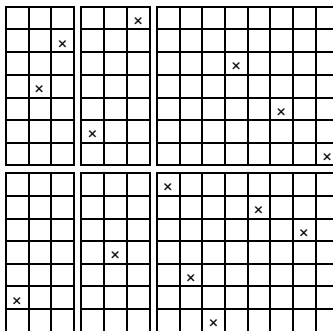


Ego and Scruples



Compiled by Douglas Spencer in March 2010, with contributions from Julia Daly, James Bacon, Lee Justice and Fran Dowd. Presented at Corflu Cobalt (Corflu 27) and Odyssey 2010 (Eastercon 61).

Why “Ego and Scruples”?

Douglas Spencer

It’s Their fault. Blame Them.

When They heard I was running for GUFF, They said “You’ll have to convince people you’re wonderful. You’ll have to convince people you’re entertaining. You’ll have to convince people you’re worth having...”.

There was a moment or two of silence, while They gathered Their collective thoughts. Then one of Them said “... and you have to administer the fund afterwards. You’ll have to convince people you’re honest and trustworthy and reliable, as well.”

“Shut up,” I reasoned, and changed the subject. “I’m going to Corflu.”

“Why are you going to Corflu?” They demanded. “It’s a convention for fanzine fans; you’ll have to produce a fanzine of some kind.”

“Will this help?” I asked.

“What is it?”

“It’s a fanzine of some kind...”.

And what’s that strange design next to the title?

It’s a puzzle, a kind of combinatorial cipher. Use it to transform the title into a secret message telling you who to vote for in the GUFF race.

One Man's Struggles with Gravity

Julia Daly

Before doing business with Westerners, the Hong Kong Chinese were renowned for getting them roaring drunk, and deciding whether they were appropriate business partners from the way they behaved. Those who got angry and abusive or excessively loud were generally not acceptable, although quiet staggering and crawling about the floor was fine. Perhaps one should examine one's GUFF delegates in a similar manner.

Douglas Spencer likes his beer — and his cider — and his wine, and whisky, and vodka, and liqueurs (particularly Amaretto). He enjoys attending parties and drinking congenial amounts of booze in congenial company. However, Doug has three superpowers that can create odd situations. The first and second are everyone's problem; the third is mostly mine. You see, Doug's first superpower is that of being rather deaf, which enables him to ignore my household cleaning suggestions at a single bound. Generally this is not a problem or even detectable as he is pretty good at filling in what his ears miss with lip-reading. Unfortunately, at a party it is more difficult to do this as a) the background noise decreases his hearing ability still further, b) there are lots of drunken people all talking over each other making it more difficult to follow a conversation and c) the more he has drunk, the harder it is to focus on what is going on. Superpower number two is something quite common within science fiction fandom — an ability to fixate on a certain bit of information and deliver it at all costs. In the party scenario this means that, early in the evening before things are too noisy he will wait for an appropriate gap in the conversation to continue the point he was making, and if the conversation has moved beyond it being relevant he may even drop the point and move on to other topics.

However, the combination of superpowers one and two with alcohol provides for some very bizarre conversations as by mid to late party he is unable to hear that the conversation has moved on, or that other people are still talking unless he is looking directly at them, and he becomes less and less likely to drop the point he wants to make. As a result, I usually spend the morning after the night before explaining why that person is looking daggers at him (“You cut her off in deeply personal mid-anecdote six times last night to insert the facts as you understand them about the aerodynamic natures of various MPs if catapulted across the Thames from the Houses of Parliament” or “He was holding forth on his theory that Shakespeare was abducted by aliens when you declaimed a series of dirty limericks”).

This situation would not happen in a less crowded and noisy environment. For example, when we stayed with John and Eve Harvey at their house in France, Eve complimented Doug on his ability to politely wait his turn to repeatedly reiterate his point amongst a group of drunken fans, each individually discussing at length their own subject to the exclusion of all others.

After the party is over is the point when superpower three gives out. Until this point Doug's superhuman ability to counter the crushing effects of gravity is at full strength. However, alcohol (his own special form of kryptonite) will suddenly reach critical mass and ambush him all unawares. The first time I discovered this problem was at the end of one of my birthday parties when I found Doug collapsed on the narrow first floor landing which led from the rest of the house to the only toilet. Coaxing and sweet-talk were unable to move him. Eventually I was forced to put some steel into my voice and in best Miss Whiplash style snap "Douglas Spencer! Get up off that floor and into my bed NOW!" This had a remarkable motivating effect, although it is unclear whether it was the excitement of being dominated or the thought of getting into my bed that caused the sudden surge of movement from the floor.

More recently, Doug has fought the kryptonite for long enough to make it to the bedroom without further encouragement. However moments after clambering onto the bed gravity, that bringer-down of empires and space stations, drags him to the floor in an ungainly heap. He usually manages to stay in bed two out of three times. Mostly....

So, here's the thing. Doug doesn't often drink to excess. On those rare times that he drinks huge amounts of alcohol, he remains cohesive in his own conversation, but has difficulty following that of others. If he can hear you or see that you are talking, he is unfailingly polite and will always wait for you to finish before interjecting his own random point, which may or may not have anything to do with the rest of the conversation. He knows a considerable amount of (often rude) poetry and will recite it at the drop of a hat, or any other inducement, however faint. He is good natured, doesn't lose his temper or get riled in any way whilst under the 'fluence. And, nowadays, he always makes it to the bedroom before gravity gets the better of him.

The year Ireland cried

James Bacon, introducing Lee Justice

DougS is one of many many fans who myself and Stef have come to rely upon, sometimes formally and sometimes informally. For example, our convention in Dundalk, a rural town on the east coast of Ireland, benefitted greatly from Doug's input. He turned up looking quite wild-haired, he had grown his locks to a fine length and had a full beard, and agreed to specifically do two panels; Papa Lazarus' Pegs Of Pain, a guide to S and M by Douglas Spencer, and The Freemasons, Do We Get Free Housing Then by Douglas Spencer. I ran it, so I can barely remember it all, so I found someone who did....

They Came And Shaved Us, A Weekend of the Wondrous, Dundalk, Ireland, 24th to 26th October 2003

Lee Justice

They Came And Shaved Us was many, many things. A dream world of ethereal surrealism edged with academic construct, an engineered forum built from the esoteric realms of the most bizarre reaches of pop culture fetched across the foundations of a generic science fiction fan-base. This mix of inanity, of great effort and camaraderie, of black, self-indulgent fun, was nothing but a feast of sick, brilliantly sculptured mayhem and insanity, a weekend of the truly wondrous, a spectacle never to be forgotten.

The measure of it is a hard measure to gauge, just as is that of the metaphorical piece of string of yore. An easier option would be the gauge of the fun of it. From here the depravity of the whole of it would begin its roll, a figurative snowball of surrealism that wouldn't slow until Monday night!

The first thing I recall with any alacrity was the hotel, Fairways Hotel to be precise. "Ye Gods," I thought upon seeing the crumbling brickwork and peeling paint. Ye Gods indeed! Beyond the reaches of the outside world, which ceased to exist from the moment I stepped in through the great double doors, was fetched a mighty expanse of splendour that would be all ours for the weekend.

Papa's Pegs Of Pain was on my agenda, being a talk on the corporeal delights of BDSM, by Doug Spencer. Until that moment I had never seen Doug without hair; he had always been a man with a head full of the stuff and a face to match. Today the lad stalked into the arena shaven headed and shaven faced, having endured a fierce attack of the razors in the name of charity. Doug's talk was both informative and enjoyable, educational and fun, filled as it was in dedication to the much misunderstood world that

is B+D, D+S and S+M. I never knew how much fun could be had with the simple application of pegs all over your body, elastic bands around your face and electric buzzing things near to people!

There were crazy, inane Olympics where three legged sack races and shot-grape offered as much humour in the doing as the watching it being done! But undoubtedly there was nothing to compare to the Chicken Fisting! The Chicken Fisting was something else. Take a fist, any fist, just the one, and insert the fist into a chicken. Wrap around duck tape up to the elbow, securely securing fistied chicken to fist, and hit someone repeatedly until the chicken is no more. Yes they really did this. It was a cross between conkers and boxing and they really did do it. I'm not making it up. They really did it and it was nasty.

Of course there were many varied degrees of nasty things on the go the whole weekend, nasty things like putting your hand into a box to see what was in there. And from such minds that dreamed up chicken fisting, you can have a good guess at what was in those boxes. Pig heads, beef hearts and a brain, and all sorts of diabolical absurdities.

There was also watching people do horrible things to themselves, like pulling their arms out of joint and then putting them back in, walking on the very tips of their toes, cramming lots and lots of stuff into their mouths and then sicking all those things back up. And then eating the sick! It was all most disturbing. I left wondering how any one person could actually get 42 grapes into their mouth without breaking a single one. But somebody did. And that somebody was Wag.

There was a talk on Freemasonry, by Doug Spencer, who talked us through the inauguration and degree systems of one of the world's most secret organizations, a quintessential look at the Masonic art, given by a past master himself.

And then there was Sunday's disco, which really was bizarre. Rock Night was the theme and more big hair was in evidence. And black T shirts also. And much leather and studs and loud banging music, and blow up guitars to air with. And of course a Rock Night would not have been complete without a live performance from arguably the greatest Rock Combination on Earth, Ghandi's FlipFlop....

I genuinely have no idea what he is talking about, it's all Dutch to me, but what I do know is that Doug had many of the 170 people at the con enthralled, intrigued and sometimes in pain.

James.

Inconsequential Hogswatch

Fran Dowd

To celebrate our second wedding anniversary, in 1992 John and I went to Inconsequential in Derby. It turned out to be Incon 1, effectively the second of a series of British FunCons which have grown and developed over the years, spawning such delights as Aliens Stole My Handbag, Confounding Tales, and Teledu. Incon 1 was an amazing convention. Terry Pratchett and Robert Rankin had a, mmm, discussion; Rankin's room party broke the jacuzzi; Steve Lawson permanently crippled himself wrestling John in a wardrobe, after inventing parkour by running all over the hotel roof. There's a video of it all, somewhere. The toga party, the Pratchett trial, the Smurf soup and, inevitably, our first encounter with Doug.

One of the programme items was a Sumo Basho, which we were keen to go to. Sumo is one of the few sports John will watch on TV, and he knows quite a lot about it. One of the competitors was in it to win it, most of the others were just these guys, y'know, and one was fully prepared. Doug was naked apart from his formal mawashi loincloth, and had got the leg stomping shiko ritual off pat. At first I had assumed that the mawashi was made from hotel towels (it was that sort of convention, they even gave us all an extra sheet each for the toga party), but closer inspection proved it to be home-made in advance, from Real Material™. We cheered him on in delight, but his preparation had not included a lot of upper body work, and he was declared shini-tai fairly quickly. At least he was wiped out by AI, who went on to win the whole basho, very convincingly.

Over the years we were to realise that this level of attention to detail was typical. Especially if an event involved costuming potential, or food. That, and a willingness to participate to the max. I've seen him in many guises, and have photographic proof of a Chicago gangster (with attached flapper), Tarzan (a leopardskin costume which doubles for a Flintstone), and Ponder Stibbons.

To celebrate the sixteenth anniversary of our meeting, on New Year's Eve 2006 John and I threw a Hogswatch party. There was a Tower of Art carved out of Spam, a chocolate sleigh full of chocolate goodies pulled by chocolate boards, a cake topped with a painting of pigs playing poker, and a general celebration of pork and pork-related products. Some people brought food, some came in costume. Doug came as Ponder Stibbons, and brought bacon vodka.

We love Doug.