

THINK BLUE, COUNT ONE

ROTSLER
NOSES!
GET YOUR
LOVELY
ROTSLER
NOSES!!



HARRY/BELL 76

Corflu Cobalt: Progress Report 2

THINK **BLUE, COUNT ONE**

The second 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. Once more, Sandra Bond was left standing up when the music stopped, and consequently got to edit this PR. Cover by Harry Bell.

The calendar has ticked over to 2010, and strange things are happening out around Jupiter; it's definitely time to hold another iteration of the fanzine fans' convention while we still can. If you haven't already signed up, now would be an excellent time to do so; at the time of writing we have exactly one hundred members, but there's still room for *you*. Sign up now, you foxy beetle!

"How do I join this wonderful convention?" I hear you gasp in awe. It's simple; you send us £45 in sterling, or \$65 in greenbacks, and do so before 16th January 2010 when our rates are slated to rise. If joining after that date, memberships are £50 or \$75. And advance memberships will close entirely on 13th March 2010, because we need to give the hotel a head-count for Sunday's brunch, a Corflu tradition which we shall be upholding.

If you know you won't be able to make it to the convention, supporting memberships are available at \$10 or £15. These will provide you with not only the programme book, but also a copy of the Corflu Cobalt fanthology, a retrospective of the last fifteen years in British fanwriting being produced by Claire Brialey, Mark Plummer and Randy Byers. We cannot guarantee that this fanthology will be available after the convention, or if it is, at what price it will be offered. What if its editors decide to crank the price up every time a copy is sold, like D West? Get in *now*, is the word on the street.

You can join us by traditional means such as giving our membership secretary, or her American agent, money or cheques in person or by post; or you can be all high-faluting and pay us by Paypal. Full instructions on joining, with a wealth of other information about the convention, the hotel, the events we have planned for you, and why Jim Barker resigned from the BSFA, are to be found online:

www.corflu.org

If you want to write to us, here is the address:

Corflu Cobalt, 45 Kimberley Gardens, London N4 1LD

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

But we're all modern, go-ahead, future-oriented, stars-in-our-eyes skiffy fans, and we highly encourage you to use email if you want to get in touch with us, as follows:

- * 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: cobaltPR@corflu.org
- * Robert Lichtman (US Agent): cobaltusa@corflu.org
- * Ian Maule, Corflu Cobalt web pages, virtual consuite: webcobalt@corflu.org
- * Mike Meara, FAAN awards: cobaltfaan@corflu.org

CHAIRMAN'S WELCOME

BY ROB JACKSON

I can feel it in my bones – it's going to be a Good Con. A good hotel who are keen to have us, reserving all their rooms for us and looking forward to having us; an interesting, historic and civilised traditional English cathedral city with a great variety of restaurants; an interesting programme in draft form already; and – above all – You Lot: a great bunch of fans from North America as well as the UK not only registered, but booked, to come along and have fun. (Desperate or otherwise.)

Oh, and possibly chat a bit about fanzines, and maybe even produce one or two during the con.

The business bits of this PR contain mainly travel information, particularly relevant to those of you coming from overseas; information about the hotel so you know what to expect when you arrive; information about the Programme; plus our plans for the Guest of Honour selection. There is also info about the FAAn Awards, more info about how we will help everyone make their plans for a joint touristy trip out on Friday, and our selection of another classic bit of British fanwriting.

We are holding back information about restaurants until our third and final Progress Report, which we expect to distribute around a fortnight before the con. We don't want you to run out of saliva between now and then....

The Guest of Honour

The tradition of choosing the Corflu Guest of Honour by random selection out of a hat is a great example of egalitarianism – no-one is singled out. The drawback, though, is that not everyone likes the idea of being forced to stand in front of the whole con at the Banquet and give some kind of peroration; public speaking is anything but an honour for some of us. It's OK to love it – Graham Charnock of this here committee has revealed he used to volunteer for leading parts in his school plays, and so was rather used to speaking in public when in his band The Burlingtons. But there are others who have been so desperate to opt out that they have regularly donated extra cash to the Corflu coffers simply to escape the fear that their name might come out of the GoH Hat at the Friday evening opening ceremony.

We on the Corflu Cobalt committee think that this is a little coercive, and so we are changing it a bit. We are not abandoning the GoH opt-out completely – anyone who really doesn't want the risk is still welcome to donate £10. But we are making the GoH role as attractive as we can under the circumstances.

Firstly, the GoH can choose how to contribute to the con. It isn't actually compulsory to do anything, but for most people Corflu is most fun as a participative event. If the chosen person wants to give a talk at the Banquet, they can do – but it is not the only way they can fulfil the GoH role. This is after all, a convention for fanzine fans. So logically, the chance to do a piece of fanac should be open. As we are publishing a daily newsletter, the GoH is welcome to write an article or draw a piece of artwork, ideally created mainly (or at least finalised) during the con. If you are able to comment on the way the con is going, or produce a piece of reportage on what we are all up to, that would be perfect.

If this is what you as GoH choose, the piece will be published in the con's daily newsletter, which is to be edited by Sandra Bond. But if you want to do the Charnock thing and

perform in public, the traditional route of giving a speech or performance at the Banquet is still there. The choice is yours – but given this extra flexibility, we don't think it is quite right to say "Er, no thanks," on the night as was allowed last year in Seattle.

The other privilege open to the GoH is that his or her table will have the honour of being the first in the queue to the Banquet buffet. As fans are not known for their lack of appetite, this could be quite a significant privilege. (Though we will be having a word with the hotel to make sure they don't do a Hotel Deca and run out of food!)

If, despite this new opportunity, you really don't want to be in the hat for the role, please either let us know before the con, by email to cobalt@corflu.org (or pay £10 by PayPal if you prefer, to cobaltreg@corflu.org with the category "Goods (Other)" and subject "GoH opt-out"), or let us know at the con itself before Friday 7 pm, when the names will finally be going into the hat. If you let us know in advance by email but haven't paid in advance or on arrival, we will chase you relentlessly during the con, rubbing our fingers at you.....

It should of course be self-evident that we are maintaining the tradition that if you have been GoH before, you are now excused. But I am saying it again anyway.

Finally, I should say that the GoH Hat itself will be as prestigious as we can manage. We don't know whose it will be yet, but watch this space.

Friday Fun

Though the con doesn't officially open till 7 pm on Friday, Corfluvians regularly arrive a day in advance and get a bit of communal fun together during the day on Friday by heading out and about to see something of the area. For the last two Las Vegas Corflus, there have been trips into dramatic desert countryside. In Seattle last year, the Science Fiction Museum was the obvious choice.

This year, we have a number of potential sources of fun and inspiration. We considered no less than five options.

First, the biggest attraction of them all is: <http://www.historicdockyard.co.uk/> - the historic Dockyards at Portsmouth. The attractions of these are self-evident – anyone with the slightest interest in naval history, either from Tudor or Nelson's time, would find this an essential visit, and they were recently voted among one of the top ten visitor attractions in the whole of the UK. Any Hornblower or Patrick O'Brian fans out there? However these are Not Cheap to visit, and to do them justice would take at least a very full day, plus 40 minutes each way by car. (Some who have been recently say there is so much to see and do that it would take two days really to get everything out of it.)

Next, Wickham Vineyard is pretty good and has good visitor facilities as well as free wine tastings, and apparently is responsible for at least one of the House of Commons's house wines: <http://www.wickhamvineyard.com/> - and audio guided tours are available at any time. This is only half an hour by car, has a fair amount of indoor activity, and would be good for those who enjoy wine and don't want to spend a whole long day out.

The third option is <http://www.butserancientfarm.co.uk/> - which will be of interest to any ancient historians (or even prehistorians) among us, even though the website itself is now also somewhat historic. It is also a bit of a distance – about 50 minutes' drive from Winchester, and is very much an outdoor place. It may not be much fun in iffy weather, so if you go for this, wrap up warm.....

A local real ale brewery, and a preserved steam passenger railway, were both considered but unfortunately are not open on Friday 19th March. For example, <http://www.ringwoodbrewery.co.uk/tours/> are only available on Saturdays or weekday evenings; and the Watercress Line also only runs trains on certain specified days: <http://www.watercressline.co.uk/mhralp/special10/events.html> - damn. We would particularly have liked a real ale special train....

So we are slightly spoilt for choice. Rather than Give Orders and so rule out one or other of the trips, what we propose to do is let you all coordinate with each other what visits you would like to make, and make a list of those British fans who have cars (possibly including the committee), or visiting North Americans who have hired cars, and want to head out on one or other of these trips. Portsmouth is also accessible from Winchester by train, though not very fast – an hour each way.

Email me on cobalt@corflu.org if you know in advance what you would like to do, and particularly if you are likely to go by car and offer someone else a lift.

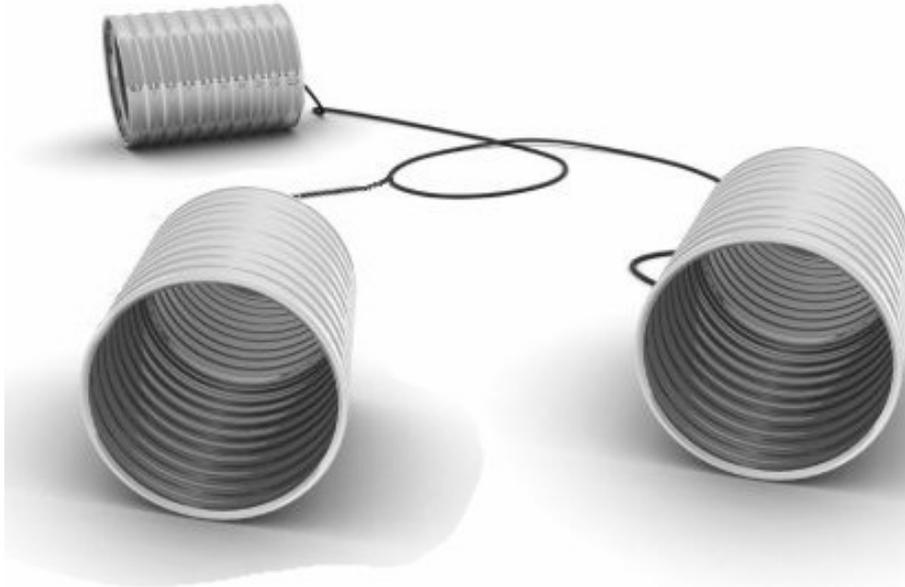
-- Rob Jackson, December 2009

OUR MEMBERS as of
1st January 2010... Karma
Police, arrest these
men...

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

MR SULLIVAN - COME HERE - I WANT TO SEE YOU

By IAN MAULE



I'm pleased to report that the test of the hotel WiFi system at the end of October has been a success. With the aid of a login/password provided by the hotel I managed to get the Ustream system to broadcast a nice view of the main convention hall. Peter Sullivan watched as I panned the camera around taking in scenes of chairs, tables, the floor and occasionally Mary, the Duty Manager, waving from behind the bar. Later Pat Charnock joined the test so we know the broadcast can be received in at least two places!

Last month I did a test of some software that allows two feeds on one Ustream TV channel. The software is mentioned in one of the FAQs on Ustream so I thought I'd see what it did. Well, it worked but the second camera view appears as a window within the main view and whilst you can swap which is the main and which the window it's not very fast at doing it and of course resolution suffers because the two cameras are sharing the same bandwidth. On the whole an interesting test but not something that's viable for Corflu IMHO.

PR3 will contain details for how to use the Ustream TV system.

THE FAAN AWARDS

As you'll know if you've been keeping up with the news, Mike Meara, the Administrator, has now released the ballot for these awards. For your convenience, a copy is reproduced on the next page; alternatively, you can download a copy from our website :

<http://www.corflu.org/pdfs/2010faanballot.pdf>

Submit your ballot by email, by surface mail, by air mail, by carrier pigeon, whatever – but do *not* forget that the deadline for Mike to receive your vote is midnight on Saturday 13th March 2010. Some Corflus have in the past permitted voting at the convention itself, and our British members, of course, are well used to voting in the Nova awards on that basis. But *there will be no votes accepted at Corflu Cobalt*, and if you try, Mike will look at you with an expression of commingled pity and disgust.

2010 FAAn Awards Ballot

The winners of the 2010 Fan Activity Achievement (FAAn) Awards will be announced on Sunday March 21st 2010, in Winchester, UK, during Corflu Cobalt (www.corflu.org).

Deadline for voting is 24:00 GMT on Saturday March 13th 2010 – no voting during Corflu this year.

Submitting your ballot - you may submit your vote in either of two ways:

- by email (cobaltfaan@corflu.org) – you are not required to submit this ballot, only your choices;
- by real mail: Mike Meara, 61 Stoney Lane, Spondon, Derby DE21 7QH, United Kingdom.

Voting – with the exception of the Lifetime Achievement Award, you are voting on work made public in 2009. You may make between zero and five choices in each category. Votes for yourself will not be counted. In the case of Best New Fanzine Fan, you are voting for someone who has been active for no more than three years; in the case of the Lifetime Achievement Award, you are voting for someone who has been active in fanzine fandom for at least the last thirty years, the odd period of gafia being allowable; use your judgement here. Each first-place vote scores five points, each second-place vote four points, and so on. In addition to the categories listed below, an award for Number One Fan Face will be made, by calculating the total votes cast in all categories.

Eligibility – you do not have to be a member of Corflu in order to vote. Anyone with the necessary knowledge of the people and their work is eligible. If you think you may be unknown to the Administrator, please cite a fan (including contact details, e.g. email address) who can confirm your credentials:

Fan contact: _____

Best Fan Writer

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____

Best Fan Artist

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____

Best Letterhack¹

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____

Best Fanzine (state fanzine name and editor(s))

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____

Best New Fanzine Fan

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____

Best Fan Website (state URL and author(s))

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____

Lifetime Achievement Award

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____

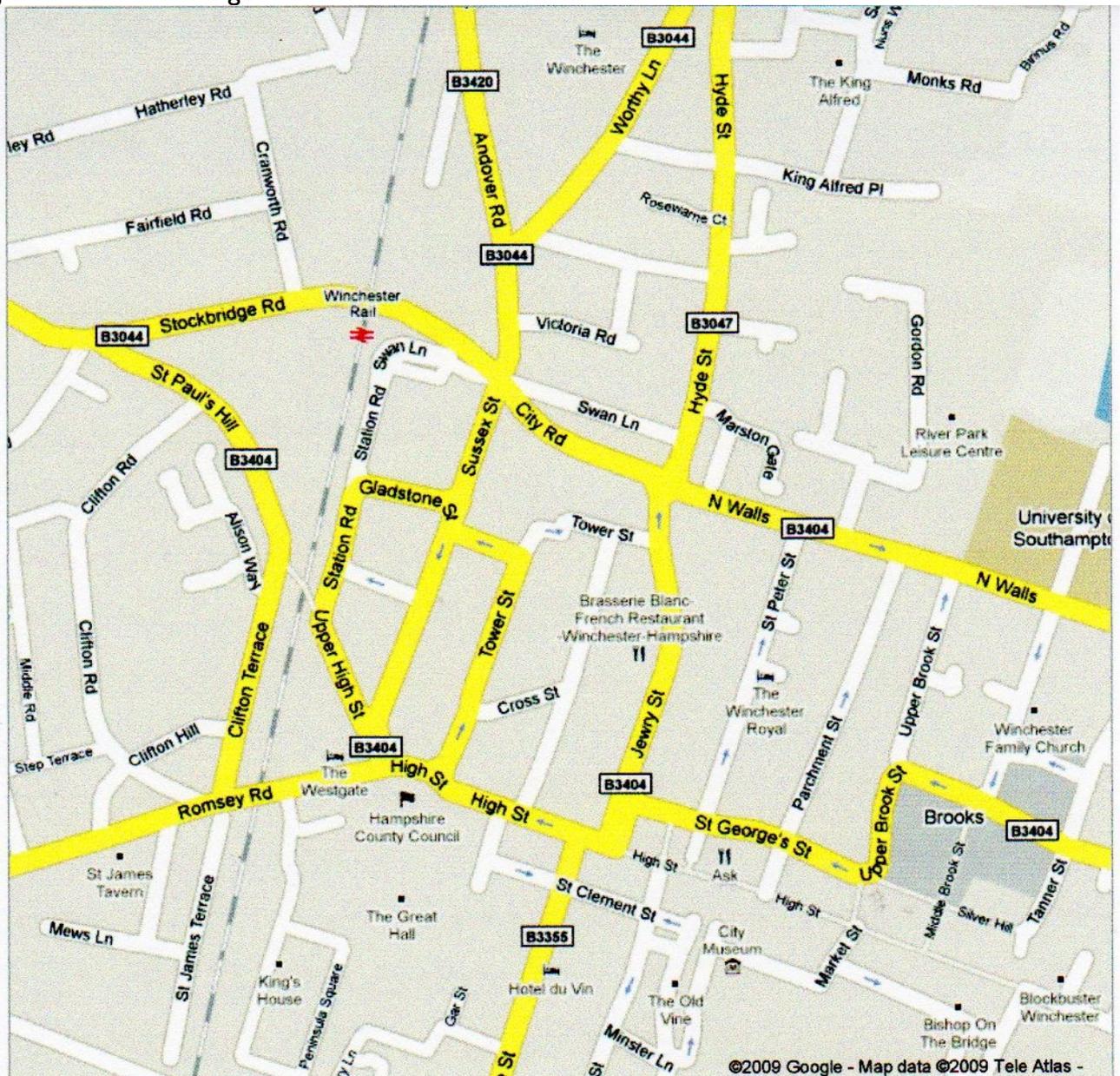
Notes: 1 Also known as the Harry Warner Jr Memorial Award for Best Fan Correspondent.

Your name and contact details: _____

How **NOT** TO BE A LOST ALIEN

Making your way to Winchester

Travel within the UK: By road: Winchester is conveniently located about 15 miles north of Southampton just off the M3. Leave at junction 9 if you are coming from London or anywhere north or east of the M25, or junctions 10 or 11 if you are coming from the South or South-West. If you are coming from the West or North-West, you will probably come off the M4 at junction 13 and down the A34. We will have detailed directions in PR3, but here for info is a town centre map. The Winchester Hotel is top centre, with its entrance off Worthy Lane. The rail station is towards the top left corner. The main city centre with shops and restaurants is on the High Street, which is a pedestrian precinct where the map shows it as narrowed. The National Express bus stop is not directly shown on this map, but is just at the bottom right corner:



By rail: Winchester is on the main South-West Trains Southampton line from Waterloo. The timetable is here: <http://www.southwesttrains.co.uk/uploads/xl9.pdf> – and most train routes that connect via any London terminus will involve a transfer to Waterloo. There are also links from Reading, Oxford and Birmingham. Some of these involve a change at Basingstoke, but the Cross-Country Trains route map will give you an idea of alternative routes: http://www.crosscountrytrains.co.uk/Find_a_train/Route_map.aspx

On arrival in Winchester, the hotel is only 5 minutes' walk from the train station, so a taxi is hardly worth it (but would cost only £3-4 anyway) - if it was me, I'd walk it. It shouldn't pose a problem if you have a case on wheels. From the station entrance, go downhill to the traffic lights, turn left onto Andover Road, then cross the road and turn right into Worthy Lane. The hotel is on your left. See the map above.

By bus/coach: National Express is the bus operator with most arrivals in Winchester. The National Express coach stop is about 15 minutes' walk away – at the far end of the High Street, outside the Guildhall. Deceptively, it is not in the Winchester bus garage. www.nationalexpress.com

Getting to the UK from abroad, and making your way around

Here is info not only about how to get to Winchester, but also how to ensure you and your money are safe both before you arrive and while you are spending it in the UK.

Insurance and health: First, before you leave, it is well worth ensuring you are insured both for cancellation and for possible health risks. Make sure you have travel insurance. Though the NHS is free to Brits and to other countries with which we have a reciprocal arrangement, it won't work for Yanks. Should you have a health problem, the most efficient NHS hospitals or clinics (and all private ones, if you happen to find any) will bill you. (There may be some inefficient ones who fail to bill you, but don't take the risk!)

Travel from abroad: The likeliest airport for Americans arriving in the UK is Heathrow, which is London's biggest, and is to the west of London itself. Winchester is on the South-West Trains line from London Waterloo station to Southampton, and is only about 15 miles north of Southampton. We do recommend that if you land at Heathrow and want to get straight to Winchester, the best route if you don't have a lift is via the half-hourly RailAir coach link to Woking station, which is on the London Waterloo to Southampton line, so the train from Woking goes straight to Winchester. Coaches call at all the Heathrow terminals; for transatlantic flights these will be mainly Terminals 3 and 5. Inclusive return tickets from Heathrow to Winchester are available; pay at the RailAir (Speedlink) desk in the terminal.

Coaches leave every 30 minutes throughout most of the day to/from all five terminals, and take just 40 minutes. For just the coach journey, a single fare is £8.00, a day return is £10.00 and a period return is £16.00. As at New Year 2010, the combined off-peak return tickets from Heathrow to Winchester via Woking are

£44.60 off-peak return, or £51.70 anytime return if bought in advance via TheTrainLine.com. If bought on the day, they may cost a bit more. Tickets must be purchased before boarding. On arrival at Woking customers should allow at least 10 minutes to transfer to your train after the arrival of the coach at the station. When you get the train back to Woking for Heathrow from Winchester, exit on platform 5, and the coach leaves from outside the station. <http://heathrow.airport-information.co.uk/directions-rail.html>

The trains are every half hour; the one which leaves Woking exactly on the hour is the quicker of the two hourly services, taking 33 minutes. The stopping one takes 44 minutes. This is the pdf of the Mon to Fri timetable, which is most relevant for Corflu attenders. It will be revised for the spring, but not usually by much: <http://www.southwesttrains.co.uk/uploads/xl9.pdf>. See above for directions to the hotel from the station – it is a short and easy walk for most, but taxis are available for those with mobility problems.

Bus travel is available, with some advantages compared to the train but some disadvantages. It is quicker – journey time about one hour, which is quicker than the (two-part) train journey. This is convenient if the timing is right, and it doesn't involve any changes; but the coaches are less frequent – nine spread over the whole day. Also, the National Express coach stop is further away – at the far end of the High Street, outside the Guildhall and not in the Winchester bus garage. Walking with a suitcase on wheels is possible but a short taxi ride would be better. It is possible to book this from your country, but if your flight is delayed, you will be put on the next available coach. You can also get the tickets at Heathrow of course: www.nationalexpress.com

Get back to us with further questions – it'll give us ideas as to what to put in the final PR! If you are arriving at other airports or by other means than air, please let us know what you would like to know; or email us direct with individual queries at cobalt@corflu.org.

The lingo: Whichever way you are going, transatlantic crossings ought to come with a phrase book for use on arrival. This link provides a really useful (though occasionally imperfect) guide to British slang. Thanks to Harry Bell for the link:

<http://www.effingpot.com/slang.shtml>

Spending it: There are different electronic payment systems in Europe (and most of the rest of the world) compared with the US. In the UK, as with most non-North American countries, Chip and PIN (the use of a 4-digit Person Identification Number or PIN, which you memorise instead of a signature) is pretty much universally used now, as it is more difficult to forge. The US way, using a signature, is seen as rather old hat nowadays, but many of you may have cards which do not yet have chips with PINs in them. Here is some advice from seasoned travellers Bill Burns and John D. Berry.

Bill found a very helpful article which says: “Most traveling U.S. residents who stick to large hotels accustomed to serving tourists, or major restaurants or department stores, probably won't have problems using their magnetic stripe cards. But in small

shops, hole-in-the-wall restaurants and unattended gas stations, some U.S. residents hit snags when it's time to pay.”

Bill himself reports: “I've only ever had one problem – at the left-luggage office at Waterloo a few years ago, where the attendant insisted he had no way to run a card without a chip. Otherwise my US card has always worked fine at hotels, restaurants, garages, shops, museums, etc.”

John D. Berry adds: “In my (recent) experience, it's inconvenient but not a real problem. People at restaurants or wherever in the UK were surprised that my card didn't have a chip, and occasionally had to remember what to do, but they could simply run it the old way – and I'd sign and pay that way. (I was using a debit card that also works as a Visa, but I don't think the debit-card aspect would have made any difference. It functions in situations like that as a credit card.)”

“What I have found annoying is that in some UK establishments (but not all), you cannot add the tip onto the bill after they've run the credit card. That is universally the way it works here in the US. So I'd end up either having to think ahead and add the tip *before* totalling it up (and ask how to do that), or leave the tip in cash.”

Quite often the "tip" taken by credit card doesn't reach the staff who served you, and the management use it to pay them the standard wage. Sometimes it is best to stick to the old way of putting cash on the table and making sure the waiter/ess picks it up – but use your judgement! The standard tip for competent and reasonably helpful service is at least 10% in the UK.

-- Rob Jackson, December 2009

As you may recall from our previous progress report, in all of our publications we'll be bringing you a classic slice of British fanwriting from the past. Normally it's an unalloyed pleasure to be able to do so, but the present occasion is rather different.

Many of you will know that British fan and professional, Rob Holdstock, passed away at the age of 61 on 29th November 2009. Rob was a contemporary and friend of many of the Corflu committee, and to say that his death is mourned, and comes as a horrible blow, may sound trite but is no more than the truth. Many of his friends remember him in an ANSIBLE supplement (<http://news.ansible.co.uk/a270supp.html>).

In the circumstances it seemed obvious to turn to Rob's writing for our reprint this issue, and with the kind permission of his partner Sarah Biggs, we can present what many would say was Rob's single best piece ever for a fanzine. It originally appeared (in a slightly different version) in issue 4 of STOP BREAKING DOWN, dated March 1977, itself arguably the best fanzine of the day, edited by Greg Pickersgill; it was subsequently reprinted in the fanthology BY BRITISH in 1979, edited by Ian Maule and Joseph Nicholas, and from that reprint we've taken Rob Hansen's accompanying artwork.

While on the subject of credits, this is probably a good place to mention that the Harry Bell illustration on the front cover of this PR originally appeared in XENOLITH, First Series, #1 (October 1977), ed. Bill Bowers.



(Note: in 1976, Rob Holdstock finished his first two months of hacking for money. This is his account of the penultimate week.)

TUESDAY Delivery day for *Shadow of the Wolf*, first of a great historical fantasy hack series. Awake at seven-thirty with the sun, the birds, and the fire alarm in the Flour Mill across the road. Ah, this is country life. Lie peacefully and happily staring at the ceiling, then remember with a great surge of sickness that I haven't yet *finished* the bloody book. Leap out of bed and begin typing in considerable panic; the book has gone on ten days over my private schedule already. Ten pages still to do and a full three hours to do them in. Ought to be a cinch. I promise myself that I shall never again be so lazy as to leave the completion of a book until the morning of Delivery Day. Sheila slams the bedroom door pointedly. Feeling guilty about typing so early, but the thought of being dragged through the courts in front of my buddies adds life to my fingers. The book is finished at eleven o'clock, and a two minute dash to the station gets me to London on time. Deliver book to Rosemary Daughton at Sphere, feeling proud, wanting everyone to know that this is my first novel. Deflated as mine is bunged on big pile of other commissioned manuscripts. Aren't you even going to glance at it, I wheedle? Once started, I know, she'll be hooked, she won't be able to put it down. She picks it up and leafs quickly through it, and manages to find the one dirty bit. The page looks greyer than the rest and I realise that repeated reading of my own pornography has marked the manuscript for ever as being the work of a mental juvenile.

Lunch with Rosemary. Have looked forward to this for weeks. Squid In garlic, fillet steak and Greek wine. The waiter hustles us through the meal while we talk of faux pas and embarrassing moments, which seem to plague us both so we have lots of examples to throw around. The intellectual conversation finished we talk of dull things like writing and publishing. At the end of the meal I could eat it all again, but haven't the courage to ask for seconds. Bill is mind-boggling. Why do I still feel hungry? We go to pub. More discussion of embarrassing moments. Then we begin to *make faux pas*. Mine is less critical than usual, but sets me up well for the One Tun on Thursday when no doubt I shall get through several. Rosemary is telling me about an embarrassing moment last year when she kept bending forwards in a loose blouse and wondering why Angus Wells, then editor at Sphere, was going glazed around the eye region. He finally told her that everything was visible when she leaned forward, and she was highly embarrassed. As I listen I think of loose blouses and how the navel can often be seen by a sharp pair of eyes on top of a very tall man, and since there's nothing wrong with navels I feel confused and say "Why so

embarrassed ...?" Rosemary thumps me on the chest, very hard, and I realise that I've unwittingly insulted her. Later she gets her own back. "With all the money you're going to pay me," I say, "I'm going to buy clothes. I'm going to smarten up." She snickers loudly. That snicker really sinks in deep. Hours later I can still hear it, echoing in my brain.

WEDNESDAY Beginning of new book. Clear away all the crap involved with *Shadow of the Wolf* and look contentedly at empty desk. Check diary casually, and feel horrendous surge of nausea as I notice that the great new work has to be delivered in eight days' time. Surely this is a mistake! Count the days, over and over lips moving as I frantically flip the diary pages, but sure enough it has to be in one week tomorrow. I can't believe it, but the extra time on *Shadow of the Wolf* has bugged my schedule all to hell. Do sums. 180 pages in eight days means 23 pages a day. Ought to be a cinch. Heartened I draw a film script from the pile and read it through. The book is *The Satanists*, a novelisation of the film of the same name from Tyburn Films, the group who gave us such memorable classics of the cinema as *The Ghoul*, starring Peter Cushing, *The Legend of the Werewolf*, starring Peter Cushing, *Persecution*, starring Peter Cushing Who's the star of *The Satanists*, I wonder? Good grief, what a surprise, Peter Cushing. Baddy to be played by Telly Savalas. Must remember to ask Kojak fans for a few Kojak jokes. I sketch the characters quickly. Lesley Anne Down is playing the girl. Who the hell's she? No matter. Auburn hair, big breasts, slim legs, and ginger pubic hair that will be revealed in the last chapter. Well, that's the characterisation over, now to work, reading the script. By midday I feel queasy. I have to write a novel based on this? I rant around the flat. I throw the script around. Then I remember *eight days*. I run whimpering to the typewriter and start to churn.

Peter Cushing is sitting on a bank by the river. His daughter Felicity is making a salad picnic. He opens a letter and finds a terrifying message for help. Hmmm. I read through the pages of script again, realising that I have to make five thousand words out of that. Panic stricken I read it again and again, looking for hidden depth, but nothing! *Five thousand words!* Brain ticks for five minutes. Okay, here we go. Cushing is thinking about his wife whom he watched being sacrificed at a Black Mass twenty years ago, and did nothing to help. He looks at the clouds and sees her white limbs stretched, and the black shaft of the Devil tearing into her belly, and the knife cutting out her heart. Great stuff. I write until I can't jerk any more nausea out of the scene, and discover I've done twelve pages. I'm still on the first line of the script. Hmmm. Next bit, some dialogue. Cushing dips his finger into the salad dressing and asks what it is, and she says it's avocado pear, and he says isn't that expensive, and she says be quiet and eat it, and he says okay you win, and eats it. Four pages of the script! That means Christ! Two thousand words! The brain ticks. He tastes the dressing and remembers that his dead wife used to make it, glances upwards, sees the clouds, remembers the Mass again Replay a condensed form of pages 2 to 14, limbs, shaft, blood Good, two thousand words roll off as easy as pie. Lunch time. Carlsberg Special, two bottles. As usual I slump heavily over the typewriter and wake up in the late afternoon. I finish on time, however, first thirty pages done.

THURSDAY Start at eight and the pages shoot out of the typewriter. Have found the knack now; take five pages of the script, which typed out make about half a page

of print, waffle about weakness, fear, Christianity, memories of the past, until all pages done, then copy out the script almost as per original. It's very easy.

Phone doesn't stop ringing. A good day. Doubleday has bought Great First SF Work for US publication. They want a little change. Defences go up. How little? More explanation at the end of chapter one. I agree. I walk around the flat feeling important, then scurry back to the typewriter and keep on hacking. Phone again. Thick Brummy accent, could be either Peter Weston or Rog Peyton. It's Weston. Wants to use my story "A Small Event" in *Andromeda*, but there are just one or two little things. Feeling confident now I say "Sure, send it back and I'll deal with them right away." Walk around the flat feeling important. Then scamper back to the typewriter and kill Geoffrey; a good scene, very enjoyable to write. In the same burst of speed I have his corpse reanimated and bend close to the sleeping Felicity, dribbling maggotty ichor over her face. Lovecraft looketh over my shoulder. I make myself sick with the descriptions and have to go into the garden for air. I take a hundred pot-shots at tin cans and water-rats with my air-pistol and, later, I feel recovered. Phone is ringing when I get back in. The Film Studio, the Big Boss. "How's the book?" he asks. "Putting the finishing touches," I say, coldness creeping through me. Two bad days could fuck me. He's already told me how he spends three-quarters of his time suing people. I leap back to the desk and am typing before I hit the seat. I begin to feel bored and fed up with the book. It's so tedious.

In the evening we go to the One Tun: a splendid evening. Everyone is friendly and happy, and though my paranoia increases to the end of the evening I enjoy myself. Chris Evans tells me how much he liked *Eye Among The Blind*. I buy him a drink. Diana Reed avoids the topic – she has obviously hated it. I can't believe it, but it's true. I rush back to Chris Evans and get him to repeat what he said earlier. Buy him another drink and feel better again. Ratfandom corner is apparently in intense discussion and I stand nearby trying to get involved, but after an hour I wander off. I never know what's going on. Rosemary Daughton (6') arrives and I smile at her as she goes past. "You're always standing there grinning at me," she says, and I look around wondering if she's addressing someone else. Andrew Stephenson (6' 2") comes over and introduces himself and I (6' 2") back away as a faux pas flies through the air from Rosemary's lips, narrowly missing me and landing squarely on Andrew's chin.

Dave Langford is passing out party invitations. I grab two, reasoning that if it's a good party I can go away and come back again. I engage him in conversation. He tells me how many stories he's sold and I feel a cold hand clasp my heart. "How many have you sold recently?" he asks. "Fuck off," I respond wittily, thinking that *one* sounds very small no matter how much you emphasise it. I ask him about his work at top secret Aldermaston and he changes the subject. I rant about later, furious, crying, "It's not right! My fucking taxpayer's money is going to pay buggers like him to work on secret missiles and they might be discovering things I have a RIGHT to know about! How dare he not tell me?" An Oxford yobbo takes sympathy on me and mutters about Dave actually working on Neutron Flux, although that could be just his cover story. More Fury! I hate not knowing what's going on! He prattles on about sinusoidal motion and neutron flow and I stare at him blankly. I don't know what the hell it all means, but I have a right to know. Curses. That is the only bad spot of the evening, but it resolves me to get my own back. Henceforth I shall write

one story a year in top secret and tell everyone except Langford. The fiend.
Paranoia rules OK!

FRIDAY Hangover. Walk around the flat bumping into things, and finally discover desk by pure random motion. Grab it and sit down. Midday comes and goes and I haven't written a thing. My head splits, my stomach heaves. I shall never drink again. That's it, no more. Coke and the odd half of bitter for the rest of my life. My heart hurts. I ring up Pickersgill and tell him I've just had a heart attack. He laughs and I hang up in pique. My left hand isn't moving very fast and I panic when I think that the control mechanism in my brain has been wiped out. My heart hurts some more. I hit it, gasping for breath and clutching my desk, muttering "Help me, help me", and think ahead to Sheila arriving home and discovering my blue-lipped body wrapped around the filing cabinet, a scrawled last message in the dust – "I love you still ..."

The wind blows as I am buried, and all the Ratfans are there weeping, casting fanzines and handfuls of apologetic notes on to the coffin, notes that contain their apologies for all the hasty things they've done and said to me in the last few years, especially from that bugger Edwards, for what he said about me in *Stop Breaking Down* 3. All the publishers are there, crying softly, and then they go away and seek out all my unpublished novels and half-written stories and I become the new Sylvia Plath, recognised in death as I was ignored in life. My heart still hurts, but after a while I realise it's indigestion and I get up and sigh, staring at *The Satanist* and wondering if it's all worth it.

I do two pages and the phone rings. It's Angus Wells, who is now hacking for a living and lives just across town. "How're you," he says. "I've given up drinking," I say. "It's destroying my brain." "Oh," he says, "That's a shame, I've got a bottle of red wine here" "I'll be right round," I say.

I enjoy myself, Angus's new western looks very good, and he reads a chunk of *The Satanists* and grunts his vague appreciation. We talk about hack-writing and money. We shoot a few bottles with his Winchester-replica air-gun. We toy with the notion of writing a spoof film-script like *Trog* and trying to sell it to Hammer Films. It sounds like a good idea and we earmark a week in October to write it. I cycle home, to spend the rest of the day hitting the desk, bitterly regretting ever leaving medical research, because there at least I was taxed intellectually. I keep looking at the script and thinking of what's to come: *The Bull Chief* – more historical bullshit in September, *The Secret Of The Crags* – fantasy crap in October, *The Memory Stone* – horror nausea in November ... the list takes me to March, and I feel panic when I visualise the zombie that will arise from this desk at the end of that time, murmuring incoherently, "Now is dah time fer me ter write a intel ... intrel ... lactua - a brainy book ..." Hack writing is like a wasting disease, with one good side effect visible in the bank account. Sheila arrives home and I haven't written a word. A bad day.

SATURDAY I get ten pages done whilst Sheila potters about enjoying her day off, I keep muttering through the weekend "Must get some work done" and she keeps saying "Well, I'm not stopping you," and I say "Right, good, well, let's have a drink shall we, then I'll do some work." And then I fall asleep. The story I've sold to *Andromeda* arrives from Weston and I unwrap it wondering what the "one or two little things" are. My cry of anguish brings Sheila running. He had obviously meant

there were one or two little things that could stay as they were; his list of changes runs into two pages, I have another crisis of confidence so I go down to the river at the bottom of the garden to shoot water-rats. Andrew Stephenson arrives later to spend the evening with us and by that time I'm calm again. Sheila cooks the evening meal and we chat about SF, and he refers to a TV programme and I say "Oh, our TV is bust, been bust for a year." He's on his feet in a flash, running about the room, looking behind pictures and chairs and yelling "Where is it? Where is it?" I drag it out and he greets it like he even knows the man who put it together. The back is off in a flash (I have never been able to get the back off) and I peer over his shoulder at the printed circuits and say "Wot, no valves?" which shows how long it is since I've seen the inside of a TV. He identifies the cause of the malfunction in about five seconds of probing with a screwdriver and pliers, and all the parts he's taken out quickly build up again and go back with none left over. I see that as he works his eyes are closed, as if he's trying to prove something. He asks if we have a soldering iron. I laugh. The pliers he's holding is the most sophisticated tool in the house. We need some heat, he mutters. Facetiously I say that we have a gas stove. That'll do, he says, and we carry the TV into the kitchen, and he repairs the TV over a low flame. It works, too. Thank you, Andrew. Any good at water closets?

After the meal we idle around throwing names at each other, pinning down a writing philosophy; any such discussion is bound to end in frayed nerves because Andrew and I are at opposite sides of the fence regarding SF priorities. But the discussion is amiable and interesting, until by accident we bring up Solzhenitsyn. Somehow, whenever I talk about writing Solzhenitsyn gets mentioned, and at that moment Sheila, who is enthusiastic about Russian writers, leans forward with an evil glint in her eye, watching me, waiting. I know what she is waiting for, but I can never stop myself; it's like being on an icy slope, once started you can't stop. I talk on about Solzhenitsyn, getting nearer and nearer to *The Moment*, and Sheila's grin grows. Eventually I say it: "I've read some Solzhenitsyn. I read *A Day In The Life Of Ivan Denisovitch*. Actually, I read about a quarter of it Well, to tell the truth I saw the film"

Collapse of Irish contingent in laughter. I feel furious with myself, of course. Andrew doesn't seem to notice, or is too diplomatic to mention it. One day I really *am* going to read some Solzhenitsyn. One day.

SUNDAY I work like the clappers and page ninety comes and goes. Half way through and three days to go. It's still possible, assuming no disasters occur. I make my usual mistake in the evening; two bottles of Carlsberg Special and a chicken chow-mein takeaway. Feel nauseated and pissed and spend the evening watching *Arabesque* on TV, unable to understand why my body won't move when I tell it to. In the last month I've eaten Chinese food almost every night. It's always the same thing, chicken chow-mein. The order is half-prepared in the kitchen whilst I'm still pretending to read the menu, aware of the embarrassing repetitiveness of my taste. The Chinese waiter, no doubt as sick of my face as I am of his, engages me in conversation for the first time. "You live lound here?" he snaps. I jump, look at him, and see his grinning teeth (teeth *can* grin). "Yes," I say, "I live on the outskirts of town." His face drops. "Skirts?" he says. It goes on from there. I can't go back, I'm always so embarrassed. I shall feel the need to talk, and so shall he, and one day I'm going to break down and cry.

MONDAY Up at the crack of dawn ... well, eight-thirty. I bring Sheila coffee in bed and she stares at me with a stunned expression as if she's just seen a miracle. I hit the typewriter an hour before the post and get a lot done. The post is huge. Another letter from the Medical Research Council which I throw away without opening; they want my vivisection licence back, but if they get it I can't shoot water-rats and claim I'm doing it in the cause of science. From Fabers I get the contract for my second SF novel, which is densely typed and which I sign without really reading. I notice with pleasure that I've moved from the 50-50 paperback split with Fabers to 60-40 on everything over 2½ million copies sold. "Power!" I cry. I'm very gullible. The contract is all wrong, as it happens, but to me the important fact is its existence. I phone Chris Priest later and he says the first two or three books are supported by the publisher, but then they drop you if you're not selling. He also casually mentions that he's heard my first book is a doubtful seller. The rest of the mail includes a fanzine - *Scribe 3*, which I put aside for later enjoyment – some advertising, a couple of letters, and a copy of Ian Watson's *Oxford Mail* review of *Eye Among The Blind*. I feel very chuffed when I read what he says. "The emotion works as language", says the review. Damn right, I scream, beating an imaginary Martin Amis about the head. Take that you little fucker. Later I sneak off and look again at Fuckers Amis's four line mention in *The Observer*. "A shy promise" is all he condescended to say. I sulk again, brooding about obscurity, failure and that bugger Sheckley who got a column and a half about something he wrote years ago. I hate the world for an hour and then get back to work.

Two days left and sixty pages to go. I read from the script; Felicity is dressed in a simple white shift and kneeling in some sort of trance; the Duchess sensually strokes the girl's creamy white neck ... I perk up immediately. Strong possibilities here. Ditch the shift; stark naked, full breasts, firm rounded bum, a hungry look in her eyes like she wants to do something repulsive. The Duchess dressed like a belly-dancer. Touch of lesbianism. Rubbing magic oils into their bodies. By mid-morning my hands are shaking. Phone Pickersgill, who is into this sort of thing and read him several steamy scenes. The heavy breathing from his end is taken as approval and I carry on. By midday I reach a crisis. I can't decide whether to have her raped or not. Decide not to. Story flags a bit as Black Mass proceeds, so flip to priest slumped in a corner and have Satanist come over and kick him a few times. "Vomit rose to his lips as the foot thudded into his groin, then smashed into his mouth." This sounds familiar so I check back and find I've used exactly the same expression twice in the same chapter. How many times can one be kicked in the mouth and lose the same teeth? I am reminded, and I laugh at the thought, that last year in three consecutive SF stories I wrote "The screams of the time travellers were terrible to behold." Just for the hell of it I write "Simon's screams were terrible to behold." I imagine that'll be edited out, unlike my joke in *The Legend Of The Werewolf* in which I called a hospital in Paris the Sacre Bleu Hospital. It's still in there.

By five o'clock I've finished page 142, with lots of mistakes as energy and interest wanes, but I'm now close enough to finishing to remove the terror from the situation. With Wednesday's output I'll be up to page 172, and that means just eight pages early Thursday morning to round off the book before delivery at noon. Is this what they call obtuseness?



PROGRAMME ORGANISER GRAHAM CHARNOCK ADDRESSES THE NATION IN OUR HOUR OF NEED

Friends, Romans, fellow Corflu attendees... no Corflu has ever been remarkable for the intensity of its programming. 'Laid back' is often a term used in these circumstances. 'Ramshackle', 'inept' and 'haywire' are other terms which come to mind. For an event where providing pizza is often seen as a major programme item this is hardly surprising, but we, the team, by which I mean me, are determined to put at least the basic minimum of forethought into organizing the programme. Let me put that another way... or perhaps not.

We already have lots of ideas which aren't worth the paper they aren't printed on, but the Corflu programme, more than perhaps any other convention, always relies on the input

of its members, or, to put it bluntly, you lot. Many people have already volunteered their services, but so far only James Bacon and Steven Stiles have managed to make it through our rigorous scrutinization process, so that's two reasons to get depressed. Is there anything YOU would like to see at Corflu (except for the sight of Brian Parker dancing)? Do YOU have anything to offer (apart from money, obviously), in terms of audience participation. Is there anyone among our membership that YOU would particularly like to see make a fool of themselves (except for Brian Parker)? Let us know. Please. I don't want to sound desperate but... please... please... for God's sake.. Let us know!!!!

HERE'S THE REALLY BAD NEWS

One item we have in mind is a 'Beautiful Baby' competition. We hope to feature a photographic display of fans in their first flush of youth, or at least an early flush. Attendees will be invited to identify the bonnie bairns and prizes will be given for the most correct answers. So, please... etc... can I ask you to rummage through those old boxes of photographs and those dusty old hard drives, and send us any photographs of YOU which might be appropriate. This won't work if there isn't any input from YOU but I won't waste time making you feel guilty, I shall just cry if there is no response.

Here are the addresses to send photos, ideas, and requests for your money back:

graycharnox@blueyonder.co.uk

Graham Charnock, 45 Kimberley Gardens, London N4 1LD

AND, OH YES, THERE WILL BE PIZZA!

(Here's the phone number for Dominos Pizza, Winchester which will be handy when you come to order it: 01962 89 0808)