

# Nowhere Fan

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*Lost in the Brexit Sea*

# Nowhere Plans

*Spring 2017*

My original concept for *Nowhere Fan* was that it would be frequent, timely and about something more than my life. It would attract contributors and become a forum for discussion about SF fandom, utopianism and dystopianism. It would provide a bridge between my academic work and my fannish interests. And so forth. But with only three issues under my belt since 2013 it barely constitutes a ripple in the multiverse of fanzine publishing. It's now 2017 and fan publishing, such as it is, has gone on quite happily without me, and I realise that I'm not just behind on publishing my fanzine, but on reading other people's fanzines. And I wonder, not for the first time, what is it all for? But emerging from six and a half years of writing a PhD and various other events, I'm trying to take back control of this narrative that they call life and re-discover the Christina Lake of 2017 (or 2018... by the time I finish writing this). I think this is one way of saying that the *Nowhere Fan* of 2017 might not be the same as the *Nowhere Fan* of 2013. Or then again, it might be exactly the same. But a fanwriter has to (re)start somewhere. *Nowhere Fan 3* crashed out of the sky at the fanzine launch at the 2015 Corflu. Coincidentally, Tynecon III was also my last active involvement in working on a convention. It was certainly a full-on experience, despite the number of people involved, which should have made it relatively painless. Maybe the truth about Corflu is that the work multiplies according to the number of people on the committee. Question: How many Corflu committee members does it take to change a lightbulb? Answer: they don't need to change it, because Rob Jackson will invent an alternative source of lighting in his garage. But enough of that. There's been a lot of water under the bridge since then, or should that be a lot of craft ale logged on Untappd? There were plenty of positives about the experience and I really believe that the programme that Doug and I ran with the Fishlifters was a pretty good one, especially thanks to the input of Corflu 50 delegate Geri Sullivan. But where did all that energy go? We were all going to make fandom a better place, and then what happened? Some might say that puppies messed it up some more, though actually to be honest, I don't care that much about Hugo voting. Or maybe fandom just became less urgent for me from far away Cornwall. More like something that happened to other people while I was busy doing something more boring.

Not that we opted out completely. In June 2015 we went to Archipelacon on the Åland Islands and then on to Finland to get a head start on Helsinki before the Worldcon. We also supported Nigel Rowe's virtuoso solo performance as Corflu chair, committee, and, as it turned out, GoH by travelling to Chicago for Corflu in 2016. We even went back to Eastercon and Novacon as if we were new fans (though of a certain age) discovering the world of fandom for the first time, or denizens of a distant land emerging to gorge ourselves on friendship, laughter and craft ales before the darkness descended once more on our sybaritic rituals.

It turns out to be hard to write about how things have changed since the halcyon days of 2015, living as we do under the clouds of 2016 and 2017. So, I thought I'd do a dream sequence instead. But being a lazy writer, I decided the best way to do a dream sequence was to wait till an interesting dream came along. After all I'm always dreaming about fandom. Usually about being stuck at some convention unable to get in the lift or find my room. There is this massive hotel in Birmingham, you know, built on pillars above a carpark, and it has ballrooms and endless zigzag staircases, with enormous chandeliers and a huge lift that never stops at your floor. And when you do finally get to your hotel room you find that there are a whole load of strangers sleeping there because actually you're in a hostel. And because someone has stolen your bed, and your clothes, you never do make it back down to the programme, or

the bar, or that all important meal out with Lilian Edwards. Anyway, I was hoping for a good night's dreaming last night, but was so anxious about dreaming (and work, and well the whole 2017 situation, really) that I woke myself up before I could get going. In the end, to save on stress, I decided that I'd just have to make up a dream after all. In this dream, I'm running through the woods, along fragrant paths surrounded by bluebells and wild garlic, down to the sea. The air is caressing and cool as velvet, the water is still, like a poem, pellucid in the lowering sun. My legs are running faster and faster even though the coast path is narrow and twisty. I pause on a stile, seizing the moment. But before I can get to the part about the cows and the barbed wire, I turn on the news and see that Trump has sacked the Head of the FBI, and that a crane has crashed into the docks at Falmouth. Maybe life is just one long dream sequence?

Well, that was written back in pre-election May, when the pre-election Theresa of that name looked unassailable, the pre-election Jeremy unelectable and Lord Buckethead hadn't begun his campaign for world domination. Since then, the world's just got weirder and weirder. A packed news agenda of terrorism, fires, Trumpistakes, and more Brexit chaos courtesy "Thatcher in the Rye". What did we talk about before?

### **November 2017**

It's now just a week and a half till Novacon and I realise it's now or never to publish this belated fanzine. Content is not as diverse as previous issues. It's all by me and contains far too much writing of the "what I did on my holidays" variety. Even if the holiday in question contained a Worldcon. But then who needs con reports in the modern world? Surely Facebook provides the immediacy, the photos and the one-liner jokes. Blogs do any in depth analysis, political outrage and even the personal story, while Twitter does all of the above, but with added cats. But it's my fanzine, and although I was hoping to fill it with incisive and intelligent comments on books, movies and the state of the world, I'm out of practice. So it's back to semi-autobiographical musings and meandering accounts of misspent conventions. Even though I finally finished my PhD this March, somehow the extra time I thought I would have has never materialised. Though maybe joining Anzapa, a surprisingly active and engaging community of mostly Australian fans has something to do with it. Oh yes, and I'm also suffering badly from imposter syndrome since the wonderful team at Follycon made me one of their guests for the 2018 Eastercon in Harrogate, alongside one of my favourite writers, Kim Stanley Robinson, as well as the amazing new talent Nnedi Okorafor and totally cool comics guy Kieron Gillen. I am most definitely not worthy. But plan to have a lot of fun anyway. (Come and join me at Follycon in Harrogate this Easter!) And then, just to complete the narrative and connect neatly back to *Nowhere Fan 1* where I told the sad tale of running my first 10K in Bournemouth, I'm starting to train for the Paris Marathon in April, the weekend after Follycon. Folly indeed, especially since my local medical practice wish to charge me £108 for a medical certificate. A requirement specific to French races which is beginning to tax both my Europhilia (see next article) and my loyalty to the NHS (see British culture 101).

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**Nowhere Fan 4** is an anachronistic throwback to the days of fanzine fandom and is available for a short-time only in paper format, or else as a PDF from [christina.l@virgin.net](mailto:christina.l@virgin.net) or online from [efanzines.com](http://efanzines.com). All content is written by Christina Lake, 4 West Rise, Falmouth, Cornwall TR11 4HJ. Cover is by cartographer supreme Doug Bell. Cartoons p.6 & 16 by the incomparable Brad Foster.

Christina Lake November 2017

# Europe in Translation

Dave Hutchinson's sequence of Europe books capture a certain zeitgeist when it comes to Europe. But I wonder how much of the current political row around Brexit even takes into account the reality of the European Union. I've always been proud to think of myself as a European. I studied European languages at "A" Levels and French at university meaning that I was a regular visitor to the European continent in my late teens and early 20s. I fell in love with the French way of life, or rather the French standard of living, when I went on a French exchange as a 14-year old in the 1970s. I loved the taste of real French ham and the pastries that we bought from a little van for "gouter" at around mid-morning. I loved the spacious house and the relative affluence of the family I visited, who were able to take me ski-ing in the Pyrenees and to the family second home in Albi. Even being subjected to tear gas at a French concert on my first night didn't put me off, nor did being vaccinated for smallpox at the airport, before being allowed on my first ever flight. I was keen to get away from home and France was one means of escape. I had to work hard to get onto this French exchange. Both my brother and sister learned French at school, but I was put in the German stream, and although there was a school trip to Austria, my family couldn't afford it. So, the only way to claim equivalent rights to my siblings was to learn French, which I proceeded to do over the holidays (with a bit of help from our visiting French exchange students).

My next trip to France wasn't till I was 17, when I managed to get a grant to go to Strasbourg for six weeks with three of my school friends. We were there to improve our French and German, but actually learned bigger lessons about life, loneliness, and survival. This wasn't the safe family environment of my first trip. We were in university residences, sharing with strangers. Strasbourg was quite a mixed race city, and we soon fell in with a bunch of Tunisians, leaving me the odd one out because I didn't want to go out with the guy assigned to me. If I'm honest, I was slightly scared of the whole idea, as I had no experience with managing boyfriends in my own culture let alone from one so different. Was I being racist as well? I grew up in seaside town in Essex where most of the neighbours were white, though there was some diversity in my school, including one of my best friends who was from Goa. But, yes, for sure, the idea of going out with a big black guy who pissed in the streets (like most Frenchmen) was not that appealing to a seventeen-year old brought up with fantasies of strong (if moody) white guys.

Strasbourg was also an interesting mixture of German and French. All the buildings in the centre by the river were old-style German, but the university, with its classical statues, could have been built by the Académie française and the suburbs were all French-style high rise buildings. Its role as site of the European Parliament was less relevant than its location as a border city, even though this was only a month or so after the first UK referendum on whether to stay in the Common Market. At that time, the European Community was a much smaller unit, comprising the six original countries - France, Germany, Belgium, The Netherlands, Luxembourg and Italy, plus the three newbies - Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom. It made geographical, and more importantly, political sense given the post-war configuration of Europe. At this stage in my life, Europe seemed like the world of my future. I saw myself as maybe becoming a translator, living in Brussels and working for the EEC. Europe, with its many languages, its big metallic trains headed to exotic trans-European destination, its large open spaces and arresting scenery felt more exciting, more dangerous and definitely more alien than Britain. London, on my doorstep, felt like just a bigger version of what I already knew. On the other hand, France and its neighbours across the Channel was a whole different world.

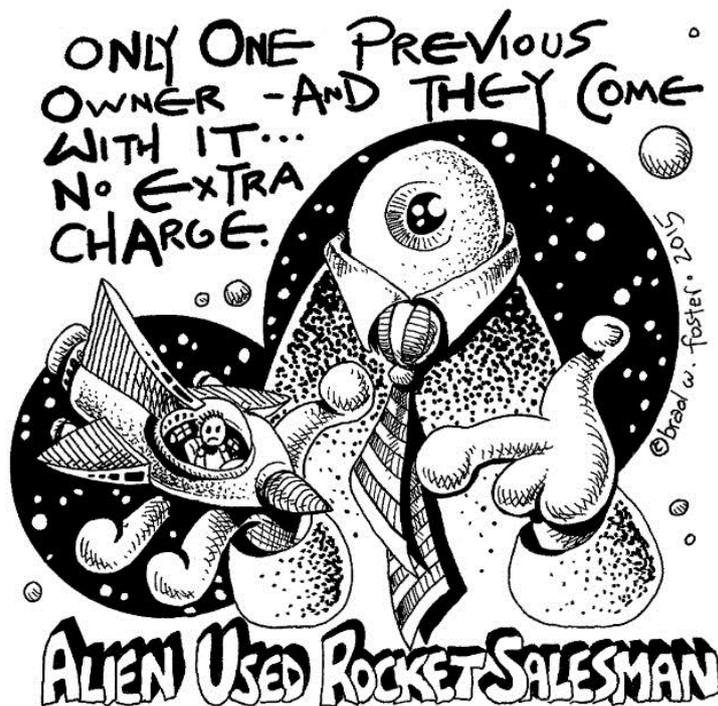
I eventually spent a year in France, living in Bordeaux, as a language assistant in a French school. The school was expected to find me accommodation but when I arrived no-one had sorted anything out. I

spent a few days billeted with one of the teachers, and then was offered a room in a *foyer*, a hostel for young women run by nuns. This felt like a step backwards compared to university life, but at least it meant I was living with French people, and speaking French most of the time. I did eventually move out to share with other students, but it took a long time to find my feet. In between was acute homesickness, and a disappointing sense that living in France wasn't as exciting as I'd hoped. However, by the end of my stay, I was feeling more cosmopolitan, having developed a taste for Cointreau and sitting in bars till well beyond the closing times of British pubs. I never went down the French music route of many of my fellow students, being convinced that British and American music were far superior (reinforced in this aspect of Anglophone superiority by my pupils love of Bob Dylan and Led Zeppelin). I still thought I'd like to come back and live in Europe someday but maybe somewhere in Northern Europe like Germany, which would be less crazy than France.

By the time I had a job working in the water industry there were 12 countries in the EC as we then called it. Part of my job was to keep track of European directives, those much-maligned measures for enforcing the correct shape of bananas, or in the case of Wessex Water, stricter rules on how much sewage they could dump at sea. These regulations in fact led to several trips to France and Switzerland where I temporarily lived the dream of being the translator for my mono-lingual colleagues as they investigated a process that would turn sewage sludge into environmentally useful fertilizer pellets. I was quite happy with Spain and Portugal as new members of the European Community, because I'd started learning Spanish after leaving university, and had adopted Spain as my new favourite country. I was less sure about Greece, since the language had its own alphabet and I was uncertain of my ability to learn it, after struggling to master Cyrillic in a brief wave of optimism following the fall of the Berlin Wall. At this stage in my life, I still foolishly adhered to the principle that I would only visit countries where I vaguely understood the language. Even going to the Dutch Worldcon was preceded by a futile and pointless attempt at learning Dutch, even though I already knew that the Dutch preferred to speak English. But it was symptomatic of my belief that the only way of interacting with Europe was to speak the language. I didn't want to be the foreigner, especially not the typical English foreigner. But I was also fascinated by reading the local newspapers and watching the TV news, and understanding more than anyone expected me to. Maybe my enthusiasm for the EU waned in proportion to its inclusion of cultures I didn't understand. When Austria, Sweden and Finland joined in the mid-1990s, Europe was beginning to move beyond my comfort zone. True, the Austrians spoke German, and I'd already spent several weeks in Vienna in the 1980s trying to rediscover the Ultravox glamour of the city, and instead only encountering dead Hapsburgs. Learning Swedish seemed like a possible project for the future, but Finnish, I had to admit, realistically, was just not going to happen.

By the time more countries joined in 2004, I'd stopped caring. I was barely aware of it, other than as a background grumble. I knew the British media was very anti-European. I put up with Ian Hislop complaining about corruption on *Have I Got News for You* for years, wondering if I was wrong to still love the European project. I even came up with my own theory that the EU was a dystopia. America was colonised by religious pilgrims, based on the principle of building a better world than the one they had left behind in Europe. Europe was full of divisions, old rivalries and in the 20<sup>th</sup> century major, bitter conflicts. Europe didn't come together on principle, or only the negative principle of avoiding war. There was no pan-European idealism to cement the new alliance together. No common language. No wonder the EU became over-bureaucratic when the only thing that held it all together were rulings and regulations. Basically, the economic work was done without the cultural underpinnings (European city of culture initiatives notwithstanding). Leaving a vacuum at the heart that no-one could love.

Yet, oddly enough it feels there is much more to love about Europe than when I was growing up. Back then France and Germany were the two mainstays of British relationship with the continent, along with the costas of Spain. Package holiday Europe has given way to Easyjet Europe where we're hungry for the novelty and cheap drinks (as they once were) of Europe's many "destination" cities. We want variety and have embraced the expanded Europe beyond that created by the Second World War. In a sense we relate better to this version of Europe than the French and German dominated one we first joined. Despite the media frenzy over Eastern European immigrants, there feels more genuine friendship with these new arrivals who all seem to speak good English, and do not have the fraught historical baggage of our nearer neighbours. My sense of the EU being too big is a nonsense. We've all been interacting with each other for centuries, combining and dissolving (Holy Roman Empire anybody? And, of course, Henry the Eighth, that first great Brexiteer). More and more, in modern Europe I see the constructedness of the fixed geographic entities that I grew up with. Even Belgium is no longer stable, Catalonia is in crisis, and even the survival of the United Kingdom can't be taken for granted anymore. More than ever, it feels, Europe needs the looser conglomeration of a pan-European structure to release these tensions. And perhaps, although I hate to admit it, the rise of English as a common language as well as allowing me to relax my travel language requirement, has helped the British feel more comfortable with Europe. It might even have contributed to the belief that British business can make its own way in Europe without the support of the EU. But it also makes me hope that, despite Brexit, generations to come will not all be turning their back on Europe, but continue to enjoy and explore the cultural diversity that is now more accessible to us than it was in the last century. Though I'm still afraid that the process of Brexit will lead to long-term bitterness, I also feel that this threat to our relationship with Europe has made us re-examine what we value about Europe and look beyond the simple tabloid Euro-bashing and EU bureaucracy to a more positive vision of what Europe stands for. And now, at least, I don't feel quite so alone in my love for Europe.



# The Road to Helsinki

## London

Travelling from Cornwall to Helsinki is never likely to be direct but we thought we'd mix it up a bit by going for a three-location holiday, stopping off in London and Tallinn before Helsinki. It was a crowded train ride from Truro. But what can you expect on a Saturday in the middle of August? Well, at the very least, that our pre-booked tickets would have reservations attached. Apparently the Trainline had decided to omit that part of the service. Once finally in London, we headed over to Tottenham for a pre-convention party at Joseph Nicholas and Judith Hanna's. Judith's Facebook invite to all her known friends seemed to elicit reluctant apologies from most of them, as either they'd already fixed their travel plans, they were at Nine Worlds convention, or simply happened to be on the wrong continent. So, if Facebook were to be believed, it would be a bijou affair with Australian special guest Roman Orszanski, plus Alison Scott and possibly Graham Charnock. But Facebook is not the whole world and so there were a goodly crowd including Mike & Pat Meara, down from Derby, as well as Rob Hansen, Alun Harries (who was delighted to re-convene "arse end of a dog" fandom with Doug) and various additional Australians. There were cakes, craft ale, and plenty of wine, not to mention Joseph in the briefest of shorts to more than justify our visit. Though the best part was how pleased people seemed to be to see us, as if maybe Cornwall were even further away than Australia when it came to visiting fans. We parted reluctantly as the party wound down, confident that we would see many, though not our hosts, Joseph and Judith, in Helsinki. The next day we continued our convention preparation by joining various Croydon fans down the pub, to perfect our new catch-phrase of "See you in Helsinki!"

## Tallinn

Monday morning saw Doug and I up bright and early at Gatwick airport catching an EasyJet flight to Tallinn in Estonia. Tallinn was the supposedly non-SF part of our holiday, for a bit of chill-out time and sightseeing in a new-to-us city before the convention. Needless to say, we weren't the only fans with this idea, and we were delighted to find that our stay was going to coincide with a couple of our friends from California, Lucy Huntzinger and Rich Coad. The weather in Tallinn was beautifully fresh with clear blue skies and mild temperatures. It was just a short taxi ride from the airport to our hotel, just outside the Old Town on the wrong side of a convoluted traffic system. But we could see the gates of the old city, as well as what might once have been, or was about to be a tramline. As we took our first walk around the old city, I realised that Tallinn reminded me of Lagos in Portugal in that way that scenic old cities with walls, cobbled streets and street cafes can, but the weather was so much more pleasant to roam around in, and Lagos didn't have loads of shops selling Baltic amber. Nor did it have a Depeche Mode bar. Or at least not as far as I know. Lucy wanted us to meet in the Depeche Mode bar, but it wasn't open, so Rich guided us in to the nearest alternative, and we were soon installed in revolving chairs at the bar, sampling Estonian beer. Who knew that Estonia would be the home of so much craft ale? Actually, we did, through our Beer 52 subscription, which fortuitously supplied us with a box of Estonian craft beer a couple of weeks before we set out. We chatted and drank, but the chairs really weren't that comfortable. Also our friends were hungry, so we went off in search of food, opting for an amazingly historic-looking though disturbingly empty restaurant. It was serving traditional Estonian cuisine which seemed to consist of various roast meats, borscht, dumplings and other Eastern European standards. The emptiness, we later discovered, was because Tallinn fills up in the daytime with tourists making the short crossing from Helsinki, and then they all leave, somewhere around the time we walked into town. Anyway, we ate and marvelled at the music which featured women doing unlikely covers of old pop

tunes. Rich used Shazam to establish that they were in fact different local artists, exploring the highs and lows of what must once have been the decadent Western music scene.

Talking of decadent music, after eating we returned to the Depeche Mode bar, which was finally open. It really was a shrine to all things Depeche Modean, featuring albums, pictures and memorabilia, but, alas, very little in the way of good Estonian beer. So, after taking a few photos we dragged Lucy away to a promising looking place called the Hell Hunt. Here the beer menu was everything we could hope for. Unfortunately, Lucy's appetite for beer was not up to the variety on offer, and our barmaid started taking it as her personal mission to encourage Lucy to buy another beer, or if necessary, drink one for free. Lucy meanwhile was telling us about the search for her birth family which was proving almost as fascinating as an episode of *Who Do You Think You Are* (my favourite genealogy TV show). I can't remember the details apart from the fact that Lucy's birth father's surname was Lucey, meaning that by the end of the evening we were calling her Lucy Lucey. Anyway, when Lucy headed off to bed, as she had an early ferry to Helsinki the next day, the barmaid was so upset at her failure to tempt Lucy away from the paths of semi-sobriety, that she gave us a bottle of beer to take to Lucy in Helsinki for her birthday party.

The next day we embarked on a spot of sightseeing, though much later than planned, as I'd failed to realise we'd lost a full two hours in transit between Britain to Estonia. Not only had we missed breakfast, but we were too late to get into Tallinn ahead of the tourist boats. By the time we emerged, Tallinn was already as busy as a George R R Martin signing session. Come to think of it, Tallinn with all its medieval buildings might have made a good location for early season *Game of Thrones*, before winter and internecine war got in on the act. Determined to find out more about the city, I dragged Doug into the Estonian history museum in the Great Guild Hall, a building even more ornate and historic than our restaurant from the night before. Unfortunately, I'd failed to notice the clue in the museum's name. There was copious information about Estonia and its people, but not so much on Tallinn itself (or Reval as it used to be called). The building was packed with interesting stuff, though not all of it essential viewing - how much would the history of the Reformation help, I wondered? Partway through we met up with Rich, but he was several rooms behind us, so we arranged to meet for lunch then headed out into the still massively busy historic centre. After lunch we took Rich off for a walk up on the city walls, where Doug and I ended up exploring the many narrow and winding staircases leading up to tower rooms, while Rich used the excuse of vertigo to sit and wait patiently for us to complete our explorations. After a coffee, we ventured beyond the city walls to climb up to a viewpoint over the city at Toompea Castle. The climb was made more exciting by the arrival of a couple of military planes flying low overhead, just as a group of people pushed past us, taking the steps down to town at a run as if trying to escape some imminent threat. We speculated that WW3 might have broken out, but perhaps it was just tourists late for their ferry?

After taking some photos and admiring the view, including the blue of the not so distant Baltic, we waved Rich goodbye for his ferry and walked off to explore the parkland surrounding the city walls. It was another lovely day, and we circled back round to the city centre for a last saunter through town, ending up in a tiny craft brewing shop, where we stocked up on some Estonian beers to take to the convention. Food that evening was Estonian tapas including Estonian garlic bread, which turned out to be rye-bread toast with a garlic dip. We didn't risk going back to the Hell Hunt bar in case we got in trouble for not bringing Lucy Lucey with us. Instead, we moved out of the centre with its historical bubble to one of the up and coming suburban areas where we found the BrewDog bar in a post-industrial area of new restaurants and reclaimed factories. There we sampled some more Estonian craft beers, while noting that some of our friends were already doing much the same in Helsinki.

The next morning we managed to get our timing right, not just for breakfast, but for the ferry over from Tallinn to Helsinki. It only took a couple of hours and was a beautiful journey, but I was sad to leave Tallinn so soon. When we'd booked our trip, I hadn't realised the Worldcon was going to be starting on the Wednesday, so our visit was briefer than anticipated. But I'd like to think we'll be back, not just to see more of Tallinn, but maybe discover more about the rest of Estonia.

## Worldcon 75

It was my ninth Worldcon, and I was *still* struggling with how best to spend my time. Being in Helsinki only made this worse. Part of me wanted to see as much programme as possible. But part thought that Helsinki with its lakes, architecture, street scenes and bars would be far more interesting than the echoing halls and hot queues of the Messukeskus. Let's face it, I no longer have the commitment to fandom I once had. And besides, this time I was going to be on the academic programme, delivering my first Worldcon paper (on Mars as a location for Utopia, since you ask) and so had to factor that into my convention plans as well.

The programme did look good, but I was overwhelmed by all the different options. Choice is good, but once you've resigned yourself to discarding so many alluring items you become crippled with anxiety over making the wrong decision and end up going to see none of them. On day one programme seemed impossible. We arrived too late for the Opening Ceremony, and a brief foray into the crowded corridors convinced me that there wasn't much prospect of spontaneously sampling any of the remaining programme. The next day I turned up with good intentions and managed one session in the academic programme and two items that proved that it was possible to get into the programme but convinced me that random sampling doesn't always provide the best results. The next morning I only managed one session of the academic programme before being lured back into Helsinki for a visit to the BrewDog bar. On Saturday I was too worried about delivering my paper to go to any programme apart from my session of the academic track. And on Sunday it was nearly all over and I still hadn't been to much of the programme, but also wanted to ride round the city on the trams, and go back to the beach near the Sibelius monument. And by the afternoon the queues for the rapidly dwindling remains of the programme were back again. Okay, so my convention experience might have benefitted from a bit of preliminary planning, but sometimes it's better to go with the flow.

Finding people at the convention proved to be a bit of a challenge too. There was no obvious place to hang out. On arrival, we stood around at the entrance, meeting up with so many different people for fleeting conversations that I began to doubt we'd ever move away from the spot. Eventually our Australian friend Paul Voermans (once of Bristol, now of Melbourne) convinced us that what we really needed was a bar. He was not wrong, but it turned out there wasn't one in the convention hall. Instead, we found some space at the tables outside the Holiday Inn where the party seemed to grow in size from Paul, Lennart and us, to incorporate the Harveys, Rich Coad and several others whose names escape me at this point in time. We created a kitty to overcome the unfriendly bar prices where even the famous Finnish Long Drinks, a refreshing concoction of gin and grapefruit, seemed more expensive than I remembered. Luckily I was feeling a bit drink adverse at this point. Perhaps there was some residual puritanism attacking my pleasure centres and telling me I needed to work before I could party? I know we abandoned Paul in the bar, with Rich Coad and the remains of the kitty, and indeed might never have seen him again but for the magic of social media which allowed us to arrange to meet up again for dinner on the last night.

Doug, Lennart and I went off to explore the convention facilities. The dealers room was the usual echoey gym hall, gearing up to host a plethora of hopeful nations in a bid for convention customers. The Follycon table was already open for business, and Caroline Mullan insisted on taking my photo and

tweeting me. I hoped it would have the desired effect. The fan lounge was large enough, but short on furniture, and even shorter on fans. But we did pick up Tim and Clarrie, our buddies from Bristol, along the way, and then later, as we set out for food, our Swedish friends Jessica and Tony, who'd visited Cornwall earlier in the year to walk the South West coastal path. Jessica was working on the convention as a press officer, and so was having a strenuous day as the committee attempted to cope with the overcrowding and mitigate the effect of the queues. We managed to persuade her that the convention's reputation would survive in her absence, and dragged her off to a Chinese restaurant. The fact that it wasn't the restaurant that Lennart had intended was forgotten in the relief at finding there was room for us to sit. The menu was basic, but inexpensive, and quietly edible. Tony amused us all with his tales of his early days as a fanzine editor. Like many a Swedish fan, he was still at school when he encountered fandom, and threw himself into the hobby with a passion, aiming to produce a fanzine a day. He would have kept it up too, if his parents hadn't taken him away on holiday. Jessica, meanwhile, was singing the praises of a resurgent fanzine that only accepted locs on paper. I think they might have had to be hand-written too. All I know was that there were lots of rules, and that email was definitely verboten. Oh yes, the good old days, when fanzines involved real work, and typing up the letter column took half your time. Maybe stencils were involved too, and letraset.

Our first encounter with the parties at The Winter Garden later that evening was not encouraging. It felt less like a social event and more like one big long cacophonous queue, though we did at least have a free drinks token to sweeten the experience. And it was heartening to talk to enthusiastic Finns, welcoming us to the convention, seeming surprised and delighted that we were all there. But it didn't take much persuasion to follow fellow Anzapans Alan Stewart and Roman Orszanski to the Australians and Croatian party. This party was being held up the road from the convention centre in a wooden yellow hut that looked like it might once have belonged to the nearby railway station, or perhaps simply a sauna. It was a totally different environment in any case, quintessentially Finnish in character. There was tea and gin or walnut liqueur for refreshment, and the slowest raffle in the world to keep us entertained. Charming as this was, Untappd, or the beer stalking app as Clarrie called it, was telling us that other fans were having more and better beers than us in downtown Helsinki.

Eventually after persuading Roman that he really wasn't going to win the raffle, we headed back into town, picking up Jim and Carrie Mowatt en route. A short train ride later and we were able to join Claire Brialey and Mark Plummer in the Teerenpeli bar for some locally brewed craft ale which proved lethally drinkable. I think Spike and Tom were there too. They certainly were the following evening when we somehow ended up in the same bar again. In fact, a pattern developed. Drinking in town, and ignoring the overcrowded convention parties. Though we were lucky enough to be invited to Lucy Huntzinger and Lena Jonsson's fabulous 60<sup>th</sup> birthday party in a suite at the top of the Holiday Inn, and we did come close to inadvertently discovering the Hugo party. If only we'd listened to Lilian. How often do you hear me say that? Lilian was determined to take us to The Steam bar, close by the Teerenpeli, legendary for its gin selection. But we'd tried it the previous night, and there'd been a charge on the door, which had seemed sufficient deterrent, even for Roman who'd instigated the whole move. But Lilian scorned this penny-pinching behaviour. What are a few Euros amongst friends, when there's expensive gin to be sampled? But just as our resistance was being worn down, we had a text from Spike suggesting that we meet them in a different bar, and so the moment was lost, and along with it the Hugo party as we discovered the next day.

One convention event I didn't mind missing was the storm that swept in out of nowhere, or at least so it seemed for those of us not studying the weather forecast. I'd been sitting in a park with my Finnish friend Rebecca and strolled back to our hotel, one of the not so original Original Sokos variety. A short

while later, as Doug and I were preparing to go back to the convention, I realised that the sky, or what we could see of it from our window, had gone dark, and then it began to thunder and rain. The tweets from the convention centre made it sound quite exciting, though more so for the spectators than the participants, especially the blacksmiths who had to flee their manly pursuits as the wind made short work of their stalls. But the people I felt really sorry for were the marathon runners I'd seen earlier in the day, the ones still out on the street trying to complete their run, in spite of the weather. The storm seemed to go on for a long time, trapping us in our hotel room as we waited for any sign that it might be safe to leave.

Eventually it merely seemed to be raining, so we went out to find some food, landing up in the Sori bar, where we ordered a mixture of tapas and shared the mandatory beer tasting tray which judging by Untappd, many of our friends had sampled already. Twitter seemed short on indications of what had become of fandom since the storm. Either it was all safely drying off in the masquerade, or everyone had dispersed back to their hotels. One positive sign was a text from Rich Coad asking where we were. He soon joined us at the Sori bar, and looked like he'd be happy to settle in for the evening. But I was feeling restless. It was Saturday, the last real night of the con, and I wanted to make it back to the convention centre, even though it was already past ten in the evening.

The storm had left some chaos in the station from delayed trains, and we had to move platforms, and then trains, to get to Pasila. By the time we arrived, a steady stream of people were walking in the opposite direction to us, heading to the station from the con. I wondered if we'd made a big mistake and if the storm which had closed down the blacksmiths had killed off the parties. But no, there was the familiar barrage of noise in the convention bar. And there was Doug's Swedish brother Lennart to greet us. In the corner, the Irish were having a victory party. I could see James Bacon and his mates doing a jig, or were they pogo-ing? Armed with a can of Long Drink I went to investigate Rich's suggestion that they were dancing to Teenage Kicks. Indeed, they were. Moreover, in the party corner I found more of our missing friends, Jim and Meike, Clarrie & Tim. And a real atmosphere of the random fun that I'd been missing in my anxiety not to get left behind. There it all was. A guy wearing a 40<sup>th</sup> birthday badge, celebrating his birthday, even though it had happened in March. Tobes sharing snippets of his love life. The further adventures of "Phil", Tobes's moustache which had taken on a mythology of its own. Catherine Crocket assuring us there'd be a hotel and date announced for the Toronto Corflu real soon now. The chilli liqueur which nearly blew the head off of Rich Coad. My search for a top-hatted TAFF delegate which resulted in a confusing conversation with a fan who mistook me for a Guest of Honour at a future convention. Yes, I was going to be a guest of honour, but no, I wasn't a famous author, and didn't know anything about weapons and combat. He then tried to find out if he could read any of my novels before Follycon. I tried to explain about fanzines, feeling ashamed to admit I didn't even have a blog. So old school! But I promised him a fanzine, and he bought me a drink.

The music seemed to be getting louder, the party rowdier, with more people than ever dancing. But the hotel staff were anxious to get us out and clear up, so the green lights over the Irish party were switched off, and after a rousing chorus of "We Are the Champions", the osmosis out into the late-night bar, with its inevitable late-night-bar queues began. Jim de Liscard had to take evasive action to retain his glass of Helsinki gin, with berries, made with the finest gin in the world (allegedly), which would have cost a fortune if he hadn't been the beneficiary of drink vouchers from a drunken and exuberant James Bacon. The outside tables were back in action after the storm. We'd even gained new friends in the form of Jimmy, a Scottish fan who lived only a few miles down the road from Doug's home town of Penicuik, and his Polish girlfriend. But after some more beer, we decided to follow Jim and Meike to the train station to

catch the only slightly late running train back into Helsinki. It was two in the morning on a Saturday night, and the streets of Helsinki were lively, but not violent.

It was just as well that we didn't have our hearts set on the dead dog party, as news came through that they were turning people away. No surprise given the incredibly cheap food on offer. But we did have a sociable last afternoon at the con where I caught up with many of the people I'd failed to see all weekend. I finally met John Purcell the TAFF delegate (no longer in a top hat) and Donna Maree Hanson, the GUFF rep. Donna gave me a koala for my badge and an Australian flag sticker, perfect for Alan Stewart's photoshoot of the British members of Anzapa. Tami Vining gave Lilian a huge bag of jewellery donated by fans in Seattle after hearing that she'd been recently robbed of all of hers in a burglary at her flat. Donya White sat with us, patiently untangling chains, while Lilian passed round the stuff she wouldn't use. When we were all thrown out of the fan lounge for take-down, there was more milling around at the entrance, just like on the first day, and a subsequent move to the Holiday Inn bar, where, with the closing ceremony in progress, suddenly the space seemed full of familiar faces.

Later that evening, Lilian hosted a party in her hotel room. When Doug, Lennart and I went back to our hotel to collect drinks, we nearly ended up collecting a Ron Gemmell. Ron materialised out of nowhere, just as we were getting into the lift, a half-empty glass of lager in his hands, demanding to know where we were going. But by the time we returned, Ron had disappeared again, like a lost apparition. It was just as well. Lilian's room was already very full of people, taking up most of the bed space, all the chairs and even parts of the floor. I managed to perch on a corner of the bed and drink some wine. Doug was finally able to share the beer we'd bought in Estonia, but there weren't enough wine drinkers in the room to broach the wine box I'd bought on the ferry to Helsinki, and the gin tasters rightly scorned the bargain bottle of gin I'd bought for Lilian. The noise levels rose, but Lilian was unperturbed, as none of the neighbours were actually complaining, at least not that we could hear. Eventually the party broke up and Lilian tried to give away drink to those staying on in Helsinki. Roman disappointingly refused to agree to smuggle it into St. Petersburg. Have these Australians no desire to end up in a Russian jail, we wondered? Though surely the Russians are the last people to jail anyone for alcoholic indulgence.

Everyone was travelling somewhere the next day, mostly back to London, as we discovered as we joined the growing throng of fans at the departure gate for the afternoon Norwegian Air flight back to Gatwick. There was speculation on whether the British side of TAFF would survive if the plane went down with both fan fund administrator Anna Raftery and back-up TAFF factotum Claire Brialey on board. Luckily it wasn't put to the test! Fandom survived to reconvene round the baggage carousel and disperse to all points Croydon and beyond. We'd had a good time at the Worldcon even if it had passed too quickly to do half the things I'd wanted to do. Better that than being bored. While perhaps not Finnish enough in character for my taste, it was a terrific endorsement of the ability of fan populations outside North America to hold a successful Worldcon. I hope that means there will be more on mainland Europe in future, but in the meantime, I need to start planning for the Dublin Worldcon.



# News from Nowhere: a letter column

*Or maybe that should be a time capsule? But my article on Aldous Huxley's *Island* elicited some interesting responses, as well as plenty of scepticism about mindfulness*

**John Nielsen-Hall [johnsila32@gmail.com]**

I found your article on Huxley's *Island* very interesting. I read the book a long time ago, and I've got a few bones to pick with it, some of which you chew on as well. First, pedantry: I feel compelled to point that out in response to the title of your article that Karuna, the word, does not mean "mindfulness" but "compassion". The Sanskrit word for mindfulness, depending on context would be Avadhana. The practice of mindfulness as in meditation would be "Anapanasati". Second, the idea that mindfulness as a practice ("the sacramentalising of common life") can lead to enlightenment is, I think, misleading and unhelpful. As you have evidently found, the practice of it via guided meditations (or solo meditation, come to that) can help refocus and rebalance the mind, but you could have achieved the same thing via chemicals or bondage or extreme sports or whatever. That is not enlightenment and personally I doubt that it is even a step towards enlightenment. My copy of *Zen Flesh Zen Bones* includes a few paras after the 112 mindfulness practices, headed "What is Zen?" I quote a part of what it says:

Zen comes of itself. True Zen shows in everyday living, CONCIIOUSNESS in action. More than any limited awareness, it opens every inner door to our infinite nature.

I don't think Huxley grasped any of that, although I think he realised (as you point out) that enlightenment was unlikely to come from swallowing anything psychedelic, but the making of the ingestion of the moksha into some sort of significant ritual is only more of the same, and makes no difference to the basic problem. The inhabitants of Pala spend their lives turning their ordinary tasks into rituals, but in the end, rituals do not lend any meaning to anything. I believe rituals become an end in themselves, devoid of meaning, and get you nowhere. I have been on retreats where for at least part of the time, utter silence was observed in the hope that the absence of chatter would force us to focus on the everyday and the practice of mindfulness. But how does that work when no one is looking at you at breakfast time, and you want someone to pass the butter so you can mindfully butter your toast?

Mindfulness will not be obtained by ritualising tasks, and enlightenment will not follow from mindfulness alone anyway. *Island* is a book that ultimately goes nowhere, its real subject not even being properly understood by its author.

Good fanzine though, Christina. You should pub your ish a bit more often.

**Steve Stiles, 8631 Lucerne Rd., Randallstown, Md. 21133 [stevecartoon2001@gmail.com]**

*Island* was an important book for me and I've still got my battered paperback copy. I even tried writing a novel inspired by it ("The Machiavelli Machine"). In the early sixties there were whiffs of big changes in the air and I was a naïve young man, very confused, trying to figure out what it was all about, where I was going, where was society going, and trying to get a clue by devouring lots of Huxley, Freud, Alan Watts, Erich Fromm, Albert Ellis, Karl Marx, and Colin Wilson, to name just a few names. I'd like to think I'm better for doing so, but here I am in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and I'm still confused (thank god I'm a cartoonist!) and a bit neurotic. I console myself by thinking that if I *wasn't* a bit neurotic, there'd have to be something seriously wrong with me; this thing we call "civilization" is like the Procrustean Bed: trying to adjust to arbitrary standards, much conflicting with full human potential (whatever that is), that are imposed on us. And that was the book's big attraction to me; even as an eighteen year old it was obvious that modern life was an uncomfortable fit. It seemed to me that Huxley's society, or something like it,

might just be possible through a judicious synthesis of elements of Buddhism, psychotherapy, and psychedelics. And if change for the better was possible, well then, why not aim for it? Of course, at the end of the novel the reality we're still experiencing today intruded and The Big Oil Interests moved in, destroying the saner, more balanced, island society. You can't get timelier than that! (But I can still hope.)

**Randy Byers [fringefaan@yahoo.com]**

I've read two of Huxley's novels, but while I owned a copy of *Doors of Perception* for many years I never read it and eventually loaned it to a friend who never returned it. So I've never delved into Huxley's ideas about psychedelics, although what you report tells me I picked up a number of those ideas second hand in my own days of doing LSD. (Somewhere in the back of my mind I can hear Eileen Gunn quipping that she remembers when transcendence was five bucks a hit.) On the other hand I didn't know anything about Huxley's interest in Buddhism and yoga. A proto-New Ager! Your discussion of Huxley, utopia, psychedelics, meditation, and mindfulness was utterly fascinating, and I particularly liked how you capped it with the ironic observation of the value of mindfulness in making workers more effective. Or is that actually a utopian idea?

**Joseph Nicholas [excellenceingardening@gmail.com]**

A response to *Nowhere Fan 3*...I haven't read any of the 2012 Clarke award nominees (although I did read and enjoy Chris Priest's thoroughgoing assault on them), so can't say anything at all in response to Sue Thomason's article on one of the novels in question. Nor, unfortunately, can I say very much about mindfulness, since it all seems a bit vague and New Agey, up there with tantric yodelling and people offering to massage your aura. *The Guardian Weekend* magazine had a big article on mindfulness about a year ago, but the more of it I read the less focused it seemed (as in: the longer it went on, the less it actually said), and I emerged from it with no clearer understanding of what mindfulness entailed than when I started. Other than that it was all about experiencing the moment, and learning to let your thoughts drift, and feeling the weight of your body on the earth; as I said, a bit New Agey. I wouldn't try to claim that a good part of my antipathy to that sort of thing is attributable to having read *New Scientist* every week for the past forty-plus years (i.e., more than two-thirds of my life to date), but I'm pretty sure that must have had some impact on my thinking. Or at least my tolerance for Woo-Woo (to use a non-technical term).

*I wonder how much tolerance Huxley had for Woo-Woo either. After all his grandfather was T H Huxley, Darwin's bulldog, and a champion of the scientific method, and his brother Julian was a geneticist. I think he did consider it scientific, a kind of experiment on his own mind. Which might be why John thinks that Huxley was missing the point about enlightenment.*

**Murray Moore [murraymoore@gmail.com]**

Mindfulness and I are incompatible. While reading your "Karuna. Karuna. Mindful Island" I also was thinking of, since rain has stopped falling, removing from our back yard two piles of leaves and pine needles and twigs, and also replying to a fmzfen e-list post by Randy Byers in which Randy corrects my statement in my 'I Remember Art' post memoir that Corflu was in Seattle in 2013.

While reading about Huxley and psychedelics and Buddhism and Etc. I was thinking I should reply to Randy, "Please help me distinguish between Portland and Seattle: which is the city where the weather is fine when rain is not falling." Steve Stiles' cover art of a modern Icarus falling because of credit card debt illustrates the danger of a common kind of non-mindfulness.

Thank you, Sue Thomason. I do not need to read *The Testament of Jessie Lamb*, having read your thoughts about it.

**Sue Thomason 190 Coach Road, Sleights, Whitby, North Yorks YO22 5EN**

Huxley's ISLAND goes on the to-read list, though with reservations. I like and am interested in utopian fiction, and I would like to read Huxley's revised vision of a drug-regulated society (moksha-medicine vs. soma) – of course, here we have a society regulated by alcohol, tobacco, sugar and antidepressants, so the idea of a “drug-regulated society” seems strange to us. Interesting, but not surprising, that Huxley's thought seems to have been so grounded in the Christian sin-guilt thought-complex that he couldn't strongly imagine alternatives.

Mindfulness is something I have been trying to investigate without much success – of course, mindfulness involves letting go of ideas of success/failure, so perhaps I should say “without garnering many interesting results” ... but mindfulness involves letting go of artificial divisions between interesting/uninteresting... there's an endless recursion here, I think.

*After trying a Mindfulness course, and a meditation website, Sue experimented with meditating every day for a month:*

I'd asked my partner to evaluate my behavior at the beginning and the end of the month, to see if regular breath-counting had made any difference. My aim (which I hadn't told my partner, in order not to bias his observation) was to become less angry. And at the end of the month, he said “um... maybe you are more positive?” (which I think is what he thought I was trying to achieve). So I think he was telling me what he thought I wanted to hear, which is Not A Good Result. So I have given up breath-counting, along with keeping a list of three good things that have happened every day, and as a result I feel much less stressed and hassled.

One interesting observation about the breath-counting is how much goes on in my head when I'm not focused on something. Most of the time, when I'm reading, writing, making music, at work, etc. I'm in task-focussed mode, and there is no “me”. When I was breath-counting, I was able to count breaths (without losing track – ever), while planning the week's menus, visualizing a still clear pool (full of strange and beautiful creatures; ammonites and sea lilies and such) and mentally listening to music. And the idea of being aware of ... everything ... is hugely, confusingly scary. Surely there is *far too much* going on *all the time* for a mere human to be able to pay attention to all of it? For example... I did a month of breath-counting, while paying attention to the ambient external sound, and being unable to stop my inner Bach, and visualizing the still pool, and worrying about whether or not my toes were relaxed, and what to do with the half-pack of frozen turkey mince that needed using up, and NOT ONCE during any of those meditation sessions did I pay any attention to my heartbeat. Because nobody had mentioned it as a thing that could be paid attention to. I have only thought of it just now.

*I haven't been doing much mindfulness recently, but I find it useful for helping me let go of all those distracting worries from daily life, whereas, in your case, it seems to amplify them. But minds are all different. As Sue suggest later in her letter: Maybe mindfulness has different effects on introverts and extraverts? And now more skepticism from Joseph:*

**Joseph Nicholas** (again, in a later email)

As if on cue, the latest New Scientist arrives, with a short article on the dangers of meditation and mindfulness: “Twitching, trembling, panic, disorientation, hallucinations, terror, depression, mania and psychotic breakdown -- these are some of the reported effect of meditation. Surprised? We were too.”

The article goes on to explain that because meditation techniques were originally developed to "challenge and rupture the idea of who you are, shaking one's sense of self to the core" it's not surprising that they should have their downside.

**Brad Foster [bwfoster@juno.com] PO Box 165246, Irving, TX 75016 USA**

Interesting little read, though the only note I have here is in the margin of page 5, wondering if "mindfulness" is simply another term for "meditation"? I tried out learning transcendental meditation while in college, and found out after ran through the courses that I had pretty much been doing the same thing on my own, just without the more mystical trappings. Up until then, I thought it was just me staring off into space, but then found out I was actually meditating. Cool!

Nifty cover from Steve seems fraught with meaning, but I'm not sure exactly -what- that meaning might be. What gives there? (Though, shouldn't complain too much bout being confused, as it gave me a chance to write the word "fraught", and I don't get to do that every day.)

**Lloyd Penney [penneys@bell] 1706-24 Eva Rd. Etobicoke, ON CANADA M9C 2B2**

Great Stiles cover, and so true. We willingly put ourselves into such financial servitude, and sometimes, we crash and burn. It's easier than ever to put ourselves into that position, and tougher than ever to get back out. We wind up being mere cogs in the huge financial machine, and should we fail, there's plenty of other cogs lined up to shoulder the burden.

I did not know Aldous Huxley was a fan and user of psychotropics. Learn something new every day, I do. Exercises the leetle grey cells. There are times I could use a little outside boost to get through the day, but I have learned to rely on caffeine. Not only legal, but free at work...

IAHF: **Ian Millsted, Jay Kinney, Garth (Van) Spencer, Jennifer Steele, R. Graeme Cameron** and the last word goes to **Jerry Kaufman**, who evidently knows me too well: "Some letter this is - please be sure to let it simply get a mention in your next issue, two years hence."

