl's heart to spoil the fine lines of his layout with all that fan art (albeit from such excellent sources as D West, Brad Foster and Ian Gunn, amongst others.) Luckily all thoughts of custard are soon dispelled by Randy's section of the editorial which bridges the gap between US and British fandom by talking about beer and pubs (though Randy may have gone back on the idea of establishing a Seattle pub meeting after hearing too much about the problems of our own dear London meeting!) The next highlight of the issue comes from Andy Hooper who follows up on his gonad factor article in the previous issue by talking about sex at conventions. He manages to invoke the atmosphere of excitement that a convention fling can induce whilst cleverly not spilling any beans on specific incidents, except those that involved his wife. A brave but not foolish piece. Lesley Reese meanwhile is definitely getting back into her stride. Or I'm getting back into her mindset. I didn't particularly care for her first piece about coffee, but by now I'm hooked. I want to hear what Lesley's reading, how it happened, and

why Oprah doesn't do it for her. A neat piece. Maybe she *is* the perfect columnist? Randy, Andy and Lesley aside, I found the remaining content less compelling. I was probably the wrong audience for Stu Shiffman's Celluloid Fantasia. Discussions of Star Trek in a fanzine at least make a change from Buffy, but I find it hard to really care whether the Trek franchise lives or dies, or what the motives of the Q continuum might be. Overall a good issue, no doubt contributing to Chunga's well-deserved Faan Award win at the Madison Conflu. **[CL]**

Randy Byers, Andy Hooper, Carl Juarez, c/o 1013 North 36th Street, Seattle, WA 98103

QuasiQuote 5

Sandra Bond looks like she has fun publishing fanzines. I like the fact that there is a lot of editorial presence, and that it is generally lively and opinionated. And I like the kind of article Sandra gets from her writers, and the fact that they're not necessarily the usual suspects. Stand-out piece for this issue was by David Redd – famous mostly as the other fan in Haverfordwest – who gives a blow-by-blow account of his appearance on Who Wants to be a Millionaire. I don't know how David coped with the pressure, but I felt nervous just reading it! Well worth the ten pages of fanzine it devours. Not quite so gripping, but equally readable are Earl Kemp talking about London in the 60s and Ron Bennett on his early experiences with comics. Add to this Mark Plummer's amusing (well, it *is* Mark) pen portrait of a former flat-mate,

and Sandra's own writing, including a chatty account of a trip to the Spaceguard observatory near Hay-on-Wye, and I can genuinely say that I enjoyed reading this issue from cover to cover (give or take the odd letter, though Sandra's comments kept me going – especially those relating to the feud she is no longer having with Cheryl Morgan.) [CL]
Sandra Bond, 7 Granville Road, London N13 4RR (sandra@ho-street.demon.co.uk)

Swiss Tony Speaks To The Nation

This zine was written in the last days of peace leading up to the Iraq War. Its sole-writer, Tony Keen, makes his anti-war feelings known. I have to admit that I admire both the way this zine is written and its politics. Tony's arguments against the conflict are clearly set out and written with a no-nonsense style that I like. Even now I find it hard to express my views on the Iraq War clearly without them sounding confused. That Tony manages to lay down his arguments on paper in a readable concise manner is a wonder to me. I was already against the conflict before this zine made its way to me, and though I'm not sure that if I had been pro-war it would have made me change my mind, I do think that it might have made me seriously question my beliefs. I must admit that I didn't enjoy reading this zine as I ended up angry and upset. The fault for that is all Tony's, Blair that is not Keen.

[DB]

Tony Keen, 48 Priory Street, Tonbridge, Kent, TN9 2AN

Velleity 2

Damien's had more problems than most in getting out that difficult second issue. He had to survive cancer of the bowels, and the pressure that goes with being reigning knurdling champion. But here it is, slightly slimmer than last time round but with a cool, laid-back feel that comes from the copious use of white space, some strange interlineations and the zen-like statement on the front cover. Damien only refers obliquely to cancer here with a brief account of a scan (or some other form of radiation treatment.) I love the last line: "Still no super powers. Am still not Dr Titanium, man of the atom. Oh

well." Nick Falkner's diary of a winemaker makes a welcome return. I like the way he writes about the science of wine-making; it's detailed but accessible, and of interest to anyone who likes to know how things work. But for those who don't, the winemaking stuff is interspersed with tales of local characters and dollops of personal philosophy. Somehow Steve Davies reads very differently when not surrounded by all those Plokta jokes. His article is peaceful, almost pastoral; an afternoon escape from job-hunting to drive through some of the ancient landscape around Reading. It suits the pensive mood of Velleity. But what to make of the opening page: Cooking with Ben. It's a recipe? No, it's a form of Hungarian torture, judging by the insistence on large quantities of good, hot banana peppers. But even this is whimsical. Velleity may be a fanzine of fewer words than some, but I enjoyed it. Judging by the letter column, most people liked the first issue too. May there be many more! [CL]

Damien Warman, 15 Alan Street, Port Noarlunga, SA 5167, Australia (dmw@pobox.com)

Zoo Nation 3

Aha, so there are new fanzine editors out there. I'm just not plugged in enough to get their zines. Luckily Lilian made Pete Young give me his fanzine at Eastercon. Despite its A5 format, the presence of poetry and book reviews, the immediate impression is of high-tech fun. A colour cover, photographs, cartoons and full page jokes, like the periodic table of "Condiments that Periodically Go Bad". It could almost be Plokta! The writing's worth reading too. Pete gives a rundown of SF-related Yahoo groups (maybe I should join an online reading group?); Farah Mendelsohn is eloquent on why talking about the Iraq situation is relevant on any SF discussion group and various new fans share their experience of – mostly online – fandom, notably Nick Honeywell who finds that even on the web where there's an interest group for almost anything, he can't find enough people who want to talk about 60s and 70s SF. Even some of the poetry is amusing – try Farey Farey night from Del Cotter. I like this



fanzine's assumption that to be active online in SF discussion groups is to be a fan. It makes sense; these are people who care enough about SF to want to write about it.

What more do you need? **[CL]**

Pete Young, 62 Walmer Road, Woodley, Berkshire RG5 4PN (zoo-nation@macunlimited.net)

Littlebrook 2

Where to start...what can I say about Littlebrook? I could begin with some short 'n' snappy statement along the lines of "just another fanzine from Seattle" but that wouldn't really do, would it? So let's skip the preliminaries and get down to the nitty-gritty straight away...

Technical details first; Littlebrook is printed on blue paper, has a big friendly heading font and a clear user-friendly layout. Nice...I'm impressed without even looking at the content. Art next and it's all top quality contributions from the drawing boards of the likes of Alexis Gilliland, Brad Foster, Stu Shiffman and Steve Stiles and is enough to make any fan-editor jealous. On the writing front Jerry leads off #2 with a detailed account of his daily commute to work. I like the idea of rising at 5:45 am each morning to take that boat journey and see all that wildlife and scenery; it sure as hell beats being stuck on the 99 bus on the Gloucester Road, and makes for a nice piece of writing to kick-start your zine with to boot. The rest of Littlebrook is composed for the

most part of just the sort of article that I love reading – very personal pieces. Lesley Reece contributes a short article on how the Russians she's known were far from the being Cold War enemies, while Luke McGuff relates his reactions to the film "The Gleaners and I" which I hadn't seen or even heard of before but am now desperate to see...always a sign of a good article. Stu Shiffman writes with authority on dime novels and penny dreadfuls, something I know little about but enjoyed reading nonetheless. The highlight for me though is Randy Byers "An Uneventful Day", which while being truly uneventful is completely entertaining. It is hard to make the mundane details of life interesting but Randy manages it with such ease. Andy Hooper returns for his as usually perceptive and intelligent fanzine reviews. All in all there's a lot of creativity and fun here, as well as a lot of different personalities involved. It would be easy for Suzle and Jerry to get swamped in amongst all the other voices here but somehow they manage to wrangle it all into 22 pages which is quite a feat. Good writing, great art, nice layout, strong editorial presence...yeah maybe just another fanzine from Seattle was right all along. **[DB]**

Jerry Kaufman and Suzanne Tompkins, 3522 N.E. 123rd Street, Seattle, Washington, 98125, USA (jakaufman@aol.com or suzlet@aol.com)



TAFF Man of The Moment Randy Byers is shown the Bristol's Clifton Suspension Bridge with Christina Lake and Bristol SF Group Friday Meeting Regulars Cat Coast and Dave Hicks.

Remember that quest for the perfect boots? **Debbi Kerr's** still looking!

Put the Boot On Fandom

(Male readers should turn to the next page)

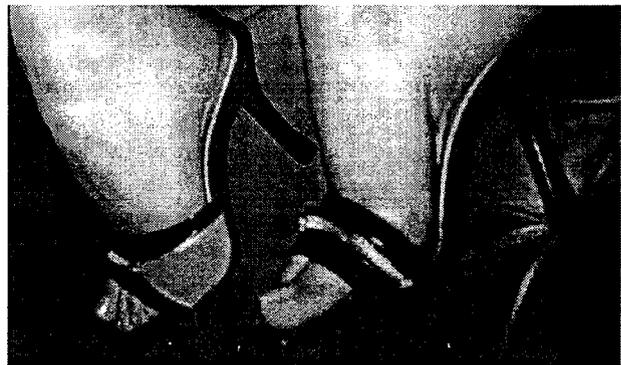
Gothishness is not something I aspire to anymore so why is it that I find it so hard to buy footwear in any other colour than black, especially boots? I have thirteen pairs of boots - including a pair of leather thigh boots, knee-high boots and walking boots - the rest are ankle boots. And they're all black.

I have 5 pairs of leather black ankle boots with differing heel heights, an ancient pair of goth boots with buckles and tiny stiletto heels. Suede boots, suedette boots decorated with diamante round the top (they've not been worn out yet). Brown French suede boots - I know, I know, not black. And a pair of emergency boots in the car, for, well, an emergency.

Why the obsession with ankle boots? Well, a few years ago my favourite pair of black pull-on ankle boots died. There I was walking along the draughty corridors of power (Leeds Town Hall) when I suddenly staggered (certainly not drunk) to one side. The heel of my left boot had completely broken off. Heart-broken I hobbled off to the nearest cobblers hoping he could help. The cobbler effected a temporary repair by simply gluing the heel back on but that was all it would be, temporary. Instead of being fuck-me shoes they were well-fucked boots.

Of course I had bought them in a sale a few years ago so there was no chance of simply replacing them. Why, oh why, didn't I buy more than one pair? I thought sadly as I consigned them to the bin. And so it began. My quest was to find the replacements for my favourite boots. Those boots which though they had 2 inch heels were still comfortable enough to wear all day, could simply be pulled on, no messing with zips or laces, and were black.

Which is why I have so many ankle boots of one particular type. The others are just digressions along the footpath of footwear which I found cute or had to have for some reason. I am still looking but the urgency has dimmed a bit sidelined by "other" things. Wallis Simpson may have said "You can never have too many handbags or be too thin" but I think you can never have too many black ankle boots, little black dresses or tottering high fuck-me sandals. I've spent a long time cossetting my inner girly. The results are only now emerging.



Of course, now I have developed a different footwear related hobby. How many pairs of silly or high-heeled sandals can I acquire? So far, a pair of red sandals with artificially bejewelled snakes curling along the toe bar, two pairs of silver strappy sandals and metal-heeled stiletto mules with metallic dots on them (they look nicer than they sound). I have had setbacks though like when my favourite cheap and silly shoe shop in Hamilton suddenly closed.

Most glorious of all though are the black and pink zipped patent leather mules which are pure ONJ when she transforms to get her man! Again I've not found the perfect occasion to wear them in public. I shall just have

to wait or I could show you pictures. Fortunately for my purse I manage to find these silly things in sales, charity shops, markets or cheap, I mean really cheap, shoe shops, which considering I have size 8 feet, is also a feat in itself.

When you're open to the suggestion of silly shoes, shoe shopping is fun.

But why black? Well, it just seems the perfect colour to go with everything, even white. And I wouldn't want to run the risk of wearing white shoes after Labour Day, would I?

(By the way if anyone is interested in a pair of size 8 flat-soled leather thigh boots I am willing to give them to a good home for £20. People always made principal boy jokes when I wore them)

Head Letter Office

Christina sorts the letters and tries to make sense of it all!

We discussed this at Seacon. All our best response to Head! comes from America, I told Randy. The Brits just mug you for the fanzine at the convention, then throw it away in a corner of the bar, or take it home in their luggage, and don't even read it. (How do I know this? I've done it myself. Oh shame on me.) But no, the best letters come from Britain, Randy insisted. Maybe it's an effect of the light, a psychological trick, a breeding strategy to keep the fanzines circulating across the ocean (for what deviant purpose we have yet to see, but you have all heard of the Selfish Zine.) But now that I come to examine locs and emocs, I realise that I am doing my British readers an injustice. So, none of them sent art work with their letters like Steve Stiles and Brad Foster, or news of positive fanzine reviews like Jerry Kaufman and Frank Lunney, but at least they proved that Brits can still give good comment, even to their own fanzines. But enough of this philosophising. Let the letter column commence!

Randy Byers, 1013 N. 36th St., Seattle, WA 98103, USA

Bless Brad Foster for delivering such a foamy, tasty cover that you didn't dare let it go to waste. That really is your best cover so far, and the second great Foster cover of 2002

that I'm aware of — the other one being the cover of Arthur Hlavaty's DEROGATORY REFERENCE One Hundred.

I thought Christina's piece on fandom was a great re-examination of old questions under new conditions. The meditation on Max and LiveJournal was particularly interesting, and the suggestion that the range of fandom is prescribed by the readership ANSIBLE is provocative. I'm still not quite sure why fanzine fans worry so much about recruitment, but maybe it's because I don't have a clear sense of the attrition rate yet. Alexis Gilliland said in his latest LoC to CHUNGA that fanzine fandom actually produces more zines than anyone wants to keep up with, although I'm not sure whether he's thinking of the broader zine world or just our little corner. However you define "our little corner," for that matter. You could do an interesting sociological study of the zine world by doing statistical analysis of mailing lists, if you knew more than I do. Anyway, I appreciated the convention-worn tone of Christina's piece as well.

The prize piece of this issue for me, however, was Doug's travelogue about the Basque Region. Wow! I loved all the

tidbits of local history, custom, language, and cuisine. That's some very dense and yet sprightly writing. "Everyone knows a French bread tastes better after it's been taken out for a walk." Ha! Not much personal detail, but I enjoyed the glimpses, as with the multinational surf clothing labels. Perhaps most importantly, it made me want to take the trip too. Great stuff, Doug.

If I have any bitch about the zine, it is with the subject-oriented structure of the lettercol. There's a certain gain in coherency, I suppose, but I miss the organic, rambling structure that results from subjects rising and falling throughout the column. It also messes with the "voice" of a letter. (And yes, I have this same problem with WABE's lettercol.) Nonetheless, it's a small bitch, perhaps Chihuahua sized. But under which subject would you fit this paragraph, I ask you?

Whether to edit the letter column by subject or person is presumably a question that technology could resolve through offering the reader the choice. However, since I prefer there to be an editorial voice (even a silent one that's implicit in the selection and arrangement of the letters), let's not go there (yet). The way I present the letters normally depends on what's in the letters, and how the conversation flows. So on with some more free-range ramblings:

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

Super interesting article by Gary Wilkinson on which I won't comment. This is, after all, a LoC! But, art is subjective; we all have our own ideas about art (which is what subjective means. Hell, I'm bright. Must be a Monday). But, like Gary, I also make a habit of visiting art galleries. Why, I've even been to the Tate Modern. Wonderful, even if I can't quite get my head around a grand piano hanging from the ceiling. My favourite galleries have to be the condiment building in Trafalgar Square and the wonderful, marvellous, terrific etc etc Quai d'Orsay. Oh, yes, and thank you for reproducing the

Warhol. I must scan it and print it out in its variant colours.

Doug's account makes his wandering through the little back streets of the Casco Viejo in Bilbao sound fascinating (so that's where all our cod went). I'm jealous. One of the joys of the time I spent living in Belgium was wandering the little streets near the Cathedral in Antwerp (yes, lots of bookshops, too). Wonderful description of the city and the Guggenheim, good enough to make me want to rush out to the airport and buy a ticket. And not many accounts make me want to do that. An excellent article-cum-report. Absolutely excellent. I can't think of any way in which it could have been improved. Full of such leap-out-of-the-page enthusiasm for what Doug saw and experienced, and with touches of gentle humour, that I can't wait to go to the region myself. I haven't enjoyed a holiday report as much.

Interesting to see Christina write about "the old and cynical fan," obviously regarding herself as such, while to me she's one of the newer stratum. And interesting, too, to see her asking how to draw newcomers into fandom. Ha! I've actually heard this one before. A lengthy head to head discussion on the subject produced the BSFA. Plans went just a little awry there. But it's encouraging to appreciate, entirely from the fannish standpoint (or sitpoint considering that one doesn't batter a keyboard while standing. Well, I don't anyway, lazy sod) that new fans do emerge from somewhere and, like yourselves, have so much to offer and with which to delight fandom. Don't be disheartened. Fandom will survive. And, if it doesn't, what the hell? We've had a whale of a time, (well, I have) anyway (not only a lazy sod, but a selfish one, too, evidently).

I've had a great time too. I just want there to be a new generation of fandom to keep me in my old age. Or keep me from having an old age. Or something like that. I dunno. Maybe I just go to the wrong conventions?

Interesting that Jerry Kaufman lists Buster



Keaton in his list of favourite film directors. The thought of including Keaton in a list of directors wouldn't even have occurred to me and yet Jerry is so right. Ah, the things one learns from reading fanzines.

Indeed, so let's see what we can learn from Jerry this time.

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

Thanks for the fifth issue of Head! I enjoyed it - I even wrote a laudatory review of it for the third issue of Chunga. ((Thanks!)) I didn't say everything I had to say in the review, of course, since I was describing it for others and not responding to it or you. So let's see if I can remember the odds and ends I wanted to talk about.

Christina on fandom, Max, LiveJournal, etc. is pretty interesting, though I am neither a LiveJournal writer nor groupie. I'm dubious about con reports being the staple fare of any good fanzine. You don't have any in this issue, for one thing. Very few US zines have them, even the ones I would consider good, and when they do, the reports are pretty routine, doing little to energize, amuse or impress me.

They're mostly written as reviews of the con, a much different thing. (I'll make an exception for the most recent issue of Wabe, in which Tracy Benton does a good job of her Novacon report by using Michael Abbott's "top ten marks of a bad con report." But she's reporting on a British convention, using a framework she borrowed from a British fan.)

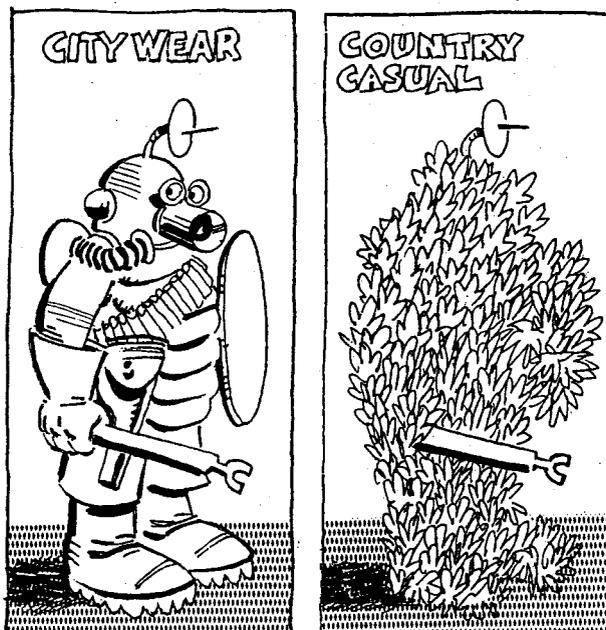
Maybe con reports are more central to British fanzines than American? It's not a point I've ever considered. Perhaps it's because British fandom is less geographically dispersed than American, and we all seem to go to the same three or four conventions a year? It has always been a primary narrative mode since I've been in fandom (and before.) At its best (or do I mean worst?), it combines fannish gossip with myth-making, existential angst and a chance to invent new metaphors for fandom. Most issues of Head! (including this one) do contain a con report.

I reacted well to Gary Wilkinson on art, though Andy Warhol is not an artistic hero of mine. Instead I have enjoyed the atmosphere of freedom and creativity he instigated and inspired. I enjoyed some of the films, like *Trash*, that he was associated with, and The Velvet Underground is one of my all-time favorite bands.

I haven't thought much about art as being a healing substance like medicine - I've thought of it as something that can distract, soothe, energize, enlighten. But all of those can be healing actions, can't they? I'll have to say that much of what I see in Seattle galleries, and in shows of contemporary art, don't do the above - they just puzzle. Some are abstractions or purely intellectual constructions, others are figurative works of deliberately childish crudeness. Even after reading material about them, I still don't like them or understand them. On the other hand, a few things I see are remarkable. If ever there's a show within striking distance of work by young Chinese or Japanese artists, go see it. I've seen some things here that are fresh, funny, disturbing and crafty, using everything from dressed-up mannequins to flattened pop cans, photos of naked people in pyramids to evil anime figures in apocalyptic landscapes.

To continue the discussion of art and things I don't like, we in Seattle are quite familiar with the work of Mr. Frank Gehry, in the form of the Experience Music project, a sort of do-it-yourself-dreadful interactive music museum. It looks from the outside like a great smashup of differently colored iron works. Here's a bit that looks like a jet intake, over there are some strands of metallic linguine. It's all meant to be reminiscent of broken electric guitars. The insides, however, seem to work much better, and the different sized and shaped portions of the interior are very interesting - some are exhibit areas, some interactive music labs, one is a high-ceilinged performance and filmshow space, another is a bar and restaurant.

FUTURE FASHION Steve Stiles



**Steve Stiles, 8631 Lucerne Road,
Randallstown, Md. 21133, USA**

I'm guessing that few fans share my enthusiasm for modern art, so it was nice reading Gary Wilkinson's piece. I try to get to museums and galleries as often as possible, and whenever I do I usually feel recharged and refreshed, enjoying the beauty, surprize, and very often humor, that a good show – like good music – provides. And it can be glorious. Of course, "good" is subjective: for example, I loathe Andy Warhol, especially after having been forced to sit through 45 minutes of his "Empire" in order to catch some Emswiller films. His work is all surface and as antiseptic as the man himself was. While fine art has always been "commercial", Warhol pushed that to obscene lengths, ultimately reducing art to a red-hot investment commodity and status symbol for CEOs in the 1980s. That feeding-frenzy art world Warhol helped create would consume poor drugged out Jean-Michael Basquiat, an artist whose output was more engaging than his mentor's silkscreens of Marilyn Monroe and hotseats (ironically Phoebe Hoban's Basquiat biography is subtitled "A Quick Killing in Art"). Ultimately, though, as much as I like a lot of contemporary modern art, if I ever decided to get a tattoo it would be some line drawing of Paul Klee's.

**Sue Thomason, 190 Coach Road,
Sleights, Whitby, North Yorks, YO22
5EN**

Christina, interesting that you define yourself as creative. I don't think I've ever got around to defining myself as anything much. For me, where the writing bit goes when I'm not using it is presumably the same place as the librarian-trained bit lives most of the time, or the flute-playing bit, or whatever.

What a scary thought. If the librarian bits got mixed up with the writerly ones, my characters would spend all the book worrying about OLIB and UDC codes, which wouldn't make for very good fiction.

I also find the idea that if I die tomorrow, my brain will just be a useless piece of sponge, but my writing would be my legacy, a bit worrying. I don't actually feel myself that I have anything much to leave (writing or non-) or anybody much to leave it to. I don't really need proof that I was once alive, because I'm still alive right now (and I don't really need proof of that either). Which leaves the questions of why I do write? Maybe Gary Wilkinson is right, and art is magic, or medicine, or both. Maybe the creative process is, at least sometimes, a healing process in which the created form

heals both its creator(s) and its appreciator(s). That would be good. Also a good justification for spending a lot of time and energy on it.

In the great search for meaning, this sounds like a better idea than the one that I came up with. For a start it doesn't put death into the equation, and since meaning only matters to me while I'm still alive, that has to make more sense. But as an inveterate reader of grave-stones, I still hanker in a small way after legacy.

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

I'm sorry to short change you but I don't seem to have any comments. Hang on a minute I do have a couple of thoughts. Being some what older than Tony Keen's mother, and my husband being eight years older than me, it is odd that it is less advancing years that make me aware of human mortality but the modern increase in such diseases as cancer and heart attacks. Two of our offspring in their forties have been very near to death indeed. Both thankfully recovered but it's a reminder of just how many elderly people today have outlived their children. While those who do live to get their pensions can expect to carry on well into their eighties. I suspect the statistics of the ageing population will fall short because fewer of the current pensioners' offspring are surviving the stress of modern life.

Christina's piece [on fandom] had my head whirling. A rather convoluted discourse. Yet it reflects fandom. There has always (well certainly for the last thirty years) been many strands to fandom. Some of those strands break away completely (does any Con have dungeons and dragons today?). Some fans stick to one strand and some to several. I did feel at one time my sort of fandom would disappear altogether. I'm happy to say that my particular strand is around and neos (sorry newbies as they prefer to call themselves) who come across fandom via the net do find their way in to my strand. Max is a lovely example. Whilst railing at we old fogies she publishes a zine that opens a door on her primary strand. Who has the time and energy to be

active on all fronts, few even need or want to be? Though thanks to those who enjoy more than one activity we can be and are aware of the wider picture.

Eric Lindsay, Airlie Beach, Nth Qld, Australia

Must admit that I still don't get the LiveJournal stuff at all. A few people, like Arthur Hlavaty, mentioned where to see their LiveJournal pages, and I've looked them up, but who knows who else I know is there? I know Lilian is into it, but can't locate her pages. I'll almost certainly ignore it entirely, except when someone actually lists a URL.

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

"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)" says Christina. Such, I would have thought, is the traditional response of any fan to discovering not just that something else is happening somewhere else and they weren't invited, but that the something else may be the new centre of fandom to boot. And there are times when I feel left out too — but only when I actually stir myself to look at some of this LiveJournal stuff. And even when I do, the feeling of being left out is rapidly replaced by the twin thoughts "Who are all these people?" (I recognise some of the names behind some of the pseudonyms, but many of them are completely unknown to me) and "How do they find the time to write all this?"

I've never kept, and never been interested in keeping, a diary — rather like Proust, I rely on associations of time, place and world event to summon the memories of things past — so the alleged attractions of online journals and weblogs leave me cold. Reading other people's diary entries leaves me, if anything, even colder — not just because of the quasi-voyeuristic peeks into the details of other people's lives, but because the said details are so uniformly

boring. We all oversleep once in a while, miss a train once in a while, get peeved once in a while at some faceless corporation's excuse for customer (non-) service.... and so on. The fact that lots of people choose to write about such things doesn't mean that it's suddenly become the new centre of everything — indeed, one can argue the opposite: the fact that so many people are writing about such things is proof of the absence of a centre to keep them interested in real issues.

LiveJournal exists so that you don't have to read about people's train journeys, trips to Ikea or problems with their kitchens in fanzines. Well, that's my latest theory! If I've had a frustrating day, it does me good to write about it. No-one's obliged to read. But Joseph continues:

Well, sniffs the archetypal LJer (assuming such a beast exists), that's just your rationalisation for not having a LiveJournal. And perhaps it is. But, equally, it's emblematic of two other stances: firstly, not being as involved in fandom as I once was (and hence not recognising many of the people on LiveJournal), so therefore feeling under much less pressure to keep up; and, secondly, having made a decision some time ago not to follow everyone else into online fandom and being quite content to stick to it. If I didn't, there would be no time left over to read books, work on the allotment, watch Buffy and other cult TV programmes, pub my ish, and so forth. (Pub your ish? says CJL scornfully. Er, well, look, IRG isn't dead....just sleeping. Really.)

So how do you feel about LiveJournal now you have your own account? Do you stand by your original views?

Several people comment on what Simon Ounsley should have said to the Dear Leader as he shook his hand. They (and you) may be interested to know that I once had an opportunity to verbally abuse a senior Labour politician, and did so. This was in December 1996, when the Major government was

clearly struggling through its last months of life and I was then working in the Department of Health in Whitehall.

I had alighted from the Tube at Westminster station, and was proceeding up Whitehall towards Richmond House when I spotted Jack Straw, on his own, hurrying down it, towards the Houses of Parliament. Straw was then Shadow Home Secretary, and nominally leading the Parliamentary opposition to Home Secretary Michael Howard's latest piece of thoroughly illiberal criminal justice legislation — "nominally"

because Straw, an authoritarian and anti-libertarian (in power a few months later, he was to publicly claim that Labour had not promised a Freedom of Information Act, even though its scope had been spelled out in the manifesto), was in fact criticising Howard's proposals for not going far enough: a position which had resulted in him being attacked by not just the usual suspects (the Guardian and Mirror) but also the right-wing press (The Daily Torygraph, The Daily Hell) for "betraying" Labour's libertarian heritage and selling out on civil liberties in general. It took only a moment, in the few seconds between spotting Straw and passing him, to work out what I was going to say; and as I came abreast of him I leaned over and snarled "Off for another day of sucking up to Michael Howard, eh, Jack?" He looked momentarily startled, stepped sideways to avoid me, and I went on without looking back. A few days later, Straw ceased criticising Howard for not going far enough and started attacking the proposals for their illiberality. The Bill was heavily modified in consequence. I doubt that my verbal attack had anything to do with this, but one never knows, what?

Some other comments to round off: why are the final paragraphs of Gary Wilkinson's article illustrated with a picture of Servalan from Blake's Seven? It's probably too late to do anything about it now, but I wonder how Christina might have been treated had she been a bit more assertive with the obviously indolent GPs who saw her? (The words "law suit" and "struck off the medical register"

seem good at concentrating medical minds.) (But I certainly hope her arm is lot better.) And what is the reason for the Whovian adulation for Paul McGann, who appeared in one indifferent TV movie which the BBC deliberately underpromoted to ensure that it got poor ratings so they wouldn't be forced into making another?

So many questions. Servalan was there because we ran out of space for her elsewhere (and she had been drawn by the author of the article.) I did go back to the doctor and ask for physiotherapy, but he made me have the arm x-rayed again; which proved it had been fractured, but they still didn't want to give me any physiotherapy. Luckily, since then it's got much better of its own accord, and I'm back riding my bike again. McGann may have only appeared on TV in one underpromoted film, but his incarnation of the doctor lives an active life in the BBC Dr. Who books.

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

Christina, we've been where you've been when it comes to accidents. Ditto 15 was this past October, and Yvonne and I were in charge of registration. On our way home from the convention Friday night, we were in a two-car accident by a major shopping mall just south of our place. We spent the next hour talking to police, tow-truck operators and ambulance attendants, and then we spent the next seven hours after that at Etobicoke General Hospital, waiting more than anything else. Yvonne broke her right wrist in three places, and I had huge hematomas on both knees from bouncing them off the front dashboard. At 3am, there aren't many hospital staff around, and in Ontario, where funding for health care has been slashed over the past 8 years of Conservative rule, there's far too much work for these people to do. We finally got home by taxi at 8am the next day. Shot the rest of the weekend for us, too.

That's infinitely worse than anything that happened to me!

Doug's descriptions of what life is like in the

Basque region reminds me of the more dangerous periods of Canadian life, especially life with Québec and the rabid separatist movement of the 1970s and 1980s. English would be spraypainted on bilingual signs, riots would fill the streets, flags would be flown, but not the Maple Leaf, and English speakers would take their lives in their hands. These feelings have mostly gone, and the separatist movement is dying, but there is still the feeling of occupation in the minds of some. The rest have accepted the status quo, and are dealing with Québec as a predominantly French speaking area, but with lots of English, Italian, Portuguese and Punjabi speakers, amongst other languages.

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

You know, all those kind words you said about the last cover really put the pressure on. Unlike the previous ones, all done for fun, "top of the head" so to speak, I found I was actually doing *research* this time, trying to find different meanings for the word head, doing preliminary sketches, designs... this started to get out of hand. As well, nothing I was doing really seemed to be any good, too labored, and I was getting frustrated. Then I picked up a sheet of paper and did a quick doodle without really thinking about it, and *ta-dah* I had an idea I liked. Fun, but clean and simple. So I did it up full size, and the result is enclosed for you to consider.

*And it's now on the front of this fanzine.
Thanks again Brad. No pressure, but we hope
the inspiration never runs dry!*

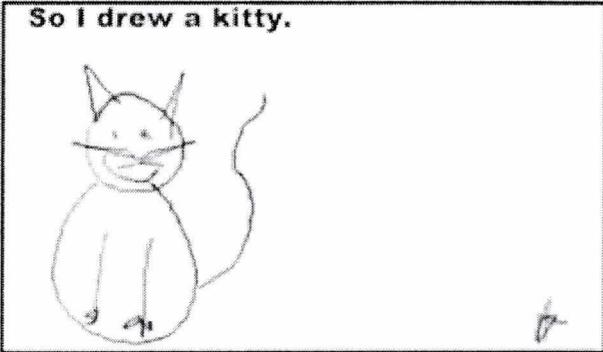
WAHF: Pete Crump, Jackie Duckhawk ("I've never looked at one of these log things, should I?" – dangerous thoughts, Jackie!); Frank Lunney; Pauline Nicholson; Dale Speirs (who sent me a postcard of my namesake lake in Canada, I quote: "Christina Lake is a holiday paradise for tourists. The average summer water temperature is 73° F. Activities include camping, excellent wilderness hiking trails, good rainbow trout and bass fishing, swimming and water-ski-ing." One day I'll go and find out for myself); and Alan Sullivan.



KITTY PRIDE

This was supposed to be a scathing attack on the New age wankery that pervaded British comics during the eighties and early nineties.

Then I realised that it was 2003, No one cares, And most of my targets are wealthier and more famous than I.



And now a special message for our Australian and New Zealand readers:

Vote Doug Bell for GUFF!

You know you want to meet him! If elected, Doug plans to visit New Zealand and attend ConTour in Rotorua over the Easter weekend, then go on to Canberra to experience Anzac Day at the Australian Natcon. Although he cannot hope to emulate Tobes's memorable feats of partying as the current TAFF delegate (unless you see him drinking whisky through a straw - then beware!), he intends to provide good value on the social scene, meet as many Australian and New Zealand fans as possible and sample the Ozzie lifestyle, especially barbies, beaches and beer (assuming he can find something more inspiring than VB Bitter). But he's also after the truth behind the stereotypes and would like to do and see things not on the main tourist trail. This should give him plenty to write about in his trip report!

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Art

Cover art courtesy the incomparable *Brad Foster*. Other illustrations from *Steve Stiles* (pages 11 and 32) and *Clarrie O' Callaghan* (pages 6 and 36).

Head! 6 is another co-production from Doug Bell and Christina Lake, and is available for trade, letters of comment, show of interest or the usual liquid bribery.

Contact us at **head@headwest.fsnet.co.uk**. Or rush us your fanzines and artwork to:
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