



LICKS #13 (February 1995) is written and produced by Rob Hansen of 144 Plashet Grove, East Ham, London E6 1AB, UK, for the 230th FAPA mailing. © Rob Hansen, 1995.
e-mail: avedon@cix.compulink.co.uk

MY FAN GROUP & OTHER ANIMALS II - TRAVELLING MEN

In LICKS #4 (FAPA #218) I described a typical meeting of my local fan group and provided word-sketches of its members. One of these, the improbable Cedric Knight, decided to visit South America last summer. He sent us a postcard message, one which deserves a wider audience:

The novelty of being on a different continent wears off after about five minutes: it's all rather depressing now. I suppose we chose the wrong time to arrive, wrong for several reasons:

- (a) June/July is the rainy season and my sandals are full of sewage;
- (b) the Venezuelan government has suspended all foreign exchange while they introduce some currency restrictions even the banks don't understand;
- (c) the ruling party (Democraticos Accion - another misnomer) decides to also suspend half the constitution (eg. the bits stopping the National Guard from abducting people from homes and hotels and locking them up for 12 hours without excuse) to maintain "order".
- (d) I develop piles for the first time in my life. Being mugged once I get here doesn't help much either.

Venezuela strikes me as one of those "whited sepulchre" thingies: you wouldn't believe it was the third largest oil exporter in OPEC, particularly when people keep coming to your table and grabbing any leftovers. In a tourist trap like this, the only women in the discos and clubs are whores. Probably because they're the only ones who can afford the drink prices. Better luck in Colombia, I hope.

ps. A 15 year-old told me "tu paresos a Michael Jackson", which I'm sure means I look like MJ. Can't think why - must be because I'm white.

Alas, Cedric had to cut short his holiday when he was mugged a second time.

BLOCKBUSTER!

As Rob Hansen and I jokingly agreed at a Wellington meeting a couple of months ago, we don't want any of this sensitive artistic bollocks - what we want is giant indestructible robots from the future blowing people's heads off in slow motion with guns the size of severely aroused elephant parts and bloodsned by the pumplod! Arnold Schwarzenegger for world president!

- Joseph Nicholas, from a LoC in
THE METAPHYSICAL REVIEW 19/20/21 (July '94)
ed. Bruce Gillespie.

You know the sort of film Joseph is talking about; one where the square-jawed yet taciturn hero has a suitably macho name like, for example, Rock Stone, and where the token woman is played by an actress with a name like Tiffany Burbank who's all tits, teeth and hair, and whose major attributes owe less to nature than to silicone. These days she may be 'feisty' but she's still there mainly as a tasty prize to be fought over by the hero and the villain. The hero is

inevitably a high-testosterone maverick loner, impatient with authority, and often a Vietnam veteran, despite being played by an actor who was a draft-dodger. Or an Austrian. He will also always be ex-CIA/Navy Seals/Secret Service/Marine Corps, while the chief villain will be British. Or, more precisely, English. To Hollywood, no-one makes a better cold-blooded swine than an Englishman. In fact, this trend recently reached its absurd apogee in CLIFFHANGER, where the psychopathic upper-class English villain was played by an American actor. Those films with British villains I can name off the top of my head (I know there are more) are PASSENGER 57, THE ROCKETEER, DEMOLITION MAN, BEVERLY HILLS COP, CLIFFHANGER, DIE HARD, and even THE LION KING (Scar is voiced by Jeremy Irons). A famous director was quizzed about this curious new tradition in big budget action films a short while ago:

"Yeah," he laughed, "if we'd dared make members of any other ethnic group or nationality the bad guy as often as we do you Brits they'd have had our hides by now, but you guys just seem to be amused by it."

As a Welshman, I view this constant depiction of upper-class Englishman as complete and utter bastards with total equanimity. Apart from being English, the villain will have either had some past association with the hero, or been made bitter and twisted by something like being hideously disfigured in a freak chess-playing accident. Oddly enough, even though he may be monosyllabic and do most of his thinking with his fists, the hero always defeats the villain despite the latter being a genius who already had a string of degrees to his name by the time his balls dropped. This can be seen as the inevitable triumph of good over evil, but just as often it comes across as that of good, clean-limbed, all-American athleticism over effete British intellectualism. But that's OK because these films clearly take place in a parallel universe, one where normal physical laws do not apply, particularly those governing the human body's ability to survive impacts. In these films the hero routinely shrugs off the sort of punishment that would see you or me in traction. Or in a pine box.

On Xmas Eve, Avedon cruelly thrust me out into the freezing cold so that she could cook without me being, as she put it, "in the way". While out I visited Leicester Square and, in the window of Planet Hollywood, got my first look at the costume and bike Stallone will use in the forthcoming SF/action blockbuster JUDGE DREDD. I don't know whether it'll have a British villain or not, though the odds are pretty good, but I'm sure it will look spectacular. However, since Dredd (a popular comic character since 1977) is basically a cop in a future US fascist police state, there may be a problem. What made him acceptable in the comics stories were their dry humour and heavy irony. Since Hollywood is not exactly renowned for its understanding of irony, they may play it straight and end up with something that comes across like a propaganda film for the Third Reich. We shall see.

STUFF

As you will have noticed from the colophon, we now have e-mail. Though Avedon's is the name that appears in the address, stuff sent to it will reach either of us. In this connection, I should also mention that the first four issues of THEN, my serial history of British fandom, are now available on the net and can be downloaded. To do so, connect by anonymous FTP to ftp.dcs.gla.ac.uk and retrieve files from /pub/SF-Archives/Then as Then.1 to Then.4 .. (NB this is case-sensitive: "then" or "THEN" won't work) This version of THEN #1, covering the 1930s and 1940s, incorporates info that came to light after original publication and is considerably revised.

I have also finished my TAPP report. No, seriously. ON THE TAPP TRAIL, a 33,000 word account of my 1984 safari through fannish America is available from me

(address as colophon) for a mere US\$5 plus postage (\$1.50 seasmall, \$2.50 airmail) or £3 (plus 50p p+p), all proceeds to TAFF. Cheques should be made payable to me. Sterling or US dollars only please, as these are the only cheques I can process without incurring ludicrous bank charges.

MAILING COMMENTS

Harry Warner: ct me: "Here's another parroting of the hackneyed platitude that Prohibition created organised crime in the United States. It gave existing organised crime something else to do but the real cause of greater lawlessness was the spread of motor vehicles to the general public and road improvements after World War One, which solved getaway problems and eased the transportation of illicit or stolen goods." Right, and keeping teenagers ignorant about sex keeps rates of teenage pregnancy down. You bet. I'm sorry, Harry, but this is absurd! Sure, getaway problems and illicit transportation were undoubtedly eased by the developments you cite, but it's a documented fact that Prohibition turned criminal gangs in America from a nuisance into an organised menace that now has its claws sunk into almost every aspect of American life. As historian Edwin C. Rozwenc put it in 'The Making of American Society' (Allyn & Bacon, Boston 1973 - just one of many history books I could've quoted from): "A disastrous consequence of prohibition was the emergence of an organised criminal class which developed bootlegging into a multimillion dollar racket. Gangsterism became a frightening social problem". It sure did. It was during Prohibition, flush with vastly more money than they'd ever known, that gangsters organised themselves on the national level. Vast money, be it criminal or legitimate, brings power with it, and organised crime has been using that power to corrupt the US ever since. (The most awesome example of criminal financial power in recent years was when the Colombian drugs barons offered, in exchange for their government scrapping an extradition treaty with the US, to pay off Colombia's national debt!) And, far from being a noble experiment, Prohibition was a sleazy and sordid affair from the very beginning. Avedon did a lot of research into this for a college paper when studying for her sociology degree, and what she uncovered is fascinating. Briefly, the two main groups that campaigned for Prohibition and eventually got it passed - the Anti-Saloon League and the Women's Temperance League - were secretly bankrolled by major distillers; the former by the Rockefellers and the latter by the Carnegie Mellons. Why? Well, before Prohibition there were around 400 distillers in the US; after Prohibition there were four. Guess who two of them were? Having been careful to secure government contracts to produce industrial alcohol the backers of the temperance groups were able to continue production while their rivals went to the wall. The temperance groups were what the Communists used to refer to as "useful idiots". Much as you'd like it be otherwise, Harry, and without in any way trying to dismiss the problems caused by abuse of alcohol, all this is documented fact. Prohibition was an unmitigated disaster. Period. As a footnote to this, it's interesting to note that, as Ray Schaffer pointed out a few mailings ago, cloth can be made from hemp, a plant easier to cultivate and less ecologically damaging than cotton. All that stopped it being widely used was the difficulty of spinning it until, that is, someone finally patented a viable hemp gin. Strangely enough, it was soon after this, on the convenient grounds of the mildly narcotic properties of the hemp leaf, that it was criminalised. Even stranger, the man largely responsible, Narcotics Bureau Chief Harry Anslinger, was a member of the Carnegie Mellon family. Sometimes seems like our lives are ruled by coincidence, doesn't it?

Jim Caughran: Oddly, the first Avedon and I heard of the Clipper Chip was not via the media but from someone who spoke against it at a congressional committee. I don't know whether or not the name Whitfield Diffie means anything to you or not, but it was Whit who apparently made the initial breakthrough that led to public-key cryptography (he was cover-featured on the

New York Times Magazine of 12 June 94, which carried an article about the Clippier controversy titled 'The Cypherpunks vs Uncle Sam') and, as a staunch civil-libertarian, he doesn't see why the government should be able to poke it's nose into the average citizen's private computer traffic. Anyway, we first got to know Whit about 3 or 4 years ago when, having heard about THEN, he got in touch with me to inquire about aspects of Arthur C. Clarke's early days as a fan. We hit it off, he and Avedon particularly, and he now stays with us every time he's in town - usually about twice a year - and arranged a meeting with the gov in 1993 to co-incide with our visit to Washington that year (he lives in the Bay Area). He's a fascinating guy, but I have to admit that for the first couple years we knew him, not being all that knowledgeable about the computer biz I didn't realise he was anywhere near as prominent as he is. It's really awesome the people fandom puts you in touch with sometimes.

Brian Earl Brown: I know what you mean about STAR TREK and BABYLON 5. While THE NEXT GENERATION is vastly superior to the original ST, both are less satisfying than B5. B5 is more interesting than either version of ST because it has an obviously carefully worked out backstory that is only gradually being revealed to us, and there are mysteries aplenty. By contrast, after thirty years of STAR TREK what do we actually know about the political situation on earth? Nothing. We know that Starfleet is based in San Francisco and that whales are extinct, but we know absolutely nothing about how the world is governed, or about the political tensions that exist (which they will, even in the 23rd century). STAR TREK exists in a vacuum and, as entertaining as it can be, it's always seemed to me that there's something hollow at its centre.

Arnie Katz: Thanks to the wonder of e-mail it seems like we've communicated more in the past few weeks than we have in the past few years and, in some ways, had more of a conversation than we've often managed in person. Yet for all that these are the days of miracles and wonders, the old fan in me still sees fanzines as both the primary form of fannish communication and fandom's highest art form. It's good that you still do them so well.

Russ Chamberlain/John Hardin: Good to have you on board, guys! Though I do occasionally have the uneasy feeling that, a few years down the road, FAPA will have become the internal apa of Las Vegas fandom.

Vijay Bowen: "You don't like dancing to heavy metal music? (I'm very disappointed in you, Rob.)" Oh Vijay, Vijay, my sweet! Surely we've danced together enough that we must have done so to a heavy metal number at some point? I have no objection at all to dancing to heavy metal (and, indeed, one of my longtime favourite groups is Led Zeppelin, the spiritual fathers of heavy metal) but was just making fun of Status Quo fans. I don't know about the US, but over here Status Quo fans tend not to be fans of heavy metal in general but of Quo in particular, much as I gather US Deadheads are often primarily fans of that one band. This single-mindedness has to some extent led to Quo fans being mocked by other metalheads, a local phenomenon I was exploiting in my con report. Christopher Priest is a Status Quo fan.//I saw a few of the STAR TREK films when they were reshowed on TV over here recently and was struck by how differently Klingons were portrayed in them than on ST:NG. In the latter they come across as super-macho buttheads and I could never understand how, with their attitudes, they'd ever developed the technology to become a space-faring race, whereas I could just about believe it of the Klingons in the films. Maybe it's the knobby heads. In the original ST their heads were totally unknobby and, while militaristic, they were capable of subtlety. By the time the films rolled around their heads had started getting knobby and they'd become more aggressive. By the time of ST:NG their heads were even more knobby and they'd become even more macho. That's it! They've been mutating for generations, developing these knobby ridges on their heads that are pumping more and more testosterone into their systems! Eureka! - Rob 15 Jan 95.