

Now in its fourth decade, we proudly
present the return of Ian Williams'
personalzine

Siddhartha

(Volume 3:1)

and here's a photo of a cat to prove it.



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Except for quotations, all the text was written by Ian Williams who also took the colour photographs (except for two but they were with his camera anyway). The cat on the front is [Ted](#) (sometimes [Tough Ted](#) or [Big Ted](#) but really [Quite Soft Ted](#)), our 8th and last feline acquisition, for quite a while anyway (the neighbours are grumbling).

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This issue is dedicated to the wonderful [Bill Burns](#).



I AM A WOMAN by ANN BANNON

Amazon.co.uk review by IanW, "top 1000 reviewer"

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***** (5 stars)

"A pulp masterpiece."

(for [Earl Kemp](#))

I started reading this book and only reluctantly put it down -to go to work, etc- picked it up again, racing towards the ending and when I got there I logged on to the Internet and ordered the rest of Bannon's available novels. Apart from the quality of the writing (evocative, to an extent naive, almost transparent), the story (a young lesbian fleeing to the big city from both heartbreak and an abusive father and falling in love with a straight woman), the characters (flawed, involving, tragic), there was something more, much more.

This is a book which works effectively and simultaneously on more than one level. Written in the late 50's it was aimed at (largely) closeted lesbians. So, why does it strike such a chord in a straight middle-aged man? That's me in case you were wondering.

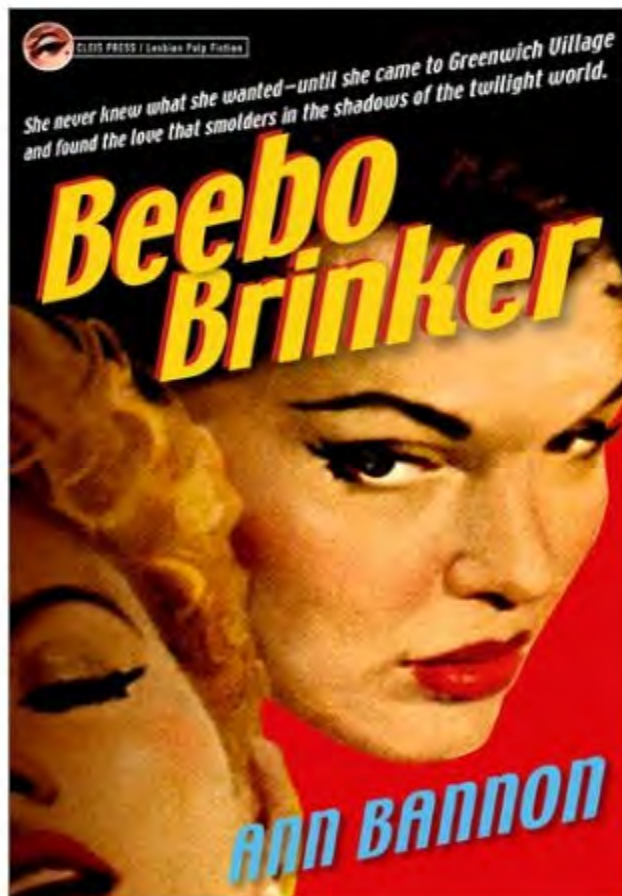
For a start it's an interesting counterpoint to the tv series *The L Word* (of which, surprise surprise, I'm a big fan) in the sense that it's almost an historical document which reflects certain changes in Western society. It depicts a time of repression when gays of both

sexes hid in the shadows whereas today,(ideally and at least in liberal circles) to admit to being a lesbian (or gay) has little more impact than stating that one is left-handed -yeah, so? And perhaps that might be a more idealistic statement than an accurate one. No matter, it is a fascinating, albeit depressing, portrayal of an earlier repressive period.

But what particularly spoke to me about it was to be able to interpret it as a metaphor for the Outsider figure. Now almost certainly this is not what Bannon was intending; she was writing (she hoped) to reach lesbians hidden in the shadows of 1950's American society. What it did was to remind of myself about the same age as Laura in the novel but over a decade later. Reading Colin Wilson's treatise 'The Outsider' in my late teens helped me understand alienation and realise why I didn't quite fit in (indeed only recently a friend called me 'the cat who walks by himself'). It was only discovering science fiction fandom at a convention in 1970 (long before Star Wars made SF reasonably hip) when I felt like I'd come home, meeting people who shared similar idiosyncratic attitudes to myself. Reading this novel reminded me of those days.

By the end of the novel, Laura hasn't quite reached that stage (of finding a subculture she can embrace) but she is getting there. What I feel is that Bannon has created an extended metaphor where people who, for whatever reasons, are alienated from conventional society (though I suspect this is less these days than when she was writing), can identify with. Whatever her intentions she reaches beyond her target audience to speak to anyone who ever felt themselves different from the norm and this is the mark of a powerful writer.

You might also like to try:



A Life Uneventful.

1. The child is father to the man.

My first memory comes from when I was three. It's possibly the only memory I'm sure I have of my life before the age of five, not that there are many others. I'm told that, about age two and a half I was riding round the house on my tiny trike, ran into my great-grandmother causing her to pour a panful of near-boiling hot broth over me. I still have the scar on my left shoulderblade, but no memory of the incident.

So, I'm three years old and I walk several streets away with my my gran, my maternal grandmother. In the same street, a terrace built on a bank, where my nana, my other grandmother lives (the two don't get on and my parents have been separated for several months), and while my gran goes into a house I go and visit my nana for a few minutes. When my gran comes out of the house she's holding a wicker basket containing a small ginger kitten. I carry the basket all the way home and name the kitten Ginger Pop, almost immediately shortened to just **Ginger**. The year? Oh, it's 1951.

Ginger was never a healthy cat. He was born with a rupture, a lump hanging down from his stomach. Nothing was ever done about it and when he was twelve it strangulated and while holding him I noticed blood coming from his anus staining my jumper and he was put to sleep. He was a gentle amiable cat, happy to jump on my knee and curl up, purring faintly as I stroked him and, though you know this without me stating it, I loved him very much.

If my gran had come out with a puppy I'd no doubt be a dog-person today, but we had always been a cat family and there had been cats in the house since my great-grandfather (a bad-tempered Victorian patriarch who would die within four years aged 93) bought it back 1896 and it would finally be sold in 1989.

There you have it: the start of my life-long love affair with cats.

The first comic strip I remember was science fiction, though I've no idea what it was, only the blurred image of a colour page remains. The first comic hero (a space hero, as if it could be anything else) I remember was Captain Condor from the British weekly *The Lion*, followed later by Jet Ace Logan and his ilk. Sometimes I would try and write my own versions of these stories.

Around the age of 8 or 9, already a regular cinema-goer every Saturday afternoon with my mother or at the Saturday morning kiddy matinees -British readers of about my age are free to sing "We come along/on a Saturday mor-ning/greeting everybody with a smile/Smile!/Smile!"), I saw a double-bill of a 'Pirates of Tripoli' and Ray Harryhausen's **It Came From Beneath The Sea** while on holiday in Scarborough on the Yorkshire coast. I also remember watching a rerun of "Earth versus Flying Saucers at one of the fleapits in the town centre. Both movies are now on my shelf (along with "20 Million Miles To Earth") in a dvd boxed set in colourised and original monochrome.

And about the same time I was reading Capt. W. E. Johns' (of Biggles fame) science fiction series and any other sf, along with pretty much anything else which caught my fancy (anything and everything from Enid Blyton to books about evolution), that I could find in the childrens section of the local branch library.

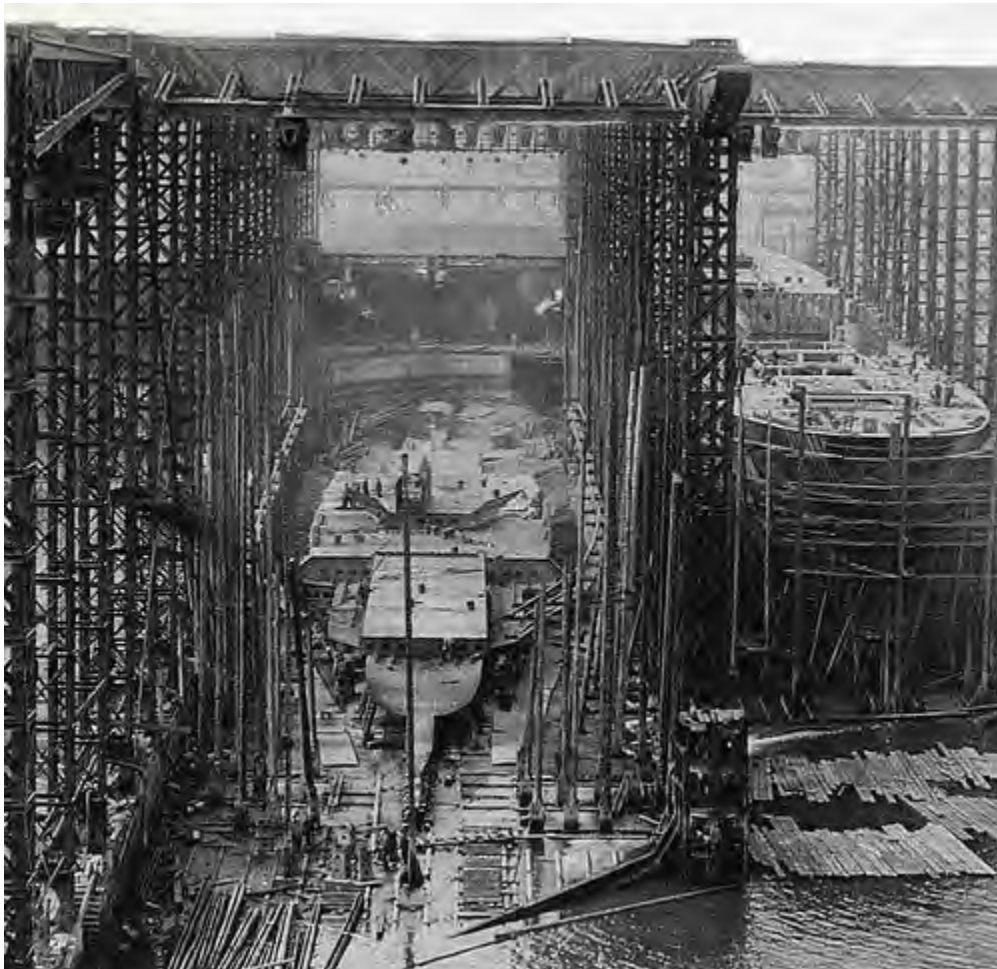
So, there you go: cats, comics, books, sf, writing, monsters, cinema.

Not all the great loves of my life -rock music came along a few short years later- but pretty much most of the hard core of them. If there was a soundtrack to my life then it was the never-ending clanging from Sunderland's busy shipyards ,now decades-silenced. At night the River Wear glowed with flames from furnaces and sparks from welding and the illumination of drydock lights.

I did visit those docks now and again when my grandad's (my paternal grandfather) ship was in port and he'd proudly show me the noisy hot and dirty engine room of which, as ship's chief engineer, he was the proud master. (He died, sadly as he was a kind man, from a heart attack, aged only 53, dropping down dead in a doctor's waiting room, the result of strain placed on the heart during the Second World War, when a ship he was on got torpedoed and he suffered severe injuries.)

For the first half of this century (probably earlier too) and up till the mid-60's, Sunderland was known as the largest ship-building town in the world. (Coal too was mined in a colliery not far from the banks of the Wear.)

Here-



Now it's...

Well, later, perhaps.

2. And Then It's Gone.

And here I am.



It's approximately 2pm on December 3rd, the place is Ariete (arry-et-uh), a fishing village on the north east coast of Lanzarote, part of the Spanish-owned Canary Islands. That's the Atlantic rolling in and seventy miles east is Morocco. I am, naturally, eating fish which was landed about 200 yards north of the restaurant. It doesn't get much fresher than that. Note too the jug of wine and filled glass; not red though, not on a lunchtime, with fish, heavens no.

And I'm 60 years old.

My final day, after 38 years with Sunderland public libraries, was 31st July 2008, my first day of retirement, my 60th birthday, 1st August. It was a good one, my last day, short too. I had a presentation. A senior member of management, one I'd worked closely with and respected, made a not-excruciating speech about me and my years on the staff and presented me with an acceptably large Amazon gift voucher. Then I made my speech.

I'd had run-ins with a number of senior managerial staff over the years and for the previous three had been the departmental Unison union representative. On the other hand I can state, honestly, that I believed myself to be liked and respected by the majority of people I worked with both on and off the library floor. Would I, they wondered, take the opportunity to settle scores.

I didn't. I gave a short but dignified speech thanking all the good members of staff, past and present, that I'd worked with over the years, I emphasised how much my heart was on the frontline working with and helping the members of the public, how all the individual departments were part of a larger team, all interdependent (I deliberately omitted

management, my one little subtle dig), I put in a few jokes (they laughed) and ended on a poignant moment.

It went down well as I was told by many people then, later, and at my actual leaving do. Then I was given hugs, cards, and presents (mostly red wine -how well they knew me) from a variety of individuals. I was even told that my speech moistened some eyes.

My actual leaving do was an informal occasion held a few days later at the pub next door to the library. Just a drop in after work, stay as long or as briefly as you like. Me, being typically me, was worried that no-one would turn up. In fact, at one point there were over 40 people which, for a library do, was pretty damn good. (A month later someone else from the City Library retired and only half that number, with me among them, attended.)

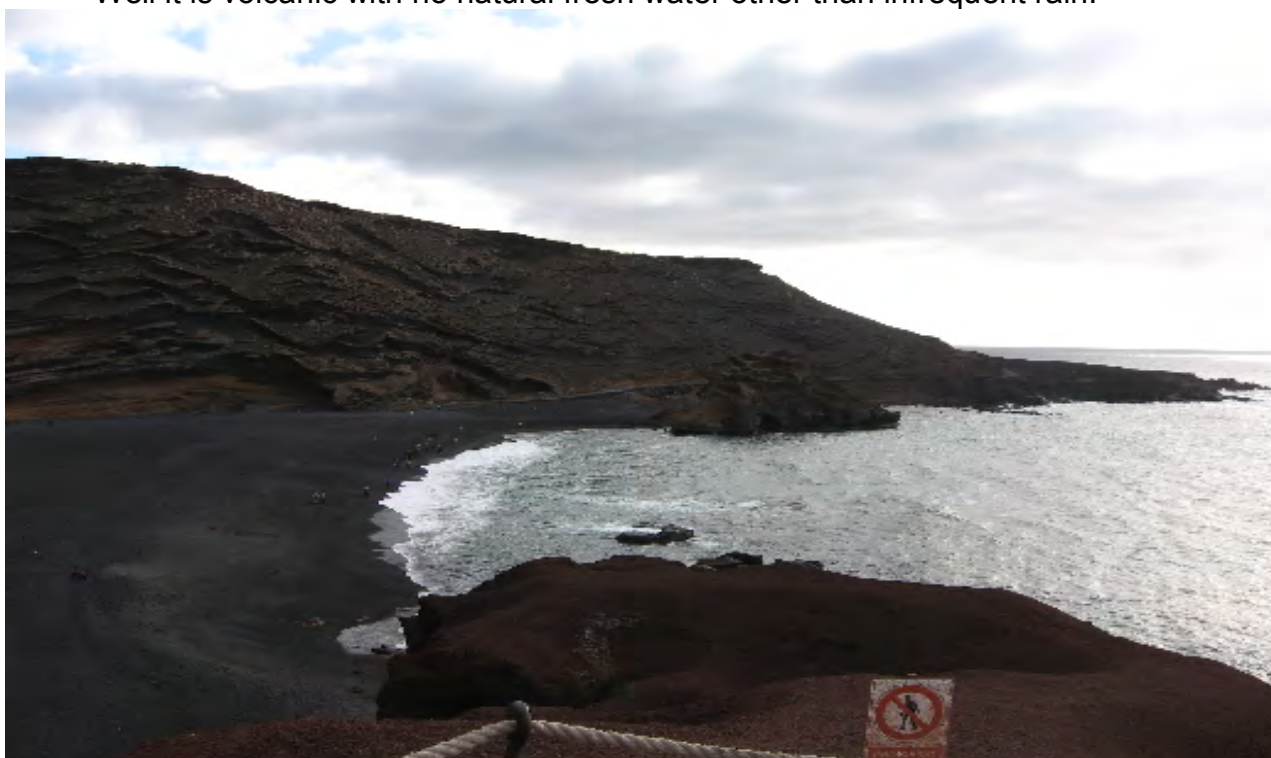
I left with dignity, with my head held high and it felt very good indeed. I did indeed have the respect and genuine affection of the people I worked with and it doesn't get better than that.

Elaine, a senior librarian, left at the end of December, refusing a presentation and not holding a leaving do so bitter was she at the way she'd been treated by management. More than one person who knew us both commented that I had just as much reason to be angry at management but felt, as I did, that it, Elaine's attitude that is, was very sad. I rang her just before she left (we'd been friends and colleagues for 34 years) but couldn't change her mind. A shame because she was a very good librarian and well-liked by the people she worked with. I asked what her plans were (her partner died of a stroke three years ago aged 55) and she told me she had none and didn't know what she was going to do.

Six months later I regularly visit the library, though I borrow few books, and chat to the staff. Once a week I have coffee in the city centre with Denise and Sylvia, two women I've known since my first day and who, like me, both retired last year. None of us have any regrets. Though, by and large, we enjoyed our work, it's like a weight lifted from our shoulders.

Lanzarote itself is a nice place, despite my initial impression several years ago when, sitting in the car heading from the airport to the apartment owned by my friend Ian Penman with whom I was staying, I exploded, "Christ, it's a fucking pit heap!"

Well it is volcanic with no natural fresh water other than infrequent rain.



3. And, In Between, A Life.

Life, in part, is an intellectual process, a gradual refining of beliefs and ideas which are modified by age and experience and the individual's perception of the world as the world itself changes. What you start out as, as say a teenager when certain values and beliefs are already in place, may not be how you end up. Your beliefs and values may well have changed. Many of mine did.

I was a child in the 1950's when everything was grey. Everyone smoked, it seemed. Women were second class citizens. The 'N' word could be used casually and unthinkingly about black people. Indeed the influx of immigrants from the Caribbean in response to the post-war boom was causing racism to rear its ugly head, though being a child in the North East of England with its traditionally high unemployment meant that I saw very few people from ethnic minorities and I never even met a Jew until I went to grammar school age 11. I have to say my response to that was simply a puzzlement that Fatty Gordon's family didn't celebrate Christmas and an 'oh well people are strange' shrug. I was aware of the Holocaust (and horrified by it) but simply didn't understand the concept of anti-semitism.

What am I? A Christian, believing every word I heard and was taught at the Methodist Sunday school. A boy scout, not a good one, but nevertheless... Following the example of my family, I supported the Conservative Party and believed, again like my family, that I was of the middle classes -we weren't, upper working class at best, just one of the many collective delusions my family held.

For American readers I'll repeat a joke, of sorts, I heard decades ago. The Republican party is the American equivalent of the Conservatives. And so are the Democrats. (That's it.) Americans tend to strike the British as rather politically naïve (while we are cynical). This did seem to be born out when I watched an elderly American from Maryland describe Obama as a socialist. I nearly laughed my socks off. Your new president is no more a socialist than is David Cameron the leader of the Conservatives. And, yes, like everyone else, I would have voted for him if I could and I watched his inauguration live on tv. Today I've ordered his autobiography from Amazon.

Barack Obama has the opportunity to change the way Americans see themselves and how they see the world by opening their minds to alternative ways of thinking. Just as we do, or should do, throughout our lives.

Change is a gradual process built on the measuring of past and present experiences. Everything is built on what has gone before. Darwin, one of the greatest men who ever lived, in part based his work on what had gone before by scientists such as Carl Linnaeus (or so memory tells me, it's been a while). What he did do was the connect the dots in a way that no one else had ever done - such is the mark of genius.

I believe the way that you change is inherently based on your personality. True revelations on the road to Damascus are relatively rare. We are predisposed to certain beliefs, certain ways of thinking. For example, while not of a scientific bent, I was as a child interested in science, in how the world worked so perhaps it was inevitable that, once I started questioning my religion, I became an atheist. I became a librarian and the most satisfaction I got from my work was on the frontline, working with the public, helping them. For all my self-obsession and various character flaws, it is my inclination to help. So it's no surprise that I became strongly opposed to anything which sought to suppress humanity for perceived differences such as being of a different racial or cultural group, being a woman, having alternative sexual preferences, and why I accept *political correctness* believing it to be merely a form of good manners. It's no surprise too that ended up quite left wing politically (although it took years of gradual change), willing to admit to being a non-dogmatic socialist. My becoming a union steward is another stage in this my personal growth and enlightenment. I'll return to the subject of politics later.

My 20's and 30's were pretty much dominated (and to those who know me, yes this is an oversimplification) by my involvement with fandom and with writing (not that the two are separate.

I'm not going to go into that here, partly because this isn't intended as autobiography, and partly because I've written about it at length in fanzines in the past. Earl Kemp was kind enough to reprint a piece of mine on writing in E which is easily accessible on *efanzines* if you're interested.) They ended with me being a chain-smoking borderline alcoholic who'd sold a teenage sf novel.

Then, while attending an Open University Social Sciences foundation course, I met [Susan Hardy](#) who changed my life completely and for the better and we got married on 24th August 1988, two months after we started going out and eight months after we first met. And we're still married. Oddly, it wasn't the course that made us click, but our love of animals.

Thus my 40's and 50's were marked by a growing involvement in animal welfare on a local basis. (Again a simplification but, as I've already said, this is not an autobiographical essay.) It began with some minor involvement with the local branch of the National Anti-Vivisection Society, Susan and her mother being members. While generally agreeing with this, I did have some reservations about a complete ban, and felt guilty again about having them. Towards the end of the 1990's Susan and I became involved with a couple of local animal rescue groups which ended with us, with others, forming [Animal Krackers](#) a charity set up to help local rescue groups but ended up with us becoming one as well. At one point a local government councillor tried to get all the different groups to work together under a new umbrella group. It failed because the chair of the group (me) got sick of doing all the work without the support I needed and it fell apart without really getting anywhere. Animal Krackers has now been going for six years and is well known and respected in the Sunderland area. Me, I'm the main cat rescuer/transporter to vets.

Below is the queue at the back of our shop when we held a free microchipping session.



4. The Political Compass.

(I'm trying to be a clever shit. [The Political Compass](#) is a website but the phrase also refers to the content of this fanzine in the sense that everything is political, every stand we take, every view that we hold, has a political dimension and this fanzine is about mine.)

While I have an inherent distrust of almost any large organisation (including those of which I've been and am an active supporter), it's pointless to complain that they exist because it's natural for individuals to band together in common cause. We are a group-animal (call it clan or pack or family, or whatever), it's in our nature. One of the most stupid things Margaret Thatcher ever said was: "There is no such thing as society."

One of the most interesting websites I've ever come across is

<http://www.politicalcompass.org>

This is from their opening statement:

The old one-dimensional categories of 'right' and 'left', established for the seating arrangement of the French National Assembly of 1789, are overly simplistic for today's complex political landscape. For example, who are the 'conservatives' in today's Russia? Are they the unreconstructed Stalinists, or the reformers who have adopted the right-wing views of conservatives like Margaret Thatcher ?

On the standard left-right scale, how do you distinguish leftists like Stalin and Gandhi? It's not sufficient to say that Stalin was simply more left than Gandhi. There are fundamental political differences between them that the old categories on their own can't explain. Similarly, we generally describe social reactionaries as 'right-wingers', yet that leaves left-wing reactionaries like Robert Mugabe and Pol Pot off the hook.

You are then invited to take a test which assesses your views on society, politics, economics and more, What you end up with is your place on a grid divided into quadrants. The authors of the site emphasise that even this is simplistic and that it is a two dimensional representation of a fluid continuum, but it is more sophisticated than the simple left/right divide and correspondingly more interesting.

On the next page is the result of my latest test which reveals me to be a rabid lefty/libertarian and gosh I'm proud of it.

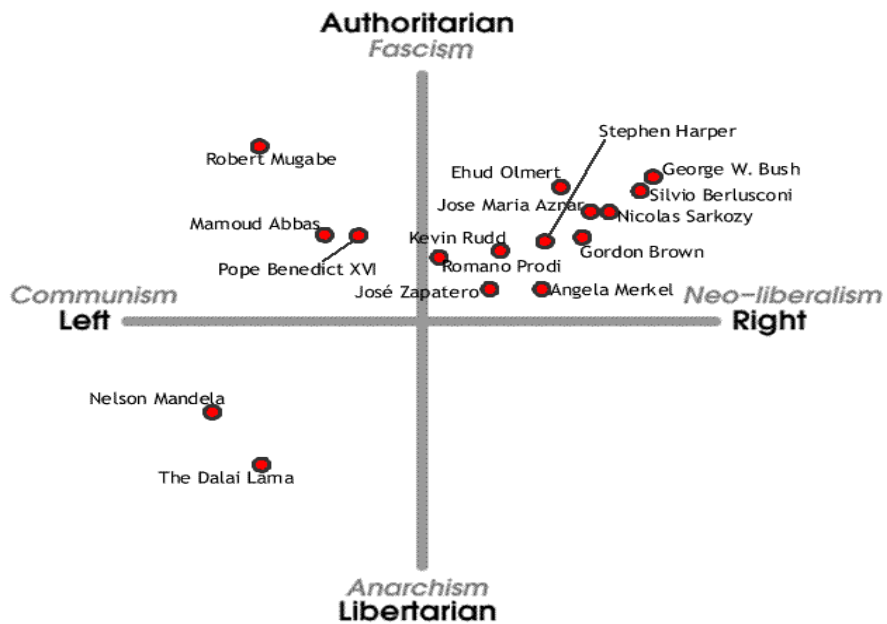
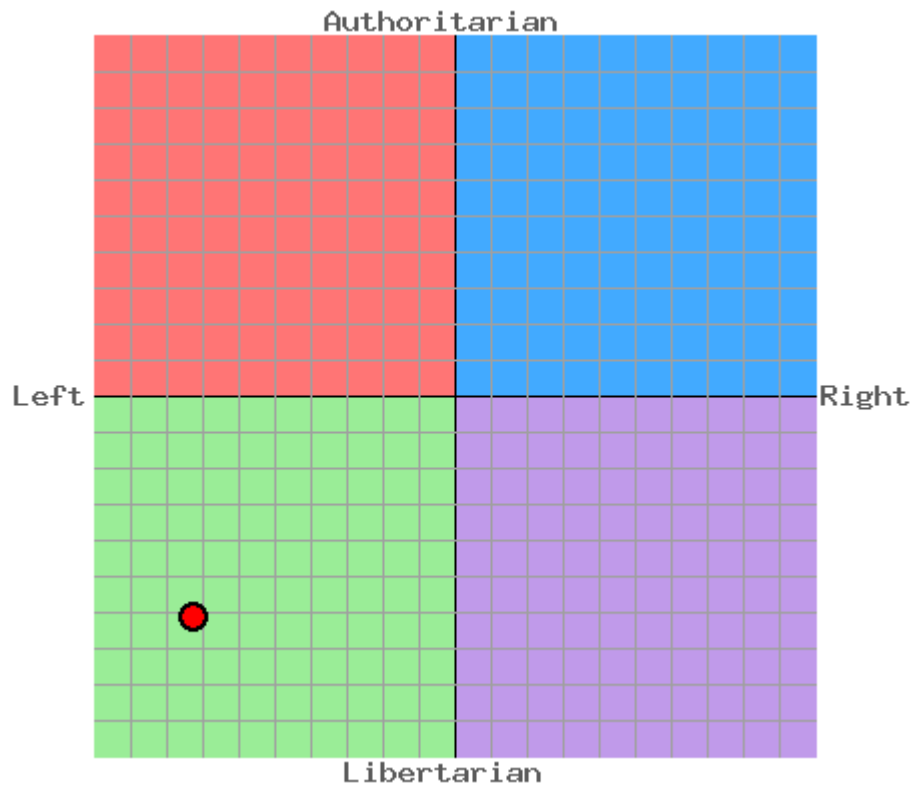
The grid beneath that shows me to be not a million miles away from the Dalai Llama and Nelson Mandela. Now that is company I'd be honoured to keep. If it's good enough for two of the greatest leaders of our time, it's more than good enough for me.

An assessment elsewhere on the site puts Barack Obama in the authoritarian right quadrant but, don't worry, he's quite close to the axis as to almost make him a centrist (socialist, indeed!) along with other leading Democrat figures (Hillary Clinton for one).

I hope that you'll check out this website and take the test. I'd also be very interested to see your results if you'd like to send them to me along with any comments you'd care to make. If you do, unless you say otherwise, I'll assume they are for publication.

Economic Left/Right: -7.62

Social Libertarian/Authoritarian: -6.46



5. Hello.



This has been a somewhat unusual issue in [Siddhartha](#) terms as firstly it's thematic and secondly it has little to do with either sf or fandom; there isn't much in the way of humour either. But, what the hell, we're all grown-ups here.

Hitting 60 years of age and retiring inevitably makes one feel reflective. Me, being typically awkward, it's the intellectual process that I've undergone which interests me, an attempt to define the sort of person that I've become and how I see myself in the world. What I wanted was an overview, macroscopic rather than the reverse which would involve listing lots of details. (I could have mentioned my on and off flirtation with Buddhism, my short time as an evangelical vegetarian, or details of the people and animals I've helped recently.) I'm not sure if it works but I needed to do it.

The layout is interesting as, once I'd begun, I realised it could be constructed as a series of double-page spreads. Try and look at it that way and see if it works. I quite like it, though I doubt I'll do it again, as it also provided a structure to the text.

It's been fun and took me about a week. Now I've got to try and convert it into a pdf file, something I've never done before, and send it to Bill. All comments are welcome.

On the previous page is [Muffin](#), whom I rescued recently, and who will hopefully be rehomed by the time you read this. She a nice, gentle and quiet cat.

Below is the photo on the cover of our charity's leaflet. The shop logo was done before we'd finalised our name (for legal reasons) as Animal Crackers. I shouldn't have been folding my arms as it obscures a neat Grateful Dead t-shirt and Susan (second from left) shouldn't have been wearing that cheesy grin.

Next, something completely different. And soon, not 14 years between issues like last time. Maybe just weeks.

