

# Journey Planet 6



# JOURNEY PLANET ISSUE 6 - MARCH 2010

EDITORS: JAMES BACON, CLAIRE BRIALEY, CHRIS GARCIA

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# EDITORIAL

## BY JAMES BACON

I love London, I really do; it's a fabulous city, really great fun and full of life and history. I am grateful to all our contributors.

Our next issue will be about outer space, so if anyone wants to write about their favourite SF works set in space, or draw some rockets, or look at the fascination humans have for space, any of that would be welcome – get in touch. During the summer I hope to work on a special project, which is about tanks and armoured vehicles. A little off kilter; but if any of you have any

knowledge or interest in this field, do let me know.

Some of this issue of *Journey Planet* does not require immediate email or online response; it requires thoughtfulness and then calm and measured comments. I find that online conversations go wildly out of control, and although some people are insightful and can be brilliant, it can sometimes all be rather fruitless.

When someone I know wanted to 'do something' to make people aware that, although conventions are great places, we need to be aware of bad things that happen at them, we were happy to include that in this issue.

We are all human, and this issue has made me feel more human than normal. Being far from perfect myself, having made many errors and mistakes and being fully aware that everyone can make mistakes, despite

good intentions, I am mindful to allow the pieces to speak for themselves.

None of us here at *JP* will discuss who wrote the articles that are published anonymously. Our contributions come from some surprising corners, and on this occasion we feel that publishing and protecting those who wish to speak is paramount.



# OUR READERS WRITE

LETTERS, EDITED LIGHTLY BY CLAIRE BRIALEY

## John Nielsen-Hall

Outside the dim halls of the Ministry of Information, the rain fell as it had been falling for many days, from implacable grey skies. The flood water was not yet above the kerb level, but the hall porters were laying down sandbags in the entrances, just in case. John Nielsen-Hall, senior officer in the publications department, had just stepped as nimbly over the bags that had been positioned in a line across the main hall as his bulk would allow, and was now bearing down on his office. Most of the junior staff had made themselves scarce as the shadow of his intimidatory bulk passed their cubby-holes. He barged through his own door, sat down heavily at his desk, and extracted a publication from his briefcase. He pressed the intercom button. With a wary expression on his face, an assistant appeared in front of his desk, having quietly entered from behind a hidden door.

“Seen this?” Nielsen-Hall tossed the mag over to the assistant.

“*Journey Planet 5*,” read the assistant in a tone of curious wonder. The cover showed a montage of tall buildings, a balloon craft of some sort and something unidentifiably mechanical striding through the tall buildings while lightning flashed. It was like nothing he’d ever seen before.

“I’ve just come from the Security Ministry,” said Nielsen-Hall. “They see it as subversive. It’s about so-called Alternate Histories. If you read it, though I don’t suggest you do, you’ll find it hypothesises another reality, in which Science Fiction fans publish magazines and meet each other in pubs and hotels to carry out Heaven only knows what immoral acts, just as if the Moral Revolution had never happened. Security have files on the so-called editors of this thing – one’s American, one’s Irish and the other is a British woman, shocking as you will find that intelligence! It only needs a Scotsman or a Jew to be a saloon bar joke. But Security are not laughing. We have to stop this thing being distributed.”

“Well, we have had dealings with Science Fiction fans before,” the assistant said, still leafing through the pages. There were pictures of people driving their own cars, something that had been made illegal years before, and some of the text appeared to refer to banned books. “Most of them are alcoholics or dope heads; a very few have some sparks of intelligence and those, of course, are the ones we must be most proactive against. We know what to do.”

“Quite.” Nielsen-Hall’s chins quivered. “You know, I have to admit I have a sneaking regard

for them. When I was younger, I used to want to produce a little magazine of my own. Things were different in those days, of course. It would have been folly, I know, but it would have been amusing to see my own writing in print.”

At that moment the bells in the corridors began to ring. “Flooding alert,” said the assistant, relieved at not having to comment upon his boss’s embarrassing disclosure. “I expect we will have to evacuate the building. I wonder what does cause all this bad weather? Do you think there’s anything in this Global Warming theory?”

“Keep your opinions to yourself,” advised Nielsen-Hall. “Security want to clamp down on that idea. Bad for morale, they think.”

The bells continued ringing as the assistant slipped away, as unobtrusively as he had appeared. Nielsen-Hall sighed and regarded the wet grey world beyond his office window. Surely, he thought, there could have been a better world than this.

– 25 March 2010

Coachman’s Cottage, Marridge Hill, Ramsbury, Wiltshire SN8 2HG, UK

**Claire:** Just as well it was all a dream, eh? Who would want to live in a world in which science fiction fans published magazines?

## Mike Meara

Well, there’s no point in me washing my hands now; I must already be infected.

What a shock it was, opening the envelope and finding a fanzine devoted to that stuff real fans never read any more... what’s it called... science fiction. I have to tell you, it’ll never catch on. There *are* no new SF ideas, they’ve all been used up – haven’t you heard?

Don’t get me wrong. I love reading the stuff as much as the next genregheftoblashed geek. Although perhaps not as often, these days. And I can yak into the early hours with the best of them (while not ever being one of that group) about why novel X was crap, despite what *you* may think, and why novel Y was actually great, ditto. Novel Z? Well, we both spit on it, don’t we? Oh – we don’t. Hmmm.

It’s just that I don’t actually like *reading* other folk *writing* about SF. No, not even the big guys, Knight and Blish and their modern equivalents, critiquing the stuff, nor fans, however erudite, writing about their love of it. No, not even you, Claire. (If I was *talking* to you about it, probably over a nice glass of something, now that would be very different.)

As a result, although there is a lot of worthy stuff in issue 4, which I know others will comment on far more interestingly than I could, there's not much that stirs *me* to say anything. However, there are two pieces that I do like a lot. The first is Emma King's about Venus; I had no idea who Emma King was until I Googled her, and even then I had to disentangle the cosmologist from the psychic, the knitting designer, the actress. (Unless they are all the same person, in which case she's even more talented than I thought.) Anyway, she certainly knows how to make facts get up on their hind legs and perform entertainingly for the audience. Of course, colour, or at a pinch color, would have made it even better, but I suppose I have to go online for that.

And the best bit of all is Chris's 'Eight Science Fiction Novels And Eight Women'. At the moment, I can't say just why I found this piece good enough to re-read several times. Is it the voyeur in me? Is it the non-linearity of the structure? Is it the Hopper-like images I see? Is it the echoes of hard-boiled detective film dialogue I hear? Probably all of these, and more that I can't put into words yet. But I can say that anyone who can get to me like that in just a few hundred printed words qualifies for my rarely-made offer of a free drink of choice. We just have to meet up first, Chris.

And so your collection of writings about SF earns its place on my shelves, in the same way that collections of SF short stories do: if a collection has even one top-rated story, I'll keep it, because top-rated stories don't come along all that often.

– 10 January 2010

61 Stoney Lane, Spondon, Derby DE21 7QH, UK

**Claire:** Well, at least that

means we can please some of the people some of the time...



### Tony Keen

Like Steve Jeffrey, I will keep the 'zine in my academic collection, and will return to it for articles like Mike Perschon's introduction to alternate history, or Edward James's further musings on the topic, or Jon Courtenay Grimwood's explanation of his own approach. I shall probably refer to Niall Harrison's article when I write my own study of another Baxter alternate history sequence.

It was a great idea to mix analyses of alternate history with actual examples of the genre. I particularly liked Chris and Jay's speculations on a different cinematic history (I so wish *There's Something About Mary* really had starred Marilyn Monroe), and Martin Easterbrook's deconstruction of *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy*, proving its untruth through the impossibility of things (like the catastrophic destruction of a Japanese carrier fleet) that we, in our world, know to be true.

And that CF-24 from Taral Wayne could have been in a Gerry Anderson series!

– 28 February 2010

48 Priory Street, Tonbridge, Kent, TN9 2AN, UK

### Philip Turner

*Journey Planet* seems to be growing. A5 for issue #4, A4 for issue #5... It's going to be the size of a house by the time you get to issue #10!

The first piece by James Bacon in the

current issue struck a chord as I am a fan of exotic technology and I have watched a lot of the alternative history 'documentaries' on the digital TV channels about the Nazi super-weapons. You have to give them an 'I' for imagination while feeling grateful that they never got the chance to exploit their amazing inventions.

The Spinrad story reminded me how long it is since I read *Bug Jack Barron* in *New Worlds*, and I thought it went on a bit too long (but see a little later). Edward James's piece was thought-provoking and started me thinking that the non-fiction pieces were working better than the fiction. Then along came Barbara Johnson-Haddad's excellent story and demolished the notion. Paul McAuley also scored points for fiction versus non-fiction.

And then I went off at a tangent.

Suddenly, my competition between fiction and non-fiction was subdivided by a third category: 'Which is it?' 'The Celluloid Dream', out of the context of the magazine, looks like a tale of how Hollywood and its population of weird people operate. Someone who didn't get the clues could easily assume it's non-fiction.

Which left me asking myself, "Does wondering whether the piece is fiction or non-fiction distract the reader, divide his/her attention and reduce the reader's appreciation of the author's skill in presenting fact in a readable form or in weaving something that looks like fact even though it isn't? Are the best items to go in a magazine devoted to alternate history those which shout their category, fiction or non-fiction, for the reader's reassurance? Or is skin-dancing across the surface of history a better strategy?"

Ask enough people and you'll probably come up with a 50:50 split. And some awkward sod will probably throw in a fourth category to complicate things further.

Anyhow, I enjoyed reading the magazine, which is what really counts, and you had an excellent, clear-to-read Table of Contents. And you even managed to fit in the contact information, even though the tail of the last category disappeared off the side of pa

– 20 February 2010

10 Carlton Avenue, Romiley, Stockport SK6 4EG,  
UK

**Claire:** I cursed when I saw the bottom of the letter column in the printed fanzine. I cursed again when I realised that at least one eagle-eyed reader had spotted that too. Foolishly I thought that would be the obvious mistake which all fanzines must contain, and since it had thus been found I could now stop worrying about it.

## Steve Jeffery

If the many universes theory held by physicists like David Deutsch is true then each action, however small and insignificant, results in the budding off of new universes where the outcome takes alternative paths. Which suggests there is no such thing as *an* alternate 'history', but an infinity of universes, all equally real – or equally alternate – to each other.

In this one, I am writing a email letter of comment to *Journey Planet*. In others I fail or simply forget to respond. In another universe this issue of *Journey Planet* does not have an unfortunate glitch in the middle of Paul McAuley's story, three quarters down the first column on page 31, that requires the reader to invent a couple of missing paragraphs to work out what's going on, or a truncated list of references at the end Mike Perschon's article. And yet another where my letter of comment to that issue is even reasonably coherent.

Somewhere, down a more divergent branch path, this letter of comment is being written out in freshly-ground ink onto vellum, with a warning that some of the ideas contained within your publication may be considered heretical. Consequently there will be another history in which *Journey Planet* finds itself in the Vatican's Index of banned works (a rare honour indeed for a fanzine, though not without its attendant hazards).

In this theory, every moment (or every observed moment: there may be infinitely many Schrödinger's universes where both outcomes exist in undecided suspension), is a Jonbar point, budding equally probable alternate universes down an infinite garden of forking parks.

When you start to think of the statistical improbabilities of being who we are, in this particular universe, in this particular place and time, rather than who we might have been, the mind quails. The only adequate response is the pragmatic philosophical reflection "we're here because we're here because we're here". (I once had a conversation with a friend who regarded the *Star Trek* transporter as an object of existential terror, because she was convinced that the 'you' that stepped out could not be the same 'you' that stepped in. I didn't encourage her to read any Greg Egan.)

Given this multitude of possibilities, it's strange that the genre of alternate history, and *sf*nal alternate history in particular, seems so perpetually fascinated by a relative handful of scenarios: Hitler and the Third Reich, the Reformation, Napoleon and the battle of Waterloo, Gettysburg and the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. More fascinating, to me at least, are those that explore possibilities based on events I am less

familiar with: Mary Gentle's *Ash: A Secret History*; Giordano Bruno's execution on the Campo des Flores in John Crowley's *Aegypt*. Both of these sent me off to explore the writing of other historians and scholars and fill several yards of bookshelves in the process.

Despite the production glitches noted above (though I really would like the rest of those references), this is a stonking issue, possibly your best yet. And yet it opens up a minefield. One of the problems for someone like me, who pursued an education and career in the sciences at the exclusion of the humanities, is figuring out the real from the invented, or where a seemingly plausible article wanders into a spoof or wind-up. 'The Limerick Soviet' falls firmly into this category. I don't know enough about Irish history. It comes up in Wikipedia (but how far can we trust Wiki?). But look, here's a photograph of the Limerick General Strike Committee 1919 (<http://www.limerick.ie/media/Media,3944,en.pdf>). I have to concede. Truth, as they say, really can be stranger than fiction.

If I mentioned everything I was fascinated by and enjoyed in *Journey Planet* #5, this LOC would end up longer than your entire letters column, or possibly your next issue. It's difficult and invidious to pick out favourites, but 'The Grasshopper Lies Heavy...' and 'The Celluloid Dream' were hugely entertaining (the only jarring note in the latter was the Tuckerian reference to *Plokta*, which jolted me out of the frame for a moment). Mike Perschon's article took a while to get into, but was fascinating and rewarding. (I'd not seen the fine distinction between 'alternate' and 'alternative' histories before, but it make sense.)

Can you top this issue? I'm now really intrigued to find out.

– 27 February 2010

44 White Way, Kidlington, Oxfordshire OX5 2XA, UK

**Claire:** Caroline Mullan also emailed me to warn that the reproduction of the McAuley story had glitched, which was appreciated.

That'll teach me to be too busy to recheck the final PDF when it gets emailed through before printing and web-publishing, and demonstrates some more of the hazards of this inter-continental editorial team; the full text was in the file I saved and sent off with all our other edited contributions (and indeed is on Paul McAuley's website at [www.omegacom.demon.co.uk/brief\\_guide.htm](http://www.omegacom.demon.co.uk/brief_guide.htm) as well as in *Postscripts* #15 where it was originally

published, where you can therefore read it properly and I thoroughly encourage everyone to do so), but tracking this through now I see that nearly 1,700 words of story – rather more than the couple of paragraphs Steve assumed – are misplaced from the version we published.

Our sincere apologies to all readers, to Mike Perschon, and especially to Paul McAuley, one of my favourite science fiction writers whose talent we've inadvertently misrepresented.

### Milt Stevens

I immediately noticed that *Journey Planet* #5 has three editors on two continents. Co-ordination must be a little difficult. Maybe it's a good thing that fans aren't too much concerned with co-ordination at most times. *Journey Planet* seems to be a journal of alternate history. With three editors, you could have called it *Cerberus*. In fact, you probably did call it that on some other timeline. "*Cerberus*, the fanzine that bites you on the arse from three directions." Well, maybe the idea needs some more work.

A while ago, I was thinking of an alternate fandom idea. What if Hugo Gernsback had been interested in alternate history rather than science fiction? Instead of *Amazing Stories*, he starts a magazine titled *Other Days*. Science fiction eventually develops as a sub-genre under the name Future History. Would this alternate genre attract the same group of SF-loving geeks and nerds or would it be a different group of geeks and nerds?

It's unfortunate that alternate history spends so much time on a few well-known periods like the US Civil War and WWII. Why not think about how Calvin Coolidge started the Anglo-American Naval War? How did the Japanese get into the 1941 World Series? What if Technocracy had swept the world except for the United States? What if a worldcon had a contest for the least likely alternate history idea?

In the long run, would the world have been happier with Trotsky instead of Stalin? Trotsky either wasn't a monster or didn't get a sufficient chance to show he was a monster. However. He was much more ra-ra world revolution than Stalin was.

If time travel existed, imagine how many people might be trying to do *something* about Hitler. It would be quite a crowd. Imagine Hitler growing up in a world where things changed in unpredictable ways every day of his life. It wouldn't take much time for him to go entirely *mad*. On the original timeline, he went to New York after the Great War and became an illustrator for pulp



magazines. Somehow things had gone terribly wrong.

Zeppelins, why does it always have to be Zeppelins? You know it's an alternate timeline when there are Zeppelins all over the place. If we like Zeppelins all that well, why don't we build some more of them?

– 25 March 2010

6325 Keystone Street, Simi Valley, CA 93063, USA

**Claire:** Not having a Zeppelin is a frequent reminder to me that things have indeed gone terribly wrong. And I don't just mean with the production of this fanzine.

### Steve Sneyd

I enjoyed/found interesting in different ways just about everything in the alternate history special – tho the alternative WWII aircraft were more up Terry Jeeves's street than mine! The problem that positivity of reader response creates is, of course, that it tends not to inspire much comment-wise.

Yet another addition to the myriad Confederacy-won-US-Civil-War stories ('wrong but romantic', as with Royalists in our Civil War, at least for whites; rows over flying of CSA flag outside state buildings in South Carolina indicate that for many blacks it's like flying a swastika) reminds me that around the thoughtfully-defined Mike Perschon analytical area of alternate history writing is a massive tangential penumbra of related variants – like the way rival groups see 'actual' history so differently they could equally be viewed as two alternate histories. (Other examples would be Israel/Palestine, Republicans/Unionists in the north of Ireland, etc. etc.) As a specific on the 'Confederacy won' trope, its prolificity also contrasts strikingly with the absence – at least as far as I know – of any counterfactuals depicting successful slave uprisings anywhere in the US South. After all, there was at least one successful slave uprising in the western hemisphere, in Haiti (and the Maroons in Jamaica were slaves who achieved enough of a stand-off by their rising to be left alone in the hills); so the possibility would be intriguing for writers, I'd have thought (although perhaps difficult/controversial to market?)

Another fringe area would be 'hole-filling' – i.e. stories set in areas where the historical record is so patchy or totally lacking that, at least at present, there is no way of knowing if it is alternate history at all. Bernard Cornwell's novel of the building of Stonehenge, 'real' Arthur novels, and so on; the Celtic mummies of Xinjiang, to date totally unexplained, are another example open for being given a history. Conspiracy Theories (except

when they turn out to be true, of course) are also another near-relative, as are the rivalrous theories of archaeologists, quite different conclusions from the same excavation data – as with Maiden Castle, where equally eminent academics can say that either the bodies found were the victims of Roman military attack or the respectful or even ritual burials by the native inhabitants of the place of their own dead under non-warfare circumstances.

Going back an instant to the Perschon article, his use of term 'discovery', in his case without quote marks, for Columbus's activities is itself an alternate history. Quite apart from the likely Viking arrival in Newfoundland – and the more arguable Madoc/Welsh, Quetzalcoatl and his people, Africans recorded in the hamitic-featured Olmec heads etc., speculated prior arrivals from the east – the people whose descendants became the First Nations of the Americas had millennia earlier discovered the Americas from the west across the Bering Straits. So there again alternative history/perception of 'fact' intersect.

As a future prospect, too, universalisation of DNA testing worldwide – which could plausibly occur as part of the extension of all governments' urge to database-building – could as a by-product provide accurate pictures of the actual origins of ethnic groups and their inter-relationships, many likely to be embarrassing to simplistic national stories, and in themselves offering the prospect that what would now be seen as alternate histories may in the end prove to be plausible actualities – a Nick Griffin-alike turning out to have black ancestry from a left-behind Roman auxiliary unit from Africa, to take a colourful individual example of relative likelihood.

I'm grateful to have my guilt over never having ever read *Voyage* eliminated, as I now have such a clear picture of it from Niall Harrison's article that there is no need. It did remind me of a striking might-have-been/what-if from the space race: there was a talk, a few years back, at the Uni here by a Russian who'd had a senior role in the Mir programme before NASA forced its abandonment/burning as our price for the Russians having a role in the ISS. In Q&A afterwards he was asked if the Soviet Union had considered a Mars mission, and said that at one time a one-way mission had been seriously considered, with no shortage of volunteers willing to die there for fame.

The printed statement on this sheet ['This page intentionally left blank'] seems to have appropriately paradoxical quality for response to this issue (and perhaps directly to the page 46 blankness illo?!)

– 18 February 2010

4 Nowell Place, Almondbury, Huddersfield, West Yorkshire HD5 8PB, UK

**Claire:** Ah, at last something I can explain!



Although I might just let our next correspondent do that.

### Lloyd Penney

As a philatelist in my past, I can appreciate ghost issues of stamps, and I may have a couple in my not insignificant collection. I suspect there's a ghost issue right in the middle of page 46. You have to look at it just right, though...

A dictionary of US and British English terms and translation, so to speak, would be handy; but I am in between these solitudes, living in Canada. I am of Scottish descent, living fairly close to the US border, so when I get the right fanzine, I know which US or UK slang words to use. My mother taught me elevator and lift, cord and flex, boot and trunk, and much more. Add in Canadian vocabulary, plus the little bit of French-Canadian slang I know, and I might be considered multilingual.

You are right, Claire, in that we need to feel we belong in a community; most times I do, but there are times when I feel like I am on the outside looking in. I know of lots of folks who do not read or watch SF, but have become members of the fannish community because they see literacy, involvement, imagination, good times and friendships. Sometimes they also see nasty politics, feuding, ulterior motives, and the worst in people, and they either move on, or decide that they can back off on that stuff while waiting for the good things to return.

While I am still an SF reader, I know of many people who have either given up on it because it's changed so much, or they've found another genre to give their minds a different challenge, like detective. One pleasant side-effect of fandom is that you have friends and acquaintances to last a lifetime and, deep down, that may be all we really wanted: to have some friends, and be social the way we wanted to when we were younger. Steve Jeffery writes one thing that I've written before... if we are devotees and readers of a fairly liberal literature, as slannish as we think we are, why are we so conservative as to how we define SF? Do we exclude until there's nothing left in the category, or do we include until the term science fiction is meaningless?

I don't read many alternate histories because they are usually concerned with military history, but those non-military alternate histories have been entertaining. A single change in the chain of events, and someone famous (or infamous) could have stayed in complete ignominy, or someone else would have taken that role in our history, or our history would have changed completely. That brings back the wonder, the what-if we have enjoyed in SF. Such alternate histories and alternate realities have brought about other

interests like steampunk, which also asks what if, and extrapolates from a basic idea or setting. It also caters to our innate wish for a simpler time or a time when there was still adventure, exploration and discovery, and anyone could be noble or intrepid. We yearn for a time that never was, just a version of asking what if.

I do like radio plays, but I'd never heard of *Stroke of Fate*. I've got to look it up, and I have a friend in New York state that sells CDs of old radio shows... Maybe I can purchase the run.

There are little zines that are easy to go through, make some comments, and send a letter off. I like them a lot. Then there's zines like *Journey Planet*. They are not easy to go through and just make simple comments. They are a challenge. I like them a lot, too.

– 9 March 2010

1706-24 Eva Road, Etobicoke, Ontario M9C 2B2, Canada

**Claire:** One of the advantages of finishing off this issue a little later than we'd planned – oh, the irony that a fanzine convention and all the advance work for that got in the way – is that I've got the opportunity to include a few other letters we received recently.

### Jim Linwood

One possible future John Scalzi missed is Hitler's visit to his half brother in Liverpool as chronicled in Beryl Bainbridge's novel *Young Adolf*. Taking a cue from Beryl's book, in another alternate world, Adolf likes Liverpool so much he forgets politics and becomes an art teacher and, in old age, gives the young John Lennon lessons.

I had a strange alternate world dream last night: I found an old second-hand bookshop full of old SF mags including an almost complete run of *Astoundings*. The '50s ASFs bore the name Vargo Statten in big letters on the covers and, sure enough, he turned out to be a major contributor with all his novels serialised therein.

– 25 February 2010

125 Twickenham Road, Isleworth, Middlesex TW7 6AW, UK

### Andy Sawyer

I'm still reading through *JP #5* and finding more and more interesting – my eye has just fallen on Mike Perschon's suggestion that 'hypothetical fictions' such as Josephine Tey's *The Daughter of Time* could be classed as alternate history, which I hadn't really thought of before (although wouldn't that mean that Shakespeare's *Richard III*, which Tey is writing against, would be the 'true' alternate history as Tey is saying that Richard

didn't actually do all those things he's accused of doing?).

I enjoyed Mr Green's report of his trip West, even though I am surprised that a gentleman of his erudition should get mixed up with the sci-rom crowd. Sci-rom indeed! I am sure H G Wells would be spinning in his grave.

– 5 March 2010

1 The Flaxyard, Woodfall Lane, Little Neston, South Wirral, Merseyside CH64 4BT, UK

## David Redd

Nodded approvingly at the first page, with Philip Turner's alternate viewpoint rating Eric Frank Russell as better reading than Cordwainer Smith or Kim Stanley Robinson. (My heretic view too, although rather unfair to KSR – for example, his *Antarctica* did have a lot going for it.)

Lots of goodies, starting with Jon Courtenay Grimwood's novelist's-eye view of the why and how of alternate histories. Liked his incidental point about "the psychological blindness we bring to past cultures" which as an oldie I seem to feel about certain present cultures. If people from alternate realities ever materialise in 'our' reality, how different will their cultural assumptions and thought patterns be – and which country might provide the best interpreters? Lots to think about in there.

Mainly, alternate history is a playground to have some fun in. (As John Scalzi does; lovely punch line, eh Margaret?) Problems come, though, when the reader doesn't have enough background knowledge to appreciate what's going on, like a non-fan reading a fanzine. I really don't know (without checking) whether James's 'The Amazing World of John Baxter' and 'The Limerick Soviet' are fact articles or fiction, and am not the best person to comment on 'Harper's Ferry'. Actually, I had this problem when I first pulled *JP #5* from its envelope, opened it at random and started reading 'The Celluloid Dream' without realising the issue was about alternate history. (I soon found out.)

To lapse into reality for a moment, the article's comment "the added section of supposed commentary on the book [*Lords of the Swastika*] is somewhat brilliant" is perfectly true in *this* reality, and I still regret that Spinrad chose to devote most of his words to creating the ultimate ambitious-but-lously pulp SF novel all too meticulously. Lacking further 'editorial' notes on reader attitudes and Hitler's sources (the 'Gray Lensman' cover, an anti-Irish cartoon, etc.) the chance to insert footwear enjoyably or enlighteningly was lost. But I didn't appreciate until many years after reading Spinrad's book that he had been more intelligent than me in one respect, in predicting what the final super-children Lensmen might do next: Superman would act like any other alpha-male predator

blocking out the genetic competition. Bulls-eye from Spinrad there, I reckon.

Anyway, that lovely Crasdan-Garcia article is delightful for all the reasons that *Lords of the Swastika* isn't: the Hollywood politics, the Marilyn later-life film choices, and the throwaway line "Spinrad, who did a quick rewrite without question". Maybe I should have written an alternative version featuring Stanislaw Lem, Harlan Ellison and Carrie 'script doctor' Fisher... but, like *Lords of the Swastika* itself, maybe it's better imagined than written. Or better filmed.

That was the first article I read in *JP #5*, and it resonated well with me, probably because so much of the ingredients were within my world-view. Other articles/jokes either worked or didn't work for me, depending on my level of familiarity with their particular ingredients. (Like the present-day reading public reacting to older prose, even to the Billy Bunter stories, with sheer incomprehension due to too many classical references.) Come your next letter column it could be interesting to contrast-and-compare the responses from readers of differing cultural backgrounds, as you probably had in mind all along.

Interesting musings on turning points of history. I wonder what would have happened had the Falkland Islands remained French? Personally, even in this reality, I'd say they should never have been ceded to Spain in 1767, still less been allowed to slide into the hands of La Plata AKA the Argentine Republic. The Malvinas should be a department of France, honest they should, although who knows what part the Isles Malouines might have played in the Napoleonic wars or indeed in the career of Margaret Thatcher? In unlikely places such as the Falklands (and the obscurer corners of Ireland or China) alternative directions for history seem endless.

An aside on 'Ghost Issues' – was that blank square on p.46 deeply symbolic? Actually, a web-search will turn up sites seemingly dedicated to cataloguing 'evidence' for such metatemporal objects; sort of fictional Fortean. I suppose creating these fills some psychological need (as does sense-of-wonder SF) or is simply fun. The nearest thing to such materialisations in real-life, I suppose, would be the strange discovery made by DJ and record collector Andy Votel. Stop me if I've told this one before, but Votel found an old 45 of a terrific song he didn't know, by a singer he'd never heard of, in a language he couldn't understand or even recognise, and it was a UK single. How alternate was that? (Eventually he realised he'd found the first modern Welsh-language pop song.)

The finer points of Stephen Baxter's *Voyage* sort of eluded me because I encountered it as a frantic BBC audiobook with bits of interesting stuff making me think "Hold on now, what, who..." while the dramatisation kept charging ahead. In

some alternate world, I read the book instead. The Baxter book I really want to read when it sees print is the first volume of his trilogy about Alfred Wallace, the naturalist who unilaterally announced his Theory of Evolution to the Royal Society in 1858 (showing them a specimen of Flores Man as evidence) and who published his *Is Mars Habitable?* as early as 1866, following his discussions with Jules Verne. The draft scene where Wallace walks his Komodo Dragon through Westminster to meet Prince Albert seems very promising, although I'm not sure where Baxter got his evidence for Sir George Cayley's ill-fated moon rocket.

Thanks again for what was, overall, an issue alternating between enjoyable and incomprehensible.

– 14 March 2010

30 Bulford Road, Johnston, Haverfordwest,  
Pembrokeshire SA62 3EU, UK

**Claire:** I think we may adopt that as a strapline.

In fact I sometimes wonder whether we should include in the colophon a reminder that views and opinions expressed in articles are those of the individual contributors rather than necessarily those of all or any of the editors – including articles written by one of the editors! I'm pleased to be able to finish this time with a response that answers one of those articles:

### Emma King

In 'Under the Jackboot – Traitor or Terrorist', James Bacon poses an interesting question. Faced with oppression, what, in truthful honesty, would you do?

Most of us, reading books or watching films, like to put ourselves in the position of the hero, and in this sort of scenario that usually means fighting the oppressors in one way or another. But, in all honesty, I think most of us would have to admit that we may not be willing to do anything so rash were we unfortunate enough to end up in their position.

I am, fundamentally, a selfish person. I do the things I do in life because they benefit me – sometimes in the short term, sometimes in the long – and sometimes they may appear selfless; but even when helping others, if I'm honest, the motivating factor is how *I* feel about myself for doing it.

On the whole I believe that most, if not all, people are motivated by selfishness in this way; it's just that some of us are more honest about it, both to others and to ourselves.

So, in answer to the original question, I know exactly what I would do: whatever was best for me and my loved ones. I like to think that I

might have some limits, some moral boundaries over which I would not step, but self-preservation is a powerful instinct. Point a gun, literally or figuratively through implied but very real threat, at me or someone I love, and I can very readily see myself doing all manner of things I would otherwise shudder at.

I find myself reminded of the French farmer who, at the beginning of *Inglorious Bastards*, has hidden a family of Jews under the floorboards of his house; but when the Nazi officer comes calling and it becomes clear that he *knows*, the farmer gives them up without a fight. That's me. I would do what I could, quietly, in secret, but if it comes down to me and mine or you and yours, you can be sure I'll pick me and mine every time. And for that, as un-heroic as it may be, I make no apology.

– 11 March 2010

Port Soderick Station House, Port Soderick, Isle  
of Man

**Thanks also to: Pamela Boal**, explaining why she can't write a real LOC right now ("My washing machine has a bug; the repair man has just been for the third week in a row. My computer has a bug and I'm changing my ISP tomorrow. I've got a bug but unfortunately there are no new parts or repairman to deal with it. That's the tip of the bugburg..."); **Jon Courtenay Grimwood**; **John Nielsen-Hall** (again, or rather before – just in time to miss the letter column for the previous issue); and **Taral Wayne**.

If you want to appear here next time, send your letters:

- By email to: [journeyplanet@gmail.com](mailto:journeyplanet@gmail.com)
- By post in Europe (c/o James) to: 55 Cromwell Road, Croydon, Surrey CR0 2JZ, UK
- By post in North America (c/o Chris) to: 962 West Weddell Drive, Apt. #15, Sunnyvale, CA 94089, USA
- By post from anywhere else in the world to whichever of those addresses you prefer...



# HITLER'S GREATEST WARSHIP?

BY STEPHEN BURKE

Most people had never heard of Nazi Germany's largest warship until the discovery of her wreck lying deep in the Baltic Sea in June 2006. Those people who knew of her existence probably had no idea as to her fate, as this was shrouded in the mystery of events that took place behind the Iron Curtain that descended over Europe shortly after World War II.

Launched in December 1938 at the Deutsche Werke shipyard in Kiel, she had a waterline length of 250 metres, two huge hangar decks and an upper deck that ran without obstruction for 244 metres of her length. From this description, you might guess that I am talking about an aircraft carrier, the only aircraft carrier ever built in Germany and Nazi Germany's largest warship: the KMS (Kriegsmarine Schiff) *Graf Zeppelin*.

It is difficult to believe that until just three years before *Graf Zeppelin*'s launch, Germany had been forbidden from developing aircraft carrier technology – a result of the military restrictions imposed on Germany by the Treaty of Versailles in the aftermath of the Great War of 1914-18. However, by the mid-1930s, following Hitler's repudiation of the 'Versailles Diktat', a new arms agreement was presenting Germany with much greater military freedom.

The Anglo-German Naval Agreement of 1935 would sanction the introduction of aircraft carriers into Hitler's navy, *Graf Zeppelin*'s

subsequent rapid pace of construction owing much to the forethought of Germany's marine engineers; they had established the desired size, speed and number of aircraft to be carried by such a vessel in a study completed two years earlier, greatly accelerating the design process.

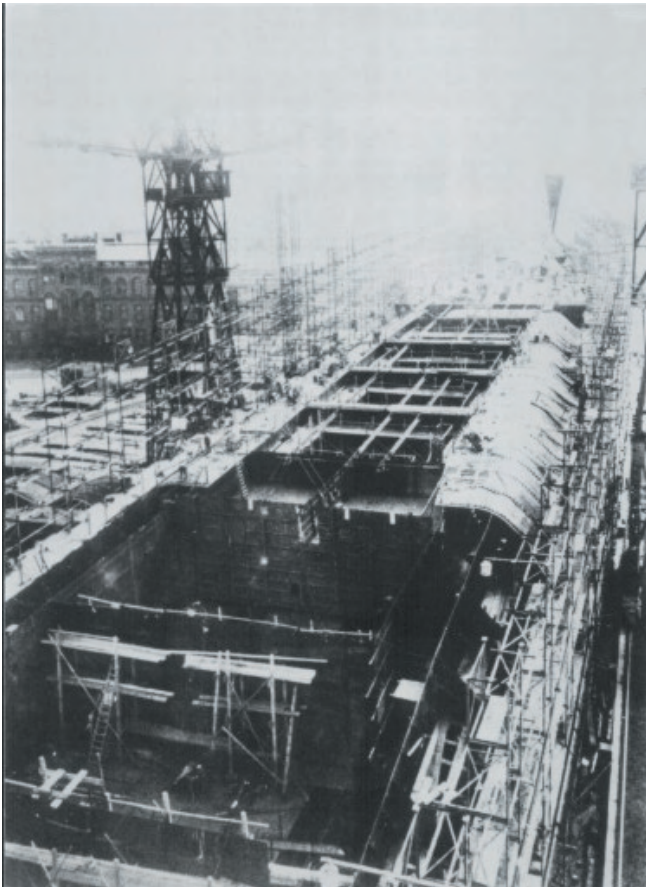
However, being aware that they had no real knowledge of constructing such a vessel, before beginning work on their own carrier *Graf Zeppelin*'s designers endeavoured to learn from other more experienced aircraft carrier-operating navies such as Great Britain's Royal Navy and Japan's Imperial Navy, both of whom they visited.

Germany's engineers would learn little from the Royal Navy (perhaps because they had visited two very early examples of aircraft carriers, perhaps due to a lack of willingness to share information with an old foe), but their visit to the Japanese carrier *Akagi* would be much more successful. Here, Germany's soon to be allies would offer plans for essential carrier equipment such as the arrestor wire brake systems essential for stopping an aircraft returning at speeds in excess of 140 km/h in just 30 metres. The Japanese would also offer their guests the opportunity to stay and study how they operated such a vessel, but this offer was refused – perhaps out of a desire to return to Germany and begin work, driven by the urgency with which the Kriegsmarine intended to expand.

*Graf Zeppelin*'s keel was laid in December of 1936 and less than two years later she was floating in the Kiel Basin. However, she would still need more than a year before the construction of her superstructure was completed and all her machinery had been installed.

Once operational, she would be able to boast at having more horsepower than any other vessel in the German fleet, with her four steam turbines being capable of providing a total output of 200,000hp, giving her the ability to go from a standing start to 20 knots in just two minutes, and an estimated cruising speed of 32 knots.

When the war began in 1939, *Graf Zeppelin* was no more than a year away from being put into commission. Had she been completed in time for the early days of the war, potentially her contribution to Germany's war effort could have been staggering. For, contrary to popular belief, it was not the twin battleships *Bismarck* and *Tirpitz* that Great Britain's Royal Navy (and her allies) feared the most, but Germany's aircraft carrier. The Royal Navy was greatly concerned about the vast area that the ship and her aircraft could reconnoitre, an ability that made the location and destruction of some of the vital convoys of merchant



ships heading towards the British Isles inevitable. This situation was made worse by the fact that the Royal Navy in these earlier days of the war consisted of elderly warships, and a Fleet Air Arm that operated obsolete aircraft, all of which were outclassed by those intended to be operated by the Nazi carrier: the famous Bf109 fighter, Ju87 Stuka dive bombers and the purpose-built Fi167 torpedo bomber.

Luckily for the Royal Navy and her allies, the value of *Graf Zeppelin* was not recognised by the Kriegsmarine and construction only continued on the carrier for the next few months, work coming to a halt in April 1940 when she was approximately 85 per cent complete; with the advance of the German army throughout Europe seemingly unstoppable, the decision had been taken to stop work on the aircraft carrier. For the time being at least, *Graf Zeppelin* was not seen as vital enough to the war effort; and besides, some of her equipment had been traded with Russia in order to secure the Eastern Front prior to the invasion of Poland, a trade that had caused a twelve-month delay in the completion of the carrier.

Grand Admiral Erich Raeder himself, the head of the Kriegsmarine, had suggested work on the carrier be suspended. This suspension would free up the materials and manpower needed for work being carried out on the submarines the navy needed and the politically favourable battleships (*Bismarck* and *Tirpitz*). On Raeder's orders the carrier was stripped of her weaponry and taken under tow to Gdynia in Poland.

*Graf Zeppelin's* move from Kiel was viewed as necessary because of the increasing ferocity of the war. There were concerns in Germany that the carrier would be susceptible to aerial attack – concerns that were well founded, as Great Britain's Royal Air Force (RAF) was indeed planning to attack the carrier, though at this time for strategic reasons the attack could not be carried out.

One of the repercussions of *Graf Zeppelin's* lack of operational status was that when the battleship *Bismarck* departed on her one and only mission, she did so without the benefit of any significant aerial support: a situation that directly contributed to her demise. It seems unlikely now that *Bismarck* would have been lost on her maiden voyage had *Graf Zeppelin* departed with the battleship (as had been the Kriegsmarine's original intention) on that first foray out into the Atlantic Ocean. With the addition of the carrier and her aircraft, history books may well have recorded an alternative outcome.

*Bismarck's* story is well known. She had departed on her maiden voyage with one escort, the heavy cruiser *Prinz Eugen*; it was shortly after these ships broke out into the Atlantic Ocean on a commerce-raiding mission that they encountered the British battle cruiser *HMS Hood* and the newly commissioned battleship *Prince of Wales*. On sighting each other, both groups of ships opened fire at extreme range, the German fire being particularly accurate. Shortly after action had commenced, a shell from *Bismarck* pierced one of *Hood's* magazines; the ship exploded and



quickly sank, taking 1,400 British sailors to their deaths. Immediately after the loss of *HMS Hood*, *Prince of Wales* was forced to disengage owing to the malfunctioning of all but one of her main armament – the newest battleship in the Royal Navy, complete with the civilian technicians who were still on board due to the hasty commissioning of the ship, retreating away from the battle. *Bismarck*, taking advantage of *Prince of Wales*'s misfortune, used the opportunity to disappear into the grey wastes of the Atlantic, initiating one of the most famous pursuits in history: a pursuit that stretched across the Atlantic until *Bismarck* was cornered and sunk by overwhelming British firepower.

These six days in May 1941 had had the potential to become a defining moment in World War II. The presence of the Nazi carrier would certainly have altered some of the events that we today consider historical fact, her name inevitably being as well-known (if not more so) as that of the *Bismarck*.

With *Graf Zeppelin* sailing in company with *Bismarck* and *Prinz Eugen*, it would seem most likely that in the early hours of 24 May 1941, shortly after clearing the Denmark Straits, having been spotted by the British cruisers *Norfolk* and *Suffolk* late the previous evening and subsequently stalked at a distance by the use of *Suffolk*'s new radar set, *Graf Zeppelin* would deploy the first ever German carrier-borne air strike, targeting the two British ships. Their proximity was known to Admiral Lütjens, the task force commander, stationed onboard his flagship *Bismarck* – *Norfolk* having exposed herself to the *Bismarck* late on the 23rd and *Suffolk*'s radar transmissions being very detectable to the *Bismarck*'s radar search receiver.

Although the weather conditions on 23/24 May had been poor, by the early hours (4.30 AM) of the 24th they had improved enough to allow the approaching *Prince of Wales* to consider launching her seaplane, visibility being approximately twelve miles; however, contaminated aviation fuel prevented this. These improving conditions would, of course, have been good enough for the Germans to begin their carrier operations also – if indeed they had not already done so.

Crucially to the historical events as we know them today, an attack at this time on the *Norfolk* and *Suffolk* by German carrier aircraft would have allowed the *Bismarck* task force to shake off or destroy its pursuers.

For Admiral Lütjens, knowing that he had been stalked for several hours by British cruisers that were obviously acting as homing beacons for a more powerful fleet, it is also fair to assume that he would have taken this opportunity to order not just an air strike but to fly off some reconnaissance

aircraft as well (probably one or more of the Fieseler's). With these spotter aircraft aloft, we can be certain that *Hood* and *Prince of Wales* would have been spotted in ample time to have allowed Lütjens to fully consider his next move. Lütjens would in no way have been compelled to join action with them as actually happened in May 1941. We know that *Prince of Wales*, though equipped with modern radar, did not have it switched on and thus sailed blind towards its foe, dependent on the radio messages coming from *Norfolk* and *Suffolk* to act as its guide; this was as a result of an order from Admiral Holland on board *Hood*, who had declared that in order not to disclose the group's approach to the German ships *Prince of Wales*'s radar should only be switched on when action became imminent, so as to utilise its capability as a range finder for her main armament.

At this point in our fictitious history of World War II, one of two events could happen, both detrimental to Great Britain's struggle and the repercussions far-reaching. The first scenario sees Admiral Lütjens, forewarned of the approaching British ships by his spotter aircraft, deciding to avoid a confrontation. Lütjens would have had ample time and opportunity to alter course and use his superior speed to escape. In this scenario, both the British battle cruiser *Hood* and Germany's battleship *Bismarck* live to fight another day. For *Bismarck*, roaming free in the Atlantic Ocean, there would have been ample opportunity to cause havoc. With *Graf Zeppelin*'s aircraft surveying



the vastness of the Atlantic, providing protection from foes and searching for suitable targets, the collateral damage to Britain's convoys would have been extreme, more so than that caused by the preceding missions of Germany's pocket battleships and battle cruisers.

The *Bismarck* task force would have had a huge benefit over the ships being operated by Great Britain. All modern, each of these ships was capable of outrunning every one of their contemporary British rivals; the only British battleships capable of coming close to matching

*Bismarck* in speed, armour and firepower being the new King George V (KGV) class of which only two had been completed (*King George the Fifth* and *Prince of Wales*). As for aircraft carriers, though Germany was at a distinct numerical disadvantage, Britain's carriers were distributed throughout the various theatres of conflict around the world and, besides, several of these were elderly slow vessels, not suited for keeping up with a battle group travelling at speed.

There was, of course, also the matter of British carrier aircraft. Had the aircraft flown from the two modern British carriers that were actually present in the hunt for the *Bismarck* been unfortunate enough to locate their targets, they would stand little chance of making it back to their ships, for had the slow Fairy Swordfish of the Royal Navy's Fleet Air Arm survived the ravages of the combined anti-aircraft fire of the *Bismarck* task force, the odds of them surviving the long flight back to their carrier whilst being pursued by a flight of Bf109s would have been almost nil.

The second scenario in our alternative history would witness Admiral Lütjens emerging from the Denmark Straits and opting to turn towards the British ships in order to make battle. During the action that follows, *Hood* is of course still lost; however, *Prince of Wales* is unable to disengage at will when her main armament malfunctions. With Admiral Lütjens receiving crucial information as to what lies over the horizon via *Graf Zeppelin's* reconnaissance aircraft – other than the two cruisers and four destroyers (at best an hour's sailing away) that Admiral Holland had detached some hours earlier in order to hunt for the *Bismarck*, there are no British warships within many hours' sailing – history may well have recorded that he turned his small party of ships for the final kill, savaging Britain's newest battleship with devastating fire from *Bismarck's* 380mm main armament, whilst carrier aircraft covered his flank to ensure that none of the trailing British warships could come close enough to meddle. It is even conceivable that at this point in the battle some of *Graf Zeppelin's* torpedo and dive bomber aircraft may have become involved in the mêlée, with *Prince of Wales* inevitably sustaining further damage, if not complete destruction, from the air – fulfilling her destiny to become the first battleship lost to an aerial assault on the open sea, a full six months before this actually happened at the hands of Japanese aircraft in the South China Sea.

The loss of *Prince of Wales* at this time may have contributed more than we can possibly imagine to the Nazi war effort. Great Britain, standing alone in the struggle – her army minus



much of its equipment having been evicted from first Norway and then continental Europe 12 months before, followed by the great losses in personnel that went with the evacuation of Greece in the weeks before *Bismarck* had broken out into the Atlantic, coupled with the subsequent collapse on the strategic Mediterranean island of Crete just days after this most devastating of naval battles – but thus far with her Empire still intact, may well have sued for peace. Indeed, by February 1941 many in Germany believed Britain was ready to capitulate.

If the great series of defeats on land coupled with the naval disaster of May 1941 was not enough to tip British public opinion towards capitulation, the following six months may have done just that. Another modern British warship, the famous aircraft carrier *Ark Royal*, was torpedoed and sunk in the Mediterranean by *U-81* on November 13; and just twelve days later the battleship *HMS Barham* was lost with significant loss of life – to make no mention of the other warships of varying types and sizes that suffered damage and loss. Furthermore, without *Prince of Wales*, as 1941 drew to a close and the possibility of war with Japan loomed large on the horizon, the only effective capital ship of the Home fleet would have been *King George the Fifth* (the third ship in this class, *HMS Duke of York*,

would only just be embarking on her shakedown cruise in December 1941).

With the *Bismarck* still in existence and *Tirpitz* now complete, the Royal Navy would have been severely limited as to what ships they could have sent by way of a deterrent to Far Eastern waters. In reality, back in 1941 the Admiralty had sent *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse*; had *Prince of Wales* been lost the previous May, this would of course not have been an option. In this situation the Royal Navy may have been compelled to send the four elderly 'R' class battleships as had been their original idea (it was Winston Churchill himself who had sidelined this plan, insisting the Admiralty despatch *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* to this theatre), heralding Great Britain's second, crushing naval defeat in just six months, and perhaps her exit from the war.

Of course, that narrative is thankfully a fictitious one; *Graf Zeppelin* was not present with *Bismarck* on that first fateful mission and *Bismarck* was lost, with British carrier aircraft playing an important role in her destruction.

Though *Bismarck's* loss had so graphically demonstrated Germany's need to possess an operational aircraft carrier, a shortage of steel coupled with the urgency to produce vast numbers of U-boats would prevent the necessary work from being carried out on *Graf Zeppelin*. It would take the near loss of *Bismarck's* sister ship *Tirpitz* to torpedoes dropped by British carrier aircraft early the following year before they would fully realise the necessity of having an operational aircraft carrier of their own. But even then it would still be the end of the year (1942) before the necessary dockyard space, manpower and materials could be found to complete the job.

Work had barely restarted on *Graf Zeppelin* when a bitter argument between Grand Admiral Raeder and Hitler over the future deployment of the fleet once again brought her construction to a halt. Hitler had been complaining for a long time about the lack of successes achieved by the Kriegsmarine, and was now adamant that all the big ships should be withdrawn from service and scrapped – a demand that compelled Raeder to resign immediately. In his place Karl Dönitz (head of U-boat command) was appointed by Hitler to fill the role of Grand Admiral, signifying Hitler's desire that the Kriegsmarine should move away from operating the big ships.

Dönitz quickly realised Hitler's error in withdrawing these ships, and in a meeting with the Führer managed to convince him of the worth of keeping at least some of them in service. However, *Graf Zeppelin* was not amongst the ships retained in service by Dönitz, the construction work then under way being wrapped up and the ship withdrawn to Poland.

Dönitz's decision to withdraw *Graf Zeppelin* was no doubt influenced by the Kriegsmarine's chronic shortage of heavy fuel oil and manpower – her relocation to Poland being driven by the fear that her presence at Kiel would have attracted still more attacks by the heavy bombers of the RAF.

*Graf Zeppelin* arrived on the river Öder in April 1943. As Germany's military situation worsened over the coming years, the opportunity to use this ship never materialised and the rest of the war would largely pass Hitler's aircraft carrier by as she sat at her mooring on the river.

She would still be moored on the Öder in early 1945 when, with the advancing Russian army in sight, German troops once again boarded her. With the Soviet advance now clearly unstoppable and the capture of such a prize being completely unacceptable to the Kriegsmarine, the men who boarded *Graf Zeppelin* that day went not to defend her but rather to destroy her. They rigged a series of explosive devices throughout the ship, and when the command was given detonated them by remote control, the ship settling into the shallow riverbed.

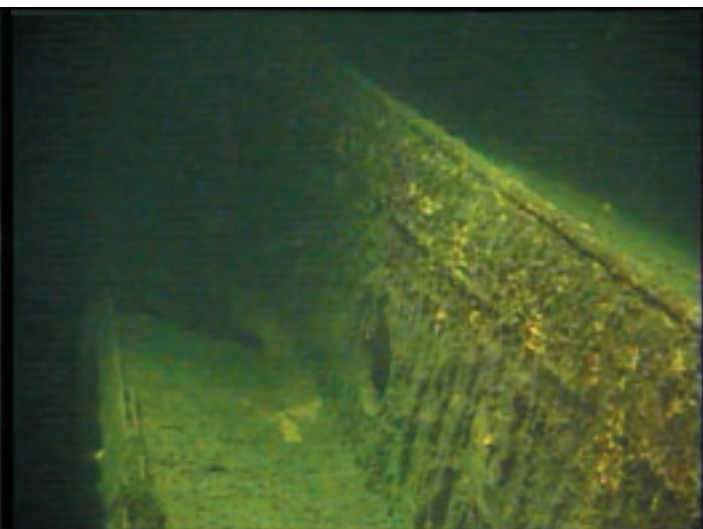
Just days after these events the war was over, and it would not be long before Soviet engineers set about trying to raise the ship, a feat they achieved by September 1945. Unfortunately for *Graf Zeppelin*, by 1945 she was of an obsolete design – and had suffered significant damage during her scuttling. No longer the cutting edge technology that had been launched back in 1938, *Graf Zeppelin's* chance of glory had passed.

She had had the potential for a brief period in the early years of the war to give the Kriegsmarine the lead in technology and firepower over the Royal Navy – a task force comprising *Graf Zeppelin*, *Bismarck* and *Gneisenau*, escorted by two heavy cruisers and a dozen destroyers, being a phenomenally powerful force that could not fail to have altered at least some of the now historical facts of World War II.

Unfortunately for *Graf Zeppelin*, the reality is that she played no significant part in Europe's history, her allure being in her unfulfilled potential and the numerous 'what if' scenarios endlessly discussed by *Graf Zeppelin* fanatics such as myself.

Today, more than sixty years after those final dramatic days of the war, *Graf Zeppelin* would be completely forgotten had she been broken for scrap where she lay on the river Öder, just outside the city of Stettin on Poland's Baltic coast. This, after all, was to be the fate of the other ships of the Kriegsmarine that had similarly ended in the shallows. However, for some reason Soviet officials took the decision to dispose of the re-floated *Graf Zeppelin* as a weapons target. Sceptics would say this decision came out of a desire to be ready for





a potential conflict with Russia's recent allies – namely Great Britain and America – which had operated many such vessels during the war, vessels which Russia had no experience in either operating or sinking.

In August 1947 *Graf Zeppelin* was towed out into the Baltic Sea. Here she would endure a series of attacks by Soviet air and naval forces before worsening weather conditions forced the premature abandonment of the weapons test, the ship being sunk immediately by torpedoes: the last aircraft carrier of the twentieth century to be sunk by conventional weapons.

*Graf Zeppelin* was located in 2006 lying in 88 metres of water. She rests with a heavy list over towards her starboard side (approximately 35°), superstructure down. Side scan images of her show that she is mostly intact, her port side towering more than 20m above the seabed, demonstrating the sheer size of this vessel – she is in excess of 30m wide. Her superstructure and bow are damaged, her bow significantly, and a large hole has opened up in her flight deck just aft of her mid-ships elevator – one would presume as the result of the Soviet weapons test.

The Polish naval team that located the wreckage of *Graf Zeppelin* (the Department of Diving Gear and Underwater Work Technology) have recently completed a survey of the wreck in conjunction with their Hydrographical Support Squadron, and it is their images that we see shown here. Sadly, for the time being at least, there is no possibility of any further diving expeditions to the wreck site. Even for the Polish navy, access was a complicated matter. Since she fell into Soviet hands at the end of World War II, *Graf*

*Zeppelin* is technically a Soviet warship and this is the first obstacle that any hopeful visitor must overcome; the Russian Federation does not wish to have visitors to the wreck site, and it took much communication between Poland and Russia's Foreign Office before even the Polish navy could visit her. Secondly, *Graf Zeppelin* lies very close to a Polish oilfield and the authorities there are not keen to have any unnecessary operations going on in the area.

Hopefully, one day at least, the wreck will become accessible to sports divers – let's remember that she is one of only two realistically diveable World War II aircraft carriers in the world and the last to be sunk by conventional weapons – and *Graf Zeppelin* will become as well visited as wrecks such as the *USS Saratoga* (the only other diveable World War II aircraft carrier, a ship that was similarly disposed of in preparation for the Cold War).

#### STEPHEN BURKE

This article is based on information uncovered during the research I carried out for my book *Without Wings: the story of Hitler's aircraft carrier*. If you wish to read more about *Graf Zeppelin* my book is available from Amazon or directly from me at [www.withoutwingsonline.co.uk](http://www.withoutwingsonline.co.uk), priced £13.99; it comes with free postage to readers who quote this magazine's title.

*Images courtesy of the Hydrographical Support Squadron of the Polish Navy and the Department of Diving Gear & Underwater Work Technology, Naval University, Poland*



# COMIC GIRLS: MY FAVOURITE WOMEN IN COMICS

BY JAMES BACON

International Women's Day is this month, and what with the recent *SFX* gaffe where they forgot to mention any female horror creators in a horror special, I got thinking about women in the medium that I love the most: comics.

I think it's fair to say that men are the predominant creators of comics. That's not to say they don't always do a good job. The idea that the portrayal of women in comics is all bursting breasts and blonde bimboness is a false one; some comics do look clichéd, but the majority of readers want decent characters. There are many very intelligently written female characters and leads and that's where I will start.

**Kit Ryan – *Heartland* by Steve Dillon and Garth Ennis** (single issue comic)

Kit Ryan was the love interest of John Constantine in the comic *Hellblazer*, a dark occult horror comic with a little bit of humour and a mature content. I actually liked Kit's portrayal in the comic, followed the romantic and human element that it gave the story (which it needed) and was sorry to see her leave – although Constantine is very self destructive and a dangerous person to befriend, so when she left, he deserved to be alone.

In *Hellblazer* issue 70, Kit returns to Belfast; this comic was entitled *Heartland* (in the Tainted Love collected trade edition). In a standalone special, also entitled *Heartland*, we see Kit in Belfast, her father dead, but many skeletons to deal with. This is a story of people, of life gone wrong, of family and of Belfast. I consider it to be the second finest piece of fiction about Northern Ireland: no super heroics, no occult, no spandex, just real life stuff; the violence is the type that is really scary, because it's just so close to reality.

***The Ballad of Halo Jones* by Alan Moore and Ian Gibson** (25 episodes in *2000 AD*)

How couldn't you fall in love with Halo Jones? I did. She was an amazing character, turning up in the pages of *2000 AD* in 1984, full of life and fresh and different. The story is set in the 50<sup>th</sup> century and was to be a saga: a total of nine books telling the life story of Halo Jones,

an ordinary person.

The first story sees the seventeen-year-old going out shopping, and this is the content of the whole book: a day in the life of Halo Jones. Gibson had many of the ideas, and Moore – who has an amazing grasp of language – introduced terms and notions that were unique; the first issue seems cryptic but is intrinsically highly detailed and revealing of a future, with all aspects – fashion, food, fun, politics, cults – being explained as you follow Halo. There is violence, and I was especially saddened when her best mate becomes 'addicted' to a drum beat-making implant, and is essentially lost to her – not her only loss in this book.

The ballad continues: in the second book Halo becomes a stewardess on the *Clara Pandy*, an intergalactic space liner, and it's as if the tempo ups a notch, not only in vision but in emotional content and intelligent writing.

Book three, set ten years later, is interesting because it is a military story. Halo has enlisted and is fighting on Moab; there was a distinct Vietnam feeling about it, yet there was also some incredible



poignancy and she is far from naïve. And the clever way time worked differently in the battlezone was inspired. It ended in 1986.

The book has been collected many times since 2000, but there is no chance of Moore ever writing more of this sequence. This quote from Fanzine Mustard explains all: “But I got to the point where I’d said to IPC, ‘Look, you know that you’ve ripped these characters off from us. If you were to give us the rights back, I would gladly write another three books of Halo Jones.’”

And Ian Gibson says on his website, “Halo is NOT eye-candy. The reason so many young men fall in love with her is because she has a reality. A real girl in a quite fanciful story.”

That’s about spot on. Defy anyone to read it and say otherwise.

***Tank Girl* by Jamie Hewlitt and Alan Martin** (originally published in *Deadline* magazine, collected in many graphic novels)

I wasn’t sure about *Deadline* but, as a *Crisis* buyer, when I had the money I would buy it. I got the first dozen gifted to me, and this is where I first saw and read *Tank Girl*.

*Deadline* was created by two of my favourite artists, Brett Ewins and Steve Dillon. I heard the story, that all the *2000 AD* creators would drink in a pub in London and it was known as a place for new artists to tout their work. Hewlitt and Martin were touting theirs after producing a couple of fanzines, along with Phillip Bond, and the *2000 AD* editor Richard Burton wasn’t interested; Dillon and Ewins were so impressed they decided to create a magazine which featured new comic creators and music. It was the closest I ever got to buying music mags.

So *Tank Girl* was born. Drawn by Jamie Hewlitt and written by Alan Martin, it was set in a future post-apocalyptic Australia.

She was hilarious, beautifully obscene and irreverent, and she lived in and piloted a tank. There was a bizarrely wicked humour; for instance she failed on her mission to deliver colostomy bags to the President (Paul) Hogan. Her boyfriend was a mutant kangaroo called Booga, and the pages were always filled with odds and ends, and a mess – but in a detailed way. She was a mess herself actually, a slob: a lazy, smoking, drinking, looking for her knickers sort of girl, who couldn’t care what she did to her hair once it was fun doing it. *Tank Girl* was just incredibly irreverent, tremendously sexual, independent and rebellious, while only after a good time; and giving Booga a really hard time, but he didn’t mind ’cause he was getting some. She oozed a real and raw sexuality that was unusual for comics, and seemed to capture a post-

punk indie irreverence that was palpable in the late Eighties.

“I don’t go nowhere without my tank! Otherwise I wouldn’t be tank girl, now would I? No, I’d be no-tank girl.”

“We’re anarchists, you motherfuckers!”

***Black Orchid* by Neil Gaiman and Dave McKean**

Before *Sandman*, and *Desire*, *Delirium* and *Death*, before any work for DC Comics, Neil Gaiman found a character which Karen Berger didn’t know and he wrote a mini-series about her, drawn by Dave McKean, who had worked on *Violent Cases* with Gaiman. Now the two are strongly linked, and McKean did do all the *Sandman* covers, but his painted interior work is phenomenal.

We learn a lot about *Black Orchid*’s origin, which was always alluded to in her original Bronze Age incarnation, and sometimes even used as a story plot but never fully explained. We follow her, learning how she is a friend of Phil Sylvian, and how they found refuge in the garden from personal horrors – he being bullied, her abusive father – as children. We learn about Susan’s life and how, upon being killed, Phil created her as a half-human half-plant hybrid, to resurrect her.

Susan’s ‘sister’ – a hybrid of a person and the eponymous plant – is created, and so we have a new *Black Orchid* (*Flora Black*) who has some shared memories, but who is generally in the dark. Her creator, the biologist Phil Sylvian, explains that he could never have managed it without his college friends and tutor: Alec Holland (*Swamp Thing*), Pamela Isely (*Poison Ivy*) and Dr Jason Woodrue (the *Floronic Man*).

Then Sylvian is killed along with her ‘sisters’, except for a younger one, still a child. The new *Black Orchid* goes in search of her younger child sister (*Suzy*) and their origin. We find that they are linked to *The Green*, a realm that is a mystical mind space for the Parliament of Trees, an idea from *Swamp Thing*, which is an interconnector for all botanical life on the planet, which includes the likes of *Swamp Thing* and *Poison Ivy*.

It was a very different story; I found it very hard going initially, but the beauty of the artwork and, of course, the cameos of Batman and Gotham’s villains made it more palpable. *Black Orchid*’s visit to Arkham Asylum is a show piece. In later reading I have come to see that it really is quite a finely told story, trumping, for my money, Gaiman’s later series about *Death*.



***Kill Your Boyfriend* by Grant Morrison and Phillip Bond** (standalone comic)

Jamie Hewlitt and Phillip Bond came to prominence around the same time – they had worked on the same fanzine together, with Alan Martin – and Bond had a very stylish, mildly cartoony but clean drawing style. In 1995 Vertigo released a series of stand alone comics, entitled Vertigo Voices, and Grant Morrison wrote *Kill Your Boyfriend*. The story introduces us to a very cute-looking teenage girl, stuck in the mind-numbing mediocrity of modern urban life: a middle class school, parents more worried about appearances than life, a boyfriend who is a dick. “He must want to, what’s wrong with him? What’s wrong with me? He must want to. Is there something wrong with me?”

She imagines herself going postal and then, after a row with her parents who find a condom – wishful thinking on her part confronted with melodramatic over-reaction – she leaves the house.

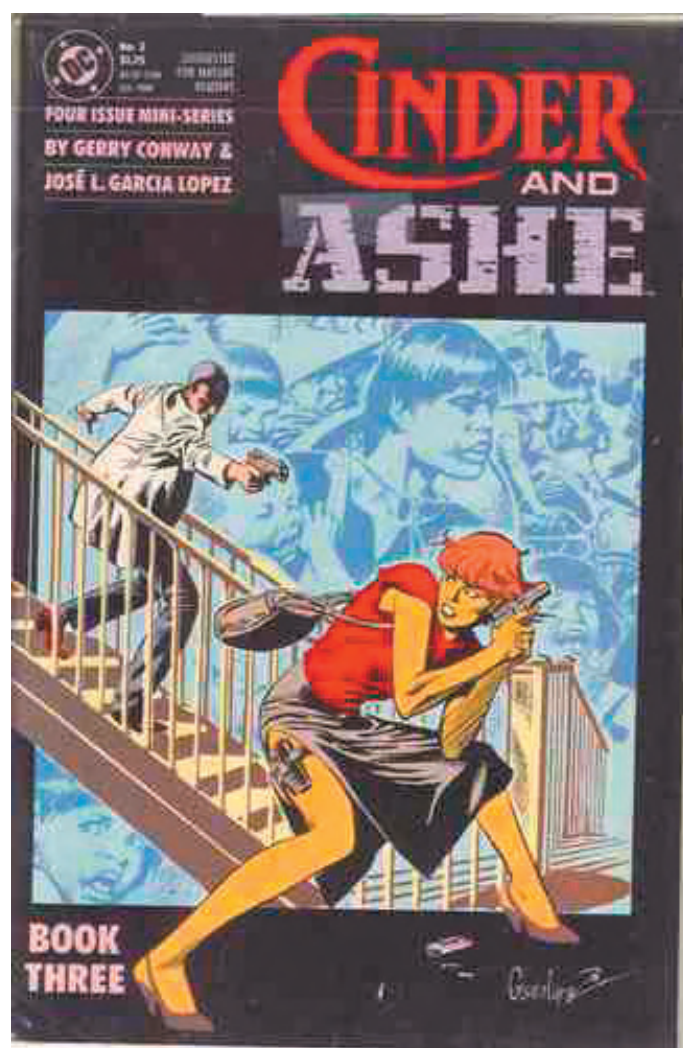
She falls in with a bad fellow, a bold guy – charming, good looking, dangerous; she had seen him stealing, and abusing a cop, and he convinces her that they should kill her boyfriend. Which they do. And so begins an amazing road story; we follow them as they commit crimes, falling on their feet, going out clubbing, doing drugs, enjoying one another, having sex, and escaping by hitchhiking a lift on a bus full of art students who want to shake

up the world and bring an explosion of new art. They even have a hand grenade.

It’s a class story and it gets better. There are many hilarious moments; the transition from Doc Martined bookish pig-tailed girl to high heel and blonde wig-wearing sexual experimentalist is stunning. She is terribly cute, but there is an element to the story that totally endears her to the reader. We don’t have thought bubbles; she breaks the fourth wall and speaks out her thoughts to the reader. It’s not cryptic, and she doesn’t always need to be looking out of the page; but she occasionally does, and it gives an extra level of insight and ultimately enjoyment.

***Cinder and Ashe* by Gerry Conway and José Garcia Lopez** (DC 4-issue mini series, never collected)

*Cinder and Ashe* is an incredibly hard comic. It’s complex in its brutality, and it’s sharp in its terror and violence; it’s poignant and very thoughtful. Ashe served in Vietnam, Cinder was born out of it. When Cinder lost her mom, Ashe was there to save her, in 1968. The comic is set in 1980s New Orleans, where Cinder and Ashe are now ‘Damage Control Experts’ – hired private detectives with guns – a city where Ashe’s life of



soldiering and Cinder's street and college skills combine to make them a brilliant team in a society as corrupt as wartime Saigon.

Someone from Cinder's past returns: an American from Vietnam, someone who preyed on her as a child, first getting her to work for him, and then raping her when she was 12. He is back to haunt her; she feels him watching her every move and he is somehow involved in her current case. The case itself is difficult, a family being threatened and brutalised, and as the story proceeds we learn more about what happened in Vietnam. As moments of emotion or fear occur, the artist portrays the characters in a similar pose, similar moment – but thirteen years previous, in East Asia. Ashe returned in 1975 and took Cinder out of Saigon, left her with his friends in Louisiana while he continued to serve as a soldier. Cinder's tormentor, who now is intent on killing her and Ashe, is mixed up in the darker side of politics and it's all interconnected. The relationship between Cinder and Ashe is not simple; it stems from Ashe's own boyhood and, of course, there is love between them, he being her saviour and friend.

Again, here we feel very close to Cinder as we can feel and read her thoughts. Cinder is not in this comic solely to be brutalised, a plot tool for heroic men to enact revenge; the whole comic is about her story, her horror, her feelings, how her story interweaves with Ashe's, and how she has to fight a fear that is palpable and really very unsettling and unpleasant, and how she overcomes that. Very moving overall.

### ***Judge Dredd: America* by John Wagner and Colin McNeil**

From the world of Judge Dredd, set in the futuristic Mega City One, we find a tale of love, hurt, democracy and terrorism. A beautiful girl, America, with ideals and a moral conviction of what freedom really means to her. Judges – judge, jury and executioner – instil fear, even at a young age, the younger the better. From an early age America sees them to be evil and thuggish. Meanwhile her best friend Beeny is just scared of them and pursues his love of playing his Gitter.

In America's eyes, the Judges are a totalitarian regime existing to sustain themselves and suppress the people they claim to protect, continually watching, suspecting, degrading and suppressing the citizens of Mega City One. Her anger at the system manifests itself as she becomes a pro-democracy activist. Beeny, who is not only her great friend but is truly in love with her, is eventually spurned for a pro-democracy boyfriend when he finds the strength to ask her out. As these two friends' lives diverge, one gets

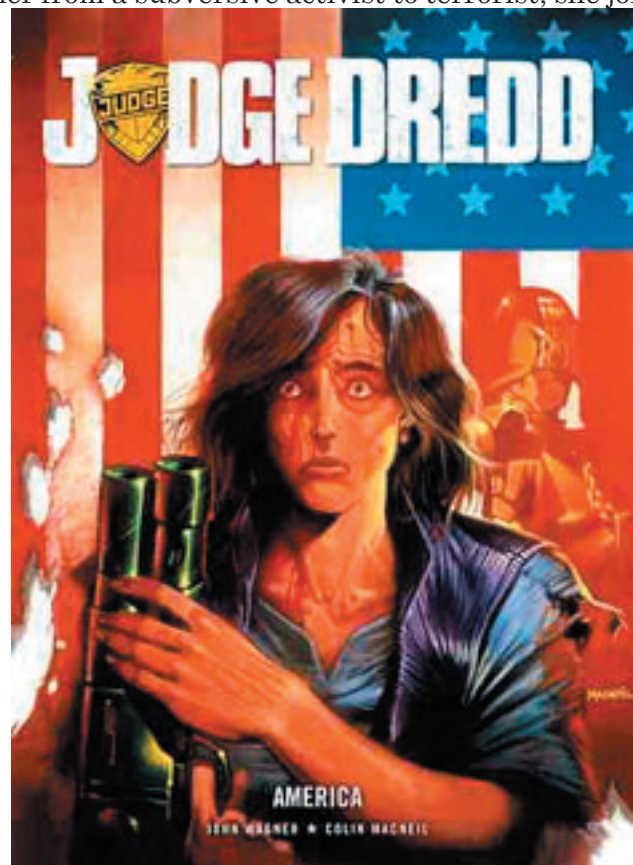
involved in politics while one succeeds with a dream of success.

We rejoin the friends years later: Beeny is rich beyond his dreams but is lonesome and inadequate with girls. Luck is strange and he meets his childhood sweetheart: that girl next door who he grew up with, his best friend who broke his heart, but since he can't forge a meaningful relationship he is left propositioning prostitutes, and suddenly he is propositioning America under a street light.

It gets worse, as it turns out it's a set-up to kill Judges; suddenly Beeny is a witness to some quite terrible slaughter as the trap is sprung and terrorists slay Judges, the street walker the bait. Beeny is in shock, more so as he realises that terrorists leave no loose ends and one of America's terrorist comrades shoots Beeny despite her distraught protestations.

He isn't killed though, and he covers for America, lying to the Judges to protect her.

America tracks him down to talk; she tells him of her life which has been one of travesty and horror, and she recounts the suffering of unquantifiable injustices at the hands of the Judges. The Judges had subverted a peaceful democratic march in order to beat it into submission; America's partner was killed during this. She was imprisoned and while incarcerated the judges told her that her unborn child was genetically defective and forced an abortion upon her. The murders of her partner and her child drive her quite insane with vengeance and turn her from a subversive activist to terrorist; she joins



Total War, a terrorist organisation.

Her outpouring brings them together, and they consummate their love. She subsequently asks for money for explosives to blow up the Statue of Liberty. Beeny is besotted; he will do whatever she wants, but also wants to save America from her life, from herself, to take her away from the horrors she is perpetrating. He wants to save her and how he tries to do this brings the story to a close. He knows one way or another blood will be on his hands.

The ending to this story is one of the most poignant in the history of the *Judge Dredd* oeuvre. The story draws upon thirteen years of Mega City mythology and history. Readers of *Dredd*, familiar with the types of story, were suddenly presented with a very politicised and oblique view of the futuristic city and law enforcement that had created so many tongue in cheek, hilarious and exciting moments. Here Wagner throws a real googly as he upturns the world readers knew so well and shows it in a very unsympathetic and acutely blood-drenched light. It is telling that, eighteen years later, the story can still be reflected upon in the light of what we call freedoms in today's world.

### ***V for Vendetta* by Alan Moore and David Lloyd** (originally in *Warrior* comic)

Initially I assumed when I read this comic that V was a man, but as I was reading a female friend of mine at the time – Anna Casey, who lived in Dublin and was stunningly intelligent in that also good-looking way – suggested that V could be a woman, and I realised that she could be right. Such a simple suggestion gets one thinking. Of course, the person in room 5 is referred to as a man, and an ugly one at that; yet V is described as beautiful so even that point of doubt makes the gender of V very unclear.

Throughout the comic, it is women who are key points: Valerie's incredible story of love in prison; the act of Evey prostituting herself, only to be threatened with a brutal retribution planned by men of the government which heralds her encountering V; the torturer, Dr SurrIDGE, who knows part of V's tale; the downfall of a man of the cloth, who prefers 'younger' girls; the wives who plot and are entangled into the story; and of course the main character Evey. A young girl, really it's her story, not V's. It's her journey, from factory worker through self realisation and education and enlightenment, and ultimately the cruelty of truly breaking free, that she releases herself.

This is one of my favourite comics. Again Alan Moore seems to be able to portray women very well; Evey is a wonderful character, as is V.

Who I still don't know is a man.

### ***Tulip – Preacher* by Garth Ennis and Steve Dillon**

*Preacher* is one of my favourite comics, ever. It's a fantastic story and although the main protagonist, Jesse Custer – who was once a preacher, and the living host of Genesis, the offspring of the copulation of an angel and demon that escaped heaven – is a man, the story of his friends, and most importantly the interaction between him and Tulip, is crucial to the story.

Tulip, brought up by her father, is a gun-hefting beauty with a tremendously independent streak hidden behind her beautiful looks. She is the girlfriend and ultimately true love of the main protagonist, yet I personally feel she is treated brilliantly as a character: unusual, unpredictable, and far from a plot-device girlfriend. The friendship between her, Cassidy (an Irish vampire) and Jesse is as much of this story, as anything.

We travel across differing parts of America, encountering the good, the bad and also the really quite damn ugly. It's nasty and laced with an addictive dark humour, and 66 issues of well-crafted story. It has a start, many middles plaiting together, and a fantastic ending. The artwork is by Steve Dillon, who has great skill and enjoys the portrayal of facial expressions. The use of language and dialogue is a joy, and Ennis – who hails from Belfast but now lives in New York – has a unique tongue and embodies his characters through their dialogue. I cannot do it justice, I fear; it is too big a work to easily condense into a mere few hundred words. It is not high brow, neither is it super hero hash, just an enjoyable read.

### ***The Tale of One Bad Rat* by Bryan Talbot**

*The Tale of One Bad Rat* is a poignant human story. Bryan Talbot has a skill in being able to tell any type of story, and this is a personal one of Helen Potter, a young girl who has run away from a home where there is nothing for her, except a horrible mother and a father who is sexually abusing her.

She lives on London's streets. Her companion in London is her Rat, which gets killed by the cat in the squat she ends up in. She then goes on a journey north, in search of something, but drawn by the connection to the author Beatrix Potter. On her way, she fends off an assault, and she is taken in by the owners of a pub in the Lake District. For much of her journey, since the death of her Rat, she is accompanied by a massive rat, which is surreal but may also be a reflection of the workings of the mind. The pub is a refuge:

reading, walking, learning, healing from her past, she confronts her parents, and seems to be able to move on.

This is the story of a young girl overcoming some very traumatic experiences, leaving us with a very moving feeling that there is always hope and people can move on. It's incredibly popular, and according to Bryan Talbot's website, is the second most requested graphic novel in the US public library system, after *Maus*.

So those comics just feature strong women characters, but what have I left out?

Well, the following books are on my shelves, and I had considered them: there is Frank Miller's *Sin City* series, which occasionally has a strong female character, and also his *Return of The Dark Knight*, as I love the Robin in that story. There is *Electra*, who just never really did it for me, to be honest. Brian Michael Bendis has a number of female characters turning up in his massive run of *Daredevil*, and I really loved them, especially Matt's love interests.

Deena Pilgrim in *Powers*, also by Bendis, is pretty good, but really *Powers* is about Detective Walker. Prometha, Mina Harker and Tesla Strong are all incredible characters; but I already have two Moore characters – although I could probably fill a list with his female characters and, of course, Wendy, Alice and Dorothy in *Lost Girls*, by Moore and Linda Gebbe, is brilliant. *Alice in Sunderland* is partly about Alice but, again, Bryan Talbot's work above is different and much more deep, I feel.

Mikkita and Maya Antares in *Red Star* by Christian Gossett are both very different and yet wonderful characters, while Mary Raven in Warren Ellis's *Ignition City* (a steampunk story) captures much of the female aviatrix.

But what of women creators? Well, I have to be honest, I buy many comics, and that is the measure of my taste, but I have too many comics...

Amanda Conner is an amazing artist; her comic with Garth Ennis, *The Pro* – the story of a hooker who gains super powers – is hilarious, and her artwork is so nice and clean, a little bit of a cartoon feel, but in a very positive way. I also really love her Supergirl story in DC's *Wednesday Comics*.

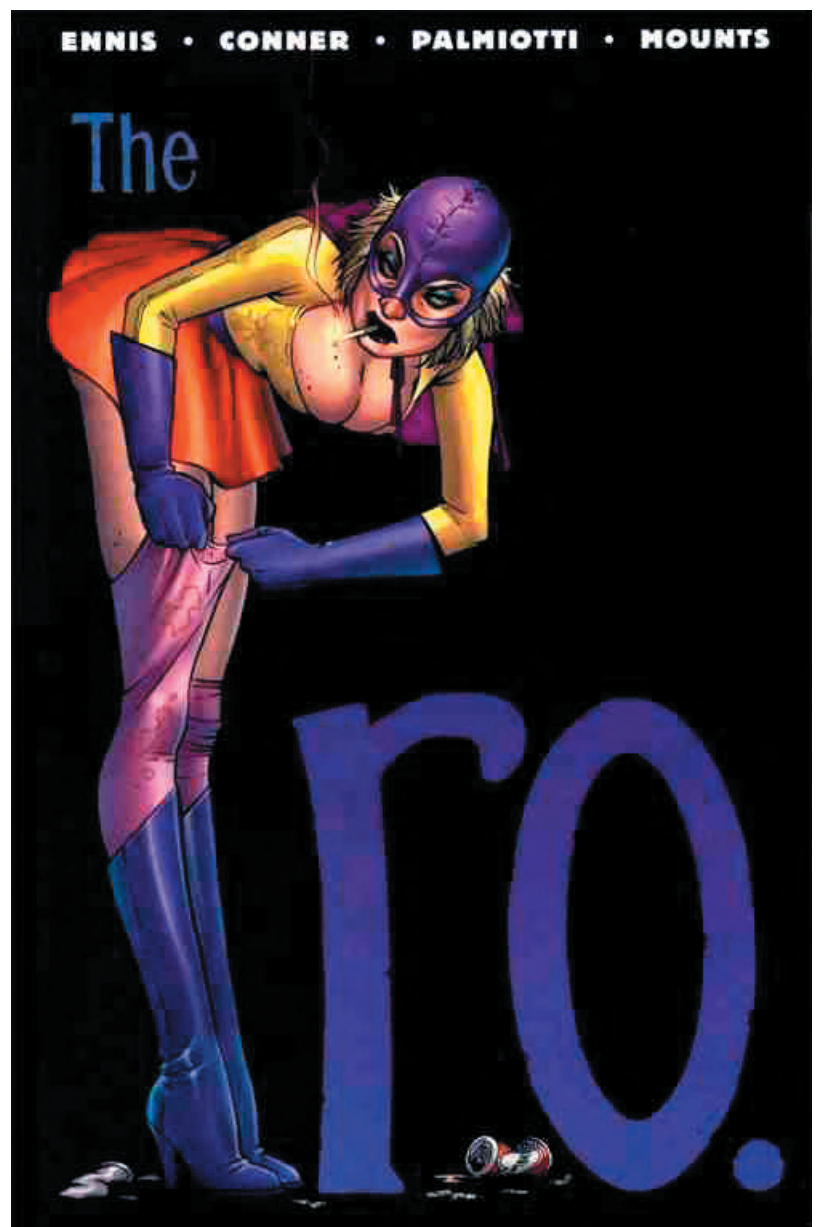
Between 1991 and 2003 Roberta Gregory drew and wrote *Bitchy Bitch*, for fatangraphic; it's not exactly to my liking,

but I have many of her comics and most of her graphic novels, and make a point of picking them up and gifting them when suitable, as they are popular with friends.

Tove Jansson has to get a serious mention, mostly because she is so incredible and, of course, her *Moomin* strip is just brilliantly drawn and very beautiful. Colleen Doran, who has done a lot of work that I have no interest in, did a beautiful job on Warren Ellis's *Orbiter* which I did really like.

Becky Cloonan's artwork for Brian Wood's *Demo*, an amazing graphic novel, is really quite good. Laura Martin is a colourist who has worked on heaps of comics; I have *Ultimates Volume 2*, by Mark Millar and Bryan Hitch, as well as *War is Hell* by Garth Ennis and Howard Chaykin.

Being a sad loser who likes Robotech, I have *Robotech Defenders* by Judith Hunt and Chuck Dixon, which is more about me being a completist than anything; I do love the Space Battleship Yamato.



As for writers, well, I have all of Elaine Lee's *Vamps*, although I did notice her work first because it was drawn by Will Simpson. I liked Scotswoman crime writer Denise Mina's tenure on *Hellblazer*; I was disappointed she only did 12 issues, but they were gritty and good. I liked Straczynski's *Rising Stars* and have gone on to buy both of the spin-off series by Fiona Kai Avery. Leah Moore has worked on a variety of things that I have enjoyed, from an Edgar Allan Poe collection to zombies...

And of course, Joyce Brabner was the editor and fairly crucial in helping make *Brought to Light* by Alan Moore and Bill Sienkiewicz, a very political graphic novel; and I am pretty sure I have read hundreds of comics that DC Comics' Karen Berger was in charge of. Ann Nocenti did quite a run on *Daredevil*, and with John Romita Jr doing the artwork I have quite a number of her issues and they are all pleasing.

And, as if that wasn't enough, Marvel Comics have released a three-issue mini series called *Girl Comics*, which features all women, this month. It's a real showcase; I was prepared to pay full price for this one, and that's a key part of comics. If you like an author, male or female, you need to buy their work. It's no good bemoaning that there are no women in comics, if we don't buy their comics. This comic has a super Amanda Conner cover, and the introduction by Colleen Coover is really quite superb. Stories that struck me were the Punisher one, which was nasty in that unmentioned yet visually descriptive sort of way,

by Valerie D'Orazio with art by Nikki Cook. I was really taken by the story by Devin Grayson, which featured Cyclops, Jean Gray and Wolverine; the artwork, by Emma Rios, was stunningly good: very beautiful, full of action, a lightly painted mature manga flavour to it. I would just prefer if a story could exist about those three that didn't involve Scott Summers's insecurity about Jean Gray and her unrequited desire for Logan. But it's still good. The other stories were not really for me, but

that's OK.

I suppose I am not into female super heroes that much, like I have never ever read *Wonder Woman*, and although I enjoy Harley Quinn stories I am not that keen on many of the other Batman female characters; I have the *Batgirl* graphics, which are quite OK. I also haven't yet read a Gail Simone comic that I have really rated; she is an OK writer, but I didn't get into her *Birds of Prey* stories and, worse, I recalled one issue which I really enjoyed (about Lady Blackhawk) only to find it was by someone else.

OK, I haven't mentioned Jill Thompson who did a *Death* graphic, and *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi. I haven't mention Caitlin R Kiernan, who spells her name wrong but has done a lot of writing for Vertigo. Psi Anderson is an amazingly strong character in the Judge Dredd universe, and stood up to him and was well-written, but isn't there for me. *2000 AD* also had a number of female writers: Hilary Robinson from Northern Ireland did *Zippy Couriers*, and Fiona Staples has done work for *2000 AD* and is working on Brian Wood's *DV8* covers.

Suffice it to say, then, that there are many women characters and creators involved with comics, and many of both are really quite good...





# THE MASTER CRIMINAL AND THE EVIL CHINAMAN: WHO'S WHO IN 'THE LEAGUE OF EXTRAORDINARY GENTLEMEN' VOLUME ONE

BY PÁDRAIG Ó MÉALÓID

The 1898 League, the first one we meet, consists of the following pre-existing literary characters: Mina Murray from Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (Archibald Constable and Company, London, May 1897); Allan Quatermain, whose first appearance was in H Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (Cassell & Company, London, 1885); Captain Nemo, who first appeared in Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* (Pierre-Jules Hetzel, France, 1870); Dr Henry Jekyll (and his alter ego Mr Edward Hyde) from Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (Longmans, Green & Co, London, 1886); and Hawley Griffin from H G Wells's *The Invisible Man* (C Arthur Pearson, London, 1897).

It can be seen that the original works where the members of the 1898 League first appeared were published between 1870 and 1897, making them all properly contemporary with the time in which the book is set. Also note that in H G Wells's *The Invisible Man*, the titular character is known only as Griffin; Moore decided to give him a first name, and chose that of Hawley Harvey Crippen, a notorious English murderer and the first criminal to be captured with the aid of wireless communication. Finally, although this version of the League has a government handler of sorts, a man called Champion Bond, he is about the only character in the entirety of the work who is actually created by Moore and O'Neill, as they could not find a pre-existing fictional character to fill the role they had in mind. Mina Murray is constantly chiding Bond about his mysterious superior, known only by the initial letter M, who she presumes is Mycroft Holmes, the older brother of the great detective himself, Sherlock Holmes. This, it will turn out, is not the case.

As they progress through the early part of their adventures in this first volume, mostly taken up with the traditional pursuit of actually putting the team together, the League meet C Auguste Dupin from Edgar Allan Poe's short story *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* (*Graham's Magazine*, Philadelphia, 1841) – who laments the recent death of the prostitute Anna Coupeau, known as Nana: eponymous heroine of Émile Zola's novel *Nana* (Bibliothèque Charpentier, Paris, 1880) – and Miss Rosa Coote, headmistress of Miss Rosa Coote's Correctional Academy for Wayward Gentlewomen, who appeared as a stock character in a number of different Victorian erotic works, including *The Convent School, or Early Experiences of A Young Flagellant* (William Dugdale, London, 1876), where she is also the pseudonymous authoress.

Pupils in Miss Coote's Academy included

Olive Chancellor from Henry James's *The Bostonians* (Macmillan and Co, London, 1886), who we see being 'disciplined' by Katy Carr, who first appeared in Susan Coolidge's *What Katy Did* (Roberts Brothers, Boston, 1872); Becky Randall, who first appeared in Kate Douglas Wiggin's *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* (Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1903); and Polly Whittier, who first appeared in Eleanor H. Porter's *Pollyanna* (L C Page, Boston, 1913). It would seem that Miss Coote had a fondness for Bostonians, as schoolmistress Katy Carr and the three identified students all have Boston connections.

Later on, back in their headquarters in the secret wing of the British Museum in London they meet Professor Selwyn Cavor, inventor of the anti-gravity material Cavorite, from H G Wells's *The First Men in the Moon* (George Newnes, London, 1901). Cavor is concerned by the recent theft of his favorite.

Whilst this is being debated, Mina Murray finds herself looking at a picture of an earlier version of the League, dating from 1787. This group consists of Lemuel Gulliver from Jonathan Swift's *Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World, in Four Parts. By Lemuel Gulliver, First a Surgeon, and then a Captain of several Ships*, generally known as *Gulliver's Travels* (Benjamin Motte, London, 1726); Mr and Mrs P Blakeny, actually Percy Blakeney and his wife Marguerite St Just from Baroness Emmuska Orczy's *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (Hutchinson, London, 1905), originally a stage play in 1903, before being written as a novel; the Reverend Dr Christopher Syn (who occasionally becomes the pirate Captain Clegg), who first appeared in Russell Thorndike's *Doctor Syn: A Tale of the Romney Marsh* (Nelson Press, London, 1915); Mistress Fanny Hill from John Cleland's *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (G Fenton, London, 1748 & 1749); and Nathaniel 'Natty' Bumppo, who first appears in James Fenimore Cooper's *The Pioneers: The Sources of the Susquehanna; a Descriptive Tale* (Charles Wiley, New York, 1823), but is probably best known for his appearance in *The Last of the Mohicans* (H C Carey & I Lea, Philadelphia, 1826).

While Mina is examining the picture, Champion Bond is explaining to Quatermain and Nemo that he believes Professor Cavor's favorite has been stolen by a "warlord from the orient" – referred to as "The Doctor" or "The Devil Doctor", and who remains unnamed throughout the rest of this volume but is obviously meant to be Dr Fu Manchu, who first appeared in Sax

Rohmer's *The Mystery of Dr Fu Manchu* (Methuen, London, 1913), a fix-up novel of short stories published between October 1912 and July 1913 in *The Storyteller Magazine* (Amalgamated Press, London, 368 issues, April 1907–November 1937), the first of which was *The Zayat Kiss*. *The Mystery of Dr Fu Manchu* was known in America as *The Insidious Dr Fu Manchu*.

Mina Murray and her four companions make their way to the Limehouse district of London to see if they can find any trace of Manchu. Mina and Quatermain go to talk to Quong Lee, who first appeared in Thomas Burke's *The Song Book of Quong Lee of Limehouse* (Allen & Unwin, London, 1920), a collection of narrative poems. After talking to Quong Lee and some other, unnamed, persons, Mina and Quatermain find themselves in Shen Yan's Barber Shop – Shen Yan being the real name of Shanghai Charlie, according to Quatermain, presumably referring to Singapore Charlie, who runs an opium den in *Mystery of Dr Fu Manchu*. While there Quatermain catches a glimpse of Fu Manchu torturing Ho Ling, a minor character from the work of Thomas Burke, who first appeared in *Limehouse Nights* (Grant Richards, London, 1916).

At the beginning of chapter four, we find Captain Nemo talking to two of his crew: first mate Ishmael, from Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* (published by Richard Bentley, London, in October 1851 in a shortened form as *The Whale*, subsequently published at full length by Harper and Brothers, New York, as *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* in November 1851); and Broad Arrow Jack, who first appeared in *Broad Arrow Jack*, a serial written by E Harcourt Burrage and published in *The Boys' Standard* from 1866 onward.

And by this point in the story, we have met virtually all the members of this volume's *Dramatis Personae*, bar three very important characters plus one other minor player.

At the end of chapter four, we finally meet Campion Bond's mysterious superior M – who is not, as Mina has speculated, Mycroft Holmes but rather Professor James Moriarty, who first appears in Arthur Conan Doyle's short story *The Adventure of the Final Problem*, first published in *Strand Magazine* (George Newnes, London) in December 1893, and subsequently collected in *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes* (George Newnes, London, 1894).

Chapter five then begins with a flashback sequence to the events in *The Adventure of the Final Problem*, which took place on 4 May 1891, where we see Professor Moriarty at the Reichenbach Falls, about to fight Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes, who first appeared in *A Study*

*in Scarlet*, first published in *Beeton's Christmas Annual* (Ward, Lock and Co, London, 1887) and published as a book by the same company the following year. After Moriarty loses the fight, and plunges down the falls, he is rescued by Colonel Sebastian Moran, "the second most dangerous man in London", an occasional character from Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories, who first appears in *The Adventure of the Empty House* (first published by P F Collier & Son, New York, in September 1903, and subsequently collected in *The Return of Sherlock Holmes* (George Newnes, London, 1905)).

Much later on, two pages from the end, we meet our very last character. Now taking over Professor Moriarty's role as M we have Mycroft Holmes, Sherlock's older brother, who first appears in *The Adventure of the Greek Interpreter* in *Strand Magazine* (George Newnes, London, 1893), subsequently collected in *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes* (George Newnes, London, 1894).

And that's it. That's all the major, and indeed minor, characters who appear in *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen Volume One*. Well, almost all of them. There is also a text story in the rear of the collection, which contains a few more characters from the literature of the period, and which I will leave as an exercise for the reader.

I should also point out that you can get a lot more information on the goings-on in *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen Volume One* in Jess Nevins's excellent *Heroes & Monsters: The Unofficial Companion to The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* (MonkeyBrain Books, Austin, 2003). Virtually all the information above was researched independently by myself, although there are one or two occasions where I cheated, and had a quick peek into Nevins's book...

## PÁDRAIG Ó MÉALÓID

**A note on attribution:** If a character appears in only one work, this is indicated by the word 'from', as in "Olive Chancellor from Henry James's *The Bostonians*"; whereas if a character appears in a number of works, this is indicated by 'who first appeared in', as in "Captain Nemo, who first appeared in Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*."

# Journey Planet



Welcome to The City of London

# WHICH LONDON WOULD YOU LIKE WITH THAT?

BY CHRIS GARCIA

There is something very strange about London the Idea. There's plenty strange about London the Place, but London the idea, like most cities of long-standing, is varied and hard to pin down. London has played more roles in films, television and books than just about any other city not named Paris.

I experienced London through books, mostly. You could choose the darkest of Londons, the one explored in *The Anubis Gates* or (in all but name) *Perdido Street Station*, or the most sepia-toned from *The Face on the Cutting-Room Floor* or the Jeeves & Wooster stories. There's the Hornby London, the Ackroyd London, the Rowling London. There's no unified literary London. It's the exact opposite of Los Angeles, which exists only as one storyline (Hollywood seduces the young, chews them up and spits them back to Iowa as pine-riding corpses).

I read London books, lots of them, because I was in love with a city I'd never seen. Maybe it was the fact that I was into steampunk from the early and that's the capital of the steam-powered universe. I followed the adventures of Langdon St Ives on an old map. I searched out the Ashbless sightings on the net. I powered through so many novels which featured trips to the waterfront, down the Thames, across any number of bridges. Always bridges. So many bridges.

London in the songs of my youth was the city of Elvis Costello, Joe Jackson, The Clash and Morrissey. It is amazing that I wasn't turned off the city by their lyrics; those are four acts that seldom celebrate London. There's Joe Jackson, talking about the disowned boys of the city. The Clash simply point out the grime, and the glitz pretending to be grime. Morrissey mourning just about everything. There's Mr Costello and his lyrics about... something; I'm not entirely sure what, but I'm sure it's not pleasant.

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***New York, London, Paris, Munich  
Everybody talk about Pop Music  
– M, 'Pop Musik'***

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London in movies tells me a lot. *Love Actually* is one of my favorites. It's the only movie I can think of I've seen that makes me feel like I did when I was there. It doesn't just show you a single view, but a series of changing and overlapping neighborhoods, each performing the role of the individual characters. *A Fish Called Wanda* was a fun London, *Shooting Fish* a wickedly charming London, *Snatch* a gritty corrupt London. Every film gives the city a flavor. There are tons of films that show London at various points, many of which

take place far from the now, and even further from reality. Ah, Pinewood Studios, you've messed me up forever!

And then there's the London you see that first time you rise up from the Tube station; and there you are in Leicester Square, and you look around and you realize that it's New York or Montreal or Boston or San Francisco or any other major city in the world, but then you look closer and let your eyes adjust to the city.

It's absolutely nothing like any of them and further more, it's like no London you've read or seen or heard of. When I first told people I was going to be spending most of my time in and around London, I got stories, recommendations, comparisons.

*If you like New York, you'll love London.*

*You've got to go to Harrod's.*

*You'll find a pub and end up drinking there every night.*

None of those fit. I wandered around and at some point, I found myself utterly tied up in a confusing mess of streets and houses and no idea where I was or how I'd managed to get there. To me, that moment was an insane realization that this wasn't anything I understood. This entire city baffled me. It was like the China Miéville story where the streets got up and took a walk. I was alone, despite hundreds of folks walking briskly by, and I started to see what it was all about. To quote one of those song writers I mentioned earlier: "I stepped into, I stepped into, into another, into another world."

When James mentioned this was a potential theme for an issue, I was all over it. I can't think of a city that I've visited that made me feel so different. I enjoyed it, I loved London, but I don't think at any point I felt like a fish that had been put back in its water. I'll say it's my third favorite city. It's not San Francisco (it totally lacks sourdough bread<sup>1</sup>) and it's not quite Montreal (How could it compete? There's no poutine) but it has a place in my heart because it challenged me in a way I never thought it would and which I don't think I'll ever find another place that could do it.

So, here's London, or at least a series of Londons. I hope at least one of them moves you like the real one moved me.

CHRIS GARCIA

<sup>1</sup> This indicates that on his next visit Chris needs to make sure he gets to, say, Borough Market.  
– (One Of The Other) Ed.

# LEGENDS OF ROMAN LONDON

BY TONY KEEN

As Neil Gaiman or China Miéville would surely tell you, London is a place of myth, legend, or story. But what are legends? They are the stories we tell ourselves not because we know they are true, but because we want them to be true.



*The Wall of London at Tower Hill. The lower courses up to the fourth tile levelling course (about the level of the viewing platform to the left) are Roman, from c. 200 CE. The remainder is mediaeval, using the Roman wall (by then buried) as foundations. The exposed wall would never have been this tall when in use.*

London has legendary origins. Brutus, second-generation Trojan immigrant in Italy, was ejected and fled to Britain, where he founded 'New Troy', which became known as Trinovantum. Then King Lud – who was eventually buried in Ludgate, to which he gave his name – refortified the settlement, and it became known as Kaerlud, 'Lud's Castle'. From there, London.

This is the tale Geoffrey of Monmouth recounts in his *History of the Kings of Britain*. But it's not supported by any archaeological evidence. The lower Thames valley was certainly not depopulated in the Bronze and Iron Ages; there's plenty of evidence that the area was farmed. But nothing has been found to conclusively suggest that there was a settlement on the site of London before the Romans arrived in 43 CE.

As is often the case, these stories tell us more about when they were written than about the time they purport to describe. Geoffrey wrote in the twelfth century (the journey of Brutus to Britain is found earlier, in Nennius's *Historia Brittonum*, written in the ninth century; but he makes no mention of London). Over the previous century, at least since Edward the Confessor built the Palace

of Westminster, London had been becoming the most important city in England, eclipsing Alfred the Great's capital of Winchester. Winchester *was* a pre-Roman settlement (as, by the time you read this, I will have explained to members of Corflu); the stories of London's mythological origins sought to bolster London's standing by asserting a greater antiquity for that city (at the same time, this helped to assert the ancient origins of the lines of the Kings of England, a propaganda tool against the King of France and the Holy Roman Emperor). In the end, Brutus and Lud are fictions, no more real than the sanctified King Lucius – who supposedly founded the first Christian church in London, St Peter's upon Cornhill, in the second century.

Boadicea, or rather Boudicca, was real. But there is no reason to believe that she is buried under Platform 10 of King's Cross station, her ghost dourly gazing on all the young wizards a quarter of a platform away. That is a recent legend – it can be traced no further back than Lewis Spence's 1937 book *Boadicea: Warrior Queen of the Britons*. Nor are Parliament Hill or Hampstead any more likely burial sites. Again, these seek to link London with a great national heroine. But Boudicca probably didn't think of herself as 'British' – 'Britannia' was a concept imposed on the island by the Romans – and she burned the citizens of Londinium with as much gusto as she burned the Roman colonists of Colchester. Why, then, should she want to be buried there? One of our sources, Cassius Dio (admittedly over a century after the events) suggests that she was given a lavish burial. If this was true, then it is much more likely that she was buried in her native Suffolk or Norfolk.

But at least Boudicca has more claim to be British than Saint Helena, mother of the first Christian Emperor, Constantine the Great. Her descent from British aristocracy is commemorated in the mediaeval church of St Helen's Bishopgate, tucked away in the shadow of the 'Gherkin'. But the earliest sources suggest that Helena's birthplace lay somewhere in modern Turkey.

Sometimes, the legends only elaborate slightly upon historical truth. In Brentford, there is a cylindrical monument, now outside the County Court (not its original location). I've never visited it myself, but I'm suspect one of the editors of this journal may be familiar with it.

The Brentford Monument was set up in 1909, and commemorates four battles in the area – in 1642, 1016, 750-751, and 54 BCE, when Julius Caesar fought the Britons as he crossed the Thames.



*The Church of St Helen's Bishopsgate, with the 'Gherkin' (the Swiss Re Building) in the background. The church as it survives is mostly fifteenth century, though some elements go back to the twelfth century. The double nave is due to the fact that it was originally two churches next to each other, the one on the left being for the local parish, and the one on the right for a convent on the site.*

Now, we know Caesar fought Britons as he crossed the Thames, because he tells us so himself in Book V of the *Gallic War*. But we don't know for sure that this was at Brentford. There is no mention of a local dignitary, Robertus Rankinus, nor of locals working to produce nylons. (No? Just me? Oh well.) My personal view is that, given his ultimate aim was to attack chieftain Cassivellaunus (surely a royal rather than a personal name) in Colchester, Caesar would have moved along the Thames until he came to the first crossing he could find – and the evidence suggests that the lowest crossing was down the river at Westminster. Caesar knew of no other crossing beyond the one he used, and whilst I can imagine him knowing about Westminster, but not the one up the river at Brentford, I find it less plausible that he would know about Brentford but not Westminster.

And then, of course, there's the London Stone. This once stood on the south side of Cannon Street, when it was described as 'very tall', and was a traffic hazard by the mid-eighteenth century. All that remains is a small chunk mounted behind a grille on the north side of Cannon Street, in a building now set to be demolished, but which was once a sports shop and before that the Bank of China. When the building was being renovated for its most recent use, workmen nearly destroyed the Stone, with only the new tenant's intervention stopping them.

There are many theories for what it was: part of a stone circle that stood on Saint Paul's; or an altar set up by Brutus; or a Roman milestone, perhaps that from which all distances in the

province were measured (unlikely – there was a monument in the Forum Romanum in Rome from which all distances in the empire were measured, but I know of no evidence that this was repeated in the provinces); or part of the Roman Governor's Palace that stood where Cannon Street station stands now (except that many, myself included, no longer believe in the Governor's Palace, though clearly there were some high-status buildings there); or a Saxon pagan monument or Christian Cross. And those are the sane theories; pretty soon you get to the ideas that it's on a ley line, that it is the stone from which Arthur drew Excalibur, or that the rest of it is still buried under the pavement on the other side of the road (myself, I think the remainder has been destroyed, broken up and taken away as souvenirs in the eighteenth century).

The trouble with all the theories is, there's no evidence for its existence prior to 1188. This is one of those occasions when no attempt to explain it is truly satisfactory. I don't think it's Roman, but I don't think it's pre-Roman either. The only thing that is certain is that, being made from non-local limestone, it's a high status monument of some kind.

If you get there early enough, before 4 PM, see if you can get into the crypt of the church of All Hallows-by-the-Tower, the church that faces the Tower of London across the plaza where the tourists buy their tickets. Down there, you will find the Undercroft Museum, full of antiquities. The tessellated Roman pavement to your left belongs to an original Roman building that stood on the site. The one you walk on is also Roman, but has come from elsewhere, as have most of the antiquities, derived from some antiquarian's collection. There is also a model of Roman London, made in 1928. On top of Ludgate Hill this model shows a temple. This is the Temple of Diana, supposedly under St Paul's Cathedral. Another legend. Sir Christopher Wren, like many of his contemporaries in elite British society, a good antiquarian, looked for the Temple as he was working on the new cathedral. He found nothing.

This legend seems to emerge at the beginning of the seventeenth century, though it has roots that go back a bit earlier. It is always possible that there was a temple on top of one of London's two hills – it seems a reasonable place to have some prominent civic building. But there's no evidence, and until archaeologists are allowed to remove St Paul's, there won't be.

People are still making legends about Roman London. Some want to believe that there was a major Celtic cult centre on the River Walbrook, obliterated by the Romans. It's certainly

possible that dedications were made – they seem to have been made in rivers across Britain. But London exists because, once the River Thames became more important as a communications route to the Continent than as a barrier between political states, it made sense to have a port city at the point where the roads, crossing the Thames at Westminster, met the high point of tidal activity (rising water levels mean that the Thames is now tidal up to Richmond). And the city is in its precise location not because of anything on the north bank, but because the island of Southwark, permanently rising above the tidal marshes above it, provided one of the few points at which a bridge could be secured on the south side of the Thames.

Others argue that Roman London had a special status, as a possession of the emperor himself, outside the control of the provincial governor. This is argued on such grounds as the size of the *basilica* (town hall); London has the biggest north of the Alps, and there's no justification for this size. But my feeling is that the size is dictated by decisions made during its construction. In what is a pattern found elsewhere in the empire, the *basilica* was to form one side of the new Forum; and the size of the new Forum was dictated by the decision to build it around the old Forum, and to keep the latter in use until the very last moment, when the new Forum was complete, and only then demolish it.

We tell each other these stories, and the stories about ghostly legionaries seen in the sewers, their feet resting in mid-air, on what was the Roman ground level, because we don't know as much about Roman London as we'd like, and we can't see much of it. There are a few bits on display, such as the large chunk of the Roman Wall that can be seen at Tower Hill. But London is not like Rome or Athens – antiquity is not part of the fabric of the modern city. Nevertheless, you can still see bits here and there. The south-west corner of the Roman fort (the reason, it turns out, for the strange kink in the line of the Roman and Mediaeval City Wall around Cripplegate) can be seen in Noble Street, having been excavated in the 1940s by the Luftwaffe. A plaque on what was once Marks & Spencer but is now financial offices marks the location of the *basilica*, which with the Forum underlay what is now Leadenhall Market (one of the things that you find out about London is how the same areas have the same use through the eras). But don't get fooled by the 'Roman Bath' in Strand Lane – it's almost certainly Tudor.

The strangest relic of Roman London is in the porch of St Magnus the Martyr church on Thames Street. This was where the mediaeval, and before that the Roman, London Bridge crossed the Thames. Hidden away, neglected, spattered

with pigeon crap, there was for many years a Roman timber. This had been found in 1931, when the wharves of Roman London were excavated, when a building on King William Street was torn down. (The building, incidentally, had been the surface level entrance to King William Street Tube station, original northern terminus of the City and South London Railway. The replacement, Regis House, only lasted until the 1980s, when new excavations were possible.) When I led a group of students there in summer 2009, the timber had gone, removed into the church, where they are deciding what to do with it. It is now back, on a slightly better base, and with the worst of the pigeon crap removed.



*The timber from the wharves on Fish Street Hill, now in the court of the church of St Magnus the Martyr. Date c. 75 CE.*

London is a place of myths and legends and history, and little nooks and crannies that hide things you may never have known were there. You should explore them some time.

TONY KEEN

# THE GHOSTS OF LONDON

## BY ADRIENNE FOSTER

London has been one of my top two favorite big cities ever since I briefly lived and worked there on a student exchange program in 1979. Given the time, money, and the most meager of excuses, I am always willing to go again. When I returned the first time in 1986, it was for a screenplay writing seminar. In 1995, the World Science Fiction Convention (in Glasgow) prompted me to pursue my interest in Tudor history. When the World Science Fiction Convention was again held in Glasgow in 2005, I took it as another opportunity to tour the United Kingdom. With my flights booked in and out of London and a Britrail pass in hand, I made the 23-day trip my dream vacation.

My biggest passion has always been ghost folklore and that was what I was going to focus on during this visit. A country with almost two millennia of recorded history certainly has had plenty of time to collect all kinds of phenomena. London has been a city of major political and social influence for a few centuries and finding haunted sites that are accessible to the public was easy. Shoot, I even ran across one on which I had found no previous published info.

For anyone looking for the paranormal, there are a wide range of places to start. For instance, I felt the 'spooky vibes' as soon as I walked off the plane at Heathrow in June 1979 for my first lengthy visit. Little did I know on that sunny day that ghosts have been reported at London's biggest airport. After a fatal crash in 1948 on Runway 1, people working there have encountered the shade of a gent in a bowler hat asking about his briefcase. With all of today's security concerns, I seriously doubt airport officials will let just anyone go out to a runway, so don't even consider it. In my search for haunted sites in London, the following locations are those I have personally visited and allow some form of public access.

### **Spiritualist Association of Great Britain (SAGB)**

33 Berkeley Square, London SW1X 8QB. Telephone: 020 7235 3351 (from outside UK: +44 20 7235 3351). <http://www.spiritualistassociation.org.uk>

OK, it might be hokey, but every time I've visited the UK I have paid a visit to SAGB for a reading by a medium and, unlike some others. I have run across, they have always felt real. Among its gallery of mediums is Gordon Smith, who has appeared on *Most Haunted*. For my first few sittings, they never asked for more than £10, but

they charged £30 for the last one. As far as quality readings go, this is still a reasonable price for 30 minutes. They do not take bookings by email, so direct contact must be made with the receptionist and I did have to secure it with a credit card number. I was also fortunate I planned to do this at the beginning of my trip instead of the end, since the place was closed for two to three weeks in August, which included the last three nights I spent in the UK during 2005.

One of the things that blew me away was when the medium told me he could see me cutting my hair short and coloring it darker, which was something I did less than a week later. This was certainly not an earth-shattering prediction, but how would he know I was planning to have my hair restyled? I never said anything. (I recommend bringing a recorder and taping the reading so it can be referred to in the future.)

SAGB does a lot more than readings, even though that is what I am usually interested in. They also offer workshops, events, psychic portraits, healings, and past life regressions. It also shares the same square as No 50, one of England's most notorious haunted houses, which now accommodates Maggs Brothers, an antiquarian bookseller.

### **London Walks**

PO Box 1708, London NW6 4LW. Telephone: 020 7624 3978 (from outside UK: +44 20 7624 3978). <http://www.walks.com>

One of my favorite things to do when I'm traveling is ghost walking tours, and London Walks can be blamed for hooking me to this addiction. I took my first one with no less a folklorist than Richard Jones in 1986. They do more than just ghost walks, though. They cover a wide variety of aspects of old London Town, such as Dickens, the Beatles, Sherlock Holmes, the court district, the Jewish Quarter, Jack the Ripper, and much, much more. (Refer to their website to see everything.) Two subjects that are touched on every day are Jack the Ripper and ghosts, although they have a few different versions of the latter. London is such a big tourist destination and this company is so well established that there is no need to make reservations beforehand.

On my 2005 trip, I took the walk titled 'Ghosts, Gaslight & Guinness'. My guide was 'Richard III' (several of their guides were named Richard and he was the third). He put on quite a show himself with an expressionless face, stiff posture, and betraying no sense of humor. (In



truth, he has worked as a stand-up comedian.) Among one of the sites we stopped at was Lincoln's Inn, where he told us the story of Robert Perceval, who was the cousin of Spencer Perceval, the only British Prime Minister to be assassinated (in Parliament, no less). Robert came to study law, yet was seduced by the hedonistic pleasures easy to find in London. One night he took a break from his drinking, gambling, and whoring to do some studying and was taken aback when a hooded figure suddenly appeared in his room. Feeling threatened, Robert immediately grabbed his sword and ran it through the intruder. Once the hood was pulled off him, Robert was stunned to see his own image with wounds about his face and chest. When his doppelgänger faded away, Robert took it as a warning and gave up his life of debauchery, but he eventually became inured. He went back to his carousing and amassed huge gambling debts. It was not long before his lifeless body was found in a gutter by the Strand, run through with his own sword. The friends he had told of his doppelgänger claimed the wounds on his body matched those he had seen in his encounter.

All of the walking tours London Walks offers are highly recommended, regardless of their topic. It's one of the best companies of its kind out there.

### **Theatre Royal Drury Lane**

Catherine Street, London WC2B 5JF.

<http://www.theatroyaldrurylane.co.uk>

These days, theatres seem to be the places with the most reports of active phenomena and the Drury Lane has one of the best known ghost legends in the West End, the Man in Grey. He is a young man wearing a tricorne hat on a powdered wig and a grey riding cloak. Countless witnesses have seen him cross from one side of the upper circle to the other, where he disappears into a wall. Occasionally, he has been caught sitting in an end seat of the fourth row in the center circle. It is believed he was in love with one of the actresses working there and was killed by a rival. This story was given some validation when some remodeling was done at the theatre during the 1870s. Workers tore down a wall revealing the long-forgotten room the Man in Grey walked into; in it was the skeleton of a man with a dagger impaled in its chest and shreds of grey clothes. His identity is still unknown, but the cast and crew of any production more than welcome him. Whenever he is seen at the start of a run, the show has always been successful.

This is also one of the stops on the 'Ghosts, Gaslights and Guinness' tour and Richard III has more stories to tell about it.

### **Ye Olde Cock Tavern**

22 Fleet Street, London EC4 1YA. Telephone: 020 7353 8570 (from outside UK: +44 20 7353 8570).

Ye Olde Cock first opened in the sixteenth century and looked very much like a Tudor establishment when I first visited in 1986. The white walls had black trim and it was furnished with wooden benches and tables. When I returned in 2005, it had much more modern décor, golden booths with upholstered seats were opposite the bar. There had been a fire there since my last visit, so the management updated; it is a much more comfortable place to visit.

This tavern has had an illustrious list of punters through the centuries, including Nell Gwyn, Samuel Pepys, and Lord Tennyson. It is said that Charles Dickens had his last public meal there a month before he died. Oliver Goldsmith is buried just outside its back door, and one bodiless head manifestation seen by a server was identified as him. They served many more lower profile folk as well; when one husband spent so much time there, his wife threatened to assault him with a red hot poker as he slept. After dealing with the fire, I asked the barwoman if such a powerful element had scared them off. She told me they were still there. Unexplained noises were occasionally heard and strange forms appear on their security cameras.

### **Twinings Tea Shop**

216 The Strand, London WC2R 1AP. Telephone: 0870 241 3667 (from outside UK: +44 20 7353 3511). [http://www.twinings.co.uk/strand\\_shop.asp](http://www.twinings.co.uk/strand_shop.asp)

I'm a big fan of tea. When I'm in London, I make a pilgrimage to the temple of tea. The Twinings family has kept a shop on the Strand since 1717 and shows no sign of leaving. When this shop first opened, the Thames was still being used as a freeway and the Strand/Fleet Street was one of the busiest boulevards in London; it was a mecca for shopping. Today, on the other hand, this section of the city offers courthouses and office buildings. The Twinings Tea Shop looks quite isolated flanked by two much larger buildings. (From what I understand, several old storefronts have been preserved at the Victoria & Albert Museum.) The traffic at evenings and weekends is just too sparse to make more extensive hours worthwhile.

During my latest visit, I grabbed a hand basket and busily filled it with tins, teabags, souvenirs and gifts, then filled another. As I scurried about the store making my purchasing decisions, a small china lid fell off a display on the

bottom shelf as one of the shop clerks walked by. I had noticed earlier that the lid was perched at a precarious angle and it might fall off, but it seemed secure enough for display purposes and never touched it. Regardless, the timing of this minor occurrence struck me as kind of odd, since the floor was a sturdier slab foundation than most of what is found in the earthquake country of California. This slim clerk definitely made no tremors when she walked. She quickly turned around to pick it up and I asked, "Is this place haunted?"

She shrugged as she replaced the lid: "I don't know. I've only been here a month."

When I finally made my transaction, I asked the cashier, who had been with the company longer, if the shop was haunted.

"Oh, yes. This place is 300 years old."

She told me that they believed it was Mary Twining, the wife of Charles, the second of the family to maintain the business. Mary was heavily involved in the business herself and her portrait is one of those on the wall. Odd noises are heard on the premises from time to time and several employees have felt as if they were being watched. The people who encounter the most phenomena are the ones Mary believes are doing the company wrong. If that lid really was given a little push, which would have needed precious little energy on the part of the ghost, then I wonder if that young clerk still works for Twinings.

## The Tower of London

With all of the drama and violence associated with the Tower, legends and ghost stories play a major part of its atmosphere. Charles II came close to euthanizing the ravens at the Tower when his astronomer complained the birds were interfering with his observations at the north-east turret. Someone reminded Charles that if the Tower lost its ravens, both the Tower and the kingdom would fall. Charles had had some experience with that already, so he took no chances. There's been a small population of ravens within the Tower ever since.

The leading star of its ghosts has to be Anne Boleyn, who was executed on the grass of its Inner Ward. During the 470 years since her death, more than one witness claims to have seen the headless shade of a woman in Tudor garb. Some also attribute such sightings to Jane Grey, the 9-day queen. Other reports have it that Sir Walter Raleigh is seen walking through the battlements near the Bloody Tower. Timeslips have also been reported. One

WWI sentry saw a medieval procession carrying the stretcher of a decapitated man to his final resting place. Yet another said he saw a group of people in old-fashioned clothing clustering around a campfire. Most of these phenomena usually occur at night, after closing time, when the Tower is quiet. I would soon learn some paranormal activity was at work during the day too.

With Anne Boleyn, Sir Walter Raleigh, and the Princes dominating the Tower's ghost folklore, it's worth repeating some of its more obscure published accounts. Although the Royal Menagerie was moved out in 1834 on the order of the Duke of Wellington (who quite sensibly thought of the Tower as a military center and museum), there have been reports of some of its guards encountering the phantoms of exotic animals. One guard was frightened when he confronted a bear near Martin Tower. He thrust at it with his bayonet, only to plunge the blade into a wooden door. When the bear rushed the soldier, he fainted. On hearing the blade hit the door, another guard appeared but saw nothing of the bear. The first soldier never recovered from the shock – repeatedly describing the incident – and died a couple of days later.

Edward Lenthal Swifte was a former Keeper of the Crown Jewels. During October 1817, he was sitting down to dinner with his wife, their



little boy and her sister in their private rooms in Martin Tower. Both Swifte and his wife noticed a cylindrical object appear and hover between the table and the ceiling. He said it was like a glass tube with a dense white and azure liquid pulsating in it. It eventually moved from diner to diner, until it paused over his wife's shoulder. "Oh Christ, it has seized me!" she cried. He immediately picked up his chair and swung it through the manifestation and it disappeared. What baffled them even more was that neither Swifte's sister-in-law nor son saw it.

The White Tower, being the oldest building in the fort, has had the most time to absorb paranormal imprints. Aside from the belief that that was where the rack was located and operated, so was 'Little Ease', a prison cell that once held Guy Fawkes; Little Ease was so small its inmates could neither stand up or lay down full length in it. Once the Ceremony of the Keys has been wound up and the residents of the Tower have settled down for the night, the security of the keep is handed over to the Custody Guards, who pass through the premises several times during the night to ensure all's well. Of course, it's a general rule that ghosts are intimidated when lots of people are around. When all of the visitors have left for the day and the building is quiet, they're much more likely to come out. Custody Guard B 'Taff' Cullen reported smelling a cheap, nauseating perfume that would start permeating St John's Chapel around midnight, build up through the wee hours of the morning, and then dissipate just before life starts to stir for the new day. Another guard backed up his claims. Yet another custody guard, Arthur Crick, was doing a walk-through one night when he sat down to briefly rest his feet in the Tournament Gallery just before leaving the White Tower. He took off one shoe, then heard someone say, "There is only you and I here. There is only you and I here." Needless to say, he was the only living person in the structure at the time.

"You wait 'til I get this bloody shoe back on and there'll be only you here!" Crick replied, then promptly left.

I was really disappointed when one of the Beefeaters had no ghost stories to share. "I don't believe in them," he said with a tone of dismissal. OK. It's hard to believe anyone living in the Tower had not heard any of its ghost stories. It's all part of its atmosphere. Fortunately, the one who took the picture with me was able to give me a couple of fresh ones. He told me just the day before that his daughter had walked through Salt Tower and came out of it finding some fresh scratches on her legs. This is an example that the living *can* be harmed by ghosts. Fortunately, I came out of the building unscathed and seeing nothing out of the ordinary.

However, this Yeoman Warder also added

some fresh detail to one of the Tower's darkest ghost stories, the one about the Princes. At the height of the War of the Roses in the late fifteenth century, 12-year-old Edward V ascended the throne when his father, Edward IV, unexpectedly died. Edward IV's brother, Richard, Duke of Gloucester, took custody of the boys and put them in the Tower for 'safekeeping'. Realizing he could lose his power as Regent, he found a loophole to declare Edward IV's marriage null and void, making Edward V and his brother illegitimate and ineligible for the throne. Gloucester then became Richard III. The little Princes were often seen playing around Tower Green and its battlements, but were seen less and less as Richard usurped their power and were eventually no longer seen at all. Rumors started that they were murdered and by October 1483 were commonly accepted. Even to this day, no one knows exactly what happened to the boys. Perkin Warbeck even made the mistake of challenging Henry VII during the 1490s by claiming to be the younger one – Richard Plantagenet, Duke of York.

In 1674, while some remodeling was being done on the White Tower, workers found the remains of two children under a staircase. The details of these skeletons matched everything that was known of the Princes, settling the question of where they went. However, their apparitions were seen beside each other, wearing white nightshirts, in the Bloody Tower. There have been many claims that they can still be seen playing on Tower Green and in the battlements. What my Yeoman Warder friend added to this story is that one of his colleagues went ballistic when he learned that his own children were playing with the Princes.

London has plenty more haunted sites to see, but I'd reiterate that these are the ones I visited and that others can too.

I think my biggest disappointment was not being able to determine a haunted hotel, which I'm sure it has plenty. I did learn of one within a few days before leaving for my trip, but at that stage it would have been too complicated to make other arrangements. Despite everything, London is one of the most exciting cities I have ever visited. For first-timers, the three things I recommend doing to make their visit the fullest is visit the Tower of London, go see a live play or musical, and have a meal at a pub. Everything else is gravy for the roast.

Regardless of the heavy expense, I'd be willing to live and work there again given the opportunity. (I *already* live in one of the most expensive parts of the world.) I highly recommend London to people, particularly if they want to go shopping for historical or ghost stories or possibly experience something *phenomenal* themselves.

# THE ROYAL SOCIETY

## BY EMMA J KING

The Royal Society was officially founded on 28 November 1660, making this year its 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary. It was formed at a meeting at Gresham College in Holborn, when a group of natural philosophers – including Christopher Wren, Robert Boyle, John Wilkins and Sir Robert Moray – came together to found “a Colledge for the Promoting of Physico-Mathematicall Experimentall Learning”. The group had, in fact, been gathering at Gresham since the mid-1640s, when they began coming together regularly to discuss the ideas of Francis Bacon. In these early days they were known as the Invisible College, but this meeting made their existence official and Moray informed the King, Charles II, of the venture and secured his approval for it. Initially the society appears to have been nameless, but in the second Royal Charter of 1663 it is referred to as “The Royal Society of London for Improving Natural Knowledge” and is sometimes known as The Royal Society of London. For the majority of its history it has, however, simply been known as the Royal Society.

Although it has had several homes, the Royal Society has always been based in London, and it is very much a British institution. From Gresham College at its foundation, it has migrated via Arundel Street (just off the Strand) in the mid 1660s – when the Society’s activities were somewhat interrupted first by the Plague and then by the Great Fire of London – Crane Court (just off Fleet Street) in the early 1700s, Somerset House (again off the Strand) in the late 1700s, Burlington House in Piccadilly in the mid 1800s, to its current residence in Carlton House Terrace, just south of Pall Mall and north of St James’s Park, in 1967.

Since its inception, Fellows of the Society have had to be elected. Initially criteria for Fellows was vague, and the majority of Fellows were not, in fact, professional scientists. In 1731 the process was formalised, each candidate being proposed in writing, with the document being signed by those who supported the candidate’s election; but the society still generally consisted of a mixture of accomplished scientists and wealthy amateurs who supplied the majority of the funding – a situation which persisted until 1847, when it was decided that fellows would in future be elected purely on the basis of their academic achievements.

Today the Royal Society is composed of over 1,300 Fellows from the UK, Commonwealth countries and Republic of Ireland, along with approximately 150 Foreign Members from around the world. Election to the Society, which is done purely on academic merit and scientific achievements via peer review and a vote of existing

Fellows, is considered by many to be the highest accolade a scientist can receive other than a Nobel Prize. Current Fellows include names everyone will recognise – Jocelyn Bell Burnell, Richard Dawkins, Stephen Hawking, Harry Kroto – while former members include some of history’s greatest scientific minds including Isaac Newton, Michael Faraday, Charles Darwin and Ernest Rutherford.

The Society’s motto is *Nullius in Verba*, which roughly translates as ‘Take nobody’s word for it’. This expresses the determination of the Fellows of the Society not to bow to accepted wisdom regarding a subject, but to verify all statements by their own experimentation and investigation of the facts of a matter through the application of scientific method. By doing so, Fellows of the Society have made some of the most important scientific discoveries in history. But such impartiality, although desirable, is not always possible to achieve, and sometimes the very Britishness of the Society has interfered with its lofty scientific aims.

One of the Society’s most famous and distinguished presidents, Sir Isaac Newton, is suspected of having abused his position when settling the debate of whether he or his German rival, Gottfried Leibniz, invented infinitesimal calculus – a branch of mathematics which to this day underpins much of maths and science. Newton, in his position as President of the Royal Society, appointed an ‘impartial’ committee to determine who had first come up with the method. It is now generally accepted that both scientists invented it independently, but Newton wrote a report on the matter himself, publishing it in the committee’s name, which unsurprisingly named him as the original architect of the idea.

Politics has not always been so kind to the Society’s presidents, however. In 1777 Sir John Pringle was forced to resign as president over a row regarding lightning conductors. Pointed lightning conductors had recently been invented by the American Benjamin Franklin, while Benjamin Wilson, a British scientist and Fellow of the Royal Society, had invented rounded ones. The debate over which was intrinsically superior started as a scientific one, but soon supporters of the pointed version like Pringle were labelled as American sympathisers and anti-British, forcing them to back down for purely political reasons.

A similar ‘British vs. foreign’ view was held of General Relativity when it was first proposed by Albert Einstein in 1915, although this time turned out to be of benefit to some of the scientists involved. Being just after the outbreak of the Great War, during which collaboration between

German, Austrian and Hungarian scientists and their British, French and American counterparts all but ceased, Relativity was seen by many as a German attack on the very British theory of gravity – as formulated by Sir Isaac Newton, a former president of the Society.

Sir Oliver Lodge, a Fellow of the Royal Society who made significant contributions to various aspects of electromagnetic theory, proudly proclaimed at the beginning of the war that “Science is above all politics”, but unfortunately this proved not always to be the case. As the war continued, scientists on both sides began to attack and condemn those on the other for their part in the war, and relations broke down to such an extent that at least one article in *Nature* denounced all good German science during the war as plagiarism of work done by foreign scientists in Germany. There was a common concern amongst British scientists that relations were so damaged that they doubted it would be possible to resume collaboration even once the war was over.

Einstein was a pacifist, to such an extent that he had actually renounced his German citizenship, and thus he did not conform to the stereotypical view of untrustworthy German scientists. Even so, the British were not likely to be receptive to his theories without a British champion. This champion appeared in the form of Sir Arthur Eddington, Fellow of the Royal Society, secretary of the Royal Astronomical Society, and one of the few British astronomers with the mathematical knowledge to truly understand Einstein’s challenging theory. (Indeed, there is a famous story that at a joint meeting of the Royal Society and Royal Astronomical Society, Eddington was asked if it was true that he was one of only three people in the world who truly understood the theory. Eddington hesitated to reply, and when he was chided for being too modest said that, on the contrary, he was merely trying to think who the third person might be.)

Eddington was also a pacifist and, when called up at the beginning of the war, applied for conscientious objector status. Had this been granted it would likely have ruined his career and consigned him to labour camps for the duration of the conflict, but luckily he had friends in high places. Sir Frank Dyson, the Astronomer Royal, intervened and persuaded the government to defer Eddington’s conscription to the armed forces in favour of him organising and then leading a high-profile scientific expedition to observe the 1919 solar eclipse on the island of Principe, just off the west coast of Africa. The purpose of the observations was to determine whether the predictions of General Relativity regarding the bending of light by a massive object such as the Sun were correct. Dyson appealed to national pride, intimating that it was important that British science be seen to triumph over German and that Eddington could

ensure this by making a significant contribution to this emerging new theory – or, perhaps, disproving it altogether, thus restoring the British theory of Newtonian gravity to supremacy.

Thus in this case, the scientists used the politics to manipulate the situation to their advantage, securing funding for the expedition and keeping one of the country’s greatest scientific minds out of either military service or labour camps. The experiment, of course, confirmed the predictions made by General Relativity (as Eddington had always been sure it would – something which led him to present his results in the most favourable light possible, although they have been confirmed much more rigorously since); this confirmation was ultimately pitched as a triumph of science over politics, with the theory embraced by the scientific community and the public alike, in spite of its German origins.

Even today it is sometimes impossible to separate science from politics, although usually the reasons have less to do with nationality than in the past. In 2008, the Royal Society’s Director of Education, Michael Reiss, suggested that rather than simply ignoring creationism, teachers should take the time to explain why the idea has no scientific basis. The press misrepresented his views, suggesting that he supported the idea of teaching creationism in science classes, and he resigned within days.

But despite these occasional political hiccups the Royal Society has, for 350 years, supported our greatest scientists. Its Fellows have been heavily involved in everything from gravity to evolution, from the electron to the double helix, and more recently in the invention of technologies such as the internet which have changed the modern world. Today it is our National Academy of Science and provides funding for outstanding British researchers from post-doctoral level upwards, along with international grants to encourage collaborations. It publishes seven peer-reviewed journals covering physical and biological sciences, interdisciplinary research and the history and philosophy of science, and hosts international, interdisciplinary conferences and meetings on all aspects of science, as well as acting as chief scientific advisor for Her Majesty’s Government and heavily influencing British science policy.

In short, if it’s science and it’s important, you can be sure that the Royal Society is involved somewhere.

EMMA J KING

*For further information about the Royal Society, including information on the lectures, exhibitions and discussions being organised around London and across the country to celebrate its 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary, visit <http://royalsociety.org/>.*

# MARYLEBONE FOR THE CONTINENT

BY ROBERT COGGER

Nowadays people think it's a pretty cool idea that you can get on a train in London and go through the Eurotunnel direct to France. For 15 years you've been able to do that; but if the builders of London's Marylebone station had had their way, it would have been closer to 115 years.

It's not generally well known that the line into Marylebone was originally built with the intention of running through to Paris. Even today, the Chiltern railway line which now runs from Marylebone has a more generous loading gauge than most other British routes, a legacy of being designed for larger continental rail vehicles.

Sir Edward Watkin was chairman of the Great Central Railway which built the Marylebone line, England's last major new rail route before the

recent high speed Channel Tunnel link. He was also chairman of the Metropolitan Railway and the South Eastern Railway and held a seat on the board of the Chemin de Fer du Nord, a French railway company on the Calais side of the English Channel. His plan was to run direct trains from the North and Midlands of England over the tracks of all four railways. He even started construction of his tunnel under the Channel.

But his futuristic plans and forward thinking were scuppered by Victorian paranoia about those nasty French and Bosch types invading these fair islands. But it shows that what, for the Victorians, may well have seemed to be science fiction eventually turned into fact.



*So I ask you should I cry or laugh  
Drinking tea in a Kings Cross caff  
A leather jacket against the cold  
Gone down to London turning coal into gold  
Down to London – down to London  
Gone down to London to be the king  
– Joe Jackson, 'Down to London'*

# LEAVING LONDON, ARRIVING IN ALBION: THE FUTURE OF STEAMPUNK

BY MIKE PERSCHON

A month before my first steampunk convention in 2008, Adam Frucci at Gizmodo declared steampunk dead. I interviewed Jeff and Ann VanderMeer about their first steampunk anthology at that convention; and here we are, two years later, seeing the release of a second anthology. I suppose in some people's minds, so long as one person attends the San Francisco Dickensfaire with brass goggles, steampunk will still be alive.

Clearly, steampunk isn't dead. But being alive doesn't necessitate robust health. The emergence of dieselpunk has caused critics to quip that the ultimate end of steampunk culture is a perpetual progression along the historical timeline of the twentieth century, eventually moving onto atompunk before finally catching up to cyberpunk (which will be retrofuturism by that time, I suppose). The assumption is that for steampunk to do anything new, it will have to move *temporally*.

What isn't considered is that steampunk might just move *spatially*, beyond the geographies of London and the Thames. While the steampunk of the original trinity of Powers, Jeter, and Blaylock focused on London and the United Kingdom, recent steampunk has abandoned Albion, striking out for America, Asia, and beyond. To chart a course for the future of steampunk, we will fix our sights on the horizon, keeping in mind where steampunk has gone in the past decade. I will leave the fashion to the lovely Ms Carriger, and the making to the esteemed Mr Von Slatt. My eyes are on the page, the screen, and on the future.

In leaving London, the most logical first step in our journey of far more than a thousand miles is not the homeland of Confucius, but an Atlantic crossing to the Americas. The idea that the future of steampunk lies there may seem strange, given that the writer responsible for coining the term was American. But readers of steampunk have hungered to see what British North America, the Republic of Texas, and French Mexico looked like since seeing the map inside *The Difference Engine*.

Noteworthy examples from before the turn of the century include Rudy Rucker's *The Hollow Earth*, James Blaylock's *The Digging Leviathan*, and Lea Hernandez's Texas steampunk manga *Cathedral Child* and *Clockwork Angels*. Sadly, these books are not commonly mentioned on steampunk reading lists. I'm guessing the limiting view of steampunk as neo-Victorian excluded these books from the early 'canon'. Rucker says he

wasn't interested in writing steampunk as it was understood in the '80s because it was too polite, too Victorian (recall Basil Fawlty's adventures with the American tourist and the Waldorf salad to see what Rucker was getting at). It might be the 'punk' edge many claim steampunk is missing. In leaving London, we leave a stack of *Debrett's* works on etiquette at the airship station.

One of the best examples of how irreverently impolite and impolitic American steampunk could be is Joe Lansdale's fantastically bizarre *Zeppelins West*, which not only eschews polite convention, but drags it kicking and screaming across several lines of good taste before leaving it to be devoured by satirical versions of Dr Moreau's beast men. *Zeppelins West* is an American historical fantasy, employing real-world heroes Wild Bill Hickok, Sitting Bull, Annie Oakley, and Buffalo Bill Cody alongside fictional characters ranging from Frank Reade (the hero of Harry Enton's Steam Man dime novels) to parodies of Captain Nemo, the Tin Woodsman from Oz, and Frankenstein's monster. Before reaching the end of *Zeppelins West*, readers have been witness to some of the strangest sexual couplings since John Varley's Gaea trilogy. Lansdale goes beyond breaking social conventions to shattering taboos, all with a wink and a smile. If Lansdale is pointing the way for American steampunk, it's headed toward a horizon filled with raunchy sex, graphic violence, and a tongue firmly in cheek, reminding the reader not to take things too seriously.

This interest in dark comedy is echoed in Mike Mignola's *The Amazing Screw-on Head*, which could easily take place in the whimsical universe Lansdale created for *Zeppelins West*: no one hires David Hyde Pierce to do voice work for a power-mad zombie villain unless they're looking to make us laugh. Like Lansdale, Mignola plays with historical figures, Abraham Lincoln himself sending the show's eponymous hero on his mission. And while he avoids established literary figures in his cast, being Mike Mignola means he can't help but invoke shades of one of America's greatest horror writers, H P Lovecraft.

Lovecraft has been creeping in the side door of steampunk for quite a few years now, beginning with Paul DiFilippo's wonderful 'Hottentots' from *The Steampunk Trilogy*. Steampunk often draws inspiration from period writers, and while Lovecraft is post-Edwardian his sensibilities are decidedly nineteenth century. In drawing from the fantastic writers of its past, American steampunk

should look to writers like Lovecraft and Poe for a horizon filled with macabre darkness.

One of the clearest examples of Lovecraftian inspiration is found in 'Iceland Spar', Part Two of Thomas Pynchon's *Against the Day*. I could easily use Pynchon's epic for nearly all of the places steampunk seems to be heading, but the nod to *At the Mountains of Madness* in 'Iceland Spar' shows the best blending of airship adventure and Lovecraft mythos I've seen yet. Like Lansdale, Pynchon makes no apologies for this crazed narrative in a work of 'serious fiction', drawing in equal parts from Lovecraft, John Carpenter's *The Thing*, and giant monster movies like the original *Godzilla*.

'Iceland Spar' tells the story of the Vormance Expedition to the Arctic to find and retrieve what is believed to be a meteorite. Pynchon builds to an apocalyptic arrival in New York with wonderful tension: the airship crew, 'The Chums of Chance', arrive in what *would* be the nick of time, if only the Vormance Expedition were, contrary to the rules of good horror, interested in heeding warnings. When the Chums arrive, their Scientific Officer warns the expedition of "mortal danger", before demonstrating a malevolent sentience lurks beneath the icefield: the use of a Special Ray Generator, aided by the veil of a human caul, reveals the entity in increasing detail, beginning with a "blurry confusion of a strange yellowish green, in which areas of light and dark moved in a squirming restlessness" until clarity emerges, and a Figure is seen, whose eyes "for the most part, if eyes be what they were, remained open, its gaze as yet undirected – though we were bound in a common terror of that moment at which it might *become aware of our interest* and smoothly pivot its

awful head to stare us full in the face." To quote R J MacReady, ignoring all good sense, "They dig it up, they cart it back ... Somehow it gets thawed, it wakes up, probably not in the best of moods, and..."

I won't say exactly what happens once the thing in the ice wakes up, except to say that I'm not invoking giant monster movies lightly. Besides, since this episode ends in excellent Lovecraft fashion, I can't really tell you what happens: the outcome of the Figure's arrival in the United States remains ambiguous. Pynchon raises the narrative to a fever pitch, and then drops the thread entirely to turn to the story of a private detective in pursuit of a notorious outlaw. The reader is ejected from end-of-the-world-hellfire into an honest-to-goodness western family revenge epic, complete with chases, kid outlaws, and a plethora of saloons. It's a strange horizon, where one finds a western so close to horror, but this shouldn't surprise us.

Weird West narratives are gaining in popularity: Seattle's Steamcon made it their theme for 2010; the popular *Deadlands* role-playing game is making waves in a re-release; Tess Fowler and Chris Gutierrez are hard at work on their martial arts steampunk western *The Seven: Scarlet Fever*; and a *Jonah Hex* movie starring the bankable looks of Megan Fox is being released later this year, to say nothing of the success of Stephen King's epic *Dark Tower* series and his Clint Eastwood-as-Aragorn protagonist, Roland. Building on this foundation, writers should find – to use a decidedly American metaphor – a veritable gold-rush of ideas for a steampunked frontier.

Consider how Al Ewing's *El Sombra* breathes life into Jonathan Green's *Pax Britannia*





series by moving the action from the oversteampunked towers of London to Mexico. There isn't a top-hat in sight in the town of Pasito, where Nazis in rocket packs and *Zinnsoldat* robots square off against a shirtless Mexican anti-hero on a mission of vengeance, armed with only a sword. Cherie Priest's *Boneshaker*, where Seattle is a walled quarantine zone, imprisoning zombies along with fugitive humans, is a blend of frontier town and '80s post-apocalyptic films such as *Escape from New York* and *Mad Max*. It's a fascinating study of where steampunk is going: after all, Romero's zombies were the monsters of the atomic age. Despite zombies being the monster *de jour* in popular fiction, this is a bold move for a steampunk writer. While there is currently an epidemic of zombie books, I can't think of any other steampunk ones. *Boneshaker's* originality should serve as inspiration to apply steampunk style in equally bold and original ways, rather than redundantly rehashing Victorian monsters and heroes.

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*The pretty things of Knightsbridge  
Lying for a minister of state  
Are a far cry from the nod and wink  
Here at Traitor's Gate  
– Elvis Costello, 'Man Out of Time'*

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Crossing the border into the north, we come to the open expanse of Canada, my home and native land. Steampunk is just catching on here in the Great White North, but we've had a few offerings from our own writers S M Peters and Kenneth Opiel. Lamentably, neither writer chooses the setting of the Canadian Dominion for their stories. Canada has many unique historical moments for steampunk to play off; if the building of the Canadian Pacific Railroad weren't enough, there's the source material of pulp Mountie stories to work from, collected in Don Hutchinson's anthology *Scarlet Riders*. Contrary to the Americanized icon of Hollywood, the real North West Mounted Police acted like frontier Jedi, agents of Canadian 'peace, order, and good government'.

While it may seem ridiculous to pair a police force best known for their equestrian skills with the technofantasy of steampunk, there is a fascinating real-life precedent for it: in 1905 Roger Pocock, a former RCMP constable and Boer War veteran, formed a paramilitary organization called 'The Legion of Frontiersmen' to defend the Canadian West. Pocock was convinced the best way to properly protect Canada's vast western prairie was to purchase an airship. While the proposal for *The Calgarian* and its 'aerial scouts' never came to fruition, it's an interesting 'what

if?' moment for someone looking to write Johnny Canuck steampunk.

A warning before moving on: like the actual North America of yesterday, the steampunk frontier is not all tales of adventure in undiscovered country. In Canada's case, there is the need to balance an admirable police force against the sins of residential schools. Patricia Wrede's *The Thirteenth Child* offers a cautionary example to writers thinking to oversimplify the history of Canada or America. The blanket removal of First Nations people from her *Little House on the Prairie*-with-magic alternate America was met with a heated response from persons concerned with racial issues and cultural appropriation in science fiction and fantasy. While I'm not advocating the future of steampunk pander to interest groups, steampunk writers and artists must recognize the number of high-profile articles on this sensitive subject. Articles on steampunk by Jha Goh and Ayleen the Peacemaker have pondered how persons-of-color go about negotiating the narratives of steampunk, when one of its foundations is a period of colonial oppression, slavery, and ethnocentrism. To investigate these questions further, we leave the Western shores of North America, across the Pacific to Asia.

Here our airship voyage becomes more difficult, as the cultural geography of Asian steampunk is largely unmapped. While the topic of steampunk and orientalism has produced online articles and forum discussion, steampunk fiction dealing with Asia as something more than the 'Mysterious Orient' are few and far between. This is odd, given how Moorcock's seminal *Warlord of the Air* treated the subject. While *Warlord's* protagonist Captain Oswald Bastable starts as a loyal servant of the British Empire, he eventually becomes its opponent. Once he learns that "The Indian starves so that the Briton may feast", he becomes sympathetic toward the Dawn City rebels in their "international settlement" containing "exiles from every oppressed country in the world". The *Warlord of the Air*, the leader of Dawn City, is Chinese: a bold move, given the novel's release during the Vietnam War. Shuo Ho Ti, also known as General O T Shaw, is as sympathetic in his acts of terrorism as Verne's Captain Nemo, though his enemies are the colonial powers of France, America, and Britain. Unlike many Asian characters, O T Shaw is not the companion of a Lawrence of Arabia leading the way to freedom: he *is* that leader.

Since Moorcock, steampunk has either avoided Asian characters altogether or rendered them the hero's sidekick, like the Arab and Indian companions of Captain Athelstane King in S M Stirling's *The Peshawar Lancers*. Of the exceptions to this, Philip Reeve's Miss Anna Fang in *Mortal Engines* is one of my favorites. Instead of being

presented first as an ‘oriental’, Fang is simply described as a woman in a red coat. It’s only after she removes her sunglasses that Reeve describes her “dark and almond shaped eyes”. Anna Fang – AKA Feng Hua, the Wind Flower – is a legendary aviatrix, a dangerous sword fighter, and engineer of her airship the *Jenny Haniver*, which she constructed to escape slavery. If steampunk is supposed to mirror the nineteenth century, then the rebellion against Empire should be decidedly multi-ethnic, mirroring the racial makeup of the *Matrix* films’ resistance. Reeve offers such a resistance in his Anti-Traction League, described as a mix of nations: “blond giants from Spitzbergen and blue-black warriors from the Mountains of the Moon; the small dark people of the Andean statics and people the color of firelight from jungle strongholds in Laos and Annam”. Despite a multicultural rebellion, Reeve’s *Mortal Engines* quartet remains seen through the eyes of Londoner Tom Natsworthy, and as such is still indicative of neo-Victorian steampunk with elements of other cultures.

For a work of Asian steampunk we turn instead, somewhat dubiously, to Paolo Bacigalupi’s *The Windup Girl*. It might be remiss to mention *The Windup Girl* in an article on the future of steampunk. The novel’s post-oil dystopia feels decidedly retro due to the absence of combustion engines and the profligate use of rickshaws and bicycles, with steam technology replaced by bioenergy extracted from biomass and generated by humans and gene-hacked megafauna. The manufacture of “kinksprings” echoes the Japanese *elekiter*, eighteenth century generators of electricity through friction. Nations have been replaced by Calorie companies, playing the role of expanding colonial empires. The revolt in the final act of the novel feels reminiscent of the Boxer Uprising in China; given that Bacigalupi has a background in East Asian studies, it is likely that Asia’s past informs this fictional future.

Lacking a background in East Asian studies, I cannot state with impunity that *The Windup Girl* is steampunk: perhaps I can only suggest *The Windup Girl* as a starting point for steampunk writers looking to work with the steampunk aesthetic in an explicitly Asian setting, to begin thinking about what steampunk would look like when faced with cheongsam dresses instead of bustles and corsets. What if the Song Dynasty had permitted the commercial production and distribution of gunpowder in eleventh century China? We have Japanese designs of airships that never came to fruition; steampunk samurai are already a popular choice for web artists. And at the risk of once again being too light-hearted, who wouldn’t want to see steampunk ninjas?

To move this riskier step further, I think steampunk provides an interesting opportunity

to subvert Sax Rohmer’s Fu Manchu stories by rewriting them in an ironic voice, or from the perspective of Fu Manchu himself. An intelligent approach rooted in history could potentially result in a combination of page-turner and social commentary. Obviously, the issues of cultural appropriation would loom over any such work written by a non-Asian writer, but therein lies the rub: Asian steampunk *isn’t* always all that ‘Asian’ when it comes to aesthetics.



Blogger Cory Gross of *Voyages Extraordinaires* has compiled a great list of anime rendered in a Japanese aesthetic: *Sakura Wars* set in a fictionalized version of the Taishô period, in which actors in an Imperial Opera Troupe moonlight as a counter-demon strikeforce in steam-powered battle suits; the hard-to-find *Spirit of Wonder*, a “series of lighthearted stories of mad science”; *Read or Die*, which Gross describes as “absolutely bat-shit insane”, featuring giant steam-powered grasshoppers; and *A Night on the Galactic Railroad*, based on the 1927 novel by Kenji Miyazawa, tells the story of a fantastic steam train that transports its passengers through space and into the afterlife (for a more detailed discussion of these titles, I highly recommend visiting Cory’s site). However, despite these instances, Japan’s interest in steampunk manifests itself in a decidedly western, Victorian/Edwardian aesthetic. From the painstaking accuracy of *Steamboy*’s London to the influence of Russian futurist Dziga Vertov in the live action version of *Casshern*, Japan’s steampunk draws inspiration from non-Asian sources. Despite Jha Goh’s interest in seeing a steampunk Asia without traces of colonial interference, Japanese steampunk remains cluttered with these traces.

Of particular interest are the anime and manga of Hayao Miyazaki, containing steampunk elements such as airships and nineteenth century European fashion and architecture: *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, *Castle in the Sky*, *Porco Rosso*, and most notably, *Howl’s Moving Castle*. While the other films are Miyazaki originals, *Howl’s Moving Castle* is an adaptation of Diana Wynne Jones’s novel of the same name, which contains

no steampunk elements. Miyazaki steampunked his adaptation, but in doing so chose a Western visual style to do it. *Howl's Moving Castle* takes place in a secondary world, and Miyazaki's version is quite different from Jones's. In choosing a different aesthetic to impose upon this secondary world, Miyazaki committed an act of cultural appropriation, utilizing the look and feel of *Belle Époque* France. Perhaps he was seeking to make the film more palatable for Western audiences – but the Japanese box office demonstrates that this was resoundingly popular with Asian audiences as well.

The use of steampunk environments in animated works like *Howl's Moving Castle*, or the digital settings of *Casshern*, is interesting as they are the products of pure fabrication, not historical recreation. In neither of these instances was there a *necessity* to utilize steampunk visuals to achieve authenticity: *Howl's Moving Castle* takes place in a secondary world, *Casshern* in a distant future. *Last Exile* does a bit of both, set in a fantasy world where massive air-dreadnoughts engage in fantastic pyrotechnic battles. The heroes of this anime are sky couriers who fly in two-seater vanships inspired by the Germany's Junker A35s, equally useful on the ground, air, or on water. The vanship does not fly according to the laws of physics, but by burning a fuel made from a blue ore in the vanship's steam engine. As with the steam-powered walking house of *Howl's Moving Castle*, this is the technology of another world – whether the power source be an imaginary fuel source or a fire demon, it is inherently magical. At some point, our airship passed through the wardrobe door or fell down the rabbit hole, and we have found ourselves far from home.

The future of steampunk is in Middle Earth. By this, I don't actually mean Tolkien's world, but that the second wave of steampunk has gone to the secondary worlds Tolkien spoke of in his essay *On Fairy Stories*. Steampunk has gone beyond the shores of the New World and the Orient, exchanging alternate histories for alternate worlds. While I've heard the terms magepunk and elfpunk attached to works like Michael Swanwick's *The Iron Dragon's Daughter* and *The Dragons of Babel*, I don't know that another term is needed: let's agree they're steampunked elves or mages and leave it at that.

Among the first writers to take steampunk to the secondary worlds of fantasy was China Miéville in his award-winning *Perdido Street Station*. The title references the train station in New Crobuzon, a grime-infested city somewhere between Doré's nineteenth century engravings of London and *The City of Lost Children*. While Miéville's world is easily placed under the steampunk umbrella, it is still highly original:

where other steampunk writers are still toying with steam or aether, Miéville imagines a self-perpetuating energy source in Crisis energy. Despite the lunacy of cactus people, bird men, and flying dogs, New Crobuzon's sublime filth is somehow believable enough to cohere, nearly operating on its own Crisis energy at times.

Miéville is not only adept at world-building, but also writes great characters who are fully alien and yet sympathetic. Every character in *Perdido* is richly rendered, with nuances of personality both good and bad. Like Dickens, Miéville is interested in the 'least of these', the people who do not sit in the places of the high and mighty: people like the brilliant but iconoclastic alchemical thaumaturgist, Isaac Dan der Grimnebulin, the novel's severely flawed protagonist. Any author who can make his readers connect with a hero who is sexually attracted to a female with a human body and a scarab beetle-shaped head must be commended.

Nevertheless, for all its highbrow dystopic elements, complex characterization and ambivalent moral schema, *Perdido* is an adventure story: a monster hunt. The slake moths are fitting monstrosities for a steampunk novel, since steampunk often amalgamates historical elements. The slake moths amalgamate a number of pop-culture monsters, combining the indestructibility and otherness of Giger's aliens, the flight and dreamlike ability to lure prey from *Mimic*, and the sewer chases of *Blade II*. What really drove this home for me was the introduction of a party of adventurers who are hired to aid the heroes in their pursuit of the monsters:

“They were immediately and absolutely recognizable as adventurers; rogues who wandered the Ragamoll and the Cymek and Fellid and probably the whole of Bas-Lag. They were hardy and dangerous, lawless, stripped of allegiance or morality, living off their wits, stealing and killing, hiring themselves out to whoever and whatever came. They were inspired by dubious virtues. A few performed useful services: research, cartography, and the like. Most were nothing but tomb raiders. They were scum who died violent deaths, hanging on to a certain cachet among the impressionable through their undeniable bravery and their occasionally impressive exploits.” (p.429)

I couldn't help but think of the standard *Dungeons and Dragons* party when I read this: these are steampunked *D&D* heroes. If a story has characters resembling that type of hero, it's an adventure tale. In the case of *Perdido*, an intelligent adventure tale exploring themes of otherness, shame, community, belonging, transformation, and how these all relate to moments of crisis.

Another recent steampunk novel set in a secondary world is Ekaterina Sedia's *The Alchemy of Stone*, which would feel like Renaissance Italy if it weren't for the gargoyles flying about the city, soul-swallowing Sin-eaters, and the novel's protagonist, a clockwork girl. Sedia's world displays a perfect division of the magical technology of steampunk, with spiritualist Alchemists on one side and materialist Mechanics on the other. This mixture permits Sedia to render Mattie the clockwork girl as an automaton with emotions, in a world where positronic explanations are unnecessary, a world where one can concoct a "potion to cause regret".

*Perdido Street Station* and *The Alchemy of Stone* are joined by a growing number of steampunk works that take place in fantasy worlds of varying degrees of resemblance to our own nineteenth century: Stephen Hunt's *Court of the Air* and its sequels, *The Kingdom Beyond the Waves*, *The Rise of the Iron Moon*, and *Secrets of the Fire Sea*; Ondinium of Dru Pagliosotti's *Clockwork Heart*; and Alan Campbell's *Scar Night*, *Iron Angel* and *God of Clocks*, set in Deepgate, a world suspended by chains over an abyss, where Alchemical Poisoners wear tweed and 'teen angel' could be a literal term. Some might reject these technofantasies as steampunk because they lack real-world industrial technology. Steampunk allegedly attracts the disillusioned of an iPod world, nostalgic for a time when people understood the technology they used: but this is true primarily for steampunk Maker culture. In its literary manifestation, steampunk technology is rarely grounded in real-world physical sciences. Many steampunk gadgets and vehicles require some form of magical impulsion or cohesion to be rendered plausible. This merging of magic and technology not only permits the designs of Da Vinci to be constructed, but to work; it permits safe airship travel at impossible speeds, using theoretical fuel sources such as aether or phlogiston.

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***There's a room in a house in a street in a manor in a borough that's part of a city that is generally referred to as London***

– The Kinks, 'London Song'

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To prove my point, let us part the veil of the worlds and take our airship back to London. This is not the London of Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor*. Instead, it's the London of S M Peters's *Whitechapel Gods*, the London of *The Difference Engine* built upon until the city has become the mad, crane-littered skyline of London in *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, closely mirroring the densely cluttered visuals of the *Steampunk* graphic novels from Cliffhanger! comics, where London is literally divided between an underworld of the under classes and a paradise

of the privileged. In *Whitechapel Gods*, the demarcation is horizontal instead of vertical, with all of Whitechapel surrounded by a retaining wall. However similar the London outside those walls might be to the London of history, the Whitechapel within is a world of pure fantasy, ruled by steampunk gods Mama Engine – whose abode resembles Mount Doom – and Grandfather Clock, whose eyes are every clock face. Instead of cholera, the environs of Whitechapel are stricken by the "clanks", which leaves its carriers Victorian cyborgs, a mix of metal and flesh.

In a lot of steampunk, London isn't a city: it is *the* City. It has become steampunk archetype rather than historical setting. It is not the London of alternate history, as in *The Difference Engine*. It is the London of Philip Pullman's *Golden Compass*, with its anbaric lights, alethiometers, and daemons all causing the reader to perhaps mutter, "I don't think we're in Cambridge any more, Toto." It is the London of Philip Reeve's *Mortal Engines*, a seven-tiered, 2,000 foot high city on massive caterpillar tracks, in hot pursuit of other roving cities. Obviously, steampunk hasn't entirely left London. But it's no longer myopically concerned with a historical version of it either.

I'm not contending that steampunk is concerned with North America or Asia more than other places on the globe. I could easily have said that steampunk is leaving London for France or Poland, who are collectively producing as much steampunk as the US or UK. France seems to be more interested in steampunk graphic works, often pastiches of Verne such as Brūno's *Nemo* – a brilliantly dark version of *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* – or Pascal Davoz and Richard Ortiz's gorgeous *Le Capitaine Nemo* which imagines the mysterious captain as hero, not villain. The novels are also worth checking out, but few are in translation, besides Xavier Mauméjean's *The League of Heroes*, which is a wonderful blend of recursive fantasy, comic book heroics, and virtual mind-screw. Lacking a background in Polish, I have little to say about the steampunk coming out of Poland, except that the covers of Krzysztof Piskorski's two-volume *Zadra* and Michał Protasiuk's *Punkt Omega* make me want to damn the torpedoes, buy the books, and insert every line into an online translator.

Does it matter if steampunk leaves London? Absolutely. If the success of open-sourcing has taught us anything, it is that a proprietary grip in the information age results in the death of a technology. For steampunk to thrive, it needs to be free to be applied wherever people have an interest in gears and gadgets, in the tenuous spaces between memory and history, wherever dreams of traveling in an airship ignore the failure of the Graf Zeppelins. This freedom does not imply it ought to be frivolous or foolish. Good steampunk

can blend high adventure with questions about identity, war, nationality, and technology – as Scott Westerfeld does in *Leviathan*, both satisfying the supposed YA market it targets and providing something more thoughtful for older readers. Further, steampunk’s emancipation from the corseted constrictions of Victorian society permit it to playfully examine what may end up being an endless array of worlds, times, and themes. Steampunk has moved from being soft SF to fantasy, and now finds itself in the pages of

horror and romance. Is there room in the future of steampunk for a political novel, or a novel of ideas? We’ll need better lenses than just brass goggles to know: we’re no longer sailing this airship into one horizon in one world, but into Borges’s ‘Garden of Forking Paths’, branching “perpetually toward innumerable futures”, backward to innumerable pasts, and sideways, into other worlds.

MIKE PERSCHON



# Taral Wayne

## A CLOSE SHAVE



Fresh blood in his veins, his cheeks were suffused with the colour of the living. He stood straight once more, had spring in his step. His graying temples, on the other hand, were tinted with Clairol. When all was said and done, the aristocratic bearing of this scion of East European nobility had been touched-up like an aging Tintoretto by both the Necessary Act and the Artifice of Man.

The Necessary Act lay dead behind a casually arranged screen of decaying cartons, mostly bearing empty fifths of Glenlivet and Lamb's. A few minutes ago, the Necessary Act had stepped out of the rear entrance of a working-class bar at a bad time, and hadn't noticed the shadowy figure that accompanied him. Had he turned, he would have seen an elderly gentleman in over-formal evening dress of a past age, white of hair, bent with years, with a thirsty look in his eye that whisky taken neat would never slake.

The stranger lost few words in the encounter, and they parted after a brief struggle that ended in a shockingly intimate embrace. No one noticed. Wisely, no one ever noticed strange stirrings in the dark alleys of working-class London.

Preying on drunks was degrading, and

left an unpleasant taste in the mouth. Too much impure blood inevitably led to a hangover the next evening, but a thirsty Vampire sometimes found it unavoidable. So, despite the taste of raw alcohol in his mouth, he was satisfied. Meals rarely came that easily any more. Ever since the publication of a lurid novel by some author of absurd gothic romances, the topic of Vampires had been on everyone's lips. Good folk took care in the streets, now, and were infrequently alone. Someday, it would be amusing to come across the author of that novel, thought the Vampire. A bitter meal he would make, though.

The streets of London were busy-ing as the dawn stole across its grimy streets. The rising sun robbed dark alleys of their concealment, showing in merciless detail the kind of squalor the human species habitually created for itself. Wretched street urchins ran barefoot in ragged clothes through filth, vying with starved cats for scraps of discarded food that had hardly been fit for consumption when first served on a plate. A prostitute showed her diseased charms as the Vampire passed.

"Vermin," he thought to himself. "It demeans me to prey on them, but I must."

They were worse than the grave rats who chiseled the wood of the cheap coffins next to his. At least the rats knew how to clean themselves. Thinking of his coffin, though, he hurried on. His cape was dark and heavy, and his hat protected him from the growing light of the sun – while it was still weak, at least – but he was tired and heavy with his meal. He wanted rest.

Still, he was in an unaccustomed mood. Contempt for the cattle he lived among buoyed the Vampire's spirit. He hadn't felt as strong and triumphant since he had left the Old Country. No, not even since many years before that. Perhaps there was something to be said for 0.6% blood alcohol levels after all. He should imbibe outside bars more often, he thought. He had bled white the Old Country, though: it had been dying and he with it. There had been no choice but to leave tradition and sacred soil behind for this tumult of human corruption, this centre of new empire, this untapped sea for the nourishment for his spirit. Fresh blood; fresh enterprise; fresh life in this cancer of warm flesh. He hiccupped once, without noticing.

A well-dressed gentleman on an early-morning errand passed by. Gentleman. While indistinguishable from himself, the Vampire knew that the resemblance was superficial. Outside was breeding, education, and culture. Inside, the most correct English gentleman was no more than his labouring cousin – a frightened ego and flickering mortal spirit that belonged in the mud, ordained by fate to be the prey of a natural superior.

"Pass, cattle," thought the Vampire as he glared at the retreating back. "I am not hungry now. But I may be tonight, if you are out in the streets again. The weak fall prey to the strong, as they should."

Blood had brought vigour not only to the Vampire's mind and body, but to his very body cells. His hair had grown nearly half an inch beyond what was fashionable, and a stubble darkened the noble length of his jaw. There was a barber shop on the street, he noticed, already open to early morning trade. Below the barber's name, the sign urged "We Take All Customers".

The thought of allowing a mortal, a passive food animal, to tend to the Vampire's throat with a razor filled him with amusement. It was an irony only he would

savour. He needed a shave. He was in a rare, hilarious mood. He would play with this barber, submitting himself to the blade, and in the end he would be the one who would take the barber's blood.

The scent of cooking nearby revolted him. "What was in those meat pies," he wondered. "The neighborhood dogs and cats?"

He shrugged it off and climbed the rickety wooden staircase to the shop above.

"That's a cheery grin for so grim a face," said the barber, flicking a none-too-clean sheet before tying it around the Vampire's neck.

"Appearances are deceptive," answered the Vampire.

"So they are," the barber agreed and mixed lather in a chipped china cup that had seen far better days.

The Vampire looked away from the barber and saw the name of the shop reflected in a mirror. The backward letters were now the right way around. A corner of the Vampire's lips lifted in a chilling snarl, but no fang showed in the mirror. Only the name of the barber.

The barber, however, had his back turned to this and didn't notice. He lifted a chased silver razor with the flourish of a man delighted by his profession.

"And what can I do for you this morning?" he asked, tucking the sheet snug under the chin of the day's first customer.

"A shave," said the Vampire. Silver touched the skin of his neck delicately... too sharp to feel as yet. "A close shave, Mr. Todd."



# WELL MET IN LONDON

BY CLAIRE BRIALEY

About two years ago I rushed into a shop at Heathrow airport to buy a disposable camera since, despite all our other preparations (including the traditional sign reading “Croydon fandom welcomes international cultural delegate”), twenty-first century digital technology was proving a bit unreliable. Unless that was twenty-first century digital James Bacon. The quality of the photos thus owes something to twentieth century technology and something to the quality of the lighting at the airport, but we have documentary proof that two years ago Chris Garcia walked among us and things have not quite been the same since. (I mention this as much as anything because I hope I can now persuade Chris to publish several photographs of himself which I only got developed more than a year too late for his TAFF trip report.)

Chris stayed in Croydon for several days, during which time he wrote many, many words of that trip report, risked his taste buds to find out what Mexican food is like in the UK, and occasionally sallied forth into the rest of London armed with an A-Z which he didn't entirely believe on the grounds that no one would give real street names like those, but which I recently realised that he's still got. And then we all went back to Heathrow to go to an Eastercon.

About two years ago, in that Heathrow hotel, Chris and James also launched the first issue of this fanzine on an unsuspecting world – who'd thought that perhaps the product of a fanzine-in-an-hour programme item would be a single sheet, maybe even as much as four pages. With contributions from a range of fans at the convention as well as many commissioned or permissioned in advance (from fans, SF professionals and external contributors) its ambition was evident.

Unfortunately, given the haste in which the fanzine was put together at the con, there was an obvious risk that the presentation would let down both the specific material and the overall vision that James and Chris had for the project. It was perfectly possible that they could do better when they weren't in such haste, but I wasn't sure people would stick with them to find out. Rather than risking the whole endeavour being written off as a crudzine, I volunteered to try to help to tame the words a bit, although in the intervening two years I may have created even more frustrations for my co-editors – not least through my glacial

pace relative to them – than their original output and ways of working have for me.

That may all be because I wasn't sure I fully understood their vision. Was it a London Eye: a supposedly temporary addition to the landscape that, if successful, might reasonably be expected to stick around and which gradually became an accepted part of the traditional skyline even while it remained eye-catching? Was it a 30 St Mary Axe (the Gherkin): a new way of doing what had been done all around it for some time, which some people would like more than its older neighbours but some would feel never quite fitted in, however good it might be on its own terms? Was it like Portcullis House, the MPs' offices opposite the Palace of Westminster: a new structure which provided some expansion room and also enabled the original to better fulfil its original purpose?

Well, two years on, you tell me – and I really don't know if it's significant that I can't think of a new building that aims to fit seamlessly into the traditional landscape so that you couldn't tell it hadn't always been there. Other possible analogies are not quite as flattering to us. The Millennium Dome: a grand plan that didn't really achieve what it set out to do but later on, when the hype had died down, became a useful and accepted part of the city. The Tate Modern: a reinvention of an institution that had been crumbling for some time, put to a whole new purpose, generally much applauded but sometimes criticised for style over substance. Or Battersea Power Station? Wembley Stadium? You pay your money and you pick your building. Those not so familiar with London, of





course, might instead be feeling alienated by this whole concept.

I'm not a Londoner, as such. My parents both come from London (the East End and Islington before it was posh) but moved out to Kent before I was born and then on to north Essex when I was very young. I went south to Sussex to go to university and after a couple of years at work moved closer into London to make the commuting easier and trade off the cost of travel against the cost of a larger house. Croydon is a London borough but has a marginal relationship with the mother city; its postcodes leave most of the borough, including everywhere I've lived, stamped as part of Surrey even while its phone numbers place it back within London. Croydon itself aspires to be a city within the city, and like London overall is really a collection of urban and suburban villages.

I don't feel a particular attachment to London until someone who isn't from London or who has rejected it is moved to criticise it – or, indeed, until someone living in one of the inner boroughs attempts to exclude Croydon from London and cast us into some provincial hinterland. I've lived here for most of my adult life and, by now, very nearly longer than I lived with my parents. I'm not really one to want to be defined by belonging to a geographical community, but I'm probably a Londoner more than I am anything else.



I don't walk through science fictional London, seeing or even looking for the locations of stories set here, but rather a London that is the sum of its history and its own mythologies. But I meet the city with delight in fiction as I do familiar characters and representations of real people: in *The Anubis Gates*, which Tim Powers wrote many years before he first visited the UK (as a guest of honour at last year's Eastercon); in Neal Stephenson's Baroque Cycle, where puzzling out which stories of the city were real and which a subtle warping to support the shift he'd levered into the universe often engaged me more than the laborious progress of the fictional characters through the volumes; in the new Sherlock Holmes film, where I kept trying to map the interior shots of Parliament onto what I know from working in the Palace of Westminster and where one of the most arresting elements of what looked like an authentic Victorian London was the partly-constructed (and not, I gather, anachronistic) Tower Bridge.

Fannish London is something else. In 2005 Tony Cullen mapped the perambulations of the London Circle 'First Thursday' pub meeting between the fifteen venues used since the first meetings in the White Horse (although without including the precursor venue of the Shamrock in Fetter Lane mentioned in Rob Hansen's history of UK SF fandom, *THEN*). A somewhat diminished group of London fandom can still be found on the first Thursday of every month in its latest venue, the Melton Mowbray on High Holborn, which is just round the corner from the former location of the White Horse.

London has also hosted its share of big SF conventions, although it's not usually affordable for smaller ones. Worldcons were held in London in 1957 and 1965 respectively, and there have been ten London national conventions in the modern series (from, and including, Whitcon in 1948 which is one of the reasons I haven't just described them as 'Eastercons').

And this Easter, two years and another five issues of this fanzine later, Chris and James and I will meet again in Croydon and then at a convention in London, in the same hotel where the first issue of *Journey Planet* first appeared. And we will talk about the fanzine, and about science fiction and the city and all the other things. And Chris will give me back the A-Z.

CLAIRE BRIALEY

*The Ice Age is coming, the sun's at an end  
Meltdown expected, the wheat's growin' thin  
Engines stop running, but I have no fear  
Cos London is callin' and I live by the river  
– The Clash, 'London Calling'*



# A SAFE SPACE?

## BY PEPPER

Conventions are widely regarded as being a safe space for fans – a place where eccentricities and foibles are better tolerated than in the outside world and where diversity is welcomed and appreciated. Conventions provide the opportunity to learn new skills in a safe environment, to dust off those articles of clothing that might not necessarily be appreciated at the office Christmas party, and to participate in lively debate on a huge variety of topics. The spirit of a convention is one of tolerance and acceptance.

However, there are small minorities who try to use this openness in a more unwelcome way. These are the people who do not appreciate the concept of ‘look, don’t touch’ and who will attempt to take advantage of those who are a little more naïve or vulnerable than others.

There are some in this minority who will say, “Oh, don’t shout at me; I’ve got Asperger’s, how was I to know you don’t want me following you around the dance floor trying to grab your breasts at any opportunity?” But here’s a tip for that minority: don’t touch unless expressly invited to do so. There is no circumstance in which that behaviour is acceptable and, quite frankly, it is insulting when you tell me you cannot control your behaviour and therefore (in the spirit of conventions being a safe and accepting place) I should allow you to continue. If you have a behavioural disorder or someone has driven a pitchfork through your frontal lobes and consequently you are unable to regulate your actions, you should either be with a carer at all times who can tell you when you need to moderate your excesses, or in custody.

I appreciate this could sound harsh, especially as fandom does have a number of people who are not especially adept at reading social cues, but a lack of social ability is not an excuse to behave inappropriately and other convention attendees should not be asked to put up with it.

Even more unfortunately, there are others attending who pose a greater danger. I have heard whispers of assaults and seen a friend threatened with violence at a convention. That’s not my story to tell, but I would like con-goers to be aware that such things can happen, and just because you’re at a convention doesn’t mean you’re safe. I think (I hope) it’s a rare occurrence, and I certainly don’t want to discourage people from attending, but please do consider your own safety, particularly if you’re drinking alcohol. And if you feel unsafe, get out. Call someone you trust (*not* that nice person you met for the first time at a panel earlier today!): someone who is sober and someone who can make sure you’re safe and well. And if the worst happens, then it’s a police matter, just as it would be outside the convention.

Being at a convention does not give predators the right to attack and doesn’t take away the right of the attacked to justice, regardless of how well known or respected in fandom the attacker might be.

I hope I’m not painting a really unpleasant picture here, or giving the impression that I consider conventions to be full of murderers or rapists, because I don’t; I believe that the vast majority of people attending a convention are decent citizens and I’m looking forward to seeing many of them again at Easter. I will, however, be mindful of my own safety at the con and urge people to be mindful of theirs. And if you have ever felt overwhelmed, unsure or frightened, then speak to that person you trust, and take time out to get yourself together, rather than be persuaded into something you may later regret.



# WHY I DON'T GO TO CONS

*You want to know why I don't go to Eastercons now.*

They put out a message that anything goes, and you seem to be expected to let your hair down sexually. It's the norm for people to dress provocatively and one-night stands and threesomes (or more) are the talk of the town – even imaginary ones. And then there are panels telling you all about the sex in this and the sex of that or how to do something that is sexually orientated: write it, wear it, and how to make corsets to put yourself out there even more. So if a girl gets raped at one of these things there is a chance someone will say: but she went to that sex panel or dressed in that corset or got really hammered – and thereby imply she is over-reacting.

Impressionable women would likely feel that sex of some sort is almost 'expected' to happen, and that to think otherwise is prudish. And men certainly expect women to be more 'open' (for which read loose) at conventions; that's after all the expected convention. So protesting may be seen as foreplay...

So many jokes abound: do you hear them? And most of them get circulated at the con bar. If a girl wants to fit in and be popular...

Don't get me wrong – the pressure and/or skewed reality is not just coming from the males. I can name the women who talk the talk as if they are in the hot seat, with their flirty corsetry, stockings and flashing. Those women do so from a position of supreme security. No man would ever approach them, if they didn't want them to. Yes, some women are putting the wrong image out there, and some men wonder aloud why more girls cannot be like them. Then some other girls are probably feeling (even subconsciously; and yeah, not *all* girls) that they have to live up to this bastion of convention womanhood. And if they did, if they flashed their legs, and if they got pissed and tossed about sexual innuendos all over the place; and if they got raped, got forced to have sex against their will – even if the light petting that happened first was their idea – if they complained of rape, could you guarantee no convention goer would then say they were looking for it? That is why women don't report it when it happens. Especially at some convention where they should in theory be as safe as anything to be able to express themselves and be heard and be among friends and not be ridiculed or bullied.

Also, I don't go to cons because my partner is always busy running that con or the next one. Talking incessantly about cons is not my idea of fun, especially when he is a bad partner and fails

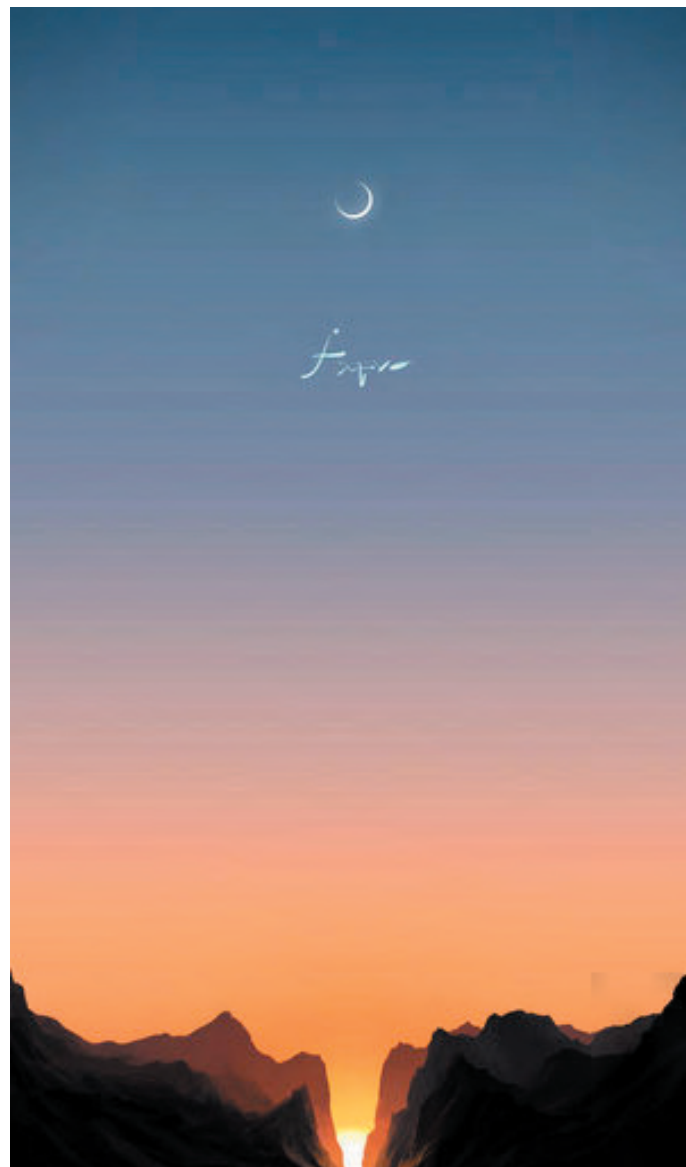
to buy me a beer.

But if I was single, I would not go to Eastercon, because of the heavy sexual overtones and the feeling that I was fresh meat there for the taking and that it was very acceptable to be groping me without my permission. Yes, my tits were groped. Bastards.

Constantly fending off unwanted male attention is not a fun way to spend time. If not for my partner being there, I would've left after the first night. I felt physically unsafe. And I felt stupid for feeling so, because of the parading corsets through the bar and the women strutting their stuff and the men all over getting tits stuffed in their faces, making me feel like sex was the done thing and I am a prude.

OK, I might go this year to see Mike Carey, but I won't be hanging around.

ANON



# WHAT SAFETY MEANS TO ME

BY KARI

I don't remember when I learnt that my body was not mine alone. That knowledge, that I am partly public, has been with me for years and years and years. I absorbed it in the comments of family and friends on how pretty – or, more often, plain – I was. I drew it in from the pictures on the television, the Slimcea girl who was showing herself to the world, perfected through self-privation; the Playtex girdle woman who knew that hours of discomfort was better by far than being seen to be imperfect; the Harmony girl on whose hair men always remarked. I knew it from my mother's comments on actresses and models and friends. My mother is a kind woman, and her comments were seldom cutting, and yet I knew all the same from her that X wasn't as pretty as she might be, due to the size of her hips, or that Y dressed badly for her shape. I knew it through the girls at school who were harsh in their judgement of everything – openly their enemies; privately, their friends; most privately of all, perhaps, of themselves. *I'm so fat, I'm so plain, my nose is all wrong, I'm flat-chested, my boobs are too big.* Not one of us was content with herself and nor were we encouraged to be. We were female in public, there to be seen and to remarked upon.

Sometimes boys were remarked on also – for size, for hair colour – but it was only certain boys, not all boys. It was not all the time. There was no Slimcea boy, no girdle guy, and the Old Spice man was an adventurous surfer. People did not touch my brother in the same ways they tried to touch me, and they did not caution him that his behaviour must be modulated at all times to avoid the wrong kinds of attention from the opposite sex. *Boys have powerful impulses. You mustn't lead them on.* It was a double warning: my body was not only mine, and it was up to me to police it at all times lest it cause problems.

We are taught, all of us, from early on, that the female form is both desirable and dangerous. We are taught to feel ashamed of it or awed, covetous or intimidated, despairing or resentful. Girls are taught that it must be controlled and disciplined, pummelled and starved, before it can become acceptable – 'figure faults' must be corrected, different parts must be displayed or covered, stripped of hair, dyed, strapped in, or out, or down. Yes, some of us opt out of some or all of this. But whatever we do, there will likely be comments.

And you're wondering, out there, what all this has to do with anything; you're wondering,

and maybe saying, "Well, men have body image issues too, and people yell things at them too," and all that is true enough. But what I'm saying is this: we are taught as a culture that women are to be looked at, and both sides accept this. And this inevitably affects the ways in which we behave to ourselves and to each other. The female body is culturally packaged and sold back to us, not as it is – the shape of a person – but as something separate, something at once less and more, and it's this attitude that leads to the Open Source Boob Project nonsense of a year or so ago (the promoters of that seemed to have forgotten that breasts come attached to people). Being female is an action; in every moment and every space, it is loaded, immanent with meaning, coded, complicated.

When I was nineteen, a man I knew through fandom stalked me for about six months. I did not know it was stalking, though I knew it was worrying and distressing and undesirable. I didn't know it wasn't my fault. Some of that was down to circumstances: stalking had not at the time been widely discussed and I had no label for it. Part of it was down to my own education: I didn't know what to do with the situation, how to deal with it. I'm not sure I told anyone, apart from my boyfriend of the time.

He blamed me for it. I must have done something to make this happen. I spent six months feeling scared and culpable, trying to avoid the stalker and simultaneously feeling that I ought to be extra nice to him, because somehow I had made him do this, I had brought this on myself, while all the time inside me all I could hear was fear and revulsion and a desire to get him as far from me as I could. Another young woman might have reported him, made a fuss, made threats. I wasn't that woman; I hadn't been told that was allowed.

I'm lucky: that man didn't hurt me. In the end, he found another young woman who was actually interested in him and entered into a long relationship with her. But all these years later, I wish that 19-year-old self had known she was allowed to make a fuss, to summon college porters, to threaten him with the wrath of college authorities. Because I didn't have to endure that; I didn't have to hide in my room like that for all that time; it had never been my fault. He was attracted to me. I was not attracted to him. That should have been the last of it. But my context – and that old boyfriend – convicted me of being female in public,

contributory in my own fate.

*I was lucky.*

I'm not even sure I should write that, though my head is full of sentences which start that way. I'm lucky, I've never been raped. But what about the man – a different man, around that same time – who insisted on spending the night in my room despite my protests, and on handling me despite my protests, because he was unhappy and I owed him? What about the man who verbally coerced me into sex? The man who forced me into his car? The man – a complete stranger – who openly groped my body in a con lounge? The man who informed me I would be providing him with sex due to my hair colour? What about all those men who looked and saw my shape or my clothes, saw Woman, but not Person? Was it luck that meant none of those situations got out of hand? Lots of times, no, it wasn't; it was other people – the good guys and gals of fandom who came over and intervened, who protected and helped, who helped me when I didn't know how to help myself. Sometimes it was... I don't know. Not luck, just a sense that I had to get through this and out the other side.

Not all the situations I've listed above happened within fandom, but all of them happened. I'm not particularly pretty: I was just sometimes in the wrong place. It's a sad fact that most women have had brushes with this kind of thing. Which is not to say that all men are bastards, all men are abusers, all men are the enemy. Nothing is that simple. Nothing is that easy.

And fandom can be extra-complicated, because it constructs itself as a safe space in many ways. It's often said that fans include a fair number of people whose experience of wider society has not always been kind, and who are perhaps thinner skinned or less comfortable with some forms of socialisation. A lot of people expect to be more readily accepted within fandom. (I'm

not 100% sure that this is true: fandom can look pretty unkind sometimes. But this is not the place for yet another discussion of the Myth of Fannish Tolerance.) Fans can be more touchy-feely with one another; they may dress a little (or a lot) oddly. It can be hard to see where boundaries lie. It can be very easy to cross those boundaries by accident. It happens. But there is a huge difference between accident and intent. And that's where the difficulties arise. That's when safety for one person becomes danger for another.

If you dress like I do – I have done – then it will draw attention of all kinds. I accept that (and the only time I resented it involved a hotel employee who was hoping for a bribe). I accept that if I wear a short skirt, someone may comment and the comment may not be complimentary. I accept that I may be asked for contact or more. I dress as I do because it's how I am, who I am. And I accept the consequences.

Up to a point, and here it is: it's still my body, my self. I'm still a person, under the clothes and the flesh. I have the right to say no. I have the right to say no and walk away. I have the right to say no and walk away and to have that respected. It was the chant of the *Reclaim the Night* marches: Whatever I wear and wherever I go, yes means yes and no means no. It ought to be easy.

It isn't, of course. People get confused, or resent what they see as rejection. People misinterpret, they hope, they imagine. We all do it. But the thing is that once that 'no' is established, that should be the end of it. My reactions are my responsibility. Yours are yours. I didn't owe anything to that young man who stalked me, but he didn't understand that, and for month on month he made my life unsafe.

And it really is that simple. It's OK to ask. But no is no, and that should get to be the end of it.

KARI

# WHEN FANDOM IS NOT SUCH A SAFE SPACE

Recently, a girl in Australia was reportedly sexually assaulted and raped by a man she met at SwanCon, the annual Western Australian Science Fiction and Fantasy Convention.

This incident has, unsurprisingly, sparked outrage amongst fans both in Australia and around the world and has been talked about a great deal of late, both online and off. Discussions have revolved around the levels of harassment which are tolerated at conventions and about what, if anything, can or should be done about it.

These discussions have prompted me to write about something that happened to me at a convention some 14 or so years ago. I'm writing this anonymously because, even now, I'm not sure how I feel about talking about this incident in public. But in spite of that disquiet about making my own experiences known, I think it's important to realise that sometimes bad things do happen at cons and to consider carefully what we can practically do to try to stop such things from happening in the future.

So here is my story, and my thoughts...

I started going along to fannish events, pub meets and days out and so forth, aged about 15 or 16, and went to my first 'proper' con aged 17. Having always been a bit of a misfit at school and amongst my peers, it was wonderful to find a place where I could hang out with people who felt a bit more 'like me', and where I could be myself without being thought weird. It felt like a place I fitted in, for the first time ever, and I'm sure that's a feeling a lot of fans can relate to. A *safe space*, many people call it, meaning a place where you can be yourself without fear of rejection or judgement, and that is a wonderful thing.

At that age I was not especially confident. I was fairly unpopular as a child and reaching an age where suddenly people started to appreciate me, for how I looked if nothing else, was quite exhilarating. I definitely wore things to get noticed and looked at, because I enjoyed the attention. It was new, and it was exciting. But on more than one occasion the admiring looks and nice compliments and attention that I enjoyed spilled over into something more, a level of attention that I *didn't* enjoy, and that I *didn't* want. And, being young and inexperienced and lacking in confidence, I didn't always have the wherewithal to handle that level of attention.

Most of the time it worked out OK, usually because there were other people around that I knew who I could hang out with for safety. But I went to one con alone. I knew people there, but only peripherally; they were people I had met and knew casually through fandom, but not, at the time, close friends. Before I arrived it never occurred to me that this might be a problem. All the fans I

had ever met were nice, friendly people, and I had always felt safe amongst them.

On the first night I got a lot of attention from one particular guy in the bar. It started as the sort of attention I wanted but, after I'd accepted a couple of drinks, became a level of attention I didn't want. I started to withdraw, trying to make my disinterest in anything beyond conversation clear, but he didn't really seem to pick up on the hints, and I didn't know anyone else well enough to run off and talk to them, so I felt kind of stuck.

Eventually I went off to bed and he wanted to follow me, rather implying that the drinks he'd bought me entitled him to do so. I was glad to have the excuse that I was crashing on the floor of some acquaintances so no, I couldn't let him join me. He continued to pester, saying he had nowhere to stay; eventually I said it was their room, so he should ask them. I knew they were already asleep so thought I was safe, and the comment got him off my back which I desperately wanted. He was literally holding on to me and I clearly wasn't going to get to leave until I had said something of the sort to appease him.

To my surprise (and dismay) he woke the people I was staying with and asked them if he could crash on their floor. Being the sort of friendly, welcoming people that fans pride themselves on being, they said yes. So that night I ended up with him cuddled up next to me on the floor of that room, with nowhere else to go. And once everyone else was asleep, he started to grope me. I whispered to him to stop it and pushed his hands away, but he just kept on, undoing my pyjamas as fast as I did them back up again, and eventually I ended up naked. At about that point I gave up trying to keep his hands off me and just closed my eyes and tried to ignore the feeling of him touching me.

Why didn't I do something more? Shout, or wake up the other people in the room? That's simple. I didn't know them particularly well. They were being very kind by letting me stay on their floor. I didn't feel I had any right to wake them with my problems. I didn't feel I had any right to impose on them any more than I already had. They were asleep, and I didn't want to disturb them. Awfully British of me. Apparently, this desire not to make a fuss is a common problem amongst women who get harassed or assaulted. It's an odd feeling. You want what is happening to stop, more than anything in the world, except for one thing – causing anyone any bother. It makes getting help before things have gone too far very difficult.

Also, I was a little afraid. I had asked this man to stop, pushed him off me, thought I had made my wishes clear, and he'd just completely ignored me. If I shouted and struggled, what was

to say he'd stop then? He was big and strong, and I was not, and perhaps he'd just get violent. Perhaps it would get worse. Better just to try to pretend it wasn't happening. After all, he wasn't *hurting* me. Not physically.

Plus, in some ways, I JUST COULD NOT BELIEVE WHAT WAS HAPPENING. It was surreal, like a dream. I think part of me kept thinking I would wake up. I doubt the fact that I was quite drunk helped at all.

Finally he, then I, went to sleep. The next morning, the others in the room saw us cuddled up under the duvet together and assumed that I had invited him along because I wanted to spend the night with him. I didn't know what to say. After all, by that point I had *allowed* him to do what he wanted, so I couldn't very well complain, could I?

I spent the next day at the con avoiding him as best I could. I went and sat in programme items I really wasn't interested in, just because he wasn't there. I found every excuse I could to keep away from him. But completely avoiding someone is impossible at a con and, unsurprisingly, he caught up with me several times during the day, when I always made a hasty excuse – about having something I wanted to see or somewhere I wanted to go – and left; and then in the evening in the bar, when excuses weren't so easy to come by. I really began to feel like I was being followed, and hounded, and by the end of the day I just wanted to leave, but I'd had a few drinks so driving was out of the question. Again I was rather stuck, and still didn't feel like I had anyone to turn to. My efforts to hide during the day had largely kept me away from the people I did know a little, as well as from him. Plus, of course, I still didn't want to make a fuss. Instead I just kept hoping that everything would be OK.

Eventually he said I was looking tense (I wonder why!) and invited me back to the room he had magically arranged for himself since the previous night for a massage. He persisted with the question even when I said that, well, um, I really didn't think that I did. By that point in the day, having spent so much time avoiding him and trying to hide and making excuses, I just remember being so very, very tired. I remember looking at him and asking if he really meant *just* a massage. Yes, he promised, that's all. I don't know if I really believed him. I hoped he was telling the truth, certainly, but I simply didn't have the energy to keep on saying no, so I gave in.

Unsurprisingly, a massage was not all he had in mind, as became clear very quickly once we were alone, and by that point I felt like I had completely given up any right to keep on saying no. I'd accepted drinks from this man, told him what room I was staying in, told him who to ask if he wanted to stay there too, allowed him to fondle

me, and now gone back to his room with him. I was an idiot, and he was entirely within his rights to have sex with me. Besides, I knew he wouldn't take no for an answer, so what was the point in saying it? And again, there was a level of fear that, especially now that we were completely alone, if I physically resisted he might continue to ignore me and perhaps get violent. The situation seemed hopeless, so I just went along with it.

I wouldn't call it rape – that seems far too strong a word. I wasn't physically forced, but I was heavily pressured and coerced, and I certainly didn't freely give my consent to what happened, although I did stop protesting. Ultimately I actually don't think it matters whether it was technically rape. It was a pretty horrendous experience and one which, up until now, I have only shared with a few very close friends; but I survived and, actually, now view it as quite a positive experience, in a strange way. I am extremely happy with the person I am now, and how my life has worked out; and I am the sum total of everything that has happened to me, good or bad, so I wouldn't go back and change the bad things if I could. They're all part of me (and I'm great!).

Oddly, I honestly don't think that he thought he had done anything wrong. He seemed to think that I was only saying no because it was what I thought I was supposed to say, and that I "wanted it really". Afterwards he acted like I'd really enjoyed the whole experience, and maybe we should see each other – something I did eventually manage to get him to understand wasn't happening.

Now, there are a proportion of fans who are what I would call, no offence intended, 'socially awkward', and who therefore sometimes upset others but really don't know that they're doing anything wrong. People who have more trouble than most picking up on non-verbal clues like body language or *how* you say something rather than *what* you say. Sometimes, some of those people can behave in ways which are inappropriate simply because they don't realise they are doing so, which can result in them coming across as insensitive or creepy, and can make the person on the receiving end feel uncomfortable or awkward.

Admittedly this is not great, but the vast majority of such people are actually very decent and if told, directly, that their attentions are unwanted, they will back off. Some people, myself included, would often prefer not to have to be so direct about it. I guess we're just used to people picking up on the clues, but in some ways that's our problem as much as theirs. If you want someone to leave you alone and they're not picking up on your subtle hints, you should tell them; to expect them to psychically know is actually a bit unfair. Although I guess if you're not sure, you can also always ask someone if you're bothering them. It's a



two-way street.

As it happens, this guy was not like that. He was socially adept, reasonably good-looking, charming, friendly – all reasons why I was initially happy to chat to him. But when things began to get beyond where I was comfortable I did, more than once, directly say things like “please don’t”, or “please stop that”, or “no” and was completely ignored. I think, in his mind, I couldn’t possibly really mean what I was saying. After all, he was reasonably good-looking, charming, friendly, and a lot of girls probably *did* like him, and *did* want to sleep with him. When I said “no” he heard “actually I’d really like to, but I’m worried you’ll think I’m a slut or that other people will judge me or [insert other ridiculous reason here] so I’d like you to do it anyway...”. He was very wrong.

Fundamentally, however difficult you may find social situations, it is very important to remember one incredibly simple rule. No means no. I think as long as you stick to that, and respect a “no” when it is given, the *first* time it is given, you might cause some discomfort or awkwardness but you’ll probably avoid leaving psychological scars... It’s the people who won’t take no for an answer who cause genuine offence, hurt, upset and distress, whether it’s about massages in the bar, or taking photos, or hugging, or sex, or pretty much anything else. If someone doesn’t want to do something, and tells you so, you shouldn’t pressure them into doing it. It’s a pretty simple rule.

Even so, I take some responsibility for the incident. I don’t think it was my *fault*, but I could have done things differently, and I did learn from the experience. I certainly didn’t go to cons alone again, and it was years before I would accept a drink from a friend, never mind a stranger. It’s something that happened, but it’s in the past and, for me, that’s where it’s staying. I’m writing about it now only because I think that it’s important for people to realise that fandom is very definitely *not* always a safe space, especially not for young women (or men, for that matter) who are lacking in self confidence and who don’t have close friends nearby to look out for them or to turn to if they have a problem.

These days I have no problem fending off unwanted attention. I’ve had more practice, I’m a lot more confident than I was in my late teens and early twenties, I have quite a number of good friends at every convention I go to, and anyone pushing the issue will get told where to go in no uncertain terms. Looking back at the shy, insecure girl I was then, it’s hard to recognise myself. Although I can still feel her pain, in many ways it almost feels as if it happened to someone else. But when you’re young and people push you it’s not so easy to push back, and a lot of people discover fandom as teenagers when, although they appear to

be adults to the rest of the world and think they are themselves, perhaps they’re not so well equipped with self-assurance and lifeskills as we, and they, think they are. If we want fandom to really be a safe space, we should watch out for them.

So the question then must be how best to do that? First and foremost, I think it’s important that people realise that although fandom is often considered a ‘safe space’ in that you can express yourself more freely there than in many other social situations, this does *not* mean that fans are inherently somehow nicer, kinder or *safer* than any other people simply by virtue of being fans. At the same time, we don’t want to scare people off by giving them the impression that fans are any *less* safe than other people either. I have heard it suggested that “don’t forget to not sexually harass people” be added to the same part of the programme where it says “don’t forget to shower regularly”; but we as a community have enough of an image problem as geeks and nerds without making newcomers feel like they’ve just arrived somewhere that people need to be reminded about reasonable standards of personal hygiene, never mind making them feel like they’ve just arrived somewhere that people need to be reminded not to rape anyone!

Ultimately, people are people, wherever you meet them, and some of them are nicer than others. The vast majority of fans are very lovely people – some of them are even my friends! – but, just like any other group, we have nice folk and not so nice folk in fandom, and we shouldn’t delude ourselves into thinking that everyone who is a fan is *de facto* a wonderful person who can do no wrong.

There is an argument to say that we should name and shame those who cross certain boundaries, in order to warn other people about them. I have never told *anyone* who the guy was who caused me such distress, and I never will. In fact I didn’t tell anyone about the incident at all for quite some time. At the time, telling people about it would, I’m sure, have caused a big stir, and that was something I simply didn’t feel I could deal with on top of what I was going through anyway. Maintaining a level of normalcy, by pretending that it didn’t happen or that it wasn’t a big deal, was a defence mechanism. Plus I guess I still didn’t feel I had any right to complain, and was concerned that others might not believe my side of things. After all, no one who saw us together at the con ever said, in public or private, at the time or afterwards, that it looked like he was bothering me; so, obviously, however I had felt and whatever I thought I had said or done to try and get him to leave me alone, I must have been giving out all the signals that I was happy with what he was doing. It never occurred to me that others may have seen, and wondered, but just decided not to get involved.

I saw the man in question at a couple of cons

after that one and avoided him for obvious reasons. Not long afterwards he got a girlfriend, and both he and she seemed happy. What sense in upsetting that by telling everyone he had upset me? And now I've not seen him around for years and years, although I know if I said who he was, some people within my circle of fannish friends would know who I'm talking about. I really don't want them to know, though, and it's hard to explain why. It feels like a sort of self-preservation thing. It might be good for others to know, if only so they could avoid him and watch out for other people around him and so on, but I don't think it would be good for me. It would turn this into a Big Thing, years after the fact, when right now it's just a thing and mostly one which is fairly irrelevant to me, and I'm perfectly happy for it to stay that way. So even if you think it's a good idea to name and shame (and I'm not at all sure that I do) you often just won't get people to do it, which makes it a bit of a non-starter.

One thing we *should* all try to do is to keep an eye out for inappropriate behaviour which is causing distress, and have the courage to step in and politely enquire if we can be of help if we think someone might be in trouble; or at least point it out to a committee member or someone else who might be willing to step in and offer assistance, if we don't feel able to do so ourselves. One person noticing a young girl without an obvious social group to hang out with, looking a little unhappy, and saying in a quiet moment, "You're getting a lot of attention from that guy and you don't look entirely comfortable with it. Do you want me to tell him to leave you alone, or just hang out with me so you don't have to be alone with him?" would have made a massive difference to me. Especially since, like many people in that sort of situation, I didn't feel able to go to anyone to ask for the help that I needed, even though I know that the majority of people there would have been more than happy to assist had I had the courage to approach them.

Which brings me to something else we could do; make it as easy as possible for someone who is feeling uncomfortable to approach someone at the convention and ask them for help. People who are being harassed often do not want to make a fuss, more than anything else, so this needs to be as fuss-free as possible. Yes, I'm sure they could always go to a committee member, but committee members are busy, important people (or so they can seem to someone young, insecure and new to conventions) so they're the last person they are likely to talk to. Yes, many fans if approached in the bar would happily assist someone in trouble; but again, someone in trouble isn't going to want to bother people they don't know extremely well. It needs to be someone who is there specifically to help. Someone where you're not interrupting their con, or disturbing their fun, if you go to them.

I have heard that cons in the States sometimes have areas which are only for women. I'm not particularly in favour of such a thing – it's not all men we need protecting from, and besides, sometimes it might be a young man who's in need – but that would at least have given me a place to go where I felt genuinely safe. Perhaps, instead, we need a small, quiet room somewhere at a convention where you can go to find someone to talk to about any problems, of any sort. Someone you know is there to listen, who will treat what you say confidentially, who won't do anything or tell anyone unless you agree; but someone who can, if you want them to, speak to the person you're having problems with on your behalf, or confront them with you, or just help you to stay away from them and make sure that you and they are not left alone. Something like that would have been a huge help to me.

I'm sure there are many other ways to handle this sort of problem, and different people will have different ideas about how to go about it. The most important thing is to recognise that the problem exists, that people do occasionally feel harassed and put under pressure, and that the behaviour that makes them feel that way is unacceptable and should be challenged.

I would like to end this piece with a small addendum to my story – a happy ending, if you like. I met a man at a convention not so very long after the one I have been talking about, at a time when I was still very affected by that incident and feeling very vulnerable. He, too, was good-looking, charming and friendly. We got chatting, one thing led to another, and I ended up in a situation where he could very easily have taken advantage of me. At that point I actually expected him to because, well, guys you meet at cons don't take no for an answer; I'd learned that the hard way. It turned out that this guy was different, by which I mean that he was kind, decent and caring. He didn't take advantage – quite the opposite. He listened to how I felt, didn't pressure me into anything I was unsure about, and held me as I cried with the simple joy of discovering that someone was interested in me for something more than just sex, and as I fell asleep in his arms. He showed me that it wasn't 'men you meet at conventions' who were the problem, but *that* man who I happened to have met at a convention. It was a simple act of kindness which did a lot to repair the damage that the previous guy had done. He knows who he is, and what that meant to me. Thank you.

ANON

**James adds:** I told this person my idea. It's not new; I suggested it back in 2006. The above contributor liked it and gave it the name. I may help to make it happen, although I think just coming up with the idea is enough; in discreet discussions, a number of other people seemed interested in taking it on. I would not be right for this sort of thing myself, but here is the idea.

## **CONFIDENTIAL**

The con nominates or asks a responsible person, mature of mind, to run a given year's CONFIDENTIAL. From that point, they are separate from the con: non-committee, non-staff, but authorised.

A few people work with this person: people who have common sense and life experiences. People who won't police, but who will be sensitive, won't moralise but will be on hand to help when needed. They might have a room available to them, but these people can find a quiet space. They agree to have a phone number published, for the weekend; buying a phone is easy.

Then in the PR, just somewhere discreet, and also maybe on business cards around the con, there's something like this:

### **CONFIDENTIAL**

In a bad spot, worried about unwanted attention, feeling threatened, need rescuing?

Call Connie or Charlie on 07777 666XXX. They are happy to chat, come to fetch you, get you out of trouble, or put you in touch with a professional you need.

Most colleges have a nightline, or something similar, so young people should see it for what it is: there if you need it, not a reflection on the event itself. It's an idea, but one I hope that is measured, practical and that could help.

Would you be interested in doing it? Are you chairing a con, or just a suitable ear for people to tell their concerns? Do let us know.

**Claire adds:** James was keen for Chris and me to feel able to write something on this overall subject too. It's really important; but here and now I don't have the words. Which only underlines my thanks and respect for those who have shared theirs.



