

Mrs Slocombe's pussy	Tony Blair	Disney	might sue
Simo	John Prescott	Flick	
MIS and MI6	Tony Luke	at GCHQ	Unions

Print this page and take it to the pub. Whenever Robert Newman mentions a topic, mark your card. When you get a straight line, shout “Croydon” and demand that he buy you a pint.

Cardboard Newman Bingo Douglas Spencer

21st July 2004 “dougs” on LJ

And that's how I hired my ~~little pickup truck~~ large box van today.

I explained that the gentleman at central bookings had told me that my UK/EU driving license would be perfectly good, and she hummed and haaed and looked at her employee manual and phoned someone, and decided that yes, it would be fine.

With my debit card, it was perfectly in order for me to hire a stupidly large box van, and could she just check my driving license...

I explained that the gentleman at central bookings had told me that my Visa debit card was perfectly in order, and that in fact he'd taken the booking using this very card. She told me that it was perfectly in order to *book* using a Visa debit card, but in order to actually hire a pickup truck or a small van, I would need a credit card. You see, the pickups and the vans are *leased* by U-Haul, and the terms of the lease forbid them from being hired out on debit cards.

I d previously established that the usual car hire places aren't satisfied with anything less than a major credit card. However, U-Haul are allowed to take a Visa debit card, a piece of plastic with which I am blessed. I nosed around on the U-Haul website, and determined that the Capitol Hill branch of U-Haul was the easiest for me to get to on foot and using the Metro. I phoned central bookings (a 1-800 number) and spoke to a nice gentleman there. I explained that I wanted to hire a small pickup truck from U-Haul at Capitol Hill, and he said that they could do that. I told him that I had a Visa debit card, rather than the more usual credit card, and he said that this would be fine. I mentioned that my driving license was a UK/EU driving license, and he told me that any driving license would be perfectly good. He took my card number and my booking. He attempted to put me through to the depot, but the line was constantly engaged. I needed to speak to the depot, he said, in order to pin down the final details of when I would be picking the vehicle up and so on. He tried to connect me once more, without success. And so he gave me the number of the depot (another 1-800 number), he wished me well, and we disconnected.

The Truck Story Douglas Spencer

28th June 2004 “LJ on ‘dougs”

I was spending a couple of weeks in the USA.

I needed to hire a vehicle.

I d previously established that the usual car hire places aren't satisfied with anything less than a major credit card.

However, U-Haul are allowed to take a Visa debit card, a piece of plastic with which I am blessed.

I phoned the depot on the number supplied several times over the next hour, but the line remained busy. Eventually, I decided that I would just turn up, and sort out the details over the desk. I strolled down to the Metro, hopped on a train and went down to Union Station, walked round the corner and into the depot.

He'd never heard of me. His colleague hadn't heard of me. I wasn't on their list, and they didn't have any vehicles that were free anyway. They could get me one for Tuesday, perhaps — if I faced east and sacrificed a badger — but not today, not at all. I asked them to check the computer for my booking, and they solemnly informed me that my truck was at Hyattsville, over the hills and far away.

Conversations 5

I'll take the fifth.

Conversations compiled by Douglas Spencer
Issue 5 published 9th October 2004
Future issues published when I feel like it.

Available for the Usual.

Because you helped.
Because of your LOC.
Because you found it in the bar.
Because you sent me yours.
Because you're on my friends list.
Because.
And, inevitably, online.

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<http://elfanzines.com/Conversations>

Jim says “Damn, I feel like I'm spinning, trying to read it online.

Either rotate and rotate and rotate, or read upside down.”

Cookery Section Douglas Spencer

2nd July 2004

“dougs” on LJ

Hot Fruity Pork

Four medium size mid-cut pork loin chops

Orange, strawberry and banana juice

Balsamic vinegar

Brown sugar

Garlic salt

Nutmeg

I took a small glassful of fruit juice, a small sloosh of balsamic vinegar, a very heaped teaspoonful of brown sugar, and about a half teaspoon each of garlic salt and nutmeg. I combined these and poured the result into a shallow dish, in which I marinated the pork for about four hours, turning it occasionally.

I took a nice hot non-stick frying pan with a little dribble of olive oil, and blasted the chops for a few seconds on each side. I then turned the heat down a little, and let them cook for a bit. After a while, I poured the remaining marinade into the pan, and let it bubble until the meat was cooked, turning them over occasionally. You can gauge how well cooked a chop is by prodding it — there's progressively less give as it becomes more fully cooked. Additionally, the marinade/sauce was reducing, thickening, caramelising slightly. Going brown, anyway.

Meanwhile, Susan was pinging a couple of sweet potatoes and a tin of peas (not in the tin).

All very nice. And well worth a try, if you fancy it. And, if you don't have any of the ingredients listed, then some suitable substitutions are almost certain to work just as well. Enjoy it.

The LOC Box

Geneva Melzack

10th May 2004

I think Convers[at]ions just proves that it is indeed worth publishing material originally published online in a paper fanzine. Despite the fact that I'm online regularly, and am on livejournal too, I had never read any of the pieces in Convers[at]ions 4 until I read them on paper.

I was particularly impressed by Erika's piece "An Exercise in Letter Writing". She writes incredibly well (I looked for more of her stuff online after reading her article in Convers[at]ions) and this letter was powerful and moving. It made me think back to my own school experiences, and even though I was in a very different situation to Erika and on the other side of the globe I felt I could empathise with what she went through. Her piece really painted a picture for me of what her school days felt like, and it made me wonder what kind of letter I'd write to my eleven year old self.

I also liked the sentiments of your own couple of articles; two very thoughtful and caring little pieces about the kind of small affectionate gestures that can end up having very large meanings.

As an ex-theologian, Dave Bridges' piece on the Bible made me smile. Like Dave, my respect for the Bible has nothing to do with believing, but unlike him I've never seen the good book bounced up and down on a single flimsy page. I was about to try it on my own copy before deciding that it was probably much cheaper and crappier than the editions he was talking about.

I also heard from Jim Caughran, Erika Maria Lacey, Lloyd Penney, some people talked to me about it in the bar or online, of course ... and some administrative asides from Bill Burns and Victor Gonzalez.

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DiscWorldCon IV — A story of conspicuous consumption 4th September 2004

Liam Proven

“Iproven” on LJ

I am chronically indecisive. If I'm faced with a choice of things to do, I vacillate until the very last minute.

What do you do when the plans for a weekend fall through? In my case, you panic and fluctuate wildly between alternatives until it's as close to too late as is possible. But in the end, I decided to go to DiscWorldCon IV — the biannual Terry Pratchett convention.

Now, the thing is, I've been going to conventions for a long time. A scarily long time. About 17 years: since 1987, Conspiracy, the Brighton Worldcon, where I spent almost every spare penny I had to sail back from the Isle of Man to England again to go down to stay in a youth hostel for a long weekend. And damned good it was, too.

So this time, I surrendered to temptation to join Chris, who had generously offered to not only give me a lift but share his room for the weekend with me. (Thereby saving him a tenner a night, but that's neither here nor there.) So off we went.

We came. He registered. I didn't, 'cos they weren't set up to take registrations on the door. We went to the bar, like you do. (Chris may not drink, but he knows how to fake it.)

And we stood around like lemons. Here we were, veteran con-goers, if not SMOFs then distressingly close — I'm averaging out, here — and we're at a con of about 800 people, and between us, we knew about ten, maybe twelve of them. It was quite scary. We hung around the bar together, awkwardly, wondering how to start talking to anyone. I'd not felt like this for a decade — Chris, longer.

Eventually, we broke the ice, somehow, but it was weird and awkward.

And as is usually the case in such situations, I drank too much.

Somehow I spent 'til about 3am in the bar and got a smidgen intoxicated.

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Saturday dawned painfully. I rose at 10:30am for breakfast, then thought better of it and returned to bed for a few more hours. About 5 of them. Thus missing most of the day's programming. Eventually I staggered down at some point past 2pm, volunteered as a gopher and started talking to people. And somehow, I did — I met loads of them. I got accosted to man the **THUD!** table — a stand where folk could register for a con-wide tournament of a DiscWorld-themed boardgame. I had all sorts of paperwork for administering the tourney, except any kind of instructions for the game itself, so I passed the time writing a letter to Rachel on the back of some unused scoresheets. (I must finish and send it.)

But by Saturday evening, I found myself in the bar happily chatting to loads of new people. Anecdotally, it's easy when you know how — but if it's so long since you've last done it, it can be really quite difficult. But we got over it, and natter happily we did, until about 5am or so.

DiscWorld fandom is strange. Probably, to be fair, not that strange by the standards of such things, but odd if you're used to what for want of a better word I'll call “mainstream” fandom. I know lots of people from (broadly) literary fandom. My entrance into this odd little sub-world was through ZZ9 and that's how I know most of my friends therein, but Pratchett fandom is something else entirely. I've never seen so many people in costume at a con before — scores of wizards and witches, mostly the expected ones, but also Cohen the Barbarian — a particularly memorable example, and bloody good at it he was, too, if a little more heavily tattooed than I imagine, and damn me if he wasn't complete with Horde too; plus warrior maidens and vampires and several Deaths and Susan Sto-Helits and many more besides.

Once you get past that, though, they're just folk, as ever. Yeah, dressed weirdly, in some cases; yeah, somewhat obsessive, perhaps, but I'm guilty of that, too. Before DWC4, I'd have said that I bowed to no-one in my fondness for TP and his works — I was a fan in 1978, from the first paperback, and have been ever since. But looking at the degree of devotion of so many people here, I am but an egg. I have not memorized my favourite scenes, nor got particular characters with whom I strongly identify; I do not know every book backwards, as I do to some extent

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with the (considerably smaller) Douglas Adams canon. I know notheenk, in fact.

And yet, even so, I still felt welcome, once I stopped thinking that I was a jaded veteran who knew my way around and accepted my status as a born-again newbie. That done, I was welcome.

And yet, it's odd. Almost everyone I spoke to did every significant Pratchett event — and nothing else. By and large, they're not interested — they have their thing and the rest can go hang. It's not that it's that different — it isn't. It was just another con, really. But it was a Pratchett con, not a Fandom con. These people have their fandom, they neither want nor need to join anyone else's. It's their thing and they love it. Why should they waste their time on non-DiscWorld stuff when it's DiscWorld that they love?

It was a little odd, a little disturbing, to see the degree of veneration accorded to PTerry, the father of it all. I only know Mr P very very slightly — I've talked to him a few times, years ago I gophered at a Worldcon in close association with Rhianna, another neo at that time. My impression is that, like Bop Ad*, he's a bit weirded out by all the worship, but unlike Adams, as long as it's not too often, he's happy to play along. He knows what's good for him and I can't fault him for that. But it seems to freak him out a little and he seems... reserved, perhaps standing a little back from it all. A total contrast to Robert Rankin, who could not be more involved in his own fanclub, while Mr P seems to stand at a slight remove.

So. Odd, really. I have no incisive insights, but it was a damned fine weekend, I met loads of interesting people — some LJers, such as hobnobs, koalaesq, bellinghman and bellinghwoman, natural20 and watervole, amongst others — and I really enjoyed myself — to an extent that I haven't done at mainstream cons in some years. Somehow it was all newer and fresher, I suspect because of its lack of familiarity.

The only downside, really, was drinking and buying people £90 worth of beer in three evenings. I'm not sure if my liver or my wallet hurt more.

* Douglas Adams, the late great and lamented — or at least, that's what his signature appeared to say.

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