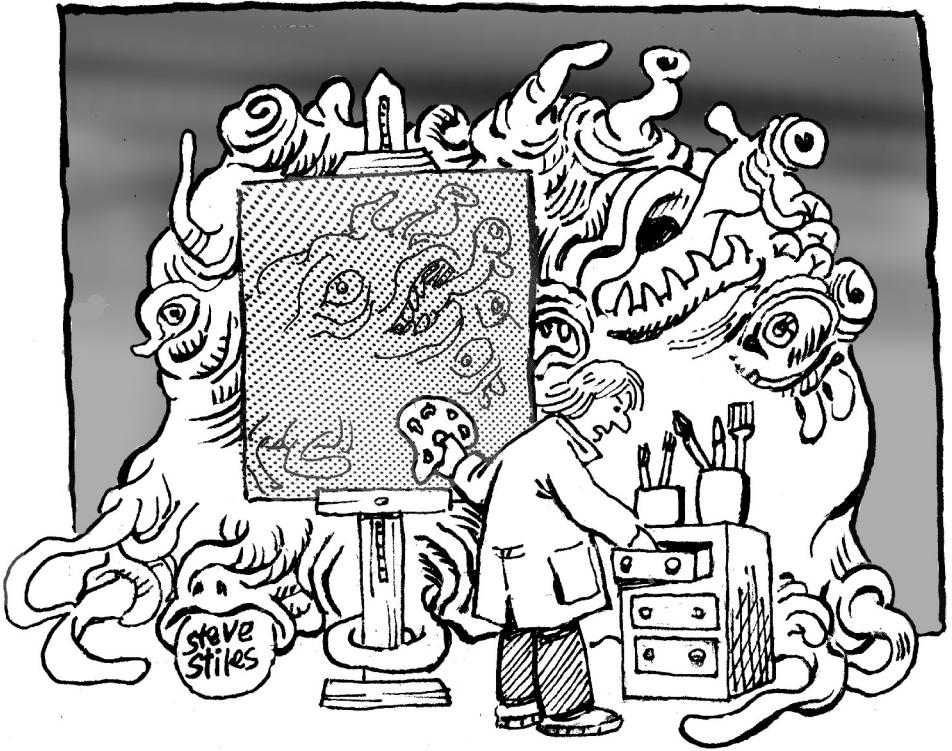


# PIPS X



*"Damn! I'm all out of Shit Brindle!"*

# Editorial

Jim Mowatt – [jim@umor.co.uk](mailto:jim@umor.co.uk)



Welcome to *Pips* number 10 and the summer of 2013. It's an exciting time for me in that I stand on the cusp of what should be a glorious adventure. I have won the TAFF race and will be going to North America to do my TAFFly duty for Europe. I must lurch about the continent being all ambassadorial and that, representing European fandom. Of course it is something of a conceit to claim I am representing European fandom. The gap between UK and many other European cultures is probably greater than the gap

between UK and American cultures. However, this is the mantle I wear and I intend to carry it off with aplomb, panache and probably a hat or two.

This is the current plan for my TAFF trip with funky hat map by Carrie.

8th August – Travelling – arrive Toronto

9th August – Toronto – with Catherine Crockett

10th August – Toronto

11th August – Travelling – arrive Abingdon

12th August – Abingdon – with Curt Phillips

13th August – Abingdon

14th August – Travelling – arrive Seattle

15th August – Seattle – with Randy Byers

16th August – Seattle

17th August – Seattle – Party!

18th August – Travelling – arrive Santa Cruz – with Glenn Glazer

19th August – Santa Cruz – maybe BASFA meeting in the evening

20th August – San Francisco - with Jay Kinney

21st August – San Francisco - with Jay Kinney

22nd August – Travelling – arrive Las Vegas  
 23rd August – Las Vegas – with Jacq Monahan  
 24th August – Las Vegas  
 25th August – Las Vegas – annual BrunchCon Fannish Fiesta!  
 26th August – Las Vegas – with Alan White  
 27th August – Las Vegas  
 28th August – Las Vegas  
 29th August – Travelling – arrive at Worldcon  
 30th August – Worldcon  
 31st August – Worldcon  
 1st September – Worldcon  
 2nd September – Worldcon  
 3rd September – Travelling – arrive at New Orleans  
 4th September – New Orleans – with Rebecca Smith  
 5th September – New Orleans  
 6th September – Travelling - returning home

Now I look upon the full list I do begin to feel a little daunted by it all. I may be in need of a holiday after that lot.



Finally - looking back on recent events -



A moment of remembrance for Iain Banks who was wrenched from us by gallbladder cancer - a lovely man and a fine writer.

A moment of remembrance for fellow *HitchHiker's* fan, Zoe Parsons who could be such fun at times but unfortunately succumbed to her inner demons and took her own life earlier this year.



## Worldcon

As part of my TAFF trip I will be attending LoneStarCon3 in San Antonio. Carrie and I have volunteered to help with the newsletter and we will be editing the Friday morning issue of the newsletter. I will be spending as much time as possible in the fanzine lounge which I am reliably informed is quite close to the bar. John Purcell will be overseeing the goings on in the Fanzine lounge and informs me that the Fan Funds auction will take place there at 4pm on Saturday. Please bring stuff for us to auction and bring money to buy stuff. Spike has also contacted me asking if I want to be involved in a panel about the Alamo. Fool that I am I have said yes. Now I need to do some research so I will have some idea what the other panelists are talking about.

## Steve Stiles

The front cover of this zine was created by the wonderful Steve Stiles. Steve, who has probably saved kittens from burning buildings and might well untie young maidens from railways tracks has been nominated for the fan artist Hugo. Vote for Steve Stiles and make him a very happy chap indeed.

## How to format your fanzine for e-readers

Me and my Kindle, we go everywhere together. We travel together, we bathe together. We even go to the toilet together. The vast majority of my reading material is on the Kindle and I get a little miffed, indeed almost petulant when I can't get the thing I want to read on my Kindle and have to settle for cumbersome paper stuff instead. However there are forces at work. I was recently quite delighted when the Hugo voting package arrived all ready to be transferred to my ereader of choice. Obviously they knew I wanted it in this format and vast armies of volunteers slaved throughout the winter evenings to make it so, just for me. I was even more delighted when Mark and Claire began producing an ebook version of *Banana Wings* and were happy to email it directly to my Kindle as soon as it was ready. This means that every now and again a *Banana Wings* powered by pixie dust and fairy powder will appear magically before my eyes when I open up the Kindle. Of course the magic is actually technological gubbinses, but it is magic nevertheless.

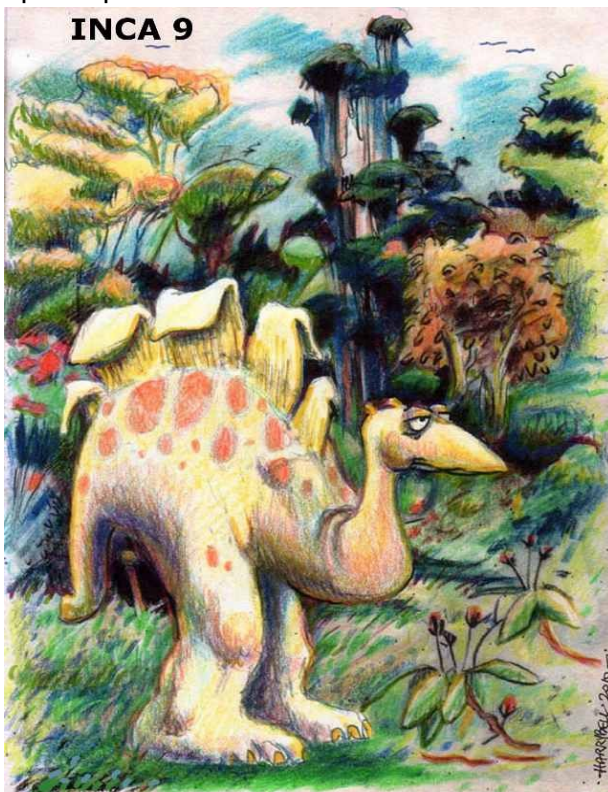
However, thinks I. There are many other fanzine editors out there not producing ebook formatted zines. So, my plan (hopefully not an evil one and definitely not very cunning) is to write a piece here showing how to convert your fanzine to ebook format so that we folks with Kindles, Nooks, Kobos, iPads etc will be able to read it on our device of choice. I'm a terribly obvious fellow and so have chosen the obvious thing to do. That thing is to ask a FanEd to give me his or her files so I can go through the process of creating a zine for ereaders.

I put out my appeal and Rob Jackson tentatively stretched out his toe looking for just a little immersion into the waters of ereaders. I grasp that toe firmly and give it a good tug. Rob is exactly the sort of FanEd I was looking for. You only have to look at his fanzine, *Inca* to see how much he glories in the look of a zine and its layout. Colour photos abound and there's all manner of pictures, headers and general razzmatazz all over the place. I needed to interact with someone who likes this sort of thing to better understand what goes on in the mind of the FanEd. I, myself am a simple soul and like a very simple layout but my wife tells me I'm a



freak and my own FanEd impulses cannot be trusted. Maybe working with Rob will help me figure out how big a gap needs to be bridged before I can persuade people to produce ereader fanzines.

So, Rob sends me his beautifully formatted, double column Word files. First problem is that I'm using a Linux machine. I can read the Word files but cannot convert them back to single column format which is what I need if I'm going to convert his files to read on my Kindle. Carrie (for 'tis she) leaps to my rescue brandishing a bona fide copy of Microsoft Office and a laptop that will put up with that sort of nonsense. I throw the files across to her and she deals summarily with each one. A little later they return to me reduced to single



column and ready for me to convert into a file that can be read by an ereader. My usual process at about this stage would be to shove it through my word processor, check that everything is in more or less the right order and then save it as HTML so I can continue to edit it in a web page editor. At this point you've possibly just written me off as some perverted weirdo. We are building a file for ereaders and I want to start playing with web pages. That's just crazy talk. However the program we will be using to convert the file is Calibre (free download available for most machines) and Calibre understands HTML quite well. Therefore if there's any fine tuning to be done then HTML markup language is the way to go. I realise however that not everyone enjoys larking about with pointy brackets and the like so I wonder if there is a way we might be able to avoid the HTML editor. I load up the Word files into my word

processor and save them as .odt files (Libre Office, Open Office and most of the open source word processor packages will use this format). I then start editing the files. There is a glorious cover image by Harry Bell and I import this into the word processor and then save it out again as a jpeg (it could, of course be any picture file but my personal default is usually jpeg). Calibre will want a picture file to be the fanzine cover image. Next there's a file with the contents page. I delete those contents so that Calibre will be able to build its contents page from everything that I mark as a piece of header text. I slot in the guest editorial about trying not to kill Nigerian families and remove the footers and headers. I agonise over changing the size of the picture at the end of the 'Fun with Faans' article. It is a wide picture that will look far too small on the portrait view of a 7 inch screen. I can't really alter it too much without messing up the ratio and making the picture look squashed. The fanzine is going to look better in portrait mode but this picture is certainly going to be too small to show up any detail. Next there's the 'Gift of Memory' article which is fine until we reach the photos. Carrie has tried to separate them out for me but I'm still finding photos scattered hither and thither with a variety of strange captions claiming that a single female is Terry Hughes and Arnie Katz. Fandom is a splendidly varied place but sometimes physics steps in and tells us that certain things just aren't possible without the Key to Time, the Power of a Collapsing Star and the Psychic power of the Krell. I anchor all the pictures to a character and make that character its description. I also indicate no wrap for every picture as Calibre will insist that text doesn't flow around pictures no matter how much you might want it to do so. 'Uncle Johnny's Weird Dream' is easy as that is just plain text and then we have the LoCs. I remove headers and footers and mark the main title, 'Circulation' as Header1. Looking back at the contents page I notice that Rob has an additional contents list for the art credits. I figure that if he wants a list for the art credits then I should see if it's possible to provide that. I delve into the help files and find something that may offer a halfway solution. When you are converting books in *Calibre* there is a table of contents section and you can enter Xpath expressions (Xpath is a language used to manipulate XML files) to alter the behaviour of the program when it builds the table of contents. It can do up to 3 levels of contents so you can have chapters within chapters. I add the expressions `//h:h1` and `//h:h3` to 2 of the 'Table of Content' levels. I then put a little title on all the photos and artwork saying something like, Artwork by Alan Hunter and mark it Header 3. This will then slot in a second level link to the artwork

in the table of contents so that between the chapter headings there will be another level as if they were chapters within chapters. The zine has been altered quite a bit by this jiggery pokery. I wait with bated breath to see what Rob thinks of it. It is quite possible he will hate it. He's created

this thing and I've made it into something similar but not the same.

And so Rob received the files and first transferred the epub edition to his phone. I must admit, I hadn't thought of reading a fanzine on a phone but I suppose it's quite possible. He seemed pleased with the experience although made mention that it had made 'quite a dogs breakfast of the photos in the 'Gift of Memory' Suncon article.

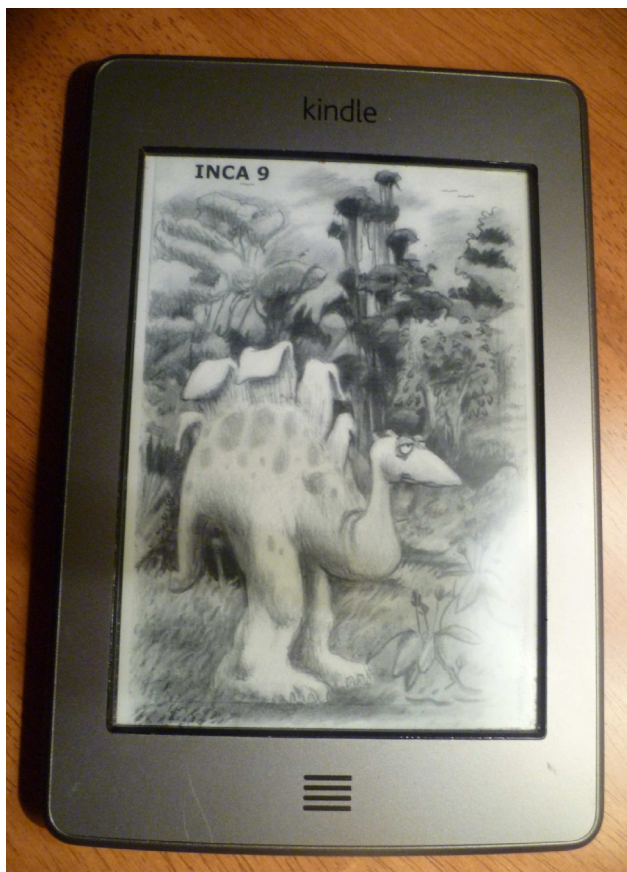
I also sent the ebook version of *Inca* to his Kindle and this was apparently much more pleasing. So I feel I've had quite a good response here. There

are sacrifices to be made to adapt fanzines to the small screens of most ereaders but Rob Jackson seemed happy with what it did to his fanzine when it was converted to ereader format.

## Toolkit

A word processor

Calibre (the conversion program)





## Steps

If you have more than one column then convert your word processed file back to single column.

Format the art and photos so that they are anchored to a character (the character should be part of a sentence describing what the photo is or one that names the artist or photographer). In Microsoft Word the anchor option is a little hidden. It's a hidden text option. Navigate to the view tab of Tools : Options and tick the box that says object anchors. After you have done this you will see a small anchor near your picture when you select it. Just grab this anchor and place it onto the text to which you are anchoring the picture. Of course, you may find different methods of holding down the picture to a particular piece of text.

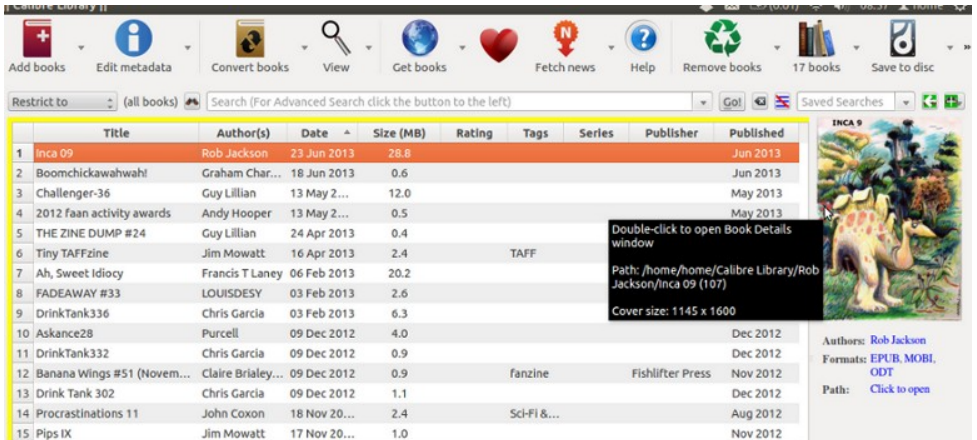
Make each picture 'no wrap'. Calibre can't flow text around pictures so best to get this sorted at the word processor stage and it will make the conversion easier. In Microsoft Word you would probably choose the 'Top and Bottom' text wrapping option. This lurks under the advanced tab on your text wrapping options.

Make sure your text is formatted similarly throughout so that the document has a nice consistent look.

Remove any page headers and footers. The document is going to look quite different as an ebook.

Make all the titles into header1 text. Highlight the text and then use the drop down box in your toolbar. Calibre will read these as the beginning of a chapter and so start a new page. It will also put that title into the table of contents. These will be links so that the reader can click on their chapter/article of choice and be transported to that page.

Save the file as an odt file or if you're using Word then save as a .docx or a HTML file.



Import your file into Calibre using the 'add books' button.

Convert the book using the convert button. This will take you through a series of options. The first page you are presented with is the metadata page. You can fill in the title of the zine and author name here. You can also add your cover image here too. There are 2 drop down boxes at the top of the page to the right and the left. One is to choose the input format and one to specify output. There are many other options you can play with to fine tune the conversion but I usually just choose a couple to tweak. With Rob's zine I added a couple of bits of markup to the 'Table of Contents' section. I put this //h:h1 in the space for level 1 TOC and this //h:h3 in the space for level 2 TOC. This will cause Calibre to search through the document for any text marked up as H1 (H1 is all the chapter headings that you converted into header1 text) and putting it into the table of contents as a chapter and then within those chapters it will look for level 2 chapters marked up as H3 (these are the little bits of text describing the artwork that you marked as 'header3' in your word processor) and will place them in the table of contents also. I used this to place the artwork and photos on the table of contents.

When I'm producing mobi files I will also go to the mobi output section and tick the box that says put generated table of contents at the start of the book instead of the end. I'm a little baffled as to why the default is to place the table of contents at the end of a book.

You will probably do all of this twice, once to create a mobi file and once for an epub.

Then you'll need to get them onto your reading device. I was a little surprised that Rob had only put books onto his Kindle by using the Kindle store. He'd used his Kindle very seldom so hadn't really got around to experimenting with it yet. I wrote out a little guide explaining how to get documents onto the Kindle which I have reproduced here.

## **How to get files onto your Kindle**

We have one, no two main ways - among the ways we can put files on your Kindle are:

Treat it as a USB drive. You've probably got a USB cable with it. Plug one end in your computer and the other end in the Kindle. It should show in 'My Computer'. Open it up and you'll see some folders. One of them will be Documents. The .mobi file can be dropped in there and you will see it the next time you open your Kindle.

The other is slightly more complicated but immensely more wonderful and magical. Go to the Amazon store - log in. Go to 'your account' and then navigate to 'Manage Your Kindle'. In the box at the side you will see an option called 'Personal Document Settings'. You will see a menu come up. At the top it will probably say something like 'Rob's Kindle'. There will be an email address at the side of this. This is the address that the person will need who will be sending things to your Kindle.

Further down you will see 'Approved Personal Document E-mail List'

You will need to enter my email there using the 'add a new approved email address' option so that I can send you the file.

Enter the address, jim@umor.co.uk and click add address.

Next time your Kindle connects to your wifi then you should receive the fanzine.

Obviously your Kindle name may be slightly different (unless you are using Rob's Kindle) and you may add a different address. Anyone who wishes to receive my fanzine on their Kindle then follow the instructions above, send me your Kindle email address and my zine will appear, as if by magic upon your Kindle ereader. There may be ways to do similar things with other devices. Please write and let me know and I'll pass that information along.

## Easter In Bradford

**Friday** - Hour after hour we crawl. Endless lines of slow, lurching vehicles accompany us as we move tortuously northwards, eventually to be deposited at the Cedar Court hotel in Bradford. It's cold in Bradford but registration and room allocation is easy. Only moments after our arrival we are signed up, checked in and dragging large bags of t-shirts and Beeblebears into the dealer room. We are jammed into one of the centre tables and have to trample our way across bodies and bags galore but we are focussed and strong and nothing shall stand in our way (well if it does we will shall say in the strongest possible terms, "Excuse me please, can we just squeeze past"). Nesa Sivagnanam appears almost immediately with a hopeful look in her eyes. She's a woman that knows what she wants, and what she wants is Beeblebears.

We have so few. Alex McLintock has all the rest and we haven't seen him yet. She's not sure she believes us and prods about under the table just to check.

Upstairs I hear loud noises coming from the boardroom. Soon afterwards several Zulus leave the boardroom. Well that explains that then.

Later there's a TAFF panel item. Theresa and I are there. Several audience members wait patiently expecting us to do something. The moderator, John Coxon doesn't appear. We wait several minutes and he still doesn't appear. We decide drastic action is needed and so begin talking about him. It does the trick. He arrives shortly afterwards to ensure he can talk about himself also.

John complains that he didn't get any free beer at the Worldcon. Crystal, in the audience protests loudly that he got an abundance of free meals. John accepts this but assures her that food is not beer and therefore doesn't count.

We were all introduced and then John probed us thoroughly as to our fan fund feelings and intentions. Theresa and I assured everyone in the audience that we loved them all and thought fan funds were fine and wonderful. We both pointed out what a simply super idea it would be if people decided to vote for us. The probing continued but at some point it

mysteriously veered off into a discussion of the Worldcon rules about site selection. The panel threatened to run into the next hour but Doug Spencer, myself and Carrie were scheduled for the Milliways Frolics down in the main programme room and so we requested that John close the proceedings so that we may run away.

In the main hall the tech crew are frantically running around putting things on desks and moving items hither and thither. They've set up Carrie's foley table and she has stationed herself behind it. My microphones are all ready and waiting for me.

The music starts and I edge my way toward the stage. Unfortunately I've given them the long version of the music and so it takes bloody ages to get going. I wait but Carrie is making eye rolling motions at me and is wondering whether I've abandoned her. I decide to go before the climax and wearing my tux, replete with gold sparkly bow tie and gold cane I leap onto the stage. I introduce the evening Max Quordlepleen style and begin to describe the end of the universe.

“And as the photon storms gather in swirling crowds around us” – Carrie waves two torches around.

“The skies begin to boil” – Carrie plonks a kettle onto the table and tech play the boiling water effect. “See where the light of infinity bursts in upon us” Carrie turns on a small wind-up lantern.

I'm trying not to look at Carrie as she's demonstrating the end of the universe so that I don't laugh and so make strange puffing noises into my microphone. I don't entirely succeed. A few seconds later we finish off the universe for good with a party popper, some fairy lights and the room lights being extinguished. That's the end of everything – except of course for the sweet trolley and a fine selection of Aldebaran liqueurs.

Next we call up some prospective Vogons. Well, actually I drag them up onto the stage and ask them desperately searching questions about administration. This is just a prelude as the real skills of a Vogon lie in their stamping, shouting and throwing humans out of airlocks abilities. There was some fine stomping and shouting and an extremely brutal airlock incident, but one person excelled and was recruited as that evening's Vogon. She was a tiny little person but had a fearsome



expression, a ferocious stamp, and a voice that could boil an ocean. A very useful ally indeed to have during a games evening, so I persuaded the Vogon to lurk at the back of the stage ready to pounce upon any miscreants. She came in particularly useful for ejecting Doug Spencer from the stage later on. He does enjoy himself rather does Doug and sometimes a Vogon is the only thing that will shift him.

Next was Runaround. There were fiendish questions supplied to me by David Haddock. Frankly though, some people just enjoyed the running around bit. Yes, Crazy Dave, I'm looking at you.

An example of one of the fiendish questions – The building that Douglas Adams was born in was built in which year?

Next, Doug Spencer took to the stage to fire off a bunch of devilishly cunning questions at we poor innocent fools inhabiting the first row. These questions were designed to expose our opinions on such weighty matters as our preference for the radio or TV version of *Neverwhere* or the film or TV version of *Hitchhiker's*. Where we planted our arses on the line of chairs indicated our strength of feeling. Doug would then pick out some hapless victim and ask them to justify the position of their posterior. Eventually though I had the Vogon remove him from the stage and we



played a game of Towels of Hanoi. Two teams endeavoured to move 4

towels of ascending size from point A to point C. A smaller towel could only be placed upon a larger one. There was a slow and confused start but one team figured out the solution and so shifted towels along at a brisk rate. This fine performance carried off first prize, which consisted of being pointed at and told you had won.

Lastly we had Disaster Area Stuntship. I handed out large numbers of A4 sheets of black paper and people manufactured a ship capable of sundiving. Instead of a sun though we used our 'Light of Infinity' that had played such a vital role earlier, during the end of the universe. A fascinating variety of stuntships were made. To prove their worth, the ships battling it out for the title of Supreme Sundive Stuntship were launched toward our Light of Infinity. There were many dismal failures and an alarming number of stuntships that flew backwards. However two came within singeing distance of our surrogate sun. One craft was a slim dart type affair and the other had been folded into a circle (of sorts) by Malcolm Hutchison.

Frantic messages were being passed to me now that tech crew were more than a little weary and would like to go to bed if at all possible. We finished up and retired to the bar. We were, however, very tired so had just one more drink and went to bed.

**Saturday** – Disaster – I was undone by physics! I had put a rather splendid chocolate egg on the window sill to keep it cool. Unfortunately the morning sun had other ideas and melted it into an unseemly mass. Oh well, consolation downstairs in the shape of breakfast – sausages, egg, bacon, mushrooms and lots of coffee. Doug and Julia joined us and we heard that there was a young lady of Devizes. This was a limerick of course, and it seems that Doug has a habit of reciting limericks during times when his partner might be expecting him to be whispering sweet nothings. Most disconcerting said Julia.

Bought a Womack and a Benford for Carrie and me respectively.

Then had a bath



Then had a Beeblebears' picnic.

Then off to the supermarket to hunt down a swimming cossie for Carrie.

Then spent an hour on the ZZ9 dealer table.

Talked to Tobes and James Shields. Handed out Beam. James said that Irish fandom didn't really do fanzines at the moment. Tobes said, "ah yes, they do lego instead don't they."

Another hour on the dealers table and then into the canteen-style dining room thing where we met up with Bill and Mary Burns, stuffed food into our faces and had a pleasant chat.

*Doctor Who* has become an Eastercon institution that is both hated and loved. Everything stops for the Easter broadcast of *Doctor Who* and we all attempt to crowd into the main hall to watch it together. I was convinced I would hate this shared experience but have grown to love it and adore witnessing my own appreciation of the program magnified by all those around me. There were also large amounts of jelly babies handed out courtesy of the concomm. Very welcome indeed. Unfortunately there were

problems with the internet feed. Many groans were heard from the audience as the gremlins snuck in and stole away vital seconds from the program – Deborah\_c from tech tweeted

“Scariest Doctor Who Episode Ever. Content immaterial. Sorry, guys... “

A splendid episode that kept us hooked with the Doctor's desire to learn something about Souffle Girl.

Exiting the *Doctor Who* screening we relaxed and chatted with Nicholas Jackson and Dave Haddock. Both of them are 'doing things' for exhibits at Worldcon. There are Banks things, *Hitchhiker's* things and sciencey things. It all sounds quite intriguing.

Then Carrie went to an item on Law and New Technology – Carrie's review – funnier than the title suggests. Sounds fine but I'm not doing any wailing or gnashing of teeth over having missed it.

Later that evening there's a room birthday party for Julie McMurray. What seemed like several hundred people (but was actually about 20) all crammed into one hotel bedroom. I gave Julie my offering of a melted Easter Egg. She received it with much grace and suggested it was a fine SFnal offering conjuring up visions of some horrendous beast having emerged from it and now roaming loose amongst the unsuspecting conventioners. Someone at the party had brought along a splendid green drink called Cloosterbitter. A sweet substance but with a fine kick inside that warmed your throat nicely. Yum said I and had another. I learned many things that night such as how many spin offs there have been from *Happy Days* (*Laverne and Shirley*, *Mork and Mindy* and *Joanie Loves Chachi* although Yahoo Answers lists several more). Pat McMurray passed out on the bed.

The room party was only 20 yards down the corridor from our own room, so crawling back was a quest of only difficulty grading 1. Easily accomplished, and then falling unconscious once we had reached our beds was even easier.

**Sunday** - Aaaargh! Someone has stolen one of my hours. It's an hour I needed for slobbering about and doing nothing. Instead I am showering rather than bathing and shovelling in mushrooms and sausages at a rate most unseemly. I rush to the dealer table so Alex can go off and check

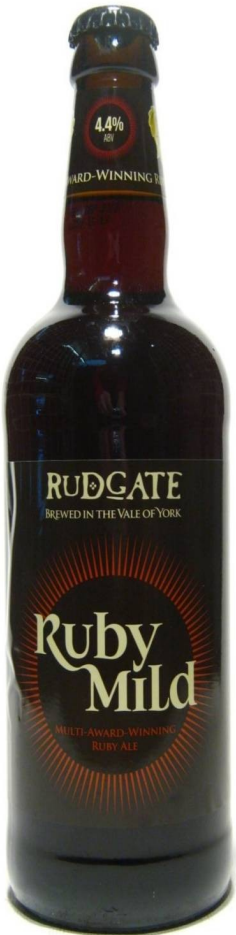
upon potential Art Show purchases. There seems to be some arcane ritual that involves forms, bidder numbers, visiting the room and negotiations with other bidders who also spend a lot of time visiting the art show to see who else has been bidding against them. It's all fun and games until someone loses an eye (as my mother used to say for no apparent reason).



I spend quite a while at the dealer table today. Nice to be able to sit there, type on my laptop and chat as the world goes by. I write a little bit about the beer to send to the newsletter. It appears in issue #5:



Beer! Beer! Beer!



We are blessed with several beers at the convention which all complement each other rather well. There are some light drinkable little numbers such as the Clark's Traditional and the Clark's Blonde. Both of them taste very blonde indeed and slide down the throat with much ease. These beers are nice but oftentimes nice isn't enough and some actual flavour is required. A beer with character, attitude and taste. A beer that you wouldn't want to take home to meet your mother (unless she was a mean, ass-kicking biker woman). Ruby Mild and the Chocolate Stout will fulfil these requirements. Ruby Mild has a strong dark taste with bags of character and the Chocolate Stout takes this and makes it just a tad sweeter. Mine's a Ruby Mild please Jim looks hopeful as he peers into an empty bottle.

While I am sat in the dealer room I am also able to remind people that those nice Fishlifters are just over there and will accept TAFF ballot forms and donations to the fund. I see Liam Proven and suggest he votes in TAFF. He shouts 'no money' and flees from the room.

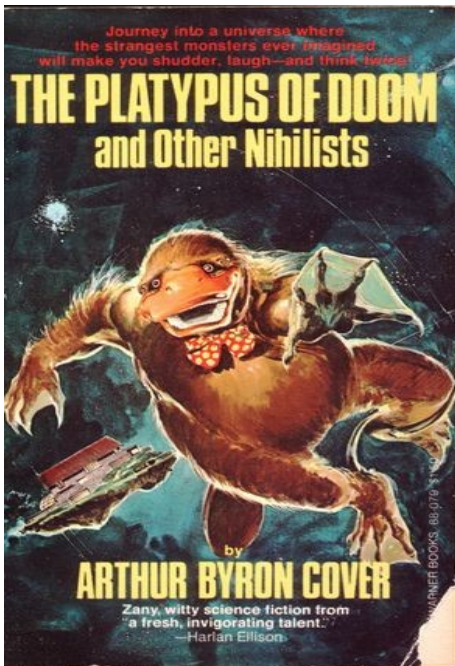
At 20:00 that evening there's a panel in which I have an interest. It's called 21st Century Fanzine Fan so has already scored many points in my psyche for putting the earworm, *21st Century Schizoid Man* into my brain. Bill Burns, John Coxon, Sarah Groenewegen, Steve Davies and Mark Plummer are holding forth on what fanzines have been getting up to lately. It seems that fanzines are still around and are teetering on the edge of a fully fledged electronic existence. Just around the corner is a brave new world. It'll be kind of like the old one but with a little less physicality, it seems.



Hot on the heels of the 21st Century Fanzine Fan is the Fan Fund auction starring Flick, Claire and Mark, John Coxon, Theresa and myself. We have large amounts of weird things, clothes and books to offload on to charitable minded folks who have come along to throw money at us. The auctioneers begin to parade their wares and the happy crowd shout out their bids. Lots of Jesus action figures change hands and an invisible Jim (completely devoid of darting eyes). Theresa launches into bawdy wench mode and Flick leans back to me saying, "If the TAFF vote were now then she'd win this." Theresa did a fine job coaxing money out of the bidders and passed around a collecting tin for people who wanted to see Fran do something with cats. I'm not quite sure what Fran is expected to do but lots of people paid pots of cash for whatever it was. It's quite possible they didn't know what they were giving us money for either but the generosity was certainly not strained. Thank you, thank you everyone who gave so generously during the Fan Funds auction. We raised over 800 quid which was split equally between TAFF and GUFF.

We sit around in the bar that evening. We're drinking beer and speaking of mighty matters, both worthy and wise. Dave Haddock trumps all previous conversation by whipping out his latest acquisition from the dealer room. He slaps it on the table and admiring noises increase in volume as its full wonder is revealed. For this is a book and it is no ordinary book. It is a book where future humans explore the emptiness of existence. There are 4 stories all with such delightful titles:

Platypus of Doom



Armadillo of Destruction

Aardvark of Despair

Clam of Catastrophe

SMS is immediately attracted by this book and gazes wonderingly at it. We wonder many things including the possibility of similar stories featuring different animals. We and he ponder different countries having their own animal that features a national trait. I think the *Badger of Queuing* was a favourite in the GB stakes.

That night, the last ones in the bar are me, James Shields, Tobes, Malcolm Hutchison, Carrie and then Liam popped in for a bit.

Tobes says to Liam, “Vote in TAFF, I’ll even give you the two quid, and make sure you vote for Jim you bastard!”

It will be interesting to see whether this exhortation will have achieved any results. I suspect not (it didn’t, there was no Liam Proven vote in the TAFF election).

**Monday** – Breakfast.

Someone walking by sat on Carrie’s toast. Most peculiar behaviour.

“Sorry” she said, extracted it from her bum and put it back on the plate. I’m not sure that’s entirely adequate. I’m sorry, I’ll just nip off and toast you some more seems to be the required response there.

Jan van’t Ent won the Doc Weir award. I’ve voted for Jan every year. It’ll be quite odd now trying to figure out who to vote for. I may even have to do some thinking. Appalling what is expected from one at Eastercon.

SMS - talked to me in toilet. This is not done in The North and shocked me to the core. “How is it down your end,” says he. I glance down into the urinal. “Well, it’s full of pee” says I. SMS is an enthusiastic fellow. I

suppose I should be grateful he didn't try to hug me in the toilets (that is even more definitely not allowed in The North).

We are in Bradford and therefore by special decree we are required to partake of a splendid curry. Carrie and I clamber into a taxi and ask the driver to take us to *Akbars*. He tries to baffle us by asking which one. We tell him, the biggest, the best and the nearest. Soon we are entering the wildest, noisiest most chaotic seeming Indian restaurant I have ever visited. We can see through into the kitchen and it looks like one of these 1940's films depicting steamship engine rooms. People rush hither and thither seemingly in a life or death struggle with machinery and steam. In the restaurant waiters are rushing by and a man who seems to be impersonating the side of a barn bellows at each and every one of them. Amidst all of these someone asks us what we want to drink. Excellent! this is the kind of thinking I can get behind. "Bring me Cobra" says I, and they do. This noise and chaos should be a kind of hell for me. Restaurant dining, I believe, should be a quiet and peaceful experience. I should be able to whisper sweet nothings to my partner as gentle jazz wafts across the open spaces and waiters shimmer in and out of existence as I require them. We are eventually seated and there is a permanent draught from the mad flurry of waiting staff rushing to yet another table with a fizzing candle as the PA system blares out the most recognisable tune of all time. I should hate this cacophonous madness and yet am quite enjoying the experience. It all seems like a show that has been put on for my benefit. Performing waiters, strange experimental discordant music and fizzy things being rushed through the building as if they were a lighted bomb. The show is fast and furious and they top it all by bringing the most amazing creamy curry with a depth of flavour that goes on and beyond and round and around. It is flavour that hints at everything and yet brings enough full blooded mouth appeal to satisfy the most insatiably curious of palates. To partner this curry is a naan bread that could house Mum, Dad, 4 children, Auntie Ethel and dirty Uncle Bertie. This naan is brought to our table impaled upon a spike to warn any other naans what could happen if they get uppity.

Afterwards I am very full and very happy. A cab takes us back to the hotel.

**Tuesday** - We pop over to Leeds to see Sarah Mooring and hand over the Dave Mooring memorial book. She feeds us excellent coffee and we catch up on her life and times. In return I force my fanzines upon her. It's delightful to see Sarah again after so long. She brought back so many happy memories of Leeds Group from the 90's. We meet her partner, Floren. It's fascinating hearing her speak a stream of Spanish to him (for 'tis his native tongue) and end the exchange with the only word recognisable to me, "sweetie". I also enjoy the clinky, clanky lift going up to her flat. The lift is a nostalgic, atmospheric and fear inducing experience that I find most pleasing.

Later we clamber back into the hire car and go home.

## Running and the Tricky Brain

I've been doing some running lately.

Oh no, I've just lost at least half my readership. I remember reading a quote about equations. It was something like, for every equation you use in a book then half of your readership will be scared away. I was convinced that this was something that Isaac Asimov had been told and he related in his autobiography. Google tells me otherwise. It seems Stephen Hawking produced this little gem, in his book, *A Brief History of Time*. However I have chosen a non mathematical way of chasing you all away. I know of very few fans who do any running but I have met quite a number who have struggled with the tricksiness of their own heads, so maybe we have some common ground there. I've found this running business to be a fascinating experience for what it does to the inside of my head and if there are any of you left still reading this I'd like to tell you a little bit about it.

Over the years I've often thought that this running lark might be a jolly fine thing to do. It's easily accomplished, should be really good exercise and it's absolutely free. So every now and again I would don shorts and training shoes and off I'd go. A couple of hundred yards later I would be huffing and puffing and aching and hurting in all sorts of places. My brain would be screaming at me to stop before I died. I knew those messages were ridiculous as I've seen vast numbers of people run more than two hundred metres so surely it couldn't be fatal. I would push on a little



further but the pain overwhelmed me and I would be found clutching a lampost, fighting for breath and feeling thoroughly useless and ridiculously unfit. I was sure that this reaction must be psychosomatic despite what seemed like so much physical evidence so would try again and again and just find myself clutching yet another lampost feeling pathetic. And so things continued until I discovered something called Parkrun. Every Saturday morning for 09:00 large groups of volunteers mark out a 5 kilometre route, and runners turn up to run the course. You get a bar code by registering on the web site and the volunteers will time you and provide a finishing tag. You then take the barcode and finishing tag to the scanning team and the results are then published on the Parkrun website. A marvellous resource indeed and completely free but of course I worried and dithered for along time before I went along to



give it a try. I mean this was 5 kilometres for goodness sake. That's a long long way. Surely I could never run that kind of distance. Armed with this mighty multitude of negative thoughts I turned up to give it a try, confident that if I found it too difficult I could just give up and go home. This plan was immediately scuppered when I encountered a friend and work colleague there who assured me that after he finished he would wait by the finish line to cheer me in.

Damn!

I started near the back of the field and was cheered to find that we set off quite slowly and the people around me were doing quite a gentle little trot. Excellent, thinks I. This pace will suit me nicely. Then after a

kilometre the pain hits. I can't breathe and I know my face is contorting madly as I strain desperately to try and get some air into my lungs. It seems that it doesn't matter how wide I open my mouth I just can't get any oxygen in there. I'm now swaying from side to side with my mouth

agape doing a fine impersonation of a great galumphing hippopotamus.

My mind screams at me to stop before I die. I keep going. My heart starts thumping and I feel a pain there. See, says my brain. You wouldn't listen to me and now you're going to have a heart attack. I ignore the pain and carry on. Now the muscles in my legs are starting to do strange



twanging things. I imagine tendons being stretched to breaking point and snapping abruptly leaving me with useless floppy limbs. I reject the floppy limbs scenario and keep going. The brain then realises that it needs to get more sneaky if it's going to get me to stop. Maybe you could just rest for a bit Jim. Surely just a moments rest wouldn't be too much of a problem. Possibly a rest might help and then you could run faster after you've recovered. Tempting indeed but I realise these are brain tricks. At that point one of the volunteers shouts out the time we've been running. I start doing calculations in my head trying to figure out what speed I'm going and extrapolating my finish time if I actually do finish. This keeps me occupied for some time and I pass the 2 kilometre marker. This is a revelation as I realise that I haven't died yet and the pain hasn't gotten worse. What's even better is that I'm now breathing fairly evenly. There are still scary wheezing noises emanating from my mouth but I no longer feel like I'm fighting for every breath. This buoys me up a little and I push on to 3 kilometres with only muted screaming

noises going on inside my head. Then the doubts come flooding back in. Three kilometres is only a little over halfway. That strange twanging feeling at the back of my knee has made itself known again. Maybe if I keep going it will just snap and I may never be able to walk again. I picture myself negotiating the rest of my life in a wheelchair. It all feels so vivid and I'm convinced that the reality will be realised in only a few seconds if I don't stop now. I try distracting myself with numbers again but it isn't working. I've slowed down from a trot to a totter and look close to falling over. A volunteer asks me if I'm OK and I try to look brave and assure them that I'm absolutely fine. They ask if I'm sure and I reply in the affirmative. I obviously don't look OK. Then something magical happens. I encounter the 4 kilometre sign. This sign means there is just one kilometre left. I start counting down. These are manageable numbers now. The end is no longer an unobtainable goal. I count up to a hundred and that means there are only about 900 metres to go. I count to another hundred and think aargh, these numbers aren't going down very much. It's still a long way to the finish. However, thinks I. Maybe I haven't been entirely accurate and possibly instead of 800 metres left there are only 750. In fact while I've been thinking about this I could have run another fifty metres so there could only be 700 metres left. No that's silly you're just kidding yourself. I argue back and forth about how much I'm deluding myself as regards the distance left to cover and then all doubt is vanquished as I see a sign telling me that there are only 300 metres to go. Hurrah thinks I surging forward and then rapidly running out of steam as I find that 300 metres is still quite a long way. Eventually I stagger across the finish line and collect my finishing tag. I lie down on the grass feeling totally exhausted but elated. My mind told me that it couldn't be done. It was absolutely emphatic about it and yet it had lied. I had reached the end and although I ached and hurt, I was not injured and I was now a 5 kilometre runner (albeit a 5 kilometre runner who was walking like a drunken cowboy). This was a distance that I never thought I would attain. I've been out running quite a bit since then and the battle against my brain still happens every time. It was particularly prominent recently when I started to run 10 kilometres. My brain said this was a ridiculous notion and threw many obstacles into my path. I would say that I stepped deftly around these obstacles but I think it is probably

more accurate to say I staggered and stumbled my way through until I reached my 10 kilometres. I'm more confident about my running now but the brain still occasionally wins through. If it can't stop me it tries to suggest I should rest this week and run a little slower so that I can make an extra special attempt next week. It's a tricky little bunch of neurons that brain thing.

I wonder if I should have a bash at a half marathon?

## How The Cat Lost Its Roar

The garden rang with the anguished wails of the forlorn deity

“Who slew my mouse,” he cried?

Many of the animals hid in fear but one stood tall and proud.

“It was I,” roared the cat. “I, Cat, the mighty hunter did destroy puny rodent.”

The deity waxed wrathful and fierce. “Thou art a cruel and selfish creature. Henceforth thou shalt lose thy roar and make a stupid mewling noise instead.”

And so it was that the cat opened up its jaws to display its power and glory and there came forth a comical high pitched squeak.

What moral should we take from this story?

Don't piss off a deity?

Admit nothing?



If you're going to kill something check to see whether it belongs to a god? or do you, dear reader have other suggestions?

## Will You Not Even Be Coming Thursday?

I wake up, slightly breathless and troubled. It was a dream and yet all the details have immediately fled. I'm left with the final scene and the single phrase ringing in my ears. Tears are streaming down her face. Her arms are raised as if she wants to strike me and her hands balled tightly into two little fists. She has dark hair cut into a bob style and is wearing an apron. Her clothes have a very 1940's look about them. Even after waking I can quite plainly hear those words: "Will you not even be coming Thursday?" They feel like they have been ripped from her throat and thrown forcefully across the room. They are intended as an accusation, a plea and a wail of desperation. I feel guilty about all of this but I don't know why. Dreams eh? Almost as weird as life.



## No Convention Reporting Please

There's a TAFF trip looming and I need to start thinking about my trip report. Now, there's stuff that needs to go in there such as names and a thank you or two. However there's lots of other bits and pieces that I am somewhat reticent to include, such as problems with travel and what I ate for dinner. In *Broken Toys #13* Taral Wayne wrote a fairly savage deconstruction of the standard con report. He points the finger at all manner of con writing crimes and looking at mine own Eastercon report I see that I have recreated so many of the crimes exactly. It is almost as if I took his satire and read it as a masterclass in con-writing. However, I look at that con-writing satire again and realise something. Taral in attempting to show what was wrong about con-reporting has actually written a very entertaining little con report. I guess he just couldn't help himself. The lists are, admittedly tedious but some of the details are delightful. There are stories of bad service that always end with the wonderful call-back line, 'tipped the driver/waiter anyway'. There's the crime of writing about food that has such great lines as 'The wasabi was weak, as well – it made your eyes water properly, but didn't craze the porcelain plates at all. But the salmon and octopus were superb, and there was green tea ice-cream for desert. Service was awful, but we tipped anyway.' Complaining that the Wasabi didn't craze the plates is too much fun to portray a really dull con-report. I had gone back to re-read that article due to Andy Hooper putting the frighteners on me in *Chunga #21*. Andy said 'Taral Wayne's recent deconstruction of the convention report in *Broken Toys #13* has me feeling terribly self conscious about ever engaging in the form again. If I had to write a TAFF report I'd have to write it backwards or in the form of a musical.' I see what Andy means here although I'm not sure that would entirely sidestep Taral's criticism of the form in that I think his central point may have been contained in the line that he only ever writes con-reports when he feels he has something to say. He gives the example of his write up of being a guest of honour at a Worldcon. Taral felt that one worthwhile to give an insider's perspective on the experience. At first I'm cheered by this as maybe that is what I can give to fandom via my trip report. Then the waves of gloom and doom sweep back up the beach to frolic playfully around my ankles. The fan fund has had many people cross back and

forth and quite a large number of them have written trip reports. I'm not offering a particularly unusual perspective. I see myself turning to fandom with the speech, I have nothing to offer but the same old wibble you've heard many times before. There will be wibble in the hotels, the airports and the homes of the brave. The wibble will go on forever. Gosh thinks North America, that sounds splendid. Give me your tired prose, your huddled descriptions of sushi yearning to roam free. The wretched refuse of your teeming imagination. Send these lost and meaningless phrases and post them through our golden door. I think Taral has both struck me down and lifted me up again. There will be much that has been done before in my trip report but I hope that I can emulate some of those delightful little touches that Taral couldn't resist throwing into his example. I don't feel that I need to start a revolution (revolutions can be so dreadfully tiring) but just need to look for fun and unusual perspectives that I can show to my readers. TAFF report, I shall not fear thee for 'fear is the little death that brings total obliteration.'

## Letterthings

Dear Jim:

Now that I've responded to Beam, it's time for your own zine **Pips IX**. It's been a great Christmas, followed by a job loss, so this season has had its ups and downs. Mostly ups, though. Hope your Christmas was as memorable as ours.

Good luck with the TAFF run! We had thought to run for 2014, but health concerns stopped our hand...the race around Britain visiting folks might be more than we can handle. Still, we hope to go to London for Loncon, but the job loss mentioned above is another hurdle we have to cross. Good thing I still have my evening job.

I don't have a laptop or iPhone or tablet, so getting a zine as a .pdf is pretty well necessary for me for portability. I can carry a lot of zines to **loc** on a small USB drive. Maybe one day I can get a tablet to read and **loc** zines as I travel, I'd like that a lot, but as always, so many demands and only so much money. When it's time for the big conventions (Worldcon, Novacon, CanVentions here), the good clothes come out...suits, dresses, gowns. All I

can say is that we can clean up nicely when we feel we need to. I haven't seen Lilian Edwards in a long time; same goes for Yvonne Rowse. I know some people would never stoop to run conventions, and others try it, and don't like it. My wife Yvonne and I have just retired from running cons for 30 years. It's been fun, it's taken a lot of time, but it has also given us valuable business experience, and we even put it on our resumes. Everyone gives their feedback to con committees, but when you are on the committee, you can make your own feedback happen. Corflu...I'd like to get to more of them, but it's the same excuses. Also, they seem to be some distance away from where I am. Not as far as you are, but... I've been to Corflus in Toronto and Las Vegas, but I suspect that those two will be it. I have no doubt my possible candidacy for TAFF was discussed at the most recent Vegas Corflu, and was found wanting, but that's okay. I am finding interests my are expanding and changing, so there may be new things for me in the new year. I was a little disappointed at not winning Best Letterhack at that Vegas Corflu, but there are other years yet to come, and fanzine fandom shall not get rid of me that easily. I have just about done my page, now I have to dig up that past issue of Beam to get your e-mail address. I don't see it here. No matter... Yvonne and I wish you a very happy 2013 and we will see you there.

Yours, Lloyd Penney.

I was sure I had put my address on the last Pips but having checked I find that it had been pushed off the edge of the document and I hadn't noticed. Shame on me. I shall check this one twice.

Jim Mowatt

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# Awaiting the TAFF winner

