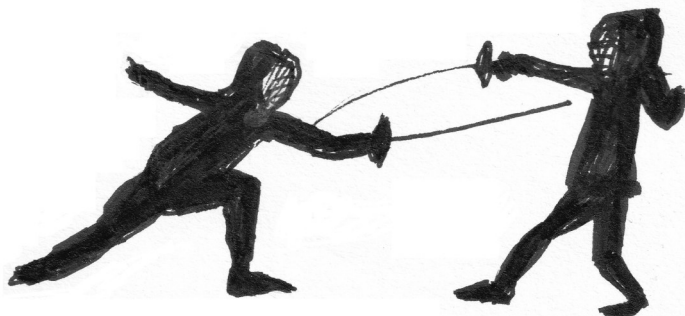


GREEN GOBLIN

27



I am John Breakwell. It is currently the end of June, 2025. In the previous century, I would put in this box my contact details— home address, telephone number and work email address. Back then, the issues were sent to other fanzine editors and the occasional subscriber or maybe handed over in a sale at a convention so only a tiny group of people knew you existed. Now, this issue is probably going to be available in the Internet as a PDF file so the expectations of privacy and safety are very different.



Another change is my respect for intellectual property. Previous issues would rely on content (text and artwork) 'borrowed' without permission from printed and digital sources. Comic strips used to make good space fillers if a story didn't fill the page exactly.

Whole articles in magazines could be photocopied straight when the page count so far was short of the target. No more. I've even contacted the BBC about using the Grace Petrie transcript.

Credits

- ♦ The front cover artwork is by Steve Dismukes. He was a guest artist at an Eclectic Games event back in 2010 when they were still located in Market Place. There was cake so maybe it was celebrating the move from their previous location(s) opposite the station. Steve was offering character sketches for a few coins—not of you but of your RPG characters. So the front cover shows Zebek, my main D&D character from the 80s. I think Steve did a good job of catching Zebek's personality.
- ♦ There are four small drawings by Sue which represent some fanzines from yester-year. See if you can guess the fanzine titles.
 - ♦ The pun title to my office/supermarket article on p23 was provided by CoPilot AI. Also the back page pun.
 - ♦ Page number faces are by me. I can only draw them facing to the right so half of them have been flipped for the odd-numbered pages.



REBEL BEGINNINGS

I should really start with why this fanzine has risen from the dead like some necromantic prank. As with a lot of things over the last two years, it's for a badge. Back in 2023, Sue bought me volume 1 of the Rebel Badge Book as a present that she believed I would find inspiring. She obviously thought I needed some new hobbies and a book about adults earning merit badges would do the trick. Inside were instructions for earning 52 different badges, such as baker, runner, diarist, fundraiser, mindfulness, and so on. Each badge is supposed to be completed over a few months so you've actually spent the time and effort to achieve something meaningful. Take baker, for example. I had to bake three different types of bread, three different cakes, three different types of biscuits, a pie, a tart, a pudding, eclairs, and mille-feuille. These badges are self-assessed so you decide if your focaccia is good enough to tick the box. You need to bear in mind that it doesn't actually have to be any good—and often it won't be. The important thing is that you are taking on a challenge and spending time on yourself. It can be more about the journey than the destination.

Very early on, you will venture onto Facebook to check out the Rebel Badge Club page. At the last count, there were 6,346 book-owning members of this private group. A decent chunk will be inactive but there will still be a huge number of people sharing their badge-work. At this point, you still have a chance to back away. You may decide that doing the occasional merit badge is, in fact, enough to keep you going. That keeping an orchid alive is an appropriate challenge for you. I didn't realise at the time that there was an option. So now every month there is a themed special badge—Craftivist for June—to complete. You can sign up to take part in the Rebel Cup and win points for your patrol doing another bunch of themed activities each month. Through the year and around the country there are in-person and online events. All to get you learning new skills and having fun.

So far, the long list of things I would not otherwise have done includes such activities as:

- Signing songs in ESL (badly)
- Belly dancing (also badly)
- Building a glow-in-the-dark scorpion from lollipop sticks
- Buying the aforementioned orchid (it still lives!)
- Improv comedy
- Litter picking

And I suppose this issue of the fanzine should be added to that list. Sometimes the badges prompt you to do things you realise you wanted to do anyway but had just not got round to yet.

Check out the Rebel Badge Store at www.RebelBadgeStore.com and survey Charly Lester's work. It's not really a cult. You can leave any time. Supposedly.



REBEL BADGEWORK 1

Some badgework can be easy and just takes time. For the Craftivism monthly badge, I opted to watch “**Craftivism. Making a Difference**”, a BBC 1-hour programme from January 2021.

Comedian Jenny Eclair meets crafters using their skills to make the world a better place, one stitch at a time. Can you use craft to help make the world a better place, one stitch at a time? Writer, comedian and art lover Jenny Eclair meets people doing extraordinary things with knitting, cross-stitch, banners and felt to change hearts and minds. Hearing stories from craftivists around the UK and beyond, Jenny visits Bradford on Avon in Wiltshire to see how miniature knickers are discreetly placed around the town to encourage screening for cervical cancer, and learns how felt 'graffiti' has a wellbeing message for visitors to a London park. From banners at Liverpool Football Club's Anfield Stadium to a huge memorial quilt remembering those who lost their lives to Aids, the initiatives all have one thing in common: a painstaking, thoughtful and beautiful way to get heard.

After watching it on YouTube (as it's not on the BBC's website), I'd definitely recommend it as a good use of your time. I found it quite moving and inspirational, especially the footage of the AIDS memorial quilt.

REBEL BADGEWORK 2

For the Craftivism monthly badge, I need to understand the legal and environmental restrictions in my area surrounding different types of craftivism. For example, local bylaws related to stickering, environmental impact of certain types of yarnbombing, and so on.

Consent is key—if you don't have it, you probably shouldn't be doing it if you want to stay within the law.

First stop is looking at **graffiti**. In the UK, graffiti when regarded as vandalism constitutes criminal damage under the Criminal Damage Act 1971. Defacing public property is considered a criminal offense under the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003. Graffiti that uses hate speech, obscenity, or incitement to violence would also be subject to legislation. Additionally, using copyrighted material without permission could also have legal consequences. Street art, though, such as authorized or commissioned murals, may be recognised as a legitimate art form and receive legal protection. There is a grey area (pun intended) regarding reverse graffiti where dirt and grime is selectively removed to leave an image.



Stickering can be treated as a form of fly-posting or defacement of public property. Placing stickers on lampposts, signs, or benches is typically governed by local council byelaws under provisions of the Local Government Act 1972. for which they may issue Fixed Penalty Notices.

Yarnbombing (or guerilla / graffiti knitting) may be treated as graffiti or fly-posting and treated as above. Yarn installations could also be classed as littering and disposed of by the council. There is an additional consideration that yarn bombs using synthetic fibres may contravene the Environmental Protection Act 1990 as they can harm trees or wildlife if left too long.

As I'm in Wokingham Borough, I've checked www.wokingham.gov.uk to see what's online:

- *"We don't remove graffiti from private property - where possible, we will inform the private landowner of the graffiti and encourage them to arrange for its removal"*
- *"We don't remove graffiti from council property unless it's racist or offensive"*
- *"Fly posting is an offence under Section 224(3) of the Town and Country Planning Act (TCPA) 1990 and the Highways Act 1980."*
- *"Biffa has been appointed as the area's new contractor for waste and recycling collection, and street cleansing, starting from 1 June 2026. The street cleansing service includes street sweeping, litter collection, fly-tipping removal and graffiti removal."*

Being also resident of Woodley Town Council, I checked their website too but found nothing. Emailing the council, I was informed by Heidi the Administration Officer that "unfortunately [[the local byelaws]] had been inadvertently, omitted from the website, however, after speaking with the Town Clerk this morning, you can find this information at the following link." The link provided was to a scanned single-paged document signed in 1984. Judging from the path (<https://woodley.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/WTC-Open-Spaces-Byelaws.pdf>), it looks like Heidi uploaded a copy just for me, which was nice. The only bylaw of interest to the discussion is clause 6:

- *"A person shall not affix any bill, placard or notice to or upon any tree or upon any part of a building, seat of other erection on the ground."*



Here's an unofficial Rebel Badge created by Laura, woman of mystery. I'm not sure what the various clawses would be for the badge. Any ideas?



REBEL BADGEWORK 3

Next on the list is researching the history of craftivism. Maybe I should have done this bit first.

The concept of using crafts for compassion and justice is not a new one, though. Some famous examples are:

- Suffragettes in the late 19th and early 20th centuries stitched banners and sashes with bold slogans to demand women’s voting rights. One of the most iconic examples was the “Votes for Women” banner carried by Christabel Pankhurst and Annie Kenney at Manchester’s Free Trade Hall in 1905. In the massive 1908 London procession organized by the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies, over 70 hand-crafted banners were created by the Artists’ Suffrage League, many designed by stained-glass artist Mary Lowndes. They were deliberately designed to be eye-catching in marches—using rich silks, appliqué, and embroidery to command attention.
- Mahatma Gandhi promoted hand-spinning and weaving of khadi in the early 20th century as a form of resistance against British colonial rule, with a major push during the Non-Cooperation Movement of 1920–1922. By encouraging Indians to spin their own cloth and boycott British textiles, Gandhi aimed to revive traditional Indian crafts devastated by colonial trade policies, empower rural communities economically and socially, and unite people across class and caste through a shared act of resistance. The spinning wheel (charkha) became a national icon, and wearing khadi was a visible act of patriotism.
- In Argentina, the *Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo* embroidered the names and birthdates of their disappeared children onto headscarves, turning personal grief into public protest during Argentina’s brutal military dictatorship (1976-83). Their children, known as *the disappeared*, were often young activists, students, or workers abducted without trial. Every Thursday, these women would gather in Plaza de Mayo, the square in front of the presidential palace in Buenos Aires, walking silently in pairs.

The word craftivism was coined in 2003 by American writer and maker Betsy Greer, who defined it as “voicing opinions through creativity”. This helped unite a global community of makers using traditional crafts—like knitting, embroidery, and quilting—for social change.



REBEL BADGEWORK 4 - The Manifesto

For the Craftivism monthly badge, I need to find out what the Craftivist's Manifesto is, and what it means to me.

As craftivism wasn't a term I had encountered before (Betsy Greer coined it in 2003), I thought I may be onto a steep learning curve. I was aware of activities like yarnbombing but hadn't really connected them to some grass roots political activity. So I've downloaded a copy of "**Craftivism—A Manifesto/Methodology**" handbook from Tal Fitzpatrick's website (helpfully, *TalFitzpatrick.com*). 4,500 words. From the start of the handbook:

WE THE CRAFTIVISTS: A MANIFESTO

No longer will we be okay with benefiting from the oppression of the other. No more will we tolerate patriarchal, colonial systems of oppression, nor toxic masculinity or white supremacy loosely veiled.

No more will we remain silent, complicit. We stand against artificial hierarchies and histories of hate.

We are the craftivists.

A patchwork of makers, diverse but united in kinship.

We stand for justice, universally applied.

Through our craft we bear witness.

With our skilled hands and compassionate hearts, we mend the tears in the fabric of our society.

We make to make connections.

We make to raise each other up.

We make to make a difference.

We make to make change.

We resist.

Tal then goes on to provide a host of practical guidelines. For example, if your project is designed to state your own political opinion to inspire other like-minded people then become as politically explicit as you want but be more ambiguous if you aim to engage other groups in conversation. Another example—do your research before starting and listen to people with first-hand experience so you don't make wrong assumptions about the people you are planning to help. Or be playful to make changing the world seem more like fun and something people are attracted to engaging in.

I've learned a new word through reading the handbook—DISSENSUS, the opposite of consensus. Consciously bring out the stories and people that don't form part of the status quo. Don't focus too strongly on forming consensus and peaceful coexistence.

The badge clause asks "*what does it mean to me?*" That's not easy for me to answer without looking unfeeling. I'm not sure I care strongly enough about anything to put the time and effort into starting my own craftivist project, and I'm too independent to help in a cooperative activities with a group of people. I will massage my guilt by donating to charity, though.



REBEL BADGEWORK 5—Zines

For the Craftivism monthly badge, I need to research the history of zines.

I find this clause funny, in a way, as it should be easy to complete as for 10-15 years I loved being involved in fanzines. But, no. Like many things in life, you don't often engage outside your own community unless you really want (or have) to. So there are many zine realms I barely know anything about.

Science Fiction seems to be the birthplace of fanzines with ***The Comet***, published in 1930. Over the years, a number of famous writers such as Isaac Asimov and Matt Groening would develop their skills through fanzines.

Come the 70s and advancements in technology for fanzine production, come the punk zine explosion. Relatively cheap photocopying meant it was getting easier to self-publish your own music zine and one of the most famous, ***Sniffin' Glue***, had a circulation in the thousands. Low cost, self-sufficient and reacting quickly to a changing youth culture.

Many other communities would take advantage of the zine publication, which is where I came in. Attending conventions for tabletop gamers (or 'gamers', before computer games really went stratospheric and stole the name) for Dungeons and Dragons, Runequest, Traveller, and so on, I noticed fanzines starting to appear next to racks of figures and stacks of rulebooks. People would be writing about their own ideas for games, passing on information and telling their own stories. I quickly realised that I could do that and share my world with literally dozens of other people through the postal service. After a few years, I branched sideways into play-by-mail fanzines that enabled you to play the games (admittedly very, very slowly) that you had otherwise needed to have people sat round a table to enjoy. Then, seemingly from nowhere, the Internet came along and the world went online and digital.

But what about Craftivism zines? Unknown to me, these began to appear as handmade publications that documented protest projects, shared patterns with political messages and embroidery tutorials, commented on issues like global warming, and reflected on activism through craft (and many other things besides). So community-building, reflection, and hand-made disruption, made accessible to the sort of people that might not sign up for a traditional protest.

My favourite Craftivist zine title (used often, apparently) is:

"The Revolution Will Be Handmade".

And that's it—June's badge completed. Roll on July to start all over again.



Dissenter

by Mark Long

<https://www.MarkLongAuthor.co.uk>

His mind tasted of coffee dregs and salt. Minds didn't truly have a taste, but that was how it felt to be inside one. It blended synaesthesia and telepathy into a singular, strange experience. Since everything was being recorded, I sub-vocalised, "Sensory hallucination, bitter and salt." My colleague repeated my observation word for word and then added, "Undertone, reminds me of liquorice." I had tried to stay more objective.

The day had begun routinely enough. I lived at the centre alongside the other Espers in our region. As a class two Esper, I had been given special treatment and my own room, a luxury that I rarely left unless my work required it. The assignments appeared on the computer — never more than one per day and sometimes none for days. After my morning shower, I logged on and a job alert flashed up.

Requirement to witness, room A29, 16:30, political.

The agency never provided more details than necessary to avoid witnesses forming preconceptions. It hadn't mattered to me since I was a class 4 as probing into someone's mind had always been an overwhelming experience that drowned out external thoughts and memories. What I perceived came purely from what existed. Regardless, I had a job to do, and it meant getting ready. My preparation always followed the same pattern—not out of ritual but because I appreciated order. Perhaps it served as a coping mechanism for the chaos inside other people's skulls, though I had been methodical even before joining the agency.

I had served as an Esper for six years. The longest tenure anyone had endured was twelve. Some days, that mark seemed achievable; others, less so. At least this testifier was a "political." Those minds didn't haunt me the way that criminals did. I called them "accused" or testifiers rather than criminals since their guilt hadn't been formally determined when we witnessed their thoughts, but it was a mere formality. Their fate was sealed the moment we provided evidence. It was our duty and privilege to protect the citizens of the people's empire.

The first step in my preparation involved visiting the medical centre. They would have come to me if I'd requested it, but I preferred to go myself. The process had always been solitary. I entered a booth and lay on the bed. My ID chip, implanted in my left pectoral muscle, activated automatically. It didn't



matter where it had been placed; it was little larger than a pinhead and readable from eight feet away. As I lay down, the system registered me, and my medication was ready within a minute. I always received the same drugs: an acid suppressor for my stomach; an anti-nausea drug, though it wouldn't be necessary for a political; an adrenal suppressant to keep me calm; and a stimulant to sharpen my focus. Some were slow release, while others needed to be taken immediately before witnessing. I knew them all as second nature and hadn't required the sensitivity enhancement drugs in years.

Next came the sensory deprivation tanks. A technician remained on duty but had been trained to keep her mind closed and calm. Her presence barely registered as I passed by. I quickly stripped naked, and she assisted me into the tank before retreating quickly to monitor my wellbeing remotely. Espers were valuable resources, and they wouldn't risk losing one to drowning. I had found three hours in the tank to be ideal—too little left traces of personality within me; too much invited the subconscious to create false constructs. In the tank, I floated in utter darkness, suspended in salt water warmed to match blood's temperature. It removed all boundaries, leaving only the essence of my mind. I spread my perception, seeking an anchor in the void, becoming more sensitive.

I emerged from the tank with time to spare. Dressed in a freshly unpacked paper suit, I made my way to the witnessing room. The walk took several minutes as the rooms were intentionally spaced far apart to prevent interference. Class one Espers often complained that the distance was insufficient, though I had never struggled with filtering external stimuli. It was a skill I had refined over time. Upon entering the preparation room assigned to me, I noted the presence of a glass of chilled milk. I drank it with the remaining tablets before lying on the foam mattress.

Building mental shields came next. I visualised black leather—thick, hard, and layered—panel by panel until every memory and emotion had been sealed away. What remained of me was separated into two parts: the private self and the professional void. The stimulant's effects eased the task, and I knew my barriers were secure. Rising, I walked to the door leading to the witnessing room. Fear emanated faintly from the suspect waiting inside.

The room had been designed in pale green tones, purportedly to relax the occupants. It offered no distractions, with its equipment concealed and its atmosphere sterile. There were three other minds present. The suspect sat restrained in the chair, bands padded for comfort and safety. There were no sharp edges so that he could not escape into death. His physical appearance revealed no distinct racial origins, though it didn't matter in an age of nano-tech surgery.

A technician stood nearby with a mind tightly focused on objectives and priorities. Physically, he appeared soft—a retreating hairline and a slight paunch—but his mental state belied his body's frailty, arrow sharp and a deep purple to my senses. The third mind barely registered until I saw its owner, a younger Esper in his



late twenties, probably a class 3. He wore a suit identical to mine, revealing only his wiry brown hair and dark face. If we had worked together before, I didn't recall.

The technician began the setup, attaching us to the recording equipment. I focused on the voided portion of my mind, suppressing irritation as his purposeful thoughts brushed against mine. His overly emotional state coloured my perception, but my barriers held firm. Once the technician finished, I sub-vocalised my name and swore the secular oath. My co-witness followed, opting for the Muslim version. His name seemed familiar, though I chose not to dwell on it. It was rare to meet the religious, but it was an allowed freedom.

As the senior, I made the request as was protocol. "Permission to link?" He nodded, extending his hand—a gesture some Espers preferred, the physical contact helpful while linking. It didn't matter to me, but I accepted out of courtesy.

The younger Esper tasted of woodsmoke, and I recognised him then. We had worked together before; he had been adequate. His shields were weaker than I considered wholly professional, though workable. We sub-vocalised in unison, "Link established," before turning to the technician. With his nod, the equipment was confirmed functional. The suspect's fear had all but vanished, replaced by emptiness. That wasn't usual. An explanation would be needed.

With linked minds, we entered the suspect's consciousness. It didn't welcome us, but his consent wasn't required. I paused, slightly surprised. I encountered two shields outside my own instead of just that of my partner. My leather panels felt familiar, my partner's wooden barriers seemed solid, albeit it with faint impressions leaked through, while the suspect's metallic shield shimmered, ill-defined and hazy. Training from the resistance had equipped him to guard his thoughts—a rarity in such cases.

We breached the shield with combined pressure, pushing past its hazy edges as it curled away from our thoughts. Behind it, the suspect's mind roared with noise—a popular, mindless song of loyalty to the First Brother. My co-witness tried to suppress his amusement, but it leaked through into the now shared space. I advised tightening his barrier. Ignoring the irritating tune, we began our attempts at triggering responses with carefully selected cues.

Leaflets, banners, and codes evoked only quick flashes of suppressed memories. Meetings and distorted faces cascaded in fragmented impressions, which we sub-vocalised independently for record-keeping. Some were twisted into caricatures while others wore masks. Evidence revealed subversion and dissent—a deliberate rejection of the collective good. He was an individualist and so a criminal.

Violence remained absent from his thoughts despite our prompting. Graphic sexual imagery elicited disgust instead of lust. Images of men and women elicited only a desire for comfort tempered by distrust. The sexual drive was wholly absent and probing deeper revealed a twisted resentment toward the people's

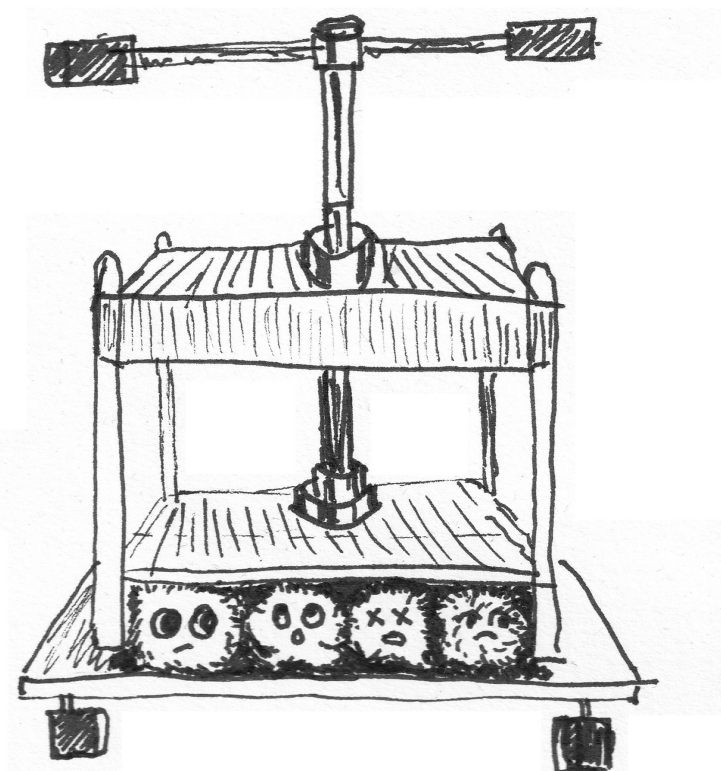


mandatory breeding programs, and his disgust for his parents at having created him in such a way. We tested him with images of children, but the responses were harmless, warm memories of a simpler time in the community creche.

As the suspect's mind faltered under our onslaught, we harvested the final impressions, tracing his anger and self-loathing to their core. Driven by an inability to conform, he had rebelled against conformity, making it a thing of pride rather than shame. He failed his duty to the state. When his consciousness faded into static, we documented all we had witnessed. It was far more than enough to seal his future.

Exhausted, I became aware of my surroundings again. My co-witness had fallen to his knees, while my own muscles burned with strain. The technician spoke at last. "41 seconds. Well done, gentlemen. The people thank you." Removing the headgear that the technician had attached, I left the room without looking back.

I needed solitude, a shower, and time to cleanse myself of the intimacy forced upon me. I felt dirty but I was proud of my work. One day soon, I would be a class one Esper and prove myself more than other men, a greater servant to the masses. I held my shields tight, careful not to let my emotions be sensed. No-one could ever know of my self-regard or my ambition. I would never be the one strapped to that chair.



Grace Petrie

Being a fan of Billy Bragg when I was 'growing up' (the University years of "**Life's a Riot with Spy vs Spy**", "**Brewing Up with Billy Bragg**", "**Talking with the Taxman About Poetry**"), it's no surprise that I've taken Grace Petrie to my heart.

She initially hadn't made a big impact on me when I first saw her, supporting Josie Long and Robin Ince on their 2013 Shambles standup tour, but then three years later she was part of the Saturday night entertainment at QED and that properly caught my attention. Since then, I've tried to see her whenever she's in the area - which recently has meant a range of venues up the road in Oxford. Ironically, her next Reading gig clashes with QED...

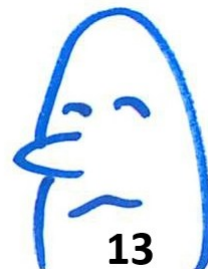


There are few great songs she's written that I always expect in her set. There's "**Ivy**", about rushing home from Glastonbury on Sunday morning because her sister had called to say she was in labour. Such a lovely song with a great post-chorus which the audience always belts out the last line of.

"Thanks for waiting for me to arrive
And let me just say thanks for not bringing labour on
Until Sunday night and halfway through Kasabian
Because who the fuck cares about Kasabian?"

And there's "**Nobody Knows That I'm a Fraud**", dripping with self-deprecation.

"When people call me a musician that makes my palms perspire
I took Grade I piano, and I never got no higher
If I didn't have this capo then you'd all see I'm a liar
Nobody knows that I'm a fraud"



And “**Northbound**” is fun with Grace needing to guide the audience participation so we don’t overzealously sing too many lines.

[Chorus]
 By night and day
 (Audience) By night and day!
 (Grace shakes head) By motorway
 I’ll get there any godforsaken way
 By road or rail
 (Audience) By road or rail!
 (Grace shakes head) By sea to sail
 If there’s a way home I won’t fail

But the crowning glory is “**Black Tie**” off the “**Queer as Folk**” album. This song will bring me to tears and I have a lump in my throat just writing this. I don’t understand why it affects me. The song should not be relatable for me. It’s about a teenage lesbian trying to come to terms with gender identity and society’s expectations of how she should fit in. I didn’t have anything like the same issues growing up and I think I had it pretty easy in comparison. Maybe it’s the message in the song that “*everything’s gonna be alright*” which is triggering something for me. I found a recent interview on the radio really helpful. As part of 6 Music’s Loud and Proud season Tom Robinson talked to Grace Petrie about her life and career. Part of the way through, Tom asked about “**Black Tie**” (and I spent ages transcribing it):



TR : “Are you still proud of that song?”

GP : “I am immensely proud of that song. And the joy in the room performing it every night is something that I never, ever, ever tire of seeing. When I was growing up, I didn’t see anybody like myself on stage or on screen anywhere. A lot of that was to do with being a lesbian but a lot of it was to do specifically with being butch, and being butch is something that took me a very, very, very long time to make peace with and be proud of. It wasn’t until I was in my thirties when I wrote that song that I realised I had the option of not being ashamed of the way I look and the way I present to the world because it comes so naturally to me. I always knew right from when I was a really young kid that I would never be capable of being any other kind of girl or any other kind of woman. This is who I am. It’s in my bones. And Black Tie, really, the process that led to writing that song was realising, discovering, I suppose, that the reasons that I’d been made by society to essentially hate myself and hate the way I looked all stemmed from patriarchy and all stemmed from misogyny. Once I could see that, I was able to kind of be free of it and so I sat down and I wrote that song. I was thinking about what would I say to my 15 year old self if I could talk to her and I realised that when I was 15 I wasn’t even that worried about being gay but I was really worried about being butch and I really felt tremendously, tremendously



ashamed of myself for years and years and I thought if I could sit down and talk to my 15 year old self what one thing would I want to tell her, and I realised that the one thing I wanted to say was "you're exactly who you're supposed to be, you know, you don't need to worry about it." It's funny looking back because I wrote that song for myself. I wrote it as a cathartic exercise and I didn't think it would really mean much to anybody else. I was proud I wrote it and it meant a lot to me."

TR : *{{interrupts}}* "Those are the best songs. The ones you write for yourself but then prove to be universal"

GP : "Absolutely. I never could have imagined the impact that it would have on people and there's scores and scores and scores of queer people and particularly, maybe, gender non-conforming people who've spoken to me or written to me or come up to me at gigs and said Black Tie made a big difference in my life. **But also you never know, I've had six foot straight cis men come up to me at gigs and say "I cried all the way through that song" so you never know.** For me it's a quintessentially and uniquely queer experience that I'm singing about in that song but I do think there is a universality to the fact that most of us, if not all of us, have got a lonely teenager inside them somewhere who feels like they don't belong and they feel like they're not right and all of us, I think, benefit from a reminder from a grown up calling to them from the future and saying "it's going to be okay, actually".

So there are men like me—although six foot tall—who react in the same way. I wonder what they think the song means to them. Maybe I'll ask somebody next time.

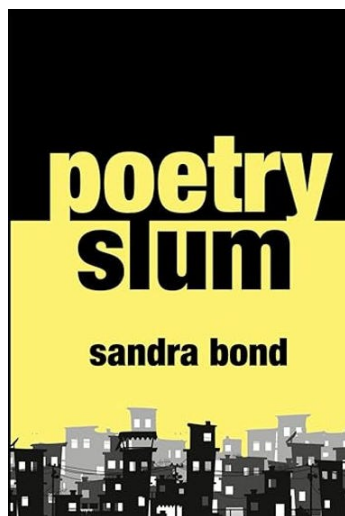


Dancing At The Horizon

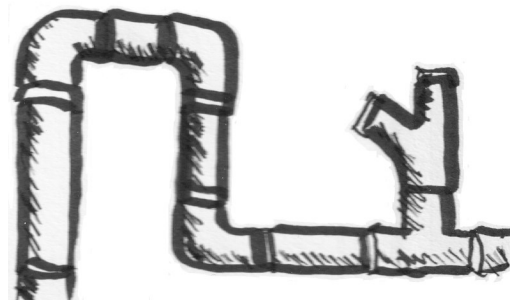
by Sandra Bond

<https://www.Sandra-Bond.com/poems>

You can spend a lifetime
Walking to the horizon
And when you think
You must be almost there
You look up, only to find
The horizon has receded
From you and now stands grinning
As far away as it ever was
Like the rainbow's end
But without the pot of gold.
The horizon is unreachable
By humans, but when your cat
Goes out at night and comes back
Several hours later looking particularly
Smug, you can just bet that
Your cat has been out having fun
And dancing at the horizon.



Sandra is an “Indie author, poet, and wrangler of words in every form.” In addition to a few SF/fantasy novels, she has written Poetry Slum, a “collection of verse covering a broad range of topics, most of them controversial or argumentative” as Sandra doesn't see much point in “cosy poetry”.



Book Review of Busking Business

We've been Pressgang groupies for many years and try to catch the (now ex-) band members whenever they are in town, maybe at the Rising Sun Arts Centre or the annual Waterfest. It's nice to say hello and have them vaguely remember talking to you before (or maybe that's a skill travelling entertainers develop). Damian Clarke is the band member we've kept in touch most with and had the pleasure of hiring him to perform some of his songs at our 25th wedding anniversary party. I was still pleasantly surprised to receive a birthday present from Damian a few weeks ago—his book **"Busking Business"**.



As Damain said on his Facebook page: *"It tells tales of how I was arrested the first time I ever busked to how I earn more than Supply teaching and sometimes much more. And the decisions I had to make along the way. Fun and informative."*

Damian has found a niche for himself as a player of both the hurdy-gurdy and the hammered dulcimer (although not at the same time), neither instrument you'd normally expect to see in the hands of a busker. On top of that, he can sing at the same time as playing.

If you haven't seen (or heard) a hurdy-gurdy before, it's a slightly weird contraption, being a stringed instrument with a crank handle at one end. The handle rotates a wheel that rubs the strings in a similar way to using a bow on a violin. I can't say I found the sound appealing. A hammered dulcimer, on the other hand, makes a much nicer sound. The construction reminds me of the insides of a piano where you have a bed of strings that are hit by hammers but there is no keyboard to do that with so the hammers are instead held in your hands.

What comes from Damian's writing is how much he enjoys doing what he is doing. Despite the vagaries of the weather, dealing with the public, other buskers and business owners, bureaucracy, the travel and so on, he looks forward to turning up in some tourist town to play all day in front of people.

I'm not usually someone that stops to watch and listen to a busker. Most times,



I'm on my way somewhere and the busker won't be performing anything I'm particularly interested in. I rarely go to see live bands anyway and if I want to listen to music, it's all in my back pocket. I think that it's great that they are around to add variety to the shopping experience (*unless they have a PA set to 11 when they can just get out of town*) but I'm not the audience.

On page 10, Danian has included a photo of himself (on banjo) and fellow Pressgang member George Whitfield (on piano accordion) playing as The Two Butchers in Woodley precinct in the late 90s. I thought the picture looked familiar and immediately realised we'd taken it ourselves on our own photographic film camera, sharing a scanned copy with Damian years later. Below is the other photo we took at the same time. Turning detective here as Damian says the photo in his book is circa 1993 but we think it's 1998. Now, if I could tell if that was the Woolwich building society or the Woolwich bank in the background, I could say which side of 1997 we were.



He is raising money for **Shelter** with the charity getting 20%. If you'd like a copy, you can send him £10 (+£2 p&p in the UK) via PayPal to VoxPopOnTheRoad@yahoo.co.uk.

Alternatively, the Kindle version is available on the Amazon website (although the Kindle version has a published date of 4th August 2021 (which explains the references in the book to Covid) and 10 chapters whilst the physical version, published in 2025, has four extra chapters so there has been some editing over the intervening years.)

Touch the Frog

Back in 2018, I joined a local workshop run by David Wall called **Corridor 14** which planned to create a collaborative anthology comic book/graphic novel for publication. The group managed several monthly sessions where we discussed panel layout, pacing and the like. We even had a display of work-in-progress at a small Book Fair held by the Rising Sun Art Centre (picture on right, featuring David).

By the Spring of 2019, though, the workshop ground to a halt and we didn't hear from David again. We did have some ideas but lacked the confidence and drive. I think the project was just too much of a challenge for the small number of unskilled people the workshop attracted and maybe David decided to invest his time elsewhere.



Over the next three pages, I've included my contribution.

- The title is from a story Adam Hills tells on his "Happyism" tour (2013) about sharing the stage with Kermit the Frog.
- The human character is also named after Adam Hills.
- The frog character, Kenny, is named after Kenny Loggins (of "Footloose" fame).
- All the inspirational quotes are from Kenny Loggins.
- The art is all traced from pictures found on the Internet. I'd put the paper on the computer screen and pencil in the picture that shone through. I did take some photos of myself in a running pose as references for the Indiana Jones bit. Colouring in with Sharpies before scanning and some computer work on the last picture for the hair and skin.
- The frog-themed typeface is the free-to-download "Gutes Wetter, schlechtes Wetter" font ("Good weather, bad weather"?)

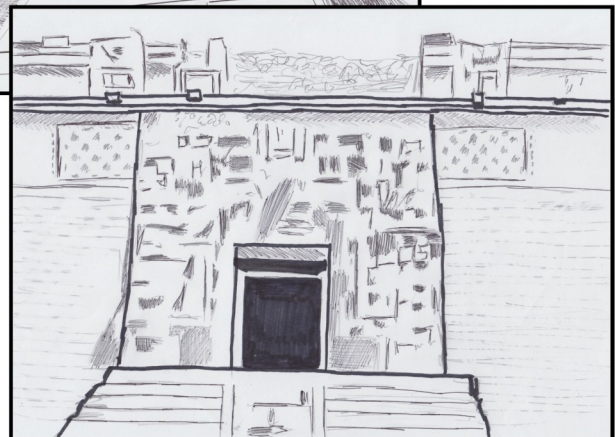
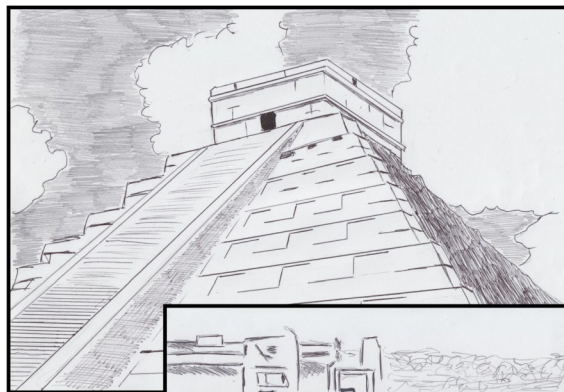




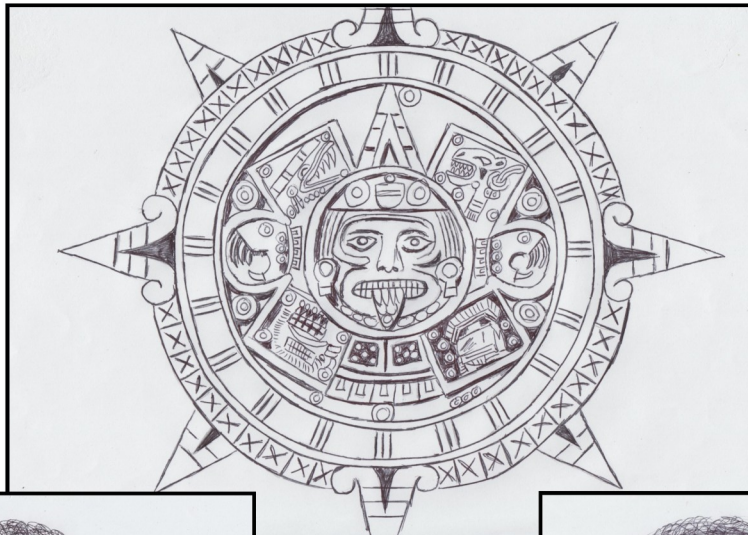
**DON'T
TOUCH
THE
FROG**

Starring Adam.
And Kenny
(the frog).

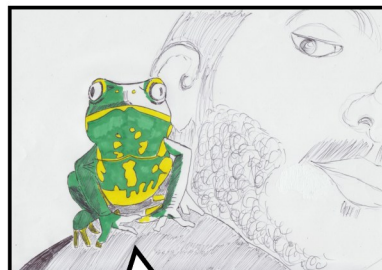
Design: John Breakwell



Courage is
always rewarded.

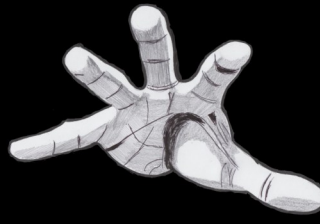


In every moment there is
a reason to go on.



That's an old saying I
just made up.

I must let go
of my need
for the world
to love me.



Running
away will
never
make
you free.

I warned him not
to touch the frog!



I asked for a promotion...

they sent me to the checkout

One thing I've noticed recently is a strange correlation between where I have worked and the local supermarkets that I would go to for food.

When I worked at Mastercard in a converted laundry in residential Caversham, there was a Co-Op a mere 150m away at the end of the road. At the time, it had been recently converted from a large 1930s roadside pub called The Star. If I wasn't too bothered by the bargains on offer for lunch, there being no office canteen, I would walk up Donkin Hill to the other Co-Op. Two supermarkets for the same franchise, just 350m apart. Both Still going strong, too.

After the Mastercard office was closed and the work relocated to Hemel Hempstead, I decided to cross the River and work at Visa. This was working in a proper office with kitchen staff and everything. I would still, on occasion, want to pop into Reading for shopping, making use of the Sainsbury's which was just an 8 minute walk away. Admittedly, there is an M&S almost next door but you'd have to trek through the store to get to the food hall at the back.

After my job at Visa was relocated to Austin TX, I had to travel further afield and found employment in the mansion house in Lily Hill Park, Bracknell. Working in a 23 hectare park meant that shops were not nearby but there was a large Tesco just a 15 minute walk from the office and right next to the railway station where I commuted to. And on the days when I drove to work, there was an even larger Tesco over a mile way in the opposite direction to find lunch.

After the Lily Hill House office was closed, I ventured to the Big City and an office complex with a Waitrose stuck on the side. I was definitely going up in the world, if only for the length of the work contract. There were two small Sainsbury's on the way to the Underground, which I would occasionally frequent if I was going out that way for a touristy stroll, and an Amazon food store which I visited just the once just to see how it worked, but it's hard to compete with a Waitrose.

All good things come to an end and I'm back to Bracknell and working next to a major roundabout on the A322. I had thought I was leaving Waitrose behind but no— their HQ is right next door with it's vast warehouses, conference centre and trucks. Tragically, there is no supermarket on their site, although that's understandable as the footfall is pretty light. Instead, I have to pop into Morrisons to pick up lunch on the way from the station in the morning. There is a café in the building where I work but after all these years I just prefer the random delights of the reduced item shelf.

This trajectory has me concerned, though. If the current job doesn't work out, where will I be getting my lunch from next? Lidl? Aldi? Not Asda, surely?



The Dead Simple Guide to Cities & Towns

by Craig Cartmell

The Prologue

Few things scare a fantasy RPG GM more than the thought of creating a city or town. In a dungeon there's just a few monsters and rooms to worry about, but a city or town could have thousands. In fact, creating a city or town is fairly easy. It's all a matter of thinking like a film director. All they need to make you think your hero is in a city are Sets (usually two-dimensional building fronts), some props, some extras, and ... action!

First steps in designing a city or town

So, what does a medieval city or town have that adventurers might be interested in:

1. A Tavern/Inn to stay in.
2. A Marketplace with merchants to whom they can sell their loot to and buy new stuff.
3. A Patron to send them off on their next adventure.
4. Maybe a Temple or two.

So, here's the Dead Simple guide to how to construct an entire city or town in under 20 minutes.

First think of a name for your city or town. Keep it simple. [Let's give it a try:](#)
[Our town is going to be called 'Aldford'.](#)

Then write one-line descriptions of the following:

1. The city gate and its guards. [Two stone towers frame a narrow gate with a rusty portcullis, guarded by three elderly watchmen in leather tunics and pot helmets.](#)
2. A street leading from the gate. [Aldgate street winds upwards from the gate, its steep cobbles slick with wastewater overflowing the stone channel down its centre.](#)
3. The types of buildings. [The wooden buildings are tall and narrow with three floors and steep pitched slated roofs.](#)
4. A market square at the end of the street. [The Aldmarket is a small square with a gallows in the middle, surrounded by stalls busily selling a range of fruit, vegetables, dried meat and sausages.](#)
5. An inn on the square. [The Golden Gibbet Inn has seen better days but still boasts a large and busy taproom and several reasonably priced rooms.](#)
6. The landlord of the inn. [A tough drunkard, Pegleg Jones is a former gladiator who used his winnings to buy the inn.](#)
7. Some market stalls or shops around the square. [Tucked in amongst the food stalls is an armourer, a sword smith and an apothecary selling potions and lotions.](#)
8. Maybe a small temple if you're feeling brave. [The Chapel of Saint Ethelberkh is a brightly painted stone building that supports several monks and fat Abbot called Father Gerhardt.](#)
9. The weather. [The weather is cool and bright, though it is obvious there has been some heavy rain recently](#)



A key to making your city or town seem alive is to describe not only what people see, but also what they hear and smell. The hubbub of the citizens going about their daily business, the smell of the horse manure in the street, the tolling of temple bells calling people to prayer, the cries of the traders, the sound of hoofbeats on cobbles and the smith's hammer on an anvil.

If you want to go a little further, then describe the following:

1. The ruler of the city or town. Is it a noble or a council?
2. The nature of the Guard or Watch. Are they professional or volunteers, and are they corruptible?
3. The general make-up of the citizenry (rich and poor, human, and non-human etc.).

Developing your city

Only when the players want to explore the city rather than just rest up there and reprovise do you need to go any further.

Here are some common details of medieval cities to help you flesh it out further:

1. What is the unique thing about this city or town? It's large elven community, the magnificent cathedral to the main deity, the corruption of its merchants, its drunken Lord, the magic college, its soaring towers. Decide on one thing and run with it.
2. A city or town will generally have 2-4 gates. Each may have a main road leading towards the centre, or to the other gates.
3. It may have more than one marketplace, and markets do not occur every day.
4. Most did not have sewers; the filth was just thrown into the street or into a midden in the garden.
5. City walls were poorly maintained unless there was a war on.
6. There were often plenty of open spaces inside the walls, and the locals used these to grow food, keep pigs and chickens and even bury their dead.
7. Temples would be of better quality than the surrounding houses.
8. Many buildings had narrow alleys leading between them, and small enclosed yards.
9. Only the main streets were fully paved/cobbled.
10. The city's ruler would live in a fortified palace or castle.
11. Many of the city's elite - nobles and merchants - would have fortified houses as well, and professional bodyguards.
12. At night cities were very dark places. Only Inns and Taverns were well lit.
13. Strange folk, such as non-humans, would often have their own area, where they would reside close to each other for protection.
14. City authorities would raise money by charging tolls on gates, bridges, markets or strangers (such as Adventurers).
15. The Guard were often retired soldiers, competent at roughing up civilians, but in no hurry to die against more dangerous foes. They were not a police force and did not investigate crimes beyond the 'who hit who first?' level.
16. Most crimes taken to the Ruler ended in a fine or a very short, unpleasant, and permanent sentence. Cities did not generally have prisons.



Mapping your city

This is quite easy. The things to remember are:

- That this map is for you, not the players.
- The key to your players enjoyment of your city or town is in your descriptions, not the map.

Get a piece of plain paper and draw thick lines for streets, thin lines for alleys and squares or circles for the various plazas and market squares. Don't make any of them very regular or too straight. Medieval cities and towns tended to grow organically.

In the example of Aldford, that is one gate, a thick line for Aldgate Street and a square for the Market.

Number various locations you want to remember and keep a key to them or even write it on your map.

Another easy way is to use Google and download an actual map of a medieval city or town. Just rename things to suit yourself.

There are also numerous artists who produce such maps. Remember to reward them with feedback and join their Patreon if they have one.

Organizations

Most cities or towns have many organizations that may help, hinder or even hire the adventurers.

For example:

1. The Guilds. Every craft and profession in a medieval city or town had a Guild. This was like a union and just as ambitious. All Guilds compete, and this competition could turn very nasty.
2. Secret Societies frequently form or operate in cities or towns. These could be religious cults, demonic cabals, magical covens or just a gang of self-interested nobles or merchants. They are secret because if the Ruler found out he'd probably have them all hanged, or worse.
3. The infamous Thieves' Guild. This could be well-organized like the Mafia or more like a loose brotherhood of contacts. It could be very business-like providing goods and services you can't get in public, or a vicious network of murderers and brigands.
4. The Temples. Where there is more than one God in a city or town then each temple will be vying to be the most powerful.
5. Noble Houses are a staple of any medieval fantasy city or town. These are the families of the rulers of the city. They are full of ambitious lordlings, jealousy, greed, and the desire for vengeance on other houses.



Buying and Selling in the city

Just about anything the adventurers could wish for can be found in a city or a town, for the right price.

Although a city will generally be cheaper than a village, every trader, shopkeeper and merchant will charge what they think that they can get away with. There are no fixed prices regardless of what your rulebook says.

Haggling will be the usual method of establishing a price. This is where the adventurers' Persuasion skills can come in handy, though roleplaying important interactions is often more fun.

There will also be more people able to handle the adventurers' loot and give a better price for it than they could get in a village. If they are not careful though, there are also people who would like to steal their loot as well.

Epilogue

So, the keys to creating an urban environment are:

- Do absolutely no more than you need to.
- Keep it Short and Simple.
- Use the see-hear-smell rule for giving descriptions.
- And finally, keep notes, because you will never remember that bard's name that they saw performing in the Bent Goose Inn.



You've reached the end,
but is it really over?