

Nowhere Fan 2 is the belated successor to *Nowhere Fan 1*, brought to you by **Christina Lake** (christina.l@virgin.net). This time there are locs, a convention report by Lilian Edwards, a review of *The Carhullan Army* by Doug Bell and stuff from me about Bristolcon, *The Big Bang Theory*, utopianism and what I've been doing while Doug's been away.

One of the scrolling headlines on the news service in First Great Western's so-called Entertainment Carriage reads Hayling Island 'hit by tornado'. That this is intrinsically ridiculous compared to truck bombs in Syria and bush-fires in Australia is highlighted by the masterly use of the quote marks round 'hit by tornado'. Clearly, since Hayling Island is on the south coast of Britain it can't have been an official tornado, only a quasi-British type of tornado, albeit one that damaged around 100 houses. Since train-news is short on time-checks and details, I have to hope it's referring to the same storm that swept through nearby Bosham (where I was staying with my mother) at 7.30 in the morning, exhibiting suitably tornado-like intensity, rather than some subsequent incident which could have swept my mother off along that yellow brick road in the tradewinds from Hayling Island.

But back to my life on trains. In a fit of overcompensation for not being on a European odyssey with my partner Doug, I find myself on the FGW train from Westbury to Cornwall for the second time in a fortnight. Two weeks earlier I'd set out to London with Doug, only to be stranded on a platform in Par, watching my train disappear up the branchline to Newquay (no, that's not an euphemism). We'd been turned out of the Plymouth train, crowded with people trying to connect to London, Bristol and the rest of the outside world, and forced to wait for an hour at a station with no catering facilities, and only one heritage toilet (yes, I swear it was genuine Victorian plumbing). That little blip translated to a rather rushed evening at the first Thursday SF meeting in London for Doug and I where the Melton Mowbray's pies and draught beer remained undistinguished but the company

was boosted by the presence of Pete Crump who gathered followers throughout the evening like a virgin on Twitter. I meanwhile failed to do anything more adventurous than eat pie, drink beer and let Rob Hansen, Avedon Carol, Caroline Mullan and Alun Harries do their best to make me feel special (or insulted, but that's just Alun's way of saying hello). Mark and Claire scooped us up and took us on their fast and furious trains (and full and friendly buses) back to Croydon where we drank whisky and talked about all those important matters that fans discuss when more than one gathers in the presence of a mobile connection to certain 24/7 international fannish discussion fora.

Next morning I couldn't put off the realisation that Doug really was going away to Europe without me. Up till then I could always just pretend that we were up in London for a fine fannish time (hey, we should do this more often. But on a better train service). So we parted at East Croydon station, Doug for Gatwick and Vienna, me for St Pancras and the British Library. I waved off his train, wondering whether I would have felt any better if I'd gone all the way to Gatwick with him. Or better still Vienna. I'd had as many plans to accompany Doug for part of his trip as Doug had had of iterations of his itinerary. But when a two-hour Monday morning library session with Exeter PhD students blew Swecon out of the water, I lost heart. Technically it's not impossible for me to take leave in the first few weeks of the academic year, but in reality it's a lot of hassle. You can guarantee that the day I pick to abscond to parts European will be the very same one that Film will try to book in a whole load of library tours for the Freshers, or Geography will commandeer an IT suite and

not let me out until all the students know how to search Web of Science.

The British Library wasn't Vienna, but joining it for the first time was pretty cool. Now I have a library card which gives me access to almost any book in the world I might want to read, the older the better. I feel like Jo Walton's character from *Among Others* when she discovers inter-library loans. Pity I live so far from London.

In another attempt to overcompensate for not going to Vienna, I went on from the British Library to Bournemouth to stay with my sister and run in the Bournemouth Marathon Festival. Needless to say I wasn't actually running a marathon, but I had signed up to run in the 10k (yes, 10K, when the best I'd managed before was a rather slow 5K in Race for Life). In fact, I was feeling quite blasé and confident about it all. How hard could it be? I'd been getting up early on Saturday mornings and doing about an hour of running up and back along the seafront without too much difficulty. But none of my "training" had prepared me for going running on an unseasonably warm October afternoon. I felt massively overdressed in my running gear even before we started. I was wearing a cheap running t-shirt and full-length trousers, while everyone else seemed to be aerodynamically attired in minimalist lycra shorts and airy sleeveless tops. Even the pensioners looked more sporty than I did.

It turned out that running 10K was much harder than I'd thought. Who knew? I'd run 5K before, but no-one takes that very seriously. At 10K, they'd all been practising, and so a lot of people were overtaking me. Even my sister who had an injured ankle, for goodness sake! As I jogged along at my normal undistinguished pace I began to get paranoid about being 'swept up'. I'd read on the race website that anyone going too slowly would be swept up by the race organisers and made to leave the race, so I redoubled my efforts not to fall to the back. The heat was making it hard work, and when we were handed bottled water at the 4K mark I used most of it to pour over myself. By this stage I began to realise that I

was not going to settle into my stride as I'd hoped but would probably be struggling to keep going the whole way round. Even running up and down Bournemouth pier barely cheered me up. I love piers, and I love running by the sea, but in the late afternoon heat I felt very tempted to give up and run into the sea instead. Somewhere between 6 and 7K, someone had parked a brass band on the roadside. I tried to pretend it was giving me a boost, but I really just wanted the whole cacophony of them to shut up. The section from the brass band to the point where I would turn to run back to the finish line seemed endless. All the people running in the opposite direction were still colour coded for the fast track runners. At last I began to see some of my own cohort of self-confessed slower runners, and finally my sister who told me I wasn't far from the turning point. I did feel tempted to just cross over and run back with her. But what's the point of setting yourself a challenge if you're going to cheat? By this time I'd been running for about an hour, and only covered three quarters of the length. I could see that my estimate of completing the run in an hour and ten minutes was going to be way out of line. I could also see, after I turned to run back, that the sweepers, a couple of guys on bikes riding slowly behind a very red-faced woman, were not so far behind. This is the point when I'd like to say I found my second wind, but with the 8K marker coming up, I didn't have that much more to give. I started to alternate running with fast walking. But once you start to walk it's really hard to get running properly again. Even annoyance at the brass band couldn't get me going again. At the 9K mark I began to see completed runners strolling along with their race t-shirts and medals. I hated them all, with their smug faces and relaxed, unsweaty bodies. But not as much as I hated the race stewards who kept telling me I was nearly there. It might only be 1K to go, but it could just as well be 100K as far as my energy levels were concerned. But by then the pier was finally within sight again, and I put in a last effort to run the final 500m and make it over the finish line at a proper pace. I'd made it – just – in a none-too stunning 1 hr and 20 minutes.

So two weeks ago, I was sitting on the train back to Falmouth, clutching my race t-shirt, blingy medal and new running trousers, thinking positive thoughts about all the things I would do in Doug's absence. Running, fanzine articles, begin my H G Wells research, catch up on all the film and TV that Doug wouldn't want to watch. And what have I really done? Work, of course, not getting back till nearly seven in the evening kind of work. Running - on the days when I've dragged myself home before dark. Facebook, following Doug's Nordic exploits on Facebook. Booking trains to visit my mother in West Sussex (this took an unbelievably long time, because getting return tickets from Exeter to Bosham is apparently not really possible), doing laundry, going to work, going shopping, feeling tired. In truth, it turns out that I achieve far less when Doug is away than when he's at home.

The train pulls into Truro, and I ring my mother to find out whether she's seen any tornados, with or without their self-deprecatory British quote marks, but it's been all quiet on the weather front since I left. Back in Falmouth, I let myself into the house. It's still light, and I

have no-one to please but myself, so I put on my running gear and run down to the sea. The weather is cool and breezy, and after sitting on the train for seven hours, it feels pleasant to run.

Now when it doesn't matter, I feel like I could run forever.



Next up our utopian correspondent asks:
Is SF fandom utopian?

I've often seen fans debate the difference between utopian fiction and science fiction, but not talk about utopianism in relation to fandom. It seems that utopian fiction can count as science fiction if there is enough futuristic technology, a science fictional setting (far future/ alien planet) and preferably some kind of story. Conversely, when utopian fiction is just about the rules and regulations of the new world, then it's clearly sociology or politics, but not science fiction. Or to skip to the convenient definition of Darko Suvin, there has to be a "novum" – a scientifically plausible new element that drives the story.

However, this definition doesn't prevent some science fiction being utopian fiction, or working from a utopian premise. I've heard Iain Banks's *Culture* described as utopian; the *Star Trek* universe with its prime directive and benevolent Starfleet officers is utopian (in a

colonialist kind of way); Le Guin, Russ, Delaney, Heinlein, Robinson and many others all had their utopian moments. But the more interesting question is whether science fiction has utopia in its DNA. Can science fiction avoid taking a view on which elements of our social and scientific development will help us survive into the future, and which prevent us moving on? Even a good adventure story set in space presupposes that humans will develop suitable technology and that science will help us to make that leap rather than destroy us. Which leads me back to my original question – is fandom itself utopian?

In the early twentieth century social theorists thought that science could be applied to society in order to create utopia. For them, science was synonymous with progress. What interests me is how much of that utopian faith in science transferred over into science fiction

fandom. In *Then*, Rob Hansen talks about the crossover between the British Interplanetary Society and the original science fiction fans of the 1930s. He also quotes Gilling's original advertisement for the Ilford Science Literary Circle which emphasises scientific knowledge and progress. In New York, the Futurians espoused the utopian idea of SF fans working towards the founding of a scientific world state. While fandom is noticeably lacking in a political agenda today, there is some crossover with modern forms of utopianism such as transhumanism and extropism (an optimistic futurism that promotes transcendence of the human condition, not to mention abolition of restrictive copyright laws). There's certainly still an interest in science in fandom - many conventions have a science programme. Eastercon has a whole stream of it, while Novacon prides itself on its science speakers. But does this assumption that there is a major

crossover between interest in science and in science fiction translate into a belief in science? I don't know. I've certainly been made to feel that it's my duty as a science fiction fan to be interested in science, and the science panel at Bristolcon reinforced the concept that not only was science fascinating, but understanding it was socially important. The lack of science in fantasy and media manifestations of fandom is possibly a factor in them being seen as different fandoms, lacking that important, but largely forgotten utopian element. My long years in British fandom suggests that we're a cynical bunch, but I wonder if there is a residue of scientific utopianism left in fandom which still sees humans as on their way to greater things through technology, genetic engineering and the belief that there's nothing that can't be solved through a spot of science and rational thinking?

Last issue I mentioned the kickstarter-funded convention Nine World, which I might have been tempted to attend, at least for a day (if there had been day memberships, and I'd lived in London). Luckily Lilian Edwards managed to wangle herself a guest pass, and here she reports back on the experience in:

If that was Nine Worlds, will the next one have Ten?



By Lilian Edwards

So was Nine Worlds really the convention that broke the mould, changed the game, pick the cliché of your choice?! The world's first crowd-funded convention (or at least the UK's?) was, like Netflix's remake of *House of Cards*, discussed in my circles more for its pioneering business model than its actual content. Floated on Kickstarter with remarkably little conventional (sic) publicity, around 1600 members - more than most recent Eastercons, except that one that had Neil Gaiman - obligingly pledged their cash to attend a new convention on the outskirts of London, running seeming thousands of geek-friendly streams, including ones on knitting,

Game of Thrones and queer theory (though not all at once) but not (for variety!) bondage. Would the world be changed forever? In "our" fandom, the prognostications were mostly pretty gloomy. Who were these upstarts with their newfangled Internet ways anyway? They didn't go to Eastercon, or if they did, at least certainly not Novacon! The committee didn't put their surnames on the website! Hell they didn't even put the name of the hotel on the website, or at least not where Chris O'Shea could find it! Even after the con had been and gone and been declared by most who actually attended it to be, amazingly, a success, and possibly even, an amazing

success, grumblers, well, grumbled on. On Facebook, tried and trufans complained that as they hadn't even *heard* NIne Worlds was on, it proved how inexperienced the con committee were at marketing and how 9 Worlds was thus doomed to failure. You couldn't help feeling their real issue was that they hadn't even had the chance to go along and grumble! (or complain it was too expensive and too full of fanfic fans and not go at all!). A lone (well, dual) voice of glee in the fannish gloom seemed to come from Kate Keen and sturdy acolyte Tanya Brown, who from their FB posts seemed to be living in a fanfic dreamworld of cocktails and cupcakes, while thinking up ever more esoteric slash related panels.

On Twitter, a rumour broke that the con was offering to make anyone with a Twitter account a guest with free entry and maybe even a hotel room for a night or two. Impossible! said the smoferati and produced advanced mathematics to show that the con would almost certainly be bankrupt before it opened. Canny Scottish lawyer me, however, proud possessor of @lilianedwards and with academic interests in copyright, fanzines and robots, quietly emailed them to offer the odd talk, and found myself, for the first time in fannish imagining, actually a guest, albeit one of dozens, at an sf convention. Take that, fanhistorians!

So what did I think? I did feel a bit of an outsider anthropological observer. Eastercon it was not. I couldn't collapse into my usual puddle of all the people I've ever known for the last twenty years. There weren't readily available parties of people to go out for nice dinners with - most of the people I did know were busy running the thing. There was Liam Proven, hopefully roaming the place looking for new underage female flesh, and Anders Holmström, almost unrecognisably natty in summer businessman plumage. I met maybe 20 fans I knew, rather than the couple of 100 I would expect to run into at an Eastercon - and although it all felt very friendly and almost overwhelmingly open and accepting and stuff (I still can't quite believe it wasn't parody when I saw the programme book apologising for the

lack of gender neutral toilets) I didn't meet that many new people either.

But that was probably because I felt at least partially in work mode, as they had effectively (and incredibly) paid me to talk: so I did one full lecture and two pretty high powered panels (with rather more important people than me like Charlie Stross and `Cory Doctorow) and swotted for all of them much more than I ever normally would. All went down very well I think, and what was really gratifying were the number of people I'd never heard of who reported volubly on Twitter how much they had enjoyed them, and the people who hung around at the end to ask questions with genuine curiosity. With the greatest respect, I don't think that's really ever happened to me at an ordinary sf con. Maybe that was because 9 Worlds trusted me to talk about serious stuff as a grown up, whereas at "ordinary" sf cons I'm still regarded as a creature of the fanzine or, more recently, media ghetto? It was nice, anyway. This was a younger crowd, less jaundiced, more Internet-comfortable, thrilled to be somewhere where they could actually talk (and tweet, and facebook) about gay sf and wingfic fandom and privacy online and transsexual politics. Or some combo thereof, with (in my case) added robots. It reminded me of the early Glasgow sf cons I went to when in my late teens, that sense of dawning community, and made me feel a bit elderly but mostly pretty happy.

Would I go back? I'm not sure - but that isn't really the question that matters. Will the 9 Worlders come to Eastercon (or Novacon or Loncon? especially when Loncon is a week after the next 9 Worlds?) That's more the question to be asking. What may even actually have broken the mould is not how they paid, but the fact that 9 Worlds seems to have sourced a comparatively vast number of people who hadn't been reached by conventional confandom and who don't fit into the well known demographics of greying, greyed or even downright bald and in a zimmer frame fandom. What we think about them is probably irrelevant. As I said on Facebook, we need Nine Worlds now a lot more than it needs us.



The Ever Expanding Bristolcon Experience

Bristolcon has become all grown-up since I went to the first Bristolcon in 2009. It may not have nine worlds, but it does have three Guest of Honour, two programme streams, Kaffeeklatsches, dealers room, artshow, convention bar and over 250 members. I saw some familiar faces from other conventions, as well as people I've known through being involved with the SF community in Bristol and surrounding areas, but there were also plenty of people I didn't know. Bristolcon's formula of keeping the event to one day and offering relatively cheap memberships and a strong programme seems to be working for attracting people who don't always go to conventions. I liked the fact that many of the panellists were people I hadn't come across before, many of whom were very articulate and interesting – though it did feel you had to be a writer, scientist or at the very least, an amateur folklorist to get on a panel.

The convention was very efficiently programmed. Each of the panels ran for 45 minutes, and then authors were given a ten minute slot to do a reading. This was a nice idea, but did lead to a choice between getting a break between panels or going straight from a reading to another panel. I'm afraid I chose the break over the readings. A short paragraph on each of the authors in the programme book, and something on what they were going to read might have helped to change that decision. Or the occasional longer break in the programme. As it was Doug and I had to miss some good programming to go out and get lunch (there didn't seem to be anywhere to just grab a sandwich in the convention, so we went down the road to a nice cafe near Bristol Temple Meads). I think most people were having lunch while the book launch was on, which meant they missed out on hearing about *Looking Landwards*, an anthology of futuristic stories about farming and climate change, sponsored bizarrely enough by the Institution

of Agricultural Engineers. It also meant that the only people socialising around the free wine and snacks were Doug, Ben Jeapes and myself. Since book launches can often be a bit of a social event, this was a shame, as perhaps the biggest thing lacking in the Bristolcon programme was the chance to get together with other fans. I talked with a lot of people in corridors between the programme items, but in many cases it was as we were heading in different directions to different programme items, so an event that pulled everyone together might have made more time for those catch-up moments. I heard one of the dealers commenting that it was very quiet apart from a manic ten minutes between programme items. I did plan to take more breaks, but everyone I knew seemed to be busily going to programme (apart from Doug, who travel-lagged from his Nordic trip left early), while the people in the bar looked so intent and business-like that I feared I'd be interrupting a multi-media deal (though they were probably just gossiping!)

Nevertheless, going to so much programme led to a very intense day and not enough time to digest and talk about the experience from one panel before plunging into another. The two panels I most wanted to talk about were probably the fan fiction panel and the science one. The fan fiction panel (*My World is Not Your Sandpit*) generated some strong views from the writers on the panel about what fans should or should not be able to do with their property legally and morally, but there was not enough representation of the views of the fan fiction fans. Also there seemed to be a strong and unexamined assumptions that fanfic was all about being a training ground for budding writers rather than a social activity in its own right, and that the author always knew best about what their characters would do. Once your creation is out in the world in whatever medium, you can't control what your characters do in other people's head, not it

seems, in public, on the Internet. The science panel (How Science got its Groove Back) featured some interesting discussions of first encounters with science, but really got going when a member of the audience asked whether the democratisation of science was necessarily a good thing. She talked about the way that the climate change debate had been hijacked by amateurs, manipulating data for their own ends. There was also an admission that science moves faster than the pace of the average SF writer, making it difficult to write near future fiction, or invent anything more bizarre than real science.

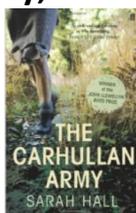
I couldn't stay around for the evening entertainment, which might have been the

time to relax in the bar with a drink or two, and join in the pub quiz, run by Bristol's own Dr Who-meister Nick Walters. I'd definitely recommend Bristolcon for its programme and general friendliness, but watching the dealers room being packed away at seven in the evening, made me feel the convention was somewhat truncated.

Maybe a second day would have allowed for a more relaxed pace of programming and an even better experience? But can Bristolcon hack it in the big league of weekend-long conventions, while keeping its cheap and accessible approach? On current evidence, I think the answer would be yes.

When Doug kept raving about how good the Carhullan Army was, I decided to try and persuade him to write about it for Nowhere Fan. He finally succumbed and so here we have:

The Carhullan Army, Science Fiction and Me



By Doug Bell

I feel out of place in conversations about science fiction. From spending years around fans I suspect I read less than others, don't keep up as much with the latest releases and probably waste more time on decidedly non-fannish pursuits such as sport when my time should be better spent reading the latest Alistair Reynolds. I often discover books out of step with other folks – Sarah Hall's *The Carhullan Army* is one of those. Although I first heard of this novel when it was short-listed for a Clarke Award back in 2008, it was only recently I finally got around to reading it.

In case you're a latecomer like me *The Carhullan Army* is set in a dystopic near-future Britain. The oil has gone and a military dictatorship has taken control. Resources are so scarce that the UK is only being kept afloat by food parcels from the US. This hyper-austerity affects the female population brutally

as in order to limit population growth women are forcibly fitted with devices to stop pregnancy, unless you are lucky enough to win the reproduction lottery. It is a scary future and one that feels all too plausible given the current political rhetoric coming out of the ruling Conservative-Liberal coalition with regards to austerity, public services and civil liberties.

The novel is told via a narrator only identified as Sister. Her tale starts in the town of Penrith where she dreams of escaping the Authority to join the off-grid agricultural feminist collective at Carhullan, hidden high up in the Lake District. One day she seizes her opportunity, evades the powers-that-be and makes the short but brutal journey to freedom. Taken in by the farm and the charismatic leader Jackie, she learns to work the land, survive in the countryside and find her place in a supportive

alternative society. When Sister toughens herself up in order to join Jackie's guerilla patrols you feel the novel move inevitably towards its bleak conclusion... after all the very first words you read are "English Authority Penal Archive".

I've found my tastes in science fiction have changed over the last five years. I now struggle to read yet another space opera no matter how well written or cinematic it is. Posthuman novels feel like solipsistic wish fulfillment. Maybe I've been brainwashed by too many convention panels that state science fiction is the only genre that can deal with big new ideas, but I find most contemporary novels well written, full of SF trappings but lacking in ideas that make me pause for thought. They seem little more than fantasy novels set in space. Deep down I want something that speaks to me about the present day or our near-future, which means the novels I've most enjoyed in the last few years are *River of Gods* and *The Dervish House* (both Ian McDonald), *Air* (Geoff Ryman), *Rule 34* (Charlie Stross), *Zoo City* (Lauren Beukes) and now *The Carhullan Army*.

In addition to this, Sarah Hall manages to tap into something I love and often feel is missing from science fiction – a love of landscape and

the ability to write about the non-urban world convincingly. I studied Physical Geography at university and find there are few speculative writers who can write poetically and accurately about landscape. Kim Stanley Robinson, Ian McDonald and Paul McAuley can, Tolkien does surprisingly well, and Keith Roberts did too. I've often felt that Earth Sciences are overlooked by most authors in favour of "cool sciences" like astronomy, physics, maths and engineering. While I've heard many conversations where fans pick apart starship mechanics I've heard few bemoaning the lack of understanding in world building of landscape, agriculture, soil or weather patterns. And don't get me started on appalling level of cartography seen in maps in the front of novels...

As such *The Carhullan Army* was a revelation to me. It ties many strands of science fiction in a highly convincing manner – dystopias/utopias, feminist SF, mundane SF, alternate ways of organizing society and British pastoral SF (again Keith Roberts). It gives me hope there are other such contemporary science fiction novels out there for me to discover that are less involved with alien worlds, huge starships and post-singularity wish fulfilment.

And it all started with a big bang!

I've been a bit of a latecomer to *The Big Bang Theory*. Doug started watching it when he was off sick from work last Christmas, and over the course of this year we've been watching randomly episodes ranging right from the very start of Season 1 through to some from Season 6. It's reached the stage where it's getting difficult to find episodes we haven't seen, even though E4 seem to show 3 or 4 a day.

When I first started watching some of the earlier episodes, I felt a bit uneasy about the fact that all the male characters were meant to be high-flying scientists and mathematicians, while the main female was a high-school dropout who believed in astrology. But Doug who has a soft spot for Penny, assured me that she

was far smarter than the men in all the ways that really counted (more streetwise, better social skills etc). Then along came Amy, the female counterpart to the Spock wannabe Sheldon, and Bernadette who managed to be cleverer than them all while appearing really girly. Not to mention Darlene (Sara Gilbert) from Rosanne occasionally popping up to make fun of the boys, particularly her ex-boyfriend David who had grown up to become Leonard, and Darlene's Aunt Jackie who plays Sheldon's fearsome bible belt mother.

All the same, the fact remained that the geeks in the Big Bang are all male. SF, comics, gaming, obsessive collecting of memorabilia are seen as the province of men. Even the

dysfunctional Amy is not interested in such matters, and instead dreams of sleepovers, tiaras and Disney princesses. The comic book store is a male hangout where the rare woman that crosses its threshold is treated with a mixture of fear and adoration.

While you can't demand gender parity in the representation of fannish life in fiction, TBBT tends to perpetuate a stereotype of men as childish, and SF, gaming and fantasy as boys toys. To me it feels that this is happening because gender polarisation is one of the basic premises of the series. The men have grown up in a world where they have been bullied and put-down by women (particularly their mothers) and so retreated to a male fantasy world where the homosocial bonds of masculine friendship are stronger than the real world. For them women are the true alien country – one they long for but fear. The women on the other hand have little basis for their friendship other than as girlfriends of the men (so in this sense fail the Bechdel test). The humour of the series is based on the maintenance of these stereotypes, that the

men will always be geeks and socially inept and the women will always laugh at them, but love them too.

Even though the chief relationship is between Penny and Leonard, some of the best scenes come when the two extremes of Sheldon and Penny are paired up. Penny's character seems to have grown over time into someone who can deal with Sheldon, and is even quite fond of him. (A sneak look at the Big Bang Theory FanFic site shows that although Shamy (Sheldon-Amy) is the main relationship, Shenny, or at least Sheldon attempting to comfort Penny after a break-up with Leonard, is also a thing).

As the series has evolved, the characters have changed. Penny even finds herself getting SF references (much to her horror) and Raj Koothrappali is rumoured (on that big source of spoilers, Wikipedia) to have picked up his girlfriend in the comic book store. With Season 7 just starting, who knows what might happen? But I'm not betting on a geek chick lesbian romantic interest for Penny, not just yet.

And finally some feedback on the last issue, distributed at Corflu (also available on e-fanzines.com)

Jerry Kaufman

Did you pick your title just as a play on "Nowhere Man" by the Beatles, or did you also think of the utopian novel, News from Nowhere? I don't think you mentioned this book in your first essay. I've never read it myself, but I understand its a William Morris book with a socialist society.

My title comes from the same source as William Morris's – utopia as nowhere. Samuel Butler's Erewhon was also a play on the same idea.

Steve Barnes wrote an alternate history back in 2002, called Lion's Blood (and a sequel I haven't read) in which the Europeans were the slaves and the Africans were the masters. As you say in your bit on Noughts and Crosses, there's much more detail about how this came to be - Islam became the dominant religion in Africa and the Middle East, while Christianity did not take hold in Europe. So Africa became

the First World, while Europe stayed pagan and Third World.

A blank back page? The mind boggles.

I know – there was a bit of miscalculation with the page count and not much time before Corflu. Still at least blank pages don't cost anything to photocopy.

Lloyd Penney

The only person I know who makes a living out of writing science fiction is Robert J. Sawyer. He's always promoting and touring, and I have to wonder how much time he gets these days to actually write. I would like to see some modern utopian SF, but we do seem to live in extremely dystopian times. Perhaps that is part of the appeal of some popular TV shows, that their establishing background is utopian, no matter what happens in any particular episode. (I am thinking of shows like Star Trek and Babylon 5.)

Steve Green

I get the feeling (research? me?) the final death knell for utopian fiction was the Great War, which pretty much killed off any hope of a glorious future. In any case, didn't Thomas More call his 1516 novel *Utopia* as a kind of joke, since the Latin implies such a world could never exist?

Utopia means no place (in Greek), but could also be a play on words for Eutopia, or Good Place. In any case, More's Utopia is a highly ambivalent book which it is hard to take at face value. I think you're right about WW1 finishing off the late-nineteenth century boom in utopias. But I've found a good list of inter-war British utopias/ dystopias in a book called Utopian Fantasy by Richard Gerber (published in 1955). Recurrent themes seemed to be fear of variously socialism, Bolshevism, the Labour Party and scientist, while many of the utopias involve religious revivals, breeding supermen and most bizarrely of all, island utopias populated by children. Here's some of my favourite descriptions:

1926 Ridley, F H *The Green Machine*. On Mars; the ants who are very clever beasts in mathematics and social science, dominate degenerated man

1929 Naomi Mitchison: "Cardiff AD 1935" Human sacrifice has been reintroduced. Once a year there is a ceremonial drowning of a capitalist in order to appease the poor. *And who could resist:*

1932 Stanley Freese: *The Ten Year Plan, a Dream of 1940*. Mostly concerned with town planning.

Pat Charnock

You say people like you may be "out of the loop". I'm definitely not constrained by the running knot. I haven't been to a First Thursday for donkey's years. In my days the regular attenders would have been people like Jack Marsh, Greg Pickersgill, Langford, Kettle, and Rickard. I vaguely remember going to one where Caroline Mullan was in attendance, and feeling my time was already past. Your Easter break sounds like fun. See, I'm so far out of the loop that I didn't know that Eastercons no longer have banquets.

And now for someone who's in a different loop entirely:

Murray Moore

Dear Christina

Do you, too, when reading, see a word familiar to you and experience a revelation of its history? e.g. word X is from the Latin XY? Un-usefully I can not think of an example from my life. But the cause of the previous sentence was my typing your given name, your, dare I say, Christian, name. I am suddenly wondering, is Christina a derivation of Christ? This thought is a thought I never have had. But you might be thinking, 'Oh, no, not that old Christina and Christ thing again.'" And maybe, further, 'God give me strength.' And maybe even further, 'Of course, you idiot! Christina is a reference to Christ.'

God give me strength, Murray, and is your name a reference to mints?

I wondered recently, why is vegan, in my experience, pronounced veeeeee-gan and not vejii-gan? Vegans eat vegetables and vegetable is pronounced vejii-e-tuh-bul. Hmnn? Woman Named After The Son of God? You certainly should be qualified to discuss utopias.

Now you're giving me a power complex.

I have not read *Noughts and Crosses* however your description leaves me wondering whether in it the message 'Racism is stupid' was implicit or explicit. I just read Nancy Kress's Hugo-nominated novella, an end of the world story in which Gaia is suggested as the cause of the end of (our) world, in the manner of a dog jumping in a lake to get rid itself of fleas, so stop despoiling our world, reader.

*And the last word comes from "Jetlagged Lil" (aka Lilian Edwards) who complains: Waa. Even you don't send me your fanzines anymore! That's because **Nowhere Fan** is primarily an e-zine, though I'll be doing print copies to hand out at conventions, and to send to contributors. Please email me to join the mailing list (christina.l@virgin.net).*

NWF2, November 2013