

Think Blue, Count Zero



Corflu Cobalt – Progress Report 1

This is the first progress report for CORFLU COBALT, a science fiction convention to be held from Friday 19th to Sunday 21st March 2010, at the Winchester Hotel, Winchester, Hampshire, England. This PR dated October 2009 and edited by Sandra Bond, and she almost deserved it. Cover by Jim Barker; art for The True Cat (pages 12 and 15) by Lisa Conesa.

Yes, it's true – for the second time in its 27 year history, Corflu, the annual convention for fans of science fiction fanzines and their pals, is to be held in England. England! The nation that gave the world H. G. Wells, Eric Frank Russell, Peter Weston, D West and Keith Walker. England! The nation where a nice cup of tea is seen as the cure-all for every ill from an alien invasion to an exploding photocopier. England! The country that swung SF, the country where time winds blow, the country where the unknown past and the emergent future meet in a vibrating soundless hum!

We hope you'll join us (if you haven't already) and take part in the fun -- some traditional, some new, some comparatively safe and some wild and crazy -- that will be Corflu Cobalt.

CONTACT DETAILS:

Email is the recommended means of contact; here are some addresses...

- * Rob Jackson, chair: cobalt@corflu.org
- * Graham Charnock, programming: cobaltprogram@corflu.org
- * John N. Hall, treasurer: cobaltreg@corflu.org
- * Pat Charnock, memberships: cobaltmemb@corflu.org
- * Sandra Bond, publications: cobaltpubs@corflu.org
- * Robert Lichtman (US Agent): cobaltusa@corflu.org
- * Ian Maule, Corflu Cobalt web pages, virtual consuite: webcobalt@corflu.org
- * Mike Meara, FAAn Award administrator: cobaltfaan@corflu.org

If you should need to make postal contact, the address to use is:

Corflu Cobalt, 45 Kimberley Gardens, London N4 1LD

Or in the US: Corflu Cobalt, 11037 Broadway Terrace, Oakland, CA 94611-1948

Membership fees are £45 or \$65 for an attending membership, or £10/\$15 for supporting. Payment may be made by cheque, by check, or by Paypal (see our webpage at www.corflu.org for instructions). These rates will be held until 16th January 2010, after which anything (anything? ANYTHING) might happen... so get in early...

Why Cobalt? Because Cobalt is the 27th element in the periodic table, and this is the 27th Corflu. Tout court.

Why "Think Blue, Count Zero"? Because cobalt, a transition metal (so chemists tell us), frequently forms blue compounds. Hence, the colour blue pervades our entire convention. You can even dress all in blue for the convention if you like! As for the title itself... if you don't know that it's borrowed from a Cordwainer Smith story (with a nod en passant to William Gibson), you must be some kind of fakefan. (Special Fakefan memberships are available; just add £10/\$15 to the price of a regular membership.)

Why Winchester? Because Winchester is an ancient city (former capital of England, no less) with many enjoyable tourist venues for those who want to turn the convention weekend into a longer visit. In our next PR we hope to highlight some of them for you, as well as give practical info about eateries and how to get to Winchester in the first place.

Corflu FAQs

An intro by Rob Jackson



What does Corflu mean?

Short for Correcting Fluid. When fanzines were mimeographed (or duplicated – same meaning), the stencils on which the editor typed were crucial in producing a good-looking fanzine. Corflu was a solution of quick-setting plastic; you could correct an error by re-typing over it once it was dry. (Nowadays, think Tippex – or more likely spellchecker in Word or whatever.)

Why is this one called Corflu Cobalt?

It's the 27th in the series of conventions.

For the link between the number 27 and cobalt, ask that nice Mr Mendeleev.

What is Corflu for?

It's a lightly programmed small con, almost a relaxacon, with a traditional brunch Banquet on the Sunday morning at which the Fanzine Activity Achievement Awards are presented and a few other non-serious formalities take place. The aim is to promote friendship, communication and creativity in fanzine fandom in different parts of the English speaking world. For those present to be actively involved and contribute – and – to have **fun**.

Who is Corflu for?

Those interested in **fanzines** about written/ literary SF and its related fandom. Basically, current, past, and potential, fanzine fans. Also – those who want to be a part of it!

What are the FAAn Awards?

Go to the Corflu History page, and see the link to FAAn Awards History, top right.

<http://www.corflu.org/history/faan.html>

Who will be your FAAn Award Administrator?

Mike Meara. See Mike's mini autobiography, and article, elsewhere in this PR. His level-headedness and strong sense of fairness make him the ideal person to look after the Awards for 2010.

Will there be any changes in the FAAn Awards for Corflu Cobalt?

Yes. It suddenly occurred to us on the Corflu Cobalt organising group that there is so much

awareness of the history of fanzine fandom in our group, that it is daft that we have not yet celebrated the lifelong achievement of some of the greatest practitioners of the art of fanzine editing, writing, design and art. So we are introducing a Lifetime Achievement Award, to go to someone we want to recognise as having contributed to the SF fanzine world for 30 years or more, is still active, and whose work we want to recognise as of lasting value.

How will a British Corflu be different?

British cons have a unique feel, rather different from American ones – the hotel bar is often the focal point socially, rather different from the con-suite which is such a regular feature in the US. We will be doing our own thing, and it should be the best of British, though still honouring the fine traditions which have grown up in Corflus held in the US.

How is the Guest of Honour chosen?

At the Opening Ceremony on the Friday evening, the GoH's name is usually drawn out of a hat, from among the convention members. Traditionally, as Corflu is a con where we all get involved, the GoH is then expected to give a presentation at the Banquet on the Sunday. However, this has not been all that welcome for all Corflu members, so people have recently been allowed to buy their way out of being in the GoH Hat by a payment, of say \$20 – which helps fund con-suite goodies or future Corflus.

Is this GoH selection process going to work like this forever?

Like anything else in life, it is evolving. Most who don't want to risk having to sing for their brunch on the Sunday have been happy to contribute in this way, but one or two people find this also a bit worrying. So at the 2009 Corflu (Corflu Zed in Seattle) people were allowed to decline even if their name came out of the hat. At Corflu Cobalt in Winchester, we are going to take this a stage further by giving people a choice of privileges for being GoH – first to the banquet brunch, or a few other similar ideas yet to be confirmed; and a choice of responsibilities to help out the con in some way (including the traditional speech as an option, but with other choices also yet to be confirmed – some of which may depend on the talents of the particular GoH). But if you **really** don't want to be in the hat, you can still buy your way out – though at a reduced cost compared to recent years. This being a British con, £10 is our suggested donation.

THE FAAn AWARDS

by Mike Meara

As usual, the awards will be presented during the Sunday brunch. The categories will be pretty much as before:

Best Fan Artist; Best Fan Writer; Best Fanzine; Best Letterhack; Best New Fanzine Fan;
Best Online Site

with the addition of one new category agreed by the Committee:

Lifetime Achievement Award

...the eligible recipient of which will have been active for at least 30 years, and still going. We've also decided that the eligible "New" Fanzine Fan will have been active for no more than three years (sorry, Peter Sullivan!). The #1 Fan Face award will be decided by calculation of total points scored in all other categories.

You will be able to nominate up to five contenders in each category, which means there's quite a lot of thinking to do. What can you remember? I know, it's difficult. So start now! Bear in mind that you'll be voting on activity during 2009, except in the case of the new Lifetime Achievement Award.

If you're reading this, you are probably already a member of Corflu Cobalt. But it's not necessary to be a member to vote in the FAAn Awards; all you have to be is a fanzine fan. So please spread the word that the process is underway. Information on how to vote, and voting forms, will be available in early January. The purpose of this little bit is to get you thinking, and along the right lines.

GET WITH THE PROGRAMME by Graham Charnock

Many people are under the impression that, because a Corflu is such a laid back, low-key, easy-going kind of convention which frowns upon such things as contact sports and bloody re-enactments of the Romulan Invasion of K'ith, very little forethought or pre-planning goes into the actual programming and it just somehow comes together and happens on the day.

I know I was.

I was recently disabused of this notion, however, when after I emerged from a long-term coma induced by the spectacle of James Bacon and Ian Sorensen dueting on Auld Lang's Syne at Hinckley in 2003, several members of the committee took me to one side (the left one as it happened) and forcibly reminded me of the rigorous procedures of selection and deselection, discussion, argument and force-feeding that are followed before any programme item is positively approved. Events such as Andy Hooper and Jerry Kaufman wrestling naked don't just happen spontaneously, and sometimes, thank heavens, do not happen at all.

Be assured this process is currently well under way with regard to Corflu Cobalt, or Corflu Wrigley's Chewing Gum as we are thinking of re-naming it if they come through with the sponsorship fee. While I am not currently at liberty to outline any of the fascinating and exciting programme items we are at this moment honing, finely chiselling, and subjecting to other procedures involving sharp implements, I thought I would share with you some of the items which, after much heart-wrenching group discussion, sometimes at sessions which lasted long into lunchtime, we have decided to reject, just so you can be assured we are not just sitting around here catching up on old episodes of Battlestar Galactica:

Frog Racing. This was in the frame as a possibility for a long time until the always sensible Claire Brialey reminded us that open season for frogs, at least in the British Isles, traditionally does not start until October 14th and extends only until January 10th when moulting occurs and any person not returning a frog to its natural habitat is subject to a severe overdue frog surcharge. I'm sorry. If anybody offers to sell you tickets to a back street frog racing event at Corflu Cobalt, sidle away nervously as you would when confronted by any 'normal' nutter. If they are a member of the Committee, report them to another member of the Committee, and we will both talk to you in a dark soundproofed room.

Enema Jousting. We are aware that there is a strong tradition of this at recent Corflus, and we are mindful of Winchester's ancient connection with the Arthurian chivalric traditions, but we regret we cannot justify the expense involved in the purchase of waterproof tarpaulins and the hire of St John's Ambulance Brigade to be on standby. Furthermore, its main proponent and advocate and holder of the World Title Belt (you know who we mean) is unlikely to be attending in 2010 due to other commitments and a foreclosure notice being posted on his Welsh hill farm.

The Nic Farey Memorial Room Party – Regrettably this has had to be cancelled due to the Winchester Hotel's strict no smoking policy. Our apologies to all those who were wishing to show their respects to this much-missed iconic figure of fandom and his survivors.*

(*I have just been informed that Nic Farey is in fact still amongst us, so F*ck *ff, Nic.)

How to Build a Duplicator Out of an Old Washing Machine. This talk is one of many D. West related items which has foundered because of the steadfast refusal of D. West to have anything to do with the convention except to draw cartoons from a distance. (See also *Pole Dancing for Beginners*, *A Short Discourse on Practical Techniques of Fanzine Criticism*, and the *Corflu International Three-Day Dominoes Rally*.)

Brian Parker Sings. We have had many requests to book this popular and versatile entertainer and exhibitionist, but unfortunately an equal number of people threatening to slash their wrists if we went ahead and did so. We have also had to cancel the planned Unconditional Love-in and Dance Fest Brian was thinking of holding in a nearby field, because he has suffered an unconditional groin strain, or at least will have by next March if we have anything to do with it.

In truth many more suggestions didn't even make it as far as the discussion stage, and were dismissed out of hand, though most of these involved the BNP. As for the actual programme, rest assured that work proceeds apace in organizing many splendid events, and it will all be all right on the night. Of course you may not get to hear about many of these until the night itself. But you can rely on me. As sure as my name is Ted White.

THE GUILTY PARTIES

... named in no particular order.

IAN MAULE: Active in fanzine fandom throughout the seventies and early eighties and then gafiated in favour of work and being a recluse. From 1984 professionally involved with personal computers and from 1997 was technical manager for a large Internet system; later involved with strategic issues. Retired in 2003 to concentrate on contemplating my navel. Currently active on a few email lists. This will be my first Corflu although I did virtually "attend" the last two.

GRAHAM CHARNOCK: Born 1946. Discovered sf. In charge of New Worlds slush pile for short time. Worked in bookshop. Produced Phile and helped wife produce Wrinkled Shrew. Wrote and recorded with Mike Moorcock as one of Deep Fix. Worked for a book wholesaler. Wrote a few short stories. One of the Secret Masters of the Astral Leauge. Produced publications for Seacon '79. Worked for a book distributor. First Corflu was Quire in Austin.

PAT CHARNOCK: Read The Chalet Girls and Little Women at school, and didn't meet fandom until, at the age of 22, my future husband dragged me into it. Got involved in fanzines - Wrinkled Shrew and an APAzine and assorted one-offs - and convention committees - Seacon 1975, Channelcon 1982, and the '79 Worldcon. One of the secret mistresses of the Astral Leauge. Got sidetracked by raising two sons and paying a mortgage. Then I got sucked into e-list Inthebar, and started writing again. I went to Corflu Silver to meet my friends and felt right at home, back where I belonged.

CLAIRE BRIALEY and MARK PLUMMER entered fandom in the mid-1980s, at about the same time that many of the Corflu Cobalt committee were giving it up as a bad job. They thus fulfil the dual roles of explaining fannish developments of the last twenty years to the iceberg fans and being duly reverential to their elders and betters. Their fanzines are widely regarded as too long and too serious although they remain popular with the Welsh. They may have something of an editorial nature to do with a fanthology which we hope will appear at Corflu Cobalt.

ROB JACKSON: Read Clarke and Wyndham at school then as a medical student at Oxford in the early 70s: forgivable? Wrote stories for Sfinx; more study in Newcastle & became a Gannetfan. Tynecon committee in 74; took over MAYA (became Hugo-nominated genzine). Committees of first few Silicons (Geordie relaxacons) & Seacon 79 (UK Worldcon). Moved down South, married another fan (Coral – previously Clarke). Reviewed fanzines in Matrix 79-81; publications for Mexicon 2 and Conspiracy, the 1987 Worldcon. Consultant psychiatrist in Chichester 83 onwards; 3 kids; gafiated till 2001 – Greg Pickersgill's Memory Hole e-list revived contact. Loved it again, especially Harry Bell's IntheBar. Publishing Bellissimo!, fan pubbing again with INCA, Corflus, IntheBar gatherings and Ploktacon all great, especially now I am retired. Is fandom addictive? My two most active periods in it have bookended a career as a psychiatrist specialising in addictions.....

MIKE MEARA: My first convention was a good 'un: the 1971 Eastercon in Worcester, organised by the Eminent (he was eminent even then) Peter Weston. After that good start I was quite active throughout that decade, going to pretty well all the cons there were in the UK - not many, to begin with, but steadily increasing - and pubbing my ish (LURK, and later KNOCKERS FROM NEPTUNE). The high spot was a visit to the States in 1977 to support Britain's Fine In

'79 at Suncon in Miami. I gradually faded away during the 1980s. I think the last con I went to was Rubicon in 1988. And that was the last most fans saw of me and Pat until 20 years later, when that nice (and still Eminent) Peter Weston tempted me, via PROLAPSE/RELAPSE, to go to a con again. This was his Cytricon V, in Kettering. So I've come full circle, thanks to That Man. My fanwriting these days is in the bar rather than fanzines, though I do try to write a few locs. And cons are interesting again – Corflu Cobalt is my fifth since Cytricon, but my first-ever Corflu, so I hope you'll be gentle with me.

ROBERT LICHTMAN: Born 1942, discovered SF through radio and comic books while age still in single digits. Found fandom via Robert Bloch's final "Fandora's Box" column in the summer of 1958. Published first fanzine by Christmas that year (PSI-PHI, seven genzine issues by end of 1960, three more later), joined my first apa (SAPS) the following summer. Was in many apas during the first half of the '60s (was President of OMPA 1961/62) and also published six issues of FRAP 1963-64. Moved from L.A. to S.F. in 1965 just in time for "the '60s," which proved an enjoyable distraction. Held onto FAPA membership and did local social fanac through 1971, and also went to the infamous Pacificon in Berkeley (1968) where drugs and rock music made their first appearance at a worldcon. Fafiated for the '70s to go live on The Farm commune in Tennessee. Moved back to California 1980 to work for Paul Williams's small publishing company and reconnected with fandom when Paul began getting PONG. Wrote a LoC and never looked back. Started TRAP DOOR in 1983. Rejoined SAPS (1984) and FAPA (1985), and have been Secretary-Treasurer of the latter since 1986. Was at the first Corflu in 1984 (at the same hotel where that '68 worldcon was held). Was TAFF winner in 1989 and have joined the ranks of those worthies who haven't gotten round to writing a report. Have four grown sons all born at home with midwives on The Farm. Have been with Carol Carr since late '80s, married since 2000.

JOHN NIELSEN HALL: Hi! I am your Uncle Johnny, and I am in charge of Enforcement at Corflu. You can expect to see me wandering the hotel, waving my big stick. I expect high standards of attendees, and sitting alone speaking to no one will not be tolerated. If no one else is available to socialise with, there is a special Host, whom you will recognise by dint of his unkempt beard, bald pate, swivelling eyes and dribble. Please note that while vomiting and falling over are tolerated, if not actually expected, serconism is not allowed in any circumstances and references to SF and what proceeds there from are limited to panels unless the subject under discussion lives in Brooklyn. Speaking of which, I should like to extend an especially warm welcome to our North American visitors and being mindful of the limitations of the education systems in that part of the world, I shall be happy to provide any translation necessary for those of you baffled by accents. Be advised that if your interlocutor appears to be saying "grooten graatten" repeatedly, that is a speech impediment and I cannot help you. Also you should note that if you find yourself next to anyone with a badge name that ends in "Kettle", you are required to end every sentence with "Sir" or "Ma'am" as appropriate and bow as they enter and leave the room. These are just a few small hints at what is expected from participants and I hope they add to your enjoyment. I shall be glad to receive suggestions from anyone, but particularly from large people who might also possess a big stick – Reception will give you my room number.

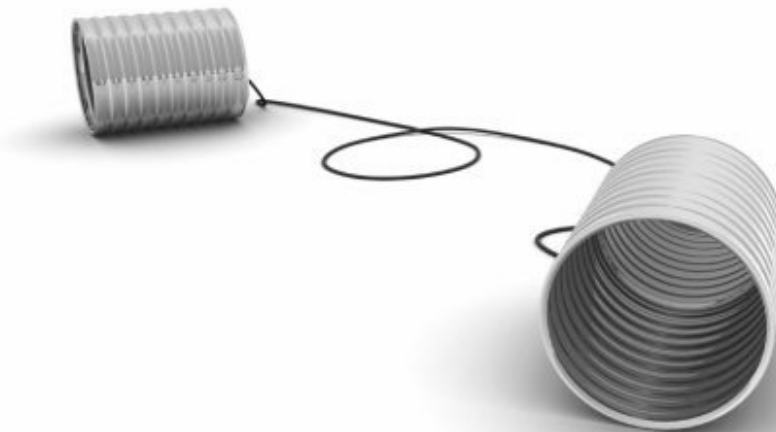
LINDA KRAWECKE: Born in the southern USA on a date we shall not mention, Linda made contact with British fandom at the 1977 worldcon in Miami, and was impressed enough to attend the 1979 worldcon in Brighton, following which she was soon to move to these shores. She's remained here, and active in British fandom ever since. Some high points include the founding of Britain's first modern apa, The Women's Periodical, which continues to this day;

editing fanzines such as START BREAKING UP and TIGER TEA; and providing moral guidance to young fans beshadowed by internal doubt.

SANDRA BOND: Discovered SF through Panther Books with Chris Foss covers at a tender age and has been a sucker for knobby spaceships with rivets all over ever since then. Discovered fandom in 1987 just in time for the British worldcon that year, which I was possibly the only person to enjoy throughout and find no fault in (ah, innocence!) Have maintained a constant presence in fandom since. I prefer my conventions to be Awfully Big or else Small and Cosy, so have made recent British worldcons while rarely showing my face at Eastercons; first convention committee was Mexican III, 1989, first Corflu was Corflu Blackjack, 2004. Editor of QUASIQUOTE, BOGUS, and certain other fanzines best left buried in the compost heap of time. Also editor of this progress report, and those to follow.

The Virtual Con-Suite

by Ian ("Dr Technical") Maule



We have the technology and the hotel has the free Wifi access in the public areas but will it work? During a visit to the hotel this summer I managed to get a signal on my laptop and accessed the internet but that day Ustream TV wasn't playing ball.

"Don't worry, Ian, it'll work," said Dr. Rob. "Don't worry, Ian, it'll work," chimed the Charnox in unison. "Don't worry, Ian, it'll work," cried Linda. The Nielsen Halls looked up from their free lunch, made a silent gesture as if to say, "Don't worry, Ian, it'll work," and carried on eating. Sandra wasn't there but I'm sure she would have echoed everyone else.

The next opportunity to test the system will be at the end of October when I spend a couple of days at the Winchester Hotel. Assuming it does work then we can go ahead with the Virtual Con-Suite as planned.

Peter Sullivan has volunteered to help out. As you might know he's very experienced with using the Ustream broadcast system having participated in the last two Corflu, the Katzes' Virtual Fan Lounge broadcasts and run the virtual con suite for this year's Eastercon in Bradford.

Some ideas:

The roving camera, courtesy of Bill Burns, worked well at Corflu Zed and was appreciated by all those watching at the time. We hope to do something similar at Corflu Cobalt.

Signage to tell con-goers the camera is "live" (unless of course they really want us to hear them telling their friends about their current diet - and then seeing them break it when they sneak over to the food table when they think no-one is watching!)

A microphone wired to the panel sound system.

And if it doesn't work in October? ...well, then, we still have several months to come up with a work-around. The virtual con-suite has become Corflu's newest tradition, and a very welcome one in a world where finances, health, or other factors mean that many fans who would love to attend Corflu just aren't able to; and in a year where Corflu is held outside the USA, this is even more the case. Rest assured that we'll find some way of bringing the spirit of Corflu to your very desktop, even if we have to resort to the device shown above. (If we do, the Corflu auction may have to be dedicated to buying us a very, very large ball of string...)

Our hotel

After a good many potential venues were scrutinised under our intense scrutiny, we decided to hold Corflu Cobalt at the Winchester Hotel, Winchester, Hampshire. The hotel is newly refurbished, centrally located, of about the right size for us to use most if not all its facilities, and its staff seem to relish the prospect of our attendance.

We have secured room rates of £65/night single or £80/night double/twin for the convention period. As is usual for British convention hotels, those rates include all taxes, and also breakfast.

Hotel bookings are now **OPEN**, and we highly recommend that if you haven't already done so, you get your booking in chop-chop to avoid possible disappointment. The preferred mode of doing so is to visit <http://www.corflu.org/booking.html>, where you will find full instructions. A specific code is needed to access the reduced rates available to con members. This should have been emailed to all members, but if you have not received it or have mislaid it, email cobaltmemb@corflu.org.

We may not have art-deco knobs and chrome like Seattle... we may not have glitzy casinos like Vegas... but Winchester is a charming city with a character all its own, and if you don't know it, we think you'll enjoy it.

Membership List

- | | | |
|-----------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|
| * Jay Kinney (A) | * Bruce Townley (A) | * Marianne Cain (A) |
| * Ted White (A) | * Peter Sullivan (A) | * Jonathan Cain (A) |
| * Frank Lunney (A) | * A. Sullivan (A) | * John Dallman (A) |
| * Elinor Busby (A) | * Pat Mailer (A) | * Steve Davies (A) |
| * Claire Brialey (A) | * Jeanne Bowman (A) | * Giulia De Cesare (A) |
| * Mark Plummer (A) | * Alan Rosenthal (A) | * Tony Berry (A) |
| * James Bacon (A) | * Tracy Benton (A) | * Julian Headlong (A) |
| * Pat Virzi (A) | * Bill Bodden (A) | * Ian Sorensen (A) |
| * Geri Sullivan (A) | * Sneerpout (A) | * Yvonne Rowse (A) |
| * Allyn Cadogan (A) | * Ang Rosin (A) | * Doug Bell (A) |
| * Hope Leibowitz (S) | * Wendy Freeman (A) | * Christina Lake(A) |
| * Murray Moore (A) | * Keith Freeman (A) | * Bill Burns (A) |
| * Mary Ellen Moore(A) | * Brian Parker (A) | * Mary Burns (A) |
| * Jerry Kaufman (A) | * Bridget Bradshaw(A) | * Dixie Tracy-Kinney(A) |
| * Suzle Tompkins (A) | * Elaine Stiles (A) | * Steve Jeffery (A) |
| * Art Widner (A) | * Steve Stiles (A) | * Vikki Lee France (A) |
| * Nic Farey (A) | * Earl Kemp (A) | * Caroline Mullan (A) |
| * Bobbie Farey (A) | * Mike Meara (A) | * David Redd (S) |
| * Ian Maule (A) | * Pat Meara (A) | * Ritchie Smith (A) |
| * Janice Maule (A) | * Joseph Nicholas (A) | * Jim Mowatt (A) |
| * Marion Linwood (A) | * Judith Hanna (A) | * Carrie Mowatt (A) |
| * Jim Linwood (A) | * Rich Coad (A) | * Katrina Templeton(S) |
| * Steve Green (A) | * Stacy Scott (A) | * Martin Easterbrook (A) |
| * Graham Charnock (A) | * Randy Byers (S) | * Margaret Austin (A) |
| * Pat Charnock (A) | * Michael Scott (A) | * Vincent Docherty (S) |
| * John Hall (A) | * Flick (A) | |
| * Audrey Hall (A) | * Sandra Bond (A) | |
| * Rob Jackson (A) | * Jim Caughran (A) | |
| * Dave Langford (A) | * Janet Carrington (A) | |
| * Harry Bell (A) | * Alison Scott (A) | |
| * Robert Lichtman (S) | * Steven Cain (A) | |

There's still plenty of room
for your name here...

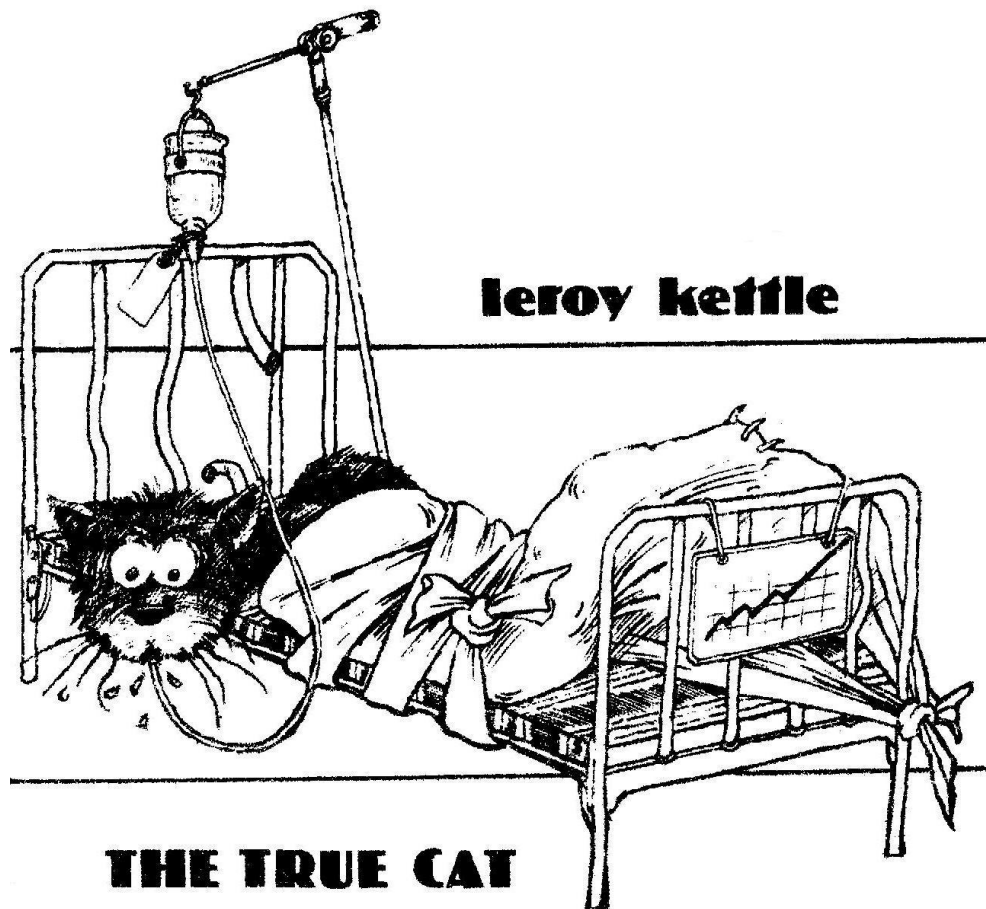
REVIVALS

Last year, Seattle's Corflu Zed had the excellent idea of using their progress reports to reprint deserving pieces of fanwriting by local fans from over the years. We here at Corflu Cobalt applaud this innovation, and are unrepentant in stealing the idea wholesale; so in these pages you'll be reading some choice items from British fanwriting of years gone by.

We start this ball rolling with a name which is hopefully familiar to many of you – Leroy Kettle. Most active in fandom in the 1970s and early 1980s, Roy's unique style of humour was highly

popular and led to his fanzine TRUE RAT being rated as one of the classic fanzines of the time, a reputation which it has retained.

Roy also wrote for others; his account of trying, and failing, to interview an author for SCIENCE FICTION MONTHLY became an article "An Interview With Thomas M. Disch", a title which has led to it being listed as a genuine interview on some bibliographic lists. Neither did he confine himself to his close cronies' fanzines, contributing pieces to such diverse editors as Richard MacMahon (INVERTED EAR TRUMPET) and Lisa Conesa (ZIMRI); and it's from this last fanzine's eighth and final issue, with original illustrations by Lisa Conesa, that we bring you the antidote to every twee fanzine article ever written about the editor's cats... *The True Cat*. Enjoy.



In the daze of my youth we seemed to get through a lot of cats. We got through them like some people get through Kleenex, and almost as messily, although they were slightly more difficult to dispose of.

For a long time I thought we only had one cat. It was called Fluff, like all good cats were then, but ours was not a good, nor a normal, cat. Often it was ginger or black and white, and at other times tabby. Once, for a whole week it was tortoise-shell (which is alright for tortoises, but looks sort of untidy on cats). Funny old Fluff, I thought.

I knew the changes in its colour (and size, which I ignored) coincided with the times that my

grandmother used to totter out onto the main road and scrape up a shapeless, red-streaked lump but I didn't know why. She used to bury these lumps in the back garden with monotonous regularity and my toy shovel. My grandfather couldn't understand why his marrows won no prizes that year but, as usual, blamed it on "too much bloody weather",

Whenever my grandmother got hold of another stray and told me that Fluff was back (my childhood stupidity is a family legend) she also suggested that I begin to learn to close the gate. But it wasn't me who let the cat out. It was my crazy uncle, who drank meths from the Corona bottle in which it was kept because he thought it was flat pop, who used to chase the cats onto the main road and laugh and laugh. I wouldn't go near Fluff despite accepting the general opinion that he/she was a nice cat.

Probably because I looked like a smaller version of my uncle the cats used to sharpen their claws on me frequently. I soon learned to keep my distance, which could well explain my inability to detect any relationship between dead cats and live ones, and also why I was prepared to accept *any* Fluff without argument. In fact, I found I couldn't even recognise any similarities between cats killed by the frenzied Bilston traffic and those killed by other methods. The pathetic Fluff that went (I hope) to the Great Fishmonger In The Sky after coughing up blood and fur for several days bore no resemblance to the unfortunate version which my unrepentant uncle tried to flush down the toilet. Quite understandably it had failed to survive his repeated (and bewildering) attempts to shove it around the U bend, and when the resultant dripping black mass was buried it meant nothing to me.

Eventually I grew large enough to emulate my uncle. The combination of being able to copy a pseudo-adult and wreaking revenge on Fluff (who, after all, seemed indestructible, and whose scars I bear to this very day) proved too much for me.

To my shame I threw the current Fluff onto the living-room fire. Once more my grandmother had to find space in the back garden, and then I began to understand how the buried, twisted object had once been a living creature. Since then I have been reasonably pleasant to most small animals. I was very young.

Anyway, not long afterwards my father married again (and I stopped living with my grandmother and her bizarre son). The subsequent delicate additions to the Kettle household no longer allowed cats to be present, as my step-mother regarded them as biters of babies, foulers of furniture and clawers of carpets, besides their anti-respiratory habits of moulting in mouths (specifically babies' mouths, and with remarkable accuracy for a condition so uncontrollable). Anyway, she didn't like them. I don't think she had ever been within swinging distance of a cat, and, certainly, had not had the traumatic experiences of my earlier days to mould her character. It appeared to be a completely irrational hatred of mobile furry objects, which makes one wonder where the babies came from.

I well remember one day how she cheered when the evil moggy from next door came scuttling across the lawn with its one good eye staring at the crowded bird-table, and my father, springing from nowhere, booted the already tattered and scarred cat high into the air. Before it touched the ground, my uncle (no relation) overcoming the bad leg injury which kept him out of work (not too amazingly, it was an old cat injury), swung his boot beneath the sorry animal which, with a doppleresque wail, flew back next door where it landed in a twitching heap.

It took me some time to overcome this persistent anti-animal propaganda. I still can't sit in a car without feeling a touch of panic if a dog runs into the road in case the driver, like my father, decides to chase it regardless of highway codes, moral codes or pedestrians. But cats I eventually got to like. Very much.

Oh, yes, except for Oscar. He belonged to Paul the Postman who lives next door to me. Paul the Postman's a bit of a sod, who with his unspeakable friends likes nothing more than a quick revival of any long, loud musical right outside my room any time after two in the morning. That's not really relevant. Anyway, he decided he would like a kitten, got one, and called it Oscar. It was the most singularly vicious animal which ever existed. Blofeld's piranha had nothing on it. Possibly its temperament was due to the inches of dust and filth through which it had to plough all the time. Or it may perhaps have been Paul's insistence that Oscar cost him nothing in upkeep which finally drove it berserk. Like Paul, the cat used old newspaper cut into strips for certain purposes of personal hygiene. It often used to slink downstairs (coughing and choking) in order to leave horrifyingly white faeces in somewhat more cattish places than a basin full of tits and bums ripped from the Daily Mirror. It also used to eat stuff which could never come out of a tin. That food was extraordinarily hideous, both in looks and smell, besides having a strange propensity for attracting maggots. In such an atmosphere of cleanliness and affection did Oscar grow up to be a revolting little cat. It hit, clawed, or merely hissed at anything which moved. It would not be picked up, stroked or ignored. I've had less ravaged skin picking gooseberries for a fortnight without gloves. Eventually it ran away. I've always suspected that someone deliberately left the door open for it (not my uncle this time though). Paul still deludes himself that it was a nice animal and that someone may have stolen it, but I suspect it was ripped into as many pieces as his Daily Mirror by the first full-grown street-cat it met.

You may wonder whether this rubbish about cats ever gets fannish. Well, it does. So there.

John Hall's cat was the next I saw a lot of and, luckily, it was quite a nice one, so I got back to liking them again. He called it Chissum (spelt Chisholm, as in "Trail" and "get along li'l dogies") probably because he thought this was ethnic (a word he thinks means Country and Western which is a type of music he likes *more than he lets on*.) Chissum had a permanently dazed expression and was friendly to everyone except John, but in a bewildered sort of way. This was probably because John had a habit, whenever Chissum did anything wrong, of picking it up and shouting in its ear, "You know that's wrong. You naughty cat. I've told you before not to do that and you still do it. DON'T DO IT ANY MORE." Then he'd drop Chissum which would stand rigidly where it landed for some minutes before beginning to shake its head furiously. This treatment must have damaged its little feline brain, as must its enforced proximity to John's speakers, but fortunately in a different way to Oscar's. And it never could understand spoken English quite as well as John thought, because it did do things again. But it was a nice cat.

So we come to the Charnocks. When Tigga Charnock gave birth (after having been impregnated, I understand, before the delighted eyes and slobbering mouth of Graham in the Charnocks' front room) a happy home was wanted for Treackle, the black one, Tabit, the tabby, Blob, the other tabby, Ginger, the ginger (yes, indeed) and a ginger and white one whose name I forget. I decided I wanted a man's cat, which, contrary to Graham's belief doesn't mean a bitch. I didn't want a silly woman cat that would go around making herself pregnant (or however they do it). Luckily, the one I liked the look of most, and which ran away from me least, the ginger tom, was a tom. I had him, and Chris, being misled by their apparent cuddliness, chose one too.

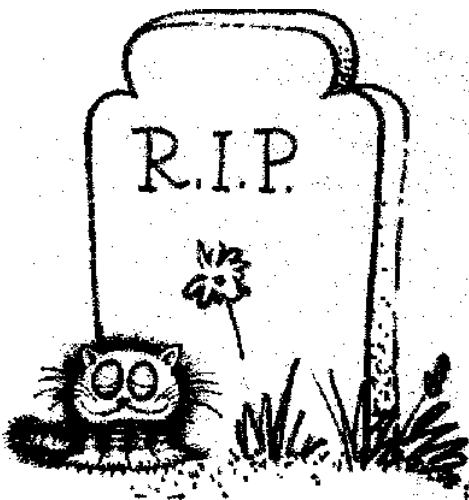
Tabit. A female.

I had been determined to call mine Fang, which I'm now very grateful I didn't do as it would have sounded pretty bloody silly at the vet's for one thing. Instead, long-tired of calling fannish names after animals, I decided to call my animal after a fan. I chose a prominent fannish cat-lover and named my cat Robert. (Chris called hers Tabitha, which is a typical effeminate name for a female cat.)

Unfortunately, it soon became apparent that, while Chris had a sharp little cat that could chew mice and walk at the same time, I had a mentally defective creature. Sadly, there was no guarantee. I had apparently got it shop-soiled, so to speak. I understood exactly what this meant when I discovered that Robert took great delight in treading in his turds. Little brown paw-prints appeared all over the house. At first, I took this to be further sign of Robert's amazing dumbness. For instance, when under a chair he would rear up for no apparent reason and smash his head against the underside, staggering away semi-conscious in search of another chair. He would take flying leaps from bookcase to table, or chair to settee, and completely miss his target shrieking pathetically as he shot past. He would hang from the top of the wall, caught by his claws in the heavily embossed paper, and only manage to get free as someone was walking underneath. This, I thought, is one dumb cat.

What I didn't realise was that all this was only camouflage.

What happened was that as a result of his turd-treading activities I felt obliged to train him into cleaner habits for his own sake (as stinking cats are unloved cats) and my sake (as I had to live with his offensive foot-prints). This I did by attempting to get him to turn more carefully after he had done his number twos (*Zimri* euphemism number one). During these attempts I had reason to be in closer proximity than usual to his turds. After the first day I noticed that these brown, vaguely cylindrical, objects had fallen in the shape of an F. This was reasonably amusing and momentarily took my mind away from such pressing matters as vowing never to feed him fishy substances again. However, the next day the letter U appeared, quite clearly defined. Following days produced a K and a C. (I put down the peculiar order to bad education at the hands of Graham.) After a short period of rather ineffectual turds he came up with a Q, closely followed by an arrow pointing towards me. This completed the message as far as both of us were concerned because he never trod in his turds from then on and I never underestimated his intelligence.



It could well be that my uncle, seeing things through a methylated haze, had discovered this catty intelligence, well-hidden though it is (especially in Robert's case) and was waging a private war against them. It could well be that Oscar, being as well-versed, or better, in his alphabet as Robert, had been driven mad by reading the strips of *Daily Mirror* which graced his litter-basin. It might even be that Chissum was struck dopey by the astonishing illiteracy all around him in the Hall household. I can't say definitely, of course, but that message FUKC Q really *did* appear from Robert and I find it just a little bit disturbing. I may not even have him done in case he retaliates. I'm certainly not going to leave a carbon of this lying around. Be warned – Leroy.

P.S. Since writing the above (as the saying goes) there have been two cases reported in the Hackney Gazette (slogan: 'Ave A Look In The 'Ackney) of people being killed by their cats. One was smothered to death like Huple, the other was tripped and fell out of a third storey window. Has anyone heard from the Charnocks lately? – Leroy.

P.P.S. Has anyone heard from Kettle lately? – Robert.

You have just read: FAECES FACTS II

SUNDRIES

There should be another progress report out at about the end of 2009 with more goodies. For now, though, a few snippets to round off matters...

THE AUCTION:

It's a Corflu tradition for there to be a fundraising auction with the aim of securing and underwriting the ongoing annual organisation of a Corflu. Corflu Cobalt will be no exception; but as a British Corflu, we hope to have a uniquely British slant here as elsewhere. Start sorting out your Britfannish heirlooms now!

THE CORFLU FIFTY:

A more recent Corflu tradition is for the eponymous Corflu Fifty, a group of up to half a hundred fans, to sponsor the attendance of some deserving fan whose attendance at Corflu might otherwise be in doubt. This year the fan in question is EARL KEMP, editor of the acclaimed *el*. More about – and possibly even by – Earl in future publications! More Corflu Fifty members welcome: contact Rich Coad (richcoad at gmail dot com) or Rob Jackson (jacksonshambrook at tiscali dot co dot uk).

THE T-SHIRT:

Here's another Corflu tradition; most if not all previous Corflus have produced a T-shirt featuring the art or graphics of a well-known fan artist. We intend to be no different in this regard; more info soon. Keep your eyes on the skies and your ears to the ground. (If you can do both, you are an Astral Master.)

THE BANQUET:

A fourth tradition, yet! As Rob Jackson's FAQ mentions, the FAAN awards for yearly fanzine achievement are traditionally made at a brunch on Sunday morning which the entire convention usually attends. Dealings with the hotel are in hand for the Sunday banquet, but indications are that all should be well and nobody will have to dine on bread and water on our watch.

THE FANTHOLOGY:

Like TAFF reports, more Corflus promise these than actually issue them. So we're chary about making extravagant promises here. But we certainly *intend* to bring out a spiffy publication to showcase the many high points of British fanwriting since Corflu last came to the UK in 1998. Once more, we say: watch this space...