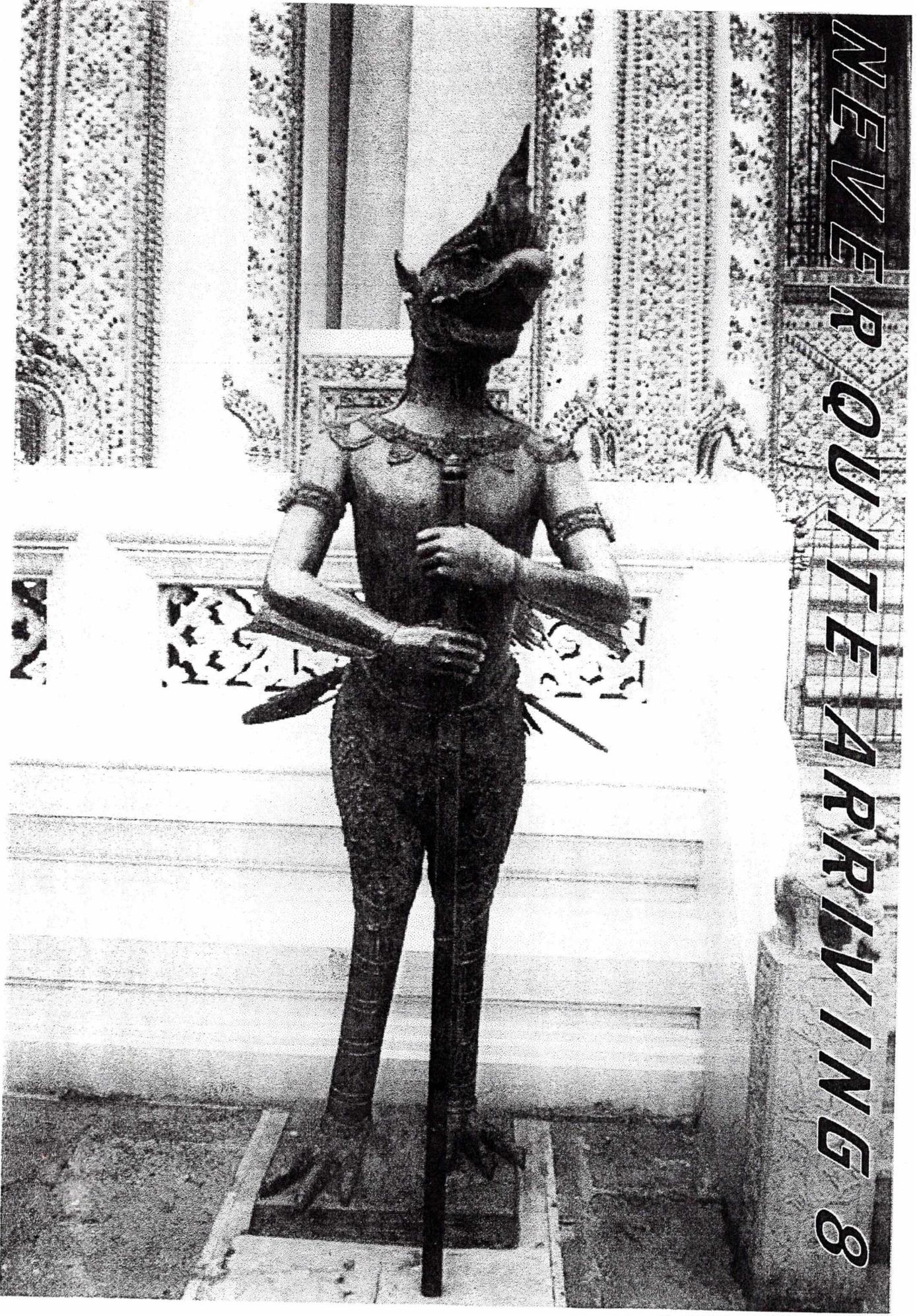


NEVER QUITE ARRIVING 8



This brand new issue of **Never Quite Arriving** was produced for Corflu 2000 in Seattle, but will probably also be distributed at 2Kon, & even Ploktacon. It is available for the usual paraphernalia from **Christina Lake** of 12 Hatherley Road, Bishopston, Bristol, BS7 8QA, UK, (or for those that prefer [christina.l@virgin.net](mailto:christina.l@virgin.net))

## Editorial colours

It came as a bit of a shock to discover that the last proper issue of *Never Quite Arriving* came out in October 1997, and that the healthy pile of locs sitting in my desk drawer on NQA 6 had been mouldering there since late that year. Whatever happened to 1998? I wondered. I can't have spent a year and a half on *Never Quite Aboriginal*, the all Australian issue of NQA that came out last year – though at times it felt like it. This oversized trip report intentionally didn't go out to all my normal mailing list because I was unconvinced that everyone would want to peruse 50+ pages of my adventures in Australia and New Zealand, and besides, it was damn expensive to produce! But if I was wrong, and you would like nothing better than to read about encounters with koalas, fans and aboriginal practices – well, there should be plenty of that kind of stuff in the pipeline from the many talented writers out in Australia for the Worldcon (or post-Worldcon. Hi, Lilian!). If this prospect still doesn't scare you off, then you could always go to the NQA web-site (<http://www.geocities.com/TheTropics/Bay/8887/>), or if not net-enabled, write me a persuasive letter, enclosing the customary used fivers, postage stamps, offers of Nova Award votes etc.

So, what did I get up to in 1998 and beyond? Well, I helped run the UK Corflu in Leeds, which in retrospect seems a rather drastic displacement activity for turning 40. Surely it would have been much easier just to invite everyone round my place for a party? But then I doubt many would have travelled across the Atlantic for the event (there are times when I have difficulty persuading people to travel across Bristol for my parties!), and I would have missed

out being presented with a big cake by Ian Sorensen, and more importantly, a FAAN award by Victor Gonzalez. Yes, it was a memorable convention for me! My respect for the people who make a habit out of running these things has increased immensely - along with the conviction that they're all mad.

1998 also saw another trip to the USA, mainly for the purpose of wandering around the baking streets of Baltimore in search of entertainment. I think it had something to do with a Worldcon. I also participated in a surprise birthday party in Washington DC for Dan Steffan. I was part of the team charged with taking Dan out to dinner while the party was being set up. I don't know how Lynn, his wife managed to cope – just this peripheral role in the deception was enough to give me the jitters. And after all that, I missed the bit when everyone jumped out and said "Surprise!" or whatever they did, as Lynda White and I were round at the convenience store buying last minute supplies. But, I have to say that it was a pretty cool party, and I'd tell you all about the conversations and the people there if it wasn't that it was all so long ago!

A couple of weeks after getting back from America I flew off to Amsterdam. This was for the infamous Pete Binfield 30<sup>th</sup> birthday party (much chronicled in *Balloons Over Bristol*). Amsterdam is a great city to fall in love: all that sex to put you in the mood, all those drugs to relax you and Heineken beer with two inches of head to give you something to talk about. The only drawback for myself and Doug was that we were both billeted in dorm rooms with other party goers, so had difficulty achieving the kind of intimacy for which Amsterdam is world-famed. Which meant that Doug was obliged to come and visit me in Bristol to

make up for it. He came down from Edinburgh for a weekend, and ended up staying for a week and a half. I was amazed at how natural it seemed having Doug around, and how much we had in common, particularly as Doug is considerably younger than me.

But it soon became clear that a long-distance relationship between Edinburgh and Bristol was going to be stressful, if only because Virgin Rail seemed to have difficulty with the concept of running trains to time. So, in February last year, Doug decided to move down and live with me. A move which immediately undermined my post-travel attempts at minimising my possessions – in particular excess books, comics and fanzines – by importing a whole new batch of them to the house, plus several boxes of videos (not previously one of my vices). Still, we managed to squeeze it all in somehow, and even rearrange the house so that there's room for two computers – a necessity for the dual fanzine editor household, you know!

It's now February 2000 and as we approach our first anniversary of living together, it's hard to imagine life without Doug (or without his videos, *Knights of the Dinner Table* comics and CDs of NoMeansNo, The Grateful Dead, Moby et al). And now we're going to make our first transatlantic trip together to Vancouver, and Seattle, for another Corflu, this time one I can relax at and enjoy.

So, you may be wondering, does this mean the end of my adventurous lone travelling days? Has Never Quite Arriving actually finally arrived at the sort of comfortable domesticity that will render it obsolete? I do know that one of the reasons it's taken so long to do this issue is that I don't have so much to write about as I did when I was travelling (or even when I was unhappy). But there's no saying what's round the corner. I don't rule out future trips, whether geographic or psychological, alone or with Doug. There's still so much I want to do with my life, that I don't think it can ever fully "arrive", so expect more issues as and when I have the yen to

communicate and the time and money to inflict it on all of you.

But back to the zine in hand. This time it's all from me, apart from a sizeable letter column that reminds me of the good ol' days when fans still knew how to loc (and it's not just my fanzines that hit the streets to an apparent complete lack of interest, see also Debbi Kerr's "Letter writing is a lost art" in the latest *Did I say that out loud?*). I also wax less than lyrical about my place of employment, delve into my Indonesian travel diaries (difficult when there's a huge stain where Thai whisky soaked through the pages) and tell you what I did at the millennium (actually I wrote this piece for Lilian's fanzine, but then decided my need was greater than hers. But you can still blame her if you're bored of articles about millennium night. (And if use of the term millennium for the start of the year 2000 still annoys you, you'll just have to blame your own pedantic nature!)). Hope you enjoy all, or some of it!



*Dan Steffan opening presents at his surprise party*

## Purple Patches of Millennial Decadence

Where do ideas come from? Sue told me one day that she was going to turn my house into a Roman Villa for our Millennium party. I listened with tolerant interest, not even asking the obvious question: why Roman? It sounded fun, and more to the point, decadent, which was one of the themes of the party. If Sue had a vision of my house draped out in white, purple and gold, and wasn't going to make us all wear sheets, why should I argue?

Maybe it's just human nature that I didn't feel quite the same when we arrived back from Scotland the evening before New Year's Eve, after 8 hours on the motorway checking out the perpetual M6 traffic jam between Warrington and Birmingham to find the house in chaos, smelling of paint and littered with cardboard, evergreens, gold foil and bed sheets. I evicted the decorators with merciless speed, piqued on by the fact that in the midst of such creativity, Sue had forgotten to do either of the two party essentials that we had charged her with, viz switching on the spare freezer to make ice, and buying the party beer from Smiles Brewery.

This turned out to be the low point in the creation of the party decor. A few hours hard work the next day and Sue had redeemed herself. By six o'clock, two whole hours before party lift-off time, everything looked fabulous: pillars, caryatids, floating candles, table laden with decadent foods. Maybe the overall effect was more a Greek temple than a Roman palace, but no-one was complaining. For the first time ever, one of my parties was ready before the first guest arrived! All we needed to complete the effect was Richard with a round of champagne cocktails.

Half an hour into the party and people still seemed a bit daunted by Sue's gold and purple palace. It was getting crowded in the other part of the room, so Pam and I went and stood inside the temple. "Nobody seems to want to come to Rome," I said. Pam nodded in agreement, though she was busy surveying the rest of the party. "Do you know what? Steve Brewster looks a bit like a young Martin Tudor." Steve, better known for sporting a long straggly ponytail, had that very day been for his first haircut in several years, and was looking good. A new Steve for a new millennium, we all agreed. I couldn't see the Martin Tudor resemblance myself, but Doug had been running round earlier, claiming to be the new Tony Berry. It had something to do with looking after the kegs of Smiles Beer, I think. "Well, if Steve Brewster's the new Martin, and Doug's the new Tony - look over there!" I said. Pam couldn't see the guy I meant at first. He was short, bearded and somewhat rotund. Then she spotted him. "Oh my god, the new Steve Green!"

As Rome grew in popularity, we had to rename the rest of the house. We decided upon Gaul for the room outside the palace, Germania Superior and Germania Inferior for the 2 parts of the kitchen, Hibernia for the garden, and Janus for Ian because he spent most of his time in the doorway at the back of the house, smoking. Tina thought the bathroom upstairs had to be Venice, but since no-one could come up with the Roman name for Venice we settled on Aquae Sulis, the Roman name for Bath. "Where's the vomitorium?" Pam asked. "Hibernia" I decided hastily, preferring to keep any vomit outside the house, however Roman a custom it might be. This edict came in handy later when Janus, suffering from a surfeit of beer, dope and champagne, made copious use of the facilities.

One of the causes of Rome's later popularity was Jane. She had arrived dressed in a little black number, but after ten minutes announced that it was too tight to dance in, and tasked me with finding her one of Doug's t-shirts. Thus dressed only in a green 2Kon t-shirt and a pair of stockings, she began playing balloons with Simon. Every time she jumped up to hit the big purple balloon, the t-shirt rode up to reveal a glimpse of white flesh above the top of her stockings. Jane had been telling me for years how erotic men find stockings. Watching them watching her, I had to admit she was right.

I had planned to stay relatively sober till midnight, but Nick Mills wanted Richard to make him an ice-cream cocktail, and Richard seemed to need volunteers to help drink it. So I emerged proudly from Germania with a creamy blue concoction with pineapple wedged on the side. I wasn't quite sure what was in it, but I knew by the taste it was pretty strong. Still, I was doing better than Steve Brewster who had been swilling an unfeasible amount of Richard's absinthe, or Doug, who after doing the Tony Berry beer thing for a while, had reverted to his role as Richard's cocktail apprentice, and begun on the margaritas.

Midnight was approaching, and having banished the TV from Rome as an anachronism, our only connection to the outside world was a primitive black and white telly in the kitchen. Brian peered at it anxiously: "Is that the BBC? We've got to have Big Ben," he insisted. All the channels seemed to be much the same. Parties in the Dome. Parties in Edinburgh. Fireworks on the Eiffel Tower. I twiddled anxiously between them, while Steve Brewster relayed the countdown to the people of Rome. Success at last as the Dome channel cut to Big Ben. Brian was happy. Midnight sounded. Party poppers exploded. Clearing up for the next day tripled at a stroke. Happy New Millennium!

We all streamed outside to watch the fireworks which were exploding all over the Bristol sky. Richard, undaunted by the size of my tiny back yard - smaller than the minimum retreating distance for any decent fireworks - commandeered my shed for his own contribution to the explosions and did us proud. Doug couldn't have been so very drunk after all: he exercised a veto when Richard suggested setting off the huge rocket via my drain pipe. It's just as well - in a spirit of millennial insouciance, I might even have agreed.

Indoors again, Dr Who writer Nick Walters drank his way through a whole magnum of Fosters, while the rest of us failed to make much impact on all the bottles and bottles of champagne that we had been collectively stocking up for the past six months. Doug, having refused to eat any dope cake earlier in the evening after our bad experience at Novacon, suddenly confessed to me that he had scoffed down two huge slabs (I'm not sure if this was before or after helping Ian smoke his joint.)

I think it was the dope that did for me in the end. It was half past three in the morning, Donald was falling asleep in his chair, Nick, Simon and Doug were talking, and in between Doug and I the inflatable alien in his millennium hat was beginning to exude a strange presence. I kept spacing out and thinking the alien was real. Sometimes I wasn't too sure if it was the alien who was speaking or someone else. But on the whole, the alien seemed to be making more sense than most!

Almost everyone had gone by this time. Brian having worked his way efficiently through to the end of the two kegs of Smiles beer, politely took his leave, dragging away the new millennium Steve Brewster, who nonetheless kept insisting on playing old wave music by the likes of Sparks and Sweet.

In the end, none of us stayed up to see the dawn.

Next morning: so this is 2000, I thought. A floor strewn in party streamers, black feathers from Tina and Sue's feather boas, plastic glasses, a mouldering mattress, burst balloon skins, a cigarette butt. Not post-apocalyptic, merely post-party. I washed up while Doug hoovered. I emerged from the kitchen to find the sofa returned to its normal position opposite the empty TV stand and the palace gone. Rome might not have been built in a day, as Sue could testify, but it certainly didn't take all that many minutes to dismantle.

## Looking through Gary Glitter's eyes

I was never a big fan of Gary Glitter in my teenage years, though for a short while during a French exchange visit to Toulouse, Glitter's Rock 'n Roll Part 2 did vie in my affections with Gilbert O'Sullivan's Get Down as favourite song of the moment. So I had no shattered illusions to deal with when Glitter was had up for child pornography, only the extra frisson of local interest – the trial was taking place in Bristol – and a passing sense of weirdness about it all. What had the guy actually done? Clearly he was guilty of abuse of power in taking advantage of some of his teenage fans – but the woman bringing the charges against him appeared to have gone on to a longer-term relationship with him. Was this child abuse or a crime more common within the showbiz world – the taking advantage of underage groupies? I don't read the tabloid press often enough to know the answers on this one, and before I could glean more details from the radio reports, the charges were thrown out on a technicality, and the attention of the country turned to Gary Glitter's computer. If the press is to be believed, then the images found there were particularly repellent. I don't deny that this is a sick hobby to indulge in, but what I find disquieting is that the crime for which Glitter is being convicted is simply that, looking at and storing sick pictures, not any direct act of obscenity against a child himself. Isn't that a bit like saying that if we look at pictures of some war-related atrocity on the news, or cut them out from the newspaper to put in a scrapbook, we are guilty of the act itself?

I *can* understand why there are laws against the distribution of child porn. It's not something society wishes to sanction because of the vulnerability of children to exploitation. But, rightly or wrongly, there are a large number of people for whom this is a turn-on. That's a fact of human nature that won't go away however tough the laws. All that will happen is that it'll go underground, and the profit margins will increase. The emphasis in child protection should not go on the prosecution of people that look at the pictures, but those who supply them, or those who take advantage of children for their own sexual gratification. A person's sexual preferences are their own business. The law should only get involved when someone else gets harmed through a person acting on them.

The computer I am writing this on came from the same PC World that blew the whistle on Gary Glitter when he took it in for repairs. When I purchased it, they made the usual attempts to guilt trip me into buying an extended warranty. I felt like saying – and what if you don't like the pictures on my hard-drive either? It's bad enough having the thought police around at your place of employment, without having to worry about your friendly, neighbourhood computer superstore. Or maybe this is a special service for celebrities only. I wonder how many people they shop for unlicensed software? I bet there aren't many PCs around without something incriminating on them.

Still the whole Gary Glitter saga did give me a couple of months of enjoyment through my proximity to the local villain. The prison being just two blocks away from my house, it was fun to speculate when you heard the police helicopter circling overhead that it might be a rescue attempts by teenage fans; also I could always toy with the idea of getting out a ghetto blaster, maybe during the millennium party, and playing some of Gary Glitter's hits at top volume outside the prison walls.

We weren't the only ones to think this way. According to the local paper, fellow prisoners taunted Glitter by chanting: "Do you want to be in my cell, my cell, my cell." And when he was released a single fan turned up in a Reliant Robin and started playing his hits over the speakers of the car stereo before being told to move on by the police.

The prison spell wasn't very long, but there's no doubt that this is the end of Gary Glitter's career on the old rockers circuit. Not a great loss to art, but a sign of the times. Computer files can be more incriminating than paper. Watch out!

## **Two Colours Red: on the election trail 1997**



Java, Indonesia was my favourite out of the Asiatic destinations I visited on my world tour. Probably because it was the first, but also because of the fantastic Hindu and Buddhist ruins, the beautiful volcanic island scenery, and not least the interesting political situation taking shape at the time. While Tony Blair was convincing the British public - unbeknownst to me - that things could only get better, Indonesia's ruling Golkar party were gearing up for another landslide victory. As it turned out, one of their last. The signs were already there...

### **Yellow Day – Yogya**

I started the day with a breakfast of boiled egg out in the courtyard of my hotel. There I got talking to an elderly Indonesian guy, first of all about English language books translated into Indonesian (he said that Agatha Christie was very popular, and Ernest Hemingway), then about his hopes of travelling in the US, Mexico and Australia. I tried to be encouraging, but it was hard to believe that it would ever be within his means.

First stop after breakfast was the history museum at the old Dutch fort. The first room was full of photos from the War of Independence, fought against the Dutch. Unfortunately all the captions were in Indonesian, but it was still interesting to see some of the figures of modern Indonesia. Former vice-President Hatta looking like a Thunderbird puppet of Brains in his big glasses. Former president Sukharno always impassive at the centre of a crowd. One vivid faced man who might have been Suharto, the present President, but was more likely to be another general.

After the museum I wandered on to the local palace, known as the Kraton in search of traditional dancing. One person told me that the Kraton was closed for a political rally and there would be no dancing. As usual, the information was false. The Kraton *was* open, but the guide sent me round to another building for the dancing. This building turned out to be the Sultan's palace, much to my confusion, as I thought the Sultan's Palace and the Kraton were one and the same.

After the show, I headed off in search of the Taman Sari water palace. The streets were festooned with yellow and green banners, representing the two main political parties. En route to the Taman Sari a local guy fell into step beside me, offering to direct me there. I tried to protest, but he kept walking with me. He was wearing a baseball hat saying USA, and despite being quite young, only had stumps for teeth. He took me down a side street, through a few backyards and into a tunnel. I was sceptical about where he was leading me. I would have been worried, except there were other tourists about. "This is the Taman Sari," my guide insisted. We emerged in some ruins, next to a flight of steps leading up to the remains of a tower where some locals were carrying out what appeared to be a modelling shoot. I later worked out that this was the old mosque. Eventually my guide took me to the real Taman Sari. Sadly there was no water left in the Water Palace, just drained bathing pools. When I arrived back at the Central Square, the political rally was in full swing. Everyone was wearing yellow t-shirts, hats and scarves, just like football supporters. Up on stage, a woman in a yellow dress, backed by musicians in yellow was giving a rock concert. Cars kept arriving, full of people waving yellow scarves, or men in yellow

combat gear. The T-shirts featured faces of Golkar leaders, their Banyan emblem and slogans. No-one paid any attention to me for once, not even to sell me anything, recognising that their election had nothing to do with me.

### **Green Day - Solo**

Arriving at Solo station, the cheapest way into town turned out to be by horse and cart, providing that is, we let the driver take us to Relax Homestay. Relax Homestay came well recommended in the guidebook, so we agreed to take a look. For once the book was right - it had a lovely garden with cafe area and hammocks. The rooms were resplendent with brightly coloured linen and immense mosquito nets that made the bed look like a palace.

My travelling companions at this point were Gabriel from Brisbane whom I had hooked up with on the river boat to Yogyakarta and Greg, an immunology PhD from Stamford whom we had met on the train that morning.

After being initiated into batik by Greg, and trying to appreciate the subtleties of "tulis" (hand-drawn) and "cap" (some kind of contraceptive, surely?), Gabe and I set out in search of Solo's kraton. We walked for ages, getting hotter and hotter, whilst being strafed by gangs of motorcyclists in green who were rampaging round the town, honking their horns and driving on the wrong side of the road. Maybe this was what Greg had meant when he had warned us of political unrest in Solo? It was unnerving, even though none of the aggression was directed at us. When we did finally find the kraton it was, inevitably, a let-down. Not as magnificent as promised, large portions out of bound and a museum full of the same stuff as I'd seen in Yogya.

We were sitting in the Homestay garden recovering when one of the Indonesian running the place came over to ask some advice on English texts he was setting his students. Big mistake! An American, an Australian and a Brit are hardly likely to agree on what sounds best. He also attempted to explain the election to us. He said that each party took it in turn to have a day for their rallies. This, presumably, was to prevent full-scale gang warfare. The yellow party, as I had already gathered, was Golkar, the government party, green was the Islamic party, and red the remains of what used to be the party of Megawati, daughter of the former president Suharto. "Didn't the government stop Megawati from standing?" asked Gabe. "Oh no," said the Indonesian teacher. "Of course not. They couldn't do that. It was the party that decided they didn't want her as leader." Gabe looked sceptical. "That's not what they said in the Australian press," he muttered to me.

Twilight at the Homestay, and I was sitting in the porch, talking to some women who had just been to Cambodia. "Cambodia's very safe," explained the French woman. "You just have to make sure that you're not out on the streets after seven at night. People out after curfew might get shot. And don't pay any attention to what the press said about the recent riots. It was all an exaggeration. Really it's extremely safe there." Angkor Wat, she added, was fascinating, but I lost my enthusiasm a bit when she explained that it had been so hot that you had to drink a bottle of water every 15 minutes. I imagined them climbing up the ruins with a line of water bearers walking behind.

That night Gabe and I ate at an Indian restaurant for a change from the Indonesian food. Whilst waiting for the food to arrive, I leafed through the restaurant's comment book full of jokes and travellers tips. Several of the travellers were ranting against the omnipresent Lonely Planet guides. Their only use, one suggested, was to see which places were mentioned, then avoid them like hell.

After we had eaten, the Bangladeshi owner of the restaurant got talking to us. Even though he was married to an Indonesian woman, with whom he had a son, he couldn't get permanent residency in the country. He was only allowed to stay because he was still officially a student at the local university. Even his son didn't count as an Indonesian citizen. On the other hand, he explained, it was not easy to leave the country either. That would require extensive paperwork from Jakarta. Any Indonesian wishing to leave has to pay an exorbitant departure tax. In between

these criticisms, he kept emphasizing how much he liked the Indonesian people; it was just the law that was the problem. (He refrained from saying "the government".) He also confirmed Gabe's view of the Megawati situation. The government had done its best to prevent her standing. Because of this, most of the red party supporters had joined the green party. This was why some people wore green tops over red. He also demonstrated the hand signs the different parties used, involving different combinations of thumb and fingers.

### **Yellow Day - Candi Sukuh**

I took a bus and then a bemo out to a temple in the countryside outside Solo. Despite being mentioned in the Lonely Planet guide, I had the place to myself apart from a few Dutch tourists. The temple, in the shape of a pyramid, looked bizarrely Mexican. In front of it were a couple of stone tortoises. I then decided to have a go at the recommended walk to Tawang Mangu, the nearest town. The track went through the valley, round all the fields and over the mountain passes. It was pretty well used - no cars or bikes, but plenty of school children, carriers and workers. The fields were also full of activity. Every inch of land seemed to be in use, the hillsides terraced and cultivated, so people were out tending, planting, harvesting or simply sitting in the sun drinking tea. There seemed to be a lot of women workers, particularly tough, wiry and very small old women, wearing the local batik in a kind of split sarong (very useful for peeing standing up, as I saw one do).

On the way back, my bus was held up for a long time by hordes of bikers in yellow, streaming past. Each bike held two or maybe three people. The passengers would be standing up, making a V sign, often wearing a flag as a cloak. Sometimes when the bikes had been circling too long, the army would intervene to move on the traffic. All the same it took several hours for me to crawl back into Solo.

### **Red Day - Jakarta**

It was my last full day in Indonesia, and I had to spend it travelling back to Jakarta. I wished I was going on to Bali like so many of my fellow travellers, but I had a flight booked to Singapore. The train was over an hour late in setting out, but for once there were no delays from the election traffic. The red party deprived of Megawati had turned Red Day into rest day for the beleaguered politically neutral.

Back once more in Jakarta's tourist compound that had seemed so scary to me on my first night in Indonesia, I felt world-weary, quite the seasoned traveller. I went back to the Jaska Bar to eat, hoping for a quiet evening reading the paper. But this time all the papers were in use, and I ended up talking to an Indonesian banker, an Asiatic yuppie with a business interest in the bar. He signalled to the staff to bring us free beers while he told me about his Western lifestyle, and semi-permissive girlfriend (they used to have sex till her family put a stop to it.) Then inevitably our talk turned to elections. It was May 1st, election day in the UK. "Why wouldn't the British want to vote for John Major?" he asked me. Britain was doing well. Major was well respected internationally. Surely there was no question of him losing? I felt the *deja vu* of election depression creep over me. I was a long way from home, and had no idea who was winning - but experience had taught me that it was usually the Tories. My businessman was naturally pro-Golkar for his own country. In Indonesia, he said, Golkar stood for creativity. The real issue of the election of course was not who would win (obviously Golkar would), but who would get picked as Vice-President. Suharto's daughter was being talked up for this job in the press - possibly in an attempt to counterbalance Megawati, herself daughter of a former president (the long-term dictator overthrown by Suharto). But he did not believe it would be Suharto's daughter as she was not popular enough, and besides he did not think people would want a woman in the job. The Suharto family had other irons in the fire anyway: they were building up their business interests and selling shares to the public so that it would be difficult for a future political opponent to shut down their businesses.

Finally exhausted with the subject of political venality, my companion pointed out a couple of prostitutes, drinking in the bar with a white guy, a regular who knew their profession. The difficulty, he said, was to keep them from using the bar to ply their trade, especially when they came in with travellers. Was that so very different from him chatting up Western women, I wondered. His friends at the next table seemed very amused by our conversation. They obviously thought we were the evening's entertainment, like an Indian opera. I wasn't sure about that; but I was glad that I had spent my last evening talking to an Indonesian, rather than another traveller.

### **Postscript**

I finally found out the British election results the next evening, listening to the World Service on my walkman in the dorm of a Singaporean hostel. I felt quite emotional about it all, and rather homesick, because there was no-one there to share in my jubilation as my room mates were from South Africa, America and various parts of Asia. I had thought that Singapore would be a haven of modern comfort amidst the horrors of third world Asia. In fact, accommodation was so expensive compared to Java that I ended up in what was virtually a doss-house where the toilets always smelled of piss and people would drop in for an argument and a quick smoke over my luggage while I was trying to get some sleep. The only thing that worked well was the air conditioning – too well as I ended up catching a cold, followed by flu. Not such an auspicious beginning to the brave new era at home.

I lost track of the Indonesian election while I was in Malaysia and Thailand, but have followed subsequent events with some interest. In October 1999, Indonesia finally elected an assembly that saw a new coalition of parties in power, and Megawati in the role of vice-president. But as in Britain, how much has really changed?

Here are a couple of extracts from reports on the World Socialist Web site:

#### **Megawati Mania**

In recent years Megawati has become so closely identified with the Clinton administration in Washington that she features a US State Department human rights report as the first item on her Internet homepage. But the Bali rally showed how Megawati and her backers are walking a political tightrope. While distancing themselves from Sukarno's anti-colonial populism, they are seeking to exploit her prestige as his daughter to elevate her to cult status among the Indonesian masses. By one police estimate, one million people gathered in the area surrounding the rally, near the beach resort of Sanur. Banners proclaiming "Mega-mania", "Mega for President", "Mega-Trend" and "Mega-Fanatic" decorated cars, shops, taxis and fishing boats. The open-air meeting itself was a sea of red, with tens of thousands of supporters dressed in the party's colours. Red banners displayed images of both Megawati and her father.

#### **A travesty of democracy**

After more than a week of political machinations and backroom dealings between parliamentary factions, Abdurrahman Wahid, head of the Islamic National Awakening Party (PKB) was anointed Indonesian president yesterday. It is worth considering how Wahid, who heads a party with 12 percent of the vote in the June national elections and just 51 members in the 700-seat MPR, came to win the presidency. Megawati's Indonesian Democratic Party-Struggle (PDI-P) outpolled all other parties, winning 34 percent of the vote. Both Wahid and Megawati, who have been built up as democratic reformers, were involved in negotiating with Golkar and its chairman Akbar Tandjung. No doubt there were a number of personal and political considerations that led the ruling elite to swing its support behind Wahid. It was not that Megawati was not prepared to do a deal with Golkar and the military; for months she had been courting the army and has a number of ex-generals in PDI-P's leadership. Like Wahid, she has also pledged on a number of occasions to implement the IMF's policies. Wahid, however, has a number of characteristics that may make him an easier figure to manipulate. The 59-year-old Wahid is virtually blind after two debilitating strokes and may not even last out his term of office.

## Variations in Orange and Blue

Sunday night isn't my favourite night to travel away for work. Normally, I would try not to do it - but this was something important to me: an upgrade to my poor, ailing web catalogue that hadn't been working for the past 3 months. Permission to go ahead with the work only came through at the last minute, and I had a busy weekend planned already, so no time to invoke the Leeds group, or even arrange a quiet drink with Debbi Kerr. Instead I arrived in Leeds at around 8 in the evening and checked into the Queens Hotel next to the station. Feeling hungry and in need of some fresh air, I decided to go off in search of food, curious to see what I could remember of the centre from my last visit to Leeds, for Corflu UK.

Sunday night in Leeds city centre is not exactly exciting. There wasn't even the normal array of teenage girls in mini-skirts out on the prowl. But I was glad to stretch my legs after four hours on the train. I made a circuit of the streets, trying to get my bearings, and on the look-out for somewhere to eat. I'd walked as far as the Marriott Hotel, before I realised that I hadn't noticed the Griffin Hotel, site of so much angst and conflict for the Corflu committee (though hopefully not for the members!). I carried on with my quest for food, but the only places open and doing business seemed to be pubs, and although some advertised food, all had stopped serving earlier in the day. Eventually after staring in the window of a couple of restaurants that claimed to be open but weren't, I ended up back at a place that I had checked out earlier. It was one of those modern bar cafes that seem to be springing up everywhere in city centres. The food looked servicable if unoriginal - but then I wasn't after a three-course gourmet meal. The place was very empty. There was just one person eating, though a couple more came in later while I was waiting for my food. Obviously the other restaurants had judged right when they made the decision not to open.

It wasn't till I'd been sitting there for a while that it struck me that even though it was all decorated in blue and orange now, this *was* the Corflu hotel. At least the door and the raised seating areas near the windows were the same, and it was in the right position viz a viz the street. It even served the same limited selection of beers. But, if that were the case, what had they done with the rest of the hotel? I was still in two minds about it, not quite able to piece together the old floor plan from what I saw around me. I have such a poor sense of direction, I could easily have the wrong street corner. It wasn't till I had finished eating and gone outside to look for some landmarks that I was forced to accept that it was true. There, embedded in the corner of the building, just above eye-level, was a clock with the words Griffin Hotel still written on it. So, our convention hotel was no more. Cursed by Ian Sorensen out of existence, or more likely restructured to face up to the competition from the other hotels in the same neighbourhood. Though judging by my experience, it wasn't doing much better in its new incarnation.



## Greenery

There is nothing like having the words "Government Buildings" plastered across one's business cards to make you feel out-of-date, calling to mind Gormenghast-like bureaucracy, doddering civil servants and dusty rooms full of red tape.

As if it weren't bad enough being a librarian!

The Government Buildings in question are dotted round a site of mixed car park and over-mown grass, too old-fashioned to be called a business park, too modern for any kitsch value. My building is a rectangular, flat-roofed '60s concoction of corridors and small office rooms, arranged by the kind of office manager who has heard of the concept of "open-plan" and doesn't like the sound of it. There is no air-conditioning: in the winter the wind blows through the cracks in the window frames; in the summer, desk fans, open windows and venetian blinds barely keep the heat down. The other building on the site that my organisation - the Environment Agency - uses (the imaginatively named Block 2) is even worse. It looks like it used to be a barracks, or a prison - until you get inside, where something about the atmosphere reminds you of a hospital or maybe an old physics lab. Block 2 feels truly governmental. The reception desk is run by a couple of old security guards in uniform and is festooned with notices forbidding you from sneezing, jumping or running off with the tea trolley. The state of security is always prominently displayed, but disappointingly, always seems to be black. (Where are all those red alerts so beloved of Star Trek?) The security guards are usually quite friendly, but last time I went over - to deliver a card recycling box - I found myself caught in a Kafkaesque impasse:

"Can you call down Grant Anderson," I asked in my best friendly, slightly girly manner.

"He's not in today."

"I just talked to him on the phone."

"He doesn't work here. He works in Exeter."

"He *does* work here, and I've just spoken to him."

"That's not possible. He hasn't been in this office for months."

This continued for some time, until I thought I would have to go back to my desk and call Grant again. Then suddenly it was: "Oh, Grant Anderson. I thought you were talking about Grant Black." And without any attempt at apology, the guard looked up Grant in the staff directory he had previously denied possessing and called him down.

Grant is a fellow member of the office Green Team. The Environment Agency, despite billing itself as Europe's foremost environmental enforcement body, is a bit thin on environmental credentials among its own staff. Not so surprising given that it was formed from the rump of the privatised water industry (i.e. all the people who didn't think they could hack it in the cut-throat world of private industry) plus a few government factory inspectors. The Green Team's role is to raise environmental awareness amongst fellow employees. I can't precisely remember why I joined; I think I probably made the mistake of asking what the Green Team did, and was invited along to find out. In fact the Green Team, although well-meaning, doesn't do a great deal of anything that shouldn't already be covered by our building managers. My environmentalism tends towards the philosophical if not downright Sfnal: what is the city of the future going to look like? What will happen when the oil runs out? Is the climate really going to change? The Green Team is much more practical and rarely strays beyond cycling, recycling and gardening. At times we verge on the ridiculous. I narrowly averted the team from voting our environmental suggestions award to an elaborate labelling scheme designed to make sure everyone turned out the lights on

leaving the building (instead we gave it to the guy who pioneered fairtrade products with our catering contractors.)

But there is no doubt the Environment Agency is in serious need of greening. It didn't take me long to work out that the only way to make money out of a job at the Agency was to do a lot of driving: that way you either win on the casual mileage rates, or they give you a company car. Despite repeated lobbying, Personnel (bless their cotton cummerbunds) refuse to budge on the annual mileage requirements for keeping a company car. So while we are repeatedly being urged to take the train, use the videoconferencing facilities, stay in the office, people still feel under pressure to drive to make up their miles. (Of course, we could just give our cars back. Oh yes, like anybody's going to do that!)

But it's not just all these offices conveniently located next to motorway junctions that make the efforts of the Green Team look futile, it's the behemoth-like inflexibility of the organisation that gets you down after a while. Why do whole print runs of internal leaflets get "recycled" just because they're not in the correct shade of corporate green? Why must we use plastic disposable cutlery in the kitchen just because people have been known to keep the metal spoons at their desks? And why does our Chief Executive think that censorship is the answer and attempt to cancel all subscriptions to ENDS Report every time the editors say something critical about the internal workings of the Agency?

At least the Environment Agency pays lip service to environmental concerns. When it comes to technology, you can only conclude that management see it as the biggest threat to internal security and the work ethic since the invention of lunchtime drinking. Desktop Internet access is still looked on as the spawn of the devil, and the organisation is only just setting up an Intranet. Technological change tends to occur by fiat. So for all of 1998 and most of 1999, the official word was that there would be no Intranet in the Environment Agency (some particularly corporate souls even deemed it a crime to speak the forbidden term "Intranet" out loud). This vision of retrograde thinking was accompanied by the dictate to the effect that there should be only 0.9 computers per person in any department, leading to speculation that the excess 10% would be removed through the confiscation of keyboards, mouse and other peripherals.

Then round about October last year there was a volte-face and it was decreed that we should have an Intranet by Christmas. This might even have been funny to watch if my boss hadn't been tasked with most of the work. Luckily she had Sarah, computer whizz-kid and workaholic on board. Soon the entirety of the Intranet so far was residing on Sarah's laptop, which made for a certain amount of paranoia as the team set out by train to Birmingham for an early Christmas get-together, a week before the projected launch of the Intranet. What if someone ran off with the laptop while we weren't looking? What if it fell out of the luggage rack? To add to the fun, Sarah is one of these people who can't travel backwards on trains, so when we arrived in Gloucester where the train reverses direction, we all had to change places - whilst not losing sight of the laptop. Somehow it survived the trip, and even the return leg where hysteria took over at the non-arrival of taxis, the statutory 2-hour delay of certain Virgin trains and the realisation that if we'd had the Twister board with us, Sue really would have played Twister on Birmingham New Street platform (at which point the Intranet might well have been confiscated.) Why, someone wondered belatedly, hadn't we decided to drive?

The Intranet was about the only project making active progress in December 1999. Everything else had to be put on hold till after the millennium. Y2K checking was complete, the contractors had been instructed to take a three-week holiday, and we were left to speculate on what might happen if any of our systems broke down. Apparently nothing was

to be changed, however simple and useful, unless it could be proved that it would cause the Thames Barrier to fail or the Somerset Levels to flood. Anything less urgent would just have to be replaced by a pencil till after the New Year. The head of IT chose this moment of deep frustration to send round a questionnaire about the service. It came as little surprise subsequently to hear that he was about to retire.

When the millennium bug finally struck it turned out only to effect humans. The machines survived unscathed while their so-called masters coughed and spluttered their way through the January flu. Even the Elf-Bowling game, a little Christmas amusement where Santa bowls at lewd, gesturing elves, didn't trash hard drives as predicted by one major newspaper. Just as well; the game had replicated itself round our offices better than any virus and all those beautifully Y2K compliant systems wouldn't have been much use without any functional PCs to run them on.

In the after-math of so much power, the IT managers have turned distinctly fascist on us. They won't let go of their control, and relative common sense has been replaced by a regime of form filling, supplemented by abject begging and pleading as deadlines approach. This is, I have to admit, a bad time to find myself caught running the slowest library management system in the Western world.

To counteract all this frustration, and in the faint hope of getting a bit fitter, I've taken to going out for lunchtime walks. It's quite amazing what you can find in a half hour radius of our governmental campus. After a year here during which I rarely ventured further from my desk than the ladies toilets (a cold and depressing expedition, I can promise you), I'd come to think there was nothing out there but the shed (which exercised an unholy fascination over my colleague Margaret until she found out it only housed the heating system) and the smokers hut, a small wooden structure that looks like it would burn down at the first spark. Instead, a bit of exploration has already revealed a number of unexpected treasures: the "walk with a view" that crosses the grounds of the nearby hospital and offers an outlook over the Severn Estuary, a ruined chapel which may or may not be in someone's back garden, the many acres of Blaize Castle park (a brisk 10 minute walk away) and "the secret place", a large patch of common ground and woods hidden behind the nearby school. My catalogue of off-road walks is becoming surprisingly diverse, and even on a winter day, it's wonderfully good to get out to where you can see trees, birds and sky. The best part of all is that the afternoons no longer drag as badly as they did before. At last I've discovered the secret of increased job satisfaction - take a lunch break. It's so simple, and it's even in my job contract. Maybe, after all, the location is worth the opprobrium of being branded a government servant, even in these days of Blairite bureaucracy.



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Finally a green event...

## ***Psychic Allusions to a Black and White Past***

*Never Quite Aboriginal generated a goodly number of locs, but after a while, I was forced to wonder - were they all written by people trying to set the record straight? Take, for example, Irwin...*

**Irwin Hirsh, 26 Jessamine Ave, Prahan East, 3181 VIC, Australia**

Right at the beginning I better correct you on one point. None of the Hirsh family have ever referred to any of the sculptures at the National Gallery of Victoria as "the dirty old man" and the specific sculpture isn't of a nude, middle aged man. It is of a middle aged man wearing only his underpants, and we call him "the dirty man." The story of how we've come to call him "the dirty man" is this: The sculptor, Peter Corlett, is a long time friend of my parents, and they own a number of his pieces (all from his early, struggling artist days). At a very young age Adrian (our oldest) took to one of the sculptures in my parents' collection. Titled 'White Play Lady', it is made from hollow fibreglass, with a rounded base which is filled with 40 or 50 kilos of lead. If you push the statue it just pops back up into upright position. In a short time it was re-titled by Adrian as "push".

One day we went to the NGV and on the way we were telling Adrian that the Gallery has a couple of sculptures by the same man who made "push". One is the 'Tarax Children's Play Sculpture' which is located in the Garden behind the building. Adrian really enjoyed that one, since it is designed to be climbed upon and in. When we went to look at 'The Connoisseur II' he was nowhere to be found, so I asked an attendant about it and was told it was currently in storage. I relayed this to Adrian and in response to his "Why?" explained some of the reasons items are placed in storage, though in terms relevant to his age (he was then about two). The next time we saw my parents Adrian told them about his afternoon at the Gallery and he mentioned that he we couldn't see "the dirty man because he was getting cleaned". After that the name stuck, in the way that every family builds up their own culture or mythology.

The model for "the dirty man" is Mark, my father's oldest friend. This year Adrian began playing football and one of his team-mates is one of Mark's grandchildren. And, just to complete this anecdote on a fannish note, Jerry Kaufman has been to an Australian Rules Football match with Mark.

*Talking of Jerry:*

**Jerry Kaufman, 3522 N.E. 123<sup>rd</sup> Street, Seattle, WA 98125, USA**

55 pages of memories - and some of them feel like mine. Thanks. You didn't exactly duplicate my path or stay with all the same people - I went in 1983 and some things do change. And I was there only two weeks, while you were there much longer. But we did a surprising number of the same things, including the trip to Alice Springs and Ayres Rock, and spent time with many of the same people.

One big difference was that I stayed with Irwin when he still lived at home, and had been dating Wendy only a short time. Irwin's parents are not simply patrons of the arts; they had a museum's worth of modern and contemporary art in their home. I took a roll of photos there, so impressed was I. Furthermore, they were attractive and gracious people. (Still are, I should think.)

I didn't go to a Swancon; I went to Syncon. It was more cosmopolitan and larger than the Swancon. It felt much more self-assured than the Swancon you describe, but certainly back then Perth and its fandom had the sense of being "back of beyond" and dwelt on what it lacked and how isolated it was. (When I stood on the beach in Fremantle I strained my eyes trying to see India.)

*I found Perth fandom isolated but not lacking in self-assurance. People seemed to be too busy having fun, and inventing their own traditions – at least during Swancon - to fret over what they were missing.*

**Eric Lindsay, PO Box 640, Airlie Beach, Queensland 4802, Australia**

I enjoyed your understated description of Melbourne fan ...tensions. And the understanding nature of your comments on those who cycle all over Melbourne. Naturally I was delighted that you found Australian wines to your taste. We keep finding really nice ones that are just outside our quaffing price range.

Recent reports on the "slip, slop, slap" sun block campaign seems to indicate it provides a false sense of protection. Mind you, in tropical Queensland where we now live, even in winter the sun is sufficiently hot that I can sit tanning on our balcony. Odd computer reference in this. My Psion organiser gets too hot to allow the display to be seen clearly after five or ten minutes. I bet their tester in the UK didn't have that problem.

A most apt description of Valma's driving habits. A long time ago, in a state far away (well, actually NSW), I drove Leigh and Valma back from her appointment with an eye specialist, when they were staying in our Faulconbridge home for a few months before moving to Perth. We had the impressive arrangement of bookshelves Leigh made in that room for a decade.

**Valma Brown, 12 Raglan Street North, Ballarat, Victoria 3556, Australia**

Enjoyed your fanzine very much. It is strange reading about people you know from another person's perspective. I must admit your description of me had us both laughing. Short! It is the first time I have been described as short at 5ft 6ins. I don't know what my colour hair would be called by other nationalities but in Australia it is red. Maybe it has something to do with Ayres Rock. Whoops I've not been politically correct.

*Tut, tut! Agreed, 5ft 6ins isn't short. I must have been visualising Valma in relation to Leigh who is very tall. As for the hair colouring, red heads to me are those with deep red hair. Maybe it's another of those cultural differences in vocabulary!*

**Yvonne Rousseau, PO Box 3086, Rundle Mall, Adelaide, SA 5000, Australia**

Having read *Never Quite Aboriginal*, I once again helplessly admire and wonder at your stamina as Intrepid Traveller -- and in addition am madly impressed by the amount of information you absorbed without being seen to take notes. You also capture Melbourne so well that you add to my ever-present nostalgia for it.

Back in Adelaide, a new and unexpected naming difference reveals itself. The daunting amount of whiting served to me in Norwood was not (as 'whiting' would have been in Britain) cod. Australian seas apparently hold no gadoid fish at all, so that many an ichthyologist probably lives in constant awareness that Australia's so-called 'whiting' belongs to the Sillaginidae instead of the Gadidae family. In enigmatic mood, Julian E. Tenison-Woods therefore reports, in *Fish and Fisheries of New South Wales*, 1882: 'the "whittings" are not like those of Europe.'

A visit to Britain is likely to be an Australian's first opportunity to taste marine cod -- often with a startled feeling, and with an initial leaning to Oscar Wilde's opinion of it, as reported by Hesketh Pearson: "A nice piece of cod?" suggested the waiter. "I hardly think cod is a very nice fish, is it?" said Wilde; then, seeing that the waiter was pained, he hurried on "Oh, no doubt the cod is a splendid swimmer, admirable for swimming purposes, but not for eating."

In similarly bookish gourmet mode: one of my Christmas presents seems to explain how a tooth-blackening violent-shudder-inducing liquid infiltrated the British Isles. From now on, I blame irresponsible parliamentarians. At least, in the *Spectator* of 1 February 1963 (in an article reprinted in *An Omelette and a Glass of Wine*), Elizabeth David reports: 'It was the winter of 1946-47. In the late summer of 1946 I had returned to England after some years spent in the Middle East and a brief period in the Farther one. After years of enjoying comparative plenty,

rationing was a challenge. Everyone else had hoards of things like powdered soups and packets of dehydrated egg to which they were conditioned. I started off untrammelled; an empty cupboard was an advantage. With whatever I could get I cooked like one possessed. The frustrations were great. All the same, one managed some entertainment. Nobody ever came to a meal without bringing contributions. Unexpected ones sometimes. A wild goose. Snails from Paris. Mock liver pate from Fortnums. British Government-bought Algerian wine.'

*One thing's for sure, I will never be able to see a bottle of Algerian wine, and not think of Yvonne! Still, in learned (and indeed bibulous) mode, we have:*

**William Bains, 37 The Moor, Melbourn, Herts, SG8 6ED**

Aborigines and Alcoholism. The aborigines do have reduced levels of alcohol dehydrogenase compared to caucasians, as do many non-European populations. This means that they cannot metabolise alcohol as fast, and get drunk much more easily. Some Asian populations are the same - they can get flushed and merry on half a pint of lager, and no amount of practice can make them much better. In Japanese this is due to ADH levels, in some Chinese populations another enzyme - aldehyde dehydrogenase - is also low. (ADH converts alcohol to acetaldehyde, ALDH converts acetaldehyde to acetate, which is innocuous and the body can 'burn' through the same enzyme machinery as burns fat. This is why drinking leads directly to fat, not muscle or anything.) You only get low ALDH in populations with high ADH too, because acetaldehyde is very toxic, so if you have lots of ADH to make it and little ALDH to destroy it you would feel extraordinarily ill every time you took alcohol. In fact, antabuse, the anti-alcoholism drug, works by blocking ALDH and so ensuring that someone taking it has a violent and (it is hoped) educational reaction to any alcohol they drink.

However, this is not the reason that the aboriginals have an alcoholism problem, as you can study many populations and ask 'do alcoholics in those populations always have low ADH, and non-alcoholics have high ADH?' and the answer is definitely 'no'. Low ADH is linked to alcoholism, but is not the main cause. This is reasonable - an alcoholic will drink until they get drunk, no matter how long that takes, and a moderate drinker will stop drinking when they feel the alcohol having an undesired effect, whether this is after half a lager or a bottle of gin. There are other genetic factors, and almost certainly cultural ones as well, which influence alcoholism. Which is it in the case of the aboriginals? As no-one can agree on what the social factors are (in broad terms, it falls into three schools of thought - 'it just needs willpower to kick the habit', 'it is all society's fault', and 'they learn these behaviours from their parents') and no-one has discovered a convincing genetic factor, it is all a bit moot.

*Maybe the problem in Australia is that the less alcohol-tolerant Aboriginal people find themselves living in a heavy drinking culture (particularly in a town like Alice (Springs)), and in drinking to the same level as the white population end up even more intoxicated than their European counterparts.*

*I can't see how Antabuse would be useful: if becoming violently ill were likely to put people off alcohol, then surely the traditional effects of alcoholic overindulgence would be sufficient.*

Interestingly (well, interestingly to me), one of the most alcohol-resistant populations is Europeans, who have soaked their culture in alcohol since the middle ages. I suspect natural selection is doing its thing. Since the industrial revolution, industrial quantities of industrial-strength alcohol have been available, raising the selective pressure substantially (and since the turn of the century industrial quantities of other drugs, of course). Whether in 500 years time alcoholism will be as dead as rickets in Western communities, because anyone who can stand the stuff will have killed themselves off, is an interesting speculation.

I am also skeptical about the statement that the aboriginals lived long and healthy lives before Europeans arrived. It is very likely true that they suffered little from diabetes, heart disease etc. In Saudi Arabia (a country I know more about, having never been to Australia), the incidence of diabetes in the 1920s was less than 1% of the population. Now, with the wealth of oil allowing hugely rich Western diets without the need or the motivation to work them off, incidence is 25% and climbing. However that does not mean that they all lived to 110 years before the oil. Like the aboriginals, traditional Saudi society encourages marriage within the clan, and the resulting load of genetic disease is staggering - diseases which within Europe occur at 1 in a million are significant causes of death there. It is also true that most non-literate societies have a tradition of long life and health, but it is just that - a tradition. If you dig up the bones you find that they did not live all that long (although neither did they have a 50% child mortality like Victorian England).

It is easy to point to the diabetes and alcoholism and say 'look, we were living in paradise before you bloody whites came along', but not necessarily true. But I note that you carefully avoided editorialising on the subject. Were you so restrained at the time, expressing non-committal but sympathetic noises? I probably would have done that. I am only brave behind a computer keyboard.

**Robert Lichtman, PO Box 30, Glen Ellen, CA 95442, USA**

The thread running through your account that most captured my attention is the one concerning the aborigines, which first surfaces in your description of the sandpainting and other artwork done by "urban aboriginal women," which you characterize as demonstrating "a sense of resentment at white society and its attitudes to aboriginal people." To me, this is quite parallel to the state of race relations in this country -- and for that matter in England with its not so veiled antagonism not only to black people but to everyone of color. The discussion between your roommates at the hostel at Alice Springs reveals this most strikingly: Jane, a fellow Brit, expressing "surprise at the gap between the two cultures" on the one hand but then mouthing stereotypes on the other -- "the government handouts," "only just out of the stone age," and most appallingly her statement that the "bright aboriginal boy who could have gone to university" that Valma told you about "must have been half-blood." And then, on the next page, her complaint of reverse discrimination, that somehow the government is down on the whites. Yes, one \*can\* see why Pauline Hanson is so popular.

A few pages later Paul, the driver and guide, observes that the aboriginals haven't told very much about their culture, maybe 10% at best. In the same section you mention that the aboriginals charge for access to their lands are working on banning tourists altogether. This is parallel with the way our Native Americans have dealt with white culture here, except that our contact has been going on somewhat longer, we've impinged more, and we have this insatiable interest in learning about their cultures.

As you know from reading my fanzines, I've been interested for quite some time in the arts and culture of the various tribes in the southwestern U.S.: the Navajo, Hopi, etc. I have books describing their creation myths, explaining some of the symbology they employ in their arts (the Navajo's weavings, the Hopi's pottery, etc.), but in all of them is stated that these people hold some of their belief systems sacrosanct and do \*not\* make them available outside their tribal culture. Also, some of them charge for access to various parts of their tribal lands, and rightfully so.

The descriptions by Keith [a half aboriginal guy] of some of their cultural practices make them sound a lot like, although different in details, from Native American practices in that they come out of a belief system and cultural experiences that have nothing to do with "Western civilization," but that doesn't make them either quaint or invalid. You conclude that "aboriginal society was very rigid, set up for survival in tough desert conditions. Too rigid to adapt very easily to modern life." True enough, but I stumble a little bit on the word "modern," since to me it implies that our way of life (First World) is somehow superior to others. One might ask why

the aboriginals (in Australia or elsewhere) should have to "adapt" to our ways -- in my view, they shouldn't be required to. There shouldn't even be the expectation that they might want to. Over time, they might to some extent -- some Native Americans here drive trucks, for instance, and have microwave ovens -- but it should be their choice, not ours.

*Undoubtedly. But how much do any of us get to pick and choose what we want from "modern life"?*

Your mention of Frank Macskasey being of Hungarian origin with "the national cuisine being meat, more meat and half a ton of lard" prompts me to mention that I, too, am half-Hungarian and the description of Hungarian food is quite apt. I remember as a child that my grandfather would come to backyard barbecues at my parents' place armed with a chunk of what appeared to be 100% fat. Having first cut up spring onions into tiny bits and keeping a pepper shaker handy, he would skewer this fat and hold it over the hot coals. When it began to drip, he would press it against slices of rye bread and let the grease permeate them. He'd then sprinkle the spring onions on the bread and liberally pepper it. As a kid I loved this, of course. Your mention of a sour cream sauce also reminded me of stuff his wife, my grandmother, would cook. It's a good thing I became a strict vegetarian for several decades after being raised on food like that.

On page 45, you mention that you and Tim Jones have been trading fanzines since the '80s. Me, too, but I'm led to wonder when was the last time you got a fanzine from him? In my own case the most recent was TIMBRE No. 7, which is undated but from internal evidence seems to have come out in 1993.

*I'm not sure when I last received a fanzine from Tim, but he does still send locs:*

**Tim Jones, 87 Ellice Street, Mount Victoria, Wellington, New Zealand**

The whole report was a very enjoyable mixture of the new - your experiences around Alice and Uluru, and Western Australia, neither of which I've ever been to - and the familiar - much of what you said about Melbourne brought back memories of Kay's and my trip there in 1994, and your reaction to the gap between the promise and the reality of the Melbourne Science Fiction Club meetings was exactly the same as ours - for years, I'd been hearing about the wonderful MSFC and its marvellous meetings, and to find that these consisted of fans milling rather aimlessly about a drafty church hall, and that (if you'll forgive the aspersion) the library was the most interesting thing there, was about the lowest point of that trip. But I like Melbourne a lot, and it sounds like you did too.

Ah, there's such a lot of good stuff in that report! Your comments about the (NZ) Conspiracy congoers mirror my thoughts: that was the sort of fun I used to have twenty years ago, but as Sam Goldwyn (?) used to say, we've all passed a lot of water since then. Murray's monthly fanzine still hasn't put in any further appearances (and please don't mention TIMBRE).

*Too late - Robert already has!*

**Jean Weber, PO Box 640, Airlie Beach, Queensland 4802, Australia**

So your zine, with the perspective of a visitor from the UK (and the bits about Sibylle's views), made very interesting and enjoyable reading on several levels. I'm always interested in how others see us, but mostly get my input from visiting Americans. I'm particularly interested in hearing about people's experiences when travelling in very different ways than I do -- in your case, on buses and trains and staying in backpackers' hostels. I toured (western) Europe in the '60s that way, and thoroughly enjoyed it. Nowadays, I have too low a tolerance for other people's noise, and I can't imagine going into the backpackers' bars (I've been briefly into a few here in Airlie Beach and fled quickly).

I've met several women around your age who've been travelling that way, and they've all been having a wonderful time but the same "I'm old enough to be their mother" feeling about the majority of their travelling companions. I freaked when I read about you going off with that guy in Cairns -- not because he was black, but because the whole situation was so dangerous. (Mind you, I've done equally dangerous things at various times, so I'm not casting stones.) Your account of the experience showed that you quickly recognised the danger but kept fairly calm about it, so I was impressed.

*I was pretty freaked by the experience at the time. I did think seriously about leaving it out because I was embarrassed by my own stupidity - but it also stuck strongly in my head as a less patronising view of aboriginal life than the others I had given - particularly the wrath of the sister when she saw that her brother had brought back some white backpacker floozy.*

I really appreciated the level of detail in your account of your travels, in the descriptions of where you went and with whom, and your reaction to things. I laughed over your experiences at Australian conventions, because I recognised the situations so well ("This is Australia; there will be no one in the bar" indeed), and also recognised the casual racism of so many people, both travellers and residents.

*Now back to that far distant NQA and the locs that wouldn't die. Where better to start than with:*

**Ian Sorensen, 7 Woodside Walk, Hamilton, ML3 7HY Scotland**

No, this still isn't a loc, more a pathetic query: why do you hate me?

It was actually Debbi [Kerr] who mentioned that she was concerned that you seemed to have it in for me, so I read the rest of the zine to discover

- 1) the implication that you think either me, my sex life or my fantasies are bland
- 2) you find me as irritating as Kev McVeigh
- 3) I need help with my jokes.

Now, I'm quite happy with 1. I can live with 3. But to imply that I am IN ANY WAY like Kev is deeply insulting, worrying and just plain wrong. I demand a retraction or I will be forced to reveal what I know about your strange passion for Terry Jacks songs.

*Too late - everyone knows already. Ian continues in a later e-mail:*

OK, you've sussed me. I'm not really hurt, it's just a pathetic attempt to force you into admitting you don't hate me after all. (Does that make me insecure? Does that make you want to mother me? Fancy a shag? - oh God, I *am* like Kev McVeigh!)

Anyway, on with the proper loc. I have to say that I'm not a big fan of travel, and so travel writing is an abstract artform for me rather than a travel substitute. But they do make me think about travel: I think I never want to leave my house. Honey with bees in it is a charming image that will live with me for many breakfasts to come.

Victor's piece was fascinating as I read it just after completing my own article on Diana's death in which I explain why it had absolutely no impact on me, beyond irritation at the disruption to the TV schedules. Victor's paralleling his family, the Washington car crash family and hers was poignant and well structured. I wondered as I read it if he was assuming we would have read his earlier piece on his own car crash, a knowledge of which added even more force to his observations.

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

Victor's personal and original comment on the death of Princess Di is very poignant. I did more or less meet her once (I was in the front row but she didn't actually speak to me, just briefly

greeted my neighbour) formed the opinion that she was a nice enough lass neither as good or as bad as the pictures painted of her. Victor's piece puts things in perspective and is one of the best bits of his writing I have ever read.

I greatly enjoyed Maureen's discovery of America. I met Americans during WWII so my first knowledge of them was that they were all very large and very rich and that they didn't need coupons for sweets. They were also very generous with that forbidden substance GUM which if chewed would choke you, a just punishment for taking presents from strangers. Then my knowledge was expanded in just the same way as Maureen's. After the numerous visits from American friends to my home here and my two visits to America (not to mention thousands of letters over a time span of 34 years) I'm still not sure that I could put my finger on anything and say that is America. It is even bigger and more diverse than they themselves give it credit for.

I greatly enjoyed your own travel tale. As to your reflections on age it made me think there are more ways to travel than physically, I was in my late thirties when I discovered fandom that proved to be a journey with mostly much younger companions. Of course in our travels abroad (with the RAF) we had no choice but to take the children. I would recommend it, their questions and viewpoint enable one to really look and see. It is our experience that outside of Britain and some ex Empire countries just about every country is child orientated. If special care is taken on hygiene and health matters a child is often safer and happier abroad than at home. Even education can be superior, the Chinese nursery school ours went to was the best they ever attended.

**Colin Greenland, 98 Sturton Street, Cambridge, CB1 2QA**

Maureen is brilliant on her intermittent reception of the great broadcast that is America. Trolleys, dames & napalms. I wonder, in amongst all that did she really escape the virus of anti-Americanism? We had US exchange students at our school too, in the last years of the 60s. We viewed them with a mixture of suspicion, contempt & envy. They were rich, but were they not a bit dim? When we got one we liked, he was definitely a nice bloke despite being a Yank. We were only confirmed in our prejudice by what we picked up of the accumulated clamour of dissident American youth, Woodstock, *Easy Rider*, with commentary on the subject of US foreign policy provided by the keen cub Marxists among us. I remember my housemaster at evening assembly, telling us: "Individually, Americans are the most delightful people you could wish to meet. Collectively, they're a disaster."

The first & last truth about America is how unspeakably bloody huge it is. Everything else follows from that. Americans project themselves, form themselves into affinity groups: a strategy for too much space. Britains repress themselves, keep themselves to themselves: a strategy for too little. We accuse them of being parochial, but what else could they be, living in 50 separate countries pretending to be one? America *is* an affinity group.

Americans are great while everything is going well; bewildered & full of righteous indignation when things go wrong. Britons expect things to go wrong; have no idea how to cope when things go right. I miss America. I miss the unassuming friendliness; the optimism newborn each morning; the heartbreaking dumb epic grandeur. I mean to go back some time, some time soon, just to show Susanna where I used to go every year, up in the mountains of Colorado: the rock I sat on, writing *Other Voices* & the beginning of *Take Back Plenty*.

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

Maureen Kincaid Speller's *A Dance Called America* was enthralling reading, because many of her concepts of America were similar to mine, even though I lived in the place. Remember, I never got more than 100 miles from Hagerstown until I was in the late stages of youth, I didn't watch television until the mid-1950s, and most of the images Maureen received from books and movies about the 98% of the United States I'd never seen came to me through the same sources that she utilized. By now I've seen probably another 1% of this nation in person and have had the advantage of television to obtain a more realistic image of the rest of it. I think I prefer the notion of the entire nation that I had when I was a boy to what I know about it now.

### **Jerry Kaufman**

I do recall, upon flipping the pages, that I was surprised that Victor wrote about his mother's death again, until I saw how well he'd connected it with something that was on many people's minds only recently, and illuminated (for us and himself) both subjects.

I was also pleased, I soon remembered, with Maureen Speller's reactions to mythic America, and that she liked William Least-Heat Moon and Helene Hanff (Blue Highways and the Hanff books are all delightful). If Maureen can find it, I See by my Outfit, by Peter Beagle, is another very good "discovering America" book. (There are quite a few of them, by the way; do you have such a thing in Britain? I know Paul Theroux has written one that could be described as "discovering Britain," but are there others?)

If ever you return to Seattle, I have a friend I'd like you to meet. David took a life's dream trip to Thailand (with side trips, I believe, to Laos and Burma); it was hell on wheels. And on elephants. The man was beaten; robbed (by street thugs and by customs officials who he thinks ran up charges on his Visa); fell off an elephant, and then had to walk blocks to a hospital with a broken leg; went into a coma after he developed septicemia (they almost amputated the leg); etc. I haven't heard the whole story, that's why the "etc." Too bad David isn't a writer; it's a Redmond O'Hanlon book for sure.

*Enough to put you right off your round the world trip that is! I'm really relieved I didn't encounter anything that bad. And I don't care if it would have made a brilliant fanzine article.*

### **Sue Thomason, 190 Coach Road, Sleights, Whitby, North Yorks**

Well, you have convinced me that I never want to go on an elephant ride. And that I never want to go on that kind of trek. And probably that I never want to go to Thailand. What really seems to have caught your attention is the other trekkers, rather than the landscape, or the people who live in it.

Does real travel have to be done on your own? I ask because I've always had Rory with me on trips abroad; I think he's much more interested in exploring strange new places than I am. And my trips abroad have always been centred around physical activity: skiing trips to France (and once to Austria), a week hiking in the Canadian Rockies, and three weeks on a mountaineering expedition in Norway. My main criticism of mountaineering expeditions as a way of getting to see a strange country (apart from the fact that someone got killed on the Norway expedition) is that the expedition members tend to form a tightly-knit group, and not interact with local people much.

As I suspect we have very different attitudes to travel, I'd be really interested to hear what the Good Things about travel are for you -- what really makes you recommend it as an experience you'd encourage others to share. Is it because travel has given you more self-reliance? Given you a broader perspective on problems that seem overwhelming at home but trivial in a different environment?

*I think what I was recommending most was time out from your daily routine. I don't have any prescription for how or where to travel. The trips abroad you describe, hiking and mountaineering, sound more exciting than most of what I did (which was mainly to bum around cities). What travel did most for me was give me time to think and read, and experience the unusual. I also found it energised my life when I came back. But sadly that doesn't last!*

*And here's another person wondering what I got out of it all:*

### **Brad W. Foster, PO Box 165246, Irving, TX, USA**

I had to read your "Drinking Cola in Thailand" piece twice to make sure my first impression was correct, and that I hadn't simply missed something in it. But it seems to me that no where in

those pages is there any indication that you actually *enjoyed* the experience. In the same regard, no where do I find anything saying, blatantly, that you *didn't*. But certainly the events themselves didn't seem all that enjoyable. Guess it reinforces why I love cable television with the infinite variety of travel shows - someone else can do all the uncomfortable trekking about, and then take lovely picture of the nice bits for me to enjoy in the comfort of my own home.

*That doesn't work for me - travel programmes just make me want to be there myself. I suppose that's why I enjoyed that trek in Thailand (and I did!): being there and experiencing the sights, sounds and smells, and a sense of adventure and achievement. But on with the disaster stories:*

**Janet Stevenson, Roan, Rowelton, Carlisle, CA6 6LX**

When I was at Leicester my house-mate spent a nine-week "block" at a missionary hospital in a malaria-infested part of Kenya. She was fairly fit when there but returned home and was Dreadfully Ill. After a month they realised that she did not have a Dreadful Tropical Disease, not even Malaria. She had a Very Rare Reaction to the antimalarials instead. She kept on turning blue. (Sounds like "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory"?)

**Kim Huett, PO Box 679, Woden, ACT2606, Australia**

I see even the professionals had trouble with pigs. In *Fear Drive My Feet* by Peter Ryan, an account of the author's patrols behind Japanese lines during WWII he complains about the inconsiderate manner in which hungry pigs would act while he was staying in remote Papuan villages. He is very circumspect in his account but I still don't think I want to meet village pigs up close and personal.

Not that I am totally against discomfort when travelling since to a degree it's part of the experience. I do have limits as to what I'm willing to put up with however. These do vary according to the circumstances as roughing it seems quite reasonable while walking up Mt Kilimanjaro but not when staying in a Nairobi hotel. It's for this reason I'm also glad I didn't try overseas travel until I was in my thirties. If I had tried it ten-fifteen years ago I would have been forced to do so in a hand-to-mouth manner which I'm sure would have taken the edge off my enjoyment. Even putting comfort to one side I like to know that if problems occur I have the funds to insulate myself from the worst of the stress. I know money won't solve every problem but if I happen to miss a flight, as has happened, I find it comforting to know I can afford to stay in a hotel if need be. Armed with that knowledge I find I am able to travel without constantly worrying.

Of course not everybody worries about such matters as I do. The backpackers you met in Australia for example almost certainly wouldn't be bothered by such concerns. People not bothered by the idea of leaping into the void with only a backpack for company are not bothered by much. I doubt Australia's less salubrious side would concern them when considering if they would like to live here on a permanent basis. Actually, I don't think racism in this country is on the rise anyway. It certainly exists but doesn't seem any more wide spread now than it was ten, or even twenty years ago. It just seems that way at the moment because the media has given it a bit of press of late in the never-ending search for shock value. We certainly have too much racism here (well any figure above zero is obviously too much) but despite the media beat-up I don't think it's anywhere near what I would call a scary level. I suspect backpackers from part of Europe (Germany? France?) for example would find Australia a refreshing change.

For another example I couldn't imagine a cartoon like *King of the Hill* being made in Australia. Well, actually, I don't understand why *King of the Hill* was made anywhere. From what I've seen it's a rather stodgy soap opera about dull, unpleasant people. I assume that it's meant to be a comedy in which case it does seem rather devoid of humour. Mind you, I'm not totally surprised it fails to be funny since I understand it's from the bloke who created *Beavis and Butthead*, a cartoon which only just manages to be funny. I think he's overreached himself by making *King of the Hill*

*I think King of the Hill does quite a sophisticated take on racism. The characters have the prejudices typical of their class, but the events of the episodes often cause them - in particular the lead character Hank Hill - to examine what they think and come up with a more humane outlook.*

**Tom Cardy, 7 Hawker Street, Mt Victoria, Wellington, New Zealand**

I was fascinated by what you had to say about New Zealand fandom and our few if any fanzines when you were here. Your assessment was almost spot on. Where you say "too isolated in their individual cities (or countries) to interact effectively with each other, too parochial to see a larger picture." I agree in part. New Zealand and Australia have tended to be disinterested in each other's fandoms most of the time. For every fan on either side of the Tasman who forged links, there were at least 20 who weren't interested and a few who were actively hostile to any real interaction. I don't know if this has anything to do with the semi-mythical rivalry between the two countries, but it's being going on since New Zealand fandom existed in any real form since the late 70s.

In defence of New Zealand though, I'd say from experience visiting fandoms in Australia, the US and Britain, that we're probably more open minded and interested in what you lot are up to than visa versa. This could be typical small country syndrome paranoia: I always felt there was a certain snobbery going on among fandoms. The Aussies sucked up to the Yanks and, to a lesser degree, the Brits. The Brits sucked up the Yanks. The Yanks, as usual, were up their own arseholes. Of course I can think of lots of exceptions as well. But in New Zealand we tend to be almost obsessed with knowing and appreciating what goes on outside the country than what's in it - and that applies also to fandom.

*And I thought New Zealanders were just obsessed with bungee jumping! Finally, on the subject of strange local customs, here's Brad again:*

**Brad Foster**

I keep getting hung up when I come to the line "I'm just in time to rescue the last chocolate banana from the barbecue". I like bananas and I like chocolate, and while I've no interest in experiencing those flavors together, I can still understand that. I've even seen frozen chocolate bananas. But barbequed? I can only assume that using the phrase "in time to rescue" was literally true. Since no one would actually think to cook such a concoction on purpose, I can only guess they were torturing a perfectly innocent little treat on the grill, and you came along just in time to literally rescue it from the flames of destruction. Tell me this is true.

*Of course it's not true. Does no-one barbecue bananas in the US? Cooked bananas, melted chocolate, and a little dash of liqueur (maybe Cointreau) and you have a wickedly decadent end to a barbecue. (Well, Alison Scott was willing to give it a go at her barbie!) Try it - you'd be surprised.*

*Thanks too for cards and letters on NQA from: Teddy Harvia, Joseph Nicholas, Dale Speirs, Walt Willis, Mark Plummer and Lloyd Penney*

February 2000