

Corflu Memories



Issue One

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Corflu Memories is both an electronic fanzine, available on <http://www.efanzines.com>, and a paper fanzine, with copies available for the fannish usual. Letters of comment are welcome. The next issue should appear in about a fortnight.

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Front page picture is the "Survivors' Group Photo" from Corflu 2010 at Winchester.

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For those with a lousy memory for names, an index print to this photo is also available at:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/bohemiancoast/4457487862/>

Editorial

Corflu is an annual, rotating, convention for science fiction fanzine fans. OK, that's the easy bit.

Explaining what that means in practice, and what makes this different from the many other science fiction conventions in the British Isles, North America and across the world, is a much bigger question, and one that I don't feel qualified to answer by myself. So, in the best fannish traditions, I'm going to "crowdsource" the answer, with a series of interviews over the next few issues with a number of British fen who have tasted the Corflu sensation themselves, and have been brow-beaten by me into talking about it.

This year's Corflu, the 29th of the series, is being held in Las Vegas in April 2012. I'm not going to give any more details here, as the best place to get them is from the Corflu website at <http://www.corflu.org>, where Arnie Katz has been publishing weekly progress reports under the name of Glitter. One particularly useful issue, if you're looking to get a lot of information about Corflu 2012 all at once is Glitter 30. Which, for recipients of the paper version of this fanzine, rides with this issue (and indeed, has probably already slid out of the envelope). And, for the rest of you, is available on-line at <http://www.corflu.org/corflu29/Glitter-30.pdf> Alternatively, if you're not already on Arnie's e-mailing list, you can e-mail him at crossfire4@cox.net to get yourself added for future issues.

– Peter Sullivan

Interview 1 – Jim Mowatt

Jim Mowatt has been involved in fanzine fandom since the 1980s. He has produced podcasts for the Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy appreciation society, ZZ9 Plural Z Alpha. Jim also produces his own podcast, Historyzine at <http://historyzine.com>.

PS: How did you discover science fiction fandom in general and fanzine fandom in particular? Presumably that was through ZZ9 Alpha?

JM: No, not at all. That was some time later. I thought that would surprise you. No, I was living in Leeds back in 1980-whatever it was,

and I was friends with the Glovers – Steve Glover and Jenny Glover. Jenny Glover was running the zines for the BSFA at the time – Matrix and Vector (the one that deals with fiction). So she was running Matrix and she wanted me to do some fanzine reviews. And I'd already started receiving some fanzines at that time. And I was – as I still am – delighted by the world of fanzines – by these people who wanted to create something. Because there certainly was at that time some brilliant fanzine writers. Leeds was renowned for particularly good writers, for Simon Ownsley, for D West, for Dave Mooring, and the people who were producing brilliant pictures and words. And lots

of people who were producing brilliant stuff in Leeds at that time. So I was really fortunate to be amongst all of those people. And I was fascinated by fanzine fandom at that time. So I didn't come through ZZ9, I discovered them a little bit later.

And I entered fanzine fandom, discovered all these people – discovered someone called Nesa Sivagnanam, a woman I was particularly fascinated by and who said, “Why don't you come along to the Eastercon?” and so I went along to the Eastercon that year, which was in Liverpool, at the Adelphi. And the Adelphi is just – well, in many ways it's the ideal home for the Eastercon. I mean, there are many, many problems that have grown up about the Adelphi, about Liverpool. Because Liverpool is, mostly, a complete shithole. It's a lot of people who are unemployed, a lot of people who are stealing from everybody else, and we used to get so many thieves coming in to the hotel. And we got that in the Adelphi; lots of people coming in who shouldn't have been allowed in. And so, the Adelphi, although it was a glorious hotel, modelled on the Titanic, looks beautiful, has that big, open space in the middle where everybody can meet, it has this problem. The problem is the fact that it's in Liverpool. And it's such a shame.

PS: How did you first hear of Corflu? Was it something you were aware of fairly early, or was it not really until the 2010 one over here? 1998 was in Leeds, wasn't it?

JM: I was looking back to the one that was in Leeds. I'd heard about Corflu, because of it being a fanzine convention, and because of this reverence I'd had for fanzine fans, and for fanzines. And so I'd heard about it through the others. We used to meet at a pub called the Adelphi in Leeds and me and [Michael] Ashley and D West and Dave Mooring and Sarah, and lots of people, the Leeds fans would all meet there. One of the things we used to talk about was the Corflu fandom, and fanzine core, and then it came up that they were going to Corflu in Leeds in 1998 at the Griffin Hotel in the middle of Leeds. It was completely off the wall because Corflu I think at that point had never been outside North America. And so it was a great honour for us in Leeds to have that Corflu outside of North America and to have it

in Leeds. I loved it to bits, and I got to meet all of these people from North America, and all of these people whose writings I particularly enjoyed as well as these people that I'd had – there were various people who I'd had arguments with over the net. Because we're in the period of Usenet at this time, we're in the period of rec.arts.sf at that time, and there were lots of people who I'd had – mmm, some difficulties with. I don't think Gary Farber came over at that time, and everybody had had trouble with Gary Farber at one time. But Victor Gonzalez came over then, and I think Victor Gonzalez had decided that I was a retarded truck driver. Well, OK, I'm willing to accept retarded. But I was a bus driver, dammit. So I had to see him to put him straight on that. So it was great to see Victor there and to talk to him about that.

PS: What other Corflus have you attended since? Obviously 2010 Winchester, but have you ever managed to make it Stateside for one?

JM: Oh, I would so love to make it Stateside for one. But I've never managed. I managed Winchester which I loved to bits. I did attend the last one in Sunnyvale, only virtually, and it was an interesting experience. I've been talking to Doug [Bell] and Christina [Lake] about the Fan Programming at Eastercon. One of the programme items we're putting on is Virtual Cons – how you do Virtual Cons and how much you get out of them. And I attended Sunnyvale as a Virtual Con. And OK, it wasn't the con experience, it wasn't being able to sit with people and really feel that connection. But it was incredibly close. I think, in future years, it could be almost as good. With the Sunnyvale one, we had Kat [Templeton] taking the computer around, she had the laptop, and she was taking it around and going, “Look, here's people.” And mostly people forgot about us or didn't know we were there. Sometimes we were totally neglected, we were on the shelf. But we got to see some things, and we got to see them particularly well. Particular events such as Dave Hicks' arts event where they were showing off. They did a production which was absolutely brilliant and Dave Hicks is such fun. So we got to see that sort of thing. And we got to talk to people as well. And sometimes it worked; sometimes it didn't. We got Gary

Farber coming to us at way, way past midnight. He was very drunk and he kind of lurched at the camera. Which wasn't as much fun as it could have been.

In theory it's a brilliant idea, to have us in a laptop in a corner of the room somewhere and anybody from the convention who wants to can go and talk to us, but I think we're not used to it yet. We're not used to it being there. I remember you at Eastercon in Bradford; you had a laptop there in a very, very central position at Bradford. And people were all a bit wary of it. They were all a bit "Ooh, this guy's got a camera." It was only a laptop with a webcam on. But they're thinking, "Ooh, he's got a camera. I'm a bit scared of this. Do I want to be on this, do I not want to be on this." And I think that, once people get used to it, and once we have a sort of – this is a designated area; this is where you go if you want to talk to people all over the world. I think once we have that. Once people know how to interact with it, how to communicate with it, that will become a part of conventions. And more of us will be able to join in. Let's face it, there's all these Corflus, I would love to go to in the States. And there's no way that I'm going to be able to go to them. But virtually, I think I'll be able to go to quite a few of them. I think I'll be able to enjoy that. But it needs this – sort of understanding of the virtual attendee. Right, these people are out here and we'll bring them in to our convention. And I really enjoyed Sunnyvale, the little bit that I was able to get involved with, and I didn't feel part of it, but I sort of felt on the edge. It's quite fun, I thought.

PS: I think that my perception is, at the moment, the virtual convention seems to join up with the main convention for the big ticket events – for the panels and things like that. But other than that, it's almost as if there's another convention going on on the virtual side, as it were. That people tend to interact, at the moment, primarily with other virtual attendees. I think there have been times where it has worked. So, for instance, at Winchester, we made a particular effort after the banquet to start trying to involve people. But it's a difficult balance, isn't it, between trying to involve the virtual convention whilst enjoying yourself at the convention yourself?

JM: It is, it's an incredibly difficult balance. Say you've got a mobile phone and you're talking to someone on that mobile phone. And you've also got someone in front of you who is somebody who would be interested in this conversation, but who is there present with you, and says "Oh, who is this and what are they talking about?" Now, who do you give priority to? Do you give priority to the person on the phone, or the person in front of you? Now, normal human behaviour is the person who's with you. But should it be the person on the phone? Maybe they were the person you talked to first. But then there's a real live person there too. So you're going to have to balance all of this normal etiquette and try and re-arrange it for this new world. And there's a lot of things to balance, because every time you interact, you interact slightly differently. And it's quite exciting, but quite scary at the same time.

PS: Going back to your experience at Leeds [in 1998] and Winchester in 2010, what do you feel makes a good Corflu? I suppose the tricky bit is how much of it is stuff that the convention committee can actually influence, and how much of it is things that just happen. The usual issue around some people view Corflu should be very programme-light; other people view it as the programme being very important. To what extent do the different factors make up a good convention – or a good Corflu?

JM: I see what you mean, yes. There's a lot of factors involved in that. I think I'm probably not the ideal person to ask about this, because I've always felt a little bit of an outsider as far as fanzine fandom's concerned. I produce fanzines, and I love fanzines. I am an admirer of the idea of the meritocracy. The idea that we should revere people who write well. And this includes fanzine writers as well. And I want to talk to people who write well. Because I want to know about that talent, I want to know about how they produce that. Because I am envious of that, and I feel joyous about that. So I want to know, and I want to talk to the people who write well, the fanzine writers. And so they're the people I want to connect with. And, in a Corflu, this is an ideal place to connect with them, because it's about fanzines. It's about fanzine writers. But it is odd in that although it's a meritocracy, it's also very cliquey. So it's kind of hard to get into.

Now, at one level, I think, great. It should be hard to get into. Because you should be damned good to be accepted by these other people who are part of fanzine fandom. But on the other hand, I have this problem that I don't really feel part of it myself yet. And maybe that just means I have to work a little bit harder to get involved. Because I went to the one at the Griffin Hotel in Leeds and I talked to a few people and I was fine; I enjoyed talking to them. I still didn't feel quite part of them, but I felt that I'd introduced myself to rich brown and Victor Gonzalez and various people. And I went to the one in Winchester and I met various people there and I introduced myself. And then I went to a virtual Corflu in Sunnyvale. And the very person who was running Sunnyvale, which is Chris Garcia, is someone I know very well, got on with very well. And yet I still feel a little bit outside this fannish community and I'm not quite sure why. But I think I have to put this down to myself. I don't think I can say there's something wrong with the system. I think this has to be down to myself; I just have to get involved with Corflu and get involved with the fanzine fannish society somehow.

PS: One thing I've heard said is that one of the problems these days is that the average quality of a fanzine is so high that there aren't the crud-zines around that there used to be. And that, in some ways, almost acts as a disincentive, in that people feel that they've got to produce something of the quality of Banana Wings or Chunga or whatever. Whereas in the old days it would have been a case of if I can produce something that's almost as good as these two or three sheets of illegible ditto, then that's much less of a hurdle to climb. And of course you'd have crud-zines that would die off very quickly but then you'd have the ones where people learned and developed their craft.

JM: I hear what you're saying, yes, there were a lot more crud-zines in the 1980s and 1990s and the early 2000s. I wouldn't say that there are that many high quality zines about at the moment. There are a lot of decent fanzines at the moment. Some reasonable quality fanzines at the moment. But I would be very hard put to find something high-quality at the moment. If you look at some of the fan writing of – well, say we go back to D West in particular. Who is

known as an artist. But look at some of his writings and look at some of the recent fan writings and you will find nothing as good as that. I think as in-depth, I think nothing where you feel the writer has actually hurt to write this stuff down. So I don't know. I know there are a lot of decent fanzines around at the moment but there isn't much great writing I think at the moment in fanzines.

PS: How do you feel that technology is changing fanzine fandom? In some ways, we've now moved beyond the paper vs PDF debate, and that's pretty much a done and dusted issue. But it's now almost the new side of technology. So it's things like podcasts and things like video and so on. The impression I get is that fanzine fandom is a little bit wary of new tech. Or is it just something that people aren't comfortable with? I suppose I'm thinking of the podcast side, you're probably the only prominent podcast producer [in fanzine fandom]. Although, equally, the TAFF podcasts that you've been doing seem to have become a bit of an institution already.

JM: Yes, new technology is making a huge difference to fanzine fandom. We've already got Bill Burns doing a wonderful job on the fanzine archive. This is PDFs online and they will always be online. I mean it's a good job but it's a little disturbing in a way. I found myself today – I had a little bit of spare time today and I thought, "Right, I've got a few things to do, what shall I prioritise?" As we all do. And one of the things was LoCs, LoCs on fanzines. And I thought "Which LoC should I look at first?" And the LoC that I looked at first was Banana Wings. Now, this is a little unfair, because Banana Wings doesn't appear as an electronic fanzine in any way. It's purely paper. So I'm LoCing Banana Wings because I want more Banana Wings because I think it's a good thing. So does that speak volumes for having a paper fanzine? Because I can get – I mean there's a fanzine I'm co-editing, which is Beam, with Nic Farey. And that is available as a PDF. So whether you LoC it or not, you will get Beam. You can go along to efanzines.com, you can get Beam at any time. So you get the next edition of Beam, you read it, you think "Yeah, that's alright." But you don't have to do anything. You'll get the next one, and the next one, the next one. So you have no obligation. So what does that mean for fanzine

fandom?

However, you look at things like podcasts. I produce podcasts myself. I produce one called Pips. I've done regular podcasts. But mostly I think what many people out there will know me for is doing podcasts about TAFF, because I think TAFF is a wonderful institution, I think it's absolutely glorious and I've been and interviewed the various TAFF candidates. So I've done that and gone out and interviewed these people and produced these podcasts and actually they get huge numbers of downloads. And Star Ship Sofa, which won a Fanzine Hugo the other year, has thousands and thousands and thousands of downloads. And so there must be a bridge between the fanzine fans that exist now and the podcast fans, because they are very, very similar. They are people who are interested in science fiction they are people who are interested in getting involved. And why are they not connected? They should be connected. It's a whole new media.

I keep talking to people over and over again, fanzine fans, who say, "Oh yes, I don't want this audio stuff, because I read much faster than audio happens." Catherine Crockett and Liam Proven, the two people who stand out. Any time I put anything out in audio, Catherine Crockett and Liam Proven both write to me and say "When are you going to put this out as text? Because I much prefer text?" Now, I understand this. I know I read text very, very fast too. And a lot of fans do. It's the nature of us as fans. We read text very, very fast. But another thing that happens is, we have very, very busy lives, we have lots of things to do. And one of the things that we do is commuting. And while we're commuting, we can be listening to things. And one of the things we can be listening to is fanzines. And I think a lot of us don't do this yet. We haven't yet quite connected yet with the idea that this is dead time that actually we could use for something really, really cool. We could be listening to fanzines from people we know, from people we admire, from people we adore, from people we delight in. And I think this is where this connection with podcasts and fanzine fans could come across. With this commuting time; with this sort of moving about time. You've got your headphones on and you can be connected to the world of fandom

through podcasts. And this hasn't quite happened yet. Because we're readers, we're locked into this idea of being readers. But we can be readers; but we can be listeners at the same time. And I think this is a way forward for fandom. We're busy people, we're doing lots of things. We haven't got the time any more to sit down and read fanzines. So why not have audio fanzines with that extra little something that audio gives us, where we can ignite our imaginations, and yet we're doing it without using time, we're doing other things. Like commuting to places, like walking to places, like going hither and thither to the shops or whatever. So fanzines, we can still connect even though our time is squeezed really tight.

PS: In some ways, the podcast science fiction community has almost developed on a different track to the traditional fanzine fandom, and I suppose that's part of the reason that there was a lot of the controversy about Star Ship Sofa. And that's part of the reason that we've now got a separate Hugo for the podcasts. I'm guessing that in some way will help with making it clear that podcasts and traditional fanzines aren't in competition, as such, they're just different ways of achieving the same fannish activity.

JM: Absolutely. I think that it's about the message not the medium. Which it is. I was talking to Kevin Standlee, a chap who is very, very involved with Worldcon rules. I was talking to him at the last Eastercon and he was saying it should be about what the thing "is," not how it's conveyed. And the thing "is" a fanzine. Whether it's in audio, whether it's in text, whether it's in video. Whatever it is. If it looks like a fanzine, quacks like a fanzine, then it is probably a fanzine. And so, if it's about us, then it's a fanzine. And I think – ideally I would like the category to be fanzine, and for that to cover text, and audio, and video. But it's not going to do, I think, at the moment. And there will be problems as one medium comes into fashion or another medium comes into fashion. And I think we will get audio coming into fashion. Then, I think, absolutely definitely, we'll get video come into fashion. We'll get video fanzines. Because that's going to happen very, very soon. That might over-take audio fanzines. They might never happen. We might leap straight onto

video fanzines. Because, I think, that's what people want. They're used to watching television programmes, they'll want to watch video. So they'll want to watch Gary Farber, hobbling towards us on his cane and telling us we're all a bunch of – whatever we are. And I think this visual medium is the way that we're going to go in the future. We're going to go for visual fanzines, and we're going to go for video fanzines. And, even though I think that some things will be lost in this way, I think it's the way things have to go. And I think it should be all about how good is the message. Not how good is the medium. How good is the message? So how good is either the text, or the audio or the video. And that should be able to stand up against what ever medium it comes across.

PS: I think that's right. Because, in effect, it's always been an evolutionary process. That fanzine fans just basically hook on to whatever means of communication are there. And if you look at it as an evolutionary process, you start off with ditto, mimeo, photocopying, on to the electronic forms like e-mail and PDF. And audio and video are potentially just the next two steps in that evolutionary chain.

JM: Yes, absolutely. And so we're going along into the new world, and the new world is computers, it's audio, and it's video, and we have all these magnificent tools at our fingertips now. And so we can produce fanzines in a variety of ways, and the fandom now will take some time accepting fanzines in a variety of ways. But it will accept them, because we're moving along, it's an evolutionary process. And we will also attend conventions in a variety of

different ways. The best way, of course, is to actually be there in person, talking to people in person, and drinking real beer in person. So that's the best way of attending a convention. But we can't all do that. Especially with a Corflu, which is quite a small convention. One of the joys of the Corflu is that it's a small convention. You go to a Corflu and you have a pretty good idea of who's going to be there. And it's delightful for that, because – yet again – fanzine fandom is a meritocracy. And so the people who are there will deserve to be there. Because they are quite good at what they do. And so it will be a delight to meet those people. I like to meet talented people and at Corflu I will meet talented people. And so I love it and I glory in Corflu for that. But I think, also, as well as being there, we will have a virtual Corflu convention, and I think we can celebrate those being there as well, because the people who take the trouble to be there virtually, are probably going to be people we want to meet as well. Probably going to be people who should be part of Corflu as well. So we can have – Corflu is what, about 120 people? Virtually, we'll probably have about another 50 or 60 people there. So we'll end up with an 180 people convention. And 180 people is about the size of fanzine fandom across the world. We're quite small, really. But we like that, we like being part of this small community that is full of really talented people. And I like that too. I like this community. And I like these people.

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