

Gasworks #1

John D. Berry

NEW FANZINES, OLD FANZINES. Here's a new one.

When Steve Swartz moved to Seattle from Madison, Wisconsin, he started agitating for my publishing a fanzine with him. It goes along with his character; Steve likes to stir things up. (Other, more volatile people prefer their human surroundings shaken, not stirred.) There I was, contentedly resting as what Jim Benford once called an "ex-fan," bound to the sf community through friendship and shared history but not actively participating all that often. It had been five years since I'd last published an issue of *Wing Window*, and the previous issue came out five years before that. People would occasionally come up to me and ask, in a sort of desultory ritual, "When's the next *Wing Window* coming out, John?" There are really only two possible answers to a question like that. Either "real soon now," or "when you least expect it."

But there was a third possibility that you never even suspected, and that was that I'd take on a more energetic sidekick and start a new fanzine. (In truth, it's I who've been taken on as a slightly old and tired sidekick, but don't tell Steve.) This one will come out a little more frequently than *Wing Window*. Our lackadaisical non-plan is to keep it small, but to pack in several different pieces each issue, including a few rubrics from our farflung correspondents. (In this issue, our Mr. Waldrop, of the Oso Gen'l Store Waldrops, has been prevailed upon to cover the Weird Science beat.) We may even have a more focused article now and then. In other words, it's another of those ensmallled genzines. "Damn, Marge! Get the spray!"

Gasworks. Your urban-guerrilla public utility. Ours, really. Read it 'n' weep.

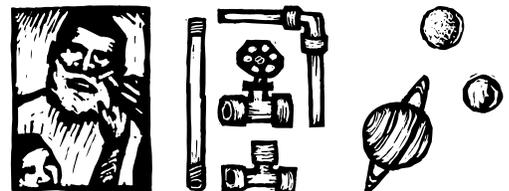
¶ David Hartwell looked at me and said, "It's always appropriate to come to WisCon in drag."

He was referring to me. Just before that, he'd told me, "You'd look at home now in places where you never would before." I asked him just where he meant, curious to know whether he had anything more than the obvious in mind, but he wasn't specific. Not back in the gutter where science fiction belongs, I'll wager.

All I'd done was get a fairly short haircut ("for the summer") and, to go with it, shaved my beard down to a goatee, just to see what it would look like. Then I showed up in Madison for Wiscon, noted for being a decidedly feminist, gender-bending sf convention. (Though not noted, this being Wisconsin, for a hell of a lot of people actually showing up in drag.) My cheeks haven't been bare since sometime in the early '70s. The newly shaven jowlets looked pink and chubby, an effect that I can't say appealed to me, but it was fun to see who noticed – or rather, who said anything about it.

Frankly, I regard shaving as an unnatural act, which of course it is, and I'm already growing back the rest of my beard. The hair? Either the back and sides need to grow out again, or the whole thing needs to be shorter still. Who cares about cowlicks when you've discovered L.A. Looks?

Yeah, Wiscon was fun, too.



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ELECTRONIC EDITION

Rough Red Down Under

Steve and I thought we might start out this first issue of ours by writing about some of the travels we've done. Steve went to the British Eastercon this spring, in Liverpool, but I'm stepping back a bit: to the trip that Eileen and I took to Australia in 1989, when I'd won the Down Under Fan Fund and found myself traveling – in what, in fandom, passes for an official capacity – to the Australian national convention in Perth, and then to other cities around the country with sf fans in them.

Like so many other fan-fund winners, I had firm intentions of writing a trip report the very moment I got back home. It was going to be short and quick – no longwinded blow-by-blows, no chronicling of the sandwiches we ate from one day to the next; just a kaleidoscopic juxtaposition of a few well-chosen scenes, events, and observations. Like so many other fan-fund winners, I didn't do it.

I had a few fragments written, though, and great intentions that simmered through the years. I think, by now, that the intentions have cooked down to a fine consistency and may be ready to eat. I'm hoping that in the pages of this fanzine I will gradually assemble enough tidbits that in the end I'll have a trip report. Still a short one, and not very linear; but no longer, alas, quick. The tale of my DUFF trip to Australia begins, as so many such things do, with John Bangsund.



John D. Berry

¶ Melbourne, 1989. We're on the way down the road with John Bangsund, heading from central Melbourne to his home in Brunswick, where we'll have dinner with him and his wife Sally Yeoland. John detours into a drive-up wine store, to pick up something to have with dinner.

"I can't drink the red any more," he says. "It'll kill me." Instead he gets several bottles of a cheap, drinkable chardonnay called Queen Adelaide, waving aside our offers to pay for it. "Who the hell is Queen Adelaide?" I think. The label is elaborate, the price right, and indeed it will prove to be quite pleasantly drinkable. (When it later shows up on a supermarket shelf in Seattle, once, we buy a bottle for nostalgia. But in Seattle it's priced like a premium import, so we don't make a habit of it, and it soon disappears.) Into the boot goes the wine, and off we go down the highway again.

My memory goes back to an earlier expedition with Bangsund, on my first trip to Australia in 1975, when he took me and my traveling companions, Susan Wood and Carey Handfield, to a wine-buying club that he belonged to in Canberra, where he and Sally were then living. In those days, he drank copiously of rough red, and when he could afford it of somewhat smoother red, and he had in fact been saving a

bottle of his favorite Kaiser Stuhl Bin J246 for my arrival. (It was excellent. John Bangsund and Bruce Gillespie, between them, seemed intent on personally supervising my education in the red wines of Australia.) After we'd polished that one off, and quite a few others from his wine closet (there being no cellars in Australia), it was time to restock. He would buy two cases at a time, one for immediate drinking and one to lay down for the future. Later that same day, he popped the corks on several bottles of good red and set them upright in a cardboard case in the back of the car, then drove us off to his favorite restaurant in a nearby town; this way the wine we brought with us would have time to breathe.

¶ 1975. When I went to Australia for the first time, it was to be there for the first Australian worldcon, to continue traveling with Susan Wood, to see the country, and to meet John Bangsund.

(It was Susan who made it possible for me to go to Australia in the first place, by deciding that she'd like my company and lending me the money for the fare when I didn't have it myself. And glad I am that she did.)

In the late '60s and early '70s, Bangsund had been the most brilliant star in a cluster that had lit up sf fandom from the constellation of Oz for sev-

eral years. Wonderfully intelligent, vibrant, volatile fanzines came out of Australian fandom during this period. Bangsund launched a great deal of it when he started publishing *Australian Science Fiction Review* in 1966, roping in the best and most articulate writers about sf from around the world and giving them a place to talk to each other where they would be appreciated for their wit, their fervor, their intelligence, and their freedom from received wisdom. In some ways the culmination of his efforts, or at least the most permanent of them in printed form, was the volume of reminiscences and appreciations he put together and published after the death of John W. Campbell – and the brightest light in that book was his own “John W. Campbell and the Meat Market,” a tour-de-force of context and simultaneity, and possibly Bangsund’s most polished, complete, and fully realized piece of writing.

By the early ’70s, Bangsund was producing more personal, more open-ended, but no less brilliant fanzines, and the forum for sf intelligence had turned to Bruce Gillespie’s *SF Commentary*.

¶ **1989.** Bangsund doesn’t travel well. Apart from the occasional road trip, in fact, he doesn’t travel at all, for whatever reasons of his own make sense to him. I couldn’t afford to go to Australia again for the second Aussiecon, in 1985. Fourteen years after my first trip there, however, I finally did get to see

John and Sally again, and to introduce them to my partner, Eileen Gunn. I had been persuaded to run again as a candidate for the Down Under Fan Fund (which I had run for and lost in ’75), and this time I won. On our return swing across the continent after attending the Australian National Convention in Perth, we spent nearly a week in Melbourne. Bangsund proved both reclusive and elusive, partly due to some bad timing in family emergencies, but finally we worked out a plan over the phone and met him at the office of *Meanjin*, the famed literary magazine of which he was a large part of the staff.

The cramped office is in the second storey of a building across the street from the edge of the campus of the university. In these confines, he and the editor, Jenny Lee, were producing one of the most respected and eclectic literary magazines in Australia. Bangsund is well suited to such an endeavor (though he has since given up the position), but he obviously had a deep and abiding ambivalence about the university. There it was, right across the street; it had a relationship to *Meanjin*, but none to him. He gestured toward it and said that he almost never set foot on the campus. I tried to remember whether John had been to a university himself. He had had a college education, but I believe it was at a religious college, when he was in training to be a Protestant minister, before he broke beyond the bounds of that limiting career. He knew

a great deal more, in many more fields, than most of the people with affiliations with the university across the way, but he seemed to feel at the same time that he didn’t fit in. Well, John Bangsund doesn’t fit easily into any institution. And it’s not John Bangsund who is spoken ill of by that statement.

While we were there, we never stopped talking. John extolled *Meanjin*’s editor for her many talents, but we didn’t get to meet her; she was out of town, or about to leave or come back, and very pressed for time. There was at least one phone call from her while we were there, I think. (I did buy her anthological *People’s History of Australia*, later, only to discover that it was only one of several expensive volumes. Australian book prices are phenomenal, thanks to a very small home market.) John hustled and apologized, alluded and referred, and also dealt with the practical problems of getting home with us and picking up the wine and arranging our only real time together, dinner with him and Sally at their house that evening.

¶ **1975.** Like all fannish movements worth noting, the Australian renaissance of the late 1960s was focused on a fairly small number of people who happened to come together for the unique kind of interaction that a group of inspired and articulate sf fans can create. All it takes is a few exceptional people; the energy that they release attracts others, and you have a renaissance.

This one was concentrated in Melbourne, and its culmination was at the first Aussiecon.

Bangsund started out as chairman of the bid, but backed out and took the lesser position of toastmaster at the Hugo-award banquet. He did that in the character of the popular and irreverent Australian TV personality Norman Gunston, who was noted for his straight-faced, faux-naïve interviews of celebrities conducted while his cheeks were pocked with white bits of tissue stuck to putative shaving cuts. (Bangsund himself was usually seen with a full beard, as I am, though my memory tells me that he didn’t have it at Aussiecon. It would have made the impersonation too ironic.) The ceremony was interrupted by a subversively planned guerrilla disruption, in which I was an enthusiastic participant, when, at a signal unknown to Bangsund, the solemnity of the occasion was strewn with thrown confetti.

This performance confused some of the North Americans and offended the more prim of the Australians, but it seemed to me and to many others a good way – and a very Australian way – to undermine the po-faced solemnity that even in 1975 was encasing the Hugo awards like caked mud.

This was the same worldcon banquet at which Ursula Le Guin delivered her rousing declaration that the walls of the science-fiction ghetto had

fallen down and we were finally free. (It was later published as “The Stone Ax and the Muskoxen.”) Too bad, as she herself observed in a twenty-years-after reflection, that hardly anyone dared stray outside the rubble of the destroyed walls.

¶ **Still 1975.** I had come all this way to meet John Bangsund, but when the time came, he snuck up on me and I had met him before I realized it. The nature of correspondence over very long distances is such that you often know someone quite well on paper (or, these days, on the computer screen) without ever having met him or her. But I had been in fandom for quite a few years by 1975, and I had met almost all of the North Americans and even British fans I had corresponded with; Aussiecon was a chance to have that experience again, that frisson of seeing for the first time a friend you’ve never met.

I didn’t even know what John looked like. I had seen only two photographs of him, after all, one of which I didn’t even realize was him.

I don’t remember what led up to it, but shortly after our arrival in Melbourne I remember finding myself walking down a hotel corridor next to Susan, who was conversing animatedly with a short man on her other side whom I had never seen before and didn’t remember seeing join us. Obviously he was someone worth knowing; apparently she had already made his acquaintance.

Finally I had to stop and say: “I’m sorry, but I have no idea who you are.”

He looked up, with a peculiar smile. “John Bangsund,” he said. Embarrassed confusion ensued.

But from then on we stuck close to Bangsund, whenever he wasn’t embroiled in his official and unofficial duties at the con, and we ended up spending several memorable days visiting him and Sally at their house in Canberra. (For more details of all this, go dig up a musty copy of the issue of *Amazing* in which Susan published her trip report in an effort to communicate the spirit of joy to her readers, or the more kaleidoscopic, episodic one she did for her own fanzine – which was, come to think of it, no less a communication of joy, just to a closer, more personal audience.)

¶ **1989.** You can tell, in listening to John Bangsund, that he is a very careful writer, and a painstaking editor of his own work. It’s not just that his words are carefully chosen, but that he’ll pause in the midst of a sentence that he’s constructing – pause for quite long moments, sometimes – to search for the exact word he wants or the proper phrasing to convey the nuance that he has in mind. This is, of course, infuriating, since you’re suspended in a limbo of anticipation until he goes on with his sentence; it may be doubly infuriating if you’ve been waiting for him to finish so that you can challenge something

he said several sentences back. (Like many accomplished monologists, Bangsund leaves only the kind of pause that you cannot interrupt with your own thoughts; it’s clearly not the pause that allows the other speaker to reply, but the contemplative pause of a composer working alone and in silence, trying to find the right word or the right note before committing it to paper.) If John were not a friend whom I love very dearly, and if I did not value very highly just that precision of phrase that requires so much work, I’d throttle him.

Sally has a forceful personality, and she, too, tended toward monologue that evening, but in a very different style from John’s. She is quite simply an able speaker and an able thinker. I suspect that she’s evolved a habit of speaking at length once she’s started simply as a response to John’s conversational rhythms, much as a tree growing high on an exposed mountain slope grows in a shape adapted to the force of the weather. If we hadn’t been limited, by circumstance, to one long evening in which to try and fit fourteen and a half years of talk, I imagine that our conversation would have settled down to a more relaxed form of give and take.

¶ **1989.** Bangsund’s fanzines are treasured by those who cherish erudite, skillful, straightforward but skewed, and entirely natural writing with a loose tether to our science-fiction community. But not only did his publish-

ing schedule become erratic after he gave up *ASFR*, he often didn’t even mail the things out. A legend grew, of the stacks of brilliant fanzines gathering dust and spiders in his garage, fanzines that could only be obtained by actually making the pilgrimage to this garage and picking them by hand (always watching out for the spiders).

At my request, John showed us the garage. This garage was the latest of several, he and Sally having moved a number of times, and it somehow seemed to have misplaced its glittering stacks of brilliance. “They’re around here somewhere,” John opined, while showing us the cosy office that he’d installed in one end of the garage and mused harrowingly once again on Australia’s common poisonous spiders. In the end, we gave up, promising to think about it again at some later time. I may have to subsist on the many fanzines that John actually mailed to me as they came out, and you will have to beg reading rights from those of us who have them – or go in search of John Bangsund’s garage yourself.

Intervention

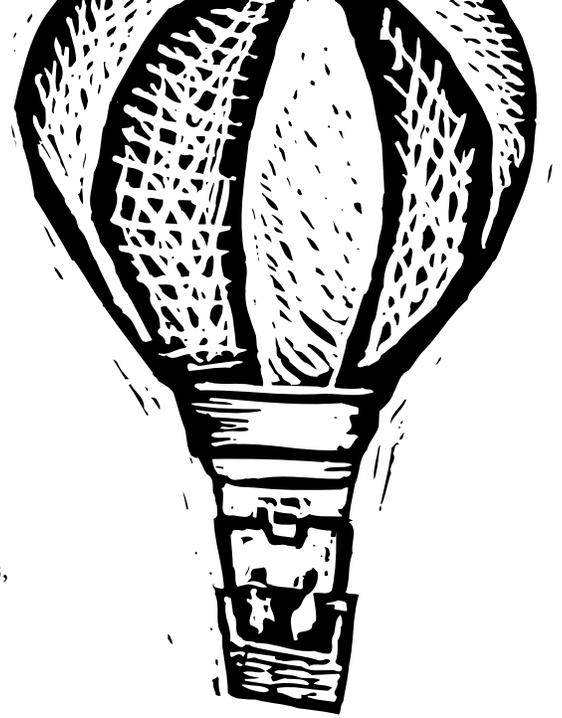
“I could never understand why you Americans are so dotty over Walt Willis. Lots of people have written better since.”

Steve Swartz

I'm sitting in the £1.50 bar in the Adelphi Hotel. This bar's been set up in a two-story room with tall windows, light salmon walls, and middling ornamentation. It's Saturday night at Intervention, sometime after midnight. Fifteen of us sit in a long circle of chairs, couches, and ottomans that's squashed itself up against the wall across from the bar. Rob Hansen sits along the wall to my right; Jackie McRobert sits in a chair just pulled up to my left. A tall, thin, handsome newscaster sits across the long dimension of the circle from me. A woman I haven't met (Alison? I don't remember: so many British fen are named Alison...) keeps asking him, “But really: Who *are* you?” She's interested if he's somebody, but he's not (in this crowd, anyway). He plays coy; she keeps asking. Meanwhile, Ian Sorenson holds forth on the British Corflu bid. He's just told us that he's trying to get Walt Willis to come over to the British Corflu next year. He hopes that'll attract more Americans.

I'm not very drunk for a fan at Eastercon, I've probably had no more than a half dozen pints, but the alcohol has me in a quiet, watchful mood. I'm not ready to speak for America. And, if the truth were told, while I read fanzines when they come my way, I'm not well read in the grand scheme of things. I mean, if we all play “Rate the British fanwriters of yesteryear,” I won't place. So, this conversation threatens to turn down a Bad Road.

Fortunately, I think the question misses the point. “It's not the writing,” I answer. People turn to watch. It's my turn to rant. “Willis was a great fanwriter, sure, but I think it's as much the path he opened as the things he wrote that made his name. Before Willis, fen were



wannabe pros. Some of them made it, more of them didn't, but the wannabe spirit permeated their fanac. The problem Willis and Shaw solved is, wannabe doesn't age very well, so, how do you grow up and stay a fan? What Willis's fanac said was, ‘Hey, we don't have to wish we were pros, being a fan is a fine thing in itself, we can write about that, we don't need to wannabe anything other than what we are.’ By turning fanac back on itself, by making it fandom a worthy subject in its own right, he opened up a way for adults to be fen. American fen learned from Willis, and they appreciate him. It's that lesson, as much as the writing, that makes Americans so dotty over Walt Willis.”

I take a deep drink. People stare. That's a long speech for the hour (too late for sober talk, not late enough for drunken argument). As I'm a long way from home, they're inclined towards friendliness, and anyway I'm not important enough to score points against. “Hmm, I suppose so,” says one. “You're still a fucking asshole, Sorenson,” says another. “Who are you, *really*?” says a third. The Willis Question fades...

¶ Liverpool is a surprise and a confusion. Most of the city is frighteningly devastated by poverty. Buildings everywhere are boarded up and falling down. The convention is downtown, in an island of commercial revival led

by semi-upscale merchants catering to wealthy suburbanites. Many central streets are closed to all but pedestrian traffic. Mediocre goods are plentiful, and if you pretend that the exchange rate is £1=\$1, they're quite reasonably priced. Bookstores are bad. Music stores stock lots of European CD's selling for about what you could get 'em for over here. Big knots of people tie up the sidewalks to watch itinerant preachers and young Christian choirs. Coffee is hard to find and bad when you find it. McDonald's are plentiful and popular. The night life swirling through the streets around the Adelphi seems young, wild, brightly-clothed, and adequately successful. My eyes tell me I'm in downtown Madison, Iowa City, Lawrence, Ann Arbor, Bloomington. My ears, on the other hand, say I'm not in Kansas anymore.

The Adelphi is great. Walking through the lobby, past the dance, liquor, and American Bars, you go up some stairs and into a room that looks exactly like the ballroom of the Titanic. This is neither kitsch nor idle mimicry: the Adelphi was built at the same time as the Titanic, by the same people, as a staging point for the Titanic's passengers as they left for the New World. More of those tall, wide windows (indoors, this time) span both the left and right walls. Through those windows I can see the long, non-descript rooms serving as Dealer's Room and buffeteria. On past the ballroom and up some more stairs is a space filled with tables from which conventions, political organizations, and fangroups hawk their memberships. Programming is straight ahead past all that. Up and to the right are more important places: the real (and often free!) ale bar, the bathrooms, the fan room. Greg Pickersgill has set up the Memory Hole in the fan room, and spends a lot of time asking for and handing out fanzines. Beyond him is the end of my con, stairs leading to places I never went, poetry and writers' workshops and filking.

Eastercon itself is quite different from your average American convention. Take programming, for instance. The program book lists events, times, and rooms, but no participants. Cardboard placards up against the registra-

tion desk list different events, time, and rooms, still with no participants. Peek into a room, and you'll often find some third event. No American convention other than Minicon offering this much programming remains this sanguine about the details. And Eastercon is no Minicon: no hoards, no pool, no S&M party, no hall theater whatsoever. But still, programming worked. What I went to and still remember (Ian Sorenson's fan-theatre; the bad fiction readings) was exquisite. I am an American Abroad, but still, I have no complaints. But it is different, there's no denying that.

I figure it's the beer. Over the weekend, several people explain to me that British fen are sober as an extended family of churchmice during their workaday lives, but when they gather in fanac, they tend to drink to what a casual observer might call excess. That drunk, I know I couldn't even type up a list of a hundred panels, let alone put them in rooms or assign people to them. So the casualness about the schedule is a chemical casualness, a casualness I can understand. If people expected something else, I suppose it would be a problem, but everybody seems happy enough. The convention flows around us all, and we talk and drink and talk again. Few conventions offer anything more.

¶ "The FAAN awards are worthless. Look, you voted for Apak as best fanzine again. That's crazy."

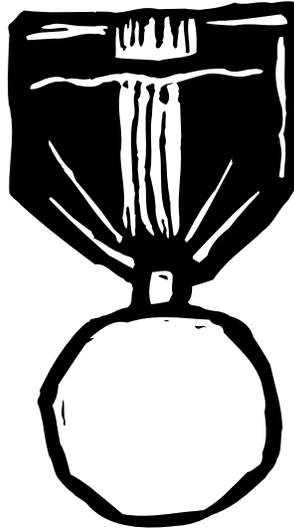
It's later Saturday night. I'm drunk, now: maybe it's the fact that I'm a long way from home and I've just found out that bankruptcy has left me unemployed. Or maybe it's just Eastercon, I don't know. Jim Trash is a Second-Generation Leeds fan, which means (I think) that he reads British fanzines, and hangs out at the pub with the rest of the Second-Generation Leeds fen. He doesn't know that Andy Hooper is one of my oldest fannish friends, someone I met in the second apa I ever belonged to, someone who helped teach me that all fandom was not *The Cult*. Jim likes genzines. He thinks Paul Kincaid is wise. He doesn't value the way Apak shares its community. It offers a tri-weekly chance



to meet the regulars in a public place of their own construction. To me, *Apak* is not unlike that Leeds pub that defines Jim's fandom. "Would you compare your pub unfavorably to a genzine?" I ask, but my point is lost. Reason fails me, so I try analogy.

"Look at it this way, Jim: fanzines are like dogs," I said. "Judging fanzines is like judging a dog show. You don't just put all the dogs in the ring and pick your favorite. You split 'em up by breed, you define the ideal for each breed, and you judge the individual dogs by how closely they match their breed's ideal. When it comes time to pick Best of Show, you look at all the dogs, you find the one that most closely matches its ideal, and there's your blue ribbon choice. You, Jim, are judging all dogs based on your preference for long legs and a solid torso. Genzines are the German Shepherds of fanzines; proud and strong, sturdy and useful. *Apak* isn't anything like that. *Apak* is a friendly little yapping dog, bouncing about, making noise, full of itself, and proud of it. There're lots of good American genzines out there, but compared to *The Genzine*, none of them are really outstanding. *Apak*, on the other hand, is a truly remarkable little community 'zine, one of the best that's ever been. It's ephemeral, I'll grant you that, but isn't true fannishness essentially ephemeral? I'll say it again, *Apak* offers all the same pleasures of your pub, it's like a Vanguard evening in Jane and Luke's basement, but it's portable, it can be shared across an ocean, it binds. And if that isn't fannish, what is?"

Jim doesn't buy it, but then, Jim isn't on the *Apak* mailing list, and maybe he's just jealous. We'll never know; *Apak* has passed, and Jim is about to become already always excluded from fanhistory, as so many of us already always are. I think my point is valid, though, besotted as I was when I made it. I leave it to the Grand Categorizors to lay out a more thorough correspondence between fanzine genres and dog breeds. When we judge the fanzines we receive, though, I think we need to rise above our preference for one breed over another. Fanzines are born to be what they become, and we're poor readers indeed if we judge against what we wish they already were.



What I'd like to see, Jim, is for you and your Second-Generation Leeds fandom to start publishing a monthly 'zine that communicates what it's like in your community. Try that for a while, and then let's revisit the question of *Apak*, OK?

¶ The biggest confusion I've brought to Intervention is the expectation that I'd find something like an American regional convention. What I found, instead, is a great big relaxicon, and it suits me fine.

I'm sleeping in the Moat House, the overflow hotel on the other side of the developed part of downtown Liverpool. I wake up around noon, shower and shave, and wander through the shopping area downtown, stopping for a latte and a bun. They've got Starbucks and Seattle's Best in London, but they haven't followed the McDonald's up to Liverpool yet, which is a pity, because the latte is horrible. Anyway, after the necessities are taken care of, I find my way through the streets and on over to the Adelphi, and walk up and in and up to the Grand Lobby.

The Lobby is maybe 40–50 feet tall, as ornate as you'd expect the Titanic's ballroom to be, and filled with maybe a hundred and fifty comfy chairs, arranged in circles around end tables and lamps. It's a remarkably nice place to sit, and when I got to the hotel I sat down with my coffee and chatted with whoever sat next to me. Rob and Avedon are there most of the day; it's a strategic spot, pretty much everyone who comes into the building has to go by on their way through the door and on into the convention proper. Ian and Nancy walk by (they're here from Seattle to attend the alt.polycon that turned out not to be), and sit out for a while to talk. Sheila from Boston is up and around, along with her brother Kevin, who does his best to offend. Meg from Madison sits down from time to time; she teaches us that you can buy pots of coffee at the buffeteria, which saves a lot of trips. Other folks come and go, coffee flows at a rapid rate, and suddenly it's 6PM. Time to switch to beer.

As I drink my first ale, it occurs to me that this is a fine way to run a convention. All around the room, people are sitting in circles talking. Folks flow to and from programming as the mood takes them. A free keg opens in the real ale bar, and the room empties noticeably. Certainly there are things going on all over the place, but I don't get the feeling here I get at so many American regionals, that many people are straining themselves to do a mediocre job at things they believe they have to do. Intervention seems to be exactly what it wants to be, and its attendees seem pleased with the result. Which is more than I can say for ManyACon...

¶ “Bloody Ian Fucking Sorenson.”

I'm in the Adelphi liquor bar right outside the hotel restaurant where nobody eats. It's Friday night, I've been in Liverpool a few hours, and I've just hooked up with people I know. Lilian Edwards beat feet shortly after introducing me to Greg Pickersgill and Tony Brown, and so missed the ongoing dissection of her and Ian and the British Corflu. As Greg wields his scalpel, I try to let it be known that I'm a conscientious objector to fan feuds I'm not a part of. “There's more background here than I care to know,” I say. I also express surprise that Ian has so many nicknames – he hadn't let on when I met him in San Francisco, two weeks earlier. Perhaps those are family names? The Bloodys of East Fucking-On-The-Lake? But Greg rants well, and he's on a roll. I can't get many words in edgewise, this time.

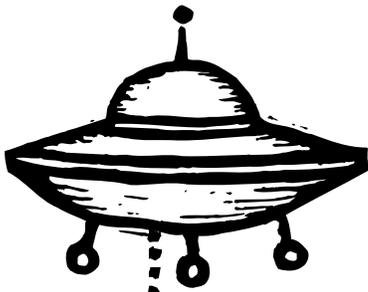
As the rant continues, I pick up some of that background I wish I didn't know. I learn that Greg is not alone in his opposition to the bid. Pam Wells feels like she should be a bigger part of things, having first floated the idea to Americans at the Nashville Corflu in 1996. The Precursor and Attitude folks are grumpy over the notion that a recurring British fanzine convention needs kick-starting, each feeling as though they've already done their part. Beyond all this, lots of people think that if the British want to have a fanzine convention, they should have their own. No need to borrow one from the Americans, they say. They find it demeaning, and foolish, and bloody stupid.

All this is as confusing to me as Ian's desire to make the Corflu as American as possible. Something's missing from the underlying notion of community, I think. Acknowledging differences is good; working them out in private is good; going ugly and public with them is puzzling, and sad. Courtesy is good; making visitors feel welcome is good; making your home into something it's not to make me comfortable is also puzzling, and sad. Without getting too woo, maybe what's missing is an undercurrent of family feeling, a notion that beyond our differences, we are all kin. Strange uncles, many of us, and family I'm often glad lives far away, but surely family I don't mind seeing at the annual reunion. I wonder...

What I hope to see, when I come to Leeds next year, is a very British convention with a good turnout from both British and American fanzine fandoms. I don't expect good toilet facilities: I don't mind if I have to share, I don't mind if I have to wipe with crêpe paper, I don't even mind if the showers dribble more than flow. I'll trade cake for beer in a heartbeat. The essential parts of Corflu that we all need to see replicated in Leeds are conversation and community. If it ends up being like a little Intervention, that'll be just fine.

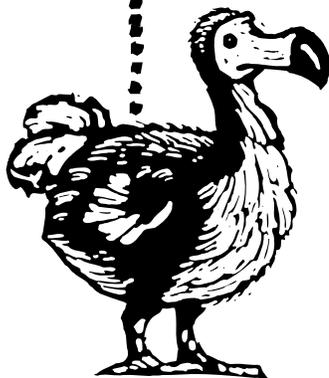


My Heart Belongs to Dada (#1)



When I heard the pilot of the A-10 Warthog had broken formation and taken off for the Four Corners area, my first words were, “The Grays must have pushed the Come-Home button for the receiver/tracker up his nose.”

¶ See, there’s this bunch of aliens, called the Grays, we made a deal with after Roswell and the other saucer crashes of the ’40s and ’50s. In return for their technological stuff, we let them have, say, 10,000 humans a year, to use to make human/alien hybrids, and to work their operations on the back side of the Moon. (They’re from a dying world and need to breed a race that’s tough enough to stand Earth-like conditions.) All that stuff from Area 51 in Nevada is based on Alien Technology. Only just after they gave it to us, the Grays started doing Bad Things, like kidnapping more than a million people a year, and setting up deep underground bases where they weren’t supposed to, and they gave us, like, stuff that hadn’t passed Quality Control back on the Dying World; sometimes it worked, sometimes it didn’t, like that stuff we gave the Iranians during Iran/Contragate. And that’s when we ran into the Whites (or Blues), the other aliens, part of the Galactic Brotherhood, who said, you shouldn’t be dealing with those guys, they’re sort of like, you know, Romany; they’ve got a Bad Galactic Rep. Since then, we’ve tried to oust the Grays, or at least redo the “treaty” – sounds like our former Native American policy in reverse, don’t it? – speaking of which, one of the big bases of the Grays is under Dulce, NM, the reservation town of the Jicarilla Apache. Several times the Special Forces have gone in to capture the place, or release the abductees before they can be conditioned for the mine on the Moon where they dig up the Important Secret Stuff (Bill Warren’s words) the Grays use as a power source or for insulation, or something. Every time the Special Forces have gone in, they lose 66 men...



I could go on and on. But I can’t. This is part of the new mythology of the Saucer Age, which turns 50 this month, with the anniversary of Kenneth Arnold’s sighting of the nine saucers between Rainier and Adams in June, 1947.

If you’re wondering about all this, read Curtis Peebles’ *Watch the Skies!* published by the Smithsonian Press a couple of years ago. It’s not a “saucer book,” it’s a book about the Saucers and the myths that grew up around them, and what people thought about them in each of the major eras – the first sightings, the ’48 Classics, the ’52 and ’57 flaps, the “Swamp Gas” ’60s and the Condon Report, the cattle mutilations (with Snippy the Horse!), etc. etc. up to Now. Each section ends with a summary of what the saucers were or were not thought to be; things they weren’t; beliefs no longer in favor. The list gets longer and weirder up to the late ’50s, then sort of rational in the ’60s and early ’70s, and then they get weirder and more all-encompassing (and at the same time more TV/movie science-fictional) toward the present. The book is a swell overview of the phenomena.

¶ On the latest stuff: it’s the most complicated, a paranoid’s dream that tries to Explain It All. Abductions. Men in Black. Saucer crashes. Area 51. The Bildenbergers. The Trilateral Commission. All the governments in absolute collusion; a conspiracy of silence because we’d panic if they let us know they’re Not In Control anymore, the Grays are. (Everything is based on what happened to Orson Welles’ *War of the Worlds* broadcast in 19-fucking-38.)

¶ A few words about Dulce NM. I've been there. It's one of the few reservations in the SW with some nice trees. There's trees. There's the town, at a cross-and-a-half-roads. The main source of income is the lake on the reservation, about a mile out of town, where you pay \$3 a day for a permit that gives you a chance at a nice trout.

When Jacques Vallee, a writer on UFOs who cannot really be considered a skeptic, first heard about the supposed Grays under Dulce, he asked, "Who takes out the garbage?"

¶ A conspiracy so immense... Peebles goes into some of this, about what a conspiracy it would have to be. The example he uses is stuff he's gotten from the Freedom of Information Act, on the exact state of our nuclear stockpile on a certain day in, like, 1952, including types, fusing, etc. Stuff for which he would have, after a speedy fair trial, had to Ride Old Sparky along with the Rosenbergs if he would have published it in 1952. I've got my own example:

I was in a conversation once, in Denver, with the guy who would have been my Step-Father-in-Law (if I'd been married). He said to me, "My brother said to me, the day after they dropped the Big One on Hiroshima, 'I knew it.' 'Howzat?' said my S-F-I-L (iIbm). 'Well, starting last year, once every three weeks, I'd go to the Brooklyn Navy Yard and there'd be this sealed-up truck there. I'd

sign for it, and then drive across the country to this nowhere place in the middle of New Mexico. There was an MP guardhouse there. One of the MPs would sign for the truck and drive it away into the hills. I'd shoot the shit with the other MP about the war and baseball and stuff. By and by the truck would come back, empty and unsealed. They'd sign it back over to me, and I'd drive it back to Brooklyn. Once every three weeks. Last run was just about VE Day. Now this. That's what it had to be."

That's the Manhattan Project, from a truck driver's POV.

Where's the Dulce garbage-truck driver's story about a conspiracy that involves about 10²² more people than that?

¶ But I want all this to be true, all the Gray conspiracy stuff. You know why? Because it would serve us right. It would prove that not only does life imitate art, but Bad Art; that the Universe is not stranger than we imagine, or can imagine, but that it's exactly like some unemployable screenwriter's idea, one who's been raised on Whitley Strieber books, Star Wars and CE3K, of High Concept. (It should star Bruce Willis, and, you know...Julia Roberts.)

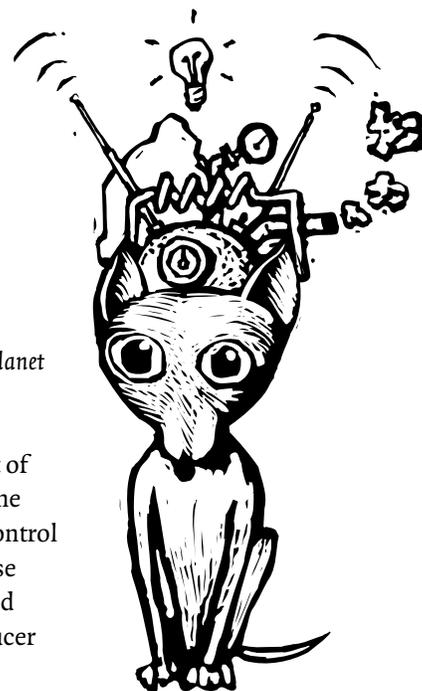
It would serve us right if all we can think up, through the usual folk/urban legends channels, is bad SF premises – the Dying World out of Earth vs. the Flying Saucers, The Mysterians, This Island Earth, Flight to Mars; good alien/bad

alien like Brain from the Planet Arous; aircraft that make Firefox look like Sopwith Pups; technology as sort of an interstellar bad cocaine burn-deal; things that control you up your butt and nose like Invaders from Mars and It Conquered the World; saucer crashes from The Thing; MJ-12, an organization straight out of Seconds or Executive Action or Brotherhood of the Bell; and on and on...

See, that would be a reassuring world, one that's just like TV and the movies. Sure, it'd be scary, but you could understand it. You've seen it all before, and once you know it for what it is, you can go into your James Cameron weapons-porn locking-and-loading scene, ready to storm Dulce... (Another great High Concept: a cross between Walking Tall: Part II, Aliens, and Viva Max! Good old boy brother-in-law [also uncle] of abductee, tired of namby-pamby govt. dealing with Grays, gets his VietVet buddies together... NOW IT'S PERSONAL!)

I think the Universe deserves a little more respect than that.

If aliens come, I think they'll have ideas of their own, ones not learned from movies and TV, which may be above or



below their electromagnetic windows. Maybe, as in so many old Analog stories, they'll be dumber than us. They have interstellar flight, but it took them 12 million years to go from the idea of a match to the idea of Close-Cover-Before-Striking... They can be dumber than us. Or smarter, much smarter. But, please God, not just as dumb...

¶ So when the pilot took off for his rendezvous in Vail, my secret hope was that he, in true High Concept fashion, was going to bomb Dulce with his four 500 kg bombs. ('Eat Screaming Death, Gray Scum!')

Because that's the way we are.

But what I said to Dave Myers was, "The Grays pushed the Come-Home button in the receiver/tracker up his nose."

