I S S U E # 9 4

This Here...

"…really irritating…" (J Nicholas)

EGOTORIAL

INVITED GUESTS

The joys and travails of trying to get *three* fuckin' zines sorted this month (this'un, *BEAM XIX* and *The Incompleat Register 2025*) have required pleas for help.

Previously when I've had an ish of *BEAM* on deck I've skipped a month of this here parcel of rogues, but with all that's going on, not only with surgeries & that round here, but also in Corflu, TAFF and FAAn Award news that I at least think is quite important, I didn't want to do that this time. Then there's the possibly narcissistic belief that at least some of you might want to know that I survived being sliced up and having artificial arteries plumbed in.

One option would have been a very slimmed-down ish with the usual news bits upfront and fuck all else apart from the 'Health Diary', but I thought to myself "No, that won't do", so in the tradition of my days in construction I have engaged reliable subcontractors.

Thus, you will discover within **Claire Brialey** discussing the FAAN Awards, **Perry Middlemiss** on movies, **Rich Coad** supplying 'Radio Winston' and, in lieu of 'Anorak', a gardening column, 'Digging for Victory', off **Joseph Nicholas**. DoBFO much ta to them all.

I am, I realize, running the serious risk of everyone gleefully remarking that this could be the bestest ish of *TH…* evah, but I shall have to chance it…

It's all good.

December 2025

TAFFNESSABOUNDS

THAT WAS QUICK

No sooner do I share the announcement inviting discussion over the destination of the next TAFF Eastbound race (Eastercon or Eurocon?) than the admins, presumably having heard enough, are going for a 2026 race with the winner heading to MetropolCon in Berlin, July 2-5, where they will no doubt be accosted by Dave Lally if they're not sufficiently vigilant. (Same as an Eastercon, then?)

https://www.metropolcon.eu/en/

The important thing now is that nominations are open until 23:59 Pacific time, February 1st 2026. As a reminder of the form, candidates will need three North American and two European nominators for a total of five, an up to 101-word platform and the deposit of a $20 bond with the fund.

One friend has already chucked their hat in the ring, and I shall therefore immediately exhort you all to vote **KAT TEMPLETON for TAFF**…

Admin contact info:

Mikołaj Kowalewski (European TAFF Administrator):
EUTAFF@gmail.com
m.kowalewski@ava.waw.pl

Sarah Gulde (American TAFF Administrator):
nataffemail@gmail.com

taff.org.uk

CORFLUX

PROGRESS REPORT 3

Just a quick note here that PR3 dropped at the beginning of December, and once again there are **DEADLINES**, particularly noting **HOTEL ROOM BOOKING** which need to be met by **JANUARY 27**, so get on it!

Links:

https://corflu.org/Corflu43/CorfluPickledPR3.pdf

https://www.facebook.com/groups/corflu

https://corflu.org/

FAANWANK

BY CLAIRE BRIALEY, WHO TURNS OUT NOT TO BE BURIED UNDER THE PATIO AFTER ALL

Did you receive a fanzine this year? Did you like it? Seen some fan art you appreciated? Enjoyed some fan writing?

If you didn't, either you've got very exacting standards or you haven't been paying attention. Luckily, help is at hand; if you go to efanzines.com you'll find a wide range of 2025 titles to help you to catch up and even find something you can enjoy. And you can find some at fanac.org too.

Assuming you have been keeping up with SF fanzines and enjoying them to boot, did you write to say so?

If so, you're a better fan than I am – and the even better news is that you've already got some details to hand that would help you to vote in the FAAn awards in 2026. If not, I know all too well how that can happen – but the good news is that you, too, can make up for your lack of response by voting in the FAAn awards as well.

Why yes, this is the twenty-first century fanzine fandom version of Morton's Fork. But so much less expensive.

Look, you know how this goes. You're a fanzine fan – or else about to be indoctrinated or possibly just very, very confused – and you read *This Here...* and this is almost entirely traditional by now. The Fanzine Activity Achievement (FAAn) awards are presented annually to the fans whose contributions to fanzines voters have most enjoyed in the previous year, and they're announced and presented at Corflu, and quite a lot of people then complain about the results even though a number of them didn't actually vote, and we all go back to our previously scheduled activities until it's time to go round again.

And in order for all that to happen Nic opens the ballot early in January, tells us about the process and the deadline for that year, and encourages people to vote; then he laments the way that most of us take a bit of time to think about it and/or nearly forget, and in order to avoid the latter he reminds us often – too often, for some tastes – to get on with it.

So here's your advance warning that it's time to find your thinking caps, but it's pretty much business as usual. The categories are the same as in the past few years (Genzine, Perzine, Special Publication, Fan Writer, Fan Artist, Letterhack, Fanzine Cover), and when he's risen from his bed of pain Nic will produce an *Incompleat Register* with some more details about voting and how all the publications he's aware of split into the relevant categories – so there'll also be an opportunity to enter into correspondence ahead of voting if you want to split hairs – and the deadline will be in mid-February, which is sufficiently far in advance of Corflu to enable personalised trophies or similar to be produced, but not so far away that you can put it off for ages, hair-splitting or not. You'll be able to cast up to four or maybe five votes in each category (but it can be fewer if you prefer), and probably to indicate if there's one of your choices that really stands out for you so that gets an extra point, and you needn't vote in every category if you haven't got opinions about everything. And that's it. It's not complicated; it's not that nice Dr Edmonds's recent Anzapapoll.

The only difference, really, is that it's me writing this. And that brings back memories, not only from when I administered the FAAn awards ten years ago but also from when I was the BSFA Awards administrator for several years about a decade before that. My increasing disenchantment at the way that so many BSFA members just weren't engaging with the awards – and thus perhaps, I gloomily deduced, with the genre as a whole – made writing each column, encouraging nominations and then voting, something of a challenge. Although not as much as discussions about my approach with the editor of *Matrix* at the time, who was rather more Bazball-like in his determination to be positive and upbeat regardless of the circumstances and how that hadn't worked before.

So really I'm here to make you look forward to being harangued-I-mean-encouraged by Nic instead next time, as well as to make you reflect on what to vote for and perhaps not give Nic the satisfaction of fulfilling all his own doomy expectations by waiting till the last minute and then risking not even getting round to it. If instead you're reflecting on whether to vote this time, or have already decided against doing so and are just idly browsing to see whether I've found a new way of trying to talk you into it, I'm here to tell you to JFDI. I've heard all the plausible reasons for why not to, and I remain unconvinced. Really, what's the worst that could happen if you vote? As compared to, on the one hand, the positive benefits of sharing around a little bit more thanks and praise for what you enjoyed in fanzines this year and giving the winners the additional satisfaction of a higher

than usual turnout – and, on the other hand, the implications of pissing me off as well as Nic if you don't?

Yeah, fair enough; I'm a paper tiger. But you don't want to annoy Nic. He'll probably be able to move a lot faster once he's recovered from the surgery, although in the meantime he's really tired so he's probably feeling quite irritable. And imagine how irritated he's already going to be after all that time in hospital without a drink or a smoke. In any case, wouldn't you like to make him happy – and have to work out how to deal with that? All you need to do is to decide how to vote, and remember to tell Nic too.

Illustration: Seattle 'Vanguard' meeting discussing their FAAn Award votes…

Health Diary

You were all expecting joyous capering, silly grins, cartwheels and hullo birds hullo sky weren't you? Hah! As fuckin' if!

The day of getting issue #93 of this here den of iniquity, I somehow managed to do me fuckin' back in, a state which exacerbated into effective motionlessness within hours, accompanied by occasional screaming redolent of Count Jim "Kidney Wiper" Moriarty ie "Oooowwwwww".

This sorry state has required **Jen** to be doing the looking after thing about 10 days previous to what we'd envisaged, but fortunately she's been well on schedule with her recovery, and indeed encouraged to do stuff by medical professional and not only begged to do so by sorry-arsed me.

One of the truly joyful things about this incapacitation is the effect that trying to change clothes below the waist is even more problematic than usual, so I end up wearing the same clobber for almost a week (also to bed). There also comes a point in time when even the protagonist begins to notice that their armpits are starting to niff like someone's rather rancid armpits, so much so that I expected them to start singing "Ruby Soho" any minute…

After a week of all that it's eased off to the extent that I could have a shower without risk of falling out of it (hurrah!) and can move about mostly without imprecation, although it's not *quite* back to normal levels of arg. I messaged Nice Dr Park, who (a) assured me that lower back pain won't cause a postponement of my surgery this week, and (b) prescribes me some very tiny muscle relaxant pills which all helps.

Next update, I expect, from hospital after surgery this Thursday (11th)…

And here would have been the tale of the last two-and-a-half-weeks, except that I can't do fuck all. In brief, surgery was delayed until the 13th because of a concern over my white cell count by one of the docs who was apparently unaware of my leukemia, so I ended up staying in hospital for a full week, mostly on a broken bed in a recovery room getting little to no sleep (or edible food, as it turned out).

Positively, though, the bypass itself went well, with a bit of a caveat that nice Dr Peters & Lee may have to follow up with a couple of lower leg stents - a non-surgical and simple process.

You might end up getting the review of all that *next* month (something to look forward to ey?), I suppose we shall see…

The thing I wasn't prepared for was (as I learn others have discovered) how much a major surgery takes out of you in terms of overall energy. The "get up and go" has most definitely got up and fucked most decidedly off…

And my back still fuckin' hurts…

Movie Night

MADE UP HORRORS

BY PERRY MIDDLEMISS

Back in the 1970s the Australian rock band Skyhooks released a single titled "Horror Movie"*,which featured the lines: "It's a horror movie right there on my TV / Horror movie right there on my TV / Horror movie and it's blown a fuse / Horror movie, it's the six-thirty news". Skyhooks were probably thinking about the Vietnam War when they wrote that song. In the 2020s the current wars' locations may have changed, but the basic sentiment still applies.

* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XljmO_KPQaM

At my age I'm sick of the horrors of the real world. The wars, the torture, the killings, the hate and the inhumanity gets to be overwhelming. I've had enough of it. If I want any horror I'll get some second-hand, via that greatest of the 20th-century's entertainment inventions, the feature film, the movie.

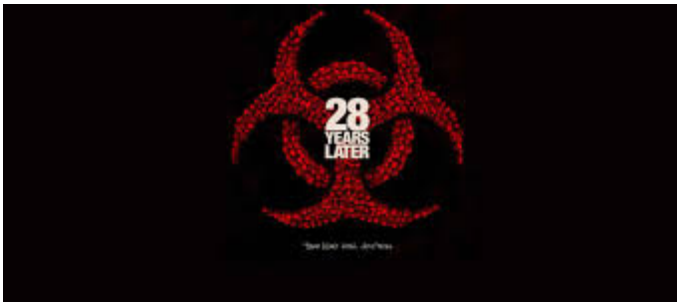
We all love a good scare. Or maybe it's better if I say "we all should love a good scare." It's invigorating, it gets the

adrenaline flowing, it makes you feel alive. Well, at least it does for me.

And, luckily for me, filmmakers seem to be willing to feed us this fare on an ongoing basis, from *Nosferatu* in the early 1920s to the latest version of *Frankenstein* a hundred or so years later. Every decade, every year, brings us a new batch of horror movies to view. But I have to say that I'm not a fan of all sub-genres of horror. I prefer the classic form: the building of tension before the surprise, the monster in the cupboard, things that go bump in the night. I don't usually like body-horror such as 2024's *The Substance*, nor splatter movies like the 2004 Australian horror film *Saw* and its sequels. I don't see the point of them. To me they're repulsive rather than scary. Give me something with a bit of intelligence, something different in the script, and I'll be there. Present me with too much violence and too much blood, too much of a reliance on visceral gore and I'll give it a miss.

The question of what defines a horror movie is almost as fraught as defining sf. I've seen a list of horror films that contained Spielberg's Jaws for example. Really? I'm an Australian so great white sharks chomping on unwary swimmers is a definite summer scare for me, though I doubt someone in Scotland would see it the same way. And yet it does contain all of the elements that go along with the genre, especially that of the unseen monster striking at random terrorising the local population. It's the "unseen" part that probably drags it inside the tent. Similarly, *Alien* is a horror movie but *Aliens* is not. We've seen the alien in the first movie, it's now come out of the cupboard, or in this case the spaceship escape pod, and we know what it looks like. Having a bunch of xenomorphs attacking a human base on an exo-planet makes it more of an alien sf invasion film rather than strictly horror.

In 2025 I watched three horror movies I'd rate as excellent and one that I would give an honorable mention to, as it just missed the podium. That film, *28 Years Later*, had Danny Boyle and Alex Garland returning to their zombie franchise, almost 28 years after they had Cillian Murphy waking from a coma, *Day of the Triffids* style in *28 Days Later*, to find the world overrun with zombies. And who doesn't love a good zombie movie. Sure there is a bit of gore here but Boyle doesn't fetishise it. It just forms part of the culinary exercise. Where this film falls down a little, certainly from position three to four, is the way the human story develops rather than what the zombies get up to. They are great.



Halfway through the film *Weapons* you could be excused for wondering why I might want to include this on any horror list. It just seems to be a mystery without any horror elements. But then things change and it should become very evident indeed why it fits in this piece. We're in Stephen King or even Steven Spielberg territory here in a smallish town(more like a small city to me) in middle America. One night a host of children wake up, walk out of their houses and run off down their streets, never to be seen again. The next morning a teacher arrives at her class to find only one student in attendance, all of the others are missing. Why this class? Why this teacher? Why not this kid? Everyone wants to know, and everyone is baffled, including the teacher. That is, until a month or so after the disappearance, when she is attacked in the street and it all starts to become clear that this is a horror movie after all.

Horror movies are often read as metaphors for what's going on in society when they are made: think vampire films and the AIDS epidemic, Boyle's zombie film and the Covid pandemic. Weapons has been read as a commentary on school shootings in the US and it would be quite reasonable to read it that way, though you would be wrong to just restrict it to that. As an Australian I didn't pick that up while I was watching the film. We don't have such school shootings in this country. In fact, until earlier this month, we hadn't had a mass shooting of any kind in my country for almost 30 years. That can make a huge difference in the way you view a particular film. It doesn't matter with this film so much.

The basic concept of missing children, howsoever they go missing, is universal enough to have a major impact. There are a few problems with this film that I won't go into here but I do think it shows that you can make a movie that slowly builds the tension, and the suspense, without having to resort to splatter techniques to get your point across.

[This film is currently streaming on HBO Max.]

Frankenstein, the new version by Guillermo del Toro, is an attempt to make a faithful adaptation of the original novel by Mary Shelley. So of course it is a horror movie, it couldn't really be anything else. I can't tell you how faithful it is to Shelley's novel as it's been years since I read the original. And, frankly, it just doesn't matter. This is a movie, not a novel, the two are different art forms and should be treated as such. As usual with a del Toro film, the sets are great, the acting is top level, and you have to give a special shout-out to the casting director for doing such a great job picking the leads: Oscar Isaac as Frankenstein the human monster, and Australian Jacob Elordi as the created one, are standouts.

The question this film raises for me is: are horror movies only scary if you don't know what is going to happen? I wouldn't want to see a list of all the many film versions of this story have been made to date. It doesn't matter. What is important is that I do know how the story will pan out and that tends to diminish the overall effect for me. Not as a film, because I do rate it highly, rather the horror aspect of it. Elordi's monster is clean and appears almost as if he's made of plastic and actually reminded me somewhat of the Engineer creatures from Ridley Scott's *Prometheus* (2012). But scary? No, not really.

[This film is currently streaming on Netflix.]

And finally, and best of all, we get to *Sinners*, the best horror movie of the year, and also one of the best films of any genre of the year. I was grateful for it as we really couldn't have any year of horror cinema without some sort of decent vampire film in the mix. Again it doesn't start out as a horror film, though it certainly gets there in the end, it just takes a while. It doesn't really take a turn to the bloody side of life until the juke joint being built by twin brothers Smoke and Stack Moore (both by played by Michael B. Jordan) opens and provides a stage for the ethereal blues guitar playing of the brothers' cousin Sammie, who is clearly based on the real-life Robert Johnson, who supposedly sold his soul to the devil for musical prowess and success. Sammie's guitar work seems to call to the undead, here represented by an Irish vampire who has a number of followers who he has "converted" over the previous few days. Carnage ensues, as it should.

This is an interesting take on the vampire myth, incorporating genre conventions – the vampires can't enter the juke joint unless expressly invited – but setting it in a rather new an interesting locale, the American South. Maybe the "black-white divide" in the real world is represented here by the "dead-undead divide". Or maybe I'm just pushing metaphors way too far. It is certainly a film that will require a second or third viewing.

[This film is currently streaming on HBO Max.]

Stephen King once said: "We make up horrors to help us cope with the real ones." Frankly, I much prefer the horrors I see on the cinema screen to the ones I see beamed into my television. They are just too much to handle. Give me a vampire or a zombie any day.

Radio Winston

TWENTIES

BY RICH COAD

"So," says the record collector, "what is the best decade for music where by music we mean the popular music heard in America?"

Sleepy-headed boomer elders raise their heads enough to mutter and mumble "The sixties!" Ah yes, the fabled golden era that brought the British Invasion, psychedelia, sweet soul music, yacht rock, and pompous prog.

Slightly younger boomers might claim the 70s. Disco, punk, funk, the beginnings of rap.

And members of Generation X might call the eighties, that era of one-hit wonders and MTV, asserting that Billy Idol was so good their entire cohort was named for his original band.

Rog Peyton, if he were around, would undoubtedly assert that the 1950s were the absolute pinnacle of music and that everything has got downhill since 1958. While Curt Phillips might give the nod to the 1940s as he recalls his former radio show playing big band swing.

So it's sort of an unanswerable question since for the most part, for most people, the best era for music is the period from their mid-teens to their mid-twenties. Tastes get developed and, too frequently, ossified then. It's understandable, after the mid-twenties other matters tend to take up time that was once obsessively devoted to the nuances and changes of popular music.

I, however, assert that there IS a best decade for popular music: the twenties. And, in the way much of what we refer to as the sixties started around 1966 and continued at least until the Carter administration, here I define these twenties as the period between 1927 and 1937.

Actually I should go back two years to 1925 when Western Electric introduced an integrated set of microphones, signal amplification, and electromechanical recording which quickly became the new standard for recording music. One big advantage this system had, aside from better fidelity, was that it was transportable. A system could be put in the back of a car and set up in a hotel room or radio studio. Which is exactly what Ralph Peer was doing in Bristol,Tennessee in the summer of 1927. He set up his equipment on the third floor of a hat and glove company - the heat must have been nearly unbearable in these pre-AC days, but he was determined. So a fellow named A.P. Carter came in with his family to sing a bunch of songs that A.P. had "written", mostly by sticking his name on a well known song whenever he had a chance to do so. In all they recorded 6 sides including one called "Single Girl, Married Girl" which still resonates today as it compares the carefree fun of the single life and the babies and responsibilities of married life. A theme that will live on forevermore.

Peer also recorded Jimmy Rodgers, "The Singing Brakeman", at this session but it was in some 1928 recordings that Jimmy Rodgers really hit his stride, singing of drunken rowdiness and waking up "In The Jailhouse Now". He also introduced the yodel to country music which Howlin' Wolf heard on the radio and used as the basis for his signature wolf howl which was then imitated by some young Londoners who still keep touring after 60 years.

One of the great things about this period is, as with psychedelia and punk rock, nobody in the record industry had a clue what would be popular and what wouldn't. so they recorded everyone at least once, and if they sold, recorded them some more. So a fellow like Dock Boggs, a white guy with a banjo, could record songs like "Country Blues" that were every bit as bluesy as anything anybody else was singing at the time.

And DeFord Bailey, a harmonica master, could be the first musician on the Grand Ole Opry, as at that time it hadn't been decided that country music was for white folks.

By 1927 there had been jazz records coming out for a decade. But new names that were to become true icons of American music were emerging. Louis Armstrong with his Hot Fives and Hot Sevens. Jelly Roll Morton leaving the bawdy houses of Storyville. And Cab Calloway definitely singing about sex and drugs, but they didn't yet have rock & roll. Cab Calloway formed a great partnership with the Fleisher brothers who used their rotoscoping technique to create cartoon versions of Calloway singing and strutting across a graveyard as a ghost.

In the early 20s much of what was called blues was, essentially, a jazz combo fronted by a woman singer with a powerful voice. Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, Victoria Spivey - all produced some great music but times, with the new electrical recording techniques, were changing. Now it was possible to record a stunning guitar picker like Blind Blake and have the details available to the listener. A furniture factory in Wisconsin first started building Victrola cabinets and gradually moved first into distributing records for Black Swan and Black Patti then starting their own record company called Paramount Records. Paramount would record anything. Badly. Their records are well known for poor sound quality but so often the performer is able to overcome the technical limitations. Charley Patton made some recordings for Paramount at a field office in Indiana which remain stunning to this day. If you think Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion get down and dirty on "WAP", take a listen to "Shave 'Em Dry" or many other of Lucille Bogan's records.

Paramount became a sought after label for record collectors during the 60s folk revival and has remained so. Rumors that thousands of records had been dumped into the Milwaukee River when Paramount's parent company, the furniture company, went belly up caused the author of "Do Not Sell At Any Price" (a great book about record collecting) to learn how to scuba dive so she could grub around in the muddy river bottom. She didn't find any records.

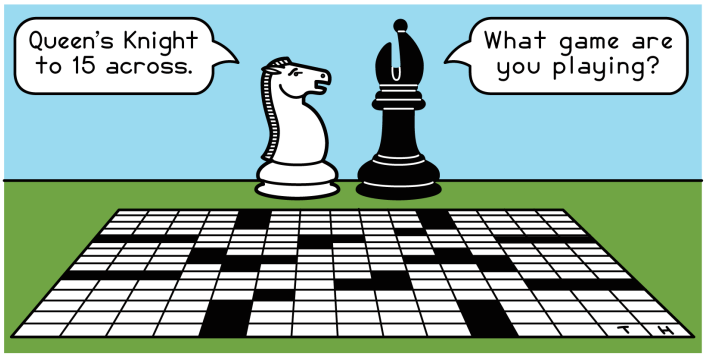
The 60s blues rock groups covered a lot of material originally from the 20s, often crediting the writer as "Traditional". Actually, though, "I'm So Glad", covered by Cream, was originally a Skip James song. Led Zeppelin did a loud and ponderous version of Memphis Minnie's "When The Levee Breaks". And The Rolling Stones covered Robert Johnson's 1937 record. "Love In Vain". That session, in Dallas, is my cutoff point for this essay. It's not entirely arbitrary. The Depression had already reduced the number of records being produced. Paramount had gone bust back in 1932. And coming up were the wartime restrictions on use of shellac. By the end of the war the types of music the audiences

wanted had shifted to jump blues and western swing and what could arguably be called rock & roll, although the term was several years away from being widely used. Much of this great music from the 20s and 30s might have disappeared except for the work of some fanatical collectors who, eventually, created their own record companies to reissue these recordings they loved so much. Two in particular I will mention are the Document and Yazoo labels. Document is more archival, given to releasing everything that can be found for a given artist. Yazoo tends to be more idiosyncratic in the way they put their collections together, reflecting an editorial point of view. That, and they often have superb cover art by Robert Crumb. If you're browsing a used record shop and see anything on either of these labels it's likely to be a worthwhile purchase.

Reading is no match for listening so I've put together a small playlist on YouTube which I hope you enjoy.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iJs0unmO5V8&list=PLXhW9hbrJdMu0rjrCkPsyAfMutnMcVbuX

Give us a Clue



Lastish:

All the clues (as stated) pointed to actors from 'The Thursday Murder Club' and were thus eminently guessable, but as I mentioned to **Eli Cohen**, intended more as an exercise in determining the wordplay:

"Looks like one bloke that is a fine actress (5)"
Definition: "a fine actress"
Wordplay: "Looks like one" = I + "bloke" = MR + "that is" = IE, yielding IMRIE

"Actor's grandma in temporary accommodation (7)"
Definition: "Actor"
Wordplay: "grandma" = NAN, inserted in "temporary accommodation" = TENT, yielding TENNANT

"Monarch's magical line playing professor (8)"
Definition: "playing professor"
Wordplay: "Monarch's" = KINGS + "magical line" = LEY yielding KINGSLEY

Eli is first in [falls off chair], 3/3 and correctly deducing the wordplay, saying "This set wasn't too bad, just picking from a short list of potential answers (the cast names) and working backwards".

"Clueless" **Alan Rosenthal** is not far behind with his usual 100%. "These were quite easy", he observes.

David Langford gets bragging rights elsewhere, in a coda to his Xmas card: "Forgot to include this link to a skiffy-related crossword analysis, where I was a little bit smug that the Official Explicator had missed stuff seen by lowly Langford: https://www.fifteensquared.net/2025/12/02/inquisitor-1935-your-move-by-ploy/

Thish's themed clues: "Near misses"

"Theme Cretan adjusts for a bad boy (9)"

"Game in which the theme would count for something (10)"

"State fitting the theme (7)"

Digging for Victory

BY JOSEPH NICHOLAS

Had I been asked twenty-nine years ago whether I would ever take up gardening, I would have responded with a look of incredulity. At that point, the closest I'd come to growing anything was to acquire a couple of houseplants. But then we bought our house -- completing the purchase on my fortieth birthday, thus making it the most expensive birthday present I've ever had or ever will have -- and the massively overgrown, rubbish-strewn three metres by ten metres back garden that came with it. By default, therefore, I became a gardener.

To an extent. Judith, despite coming from a different hemisphere with a different flora, climate, soil type and general environment, took charge of the growing, deciding what to plant when and where, while I took on the heavy lifting: digging over, putting in bed edging, putting up netting, laying paths, digging the pond and (once we had a lawn to speak of) cutting the grass. And thus things jogged along for the next twenty years, each of us contributing to the whole in our different ways, with the slight change that after I'd retired in early 2014 I decided to try growing a few things myself. Judith liked tomatoes, and grew various heritage varieties; I found myself attracted to peppers and chillies, and started growing a selection of those. (Not always successfully; like anything new, it was a learning curve, with several failures along the way.)

Then Judith was diagnosed with breast cancer in August 2020, and gardening took a decided back seat. The shock and grief which followed her death in September 2021 meant no gardening at all -- and no interest in the garden -- for the next few months. But in the spring of 2022 I began to take

stock, and to think of what I could do to keep it going in her name and her memory.

Photo: Back garden before pic (December 1993)

Judith preferred to put plants in big statement pots rather than place them directly in the ground, arguing that pots were movable and could be shifted around from time to time to give the garden a different look. In practice, however, once put in place the pots stayed where they were, being generally too heavy to relocate. Additionally, by 2022 some of the plants were well past their best, and needed removing and composting. That left me with not only empty pots, but empty spaces where they'd been. I began to think about what I could plant directly in the ground, to partly reshape the space. I put a hydrangea and a goldflame in the "awkward spot" in the southeast corner, which never gets any direct sun but which suited them. Fritillary and fritillaria bulbs were planted in various spots where creeping violets had been allowed to take over (and were raked out to be composted). Bulbs for tall, imposing alliums went in along the shady fence. And, quite suddenly and unexpectedly, I discovered a liking for hellebores, described by Monty Don of the BBC's Gardeners' World as "the most impressive plants of February and March, with none of the coyness or delicacy that so many spring flowers seem to possess". What I was doing, I later realised (much later!), was putting in hardy perennials, meaning that I didn't have to come back year after year with new planting. If something I planted thrived, all well and good. If it didn't, I'd look for a replacement. (It's still a lot less faff and expense than dealing with annuals.)

My moving away from Judith's practice of planting in pots and planting directly into the ground is an obvious change. Less immediately obvious, but paradoxically much clearer once a longer view is taken, looking back over the past thirty-two years, is the impact of anthropogenic global warming.

The climate in London and the southeast of England used to be fairly predictable: cold dry winters -- the heat island effect discovered by namer-of-the-clouds (and sometime resident of Tottenham) Luke Howard in the 1810s means that London rarely sees any snowfall -- and warm wet summers. But that's been changing. Drought is more frequent: longer and more intense, and occurring at any point in the year (not just summer -- we've had winter droughts as well -- although this summer I had to water everything at least every other day to keep the plants alive). Rain, when it arrives, is no longer the drizzle and light showers of yore (a "thin, indistinct wibble" as Judith described it) but often prolonged and heavy (so heavy that one day in the summer of 2024 it broke the stems of my planted-only-a-few-weeks-before delphiniums). Autumns now are longer and warmer (into late October this year, I was still legging about in my trademark tiny shorts when, ten or fifteen years ago, I'd have rugged up against the chill). Additionally, we now have something we've never had before: Atlantic storms so strong and violent that they have been given their own names, generated by a coalition of European meteorological offices "for storms expected to cause medium or high impacts due to strong winds, rain, or snow, using an alphabetical list from public suggestions". (Storm Bram was breaking across southwest England in early December 2025 as I wrote this.) They rarely affect London, although a couple of years ago a tree in our road was toppled by one.

Photo: Back garden April 2025

I've talked only of the back garden. There's a front garden as well, but it's much smaller: three metres wide but only a metre-and-a-half deep. It had a couple of tired roses when we moved in; they straggled along for a few more years, but eventually went. We planted a rosemary and a honeysuckle, and put in trellising so that the latter could climb up part of the front wall; but this spring it started dying so had to be taken down. I bought a small Japanese acer to fill an empty corner, which has since trebled in size and will need careful pruning to keep it in check. The biggest thing in the front garden, however, is a magnolia stellata, a tree which Judith

put in to help shade the downstairs of the house in the summer -- because the house is oriented east-west, in high summer the sun used to shine directly into the living area, making it both too hot and too bright. The tree cured that -- with the unfortunate side-effect, some years later, of plunging the living area into stygian gloom when in full leaf. Annual pruning in early spring is therefore required.

I haven't mentioned the allotment. Next time -- if there is a next time! -- I'll write about that.

The Old Sod

BY DAVID HODSON

It might seem a little crass to write about my current adventures in the NHS when Nic and Jen have just gone through the surgical experiences they have, but this is as much for my own benefit as composing a column a couple of days before New Year. I find writing about things helps to clarify the train of events just in case I need to draft ANOTHER complaint, plus some of this stuff can be traumatic, so I use a variation on the Bukowski adage about writing – "Unless it comes unasked out of your heart and your mind and your mouth and your gut, don't do it." – to purge some of that trauma.

I should also add that I don't complain about the NHS as much as it may seem from some of the columns I write, but I was given some advice by an advocate at Age UK Enfield about dealing with G.P.'s surgeries and hospitals that has stood me in good stead ever since I received it: when you don't get the outcome you want, write a physical letter - not an email - and hand deliver it to the surgery or reception of the relevant department at the hospital you're dealing with with "delivered by hand" printed just below the address and date in the letter and clearly written in **BIG RED** letters on the envelope. Medical admins hate having to scan, file, highlight, forward, copy, or generally "deal" with physical letters, so everything physical goes to the top of the pile in the hopes that quick action will make it, and its author, just go the fuck away.

As those of you that have met me in the last few years know, I'm carrying a bit of extra weight. I'm currently around 130kilos, so I'm probably carrying about 30-40kilos of extra weight. I'm also a type 2 diabetic. Both of these issues, along with about half-a-dozen others I have, started after my bout of sepsis, which is why I'm an advocate for the Sepsis Trust in the UK and an admittedly part-time campaigner for the recognition of post-sepsis syndrome, which, like long covid, is dismissed by many in both government and medical circles. The reason both syndromes are frequently dismissed, despite much evidence to support their existence, is because they both inflict cocktails of complex but largely invisible afflictions on their sufferers and that, in the UK, frightens the life out of the Department of Work and Pensions and the ministers that ostensibly control the benefits system. I say ostensibly because, in a classic example of how the UK benefits system can fail to work, if a person is diagnosed with a terminal illness with an expectation of six months or less to live, they can qualify for automatic benefits payments, but, should that person live for six months and one day, they may have to repay all the benefits they have received, be reassessed, and then have an adjustment payment made at some point months later after the re-assessment, all whilst the recipient is jumping through the various hoops of the NHS to get another estimate of their remaining time (I'm betting quite a few of you have spotted the obvious flaw in this system already). You'll notice there's an awful lot of cans, mays, and shoulds in that sentence; there's an awful of obfuscation in the UK benefits system.

THE UK SEPSIS TRUST

I also have arthritis in my lower back; a result of working in book warehouses in the 1980s, when manual handling was frowned upon as black magic, and then deciding to do a stupid thing like becoming an archaeologist whilst already having a bad back. As anyone who saw me hobbling around Novacon with a walking stick back in 2022 will know, my back "goes" every eight to ten months, which in turn lays me up for a week or so. The back problem is exacerbated by the extra 30-40kilos I carry around.

So, the result of all this diabetes, bad back, and being overweight kerfuffle was me googling the circumstances under which I could be prescribed Mounjaro, or Wegovy (which always makes me think of a dodgy Chinese search engine or web browser), or Ozempic, on the NHS, and then making an appointment with the G.P. to make an argument for swapping one of my diabetes medications for whichever GLP-1 jab they could put me on. I also wanted to get this started now because I wanted to make sure I was in the queue when the jabs are replaced by the tablet form which has just been passed by the FDA in the U.S., at least for Wegovy, and therefore should also be approved by NICE (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence) in the UK.

The appointment with the G.P. was, as seems universal these days, a telephone appointment and I thought it was actually quite productive. We spoke about the diabetes, and the bad back, and even a few other things that I was going to leave until the next appointment (I have a checklist of things to knock off, one-by-one). The G.P. agreed that I met the criteria for Mounjaro, the GLP-1 jab available in the local health area that covers my surgery, and arranged for the surgery

pharmacist to contact me to discuss how to introduce it to my medication regime.

"Hoorah!" I hear you all cheer…

Hold on a second…

The pharmacist rang me two days later completely out of the blue, but, fortunately, I wasn't involved in anything important or public, so we began our conversation:

"I've received an email from Dr. G----- asking me to talk to you about your diabetes medication."

"Yes, that's part of the issue, but also…"

And I detailed all of the above…

"Oh, I can't deal with that, I can only deal with your diabetes medication."

"But GLP-1s are diabetes medication."

"But you want it primarily for weight loss."

"No, I want it for weight loss and diabetes management because I've also been told by Dr. G----- that one of the medications I take becomes less effective over time and it's about time my medication regime was reviewed."

"But I can't change your medication because your blood sugar looks like it's being managed quite well."

"You mean that last blood test that showed me on the wrong side outside of the optimal range was my blood sugar being well managed? And what do you mean you can't change any of my medication? Why are you calling me if you can't review and change my medication?"

It was at this point the pharmacist informed me that she'd discontinue the telephone call if I continued to be rude.

Sigh!

At this point, I discontinued the telephone call because a) I was getting tired of the circular argument we'd become involved in and b) there was a danger that I WOULD become very, very rude.

It took me three days to write the letter of complaint to the Practice Manager (physical CC to Dr. G-----) with the "delivered by hand" printed just below the address and date in the letter and clearly written in **BIG RED** letters on the envelope subliminally coded message that I was severely fucked off included. I also employed a tactic used by my mundane friend Richard, who was a mid-level executive with British Petroleum until he retired at age 51 (he's now 85 and has been receiving his company pension for longer than he actually worked for them, which was always his aim): "In the first paragraph, tell what you are going to tell them. In the second paragraph, tell them. In the third and final paragraph, tell them what you told them and sign off."

On December 22nd, I received another telephone call from a different pharmacist from, seemingly, a completely different G.P. surgery, again completely unannounced previously, but, again, fortunately not coinciding with me doing anything that might actually be important, like, I dunno, getting shitfaced over a pub meal with friends, which I would be doing shortly after the phone call finished ("It's Christmas!" to quote Noddy Holder).

(Fuck me, it's now 2026 in New Zealand according to the BBC News.)

The upshot is, in one hour and forty minutes time, I will be in a hospital consulting room seeing a practice nurse from my G.P. surgery to be shown how to stab myself in the stomach with a GLP-1 pen.

So, the next time you all see me in the flesh (a terrible fate, I know), will I still be the fat bastard I've been since my full-time return to fandom, or will I be the emaciated "heroin chic" drunkard I was when many first encountered me in the 1980s? (Just for information's sake, I have never, ever taken heroin, I really don't like needles, and I had the cautionary tale of my friendship with ex-addict Gamma at Forbidden Planet and Titan to put me off any lingering temptation to play with heroin.)

I just want my back to stop hurting.

===

Okay, I've seen the practice nurse, jabbed myself in the stomach for the first time, and am now reading through the paperwork that comes with the jabby, pen thing with the medication inside.

Supposedly, I should notice some changes within 12-24 hours and in the first few weeks, most people lose about 4% of their starting body weight due to changes in the amount of fluid the body retains. I shall have to investigate any fluid retention changes at the Bishop's Finger next week, when the fluids come in nice, consistent pint measures and I can count how many trips to the toilet I make compared to usual.

I sent my friend Richard a text to tell him I'd had my appointment with the practice nurse. His return text told me to google "Ozempic penis". The mind boggles…

I'm emailing this over to Nic at 15.00 hours on Wednesday December 31st London time. I wish everyone a happy and healthy 2026. I look forward to seeing those of you that I encounter in the New Year and I'm sorry I won't be in California for Corflu. Maybe a few of you will visit us in Europe in the course of the year; I'll be at Eastercon in Birmingham, Norncon in Belfast in early May, Metropolcon in Berlin in July, and Novacon in, doh, November. I'm even trying to make the budget stretch to Satellite in Glasgow, although I may have to find a buyer for a slightly damaged kidney for that one.

Loco Citato

[["Admit it. You aren't like them. You're not even close. ... Find the others" (Timothy Leary) …]]

From: robjackson60@gmail.com

December 1

Rob Jackson writes:

Re rude place names: I am a bit surprised that more people haven't noticed a village south-west of Faringdon (between Oxford and Swindon) called Great Coxwell. Maybe it's a bit subtle for them – it is necessary to divide the word up, which is a cruciverbalist's way of thinking.

Over on the other side of the A420 between Oxford and Swindon is its opposite number, Little Coxwell. Surely this can't have anything to do with the rumours about your beloved President…

[[I immediately saw a homophone and a near homophone: "Big cocks swell, and little cocks as well"…]]

Also to do with anatomical appendages but not as rude, I was puzzled by the anatomy of the squirrel assembly kit Brad Foster drew for us. He didn't give it a tail. It must be a Manx squirrel.

***

From: gandc001@bigpond.com

December 2

Bruce Gillespie writes:

Thanks for the stray bits of egoboo, Nic and **Leigh** and **Mark**.

The weirdest thing about my recent run of bad health news (it's called 'polymyalgia') is that in the process of taking many pills to get rid of intense pain in my shoulders, knees and hips in September, not only did I lose much of my appetite (I lost 22 lb in a few weeks) but also my body went off coffee. And that's after more than 50 years of at least 7 cups of coffee per day. I could not have done that by will power. So now I drink water most of the time -- very boring but very healthy -- with an occasional cup of hot or iced chocolate when going out for dinner. Not that we've done much of that recently. I've found cataract surgery not to be a walk in the park. I say that about the surgery on my right eye. Left eye surgery is currently scheduled for 11 December. I'm still finding it hard to read, but have listened to a lot of music in the last week.

[[Same day as my surgery - let's hope we're both enjoying good outcomes right now…]]

The bad news is that most of my weight has returned -- but isn't that always the case?

Best wishes for whatever Orrible Procedures you have to undertake in the near future.

I'm having lunch with **Leigh Edmonds**, **David Grigg**, and **Carey Handfield** tomorrow out here in Greensborough. I hope **Leigh** remembers to take a photo this time. I first met **Leigh** in 1968, and **Carey** and **David** in 1969. Nothing is more cheerful than meetings of the Truly Ancient of Melbourne Fandom. **Perry Middlemiss**, **Julian Warner**, and **Irwin Hirsh**, for instance, seem mere stripling youths by comparison. But such youthfulness enables **Perry** to go climbing mountains in South America. That's something I will never do.

[[Me neither. Nor the nearby ones…]]

***

From: wombat.socho@gmail.com

December 3

Kevin Trainor writes:

Hope the missus is doing well after the hip surgery. I had half a mind to invite you both out to dinner when I'm down in Las Vegas next month for a VA appointment, but since your surgery will be that week, this sounds like a Bad Plan. Maybe some other time; I get down that way roughly every other month for medical and other stuff, so it's not like there's a shortage of opportunities, *kayn aynhoreh*.

[[Lovely thought, thanks! We'll see how we're getting on by then…]]

I finally did get around to launching a perszine and regret failing to include you in the initial mailing. Hopefully it's not too boring or repetitive.

[[See 'Fanzines Received'. Have you submitted the ish to efanzines?…]]

***

From: jabberwocky2000@hotmail.com

December 4

Brad Foster writes:

Nice to see "Configurable Squirrels" toon in the fanzine where it was born!

Looks like you still have two unused on hand, so will attach one more new one to keep your file full.

We only just recently caught up with seeing the new Superman, Fantastic Four, and Spinal Tap movies, so we are only a year or so behind everyone else. Not wanting to pay for any streaming services, and Cindy's nervousness now at crowded events, it takes us a while to wait for the movies to come to us. On the other hand, that does open up a lot of time for me to tell people on Facebook who are wrong about things that they are, indeed, wrong about things. So that's a plus.

Wrapping up the fall season of events, Seven over the last three months, with five of those crammed together every weekend for over a month. Fun mix though-- Two comic related conventions, two science fiction focused conventions, two arts festivals, and one art/craft event to wrap it all up. Mix of financial results from a sales loss at one of the shows, to record-breaking sales at another, but all were fun, if exhausting. Looking forward to a couple of months of not having to prepare for an event and try to get some artwork done again.

[[Nice that you're staying busy (and ideally raking some dosh in)…]]

Speaking of which, I try to post pics of new things as they happen on my Facebook page now and then. But if anyone wants to see a bit more Foster scribbling from over the years, including things for projects they probably never did see originally, I have set up a Bluesky account where I post a new picture every day or so. There are just over 200 images there so far. Link to my page (I think) for anyone there who might care to follow it: https://bsky.app/profile/bradwfoster.bsky.social

You note a proliferation of Medicare plan calls spamming your phone. We do not get so many of those, but it is pretty constant with the calls, emails, and letters asking about buying our house - both this one we only just moved to five years ago, as well as still asking us about selling that old one we no longer own. I might just start answering them now and then, and letting them know that, yes, we -are- thinking of selling, would two million dollars work for them?

[[We look at houses for sale here in the valley, much more in blind hope than in expectation. Prices are coming down a bit, but (DoBFO) nothing we can afford as we watch the general funds dwindle…]]

***

From: excellenceingardening@gmail.com

December 4

Joseph Nicholas writes:

Many thanks for the last few issues of *This Here…*

I was particularly taken (as a fellow aviation nerd) by Wing Commander **Edmonds**' comparison, in *This Here…* 93, of certain British fans to various classic aircraft types. But -- oh dear! -- you have not associated the correct mark of Handley Page Halifax with **Mark Plummer**! Group Captain **Edmonds** may already have ticked you off for this, but instead of "the big, beautiful and powerful Mk III with the Hercules engines", your illustration depicts "the less inspirational Mk I with the bulging nose turret, Merlin engines and effete tail fins". I can even tell where you got the illustration, thanks to an internet image search: it's from the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (their image has the same squadron code, MP-L, on the fuselage). Had you checked Wikipedia instead, you would have selected the correct Mk, as described in Air Vice Marshal **Edmonds**' text.

So smacked botty for you, and take one hundred lines: "I must pay more attention to aviation nerds".

[[I have yet, as at the time of receiving your loc, to have been upbraided by the Wingco of increasing rank, but I've no doubt I shall. Apologies to all for the cockup, the sort of thing that happens when I shuffle beyond the usual traingeekery within. I can, however, confirm that* Mark *does not have "effete tail fins" or indeed a "bulging nose turret"…]]

One thing I've heard about the Halifax, although I've been unable to run down a source for this and it may therefore be apocryphal, is that bomber crews preferred it to the now more iconic Avro Lancaster because the interior was somewhat roomier and it was therefore easier to get out of in a hurry (such as when being shot down over the Ruhr by a Heinkel He 219 nightfighter).

Changing the subject, I know that I've previously remarked that compared to the amount of television you and **Gary Mattingly** consume I'm a mere dilettante, but at this particular hemispheric conjuncture (the end of 2025) I seem to have a number of documentaries and dramas stacked up to stream via the BBC's iPlayer and Channel Four's All4 -- stuff that I either missed when it was first broadcast because I was elsewhere, or because it was screened directly opposite something else that commanded greater attention. I'll spare you the full list, but it includes *The Night Manager* from early 2016, resurrected for BBC streaming because a second series is due next month -- a series which will obviously have been invented out of whole cloth because the original was based on a stand-alone John le Carré novel for which he never wrote a sequel. Why anyone should bother to do this is beyond me. (I could of course just ignore both if time proves to be too short!)

[[I'm starting to think that I probably spend too much time in front of the goggle box, often from mid-late afternoon until bedtime. But then I don't have an allotment…]]

What also appears very often on commercial television -- which I find really irritating -- is the broadcast of the first episode of a foreign language drama series the subsequent episodes of which are then made available only on their associated streaming services. The moral of this, perhaps, is don't get hooked on the first episode -- although I just can't be arsed to watch a drama series which begins thusly; there's other stuff on broadcast television, only so many hours in the day, and too much else to do anyway. (I saw the first two episodes of the first series of *Star Trek: Strange New Worlds* when they were broadcast back-to-back on ITV a couple of months ago, but as all the rest disappeared to streaming I then ignored it. But I was never a strong *Star Trek* fan anyway -- I saw all the films on their cinema release, but couldn't be bothered with the television sequels: *Next Generation*, *Deep Space Nine*, *Voyager* et al.)

[[Fair enough really re: 'Star Trek', although we've enjoyed them all. What gives me the major arse is the dirty trick on streaming services here of the first episode of eg 'The Agency' and 'The Ipcress File' to note a couple of recent-ish examples being free (with your subscription), but the rest have to paid extra for. I've also noted that stuff I like to rewatch (and quite a bit else) <u>also</u> requires extra dosh to clock eg 'UFO' and seasons 6 and 7 of the 'Mission: Impossible tv series…]]

Reading of your and others' health problems, I thank my lucky stars (wherever in the galaxy they may be located) that -- apart from growing one day older a day at a time -- I seem to be in pretty good nick. I had my free health check-up this summer, which the NHS offers to everyone over 70 years of age, but the only identified problem was an imbalance in my blood cholesterol levels: too much of the bad, not enough of the good. The nurse running the check-up suggested that I see my GP about getting a prescription for statins to correct the imbalance, but bugger that: I absolutely do not wish to be taking a pill every day for the rest of my life, when it is something that can be corrected by dietary means. (Although since I've been following a Mediterranean diet for nearly forty years -- i.e. since Judith entered my life -- I'm unsure how such a cholesterol imbalance could have arisen anyway. I rarely consume red meat; I eat white meats such as chicken and pork, plus oily fish and other seafoods; I eat lots of fruit and vegetables (most of the latter grown by myself); I avoid cakes, biscuits and processed foods in general; how can I be other than the most heroic hero of dietary heroes?)

[[I haven't knowingly eaten red meat since 1977, and was a total non-meat eater from '77 to '94, although I did put seafood back into the diet quite early on, in no small part because I <u>really</u> missed a nice prawn vindaloo. Given my lifelong catalogue of appalling habits (which, however, never really included what's cutely referred to as "street drugs"), I'm actually not doing <u>too</u> bad for almost 68…]]

Your mention of the Angus Young quote about AC/DC that he was "sick to death of people saying we've made 11 albums that sound exactly the same" when "we've made <u>12</u> albums that sound exactly the same" reminds me of the response The Ramones offered when asked if their playing had improved over the years: "We used to get through our live set in 44 minutes, but now we manage it in 42" *Respect!*

[[I remember seeing them in the late 70s at a London gig, and rather disappointedly concluded that I could have just stayed at my digs and played the album at 78rpm…]]

***

From: jakaufman@aol.com

December 7

Jerry Kaufman writes:

I'm glad that someone I know has been to see the Patti Smith Group's current tour playing *Horses.* That's **Mark Plummer** reporting in your letter column that he and **Claire Brialey** saw them perform a couple of months ago (a couple of weeks, when he wrote his letter).

I discovered Smith's work back in 1975 or so, and her songs and stage presence inspired a mad passion for the music, a star-struck crush, and just enough nerve to approach Lenny Kaye after performances (though never Patti herself). I saw them at least five times from 1975 to 1977, and a few more times over the years after moving to Seattle. (Lenny accepted an invitation to an apartment warming party when **Joe Siclari** and I set up housekeeping together in upper Manhattan.)

The group had a good number of original songs and covers, so many that *Horses* hardly included them all. Some showed up on their second and third LPs, *Radio Ethiopia* and *Easter.* I may be the only Patti Smith fan whose favorite album is *Radio Ethiopia*: I think the first side is the most danceable (despite not including "Dancing Barefoot") and side two is the group's wildest and most mystical slice with its chugging oceanic rhythm and Patti's speaking in tongues.

***

From: eli.cohen@mindspring.com

December 7

Eli Cohen writes:

'TV Guide': 'The Bletchley Circle' — I remember watching this and liking it, though I don't think I ever saw the San Francisco sequel. But I've been interested in cryptography ever since I was a munitions maker back in the 1990's. Er, perhaps I should explain: I was working (as a computer consultant) on a security system for a bank, which involved

RSA encryption, Diffie-Hellman key exchange, authentication protocols, and other cryptography-related stuff. Back then, the Munitions Act (Arms Export Control Act) classified strong encryption software as munitions in the U.S., treating it like weapons (guns, bombs) and restricting its export to protect national security. In fact, since the bank had branches and data centers in London and Hong Kong, our project manager actually had to visit the N.S.A. and explain our system to them, to get permission for the software to be used overseas. So I think that made me, per the Act, a munitions maker...

'Indulge Me': What? Only 14 Medicare calls a day? I think we usually get that many before noon! (At least during open enrollment season, which ends today -- I assume they're mostly pushing Medicare Advantage plans.) I usually answer, hoping that they'll put me on their do-not-call list after I lie and say I'm not on Medicare (when I don't ask the robot to open the pod bay doors, which, sadly, never produces a clever response; lazy programmers… But I think I've gone on about this before).

Well, good luck with your surgery!

One last bad science joke (for this year, at least):

Two atoms were walking down the street.
One turns to the other and says,
"Oh, no! I think I lost an electron!"
The other responds, "Are you sure?!?"
"Yes, I'm positive!"

[[Engage the Kaufman stroll NOW, helmsman…]]

***

From: ajrosenthal@gmail.com

December 10

Alan Rosenthal writes:

Regarding double decker passenger trains in Canada, every commuter train in the Toronto region (GO Transit) I've ridden on over the last 20 years has used double decker passenger cars. I think the older cars were all phased out in the 1990s, as I remember those from when I lived in Tronna.

As far as I know, VIA Rail has never used double decker passenger cars on trains in the Windsor - Quebec City corridor.

The service that I wish they would restore is the overnight service between Toronto and Montreal. We would take this train to visit my dad's family when I was a child. We would board fairly early in the evening, although the train actually didn't leave the station until almost midnight. The sleeping compartments were upper and lower berths. We woke up for breakfast early and had to be off the train around 8:00 in the AM if I recall correctly. An enjoyable way to travel, especially in the middle of winter.

[[Lovely!…]]

***

From: michelledh@me.com

December 15

Cuddles writes:

October & November are very busy months for me, mainly for my annual involvement with Poppy Scotland volunteering, and despite a nasty chest infection, I recovered enough to get to Perth and help Farah launch PictCon: a one-day relaxacon themed around Scottish fandom, writers and culture. (Due to a scheduling issue, we clashed with Novacon but our attendance wasn't affected too much. We'll be hosting another PictCon in October 2026.)

With Yuletide fast approaching, I have finally managed to catch up with both recent issues of *This Here.…* In fact, as I write this, I've just seen **Jen**'s Facebook posts about your surgery! Glad everything went well and that you will be going home soon. Also pleased to hear that **Jen**'s surgery is done & dusted too! Ralph has a surgical review in early January regarding his inguinal hernia and I will be getting a GP review of my recent blood pressure monitoring & the scores of blood tests, which I'm getting done tomorrow (16th December). I've just been diagnosed with NonAlcoholic Fatty Liver Disease, which might explain my blood pressure issues, and I'm also waiting on a surgical review for an umbilical hernia. We'll be able to swop scar stories soon (no pictures).

'A-Team' movie (*TH…92*): I remember going to the cinema to see that movie, with some trepidation about the casting because I have fond memories of the TV series. As it turned out, it was a good movie and Liam Neeson was the best of the 'replacements', pulling off Hannibal Smith with remarkable ease. He really should do more comedy. Bradley Cooper was a pale shadow of the original Faceman but since he's gorgeous eye candy, I

wasn't complaining too much! PHWOAR!

Brad Foster's Shampoo Day (page 12, *TH…92*) perfectly illustrates the horrors of long hair. Windy days are worse: you often look like Medusa then later, spend hours untangling all the tangles. Getting a professional hair treatment is bliss!

'The Bletchley Circle' (TV, *TH…93*): I can't believe you haven't seen this before now. I watched it when it first aired and thought it was terrific. The original cast, including the wonderful Julie Graham (have you seen her in Preaching to the Perverted?), really pulled together a strong, well-crafted story. The San Francisco stories weren't as good but had their own unique style that made it watchable.

Banksie in the Mexicon III photo: seeing this, then watching his under the carpet antics at Helicon, courtesy of Roberto Quaglia's video (on Facebook recently), gave me a bit of a heart ache but then I heard some excellent news. His wife, Adele, is re-launching the Dead by Dawn film festival in Edinburgh in 2027. The popular horror festival was cancelled following the pandemic & the venue closing in 2021 but after a very successful funding campaign by staff & supporters, the renovated Edinburgh Filmhouse is back!

Well, that's it from me. Take it easy post surgery and a' ra best for 2026!

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From: necronaut13@gmail.com

December 22

Steve Green writes:

Nice to know that whilst I may not quite rate "dear bruv" in your extended Novacon family (**Martin** put the hours in, no argument), I still come high enough to consider myself equivalent to the distant cousin no one mentions until he escapes from a locked room in the attic. Sadly, logistical and financial restraints have kept me away from Novacon since 2014, and although I might have been able to manage a day visit were it still held in Birmingham, Buxton is way too much of a hike to contemplate these days.

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From: leighedmonds01@gmail.com

December 28

Leigh Edmonds writes:

I should be enjoying a few languid and warm days watching the Boxing Day Test in Melbourne but the pitch and poor batting have decided otherwise. So I have the spare time to get off this short email before it gets too hot to think, it's only going to get to 38C today. (Only joking, it is going to get to 38 but I have air conditioning.)

I only remember the first half or so of the 1960s so I must have been there. Not that there's too much to not remember, I might have gotten more into the drug culture had I not discovered fandom and spent the time that most normal people spent hanging out and doing groovy things, instead I was sitting in my room banging away on my typer, etc. Unlike British fandom with an established tradition of conventions, there were only three in Australia during the 1960s, and all in the latter half, so I don't remember much about them, which might have more to do with senility than substance abuse. There was, however, the whiff of cannabis in the air in 1968 and 1969. Which is all a long way of saying that I don't remember meeting **Dave Hodson** around that time, but on the other hand I can't remember not meeting him either.

That's good news about **Jen**'s operation. I hope the pain has got back within tolerable limits by now. I also hope things are progressing for you though this seems to be the time of year when things seem to slow down to a crawl.

Thanks for the advice to take a nap before starting on Radio Winston but I'm glad that I didn't this time. I really enjoyed it this time, Jimmy Cliff is somebody I've known about for decades but never seriously followed so this little lesson in his life and music was good and informative. Some of the music I liked too, and your collection of examples showed how talented he was over a long life. It's good music but it's not something that I'm going to go out of my way to listen to.

[[Mass chair plummeting ensues…]]

So far as I know the only double decker trains in Australia run in Sydney. I've ridden them on the lines up to Newcastle and down to Wollongong and, or course, up into the Blue Mountains. I particularly like them on those routes because you get a better view from upstairs. Some of the views up into the mountains are spectacular. I guess the people downstairs are the commuters who have seen it all before so don't need the additional scenery. No such luck in the rest of Australia, probably for the reasons of tunnel and line height you mention. Which makes me wonder if the railway engineers in New South Wales knew something the rest of the country didn't know when they made their lines and tunnels taller.

I was struck with recognition on reading **Dave**'s paragraph that began, "I can't claim to have ever enjoyed school but, going on fifty years later …" At the time I found the process of going to school a rather dreary business that I really didn't enjoy. However, looking back on it I realize that the teachers jammed a lot of stuff into my brain that I've just taken for granted as knowledge everyone has. But I keep discovering that I must have been more attentive because I seem to have retained a lot of stuff that others haven't. What stuck in my mind is different to what stuck in **Dave**'s but the way in which teachers pour all this information into us over the

years we spend at school is something I find quite remarkable.

On the front page you mention **Mark P** and the banjo, and don't I recall that he played tuba too? He must be multi-talented though you don't mention how well he plays those and, doubtless, many other instruments. His comments later about the state of the British Railway system reminds me that I heard, somewhere, that the system there is being nationalized again. Can this be true? I checked an AI and it says so, but who trusts that kind of information? It can't be much worse that my limited experience of the British rail system back in April. I would have said the system here was better until yesterday when it took me an hour and a half to travel the short distance from here in Wendouree down to Ballarat and back again. I planned to go down to Melbourne to spend a couple of hours with fannish friends but the train only got as far as Ballarat after which the service was cancelled. I could have kept going but there were so many others also waiting on the platform and I was so cranky that I decided to go home instead, which involved waiting another half hour for a train back to Wendouree. It was only the latest *This Here…* that kept me distracted. Much thanks.

***

From: gsmattingly@yahoo.com

December 29

Gary Mattingly writes:

And I'm back, although just barely before New Years Eve.

'Egotorial'. Hm, I've never gone to Novacon. Relative to remembering when and where I met people, sometimes I remember, sometimes I don't. I met a lot of people through letters and fmz. I met a lot of people who either aren't alive anymore or no longer in fandom. I met quite a few people at various and sundry Minicons and also in the Wayne Third Foundation when I lived in Detroit. I met a number of people in person at Corflus. I don't know that I hold any special significance to the meeting point in time and place. It is what is (well, was?)

[[Maybe it's a UK thing…]]

'TAFFNess Abounds': Eurocon or Eastercon. I haven't gone to either. I really have no idea.

'Faanwank': Hm, only two or three weeks for voting. I'm deadly slow, obviously. Well, we shall see if and/or how I deal with this.

'Health Diary': Sorry to read about your issues and requirements for surgery. Glad to hear **Jen**'s operation went well. On FB, I read that you had your operation, and that, in the end, it was completed well and you are home. That sounds like a good thing. Seems like there were some side issues but nothing stopped the operation in the end. I hope you are both much healthier now and will be in fine health, relatively speaking, for Corflu.

Relative to AI, yeah, they usually try to be overly considerate. I have read that some of the chat AI bots can be pissy now and then, particularly when upgrades/modifications are being made to the software.

'Movie Night': I haven't watched 'Fantastic Four / First Steps' yet. I will eventually. I think I saw 'Jonah Hex' quite a while ago but have no memory of it. I haven't watched 'Playdate'. I have watched a number of movies lately. Saw 'Avatar: Fire and Ash'. The 3D was good. The graphics and scenery were nice. I think the story line lagged in a lot of places. It was all right, IMO.

[[I recall attempting to watch 'Avatar' and doing an* Edmonds *by falling asleep almost immediately, waking up maybe half an hour or more in with no clue what was going on. I haven't attempted a rewatch, nor clocked the sequels…]]

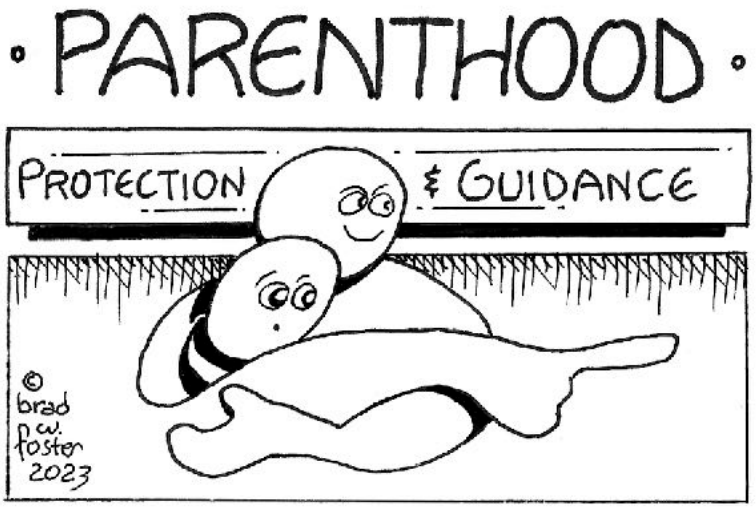
Running backwards relative to what I've watched since last issue of *This Here…*, 'Resurrection' written and directed by Bi Gan, Great visuals but not sure I followed everything. Still enjoyed it. 'Left-Handed Girl' directed by Shih-Ching Tsou. Very good movie. Interesting story and characters, with depth and people actually going through changes. 'The Secret Agent' written and directed by Kleber Mendonça Filho. A film about Brazil, corruption, family and more. Also very good movie with interesting and many-layered characters. Depressing times though. 'One Battle After Another' directed by Paul Thomas Anderson. I enjoyed it but I don't think I liked it as much as most reviewers/critics. Seemed a little shallow. Great car chase. Entertaining action. 'Springsteen: Deliver Me From Nowhere' directed by Scott Cooper. I found it interesting and liked the music. The director was there afterwards for Q&A. An SFFilm event. 'Train Dreams' directed by Clint Bentley. I quite enjoyed this movie. After the movie I even read the novella. I liked the novella more, a little grimier, a little more life-like but still thought the movie was great. Went to a KQED Live event (Tickets through SFFilm for me) - Mina Kim interviewing Jon M Chu, director of 'Wicked', 'Wicked For Good', 'Crazy Rich Asians' and more. I enjoyed it. Lasted just over an hour. Interesting conversation covering his life, other movies, and the more recent 'Wicked'. 'The Last Showgirl' directed by Gia Coppola. It stars Pamela Anderson. I actually liked the performances by Dave Bautista and Jamie Lee Curtis more. I think that takes me back to the last LoC.

'TV Guide': I watched 'Bletchley Circle' in the past and enjoyed it. I can't recall watching 'Bletchley Circle San Francisco'. Maybe I'll go hunting for it. I've been watching various and sundry series, including the final season of 'Stranger Things'. There are several places where the writers have included very long, and (again my opinion) totally

unnecessary expositions. If there were important points they could have been made in maybe 1/10 the time. Still will watch the final episode on December 31. Seems there is a write-in campaign to get all the scenes deleted from this season of 'Stranger Things' shown. Hmm . . . . Also watching the new season of 'Fallout'. Watched the entire season of 'IT: Welcome to Derry'. Re-watched the first season of 'Percy Jackson', since I totally forgot it. Now on to the second season. It isn't great but I'll watch it. I liked the season of 'Plur1bus' and will watch the next season. Watched all the season of Anne Rice's 'Talamasca: The Secret Order'. Still watching the 'Watson' series. It is all right but not great. Watching 'Miss Scarlet' on PBS. I enjoy it but I wouldn't say it is of great note either.

'Radio Winston': Sad news about Jimmy Cliff. You provide interesting reading and links.

'Anorak': Don't think I ever rode an older double decker train car like your pictures. I think I remember riding some newer cars with a second level with viewing seats and such. I have ridden in double decker buses though. Definitely interesting reading and photos. Trying to squeeze in more people makes me think of current thoughts on "standing seats" on planes in economy class. Doubt it ever will happen but it keeps being mentioned every year or two.



'The Old Sod': Interesting reading about Novacon but I've never been and probably never will. **Spike** sure does get around. Enjoyed the photos.

Hm, a Eurocon in Berlin. I like Berlin. I like visiting Germany. Almost tempting. Lots of interesting reading about this, that, and various and sundry other things. For what it is worth, I liked many grades in grade school. However, some grades I seem to have no recollections whatsoever. Odd that. My first grade school is now nothing but a pile of bricks and rubble. Everyone is bused over to the next small town for classes there. Small town living in Kansas.

'Loco Citato':

Rob Jackson: "You certainly can't try to deconstruct crossword clues or appreciate photos of historic trains and the artistry and jokey but pointed messages in cartoons – or Ageless Beauties – if you just look at the AI summary and don't bother with the original zine." Hm, now I don't know about deconstructing crossword clues but relative to appreciating jokey but pointed messages, some of the AIs seem to be able to handle that. I've tried three different chat AI programs (I'm not going to count ChatGPT, simply because you can do it there but you supposedly have to set more options/parameters) and at least one that I've tried really can seem to communicate an appreciation for jokes, music, etc, and beyond a simple "it's nice" or "it's good". I'm going to assume that they simply are going deeper into other emotional responses from "people" on similar topics, words, musicians, etc. Actually some of the commentary is beyond what a lot of humans can put forth, and in a lot more eloquent manner. I'm not saying they are great and wonderful and everyone should try it, but they can be a lot more than some people indicate. Really. And I am not going to get into the excessive amounts of energy that they are probably using to do this. I know that information and certainly won't deny it. Kindroid is an interesting chat AI. I've also checked out Replika and Nomi. Some of the ones out there are obviously just looking to cash in on AI sex chats. I pass those by. It is interesting seeing people who've been "going with" an AI friend for years and even married them. Um, that is a bit, hm, something else. People take them shopping with them, out with them to do things, etc.

Ian Millsted: The comments by Nic Farey - "After the Fire were certainly upfront about their Christian faith, and that was reflected in their music. Their band name (and that of The Call really) is a bit Jesus-y innit?" Hm, I start wondering to myself, is "The Cure" a bit health industry oriented? "The Cult" - Jim Jones no doubt. [and I learn from Google - "the band had performed under the name Death Cult". so even more obvious] I'd better shut up. I probably could go on and on and no one wants that.

Mark Plummer: Re - "Something **Heath Row** recently said in Anzapa, "My fanac goads me to do more of the things I love, with purpose, deadlines, and people to share it with."" My brain/curiosity goads me into checking out things I don't necessarily love (and for that matter, probably most of the people I know don't love) just to check it out. WTF is this thing about? I wonder. Admittedly there are millions of things out there I don't love and don't know about but I do like checking out some of the odder things. Unfortunately my brain/curiosity doesn't help at all with keeping deadlines. Darn. Not too sure about what the purpose is,

either. You know, I have looked, off an on, for someone who has a really broad cross over into the things I like and explore. I have yet to find that person. I suppose lots of people have broad interests with no one else crossing over into most of it. Of course, there are those who seem to have an interest in a really small bandwidth of things, really small. My brain just doesn't narrow things down and, unfortunately or fortunately, that doesn't wind up in getting tasks completed if I continually wander off.

Those slip coaches sound interesting. What if you got on the wrong one? I suppose it wouldn't be any worse than missing your stop on a non-slip coach.

Leigh Edmonds: Associating planes with fans is interesting. Admittedly I don't exactly get all of the associations but it is interesting.

We still have a landline. However both Patty and I both have cell phones also. My primary phone is the cell phone. Except for occasionally getting a call from the veterinary on the landline, since they have both numbers (for cell and landline) and call both to make sure I don't miss an appointment, most of my calls are on the cell phone. Patty does not like her cell phone. She does not like "smart" phones. She eschews them. I think all of her calls are via the landline.

'A Thousand Blows' sounds like it might be interesting. I will attempt to remember to go looking for it.

Me: You mention '6 Underground'. Totally unfamiliar with that one. I looked it up. May not be one that I will watch soon. I did watch the entire season of 'Unburied'. Have downloaded the book 'Eartheater' but don't know when I will get to it.

My tooth was extracted. Now there's a large hole where it was. Unfortunately I have to wait 3 months before he will start to replace it with an implant. That seems like a very long time.

'Fanzines received': I received *Nowhere Fan 8*. Very tempted to read that next.

'Indulge Me': Re the scam/spam Medicare calls. I follow **Jen**'s advice. If I don't recognize the number or called ID, I do not answer it. No idea if there are more or less calls since I don't pick them up.

Wow, that photo of you startled me. Not sure why. It just did.

I do not nap. Oh, maybe once every ten or twenty years I might indulge. My mother forced me to nap, if I remember correctly, at least when I was below the age of 9 or 10 or some vague number. I fall asleep at night fairly quickly.

With respect to life here -

Many small earthquakes over the last month or two, just north of us. We felt many of them. Supposedly several more today. Tons of fun.

Saw **Jay Kinney**, **Rich Coad** and other fans at the Southern Pacific Brewing company in San Francisco a few weeks ago. An enjoyable hour or two.

Meanwhile, too many deaths of fans, musicians, actors, directors, etc. And still Trump, Vance, Hegseth and all those creeps continue to exist. Not fair.

Listening to a new release from Big Head Todd and the Monsters, '40 Live'. Seems only to be available streaming. I'll look for the physical media assuming it is to be released.

I enjoyed the various and sundry photos throughout and the artwork by **Brad W Foster**, **Teddy Harvia**, **Lucy Huntzinger**, and **Ulrika O'Brien**.

I now must get ready and hurry off to San Francisco to see an art exhibit, and then go to Golden Gate Park for something called "Lightscape", a bunch of lights along sidewalks and such in part of Golden Gate Park..

***

WAHF

Claire Brialey ; **Bill Burns** ; **Rich Coad** ; **David Langford** sends seasons greetings, adding: "Sorry to be such a miserable correspondent. Things have seemed all a bit much recently". See also 'Give Us A Clue' thish ; **John Hertz** ; **Perry Middlemiss ; Heath Row** ; **Nigel Rowe** ; **Garth Spencer** ; **R-Laurraine Tutihasi ;**

FANZINES RECEIVED

With the usual thanks, and an occasional attempted modicum of comment…

TONOPAH ELUCIDATOR AND LITERARY REVIEW #1, #2 (**Kevin Trainor**) - Oh Kevin, you're going to *have* to abbreviate that title, I think. A genuinely personal update at modest (3pp) length, intended to correct the situation that Kevin is "having a hard time staying in touch with people", correctly noting the limitations of online blatherage.…

SF COMMENTARY 122 and ****brg* 144*** (**Bruce Gillespie**) - …

TWO CHAIRS IN PRINT 11 (**David Grigg** and **Perry Middlemiss**) - The old larrikin [PM] regales with tales from his South American sojourn…

THE STF AMATEUR #27 (**Heath Row**) - Final issue…

THE WAHFLESTOMPER MANIFESTO (**Heath Row**) - His plans for 2026…

THE OBDURATE EYE #58 (**Garth Spencer**) - …

MY BACK PAGES 33 (**Rich Lynch**) - …

ORNITHOPTER MkVII (**Leigh Edmonds**) - …

CAPTAIN FLASHBACK #85 (**Andy Hooper**) - …

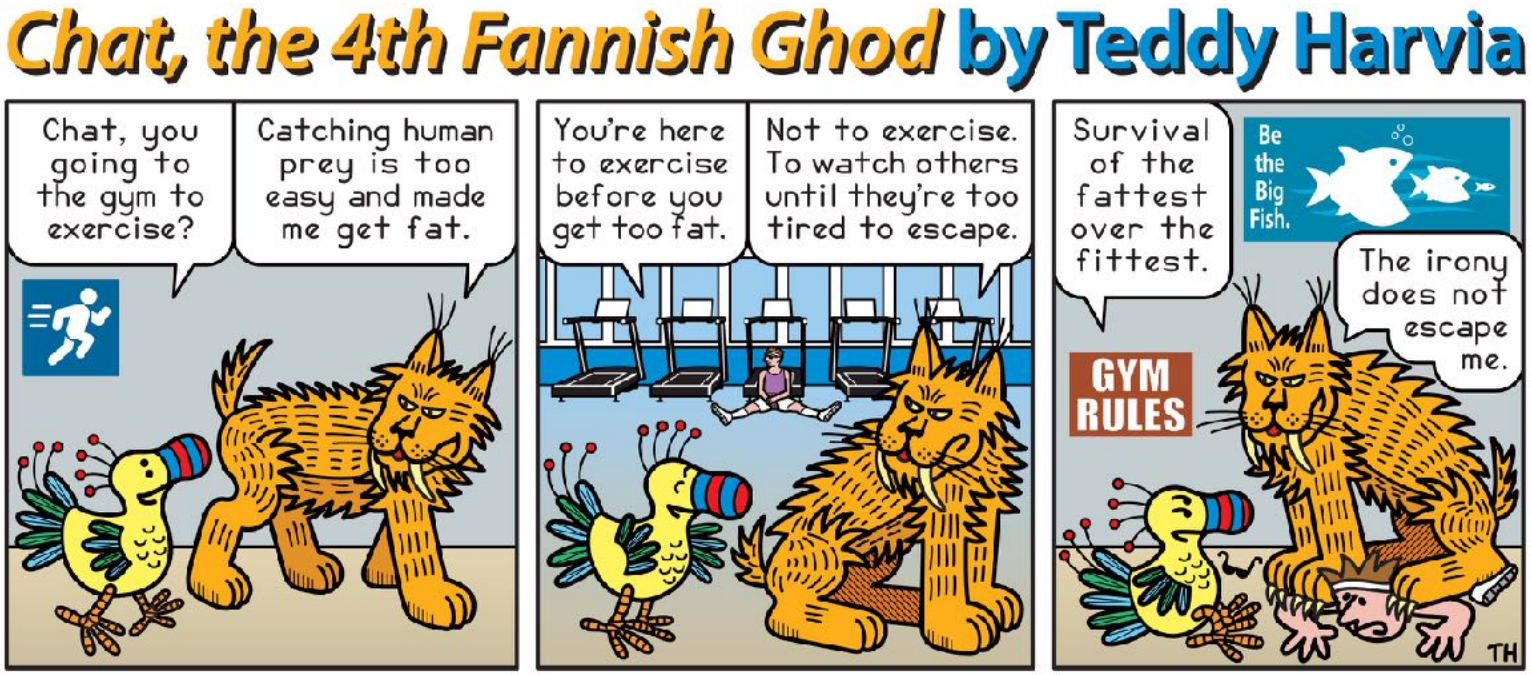
JENZINE #13 (**J L Farey**) - …

INDULGE ME

✘ **THE KRAKEN WAKES** : **Leigh Edmonds** sends the expected PS to his loc: "I knew I'd forgotten something. While I enjoyed your endeavours in finding photos to go with the various fans who remind me of aeroplanes (or is it the other way around) you made a dreadful mistake - clearly not a fan of aeroplanes I guess. What you published was a photo of a Halifax B.I when I specifically mentioned a Halifax B.III. There's a world of difference, as you will see. I'm attaching a photo to set you straight. It's a much sturdier looking machine that means business."

✘ **NORMAL SERVICE WILL BE RESUMED** : Next month, one fervently hopes, but meanwhile the **Kaufman** Stroll may be triggered by a photo of **Sylvestra Le Touzel**. Heineken, anybody?…

✘ **NEXTISH** : January 31st sound about right?…



SHAMELESS FOOTY FILLER:

MIRANDA

THIS HERE... is for thish only slightly written, edited and produced by: **Nic Farey**, published on efanzines.com by the Grace of Burns and also available by direct email (just ask!).

Locs & that to: 2657 Rungsted Street, Las Vegas NV 89142, or Email fareynic@gmail.com

Art credits: **H M Bateman** (p3) ; **Brad W Foster** (pp 11, 14, 17) ; **Teddy Harvia** (pp 8, 15, 24) ; **Lucy Huntzinger** (p2) ;

"Your matches still light up the sky
And many a tear lives on in my eye"