



XENIUM

THIS WEEK PISSED IN THE UK  
STARRING DUSTIN HOFFMAN AS 'GLICKSOHN'

THE NEWT

BAR

OLD RED COW

FROG  
&  
FIRKIN

XENIUM

HANSEN/MR. BEN 86



# IN MEMORIAM

This issue is dedicated with respect, admiration and love to two fine men who greatly changed my life in many ways, both obvious and subtle. Each had considerable impact during his life and my own world was the richer for the contributions each made to it. We are all poorer for their recent passing but their legacies will not be soon forgotten. With thanks for all they did for me and with love for who they were, this one is for

JACK GAUGHAN  
&  
JACK HALDEMAN







IF IT'S RAINING  
THIS MUST BE  
ENGLAND

-or-

THE SEVERELY SOGGY  
SUMMER OF '7/85

by

MIKE GLICKSOHN



PROLOGUE

In the last issue of this fanzine, a mere eighteen or nineteen months ago, I wrote a piece I called "The Road Not Taken" at the start of which I briefly mentioned my unfulfilled plans to "do" my 1979 summer vacation in England in the proper XENIUM style. (I reiterate that because I remain

convinced that I'm not the only fan who really doesn't remember what other fans put in their two year old fanzines. Of course, this may have something to do with the fact that I don't remember what I put in my two year old fanzines either.) When I wrote that I had no expectation of seeing England again before 1987, when it seemed obvious English fandom would again host a Worldcon. So I was sadly sure that all my carefully taken notes, complete with their cover page showing the droll title I'd planned to use (those of you with broad mental horizons may be able to deduce what it was) were so much cosmic kipple. It seems, though, that not all the roads we fail to take are forever closed to us.

In the spring of '85 I ran - unsuccessfully - for DUFF. When the results came in I thought for a while about a consolation trip to England -- it had been six years, after all, since I'd seen my family and friends there and I had one and a half second cousins I'd never seen at all -- but eventually decided I'd be better off looking into central air conditioning or new eavestroughs or getting the basement water-proofed or something equally frivolous and romantic. I even wrote to Paul Skelton to tell him my vague plans to visit had de-materialized.

Happily for me, Doris is considerably less pragmatic than I am. To my delight and amazement (and to the total astonishment of most of the English fans I mentioned it to) her birthday present to me was a ticket to England on Wardair for the month of August! She even arranged for me to arrive in time for the August One Tun meeting and stay long enough to attend SILICON in Newcastle. (Sorry, Ian Williams, but as I told you in the bar, there aren't any more like her in Canada!) So I spent an unexpected and delightful month in Britain, took copious notes, and goddamn if that six year old fanzine article title didn't turn out to be perfectly salvagable!

**SELF-INDULGENT ASIDE** I've never denied that I write this sort of XENIUM article primarily for my own posterity. If it entertains a reader or two at the same time, that's nice but the mass of evidence shows that unless I record the things I'd like to remember at a later date they vanish from my consciousness and are lost to me forever. A case in point were the notes I made for that not-to-be 1979 trip report.

I reread them just prior to starting this part of the fanzine. And as usual, I was surprised at all the things that had happened to me -- mostly good, and a few on the down side -- that I'd more or less forgotten completely. One or two of the things I read even made remarks by fans in '85 make sense! On the other hand, a few things made no sense at all. Why, I wonder, did Pete Presford set fire to one of my socks? And what was so special about Rob and Coral Jackson's wallpaper? Just two more items for my Things Mike Was Not Meant To Know file.

There were a few things, though, that I wanted a more permanent record of (and if one can't be self-indulgent in one's own fanzine then what's it all about, Alfie?) I don't want to ever forget the eight special bottles of Scotch that Paul Skelton had painstakingly accumulated during the months prior to my visit. Nor do I wish to lose the memory of how I repaid his kindness and generosity by putting my foot right through the ceiling of his bedroom. (Don't ask.) And I'd like to be able to tell Doris's grandnieces about my mystical experience in Harrod's dining room and about the time Richard "Riff-Raff" O'Brien bought me a whiskey and both signed and defaced a pound note. Then there was my Close Encounter with the English Constabulary...

On Tuesday, July 31, 1979 -- mark that date well -- I took a one hour walk to the factory that Paul Skelton was then working at in Stockport in order to have lunch at one of his local pubs. As I was toiling up a long incline within sight of the factory a small two man police vehicle began trailing along just behind me. After a few seconds I turned to face it and the two officers approached me. "What's your name?" the first one asked politely. I told him. "That's the one," said his fellow officer. I wasn't especially nervous (I hadn't even worn my caftan in public at the time) and willingly showed them my ID when they asked for it. After a few moments of checking they handed it back to me, apologized and started to head for their car. "Do you mind telling me what that was all about?" I asked. Somewhat embarrassed they explained that a person with a beard, long hair and blue jeans had been reported as having run away from home!

When I told Paul the story his howls of laughter and his falling off the bar-stool were almost sincere enough to convince me that he hadn't set the whole thing up and been watching out of one of the factory windows. And after all, it was a perfectly natural mistake. I was only 33 at the time.



*'That's the last time you'll drown the Glenrolloch, Jobson .*

# THE WHO, WHAT, WHY, WHEN, WHERE & HOW OF IT ALL...

## BUT NOT NECESSARILY IN THAT - OR ANY OTHER - ORDER

During the twenty nine days I spent in Britain during August of 1985 I took notes. I wrote down what I did and who I did it with, where I ate and drank, what the countryside looked like, the little things that strike one as interesting/amusing/unusual as one travels (like the traffic sign that reads CHANGED PRIORITIES AHEAD which I found delightfully existential) and dozens of other pieces of information I thought might or might not be useful if I were to try and write some sort of trip report. But I have no wish to write (and I'm sure you have no wish to read) a chronological "First I did this and then we did that and then so-and-so threw up" sort of report. Instead I'll try to talk about and detail the things behind the trip and those parts of it that were most memorable to me. That way I can reread this issue just before the '87 Worldcon and hoodwink my British fan friends into thinking I actually remember what happened during the severely soggy summer of '85.

## WHEN...

The temporal reply to that query is simple indeed: I was in various parts of Britain (i.e. England, Wales and Scotland) between Wednesday July 31, 1985, and Wednesday August 28, 1985. But there was more to it than that.

English weather is, of course, notorious and as an expatriot I really Should Have Known Better. But since I left England as a boy in 1957 I've been back a half a dozen times and have experienced some damn nice summer weather. Add that to the fact that I really didn't remember what my last visit had been like (those wasted notes actually had a cover sheet stating "The Slightly Soggy Summer of '79") and I can perhaps be forgiven for anticipating at least a modicum of acceptable climate on the trip. Ha!

My calculator tells me I spent twenty-nine days in Britain. It rained on twenty-five of them. It rained on each of the first twenty-four days I was there. Sometimes it rained torrentially and sometimes it only showered briefly but for three and a half solid weeks it rained. *Everybody* was talking about the weather. Complete strangers were stopping obvious tourists on the streets and apologizing for the weather. "It's the worse summer in fifteen years," they'd explain. After the first couple of weeks this graduated to "It's the worst summer in twenty years, you know" and it didn't take much longer to reach its full growth and become the catchphrase of the season, "It's the worst summer in thirty years." I probably heard that line a hundred times in the month I was there. Of course, the last thirty of them were my own fault. As SILICON began in Newcastle I made the mistake of mentioning how sick I was of hearing this odious comparison concerning the weather. Naturally bunches of fans (led by Tony Berry as I recall) seized on this admission and tormented me with choruses of the bloody refrain at each suitable (and unsuitable) break in the conversation. The only thing that was even *more* annoying than all this was constantly being reminded that September would make up for it all by being an absolutely splendid month!



(Two aspects of the press coverage of the unusual weather caught my eye and delighted me. I'm pretty sure it was in The Manchester Guardian that I read an article on the unnaturally severe weather in which the writer chastized the British public for their uncalled-for complaints. "Everyone is complaining that this is the worst summer we've had for ages," he wrote. "Don't they remember what it was like in the summer of 1374?"

And as I wandered through the newsstand at the airport on my last day in England I happened to notice a brand new issue of PUNCH. The garish cover was quite an attention-getter, all reds and yellows and oranges so I took a closer look at the cartoon on the cover. It showed two large, ugly, red demons at one of the entrances to Hell. Masses of flames were everywhere and a huge crowd of obviously terrified mortals were frantically trying to avoid being pushed further into the inferno. All except one, that is. In the centre of the crowd was a small wimpy-looking chap with a big smile on his face. He was rushing eagerly forward as one demon said to the other, "I understand the British have had a cold wet summer this year."

HOW... Naturally, I flew there and back but as with most of the things I do it wasn't quite that simple. When Doris originally made the booking it had me arriving in London on the morning of Thursday, August 1st, just in time for the One Tun meeting, and leaving a couple of days after the end of SILICON. (She had managed to pump me for this information some weeks earlier without giving me the slightest inkling of what she was planning. As it said on the button I put in her Christmas stocking, "All this and brains too!") However, not too far from the departure date the travel agency called me to let me know that my flight had been cancelled. Not to worry, though, they reassured me, they'd put me on a flight leaving the next day...and get me to London a mere eight hours after the One Tun meeting had ended! I tossed some not-so-jovial rhetoric in their direction, wrote a scathing letter to the head of the organization that had chosen them to be our travel agents and looked around for an alternate booking. The only flight still available left a day earlier which would have been fine except that (a) it was more expensive and (b) I was Toastmaster at RIVERCON and would be in Louisville until the Monday which made catching a Tuesday flight to England somewhat hectic. Of course, expediency is the daughter of necessity so I cursed the original agency and booked with WardAir. (The curse worked: shortly after I returned from my holiday that agency folded, stranding many travellers overseas and depriving many more of their holidays. The curse also backfired on me: this particular WardAir flight went to Stansted.)

So I did this brilliant Toastmastering gig in Louisville, destroyed George Martin's credibility as a science fiction writer forever (I admit to being worried, though; he's got an excellent memory and he can be one vindictive s.o.b.) and limped back to Toronto in the Pony (not so) Express (whereby hangs another tale entirely, coming soon to a fanzine near you (as soon as I get around to writing it up.)) A day was spent in tidying up loose ends and getting re-packed for Britain and then my completely unexpected but eagerly anticipated trip to Britain began.

WardAir, in my past experience, had been a better than average charter airline and I was pleased to find that the service and the quality of the flight was still high. And flying WardAir does have one major advantage: the free open bar! So I had several drinks instead of trying to sleep along with a cocktail and some wine with dinner. As she was tidying the dinner trays the stewardess asked if I'd like a liqueur? Is mimeo fannish? I asked for a double brandy. A few minutes later a steward asked me if I was having an after-dinner drink. I said yes, I was having a double brandy. Yup, you're right, they ended up giving me damn near a water glass full of brandy, this at about an hour out of London. Come to think of it, maybe that explains what happened when we got to Stansted...

If you've never heard of Stansted, join the club. Neither had I before I touched

down there in the early (somewhat fuzzy) morning of Wednesday, July 31st. Stansted is the newest, smallest, least accessible, poorest equipped, most laughable and least enjoyable of London's three airports. If Stansted is not the armpit of the universe then it is certainly the two-week old five-day deoderant pad that once covered that armpit. Even in my state of brandy-induced mellowness I was completely underwhelmed.

My original plan had been to arrive in London, show up at the One Tun and surprise a few people and find someone I could crash with for a while but arriving a day early naturally changed all that. I'd already decided to find an inexpensive hotel somewhere (yes, I know now how naive that was) so after strolling past the non-existent customs check and ignoring the absent immigration officials I picked up a list of local accomodations from the Tourist Information booth that seemed to be the only operating part of the airport and sat down to peruse it. I was tired, having been up for almost twenty-four hours, and definitely feeling no pain so it took me somewhat longer than it should have to read through the list and come to the decision that I'd be better off actually going into London. But it couldn't have taken more than ten minutes. Which was why I was stunned to look up and find I was the only person left in the terminal! Where all my fellow passengers went so quickly I've no idea but one must suppose that most of them were met by friends or relatives since public transport in and out of Stansted is minimal. Hence there must be upwards of a hundred people living in England *who actually know where Stansted is!* It boggles the mind.

(The Stansted cloud was not without its silver lining, however. When I realized I was all alone I wandered in the direction of the sign showing busses and found a shiny green double-decker bus. I asked the driver if it was the bus for London and was told it wasn't and the London bus would be along in maybe an hour. I sat on my suitcase feeling vegged out and puzzled and after a few minutes the driver returned and told me that, by golly, he'd called his depot and now he was the London bus. So for three pounds I had a private bus take me for the two hour trip into the heart of London!)

While in London the "how" part of the trip included a one-week London Underground pass which I'd rate as an absolute essential to the serious tourist. (I'd picked up a voucher for my pass in Toronto which made it slightly cheaper than buying one in London but either way it makes good economic sense to have one if you're expecting to do a lot of hop, skip and jumping while you're there.) It is not only cheaper to use the pass but also much more convenient since you can avoid line-ups at ticket windows and ticket machines and don't have to weigh yourself down with a pocketful of small change for bus fares. This latter aspect was particularly useful during those dreadful three hour intervals in the afternoon when the pubs closed, it was pouring with rain and I'd done my formal bit of touring for the day. I'd jump on the first available bus (double-decker, of course) and let it take me wherever it happened to be going until it passed something interesting enough to merit a closer investigation (or returned to where I'd boarded it having shown me parts of London I'd never otherwise have seen.) The next trip may not require such measures, however since (a) it may not be raining constantly in which case the best way to see London is to walk and (b) several British fans may show themselves to be predictive geniuses and the afternoon closing of English pubs -- introduced as a temporary measure during the first World War -- may have been eliminated, thereby eliminating the need for much travelling around at all!

For the really serious part of my touring through the hundred and seven different types of British rain, the "how" of it involved British Rail. I've always enjoyed train travel. It has a somewhat romantic air to it, undoubtedly fostered by all the movies I've enjoyed that were set on trains. Someday I'd like to do some long-distance touring by train and get one of those little private compartments that have fascinated me ever since we put Tucker and Rusty into one in Sydney ten years ago.

-----

Each of my previous return visits to England had involved train travel, usually from London to some place like Newcastle or Portsmouth where I planned to spend a few days with friends or relatives, so I was familiar with the Jekyll and Hyde nature of British Rail. Most trains left on time and the service between major cities was frequent and fast. On the other hand, trains got cancelled capriciously and the quality and cost of what passed for food on British trains gave new meaning to the word "outrageous." This trip reaffirmed the truth of *Plus ca change, plus c'est la meme chose* and more so!

When Hania heard what Doris was getting me for my birthday she decided to augment the gift and generously bought me a one week BritRail pass. On past trips I'd thought about getting such a pass but decided that my normal pattern of travelling to a city and staying there for several days visiting friends made such a pass uneconomical. With a pass as a gift, though, my thinking naturally changed. For about \$140 I could upgrade the pass into a two week, First Class pass and for two weeks of first class unlimited train transportation anywhere in Britain that seemed like a damn good deal. And it most certainly was!

Getting that pass was probably the smartest move I made with regard to the trip. (Next to getting together with Doris, that is.) I only actually used it on eight of the fourteen days for which it was valid but it was well worth having for those days. Britons use trains the way we use cars. Oh, many Britons have cars, of course, and even one or two British fans have cars (I never met any but I heard about some... well, maybe that's a slight exaggeration but I certainly didn't meet many) but for a sizeable percentage of their travelling the British take the train. (By comparison, I'd bet that quite a few North American readers of XENIUM have never been on an inter-city train.) However, the British simply do not seem to even consider First Class. (When I first considered going to Britain -- the plan that I cancelled some time before my birthday -- I wrote to Paul Skelton and asked, among other things, for some sample train fares between some of the cities I expected to visit. He sent me back a wealth of information on all the different types of fares including various super-savers that required one depart at three o'clock on a Thursday morning, stay at least a month and make sandwiches on both parts of the trip, but he dismissed travel passes and First Class with a simple "but those we don't even have to think about.")

And it isn't just British fans who ignore First Class. An overwhelming majority of the people travelling in the First Class compartments on British Rail are tourists. I overheard Americans, Canadians, Australians, Scandinavians and numerous Europeans but it was very rare to find a Briton in our midst. It seemed as if the majority of British travellers couldn't afford First Class and those that could could afford other forms of transportation and didn't lower themselves to train travel. The obvious advantage, of course, was that even on the most popular runs with the most crowded trains the First Class compartments were normally half empty. On several occasions I found myself with an entire compartment of my own. Add in the fact that the First Class coaches were, generally, much newer and were always roomier and more comfortable and the First Class BritRail pass most definitely made the trip much more enjoyable.

The pass also provided me with a delightful degree of freedom. At the Bristol station I walked up to the information window and asked the young lady where the first available First Class train going somewhere interesting would be. She asked me where I wanted to go. I told her I didn't care as long as the destination was attractive and the train ride itself was enjoyable. I ended up that night in Holyhead, North Wales and had a marvellous time the whole day. In Edinburgh I did the same thing and ended up in Inverness. And at any time I knew that if I found myself somewhere I didn't want to be I could always hop on another train and quickly be somewhere else. After due consideration I completely recommend the First Class BritRail pass...especially if a good friend buys half of it for you!

**WHY...** That's the easiest question of all to answer. It only takes two words: people and beer. (Sorry, that's three words.) I was born in England and I still have family there, family I'm extremely fond of. There was a second cousin who'd been born since my previous visit (and a few days after I returned yet another second cousin was born for me to see for the first time on my next trip over) and six years is too long to go without seeing one's family. And I've been an active participant in British fanzine fandom for over fifteen years so had many fannish friends I wanted to see again, plus a few of the new wave of British fans I wanted to meet in the flesh. People have been, were again and will always be my main reason for wanting (and needing) periodic trips across the Atlantic.

But if people were my top priority, beer (and its natural habitat, the traditional British pub) wasn't far behind. I like beer. I especially like English beer. And I especially especially like English draft Guinness. (If sanity ever catches on in Ireland I'd like to visit there and experience The Real Thing but until it does and since I know no better I'll continue to enjoy and appreciate the thick black liquid they serve throughout Britain.) I also happen to like pubs. I think it's more than likely I'd like pubs even if I *didn't* like drinking but thank god I'll never have to test that theory out. I enjoy the atmosphere of pubs, and their history, and the hearty and relatively inexpensive food they serve and the friendliness they, for the most part, convey. Were I suddenly to become independently wealthy I could think of a lot worse things to do than spend a year travelling the British countryside frequenting ancient pubs. In fact, if anyone hears about a job along those lines...

So I decided early that pubs would be a prominent feature of the summer of '85. But it wasn't until I actually arrived in London that I realized that what I really had in mind was to visit at least one new pub each day I was there and drink in one hundred different places during the month of my travels. (This gives an extra meaning to the "severely soggy" part of the title of this piece...which only barely beat out "One Hundred Pubs A Month; That's Not Too Many" when I reached for the lettering guide.)

I made it, of course, and it wasn't all that difficult. Starting with "The Slug and Lettuce" in central London my happy wanderings took me to such delights as "Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese (Rebuilt 1667)" where Johnson used to hold court (John Jarrold and I went down to the cellar and walked the same uneven stone floors that Johnson himself walked and we drank good whisky at the same bar where Johnson used to drink and the shivers down my back weren't due to the damp and the cold) and "The Citty of York" with its two-hundred-year-old beams and private wooden booths and "The Bishop of Norwich" where they serve half gallon beaten copper pitchers of Davy's Old Wallop to be drunk from pewter tankards by customers who've passed the dress code and been allowed to enter and "The Brewer's Arms", one of a mere handful of Portsmouth-area pubs supplied with George Gale's HSB, arguably one of the best bitters in England, and, if you're lucky, a tiny bottle of Gale's "Prize Old Ale", reputed to be one of the countries strongest brews. And in a country filled with bizarre and delightful places to drink few can top the six outlets of the small independent Bruce's Brewery which runs such London landmarks as "The Ferret And Firkin In The Balloon Up The Creek" where I enjoyed several delicious pints of Dog Bolter and deeply regretted that the much stronger Gagglegobbler was off that day. From "World's End" in Chelsea to "The Dublin Packet" in Wales to "The Malt Shovel Inn" in Scotland I quaffed my way across Britain finally ending up





with two solitary pints of Guinness on my twenty-ninth day in my one hundredth pub, the-recently-cleaned-up-by-the-Health-Department-and-no-longer-quite-so-interesting "Dirty Dick's" (where all but two of the mummified cat skeletons have been removed from the rafters and those two are displayed in pristine glass cases, proving, once more, that all good things come to an end and you really can't go back.) I enjoyed each pub (with the possible exception of "The Boltons" in Earl's Court where one of the leather-clad spiked-haired all male customers followed me into the toilet and shook his dick at me while I took a much-needed piss and tried not to look in his direction) and if my waistline got bigger and my wallet got thinner, well, what the dickens, it was the best of times, it was the best of times...

**WHERE...** "Where" provides the bare bones that "what" and "who" flesh out so I'll keep this one short. (Those who applauded remember how much you paid for this fanzine.) The where of it all was London, Portsmouth, Bath, Bristol and Clifton, Holyhead, Stockport, Skipton and Bingley, Edinburgh, Inverness and Newcastle/SILICON along with a couple of hundred other settlements that were passed through or stopped at along the way. (Those with a fascination for the minutia of other people's lives are welcome to stop by and view my annotated "British Rail Passenger Network 1984-85" map which shows all one hundred and twenty five of the stations I went through that British Rail views as important enough to be on the map. Of course, the map isn't complete: it fails to take note of a famous station like Llanfairpwllgwynyllgogerychwyrndrobwillllantysiliogogogoch although I passed through it twice. Nevertheless, this particular map is a *MUST* for any tourist with a rail pass.)(I also have a list of the other ninety-nine pubs at a slightly higher price.)

**WHAT...** I was eleven when my family moved from England to Canada and on my other return visits I was primarily interested in getting reacquainted with friends and relatives so in reality I knew very little about being a tourist in Britain. Since Doris and I would like to travel to Britain together for the 87 worldcon and since she rates pubs somewhere beneath abattoirs on her list of Fun Places To Visit I thought it behooved me to check out a few places for later reference. (Those things I did in the company of fan friends will mostly appear in the "Who" section to follow this one. So if you're reading this to find your name don't give up just yet.)

London is one of the most fascinating cities in the world (though god knows I'd never want to have to make a living there) and one of the most enjoyable to walk around. What surprises many visitors is just how small the central core of the city is and how close together many of the main attractions are. And it's practically impossible to get lost in the central part of the city as you're never far from an underground (i.e. subway) station where your transport pass and their excellent maps will quickly get you back to wherever you need to go. You can wander around central London and be constantly surprised at the famous and unusual and quaint places you stumble across on your travels.

Of course, systematic serious touring has its place in a city as rich in history and culture as London so in addition to my usual aimless meandering about looking at tiny little lanes and alleys and squares and closes I made a trip to the Tower of London. If you want to experience awe stand and look at the White Tower and imagine the 905 years of its history, investigate the New Armouries (built as recently as 1663) and try to convince yourself that the 520 carat Star of Africa is actually real. (The Crown Jewels and the surrounding treasures simply beggar description. The monstrous -- and monstrously ornate -- solid gold wine cooler that greets you as you first enter the room and appears to weigh a half a ton almost numbs the mind to the wonders that follow it.) A day at the Tower seems to encapsulate everything about England that so fascinates North Americans and should be on every tourist's itinerary. But get there early and go straight to the Crown Jewels or you'll waste a couple of hours traipsing up and down Disneyland-type people moving lanes.

I used to be fond of saying that I originally purchased a VCR so I could watch the half-hour animated short "Great" and while there was a certain amount of poetic licence in that statement there was also a great deal of truth. For those of you so unfortunate as to never have enjoyed this Oscar-winning marvel, "Great" is a bizarre biography of the 19th century English engineer Isambard Kingdom Brunel, a genius who deserves to be much better known in North America than he is today. Brunel featured prominently in my '85 trip although I had no idea that he would until it happened.

From Portsmouth I started my two weeks of close encounters with British Rail by heading to Bath, a city recommended by my relatives. I spent an afternoon there and even took a bus tour of the place which is a reasonable way to get a feeling for a city when you have no transportation of your own. I had every intention of staying for the night but quickly discovered that there don't tend to be any cheap bed and breakfast places in the vicinity of most inner-city train stations. So I hopped on to Bristol instead, completely on a whim. When I detrained at Bristol Temple Meads station I happened to see a sign on a bus stop for Clifton and for once my legendary memory *didn't* fail me. A little light went off inside my head and illuminated a small cartoon character pacing back and forth puffing on a big cigar and muttering, "A grand competition for a bridge across the Avon gorge at Clifton." Sure enough, a few moments later I saw another sign for the Clifton Suspension Bridge and realised that quite by accident I'd stumbled onto the site of one of Brunel's earliest undertakings.

I jumped aboard the first Clifton-bound bus and not too much later, for the extravagant fee of 2p, was walking across the bridge. It's hard for me to explain just how important and how moving that experience was for me. Part of it was due to the fact that the Avon gorge at Clifton happens to be awesomely beautiful, easily the most glorious natural sight I saw in a month of travelling back and forth across Britain. But mostly it was because of my fascination with Brunel. Since I first learned of IKB some six years ago I've been captivated by him. In my usual dilettantish way I looked into his life and his work. And there I was actual standing in the middle of the first great bridge he designed. Brunel himself must have stood on the same spot as I did to gaze across the gorge and envision his creation. (He died before it was completed or we might have walked across the same path.) For once the sky was clear and the sun was shining, the gorge was magnificent and the bridge that I'd seen two or three dozen times as a cartoon blueprint was all about me, its massive grace a truly moving sight. I thought of Brunel supervising the start of its construction over a hundred and fifty years earlier and it was a magic moment, made all the more magic by the serendipitous way it came about. After soaking it all in for about an hour, I caught the bus back to town and celebrated with a couple of pints of Guinness in pub #50, "The Isambard Kingdom Brunel."

(I was soon to realize that Bristol was Brunel crazy. It happened that I'd arrived during the sesquicentennial celebrations for the Great Western Railway, Brunel's first really major success. The GWR -- or "God's Wonderful Railway" as everybody was quick to point out -- ran from London to Bristol and the city was busy celebrating it in particular and Brunel in general. My fiftieth pub was only one of dozens of things named after him and the whole situation tickled the hell out of me. My luck wasn't entirely good, though: after walking two or three miles through some of the seamier parts of the Bristol docks I had to settle for a partial glimpse of the SS Great Britain, a Brunel steamship that has been refurbished and is on display except I got there an hour after they closed for the day. I suppose most people would not rate standing in the middle of a century and a half old bridge one of the two or three highlights of their trans-Atlantic trip but what the hell, a little eccentricity never hurt anyone, right? Well...wrong, but who cares!)

If London is the most interesting city in Britain, Edinburgh isn't very far behind in the number two spot. I'd never been there before and I regretted having only a day in which to catch the barest glimpse of a small part of the city. That day hap-

-----

pened to be in the middle of the annual Edinburgh Festival so the city was filled with tourists and the streets were filled with performers. (I was amused to hear a comedic juggler end his performance with a line of patter that was damn near word for word what Ro Lutz-Nagey used to use in the harbourfront in Baltimore.) I have to admit that I found Edinburgh to be a physically more attractive city than London (it seems considerably cleaner and the architecture generally has more grace to it) and it would be churlish of anyone to suggest that this had anything to do with the fact that its pubs are open *all day long*. No afternoon closings, no eleven p.m. curfew; it was almost like civilization. (I found Edinburgh beautiful *despite* the memorial to Sir Walter Scott but I suppose anyone who sings the praises of a city that contains the Albert Memorial has to be on thin ice where the aesthetics of public monuments is concerned.)

I walked Edinburgh's famed Royal Mile, reading the descriptions of the historic buildings, even shopping for cashmere at ridiculously low prices, and occasionally stopping at a pub to re-energise. (Someday I'd like to walk that Mile again and go into every pub along it. But I'll need more time, more money and someone with me to carry me home when I'm through.) I saved most of my active interest, though, for a store window that advertised 80 different single malts available on the premises! Although I must admit I thought for a moment and *almost* entered a hole-in-the-wall eatery that advertised "Haggisburgers, with a sprinkle of whisky on every one" until I recognised that I'd never have had the nerve to order one even if I hadn't been stuffed with beer and pub grub.

Edinburgh was a brand new experience for me (hell, I never even knew Scotland had its own money!) and a most enjoyable, if too brief, one at that. I imagine we'll go back there in '87; Doris for the cashmere and me for the *camera obscura* and another dozen of those Royal Mile ~~pubs~~ historic sites!

Inverness is a rather dull place if you don't have a way of getting to the loch (you know, Loch Ness, the one all the fuss is about) but the train rides to and from it are extremely worth while. I went to it up the east side of Scotland, through Aberdeen, and returned down the middle of the country and apart from ~~this being~~ beautiful country, with rolling hills, mountains, cliffs along the sea and lush valleys in the centre, I damn near had a religious experience during the trip.

There I was, about four-fifths of the way from Edinburgh to Inverness having admired the landscape and dutifully observed several castles and ruins, when the train went through the small town of Keith. I glanced out the window and saw several fields of barrels. We're talking acres of barrels. Tens of thousands of barrels all neatly lined up or stacked in massive pyramids. I took an immediate interest that was only heightened by the sight of numerous guard dogs roaming around. In moments we were passing huge bonded warehouses. Not one or two but a dozen or more bonded warehouses, each the size of a couple of football fields! I imagined what they contained and felt decidedly faint. A huge sign told the whole story: Chivas Brothers Factory. But it wasn't until I spotted the *railway car* marked Royal Salute that I actually fainted.

The return train came with its own little program guide and a steady stream of tourist commentaries over the PA system as we had our attention directed to the ancestral homes of various clans and lairds and were told a little of the history of the region we were passing through. (How many of you knew, for example, that Atholl Castle is the home of the Duke of Atholl who is the only man in Britain allowed to have a private army?) There was obvious bias, though, and I had to research my own maps to identify when we travelled alongside the river Spey, and I underwent another near-epiphany contemplating the waters that have most definitely shaped my life over the last twenty years.

Later during the same trip we passed through Berwick-upon-Tweed and I relayed to some

-----

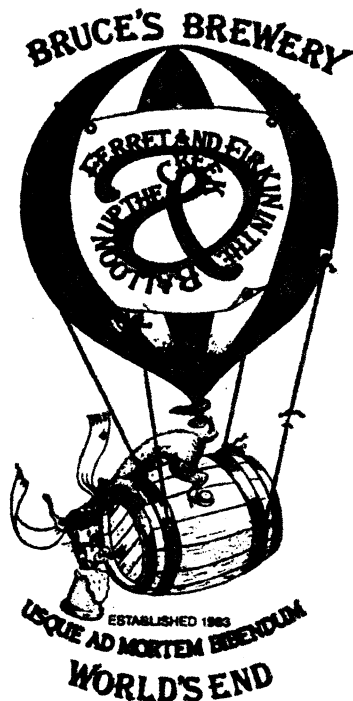
fellow tourists in the first class car a marvellous story I'd been told in Edinburgh by, I believe, Owen Whiteoak. It appears that when Scotland and England declared war on Russia at the start of the Crimean War so did Berwick-on-Tweed, a small town that sits on the border between the two countries and which was, at that time, the cause of a dispute as to exactly which country it belonged to. However, when the war was over only representatives of Scotland and England signed the treaty. So the town of Berwick is still officially at war with Russia! I told this tale as we went over a bridge overlooking the town and several Americans dutifully pulled out cameras and took pictures of this curiosity. I can only hope that when they get them back they'll remember why they photographed a nondescript section of terrace housing.

SILICON mostly belongs in the "who" section but it was also a "what" as it differs so much from any other convention I've ever been to. Of course, British cons in general differ significantly from their North American counterparts in a couple of major ways. I'm pretty sure that I was rather unsuccessful in convincing most of the non-travelling British fans I talked to that for the same price they pay just to attend a con I could go to a normal US or Canadian convention *and* drink their booze for free all weekend. Now most of the time I was trying to make them believe I was not trying to make fools of them with my farfetched stories we were standing in the bar drinking Guinness at 86p a pint and building up our bar-bills 'way past the registration fee for the weekend so perhaps this had something to do with their reluctance to take me seriously. Honestly, though, guys and girls, I wasn't making it up. I can't think of a regional con I go to regularly that doesn't have an all-you-can-drink-all-weekend free con suite. (Which is undoubtedly one of the reasons I do go to them regularly!)

Then there is the English concept of a hotel for visitors to deal with. The North American who is used to every hotel room coming with two double beds, air-conditioning and a full bathroom and shower is going to find most English hotels quite a change of pace. Oh, England has these types of hotels but the great majority of the

places I've seen and stayed at on my trips could best be described as small, quaint, tiny, spartanly furnished and very very little. SILICON's Grosvenor Hotel was all this and more. The "more" dealt with the fact that the hotel was a bewildering but delightful labyrinth of narrow corridors, hidden staircases, unexpected rooms and passageways which seemed to relocate themselves as the weekend progressed. The whole place had the air of having been designed by a rich eccentric for his kids to play Dungeons and Dragons in. I'm certain there were parts of the place I saw only once during the four days I was there and I was never quite sure where the toilets were. (Most English hotel rooms are too small to have on-sight toilets so one goes searching for the various types of facilities that are randomly scattered around the hotel. One might find a bathtub, a sink, a toilet or any permutation or combination imaginable. After a dozen pints of Guinness playing Washroom Roulette in search of a place to piss can be quite exciting!) And before I'm accused of being an Ugly Canadian bragging about how much better things are At Home let me make it clear that these are observations, not com-

**'Bruce's Beer - You'll PreFerret To Any Other'**



114 Lots Road, Chelsea Creek, London SW10  
Tel: 01-352 6645

plaints. I *liked* the Grosvenor (hell, any hotel that assigns me to room 42 is okay in my book) and I had a great weekend there.

SILICON itself was most definitely a unique experience. It was my first exposure to the British idea of a relaxacon and I was definitely taken a bit by surprise. Oh, I expected the hotel bar to be a central gathering point for the whole weekend and I expected to spend a large part of each day drinking ~~I/WOULD/NOT/HAVE/GONE/OTHERWISE~~ but I was unprepared for the degree of *organization* behind the search for "desperate fun." (An up-and-coming catchphrase which may or may not become part of fannish myth-making.)

SILICON was very games oriented. I suspect that the British in general are more games conscious than most North Americans (which may explain why I'm far more into games/puzzles/contests than Doris) and this was reflected in the structure and the program at SILICON. The majority of program items were contests, pitting teams of fans or individuals against each other in battles of wits, intelligence or the ability to make a fool of yourself in public. There were quizzes about movies, music, science fiction and a few more peculiar topics and everyone seemed fair game. I was on a couple myself, handling a few questions about films but getting clobbered in the "Battle of the Sexes." And whenever a new contest was due to start various organizing Gannets would circulate through the hotel demanding *and getting* an audience. If anything captured the essential difference between SILICON and our relaxacons for me it was the sight of the heavy-drinking British fans wandering out of the bar for the start of the next round of Mastermind or whatever happened to be on at the time.

In addition to the program items, SILICON featured three convention-wide contests that all attendees were expected to sign up for. These were a video game, a darts contest and a pool tournament and while they didn't get 100% participation the vast majority of fans played in one or more of the games. I thought this was a great idea and dutifully made an idiot of myself in obtaining an all time low score on "Defender" and generally managing to miss whatever I was aiming at on the dartboard. It really didn't matter, though, as the whole idea was to participate and have fun, desperate or otherwise, and not necessarily to excel. I did okay at pool, though, and made it to the finals before losing to con chairman Kev Williams. It was small consolation that (a) he has a pool table in his basement and (b) I beat him the next three games we played.

SILICON was an excellent weekend and I'm glad I was able to get to (what may sadly prove to be the last) one. The pocket (and only) program, a 12 cm square of paper, proudly proclaims SILICON 9 FUN ENGINEERING (A.K.A. 'The Programme') and that says it all. In case you were wondering, the engineering worked. For my money the SILICON committee is the Isambard Kingdom Brunel of fun engineering!

I suppose I'd be remiss if I didn't at least mention a rather non-event that nevertheless featured prominently throughout the trip. For the entire fortnight I used the rail pass, British Rail was more or less on strike. A series of rotating shut-downs caused a great deal of inconvenience throughout the country but by simply staying away from Glasgow (not something I found all that difficult to do) I avoided any problem. There was an underlying current of tension in arriving at any given train station (would *today* be the day the labour unrest would catch up with me?) but even the threatened shutdown of the trains out of Newcastle on the Monday after SILICON never materialized and the strike only ever impinged upon me in the form of newspaper horror stories of delays, cancellations and stranded tourists.

WHO... I mentioned earlier that people were one of the two main reasons for my trip and it was certainly the people I met, or re-met, and spent time with who made the entire month so enjoyable. Here, then, in no particular order are a few of the people to whom I'm indebted and a few of the reasons I'm indebted to them for...

-----



Childish though it may have been, I was quite looking forward to surprising some of the London fans with my unexpected appearance at the One Tun. Unfortunately, I forgot that the core of London fandom doesn't show up at the pub until the middle of the evening so I spent a couple of hours drinking quietly by myself and having an occasional conversation with a fringe fan who didn't ask my name and wouldn't have recognized it if they had. By the time anyone I actually knew showed up the thirty feet between me and the door was jammed with what seemed like a couple of hundred Star Trek, Doctor Who, comic and media fans. Still, with a touch of the cosmic, the first fan to fight his way through the crowds and into my line of sight was the very man I'd most been looking forward to seeing again in London. Greg Pickersgill bullied his way towards the bar, looked right at me...and kept right on pushing his way drinkward. Sigh. The best laid plans...

It was left to me to fight my way through the crowds to *their* end of the bar to join the cream of London's fannish fandom: Greg, Rob Hansen and Avedon Carol and John Jarrold. (Greg

claimed he'd seen me but dismissed me as a remarkable look-alike since there was no way Mike Glicksohn could have been there. For the sake of my sensitive ego I chose to believe him.)

I've always liked Greg Pickersgill although heaven knows he sometimes makes that difficult. Despite his brusque and sometimes abrasive nature he's always impressed me with his integrity, intelligence and depth of interest in fandom and we've always gotten along well. For some reason he even seems to soften the facade of surly grumpiness he shows some people when I'm around (maybe because I refuse to take it seriously) and I have a very real affection for the man. He's a fine drinking companion, a good man to talk to and one hell of a generous host. He and his wife Linda put me up for most of my week in London and both were unfailingly kind during my stay. I greatly appreciated their assistance and their company on those rare times we were actually home at the same time. (To put a minor dent in my balance of payments to Greg I took the two of them to a nearby Thai restaurant both were interested in but had never tried. There I discovered, yet again, that I love Thai food and found, yet again, that while MasterCard may *claim* to be an international credit card there's always someone, somewhere who hasn't quite figured things out. Sigh.)

Despite the good karma Greg generated while I was with him he *did* do something for which I may never forgive him. Aided and abetted by the oh-so-well-adjusted Rob Hansen he ruined thirteen years of cold turkey and got me back onto comic books! It was Greg who first raved about this fantastic new English writer DC had and Rob was quick to step in and smilingly offer me a free look, just to see if I'd like it. With Avedon agonizing over the fate of the Flash it was all too easy to succumb to the pervading enthusiasm for comics I thought I'd rid myself of in 1973. A Saturday

tube to central London, a few quick pints at "The Westminster Arms" and there I was in the Comic Mart frantically trying to acquire a complete run of Alan Moore "Swamp Thing"s. I even bought the 400th issue of "Superman", the premier of Moore's "Miracleman" and the first of the DC "Crisis on Infinite Earths." Since returning home I've paid three or four dollars for several early "Swamp Thing" comics and still need a half a dozen issues that'll set me back eight or nine dollars apiece if I can find them. Yes, Greg and Rob have a lot to answer for! But I'm going to get even. When I send them their copies of this issue I'll mention in a cover note that they are in my trip report...then I'll leave those pages out of their issues.

Of course, Rob Hansen has a lot to answer for at any time. Rob may well be the most laid back fan on either side of the Atlantic. Always calm, always rational, Rob is Mister Mellow. He seems unflappable. If I didn't like him so much I'd have the urge to throttle him! But it's hard not to like the quiet, good-humoured fannishness of this talented Welshman and I enjoyed the chance to have a few more conversations and a few more beers with him. (He *is* eccentric, though: he buys hundreds of dollars worth of comics every year just so he can read them once and give them to Greg to sell. He even manages to make it sound sensible when you ask him about it.) I stayed with Rob and Avedon my first night with London fandom and later visited and picked up a fair number of recent British fanzines from a collection Rob was disposing of. It isn't often one gets to stay with two TAFF winners at the same time and can get double duty from a casual, "So when's your trip report coming out?"!

Avedon Carol and I have never been really close friends (rumoured affairs to the contrary) but over the years, once she stopped thinking of me as fandom's best bad example, we've developed a reasonable friendship. I've long admired Avedon's passionate and intelligent letters as well as her innate zaniness and since she was not yet working when I reached London we spent a couple of afternoons touring together. It was a good thing, too, because I'm sure no-one else in London fandom would have shared my excitement the way Avedon did when the bartender at "The George" enlightened us about the day-old baseball scores in the International Herald-Tribune. (Of course, she was interested in some second-rate team from New York while I was tracking the Blue Jays to their first pennant but it was nice to have someone to talk the arcane language of baseball with regardless of her poor taste.)

However, there was nothing wrong with Avedon's taste in her self-appointed role as Official London Fandom Guinness Taster. On a couple of dozen occasions we'd be sitting at a table or standing at a bar and I'd wait patiently for my pint of Guinness to ooze out of the barrel. When it finally arrived, Avedon would silently reach across, daintily raise the glass and take a very polite, very gentele sip. If she was still alive when she put the glass back down I'd know it was safe and would quickly drain the rest of it. It's true that these Armenians are made of stout stuff.

Avedon is also directly responsible for this issue of XENIUM (so you can blame her for these last fourteen pages.) One night at the Hansen-Carol abode, after we'd skirted somewhat painfully around the edges of Topic A, Avedon showed me a piece she had written for an American faned who shall remain nameless. I was so impressed by it I mentioned that I would have liked to have had it for XENIUM. She thought for a few seconds, folded it up, handed it to me and said, "It's yours." Thus was born my desire to Pub My Ish once again and the concept and the issue itself grew directly from Avedon's article. But even though she writes better than I do you'd better finish my bit first. You never know what I'll say about you if you skip over the next few pages.

I'd met John Jarrold previously but only casually so I didn't know too much about him. During this visit I got to experience both John Jarrolds: the one-on-one John who quietly but enthusiastically took me (with Avedon) on a delightful pub tour of Fleet Street and several of the most unusual and enjoyable pubs of my entire visit and the manic on-stage John, he of the neverending-from-good-to-mediocre movie imper-

-----



sonations who arose, Hyde-like, at SILICON. Personally, I liked the real John more but I was probably responsible for preserving the other when I physically restrained Greg Pickersgill from tearing across the lobby of the Grosvenor and murdering John's alter ego when he was halfway through about a six-hour singalong of every song ever written for a movie musical. I thought I owed the man who'd bought me whisky in Samuel Johnson's favorite pub at least that much! (If John is not the inventor of the church of desperate fun he is certainly its high priest but I liked him. And his singing didn't bother me; I just took my beer into the other room and shot pool.)

Certain aspects of fandom are universal so it doesn't surprise me that some of the fans I like the most in England don't like other of the fans I like the most. I'm quite used to that sort of thing after twenty years as a fan. It just meant I spent a certain amount of time explaining what a nice person Greg Pickersgill could be and a certain amount of time describing what a swell guy Paul Skelton is (and *one hell* of a lot of time trying to convince just about anyone that Dave Locke is one of the best drinking/talking companions it's possible to find.) Fans with superior memories of ENERGIUMEN and Bill Rotsler will recall that this particular type of fanac is generically known as Explaining Harlan.

Paul and Cas Skelton are my two closest friends in British fandom and they were the only fans who knew ahead of time of my impending visit. I spent four days with them in Stockport and we did what one does in Stockport. We went to pubs, talked a lot, drank whisky, listened to music, drank beer, watched unusual television shows, went to the off licence, talked to Joni Stopa, went to some other pubs, ate vast amounts of exotic foods and the rest of the time we just partied and drank a lot.

Paul Skelton manages the unusual feat of being diffidently sardonic (or sardonically diffident, depending on the proportions) and I wish to hell I could convince him to run for TAFF because I'm sure most North Americans would find his company as enjoyable as I do. Besides which, he is arguably one of the top five writers fandom currently has and resides among the top two or three when it comes to imaginative extrapolation. (Witness his brilliantly conceived thesis later in this issue.) He makes damn fine homebrew beer and drinks it with the best of them (me). Unfortunately he has all the business sense of an ice-cube salesman at the North Pole...

Paul had graciously helped me with several sorts of arrangements for my "surprise" visit. He'd tracked down all sorts of information on British Rail fares for me (get it? "tracked down"... ) and investigated SILICON on my behalf. Since I knew I'd be at SILICON but didn't want SILICON to know I'd be at SILICON, Paul had booked me a room and obtained a membership for me in his own name. And all along I'd been trying to talk him into going to the con as well. He pleaded insolvency, as is his wont, and not even my offer of crash space would make him change his mind. Until the weekend I was actually there, that is. Then he decided that he and Cas would probably enjoy SILICON (homebrew can have these sort of mind-altering effects) and started trying to make the necessary arrangements.

When travel with the Doreys didn't pan out and it looked like a train trip would be required, Paul decided it was time to sell his library of paperback science fiction books. Rather than considering the books on their individual merit, he cleverly waited until the Ashworths had left and announced he was selling paperbacks at 20p each. I foolishly decided I didn't have room for any more books in my suitcase, not even at 30¢ US apiece, so opted for the last of the beer instead. And thereby missed out on things like a first edition US paperback of Heinlein's "Puppet Masters"! I pointed out to Paul that that one book alone could have paid for most of a train trip to Newcastle but he seemed unimpressed and he'd certainly made up in quantity what he'd lost in quality. If memory serves me, close to a thousand paperbacks went south that weekend, jamming the back of Gerald Lawrence's car, and Paul and Cas *did* get to Newcastle so everybody seemed to end up happy with the way things went. With the exception of Mal Ashworth who probably still hasn't forgiven Paul's timing!



Hey, wait a minute! How did that upstart Ashworth muscle his way in ahead of Cas? Typical pushy neo...

Cas Skelton is...well, Cas is Cas. In my mind she belongs to that small but bizarre subsection of fandom I call The Charmingly Flakey. Cas operates of a different energy level than the rest of us and I've seen healthy fans wear themselves out just watching her or listening to her. And despite the fact that she is more interested in United than fanzines and thinks "evil Richard" is a slur on her favorite English king and not a reference to Topic A, she is still a fan and acts as a sort of den-mother when the rest of us gather to Be Fannish and party until the wee small hours. I've even forgiven her for once naming a long-haired guinea pig "Glick" because it was small and shaggy and then naming one of its offspring "Vomit" because it came out of Glick. But I *do* wish she'd stop running the guided tours of the hole in the bedroom roof every time new fans come to visit...

My visit to Stockport had been planned to coincide with Paul's birthday so I wasn't too surprised when about three minutes after I'd stepped onto the train station Cas let slip that there was a "surprise" party planned for the Saturday. Even if she hadn't, I might have figured *something* was up when Gerald Lawrence, Mike and Pat Meara and Mark whose-last-name-might-or-might-not-be Bennett showed up Friday afternoon. (Gerald is a slight, dark, saturnine figure who goes by the name of Boris and has a penchant for eating bizarre and unusual foodstuffs. He is also a respected London-based computer specialist who later would spend an afternoon showing me several extremely distinctive London pubs such as The Sun which represents 69 different breweries and had 109 different real ales listed the day we were there. The Mearas used to be fans until they immersed themselves in the Campaign for Real Ale. Nowadays they travel the country ferreting out obscure real ale pubs and run a real ale festival of their own. Happily Mike has not forgotten how to be the life of a fannish party and later that weekend would entertain us all while enlisting us in the Society of the Frayed Knot. Mark is a tall, quiet young man who bought most of Paul's library and is the only working archeologist I've ever met. Apparently he spends his time, literally, scouring the countryside trying to find a fossilized Saxon turd for Paul Skelton. It takes all kinds to make this fandom of ours...)

It was at the Saturday party that I met Mal and Hazel Ashworth. Mal is one of those Fifties Fandom revenants who has recently reimmersed himself in fanzines after a lengthy gafiation. For a little while I'd been encountering a prolific stream of well-written and amusing letters and articles from Mal in fanzines from both sides of the Atlantic. Although I didn't know all that much of his previous fannish incarnations (and knew practically nothing about Hazel) I'd liked what I'd been reading and was looking forward to meeting them both. They *more* than exceeded my expectations, although that first meeting was a *bit* of a shock...

For some reason I'd assumed that if Mal had been active in the Fifties he'd be...well...old. When I was introduced to the silver-haired but youthful looking Mal Ashworth I'm sure I seemed a bit surprised. And when the young and beautiful woman at his side turned out to be Hazel I'm certain I made a fool of myself by letting my jaw hit the ground. (It was my own fault, of course: I'd merely *assumed* that Hazel too was from the Fifties which turned out not to be the case. You'd think that those of us with step-mothers eight years our junior wouldn't make these false assumptions but...)

Mal and Hazel were those rare, for me, people that I liked immediately and felt relatively at ease with. (I should add that I like many people upon first meeting them but because of my own nature it usually takes me a while to be able to relax and start making friends with them.) We chatted amiably throughout the party about things fannish and otherwise and the rapport was good enough and mutual enough that when they invited me to visit them the following week I jumped at the chance. So it was that the day after they left and Mal didn't get to buy Paul's books, I took the single train car to Staleybridge, switched to the Leeds train and there caught the local to Skipton. Mal came and got me at the station and thus began one of the highpoints of the entire fannish trip.

-----

I'd have gone to Skipton anyway, just for the chance to see a bit more of the Ashworths, but they stacked the deck in their favour by pointing out two things I hadn't previously known: (1) Skipton is just a hop, step and a drive from Bingley and (2) a trip to Skipton would provide me with my only opportunity during my stay to meet the legendary, reclusive D West. It was an offer I couldn't refuse.

Historians claim D and I actually met at the 79 worldcon but if that's true then neither of us was sober enough for me to remember much about it. In the six years since Brighton, D's notoriety had increased steadily and when I learned he wouldn't be at SILICON I was delighted to have a chance to see him courtesy of Mal and Hazel. We had a quick but delicious meal, I took a fast look at their charming house, and then we hopped in the car and headed to Bingley.

The first thing that surprised me was how little D resembled his self-caricatures. I think D's a brilliant cartoonist and a competent artist but he tends to show himself as a scruffy degenerate whereas in reality his physical appearance and his demeanor make Aubrey Beardsley look like a carnival roustabout. Beyond that he is soft-spoken, sardonic, opinionated and an absolute delight to argue with or talk to. We spent a couple of hours drinking pints of beer and disagreeing on just about every fannish topic we discussed and I can honestly say it was the most enjoyable conversation I had during my trip. I got the impression that D combines a formidable intelligence with a capricious love of devil's advocacy and that one reason he and Mal get along so well is that Mal refuses to take him seriously. The evening may not have rated highly as a performance but it was most definitely a delight to me.

(I keep thinking about those increasingly grubby and sinister self-portraits of D and the reality of his youthful, classical good looks. And he's been around for a whole bunch of years. And then recently it came to me. Of course, D...for Dorian...!)

Later that night, after Mal and Hazel and I had exchanged recent fanzines, I used their phone to tap into one of the most positive aspects of fandom, the Fannish Accomodation Network. Earlier, in London, I'd mentioned that I'd heard Edinburgh was nice and might try to get there. Immediately Greg said, "Well, call Owen Whiteoak, he's a great bloke." I'd received some fanzines from Owen and written him a loc or two so I dropped him a preliminary postcard from London and made a follow-up call from Skipton. Owen was most accomodating (ho, ho) so the next day, after my Royal Miling, he was my next fannish host.

Owen Whiteoak is another fan it's hard not to like immediately. He's young, intelligent and lively. With his slender frame and long straight hair he resembles a well-dressed reincarnation of Peter Roberts. His flat also boasts the only tub I've ever seen with faucets sticking out of all three bathroom walls. (Where else can you find this sort of attention to minutiae in a trip report?) Owen and I went to the regular Tuesday meeting of the Forth group, in a pub, of course, where I enjoyed myself listening, somewhat awestruck, as this small but articulate group -- led by an erudite and witty misogynist named Jeremy -- actually discussed the works of Lem, Hardy and Nabokov. Later, when the pub closed, the survivors went back to the Malt Shovel Inn to test a few sixteen year old single malts and I was able to participate a bit more in the proceedings.

And two days later, the night before SILICON, my last fan host was the ever-reliable Harry Bell (if he finally got the cover to me in time for this issue) or that miserable swine Harry Bell (if something other than a Bell-Hansen collaboration graces this fanzine.) Harry and I are old friends and it was good to see him again and to discover that he hasn't changed a bit in the last six years. Despite having other houseguests he found room for me to crash with a bed of my own and literally astounded me by describing in precise detail the cover I'd asked him to do for that often-mentioned unwritten 1979 trip report. Nobody as talented as Harry should have a good memory as well! Harry was as quiet and enjoyable as ever and he still looks like a cherubic choirboy who is starting to feel the effects of the two litres of sacramental wine he just pilfered and quaffed.

-----

WATT (We Also Talked To) bunches of people who made the trip more enjoyable than it otherwise would have been. Old friends too-briefly seen because they were on their way to the antipodes for a worldcon, friends like John and Eve Harvey, Malcolm Edwards and Chris Atkinson, and the legendary Bob Shaw, for whom I carried a massive tin of tobacco across the Atlantic and halfway 'round England to right an old imbalance. Old friends like Dave and Hazel Langford enjoyed at SILICON where I built up good fannish karma by being the first person to buy the (much deserved and long overdue) Hugo winning writer a pint of Guinness. And old friends like Jim Barker, Dave Cockfield and Ian Williams, also at SILICON where we talked about the past and our presents. And wasn't that Ian and Janice Maule sitting over there on that bench?

There were new friends, people I didn't know in '79, often because they weren't fans in those halcyon days, people I didn't get to know too well because the pace was too hectic and the time was too short and because that's the way I am. People like Pam Wells and Anne Warren and Abi Frost and like Tony Berry and Alun Harries and Jackie Gresham. Pete Lyon and Jimmy Robertson and I shared a couple of beers and I exchanged fanzines and nothing else with Steve Higgins. Maureen Porter and Paul Kincaid were among the SILICON attendees I never really had a chance to talk to, along with several people whose names I never did quite catch. Who was that large hirsute gentleman distributing the whisky? Ah, but so it goes. Despite the missed opportunities it was a hell of a month and a hell of a visit...the parts I remember, that is.

AND DON'T FORGET... Holyhead, North Wales, which just may be the windiest town I've ever been in. I decided it was probably due to the shouts of joy made by all the passengers getting off the car ferry after returning alive from Ireland. Fifty years ago, a publican told me, there were one hundred and twenty eight pubs in Holyhead. Today there are twenty two. I went to six of them.

"Spittin' Image", a delightfully outrageous and irreverent tv show featuring marionettes and actors in costumes and masks and offering some of the most devastating satire I've ever seen on television. Rumours had it the series had been sold in the US but it has yet to surface here, and that's our loss.

The barman in Inverness who said "Ice with that?" when I ordered Glenfarclas and when I replied, "Hell no", grinned and said, "Good on ya, mate."

The commonplace public drinking I witnessed throughout England, a country where it is perfectly legal to walk through the streets of the city drinking from a can of beer or a bottle of whisky, or to open a beer on a train or subway after a hard day at the office...or pub.

The unusual concept some English businessmen have of the "lunch hour", this being a three hour slot between noon and three o'clock during which they stand in pubs downing a steady flow of pints of beer and whisky chasers and then head back to the office to...work?

Maggie Thatcher's classic novel of alien contact *Sod Off, Frog Features*.

And the bottle of Bowmore twelve year old Islay single malt from the Duty Free shop at abominable Stansted which is, amazingly, still one third full and which will be judiciously sipped from time to time when I'm rereading these pages and reliving The Severely Soggy Summer of '85.

Thank you, Doris: nobody ever had a better birthday present!

\*\*\*\*\*  
\*  
\*  
\*  
\*  
\*  
\*  
\*\*\*\*\*



# SING 'SKUNK' AND THINK 'HEDGEHOG'

by

PAUL SKELTON

How come SF writers are always getting it wrong?

Now don't *you* go getting *me* wrong. I'm not one of those guys who seems to think that predicting the future is one of SF's main purposes. In fact I don't think it's any part of SF's business to try and predict the future. However, having said that much you'd think that, strictly on the basis of probability theory, the law of averages would ensure that they didn't strike out quite so often. They fire their speculations into the future from the shotguns of their imaginations but I've always thought it a little odd that so few of the things that actually come to pass contain even the single pellet of a lucky hit.

Mind you, I think I have the answer. They keep basing their speculations upon the wrong sources. They're looking for their ideas in the wrong places. They aren't looking far enough ahead. By the time Arthur C. Heinsimov has read a piece in Scientific American and thought, "Gee, I bet this means that soon pocket calculators will be so cheap they'll make the slide-rule obsolete." and sneaked it into a trilogy and had it published, some advanced and innovative manufacturing nation (or, as they used to be known, 'slant-eyed gits') has had them on the market so long the reader fails to realize that Mr. Heinsimov was in fact indulging in speculation. In other words, when they do guess right it's already history. You only notice it when they've guessed wrong, because it is at variance with reality.

What Mr. Heinsimov is suffering from is in fact a failure of the imagination. He cannot believe that obscure elements of popular culture are fit and proper sources for stfnal speculation -- indeed that they can even prove to be areas which can initiate advances in the mainstream of scientific knowledge. Even an artist's remarks at a pop concert can prove to be the stimulus that inspires the development of bold new concepts which enhance the human experience and push ever outwards the boundaries of a true scientific understanding of the universe, and of mankind's position and importance within it. A perfect example of such a happenstance is commemorated in both the title and the substance of this article.

One doesn't often come across remarks in everyday life that seem to encapsulate the fannish worldview in its totality but that one, the title of this article, seems a perfect example. Firstly, it is superficially bizarre and yet, in context, it is perfectly sensible. However, without knowledge of that context one can hypothesize all manner of weird scenarios; a sort of Infinite Worlds of Mind-bogglingness. How like fandom and the way outsiders, without the background understanding, not only grasp the wrong end of the Astral Pole, but try to fit it into a square hole. This phrase, however, is even more apposite...but more about that shortly. To begin with I suppose I'd better put everyone into the same 'context':-

It was back towards the end of February 1978 when Cas and I first caught onto the songs

---

of Loudon Wainwright III. The occasion was one of those 'Sight & Sound In Concert' series which were broadcast simultaneously on BBC television and in stereo over one of their VHF radio channels. We'd only recently obtained our new hi-fi music-centre and were busily recording everything in sight (?) as a short-cut to a basic tape collection, most of which subsequently proved to be of no lasting interest. Not so the tape of that concert. On the strength of that performance Cas and I became rabid Loudon Wainwright III fans. Another similarity to fandom comes immediately to mind at this point. Fandom, either as a goddamn hobby or as a way of life, is off the beaten track. Musically, so is LWIII.

I find that certain music has the capacity to launch me off in the most unpredictable directions. Sometimes staggering new truths, new concepts, are revealed to me by the simplest, most innocuous of lyrics... especially if I am feeling innovative. Most especially when I am as innovative as a newt. One such song was 'Dead Skunk (In The Middle of the Road)', at least in this particular version.

Part way through he appeared to realise that the phenomenon of finding dead skunks splattered all over the middle of the highway on a summer's evening was alien to his UK audience and thus might be affecting the ambience required for this sing-along number. He gave every appearance of giving this some serious thought and, after a perfectly timed pause, announced, "OK, sing 'skunk', think 'hedgehog'." This more than anything else established the bond between singer and audience that such magic moments require. Here he was saying that, even though we were from different countries, from different cultural milieus, there was an underlying unity that would enable us to translate this song into our own cultural concepts. And thus was forged the bond that enabled, for those few brief minutes, the singer and his audience to become a single gestalt entity which justified all our 'presence' at this particular performance.

But even this near-spiritual experience is not, alone, all that is required to trigger an individual towards a higher level of understanding. If it were then millions of us would by now have rushed into print and pushed mankind's scientific development ahead by several quantum jumps. No, the experience was the orgasm. The artist spread his 'seed' upon the audience and I, I, was the egg that was fertilised. You see, this triggering of inspiration is a two-way thing. The interests and the knowledge (and general ace-ness) of the person being inspired is vital. I can only conclude that none of the other people who saw that concert was a cyclist.

Being a cyclist you notice things. Especially on the road, you notice things. You'd better, because you've got to steer around them, usually at the last possible minute. This is basically because anything you see on the road can be interpreted by your eyes as many things, but is invariably translated by your bum as a bump. It's where they've made some repairs to a sub-soil gasmain? OUCH! It's subsidence caused by collapsing sewers? OUCH! It's a ramp to slow down passing sportscars? OUCH! It's a cat scurrying across the road? OUCH! (but serves the slimy fucker right anyway.) One thing you can guarantee -- anyone who claims that having piles is over-rated as a handicap doesn't ride a bike. And, in this country at least, one thing you do notice, as you steer around it/them, are dead hedgehogs.

You notice them because they are ubiquitous. You steer around them out of force of habit -- it's on the road, steer around it. There isn't really any need to steer around a dead hedgehog as it's already squashed to a thickness of two microns, but by the time you realise it's an ex-hedgehog you've already twitched your handlebars and caused the following car, the one that was just overtaking, to swerve across the highway and seek its fate under the wheels of an approaching juggernaut, all wheels and horsepower and smug in its knowledge that it is boldly extending EEC regulations where no behemoth has gone before.

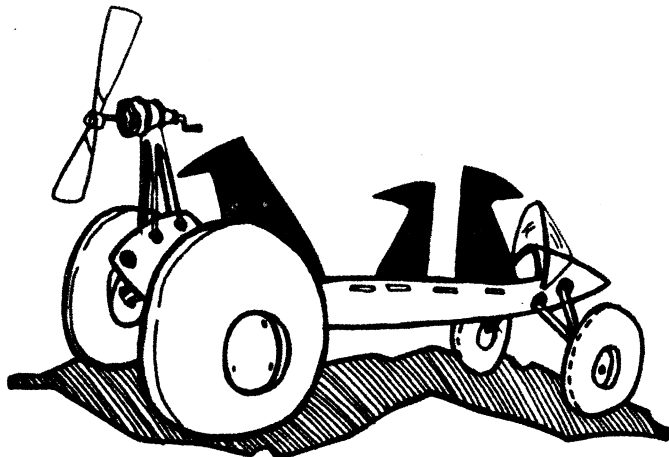
But let's get back to those "staggering new truths" I mentioned a while back. It is

-----

in the nature of Staggering New Truths that they are usually perceived when the true significance of commonplace phenomena, previously overlooked or dismissed as unimportant, is finally appreciated. The most oft-repeated example of this is, of course, Newton's apple, which proved that even people dumb enough to sit under apple trees can develop startling insights, to the effect that sitting under apple trees is a dumb thing to do -- and can then go on to lay the groundwork for our understanding of the universe by way of explaining why they weren't going to do it again. Had Newton been only slightly less dumb he would have related all this to the fact that apples also fall from trees when they are struck by lightning and this connection between the electro-magnetic and gravitic forces would have led to the development of a unified field theory 'way back towards the dawn of modern science. Alas, it wasn't to be and he turned his attention to inventing the cradle, which at least gave us somewhere to put all those babies which had, until his time, been left lying all over the place and were presumably becoming a bit of a nuisance.

Newton's apple is also a perfect example of the point that ideas come when the time for them is ripe (eh eh). Had Newton not developed those theories when he did, they would have been forever lost. No one today could have had such insights because, with the decline of moral standards and the increase in population, the thieving neighbourhood kids ensure that no apple ever stays on a tree long enough for it to ripen and fall. Where would we be today if the kids of Newton's neighbourhood had gone 'sapping' the night before that fateful day? Oh, apples still 'fall' from trees during a howling gale but as this would have led Newton to discover that the force of gravity acted in a roughly horizontal plane, I hardly feel that we'd have been much better off. Besides, I doubt that even Newton would have been dumb enough to sit in the garden in the middle of a hurricane. Benjamin Franklin might have, though, in which case it would have been left to him to discover gravity. Yes, Benjamin Franklin might have been daft enough to sit out in a hurricane. After all, he used to fly kites during torrential thunderstorms and everyone knows how dumb that is.

Well, apples falling from apple trees may no longer be a common-place phenomenon, but fortunately for the advancement of modern scientific thought squashed hedgehogs very definitely are, here in England at any rate. Squashed hedgehogs are everywhere. In town or country it makes no difference. Here, in the town of Stockport, we get squashed hedgehogs, squashed cats and squashed sparrows. Cas and I recently went on a bicycling trip through the Yorkshire Dales and there we saw squashed grouse, pheasant, pigeons, lapwings, owls, rabbits, squirrels, moles, voles, bats and...hedgehogs. In fact, so many squashed creatures did we see that we got to be quite expert at recognising them whilst yet some distance away. The easiest to recognise, of course, were the hedgehogs because they are unique. Of all the animals that fall victim to this planet's only wheeled biped only the hedgehog is rendered, even after but a single \*squish\*, absolutely flat. All other creatures, upon being introduced to the wheel, retain a certain lumpy bumpiness.



These lumps, of course, are caused by the creature's bones and bones are not squashable. That is obvious, but if you want proof take hold of a leg of mutton and thrust it into a bath of acid. After a few minutes some huge, hard, white lumpy bits will show through. These are bones and it is obvious that far from being squashable they would probably ruin the suspension of any wheel unfortunate enough to run over them. (For further proof, take a look at your hand, the one holding the leg of lamb, which you foolishly allowed to become immersed in the acid. The white lumpy bits sticking out of that are also exceedingly hard and unsquashable.) It is an obvious fact, therefore, that any squashed creature that still contains bones *must be lumpy*. The very fact that hedgehogs are squashed to a uniform, almost molecular thinness thus proves that their carcasses cannot contain any bones at all. Nary a one. And yet they had skeletons in life. The only properly scientific conclusion which can be drawn is that *at the very moment of flattening* the bones are expelled from the hedgehog (probably via the mouth as even a hedgehog can't be expected to fart bones), whereupon they are eventually scattered throughout the hedgerow.

Now, a little thought applied at this juncture will indicate that, whilst this discovery is startling enough in and of itself, there are really earth-shaking ramifications. It is, for instance, immediately obvious that hedgehogs are the direct descendants of the mighty dinosaurs. Yes, I thought you'd see the connection immediately. However, for the sake of a couple of non-fans who are doubtless reading this article as the result of a set of circumstances too bizarre to speculate upon and who therefore do not have our sharpness of intellect and awesome insight, let me plod painstakingly over the logic which *proves* that glaringly obvious statement.

What do we know about dinosaurs? Quite a lot actually, mostly about their bones. We know an awful lot about their skeletal remains but not one whit about their skin covering. There is, in fact, much argument about just what sort of skin covering they had. Some authorities have even gone so far as to suggest that they might have been feathered, offering this apparently ludicrous suggestion simply to indicate our ignorance in this area. But why don't we know about dinosaurs' skin coverings when we have found so many fossilized remains? The answer is again obvious. We don't have the remains of the whole dinosaur, only its bones. We have fossilized dinosaur skeletons but no fossilized dinosaur skins. Why not? Obviously *because the skins are somewhere else!* All we have is the bones that were ejected when the dinosaurs were squashed. The bones, of course, have not been scattered because there were no hedgerows in those days in which to scatter them. Now *only* dinosaurs and hedgehogs exhibit this phenomenon of total skeleton ejection which is *absolute proof* of a direct evolutionary connection.

Obviously the only reason that most reputable paleontologists do not advance this theory can only be that they have difficulty in explaining the agency by which the dinosaurs can have been squashed. Naturally this is an example of blinkered scientific intolerance refusing to consider the 'fringe' areas of true scientific thought. Let us, for instance, consider the facts regarding the hedgehog:

Hedgehogs are prickly little bastards which, when threatened, curl up into an invulnerable ball. Accordingly, they have no natural enemies. Anything stupid enough to go up against a hedgehog was too dumb to survive anyway. Until the invention of the wheel, hedgehogs were untouchable. So, knowing the tendency for invulnerable animals to evolve towards gigantism, our primitive ancestors ought to have been up to their arses in giant hedgehogs. But they weren't. We know of giant sloths, giant mammoths, enormous elks and bears -- but no giant hedgehogs. Why not? Well, obviously the giant hedgehogs had already been *wiped out* before our ancestors came upon the evolutionary scene. The very fact that gigantic hedgehogs did not exist when our ancestors came upon the stage and began drawing their primitive cave-paintings is, in effect, *conclusive proof* that a hitherto unsuspected agency was involved in the evolutionary process in what, in effect, was a non-Darwinian Unnatural Selection.

-----



This is where Occam's Razor comes in, as doubtless you were beginning to wonder. Of course, there is *no need* to hypothesize gigantic hedgehogs as an intermediary evolutionary stage between the gigantic dinosaur hedgehog-forebears and their small hedgehog descendants. The fact is that the dinosaurs were themselves simply a near infinite variety of gigantic Triassic, Jurassic and Cretaceous hedgehogs! You don't have to change the existing models much to imagine these creatures. All you've got to do is simply add the prickles, the skin covering that is as yet unknown. Now we can get a true picture of life in those pre-historic times, with lone prickly Tyranosaurus roaming the countryside in search of dinner whilst gigantic Triceratops curled up into boulder-sized prickle-balls and waited for them to go away.

"Aha!" you are probably crying, having Cosmic Minds. I know what's going on in your minds, you clever buggers. You think you've found a weak link in my chain of flawless logic, don't you? "How come," you are asking, "if dinosaurs were superginormous hedgehogs, and a hedgehog's only natural enemy is the wheel, how did they get extinct? It would've taken a bloody enormous wheel to squash a dinosaur and there weren't no such things around in pre-historic times, wuz there?" God, I wish you'd learn to think more grammatically!

"But there weren't, were there?"

GOTCHA!

Of course there were. Stands to reason, don't it? There had to be, didn't there? And what's more, we've got the evidence, haven't we? It's simply yet another case of common, everyday facts being overlooked. Look, you're Sci-Fi fans, right? That means you believe in UFOs, right? Of course it does, every fool knows that -- and what's another commonly misapplied term for UFOs? Flying Saucers, that's what they are called.

And why are they called 'Flying Saucers'? After all, if you look at all the photographs all you'll see is fuzzy circular or rather disc-shaped blobs. The fact is that because they're always spotted in a horizontal mode it's only natural for us to associate them with everyday horizontal disc-shapes, like saucers. But if you turn them on their sides you learn the *awesome truth* -- they aren't flying saucers at all, they are flying wheels! The only reason they glide through the atmosphere on their sides is because the laws of physics apply to them just as much as they apply to us. They get better lift through an atmosphere that way, and therefore they use less fuel. Bloody hell -- when gas stations are millions of parsecs apart you learn to watch your fuel consumption. That's a long way to walk back for a can of jump-juice, buddy! They'll only "go vertical" when they find a dinosaur that needs squashing, which explains why they're never seen in vertical mode -- there are no dinosaurs left.

Which in turn must tell us something about their sense of dedication-to-duty. Untold millions of years later and they're *still* coming back to make sure that there are no giant hedgehogs around on the Earth. God, but they must really hate those big prickly bastards! Of course this does raise certain questions about how an intergalactic civilization could come into existence with its primary purpose being to squash hedgehogs, but not being a sociologist I'm afraid I shall have to leave such considerations to the droves of scholars who will doubtless stampede into these areas of speculation now that I have done the pioneering work. What does alarm me is the way that Science Fiction authors have gotten their predictions wrong right down the line.

Take Doc Smith -- it isn't the 'Children of the Lens', but rather a society based upon The Wheel that will be important, but did we get novels titled "Second Stage Wheelman"? Did we buggery! Got it wrong there, Doc. Besides which, just *why* should the existence of giant hedgehogs be detrimental to the development of intelligence?



(Note that human intelligence did not develop until after the dinosaurs/giant hedgehogs were extinct.)

The most obviously incorrect SF story is where the Galactic Community judges humanity and finds it wanting because of its warlike nature, and we are forever forbidden the benefits of membership in the Galactic Fraternity. Bloody Hell! All we'd have to do is take them on a tour of our roads, pointing out the dead hedgehogs, and they'd shower us with advanced weapons technology (i.e. Big Wheels) and welcome us with open arms/tentacles.

So how come SF writers are always getting it wrong?

---Paul Skelton

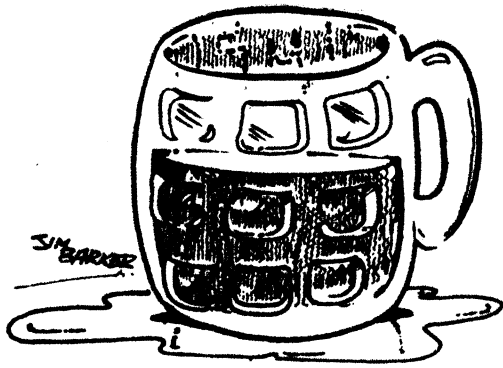


"In the case of the fabled Galapagos tortoise, nature has not been particularly helpful. The director of the Honolulu Zoo, Jack L. Throp, cites the tortoise's low breeding percentage (.0023, or roughly 1 in 43,500) despite the large number in zoos. He explains that curators still lack information on their mating and hatching processes, and the tortoises themselves 'do not fully grasp what is going on either' because of the way they are constructed. 'Tortoises must go about this business of reproduction completely on faith,' he adds, 'for if they ever pause and perceive the difficulties, they would hardly bother, and that seems to be what has happened in most zoos.'"

---Edward Wakin, professor, Fordham University

"I have just finished James Norman Hall's autobiography... There is one chapter in the book in which Hall sets down a long dialogue between himself and the collaborator, Charles Nordhoff. It is loaded with high-toned philosophical language, and during the talk Hall keeps going to his bookshelves and getting down books and reading bits of poetry and fragments of metaphysical sheepdip, possibly with the intention of illustrating a point, and the whole thing is unbelievably dull. I have known an immense passel of writers in my time and I never heard two of them get together and carry on the way Hall says he and Nordhoff did. I know the way writers talk. They say, that goddamn Jimmie Houghton has hit the best-seller list, he couldn't write his way out of a paper bag, the dumb bastard, and looka the way Simon Schuster's splashing the ads around - that son of a bitchin' louse publisher of mine, money-grubbin' prig, won't put out a thin dime for sensible advertisin' and far as I'm concerned he can kiss my foot. And they say. . . hey, Max, you see that babe I hired to type my manuscript? You keep your mother-loving hands offa her, see? That's the way writers talk."

---H. Allen Smith



LETTER FROM  
LONDON  
JULY 1985

AVEDON CAROL

Once, when I was on my way home from the Memphis Blues Festival, I met a gentleman who, I suppose, was trying to be polite but blowing it miserably. He looked to be in his sixties and a very normal, nice sort of man. For a bigot. He had decided that I was pretty nice for a Yankee, and he followed this revelation with a sort of question: "You're not Jewish, are you?"

"No, I'm Armenian," I said, without acknowledging that unstated indictment of Jews. I was being polite, you see.

"Right, you're Gypsy, right? You're not Jewish." I gave him the benefit of the doubt -- maybe he *thought* I said 'Romanian.'

"No, I'm Armenian," I said again.

"Yeah, right, you're not Jewish -- you're Gypsy, right?" He thinks he's letting me off the hook, eh?

"No, actually, I'm Jewish."

The guys in the pub in Central London were not nice, not gentlemen, and not even close to sixty. They'd had a few, too, and they sort of barged in on my exchange with the bartender to tell me -- in geographical terms that meant nothing to me -- that I was Jewish. I suspected, though, so I pressed them to repeat the information in more comprehensible terms. "You know -- are you a Yid?" Clearly they did not treat 'Yid' as a complimentary term.

"I'm Armenian."

"Oh. I guess that was an insult then, huh?"

You stupid bastard. You stinking pasty-faced piece of crap. "No. An insult would have been to call me..." *there are four or five of them, and they are all at least a head taller than I am, and they've been drinking, so I say, "Turkish." And they laugh, and I walk away with my change. It would have been an insult to call me 'Aryan.'* It was an insult the minute you opened your stinking mouth and expected me to play along with your creepy values. It was an insult for you to think I'd share your idiotic belief that it was insulting to be mistaken for Jewish. Thank god no one will ever mistake me for one of you.

One might expect that sort of thing to happen instead in the neighborhood I now live in, only a block or three from the West Ham Football Grounds where, it is commonly known, the National Front likes to do a little recruiting. It's a down-market neighborhood full of cheaply-clad people rushing back and forth around the more attractive-

ly dressed Indian women in their colorful traditional garments. The Indian women stop on streetcorners and talk to each other while the breeze ripples their saris. They do not rush. They enjoy the socializing of the streets. I often think that these women must constantly invent reasons to go out shopping so that they can congregate in front of the chemist's shop or at the Queens Market.

The Market is wonderful. Everything is about a block away from me, the Market closest of all, and on Thursdays every yard of it seems to be covered with carts and stands selling fresh fruits, fresh vegetables, fresh cream, fresh fish, and every kind of cosmetic and household item. There are dresses and underwear and bangles and beads and spice shops and bakeries -- all within a block or two of my flat. On Mondays there are only a couple of carts at the Market, mostly selling items which hold no attraction for me. On Tuesdays there are carts full of veggies, and a few people selling pantyhose and eye shadow and such. But on Thursdays, ah! What they call 'round lettuce' (and I still think of as 'Boston lettuce'), fresh and green and sweet for a mere 15p a head. And the prettiest little tomatoes, too big to be cherry tomatoes and just the right size for salads, and not a hothouse faker among them. The garlic is fresh and juicy, and huge bags of peppercorns can be found easily enough. And on Thursdays and Fridays, the fishmonger has those wonderful little fake crabsticks I usually only see at sushi bars at home. And you can often find some fairly nice blouses, skirts -- or even suits and dresses -- for a single pound.

For anything more exotic than everyday things and staples, I must venture away from my self-contained little community. London Transport issues these wonderful flash passes (day passes, week-long passes, month-long passes, and annual passes) for the tubes and busses which create an illusion of freedom and free travel (well, I paid £328 for a year of this 'free' travel) that make that easy. One block from home is the tube station, and one stop down I can walk or grab a bus to the Safeway. This is not a very big Safeway and I only go there when in desperate need of Ritz Crackers and smoked mussels. But I can get to South Ealing with my season ticket, too, and Linda Pickersgill promises that if I brave the lengthy journey across town, she will show me the big Safeway, where they sell jalapenos. Ealing is not so down-market as East Ham.

Sometimes we go to Ealing to be fannish, but mostly we go into town. We go to the One Tun, of course, which is almost unbearable if the weather isn't good. There seem to be about a thousand people, cramming in like sardines, every one with a glass in hand -- and no escape from people you don't feel you have anything to say to. Sometimes, despite the rain and the cold, you just have to squeeze your way out the door and join the handful of desperate types who have preceded you. You might find Pam Wells gasping for breath after her own struggle, listening to Gregory growling. Greg likes to growl about a number of things, not least among them Rob Hansen's appallingly well-balanced behavior. "Grump grump grump," says Gregory.

"What's he on about?" says Rob.

"He's on about, you know, existential angst and all that."

"Oh, everyone has existential angst," says Rob.

"You have never had existential angst!" says our exasperated Gregory, emphasizing every word. We all laugh, since this is true. Gregory and I like to sit in pubs wondering how Hansen can be so bloody happy and well-balanced all the time. "Look at him," Greg growled at me as Rob approached us outside Forbidden Planet one day. "He even walks like he's well-balanced."

When the weather in London is nice, it's beautiful. If such weather happens to grace a One Tun night, you can find the exuberant Arfer Thomson grinning impishly in

-----

the street, often in the company of Vinç, who appears to be carrying the world on his shoulders. Even so, he smiles broadly as Arfer bobs up and down joking around with us all. On such an evening, the road outside the Tun seems to hold an air of carnival, with each little cluster of people seeming like another ride or game or concession. Here is the KenTruFandom ride, here is the Gregory Pickersgill shooting gallery, there is the Joe Nicholas Fortune Teller's booth, and so on. Judith Hanna is trying to get people to pay up the money they pledged to sponsor her on her march. Dave Langford is leaning over and cupping his hand behind his ear in an attempt to hear what we mere mortals have to say. Rob Holdstock is everywhere, as ever. Chris Priest never quite seems to get his balance. Abi Frost sips languidly at a glass of wine. Kate Davies arranges things with Pam Wells. And so on, and so on...

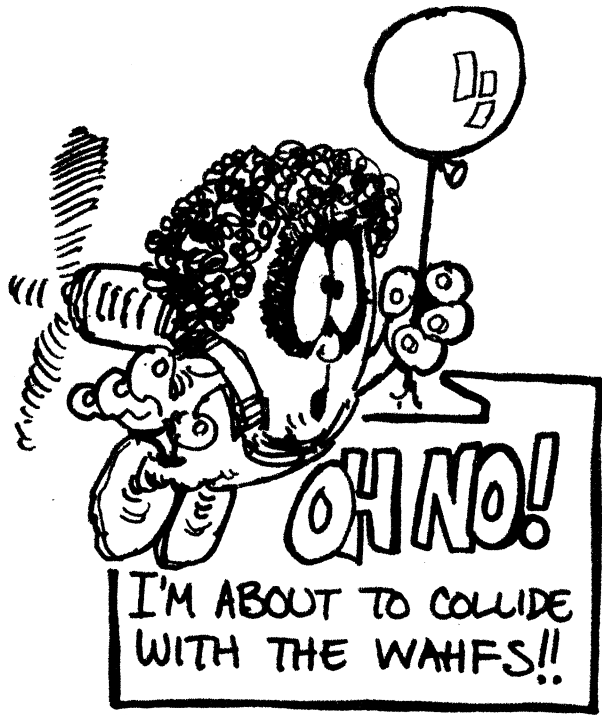
Once a month, the women's group meets at the Griffin. The best thing about the Griffin is that it is on Villiers Street, which is one of my very favorites. I just like the look of it, and anyway, it is a very short street which I usually enter from Embankment station (which is my favorite station because it is convenient to everything and it's on the District Line and if you meet people there you can find them easily), and the Griffin is in the middle of the street. There's a greengrocer's cart there with California avacadoes cheap, too. And it's fun to sit around with Pam and Lilian and Lin and Linda and Maureen and Kate and them and just, y'know, discuss the fate of the world and stuff like that that women do when men aren't around to hear it. "Why are men so boring!?" wails Lilian.

"Because their lives have no meaning."

When the pubs close I feel perfectly safe going home by myself on the tube. This is one of the miracles of London -- I no longer have that tensed-up feeling that has to create a barrier between myself and the world when I am alone, because there are no cat-calls, no wolf-howls, no creeps who grab me in the street. I'm free!

Except that we don't go to the pub up the street (yes, *that* Duke of Edinburgh) because of the 'racial incident' there. And when we went to the Queen across the way, the barkeep started yelling at some of his clientele for being a bunch of 'stupid Pakis.' And it wasn't even in my neighborhood that those creeps asked me if I was a 'Yid.' It was in a nice neighborhood. At a 'nice' pub. And you see, it doesn't make any difference at all to me whether I'm Jewish or not.

I don't mind people mistaking *me* for Jewish, even the Nazis. What I mind is the constant reminder that people have these attitudes in the first place. I suppose I could prove I was Caucasian (a real one -- not an Aryan who misuses the word) if I had to, but why should I, and what if I couldn't? And I shouldn't have to prove I'm not communist (and what if I was?) or gay (you wanna make something of it, punk?) or Catholic or Atheist or anything else. People have been mistaking me for Jewish all my life. It's never bothered me, although I know there is a certain sort of slime around who would just as soon kill a Jew as look at her. Or a commie (which I've been called) or a lesbian (ditto -- before I even knew what the word meant.) Whenever someone doesn't like you, they are likely to call you by whatever label the witchhunters are calling witches this century, in the hope that the witchhunters will come after you. I don't resent being classed with the witches -- the commie dyke kikes. I am *enraged* that the witchhunters and their sympathizers exist, let alone have the temerity to expect me to play along with their game. I don't mind that people innocently mistake me for Jewish -- because all us Mediterranean types look the same to them -- or if someone is perceptive enough to figure out what group of witches I do belong to. But I do very much mind the people who think they're better than us witches. And here, in England, I am faced with constant reminders that those people not only exist but don't realize that their sin is a lot dirtier -- dirty enough not to parade around in the light of day. Goddamn right I'm a Yid. And a Dyke. And a Commie. I'm a pinko dyke kike and *proud*. What're you, some kinda Nazi?



DORIS CARTER.

# THE RAPE OF THE LOCS

STILL FANDOM'S MOST  
ELITE WAHF COLUMN  
WHERE EVERYONE IS  
A BIG-NAME FAN.

With a fanzine such as XENIUM, which has never had a regular lettercolumn and where it may be from two to five years between issues, one acknowledges that

letter writers are not merely hoping to see their words in print but are actually expressing their interest in the fanzine through that universal coin of the fannish realm, egoboo. While I have never demanded letters I have always appreciated them, so once again a sincere thanks to the following, whose names are momentarily writ large in the annals of fanzine fandom:

HEATHER ASHBY (who almost created "The Little Known Canadian Of The Issue" department except I went on too long as it is), DORIS BERCARICH, TONY BERRY, ROBERT BLOCH, AVEDON CAROL, AL CURRY, DON D'AMMASSA, LEIGH EDMONDS, BRAD FOSTER, JOHN FOYSTER, LEE HOFFMAN, ERIC LINDSAY, GEORGE RR MARTIN, ERIC MAYER, MARC ORTLIEB ("Upon receiving XENIUM 13, I thought to myself 'This is how it used to be in fandom. Yep, another copy of XENIUM at last. It's great to see that Mike's publishing again.' But then I realized that this was the first copy of XENIUM I'd ever received, and so that wash of nostalgia was pretty pointless. I must have been listening to Leigh Edmonds again. Ah well."), PAUL SKELTON, SUZI STEFL, BRUCE TOWNLEY and HARRY WARNER, JR. ("I feel honored to own such a genuine relic of confandom as the joker...On the other hand, I won't be able to use the card in collaboration with a Susan B. Anthony coin to join poker fandom. My principles have prevented me from owning any of those coins, on the grounds that a respectable and virtuous lady like Ms. Anthony would be outraged at the concept of jiggling up and down in my trousers.")

If a frequent lettercol is the lifeblood of a focal-point fanzine then an infrequent one such as this can provide an interesting insight into the changing nature of fandom and of society. With less than two years having elapsed since #13 it isn't too surprising that the names listed above are mostly still familiar to current fans. But can the Susie B dollar really have vanished so quickly from general usage? They just seemed to disappear overnight and if this issue had been another year or so in the making Harry's comment might have baffled a few people entirely. So look upon your locs to XENIUM and upon XENIUM's non-lettercolumn itself as your own little time capsule and keep those cards and letters coming! Read, enjoy, react and commit those reactions to paper. Who knows, in a few years time you too may read a quote of your very own and think, "What in hell did I mean by that?"

SOMETHING EXTRA?

WELL, THIS HAS SOME INTERESTING LINES...

# London Tube

## DIAGRAM OF LINES

including the new  
JUBILEE LINE



## London Transport

55 Broadway, London SW1H 0BD. 01-222 1234  
ISSUED FREE No.1 1979

I've always loved the London Underground system and it doesn't surprise me that it features on a vast number of souvenirs of London. Now, thanks to XENIUM, The Fanzine That Gives You Something Extra, you too can have your very own memento of England without the expense of a trans-Atlantic trip! (If you think you've never seen the London tube system you may be wrong. Anyone who watched "An American Werewolf In London" got to see a little bit of why it fascinates me.)

These maps date from August, 1979 and are probably already out of date but they give a pretty good idea of the complexity and scope of the system. (The One Tun is a short walk from Farringdon -- on the Circle and Metropolitan lines in K5.) I picked up about half of them in one visit to the main offices of the London Transport Publicity Department but the other half had to be acquired by periodic stops at the six major stations where London Transport has a Travel Enquiry booth. Each time I passed such a station, often because of a deliberate detour, I'd approach a different clerk and get three or four more maps. I must have walked miles and spent hours accumulating enough maps but now, six and a half years later, it becomes worthwhile. Now XENIUM will go down in fannish history as the fanzine that let a generation play Finchley Central!

"I'm also prejudiced against engineers. My main contact with engineers at Aldermaston was when one rang up, explained that his section had spent two years working on some new and ever so classified substance, and could I now do all the theoretical background work for them in, say, one week? Ever willing to oblige (which means, ever willing to find an excuse for putting off my own urgent work), I asked for some vital information like the density of the stuff. "Density?" he said, as though I'd made a suggestion so obscene he didn't want to admit he understood it. "I'll ring you back," he said. After a week of what I suppose must have been massed research efforts by his entire engineering team, he rang me back. This time he sounded actively hostile: "I've got the information you asked for. We've measured a piece of the material. It's 5mm by 10mm by 25mm, and it weighs umptitum grams. Can you work out the density from that?" Faintly I assured him that with the aid of a computer I probably could."

--one of thirty eight typically brilliant paragraphs in a speech by Hugo winner Dave Langford, NOVACON, November, 1984



XENIUM

THIS WEEK PISSED IN THE UK  
STARRING DUSTIN HOFFMAN AS 'GLICKSOHN'

THE NEWT  


BAR

OLD RED COW

FROG  
  
FIRKIN



HANSEN/MARR/BEN 86



## Xenium 14 Original Colour Paper

Can it really be almost the Memorial Day Weekend (that's May 23rd to 25th for the blind and Al Curry) of an even numbered year again? I guess we should all think about stopping at the

# duty **FREE** on **THE** way to **MIKECON 7**

so we can enjoy yet another fun-filled weekend in fabulous Toronto and help those two reprobates Harper and Glicksohn celebrate their comings of age.

**YES INDEED** even though one Mike has deserted the land of his non-birth, the Dynamic Duo is once again planning a weekend of excess and enthusiasm and YOU are invited! In fact, because the still-resident Mike will be celebrating a major milestone in the form of his fortieth birthday the official 1986 MIKECON slogan is hereby decreed by the typist to be

## FIFTY FOUR FORTIES OR FIGHT!

which is a not-too-subtle reminder of the fact that out-of-town visitors will be reimbursed for purchases of Duty Free scotch and gin by at least one of the delighted MIKECON hosts.

All of which means that *this* is your official MIKECON invitation (yes, you, the one(s) with name(s) hand-written on a corner somewhere -- if all corners are blank, dip the flyer in a glass of draft beer: if your name appears after fifteen seconds, **YOU WIN**, and you will be welcome; if your name does not appear you can expect to be thrown out of your local tavern in a very few seconds.) If you are a winner your prize is an all-expenses non-paid weekend in Toronto, home of the world's tallest free-standing structure and the world's smallest free-falling dollar so **DO** come along and join us and help us have the sort of good time two swell guys like us deserve. As usual, it is your presence we require, not your presents.

## EXPECT THE TRADITIONAL "MIKECON" TRADITIONS...

An overwhelming preponderance of particularly enjoyable people (plus a few people who insist on talking about their computers.)

Copious quantities of liquid refreshment (plus blocks of unprogrammed time as long as *five minutes* for those masochists who insist on eating.)

An always-available table for the Joseph W. Haldeman Memorial Seminar (plus our unrestrained delight at accepting your American money at par.)

Whatever the distaff MIKECON subcommittee decides they'd like to titillate your palates with this year (plus all the junk food we can afford after the beer is bought.)

## BUT LOOK FOR A FEW MINOR CHANGES...

We have less space this year so (a) we can expect fewer out-of-town friends (b) some out-of-town friends will have to settle for crash space a half-hour drive from the parties, or (c) some affluent out-of town friends will have to rent rooms at the motels down the street (at reasonable rates which become almost cheap when translated into **American dollars**.) Whatever you decide you'd better check in with Mike the G at (416) 766-9975 and conform (and unless you got it in writing from Doris do not assume **Everything** is Set) and let the royal Us know you are coming. (And, yes, that "conform" was intentional.)

## ESSENTIALLY "MIKECON" IS UNCHANGED...

A BNF or two, a SNP or two and perhaps even a person you'd like to talk to for a while.

Parties at 508 Windermere each night starting at 8pm and lasting as long as one of you can stay with a forty year old with nothing to prove.

Do-It-Yourself programming limited only by your own imagination and *no rules whatsoever*.

A chance for you to visit us, get \$1.45 on the dollar and see Mike and Doris and Mike and Susan at least half in their native habitat. A shopping spree...a chocolate orgy...a Blue Jay game...a movie...a bar-b-q...your forty-third viewing of "Great"...diablo...garlic dip...the zoo...the islands...frisbee...croquet...cold beer...good scotch...good conversation...good food...good friends... Whatever MIKECON means to you. Do come...you're invited.

# **Xenium 14 Mikecon Flyer**

GEORGE GALE & CO



**PRIZE OLD ALE**

*George Gale & Co.*  
Lim.<sup>d</sup>

REGISTERED TRADE MARK

BREWED AND BOTTLED AT THE BREWERY  
HORNDEN · HAMPSHIRE · ENGLAND

# London Tube

**DIAGRAM OF LINES**  
including the new  
**JUBILEE LINE**



**London Transport**

55 Broadway, London SW1H 0BD. 01-222 1234  
ISSUED FREE

No.1 1979



LINES				
VICTORIA	CENTRAL	CIRCLE	PICCADILLY	NORTHERN
BAKERLOO	DISTRICT	METROPOLITAN	JUBILEE	BRITISH RAIL
<small>Underground paths only Main services &amp; R.</small>	<small>Exhibition Service only</small>	<small>East London Section</small>		

# THE LONDON UNDERGROUND

- Interchange with other Lines
- ≡ Interchange with British Rail
- ⊠ Interchange with British Rail within walking distance
- ↑ Open Mondays to Fridays, peak hours only
- ★ Closed on Sundays
- ⊠ Closed on Saturdays and Sundays
- ⊠ Certain stations are also closed on Public Holidays
- ⊠ Nearest stations for the Round London Sightseeing Tour
- EUSTON Stations named in red have Travel Information Centres
- ▲ Piccadilly Line trains stop here early morning and Late evening Mondays to Saturdays and all day Sundays.