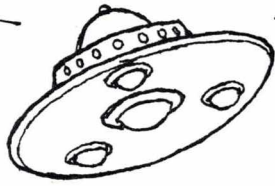


YOU CAN'T DO THIS TO ME!

IT IS USELESS TO STRUGGLE, EARTHLING

I'M A MEMBER OF THE CORFLU COMMITTEE!



WE INTEND TO PROBE YOUR INNERMOST SECRETS

PROBE PROBE PROBE
GOSH WOW OH BOY OH BOY
PROBE PROBE PROBE

THESE CONVENTION ORGANISERS ARE ALL THE SAME

ANY EXCUSE TO PUT OFF GETTING ON WITH THE WORK



Never Quite Arriving 6

Data for the Didactic Generation

The clocks have gone back, summer time is over and it's that time of year again when a fanzine editor's thoughts turn to Novacon and she realises she doesn't have long to pub her ish. This, therefore, is **Never Quite Arriving 6**, the fanzine that's been around the world and now wants a long rest.

As an experiment in response management there will only be one address for this issue. Boring I know, but I'm back at my old address, trying to get my head round working full time at the Environment Agency (a weird place, but more about that some other time, no doubt.)

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This issue is available for copies of Apparatchik 77 (I do hate changing continents, you always miss an issue), a new library management system, muesli without too many dried bananas in it, bottles of Ruddles Rutland Independence Very Strong Ale, Nick Cave albums, sunshine and a week's worth of undisturbed sleep.

More data for the discontented

The cover will look familiar to the select group who received Dasnaid 7 and a half (damn these word processor with no half key), but as we know, D is not one to waste his work. And I'm not one to turn down a good cover.

Featured New Zealand artist of the issue was going to be Tom Cardy, but his artwork seems to have been impounded at the airport, or else is still sitting in a mail sack on a boat crossing the Tasman Sea. So instead we have equally famous - actually a lot more famous - New Zealand artist Dick Frizzell, courtesy my souvenir leaflet from his exhibition in Wellington. Hope he doesn't mind! (Besides, Mike Abbott swears that one of the figures in the header on page 16 is really Mike Scott.)

Other art comes from Brad Foster (p. 27), Bill Rotsler (p.15) and D West (pages 19 and 29)

This fanzine supports Victor Gonzalez for the US-Europe TAFF race and Maureen Kincaid Speller for the one in the opposite direction. Read an article by each further on in this fanzine (starting pages 8 and 11 respectively.) Then go out and vote!

The rest of the text has been written by me, as usual (with a little help from the letter columnists)

This fanzine also urges you all to come to Corflu in Leeds on 13-15th March 1998 as it's going to be a damn fine convention (and I'm not just saying that because I'm on the committee!). Attending membership £25 or \$40, send cheques made payable to Corflu to Ian Sorensen, 7 Woodside Walk, Hamilton, ML3 7HY.

October 1997

DRINKING COLA IN THAILAND

Most people go to Chiang Mai for the trekking, to see the hill tribes of Northern Thailand. Not me. I was just there for the temples. I didn't have the time, the malarial protection or, having abandoned my closest approximation to walking shoes in a Chinese hotel in Kuala Terengganu, the hiking gear.

Within 10 minutes of arriving at my guest house in Chiang Mai I had signed up for a trek.

Not that it took much to overcome my resistance. After two weeks in Malaysia where none of the tours ever ran, I was game for almost anything. It was the dry season, the guide told me, so I could hike in my sandals. They would lend me a small backpack to carry my clothes. The trek was only two days, so there'd still be time to see the temples. And although I seemed to be the only traveller in S E Asia not taking anti-malarial drugs, I was also, I'd noticed, the only one not being copiously bitten, thanks to the industrial strength and no doubt deeply carcinogenic insect repellent I'd brought with me from Australia. Which, when you consider that the drugs are only about 60% effective against malaria and 0% effective against other mosquito-borne diseases such as dengue fever, elephantitis and Japanese encephalitis probably put me less at risk than the majority of my Lariam-ingesting fellow-travellers.

Before the trek proper began, we were taken off for an elephant ride. Mounted in swaying splendour on the hard wooden seat on the elephant's back, I might have felt like one of the old kings of Chiang Mai, or at least Michael Palin, if I hadn't been given the smallest elephant of the pack to ride, a dwarf half the size of the others. "He's very strong," his trainer assured me as I climbed up on the seat next to Eric from Bordeaux. But not all the "hui" and "hinnies" of elephant language, nor sharp taps on the hide, would get the baby elephant up the hill till the Thai trainer had dismounted and fetched the leading rein. The "baby" elephant, I learned later, would be round about 20 years old and the full grown ones 40.

Elephant trekking was a bit like being on a chain gang. The elephants shuffled along, chains clanking, harried by the troupe of boys who rode or led them. Animal rights activists would be incensed. Uphill was an enormous struggle for the elephants; downhill was a struggle for the tourists as the seats pitched forward, sending water bottles and cameras crashing to the ground. I clung with my arm looped through the back of the seat so as not to slide out. Even Oskar, token group maniac who'd insisted on sitting astride the elephant's head, stopped fooling about on the final long descent to the river and climbed back into the seat.

My elephant was so small that I had to step UP to the platform to dismount at the end of the trek. All the same, I missed him when it was finally time to pick up my pack and begin the walk off into the hills. Why couldn't we have an elephant to carry all our gear?

We struck off along a path by the river. Laura from Hastings, who had the physique of a typical science fiction fan, kept falling over. I just wished I hadn't packed the spare pair of jeans as my pack seemed to be twice as large as anyone else's. Still, all went well till the first river crossing. How on earth was I going to balance on a tree trunk with my elephantine pack and slippery sandals? It was only the sight of Jak the guide leading an equally nervous Laura across the gulf that convinced me I could do it. I took his hand and put a very sweaty palm on his back, then, remembering the cliché about putting one foot in front of the other, I inched my way forward without falling off. By the third and easiest log trunk bridge I could do it without Jak's help.

We were all hot and sweaty by the time we reached the waterfall. Jak urged us to get in the water and wash as there would be no water in the hill tribe village. This was not particularly reassuring news, though I didn't at that point think through the obvious implications in relation to toilet facilities. My mind was more occupied with the prospect of the long trek uphill for the next phase of our journey.

As advertised, the hill went steeply upwards for a very long way. Our party was soon strung out on its slopes, Eric in the lead, even though, ilike most of the French I met en route, he smoked incessantly, then Oskar, carrying the bread over his shoulder on a pole just to show off to the female Thai travel agent from Bangkok. Following them were the 2 Danes with their video camera, the bobble-hatted assistant tour guide, carrying the rest of the food, me, then a long way behind Laura and her boyfriend, trailed patiently by Jak. I was pleased to see that I felt less unfit than when I went trekking in Fiji and Australia. With a couple of breaks, I made it up the long hill without any difficulty. At the top it seemed cooler, the sun mellow rather than fierce as we walked along a ridge, surrounded by forested mountains.

A short while later we arrived at the village. It was just a collection of wooden huts in a clearing at the top of the hill. Much smaller and more primitive than the village I'd stayed at in Fiji. At the centre was the rice-dehusker, thudding away, worked manually by a toothless old woman in a red embroidered dress. Another woman was busy chopping wood. The only sign of entertainment was a Volleyball-like net, where the boys played Thai football. There didn't seem to be many men in the village. One turned up on a motorbike. Another, an old man, sold us our vital supply of bottled water. It was hard not to conclude that all the men had gone off to live in the modern world, leaving their women to tend the children and animals, carry out hours of gruelling labour just to get a plateful of rice, and earn them some tourist income by wearing embroidered clothes. There was so little sign of modern life - no TVs, videos, electricity or water - that it came as a shock when the 2 Danes returned to our hut with cans of coke. There was a little shop in one of the houses on the edge of the village, they said. They pulled out some packets of crisps they had brought with them.

"Isn't it amazing," I said, "we're in the middle of nowhere and you can still eat junk food."

"Yes," said one of them. "Thank goodness."

I could have lived without the crisps and coke, but was more worried about the toilet situation. I spotted Eric returning from the woods with his toilet roll. "Is there any toilet?" I asked optimistically. "Ah, be oui," he said. "La nature."

Later, after supper (Thai pork and vegetables, stir-fried over a fire), Jak began to tell us about the village. There were approximately 50 people living there. As I'd observed, more women than men. The men left to get jobs. The villagers were part of the Karen tribe from Burma. At the end of each rainy season their counterparts in Burma went to war with the Burmese government to try and win their independence, using state of the art guns, probably supplied by China. This had been going on for a number of years, to little effect. Now that Burma was about to be admitted to ASEAN, the military government was likely to gain even more credibility. I knew that tourists were being allowed back in the country. I'd met some. They said you could either do the tourist circuit clock-wise or counter clock-wise. Either way you met in the middle as there was only one route you were allowed to take.

"What about those big reefers they smoke?" Laura asked. "Are they opium?"

"No. You burn opium as incense."

Jak didn't elaborate any further on what might or might not be in the big reefers.

We sat around drinking Thai whisky, waiting for it to get dark enough to see a good display of stars, but then the moon came up, just past full and low and bright in the sky, putting paid to that idea. Well, at least it should be easy to find my way back to the hut from our natural toilets.

A couple of the villagers brought along a dead animal for us to admire. It looked like an armadillo, but was probably an anteater since it had a long tongue for eating ants. With its scaly skin, it didn't look particularly dead; more like it'd never been alive. I watched them play with it without any feeling of revulsion.

The next offering was some honey, taken direct from the tree, so fresh it still had a couple of bees in it. The best honey of the year, Jak promised, reeling off a Thai expression that meant "honey gathered in May." I tried it, getting myself all sticky. The other two English, more careful

for their stomachs, refused. Jak began to tell us some ghost stories about the spirit of a dead woman and her unborn child, when he suddenly broke off mid-sentence. He'd just been stung by one of the dead bees, he said.

We all slept together in the one room of the hut. Not on the bamboo floor as I'd feared, but on some cast-off mattresses from the guest house. But they were extremely thin, and I could feel the wooden floor through them. Each time I woke up, Eric seemed to be smoking another cigarette. When I woke up for the final time, at 6.30, Eric was folding his blanket and shaking out his mattress, oblivious to the fact that people were still trying to sleep. When he saw I was awake, he popped out his camera and took a picture. I tried to remember if this was normal behaviour in France.

The next hurdle was to find a spot where I could go to the toilet without being disturbed by the pigs. Not easy as there were a lot of them around, ranging from cute piglets to menacing bruisers, outclassed only by the dogs. Village life was not for me, I decided, after I failed to outsmart the pigs. The day before I had been chased by some of the dogs. The only animals to leave me alone were the hens. But I felt a bit better after I'd washed my hands and cleaned my teeth using some of my precious bottled water. Jak made us all breakfast of fried egg and toast, and reassured us that the remainder of the trek was mainly downhill. His bobble-hatted assistant carried the remains of the honey down the hill with him on a stick, singing all the way. What had he been smoking earlier, we wondered.

The hike ended at another waterfall. There wasn't enough water to swim, but Oskar and Eric ventured over the slippery rocks to drench themselves under the fall. Half an hour later we were back in the van, being whisked back to the roadside cafe where we'd had lunch the day

The final event of the day was a rafting trip down the river. It was not unlike punting, if you can imagine a punt made from bamboo poles, and attempting to punt in a twisty, rock-strewn river. It felt dangerous enough even before the Latinate dynamic duo of Eric and Oskar decided to hound us, heaving at their poles and crashing into rocks in a high-spirited attempt to pirate and sink the raft I shared with the English couple. Fortunately we had the good sense to let our steersman do most of the work, so each time it looked like Oskar and Eric would ram us, he pulled off a dramatic turn on the rapids, sending us shooting ahead while the others ran into some obstruction and had to prise themselves off the rocks before they could continue. By the time we got back to the van, my shorts and shoes were soaking wet, but at least we were on our way back to civilisation where my room had a shower and toilet. I had reason to believe I would make good use of them.





Viva TAFF!

I've never been asked to nominate anyone for TAFF before. It makes you stop and think. I'm used to politicking about TAFF, but not putting my weight behind a particular candidate in advance of the event. Not that it should be that difficult. I generally have quite strong views about who should win fan funds - assuming I know any of the candidates in question. For example, I thought Abi should win both times she stood for TAFF. Not because I believed she would necessarily be a better delegate than Pam Wells or Tony Berry (though Tony's tendency to sound like a less daring version of John Major did take some of the pizzazz from his candidacy), but purely on the strength of her writing, and the campaign she ran. Lilian Edwards and I put out at least 3 if not 4 issues of *The Caprician* while we were campaigning for TAFF, and I was firmly wedded to the concept of basing my vote, partly at least, on performance during the campaign. I suppose the notion of the strong campaign also goes back to that paradigm of my early days in fandom, the Dave Langford/ Jim Barker race, where friendly rivalry between two talented contenders raised the profile of the fund to such an extent that mere neos like me were convinced that you had to be a giant among fans before you could stand. Even after Lilian and I had contrived not just to stand but even win without attaining the mega-star status of Dave and Jim (though, of course, we had done some pretty nifty fanzines), I still held to the view that you had to be big to win TAFF. Not in girth, but in reputation, like Greg Pickersgill or Dan Steffan. Or Abi. Abi Frost was one of my early fanzine heroes, not just for the wit and unconventionality of *New River Blues*, but the verve and outspokenness of her early contributions to TWP (the British women's apa) and her convention newsletters which ran on party-fuelled adrenalin rather than the latest photo-scanning technology.

But those were days of desperate fun, before the advent of the professional con-runner, Pam Well's TAFF newsletters and Swedish furniture made out of potentially lethal MFDS. It simply never occurred to me to vote for TAFF on the basis of how well someone might run the fund. Surely the worst that could happen was gaffiation in the mould of Kev Smith? I did give some fleeting thought to the impact of the delegate on his or her hosts. Would the Americans be able to cope with Michael Ashley, we wondered, as Leeds' favourite miserable sod contemplated the concept of standing? Would he be able to cope with them? But my general feeling was that if the Americans could take Gregory, they could take anyone, so let's at least send them someone entertaining. Where, I wonder in retrospect, was the good sense that led the assembled might of TWP to vote in the reliable Caroline Mullan as first elected administrator over the flamboyant Abi?

The soul-searching about TAFF continues (though am I the only one to feel it reflects rather badly on us British fans that none of us saw what was happening to Abi? But then again, London fandom has never been strong on fandom's mythical role as surrogate family). Worse still, the fan police are out with their thumbscrews, trying to extract TAFF reports from dormant fan-fund winners who never thought they would be called to make good on their promise to write it up

one of these decades. Heroic feats of hairdressing have been brought in to play to replenish TAFF's empty coffers. And 1998 should see two trips - one to Eastercon in Manchester, and one to the Worldcon in Baltimore.

But who should we vote for in these pre-millennial days of cheap travel, fast e-mail, rec.arts.sf.fandom, globalized conventions and an Ansible in every pocket? Now that brilliance has been discredited and indigence proved a liability? I find my ideas haven't changed so very much. I still want to send someone to America who deserves the honour, who will run a great campaign and will write a full and fascinating account of it all. I will now remember to consider whether he/ she is temperamentally suited to the task and what kind of administrator they might make. Much the same holds true for visiting delegates - what counts is reputation, in writing, through word of mouth. A general buzz that this is a person it would be cool to meet. Suitability and administrative skills I leave to the judgement of their home constituency.

Of course, with a year of travel behind me, meeting many overseas fans, a new criterion intrudes - the temptation to match-make. Mentally working out connections between fans I meet and those I know back home, it's hard not to cast myself in the role of talent scout and want to return triumphantly bearing, say, Tom Springer and Tammy Funk, or Grant Stone, or Murray MacLachlan, or any number of other fans barely known to my friends in the UK. But they wouldn't all fit in my backpack, or even necessarily into the parameters of a fan fund race. Even a British Corflu won't gather them all together, though I have hopes of Aussiecon III for the antipodean faction (though this requires exporting my friends to meet them, which might be just as tricky!) So vive les fan funds, say I, whether official, unofficial or on the verge of discredit. We need more peripatetic fans, not simply turning up at each other's worldcons, but interacting and making contact. It could be a way of life.

Some of which leads me, indirectly, to Victor Gonzalez. I didn't meet Victor while I was in America. I was staying on the East coast, and he lives in Seattle. He wasn't at Toner or LAcon III. But I did hear a lot about Victor, in the pages of *Apparatchik* (a fanzine I feel a deep affection for as it held parts of my life together while I was travelling) and from the people that knew him. I also felt a rather more direct connection to him when he chose to write about *Never Quite Arriving* at some length (for *Apparatchik*). Then things got even weirder. He wrote about meeting Sheila, a character from my Mexico report last issue. Sheila, needless to say, is real too. But for a while, I thought I had a copyright on her. Then Victor met her in real life, and I realised that she had strayed out of the pages of my fanzine into his. Should I charge? Wasn't that what Rob Hansen used to do if people wrote about Martin Smith? Maybe I could sue? But in the end I settled for sending Victor nosy e-mails, and agreeing enthusiastically to nominate him for TAFF. If this guy is going out with my erstwhile travelling companion Sheila, then I had to meet him! Victor says that if he wins, then both he and Sheila will be making the trip to Britain, probably an Australian-length trip (i.e. a couple of months), hopefully making it over in time for Corflu and getting the feel of Britain before meeting the crowds at Eastercon. What can I say, except that it seems pretty good value to me.

I've been looking at some of Victor's earlier fanzines. I have a couple of copies of *Instant Gratification*, co-edited with Jerry Kaufman, one *Parasite* where Victor does it with Tom Weber and a *Sans Serif* in which Victor goes it alone. What has remained constant is Victor's commitment to the short, snappy school of fanzine. His philosophy as expressed somewhere, is grab a friend and put out a fanzine. And it almost looks that easy. It's like a good rap, people talk fanzines, they talk cultural heroes, they groove on their drug of choice and the closest we get to domestic mundanity is Victor asking us to note his latest change of address yet again. The quintessential Victor appears in the con report in *San Serif*. Like most of Victor's writing, it's cerebral rather than discursive. But so what? If we want little quirky stories about life, there's always Lesley Reece. Victor's convention report is full of what people were saying and thinking, the politics of the era, Ted White's jail sentence, and even a manifesto. "Is this a con report or a

fannish statement"?" Victor asks at one point in the report. And concludes : "The written word is the basis of fandom. Fanzines are an arena of words . A fan should be judged (as a fan) by his/her writing and secondarily, production (but only to a certain degree; money can buy anything). And that's it." Think of him, if you like, as a Paul Kincaid with counter-cultural values. Victor takes fandom seriously. He takes life seriously (as you'll see in the piece below). And as far as I can tell, he's never lost that commitment to writing.

Look Both Ways

by Victor M. Gonzalez

In the darkness of an early October morning on the eastern Washington desert, a car driven by a 15-year-old drifted off an interstate freeway after the boy nodded off. His father and his father's fiancée, asleep in the back of the car and not wearing seatbelts, were thrown out the windows as the car tumbled and rolled. The driver's eight-year-old brother, one arm hanging by a tendon, crawled up the embankment and flagged down a passing motorist.

Three of the four survived with varying degrees of serious injury; the 40-year-old woman died when her head hit a rock. Her passing was officially noted in about two inches of newspaper copy in the Spokane newspaper, bundled under the headline with another weekend fatality.

That's not much compared to the column space dedicated to a victim of a different wreck, Princess Diana. Newspapers have surely generated over 10,000 inches of original copy about her. But, as a person who had never paid any significant attention to the Royal family, I felt a strong empathy to the situation of Prince William. I was two years older when my mom died in a senseless car wreck. Thirteen years later, I still think about it a lot.

Is there a sense of security idealized in the concept of "family" -- in the traditional, masculine sense -- epitomized by the death of Diana?

There is in my mind.

In Diana's case, she wed into the Royal family, became dissatisfied, divorced after many years, and then was killed in a car accident with the man she might have intended to marry -- and with somebody else at the wheel.

In the eyes of many, the accident was doubly a tragedy because Diana, long in the shadow of a dominant, pretentiously serious man, had escaped and might have found the first true happiness she felt since adolescence. Indeed, is there anyone who can look upon the liberation of an oppressed soul without some emotion? There is a sweet release in viewing the poor revenge themselves against the rich, of beaten women murdering their brutal husbands.

And regardless of some of the sillier arguments about whether alcohol or the photographers were "responsible", in truth the accident was a cruel, insensible twist of fate. Diana's death is not a benefit, even to those who found her image intolerable.

It was stupid to drive so fast. The only threat that could comprehensibly excuse such dangerous speeds on that road would have been armed assassins chasing the Mercedes. The "shooters" on the motorcycles were not armed with bullets, just film. It was an act of frustration and pride that led the driver to put four lives at risk.

That said, I must also admit I was fascinated by the comparisons with Ballard's Crash that came immediately to mind. Have you asked yourself why it took an hour for the ambulance to make the six-mile journey to the hospital?

Though, fortunately, I don't suffer from sexual feelings related to car wrecks, I do have a dark interest in the details that has grown more prominent over the years. I ordered the State

Patrol reports on my mom's crash, and read them carefully. I even got copies of the short newspaper account. In the last three years I have written many similar squibs, no doubt also clipped out by grieving friends and relatives. Many times, as I digested a Patrol memo into four or five inches of copy, I have tried to imagine whether, in the last moments, the victims were aware of what was coming. It is a painful connection between automobiles and death.

People have gone out of their way to beatify Diana, very much the same way the 13-year-old memories of my mother have her playing the role of a saint. My mom brought me up honestly, assiduously took care of me, and kept me from the worst excesses of my dominant, pretentiously serious father.

My parents fought throughout my childhood; the trauma of overhearing their frequent arguments haunts me in ways I can't comprehend or catalog. When I was 15, they split up.

After the divorce, my mom took a good look at what she wanted to do. She found men who gave her more satisfaction emotionally than my father has ever been capable of; she went back to university. It took her 15 years to get her bachelor's degree in sociology -- she worked half-time or more, took care of me and the house through those years. But after the divorce, it took her only two years to get her master's degree in social work.

It seemed that she was starting to live a life defined by her own needs, not those of me or my father. She found a man who liked to play bridge as much as she did, and she moved to Portland, Oregon, to be with him and his two sons.

The happiness she felt was evident every time I talked to her. Her fascinations were now considered important; her needs were now priorities; her discontent was now addressed.

But that man eventually allowed his sleepy 15-year-old son to drive, supervised in the front seat by an eight-year-old, at 3 a.m. on an empty, dark freeway. Did he feel the bump of the rumble strip when the wheels slipped out of the lane? Did my mom, my dearly beloved Betty Jo Gonzalez, awaken briefly as the rolling car hopped from impact to impact?

In short, Diana left the protection afforded by the palace, and put herself in the hands of the Fayed's. I doubt that, had palace security still been in charge, Diana would have been allowed in the car with a drunk driver, nor that the driver would have been allowed to outpace the photographers. Diana's new paternal protectors failed her.

Similarly, I can't believe that my father would have allowed a 15-year-old to drive his car so late at night. No bridge tournament is important enough to take such a risk. My mother's divorce from him put her in the hands of another - a man who didn't have the proper respect for her life or his own and put her into a deadly situation.

Of course, both women had the ability to analyze the situations, and both could have made sure they were better protected. Neither decided to overrule their new male powers-that-were. Both died.

In a way, this presentation doesn't make sense. From the hands of men, into the hands of men. Random death happening randomly. What's the difference? Where's the causal link? I'm sure I can't tell you. I can tell you that I very much despise drivers who don't take their responsibilities seriously. I can tell you of the self-consciousness of accepting the death of a loved relative over more than a decade. I can tell you that I sank into drug-addiction, and brushed close to physical and spiritual death before I recovered. But I can't assure you that it wouldn't have happened if she hadn't died. Given that he is famous, William will have more opportunity for trouble and for assistance. I think I can say that life is difficult enough without such additional complications. I know I can tell you, above all, that I wish I could talk to my mom. I wish I could tell her stories of the things I've seen and learned of, and absorb from her the wisdom I had difficulty affording when she was alive.

And I can tell you that I emerged from the funeral (a mixed-reaction memory: my father pulling up to my apartment after the ceremony, saying sadly, "Now there's just two of us,") with

the impression fully established that, for all of my dad's faults, he wouldn't have allowed her to die in such a stupid way. There is a conservative part of his personality focused not on politics but on preservation. I retain the sense that this is very important to the integrity of any person.

And that makes me wonder if I, a dominant, pretentiously serious man, will be able to protect the women in my life from meaningless, avoidable accidents. By god, if someone has to die, let there be a reason, a criminal to hang or political cause to be martyred for. Drunks, photographers and sleepy teenagers aren't enough. The human mind, given the right impulses, all too often nods off, ignoring sensibility in a need for escape. That kind of mistake is too regular, too much a part of human existence, to easily be paper clipped to responsibility.

Perhaps more importantly, I wonder whether I'll be able to allow the woman in my life the freedom of action and spirit that will compel her to accept my cloak of imposed security. Thankfully, she tells me I have no choice.

(VMG)

Victor was the first person, ever, to ask me to nominate him for TAFF. Then a few weeks later, Maureen asked me the same thing, only for the Europe to America race. I was pleased to accept. But, how can I talk dispassionately about Maureen when I've known her for so many years? I can still remember the bike ride up the hill to her house back in the 80s when we both lived in Oxford. The 23 club founded by her and Peter-Fred Thompson, which I was only allowed to join on sufferance because I was already 24. Running TWP together, Maureen coaxing the duplicator into action while I tried to think up the rest of the Excuse Corner. Coach rides down to London for the Griffin meetings. Cakes and conversations about books.

But my Oxford days came to an abrupt end when Peter-Fred got a job in Bristol, and I abandoned Maureen two thirds of the way through the apa year, leaving her to put out the mailings on her own. After that I tended to see Maureen at conventions or meetings in London. I remember the Novacon when she found Elidor, and incidentally Paul Kincaid. I remember parties at the Pickersgills, and convention committee meetings. And somewhere along the way, Maureen moved to Folkestone, cut her hair and developed a new self-confidence. The rest as they say is history.

I think it's too easy to see Maureen the formidable organiser and skilled operator of duplicators, and forget Maureen the writer. Maureen hasn't written nearly enough for general consumption. Over the years she has written a tremendous amount for apas - TWP, Frank's Apa in its heyday, Acnestis (the litcrit apa she founded), and for the BSFA, but much less for general circulation fanzines. There was the article for an early TNH where she showed an uncanny familiarity with baby buggies, the Elidor episode written up for Tesseract, Bottled Lightning, a perzine of her own in the mid-80s, and of course, her present day incarnation as occasional writer for Banana Skins and proud presenter of Snufkin's Bum, her latest perzine.

Back in the 80s, Maureen was even credited with a school of writing - pastoralism. Descriptive writing, noted more for its atmosphere than content. But this isn't really how I see Maureen's writing. What has always impressed me about her is her honesty, and her desire to get to the substance of the matter in hand, even if it takes several pages. One thing that Maureen cannot be accused of is leaving her arguments half-developed, or skating across the surface in the cause of a convenient one-liner. She takes hold of a subject, examines it, agonises a bit (no wonder she has such affinities with Croydon fandom) and comes up with her considered take on the subject in hand - whether it be book, social phenomenon, or life experience. But always in a human way that makes you feel you're being invited into Maureen's world, rather than lectured at on some abstruse point of intellectual pride.

In this article for NQA we see both sides of Maureen - the reasoner, tracing back her connections with America, and the pastoralist, roaming across the landscapes of her imagination. It should, I think, give some idea of what we might expect to read from Maureen if she makes the trip to see the real world of America 1998.

A Dance Called America

by Maureen Kincaid Speller

There are some moments of childhood I remember with ghastly clarity, like when I wobbled once too often on my first bicycle and fell into a rose bush, but there are others which are simply lost in the day-to-day acquisition of new information. I mean, there must have been one last moment when America didn't exist for me, and then the first second of believing it did, but I can't find it. What I do know is that in the first nine years of my life, America came in two simple flavours.

The first was as folksy as you like, fuelled by my mother's love of stage musicals and fifties films, preferably combined. Consequently, my vision of America was a little distorted. People arranged to meet one another in St. Louis, or on trolley buses, or else rode around in surreys with fringes on top. They all wore dungarees and funny straw hats, slapped their thighs a lot and raised barns at weekends. Oh, and the corn was, of course, 'as high as an elephant's eye', a notion that baffled the budding naturalist who *knew* that there were no elephants in America, at least not wild ones ... were there? Life was one great song-and-dance routine. Mops and buckets, puddles and umbrellas: if you could jump in it or over it, ideally both, you could dance with it, and there was a song for every occasion. There was nothing like a dame, we were assured (which worried me slightly as in Britain a dame was that man dressed as a woman you saw in pantomime each year, and I had a feeling this wasn't what they meant), and I had an early repertoire of schmaltzy love-songs which it embarrasses me to think about now. In fact, I can only think of one film that baffled me, and that was *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, which I was way too young to understand, but it took me years to shed the notion that eating in the street was wrong! On the other hand, there was also the very wonderful *Bewitched*; I spent hours failing to wiggle my nose, convinced that if I only succeeded, then I too would become a witch.

When wholesome living got boring (and let's face it, there is only so much candy you can eat before your teeth ache, as Shirley Temple so sagely observed ... but what was an 'animal racker'?) there were always Westerns. The cowboys fought the Indians, and almost invariably won, and when the supply of pesky redskins ran low, they could fight with one another for a change. It was a squeaky-clean world. Knives, bullets, arrows and spears passed smoothly into the body, came out quickly, leaving only the smallest of red patches on the shirt, maybe a small tear in the cloth. Villains had the grace to die quietly and tidily, with just a faint trickle of blood at the corner of the mouth, while the hero got up off the floor, shook the dust of Main Street off his hat, dropped his gun back into its holster and rode off into the sunset. If we were very lucky, he didn't sing.

True, there didn't seem to be that many women in these films but, to be honest, it didn't really worry me. There was the occasional sappy cattle heiress, panting with relief when she found the right man to marry her and take over the ranch (I wasn't that fond of cows and horses myself, but this roping steers business looked fun), and there was Annie Oakley and Calamity Jane. CJ was my role-model for about half the film, because of the buckskin and the hat, but when she had a fit of gingham and managed to win her man, I shifted my allegiance back to books and the

irrepressible Jo March, who could be relied on not to let me down (I hadn't read *Good Wives* at that point).

The other flavour was altogether less pleasant, all the more so because I didn't really understand what was going on in the outside world. Mostly, it seemed to be going on in America and it mostly seemed to be bad. Men were being sent into space (this was interesting, but rockets were apparently boys' stuff, so I left that alone), there was a war in Vietnam, politicians were being gunned down, and there was something called a nuclear threat, which sounded ominous. I've no idea what terms I actually cast it in as a child, but there was this overall sense that the world in general, and America in particular, was very dangerous. (Curiously, I have little memory of current affairs in this country at that time, except the Moors murders, but I suppose the Profumo affair et al wouldn't have held much interest for any but the most forward child.)

There was, though, no source of comfort. My mother's view on world affairs was unequivocal. It was nothing to do with us, and therefore was of no interest to us as a family. We behaved blamelessly, kept ourselves to ourselves, paid the bills and didn't waste anything, and in return the world knew this and didn't bother us. Consequently, there was no need to discuss the outside world as we wouldn't have to have anything much to do with it. You might argue that she was trying to protect innocent minds from traumas beyond their comprehension, but I think it was more that she genuinely believed that world events did not in any way impinge on her life and therefore there was no need to be concerned with them. It never occurred to her that any of her family members might think otherwise. Nevertheless, I watched the news, saw planes scattering bombs like sugar strands over the jungle, and pictures of men lying sprawled in pools of dark liquid while people stood round looking (my mother always hustled us away from accidents). Some of them carried guns. Guns belonged in films but this was real life and I comforted myself with the thought that this didn't happen here. (This was in fact entirely untrue as around this time, the father of a classmate who lived round the corner flipped one night, shot dead his wife and two children and then turned the gun on himself, but we didn't talk about that either and I forgot about it for years.)

In 1969, everything changed. America moved closer. To be precise, it arrived in my classroom, in the person of Ricky, who wore a plaid shirt, had the shortest hair I had ever seen, and hewed gum. When he didn't chew gum his mouth hung slackly open. He also had a squint and it was, I regret to say, some years before I shed the notion that all American boys had something wrong with their eyes and chewed gum to keep their mouths shut. Beyond that, he was the first person I knew of outside a film who said 'OK', until the teacher told him to say 'yes' instead (I meanwhile was experimenting with saying 'OK' at home, and also getting told off because it was 'not nice') He also called the teacher 'ma'am' until she insisted he call her 'Mrs Morton'. She was a strong advocate of the 'when in Rome ...' philosophy and made Ricky's life a misery as she struggled to turn him into a proper little English boy.

My part in all this was to initiate Ricky into the mysteries of country dancing. Our primary school celebrated May Day each year with an elaborate ceremony which included a procession in which all the school took part, and Maypole dancing, performed by Mrs Morton's class. I liked country dancing, and was fairly good at it, but this cultural exchange effort faltered with the realisation that on top of everything else, Ricky had two left feet and not the faintest clue as to what he was supposed to be doing. Somehow, by dint of pushing, shoving and sheer willpower, we got through the ritual without him once getting entangled in the maypole's ribbons but it is perhaps significant that I have absolutely no other recollection of Ricky beyond that day.

1969 also saw the Woodstock Festival; curiously enough, given the family's resolute refusal to acknowledge that anything was going on, this seemed to upset us immensely. My mother simply disapproved of the whole thing on principle; she didn't really like to see people enjoying themselves. I, on the other hand, was very bothered by the fact that Woodstock had shifted continent. After all, Woodstock was a small country town near Oxford, with a rather nice museum, a set of stocks with five holes, and Blenheim Palace. Once I understood that the festival wasn't going on in the park at Blenheim, I became quite outraged at the idea that America had stolen Woodstock's name. Thus did I stumble on the fact that two places, far apart, could share the same name (though it was years before I realised that this was the result of homesick migrants trying to recreate a flavour of the old country). Worse was to come when I discovered that there were several Oxfords in the USA; we didn't have a monopoly on the name. Another verity disintegrated before my eyes as I scanned the index in the atlas.

At the same time, certain geographical niceties notwithstanding, one thing was still sure. 'In 1492 Columbus sailed the ocean blue ...' and of course, discovered America. Not that it had ever been lost, but that level of sophistication came later. Thanks to a story read on Jackanory, a BBC institution in those days, in which a modern explorer retraced Leif Eiriksson's voyage to Vinland, now Martha's Vineyard (possibly), I was too busy getting to grips with the fact that Columbus probably hadn't discovered America so much as rediscovered it, and that actually the Vikings had got there first. For some reason, probably the fact that I knew more about Vikings than I did about Spaniards and Italians (who were, thanks to some rather basic history lessons on Elizabethan England, all piratical baddies who deserved their comeuppance for the Spanish Armada; I said it was basic), and had also obsessively reread Thor Heyerdahl's book about the Kon-Tiki expedition, this idea appealed to me. I liked the element of uncertainty - did they get there or not - and the fact that John Anderson had traced the journey through the old Norse sagas. I liked this idea so much I began reading Norse sagas for myself, and also developed a passion for books retracing old journeys as well as a taste for mysteries, which America seemed to have in abundance.

I grew older, and America came and went from my life in the shape of assorted temporary students in my classes at school, all of whom seemed frightfully clever and articulate, all of whom I liked immensely and got on well with because, like me, they seemed to actually enjoy learning and were not obsessed with boys and cosmetics like most of my female classmates, and all of whom disappeared at the end of the term leaving me to struggle on. Misapprehensions about gingham had long since been laid to rest, and if fears about nuclear war hadn't abated, at least I no longer felt that America had a bomb with my name on it. Instead, for the first time I could see the individuals rather than the amorphous nation: Stacia, Elizabeth; the woman who introduced me to cheesecake (my first introduction to 'foreign' food; I still love cheesecake), and George, who gave me a copy of Peter Beagle's *A Fine and Private Place* because he thought I might enjoy it (and was absolutely right). Americans seemed kind and friendly, and I suspect that deep in my heart I also saw America as a Promised Land, somewhere I could go where people would understand me.

Except, of course, that I would never go there for real. I had been abroad once, to Italy with the school for a whole fortnight when I was thirteen, and it had been firmly impressed upon me that this was the chance of a lifetime, that my parents were making huge sacrifices for me, and that I would never get the chance to go anywhere ever again so I had better make the most of it. Adolescence proceeded slowly; the only solution was to read my way through it as best I could. If I couldn't have rebellion, then I could at least manage passive literary resistance.

Which brings us back to *A Fine and Private Place*. I'd already read *The Last Unicorn* and adored it so was rather hoping that *A Fine and Private Place* would be more of the same. Of course, it wasn't, but after an initial twinge of disappointment, I was caught by the charm of the story. I'm partial to ghost stories anyway, but this was about as far from M R James as you could get (though much later, I was to discover that MRJ in turn had a passion for Wild West shows and saw Buffalo Bill's show a number of times) and it was also a very comforting love story, which I really needed then. And so America took on yet another shape in my mind. It became urban, it became literary. I don't know why it hadn't before; after all, I had read Louisa May Alcott, not to mention Susan Coolidge's *What Katy Did ...* ah, yes, I think I see now. I became caught up in a loop of 'like-unlike' in this fascinating world which was very like my own until I looked hard, at which point it became totally alien for a moment. Bricks and mortar, but what's a brownstone? Bread, but what's baloney? They speak English, but what's Yiddish? *A Fine and Private Place* walked me through the streets of an America I simply hadn't imagined existing, and I wanted more.

I'd grown up, got a job, left home, got married and discovered that adult life wasn't anywhere near as much fun as I'd hoped it would be, so living life vicariously was the best I could do. More arrived from a most unexpected source: Woman's Hour on Radio 4. In the late nineteen-seventies, it began broadcasting a monthly Letter from New York from Helene Hanff, and I fell under her spell. She had this incredible voice, well-martini'd and kippered as I was to later discover; I had no idea that a woman could speak so gruffly, and she told these marvellous stories of life in her apartment block. Her neighbours quickly became my neighbours too. I learned about the trials and tribulations of parking in New York, about putting my garbage down the chute (this in itself was a novelty as I put a rubbish bin out for the dustman once a week, and if I was very lucky, he emptied it. If I was really good, I got the bin back), about the joys of Central Park, all without leaving the room. I didn't need to. Hanff's descriptions were so vivid, I could see it all so clearly in my mind's eye. In particular, I loved her descriptions of sitting on the step in the evening, and the parties with her friends in the block. I'd also finally got round to reading *84 Charing Cross Road* and knew for sure that Hanff was a kindred spirit for, like her, I had always bought and read secondhand books, and believed in self-education. When the going got tough, I took *84 Charing Cross Road* to bed and pretended I had a little one-and-a-half room apartment of my own.

'Read this', said Paul Kincaid, while we were discussing books one day. 'You'll like it.' 'This' was *Blue Highways* by William Least Heat-Moon, in which the author took to the back-roads of America in a camper van after his marriage began to fall apart. Mine was falling apart as well, but I didn't have the nerve to cut loose in the way Least Heat-Moon had done, and for that matter I didn't have the camper van either. One thing was for sure; I loved the book. I'd read travel writing for as long as I could remember, maybe subconsciously compensating for my own rootedness, but had rarely tackled modern writers. I'd gone round the world by train with Paul Theroux and done a certain amount of walking with John Hillaby, but hitting the road by car or van was an entirely new idea to me. (It's interesting to note that when my brother's marriage fell apart, he instinctively took up with Jack Kerouac, so maybe this is a family thing and we were gypsies in a past incarnation.) I became totally absorbed in Least Heat-Moon's journey as he circumnavigated America, trying to do his best to avoid the identikit towns with their fast-food outlets while looking for real America. America expanded again, and the wide open prairies returned, but along with them came forests, deserts, small towns, large towns, tiny little settlements which vanished as quickly as they arose, a whole complexity of landscapes completely unlike anything I had ever encountered, and quietly observing this was Least Heat-Moon, a man who had a way of evoking massive panoramas in my head, with a few well-chosen words. Other travel writers followed: Bill Bryson was outrageously funny about everything,

Douglas Kennedy filled in the background of life in the Bible Belt, Pete Davies chased tornados (I am still fascinated by extreme weather and have now watched the same programme on tornado-chasers five times) but it was Annie Dillard who slowed the pace down again with her delicate observations of nature, and Least Heat-Moon who examined one small area of Kansas in minute detail, in *PrairyErth*, my joint second favourite travel book on America, along with Steinbeck's *Travels with Charley*.

Reading these people was how I began to pick fragments of American history as well and to realise how little I knew. In school, once Columbus had returned safely to Spain, no more was heard until the Mayflower set sail, and there was that little unpleasantness at Boston. We'd also read about the death of General Wolfe but not much more. Although I had known that Sir Walter Raleigh had travelled to America I hadn't realised just how vigorously the Elizabethans had attempted to settle America, nor exactly what the British got up to in New York during the eighteenth century (as Helene Hanff put it, our behaviour was 'simply FILTHY'. Quite). For that matter, I knew little about the settlement of the West, about the Goldrush, about the waves of European emigrants, but reading Least Heat-Moon and others, the faintest connecting lines began to be drawn in, to be augmented by snippets of knowledge gleaned from all over.

And at the back of it all is fandom. Once I started to read fanzines and to make contact with American fans, the States moved even closer, became more real, more immediate. Perhaps the sense of mystery faded a little, or perhaps it became transformed into something else, more Least Heat-Moon than Peter Beagle. Helene Hanff wanted to know what it was like to walk down Charing Cross Road, or stand on the steps of St Paul's Cathedral. I found myself wondering about New York and San Francisco, about the differences between British and American conventions, about food, about the colour of sunsets, the sound of the streets, the deserts and the endless highways. 'I don't suppose I'll ever ...' began to turn into 'I wish I could ...', a feeling reinforced by every visit from American fans. And now I've got email and I post to r.a.sf.f, it's almost closer than the street outside; every day brings something new to think about, from Girl Scout cookies to yet another interesting quirk of language, and 'I wish ...' becomes 'I want ...'

Someone once told Helene Hanff that people who go to England find exactly what they go looking for, and I'm sure the same is true of America, though it strikes me as being as much a curse as a reassurance. I mean, supposing I hadn't got beyond fifties musicals? As it is, I am sure that the worlds of Peter Beagle *and* William Least Heat-Moon, as well as those of every other American I've ever read or met are waiting to be discovered, if I want to look. And I do ... very much.





Southern List Cult

& other eclecticismisms from Down Under

This was the point in the fanzine when I was going to do my in depth review of the Australasian fanzine scene, but let's face it, it's too long since I read them all, you're not likely to see any of them unless you're already on the mailing list, and Cheryl Morgan has probably already reviewed them. Then I thought I could do my top 10 cute Kiwis (no offence to Australians, but cute Australians doesn't have the same alliteration), but I could only think of 8. Besides, I remembered that lists are one of the mainstays of *The Metaphysical Review* and that if I were to keep up with Bruce Gillespie's standards, I should really come up with my 100 favourite Kiwis, which would be tough without including either sheep or glaciers. So what I've decided to do is just chat a bit, in an unstructured way, about some of the fanzines I received, the people that handed me them and how they struck me at the time. - and if that degenerates into a review (which it does at times), then so be it.

So back to *The Metaphysical Review*, which Bruce dug out for me, along with *SF Commentary* and a few of his recent Anzapa contributions when I went round for tea. While Bruce was sorting out the fanzines in his CD-lined study, his partner Elaine took me out in the garden to meet the cats, and then, once we'd tracked down some but by no means all the feline population, introduced me to her favourite spiders as well. That was the kind of person she was.

In many ways, *The Metaphysical Review* was my key to Australian fandom. Bruce's most recent issues may date back to late 1995, but their relevance remained unsurpassed. I was deep into Sally Yeoland's account of her relationship with John Bangsund in the 1970s, complete with excerpts from John's succinctly witty writing of the time, when Julian Warner rang to ask if I would mind if our wineries tour was combined with a visit to John and Sally's for lunch. Needless to say, I didn't have any objections. The same issue also contained Race Matthews writing about the early days of the Melbourne science fiction group, while in present day Melbourne fandom his film nights were one of the talking points (and although I did meet Race, I never, to my regret, made it to the film night). Recent Eastercons were covered in the form of reports from Ditmar award winning writer Terry Frost (but, more of Terry later).

The second issue of *The Metaphysical Review* was less fannish, but contained extensive accounts of travels round Australia, one written by an old school friend of Bruce's, describing the kind of dirt road trip I would have loved to make (another time, maybe!) and another by poet Doug Barbour which eerily mirrored my own itinerary, down to the people he met. This issue was also the main source of the lists. List-writing is contagious (indeed *The Metaphysical Review* seems to have caught it from the British literary apa Acnestis) and after reading the 100 page issue 24/25 with its collection of 100 favourite writer lists, I found myself pacing round my bedroom annexe at Leigh Edmonds' and Valma Brown's house in Perth, trying to come up with my top books, movies, TV shows and music (I still have the lists, but they are partly illegible from where I spilt Thai whisky over my notebook)

But while *The Metaphysical Review* has to be considered as the Bible of Australian fandom, *Thyme* could easily be renamed Thyme Out. It's the essential listings magazine, no longer in the Australian blue duplicated format of the '80s that's made it the Cinderella of so many British convention give-away tables, but closer in style to the output of our own dear BSFA, though with the added advantage of Ian Gunn artwork. I pored over its pages to find meeting dates, contact addresses and the latest dispute over Basicon or the Australian Worldcon. Admittedly I ignored most of the book reviews, and didn't always want to read about the schedules for US SF

shows in Australia, but isn't that always the way with listings mags; you read that 25% that's essential to you.

I don't really need to talk about Kim Huett's *Existentialism* since everyone in Britain probably saw it before me (though note what I said about the prevalence of lists in Australian fandom .) It really takes the shine off world travel when you realise that the people back home are going to meet well-known foreign fans before you do (see also Gary Farber). The same goes for Karen Pender Gunn's *Pink* series. Since her GUFF trip, *Pink* and *Pinkettes* have been fairly well distributed round British fandom. The latest *Pink* clearly post-dates my return from Australia. I can tell this by the way it's not all creased up like the fanzines I had in Australia, nor so thoroughly read. But the interesting thing about it is that it's the logical extension of the Australian list culture, a compilation of factoids telling me, in this case, more than I ever wanted to know about the fast food industry. I only mention this because it might help to explain *Oscillation Overthruster*. Sue Ann Barbour, the editor, was vigorously touting her zine for whatever award they hand out at Swancon. Sue Ann is a wonderful person, but her idea of a fanzine seems to centre round collecting information on some bizarre aspect of cultural kitsch and throwing it all together with a few cartoons and very little commentary. So, in one issue we have Samurai Pizza Cats, the science fiction of Hanna Barbera, the history of the Yo Yo and Buckaroo Banzai, and in the next lego, more Samurai Pizza Cats, a listing of cereal toys and synopses for the first 11 seasons of British children's TV series Grange Hill (which, on the long train journey from Perth to Adelaide, caused me to break off from listing my top 100 clumps of spinifex observed in the desert in order to try and remember the storylines of the remaining 8 seasons of Grange Hill. There's nothing like long-distance travel to confirm the banality of the contents of your mind.) The frustrating thing about *Oscillation Overthruster* is that Sue Ann is such a strange person that the fanzine would be ten times better if there were less lists and more of Sue Ann.

The only other fanzine in evidence at Swancon was Terry Frost and Danny Heap's *Fans Behaving Badly 1*. Now, this is closer to my concept of a real fanzine. A *Rude Bitch* for the bloke generation, if you like. I was handed my copy by Terry Frost at the Melbourne SF club. Strangely, given his reputation, Terry didn't try to chat me up. In fact, I thought he was a bit shy. We had a conversation - about DUFF or something equally rivetting - then I was dragged away to see some library books. If I'd read the fanzine first I might even have felt insulted (or conversely, relieved!). Terry and Danny do their best to come over as sleazeballs, and by and large succeed. Danny wins the gross-out of the fanzine award by his loving and very detailed account of a compulsive nose-picker. Terry takes on the legend of Pauline Hanson (Australia's equivalent of Enoch Powell, or maybe I should now say Lord Tebbitt) and fantasises how he would fuck her into submission. Does even Australia's favourite hate figure deserve this? The "When Danny met Terry - fanboy dialogue" is only about 50% comprehensible if you've never been to the Melbourne Science Fiction Club, and not nearly as funny as Terry and Danny clearly think it is. "Are we doing random stupidity" Danny wonders at the end. Yes, guys, you are. But, hell, I like a bit of shock value to my stupidity. Ian Sorensen should be glad - at last the male fan gets to tell his fantasies. And I'll take tasteless over bland any day of the week.

Which - bland - brings me back to New Zealand. Well, not New Zealand itself, which was far from bland, but Alan Stewart's account of his FFANZ trip there. FFANZ which stands for, well fucked if I know, but it shuttles fans between Australia and New Zealand in the usual way. The only difference seems to be there's no prejudice against doing FFANZ, then going on to win one of the bigger fan funds. Alan Stewart did it, and so did the Pender Gunns. Maybe that accounts for the trip reports. After all, who's going to vote you onto another fan trip if you haven't produced for the first (now there's a thought for BritFans. Instead of proclaiming it bad form to run for a second fan fund when you've already won a first, only let people run once they've written up and published their trip report. Can I be the first to say Rob Hansen for GUFF?) On the other hand, Alan Stewart's report is a clear case of what you get when you care more about putting out the report than its content. Alan is a fine fan, a conscientious and effective editor, but

writing is clearly not his forte. *FFANZ across the Water* pays its dues by telling you what Alan did and who he met (the names are even printed in bold so it's easy to egoscan. Maybe a sign that Alan never expected anyone to read the thing in its entirety) The end result is more like a memory book of the event, scattered with pictures, cuttings and memorabilia. Probably interesting if you were there, but not very enlightening if you weren't.

Luckily for the reputation of FFANZ trip reports, I was also able to buy a copy of the 1994 trip, made by Tim Jones of New Zealand. Tim used to do a fanzine called *Timbre* in the 80s, and was also a contributor to *This Never Happens* (famously non-Nova award winning fanzine published by me and Lilian Edwards), but nowadays he doesn't get out enough (largely due to the arrival of Baby Gareth), and he certainly doesn't do enough fan-writing. So, it was a treat to find this account of Tim and his partner Kay's visit to Australia. Kay's contributions appear in brackets, which gives the report a slightly uneven tone, but adds to the dynamic of it all. Lots of it struck chords with me of parallel experiences from my visits to the same cities or the same fans, but even without the synchronicities I think I would have found it a good read. Tim and Kay manage to do more than tell you what they saw and who they met, they describe people and places and say what they thought of it all. There were also some useful footnotes, like the one about New Zealand convention discos "[They] usually have the following range of music: We are the Champions (Queen). I'm a Really Sensitive Singer-Songwriter but Boy, Can I "RockOut" When I Want To! Phew! (Billy Joel). The Time Warp (Omnes)." Sadly the disco was on far too early (i.e. first event of the first night after the Opening Ceremony) at the New Zealand EasterCon for me to test the validity of this observation.

Finally, while we're in New Zealand, we come on to *Phlogiston*, New Zealand's token sercon fanzine. Alex Heatley is obviously trying to do for his country what the entirety of the BSFA does for Britain, or Bruce Gillespie, Alan Stewart and portions of the Melbourne Science Fiction Club do for Australia. But he wants to do it all whilst wearing a leather waistcoat and inviting women to admire his nipple ring. I suspect some dissonance between Alex's original ambitions and current interests. Maybe he should join the Blokey fans behaving badly cabal and talk about his sex life instead. People warned me about Alex Heatley before the convention. "Stay away from him," the more subtle suggested. (The less subtle treated me to diatribes about his personality and why they hated him.) Needless to say, I was interested to meet this guy. All the same, it was a bit alarming that in a convention full of strangers he was one of the first people to talk to me (I claim no merit. I had blagged my way onto the table where the Guests of Honour were sitting by virtue of being English and not knowing who else to talk to, and Alex was merely trying to pursue the same tactics but with a New Zealand slant.) But, to be honest, I didn't find him any more irritating than, say, Kev McVeigh or Ian Sorensen. At least I felt we were part of the same sub-culture, which was by no means the case with the rest of the fans at the convention (though I think I wrote about this for *Apparatchik*. If only someone would give me a copy of issue 77 I could find out what I said!)

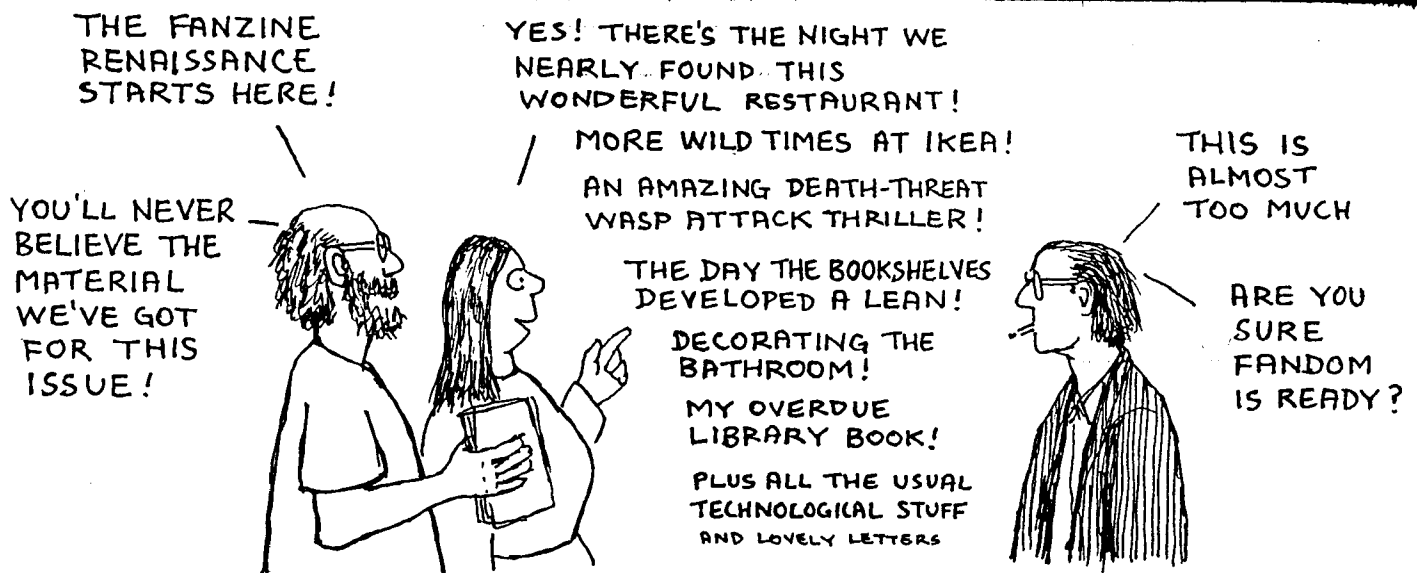
But back to the fanzine. The main disappointment was that it wasn't very New Zealand-oriented. A huge wedge of the text came from Evelyn C Leeper in the form of book reviews and part two of her *Intersection Report* (does this woman really get nominated for awards?), none of it tailored in any way to her New Zealand audience. Then there was an interview with Isaac Asimov, an article about the image of Britain projected by Thunderbirds and a random grab bag of film and TV reviews. I realise that it's not really fair to expect all New Zealand content (particularly in a country where persistent questioning revealed an SF tradition of some book set in New Zealand in the 60s, Margaret Mahy, and an anthology for up and coming writers.) but some sense of local colour would have been welcome. The best we get in the end is Tim Jones column for aspiring New Zealand writers. He may not spell it out, but it's clear that's it's tough out there, submitting SF from a small island on the edge of Australia with no home-grown SF market to support you.

So what can I say about the fanzine scene in Australia and New Zealand after all this? That I've forgotten to mention Perry Middlemiss (I'm not sure where I filed the latest issue, but I hope

there'll be more)? That Terry Frost will offend 99% of known Americans? That come Aussiecon Three, everyone will be too hysterical to do fanzines any more. (Did you know that worldwide research conclusively shows that the only people looking forward to an Australian WorldCon are the New Zealanders and the British?) That I think the heyday of the Australian fanzine was the mid-80s and that it's about time certain fans got off their back sides and did something about it? The fans of Australia and New Zealand seem like squabbling kingdoms, too isolated in their individual cities (or countries) to interact effectively with each other, too parochial to see a larger picture, too disparate to all be friends. Yet, there's lots of weird and wonderful people out there, worth travelling to the ends of the earth (which for the purpose of this fanzine we'll designate Dunedin, a very wonderful city, with a very wonderful fan community) to meet. I'm planning to go back there for the WorldCon. I just hope, after all I've said about everybody, that they'll let me back in!

Appendix 1 Top 20 cute Kiwis

1. Tom Cardy - the enigmatic Mr. Cardy could probably win on scarcity value alone. Tom was so elusive I nearly didn't meet him at all.
2. Frank McSkasy - the Hungarian mafia stick together! Okay I'm only 1/16th Hungarian at best, but it's in the blood
3. Murray MacLachlan - this man can talk, cook, drink wine and hardly pause to draw breathe.
4. Chris Chitty - I'm not sure if he's really a Kiwi but he's good at making mechanical sheep so he ought to be
5. Michelle Muijsert - I didn't find her, but she's bound to still be cute
6. Tim Jones - slightly harassed by fatherhood, but holding his own
7. Tony, the Magic Bus driver - cool dude who knew all the Maori legends
8. Nigel Rowe - can't let him off the hook just because he lives in America
9. Tracy Nicholson - should be higher up the list. Just ask her about her kidnap hostage experience!
- 10 My cousin Peter Bobby - even if he does look a bit like Grant from EastEnders
11. Franz Josef glacier - real cool glacier
12. Sheep - ask a drover
13. Aaron Nicholson - not as cute as Tracy Nicholson
14. Shane the Magic Bus driver - not cute at all
15. Hildagond - Shane the Magic Bus driver's bus, named after some Norwegian he pulled
16. Dan McCarthy - cute in an over 50s sort of way
17. The brocolli - star of Mars Attack and sex symbol of the New Zealand Eastercon
18. Danny John Jules - extremely cute, but not a Kiwi
19. Phil Palmer - whatever happened to Phil Palmer?
20. The Milford Sound - supposedly the cutest part of New Zealand



BEFORE ALL HELL

BREAKS LOOSE

It's Matthew's party and one of his friends is trying to guess the connection between us. Work? Choir? Wine tasting classes?

"She was the only person I knew when I first moved to Bristol," Matthew asserts, not really helping the situation.

"Friend of the family?"

Matthew starts to bob up and down, imitating a puppet. "We dress up as Thunderbirds," he offers bizarrely.

"Children's parties?" guesses the woman feebly. "Pantomime?"

"No, think books," I say, before Matthew can convict me of any worse crimes. Earlier I had been staring at the bookcase, trying to focus on "Hello America" while a South African woman talked about rafting on the Zambesi and the joys of throwing your body into a wall of whitewater. I had to stare a long time to focus, which was worrying as I wanted to stay sober enough to move on to another party.

Now I can see the title clearly, and a pile of less emblematic Ballards beneath. Isn't it funny how you can will yourself to be less drunk, purely by the power of concentration?

"Science fiction conventions," says Matthew to put the woman out of her misery. She still looks baffled, but fortunately for Matthew, the door bell rings and he can rush off to answer it. I start to wonder how I first came to know Matthew. Apas? Oxford? Channelcon?

"I didn't know Matthew read science fiction," the woman confesses.

"I don't suppose he admits to it these days."

"And what's your involvement?"

"I read it. I write it. I talk about it." I could continue. I'm bizarrely confident that everything I'm saying is giving me status in her eyes.

"I think I once watched an episode of Dr Who," she says doubtfully.

I still think she's impressed. Ever since I returned home, I have been showing off. Telling people I'm a writer. Dropping in snippets of information about my travels. I suppose I don't want to go back to being ordinary again.

The newcomer is Alastair, one of the funniest people I know, and a fan.

"Alastair!" I say. "I'm trying to explain fandom to this woman."

"What on earth for," he says, looming over us.

"She wants to know how come I know Matthew."

"But everyone knows Matthew," says Alastair, in his exaggeratedly Oxford accent. "What more do you need to say?"

The South African woman returns to tell us how she once managed to convince a whole group of people at a party that she came from Greenland.

"Your accent does sound a bit Scandinavian," I agree. "But wouldn't they want to know an awful lot about Greenland."

"No-one's ever been to Greenland. That's why I can say what I like."

"But wouldn't you have to make up so much?" I feel mentally exhausted by the mere concept. Maybe none of us are what we seem at parties.

"People remember me years and years after we meet," says Alastair, explaining his own version of the white man's burden.

"It must be your height," we agree.

"And Ian Sorensen keeps asking me to come up to Glasgow."

"He probably wants some help with his jokes."

Across town at my second party of the evening, people are sitting out in the garden in the rain. I'm just in time to rescue the last chocolate banana from the barbecue. Sue and Bridget are hugging. Bridget is clearly drunk and is talking about the summer of love. "When I was fourteen, I had men queuing up for me," she says. "Quite literally. When one man went, another would take his place. It was a great time to be young."

Bridget now has two teenage children, but she's still a hippy at heart. "My husband has no soul. No sense of romance," she says. "Though he did propose to me in a very romantic way. I only married him because of how he proposed. He took me up in an aeroplane and flew me over the crescents of Bath. Then he asked me if I would marry him. It was completely out of the blue. So, I said yes. And he had press reporters and champagne waiting for us when we landed."

"Does he still fly?" I ask.

"No, he had to give that up when we had the children."

"Ah, then that's what happened to his soul."

Later Sue and Bridget are hugging again. They're trying to explain it to Sue's estranged husband Pete and a guy who looks like Martin Coombs out of *Men Behaving Badly*. "Men should be able to hug each other," says Sue. "Hugs are good for you." We start a hugging session but the men carefully manoeuvre themselves out of the way of hugging each other.

"It's pathetic," says Sue.

"We prefer to give each other a manly punch on the shoulder," says the Martin Coombs look-a-like (who for the sake of convenience we shall call Martin). "Or buy a round of drinks."

"It's so British and repressed," I say. "I never used to hug till I went to America."

Martin's friend Nick joins the hug-in. This unbalances the numbers, but Nick being a self-professed romantic (the sort that turns up to parties with a volume of Shelley and a bottle of gin) doesn't seem to mind hugging a man. His huggie (Richard) is not so sure. "Give him a manly punch on the shoulder," suggests Martin, "and it'll be all right."

The group hug realises it's running out of drinks and has to manoeuvre itself out to the kitchen to get some more. Nick and Martin split most of a bottle of vodka between them, topped up with orange juice, in anticipation of more unmanly demands on their emotions. Or maybe Nick's getting ready to read Shelley again. The people not in on the hug are beginning to get suspicious and keep sending envoys into the kitchen to see what's going on.

Eventually "Common People" comes on for the second time of the evening and we go back to dance. Nick keeps on insisting on making me do Le Rock. Every time he lifts his arm, I'm supposed to twirl.

"Why don't *you* twirl," I say, lifting my arm.

"You're supposed to signal first," he says, failing to twirl.

"You never give me signals."

"I know. I only went to one class. I never learnt the signals."

"Teach me," says Sue. "Dalva taught me to samba. You could teach me LeRock."

I hand over my partner with relief. But a few minutes later, Sue seems to have given up. "I don't want to learn Le Rock," she says, "it's too rough."

We go back to doing a group hug dance, which is a bad move. First we all fall onto the sofa. Then we fall on to the ground, and I land awkwardly, unable to break my fall.

"My back's broken," I say. Everyone laughs. "It is!" I insist. It's not, because I can get up. But it does hurt. I go and sit by myself in the next room to recover, but then Park Life comes on and I have to go back. "Look a really manly song," I say, "you can all dance to this."

Dancing's all right, but when anyone dances with me, my back hurts. Every time I say my back hurts, they tell me to stop whingeing. So I go and lie on the sofa with some combination of Martin and Sue and Bridget and Richard. Something's happened to our brains, because suddenly there's a request for Seasons in the Sun. "Seasons in the Sun! Seasons in the Sun!" we all start to chant (even my brother Simon who's a serious cool techno/dance musician). Tina whose house it is looks at us in despair. "If you put that on, I'm leaving."

We put it on. "Goodbye Michelle, it's hard to die," we chorus, "while all the birds are singing in the sky."

"Whose idea was this?"

"It's terrible."

"We had joy we had fun we had seasons in the sun..." Terry warbles on.

Someone kills it. Tina is able to come back in from her long walk round the garden.

The party is supposed to go on till dawn. Then we would climb the hill behind Sue's house, fly kites and come back down for breakfast.

But Sue is fading. Bridget goes home. Pete and his kite follow. I attempt to go too, but Mike, my boss asks me for a dance. He's drunk and no-one knows why he's still here.

Mike says he hasn't been to a party since my leaving party in May 1996. I'm not surprised. He's married with two young children. It's nearly four in the morning. He'll have hell to pay tomorrow and probably won't be allowed out to a party for another year and a half. We find the music completely impossible to dance to, but he insists we do the next dance too. After that, I say I need some water, then don't come back. The two Nicks - poet Nick and Dr Who Nick - walk me home. I leave them outside sitting on the wall, glowering at each other. Or maybe they're just working out what to do next. A manly punch, a hug, or go back to the party.

I wake in the night in pain from my back. I'm too old for this I decide. When people knock me over at parties, I break. I need to go to the bathroom, but nearly black out from the pain of moving. I crawl back into bed, whimper a lot, then fall asleep, exhausted. Next time I wake up, it's about eleven in the morning. Outside there's thunder, but it's not quite raining yet. I limp out of bed to try to get to the paper shop before the storm breaks. I just pull on some trousers and a coat; anything else is too painful. I see lightning outside, and another crack of thunder. The storm's getting close now. As I get near to the paper shop it begins to rain, but I can't run. I feel crippled like an old lady. I'm just inside before the real downpour begins.

I go and pay for my paper. On the radio in the shop, someone is saying Princess Diana is dead. There's nothing about it in my paper of course. I wonder if she's committed suicide. An old man by the door, sheltering from the rain, says: "It was her heart. They've just said it on the news. It couldn't take the shock. You'd be surprised how many people die of heart failure. I was in the army, so I know."

Once a princess, now an icon

J G BALLARD has already said it all — not only in his 1973 novel *Crash* (recently filmed by David Cronenberg), but before that and again since. I've just been re-reading a cutting of a brief interview with him which appeared in the *Sunday Mirror*, on May 19, 1968, headed: "If Christ Came Again He Would Die in a Car Crash".

Ballard is quoted as saying: "Crash victims like Jayne Mansfield, James Dean, Aly Khan, Jim Clark and President Kennedy (the first man to be murdered in a motorcade) act out the Crucifixion for us. Their deaths heighten our vitality in a blinding flash. The death of Kennedy was a sacrificial murder, convived at by the millions of people who watched it endlessly recapitulated on television. If Christ came again, he would be killed in a car crash."

David Pringle,
Editor, Interzone,
217 Preston Drive,
Brighton BN1 6FL.

I walk back out into the storm. Why am I abusing my system? The shock of the party, the shock of the storm. Something will get to *my* heart one day. I feel very weird.

On the TV news they are talking non-stop about Diana. It was a car crash. How very *Ballardesque*. A month or so ago, Camilla Parker Bowles was in a car crash too. What are Charles's women playing at?

On Radio One, instead of the normal mix of DJ chatter and trite music, they're playing long ambient pieces which might have been written by Philip Glass. It's a great improvement on the normal playlist, but totally bizarre as a concept. I didn't realise that official mourning meant that you can't play pop music on the BBC. The storm rages on, my body hurts each time I move, and I want to ring someone to check that my reality is the same as everyone else's.

But I can't think who would know.



Self-Portrait as a Lion Tamer

World Travel And The Single Woman

Or, How Was It For Me?

I have to say I loved it. A year out, bumming around in America, Australia, New Zealand and bits of South East Asia. What more could a gal ask for? Someone to carry her luggage perhaps. Or a laptop to help me record my adventures. (The three exercise books full of notes may or may not be transcribed at some later date.) But even if I never get around to writing it all up, and no-one makes an award winning documentary of my travels, I don't care. It's been a year well spent. And undoubtedly one of the best things I've ever done.

Not that there weren't some problems. The normal age to go travelling is in your early 20s. I wasn't the only over-30 out on the road, but we were certainly in a minority among the backpacking community. I came to dread that moment when people would start mentioning their age and I would have to say I was 38, or even worse, as time went by, 39. Why that's nearly 40. And if the person you're talking to is only 20, then you're old enough to be their mother, which doesn't do much for your ego or sense of belonging. Mostly though, people take you as you come. They assume that if you're doing the same kind of travel as them, then you are more or less their contemporary.

I only lied about my age once. In Australia, up in Queensland where the average age of the backpacker was practically prepubescent (the East Coast of Australia being the prime stamping ground for the teenage traveller out seeing the world on Daddy's credit card). I went out to a nightclub with a group of people from my hostel, lads from the North of England, all in their late twenties, and didn't want to embarrass the guy I'd been dancing with (designated in my diary as Bolton gravy man for reasons I can't now remember) so told him I was 34. But even then I felt bad about it. If you alter your age, there's so many ways you can be called on it. The music you remember, the events you've lived through, the incarnation of Dr Who you prefer. One of the fascinations of travelling is having real and sometimes quite intense conversations with people you meet only for a short time from different backgrounds and cultures to yourself. There's not much point to that if you're lying about who you are. Then again, in an Australian nightclub where the music is relentlessly 70s disco (Abba's about as good as it gets), how meaningful are the exchanges likely to be?

In spite of the occasional embarrassment factor, it has to be said, that I felt it was a positive advantage to be travelling in my 30s. Like so many things in life, travel is wasted on the young. Not to say that it doesn't have its value, but most of the younger travellers seemed primarily to be there just to get drunk, visit nightclubs and find the love of their life. I reached the stage where if I'd had another backpacker sobbing on my shoulder about having to leave behind the wonderful man she had met in Sydney, I would probably have decked her one. For some reason, the youth of Europe seems dead set on living in Australia regardless of recession, climatic extremes and rising racism.

And to be honest, I don't think I could have handled it in my 20s. I'm amazed at how mature some of the people were. The type of trip they would take on without a second thought (though maybe that was just youthful recklessness?). I met a number of women in their 20s travelling on their own, without any problems. Others teamed up with chance-met companions of

the route. Maybe in my twenties I'd have been too naive to realise I was vulnerable. At least by the time you reach your late 30s you're not such an obvious target for the local talent.

All of which goes to support my theory that the time when you need to travel is not before you've settled into your adult life, but after you've been working a number of years, and need shaking up. When you're young, you're pretty flexible about what you do, you have plans, ambitions and a belief that you can make something of your life. Then comes routines, possessions, money (if you're lucky) and frustration. Work that takes up your time and energy, but doesn't give back very much. A cycle that locks you into one or two holidays a year that are always too short, hectic weekends, evenings in front of the television, moaning sessions with your friends, too much alcohol, and a gradual loss of excitement about life (or at least your own life) and decreasing tolerance for anything that makes life more difficult (unexpected visitors, strange beds, late nights etc.) I suppose it must be possible to combine long working hours with something more intellectually challenging than the latest Ikea catalogue, but sometimes it's a struggle. It's easy to lose yourself in your work identity (which often isn't much of an identity anyway) and forget that it's your own life and your responsibility not to waste it.

Yes, most of what I'm saying only relates to someone with a life like mine. People with creative jobs, or children, or employment problems are going to have very different priorities. I'm just saying how it felt to me. That I'd been in a rut, unhappy, rather inflexible. And that travelling - not so much the process of getting from point A to point B but leaving behind my old life for a time - wakes up the brain and gave me a chance to reassess what I wanted from life.

Am I changed person? I doubt it. But I'm probably more emotionally independent than I used to be. You learn a certain self-sufficiency when it's just you, your walkman and your books out there (and getting hold of books suddenly becomes very important). You become more sensitive to places, especially in Asia where there is quite a contrast between the physical beauty of the landscapes and the ugliness of some of the rooms I stayed in. I also ended up making certain decisions about how I wanted to live my life in future. Over the months away it gradually became obvious to me ways in which I had made my life more stressful than it need be. Little things like always making sandwiches to take to work. Big things like not owning a car (though I suppose cars bring their own level of stress). Also, how much surroundings do effect your mood. Maybe I would be happier living somewhere more beautiful than in a small house, just off a main road in the middle of Bristol, or if it isn't practical to move, then making my house a better place to live in (yes, we've come full circle back to that Ikea catalogue). Or take my article two issues ago about my ex-husband's washing machine; it's taken a trip round the world to realise how much of Peter-Fred's input into the smooth running of my life can be replicated through a few trips to Maplins (the local electrical shop). I guess I've finally realised that if something needs fixing, I'm grown up enough to pay someone to come in and do it.



But how to pay?

Various people have asked me how much my year of travelling cost me, so I thought I might do some very basic accounts. It was extraordinarily difficult to make any kind of a stab at a budget before I went away. I didn't know how many travellers cheques to get, how much I could use my visa card and what I would do if I ran out of money. Fortunately, that didn't happen! Now that I realise how easy it is to get money from ATMs overseas, I would handle my finances that way another time, with a few travellers cheques as back-up (particularly for Asia).

Initial expenditure

Round the world ticket : £1,000 (you can get cheaper, but mine was pretty flexible)

Other travel (+ insurance) : £1,000
(e.g. train pass Australia,
flight to NZ, internal flights
Australia)

Travellers cheques : £6,000

I then had an account set up to pay my Visa card bills by direct debit. £250 a month went into the account from my savings, which meant in effect that I spent another £3,000 from my capital.

Between that account and my travellers cheques I covered all my expenditure while I was away, including a Worldcon, a flight to Mexico, buying a car and the Magic Bus Pass round New Zealand. I did make a profit on letting out my house (despite certain problems with tenants and the letting agency), plus I earned a small amount of money in the US doing waitress work and transcribing audio tapes. And I sold my car again before I left (at a loss. You could do better on this one.) Also the extreme generosity of my friends has to be taken into account - I was living rent free in Boston for six months (though contributing to my upkeep) and hardly paid for anything at all while I was staying with my friend Sibylle in Sydney. Other fans I stayed with for shorter times were equally generous!

So, all in all, my year away cost me around £11K, which sounds a lot of money, but isn't very much by comparison with what it would have cost me to live at home during that time. Certainly cheaper than a year at home not working, even if I had been eligible for benefit. Of course, I was lucky to have the money to spend in the first place - my ill-gotten gains from working in the water industry at the time of privatisation. The luck continues, as when I came back I found some of my expenditure had been offset by payouts from the equally politically questionable privatisations of various building societies I have dealings with.

So next time you get a cash bonanza, don't buy a new sound system or decorate your house but consider a bit of travel instead, even if it's just for a couple of months. In Australia sabbaticals are quite common, in academe they're part of normal career development. I think it would do us all good if it were built into the work culture that every so often you need a long break from your daily work to reassess your life and exercise skills or interests that have lain dormant for too long. I'm certainly hoping to test the potential for a spot of unpaid leave in my new job, and maybe do that trip to India I've been thinking about, or Latin America, or the inevitable return trip to Australia and New Zealand!

Never Where?

- indigestion for the masses

Yes, folks it's a bijou letter columnette this time round. Either no-one could work out which continent to send their appreciation to, not to mention which currency I wanted my used fivers in, or I lost the letters en route. Shame really, it was only the thought of the big pile of mail from my loyal readers that persuaded me to come home in the first place (that, and the fact that BA weren't prepared to trade in my ticket for a decent price.) But, hey, all the less work for me to produce a letter-column!

Besides, as we all know, loccing zines can seriously damage your health...

Harry Warner, Jr. 423 Summit Avenue, Hagerstown, Maryland, 21740, USA

I have a nagging headache and a slight bellyache this evening. They may result from knowing I intend to write finally a loc on the fifth issue of Never Quite Arriving, with all its talk of travel, an activity that invariably produces those two afflictions in me and so I may have been affected by just the thought of how terrible I'd feel if I'd engaged in all the journeys you describe in the last issue.

It wasn't that terrible really. After a while the stomach aches subside, the head gets back to normal, and you're ready for another all-American hamburg.

Most of the things you list as your dislikes about the United States at the bottom of page 25 are on my own pet peeve list, too. I never drive on the interstates unless it's absolutely necessary. I visit the local mall about two or three times a month and I'll probably cut back on that frequency soon when a restaurant in it closes in the spring. My stomach can't endure fried food nowadays, and it's possible that it mistook today something unfried for fried and created its upset condition.

Aha, so the truth comes out. I'd hate to think of my fanzine causing gastric disquiet!

I'm sure I could never be a waiter because my memory wouldn't be good enough to give a plateful of food to the person who ordered it and my temper wouldn't permit me to be subservient when a patron talked nastily to me. However, none of the misadventures you describe during your waitress days was nearly as bad as some I've seen as a customer. At one lunch counter, a new waitress needed to learn how to prepare the items on the menu in addition to serving them because there was nobody to do the cooking. So when a customer complained to the woman in charge about the bacon, lettuce and tomato sandwich he had just received, the new girl tried to defend herself: "Well, if he wanted the bacon fried, why didn't he say so?" Just yesterday I ordered coffee with my meal at a restaurant and the waitress gave me a cup with nothing in it. Several minutes later, she came back, looked at the cup, and began to lecture me for gulping all that coffee down so fast.

Smart tactic! I'll have to remember that if I ever take up waitressing again.

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

America is a big scary place, and I live right next door to it. Perhaps it's the size of it, or the violence of the cities, or the shabby run-down quality of it, or the ability to get lost in it as tourist, and possibly not come out. Maybe it's the willingness of the American public to zone out in front of the tube, or drink themselves into mental oblivion. Whenever I go to an American Worldcon,

there's a touch of fear, but the familiar faces of fans are a comfort, as is the big hotel with places to go and eat, and not have to wander too far into the great American unknown.

First time I read "tube" I miscompiled it as underground system instead of TV and had this mental image of loads of drunks outside the London Underground. I think drunkenness is far more scary in Britain than in the US. Just go to the centre of any large city at pub turning-out time and there's quite an edge. Not necessarily violent, but a load of animated people on the street late at night can be quite disturbing. (Or exciting, depending on how drunk you are yourself.)

The only time I was in Mexico was a half-day trip into Tijuana from San Diego, a few days before going to the Los Angeles Worldcon in 1984. We made a lot of purchases, including some serapes from a local craftsman. Yvonne is fluent in English and French, but can also get by in Spanish, so she was able to talk the craftsman's own language, and talk him down to a good price. He was also happy that a couple of Canadianos were taking his good work home. Somehow the word of a Spanish-speaking Canadiana got around and people were only too happy to sell us things. We smiled, but did not buy, although we did hit the local liquor store, bought some VERY inexpensive Kahlua and vanilla, and headed for the tour bus to take us back to San Diego. Our bus driver, who knew all the local businessmen, asked us how much we paid for all our ill-gotten booty, and when we told him, he was suitably impressed, not just by the low amount, but how those bargains were obtained.

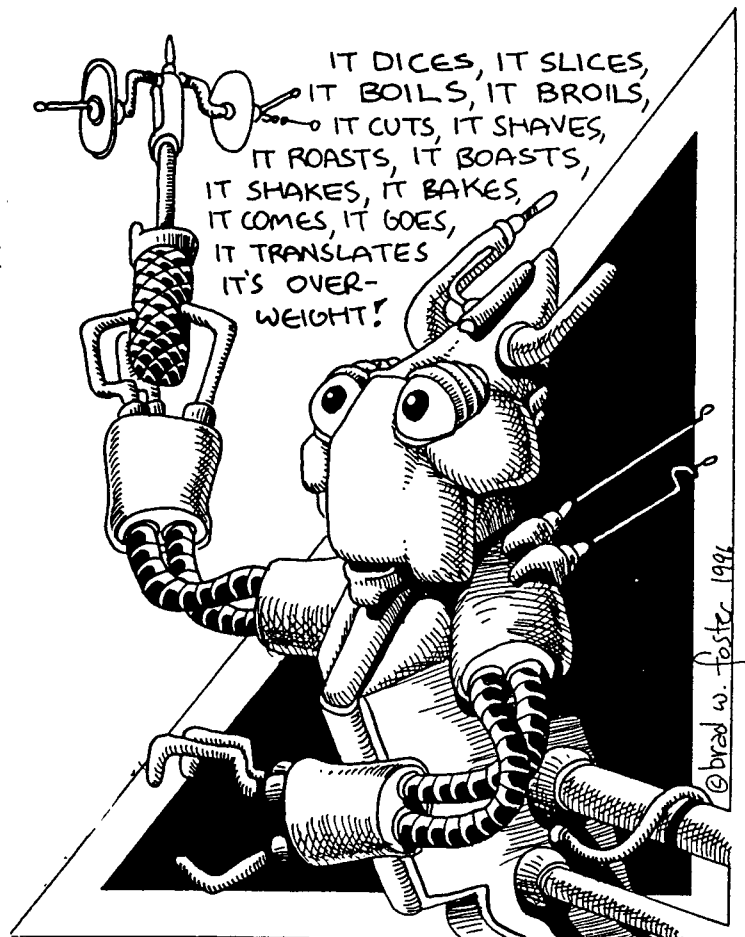
I've often wondered what a serape is and let's face, I'm still none the wiser.) But I can agree with you that it helps to speak the local language; but you have to get into the right mind-set to bargain effectively. Otherwise you start to think, why the hell am I arguing over what is a only few dollars in real money.

George Flynn, PO Box 1069, Kendall Square Station, Cambridge, MA 02142, USA

Hey, I recently visited Mexico too, though in my case it was just a couple of tourist traps in Juarez during Ditto in El Paso. (Found one bookstore; its SF stock seemed to consist of three or four book by Julio Verne and Terry Pratchett's *El Color de la Magia*.)

I was amazed when talking to Nigel Rowe about the El Paso Ditto that there were only about 9 people there. But Nigel was adamant that they'd had a great time. And with side-trips to Mexico on the programme, who's to argue with him?

Here's one letter that was waiting for me when I got home. William was halfway through loccing NQA 4 when number 5 arrived, so he just carried on, sending the cumulative results to Bristol to await my return.



William Bains, 101 Beechwood Avenue, Melbourn, Royston, Herts SG8 6BW

It is no surprise that the Raggett's children's favourite programme is The Simpsons. Our favourite programme is The Simpsons. This is because it is a totally realistic portrayal of family life, with jokes. Families are really like that, Christina. The idea that they are 'dysfunctional', and we should all behave like The Waltons or The Sound of Music is a load of ... well, what young children produce so copiously. Noise, I mean.

But what about King of the Hill? Is that the future for the all-American family. And will anybody say it's better than The Simpsons?

Our children also have American accents at times, and say "cool!" and "weird!" a lot. It comes from American TV. I would bet that Dave [Raggett] is no more a virtual guy than his children. He is virtual thanks to the WWW, they are virtual thanks to Hollywood and 24 hour 60 channel television.

Not if Jenny Raggett has anything to do with it! She used to ration the children to one hour of TV each day. I don't know how that policy is holding up now they're back in England, but if Jenny is to be believed, Dave is getting daily more virtual till she's not sure if she's married to a man or a computer attachment.

Actually, your trip (so far) sounds wonderful. I long to do the same thing, with wife, sans children. Actually the older two (10 and 9) would be great fun, but the younger two (6 and 4) would be a bit of a slowdown on the longer hikes, conventions, drinking sessions etc. Thinking about it again, the older two might be as well. I keep trying to convince them that they want to move to California, but no-one is falling for it. They will keep me tied to the fenlands until I am old and grey, and they go off to California anyway and telephone me in the middle of the night saying "Oh, Dad, you are so boring, you never went anywhere when we were young." (Actually, Catherine, number 4, has been to Normandy, the Loire Valley, Biarritz, Northern Spain, Nice Monte Carlo and Geneva, but will remember none of it. And they have all been to **Disneyland**, of course, but that does not count as foreign travel really, as it is just an extension of their video collection into the physical world. Mexico sounds more the sort of thing we would do, but sans children I think. Would you have taken Thomas and Louise there?

No way! But then, it would require major feats of bribery before I took any two under 12s on a three week holiday, regardless of the destination. In fact, Mexico is very child-friendly. The Mexicans love children, and bringing a few of your own could only be to your advantage. But I'm not sure I'd recommend taking them to Mexico City.

The Virgin of Guadeloupe sounded substantially odder than Lourdes. I remember it as the medieval equivalent to Disneyland, with an orchestrated crescendo of churches and shrines leading you to, way over there behind the nuns standing behind those guys who are holding the wheelchairs next to that row of crosses, a small hole in a wall. The Mexican version sounded much more chaotic, But I was visiting with a college friend who, like me at the time, was studying for a BA in cynical materialism (he is now a banker), and neither of us had been exposed to Catholicism when young. There are strange parallels between religions and diseases. Evangelical Christianity is like influenza, which, if you are one of the few struck down with it, rapidly runs riot through your system and either leaves you immune forever or kills you (that is, removes you from normal agnostic society into the realms of the saved). There are many minor snuffles called 'flu, but these, like Methodism and Baptists, are pale imitations of the real thing, leading only to a few years of church attendance and a lingering after-effect of feeling guilty at Christmas. But Catholicism, that is like Herpes, which infects early in life and appears to go

away, but is always there, waiting for stress to bring on a recurrence. It can strike at any time, causing unsightly weeping and infecting those close to you. I'm not sure what religions HIV and Ebola virus are like...

I'm sure you've come up with something by now! William now turns his scientific mind to my description of the strange effects of grass juice I drank in America.

I would be interested to run an analysis on Wheat Grass, and indeed might photocopy this bit of NQA to someone who does just that sort of thing -discovering new drugs in strange natural extracts. Why on earth should it give you a 'burst of energy'? It cannot be the sugar content, not unless they mash up a small bale of the stuff for each glass (or add sugar to it to make it taste nice.)

I doubt it. After all, it didn't taste particularly nice; just grassy. Besides, health-conscious Frank Lunney wouldn't have raved about it if it was full of sugar.

It could be something like caffeine in the grass, which if you were not a terminal coffee addict like me you would find stimulating. In neither case would it be necessary to use fresh wheat grass, but that would make it smell much nicer, and be green as opposed to muddy brown. I think the most likely explanation is that it is just coloured sugar water with trace yummys, and the effects are almost entirely psychological. You can cure Herpes with psychology (to return to a previous topic), and could probably do the same to a hangover. 'Buzz' is a notoriously tricky medical endpoint to measure objectively.

It can't just have been coloured water as they squeeze the juice in situ from clumps of virulently green grass. And the effects felt very physically real. Maybe you'd better send your friend over to Bread and Circus in Washington to test it out.

You did not even acknowledge my Loc to NQA 4. Oh, this is because I never sent it to you. It is this letter.

SOMEBODY GAVE
ME THIS REALLY
TERRIFIC CARTOON
IDEA LAST NIGHT



"ARGH WURRA
SHNEESH ZUZZUMS"
WAS THE CAPTION



NO, THAT WAS
YOUR RESPONSE

THE BAR
IS OVER
THIS WAY

Before we get lost in any more paradoxes, on to some postcards. The first one depicts fried meat sellers near Mexico City, 1895. Not one for Harry Warner Jr to contemplate, I fear.

Teddy Harvia , 701 Regency Drive, Hurst, TX 76054-2307, USA

As a pickup line "Aren't you Christina Lake?" is totally useless. I tried it on a woman at L.A. con and, although she had a British accent, she denied any connection and couldn't get away from me fast enough.

Yes, you're right, it's not much a chat-up line. I always prefer "Aren't you Lilian Edwards?"

Steve Stiles' cover art for you is great. The surrealistic landscape and touches are fantastic. If only real travel were that simple. Much better than "Sliders".

Bridget Hardcastle

I love Steve Stiles' cover - there's a lot in there. London at the bottom looks bizarre, very post-apocalyptic/ Planet of the Apes looking - it's gone downhill since you left! There were lots of nice bits in the zine, like mistaking breaded fish for baklava while waitressing, and the image of Doyka spinning her mother in Mexico. The travel tales painted a vivid picture of Mexico, though how true it is remains to be seen - but I felt disconnected from your America bits and they confirmed my worst fears about the car culture and identikit malls/motels.

You'll have to do better than that now you're a TAFF candidate (at least, I've heard you're going to be a TAFF candidate.) It's not really as alienating as all that, outside the Interstates. On the subject of the car culture, a student behind me on the bus the other day was talking about bringing his car down to Bristol. "A driving licence," he insisted, "isn't a licence to drive. It's a licence not to walk." Once he had his car with him, he was going to drive everywhere, even down to the garage to get milk. "It's only a two minute away," he said with macho pride, "but I'd just in the car anyway. I just can't be fagged to walk, not if I've got the car." Well, at least he has the option!

Next, I begin to understand why I didn't get many locs

Janet Stevenson, Roan, Roweltown, Carlisle, CA6 6LY

Why forward loc to the Bristol address not B'ham one on the back of envelope? Why should I not loc to a foreign COA? A number of my genealogical correspondents live abroad. Recently I went to the Post Office and bought 'ten stamps for abroad please'

See, it's awfully easy. And could it be possible that all my locs really went to Bernie Evans?

Finally the question of laundrettes continues to vex my foreign readers:

Pauline Nicholson, 5 View Street, Manapouri, New Zealand

I noticed when I lived in London that not many people, or flats, had washing machines and one had to drag it (the Washing) to the laundrette. Why is that? In NZ I don't think anyone would take their washing to a place like that. A laundrette is rather rare.

Surely it can all be attributed to that perennial peeve : British plumbing. Besides, if Londoners didn't have to drag their washing to the laundrette, half the social interaction in EastEnders would never occur.

Long-time readers will be pleased to hear that I'm proposing to close the subject of laundrettes once and for all by buying myself a washing machine. They may be even more pleased to hear that Peter-Fred is now talking to me again - and indeed came to my party, complete with new beard and new girlfriend. What happier note could I chose to end the fanzine on?

*Or at least I would end it here, if I didn't still have to run the IAHF (or Institute for Australian Hydrological Fallacies) and the addresses from the fanzine reviews. Hero of the issue award has to go **Dave Hicks** who sent me a compilation of *Will Self* restaurant reviews to cheer me up in my exile. "I'd never realised there was kill the fuckers restaurant criticism!" he says. But, has anyone seen Gary Ricky, the vomiting restaurant reviewer in BBC2's *Holding On*? Could they be getting at *Will Self*? At least they didn't make him a heroin addict. Shortest postcard award goes to **Dale Speirs**, which I quote, in its entirety "Received NQA5. Best wishes of the season." But then, isn't that what Christmas does to us all? And finally I had a note from **Cheryl Morgan** : "Many thanks for sending me NQA5. I learnt a lot, in particular that I am lousy at writing travelogues (though I don't think I am as bad as *Andy Hooper* makes out)"*

Oh no, could this be another indigestion effect of my fanzine?

Appendix Two: Fanzines discussed

The Metaphysical Review - Bruce Gillespie, 59 Keele Street, Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia

Thyme - Alan Stewart, PO Box 222, World Trade Centre, Melbourne, Victoria 3005, Australia

Pink 16 - Karen Pender-Gunn, PO Box 567, Blackburn, Victoria 3130, Australia

Oscillation Overthruster - Sue Ann Barber, PO Box 1169, Bibra Lake, WA 6163, Australia

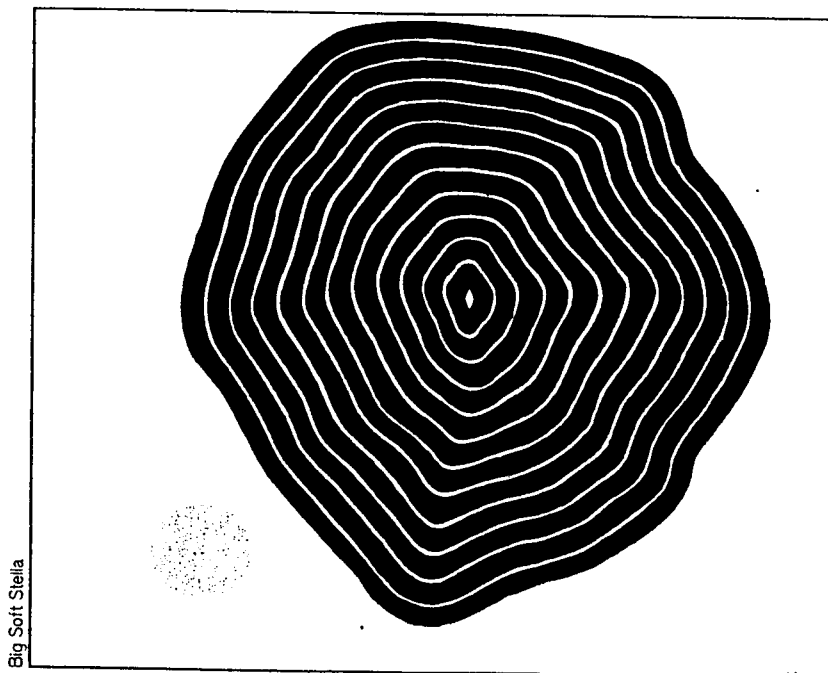
Fans Behaving Badly - Terry Frost, 1/11 Halpin Street, West Brunswick, Victoria 3055,

Australia and Danny Heap, 6 Lido Court, South Oakleigh, Victoria 3167, Australia

FFANZ Across the Water - Alan Stewart, PO Box 222, World Trade Centre, Melbourne, Victoria 3005, Australia

Australian Crawl - Tim Jones, 87 Ellice St, Wellington 6001, New Zealand

Phlogiston - Alex Heatley, PO BOx 11-708, Manners Street, Wellington, Aotearoa (New Zealand)



Big Soft Stella