

THE (INGLORIOUS NINTH) FORTNIGHTLY FIX



“Last week, I ate a dead man’s nuts” [Linda Monk]

Before a Fall

When the late Rick Sneary wrote “It is a proud and lonely thing to be a fan”, he no doubt encapsulated a feeling many of us experienced as we first encountered the science fiction genre, at least back in the days before its visual expression dominated both the big and small screen. (I’m old enough to remember when the release of a movie such as *Logan’s Run* or the tv version of *Planet of the Apes* was quite an event, even if they soon proved a hollow one.)

However, whilst there’s no longer a need to engage with sf in isolation -- even the UK has a regular roster of conventions, though nowhere near the crammed calendar on offer across the Big Pond - there remains the matter of ‘fannish pride’, which I’m beginning to fear has tipped over in certain quarters into arrogant elitism.

My disquiet was initially sparked by the stance a number of so-called ‘core’ fans adopted when Chris Garcia and I announced the candidates for the 2010 TAFF race: Frank Wu, Anne KG Murphy and Brian Gray (the last two standing together). All three are active in fandom -- Frank won last year’s Hugo Award for Best Fan Artist (I was one of the three co-presenters), Anne and Brian help organise conventions, Anne’s also edited four issues of *MidFanzine* -- yet from the way some responded to this line-up, you’ve have thought Chris and I had trawled for nominees on the nearest street corner.

There was another whiff of this last month when John Purcell and Jeff Boman threw their hats into the ring for the chance to ride the DUFF ticket to Australia. I’ve read John’s fanzine *Askance* with great enjoyment for several years and had the pleasure of hanging out with Jeff in Montreal (when he handed me a copy of his comiczine *The Original Universe*); both would first-rate ambassadors for North American fandom, but the personal element led me to add this fanzine’s backing to Jeff’s campaign. Hardly in the same league as Rupert Murdoch’s *Sun* switching allegiance to New Labour, but there were still raised eyebrows at my decision: sure, Jeff might be a valued member of the Montreal SF & Fantasy Association and a recipient of the Prix Aurora, Canada’s equivalent of the Hugo, but he’s not one of ‘us’, right?

Wrong, because by that process, neither am I. Way back in the mists of prehistory, I stumbled onto the existence of fandom via an ad for the *Doctor Who* Fan Club in the back pages of the BBC listings magazine *Radio Times*. Shortly afterwards, I encountered comics fandom and sent in my first letters of comment and even the occasional artistic contribution. My very first interaction with a Real Life Author came about because I spotted Bob Shaw’s home address in a copy of *Marvel’s Unknown Worlds of Science Fiction*, sparking a friendship which lasted nearly two decades. All of this before I joined the Birmingham Science Fiction Group in the spring of 1977, and several years before I produced my first sf fanzine.

It’s possible I’m being unfair to those whose eyebrows I elevated, but certainly no more unfair than they’ve been to the likes of Frank, Jeff, Anne and Brian. Fandom is not as it was when I entered it in the early 1970s, and definitely not as it was when many ‘core’ members joined the ranks: it’s past time they recognised this fact, and learned to live with it.

Down the Loccol

- Paul Vincent: “Just wanted to say how much I'm enjoying reading your *Fortnightly Fix-es*. I'm agog at your determinedly retro endeavour to produce fanzines in ye olde fashioned duplicated way. You're a traditionalist at heart, sir!

“Anyway, good to see you getting involved in local elections - I must say, since Blair turned his once-Labour Party into New Improved Tory-Lite, I've been reduced to casting my vote forlornly in the direction of the LibDems. I know it's a bit like putting all your money on the three-legged horse with a limp and a wheezy cough, but hope seems all we have, now, however slight.”

Individual constituencies don't always reflect national patterns, and our candidate is far from crippled or wheezy. I'm mostly working to create a level racecourse, where the local Tories can't simply rely upon their deeper pockets.

- Chris Holmes: “Politics and I have always been separate entities, I long ago came to the conclusion that most of that world is made of bullshit and decided to get on with my life. It's kind of like my feelings about organized religion, I have a true respect for the *true* believers who walk the walk, but I haven't met that many in my brief 53 years at this here party!

“I applaud your attempt to turn back time and do the fanzine manually. As foolhardy as it may be, I believe that there is a very real reward to the spirit for doing the work without the technology interface. I understand the perceived advantages for those artists who choose to go that route, but it really pisses me off to spend hours trying to do something that I could do in five minutes with a pencil and paper. Also, I still get a Zen-like tranquillity out of the applied concentration and the hand-eye coordination that I wouldn't miss for the world.”

Thanks to Freagle (the breakaway British wing of Freecycle), I now have an Adler electric typewriter, so the only piece of technology as yet untested is my old Gestetner duplicator, which has spent most of the past twenty-three years residing in my garage. Fingers crossed...

- Claire Brialey: “I'm curious, now that you're working on your local MP's re-election campaign; is your name sufficiently non-rare that you're not bothered about the possibility of your online fan activity being linked to this in a way that might have unintended consequences?”

I suspect that particular ship sailed a long time ago. If the Tories want to sniff around my fanac in the hope of uncovering a little dirt, great: it's a waste of their resources, not mine. That said, I seriously doubt I rank very highly on their hit list.

- Sue Jones: “I accept that the moon has to be off the menu for now, there are more urgent tasks to use our resources and ingenuity on. But I was lucky to have watched the first moon landing at an age that was old enough to appreciate how momentous an occasion it was, while young enough to have no knowledge of the politics. And innocent enough to have hopes. Since when I've reluctantly had to put the space-faring future of my teenage dreams away in the box with those of real alien contact, teleport devices and all the rest of it. Sigh!

“As for kids 'being lied to by their own national beverage', this was the tea company that taught us that chimps could talk and were able to push pianos down stairs, wasn't it?”



- Marilyn Holt: “While it may sadden you that the *[United States]* government is scrapping the moon landing, it comes as no surprise to those of us who realized that the lack of funding went far deeper than postponing Bush’s ‘promise’. Bush did the same thing for education, infrastructure and science. This has been an ongoing assault on my country from within, done at the highest levels. Weakening the US may delight many, but it rips my heart out. This endless war, btw, siphons off more resources and money that could be better used for constructive purposes. We are all caught in the web of this perfidy, even President Obama, who is surrounded by those who think they prosper from this malicious attack. My new mantra is ‘Heinlein was right.’

“P.S. I have always admired the symmetry of the vowels of Heinlein’s name.”

- Taral: “As for the Chinese going to the moon, forgive me for saying I hope their spaceships all blow up. The Chinese are dangerous enough and wicked enough that they don’t need encouragement to be even haughtier and pushier. They’ll be staking out a portion of the moon and fencing it off, saying that it was always a part of China... just like Tibet. I don’t mind if the Indians go to the Moon, or the Russians even. But until the Chinese live under something resembling a democracy, they have too much of one planet already.”

Well, I don’t recall racist laws or the illegal bombing of Cambodia proving any obstacle to the early US space programme, or the invasion of Hungary and Czechoslovakia being any block on its Soviet equivalent. What counts in the end is money and sheer political will.

- Dave Hardy: “I saw *Avatar* in 3D last week and thought it was bloody fantastic. Not the story, which with its ecological message was pretty hackneyed really, but the whole thing wasn’t like just going to the pictures and watching a screen in front of you -- it was a total immersive experience. I’d say it’s one of those watersheds, a benchmark by which other films (sf, anyway) will be judged in future...”

- I also heard from: Jean Weber (“The frequency of your publishing schedule exhausts me, Steve. That’s a compliment, btw.”); Ian Williams (“I think this business of MPs expenses is a storm in a teacup. Compared with many countries, our system is highly honest. And haven’t we all fiddled expenses at one time or another? Joseph *[Nicholas]*, I feel, always overreacts. I think he enjoys feeling morally outraged.”); Darren ‘Daz’ Flynn; Mike Glicksohn; Rick King; Jerry Kaufman; Jonathan Cowie; Char Shea; Chris Holmes (again); Hazel Ashworth (“If you ever need ink or stencils, just shout!”).

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