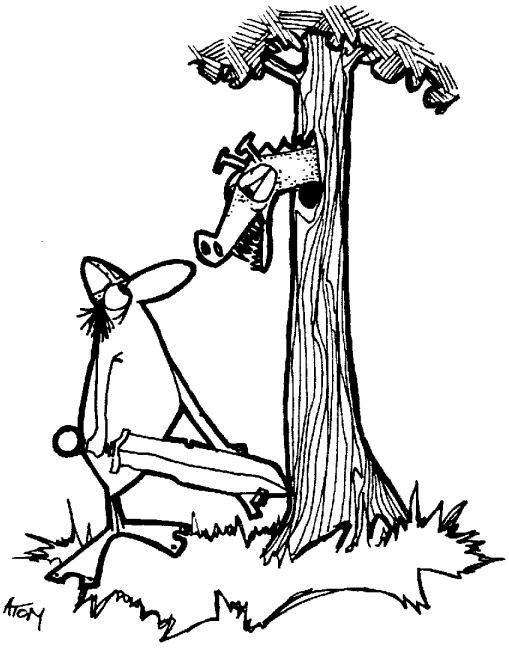
# The (second) Fortnightly Fix



## There and Back Again

Although I'd already flirted with *Doctor Who* fandom and written reviews for a handful of comiczines during the couple of years prior to attending my first Birmingham Science Fiction Group meeting (18 February 1977), that was very much my initial encounter with sf fandom proper. Back then, as I listened to the likes of Brian Aldiss, Bob Shaw and Christopher Priest discuss their craft and inspirations, I even allowed myself to fantasise that I might one day find myself on the other side of the speaker's table, regaling members with anecdotes about my own career as a fulltime science fiction author. Ah, the sweet idiocy of teenage ambition.

Well, that never happened (surprise, surprise), but my flight of fancy came partially true on Friday, when I did indeed address the Brum Group, albeit in my capacity as TAFF delegate and general fannish survivor. Once I'd recovered from my shock at the invitation, I decided to re-engineer my presentation to Microcon 29 (*Fandom: Its Part in My Downfall*) into the first half of my appearance, then concentrate on my transAtlantic adventures for the second (which could itself form the core of my TAFF item at Novacon the following weekend). Unfortunately, my disregard for deadlines had by this point approached Douglas Adams-esque proportions (I added the finishing touches to part two around 5am on Friday morning, just thirteen hours before I was due to rendezvous with Rog Peyton and Tony Berry for a pre-meeting meal at Café Rouge on Birmingham's New Street).

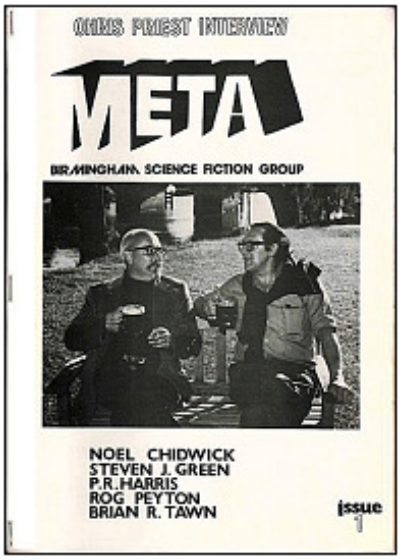
Whilst we waited for Tony to arrive, I admitted to Rog that I felt a little nervous (it's one thing to disappoint complete strangers, quite another to let down the group which effectively drew me into sf fandom), but assured him that "Sideshow Steve" would happily take over soon as I stepped into the spotlight. That struck a chord with my dinner companion, who admitted he has a similar persona, "Auctioneer Rog", assumed whenever conventions need him to extract the final pennies from their members' pockets. (In a recent conversation with my mom, she resurrected the semi-repressed memory that teenage shyness occasionally resulted in my having a slight speech impediment, which disappeared just after I started college, an event she credits to my becoming class representative on the campus parliament. Sometimes, it's just easily to shift into "Sideshow" mode for entire conventions.)

Despite a few technical hitches (my laptop refused to communicate with the plasma screen in the Old Joint Stock's function room, though it did detect the DIN lead, which leads me to wonder if the connecting cable was in some way faulty), the evening appeared to go well, and the fact that the audience had to move forward in order to watch my presentation on the laptop screen resulted in an unanticipated intimacy. Less unexpected was Peter Weston's cry of "It's a fake!" when presented with a photograph of himself cavorting with several ladies in a state of *dishabille*, to which I quipped "Sure, Pete, and so were the Moon landings." (Needless to say, the image *was* phony, but well worth the cheat for the laugh it generated.)

*"Fandom is like herpes... it stays in the blood, doesn't kill you, but it's unpleasant and anti-social once in a while."* [Ann, March '86]

## Group Amnesia

One of the more bizarre moments on Friday was discovering virtually no one present could recall the Brum Group once published a fanzine -- even Rog Peyton, who was among the contributors. Okay, *Meta* (as in "metamorphosis") wasn't a particularly exciting venture, but it scarcely deserves erasure from the collective memory like one of Stalin's airbrush victims.




At least the one and only edition (dated autumn 1977) is listed in both Vin¢ Clarke's and Greg Pickersgill's fanzine indexes (although neither gets the pagination quite right, since Vin¢ counts the blank inside cover and Greg didn't spot we managed to include *two* page nineteens; for future historians, the correct answer's twenty-one).

To be honest, it's a fairly embarrassing debut for all three editors (the first issue of *Astron*, which I produced with my old school chum Chris Cutts, wouldn't appear until that November; so far as I'm aware, my *Meta* collaborators Noel Chidwick and Paul Harris dropped out of fandom shortly afterwards, although I've a rather vague recollection that Noel attended Albacon 80 in Glasgow, which leads me to wonder if he's the same chap who currently fronts the Scots prog folk band Arbelos). The editorial tone is pompous, the general approach to our material dry as a bone and the text is riddled with odd (and inconsistent) punctuation; that it was typed onto stencil by three people taking turns at the keyboard on two different machines didn't exactly create an underlying ambience of homogeneity.

In our defence, it wasn't noticeably different from much of the British Science Fiction Association's output at that time (Noel and I were both members back then) and my writing style did begin to loosen up once I'd attended Novacon 7 and read a few non-BSFA fanzines (*Astron #2*, which included Chris' name in the colophon pretty much as a courtesy, includes mentions of Rob Jackson's *Maya* and Jean Frost's *Jabberwocky* -- plus *Negative Overdrive* from Bridgwater-based fan Mike Evis, who further research indicates is sadly not the same fellow who launched the Glastonbury Festival fifteen miles down the road).

Still, I'm sure all of us have similar skeletons in the creative closet -- it's a fannish rite of passage -- and nothing here is quite as startling as glancing through the loccol in *Astron #2* (spring 1978) and reading that the rate for *attending* the following year's Brighton worldcon was now £4.50, but was set to rise that Easter. "Cons, especially world ones, are expensive," warned Rob Jackson in his letter, which just goes to show some things never change.

## Ad Absurdum

There's an advertising campaign running on British television right now featuring generic members of the public taking credit for assorted components of Windows 7. Several elements strike me as nonsensical, not least why Microsoft's development team (which is based in Washington state, as I confirmed during my stay in Seattle) should try and salvage Vista's unholy legacy by tapping the boastful witterings of a bunch of Brits whose claims, if substantiated, would scare the crap out of Bill Gates' legal department. However, if these people really *are* responsible for Windows 7, might we at least have their names and addresses, so we can drive round and beat them over the head with a copy of *Software for Dummies* the first time the system grinds to a blue-screened halt?

## Down the Loccol

My comments last issue on what I personally perceive as the high cost of single rooms at next year's Corflu brought a swift reaction from con chair Rob Jackson:

"Some of us who are organising Corflu Cobalt were a bit surprised to see your description of the £65/night room rate at the Winchester Hotel next March as 'ludicrous'. In which case, pretty much all hotel room rates at UK cons also have to be described as ludicrous. We have done a little bit of checking, and here are the rates at other comparable cons:

Odyssey (next Eastercon): £64/night
Conrunner 2: £65/night - the same as ours
Plokta.con (last May, held in an educational/conference place rather than a hotel, and with significantly more basic room facilities): £60/night
Novacon: £55/night (the only one which is significantly cheaper)

"So I do hope that next ish you will be describing most of the other cons' room rates as ludicrous, too. It seems pretty clear that Corflu's rates are within the normal range; and we do think our hotel is a damn good one in a fun city to visit."

As I explained when I replied to Rob, I most certainly do consider most of these room rates to be ludicrous, given the cost per person / per night for members sharing a twin or double at those same four events work out at £42, £35, £40 and £40 (the last two being the same at Corflu's). I make that a 37.5% surcharge for single occupancy at Novacon, 50% for Plokta.con, 52.4% for Odyssey 2010, 62.5% for Corflu and an astonishing 85.7% for Conrunner 2.

The plain fact is, hotels are taking the piss with the penalties they impose upon convention members who, for whatever reason, do not require two beds. Obviously, the disparity's really been brought home to me since I lost Ann, but even back when we were negotiating rates for Novacon 37 (which would be mid-2006), I was conscious of the inherent unfairness and got the surcharge down to 32.5% (£50, against £37.75 for sharers, and that at a hotel which didn't actually have single rooms, but redesignated a limited number of doubles for single occupancy). That hotels seem not to have noticed we're currently suffering the worst economic depression in seventy-five years simply underlines the absurdity.

Anyhow, back to Rob, in a later e-mail:

"We (the Corflu Cobalt committee) did scour the country looking for hotels who would give us a moderately decent deal, all the way from York via Oxford, Reading, Bath and Eastbourne, and the one in Winchester was the best value we could find in terms of a good hotel, who were *genuinely* interested in us and willing to give us a better deal (read: less worse deal) on room rates than the rest. Also, one of our key points was to hold it in a city which would be of interest to US fannish visitors (as well as UK ones, of course). Some hotels quoted over £100 a night and wouldn't budge. Tuff luck for them. York was particularly expensive, but I suppose that at weekends they have all the tourists they can cram in."

I'd just returned from Manchester's Festival of Fantastic Films when I started work on the first issue, and included what I considered to be a fairly basic criticism of the programming (scheduling me to interview actress Emily Booth the evening before I was originally due to arrive). Cue a rare letter of comment from Rog Peyton:

"Many thanks for *The FFix #1* -- the first fanzine I've received, other than *Prolapse / Relapse*, for a few years. Not really my cup of tea, as I have very little interest in movies and even less in horror movies. What I did find interesting is the fact that convention committees still

manage to fail miserably in providing proper entertainment over a weekend. It does help to reinforce my belief that we are *very* lucky with Novacon committees and most Eastercon committees. Back in the early '90s, I tried to get info off the Delta Group *[organisers of the Festival of Fantastic Films]* so that I could publicise their event. Nothing ever transpired. No info, no invitation or even a 'thank you for your interest' note. It would seem they still can't organise anything professionally."

Across the Big Pond now, to hear from fellow eFanzines alumnus John Purcell:

"Welcome back to the fan-editing fold. I hope your plan works; it reminds me of when I re-entered the fray a few years back. My plan of getting my name back out among the living by producing a monthly genzine / perzine (*In a Prior Lifetime*) and writing a shit-load of locs (between the fall of 2005 and the end of 2007, I cranked out something like almost 400 locs) worked fairly well, so that when I stopped *IaPL* at 20 issues and scaled back to a new zine on a bimonthly schedule (*Askance*), folks would know who the heck I was. So far, so good.

"All this, of course, is just my way of saying I like the idea of a fortnightly zine; every couple of weeks (to us Amerikaners) is much easier to do nowadays thanks to the technology. I remember well bashing out zines on my Royal manual typewriter back in the 1970s and early '80s; my mimeograph didn't work so well, but my brother was the head printer at a downtown Minneapolis company, so he ran the zines off for basically beer money provided I also brought my own paper. Not a problem. Ah, those were the days...

"At any rate, your short con report sounds like you had a good time -- that Emily Booth is hot, y'know -- and that all went reasonably well. That drive into Manchester reminds me of driving to Dallas for FenCon last year with all the road construction turning that weekend excursion into a concrete slalom course. It makes for an adventurous drive, but we survive these things. What we put up with for our little corner of the universe. A lot, it sounds like.

"So many thanks for the first ish of *The FFix*. Pretty soon you should be mainlining -- er, I mean onlining -- bigger zines on eFanzines. Bill Burns is my hero."

I also heard from: Paul Birch ("Nothing like a self-imposed deadline to help engage the brain in both purpose and focus; that it's an entertaining read, too, is a bonus!"), Phil Greenaway ("A great effort, Steve. I'd pencilled in joining you *[at the Festival of Fantastic Films]* for the day, but life and events have taken me elsewhere."), Ron Salomon ("Back when I was doing my two-pagers my purported pubbing schedule slipped immediately, and hoping none of the same for you, sir. Especially if there is more coverage [or un-] of the lovely Ms Emily Booth."), Mark Redfield ("Wish I could've been *[at the Festival]* this year."), Moshe Feder ("Nice shot of you and the cute babe. My only suggestion at first glance is to add blank lines between paragraphs next time around for a nicer look and better readability."), Joel Lane ("Good stuff!") and Lloyd Penney ("To be honest, if it's not out every two weeks, I wouldn't flog myself over it. At least you don't have ravening shareholders who might scream for your blood if you are a day or two behind schedule.").

Thanks to everyone who responded; one of my concerns when I started this project was that going electronic might stifle feedback. For once, it's nice to be proven wrong.

This has been ***The Fortnightly Fix #2***, dated 12 November 2009. Blame Steve Green, who can be contacted via stevegreen@livejournal.com. Illustrations by Arthur "Atom" Thomson and Chuck Winter (from *Suspense #26*, January 1953). My usual gratitude to Bill Burns at eFanzines.com.