

## THE CONVERTIBLE BUS NO. 2

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Well, that wasn't very clever, was it? I go to all the effort of producing the first *Convertible Bus*, and then only distribute it to people at the Tun, never getting around to posting it to any of the people I should have sent it to. Guess I've dropped off the *Plokta* mailing list after all. Four or five months have passed since I did the first one, so it would seem silly to send out copies on their own now. But if I do another, I can justify sending the first one out with it. And it makes me do another one.

I might have used this, in a similar way to the last one, to record my reactions to Byzantium, the southern fandom event in Fratton last month. Except that I was snowed under with Open University work, and so didn't go.

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### Horror upon horror

Channel 4 are a rum bunch. Quite happy to commission innovative and rather surreal home-grown comedy shows (*Black Books* is looking like the next must-see), but give them sf or a cult US series, and they don't know what the hell to do with it. Someone thought it would be a good idea to put the last few episodes of *Babylon 5* out as part of *The Big Breakfast*, they didn't even bother telling anyone about *Crusade*, and don't get me started on *Space Cadets*.

And now there's the appalling way they're treating *Angel*. In fairness, it's not Channel 4's fault that Fox didn't sell *Angel* to the BBC, but then we can't be surprised that Fox should try to squeeze as much money as possible out of their property — they are owned by Rupert Murdoch after all. (Possibly, of course, the BBC could have had it, but blew it. They do sometimes give the impression of being run by people who only experience television through the pages of the *Daily Mail*.) It is Channel 4's fault that the programme goes out as part of T4, complete with, on the first broadcast, the sort moronic chimp presenters that work on *The Big Breakfast* only because all the viewers are too sleepy or hungover not to have their intelligences insulted.

The worst bits are the cuts. For all that fans complain, the cuts in *Buffy* aren't all that bad, and are only rarely really noticeable if you're not looking for them. Those in *Angel* could only be missed by the sleeping or the dead. One moment you're watching the action progress, then suddenly it jumps, and you have no idea what has

happened in the meantime. Every single act of violence seems to have been cut, and the programme is barely comprehensible as a result. You might think that if a programme needed to be cut to this degree to make it suitable for its time slot, it was in the wrong time slot. But clearly Channel 4 decided long ago that this was the correct time for Programmes That Appeal Mainly To Students, and that *Angel* is such a programme.

It won't be moved, of course, no matter how much fans complain. The farrago over *Babylon 5* will have seen to that. After a vigorous letter-writing campaign, *B5* fans succeeded in getting the show moved to a later time slot — and then complained that it was *too* late. What they wanted, of course, was *B5* in the sort of prime-time slot that *Ally McBeal* or *ER* have. That was never going to happen, and all they succeeded in doing was persuading the powers that be at C4 that fans aren't worth listening to because they'll never be happy.

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### Oh, stop whining!

I didn't enjoy the fuel crisis. It seemed to me mostly a bunch of people who had to good for too many years whining when harsh reality burst in upon them. To those of us who are reliant on public transport, and have seen the cost of that go up in real terms when the cost of road transport, already heavily subsidised, has gone down, the sight of hauliers and farmers who had probably all voted for the Thatcherite revolution that shifted the burden of taxation from earnings to spending demanding European tax rates on fuel but presumably not willing to pay European income tax rates elicited very little in the way of sympathy. This left me rather in a minority at work.

What was interesting was some of the press coverage. I expected *The Guardian* to be, by and large, against the protests. I expected *The Daily Mail* to be for. What I didn't expect was for *The Times*, by and large, to support the government's approach.

The government were right, of course. Just because a bunch of farmers and hauliers have enough time on their hands to try to hold the country to ransom doesn't mean environmentally-damaging fossil fuels should become even more easy to use than they already are. There are vociferous groups who think that people should be persecuted just because they might be paedophiles, or that people should be able to claim self-defence when shooting unarmed burglars in

the back, or that gays are an abomination in the eyes of God. These are not the voices of conservatism, but the voices of the Dark Ages, and god help Billy-boy Hague if he ever should get elected, because he won't be able to satisfy them and will get crucified as a result.

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Tally-ho!

One of the first movies I can remember being aware of, back in 1969, was *Battle of Britain*. As a result, I have always loved that film, much more so than any other war movie, and have also gained a lifelong interest in the events of the summer of 1940. So, naturally, I have been paying attention to the commemorations of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle.

This involved my first visit to an airshow in more than twenty years. My parents used to take me a lot, as they had figured out that this was something that interested me. In fact, for a time, I wanted to be an RAF pilot when I grew up. (It would never have worked. Not only am I not a military man, but whilst I like aircraft, I have a pathological fear of flying.) Like most little kids, I spent a lot of time getting lost at airshows, and missing the displays because I was in the lost children tent.

This September, I went to the Duxford airshow. Again, there's a connection with *Battle of Britain* the movie, as well as the actual battle, as many of the scenes were filmed at Duxford (including the destruction of one of the hangars; it has never subsequently been clear whether the production company actually had permission to do this). The display was really quite spectacular. Harriers are *extremely* loud when doing their displays. It was interesting to see privately owned jet fighters in airworthy condition being put through their paces; I was particularly glad to see a Gloster Meteor, as my father spent his National Service as a fitter on that type of plane. But what I'd really gone for was the Spitfires and Hurricanes, twenty-three of which were going to fly as a mass finale. I managed to get near the flight line as the aircraft started up their engines, and it was a pretty evocative sensory experience hearing twenty-plus piston engines going, and then watching the aircraft take off in twos and threes. This, I thought, must have been what it would be like at one of the big airfields like Duxford, watching two or three squadrons take to the skies to engage the Luftwaffe on their way to bomb London. It sometimes amazes me that these events took place within my mother's

lifetime — it seems so much further back in time.

For the final touch, eighteen of the aircraft flew over the hangars and the crowd, in vic formations of three planes each. I left for the bus back to Cambridge, thoroughly glad I'd gone.

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A story that will appeal to Paul Kincaid

This August, I made my second trip to the Shenandoah valley in Virginia, to visit my uncle and his family, this time on the occasion of his daughter's wedding. The first time I went to the US, I was overawed by the place. It was everything I expected it to be, yet wholly different, because it was all real, and not just something seen on TV. This time, everything seemed a lot more familiar. Next time, I must go to some new place.

My uncle is a big American Civil War buff, and took me and my grandmother to visit the battlefield centre at New Market, a battle notable for being the last major Confederate victory (but not major enough to get in many histories of the war), and for the contribution made by the cadets of the Virginia Military Institute. The official State museum is on the battlefield itself, but to reach it, you pass a very impressive colonial-style building that advertises itself as the New Market Battlefield Museum. According to my uncle, who has visited it, this place is run by the Basil Fawcety of Civil War museums. My uncle asked with whom this museum was affiliated. He was told that it was a private concern, and "Do you have something against private enterprise?" and "You're the first English asshole I've met!" As my uncle and his party left, the owner jumped up and down making rude gestures at them. When they got to the State museum, they mentioned this experience, to be greeted by "Oh no, what's he done this time?" The man seemingly has a reputation.

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**The Convertible Bus No. 2** is another work of inconsequence from the word-processor of Tony Keen, [old address deleted]. Still distributed at whim. Format still stolen.