



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

40 Deramore Avenue, Belfast, BT7 3ER, Northern Ireland

E-mail: tferg@dial.pipex.com Phone: (01232) 293275

Web Site: <http://members.tripod.com/~Tommyworld/index.htm>

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, 23/2/98

Let's not go there

I took a tour of East Belfast the other day as my sister and her boyfriend came up from Derry to buy some tropical fish. Driving around the Upper Newtownards road, Knock, the Short Strand and Bloomfield I realised that in many ways the bombed out and deprived neighbourhood that is the demilitarised zone of East Belfast is not so different from other large cities.

In Toronto there were a few areas that I would not grace with my presence, even whilst out running. North of the city is the high rise flats inhabited by welfare recipients who are mostly black, Asian and native Indian. In Northern Ireland parlance I viewed this whole area as bandit territory, somewhere I didn't belong and where bad things would happen to me if I poked my nose in. I would only have be welcome North of Steeles Ave if I wanted to score some crack or heroin; they view dope users as pussies there.

Similarly in Seattle Lesley Reece, with whom I stayed, lives on Capitol Hill, an area where it is alternatively pretty run down or else predominantly gay.

"That looks like a good place to eat," I mentioned of a particularly interesting Italian eatery.

"Only for the boys Tommy, sorry."

She then went on to point out the two gay clubs just beside her apartment and the lesbian biker joint just down the road, amongst other places in her neighbourhood where I would be welcome for all the wrong reasons.

In Seattle though there was no indication on the outside of these establishments apart from one or two obvious names, they looked pretty classy joints that I would have no problem going into and trying to start up a conversation. The only problem I would have

found was one of personal discomfort at being chatted up and perhaps the disapproval of the staff and customers at being there in the first place. This is only my own prejudice showing through, I could have been made to feel extremely welcome and left completely on my own to enjoy a pint. I am fairly sure though that if I went in with Lesley I probably would have felt uneasy and made to feel that way as well.

My point is that Lesley had to tell me all these things, otherwise (apart from the Lesbian biker joint) I would never have guessed some of these places were predominantly gay.

In East Belfast however there is no pretence. The Clubs are barred with metal grills, security cameras lurk on the corners of blocks, checking those who come and go. Bouncers the size of small elephants, tattooed with all the latest paramilitary insignias, for all the world like new season soccer jerseys, dismissively wave you past the doors. It was made very clear that if I wasn't part of the local battalion of the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) or even worse, in the Upper Newtownards Road, the Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF), then I would definitely be made to feel uneasy. In East Belfast being made to feel uncomfortable is a straight forward, unsubtle, physical phenomenon. Being thoroughly beaten about the body with big sticks and left unconscious and bleeding to death in a dark alley is the equivalent of being made to feel 'uneasy': getting off light.

In Seattle I actually have wanted to go into some of the gay bars and restaurants and in Toronto those neighbourhoods in the North of the city had some goo places to eat that I would have liked to try out. In Belfast I'd be embarrassed to legitimately torch these buildings. The point remains the same though, that each city has its own areas where you simply don't go. Either it is predominantly gay, or black or Chinese a white person is not made to feel welcome. (I will just say that if you are Black, Asian or whatever there are similar parts of any city where it is predominantly white, and you will not be embraced as beneficial to the community.) Belfast in that respect is just like any big town you be careful where you go, you don't walk alone at night and you try to suss out what kind of place you are going to, before you get there.

Granted in Belfast the mistakes have slightly different consequences: if you do stray off the well-beaten path you are likely to be well beaten back onto it, at best and, at worst, become part of that path. In my view though, if you are stupid enough "to go there," then natural selection is again proved to be the guiding principle in urban development.

Well I got out of Harris yesterday morning at 10.00 am. After a huge protein intake (via an Ulster Fry) and a long, long bath (with the temperature 1° hotter than it should have been) I went to bed and slept for eleven solid hours. I got up last night at 11pm for a couple of hours and went back to bed. It is now just after 10 am on Monday and I feel a lot healthier (over a week of no caffeine, alcohol and a proper diet,) wealthier (£570, to be exact,) but unfortunately none the wiser. Mark McCann who was in with me for the

week was a lot fitter, but then that bastard (with James McKee) is off to Cuba on Wednesday for a couple of weeks R&R before Corflu UK. No doubt some, if not all of these will feature, in a future Götter.

Now some really exciting news: "Eugene, could you let the Monico crowd know that the soc is holding a con, entitled 'Mecon', on the 18th-19th of April. So far we've got Ian McDonald, James White, David Wingrove, Graham Joyce, Diane Duane, Peter Morwood, Kathryn Kurtz, and Scott McMillan confirmed as guests. Looks good so far. As soon as I get more info I'll let you know. E.Watters@Queens-Belfast.AC.UK" This is the first general SF con to be held in Belfast since the Unicon of 1989 and is being run by the Queen's University Science Fiction and Fantasy Society (you can check them out at: <http://quis.qub.ac.uk/fantasy/>) for those of you who attended any of the previous Belfast cons, don't worry this will be a lot better.

First off is the location, always a problems with the old NiCons. The common room is not in the Student's Union, but just around the corner from it. It is a professional function suite, with a dedicated bar, accommodation space, and conference facilities. Secondly, it is in the middle of the University district and accessible to all sorts of goodies. Finally the people on the committee are fairly sensible and mature and the con should be professionally run. If you're going to be in the UK for Eastercon (or even Corflu UK) give it some thought, I know I'd love to see you there.

And now, you.

Cheryl Morgan cmorgan@ceres.wallis.com "Hi Tommy, I agree with you that a con report cannot help purchase decisions the way a book review can, especially outside the US where so few conventions repeat with the same staff. However, it is possible to criticise the techniques of con-running, and that is a perfectly valid part of reviewing. It is also a big help to people thinking of running a con. For example, my review of LoneStarCon 2 had a lot of stuff on what worked, what didn't, and why. I think that is the sort of thing that Clare was advocating. ((And later))

Hi folks, Guess what, I'm in England for 3 months. I'm working for a company called Zai*Net who are based in the City. My office phone number, should you need it, is 0171 329 3548. Hopefully I'll be able to catch up with a lot of people whilst I am here. At the moment, other than Corflu and Eastercon, my weekends are fairly free. But I suspect it won't be long before I end up working weekends and evenings, so if you'd like to catch up with me and won't be at any of the above conventions, please let me know so I can fix something.

Finally, does anyone know of someone with a spare room they'd be willing to let to a house-trained person for a month or two? Currently the best I can manage is staying

with a friend in Swindon which is going to cost me an absolute fortune in train fares. All offers gratefully received."

Jim Trash jim@scream.demon.co.uk (also at <http://www.scream.demon.co.uk>) ">I'm still working on trying to eliminate the HTML shit from the RTF version - >more later. Ah, that'll be that error thing I keep seeing. I just thought it was some obscure joke I didn't understand and so put it on the back burner waiting for it to enlighten me at some future date.

I was absolutely baffled by some of your comments on Banana Wings. In particular your liking for Paul Kincaid's fanzine reviews. I think there is a need for some regular, in depth fanzine review stuff but Paul's column is a poor substitute for 'the real thing'. Much of Kincaid's reviews look like troll material designed almost solely to elicit response rather than saying anything he really feels. Yes, he's playing with ideas and it looks like he does take the trouble to read those fanzines but so often it's only too obvious that he's thought of a concept and then squeezed the comments to fit. His sincerity seems more than a little suspect. Banana Wings strikes me as a fun, playful zine which may have lost some of its initial edge but is still streets ahead of the rest of the UK fanzine scene. Plotka, although still a little insubstantial, are making good ground producing some brilliant comic ideas in the last two issues. The baby/computer/cat comparison was brilliant and the Novacon pirate thing contained much in the way of keen perception and slapstick joviality.

I.R.A it's near as dammit impossible to have any discussions concerning 'the Irish question' here as the word 'Bastards!!' emerges very quickly and brooks no argument." ((A lot more on this next issue. Promise, Jim))

Pamela Boal PJBoal@aol.com "Dear Tommy, Seems this time we have struck gold, you got the sending right and I got the receiving right. 32 came through during a Flash Session and went straight into the correct file where I can read it (well with my eyes that means make out the text bits) off line and edit it to print out. Now if you can get rid of the HTML stuff it will be perfect. Sorry no proper comment this time as I'm rather under the weather." ((Get well soon Pamela, let us know how you feel))

Ulrika O'Brien, UAOBRIEN@uci.edu "Tommy- Any links from your web page that depend on Tripod for storage/retrieval seem not to work, at least on my reader -- you might check on that. Also, Murray Moore asks what FWIW stands for. I'm sure you'll get a blizzard of answers, but it's: For What It's Worth." ((I have heard this from a number of people. I think it is the Tripod advertising window which buggers up most browsers. Unfortunately it is a free service which depends on the advertising and there is nothing I can do about it.))

Richard Brandt rsbrandt@cris.com (also at: <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/8720>)
"Dear Tommy: "FWIW" is short for "For What It's Worth." HTH, Richard" ((I also like his sig file: "That's what makes software fun: it's like preparing spaghetti. You throw it against the wall, and if some of it sticks, it's done." -- Robert X. Cringley. Talking of which))

David Langford ansible@cix.co.uk (also at: <http://www.ansible.demon.co.uk/>) "Tommy ... >W. C. Sellar, 1066 And All That. Because I am a loathsome pedant, I can't restrain myself any longer from asking what you have against the co-author R.J. Yeatman.... Good luck earning that £600. We all believe you are above mere questions of corrupt personal gain, and only do it because it's sure-fire material for a fanzine article. best: Dave."

Ned Brooks nedbrooks@sprynet.com "My comment "I've got that book" was meant to refer to the book you quote from in your tag, Sellars' 1066 and All That. Thanks for the new issue. I don't know what you mean by RTF or eliminating HTML or that this latest is an ASCII version. The HTML language is set in ASCII, that's the point. I just translated It Goes On The Shelf 18 from FancyFont set in ASCII to HTML set in ASCII except for scanning in the pasted-up art. Perhaps when I've added that I will try sending it to selected victims."

Kate Schaeffer kate@scn.org "Tommy, It's Kate Schaefer. Not Schaeffer. Not Shaffer. Not Sheaffer. Not Scheffer. Not Shafer. But thanks for sending me the pointer. I adore Lesley's writing; the loss of an outlet for her essays is high on the list of reasons I'm sad Apparatchik folded." ((Er, sorry. Big Time.))

Vikki Coven VCoven@compuserve.com "I greatly appreciate being on the current list. The only problem is that I haven't been able to read an issue for the last month! A month ago some very rude person decided to kick in my back door and steal both computers. That is all they took. Left the printer and modem While I appreciate access (more than I expected, I am addicted!) this primitive little blue and white screen holds many mysteries for me as I used macs before this."

IAHF: Julia Daly (EOA: desk.help1@traf.com), Marc Ortlieb, Nigel Rowe (EOA: nigel@mwpssoft.com), Luke McGuff, Lucy Huntzinger ("Lucy, cheerfully answering her email on time for once"), Caroline Mullan (Who appears to be still in the midst of moving to:), Garth Spencer, Pamela Boal (a few times on technical problems. See above), Randy Byers, Andy Hooper, Jerry Kaufman, Ted White ("My new e-address is TedWhite@aol.com. This is my daughter's machine and account, and I only get out here to use it & check my mail about once a week.") Thanks to everyone who wrote, even just to say Hi. A lot more responses and comments next week. Honest.

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.