

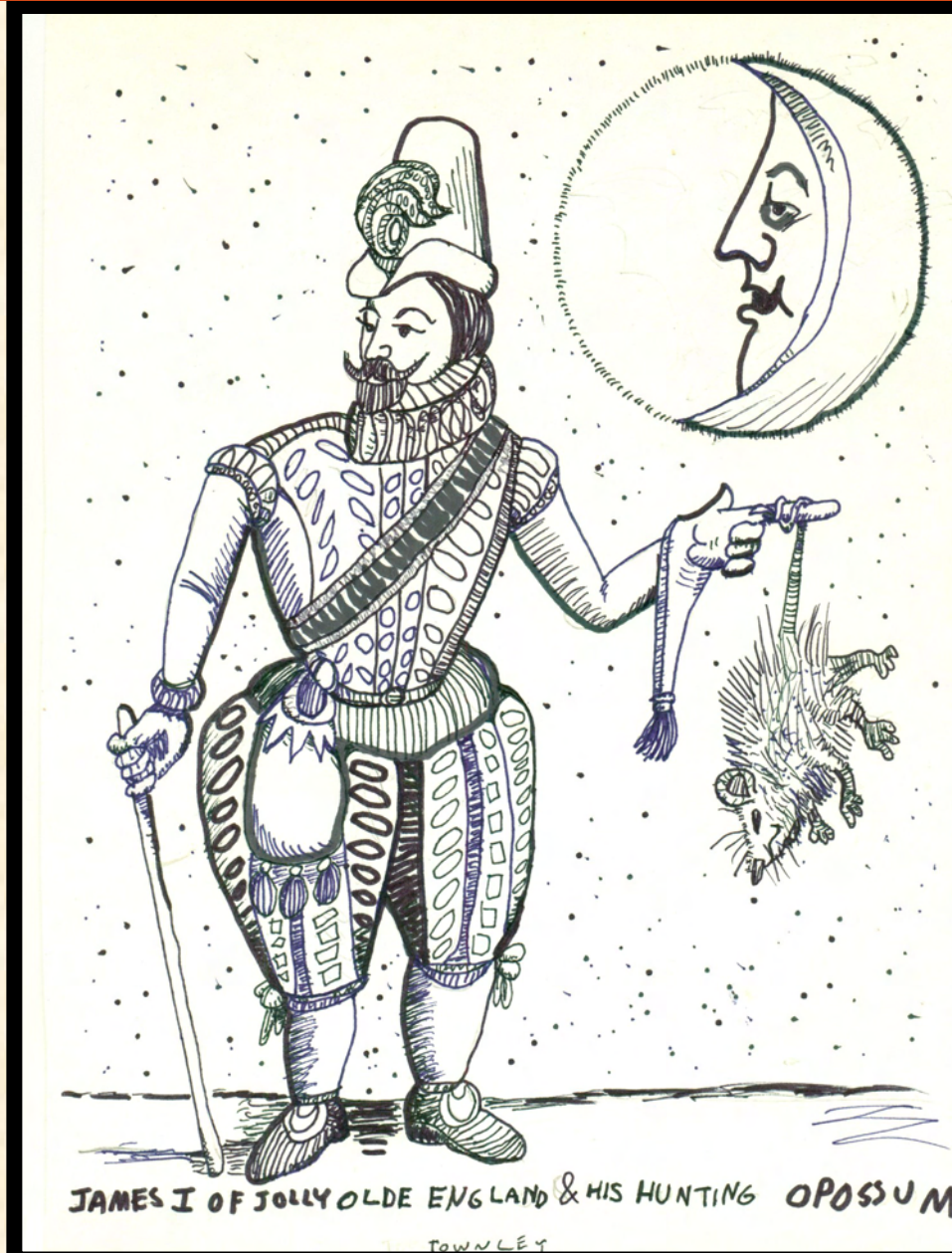
GROSS ENCOUNTERS #22

LOOK—IT'S BACK!



- *WEIRD STUFF
- *CARTOONS
- *COMMENT
- *REVIEWS
- *STAPLES

COVER ART BY THAT VERY NICE
BRUCE TOWNLEY



JAMES I OF JOLLY OLDE ENGLAND & HIS HUNTING OPOSSUM

DECEMBER 2012



- *TALL TALES
- *PARODIES
- *EXCUSES
- *WORDS
- *GOSSIP

INSIDE: CARTOONS FROM
HARRY BELL

DECEMBER 2012

GROSS ENCOUNTERS

ASTONISHINGLY SUSPENSEFUL TALES OF MYSTERY

THIS IS GROSS ENCOUNTERS #22 dated December 2012 and has come to you from ALAN DOREY who went out for a short break and, fourteen years later, returns to the fanzine fray.

Unfortunately, the cornershop was much further away than I had remembered and would you believe it, when I got there they didn't have any tea anyway. So, instead, I embarked on a series of escapades and adventures which took me to the four corners of the land—and to foreign shores as well. But when the energies ran low and my interests had peaked, it became time for a reflection and—boy, has the fanzine world changed.

It's all gone electronic and folks have got older and conventions seem to be popping up all over the place and...and...well, if you're reading this, it ain't exactly news to you.

So, let's start again. Gross Encounters—the first issue came out in January 1978, the last (# 20) in the summer of 1998. I did get half way through writing the next issue, vaguely intended for the millennium....but well, you know. So here we are with #22. Available on-line, as a pdf and for a select band of individuals, on paper. It's nice to be back.



alan10258@aol.com



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ALAN DOREY

9 Haywards Farm Close, Verwood, Dorset, BH31 6XW

OK COME IN

IN WHICH WE LEARN SOME INTERESTING FACTS

Fandom is a strange entity.

In many ways, it's a chosen microcosm of the world at large, but in others, it seems to obey its own laws of time and space. The late 1990s saw my activity increasingly head towards the back burner, taking its place amongst a host of other projects that sat there gently simmering away. I can't quite place my finger on the exact moment, but sometime between 1998 and the fuss over the new millennium, the shilling in the meter must have run out and the burner flickered no more. My last fanzine had been—let's be honest—a rough and ready affair aimed at a convention and even I could tell that my heart wasn't really in it. I never imagined that this time would come, but come it did and the trades dried up and my involvement with fan groups and fans fizzled out.

It's easy—looking back—to lay out all the competing elements of my life back then. A growing family. An increasingly responsible job—and a job that took me off on visits around the UK with overnight stays and free time that didn't really seem my own. And, for the first time in a while, we were comfortably off and started spending several weeks each year in the States visiting Rochelle's family and friends. My long-time interest in music was also coming

more to the fore and CDs and gigs seemed increasingly agreeable and affordable.

It all seemed fulfilling enough and the longer I spent away from fans and fanzines, conventions and meetings, it felt more and more like a pleasant warm memory rather than something vital to my being. It also gnawed away at me though, pangs of guilt popping up every once in a while—usually at the prompting of a name from the past on a Christmas card or some reference to this or that fanzine. I suppose I convinced myself that the longer I'd been away, the more tricky and awkward it would be just to float back in. This argument span round in my mind and the desire to “find out what so and so is up to” always tended to get cancelled out by the million and one other things I was doing.

Which is a pretty lame excuse, I grant you.

I was comforted in some ways by knowing that others had trodden similar courses in the past and, I did keep up with one or two fannish friends who usually tried to keep me abreast of all the latest news. This was all pretty feeble really, especially as I can recall writing on several occasions in the late 70s and early 80s that fandom is “life” and that things like work and families needed to accommodate it. Oh yes, nothing but the most definitive of statements will do for me!

But times change and “events, dear boy, events” as Prime Minister Harold MacMillan once said seemed to align themselves in the past few months to give me a bit of a rethink. What started as a move to

further promote my radio show by caving in and joining the facebook fraternity ended up reconnecting with some familiar names. And so dear reader, here we are, anxiously making up for lost time.

The Admin Bits

It hasn't all been quite leaping into the unknown. I was gratified to discover that others *too* had drifted away for a few years and the welcome back has been very heart-warming. I must thank Harry Bell for pushing at my half-open door and enticing me to return to the fold: I must also thank him and Roy Kettle for the cartoons that pepper this issue. It was also fortuitous that Bruce Townley purchased some new reading glasses and was thus suitably fired up to provide the cover artwork—a real Gross Encounter involving James I and that North American marsupial, the opossum.

I also spent some time scanning through the publications on Bill Burns' efanzines site to get a view on formats. That's why the pdf and on-line versions of Gross Encounters are landscape—so much better to fit wide-screen monitors. No doubt I'll have to think about tablet versions in due course, but that's for another day.

In the meantime—there's a fanzine to write.

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WHY I WRITE

It's one of those questions I often ask myself.

During my *lost weekend* I seem to have spent large amounts of time devoted to the task, often for the company I worked for, but also through my increasing involvement and interest in the world of

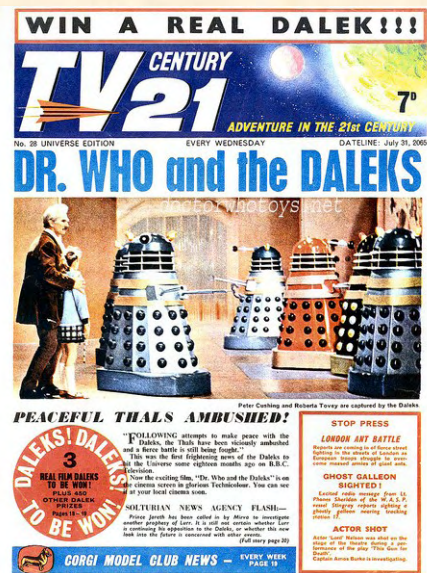


music. I've always been a music fan ever since my uncle bought a Beatles single for my younger sister Judy: needless to say it was Hey Jude and as she was not yet ready for such wonders, I borrowed it and fell instantly in love with the b-side, Revolution. I had

enjoyed music before that, watching Ready Steady Go, Top Of The Pops and all manner of entertainment shows in the hope that some decent band would turn up. The biggest let-down was the strange anticipation each Friday for Crackerjack, the popular children's show presented by Eamonn Andrews— and later, Leslie Crowther. It tried so hard to be hip, but even to my young eyes, I

could tell that they just hadn't got a clue. The let-down? The bastardised version of some chart hit by members of the cast in a *humorous* sketch at the end of each broadcast.

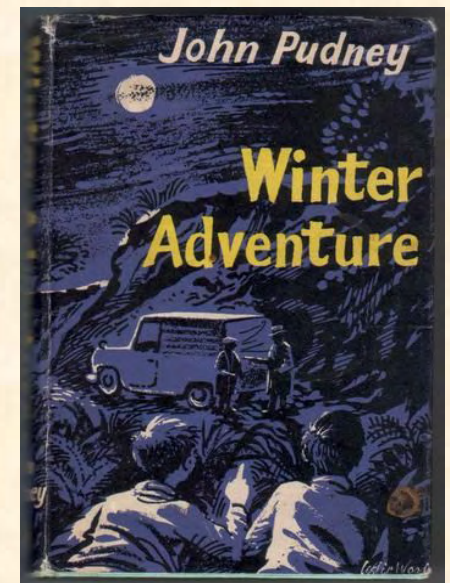
I won't dwell on the work-related writing—other than to say I was an Operations & Training Manager and it involved huge volumes of procedures, training materials, presentations and video scripts. And as for the music writings, these have led to the recent completion of a book collecting some of them together, complete with substantial new sections as well. What had been intended as a modest little effort for a few chums has ballooned into a 192 page volume and I'll come to this later on in this issue. The more eagle-eyed amongst you—those who have been Paying Attention—will have noticed that I haven't really answered my initial question. In essence, I write because I always have done.



I was encouraged to read before I started school, so from an early age, books and comics loomed large in my life. Inevitably, they proved to be an influence and led to my abiding interest in SF, a combination of TV21—and the Anderson TV shows—and Doctor Who causing me to write my own little stories. My primary school had only opened in 1963 and was pretty progressive, so

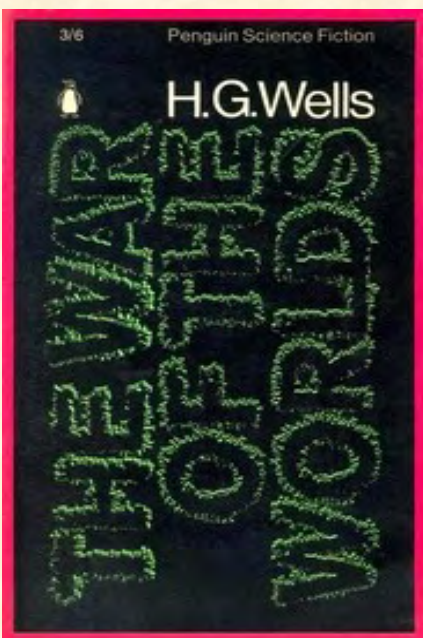
the teaching staff added to my interests by actively encouraging me to write without too much insistence on old-fashioned teaching methods. Thus, I had the freedom to write five or six page epics in my work books, rather than a grammatically correct and dull "What I Did On My Holidays" type piece. Concurrently I also discovered our local library, both my parents being keen members who'd borrow the full limit of books each week. It was housed in a converted chapel in the centre of Woking and what was once the vestry was given over to the Junior Library.

To my childlike mind, this nineteenth century gothic-style chapel was stunning and I couldn't wait to be taken there each week. I cleared the shelves—or so it seemed—within quite a short space of time: two writers linger in my mind—John Pudney who wrote a series of what I can only describe as juvenile thrillers ("Saturday Adventure was a particular favourite) and Malcolm Saville and his Lone Pine series. What both had in abundance was a treatment of youngsters as central to the stories, almost as if they were the only ones that mattered: and to me this was important and proved that I too could write my own material. Looking back, I'm sure if I read them now, my grown-up mind would



probably find them somewhat twee and middle-class. But hey, I did enjoy them and couldn't wait to get back into school each Monday and wait for English lessons to start so that I could add to my canon of self-penned epics.

My tales were a combination of elements gleaned from TV shows, those books, comics and my imagination: to me, it wasn't a chore but rather enjoyable churning out these stories. I was 9 in 1967 and although rather young for the summer of love, three good things did happen that year. The Apollo missions started; we had a new class teacher—and my grandmother gave me H G Wells' War Of The Worlds for my birthday. It had an odd cover, odd to my trained mind which expected white and orange, but nonetheless enticing. It was designed by Alan Spain and I still have that very copy with my



neatly written age and name on the title page. My grandmother bought it because she thought I'd be interested in the setting—my home town of Woking—which was very astute of her. Without realizing it, I not only became well and truly hooked on SF, but I also aped the great Wells in one regard: sadly, not my writing skills, but my desire to rush out on my bike and explore Horsell Common sand-pits where the first Martian cylinder had

landed and the heat rays burned all the pine woods.

I wrote about it at school, of course—and received even more encouragement from the new class teacher I mentioned earlier. He was probably not long out of teacher-training college, early twenties, looked like Manfred Mann in his “beatnik* days and had leather patches on his jacket elbows. His teaching style was a breath of fresh air: he showed us how to include dialogue in our work, how to make it sound realistic and—on occasion—allowed us to use emotive language. I'm sure he'd have drawn the line if I'd included the odd “bloody hell” (which even then was my curse of choice), but it did mean I could get increasingly creative without having to feel too strait-jacketed. I filled exercise book after exercise book and was always on the search for new sources of inspiration.

This is where Apollo 7 came in, the first of the manned missions of that legendary programme. I watched much of it on TV, marveling at the reality of space travel compared to some of the books I'd been reading. I decided at Christmas of 1967 that it was time for me to write a book, only it would be factual and packed full of all the latest space discoveries. I got Patrick Moore's book “Space” as a present—it was a large format hardback, glossy dust-jacket, some 300 pages, plenty of

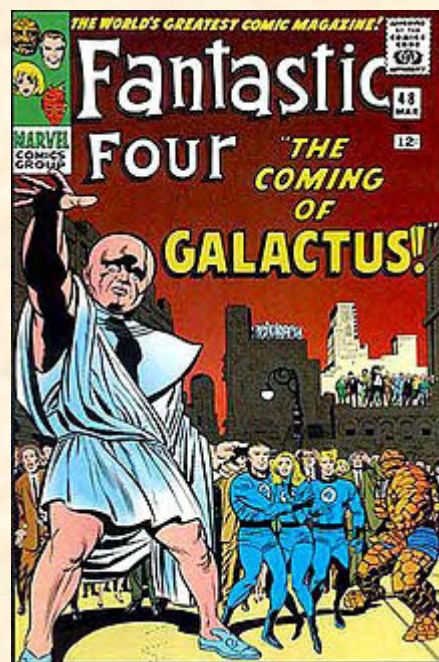


diagrams and illustrations and pictures and vitally for my enquiring mind, an appendix listing all the known satellite and manned spacecraft launches. I added my own appendix allowing me to add launches as they happened—which is where the idea of my own book came from.

There was another member of my class who seemed on the same wavelength and we'd meet at each other's houses, working away at our Grand Project. My uncle was a bookbinder, so paper supplies were free and endless which meant we could just keep expanding our work for as long as were interested in it. I drew my own diagrams of the solar system, outlined the component parts of the Saturn V rocket—and in a burst of artistic endeavor, decided that like Mr Moore, I too would have an appendix of satellites, only mine would have carefully crafted hand-drawn pictures of each one. I had to be a little inventive as pictures weren't easy to come by—and I can recall being amazed by the sheer volume of the Soviet Cosmos programme: I mean, over a 100 satellites. My innocent mind hadn't considered things such as The Cold War and Spy Satellites and I often wondered why the USA always seemed to be so far behind.

The book ended up being about 60 pages long—all hand-written and hand-drawn— and it was the talk of the class for a few days. I've no idea what happened to it subsequently; bit of a shame in retrospect.

The following school year, my last before the Eleven Plus exams in



the summer term of 1969, saw the Apollo programme get ever closer to the moon—but I'd eased up on my writing a little: football had intruded and I'd also found two local newsagents who were reliable stockists of Marvel Comics. There was only so much time in a day, dear reader. And our class teacher that year was the deputy head—early 60s I should imagine looking back and someone who seemed more interested in neat handwriting than imagination. He didn't seem too excited by my tales of adventure and derring-do, increasingly inspired by The Avengers and The Man From Uncle. I did manage one minor triumph over him though. One of the big *projects* that our group had to work on one term was



the history of the Royal Mail. I suspect this came about because some parental connection allowed us to have some large glossy posters depicting various aspects of the Royal Mail business and it seemed such a waste not to use them.

We were asked to write about “a poster of our choice”: they were all pretty uninspiring and the only one that had any promise was one titled “Motors”. It showed a number of lorries and trains used by the Royal Mail as it went about its business and my eyes lighted on that word Motors. The Man From Uncle had “Thrush”, Bond had “Spectre” and I would have “M.O.T.O.R.S”. After much thought, I decided that this stood for Military Organisation To Overthrow Russian Spies and my story-premise was set. There was plenty of action and spy-type high jinks and the only Royal Mail aspect to the narrative was a GPO telephones van being blown to bits by a bomb.

I don’t think the Royal Mail would have approved, but I was praised for my ingenuity: “Out Of The Box Thinking” before such phrases became common parlance in business circles.

The Eleven-Plus exams came and went—and having passed, Grammar School loomed on the horizon: this meant a whole new set of friends as I was one of only 4 that got through. And, despite my best efforts, when you go to different schools after years of being together, shared experiences no longer happen so readily and thus I started to move in a new set of circles. I must admit, this didn’t bother me at the time and it enabled me to discover whole new vistas—and importantly, more people who read SF. But that’s another story for another time.

My writing fell into abeyance for a year or two and then took a new twist as in 1971, I got a portable typewriter with money saved up

from my Saturday job in a hardware store.

I was all set.

My Great Novel would only be a matter of time now.

And I’m still waiting.

LITERARY CORNER

I was challenged recently by Ro Nagey to write a limerick where the first line had to include my home town. Pleased that I didn’t hail from some locale such as Weston-super-Mare (which would have destroyed the whole rhythm of the piece), I set to thinking and came up with this:

There was a suave young spy from Woking

Whose methods of murder were smoking’

With gun or garrotte

He’d kill off the lot -

His license in need of revoking

It won’t win any prizes—but further entries are encouraged. Go on—you know you really want to!

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CARTOON INTERLUDE #1

This is the first of three Cartoon Interludes. Pleasingly, they're all from Gateshead's very own Harry Bell. He created these for a weekly competition run by a British cartoonists' organisation, collaborating with Roy Kettle on the ideas. It's worth noting that the cartoons had to be done to set themes or make use of set captions. Occasionally, the finished item had to be without captions or words.

If you have a hard-copy greyscale version of this issue, I'd strongly recommend that you head across to Bill Burns' wonderful efanzines site where you'll be able to see them in glorious colour. Or



The vending machine clots up again

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RADIO: A SOUND SALVATION

I think Elvis Costello nailed it with his 1978 single Radio Radio and the line “Radio is a sound salvation/radio is cleaning up the nation”. If ever there was a song which pitched both the subversive and establishment duality of the wireless, this was it.

I’ve loved the very idea of radio for as long as I can remember: from the radiogram that glowed and hummed in my parents’ living room to the battery-powered transistor in the kitchen, there was always sound in our house. It’s an old technology and yet has been constantly reinvented so that today, it’s probably as influential as ever. Music was always my first love, even if I had to endure the pain and agony of shows such as Music While You Work and my personal bête-noir, Sing Something Simple. Of course, I have fond memories of comedy shows such as The Navy Lark and Round The Horne—but music was the thing for me and my chums at school.

So how did I end up getting involved with broadcasting and still having a blast, as it were, over six years later?

I’m not really sure.

I remember being interviewed by BBC Radio Leeds with Mike Dickinson in early 1979 for Yorcon I. Broadcasting House was then on Woodhouse Lane and looked like a converted chapel and had the BBC motto “Let Nation Speak Peace Unto Nation” carved in

stone above the rather splendid entrance. I recall being more interested in what went on in that building that I passed every day rather than the purpose of our visit. Maybe that was the start, but it struck me that here was something I’d like to have a go at. Although somewhat shy as a child, I’ve always found it pretty easy to present and talk to people—be it work-related matters or thrilling things like acting as MC at convention events, so being a radio broadcaster had a certain attraction.



BBC Radio Leeds



BBC Manchester

I had other interviews for conventions, but my first proper experience came for BBC Radio Manchester. I’d seen a small ad in the Manchester Evening News asking for volunteers to review books on a new weekly show they were starting as part of their afternoon sequence. I applied and got a letter back saying that they’d already filled the slots, but that they’d “file my letter” just in case. Somewhat crestfallen, I saw my glittering broadcasting career in tatters, but the very next day another letter arrived saying that “would I like to come down to New Broadcasting House on Oxford

Road” and take part. So even then in the pre-internet age, left hands and right hands weren’t terribly well coordinated.

Compared to the grey and grimy stone BBC building in Leeds, New Broadcasting House was indeed *new* and also combined the TV studios for BBC North. It was a large, angular mid-70s block and as I sat in reception awaiting my summons, I wondered what broadcasting marvels were being created: my illusions were shattered when him off the telly, Blue Peter’s Peter Purves wandered by: not the hot-bed of creativity I’d expected. I met the show’s producer and the routine was to be given a selection of books to read and then prepare bullet-point reviews. These would form an aide-memoir as the show’s host—Briony Barton, I recall—would then discuss them with me on air.

The first batch of books were a motely collection, probably not ones I’d have chosen myself—but, hey, small acorns and all that. I did read them, I did my homework and returned to Oxford Road on a Wednesday afternoon for the live broadcast. The studio was much smaller than I’d expected: dark, functional rather than attractive and surrounded on three sides by toughened glass screens. We did some levels checks for sound quality, briefly discussed the approach and format of the show—and waited for our moment. And then—on air!

It was soon clear that the host hadn’t really read the books such was the incisiveness of her questions and observations. I could have said anything and she wouldn’t have been any the wiser. But, ever

the professional, I had my say and before I knew it, the half hour was up and that was it. There were a few more, and the book choices got better, but I never really did find out what happened as the run came to an end and that was it. It was fun while it lasted and I did learn some of the broadcasting basics: using the right pace in my speech, effective use of the mics and how to talk to an audience I couldn’t see. It all came in useful at work where I narrated and scripted a number of training and promotional videos. Not quite yer John Cleese, but they kept asking me to do some more, so I had to be doing something right.



The Forest FM gig came up initially in 2003 or so when a Restricted Service Licence radio station started up in our part of Dorset. RSL stations were those given a temporary license by Ofcom for a particular purpose. One of the biggest is Radio Avalon which broadcasts across the Glastonbury festival. Such stations can transmit for up to 28 days in a row “no more than twice a year”. Verwood FM—as it then was—took full advantage and broadcast their four-week stints around two large events in the local calendar: the Carnival and the Flameburst Fireworks event. The station manager’s son knew one of my sons and thus it was that a suggestion was made that I’d like to get

involved. At that stage, my job was taking me all over the country at very short notice so reluctantly, I held back until circumstances changed. In 2006, Verwood FM—after it's latest application to Ofcom—was granted a five-year, 24 hours a day licence with a larger broadcasting area too. It changed its name to Forest FM and the call came once more—and this time, I made time somehow to start my weekly show The Musical Box.

Since those early days, I've clocked up over 320 shows including various specials and interview slots and through evolution, my format has settled into a flexible framework which seems to work. Let's take a look at how it all gets put together.



Mission To Mars Special



Phil Jupitus—Breakfast Guest

The Musical Box runs for two hours on a Thursday night between 10pm and Midnight. Preparation usually starts a couple of weeks in advance as I check out all the new releases each Monday. To this, I add the record company newsletters and band e-mails I get—and then take a whizz through several websites, particularly NME.com, rollingstone.com and piccadillyrecords.co.uk. This gives me a good feel for what's around and how interesting the albums and downloads might be.

The show runs to a loose format which can be summed up as “old, New, Borrowed, Blues” . It's a simple formula, but it works and it ensures that there's always plenty of new music as well as older sounds and a mix of genres. There's a handy little phrase in putting a show together—“hammocking”: this is the process of book-ending segments with more familiar music so that casual listeners aren't put off with too much new and unfamiliar music. The show is split into four segments, roughly half an hour each, and my planning ensures that each segment can stand on its own.

To this mix, I add some regular features:

- ◆ Album Of The Week: A new release— three tracks
- ◆ Archive Artist: Career snapshots—three tracks
- ◆ Sounds Of The City: A musical location and the bands from it
- ◆ Let There Be Prog: A slice of progressive rock

By now, the format is pretty tight and a week before broadcast, my playlist is probably two-thirds full. The new music aspects are left to

the Monday and Tuesday before broadcast so that I can include all the latest releases, or those that I've already been given but have been embargoed until a certain date. All tracks are converted to MP3 format (320kb) which is ideal for broadcast and I then set up a broadcast folder for them. To this, I add a couple of comedy clips to lighten the show up—and finally, add my jingles folder which has my show idents and any promotional pieces and “bed” music that I've put together.

I have all my raw material, but I need a running order so that there is some semblance of planning and coherence to the broadcast—and critically, something for me to use as a basis for my vocal pieces. I use a simple Word Table with colour coded slots for each track—the colours represent old/new/borrowed/blues—and this then forms the basis for my fact-finding. I am broadcasting largely to people who are music enthusiasts, so I need to make sure my comments are factually correct—and I do like to include odd bits of information about each act. This will typically be who they are, where they're from, how long they've been together, name of the album the track is from, any tours lined up— and for older bands, odd pieces about their history. I only ever use some of the research, but it's a safety net for when I'm talking ten-to-the dozen to know that I can fall back on it and still have something to say.

And when it comes to the broadcast, I have two windows open on the PC—the broadcast stream (ie: the tracks and promos all lined up in order so I can see what's coming) and the other is my running

order chart. Finally, I also have pen and paper to hand to scribble odd pointers on the way through – things I recall at the last minute or something that comes to mind as I'm listening to the track. Usually, I try to make some smart and clever comment, but on occasions it ends up being a somewhat cheesy and blindingly obvious link, but hey, that's radio for you. The final piece in the jigsaw is to have Wikipedia open, but minimized, just in case I really do need to check a fact mid-show.

As for the broadcast, well I really enjoy doing them—but there is always that sense of pressure and anxiety underlying everything: will it go okay? Will there be a power cut (happened once!) ? Will I run out of coffee? Will I start a coughing or sneezing fit? Will it all Just Work? But a track or two in, and I'm usually flying and I guess it's as much a performance as being on stage with a band myself. Which of course will never happen as I can't sing (I mean, I Really Can't Sing) and despite the best of intentions, I've barely mastered the triangle, let alone my guitar.

So radio then. A sound salvation?

I think so.





I'VE GOT POST



Which I've just made up for comic effect

From: Mrs Rose Garden, Rhyl, North Wales

My next door neighbor Mrs Trellis suggests that I write to you. For several years now, she has written amusing letters to BBC Radio 4 and when your magazine landed on my doormat, I asked her if it was by any chance intended for her. She replied "I'm Sorry I Haven't A Clue". I told her it was two words, five letters and ten letters, first letter G. We've not had a crossword since.

A Doctor Replies: *You appear to be suffering from what we doctors call Stickius Endius Inappropriatum. Take two aspirin before retiring and remember me in your will.*

From: Colonel Sandy Vole-Strangler, Hitler, Surrey

I wish to complain in the most vigorous manner about your latest advertisement for your organ. It promises staples and yet when I clicked on your pdf copy, not a staple did I find. I shouldn't wonder that you'll be telling me next that it's not even printed on real paper.

The Editor Replies: *Every other* copy of Gross Encounters is printed on real paper harvested from sustainable trees from the sylvan setting of Wood Green, North London.*

*See "other" copy

From: Reginald Pen-Pusher, Dept. of Culture, Media and Sport

I'm hoping for a gold-plated pension when I retire.

Our Financial Adviser Replies: *I'll tell you how to make a small fortune. First, give me your large fortune.*

From: Captain Bligh, HMS Bounty, Dun Sillin', Norfolk

I have a real dilemma. Whilst sailing my tall ship on the Broads last week, a force ten storm whipped up out of nowhere and my vessel was sunk beneath the waves. I haven't paid off all the loan instalments yet: should I come clean about the loss or keep wearing my Admiral's hat in a desperate bid to hoodwink the loss adjusters?

Our Carpetbagger Editor Replies: *Hold fire son: I've just had that Time Magazine on the phone. They want me to do a big story for them about your capsizing calamity. Let me have 25,000 words by tonight and I'll cut you in for 10%. Does anyone know how to type?*

From: Doreen Nadies, "The Jungle", Aussie Road, Bedford

I saw your organ in my local newsagent window last Wednesday and am terribly disappointed in the title you have chosen for it. I've had lots of gross encounters with my antipodean friends and the last thing I needs is you telling all my constituents about what was a very private matter.

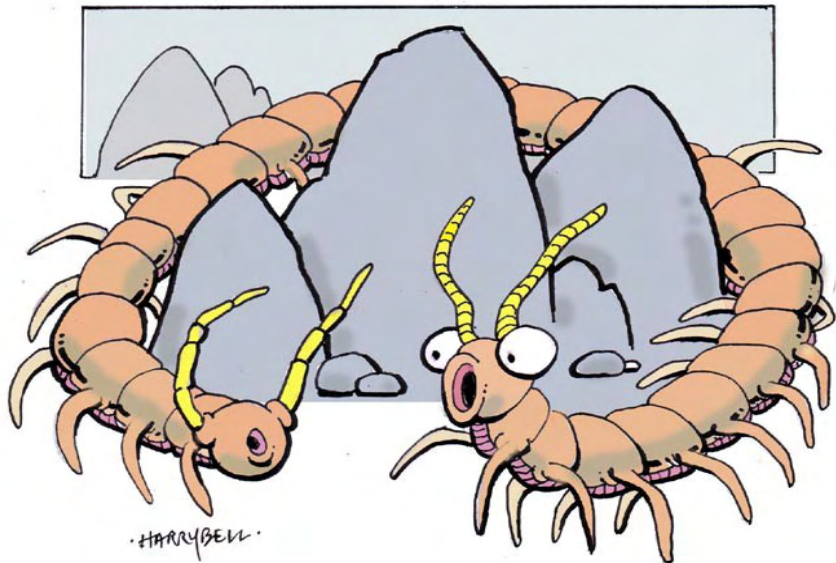
Our Marketing Manager Replies: *Anything to raise our circulation.*

From: Reginald Pen-Pusher, Dept. of Culture, Media and Sport

I'm still hoping for a gold-plated pension when I retire.



CARTOON INTERLUDE 2



HARRY BELL

"Ooooooooooooooh....Run away!"



HARRY BELL

NOVEMBER 2012



\$1.50

WEIRD AL'S

STRANGE SONGS OF PARODY AND SUSPENSE!

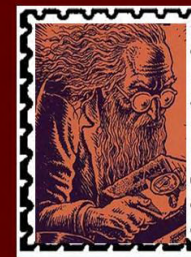


this issue

WOW!

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TALES OF PARODY AND SUSPENSE

I've always had a penchant for a neat turn of parody: I suspect this started in the pages of Mad Magazine at the tail-end of the 60s and then developed via Punch (when edited by Alan Coren in the 70s) and into Private Eye. Those who know me will no doubt groan inwardly at the mention of Lord Grovel's organ, but it is without doubt one of the most important magazines of post-war Britain.

I wouldn't pretend for one moment to be in the same class as any of the writers in those august publications, but I do like a bit of a laugh when the opportunity presents itself. Forearmed is forewarned, as they say. Here are a few pieces I've put together over the past couple of months, an odd mix of sources—and an even odder bunch of participants. I've added a few words of exposition, but other than that, they're as I wrote them at the time.



RIP MAULER—PILOT OF THE SPACEWAYS

By Hank Frampson

(Roy Kettle and Ian Maule had a conversation which somehow got around to the subject of Roy offering to write Ian's obituary *whilst Ian was still very much alive*. Our cover artist Bruce Townley dubbed him "Rip Mauler—Pilot Of The Spaceways". Ian had also been having a ladder problem at home. Sounds like it's time for the next thrilling instalment...)

RIP MAULER AND THE LADDER OF DOOM—PART THE FINAL

"Last time in Rip Mauler we left our lantern-jawed hero facing the final curtain. Stranded on the Planet B'NQ with supplies of patience running dangerously low, Mauler and his faithful robot chum Lofty were prisoners of the Eyekear, their dread enemy...

RIP: *Looks like we've nearly bought it old chum.*

LOFTY: *Chin-up Mr Mauler Sir, you'll think of something.*

RIP: *Your crazy loyal metal brain shows remarkable faith, Lofty, but I fear our mission will never succeed...our capsule rests atop that high rocky ridge yonder - and our special extension ladder is jammed!*

LOFTY: *Chin-up Mr Mauler Sir, you'll think of something*

RIP: *Lofty! You're right! Dammit old fruit, I'm Rip Mauler Pilot Of The Spaceways—I never give in! If I could loosen these*

ropes before the Eyekear notice...we might yet make our escape! Quick your heat-ray eyes...

LOFTY: *Chin-up Mr Mauler Sir, you'll think of something.*

RIP: *Come Lofty, my faithful retainer, focus your heat ray eyes on the ropes and I'll be free!*

LOFTY: *Chin-up Mr Mauler Sir, you'll think of something.*

RIP: *Nearly there my mechanical marvel, nearly there, and yes I'm free! Now, how the devil do we get to that ridge?*

LOFTY: *Chin-up Mr Mauler Sir, you'll think of something.*

RIP: *Lofty! You cybernetic chum you...I've got it! Quickly, put these ropes in your replicator...*

LOFTY: *Chin-up Mr Mauler Sir....no wait, it's my big line..."Will 60 yards be sufficient?"*

RIP: *You positronic robot-person you that's amazing! 60 yards is right on the button!*

LOFTY: *What now Mr Mauler, Sir?*

RIP: *Well you redoubtable replicant Lofty, it's time for a futile gesture on your part...quick break open your legs and pass me your tibia...*

LOFTY: *It is an honour Mr Mauler, Sir!*

RIP: *Yes it is, it most certainly is my fabricated friend: and by using your tibia as knitting needles, I've lashed up this*

amazing rope ladder...

LOFTY: *But Mr Mauler Sir, robots of my model and specification can't climb stairs, let alone rope ladders!*

RIP: *Fear not you excellent electronic entity, Lofty—I'll make sure you're mentioned in dispatches..... farewell and goodbye!*

LOFTY: *Surely you mean "au revoir" Sir?*

RIP: *No my marvellous manufactured mechanical mate, Lofty, it's definitely goodbye.*

*(Needless to say, this *borrowed* influences from Forbidden Planet, Dan Dare, Hitch-hiker's Guide To The Galaxy, Lost In Space and Beyond The Fringe amongst other things).*



For our next thrilling piece, we get a little more cerebral. Picture, if you will, a Fan Room bar at a Corflu—it could even be Corfu Cobalt at Winchester last year, but then again, it might not. Rob Jackson and Graham Charnock are at the bar: they are thirsty fans, but can't get started because they are awaiting the arrival of Ted White.

This is their existential story.

WAITING FOR WHITE



By Hyacinth Beckett

WHAT THE CRITICS SAID

"I'd like to say this was the best play I have seen all year: I'd like to, but can't summon up the enthusiasm" - Will I Am Shakespeare

"A scarifying indictment of the world in which we live" - D.West

SCENE: An empty Convention Suite Bar. There are bottles scattered across the abandoned tables, discarded fanzines lie on the floor and a jukebox hums and glows nearby. Enter Jackson and Charnock, both look thirsty and dejected.

CHARNOCK: What's to be done?

JACKSON: I'm beginning to come round to that opinion

CHARNOCK: Charming bar this. Inspiring ales. Let's drink.

JACKSON: We can't

CHARNOCK: Why not?

JACKSON: We're waiting for White

CHARNOCK: Ah. Are you sure it was here, in this bar?

JACKSON: What boss?

CHARNOCK: That we were to wait?

JACKSON: He said by the jukebox

CHARNOCK: Looks more like a fruit machine to me

JACKSON: What are you insinuating? That we've come to the wrong place?

CHARNOCK: He should be here.

JACKSON: He didn't say for sure he'd be coming. He's writing.

CHARNOCK: And it he doesn't come?

JACKSON: *We'll come back tomorrow*

CHARNOCK: *And the day after tomorrow?*

JACKSON: *If Coral will let me*

CHARNOCK: *So what did we do yesterday?*

JACKSON: *In my opinion, we were right here*

CHARNOCK: *You recognize this place after all that drink?*

JACKSON: *You're so cruel and merciless*

CHARNOCK: *No, I'm just waiting for White*

JACKSON: *But if we were here yesterday and he didn't come...*

CHARNOCK: *...he may not come today?*

JACKSON: *Maybe we should conduct a thorough search*

CHARNOCK: *A search?*

JACKSON: *I have my Prius outside*

CHARNOCK: *Put it away before you're arrested!*

JACKSON: *The car! It's A car! It's green and eco-friendly*

CHARNOCK: *But we're waiting for White. He said he'd be here*

JACKSON: *You're right of course.*

CHARNOCK: *I usually am*

JACKSON: *What's to be done?*

CHARNOCK: *Wait...that noise...someone's coming*

JACKSON: *Be careful—they may be an evil fringe fan*

CHARNOCK: *It may be White with his completed manuscript*

JACKSON: *Is it him? Can you make out the shadowy form?*

CHARNOCK: *It's a familiar shape*

JACKSON: *Is it him...is it White?*

CHARNOCK: *He has that bearing*

JACKSON: *Oh boy oh gosh oh wow oh wow...yay! It definitely looks like him...*

(Enter a lantern-jawed figure in Space Corps uniform)

MAULER: *Only me!*

CHARNOCK: *It's your call Rip!*

JACKSON: *Trebles all round!*

THE END (For now)

Our final piece could also take place at a Con, but this would be a timeless one, one where hours and days become almost meaningless. We are thrust in to the Ballardian nightmare world of The Vices Of Time. It all starts on the next page...



**NEW WORLDS
SCIENCE FICTION**

No. 112
VOLUME 38
2/6

G.K.BALLARD

THE VICES OF TIME

BRON JUNNER

THEY LOOK UP TO ME

PHILIP E. HIGH

THE MAN IN THE DICK CASTLE

ADRIAN BLISS

NEW MAPS OF OXFORD

*

*15th Year
of publication*



The legendary issue of New Worlds that contained G.K.Ballard's landmark short story, The Vices Of Time in October 1960.

THE VICES OF TIME

By G.K.Ballard

Later, I often thought of White and the strange grooves that the fanologist had cut, apparently at random all over the floor of the empty convention bar. An inch deep and twenty feet long, interlocking to form an elaborate message: they had taken weeks to complete and he had obviously thought of little else, working tirelessly away amidst the hustle and bustle of the patrons. Charnock had watched him from his spyhole window at the far end of the saloon, carefully marking the channels with blunted crayons and carrying away the stone detritus in discarded crisp bags.

After White's disappearance, Charnock would wander down the deserted lounge and look at the crayoned grooves, half-filled with beer dregs leaking from the slowly rusting cans of Miller High Life that littered the floor. Stepping back, he thought he could make out a message , an enigma almost past any solution. Initially, perhaps he was too preoccupied with completing his own departure from the bar to take it all in. Lethargy and inertia had however blunted his anxieties and he wrestled with the implications of what he was now viewing from his lofty vantage point. Bending down and slowly tracing the grooves with his right hand, Charnock read out loud: "Fetch Drink!"



CARTOON INTERLUDE

3



Many thanks again to
Harry Bell & Roy Kettle.

THE MORTICIAN'S GALLERY

A LOOK AT FANZINES

There's a folk singer-songwriter by name of Vashti Bunyan. She was part of the London scene back in the mid-sixties and was noted for her lyrical skills and her pure, smooth voice. She recorded her first album in 1970 and just as possible fame was about to strike, gave it all up and bought a horse-drawn caravan and went off to Ireland with her young family. The album, *Just Another Diamond Day*, became much sought after during her absence and copies were sold by dealers for sums approaching £1500. The album was eventually issued on CD in 2000—and the title track was used by BT in a memorable TV advert.

This advert prompted fans to wonder what had happened to Vashti Bunyan and one of them managed to make contact and invited her to add vocals to a song he'd written. One thing led to another and in 2005, 35 years after her previous album, her follow-up was released.

I mention this as it's a neat link to both my interest in music and fanzines: whilst I have written fanzine reviews through to the late 90s, it's over 32 years since I used the title *The Mortician's Gallery*, a title stolen from a BBC documentary series featuring Jonathan Miller. It was in issue #1 of Rob Jackson's *Inca* and such an impact my words must have had, that it was to be his last issue for years.

But, I can shoulder the burdensome weight of history and since my last reviews, that history has got even heavier.

Clearly, my absence in recent years puts me at some kind of disadvantage: I've missed following threads and feuds, good and bad writing, the migration from paper to web and all manner of in-jokes and gossip. I've also not had the benefit of circulating with the editors and writers, a useful way of understanding the psyche that goes into fanzine creation. And of course, without seeing how writers and fanzines develop and decline over time, any latter day snapshot view is bound to be seen out of context.

But, in flipping these disadvantages over, there are positives: I haven't been sucked into the fannish milieu and can thus look at them objectively; I've not been associated with any specific group of fans and thus can't be accused of being part of what was quaintly known as "the Leeds mafia"; and I can spot trends that might have passed me by—the "wood for the trees effect". Some commentators are saying the days of fanzines and fanzine fans are over, that fans prefer media and gaming and genre conventions, that they aren't inured any more to the need to read novels and short stories. There may be a grain of truth in that, but my belief is that the whole level and range of interest in science fiction (however it is defined) has expanded far beyond anything we might have wished for in our heyday.

History goes through cycles which can also apply to SF fandom. Can we always remember the past? Our mistakes and wrong turns? As

Spanish philosopher George Santayana said, if that's the case "we are doomed to repeat them". And when we come to fanzines, that does seem to hold true from what I have seen. How so? Technology isn't always a beneficial thing—it doesn't always mean we get better at what we do, it can mean that we make just as many mistakes as ever, but now it's easier and quicker to make them.

The printed fanzine may be a rare creature indeed, but with the electronic fanzine and the range of inexpensive software that allows them to be generated, their production has been democratised. Want to do a fanzine? Wow—just look: No paper costs, ink costs, postage and packing costs to get in the way for today's editors. Templates aid page design, plug-ins enable pictures and text and design-elements to be married together—and then your address book makes it a simple task to zip your finished copy off into the ether.

So, why aren't there millions of fanzines everywhere?

I've heard arguments that fans are happy enough attending cons, meeting friends and spending hours in on-line specialist groups, a cocktail that doesn't need to be shaken or stirred by the addition of writing fanzines. But, from what I've seen, some of these groups have inspired people to write, or return to writing. It's easier to encourage a spark of interest, to nurture that flame and almost force people to *pub their ish* - and that's not always a bad thing. So, trends and interests come and go, but no matter where we may be in the media/written word dichotomy, fanzines are still around

and still worthy of review. Which brings me to the purpose of this piece, this second chapter of *The Mortician's Gallery*: let's take a look at some of the current fanzines and see what we can learn.

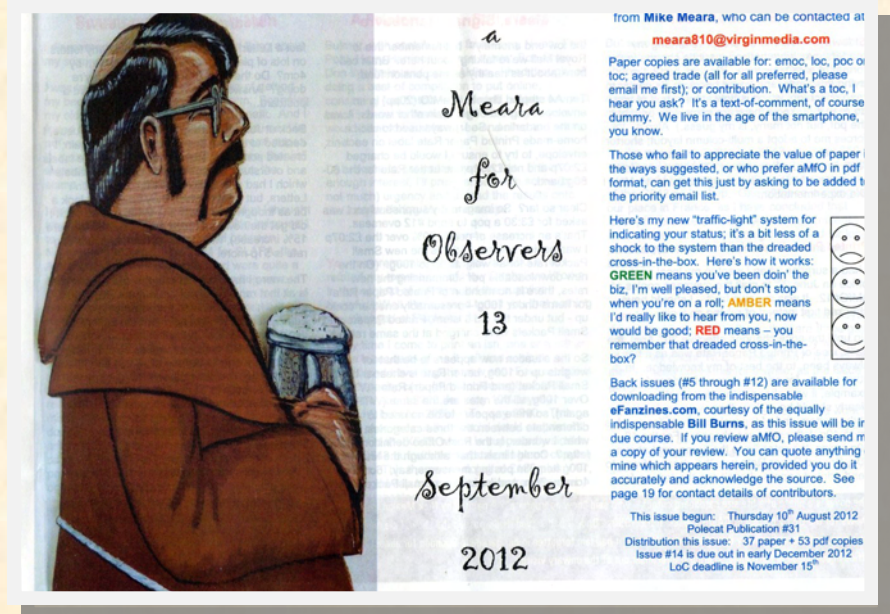
A MEARA FOR OBSERVERS #15—Mike Meara—September 2012

Some things don't change: Mike Meara's address which is reassuringly the same as I remember it—and his facility with a quick pun, clearly demonstrated in the fanzine title. This issue sees a change of format to accommodate on-line viewing and adopts a three column approach to the layout. This suits me fine, but I'm sure there will be those who will worry away at it in much the same vein as those who criticise "family heavy" fanzines as annotated photo-albums. My initial take was that this is a comfortable personal zine with a regular schedule that encourages a decent-sized correspondence section. This is a little unfair as both Mark Plummer and Paul Skelton contribute articles and there's a fair amount of interaction in the way the letters have been laid out.

Mark Plummer tells us why he still prefers hard-back books to all this modern malarkey with kindles and the like. I can sympathise with the "collecting" nature of having books, but I do find it strange that SF fans—who presumably have open and enquiring minds—do come across some times as a pretty conservative lot. He argues his case well, but I wonder for how much longer publishing economics will allow him to pursue his passion.

As for Mike himself, his writing flows along in a chatty sort of way

and his gripes about printing costs, postage costs and ink costs is done in a resigned sort of world-weary fashion. "I dunno. All I wanna do is produce a fanzine" he says, and on that score, he has succeeded. It's a fanzine that's happy in its shoes, one that knows and understands its readers—and whilst it won't set the world on fire, it's a good sort of publication to have around.



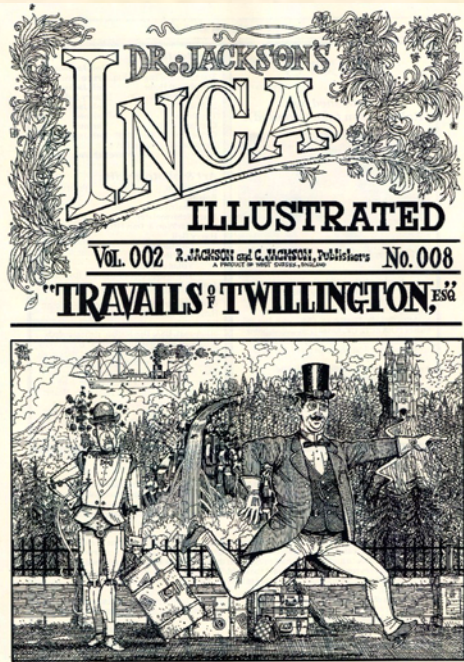
INCA #8—Rob Jackson—July 2012

"Paper versions available for substantial & relevant paper fanzines in trade" says Rob Jackson on Page 2. That puts me in my place then, but fortunately, he redeems himself later by adding "or friendship". Inca grew out of Jackson's epic and fastidious fanzine *Maya* back in the 70s: *Maya*—in those far off days of electric typewriters and Tippex—always looked the part, well designed, great

covers and justified margins. It could either have been the product of an absolute perfectionist or a total labour of love: or indeed both. There were times when I wished he'd have lightened up a bit and gone off on a riff to somewhere bizarre and challenging, but that's not Rob's style. With Inca though, as it is today, the good things are there in abundance—plus a more relaxed writing style too. Does this make for a great fanzine?

It's 56 pages long and has a stunning cover by Dan Steffan, a truly effective black-and-white steam-punk piece that combines the best of Victorian design with the characters straight out of Bruce Townley's equally masterful tale, "Travails Of Twillington, Esq". It's hard to do justice to this pastiche, but it's language is both elegant

and appropriate and it tells a good story. It sets the tone for the rest of the issue which also includes an excellent Harry Bell portfolio (in colour) and other than a substantial letter column, a late entry Corflu Glitter piece by Rob himself. It's here that as a writer he takes a more relaxed approach than of yore and it works well for him. The thing about Corflu, I gather (having only been to one myself, Corflu 7 in New York back



in 1990) is the add-ons, the travels and visits, the sights and memories other than the centrepiece convention itself. Here, what could have been a tired litany of one excited visit after another is an actually rather engaging travelogue in which Rob talks about the small stuff as much as the subject of a particular stop or visit. Supported by some decent pictures, it's a good introduction to Corflu Glitter, an experience which looks like it was a lot of fun interspersed with mercy missions to collect more drink and outings to eat local restaurants clean of their food.

As I noted with AMFO #15, some things never change.

BANANA WINGS #51—Claire Brialey/Mark Plummer— Nov 2012

I learnt in my early days of fandom that industry and energy can sometimes compensate for consistent talent. In 1978, I did four issues of Gross Encounters and won the Nova Award, an award in which such as Dave Langford and Kevin Smith were simply runners up. Both were better writers than I, but I suppose in my level of activity I was more tuned in to the zeitgeist.

I only say this because Banana Wings started after my temporary departure and in that time has now reached its 51st issue. Clearly a regular—and disciplined schedule —and of course, aided and abetted by a good mix of contents and some fine writing. And it's been rewarded with countless Hugos and various other pieces of recognition that others may only be able to dream about. Prior to BW #51 arriving in my in-box, I had read much about it, a not very

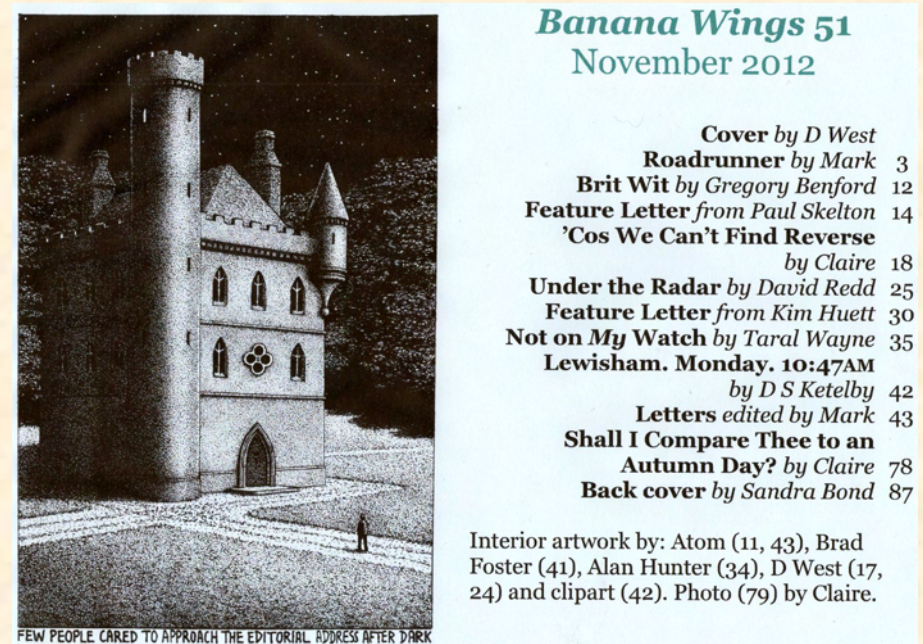
difficult task given that it appears to sit at the nexus of fanzine fandom. So my task was to see whether or not the product matched the promise.

I haven't seen D.West in some years, but he was always highly supportive of me in my early days and contributed many pieces of artwork to fanzines and various convention programme books I produced. D is one of those fans who I liken to Peter Cook, a writer, an artist, a true original who rarely lets the side down—but appears to find it all such a simple exercise, a casual scattering of his works upon the fallow fanzines of the land. Like Cook, there's always a feeling that D could have made it professionally and taught the publishing world a thing or two, but we must be grateful that he's persevered with SF fandom. His cover for BW #51 is a real hark back to his painstaking pen and ink style, intensely detailed and carefully wrought—and delightfully captioned too.

I was surprised, therefore, to see the internal layout: tidy and workmanlike, but not really leaping off the page at me. Plenty of white space around unjustified margins and occasional illos and simple headers. It's not a bad thing—after all, I read fanzines for the content—but compared to say both Inca and AMFO, it looks less enticing. But, it is a substantial issue, again adopting a two-column landscape approach and running to some 87 pages. And it has some interesting contributors, some fine names from the past such as David Redd and Taral Wayne plus a superb extended letter from Paul Skelton written shortly after the death of Mike Glicksohn. (As

an aside, this is one of the downers from being absent for the past 14 years—just missing the fans who are no longer with us).

Both Mark and Claire are fine writers: Mark's Roadrunner column is a collection of day-to-day minutiae mixed in with some pithy observations on matters such as politics, the London Worldcon win, stamps and shopping. It's this sort of approach which I admire as it tells you more about the person than any number of extended essays on their book collections or what they like on TV ever could.



The best piece for me was Claire's riff on conventions, a great piece of writing which took as its hook her 25th anniversary of her first con in 1987. She says "I gather that some people don't enjoy fanzine articles about conventions, whether because they weren't

there in person or because they don't go to conventions themselves". Whilst there may be some truth in that, the quality and interest of the writing should win out and here, we have some good reflections on the purpose of conventions and whether or not they're all they're cracked up to be. There are too many keen observations that she makes to go into, but suffice it to say, even if you've only been to one con, you'll empathise with this article.

And I did like Sandra Bond's spoof advert on the back cover.

BEAM #5—Nic Farey & Jim Mowatt— October 2012

If I had persisted with fandom over the past 14 years, then Beam is exactly the sort of fanzine I would have been proud indeed to produce. I know I've said that design isn't so important provided that the written content is up to scratch, but more than any of the fanzines under review here, this is the one that marries those two aspects to almost perfection. There's a maverick, somewhat unkempt and left-field feel to Beam and it hits the pleasure centres straight away. Jim Mowatt has provided a design template that looks like it fits this fanzine, rather than a fanzine being made to fit a design template—and this really lets the articles sing. Nic Farey's buzzed-up approach to life comes across well and the range of contributions is superb.

As with Banana Wings, there's a decent piece on conventions, this time from Chris Murphy and focusing on Novacons which are as he says "the only conventions I've attended anything like regularly". I

always found Novacons an oasis of fandom compared to the Eastercons: even though I helped run four of them from 1979 to 1985, I always felt we were fighting a losing battle in our attempt to make them fannish –and still attract a wide enough attendance to pay all the bills. Murphy reminds me of those I went to (1977 to 1990 inclusive) and helpfully fills me in on those subsequently. He mentions use of the Quality Hotel at Walsall, and having once run a business conference there, I can only imagine the horrors that such a venue would inflict upon a bunch of fans bent on having a good time.

Best piece for me was Jacq Monahan's extracted TAFF trip report: I remember the days when fans had to be roasted on a slowly turning spit before they'd deign to write a report, but Jacq comes across in a happy mix of delight and description and really brings to



life what her visit was like. It's full of flavour, pithy turns of phrase and pleasantly self-deprecating.

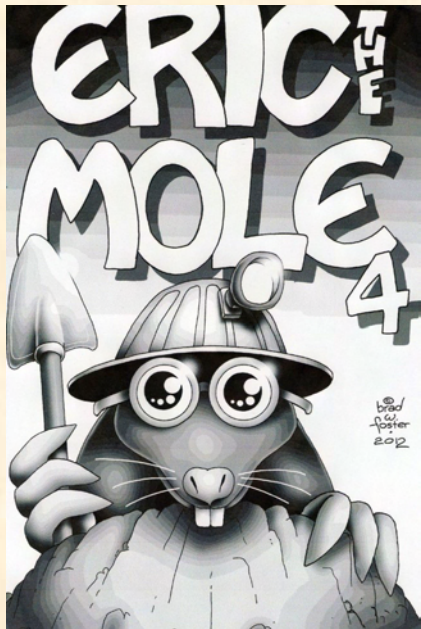
Other honourable pieces include some Harry Bell/Roy Kettle collaborations, Christina Lake on the arcane secrets of convention programming and Sandra Bond's almost Ballardian take on her Corflu report. It might be lazy to say something as simple as "A Great

Read”, but that’s just what it is. It’s the sort of fanzine that makes me want to go back and search out the first four issues on Bill Burns’ efanazines site and see how it’s developed in that time.

ERIC THE MOLE #4—Ron Gemmell—November 2012

The last fanzine is from an old Warrington chum, Ron Gemmell.

It’s not a big production number, it’s not stuffed to the gills with artwork and articles and it’s not terribly long either. But what it is a good example of a simple, short and chatty personalzine. Ron claims that “it’s been a long time coming”, but it’s a mere seven years since the previous issue and we prodigal editors laugh in the face of such a regular frequency.



It’s an A4 sized, twin column layout and other than a splendid Brad Foster cover, it’s just Ron talking about walking and cycling adventures in Scotland, holidays past and an article about his dilemma over whether or not to volunteer to help out at the forthcoming Loncon in 2014. In some ways, it reminds me of my very first personalzine all those years ago and it’s good to see that in this world of high tech and on-line wizardry, there’s still room for this sort of fanzine.

In Summary

So, what have I learnt on this little trawl in the fanzine ocean?

A good editor is critical, someone who can inject some personality and order to the fanzine. Their selection of writers and subjects is key to the framework, the look and feel of the fanzine. And into this framework, we must pour good quality output, writing that will bring the content to life and help it have an existence beyond tomorrow’s fish-and-chip papers or on-line recycle bin.

I’ve seen that an eye for design is a good thing too, although equally, not a pre-requisite to a good issue provided there is some logic and order to the layout.

And, I’ve also seen that the tried and tested formats of years gone by still seem to work, whether it’s a big fat genzine, a plain and simple personalzine or a fizzing and lively combination of the two. My intuition tells me that maybe there’s a bit of a fanzine renaissance under way judging by the number of fans who have declared an interest in pubbing their ish. Facebook and Yahoo groups alike are proving to be potential hotbeds of activity and provided good intentions are followed through, the next few months could be very interesting indeed.

As for me, well I’m nearly at the end of Gross Encounters #22 and the ideas and enthusiasms for #23 are already taking root.

For which, I’m really rather glad.



GROSS ENCOUNTERS

ASTONISHINGLY SUSPENSEFUL TALES OF MYSTERY

THIS HAS BEEN GROSS ENCOUNTERS #22 –DECEMBER 2012

So, that's it then, my return to fanzines after fourteen years. It's been a fascinating experience, it must be said, and one that I am sure, dear reader, you will find to be an amusing addition to your normal reading material. It's been a little strange resurrecting this title, grappling as I have with my scant knowledge of the contemporary fannish world. But the more I dig in, the more I see that whilst much has changed, some things stay resolutely the same. I have missed the interaction, the wit and humour and I'm sure you'll all be bursting to send me letters galore for inclusion in the next issue.

If ever you're at a loose end at 10pm on a Thursday night, do take a listen to my radio show The Musical Box: unless you live within a 20 mile radius of East Dorset, it's best to listen on-line via our Radio Player which you can find right here:

www.forestfm.co.uk/radioplayer/console

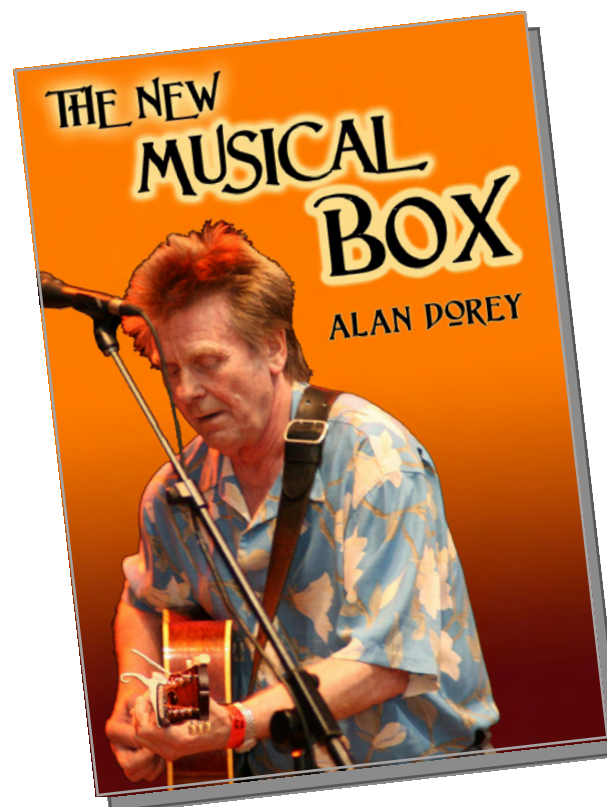
In the meantime, letters of comment should be sent to me here:

alan10258@aol.com

Thanks for reading: see you in Gross Encounters #23.



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