



The forty-fifth issue of a sortof letter substitute, kinda thing, maybe weekly, maybe not, from:

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Available only via the net. See the colophon for the usual disclaimer. Supporting Toronto in '03 for the 2003 WorldCon, Seattle and then Belfast for the next Corflus, Andy Hooper for Duff and Paul Kincaid for GUFF. This issue dated, already, 10/3/99.

"Is it safe?"

This is a quote from *The Marathon Man*, a classic movie for many reasons. Personally it is because I always thought that it was a dramatisation of one of my favourite books: "The Loneliness of a Long Distance Runner." Why I thought this is a completely different story, but illustrates one of the many problems I had with this film upon first viewing it. I was fairly young, I have to say, but 'what' was supposed to be safe and how the hell would Dustin Hoffman know? It wasn't until much later, after time and re-viewing that I understood what was going on when Dustin was asked "Is it safe?"

So I hated my time at the Belfast Telegraph. The job, however, was perfect. It was challenging enough that I was constantly learning new things. It was interesting and exciting enough (well, databases are interesting and exciting. To me, that is Sad I know, but there you have it.) for me to want to continue doing the work. The working environment though was awful.

"You're gonna hate it there, Thomas. The 'Tele' has a really bad reputation and a high turnover of staff." The fount of all knowledge Nyree Campbell told me upon hearing that I'd got the job. (She knows all about Whirling Dervishes and what it says about their culture that they whirl, rather than leap up and down. Nyree is full of stuff like that. It can be scary.)

I was just back from Canada at the time, unemployed and the job was perfect for me, so I had no hesitation in taking it. The management structure was developed into departments and this took some time getting used to. The role was Database co-ordinator, which meant reporting to different management, at different levels, all of who had conflicting agendas. Internal politics were, at times, astonishing in their complexity. This from a man with six years experience in the Inland Revenue and Civil Service Trade Unions. All of which meant that it wasn't a very nice atmosphere to work in, and there was conflicting calls of my time and resources.

To top it off, my line manager's manager left the company in June last year, after being caught embezzling somewhere in the region of £70 000. Suspicion immediately fell on his manager, the department head, who just happened to be his brother in law, and all the field reps who worked directly for him about half of the department. Although the Police and internal auditors didn't extend their investigations wider the whole department essentially got down graded in the grand scheme of things.

So over Christmas I started to think the unthinkable: walking out on a well paying, secure job to do, well I had no idea. So I decided to hang on until I got an idea and then would leave. Ideas were thin on the ground in January: nothing in the papers, no leads or companies jumping on my back to employ me. Not being the best person in expressing his disaffection I just got hacked off and took some sick days. Then, I really got sick, which was embarrassing. At the end of that I knew something had to be done. Throwing caution, and probably good sense, to the wind I sat down with my boss and told him exactly how I felt. He couldn't do anything for me (natch!) and I upped and resigned on the spot.

I registered with a few Belfast employment agencies and worked my notice and panicked. Nothing much happened for the first week, and so the next week I registered with a few more agencies in Dublin and interviews started to happen, but none that really grabbed me and with companies who wanted more technical knowledge that I had to offer, or to whom I could justifiably bull shit. (Check out the web site at <http://websites.ntl.com/~tferg> to see what I consider justifiable bullshit.) So I expanded my search to include the whole of the UK.

I don't have any real ties to Belfast. As much as I love living here, my parents and family are in Derry. With a flight from anywhere in the UK to Belfast taking about an hour and the bus from the airport to Derry taking another hour there isn't much odds where I am to them. There is no house here anymore, no relationship to take into account, no real social need to be here and well

So when the English agencies heard about me they were all over me. Last week I had 8 interviews in one week and this Tuesday, the week after, I had been offered four jobs, one in Dublin, two in Birmingham and one in Nottingham.

Why Nottingham? Well, no reason at all, as I said at all my interviews it is the role that I'm into. Technically I'm an Analyst/Programmer and the company will train me in both roles to the technical specifications they require. Eugene noted upon hearing this: "Have you ever analysed anything, Tommy? Or programmed anything, for that matter?" Funny man, is our Eugene.

So I start on 22 March and will be in Nottingham the week before to get myself set up and use up the relocation package they have put together for me. Like the movie I'm not entirely sure what is waiting for me in Nottingham, how the job will work out and

whether or not I will be happy there. However I have proved to myself that I am capable of just getting up and moving on, if I'm not happy. I won't stick at something that makes me unhappy, no matter how secure it makes me. I won't remain in a place where I don't feel comfortable. And I will take risks to achieve what I want.

I have no idea whether it is safe. I'm going to find out though

The above address and contact points are valid through to September 1999, though obviously there will be a new address in early April. I anticipate this appearing in all the usual places, and I will issue a note to everyone on the mailing list. Being in the centre of England, of course, does mean that I am expecting party invites, and will no doubt be throwing my own house-warming bash at some stage as well. Come on, you know you want to

Next issue will be the heavily re-written article about the Nova awards. A huge rant written at the start of the year has been mulled over, with input from Tony Berry (in the form of the award rules) and Martin Tudor, and has been distilled into something resembling a coherent argument. I bet you can hardly wait.

And Now You

Ted White tedwhite@compusnet.com "Dear Tommy, for the past few weeks I've been submerged in the internet, learning a new job therein, and more or less ignoring a lot of fannish stuff. I printed out a copy of TW#44 -- it's not a fanzine unless I can hold it in my hands -- but didn't get a chance to read it (along with a bunch of other stuff) until now.

How do you pronounce "shite"? As "shit-ee/shity" or with a long I? The concept of having a long drunken serious conversation strikes me as oxymoronic -- "drunken" and "serious" being unlikely companions to my way of thinking -- but fascinating in your description. Lloyd Penney remarks on the Irish consumption of alcohol and you appear to bear him out. I shake my head in wonder..." ((It is pronounced with a long 'I' as in 'shy-it' try with a bad Irish brogue, and you're nearly there. Yep, its all true. And don't shake your head like that, makes me ill))

"Remembering Vince Clarke from the fifties, I also shake my head in wonder that he is now remembered as "among the gentlest of souls." T'was not always so -- although I think the trauma of the Inchmerry breakup in 1960 had some profound effects on Vince's nature. Vince was once a fiery and powerful writer, a British Laney of sorts, not given to suffering fools gently and a strong critic of fuggheadedness as he perceived it.

I'm not saying this to in any way denigrate Vince; I think it was one of his admirable qualities. But, having once or twice suffered the sting of his scorn, circa 1959 -- a time when his housemate Sanderson was attacking me openly in APE over misunderstandings about what Greg Benford and I were doing with VOID -- I'm quite aware that Vince was nobody's pushover in the intellectual arena. (I'm glad I got to know him better in the eighties, when he returned to fandom.)" ((We're all only human. Well, most of us.))

Mike Glicksohn mglick@interlog.com "Just a quick thank you for the electronic version of this issue. I only met Vinc once or twice and then only briefly but I'm aware of his reputation and his career as a fan. Your words about him are without doubt the most eloquent of the tributes I've read since he passed away. A fine piece of personal writing in honour of a fine gentleman indeed and I thank you for sending it my way. All the very best."

Lloyd Penney Yvonne_Penney@email.whirlpool.com "I've had enough arguments with drunken fans in con suites, but I don't think I've ever had to explain fandom to a complete outside. Even my mother got much of what I had to say about fandom, but then, she's the one who got me reading the stuff in the first place, and we both read the various essays about Worldcons and Hugo Awards in anthologies... Yes, you did meet John Millard at your birthday party, I remember now. At his wake, we discovered that based on his book collection and his reputation outside of fandom, John may have been the world's leading authority on Antarctica. The things you learn...

To respond to Ned Brooks...90 to 95% of the fans I've met have been great. That 5 to 10% have ranged from rude to openly hostile to arrogant to vicious, from engaging in a few snarky remarks in fanzines to active rumour-mongering and slander. That percentage may sound high, and those negative activities are practised by a similar percentage of the general population, but it just seems that fans are so good at being so rotten. This reinforces the general idea many have had that fandom resembles a giant soap opera."

Caroline Mullan cjm@porcupine.demon.co.uk "Hi Tommy Thanks for TommyWorld 44 - an interesting read, as usual. I'm sorry your brother doesn't get it (fandom) but not surprised. In some ways fandom is a very long way from anywhere else." ((Quite strange that. I didn't mention anywhere who the person was, intentionally. It wasn't my brother, we'd have got to the fight stage a LOT quicker in that conversation.))

Daniel Farr cardinal@netinc.ca "Well it's about time that I wrote you again. Reading the latest TommyWorld and your attempts to explain to a mundane (sic) your writing and how it relates to fandom reminds me very quickly why I don't even bother anymore. It just ain't worth it. Oh sure you might scratch a bit of the surface and get one of them to read it, maybe even some of them like it, but really get it - noooo! I read your tribute to Vinc Clarke, and while it wouldn't have been the tribute I would have written it certainly did have it's point. I only knew him from his paper personality and always appreciated

the kindness and generosity that displayed by writing locs to issues of fanzines that really didn't deserve such kindnesses."

Garth Spencer golem@direct.ca "Dear Mr. Ferguson, Just got TommyWorld 44. I've been thinking about political (and homicidal) behaviour ever since you described some things about living in Northern Ireland. Obviously your home country has a powerful draw on you. I know that feeling; I live in the Pacific Northwest, and cannot seriously imagine living anywhere else.

The little I understand of your home town is that there are people in your country, in the Sinn Fein or the IRA, who will behave as the Mafia or an Asian criminal gang would behave here. I steer clear of some parts of town, or some enterprises carried on in Vancouver. I wouldn't know how to steer clear of violent people in Northern Ireland, except by never talking politics. Would that suffice, I wonder.

I second much of what Vicki Rosenzweig writes, as far as she describes the North American definition of class. It is as if anyone is considered Good Enough here, if they make x amount of income per year; but I wonder if "x" has been increasing, and whether it has in fact become steadily harder to find or make opportunities to better your income. I really did not know that the poor were *blamed* in my culture for being poor. I have noticed more and more homeless people on the streets, since the early 1970s. I remember when I never saw street beggars at all." ((Interesting viewpoints, marred only by that 'Mr. Ferguson' lark. What is that about? You looking for a voluntary contribution or something? Arrgh!))

Steve Jeffrey Peverel@aol.com ((Who sent me a bunch of these. Here's the ones I like. Sad, but true)) Question: Why did the chicken cross the road? (1) Microsoft Chicken (TM): It's already on both sides of the road. And it just bought the road. (2) OOP Chicken: It doesn't need to cross the road, it just sends a message. (3) VB Chicken: USHighways!TheRoad.cross (aChicken) (4) Delphi chicken: The chicken is dragged across the road and dropped on the other side. (5) Java Chicken: If your road needs to be crossed by a chicken, the server will download one to the other side. (Of course, those are chicklets) (6) Web Chicken: Jumps out onto the road, turns right, and just keeps on running. (7) Newton Chicken: Can't cluck, can't fly, and can't lay eggs, but you can carry it across the road in your pocket ! (8) Quantum Logic Chicken: The chicken is distributed probabilistically on all sides of the road. (9) Mac Chicken: No reasonable chicken owner would want a chicken to cross the road, so there's no way to tell it to.

WAHF: Pamela Boal, Murray Moore, Bridget Wilkinson, Dave Langford, Steve Green, Randy Byers, Jo McBride, Pam Wells, Peter Halasz, Steve Jeffrey, Arnie Katz, Kate Schaefer, Bill Bowers, John Fairleigh, Vicki Rosenzweig

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.