

# matrix

The newsletter of the  
British Science Fiction Association

## Issue 116



### **Charles Platt**

Thinking Locally,  
Acting Globally

### **Dave Langford**

on cons of 1991

### **Joseph Nicholas**

on Tank Girl, First Knight  
and Judge Dredd

### **PLUS . . .**

sf and fandom in Ireland  
alt.fan.pratchett explained

Bester variorums

"But What's a Convention For, Mummy?"

Sue Thomas profile

Weirdness in Warwick

News, competitions, letters, and more

£1.25

August – September 1995

# matrix

the news magazine of the



British Science Fiction Association

matrix 116 • aug / sep 1995

Editor: **Chris Terran**

9 Beechwood Court

Back Beechwood Grove

Leeds, UK

LS4 2HS

Tel: 0113 278 2388

Email: [terran@cityscape.co.uk](mailto:terran@cityscape.co.uk)

Cover Art: **Steve Jeffery**

Internal Art: **Ian Brookes** and **Ian Gunn**

Technical Assistance: **Tom Satterthwaite**

Design / Production: **Chris Terran**

The deadline for the October/November issue is

**Friday 22 September 1995**

- 3 News — the happening world
- 5 BSFA News  
*Free book! T-shirts! Posters!*
- 6 Recent and forthcoming books
- 8 Mailbox
- 9 Thinking Locally, Acting Globally  
*Charles Platt on the future and the net*
- 10 But What's A Convention For, Mummy?  
*Jilly Reed considers conventions*
- 12 Heat Strokes  
*Joseph Nicholas glares at Tank Girl, First Knight and Judge Dredd*
- 14 Conquassation  
*Dave Langford remembers the conventions of 1991*
- 16 SF in Ireland  
*Maura McHugh reports*
- 18 So what is a merkin, anyway?  
*Colette Reap catches Terry Pratchett in her Net (helped by Alan Bellingham and Terry himself)*
- 20 The Editor My Destination  
*Roy Tappen looks for the real Bester*
- 21 PoMoTion  
*Istvan Ronay finds Weirdness in Warwick*
- 22 Events Diary
- 23 People in SF: **Sue Thomas** profile  
Members' Noticeboard
- 24 Competition Corner  
*Roger Robinson and John English*

## BSFA Membership

This costs £18 per year for UK residents, £9 for unwaged. Please enquire for overseas rates.

**Renewals and new members:** Alison Cook, 52 Woodhill Drive, Grove, Wantage, Oxon., OX12 0DF

**USA Enquiries:** Cy Chauvin, 14248 Wilfred Street, Detroit, MI 48213, U.S.A.

## Officials

**Administrator:** Maureen Kincaid Speller, 60 Bournemouth Road, Folkestone, Kent, CT19 5AZ Email: [mks\\_pk@cix.compulink.co.uk](mailto:mks_pk@cix.compulink.co.uk)

**Treasurer:** Elizabeth Billinger, 82 Kelvin Road, New Cubbington, Leamington Spa, CV32 7TQ

**Orbiters:** Carol Ann Green, 5 Raglan Avenue, Raglan Street, Hull HU5 2JB

**Awards:** Nicholas Mahoney, 275 Lonsdale Avenue, Intake, Doncaster, DN2 6HG

**Foreign Liaison:** Bridget Wilkinson, 17 Mimosa, 29 Avenue Road, London N15

## BSFA Publications

**Matrix:** Chris Terran, 9 Beechwood Court, Back Beechwood Grove, Leeds, West Yorkshire, LS4 2HS

Tel: 0113 278 2388 Email: [terran@cityscape.co.uk](mailto:terran@cityscape.co.uk)

**Vector Letters and general queries:** Maureen Kincaid Speller, 60

Bournemouth Road, Folkestone, Kent, CT19 5AZ

Email: [mks\\_pk@cix.compulink.co.uk](mailto:mks_pk@cix.compulink.co.uk)

**Articles:** Andrew Butler, 19 Minton Street, Clough Road, Hull, HU5 5Mail:

**A.M. Butler@english-language-and-literatures.hull.ac.uk**

or Gary Dalkin, 5 Lydford Road, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH11 8SN

**Review material:** Paul Kincaid, 60 Bournemouth Road, Folkestone, Kent,

CT19 5AZ

Email: [mks\\_pk@cix.compulink.co.uk](mailto:mks_pk@cix.compulink.co.uk)

**Focus:** Carol Ann Green, 5 Raglan Avenue, Raglan Street, Hull, HU5 2JB

Julie Venner, 42 Walgrave Street, Newland Avenue, Hull, HU5 2LT

British Science Fiction Association Ltd. Company No. 921500. Registered Address: 60 Bournemouth Road, Folkestone, Kent, CT19 5AZ. Registered in England. Limited by Guarantee. Printed by PDC Copyprint, 11 Jeffries Passage, Guildford, GU1 4AP. Copyright © BSFA 1995. Individual copyrights are the property of the authors and editor. ISSN 0307 3335. Designed and produced by Chris Terran on an Acorn A5000.

## Silverberg Pulls Out

Robert Silverberg has had to pull out of attending Intervention, the 1997 Eastercon, owing to "an inadvertent clash of dates". He will be replaced by Octavia Butler, who will join Brian Aldiss and David Langford at the Adelphi Hotel in Liverpool.

## The Other Campbell Award

The John W. Campbell Memorial Award was won this year by Greg Egan for his novel *Permutation City*.

\* There was some disappointment at the non-appearance of this novel on the Hugo shortlist, and the award goes some way to rectifying the omission.

## Pratchettiana

Four Terry Pratchett connected TV projects are currently either in preparation or being mooted (three Discworld, one Johnny Maxwell). If all goes to plan Channel 4 will broadcast an animated Discworld series next year, for which an introduction — a fully computer-generated Discworld flyby — has already been completed. Terry says: "We're not talking cartoons or models, but something which compares pretty well with the planetary flyby simulations you occasionally see on TV. Discworld as astronomical object!" There are plans to make the sequence generally available if it's possible to produce a file which will run on a PC, and it isn't too big.

## Savoy Blues

Publisher Savoy Books is still being persecuted by Manchester's finest for their publication of allegedly 'dangerous' material. On 19 July stipendiary magistrate Janet Howard 'rejected all defence arguments and decided that 4,000 police-seized Savoy comics (*Lord Horror* 1 and 2, *Hard Core Horror* 1-5 and *Meng & Ecker* 1-3) were a) obscene, and b) had no literary merit that might support a 'public good' defence," reports Dave Langford. Savoy desired trial by jury, but this was refused.

## Mythopoeic Awards

This year's winners of the Mythopoeic Awards were:

Fantasy Award for Adult Literature:

Patricia McKillip *Something Rich and Strange*

Other nominees were:

Pamela Dean *The Dubious Hills*

Robert Holdstock *The Hollowing*

Rachel Pollack *Temporary Agency*

No fifth book received enough

nominations to get on the final ballot.

Fantasy Award for Children's Literature:

Patrice Kindl *Owl in Love*

Scholarship Award in Inklings Studies:

Doris Myers C. S. Lewis in Context

Scholarship Award in Myth and Fantasy

Studies:

James Roy King *Old Tales and New Truths:*

*Charting the Bright-Shadow World*

## Babylon 5 Con?

Attempts are being made to set up

ShadowCon, another Babylon 5 convention in England, which will attempt to repair the damage done by Babcon (see report last issue). The show's creator J. Michael

# NEWS

H  
O  
U  
N  
D  
S

## Many thanks to

John Bark, Brum SF Group, Andy Butler, John Clute, Martin Easterbrook, Steve Glover, Dave Langford, John Ollis, Peterborough SF Group, Berni Phillips, Terry Pratchett, Julie Rigby, Andy Sawyer, Simo Simpson, Maureen Kincaid Speller, Sue Thomas

H  
O  
U  
N  
D  
S

Straczynski will be present, the suggested date is September 1996 (just before *Babylon 5* should be beginning its fourth and penultimate season), the venue will be in the North of England (possibly Harrogate or York) and the emphasis will be on the literary and serious side of the show: "we feel there is room for a B5 convention which will explore the whole sf genre and B5's place within that genre". No actors will attend, and the con will be non-profit (any surplus funds will go to a suitable charity). If you're interested in supporting this idea contact: ShadowCon, 45 Fife Park, St Andrews KY16 9UE or tel. 01334-463268 or email [aaa@dc5.st-and.ac.uk](mailto:aaa@dc5.st-and.ac.uk)

## Barker Is Willing

The BBC are currently in negotiations to film an eight part adaptation of Clive Barker's fantasy novel *Wateworld*, the first time a Barker book has been translated to TV. No news on co-production partners, which the expense of filming the world-in-a-carpet story will certainly require.

## Emmy Nominations

Selected sf-relevant nominations for this year's Emmy Awards:

*The X-Files* (Drama Series)

*The X-Files* "Sleepless" (Editing)

*The X-Files* "One Breath"

(Cinematography)

*Tales From the Crypt* "Whirlpool" (Costume Design)

*Babylon 5* "The Geometry of Shadows"

(Cinematography)

*Star Trek: Voyager* (Graphic Design and

Title Sequences, Main Title Theme Music)

*Star Trek: Voyager* "Heroes and Demons"

(Cinematography)

*Star Trek: Voyager* "Faces" (Makeup)

*Star Trek: Voyager* "Caretaker" (Costume

Design)

*Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* "Distant Voices"

(Makeup)

*Earth 2* "After the Thaw" (Makeup)

*Lois & Clark* "That Old Gang of Mine"

(Costuming)

Finally — and irresistibly — the

highly-coveted award for 'Individual

Achievement in Hairstyling for a Series' is

hotly contested between *Babylon 5*, *Star*

*Trek: Deep Space Nine* and *Star Trek:*

*Voyager*. May the limpest wrist win.

## Intersection Breakdown!

As of 20th June, the membership breakdown for Intersection looked like this:

COUNTRY	Guest	Att	Sup	Child	Jun
Andorra		1			
Australia	16	10			
Austria	6	1			
Belgium	10	2		1	
Bermuda	1				
Canada	126	48		2	
Croatia	68				
Czech Republic	3				
Denmark	5	1			
Finland	39	2			
France	41	4			
Germany	185	4	2	2	
Hong Kong	2	1			
Ireland	2	22	2	2	
Italy	8	1			
Japan	58	8			
Malaysia	1				
Mexico	1				
Netherlands	72	4	2	1	
New Zealand	2				
Norway	33	3	1		
Oman	4	1			
Poland	60				1
Romania	16	1			
Russia	36				
Slovakia			1		
South Africa	1				
Spain	15	5		1	
Sweden	31	5			
Switzerland	7				
Turkey	2				
UK	2	1152	59	8	5
Ukraine	5				
USA	2	2054	1137	32	22
Venezuela			1		
?		2			
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4085</b>	<b>1301</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>35</b>

Note the high figure for Croatia, the poor showing of France, and the continued strength of Scandinavian countries. On the reasonable assumptions that a fair proportion of the supporting memberships will be converted to attending, and there will be a good number of walk-ins and last minute bookings, it looks like something over 5,000 people will be descending on Glasgow.

... NEWS continued ...

## Channel 4 Celebrate Worldcon

To coincide with the Glasgow Worldcon Channel 4 will be screening a large number of sf-related programs over the Bank holiday weekend. Though mostly films, there are a couple of more unusual items, chief amongst which is an "as live" (don't they trust us?) broadcast from the convention hosted by Craig Charles on the Saturday night. It will feature interviews with attendees and hopes to explain what all this 'fan' stuff is all about

.... Also getting its first TV screening will be the infamous 'Roswell Incident' film purporting to show the aliens which allegedly landed.

The full schedule (times may vary, so check first):

### Saturday 26th August

8.30 pm *Beam Me Up, Scotty!* (Craig Charles at the Worldcon)

Followed by *Faster Than Light News Bulletin*

9.20 In Advance of the Landing (aliens are visiting us)

Followed by *FTLN Bulletin*

10.26 *THX 1138* (film)

Followed by *FTLN Bulletin*

12.05 *Takover TV - The Sci-Fi Experience*

(Appears to be spoofs of popular media sf programs)

Followed by *FTLN Bulletin*

12.40am *I Married a Monster from Outer Space* (film)

2.10am *Godzilla: Destroy All Monsters* (film)

### Sunday 27th August

9.00pm *The Real X-Files* (Equinox Special, presented by Jim Schnabel)

10.00 *Outland* (film)

Followed by *FTLN Bulletin*

12.05am *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (film)

Followed by *FTLN Bulletin*

2.45 *Metropolis* (film)

### Monday 28th August 9.00am Biker Mice

From Mars (cartoon)

9.30 *The Girl From Mars* (film)

11.10 *Back to the Future* (film)

11.40 *Mork and Mindy* episode

5.00pm *Earth versus the Flying Saucers* (film)

6.35 *Doctor Who and the Daleks* (film)

8.05 *Babylon 5: Legacies* - the body of a Minbari war hero goes missing on the space station and the Minbari warrior caste threaten war)

9.00 *Secret History* - *The Roswell Incident* (did an alien space ship crash in the New Mexican desert in 1947. The Santilli Footage claims to be film of the autopsy carried out on the aliens. Judge for yourselves.)

Followed by *FTLN Bulletin*

10.00 *Soylent Green* (film)

Followed by *FTLN Bulletin*

11.55 *The Mothership Connection* (documentary exploring the contribution made by black people, African Americans in particular, to sf. Encompasses dance music, space exploration, and literature)

Followed by *FTLN Bulletin*

12.25 am *The Brother From Another Planet* (film)

Followed by *FTLN Bulletin*

## May the 4 be with you

Maureen Speller

reports on the launch of Channel 4's "Sci Fi Weekend"

It's the obvious thing to do. When you want to launch a science fiction event you invite a lot of people dressed up in science fiction costumes. And at least you have to admit that Channel 4's headquarters on Horseferry Road makes a suitably science fictional looking venue, with its tall glass walls, and the lifts rocketing up and down the outside of the building like so many glass tubes. So that's what Channel 4 did to announce their "Sci-Fi Weekend". The foyer was graced by the presence of Darth Vader and a man dispensing foil-packed space strawberries, but the launch party was actually held in a circular pit in the middle of the foyer. Except for the glass roof it looked like the bottom of a missile silo, and it was reached by a flight of steep narrow stairs that wound around the wall. A pity, then, that one of your guests was a Dalek. It spent half the party perched forlornly at the top of the steps before somebody finally found a lift. On the other hand, we did get a great view of Darth Vader wandering up and down outside, being histrionic for the cameras, and if we'd looked hard enough, we could probably have told you what a Dalek has under its carapace, but perhaps the world isn't yet ready for this.

Instead, we mingled with some Klingons and a Borg, who'd spent the afternoon in Pages Wine Bar preparing themselves for the event, and a solitary Vogon (but then, aren't they always?) who later revealed himself to be John Philpott, wearing his own portable sauna. And we drank dubious 'cosmic cocktails' which seemed to involve copious amounts of cream, ice and food colouring, or else bottled beer, and pondered on the assumption that the final frontier certainly didn't encourage teetotality.

Hey, wait a moment — isn't a Dalek from *Dr Who*, and isn't that from BBC? Yes, and so were the Star Fleet officers, Klingons and Vogons. In fact all the costumed characters, who made up about half the guest list, were from BBC shows. At least Channel 4 are including the Peter Cushing film, *Dr Who and the Daleks*, in their season. Maybe they're envious of the Beeb? Stuart Cosgrove, Commissioning Editor of the "Sci-Fi Weekend", certainly admits that Channel 4 is kicking itself that it didn't manage to pick up *The X-Files* — which may be why they are including an Equinox documentary, *The Real X-Files*, all about a psychic arms race between the USA and the USSR, which is written and presented by Jim Schnabel, author of the classic study of alien abductions *Dark White*. In the same area, they are showing the newly-famous Santilli film which ostensibly shows an autopsy on an alien killed in the UFO crash at Roswell, New Mexico, in 1947. Interesting stuff, but science fiction? When we suggested to a Channel 4 publicity person that there might actually be a difference between UFOs and science fiction, she just couldn't see it.

Still, if Channel 4 is jealous of *The X-Files*, the BBC must be jealous of *Babylon 5*, and that is science fiction, even if it hasn't inspired much in the way of costumes yet. An episode from the first series is being reshown, and at a decent time too. "Why," Stuart Cosgrove was asked, "if you value science fiction so much, do you put it on when most people won't be home from work to see it?"

"I think most science fiction is like that," Cosgrove replied. "It starts off for children and then builds an adult audience. We're looking at what we can do with *Babylon 5*," which struck us at least as missing the point, namely that many adults are interested in sf in their and its own right, not simply adopting their children's viewing habits. Mind you, to judge from the 'galactic grub' at Channel 4 nostalgia and childhood are regarded as closely associated with sf. We hadn't seen sherbet flying saucers in years, nor sherbet fountains for that matter, and the sherbet still goes up your nose. The miniature Mars bars were more obvious; thank god there were no Milky Way bars, or perhaps they'd been eaten earlier.

So is the "Sci-Fi Weekend" the harbinger of better times, or at least better timings? We'll have to wait and see. But though Cosgrove's speech repeatedly commented on the freshness, the excitement of science fiction, most of the short season is made up of atrocious films that do little to enhance science fiction's reputation (*I Married a Monster from Outer Space*, *Earth Versus the Flying Saucers*) and do not bode well for future excursions into the genre on Channel 4. And despite the fact that *Metropolis* is a classic by anyone's standards, and not shown often enough, did it really have to be the colorized Giorgio Moroder version with its stunningly inappropriate rock score? When questioned on this, a Channel 4 person reputedly confessed that they hadn't known there was another version.

Still, there are some things that will be fresh to a British audience over the weekend, notably *Faster than Light News*, a series of news bulletins from the future produced by New York's Science Fiction Channel. The Science Fiction Channel is due to launch in the UK in October, part of what Cosgrove terms an explosion in "almost every branch of the science fiction industry," though you'd be hard-pressed, looking at this bill of fare, to deduce that that had ever been a written medium. If Channel 4 is setting out to benefit from that explosion, it seems curious that the "Sci-Fi Weekend" is timed to coincide with the Worldcon, when a sizeable part of its most devoted audience is likely to be in Glasgow. ("Couldn't you arrange to put up a large screen and show it for everybody there?" the publicity person wondered.) But it does at least allow them to present Craig Charles's personal view of *Intersection*, which promises to cover every aspect of the convention, from authors such as Iain Banks and Samuel Delany to fans, as well as the comics and costumes normally so beloved of the media. It will be interesting to get an outsider's view of proceedings, though it may not be too reassuring that despite the fact that Channel 4 is one of the sponsors of *Intersection*, in their own press release they seem to regard the convention as being "hosted" by Gerry Anderson (actually one of the guests).

It's easy to pick holes and make jokes, but in the end, Channel 4 is actually staging a three-day weekend devoted to science fiction, during the course of which more than 20 films, dramas and documentaries which relate in some way to science fiction will be shown. That's a greater commitment to the genre than any British television station has ever shown before. We can only hope that it leads on to better things.

— Maureen Kincaid Speller

# Vector news

## BSFA Mailing List

I've now set up an experimental mailing list for net-connected BSFA members which you're most welcome to join; simply email me at [terran@cityscape.co.uk](mailto:terran@cityscape.co.uk) and ask! Next issue I'll be featuring a summary of the discussions which have taken place so that non-netters can contribute.

— Chris Terran

## BSFA Meetings

... are normally held on the fourth Wednesday of the month in the upstairs room of the Jubilee Tavern, York Road, outside Waterloo Station in London. There is usually a talk from a featured guest, and all members are welcome. Come along and accost us!

## Wellies On

Members within reach of London might also like to try turning up at the 'Ton meetings, held on the first Thursday of the month at the Wellington pub opposite the Old Vic exit of Waterloo Station (and not at the other one). Wellington on the north side of Waterloo

Bridge, like your editor did). Get off the tube and follow the signs through a maze of twisty little passages, all alike ... These meetings — or rather pub take-overs — are open to anybody with an interest in sf, and you'll find them packed with fans, writers, editors, artists — yes, even BSFA members — many familiar to you from the pages of *Vector* and *Matrix*. Dave Langford will be found at the bar distributing the new *Anisble*, fanzines and flyers are handed out, and much gossip is committed. In August I paid my second visit and found myself talking to Maureen Speller, Paul Kincaid, Catie Cary, Sims Simpson, Jackie McRobert, Ian Sorenson, Pat McMurray, the Infamous Nina Watson, Roger Robinson, Steve

Glover, Bridget Wilkinson, Doppelganger, Rob Hanson, Dave Langford, Joseph Nicholas, Judith Hanna ... and many more. The beer's excellent, there's no music to drown the talk, and a fine time is had by all. Try it!

— Chris Terran

## Renewals Address

Please note that there was a slight error in the postcode of Alison Cook's address last issue. Send all renewals and subscription enquiries to her at:

52 Woodhill Drive  
Grove  
Wantage  
Oxon. OX12 0DF (not "0DS")

## Unfinished Business Maureen Speller

There's a bundle of BSFA news before we pack our bags and head for the Worldcon. If you're going to be there, do stop by the BSFA desk and introduce yourself. We're looking forward to meeting as many BSFA members as possible — it's always good to put faces to names. And if you want to give a hand on the stall for an hour or two, all the better. But do drop by, because we also have something we want to give you ....

### A Very British Genre

You'll recall that way back at the beginning of 1995 we promised you something special for later in the year. On behalf of the Committee, I'm delighted to announce the publication of *A Very British Genre: A Brief History of British Science Fiction and Fantasy* by Paul Kincaid, who is of course well-known to BSFA members as *Vector*'s Reviews Editor, as well as being an adviser on and contributor to a number of sf reference works.

This 64-page booklet covers the whole history of British science fiction and fantasy, from Malory to Jeff Noon, and is accompanied by a chronology of works mentioned in the book, and a checklist of recent books by British authors. If we say so ourselves, we think it's pretty damn good. We're launching it at Worldcon, and will be selling it at £5 a copy at the BSFA desk, a real bargain.

The best news, however, is that *A Very British Genre* is FREE to BSFA members so if you're coming to the Worldcon, claim your free copy by calling at the BSFA desk in the Dealers' Room. Your membership number would be helpful for our records — it's on the label, on the packaging you've just thrown in the bin, so get it back now — but we can manage without, so don't worry if it's too late.

If you're not coming to the Worldcon, claiming your free copy of the history is simple. Please send an A5 self-addressed envelope, with 47p in stamps (first 40p or 30p in stamps (second) firmly stuck on the front, to me, Maureen Kincaid Speller at 60 Bournemouth Road, Folkestone, Kent, CT19 5AZ. I will dispatch your copy of the *History* as soon after Worldcon as possible, bearing in mind that I intend to grab a brief holiday after the convention and won't be back until September 4th.

Overseas members, please send 3 International Reply Coupons if you want your copy of the *History* sent surface, and 6 International Reply Coupons if you want it sent airmail printed paper.

Naturally, the BSFA Committee is very excited about this new publishing venture, its first in more than twelve years, and would particularly like to acknowledge the assistance of Sou'Wester, the 1994 Eastercon, whose generous donation of £250 from the convention's profits helped make this booklet's publication possible.

Now, we really want to begin publishing booklets and monographs on a regular basis and would very much like to hear from you with comments and suggestions, not to mention proposals for future titles. What we have in mind is to publish at least one substantial booklet per year, to coincide with Eastercon, but we would also be very happy to consider publishing long essays or short collections of articles as monographs throughout the year. So, if you do have ideas for future publications, booklets or monographs, please write to me, Maureen Kincaid Speller at 60 Bournemouth Road, Folkestone, Kent, CT19 5AZ. Don't send manuscripts at this stage, just ideas and comments.

### Posterman Dave

The publication of a new booklet is great news, but the BSFA has been busy on other matters as well. We commissioned Dave Hicks, artist and fan-writer, not to mention publisher of *Morarty's Revenge*, an excellent fanzine, to produce a new poster for us. The design he produced is very striking, a very strong image of an astronaut peering out into our world, and incidentally forming the cover of *A Very British Genre*.

The poster has been designed with a blank box at the bottom, to either insert a contact address for the BSFA, or else to advertise events involving the BSFA. If you know of somewhere you can display a poster advertising the BSFA — please obtain appropriate permission before displaying a poster — contact me, Maureen Kincaid Speller, at the usual address, specifying A4 or A3, and the number of copies you need, and what you need them for.

And if you can't put up a poster, but know of any place that is willing to take membership flyers, we also have a new A5 flyer, featuring the new BSFA logo on the front. If you can help out by distributing some of these membership forms to, for example, local bookshops or libraries, or arranging for them to be displayed at local events, please contact me for copies. We are also particularly keen to arrange reciprocal mailing or advertising with conventions, small press magazines and any other appropriate outlets. We will also have advertising rate cards available — ask for further details.

And as if that wasn't enough activity, the BSFA has also branched out into merchandising, with t-shirts in three designs, white on black. Dave Hicks's astronaut features on one t-shirt, with cartoons by D. West on the others. These will be available at Worldcon, and thereafter by post. Watch for details in the next issue of *Matrix*.

### Vector Components

As you'll have seen from *Matrix* 115, Catie Cary has had to relinquish the editorship of *Vector*. The Committee is certainly sorry to see her go, and I'm sure all you members will want to join with me in thanking Catie for all the tremendous work she has put in on *Vector* over the last few years. Having edited a magazine myself, I know that it's pretty exhausting and I can well appreciate the reasons behind Catie's decision. However, rest assured that Catie will still be writing and reviewing for the BSFA, and we'll be seeing her in the magazines as well as at conventions and other events.

To take over from Catie, we welcome several new faces to the BSFA Committee — Andrew Butler, Tony Cullen and Gary Dalkin. Andrew and Gary will be taking over as Features Editors, while Tony Cullen will be our new Production Editor. Tanya Brown will be joining Paul Kincaid in editing reviews. Andrew is currently finishing a PhD on the work of Philip K. Dick and is a stalwart of the Hull Group, while Gary has been lately contributing TV columns to *Interzone* as well as discovering amazing bargains in his local bookshops. Tony is on the fanfash fast track and in six months has attended two conventions, joined the BSFA and an apa, and volunteered for this.

If you have letters or articles for *Vector*, send them to Andrew Butler at 19 Minton Street, Clough Road, Hull, HU5 0 Gary Dalkin, 5 Lydford Road, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH11 8SN

Any other queries concerning *Vector*, please send them to me, Maureen Kincaid Speller at this stage and watch for future announcements about what to send where in the next issue of *Vector*.

And last of all, a little story for you, dedicated to John Ollis.

### Once upon a time ...

there was a little girl called Maureen Brown, who didn't like her name.

When she grew up and got married she became Maureen Porter, and also became involved in fandom. Later, she got divorced and wanted to change her name, but didn't want to return to her maiden name. Instead, she adopted an old family name and became Maureen Speller. Later still, she got married again, to Paul Kincaid, but didn't become Maureen Kincaid, much to everyone's confusion.

She also had a middle name she didn't like, so because she wanted to include her husband's surname in her own name, and because she liked the American habit of including surnames as a middle name, she adopted Kincaid as her middle name, thereby confusing lots of people even more, especially when they keep donating hyphens to keep the bits of her name apart.

If in doubt, call me ... Maureen.

— Maureen Kincaid Speller, BSFA Administrator

• All unquoted remarks by Chris Terran. Abbreviations: pb, paperback; hb, hardback; tp, trade paperback; pp, page count.

#### HIGHLIGHTS

Paul J. McAuley *Fairyland*; Paul J. McAuley *Pasquale's Angel*; Gregory Benford *Sailing Bright Eternity*; Christopher Evans *Mortal Remains*; Phillip Mann *The Dragon Wakes* (Gollancz). David & Leigh Eddings *Belgarath the Sorcerer* (HarperCollins). Newt Gingrich & William R. Forstchen 1945 (Baen). Jim Lovell & Jeffrey Kluger *Apollo 13* (Coronet). Maggie Furey *The Sword of Flame* (Legend). Michael Moorcock *Fabulous Harbours* (Millennium). John Clute *Science Fiction: The Illustrated Encyclopedia* (Dorling Kindersley).

#### PUBLISHING NEWS

Gollancz are hoping to fill the Christmas stockings of Terry Pratchett fans with "the first four gilt-sized editions" of Discworld books. In October they'll be releasing *The Colour of Magic*, *The Light Fantastic*, *Equal Rites* and *Mort* as miniature (87x72 mm) hardbacks for a very reasonable £4.99 each. All editions contain the full text and have Josh Kirby covers. Tireless Terry will be doing yet another promotional tour then to publicise both the mini-books and *Muskadee*, the next Discworld novel. Wherein the Ankh-Morpork Opera House contains two old ladies in pointy hats eating peanuts in the gods and looking up at the big chandelier and saying things like: "There's a disaster waiting to happen if ever I saw one."

Terry has just finished another 'Johnny Maxwell' book for publication next spring ("we're still arguing over the title") and is currently trying out ideas for the next-but-one Discworld book.

K. W. Jeter's sequel to the film *Bladerunner* will be published in the US by Bantam Spectra in November at \$21.95. It will be called *Blade Runner 2: The Edge of Human*, and in it "Deckard finds himself guilty of murdering a human and must escape from those who seek to punish him."

#### Baen Books

Newt Gingrich & William R. Forstchen 1945 (14 Aug; £14.99 hb, 382pp) — Here it is, the much-hyped alternative history from US politician and former history professor Gingrich (though reportedly many of the juicy sex scenes were cut). The premise is that the US did not enter the war against Germany after Pearl Harbour, but instead defeated the Japanese and exists in an uneasy truce with Nazi-controlled Europe; only Britain (curiously omitted from the western hemisphere map) remains independent, and is the centre of much intrigue. Germany continues her development of super-weapons (including cruise-missiles, long range jet bombers — can they reach the mainland US? — and attempts at 'stealthed' weapons), and is engaged in a race with the US to develop the atom bomb. UK distributor Simon & Schuster's publicity material draws explicit parallels with the successful *Fatherland* and fails to mention the of antecedents. The book ends with the dead words: "To Be Continued . . ."

#### Bantam

Anne McCaffrey *Freedom's Landing* (6 Jul; £15.99 hb, 400pp) — First in the 'Cattani' sequence. • Kevin J. Anderson (ed.) *Tales*

*From the Mos Eisley Cantina* (10 Aug; £4.99 pb, 387pp) — Anthology based around characters in the pub featured in *Star Wars*. Stories from Timothy Zahn, Barbara Hambly, David Bischoff, Daniel Keys Moran, Judith and Garfield Reeves-Stevens, and others. • George Lucas & Chris Claremont *Shadow Moon* (10 Aug; £12.99 hb, 352pp) • Garry Kilworth *House of Tribes* (7 Sep; £12.99 hb, 448pp) — After foxes, wolves and hares Kilworth turns to mice in his continuing series of 'talking animal' books. • Timothy Zahn *Conquerors' Heritage* (7 Sep; £4.99 pb, 360pp) — Sequel to *Conquerors' Pride* from an author most noted for *Star Wars* tie-ins. Bantam says it is "One of the most powerful evocations of an alien society ever created." Hugo-winner Zahn has a Banksian penchant for silly names: the "Zhirrzh" are the aliens, amongst whom are "Thurr-gilag", "Hgg-spontib", "Cvv-panav", "Nzz-oonaz" and "Pr't-zevisti". Excuse me while I clean the screen. • Robert Rankin *The Garden of Unearthly Delights* (5 Oct; £14.99 hb, 272pp)

£8.99 pb, 336pp) — "In the 21st century change is the certainty amidst endless civil wars and technological revolutions. Europe is divided between First World bourgeoisie, enriched by nanotechnology and the slave labour of genetically engineered Dolls, and the Fourth World of the refugees and the dispossessed." Science fiction is not about the future; it's about the dreams of today. I opened this book on a coach at King's Cross in London, and saw the title of the first chapter: "King's Cross"; so I was able, rather eerily, to look out at the scenery described: a cosmopolitan London of low-lives and street kids, nanotech and designer drugs, VR arcades and the death of wildlife. Sounds familiar, but this is — like *Vurt* — an extremely British treatment of cyberpunk themes, and in a very different way to Holdstock tackles the Matter of Britain; the epigram is "The Goddess starts her endgame in Britain, where nobody's looking". With its wealth of cultural references it belongs firmly in the 90s, and is surely an award contender next year. Graced with an elegant and



## Recent and Forthcoming

#### Corgi

Anne McCaffrey *The Dolphins of Pern* (7 Sep; £4.99 pb, 320pp) — "A compelling new saga in the history of Pern."

#### Coronet

Jim Lovell & Jeffrey Kluger *Apollo 13* (17 Aug; £5.99 pb, 378pp) — Film tie-in edition of a book originally issued in America as *Lost Moon: The Perilous Voyage of Apollo 13*. Lovell was, of course, one of the astronauts on board the ill-fated flight. Though written in a fairly fictionalised way with flashbacks and character development, the book contains various technical appendices and an index.

#### Gollancz

S. P. Somtow *Vanitas* (27 Jul; £16.99 hb, 352pp) — Subtitle 'Escape from Vampire Junction', this is the third Timmy Valentine vampire novel. • Arthur C. Clarke *Tales of Ten Worlds* (Jul; £4.99 pb, 256pp) — Reissue of a classic anthology. • Gregory Benford *Sailing Bright Eternity* (24 Aug; £16.99 hb, 404pp) — "The long-awaited finale to the celebrated hard of epic. The final chapter of humanity's future has begun and one man, Nigel Walmesley, has been alive through it all. He recalls Earth's desperate struggle against the mechs, a violent artificial intelligence dedicated to total annihilation." • Gregory Benford *Great Sky River* (24 Aug; £5.99 pb, 336pp) and *Tides of Light* (24 Aug; £5.99 pb, 368pp) — Reissues of the first two novels in the 'Galactic Centre' series. • Gregory Benford *Furious Gulf* (24 Aug; £5.99 pb, 341pp) — First paperback release of the third 'Galactic Centre' novel. Includes an extract from *Sailing Bright Eternity*. • Paul J. McAuley *Fairyland* (31 Aug; £16.99 hb.

understated cover by Steve Crisp, *Fairyland* is highly recommended and your editor's choice this issue. • Paul J. McAuley *Pasquale's Angel* (31 Aug; £5.99 pb, 384pp) — Paperback of the Clarke Award nominated novel, with a Jim Burns cover. A fast-paced and highly enjoyable alternative history tale set in a Florence of 1518 where da Vinci's devices work and the political intrigues are as labyrinthine as they were in our world. Pasquale is a young artist's apprentice who gets involved in a locked-room murder mystery; soon he, the journalist Machiavelli, a Barbary ape, an Aztec servant girl and the Great Engineer himself are on the trail . . . Great fun, and recommended. • Margaret Weis and Don Perrin *The Knights of the Black Earth* (31 Aug; £15.99 hb, 383pp) — "A brand new Mag Force 7 adventure." This is co-author Perrin's first collaboration; he is described as a "weapons and electronics warfare expert" who formerly worked for the Canadian Defence Department in connection with battle software.

• Christopher Evans *Mortal Remains* (Sep; £15.99 hb, £8.99 pb, 320pp) — Evans turns to hard of the BSFA Award winning *Aztec Century*. • Phillip Mann *A Land Fit For Heroes Vol. 3: The Dragon Wakes* (Sep; £16.99 hb, 272pp) — Third in the alternative-world sequence where Rome never fell to the barbarians and is the capital of a vast global civilisation. • Ian Watson *The Fallen Moon* (Sep; £5.99 pb, 544pp) — Paperback release of "The Second Book of Mana", based on the Finnish epic *Kalevala*.

#### HarperCollins

Mike Jefferies *The Knights of Catador* (10 Jul; £4.99 pb, 381pp) — "A glorious new epic fantasy from the writer of *Loremasters*

of Elundium." Norfolk-resident Jefferies is a keen rider and in 1980 was selected to ride for Britain in the Belgian Three Day Event. • **David & Leigh Eddings** *Belgarath the Sorcerer* (27 Jul; £15.99 hb, 662pp) — The long awaited prequel to *The Belgariad*. Although previous Eddings books were credited only to David, they were actually written by both; as the Authors' Note says, "It's time to give credit where credit is due, so let's make it official, shall we?" • **Robin Hobb** *Assassin's Apprentice* (7 Aug; £9.99 hb, 375pp) — Fantasy. Bargain priced first novel from a new American writer. There's a sequel on the way, *The Royal Assassin*.

### Legend

**Greg Bear** *Legacy* (3 Aug; £15.99 hb) — New hard sf novel set in the *Eon* universe. • **Max Allen Collins** *Waterworld* (3 Aug; £4.99 pb) — Book of the film. • **Maggie Furey** *The Sword of Flame* (17 Aug; £5.99 pb) — New novel from the fast-rising fantasy writer. • **Andrew Harman** *Fahrenheit 666* (17 Aug; £4.99 pb) • **Anne**

The forthcoming *Amongst the Angels* will complete Moorcock's 'grand finale' to his fantastic fiction. • **Kristine Kathryn Rusch** *The Fey: Sacrifice* (21 Aug; £16.99 hb, 550pp; £8.99 tp) — Large scale fantasy epic.

### New English Library

**Gene Wolfe** *Calde of the Long Sun* (17 Aug; £5.99 pb, 371pp) — Third volume of 'The Book of the Long Sun'. • **Ben Bova** *Brothers* (17 Aug; £5.99 pb, 550pp) — First UK publication. Near-future techno-thriller about the development of a means to regenerate human organs within the body. • **W. A. Harbinson** *Millennium* (17 Aug; £5.99 pb, 617pp) — Fourth and final part of the 'Project Saucer' series. •

### Orbit

**Patrick Tilley** *Star Wartz* (10 Aug; £15.99 hb, 409pp) — First comedy novel from the North Wales resident sheep-farming author of the 'Amtrak Wars' series. "When former SAS soldier and struggling freelance journalist Andrew Webber [sic — CT] receives an intriguing circular

*Science Fiction* — has put together a very useful addition to that book. • **Michael Foot** *H. G.: The History of Mr Wells* (Doubleday; 7 Sep; £20.00 hb, 409pp) — To mark the 50th anniversary of Wells's death, here's a major new biography from Foot, who was a personal friend of Wells in his youth.

## Recent and Forthcoming

**Rice Taltos** (7 Sep; £5.99 pb) • **Tad Williams** *Caliban's Hour* (21 Sep; £4.99 pb) • **Ken MacLeod** *The Star Fraction* (21 Sep; £10.00 hb) — Bargain priced first novel. • **Leonard Nimoy** *I am Spock* (5 Oct; £14.99 hb)

### Millennium

**Ellen Datlow** (ed.) *Little Deaths* (7 Aug; £5.99 pb, 454pp) — "24 Tales of Horror and Sex" is the unembarrassed subtitle of this collection of mostly original stories. Authors include Nicholas Royle, Nicola Griffith, Clive Barker, M. John Harrison, Barry N. Malzberg, Joyce Carol Oates, Ruth Rendell, Jack Womack, Pat Cadigan, K. W. Jeter, Lucius Shepard and others. • **Steve Perry & Stephani Perry**, **David Bischoff** *Aliens vs. Predator Omnibus Vol. 1: Prey & Hunter's Planet* (7 Aug; £5.99 pb, 259+260pp) — Bound together reprints of two film spin-off titles. Two moans: the authors aren't credited on the spine, and the book hasn't been repaginated. • **Michael Moorcock** *The Eternal Champion* (7 Aug; £5.99 pb, 659pp) — Second in the complete edition of *The Tale of the Eternal Champion*. Contains *The Eternal Champion*, *Phoenix in Obsidian* and *The Dragon in the Sword*. • **Michael Moorcock** *Fabulous Harbours* (21 Aug; £15.99 hb, 192pp; £8.99 tp) — Collection of mostly reprinted short stories, some updated. "A linked series of stories narrated by characters familiar to the Multiverse. *Fabulous Harbours* is not strictly a sequel to *Blood* [though it is subtitled as such — CT], but it takes the story begun there forward and on towards the final coming together of Moorcock's two theories of Law and Chaos by which the Multiverse is ruled."

letter at his flat in Catford inviting him to be registered in the galactic fax directory, his sense of curiosity is provoked. He leaves for London — and suddenly finds himself transported from a small office in Soho to another galaxy, the Rimworld, which has 1476 planets orbiting two suns. The inhabitants resemble humans, but are all over six feet tall and live for 600 years."

### Pocket

('ST' = *Star Trek*, 'TNG' = *The Next Generation*, 'DS9' = *Deep Space 9*, 'V' = *Voyager*, 'SA' = *Starfleet Academy*). **Gene DeWeese** *ST TNG #36: Into the Nebula* (Aug; £4.50 pb, 274pp) • **Ira Steven Behr** *ST DS9: The Ferengi Rules of Acquisition* (Aug; £3.99 pb, 84pp) — Bizarre little booklet of mottoes, one per page. Examples: "202: The justification for profit is profit." "58: There is no substitute for success." Very profound. • **NA ST 1996 30th Anniversary Calendar** (29 Aug; £6.99) • **NA ST TNG 1996 Calendar** (29 Aug; £6.99) • **NA ST DS9 1996 Calendar** (29 Aug; £6.99) • **NA ST V 1996 Calendar** (29 Aug; £6.99) • **Michael and Denise Okuda** *ST Interactive Encyclopedia* (30 Aug; £54.99 CD-ROM, Windows and Mac versions)

### Others

**John Clute** *Science Fiction: The Illustrated Encyclopedia* (Dorling Kindersley; 5 Oct; £25.00 hb (245x285mm), 312pp) — Words like 'lavish', 'coffee', and 'table' usually come to mind for this sort of book, but *SF: TIE* transcends this; Dorling Kindersley are renowned for the high production quality of their books, and this is no exception. Clute — who co-authored the mighty and indispensable (though unillustrated) *Encyclopedia of*

# MAILBOX

From Robert J. Newman  
37 Keens Road  
Croydon, Surrey  
CR0 1AH

I was amused by "Simo" Simpson's article "The Fan Club at the End of the Universe" in *Matrix* 114. Simo, correctly, tells us that Z29 Plural Z Alpha, The Official Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy Appreciation Society massively increased its membership by advertising in the back of the fifth Guide novel and then goes on to say that "the BSFA elders would do well to bear this in mind when considering plans for increasing recruitment".

As someone who was on Z29's committee at the time it was decided to place the advert I feel qualified to make a couple of observations. When it was first announced that Douglas Adams was writing another Guide book, the then Z29 committee had a meeting at which I suggested we should try to put an advert in the back of it because advertisements in the backs of books seemed to work well for the BSFA. I believe the BSFA were advertising in the back of British sf paperbacks as long ago as 30 years and still occasionally get membership enquiries as a result of some of these old adverts (an alarming prospect as it is my address in the back of *Mostly Harmless*). For Simo to lecture the BSFA on an idea that Z29 stole from the BSFA in the first place is, I suppose, at least in the style of the Hitch Hiker's Guide. Perhaps he should have put a copy of the idea back in time so that he could sue the BSFA for stealing Z29's idea!

Simo's "we know better" arrogance on this matter is only equalled by his suggestion that his taking over as editor of Z29's newsletter was a "significant factor" coinciding with Z29's membership boom. The Z29 membership boom is entirely due to the advert in the back of the fifth Guide novel (as I know from getting all the mail) which was as a result of a decision taken by the Z29 committee years before Simo was elected to it.

While I'm writing about Simo I might as well mention his letter in *Matrix* 114 (as "M. J." Simpson). If you'd told me ten years ago that I would live to see the day when someone wrote to the BSFA complaining that Joseph Nicholas had written a review that wasn't harsh enough, I would have laughed in your face. What is the world coming to when Joseph Nicholas has mellowed out and a brutal new generation are slagging him off for being soft?

And since I seem to be stuck on the subject of Mr Simpson I think I should congratulate him on the publication of the first issue of *SFX* in which he is credited as Mike Simpson. Why can't he make his mind up what his name is? ☹

From Philip J. Knight  
12 Cook-Rees Avenue  
Neath, West Glamorgan  
SA11 1UN

Joseph Nicholas claims that "Next Generation fans are reportedly so hostile to *Babylon 5* because it deals with adult political concerns rather than manufactured simplicities". This is of course rubbish, *B 5* is a kids' show. It is nothing more than an sf reworking of *The Lord of the Rings*. If *B5* does deal with "adult political concerns" then they are so hidden under quasi-religious mumbo-jumbo as to be no threat to the establishment.

*Star Trek: The Next Generation* on the other hand has often dealt with issues of social and political importance. For example the BBC banned the episode "The High Ground" because it referred to the British occupation of the North of Ireland. In the US the "moral majority" condemned the story "The Outcast" because it dealt with the issue of homophobia.

Other "issue" episodes of *Next Gen* include "The Arsenal of Freedom" (the arms race), "When the Bough Breaks" (the greenhouse effect), "The Masterpiece Society" (eugenics), and "Descent" (fascism). However the most powerful political story in *Star Trek* is the *Deep Space 9* two-parter "Past Tense". This thought-provoking story deals with such social issues as unemployment and "community care". "Past Tense" is now on video and it's better than any old cartoon.

I will leave the last word to Kosh the Vorlon from *Babylon 5*: "A rolling stone gathers no moss, but butter is better on your bread." ☹

From John Ollis  
51 Belmont Road  
Luton  
LU1 1LL

Another excellent issue of *Matrix*, no. 115 — a couple of points on letters.

Regarding John Oram's plea for membership cards, when I joined in '86 that is precisely what I received, though admittedly it is slightly larger than a credit card. As I've still got it after nine years it must be fairly sturdy, and one wonders why these were phased out. It's a plastic-faced piece of thin card with the old logo on it.

I must thank Susan Booth for her long letter regarding conventions, which is very helpful. The idea of stencilling NEO on the badge is a good one, and how about a badge of a distinctive colour for new members? I saw several different colours in use. Red for newcomers, say; then they can be positively avoided or welcomed.

It's certainly reassuring to realise that, at my present rate of progress, I shall know as many con-goers as Susan does now by the year 2030.

Letters (and emails) on any subject are very welcome.  
Send letters to: Chris Terran  
Matrix  
9 Beechwood Court  
Back Beechwood Grove  
Leeds LS4 2HS  
or email: terran@cityscape.co.uk

One point on the accounts — the Library is shown at cost. Has there ever been a valuation, and, if not, I wonder why not, since writing it up to current values would make for a more impressive Balance Sheet, assuming that it is worth more than the present WDV of £28. I think it must be, since reference is made in the minutes to 'books of particular rarity'. ☹

[Maureen Speller responds, first on membership cards, which:]

... may be available by Worldcon — they're now being worked on. They will certainly be available just after Worldcon. [On newcomers to conventions:]

I'd like to respond to this matter of news at conventions at greater length in the next *Matrix*, after the Worldcon. Being joint fan guest of honour at Evolution, a convention particularly concerned about welcoming people new to conventions as it will be the first large convention after Worldcon, I'm keen to use this chance to get the BSFA more deeply involved in helping. I'm currently discussing various issues with the convention committee and hope to have more news for people soon. In the meantime, if anyone has any thoughts on this, I would be delighted to hear from you. [And regarding the BSFA library, Maureen will be visiting the Foundation Library soon and will inspect the BSFA collection then.]

Letters and emails were also received from: Harry Andruschak; Simon Bisson; Steve Brewster; Andy Butler; John Clute; Cardinal Cox; John English; Jenny Glover; Steve Glover; Neyir Cenk Gokce; Valerie Housden; David Langford; Neil Mackie; Caroline Mullan; Mark Ogier; Stephen Payne; James Petry; Alan Poulter; Andy Sawyer; Sue Thomas; Jim Trash; and Bridget Wilkinson. Thanks to all!

## Crossword 15 Solution

s	p	a	c	e	o	p	e	r	a	d	e	r	v
i	g	u	a	r	d	r	a	i	b	a	c	o	n
n	m	o	t	e	s	e	c						
a	v	i	o	n	i	c	r	e	t	r	a	c	e
l	n												
m	o	t	o	r	h	e	a	d	c	o	d	e	d
a	a	e	r	t	i	l	l	o	i				
n	o	s	e	s	t	a	s	e	l	l	e	d	
t	e	r											
t	e	a	r	o	o	m	w	o	o	m	e	r	a
a	t	r	o	o	b	e	a	c					
r	a	i	s	e	r	a	r	e	a	r	e	a	r
o	o	s	i	l	l	l	l	t	m				
y	a	n	k	s	a	n	d	w	i	c	h	e	s

All but one of the eleven entries were completely correct, with **Theo Ross** being first out of Roger's hat. Congratulations, and a book token is bound for Oban.



I'M WRITING THIS after three days attending the 1995 conference on Computers, Freedom, and Privacy in San Francisco — a peculiarly depressing event which has great significance for future free exchange of text, art, and information.

The annual conference was initiated five years ago by a political activist and computer programmer named Jim Warren. His stated aim was to encourage people in government to talk on an equal basis with people who are building and using computer networks. That sounds a good idea — and yet, after today's session, I've come to the conclusion that some people aren't worth talking to.

Today I listened to a representative from the Washington Attorney General's office (the American equivalent of a Director of Public Prosecutions) telling the crowd that the Internet is already functioning very much like television, and should be regulated accordingly. Someone in the audience wanted to know if this meant that the net should be "dumbed down" to the level of the lowest common denominator, such as religious fundamentalists who choke on the mere mention of words such as "breast" or concepts such as evolution.

The answer? Since the Internet is a national resource which will soon be accessible to all consumers, yes, it must satisfy the standards of the most backward communities.

I was reminded of a Philip K. Dick novel, *The Zap Gun*, in which a character marvels at the barefaced nerve of government officials who describe their repressive policies without a blink of embarrassment. Dick suggested that there should be a book published by the government titled "How we rule you people, and what are you going to do about it?"

Well, what are we going to do about it?

If the audience at Computers, Freedom, and Privacy is any guide, the answer is, "not much." I was stunned by the trusting, respectful, altogether *decent* attitude that net users showed toward the men from Washington who are even now planning to limit our ability to discuss certain topics, view certain pictures, and read certain types of text online. Overall, everyone's attitude seemed to be that some sort of regulation is inevitable, and we should accept the situation.

This makes no sense. The Internet has received more than its fair share of hype, to be sure; but I believe it is the most benign, egalitarian, enlightened, utopian environment that has ever existed on a large scale in human history. It is, in fact, a much larger, much more diverse version of fandom, with no leaders and few laws. It may be the first and only example of a truly anarchic system which works — and works brilliantly.

On the Internet, there is virtually no crime, and there are virtually no victims. There is virtually no discrimination on the basis of age, race, or nationality (although well-funded thought police such as the Simon Wiesenthal Institute are constantly complaining that out of 10,000 news groups, a couple dare to discuss "naughty" ideas about race and ethnicity).

In fact, the Internet is a lot more benign and works a lot better than any other social system I can think of. Yet its citizens are so naive and so gentle, instead of insisting that our morally bankrupt leaders should show a little humility are learn some

lessons from us, we are supposed to acquiesce and do things their way — even though they have already proved that they are totally incompetent to maintain law, order, equality, and prosperity in the everyday world where they hold power.

I hate to have to say so, but I fear they will get away with it. I foresee selective enforcement of existing laws, plus new legislation specifically designed to combat our "dangerous" freedoms. Some system administrators will be thrown in jail for disseminating "obscenity" from their sites; the rest will be frightened into submission.

And yet, there is still some hope for freedom, because the Internet is not just a national phenomenon. It is global.

Can the reach of United States legislators really extend as far as sites in Denmark or Finland? Can national governments really hope to control the flow of "naughty" text and pictures from overseas? Isn't this a case where we may find that instead of censorship being imposed to suit the lowest common denominator, we may see liberty rising to the level of the freest society that participates?

Already there has been a case in Canada where reports of a trial in progress were suppressed under the local sub-judice law (which is similar to the law in Britain). But Canadians had no trouble accessing U.S. sites where the principle of *sub-judice* is not legally recognised, and full reports of the Canadian court case were freely available — much to the anger of Canadian legislators.

Likewise, even though the American press has declined to cover the story of attempts to tie Bill Clinton to cocaine smuggling during his term as governor of Arkansas, I am able to read British news reports on this topic which a helpful Englishman scans into the net for the edification of myself and dozens of other users. I have never met this person; I know nothing about him. He disseminates the information because he believes, as I do, that all information should be readily available.

Back in the 1960s, when Arthur C. Clarke first started writing about communications satellites, he predicted that they would eradicate national boundaries. Television relayed by satellite, he said, would enable us to see each other as human beings rather than as enemies, and warfare would become obsolete.

Clarke's ideas now seem a bit naive, and maybe I'm being equally naive imagining that in the 1990s, everyday people will be able to continue evading their repressive governments. But I remember how students in China learned about events in Tiananmen Square through faxes from the United States. Telecommunications really can make a difference.

It seems almost incredible to me that in the United States, where liberties are supposedly protected under the U.S. Constitution, we should end up like the Chinese students, accessing text which we are not supposed to read from friends in nations overseas. But if that's the way it has to be, at least the Internet makes it possible. My biggest regret is that so many of my fellow net users now seem willing to accept this situation with a shrug and a smile.

—Charles Platt

# Thinking Locally Charles Platt Acting Globally

# What's a Convention For, Mummy?

## Jilly Reed

**S**OU'WESTER, the 1994 Eastercon, was my first convention; I had no idea what to expect. I'd only recently discovered the existence of such things as "fans", from reading Larry Niven's and Stephen Barnes's *Fallen Angels*. When I saw Sou'Wester advertised I realised it was one of those convention things and sent off my membership money, promising myself I'd go home if I didn't like it. I did, very much. But then, I'd had the most tremendous piece of luck: it was called Chris Bell. She was doing hotel liaison and I'd written to her asking what a first-timer should do. She could have replied, as almost everyone does, Be A Gopher — it's a reasonable answer — but she didn't. She sent me a long, friendly letter detailing the options and recommending me to work on the newsletter. She even introduced me to its tutelary spirits. This meant that Dave Langford and Paul Barnett were the first friends I made in fandom; you see why I had such a good time.

Which is why I was rather troubled to read John Ollis' piece in *Matrix 114*. With the Worldcon coming up — one hesitates to use the phrase 'looming over us', though not for long — I've been thinking about conventions, and what they offer both to old hands and people making their tentative way into this large and sometimes alarming sub-culture. It's a terrific cheek — I've barely been around eighteen months and here I am, teaching you how to suck eggs. My only excuse is that I have an unusual viewpoint: by great good fortune (and enormous personal charm, of course) I've been catapulted into the middle of things while still a comparative neo.

I realise now how unusual it is for someone to be given that kind of entree but at the time I assumed it was normal. After all, wasn't everyone I met in Liverpool heavily involved in something or other? Like the charming young Irishman dressed in the bridge uniform of the USS Enterprise; he was an usher for the Masquerade and popped up all over the place as a gopher. Or the gamers in the room next to the newsletter's: they had the kind of non-stop, all-join-in fun that's everyone's idea of a good time. And they were so welcoming! Yet another charming young man kept dropping in to entice us to play and only the fact that I was chained to the keyboard prevented me. (This caused me much puzzlement later with all the business about the fragmentation of fandom — far from being exclusive, they practically dragged us through the door.)

Everything I saw led me to think all convention-goers were deeply absorbed in whatever was their thing, whether new bugs or old stagers. Given the odd terms flying about — filkers, gamers, costumers, fanzines (fanzine? wasn't that where you sent off five bob and they sent you a picture of Donny Osmond?) — I gathered there were any number of arcane activities needing people's assistance. Nobody seemed to be uninvolved. Even the two programme items I caught — the closing ceremony and Barbara Hambly's guest of honour speech — were the kind you *expect* to be performer / audience affairs. I vaguely thought that all the bits I'd missed were the same sort of do-it-yourself high jinks as were going on all around. (I didn't get to any panel items, the old firm of Langford and Barnett, Purveyors of Gossip to the Gentry, employing very well-trained slave-drivers.) So now I knew what a convention did — it gathered together lots of people

who mostly knew each other to pursue Serious Fun, picking up newcomers on the way and slotting them smoothly into their preferred niche. (I said I was new.) And the next one confirmed it.

That was Mexican. Again, it was sheer good luck that I went. (It happened to be at the Clarke Award presentation evening when it was mentioned.) At Mexican everyone did practically everything, from earnest discussion to silly games; nobody watched from the sidelines. This led to tremendous group morale and the spirit of Let's Do The Show Right Here reigned supreme. Obviously, the fact that it was so much smaller than Sou'Wester made for greater camaraderie but that was simply a question of scale (I thought); it didn't occur to me that they might be different animals altogether. Or that anyone might be feeling left out. At Mexican, chance would've been a fine thing.

Then there was Novacon. This too fitted my early impression that cons are essentially inclusive (if different in degree) though for the opposite reason. It had minimum programming because, as they patiently explained, it was a relaxacon and everyone was there to, er, relax. (Seemed sensible to me; clearly, a heavy programme required the combined energies of every single attendee.) Hence most people spent much of the con in the bar and this also helped the community spirit, leading to camaraderie, joie de vivre and for all I know, brouhaha. Having gone there a bit apprehensively — what would I do with no newsletter? — I was introduced to the concept of *ignoring* the programme. What a revelation! I'd seen hardly any of Sou'Wester's, of course, but that was because they wouldn't let me out of the newsroom; here, however, was a whole new approach.

After that came Microcon (I may be new but I get around). With more guests than attendees, there was no avoiding the programme. Once again, everyone did everything and at measured intervals, repaired to the bar. The sterling efforts of P. Barnett, his wife Catherine and the prodigious Jane (online begueter of the con) made everyone welcome to the pursuit of the Higher Frivolity. Just like Sou'Wester! Even to the same ghastly crew.

And so round to Eastercon again and the collapse of my fond theory. Not that Confabulation was bad, far from it. The committee had deliberately gone for a limited-number, lightly-programmed con in order not to exhaust everyone for The Big One and to that end, succeeded beautifully. More to the point, they'd told everyone this so we knew what to expect. At least I thought I did; but I found that without an overriding occupation to ~~work you to death~~ keep you occupied, a big con can be frustrating. All praise to the committee for achieving their aims so well but I'm not entirely sure those aims were wise; can you have a relaxing Eastercon? And still be an Eastercon, I mean? Should you? Bearing in mind that it's the one big gathering of the year, I wonder if the bigger the con, the more programming you need? I'd quite like to have had more items on offer in the afternoons, for instance, when desperate fun had gone off to lie down for a bit. For the first time I noticed people wandering round looking a bit aimless, probably because I was doing the same. It made me re-think some of my blithe assumptions.

For example, The Neo Problem. I'd encountered discussion of it in the fanzines I'd nagged people into giving me. (Hint — keep quiet about Donny Osmond.) They seemed divided between those who thought newcomers should be given a hand up and the I-did-it-the-hard-way school. About the same time, I found myself in the peculiar position of actually being a neo while listening to people complain about them. The complaints seemed to cover the same narrow patch of ground: *It's their own fault — all they have to do is talk to us.* (True; but it seems so rude to push in on a conversation. The odd smile helps a lot.) *If they'd just have a bit of gumption, they'd be fine.* (It takes a hell of a lot of gumption to face meeting five hundred strangers. Credit where credit's due!) *I come here to enjoy myself, not nursemaid new fans.* (Couldn't agree more, but isn't there are a middle course between ignoring people completely and tucking them up in bed?) What I resented most, even insulated as I'd been, was the dismissal of neo-troubles as self-inflicted. It was unfair to equate the desire to be invited in with the intention to batten; neos don't ask to be wet-nursed, just welcomed. It was fine for me: I'd had Chris Bell hauling me in her wake, announcing to all and sundry that I was a neo and they'd better be nice to me. (She didn't have to say Or Else.) What about the rest?

I had such a roaring good time at my first convention, I'm saddened that an open-minded, well-intentioned chap like John Ollis should have felt excluded. Especially when the people he feels excluded by are, did he but know it, so friendly. I think the trouble is that apart from in exceptional cases — and C. Bell on the warpath on behalf of a protegee is definitely one of those — most long-time con-goers only want to meet old friends, catch a few interesting programme items and have some (all right, lots of) convivial drinking sessions. Anyone introduced to them as I was is likely to be welcomed but they're not going to tawl for lost souls. And why should they? I don't.

Which leaves us with the problem of how to make it easier for new fans to feel at home. (If you feel that's their problem, don't bother reading the rest; you'll only get cross and there's no need when it's not directed to you.) Could the BSFA help? Given that it seems to be a point of entry for many people, perhaps we should regularly print a New-To-It-All piece. Possibly that's a silly idea — I don't pretend to have the answers, only the questions — but I'd be interested to hear other suggestions.

Or perhaps conventions themselves could do more to welcome new fans? Bear them in mind when compiling preliminary information and Progress Reports, for instance. Sometimes these can seem addressed solely to the cognoscenti. If the con is intended to be more like a weekend party than a serious literary discussion, advise people of that. (This isn't as daft as it might sound; I was genuinely anxious, before my first

Eastercon, that I'd cover myself in shame by not knowing enough about sf. Go on, laugh.) For example, I know now that Novacon is a relaxacon, and what a relaxacon is, but it was all Greek to me then. I had a great time there — the Brum Group really know how to throw a party! — but that's because I have No Shame and besides, it wasn't my first and I'd been urged to go by the friends I made at Sou'Wester. I suspect it's not a good idea for a new fan to go to a very lightly programmed con as, if they don't know anyone, they could spend a lot of time staring into their beer. Ought we to tell them so? (This isn't meant as a criticism of Novacon; rather, a tentative suggestion for anyone organising something similar.) Could this be something new to put in Progress Reports? Good lord, I'll discover the Philosopher's Stone next.

Of course, if a convention committee doesn't want brand-new fans at the door, fine; if they're doing all the work they have every right to set the rules. But they should say so, clearly.

Again, the PR writer might consider including some kind of guide to the local language and customs. Once you've got some fool to write it — and the name Maureen Kincaid Speller springs to mind here — it could be bunged in anywhere in a series of PRs. Boring for old hands but after all, they don't have to read it. Sercon, apas, fanzines, filk, experienced con-goers don't realise how their speech is sprinkled with these useful but baffling terms. Of course neos can pick it up eventually and it's a good way to meet people, marching up to them and sternly demanding to know what a gamer is, but a bijou guidelette would be a welcoming gesture. (And prove you knew we existed . . .)

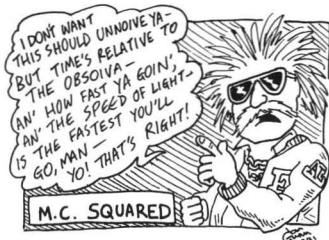
Committees could even provide neo badges, if wanted. (Handing them out regardless could make people feel like lepers.) An extra box to tick on the volunteer form, a committee member to act as a contact name, a line in flyers directing interested newcomers to a source of information; with a pre-written Learners' Guide, it wouldn't be too hard to make a little help go a long way. And I don't get the impression that PRs are so full of novel and exciting items that there'd be no room for something of the sort.

Oh well; perhaps when it's my turn to rule the world. Perhaps this is foolish. Do cons have a duty to their newest members? Search me.

And now I'm a neo again, only worse. Having got used to knowing my way around, I feel like the veriest beginner with **Worldcon: The Nightmare** hovering into view. Five thousand people! Giant aircraft-hangar con space! Foreigners! What will it be like? Will I see anyone I know? Will I hate it?

I'll let you know.

— Jilly Reed



# Heat Strokes



**Joseph  
Nicholas**  
reviews

## Tank Girl First Knight Judge Dredd

**I**T'S SUMMER, which means that in between lying in the garden watching the frogs in the pond, it's time to visit the cinema to consume some would-be blockbusters.

I remember when it was different — not just when summers were cooler, but when would-be blockbusters were released around Christmas, supposedly to capitalise on the holiday instinct which makes people spend more. Somewhere along the way, there's presumably been a demographic shift towards more differentiated audiences and / or spending strategies, which means that big films now do better if aimed at school holidays rather than holidays in general.

So times change. But I also remember when we had better films to watch than the load of celluloid manure which appears to have been dumped before us this summer.

Leaving aside the films which are not fantasies and thus not reviewable in *Matrix* — such as Michael Caton-Jones's *Rob Roy*, which was pretty watchable and well-played (although its context was inadequately explained and so probably impenetrable to anyone not familiar with Scottish history), and Wolfgang Petersen's *Outbreak*, the plot of which relied too much on unlikely coincidences (and which did nothing not done twenty years ago by Robert Wise in *The Andromeda Strain*) — the first out of the traps (a terrible pun, but I like it) was Rachel Tallalay's *Tank Girl*, inspired by the comic strip of the same name and featuring original artwork from Jamie Hewlett intercut with the action scenes. Which is just where the film goes wrong: firstly because it makes abundantly plain that Lori Petty looks nothing like the comic character — and doesn't even act like the character: she pouts, she simpers, her accent is all over the place — and secondly because to replace an action sequence with a static comic panel, though doubtless perceived by its makers as a nifty post-modernist trick, bespeaks a certain lack of confidence in what you're about. But then this lack of confidence may be attributable to the milieu in which *Tank Girl* (comic strip and film) is set: post-Cold War, post-*Mad Max*, we can no longer take seriously the bleak, shattered landscapes against which such tales are set. (Indeed, *Mad Max*-style landscapes are now taken so unseriously that they have been recycled into two series of lager commercials, one of which even features Bruce Spence as the Gyrocaptain.) So if it's to have any impact, the tale has to be played for laughs; but any humour present in the original script seems to have been squeezed out before the final edit.

It's a shame, since it looks good on screen, has a grunge rock soundtrack selected by "executive music co-ordinator" Courtney Love-Cobain (as she's styled in the final credits, perhaps out of fear that people may begin to forget who she is), and has another good performance from Malcolm McDowell as the pinched and hunted-looking bad guy. (With one caveat: although it's nice to see how his career has revived, it's slightly worrying to see how all his bad guys are exactly the same. Some director somewhere should offer him a chance to play against type, and soon.) Also looking good, and thus doomed to disappoint, is Jerry Zucker's *First Knight*, supposedly based on the Arthurian legends but in fact having little connection with them. The only concession to works of White, Tennyson, Malory, Geoffrey of Monmouth, Chretien de Troyes *et al* is to select a disaffected knight called Malagant rather than Arthur's brother Mordred as the bad guy, presumably after Meliagrance, a character in the Welsh versions of the tale who kidnaps Guinevere and carries her away to the "summer country" underground (as Persephone, the Greek goddess of spring, was kidnapped by Pluto). Other than this, however, and apart from their names, the Arthur / Guinevere / Lancelot love triangle could be any love triangle — albeit that Sean Connery's Arthur is too old for Julia Ormond's Guinevere and Richard Gere's Lancelot is too obviously in love with himself ever to fall for her — and is distinguishable from other love triangles only by some rather good battle scenes and the High Middle Ages setting copied from the sanitised of same concocted by William Morris rather than the real thing — Camelot is far too clean and orderly. But there's no Excalibur, no Merlin, no Avalon; and thus, for all its faults, the definitive attempt to put the Arthurian legends on screen remains John Boorman's *Excalibur*.

However, where *Excalibur* attempted to address the legends' core themes, *First Knight* embraces a completely new and anachronistic one: the struggle between democracy and dictatorship. "By serving each other we become free" is the motto which runs around the centre of the Round Table; as Arthur explains to Lancelot, this makes all men brothers, and thus all equal. Malagant, by contrast, offers strong leadership, to relieve people of the need to make decisions themselves; Stalinism, and Stalinist obedience from the masses, against Camelot's version of the US constitution. The US constitution naturally wins. The Cold War has been replayed on film in many different ways, but to appropriate the Arthurian legends as a vehicle to celebrate the downfall of Soviet communism is preposterous. At the risk of sounding petty-nationalist, these are our legends; if you want to celebrate 'victory', make up some legends of your own. To which offended US citizens could doubtless riposte: but look at you, inventing an American character called Judge Dredd to star in a British comic.

'Teaser' trailers for Danny Cannon's *Judge Dredd* had been appearing since January, from which it seemed that — bearing in mind Hollywood's lack of irony — we would be offered one of two possible storylines: either a recruiting film for the Third Reich, or a film in which the character experienced a moment of epiphany around the halfway mark, realised that he'd been fighting for the wrong side, and led the masses in revolt against the corrupt, authoritarian, self-perpetuating, etc. etc. oligarchic rulership. Well, we get a corrupt, authoritarian, etc. etc. oligarchic rulership, albeit one nominally constituted around the rule of law rather than personal whim (which of course leaves aside the question of who drafted the laws); but the rest is a relatively conventional tale of a good guy framed for a crime he didn't commit fighting back to clear his name, in the process cleaning out the corruption at the top. The trouble is that the good guy is played by Sylvester Stallone, and although the nose and the chin of the original comic were modelled on Stallone's everything else about the film makes you think that Dredd should have been played by Arnold Schwarzenegger. The rôle even seems to have been written with him in mind, right down to the Schwarzenegger-style jokes: capture the miscreants, tell them which laws they've broken, carry out the sentence by blowing their heads off with a large gun, and then say "Court's adjourned". The audience laughs, of course; but I have a sneaking suspicion that many were laughing at Stallone, rather than with him.

Once the scenario is examined more closely, it begins to fall apart. In an authoritarian society like this, why are guns so freely available? If the society is as authoritarian as it seems, would investigative journalism not have been crushed long ago? In an enclosed and overpopulated city, how can there be room for private cars of any kind? How can an enclosed and

overpopulated city sustain itself if the world outside is barren and radioactive? And so on — while the look of the film is entirely derivative: *Blade Runner* or *Total Recall* pushed to the ultimate, with sleaze and squalor below and luxury and light at the top. As a future, it's as out of date as the rest of the cyberpunk future.

Kevin Reynolds's *Waterworld* offers a different future, but has still to open as I write this — and, at \$130 million, is likely to be the most expensive flop in cinema history, with not even the prospect of a critical re-evaluation in ten years' time to rescue it from oblivion (as eventually happened to Michael Cimino's *Heaven's Gate*). As more and more people now recognise, Kevin Costner's acting method has been derived from prolonged study of a block of wood (probably in the shape of Charlton Heston), and the public's consequent indifference to the film will not be overcome by the scenario, no matter how interesting or well realised. (Which may be a shame, since if one film about global warming fails no one will make another, better one.)

The cure? Perhaps everyone should stop making sf films for a few years, to allow time in which to uncover what's gone wrong and rethink our approach. There are plenty of other films to see, after all — Bertrand Tavernier's *D'Artagnan's Daughter* looks interesting, for example, but is French and therefore has to be boycotted in protest at France's resumption of nuclear testing. Mel Gibson's *Braveheart* opens shortly, for another example — but looks awful, too. Perhaps I should stick to watching the frogs in the pond.

— Joseph Nicholas

October 14th & 15th



Guest of Honour

**Mary Gentle**

Author of "Golden Witchbreed", "Rats & Gargoyles" and "Grunts"

**SPECIAL COMICS GUESTS:**

**WILL & WENDY SIMPSON**

**OTHER GUESTS:**

Michael Carroll, Diane Duane, Maggie Eurey, Robert Holdstock, Katherine Kurtz, Morgan Llywelyn, Anne McCaffrey, Scott MacMillan, Tom Mathews, Peter Morwood, Kim Newman, Tom Richards, Michael Scott, Freda Warrington & James White.

**EVENTS:**

Science Fiction, Guest Panels, Readings, Workshops, Horror, Games, Tarot, Fantasy, Star Trek & Babylon 5, Role Playing, Radio Play, Fancy Dress Competition & Disco.

Name:	_____			Name on badge	_____
Address:	_____ _____ _____				
	Phone Number _____				
Membership:	Supporting (£10) <input type="checkbox"/>	Adult (£16) <input type="checkbox"/>	Junior (£12) <input type="checkbox"/>		
Send to: Octocon, 30 South Circular Rd, Dublin 8		E-mail: <a href="mailto:mmmchugh@tcd.ie">mmmchugh@tcd.ie</a>			
Phone: +353 1 4539502		WEB page <a href="http://arrogant.ite.ie/OctoCon.html">http://arrogant.ite.ie/OctoCon.html</a>			
Make all Cheques/P.O.s (in IR£) payable to Octocon					

Royal Marine Hotel, Dublin

# Conquassation

Cons of 91

Dave Langford

[Why dig up the ancient conventions of 1991? Read this piece of classic fan writing from Dave Langford (originally published in The Mexican 5 Fanzine Sampler in 1993) and you won't need to ask...]

**T**O TAMP 1991 securely into its grave I planned a stupendous summing-up of the British convention scene for my very occasional fanzine *Sglodion*... but ran into two snags. The first was that I'd insanely committed myself to reviving, for at least a year, the unreliable newsletter *Anisble*, and so *Sglodion*'s time and money went gurgling into this (to quote my all-time favourite [sic] explanation of the crop circle phenomenon) stationery vortex. Piled on that was the deeply philosophical problem of distinguishing between the 1991 cons I hadn't attended and the ones I'd completely forgotten. Apathy would have raged unopposed if not for the devious wiles of our editor Arnie Katz, who has no shame (even when as a last resort you lose all his 'Send Me An Article' letters, he smilingly recreates them from backup disks). What seems to remain of 1991 is...

## May: Mexican IV, Harrogate

As D. West was to remark with appreciation, the fourth Mexican took place in a cheery atmosphere of sleaze and grime. On first climbing the hill to the decaying Cairn Hotel (In Liquidation), I overtook GoH Howard Waldrop sneaking along with a large brown bag that trailed suspicious wisps of steam. 'A Chinese take-away seemed sort of safer,' he enigmatically remarked. I had yet to meet the Cairn's determined simulation of authentic Mexican snacks, Yorkshire style.

There'd been a sparsely-attended Meet Waldrop party in London two days before, which gave me a pang of alarm. For years I'd been hearing about this Mexican guest's weird dress sense, with fearful words like 'polyester' being bandied freely: in the event Howard looked reasonably normal to me, and about two minutes after the introductions said, 'I like your jacket.' On my next visit to the Gents I stared very nervously into the mirror, wondering. The evening ended with several tons of spare buffet food being loaded into ecologically sound paper bags for recycling at Mexican: I made a rough drawing of one Scotch egg I secretly hoped not to encounter again.

Langford policy after booking into a con hotel room is to seek short cuts involving fire stairs. This doesn't always work... sometimes you emerge into clouds of evil-smelling steam populated by Orwellian skivvies who make coarse remarks, and once in the Birmingham Grand the hidden corridors led me to a vertiginous little balcony high over the main hall, littered with dusty stage lights and second-hand condoms. The Cairn's backstairs route to the bar was effective enough (especially as the hotel lift was not only the traditional quarter-mile away but ran on a roughly hourly schedule): I got quite used to the steep, greasy stone steps, vomit-splashed paintwork last cleaned in 1936, and the place where someone had apparently hurled an entire chili con carne at the wall. By their fire stairs ye shall know them.

[1993 footnote. The hotel Duty Manager at Mexican 5 in Scarborough this year reminisced of having visited the Cairn a few weeks previously. The chili stain was still there.]

Downstairs it was OK. The Mexican atmosphere is always loaded with pleasing intangibles, like the second-hand satisfaction felt when there's a damn fine programme for me not to attend. (Mea culpa. Either I'm growing dealer or my attention span is dwindling with age, but sitting there listening seems harder each year. I

used to go to Stentorian Tom Shippey's sf talks as the one thing I could be sure of following, and never really figured out why people were laughing at Bob Shaw being serious and scientific until I was able to swot it up in fanzines.) This infectious good cheer could lead one into deeply unnatural acts: the bar did a steady trade in real imported Mexican beer, Sol and Corona, to be authentically drunk from the bottle with a truly stupefyingly authentic segment of fresh lime shoved into the neck... and suddenly perceptions would tilt to reveal that one was drinking a very expensive lager and lime. 'An exit application from the human race if ever there was one,' as bonhomous Sir Kingsley Amis wrote of this beverage.

The usual suspects were up to the usual things. Paul Williams twitched nervously through panel after panel, little knowing that with hysterical wit young Michael Ashley would soon be describing him as a Dickhead (how we all roared). D. West said perfectly friendly things in that sidelong Yorkshire mutter which transforms everything into the semblance of hideous sarcasm (Brian Stableford can do it too). Greg Pickersgill carried on being Greg Pickersgill and Avedon Carol deplored this noxious habit of his. Roz Kaveney and Chris Bell spent long hours in diplomatic negotiation over the great Midnight Rose Shared World Anthology Dispute (too complex and tedious to detail here or anywhere else, this involves a scrapped anthology, partially famous artist Fox, bitter lifetime feuds about whose fault it all was, and arcane legalistic documents bearing such dates as the Feast of St Ursula and the Eleven Thousand Virgins).

Meanwhile, I discovered the one absolutely fatal remark to make at a Mexican. This goes: 'What a coincidence, you're producing the convention newsletter with the identical software I use for my fanzines.' Everything went black and I woke up chained to this keyboard.

Let us not dwell on the hardware Mike Ford had borrowed to create the awesome *Cactus Times*. Eager volunteers discovered that breathing, allowing your heart to beat or mentioning the BSFA were all sufficient to send it down in flames. This did not help the tranquility of chief editor Abigail Frost, who at fifteen-second intervals would light another ciggy from the last one and issue great ululating cries of, 'Will you please fucking go away, I need absolute quiet to compose my hard-hitting apology about the real beer running out again...' Newsletter highlights included a complete short story by really famous author Neil Gaiman ('Pitman's Model', after H. P. Lovecraft: 'Bt b Gd, Elliott, it was a phitgraph from Ife!'), a Eurovision Song Contest scoop and a great number of lies.

But Brian Stableford truly did improvise a talk on homeopathy, extending the principle of vast dilutions which are supposed to increase drugs' potency to amazing levels. This was largely pinched from a breakfast conversation in which I'd reasoned that it was entirely logical for there to be (as just featured in the *Observer* colour supplement) a homeopathic cure for claustrophobia: merely dilute the small room which causes the symptoms, until it becomes a much larger one. Brian gave us homeopathic morality, about which the less said the better, and likewise homeopathic education: 'It's well known that the people with the loudest and most potent opinions in pubs are the ones with the most infinitesimal, diluted traces of actual information or education.' We all rushed to do field research in the bar and found famous set Gamma apparently trying to snort the imported beer. (Next lesson: Homeopathic Fansmanship, or how to retain vast fame and influence by doing absolutely bugger all.)

It is also true that I made an attempt on the Smallest Programme Item record upon finding the BSFA discussion panel entirely empty, even of panellists. Inspired by memories of a US fanzine piece on 'microprogramming', I delivered a stirring address to vacant seats for almost thirty seconds. 'As I gaze on the rows and rows of shiny, earnest little faces in the audience, my faith is restored and I know that the BSFA will endure for a thousand years . . . ' Leaving in abrupt haste, I looked long and suspiciously at my bottle of that Mexican beer.

Memo: produce an Abigail Frost Phrasebook to assist future newsletter terms. Mild-mannered Vincent Clarke needn't have looked so shaken if he'd found in advance that 'Fuck off and DIE!!!' means only, 'Excuse me, I am trying to concentrate on typing this.'

#### July: Twentycon, Birmingham

This is the Birmingham SF Group's twentieth anniversary party, ingeniously held in competition with the BSFG's own Novacon later in the year and thus (owing to the fabled proverb 'One trip to Birmingham is as much as anyone in the world can stand in any twelve months') hugely unattended by fandom at large; also, for some reason, by the Birmingham SF Group. I remember asking Storm Constantine about the slight double-entendre in a book of hers set in a world of radical cosmetic surgery: as a quick health check someone prods this skinny kid, whereupon 'He could feel the bones through her spare buttocks.' I remember Storm's hearty laughter as a few seconds later I picked myself from the bottom of some stairs while her enormous Gothic minders dusted their hands. I remember Martin Tudor contemplating with anguish the gigantic mounds of cheap snacks and barrels of real beer laid in by the hotel in anticipation of the promised hundreds, and insufficiently depleted by the actual dozens. Finally I remember saying merrily to the haggard committee, 'Planning to do the coming-of-age Twentycon next year?' Their red, feral eyes are the last thing I can recall before losing consciousness again. Memo: must practise tact.

#### July: Mabinogicon, Bangor

This, held on the remote north coast of Wales, had traditional guest of honour problems. Anne McCaffrey had let down the committee, or the idle committee had failed to send her the necessary weekly reminders that she was GoH . . . something of the sort. In the manner of Greek tragedy, messenger after messenger scurried into the bar with the latest from the battle: 'We phoned Anne and got someone who wouldn't let us talk to her!' 'We phoned again. Her secretary says she gave up on Mabinogicon when we sent her a progress report in Welsh!' (All the more baffling since they'd never in fact done a progress report in Welsh.) 'We've spoken to Anne! She says she'd love to come but some incredibly important proofs have just arrived and she absolutely has to correct them by Monday!' A passing semiologist translated this as: 'Fuck off and die.'

The show went on. In place of a GoH speech there was a guest interview, fortuitously found printed in an old issue of *Vector*. The original interviewer David V. Barrett repeated his savagely probing questions, and the answers were delivered by a cunning simulation of Anne McCaffrey, being con chairman Ivan Towson in a rather fetching borrowed dress. He had neglected to shave off his beard. I noted a few slight deviations from the script.

Barrett: 'Anne, do you ever think . . .'  
False Anne McCaffrey: 'Good heavens, no!'

#### August: Wincon, Winchester

The Winchester venue was extremely hot and tilted at an angle of 45°, which made getting to and fro a bit difficult. One tended to sprawl on grassy banks with rapidly warming beer, and watch the dragonflies. Occasionally the bar opened, but (this being a campus) soon thought better of it.

Here my famed ability to attend and appreciate the programme at second hand was assisted by an entire Midnight Rosary of shared-world editors (motto: 'Not At All An Imitation Of Wild Cards, Honest') who came stumbling out of the climactic Author Panel with symptoms of advanced brain death. As Roz Kaveney partially expressed herself, 'Oh God, John Brunner and Bruce Sterling are contending hotly for the title of World's Greatest Jerk . . . with, I regret to say, some competition from Gwyneth Jones.'

Warning to her theme, she went on: 'They were supposedly talking about plot, and first Gwyneth told all fely and say something like, "I don't plot, I just steal old fairy stories and put in some gravitrons." And then Bruce would come back very, very slowly, with: "The . . . concept . . . of . . . plot . . . is . . . no . . . longer . . . tenable . . .

since . . . reality . . . is . . . in . . . fact . . . a . . . series . . . of . . . unrelated . . . intersections . . . ' And then John Brunner would cap them both with some massively cosmopolitan anecdote like, 'Personally I was very proud to meet this fan in Prague who said to me, "Others, Mr Brunner, have Told us about the art of Plot, but you . . . you have Shown us!" And so we all walked out and headed for the bar.'

The bar was shut.

#### September: a Wellington Pub Meeting, London

'I want to *berate* you,' said famous actor Mike Cule, heedless that I might mock his latest major TV project (an ad for Nuclear Electric). 'I wish to taunt you with your failed futurology.'

'If it's *The Third Millennium*,' I explained with practised haste, 'Stableford wrote that bit.'

'In your convention talk about that very book,' sneered Mike, 'you accused General Sir John Hackett of wishful thinking for suggesting the entire Soviet Union would fall apart in internal rebellion after the first nuclear strike. Didn't even need that, did it? I taunt you, Langford. I berate you.'

Bloody hell, that was five years ago. I offered the suggestion that a nuclear attack in recent, crucial times would have been about the one thing that could have reunified the USSR, but Mike was too busy taunting and berating me to take this in . . . and on my other side awesomely famous fan John Richards had embarked on a harangue of his own. This went something like:

'I've had enough of fanzines. All fanzines are self-indulgent rubbish. They don't contain enough about sf and they have far too many first-person pronouns. They give masturbation a bad name. I'm going to publish a serious diatribe about all this, as a fanzine.'

Although he later mumbled something shifty about taking an extreme position to er you know provoke discussion, I was enchanted and began to imagine a fanzine that would conform to the new ideology. Luckily, scientific training provided an obvious model:

A specimen of 'science fiction' was procured for examination from the Anal laboratories. The selected sample proved on preliminary examination to weigh 0.22 kg plus or minus 1g and to contain 192pp plus or minus 0.5 page. A molecular spectrographic analysis was conducted and the chemical constituents determined to be 67.5% inert padding, 32.2% faecal matter associated with domesticated ruminants (male) and 0.43% experimental error. See Table 1.i.a. The repeatability of the procedure was checked using 49 additional specimens of this product, and . . .

#### September: Harlech, North Wales

This is where we truly Get Away From It All; Harlech beach, out of season, is reliably lonely. If so much as one tiny figure is visible in the five miles or so of wind-blown sand, Hazel will hiss: 'It's a crowd.' This time it wasn't just a crowd, and I cringed in alarm. After the stormy night it looked like an alien invasion. My sense of wonder glowed fitfully and then blew a fuse.

Mere reason might instruct us that this sinister, gelatinous dome, with whirly things like brain lobes visible through purplish flesh, had to be a mere jellyfish. But it was two feet across and bulged six inches high. Long-established sf instincts made it clear that the thing was just waiting to dissolve my flesh (Damon Knight), soak symbiotically into my pores (Hal Clement) or swarm up my back, override my nervous system and turn me into a shambling libertarian neo-conservative (Robert Heinlein). Paranoia grew as we covered three miles of foreshore and passed a further 63 of these monsters, many even bigger. Once is happenstance, twice is coincidence . . .

'They were merely *Rhizostoma pulmo*, the largest British jellyfish, which can officially be 60cm or more in diameter,' said Hazel, looking up from a reference work some time later. 'It was perfectly natural.'

The Observer's Book of Pulsating Blobs may never lie, but it doesn't feel natural when after lifelong ignorance of this sodding great creature you meet 64 in one afternoon, hundreds of kilograms of wobbly biomass. Plus a number of patches higher in the sand where the sun had shrivelled further specimens (which out of purism I didn't count). And a dogfish. I could have coped with just the dogfish.

After a while I thought of the moral: could this be how some ordinary sane visitor from the outside world feels on discovering a seemingly normal British hotel to contain not one hideous and unlikely sight, not two, but an entire SF convention?

— Dave Langford, July 1992



# A SHORT HISTORY OF IRISH CONVENTIONS AND FANDOM (GIVE OR TAKE A THOUSAND YEARS)

*Maura McHugh*

*Illustration: Ian Brooks*

IRISH PEOPLE LOVE to party — it's an indisputable fact, and one which is much remarked upon by visitors to Ireland. We have an expression over here which goes: "ceol, caint agus craic", which translates as "music, talk and fun". This is the essence of what a good social occasion over here is all about. In fact, if I was to focus on one particular aspect which is of paramount importance for an event to be successful in Ireland it would have to be the conversation. The Irish love to talk, and we've got opinions about everything — even on those subjects we've never heard of before, since that's not considered a good reason to stop a discussion. This is a little understood aspect to Irish people's notorious consumption of alcohol — we're thirsty from all that talking. Another interesting fact about the Irish is that we have a voracious appetite for the written word; we read more newspapers and books per head of population than anywhere else in the world. And of course, some of those books happen to be science fiction, fantasy and horror.

Considering these factors it is rather surprising that the first fan group, the ISFA (Irish Science Fiction Association), didn't get off the ground until the mid 1970s — or were they the first? I have my own theory. Anyone familiar with archaeology will tell you that Ireland is the site of one of the oldest engineered buildings in the world — a structure known as Newgrange. It is figured to have been built over 5,000 years ago and its speculated uses have been: a huge grave, a centre for Celtic Ireland's rituals, and an elaborate calendar. One of the most amazing aspects of Newgrange is that on the shortest day of every year the sun shines through a box above the entrance, down the tunnel and into the centre chamber, and it has done so for 5,000 years despite the fact that the earth has tilted four degrees on its axis since it was constructed. Even that far back the Irish were looking at the stars and wondering about life other than their own — and probably having long speculative conversations about it. This fascination with the unknown is also reflected in our folklore and myths which deal with fantastic creatures, great battles and mysterious weapons. Storytelling and exaggeration were an essential part of Celtic Ireland's culture; we even had boasting games in which the person who spun the best story won. Great prestige was attached to a person's ability to create stories and the Bards in ancient Ireland were considered more important than the King (or Queen). Considering the Irish's propensity for gabbing and their sense of immanence it makes you wonder about Newgrange — was it Celtic Ireland's religious centre or was it the first site of an Irish Science Fiction convention?

Speeding quickly back to this century, the founding of the ISFA was a landmark in the development of the Irish fan network. Though it has gone through its bad patches, and did disband for a brief period, the ISFA has continued unabated since. It organises monthly meetings and publishes a monthly newsletter, *First Contact*. As well as this the ISFA has an Artists' and Writers' workshop out of which comes some of its more infrequent magazines — the most recent being the *Phase* series. In the early 1980s the ISFA organised a few one-day events and one convention but these first attempts proved to be fraught with difficulties. It wasn't until 1989 that Ireland saw its first multi-media science fiction convention in the form of Octocon, and it has been running successfully in Dublin ever since. Some of the guests of honour include: Terry Pratchett, Orson Scott Card, Robert Holdstock, and this year, Mary Gentle (it's the only convention I know of where the Guest of Honour asked to pay in advance to secure a place at the next one). There are a number of well-known sf / fantasy / horror authors in Ireland who support the convention all the time — this can lead to Octocon having a guest line-up to rival some of the bigger conventions in England.

Interestingly, 1989 also saw the first major rôle-playing convention to be launched in Ireland: a three-day event called Gaelcon. Rôle-playing has always had a small, but strong, community here; in fact, the oldest regular convention in this country is Leprecon, which is a rôle-playing convention that operates out of Trinity College in Dublin.



Since then numerous fan organisations have sprung up. The advent of the new *Star Trek* IV series seems to have had a galvanising effect on the *Trek* fans in Ireland. One of the first fan clubs started was Star Base Ireland, which subsequently splintered into quite a plethora of other groups north and south: including NISTS, Pon Phar and the National Star Trek Society. All of these groups are very active and there are a number of regular *Star Trek* conventions, and one-day events, in Ireland because of the popularity of this phenomena. First there was Timewarp in 1993, followed on by Timewarp 2 in 1995. Both of these cons have been mostly *Star Trek* centred and have featured big-name guests and lots and lots of *Star Trek* videos. The other regular *Star Trek* convention is Irecon, which is one of the few conventions which varies its location around Ireland; most of the other conventions are located in the Dublin area only. Another dedicated *Star Trek* group, with a few more interests besides *Trek*, is in Dublin City University. In May of this year they had a *Babylon 5* one-day event and have promised at least one more before the year is out.

Another well-established group is the Bram Stoker Society which is located in Trinity College and shows cult movies throughout the College calendar. It also holds the International Bram Stoker Summer School each July in Dun Laoghaire and a number of well known academics attend every year. Two years ago, the Official Robert Rankin fan club, Spoutlore, was launched at Octocon in the presence of Mr Rankin and has been thriving ever since. They publish a quarterly newsletter — *The Brentford Mercury* — which is full of strange stuff. Lest I forget, the SCA have a Shire in Dublin (the Shire of Lough Devnaree) and enjoying dressing up in medieval customs and beating each other up. At the periphery of the sf fan community, but still a part of it, is the Irish Irish Astrological Association which is very active and organises lots of events for its members. Yet another event which has loose ties to the sf community is the Rathdrum Cartoon Festival which goes on every June in the small village of Rathdrum. As if this wasn't enough a group of writers got together and began publishing a quarterly magazine, *Albedo 1*, which has found a niche in the market over here. The writers aren't the only ones trying to get themselves noticed, we've also seen issues one and two of *The Big Comic*, and another comic was launched last year by a group of young artists in Cork.

Actually, this is only one side of Irish fandom. As mentioned above, there are numerous rôle-playing societies in Ireland and since Gaelcon was initiated there has been a surprising growth in conventions of this type around the country. Nearly every College and University in Ireland has a rôle-playing society and as a result nearly every one of the institutions, north and south, is host to a convention. At this point there is a very full schedule of rôle-playing events throughout the academic year. These break down as: Leprecon, Lugcon, Warpcen, Vaticon, Q-con, Summitcon and Gaelcon, and two more conventions rumoured to start late in the year. And a bunch of fans have recently produced their own fanzine, called *Psycho Bubble*, which is distributed free in all the gaming shops in Ireland. The

recent craze of card games such as Magic: The Gathering has already resulted in a one-day celebration of all things cardboard — CardCon — and I'm sure there will be more to come. These events run in parallel to the more mainstream conventions running in Ireland and the two strands don't make contact very often; perhaps because these are also the cheapest cons to attend and students don't have much money for the more expensive conventions.

All of this activity is also reflected in the commercial world. There has been a rise in the number of speciality shops in Ireland, and a number of outlets dedicated to providing merchandise to people interested in rôle-playing and sf / fantasy / horror books and comics have set up in the last five years. Some of the more well-known are: Dandelion Books, The Dungeon, The Forbidden Planet (2 shops), Future Zone, Games People Play (2 shops), Harry Halls, Oubliette Games and Sub-City. The fact that comics went through something of a rebirth in the late 1980s can be seen by the number of mainstream shops who now stock them.

So, on the face of it, Irish fandom is extremely viable and has many events going on throughout the year to suit all tastes. Are there any problems? Well, I would say that Ireland is now rapidly reaching its convention saturation point. Because most of the conventions are clustered around Dublin, each group is trying to angle for the same cachement audience who can't afford to go to all of the conventions. Also, most of the more recent conventions revolve around tv or movie shows and tend to be more spectacular and also more expensive. This is narrowing down the number of people who will go to more than one convention in a year. Where does that leave the smaller convention? Either they can try to catch up or shut down. Or, they can do what Octocon is trying to do and cater for all tastes, however, this runs the risk of spreading the convention too thin and not satisfying anyone — it's a very fine line to try to tread.

The future of Irish fandom and conventions? Hey, I just like to talk, not predict the future. However, if I was going to take a stab at it I would say that we are going to see a levelling off in the number of conventions just because there are only so many fans, and money, out there to support them. The past two years have seen an unprecedented growth in these events and I think this will slow down very soon. Hopefully, we will not see a period of decline as I'm sure it will be the smaller and more user-friendly conventions that will be the first to go. Perhaps it will be our love of conversation that will save us all in the end — after all, we can't bear to miss out on a good discussion, as long as we have something to wash it all down with as well.

— Maura McHugh

Maura McHugh has been involved with the ISFA for the past 3 years and regularly contributes to both its newsletter and its magazine. She is currently studying for a PhD in English in Trinity College Dublin and has been known to enjoy talking on any subject as long as there is something to drink. Her e-mail address is: mmhugh@tcd.ie

## Irish Contacts

**The Irish Science Fiction Association**  
21 St Joseph's Road, Aughrim Street, Dublin 2  
WWW: <http://arrogant.itc.icl.ie/ISFA.html>

**Albedo 1**  
2 Post Road, Lusk, Co. Dublin

**Star Base Ireland**  
PO Box 3208, Dublin 14

**Gaelcon**  
PO Box 4345, Dublin 1

**Psycho Bubble**  
2 Belvedere Place, Dublin 1

**Spoutlore**  
211 Blackhorse Avenue, Dublin 7  
WWW: <http://iol.ie/~jsields/fanclub.html>

**The Irish Astrological Association**  
Henley Cottage, Upper Churchtown Road, Dublin 14

**Octocon**  
30 South Circular Road, Dublin 8  
Phone: +353-1-453-9502  
WWW: <http://arrogant.itc.icl.ie/OctoCon.html>

**The Bram Stoker Society**  
c/o David Lass, Hon. Secretary, Regent House,  
Trinity College, Dublin 2.  
Fax: +353-1-677-2694

The various gaming convention can be contacted at the College out of which they operate: Leprecon (Trinity College Dublin, Dublin 2); Warpcen (University College Cork); Lugcon (University of Limerick); Vaticon (University College Dublin); Q-con (Queen's University Belfast, Northern Ireland); Summitcon is not attached to a university and operates out of Youghal in Co. Cork.

# So what is a merkin<sup>1</sup> anyway? or Colette Reap with

**D**EEP IN THE MORASS OF Usenet, beset by `rec.arts.sf` and `alt.binaries.multimedia`, the unwary net lurker comes across what is, at first sight, a peaceful clearing free from flamewars, unsullied by AOLers, and devoted to the works of the most consistently funny fantasy writer working today, one Terry Pratchett. Yes, the lurker has found `alt.fan.pratchett`, and there then follows a moment of delicious anticipation as he awaits enlightenment on forthcoming works, signing tours, explanations of some of the more abstruse references in the texts, and general discussions on the implications thereof.

It is perhaps unfortunate that he then starts reading some of the articles, for at this point, he becomes totally confused, a sad state of affairs for the editor of a respected sf journal.

But fear not, dear reader, for there is a happy end to this tale. At the infamous MooseCon (or Confabulation, according to its literature), our anonymous editor fell into conversation with one of the strange denizens of `alt.fan.pratchett`, and received enlightenment. Overcome with gratitude (or something like that), he impetuously asked her to produce a piece explaining some of the insanities to the readers of *Matrix*. This is the result.

## So tell me about `alt.fan.pratchett`

Initially, `alt.fan.pratchett` appears to be a normal newsgroup. But fairly quickly, one of its idiosyncrasies becomes apparent: many of the thread titles begin with "R" or "I". This, though, is a minor foible: it's the subject matter of these threads that may be baffling.

First we should ask 'what' (or possibly 'why') is `alt.fan.pratchett`? Although nominally the newsgroup dedicated to discussion of the works of Terry Pratchett<sup>2</sup>, one of the first things that the reader discovers about AFP (for such is its usual abbreviation) is that its threads mutate away from the subject line faster than you can say 'polymorphic inheritance'. While threads may be started by someone who wants to say something about one of

Terry's books, many, many, many, veer off at a tangent.

The lurker should perhaps consider AFP to be two newsgroups, masquerading under the same name. The first would be better titled `rec.arts.books.pratchett`, consisting of serious discussions on such subjects as the plotlines of the novels and the mechanics of the Discworld, and this is what many are initially looking for.

Unfortunately for these innocents, there is a second AFP, which is a general free-for-all between people who assume that the other readers have similar interests, and who will start threads with no apparent relevance to the subject at hand. Frequently, these threads will maintain the same title that they had previously, with the result that an article titled 'Dragon digestion' may actually discuss the mating habits of the Boeing 747. (For those who are interested, it appears that the result is not the Learjet, nor even the HS 146, but rather a small submarine larva that eventually creeps

ashore near Seattle, pupates in a large hanger, and eventually emerges as a full grown Jumbo.)

Some of the tangents are well-worn paths, which include discussions about beer, roundabouts, bread, merkins<sup>3</sup>, children's TV programs, quantum mechanics and proposals.

Another tendency is for some AFPers visiting other newsgroups to crosspost apparently relevant articles to AFP. These then frequently mutate, thereafter causing much consternation to the original group from which they were crossposted.

## Who are we?

Unsurprisingly, the majority of the posters are in the UK, although there is a strong representation from Australia, New Zealand and America<sup>4</sup>. There are also regulars in Eire, Germany, South Africa, Scandinavia and The Netherlands. An indication of the international nature of the group can be surmised from the fact that the AFP FAQ<sup>5</sup> is maintained by Orin Thomas in Australia, and the APF<sup>6</sup> is maintained by Leo Breebaart in The Netherlands (both of whom, by the way, do a magnificent job). There are also a number of web pages scattered around the globe — for example Colm Buckley at Trinity College, Dublin has scanned in the Clarcraft catalogue of Discworld figures and jewellery<sup>7</sup>.

Of those in the UK, a fairly high proportion are university students. A certain amount of trepidation pervades the group as September approaches — as in many newsgroups, it sometimes gets called 'newbie season' as the new intake of students arrive at university and many hit the net for the first time, with all that that entails. The flurry of activity that this causes usually dies down by about November. The other main flurry of 'activity' tends to happen in May and June, round about finals time — personally, I put it down to stress :-)

On the whole, we are a friendly bunch. Like most groups, we have our ups and downs (thankfully with nothing like the level of

vitriol or flaming I have seen flying around in other groups). I tend to agree with the description mooted a while back, that it is like nipping down to your local for a pint and a natter with the regulars.

## What's this about \*R\* and \*I\*?

Because of the dual nature of AFP, (and because the volume of posting is quite high, especially during university term time) a consensus was reached in the group that people should indicate the nature of the content of the thread in the subject line — not by the title of the thread; as explained above, that can be completely misleading — but by a series of codes. The idea is that it allows people to skip those threads in which they have no interest.

The first two to be adopted were "R" and "I", which was an attempt to indicate the split between the two parts of AFP. A thread with an "R" in the subject line supposedly indicates that the posting contains something relevant, such as news about

## What Terry makes of it all . . . .

I don't know what to make of `alt.fan.pratchett`. Risotto would be nice.

Having a newsgroup that is theoretically devoted to you and your work is . . . well, mildly embarrassing. Un-British, even. But it turns out to be perfectly okay because AFP as an entity has the attention span of a butterfly on cocaine and a thread that begins with some perfectly relevant message (like "IMHO, *Reaper Man* was complete crap") will within hours become a heated argument about the merits of the ZX81 (followed by a longer thread ostensibly explaining to the Americans what a ZX81 was but really about bread).

Do I like it? It can be good fun. There is an expert on anything — when I needed to know about some aspects of the Chinese language offers of help came in for months. I also get to see where the books end up (and where they don't end up; publishers are now used to faxes on the lines of "Why haven't they got *Interesting Times* in New Zealand yet and I 'know' they haven't"). The committed Baconians are interesting — I always like to see keen academic minds at work, and am always happily astonished at the breadth of my learning they reveal. And, most valuable of all, I get an insight into fans' expectations.

I know, for example, that my next book must contain 1) lots of new characters and locations 2) all the old characters and locations and 3) fries and a Coke.

Funny thing . . . if it wasn't there, you know, I think I'd miss it . . . .

— Terry Pratchett

# How to cope with alt.fan.pratchett

## Alan Bellingham

Terry (signing tour details, television/radio appearances, performances of the plays based on the Discworld books and serious comment about his writing) or news about Discworld merchandise<sup>1</sup>. \*A\* (for irrelevant) indicates that the thread has wandered off to discuss things like the sexual dimorphism of hovercraft, or quantum butterflies. Posters are expected to retitile the thread with the relevant code when it crosses the ill defined border between the two, and though this doesn't always happen, one may quite effectively filter AFP by only reading the articles with the \*R\* code in.

### The Annotated Pratchett

One of the joys of reading Terry's works is that, especially in the Discworld novels, the books are peppered with veiled references to things in this world. Although the Discworld may be a flat world resting on the backs of four giant elephants, who in turn are standing on the back of an even bigger turtle which is slowly swimming through space, the characters thereupon are far from your standard "Another flagon of your best ale, landlord" fantasy characters, and much of Terry's effect is due to his deliberate contrast of the setting with everyday references from our own world. As a result, one of the favourite pastimes of AFPers is annotating Terry's books. Many of these references come from popular culture — for instance, the Blues Brothers, Dirty Harry and Meatloaf — but others may be from classical mythology or modern physics. Eventually, these annotations tend to be collected together and published in the Annotated Pratchett File (or APF, which causes a certain amount of confusion in its naming).

Somewhat inevitably, a new code, \*A\*, was adopted to signify these annotations. This allows those AFPers who haven't yet had the chance to read one of the books, either because it's as yet unavailable in paperback, or because the publishing schedule in other parts of the world is still far from consistent, to avoid "spoiler" articles.

### Oh, no, not the game!

Some months ago, a Discworld graphic adventure game was released, initially for the PC. After an initial flurry, it was recognised that a large number of posts started "Help, I'm stuck at ..." etc., so "G" was introduced, and a game FAQ and walkthrough created<sup>2</sup>. The consensus appears to be that the game has wonderfully atmospheric graphics, the dialogue is very nicely done, but that it could really have done with more playtesting, and that some of the puzzles seem to lack all sense, even in retrospect.

### "Colette, will you marry me?"

One of the more unusual traditions of AFP is the marriage proposal. Originally, the first proposal came from a lad impressed by the sense of humour of one of the female posters, and was regretfully declined by its recipient on the grounds that she was already married, although this was felt by onlookers to be insufficient reason. However, this has since evolved into a tendency to make such proposals to any (apparently) female poster, especially if she is to mention that she hasn't thus far received one. In order that no-one should be deprived, certain regular posters now propose to just about everyone.

### Footnotes (an AFP speciality)

1. See footnote 3.
2. Or Terry, as he is often referred to on AFP. This started after the publication of *Pyramids* which contained characters called 'Praci' and 'Peppic'.
3. It's a public wig.
4. As provided by Stephen 'CMOT' Briggs and Clarecraft. Stephen sells Unseen University scarves, the AFP tee-shirt, the AFP tie and the 'Turtle Moves' tee-shirt. Stephen also writes and appears in stage adaptations of the Discworld books. He can be contacted at sbriggs@ccx.complink.co.uk. Clarecraft, who can be contacted via bernard@behemoth.demon.co.uk, or see Colm Buckley's web page<sup>9</sup>, produce the Discworld figures, Discworld-related jewellery and AFP-related jewellery, namely the anorak<sup>h</sup>. Don't ask ...
5. The game faq can be found in The Pratchett Archives<sup>11</sup>.

This in turn has spawned a series of challenges to duels between AFPers who have proposed to the same person. One duel has actually taken place — fortunately for the participants, the weapons used only fired foam rods.

### \*F\*: Fanc

This electronic atmosphere has moved into the 'real' world. Not content with sitting in front of our screens, we have got out to meet each other. There have been several 'AFP meets', mostly in pubs, and a couple of months ago an AFP meet was organised round a formal hall at Trinity College, Cambridge (thanks, Tony). Meets have also taken place in the States and in Australia.

By the time this appears in print, Bernard, Isobel and Tom Pearson of Clarecraft will have held their 'Discworld Event' — a weekend of fun and games, complete with barbecue and beer tent, at their factory in Woolpit. (On visiting their factory earlier this year and being shown round the place, I came away thinking: "People get paid to do this? Where did I go wrong?")

And, as an outgrowth of all this, the first Discworld convention<sup>10</sup> will be taking place next year, on June 28th-30th, in Manchester.

### Terry and AFP

"Does Terry Pratchett really post here?" Yes, he does. One of the myths of AFP is the large number of posts asking that question, but, contrary to popular rumour, I can't recall seeing a posting to the group asking that — however, I've only been in the group for just under two years, and it may well have been a problem in earlier days. However, he does get a lot of email asking "Are you really the Terry Pratchett?" (Apparently, he knows of two others.)

Much of the flavour of AFP is due to Terry's presence, and there is an assumption that anything which interests him is somehow relevant. He will occasionally (not too frequently, we hope, he has books to write) join in, and many thread traditions derive from his interest in small microcomputers and a regrettable liking for the game DOOM.

However, although he is the *raison d'être* of AFP, his position is more that of a constitutional monarch rather than a dictator — when asked for his opinions on how something should be done, his response is likely to be along the lines of, "Hey guys, this is your group, not mine." The only matter in which he has expressed a preference is that fan fiction shouldn't be posted to AFP itself, as it might interfere with his own ideas. However, if alt.fan.pratchett.creative were to be set up, he is not expected to object.

As for his own feelings on AFP — well, that is beyond the scope of this article.

### Conclusion

To return to the 'AFP is like a pub' metaphor, when you go to a new pub, it can seem a bit strange the first few times. Then you begin to recognise people and start to feel comfortable about joining in conversations, and before long you're one of the regulars too. So what are you waiting for?

— Colette Rasp with Alan Bellingham

6. We're back to Merkins again ... :-)

7. The AFP FAQ can be found in The Pratchett Archives<sup>11</sup>.

8. The APF can be found in The Pratchett Archives<sup>11</sup>.

9. Colm Buckley's web page address is

<http://vangogh.cs.tcd.ie/~cbuckley/clarecraft>

10. For more information contact Paul Rood at discworld@macdoel.demon.co.uk or snailmail Discworld Convention, P.O. Box 3086, Chelmsford, Essex CM1 6LJ<sup>12</sup>.

11. The Pratchett Archives' home site is:

[lspace.cpn.tudelft.nl/in\\_the\\_directory/pub/pratchett](http://lspace.cpn.tudelft.nl/in_the_directory/pub/pratchett)

It is mirrored at the following sites:

In Europe: [ftp.britain.eu.net/in\\_the\\_directory/pub/misc/pratchett](http://ftp.britain.eu.net/in_the_directory/pub/misc/pratchett)

In America: [death.scs.mit.edu/in\\_the\\_directory/pub/pratchett](http://death.scs.mit.edu/in_the_directory/pub/pratchett)

In Australia: [theory.lcs.us.edu.au/in\\_the\\_directory/Mirror/Pratchett](http://theory.lcs.us.edu.au/in_the_directory/Mirror/Pratchett)

12. ... or look on <http://vangogh.cs.tcd.ie/~cbuckley/DWCon96/>

# The Editor My Destination

## Roy Tappen

[The two great fireworks which Alfred Bester let off in the 1950s, *Tiger!* and *The Demolished Man*, are among the greatest — and certainly the most enjoyable — sf novels ever written. But *Tiger!* Tiger! has had a complex publishing history; here Roy Tappen — in an article which originally appeared in *Quantum* 43 in 1993 — examines the various editions that have appeared and finds some puzzling differences....]

IT IS NOT OFTEN that I pick up an issue of *Quantum* and cry aloud, 'You bastard, Arthur Haupt!' But this man's compulsively detailed discussion of Alfred Bester's *The Stars My Destination* (alias *Tiger! Tiger!*) in issue 42 did rather cut the ground from under a tiny piece I'd been planning, on the question of just what is the definitive version of the typographical special effects in that fabled synaesthesia sequence. According to me, the indications are that no published text has ever featured the entirety of what Bester wanted.

The much-reprinted British edition *Tiger! Tiger!* has stayed more or less unchanged since the Sidgwick and Jackson hardback of 1956, through subsequent paperbacks by Panther, Penguin and Mandarin (and a 1984 hardback in the short-lived Goodchild 'SF Alternatives' series of classics). It still regularly tops All-Time Best SF Novel polls here. Unhappily, this setting of the book simply leaves out all visual effects which are even slightly difficult to handle in type. Even the male and female symbols in the names of the Scientific People were too much trouble. Phrases like 'RED LIGHT RECEDED... GREEN LIGHT ATTACKED... INDIGO UNULATED WITH SHUDDERING SPEED' are not shown in lettering that grows, shrinks or wiggles, but in plain small capitals. The little bits of artwork for 'a scintillating mist... a snowflake cluster of stars... a shower of liquid diamonds' are simply omitted — though they did have a go at the 'strand of cool pearls', with a wobbly line of small O's.

What caught my eye way back in the 1970s was that even without knowledge of US versions, the British text has two blatant omissions. Two paragraphs in the 'synaesthesia' section of the narrative end with colons, clearly introducing special effects which don't actually appear. One is 'The churning of the surf blinded him with the lights of batteries of footlights' — followed by a solid block of asterisks in the original *Galaxy* serialization and, in the deeply ugly type of the 1970s Berkeley paperback, two wavering lines of asterisks which look less like footlights though more like surf. There may be nothing there in my various British copies, but at least I know how it ought to look.

What, however, about the next effect just two paragraphs later? Has anyone ever seen it? Foyle speaks and 'The sound came out in burning star-bubbles'... but not even the Berkeley version offers anything after this colon. The formerly helpful *Galaxy* serial rewrites the sentence to omit the colon cue, offering: 'The sound came out in burning, babbling, burbling star-bubbles.' Ugh. I have a suspicion that *Galaxy* editor Horace Gold, who was slightly notorious for putting in little bits of his own, might have been responsible for this seeming effort at distraction from whatever's missing here.

In fact there is a faint whiff of censorship in the air. As all true sf fans (who naturally know the book by heart) will have been muttering for some while, we experience the beach scene twice thanks to the time-travel of the Burning Man and know exactly what it is that Foyle says but does not appear as a graphic effect: 'Christ!'

I wonder. In Bester's original MS, was this word perhaps manically patterned to form a typewriter-picture of a cross or — 'burning star-bubbles' — several crosses? Did all three editors decide to cut out this one 'controversial' typewriter-doodle on the basis that it was all right to say 'Christ!' but not to *flamit* it in typewriter

effects? (First Gold with a camouflaging rewrite in *Galaxy*, then someone at Sidgwick and Jackson in Britain for the 1956 *Tiger!* and someone else at Signet for the 1957 *The Stars My Destination*?) I am assuming the Berkeley text accurately follows Signet's, just as every British edition follows S&J's.) Or did Bester himself think better of it but accidentally leave the introductory colon in place for each of the two slightly different book versions? Are the original typescripts preserved in some university library? If not, why not?

Not long ago an sf fan remarked to me that Bester would have loved to have had access to modern desktop publishing while writing *The Demolished Man* and *Stars*. Maybe it's as well that he didn't, since when he finally gained complete control over the graphics in a novel the result was the truly dire *Golem 100*. Nor was I terrifically impressed when in his *The Deceivers* (which in many incidental details reads like a sort of diluted self-plagiarism, of *Stars*) we are introduced to a computer display seven centuries hence which can do no better than crude typewriter-patterns of asterisks. But with DTP now universal and *Stars* reportedly out of print in the USA, I urge one of sf's endemic small presses to think about a memorial edition with a good text (correcting the almost universal 'planets' for 'plants' in the introduction as noted by Arthur Haupt, and the place where Bester typed the silly 'Inert Lead Isomer' for what should be 'Isotope'... but that takes us towards the murky realms of Bester's science, about which all too much can be said: see Damon Knight's balanced early review in *In Search of Wonder*). Modern typesetting and graphics software would surely see to it that INDIGO UNULATED WITH SHUDDERING SPEED more sickeningly and effectively than ever before.

Meanwhile, the British text has further oddities. As well as changing the now legendary 'Vorga, I kill you filthy' to 'Vorga, I kill you deady', the Sidgwick & Jackson editor modified 'Help, you goddamn gods' in Foyle's very first speech to 'Help, you Heels.' A few pages later, 'lousy gods' and 'sweet prayer-men' become 'Heels' and 'sweet Heels'. As might be expected, people seem to prefer the version they were raised on and can debate at length whether straight blasphemy is more or less effective than the alternative of British Understatement.

Our UK editor also thoughtfully changed 'twenty-fifth century' to 'twenty-fourth century' throughout, while leaving the prologue's one actual date ('the 2420s') untouched. There is a mysterious cut in the publicity interview on jaunting, omitting a paragraph of great interest to inmates of Gouffre Martel... I suppose the editor didn't want to publish information that might help the criminal classes. Was it respect for religion that led to Bester's correct 'Skoptsy' (or Skoptsi) being disguised as 'Sklotsky'? Worst of all, the crucial repetition of the 'Gully Foyle is my name' jingle near the very end of the book is lost in Britain — jettisoned along with the disposable info-dump sentence that reminds us who the Scientific People are. But I've always rather liked the circular hall of the Scientific People with (at least in the Penguin edition) its 'doomed roof'.

On the other hand, compare: 'Of all brutes in the world he was least valuable alive and most likely to live.' 'Of all brutes in the world he was among the least valuable alive and most likely to survive.' With its unshaded hyperbole and incantatory rhythm, the first is surely more Foyleish, more Besterish. Yet it's the second, slightly limping sentence that appears in the generally preferable US text. Moreover, nearly all the motion-as-sound synaesthesia effects are *longer* in *Tiger*. Bester evidently added bits for the British edition. 'MANTERGEISTMANN!' shouts the movement of the flames... and in *Tiger* (only) continues with 'UNVERTRACKSTEIN GANZELFURSTINLASTENBRUGG!' Likewise the surf cries 'LOGGERMIST CROTEHAEVEN JALL. LOOGERMISK MOTESLAVERN DOOL' (not a bad sound-picture of its motion), while US editions carry only the first two nonsense

words. At the end of Foyle's famous speech, after 'I give you the stars,' *Tiger* has the closing line 'I make you men': *Stars* omits this and merely adds 'He disappeared.' — which is not in *Tiger*. Help! These are deep waters, Watson, and nobody thought to ask Alfred Bester until it was too late.

(My fervent thanks to Rob Hansen, Chris 'Bester was a meretricious hack!' Priest and especially Dave Wood for helping me with variant editions of *Stars / Tiger*!)

Indeed there is a thesis of awesome scope to be written on the sufferings of sf novels as they flit to and fro across the Atlantic. What is the fifth paragraph of A.E. van Vogt's *Slan*? My Panther edition (following a 1953 UK hardback) has a fifth paragraph of info-dump, beginning 'It was new and exciting' ... not present in the Doubleday hardback, which on the other hand has several passages omitted by Panther. Travelling the opposite way, there was the infamous case of Eric Frank Russell's *Dreadful Sanctuary*, which in one US edition (1963, I think) acquired — against the entire narrative trend of this

wisecracking action-adventure — an unhappy ending. Research continues.

The final stop on my current mission of pedantry was to check out the latest British edition of Anne McCaffrey's *Dragonflight* from Transworld / Corgi, which since 1970 has delighted me with a specially unfortunate one-letter misprint. (Er, I assume it's a misprint, with B typed instead of H.) A testimony to the rigid quality control of publishers, it's still there in 1992. The great moment comes when heroine Lessa has mysteriously vanished upon her vast, telepathic, teleporting dragon steed, and the hero gets worried about this, whereupon his own dragon telepathically scans the entire world of Pern for the missing pair and reports (possibly to howls of agreement from wicked readers who'd found Lessa's terminal wilfulness and the dragon's terminal cuteness a mite hard to take): *I cannot bear them.*

Blackout. ...

— Roy Tappen

## Istvan Ronay

on an academic conference with a difference . . . .

THE VIRTUAL FUTURES CONFERENCE was held at the University of Warwick at the end of May — I guess it's becoming an annual gathering sponsored by Warwick's Philosophy Dept. The governing statement begins with, "We have gathered you here this weekend to bury the 20th century and begin work on the 21st . . . . We will not know the results of the tumultuous global changes we are undergoing and creating for a hundred years or more, if we can survive them, but we are less interested in knowledge than in experiencing these changes . . . ." The "theme" of this year's conference was "Cyberevolutions."

I went to give a paper (on Virtual Reality and the future of religion), to pontificate on a panel on cyberpunk, to meet some writers, to drink gallons of bitter with friends, and to simply be in England. Postmod conferences are like all conferences — loads of pretentious bs, but memorable moments of intense and friendly intellectual communication. Virtual Futures was more like this than others for me.

The governing group follows the ideas of the wild French philosophers, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. Those ideas are unsystematic, erudite, difficult, extremely provocative, and hard to talk about, let alone organize conferences around. I can say this for the conference, my previous grudging respect for D-G turned to real admiration.

Anyway, the conference . . . . So the scene is England, 1995, the hippest of the youth. People are wearing more black than the Japanese Diet. Huge quantities of gold are displayed arrayed along earlobes, ear-cartilage, nostrils, lips, tongues, and no doubt other less visible spots — the safety-deposit zones. Doc Martins on every hoof. Faces white, hearts and intentions multiculti. More cigarette smoke than I seen in years in the US. A lot of the featured talks aspired to beatnik cafe poetry — missing were the bongos, noodling saxes and "man" at the end of every sentence, but the intentions were clear. There actually were several multi-media performances, but the sound of choice backing the talkers was a sort of electro-organic panic, the noises an airplane must make when it hits violent turbulence at 30,000 feet. ("Whooooa! Wow!")

It was a sort of Nihilists' Ball. I didn't go to the rave (how many philosophy departments adjourn for a rave?), but a certain buzzing ecstasy was evident among all the black cloth. There were a few talks devoted specifically to science fiction, but that wasn't the point. It was pretty clear that the whole attending

crowd had read deeply in sf and knew its cyberpunk lit, film and music backwards and forwards. PC and Net usage terms were part of the vocabulary. The point was that everything those two or three hundred people thought and did they conceived as living sf. An outsider would probably have considered the group prime material for sf.

The most intriguing things at the conference were the multimedia and experimental performances. Multi-media was very crude, but full of heart. Typical example: the group "Orphan Drift" did a (to me) incomprehensible slide show / video / music / reading called "Death Simstim." Is Death-Simstim good or bad? Does it matter? I didn't catch that part, but I won't forget the phrase. The Australian performance artist Stelarc (a lovely down-to-earth guy) explained and demonstrated the use of his prosthetic third arm, and his newer work in stimulating the movements of his left arm through computer-generated myoelectric stimulations. But the *pièce de résistance* had to be the French performance artist Orlan's presentation on her "surgery art". Orlan is a "surgery artist", don't ya know. She has plastic surgery done according to certain abstract specifications, has it videotaped while it is being performed in the O.R., and then discusses it live while the video is played behind her on the big screen. This is Big Art, and gets Big Funding from international arts' funding institutions. The experience of watching an operation on Orlan's facial skin was definitely weird sf. It isn't so much the blood (not much of it, actually) or the cutting, or even the forceps loosening the epidermis from the rest of the tissue from underneath, like some crazy geometrical mole on speed making square molehills, it's the combination of all this with the fact that Orlan has designed the O.R. uniforms herself to make a fashion statement (her sign-language interpreter (!) wore a sort of neo-Golden Temple Kundalini Sikh turban-robe combination with accents of Elsa's Bride of Frankenstein), and the fact that, being French, Orlan is talking throughout the whole operation, even when her lips have been anaesthetized and they're customizing them. A hilarious, weird, troubling, and unforgettable experience.

Enuff. Ya had to've been there. Still, it's important to me that there are so many people (mainly young) who consider sf to be a valid commentary on their lives.

We now return control of your eyes . . . .

— Istvan Ronay

# PoMoTion

# EVENTS

## 23 August: BSFA London Meeting

Cancelled due to, er, prior commitments ...

## 24-28 August: Intersection

Too late now ... have a good one!

## 1-3 September: Lightspeed '95

The Hilton International Hotel in Leeds is the venue for this *Star Trek*, *DS9* and *TNG* con. Guests include Robert O'Reilly and Dennis Ashton. Registration is £35 for the full weekend (children (5-14) £17) or £23 per day. Hotel rooms per night cost £44.50 (single) and £59.00 (double/twin).

Contact: Lightspeed, 16 Bramwell St., Eastwood, Rotherham, S. Yorkshire, S65 1RZ.

## 7 September: London SF meeting

Wellington pub opposite the Old Vic exit from Waterloo Station. Usually starts about 5pm. No special events but very popular. Will doubtless be full of messy autopsies on the ~~Scottish~~ *Conventions*.

## 22-24 September: Festival of Fantastic Films

Sacha's Hotel, Manchester. GoH is Roger Corman, with Don Sharp and July Sharp. Registration is £40 before August, £45 thereafter.

Contact: 95 Meadowgate Road, Salford, Manchester M6 8EN

## 27 September: BSFA London Meeting

Juliette Tavern, York Road (near Waterloo Station). Starts at 7pm in the upstairs room. Admission is free and both members and non-members are welcome. Guest TBS.

## 4 October: Peterborough SF Club

Mike Scott Rohan gives a talk at the Blubell Inn, Dogsthorpe. Contact: Pete Cox, 01733 370542

## 5 October: London SF meeting

See above for details.

## 14-15 October: Octocon 95

Ireland's national sf convention, at the Royal Marine Hotel, Dun Laoghaire. A superb guest list: GoH is Mary Gentle, others are Diane Duane, Robert Holdstock, Katherine Kurtz, Anne McCaffrey, Scott McMillan, Peter Morwood, Kim Newman, Tom Richards, Michael Scott and James White. Registration until 1 September is £10 supporting, £16 adult (over 16) and £12 junior attending. Contact: Octocon, 30 South Circular Road, Dublin 8 or email mmchugh@tdc.ie or WWW/https://arrogant.ltc.icl.ie/OctoCon.html

## 24 October - 18 November: Into Orbit

Peterborough is hosting a month-long exhibition on space exploration; selected events are listed below and full details of the festival can be obtained by sending an SAE to: Peterborough Museum, Priestgate, Peterborough

## 25 October: BSFA London Meeting

See above for details. Guest is sf writer and humourist Robert Rankin.

## 27-29 October: Welcome to my Nightmare

"A celebration of horror writing" at the Forte Posthouse Hotel in Swansea organised as part of the UK Year of Literature and Writing. Debates, readers' and writers' workshops, and a really first-rate guest list: Ramsay Campbell, Jonathan Carroll, Graham Joyce, Peter James, Lisa Tuttle, Garry Kilworth, Ben Leech, Mark Chadbourne and Simon Clark have been announced with more to come. Horror writer and broadcaster Phil Rickman will also be there, recording a radio programme for broadcast later in the year.

All this costs only £15, too ... hotel rates are £37.50 pppn single, £32 double/twin. Cheques payable to 'Welcome to my Nightmare'. Contact: Steve Lockley, 14 Cae Eithin, Llanyfyllach, Swansea, SA6 6EZ or tel. Mike O'Driscoll on 01792 403575.

## 27-30 October: Cult TV Appreciation Weekend

Haven All-Action Centre, Caister, Great Yarmouth. Covers UK and US TV series of all types, but mostly sf. Guests include Chris Carter (creator and executive producer of *The X-Files*) Kenneth Cope (star of *Randall and Hopkirk (Decayed)*). Registration is £39.

Contact: Send a 9"x6" SAE to Cult TV 1995, P. O. Box 1701, Peterborough, PE1 1EX.

## 28 October: Into Orbit

Evening discussion at Peterborough Central Library with Stephen Baxter, Keith Brooke and Peter F. Hamilton. Contact: Pete Cox, 01733 370542

## 2 November: London SF meeting

See above for details.

## 3-5 November: NovaCon

This year's NovaCon is the 25th, and features guests Brian Aldiss, Iain M. Banks, Harry Harrison and Bob Shaw. Venue is the Chamberlain Hotel, Alcester Street, Birmingham, and membership is £25 until 30 September, and £30 thereafter.

Contact: Cheques (payable to 'Novacon 25') to Carol Morton, 14 Park Street, Lye, Stourbridge, West Midlands DY9 8SS. Enquiries (before 9pm please) to Tony or Carol Morton on 01384 825836.

## 3-5 November: ReContaniméTed 1995

This anime convention will be held at the Grand Hotel, Colmore Row, Birmingham. Registration is £21 until 30 Sept, £26 thereafter. Contact: SAE to Martin Pay, 29 Langton Avenue, Chelmsford, CM1 2BW [This is the payment address; the enquiry address, phone number and email address are illegible on the flyer. Publicists take note!]

## 4 November: Into Orbit

Sf writing workshop led by Ian Watson at Peterborough Museum. Contact: Pete Cox, 01733 370542

## 22 November: BSFA London Meeting

See above for details. Guest TBA.

## 5-8 April 1996: Evolution

The 1996 Eastercon will be held at the Radisson Edwardian Hotel, Heathrow. Guests will be Vernor Vinge, Jack Cohen, Colin Greenland, Bryan Talbot, Maureen Speller and Paul Kincaid. Membership is £24 attending, £14 supporting and child rate. Contact: Evolution, 13 Lindfield Gardens, Hampstead, London NW3 6PX or email bmb@ee.ic.ac.uk

## 12-14 April 1996: Accelerate 96

Hot on the heels of Eastercon the Heathrow Radisson will be hosting the third British *Quantum Leap* Convention. Full weekend rates are £35 adult, £17 under 14s (no charge for under 5s).

Contact: Accelerate 96, 78 Sterry Road, Dagenham, Essex, RM10 8NT or fax (office hours only) 0171 262 3195 or email Accelerate@paysia.demon.co.uk

## 28-30 June 1996: Discworld Convention 1

The First International Discworld Convention will take place at Sacha's Hotel in the centre of Manchester, England. Confirmed guests are Terry Pratchett, Josh Kirby and Stephen Briggs, with more TBA. Experience: Unseen University Challenge; First official Cripple Mr Onion All-comers Tournament; Bananana Dakrys on draught; Discworld Karaoke; Unseen University Midsummer Lecture; Reduced Discworld Theatre Company; Exclusive Claretcraft models; the Biker Morrison (don't miss!); Maskerade (sic) Ball; Filk; Clicks; Dead Monk ... sorry, Ape Party. And 1001 Elephants, apparently. Membership rates are £17.50 attending (other rates TBA) until December 31st 1995, rising thereafter. Twin or double rooms cost £32 per person per night. Contact: SAE to The Discworld Convention, P.O. Box 3086, Chelmsford, CM1 6LD or email discworld@macloed.demon.co.uk WWW/https://vangoth.ca.cd.tl/cbuckley/DWC96/Listerster Send message 'get Disc96Info' to discserver@flyhstr.demon.co.uk

## 26-27 July 1996: SFCD-Con

The annual German national convention, the SFCD-Con, will be held in Saarbrücken, close to the border with France and Luxembourg. This convention is interesting for foreign fans because its main tracks are East European fandom and the history of fandom (not only German). Some of the panels will be held in English. The organisers intend to invite a large number of fans from East Europe instead of two or three professional GoH, and currently have representatives from Poland, Russia, Lithuania, Czechia, Slovakia, Romania, and of course our own Bridget Wilkinson. Also planned are an RPG theme and production of a radio play which will be regionally broadcast.

The membership list until 31 Dec 1995 is 30 DEM. Payment by credit card (only VISA accepted) is possible.

Contact: Juergen G. Marzi, Scharnhorststr. 27, D-56073 Koblenz. Phone +49-261-48259 Email 110112.352@compuserve.com or jmarzi@textbox.lahn.de

## 28-31 March 1997: Intervention

The 1997 Eastercon, themed around 'Communication'. Venue is the Adelphi Hotel in Liverpool. Guests are Brian Aldiss, Octavia Butler and David Langford (note that Robert Silverberg has had to pull out). Membership is £20 attending, £10 supporting. Contact: Intervention, 12 Crowsbury Close, Emsworth, Hants, PO10 71S or email intervention@pampy.demon.co.uk

Who?

THEM!

We...

## People in science fiction

### Sue Thomas

... is the Nottingham-based author of the widely admired and Clarke Award nominated novel *Correspondence*, and mixes writing with academic life; she's Course Leader of the MA in Writing at Nottingham Trent University. She's always had the desire to write: "From the age of about 12 I planned to be a novelist, but got side-tracked and didn't properly start until 1988 when I went to an Arvon course taught by Lisa Tuttle and Iain Banks. They gave me enough encouragement to begin, and I've been writing ever since. I can't imagine what my life was like in those dark days Before Writing!"

"Before I got this job I did a lot of freelance work, including workshops with adults and kids, especially school workshops where I encouraged the children to invent alien friends for themselves and write stories about them. I feel very strongly that it's vital we teach children not to be afraid of difference but to value it — the opposite route leads directly to racism and homophobia as well as negative attitudes towards our friends from outer (and inner) space. However my interest in aliens and robots did come unstuck one day when I arrived at a comprehensive school to find a large eager crowd waiting for me, and behind them a banner erected by their teacher which said COME AND MEET A REAL LIVE ROBOT! Talk about breaking the Trades Description Act! It took quite a while to convince them that I didn't actually have a sentient machine waiting outside in my car."

Sue is an Internet convert, and is very interested in the possibilities represented by the medium. "I've only been online at home for a month or so, but it's given me the time to surf which I don't have at work. I used some of my Arts Council Award to buy a laptop with an internal modem and I LOVE it! I've had a new phone line put in but God knows what the bill will be like..." She's currently planning a "CyberWriting" project "which I'm just getting off the ground. Basically I want to establish a Writers' Homepage with WWW links for writers. Of course it's been done before, but like every 'travel guide' it will have its own particular flavour which will I hope appeal to readers and writers interested in the potential of virtuality. Very early days as yet..."

Other aspects of post-modern culture hold much interest for her too. She visited the Virtual Futures conference at Warwick University (see *Istvan Ronay's* report on page 21) in May, and is fascinated by Stelarc: "He is a performance artist of the body and articulates the sorts of things I've been thinking about for years but have not found anyone to talk to about. I just wish I'd heard of Stelarc when I was writing *Correspondence*."

In October 1992 Sue was a guest at one of the regular BSFA London meetings, and can testify to their, er, liveliness: "I was giving a reading when two drunks sat down at the back of the room and proceeded to make a lot of noise. Absorbed in my reading, I didn't notice much at all until suddenly two women I didn't know leapt up in fury and knocked one of these men off his stool, where he lay on the floor like a stunned insect. Not sure what to do, I decided to stop reading for a moment (I) while they argued about their relative civil liberties. Eventually after 10-15 minutes of debate and the offer of some drinking money by a gallant fan the men agreed to go away and I resumed the reading. I have to be honest and say that I rather enjoyed the whole thing, never have been fought over before, and my only regret is that I never got the names of the two women who'd travelled from Cambridge for the reading."

She's currently working on a new novel, as yet untitled. "The book I'm writing now will, I hope, take *Correspondence* a few steps further. When I was writing it I had no access to the Internet but now I'm so much more experienced and I want look at what happens when we leave our meat bodies behind and go off to explore the intimacy of cyberspace."

Sue's most recent book is *Water*. It was well received on its American publication, and will shortly be published in the UK: it's available to Intersection — where she will be appearing on a panel — and BSFA members at a special discount (£6.99 from Five Leaves Publications, PO Box 81, Nottingham, NG5 4ER).

Sue has her own Web page:

<http://arrogant.itsc.iol.ie/Authors/SueThomas/> is active on the BSFA mailing list, and is busily pushing sf into the next millennium.

—Chris Terran

## Members' Noticeboard

Advertisements and announcements are free to BSFA members. Send your ad to the editorial address.

**CRUCIFORM VARIATIONS**, a collection of 12 science-fictional cryptic crosswords by **John English** (including annotated solutions) will be available from the Becon Publications table at Intersection (price £2.00), or by mail order from Becon Publications at 75 Rosslyn Avenue, Harold Wood, Essex, RM3 0RG after Intersection.

**GADZOOKS!** Studies in swashbuckling fiction. Orczy, Sabatini, Farnol, Thorndike *et al.* New fanzine seeks contributors and readers. Details: Mark Valentine, 40 Ash Grove, Ilkley, West Yorkshire, LS29 8EP. Enter the last great unexplored genre.

**HELP! FILL THIS COLUMN!** Been looking for a book for years but can't find it? Got a fanzine you want to distribute or solicit articles for? Books, tapes, videos for sale? Want to make contacts? Penfriends? Use this FREE service and reach every BSFA member! Write to the editorial address or email [terran@cityscape.co.uk](mailto:terran@cityscape.co.uk)

**CAN ANYONE PLEASE HELP** me get my hands on paperback copies of the following books by **Sherri S. Tepper**, in any readable condition, at not unreasonable prices?

*The True Game*, *The Revenants*, *The Chronicles of Marvin Manyshaped*, *Jinian Star-Eye*, *The Enigma Score*, *The Bones*, *Derivish Daughter*, *Blood Heritage*.

Write to me first with details and price, and I promise a quick reply. I'm not a collector, I just want to write an article about her. Contact: Norman W. Beswick, 21 Churchill Road, Church Stretton, Shropshire, SY6 6EP.

**WANTED:** A copy in any condition of *The Science Fiction of Mark Clifton* edited by Barry Malzberg and published in 1980, though I don't know by whom. Contact John Ollis, 51 Belmont Road, Luton LU1 1LL.

**SF BOOKS / MAGAZINES FOR SALE** The Science Fiction Foundation Collection has a large number of science fiction / fantasy books and magazines for sale at bargain prices. Proceeds to the SFF.

Contact Andy Sawyer on 0151 794 2696 / 2733 or email [asawyer@liverpool.ac.uk](mailto:asawyer@liverpool.ac.uk) for further details.

**A LOAD OF OLD BOSh**, ten of Bob Shaw's serious scientific talks! Produced by Becon Publications for Confabulation, the 1995 British National SF Convention. All profits will be donated to the RNIB Talking Book Fund. £4.95 from Becon Publications, 75 Rosslyn Avenue, Harold Wood, Essex, RM3 0RG

**The University of Warwick Science Fiction and Fantasy Society** would like to hear from other student SF societies, and also to receive fanzines, particularly student fanzines. If you can help, please contact the UWSFFS at: Arts Federation Pigeonholes, Students' Union, University of Warwick, Coventry, CV4 7AL.

**WANTED:** A copy in any condition of Brian Stableford's novel *The Paradox of the Sets*, published by Ace Books in the 70s. Chris Terran, 9 Beechwood Court, Back Beechwood Grove, Leeds LS4 2HS or email [terran@cityscape.co.uk](mailto:terran@cityscape.co.uk)

**HARM'S WAY** by Colin Greenland — "What if Charles Dickens had written a space opera?" (*Locus*) — large paperback, the one with the pretty cover, £3.50. Also the two linked fantasy paperbacks, *The Hour of the Thin Ox* and *Other Voices* (great covers by Roger Dean and Ian Miller), £1.50 each. Prices include postage. Colin Greenland, 2a Ortygia House, 6 Lower Road, Harrow, Middx. HA2 0DA.

**MICHAEL MOORCOCK — *Lunching With The Antichrist***, an exclusive new American collection from Mark Zeising Books containing previously uncollected and/or revised stories. No UK equivalent. In trade hardcover or signed, limited, slip-cased editions: £15.00 and £36.00, respectively. Contact: D. J. Rowe, 18 Laurel Bank, Truss Hill Road, South Ascot, Ascot, Berkshire,

# COMPETITION CORNER

Roger Robinson

## COMPETITION 116 — "FIVE IS TOP"

As you will have only a few days spare time in the next month with The Event Up North (or South to those of you from the Ben Nevis area) I have set a quick test this time. All you have to do is write a short piece giving the basic plot of two (or more) of the books given below — or some other books that fit into the same set. You must only use words (up to fifty per book) of **five or fewer letters**. Oops, can't use that word, it's too long. . . .

*Vurt*, Jeff Noon

*The Book of the New Sun*, Gene Wolfe

*Blood Music*, Greg Bear

*Man Plus*, Fred Pohl

*The Snow Queen*, Joan Vinge

*Ubik*, Phil Dick

*Was*, Geoff Ryman

*The Black Cloud*, Fred Hoyle

*Night Walk*, Bob Shaw

Please send all quiz and crossword entries, together with any competition correspondence, to the usual address:

Roger Robinson  
75 Rosslyn Avenue  
Harold Wood, Essex  
RM3 0RG

by Friday 22nd September 1995.

## RESULTS OF COMPETITION 115 — "MIXED GRUES"

Bingo! Entrants at last! After two *Matrixes* with the same competition some people got it right. The first entrant out of the hat who solved all 15 anagrams also got the three groups that I had intended. Well done **Barry Traish** — the £5 book token is on its way to Leeds for you.

The anagrams were:

1. SURE IDEA = *Deus Irac*, Dick & Zelazny
2. OTHER POSSE = *Sos the Rope*, Anthony
3. HE GAVE MORT = *The Vor Game*, Bujold
4. HE MEANT FLAME = *The Female Man*, Russ
5. SAVE SHOT CLUTE = *The Lotus Caves*, Christopher
6. SHOW NIGHT SHAPE = *The Ship Who Sang*, McCaffrey
7. CHOOSE TAN TRIFLE = *The Castle of Iron*, De Camp & Pratt
8. THE BLEEDING CROWD = *Golden Witchbreed*, Gentile
9. DOE SEEING TO THYME = *The Mote in God's Eye*, Niven & Pournelle
10. ELBOW STOOD IN WANT = *Downbelow Station*, Cherryrh
11. A FATWA HOARD SEIZER = *A Wizard of Earthsea*, Le Guin
12. WHICH BULL TROE TINE = *Trouble With Lichen*, Wyndham
13. THATCHER NAMES CEPS = *The Space Merchants*, Pohl & Kornbluth
14. DEAL IRON, CLEAN WIND = *Alice in Wonderland*, Carroll
15. FREE FENCED IN THINGEE = *The Difference Engine*, Gibson & Sterling

The groups were:

1. Dual authors (1,7,9,13,15)
2. Pseudonymous authors (2,5,10,12,14)
3. Female authors (the rest)

## Crossword 16

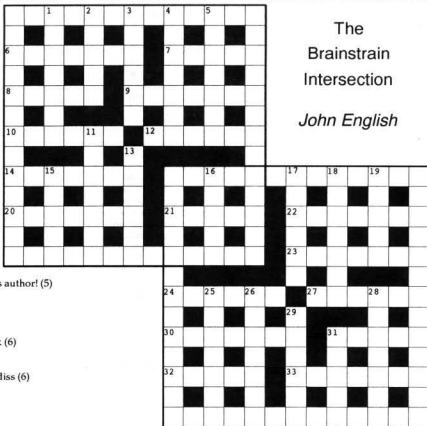
### Across

6. Resolve to be obsessive? Yes, sort of! (7)
7. Morwood's safe? (5)
8. Lift engineers surround Wintermute and others (5)
9. A hundred on bucking bronco at centre of plant (7)
10. Result of wages being cancelled? (3-3)
12. Heinlein's work completed before weekend (6)
14. Coppers turned and lifted some sugar (7)
20. Exciting story about Switzerland's currency (7)
21. Pertaining to essayist, the European MacDonald (5)
22. Secret police ingest a potion (7)
23. Cloying sentimentality let race evolve (7)
24. Symbol of energy, doctor attending writer (6)
27. Tots' dad turns to drink (4,2)
30. Paradigm was once sufficient (7)
31. Doctor invokes household god to extract tooth (5)
32. The language of Hollywood? Money! (5)
33. Aims uncertain, scripted without producer at first (7)

### Down

1. Deranged liar, yet truth comes out (7)
2. Ylem initially 'found in singularity? Not according to this author! (5)
3. Ditch model, foreign, topless (6)
4. Salesman in capital city turns to ruler (7)
5. Formic heartburn cure? (7)
11. Chattered about article held by tailless ringbearer (7)
13. Helium rises in Brown University due to Le Guin's work (6)
15. Church melody played at academic appointment (5)
16. Be stuck initially in departure (5)
17. Mercury's number of minutes per hour, according to Aldiss (6)
18. Dangle us in exhaust (7)
19. Herbert nearly gains a hundred in foreign currency (5)
25. Somehow Tubb ran to barrel of surprises (4,3)
26. Writers drowned in river; think of the cost! (7)
28. Page cut about and got married (7)
29. Old sailor summoned up deity (Norse deity), full of energy (3,3)
31. Balrog's lair in Missouri has uplifting atmosphere (5)

The  
Brainstrain  
Intersection  
  
John English



Crossword 15 results on page 8

In honour of The Scottish Convention, this issue's crossword consists of two intersecting puzzles. The perimeter of the top puzzle, when read clockwise starting from the top left corner, will spell out the titles of four works by one of Intersection's guests of honour (4 words, 19 letters; 2 words, 9 letters; 1 word, 12 letters; 1 word, 8 letters) while the perimeter of the bottom puzzle, when read clockwise starting from the top left corner will spell out the titles of four works by the other guest of honour (4 words, 16 letters; 2 words, 10 letters; 1 word, 8 letters; 2 words, 14 letters). The perimeters are otherwise unclued. Numbers appearing in the titles should be spelled out as words wherever necessary. The unchecked letters of the top puzzle's perimeter (including the two letters at the points where the two puzzles intersect) can be rearranged to spell O, BUT INTERSECTION BE THY CHEERY JOY while the unchecked letters of the bottom puzzle (also including the two letters at the points where the two puzzles intersect) can be rearranged to spell "WRITTEN HOT NOVEL, MAN!" RANTS BROTHER. Otherwise, all clues are normal.