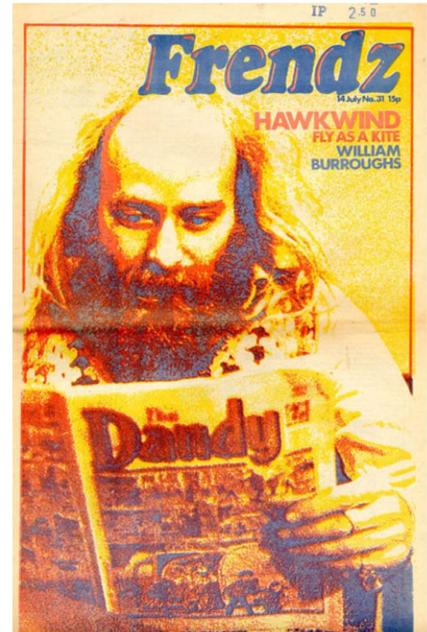


Gone with the Wind

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Down along the borderline which divides Germany into East and West, the guards all line up in uniform and shades so that they look both anonymous and vaguely sinister at the same time. They stand, either still as statues or chewing gum which makes their cheek-bones twitch, perfecting the art of being faceless. The Germans, after all, have always been strong on the tradition of uniforms and silent machismo, and these dudes have learnt their lessons well. The way they coolly ask for your passport, using every pause and movement to ensure that the beloved paranoia rating of any self-respecting hippy will reach a suitably impressive score. Meanwhile inside the area cordoned off on both sides by road-blocks, a strange figure appears from a nearby public convenience. Of impressive height and build, long reddish-blond hair and beard, and a uniform of black leather, he has the words "Thunder Rider" emblazoned on his motorcycle jacket. No-one takes much notice of him, though, as the starkness of the landscape surrounding them has seemingly stunned their capacity for wonderment or even vague curiosity. A small gathering of Frauleins stare at him suspiciously while constipated husbands glower over a frankfurter. There soon appear more such characters - a look of quiet fatigue on their faces, their cheeks slightly swollen (this was because they were carrying dope in their mouths, but, I digress). A strange mutant boy from among the company with an awkward physique and outrageously long flowing hair falls over and mutters profanely in a foreign tongue. No-one takes much notice. Their two cars stand together distinguishable from each other only by the fact that one of them has heavy damage on one side and the other has vomit stains trailing off from the back window. These people have obviously come a long way. And for a purpose. Slowly they leave, heading out toward the autobahn. Their destination - who knows where? They depart, leaving behind the soulless to continue their silent contemplation of the Wasteland.



The fools. Did they not realise that they had received a visitation from the cosmic Prophets of the Unalterable Apocalypse - no less than the Sonic Assassins, the mighty Hawkwind?!? (Here some electronic sounds should be produced for effect in a suitably ominous fashion).

One would be hard-pressed to imagine describing cruising down an autobahn a pleasure trip. The roadways themselves are vast and endless like something straight out of Godard's Alphaville while the landscape changes from being merely stark to being downright depressing. Still our heroes were labouring somewhat but still managing to keep it marginally together. In one car, Del the magic mind behind the synthesizer was at the wheel cultivating a bad mood, while Dave Brock continued to grumble. DikMik and Lemmy of Speed Freaks Inc could be doing anything from taking pills to reworking some of the upholstery with DikMik's switchblade while Simon the drummer was probably talking amiably to no-one in particular. In the other automobile, Nik "Thunder Rider" Turner was living up to his name, leaving only the smell of burning rubber and the occasional roach behind, as he drew yet another joint to his lips before passing it passengers, manager Doug Smith, Paul, the tour manager, and a certain music writer and general freeloader from the Underground Press.

The previous night had been spent in Düsseldorf where the band had played at an all-night festival. The concert, held in a stadium the size of the Empire Pool, Wembley, was a miserable affair in the grand tradition of show-biz festivals. Organised by a reasonably obnoxious little Irishman far more at home in a night-club than a rock concert, the evening had got underway with the ticket money being ripped off, immediately causing unrest among the performers as to whether they were going to get paid. The organisation was clumsy and heavy-handed and the most amazing thing of all was the total apathy the German audience exuded throughout the proceedings. Where was all that energy that used to work up at the Nazi rallies? The only action seemed to be coming from young kids intent on stealing drumsticks or any piece of equipment which might be lying around. Strange.

The apathy was cultivated further by the generally feeble standard of the bands booked to play. There was Titanic, a ghastly conglomeration of Three Dog Night, Santana and Led Zeppelin, to be avoided at all costs, the gross excesses of Atomic Rooster and almost every other third-rate English progressive band one would care to mention. Where, one vaguely wondered, were all the new-wave German bands like Can and Amon Duul II? Why did all this dross have to be specially imported for mass consumption, when real creativity was hard at work in their own country. The old saying about a prophet not being fully appreciated in his own country is still relevant.

But there was of course consolation in the presence of Hawkwind who are as good as the aforementioned German creations. While some pop star was pulling his yellow boots carefully over his jeans and adjusting his tee-shirt in the dressing room, Dave Brock, resplendent in carpet coat and wasted denims, tuned up his guitar. Dave was the original member of Group X who used to play the blues around the clubs and who eventually changed into Hawkwind Zoo and then finally Hawkwind. It all started with him, Terry Ollis on drums, John Harrison on bass and then Hugh Lloyd Langton on lead guitar. They were soon to be joined by one Nik Turner, ex-merchant navy and part-time roustabout, first as roadie and then as saxophonist. As fate would have it, DikMik, ex-photographer and general degenerate appeared again starting off as a roadie and ending up working away on his secret passion for electronics. Bass players came and went in abundance, mainly owing to personality hang-ups and a certain incompatibility they seemed to develop with Mr. Brock. Finally Lemmy, a speed freak of some proportions and naturally a good hustler worked his way into the set-up. Before this, a road accident involving the Hawkwind van which resulted in a person being killed freaked DikMik so much he immediately split with vague plans of going to India. This left Del Dettmar, the roadie whom everyone in the band got on with well enough, to take over the synthesizer which he did quite admirably. Finally Terry Ollis left due to a growing dissatisfaction with the way the band was progressing coupled with an inability to hold his side together while he was continually taking downers. His place was taken by Simon King who had stood in when Terry hadn't shown up and who fitted in OK so....

Stand out Brock is now 29 and having chosen a life-style which incorporates much discomfort (up until quite recently he earned his living as a busker), the routine of touring is none too pleasurable to his way of thinking. However, he and all the band recognise fully just how big Hawkwind has become. They could work every night for months charging large amounts of bread, but then that would immediately become a drag. Hawkwind, after all, was conceived as a means of having fun - no more, no less - and Nik Turner still expresses great surprise at being placed in such an exalted position. Here was a band renowned for its lack of togetherness; if Hawkwind played a gig, you could be fairly confident they'd turn up, but how many there would be and exactly what would happen would be another matter entirely. Once Dave Brock was in the country, spaced on mescaline, leaving the band -at that time, just Nik, Terry and Dave Anderson, with Del taking his first steps in electronics- to play a gig. An even more classic occasion was when the band was so untogether it was fronted by Twink on an electric guitar with four strings. Nik enjoys being placed in those kinds of situations in that "you've got to make the most of what you've got. It's really an experiment and as such it's always interesting to see the results. I can get far more out of that kind of gig if it works out successfully than I can out of a smoothly run performance. It tests your ability to keep it together."

The loose and easy set-up Hawkwind demands for itself shows itself in everything from their amazing record of community work to Terry Ollis' preference for playing in the nude. Terry's leaving the band was provoked by his recognition of the way things are changing for Hawkwind. Stacia, the band's regular dancer -she is in effect another member- claims that his over-reliance on pills was almost a conscious move to phase himself out from the set-up: He was unhappy with what was going down and this precipitated the degeneration of his capabilities as a drummer. The last gig he played with Hawkwind he doubled with Simon, by that time regularly filling in for him, but the results were so bad that nothing more was to be said. Since then he tried to get a band together which fell apart owing to a bust and has spent some time in hospital. He is now reported to be quite together again and there are hopes that he will rejoin the band when he is ready to.

Nik Turner recognised Terry's discontent but is unable to understand it. He digs the benefits of remaining a small band but finds the idea of becoming big perhaps more appealing. As with most things, he doesn't seem to be worried about hype and possible loss of the original roots following. "I think one can only get out of

hand and into a big ego scene when the process is sudden - when you're taken by surprise by it all. Hawkwind has been such a gradual thing, it controls its own speed and in that position you're into the reality of what being a band is all about."

This is where the parallels with the good old Grateful Dead are relevant. Both bands in their infancy worked on a recklessly idealistic level - and have been righteously fucked over because of it a few times - simply steering their chosen course by maintaining a positive approach. Now the Dead have gradually reconciled themselves and their business and are being run gently but firmly by professional good karma. The Dead are superstars but without all the jive aspects that term infers and have reached this state slowly but surely like anyone setting out to fulfill a vision of any substance. Hawkwind are now reaching a state of stability but have yet to prove to themselves if no-one else that they can hold it together and gain a balance between their original aims and their peak of success. A possible/probable hit single, a projected tour of America (nothing definite, but the interest is there) where *In Search of Space* is getting strong FM airplay and good reviews and a series of European gigs which are being performed right now, are all going to effect changes of some strength.

Things are certainly far more together now, though there is always that element of disorganisation. But then again friends, half the joy of the Underground is to be found in its lack of organisation. For this tour of Germany, Amsterdam and Italy, the fun centred around Lemmy losing his passport the day before he was set to go abroad. Once we had actually started touring, all sorts of little treats were in store for us most of them concerned around problems over vehicles. On the journey from Düsseldorf to Berlin, our car developed a fault in its brakes which culminated in us hitting a crash-barrier on a corner. Chills and spills indeed!

When we in fact arrived in Berlin, we were quite pleasantly surprised by the gig - it's another festival constructed in a picturesque spot surrounded by woods. Quite a few of the bands who played at the previous monstrosity are booked for this one and the organisers are making a loss but there is considerably less tension felt. Damo, Can's lead singer who looks like a Japanese version of Iggy Stooze is present with his girl-friend and they go off to find us some dope. Meanwhile Lemmy is busy sussing out the situation as regards speed. Lemmy, by the way, gained his name, not, as popular legend has it, from Lemmy Caution, but from his persistent cries of Lemme have some Southern Comfort or Lemme play your guitar. He's a hustler but has a strong sense of humour which is refreshing, also he's a Capricorn and very proud of it. With his long hair, moustache, and vaguely gypsy features, he makes a good drink'n'drugs comrade for DikMik. They naturally have a lot in common and are prone to make expeditions which result in one finding them in various stages of total degeneracy towards the end of an evening. Fortunately they seem to function on the paradoxical state that allows them to be both wrecked and together enough to perform at the same time. Steve Miller used to sing about being a space cowboy, but both DikMik and Lemmy are living his fantasies for him.

If Del looks like he's come straight out of *Lord of the Rings* and Nik Turner seems to have appeared from a Thor comic then DikMik and partner are range-riders of the cosmos complete in faded denim and boots. The synthesizer just fits into the saddle-bags. Dik occasionally prone to fits of brooding and open aggression is one of the three essential members of the band, the other two being Messrs. Turner and Brock. It all stems directly from the fact that they're all original members and have therefore been around long enough to imprint their personalities firmly on the band as a whole concept.

Dope duly arrives and we partake of a series of communal joints. At some godforsaken hour in the early morning, the band goes on and plays the set they were to play for the whole tour. Whistles which could be heard throughout could either have been interpreted as encouragement or signals of discontent but the band left the stage with a five minute encore - so it was yet another victory. The set, which seemed shorter than usual, peaked with old favourites "Master of the Universe" and "Paranoia" and the new single "Silver Machine". The band began and finished with extracts from Bob Calvert's *Space Opera*, which hopefully will comprise their next album.

The Opera itself is constructed around a Calvert story and except for a song each from Nik and Dave Brock, is written solely by him. The plot is one of those Lost in Space affairs but with a difference. Starting off with Calvert's "This is Your Captain Speaking - Your Captain is Dead" line, the work is based around the premise that one can have dreams when in space. There is no message or attempt at a philosophical conclusion. The work appears to consist of a series of portraits which are the dreams of those who are adrift in the spaceship.

Influences can be traced from 2001 to much of the New Worlds sci-fi output. Michael Moorcock, probably Britain's finest writer in the science-fantasy tradition as well as being the creator of Jerry Cornelius and the prime mover behind New Worlds itself, has in fact given Hawkwind some of his poetry and lyrics to use, though so far they have been unable to work with them. Moorcock was advised to go and see the band some time ago. Having experienced most of the pretty dire attempts by rock bands to explore space music, he dragged himself along with no expectations whatsoever. What he in fact saw quite overwhelmed him - here at last was a band who were living out his fantasies.

Sure, there was the Pink Floyd, but they were musicians who were simply translating space fantasies into music in the same way that Moorcock or Mike Harrison were verbalising them. The Floyd had blown it anyway when they forsook space-rock as in "Set the Controls for the Heart of the Sun" to pursue their pretensions towards space symphonies which always ended up sounding like third-rate Vaughan Williams. While the Floyd and the Soft Machine were out performing "art" with a capital "A" Hawkwind were working on a primal level of creativity. They were playing (wait for it) psychedelic music - hypnotic rhythm, about three chords thrown together and a strobe light. God knows that sort of thing had disappeared with flower power, and if you were still interested in it, then at least you should have decent credentials.

Critics in the straight press need to have yardsticks by which to measure anything new. The Floyd were cool because they were well up on their A to Z of the Avant-Garde and could drop names ranging from Cecil Taylor to Varese with ease. When anyone asked Hawkwind who they listened to, expecting to hear Penderecki or Coltrane in reply, they must have been a trifle put out when they were informed that the band listened to a lot of Jimi Hendrix. But Hendrix was the greatest space-rocker of them all. People like Ornette Coleman and Taner were into the music in a much more literal sense - space as in silence, and therefore it was full of spiritual implications. Hendrix was into real space-travel though, bopping round the planets on his hot guitar; he was untouchable. It was only when Jimi tried to go too far into his music to get higher and higher onto a truly ethereal level. Up to the very end, Hendrix talks about the masterpiece he is yet to create in terms so vivid and yet so vague. Perhaps it was only desire to get it out from his fantasies that drove him to the desperate measures which caused his death. What remains though is the fact that at his prime, Hendrix flew so high he could kiss God.

Hawkwind work in a similar way to Hendrix with one major difference - none of them are virtuoso musicians, and that is perhaps their saving grace. It is their honesty and lack of pretension that makes them so believable. They were brought up on the New Worlds style of sci-fi and want to be thought of as a natural expression of the ideas expressed by its writers. Moorcock believes that they have not only achieved this, but that by doing so, they have rendered the writer's ideas almost completely useless. Carrying on from this he states that he sees Hawkwind as the band who represent the impending Apocalypse. By "Apocalypse" he means at the least the destruction of an era and the systems it builds.

Certainly they showed something vital when they and the Fairies set up an alternative festival at the 1970 Isle of Wight fiasco and ended up transplanting the good vibes etc that festivals are always supposed to be about from Ricki Farr's simulated all purpose Spirit of Woodstock affair to the righteous bandstand where most of Desolation Row would congregate. It was enough of a gas just to see Nik Turner walking around Canvas City with his silver painted hair (ya gotta admit it - the kid's got style) but the music made by both bands came out as the most exhilarating of the whole festival. While the performers on the main stage were exhorting the spirit of peace, love and apathy or else giving the folks out there their daily orgasms, Hawkwind and the Fairies were simply feeding it out to anyone who wanted to listen.

And then in 1971 there was Glastonbury which was the total fulfillment of all the experiments that had gone before. Again there is no pretension in Hawkwind's attitude to the vast number of free gigs they have played. "We just go along in the hopes of having a good time. That's all." Nik and Doug Smith rap together about some of the more memorable gigs, recalling a time when they played in Devon for free for some farmers. The whole thing was arranged by one Larry the Mole. A sort of mini-Owsley, who somehow spiked the liquid refreshment with certain mind-expanding chemicals, thus precipitating a mass, yokel freak-out. Fun and games were had by all and the band played on (with Terry Ollis in the nude, naturally) to the great pleasure of those dairy farmers who found that the cows produced more milk as a result of being in the direct jiving line of the Sonic Assassins.

Hawkwind must know most of the freak community throughout England, and they have compiled an impressive list of freak acquaintances. There's Larry, of course, and Speedy Brian and Denny the Pervert, a Hell's Angel who writes amazing letters amongst other things, and there's some other guy who Nik claims to be the toughest hippy to be found on this fair isle. Among his failings is the strange impulse to rape girls in broad daylight on beaches. Nik assured me he was a charming fellow and I'm perfectly prepared to take his word.

Amsterdam was a one-stop affair with a gig at the Paradiso (where else?) all set up. There was only a smattering of the usually vast number of freaks who invade the city around summer, and they were all professional 24-hour-a-day hippies, well-practiced in the delicate art of being permanently stoned and looking vaguely mystical. Amsterdam is a quaint city devoid of any real energy but very pleasant. People don't seem to be moving anywhere, but then they're not concerned about it. Perhaps they've got the answer - all I know is that I found myself standing outside it all and I found the scene quietly disturbing. Not that I was alone - Simon the drummer was going through a fit of rage about the drum-kit which he hadn't had the chance to use (Mostly all of Hawkwind's gear was ripped off a short while back) and ended up threatening the manager of the Paradiso with a punch-up. The house-hold hippy turned away in disgust at the sight of the aggressive Mr. King, muttering something about a compulsory diet of brown rice.

Not that Simon is normally prone towards this kind of action - he's usually about as amiable a person as one could care to meet - but there are exceptions to the rule and this was one of them. Simon's the youngest member at 21 years of age and resembles one's vision of Barnaby Rudge - there's a definite touch of Dickensian style in his gangling physique and thin well-constructed features. He's even got two bad teeth which make for an even more authentic look, and there's also -wait for it, girls- an impressively long mane of black hair to top it all off with. Simon likes school-girls, works in the antique business with his father and is usually seen with his alsation, Pegasus. Does he sound like your kind of popstar? Well, if so, tell him about it - he'd love to know. He's a very good drummer, technically superior to Ollis and has settled in surprisingly well.

Meanwhile Nik Turner is off somewhere checking out the sights. Both he and Dave Brock lived in Amsterdam for extensive periods, Nik spending much of his time working as a roustabout - back in '67 when he and his friends were organising a freak circus in the city. He also stayed with a number of free-form jazz players listening to Coltrane and Sanders until he realised that a musician needed only to express himself. Since then he's never looked back, and now at 32 he's a pop star. Turner is the front man on stage - the centre point around which all the other members revolve themselves. Visually he's amazing, bedecked in jewellery and trinkets, a touch of make-up, gold braces, blue suede shoes and the studded motorcycle jacket that Barney Bubbles painted for him. As a vocalist, he is adequate, able to pitch his drone-like voice to good effect. For some months, Robert Calvert was the lead vocalist but problems centring around the destabilising effect on both the mind and the ego that transcension from writer to being both writer and pop star entailed forced him into a mental hospital. Calvert is, to put it mildly, an overwhelming person possessing a seemingly inexhaustible supply of natural adrenalin and as such he seemed to take over Hawkwind's direction for a time fixing on himself the role of Space Captain. His ideas were getting further and further out: he was working on the idea of taking a machine on stage to duplicate poems he would write spontaneously there and then to be handed out to the audience.

Calvert is capable of flashes of brilliance and it his temporary inability to control them that is causing the hang-ups. Though it is unlikely he will perform onstage with them again, his presence as lyricist and general creative force will continue to add a vital extra dimension to the band. His immediate plans include a solo album Captain Lockheed and the Star-Fighters, all profits from which will ideally be donated to the widows of fighter-pilots, plus a couple of possible film roles, one as Jerry Cornelius in the film taken from Moorcock's comic strip, and the other as Aubrey Beardsley in a film scripted by Johnny "Groupie" Byrne. Talking to him just before I left with the band, he seemed bitter about the situation claiming that the rift had occurred because he was too individually creative a force for the band to take. Since then he has spent another period in a mental hospital, and is reported to be getting himself well and truly together.

Backstage at the Paradiso, the manager is hustling someone on the telephone, while two masculine looking chicks play poker on the table. One of the ladies has her blouse open to the extent that her breasts can be full-viewed, nipples et al, by any rock n' roll star who cares to look her way. No-one is taking that much notice though, being more concerned with crashing out in a chair or maybe even holding heavily slurred conversations. The joints are coming round thick and fast, while a bottle is also seen moving slowly from mouth to mouth. Stacia is putting on her make-up for the show, talking a lot while DikMik is contenting himself by pondering over his switchblade knife. Photographers are brought in to take group shots and Dik stubbornly obliges to take part.

Some guy from a Dutch rock paper attempts to do an interview but everyone is too spaced to get that number together. Del who looks like a goblin seems genuinely concerned that I gain a clear impression of what the band is all about. He talks about his self-consciousness in relation to his inadequacies as a musician. He wants to learn how to read music and therefore get into a more musical dimension with the VCS3 synthesizer which he operates. At the moment his scope is very limited owing to his lack of musical knowledge. But Hawkwind are really a bunch of misfits who couldn't make it in the conventional fields of their chosen trip. Stacia was too big to be a dancer, Nik Turner never had the confidence to get into music and had never really played a wind instrument before coming into the band, Del and DikMik are both electronics freaks with no musical upbringing and not enough money to purchase a moog, Lemmy is a lead guitarist only recently turned to bass and Dave Brock is an ex-busker now into cosmic electric boogie - how much more freakish can you get, you may well ask.

But seeing the band live - and you have to see the band live in order to make any kind of judgment whatsoever - it all comes together like a miracle. Hawkwind are a unique band, possibly the only group around playing space rock in the specific terms of the phrase. Numbers like "Master of the Universe" and "Silver Machine" are masterpieces of primal riff rock n' roll, perfectly embellished by the extra-terrestrial doodlings. There are a few messages directly stated - no portentous lyrics (if one can exclude Brock's "We Took The Wrong Step") and no prissy philosophising. The band work on a heavy metal, white heat energy level and an inspired set almost reaches the level of a continuous version of "Sister Ray" and that's pretty awesome in itself.

The only other parallels that can be drawn are with the German avant-garde bands, particularly Amon Duul. Yet even here these bands work on a primarily nihilistic motivation while Hawkwind play positive music embracing the more conventional patterns of rock music (in this context, a new number like "Brainstorm" sounds like a psychedelic, futuristic variation of Eddie Cochran's "Nervous Breakdown"). But ultimately the band should not be judged on their music alone. The fact that they are not hung-up as musicians is a positive joy in that they are free to explore totally the new range of science fantasies without merely interpreting them within the terms of their artistry. Just like the good guys in those space comics, you know they'll keep coming out on top. Which all goes to show that there's a lot of Kosmic Karma buzzing around the planet.

-Nick Kent