



The Thirty First issue of a sortof letter substitute, kinda thing, maybe weekly, maybe not, from:

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Available only via the net at the moment. Welcome to the new readers and see the colophon for the usual disclaimer. Thanks to Mark McCann for computer usage and computer advice. Supporting Maureen Kincaid Speller for TAFF and Toronto in '03 for the 2003 WorldCon. This issue dated, already, 2/2/98

"This e-zine is an espresso stand."

by Lesley Reece.

There's no excuse for not having had your coffee in Seattle. I live within 100 meters of four different sources, just in case my home espresso maker breaks down. If I don't have time to stop in my neighborhood on the way out, there are plenty of other options.

One day about six months ago, though, I just forgot. I'd been all over downtown trying to get things done, when I noticed I'd developed a horrible headache. I looked at my watch. It was two pm, way past coffee time. I stopped and looked around. As I'd suspected, there was a Starbucks less than a block away. That's usually the case. If you're too decaffeinated to walk anywhere for coffee, you can just sort of stand on a corner and they'll open a Starbucks soon enough.

I ordered a double espresso, then joined the little cluster of twitchy java junkies waiting for their orders by the big stainless-steel machine. A minute went by.

"Double shot?" the barista finally said. She put a little paper cup on the counter in front of the espresso machine.

I reached up to take it. At the same time, in my peripheral vision, I saw another arm reaching. Like my own, it wore a black sweater sleeve. It too had a pale hand, with longish brick-colored fingernails and silver rings on its fingers.

"I'm next to a mirror," I thought with some practically subconscious section of my brain. I kept reaching.

My hand bumped the other hand. It wasn't a mirror.

"I'm sorry," a voice said, "I thought this one was mine."

I turned. The hand's owner stood there, as tall as I am, her hair the same dyed-henna color as mine, her skin just as pale as my own. I didn't own an outfit exactly like the one she was wearing, but if I'd seen one like it in the store, I'd have bought it. She looked a few years older than me, but our faces had the same roundish-oval shape. We were wearing the same shade of lipstick.

"I'll get another one," I finally squeaked, gesturing toward the cup. Maybe I didn't need any coffee after all.

"Here's yours," the barista said.

"Oh! Uh, thank you," I said. I grabbed it and sat down, then looked up just in time to see my twin heading out the door.

What bothered me most was she hadn't looked the least bit surprised to see me standing there resembling her. Surely she'd have reacted a little. Unless -- she hadn't been surprised.

Shuddering, I drained the coffee. Had someone sent my twin to the Starbucks, just to stand behind me and freak me out? I looked down at the table, expecting to find instead a crumpled piece of paper with "table" scribbled on it. No, everything was still there, but maybe I should look around for a hidden camera, or a man in sunglasses, or --

"Hey!" interrupted the non-imaginative part of my brain. Its voice sounds like Mrs. Rozsak, my high-school gym teacher. "Why would anyone do something like that? You're not important enough! No more X-Files for you, young lady."

Time travel! That was it. It had been an older version of me from the future! That would explain why she hadn't looked surprised to see me. She'd come here to grab that coffee away just in time. There'd been something wrong with it; it'd been poisoned, it'd been --

"Fifty laps!" barked Mrs. Rozsak. "If that coffee was poisoned, how would she have been alive to come back? Honestly, you get so confused whenever there's time travel in the plot."

I had to agree with that, and objective reality slowly swam back into focus. Plenty of women in Seattle are as pale as I am, I told myself. There isn't much sun. And anyone can buy hairdye this color. And a lot of people wear black sweaters, and brown lipstick, and order double shots. Besides, I hadn't seen any UFOs recently, at least not that I could remember.

Unless they'd erased my memory --

"Stop it," said Mrs. Rozsak. I thanked her, got up, and went out to do the rest of my errands.

On the wall next to my computer is a sign that reads, "That's me: paralyzed by imagination. For me a flat tire on my car is a) the End of the World, and b) an Indication of Monsters (although I forget why)." It's a quote from "Now Wait for This Year," an essay by Philip K. Dick.

I like that he used the word "paralyzed." Having an active imagination is supposed to be a blessing, especially for writers. But Phil knew the truth. Your mind can freeze you solid in a nanosecond, or however long it takes to ask "What if?"

I don't honestly believe I'm being followed by an unmarked van full of government agents in charcoal-grey suits. I know they don't wait for me to go for coffee, then radio some other bunch of agents and tell them to hustle the Lookalike in the back door, pronto, before I notice something. It's just that Mrs. Rozsak always takes a minute to show up and provide a rational explanation for any coincidence. By the time she arrives, I've already asked myself "What if?" and I'm standing there with all operations locked, heading for a fatal system error.

But that's just the way things work with me. In fact, I think that's the reason I was attracted to science fiction in the first place without "What if?" SF wouldn't exist. I've actually grown to enjoy these Phildickian interludes. For example, in the past couple of years I've met half a dozen people who, until they saw me standing there, had thought Andy Hooper and Victor Gonzalez had made me up.

"Hah!" I always say, "They made a damned bad job of it!"

I've never bothered with confirming or denying anyone's suspicions, though. I don't want to spoil a potentially entertaining PKD moment for someone else. The next time you're introduced to someone, concentrate carefully and see if they don't suddenly turn into a bit of paper with a name scribbled on it. You never know, they might.

And if they don't, you can always check the area for an unmarked van.

And now, you

Ulrika O'Brien UAOBRIEN@uci.edu "Thanks for #30. I can't follow you at all on the Northern Ireland-Sinn Fein-return to violence thing. Too non-linear for me, I think. In particular, I can't figure out at all why you say you think it's time for a return to violence. You say that and then seem to justify the opposing view the rest of the way. Then again, I'm not sure I want to ask. The troubles in Northern Ireland almost always leave me a self-imposed mute, too aware of all the things I don't know, or haven't been

through first hand. It's an old joke, but I sometimes feel that 'It's An Irish Thing, And I Wouldn't Understand.' Maybe that's part of the problem, I'm not sure. Any rate, I do think it would be lovely if the British would get out; I'm never sure why they're still *in*, other than bluster and the convenience of having a live-fire exercise to train soldiers in. But maybe that's a British thing I wouldn't understand." ((Check out my sig. file for the funniest, and yet fairly accurate, take on British Irish relations over the years. I don't want to point out what I hoped was fairly clear, but the desire for a return to violence was not said seriously. Similarly if the British were to leave Northern Ireland straight away the political, and economic vacuum would be disastrous all round. My take on the whole thing, therefore, was meant to be somewhat ambiguous, ill defined and not terribly logically. It is the way I feel.))

Cheryl Morgan cmorgan@ceres.wallis.com "Hi Tommy, Hmm, fascinating demonstration as to why there is no solution to the Northern Ireland question. I disagreed with all of your best of 97 list except Jeff Noon. Have you read Automated Alice yet? Noon fans in Australia seem to be very much divided over it. As to Jim Mallory's poser, if there is a defining book for our generation it is surely Lord of the Rings as more people seem to have read it than any other book of the period. What this says about us is another matter..." ((Yeah, Automated Alice was a gift to me from Nyree she's cool that way. I thought it was funny and well written but a bit too self-knowing for its own good. I don't think I would have bought for myself. LOTR is an interesting choice, although I would have gone for The Hobbit or one CS Lewis' Narnia books both of which were read out in class by my teacher, when I was 7 or 8.))

Sandra Bond Sandra@ho-street.demon.co.uk "Hi, Tommy, I'd love to receive the zine but my primitive computer couldn't handle whatever it was you attached it as -- any chance of a plain text attachment? In the spirit of Knew Mutation." ((This is only included in the vague hope of engendering some comments from people who remember who, and what, the Knew Mutants were. People who are Knew Mutants, obviously, are barred from replying))

Ned Brooks nedbrooks@sprynet.com "Dear Tommy - Got the TommyWorld 30 and my Windows97 displays it just fine, with only a warning that it might contain macros or something. Love the quote about Gladstone - I have that book. I don't agree with you about the politics, but then I have never lived there - I would be opposed to legal or extra-legal assaults or executions, and much less concerned about the historical origins of an organization, over which they have no more control of you or I. But they are responsible for their actions, individually and collectively."

Luke McGuff luko@oo.net "No technical problems, and an enjoyable read. I don't know much about Irish politics or history, so it's nice to get your viewpoint. I've left Catholicism behind as much as possible, and my main experience with being Irish was having to eat corned beef and cabbage on St. Patrick's Day. I don't even wear green on March 17th, because I feel like it's wearing the colors of a gang I don't belong to.

(Although I liked the Oyster Band a lot.)" ((Go to any major city in the States and you can tell that you don't have to be Irish to be Irish on St. Paddy's Day))

Don Fitch fitchdons@aol.com "Hi, Tommy: Thanks for sending Tommy's World #30. It's the first email/internet download I've received (in c. 3 years) that preserved the formatting (mostly Times New Roman) and whistles & bells. (Well... actually, the line-frames/boxes around the masthead info and the colophon resisted attempts to shrink them, but that's no real Problem.)

Your comments on the political situation in Northern Ireland, and on the Sinn Fein, convince me that I don't have the faintest idea what's really going on there, and have no business expressing opinions concerning it. Well... except that I do rather think quite a lot of people on various sides are saying and doing things that are harmful both to their cause and the well-being of the people in general. I.e., they're behaving precisely like human beings. *sigh*

Concerning fanzines/fanwriting and the Internet, I'm less modestly reticent, despite being a (comparative) newcomer to the electronic microcosm. I think Ulrika O'Brien pretty much has the right of it (even though her use of "essay" might be a tad too specific), and that this corresponds almost precisely with what you complain about. Yup, Usenet is set up to handle small, singular bits of information -- the sort of thing that's extremely annoying to those of us who desire (or when we desire) coverage of a complex topic with the integration of multiple factors. As far as I can figure out, there's nothing inherent in the structure of Usenet that actually militates against the kind of Structure and Form one finds in an Essay or Article, and my Pet Theory is that it was originally formed by, and still largely attracts, people with Attention Deficit Disorder and/or who prefer to take the analytic approach of zeroing in on one tiny aspect at a time rather than going for a broad overview of complex multiple interrelationships.

You ask "Does each generation have a book which defines their time, which everyone had read and is something that defines an era?" FWIW, I don't think so... nor do I think that the concept of "generation/era" is necessarily valid. We pick out a distinctive/spectacular movement/group/subset from a given time-span, apply a Name and maybe an Icon (perhaps the "book" you mention) and settle for a ridiculously artificial over- simplification.

Lessee now.... "The '50s ... The Beat Generation. ... Howl (or maybe On The Road OK? Hey, I was there -- graduated U.Calif. Berkeley, Class of 1955. A bunch of pseudo-nonconformist (hangers-on/acolytes had to conform to their patterns of non-conformity, at the risk of being ignored or ridiculed) socio-political-cultural Activists (some of whom were Talented) who took themselves Very Seriously Indeed. A lot of them had ideas and approaches and ways of writing that seemed new & exciting and revolutionary to those of us who were young and ignorant at the time, but.... No, IMHO, this wasn't "the '50s", or "The Beat Generation", this was just a subset of one stream of Western

European/American Intellectual/Artistic Popular Culture (which might be, in itself, more of a pompous artefact than something of genuine importance. Actually, it was pretty much any Younger Generation since... ummm... at least the time of "La Vie Boheme" or "Patience", and perhaps that of Villon. So some group gets the PR and becomes the Symbol of the Era.

Then too, there are more than a few people who will say that the "generations/eras/decades" in the past half-century are properly based on aspects not susceptible to being marked by books. What book defines "the Beatles Generation", for example, or movies after Mifune or "The Seventh Veil", or post-modern architecture? Sure, books are written, after the fact, and we'll often settle on one as being the best and hence definitive of the era, but this is a matter of history, and subject to change as later generations do some re-evaluation. All of which is much too Profound for me, at this hour of the night." ((Yeah, but it reads really well. This was originally Jim Mallory's idea and I still think it has some merit. As a child I think there was definitely a book, The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe. Later it was Swallows and Amazons, later still the Man in the High Castle and now, probably, Miss Smilla' Feeling For Snow. All of these have been influential in different eras of my life, but that isn't exactly what Jim was referring to. I've asked him to elaborate a bit on this and hope to bring you that, and more, next week.))

Steve Jeffery peverel@aol.com "Dear Tommy. Home again home again (jiggety jig), ("Good evening, Sebastian.") so I can catch up on TommyWorlds 27 thru 30. r.a.s.f.f. and mailgroups. From the few time's I've dropped in on these it's been a disappointing experience, akin to panning for nuggets in a flood of bilgewater. Apart from the 90% inane chatter, it's not helped by the cursable tendency of emailers to re-quote entire chunks of a previous message back at you and append a single line, or even monosyllabic reply. It gives the (probably completely warranted) impression that hardly anyone on the internet newsgroups has the intelligence, or ability, to string together a complete and coherent sentence or precis an argument effectively. That said, there are arguments for bulletin board newsgroups and it's something I think Inception will have to take a look at before long, to keep us from being totally overwhelmed with one-to-one email traffic. Unfortunately I have no idea how to go about it, or how easy or possible it might be to set up a shared bulletin board, say on our AOL webspace.

Like Ian Sorenson (someone has to admit to it), I get a double posting of the email message that comes with the TW RTF download file. The first part is in plain text and it's followed by a repeat of the same message adorned with HTML codes. TommyWorld is readable via Word 6 (apart from the fancy boxed heading, which doesn't stay attached to the text, and the email address for loccers which merely come up as greyed-out "Error Reference Source Not Defined" codes [that they are email addresses is found by wading through the RTF text source in Notepad, so I can sympathise if that's the only way Ian sees TommyWorld]). So I would go along with a text-only version as probably smaller and quicker loading than the formatted one, with the loss of font size and colour

as a trade-off. The only problem then is word wrap on the default Courier monospace font (which I hate, and reformat to something like Times for readability. That too, with a bit of tinkering, is potentially fixable, but I wish the internet handled generic wrappable ascii text properly, without adding end-of-line carriage returns). ((I'm still thinking about all these options and have introduced a Notification only list for those people who would rather just read TW on the web site. The Text only version is looking good at the moment.))

"My, you are schizophrenic in TW30. I can understand, sympathise, but see no potential solution to accepting a vigilante force that might deal with the nastier element (if you accept e.g. paedophiles as evil rather than mentally sick, or are willing to discount shades of grey. Hey, I am not defending them, much less their practices, but I see a very worrying judgmental fundamentalism hovering around the edges of this argument) but have a equally proven record of cocking up and killing innocent people in a shoot first, think later (or not at all) policy of 'community enforcement'. Can you condone the 'occasional' firebombed granny as the price of cleaning up the neighbourhood. I don't think I can, although the ineffectiveness (and liberal pandering to) the endemic drug/dealer/career burglary problem here in Oxford means that we only feel secure when Inception Towers is now akin to Inception Fortress with all round double glazing and solid multiple deadlocked doors. Anything less is practically an invitation to the local user/petty criminal fraternity to turn you over for their next fix. I'm equally schizophrenic, because Vikki's work at the Mental Health Unit is basically sponsoring this sort of lifestyle and activity when I think a no tolerance policy (preferably with nailed sticks) would actually be a much better solution. But then, we've seen what this much-vaunted 'zero-tolerance' policing actually turns out in practice." ((("I refer the honourable member to my earlier comments"))

Marc Ortlieb mortlieb@vicnet.net.au "Thanks, This one arrived with no problems. Living in Australia tends to bring one into less contact with violence. Regardless of that, I can't say that vigilante style killing is high on my list of good ways to deal with criminals. It's a quick fix that deals more with the symptoms of a problem than with the problem itself. Why are so many kids so easily turned on to drugs? Why are there pimps? Why is there child abuse? It seems to me that, if we spent half the money on dealing with social concerns that we do on military nonsense, then we could clean up most of the problems without having to kill people. Mind you, that would require a major change in society. In the early Seventies, I used to think that society could be changed. Now-a-days I concentrate on trying to improve things in my immediate vicinity - often the classroom. I guess I'm just another of those disillusioned pseudo-hippies.

Best of 97 > * Best Book: Pollen by Jeff Noon. The only novel of Noon's I've read is Automated Alice, and that's largely because of my interest in things Carrollian - interesting, but doesn't quite make it. * Best TV: I suspect we'd differ here. I'll take Drop the Dead Donkey over any American sitcom, and enjoyed McCallum. (I find Hercules and Xena far funnier than anything that the Americans promote as comedy.)

My favourite music in 1997 came from two concerts - Patti Smith (her first visit to Australia) and Richard Thompson (his second). I tend to think of each generation of fandom having its own comedy icon. For my generation it was The Goons and Monty Python; for the next wave it was The Young Ones and then Red Dwarf. Perhaps my problems with the current fan generation is their fascination with Seinfeld. (I have no problems with The Simpsons.)"

IAHF: Kate Schaeffer (who is now on a list of one a notification that there is a new TW and an invitation to view it at my web site. Does anyone wish to join her?) Jim Mallory (who sent a list of jokes about Princess Di which led to 20,000 copies of the Student's Union Rag Mag (PTQ) being pulped. What was the fuss about? Well, these: Q. What does a bee and Princess Diana have in common? A. They both made royal jelly. Q. What's the difference between Dodi's driver and George Best? A. George Best could still take corners when he was pissed.) Peter Halasz, Andy Hooper, Victor Gonzalez, Vicki Rosenzweig. I may get the next issue out on Sunday/Monday as normal so comments would need to be Swift

This is being distributed to a whole bunch of friends on the net, if you received this and would NOT like to be on the mailing list please accept my apologies for this intrusion and let me know so that you will not be bothered by further ramblings. If you know someone who would like to be on the mailing drop me a line.