

THE FORTNIGHTLY FIX

#EIGHT



Space, the Fiscal Frontier

I'm sure I wasn't alone here in feeling a twinge of regret when the US Government announced on Monday morning that it was effectively moth-balling plans for a manned return to the Moon.

It's a sobering thought that there are grandparents on this planet who have never looked up into the night sky and been filled with awe that, at the very same moment, members of our species were striding across the lunar landscape. A mere twenty-one made the voyage; of these, just twelve stood upon the surface. For many around us, it's virtually ancient history.

Not that I really expected the project to move forward. Bush's grandstanding six years ago couldn't disguise the fact that he was making no actual increase in funding, merely shuffling cash from one corner into another. Even before the current economic slump, Obama was left with little room to manoeuvre: the fact remains that manned lunar missions have always owed more to public relations than any deal-breaking advantage over remote-controlled probes.

Of course, none of this precludes another party stepping into the breach. The Chinese have certainly flexed their scientific muscles in that direction, and have the financial resources (as the US's largest creditor, maybe they can persuade Obama to offer NASA's unused launch vehicles as a down payment on his administration's somewhat hefty IOU).

It's all a bit of a swizz, though. When I was a kid, PG Tips gave away cards with its tea, and one such series covered the history of spaceflight. The final images covered Voyager's "grand tour" and a manned Mars mission some time in the 1980s. It was clearly stated that the technology already existed for the latter; all we needed was the political will. It's a sad state of affairs when impressionable youngsters are lied to by their own national beverage.

Forward to the Past

Plans to drag my fanzine production backwards into the Twentieth Century took another lurch onward this Tuesday, when I took receipt of an Adler 131D electric typewriter from a fellow subscriber to Freecycle (or rather Freagle, as the UK version now styles itself). It's a substantial beast, only slightly lighter than the average engine block, but I'm rather looking forward to taking it for a spin this summer.

So, I have the stencils (including at least one box bequeathed to me by Norman Shorrocks), the duplicator paper (Caroline Mullan and Brian Ameringen kindly added to my stock at the recent Novacon) and ink (so long as it hasn't gone weird since I produced *Gaijin #3* in November 1993). Not forgetting the Gestetner 320 printer currently residing in my garage.

As I wrote the above paragraph, I headed over to Greg Pickersgill's Memory Hole fanzine index and actually looked up the date of my most recent duplicated fanzine (easier than digging out file copies, I promise you). 1993?? I truly had no idea it was *that* long ago. The big clue is that *Gaijin #4* was dated May 1994, by which time I was working in an office with an unguarded photocopier. How easily the creative urge drags us into petty criminality.

Of course, should I discover my printer no longer functions, the project will have to go on ice until I find a replacement. I suspect even Freecycle might draw a blank on that one.

Down the Loccol

Joseph Nicholas: "I noticed your statement in *The Fortnightly Fix* #7 that you're working on the re-election campaign for your MP, and after a few moment's sleuthing have deduced that this must be the Lib Dem [redacted], who took the seat in 2005 with a majority over the Conservative incumbent of 279 votes. Well, lots of luck, because (a) it's a very small majority (smaller even than Jim Knight's majority in South Dorset), (b) [your town]'s Parliamentary history suggests it's a naturally Conservative seat (as was South Dorset until 2001), and (c) seats of this marginality which are naturally Conservative are likely to be recaptured by The Boy David and his troops this May.

"May is most likely, to coincide with the local government elections in London and elsewhere, although Haringey's Lib Dems suggest that a general election in April is possible, to get the pain of the expected Parliamentary defeat out of the way and thus gather a sympathy vote for Labour a month later and hang on to councils which the party might otherwise have lost. But I think an April general election would simply depress the turnout in May, because who wants to trudge out to the polling stations to cast another vote only a few weeks later?"



"Of course, I shouldn't be speculating about any of this at all, having publicly stated in an LJ post last year that, in the wake of the MPs' expenses scandals and the blocking of meaningful reforms due to the stranglehold exerted by the party whips -- themselves responding to the desires of the party leaders never to surrender any of the powers which come with office -- I would no longer be casting a vote in general elections because the system is rotten to the core, and that the only way it will ever be reformed is if we all stop voting and leave MPs to represent nobody but themselves, thus destroying their legitimacy. But now I'd go even further: democracy is incapable of delivering meaningful change, because politicians simply pander to the lowest common denominator: whichever interest group spoke to them last, and whatever policy will cause the least inconvenience to themselves and their clients (sometimes called "constituents", but since half the population doesn't know who their MP is and never interacts with Parliament except at general elections,

they scarcely merit the term any more). Which means that they will never tell the truth about, or be honest about the scale of the actions required to deal with such important issues as peak oil, anthropogenic global warming, the scarcity of rare metals (i.e., the metals necessary for the wired world to exist at all, over which the Chinese have growing control), et bloody cetera. In consequence, anarchism is the only answer. Do things for yourself, and forget about windbags in suits in an antique debating chamber by the Thames.

"At which point, one is reminded of the old joke about the only honest man ever to enter Parliament. His name, of course, was Guy Fawkes..."

Astonishingly, I find myself myself less cynical at a local level, but can sympathise with the rest, particularly in a week a once left-leaning government (the party I believe you stood for in local elections, Joseph) somehow finds the £20bn needed to renew and expand Trident.

I also heard from: Jo Charman (requesting to be removed from the mailing list); Paul Birch; Ian Williams ("Nice stuff."); David Hardy ("I'm another who hasn't seen *Avatar* yet, but I'm told I need to see it at a cinema, not wait for the DVD as I usually do... I'm with you on *Moon*, though."); Felicity Walker; Jonathan Cowie ("I have long been aware of the er... snot in some

parts of fandom, including from some high profile fans who are in a position that they really should know better: those same parts that seem to be greying. Coincidence? Probably not.”); Bridget Wilkinson (“Good luck with the work on the [election] campaign - and relaxing in front of the odd film needs to be squeezed in!”); Hope Leibowitz (“Are you a volunteer (without pay) for this new job? [Yes.] That is really amazing of you, to do all that work because you believe in the candidate.”); Peter Sullivan (“Much as I appreciate the shout-out from James [Bacon], it’s actually the Corflu committee itself which is taking the lead on the webcasting from Winchester, with Ian Maule having already done a trial broadcast using the hotel’s wifi. My role so far has been mainly limited to ‘technical consultancy’ (a posh phrase that basically means I get to reply to e-mails from Ian and say ‘I wouldn’t do that if I were you’ about various things.)”); Nic Farey; Char Shea (who wondered if the aforementioned Mr Farey was a Las Vegas lounge act, har har); Andy Neilson (“I must say, I was interested in your interview with Emily Booth. I seem to remember her as Emily Bouffante, a lady who used to co-present a cable show called (I think) *Blue Review* in which she and some chap cast a critical eye over recently-released ‘grumble’ movies.”); Bill Mills (“Got it, read it, loved it.”); Marilyn Holt; Sarah McIntyre’s internet autoresponse (“Thanks for your e-mail. I’ll be in France at the Angoulême comics festival until Monday, 1 Feb, but I’ll do my best to reply to you when I return.”); Lloyd Penney (“Based on Barack Obama’s changes to the American space programme, John Toon’s rocket going ‘VOOOM!’ on page two may be the closest to a rocketship to Mars we’re ever going to see. If we can’t get our space realism any more, will this mean a resurgence for science fiction? I’m greedy, I want space and science fiction, but it’s beginning to look like we can’t have both.”); and finally, Jeff Schalles, commenting over on Facebook (“Fanzines? Do people still make fanzines? Wow! I say, go for it!”).

My old friend Andy’s reference to my cameo at last year’s Festival of Fantastic Films reminds me I recently perused its official photodisk (a generous gift from the FFF organisers).

Included was the snapshot immediate stage right, which I strongly suspect is the handiwork of that fine fellow, Elmar Podlasly. As you can see, it captures an inexplicably intimate juncture in the interview when I appear to be taking Ms Emily Booth’s pulse (I’m proud to say I’ve never lost an interviewee yet, though I came worryingly close eight years ago with an unexpectedly pharmaceutical-free Gwyneth Jones).

Anyhow, at the risk of clogging my in-box with thousands of rude suggestions, I’m making this *The FFix*’s first Official Caption Competition. Answers on an electronic postcard to the address below no later than 15 February, please.



This eighth issue of *THE FORTNIGHTLY FIX* is dated 5 February 2010. ’Tis entirely to be blamed upon Steve Green, who can be contacted via stevegreen@livejournal.com. Artwork by Alarming Alan White (pg.1) and Blistering Brad Foster (pg.2). My usual thanks to Brazen Bill Burns at the online archive eFanzines.com. *The FFix* backs Jovial Jeff Boman for DUFF. [I really must stop reading the credit panels on 1960s Marvel comics, though I recall Paul Cornell’s thumbs-up for my suggestion Neil ‘the Shaman’ Gaiman.] This has been a Gutter Press production. Oh yes.