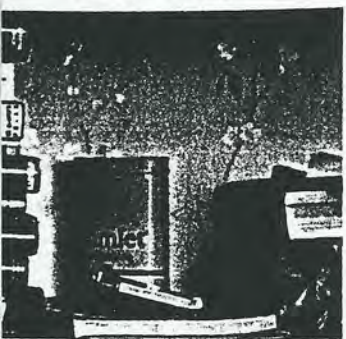


INTERVIEW

Words Graeme Bowman
Photographs Chris Blott



SHOOK LOBSTER

Behindology: the study of hard political realities obscured by layers of hype and spin. Britain's leading professor on the subject, irascible Scot Robin Ramsay, publishes conspiracy theory magazine Lobster from his front room in Hull. Reading it may just change your view of the world ...

WHO whacked JFK? What happened to Dodi and Di in Paris? Did Blair and Campbell tell us all porkies about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, and how many American troops are based overseas in foreign states?

If these questions give you sleepless nights, speak to Robin Ramsay, editor, publisher and chief writer behind *Lobster*, the world's most authoritative conspiracy theory magazine. You probably won't have heard of it – *Lobster* only surfaces twice a year and it's not available in WH Smith's next to *Loaded* or *Maxim*. It doesn't carry advertising or pictures, and it's kept afloat by a small but dedicated band of subscribers.

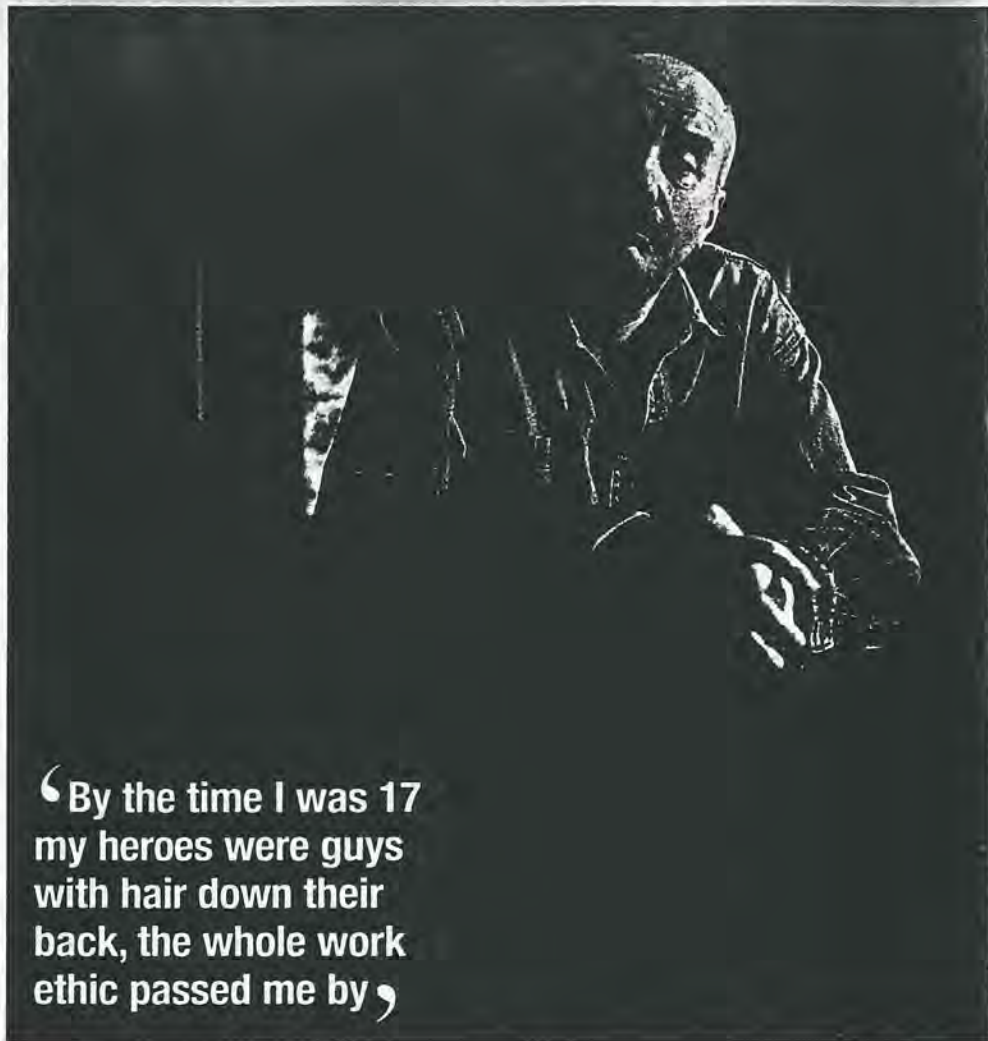
Movie director, subscriber and occasional *Lobster* contributor, Alex Cox, is a big fan of Ramsay: "Robin is the only journalist writing and publishing articles about the deeply dodgy Atlantic Alliance. The reason we are in such a mess today – the reason we went to war for American oil companies – is this alliance, and Robin is the lone investigator digging at the roots of it. His work, published in *Lobster*, will, in later years, be regarded as of vital importance in understanding these things."

Quite an endorsement, and *Lobster*'s certainly a conspiracy theory magazine with a difference. While other publications might try to kid you that the Windsors are a race of super-intelligent space lizards (if only they were that interesting), or that Hitler ended up running ice-cream parlours in Buenos Aires, the *Lobster* credo is facts, figures and verification. Every unpalatable truth featured in the mag is backed up with references, so if you think *Lobster*'s leading you up the garden path, you can examine the original sources and draw your own conclusions. It's this standard of authentication that differentiates *Lobster* from the competition and explains why it's still going strong 20 years after it first saw the light of day in a Hull back bedroom.

So what sort of terrain does the armour-plated crustacean cover? Recent issues have examined the impact of naval sonar devices on whales (it kills them), an alternative take on Watergate (it all started with hookers), election-rigging in the UK (remarkably easy to do), an analysis of al-Qaeda's PR campaign (amazingly effective), and possible CIA involvement in attempts to sink a boatload of buses in the Thames in 1964. It's an eclectic brew which reflects its editor's passions and interests, so if you want to know more about *Lobster*, you need to understand Ramsay. It's a life story which takes us into an almost vanished world



Film director Alex Cox believes that Ramsay's work in *Lobster* is of "vital importance"



‘By the time I was 17 my heroes were guys with hair down their back, the whole work ethic passed me by,’

of bohemian beatniks, free jazz freak-outs and spontaneous art happenings. There's even a small but hugely influential role for the poet laureate of suburban despair, Philip Larkin.

THE *Lobster* story begins in Edinburgh in 1948 when Ramsay was born, the eldest child of a food chemist father and housewife mother. Both parents were Communist Party members until the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956, so Ramsay grew up in a bookish, lefty atmosphere which encouraged a sort of instinctive hostility to the society we live in.

Music was his first big love and an early interest in the violin and trumpet led to a precocious appetite for avant-garde jazz. Like many other post-war dissidents, it was Radio Luxembourg which pointed the way to an exciting new world beyond the cosy confines of the BBC.

"In the late fifties you had the BBC Light Programme or the Home Service, and then there was this decadent stuff swimming through the ether from Radio Luxembourg or the Voice of America and it seemed exciting and hip," Ramsay recalls. "I'd lie in bed with this little transistor listening to jazz. The signal was appalling but that just made it all the more exciting."

In pre-Beatles Britain, jazz meant beatniks, beatniks meant bohemia and bohemia meant non-conformity. Ramsay's cultural antennae started quivering on the Mound, Edinburgh's equivalent to Speakers' Corner in the Sixties.

"I used to hang out in the school holidays

with a bunch of beatniks I met on the Mound. You'd get guys from Protestant Action, brilliant Glaswegian socialists and every now and then one of these Edinburgh beatniks would stand up and start effing and blinding just to wind up the cop who was taking notes. By the time I was 17, my heroes were guys with hair down their backs, and the whole work ethic just passed me by," he says.

But 1967 was a landmark year for Western pop and also the year in which Stirling University opened its doors for the first time. Ramsay was part of the pioneering intake but it wasn't a happy experience.

"I lasted one term. I had a completely hideous time and the problem was all inside my head," says Ramsay. "There were 120 of us stuck on this beautiful campus in Stirlingshire but when you're 18 or 19, visual beauty is not what you're after, so I dropped out at the end of my first term, took my grant and headed off to London to become a jazz musician."

The London jazz odyssey turned out to be nine months in a bedsit with no one to talk to and a part-time job in Marks and Sparks, so, in late '68, the self-styled Albert Ayler in a kilt high-tailed it back to Edinburgh to immerse himself in the capital's thriving counter culture.

"I organised Edinburgh's first rock concert in the park, helped set up an arts lab, worked with Lindsay Kemp's Mime Troupe, and played jazz in the Free Association Quartet."

However, it was one of these counter-culture ventures which prompted a sharp exit from shortbread city. "I was running a rock club for an Edinburgh gangster and it was losing a lot of

► money. I made the mistake of slugging him off one night and his henchmen overheard. The rumour started going round that they wanted to re-arrange my kneecaps, so I packed my trumpet, a book and a bag of clothes and headed off to see my sister in Stoke-on-Trent."

A year there produced a first wife ("the landlord didn't like us living together so we thought, 'sod it, let's get married'"), a brief career as a life-drawing model, and a re-location to Hull to acquire the degree he'd abandoned in 1967. By 1974, the newly graduated deep green environmentalist was desperate to leave Britain and only New Zealand's bizarre immigration policies, claims Ramsay, confined him to these shores.

"At the time, they were only taking orthopaedic bootmakers and lighthouse keepers, and as I didn't have the necessary qualifications, I had to stay at home," he says.

Mid-Seventies Britain was a miserable place, characterised by economic decline, industrial unrest and hyperinflation. Showaddywaddy and The Wombles dominated the charts and the smell of fascism (and Thatcherism) polluted the air. Trapped in a traumatic emotional triangle, Ramsay wasn't having much fun either. However, this era of unmitigated gloom produced his Eureka! moment, occurring in the unlikely environs of Hull University library.

"This conspiracy theory document on the Gemstone Files (files which contained information on the Kennedy assassination) surfaced in Hull and everybody was going 'Wow, far out!' and I went 'Wow, far out, I'll go to the library and see if it's true,'" he reports. "So I went back to Hull University library and visited floors I'd never been on as a student. I went to the American history floor and found all 26 volumes of the Warren Commission Report which Philip Larkin must have ordered while he was librarian. Nobody had ever taken it out, but I started reading it and went 'Aha! Now I know what I should be doing with my life!' So I spent the next seven years in Hull University library, reading books, signing on and educating myself."

With hindsight, Ramsay believes that his mid-20s fascination for conspiracy theory was linked to his teenage perception of his parents' marriage. "The origins of my interest in dissenting knowledge probably lie in my relationship with my father," he says. "When I stumbled across conspiracy theories, I felt comfortable straightaway because they were all about competing versions of reality. When I look back on my parents' marriage, they pretended to be happy but they weren't, so my interest in world politics mirrored what I'd sensed as an adolescent. My father and mother detested each other, but stayed together for the children's sake, and that's probably why I got interested in all this under-the-counter stuff."

Finding personal catharsis by investigating the Kennedy murder, the final link in Lobster's evolutionary chain was forged in 1982 when Ramsay met fellow Kennedy assassination enthusiast Stephen Dorrell and they decided to start publishing a magazine which explored all the topics which fascinated them. Lobster

made its first appearance in September 1983 as a 24-page A5 magazine, with an initial print run of 150. Its early credibility received a big boost in 1987 when Peter Wright's *Spycatcher* was published and confirmed that elements within British Intelligence had been trying to destabilise the Wilson government in the Seventies.

Lobster had been banging on about this for months, but it was only when a crusty old spook confirmed the accuracy of these allegations that Lobster's claims were taken

American secret state.

Producing *Lobster* is Ramsay's main raison d'être, but he's realistic about its ability to promote major change. "Lobster is a futile remnant of an ancient notion of trying to educate people to behave rationally in politics, so it's a complete waste of time," he insists. "I try to achieve an error-free magazine, but I haven't managed it yet. I have no ambition to profoundly change the world - I publish *Lobster* because I enjoy it, and the fact that it seems futile, objectively, doesn't mean that it's not worth doing."

As he surveys the world through the prism of war-torn Iraq and escalating tensions between Islam and the West, Ramsay's take on the world is frighteningly pessimistic but articulated in his trademark trenchant tones.

"The Americans now plan to control the entire non-EU world so that they can continue to extract raw materials and consume at their present rate. A lot of skinny brown, black and yellow people are going to die to enable a lot of fat Americans to stay fat. This new American empire will not be sustainable for long, but its creation and collapse will be bloody and terrible," he says.

"For historical reasons, and because the UK is the world's second largest overseas investor,

This new American empire will not be sustainable for long, but its creation and collapse will be bloody and terrible. Meanwhile we have the degrading job of being the school bully's best friend

seriously. This investigative breakthrough led to a short-term career working on Channel 4 news items and an unsuccessful attempt to influence the left wing of the Labour Party. However, since 1988 Ramsay's been back in Hull, publishing *Lobster* as a one-man band, writing books and nipping at the heels of the high and mighty. Moving in with long-term partner Sally in 1988 led to a joint career as a magazine publisher and house-husband, balancing domestic duties with efforts to expose the murky machinations of the Anglo-





Lobster 45

Summer 2003

Jane Affleck
Malcolm Kennedy and the In-
Powers Tribunal
John Burnes
David Mills, Berlusconi and New
Labour
William Clark
Demos
Tom Easton
Title-tattle: the British American
Project and the war on Iraq
Terry Hanstock
Re:
Robert Henderson
Being harassed by the state
Alfred Mendes
The Crux
Robin Ramsay
Lying about Iraq
Corinne Souza
Iraq, 'the allies' and PR

ISSN 0964-0116

Britain is committed to supporting the US – we're still the Yanks' unsinkable aircraft carrier. This means that a lot of unpleasant things will have to be endured. At one level, people in villages on the North Yorkshire Moors near the American listening base at Fylingdales will have to endure rising cancer rates which are caused by its signals.

"At another, British armed forces will be involved in 'peacekeeping' duties around the world, trying to re-assemble Humpty Dumpty after the Americans have blown him to smithereens. And at another, British diplomats will have to provide support for America's increasingly ludicrous rationales for its imperial expansion. It's a degrading job being the school bully's best friend."

No one ever could accuse Lobster of being an easy read. Monitoring the machinations of the shadowy masters of the world is a demanding business, which requires a lot of time and effort. Reading Lobster could best be compared to a vigorous burst of arduous mental exercise – you might not enjoy it much at the time but you'll feel better for it afterwards.

And with so much mush and pap dominating the airwaves, Lobster is a welcome antidote to the tidal waves of hype, spin and bullshit emanating from Westminster and the White House. America currently has more than 200,000 troops stationed in 144 countries and territories♦

You can check out Lobster at www.lobster-magazine.co.uk

Just a few of the subjects Lobster has taken to its heart over the years (clockwise, from left): Princess Diana and Dodi al Fayed – tragic accident or murder?; Who really shot John F Kennedy in Dallas?; Lobster believes that Tony Blair and Alastair Campbell spun the whole Iraq/WMD debacle; Peter Wright's Spycatcher reiterated what Lobster had claimed for months; what really precipitated Watergate, Richard Nixon's downfall? Above right: the plain-looking, plain-speaking Lobster magazine

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