

ORDER OF

THE GOLDEN SPROUT

*Robert Rankin invites you to a party
to celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of
The Antipope*



7pm Saturday 23rd July 2011

*The Princess Royal
107 Ealing Road
Brentford*

DRESS CODE: Villains and Villainesses

THE MAGAZINE OF THE OFFICIAL ROBERT RANKIN FANCLUB
ISSUE EIGHT

MAY 2011

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Many thanks to all contributors - think you have something for the next magazine? Contact details are on page 2 or through the club website.

THE CASE FILES

Welcome to issue eight of our esteemed organ (Oooer) which sees us, technically' two years old in our new clothes as The Golden Sprout. I say technically' as it has actually been slightly longer than two years since issue one was published; yes, keeping up with the fine traditions of the club we are running slightly late on the magazine - only a couple of months though so not bad, hopefully we will play catch up over the rest of the year.

So what of the rest of the year? Or how about what has happened this year and since the last magazine?

The SFX Weekender 2 came and went in a blur of panels, games, celebrities, awards and alcohol, it was; of course, quite excellent and though not a club event there were plenty of us there and that of course included the magnificent Rankin's who again played our hosts for the SFX

awards ceremony, more on this later. Here was also the Beer and Bones get together, not sure what that was? See the article herein. Coming up we have the BIG party of the summer which is predominantly a celebration of the 30 years that have passed since the publication of Robert's first book, "The Antipope". Robert and Rachel have put a lot of effort into organizing the main event for the Saturday (see the full page blurb for details and dates) so I am sure lots and lots of you will

be along. Prior to that we have the joint event with the Douglas Adams fan club, ZZ9, many of whom are members here and vice versa - Dining with Dinosaurs, more details further in.....

Other news – the plans for a hard cover print of the Guide to Brentford and A-Z of Characters, the extract of which appeared in the last magazine, is still on the agenda but there are funding issues to be approached as well as a couple of extra pieces to be produced to complete the project. To this end I will be putting a poll on the website asking for people to let me know if they would be willing to pre-order the book and pay some monies upfront to help publication cost – we'll see how that goes.

Other events? Well Robert will be busy as usual doing various gigs and cons as well as his day job and his newest venture, the “Empires” comic book. Keep your eyes on the website; especially the forum and the upcoming events for details as they arrive.

Finally, don't forget; this is your club! If you have an idea for a get together that might be of interest to fellow Sprouters in your area then do get in touch and if possible we'll help you make it happen.

On with the magazine – enjoy.

Ian



THE ORDER OF THE GOLDEN SPROUT



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Robert at the Birmingham Science Fiction Group

Helen Brunton

It was a winning combination from the start. Robert Rankin and The Old Joint Stock pub in Birmingham, both are popular, both are always beautifully dressed and both regularly contain a good selection of fine ales. I had intended to turn up early to admire the spectacular Victorian décor and browse the fine beer collection but due to traffic and disorientation, I ended up running in at 8pm gasping for a drink but too pressed for time to have one.



Robert was looking very summery in his Hawaiian shirt and Rachel was looking stunningly blonde. I only had time to greet two people from my writing club and find a seat before Robert launched into the evening's entertainment.

Robert told us stories of his father's tale tales of whaling, paddling a boat with a swordfish sword, being on the grassy knoll. Then he related stories of celebrities who had injured him and celebrities whom he had injured, the latter list being significantly longer than the former. Then we heard his plans to remove Peacehaven by rendering it invisible with ultraviolet paint and silent by playing the silence from the Dalai Lama's meditation room really loud.

There were tales of getting a free trip to Australia via an admin error, herbal assisted time travel and the mayor of Peacehaven revoking Robert's welcome to that town. My favourite section of the evening was the display of Robert's collection of 'Guest publications' including 'Sissies on Parade', 'Bacon Busters' and a rather odd pornographic magazine full of enthusiastic women and guys who just didn't look terribly interested.

Then Robert unveiled his flying V ukulele and miniature Marshall speaker stack and treated us to George Formby's lesser known heavy metal hits, unplugged because neither he nor Rachel could get the plug to stay in the ukulele.

My second favourite moment in the evening was when a colleague from my writing club put up his hand and prefaced his question with "I haven't read any of your novels" and Robert promptly told him to "fuck Off".

Robert then ended the evening on a serious note, telling us that our purpose on the earth was to bring a little happiness to other people. We were moved, rendered thoughtful and then showed our appreciation.





ZZ9 Plural Z Alpha

The Official Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy
Appreciation Society

www.zz9.org

Robert was thanked by the organisers and Uncle Nick (who had arrived 30 minutes late, thereby missing strippers, fire eating, levitations and menagerie of creatures thought extinct) joined the book signing queue while I and a large section of the audience fell upon Robert's guest publications for a closer, disbelieving look.



Introducing Burlesque

By Cardinal Cox

As some of my fellow Sprouts might know, amongst the various events and venues I perform poetry at, there is the burlesque troupe that I sometimes read with, between the dancers (called *Candyland*

you should be able to find some clips on Youtube, including me dieing on stage, I know I was dieing because a couple of times you can clearly see the Grim Reaper walking through the audience).

Now some of you gentle Sprouts might

not have ever attended a burlesque night but think that you might like to, so how do you prepare yourselves? Well, first, what to expect from a good burlesque night? The best burlesque has a sense of

humour and also is more tease than strip. After all, in these days of Internet porn you can see all the naked bodies you might ever want to, (and I'm so old that when I was a lad the closest we could get

to computer porn was to type 5318008 into a calculator and turn it upside-down) but the elegance of a lady taking off her clothes, at her own pace, is something to be experienced live. And as to the accusation that



burlesque exploits women, I've found that in many cases it is the women who are the organisers and they are in complete control.

So, before you go to a burlesque club, here are some tips.

Read a Book. You might be able to get *The Velvet Hammer Burlesque* by Michelle Carr published by Die Gestalten Verlag) through your library. This is a large photo-book about an L.A. burlesque club started by some rock-chicks who enjoyed vintage men's magazines and wanted to do something themselves. The girls come in a variety of sizes and shapes, but all with an elegance that even the candid back-stage shots cannot diminish.

Listen to a CD. *The Best of Burlesque: 50 Original Club Classics* (on Demon) is an excellent collection of Jazz and Blues from the 1940's and 1950's that ranges from Frank Sinatra, through Dale Hawkins and Bo Diddley to David Rose's track *The Stripper* (and yes, I could only think about Morecambe and Wise) and Big Joe Turner's *My Gal's a Jockey*. I picked it up in a local record shop for under £10 and is good addition to everyone's collection.

Watch a Film. *On Tour* (in French is *Tournee*) stars and is directed by Mathieu Amalric (who was a villain in a Bond movie) plays a disgraced Parisian television produce (you never really find out what it is he did) who is on the road with a handful of American burlesque performers. While he's trying to get them the promised show in Paris, they have to play low-clubs on the coast. The performers include Kitten on the Keys (who I've met, she's really sweet, get her CD's if you can) Mimi Le Meaux, Dirty Martini, Julie Atlas Muz (you won't believe what she can do with a weather balloon) and Roky Roulette. Parts are in French (with subtitles), parts are in English, doesn't really go anywhere, but is fun.

Get a Party Together. Any burlesque club worth their salt will love a hen party. But before you try the intimate atmosphere of the burlesque club, see if Easy Theatres show *An Evening of Burlesque* is playing in your town. With a rotating cast of performers, both dancers and comedians, you're unlikely to see the same show twice. When I went, I admired the fan dancers artistic ability but preferred the tongue-in-cheek attitude of a couple of the up-and-coming acts. The audience our night included a couple of hen parties and so tipped the balance to a higher ratio of women to men (which is always good).

Have Fun. And if after you've been you fancy trying the burlesque dancing classes on offer around the country, give it a go. A couple of my ex's had both been to (separate) belly-dancing classes and they found them a real hoot of women together just having fun. I imagine (and I do like to imagine it) that bump-and-grind and nipple-tassel-twirling classes would be just as much a giggle.

If you were at the Rankin's combined one hundredth birthday celebrations in 2009, you might have had a copy of my poetry pamphlet *One Night at the Brentford Burlesque* forced on to you. The sort-of follow-on *Cabaret of Curiosities* has been released and if you'd like a copy (while stocks last) drop me an email at: cardinalcox1@yahoo.co.uk

Editors Note: The Cardinal is and has been a stalwart of the club since before my time as both a member and leader and I'm sure he won't mind when I say I consider him our house poet, and an excellent one at that. His latest collection, "Lundone" arrived with me a couple of weeks back and is a great read, it's steam-punk! Drop him a line at the email given above to find out how to get this and other collections.

Doctor Hills Cabinet of Curiosities Number 23

Welcome back to my ever-expanding Cabinet of Curiosities, this time round I have for your edification a rather disgusting parasite, the attack of the killer custard creams and the fattest goalkeeper ever to play league football. Enjoy.

What The F..K!

Time: Today

Place: USA

In the words of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, whoops Wikipedia "Parasitism is a type of symbiotic relationship between organisms of different species where one organism, the parasite, benefits at the expense of the other, the host"



Mnnnphn..Nmmp!!!

One particularly spectacular parasite features in one of my all time favourite films, *Alien*. Who can forget that wonderful scene where that nasty little critter bursts out of John Hurt's chest? Well good old Mother Nature is replete with a whole host of appalling parasites just as bad if not worse.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Boys and Girls I present for your delight/digust the ultimate niche parasite "*Cymothoa exigua*". This little creature is so bizarre that it seems impossible that it was "designed" by a higher being and if it was it must have been around 3 in the morning after too many tequilas. I mean what kind of all seeing diety/being would inflict such a crap creature upon another unless it had a

really sick sense of humour? This lovely little crustacean between 1.2 - 1.6 inches (3-4 centimetres) long floats around in the ocean until it gets close enough to a fish, a spotted rose snapper for preference, and then crawls in through its gills, enters its mouth and attaches itself to the base of its tongue. At this point things take a turn for the weird.

Rather than doing the normal parasite things, draining the host of its blood, eating it from the inside out, diverting food to itself or burrowing up into its brain and taking over, this little bastard drinks blood from the base of the fishes tongue which eventually atrophies and dies. The tongue-eating louse (to give it its non-scientific name) now moves in, attaches itself to base of the fishes now tongue less mouth and becomes...you guessed it, the fishes brand new tongue! This horrible little parasite is unique in nature as it is the only one that functionally replaces a creature's organ without causing any harm. I'm sure that the lucky fish is really; really pleased about this and would say so if it could talk, which it probably couldn't before but certainly can't do now, not with a mouthful of *Cymothoa exigua*!

Attack of the Killer Custard Creams!

Time: Present

Place: UK

What could be more relaxing than a nice cup of tea and a biscuit? Picture the scene, you've had a hard day at work and you are now relaxing at home with your feet up and are poised with a mug of your favourite Earl Grey in one hand and a nice rich tea or digestive biscuit in the other ready to dunk away to your hearts delight. But, pause for a moment dear readers for terrible danger is just a dip of a biscuit away! Surely, I hear you say, this genteel act could not possibly be as hazardous as hang gliding in a hurricane, taking on a tiger with a teaspoon, naked alligator wrestling or even asking Robert Rankin where he gets his ideas from? Where on earth could such appalling danger lie? Fear not for the mighty brains working at Mindlab International led by Dr David Lewis have published an exhaustive and far ranging report to warn all you careless dunkers of the unimaginable perils that lie in store.



Danger!!! Will Robinson, Danger!!!

Panic no more for here is the wonderfully named...

"B.I.T.E (BISCUIT INCIDENT THREAT EVALUATION) which includes sections on "Near Range Explosiveness, Long Range Explosiveness, Measure probability of crumb dispersion, Probability of losing a chunk, Measure of splash, Dunk Likelihood, Fall Likelihood (Probability of a piece falling to floor that is worth eating) Average

maximum sustainable force of biscuit clumps in Newtons Loudness & Average number of chews required...

DISCLAIMER: this formula has been calculated based upon only the most obvious types of injuries and based upon common biscuit-eating behaviour types. It is strongly recommended that the individual consult the biscuit manufacturer and perform a self assessment of their particular risk prior to eating biscuits."

(In case you are wondering, and I certainly was, "Explosiveness" is defined as what happens when a biscuit is broken and the crumbs come hurtling at you with almost lethal force).



Harmless looking but surprisingly dangerous

"The following risks were determined as most likely to occur:

1. Eye/ear/trachea (windpipe) irritation caused by crumbs.
2. Scalding - due to splashes caused when a piece of dunked biscuit falls into hot liquid.
3. Back Injury, hernia, muscular problems from picking up dropped biscuit pieces.
4. TMJ (temporomandibular joint) syndrome to jaw by frequent biscuit chewing.

5. Workplace injury due to being distracted by the sound of biscuits being broken.

6. Dental Damage due to biting on a hard biscuit or something within the biscuit, such as a nut or piece of hard chocolate. Especially likely to cause damage if the tooth has previously been filled."

There is also the danger of your cute cuddly pet leaping up and tearing not only the biscuit from your fingers, but your fingers as well! I would love to know what the least obvious type of biscuit related injuries were, falling backwards onto half eaten Bourbon, having a soggy Garibalbi stuck up your nose or absently minded biting your own thumb off?

The report also helpfully lists the most "dangerous" of biscuits based on the sections listed above. So for all you biscuit lovers out there here is the "rogue's gallery" of lethally tempting treats.

Custard Cream 5.64, Cookie 4.34, Chocolate Biscuit Bar 4.12, Wafer 3.74, Rich Tea 3.45, Bourbon 3.44, Oat Biscuit 3.31, Digestive 3.14, Ginger Nut 2.99, Shortbread 2.90, Caramel Shortcake 2.76, Nice Biscuit 2.27, Iced Biscuits/Party Rings 2.16,

Chocolate Finger 1.38, Jaffa Cakes 1.16.

So the next time you are hit in the eye by a stray crumb, burn your fingers rescuing a soggy piece of rich tea, strain your back picking up a dropped digestive or in one case getting stuck in wet cement trying to retrieve a particularly enticing morsel, you can't say you haven't been warned!

Doctors Notes

This extract from the report

"According to statistics from 'The Home Accident Surveillance System' 2002 report by the Department of Trade and Industry, there were more than 500 'biscuit related' accidents in that year, or around ten each week. To investigate just what it is about this humble and apparently innocent looking snack food, we asked students to investigate their physical characteristics.

The study, supervised by Mindlab International Ltd scientists, involved ten students (5xM & 5xF) aged 16 -18 (average 17.2) to investigate the physical properties of biscuits. Experimental work was carried out at the Sussex Innovation Centre based at the University of Sussex in Brighton"

The fruits of the extensive research can be seen on this website
<http://www.rockybiscuit.co.uk/downloads/rocky-bite-report.pdf>

PS. My own favourite is the ginger nut weighing in at a risky 2.99.

He ate all the pies!

Time: 1894-1907

Place: UK

Many football players have acquired "nicknames" over the years, Colin "Chopper" Harris, Norman "Bites yer legs" Hunter, David "Golden Balls" Beckham, Billy "The fish" Thompson and Fernando "worth every penny" Torres being some of the more printable. Into this august company of superbly fit, highly trained and not at all overpaid athletes step forward William "Fatty" Foulke, (1874-1916) Britain's heaviest ever professional footballer. Weighing 350 lb (158.7kilos) and standing 6 ft 4 in (1.93 m) when the average height of players was 5 ft 5in (1.67 m) William was literally head and shoulders above all others. As with many players of this period he also played Cricket at County level but it is for being the largest (and by the end of his career) the fattest goalkeeper ever to play in English league football that he is most remembered.



Definitely ate more than one pie.

Discovered playing for village side Blackwell in a Derbyshire Cup tie at Ilkeston Town William was signed up by Sheffield United for £20 where he played in goal from 1894 to 1905. Making his debut for Sheffield United against West Bromwich Albion on 1 September 1894 and led the team to three FA Cup finals (winning two) and a League Championship.

Although he had not reached his final massive weight, he was an imposing no nonsense player in a time when football was great deal more physical than today. Once, he grabbed a Liverpool centre forward by the leg and bounced him up and

down on his head. Another time, Foulke scooped up a Port Vale player and hurled him into the back of the net. He would often do this to any forwards who "annoyed" him. I would love to see some the over-priced prima donnas playing today come unstuck against this man mountain!

Players were also allowed to barge the keeper into the net. C. B. Fry, the famous cricketer, who also played football for Southampton, remarked: "Foulke is no small part of a mountain. You cannot bundle him."

At the end of the first match in the 1902 Cup Final Foulke protested to the officials that Southampton's equalizing goal should not have been allowed. So angry was William that he stormed out of his dressing room stark naked and pursued the referee, Tom Kirkham, who took refuge in a broom cupboard. Foulke had to be stopped by a group of F.A. officials from wrenching the cupboard door from its hinges to reach the hapless referee. "The linesman, J. T. Howcroft, described how Frederick Wall, secretary of the Football Association, tried to placate the goalkeeper: "Foulke was exasperated by the goal and I saw F. J. Wall, secretary of the FA, pleading with him to rejoin his colleagues. But Bill was out for blood, and I shouted to Mr. Kirkham to lock his cubicle door. He didn't need telling twice. But what a sight! The thing I'll never forget is Foulke, so tremendous in size, striding along the corridor, without a stitch of clothing."

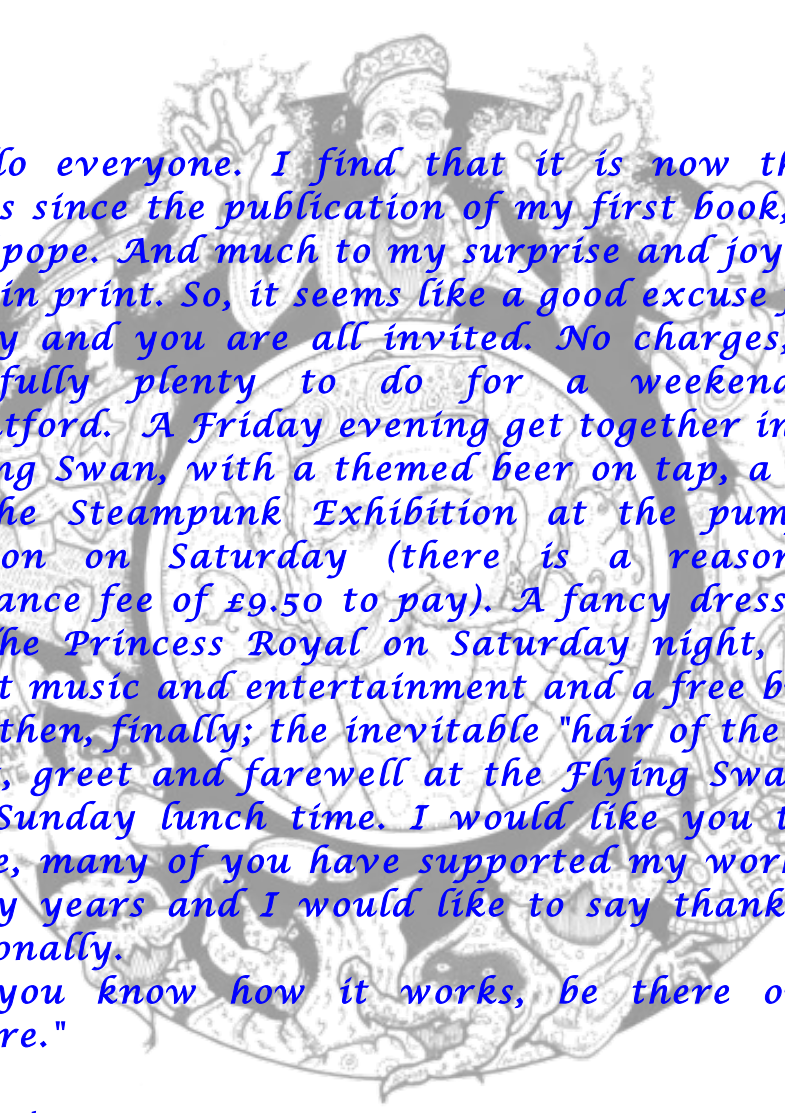
During the 1896-97 season, Foulke brought a Sheffield and Derbyshire League match to a halt by swinging on the crossbar and breaking it. "Foulke covered himself with glory - splinters and network, by swinging on the crossbar and bringing it down with a crash." (Sheffield Independent 15th Feb 1897).

He went on to play for Chelsea as club Captain during the 1905-1906 season after refusing to take a pay cut at Sheffield, again for the enormous fee of £50! Foulke by now was remarkably temperamental. If he thought his defenders were not trying hard enough, he would walk off the field. However, he continued to put on weight. According to one report, Foulke was known to arrive early for breakfast, set for the entire Chelsea team, and eat the lot. After playing just one season he joined Bradford City, again for £50. However, he now weighed over 25 stone, and was no longer as agile as he was and he retired from first-class football in November 1907.

Foulke remains in the record books as the heaviest ever first-class footballer to play anywhere in the world.

**THE ANTIPOPE 30th ANNIVERSARY PARTY
BRENTFORD**

22nd, 23rd and 24th July 2011



"Hello everyone. I find that it is now thirty years since the publication of my first book, The Antipope. And much to my surprise and joy it is still in print. So, it seems like a good excuse for a party and you are all invited. No charges, but hopefully plenty to do for a weekend in Brentford. A Friday evening get together in The Flying Swan, with a themed beer on tap, a visit to the Steampunk Exhibition at the pumping station on Saturday (there is a reasonable entrance fee of £9.50 to pay). A fancy dress ball at The Princess Royal on Saturday night, with great music and entertainment and a free buffet and then, finally; the inevitable "hair of the dog" meet, greet and farewell at the Flying Swan on the Sunday lunch time. I would like you to be there, many of you have supported my work for many years and I would like to say thank you personally.

So, you know how it works, be there or be square."

Robert

The Japanese Devil Fish Girl and other Unnatural Attractions.

By Robert Rankin (Gollancz, September 2010 UK - March 2011 US)

A Review by James Bacon

This is a splendidly fun adventure story set in the aftermath of one of the great science fiction classics, *War of the Worlds*, and yet it's thankfully fresh and full of humor, and belies a deeper, more thoughtful message.

Never happy with a clichéd setting, Rankin immediately meddles with literary history by moving the infamous interplanetary conflict so that in his far-fetched world it occurred in 1885, allowing him further flexibility and to draw in more historical characters. Not that this was needed by an author who regularly addresses his readers through his footnotes, creating pseudo-scientific explanations in a jocular fashion to explain away inconsistencies and to allow him latitude for laughter.

Despite being set in the wake of the Wellsian masterpiece, it is in no way a derivative or second rate work, and in actual fact, like most Rankin books, is of its own style and setting, with quite an imaginative and visually satisfying feeling and in this case relying on an interestingly fantastical mixture of alternative history and steampunkedness, while discreetly reflecting on our current situation—most pointedly the current conflict in Afghanistan.

Rankin started entertaining readers with *The Antipope*, the first of the Brentford Trilogy in seven parts in 1981. His initial series of books were set in suburban west London, a flat cap humor with a neat mix of urban legend, mysticism, pint drinking, rascalling and buckets of laughs. He went on to write more science fictional work, with his *Armageddon* series, starring Barry a Time Travelling Sprout, and a General Electric Mini-gun toting Elvis, and *Earth the Television studio*. With thirty two books his style and subject have been variable, from stories set in Toyland with Nursery

characters to the Road Trip adventure of friends.

In recent times, his works seem to have a maturity and sensibility that some people, and dare I say some reviewers, just wash over as they laugh at the good mix of joviality or critique the style of humor. It's easy to enjoy the humor and smile at his expert knowledge and ability to create incredibly realistic Victoriana, or whatever subject his characters are engrossed with at the time.

His last two books have in turn dealt with the complexity of the mind, and real friendship. In *Da Da De Da Da Code*, Rankin, with consummate writing skill, maintains a fun story while exploring what is insanity, with the main character thinking that he has a reincarnation of guitarist Robert Johnson in his mind as a monkey, telling him what to do, but the readers never know whether this is madness or part of the absurd fiction that they are used to, and the ending is a grim reflection on the depths our emotional scales can sink to and a reminder that we truly do not understand the human mind.

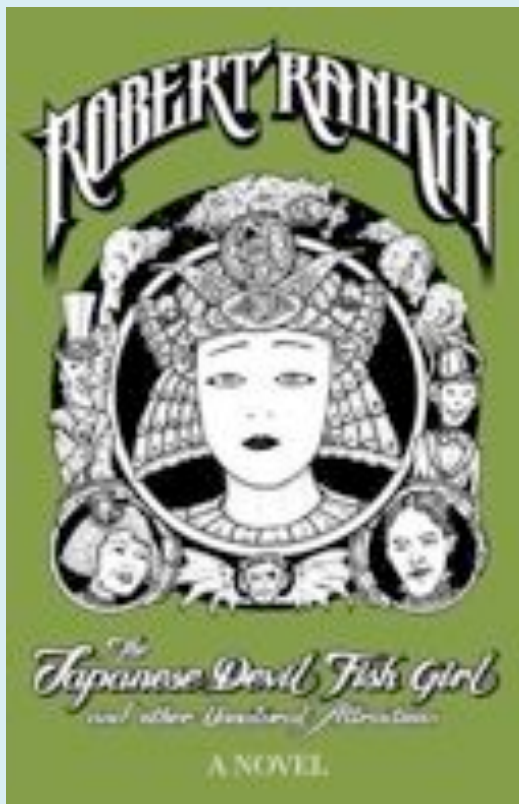
With *Retromancer*, it was about time travel, puns and jokes in a German-occupied Britain, but it's also about friendship, and what real friendship, comradeship, back to back looking after one another is about. Again, the art of the comedian telling the hilarious joke that is in front of something terribly sad comes through here, and that is the sort of entertainer that Rankin is. He has great stories; they are ingenious and unique, although he uses many sources to derive his angle on life. He engages with his readers, but underneath it all, he has a chilling cynicism and insight into humanity, like many observers, an aspect that needs deeper consideration.

To categorize Rankin for those of you unfamiliar, unfortunately, there is no genre per se for his work, so it gets lumped into the shoebox of British Humorous Science Fiction and Fantasy. This is a category to which others, such as Pratchett, Holt and Fforde are also ascribed. Just like the Goons, Monty Python, The Young Ones and Little Britain, all the creators are quintessentially British, and are skilled in making readers smile and laugh, but apart from this, the commonality gets more difficult to identify. Of course if Pratchett is the Mainstream Master of this category, then Rankin is the Cult stand up rebellious comedian.

In Britain, Rankin has a massive following. Estimated, he has sold around 3 million books, including foreign sales, but he is also a man of the people, engaging in activities, from Open Top Bus Tours of his beloved Brentford, to making costumes for his attendance at conventions, performing live gigs playing the ukulele and of course, designing and creating all his book covers, for the last fifteen years now, initially as sculptures, and of late being commissioned to draw the cover artwork.

The Black and White Artwork on the cover of this *The Japanese Devil Fish Girl and Other Unnatural Attractions* is also by Rankin and it illustrates the characters and gives the readers a

taste of the slight strangeness of what is in store, although some may think that it looks very detailed and yet may have been done with a Magic Marker, and this may be true and is in itself allegorically the simple beauty of Rankin.



It's 1895 and initially we are introduced to our protagonist, young George, in charge of a showman's grotesque, a pickled and quite rancid Martian, along with George's employer, the feckless Professor Coffin who runs the Cabinet of Human Curiosities. They are showmen.

Following some interesting 'precognitions' that also make one of the aforementioned horrors of state a little clearer and more personal,

George and the professor, who seem quite a pair of bounders, are soon both on an adventure as they use credit and aliases, and cheat their way on board the Empress of Mars, a massive trans-oceanic lighter-than-air vessel, with sumptuous trappings as they seek out the Japanese Devil Fish Girl, the ultimate showman's freak, or is it folly?

Rankin conjures up a beautiful vision of Victorian Splendor, laying it on in a manner that sets it slightly apart from reality, but which still feels truly of the age, where solar system trade and travel is a given. Between Babbage and Tesla, and some nifty back engineering, the world is considerably askew from that at the

end of the original Wells work and very far from the picture that Edison drew.

The author manages to provide us with Jovians and Venusians to complement the Martians of invading fame, while the callous and most horrid manner in which the war with the Martians is brought to their home planet and to an end is quite inspired in its despicability, but not unimaginable. The British Empire, for all its pomp, was never fair and quite frequently horrifyingly diabolical, something missed by many in a Steampunk costume these days, and Rankin ably reminds us that lying to the masses and using means justified by the ends is as common as ever.

The manipulation and true horror of what powers will do to stay in control, convince people that they have something to fear, and then deal with the matter in such an underhand and despicable manner is insightful. This occurs on a number of levels, as mind control, both manipulative maneuvering and chemically induced, are included in the story. There is nothing as horrible as thinking you may have been forced or induced to do something you didn't want, and this is an important part of the immediate story, or how this is overcome, and how nastiness, greed and self interest can easily make any qualms disappear. Rankin has an inspired understanding of the human consciousness and thought process, yet he makes it feel light and understandable; there is no high level philosophy being shoved down the reader's throat, but as part of the story, as part of the tale, we get to understand the evil nature of a man who wants to manipulate.

To counter this dark sounding aspect, as soon as George embarks on adventure, he meets Ada Lovelace, who quickly becomes a love interest as well as able adventuress. It is this relationship, full of quirks and George's doubt, that becomes so important to the story and to a degree the positive aspect that fights against the surrounding dark.

We visit New York and the trip takes quite a few twists and turns, taking us to a massive predicament, for humanity and most importantly for London, leading to a wonderful battle between the various worlds inhabited of the solar system in London's skies.

There is also an embedded moral message within this book, that goodness and love will overcome. This sounds rather whimsy, but it is George's intrinsic goodness that allows him to overcome evil. There are other metaphorical references, a recurring anti-war message reflecting Britain's current state of war and a finger is also pointed at the preposterousness of violence for the sake of beliefs.

I frequently feel that there has been a lack of reflective science fictional work shining a thoughtful light on the current conflicts. I realise that the job that was once science fiction's, with Heinlein and *Starship Troopers* calling on his World War 2 experience, and Joe Haldeman and *The Forever War* with 'Nam, James White and Tableua with the background of Irish Problems, John Scazi's books perhaps a reflection of his own issues, but where are the books for the now conflicts? Ken McLeod's *Execution Channel* is one I can hold up for sure, but it stands out. Meanwhile reality has caught up with SF, with an RAF squadron based in Nevada, piloting remote control MQ-9 Reaper UAV's in Afghanistan.

There have been so many books by combatants, so immediately; our shops shelves are full of them and sometimes it's as if Iraq two wars and Afghanistan's current ongoing war have all melded into one 'war, somewhere over there' in people's minds. Movies about Iraq and Afghanistan, *Green Zone*, *Hurt Locker*, *Jarhead*, even *Iron Man* showing a terrible and gritty war, while these wars are essentially still ongoing. Movies during the Second World War were essentially propaganda, and hard grit with the realities of war took decades to show. If we consider MASH, its proximity to Vietnam meant it was about Korea, and in the eighties, *The A-Team* were Vietnam vets, in the noughties no such gap of time is required for our sensibilities, they were Iraq Vets.

Chris Ryan and Ross Kemp keep us fed with books and television, while authors who have been there as journalists or more often now as combatants, such as Patrick Hennessey's *The Junior Officers' Reading Club: Killing Time and Fighting Wars* gives an immediate account of what is really going on. Added to that the blogs and You Tube raw footage, people can see the horror up close quite easily. Is this a job that has been lost by science fiction in the twenty-first century?

In fairness, one media I can say has been open to looking at the conflicts are comics. With Brian Wood's *DMZ*, America is torn apart by Civil War, with Manhattan is a DMZ uncontrolled buffer, the media and governments are intrinsically linked and the violence and horror of war is nasty in its intimacy, it's a fine example of science fiction reflecting on today's woes, although the SF genre even in comics, doesn't reflect it as much as I would like. We have Mark Millar's *War Heroes*, and Captain America, but there has been quite a lot of pure war literature through the medium of comics much of it independent: *War Fix*, *Shooting War*, *War is Boring*, and even in the mainstream of comics with *Combat Zone: True Tales of GIs*

Editors Note:

James wrote this article for American readers, hence why it has more background and filler, which OGS members are no doubt be aware of. A version of this review went onto SF Signal, and is also in San Francisco Steam Punk Magazine, Exhibition Hall.

in Iraq by Marvel Comics.

Robert Rankin is well known for his light, fun humor and easygoing patter, the ability to wink at the reader, and sometimes to break that fourth wall, and in this novel as always, there is much to enjoy and to be fascinated by, but there is a deeper meaning, a deeper reflection, perhaps some sort of subconscious reaction to the modern twentieth first century horrors that we can comfortably laugh at, in a science fiction novel set in 1895.

His ability to give a reader a cheap laugh as they sup on a pint, to impart the fun of adventure and vividly visualise great settings and yet as a by product, somehow, subconsciously even, with the laughter make a reader think, just a little bit about what is going on in reality is a reflection of the intelligence of this writer. To laugh and later think about it, is indeed unusual.

A splendid story, from an author who seems to be at home in a very far-fetched yet wonderfully realised Victorian Scientific Romance world



CLUB NEWS

EVENTS

Already mentioned, more than once, the Antipope 30th Anniversary Party happens over the weekend of the 22-24th July. It's going to be BIG with a great line up of entertainment on the Saturday night as arranged (with a great deal of effort) by Robert and Rachel. All you have to do is get yourselves there, bring beer / food money and prepare to have a good time ☺ It all kicks off in the Flying Swan (The Magpie and Crown) on the Friday, expect people to start turning up from 1900Hrs onwards, there is going to be (or planed to be) a special ale on tap, Golden Sprout! For those that want there is a visit to the Kew Bridge Steam Museum for their Steampunk exhibition, you will need to pay your admission, £9.50 – check out their website for more info (just google or bing Kew bridge steam museum) then that evening the party kicks off at Fangio's Bar (The Princess Royal), don't forget your costume; Villains and Villainesses being the theme, and no; it's not compulsory ☺ But the effort is always appreciated..

Finally on the Sunday, for those still around, we will meet up at the Flying Swan for lunchtime farewells.

Also coming up, and hopefully this magazine gets to you before it happens, is the dining with dinosaurs event. A joint event with the Douglas Adam's fan club, ZZ9, Bring a picnic and enjoy a day at Crystal Palace Park with plenty of like minded ~~idiots~~ people. Meeting point is Crystal Palace Rail Station for 1p.m. and then just go with the flow ☺ Oh, date - Saturday 2nd July.

THE SERIOUS BIT

This is issue eight of the club magazine and officially the end of its second year under the new regime and with the full colour magazine, it has been a great ride so far; couple of bumps along the way (Dacon ☹ being the obvious one) and it's time to look to the future. There are issues to address and one of these (the biggy) is the escalating cost of the magazine production. Over the two years the cost of producing and shipping the magazine has increased by over 30%, this down to increased printing costs increased VAT and increased postage! The club cannot absorb this cost. So what to do?

I am loathed to increase the price of membership and equally loathed to see what you get for membership reduced or diminished but something has to give. With this in mind I have a couple of proposals:

1. Reduce the number of print issues per year and off-set with PDF versions online, 2 and 2 with the print issues being mid year and start year and PDF versions in-between.
2. Keep the full colour covers, two pages front and two pages back with the rest of the magazine in black and white / grey.
3. Go completely to a PDF online system – this would see the membership price actually reduced, exact changes to be confirmed.

I am going to open this up on the forum for member discussion and all and any suggestions will be looked at with a decision being made in the near future that (hopefully) suits most parties – Certainly you, the member's, and Robert's opinions being the major considerations!

Beer, Bodies and Bogs

Helen Brunton

So when Uncle Nick decided to break his journey from the frozen North by parking up in Birmingham and joining me on the train to London, the rail transportation establishments of Britain celebrated by digging up the entire length of the Chiltern line and crashing their ticket sales databases.

However, we failed to take the hint and uncle Branson kindly stepped in and got us into Euston at twice the price that Chiltern would have charged. So that's how he funds larking about with space tourism and high speed balloons.

We arrived at Holborn and after an urgent telephonic login to the golden Sprout

to establish where we were supposed to meet (a small oversight considering the previous disruption to our journey), we arrived at the Shakespeare's Head, a pleasant Weatherspoons pub with a nice library at the rear (Note to government, I think I've found a way of making libraries more popular). People started to arrive and peaked at a total of 12, just the right number for all-inclusive



conversations. The group comprised Uncle Nick and I, Dr Hill, Dave, Alec and Deidre, Cardinal Cox and Sally, Geoff, Reverend Jim, Mika and Croydon Robert.

The conversation included a mention that the Princess Louise next door had a grade II listed urinal. I had never seen a grade II listed urinal and enthusiastically expressed my desire to see it. Perhaps I was a little over exuberant, but Dr Hill soon picked himself up off the floor and agreed that an architectural field trip could be arranged.

We had a few beers and headed off to the museum. The Hunterian is small and elegantly housed and is mainly the private collection of John Hunter, the father of scientific surgery who boarded his students above the dissection room containing the cadavers, thereby proving that he had a Sproutish sense of humour.

We arrived just in time to join a guided tour which started with what I thought were table-sized woodcuts of arteries and nervous systems but turned out to be actual

arteries and nervous systems glued onto tables. Gosh, those Italian surgeons were pretty nifty with their dissections!

The tour guide told us of punch ups at the gallows between medical students and the victim's families, body snatching and children sold by the inch. Then there was a room comprising two storeys of wall to wall pickled specimens. Hunter had organised his collection according to their position in the animal kingdom, starting with the lowest forms of life and culminating in humans though there was a miscellaneous section under the 18th century label equivalent of 'WTF IS THAT?' which contained kangaroos.

The collection includes drawers filled with fascinating, complex and eye watering instruments eliciting comments such as 'Surely that's far too big to go THERE' and 'Ouch' and sometimes 'Aiiieee!!'.

Towering over the collection is the skeleton of Charles Byrne, the Irish giant. At a stunning 7 foot 7 and still growing, his skeleton is perfect among a collection of bent and twisted 'oddities'. He didn't want to be an exhibit in a museum and had therefore asked to be buried at sea, but had instead been sold down the river, so now he stands when he would have preferred to lie. A reminder to us that these aren't just exhibits, they were people once.

Having tracked down Churchill's dentures and half of Babbage's brain (he manages to turn



up every time I go to a museum), we returned to the pub to recharge our batteries. It was here that Cardinal Cox shared his latest poetry with us and Reverend Jim reminisced over how his ankle had been broken while rollerblading at Crystal Palace. Croydon Robert divulged that he had fulfilled his wildest dream by falling down a manhole and now cherishes a lifetime ambition of slipping on a banana skin. We agree that this could be arranged. In fact, we could have a double whammy, a re-enactment and a comedy staple. I make a note to bring bananas to the Dinosaur Picnic this summer.

Feeling refreshed, it was decided that the time has come for NurseWhen to boldly go where ladies have rarely gone before (unless they are particularly interested in grade II listed bogs or are in the cleaning profession). We therefore sauntered nonchalantly into the stunningly appointed Princess Louise and then galloped downstairs to the toilets. Upon receiving the call "OK, it's safe!", I burst into the gents' to view the rather lovely granite urinals. Suitably impressed, I left and then realised that I hadn't had

this historic moment recorded, so I rushed back in, only to be met with urgent cries of “No, it's not safe!” as Croydon Robert, not content with merely viewing these historic monuments was now in the process of testing them. I rushed out again, waited for the testing to finish and then returned to have my visit recorded for posterity (and yes, the only word that can describe my expression is 'smug').

We then retired to the upstairs room of the Princess Louise to chew the fat and talk some toot. The main excitement of the day now being over, some sprouts began to wend their way home while six of us went in search of an evening meal. We settled on 'My Old Dutch', a pancake specialist and, being in the Netherlands, four of us decided to do as the Netherlanders do and ordered the 'Old Amsterdam'. It was an interesting combination of smoked ham, apple and maple syrup. We found it to be pleasantly unusual and combining the main course with pudding definitely saves time.

By now it was getting late and we start to head for our various homes, though there was still enough time for Reverend Jim and Mika to introduce Nick and I to another architectural wonder. The Euston Tap, one of the smallest pubs in London, is an experience rather like drinking in a classy Tardis which has the internal dimensions of a police box. A swift half was drunk and then the last train to Birmingham was caught and so ended a splendid day of beer, bodies and bogs.





BEWARE I KNOW DIMAC AND WAS TRAINED BY THE COUNT HIMSELF!



Chris Williams

So who was the legendary Count Danté? Does or did he really exist or is he just a figment of someone's imagination? You will be pleased to know that he did exist and his story is a bit of a far fetched one and you couldn't really make it up. Not only that, Dimac exists as well...well its really Dim Mak and is a version of kung fu which means "poison hand," these are strikes that concentrate on attacks that include the thumbing out of eyes, flaying of skin, hooking lips and similar moves

To give him his full name Count Juan Raphael Danté was actually born in Beverly, Chicago on February 2, 1939 but this wasn't his real name (ok that was pretty obvious), his birth name was John Keehan and his family were actually Irish-American and not Spanish at all (although he will try and clear this up later when he changed his name)

In his youth he attended the Mount Carmel High School and once he had graduated he joined the marine reserves and later the army, where he learnt hand-to-hand combat including Jujitsu.

Upon leaving the army he taught Judo and Karate and studied under Sensei (Master) Robert Trias at his Dojo (Japanese Martial Arts Training Centre) in Phoenix, Arizona. Trias had opened the first karate school in the U.S. and was also head of the United States Karate Association (USKA). Keehan quickly earned his second-degree black belt and was appointed the USKA's Midwest representative, soon becoming a Sensei himself. Keehan, a bit of a self publicist and showman (he has been described as flashy, self centred and arrogant by some) wanted bigger audiences and began to organize his own tournaments that emphasized the flashier and perhaps more dangerous/glamorous aspects of martial arts. The first event he organised was on the July 28, 1963 a full contact martial arts tournament hosted at the University of Chicago, this led to many other tournaments, many parring different forms of martial arts against one another, these tournaments were often attended by many eminent people from the martial-arts world, one was attended by a young lad called Bruce Lee.



Robert Trias expelled Keehan from the USKA in 1964, Keehan claimed it was because he was willing to teach non white students martial arts (he was one of the first white Sensei's to do this), although many agree that there was a hidden agenda at the time on not

teaching minority groups, others believe the disagreement was more to do with power and control. Keehan then set up his own organisation called the World Karate Federation. In 1965 Keehan and an associate, Douglas Dwyer were arrested trying to blow out a window at a rivals Dojo, whilst both claimed it was because they were under the influence of alcohol, Keehan did later explain that they had done it due to a disagreement over non payment of monies for a tournament. In the end they were both charged, Keehan getting 2 years probation.

Around the same time Keehan was also seen with a couple of animals, the first was an odd pet (although totally legal at the time), this was a lion cub which he walked around the town on a lead, the other was a bull which he drove around on the back of a lorry with a sign on it claiming that the bull would be killed with one single blow, not by Keehan as he had picked a student of his, an Arthur Rapkin to carry out the deed, although the show was a sell out this actual part of it was never carried out, Keehan claiming that the local animal protection agency had banned it.

It was now 1967 and the year The Count actually appeared, Keehan legally changed his name to Count Juan Raphael Danté, his excuse was that he wanted to reclaim the title he had lost when his parents fled Spain during the Civil War and to hide their noble heritage had changed their names. It's never been clear why Keehan decided he must be a Spanish count, especially when his family clearly had Irish ancestors or how he chose his new name, given that Dante has Italian origins rather than Spanish ones, although some think he may have got it from the street his High School was located on (Dante Avenue).



With a new name along came a new persona, a far flashier one at a tournament held in 1967, he appeared wearing a flowing cape and brandishing a cane capped by a lions head, his hair was now died jet black and he had a neatly trimmed beard. He also began to promote himself in comics describing himself as the “*The Deadliest Man Alive*”. All you had to do was mail order his booklet called *The World's Deadliest Fighting Secrets* priced at \$5.50 and they would also receive a free Black Dragon Fighting Society membership card. These adverts account for much of The Counts legend and they read....

“Yes, this is the DEADLIEST and most TERRIFYING fighting art known to man—AND WITHOUT EQUAL. Its MAIMING, MUTILATING, DISFIGURING, PARALYZING and CRIPPLING techniques are known by only a few people in the world. An expert at DIM MAK could easily kill many Judo, Karate, Kung Fu, Aikido, and Gung Fu experts at one time with only finger-tip pressure using his murderous POISON HAND WEAPONS. Instructing you step by step thru each move in this manual is none other than COUNT DANTE—“THE DEADLIEST MAN WHO EVER LIVED.” (THE CROWN PRINCE OF DEATH.)”

Also in 1967 he opened a hairdressing salon, the House of Dante – work that one out, Dim Mak martial arts to hairdressing – The Count himself claimed that the flexible working hours fitted in well with his martial arts training and it also was a good way to meet girls!.



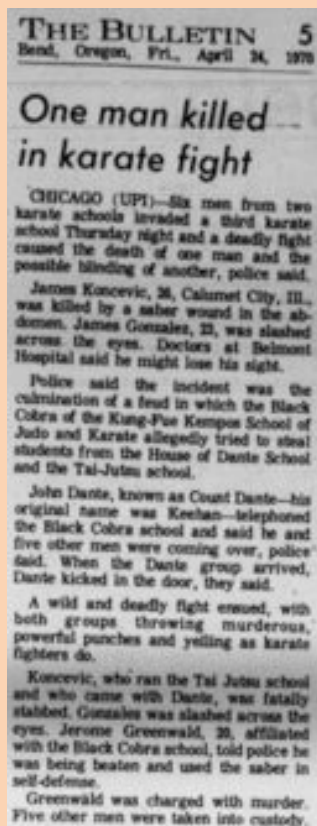
The Count's fortunes certainly grew (not bad from a few comic adverts and a hairdressers) and by 1969 he had opened three new martial arts schools in Chicago. He was still holding full contact tournaments but his new persona and bad boy image was starting to rile those at the top of the martial arts scene, Black Belt magazine refused to cover his tournaments and even published articles where many other instructors dismissed and criticised The Count and his tactics, the magazine also criticised his tournaments saying the spectators come just to see plenty of blood spilt.

In April 1970, The Count had a disagreement with a member of a rival Dojo - The Green Dragon Society and wanted to settle this so he got his close friend Jim Koncevic to call Ken Knudson of the Green Dragon society to arrange a settlement but Knudson turned it down referring to it as just child's play.

There are many conflicting reports on what happened, the reasons etc. but most accounts agree that The Count did visit the Green Dragon's Dojo, along with Koncevic (described as an animal of a fighter with a killer instinct) and another friend called Michael Felkoff.

One article published a year after the event (described as the Dojo Wars) The Count claimed that he and his students had received death threats and he had planned "to level their entire instructor force" In another article Felkoff claims that he was only there to act as a mediator.

According to an article in the Tribune newspaper, The Count broke down the front door and found six Green Dragon members inside, all armed with Chinese style weapons. It's never really clear who made the first move, some say one of the men with The Count attacked a Green Dragon member, whilst another says The Count attacked an instructor who's eye was lacerated so badly it required surgery. All accounts agree on one thing, Koncevic was ready to fight and according to the Tribune article he struck Jerome Greenwald, one of the Green Dragons from behind and began punching him, Greenwald grabbed a sword and whilst trying to block a blow stabbed Koncevic.



It appears on seeing this The Count shouted for everyone to stop fighting or the police would be called, Koncevic still with some fight in him shouted at everyone to “get the f*** out.” He himself ran out the door but stumbled and fell to the floor and died on the pavement outside, aged just 26. Three students who had come with Koncevic had already ran away and called the police. According to the Tribune, Greenwald was arrested and charged with murder; The Count was charged with aggravated battery and impersonating a police officer (no explanation was given for the latter charge).

The court case was interesting one mainly as The Counts attorney was one Bob Cooley. Colley had developed a reputation as a lawyer who would take any action he needed to get this clients acquitted, using legitimate means and it is also alleged that he was prepared to bribe judges and court officials. He later worked for the Chicago Mafia (known as the Outfit) until the late 80s, however he became disgusted with his employers after being given a contract to kill a policeman and he approached the US Justice Department and started working for the FBI. His work for the FBI sent 24 men to prison, including Outfit members, politicians, police officers and judges, the operation also led to many significant political and judicial reforms.

In Colley’s book “When Corruption Was King”, he recalls meeting The Count and describing him as a tall, wild-bearded man wearing a yellow fishnet leotard and a purple cape.

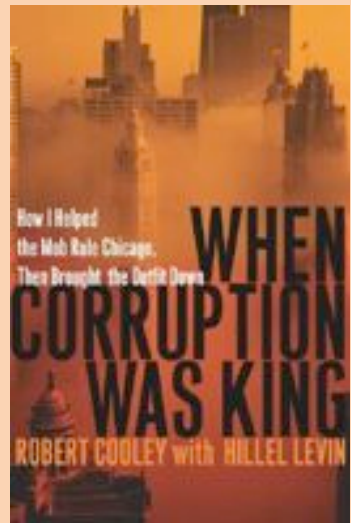
The state built its case against The Count saying he was accountable and ultimately responsible for Koncevic’s death. Cooley wasn’t too worried and argued that there was no way The Count would have known about the use of weapons.

In 1971, the judge in the case dismissed all charges; however the judge did give them a stern lecture bellowing that they were all as guilty as each other.

Although acquitted, The Count’s name was blackened, in the past interschool rivalries and grudge matches were common thing but no one had ever died, later in an official Karate article The Count did state that he blamed himself for what had happened and his days of fighting were over and he would no longer accept any challenges unless first attacked.

However this did not stop him getting into fights, Cooley stated that he remembered The Count beating up two men in a car park after they laughed at the bogus Spanish coat of arms on the door of his Cadillac. He also assaulted another man who called him a “fruit”. Cooley himself was once a victim when one night after an argument The Count took a swing at Cooley’s chin that put him in so much pain that he felt his skin had actually been ripped off, The Count did apologise for this and offered to show Cooley a trick, if Cooley fired his pistol at him The Count would catch the bullet.

Cooley kept his distance from The Count but again their paths crossed, in 1974, The Count had financial interest in a chain of adult bookstores and a car dealership but had run



into trouble with the south-side boss Jimmy “the Bomber” Catuara, Cooley was called in to help. Cooley wrote that The Count paid \$25,000 to Catuara and emerged unscathed. Their paths crossed yet again, this time in regard to the Chicago Purolator vault robbery in which 4.3 million dollars was stolen, The Count whilst not one of the suspects on trial was ordered to undertake a lie detector test which he passed.

By 1975 The Count was clearly unwell and it was suggested he was mixing alcohol and painkillers, he did make one last attempt to revive his martial arts career by hosting a tournament in March at Taunton, Massachusetts but the karate world were unimpressed, Karate Magazine describing the event as trash.

Sadly on May 25 1975, Count Dante died in his sleep of internal haemorrhaging caused by a bleeding ulcer. He was buried in an unmarked grave in Saint Joseph’s cemetery in River Grove.

So there you have it one interesting gentleman, not only was he a highly trained and expert at martial arts, he also broke down race barriers, kept exotic pets, was involved in hairdressing, porn shops, car dealerships and got caught up; or was the cause of one or two dubious crimes and met some colourful characters, I never did find out if he had to register his hands at the police station though!

Now where can I get one of those pamphlets and a Black Dragon membership card!

Not only that, when searching internet for pics, I found this, any idea who it is?



ROBERT RANKIN'S

WARRIORS