

WILD SHARKAH

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FROM THERE TO HERE, FROM HERE TO THERE

*A report from my visit to Great Britain, London, and especially
the SPECULATION con in Glasgow 29.3. - 1.4. 91.*

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From Prague to London

I decided to go by bus as it's much cheaper than the train (the cost of a train ticket almost equals the cost of an air ticket). The journey took about 24 hours but wasn't as exhausting as I had expected. We departed from Prague in the evening and at 7 a.m. I woke up and found out that the bus was in Brussels. In this city I couldn't see more than the building sites full of cranes and workers whose colourful helmets reminded me of the LEGO figures (only they didn't smile as optimistically as the LEGO ones, but moved very vividly and worked very intensively, which was surprising for me; I am used to builders without helmets working very slowly and passively).

By noon we crossed the Channel on a ferry. Another surprise for me: the ferry is so big, with a lot of space, and with some shops, bars, restaurants, cinema... My former idea of a ferry was very misty but I had imagined a flat plain deck with passengers standing at the iron railings in the cold wind and showers of icy sea water...

The British immigration officers in Dover were quite strict indeed. In particular they don't allow into Britain young people who can't prove that somebody invited them for a visit, because they are suspicious that they intend to stay and work in Britain. From each bus which comes from Czechoslovakia the officers pick a couple of people and make them return (it would not be so unpleasant if these people would be prevented from going to the UK while they were still in Prague, and so the visa requirement doesn't seem such a bad idea to me).

However, I could show the officer the invitation letter which Caroline Mullan had sent me just for this purpose, I could tell him that I had left my family in Prague, and I really amused him with a self-confident statement that *I intend to publish some British science fiction authors in Czechoslovakia*, so I was allowed to enter to the United Kingdom.

British landscape is fascinating - so different from our landscape full of ploughed land. Green meadows, sheep, hedges. And London! So vast that we went through its suburbs for one or perhaps two hours and still weren't in the city center. The old-fashioned doubledecker buses surprised me - I didn't expect them in such numbers - perhaps only a few as attractions for tourists.

What made me really mad, was driving on the left side of the roads. I was terribly confused all the time, and when I had to cross a street, I rushed across it as quickly as possible, turning my head in every direction and keeping an apologetic smile - though I *could* learn it as it's carefully written on each pedestrian crossroad *LOOK LEFT* or *LOOK RIGHT* I could never drive a car in England!!!

My London holidays

The bus from Prague to London goes only once a week, and so I needed for one weekend con to spend two weeks in Great Britain. Of course I didn't mind it. I had been in Britain only once, ~~when I was fourteen years old~~, and I couldn't remember more than Madame Tussaud's and some *ducks on the pond* - the moment I saw St James's Park I realized that *this is my memory of the London ducks*. I liked them as much as in my childhood and I watched them for a whole afternoon.

(I had a penfriend in England, somewhere in Hants, and we invited her to Czechoslovakia. She came exactly at the moment when the Soviet troops occupied us in 1968, so she has the experience of Soviet tanks in Prague streets.)

Staying in Britain is extremely expensive for us Easterners (usually I explain it very simply: the exchange rate is so horrible that I earn 2 or 3 pounds per day, but here in Czechoslovakia that's enough money for everything I need), so I am enormously grateful to the British fans who helped me and supported me. I stayed in the houses of several fans, and I got some money from the Eastercon organisers and from the FATW (Fans Across the World) organisation.

For the first five days in London, I stayed in the house of a coworker of Cyril Simsa (a British fan whose parents emigrated from Czechoslovakia in 1948 after the communist revolution, and who learned Czech quite well, which is really admirable, and tries to propagate Czechoslovak sci-fi in Great Britain). Cyril's coworker isn't a science-fiction fan at all but she is a very nice woman, a feminist and a graduated literary theoretician. She came to London from Yugoslavia four years ago, and so she could understand my Czechoslovak background wonderfully.



This is a small demonstration of a comics series which I write a scenario for. A parody, of course.

One of the greatest impressions for me came from the British Museum, especially the Fight of the Centaurs with the Lapiths (when I observed it, some feminist thoughts came to my mind, especially why men's bodies aren't considered as beautiful as women's; these muscular warriors in the tension of their effort are REALLY BEAUTIFUL, and it hasn't much to do with the sexual attractiveness; women, let us ask for more beautiful men in advertisements, in art and everywhere!) - but what was most surprising and in a way almost unbearable for me were the Egyptian mummies. I didn't expect them to exist in such a big number and such a good shape. For me, mummies had always been full of secret, of magic, and so difficult to imagine at all; and suddenly there they were, in glass vitrines, one beside the other, rows of mummies, with all their colours and hieroglyphes and magic signs - the room was stuffed with mummies. And you can stare at them and no curse, no damnation will strike you, and everything is so sober and ordinary around you.

Another great impression was the Museum of Moving Pictures, which is arranged in a very American style, with lots of opportunities for children to try some activities on their own. I stayed there almost one whole day and I just absorbed the

culture - the movie stars of the fifties and sixties and the funny speeches of the costumed guides and the chatting of children and the TV ads and so on and so on. I went to this museum instead of going to the International Book Fair which was held in Londo at that time - which was perhaps strange - but I somehow felt that every big bookstore involved as much information for me as the book fair - that I was simply saturated and not able to absorb more knowledge about books. I needed exactly something as childish as the Museum of Moving Pictures.

I ate in Mc Donald's quite often but I didn't find its food so unhealthy or bad-tasting: I quite liked it. The only thing that irritated me was the unnecessary wrapping of everything, even of food you didn't want to take away, and the immediate smashing of all the paper bags, stirring poles, paper napkins etc. into the garbage, even the unused ones.

I like that people needn't cook every evening and can take-out their food from some Chinese, Italian, Indian etc. restaurant, or they can go out for dinner, at least from time to time. It's really relieving and makes life more pleasant and less monotonous and tiring. I especially liked the Greek restaurant with very exotic meals, such as fried squid.

I spent one evening with Judy Hanna and Joe Nicholas who are extremely nice people. It's hard to believe that they (especially Judy) are able to produce something so sarcastic as the FTT fanzine. But of course this is exactly the type of humour that I like best.

Now I must say something about how I coped with English conversation. My comprehension of spoken English differed with various people. Some people I understood wonderfully, but others I couldn't understand at all, despite their efforts to speak clearly. Usually the latter sort of people also couldn't understand me. It's really dreadful when you find out that you didn't learn English but some sort of school-generated "Czechlish", as some people used to call it. With Judy, it was a bit like this. She stated that there was something wrong with her hearing but she obviously caught every word of Cyril's girlfriend Caroline who spoke extremely quickly and quietly... But I must not be so pessimistic. My understanding definitely became better after two weeks in the UK.

The first day in London, I rushed to the Tower (and I found there queues of Japanese people with clicking cameras - and I realized that the wave of Japanese tourists still hasn't reached Prague, though Prague is quite a fashionable touristy place by now), then I went through St Catharine's Docks and to the Design Museum. It was really fascinating for me, especially the contemporary design, such as the toys for disabled children. Generally, looking at the London's historical buildings and art was not *utterly overwhelming* for me as I can see something roughly similar in my country. But I was very strongly impressed by the very contemporary buildings, art and other things, as I haven't seen anything similar in my country! (This says something about the sad fate of Czechoslovakia in the last four decades.)

I went by subway to the Embankement, got out and went straight into the demonstration against the poll tax! It was great. Drums, shouting, singing, dancing, posters, leaflets, people collecting money - everything altogether new for me. Our demonstrations in 1989 were very quiet and disciplined; people weren't used to expressing their anger, emotions, or anything

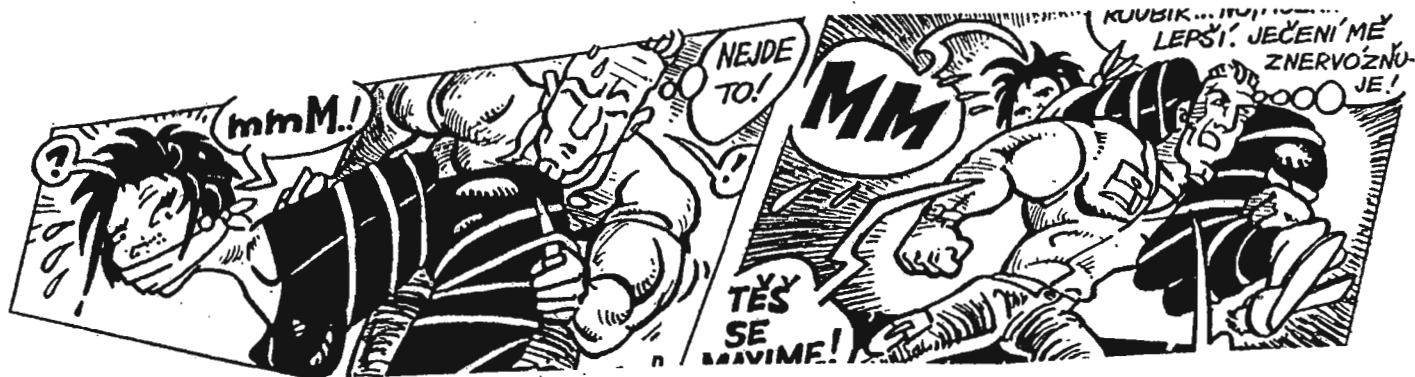
like that. I was also surprised that there exists something like the CLASS WAR NOW movement - red hammers and sickles, red flags, marxism. What still attracts people to these thoughts? I can't imagine it. (I must explain that of course I am not a rightish person, but the only reasonable view of the world seems to be the environmental one - the threats and the acute needs are so obvious! How can anybody think about classes, revolution and such things which have nothing in common with the reality?)

I had enough time to go to most of my places of interest. The weather was cold, rainy and windy, and so I spent a lot of time in museums, galleries, bookshops (especially in Silver Moon, Forbidden Planet and some second-hand stores). I enjoyed sitting on the upper deck of the red buses and looking around at the streets, so I spent much more time travelling on the buses than was really necessary for the purposes of transport.

In the Tate Gallery there was an exhibition of Max Ernst pictures that I really enjoyed. I didn't know much of him before; I like his intellectual and playful style which so clearly reflects his era with all its movements, like dadaism, surrealism and so on.

Of course it was great for me to see Trafalgar Square, Charing Cross, Soho, Piccadilly Circus, Buckingham Palace, the Horse Guards, Big Ben, the Houses of Parliament... I was lucky that in this week, before Easter, in most churches there were rehearsals for Easter concerts and masses. So in Westminster Abbey or in St James's church I listened to Easter singing and music, and it was beautiful.

Cyril showed me around an enormously big market in the North of London (I don't know the exact location any more). Lots of picturesque goods and picturesque people. Every minute there you can see something interesting, new, surprising or exotic, to the point that you become completely weary and unable to absorb any other new impressions.



I also met Sarah Lefanu, an editor of Women's Press, whose book *In the Chinks of the World Machine* impressed and influenced me deeply last year as it was the first book about women and SF that I ever read, and it provided a lot of thoughts and information about the topic. She is really great - has exactly the kind of dry humor that I like, and shares my experience of being a working mother involved in both the creative work and in raising children - but she has three kids and younger than are mine, so I really admire her!

Speculation

I spent another day in a bus on a way to Glasgow; the roads were jammed as everybody travelled for the Easter holidays. Finally, Thursday in the evening, I met Caroline Mullan,

Bridget Wilkinson from the FATW, Lynn Ann Morse, and Barbara Jane, a Scottish fan who was recently in Prague (we called her *a girl with a bear* as she brought everywhere a toy bear with two heads; in Glasgow, she had a live rat crawling on her neck and shoulders; quite cute). The first night I stayed in a flat of the local fans, Joan and Tibs, with several other fans. (I saw how the genuine fannish flat has to look, with books everywhere - on shelves, on the walls, in cases, in boxes on the floor...a sort of drug addiction, remarked Tibs. In Czechoslovakia it's different - there simply aren't so many Czech SF books and translations, and there also aren't people who could read so many English books in a comparably short time with pleasure. So you would have to collect all sorts of books for your flat to look like that.)

I took part in three panels: *Changing face of Europe*, *Biototechnology* and *Thirty pieces of silver, or what sells the SF*. Fortunately, Cyril helped me understand the queries and express what I wanted to say on all these panels.

The whole Speculation was held in one building, *Hospitality Inn*, which was quite comfortable. I hovered around between the programme and the bar and I tried to pick the British writers, show them *Ikarie* magazine and suggest they sell us some of their stories. The problem is that we pay very little (see the exchange rate - the royalty which is acceptable in Czech currency is simply funny in hard currency). I was surprisingly successful as all the writers were very kind and friendly and gave us all the stories we wanted. I've got *The Bone Forest* by Rob Holdstock, an *Interzone* story by Paul McAuley, a story by Malcolm Edwards and two stories from *The State of Art* by Ian Banks. David Garrett, Colin Greenland and Eric Brown were still nicer - they were interested in Czechoslovakia, in our publishing, and they were absolutely cooperative. I also got a promise from Jim Burns to send some pictures for publication in *Ikarie*. That would be really great!

Lisa Tuttle visited the con with her husband and her five week-old daughter Emily. I admired the baby, who was really lovely, and I realized that it's really better to have kids later in one's life, when you know what you want to do and you are somehow established in your work. Lisa is wonderfully relaxed about her work now and can concentrate on her daughter. She gave us some stories and I want to translate one of them.

I completely missed all the environmentalist and Green programs, which is a pity but it was simply beyond my possibilities and capabilities. The masquerade was rather different than the masquerades use to be in Czechoslovakia. Each mask gave a real performance and people could really acknowledge it, while at our cons, the masks just dance and nobody explains to you what the mask is like, or what it means.

I didn't go to the parties, as in the evening I was usually very tired. I observed that at the con there were perhaps two groups of people, though not completely distinct: one preferred masquerades, fun and parties, the other panels, discussions and books. I belonged definitely to the second one.

I stayed in the hotel with other fans for the second and third night of the con. The Hospitality Inn hotel has very spacy

rooms, with exceedingly wide beds and lot of comfort, so that four people could easily stay in a room for two.

I also got more knowledge about the small presses, magazines such as BBR, about the BSFA (Cyril payed the membership for me so I shall get Vector, Matrix and other materials), and about the work of the FATW organisation.

Sunday evening the awards ceremony of BSFA was held; Colin Greenland won the award in the novel category with his novel *The Last Days of Pompeii*, which is probably a witty sort of a space opera. Afterwards there was a party; Eric Brown introduced me to a member of a marxist revolutionary party and I talked with him for quite a long time. He said that the working class must start a revolution. I understand that at the moment socialism is discredited by the developments in the USSR (not to mention the reality of 40 years of Communism in Czechoslovakia), and that people may gradually become more leftist again. But I can't imagine who would fight this revolution, and how, and the guy perhaps doesn't have a very clear idea either.

He stated that the working class in Czechoslovakia must make a revolution, as it's unacceptable let the workers to bear the burden of the economical reforms, which promote unemployment etc. He thinks that only the highest peak of bureaucracy changed: that Havel was installed instead of a Party Secretary, and otherwise nothing changed. It may be true in Romania or the USSR, but not in Czechoslovakia. He had a clear image of ruling communists who have stayed on their posts. That's not true at all. The communists have been fired everywhere, which sometimes isn't even fair as they are good specialists. It would be best to judge people according to their professional abilities; but if "working class" would make a revolution and ban unemployment, neither the specialists nor the economical reforms could work...

Well, I think that's enough, you have an idea what our discussion was like.

There was several women from the BWA (international apa run by Amy Thomson from USA) at the Speculation. I spoke with some of them in a pancake place where we went to tea, and with some other in the entrance hall of the hotel, on Monday, when some people were already leaving. It's really much better to know the apa contributors personally; suddenly I have a feeling that I understand their contributions better.

I went with some other fans to the place which has been proposed for the WORLDCON 1995: an exhibition hall and a hotel. It's big and fancy and the large exhibition halls especially look like they can provide some really unconventional and creative possibilities for programs.

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Chester... and a last sight on London

From Glasgow I went to Chester where I stayed in the house of Alison and Mike Scott. I chose Chester as a nice historical place, and it was still better than I expected. It's a entirely preserved medieval town, with the complete city walls, Roman amphiteatre, lots of churches, museums, a marvellous medieval

cathedral, and so called "rows" - streets of houses which have arcades not only on the first, but also on the second floor. The houses themselves are very decorative, with white plaster and dark wooden constructions.

I walked around Chester the whole day and I enjoyed yet another nice day of my holidays.

In London, I visited two meetings of London SF fans: the Thursday one in Wellington's pub and the Friday one in the Cock Tavern near Euston Railway Station. They really differ from our Czechoslovakia SF clubs but don't differ so much from our Prague club RUR, where people from all the other Sf clubs come to chat and get news from one another.

I stayed in Caroline Mullan's house, which is older and bigger than the other houses I saw in Britain. I had a heavy and voluminous bag of books, magazines and various materials that I had bought or had been given, and so I felt it would please me most of all to sort the materials and to read through some of them. (And really, here back in Czechoslovakia I don't have time to read anything - what with my piles of correspondence, work in Ikarie, childcare, dogcare, catcare, husbandcare, housecare... what a happy day that was in London, in Caroline's house, where I read my magazines and didn't guard every minute!)

Luckily, Frank has installed the new computer (finally!) but it still can't write in Czech, so I must write in English. And that's why I finished this report so early!





The author of this monster is one of my sons.

SOME NEWS FROM THE LIFE OF CZECHOSLOVAK SCIFOIDS

(Scifoid is a person, a book or whatever connected or dealing with SF)

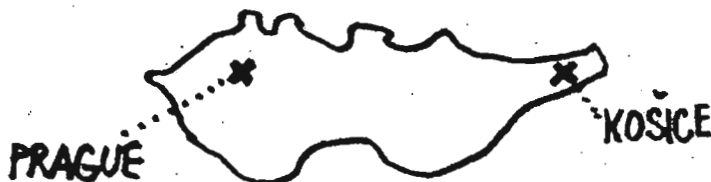
10. - 12.5. some scifoids will go to *Krakow*, where the *EUROCON 91* is held. However, the annual meeting of *WORLD SF* is split between *Krakow* and *China*, where the richest and most powerful scifoids will go in the same term: *Jaroslav Olsa, jr.*, my colleague editor from *IKARIE* magazine, will go to *China* of course!

27.4. - 28.4.91 was held a regular meeting of *Czechoslovak SF clubs* (one meeting is held each spring in the *Teplice* town, the other in autumn in *Sumperk*). About thirty chairmen and chairwomen of *SF clubs* discussed such topics as this year's fandom awards, our national con which will be held in August in the most eastern corner of our republic, in *Košice*, or bidding for the next national cons (we would like bidding very much, especially the parties, but there is not enough clubs or fans from various towns whoh would apply for it so eagerly).



Another of my colleague editors, *Ivan Adamovič*, has published recently an anthology of horror stories and comics - *Midnight Shadows* (*Půlnoční stíny*). He intends to publish a new issue twice a year. It's really a nice anthology: you can feel that the editor really loves horror.

The first weekend in June I shall organize a small con on our farmhouse, called *AGROCON*. In fact there is no much organising, just inviting a few people and chatting about biopunk. We have a biopunk *Sealing-Stick* (with a *Guard of the Sealing-Stick*), a biopunk *Conclave*, and a *Grand Master* (but he is secret so I can't tell who it is).



Our national con, *PARCON 91*, will be held in the most eastern corner of *Slovakia*, in *Košice*.