



LICKS 10 (November 1993) is written and produced by Rob Hansen of 144 Plashet Grove, East Ham, London E6 1AB, UK, for the 225th FAPA mailing. © Rob Hansen, 1993.

Later I want to explain how Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle played a significant role in almost starting World War III, and how just over ten years ago we came closer to nuclear war than at any time since the Cuban Missile Crisis (this is not a joke), but first I think I'll get stuck into some mailing comments....

Jack Spear: I'm deeply puzzled by your accusation that I "stray into Welsh chauvinism" since so far as I recall all I've ever done (with the exception of the time I cheered our rugby team) is point out that I am Welsh and not English. This is a simple statement of fact. According to my dictionary, chauvinism is "absurdly extravagant pride in one's country, with a corresponding contempt for foreign nations". (This also works on a smaller scale, of course, hence my reference to an "appeal to regional chauvinism" in my TAFF essay last issue.) Please cite instances of such chauvinism in LICKS. I've just gone back through all the issues to date and have been unable to find any comment of mine about being Welsh that comes close to meeting that definition.//Yes, if an otherwise winning TAFF candidate fails to secure 20% of the vote on one or other side of the Atlantic then the runner-up will win - so long as they have secured that 20%. This situation hasn't arisen yet.//Every American I've ever talked to has pronounced 'celtic' with a hard 'c'. The only exception, on both sides of the Atlantic, is in the names of sports teams for some unfathomable reason.// Josephine Baker was far more interesting than is suggested by the 1943 report you unearthed. Soon after appearing at Harlem's famous Cotton Club in 1925 she went to Paris in the chorus of La Revue Negre. She and the show were an enormous success and within a year she was starring in the Folies Bergere. She became a major star in France and in 1937 became a naturalised French citizen. She did volunteer work during WWII and in 1940 she joined the Resistance, her work for them earning her the Croix de Guerre and the Legion d'Honneur, with the Rosette of the Resistance - France's highest honours, I believe. In later years she cared for a 'rainbow family' of orphans of all races, periodically returning to the stage in order to raise the funds necessary for their continued welfare.

Andy Hooper: ct me: "I despair of ever being able to have a good conversation with you at a convention. And five apas don't seem to help much." I was quite surprised to hear that we were in five apas together Andy, particularly as I'm only a member of four apas in total. Since you're far too intelligent to have made such a simple mistake this can only mean that someone has joined an apa using my name and is even now spreading disinformation, perhaps lauding assholes such as Pat Robertson and Pat Buchanan in my name (complex problems do not have Pat solutions), or professing my deep love for the music of Barry Manilow. This man has to be stopped at all costs, Andy, and only you can do it. I'm counting on you - don't let me down.// Yeah, it's really difficult to have one-on-one conversations at a convention, particularly one like CORFLU where almost everyone there is someone you want to touch base with. I managed it with Vijay Bowen (and the following weekend, at DISCLAVE, with Mark Richards), but it ain't easy. All I can suggest is that you and Carrie come and stay with us for a few days sometime, a solution I also commend to Arnie Katz, who had a similar complaint.

Vijay Bowen: ct me: "You seem to be a perfectly reasonable size to me - solid enough to be cuddly, compact enough to be picked up and carried from place to place". What an appealing image! The reason I wanted to be a dozen pounds later wasn't, as you and others may have imagined, because of any desire to conform to current fashions concerning body shape (if I paid much attention to fashion I wouldn't have dressed for most of the past two decades in

a style fashion mavens refer to as 'early dishevelled') but because I felt better when I was a dozen pounds lighter. I've come to the conclusion recently that the problem wasn't so much my weight as my lack of exercise, which is why I've been working out in a gym twice a week over the past few months.//The phrase "you know, I don't think of you as..... (fill in blank)", however well meant, always ends up being an insult, particularly when the blank referred to in that instance is a fundamental part of who you are since it presupposes that part is something you should be ashamed of. The phrase is never used in connection with anything positive. Try putting a quality universally perceived as being worthy in that space (eg. honest, brave, generous, etc.) and you'll see what I mean. Being black (or white, for that matter) is neither good nor bad; it just is. Which is not to say that it should or even could be ignored in a culture like ours where it can make such a huge difference in how you're perceived and treated. What you are is what you are, and you should always give short shrift to anyone who tries either to deny those things that are a fundamental part of you or to portray them in a negative way. This includes fatuous accusations of 'chauvinism', of course.

Harry Warner Jr: ct Brian Earl Brown: "If he censors religion from his daughter's life, he will sharply reduce her chances of enjoying a decent, happy life in maturity". Alternatively, he will protect her from the damaging effects of exposure to the major wellspring of misogyny in Western culture. He will also sharply reduce her chances of becoming one of those small-minded bigots who ignore the central message of love and tolerance that is supposedly at the core of Jesus' teachings in favour of using the Bible as a club with which to beat feminists, gays, and others whose insistence on thinking for themselves and refusal to shut up and stay in the closet is threatening to such people. That a message of love has curdled into self-righteous hatred of others in the hearts of so many who call themselves Christians is deeply sad, but strangely unsurprising. Indeed, since I wrote the preceding sentence (a few weeks back - I've been busy) the Pope has come out with an encyclical, Veritatis Splendour, that validates such vicious small-mindedness and shows that it's not only the religious fundamentalism of Islam that those of us who believe in tolerance and compassion should worry about.

TALKING ARMAGEDDON

Ten years on it's difficult to fully recall the sheer fear felt over here by anyone who was paying attention to what was going on during the early years of the Reagan Administration. But as it turns out we were right to be afraid. The following is taken from my then apazine, FISH HELMET #2 (Nov'83):

On Saturday 22nd October I was one of the more than a quarter of a million people who marched through London to the CND protest rally in Hyde Park, something which would have seemed almost inconceivable not so very long ago. I...was not on last year's march. What clinched it this time was my increasing unease at the actions of the cowboy in the White House. Anti-Americanism is a knee-jerk reaction on the left and so usually dismissed without a second thought but when someone of solidly right-wing views as the Daily Mail's political correspondent, Andrew Alexander, can say in the October 26th edition of that paper that he now considers the USA...

"...a power which is now a serious threat to global security. After many visits to the States over the years I find myself, reluctantly and against all my instincts, concluding that if a World War happens it is more likely to be the United States that starts it than the Russians..."

...you know that things are getting bad.

Nor was Alexander alone in that view. Opinion polls conducted at that time

showed, for the first time ever, that most Britons also thought America was more likely than the Soviet Union to start World War III. More importantly, as recently released information has revealed, the Soviets thought this, too. Indeed, as the autumn of 1983 unfolded they became convinced the US was on the verge of launching a pre-emptive nuclear strike. Throughout the almost half-century of the Cold War there were only two occasions when KGB Centre in Moscow sent a 'Molinya' (flash) message to its stations in Western capitals telling agents to secure staff and premises against imminent attack. The first was at the height of the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. The second was in September 1983. How this could have happened is a lesson in the dangers of 'talking tough'.

In 1982, during his first few months in office, Soviet leader Yuri Andropov (Mikhail Gorbachev's mentor) launched what the Soviets referred to as a "peace offensive" calling in speeches and interviews for arms reductions and a new East-West summit. His proposals included cuts in the SS-20 missiles in Europe to the same number of warheads then deployed by Britain and France if Nato agreed not to deploy its new Cruise and Pershing missiles, and a 25% cut in the strategic arsenals of the US and the USSR with a freeze on any new deployments. In January 1993 he went further still, proposing nuclear-free zones in the Mediterranean and parts of Europe, a nuclear test ban, and that the US and the USSR should stop arms sales to the developing world and use the savings on military spending to increase foreign aid. He then went even further, suggesting a non-aggression pact in which members of both Nato and the Warsaw Pact would agree not to use force against any member of the other bloc, nor against any member of their own alliance. This last is particularly significant in that it marked a sharp divergence from the Brezhnev Doctrine, which had allowed actions like the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia. Ronald Reagan's response to these peace overtures was his infamous 'Evil Empire' speech. And while the Soviets were smarting from that brusque dismissal worse was to follow. Within days of the Evil Empire speech Reagan gave another which was to alter the very balance of the Cold War.

On 23rd March 1983, Reagan announced the Strategic Defence Initiative, a land- and space-based anti-missile system which, incidentally, violated the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. This was a vastly ambitious project involving the development of new technologies and had been suggested to Reagan by 'scientific advisors' who, as we all now know, were in fact Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle. Reagan suggested that when perfected the system could be shared with the USSR. Quite understandably, given Reagan's belligerent anti-Communist posturing, they didn't believe him. Indeed, SDI was profoundly de-stabilising, threatening the whole basis of the doctrine of Mutually Assured Destruction, the 'balance of fear' which had kept the nuclear peace for decades, since the Soviets had no reason to believe the US wouldn't use SDI to effectively nullify the Soviet nuclear arsenal, effectively restoring the monopoly on the use of nuclear power which the US had briefly enjoyed in the years immediately after Hiroshima. Andropov said as much in a speech he gave of 27th March:

"All attempts at achieving military superiority over the USSR are futile. It is time they stopped devising one option after another in the search for the best way of unleashing nuclear war in the hope of winning it. Engaging in this is not just irresponsible. It is insane."

Even before announcing SDI Reagan had made references to 'winnable nuclear war' (possibly due to having watched too many SF movies in which post-holocaust Earth didn't seem so bad) and his belief in the biblical Armageddon which, coupled with what Andropov called the "outrageous militarist psychosis" of Reagan and his cabinet, was worrying not only the Soviets but also the citizenry of Western Europe, hence the enormous surge in anti-nuclear activity there during 1983.

Reagan's bellicose anti-Communist rhetoric was already making the Soviets nervous in 1981 and resulted in the setting up that year of a mechanism whereby

for the first time the KGB and the GRU would cooperate in an unprecedented world-wide intelligence effort. Dubbed RYAN (Rakento-Yadernoye Napaeniye - or Nuclear Rocket Attack) it required a heightened state of alert among all foreign stations for any signs of the build-up to a Western nuclear strike. Signs to look out for were sudden appeals for blood donors, unusual activity at defence installations, increased activity on military radio bands, and the like. One such sign, which helped confirm Soviet fears in 1983, was the publication of the British Civil Defence pamphlet 'Protect and Survive' on ways to allegedly protect oneself in the event of nuclear attack. This was just the sort of thing RYAN was looking for.

On 1st September 1993, Soviet air defence forces, already in a heightened state of alert, shot down Korean Airlines flight KAL 007, which had strayed over the militarily sensitive Sakhalin peninsula as a result of what now appears to have been an innocent navigational error. The appalled Western reaction led to the KGB issuing a warning to secure all Soviet premises, aircraft, and personnel against possible Western attack, and Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko warned that:

"The world situation is now slipping towards a very dangerous precipice. Problem number one for the world is to avoid nuclear war."

On 6th October 1983, Lech Walesa was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. On 23rd October, US forces in the Middle East were put on alert following the bombing of the US Marine barracks in Lebanon. On 25th October there was another full scale military alert presaging the invasion of Grenada. This was accompanied by an intense burst of cyphered communication between London and Washington as Mrs Thatcher and the Queen protested furiously at the invasion of a Commonwealth member, of which the Queen was nominal head of state, by Britain's closest ally. One can only imagine the interpretation put on this sudden flood of coded cable traffic by analysts in Moscow. The Soviets were finding all the preparatory signs leading up to a pre-emptive nuclear strike that RYAN had been set up to monitor, and the KGB suspected that this attack would be launched under cover of a forthcoming Nato exercise....

Able Archer 83, scheduled to be held 2nd-11th November, could almost have been designed to trigger a Soviet panic. It involved a brief radio silence, Nato command HQs escalating through the various stages of alert, and a change in Nato communications codes and frequencies as alerts shifted from conventional to nuclear. Originally the exercise had called for Reagan, Bush, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff to take part...the disruption of usual schedules and the swift movement of the military high command around Washington this would entail being precisely the signs Soviet intelligence had been told to look for under RYAN. Fortunately, there was at least one person in the Administration, National Security Advisor Robert McFarlane, who was beginning to realise how nervous the Soviets were becoming and at the last moment he cancelled the involvement of Reagan et al. It was just as well, since nuclear-capable Soviet aircraft were being reinforced and put on standby on East German bases. On the night of 8/9th November the KGB flashed another message to its European stations warning of imminent US attack. This was incorrect, of course, but with Soviet nervousness at fever pitch they were ready react to the first incident that could be interpreted as the start of an attack. We can only be grateful that, as has sometimes accidentally happened on other exercises, there wasn't such an incident this time, and that the Soviet alert was duly scaled down. And we can only hope that politicians seeking advice from SF writers in future are never again talked into espousing such dangerously destabilising projects as SDI. (The whole damned scheme turned out to be a multi-billion dollar turkey, too.)

((The information for this piece was taken from an article excerpted from Martin Walker's book THE COLD WAR, for The Guardian newspaper of 13 Sept 93.))