

The Convertible Bus

(All fannish name-dropping in Gelfling font. Headings inspired (kinda) by Alan Sullivan.)



Lilian Edwards stole my fan writing

I was going to put some stuff in here about my trip to Edinburgh last August, but then Lilian Edwards said, 'Write something on being in Edinburgh for my fanzine'. No real reason for mentioning the fact here, except that I wanted to use that heading. Pathetic, isn't it? (Oh no, the *Hitch-Hiker's* quotes come later, don't they?)



Yes, it is a very good book

Sat at home, with the day off work, in order to clear out a backlog of Open University marking, I put on Radio 3 – I don't want to work to silence, but any other station will either have too many words (song lyrics or discussion) that will only distract me, or annoying adverts. And so I encounter *Making Tracks*, a Radio 3 programme presented by two *Blue Peter* presenters. And its tone is *exactly* like the Monty Python skit on *Blue Peter* from thirty years ago, all breathless enthusiasm and 'hello, boys and girls'.

'Now we're going to play something by ... Rachmaninoff.' 'I wonder, did that Peer Gynt ever escape from the Trolls?'¹ It's almost as if they're sending themselves up. (Maybe they are, on the assumption that nobody's actually going to listen to a kids' show on Radio 3.) Funniest thing I've heard on radio since they swapped *Just A Minute* for the dreadfully boring *Quote, Unquote*.²



¹ This works so much better when I do the voice. Perhaps I should do this as an audio fanzine.

² Okay, so that was only last week, but you get (I hope) my point. (And how come series of *Just A Minute* and *I'm Sorry I Haven't A Clue* are over almost before they've begun, whilst *Quote, Unquote* seems to go on *for ever*?)

There's an infinite number of monkeys outside who want to discuss this script for *Planet of the Apes* they've worked out

I got a nasty surprise one Saturday in May, when I turned on the news to see clips of the TV *Hitch-Hiker's*. 'Either Douglas Adams has died,' I thought, 'or he's the new Doctor Who.'

Like any other right-thinking person, I was shocked at Adams' early death; 49 doesn't seem so long away now. However, while watching the repeats of the TV *H2G2*,³ I found myself coming to a surprising conclusion, and it wasn't: My God, isn't Mark Wing-Davey awful on the telly?⁴ It was this:

Douglas Adams Ruined My Life.

'Why?' I hear you ask. Because Douglas Adams made it cool to be terminally depressed. Ask yourself, who is the coolest character in *Hitch-Hiker's*? Who gets all the best lines? That's right – Marvin.

To a thirteen-year old feeling out-of-place in the universe and naturally predisposed towards melancholy,⁵ Marvin's prominence and success as a character was a revelation. Hey, I could *do* depression, and people would think I was cool and witty. And so they did – for about three weeks. From the looks of recognition of the faces of people I have floated this idea to, I don't think I was alone here – I think there was a whole generation of schoolkids and students in the late '70s and early '80s who thought the same as me.

But what I and they had forgotten was twofold. Firstly, Douglas Adams was a lot cleverer and wittier than any of us were. Secondly, the other characters in *Hitch-Hiker's* really find Marvin difficult to cope with (sample line: 'I don't think I can stand

³ And thank *you* Radio 4 for repeating the radio series on the one day when I'm *always* unable to listen at 6.30.

⁴ Or the realization that the later books become more and more exercises in 'Stop pestering me about ...' culminating in *Mostly Harmless*, the point of which seems to be 'Stop pestering me about when there's a new *Hitch-Hiker's* book coming out.'

⁵ Oh dear, he's off again,

Oh for a pink snake of truth

that robot much longer'). And so it was with me and my friends – what at first seemed amusing soon became tiresome for them, and led to remarks along the lines of 'what is the matter with you?' And by God it's not the way to pick up girls. Self-deprecation is one thing, but constantly being miserable is quite another.

All this tended, if anything, to increase my paranoia and general (genuine) depression, and once you have constructed a persona for yourself, it is very difficult for you to tear it down, not least because other people still expect you to perform according to your stereotype. You start to live your own image, and if that image is a depressive one, it becomes a self-fulfilling vicious downward spiral.⁶

Twenty-odd years later, I hope I've shaken off most of this. Nevertheless, given the right circumstances I can easily switch into full-on Marvin mode, and whenever anyone asks me how I am, my first instinct is still to reply, in Adams-esque fashion, 'I'm all right, if you happen to like being me, which on the whole I don't.'



Convertible Bus starts, *Banana Wings* and *Parakeet* stop. Coincidence? I think not.

On *Front Row* Mark Lawson was talking about the cover of The Strokes album (which I'm sure you've all seen) as a black-gloved hand on 'probably' female buttocks. 'Probably'?? Either Mark Lawson hasn't got out much recently, or he has, but he's been spending far too much time in the company of Thai ladyboys.



There's an elephant in the room ...

They're tearing down a factory near where I live in Addlestone. It's actually quite a historically significant factory, having been the site of the UK end of the Blériot corporation, who built aircraft there between 1916 and 1924. But of course, history cannot be allowed to stand in the way of economic development and progress. So down it came.

This morning I found myself, as I rarely do these days, stood on Addlestone train station, looking across the fields to where the factory used to be. It's mostly gone, but the far ends are still standing, open to the

⁶ As Alison Freebairn would say, 'trapped by your own cliché'.

world at the end facing the station. And this morning there was a cold mist rising from the ground, out of which the skeletons of the buildings rose, almost accusing posterity of destroying them and what they stood for.



I'm going with the radical idea of the 8-page blank PR

There are some things more important than others, and watching *Captain Scarlet* is one of those things. This week's episode featured an Army general determined to respond to a Mysteron attack with a devastating missile strike, while Spectrum's Colonel White advised restraint. Sound familiar? Who'd have thought that thirty years on a Gerry Anderson series would still have things to say that reflected contemporary debate?



The *Convertible Bus* No. 7, more transport-based shenanigans from **Tony Keen** (what a dull name), **15 Heathbridge, Heathbridge Approach, Brooklands Road, Weybridge, Surrey, KT13 0UN**. For **Elaine's** sake, continues to contain nothing about cats (except this bit). E-mail: **keen-tony@hotmail.com**. The *Convertible Bus* would be a **Croydon** fanzine if it really was the creation of **Mark Plummer** and **Claire Brialey** writing under a pseudonym. Which is isn't. Oh no. November 2001. I'm 37. I'm not old. ('Well, I can't just call you "man" ...', etc.) Any resemblance to a drunk **Ian Sorenson** remains coincidental.



Get in ConteXXt – the XXth Unicon

University of Gloucestershire, Cheltenham,⁷ 9-11 August 2002

Contact: **Nigel & Sabine Furlong, 17 Cow Lane, Didcot, Oxfordshire OX11 7SZ**

(or talk to me)⁸

P.S. I didn't really mean it about Douglas Adams.

⁷ That's *Cheltenham*, not Glasgow. C-H-E-L-T-E-N-H-A-M. Got it?

⁸ Somebody has to.