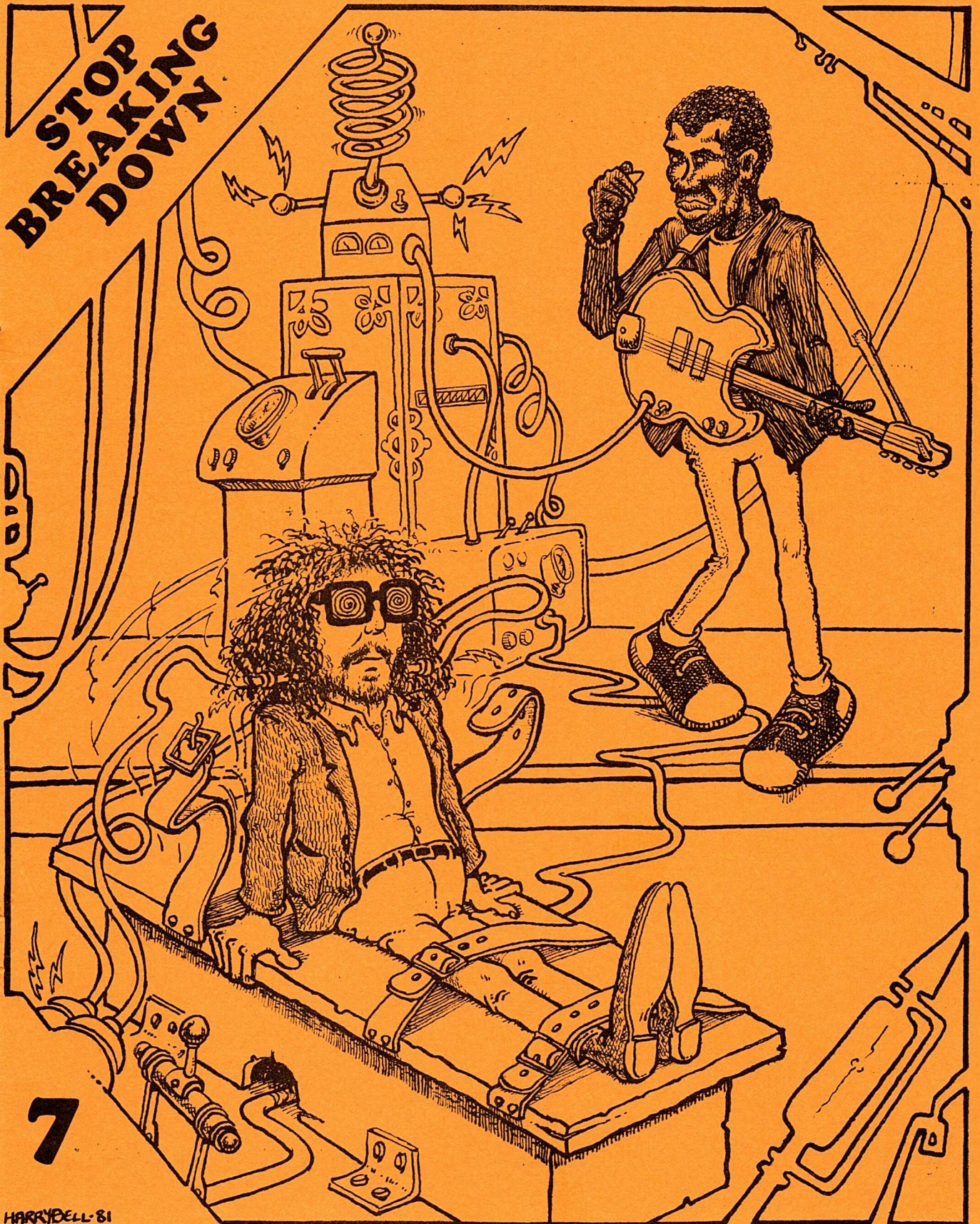


**STOP
BREAKING
DOWN**



7

This is, no kidding,

S T O P B R E A K I N G D O W N

No. 7

.....

August 1981

Edited and produced by Greg Pickersgill
assisted by Linda Pickersgill
hindered by Rastus and Beano

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STOP BREAKING DOWN is available from 7a LAWRENCE ROAD,
SOUTH EALING,
LONDON W5

for Trade, Contribution,
Letter of Comment,
Show of Interest, 30p in stamps.

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STOP BREAKING DOWN 8 will appear, probably in October 1981.

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The cover this issue is an original illustration by HARRY BELL.

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LISTS in this issue by Chris Atkinson, Malcolm Edwards, Linda and Gregory.

C H O C O L A T E F U D G E S U N D A E

Chris Atkinson

I had my first sexual fantasy at the age of seven, in Mrs Payne's kitchen. Of course I had no idea at the time that it was a sexual fantasy, nor how appropriate our neighbour's surname was to the more masochistic reaches of my imagination. Mrs Payne was a tall thin woman with sharp features and dyed black hair, and she was one of those grown-ups who know how to talk to children without patronising them. I liked her for that, but I loved her for her washing machine.

Mrs Payne washed every Monday, and every Monday I would make some excuse to be out of our house and up the road 'helping'. We would talk while Mrs Payne loaded the machine, and then, as the time to switch on drew near, I would edge closer and closer. Finally, as the machine started to throb and churn, I would be right there, my pelvis pressed tightly against the white enamel. When the cycle swung triumphantly into 'rinse and spin' I would be well into my fantasy, caught up in some monstrous torture contraption which would pummel and crush me to a slow and exquisitely painful death. Luckily for me the real-life machine seemed totally uninterested in being cruel to little girls.

As I approached puberty my imagination began to invent other people with whom I would interact in my fantasy world, but the masochistic element was still strong. My most common fantasy was of being trapped in the lower reaches of a dark castle. Upstairs was an evil baron who would come down and do nasty things to me. When I was in bed I would experiment with the sort of evil things that the baron might do, and I began to discover that certain parts of my body were responding in new and interesting ways. It became quite difficult to tell the difference between pleasure and pain, and sometimes the strength of my bodily responses was totally unexpected and left me confused and stunned.

My fantasy about the baron became more elaborate when my family began to go to church on Sunday afternoons and I would be left alone at my grandmother's house with only a senile great-aunt to keep me company. To get away from mad auntie I would lock myself in my grandparents' bedroom, and as the weeks went by I started to build up a rather strange ritual. First of all I would ransack Granny's dressing table and bedeck myself with all the diamante jewellery she kept for Masonic Ladies Nights. Then, in front of her full length mirror, I would arrange a chair upside down with its legs in the air and the back at a forty-five degree angle to the floor. I would then drape myself

backwards over the chair, knees hooked over the upended leg-rungs, head touching the floor, and arms wound painfully around the back. In the mirror I could see a reflection of myself, bejewelled and virtually upside down, my face red and strained with the effort of maintaining this extraordinary position. I would then commence my fantasy of the baron committing vile and unspeakable acts of torture upon my body. The cramps and dizziness caused by my unusual posture added realism to my imagined sufferings.

Despite my evident delight in the pleasure of pain, my fantasies have not been exclusively masochistic in tone. Once I was engaged to be married to a rather strange young man known as Whipper, whose nickname derived not from some perverse sexual rite but from his expertise at shoplifting. How I got myself into this situation is another story, but suffice it to say that even at the time I thought he was pretty repulsive. However, he did have a friend called Steve whom I fancied something rotten. Being engaged, and having at that time a very well developed sense of propriety, I could not let myself fantasise about getting off with Steve in any way that approximated real life. For reasons which I now forget I came up with the idea of feathers - vast drifts of white down, filling my fantasy edge to edge whilst Steve and I rolled in glorious naked passion somewhere deep in the soft enveloping swirls. Interestingly enough my sense of propriety did not prevent me from eventually making off with the young man in question in real life, but unfortunately I never got to try it with feathers, and without them it was a terrible disappointment.

Fantasies can generally be divided into two groups: those involving real people whom you'd love to get your hands on, and those with imaginary people. Obviously Steve and the feathers was an example of the former, and the baron an example of the latter. As I got older both sets of fantasies became more realistic. My more recent fantasies about imagined people are usually set at parties. The scene is often a large, dark old house, and noisy revelry is in progress on the ground floor. I am upstairs, however, probably amongst the guests' coats. With me can be one person, or anything up to five, of either sex. The women have long wavy auburn hair, the men have short to medium length brown hair and are compactly built. Everyone, including me, is naked, but none of us knows for sure why we are here. We begin to touch each other, although we touch without our eyes meeting, almost as though we are unaware of our actions. We move slowly, as though through syrup, partly impelled by passion to continue, and partly still distanced from what is happening. The syrupy bit is sometimes made more explicit by setting the scene in a mud-filled ditch or a vat of warm treacle or similar substance, instead of at a party, although I guess some parties might have vast vats of treacle upstairs.

Now at this point in the fantasy things can happen. Either I go to sleep, or things have got to speed up. If they speed up I can't cope with imagining more than one person, usually, and again it can be of either sex. In fantasies about imagined people I also need help from reality if I am to get out of the syrupy stage, so it's best if I'm actually

with someone at the time or have the energy to do something about it myself.

If I'm imagining real people, however, I don't need external stimulation at all. I can get everything I need out of my own imagination. Some people I know tell me that they can fantasise sexual encounters with vast numbers of people of their acquaintance, but I find this impossible. One at a time has been my limit, and I have often stuck with the same person through fantasy after fantasy, varied only by faceless auburn-haired women and their compact male companions. I can also vary these fantasies by giving them very different settings. The scenes are generally fairly mundane, the main interest being the person at the center of the action. To give some idea of the background of these encounters, however, my fantasy partner and I could be, say, stuck in a lift; in a cave, armed with submachine guns, during a revolution; in a fallout shelter, possibly suffering from radiation sickness, or other suchlike locations. It's obvious that my imagination goes for confined spaces, although in real life I have a tendency towards claustrophobia. Perhaps Freud would have an explanation. Unfortunately the action that takes place in these imagined places is often pretty predictable, so details can be left to your imagination.

The most delicious of all my inventions is, of course, the Chocolate Fudge Fantasy. This started life at a convention (Seacon 1975, as I recall) and was originally a Chocolate Fantasy. It all began when I decided to have a very hot bath, which coincided with a craving for chocolate. I therefore took a huge bar of Dairy Milk into the bath with me, and lay back to have a good fantasy. Then the Dairy Milk began to melt. My hands and face became covered in liquid chocolate. I started to incorporate this into my fantasy and smeared it over various parts of my body. Thankfully on this occasion I was in the bath, and didn't have to worry the chambermaids with telltale stains. It was the messiness of melted chocolate that led me to substitute chocolate fudge, although this becomes pretty gooey if it gets too warm. I have tried chocolate fudge in a real sexual encounter too, and found it had the right amount of stickiness without becoming unreasonably messy. It was extremely enjoyable really, except that it does get all over the bed if you're not careful, so it's best to try it in someone else's room or on the last night of the convention. It should also be good if you're stoned, especially the bit where you lick it off. Don't try to lick it off the sheets though, because it makes your mouth dry. Also you can't lick it off your own neck, so if you're having a fantasy rather than the real thing it's best to concentrate on the arm and possibly leg areas, unless you have easy access to a hot bath, or have an unnaturally long tongue. Harry Bell should be good at this one.

Anyway, I guess that the conclusion to all this has to be as follows: if you should ever find yourself trapped in a lift with me keep your hands firmly on your bag of chocolate fudge, otherwise before you know where you are I'll be curled up in a corner having a sticky-sweet fantasy about a compactly built man and a redhead in a bath of treacle with a leaking duvet and a submachinegun.

You have been warned.

Chris Atkinson

LINDA PICKERSGILL'S FAVOURITE GORY SCENES IN FILMS
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TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE - the big psycho hanging the girl on a meat-hook whilst she's still alive and kicking.

ANDY WARHOL'S DRACULA - Udo Keir as the Count has to have the blood of a virgin to survive, so when he tries a non-virgin in desperation he pukes up the blood. This is shown from a dozen different angles with gallons of red stuff spouting all over.

ANDY WARHOL'S FRANKENSTEIN - Udo Keir again, this time as the Doctor, demonstrates explicitly to his assistant that "To know life, Otto, you must fuck death in the liver."

ALIEN - the little baby alien popping up out of John Hurt's stomach.

HOUSE BY THE LAKE - Brenda Vaccaro is being raped by one of a gang of degenerates and kills him by using a piece of broken glass to slit his throat whilst he's humping away on top of her.

IT'S ALIVE - when the monster baby attacks a milkman, dragging him into the back of his truck. After horrific screams and much breaking glass you see the gutter flowing with milk and blood.

RABID - a doctor infected with a new strain of rabies goes berserk in an operating room and uses his scalpel to slice off a nurse's finger, then sucks the stub before wreaking havoc on the rest of the staff.

PIRANAH - Keenan Wynn is sitting fishing with his feet dangling in the river when a school of piranah slip up and gnaw them down to the bone.

APOCALYPSE NOW - the sequence in the latter part of the film when the bull is ritually slaughtered - shown in slow motion from several different angles. Nauseating - and surely real - as it is I can't take my eyes off the screen even when I know it's coming.

DERANGED - the leading psycho is trying to force-feed his dying mother who is spitting a mixture of pea-soup and blood into his face.

FRIDAY THE THIRTEENTH - a character lying in bed starts to stare bug-eyed, gurgle, and twitch as an arrow is thrust from under the bed through his throat.

DAWN OF THE DEAD - a zombie approaching the heroic survivors grouped around their helicopter clambers up and over a pile of crates, which puts his head on a level with the whirling rotor blades, slicing the top of it off bit by bit.

SCANNERS - a scanner demonstrating his ability has his head exploded completely into pieces by the secret evil scanner sitting next to him.

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I W A S A K I T C H E N C Y B O R G

Linda Pickersgill

"I need to make an apron for myself," I thought. It was an afternoon like many others and I was in the kitchen puttering around getting dinner together. I'd discovered that I'd somehow developed the habit of wiping my wet hands on the front of my jeans, which got them dirty quicker and meant more clothes to wash. I figured that if I could make myself a simple apron it'd protect my clothes and save myself extra trouble. Since learning to manipulate needle and thread via hours of mending and patching jeans I felt I could almost actually sew now and making an apron would be easy. Hell, it couldn't be too complicated - just stitch a couple of pieces of cloth together, right? Maybe while I was at it I'd add a piece of towelling to it especially for wiping my hands. And maybe a pocket or two as well to hold utensils whilst my hands were busy. Yeah - lots of pockets so that I can carry all the gear round with me instead of running back and forth looking for things. I could attach them to pocket-watch-like chains so I wouldn't lose any - no, wait! - better yet - forget the apron. I'll have my hand amputated and all the kitchen tools attached to the end of my arm, just like some giant Swiss Army knife! Zap - out flicks a spatula! Zip - a potato peeler! Wow - that's it - a Kitchen Cyborg!

Aaaaaauuuugh! What was I thinking? The phone rang, mercifully bringing me to my senses. It was Gregory. "I'm thinking of making an apron for myself," I told him, a note of hysteria in my voice. "That's nice," he replied, with an obvious lack of understanding as to what this meant. "No, I mean ME! I actually thought of making an apron for myself! What's happening to me? Do you realise that only months ago my closest encounter with a kitchen was as a place to feed my cat? The only cooking I'd done for years was on an electric frying pan? I used iron-on patches and went to my mother's house once a month to wash my clothes! I mean, even my folks gave me a vacuum cleaner a couple of Christmases past in the hope that I'd learn to use it. Now I'm thinking of making an apron!!" "What's for dinner?" he replied, with all the sympathy I could expect. Shit.

I hung up and began to assess my situation. I've always been a casual person and my apartments usually reflected that. Some people may have gone beyond 'casual' and called me 'sloppy', but what's in a name. As long as I knew which lump of papers to look under for some specific thing, and which pile of clothes was clean and which was dirty I was happy. But it's all been different since living at Lawrence Road. I was doing unheard-of things like washing dishes on the same day I used them,

cleaning the tub out after taking a bath, and even making the bed. This just wasn't normal. "I bet 'They' have something to do with this," I deduced. 'They' had been plaguing me for many years and though I wasn't at all sure who 'They' were I knew 'They' were out to get me. "I bet 'They' have some sort of beam aimed at the flat that makes people neat. Some sort of fiendish invisible ray that pelts you with neatnik vibrations". Oh, how cruel. I was being subjugated into a compulsive cleaner by 'Their' foul and evil neatnik ray. Or was it drugs? Could 'They' be polluting my food and drink with some crazy chemical concoctions. Either way I was sure it was some malign outside agency forcing me into a lifestyle contrary to my normal patterns of living. I bet 'They' even put that apron thought into my head. I knew I'd never think of something like that on my own. It just had to be 'Them'.

But wait a minute - don't outside agencies need some sort of inside agent to point the beam or add the chemicals? Wouldn't that mean somebody close to Lawrence Road was one of 'Them'? I couldn't imagine who. I didn't ever see any of the neighbours and though friends stop by often I couldn't begin to suspect any of them. So who? Who would want to see me reduced to cooking and cleaning and sewing and washing.....

A glance at the clock told me Gregory ought to be home any time now. I heaved myself up from my pathetic contemplative heap in the corner and gathered up the links of the chain that led back to the stove. It sure was nice of him to add on a bit of length to it so I could answer the phone without stretching out painfully on tiptoe. I threw the peeled potatoes into the pot and wiped my hands on my jeans.

Linda Pickersgill

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MALCOLM EDWARDS' "TWELVE TV SHOWS THAT SHOULD BE REPEATED".

1. FIREBALL XL5.
2. QUATERMASS AND THE PIT.
3. I CLAUDIUS.
4. GANGSTERS.
5. LAREDO.
6. HANCOCK'S HALF-HOUR.
7. HIGHWAY PATROL.
8. HAVE GUN - WILL TRAVEL.
9. ROCKFORD FILES.
10. MAVERICK.
11. DRAGNET.
12. ADAM ADAMANT.

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S A Y I N G I T A N D D O I N G I T

Bryn Fortey

Phil Thomas and Peter Atwood vied with each other to one day take over the alto sax crown of the late Charlie Parker. Ken Davies was going to be either a blues guitarist/singer in the Big Bill Broonzy tradition, or a modern jazz virtuoso in the Barney Kessell mould. Phil Suthan and I were going to be writers. We were going to lay down words of beauty and truth...with only a minimum of alteration, amendment, artistic licence, and just plain lying. Colin Tooze was already well on the way to becoming a character.

We met every Friday evening at The Handpost, a pub at the top of Stow Hill, back when Newport was still in Monmouthshire. A fair spell back. Way back. It is 1980 as I sit here at my typewriter thinking of those old times, carrying my creaking mind back through the Seventies to a time when even the Swinging Sixties were yet to happen. This was the late Fifties and even I was moderately young then.

They were good times, those days of youthful innocence and ambition. We drank varying mixtures of beer, whiskey, and tomato juice, and we just knew that one day we were going to be just great.

Yes...they were okay times, those Friday evenings at The Handpost. By most closing times Phil Thomas, Pete Atwood and Ken Davies would be well into a jam session played on glasses filled to different levels, usually accompanied by the irate landlord demanding that the noise cease and the glasses be emptied "...if you please!"

I formed a glorious but no-hope song-writing partnership with those three lads, but that particular story has already been told within the pages of Rob Hansen's music-zine LICKS - for those of you who pretend you remember obscure little one-shots.

Phil Suthan and I, though, we were going to be writers. God knows why, because I hadn't written anything up to then and I have no idea whether or not Phil ever did. Probably it was because neither of us played an instrument and, as was a well known fact, anyone who put their mind to it could come up with something at least halfway as good as most of the rubbish being published. Which shows, if nothing else, that the thought-patters of most would-be writers then were pretty similar to those of would-be writers now.

Phil Suthan, whatever his actual words-on-paper may have been like, was a terrific ideas man. He came up with a new one nearly every Friday.

"I've got this great idea for a mystery novel in which every character is a member of the Count Basie Orchestra!"

"I've decided to write a Welsh version of Tortilla Flat."

"It's gonna be set in a country where everyone is dumb! Not one line of dialogue in the whole fucking novel!"

"I've decided to write a Welsh version of Cannery Row!"

Steinbeck was a great favorite with us all.

One day it dawned on me that it was time to put my money where my mouth was. Without actually mentioning it on Friday evenings I wrote a really bad 67,000 word novel...all in longhand. The prospect of typing it was as daunting a task as I've ever faced. Especially since I didn't own a typewriter and had never used one in my life.

So did I really want that reconditioned second-hand tenor sax I'd been saving to buy? So did I really need that infernal machine I bought instead?

The two-finger typing of such a godawful 67,000 words was a chore I could well have done without, and I soon reached a stage where I felt I just had to take a break from it. So I knocked out a short story called 'A Saleable Commodity' a show-biz epic of the recording industry, and that was where fate decided to stick a long proboscis into my affairs. For the very next Friday Phil Suthan was full of this new market for short stories.

"It's called INTERNATIONAL STORYTELLER, a paperback collection published monthly and containing writers who are all unknown and most of them are going to remain so. I'm going to submit one to them. I've got this great idea for a short story about the gas oven in the kitchen of 10 Downing Streey taking over as Prime Minister."

So I sent 'A Saleable Commodity' to INTERNATIONAL STORYTELLER, and yes, you guessed it, they accepted it. Three whole pounds they offered me. Count them...1,2,3 little quidlets. Wow! I nearly packed up my job on the spot. I couldn't wait for Friday to come.

As I knew they would be, the boys were over the moon at this little bit of success. Well, Phil Thomas, Pete Atwood, Ken Davies and Colin Tooze were.....Phil Suthan reacted differently.

"You mean you've actually been writing?"

"Well, yes, a rather poor novel and this one short story."

"Yes, but I mean....actually writing!"

"It's what we talk about doing every Friday."

"Sure, of course, we talk about it...but you've gone and done it."

"Why not?"

"No reason at all...if that's what you want. Anyway, INTERNATIONAL STORYTELLER only publishes shit."

And that was it between Phil Suthan and myself. He turned up less and less frequently on Friday evenings, virtually ignoring me when he did make it, and never again talked about writing. If I remember rightly he discussed plans for taking up wood carving.

It wasn't long after that that some of the lads made tracks for London and the regular sessions at The Handpost ended, but I have fooled around with writing from that day to this.

Phil Suthan and I still bump into each other occasionally. We've even supped a pint or two together. Political theory is his bag now, and the history of the Trade Union movement. He bores the pants off me with tales of the down-trodden masses and I retaliate with lists of my (few) short stony sales over the years. The funny thing is that if Phil hadn't told me about INTERNATIONAL STORYTELLER I wouldn't have made that early sale and it could well have been that my interest in writing might have faded.

I wonder what I would have done with my time instead?

Bryn Fortey

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CHRIS ATKINSON'S "THIRTEEN THINGS THAT MIGHT COME AND GET ME".
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1. Churches - at night. Especially ones with towers.
2. Undergrounds carparks.
3. Electricity pylons.
4. Gasometers.
5. The arms on tube train seats.
6. The ends of tunnels on tube train stations.
7. Eyes.
8. Scissors - late at night.
9. Dead-end streets.
10. Greenwich foot-tunnel.
11. Margaret Thatcher.
12. The furry elephant in the spare bedroom.
13. Plants - sometimes.

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NEVER MEET YOUR HEROES



'A' S T O R Y

Linda Pickersgill

(N.B. In the Detroit area lives a depraved fan named Tony Cvetko who publishes an equally depraved little fanzine called WHO NEEDS LIFE? I GET HIGH ON DRUGS. I like getting his zines. They're always, well.... different. In the past he's covered such topics as vampire goldfish, miniature nuclear holocausts, and wimps. In an issue last winter he printed two pages of sexually related words - all in neat little columns and in alphabetical order from abortion to zoosperm. Everything was there, even including some that even Greg had to look up in a dictionary. I figured that such an extensive vocabulary would be an invaluable aid to would-be porn writers, so I decided to write a series of stories using all the words in alphabetical order as he'd presented them. This is what I came up with for 'A', and it is the SBD Classic Reprint for this issue, having originally appeared in the subsequent issue of Tony's fanzine. L.P.)

Night's darkness oozed through the filthy city streets like sludge in a sewer. The only sounds she heard were the taps of her heels echoing on the wet pavement as she walked home from work. She worked in a biological supply house preparing dead cats with a preserving lacquer. It was a lousy job but then it's a lousy world. Her thoughts were drifting back to the abortion she'd had three weeks ago. She could still see the light of the bare bulb in the middle of the cheap hotel room glistening on the blood encrusted coat-hanger in the rubber-gloved hand of the 'doctor'. If it weren't for the fact that her body was constantly saturated with so many drugs she probably would have died of infection from the ordeal. But such abuse was common in the life of Sinsa Mia. It was a lousy world.

Life had been just average for young Sins until sometime in late adolescence when she met Bordon. Tall, blond, blue-eyed and tan - she knew it was love she felt for this adonis. They married. The adultery began only hours after the wedding when she found Bordon fucking her mother in the back seat of their car. It was a bad beginning and only got worse. As time went on she also found him fucking her sister, her brother, her best friend, his sister, his brother, and the mailman. It was when she found him fucking the parrot that she left. It was a lousy world.

The only way left was down. Sins entered a world of cheap liquor, degenerate sex, and dangerous drugs. Her job at the supply house brought barely enough money to support her filthy habits and pay for

her dingy room. A.L. would be waiting for her in that room when she got home. Ol' Afterplay A.L. She gave a pathetic grin when she thought of the huge hairy brute of a man and the vile things he did with the numerous bodily fluids lying about after their 'lovemaking'. A.L. released his aggression by performing disgusting anal atrocities on her bound and gagged body. "So whassa A.L. stand for?" she'd asked on the first evening they'd spent together. "Isstans fer (belch) analingus. Thassome big woid, eh doll? Heh heh heh..." "Yeah, but innit one world..analingus? Hodya get A.L. outa..." "Shuddup slut," he'd slurred as he slugged her down onto the bed. In a flash he had her ankle handcuffed to the bedpost and her hands chained over her head. Dazed by the blow she was only vaguely conscious of the broken thermometer he'd shoved in her anus. Struggling towards awareness she'd felt an aphrodisiac odour wafting into her system. She focused to find her face buried in A.L.'s incredibly dripping hairy armpit. He was beginning to arouse her. It was while he was etching a map of Cleveland on her ass with a length of rusty barbed wire that her frantic squirms and gyrations brought the bedpost down on her head. She passed out. It was a lousy world.

Climbing the dimly lit stairwell towards her room Sins heard an awful noise coming from somewhere above. "SQUAWK" squish squish "SQUAWK". She ran up the rest of the way, her heart in her throat at the realisation that it was her room that the racket was coming from. "SQUAWK". She threw open the door. There was A.L.....fucking her parrot in it's little tiny bird asshole. "Heh heh heh" "SQUAWK". "Jeezus Christ" Sins yelled as she grabbed her baseball bat and ran accross the room. "You goddam fuckin little asswipe...get outta here!" She batted him square in the face with the heavy wood, sending out a spray of blood and broken teeth everywhere. He dropped the bird and ran out of the door. "You shit!" she yelled after him, "You said it was me that you loved..you said mine was the only ass in your life. Ya liar! Just like all men..liars!" He was gone. She shut the door and walked back to where the parrot lay in panting ecstasy on the floor. "Oh why, Aureola, why? I thought I could trust you." She calmly put the spiked heel of her shoe on the bird's head and pressed down. Another one for the lacquer line, she thought. It was a lousy world.

Linda Pickersgill

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GREG PICKERSGILL'S TEN BEST SCIENCE FICTION FILMS

- | | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| 1. THE THING FROM ANOTHER WORLD. | 6. ZARDOZ. |
| 2. DAWN OF THE DEAD. | 7. PERFORMANCE. |
| 3. TIME AFTER TIME. | 8. SAVAGES. |
| 4. SCREAM AND SCREAM AGAIN. | 9. INVASION OF THE BODYSNATCHERS
(Don Siegel original version) |
| 5. CLOSE ENCOUNTERS | 10. SILENT RUNNING. |

Plus two made-for-TV movies - SOLE SURVIVOR and THE NIGHT STRANGLER,
 and a TV play - FRIENDS IN SPACE.

F A N D O M S T R A N G E R

Greg Pickersgill

I had that sickening feeling that things had finally gone too far when one evening I got up, turned off the television, put MIRROR MAN on the record player and went to sit in the bookroom and shuffle through a stack of recent fanzines and BSFA mailings for names and addresses.

I knew it was sort of serious when a couple of days later I took a new BSFA mailing to read at work - for the first time ever putting a crease down the spine of one of those nice flat VECTORS that are so easy to file away unread - and even after drudging through more of it than I'd thought possible I was still interested in putting out a fanzine.

I knew there was absolutely no escape when Malcolm Edwards put out TAPPEN. Fanzine publishing suddenly became something more than a vague desire. It suddenly seemed possible again.

Of course, ever since bailing out of the secret control center hidden in the engine room of SEAMONSTERS in 1979 I've had plots, plans, ideas and fantasies for fanzines hovering around in my head. These impulses tended to vary with what I saw around me. A good convention, say, or even a good conversation at the Friends in Space, would get me all churned up and thinking, and counting my money, and worrying and fretting about what I could do and what sort of audience is there and is it worth it and can I afford it and so on and on. But despite these bursts of hysteric enthusiasm nothing ever quite got done. It was as if some barrier existed between the idea and the actuality. Even the cleverly engineered discovery that five hundred duplicator stencils found lying around unguarded at work fitted neatly into a Safeway bag didn't quite kick my interest into activity. Continual aggravation from people like Linda and Roberts Hansen and Holdstock did little but inspire me to think of reasons why I shouldn't do anything.

And those reasons weren't hard to find, either. After all it was a long time since I'd cranked my duplicator handle for anything more than a booklist, and things had far from stood still. If anything they'd gone bloody backwards, but that's another story entirely. Whatever, things had changed. Different faces, different names, different fanzines - and I had trouble matching them all together. A lot of the people who'd been around at the time of my last activity had either dropped out entirely or receded so far I couldn't even see where they'd been (though some who I rather wish had dropped off the set unfortunately still persist) and sometimes I began to feel like Eric Bentcliffe or Terry Jeeves, and I'd start thinking "This ain't fucking fair, I'm not even thirty yet!"

So there I was, disconnected and confused. Serves me right, really, for being inert for so long and not even so much as sending a begging letter for new fanzines or a letter of comment to those few fanzines that came my way. It was kind of disturbing to check through lists of fanzines and have proven my suspicion that lots of stuff was passing me by entirely - indeed the people who were sending me fanzines were either working from ancient mailing lists or were desperate to get rid of the excess copies of their fanzines, even to burnt out old fans like me. Gloom would descend. My darkest predictions would suddenly become correct. I had been overrun by a new generation of fandom, submerged without trace by a new wave of dynamic, literate individualists whose talents were not to be constrained by the ideas and attitudes of bygone fandom, which they would now squish casually beneath their ever-onward dancing training shoes. The only slight light to all this darkness, I thought, was that at least I had the wisdom and grace to see and accept my position, instead of pretending it was either not happening or that even if it was my position was unassailable, like some dull old fans of my once acquaintance tend to do. And anyway, I could always fall back on the good old standby of "Who cares, what's it all matter anyway, fanzines are an expensive drag, who needs it man.." and like that.

Well, all this heart-searching and self-delusion is a dangerous line to start walking, because if you're not careful you suddenly find you're spending all your time staring out of rain-streaked windows at blank brick walls whilst listening to Swedish solo saxophonists, a way of life that sounds fucking grim to me. So what you've got to do, if you've been in fandom since 1968, secretly enjoy doing fanzines, and would rather like to do it again, is get off the pot and do all your window-staring from behind a typewriter. Things may not be the same, the fanzines may not be as good as the ones you remember, the writers may not be so sharp, and your brain might well be closing down on you without sending a final demand, but, shit, it's too late to stop now.

.....

So here we are again. I've carelessly abandoned my usual pattern of fanzine production in two ways. Instead of the usual two-year gap between runs of a fanzine time and circumstance have stretched it out to over three, and rather than jamming a new title on the front of what is always more or less the same old fanzine inside I've pulled good old STOP BREAKING DOWN up from the past. It's my favorite fanzine title ever, and it's nice to have something to feel comfortable with on this dodgy venture. The first six issues of SBD between March '76 and April '78 were bloody superb fanzines (and I have absolutely no shame at all in saying that) and my main hope for this new series is that let the old firm down too bad. Things are different now - there was more light and fire in the fanwriting of those days, I think - but there are a few class acts around these days too, and I'm working on the case to bring them out.

I dunno, it's only a fanzine, but I like it.

On the runup to this fanzine I was planning on continuing the tradition of publishing convention reports as main features that was such a highlight of the first series of STOP BREAKING DOWN. It seems a shame that long narrative convention reports have fallen from favour in recent times, especially as when done at their best they were not only fascinating stories in their own right (there's nothing more engrossing than something in which one might figure as a surprise star) but had a lot of revelatory things to say about how people behave and conventions occur, and some of them were rather impressive pieces of journalism in any light. However, neither D. West, Malcolm Edwards, Graham Charnock, or Leroy Kettle came up with anything for this issue. Principally because I didn't ask them, having some sort of inane idea of doing it myself. Never done a con report before, I reasoned. Exciting new departure. New fields to conquer. Opportunity to say lots of cogent things about fandom. Easy to do, as well. Just remember the basic outline and a few good gags, trim up with some flash and glitter, and away to the races. Ah, sweet idiocy.

Of course any fool know it is not that simple. Inevitably at conventions I get so out of it that months later I'm hearing new stories of what happened to and around me. Most of the things I can remember are the sort of things that should be in fanzines but no-one has quite the courage to set down in cold duper ink, what with having to face people afterwards and so on and so forth (but one day, maybe...). And, truthfully, I probably didn't see nearly as much of the Leeds Eastercon as I should have done to write about it - though I do wonder whether conventions have now got so big and fragmented that any sort of all-encompassing conreport is no longer possible, and is this why no-one writes them any more? - having spent virtually all my time in either the bar or the fanroom.

So no convention report as such (shame on my idleness) but there were a couple of things that came up that are worth ranting on about a little.

Like the fanroom for instance. Now John Collick is, despite the deranged gleam of his little black-button eyes, a bright and intelligent individual. So why on earth didn't he kick up more shit about the lunatic idea of actually putting the fan room in a bar - especially a bar that was the only one open for some time during the convention. I mean, here's a concom gone head over heels right into the darker reaches of fannish mythos. I know the party line has it that fans are incredible piss-artists but this is ridiculous. A bar in a fanroom would have been the most popular stunt for years, but the other way round it was just a fucking nuisance. Not that I was too disturbed about not being able to hear certain fannish personalities or even that boring old radoteur Dave Langford wambling on eternally over the ostentatious prattle of a million Little Jimmy Fans demanding real ale in thin glasses, but the sort of dual purpose area Collick had to deal with gave him little opportunity to develop any true fanroom atmosphere. Up until then (or rather, since 1977, when fanrooms as a functional entity began) a fanroom was a specific place that people went to for specific purposes, and did specific things by choice. Now I'm all for conning people in by all means, but jamming them in because it's the only place they can get a drink serves nobody very well. Also because the fanroom was more of a public place than

usual there seemed to be a lot less in the way of decoration and displays than in the past. Also there was virtually nothing on the sales table. I don't know whether Collick had neglected this facet of the fanroom, or maybe no-one was being cooperative, or maybe there just weren't any fanzines about to be brought for sale or display, but it was a damn shame nevertheless. This was the worst part of the whole affair, as far as I'm concerned. Fanzines are hard enough to get when you know more or less what they are and roughly where to get them, and for someone on the 'outside' the situation is more difficult. One of the best things about the institution of fanrooms has been the availability of fanzines, not only showing a vital and alive face of fandom, but giving easy access to the uninitiated. Collick's one table covered with a thin layer of scruffy looking flyers somehow didn't quite carry on this socially-useful image. Still, it was the only real failure.

The events of the fanroom went over very well, especially the Trufan Factor, and even the panels seemed to attract good audiences that weren't entirely composed of inert and unresponsive lumps. The worst thing about fanroom panels is that you get three or four unreconstructed smartasses up there going on and on whilst the audience, trained no doubt to passive receptivity by years of reading science fiction, look on, despite constant enjoinders to intervene. Occasionally someone will lumber to their feet and offer what we might kindly call their thoughts, but the mass remains unmoved. Either this means the panelists are invariably experts who sum up the situation so conclusively no further comment is necessary, or no-one really gives a fuck in the first place. In either case I think it's time there was some heavy investigating done. However, occasionally something sticks in the brain.

Like, for example, at one point when I was on the fanzine reviewers panel (close to the end, so I suppose exhaustion had something to do with it) I found myself hovering dangerously on the edge of good-old-daysism. This is a sort of hysterical attack that makes everything one says sound like an assertion that everything was better 'then'. This 'then' has a lot of similarities to 'them' (which can be quite a lot, depending) and needs to be used with care or credibility vanishes like a Harrow student when in danger of buying a drink.

What I was saying - or what I meant to say, anyway, it's hard to tell what comes out halfway through a convention - was that back in the middle of the Seventies a whole bunch of people working in fanzines consciously felt - and had their feelings bolstered by the then current preoccupation with fanwriting standards - that what they were doing was not solely entertaining in its own right at the time but was in fact setting out a standard for writing and thinking in fanzines, and because their material can be looked back on with great pleasure today, the implication of the founding of new standards should also be taken as correct. The whole point of these 'standards' (which were of course never talked of as such, or ever named) was not to coerce fandom at large to write about any specific things, but to make it clear (as if it really wasn't obvious to anyone with half a brain in the first place) that in writing to a fanzine

there was no reason whatever not to apply the same standards as one would (or should) to anything else. That is, for christ sake make it literate, make it interesting, make the logic hold up, make the characters live, don't assume that it's just a fanzine, so it will be okay to produce some shit you'd be outraged to see anywhere else. Some basic standards of ability and consideration, that's what it was all about; that and the essential idea that just putting out a fanzine isn't enough, it has to be good as well.

Of course what went wrong, and the reason why all this now sounds to some of the people in that fanroom audience, and even to me a bit, like good-old-daysism, is that the unexpected happened and the continuity of it all lapsed. No one ever imagined that some great disaster might overtake our complacent little world and civilization as we knew it might be swept away; partially renewed by what might be the lower orders, straggling in the mud, groping Riddley Walker-like towards the truth about time back way back (or are they? Was there a time back way back?) and creating their own funny little civilization that such as I might happen into and discover that, just like that utterly unlikely alternate world where things are different, things are not like they were. Of course the villain of all this is the Worldcon. The great divider of fandom in recent times. It's just as if everything was H-bombed flat and fandom as it was vanished without a trace, creating a gap - in which there existed nothing for the new rising sons of fandom to see as good fanzines and gauge their own efforts against - across which I now point and make incoherent noises that sometimes sound embarrassingly like good-old-daysism.

The trouble with all this, though, is that everyone comes to fandom and fanzines as if they've just invented it for themselves, which is not only alarmingly solipsist but also as far as I'm concerned is totally fucking stupid. It would never occur to me to try and do something without checking on how it had been done before, and moreover, not doing it at all if I felt I couldn't at least equal the people who'd come before me. Which is why I was outraged when some character at the convention said, more or less, to hell with the past, we don't need to know; man, we do it all our way etc. Okay, fair enough, if you can do it better, by all means abandon the past (as indeed British fandom did in the early Seventies), and while you're at it kick out any obsolescent ideas and attitudes too, but do it carefully. And remember, just because it's a fanzine doesn't mean it's good or even interesting.

Fortunately I didn't spend all my time in the fanroom locked into that sort of nonsense. Although some other sequences were, essentially, just as farcical.

At the first Yorcon in 1979 there'd been a party in the fanroom that had exceeded everyone's expectations. There'd been some drink, and some music, and a bunch of people, but for once it all came together quite spontaneously and before anyone really knew what was happening it had turned into a real party. This was as much of a surprise to Ian Williams, who was organiser for that year, as anyone else, and typically enough certain strong-arm measures had to be taken against him to prevent him turning down the music and turning on the lights, and thus fucking everything up completely.

Crazed with desire to emulate this happy accident John Collick in 1981 decides to organize it this time. And not once, but twice. Like fools or suckers looking for free action (or essentially good-hearted and helpful all star fans - take your choice) Linda and I agree to organise them for him, and provide music and drink. The closer the convention gets the more stilted and artificial the whole idea gets, so boxing clever I get Collick not to put 'Parties organised by..' in the programme book. I got enough trouble already, better to do this one undercover, if at all. Of course the whole thing is doomed to failure.

I have this handy-dandy recipe for a fairly foul but strong punch for occasions like these, composed of sherry, vodka, and cider. As we (or at least I) was always late in setting up the drink table there was always a horde of desperate dipsomaniacs at the mixing bowl like dying men as soon as I poured in anything at all. I'm sure no one at all got anything remotely like the correct mixture, most of them going away with cups of neat cider or vodka or sherry or halfassed mixtures thereof. Yet they still returned for more, more desperate with every visit, and they even drank absolutely fucking gallons of Mike Dickinson's utterly unpalatable homemade wine, which I guess proves that something for nothing is alright whatever it is. Of course evryone pissed off right after all the drink vanished, so Collick's (and ours' too, honestly) of happy little fans dancing the night away vanished right quick. The only people who stayed were a bunch of sort of neo-hippies or something who got awkward when we got pissed off with it and turned off the music and split. Good intentions are not enough, and I think this is another point where the essentially public naute of the fanroom this year worked against things. If we'd all been in a real room elsewhere would people have stayed and played, like before? Maybe.

The only time I went into the main programme hall - apart from the disco - was to see who won the Doc Wier Award, and I wished I hadn't. When Bob Shaw said John Brunner had won it I felt like I'd been hit with a brick. I wasn't so much astonished as shocked. It just didn't seem possible. There was no way at all I could see any point that could justify his winning it. Okay, he certainly does attend British conventions regularly, and takes his place on panels willingly whenever invited, and yes indeed, back in the Fifties he was a fan and put out his own fanzine and so on, but this is fucking 1981, and as far as I can percieve any essentially fannish activity he may involve himself in is so slight or rarified as to be invisibib. This is, remember, a person who on being asked to lend his name to a presupporting list for an Eastercon bid, declined, saying "That's fan business, isn't it?". In fact I was so taken aback by the whole business I got on my high horse and went about asking people whether they'd voted for him or did they know anyone who had. Virtually no-one I asked had voted at all, and all those who had had voted for other people. Indeed the only person who I found that had voted for John Brunner was one Ina Shorrock, who had, fittingly, herself won the Doc Wier Award in peculiar circumstances (ie no-one could understand why) back in 1976. So what's going on.

Now, to clarify things, I have nothing whatsoever personally against John Brunner, and he has made it quite clear at the time and in

letters to fanzines since, that he was as surprised as anyone else to have taken the Award. And I'm sure he was pleased to accept it in good faith. But as far as I'm concerned the very fact that he got it without a good reason - or any reason at all in a fannish context - just makes the whole affair ridiculous and is probably the sign we all needed to make clear that things like the Doc Weir Award have lived out their time and should be abandoned.

Okay, so it's arguable that the Doc Weir Award has any value at all. Few people have any clear idea of what should be considered when casting a vote, and the majority of people at a convention either don't know about it anyway or don't care. According to the official notes the Award is presented to a fan "whose activities have not been previously honoured". The important bit here is fan, which I take to be someone whose activities (whether or not they are to be honoured in any shape or form) take place primarily in the arena of fandom proper, which means fanzines, conventions, or just generally contributing a lot by force of personality to these essentially fannish pursuits. And no matter how much I stretch my credibility I can't fit Brunner into that.

Now we all know the Doc Weir is a rig up anyway. The way it goes is that every year little bunches of people get the idea that so and so ought to win and they then go about conning and coercing all and sundry into voting for them. I know this is true because I've done it myself, and I'm sure it was done on my behalf when I won in 1978. Note that, on my behalf. No-one has ever canvassed votes for themselves, or proposed themselves for the Award - it's always done by a group or person on the behalf of someone else, who is always kept as much in ignorance as possible. This is fact is the only way the thing can continue. Without these little pressure groups no-one would ever remember to vote. Winning depends at least as much on how many people look favorably on you as much as what a hot-shit fanac artist you are. The real point is though, that in every case since the beginning in 1963 the recipients, with the signal exceptions of Ina Shorrocks and John Brunner, have actually been real live active fans who had, either during the year immediately previous, or for a substantial period of time beforehand; done notable and interesting things within the context of fandom at large, and have, in most cases, continued to do so ever since.

What I'm getting at here is that the Award isn't just another popularity poll or award for long service, or a prize for con-attendance. And it's for a fan. And, really, it has to be for someone who, when winning it, can actually be pleased to get it because they know, in their hearts, that they deserve it, that they have done things in and for fandom that deserve a bit of praise in public.

This year all these notions seem to have been abandoned, and as far as I'm concerned if no-one any longer knows or cares the real point of the Award (which becomes increasingly likely) rather than just let it peter out into something meaningless we ought to junk the whole damn thing completely.

Fandom has probably outgrown it all anyway.

WHY I DID NOT WIN TAFF.

First we go back, back in time. It is somewhen in the first half of 1981. Linda, myself, and Robert Hansen are in the Queen Victoria in Ealing. It is a Sunday, and the Friends in Space meeting has just begun. It's a slow time. We are sitting about aimlessly, bored with arguing whether any one Jack Kirby comic is worth entire runs of X MEN, or the possibility of enjoying films like STAR WARS without shutting down whole tracts of one's critical faculties. Such was our mental lassitude in those far-off days before the deluge of Harrow Tech Students. Then Hansen speaks.

"Why don't you stand for TAFF?" he says to me.

I look at him as if he's fucking crazy.

"You must be fucking crazy," I tell him clearly, and dismiss the notion by going to buy another round.

On my return he brings it up again, this time with Linda in firm support. I look at him as if he's fucking crazy, but no longer bother to tell him so.

This goes on for some time, along with the drinking. The trouble is that the more pints of Guinness I drink the more plausible the whole thing seems. Hansen's arguments about me being a big-deal fan (or, rather, a one-time big deal fan, a condition which is almost a prerequisite for winning TAFF, we both agree), having been in fandom for ages, having done knockout fanzines (I agree easily to this), and generally changed fandom as we know it (or used to know it anyway) take on a kind of drunken realism, somewhat akin to those times when you're drunk enough to feel cool and loose without being quite drunk enough to realise what a pissed asshole you're actually being. Linda, of course, is keen on any scheme which would give us an extra trip back 'home', especially to a convention where she could meet her friends in US fandom. All this begins to tell.

It turns out that there's only one other contender, Alan Dorey. Huh, I say. Alan Dorey! He only wants to go because he's marrying an American himself, so obviously he'll want a free trip over there now. What's he done anyway, only about three good fanzines out of seven, and put the BSFA back on it's feet, as if anyone cared. Hah, I say, I've got just as much right to stand as he has, even if I haven't come anywhere near the surface of fandom for longer ago than I can remember. I've got my own American too, I add defensively. Actually, unlikely as it may seem, Dorey probably has his following - all those berks in South London will vote for him whatever. Still, there might just be enough people on my side to give me a fair shake, and Linda reckons she can drum up a fair bit of support for me in the US. Weird scenes flash through my mind.

Of course it isn't that simple. If I won I'd have to go to the bloody Worldcon, for a start - a high price to pay for a free trip - but maybe I could just sort of drop in for an afternoon or something.

Anyway, somehow I find I'm saying things like "Oh yeah, wow, not a bad idea Rob", and when Malcolm Edwards turns up later on I say to him with only a slight trace of embarrassment, "I'm going to stand for TAFF, how about nominating me?"

He looks at me like I'm fucking crazy.

Time passes. Thank God.

Other people get active, but not me. Linda contacts Rich Coad in San Francisco, who goes wild with enthusiasm and says he'll nominate me and find someone else to also do so, and swears he'll work like a maniac whipping up support. She also persuades me to contact Dave Langford, the last winner and current administrator, and ask for all the true facts. Hansen keeps telling me what a great idea it is. Personally, I find the rosy glow had vanished into the hangover of the morning after, and I am left with the stark truth, and it pleases me not.

What I've done, of course, is sell all my principles down the river. Rather than standing for TAFF because I was carried there by popular demand, and having great personal faith and commitment to the Very Idea of it, and wanting to go to the Worldcon and meet lots of wonderful American fans, and generally represent Britain, and then write about the whole damned thing at tedious length afterwards, and then - God help us - ~~run~~ the whole show next time around as though it was of some importance, what I'm actually involved in is the sort of cynical ripoff that would rouse me to scorn and fury if perpetrated by, say, Ian Maule. I really don't give a fuck about TAFF, I've already been to an American Worldcon and found it one of the worst events I've ever witnessed and certainly wouldn't recommend it, I certainly don't see myself as representative of British fandom, the idea of having to write about it afterwards fills me with an inert cold dread, and the thought of all that organisation and fundraising makes me wanna lie down. It's all a farce. Even the fact that in my heart I feel I deserve to be a contender at least as much as Dorey fails to make the whole fucking mess any more attractive, so at the earliest possible moment I stop talking about it and hope everyone else forgets it too.

Then one dreadful day my dinner is interrupted by Dave Langford with one of those awful phoecalls during which I'm not sure he understands what I'm saying and I'm sure I don't understand what he's on about. It finally appears that Coad has sent in a nomination for me. Am I going to go through with it? And by the way, Kevin Smith is also running. Kevin Smith! This is too much! Not only is he one of about three British fans who could actually afford to flit over to America any time they took it into their heads to do so, but he's someone who I would never ever have thought of as a TAFF contender. I can't even think of why he's running, or who's nominating him. Bloody hell. Also, I see with sudden clarity that Dorey and Smith are most likely to take votes from each other, and I'd be bound to benefit from this. Too much, indeed. If he can do it I can too. Visions of free planerides sweep my brain, crowding out the little signs saying 'Morality' and 'Honour' and 'Do the Right Thing'. I resolve to harden my heart and be cynical. I almost convince myself that

thirteen years and all that in fandom gives me the right to run for TAFF, irrespective of my true feelings. In jig time I secure nominations from Harry Bell, Malcolm Edwards, and Rob Hansen (all of whom are fully aware of my attitude), and Linda sets me up with another American nominator named Garth Danielson. It's all green lights now. All I have to do is send \$5, a declaration of intent, and an electoral platform saying what a terrific person and super fan I am to Langford and I've virtually got it. Ho ho. Anyway, I reason to myself, TAFF is all a bloody shambles these days anyway.

Suddenly it's another Sunday, and we're in the Friends in Space meeting hall again. Alan Dorey's there, and he tells me he's quitting TAFF. For exactly the same reasons I'm still struggling to suppress. Heartily I try to convince him to take a cynic's standpoint - mostly on the grounds that foul deeds are best done in company - but much to his credit this feeble and pernicious persuasion does not take. Next morning I resolve that if Alan Dorey is going to play the white man I am too, and it's a damned sight better example to follow.

The final date for sending in declaration, money, and platform approaches, and I do nothing. The day after the final day arrives, and I've done nothing. Dave Langford phones me to find out what's happening and I make excuses but don't tell him I'm not standing. Not because I still want to, but because I have this obscure feeling I'm letting him down by withdrawing at this late date. Then I feel even more guilty about not telling him, and finally phone. "Listen, Dave, I've got some bad news.." He does not sound happy, even through the usual fog of mutual incomprehension. Afterwards, I feel surprisingly free, and altogether happy.

All of which brings us right up to date, with Kevin Smith the only entrant, and Langford, apparently under the impression that if no-one wants to stand for TAFF it's his own personal fault, dashing about like a blue-arsed fly dragging people out of all kinds of holes and corners and putting the con on them. Apparently there is a certain lack of individuals rushing to include themselves in this rather outdated popularity contest. There is even a rumour from a usually good source that Jim Barker, who lost the last TAFF contest to Dave Langford, is under pressure to stand again. Which is not necessarily ludicrous in itself, but surely becomes so when one realises that Barker went anyway to the same Worldcon as Langford, at least partially on the proceeds of a fund set up to let him go even though he'd lost the 'official' contest. Which to my way of thinking makes a mockery of the whole proceedings, and creates a situation where individuals might just as well announce their intention of going to a foreign convention and sit back and wait for people to send them money out of the sheer goodness of their hearts. Dispense with all these time-wasting polls entirely. Even Rob Hansen, who's only been in fandom five minutes, was seriously put forward as a potential candidate by someone as usually level-headed as Harry Bell (who is in fact as deserving a candidate as one might reasonably expect to find, more so than myself, Dorey, or Smith, come to that). Fortunately, though, Hansen declined the idea, mainly because of his sharing of certain ideas I've had about TAFF recently, which I lost no time in sharing with Bell when he phoned to enlist my help in persuading Hansen to stand.

Having come face to face with TAFF as a potential candidate, I found I was actually thinking about the whole thing for the first time, something I've rarely bothered to do in the past except on those occasions when the candidates were individuals to whom I might freely attach the pejorative 'arseholes'. Sure enough, on examination TAFF proves to be like so many other worthy causes that persist on the goodwill of the masses; there's something at least decayed at the heart of it, if not yet completely rotten.

TAFF was a terrific idea back in the Fifties when it originated as a one-off to get the semi-mythical Walt Willis from Northern Ireland to meet fans in the US. Indeed it worked so well it turned into a regular thing, with US and British fans winning a popular vote and a grant of popularly-collected money to travel across on an alternate basis. It seemed like the best, if not only way, that the two fandoms could keep up some semblance of personal contact. Those days it was important, and people cared about it, and it had a genuine function.

Nowadays it has all deteriorated into a fannish ritual of much the same stamp as 'Guests of Honour' at conventions, something done because 'it has always been done and anyway people expect it', rather than because there's any real need, or in fact honour in it at all. TAFF is an outdated ideal, a denial that things have changed in the world and fandom in the last thirty years, merely a seedy competition between at least partially self-seeking opportunists with a handful of money and futile and spurious prestige at the end of it.

The whole essence of TAFF lay in the facts of life of the Fifties, the most relevant one being the prohibitive cost of transatlantic travel. That situation has changed completely. Far from being an almost unimaginable indulgence almost anyone can now with a certain amount of effort - and/or some clean credit cards - get to the United States (or conversely, Britain) with comparative ease, especially with the knowledge that fans on both sides are willing to give free accomodation to any visiting fan, TAFF winner or not. This, obviously, isn't because we're all so fucking rich, but because travel costs are so comparatively low. If that sounds like an exaggeration I'll say that I went to the last US worldcon in Boston, and I haven't got two pence to rub together most of the time, and a lot of British fans are somewhat better off financially than I am. So in this day and age there's little justification for TAFF on the grounds of being the major maintainer of contact between British and American fandom.

TAFF was begun, remember, back in the time back way back when fandom was smaller. Everyone had at least heard of everyone else, cons were places one went to to meet people, and a visiting fan from overseas was a big event. None of this is the same today. Even British conventions are so large as to submerge the essentially fannish group that has the strongest ancestral links with TAFF, and American Worldcons - the cons to which British TAFF winners are expected to travel, are fucking enormous, and largely disinterested, or ignorant of TAFF. Far from being someone on whom at least weak limelight continually shines, the TAFF winner is likely to spend his time wandering aimlessly in an uncaring crowd.

There's not even any real clarity about why any given individual should win TAFF. Is it supposed to be for being such great all-round fellows? Knockout writers? The heroes around whom all fannish anecdotes revolve? Or is there any reason to suppose they are actually supposed to be representing their fandom in some sense, being able to give the group into whose midst they have been precipitated a clear and knowledgeable view of what is in fact going on on the other side? Whether any or all of these notions applies, the facts certainly don't seem to support the old idea that a fan is put up for TAFF on any kind of popular support. In the old days fans were keen for one of their number who had a particular interest in and for American fandom (say) to get on the ballot with a hope of visiting what was then thought of as fandom's Promised Land. Nowadays it is hard to think of any who is such a sparkling personality or so Americophile that their candidature is a foregone conclusion. No-one is any longer asked or persuaded to stand by their friends or associates; it's customary to get one's nominators after taking the decision to stand. The attitude of voters isn't a lot better either; merely thinking of so-and-so as an ok guy isn't good enough. This is reducing what was a fine and honorable idea to the same small stature of those convention committees prepared to take any handy sf professional as their 'guest of Honour', whether or not they or their work have actually been deserving of any honour whatsoever. It's a sort of aimless 'show must go on' thinking that takes no account at all of true value and worth. God, what a refreshment it would be to see 'Hold over funds' win TAFF, or a con without a Guest of Honour, or even, for christ's sake, 'No Award' win a Hugo! But that would be expecting too much of science fiction fandom.

Anyway, what are they supposed to do when they win? Stand around looking cute and foreign? One could go on at some length about the deficiencies of TAFF winners over the years. From this British standpoint it's especially easy to criticise the Americans, whose 'delegates' (a quaint appellation for TAFF winners, applied just as if they had, or were indeed able to carry out some mission or other) in the last several years have been often woefully ignorant of British fandom in its contemporary state and did little to involve themselves in it, and even those who seemed to have some knowledge and interest in things as they actually were (rather than as they were portrayed in fannish legend) failed signally to make much of an impression of themselves on fandom over here. This is not, incidentally, to say they were inadequate individuals per se, for likely as not had they turned up without the trappings and responsibilities of TAFF status they might have operated at a totally different level and easily found their niche in British fandom. I've no doubt at all that British TAFF winners engender much the same feelings in the United States. All this is intrinsic to a system in which winners are chosen primarily on their written personality. It seems to have occurred to no-one to consider what Little Jimmy Fan is actually going to be like when you meet him face to face.

So, anyway, what do we have right now? Dave Langford rushing around trying to scare up candidates to spare Kevin Smith the embarrassment of beating 'Hold Over Funds' - there's nothing surer than fandom would decide anyone should win rather than the sacred tradition slip.

Well, here we are at the end of the day. We have this institution that seeks to send a representative fan (impossible) by means of an (unnecessary) popular subscription awarded by a (pointless) poll to make some sort of worthwhile contact with alien fandom (unlikely). This may well have been a worthwhile proposition in times when things were smaller and we all had the same scripts, before fandom became so fragmented, and when we were all poorer than we are now (even counting inflation) but now it is just a tradition, supported because it's there. It's painful to think of all the organisation and fund-raising and grand gestures that go to keep this pointless charade going, most of them carried out by people who believe in what they're doing only because they haven't stopped to think about it. Even on the simplest level of are they likely to meet the TAFF winner at all, after having made a specific effort to buy something in fundraising auctions, donate some convention proceeds to the fund, or even go so far as to vote. Which not bloody many do, let it be remembered.

I suggest that instead of Dave Langford and any other TAFF organisers busily trying to con people into standing they should simply put forward a proposition to lay the whole thing decently to rest, abolish it in the name of changing times and circumstances, do away with it because the fine principles and intentions that birthed it no longer apply. Let it all be stopped positively, and for clear reasons, rather than let it degenerate into a shabby contest between pressed men, none of whom could be honourable winners, eventually to peter out aimlessly, a miserable mockery of what it once was.

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On reading the above explanation of my attitude towards TAFF I notice that some parts of it might be taken by people determined to misrepresent what I mean to be a personal attack on Kevin Smith, the sole contender as of 23rd August 1981. This is not so. In view of what I have said it should be clear that I do not think there is any longer such a person as a suitable contender for TAFF, and therefore Kevin Smith is no better or worse than, say, myself.

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And that's that. The end of my first fanzine for three and a half years. Don't think it hasn't been a hellish experience, or a cheap one. At the moment of finishing it I don't feel this is my best fanzine ever, but, fortunately, it isn't the worst either. Better luck next time. All that's left now is to mention this issues recommended book - RIDDLEY WALKER by Russell Hoban, a genuine novel set in a remarkably convincing post-disaster world. It's hard to read in some ways, being written in the argot of its time, but it is a true sf novel in that it speculates reasonably and without false drama and heroics about a world in which the very ideas that compose our civilization have been lost, and how some people work their way painfully back to awareness. A brilliant piece of work. Should have won a Hugo, but is too good.

Greg Pickersgill

