



LICKS #3 (August 1991) is written and produced by Rob Hansen of 144 Plashet Grove, East Ham, London E6 1AB, UK., for FAPA.

© Rob Hansen 1991

Back in May, Avedon and I went to a convention, probably the only one we'll be able to afford this year. Since some of you might be interested in hearing about what serious scientific events British conventions are, I decided to write a report on it, one I had to call:

MEXICON 4 MARTIN SMITH 0

Something would have to be done about Martin Smith, I decided, but what? I was thinking about my fellow Fanhattonite while sitting at a table in the lounge of the Cairn Hotel with a convivial group of fans, supping a tasty pint of bitter and gazing out the windows at the surprisingly charming town of Harrogate. We were indulging in that casual character assassination of absent friends that we all deplore yet enjoy so much, when committee person Abi Frost came dashing over. There was nothing remarkable in her doing this. Indeed, Abi dashed everywhere all weekend, a twitching streak of nervous energy propelled by adrenalin and fueled by prodigious cigarette consumption. Just watching her made you tired. She could have dashed for England. After a breathless greeting she showered us with copies of a flyer in support of her TAFF candidacy before zooming off again, crisp packets and flyers bowling along in her wake.

MEXICON 4 started on Friday, as conventions usually do, and after the opening ceremony we were launched straight into the play, the latest production from Geoff Ryman and his troupe. Having enjoyed earlier Ryman stage adaptations of Philip K. Dick's TRANSMIGRATION OF TIMOTHY ARCHER and of D. West's PERFORMANCE, I had high expectations of THE UNLIMITED SEX COMPANY, a totally original piece rather than an adaptation of an existing prose work. Unfortunately, it was incoherent and incomprehensible and, like many others, I left before the end. I did, however, stay long enough to see the bit where one of the players, Simon Ings, pranced around the stage wearing nothing but a black leather jock strap. The interest of the women in the audience picked up noticeably at this point particularly since, if the size of the bulge in the jock strap was to be believed, Ings was improbably well-endowed. There was much speculation in the bar afterwards as to just how much of this was him and just what he used for padding. I suggested a cucumber, one of the more sensible theories on offer.

I'd started handing out copies of THEN #3, containing my history of 1960s British fandom, as soon as I arrived at the hotel. One of those who features prominently in its pages, Pete Weston, was delighted when I gave him his copy.

"What a fine fellow you are, Rob", he said, putting his arm around my shoulders and hugging me chummily. "Let me buy you a drink. Let me buy you two drinks."

He would buy me drinks all weekend. Even before he'd read it Peter Weston was impressed with THEN #3. Eileen Weston was impressed with Martin Smith. What

impressed her about him was how French he looked. Martin's alleged Gallic qualities remained invisible to everyone else (though I suppose he does bear some resemblance to a crumpled Gaulois packet), but this didn't stop Eileen from pushing his jacket sleeves up to his elbows and ruffling his hair to emphasise his Frenchness. Personally, I didn't think this could be achieved by anything less than a complete body transplant.

I too was working on Martin's image. Over the previous twelve months Martin had achieved a rate of sexual success with women from different parts of the world and from different parts of the sexual spectrum that was the envy of lesser mortals such as myself and I thought that more people should know about this. Most fans knew Martin only as an amiable dope and butt of my jokes, but I was determined that from now on he would be known for what he truly was - a superstud and butt of my jokes. That's what friends are for, after all.

One of the first people I told was John Harvey. We were at an item organised by Linda Kraweke (the former Linda Pickersgill) that involved us standing around listening to taped music and drinking lots of punch at the time, sitting on the edge of the stage and feeling mellow. Earlier, at that same item, Eileen Weston had introduced Martin to a couple of teenage girls as a visitor from France who spoke no English and he had danced with them both, all the while responding to their attempts at conversation with a shrug and a feigned air of Gallic incomprehension. They were a little miffed when they discovered he was about as French as a bag of French fries only less tasty, but he still succeeded in luring them into the stalls. We could see them from the stage, and John whooped with laughter when I pointed out this doomed attempt at seduction. Just then Rochelle Dorey happened by and we told her what we found so amusing.

"I've got an idea", I said. "Why don't you go over to Martin, thump him on the shoulder, and shout: 'You bastard! You said you were coming straight back to bed!'"

John almost fell off the stage at this suggestion, particularly when Rochelle marched up to Martin and actually did it. I think I've only ever seen one other person's jaw drop as far as Martin's did then. (That had been a few weeks earlier, the jaw in question had belonged to a work colleague, and it had dropped thanks to my response to his simple greeting of "How are you?". "Well hung", I'd replied. Sometimes the quickness of the mouth deceives the brain...). Martin, possibly clued in by the laughter from the stage (John was going into meltdown beside me), soon figured out what was going on and gave me the finger. At which point Robert Stubbs wandered along, narrowly avoiding being knocked over by Abi as she dashed by, and wanted to know what was going on. We told him, and he asked if we wanted him to pull the same stunt as Rochelle had. We did, boy did we, but in the end he chickened out.

This anecdote went down well whenever I told it, which I did throughout the rest of the convention on the slightest pretext and, frequently, on none at all. Why, the very next morning it was appreciatively received by the group we were both sat with in the bar. It was definitely more fun telling the story when Martin was present. As his mentor and fanfather I felt it was my duty to harden him against such mockery. Later he would thank me. Now, not realising that I had only his best interests at heart, he protested that:

"If you're my fanfather then this is child abuse!"

"Why this fuss about child abuse?" I asked. "When I was a child we had to abuse ourselves."

It was a stolen line, but it had the desired effect. The beer that everyone at the table was drinking except me was a Mexican lager called Corona. Allen Baum, a visiting Californian, was suitably dismissive, announcing that Corona was as burro piss compared to Dos Equis. I agree, but a remarkable quantity of the stuff was downed during the weekend nonetheless, most of it after a slice of lime had been twisted into the neck of the bottle. Slouching in the comfortable armchairs that filled the lounge, the Corona drinkers all tended to hold the bottles in their laps which, as someone at the table pointed out, looked remarkably phallic. This led inevitably to a discussion of the manly images often used to sell beer.

"You've heard of that macho Israeli beer, of course?" I queried.

"Which one's that?"

"He-brew."

Taking their groans as my cue, I left the table and wandered over to the bar, still pondering over what to do about Martin Smith. As Abi Frost dashed by, Pete Weston strolled over.

"Let me buy you a drink, Rob", he said. Ever polite, I did.

We talked fanhistory, and Pete revealed that the company he owned had made the actual Hugo award trophies, though not the bases, for every Worldcon since 1984.

"I was over there in 1983, talking to Craig Miller, and he was complaining about how much it cost to get the Hugos made and how badly cast some of them were. Since L.A.CON II had a collection of old Hugos on loan as part of an exhibition they wanted to put on he was able to show me just how poor they were. I told him I could do a better job at half the price and when I got home I found I could, too."

Pete had made a mould from the 'spare' Hugo that had been left over after SEACON '79, a trophy that he said he had "wrestled Malcolm Edwards for". Images from Ken Russell films sprang to mind, but for once the mind was quicker than the mouth and I said nothing.

These days Vinç Clarke spends much of his time tending the temperamental electrostenciller that produces most of the e-stencils used by British fandom. After many months of this he badly needed a break. So he came to MEXICON and instead spent most of his time tending the temperamental electrostenciller that produced most of the e-stencils used for the convention newsletter. It was the same machine, too. In between trips to the committee room he, like me, got to meet Derek Pickles, who was attending his first convention in 37 years, a record for British fandom and pretty damned impressive in anyone's book. So going cold turkey can break you of the fannish habit, eh? Don't you believe it. Once a fan always a fan. If only the same were true of dancing...

The convention disco is an old and venerable tradition at British conventions, one at which old and venerable fans risk coronaries as they throw themselves around the dance floor with the same abandon as fans half their age and a third their weight. On this occasion the committee had arranged for the DJ to play records from the top 100 singles in the book by MEXICON guest Paul Williams. In

the event things didn't quite work out that way but there was enough overlap to make it, in terms of the music at least, the best convention disco in years.

Usually I pace myself at these things, but there was enough good stuff that I let caution be bludgeoned into submission by the irresistible beat of that ol' debbil music and ended up dancing to three fast numbers in a row. This was not a good idea. At the end of the third track I was completely knackered. My heart was hammering furiously at my rib cage, Niagara Falls was gushing from my brow, my breathing sounded like a defective vacuum cleaner, and I was sure the pizza I'd eaten a few hours earlier was planning a comeback. I wanted to die. Pete Weston flopped down onto the chair next to mine, red-faced and drenched. He looked worse than I did.

"Rob", he gasped, "let me buy you a drink."

Pete is a good ten years older than me, so his condition was only to be expected, but I had let myself go. No longer a giant of the convention dance floor as in my glory days (sound of mournful violins), I was nonetheless confident that my place would be filled by the young lions of British fandom, those energetic fans coming through, hungry for recognition. True, Martin Smith shows little sign of being energetic, at last not while vertical, and all he ever seems hungry for is Kentucky Fried Chicken, but I remained confident. This confidence crumbled when L.Steve Hubbard, who is younger than Martin, collapsed onto the chair opposite Pete and me. I was shocked. L.Steve looked worse than either of us. The young lions are already grown mangy, it seems. Dismayed, I retired for the night, hopeful that things would look better on Sunday.

Perhaps being on a panel moderated by TAFF candidate Abi Frost while wearing a badge proclaiming my support for TAFF candidate Pam Wells wasn't the most tactful thing I've ever done. Then again, Pam's campaign manager, Martin Tudor was also on the panel. Was Abi just being a good sport, I wondered, or was the panel going to be an experience she wouldn't wish on any of her own supporters? I'd soon find out. Not that I'd ever intended appearing on any of the programme items at MEXICON 4 in the first place. No, Abi had come looking for a sucker to take the place of the suddenly unwell Lilian Edwards (who had come down with an acute attack of sanity) on a fanzine panel. She found me. Knowing that some in the audience would have come expecting to see Lilian Edwards, I decided that when Abi introduced me I'd say "I may not be as cute as Lilian, but I've got better legs". That should get a cheap laugh. However, no sooner had Abi announced me as Lil's replacement than Martin Tudor had leapt in with "He's got cuter legs", and stolen the cheap laugh for himself. I was amazed. Was this an example of telepathy or had Martin somehow got a look at my legs, which I seldom bare? I think we should be told. (I should, anyway.)

The panel was a mess. The editor of BACK BRAIN RECLUSE, a small press SF fiction magazine, was one of the panellists and Abi kept trying to draw parallels between fanzines and small press magazines that just don't exist. The two are entirely different, with fanzines, to my mind, being the superior form. Some idiot in the audience tried to claim that fanzines had once been largely given over to amateur fiction. When I contemptuously demolished that argument he retorted by saying:

"But surely convention reports are just another form of fiction?"

"No", I replied, "magic realism."

This got an appreciative laugh and silenced my questioner, as I'd intended. Convention reports 'another form of fiction' indeed! In fact they are always rigourously accurate and unexaggerated accounts of the proceedings. Just like this one. Still, while up on the stage I'd at last decided what to do about Martin Smith. I found him and told him about the convention report I'd be writing as the first step in my plan for him.

"Martin", I told him, "I'm going to make you a fannish legend."
"You bastard!" said Martin Smith.

MAILING COMMENTS

FIRST DRAFT (Perry): How synchronistic! Your bit on the Gunfight at the OK Corral was the second piece I'd read about that event during the last couple of weeks, and I'm not a reader of Westerns or Western history either. The twelfth and final book in Simon Hawke's 'Time Wars' series centres around that same gunfight and at the end of the main text is an essay by Hawke weighing up the different historical accounts of that event and also its various media depictions down the years. It's a fascinating and well-researched piece, and Hawke is of the opinion that "curiously, out of all the cinematic portrayals of the Earps, the 'Star Trek' episode came closest in capturing what the Earps really looked like". The novel, THE SIX GUN SOLUTION, might be hard to follow if you haven't read the previous volumes in the Time Wars series, but it's almost worth buying for the essay alone.

LICKS (me): When I said that snooker is "to pool as checkers is to chess", I actually meant that it is "to pool as chess is to checkers" of course, since snooker is by far the more complex and interesting of the two (I've played both, and there's no contest). In fact snooker has, somewhat mischievously, been described as 'chess with balls'.

SWEET JANE (Eklund): Avedon is a big fan of baseball (she's a Mets fan), as is Martin Smith who was delighted when he actually got to see a major league match when we all went to New York for CORFLU in 1990. Britain's Channel Four showed the World Series a few years back (the year the Mets won - 1986?) as part of their mandate to show more exotic fare than can be found on the other three channels, to Avedon's obvious delight, but hasn't much bothered with it since then. Oddly enough, Britain had its own baseball league last century, and there have been numerous attempts to revive interest in the game over here since then the latest, according to a TV report last week, being the current push by US baseball authorities to get it a permanent slot on TV in the UK as a bridgehead into Europe. They face an uphill struggle, however. Getting it into the Olympics was a start but it's light-years away from being as popular as soccer (last years World Cup Final in Italy drew the biggest TV audience in history, even without much North American interest, dwarfing those for the moon landing, Olympic games etc.) and looks like remaining confined to North America and Japan for the foreseeable future. Myself, I have no interest in soccer but I expect to spend some time following this year's Rugby World Cup. I shall root for Wales, of course, though New Zealand have to be hot favourites. The big question remains whether or not South Africa will be re-admitted to world sport in time to compete since they used to be one of the few sides who could give New Zealand a run for their money. We shall see.

CREATURE OF HABIT (Brandt): Having made three CORFLUs to date (if we're visiting the US it's the con we try to hit) we both really wanted to be at CORFLU OCHO but, alas, it was not to be. Since we attended the New York CORFLU, Avedon lost her job (resulting in a 40% drop in household income) and thanks to the recession has been unable to find another, the Poll Tax was introduced, and the rise in interest rates resulted in an increase of about 40% in our mortgage payments. In short order we not only no longer had the disposable income that allowed us to visit the States so often in the last few years but we were barely able to pay the bills. Things have slowly improved since then, and continue to do so, but I have no idea when we'll next be in a position to visit the US again.

GLITZ (Katz): Glad to read the biographical material in this since it fills in a lot of gaps in my knowledge (gleaned from old Katz zines and from FOLLY). Incidentally, it was your piece about Becky Shayne in a recent FOLLY that sent me back to THE INCOMPLETE BURBEE (Willis gave me his copy several years back) and to those wonderfully funny pieces about Al Ashley. This in turn gave me an idea for the con report in this zine. And, yes, Martin Smith really does say "You bastard!" (he's never heard of Al Ashley) and everything in that report is true. Exaggerated a little, maybe, but all true.

DR (Hlavaty): I actually have about nine fanzines by Bob Shaw, and was looking at them only yesterday. Not by the Bob Shaw, the famous Irish wit and SF pro, I hasten to add. No, these are by Bob Shaw of Glasgow, Scottish convention SMOF and all round contentious fan. When I get down to researching the history of UK fandom in the 1970s, later this year, I face a real problem in finding a way of writing about him without causing confusion. Do I call him "Bob (Glasgow) Shaw", "Blob Shaw" (a name used by his enemies) or, as I favour, "the other Bob Shaw"? The reason I was looking at his zines is that I'm helping Viné Clarke with the bibliography he's compiling of 1970s British zines. Peter Roberts had already catalogued those produced between 1936 and 1970, a task Viné is continuing. Bibliographies and histories are a lot of work but necessary, I think, for increasing the scope of fandom by giving newer fans a form of access to earlier periods of our hobby. Anyone over there interested in continuing this work for US fandom? I'm sure I'm not the only fan who'd like to read it.

SMART ASH (Tom Feller): Well, the final episode of TWIN PEAKS aired over here a few weeks back, leaving lots of loose ends as expected. Still, Avedon and I enjoyed it hugely, never missed an episode, and hope the two-hour special that's been mooted (to tie the whole thing up) actually comes off. Other recent TV watching here at palatial Plashet Grove has included CHEERS and ROSEANNE, the best sitcoms currently being made and much better than comparable UK sitcoms; L.A.LAW, which these days sounds like it should be the title of a show about racist cops, but which remains one of the best drama series about - I've always particularly like the way they set situations up so that it's often not clear which side is in the right, and in ways that cause you to question your own attitudes. Impressive stuff. When it comes to home-grown product I find myself watching more documentaries and science programmes these days, shows like HORIZON, and more offbeat things such as OUT, Channel Four's gay current affairs show. Avedon was on TV a while back (Channel Four, natch) doing a three-minute opinion spot on censorship. I've watched it a few times since and am still surprised at how different she looks on TV. Her face looked fuller, somehow. Still, though it's kinda humbling to be living with a star of page, screen, and radio, I manage. That's it. I'm out of here.

6 July 1991.