

JOURNEY PLANET  
LETTERS from ABSENTIA

Modesto  
TRAVELodge  
807 NEEDHAM ST.  
MODESTO, CALIF.

Haida Ceremonial Canoe  
6c  
U.S. POSTAGE

MADE IN ITALY  
MANTICELLO  
ANNEX  
TERMINI IMER  
ITALY

LOS ANGELES  
APR 15 PM  
1968  
FIRST CLASS MAIL  
SPECIAL DELIVERY





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# PRACTICALITIES & *Penmanship*

## Getting Into Pens

Jonathan Baddseley

Hi, my name is Jonathan and I am a 42 year old IT worker who lives in London, England. Up until a few years ago I never thought much about pens. I'd just use whatever was available. A number of years ago I asked for some 'nice' pens for Xmas from my partner and got a couple of Pilot G2s, a Pilot V5 Grip and a Pentel retractable pencil. They were nice and lasted for ages as I kept them at home where they were used little. At work I just used whatever crappy minimum cost ballpoint I got issued.

Then in 2012, I was on a client site where they had the shittiest of pens. Disposables by a supply company called 5 Star which had an annoying sharp edge right where the cap connected to the barrel. It was just uncomfortable to use and I had a gripe to my colleague opposite. He told me about the Fisher Space pen he was using. He chose it as it went well with the small notebook he carried and he'd been through 3 refills for it. He pointed me to the Pen Addict blog ([penaddict.com](http://penaddict.com)), as that is where he'd done his research into what would make a good pen. That evening I went home and spend a couple of hours reading what is now one of my favourite blogs.

The next day I brought in two old Parker Jotters I'd had since I was a kid. I'd kept them in a drawer as they were 'nice' pens. Why would I take my fancy pens to work? This was the point where I asked myself "Why would I leave my nice pens unused in a drawer?". They were much nicer to use than the disposables.

Journey Planet 3



At the time I was a consultant, so wore a suit to work; the Jotter felt like a more professional looking pen in meetings and I realised I felt a little prouder being one of the few who didn't just use what the stationery cupboard gave them (seriously, look at how many managers have nice pens).

## “Rabbit hole entered.”

I enjoyed my jotters and chatted to the Space pen owning colleague about what I had read the previous night. That lunchtime we headed off to the Rymans office supplies down to road to buy various rollerball and gel pens.

Rabbit hole entered. Those of you in the pen community are probably laughing right about now. Yes, that's how it starts. I now have my own blog ([justanotherpenblog.wordpress.com](http://justanotherpenblog.wordpress.com)), buy reconditioned antique pens off Etsy and support cool project pens on Kickstarter. And every day whatever pen I'm using gives me a simple bit of pleasure.

So I'd like to answer a very common question: "What is the best pen?". This being the question I'm most commonly asked by people who normally use what pen their employer gives them (or what they've accumulated).

Now this is like asking "What is the best car?". The end use clearly defines the requirement (ooh, check out the IT guy). So I'm going to recommend pens that match the following criteria:

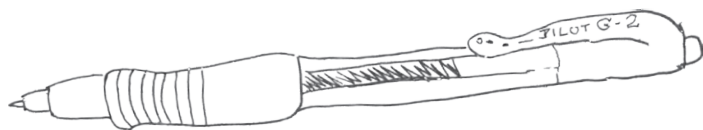
- That are good for writing. As opposed to those intended for art, technical drawing or for mummy to write your name on the inside of your PE kit.

- That can be bought in a regular office supply shop or stationers. There are plenty of places on the interweb to buy cool pens but most people just want to go into a shop and buy a pen for immediate use.

- That are affordable. I'm going to say less than £3.50 as that is the price of a pint of beer here in London and thus is my default comparison for value.



First off, I'd recommend a popular hybrid ballpoint; the Uni-Ball Jetstream. Ballpoints use oil based inks so are quick drying and don't soak into fibrous paper. But they are not very smooth and have uneven lines. Hybrid ballpoints have much more complex ink formulae that make them smoother and more uniform. The Jetstream is a smooth pleasure to use. Good ergonomics make for a comfortable grip and the design is smart for the workplace. It retains the quick drying of its ballpoint ancestors making it the best pen on this list for left handers.

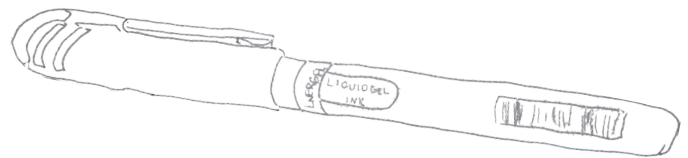


Gel pens are another popular choice. They have smooth writing and consistent lines. The cornerstone of the genre is the Pilot G-2. Outclassed by some more modern pens, I'm a big fan of its chunky rubber grip for long periods of writing.

Giving it direct competition and probably more loved by their fans are the Pentel EnerGel and the Uni-Ball Signo 207. All three are a massive improvement over minimum cost office ballpoints.




The term 'Rollerball' is used to denote a pen holding a water based ink. Often these will write a very dark, saturated line that will take a few seconds to dry. More fibrous papers will have 'feathering' where the edges of the line go fuzzy as the ink spreads like spilled wine in a kitchen towel. But they are very smooth and often have really strong colours. The Uni-Ball Eye series is easily found at any stationers. Actually, all the Uni-Ball pens use their 'Super Ink' technology to make them fade and tamper proof. So a good choice for cheques, diaries and anything requiring a signature!



All of these are easily available, cheap and a pleasure to use. Chuck the nasty junk, get a good pen and see how much difference it makes to your daily writing!



@JCMelon




skritch


on and off, here and there now and then, I like to write and draw comics about myself, my life, this is one of them...



My dearly departed dad was a cartoonist of some small reknown... he was also a pretty good painter!



I like to pencil before applying the inks... I used to work exclusively digitally.




Just do it!

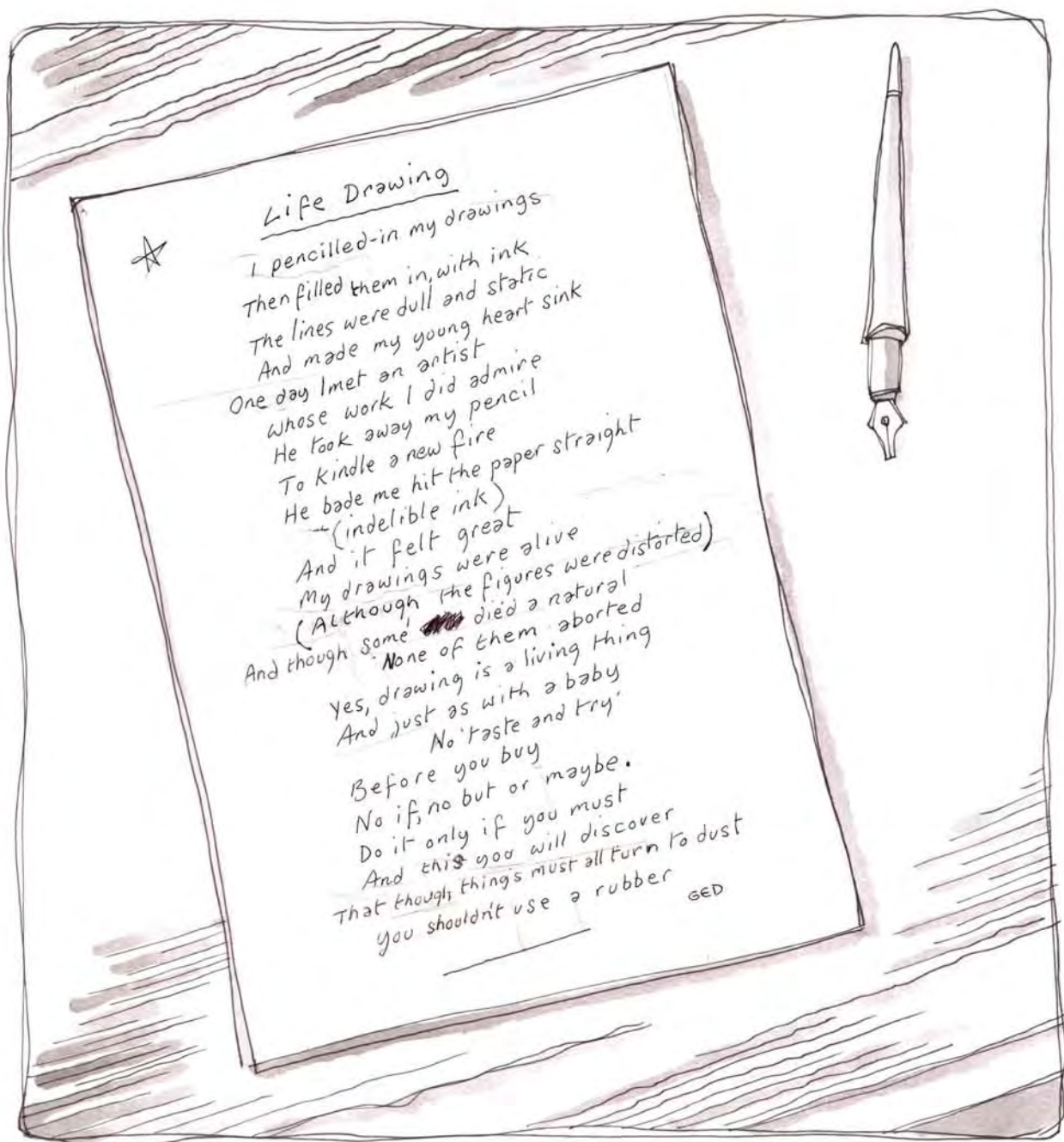
can't...

I remember visiting him in my mid teens, he'd heard I'd inherited some artistic skill... I stood frozen in front of an easel, brush-in-hand, knowing not how... square peg, round hole we had a row that day

Years later, just after he died, I found the following while clearing out his flat. I read it at his funeral...

...





My father wrote and drew with a Rotring fountain pen... he lettered in his own hand. I use any old hb pencil, and then go over it with a pilot drawing pen 0.1. My angular 'font' is a product of expediency.

"whoneedstherapycomic.blogspot.co.uk"



## Hacking A Parker - James Bacon

Parker Pens created fountain pens from 1894, and although they had some exciting ones, and ones adorned with snakes, and a Giant Red one which was orange, the biggest moment for the company was the creation of the Duofold in 1921.

At this stage, Parker marketed The Lucky Curve pen; a reference to the ink system which was worked from the end of the pen with a push button hidden under a screw end.

A sales manager, Lewis M. Tebbel asked for something more eye-catching and asked the factory to make some Lucky Curve No. 26s with red rubber. This rubber was actually an orange colour, and by using black rubber for the top and end it had a strong look. Interestingly, Tebbel's sales district was Spokane. Tebbel found these sample pens to be in demand, and in 1921 he convinced Kenneth Parker himself to consider and then produce them. They sold for \$7.

Thus the Parker Duofold was born. The initial pen was to be known as The Senior Duofold. At 139mm long and 16mm wide it became known as The Big Red, and continued to be produced for around ten years. It went from rubber to cellulose, and more colours were introduced including Lapis Blue, Jade Green, Red, Black and Yellow, followed by more adventurous colours, designs and shapes. There were also Junior and Lady Duofolds. The shape of the Duofold changed, and it received other names and numbers while retaining the duofold nib, while Parker factories in Britain and France made different shaped ones altogether.

The Big Red was always distinctive. In 1970 Parker needed something to help them

transition. Fountain pens were less popular, and the felt tip and ball pen were easier and taking over. So Parker took their famous shaped pen and made it into a felt tip and ball point. They were made well into the 1980s; starting at \$2.95 in 1970, and reaching about \$5 by the 1980s.

By 1986 things were bad for Parker, but their British Factory in Newhaven, which had always had success, was what the company pared back to.

And in 1986 they brought back the Big Red, it was called The Centennial. There was a ten day manufacturing process which was computer controlled. The nibs were huge; Parker boasted that they were the largest solid gold nibs in production, and they were hand polished. They were to such a high standard, that they were not sold. Instead they were offered to high profile politicians in the US.

Further sizes and types became available. The two main ones remain the Centennial and International, also both known as Duofolds, which still sell today. Limited Edition variants, such as The Big Red to remember Douglas MacArthur signing the Japanese surrender, or to celebrate 100 years of Ackerman's pen shop in Den Haag were also created. There have been dozens of colours for this exclusive and very expensive object.

The regular Duofold Centennial has been available in a variety of colours, but the Orange is always referred to as The Big Red, costing around £350. In homage to this colour and to the pen itself, Parker produced an IM in orange and called it the 'The BigRed', selling it at around £35/\$50.



The Centennial is \$550 in its most basic form with the cheapest nib, and can go up to thousands for limited editions. The International is \$475. Original Duofolds are old pieces, and although they can be reconditioned and maintained, they are not cheap and today sell for about \$150 in medium condition.

So, how do we hack this?

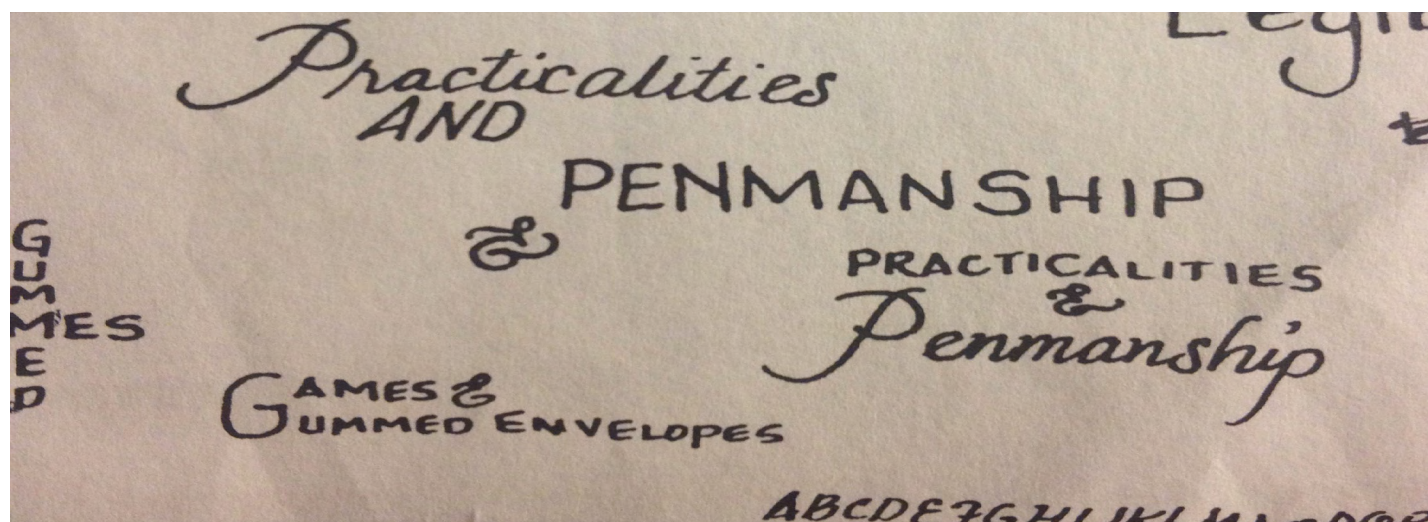
Well, the Cross Solo pen was the entry-level plastic fountain pen that Cross did for a number of years in the 90s. They stopped being made about 2006, and can be bought for about \$30 now still. The Big Red Parker ball or felt tip pen can go for about \$20. I saw an American Flag one in the Boston Pen Shop for \$25 for instance, so they can be found, there and abouts.

The Cross Solo's nib and lower shaft will fit into the Parker body perfectly. There is a minuscule step between them, but it hasn't inhibited writing, and the nib looks good.

As you can see it looks fine next to a Duofold International, some ten times the price.\*

Now in fairness, a Pilot Metropolitan, Schaeffer VFM, Parker IM, Parker Vector and Cross ATX are all cheaper, and the Metropolitan is amazing, and any Jinhao, including the Jinhao Century which is that classic Duofold shape, much cheaper, but if you want a Parker Big Red – this is the hack for it.

\*yeah, yeah, I never pay full price, I cannot afford it, that is a whole different article.



# The Riddle Of Ink

John Dodd

The secret of Ink has always carried with it a mystery, You must learn its riddle, Conan, you must learn its discipline, for no pen in this world can you trust; not Biro, not Gel, not Fountain Ink can you trust...

And this is how the legend would have started if I'd been Conan's Dad, and maybe the legend would not have been written the way it was, but the writing would have been neater.

The riddle of ink has captured me since I was younger than Conan was then, I could read from an early age, and writing followed soon after, and so began my endeavours to solve the riddle of Ink.

For me, Ink is the point at which your writing has developed to the point where you're trusted to get it right. With a pencil, everything can be deleted, changed, you have as many chances as you want to get it right, with ink, one chance is all you get. This is why we (when I was young) were all given pencils to work with, and pens only followed later.

This requires practise, but if you're willing to put in the practise, the results are their own reward.

In the digital age, when you can type far faster than you can write, and everything that you do can be easily changed with the delete key, Penmanship is an art that is only practised by a few and is all but obsolete as a method of keeping records.

So why is it so important to me?

Because the world as it is moves fast, but it doesn't encourage us to take account of what we're doing when so much of it can be changed with a keystroke, it encourages us to work as fast as we can, not as well as we can. When I type, I can put down seventy words a minute without trying, and anything I put down can be changed, which does not give me any reason to consider what I'm putting down.

one chance to get it right. Any mistake and it's a blot on the page, correction fluid everywhere, or a new piece of paper and start again. I don't like starting again, I don't like mistakes, and I don't like mess, but as you see above, when I make a mistake, I don't start again, I leave it on the page so I'm reminded that I made it. Nothing makes you try harder than seeing you weren't perfect last time.

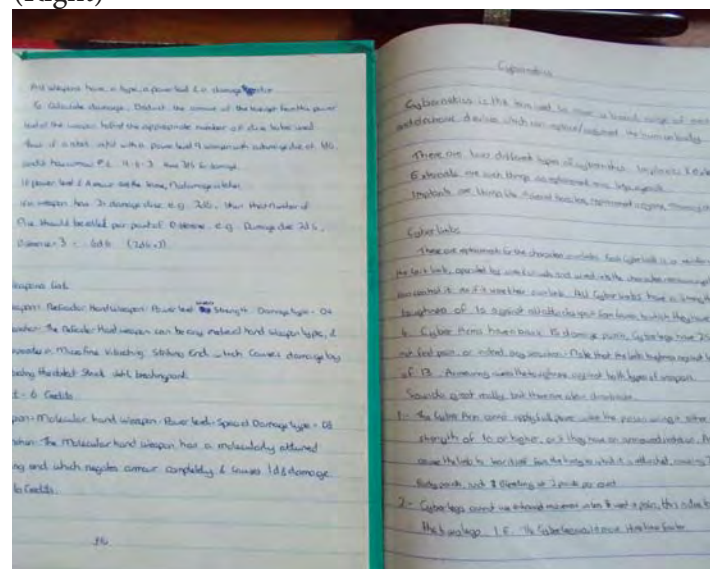
Typing would be so much easier, so why not do that...?

Because when we type something, it records the words, but it doesn't record how we were thinking when we wrote it. I can't tell from the identical ten point Times New Roman that I typed ten years ago how I was feeling when I wrote it, I have no remembrance of what I was doing at the time or how I was at the time, and in turn, this takes away something from the words.

It's why my blog is typed and my journal is written by hand, and this brings us back to how I write and how it has changed over the years. I developed my own style of writing back in the early eighties when I was not quite in my teens, and that style has been with me ever since. The books I had at the time I kept and over the years, I've referred back to them to see what about me has changed.

As it happens, not so much...

These pieces of writing are from 1984 (left) and 1994 (Right)



These are from 2004 (Left) and 2014 (Right), and I know there's a mistake on 2014, I was in a rush, and I'll come to that later...

happened to make them, I don't often make mistakes, normally I have the ideas in my head and I'm several lines ahead of where I'm writing them. Every once in a

while, I get a better idea while my hand is still catching up with my head, and that's when that blot occurs, and so I leave it there, to remind myself that I sometimes get better ideas and that creating things is a messy business.

This is why when reading back in my journals, I can tell from a glance what my state of mind was when I wrote that entry, and that helps me connect to those times far more than a typed account would.

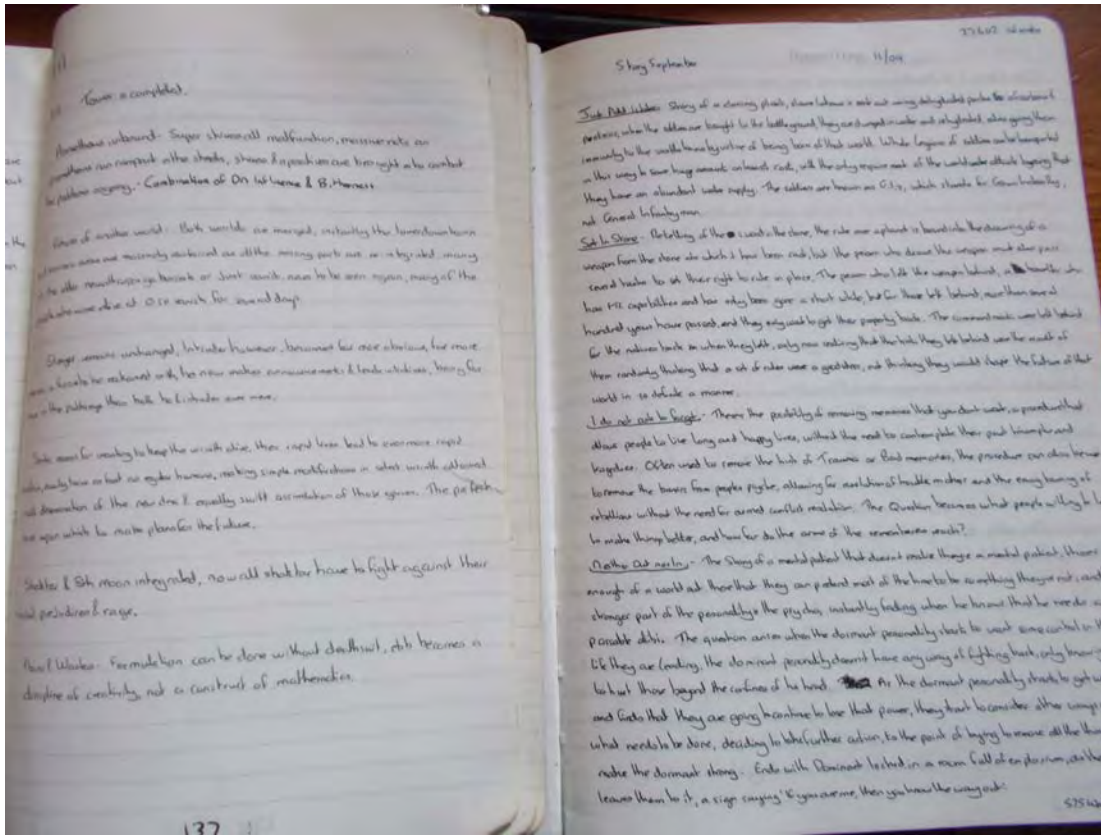
This of course brings in the question of what we write with and how that affects our writing.

Years ago, I only had disposable bios as they were all that was out there, so the writing I have from then doesn't reflect me as well as it does now. It took some years before I had the choices of pens that I have available to me now, and most of them I have for a reason. Some believe that you get a better class of pen by spending more money on them and that's simply not true. You get a shinier pen to be sure, but above a hundred bucks, you're only paying for more barrel embellishment.

In the quiet paraphrasing of Vin Diesel, ask any writer, any real writer, they'll tell you, it don't matter if you're using a Parker Jotter or a Graf von Faber Castell, writing's writing...

I choose the pen I write with the same way that a carpenter chooses the right tool for the job, and I've got the good fortune to have a number of different pens that I can use every day.

For example



Many believe you can tell a lot from people's handwriting, and in that, I agree, but only if you know how their handwriting is when they're in reasonable spirits with nothing troubling them. I know that my writing gets smaller when I'm calm; it's practically microscopic when I'm in the best of moods, because I'm really focussing on the words as I write them. My mind isn't occupied by anything else going on, so the writing is the best it can be. Conversely if I'm in a bad mood, or rushed, the writing will be larger, the form of it will remain the same, but the script will be larger, and anyone reading it will not have to focus to read the words, just as I wasn't focussed when I wrote them. Which brings me to the subject of mistakes and what's





<< Jinhao fountain pen, used if I'm in a hurry because the ink flow keeps up with whatever speed I write.

Plaiser 0.2mm fountain pen used at work because if it goes missing, it's cheap to replace...

Plaiser 0.3mm fountain pen, used at work because the 0.2mm will not write on every piece of paper.

But these are only the pens I use every day, I have many more besides, some of them fulfilling

similar purpose, some of them hardly used at all.

I write every day and not just in the journal, I have a number of notebooks that I write in, some for stories, some to jot down ideas in (never mix the two up...), and for those wondering if I'm a little OCD about this?

Damn right I am...

This is what I do, what I've done since I was young, and there's no skill I've had more practise in or gain more pleasure out of. Some people spend a fortune on cars, jewellery, fine dining, holidays. All I have to do to be in a happy place is write...

But Penmanship is something else, something that transcends the pen you write with or the paper you write on. Penmanship is the pride you take in a job well done, in not making mistakes, in taking the time to do it right, rather than just do it fast. The world could well do with lessons on how to slow down, rather than rushing to the next peak and the one after that. It's a journey, not a race, and so it is with Penmanship. I can type faster, but I'm not looking for speed when I write, I'm enjoying the discipline of writing, I'm taking my time to enjoy something that I've loved doing since I was young. What interests me most is that just as language developed over the world, so too did penmanship, and just as languages are different, so too are the written versions of these languages and the tools with which they're written.

>> Autograph fountain pen, used for Journal entries because it has good flow and is narrow in band which makes it comfortable.

Lamy fountain, used for Journal entries on days when I have a lot to say, good flow but finer nib to save on ink usage.

Beta Metal Pen, because if the world runs out of Ink & Paper, I will write on..

And when I look at new styles of writing, it inspires me to look upon

the way the rest of the world must think, and I draw comfort from the fact that there are common links between all people. To think that in every country, there will be people like me who have the same needs for precision in their daily writing (with my apologies to all those who practise Shodo for my rendering above), and pages of neat script out there because others have that need in their life.



Because penmanship isn't limited to the languages I know, or the pens I use, and that pride in the placing of the ink on the paper, of the precision of hand and eye, is reflected in every word written every day. We've all got phones and keyboards and tablets, those of us who choose to write, choose to do so for a reason, and it's got nothing to do with progress and everything to do

with taking the time every day, in choosing to go slower rather than rushing ahead.

So take the pen up, take the time it demands, and write. Doesn't matter what you write, whether it's an idea you just had, a letter to someone you haven't written to in a while, or the next great novel, just write...

For me, the riddle of Ink still rules my day, and every day I learn something new, and I'll solve it one day...

One day...

But I'm in no hurry...

---



Alan Moore answers: Do you write with a fountain pen or have any special writing implemtns or have a favourite type of pen?

This question and answer first appeared on the 19th December 2015, in The Really Very Serious Alan Moore Scholars' Group, a closed Facebook group mostly, although not entirely, for people who write about the work of Alan Moore, or have worked with him, or, one way or another, have a scholarly, semi-scholarly, or even non-scholarly interest in his work. Pádraig Ó Méalöid, who facilitates and moderates the group, oversaw 25 questions and answers for Christmas, of which this was one.

Oh, dear. This is going to be a massive disappointment, I know, and I wish I had the time and inspiration to just invent a mythic writing implement worthy of entering legend with me, like Thor's hammer or Dionysus' six-pack of Stella Artois or Pharrell Williams' scouting accessories. If I could, believe me, I'd confess that I was unable to write a word without a sharpened quill plucked from the last Archaeopteryx and then dipped in the black, palpitating heart of Tragedy itself, which even to me sounds like the sort of thing I might use for an inkwell.

As it is, however, there is a sort of desk-tidy thing like a Teflon jam-jar by the side of the chair I sit and write in that is apparently the fabled bios' graveyard, where the world's cheap and worthless ballpoint pens drag themselves as if according to some primordial instinct when they are no longer the slightest bit of good to man, beast or even feeble trainee poltergeist. This is why my every working day commences with an indefinitely protracted loop of impatient scribbling sounds and the phrase, "Oh, for fuck's sake." (Please don't everybody send me pens. I have been given fine fountain pens, but they make me feel alternately pretentious and intimidated. I did have a Man from U.N.C.L.E fountain pen once, with invisible ink cartridges so that I could pretend to be a spy. I was twenty-eight years old.) Now, if you'd been a bit more modern, up-to-the-minute and generally high-tech such as I am myself, you might have asked me whether I had a special keyboard that I liked to use for my typing, in which case the answer would have been much more positive. I'm typing this on a keyboard that Joe Brown found for me a couple of years ago – during which time I would quite easily have got through four or five of the ordinary, simpering "Oh, we're delicate! Oh, don't partially melt us and fill us with hair and drugs or we'll faint or something" type of keyboards. My current model is made out of stainless steel and is designed for use in a heavy-duty industrial environment, where it claims to be able to withstand showers of molten metal or cinders, and also the combined force of pressure hoses turned upon it from all four directions at once – yeah, that isn't a problem which arises that often, but you never know, do you? (This is actually true, by the way, although I realise I may have eroded your trust in my honesty with my continual Eddie Izzard flights of whimsy/pathological lying.) Anyway, after about two months one or two letters were sticking and one of the shift keys was no longer responding. Is it necessarily a sign of immaturity if I confess that I felt quietly proud of myself?

JOURNEY PLANET

# GAMES & GUMMED ENVELOPES



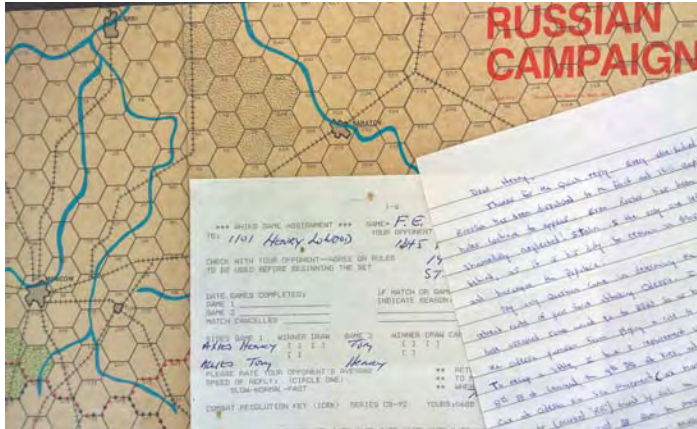
‘When posting a letter I used plain old ‘Queen’s head’ postage stamps, rather than whatever novelty themed stamps the Royal Mail was selling that month, so as to avoid the incongruity of ‘Great British Popstars’ or ‘Domestic Appliances of the 20th Century’ spoiling the effect of each letter having fallen through time from the nineteenth century’.

-- Helena Nash



# Putting a Stamp on Games:

## Wargames, Players, and PBM.



Playing games by mail (PBM) may strike some **Henry Lowood**

as an all too obviously historical topic. This is mail without the “e-,” replete with cursive writing, stamps and stacks of envelopes. What could possibly be more dated, dead and gone? I hope to make the case for the history of PBM (play-by-mail) in a different sense. This history of PBM tells us something useful even today about player communities and alternative modes of play, reminding us that organizing play involves creative work. I will focus on the early history of PBM systems for playing a group of boardgames usually called wargames, and sometimes known as conflict or historical simulations. Wargames played a central role in the nascent boardgame industry of the 1960s. Wargame designers enunciated key concepts of game design, including “game design” and “game development,” during a golden period that stretched from the early 1960s through the late 1970s. Wargames and wargame designers also influenced other game forms, such as role-playing games (beginning with Dungeons & Dragons) and other forms of simulation and strategy games.

Let me begin by briefly summarizing a few points about what was new in wargame design and the business practices constructed around it. Charles S. Roberts designed the first commercial wargame in the U.S., Tactics, in 1952. After selling this game via mail order, he was convinced he might be able to build a successful company around game design and publication. He founded The Avalon Game Company, later renamed

The Avalon Hill Game Company (henceforth: Avalon Hill), in 1958. Roberts exemplified what we think of today as a game designer, and Avalon Hill was the first company to make a serious go of marketing wargames to adults.

Roberts designed ten games for Avalon Hill between 1958 and the end of 1963. These games included the first historical wargame, Gettysburg (1958), followed by other titles that established the concept of the game as a study of historical battles or campaigns. He also produced the design vocabulary, rules conventions and physical component systems that defined wargames even after Roberts retired from the scene. Three aspects of that wargames assembled and promoted by Avalon Hill through the 1960s were especially important. First is the assemblage: “When a game is designed, generally the first things that go into it are the map, the values on the playing pieces (combat strength and movement allowance), the Terrain Effects Chart and the Combat Results Table” (Dunnigan 1980, 34-35). Second, this assemblage determined procedures of play. Players read the rules to learn about the units represented by the playing pieces (“counters”), how to move them on the map during a turn using the Terrain Effects Chart, and how to resolve combat between opposing units (and other aspects of the games as simulations) by calculating battle odds, rolling dice and consulting the Combat Results Table (CRT). Generally, these games were turn-based and designed to be played by two players: I move and we resolve combats, you move and we resolve combats, and so on.

Third, Avalon Hill’s marketing efforts concentrated on the creation and development of a community of hobbyist wargamers who would buy and play these games. These efforts accelerated after Roberts’s turned Avalon Hill over to its creditors and left the company in January, 1964. The community-building strategy was led by Thomas N. (“Tom”) Shaw, whom Roberts had brought to Avalon Hill in 1960. Rex Martin, who worked with him at Avalon Hill and later wrote a PhD dissertation on the wargame industry, described Shaw as the “godfather” of the wargaming “subculture.” (Martin 2001, 190). Shaw presided over the

Continued on page 15

## Putting A Stamp... Continued

company's strategy for expanding the hobby. The communication platform for executing this strategy would be The Avalon Hill General (henceforth The General), a magazine that premiered in May 1964, just a few months after Roberts's departure.

interested in this kind of game. Solitaire was an option, of course, and it was frequently the method chosen. Another option – one he might have read about in The General – was to play against remote opponents via the postal system.



PBM turns our attention to game design in a sense not often encountered in game studies, particularly those devoted to digital games. That sense has less to do with designing games than providing the means to play them. Mail-based methods for playing with remotely located opponents extended Avalon Hill's games of the 1960s; they did not replace these games. Later PBM games were more frequently constructed from the ground up with mail-based communication as a core component. By contrast, playing Avalon Hill wargames by mail opened up a format for competitive play that had not been anticipated by game designers.

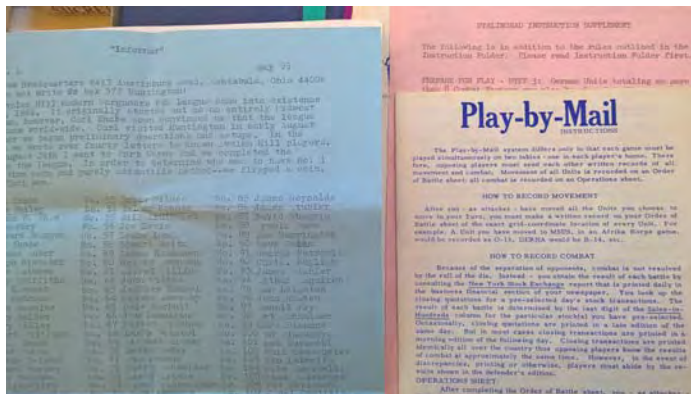
So let's start with a player who has just bought a few of these newfangled Avalon Hill wargames in the mid-1960s, probably by mail-order. He or she (mostly he) has probably browsed through the rules and components. What next? Play the game, of course. Yet, many potential players in this new, niche hobby did not know anyone nearby who was

The General launch signaled that by 1964 Avalon Hill considered it good business to nurture the community of players devoted to its games. They used the bi-monthly publication not just to market products and excite readers about future projects, but also to highlight the existence of other players, wherever they might be. For example, regional correspondents reported on events and club activities, and the names and addresses of subscribers could be found on the back page of the first few issues. "Opponents Wanted" ads appeared right from the beginning, although the first issue only included one such listing. The hobby was new, and its players were spread out across towns, cities and army bases around the country (and the world); identifying remote General subscribers would have a role to play in pulling the player community together. Certainly, PBM systems that opened up a new format of competitive play by also encouraged players who did not share the same kitchen table - or even zip code -



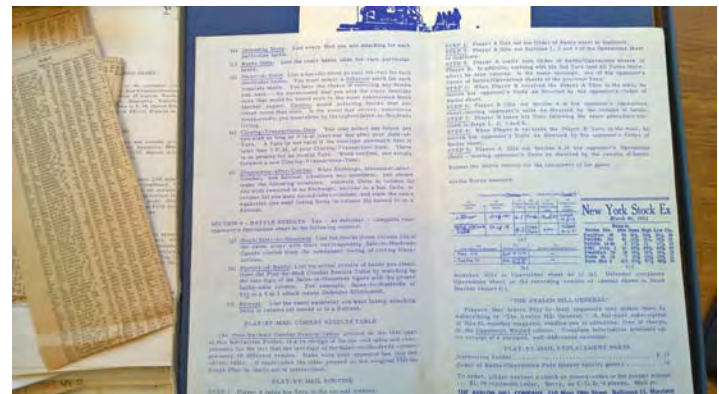
to get to know each other. And vice versa, players had to find each other, in order to play by mail. More specifically, remote play required, or at least encouraged the development of systems for matchmaking, evaluating the trustworthiness of other players, ranking players, and the like. In other words, PBM was not just a system for sharing and resolving game moves, it was also part of a system for building a community of wargamers.

Before all of that could happen, however, players needed to figure out how to play by mail.



Wargames of the 1960s and 1970s were generally turn-based affairs, and movement followed by combat resolution were the essential activities of a turn. The heart of Roberts's game procedures was the interaction of rules with charts, tables and map overlays. These procedures governed movement and combat. Indeed, two of Roberts's major contributions to game design were the key elements of the movement and combat mechanics, respectively: The hexagonal grid map overlay that regulated the movement and combat of units on the gameboard and the Combat Results Table (CRT). The CRT produced simulation out of the rules of play. In the rules manual for Avalon Hill's Tactics II, Roberts advised players that "An examination of the Combat Results Table is imperative. As this game attempts to be as realistic as possible, the Combat Results Table reflects the fact that an attacker must have a strength advantage in order to be reasonably sure of success... Please examine the Table very carefully" (Tactics II, 10). The CRT became a problem for PBM, because resolving battles against this table depended upon exact specification of unit locations, mutually

agreed-upon odds calculations, a dice roll, looking up results, and applying the results to counters on the map. Conducting this process through player actions separated by time and space required a system for accurately recording the positions of units, producing random numbers and communicating results. The PBM problem boiled down to two essential needs: A system for record-keeping and a fair process for generating die rolls.



Let's focus on die rolls. They raised trust issues. Playing across the table from each other, two players easily agreed on the result, the occasional "cocked" die notwithstanding. PBM upended this stability, and that was a problem. Die rolls also reinforced the questionable simulation value of early historical games such as Gettysburg, Afrika Korps, and Stalingrad. The simulation value of the die roll, or more precisely the randomness that dice represent, was to bring the element of uncertainty to combat results. Rex Martin notes that while various aspects of historical battles were simulated with the aid of die rolls - weather, supplies, etc. - combat resolution was the point "when players seem most conscious of the contingency of events." He explains the preference for die rolls as a favorable confluence of publishers' and players' benefits: "Although several tools exist for determining uncertain outcomes, the use of one or more dice is the method of choice in most wargames, inexpensive for game publishers and mystical for game players." (Martin 2001, 154-56)

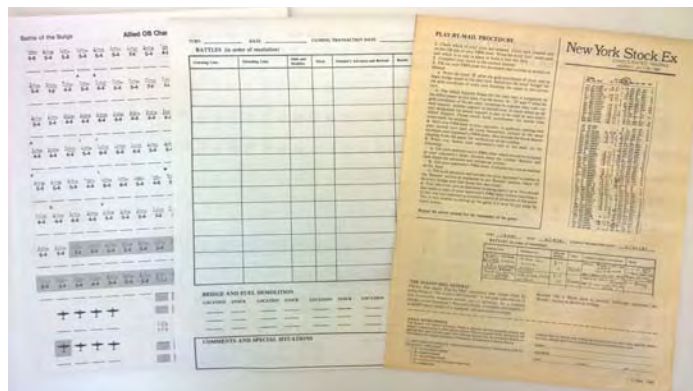
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## Putting A Stamp... Continued

How does one produce a series of D6 (six-sided die) rolls openly and fairly by postal mail? Game designers, clubs and players answered this question by providing a slew of PBM die-rolls. The various methods reduced to whether or not a game needed to be modified in order to use them. The first method was probably no method at all: Rely on your opponent to roll real dice and report the results. This method was called the Honors System. One blogger has attributed the system to Tom Shaw himself, adding that it was a “hare-brained idea,” because “the vast majority of gamers” are “an intensely suspicious lot.” He concluded that, therefore, the system was almost universally rejected. (JCB III, “The curious Saga ...”) The Honors System failed to address the issue of trust. Yet, some players continued to use it.

In 1964, Avalon Hill issued its first PBM kit in the form of a 4-page booklet called “Play-by-Mail Instruction.” It provided instructions about how to keep “written records of all movement and combat” for seven Avalon Hill game titles: D-Day, Stalingrad, Waterloo, Afrika Korps, Tactics II, Gettysburg and Battle of the Bulge. Two aspects of the system of record-keeping became fixtures of PBM. First, the Instruction told players how to identify individual hexagons on the map grid by imposing a strict row-and-column system of annotation according to a specified orientation of the map. It would be several years before Avalon-Hill’s primary competitor, SPI, introduced the practice of numbering individual hexagons on a printed game map; with that enhancement, the issue of locating units was settled. Second, Avalon Hill printed “order of battle” sheets for recording unit (counter) map placement on a turn-by-turn basis, as well as listing the combats to be resolved at the end of the movement phase of a turn. Having acquired or made forms for recording moves and combat, opponents would send these paper records back and forth by mail, essentially a turn-by-turn archive for a game in progress. So far, so good.

But what about those die rolls? The first issue of *The General*, published in May 1964, included a contest - the magazine’s first - that challenged entrants to provide the best solution for a series of combat situations in the game



Afrika Korps. The contest required that “combat will be resolved exactly as in the Afrika Korps Play-by-Mail kit.” (p. 5) This may have been the first public announcement of Avalon Hill’s own system, other than its inclusion in copies of that game. It specified two features of the PBM kit. First, “we will obtain the result of the combat by consulting the New York Stock Exchange report for closing transactions of Monday, June 1, 1964.” Since contest entries had to be postmarked on or before the 30th of May, these stock results would be unknown to players submitting entry forms. The “die rolls” would be obtained from the “last digit of the Sales-in-Hundreds column for each stock you have on the Operations Sheet.” Because the sales figures were unknown when the entries were submitted, these digits functioned as random numbers. The second feature of the PBM method altered the game. Since the last digit of the sales figures could be any number from 0 to 9, the method simulated the roll of a 10-sided die, not the 6-sided die that determined results on the standard CRT that shipped with the game. So Avalon Hill changed the CRT along with other chance tables (such as weather tables, for example. Players seem to have been troubled by different results resulting from different tables, leading to a “modest controversy.” ([JCB III]) As an example, consider the results for an attack at 3:1 odds. Rolling dice against the standard D6 table gave a 1/3 chance each for the “defender eliminated,” “exchange” and “defender back two hexagons” results. Against the PBM D10 table using stock sales the respective chances were 4/10, 3/10 and 3/10. As in this example, players concluded that the revised CRT for postal play produced a game that was more favorable to an attacking side than the original design. Many players were not satisfied by a PBM system that was not fully compatible with the original game.

Club	CTD	Stock	Bank	Result	Notes
5-10	1-1	15750	28150	5	EX
	7-1	21	27250	3	DE
	2-1	51	15215	3	C
4-15	4-1	48	13874	2	EX
4-15	3-1	52	10481	1	AR
1	7-1	62	48100	4	DS
	4-1	75	95430	5	DE
4-2	1-3	85	87520	4	AR

Players proposed alternatives to the Honors System and modified CRTs regularly in magazines and newsletters. The eventually dominant methods for PBM incorporated a simple insight: Postal play should be based on six-sided die rolls in a fashion that mitigated the trust issue. PBM could then supplement game systems without the need for an approved change such as Avalon Hill's revised CRT. Players could proceed with the standard, published version of the game they had (presumably) already purchased. Furthermore, eliminated authorized game changes created an opening for supplementary systems that were not created by Avalon Hill. Independent PBM clubs recognized this opportunity and began to issue alternative systems by the mid-1960s. Without venturing too far into the weeds of specific details, the summary version is that two systems were dominant. Avalon Hill distributed revised PBM kits after 1974 or thereabouts that endorsed a system still based on stock sales, but without requiring a special CRT. This involved stipulating a (future) "closing-transaction date" or CTD as before, then dividing the sales figures by six and using the remainder (0=6) as the D6 result. The other popular system was provided by a PBM organization founded in 1966 called the Avalon Hill Intercontinental Kriegspiel Society, better known as AHIKS. Its system was called the ICRK (pronounced "irk"), which stood for "Individual Combat Resolution Key." It was a printed form (handmade at first, computer-generated after 1975) with hundreds of randomly distributed die roll results, such as the numbers 1 through 6 for a six-sided die. These numbers were arranged in a table, with columns and rows labeled by letters and numbers, respectively. The forms were distributed by a neutral third-party, called the Match Services Officer (MSO), during the matchmaking process. The MSO was responsible for matchmaking, distributing forms for

recording of movement and combat, and generating ICRK forms for every match.

The existence clubs like AHIKS and their active attention to PBM hardly constituted a challenge to Avalon Hill; rather, it was a direct outcome of the company's community-building strategy. The General published profiles of these new clubs. The clubs, in turn, generally preferred Avalon Hill's games as the focus of their efforts to promote tournaments, PBM, and other modes of competitive play. The founding of AHIKS, for example, was reported in the September 1966 issue of *The General*, with a short article titled "A Message from the AHIKS." The anonymous author or authors asserted the uniqueness of the society, for reasons that included, "Banished are the piles of collected stock market clippings, gone are questions of their authenticity, forgotten is the wait for 'that certain date' to resolve a battle, stored away is the die-throwing cup." In any case, the ICRK system became the primary service that AHIKS offered to members, along with a newsletter called *The Kommandeur* that it published in various print and electronic formats for nearly fifty years. The Society also offered matchmaking and ranking services and ICRK. Its format for PBM - supplemented by email and pseudo-random number generators - continues to this day.

The 1966 "Message from the AHIKS" also emphasized sociability among adult players spread around an international network of members. Sociability, of course, was an essential aspect of PBM. The AHIKS Member's Guide distributed in 1981 advised members that, "you should write your opponent immediately (don't wait for him to write you: letters crossing in the mail is better than no correspondence at all) and decide on rules, edition of the game being played, scenarios, special procedures, etc. Make and keep a copy of all such agreements. Also, it is helpful if you briefly introduce yourself in a friendly way to your opponent. Now, you are ready to play." (2) Based on the evidence of letters surviving from PBM games from the 1960s through the 1990s, these brief introductions often led to long-running exchanges of letters between players, often peppered with personal news, hobby gossip, questions about rules, move corrections, and virtually anything about a game that could not be summarized by unit locations, combat results and die rolls.

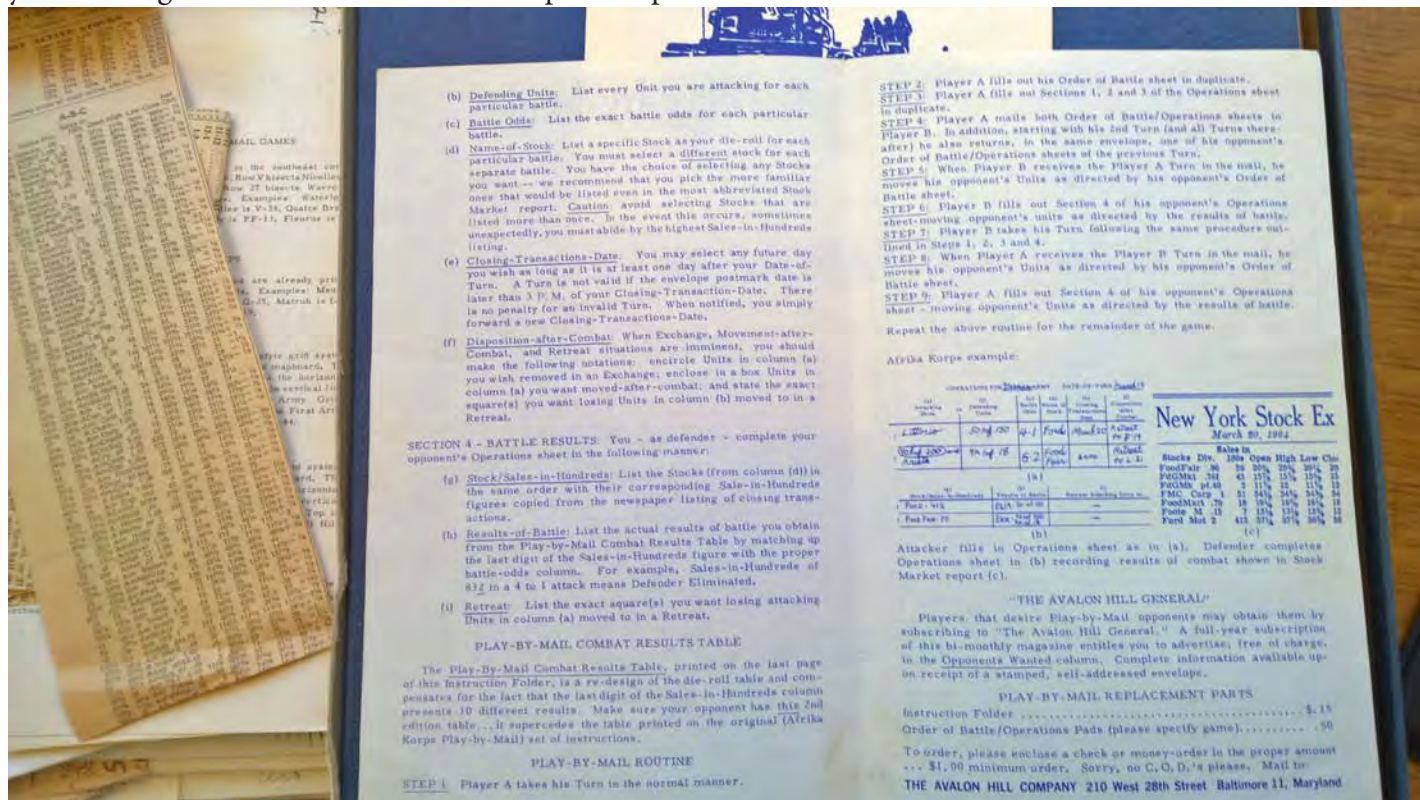
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## Putting A Stamp... Continued

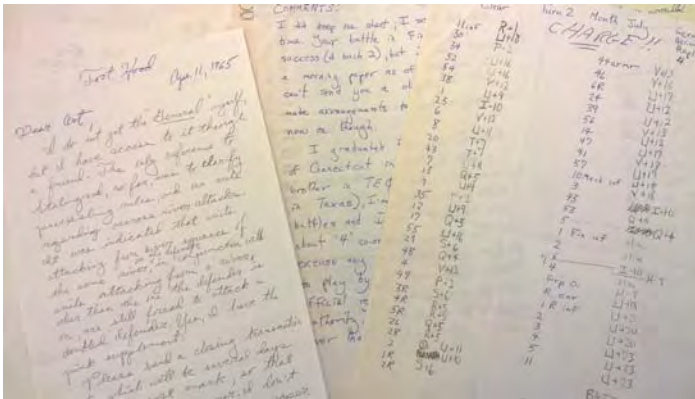
The early history of PBM exemplifies Martin's conclusion that "taken together, The General, play-by-mail, the clubs, conventions and newsletters made Roberts' unintentional hobby permanent and profitable." (234) Martin's notion of wargaming as a subculture differs somewhat from the usual scholarly uses of this term over the past half-century or so; it is closer to current use of the term "community." In this context, PBM is a chapter in a story about community-building within a small (or perhaps "niche") culture rather than resistance to a dominant culture. For example, when Avalon Hill dropped the modified CRT, it responded to player preferences, and the popularity of the resulting system reinforced the cohesion of Avalon Hill's efforts with those of clubs and player groups.

After the publication of Avalon Hill's original PBM kit in 1964, postal play seems to have caught on quickly, judging from the number of letters and articles about PBM in *The General*, as well as the increasing number of advertisements for opponents. In a letter to the editor published in the second issue of *The General*, a reader enthused, "Let me be one of many, I'm sure, who will congratulate you on your idea of 'play-by-mail' kits(s) [sic]; how about making these kits for your other games?" PBM became an important part

of the wargame hobby from the mid-1960s forward. Avalon Hill communicated with players through *The General*, and its robust mail-order system meant that these players could also buy its games from just about anywhere. Just as mail delivery was a platform for publication and mail-order, it became a platform for play. The availability of PBM solved the practical problem of access to remote players, as long as players were willing to put up with the accounting and record-keeping moments in managing a game played by mail. As compensation, much pleasure derived from this mode of play came from social interaction mediated by correspondence. Asynchronous, distant communication by postal mail perhaps implies less rather than more direct contact between players than a game played face-to-face. Nonetheless, correspondence was a social step up from the alternative method of playing solitaire. Separation in time and space had its ways of enhancing the enjoyment of games that depended upon mail delivery. The less hurried pace was accompanied by the leisure to dwell on a particular move for days rather than minutes; die rolls that meant waiting for the CTD also required a trip to the local library to find the specified stock listing; and there was that sliver of excitement that came with checking the mail in anticipation of the delivery of an opponent's move.



The correspondence itself offered handwritten, typed or eventually even electronically delivered gossip, game discussion, personal news, banter and friendly trash talk in a register that differed from the in-the-moment performance of a live FTF game.



Let's not understand postal play by comparison to digital games as "networked multiplayer, but with stamps." The point of looking at the history of PBM is not to find an essential similarity across time and differing styles of play. Unlike later digital games, PBM systems extended playing options for manual wargames designed to be played face-to-face. Rather than being integrated into the core rules systems of early wargames, they were supplementary systems. Avalon Hill's experiment with modified CRTs notwithstanding, the need for these systems provided an opportunity for players and independent clubs to add something to the games that they wanted to play. Their solutions to the problems of PBM – from matchmaking to ranking players based on the results of games - augmented the efforts of companies like Avalon Hill and SPI. Put simply, the impact of PBM on the expansion of a new hobby and its community of players was far more significant than its impact on game design.

The various written records and forms associated with a PBM match constitute an archive of a played game. This documentation differs from other ways of understanding played games as events or performances. Unlike written summaries of the events that games represent, such as fictional stories written to summarize role-playing narratives or the "after action reports" of wargamers, these documents do not recount, fictionalize or provide order. They are not summarizing narratives, but primary records constructed on a turn-by-turn basis. Unlike computer game replays that provide exact recordings of game

performance based on uninterrupted and complete data capture, PBM records present only limited data points, more like baseball box scores than surveillance videos. Unlike these other kinds of game records, PBM correspondence is also rich in contextual information, providing insights about topics ranging from personal details and the emotions of players to the organizational matrix that supported postal play.



PBM archives, for want of a better phrase, consist primarily of paper records at least through the 1990s. The records that I have seen divide roughly equally between printed forms and handwritten or typed correspondence. Few of these records have been preserved. I have had access to two collections of PBM documentation while carrying out my own research on its history. Not only were they useful, but both collections reminded me that my engagement with this subject has been shaped by my life with games in ways other than being a historian: specifically, as a curator of library collections and as a player.

The first collection of documents was a library acquisition for the Stanford University Libraries, where I am the Curator for History of Science & Technology, as well as Film & Media Collections. Since the late 1990s, this work has included the collection of materials related to the history of digital games and simulations. More recently, I have begun to add selected historical documentation relating to the history of game design and play more generally, particularly in the areas of conflict and historical simulations, including wargames. In March 2015, I learned of a collection that had become available through an eBay auction with the intriguing title, "Rare big box Avalon Hill Stalingrad + PBM History & early letters from clubs!" This particular version of the historical wargame, Stalingrad, is indeed less common than the boxed versions one usually encounters, but that is not what piqued my interest.

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## Putting A Stamp... Continued

Rather, it was the inclusion of documentation. Auction photographs included with the auction listing showed that this documentation included handwritten letters from games played during the mid-1960s. (PBM games often lasted for months, sometimes even for a year or more.) The “item specifics” spelling out the contents of the documents included this remarkable statement:

“This is a unique and historic lot. Let me explain.

For starters this is a rare big box version of Avalon Hill’s classic wargame Stalingrad. ...

But what is even more unique and exciting about this lot is what it comes with inside. The entire original game is present of course, but inside the box are a stack of original early 1960s play-by-mail letters and correspondence. The letters are all post marked and dated and include turn by turn records and analysis for multiple games played with others around the country all via the postal system. In addition many of the play-by-mail games were played against one of the most historic and venerable wargaming clubs of that era, the MIT Strategic Game Society! The MIT Strategic Game Society still exists to this day although they now focus largely on Euro games and not on competitive wargaming as they did in the early 1960s. It’s also interesting to learn that originally the MITSGS was called the MIT Wargaming Society. The President of the club writes in his PBM letter to the owner of this game in 1966 that just a few days before they had officially changed their name to MITSGS. We now have an absolute date for the birth of the MITSGS, it was Feb 12 1966. Neat stuff.

....

An unobservant person might consider tossing out all this extra stuff in the box but once you realize what it is, it’s really, really fascinating and terribly rare. I’ve never seen another record of ... PBM exploits preserved with the original game move by move from this period of early AH history. Just awesome!!”

The documentation just described give the description of the item as a “rare big box” new meaning. This big box did not just contain a game, it contained an archive! I was able to review the contents more carefully after the acquisition arrived at Stanford. The documentation comprised correspondence mostly around two or three

Journey Planet 21 PBM games involving the player

who presumably owned the game, numerous completed PBM forms, clipped stock sales tables, the Avalon Hill PBM kit from 1964, and a few documents from clubs, such as the above-mentioned MIT Strategic Game Society and the first issue of The Informer (May 1965), a publication of the Avalon Hill Modern Wargamers PBM League, founded in August 1964. In short, these documents provide a relatively complete picture of the kinds of materials that a first-generation PBM wargamer would have accumulated. They include record-keeping for turns, club communications, corrections of moves, comments on results, questions about game rules, and more. The correspondence, in particular, documents the intermingling of social correspondence and game moves, as well as implications of the pace of postal play for these interactions; for example, one handwritten letter opens, “Dear Art, I’m in the hospital, that’s why I haven’t gotten in touch with you sooner. It all happened very suddenly. While I had finished your move, I hadn’t had a chance to get in the mail.” Other letters testified to the banter and tone of PBM among mail friends: “Art, Well nobody’s perfect, and you are no exception. You made a few mistakes on your move.”

The second PBM archive is my personal collection of correspondence and order-of-battle sheets from games



played mostly from the late 1980s through the late 1990s. The mix of materials is similar to those in the Stalingrad collection. Yet, the historical context is quite different, with implications for the records, as well. For example, printouts of email correspondence are mixed in with handwritten; stock clippings with ICRK forms. The Avalon Hill order-of-battle forms date from the 1980s have a professionally produced appearance, while the ICRK sheets of that era were computer printouts.

The sameness of the mix of social interaction, gameplay recordkeeping and organizational support evidenced in the records from the 1960s and 1990s contrasts with the different impressions of the historical context for wargaming, one characterized by novelty and experimentation, and the other by mature products and routines and changing modes of communication and gameplay. The thirty years that separate these two collections of PBM records encompassed the rise and decline of wargaming as a hobby, at least in the United States. It is not at all surprising that historical records from two rather different decades for this hobby deliver different impressions about PBM. Indeed, access to such documents is a powerful reminder of the potential value of primary sources for historical game studies.

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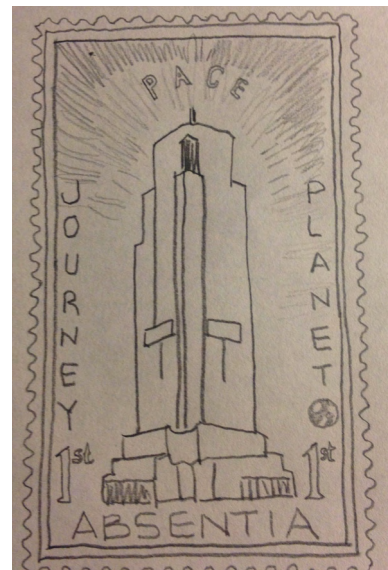
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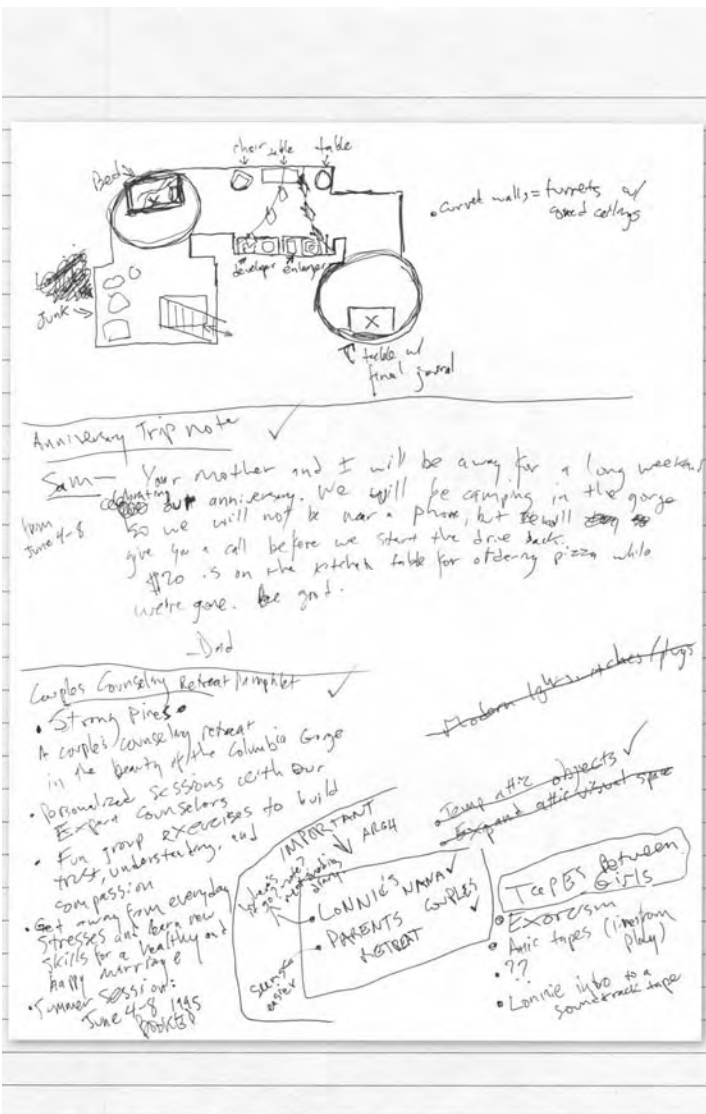
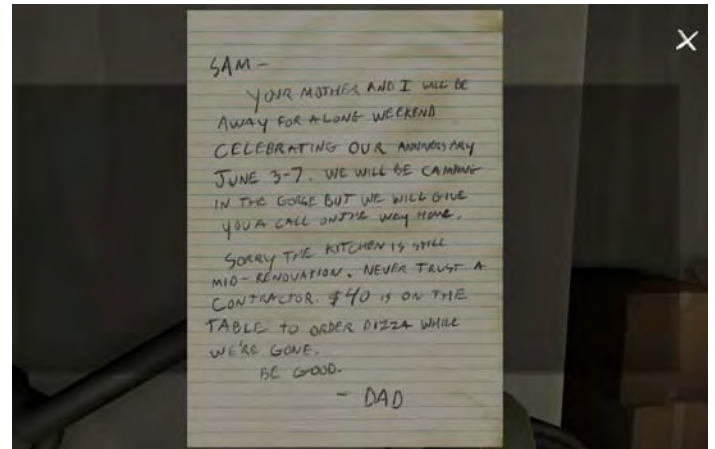
# Letters and Handwriting in Gone Home

Steve Gaynor

The human element can have a tough time shining through in video games. From unnatural character models that wallow in the uncanny valley, to game mechanics that dehumanize and systematize individuals, the inherently digital nature of games can be a real stumbling block for bringing across the unpredictability and imperfection that defines us as people.

But there are things games can easily transmit, that sidestep these barriers. Voice is one, and plenty of games use audio diaries and impassioned voice acting to form a human connection with the player. Another, less-used tool is handwriting.

Handwriting is a fingerprint. It can have as much personality as a person, as much individuality as an individual. Games may not be perfect at getting across the intricacies of a character's facial expressions, but handwriting is something deeply human that they can transmit flawlessly.



In *Gone Home*, we didn't put any characters on-screen for the player to encounter. All of the identity of the characters in the story had to be communicated by what they left behind: recordings, objects, print-outs, books - and handwritten notes (and plenty of them). To this end, we knew we couldn't just "fake" a bunch of different people's handwriting to portray the different characters in the game; instead, we conscripted everyone on the team, plus our moms, our significant others, our friends, to lend their unique handwriting to the game, so each individual character came from the hand of a different real-world person. As we learned, there is no substitute for the handwriting of an actual mom, or of a real-life eight-year-old. The authenticity of the marks shines through.

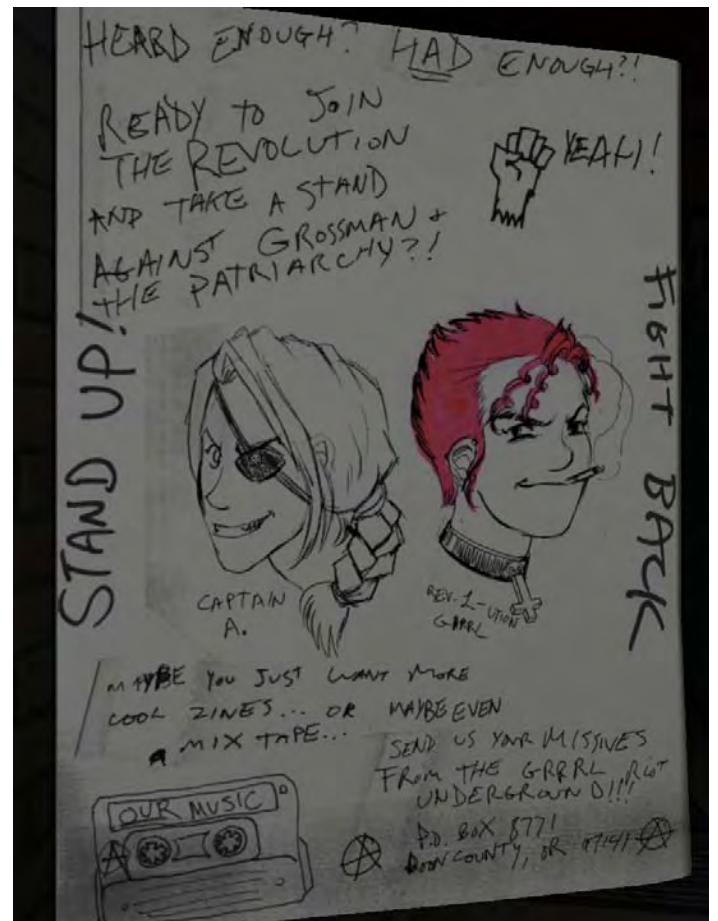
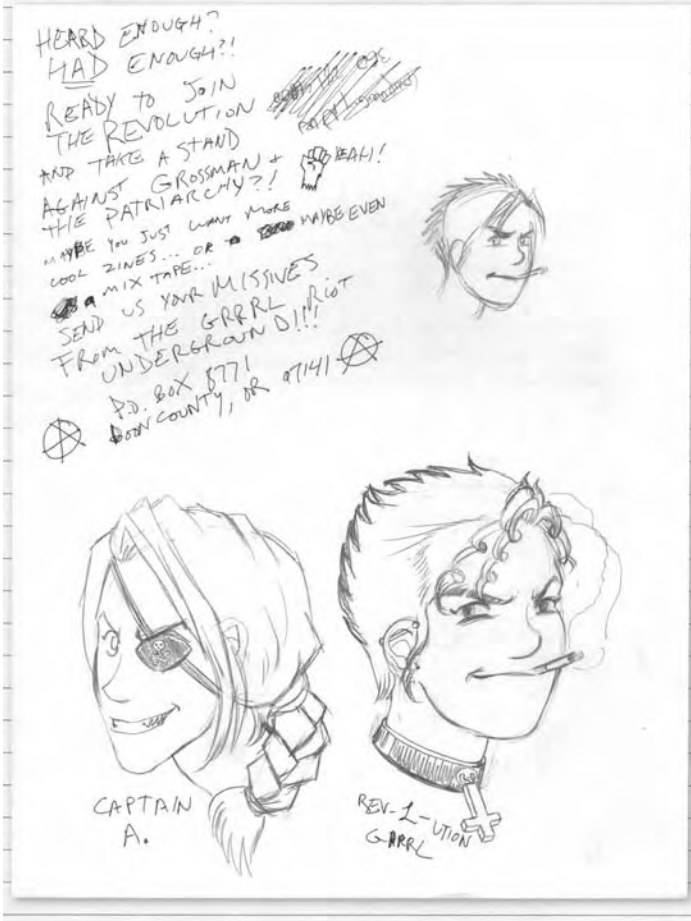
But handwriting wasn't only important inside the game itself. When I was working on the writing & design of the game, I wrote everything out long-hand in two unlined notebooks. Level sketches, drafts of notes and audio diary text, exploration of plot structure -- it all happened in my own handwriting on the page before anything crossed over into the digital realm. That direct connection to the process, of having to take the time to think something out while you write it out, of seeing how ideas connect on the page, which passages have been scratched out and replaced,



what the shape of the thing you're making is... that's how handwriting was integral to the making of the thing, not just to the end product.

And, since my handwriting "played" Lonnie's in Gone Home, some of the stuff from the notebooks did also end up getting scanned straight into the game as well, bridging the two stages of development in a concrete way:

Handwriting has a simple potency that's very rarely acknowledged, especially in digital games. But it is something that can't be faked, that has a humanity all its own, that we can't help identify with at a glance. At its best, handwriting can make a human presence in a game feel more "real" than almost anything else.



# From the Depths

## *Roleplaying By Letter* by Helena Nash

My dear Valerie,

Do please forgive me for neglecting our correspondence for so long. It seems an age since last I put pen to paper. Can you ever forgive me?

Hands up who's heard of the game *De Profundis*? Anyone? Bueller? I hadn't back in 2005 when a couple of friends asked if I fancied playing something a little different to the usual *Dungeons & Dragons* and *Ars Magica* campaigns that had been my staple roleplaying diet for years (barring a brief flirtation with the voguish *Vampire: The Masquerade* game that had been all the rage in the 90s, but even though I had bought a long black leather coat and tried getting into *Byron* and *Nirvana*, the world of angsty vamps had never been quite my thing).

So what was so different about *De Profundis*? Did it for example use only D8 when rolling in combat? No; there was no rolling in combat. There was no rolling at all. And quite possibly no combat. Did our characters have stats? Hell no. We didn't even have character sheets.

Basically, what the game amounted to was this: you wrote a letter - an actual proper pen and paper snail mail letter, mind - to another player at their actual home address. That letter was from your character and it would describe some events in their life as well as responses to anything that the other player (or players) had sent in their letters to you. This went round and round, with players sending letters back and forth to each other, advancing their characters' stories and between them building a shared world, or 'making stuff up together' if you didn't want to sound too pretentious.

I have been forced to bury myself here at Wade Hall ever since our recent sad news.

What role did the ref or GM play in all this? None. Didn't I mention that? There Was No Ref. I'm no roleplaying historian, so I guess there must have been other ref-less games out there at the time. Certainly there are plenty now, *Fiasco* and *Microscope* being two excellent examples.

*De Profundis* originally came

out in 2001, designed by Michał Oracz, and was translated from Polish into English and released the following year by Hogshead. The name of the game itself comes from a letter written by Oscar Wilde during his imprisonment in Reading Gaol, *de profundis* being Latin for 'from the depths'.

Funny that she had not thought to pack her belongings when she ran off with her young man...

Now, I should add a massive disclaimer at this point: I never read or even saw the *De Profundis* rulebook. I think at least one of our group had. Or maybe she'd heard someone else talk about it. At any rate, we knew it was a game you played by writing letters to each other. We all liked playing games and we all wanted to get back into writing letters, so that was good enough for us. In retrospect, it probably would have been better if we'd all actually read the rulebook as well, but more on that later.

We met to discuss the basics of what sort of setting our game was going to take place in, and to arrange a simple rota of who would write to whom. The setting was pretty simple; we'd go for a vague nineteenth century period set in Georgian/Victorian Britain, with broadly Jane Austen characters, but with tinges of the Gothic thriller.

All your father's talk of Telling The World The Truth sounds most out of character.

I hadn't read many epistolary stories prior to playing the game. In fact, only *Dracula* came immediately to mind, and I seemed to remember that it was kind of boring until Lucy got vamped and the heroes, such as they were, all teamed up. So I wasn't entirely confident I could carry off an authentic-sounding writing style but was resolved that I wouldn't spend several chapters talking about securing purchase rights for an old abbey or fretting about potential suitors.

Likewise, great works of English literature like *Pride and Prejudice*, *Wuthering Heights* and *Vanity Fair* weren't my preferred reading material. But I had accidentally caught a few snippets of classier BBC costume dramas over the years, so I figured I could approximate the necessary tone, mainly by avoiding the use of contractions and stringing sentences out as

long as possible, a habit that has regrettably spilled over into the rest of my writing, I fear.

The actual game rota was simple: we would each write one letter a week, first to one player and then the following week to the other player. That way we would each send and receive a letter every week to and from one of the other two, in a sort of groovy writing-triangle. How it would work with four or more players, I cannot conceive, but I suspect complex scheduling diagrams involving arrows in different colours would be required. Again, I must stress that we Had Not Read The Rules.

Poor, dear Thomas. I owe him my life, that kind brave man. I have never been a strong swimmer you know, and would surely have perished in the carriage were it not for him.

The logistics now out of the way, we each came up with a character. Mine was Rebecca Fitzhoward, a well-to-do, slightly silly young woman who lived somewhere out in the country. The others were her old school friends: parson's wife Valerie Wade and recently-widowed Evelyn Butler-Price, who lived in different parts of London. Our three young ladies would have a shared history to a certain degree. I had a few ideas about Rebecca's background and planned to start building a picture of life on her father's estate in each letter.

Finally it was time to get writing. The others had spoken in sensuous tones of the nice fountain pens and writing paper that they intended to use. The act of writing and the finished artefacts themselves - our growing stacks of letters - would be just as important to our game as what we would write. In other words, they had to look nice. So I went out and indulged in some stationery porn.

I bought myself a rather nice brushed aluminium Parker pen (the brand associated these days with TV ads in which avuncular chat show host Michael Parkinson hawks funeral plans to the elderly), two dozen blue ink cartridges, and a lovely pad of Basildon Bond writing paper. Forty watermarked sheets in a creamy champagne hue, with guide sheet and blotting paper. 178mm by 137, they could be folded neatly in two and slotted into matching champagne envelopes. Mmm. Let's just take a moment to picture it...

My father used to browse the Gazette or Wisden Cricketer's Almanack, but these are different. They seem concerned with spiritualism, ghosts and séances.

And so the game began, with me writing of Rebecca's life in the countryside, an undisclosed estate in rural England, while Valerie and Evelyn both wrote about events in and around London. Evelyn it seemed, like Rebecca, had opted for the 'remote father, dead mother' trope and was evidently enmeshed in a saga involving some family heirlooms, her papa's new-found obsession with contacting the dead and a missing husband.

Valerie on the other hand, had gone for a dead father and a dead uncle but a still-living husband (parent mortality was clearly a strong theme in our game), and a plot involving memory lapses and a mysterious young woman locked up at a local asylum.

I am quite sure that your dear departed mother's bequest to you is quite innocuous. A fancy brooch of a little stick man, you say?

Our letters would usually run to a few sides of paper and would be a mix of scene-setting, developments in our personal stories, comments and (sometimes intentionally bad) advice on the other characters' situations.

When posting a letter I used plain old 'Queen's head' postage stamps, rather than whatever novelty themed stamps the Royal Mail was selling that month, so as to avoid the incongruity of 'Great British Popstars' or 'Domestic Appliances of the 20th Century' spoiling the effect of each letter having fallen through time from the nineteenth century.

Did you not say you were an only child?

One thing became immediately apparent: my handwriting sucked. Unlike my parents' generation, crisp copper-plate penmanship had not been beaten into me at school, though I had been encouraged to express myself in potato-prints and plasticine. Consequently I wrote with an erratic scrawl that lurched from left-leaning to right-leaning like an extra on the bridge of the Enterprise during a Klingon bombardment.

Continued on page 27

## From the Depths Continued

Further, it soon dawned on me as it should have done much earlier that I was of course only party to two thirds of the correspondence, as I would never see the letters that passed between the other characters. If Valerie and Evelyn chose to confide in each other, go off and have adventures together without her or even conspire against Rebecca behind her back, I would never know. Much like some real friendships, perhaps! But that was part of the fun. I would only know what the others chose to share with me, and vice versa they only knew those things about Rebecca's life that I chose to share. And that included my choice of exactly how I revealed that information; I could be frank and descriptive, or circumspect and suggestive. This gave me the opportunity to play at doling out Rebecca's story at a pace of my choosing, although an astute correspondent reading between the lines might have guessed fairly early on that all was not quite as it seemed at the Fitzhoward estate.

We set out early, just as the light was fading. Our gamekeeper had released some of the livestock an hour before the hunt, so they would have ample time to scatter or hide as they saw fit.

Something else that became apparent was that we were actually writing three different stories. Each of us was developing some sort of mystery, thriller or (in my case) Gothic horror with an M Knight Shyamalan before-he-got-rubbish twist. Yes, our characters would discuss whatever was going on with the other characters, but by simply commenting from afar on the other two plotlines, we weren't actively involved. So as the weeks passed and the letters accumulated Valerie, Evelyn and Rebecca became more and more entrenched in their own stories, but there seemed no obvious way these disparate plots were ever going to cross over, much less converge in a neat three-way climax.

I was given only her first name, M, and the address of the institution where she resides.

And so the game went on. Rebecca continued to write of strange visitors to the estate, while Valerie attempted to uncover the identity of M and Evelyn investigated her mother's peculiar journal of paranormal investigations whilst cautiously embarking on a chaste friendship Journey Planet 27 with a certain Mr Talbot, which

thus far had amounted to tea at a Lyons corner house and a stroll around the Portrait Gallery.

In one letter, Rebecca revealed that she had ridden out on a thrilling hunt, which had culminated in a life-changing, but discreetly vague, act of some savagery...

The animal froze before me, its eyes wide as saucers, its breath coming hot and fast, as was my own.

Valerie subsequently picked up on Rebecca's hints, and had clearly deduced that all was not entirely normal at the Fitzhoward estate, though in keeping with the game's conceit of old school chums confiding in each other, voiced her suspicions only out of concern for Rebecca's well-being. In subsequent letters, I intended to delve even further into the supernatural elements of Rebecca's life (De Profundis did cite H. P. Lovecraft as one of its sources; that much I knew), leading perhaps to some horrific sticky end for my heroine or quite possibly turning her entirely to the Dark Side of her monstrous, inhuman heritage.

Sadly we would never know, because Real Life then interrupted play. Whether it was the run-up to Christmas, illness or simply player burnout I don't recall, but our De Profundis game petered out and never started up again. Foolishly I don't think any of us had actually discussed the intended game duration, or under what conditions it would come to a natural end. We just all wanted to write to each other like Lizzie Bennet and Mina Harker.

In the New Year I became distracted by other games and never returned to the world we three had created for Valerie, Evelyn and Rebecca. My pen, which had begun to act up and would now only write if the nib was held upside-down, was consigned to the stationery drawer along with the remaining sheets of champagne Basildon Bond.

If you are ever in dire need, and I mean in fear for your very life, take the charm out, break it open and cast it on the floor. Then close your eyes, Evie, no matter what.

In hindsight, a lot of hindsight (like a decade), I can see how our game might have had a more coherent feel. How we might have actually all contributed to one

story, rather than writing three separate plots. We had neglected to consider the possibility that our characters might a) leave our respective home locations (and thus get physically involved in the others' lives), and b) actively feature more in each other's letters so that they could meet and work together or maybe even against each other. For all I know, that De Profundis rulebook that I never actually read may well have strongly emphasised both those elements!

That second game-changer may have required a certain amount of trust from each of us, that the other players would respect what had already been established for our own characters and not, for example, suddenly derail a character with a line like '... and then I noticed when you walked by the mirror that you had no reflection!'

But perhaps we might have been bolder still and allowed any of the players to do what they liked with any of the characters, a little like the collaborative timeline-building game Microscope's philosophy of nobody having exclusive ownership of any story element. It would certainly have enmeshed our characters in each other's lives and forged a single story from our three minds. Who knows what the strong-willed Valerie would have made of Evelyn's dashing-but-mysterious Mr Talbot? Or if the lovelorn Evie's protective charm would have saved her from a fate worse than death (or indeed, just death) during one of the curious hunts on the Fitzhoward estate?

I've just dug my Basildon Bond paper and pen out of the writing drawer after ten years. It still only works upside-down.

I must be down at the quayside just after sunset to greet our guests and guide them here without mishap.

Do write soonest. Yours in affection,

Journey  
to  
Planet

Rebecca



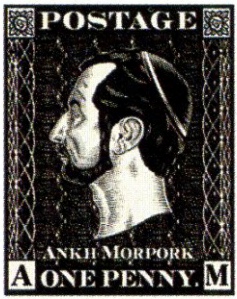


# PHILATELIA & POSTAGE

Lovely stamps! So pretty and fun. Over the course of this issue we've written more than a few letters to each other, and thanks to James, that's probably been rather cheaper than we expected. Whilst Steve shows us pretty pictures and gives us a great look at Discworld stamps over the years, James settles down to save us all a bit of money and grumble about the bureaucracy of the postage system.

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# Stamps from Discworld

Steve Tandy

Sir Terry Pratchett's Discworld novels probably need little introduction here. The forty so far published are classics of comic fantasy fiction with, now sadly, just one last posthumous book due in Autumn 2015 – The Shepherd's Purse. The stories mix magic and allegory in equal measure, introduce us to all sorts of sentient species, take us to the far corners of Discworld (if a disc can be said to have corners) and return us to Ankh-Morpork, the festering yet powerful city state around which many of the tales revolve.

Going Postal, released in 2004, opens with a convicted con-man given a choice by the city's Patrician – get the postal service working - or die! Terry in his younger days had been a stamp collector, probably from when you bought from approval books and stuck the stamps onto album pages headed with a country name with stamp hinges. Consequently perforated stamps for postage appear in the story and details of some are vividly described. To accompany the release of the book a set of Ankh-Morpork Post Office stamps would be made available to readers and Discworld fans. Outlines of some stamps were sketched out by Bernard Pearson of the Discworld Emporium from Terry's ideas, and in order to ensure that only the best would be associated with Discworld, professionals were engaged in the form of graphic designer Colin Edwards and artist Alan Batley, who added more stamps of their own creation. The bulk of these original stamps were to be printed by a security printing company that supplies banknotes and stamps for a number of countries. Terry's brief to Colin and Alan was that the stamps should sit comfortably in a collection of real early classic stamps.

Discworld fans love Discworld memorabilia, and the stamps were no exception. Apart from single stamps and whole sheets they could take a lucky dip with a Little Brown Envelope (LBE) of mixed stamps in the chance of obtaining a rarity. In Going Postal when the Discworld \$1 Tower of Arts stamps were

printed it was found that one stamp per sheet had a falling man replacing one of the birds circling the tower, and another showed a splash in the lake below. It was concluded that a bit of Unseen University magic had crept into the printing process. And so the concept of 'sports' was born; stamps with a small difference in the artwork compared to the rest. These could only be found in the LBEs. Finding and identifying sports was fun, and DW fans revel in fun. The flagship stamp, the blue triangular \$5 Brass Bridge stamp could only be obtained in LBEs, and these would be limited to just 500 copies. So these became desirable. There was an error of this stamp with the Patrician's head inverted and these were limited to just 10 copies. These are still the holy grail of Discworld stamp collectors, and sell for really serious money on the rare occasion when one has to be sold



The immediate popularity of the stamps meant new issues kept appearing, always referencing the stories even

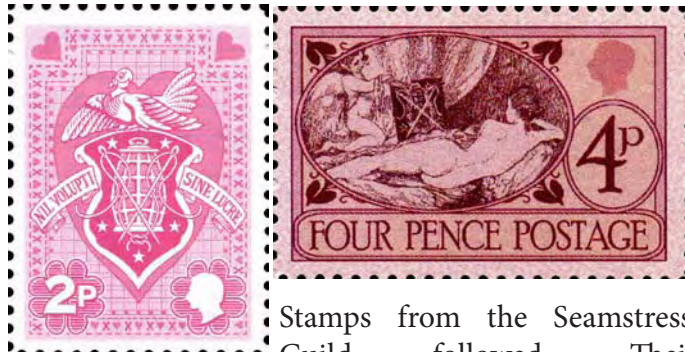
back to The Colour of Magic. Fun and humour were essential elements, with Terry approving each design, or suggesting revisions. There were occasions where he had an idea for a stamp which would go through the design process, and then make a cameo in an upcoming new book. Every so often there are stamps which break the boundaries of stamp collecting, always in a Discworldly way.

Continued on page 27



## Stamps from Discworld Continued

The first sinister looking Assassins Guild stamps had a warning skull and crossbones hand-stamped on the yellowed gummed side and had to be sold in little plastic bags. They were followed up by the required antidote stamp.



Stamps from the Seamstress' Guild followed. Their professional name is a euphemism for ladies of negotiable affection, reflected in the naming of the Two-penny Upright and Four-penny Horizontal stamps.



The Unseen University magic crept into the printing process again when their own stamps had new issues. A strip of 5 stamps of each value had the old design slowly morphing into the new.



A set of covers illustrating an incident where convoluted excuses were made when the mail Journey Planet 31 was damaged in post boxes

had enveloped stamped 'Dribbled on By Toads', 'Defecated on by Mongeese', 'Used as Hamster Bedding' and so on.



The Smoking Gnu are a group of hackers dedicated to bringing down the Clacks - Discworld's semaphore internet. A set of 12 stamps appeared after they broke into the post office building one night. Based on the Penny Patrician stamp they feature slogans in anarchist and street-art style.

A pair of postcards home from a dwarf and a troll involved in the Battle of Koom Valley, as described in Thud!, have the addresses carved into rock and dwarf bread respectively.



Then there is a letter from the Alchemists Guild rescued from the latest unintentional explosive rearrangement of their headquarters. The enclosed stamp had transmuted during the incident into lead with the design in gold, each perforation hole being hand punched!





The Igors are a caste whose talents involve recycling; recycling of body parts. Adept at stitching a replacement leg on a patient (or even working on themselves when an organ is worn out) they extended their repertoire to stamps stitched together from bits of others

Bonk is the mountainous home of Discworld's werewolves. The \$1 stamp was in suitable gothic style with a wolf howling at the moon in front of a geyser, framed by the phases of the moon. There were limited numbers of a set of seven featuring the steps in transformation of a wolf into a man.



'The Amazing Maurice and his Educated Rodents' parallels our Pied Piper story, but in Discworld the rats have been magically transformed and can talk to Maurice. They produced their own diminutive stamps and nibbled the perforations themselves.



Tax revenue stamps are included. There have been tax stamps for post mortems, and others stuck on seed packets sent by the cabbage growers of the Sto Plains.

The recent two cent stamp from Genua shows the Baron's daughter Emberella's face in a mirror. True to 'Witches Abroad' the sport stamp, when held at a certain angle shows the silhouette of the evil witch Lillith trapped in the mirror.

Llamedos is Discworld's land of druids and male voice choirs. It comes as no surprise that the sheets of stamps looked a bit water damaged from the persistent rain in that country.

Discworld can lay claim to the world's most offensive stamp - the Skunk Stamp. Based on the 50p Cabbage Fields stamp, the adhesive, created by Terry himself, was distilled from cabbages, cauliflower and kohlrabi. It had to be sealed in a jar, and this has an evidence label issued by the City Watch. One sniff of the stamp is said to induce flatulence. It is fortunate only a few of these were ever produced, and none actually used on mail.



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## Stamps from Discworld Continued

These are just a dip in the ocean; hundreds of stamps have been issued. In addition the collectors have been treated to ‘cock-ups’, in-jokes, rare items, and surprises. More than once a typo has evaded all the careful checks applied to the designs and appeared on the final stamps. To explain all that goes on would take just too long.

While there may be just one more last book from Terry’s imagination, there is still plenty of material for new stamps, while the 10th anniversary last year of the stamps brought in many new collectors. The Discworld stamps look likely to continue for a while yet. The creative mind behind the stamps now is Ian Mitchell, who took them over at the Discworld Emporium a few years ago. Just like any collecting, they can be extremely addictive, but you end up with a collection that evokes good memories of the books you have read. Of course Discworld stamps are but one niche in the philatelic genre of Cinderella Fantasy stamps, and one thing often leads to another.

## Useful Links

[www.discworldstampcatalogue.co.uk/index.php](http://www.discworldstampcatalogue.co.uk/index.php)

[www.facebook.com/pages/The-Discworld-Stamp-Collector/809424215750892](https://www.facebook.com/pages/The-Discworld-Stamp-Collector/809424215750892)

[www.discworldemporium.com/discworld-stamps](http://www.discworldemporium.com/discworld-stamps)



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# Stamp Hacking

James Bacon

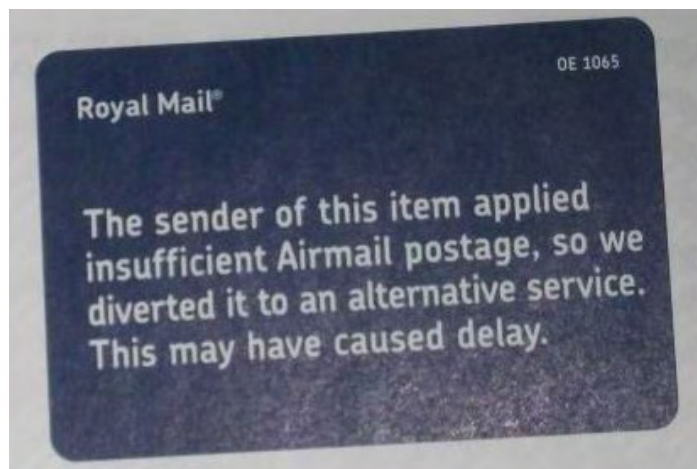
In April 2012, I made one of those simple purchases that started me off on a path. I bought stamps.

I have always enjoyed sending and receiving post, and as an SF fan who edited a fan periodical in the nineties, sending post was a part of what I did for years, as was receiving underpaid post. Because I lived in Ireland, and despite a good education system, most English people failed to pay international mail. I collected the “Royal Mail. The sender of this item applied insufficient airmail postage, so we diverted it to an alternative service. This may have caused a delay” sticker (Reference OE 1065) until I had around a hundred, and then stopped.

By 2012 I had slowly converted to writing and sending more post, and in April I warned Emma J. King

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that post would be increasing;  
1st class from 46p to 60p, and



2nd Class from 36p to 50p – both increases of 14 pence. Emma’s business sent tons of mail, I pointed out that this would be a saving of £14 per one hundred stamps, or a saving of 23%, and she swiftly bought many hundreds.

In Britain, non-denominated postage was introduced in the United Kingdom in 1989 for domestic

mail - and so they got stamps marked as 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> class. Rather like Forever Stamps in the USA, they remain valid. Royal Mail describes them as “non-value indicators”. A 1st class stamp in 1989 cost 19p.

Back in 2012, we were not the only purchasers, and the stamps were being sold in the tens of thousands before the price increase happened. This prompted a need for an official confirmation by Hayley Fowell of the Royal Mail about expiration:

“The answer is yes. Stamps without a specified monetary value are described as Non Value Indicator (NVI) and are typically first and second-class stamps.

These do not have an expiry date, therefore can be used regardless of the length of time you’ve had them. Stamps with a monetary value also do not have an expiry date and can be combined to make up the value of postage required. For example, a customer with an old 41p first class stamp would need to make up the 5p difference to use this stamp now.”

Regulator Ofcom were even pressed on the matter, and said in response that “any future change must be fair and reasonable’, so announcing ‘1st class’ isn’t 1st class might be unreasonable, while Royal Mail also

confirmed that “It is legal to resell unused postage stamps.”

I bought 100 1st and 100 2nd Class Stamps. I used them for a good while and then lost them.

Now the loss of these stamps was an odd thing. I just could not find them, and soon I found myself just not writing, as the cost of postage seemed so much. Stamps felt expensive, especially to foreign places like Ireland.

Now, when one compares stamps and their cost in 2012 against the retail price index of interest increase, one sees that since 1980 stamp prices were pretty much in line, but the jump in 2012 put them out of kilter.

The Royal Mail sells stamps, but unlike many other purchases, they will not refund you if you change your mind and bring them back. They also sell stamps not for the purpose of posting, but for collectors. First Day Covers are fully franked, and for the postage price of 63 pence, one gets a cover with up to £6.30 worth of stamps on it. These are delightful to look at, and indeed are an art form, but you are then paying for a product, not a service – even though the mail when it charges you for the stamps and envelopes is charging you for the service the stamps provide. I ponder this a lot. There are vast amount of stamps unused, but with First Day Covers, there are even more stamps sold for non-use.

Continued on page 35

<b>Year</b>	<b>Weight (g)</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> Class</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> Class RPI</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Class</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Class RPI</b>
1980	60	12	12	10	10
1990	60	22	22.47	17	18.72
2000	60	27	29.89	19	24.91
2005	60	30	33.68	21	28.07
2012	100	60	42.66	50	35.55

Prices of postage stamps, 1980-2015 in comparison to Retail Price Index inflation.

## Stamp Hacking Continued

I was perplexed by my lack of stamps. I found myself a little bereft. I asked Lynda Rucker and Emma if they had seen them as I'd been writing in their company, to no avail, and I was slightly down. I had to rectify the matter urgently.

I went looking for cheaper stamps. Some retailers such as Costco and Superdrug can offer a percentage off stamps, at times up to 5%. Royal Mail have had offers in the past, and offer a discount if a business uses a Franking Machine.

I then found a whole world that was unknown to me. And I had to think freshly about stamps, and how I could get them more cheaply, and legally, online.

The most important thing to remember is, what is the percentage saving? It doesn't matter to me whether I have one or ten stamps on an envelope, whether they are 1st Class or a mix of monetary values. If you want to save, the percentage is everything. Of course, it does mean I might need to add up some stamps and also that I lose the convenience of using just one stamp. Oh well.

So... the percentage is what I will focus on, otherwise it gets confusing fast. And just like any product there is value to bulk buying.



John Curtin Stamps (<http://www.jcstamps.co.uk/>) sell 6 x 1st class booklets

at £3.36 if you buy over £150 worth, so this is an 11% saving compared to Royal Mail at £3.78 per booklet. Curtins have a variety of stamps available, and the best value are 5 x £50 bags of mixed value stamps, which should be £250 but they sell at £185 a saving of 26%. Not a bad saving.



Philatelink (<http://www.philatelink.co.uk/>) are even bigger, and sell a vast variety of stamps but require a minimum order of £20. They sell the stamps in a variety of ways, as individual values in bulk, or as mixed bulk lots. Examples are a £1 stamp x 20 for £18, a £20 bag of mixed value stamps up to 19p for £15.00, and £200 of mixed value stamps for £150. So that's two options at a 25% saving. Lower, but one time popular denominations can be good value, so 200 12p stamps, valued at £24 are for sale at £17, offering a saving of 29%. The best saving is for 500 x 13p stamps, netting 30.76% of a saving. There are a few others at 30%.

Now I know how it is. An article that recommends or discusses e-bay is terrible. You can find bargains, but one has to wait and bid – and why quote the unattainable? I find this unfair, and how is it a decent hack? In saying that, the e-bay experience with buying stamps is good. So first off, I will look at Buy it Now items.

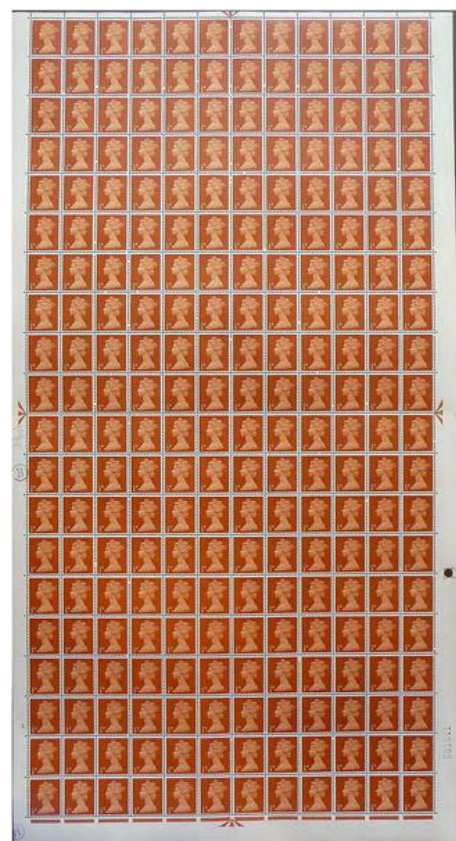


At present, 100 1st Class self adhesive stamps are selling on e-bay at £56 including postage. This is an 11% saving. 600 1st Class stamps, 50 books of 12 adhesives are £320 including postage. Nearly 16% saved. There is a bigger saving for more complexity to the end user, so £100 worth of stamps is selling at £64 plus £1.70 postage, and that is a 34% saving. That is about the best you will find for mint stamps, buying them now.

One of course can find and bid for stamps and get a better deal in the Auction section of e-bay. The best deal I ever found was 49 x E stamps.

Confused yet? Wondering where that stray 'E' came from?

On 19th January 1999, a new NVI 'E' Machin[i] definitive stamp was issued to pay the pan-European minimum airmail letter (20 grams) rate. The stamp was withdrawn in April 2004. Apparently people were confused; maybe it meant 'Euro', or something. The E stamp cost 40p at this stage, and a separate 40p stamp was also available. Booklets of 4 x 57p stamps sufficient for 40 gram European airmail postage rate seemed to 'replace' their cheaper counterparts. (Not that Royal Mail would ever benefit knowingly from people overpaying for postage). Weighing your post is so important.



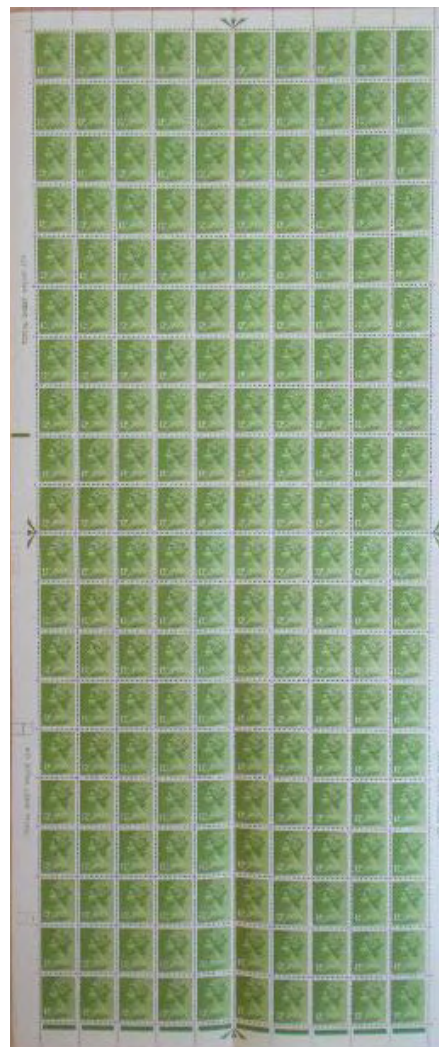
Knowing what you need to pay even more so.

Today a 20g letter to Europe costs £1.00. I bought the 49 E stamps for £10 including postage, a stunning saving of 80%.

Back to Auctions, as this buy was unusual and rather wonderful. If you search and watch and bid in the last few seconds of an auction, one can

get mint stamps at around 50% discount. That is pretty much good enough for me, and that is what my target generally is.

I decided that I like stamps as a decoration and therefore bought full sheets of various half penny stamps, which tend to be very colourful, and unusual as they were done away with in 1984, but even at face value, 2,500 halfpenny stamps are not expensive and great fun to mix with other halfpenny values.



The halfpenny decimal Machin Definite stamp was introduced in 1971. The halfpenny itself was withdrawn in 1984 and the various stamps with halfpennies made unavailable by June 1985. At the time of the withdrawal of the coinage, a 2nd class stamp was 12½p, and a huge concern was that overnight everything would go up by that ½ pence and thereby affect inflation. Royal Mail responded to this by increasing the charge for a 2nd class stamp to 13p on 3rd September 1984, a 4% increase. Did this cause an issue? I am unsure, but in 1985 the price was adjusted down to 12p, only increasing in October 1986 to 13p for seven weeks, then reducing back to 12p from 2nd December until 24th December 1986. It is certainly not a coincidence that this is traditionally the busiest time in the year for the postal system. The stamps were not withdrawn, as at the time they were legal to use for postage in multiples of two. Otherwise, the halfpenny was rounded down.

## Stamp Hacking Continued

In 2009, some 24 years later however, there was an upset. Royal Mail made a bold move. They made the halfpenny stamp invalid and no longer acceptable, while rounding down all halfpenny values regardless of being in multiples, so two 12 1/2p stamps were now worth 24p.

There was a bit of uproar. And quite rightly, Given that 30 years after their cessation I was able to buy 2,500 halfpenny stamps with a face value of £10, it begs the question, how many would the Royal Mail have written off as unused and never to be used?

There was a reversal. I found this partial statement accredited to Royal Mail:

“Following the withdrawal of the 1/2p coin from legal tender in 1984, Royal Mail had a policy of honouring all stamps tendered which still bear the 1/2p value as long as the total postage affixed was in whole pence. Recently, this policy was changed as the amount of such stamps in circulation had dropped to a negligible level after 25 years and after consulting the relevant parts of the business, such as Revenue Protection and RM Philatelic.”

Furthermore it clarifies that:

“Royal Mail have reviewed and changed their acceptance policy on post decimalisation half pence value postage stamps and from Thursday 27 August 2009 if any half pence value stamps are used together on an item, then the total value will apply. However if used singly (or in an odd number when multiple stamps are used) the value must be rounded down.”

I think that means a lot of reviews and changes, and no apologies.

Some pre-Decimal Stamps were also of the Machin design. Money in Britain and Ireland was originally Pounds, Shillings and Pence (pence were show with the letter 'd'), and in February 1971 there was a Decimal Day where the countries adjusted their currency to a simplified system. A shilling was 5 new pence, but an old halfpenny stamp was .208 pence. The stamps were still accepted for a while.

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The possession of something suddenly losing its value was of concern, and it was brought up in the House of Commons. According to Hansard on the 9th February 1972:

“Mr. Arthur Lewis asked the Minister of Posts and Telecommunications whether he will issue a general direction to the Post Office Board to continue to honour pre-decimal stamps until February, 1973, and to give a full value rebate on all such stamps handed in for cashing.”

The answer was NO.

43 years later, I can buy a full sheet of 200 mint unused pristine ½d stamps for £10. These should have a value of £4.16. Yet they are not valid. I am unsure why I could not use a 1d and ½d could not be used in conjunction with a new halfpenny stamp totalling 1.124pence. An overpayment for goodness sake...



Onwards with the buying. Aerogrammes combine postage and stationary, and while 1st and 2nd class prepaid envelopes are available and therefore resold, Great Britain Aerogrammes ceased to be sold in April 2012. I have found good value buying aerogrammes. Postal stationary is a whole thing, and I like Aerogrammes, cheap, all in one and long enough to write a nice letter. I have found good value buying packs of 10 for £6.00. That is a 40% saving, so pretty good.

I have been using these for some time, with no difficulty, but I did some considerable research and found an email ostensibly from Michael O'Donnell from the Royal Mail's Chairman and Chief Executive Office:

“We are indeed discontinuing the aerogram service and have officially withdrawn it from our pricing...”

structures as of April this year. This is due to a decline in use of the product and it is, therefore, no longer costs effective to produce this pre-paid stationary. Any aerogrammes already purchased should be used by 31 October 2012....”

There was very little publicity about this cessation. The Royal Mail knows that nostalgia can cost them; look at the halfpenny issue, so they quietly did away with Aerogrammes, which were popularised during the Second World War, and therefore there are no official Royal Mail pronouncements about them except this quiet email, which doesn't even say they are invalid. So, where does that leave me... research. Well, the Royal Mail staff just took the aerogramme and dropped it in a bag, and I know they have all arrived, so maybe the message of when they should be used was not telegraphed so well. (I will confirm receipt of the one in the picture before publication)



So a 40% postage saving on postage alone and more importantly, free stationary at that price.

Stamps, postage and defiance seem to have always had a link. Today, the Royal Mail's share value was worth twice what the government sold it for, and the question of value for the owner; the public, is ignored. Unfairness, moral ambiguity, theft, negligence and failure to deliver have permeated the wondrous institution that is the Royal Mail.

The next part though is where stamps and their usage become as questionable as the behaviour of the Royal Mail. A personal question of course rather than a corporate one.

Reusing unfranked stamps was not something

that I was ever worried about, I frequently would send back envelopes that had held a fanzine to the sender, giving them the benefit of the failure to cancel the stamp, and Mom keeps unfranked envelopes for future mail from me and just to game the government, an is an Irish tradition, be it the British or Irish government that is the victim.

When one knowingly uses a stamp that has already been used, this is fraud in the UK under the Fraud Act 2006. I cannot find any cases of action being taken against stamp users, but it exists as a crime and people have been sacked and I once found a business in trouble for buying the wrong online parcel labels, but it is an odd one.



Lifting stamps (removing unfranked stamps from envelopes) is a fun thing, be it for collection or reuse for some, but e-bay has made it industrial in its nature. Last night I watched 500 1st class stamps, valued at £315 if new, sell for £100. Now if the person is collecting these well and good, if used, they present a 68% saving. 500 2nd class stamps unfranked, off paper, no gum are £111.45 as a Buy It Now item. 59% saving.

Generally these stamps seem to sell at closer to 40% to 50% off their price, but as one can buy mint stamps with some more effort at up to 40%, there is not much in it.

So it is to the individual's choice.



Of course, where money can be made, it will be made, and a pair of stamps that should be avoided are the 24p Chestnut Brown and 2nd Class Blue with somewhat larger

Continued on page 39

## Stamp Hacking Continued

perforation holes.

There is a Post Office Revenue Protection Squad, which sounds awesome, I am awaiting them to smash in through the skylight in my bathroom as I soak stamps. In 1998 it was reported in the Machin Collectors Club June newsletter that possession of a Machin Forgery is a Crime.

The forgeries first appeared in June 1993. 24p was then the cost of a first class stamp and the sheets of 200 were passed through unsuspecting retail outlets. An offset lithographic process was used, and they are good enough to pass unless one is aware. The giveaway in sheet form is the lack of sheet markings, wider margins, and the perforation. Despite these warnings and the posturing, one can purchase what are claimed to be fake 24p stamps on e-bay for £8.99. Quite a markup; it could be a fascinating way to create a collectors item. I am unsure if one is not intending to use the stamps for postage, if they are illegal; but be warned.

## Interesting Links

Aerogrammes Discontinued.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/mbarchers/html/NF2693943?thread=8365925>

British Domestic Postal Rates 1966 - 2006.

[http://www.gbstamps.com/gbcc/gbcc\\_rates1.html](http://www.gbstamps.com/gbcc/gbcc_rates1.html)

Can you Buy Stamps Now, Then Sell Them for 30% Profit?  
<http://blog.moneysavingexpert.com/2012/04/10/can-you-buy-stamps-now-then-sell-them-for-30-profit/>

'Cancelled Stamps' - Freedom of Information Request to Royal Mail Group Limited.  
[https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/cancelled\\_stamps](https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/cancelled_stamps)

Decimal Stamps and Legalities <http://www.connoisseurcatalogue.net/catalogue/chapter4.pdf>

Discount Mint Stamps - JC Stamps / Curtins.  
<http://www.jcstamps.co.uk/discount.php>

Discount Mint Stamps - Philatelink

<http://www.philatelink.co.uk/10p-to-29p-discounted-stamps-57-c.asp>

The Fraud Act 2006.

[http://www.cps.gov.uk/legal/d\\_to\\_g/fraud\\_act/](http://www.cps.gov.uk/legal/d_to_g/fraud_act/)

Re-using Stamps - The Facts about Unfranked Stamps  
<http://www.stamp-shop.com/unfranked-stamps.html>

Stamp Prices - How Have They Changed since 1980?  
<http://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2012/mar/27/60p-price-stamp-royal-mail>

Stamp Fraud in Darlington.

[http://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/11108820.Four\\_sacked\\_two\\_resign\\_after\\_stamp\\_scam\\_investigation\\_at\\_the\\_Student\\_Loans\\_Company\\_in\\_Darlington/](http://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/11108820.Four_sacked_two_resign_after_stamp_scam_investigation_at_the_Student_Loans_Company_in_Darlington/)

Stamp Fraud - Shropshire Businessman Convicted of Fraud for Underpaying Postage Costs.

<http://www.shropshirestar.com/news/2014/02/27/shropshire-businessman-defrauded-royal-mail-by-underpaying-on-parcel-postage/>

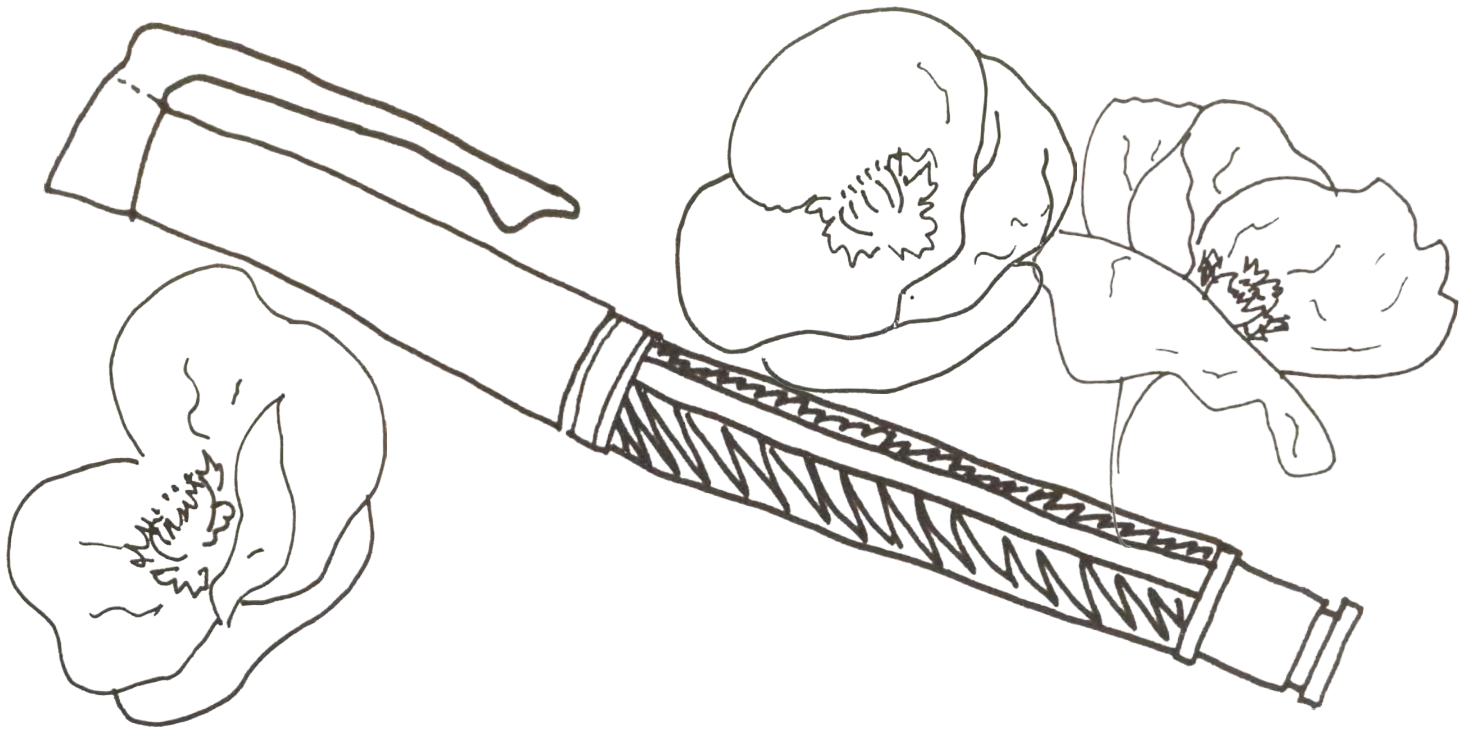




JOURNEY PLANET  
LETTERS in ABSENTIA



Writing and war seem inextricably linked, often because the popular perception of warfare often shows us brave Tommys writing home to their loved ones, and then tragically getting shot before they can return. Both Esther and Chris Kempshall take different looks at this. Along the way, James Wheale explains why he's making a mess with wartime letters, and then the editors (and Jude) get tangled up in a PoW mystery...



# WRITING

# and WAR



# From Somewhere in France - Letter Writing in the First World War

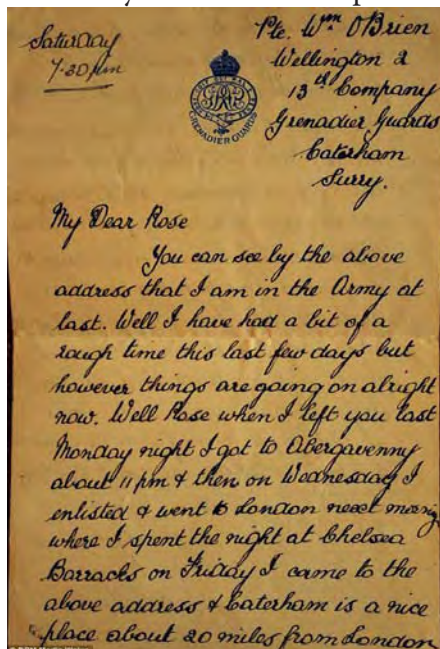
Chris Kempshall



Letter writing has always had a particular resonance in discussions of the First World War. The image of men in waterlogged trenches writing endless letters home is one borne of the need for connection whilst experiencing profound displacement. But our concept of these letters is also rooted in a modern understanding of the nature and desires behind writing them.

The postal service that exists today bears little resemblance to the sheer size and reach of that which existed at the turn of the Twentieth Century. At the outbreak of the First World War, the Post Office was one of the largest employers in Britain. Deliveries of letters would take place throughout the day and it was possible in some areas to arrange lunch meetings via correspondence on the exact same day.

Letter writing in Britain was an Edwardian pastime, particularly for the Middle and Upper Classes. Without this situation already existing before the war, letter writing would not likely have been as important to soldiers, as well-monitored by military authorities, or as interesting to us now. Therefore to get a full understanding of what letter writing meant for all parties during the First World War, we should examine the value of letters for each of them in turn.



There always seems to be something very romantic about letter writing during wartime. Much of this stems from an assumption of what these letters represent; potential last words. Seeing these letters as potentially the final contact the writer has with the recipient allows us, the onlooker, to compose our own words of poetry, our own words of love to parents or partners or children. The letter of a First World War soldier becomes our own blank page. What would you say to those you loved if you were speaking to them for the last time?

This is an appealing image because it plays into our existing belief of the First World War soldier as a romantic bound for death. Of course he is writing his final words, because of course he is going to die. The war was a literary war, filled with the poetry of those who had seen death and destruction, who knew that their time was coming, and who had only one outlet for their emotions.

Appealing as this image is, it is also flawed. Numerous soldiers did write letters to their loved ones which are heavy with the emotion that we would expect. Some of these letters do indeed carry the 'last words' of the author and they can be intensely moving. But they also play on the assumption that the author was imminently about to die. That was not always the case. How many 'last letters' would you write to your loved ones before you decided you might be unduly traumatising them? Indeed, would you want to write a letter to them that would fill them with worry but nothing to do to assist you? Many soldiers self-censored their letters to leave the horrifying details of war out, not wishing to alarm those who would later read them.

More than this though, examples such as the above all rely on the presumption that these letters carry the reality of warfare; the human struggle and the fear of death. This is a modern day misjudgement of the nature of letter writing. Instead of the question; 'What would you say in your final letter to loved ones?' instead consider; 'What would you say in your final email or text message?' What if you did not know that email or text message was to be your last?

We still imbue letter writing during the war with a level of personal significance that it did not have.

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## From Somewhere in France Continued

The vast majority of letters written by soldier were staggeringly mundane. Soldiers wrote to request news from home. They wrote to request food from home (and this is the subject of Eleanor Farjeon and Edward Thomas's last correspondence, as Esther writes about elsewhere in this issue). They also wrote to tell those at home that they had no news to write to them about. During the First World War, soldiers spent most of their time doing absolutely nothing and, as a result, were

often bored. Letter writing passed the time. If you were to look back over the emails and text messages you'd sent to friends or family today, how much feeling and thought are packed into each one? Would any be fitting final words if you suddenly (and implausibly) had to go 'over the top'? Now this is not to say that soldiers were not prone to include real details about the war in their letters. They absolutely did; but it is how you interpret 'real details' that is the key. A soldier writing about how bored they are is just as 'real' as a long missive on the progress of a recent battle.

1011 Coy Serjt Major Lewis  
Co. 1st East Lancs Regt  
East Lancs Division T F  
Citadel Cairo Egypt  
4/12/14

Dear Enylina.

Thanks very much for your welcome letter. I am glad that you like the Post cards. I will send some more if I come across any nice ones. I was glad to hear that you had some fun on Bonfire night. I was thinking about you wondering if my little girls were enjoying themselves, It was not our Christmas day that we had on Oct 26<sup>th</sup> it was the Egyptian Christmas, we shall have ours on the 25<sup>th</sup> of December. The same as you, I do not think we shall be back for Christmas but still we shall have some fun when I do come home, Egypt is a nice place but I would sooner be in Blackburn with my little girls. I hope the war will soon be over and then we shall all be happy again. I am still in good health so is Dock and I hope you are the same at home. I have not had a ride on a Camel yet so I cannot tell you what it is like. You must be a good girl and as comfort had help to you mama. and do not forget to pray every night for the soldiers in France. and your dada and Dock, and that the war will soon be over I think that is all this time.

From Dada.

(Miss Emma for me)

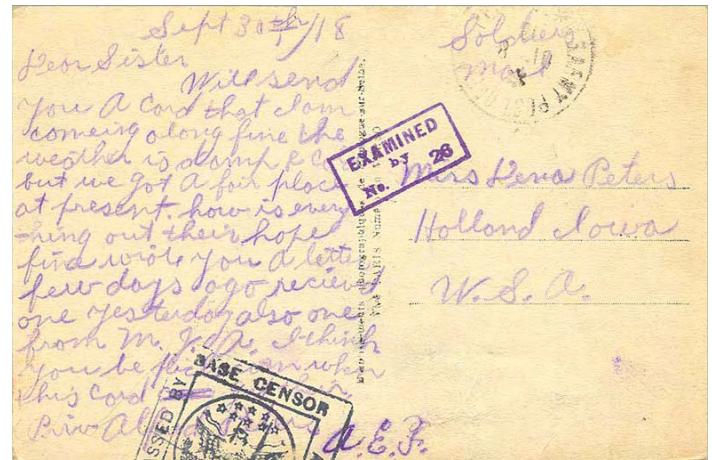
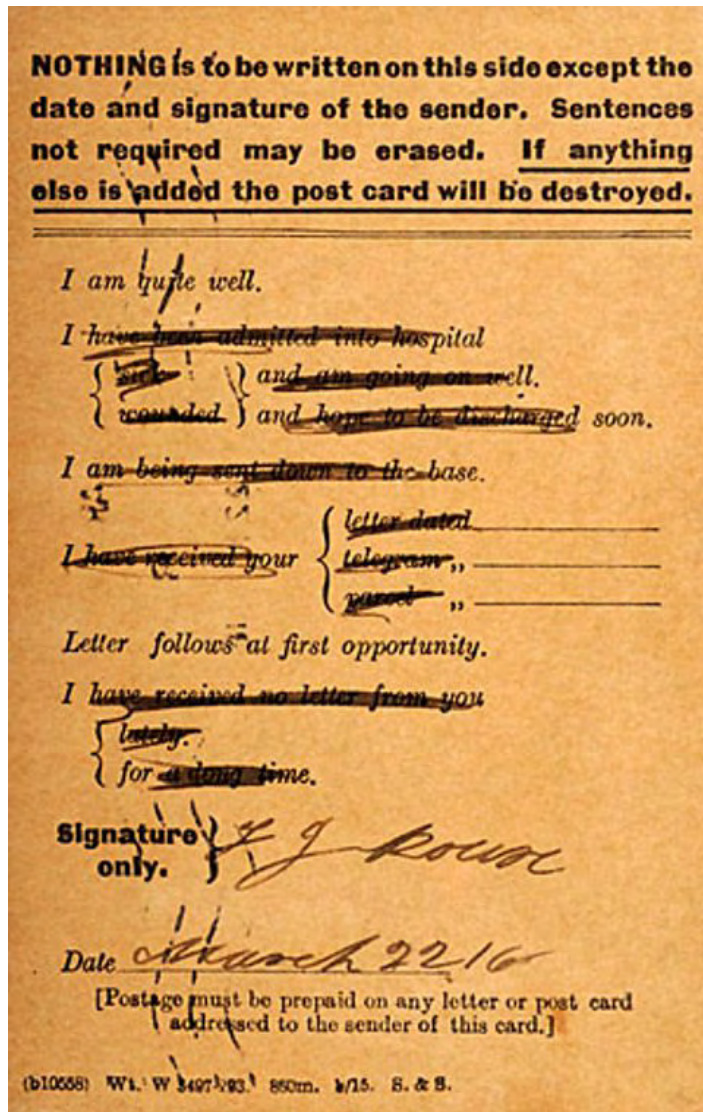
who never forget his little girls

XX for you and Nellie

Of course the military authorities were far more concerned about one of these examples than the other. The major armies in the First World War all operated various forms of censorship and oversight on the contents of soldiers' letters. In the British army the letters of regular soldiers were all checked by their commanding officers to ensure they did not contain details deemed to be classified. This criteria included information about recent battles, casualties, upcoming operations, and the soldier's current location. This last item meant that many letters were delivered having been sent from 'somewhere in France'.

the home front. Most of them did exactly that. Whether it was to obey their orders or to avoid distressing loved ones the end result is much the same.

But these censored letters could also be of great interest to military authorities. In 1916 the French Army began using letters written by their soldiers as a way of gauging their opinions on any number of manners. All the letters were read by the censors anyway, and material removed if needed, so they could also become a huge and ongoing survey on the course of the war. The reports the censors compiled from these letters still exist at the Archives de l'armee de terre at Vincennes in Paris and are one of the most useful research resources for the French Army



So what use are letters written during the war to historians? The easy, yet complicated, answer is that they are invaluable. All such documents from a similar time period are. They represent first-hand primary accounts of the war. The letters which are mundane are just as valuable as those which are poignant. They all add to the picture of someone who was there.

But we were not meant to read them. Much like nobody else is meant to read the emails and text messages I exchange to my friends and family, they are not designed or written with a consideration for the impartial viewer. So we reach a potential issue. I have read the letters of men who thought they were about to die. Some of them were correct in that belief. So I did read their last words to their loved ones. Last words that were not meant for me. I have also read the letters of men who wanted more food, more news, and more socks. Those letters were not meant for me either. If we are to decide that all the letters are to be read that you cannot cherry-pick just the obviously emotional ones.

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Censorship conditions applied to all soldiers but it was only enforced on those below the rank of about Lieutenant. Men holding this rank and above were expected to self-censor their own letters to avoid including details that could prove either militarily important to the enemy if they were to capture the postal shipment, or to disrupt the morale of those on

## From Somewhere in France Continued

Even those which appear to be bereft of emotion are in fact driven by it. I have never written a letter, or an email, or a text message to someone I did not want to talk to. Letters are written to be read. Which is why we're still reading one hundred year old ones today.

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# An Appetite for Mess

James Wheale

As 2014 marked a century since the start of World War One, I found myself ruminating on the vast upheaval and horror endured by so many as a result. My feelings ranged from disgust to anger, sadness to pity. At first my sorrow focused on the extraordinary loss of life but later transformed to terror at how recent, how thoroughly connected to all of us, the war still felt. I was compelled to explore the complex emotions I was feeling, and thought it a logical exercise to express them through my most beloved medium - food.

The two seem an unlikely pairing, food and war; together on the same plate. For a long time I wrestled with it. How could you convey the bleakness of war without resorting to simple shock tactics - blood splattered plates, revolting recreations of 'bully' in pitiful portions or rotten fruit sprinkled with mud from Flanders itself? Should I serve up on a map of the trenches, to the sounds of shellfire, or maybe dish up within a woefully recreated trench; much like unconvincing examples I saw on school trips? Perhaps too, I should hire a cheap actor, playing the plucky Tommy, to put an awful script out its misery during dinner service?

I despaired and abandoned my idea for a WW1 themed dining experience.

Reflecting later, I realized my apprehension was twofold. Firstly, staging a dining experience that didn't revolve around playful gluttony would probably fail. It was, at the time, the only dining experience model I knew of, and the theatre typically resides in its exclusivity, not content. Secondly, I struggled to prise meaning from the muddled knots of food, narrative, history and set design that I was

trying to sew together.

Death was everywhere. Rations were weak. The war was hell. We all learnt this portrait by heart at school, but I wanted my patrons to touch these concepts tangibly. Recreating soldier's last meals would be at best displeasing and at worst repugnant. That, in itself, is not necessarily a bad thing, but without any deeper substance to it, I had concerns the whole experience would be reduced to a gauche lickable ghost train. I could hear my cheap actor in my nightmares, arguing with me to let him turn his plucky Tommy into a plucky Cockney...

Perhaps then, jazzing up a meal with a theme and calling it theatre, art, or pretending it was all very profound, was tantamount to a realization that I had no idea what I was doing. It was clear it would be very easy to create something distasteful and ineffective.

I banished the project from my mind and settled into research with the University of West of England's neuroscience department on how storytelling affects flavor. I was fortunate to be joined by my good friend Dr. Tim Senior. The research is still ongoing at the time of writing this. So far it has yielded fascinating insight into how we taste and, crucially, what it means to taste. It was through this research, and Tim's contribution especially, that my WW1 project came back with a vengeance.

Eating is the most multi-sensory experience we have. It taps into the very fabric of human nature, as we taste with a sophistication and intelligence unrivaled in the animal kingdom. Flavor itself is created in the mind, fed by an extraordinary amount of data from our senses. From what temperature the food is, the sound it makes as it crunches between teeth, the frequency of that sound, how deep the color is, what we know of the provenance behind the food and the story sold alongside it all influences taste. Thus by augmenting a sensory variable like color, you change the flavor. This is when I realized flavor is a powerful device for storytelling. Our behavior is shaped by flavor and all the data that comprises it.

Further though, it taps into our memories and emotions. I started to see food as a mechanism to communicate with primal parts of our being. I was



obsessed by research that showed sadness affected flavour negatively - why should sadness make food taste bad, why has that survived to be an evolutionary advantage? My mind was full of question. It then erupted when I read the theory that war is a behavior. Is war innate to being human?

We have seen war in other species. The Gombe Chimpanzee War of 1972 saw two rival communities go to war. In total, eleven chimps died over four years. The Kahama males were eviscerated. Females were kidnapped, other chimps went missing. The war was unbelievably brutal - cannibalism, torture and rape were all present. Yet the war started when the aggressors overwhelmingly held the odds. There was method in the madness. It seems our closest relatives, who are 96% genetically identical to us, also plot war with uncomfortable familiarity. The First World War saw 17 million deaths. The first time I heard this number, I felt a chill run down my spine. The same chill must too run down the spine of a chimpanzee, as the first screeches of war cut through the dawn chorus.

I devoured another paper that argued that disgust lessens violent tendencies. Disgust became my mechanic. Disgust is a powerful feeling. It is a feeling that warns us - this taste is poison, this person is dangerous, this disease will kill you. At it's simplest

it is a survival mechanism, it forces us to withdraw, whereas violence encourages us to proceed. At it's most sophisticated it is hardwired into our emotions and ethics.

I had in my palette war and disgust. I started throwing everything at the canvas. What emerged was a hallucinogenic, darkly surreal dining experience that pushed the pervading terror onto the table. Fingernail scratched plates represented itching lice, finger and thumb prints were cast into the metal of silverware for the impressions left by soldier's hands in sucking mud - I even considered putting shrapnel in the salad. I could see the tablecloth sat on top of real mud that seeped through the fabric during the meal- making it harder and harder to dine in the dirt.

I was perceiving human beings solely as primates, with reliable social behaviours, easily tricked by bad experience - cruel food merged with unsettling reminders to make war unpalatable. I got carried away to say the least - it went all a bit Clockwork Orange. Until an epiphany hit me. My designs made the patron guilty. I was trying to embody the nightmare of war as a guilt-ridden lesson. However, The patrons were not responsible for the war and should not be treated as such.

Continued on page 47

## An Appetite for Mess Continued

Once again I found myself pouring concrete shoes around my project's feet, ready to toss it back into the depths of my pool of thoughts. That is, until I happened upon a soldier's letter.

In it the soldier thanked his wife for his parcel and described a beautiful moment upon opening. He had found himself profoundly struck by the cake tin that his cake had arrived in. The cake itself connected the soldier to his wife's food and, by extension, his wife's touch - that was very moving. However, his connection to the cake tin was the real surprise - a typically quotidian, uneventful item, viscerally transported him out of the trenches and into his own kitchen. His reconnection with home had a powerful effect on me.

I read another. A soldier described how the late arriving food parcels for dead soldiers were opened and shared between the men. He discussed the necessity but also the guilt. So much love gone in the cooking lost... meaningless to the recipients other than a serendipitous meal.

Then came a treasure trove, an entire collection from one young officer. His letters are riveting insights into the war and his world. Halfway through the familiar timeline, they abruptly stop dead. His handwriting replaced with those of support from comrades that fought on, then by the government apologizing for being unable to retrieve his body and finally with a tribute in his old school magazine.

In amongst the letters, I learnt of the parcels that served as lifelines between the men on the front and their families at home. I read how the food supplemented their often unappetizing, and sometimes meagre, rations. It not only kept them up to date with the worlds they left behind but anchored them together.

What I had stumbled upon was the messy crossroads of war. Where family squabbles chattered with gunfire, cakes soothed pining hearts and strangers' hunger, and where silence was a deafening realization. I too had a powerful moment of clarity. The sheer variety of conversation, the breadth of human experience contained in those letters pieced together my World War One project neatly. It was then I knew what I was

Journey Planet 47 going to do. I made plans for a

buffet.

Hear me out. A buffet is a meal of discovery. What table holds which gems? Who will I meet and who do I need to avoid as I navigate the ever diminishing resources? (aka canapés and small talk). It is non-linear dining, exploratory and bizarrely antisocial. It is the perfect delivery system for exploring the letters and stories of soldiers.

A pertinent example is that of the 'Cadbury Girl'. A deceptive soldier sweet-talked a young lady into sending him chocolate and other treats, unknowing of the soldier's other life with his wife and kids. He laughed about her in the trenches with the other men, giving her the moniker of his 'Cadbury Girl'. Exploring this story, and reaching the same humiliation that this poor girl must have felt, while eating bittersweet chocolate, connects together all the disparate threads I once lamented I couldn't tie together into meaning.

There is something so alive about eating. The embodiment of a substance that engages all of our senses, memories and emotions. Combined with these portals to the past, to the struggles and sorrows of the letter-writers, I hope to breathe life into the loss. I know now I want to stage an exhibition of tables covered in letters and parcels with recreated food. I want people to spend a few hours to pick, read and reflect. There is much research to conduct, many more letters to read and academics to pester, but I think I have finally found the heart of this project.

Leafing through the letters and following the recipes, I see the appetite for war and peace in a murky mixture, in a mess that stains us still.

The image shows a handwritten signature in green ink. The word 'Journey' is written in a large, flowing, cursive script. Below it, the word 'Planet' is written in a smaller, more compact cursive script. The signature is positioned in the lower right quadrant of the page.



# Morning has Broken? Thoughts on Eleanor Farjeon's 'Easter Monday.'

Esther MacCallum-Stewart

## Easter Monday

In the last letter that I had from France  
You thanked me for the silver Easter egg  
Which I had hidden in the box of apples  
You like to munch beyond all other fruit.  
You found the egg the Monday before Easter,  
And said. 'I will praise Easter Monday now -  
It was such a lovely morning'. Then you spoke  
Of the coming battle and said, 'This is the eve.  
'Good-bye. And may I have a letter soon.'

That Easter Monday was a day for praise,  
It was such a lovely morning. In our garden  
We sowed our earliest seeds, and in the orchard  
The apple-bud was ripe. It was the eve,  
There are three letters that you will not get.

(Eleanor Farjeon)

'As to my return to panting war, war crying out for  
water from a myriad blackening lips, war lying in  
seeping blood with the sweat still on the cheeks, war  
looking up with squat, livid face from the churned  
mudflat - three weeks dead and only good as a  
stepping stone - no news yet.

I don't say war is all like that - those are his most  
terrible masks. sometimes war means pained ladies  
hovering over the bar with drinks and effusive  
smiles; or sometimes it means a deckchair outside  
a Watteauesque maisonette, where the vine is just  
empurpled and the aspen lips and glistens, and the  
housedog dozes in the sun...

War's classical name should have been Proteus'

(Edmund Blunden - letter to his mother, 1918)

Several years ago I helped to collect and edit  
an anthology of First World War Poems. It took much  
longer than it should and rather informed my doctoral  
years in how not to be a good supervisor (fortunately,  
several of the subsequent years were spent doing the  
exact opposite, and I'm now proud of my students, and  
I hope, my ability to chaperone them through their  
degrees with some modicum of dignity and integrity).  
However, one of the key aims of the anthology was to  
collect more female poems, and to add these to the  
tried, tested and often rather unrepresentative voices of  
the more well known war poets such as Owen, Sassoon,  
Blunden and Rosenberg.

Although Eleanor Farjeon isn't an unusual  
author to find in these collections, there's something  
about both her, and the sadness of her poem, that has  
always appealed. Farjeon was a well known children's  
writer, and also wrote the lines to the hymn 'Morning  
has Broken' (which distinguishes itself by being far  
less dirgelike than most English religious music).  
Easter Monday commemorates the more well-known  
poet Edward Thomas, who was one of her greatest  
friends. Although there's no real evidence that she  
was sexually involved with him, and Thomas was  
married to Helen Noble during their acquaintance,  
Farjeon was most certainly deeply in love with him. I  
feel a lot of sympathy for her. Most of us have probably  
experienced unrequited love at some point in our lives  
(why, Stephen Amell, why!?!), and whilst undergoing it  
yourself is something of a bitch, and knowing someone  
endlessly mooning over someone they can't have and  
won't shut up about is just boring (and sometimes,  
creepy), there's something dreadfully romantic about  
reading about it. Especially famous people, who we can  
fabricate into somehow rather more glamorous than  
ourselves. Eleanor Farjeon's writing suggests she knows  
well the gut-wrenching feeling of sickness, the need to  
behave well in the face of adversity, and the janus-like  
feelings of happiness and sorrow when with the other  
person. I've always admired her honesty, which is both  
brutal and poignant, in talking about this, especially as  
she had the courage to remain great friends with Helen  
throughout their lives.

Continued on page 49

## Morning Has Broken? Continued

In her book 'The Last Four Years', Farjeon uses a combination of Thomas's letters, joint conversations and her own writing to describe their friendship. Her grief at his passing is deep, painful, and clearly affected her for the rest of her life.

Edward Thomas died during the Battle of Arras in 1917, very shortly after being posted to the Western Front. He was 39 - and his enlistment was voluntary, since the army was not conscripting married men when he signed up in 1915 - and became a member of The Artists Rifles.

'Easter Monday' was written shortly after Farjeon heard that Thomas had been killed in action. She heard by letter, of course; Helen Thomas received the dreaded black lined envelope and brought it over to show her (officers were usually informed by telegram, but both women state it was by letter).

Later, Helen Thomas wrote to the poet Robert Frost and his wife Elinor about her husband's death:

My dear Elinor & Robert

It is now almost a month since I had the letter telling me that I should never see my beloved again. All that time I have had it in my mind to write to you again knowing well the sorrow you would be feeling, & yet I've been unable to. I have been unable to think at all. My heart & my mind have been disunited, all I knew was despair & terror & pain so terrible that I lost my hold on life for a bit. Now I am in a beautiful part of Sussex called Billingshurst, not very far from Petersfield, & in the cosiest little cottage & lovely garden & orchard with Eleanor a great peace has come to me, & amongst all the things that he loved I am feeling his nearness. Sometimes panic takes hold of me & I seem to see the years like a long road stretching away & away & me on it stumbling along all alone without him who is my very life & my all, but then it is as if he took my hand in his great strong tender one & held it & gave me courage again.

Easter Monday commemorates Edward Thomas' death from Farjeon's perspective. It's an unusual poem; women rarely wrote about the experience of death directly,

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since their experiences were often grounded in the Home Front. Although it's most certainly a complete misapprehension to assume that the women at home were ignorant of the conditions of war (in fact, Thomas' letters suggest quite the opposite as regards his description of events on the Western Front to Farjeon), they were also limited by what events they could imagine. Farjeon's poem is beautiful in its recollection of mundane detail, and her gentle affection for Thomas, conveyed through the gifts and letters that they exchange, and then fail to exchange at the end of the poem.

Easter Monday is also very much of its time. The post travelled much faster, and a letter could sometimes get to the war fronts - and be replied to - in hours. There were several domestic post deliveries a day, since of course, this is how business had to be conducted. It's also very hard to imagine the absolute kerfuffle that might happen now if I tried to send apples to a friend in the post. Comestibles! And unwrapped ones at that. Thomas's description of finding the chocolate egg inside the box (?) bag (?) letter (!) of apples is wonderful.

But there is something very dreadful about the last line - so sad and final. I've lost a couple of letters, but the idea of all that news not being read, and the reason why it wasn't, is terrible. None of Farjeon's letters to Thomas survived. Just like so many other things, they were lost 'Somewhere in France', perhaps when Thomas's possessions were cleared away or lost. This is also the opposite of what Chris Kempshall describes elsewhere. No final letter, just letters written and never opened, never read. There's such a deep sorrow there, of a life, and of stories lost.

For me, Easter Monday is also a perfect example of the Protean nature of the war, which Edmund Blunden described so perfectly in his letter to his mother (above - and of course, more letters). In my thesis, I wrote about what a mistake it is to assume that there is one way to think of World War One, and that we must look beyond the poets for the plethora of experiences; both good and bad, that make the war what it is. The war devastated lives, but it was often different, so very different, from the poems that we get slugged into us at Sixth Form College. The fact that Blunden's quote, and Farjeon's poem, are the direct result of letters; so individual, so personal to us as unique people, underscores the importance of this.

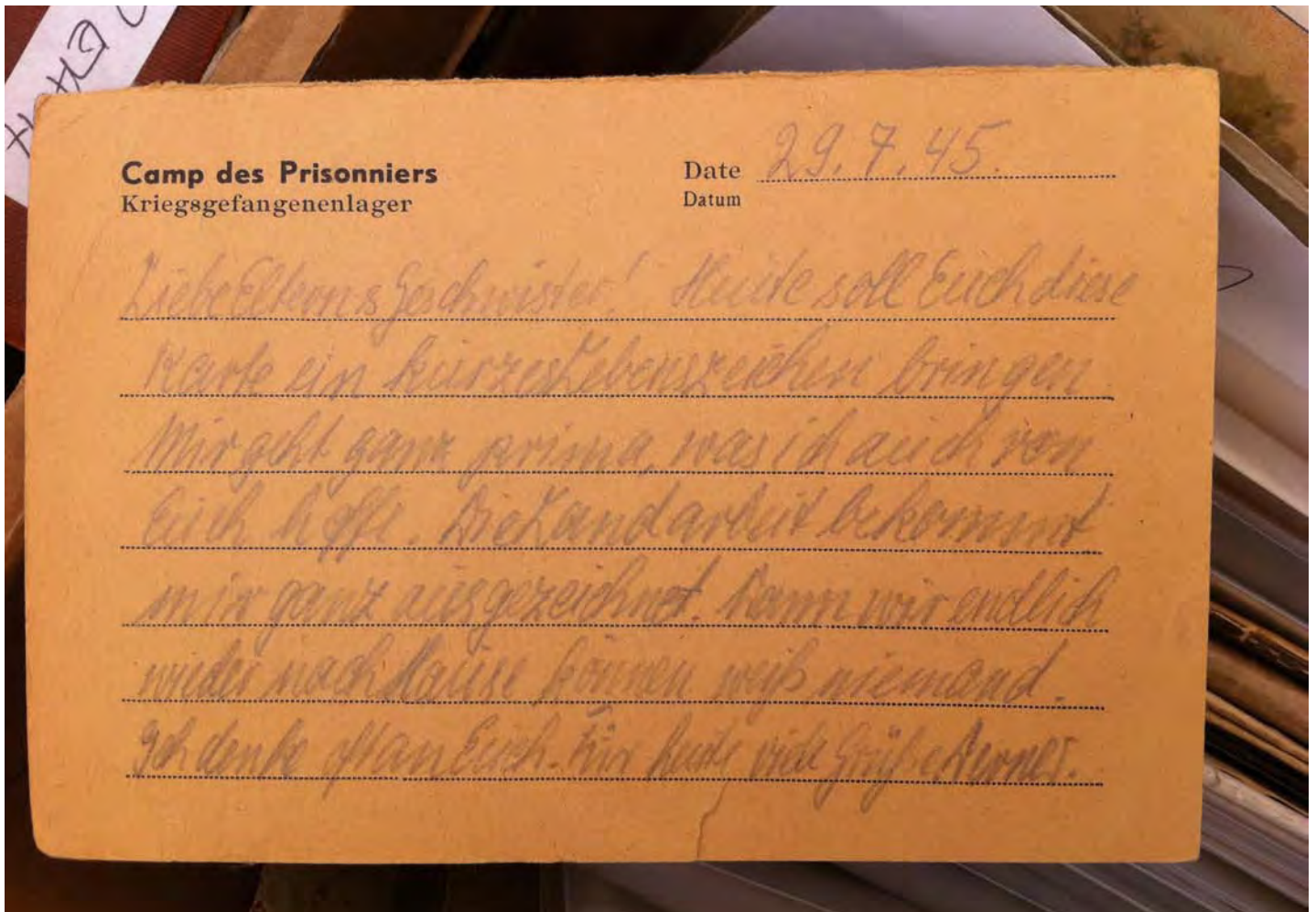
# Found In Translation?

## Deciphering a Prisoner of War Postcard

Esther MacCallum-Stewart & James Bacon with assistance from Linda Wenzelburger, Jude Melling and others

As part of writing this issue, we all found ourselves becoming more observant; sharing letters and links that either added to our knowledge, learning and taking pleasure in our shared interests. We discussed when things should be written, and when kept hidden. We looked at art and stamps and inks and links. Then on 5th August 2015, James sent us a copy of a postcard that he'd found on his travels in a box of letters...

We could see from our rather rough understanding of French and German that this card was from a Prisoner of War camp, written on the 29th September 1945, but not sent until the 10th December 1945. But none of us had sufficient translation, or an ability to read the florid handwriting. All of us were curious, so we asked our friends to help us out. What did the card say? What could we discover from it? What happened as a result was fascinating.



## Found In Translation? Continued

The first translation we got arrived within 90 minutes. Our friends were clearly as interested as we were:

### Translation 1. Linda's Friends.

From my german friend:

It's from a prison camp, saying something like the work doesn't suit me, I hope this brings you a little joy, it seems like we are never going home. I think of you, love and greetings.  
Or, nobody knows if we are ever going home..

this was 5 months after the end of the war in Europe

Depressing, but I hope since it was at the end they were able to go home...

At the same time, I had sent my friend Jude (who drew the cartoon about his father's Rotring pen in this issue), the same images. Jude teaches English to visiting students, and always has several dozen from different places around the world. The barrier here was, interestingly, not the students' German ability, but their translation for us. At almost the same time as Linda's friends were replying, I got my first response from him. And it was different; very different.

### Translation 2. Jude's First Student.

Prisoners-of-war Camp

Dear parents & siblings!

Today, this card shall give you a small sign of life. I am truly fine, I hope you are too. Canal work is really great for me. Nobody knows when we will be able to go home. I often think of you. But for now, many greetings. X (can't read the name)

This was fascinating. A different perspective (did the writer enjoy their work, or not? And why were they working in canals?), and a much more solid translation. Linda admitted that her friends had probably only given a rough translation, and over on Facebook, Jude and I were messaging each other. Was Journey Planet 51 canal work hard labour, or was it

easy? Why might the writer like it? Perhaps they liked being outside? Maybe it was specific to the area that they were being held?

At this point, Jude's second student chipped in. She'd been even more helpful, sending us a photograph where she'd spaced each line and its translation for us (we think...):

### Translation 3. Jude's Second Student.



She also had some more to add about the 'canal' work. Maybe not so wet after all:

"If i read this correctly, its Said 'Landarbeit'  
Well , Landarbeit is Working outside, for example crops  
But it may also be digging thats true  
Because of 'Kriegsgefangenenlager' Both is possible  
i guess"

So now, perhaps our prisoner wasn't working on the canals, but was digging somewhere instead. More likely, we thought, although canal digging was something PoW's in the UK were put to work doing after WW1. So, possible, but not \*that\* likely.

### 1. Jude's Mother!

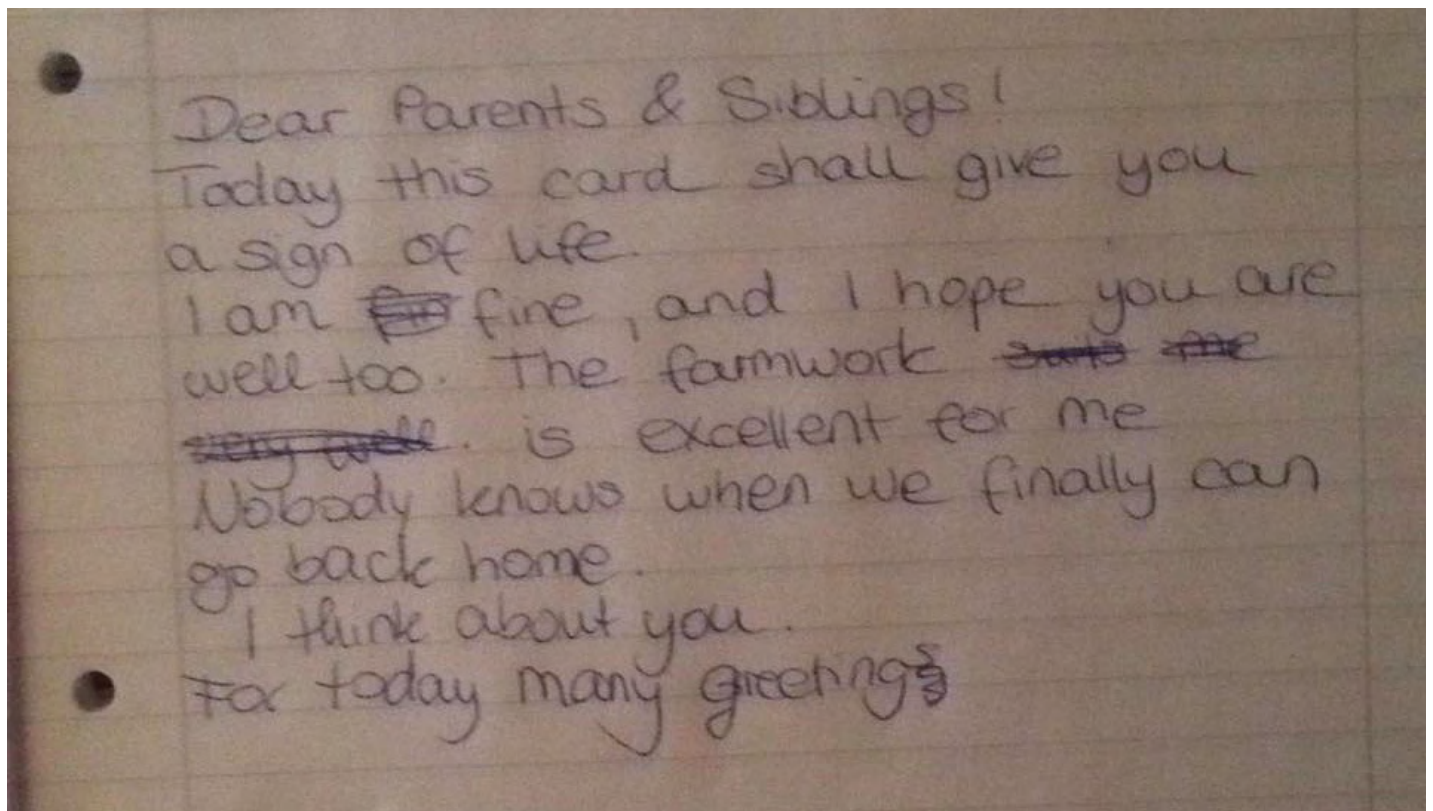
It is a truth universally acknowledged that in case of dissent, always consult one's mother for the final word. She doesn't have to be right, but her word is probably final. Several hours later, I got a short message from Jude saying that he'd shown the mail to his

mother, who was also able to read German. She concurred that 'Landarbeit' made it more likely to be farm work than canal work, although, as an afterthought, we also considered that irrigation might be one intermediary.

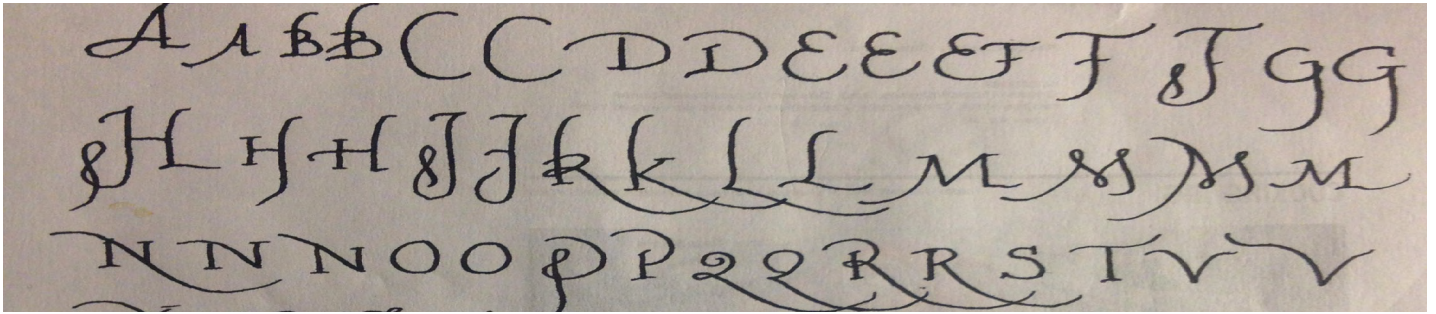
Of course, this is how historians thrive. Deciphering letters has fascinated Chris Kempshall enough to write a thesis about them (see 'From Somewhere in France'). But for me, it's interesting that this letter raised more questions than it laid to rest. Our discussions and debates in themselves became an interesting path; never quite sure what the postcard meant, but also finding, for a moment, sympathy with this person writing to loved ones and assuring them (perhaps), that despite not knowing when they would be home, they were still (probably) enjoying their work. This is something Chris also discusses, when he drily points out that there is a limit to the amount of horrible letters one wants to write home. Why traumatise your family with a situation that they can't do anything about? So perhaps our author was simply saying they were enjoying what sounds like extremely hard work outside, merely to comfort those reading. The fact that it took several months for the card to actually be posted might also support this. If letters were limited to PoWs, it might be more likely that they would write letters of reassurance than horrible travails.

What was most interesting here? Deciphering the letter or the letter itself? When James found it, he was excited enough to photograph the card and send it to us. We enjoyed the process of uncovering meaning, but then we also enjoyed not being able to give the card a final 'meaning'. Even the fact that the card was given away is interesting, because it makes us ask why that might have happened. Was it junk, someone's house clearance? Did the person it was sent to die? Perhaps they simply didn't see the letter as worth much - even war museums don't take every single correspondence they are given - there would simply not be enough room (or money) to store and preserve them all. So in the card, we see a series of other stories unfolding (for stories they are - we're fabricating by this point), whilst we scratch at them blindly.

Barthes said, famously, that the death of the author comes at the cost of the birth of the reader. Our card became something like that, surrounded in other tales as we retold its translation, its meaning. Whilst talking about this to James Wheale (who writes in this issue about his passionate relationship with food and letters), he told me about an artist who performs translations, and sees them as art in themselves. Our little card seems to be just that. We haven't unlocked it, just given it a new tale.



Dear Parents & Siblings!  
Today this card shall give you  
a sign of life.  
I am ~~am~~ fine, and I hope you are  
well too. The farmwork ~~is~~ ~~is~~ ~~is~~ ~~is~~  
~~is~~ is excellent for me.  
Nobody knows when we finally can  
go back home.  
I think about you.  
For today many greetings



# Legibility & LETTERS

When we first proposed this issue of JP, this section was going to be the bulk of the issue, although we quickly realised that Letters from Absentia was going to be more than pieces from the past. Here we've got some of the true greats of UK and Irish SFF – Banks and Heaney and O'Brien and Pratchett, and we've also got letters of thanks, from friends and family and fans. It's a mix, and it really shows why this issue got so big – there's so much to talk about!

“I wish everyone would write more small notes to each other, and I hope the recipients will tuck them away to be saved”

Anne Gray

# Correspondence Crosses Time and Generations

Anne Gray

I recently watched *If I Stay*, a mainstream coming-of-age film with a heart-wrenching fantasy twist in which the protagonist's spirit is thrown from her body in a car crash that kills her parents (this much is given away in the trailer). She is free to roam the halls of the hospital and find out what's happened to the rest of the family while her body lies in a coma, and the main plot point is that she is trying to decide whether it's time to go or time to live. In the film, her grandfather comes to sit with her, seems to hear her question of what should she do, and has a sweet heart-to-heart with her both then and in a flashback (the movie is 75% flashbacks) to another important moment in her life, when he made a point of encouraging her in a way he never had with her dad. I cried a lot during that movie, but at that moment I was suddenly crying about the fact that I never had any sort of heart-to-heart like that with either of my grandfathers, who both died when I was young. Yet through the power of correspondence, I have had the chance to know each of them a little better, and feel some of the encouragement they might have wanted me to feel.

My mother's father, Russell Welch, died in 1985, right after Thanksgiving, shortly before my 11th birthday. I remember that night (the call, the late night trip to the hospital, the way I held my stuffed Ewok Wicket tight the whole time), and I remember Grandpa Welch a little, too. I remember throwing a baseball back and forth with him, and going to Grandma and Grandpa's house with the big Welch family all around, eating huge amounts of food and listening to the adults arguing politics. I was the youngest of all the cousins when I was born. Here's a picture of Grandpa holding me, shortly thereafter.



Grandpa and Grandma Welch were Republicans, and had two sons who also turned out Republican, plus my mom, the rebel. The Democrat who married a working class sandal-wearing bearded hippie who rode a motorcycle and already had two kids from an earlier marriage: my father. The two of them also had the only two girls in the family back then: my sister and me. (My half-brothers were raised separately from us, as their mom took them to Iowa when I was only about three. They'll come back into this story later.)

We weren't completely opposed in views; Grandma had been a social worker and was ardently pro-choice, for instance, as were we, and they both loved to dance as did all my family (the way the story goes, Grandma and Grandpa fell in love on the dance floor). But Grandpa was a hunter and I guess had other reasons, and anyway he was a Republican. He even ran for office as a Republican (unsuccessfully, but there was this amazing stand-up in their basement depicting him riding an elephant; even though he didn't take office, that was a key part of who he was). Mom and dad brought us up in Ann Arbor, Michigan, a hippie liberal enclave if there ever was one. For a long time, my Welch relatives were the only Republicans I knew.

Mostly what I knew about Grandpa was that he laughed, drank, smoked, had strong opinions, lived on the shore of a river on a wonderful stretch of land, some of which we helped landscape, loved baseball and basketball and football

Continued on page 55

## Correspondence Continued

(especially the Michigan Wolverines), and used to be a farmer while also working for GM. And also that he and Grandma traveled on their vacations and had accumulated some of the finest older people I had ever met to be in their circle of friends, many of whom were so frequently present when we visited their house that I thought they were family. And they had the most wonderful parties, with lots of sitting around just chatting and hanging out.

Mom learned that from them, and she passed those values on to me, and that's surely part of why I run science fiction conventions today.

Anyway, one year, some time after Grandpa had passed away, an old friend of his came to visit Ann Arbor, and my family toured him around. He had attended the University of Michigan with Grandpa in the 1930s and they stayed friends the rest of their lives. His name was Bob Harnden, and somehow "Uncle Bob" and I struck up a correspondence.

Grandpa wasn't around when I went off to college, but Uncle Bob was. We continued to swap letters while I was at Grinnell College, and sometimes he'd send me clippings. He would tease me about my liberal views, but also taught me about how hunters are usually environmentalists, in their own way, with a great love for being outdoors and a specific philosophy about managing game animals. Between him and Grandma I came to appreciate that even when we strongly disagree, the other person may be a thoughtful, intelligent human being who just has a very different perspective. Through him I got a chance to learn a lot more about his perspective and, in a way, about Grandpa's.

I also got to learn a lot more about the end of life. Uncle Bob lived in a residence where they had three sections of the building; one for people who could have an apartment fairly independently, one for people who needed some assistance, and one for people who were dependent on it. That way you could stay in the same community no matter what your health. There was a central dining room, if you wanted to be social, and organized social events. While he was there he started "keeping company" with another Journey Planet 55 older lady, whose family was in

touch with us when he eventually died.

Before that, though, my sister Sarah and I graduated from college the same year and went on a 3 1/2 month road trip, one of the highlights of which was a visit with Uncle Bob. He lived in Memphis, Tennessee, so he took us to tour Graceland, and out to dinner (best steak I ever ate). But the best moments were when he took us to Rhodes College to show us his wife's collection of North American Native art and sculptures which he had donated to the school in her name, and when he showed us around his own apartment, got out the photo albums, and told us stories about her.

Dorothy and Bob fell in love so fast, he told us, that he asked her to marry him only six weeks after they started dating. From the glint in his eye every time he talked about her, it was clear that had been the perfect thing to do. I would think back to Uncle Bob when I met Brian and we fell headlong in love with each other right when I was still recovering from a failed first marriage, and everyone including my own analytical brain was warning me to take it slow. Uncle Bob was no longer with us, but in a way it felt like I had permission from him to go ahead and take things as they came, following my heart. Brian first asked me to marry him only 3 weeks after we met, and I said yes. We told the rest of the world after over a year of reinforcing that idea by proposing to each other, by which time the question had shifted from "Will you marry me?" to "Aren't we married yet?" I don't know if we will be as inseparable as "DorseyBob," as my mom and her brothers sometimes called Dorothy and Bob, but we can hope.

My father's father, Clifford Gay, died in 1977, when I was two and a half. I have no memories of Grandpa Cliff at all. Grandpa Cliff also worked for GM, but in a more working class position than Grandpa Welch, who was more white collar. His technical skills and metalworking tools facilitated my father's love for engineering through building and testing rockets in the back yard, and most of the stories I heard about him were about that. For most of my life I had seen almost no pictures of him, and no idea how he felt about me.

Grandma did not have any pictures of him on display at her house, nor did she tell stories about him



most of the time. My mom told me recently that Grandma had kicked Grandpa out of their bed when my Aunt Pam was born, after which he slept in the garage. That could explain some of that. I did eventually hear the story of how they met – Her walk home coincided with his drive home from work, and he had noticed her, as she was very pretty, and one day he offered her a ride. But my image of him as a grandfather did not gain details until three things happened.

The first is that I grew closer to my half brothers as we got older, and also started corresponding with their mom, my father's first wife, via Facebook. The second was that my father finally processed a bunch of film from when I was a baby and a little kid. And the third was that my mom passed on to me a box of mementos from my early life, and that turned out to include no fewer than eight cards and letters my Grandpa Cliff had sent to me in just the second year of my life. It kind of stuns me to think how much correspondence I might have gotten from him if he hadn't gotten sick and died shortly after I turned two.

These things gave me material through which to appreciate the love he clearly had for us kids, and for me in particular, and to actually grieve for the loss of him and what he might have meant to me if I had known him longer.

My brothers, Ric and Dave, are 11 and 9 years older than me. Their mother, Sydney, stayed in Flint, Michigan while my father was drafted, joined the Air Force (to avoid the Army – this was during the Vietnam War), and was sent away first to Basic, and then to his assigned post in Great Falls, Montana. They were already divorced by this time, and in fact my dad married my mom just before he was drafted, so she joined him in Montana and my sister Sarah was born out there in 1972. But I'm sure it was hard for Sydney when dad moved out of state. I learned later that it would have been even harder except that my Grandpa Cliff took the boys for the day on Saturday every week.

No wonder my brothers remember Grandpa really well! I hear he was really loving, fun, and welcoming. As an adult I came to know from my grandmother that my father and Sydney had eloped one Christmas with the help of Sydney's mom; clearly Grandma had not approved of that, and her retelling

of the story was quite dour. Thus I'm sure it was due to Grandpa, not Grandma, that they took the boys for a day each weekend, though I'm also sure she helped take care of them at the time. My sister and I visited Grandma when I was a kid, of course, but fairly rarely. She never displayed the warmth that I now know came from Grandpa, nor showed any great interest in doing things with us, and she only came down to visit Ann Arbor once a year, for Art Fair.

My father was so devastated by the loss of his father (combined soon after with the departure of Sydney and the boys to Iowa), that he never processed most of his film from 1975 – 1978, at least not while I was still a child. Those rolls of film went into the freezer, and moved from house to house, freezer to freezer, until recently when he started to get worried that film processing materials would get impossible to acquire. So he processed his film, but didn't get prints made right away, because dad is a photographer and an artist, so he wanted to color correct and perfect the images before printing them. When I found out there were 14 rolls of film waiting to be seen I wasn't that patient and convinced him to get all those rolls of film scanned. At the same time, I decided to go through the stacks of slides he \*had\* processed before then, and scan those. (They weren't all in the same place but I started with the ones I could find because you have to start somewhere). All of a sudden, I had pictures of myself as a baby. Those include this one, of me being held by Grandpa Clifford Gay.



Wow. Don't I look, I don't know. Happy? Loved? All that and more. I can't be sad, looking at that picture.

Continued on page 57

## Correspondence Continued

Well, I can, but I'm still smiling at the same time. (The same scanning project also gave me the picture of Grandpa Welch I included above, which I saw for the first time just a few years ago.)

So what about Grandpa Cliff's cards and letters? Those are cool to see too. He sent me something for my First Birthday, Christmas, Valentine's Day, Easter, Just Because, Thanksgiving, Birthday, and Christmas again. Notes on the backs from my parents tell me some came with money enclosed, and not just the birthday cards. (Note to self and other parents: write dates and little notes like that on your kids' memorabilia. It makes a world of difference, understanding context.)

The longest note from my Grandpa Gay reads thusly:

Flint, Mich.,  
Sept. 23, 1976

Hi Little Anny!

How are you getting along? I'll bet you can run faster than ever. Is Momy taking good Care of you?

Your Daddy tells me that you are learning more words Every day. It won't be long now before you will be going to school with Sarah, and that will be a lot of fun.

You be a good Girl Anny and I will come down and see you one of these Day's.

Love Grandpa Cliff

P.S: Here is something for you to put in your Bank.

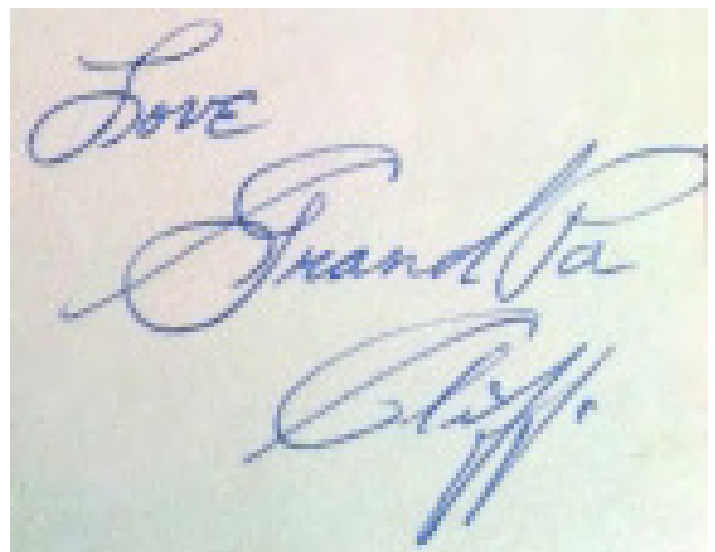
And there's a gorgeous, swirly signature. I love that signature. (Sometimes the cards were from Grandma and Grandpa but it was all in Grandpa's handwriting up until he died.) My dad tells me that Grandpa didn't write very often, but he practiced his signature a lot because he thought it was important. My dad similarly has a very distinctive, attractive signature. Me? Not so

Journey Planet 57 much.

What I've learned from that note: There was someone who called me Annie when I was little who spelled it with a 'Y'. I may have inherited my natural tendency to capitalize important words pseudo-randomly. And when I grew up to be designated "The word goddess" by a classmate in high school for winning an argument with our literature teacher about whether or not "shackle" was both a noun and a verb, I was in a way along the long path of responding to encouragement sent by Grandpa Cliff.

You were right, Grandpa. School was a lot of fun. I wish you could come see me one of these Day's, I really do (misplaced apostrophe and all). I have always tried really hard to be a good girl, so I think you owe me a visit. In the meantime, I will keep showing Rosie your cards and pictures, and we will not forget you.

I wish everyone would write more small notes to each other, and I hope the recipients will tuck them away to be saved. Especially notes of love, written to children and grandchildren. We can't travel through time, but our words can. And thus, so can our love. Now excuse me while I go work on my signature.



Journey Planet



Since 2011, the Yogscast has been one of the most popular YouTube channels in the UK. The group make videogame walkthroughs, reviews and Let's Plays. With over a million subscriptions for her channel, Hannah gets a lot of mail from fans around the world. Every December, she also records an 'advent calendar', where she opens presents from fans and friends. Every January, she replies to every single piece of fanmail she's received. Last year this meant that she wrote nearly 250 letters.

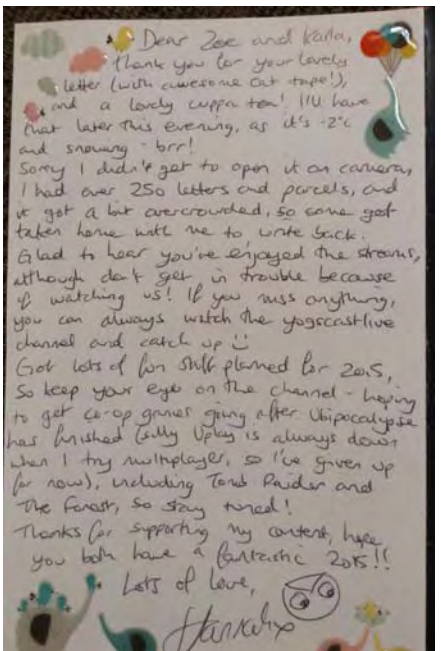


It's important to say thank-you. We're taught to do it from an early age and most of us probably also remember being sat down after birthdays and other family events, and being asked to write letters to distant (or not so distant) relatives, thanking them for presents that were probably bought in lieu by our parents, but nevertheless were a kind addition to the things we opened every year. We probably didn't enjoy the writing of the letters as much as we did playing with the toys, but thank-you letters are a good way for kids to learn the importance of saying thanks.



Hannah's letters are sort of thank-yous to thank-yous. Fans write to say thanks, and she writes back. She decorates all of the letters with stickers, using hundreds every year. Below are some of the many letters that she has sent, and which fans obligingly took photos of for this issue.

### Esther MacCallum-Stewart and Hannah Rutherford



From the mid 90's to early 2000's I was the editor of the Terry Pratchett magazine, The Wizards Knob. Terry was to end up calling us the unofficially official fanzine. This was in the days before the internet was readily accessible to the majority of us and letters were the de rigeur means of messaging.

# Letters from Pratchett

started to impact on his writing. As his and Discworld's popularity increased, his appearances were becoming 4+ hours long. I used to attend most of the dates

selling the magazine and his stamina was incredible, talking and signing well into the night in some cases.

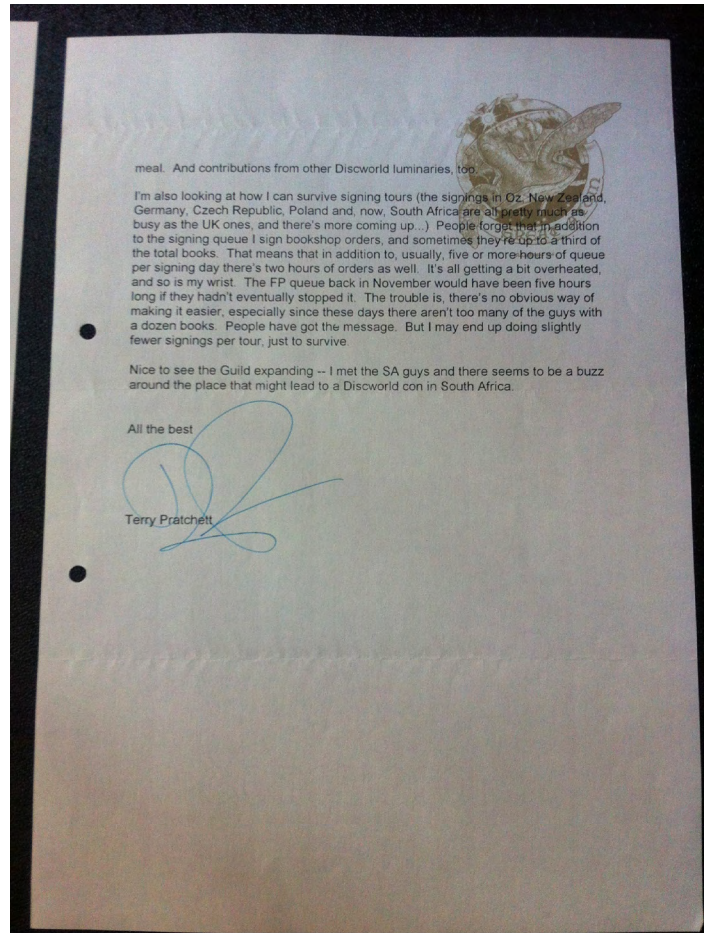
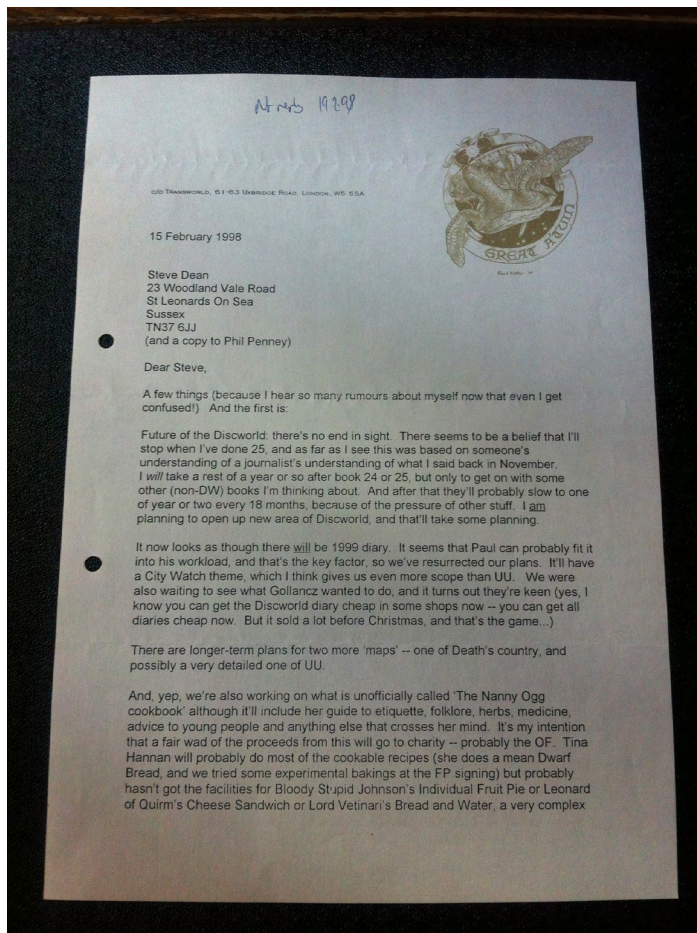
My magazine came out quarterly and I contacted not only Terry, but other Discworld personalities to gather information before putting the magazine together. In my files I have more letters from Terry, Josh Kirby, Paul Kidby, and others.

As the popularity of the internet increased and e-mail became more common, the news I was getting from Terry and his agent were becoming old by the time TWK came out and eventually I decided to call it quits. This seems to have happened to the majority of the snail mail based fanzines.

The letter featured was typical of those I received from Terry, giving me the heads up on what he was up to and what books were due to be released; but this was the first time he had discussed slowing down and reducing his workload. He talks about how the signing tours had

Hope you enjoy this issue of Journey Planet and remember the joys of receiving and writing letters.

Steve Dean



c/o TRANSWORLD, 61-63 UXBRIDGE ROAD, LONDON, W5 5SA

15 February 1998

Steve Dean  
23 Woodland Vale Road  
St Leonards On Sea  
Sussex  
TN37 6JJ  
(and a copy to Phil Penney)

Dear Steve,

A few things (because I hear so many rumours about myself now that even I get confused!) And the first is:

Future of the Discworld: there's no end in sight. There seems to be a belief that I'll stop when I've done 25, and as far as I see this was based on someone's understanding of a journalist's understanding of what I said back in November. I will take a rest of a year or so after book 24 or 25, but only to get on with some other (non-DW) books I'm thinking about. And after that they'll probably slow to one of year or two every 18 months, because of the pressure of other stuff. I am planning to open up new area of Discworld, and that'll take some planning.

It now looks as though there will be 1999 diary. It seems that Paul can probably fit it into his workload, and that's the key factor, so we've resurrected our plans. It'll have a City Watch theme, which I think gives us even more scope than UU. We were also waiting to see what Gollancz wanted to do, and it turns out they're keen (yes, I know you can get the Discworld diary cheap in some shops now -- you can get all diaries cheap now. But it sold a lot before Christmas, and that's the game...)

There are longer-term plans for two more 'maps' -- one of Death's country, and possibly a very detailed one of UU.

And, yep, we're also working on what is unofficially called 'The Nanny Ogg cookbook' although it'll include her guide to etiquette, folklore, herbs, medicine, advice to young people and anything else that crosses her mind. It's my intention that a fair wad of the proceeds from this will go to charity -- probably the OF. Tina Hannan will probably do most of the cookable recipes (she does a mean Dwarf Bread, and we tried some experimental bakings at the FP signing) but probably hasn't got the facilities for Bloody Stupid Johnson's Individual Fruit Pie or Leonard of Quirm's Cheese Sandwich or Lord Vetinari's Bread and Water, a very complex



meal. And contributions from other Discworld luminaries, too.

I'm also looking at how I can survive signing tours (the signings in Oz, New Zealand, Germany, Czech Republic, Poland and, now, South Africa are all pretty much as busy as the UK ones, and there's more coming up...) People forget that in addition to the signing queue I sign bookshop orders, and sometimes they're up to a third of the total books. That means that in addition to, usually, five or more hours of queue per signing day there's two hours of orders as well. It's all getting a bit overheated, and so is my wrist. The FP queue back in November would have been five hours long if they hadn't eventually stopped it. The trouble is, there's no obvious way of making it easier, especially since these days there aren't too many of the guys with a dozen books. People have got the message. But I may end up doing slightly fewer signings per tour, just to survive.

Nice to see the Guild expanding -- I met the SA guys and there seems to be a buzz around the place that might lead to a Discworld con in South Africa.

All the best

Terry Pratchett

191 Strand Road, Dublin 4, Ireland

Fax: (353-1) 260 0807

Erin M Underwood

4 February, 2008

Dear Erin Underwood,

Your letter arrived and I'm sorry that I have to respond with a 'no' to your request for an interview on Beowulf matters. All I can usefully say on the poem I said in the introduction, and I'm not familiar enough with adaptations/films etc. to be of any use to your thesis.

I regret this, and the brevity of this response, but there we are ...

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Seamus Heaney". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Seamus Heaney

# Yeats' Chequered Past

Pádraig Ó Méalóid



For your letters-related issue, here's a piece for you which I may have told you before.

The Irish artist Jack B Yeats - who worked in early British comics, before becoming a properly painterly painter - used to have an account with Greene's Bookshop, in the days that one had things like that. He'd order books from them, and they'd send them on, and every few months they'd send him an invoice, which he'd pay by cheque. The thing is, he's send the cheque by post and, more often than not, the envelope the cheque arrived in

had been doodled on by Yeats.

Now, did Greene's keep those envelopes, with those drawings by an important Irish artist? No, they didn't. They threw them out. Let me point out that I recently sold a copy of a book by Yeats, with an original drawing by him on the title page, to a well-known Dublin antiquarian bookshop on behalf of a friend, which I got €600 for (from which I got a small honorarium of €100 for my trouble). So, who knows what those envelopes would have been worth, if they'd kept them.

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## The Banksonian Correspondence

David Haddock

In a file in a box under the bed in the spare room is a bundle of about twenty letters from Iain Banks. I started writing to him early in 2004 when I sent him the first issue of *The Banksonian* (my fanzine about his works) and continued until shortly before his death just under a decade later.

That first issue celebrated the twentieth anniversary of the publication of *The Wasp Factory* and also Iain's 50th birthday. I sent it to him via the office of his agent and was quite surprised that I soon got a thank you note back directly from him that included his home address. In the first few years of the fanzine I produced an issue every three months, and each of these contained a 'book biography' describing the writing, publication and reception of one of his books. To do



this I read many articles about, and interviews with, Iain which generated contradictory material. So after a first draft of an article I would write to him with some questions to clarify these inconsistencies, and also ask about his forthcoming public appearances for the diary.

Continued on page 63

## Banksonian Correspondence Continued

Thus the initial correspondence was pretty dry and factual and in some cases Iain's bullet pointed answers would not make much sense without the list of questions I had sent. Over time, however, the exchange developed as did our relationship. Having seen Iain at one or two book tour events each year he established who I was, probably as I would usually take the latest book and one of my editions of *The Wasp Factory* to a signing. A game developed with Iain keen to identify the country from the cover - the only one he ever got wrong was a Chinese edition which at first glance he thought was Japanese. At the 2006 Eastercon he bought me a drink, and as Iain started going to conventions more frequently than he did in the early 2000s and he accepted Guest of Honour roles, our paths crossed more often, but the letters continued.

The letters themselves are pretty standard looking, somewhat like my bank statements which are also in the spare room. A white DL envelope with a clear address window through which his mono-spaced font could be seen, and always a gold coloured non-denominated first class stamp in the corner. My wife learnt to spot Iain's letters due to their consistent appearance, and so would let me know that one had arrived. I usually managed to leave work on time on those days. Royal Mail in their wisdom tweaked my postcode in 2009 and Iain was one of the few who have continued to use the old one. I got to recognise his correspondence patterns. When Iain was working on a book he tried to work a Monday to Friday, 9 to 5 schedule so he could socialise with friends that worked that way, although sometimes inspiration would strike him out of hours. He therefore tended to deal with his mail at the weekend. If I sent him a letter in the middle of the week I would usually get a reply by the Tuesday and so the latest information straight from the horse's mouth could go into the fanzine. Iain eventually sent me his email address but at my request we carried on the paper based correspondence as I explained to him that when challenged about a fact in the fanzine I wanted to have something with Iain's signature that I could wave to confirm what I had written had an impeccable source. That would have been harder with an email and Iain agreed, although we did exchange emails for expediency when he was ill.

Over the years I have seen quite a few letters from Iain offered for sale on Internet bookselling sites like Abebooks, and these often have scans which show that he included his home address. So what did Iain gain from assiduously writing back to those that wrote to him? He would say in interviews that he was a fan of his fans, appreciating the fact that they appreciated his work. Evidently if they took the trouble to write to him he would write back. He was astounded by the "outpouring of love, affection and respect" that he received after the announcement of his illness which mostly came via the Banksophilia website set up so he could communicate with his fans. There were also those that contacted him directly including Michel Palin and Daniel Craig, which allowed Iain to claim he got a postcard from James Bond. Contemplating this in a post there he hoped that "been made to feel very special indeed" was something that it should be true of "every author, to a greater or lesser degree". He therefore decided that he needed "to tell other writers how much their work has meant to me while they are (and I am) still alive." A couple of weeks later he reported that he "sent what was basically a fan letter to Alasdair Gray a couple of weeks ago, telling him how much his work has meant to me, then last night I got to tell Mike (as in M John) Harrison something very similar. Doing that made me feel good too."

So if you like the work of an author or a particular book touched you more than most then take the plunge, write to the author and say so. You never know where it will lead.

A handwritten signature in black ink. The word 'JOURNEY' is written in a stylized, blocky font with a large, decorative 'J' on the left. The word 'PLANET' is written below it in a similar, slightly more compact style. The signature is written on a white background.



# Jimmy Hendrix, Pen Wielder

James Bacon

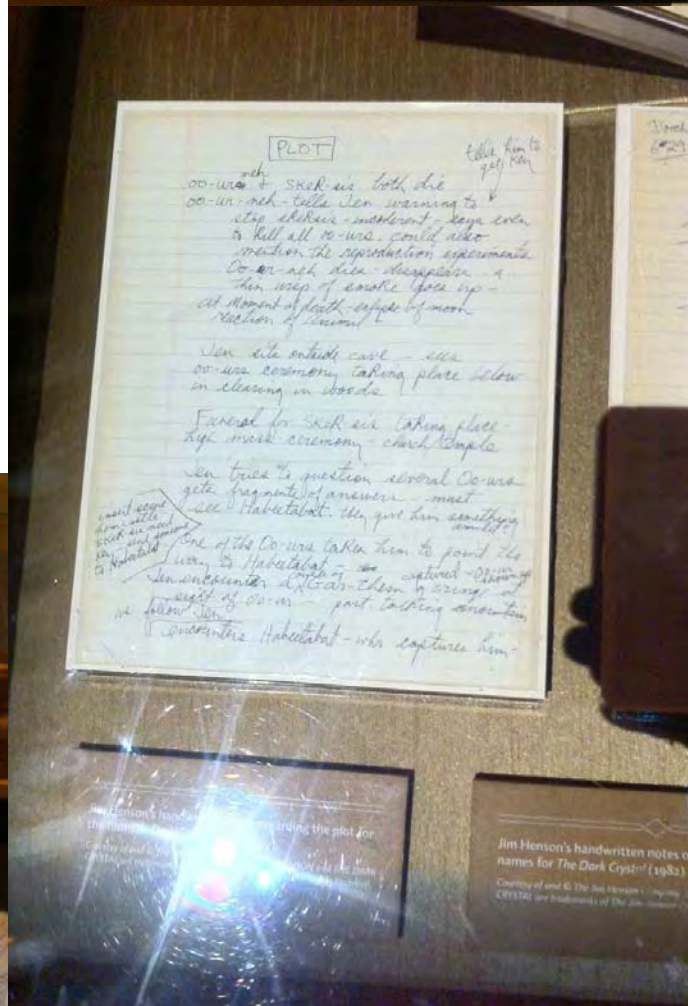
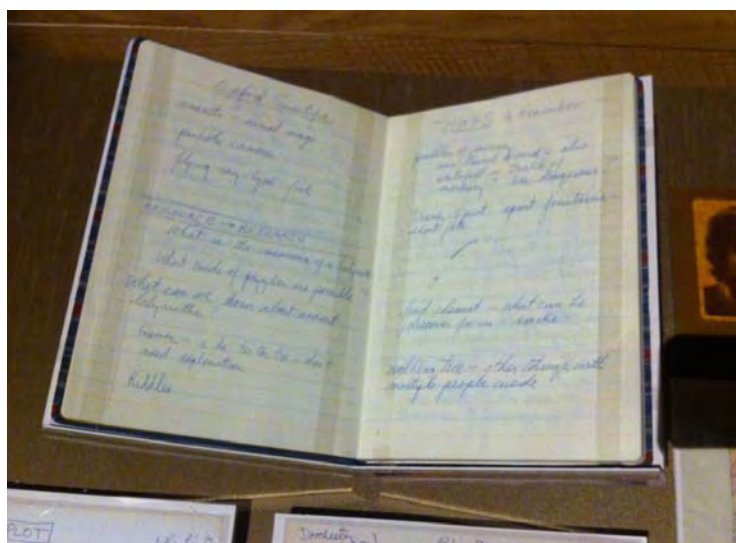
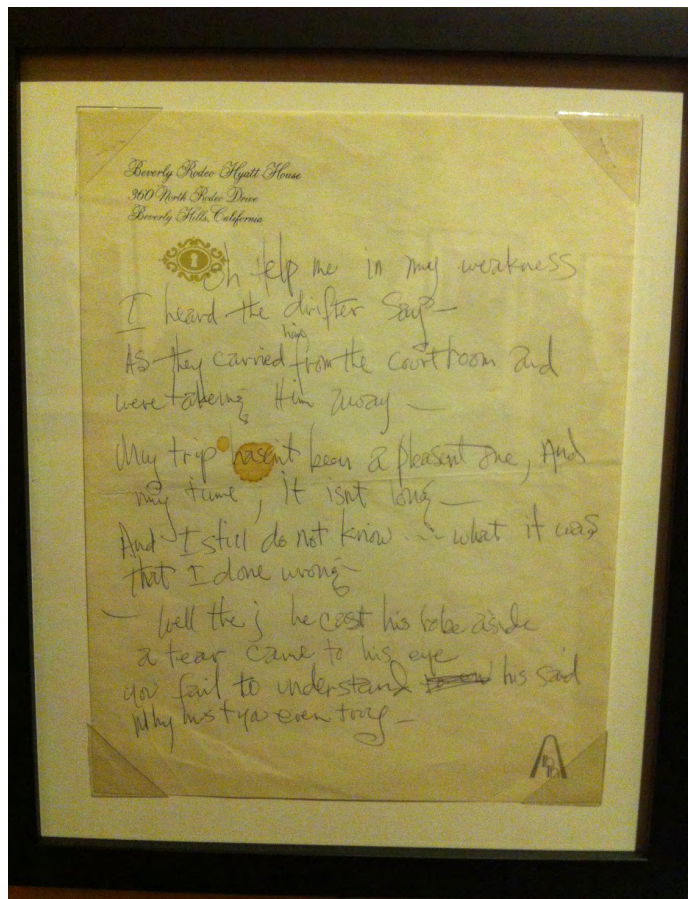
The EMP museum in Seattle is currently hosting a three year Jimmy Hendrix exhibit about his arrival in London and immediate success - he became a star in a matter of weeks.

Hendrix wrote wonderful letters, to his father whilst in the army and subsequently on tour, beautiful love letters and letters including lyrics for songs. His hand was neat and I was taken by the exhibits, some of which I was able to grab snapshots of.

I have loved James Marshal Hendrix since my brother bought a cover album ( on tape) in the eighties and I fell in love with his music.

Since then I've found continuous synchronicity with him. The 1995 comic Voodoo Child with art by Bill Sienckiwic; I suffered injuries when capturing a flung and burnt guitar from a cover band, his love of science fiction, his band mate Noel Redding coming from Ireland and this year, an unexpected exhibition including letters and finally picking up stamps from the US Postal Servies commemorating him.

The more I consider Hendrix the more I find lovely connections to make me appreciate him.





# Pen Friends

Cher François,

Helena Nash

Hello. How are you? I am well. I hope your family is well also. Thank you again for agreeing to be my pen friend, or should that be *ami du stylo*? My French is still not very good, I am afraid! I keep making up words that sound about right, or else I just use an English word but try to say it in a French way, like when you came over on the school exchange trip and you and my brother were mucking about on our way to the shops and I tried to ask you to act a bit more sensibly, only it came out sounding like *sensibleber*, which now that I think about it even if pronounced correctly probably actually means sensitive or careful of.

Do you know how they chose who from our school got to be pen friends with whom? I'm not sure how it works. I think our French teacher Miss Starkey got us all first to write short introductory letters, addressed to nobody, describing a little bit about ourselves. Maybe your English teacher did the same with you? I think I said that I like reading and that I live in a house in the woods with my parents and my brother, and that I have a small white dog called Sam. I can't remember much about yours, except that you included a photo of you and your big black dog, Marat.

to match up our letters, or did she just pair us up at random? I like to think that she put some thought into it: English teenager, quiet, bright but not the brightest, funny but not the funniest; would go well with tall French boy, easy-going, confident, also has dog. Or something like that. I like to think that she did. That she had noticed that I was a bit shy, a bit nervous, and that someone like you might make a nice pen friend.

Did you enjoy your stay with us? I hope so. The visit to the Tower of London was OK I suppose, but it wasn't exactly fun, was it? It was mainly queuing and then shuffling around to look at a load of old stuff. I quite liked the room full of spears and suits of armour though. Maybe we should have gone out and done more fun things while you were here, like going to an adventure park or a zoo or a football match or something. But our family never had anyone from abroad to stay before, and I don't think we were very good at it.

I was a bit rubbish about talking French to you, wasn't I? I'm OK in class, and am excellent at spelling tests (though not as good as in German; I always get the accents over the letter e the wrong way round). But I sort of froze up when I had to speak to a real French person(you). Good thing my dad can speak French pretty well, or you would have had nobody to speak to. Sorry about that.

Journey Planet 65 I wonder if Miss Starkey tried

And sorry for not coming to France for the return part of the exchange trip. I know you wanted me to come. All my friends went over to stay with your classmates. Most of them anyway, apart from the odd weirdo scaredy-cat like me who didn't want to be away from home. How ridiculous was that? Most teenagers want nothing more than to stay out late, hang around with their friends, go to strange places and have adventures. But I'm sorry to say I was just plain afraid. Afraid to leave home, afraid to have to speak French for a week, afraid of - I don't know - having to eat frogs or snails' legs or something, I suppose.

You must have felt stupid, not having anyone to stay with you when the rest of the English kids came over. But I hope you at least went home with some good stories (real or made up) of your time en Angleterre. That's the bit I really regret about chicken-ing out, if I'm honest; not the trip to France itself, but the stories that all my friends in class came back with. They all came back giggling and whispering about sneaking out, secretly getting drunk, getting off with Jean-Paul this and Claudette that. Not that I actually fancied doing any of those things myself, but to have been part of a story, to be acknowledged by the other kids as having been there, would have been nice. If I felt like a bit of an oddball before the exchange trip, I was definitely an outsider post-exchange.

Finally, I must apologise for not writing to you for such a long time. I guess I just felt embarrassed about letting you down like that. I think we exchanged

a few more letters, but I'm afraid it was probably me who stopped writing first. That was wrong of me. For all I know, some of the others are still pen friends, or more likely Facebook friends. Are you on le livre du visage? I looked for you earlier, but there were lots of people with the same name, and none of them looked like a forty-something version of a tall French boy who had a big black dog called Marat.

Marat's dead now. And probably has been for over twenty years. It's funny to be able to write that with such certainty about a pet I never met. My dog Sam's long dead now too, of course. And Miss Starkey, not long after I left high school. Knocked down by the side of the road after her car broke down, I heard. What a sad, stupid way to go. She was alright, Miss Starkey. A bit Miss Jean Brodie-ish by all accounts, but alright to us bright but not the brightest, funny but not the funniest kids.

Is it too late to pick up where we left off, do you think? I think I'm a little braver now; I've been to Paris a couple of times and have even managed a few halting conversations with the locals, though it seems that most of them speak English far too well these days. If you get this letter, please let me know how you are these days. If you have a new dog, maybe you could send me a picture.

Meilleurs vœux,

Helena



# Single Narrow Gold Band - Flann's Pen

James Bacon

I learned that Boston University had purchased the belongings of Brian O'Nolan (Flann O'Brien) and ensconced them in the Burns Library for safe keeping and research during sometime in the 1980's. I was fascinated that they listed all the belongings, and amongst the hat and wallet, notebooks and ledgers of newspaper clippings, I noted there was a pen.

A fountain Pen. His pen.

And so began research. I contacted the University, and Shelly Barber soon was in contact and helping me. Shelly took some photos of the pen. It was a Conway Stewart, black, with a single band. The photo was fantastic, but there was something missing – the number.



All Conway Stewart pens have an identifying number, along with the company logo. Yet the indentation can be so slight that it is very hard to see, even in good light; and such was the case with these photos. No one was sure of the make, let alone model of this pen at the University.

The world's online Conway Stewart expert was Jonathan Donahaye, but he passed away a number of years ago. However, he kindly left a huge website, cataloguing and photographing the hundreds of pens this English company produced.

(<http://jonathandonahaye.conwaystewart.info/csbook/Journey Planet 67 page1.htm#cs17>)



Soon I discovered the joy of the Conway Stewart numbering system, in that there was actually no system at all. I considered carefully the bands on the lid, as these seemed to differ both in number and width variety. The pen I was after had one band.



Soon though, I was flummoxed. The cap was wrong for a 45, which was flat. Could it be a 15, which was issued with one or no band? The 1968 70 looked too tapered, and I thought the 75 from 1957 to 1963 had a silver band. This made me question the colour of the band in the photo, surely it was gold.



Could it be the 85 from 1956, or perhaps a 115, which was an export version of the 85? This made sense, as a pen purchased in Ireland would be an export. Although, then again, Ireland has been seen in a different light by British companies. The 150 was too tapered and nearly too late, and the 386 once again had a flat cap.

Eventually I decided it must be the Conway Stewart 28 and Jonathan had the details:

28 (The) Conway Stewart: (1949-63? SH) 1 narrow band, diamond clip, nib CS 5, (matching pencil The Conway No. 25), The Conway Stewart,

number on 2nd line, short clip - early; Conway Stewart, number on 1st line - late. Dimensions - Length: 13cm; barrel+section: 9.7cm; cap: 6cm. (Original Price 24/6).

It looked right, but then so did a couple of others, and the more I looked at it, the less sure I was. Could it be a 14, with the single gold band? I was not sure.

So I bought one. A Conway Stewart 28, and it writes like a dream.

The gamble had been made, and I was content to write away, although I was surprised at how often I had to refill the pen. The pen in possession of the University was in a Parker pen box, which made little sense, but I decided the best way to sort it out was to visit the archive at the University and investigate for myself.

They were ready for me when I arrived, although I then produced another 100 odd items that I wanted to look at for Padraig O'Mealoid as well as myself, and that stunned them a bit. I had gone from being the 'pen man', to the researcher who wanted to see many things, including items from the vaults. It was a fun and fabulous day, and Shelly, Rebecca and Andrew looked after me exceptionally well in the lovely surroundings of the Library.



Sure enough, when I got to the pen, it was a Conway Stewart 28. Totally identical to my own, although well worn and indeed not in as good shape. It was lovely. I studied and photographed it, and it was nice to behold. I am sure if he were alive, O'Nolan would stab me with it. He didn't suffer people gladly, and I am certain his disdain for me would be hilarious or deadly, and he'd call me a gobshite and ejit. Or maybe that is unfair, and I'd get to offer him a pint as a counter thrust.

Of course, then Padraig O'Mealoid found another pen reference. In Myles, Portraits of Brian O'Nolan (Flann O'Brien/Myles Na Goplaeen., ed. Tomothy O'Keefe), Kevin O Nolan (note no comma there) writes on page 30:

'Our father died suddenly in 1937. Brian asked for his pen, a very old Waterman which he had used all his life. The hand changed but the pen wrote on'



And so, I must find out about this pen.



Free & Iniquity

“All the elements are there.

Clarity of thought?  
Check.

Well-reasoned?  
Check.

Slightly scathing? -  
Multi-Check”.

Chris Garcia

Okay okay, so we sort of stole this title from Blackadder (although Esther actually got it wrong, so it's a mis-quote). But, our ink for this issue of JP was specially blended by Linda, and each of the headers was hand drawn by her. Who's Queen? We reckon she might be ;). Here in this section we have the dastardly, the odd and the outraged. From strange things in the post to a history of open letters, we mixed up the slightly peculiar side of writing, and it came out... a mysterious shade of dark green.

# Something Strange in the Post

**Helena Nash** My dad's always had an eye for an unusual greetings card. He'll never send a bog-standard birthday card with a cute cartoon animal on it if there's a chance to post a weird 19th century cartoon of a ferret in waistcoat and breeches. Likewise at Christmas, it was something of a family tradition to find the oddest, least festive, most surreal card designs to exchange, from rusting tractors in overgrown farmyards to eerie chickens cocking one mad eye at the audience from a crumbling brick wall. For some reason agricultural settings seem to feature strongly.

One Christmas many years ago he picked out just such a card to send to his old mate Al. Ostensibly a reproduction of a landscape depicting a quaint old two-storey house, it was somewhat gloomy and muted in tone, perhaps to suggest the long winter nights closing in. What made the unknown artist's work slightly peculiar was the figure that was peering out of an upper floor window. A tiny indistinct smudge, no more than head and shoulders looking round the curtains, but there it was. Who was it? What did he or she want? It was like something out of an M. R. James story, or Lowry meets Edvard Munch.

So off the card went in the post, inscribed with the usual festive greetings from the family, but my dad had also penned a few thoughts about the mysterious figure at the window and speculations about what grim portent it might signify. Fatefully, he finished off the card by asking Al if he could have it back next year, as it was so weird.

Lo and behold, back it came the following Christmas. It was a big card so there had been plenty of space for Al to add his own comments on the 'spook at the window', giving him or her something of a backstory. Personally I was just glad that in the intervening twelve months the figure hadn't got mysteriously bigger. Then the sending back and forth of the damn card

became a bit of a contest. My dad's the competitive type and I think it's fair to assume that Al was pretty much the same. They were also a bit creative. That's where it started to get out of hand.

The card continued to pass back and forth every Christmas, with extra musings on the spook at the window. Space on the original card had eventually run out, so additional paper sheets and stiff card had been attached by tape and staples to accommodate each successive instalment. Moreover, one of them - and I'm assuming it was my dad who had done a bit of model-making in his time - had started to add things to it. First a small tree from a train set, then an extra building. The card had gone 3D.

From then on things got serious. Now that it needed a box to cope with the extra depth of the scenery adorning it, there seemed no limit to what might appear on the card with each passing year. One Christmas a tiny battery-operated light was added, which cast an eerie illumination over the scene, the shadow of the tree stretching across the face of the house to throw the spook at the window into darkness. Then a little music box from which a tinny, supposedly festive, tune would play eerily. Finally Al topped it off by affixing a cassette tape onto which he'd recorded a message; the card now had a voice.

Like V'ger, this once simple object had evolved far beyond its original parameters and, sensing or perhaps fearing that things had got a little out of hand, my dad abruptly called a halt to the annual Passing of the Card. He sent it back to Al, suggesting that maybe they ought to give it up now, 'on account of the rising cost of postage stamps' for something that now needed a box the size of a tea chest to hold it. I preferred to think that they had chosen to put an end to this monster that they had birthed before it gained true sentience, rose up and turned upon its creators, incensed to the point of madness by its own unnatural genesis. Cont on pg71

## Something Strange Continued

Next year a much smaller box arrived. It contained the broken and torn remains of the card, the scenery in pieces, the cardboard and paper torn and crumpled. Al had taken my dad at his word. The beast had died.

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To top it off, in an artistic move worthy of the K Foundation, those remains were then ceremoniously burnt and reduced to ashes, nevermore to haunt the highway and byways of the Royal Mail. Perhaps just as well; I swear that last time we looked, that spook at the window had moved down to the front door...

# Stalking Neil Gaiman with a Sharpened Pen

James Bacon While I was researching what type of Fountain Pen belonged to Brian O’Nolan, better known as Flann O’Brien, I learned that Neil Gaiman also likes fountain pens. My research began, and it appears Neil Gaiman had a bit to say on the matter:

You want pen neepery...?

Currently, on this writing break, I’m writing with three fountain pens. (I like changing ink color each day. It shows me at a glance how many pages I wrote.)

They are a Delta Fluida...

A TWSBI Diamond 540 (it’s the same as the one in this picture) And the incredibly small French one I got in New Orleans whose name I always forget. (Let’s see if it’s on Papierplume’s website... oh yes) It’s a Lepine Indigo Classic.

I wouldn’t use the Fluida for signings, or the Lepine. The Twsbi seems up for anything - it’s a great pen, although there’s a mysterious crack appearing in the clear plastic barrel, which worries me a bit.

Edit to add: since people have asked, I’m moving between Noodlers BLUE BLACK ink in the Twsbi and Private Reserve’s COPPER BURST cartridges in the other two. Which means that the Twsbi is being used twice as much as the other two.

Neil Gaiman, from his webpage March 5th 2012

He then goes into more detail when specially asked about it, and indeed, this is wonderful reading:

It started in 1994 when I wrote the novel Stardust - in my head I wanted it to be written in the same way as it would have been in Journey Planet 71

the 1920s, so I bought a big notepad and Waterman pen.

It was the first time I’d used a fountain pen since I was about 13. I found myself enjoying writing more slowly and liked the way I had to think through sentences differently. I discovered I loved the fact that handwriting forces you to do a second draft, rather than just tidying up and deleting bits on a computer. I also discovered I enjoy the tactile buzz of the ritual involved in filling the pens with ink.

Now when I write novels I have two fountain pens on the go, with two different colour inks. One is always my favourite, but I alternate between the two, so I can see what I have written each day. I also love the way people react when I sign books with fountain pens. I try to sign them in different colours such as brown, green or grey as it is really nice to show that it’s obviously been done by a human being.

I don’t have any time for incredibly fancy pens and use a different ‘lead’ pen for each novel. Right now I am using a Twsbi, which is an incredibly robust but smooth writing pen from Taiwan. My current favourite is a Visconti because it has a magnet in the lid which goes clunk when I put the top on - I am easily satisfied. I probably have between 40 and 60 fountain pens, which is a bit silly, but once people are aware that you like them, they like to give them as gifts.” Why are fountain pen sales rising?

(Neil Gaiman interviewed By Steven Brocklehurst. BBC News Magazine 22 May 2012)

In 2013, he retweeted a photo of himself, holding a Lamy saying:

I love @neverwear’s photo of me with my new Lamy 2000, a gift from Lamy. (Not a signing pen, a novel-writing pen.)

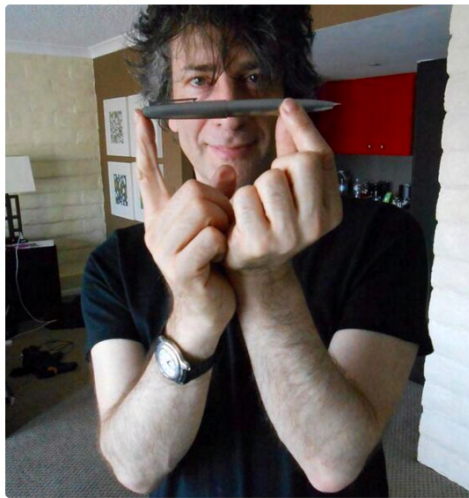




Cat Mihos  
@neverwear



happy birthday to the king of ink, mister  
[@neilhimsel](#)



RETWEETS  
8

LIKES  
20



8:50 AM - 10 Nov 2013

This was all popular and good, Lamy may have been very clever here; many spoke of their like of the pen. I soon found a screen shot of some of Neil Gaiman's pens, posted on a pen forum where interested parties were noting which ones were

which. I was about to start to research this photo, and stopped. I was unhappy about this image, it felt as if I were intruding.

I went to the Neil Gaiman website, and did further research. I learned that if I write to him, I should not include any sand and I should include a typed version of my letter. Asking questions seems to take up a lot of time for Neil; a problem of popularity, so it is generally discouraged. He encourages people to do their research, and welcomes people sending pens, which I totally approve of.

But how did this screen shot come about? After more research it turns out that in March 2013 a commenter posted an image on the <http://www.fountainpennetwork.com/>, and as he explains: 'This is from a Blackberry marketing project using Neil Gaiman, Alicia Keys and others. One shot of the video is of Neil at his desk, writing and a few frames of his pen collection.'

Another commentator soon identified the pens pictured as 'Watermans, a couple Retro 51 Tornados, a Montblanc, and maybe a Yard-O-Led pencil, another 'Waterman Phileas', another 'Waterman Opera, Montblanc 144, Waterman Lauriat, Aurora Optima' .

My god, I realised I was really entering a dark world. This creepy stalkery behaviour could not be justified,

even by assuaging myself with the knowledge that the Boston College team had been so helpful in photographing Flann O'Brien's pen for me.

Did I need to kill Neil Gaiman to make this OK then, I wondered. How dreadful an invasion of privacy was this secondhand voyeurism?

But wait, he is alive, Gaiman's alive, and I have gone to the precipice of fandom extreme, looked beyond and come back, so all is OK.

I decided I should write up the article, and consider whether Neil Gaiman has time for discussion about pens, but research no further. Ceasing my activities and penning them makes me feel I have washed away my inequities and cleansed myself of any voyeuristic sins.

## Further References for if You Too Want to Stalk Neil Gaiman and demand information about his pens:

Contacting Neil Gaiman:

[http://www.neilgaiman.com/FAQs/Contacting,\\_Contracting,\\_Inviting,\\_Interviewing,\\_or\\_Mailing\\_Neil](http://www.neilgaiman.com/FAQs/Contacting,_Contracting,_Inviting,_Interviewing,_or_Mailing_Neil)

Neil Gaiman discusses what sort of letters he does not want to receive (including sand).

<http://journal.neilgaiman.com/2004/10/sage-advice.asp>

The Fountain Pen Network discuss which famous authors use fountain pens, and consider Neil Gaiman.

<http://www.fountainpennetwork.com/forum/topic/62911-fantasy-writers-pens/>

In which the Author more closely examines a pen owned by Neil Gaiman, for research purposes.

<http://www.cultpens.com/i/q/TW40122/twsbi-diamond-580rb-special-edition-fountain-pen>

Neil Gaiman makes fountain pen recommendations for the uninitiated.

<http://journal.neilgaiman.com/2008/01/bad-blogger-no-liver-stories.html>

Neil Gaiman talks about his current pens.

<http://neil-gaiman.tumblr.com/post/18831584457/hi-neil-i-was-wondering-if-you-ever-still-use>

Neil Gaiman discusses his use of fountain pens.

[http://www.tulsaworld.com/blogs/scene/arts/arts-neil-gaiman-on-getting-hooked-on-handwriting/article\\_d0198b7e-2476-548c-afc9-b0e11609bb1b.html](http://www.tulsaworld.com/blogs/scene/arts/arts-neil-gaiman-on-getting-hooked-on-handwriting/article_d0198b7e-2476-548c-afc9-b0e11609bb1b.html)

# Rankin's Man Abroad: Postcards From Archroy.

Stolen (with permission) from Lee Justice

From The Brentford Triangle by Robert Rankin:



Archroy was a character in Robert Rankin's Brentford books. Robert introduced us to Archroy in the *Antipope* (1981); a student in the ancient arts of Dimac, he went on to journey the world, laying bare some of its most profound enigmas as he went. Neville, the part time barman at The Flying Swan pub, and undoubtedly the locus for the Brentford books, was to be kept fully abreast of his travels as Archroy would send postcards from the Four Corners of the globe telling of his outrageous adventures. The postcards were all of a similar nature, depicting as they did the famed rooftop view of Brentford, a view taken in its day from atop the now long gone gasometer.



Journey Planet 73

'The wee postman trod nearer, grinning broadly. As he drew level with the part time barman he winked lewdly and said 'Another!' Neville extended a slim white hand to receive the card, but Small Dave held it below his reach. 'It is from Archroy,' announced the malicious postman, who greatly delighted in reading other people's mail, 'and bears an Ararat postmark. It says that our lad has discovered the remains of Noah's Ark upon the mountain's peak and is arranging to have it dismantled and brought back to England.'

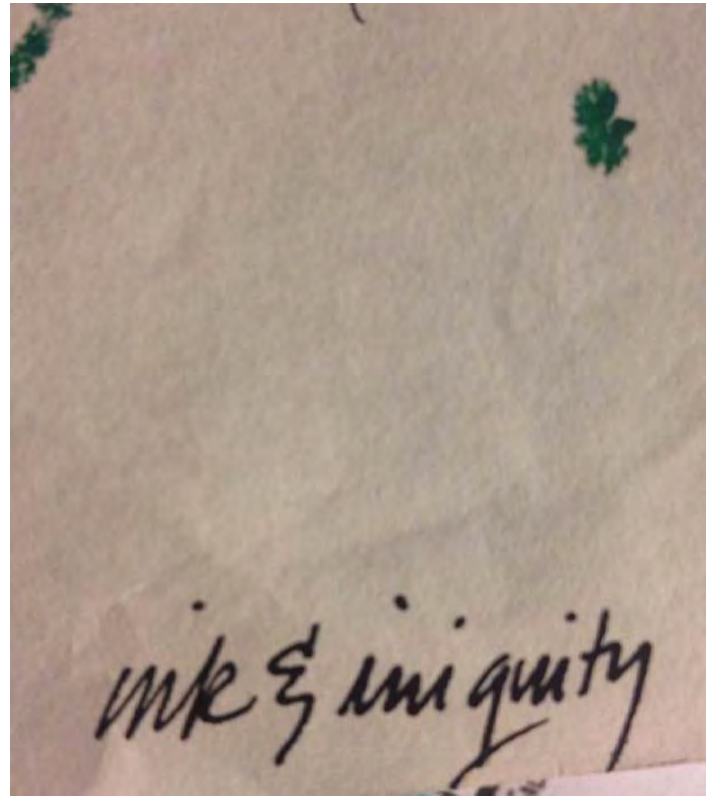
Neville turned away in disgust and slouched off up the stairs to his rooms. Here in privacy he poured milk upon his cornflakes and perused Archroy's postcard, propped against the marmalade pot. A rooftop view of Brentford. It was a great pity that Archroy, in the interests of economy, as he put it, had chosen to take a bundle of local postcards with him when he set off upon his globe trotting. Rooftop views of Brentford were all very pleasant of course, but they did tend to become a little samey. After all, when one received a card postmarked 'The Potala, Lhasa', or 'The East Pier, Sri Lanka', it wouldn't hurt to see a bit of pictorial representation on the front once in a while. It did tend to take the edge off, having read the exotic details of a Senegalese temple dance, to turn over the card and view the splendours of two gasometer's and water tower.

Neville sighed deeply as he squinted over to the row of identical postcards which now lined his mantelpiece. Certainly, the one view was so commonplace as to be invisible, but each of these little cards had been dispatched from some far-flung portion of the great globe. Each had travelled through strange lands, across foreign borders, over continents, finally to return, like little pictorial homing pigeons, to the town of their birth. Certainly there was romance here.' 'The Brentford Triangle.'

Robert did actually receive a number of rooftop view postcards in the eighties depicting all manner of ludicrous discoveries from an errant traveller who called himself Archroy, one of which we have here for



you to see. Robert is no wiser now to knowing who sent them! This postcard in question is actually a photo attached glued to a postcard. Allegedly postcards themselves were commonplace some thirty four years ago when the Antipope and Brentford Triangle were first printed, but today are scarce and rare. Sproutlore, The One-time Now Official Robert Rankin Fanclub had larger ones made at one stage.



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## An Open Letter to Chief Warrant Officer Brad R. Torgesen

4th May, 2015

Chief Warrant Officer Torgesen,

As you are no doubt aware, The Don't-Ask-Don't-Tell Repeal Act of 2010 removed barriers to homosexual members in the armed services, who may now serve openly and as equals.

You have long held the position that homosexuality is immoral behavior, and most recently made denigrating jokes regarding the orientation aimed at Mr. John Scalzi.

Your moral positions are your own, and I will not question them. However, I will remind you that you are a military officer and charged with the leadership of men and women of *\*all\** walks of life, religions, creeds, sexual orientations, socio-cultural backgrounds and ethnicities. Every single one of these people has the right to believe that you will faithfully discharge your duties as an officer, not spend their lives carelessly, not make them endure unnecessary hardship, that you will care for them with compassion and dedication. On or

off duty, you are *\*always\** an officer.

Your repeated statements of your thoughts on homosexuality in public forums create the very reasonable apprehension among homosexual members of the service that you hold them in contempt and will not lead them to the utmost of your ability, will not look to their needs and concerns, and may place them at undue risk. That this is surely not your intention is irrelevant.

Further, your publically denigrating statements regarding Mr. Scalzi are base, undignified and show questionable judgment. You, Chief Warrant Officer Torgesen, are an officer, but no gentleman. Your positions are inconsistent with the values of the United States military, and its commitment to being a service that belongs to ALL Americans.

Our nation deserves better.

Respectfully,

Myke Cole

# Open Letters I Have Known and Loved

Chris Garcia Back in the day, you could write letters. You would write it, then put it in an envelope, send it to the receiver who would then read it and know what you were thinking. Then Mass Communication came about, and sometimes, you had something to say and wanted a mass audience to read it. You might write a letter again, only this time you would publish it, send it to a newspaper, or simply have copies of the letter printed up and passed around. It was how you got criticism out to the world in the days before blogs. And computers. And the controlled transmission of electricity via wires.

Open Letters are really important to us history types. They let us know what issues are significant enough to demand addressing in a public forum. They're also often well-written pieces of snark. Not always, but often.

If you look at 'em, the epistles in the Bible are basically Open Letters, as are the things that Martin Luther wrote criticizing the Catholic Church. These are the classics, and when I realized that (after reading Wikipedia!) it all made sense. One of the most important letters in the history of US Indian Policy was by this dude called Ralph Waldo Emerson to the President: Martin Van Buren. He was protesting the treatment of the Cherokee Nation by the government, and rightly so. It was a long letter, beautifully written, but it was certainly worded in a way that made it feel like it was being written to a mass audience instead of just to the Pres, but then there are moments of personalization. The final portion is a great example of that:

I write thus, sir, to inform you of the state of mind these Indian tidings have awakened here, and to pray with one voice more that you, whose hands are strong with the delegated power of fifteen millions of men, will avert with that might the terrific injury which threatens the Cherokee tribe.

With great respect, sir, I am your fellow citizen,  
Ralph Waldo Emerson

You see, it's personalized, it's TO the President, but it's also to America, and it works. Of course, there was still another 50 years of culling and killing, but it was a start...

One of the most important of all Open Letters was the major lasting evidence of The Dreyfus affair. It was Emile Zola's letter called J'accuse, published in 1898 in the paper L'Aurore. I won't get into the Dreyfus Affair (have to save something for our future, inevitable Dreyfus Affair issue, right?) but let's just say that it was a spying case in which a Jewish soldier, Albert Dreyfus, was accused of leaking info, found guilty in something of a kangaroo court, and then sent off to South America. There was a major streak of anti-Semitism in France at the time, and Emile Zola seized the opportunity to publish a letter calling out the government on exactly that matter.

Reading the letter, it's directed at the President of France, and it addresses him quite directly. It's a letter that also directly addresses the anti-Semitism that was rampant in France at the time. Reading it today, there is a continuity through to much of what we're seeing in France today with the treatment of Muslims accused of serious crimes. This might be the finest written Open Letter I've ever read, at least in translation.

Open letters were an important part of the US Civil Rights movement. One of the most significant was the NAACP's A Letter to President Woodrow Wilson on Federal Race Discrimination on August 15, 1913. In it, the NAACP asks Woodrow Wilson to end the segregation of the Civil Service, which was a major point of conflict at the time. The NAACP, and particularly W.E.B. DuBois wrote several open letters; perhaps the most impressive being written to then-new President Warren Harding. The letter is beautiful, moving, and calls for the improved treatment of black Americans, as well as freedom for 'Our Brothers in Haiti':

We appeal to you: we the outcast and lynched, the mobbed and murdered, the despoiled and insulted; and yet withal, the indomitable, unconquered, unbending and unafraid black children of kings and slaves and of the best blood of the workers of the earth—

WE WANT THE RIGHT TO VOTE.  
WE WANT TO TRAVEL WITHOUT INSULT.  
WE WANT LYNCHING AND MOB-LAW  
QUELLED FOREVER.  
WE WANT FREEDOM FOR OUR BROTHERS IN  
HAITI.

Reading the entire letter, you can see that it was certainly an influence on Martin Luther King and many other Civil Rights Leaders of the 50s and 60s, and no doubt Letter from Birmingham Jail was written in this tradition.

Not all Open Letters are about protesting government treatment of minority communities. Perhaps the most interesting one that I work with on a regular basis is called An Open Letter to Hobbyists by Bill Gates. Basically, it came down to Gates complaining that people would buy and copy a Micro-Soft BASIC and run it into their Altair via a Teletype, then run out a new copy of the paper tape via the Teletype, and hand it around. Paper Tape Copying is Killing the Software Industry. Gates railed against the Hobbyist community, the largest segment of the home computer world at the time. He asked that clubs where folks did copying, like the legendary Homebrew Computer Club, should be banned. He also provided an address that people could send payment for their ill-gotten gains.

Not a lot of checks arrived, apparently.

This Open Letter changed the way software was viewed. Prior to this, the idea was software was a part of the system. You bought the IBM 360, you got software with it and you were not only allowed to share it, you were expected to. There's a reason the IBM users' group was called SHARE. Gates was saying "This is serious business! Pay me!" and that idea caught on. Almost a shame, though I will give Gates credit for writing a well-reasoned, if dangerously wrong-headed, letter. The problems of Microsoft today can be entirely traced back to this letter's sense of entitlement.

The Internet has given a boost to the Open Letter. There have been several very impressive open letters over the last decade, including David Cross' Letter to Larry the Cable Guy, probably the funniest Open Letter ever (and perhaps the only one signed "Fart, David Cross") and it's an impressive piece of rhetoric. Not to be outdone

by Gates, Steve Jobs wrote a really interesting Thoughts on Music, showing that he understood what music was morphing into by 2007. Google had their Letter on Net Neutrality, and there was the Open Letter to the Kansas School Board, which basically launched the Flying Spaghetti Monster and Pastafarianism. All of these really spread through the internet and have lived large via shares on Twitter, Facebook and even something that was once called LiveJournal.

Which brings me to one of my current faves - Myke Cole's An Open Letter to Chief Warrant Officer Brad Torgersen. Brad had made a cheap gay joke towards John Scalzi (one of the kind that David Cross called 'Lazy' in his open letter) and Myke took exception and sent this brief, brilliantly pointed letter to Torgersen. While this was all going on during the early portion of the Sad Puppies dust-up (when, as James put it, it was "us against the Nazis!"), Myke just hammered it out of the park:

Chief Warrant Officer Torgersen,  
As you are no doubt aware, The Don't-Ask-Don't-Tell Repeal Act of 2010 removed barriers to homosexual members in the armed services, who may now serve openly and as equals.

You have long held the position that homosexuality is immoral behavior, and most recently made denigrating jokes regarding the orientation aimed at Mr. John Scalzi.

Your moral positions are your own, and I will not question them. However, I will remind you that you are a military officer and charged with the leadership of men and women of \*all\* walks of life, religions, creeds, sexual orientations, socio-cultural backgrounds and ethnicities. Every single one of these people has the right to believe that you will faithfully discharge your duties as an officer, not spend their lives carelessly, not make them endure unnecessary hardship, that you will care for them with compassion and dedication. On or off duty, you are \*always\* an officer.

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Respectfully,  
Myke Cole

Continued on page 77

## Open Letters Continued

All the elements are there. Clarity of thought? Check. Well-reasoned? Check. Slightly scathing? Multi-Check.

Mike's words are really smart, and I was practically beaming while I read this in the hospital room with Vanessa. When I read it to her, since she knows Myke and I don't, she said "Yeah, that sounds like him."

(Myke Cole's letter is reprinted here with permission).

---

# *instant* FANZINE

Dear Friends

When was the last time you sent a piece of Post for pleasure?

Along with Meg Frank, Esther MacCallum-Stewart, Linda Wenzelburger and Chris Garcia, we are working on a Journey Planet - aboutcorrespondence, epistolary work, mailart, ink, pens and writing.

I would like to ask you to send me a post card.

This post card can be one of your own design, it can be covered in doodles or art, or it could have a significance for you. You can then explain that.

On it, if you would like to write, we have some suggestions as to what you could write about, and classically since mail is so linked to both fandom and love, that we thought some a Love Note about fandom could be nice, answearing one, any or all or some of the following:

What was your first fannish love? How did it feel the first time you were introduced to fandom? What did you do at your first fannish gathering? Describe in a few sentences what fandom means to you?

Alternatively, if you like to use a particular pen, like to receive mail, you can tell us about that..

We'd especially like some note, if you use a fountain pen about the type of pen and ink..

This is a really unusual instant fanzine request, it involves a little more work, getting a stamp and card and generally doing some more than responding by email

BUT I have an odd feeling that it would really interest you, and you might be up for it. So let me know if it does.

Please take a photo of your postcard before you post it, and send it to:

James Bacon  
Love Green Farm

As there are 5 of us involved, you may get asked twice, send one or many different cards, that is fun.

Many thanks for considering this strange and unusual request that will go into making a section in Journey Planet.

lips open love new time eyes asked told long moustache side building nothing like day night new turned mouth later now already pulled course walked front now

**I have words for you.**

Angel KNOW everything backward must presently help else because still going held peanut toward Betty JUST box instead really names little wait Sophie box kept well moment opened stood left stared wait feet caught held flies box SO turned table opened names little wait Sophie box kept well moment opened stood left stared wait feet caught held flies

KANSAS CITY 640

22 JUL 2015 PM 11



JOURNEY PLANET  
 c/o LINDA WENZELBURGER  
 PMB 104  
 1563 SOLANO AVENUE  
 BERKLEY, CA 94707

Dear Journey Planet,

Fandom is filled with all kinds of wonderful people. Had I not stumbled across Chicon 7 while surfing the web... well, there are so many amazing people I'd never have met.

Chicon 7 was my very first convention. I could count the number of people I'd know on one hand. I'd been reading science fiction and fantasy and watching sci-fi tv and movies since I was a kid. The geek I could handle - but who would I talk to?

It didn't take me long to find my groove. The room parties helped and finding my home town group - the Minnesota Magpies did too. They were so welcoming and had I not met George Winde, & Joel specifically, I doubt I would have attended Minicon and gotten involved in the feeding & keeping of their 50th event.

I met Carol while she was dressed in her finest 20s apparel working the KC bid party. She convinced me to attend ConQuest and I liked Kansas City so much I moved there! I'm looking forward to getting more involved in their community.

I love the panels, the costumes, the great discussions about beer and books... but I'm mostly here for the people. They have made a huge impact on my life.

-xoxo- Deanna



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I loved the panels, the costumes, the great discussions about beer and books... but I'm mostly here for the people. They have made a huge impact on my life.

xoxo - Deanna

# JOURNEY PLANET

∨ Why do I write?

Firstly, because if I don't get all the words out of my head, they rapidly go off & sit at the bottom of my brain going hard and stale.

Secondly, because if I don't write it all down, I'm likely to forget it, and be left with irritating memory that once thought of something clever, but can't remember what.

Mainly though, I write so I can become modernly famous and appear on Celebrity Mastermind, which is a doodle compared to the proper one.

—  
The Shropshire Hills Discover Center - which I thoroughly recommend - Also the nostalgia museum in Craven Arms: the land of lost content - which is closed on Wednesdays as I discovered today...

- Helena Nash.

Tusker the Little Mammoth heads a trail at Secret Hills - The Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre Craven Arms, Shropshire 01588 676000

Delivered by Chester & N Whacks

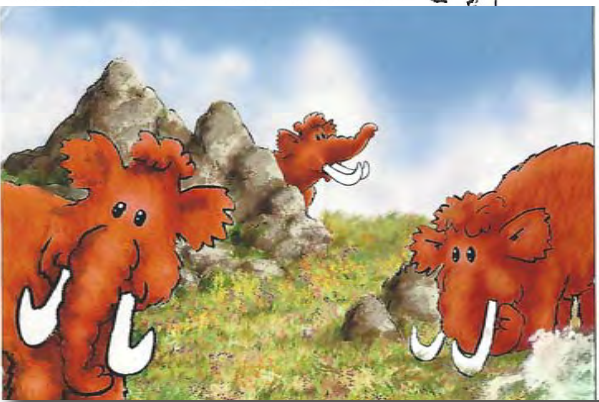
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Also the nostalgia museum in Craven Arms: the land of lost content.

Royal Mail  
Stroke

EST

Esther MacCallum-Stewart



Shropshire

Instant Fanzine

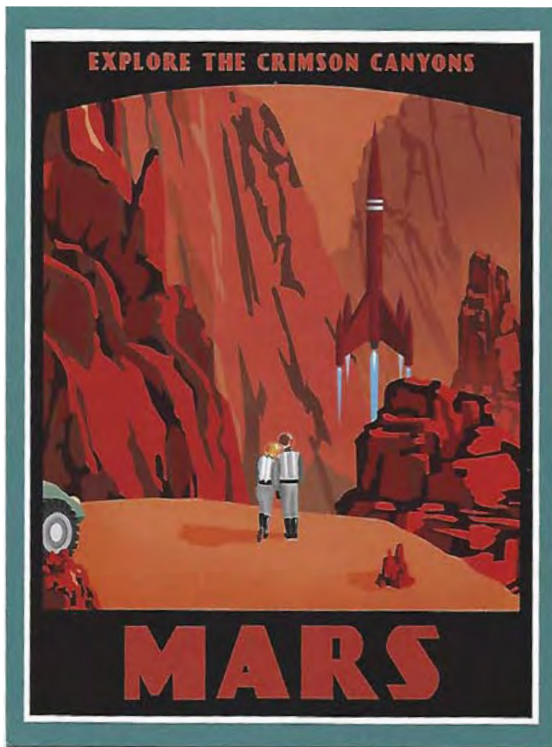
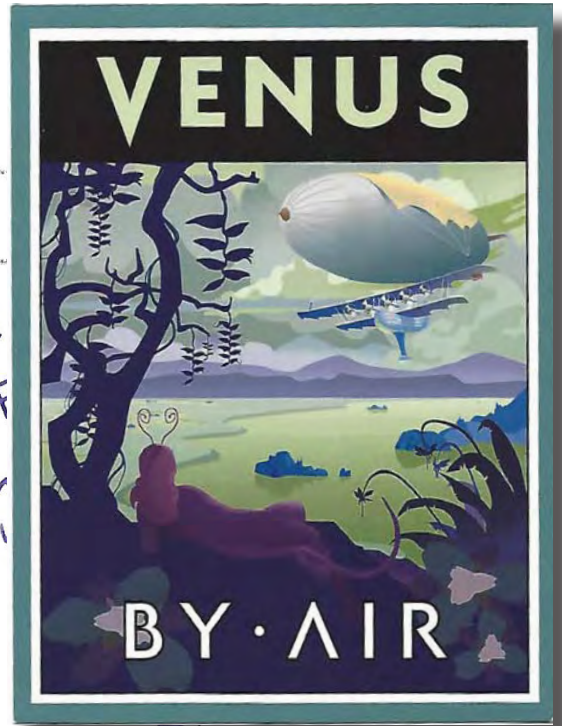
Dear Meg,

I'm not sure why this card appealed so much, but it seemed colourful and beautiful, so a good match, I think! You'll get this whilst in your travels, I hope. I've been watching your photo log of you & Mattie travelling across Europe & the rest of the world, and it's great! Vicarious travel is so much fun.

Meg Frank  
Instant F  
All over!

Fandom is meeting people. How amazing is that!!  
Ex. Hero 616. Waterman Purple. (Thanks James!)  
Copy to Linda Wanceberger!

Art by Zazzle .com/stevethomas



say hello to everyone for me!!  
not certainly an  
SOCC  
exciting!  
card,

Place Stamp Here

to represent Dublin 2019,  
hope so much that we can  
a weekend that epitomises  
modern, and all its heavy loads.  
en-happy Green and all  
t. I also use to write  
supporters, Bid Team members  
why thinking them. But the image is for

James Bacon  
Dublin in 2019 HQ  
Somewhere deep  
in Conquering).  
Fandom, Eire.

to wish us luck; for the bid & the 'Best fanzine'  
examination. Let's put our hearts into winning - these  
things are important. All my love,  
Esther xxx

Let them in Absolution.

<<Dear Meg,

I'm not sure why this card appealed so much, but it seemed colorful and beautiful, so a good match, I think!

You'll get this whilst on your travels I hope. I've been watching your photo log of you + Mark traveling across Europe + the rest of the world, and it's great!

Vicarious travel is so much fun!

Fandom is meeting people. How amazing is that!!

Exx

Hero 616 Waterman Purple. (Thanks James!)

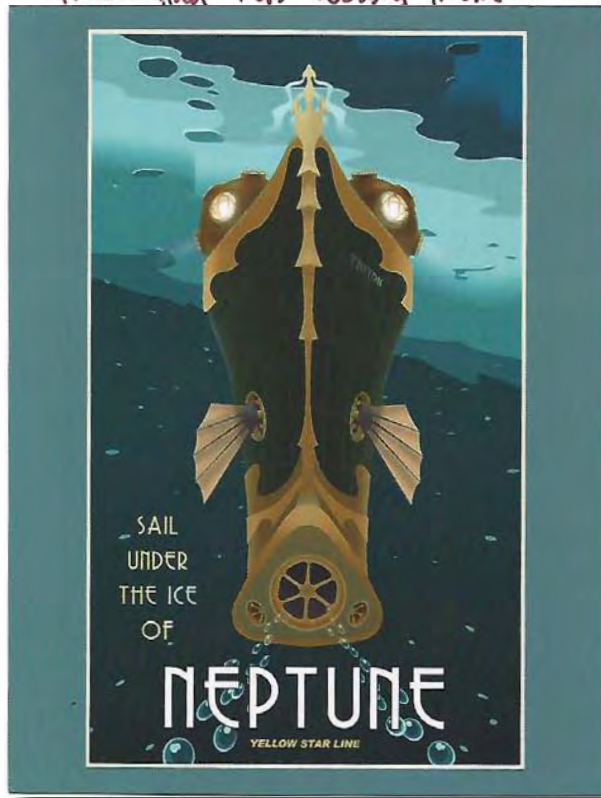
<<Dear James,

You are almost certainly on your way to SDCC now - how exciting! I chose this card, pen and ink to represent Dublin 2019 because I hope so much that we can make it into a Worldcon. That epitomizes the best of fandom, and all its many loves. This ink and pen - ??? Green and ?????? Event. I also lose to write letters to supporters, Bid Team members & others, mainly thanking them. But the image is for Dublin 2019 & Journey Planet. i've hidden a Hugo in it to wish us luck; for the bid and for the ' Best Fanzine' nomination. Let's put our hearts into winning - these things are important.

All my love, Esther xxx

Linda.  
 You have the keys  
 to the kingdom - all  
 of the cards from  
 one to all of the other editors. It's a shame we didn't  
 write to each other more during the course of this,  
 but I'm glad you did. I do wonder how those  
 swatches have aged, and I look forward to  
 receiving them.  
 In the course of this issue I have... run out of  
 ink, met people I don't know and found common  
 interests with them. Worried about my hand  
 writing, amongst other things and had a great  
 time. And this wobbly train is not helping my  
 writing!!

Waterman Purple. Hero 616.  
 Writing Place Stamp Here



<< Linda,

You have the keys to the kingdom— all of the cards from one to all of the other edition. It's a shame we didn't write to each other more during the course of Iris, but I'm glad you did. I do wonder how those swatches have aged, and I

look forward to receiving them.

In the ??? of this issue I have...run out of ink, met people I don't know and found common interests with them. Worried about my handwriting, amongst other things, and had a great time. And this wobbly train is not helping my writing!! Fandom is fun, sharing, surprises!!

Lots of love.

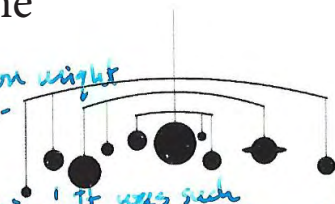
Exx

Instant Fanzine

Dear Chris,  
 Hello! I thought you might enjoy this penguin-friendly vista. Deep snows for penguins to play in! It was such a shame not to meet you last month, but I'm sure we will at some point! Asilomar was lovely. The food was terrible but we saw seals! Wow! One swam right past - so close. Anyway, I'm really enjoying this issue of JP. So much fun and so pretty. These random loves, and being able to have a cool place to write about them, and another reason fandom can be so wonderful. Much love to your family. Esther xx

Chris Garcia. Journey Planet HQ. Photo. Penguins vollen

Jinhao 450 Lanny Turquoise..



Place Stamp Here

Art by Zazzle .com/stevethomas

Dear Chris,  
 Hello! I thought you might enjoy this penguin-friendly vista. Deep snows for penguins to play in! It was such a shame not to meet you last month, but I'm sure we will at some point! Asilomar was lovely. The food was terrible but we saw seals! Wow! One swam right past—so close. Anyway, I'm really enjoying this issue of JP. So much fun, and so pretty. These random loves, and being able to have a cool place to write about them, and another reason fandom can be so wonderful. Much love to your family. Esther xx Jinhao 450 Lanny Turquoise



Two Mozart and Shakespeare fans on the road; writing lots of postcards to friends & family in Sweden & Australia with one of our favorite pens: an Uchida pigmented ink-acid-free-waterproof-photosafe-0.8 pen. We write postcards to people who appreciate them and to defy the dominance of digital mail! Pen is currently in Plockton, Skye & Lochalsh, Scotland, and has written (previously) about Merchant of Venice from Stratford, and Arnside, Lake District and will ride safely back with us to Sweden thru F, B, NL, D & DK. Hugs from Jessica & Neil.

Rochton, July 9, 2015  
 GN/24-1781  
 The "Neverwrong" Forecasting System.  
 Patent Pending.  
 © Jon Pear

Discreet Castle  
 BY AIR MAIL  
 par avion  
 Royal Mail®

Loch Carron

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ESTHER  
 27 H  
 South  
 BRISTOL

STIRLING  
 Gallery





ES:196

Because wonderful things are all  
borne of imagination, but it is ink  
that carries them to us full of purpose  
and sealed in inspiration.  
All the best  
John.

Illustrations Copyright © 2001 Wayne Anderson,  
Douglas Carrel & Helen Ward  
"Inspiration" is a trademark of The Original Company, Inc.  
www.theoriginalcompany.com



<< Because wonderful things are all borne of  
imagination, but it is ink that carries them to us  
full of purpose and sealed in Inspiration.  
All the best  
John

Jackie Kamlot

50  
me

16 July 2015



Dear fandom,

My first  
Doctor Who bowling. I was hooked  
Sad on this group! Such nice  
and all very welcoming. We've had  
Need so many adventures.  
I'd dive 25 years later and  
my adventures are just  
as fun.

This is what you mean to me:  
life-long friendships and  
happy times.

Thank you for all of it  
Jackie  
XX

Baer 507 Silver  
"The Eight Horses"  
Fountain pen  
LaPerle des Encres  
Rouge Caroubier  
INK

<< Dear fandom,

My first fannish love was Doctor Who. After a very  
sad breakup, I read an advert in Starlog Magazine for  
a local Doctor Who fan club. Needing something to  
divert my attention, I decided to go—on my own!

We talked Doctor Who, and eventually watched  
Doctor Who then went out for pizza and bowling.  
I was hooked on this group! Such nice People, easy  
to get along with and all very welcoming. We've  
had so many adventures. 25 years later and those  
adventures are just as fun.

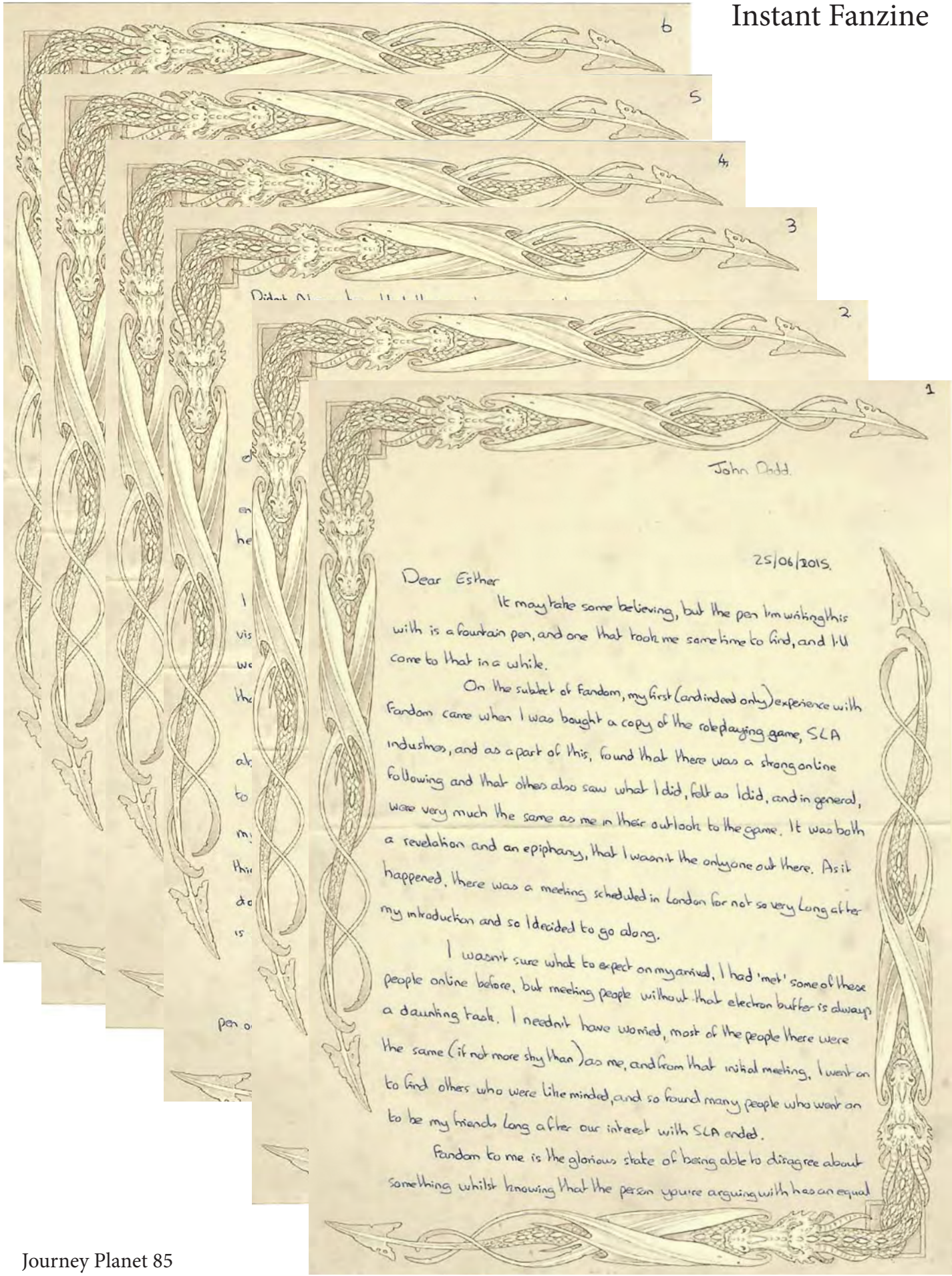
This is what you mean to me: life-long friendships  
and happy times.

Thank you for all of it.

Jackie

Xx

(Baer 507 Silver  
"The Eight Horses"  
Fountain pen  
LaPerle des Encres  
Rouge Caroubier  
INK)



Dit... ..

John Didd.

25/06/2015.

Dear Esther

It may take some believing, but the pen I'm writing this with is a fountain pen, and one that took me some time to find, and I-U come to that in a while.

On the subject of fandom, my first (and indeed only) experience with fandom came when I was bought a copy of the roleplaying game, SLA Industries, and as a part of this, found that there was a strong online following and that others also saw what I did, felt as I did, and in general, were very much the same as me in their outlook to the game. It was both a revelation and an epiphany, that I wasn't the only one out there. As it happened, there was a meeting scheduled in London for not so very long after my introduction and so I decided to go along.

I wasn't sure what to expect on my arrival, I had 'met' some of these people online before, but meeting people without that electron buffer is always a daunting task. I needn't have worried, most of the people there were the same (if not more shy than) as me, and from that initial meeting, I went on to find others who were like minded, and so found many people who went on to be my friends long after our interest with SLA ended.

Fandom to me is the glorious state of being able to disagree about something whilst knowing that the person you're arguing with has an equal

<< Dear Esther

It may take some believing, but the pen I'm writing this with is a fountain pen, and one that took me some time to find, and I'll come to that in a while.

On the subject of fandom, my first (and indeed only) experience with fandom came when I bought a copy of the roleplaying game, SLA Industries, and as a part of this, found that there was a strong online following and that others also saw what I did, felt as I did, and in general, were very much the same as me in their outlook to the game. It was both a revelation and an epiphany, that I wasn't the only one out there. As it happened, there was a meeting scheduled in London for not so very long after my introduction and so I decided to go along.

I wasn't sure what to expect on my arrival, I had 'met' some of these people online before, but meeting people without that electron buffer is always a daunting task. I needn't have worried, most of the people there were the same (if not more shy than) as me, and from that initial meeting, I went on to find others who were like minded, and so found many people who went on to be my friends long after our interest with SLA ended. Fandom to me is the glorious state of being able to disagree about something whilst knowing that the person you're arguing with has an equal measure of passion for the subject matter, it is the knowledge that you both could argue the day away, but still watch the show/play the game/wear the costume at the end of that day and have both of you agree that it is, in fact awesome.

That of course brings me to the other side of fandom, for as with all things that people love, if that love is not returned, it may in time turn into the antithesis of what it once was. I loved SLA Industries, writing stories for it, running websites, eventually even becoming Line Developer for it, but at each turn, I found that my efforts were for naught, and so my enthusiasm waned. I have stayed in touch with all those that I'd met and still talk with many of them on a regular basis, but when we talk about SLA, it's with a grim resignation that things will not change, and that we're better off without it.

I believe, with my whole heart, that fandom is divided into Love & Hate, there is no middle ground,

those who are part of the fandom of anything have some degree of interest in it, those who actively participate have gone beyond casual appreciation of the subject. This is both a good and a bad thing, and it would be a wiser man that I who could see what draws everyone to their particular Worship.

The interesting thing for me is how much of fandom is based around things that have stopped running or are out of circulation, and even when things have been gone so long, so the passion of those who still revere it increases. Take the example of Star Trek, I'm not a trekkie by any stretch of the imagination (My Step Mum, there's the trekkie in the family), but I found myself furious at the second film in the J.J. Abrams remakes. We all knew that the 'new' villain was going to be Khan, despite all rumors to the contrary. How could this be? Didn't Abrams know that there's only ever going to be one Khan, and with no question, that Khan is played by Ricardo Montalban. This was the first time that I'd found myself offended by something that someone had done, and in that, I found the true nature of fandom.

Sometimes you don't realise how much you love something till someone else messes with it. This of course does not bode well for the new Star Wars film at the end of the year, if he was willing to use Sherlock as Khan, who knows what else he's going to end up doing, and that leads me to the last thing about fandom.

Never let the fans get hold of it...and I include myself in that bracket, when I was Line Developer of SLA, I started putting things in place, changing the original vision to the one in my head, and while most of the fanbase were with me, what I was doing wasn't the original vision, and it never would have been, something that took me years to accept.

And so I stay out of fandom for the most part, I recognise that it isn't about me, and that it never will be, but I know of my need to help things, to put my own thought out there, and I know the darker side of that from my Journey with SLA, and it is something I choose not to repeat. There are things that I love, but they are things that I can do, things where I can do what I need to without it causing anyone else any issues, one of those is roleplaying games, one is weightlifting, and the other...? Continued on page 87

The Other is writing...

Not typing, typing does not fulfill the basic need I have, I need to feel the pen on the paper, I crave (there is no more appropriate word) the precision of the ink and that is why it has taken me so long to find the pen I now write with. The discipline of writing is that if you make a mistake, it is there for the world to see, because the page goes from the clean strokes of planned words, to the ugliness of as you have to remove the wrong letters from the page.

And yes, I did that on purpose, do not ask what it cost me to make a deliberate error...

The pen I'm writing with is a Platinum Plaisir with an 02 nib (denoting 0.2mm), the ink being used is platinum blue-black with an Iron Gall formula that gets darker over time rather than fading as most inks do. I have over fifty different pens, each one fulfilling a different purpose, from this, my everyday carry, to this, my reserve pen, a platinum preppy (that'd be plastic) using black Iron Gall ink, all the way up to (Brace yourself).

The broadest (and wettest) pen I have, a Jinhao supposedly fine nib, using Deep Dark Blue from the Cult pens website.

A marked difference from this pen, and one that I tend to use only when writing my daily Journal entries, but that brings me to the real reason I write. Most people have ideas, and those not used to having ideas don't carry pen and paper around at all times to make sure that they don't miss anything. I do, and there's never a time when I'm out and about that I don't have two pens (Just in case) and paper, I believe that handwriting tells us more about the people we are than typing ever would.

I've been able to write since I was young, and I've never taken it for granted, it's a moment of calm in a day usually filled with technology, it's that time when there's me and the Ink, it is said that the blood is the life, I disagree, for me, the Ink is the life. I also study Graphology, the science of Handwriting, and I believe that it holds a truth in it when we see that handwriting reflects who we are and what state of mind we were in when we wrote it. My handwriting hasn't changed much in all the years, save to become slightly smaller, and I don't write with a

ruled page, so I know if my mood was up or down (you can tell from the angle of the writing on the page...), but despite all this, going back to the fandom thing for a while, the curious thing is.

I'm not a fan of pens...

Don't get me wrong, I like pens and I have a great number of them, but I don't go on the pen forums & espouse their virtues, I don't argue about whether a pilot fine nib is finer than a platinum one, I'm not an ink snob (much), I have colours that I prefer, but I'll use Quink Ink as much as I would J Herbin Bleu Ocean 1670, it's all about the words, the pen is the medium through which I work, the Ink the keeper of the words, and while I am most beholden to both, I understand that they are tools. I can look at a Graf von Faber Castell Sanssouci Postdam pen with its sapphire and quartz inlay, and I wonder if paying £ 3000 for a pen makes you write better, or if you simply put it on a pedestal and never use it because words from such a pen must surely be worth more than those from a lowly biro.

Still, I have rambled somewhat, and I love that of pens too, when you type, you can change whatever you want, so the end result is only ever what you saw fit to share with people. With a pen, it's all the consciousness, all the time, and I like that a lot.

I have no problem with my address being displayed, Indeed anyone wishing to write to me can certainly expect mail back (although I cannot give out the magnifying glass required to read my writing sadly), and I would hope that there are others out there who share my enthusiasms. Writing is a freedom not afforded everyone, and in times to come, it may be that we gather in furtive secrecy as the world types on, there to sit in companionable silence with nibs upon paper.

Noticing that I've rambled for six pages, I will sign off here, I hope this finds you in good health and better spirits (see, that was a genuine error), and that I'll no doubt speak to you soon.

In the service of the dream,

John.





# EDITORIALS

Esther MacCallum-Stewart At the end of his fantastic piece about letters in the First World War, Chris Kempshall writes:

‘I have never written a letter, or an email, or a text message to someone I did not want to talk to. Letters are written to be read. Which is why we’re still reading one hundred year old ones today.’

He’s lucky. I’ve written a lot of letters to people that I did not want to talk to. I’ve also received letters I didn’t want to read. Bills, reminders, gripes. Two suicide notes; I nearly wrote about those in an article, but it was too dark, too sad, and one of the people long gone (not from life itself, thankfully, but from my life). But Chris is so right. Letters are written to be read.

Over the last year, I’ve written a lot of letters. Distinct from e-mails or messenger conversations or whatsapps or any of the other myriad of written communications that we undertake every day, instead I’ve sat down with pen and ink and written actual letters. I have my own spot in a coffee shop now, on a comfy seat with a wide, flat table that doesn’t wobble. I have rather a lot of cheap fountain pens, which is naughty of me, especially because I suspect their origins via a cheap workforce are less than ethically sourced. I have a suspicious stain in the bottom of my bag and today, one on my jeans from absently rubbing my fingers dry on them. Yesterday, to my considerable chagrin, I found I’d managed to wipe ink in odd trails across my cheeks, after yet another horrible attack by gamergate trolls caused me to cry all over the place without any tissues whilst writing a letter about what was going on. It did however, make me look rather like my Night Elf from WoW. I always did like her tattoos. (and fuck gamergaters).

Letters have kept me sane this year, something I would never have expected. If you’d asked me ten months ago, I would have regarded them with suspicion, glanced at the Letters Box under my bed full of nasty things I didn’t

want to read and couldn’t quite work out how to forget. The box still contains some sadness, but now I also have brighter memories. This year has been hard. Really hard. I can’t wait for it to end. The illness and crippling depression of a close friend, sadness and separation and the grinding, continuous misery of online harassment. But it’s also been full letters, wonderful, brilliant letters. Letters all colours and shapes. Letters that are late, that arrive when least expected or all in a bundle or as I push the door open in the evening (the post comes late here). Letters covered in crazy stamps, or with doodles drawn on them, or full of jelly beans and ink. Letters full of beautifully coloured writing - in colour and tone. Letters from far away and surprisingly close at hand. Letters full of arguments, but intelligent ones that spark a little as they are read from the page. Letters that are a pressure valve. And, after Helena’s wonderful article about De Profundis, letters full of secrets and mystery in my own incarnation of that game.

And so to this wonderful issue of Journey Planet. Letters from Absentia (silly person, you can’t write a letter IN Absentia). It’s a riff from the famous socialist science fiction manifesto; News From Nowhere by William Morris. But you knew that, for you, dear reader, are clever and urbane.

There’s a lot of repetition in this edition of Journey Planet; with people reiterating over and again their love of writing, paper, pens and ink. Stamps and nibs hacked and dropped. Ink swirled - Linda’s bottling of an ink unique to this issue (and how did she know I was dreaming of a green?). The comfort of letters. Recommendations and exhortations to pick up pens and buy stamps and love writing for writing’s sake from Johnathan Baddeley, John Dodd and James Bacon. The delight of a secret or memory shared. Strength from those far away, transporting itself on paper to others. Meg’s precise, neat layout. Chris’s fingers on the images of ‘5kg of stamps’ he photographed for this issue (eek!). We had so many ideas, and marvellously, our authors have realised many of them. Continued on pg 89

The Instant Fanzine on postcards - trumpeting our love of fandom and sharing it with friends. Beautiful art and observations from people like Jude Melling. Steve Tandy's knowledge of the wonderful variety of Discworld Stamps. Recollections of those we love and admire from David Haddock, Steve Dean, Erin Underwood and more. Memories of friends and thank-yous to people we never knew, through Hannah Rutherford's constant letter writing to her fans and Helena Nash's elegant, wistful recollections of pen pals past. We even had a couple of 'lost in the posts' - halfway through this edition, my briefly turned up already opened, a pile of the got left unnoticed on 'my' desk (except it wasn't my desk at all, it was on the opposite side of the room) and James misplaced an entire article ('Hacking a Parker Part 1' eventually resurfaced, thank goodness). We see letter in games, from the loneliness of Gone Home, the strange fiction of De Profundis and Henry Lowood's archives of PBM games. And of course, we also see the shadow of war. Our quest to discover the contents of a PoW postcard, Chris' meticulous questioning of soldiers' testimony, the sadness of Eleanor Farjeon, and James Wheale's earnest, wonderful project with letters, a buffet, and warfare. It's been a wonderful, vibrant journey through this all.

Write soon!  
All my love,

E xxx

James Bacon

I cannot explain well why I enjoy writing letters, the accoutrements surrounding them, fountain pens and stamps. Stamps I collected as a child and that was fun, although my current use and fascination is unclear. I do love post. Especially nice post, you know letters or comics or pens. I know I wrote many letters from South Africa and liked the change of pace, yet it may be that it's just not electronic. People ask about it in Starbucks, rather like my moustache, maybe it's an eccentric piece of me, but it feels so normal and actually human. I enjoy writing love letters, they are fun, occasional of course, but especially nice if page two of a seemingly regular letter turns intimate, and one can write so much more than one can say in a bar. And I like how letters intersect with so many interesting subjects.

Journey Planet 89

This has been an incredible issue. First off big thanks to our co-editors, Esther, Linda and Meg, who have brought so much, from system to aesthetic to new sources to hand crafting to this issue of Journey Planet. It has been great. The amount of work on this issue has been phenomenal (many joules); hand written headers, translations, transcribing.

And to our contributors, so much time and effort, we are grateful. This issue has been a real work of love and has had a long gestation period, but wow, is it worth it. Thanks to all for their patience, support and effort.

This is also the first issue since Journey Planet won a Hugo, and I'd like to thank all our guest editors, contributors, nominators, voters and readers. It's been so enjoyable and the award was amazing.

This year's Hugos were damn emotional and I was surprised we won. 1,918 votes in the first round was incredible. I love the Hugo awards and cannot express the honour of winning one for Journey Planet. I am just very grateful to everyone involved at all levels and appreciate you all seeing it through.

My thanks. Enjoy this zine, and as ever do let us know what you think.

A vertical logo for 'Journey Planet' where the letters are stacked and overlap. The letters are green and have a hand-drawn, slightly irregular appearance. The 'J' is at the top, followed by 'O', 'U', 'R', 'N', 'E', 'Y', 'P', 'L', 'A', 'N', 'E', 'T'.

Journey Planet End