



LICKS #4 (February 1992) is written and produced by Rob Hansen of 144 Plashet Grove, East Ham, London E6 1AB, UK., for FAPA
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MY FAN GROUP AND OTHER ANIMALS

Among those reading this there are, I'm sure, quite a few who are members of some sort of group and attend regular meetings of local fans. I'm no exception, and I thought I'd tell you a little about my group.

Every time there's a meeting, the evening begins with me linking up with Martin Smith in London's FORBIDDEN PLANET bookshop on New Oxford Street, and then going for a meal. We always eat in the same place on Thursday evenings, before our fan group meets, and it may well be the only time all week that Martin has a proper meal. Martin, you see, is a single male who lives alone, with all that that implies. At home in his cluttered garret he won't eat any dish whose preparation requires the use of anything more complicated than a can-opener. When not feasting on such bachelor favourites as Toast Flambe and Fillet of Spam, Martin will often dine out at Kentucky Fried Chicken. Not that he has the courage of his comestibles, oh no. He will tell you that he knows their food is junk, haughtily insisting that he only eats there when he can't find a McDonald's. (Malcolm Edwards once described Kentucky Fried Chicken as "succulent" and Egg McMuffins as "the perfect food". His taste now guides a major SF line.) No, I've often thought as I tucked into that delicious Mexican food, Martin doesn't know how fortunate he is that we regularly eat at Taco Bell.*

We chatted over our food as we always do and, it being August, I complained that I now faced the dreadful prospect of actually having to do something about the back garden, as Avedon and I affectionately think of our weedpatch. Truly, our weeds are strong, healthy and vibrant, the Charles Atlases of the weed world, ready to kick soil in the face of weedier weeds and to laugh cruelly at my attempts to drag them from the ground by musclepower alone.

"It's the neighbours," I explained to Martin, around a mouthful of jalapeno-enhanced bean burrito, "I'm convinced they're feeding my weeds steroids as a lark. But enough is enough. I've already bought some turbo-charged weedkiller, the finest and most lethal known to the British chemical industry, and I'll be launching an assault on the garden with it this weekend. Let's see how the little bastards react to that!"

They reacted with total contempt. Come next summer it looks like escalation to flame-throwers and napalm is called for since my 'garden', unlike Robert Silverberg's, is unaffected by cold weather no matter how savage the frost.

After feasting, Martin and I made our way to The Yorkshire Grey, a pub at the junction of Theobald's Road and Grey's Inn Road that's a mere hundred yards or so from the site of the Red Bull, the pub that that hosted the prewar meetings of fans such as Arthur C. Clarke, Ted Carnell, Bill Temple and John Wyndham. Indeed, with the site of the Ancient Order of Druid's Memorial Hall, where regular fan meetings were also held and which hosted the first ever London SF conventions in 1938 and 1939 (the site is now occupied by the Aliens

* (Neither did I, as it turns out, since TACO BELL and the whole Leicester Square block it was a part of have since been closed for redevelopment.)

Registration Bureau, curiously enough), a hundred yards or so in the opposite direction, the area is so steeped in fanhistory that I originally suggested our little group be called 'The London Fanhistorical Society'. Inexplicably, the others didn't take to this idea, so we eventually settled on 'The Hatton Group' (aka 'The Fanhattonites') after the pub where we first gathered, The Christopher Hatton (itself only twenty yards from the site of The Globe pub, venue for the monthly first Thursday of the month gatherings of London fans from 1953 to 1974).

Though we get occasional visitors, the core of the Hatton Group consists of five individuals, drawn from quite disparate backgrounds. There's nubile young Martin Smith, a sexual opportunist from Croydon; firebrand Armenian-American political activist Avedon Carol, from Washington DC; me, from Wales; Owen Whiteoak, our resident Fortean Deadhead gaffiate, from Edinburgh; and Cedric Knight (I am not making this name up), who's from Mars.

Anecdotes and good conversation are what these meetings are all about, so I started by telling everyone what happened the previous night, when I got back from seeing TERMINATOR 2, an enjoyable feast of mindless mayhem.

"When I got in after the film I went to the kitchen and turned the light on. There was a 'plink' as the bulb died. These things happen, I thought to myself as I replaced it. I then put some food on a plate, went through to the lounge, and hit the light switch. 'Plink', went the bulb as it died. Shit. Grumbling even more, I got a new bulb, and a chair so I could reach the light socket. As I stood on the chair there was a loud crack, and it disintegrated into firewood beneath me. Lying on the floor, bulb in hand, I decided that if there is a God then He's got a very juvenile sense of humour."

Needless to say, this story went down well, with Martin Smith laughing particularly hard at my misfortune. He's always doing this lately, no doubt as a result of having been made bitter and twisted by my ruthless expose of his exploits at MEXICON 4 in the last issue of this serious scientific journal.

Another regular topic of conversation is politics, and many a world situation has been mercilessly dissected by our fine scientific minds. Recently, an old scandal had been back in the news again, one we'd discussed with undisguised glee on earlier occasions. It was the one that had led to the fall of various US televangelists - Pearlygate - and now that it had raised its head again Avedon cut right to the issue at the heart of the debate about the affairs of Jim and Tammy Bakker.

"God, do you believe that woman's make-up?" she said. "And what's worse, she actually sells the stuff on their show."

"She looks," said Martin, "like she puts it on by dunking her head in a bucket of the stuff."

"At least it suggests an obvious title for a book about the whole scandal," I observed.

"What's that?" they asked, taking the bait.

"Texas Chainsaw Mascara," I replied. Their groans were terrible to behold.

"Talking of books," said Martin, "did you hear that Salman Rushdie's written a new one? It's called 'Buddha, You Fat Bastard'."

"Har har. You know," I reflected, "the last time we heard anything about Rushdie was during the Gulf War."

"God, the Gulf War!" groaned Avedon. "With the collapse of Communism, the US is casting about for new enemies to justify its obscene arms expenditure, which is what the Gulf War was all about. We could carry on invading pushovers like Grenada and Panama, and probably will, but I think the new 'evil empire' is going to be Islam."

" , " mumbled Cedric.

"I don't see why you need arms to fight Islam at all," said Owen, "After all, Ayatollah Khomeinei declared the fatwa, the death sentence, on Salman Rushdie because 'The Satanic Verses' was such a threat to Islam. You don't need more arms, you need more books!"

"No, no," I said, "all that would happen then is that you'd exchange the arms race for a books race. All that government research money would be switched from the physics departments of universities to the literature departments in a ceaseless quest to develop ever more deadly books."

"Have you read any of the books that come out of the literature departments of universities now?" asked Avedon. "Most of them are pretty deadly already."

"The whole language of war would have to alter, " I declared, warming to my subject. "Instead of kilotonnage we'd have to start talking in terms of kilopunnage, and instead of technicians the military colleges would have to start turning out semioticicians. There would be escalation on both sides, and Strategic Book Limitation Talks would eventually have to be held in order to break the deadlock, the 'balance of terror' embodied in the acronym MAD, or..."

"Don't say it!" said Owen, who suddenly saw where this was leading.

"...Mutual Assured Deconstruction."

The groan that rose from the others then was the most satisfying of the evening. We continued in this vein, and in several others, for the rest of the meeting until, shortly before closing time, I made a comment I no longer recall but which must have been a real humdinger since it caused Avedon to retort:

"Soon you'll be telling me that there's something in the old superstition that a menstruating woman shouldn't stand anywhere near a cornfield 'cos she'll make the crops die."

"No," I replied, "but next time it's - ah - time, could you go and stand in the back garden? You could save us a fortune in weedkiller."

She didn't, of course.

MAILING COMMENTS The November mailing arrived mere days ago, just getting in under the wire for me to have mailing comments in this issue. Though it took an inordinate amount of time to get here, the US Mail Service was entirely blameless. There was a sticker on the envelope from the Royal Mail that read: "We apologise for the exceptional delay in delivering this item. This was caused by difficulties in one of our handling centres. We sincerely regret the inconvenience." So now you know.

Tackett: ct Chauvenet. You ask FAPA's non-US members whether any of our cities "...look, as Brian Earl Brown reported about Detroit, like deserted bombed-out ruins?" The short answer is: no. One of my colleagues at work once spent a year working in the US and did a lot of travelling while he was there. I

asked him once what was the single thing about the US that made the biggest impression on him. Without hesitation, he replied: "The poverty." Your rich may be a lot richer than our rich (hardly surprising when, according to a recent article in THE INT'L HERALD TRIBUNE, the CEO of a US company gets on average 160 times as much as the lowest paid worker in that company - the figure is closer to 20 times in Germany and Japan and lower still for the UK) but your poor are a lot poorer. That disparity, what Roger Morris (an NSC staffer under Johnson and Nixon) recently referred to as your "perverted income distribution", coupled with the most inadequate health and welfare provisions for the poor of any advanced nation, inevitably leads to a deeply disaffected and desparate underclass, stratospheric crime figures, and disfigured cities. (More than one European visitor has noted the resemblance between the South Bronx and the bombed out cities of Europe in the immediate aftermath of WWII.) In an article in the INT'L HERALD TRIB of 30 Oct 91, Jason DeParle argued convincingly that the high US poverty rate was a product of deliberate choice, that through their elected representatives Americans had chosen the society they now had. So unless Congress starts showing more willingness to actually tackle fundamental problems than it has in recent years, and unless the public accept the necessity of giving them the extra tax monies necessary to do the job, nothing is going to change. Not a prayer, really, is there? // As in the US, 1992 is election year in the UK and our politicians have already started electioneering. From where I sit, it looks like I can vote for the useless bunch of tossers on the right, the useless bunch of tossers on the left, or the useless bunch of tossers in the centre. Isn't it wonderful to have so much choice?

Vijay: ct me. I had a company medical recently, which led to some surprises in respect of my height and weight. The last time I figured my height was about fifteen years ago and I did it with a piece of chalk, a wall, and a tape measure. Obviously I didn't do it too accurately since I subsequently claimed to be a shade under six foot whereas in fact, as a proper reading showed, I'm actually five-ten. Kinda ridiculous, someone not knowing their own height, eh? The surprise with my weight was that at 178 pounds I'd assumed I was overweight, whereas according to the doctor's charts I'm just within the recommended range for my height/build/age. (I'd still like to be about a dozen pounds lighter, though.)

Brown: I've got a soft spot for DR WHO as well, probably because I've followed the show off-and-on since the very first episode aired, the day after JFK was assassinated, though I've no desire at all to read any of the novelisations. Incidentally, you complain that 'Battlefield' introduces parallel universes into DR WHO. In fact, they first appeared during the Jon Pertwee incarnation of the Doctor in the early 1970s, in a story called 'Inferno'. And I still think Sylvester McCoy's portrayal of the Doctor was awful.

Hooper: Welcome aboard, Andy! This issue of NINE INNINGS was read and enjoyed as much as earlier ones have been, even if I do still find the baseball references incomprehensible. Maybe I ought to do a zine built around rugby. Yesterday (18 Jan 92) saw the start of the annual Five Nations Championship, and Wales beat Ireland 16-15. What's so exciting about this is that Wales are going through the worst patch in their history and hadn't won a match in the championship since 1989. Nah, maybe I won't do such a zine. I may be excited by this, but I couldn't impart that excitement without a long screed about rugby and why it's so important to the Welsh.

Just enough space to let you know that Avedon and I will be in the US in May to visit her parents, during which time we'll also be attending DISCLAVE. If any of you are going to be at that con, we look forward to seeing you there.

Rob Hansen 19 Jan 92.