



LICKS #11 (February 1994) is written and produced by Rob Hansen of 144 Plashet Grove, East Ham, London E6 1AB, UK, for the 226th FAPA mailing. © Rob Hansen, 1994.

Despite being a report on the 1992 Novacon, the following piece has never seen print before. It's been lying round on disk, in semi-complete, form since Xmas 1992. This Xmas vacation just past, I decided to knock what I'd written into some sort of shape and get it out (I hate having unpublished articles lying about). It's the latest in a series of loosely connected pieces I think of as 'The Martin Chronicles' and features characters who have appeared in LICKS previously. And though it may be a year old it won't have dated very much. After all, this was....

JUST ANOTHER NOVACON

If it was November this must be Birmingham, and so it was. More by accident than design, I had attended sixteen consecutive NOVACONS and now it was 1992 and here I was at the seventeenth in that unbroken run, NOVACON 22. Avedon and I arrived late on the Friday afternoon, still elated by Democratic challenger Bill Clinton's victory in the US Presidential election, earlier that same week. We had both stayed up late into the night, following the superb BBC studio coverage and the on-the-spot reports from their US correspondent, Martin Sixsmith. Having watched the candidates in all the televised debates, and sat through hours of the party conventions, and thought deeply about the issues, our considered message to the Republicans is: "Yah boo sucks!"

We were far from being the first arrivals at NOVACON, or the last. One of the latest arrivals was the newly-married Nigel Rowe, sans his bride, Karen Babich. Karen had returned to her native Chicago where Nigel would be joining her shortly before Xmas. Their celebratory bash had been held at our palatial home due to Nigel's bachelor flat having about as much room the average nostril. And less tasteful furnishings. Unfortunately, one of the guests disgraced himself in a way qualitatively identical to, but quantitatively so much worse than during his last visit to our home back in February. This second, and final bout (it had better be) earned him the nickname of 'Martin SickSmith'. Should there ever be a third bout, expect to see a tabloid headline like this the next day:

NUKE OF PUKE KOOK NO FLUKE

"It was justifiable homicide!" claims Armenian-American woman.

This year NOVACON was back at The Royal Angus Hotel which I, like most people, think is it's natural home, even though NOVACONS held in other hotels have provided fine entertainment such as the sight of Martin Smith bidding furiously for exotic American condoms during the TAPP auction. Like old soldiers returning to the scene of their finest triumphs, veterans of earlier NOVACONS held in the Angus waxed nostalgic about the old girl. Martin was one of those who spoke feelingly of his last visit to this hallowed fannish shrine, and how it helped make him the fan he is today.

"It was at the last NOVACON held in this very hotel," he said, choking back what I hope was emotion, "that I threw up in the bar."

Martin and Nigel were both staying in the overflow hotel (which, in Martin's case at least, is rather appropriate when you think about it), where Nigel had made a discovery:

"Spike Parsons always advises you to carry out a pornography search of your hotel room so I did, and I turned up some good stuff."

Spike's theory is that hotel guests conceal porn around hotel rooms where it won't be found by cleaning staff, and leave it there. Nor, it seems, is porn all guests leave in hotel rooms. According to the 1993 Automobile Association Guide, pornographic magazines are the fifth most frequently discarded item while 47 of the 2000 British hotels canvassed reported abandoned vibrators and 'sex aids', 15 had found blow-up dolls, 7 had found whips, 10 some items of bondage paraphernalia, one a leather cat-o-nine-tails, and another a large quantity of exotic American condoms. You have to wonder what sort of dozy idiot would leave such stuff behind. Our subsequent search of our room turned up none of these items, alas, nor any porn.

"And me a member of Feminists Against Censorship, too!" complained Avedon, years of fighting to make the world safe for pornography giving her no advantage.

The next morning, feeling a little fragile after the alcoholic excesses of the previous night, I breakfasted with Pete and Eileen Weston. Faced with the greasiness of my bacon and the cheery sizzling of my egg, I feared that my stomach needed very little to tip it over the edge.

"Did you know," said Eileen Weston, "that, back in the sixties, Roger Peyton almost got to dance naked around a fire?". Oblivious to the way my hand suddenly flew to my mouth, she went on to explain that Rog had tried to chat up a Satanist and that, being a non-believer like most other fans, he'd only really been interested in getting her naked.

And did you know that a fan, Gerry Webb, was once among those short-listed to be Britain's first astronaut? No kidding. Also, and I assure you I'm not making this up, his was the name that popped up when, shortly before the wedding of Prince Charles and Lady Diana Spencer, a tabloid newspaper fed Di's details into the computer of a dating agency. Nor is that all. According to Eileen, and I swear I'm still not making this up, Gerry, a fannish contemporary of the Westons, had recently been paid a four-figure stud fee to father a child. He brought both mother and child along with him to the 1992 Eastercon.

"Let me buy you a drink, Rob," said Pete Weston, at the end of breakfast. This had been his catchphrase since I published my MEXICON 4 report in LICKS 3 (FAPA 216, Aug '91), and as catchphrases go I felt it had much to commend it. In fact, I think it might have even wider application as a rallying cry, a common creed that could bind together the disparate elements of current day fandom and perhaps even usher in a new golden age of fannish peace and harmony. It is, as I'm sure you'll all agree, well worth trying.

When Pete brought me my beer we got to chatting about the world in general and almost immediately he launched into a blistering attack on John Major's government and on how they were running the country. Or rather, as recent events had shown, how they weren't. I could scarcely believe what I was hearing. Could this be the same man who back in the 1960s, when the rest of his generation was growing its hair and joining the protest against the war in Vietnam, had kept his hair resolutely short and joined the Young Conservatives in Quinton? Apparently it could, because that same Pete Weston who had organised hotel patrols to weed out marijuana users at conventions in the early 1970s now revealed that he and Eileen had recently joined the Rotary Club, whose activities, contrary to popular belief, consisted of a never-ending round of wife-swapping parties, S&M sessions, and cannibalism. (Okay, so I made up that bit about the wife-swapping and the S&M, but it was still a shock to hear Pete admit that he now finds Rotary Club meetings more enjoyable than those of the Birmingham SF Group.)

The Leeds Group were out in force at NOVAOON, notable exceptions being D West, and Nigel Richardson & Michael Ashley - the latter pair having succumbed to the

miserabilism that comes with listening to too many records by The Smiths. I got into conversation about comics with Simon Polley, who expressed his liking for Neil Gaiman's Sandman comic and his particular fascination with its regular characters, 'the Endless':

"You know," he said, "Despair, Delight, Desire, Destruction, D.West...."

Black leather was the dominant mode of dress among those Leeds Group members who were at the con, and they looked like a gang of bikers who had mislaid their Harley-Davidsons. Nor were they the only ones at the con determined to make a sartorial statement....

For Bill Clinton, 'Slick Willie' is a nickname; for Martin Smith, a condition to be achieved. To this end he ventured out into the concrete wilderness of central Birmingham to seek out some wicked duds that would focus his sex-appeal to a laser-like intensity. And, indeed, he did look pretty sharp in the nearly two hundred pounds-worth of spanking new threads he returned with, a sharpness sadly undercut by his insistence on wearing thirty pence-worth of old sneakers with them. Martin was making a statement, and that statement was: I am an idiot.

It's no great secret that I love dancing so, naturally enough, I popped into the disco a couple of times on Saturday night to see if anything was happening. Unfortunately, each time I did so all I saw was a circle of male heavy metal fans thrashing away at air guitars and furiously shaking their heads in a spirited attempt to dislodge those last few pesky brain cells. So, alas, I didn't get to dance at NOVAICON and had to console myself by drinking lots of beer with John Harvey, Martin and Nigel. Sometimes, life is hell.

And so the convention sank slowly into the sunset. Or, at least, into a pleasant haze of enjoyable schmoozing in which memory dissolves and from which little can be recalled. There are some things we can be certain of, however: drink was drunk, banter was bantered, and Martin Smith was mocked. This I know because this was, after all, just another Novacon. And we'll do it all again next year.

MAILING COMMENTS:

Arnie Katz: Much as it pains me to disagree with the usually splendid Chuck Harris, who I revere as one of my most illustrious fancestors, I think he somewhat missed the point of my piece on Heinlein's 'The Roads Must Roll' (mc to Norm Metcalf in LICKS 8 - FAPA 222, Feb '93). What I was saying was that even leaving the odious politics of the story aside, 'Roads' is a rotten piece of work, hence my puzzlement at its inclusion in 'Science Fiction Hall of Fame', a verdict that Norm Metcalf essentially agreed with in a later response in his own FAPazine. I complained about plot, character, dialogue, and the ludicrous portrayal of labour relations in the story, but as a qualified engineer I could just as easily have attacked the whole concept of rolling roads which, far from being "almost viable", is really dumb for all manner of reasons. It's axiomatic that the best solution to any engineering problem is the simplest and most cost effective that is capable of doing the job. When it comes to the problems of mass transit (as opposed to moving passengers around airports) rolling roads are neither. These would be the largest machines ever built, and I suspect it would require more than the world's annual output of steel to construct the extensive roads of the story (I'm reasonably certain I could sit down and do the calculations to prove this if I had the time and inclination). The maintenance problems involved would be horrendous, as would be the cost of upgrading the roads when the technology that ran them became obsolete. In all of these respects the technological solution we did arrive at - moving vehicles on a static road or track - is by far the best (though we need to develop more

environmentally-friendly power sources for them). If individual vehicles break down or become obsolete it has little or no effect on the system as a whole, after all. So you see, though, as stated in LICKS 8, there are Heinlein books I've enjoyed and would defend, I still think 'The Roads Must Roll' is an entirely worthless piece of work in any respect you care to mention - concept, plot, prose, dialogue, characterisation, etc. SFWA voting for its inclusion in 'Science Fiction Hall of Fame' - over other Heinlein shorts - remains incomprehensible to me. Getting back to the main thrust of Chuck's article, I certainly agree with him about the repulsive attitudes of writers such as Wells, Buchan, and Johns. I'm sure most of us could reel off lists of pre-war writers on both sides of the Atlantic whose work contains examples of anti-Semitism and other racism. Unfortunately, such views were not uncommon at that time, even in 'polite' society, and casual prejudice can be found in the utterances and writings of otherwise respected and respectable journalists and politicians of the period. It was a different era, and though that might explain the prevalence of such attitudes it certainly doesn't excuse them. Not, as Janice Eisen points out in her zine, that this should be a reason for us not to read works written in less enlightened times.

Russ Chauvenet: ct Vijay: Yeah, I shared your annoyance at all the badges at CORFLU 3 having Richard Bergeron's name on them. It also annoys me when the convention logo takes up so much of the badge that there's little room left for the person's name. Being easily able to read the wearer's name is all I want from a badge, and any committee which allows its logo to take up more than a third of the surface area has fucked up the design of the badge, IMHO.

Robert Lichtman: There's something I've been meaning to ask you for ages, but kept forgetting. Namely, does the title of your apazine indicate a preference for the music of Rice Miller over that of John Lee Williamson?

Jack Speer: Your comment to Vijay that if she is "going to be technical enough to say Mark is a person of colour because he's pinkish-brown" she must also be "technical enough to concede that black falsely describes" her brings up an interesting point about how we label ourselves since, if and when she describes herself as 'black', Vijay is obviously defining herself in ethnic terms. These terms can be slippery things, however, since a South African friend of Avedon's who lives over here was defined as white under that country's system of racial classification and thinks of herself as white even though, ethnically, she looks black to the rest of us. Then there's this strange term 'caucasian' used to describe whites in the US. A more correct term would be 'aryan', had it not been irretrievably polluted by the Nazis and their master race nonsense. 'Caucasians' should, surely, be those whose ancestors come from the region around the Caucasus, people of generally Mediterranean complexion like Avedon, who's an Armenian-American. Ironically, people from that region who've moved to Moscow since the break up of the Soviet Union are facing calls for their expulsion by native Muscovites...who refer to them as 'blacks'. So, there's now a place where caucasians are black. Funny old world, isn't it?

UNABASHED EGOBOO CORNER: Fanzines about which I have no particular comments to make but which I greatly enjoyed this time are Redd Boggs' SPIROCHETTE and Arthur Hlavaty's DISCORDIA REVISITED. SPIROCHETTE is always fascinating and consistently the most beautifully written zine in the apa, while the quality of the wit in DISCORDIA REVISITED made me laugh out loud more than once, and I love the idea of being sent to San Francisco in 1966 being considered any sort of punishment.

.....Rob Hansen, 9 Jan 1994.