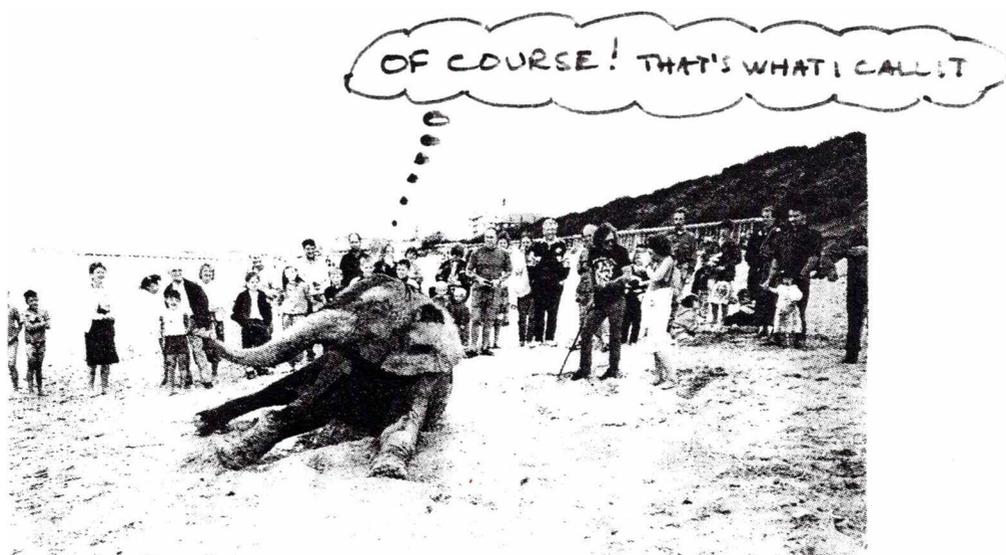


NATURALLY QUINTESSENTIAL ARBITRESS NEARING
QUADRAGENARIANISM ANNUALLY NOTATES QUALIFIED
AVOUCHEMENTS? NOMINALLY QUAINLY AVERRABLE?
NO QUARTER ASKED NO QUERY ANSWERED NO QUOTAS
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NEVER QUIZZES ALIENS' NERVE QUAKING ANGST?
NEVERTHELESS QUITE ANTITOXIC? NEATLY
QUANTIFIABLE ANECDOTES NEVER QUITE ARRIVING?
NOW QUIET AGAIN? NEVER QUITE ARRIVING? NEW
QUESTIONABLE ATTITUDES?

NEVER QUITE ARRIVING!!



NEVER QUITE ARRIVING 3 comes, in true deference to its title, much later than planned (well, it was meant to be out for Novacon 1994, to keep up a twice yearly schedule). This issue we have contributions from Tony Walsh and, er, me (for a change!). Tony has lots of exciting stuff to say about plane journeys, but before that here is a bit of an update on my state of mind. Please feel free to skip if you're not into intimate personal details about diet, mortgage and interior decorations!

LIFE ON MY OWN

Do I like living on my own? This isn't an easy question to answer, even after one year of it. There are two sides to my character - the selfish and the gregarious. The selfish manifests itself in such unlovable characteristics as possessiveness, unwillingness to share, ungenerous self-sufficiency; the gregarious in an obsessive need to be included in everything. I attribute all this to my family background. I grew up the middle child of three very close together in age, so had to fight for my individuality, prized privacy but was very rarely alone. I am actually happiest when there's a crowd of people around, but I'm not actually with them. I loved life in university hall for that very reason. I had people around and I had my own room to escape to. Communal living remains one of my dreams - who remembers the plans for the fannish commune? - but after the security and comfort of my married life, I didn't feel resilient enough to face the lottery of bed-sits and shared houses again. So when Peter-Fred, my ex-husband-to-be, offered me some money towards buying my own house, it didn't take too much soul-searching to decide to grab the cash and buy. Of course, house purchasing doesn't preclude getting in lodgers (sometimes it makes it unavoidable), but even though I have a spare room, the house is quite small, and because the two rooms downstairs have been knocked into one, I don't think it would for two people with different tastes. (How on earth the three students who were sharing the place before I bought it managed, I have no idea. Perhaps they were all very good friends.)

Anyhow, having gone through all the joys of house-buying (terrible survey report, patronising mortgage lenders, minimalist solicitors, intransigent seller) and two months of re-decorating to make it habitable, I moved in by myself on 8th January 1994. Determination, excitement and pride in having achieved independence, sustained the first few months. I loved the freedom of doing exactly what I liked, eating when I wanted, never having to wait to use the bathroom. Watching crap TV without anyone there to see just how crap it was. I also continued the house decoration programme with a dogged persistence which in retrospect can only surprise me. I was so self-sufficient it hurt. I even refused invitations to do things at the weekend in order to paint the bathroom or lay tiles on my kitchen floor.

Sooner or later there had to be a backlash. After all, there is only so long you can go on convincing yourself that a house is any substitute for human companionship. For me, the breakpoint was going on holiday. I spent a congenial week in a French gite with five other people, and came back desolate to an empty house. Living by myself didn't seem any too clever after that. It was pointless, unrewarding. At my worst I just lay on the floor and cried. I didn't want to go to work in the morning and I didn't want to come home from work at night. All there was in life, it seemed, was eating and watching television, and all either of those did for me was make me feel fat or stupid. Well, after a while, I picked myself off the floor, but by then the Russian class I was interested in had decided not to run, my friend didn't want to go to the cinema with me, and my writers group was pissed off with me either for not turning up or not paying much attention once I was there. (I perhaps ought to say at this point that the undemanding friendship of the Bristol SF group and their weekly sessions

down the pub did a lot to keep me sane throughout.)

So now I've done the upswing and the downward surge, can I get some kind of equilibrium into this living alone business? A bit more equilibrium at work might help. The worst of my depression coincided with the run-up to making about a third of my department redundant, so although I was not particularly worried about my own job, I can only conclude that the general atmosphere was getting me down. I certainly felt miraculously better after everyone knew their fate, which, though painful for some, was easier to handle all round, as people could then start trying to do something about it. Also, contrary to received wisdom, the onset of winter (apart from the inevitable problems with my central heating) seemed to give me a boost. I could suddenly see something positive in going to work (it's warm and I don't get the bill) and don't feel so frustrated about all the things I'm not doing. It can be no coincidence that my eyes now linger lovingly over the school jobs in the library vacancy supplement, and positively mist over at the mention of 30 hour weeks, term time only.

All of which makes me wonder if my summer sadness had more to do with switching to full time work, than living alone. Probably a combination of the two - pointlessness at work and pointlessness at home, and not nearly enough of the available sunlight! So there's the answer, get a lodger so I can afford to go back to part time work. My absolute ideal would be to get a new job share partner who would also rent the spare room - then not only would it be easy to keep track of what's happening at work - but I would always have the house to myself on my days off (and someone to do the shopping on my days in, and someone to look after both my house and my job when I'm on holiday, maybe cook for me when I can't be bothered and turn into my best friend in all the world - hmm, is this beginning to sound like a wet dream or what?)

And that's the other thing about living on your own (she says, hurriedly going off on a different tack); you have to cook for yourself every night, AND do the washing up. Now, I know that the correct behaviour for a woman on her own is to disclaim all interest in cooking, you know "It's only worth it if there's two of you, I much prefer to live on cheese and biscuits/ soup/ salads etc" - but the trouble is I don't! As implied earlier, food is up there with EastEnders (arrgh!) on my list of useless things that get me through my life. Think how much bigger still the hole in my evenings would be if I took to microwaved ready-meals, how much more obvious it would be that I am not doing the things I pretend I want to do (like fanzines, writing, Russian, family history), how much slimmer my waist-line would be. Actually, that last doesn't sound like such a bad idea. Even after a year, I am still cooking too much food for one (not quite enough to be worth saving for the next day - well, not once you pile it all in a big heap on your plate). I suspect the true reason is not inability to scale down but the comfort factor. Food gives me license to relax, so the longer I eat the longer I can sit comfortably not feeling I should be getting on with something else, and the more food I cook, the longer it takes to eat. Also, if your evening meal is the only thing you have to look forward to for the evening apart from going to bed with your hot water bottle then obviously completing it in five minutes does not really fulfill the emotional agenda you have set for it. Solutions before obesity sets in? Go out more (though not to pubs and restaurants, as this doesn't really help). Eat with chop sticks (which should either mean I take twice as long on half the food, or I finally get good at eating with chop sticks!) Get a life. Well, I'm working on that. But it ain't always that easy.

AT LEAST HALFWAY TO THE MOON - Part 1

By Tony Walsh

The cabin crew was auditioning for The Lifejacket Zombies and we were clawing into the sky on maximum power a bare one minute beyond the threshold when it happened : a sudden and monstrous screeching roar which lasted for three terrifying seconds then was gone as suddenly as it had come. The plane began to sink. So did my heart.

The stewardess in front of me was good. Only a barely perceptible hint of concern flicked across her face as she continued miming to the recorded safety instructions. I was not so good. I gripped the arms of my seat and fretted about altitude.

It couldn't have been a collision - there had been no sensation of impact. Nor could it have been an undercarriage problem - the wheels had already thumped into their bays. That left only one possible source of such a loud noise : engine seizure.

During my Air Force ground crew days in the 50's I had learned something of how aircraft function. Thus, even though we were not in a mad spiraling dive, I knew enough to know why I still should be worried. At maximum revs the tips of the blades in a gas turbine are rotating at a speed which, were it in a straight line, would put them at least 1000 kilometres away in one minute. That is serious energy. And if these blades stop dead, as ours just had, that energy will rip apart any of them which are even slightly less than perfect and turn the pieces into missiles capable of ripping anything in their path; structural metal, electrical cable, fuel lines, hydraulic lines and so on. I gripped my seat arms a lot tighter and fretted a lot more. Then, after about 10 seconds of sinking, we resumed our climb.

The pilot had regained control. But what was happening out on the wing; fountains of oil and fuel, flapping strips of aircraft skin, fire? I steeled myself to look through the window. Nothing. All appeared normal. And still we climbed. My fret quotient fell - a little.

"What was that?"

The question came from George, my boss and companion in flight that day. George had neither gripped his seat arms nor begun to fret. Ex-captains of the Black Watch don't do that; their normal response to danger is objective curiosity.

I unstuck my tongue from the roof of my mouth. "Something in the engine I think George."

"Well, let's hope we don't turn back."

He was right of course, for two very good reasons. First, there was the date : December 23rd. During the Christmas period every seat on every flight from Nigeria to Europe has been paid for and confirmed long before. A last minute arrangement? Forget it! Standby? Forget it! And if your plane doesn't turn up? Better pray the airline finds a substitute. Trouble was, and here comes the second reason why George was right, this was a substitute. There wouldn't be another this side of Christmas day.

The KLM crew had been very apologetic when they had joined us in the departure lounge. Seemed our plane was grounded for twenty four hours at Schipol but, they'd said, the good news was that a substitute had been found and we'd be departing on time. Good news? I began to feel uneasy as soon as I clapped eyes on it. The name - Sulaiman Air - was unknown to me, but much worse was the great go-faster stripe splashed from nose to tail in tasteless dayglo red. Oh, my prophetic soul!

And now here I was; over Africa in a crippled plane waiting for a damage report from the flight deck. If I were the pilot, I mused, how would I tell three hundred people they might be about to die, or, worse, spend Christmas in Lagos? I'd probably funk it and just send the cabin crew round with Last Will and Testament blanks.

And still we climbed on a steady northerly course. My fret quotient fell a little further. Half a minute passed. "Ladies and gentlemen, this is Jan Vorder, the first pilot" Here it

comes. "You may have heard a loud noise just now. First, let me assure you there is no danger." Oh yeah? "There was a problem with the starboard outer engine." I knew it, I knew it. "That engine is now shut down and isolated, and all other services are normal." Up yours, grim reaper. "In fact we have the capability to reach Amsterdam and I have radioed Schipol for clearance to maintain course. I will keep you informed. Once more, there is no danger. Thank you."

My fret quotient was still falling but, despite the pilot's reassuring words, I was not entirely at ease; we might yet be turned round by Schipol, and what about complications arising from the engine seizure?

In my time as a jetsetting oil man I guess I flew a total distance equal to at least halfway to the moon, and during it experienced an interesting variety of incidents; funny, fantastic, foolish, frustrating and even, you will have gathered, fretful.

The incident of the engine failure was undoubtedly the most fretful but there were others which compensated; not the least of them coming courtesy of nature's capacity to delight. Thunderstorms for example.

I am a thunderstorm freak anyway. Those great carnivals of light and noise thrill me in a quite uninhibited way. Not surprising then that I respond even more when I am 11 klicks up with a grandstand view. The most remarkable storm I recall occurred on a northerly course parallel to the west coast of India on a night flight out of Singapore. About 20 klicks to starboard was a display of lightning I would have thought impossible; not just a single flash every several seconds but several flashes every single second. It was in view for at least half an hour - at our speed of around 800 k.p.h. that is a storm of awesome size. In fact so much in awe was I that I awoke the colleague on my left in the certain belief that he would be pleased not to have missed such a spectacle. His snarl told me how wrong I was!

I have landed in a thunderstorm too, dropping into Singapore just as the whole box of tropical met effects was suddenly upended onto Changi airport : gale, rainstorm, thunder, lightning. A touch hairy that; yet even then I was more thrilled than chilled. I suspect my subconscious has believed the popular idea, that lightning never strikes twice, ever since I survived a strike whilst working on a grounded Air Force fighter back in the 50s.

Serial sunrise is another visual feast. This occurs when mountains on the horizon stand between sun and aircraft and is especially spectacular when it is viewed from above partially broken cloud. Sudden beams of blinding light pierce the gap to leap at the plane and then, because of its changing position, alternately fade and flare in a spectacular sequence.

"I see we're still climbing and heading north."

"Looks like it George."

"Promising. So where's the cabin crew with the drinks?"

"I expect they're waiting for the okay from the - "

"Ladies and gentlemen. This is the first pilot again. I am happy to inform you we have clearance from Schipol to maintain a northerly course, but it will be necessary to review the fuel situation before we pass over the Algerian coast to cross the Mediterranean." I raised a mental eyebrow. "I will explain. You will understand of course that the shutdown engine is now an added load factor. Also, we will be flying two thousand metres lower than usual. This all means that, even with three engines instead of four, the fuel consumption rate could be much higher than normal. I hope you understand. Anyway I shall keep you informed. Cabin service can now begin."

"Is that right, about three engines using more fuel than four?"

"Yes, George. You see, it's all to do with the atmospheric pressure at a lower altitude. It's higher. This means the input-output pressure ratio across a gas turbine is - "

"Yes, I'm sure you're right. Scotch?"

I had lost him to the more immediate subject of the drinks trolley, so decided not to voice the suspicion aroused by the pilot's seemingly reasonable announcement : yes, we would use more fuel but not so much more that we wouldn't reach the Med. coast of France. After all, we should have come out of Lagos with sufficient fuel to reach Amsterdam; or further if something closed Schipol. Then what was Meenheer Vorder keeping from us?

"Make it a large one please, George," I said.

The Algerian coast was the setting for another of my Christmas flight experiences; one more frustrating than fretful.

The site, at Skikda, had closed for the holiday as fifty of us Brits set off at 6 a.m. in two buses accompanied by the main contractor's on-site travel clerk who was himself going on leave and who also had arranged the itinerary for the whole party, poor sod! We checked in at Annabar airport in good time for the first leg to Algiers on an internal flight and trickled into the departure area. As with any body of Brit oilmen abroad, there was the usual infection of piss-heads and it had been a ten crate bus ride from Skikda. So it was no surprise to be faced in the departure area by two soldiers toting Moscow's gift to the missing link : the Kalachnikov. But, as we actually realised, they weren't there to control the infection. Something else was afoot.

The plane rolled onto the apron and, as it swallowed our luggage, we gathered expectantly around the locked glass doors of the boarding gate. Two check-in clerks approached across the concrete. Then, without so much as a glance our way, they opened the door of a building to our left and escorted a hundred-strong bunch of Algerians out to board the plane. It was as the ground staff were tugging the boarding steps away from the plane that we realised the purpose of the two soldiers : our plane was to go without us. I admired the way the travel clerk ignored what seemed to me excessively ill-mannered flak as he headed off to the check-in area.

Half an hour later he was back with news of how a typical piece of African corruption has stranded us.

"Our seats have been re-allocated to - you'll love this one - Annabar F.C. supporters going to a match in Algiers!"

"I don't believe it you're kidding shit we're going to miss our Air Algerie connection to London!"

"No we're not."

"Yes we are. It's non-stop Algiers-London."

"Not today, it isn't. Air Algerie have agreed to a detour to pick us up here."

And they had. With regard for neither cost nor inconvenience - 500 kilometres worth of extra fuel and three hours later into London - the plane did in fact detour to pick us up at Annabar. Our luggage was still in Algiers of course; one more problem for the poor travel clerk. He eventually established that the luggage would follow us later and gave out a contact number. When I rang the number the next day I was surprised to find it was the London office of Lufthansa who had been subcontracted by Air Algerie to handle the problem. My case arrived p.m. via Red Star

That was the end of the episode for me but not for those who'd had to hand in a "goods to declare" form on arrival at Heathrow; they had to make other arrangements for their luggage. Such was Air Algerie service.

"Well, we wouldn't be doing this if an early landing was on the cards," George commented as we peeled cooking foil off our beef casserole somewhere over the Sahara."

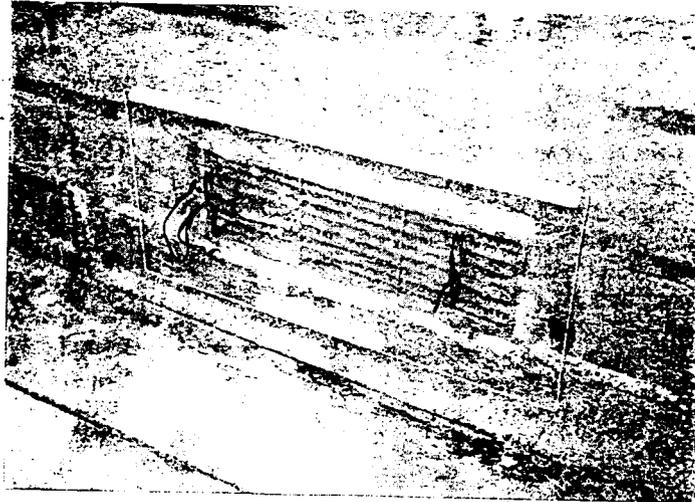
"Right," I agreed, "Looks like we'll at least get out of Africa. And even if we get no

further than Marseilles there's bound to be a space on other flights going north from there."

"Even a train to Paris would do. There's enough shuttles from there to the UK." he added.

It sounded good, if only I could silence that fretful voice telling me we weren't out of danger yet.

(To be continued)



Judging from recent writing on the subject here are the five big mistakes Lilian and I made as TAFF delegates :

Mistake number 1 - not throwing up in true British style

Sorry, we did our best to be drunken and debauched, but it just didn't work out!

Mistake number 2 - not being miserable all the time

In fact, far from conforming to the traditional British image, we actively enjoyed ourselves (though it does help to have a travel companion who will to split a bottle of wine with you when all the Americans are drinking iced tea.)

Mistake number 3 - not hating the Worldcon

Nolacon did have the advantage of being in New Orleans. Also, rather than seeming a huge characterless event, it was a great opportunity to meet up with all the friends we'd partyed with earlier in the trip.

Mistake number 4 - not believing that TAFF is pointless

In fact we were getting a distinct buzz out of being special guests wherever we visited

Mistake number 5 - not writing up our TAFF trip

So whose fault is it really that we feel like the TAFF winners time forgot?

Looks like there's only one remedy. I've been talking about it for two issues now. I've taken out all the photos. Unearthed the notes. Pulled a postcard of the Golden Gate Bridge out of my memorabilia bag. It's the summer of love. It's 1968 (give or take twenty years). It's time to start singing Flowerpot Men songs.

Yeah! Party on!

LET'S GO TO SAN FRANCISCO

More tales from the TAFF trip of Lilian Edwards and Christina Lake

TUESDAY 23rd August 1988

Seattle was always going to be a hard act to follow. Visiting with John Berry and Eileen Gunn had been pure holiday. Lounging on their back porch in the sunshine, drinking microbrewery beers and Washington wines. A leisurely trip round the Cascades. Plenty of swimming. All so much more relaxed than my image of life in an American city.

We flew out to San Francisco late in the afternoon. This time we had a window seat, but all we could see was the glare of the sun and then the colours of sunset and a dark sea moving against an even darker shore.

The plane was in slightly late, but there was no sign of Lucy. Had we told her the wrong day? The wrong time? But no, there was Lucy, all in black, hair dyed blonde, rushing up to hug us. I made the usual mental readjustments to my image of her, catching up as she whisked us along the moving pavement towards the exit. Lucy and Lilian seemed full of energy, and Lucy, eager to do the right thing by us on our first night in San Francisco drove us up to Twin Peaks (Nothing to do with the TV show, which anyway was not to hit our screens for another two years) where we could overlook the whole city. Lucy enthusiastically pointed out landmarks, while Lilian admired the pretty lights and I tried to take an intelligent interest.

Back at Lucy's flat we were given the guided tour. The shoes in pride of place on her bookshelves, the cuddly penguin collection, the girly pink phone, the unpacked cardboard boxes, evidence, she told us, of her unsettled lifestyle. Then there was John's TV room, where John hung out (the subtext being that he needed somewhere to retreat from our incursion), the living room, which Lilian and I were to share with John's gerbils and a large poster of three chickens in dark glasses (presumably a tribute to the chicken brothers), the bathroom with its shower curtains depicting the world in plastic and a copy of "Is Elvis alive?" on the window sill. Apparently we had hit America at the height of Elvis-mania, and there had been as many reported sightings of Elvis Presley back from the dead as visions of the Virgin Mary, Lucy told us with great enthusiasm. Lilian looked unconvinced - not so much by the news of the sightings, but by the whole concept of anyone caring enough to take the subject seriously. But Lucy, with her interest in kitsch culture, simply loved it.

WEDNESDAY 24th August

Lucy and John both had to go to work, so we were left to fend for ourselves. How will we cope? I wrote anxiously in my notebook. Will we even find the subway? (Sorry, tram, I amend later.) Will we even know which way downtown is? Fortified by one of the gorgeous cinammon pastries that America is so good at, the answer was yes, but only with some difficulty. We went downtown as far as Powell where the jazz bands played and the cable cars were supposed to start (but didn't as there was some snarl-up further down the line). At the tourist information centre we asked how to get to Lombard Street, without the cable cars (which I still envisaged as suspended above the city like a ski lift. I was soon to be disabused by the earth-bound reality of carriages pulled by wires running through the streets.) They suggested a bus. The guy ahead of us was asking where he could buy Star Trek stuff. This really freaked us out. Especially as the dude at the desk didn't know the answer. Lilian stepped in to suggest "Comix & Comix" on Lombard Street. Hah, we thought, you can't say we TAFF winners don't provide a service to the whole SF community.

By the time we finished battling with the transport system, it felt like time to eat again. We reckoned we were somewhere near the restaurant Lucy had recommended for lunch. We even

found the right intersection, but not the Hunan. Eventually we settled for Hong Kong (cuisine or restaurant name? Maybe both) where they served three courses, if you count jello as a course, which on the whole we didn't, for \$3.50. We then wandered round Chinatown, looking at the tack, trying to sell each other stuff. Lilian sold me a purse for holding jewellery, but then sold herself several more of them (I have a built-in advantage at this game) and a map of the world in Chinese (little realising that one day she would have a boyfriend who was a lecturer in Chinese, who could supply her with all the Chinese junk she could ever want!) We also watched a man finger-painting (how does he get the line so fine?) and freaked out over Chinese computer books, with the explanations in Chinese and actual programming stuff in English. After a while, it began to seem like there was no escape from Chinatown. We kept coming back to the same little park full of China men (and, bizarrely, a statue of Robert Louis Stevenson) and it was only by a real effort of will that we made it into the Italian sector (Italytown?) where we spent an hour mastering a peach sorbet (or, if truth be told, resting our poor tired touring feet).

After all this wandering around it was time to navigate ourselves off to Lucy's office to meet up with her and Rich Coad. If Lilian found it a strain meeting up with Rich, whom she had once been married to in a fanzine, she didn't let it show. Lucy was taking us to the infamous Tonga Rooms, which she enthused about lovingly. "It's really over the top. They even have fake thunder storms!"

The whole place was done out as a kind of subterranean Polynesian theme bar, with Polynesian rigging and bush umbrellas. Every so often, when they were feeling generous, they would run the storm sequence and we would get a tightly focussed rain storm complete with thunder and lightning in one corner of the room.

After getting ourselves cocktails, we were joined by "Denise Rehse's niece Therese", Denise herself and Sonya (Rich's real wife). Therese was dark and langorous, Denise sharp and energetic, and Sonya was calm, though she did keep eating everyone's fruit from the cocktails, especially the cherries. Therese gave Lucy a late birthday present, mainly consisting of fish in some form or other. What did it all mean? Was it connected to Joe Wesson being the fish deity? And why WAS Joe Wesson the fish deity? But the crazy theme park world of the Tonga Rooms did not seem the right place to ask for sensible explanations. Instead, we all went to grab the free appetizers, piling up our plates with breaded zucchini, battered mushrooms and chicken pieces (rather reminiscent of that Cheers episode where they all desert Sam's establishment to go to the trendy cocktail bar with the good munchies - but that too was to be in the future.) Every so often there would be another rain storm. After two cocktails this almost seemed natural.

Eventually even the wonders of the Tonga Rooms began to pall and the others went home, while Lucy took us up to the Starlite Rooms overlooking the city where we had one of those really good conversations about parents, life, love, and maybe even fanzines (though I wouldn't guarantee it).

THURSDAY 25th August

As old hands at this business of navigating round San Francisco, we headed out with confidence to Fisherman's Wharf. This time the cable cars were actually running, and needless to say, crowded with tourists. It was a bit like going on a very slow roller coaster ride. Fisherman's Wharf turned out to be infinitely tacky. All the museums looked like amusement arcades and all the stalls sold cheap trash and take-away seafood. But what else should we have expected? At least the marinas round the piers were quite pretty. Eventually we found a lido and a beach, and I proved that I was more of a fool than Lilian by going swimming. I think she was put off by the fact that the only place to change was a very public toilet with no lock on it! This was one of those very rare days for San Francisco when it was

completely clear and sunny, so I was subsequently able to freak people out by claiming, truthfully, that I had got my sun tan on a beach in San Francisco. In fact, we soon retreated from the beach to a nearby park where we got to know the repertoire of the busker by the cable car stop extremely well (Stray Cats was his best and Yesterday his worst!). Lucy's bread ticket (whatever that was!) entitled us to a half-price tour of the Bay which of course, no self-respecting visitor to San Francisco can do without. So, it was under Golden Gate Bridge (hold on, it's choppy!), up to the Bay Bridge, round Alcatraz, cameras clicking all the way. Lilian kept telling me off for not taking enough pictures. It was true that I was still on my first film to approximately her third, but then I didn't know how to take the film out of the camera, so was not going to use it all up on the backs of the baseball caps of my fellow passengers. The commentary was pre-recorded and sporadic. Every time it stopped there was a ding! not dissimilar to that made by the cable cars as they picked up passengers. Lilian's theory was that everything in San Francisco was trying to sound like a cable car.

We dined Mexican on the famous Pier 39 - half price with the ferry tickets, then to complete the tour of the famous bits of San Francisco went off in search of the famous wiggly bit of Lombard Street. More importantly still, we made it to the Comic Shop ten minutes before closing time, so that Lilian could restock on Omaha The Cat Dancer (the then trendy, but difficult to get through customs, comic).

Back at Lucy's there was consternation - Greg Pickersgill was going to the Worldcon! Lucy was on the phone half the night to her network of friends, working herself into a pre-convention frenzy. "This time next week we'll be partying our brains out!" she exclaimed to Phil Palmer. There was even a call from Joe Wesson, her Alabama sweetie. Baby, baby, baby! Lucy was just real excited. In the midst of so much happening, Lilian and I managed to find it noteworthy that we were getting our first door-to-door pizza delivery. Clearly such things were unknown in our own home towns at this time. It seemed like a good system - the pizza boy delivered the wrong type of pizza so we got an extra one free. This could really catch on, I thought.

FRIDAY 26th August

Another day of hectic tourist activity, this time spent at the Golden Gate Park, mainly in the Academy of Science, where we "did" the gemstone collection, the aquarium, the fish roundabout, the planetarium, and, of course, the shop. Lilian bought a T-shirt. I failed to buy another film.

Back at Lucy's, Lucy was busy cutting up fruit and John was out buying pie. The dinner party guests were some friends of theirs called Terry and Pam, and their kid Alex. Alex went mad playing with Lucy's Flying Penguin toy while the rest of us ate M&Ms (Lucy's party theory being that you should indulge in all the foods you can't justify normally.) Lucy's chicken was covered in hot Vietnamese sauce and was delicious. The chocolate silk pie was even better. (But what happened to the fruit? Was it in the Vietnamese sauce? Did she make fruit punch? My notes as ever are coy on these important points).

Soon after we had scoffed all the best food, more people arrived and we were swamped in fun and excitement. (That's what my notes say. Honest.) We met Brad and Wendy who had offered us accomodation (so I really ought to remember their surname) and Donya and Alan (ditto, though of course because I know them now, I find it totally unnecessary to mention their surname here, on the assumption that everyone knows them just as well as me - which judging by their recent mammoth tour of Great Britain, they probably do!). Donya told me about Apanage, the children's fantasy apa - which interestingly enough, if I had signed up for there and then I might by now be within striking distance of the top of the waiting list. Tom Whitmore offered to help out in the TAFF/DUFF auction, which immediately made him popular with Lilian and I. Alan Bostick wore a Godzilla T-shirt,

which I doubt had a similar effect. Dave Clark handed out the Bay area listing which I dutifully used to tick off the names of the people at Lucy's gathering (but have long since lost!). So fascinated was I by the great variety of apas available in the States that I began to collect them - a music apa, APA 50 (for people born after 1950, not people over 50, I believe). Then John Singer came in and we collapsed into back rubs. Photos were taken of what looks like mass orgies on Lucy's sofa, wine was drunk, wine was spilt and we were drunk. Eventually Sharee Carton and her husband turned up much to everyone's excitement. (I think this note implies they were excited about Sharee who was a tall, beautiful looking woman.) When most of the people had gone, Sharee showed us her snake tattoo, which went all the way round her body. This was in some ways a bad night to stay up drinking to all hours, since we had to get a bus to Allyn Cadogan's house the next day, but needless to say we hardly gave it a thought at the time. Little did we realise that Allyn was throwing a party for us the next afternoon...

More to follow, in the next exciting installment. Maybe next issue? I'll see what the response to this part is. If you're all bored brainless by the events of six/seven years ago, then I'll have to try and do something more exciting.

Meanwhile, who was it that said...

(You're) NEVER QUITE ALONE (with a letter column)

I'd better start with the loc that missed the last issue, but at least Robert has an excuse for his tardy response :

Robert Lichtman, PO Box 30, Glen Ellen, CA 95442 USA

Never Quite Arriving tried its best to live up to its name. I kept seeing references to it in review columns, and wondered if I would be favored with a copy. Well, it finally arrived on April 5th, over four months after its postmark in Bristol on November 30th.

((The British post office just does it to make people paranoid.))

The mention you make of "lovingly written descriptions" of beers in that Chicago brewpub as contrasted to the lack of information on the wealth of choices available in some British pubs reminded me of the time in Bristol when you and Peter Fred took me to that huge pub in a building converted from some former use, seemingly in the heart of Bristol. This was before the Bristol group meeting later the same evening at which I met Dave Wood, amongst others. Do you recall it?

((Indeed. You're the last visiting fan fund winner to come to Bristol, so how could we forget? The pub we visited beforehand must have been the Fleece & Firkin which is now mainly a small (but good) venue for various bands.))

I remember finding myself completely confounded by the vast selection of beers available there, most of which I'd never had any previous experience with beyond having heard their names. As you point out later in this issue, us American fans are markedly less into drinking alcoholic things than you lot - and at this point, five years down the line, my recollection of memorable pints is limited to that one nameless local brew I had at lunch the day I went to Llangorse. Though Llangorse was perhaps the smallest town I was in during my TAFF trip, still it had a good handful of drinking establishments. Mike Christie led me to this one on the

grounds they had the best food - I had something called a "lentil buckwheat crumble" which was as tasty in its own way as the brew.

((The Llangorse pub also served excellent 6X - better than in the Bristol pubs. There are some of us who still mourn Mike and Sherry's departure to Texas. Robert adds : "Is this how I'm finally going to write my TAFF report - as little asides and recollections in letters of comment?" Well, there could be worse ways, at least, according to Irwin))

Irwin Hish, 26 Jessamine Ave, East Prahan, VIC 3181, Australia

I'm not sure that we should be looking at quick publication of a fan fund trip report. The winner comes home to two or three years of fund administration and the expectation of 50 or more pages of copy, when neither activity had been required of them in the past. I don't mind seeing the report initially being given the lower priority of the two. There are benefits in having some quick responses to the trip and the convention attended but I have no desire to see the final report quickly published. In my time in fandom I've seen three DUFFER reports published while the DUFFER was still administrator (ie within two years of the trip) and each of those reports are among the weakest I've read. Rather than being descriptive and giving an idea of what the DUFFER saw and felt they are merely anecdote-free catalogues of people, places and events. It struck me, last time I looked at one of those reports, that if I took a similar then-I-did approach to my GUFF report I could've finished the thing within a year of the trip, but I'm unsure about the degree to which we are served by having further reports of that style. The funds would benefit financially, but I don't think fanfund supporters get a valuable record of events.

((Brian Earl Brown has a slightly different view on the matter))

Brian Earl Brown, 11675 Beaconsfield, Detroit, MI 48224, USA

I don't think TAFF delegates should worry about how far off the mark from perfection their trip report will be because any trip report will be interesting. Don Ford who won in the late 50s or early 60s was as dull as anyone you could expect and his trip report was pedestrian, dogged and earnest, but I still found it interesting reading because I didn't know these people, or barely know of the people mentioned and enjoyed what insight he brought to them.

((This is the point at which on Question Time's David Dimbelby abnegates responsibility and puts it to the studio vote. "Should the Bishop of Durham resign? " "No, it appears not." But, despite this disappointing outcome it looks like Brian is on the same side as Irwin after all!))

I don't think TAFF delegates should feel honor-bound to write really long trip reports. Ten pages of good stories is far more desirable than 50 pages of "Rained today, stayed home and worked on my notes..." A trip report ought to give some idea of one's entire itinerary, but one hardly needs to describe everything done on the trip, touching on the highlights is more desirable.

((I'm liking the sound of this more and more. No need to write up for several years. Only ten pages. Any more short-cuts I can adopt? Brian suggests, quite persuasively, that the real problem is what he calls "enormity complex"))

It's the idea that some projects looms so large in a person's eyes that instead of attacking the task piece by piece, the person is paralyzed and unable or unwilling to do anything about it.

((A bit like the ironing, really. Or the time-byte fanthology that Lilian and I are meant to be doing for Intersection.))

I often wonder if delegates aren't doing trip reports anymore because they're afraid it will never be as good as Langford's or Willis's or some other nebulous archetypal trip report and if they can't be as good, why bother?

((Yes, I have something of this syndrome. Not so much fear that it won't be good, as belief that the territory has already been well charted and everyone knows what it's like in America already.))

My answer is that nobody can be as good as Langford (not even Langford) and besides you're a different person and will see things differently from Langford and that difference is good reason for writing. If people took the same attitude about publishing fanzines as they do about writing TAFF reports, that it's not worth doing if it can't be done as well as the best, there would be no one publishing fanzines at all.

((Ah, so that's what accounts for British fandom in the 90s? But time to stop quoting from Brian before he claims he did not write this loc either "Embarrassing as it is to say, I don't recall receiving the first issue or loccing it..." If only I could get someone to loc fanzines for me too. Then again, perhaps Brian's letter was actually written by my next correspondent...))

Don Fitch, 3908 Frijo, Covina, CA 91722, USA

Sometimes it scares me that people - and especially Brian Earl Brown - so often come up with ideas that perfectly mesh with my feelings. Brian's "People support TAFF because they think these candidates are interesting people to meet, if not in person at WorldCon, then indirectly through a trip report" puts into words precisely my feelings about TripReports and fanzine writing in general. (All the TAFF and DUFF winners I've met at Cons have been delightful people, but it's rarely been possible to spend more than ten minutes with them, so Trip Reports are especially appreciated.) Then he comes to the same conclusion I've reached concerning Sharyn McCrumb - that she seems to believe that the only fit & proper goal for human beings is to Make Money, and that she holds in utter contempt those fans (of anything) who spend a significant part of their lives in merely having fun. It's not surprising that she'd be so strongly influenced by Francis T. Laney. Both McCrumb and Laney have been, interestingly, so violent in their opposition to any but these Mundane Goals that it's difficult not to speculate on their psychological motivations and possible sense of insecurity.

The perversion of "Anorak" to apply to "an unsocialised nerd with a beard" is also Politically Incorrect; the word belongs to the Inuit (though whether those living in Alaska and Western Canada, or those around Hudson's Bay, doesn't seem clear); Inuit people tend to become quite upset when outsiders mis-use their language, and since some of the Inuit still go out and kill full-grown Polar Bears with little more than a sharpened stick, one might well try to avoid offending them.

((I expect they would have got more upset by the standard of some of the garments that have been labelled as anoraks in the mild southern climes. (This description is meant to encompass the whole of the South of England, apart from my bedroom, which is well known as the frost centre of Bristol. But you don't want to hear about my heating problems, so lets allow Don to go on to my fanzine reviews.))

"Chocolate Cream Fanzines" seems an apt description - higher in calories/entertainment value

than in nutrition/information (or maybe thoughtful originality), and small enough to pop into one's mouth and consume in a few minutes. It would be a dreadful world if all fanzines were like that, or if none were. Of course, herd characteristics don't apply to people as individualistic as fans, there does seem to be a stampede trend, recently, towards these casual, spur-of-the-moment, no-big-deal little fanzines. Why, it seems almost as though British fans don't always take fanzines (and themselves) Terribly Seriously, after all. Not everyone, maybe - though the most recent issue of FTT I received took about 6 months en route, so it's obvious that people over here are going to get the time-scheme all screwed-up, and it's unreasonable to expect everyone to participate in any particular trend but.. Yes, it does look as though the younger British fanzine fans in general are taking a bit of time out from their Sercon Insurgency to be silly and toss around some paper aeroplanes.. which are, of course, mostly very well-designed and extremely well-made... some even use (*Ghasp*) Italics!

((Sorry you have to imagine the italics here, folks, because even though I've been shown which command to use to get italics, it's not actually coming out that way. The shame. Luckily, I can do bold...))

Bridget Hardcastle, 13 Lindfield Gardens, Hampstead, London NW3 6PX

Why does the British fanzine scene seem childish? Well, I don't know about everyone else but I was brought up on Smash Hits magazine in the mid-eighties akchelo, **Hello, Black Type** here... (ahem), and it has been a great influence on my writing style.

((Almost as bad as being brought up on the NME in the mid-seventies, I'd imagine. But how come you don't mention Bunty and the Four Marys among your seminal influences?))

I was going to mention my theories as to why the scene is such, but you have covered them admirably in your article. Trouble is, there's probably loads of people out there who find this light-heartedness extremely irritating, and it's only a matter of time before the revolution comes!

((It's all right, they're too busy running InterSection at the moment. But on to the more serious matters of my marauding rat.))

Why poison the rat then put a new air vent over the hole? Why not just put up the new air vent to prevent the rat returning? Maybe that wouldn't work as the rat (if there was only one), having tasted the 'forbidden fruit', had become increasingly persistent. Or were you just punishing the rat for eating your bananas? Chop its paws off, that's what I'd do. At least your fruit didn't evaporate which is what happened to half a bottle of Chinese firewater of mine in three days. I probably already told you that at Mexicon - I told most people that at Mexicon...

((Actually the punitive measures were taken purely on the initiative of the pest control officer who was full of horror stories about the danger of gnawed wires, disease, plague etc. And, just to prove I'm not exaggerating, here's another rodent story.))

Darroll Pardoe, 36 Hamilton Street, Hoole, Chester CH2 3JQ

I had an encounter with rodents at work a few weeks ago. I have two phones on my desk : the ordinary factory phone (which works via the switchboard), and a direct line (which I use mainly for my computer modem). One morning the direct line stopped working : when I

picked up the instrument all I could hear was an engaged tone. So I called BT and within two hours (smart work!) an engineer arrived to fix it. I was impressed. He wore a dark, neat suit and a tie; not at all the usual image of a BT engineer (though I understand it is the current corporate image). He decided to go up into the roof space (where all the cabling is) and have a look around. So he donned a natty pale-grey boiler suit with a BT logo on it, and off he went.

After half an hour the phone was fixed and he told me what was wrong. Apparently the cable to my phone had been eaten by mice! We do have trouble with field mice. During the winter all the field mice who live in the big field across the road from the factory decide that they'd rather be in a nice warm building than out in the open, and come over to enjoy our hospitality. I think I'd do the same in the circumstances. The canteen cat gets one or two but for the most part it must be an easy life for them.

((What a pastoral picture of office life you do paint! Any field mice that wanted to get to my office would either get run over by an InterCity 125, or mowed down by a Pickfords van. As for canteen cats - I guess we're lucky to still have a canteen. Still, it would be nice to call in my own BT engineer and see how many changes of clothes he carries (pity the company's gone over to Mercury!) But, apparently, rats, mice and BT men are not the worst you can get in the way of mysterious intruders.))

Tommy Ferguson, 42 Ava Drive, Belfast BT7 3DW, N.I.

It seems strange that everyone I've been writing to, and the fanzines I have been reading are mentioning intruders and/or other mysterious goings on in people's homes. My event was extremely weird. I woke up one morning and came downstairs and put on the stereo. As I turned to the kitchen to make some coffee Steve McQueen by Prefab Sprout came on. Now it is one of my favourite albums but I haven't played it in years. So I checked the stereo and sure enough there were a couple of cassette tapes lying about, as if someone had a pic n' mix competition and lost. I looked around the living room and saw a glass, that shouldn't have been there; there was also a satsuma skin on the table which I hadn't eaten and my chair was slightly out of place. (You know the way, when things are just out of place. If I measured the chair would have been 3 millimetres out of alignment, but I just knew.) Some one had been in my house last night, but I also knew I hadn't got off at that party down the street.

The Party. Hmm...

"Thomas, you were stoned and drunk and invited everyone back to your place for breakfast at 5.30am," I was reliably informed.

"I did?" Yes I did. Someone obviously took me up on it.

The thing about this intruder was that they had exactly the same taste as I did, my toothbrush was left exactly where I would have left it even though the toothpaste they had used wasn't. Again things throughout the house were like I would leave them, but not quite.

After lengthy investigations I've come to the conclusion that it was, as you have no doubt guessed, me. Which was a bit scary as I had absolutely no recollection of any of it.

"I'm not entirely surprised," said my ex-girlfriend, "you talked to a woman all night about John Woo films and tried to chat up one of your friends."

"I did?" Yes, I did.

((Isn't it refreshing to get locs with dialogue in them (but hell for doing the page layout.))

Irwin Hirsh

We don't have the problem of the disappearing fruit - Adrian ((Irwin's son)) tends to ask before taking something to eat - but we have been inundated with a plague of ants. About once a week there'd be twenty or thirty wandering around in the kitchen or bathroom. We'd clean down the surfaces - drowning the ants in the process - and hope their relatives and friends don't decide to make a memorial visit to the site. After going through this cycle many times we decided that drastic action was required and got into some chemical warfare. The instructions on the bottle of ant propellant told us to put down a line of the propellant across the wall nearby. At four points along the line, the liquid ran down the wall. Then next morning there were five rows of ants, four down and one across. I estimated there must have been about two thousand of the things. Wendy was disgusted by the sight, but I was transfixed by these solid lines of black. Not that I wanted the ants there, but I was intrigued by it all. I'd be hard pressed to call them pets, though as a kid I wanted one of those ant farms. Perhaps that is why I was fascinated.

Brad W. Foster, PO Box 165246, Irving, TX 75016 USA

I loved your tale of the missing fruit. Cindy and I have had some problems with mice in the walls/attic recently. I solved it by walking around the house just before we went to bed each night (for it was shortly after that, when the house became quiet, that they would tend to throw their little mouse parties, dancing disco up and down the inside of the walls and over the ceiling), and whacking the walls with a big stick while singing "Love to munch those mousie ears, love to munch those mousie toes..." it seemed to work, haven't had a sign of them since!

((I'm not surprised!))

Must admit to being a bit disappointed in the lack of drawing-type artwork in this issue. Makes it tough to feel I can send some fillos as "the usual".

((Brad, the only reason there was no real art in the last issue (and no doubt in this one too, sob!) is that I am as unsuccessful at soliciting art as soliciting articles. Fillos would be more than welcome in trade - please take note any artists on my mailing list!))

I also loved Barb's article on this Texas Rangers TV program. I've never seen or even heard of this. When did this hit the airways in Oz?.

((No idea, but if it was a child-sized Barb staring round the corners of her tv set, then I would guess the mid-sixties.))

Janet Stevenson, Roan, Roweltown, Carlisle CA6 6LX

I am really impressed by Barb Drummond's "Tales of the Texas Rangers". It is definitely memorable. Books never answer the questions you really want the answers to. Like : what kind of sanitation did the protagonists in the Laura Ingalls Wilder books use? If any. Then you start wondering about spacemen of course.

((Of course))

Tutors never tell you what you really want to know either. Three and a half years of history of German language and when I graduated I still did not know when they started using full stops for nouns.

((Pardon. I always thought they used nouns for nouns. But that just goes to show the shallow perspective one gets from A level. Maybe I should get out my book on the principles of German word order. Or maybe I should thank my lucky stars I never tried learning Finnish...))

Pat Silver, 1 Fenswood Cottages, 111 Weston Road, Long Ashton, Bristol BS18 9AE

If you (or at least William Bains) think Icelandic is peculiar, you should try Finnish. We spent 2 weeks in Finland last summer, mostly walking in the wilderness up in Lapland. Finnish has no connection whatsoever with the other European languages, neither in structure nor in vocabulary. In most of Europe I can make a guess at the meaning of a lot of written languages I have little knowledge of. In Finland you can't do that and it feels very strange to be totally illiterate. Fortunately (and embarassingly) most Finns speak excellent English. We did try to learn at least some of the basic phrases though. Finnish is actually written pretty much phonetically and you pronounce every letter that you see, even when those letters look like "puhuttekko" or "Seueresaari". Those double consonants make a glottal stop, and the double vowels make longer sounds than the single vowels. The trouble really starts when you discover that the language doesn't use prepositions, uses different endings on words instead, and that the root of the word can change according to the new ending.

((There's nowt so strange as languages, as they say, so here's a letter that just made it in before I closed the letter column, and proves that I'm not the only one who can do all these contrived links...))

Eunice Pearson, 2 New Houses, Pant, Nr MerthyrTydfil, Mid Glamorgan CF48 2AB

I liked Barb Drummond's article. Never saw "The Texas Rangers" myself, but I have been watching "Rawhide" lately. Has anyone else noticed that the boss in that looks uncannily like Commander Sinclair in Babylon 5? Or that Siddiq el Fadil ("DS9") is the spitting image of a young Dirk Bogarde? No? Just me I guess?

((What's going on? (as my 2 year old niece would say). Can't say that I've noticed any of the above, but am always glad to print letters that mention Babylon 5.

That's more or less all from the letter sack, apart from a note from Rob Hansen "Biggest surprise in NQA #2 was the LoC from Moshe. Do you realise how rare they are? I certainly agree with him about the Madison CORFLU, which I'd rate one of the three or four best cons I've ever been to, and I had toothache through most of it." and a poem from Mike Johnson (which I shan't quote from as I suspect poets don't appreciate being rearranged, interrupted and quoted out of context - unlike, of course, my long-suffering letter writers!))



NEVER QUITE ARRIVING 3

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Cover art concept courtesy Tony
Walsh. This issue's guest
publication is Environmental
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