

maguffin

interviews

This is *maguffin interviews*, a small fanzine in support of the 2007 GUFF (Going Under Fan Fund) race. It's made by me, Damien Warman; I'm the one asking the questions. If you want to get in touch with me, email dmw@pobox.com.

Reproduction and dissemination is encouraged under an attribution/share-alike copyleft thing.

What is GUFF? It's an anarchic scheme funded by donations, voting fees, and volunteer effort, to encourage fan activity through the medium of temporarily relocating fans from Europe to Australasia and vice versa. More details, a current-at-the-moment ballot, and some online voting provisions may be found at <http://www.users.on.net/juliettewoods/guff.html>.

If you read this before April 16, 2007, why not vote in the race?

All four candidates kindly consented to answer impertinent and ill-researched questions. My thanks to them, and to you for reading.

Johan Anglemark

Juliette recalls you telling us once that "fandom is my tribe". What did you mean by that?

In this post-Gothic age, we all like to think of ourselves as individuals, but we also belong to social networks the way Vonnegut talks about in *Cat's cradle* and later works. Some of these are karasses, some are granfaloons. When faced with the question "which group do you belong to?", there are many possible answers, mostly depending on the context. I am from IAR Systems. I'm a linguist. I'm an alumn of Uppsala University. I'm a Swede. I'm from Uppsala. I'm from Strängnäs. I'm one of Sture and Margareta's grandchildren. I'm a member of the Tolkien Society. I'm a roleplayer. I'm an atheist. I'm a Mac user. I'm a science fiction fan.

Some of these will be just labels with no deeper conviction behind them. Sure, I'm a tech writer, but that's just my job. I used to be a software localizer, and before that I was a games developer and an editor. Those are labels, I do not identify with them as a person. I thought about this a couple of years ago: What group do I really identify with? And I realized that I'm primarily a fan. I identify more with SF fans (fanzine fans or "classic" fans) than with other Swedes, or with roleplayers or what have you.

This doesn't mean that I prefer fans to other people, or that I like fans better than other people. On the contrary, sometimes, some fans I know are obnoxious, anti-social and people I avoid. This isn't a *decision*. It's just the way it is: I'm a fan. There's nothing I can do about it. Even if I gafiated, I would remain a fan deep down. I can't escape it anymore than I can escape being a white male.

Of course, I might discover in years to come that this conviction was only so much hogwash. ; -)

By the time we got to Uppsala, I had invented the game of asking Nordic fans to tell me tongue-twisters in their language (Swedish, Finnish, Danish, etc). This was a handy icebreaker for me, and seemed to amuse people. You have an interest in languages, I believe; obviously you are fluent in English and Swedish, but others?

I'm only fluent in Swedish and English, unfortunately. My German reading comprehension is decent and I can make myself understood. I know a bit of Russian, but it's been over 20 years since I studied it, and time is the great eroder. I

used to know a bit of Irish as well, but I was never anywhere near fluent in it. The same goes for French. Finally, I took a term of Welsh, but I've forgotten all of it by now. But, like many other fans I know, I like to pick up a couple of words whenever I travel anywhere, learn the pronunciation rules, a little basic grammar etc.

Uppsala fans laughed at the speed at which the conversation turned to linguistics: is this common for Swedes, or is it Uppsala? It's not just you? Is there, do you think, a universal-fannish appeal to language tricks and intricacies?

It's Uppsala, for some reason fans have always come here to study languages and linguistics. I don't know why. When I had been here just a year and was studying Irish, we had a conversation class where we were supposed to draw pictures and talk about them. I remember drawing a propeller beanie, pointing to it and saying "tá beanie ann", and believe it or not, but one of the other students immediately asked "My Ghod, are you SF fans? I gafiated only a couple of years ago." Yes, there is certainly a general fannish tendency towards words and language. I think it comes with the territory; if you're into reading, chances are you're a bit more sensitive to language and wordplay. And punning is the dark side of the force.

Broadly, how do the fandoms of Sweden vary? Uppsala/Stockholm? Linköping? Göteborg? Is there a generalisation about the characters of people from various towns/cities, or is Swedish fan history a patchwork of strong individuals?

It is possible to generalise—watch me doing it soon!—but fans are foremost individuals. Tommy Persson is absolutely unique, and so is Carolina Gómez and John-Henri Holmberg and Anders Bellis and Anna Davour. But—and now I do it!—if I were to generalise I'd say that, from north to south, in Uppsala we've always avoided formal structures. I also see ourselves being more into academic humour, more into quipping and conversation and fanzines.

Stockholm is the only Swedish fannish settlement so large that it can't be characterised. Of course, the resulting complete lack of organisation is a characteristic. Stockholm is split into a couple of formal clubs and several loose groupings, without much regular contact. This is typical for local fandoms in bigger cities, I think.

Linköping is a young fandom, there was no fandom there until Andreas and Carina Björklind moved there in the late 80s. They're a very well-organised core with a club, and their main activities are discussing books, drinking tea, and watching dvds. Most of them don't really know much about the old fannish traditions, but I don't think they're less happy for that.

Göteborg is living through a revitalisation at the moment. Sweden's oldest living fandom is there, and they're still around, half a dozen grizzled first fans. Remnants are also still to be found the 80s Göteborg fandom, our bohèmes, our beatniks, who everyone looked up to and envied in their heyday. They published literate, absurdist, very well-written fanzines, and have gone on to become authors and artists. Today, the ranks of Göteborg fandom are swelling with media/literature fans who have taken to this with pub gatherings and conrunning. Most promising!

Who in Swedish fandom inspires or inspired you?

I used to be inspired by and inspire Magnus Eriksson, in the days when we were both students and always had some mad project going; the Gothic League (a completely not serious but quite serious students' union political party), a convention, or something else. I thought he was cool and he was a good writer. Still is, I assume, but I never see any of it any longer. Erik Andersson, another damn good writer—well, he's a published author and translator now, whose fanzines were marvels. And he was interested in the writings of Flann O'Brien. He's more or less left fandom these days though.

You and Linnéa have a background in Tolkien fandom, which seems particularly strong in the Nordic countries (I'm thinking not only of LARP/feast type activities, but also linguistic and cultural, essentially academic studies). Why is this?

I wish I knew. Tolkien was very well received here, and the flawed Swedish translation of the Lord of the Rings was stylistically an impressive work. (Less impressive as a translation, but you had to read the original to know that). It made a splash in the literary mainstream and was printed in hundreds of thousands of copies, so it penetrated Swedish homes. Fantasy as a genre was completely unknown, so it was compared to the Icelandic sagas and Frans G. Bengtsson. It was perceived as a very Nordic work.

This means that most Swedish teenagers read it, and in my experience 1 in 100 teenage Tolkien readers ends up with a deep fascination with Middle-Earth. In Sweden, 1 in 100 proved to be unusually many teenagers...

If fandom is your tribe, but you have been involved with or introduced into "greater fandom" from a more special-interest group, how many "septs" do you consider yourself a member of?

Before I was introduced to mainstream fandom, I was a roleplayer and a Tolkien fan. My first con was a gaming con, Gothcon VI in 1982. A great convention, that I enjoyed a lot more than my first SF con. And as a 17-year-old Tolkien fan, finding Tolkien fandom in 1981 meant that a whole world opened up before me. But even though I am still both a roleplayer and a Tolkien fan (and most of my best memories from fannish-type activities are from Tolkien fandom), I am

intellectually a fannish fan.

"Swedish fandom is small but fierce"—this sounds like a description of Little My. Why is Swedish fandom fierce? That is a very good question. I don't know. It could be a hereditary disease. Overdosing on American fannishness certainly hasn't helped. Myself, I suspect there's something in the water here. The vikings had the same problem.

Tell me something about Swedish writing: who should we read?

Frans G. Bengtsson, definitely. I doubt his amazing, terse, humourous, stylistically superb language carries over into the translation, but get *The Long Ships* and find out for yourself. After reading about Red Orm's adventures in Europe I desperately tried to find something similar. I guess I was trying to find that when I picked up the Lord of the Rings and found something that set my life on a new course. Then there is Tove Jansson and her Moomin books. There is nothing like them in the whole world. They start out like children's books, but a deep Finnish melancholy enters them after a the first two or three and, not takes them over, but forms a cosily dark fusion. I don't think the English translations are as good as the originals, but Finnish friends assure me that the Finnish translations are as good as the Swedish originals.

Any other remarks? How do you see GUFF involving itself in Swedish fandom, and Swedish fandom involving itself with GUFF?

Swedes remember your tour here. I hope that the fact that two Swedes are now in the race will cause Swedish fans to feel more connected to GUFF. I don't dare to hope for many voters here, though. It's rare to get more than 45 votes for the Alvar, the national fan award, even though you can vote without donating a fee. So if ten or twelve Swedes vote I'm happy. And perhaps seeing that I and Anna are standing this year will mean it will be easier to get another Swede to stand the next time—provided we are not defeated in a too humiliating way. :-)

Ang Rosin

*Let's jump straight into the hard stuff: potatoes. Any favourite varieties? Methods of preparation? Condiments? Any ways that one should **not** serve them?*

Currently I'm fond of "Wilja" which has a yellowish flesh on the side of floury. It's a second early, sadly, which means it doesn't store well past three or four months but an excellent all-rounder in it's prime. It's fabulous when mashed with just a touch of salt, which, incidentally, is my favourite way of serving potato. I'm a bit of a potato purist but adding mustard, pesto or carrot to mash isn't unknown. I'm also fond of wedges cooked with olive oil, garlic and salt.

I'm not very keen on potato mashed with cheese but apart from that I'm game for anything. Potato latte, anyone?

You grow 'em at your allotment? We see the time-to-time discussion of your patch of ground, but it's easy to lose sight of the bigger picture, so, looking back on the last year or so of gardening, how's it been? Any greater perspective on the allotment idea in general? "The good life" still gets a regular airing on Australian tv: is this what we're talking about?

I think I should give a bit of the back story to the allotment. I live in a terraced house with no garden, just a patch of yard. I never saw myself as a lawn and borders person so this didn't bother me too much but a couple of years ago I started to buy veg from a farmers market and BOY! What a difference in taste! So I got interested in the idea of growing my own food both because it would be better for me (in terms of taste, the control I would have over additives and the exercise I would get) and better for the environment (the only food miles would be the walk up the road).

The end of April sees my year anniversary of plot holding and it's been an immensely rewarding experience. I've been really lucky that my plot had been worked before I got it so I could get down to planting straight away, and I had help and advice from so many people. There were disasters along the way—I lost my whole potato maincrop to a virus—but I did get good crops of a variety of vegetables. Far too good a crop, in one case, and my family, my friends and my workmates found themselves eating a lot of courgettes over a month or so.

The allotment has been good for me in a way I never expected. I've a planting plan for the whole of this year and rotation and building plans for the next three or four. As someone who has barely had an idea of what she's doing in the next month before now it's a level of commitment that can only improve me. I've also committed to organic gardening which has earned me the respect of my fellow allotmenters. Well, they think I'm crazy, but they respect my application to the ideal!

All this makes it sound like a very serious business but I've found it genuine fun and I think anybody who is looking for a way to keep fit and improve their quality of living should give it a go. You don't have to spend every weekend scabbling around in the mud and you shouldn't compare what you achieve with the retired semi-pro who manages to

grow squash that can qualify for child support.

You wrote "A bluffer's guide to fandom" a little while ago: still feeling a bit of imposter syndrome, or have you reconciled to being in fandom?

Bluffer's is really just a convention report wrapped up in a very long joke. It's at times like this I curse my low-level of retention. If Max was here I'd be able to lean across and ask, "What did I say that started the bluffer's guide?" and she'd remember that I said something about never going to a cocktail workshop run by Wag, or somesuch nonsense. I didn't realise that I was revealing my inner insecurity about fitting in to fandom in writing it but I was a bit suspicious of the whole thing and felt a bit of a fake. Having been around for a while I now realise that fandom is a very broad church and even if you feel an outsider with one set of fans then you'll probably dovetail in neatly with another set.

You came in to fandom via Usenet and Red Dwarf, finding a group of people some of whom you've made lasting friendships with. Why did you start to branch out from there? Is James Bacon to blame? How much residual alt.tv.red-dwarf is there in you?

I found alt.tv.red-dwarf just at the right time. I was in a boring job, working with boring people, none of whom shared my sense of humour. atvrd provided an outlet for my irreverent side and reminded me that there were people out there like me. Then, just as atvrd waned for me, fandom came along. Around the same time I was trying to change my job and work friends had left and I was feeling very isolated again. Suddenly there were MORE people just like me and it was a wonderful feeling. Aliens was a great hook but it was Damn Fine Con that reeled me in for it was there I realised that you didn't have to run around like an idiot at all conventions. You could, if you wanted, sit in a bar. Without having things poured over you or finding yourself wrapped in a sheet! What an eye-opener! So while Max talked me into my first con, and James and the Sproutlore guys ran the con that I loved so much I came back for more, it's really Claire, Mark, Tobes and everyone else who made me so welcome that meant I've stayed for so long. Tsk. I was going to try and write that funny and instead I've gone all misty eyed.

British fandom: heaving mass of energy? All too confusingly Balkanised?

I don't know. I live in the fannish equivalent of Albania and have no idea what is going on most of the time!

Brownies. Good with a cup of coffee, I would have thought. You're more or less vigourously involved in volunteering with the kids in Brownies... parallels with fannish volunteering, not just with younger-in-age fans?

I'm a great believer in social contracts and that you get more out of life the more you put in. I'd loved Brownies as a child and went along to help with my old group when it would have closed otherwise. From there I got more involved as jobs needed to be done at other levels and I did them to help the smooth running of the organisation. I think the same is true of fandom for me—I get more out of it as a social contract and will do what I can to help, if asked. The problem with volunteering is that you have to stop yourself falling into the trap of taking on too much, and also develop

a thick skin when dealing with people who don't naturally understand the concept of volunteer. You also burden yourself with responsibilities that, actually, nobody else knows about. It's taken a long time but I think I've finally learned the skill of saying "no" and that there's nothing wrong with just doing enough to get by sometimes.

Tell me a bit about YAFA. I more or less only saw a bit of exploding-things-in-microwave-ovens or soak-the-panellist, but whenever I went past it looked like a thriving threshing heave of activity. What were the best bits? Why didn't you bleach your hair? Will you do it again?

YAFA was everything you can imagine a warehouse full of young adults to be. The most noticeable thing was the noise whenever there was something active going on. Which wasn't as often as it probably sounded to people going past. I wasn't really that active when it came to engaging with our fans. I sort of fell into a "tidying up" role—y'know, the person at the party who is going to have to explain everything to the police when they turn up. Not that the police DID turn up because it was extremely well thought out and organised by James, Stef and Elvis. My favourite part was the "capture the flag" on bouncy castles and the ice cream making but it was all really good. I'd certainly do it again and I'd hope this time I'd remember more of it. Worldcon was a bit of a blur for me.

Oh, and my hair is thick, curly and practically black. Just the thought of Stef approaching with a packet of bleach caused my expensively coloured ends to split.

You also seemed to effortlessly move from the Young Person's convention to the Old Pharts lounge/speakeasy. Are you a truff after all?

This is obviously a trick question. You're not catching me out that easily!

You spend your working life in uni IT. Unusual career for a fan?

I think working in IT is the most fannish thing I do! We used to joke on atvrd about how technically incompetent I was—I only got interested in computers because it allowed me to talk to other fans. Then I took on a DNA sequencing role which meant that I started to use analysis software and became interested in bioinformatics aspects of genetics. I'm still a bit confused as to how I ended up writing webpages, database applications and doing an administrative role.

Trip report: interpretive dance?

Oh certainly. Firstly at Year of the Teledu and then whenever I'm asked to do so afterwards. A paper copy will, of course, be made available too.

Fan funds and climate change: do we need to look at winding things up? Or just travelling everywhere by solar-powered zeppelin?

I think worrying about sending a fan or two to the other side of the world every few years actually trivialises a much more serious problem. Personally I'm suspicious of the focus by government on individuals travelling for tourist purposes and I think it's a smoke screen to hide the real contributors. And, okay, so we travel everywhere by solar-power zeppelin. What happens when the serpent comes and devours the sun? Mmm? MMM?

Anna "Åka" Davour

You went to Antarctica to look for wimps? I would think you would not find any?

No wimps in Antarctica. Actually, they are not allowed in the harsh environment, you have to be "physically qualified" by going through a series of medical tests. Probably you don't even try if you're afraid of cold and of hard work. You don't come to Antarctica at all.

Tarts may exist, though. At least many of the Americans talk about "Antartica", they may even spell it that way. I hope they mean dessert. Antartica certainly looks a lot like a cake with thick glazing.

More seriously, you are involved in high-energy physics? Particle physics? What's the driving question? Are you bored with people talking endlessly about string theory?

Yes, I'm just doing the final polishing of my thesis about my attempt to use neutrinos to search for dark matter inside the Earth. For me it started with being intrigued by how particles can be detected and identified. I'm also fascinated by big machines, but detectors are more interesting than accelerators.

Actually, people around me don't talk much about string theory at all. We're experimentalists, and string theory is still far from experiments. But I'm sort of curious about the current so called "string wars"—is string theory really physics, or science at all? It seems to provoke strong feelings. I think I should read one of the popular science books on the topic.

How long did you stay in Antarctica? How did you stay sane?

I was only there for a month, but I would have liked to stay longer. I even considered applying for a winter-over position. I think this is the wrong question, because for me it was like therapy. Light! Sunshine around the clock! And work, nice hands-on proper work with the detector. Great, exactly what I needed in the middle of the Swedish winter and after months of trying to make my simulations and data filtering work (I guess I'm not a very good programmer).

You have a small daughter now? Tell us her name and age. What books will you choose for her?

Rebecka, 18 months. Right now, I give her books with pretty pictures. I also buy books about knights and vikings which I know that I would have liked when I was about eight—I'll give them to her when she gets older, and see if she likes them too. But by then I'll also try to listen to what she's interested in herself. She's always going to be surrounded by books anyway, and she can choose to read whatever she likes. She already does—she prefers big books.

But of course there will be books I'll want to read to her when she gets older. Classic childrens' literature, Astrid Lindgren and all that.

And I guess I'll talk to her about books I like, just as I do with everyone else. I talk too much about science fiction.

You are involved in activist causes? Are there parallels to fandom, or is it quite different?

Well, at the moment I'm not really doing much of this

kind of work. I've been more or less active in Amnesty International for a long time, but the last year or so I've only helped my group a bit with fundraising and not done much letter writing at all. Before Rebecka was born I also helped in Rädde barnen (Save the Children) with home work help for children in a suburb. When I was younger I was involved in a youth organization for nature and environment, called Fältbiologerna ("the field biologists").

For me, this was all very different from fandom, since I always only did work and went to meetings and never cared about getting to know the people very much.

Fanzines and fandom: how did you become attracted? How have you stayed involved?

Yes, good question! I like talking about this!

One strange personality trait is that I like talking about science fiction. I've been like that for a long time, probably since I started reading sf at an age of 12 or so. Until 1996 this usually was about me trying to convince others that sf was interesting. Sometimes it ended in everyone quoting their favourite passages in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, which is fun but not very interesting.

In 1996 I met some people who actually read sf themselves and had something to say about it. I was enthusiastic, and actually started to buy books again (instead of only getting them from the library). One of these guys, Matthias, had a homepage with some text about science fiction, which was found by Johan, who informed him about a convention. Matthias told me about it, I went there, and the rest is fan-history. People who can say things about science fiction, and like others who can, and who want to do things together! Fans are just great, and I wanted to be one of them.

What have been some of the favourite things you have published? Are you blogging? Or is online activity on message boards?

I really liked "Nålpistol" ("Needle Gun"), a strange oneshot with Jerry Cornelius-inspired faanfiction about fans in Uppsala. It also had a very nice psychedelic cover which I impressed myself by making myself—I don't usually think that I can draw or paint.

I also liked some of the things I've written about fans and fandom in Uppsala. It's difficult to describe in a few words. Low key humor, playing with words and style, and lots of enthusiasm about people and events which I want to share with others—that kind of stuff is fun to write.

I did a very appreciated fanzine issue with focus on Narnia, but that was not my own favourite. It's nice to write sercon articles, because I learn so much, but it's also kind of dull.

Yes, I'm blogging. As yet, only in Swedish. I have plans for starting a blog in English Real Soon Now. And a fanzine...

You sing in a darkcore electronica group... are you still doing this? I downloaded some mp3's, but alas I can't understand the lyrics... you are happy giving away music on the net? What musical artists inspire you?

No, I'm not doing that any more. Björn, who made the music, lost his inspiration. I kind of miss it, it was fun.

Some of the lyrics are in English (song of the vampire seeker, dark sky). Almost all of it written by Biörn¹, our pet poet, when he was younger and more prone to daydreaming. (He doesn't write much anymore.)

We did one song almost exactly out of the last paragraph of *Dying inside* by Robert Silverberg. We asked his permission, and he sort of scared us by referring to lawyers and stuff—he wanted to get his share if we should make any money out of it. As if! I had hoped that he would be happy and want to hear it... Anyway, the text is his and we don't give away the mp3 of this song just in case there are issues about the copyright. Silly, but true.

I'm very happy giving away music. Otherwise no-one would find it and listen to it.

Uppsala fandom vs the rest of Sweden: more or less traditionalist? Serious or silly?

More and less. Very serious and silly. Seriously silly.

We cherish our fan history more than they seem to do in Linköping and Göteborg, and we are at the same time much more outgoing and good for newcomers than the Stockholm groups, at least the parts I see. We are perhaps more interested in communicating and acting as a part of a larger fandom. We also have in our care a collection of old fanzines in Sten's basement, which makes us cool and important.

I don't know what more to say about this. I would have to use so much more space.

Any Swedish writers or visual artists we should be learning about?

Inger Edelfelt. Artist, illustrator, writer. She has done a lot of Tolkien illustrations, and also book covers for science fiction and fantasy in the 70's and 80's. I like her book covers, and her beautiful picture books for children. Nowadays she is writing mostly mainstream fiction, sometimes with a hint of fantasy (vampires!).

Peter Nilson. Astronomer who wrote some interesting science fiction, something like a mixture of Clarke and Stapledon, but with lots of math and new physics. Turning spacetime on its head. Finding an artifact which can change the values of natural constants. Building quantum computers on the Moon, running simulations of God. Getting transferred to another universe. Yes!

Nicolas Krizan. Definitely. Great illustrator, I especially like his drawings in black and white. Worked with *Mino-tauren*, for a long time a really good magazine of horror and fantastic literature, and still illustrates *Nova Science Fiction*.

GUFF and climate change: should we start to look at zeppelin-travel? Matter transmission? Virtual exchange?

I would like one of those vehicles they have in Dan Simmons' *Olympos*. What were they called? Like flying cars with superpowers. Faster, cheaper and cleaner.

¹[not a typo: the composer and the lyricist are not the same person—DMW]

Steve Davies

There's a slightly frightening suggestion that the Plokta cabal began life as a filk group. Musical influences? Do you play any instruments now?

We were never a filk group. On the other hand, we did get together because we were at a filk con and Gytha North thought we'd be a good filk convention committee, then after we ran *Fourplay* we just kept on going. I think the only one of us who currently plays an instrument is Alison and her infinitely expanding collection of melodeons. My guitar is still lying around the house somewhere, but I haven't had it out in ages. Never could play in public anyway.

Costuming and dress-up: not just corsets? You've appeared on the cover of Plokta in various guises... any favourites?

Well, you can tell from my LiveJournal icon that my favourite was the Bollywood musical issue with me in bandanna, Uzi and bandolier.

You were born in North Africa? Libya? How old were you when you left? Have you been back?

No. I was born in Lebanon, in Beirut. We left there when I was about two and went to what is now Yemen, but was then the Aden Protectorate. Followed by Abu Dhabi, New York, Calcutta, Bombay, Karachi, Athens and Rome. I've never been back to any of them, though we're talking about going to Rome sometime soon.

How did you meet Giulia? Her family is in Tasmania, I believe? Have you considered emigrating?

Giulia was doing her sabbatical year going round the world and she came to Novacon in Birmingham. We met there and she spent more time in England than she had planned, then came back to live here. We think about emigrating from time to time, but Giulia came to England to get away from Tasmania and a lot of our friends are here. Still, with the internet it's a lot more practicable and apparently there are even things to do in Hobart these days.

Did you start in fandom at university? Why have you stuck so long, and in so many roles?

Sort of. One of the factors in picking my university (Birmingham) was that there was an annual SF convention there (something I discovered through reading a book review of Brian Aldiss' *Billion year spree* as part of a school project—which of course I'd picked science fiction for). I guess I've stuck around because fans seem to like the kind of things I do. Which is to say, just about everything. I get terribly bored doing the same thing all the time, a change every so often is essential.

What early reading swayed you toward sf, do you think?

My father belonged to the Science Fiction Book Club and let me read his collection from when I was nine. But I'd already picked up a taste for SF from the school library at the school I went to in the US (I was reading way ahead

of the other kids in 2nd grade, so they let me use the main school library and I just ploughed my way through loads of stuff I can't even remember now). That and the fact that I got given a subscription to *Eagle* when I was six, and got addicted to Dan Dare.

Contemporary US sf vs the New British Space Opera. Any contest?

New British Space Opera, no contest. Most of the US stuff I'm reading at the moment is fantasy or urban fantasy. Their SF just doesn't seem to do anything for me, possibly because I got over my fascination with libertarianism and now it just seems quaint.

After a day of tooling about the Wiltshire countryside, Juliette's thoughts naturally turned to geology. You had a nice set of maps she could pore over. Enduring interest?

Well, my degree was in geology (I started out doing Geology and Archaeology, but they both wanted 90% of my time) and I guess I've kept up an interest in it. I suspect most of what I know is very much out of date though.

For some reason I have been recently converted to watching Top Gear. Are you familiar with this programme?

I've heard of it, but since we don't currently have a TV set I've never seen it.

Video games: any interest?

Is the Pope Catholic? As someone who has been playing video games for 30 years, I keep reading things about how modern kids are different, they were brought up on video games and need teaching differently, and I look at the leaning tower of video games on my shelf (stretching back to a copy of *Leather Goddesses of Phobos* in the original packaging) and wonder how these people managed to grow up not knowing anything about video games. Anyway, I'm currently splitting my time between the Wii (*Zelda*, *SSX Blur* and *Excite Truck*) and web games (*Kingdom of Loathing* principally). I used to play a lot of RPGs, but I'm finding I don't have the patience to get all the way through them these days and I get bored just learning the rules for some Real Time Strategy games. I'm still hoping they'll remake *Master of Magic* or *Master of Orion*.

Another worldcon for Melbourne: threat or menace? What should we be thinking about?

Well, if there's another worldcon in Melbourne, we'll be there. I really liked Melbourne. I guess the thing to remember is start early, do all the boring bits of organisation (and there are many) while you have the opportunity and nail things down before the people who turn up at the last minute can mess it up. Oh, and you need to get the programme sorted out beforehand this time.

GUFF and climate change and the whole philosophy of fanfunds... rethink on the horizon?

If travel becomes really expensive again, like in the early days of fandom, GUFF may be the only way we'll get to see each other.