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The Stolen March

Gregory Benford suffered a severe stroke on 22 December, as reported by his brother Jim in February. After several weeks in hospital he was transferred to rehabilitation; further progress reports are awaited and many fingers are crossed in hope of a full recovery. [F770]

Mr Blobby, that icon of 1990s tv, was critically transfigured in *The New Statesman*: 'A later Blobby, Paul Denson, pointed out to *Vice* that "when you're in the suit you are essentially blind". The temptation then to read Blobby as a Nineties incarnation of Milton's sightless and raging Samson Agonistes is hard to resist.' (Stuart Maconie, *NS*, 2 February) [PE]

Neil Clarke of *Clarkesworld* magazine posted a bar chart showing the recent sharp increase in 'the number of people we've had to ban over plagiarism and machine-written spam submissions': lowish from 2020 to Autumn 2022, then around 50 in December, over 100 in January and nearly 350 by mid-February. '38% of our February submissions are spammy.' (Neil-clarke.com, 15 February) Submissions were closed on 20 February when the month's count passed 500 with over 50 more per day. Extensive media coverage of this story may have brought some small compensation in the form of publicity.... (*Guardian*, 21 February) Other magazines reporting the same problem include *Asimov's* and *F&SF*.

Roald Dahl was in the news after an agreement between his estate and Puffin to bowdlerize his children's books even more. No one can now be described as fat, and so on. Perhaps the weirdest edit had the book-loving heroine of *Matilda* reading more 'acceptable' authors, with Joseph Conrad and Rudyard Kipling becoming Jane Austen and John Steinbeck, though in the same list Ernest Hemingway mysteriously survived. Literary figures took sides - 'absurd censorship', said Salman Rushdie, while unworldly Philip Pullman suggested that these reliable cash cows should be quietly let go out of print - and the mass media had a great deal of fun being outraged, or otherwise. (*Daily Mail*, *Guardian*, *Independent*, *Radio 4*, *Telegraph*, etc. etc.) The eventual lucrative compromise is that Puffin will publish both 'classic' and revised versions of the sacred texts.

Oghenechovwe Donald Ekpeki flew into Los Angeles for the NAACP Image Awards ceremony but was detained incommunicado for three days and then sent back to Nigeria in spite of his two-year US visa. Though the rules reportedly require a six-month gap between visits, Ekpeki angrily insists there's more to it than that: 'I'll just say it's way worse than anyone says or thinks'. (*File 770*, 25, 26, 27 February; Twitter)

Convictism

10-12 Mar • **Frightfest** (film), Glasgow. Weekend pass £75; for individual tickets see frightfest.co.uk/filmsandevents.html.

10-12 Mar • **MinamiCon** (anime), Novotel Hotel, Southampton. £65 reg. Further details at www.minamicon.org.uk.

11 Mar • **Picocon 40**, Imperial College, London. GoH: various. Tickets £10 (students £9, ICSF members £6) from tinyurl.com/3x9hfzj7. For other details see www.union.ic.ac.uk/scc/icsf/picocon/.

14 Mar • **Designing Dystopia** (comics panel) with Brian Bolland and Dave Gibbons, Century Club, Soho, London. 6:30pm for 7pm. Tickets £12. For details see acuriousinvitation.com/designingdystopia.html.

16-19 Mar • **Camp SFW**, Vauxhall Holiday Park, Great Yarmouth. 3-day pass £130; 2-day £99; more options at www.scifweekender.com.

18 Mar • **Bedford Who Charity Con** (*Doctor Who*), King's House, Amptill Road, Bedford, MK42 9AZ. 10am-5:30pm. £49.50; concessions/under-18s £25; under-15s £15. See bedfordwhocharitycon.co.uk.

25 Mar • **East of England Comic Con and Gaming Festival**, East of England Arena, Peterborough. 10am-4:30pm. Tickets from £13.75 (inc fee). See www.facebook.com/events/732634787956163/.

31 Mar - 2 Apr • **Corflu 40**, The Malone Hotel, Belfast. Now £70 / €80 / \$60 reg; same rates at the door; further details at corflu.org.

7-10 Apr • **Conversation** (Eastercon), Hilton Metropole near the Birmingham NEC. Now £90 reg; £45 concessions; £40 supporting or online-only membership; under-18s £20; under-13s £5. More information at conversation2023.org.uk.

7-10 Apr • **Star Wars Celebration**, ExCel, London. 4-day tickets

sold out; day passes £65 plus fees. See www.starwarscelebration.com

14-16 Apr • **Compulsion** (games), Teviot Row House, Edinburgh.

Tickets £15; £8 for Saturday or Sunday only; see compulsion.org.

6-7 May • **Portsmouth Comic Con**, Guildhall, Portsmouth. Weekend tickets £26.50, rising on 1 April. See portsmouthcomiccon.com.

2-4 Jun • **Cymera SF Festival 2023**, Edinburgh and online. Early-bird weekend passes are now on sale at £70 or £40 digital-only, rising on 2 April to £80 and £50. See www.cymerafestival.co.uk.

3-10 Jun • **Sci-Fi London** (film festival), main venue Picturehouse, Stratford, London, E15 1BX. See sci-fi-london.com.

6-8 Oct • **Grimmfest** (film), Odeon Great Northern, Manchester. Full pass for all screenings and events £79.50 at grimmfest.com.

7-8 Oct • **Octocon**, Gibson Hotel, Dublin, and online. €60 reg; concessions €40; YA or supp €20. Registration open at octocon.com.

11-12 Nov • **Comic Con**, Harrogate Convention Centre. Part of the November 'Thought Bubble' comics festival. £30 weekend; £21/day; under-12s, over-65s and carers free. See thoughtbubblefestival.com.

19 Nov • **Edinburgh Comic Art Fair**, Out of the Blue Drill Hall, Edinburgh. Free. See www.cymerafestival.co.uk - scroll down.

Rumblings. *Eastercon 2025*: the Belfast bid (see A422) has launched, using the Hilton Lanyon Place and Belfast International Conference Centre (ICC) with the support of Visit Belfast. There will be a presentation at Eastercon this year. Queries to info@easterconbelfast.org. • **Hugo Voting**: following February emails to Chengdu Worldcon members, nominations are now open - closing at the end of April, with the final ballot to be released by the end of May and voting to the end of August. The login page is at en.chengduworldcon.com/hugo-awards/#/index.

Infinitely Improbable

We Are Everywhere. 'The partridge claw reaches up from its sauce blanket like the Statue of Liberty's arm at the end of Planet of the Apes.' (Restaurant review by Giles Coren, *Times* magazine, 19 January) [PE]

Awards. *Crawford* (fantasy debut): *The Spear Cuts Through Water* by Simon Jimenez. • *Compton Crook* (genre debut) shortlist: *Obsidian* by Sarah J. Daley; *The Ballad of Perilous Graves* by Alex Jennings; *The Bone Orchard* by Sara Mueller; *Bluebird* by Ciel Pierlot; *Daughter of the Moon Goddess* by Sue Lynn Tan; *The Genesis of Misery* by Neon Yang. [L] • *Jack Gaughan* (emerging artist): Martina Fačková. • *Skylark*: no award.

Court Circular. Middle-earth Enterprises has once again put forth its power against the forces of darkness - this time, a two-man rubbish clearance outfit in Brighton that called itself 'The Lord of the Bins'. Both the name and the company slogan 'One ring to remove it all' are frowned on by m'learned friends as 'highly similar to the Lord of the Rings' and 'an infringement of our client's trademark rights'. (*Guardian*, 4 February) Which will not be challenged in court because the bin men can't afford it.

Scientific Units Redux. 'A meteor around the size of a Pembroke Welsh Corgi and weighing around the total weight of four baby elephants struck the Earth near McAllen, Texas last Wednesday, NASA confirmed this week.' (Aaron Reich, *Jerusalem Post*, 21 February)

R.I.P. *Richard J. Anobile* (1947-2023), US editor of the 1970s 'Film Classics Library' photo-script books (*Frankenstein*, *Jekyll & Hyde*, etc), 'Fotonovels' of the first two *Star Trek* films and other genre photo-adaptations, died on 10 February aged 76. [SJ] • *Burt Bacharach* (1928-2023), US composer with soundtrack credits for *Lost Horizon* (1973) and *Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me* (1999), died on 8 February aged 94. [LP] • *Ted Bell* (1946-2023), US author best known for thrillers, whose 'Nick McIver Time Adventure' diptych opening with *Nick of Time* (2000) is YA sf, died on 20 January aged 76. [AIP] • *Richard Belzer* (1944-2023), US actor best known for police roles, with genre credits for *The Puppet Masters* (1994), *Species II* (1998) and various tv series, died on 19 February aged 78. [MR] • *Igor Bereg* (Igor Pidorenko, 1953-2023), Russian sf author active since 1980 using both the Pidorenko and Bereg bylines, died on 21 February. [AM] • *Barbara Bosson* (1939-2023), US actress in *Capricorn One* (1977) and *The Last Starfighter* (1984), died on 18 February aged 83. [LP] • *Ricou Browning* (1930-2023), US actor in the title role (underwater scenes) of *Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954) and

sequels, died on 27 February aged 93. [O] ● **Melinda Dillon** (1939-2023), US actress in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977), *Harry and the Hendersons* (1987) and *Spontaneous Combustion* (1989), died on 9 January aged 83. [GD] ● **Cai Emmons** (1951-2023), US author of the fantasy *Weather Woman* (2018) and its sequel *Sinking Islands* (2021), died on 2 January aged 71. [L] ● **Gerald Fried** (1928-2023), US composer whose soundtrack credits include *The Mouse that Roared* (1966), *Soylent Green* (1973), *Transformers: Dark of the Moon* (2011) and *Star Trek Into Darkness* (2013), died on 17 February aged 95. [LP] ● **François Hadji-Lazaro** (1956-2023), French actor in *Cemetery Man* (1994), *The City of Lost Children* (1995) and *Brotherhood of the Wolf* (2001), died on 25 February aged 66. [SJ] ● **Hugh Hudson** (1936-2023), UK producer/director of *Greystoke: The Legend of Tarzan, Lord of the Apes* (1984), died on 10 February aged 86. [AIP] ● **Juraj Jakubisko** (1938-2023), Czechoslovakia-born screenwriter and director with credits for *Frankenstein's Aunt* (1987), *Pehavý Max a strasidlo* (1987) and *Bathory: Countess of Blood* (2008), died on 24 February aged 84. [SJ] ● **Anna Jane** (Anna Kapranova, 1988-2023), bestselling Russian author of teen romance novels including the vampire fantasy *Net, detka, eto fantastika* (*No, Baby, It's Fantastic*, 2016) with Yekaterina Vasina, died on 1 February. [AM] ● **Charles Kimbrough** (1936-2023), US actor in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1996 plus sequel) and genre tv series, died on 11 January aged 86. [LP] ● **Majliss Larson** (Marjorie Nelson Perisho, 1939-2022), US author of the *Star Trek* novel *Pawns and Symbols* (1985), died on 29 December aged 83. [SHS] ● **Eugene Lee** (1939-2023), US set designer whose Tony awards include one for the stage version of *Wicked* (2003), died on 6 February aged 83. [AIP] ● **Andrey Lyovkin** (1954-2003), Latvian/Russian sf author and translator of sf by Asimov, Davidson, Dick and Simak, died on 13 February. [AM] ● **Leiji Matsumoto** (Akira Matsumoto, 1938-2023), prolific and noted Japanese manga/anime creator whose work included the *Space Battleship Yamato* and *Galaxy Express 999* series (first broadcast in 1974 and 1977 respectively), died on 13 February aged 85. [JonC] ● **Burny Mattinson** (1935-2023), long-time US Disney animator (usually uncredited) and writer with director credits for *The Great Mouse Detective* (1996) and *Mickey's Magical Christmas* (2001) and story team credits for several major films, died on 27 February aged 87. [SJ] ● **Lee Moder**, US comics artist who worked on DC and Marvel titles and with writer Geoff Johns created the 1999 version of *Stargirl* (televised 2020-2022), died in mid-January aged 53. [AIP] ● **Kevin O'Neal** (1945-2023), US actor in *Village of the Giants* (1965) and genre tv series, died on 28 January aged 77. [AIP] ● **Jansen Panettiere** (1994-2023), US actor in *The Fog* (2005), *Robots* (2005) and *The Last Day of Summer* (2007), died on 19 February aged 28. ● **Leonard Pietraszak** (1936-2023), Polish actor who starred in the cult comic-fantasy film *Kingsajz* (1987), died on 1 February. [AM] ● **Gordon Pinsent** (1930-2023), US actor in *Colossus: The Forbin Project* (1970), *Blacula* (1972) and genre tv series, died on 25 February aged 92. [SJ] ● **Paco Rabanne** (1934-2023), Spanish fashion designer who created Jane Fonda's costumes for *Barbarella* (1968), died on 3 February aged 88. [AIP] ● **Aleksandr Remizov**, Russian comic artist who from 2003 contributed to the sf/f magazine *Mir fantastiki*, died on 18 February aged 54. [AM] ● **Mitsuo Senda** (1940-2023), Japanese voice actor in *Sherlock Hound* (1984), *Naruto* (2006), *07-Ghost* (2007) and other anime, died on 25 February aged 82. ● **Yevgeny Shchepetnov** (1961-2023), Russian author of 80+ sf/fantasy novels since 2012, died on 14 February. [AM] ● **Stella Stevens** (1938-2023), US actress in *The Nutty Professor* (1963), *The Manitou* (1978), *The Terror Within II* (1991), *Little Devils: The Birth* (1993) and others, died on 17 February aged 84. [SJ] ● **David Sutherland OBE** (1933-2023), UK comic artist best known for 60 years of *The Beano's* 'The Bash Street Kids', whose sf/fantasy strips included 'The Great Flood of London' and 'Fred's Bed', died on 19 January aged 89. [SH] ● **Trugoy the Dove** (David Jolicoeur, 1968-2023), US hip-hop artist with soundtrack credits for *Joe's Apartment* (1996), *Osmosis Jones* (2001) and genre tv series, died on 12 February aged 54. [LP] ● **Jeff Vlaming**, US screenwriter and producer whose credits include *The X-Files* (1995-1996), *Reaper* (2007-2009), *Outcast* (2016-2017) and other genre tv series, died on 30 January. [AIP] ● **Raquel Welch** (1940-2023), US actress in *Fantastic Voyage* (1966), *One Million Years BC* (1966), *Bedazzled* (1967) and genre tv series, died on 15 February aged 82. [LP] ● **Tom Whitlock** (1954-2023), US composer whose soundtrack credits include *Death Note* (2017) and *Despicable Me 3* (2017), died on 18 February aged 68. [LP] ● **George P. Wilbur** (1941-2023), US stuntman whose many genre credits include *Poltergeist* (1982), *The Wrath of Khan* (1982), *Nightmare on Elm Street 5* (1989), *Total Recall* (1990), *Mars Attacks!* (1996) and *Bedazzled* (2000), died on 1 February aged 81. [SJ]

Our New Fungal Overlords. 'Other researchers have set slime mould loose on tiny scale-models of Tokyo with food placed at the major

hubs (in a single day they reproduced the form of the subway system) and on maps of Ikea (they found the exit, more efficiently than the scientists who set the task).' (*London Review of Books*, May 2021)

Random Fandom. *FAAn Awards*: a final reminder that voting for fanzine-related work published in 2022 closes on 10 March. Read all about it at efanzines.com/TIR/Incompleat2022.pdf. ● **Crossword Corner**: 'Nice if conceits can be turned into a literary genre (7, 7).' (i)

Publishers and Sinners. Twenty Terry Pratchett sf and fantasy stories written under pseudonyms (mainly 'Patrick Kearns') for the *Western Daily Press* in the 1970s and 1980s have come to light and will be collected in a book to appear later this year. (*Guardian*, 27 February)

Outraged Letters. *Jerry Kaufman*: 'Suzle and I laughed at your remarks about *The Spanish Inquisition* and "The Fannish Inquisition". [See A427.] I don't think *Spaniq* would be dropped from listings or websites, but I can see being asked to retroactively change the name. In case that happens, I've picked *Otherwise Astounding*.' (2 February)

The Dead Past. *30 Years Ago*, a peep into *Selected Letters of Philip K. Dick*, volume 4: 'Tim Powers's introduction tells how PKD found he had the power to forgive sins: "How many people have you absolved?" "Well, none, Powers. Today I've decided I was mistaken, and yesterday you weren't home, and when I called Jeter he got huffy and said he didn't want his sins forgiven.... So I just forgave my cats' sins.'" (*Ansible* 68, March 1993) ● *20 Years Ago*, a perhaps unfortunate turn of phrase: 'Supernatural thriller writer Doug Clegg has been known as an innovator. In order to bring attention to himself and try to bore a solid core of genre fans, he became one of the first ever to give an e-book away for free on the Internet. (*PWDaily*)' (*Ansible* 188, March 2003) ● *10 Years Ago*: 'Christopher Tolkien, not a man for talking to the press, granted his first ever interview to *Le Monde* last year; a translation later appeared online. "They eviscerated [*The Lord of the Rings*] by making it an action movie for young people aged 15 to 25," he complained. "Tolkien has become a monster, devoured by his own popularity and absorbed into the absurdity of our time. The chasm between the beauty and seriousness of the work, and what it has become, has overwhelmed me. The commercialization has reduced the aesthetic and philosophical impact of the creation to nothing. There is only one solution for me: to turn my head away." *Le Monde* added: "Invited to meet Peter Jackson, the Tolkien family preferred not to.'" (*Ansible* 308, March 2013)

Fanfunding. *European Fan Fund* voting continues until 10 April; see fandomrover.com/2023/02/02/eff-race-begins/. ● *TAFF* voting continues to 11 April at taff.org.uk/vote.php. Further free ebooks are *Colonial Excursion* by Ron Bennett (1958 *TAFF* trip report) and *The Harp in England* by Walt Willis (reports on 1950s UK cons, plus one in 1976). See all the ebooks at taff.org.uk/ebooks.php?all. Future *TAFF* projects include paperback collections of all Ted White's 1969-1979 editorials for *Amazing and Fantastic*, with new introductions by Mike Ashley and Ted respectively.

Another Site Gone. *Ralan.com*, the sf magazine market information resource founded on 5 December 1996, went dark this year: 'This website is now closed. / To all who have sent in tips over the last 26 years & 57 days, my gracious thanks. Good luck to you all.' [BK]

Repo Man Redux. Ford has filed a patent 'for embedded vehicle systems that facilitate an automobile's repossession, including autonomously moving it to a repossession agency.' (*The Register*, 28 February)

'Unverified.' UK author Sylvia Waugh – born 1935, best known for her children's fantasies opening with *The Mennyns* (1993) – was reported in Wikipedia to have died on 6 March 2022; this claim was removed in February 2023 by an editor who could find no verification. [PW] Her son Peter Waugh has since taken responsibility for the death report, but a close relative is not regarded by Wikipedia as a reliable source.

Chog's Masterclass. *Eyeball-Fu Dept.* 'His eyes finally hit mine. Yusuf's eyebrows crowded together.' (Nathan Tavares, *A Fractured Infinity*, 2022) [AR] ● *Malice of the Inanimate.* 'The air conditioning smacked me in the face when I stepped inside.' (*Ibid*) [AR] ● *Method Acting Dept.* 'Dr Kelter's forehead sprouted italics ...' (Emil Petaja, *The Nets of Space*, 1969) ● *Mysteries of Meteorology.* 'The brassy September blue overhead had been obscured by invisible storm clouds.' (*Ibid*) ● *Intangibles Inc.* 'Sygolin 37, the material we use to line genholes, the artificial wormholes we use for interstellar travel, is synthesized from purely theoretical models of substances found near the event horizons of black holes.' (Jack Chalker, *Priam's Lens*, 1999) [BA] ● *Dept of Penetrating Gaze.* 'Her eyes fixed to Shana like a pair of thumbtacks.' (Chuck Wendig, *Wayward*, 2022). [AR]

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