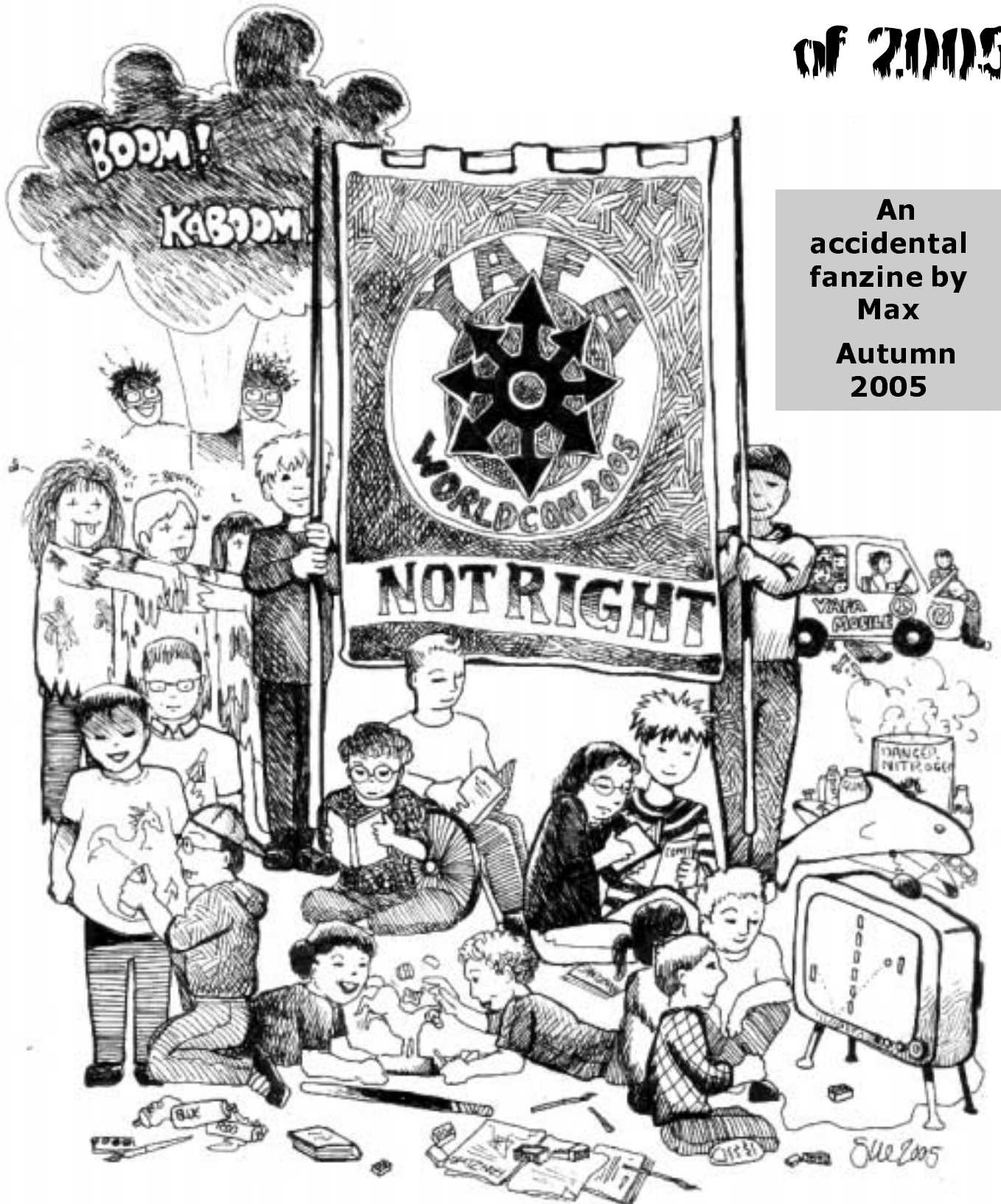


# YAWA STAFFER

## and the Worldcon of 2005



An  
accidental  
fanzine by  
Max  
Autumn  
2005

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Max can be contacted in the following ways:

Post:

Max, 20 Bakers Lane, Woodston,  
Peterborough, Cambridgeshire, PE2 9QW

Email:

m@hawkida.com

Web:

<http://www.livejournal.com/users/hawkida>

To contact contributors, in the first instance just drop me a line.

## How this came to be...



It's September, now.

I'm sure that it won't be long before the standard fannish greeting reverts to its old forms rather than the current "Hi! Recovered from Worldcon, yet?" and here I am reminding you of the whole thing before the dust has even settled.

It all started with a conversation. I told Claire Brialey that I'd decided I approve of British Worldcons with some minor reservations. Claire asked if she could quote me on that and I told her I'd summarise my views in a paragraph for her.

I went away and thought about that for a while and it didn't seem I could do it justice in a paragraph. "Would you like an article, instead?" I asked. I agreed to write a piece for the next *Banana Wings* by the end of September.

I didn't start writing straight away, but when I did the whole thing snowballed and when I hit several thousand words without even starting to talk about being at the convention we realised that even *Banana Wings* wasn't going to contain a piece of such epic proportions.

Since it practically became a fanzine at that point I invited extra contributions and James, James and Angie stepped in to help out. I dropped Sue Mason a line begging a cover off her and the fanzine was born out of several hours of toil.

The pictures are partially mine but many have also come from a CD that Dave "Elvis" Elder put together as a memento for the YAFA staff. The logo is courtesy of Anne Stokes.

I hope you enjoy the whole package.

Due to the expense of producing a zine this large I'm afraid printed versions will be a rarity. They are available on request, but the primary distribution method will be PDF. Sorry.

*Max*

# By James Shields

# THAT

How James Bacon came to be anywhere near children - other people's children - let alone running a programme of events for them at Worldcon, is one of the great mysteries of the universe. I'm sure it started with a fairly innocent conversation, along these lines...

*James: I have a great idea. I want to run stuff for kids with weapons and explosions and power tools and dangerous chemicals and stuff.*

*Worldcon committee: Right, James, you go and organise that. We'll be behind you all the way.*

*James (leaving): Great. I'll get it sorted. You can count on me.*

*Worldcon committee (snickering): Okaaaay, that's the last we'll hear from him.*

It would be a mistake to suggest that James is not a serious fan. He may take part in some activities that could be considered a little eccentric, or perhaps foolhardy, depending upon who you ask, but nobody can deny the seriousness with which he embarks upon them. Like rocket powered skateboarding - how can anyone accuse him of not taking it seriously when it is his bum on the line (literally).

His catalogue of craziness is extensive. There is a tradition, which he may not have initiated (but he certainly embraced), of starting fun conventions by hopping and stomping madly about with a piece of paper tied to one's foot, trying to detach similar pieces from other people. Usually injuries are only slight, but a few sore toes tend to be inevitable. His ideas have often involved dressing up in ridiculous costumes including grannies, military figures, hillbillies, comic book characters and radiation victims. They have involved eating things that you shouldn't (like cat food), and playing with things that you should eat (such as using chickens as boxing gloves and wrestling in baked beans). They have involved risqué elements like corsets, cross dressing and whipping. Often there is no obvious science fiction connection, but if you challenge him he will explain, in detail, exactly why there is a very strong link to serious science fiction, and why it needs to be explored thoroughly and in very practical ways. Science fiction authors would be well advised to come to James's events purely for research purposes. You could call it applied science fiction.

The "James Bacon Effect" makes it easy to overlook another side of James's fandom. This side is very serious indeed. This is the side that has driven from one end of Ireland to the other to bring authors, who weren't well enough to take the train, to conventions. This side set up and runs the James White Award, a very serious short story competition that was presented alongside the Hugo Awards at Interaction. And regardless of which side people voted for in the 2004 TAFF race, it was this side that went on the TAFF trip.

Let's look at that TAFF trip for a moment. James turned up for the convention and immediately volunteered for just about everything, without even mentioning he was the TAFF delegate. He had got himself on the staff of children's services before anyone even realised who he was. He spent time working in just about every department, always willing to chip in and help unload trucks. In the process he collected a retro Hugo, presented a Hugo, and took part in just about every party that was going on. On top of that, he embarrassed a heck of a lot of people by having his trip report written and published within months.

A side effect, when James realised that various fannish bodies pay bounties to the fan fund for trip reports, was that James put the screws on previous TAFF delegates to produce their reports. This has already produced "Tobes' TAFF Ting", which was written and produced in a few hours at Eastercon by James torturing Tobes to extract the information - another fun activity with serious fannish motives. Several other trip reports are in the works, though the last US-to-Europe report was in the 1970s.

So, with the myth that James is not a serious fan well and truly busted, we can move to YAFA.

*James: Right, I'm back. I've got a scientist to make ice cream with liquid nitrogen, another to blow things up, a couple of bouncy castles for kids to beat each other up on, and a load of roller blades for Quidditch.*

*Worldcon committee: Eh, are those safe?*

*James: Oh yes, perfectly safe as long as you take proper precautions.*

*Worldcon committee: Fine, as long as the insurance company okay it.*

*James: Okay, I'll check. Bye.*

*Worldcon committee (worried): Phew. They'll never agree to that lot.*

James spent a lot of time helping out in children's services on his TAFF trip, for good reason. YAFA was already in the advanced stages of planning, and he wanted to see how other conventions did it.

While he was full of praise for the children's programme at Noreascon, one thing James wanted to avoid was a children's programme. The name, Young Adult Fun Activities, was carefully chosen because James didn't want to refer to the participants as children. Programme items were designed to appeal to all ages, and in some cases I think the young people were the more mature ones.

# AFFAIR

# YAFA

For the most part, age wasn't an issue. We were involved in fan activities with other fans, young and old. Just occasionally, I'd find myself explaining things and I'd have to remind myself that they're only twelve. "Yes, of course I know what a Dyson sphere is."

James had recruited a body of helpers. By some coincidence there was a significant overlap with people who took part in fun conventions, and crazy Robert Rankin events, and snowboarding holidays. I'm sure that was pure coincidence, but it did mean the team all knew each other and already had experience of working together. Arriving late on Wednesday, I found most of the setup already complete, but I was able to chip in a little.



There are good reasons why many of these people work with James again and again. Friendship, of course, is a good part of it, but I think it runs deeper than that. I've heard many people remark after helping out with an event, "That was great, but I never want to work with *them* again." I've yet to hear this comment in relation to James, and there are possibly several reasons why.

First, no matter what he's involved in, he will be the hardest worker on the team. When a task needs to be delegated, he will do so, but if he asks you to do something it means he trusts you to get it done, not that it's beneath him. I have often seen him hand out what could be considered cushy jobs, then go back to manual labour. Second, he takes care of people working with him. The first thing James did at the end of YAFAs was to round everyone up and take them to the sandwich bar to make sure everyone had eaten. Finally, being part of one of James's events will always challenge you, make you do things you didn't know you were capable of, and while it might not make you a better person, it will certainly be fun.

I was amazed at how much effort everyone had put into planning their events. Safety goggles were issued to all at the merest hint of danger, lines were drawn on the floor, with strict instruction on who could cross them. Many of the programme items had a strong grounding in science, and while they included important information, like how to handle things safely, they also delved into what substances were useful and often touching on possible uses (and mis-uses) in science fiction.

*James: Great news! The insurance company say it's okay so long as we have qualified people handling the equipment.*

*Worldcon committee: Eh, what about the health and safety people at the SECC?*

*James: They say it's okay too.*

*Worldcon committee: This all sounds very expensive.*

*James: No, look - it all comes in just under the budget you gave us. Except for...*

*Worldcon committee: Yes?*

*James: It's just we hadn't planned for the SECC wanting to charge us for tables and chairs, and that would mean we'd have to cancel one of our events.*

*Worldcon committee: Well, I guess we could move that to the facilities budget, I think they have some capacity.*

*James: Thanks, that's great. Bye!*

*Worldcon committee: Argh! Why did we say that? We could have had one less dangerous event to worry about!*

One of the items I was involved in over the weekend was the YAFAs Fanzine, or YAFAZine. I say involved, but it was the young people who did nearly all the work. We had a kick-off meeting on Friday, when we discussed fanzines in general and a small but enthusiastic group, ranging in age from ten to sixteen, put forth lots of ideas. Grant Kruger, a South African living in the US made some helpful suggestions, but for the most part it was driven by the young adults, which is as it should be.

Some of them are prolific writers, and over the next couple of days they turned out a significant body of work, running to six sides of A4.

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On Sunday, I overslept, arriving late to find Max scowling at me. She had been working on the fanzine layout since the crack of dawn. I apologised and set to work on photos and scanning, getting around the problems. We'd forgotten the driver disk for the scanner, and the DTP software was on Max's laptop, but the PDF generator was on mine. Those problems sorted, we got the file over to the Newsletter team who kindly printed it for us on their super-fast printers.

One thing which struck me was how many well known SF names were delighted to take part in YAFA. Terry Pratchett did something and Iain Banks, someone who almost never takes part in conventions any more, was only too happy to do the Harry Potter reading.

In panel after panel, the list of speakers read like a who's who of SF, and it's no surprise that many items had as many old people as young in the audience. Although there was a stage with table and microphones for speakers to sit behind, most chose to ignore them and pulled chairs down to be close to their audience. Questions and audience participation were always encouraged, and from the quality of questions asked, I don't think there can be any doubt that the young people were taking the programme seriously.

But there were also lots of fun events, and by "fun", I'm talking of the "James Bacon effect" kind of fun. Events like "Capture the Flag", which took place on two bouncy castles (one for each team), with an array of inflatable weapons. Safety officials from both the bouncy castle company and the SECC were watching with eagle eyes, but it all passed off in an enthusiastic but controlled manner. At least until the adults had their turn.



And there was Roller Blade Quidditch. It's probably safer than the broom stick variant, but only just. I'm still not entirely sure how it worked, but it seemed to involve various different types of ball being thrown into the arena while the seekers chased some of the less unfit grown-ups who were passing the snitch between them. Quite how serious injury was avoided, I'll never know.

YAFA intruded into the regular programme when it got the chance. One such occasion was the Masquerade, when a horde of YAFA zombies invaded, hungry for the judges' brains but best of all was the panel on the Future of Fandom. Midway through, YAFA invaded en-masse, attacking the audience and panellists with inflatable weapons and foam lightsabres (oh yeah, I forgot to mention the lightsabre item). Someone must have tipped off the panel, as they were ready for us with water pistols, and a brave battle ensued. After we left, the panellists declared, "There is the future of fandom!"

*James: Was that all right, then?*

*Worldcon committee: All right? It was bloody brilliant!*

*James: Good. So you won't mind that I overspent a little?*

*Worldcon committee: Hmmm. We'll see if we can find a little extra budge to cover it.*

*James: Thanks. I'll be off then.*

*Worldcon committee: Oh, and James?*

*James: Er, yes?*

*Worldcon committee: We have some people from next year's committee who'd like a word...*

## A Partner's Perspective

*I'm only a science fiction fan because I married the wonderful James Shields and with him and James Bacon helping me along to these events and meeting fab new people I'm hooked. Even our son, Jack, who's five got to see the Dr Who box and have photos taken with it. He was telling my dad that he wants to go back to Scotland for his holidays next year so I see a life long membership happening there.*

*When James Bacon asked for help with YAFA I thought, "Okay, this will be cool". Little did I know what I was letting myself in for. You can imagine: this mad Irish woman is allowed to take care of kids! The whole programme was fab and I ended up again in a masquerade saying "Brains!". We had lots of parents asking if they could join in so it was a family event at times.*

*This was my first Worldcon. Would I do it again? The good half of my brain says run away but you know, I would help again and join in with all the mad kids. James and Stef and Elvis made fine leaders and any company should be happy to give them a job. With all the YAFA team I had laughs and I was shocked at the level of flirting going on among the teenagers!*

*Angie Shields*



If I'd burst onto the scene of fandom it would have been in 2000 when I attended *Aliens Stole My Handbag*. I didn't, though. I snuck in through a back door, peering at usenet and *Plokta* archives to figure out who some of the players were before drawing any attention whatsoever to myself. The attention that did land upon me I largely shrugged off by dragging in friends behind me and pointing at them.

## Ancient History

I learnt about Eastercon via newsgroups. I'd heard of TAFF many years earlier as a consequence of hanging around with Nic Farey who I'd known since approximately

forever due to the *Red Dwarf* fan club and denizens therein. The fan club was a kind of bastard child of fandom running amok in its own little corner and these days although the club still exists the bulk of its fandom seems to be spending an unruly adolescence in cyberspace.

I have seen "Hugo winner" swashed bold and proud across book covers for as long as I can remember. I can't, no matter how hard I try, figure out when the concept of Worldcons seeped into my consciousness.

By 2003 I knew just what to say to a Worldcon committee who tried to lure me into joining their ranks or trick me into taking on responsibility I didn't want. I'd been forewarned and coached.

## The Next Bloody British Bloody Worldcon

"What do we say to a Worldcon committee who offer you a role?"

"We say fuck off."

"Well I was thinking 'no' but your version is certainly less ambiguous."

Everyone in my close circles seemed to hold similar views on the subject of the last Worldcon held in Britain. It seemed like a uniform opinion and that opinion is probably best summarised by the simple phrase "Bad and wrong". The warnings were dire and hand wringing was evident and the Fishlifters in particular made dour proclamations about the Next Bloody British Bloody Worldcon. Without ever really stopping to notice I took a role and read an imaginary script written for me. I played my part in damning the Worldcon, something I knew sod all about. I'd hesitate to call it peer pressure, it was one of those universal facts that everybody is supposed to know. School dinners are dreadful, *The Guardian* is full of typographic errors, politicians philander, Ansible will win a Hugo and British Worldcons are a blight upon fandom.

Tobes likes to recount an anecdote which places him in a lift at Con Jose, his companions including whoever it was that carried the box of ballot papers for the site selection that led to Glasgow in 2005. "I could have stopped it! I could have stolen the box and changed history and Interaction need never have happened!". It gets laughs. Dissension was rife and barely anybody I knew called the convention by its real name, it was almost always referred to as the Bloody British Bloody Worldcon or, slightly more charitably, Interthingy. Maybe it was



dubbed that in a friendly way, it certainly seemed to be taken in good spirits, but it's a jeer all the same. Somebody registered the domain name and forwarded web traffic for <http://www.interthingy.org> to the real URL of <http://www.interaction.worldcon.org.uk>.

People said, "Well obviously we're going to go along and so we've signed up early to get a good rate but I did oppose the bid and it shouldn't have won. Was NOTHING learnt the last time around?". Others delighted in telling people just how far from the convention they would be staying, bandying around those barge poles we hear so much about and it was an attitude that didn't really bother me until I realised just how gleefully these reports were delivered.

Sooner or later I pulled some thoughts together for myself instead of being spoon fed mass opinion and started to wonder just what was so bad about the whole concept. I don't remember when or how, but I wouldn't be a bit surprised if that were down to James at least in part.

I can't trace my "hang on, what was I thinking?" moment of revelation about Interaction in my memories but I do know that I read James Bacon's pieces on TommyWorld. For those who missed them, here's an extract:

*So why is that there is a palpable smell when I mention Intersection, and more recently the Worldcon bid. The mumbles and shaking heads, the smell is discernible, it's the smell of unhappy fans, as they mutter unheard utterances under their breath, all I ever hear is, mumble ... bloody Worldcon ...mumble...kill...mumble...never... mumble... mumble...mumble.*

*Everyone smells it, the smell of dissent, the smell of discord, the smell of division, the smell of distaste, the smell of disappointment, the smell of disgust, the smell of distrust, the smell of disparity. It grips your nose like a finger jabbed up your nostril, a soiled finger, hideous and pungent. The only dising you don't get is 'dis-taff', cause that's a piece of wood, apparently.*

James is no stranger to fandom. His recent TAFF win may have paraded him around the scene a bit, shown him off to a few people who previously didn't know a whole lot about Irish fandom and madcap conventions, but he's been con running, reading comics, administering the James White award and participating in cons and pub meets for so long that when people sit down and count it up they wind up mumbling about how fast time goes and boggling over how young they all were way back whenever it was. James is somebody I have a vast amount of respect for. I admire his enthusiasm, his ideas, his energy and his interpersonal skills. James works as a driving instructor, some time before that he was managing supermarkets and he's frighteningly good at dealing with people face to face.

In pointing out admirable traits James carries I feel obliged to point out it's not all rose tinted by any means. It takes a bloody good editor to translate his writing into English, sometimes, as it comes out as a stream of thoughts, ambling wildly and tripping over its own typos (he uses "ASTHMA" as a logical contraction of "Aliens Stole My Handbag"). He can overplay the depraved sex loony persona



## *The Ubiquitous James Bacon*



James Bacon



he brings with him. He has his own biases, he can be downright stubborn and from time to time he comes up with a plan that makes me go “What? Why?!”. Sometimes his enthusiasm is based on beliefs that seem naïve and sometimes he's a little too motivated by a desire to prove someone wrong. Now and then he can be too effusive and alienate people in the name of trying to force them to have fun. He has his faults and I'm convinced he won't mind me saying any of this, as he takes criticism and works with it. The overall package you get when you deal with James Bacon is a win and it's getting hard to avoid him.

So, anyway, character investigation aside, there I was thinking a British Worldcon was a bad thing and there James was babbling evocatively about how much fun he had at the last one and how he couldn't understand the negative attitude people were displaying - and displaying it, they most certainly were. A cursory search of Usenet archives pulls out the likes of “I don't want to do a British Worldcon. (I don't want anyone to do a British Worldcon for at least the next ten years.)” from Pam Wells as far back as 1995 on rec.arts.sf.fandom. She got her wish and it happened only ten years later but by then she'd gaffiated herself, wandering towards the greener grass of academia.

The explanations of why people hated the idea started to come out as people told James where his enthusiastic proposed fixes were flawed and I asked a couple of the louder nay-sayers just what it was that they detested about the concept of another British Worldcon.

Burn out.

## *The Next Bad Thing*

This was the big reason. The huge, unrelenting amount of work required to put on a Worldcon can be destructive. Most of the assumptions about

the “next one” seemed to revolve around just how awful the last one had been. I wasn't there, but I have heard the tales of things turning disastrous as a juggernaut of a con raced towards the fans of 1995 and engulfed them, spewing casualties as it went. People walked off the project and others had to cover for them. I get the impression that while many of the attending fans noticed this problem or that one they generally had a fairly good time, feeling it was ruined only by a couple of issues that really should have been considered earlier. Many of those working on it, though, seemed to encounter adversity left right and centre, struggling to manage the workload and all the time hearing the gripes. They came away from the convention relieved to have come through the experience and pleased it was over and shy of going near con running again. Only a handful started to plan the next one.

Of course, I wasn't there. I'm extrapolating, guessing, doing ineffectual research and making it up. All the same, that's the impression I'm getting about what went wrong and the venom directed at the whole idea of “next time”. When Claire Brialey says “I don't see any way in the same circumstances in which I could have done anything which would have worked better - without actually giving up my career, doing a quick public relations course, or paying a consultancy about three times my total divisional budget to do it for me,” it's somewhat telling. When I talked to her about it she shared more of the personal horror of working on the convention in bitter tones and fuller detail.

It shaped my thoughts a bit further. Whilst it was really only circumstantial



evidence this served as a good warning to me and while I was less opposed to the idea of Interaction if somebody wanted to run it, I never for one moment imagined myself working there. It was a long, long time before I was even sure I would go. This was down to money more than anything and when we did eventually decide that we'd regret missing out, Tobes and I bought second hand memberships to keep the costs down.

One problem with being so new to the fannish scene is that it's difficult to get an idea of when things are progressing "just like always" and when they're changing significantly. I'm interested in what came before, but I find that "what came before" for me can often be entirely contemporary for some of those I'm with. I'm also noticing that this can work in reverse. Some of those who are particularly invested in fanac of decades past are actively struggling to keep up with what's going on now. Americans have largely never heard of Third Row Fandom; Cyberdrome, after running successfully for many years, has come as a complete surprise to some. At a fan meeting last week we joked that sometimes you feel like raising a chorus of "Oh, do keep up at the back!"

When James Bacon went to Novacon in 2002 and arranged that the James White award would be presented there I thought nothing of it until he sidled over to Tobes, bought him a drink and imploringly asked where all the people his own age were. As far as I was concerned James had probably been going to these things for ten years. By the end of the weekend he'd settled right in and exaggerated tales were rife about James having launched a trouser press from a non-existent fourth floor window in full view of the police.

In 2003 Eastercon rolled around and James was on two bid committees for 2005, only one of which was a spoof. Later there was Novacon and I think that may have been the convention where James felt he should go along for the couple of hours he could manage, despite it involving flying from Ireland and driving for many hours. In 2004 he won TAFF.

The 2004 TAFF race was the very public side of James (not to mention Anders) and the campaign ran largely through Concourse and Convivial. In the background, though, James was talking to the likes of Paul Oldroyd about the

Youth stream at Interaction and pulling together ideas with Alice Lawson and Fran Dowd for Eastercon in 2005. When James won TAFF he planned to work at the American Worldcon in order to get

to know people and give something back to the community that had given him "a free holiday".

Me? I missed Convivial – we simply couldn't justify the cost of going at that time and the long haul to Scotland was off putting. We were there for Concourse, though, and I lent a hefty hand to Tobes who was tasked with the administration of the TAFF race at the time. Gosh, that was fun. "If you want a web version it has to be in HTML, Tobes. You can't just throw a word document up there and claim it's a web version. Okay, okay, I'll do the conversion!"



Anders, James' opponent in the TAFF race, has a beer at the Worldcon Sproutlore party

## *Meanwhile, back in con running...*



Worldcon's Anonymous Claire party. We nearly hit problems when it was found that the boardroom table couldn't be removed but in the long run having it there worked out rather well.

I'd be lying if I said that there was no stress involved. If I am tired I get stressed and irritable. If I am stressed I generally hold things together but the wrong word at the wrong time and I'll lash out verbally. I know that at least once I snapped when I felt I was doing more than my fair share and I remember shouting about being pissed off at the workload, pointing out "I didn't get a free trip to America out of this, why should I be keeping on top of the emails about TAFF?!". It's one of the reasons why I avoid responsibility when I can. I know what I'm capable of and I know what will lead to stress and I can estimate the pressure I'll face given a named task.

I'm only ever a reluctant leader, I'm not that comfortable in the role. I'm not especially good at delegating unless I really know the capabilities and reliability of the person I delegate to. Put me in a team with shoddy leadership, though, and I'll make my view known and possibly wind up leading despite my protests. When my friends need help I'm more than willing to lend a hand and while far from a perfectionist I'm keen to improve things that look like they could be better. I know the time it takes, though. I know the effort things require and I know that often huge swathes of that effort will be overlooked. I try to balance things and avoid getting overwhelmed especially within fandom. It's only a hobby, after all, right?

I'm an accidental leader of the Anonymous Claire group, a LiveJournal community for fans. It's largely an admin role and demands very little from me. I have final say on when we have informal get-togethers and I do things like chasing people for money if we're trying to fund something. That's the kind of level of "in charge" that I'm comfortable with. I'm not a con runner.

James is. He sees a lot of the world through a filter that has him filing ideas for a convention and he feels moved to join in and maybe call the shots if something needs sorting. I shy away from that kind of thing. When James was organising Eastercon, planning a TAFF trip and quietly building plans for YAFFA in the middle of 2004, most people had no idea.

If I'd known about the shifts in management within the Interaction staff I might have started to heed the dire warnings of impending disaster. As it was, I had no idea that people were resigning and roles were altering. I have no recollection of finding out that James had turned into an area head at Interaction and plans that had started out involving running a few small items aimed at youth were evolving into a full stream.

My own relationship with Interaction at that point involved paying out for a membership and agreeing to let Plokta reprint something I'd written previously in their section of the newsletter. I still had little real idea of what it would be like to attend. The best descriptor I could extract from anybody was "Big".

## ***Eastercon 2005***

A brief quiz:

What do you know about Pepper?

Who is Dave Elder?

Who is Stefan Lancaster?

I get the impression, lately, that people who ought to just don't know the answers questions like those. In reverse order, Stef is Stefan Lancaster, the Stef

half of James 'n' Stef. I was a little stunned to find, recently, that he's older than Tobes. Stef went to the Worldcon in 1987 and made no friends or links to fandom at all. Stef's the quieter one of the pair, the one who doesn't win TAFF, write diatribes for fanzines or travel crazy numbers of hours to be at a con for a few minutes. As much as a guy on a skateboard, with flames on his clothes, blond hair and a silly beard can do, he sort of blends into the background with James around, but he's just as much an ideas man and he's been working the con trail for some years now. When I've felt out of my depth and unwanted at room parties, Stef's stepped in and made me feel welcome again. He doesn't talk about himself a whole lot but he's never that far from James at conventions and Sproutlore events (Robert Rankin's fan club). James describes Stef as his bestest friend in the whole world and, in comparison to James, he's the quieter one.

Dave Elder is the even quieter one, known inexplicably as Elvis. James'n'Stef events don't happen without Elvis lending a hand somewhere, quietly.

Pepper may be British fandom's next great hope for Eastercons. She's at least on record saying that when she graduates from her medical course she plans to run an Eastercon. That's long term planning, too long term for me.

When I look back at that convention it's with plenty of good memories, many of which I wrote up for the souvenir booklet. I am, however, aware that while I was there I went through an awful lot of bad moments. I wasn't especially well. I was taking antibiotics for a forceful hacking unpleasant cough that I'd been unable to shake and the more tired I grew, the worse the cough was. Tobes was partying hard and our hours just weren't meshing well. I'd get up to do things I wanted to do, like breakfast, and Tobes would stay in bed. Then late into the night I'd be exhausted and just slipping off to sleep when he came back from some fantastic room party and wanted to tell me all about it, or on one particularly irritating occasion, lay down and promptly started migraining with hallucinations, mumbling, groaning and the full works. I wasn't in the best of moods for much of the convention and to keep myself occupied I tagged along with Pepper and Ang, lending a hand here and there and throwing my weight into thrilling things like tidying up the Lego.

James had co-opted Pepper along with Ang Rosin and Mel Tudno-Jones to help out with the parts of the programme he was responsible for over the weekend. When Ang greeted us that weekend she'd told me "I've already seen James. He dragged me off to see the room of fun" in a slightly exasperated manner that suggested she might have preferred chance to check into her room first, or something.

What James wasn't sharing at the time was his Plan. He already knew he had the support of Stef and Elvis but he wanted to bring more people into his floating team. He saw Eastercon as a dry run for what was to become YAFA and for his vision of Eastercons to come. He was trying out a bunch of people.

Some would say it went incredibly well. Others weren't so keen. Pete Weston's piece on Trufen.net, in particular, caused some rather large waves that I couldn't ignore. I wrote a response to the negativity presented there and gave it to Plokta, not really expecting that they would hold onto it until Worldcon before printing it. After cooling off somewhat I still stand by everything I said in the article but I concede I was a little rude to Peter. But then, to slip into childish parlance, HE STARTED IT! It bothered me to see Peter, a well established long



James and Stef



Elvis



Pepper

standing fan, being so belligerently hostile towards the things he disliked at the convention and so seemingly out of touch. We're back to that chorus of "Do keep up at the back!" and it's downright sad that he can embrace and revel in the fun of a 1970s fannish football match but feels that people having fun at a con today will put off the serious literary types.

A long time ago, in an issue of *Conrunner*, Vince Docherty said this:

*"[...]I think it is very likely that a British Worldcon in the Nineties will be the last of its kind. For a group of people involved in the literature of ideas, embracing the concept of constant change and evolution, we are a strangely conservative bunch. [...] The main feature of SF in the 1980's has been breadth and diversity, and a move away from traditional concepts. Similarly. SF fans are and have been involved in an expanding range of activities, not just 'fannish' conventions. (The Worldcon (and Eastercon) is basically a room-party grown large.) That diversity is likely to continue, and coupled with the increasing expense and competition in running Conventions, I think it likely that by the end of the century, the Worldcon as we see it now will either fold or will change its nature completely."*

He was talking at least partially about the possibility that professional conference organisers would take over Worldcon planning but the idea holds true. Conventions will change, slowly, maybe, but partially through necessity. When James and his team run a convention they come up with a list of ideas of things that they'd like to do or see and look into ways to make it reality. Things aren't centred around serious literary discussion because that's not where their strengths lie, but denying that literature gets a look in is hiding from the facts and if you list comics under literature it's a downright lie.

## ***Try Out Sessions***

So, Fran, Alice James and the team ran an Eastercon and lots of people enjoyed it although others didn't get what they were expecting. One of simultaneously high and low points, for me, was working on Tobes' trip report. It was yet another James scheme, in which we would ply Tobes with a little alcohol, lock him in a room and extract a trip report from him. It was a long, arduous task with one of those Douglas Adams style whooshing deadlines and we worked long into the night getting that ready, my role being to throw together an article and then largely peer over James Shield's shoulder back-seat DTPing. It was exhausting but ultimately rewarding and it was another of James' try-out sessions.

What James overlooked, here, was that we didn't know we were being tried out. Many of the star pupils in the team he used weren't planning on being at Worldcon. Mel has two sons and that was part of the reason he was right at home helping out with the activities geared towards the younger con attendees, but this makes attending a Worldcon a hefty family expense, especially since the travel and attendance costs wouldn't be trivial. Pepper is learning to be a surgeon, a task that takes many, many hours of her free time and leaves her with little disposable income. She had no plans to attend Worldcon although she did in the end. ZZ9 needed to be able to staff their dealer's table and sponsored her attendance in return for hard graft. This didn't leave her free to commit to YAFA, though, as the dealers times and the YAFA hours were the same.

James said “Losing Pepper to ZZ9 and Mel not being able to make it were personal disappointments. Although, did you see how often Pepper looked in on YAFA when she was passing?”

## Joining YAFA

It wasn't until April 2005 James approached me directly and asked whether I would be prepared to lend a hand with YAFA. I agreed instantly. I've always been keen to offer support to the James'n'Stef'n'Elvis gestalt in thanks for the bloody good times they've provided me with through their conventions. Besides that, I grew up with younger siblings and the first money I ever earned was through babysitting. I've had brief forays into helping out in schools and I love working with kids but it's something I barely get an opportunity to do these days. I had no qualms about working with YAFA. By this point James and Stef had a page on the Interaction website detailing their role as Area Heads and some big mad plans involving centrifugal forces and Batmobiles. It had started to sound like there was a lot of fun to be had.

James had approached Tobes before me, not so much asking for help as mentioning the plans and adding a by-line along the lines of “And of course you'll help out, won't you?”. Tobes finds it terribly difficult to say no to James and he's got the pierced nipples to prove it. Eventually I talked him out of it and he wrote an apologetic email to James explaining “It's kids you see. I don't get on with them. At all.” Tobes actually gets on fine with kids when he encounters them but they put him on edge. He kept kidding himself that it would all be fine so long as I was around and I pointed out that this would just give me double duty time to cover and he backed down, promising to help out with grunt work and anything else Sproutlore or ZZ9 needed instead. It was partially his relieving Pepper that let her see more than just the ZZ9 dealer's table.

My only other commitment to Worldcon at this point was less to the convention and more to the Anonymous Claire crowd. We were going to have a party and I was in charge of organising it. I wasn't too worried about the logistics. Every time I was stuck I asked people for advice and made a decision and I'm becoming quite adept at throwing parties at home so it wasn't going to be much of a challenge, although I was aware it was going to take a fair chunk of time. I told James that I wasn't going to be available on the Saturday afternoon but would otherwise be happy to help wherever needed. He seemed pleased to hear it and started making arrangements for me and the many other staff volunteers to go through a clearance process whereby the police declare that as far as they know you're not a child molester.

Things progressed rapidly in terms of planning. As volunteers on James' team we were invited to look at the programme they'd put together and throw in extra ideas wherever we could. The website made a big point of wish fulfilment.

Dozing on the train into work one morning, I awoke briefly to see graffiti on the train sidings and an idea gripped me. Wouldn't it be cool to give teenagers spray cans and a place where they could legitimately decorate a wall? Instead of dozing back off I used my mobile phone to immediately email the idea to James. That was the first time I was really excited about YAFA and in the end that part



Tobes finds it terribly difficult to say no to James particularly during rousing rounds of "M'hinge"



of the plan didn't come to fruition. (The spray paint was bought but the fumes coming out of the cans were deemed a bad thing and a last minute run was made to pick up poster paints.)

I think that the prevalence of email is a telling part of why things came together better for Interaction than they did in 1995 or 1987. Not everybody has email, but the majority do. Mobile phones are prevalent, incredibly so in the UK where they're maturing and becoming more than a portable telephone after enjoying useful years as no more than that. When the YAFA team had an idea we could just throw it in the right direction immediately. There's an argument to be made regarding face to face planning but it's rarely

## Planning

practical and while phone calls can work they demand immediate attention which it's not always appropriate to give. Email is an excellent stand in and a great way of filing and planning.

I had other ideas. The main one was in a similar vein to the graffiti plan: T shirt art. James approved of the plan but he told me the budget might not be there. He'd looked into T shirts and they were just too expensive. He quoted a figure at me and I did a double take. He was talking about kids shirts costing more than I pay for them in adult sizes in the shops. I told him I could find a better deal than that and he said that since he was very busy he might need me to organise that side of things on his behalf.

Not long after that my employer took my job off me. I spent a month fighting a decision to make me redundant and throughout this period I wasn't required in the office. Whilst concerning personally, this freed me up to take on the task of helping out with the buying side of things for YAFA. I put in an order for T shirts knowing that I would be available to take the delivery. Later, James asked his volunteers to lend a hand with the shopping process and issued us with a list of strange items to look out for in charity shops and car boot sales.

The closest we came to having a team meeting was at a Sproutlore event in Derby when James asked as many of us who could to come along for a bit of a briefing and to wave around our personal identification and fill in the forms. While we performed this business the people around us were getting on with the usual socialising, banter and drinking. When I asked James how things were he took a deep breath before offering a hesitant reply that centred a lot around his feelings in the wake of Eastercon. He'd already read the piece I'd sent to *Plokta* attacking Pete Weston's views and he was surprised that I'd had such a vitriolic response to the negative aspects. He was also peeved by some of the gripes raised less publicly, the way they had been presented in some cases and in others the way that people seemed to be actively looking for something to attack and pointing out problems when it was too late to address them.

As managerial staff in a supermarket, James has always been proud to report that he would deal with obstreperous customers quickly and politely, erasing their concerns and sending them away with a freebie and a promise to do better. The Eastercon "problem customers" prodded nerves that were more raw. "I felt like saying: You don't like how we did it? Fine, next time around we don't bother trying to do that bit." It didn't seem like the old James, the one with big plans for how con staff could avoid burn out issues and rake in the freebies from big companies. Not that he dwelt on it, minutes later he was having a beer and threatening to drop his trousers for unknown reasons. There was another social



event for YAFA staff, a barbecue in July, but I was off in Jersey that weekend and missed it. Plans progressed entirely through email dissemination.

I went on to blag some freebies. The idea of T shirt art plan came from nowhere in particular and I envisioned getting hold of cheap T shirt markers. That was before I started shopping around for them. One of the best things for T shirt art is a plastic based substance that acts similarly to oil paints and dries solid and shiny. I wondered if perhaps it would be possible to get some form of sponsorship and ask one of the companies that makes them to supply us with some for free.

The last Staff Weekend for the con workers was held in Stevenage one weekend in June. Stevenage is some miles from where I live but travelling there was covered by a railcard I was already carrying and friends at the Tun the Thursday beforehand encouraged me to go along.

It was about then that I noticed: I was on staff. They'd tricked me after all! I joked about it, posting to Anonymous Claire: "Hang on a minute. I'm on the staff list for Interaction. How the hell did THAT happen?" I rather underestimated the response. People rallied around with advice. They reassured me that I was not required to do anything I hadn't agreed to, that if this was some form of mistake then to ensure it was sorted I should issue strongly worded letters sent by recorded delivery and checked: was I sure that I was actually on staff rather than just on the mailing list? I had to explain that I'd been kidding. Ang pointed out that I'd gone and said "yes" after all that time I'd spent training her in how to say "no" and James joined in with a huge "Hahahahaha!"

The staff weekend was a revelation. There's a really minute line between the utter fascination of realising just how many things need to be considered to utter boredom as somebody details the many different choices for badge blanks and the exact measurements of them. People kept telling me "You don't have to stay if you're not interested" but it was oddly captivating listening to the details of how things would work. When I eventually did leave a meeting ahead of time Alice Lawson smiled and whispered "You lasted longer than I thought you would." Sadly, none of the other YAFA staff made it but I enjoyed showing around the embryonic programme James had sent us and I used this as a chance to talk to people about asking companies for freebies and making sure I'd be stepping on nobody's toes if I wrote saying I was asking on behalf of Interaction.

I sent off letters after that weekend and heard nothing back for a few weeks. After agreeing a budget for the T shirts with James I started expanding my shopping, picking up anything that seemed like a good buy, particularly if it was directly detailed on the shopping list. The T shirt art looked likely to be performed with permanent markers until one morning I found a message wishing us all the best with our event and delivering around a hundred paints for us to use. I was thrilled – these things retail at two pounds upwards per bottle and all the company wanted in payment was some photographs of the event for use in promotional material.

I started to get a rather concerned about the mounting pile quite early. How exactly was it going to get to Glasgow? Initially James said I needn't worry, I only had to get it as far as London but when I pointed out how far it is from Peterborough to London and how the pile was growing he made alternative



## ***Taking the Staff Role***



plans. The weekend before the con we would be visited by Pat McMurray and a great big truck.

It was indeed a great big truck and it wasn't nearly as full as had been expected although Pat made a point of telling me just how much content had come from Stef. "For guys with barely any budget you've got an awful lot of stuff." Our growing pile was loaded up. By this time it included over £200 worth of equipment. There were T shirts, roller blades, sponge balls, water bombs, a toy guitar, hundreds of markers, the free paints, cricket bats, a swingball set, nearly a hundred blow up toys and all manner of other strange items. Every time I went to

## Setting Up

town I had Yafa on my mind and I'd made a couple of trips out to car boot sales just to round things off. The child sized coffin on the shopping list had me baffled, though.

Somewhere along the line we all received an email. "We have a plan for the initiation. Stef, Elvis, Matt, Graham and I are going to dye our hair blonde. If anyone else wants to join us, please shout now, so we can buy the stuff." Stef followed up pointing out that there was no dying involved, this was all about bleach and I signed up straight away. It seemed like a good idea.

We arrived in Glasgow the day before the convention started and after an unsatisfactory check in at our hotel I made my way through the SECC to Hall 3 (where I was turned around and sent back to pick up badges to gain access), noting as I went that it was, in fact, very large. We shifted stuff around, James and his cohorts discussed what was to go where and by the following morning we had the Yafa area in shape. The boxes of equipment were housed in one corner and diagonally opposite was an old car. Another corner of little interest was full of cardboard boxes and the final quadrant of the room was given over to activity areas. We had a bank of networked computers for typing or playing networked games, a massive pile of Lego bricks, games like Buckaroo, Scaletrix and TV sets with games machines attached. I amused myself later, watching teens file in and argue over whose turn it was to play the 80s video game, Pong.

The work began as soon as we arrived and it never really stopped. A murky corner of a huge hall that eventually housed the art show, dealers room and Yafa was transformed into a kind of den of fun with random things stuck over the makeshift walls throughout the week. We had a tiny admin area near the entrance and next to the main area we had something approaching an auditorium for panels and readings.

In the run up to the event I thought back to residential weekends I'd gone on as a kid and the adults who worked on them. I thought about Camp America style events and the whole thing started to seem really exciting. "I'm looking forward to Worldcon," I told Tobes. "That's because you didn't go to the last one," he told me. Habits die reluctantly. I wondered if I was likely to make friends with any of the kids and which of the events we'd got listed in the programme were going to go down best. I'd never really grasped how we'd have this den with kids just having chill out space and kids and adults coming backwards and forwards constantly. I knew it was a single stream but hadn't really realised that the games would be going alongside the stream and that the children uninterested in, say, rebel training with fake light sabres would still have a place to hang out.



People of all ages flocked to the computer gaming corner.



James tells me that much of this was picked up from working in Child Services while he was on his TAFF trip, the different areas being one of the main points. "They had an office, a chill room, a check in area, a storage room, and programme rooms. Note how our YAFA area had similar spots'."

The first day of the convention I spent most of the morning laminating badges for the kids. If I were to do it all again one of the first things I'd ensure is that there was enough of the right stationery this time around. The badge blanks had been cut to size and folded but needed to go through the laminator, be cut down to the right size, punched and attached to clips to hold them on. Later on we needed a lot of staplers all at once and we had two, one of which had run out of staples. They're little things that get overlooked easily. The laminator was slow, some of the badges needed refolding and all we had to make the holes was a standard hole punch that left a hole approximately a third of the size we thought was required. After kerchunk-kerchunk-kerchunking about seventy percent of the badges we found out that they were actually going to be attached via lanyards made of small plastic balls – this made them less likely to go missing but safe enough that they'd snap apart before a child choked. Two kerchunks less per badge could have saved so much time!

Then the kids arrived. Or, a bunch of them did. There had been some mix up with the opening time of the hall and several people were told we weren't open until 2pm although our programme began at midday. Many of them came in with adults in tow. It was required for under elevens and the policy for older kids depended on what their parents had deemed appropriate. How we dealt with kids coming and going through YAFA was determined by the kind of ribbon they had – something else that James had picked up from the American model.

That Thursday afternoon, the kids watched ice cream being made from raw ingredients and liberally applied liquid nitrogen while we sprayed the hair of others and started work on bleaching the hair of the staff. James charged around making sure everything was in order with his head covered by a plastic bag, protecting the surroundings from the bleach and peroxide he was covered in. Graham, Elvis and Matt went through the process of letting Stef play hairdresser to them with teens adding a helping hand and commentary. One lad looked gleefully on while Graham sat in the chair. "Does it hurt? How about now? Does it hurt NOW? Do me a favour. Let me know when it starts hurting."

We fed them samples of the ice cream while the health and safety man crawled all over the proceedings. I've no idea where James dug up the people with the liquid nitrogen but they did an excellent show, smashing tennis balls and bananas and flowers before moving onto the ice cream. The proceedings were watched by a journalist who spoke briefly to James and later wrote one of the most positive articles about the con for the British broadsheet, The Times, making mention of this "special" room set up for the younger ones to view on-the-spot scientific demonstrations. All the same, the health and safety officer pulled ugly faces when tiny balls of ice skittered across the floor and enthusiastic children reached out to grab them. "It's okay," said the demonstrator, "It's ice, it's perfectly safe." The health and safety man sucked on his pen and wrote something on the paper attached to his clipboard.



## *The Unslaught Begins*



Matt has his hair bleached. Rumour has it he tried to dye it back after the event and it turned an ominous pinkish tinge.



None of what we were doing was hard work by itself but the constant onslaught of questions, production-line style work like the badges and issues to be solved was gruelling. When I went to the staff weekend Alice had been very clear with me. She wanted the Yafa staff to take their breaks and wanted nobody scheduled for more than four hours at a time. "And that includes James!" she warned. "Make sure breaks are taken." Almost entirely due to everyone being too busy, my hair didn't get bleached that day and James left the chemicals on his hair for so long his scalp looked red and angry for the rest of the week.

My schedule was punishing. Nobody forced me into anything and the hours I was down for were not excessive. They did, however, tend to run in blocks that saw me on duty for three hours, off for one then on for another. Sometimes the gaps in my "on duty staff" plan were filled with an hour where I was required on a panel. I never really quite intended to spend most of the convention in Yafa but that's largely what happened. The second day saw a need to have a whole range of equipment inflated and all we had available to put air into the equipment was our lungs. Actually, that's not entirely true. Two of the tiny inflatable Batman castles came with what were claimed to be pumps. They were little yellow plastic concertina style affairs that rewarded hearty foot pumping with a pathetic squeak and little else. We asked around everyone who had driven but nobody had a foot pump with useful connections and even the Ploktoids who'd inflated fluffy beanbag style poufs for the fan room had used hairdryers in their bedrooms to avoid having to exhale excessively. (Later we reached a deal procuring those poufs for the kids, drawing them away from the fan room where they'd been launching themselves onto them enthusiastically and back into Yafa where they would disturb less people). There was nothing else for it: we set about exhaling hard into giant lollipops, baseball bats, castles and gladiator poles and I was forty five minutes into my hour off before I realised I'd missed my break. It was depressing to be depressing those same castles late that night, trying to remove the air again, after the ZZ9 party borrowed and finished with them and wanted them deflated for storage.



The thing about this kind of a task is that the support role itself is monotonous and entirely lacking in glamour. But it's worth it. Look at this kid's face. We did that.

This was largely how the week progressed, with a main task every few hours. Thursday saw me sick to the back teeth of laminated badges. Friday morning had me loathing inflatables, the afternoon had me kicking off the YafaZine (details of that later!) and on the evening Stef and myself finally managed to co-ordinate our schedules well enough that he could apply peroxide and bleach to my hair. Later, onlookers in the fan room wondered if it was some bizarre kind of pirate garb they didn't understand.

## ***I Dyed For Them***

Saturday? Now Saturday was my day off. Ha!

Before I detail just why you can detect a hollow tone in those words,

let me tell you about the whole hair thing.

When the idea was proposed I agreed to it. It sounded like a laugh. I had very little invested in my hair as it stood, in fact the length was getting irritating. I never really thought too hard about why we were doing it until people started displaying surprise. Tobes had considered joining in, despite not being a fully

fledged staff member in the ranks of Yafa but upon watching James sitting there on Thursday afternoon going “Jeez it stings. Is it supposed to hurt this much?” he became dubious. When Stef pointed out that the process can burn the scalp and usually does sting a bit Tobes walked away and didn't come back. People kept asking me if I were sure about this whole hair plan and the reactions to me reminding them of what happened last time I let a James'n'Stef con at my hair were amusing: That time around I walked away bald and significantly richer in the name of Cancer Research. That had been at the appropriately named They Came and Shaved Us which was part of what prompted the idea. This time around the reasons were more dubious but the reactions were just as fun. I struggled to answer the “but why?” with much more than “why not?” and eventually settled on “Well it's Yafa uniform”.

Of course it wasn't. Nobody was required to do anything at all to their hair but it was oddly useful. There was some sense of camaraderie to the process and to watching other people take in the new look on five of us at once: Elvis, Graham, James, Matt and me (none of whom it particularly suited, it has to be said), but that wasn't the useful part. The Yafa room was often crowded. Blonde hair became an identifying mark that it was easy to home in on upon skimming around the room visually. Stef usually has his hair that way, so there were six of us who were easy to spot at a glance and few false positives to foul up the process. At one point James took Stef and Elvis away for a break, a walk and a chat. Somebody came looking for James with some important bit of information or paper or somesuch that had to be passed on. “They went that way,” we told them. “You're looking for three blonde men.” The rhythm of the phrase amused me. I wondered if they were likely to face an encounter with a knife wielding farmer's wife.

After leaving most of the con attendees to watch Lucas Back in Anger and sitting around letting the bleach do its stuff I made my way through the maze that was the Moathouse to the room James had loaned me for bleach removal and nearly blinded myself whilst damaging one of my favourite T shirts. I'd been given a shirt that nobody wanted to use to cover my clothing but made the mistake of wearing it over my own shirt. When I pulled the shirts off the plastic covering on my head that was holding and warming all the bleachy goodness in foam form shifted and the collar of both shirts got covered. I tried to wipe it away but couldn't wash the shirt as I had nothing to change into. I resigned myself to possibly replacing it and decided that although I still had a few minutes to go before removing the foam I'd get to grips with the shower and bath controls. It was one of those fairly typical hotel set ups where the water is delivered via a mixer tap and there's a kind of plunger to pull to make the water come out of the shower head rather than the tap. I turned the cold water side of the tap and started to balance it up with the hot to produce warm water. Disaster struck. Thankfully I was already unclothed, but my head was still plastic wrapped when for no good reason the water started being emitted via the shower instead of the tap.

WHSSHHHHHHPLAT said the shower as it dumped a bucketload of water onto my head. Schlop! went the foam as it squirted out from under the plastic to distribute itself across my face. I have quick reactions and immediately closed my eyes and mouth tight and held my breath for a moment while I wiped away the suds. There was no hope of getting enough gunk out of my eyes to open them and I fumbled inexpertly with the bath controls, knocking shower gel and shampoo all over the bathroom as things clattered into the bath around me. I struggled to first remove the plastic from my head and then from the plug hole



That weird look on my face is due to me feeling I was freezing to death sat outside the Armadillo - we decided that hotel wouldn't appreciate amateur hairdressing in the bar. The weird hair sculpture is entirely down to Stef.



where it was preventing the water escaping and causing the bath to fill. I managed to adjust the water to a lukewarm point and showered slowly, eventually managing to see again and tidy up somewhat while producing water for a more temperate shower. No matter how hard I washed and how much I rinsed it, my hair wouldn't stop feeling slimy. I eventually decided it must be the smoothness of my hair with the outer layer stripped away by chemicals and gave up. When the steam cleared a bit I realised I could have used those extra minutes for the full effect, it was a rather yellow blonde.

The reactions alone made it worth the effort, Alison Scott's double take in particular being quite fun, and towards the end of the week a mother of a Yafa participant who wanted to talk to me told me "They said I'd recognise you by your hair."

It took me well over a week after the convention to adjust to not looking for a blonde when I needed to talk to an authority figure and to stop homing in on them at all. Yeah, I just called that mob "authority figures".

While I ensured I was relieved of duties in Yafa on Saturday, I had other things to attend to, namely the organisation of the Anonymous Claire party. When the schedule came out I had to remind James that I'd told him I couldn't work Saturday afternoon. He pulled me off immediately. "Thats right, you did tell me but I forget, more through tiredness than anything. I have cleared you off from 1pm onwards, would you like to go on other things on other days instead?" I checked down the schedule and realised there was really nowhere to fit in any 'other things'. I declined and wound up going along that morning to see how things were going anyway. It was a great shame I wasn't available to play with Yafa that evening as we stopped to eat before heading over to the Hilton to make final party arrangements and saw the gang gearing up for the masquerade entry. Adults and kids were being transformed into zombies with pallid faces, torn clothing, blood encrusted wounds and giant chains to drag. The effect was interesting but lost something in the beaming sunshine.

James says that masquerade entry was partly down to me. Back at Eastercon there was a section of the programme known as "games with James" and Sunday morning was listed as something to do with zombies. I thought if I wandered along I might help out making up a bunch of kids as zombies and watch them having fun. Pepper had told me the Quidditch session the day before had been great fun with lots of participants. When I arrived, though, there were barely any kids around. Mel had brought his boys and a youngster called Michelle was there but there was nobody else. So we stepped into the breach and did the shuffling for ourselves. "You really got involved with the zombies, we were doing a Kurt Cobain thing for the masquerade originally - hence the coffin on the shopping list - and after the zombie morning, we switched. Stef was the driver there, but you and Pepper were the proof people would buy into it." Stupid as it might sound, Peter Weston's comment regarding the zombies ("too early in the morning" like there's a time limit!) was one of the things that irked me most when he wrote about Eastercon I'm pleased to see that he had a better time at Worldcon and actively praised Yafa on Trufen.net. I actually avoided him a couple of times at Worldcon, not sure if he'd want to argue with me or try to come to an understanding after that article. Every time I saw him I just wasn't up to having a coherent discussion, either due to time constraints or tiredness.



Authority figures

## *Taking Saturday Off*

The Anonymous Claire party was fantastic, if I do say so myself. In fact, I wasn't the only person saying so. It was another of those slow burn tasks that started months beforehand when I posed the question to the Anonymous Claire denizens. I grew concerned when I saw the prices of the rooms but a quick poll showed that we could easily cover the cost of the room with money to spare as people happily indicated what kind of money they were willing to put up. In one instance we had a member who knew full well she couldn't attend the party or even the convention but she wanted to donate a goodly sum for the rest of us and before long we had pledges that left us with quite a budget. I spent at least a couple of months wandering around taking money from people and noting down how much I'd got and what was promised.

I planned the purchases on the way up to the convention by train and organised well in advance of that, that Douglas Spencer would take us on the shopping trip. I brought silly playthings with me for the party including glow sticks (plastic tubes that shine for hours when the chemicals within them are mixed) and rings with little LED circuits in them that let the wearer set them to flash. I tried to make sure that there was something for everybody to drink whether they wanted soft drinks or something harder and when we'd picked up everything that seemed essential including the peanuts and other snacks we bought more daft items like stickers and mini maracas before rounding off the shopping trip in the cheese aisle of the supermarket.

The shopping trip took a couple of hours with three of us in action. I put Tobes in charge of beer and pored over the selection of snacks and strange alcoholic beverages. I was particularly fond of the alcopop that came in four different flavours: Irn Bru, Dandelion and Burdock, Lemon and ... Blue. We rushed Tobes back to the SECC for a stint on the ZZ9 table and headed over to start setting up. Set up took nearly an hour and even though Doug suggested we might empty the nuts into bowls later as it only took a few seconds I was already well aware of how many "few seconds" were going to be involved.

Now, I don't need to plan things in exact detail several months in advance. I know the folly of that, the way that if you think you've got everything covered the rules will suddenly change or some other detail will fall over knocking the plans sideways. But, goddammit, things I've agreed to don't half play on my mind until they're done. I'll wake up in the middle of the night thinking "Oh no, we can't transport the plastic cups easily if we go by train!" or "Should there be a scheme to differentiate between the crisp flavours if we empty them out as nibbles?" every few days, sure, but really, I can put stuff off as long as I need to. Honestly.

It just feels so much better when it's done and if I pledge my support to something I'm going to make sure I do a reasonable job of delivering it. Zero points for seeing where this is going: If you add together the need to deliver, the desire to do all I can, the nasty proneness to stress and the fear of delegating to the wrong person then what you get is a pile of neuroses if you try to put me in charge of something with a long lead time. Remember that: Max doesn't want to be in charge of anything.



The Anonymous Claire party was a private event whereby members were invited to bring friends along but we closed the door on passing booze hunters. The party was massively successful, busy throughout, and ran long into the night.



## The YAFazine

All of which segues neatly into a discussion about the YAFazine.

If you look at the web version of the YAFA programme and seek out the first instance where the fanzine is referred to you'll note (if you're me) something interesting. I'm not listed as a participant. I thought that was mildly odd given that it was me and my big mouth that had led to us grabbing the idea we first used for Tobes' Taff Ting and effectively chaos-fanzining with the kids. I was very definite about making sure we didn't have too tight a deadline and we planned a kick off meeting, time for the kids to produce content, and finally a discussion of what we'd done and what we'd learnt. When James asked me to get a few things ready for the kick off panel I said sure, no problem but I wasn't actually scheduled to be around at that point. James led me gently by the arm to the print out of the programme that we had stuck to the wall near our admin area.

"What does that say, there?" he asked.

I looked. It said "Max **MUST** be on this panel!"

And so I was. It went fairly well. Geneva Melzack and Grant Kruger came along and myself and James Shields joined the kids who were interested in talking about what fanzines were, how we were involved and brainstorming ideas from them about how they could contribute and what they might get out of producing something. There weren't a great number of interested parties, but there were some, plenty for putting the plan into action and over the next day or so they delivered their writing and photographs to us along with some artwork. We'd gone through the details of this in advance – James Shields would bring along the software for doing the DTP, we'd have USB keys to swap data from one machine to another and we'd hammer out the details on the day. With the day having arrived we started to hammer. We talked to John Dowd in the newsroom area and made an agreement to have them print off copies when the machines were available, and we set a deadline of 3pm on Sunday. I typed the pieces that needed doing directly into James' machine and collected writing from the networked YAFA computers to hand them on similarly. Sunday morning, we agreed, James would work with the DTP and I would lend an editing hand in order to meet our cut off point and get the fanzines out early on Monday, hopefully before people started to depart.

Saturday night we partied and we partied hard. The Anonymous Claire party ran well into the night and I believe it was about 4am when I got to bed that night. Sometime around midnight I realised that if I wanted to have more than one drink of wine from the rapidly depleting stocks I ought to pour it and carry it right away. Then I realised that I could avoid carrying more than one drink by just having a really large one. And that is how I came to be drinking a pint of wine in the early hours of Sunday morning. It's not as though I drank it fast or anything, but it did look rather comical and it did lead to me being rather beyond tipsy by the end of the night and not at all in the mood or condition to tidy up the leftovers to hand on to Sproutlore for their party the next night. Meike Benzler and James Shields stepped in to help, for which I am incredibly grateful. I could have done it alone, but it would have taken much, much longer and I knew just how little sleep I was going to get.

After very little sleep I got up and, hell, I felt rough. But it was entirely self imposed and there were things to be done and so although the sight of food made



The YAFazine pages on display, right after they came back from the news room



me feel green, I headed off to Yafa to see what was going on.

What wasn't going on was the reappearance of James Shields and what was going on was stressing out James. There had been a small incident the night before surrounding the masquerade in which there was some unplanned separation of a child and her parents and there was paperwork to be completed. James and Stef, therefore, were poring over a computer while James Shields was not. I don't want to dwell on the details, here, but that morning was one of the worst points for me and when Shieldsy did appear he put his nose to the grindstone and redeemed himself admirably.

But, before that, he let me down. He kind of let Yafa down in a sense, too, in not being there when he was due. He wasn't available by telephone, not even via his wife's number and I felt I needed to get on and do work he was supposed to because I didn't know if I could rely on it getting done otherwise.

I retyped stuff that was sitting on his laptop because that was where I'd typed it the first time, I pulled Ang in to help out, and set about starting the DTP. Then I hit walls (figurative ones) because there was no way to easily transfer the document from my machine. We'd been relying on other machines with different software and my file format wasn't transferable since it came from an esoteric budget DTP program. I tried switching to doing the layout in Word but I've only ever used it for straight text and couldn't bully it into doing what I wanted with flowed text and images. After some frantic experiments with printer drivers and software that might have created PDFs if we could install in rather than drag/dropping the files from another machine via a USB key, we settled on just getting the DTP done and hoping for the best further down the line. Stef tried to offer support by way of advice but he was really quite engrossed in sorting stuff out with James for the incident report and there was general Yafa madness going on around us. Tempers were on a hair trigger all around with the stress and my stomach was in furious knots, not entirely down to the hangover.

When James Shields did arrive, well after he was expected, he made his way over to me and said softly, "I think I owe you an apology." I've no way of telling for sure but I think that he expected a response along the lines of "Ah, don't worry about it."

I fixed my eyes on him and said slowly, calmly but very firmly. "Yes. Yes, you do." He apologised profusely. Later Angie, his wife, told me that he'd spent much of the night throwing up. It wasn't the apology or any sense of sympathy for his feeling bad that made me feel better about it, though. What made me feel better about it all was the way he took over from where I'd got to, worked out a way to move the file from an esoteric DTP client into postscript and from there to PDF and sat down and worked really hard at making the fanzine look decent (although we realised after the event that the formats got muddled between paper sizes on the way across, leading to stupidly wide margins and shrunken pages). James Bacon calls it "style".

I have a hard time forgiving. There's a dichotomy in my head. I feel I shouldn't be hard on people, there's no point bearing grudges and all it will do is lead to bad feelings. But then there's the other side. If I'm let down then I'm aggrieved and

## *Desk Top Stress*



Yafa's resident artist, Anne Stokes, works on transforming kids into zombies for the masquerade



Day after day kids turned up and enjoyed themselves. I was amused to hear of one girl not yet in her teens who reported it all seemed a bit childish, particularly when there were adults turning up to most of our programming. Peer carefully at this picture and you'll notice Alex McLintock in the background.

why should I just let that pass and be walked over? I try to balance things up but knowing that this kind of thing happens is what makes it so damned hard for me to delegate at all and if you let me down you have to scrape your way back into my good books. I do want to reiterate, though, that James Shields did a sterling job on taking over when he got there and the look and feel of the YAFAzine is largely down to his efforts. At one point I imagined losing the big chunk of time off that I had scheduled that day and it was a great relief to find out I was freed up after all. I even watched panels elsewhere. I couldn't quite let go, though, I kept coming back to check things were going okay. "We need a title," James Shields pointed out. "Let's just call it the YAFAzine," I said. Maybe we should have thought of that bit earlier, brainstormed that with the kids but, hey, it worked.

Of course, this low point was the perfect time to go and take my mind off things a bit with a visit to the art show. Too bad they'd closed it to do an audit ready for the auction.

Later on Sunday, after much effort we reached a stage where we were able to collate the YAFAzine. I ran around organising getting it printed, racking up a few "I owe you a favour" points with Alex McLintock in the process and begging or borrowing each and every stapler we could find. I was keen to get the whole thing pulled together and out that evening although the first plan had seen us holding that part over until the next morning. It had started to sink in that this wasn't going to last forever, people were going to start leaving within hours and the sooner we got things done the better. It was a moment of melancholy. Even though I was doing weird overstressing things to my body I didn't want it all to stop. I don't think I faced a single moment where I needed to get away from people. Laminators? Yes. The dark of Hall 3? Now and then. The smell of stale sweat on the YAFA teens? You betcha. But the people? Not once.

My body was stressed. My eyes were tired. I hadn't eaten properly for days. On the Friday evening, before I had

## *Low Points*

my head covered in gunk and people started running off to watch the play or dress up as pirates I'd hit a really odd blood-sugar place. I found some odd plane of existence that I think it usually takes drugs to reach. I arranged to meet Tobes in the Argyll, the fan area where the real ale bar was. I arrived there and found a free seat so I sat down. I realised then that I hadn't bought a drink but I couldn't quite summon the energy to get back up. My feet were hurting a lot by that point. People have said, since, that it is largely due to the concrete flooring in Hall 3 and other parts of the SECC but my feet took some horrid punishment and we'd given up walking the thirty minutes between our hotel and the con centre on the first day. Maybe it was being on my feet all day when at home I spend most time at the computer, or perhaps it was the nasty flooring, but I had a blister for every toe (though not evenly spread) and a horrible ache in my feet that had me massaging them most times I got a chance to sit. But it wasn't just my feet at this point. All the energy was sapped from my body and the effort of blinking seemed too much. I found myself staring at the square patterns in the carpet, gazing intently at them and losing all sense of what was going on around me. I just utterly zoned out. When Tobes caught up with me my mood was up and down



and eventually we realised why and administered a baguette. Several bites into it I was back to normal but after that I became very aware of what I was (or wasn't) eating. I'd managed a bit of fruit but the odd bit of lettuce garnish on a tuna baguette doesn't really constitute vegetables. After we stapled the YAFazine and shared it out between the gophers who would distribute it and the pile for Ops to keep for Yafa the next day, we went out with Jim de Liscard and Meike to the halls of residence they were in, where we feasted on Indian takeaway. That night I went along to the Sproutlore party and James brought along some of the Yafa kids. Yells of M'hinge! Were replaced by sound shouts of "YA-FA YA-FA YA-FA" but I had to leave. My body simply wasn't up to staying awake any longer and my feet hurt so much I didn't want to leave my seat which isn't really conducive to good partying.

Monday was fun. It started out with the joyous looks on the faces of a couple of the kids who'd seen the YAFazine project through. They seemed pretty thrilled to be holding the final thing and showing it off to people. Giulia de Cesare dropped by with a certificate from the masquerade where the zombies had won an honourable mention from the judges. There was a nice atmosphere, people were relaxed and there was a sense of achievement, understated but just perceivable.

Monday was also the day that the invasion was planned to take place. I understand the original plan had been a bit off the wall, involving marching the kids into some programme item with water pistols. There was some lingering confusion over what was going on as up until around midday myself and Ang were under the impression that it was the Fan programme's closing ceremony set to be assaulted, but in fact it was a separate panel that had been set up for the purpose of invasion. The panel was named "The future of fandom" and posed the question: Where will the new fans come from? Well, it's been talked about rather a lot since it happened and the answer was "the door at the back". The panellists were primed although the audience wasn't. I didn't know they'd been kitted out with water pistols themselves – we'd pulled back the plan a bit, with thoughts of the state of the hotel carpets, and we prepared the youngsters for their mission by handing over the inflatable toys again and giving them goggles, face masks, whistles and sirens but no water.

## *Hanging Out with the Kids*

grips with Stef constantly telling the kids what we were going to be up to "this weekend". If weekends are that long I want his working hours! I knew a couple of the girls who were involved in doing the fanzine and a few names stuck for various, not always good, reasons. I spent most of my "interacting with the kids" time saying things like "Would you like a paint brush to help spread the fabric paint across the shirt?" or "The hall is closing, you're going to have to quit the game so I can turn off the computer, now," or "You two, stop, whoah, STOP. If you can't keep in the area over there I'm going to have to confiscate these. You can't run around like that right next to the Scalextric!"

When I look back it seems bizarre how few of the kids I got to know. I was impressed when other staff knew their names, I had to rely almost entirely on badges, although faces were became more familiar by the end of the week. I never quite got to



Gavin, one of the Yafa youngsters, enjoys a foaming pint of something laced with liquid nitrogen at the Sproutlore party.



Jessie poses.



The Yafa invaders. For an exercise in demonstrating the unreliability of eye witness reports examine this picture and note: not a single kid is carrying a water pistol. The panellists were prepared and had their own but numerous reports put them in the hands of the invaders.

On Monday, though, I got to know Jessie and Miranda as I took them on ahead to see the invasion first hand. Their parents had given permission for them to leave the Yafa zone but they weren't keen on donning goggles, face masks and helmets and running through Glasgow with the intent to thwap people. Instead they wanted to pose for photographs with a jousting stick, pretend it was a horse, and observe the fun. We headed out of the area towards the panel slowly, only to find the other kids were taking a different route through the back door. Having no idea whether this was a shorter route we pelted it through the SECC to the Moat House and headed into the panel. "Are you the advance guard?" Mark asked. He'd been appointed sentry duty and was keeping an eye out for rampant kids, ready to warn the panel the arrival was imminent. We sat for a long time in the room, the girls giving me the odd panicked look. "Are we definitely in the right room?" one of them whispered urgently. We really needn't have run.

Eventually, as somebody explained that things have changed and in the past women were largely expected to gaffiate if a fannish couple had children, Mark came in and waved to the front of the room. Within seconds there were kids everywhere and I had my camera shooting like crazy, not realising things were so fast that most of the images were blurred. The noise level was really quite high and I hoped that the audience wasn't going to see this as something other than the bit of fun it was meant to be. I had a nasty feeling the reviews could go either way. It turned out that the majority of the audience thought it was great – particularly since the panel were clearly prepared and Flick was doing an admirable Lara Croft impression with dual wielded water pistols. As the noise and kerfuffle died down James could be heard shouting "Retreat! Retreat!" so we did. The girls were delighted and the rest of the kids were on a bit of a high, too.

We regrouped outside by the car. Oh yes. The car. That's a story in itself. Mark and Claire were amused to read through the programme in its foetal form at the staff weekend, noting points like how the "customise a vehicle" workshop had only one item on the shopping list, that being "a vehicle". But Yafa did indeed get the vehicle, towing an old banger of a Peugeot from its sorry grave, across Glasgow to be given a new lease of... well, death I suppose. It arrived in Hall 3 on Thursday before we opened and sat quietly in the corner while the Health and Safety man wandered around it silently before talking to James. They wanted to know if it was driveable. Was its battery flat? Had it been drained of all fluids? Had we got drip mats underneath it?

## *The Car*

That guy was a pain in the posterior from the moment he arrived to the moment we were finally rid of him. He was freaking out about children touching the horror that is ice in pieces the size of average hail stones. He acted as though he lived in a world where cars aren't allowed on the streets because they're so prone to exploding. Throughout the week we had no serious injuries at all and I was rather expecting some, what with letting the kids play Quidditch style games on roller blades. In fact, the greatest casualty of Yafa was James' head, burnt to a nice bright red with hydrogen peroxide. Why? Because instead of washing out the chemicals when he should have done, he spent over an hour with Stef panicking about what the hell to put down for a "risk assessment" the H&S guy was demanding for the whole programme. I saw Stef peering through the list.

“Lego train,” he pondered before putting down “Small choking risk.” I wasn't helping much by watching over his shoulder so I left before he decided what to describe as evasive action to be taken in case of a Lego train careering into a child's throat.

James explains, “He was really freaking me out, giving me a really hard time, actively giving out to me. Fortunately Emma King had a risk and safety document to hand and I passed that to him and explained that I had sent one to his office. He was really, really unhappy and wanted the nitrogen thing to stop, wanted to chastise whoever brought to his office, wanted to stop the item.” James went up the chain of responsibility winding up talking to somebody called Jacquie. Things settled down, with a big plus: “I have no idea what she said, but they left us alone. Then they gave us permission to cut up the car, outside, which was really cool, we never intended to cut it up, but use wood. That was wonderful.” The guy had clearly been out of his depth and I've heard since that he was merely deputising at the time, possibly explaining his edginess. No matter what the reason, if he'd had the power seemed to feel he had he could have harmed YAFA terribly.

So the customised vehicle had chunks cut out of it one evening outside while Elvis learnt that pound shop value isn't necessarily value as he burnt one blade after another in the angle grinder, chopping through the roof of the car according to the kids' specifications. As James mentions, this had to be done outside and it was one of the more frustrating moments. Because Hall 3 was closed the SECC had security guards on all the doors. Because the car couldn't be left outside we needed security available to re-open the door to bring the car back in (a strange experience as every time the doors opened wind rushed through the halls pulling papers off the walls and throwing around any light equipment). Because security needed to be around, so did Marcia Illingworth.. Marcia wanted to eat since she only had a short break before she was due on a panel and it was frustrating for everyone that we were sitting around waiting while Elvis willed the grinder to go faster, endlessly convinced that the car door Matt and Stef were holding would come off any moment. Hall 3 wasn't a bad position for YAFA but the security issues were annoying and it did encroach a little into other people's plans. Julie Rigby was disappointed that the art show couldn't have relaxing music playing but wrote off the idea upon realising she was next door to YAFA. I'm sure the tales of Brian Ameringen launching a chair across the room in frustration during one of YAFA's most noisy events are exaggerated but I understand due to his position trying to sell books just outside the YAFA area he became rather aggravated. But I digress.

With bits removed and sharp edges made safe the car was brought back in and the children attacked it with paints and further customisation the next day. One minor criticism I did hear about YAFA was that a lot of the things seemed to be very boy oriented. I'm not sure that's the case given that creative writing is often seen as a more “girl” type subject along with the art of the shirt painting. Perhaps there was some boy bias, James says that he has a rule of thumb and things only get into his programme if he can imagine wanting to go along to it as a participant. However, I don't think anyone who saw the final decorated car could say it was the work of the boys alone, despite the gun sight mounted on the roof and the huge wooden wing-like rocket launcher structures: in great big letters across the hood the word GIRLS stood large and proud.



When you take your car to the scrapheap do you ever consider this is how it might wind up?





Kids in the car

After the invasion we gathered around the car for team photographs. Then James led the second revolt against the panellists. "They'll never expect us a second time!" We charged inside again. One of the funniest things I saw all week was the look on Mark Plummer's face at that point. He'd been prepared for the kids the first time but the second coming just hadn't occurred to him. After things had settled down he decided to leave the room where the panel was somehow managing to continue and timed it just perfectly. As Mark approached the door of the room from the inside James had paused for Pete Weston to take a quick picture, surrounded by kids and blow up toys. Mark opened the door to find himself facing a horde of children who immediately restarted their chanting "YAFA YAFA YAFA" and the look of abject horror as he backed away was something I just wish I'd had the quick wits to catch on camera, but I was probably laughing too much.

Things died down, there were more pictures, and then James said "They'll never be expecting us a THIRD time!". I felt it was getting a bit old. It was one of those "What? Why?!" moments and I thought we'd probably overstayed our welcome. Stef seemed to think so as well. "They'll never be expecting it... NEXT YEAR!" he tried, but it was no use, James was off, kids in tow. It turned out this was actually quite funny as the original panellists felt the joke was over, they'd done their bit and were going to wrap it up there. But then, Flick tells us, "Some of the audience got up and made a new panel. And then they got attacked by YAFA as well!". Upon returning to the car the kids piled in and then James got into the driving seat and Elvis, Matt and some others got into position to push it back to its position near YAFA. I urged the kids out of there and upset poor Jessie and Miranda who had started out with perfect seats. As soon as they climbed out other kids took their place and the car started moving. I felt quite bad but although upset they were some way off inconsolable.

And then it was all about winding down. We gave stuff away to the kids and started tidying away the piles of stuff. One particularly enterprising girl took away some fake blood every time her turn came around for picking something. "I'm going to use it at school," she explained to me. "You fake an injury and you get sent to the nurse's office. It's really cool if you do it during a test."

We paused our tidying and headed over to see the closing ceremony but there was acting. And singing. We left again and carried on dismantling the YAFA zone. There was a huge pile of stuff to be trashed and an equally big pile to go into storage for Eastercon. Tearing everything down was weird, the place had become familiar and we gutted it.

It was a fantastic experience. I got to know everyone who was on that team a lot better than I had done previously and everywhere I went I was hearing good things about YAFA. In the early moments of the con, when people started to filter in for the first items James was constantly encouraging me to "Take pictures! Take photographs, make it look busy!" with a tone of urgency that suggested crowds might be rare and people wouldn't come. We had kids there every day, loads of them, many with parents in tow. "She loves it here," one toddler's mother told me, extracting a Lego brick from her daughter's mouth. "Here and Happitots, that's where I've spent my Worldcon!" Personally I never did work out where they were hosting the childcare for the younger ones, just as I never found out where most of the programme was happening.

There were low moments, most of them I've covered. There was a constant air of something happening and something always needed doing. I was disappointed that I missed the Big Bangs item, for example, as I wasn't on duty at that point and thought I could just sit and watch, but once we gathered the audience and put them at a sensible distance away from the things we were about to explode James realised we really ought to be recording the fact that we had the chairman down here doing the legwork and risking life and limb in the absence of Emma, our team chemist who wasn't well. So I took a photograph and ran it down to the newsletter room, realised we needed a story to go with it, wrote one and wandered back and it didn't seem worth going back outside, given the time. And sadly that was the one item that over-ran causing James to make a judgement call and cancel the next item. All I saw of the bangs was Vince in a white coat and the tiny splintered remains of what had been a bucket being carried back inside. James says it's a consequence of running things. "We are lucky to see, say, 30% of what's going on as we may be carefully watching over or minding or observing rather than partaking or listening, so even say Ian Banks' panel, which I was at for a few minutes and which was going on next door, apart from the head count and the noise and clapping, I didn't see it. I was in YAFA, though."

I have no recollection of how I spent Monday afternoon, but I know I was exhausted. Everyone seemed to be and the Dead Dog and staff-only parties were nothing to write home about from my point of view. People were distracted and tired and come the end of the night people couldn't even give away free beer. It took me longer than I wanted to spend to drag Tobes away but I needed the rest again and wasn't really managing to wind down in the Argyll, so it wasn't the best of notes to leave on.

## *Worth it*

YAFA dominated my Worldcon. James was concerned. "You don't feel like I'm stealing your Worldcon from you, do you?" he asked at one point. I didn't. I chose for myself how to play the Worldcon game and it paid off.

In my life I have a variety of things I'm pleased about; things I'm grateful for, people I'm incredibly happy to know. What I don't have a lot of is pride. I am proud of YAFA, though. I'm downright proud that I helped make it happen. That took effort and the effort paid off.

I don't want to be in charge of things but I'm glad to be noticed as a bit player. I don't want to sign up to anything well in advance because I know it will make me stressed. I don't want to try to play the part of a con runner because I don't belong there under the "runner" banner, it would turn me into a nervous wreck. I never even wanted to follow the old advice about volunteering and con going. Well meaning people told me that I should go to my first few cons alone to force me to interact with people, and I should take on the gopher role because then you do a useful job and you get to know who people are. Somebody recently told me that they always feel uncomfortable when it's time to welcome in a new fan and they have nothing to say to them. "What if it turns out they're boring anyway? What if they imprint on me and it's too late and they seek me out and follow me around for years?" I never wanted to be in that position from either side and I don't want to try to make friends of strangers with falteringly bad introductions. I'm



Vince makes things go bang and Terry Pratchett reads to the kids. Just two of hundreds of events I didn't get to see at Worldcon.





downright bad at that kind of thing and stick with introductions from friends or getting to know other fans online.

But what I will offer is legwork. If I know who I'm doing something for and why it needs doing then I'll get right down to it if I have the time to commit. If I don't, or it's a task I don't see myself doing well then I have no qualms whatsoever about saying so. I didn't tell Ian Sorenson to fuck off when he tried to convince me to take a part in Lucas Back in Anger, way back at Eastercon but the message was there.



There are things I can do and things I can't and the "can do"s largely fit into the Anonymous Claire admin role. That's something else I'm proud of – many attendees at the AnonC party said that they really enjoyed themselves, that that was one of the high points of the convention. I did that. I shopped and planned and organised and I pulled it off. Others helped, of course, and essentially it wasn't my work, it was the people who were there that created the spark, that made it good. Yafa wasn't that different, really. Arrange a few logistics, have a few ideas, bash them out and hope someone comes along and enjoys them.

Tobes tells me that one of the reasons he was so down on Interaction is because he thought that lessons of the past wouldn't have been learned. He was glad to be proven wrong. However, he also levels another accusation at Worldcons in general. "They're too big! You see someone you haven't seen for years and if you don't have a conversation there and then you've missed your chance because you don't know where they are for the rest of the week!"

The T shirt art was one of the highlights for me. My idea, my supplies, general Yafa execution and it worked.

He's kind of right. On the other hand, I immersed myself in a programme stream for kids and barely left it. I saw a handful of panels that weren't Yafa-bound and they were all in the Fan stream. I don't even know where the rest of the programme took place. Despite this I saw plenty of people I'd never met before and reacquainted myself with others such as Damien and Juliette, the GUFF winners. There were people I missed. I'd wanted to at least say hello to Jo Walton for the first time and expected to see more than five minutes of



Yvonne Rowse. But I met Dave Weingart and David Cook and more of the Third Row guys and no end of other people. I saw people I don't see all that often. I always had something to do if I wanted it. But I missed a huge amount. If I had a time machine I'd seriously consider forgoing handling the JFK assassination and just taking a number of trips back to Worldcon to see the rest.

I could live at Worldcon. I want to go back to that weird place where every time I walked through the SECC I saw Dave Langford (Did he ever leave those corridors? Or does he already have the time machine?). I want to see my friends win their Hugos. I want to take part in the masquerade entry and go and see Simon Bradshaw's 3D slides and investigate the writing workshops and sit in on myriad other panels I just didn't have time for. I'd like to look at the rest of the programme and be able to go to things. I kept the programme book but I don't want to read it now because I'll only be annoyed by seeing more of what I missed. I want to see the art show when it's not all being dismantled and sold. I want to go out to eat with friends and share a taxi where the driver knows your destination as soon as you get in. I saw so much, and I

missed much more and I don't know when I can go again. Worldcons live in America most of the time. That's even further than Glasgow and getting there is logistically more complex.

That is why I will support any future British Worldcons. I think running them is getting easier. Con runners are learning from earlier mistakes and the way things come together is a little bit different each time. Before we got together at the con the YAFA staff probably hadn't been in the same room since They Came And Shaved Us, if ever. We did most of the planning online. We didn't all get especially involved in the pre-con preparation but we could have done. I was shopping hundreds of miles away from where James was planning things and Matt was storing a bunch of stuff, too, creating an incredibly wide triangle. At the convention itself we had a list of one mobile numbers for staff. I think I called James two or three times for information or a quick decision or to let him know someone had dropped something off. These are everyday things now that and they probably weren't really possible last time Britain played host to a Worldcon. If you had a mobile you were a fairly early adopter and who knows what the coverage was like? Email addresses were rare.

Even though I would support another Worldcon over it's not something I can commit myself to helping with from the outset. I look at the lead times involved with a kind of horrified fascination. I don't know how people can offer up their spare time years and years in advance. I don't know where I'll be in two years, let alone six or ten. I don't know how people can have the confidence to guess what they'll be up to and plan to work towards something that far away. I know there's an argument that says you can always back out and you're not tied to any of it but my sense of responsibility and obligation *would* tie me to it. I would find it difficult to back out if people were relying on me to do something. Even James and Stef reckon the ideal lead time is two years and they put Damn Fine Con together in only 9 months. Years and years? That's just crazy. But the people who do it are a good kind of crazy.

The next James'n'Stef con, it looks like it could be some time in coming. Way back when James was taking *Tommyworld* by storm with his rousing proclamations about the way to make Worldcon a success he was fairly dismissive of the burn out issue. "A claim made, is that due to the amount of effort it takes other conventions never get to happen, and for a while afterward the burnout factor means there are less people to do the normal stuff. I cannot agree with this exactly as I have been to a lot of conventions since 1995," he said. He said, "I just assumed that after doing something as huge and amazing like a Worldcon that you would take a break, anyhow, the same thing happens with Octocon every three years or so. People get burnt if they do too much. The way to avoid burnout is to only take on a set job, with set out tasks, and stick to it, pacing yourself." It's all terribly self-fulfilling. He recently told me, "I just know that Stef, Elvis and myself are at a barrier now, we need a break, so that its fun again when we get back into running cons".

It's weird, though, hearing it first hand. You kind of expect James to bounce back with energy from nowhere and throw himself into the next big project. James' girlfriend, Simoné is disappointed, she's never been to a James'n'Stef convention and won't any time soon. James points out that there are other things going on in the same vein, Convivial 2, for example. Other people have talked about running daft cons but never quite get around to it. James cites Jim de Liscard's "Boa con" and says it would be nice to go along and not be running things for once. He's also getting awfully watchful of his age, calculating how





old he'd be if he were helping on a con in any given year. I overheard him saying that he didn't know if he'd still want to be doing Yafa style events in years to come if he were married with kids of his own. He rarely makes a definite proclamation but there's clearly some concern there. It's a shame but this stuff happens.

Was it worth it? Is it worth people spending ten years or so preparing for what amounts to a five day long party? I think it is, and here's why: There were upwards of four thousand people at that convention, from all over the world. You simply don't get that anywhere else. Even though I was ensconced in a small corner of a large hall for much of the time I mingled with Swedes, Germans, Americans, Australians and Brits without even trying. Sure, I missed loads of people but if I were really that bothered I could have arranged meetings, made sure I was around their programme items, found a phone number in advance. The reason we didn't meet was we were doing our own things and that's the beauty of it. Our own thing was there, available for us. The media, literary, science, filk, comics and off the wall Yafa streams were all available and nobody I know of felt that any area was too badly under-represented. The convention crossed barriers in terms of areas of fandom and in terms of distance and it was a chance to get together and have fun.

If the next James'n'Stef convention is a while in coming, so be it. I mean, I'd love them to announce tomorrow that they're doing something next year and Simon Pegg is a guest and they've got a budget of thousands but it's not going to happen. Meanwhile, we've done something useful for those kids. I was previously dubious about the children we'd be catering to in Yafa. I assumed they'd be there because their parents wanted to be and they'd think almost by default that what their parents were into was not cool and nothing they wanted to be a part of. I didn't imagine the next generation of fandom coming via the kids of today's. I think I was wrong. Flick's sidekick, Abi, who was doing the party reviews for the newsletter, Peter Westhead, the friendly guy I was showing digital pictures to on the train home, Pete Weston's daughter who gets a mention in his write up of the Hugo awards; they're coming along of their own free will these days. There must be more I'm not seeing.



I hope I'm around when the Yafa kids come back and say "Yeah, I was here back in 2005, don't you remember me? You tied me to a platform and covered me in paint and put the boiler suit I'd been wearing in the art show."

Linda Krawecka put it well back over on *Tommyworld*:

*Where's the pay-off for a worldcon committee or worldcon volunteers? It has to come in the form of either self congratulation - i.e. knowing that you've done a good job and "feeling good" about it (nothing wrong with that!) or it comes from peer recognition and appreciation. Getting that slap on the back, let-me-buy-you-a-drink, hip hip hurrah kind of thing from fellow fans. [...] burnout in the form of exhaustion is inevitable & understandable. But burnout because you've been hit by the Super Moaners and Arrogant Fans can only be combated by maturity (fnar fnar) and a certain ability towards looking at the donut & not at the hole.*

Mmm. Donuts.



# Programming Perils

(or: The Importance of Being a Good Participant and Having a Good Programme.)

By James Bacon

It's unfair to wish that every author and professional be as entertaining and engaging as Megan Lindholm and Kim Newman but YAFA was very lucky this summer. I can confidently say that 99% of participants were brilliant.

The toughest part of getting the programme together was, along with Stef, playing ideas merchant and coming up with plans and then matching participants to them. Despite asking various people, we didn't have the knowledge to just ring Janice Gelb, who seems to know every US participant that exists. It was tough because we just didn't know who had expertise in various areas. I find it annoying after a panel to meet someone who would have been brilliant on it, but it's not unusual.

I asked about and we received quite a few suggestions but it was one of the tougher aspects of putting YAFA together.

Claire Brialey and Farah Mendelsohn were both very helpful and the participant form that people filled in was also great, but not all pro's filled it in, and some weren't in time for the programme to be put to bed.

Of course, we realised this didn't matter too much as we just put people onto panels, anyhow, and the reality is that it's the actual panel on the day that matters. Why leave an expert out because they aren't mentioned in the programme guide?

I mention Kim and Megan as they are both outstanding. I personally believe that Kim Newman is the best programme participant the UK has. I know of no one more entertaining, erudite and well read who has the savvy, cynicism and healthy disrespect that normal guys like me can really relate to. Any programme item he was on was superb. The Hugo ceremony with Paul McAuley was amazing, and he just really makes an effort.

Megan (also known as Robin Hobb), on the other hand, is a different example, she is the convention runner's dream. Here is part of what she wrote on her participant form in the section that covered stuff she'd like to talk about:

*Robin Hobb*

- *Getting started as a young writer: Why teenagers (or younger writers) should start to write Right Now. Scams that prey on beginning writers.*

- *Research: when is the Internet NOT a good source? What are your sources?*

- *Young writers and the Internet; protecting yourself*

- *Livejournal, Diaryland and other 'write about yourself' sites: Are these useful training grounds or distractions from learning to write? Why fan-fiction is not a good way to learn to be a writer.*

Now is that good or what? We know a good idea when we see it and after a matter of seconds of thought a programme idea came instantly to mind:

*Career Guidance: how to get into the trade.*

*Why Teens should start writing now, scams and rip offs to avoid and how to enter the trade. These are all subjects Robin Hobb feels strongly on. Along with an esteemed panel, she offers an insight into the business*

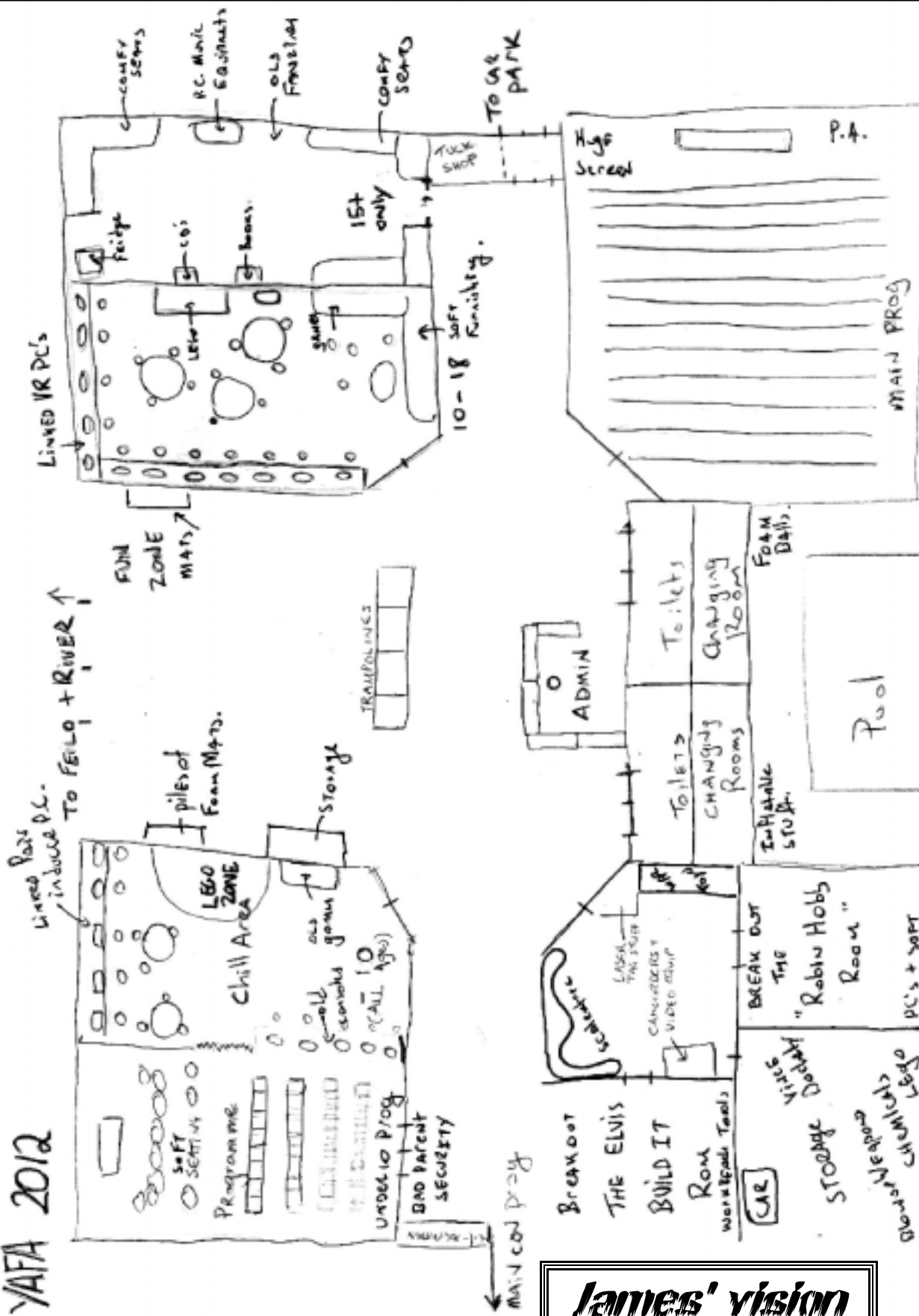
Now that's what I call easy programming, and I have to tell you that it was a rare thing to find such a perfect suggestion.

At one stage I was keeping track of the 'wank list' as I called it. These were all the people who gave an idiotic, wanker of an idea of why they should participate in YAFA. Stef thought this was amusing, but pointless. At least 14 people said they just wanted to 'do a workshop'.

Why do mediocre writers, I have never heard of all want to run



YAFA 2012



*James' vision for the future*

a workshop for teenagers? Well, I worked it out immediately. It can't go wrong, they won't be shown up as vacuous and they can self praise their own skill by propagandising its success. If I were a new writer, I would immediately go for it, how can you go wrong? So I wasn't having that.

It was YAFA policy that if we were going to have participants involved they would be the cream of the convention, not the dregs of the barrel. Now, this isn't anything about how many books published or fame levels or stuff like that, its about having an excellent profile, good experience and also being a good participant. So you can see how the 'I write and have teenagers, I think I would be well suited to YAFA' compares with the exact same sentiment from Megan above: It doesn't.

We were lucky that most people were happy to work with us. About a dozen or so came back and queried exactly what we were doing, and I wrote them an honest email, about how YAFA was an experiment, how we might have six or sixty people along and that we were providing engaging programming for the teens at the convention. Some authors still had misgivings, which is fair enough, but all were dispelled at the convention. I had no complaints from anyone at the con although I wouldn't, would I? Maybe someone did have a complaint, but I never heard it.

There was only one participant we would never ask to take part in any programme item again. I shall not name them as it would be unfair but surprisingly they had been recommended to me. The first problem with this person arose when I was introducing a panel. Another YAFA thing was to greet and thank all participants. If I couldn't, then Stef would, and if Stef wasn't there then the team of people assigned to that programme item would be our fallback. We like to meet participants, thank them, and introduce them. It's a nice thing to do. I know I don't do an amazing job, but its better than a cold start.

I introduced the panel and the item. I already had introduced myself as one of the area heads. The panel knew who I was. Immediately this panellist took the mic, and before I had even walked a pace, I heard. "Well we won't mind anything that you have to say, we'll just go about this our own way".

Now this is interesting. In order to impose their personality and authority they decided to impose a change. That's cool. Unfortunately instead of just changing the panel, in an attempt to further impress, they also disrespect me. That would normally be okay but not in front of eighty kids who I will at some stage or another have to deal with, and not when I am expected by everyone to take full responsibility for these kids. That's wrong.

I laughed, and walked away waving my hands; it's the best way but deep down, I wanted to wrench that



person off the panel and tell them to fuck off. Stef understood but as usual we were cool enough to deal with it well. He was as angry as I was.

Later, I was speaking to Maura McHugh, moderator extraordinaire, and I mentioned only one person had been a cunt so far. She interrupted me, said she had a problem with a person while moderating for YAFA, and before I could mention a name, she said it. Apparently our participant had been rude and overbearing and even pointed at her watch when there was five minutes to go, which considering Maura's excellent work was rather patronising.

I called Stef over as Maura told me more. Participant X made a point of saying how important it was that they listen to young people, that they had so much to offer and how vital that was. A young person 30 seconds later interrupted to ask a question and was promptly silenced and cut down. Subsequently the question was ignored and the diatribe continued. This was against everything YAFA had set out to be, Maura brought the questioner back in at a later stage, but already the damage was there. We had said that bullying, ignoring, speaking over and cutting down the youth was not allowed and here was our

person doing these foul, heinous things.

We agreed that we live and learn. Never again.

Of course, Maura in her own right was a true asset, as important as everyone else in my YAFA team but I truly hadn't realised that before hand. Maura was on the Octocon committee with me in 1993 as Chair and was Co-Chair with me by 1996. Great times. She was a student then and is a scholar now, continually doing courses and adding to her knowledge. She is well read and has a very natural way about her. We asked Maura to moderate about 6 panels as we wanted someone at the coal face we could trust to make sure the 'YAFA values' were enforced. She was perfect. Immediately after we asked her she contacted all the other panellists and got conversation going and started encouraging and preparing.

I had already leaned on her for idea development and panellist suggestion. An example is the Tolkien panel.

**James:** I need a Tolkien Panel

**Maura:** How about: Does Tolkien's misogynistic British Christian writing still have relevance to kids today?

**James:** Cooooooooool.

Something I learnt: although I had realised good moderators were important if I were to do it again Maura would be more inducted into the YAFA team as would other moderators like Jim de Liscard and Geneva Melzack. They also did a great job.

I was totally disappointed that I missed out on utilising a few authors. I was under pressure to complete our programme and it was tough going, to be honest. Ian Stockdale had said that it wasn't a panic, that I could submit our programme late, so I did. To my chagrin, I also missed the first posting of what participants were going to be doing, but all seemed okay.

I didn't realise that I was undoing myself at that stage. By missing this deadline, which at the time seemed okay, I was losing out, or rather, YAFA was losing out. Other areas had also chosen or selected participants, and I didn't realise that we were all in competition. So when it came to Sarah Ash and Susanna Clarke, they weren't available for YAFA. I found this a considerable blow, as they had agreed to do a set amount of stuff and that was fulfilled. This rightly pissed me off.

It wasn't anyone's fault but my own, but I

did question the motives and fairness of this situation and queried why YAFA was being marginalised, which may have been unfair, but I hadn't realised the full implications of being late and I was bloody angry at the changes this would mean. I even wrote to the authors and asked them to reconsider but they had said what they were doing in their form, so it was a no go.

That was a disappointment. No one ever lets me down as badly as myself.

The programme had to change constantly. It was hard work, and the distance between the rest of the con and the YAFA area then caused more changes. Again I felt that YAFA got the short straw on that one, but then we got the space we needed, so it's a Peter and Paul thing.

It's so hard to alter a programme like YAFA. we had sought a balance. The first change was because of availability of authors, then it was because of clashes with other programme items, then it was participants on items before or after YAFA, then it was people changing their minds.

First off the programme team sent us back my programme all changed about, but not taking into account the balance of subjects and genres that we had spread through the week. Just like the rest of the con, we had Anime, Comics, TV, Films, Books, Science and Art as well as just fun, and I had worked out, based on Noreascon's programme, the ratio of items so that we would be aligned to that, replicating the convention proper in our representation.

After that I just changed stuff myself, each time it came up. That worked better with the programme team who, in fairness, were brilliant and always apologising for the difficulties. A lot of it was out of their control, and I should have been on time. At all times Stef was there, double checking, adding ideas, and of course being a voice of reason.

Every time one item moved it meant two moving. That meant coordinating maybe eight or ten people, juggling our balance, when the talk area was available, and who was available. On it went. One move could lead to a dozen being necessary. That was annoying. It was the most stressful thing I have ever done. Stress that hurt.

On top of this came the extra Art Auction. I had asked Julie Rigby about what time she wanted to have the seated area for the art auction, and I was given a time. Then there were some

rumblings about it being needed earlier. This would be serious because again it would lead to programme changes. I soon realised that this was out of Julie's hands. That wasn't so good as I have a lot of time for Julie and like her a lot. I know she would have made a perfect YAFA person and she wanted to. Her strength was dealing with artists. I wouldn't be able to: "If they can't be bothered to help build the display, why should we display it?".

As I say, it's good to have someone who gets along but it seemed the auction was out of her remit. A decision was promised, the deadline passed. I raised concerns. Emails went about. Eventually I was copied in an email reply from Ian Stockdale, Ian of course showing courtesy cc'ing us, but his reply was to a mail of doom, which would necessitate changes, yet again, to the programme. What a nice way to hear about it. I was really really angry and nearly started being violent, but I stopped short, and just felt stressed. And sore.

Although I was annoyed, I sat down and sorted a solution, as I had to. I spoke to Stef. He was angry. We were angry together. We were abusive and derogatory and as you can see from the below cut of correspondence to Alice and Ian, I relayed our joint fury.

*[...] after the imposition of this auction, an issue which does not elicit reply to emails, nor get communicated very well, it seems, we are now in a position where we have a problem with two panels, on Sunday. Now, we had thought there would be some sort of consultation, or discussion, or something about this new development, but obviously that is not the way it works here, and I am to take it by dictum that these panels just have to move. There are so many two hour slots that we could have offered that we are NOT using the staging area, nor making noise, and I am surprised that there is no consideration given to the work we have been doing. Is this normally the Worldcon way?*

Well that one was my hissy fit, I suppose, and in fairness there were many emails



following that. I was annoyed at the communication breakdown, and was also pissed off that it had nothing to do with Julie, who I could ring and chat with. Anyhow, the resolution was more moves. More hassle but not like the hassle Ian and Ruth no doubt had in programming.

It was funny, Alice knows us so well. After many emails to no avail, and no recognition regarding our aggrievement, Alice offered a solution. She bought off our anger. As the auction would raise a few bob she said we would get some money towards something in YAFA from the con budget. This worked. Very well. More money means more fun and we had solved the programming issue anyhow so that was good. She knows how we think, hence our obedience and respect at all times towards her.

We were very lucky. We had so many excellent, well attended panels. The ratio of problems to success was always in our favour, I think. The participants were so wonderful, so good and mostly just understood and took in what we were doing and came on board.

Strangely writing this I have highlighted what I think were the only really negative things that I experienced in YAFA. It's hard to do that but what with so much vainglorious, incestuous back slapping and praise, it's only right that the cracks be brought to light.

They were *our* cracks, though, and we loved it.

