

PARANOID 23



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Photos by Ian Maule

Clip art from my collection

The main text is in 12 point Georgia. No Comic Sans
 was used in the production of this fanzine.

One of the advantages of being a registered student with the Open University is that I qualify for cheap Microsoft products through their educational discount scheme. That's how late last year I became the proud new owner of Microsoft Office Professional 2010, Visio and their web development software Expression Web 4. I don't actually need Visio any longer as I haven't used it since work days but the thought of having my own copy, cheap, was too good to miss. Office 2010 and its components are another matter. I'd been using Word, Access and Excel at work since they first appeared on the market and had vari-

ous versions at home too, the last being Office 2003.

Paranoid 22 was the first time I'd attempted to produce a fanzine using a computer since the mid-nineties when I published the couple of games zines I mentioned last time. I started the last issue using Word but almost immediately realised that it's less than ideal as a DTP application and soon moved on to a free application I'd discovered called Scribus. But that was so cumbersome and user-unfriendly that I found myself increasingly doing most of the work in Open Office even though I found it frustratingly difficult to get the positioning of the illustrations exactly where I wanted .

This time I'm trying Microsoft Publisher 2010 which comes as part of Office Professional. I expected Publisher to be more of a DTP application than I've actually found it to be. Most of the default templates that come with the software and the help instructions assume users are producing a brochure of a few pages, business cards or greetings cards and the like rather than a 20 page magazine. In the end I just started with a blank A4 page, set the header and footer attributes and the two column layout, and then typed away, or more correctly, copy-and-pasted away to my heart's content. To a certain extent this is just like using Word or Open Office but the options available in Publisher seem to make it clearer how to do things. Or to put it another way, the options available are limited to DTP type things rather than being all things to all people. One interesting quirk I discovered fairly early on was the case of the disappearing text during the paste operation. It was a little worrying until I realised the program had to be told to overflow on to the next page otherwise it just remained in the clipboard for use later.

I'm keeping my fingers crossed that by the time the next issue is due I'll have worked out how to overcome these little quirks.

Ian — March 2011

SICILY

10 Days and 9 Bites



Day 1

The people carrier transporting us to Gatwick airport arrives in Wonderful Ashford spot on 04:45 and deposits us and others on the same feeder transport network in good time to board the 08:00 British Airways flight to Catania. The full party of 32 eager tourists meet at Arrivals and we are escorted to our coach for the journey to the first hotel, located just north of the picturesque village of Taormina about 30 miles up the coast from Catania. As I dawdle behind the others on the short walk to the coach I discover there are three other dawdler-smokers on the

tour.

The hotel for the first three nights is built on a multitude of levels against a rocky cliff overlooking the sea. Most of the rooms allocated to our group are in the lofty peaks close to the cloud layer and involve the use of three lifts with short walks between each to reach them.

Dinner is a buffet with various Sicilian and Italian dishes, most of which seem to be aubergine.

No mosquito bites.

Day 2

The group shelters under a café awning drinking *caffè Americano*, trying and failing to keep dry, as a torrent of water falls from the leaden skies and makes streams under our tables. The locals look aghast at the sky and mutter dark Sicilian thoughts. The trip to visit the Greek theatre and sample the shopping highlights of Taormina is cut short and we head back to the hotel for dry clothes.

Dinner is aubergine starters with aubergine as a main course followed by aubergine sorbet.

Total mosquito bites, 2.

Day 3

A long drive up the slopes of Etna past lava flows and jumbled rocks to a tourist area. A large car park half full greets us but Salvatore our driver insists on squeezing the coach into a space next to a café where Janice and I have a *caffè Americano* before taking an easy route up some slopes to look at small craters and peer towards Etna's peak somewhere in the distance. It's cold. We take a walk to the far end of the car park and discover some wooden huts selling tourist tat. On the route back we find the toilet and the point where you pay the car park fees. This comes in useful as we direct some Indian tourists who are standing by their hire car trying to work out how they can avoid getting a parking ticket from the rapidly approaching parking attendant.

We leave Etna and head to Taormina and the Greek theatre missed the day before. In the gardens, near the theatre, I discover a reconstruction of an Italian human torpedo (*maiale*) used to sink the *Valiant* and *Queen Elizabeth* battleships in Alexandria harbour in 1941 and take many out of focus photographs of it.

Dinner is aubergine, etc, etc.

Total mosquito bites, 3.



Maiale human torpedo

Day 4

Today we leave our hotel and head to Monreale, near Palermo, where we are to spend the next two nights. On the way we visit several toilets and other interesting sites.

Dinner is waiter service and very tasty - even if there are aubergine dishes on the menu.

Total mosquito bites, 4.

Day 5

We are each given a set of earpieces with an FM frequency receiver when we board the coach. This is to allow our local guide Josie to talk to us through her microphone as we tour the 12th Century Norman cathedral of Monreale. Josie talks too fast and the voice coming from the earpieces is distorted. We give up using them. Then we drive into Palermo where we visit another cathedral and have to hand in our audio devices. We are left to our own devices for three hours before the coach returns us to the hotel. Palermo is probably interesting.

Dinner is again waiter service. Fortunately I quite like aubergine.

Total mosquito bites, 5.

Day 6

We pack and with our happy band of fellow travellers board the coach and head off to Agrigento by way of the Greek ruins of Segesta and Selinunte. Fortunately the day is dry and we get to walk around and take many photos of old Greek



Segesta Greek ruins

pillars before moving on to our next hotel.

The hotel is nice but our room is like an oven. I come over dizzy and have to lie down for a couple of hours. We eventually discover that inserting the key card in the slot “activates” the air-conditioning but as it makes no difference to the heat we switch it off and leave the patio doors open. Fortunately we are only staying one night here.

Dinner is waiter service and there are several aubergine dishes on the menu.

Total mosquito bites, 6.

Day 7

It's raining hard, but we can just make out through the downpour the temples comprising the Valley of the Temples outside Agrigento. On health and safety grounds the walk amongst the ruins is cancelled and we instead spend some

time in the museum looking at stuff dug from the site. I think of Johnnie as I stare at the ample figure of a mother goddess statue.



Mother
Goddess

We head away from Agrigento and make our way to our next stop at the Roman villa at Piazza Armerina. It's still raining and when we arrive at the café for lunch we have to negotiate not only the rivers flowing down the paths but also the Italian system of ordering and paying first before presenting the receipt to the server to actually get your order. We have a slice of warm pizza and a cup of caffè Americano and afterwards I go outside to stand under a leaking awning with my fellow smokers.

It stops raining as we take the slippery slopes to the villa but the slipping and sliding is worth it as we get to see the largest collection of in-situ floor mosaics in Sicily.

We finally arrive at our hotel in Catania where we will stay three nights before coming home. The air conditioning is fierce for a change and we adjust it to put some heat into the room to avoid freezing.

Dinner starts with fried Aubergine. I forget what else.

Total mosquito bites, 7.

Day 8

A trip to Syracuse is today's highlight. As we head south down the coast road one of our fellow travellers oohs and aahs at the view of Etna from the coach window. We all turn to look and see the snow covered peak looming over the city of Catania like a big looming thing with snow on the top. It's certainly big.

Syracuse offers more ancient Greek sites and then it's time to board the boat for a one hour cruise around the harbour. From the sea I spot what I think is a reconstruction of an Archimedes grappling hook but on closer inspection it proves to be a builder's crane doing what builders' cranes are supposed to do. Food is served which disappoints as the aubergine is strangely absent.

Dinner is a club sandwich in the hotel restaurant. Aubergines are in the filling.

Total mosquito bites, 8.

Day 9

The final day starts bright and warm. A short trip up the coast to Aci Castello to view a Norman castle is followed by an afternoon in Catania. We are instructed to be by the elephant monument in the main square at 2pm for the trip to the wine tasting with lunch.

We immediately find the monument and sit for an hour drinking cappuccino and watching the local refuse collectors with their assembled machines picketing the local government building. Carabinieri stand with arms akimbo and three Italian naval officers in immaculate white dress uniforms stride purposefully around looking important. A French tourist signals from the café doorway to her companion at the table next to ours. I catch a few words which lead me to think that she's saying there's no paper in the femmes toilet. Later Janice confirms my interpretation. The map shows the remains of a Greek amphitheatre so we trek up and down streets and finally find it exactly where it is supposed to be. Only

later do we discover that there is another, more complete, which we didn't find.

Lunch at the restaurant/winery on the slopes of Etna. 5 courses are served in quick succession, only one with aubergines. The wine arrives and



Catania elephant monument

proves to be undrinkable except to those in the party who like undrinkable wine. Back to the hotel, snores fill the coach.

Dinner, nothing.

Total mosquito bites, 9.

Day 10

Home! Due to the French air traffic controllers strike we enjoy an extra 50 minutes looking at the airport tarmac.

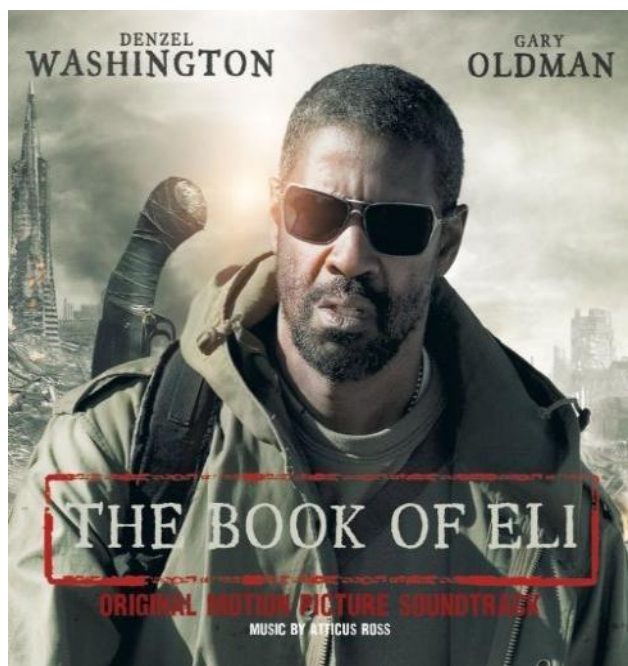
I hate the French.



Film Reviews



The Book of Eli reviewed by Roy Kettle



I watched THE BOOK OF ELI recently and, if you haven't seen it, don't. I sacrificed myself on your behalf. I'd warn about spoilers but it's not a movie you can spoil.

It's set about 30 years after some apocalyptic event or another (no-one seems to care, remember or have been at the script meeting where they decided what it was). Following this, all the bibles in the USA were destroyed (yes, *all* of them) for some unspecified reason leaving only one which Denzel Washington (Eli) is carrying west. You're not supposed to know it's a bible until near the end though it's pretty obvious it is.

But there's something mysterious about it. What could it be? He never lets anyone else see inside it. Maybe it's the real script and no-one's allowed to read it.

Denzil had used his time well since the event, becoming an expert warrior with any weapon particularly what looks like a giant cheese knife that's very sharp - very, very, very sharp - and a handgun that can hold many bullets - many, many, many bullets - and fire them very accurately - very, very, very accurately - and a crude bow and arrow with which he could kill cats for food from a long way away - a long, long, long way away. Denzil also spends a lot of timing listening to his iPod (which begs so many questions that you won't want to ask even the first one) and reading the bible.

He comes across a town run by Gary Oldman. Despite continually being ambushed and attacked by virtually everyone he meets in his travels, Denzil chooses to go into the town rather than round it. He probably needs to borrow a cup of electricity or try to get something to eat other than cat. As it happens - and who'd have known? - Gary is searching obsessively for a copy of the bible so that he can rule the world with it. (Really. Don't ask.) He doesn't tell any of his gang what book he's after so they can waste their time looking for other books that you would hope would survive an apocalypse such as THE DA VINCI CODE, 100 OTHER THINGS TO DO WITH FARTS and WHAT'S THIS PAGEY THING WITH ALL THESE LITTLE BLACK SQUIGGLES IN IT?

After some unlikely motivation and action, Gary Oldman steals the bible from Denzel (losing all his men to some devastating cheese knife, handgun and bow and arrow action in the process). It turns out to be written in Braille. (Yes, a Braille version of the King James bible which is about the size of, say, a volume of an ordinary encyclopedia, but smaller). I used to get documents transcribed into Braille for a committee I worked on and so checked this moderately important plot point. You can get the full King James bible in Braille in 18 volumes taking up 5 feet of shelf space weighing 64 pounds. Quite a lot to suspend - as well as your entire belief. And - would you believe it? - Gary Oldman happens to have a blind wife who he has been treating badly and who refuses to read the bible to him, presumably because she was busy doing some heavy-handed ironing.

Eventually, Denzel makes it to the west coast where he dictates the bible (having obviously spent much of the last 30 years when he wasn't becoming a martial arts expert, killing cats and finding ways of recharging his iPod, by learning Braille and memorising the book). He does the dictation very slowly - very, very, very slowly - to a long-haired Malcolm McDowell who writes it down very patiently - very, very, very patiently. Denzil just finishes dictating it before he dies. You'd have to have a heart of stone not to laugh*. Then Malcolm prints out a copy to add to his collection of rare books. God obviously moves in mysterious ways. He allowed this film to be made. What a waste of money.

The best bit is a most bizarre episode when Denzel comes across this solitary house in the desert where he goes to ask for a little sustenance and, after a few moments trapped in a pit (and who'd have thought he might be ambushed?), is offered an obviously unpleasant cup of tea on the best china by the two old eccentric Americans played by two Brits - our very own Frances de la Tour and Michael Gambon who must have been short of a bob or two and hadn't bothered to read the script. After hamming it up to an extraordinary extent, they're quite rightly killed in a scene where the entire house is riddled with

bullets - I mean, worse than cartoon emmental - but Denzel and his companion miraculously escape, possibly because he has a magic cheese knife but more probably because God is on his side yet again. Though He obviously didn't have a lot of time for inadequate tea-making skills.

And at one point there's a close-up of Denzel's eyes which look a bit milky. Does he have cataracts? Has he been blind all this time? Does that explain everything? Well, no it doesn't - it just raises even more questions.

Oh, and there's a woman who joins him in Gary Oldman's town and, while Denzel is dictating the bible and she is shown lolling around listening in a bored fashion, she still somehow finds time to become an expert warrior with a giant cheese knife, a handgun and a bow and arrow. The movie ends with her beginning the walk back east for unfathomable reasons and making one dread a sequel. A waste of Mila Kunis, as the other roles were similarly wastes of good actors' time.

On the plus side, it looked good - obviously it had some money spent on it as you might expect with a Denzel movie - and the OTT action scenes were efficiently violent so it wasn't without any redeeming features. But nowhere near enough of them to make it worth your time. I can only assume it was funded by some evangelical Christian group and that Denzel is a bit that way inclined himself.

Had it been a cheap movie with B actors, it might have been forgivable, but it obviously had pretensions to be something decent yet was very poor - very, very, very poor.

* Line stolen from Oscar Wilde. There had to be one good line in this piece.



The Green Hornet reviewed by Curt Phillips



It's bad. Really bad. I caught myself pulling out my own nosehairs one by one just so that the pain that caused might in some way distract me from the badness of that film. But it didn't work. The film was *that* bad. If you're going to see it anyway, do yourself a favor and deliberately get on the wrong bus when you go out. Or leave your wallet and all your money at home. Or call up the local police station and confess to some crimes that you haven't committed - *anything* to keep you out of the cinema that evening.

Ignore my warning at your own peril!



Some reviews by Janice Maule

I'm now registered as partially sighted but even so I'm keen to be represented in this issue of Paranoid. As I'm no longer in a position to give my instructive Driving Tips (other than: if you

can't see - don't drive) I've decided to contribute these short and rather personal film reviews.

Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows (part 1)

The film starts with some red bits moving from left to right across the screen. Then there's a long green sequence with three moving blobs. The end is a bit dark.

Dark City

Black, black, black.

The Illusionist

I couldn't see what all the fuss was about.

Hard Target

Lots of bright explosions but I don't know what they were blowing up.

The Adjustment Bureau

Say something scathing about the film and make it short and funny Ian told me.

But I can't, I enjoyed it.

What about making a joke about a large blob and then saying that Matt Damon has gained weight?

You can say that but I certainly wouldn't. You do a review.

But I enjoyed it too, apart from all that irrelevant American politics stuff. It's a bit like that series we saw on television and enjoyed a few years back, you know, the one with the doors and that strange room.

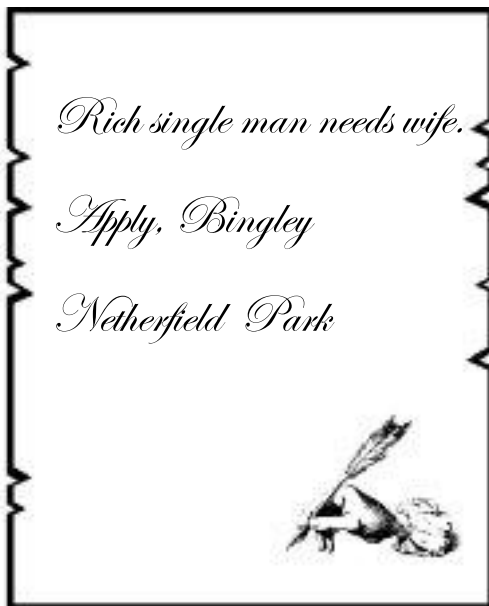
Oh, you mean *The Lost Room*. Yes, I suppose it's superficially like that but it's more like *The Matrix* but without the Kung Fu.

So are you going to write a review?

No.

How to Write Good

An email discussion.



Ian

I've never been much of a writer, as most of you realise, but lately I've been thinking about trying to improve my writing skills. I don't mean up to a professional level (heaven forbid!) but at least up to a standard where I don't feel too embarrassed by my puny efforts. I've scoured the web for ideas but courses appear to fall into two distinct categories, neither of which seem appropriate in my case. The "Learn to write English for dummies and foreigners" seems far too basic whereas the "creative writing" courses I've looked at seem to assume a starting ability a little higher than where I am now. Just the name "creative writing" makes me shudder with fright and brings back memories of a program on TV I watched a few years ago. A female reporter attended a course for writers hoping to break into the Mills & Boons market with slushy romances and bodice ripping stories. It wasn't so much the content that bothered me but that all the women, without exception, seemed to be able to put together a short piece of fiction at the drop of a hat (well, overnight) that sounded quite respectable to me. This was even before they had any of the creativity thrust at them by the course leader. No, that route isn't for me.

What I would really appreciate is something in the middle ground for people who just need to

improve their skills to a decent level.

Graham James

If it's any value, that was where I was at, around 1978 when I enrolled on an 'SF Writers Course' at Ted Hughes' Avon Foundation at Lumb Bank. My writing to that date had been just bits and pieces with nothing published other than a series of magazines I had done for the constituency party I belonged to in London. I wasn't that strong on SF either at that time (and probably not since) but the course seemed like a good idea at the time since I'd just moved to Leeds and didn't have any friendship circles there.

As it transpired, some of the other participants on the week long course included Geoff Ryman, Simon Ounsley, Mike Dickinson, Alan Dorey, Paul Kincaid (& later Dave Pringle). So began my association with fandom, fanzines & conventions and the routes of the period of the Leeds Mafia,



its cons, fanzines, BSFA domination, Interzone etc.

Not sure what it did for me in terms of writing since I'm still at the same stage I was 32 years ago with nothing further added by way of fiction.

The course was run by John Sladek with Tom

Disch visiting. The course was quite structured and centred on each person working towards a finished short story which was then read out to all participants on the final day. Ounsley's was good; I liked Alan Dorey's - entitled 'Rig' a balardian bleak dystopian piece but the outstanding work, as we all agreed, was Geoff's. Everyone thought he would make it as a writer.

The value was in being able to write, share it with others & get good feedback. Maybe there's a similar course somewhere now for you.



Graham Charnock

Chris Priest and I once enrolled together (part 23 of an on-going series of things you don't know about Chris Priest and I) for a creative writing course at London's City-Lit Institute, run by Maureen Duffy, (a lesbian novelist of some renown, more then than now). In class discussions Chris used to insist I was a better writer than he was, but look how that panned out professionally. I later went back for a Drama Writing course. I can't say I really learnt anything from either of them (except that Chris was destined for Greatness and Movie Contracts whereas I was not) but they were not enjoyable experiences in their own write (pun intended). I think uni creative classes such as Malcolm Bradbury instituted at East Anglia are just class-orientated means of putting a self-selected elite in touch with publishers and I have no time for them or any of the *writers* they produce.

John Hall

I did a creative writing course at the City Lit once. It was a special SF one run by Phil Harbottle? (Surely not). I didn't gain an awful lot from it. Phil wanted people to write like Dick or Ballard. I wanted to write like Cordwainer Smith or Laurence M Janiffer.

Graham Charnock

Phil Harbottle! Indeed, Shurely not. These sort of classes are often run by people who have published one or two things and thus presume themselves qualified to teach the secret lore, or at least just collect a cheque. I think they can be useful socially, but not for us old folks who have already established all the social networks we will ever need in life.

Pat Mailer

If it's developing fiction writing you are after then I would suggest joining a class. That way you would get feedback from others in the group as well as the tutor. Whether it would suit what you want would depend on the course and the tutor. Don't touch any Level 1 or Level 2 course, the literacy level would be low for you (Level 2 is around GCSE level). Or you could dive in and write. Try a short story and pass it on to someone whose opinion you trust and ask them for advice. I suspect you probably just need some confidence building.

Pat Charnock

I did a writing class many years ago, and found it helped me to be more self-critical, which can't be a bad thing. It was useful to hear from other people what they thought about my work.

Ted White

Ignore "How To" books.

Write.

Write fanzine pieces, whatever catches your fancy, but write **a lot**. (This works better when you're young and brimming with energy.) And as you're doing this, critique yourself. Identify what you like and don't like in your work. Try to overcome those areas where you are weak.

And -- very important -- **read** those writers and writings which you enjoy. Analyse them and identify what they do that you like and want to do, study them and learn how you can do it too. If necessary, copy, word for word, writing you like. Often getting this intimate with prose will unlock its secrets for you. Study pacing, sentence and paragraph lengths, stylistic devices. Adapt it to your own style. But nothing works better than **writing a lot**. You may throw away most of it, but the very act of writing will improve your "writing muscles."

Ian

Over and above anything else I'm mainly concerned with writing fanzine articles. Style, that's the problem. It hasn't helped that for the past twenty years I've either written dry technical stuff for like-minded colleagues or equally stolid non-technical writing intended to explain technology to the users/customers.

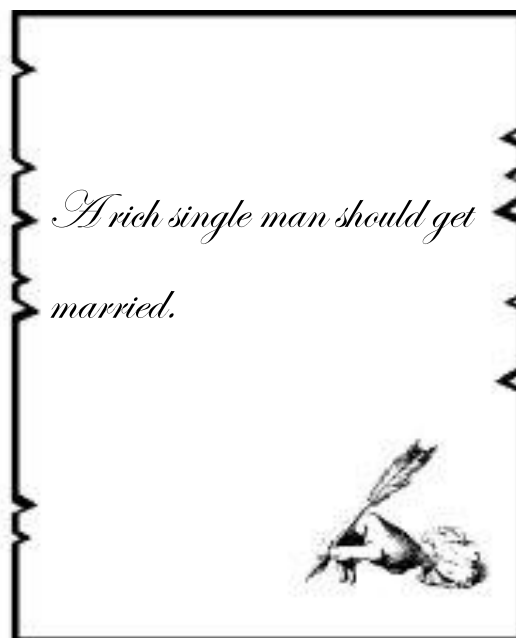
I like your suggestions, Ted. It's something I can do, well, the reading and copying bit, at least. The vast quantities of writing you envisage might be beyond me but I'll try, honest.

Pat Charnock

I spent many years just writing procedures and nothing much else. Then I was asked to produce a newsletter for the service. Oh help, I had to produce interesting copy! I spent a lot more time on it than I should have done, but it was good to be doing something other than bland procedures. Only trouble was, it all had to be good news, with a positive spin. But the point is that it was what I needed - it gave me practice in writing.

Graham Charnock

The matter of style is interesting. I would suggest you try to write small pieces, perhaps only a paragraph at a time, in various different voices, male, female, (changing sex is always interesting!) first person, third person, or perhaps trying to visualize writing as different characters, perhaps even those you know ITB or close or not so close friends, neighbours, or even tradespeople, or even favourite characters from TV or the movies. You may end up with pastiche, but I think pastiche is one of the most valuable weapons in the armoury of any writer. Many successful writers manage to get by doing endless pastiches of themselves (Dan Brown? J.G. Ballard?) but the best ones know when that is happening and manage to curb and channel it.



Ted White

As I said, it helps to have the energy of youth. But I think you can achieve your goals with some effort on your part. My basic advice to anyone who wants to learn to write is **to write**. There's no easy shortcut, although some of us seem to take to it more easily or quickly. I had to teach myself, because I had no discernible writing talent to begin with. (All my talent as a kid was as an artist, and that's what I trained for and yearned to be.) But I became a fan and writing was part of the deal. I was 13 and my writing was about what you'd expect from a 13 year old



with no discernible talent for it. I had to teach myself to type, too (one-finger, hunt and peck) and it was a breakthrough of sorts when I realized I should space after a period or a comma. In other words, I started at the very beginning.

There was nothing like retyping contributions for your fanzine on stencils. Nowadays you just run a file you received as email. Then you had to retype every letter, every word. I learned from that. (That's the copying part, of course.) In fact, in time I learned to do a certain amount of necessary rewriting, as I typed those stencils. (I'm not talking about rewriting Willis here, but rather the works of my peers, not all of whom wrote reel gud.) (But stenciling Willis **was** instructive.)

I wrote **a lot** as a neofan. I wrote letters to my friends, I wrote lengthy apa mailing comments, and I wrote stuff for fanzines. All of it helped develop my facility for writing, made writing transparent for me: I'd think a thought and it would appear on paper.

I learned to write in order to be a fan. And then, once I had acquired the basic skill, I polished it a little (my time at Towner Hall with Terry Carr) and applied it professionally. But I learned everything from fanwriting. And You Can Too!!!

The fact is, Ian, you're already over the first hurdle. You've learned how to express yourself with

clean, concise prose -- as you do here -- and now you're ready for the Second Step: developing style. Ideally that style should be an honest expression of yourself, but, I suppose, with a trifle more élan or wit. Whatever it is you desire for yourself. Study those who use the style you aspire to. Try copying them. You probably won't end up sounding like them, but will arrive at your own style.

Ian

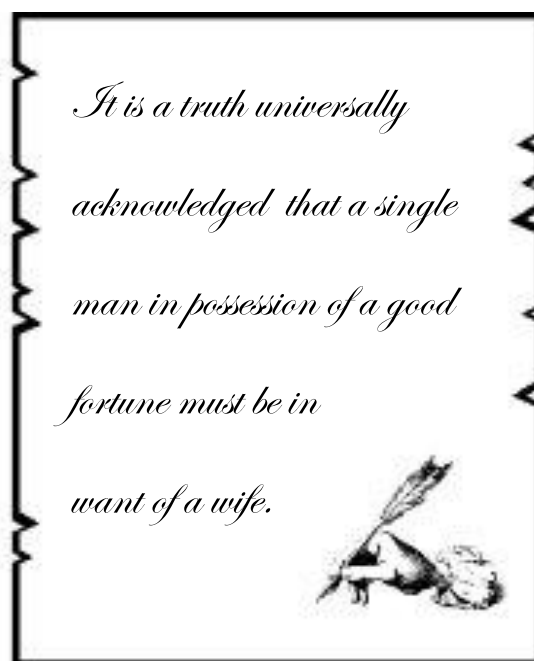
The article I'm working on is my current enjoyment of all things *Pride & Prejudice*. That includes reading and re-reading, many, many sequels (none of them published by Malcolm Edwards).

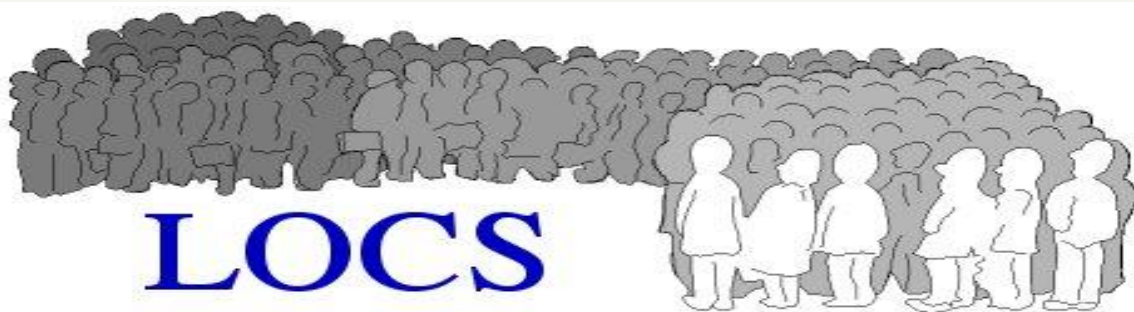
Graham Charnock

It is a truth universally acknowledged that if you aspire to write like Jane Austen I fear you may have a long climb ahead of you, and at the end of the climb may well have something nobody really wants to read.

Ian

If I had ever learned to write I should have been a great proficient.





My comments are highlighted thus.

John Nielsen Hall

Johnsila32 at gmail dot com

Thank you especially for the respectful dedication, which I do not deserve, and the reason I don't is evident from those reprinted articles, which until I read them, I had mercifully forgotten all about. I think I recognise the version of myself that wrote them - he was the one given to swallowing handfuls of amphetamines and being a bit paranoid as a result. (That's why they appeared in Paranoid, you will point out.) I certainly hope he is resting peacefully somewhere by now. I certainly see why Kettle responded with vitriol in his article. I hope never to see anymore writing like that that I might have done- if you find any, just chuck it away, please.

Your wish is my command, John. If I find any more of your old articles I will consign them to the waste.

For a fanzine entitled Paranoid, there is something at cross purposes about a picture of you gazing fearfully at numerous iterations of Graham Charnock's head. You gazing fearfully at numerous iterations of your own head might be better. Or Graham gazing fearfully upon numerous iterations of his own head, perhaps, except that that would only provoke ribaldry in most cases. Or you looking at your screen while a pack of Graham's peers around the door behind you,

all of them grinning evilly. As it is, its not Paranoid enough.

Simone Restall

Therestalls2 at btinternet dot com

I used to think my best times were fannish ones between 1963 and 1980. But ask John Hall now, honestly, was he really happy filled with doubt and angst - eating beans and behaving like a moron - or does he get more satisfaction from having the money to do what he wants, living somewhere comfortable with people he really likes around him, as he is now (presumably!)?

You have the rosy glow of those early years because you met Janice then. I also have a similar rosy glow from my time working for John Brown in Paddington, where I first met Brian - I worked there for four years and the people in our part of the company (involved in North Sea oil exploration) were every bit as exciting as fans - and when we moved to a project in Glasgow for two and a half years - and lived an "ex-pat" lifestyle on ridiculously silly pay. Even so, much as memories from those days make me smile just thinking about them, would copy from my present life make such interesting reading? Would copy from John's? That would be an interesting challenge - can these wild boys of old, come up with exciting tales from now? Is Greg having a riotous time in Wales? Is John still trashing homes or are his pursuits these days too tame? And as for Roy - call himself a Wanderers fan, I

have yet to run into him at a game - what era is his literary output centered on, when he's not writing letters to The Guardian?

As I am so out of touch, perhaps people do write fanzines that aren't all about "the good old days"? What ever happened to Graham Boak and John Piggott?

The last I heard Gray was involved with building model aircraft and posting messages in various forums that deal with the subject. I was last in touch with John in 2005 when I sent him the link to the fan photos I have on my website.

Joseph Nicholas

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I have no memory whatsoever of conversations about favourite bus routes at the Surrey Limpwrist. If this happened after I moved to London in January 1980 I would probably have plumped for route 24, which ran from Pimlico (where I -- and then I and Judith -- lived for the first few years) up to Hampstead, although I never took it all the way to the end: it was, principally, the quickest means of getting to the cinemas of the West End.

After we moved to north London, I would always recommend route 73 to visitors. This ran from Tottenham down the A10 to Stoke Newington, and then through the northern fringes of the City to Victoria: an excellent vantage point from which to see many tourist sights. Or at least it was when the route used double-decker buses; for the past few years, route 73 has been using bendy buses, which BoJo is supposedly to phase out in favour of a "new", "improved" Routemaster but which I suspect will never get beyond the prototype stage because Transport for London hasn't the money to pay for it. (It would be the only customer for such a bus, which means the unit cost would be Very Large Indeed.) In my view, we shall be stuck with the bendy bus for many years to come (although I quite like them -- it's so much easier to get one's bulky shop-

ping trolley on and off a bendy bus than other models).

I have no comments on the rest of the issue, other than to say that I couldn't read the "Dear Andy" letter in the font you used, and had to copy and paste the text into Microsoft's Notepad, which stripped out all the formatting and rendered it as straight text. Much more legible!

Yes, I had a lot of trouble finding the right font and weight for the "Dear Andy" piece. I wanted something that would look like handwriting but at the same time be perfectly legible. In the end I settled on Palace Script in a bold weight as that seemed to offer the best compromise. I was obviously wrong.

Jim Linwood

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The 65 bus is the fannish bus to ride but you missed out a few stops on the way. Brentford is featured in many of Robert Rankin's SF novels and his fans hold conventions at the Watermans Art Centre on the High Street. We actually lived on the route from 1967-72 at Kew Bridge Court and our fannish visitors included Diane Ellingsworth, John & Mary Grigg, Valerie Purnell, Dave & Maggie Hale, Alan & Linda Rispin, Chris & Jennifer Miller and Gray Boak. One afternoon the Rispins and Millers brought along their offspring to bond with ours and, looking at the assembled babies and toddlers, I never thought that the Young Science Fiction Readers' Group and Kingdon Road fandom would come to this. Further along the route are Kew Gardens where an old thyme fan breeds exotic mushrooms.

Coming out of Richmond the 65 passes close to Downe House where Mick Jagger lived before being chucked out by Jerry Hall. Jagger is supposed to have turned up at the 1965 Worldcon in London and offered to bring the Stones in to play for free but Ella Parker told him to go away as his presence might affect the serious nature of the convention.

In Ham the bus passes the house of Tommy Steele who, as far as I know, doesn't read SF.

Coming into Kingston we pass near the home of Chris Miller, co-founder of the OUSFG, and the former homes of Gray Boak and Kevin Smith. The building next to the bus in your photo has been recently demolished but was the home of Books, Bits & Bobs which sold vintage SF mags and PBs and boasted Greg Pickersgill and Sandra Bond among its customers. Some of the 65s carry on to Chessington passing near Courage House in Surbiton where Ethel Lindsay hosted the SFCoL meetings of yore.

Remind me, Jim. Is it this year we do the 65 bus route photo album?

Ron Saloman

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I love Indian food, and remember after decades Martin Tudor walking me one late night to a take-away place in Birmingham from which I enjoyed in his flat the hottest vindaloo I ever had

the pleasure to sear my tongue with, and then I had some beer and then some more beer and then some more. Good times! I've never heard of a phal but will have to ask next time I go to one of the Indian restaurants in our town what that is all about. And that will be Real Soon Now since son David got me a generous gift certificate for Indian food, knowing we both like it. And I only know of a condiment called pickles at such restaurants which consists of various bits and pieces that are hot hot hot, but not too hot for me. What is this lime pickle thingee?

Lime pickle is just another of the pickles restaurants here in the UK serve with, usually, poppodums although back then they always seemed to arrive with the main course. According to the label on the jar I have in front of me (hmmmm) lime pickle is "a delicious intense pickle of juicy limes infused with a special blend of tangy hot spice". I suspect the bottles of for example, Mango or Peach pickle, say more or less the same thing.

I bet you don't remember you and Janice visiting me [and my ever-present then-alive Mum] one

looong afternoon a long time ago in Framingham, Massachusetts. Somewhere there is at least one photo of the occasion. I say looong because I remember it being a stultifying time what with Mother trying to be nice to these foreigners [you] but not understanding them, irrespective of your delightful verbiage, which undoubtedly probably befuddled my mother whose German accent might have done the same to you. And even if you had spoken with her in Hoch Deutsch the fannishness would have gone over her head. I was still very neoish myself.

Or was it all just an uncomfortable dream?

If it were a dream we both shared it. I remember the day fondly — our first taste of US fan hospitality.

Lloyd Penney

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We found a neighbourhood pub that Yvonne's sister and her husband go to all the time... it has the best chicken curry I've ever had, and it's offered in seven heat levels. The waitress told me the highest level would blister your gullet, but there are people there all the time who enjoy the top three levels. I stayed with the lowest level, and had a great dinner. Only problem is that the pub is quite expensive, so we've been exactly once, but if we can afford a second time, we will return.

I hate telephone marketers, but I've worked in that industry before, and I was actually fairly good at it; I seem to have the voice for it, and I don't sound as if I'm reading from a script. It has gotten to the point that if there's anyone on the other end of the receiver they don't know or recognize, people will simply hang up, no matter what the pitch is. I am job hunting right now, but telemarketing is not an industry I want to return to.

How did you manage to buy your soul back from the Devil?

Ian Williams

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So you don't like needles, then you would have hated to be me about four and a half years ago when I was taken into hospital with a mystery virus that was causing me to have uncontrollable diarrhoea, plus I had pneumonia (though I never found that out until six months later), and several other things wrong with me. Now as for the needles. The first thing I was put on was a saline drip which entailed having a large needle inserted into the back of my hand. Later on it was inserted into my arms -the arms took turns- which often proved somewhat difficult as I was considerably dehydrated and my veins had shrunk to hair-thin thickness.

Once I had something injected into my stomach. On another occasion a doctor inserted a large needle into my back and into the chest cavity to drain fluid from it. For a few days I had a catheter inserted into my penis -I know it's not a needle, but still.. Then there was the camera up my bum, again not a needle but somewhat uncomfortable. This went on for about four and half weeks before I was finally strong enough to be discharged and at the end of it I'd lost nearly two stone, though my feet seemed to have developed elephantiasis. Full details, I think, in an issue of the new unimproved Siddhartha on efanzines.

Aaaaaaargh! I feel faint.

I'd been wondering about Corflu in Winchester and grumbled in a recent email to Greg Pickersgill who responded to Siddhartha's 100 favourite songs issue, about not seeing any conreps. Ritchie Smith on a visit here urged me to go but frankly I honestly didn't see myself as having much in common with the attendees anymore, though there were many I'd like to have had a one to one drink with. Then a couple of days later came Kettle's conrep in Hall's fanzine. What was your impression of it?

Being on the committee for the Winchester Corflu and having previously interacted to some extent with a few of the "old time" fans like Roy Kettle, Ted White and Earl

Kemp it wasn't too difficult to get into conversations. Where I did find it a little strained at times was trying to converse with people I've had no contact with for many, many years, in fact since I was an active fan in the seventies. On a more positive note getting to know Peter Sullivan and chatting to Steve Stiles, to name just a couple, were definite pluses.

Highlights for me were the two program items I actually got to watch. Grumpy Young Girls and, strangely, the Rob Jackson quiz. I wasn't participating in the quiz, just watching from the side-lines, but the interchanges between Rob and everyone complaining that the questions were too difficult was very entertaining.

Will I go to another Corflu? Probably not. I think my days of attending conventions are definitely over.

